



Youth Wiki national description

Youth policies in Bulgaria

2021

The Youth Wiki is Europe's online encyclopaedia in the area of national youth policies. The platform is a comprehensive database of national structures, policies and actions supporting young people. For the updated version of this national description, please visit <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>

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Bulgaria

The state youth policy is pursued by the Council of Ministers through the Minister of Youth and Sports and in accordance with the National Youth Strategy. The National Youth Strategy defines the long-term goals and priorities of the state youth policy of the Republic of Bulgaria for a period of 10 years. The Youth Act (Закон за младежта) The Youth Act defines "youth" and "young people" as persons from 15 to 29 years of age, inclusive. This is the corresponding age limit that affects youth policies. A key working method in the Ministry is to involve young people and youth organizations in the processes of youth policy development, implementation and monitoring. In the implementation of the youth development policies in Bulgaria a multi-sectoral approach is applied. Youth policy cannot make progress without the successful cooperation with other sectors. In turn, youth policies can contribute to delivering results in areas such as education, employment, overcoming social exclusion, providing equal opportunities for professional and personal fulfillment, enhancing the health status of the population, etc.

1. YOUTH POLICY GOVERNANCE

The state youth policy is targeted and consistent activity of the state, municipalities, youth organizations and society, which is aimed at creating favorable conditions for full-value personal development of young people and their participation in the public and economic life, as well as their inclusion in the governance at local, regional and national level by carrying out activities promoting the development of young people.

The state youth policy is implemented by the Council of Ministers through the Minister of Youth and Sports in accordance with the National Youth Strategy.

The National Youth Strategy defines the long-term goals and priorities of the state youth policy of the Republic of Bulgaria for a period of 10 years.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports drafts the National Youth Strategy and upon its proposal the Council of Ministers submits the draft to the National Assembly, which finally adopts the National Youth Strategy.

The main responsible institution for the implementation and development of youth policy is the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Its responsibilities in terms of youth and youth policy are as follows:

- coordinates the preparation and implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the corresponding annual action plan;
- coordinates the preparation of the annual youth report;
- develops draft laws and legal regulations in the field of youth policy;
- develops programs for youth activities;
- coordinates the work of central and territorial governmental authorities for the implementation of the youth policy;
- interacts with youth organizations in the implementation of the national youth policy;
- interacts with other governmental and local authorities in the implementation of the national youth policy;
- manages, organises and coordinates programs and projects in the field of youth;
- encourages youth voluntary activity.

1.1 Target Population of Youth Policy

The Youth Act ([Закон за младежта](#)) defines "youth" and "young people" as persons from 15 to 29 years of age, inclusive. This is the corresponding age limit that affects youth policies.

Number of young people as reported by the [National Institute of Statistics as at April 2021](#):

15-19 years of age	20-24 years of age	25-29 years of age	Total
314 238	306 421	364 385	985 044

1.2 National Youth Law

Existence of a National Youth Law

The Youth Act ([Закон за младежта](#)) is promulgated in State Gazette (SG) no. 31/20.04.2012, effective 20.04.2012 and was last amended in SG no. 21/13.03.2020, effective 13.03.2020.

The adoption of the Youth Act sets out the basic principles for the planning and management of the national youth development policy through: management of the national youth policy, clear definition of the powers of the governmental authorities, representation and participation of young people in the social and public life of the country, promotion of youth volunteering, defining the concept of "youth" and defining the concept of "youth organization".

It defines the basic principles, governance and funding of the activities carried out in pursuance of the national policy on youth. It tackles topics such as development of youth policy, youth activities, youth organisations, youth volunteering, youth workers and information provision.

Furthermore, the Youth act sets out clear definition of the powers of the governmental authorities, representation and participation of young people in the social and public life of the country, promotion of youth volunteering, defining the concept of "youth" and defining the concept of "youth organization".

Scope and contents

The Youth Act defines the basic principles, management and funding of the activities carried out in pursuance of the state policy on youth. It tackles topics such as development of youth policy, youth activities, youth organisations, youth volunteering, youth workers and information.

According to the Youth Act, the national youth policy is a purposeful and consistent activity of the state, municipalities, youth organizations and society, which aims to create favorable conditions for the full personal development of young people and their participation in the social and economic life, as well as their involvement in the management at local, regional and national level through activities encouraging the development of young people in the country.

The Youth Act defines the main principles of the national youth policy, and namely:

- legality, transparency, relevance, system, and consistency of policies of the government, municipalities and youth development society;
- coordination of youth policies in the field of education, social policy, healthcare, culture, sports, justice, interior and defence;

- coordination of the national youth policy with the youth policies implemented by and within the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations;
- integration of child and youth policies;
- ensuring dialogue and participation of youth in the formation youth policy;
- freedom of association for young people, freedom of youth initiatives, self-governance of youth organisations;
- decentralization of youth policies.

The national youth policy is governed by the [Council of Ministers](#) through the minister of youth and sports and in accordance with the National Youth Strategy. The [National Assembly](#) adopts the National Youth Strategy upon proposal of the Council of Ministers.

Revisions/updates

In 2021, the Ministry of Youth and Sports started a procedure for adoption of a Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act ([Проект на Закон за допълнение и изменение на Закона за младежта](#)).

The Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act provides for the following amendments and supplements:

- changes to the content of the National Youth Strategy: vision for the youth policy development, leading principles for the strategy implementation and expected results;
- changes to the youth report period (the Ministry of Youth and Sports should prepare the youth report every three years instead of annually) and to the youth report content: it should summarize the changes and trends in the socio-economic position of young people during the three-years' reporting period and should cover at least the following thematic areas: education, employment, health and wellbeing; participation and youth spaces; youth organisations; belonging to the European Union; inclusion and equality; young people from rural and remote areas; awareness;
- inclusion of provision to the Public Council on Youth Issues in addition to the National Advisory Council of Youth as bodies supporting the minister of youth and sports in the implementation of the national youth policy.

The Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act is currently in process of review by the National Assembly between the first and the second reading.

1.3 National Youth Strategy

Existence of a National Youth Strategy

According to of the Youth Act ([Закон за младежта](#)), the national youth policy is carried out in line with a national youth strategy. The National Youth Strategy sets out the long-term national goals and priorities for youth in a time horizon of 10 years. The target group of the strategy is the population between the age of 15 and the age 29. The institution responsible for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the national youth strategy is the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

For the time being, the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 ([Национална стратегия за младежта 2021-2030](#)) is approved by the [Council of Ministers](#) on 22.07.2021 and is pending adoption by the [National Assembly](#).

In the process of preparation of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030, the Ministry of Youth and Sports used innovative methods focused on the direct involvement of young people in the process, engaging them in a dialogue in order to identify together the most relevant priorities and objectives of the document. Furthermore, before being approved by the Council of Ministers the draft National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 was accessible

for public consultations on the Public Consultations Portal ([Портал за обществени консултации](#)).

Scope and contents

The vision of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 is as follows: capable, engaged and empowered young people ready to develop their full potential and to contribute consciously to the development of the Republic of Bulgaria in the context of the European family and the global world.

The main strategic objectives are:

Objective 1: Promotion of non-formal learning;

Objective 2: Promotion of employment and support of NEETs;

Objective 3: Promotion of engagement, participation and empowerment of young people;

Objective 4: Development and establishment of youth work at national level;

Objective 5: Connectivity, tolerance and European belonging;

Objective 6: Promotion of healthy and environmental-friendly lifestyle;

Objective 7: Promotion of culture and creativity among young people.

Responsible authority for the implementation of the Youth Strategy

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is responsible for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the national youth strategy.

According to the Youth Act, the National Assembly annually approves an annual youth report. In pursuance of the national youth strategy, the Council of Ministers annually adopts annual action plan for the implementation of the national youth strategy. Such annual action plan is prepared based on summarized information about youth activities and initiatives submitted by the relevant ministries and administrative regions. The minister of youth and sports coordinates and manages the preparation and implementation of the annual plan. Then the responsible ministries and administrative regions submit information with the results from the implementation of the annual plan.

Revisions/updates

Due to the expiration of the previous National Youth Strategy 2010-2020, in 2021 the Ministry of Youth and Sports prepared a new strategy for the period 2021-2030. The National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 was approved by the Council of Ministers in June 2021. Due to the political situation in the country in 2021 and the several care-taking governments and the lack of National Assembly, the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 is still not adopted by the Parliament.

However, the new National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 was drafted after intensive consultations with young people. The new priorities raised by the young people, such as the establishment of youth work, protection of environment, culture and creativity, among others were taken into account and put on the youth policy agenda for the next ten years.

1.4 Youth Policy Decision-Making

Structure of Decision-making

The national youth policy is implemented by the Council of Ministers through the minister of youth and sports in accordance with the national youth strategy.

The national youth strategy is prepared by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and is then submitted for approval by the Council of Ministers. Then the Council of Ministers submits the national youth strategy for adoption by the National Assembly.

The minister of youth and sports coordinates the work of the central and territorial governmental structures with regard to the implementation of the youth policy and interacts with youth organisations for the realisation of the national youth policy. The minister further organises and coordinates programs and projects in the field of youth.

District governors ensure the implementation of the national youth policy within the territory of the respective district by maintaining close cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and with the youth organisations that are registered on their territory. They further formulate the priorities and specific objectives and measures for development of the regional youth policy.

A multi-sectoral approach is applied to the implementation of the national youth policy. While implementing the national youth policy, the minister of youth and sports is supported by the National Advisory Council on Youth. The National Advisory Council on Youth is a political body that gives opinions on legal regulations and strategic documents relevant to the youth policy and suggests measures for achieving the objectives of the national youth policy. Its members are appointed at deputy-ministers level dealing with issues in the field of economy, tourism, labour and social policy, healthcare, culture, interior, justice, regional development and public works, finance, education and science and child protection. The council further comprises representatives of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Representation of Student Councils and nationally represented youth organisations.

The Public Council on Youth Matters is another advisory unit to the minister of youth and sports. It prepares positions, gives opinions and proposes initiatives for solving problems under the jurisdiction of the minister of youth and sports. It consists of representatives of organisations registered under the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act for the purpose of carrying out activities in public interest and aiming at the implementation of youth activities. The Public Council on Youth Matters was initiated in 2017. In 2019, representatives of 12 new organisations joined to the previous 27 members of the Council and currently there are 39 members. They have advisory role in the decision making process. The Public Council on Youth Matters discusses youth-relevant topics and actively participates in debates regarding the policy making process. The members are responsible for proposing concrete initiatives in the field of youth policy.

The latest amendments to the Youth Act that are currently in process of formal approval aim to formalise the role, function, composition and responsibilities of the Public Council on Youth Matters in the Youth Act.

In addition to the Public Council on Youth Matters, municipality youth councils and children's parliaments are established. They are subsidiary and advisory bodies to the local authorities in the field of youth policy.

Committee on children, youth and sports matters at the National Assembly

A special committee consisting of seventeen members of the Parliament is responsible for the matters related to youth, children and sports within the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria. The Committee is responsible for the draft laws that Parliament is considering in the youth sector. It discusses, debates and gives opinions on youth issues in the Parliament. The Committee also communicates and cooperates with the other parliamentary committees when deciding on draft laws and other documents in the field of youth within the competence of the National Assembly.

Main Themes

The main themes of youth policy are defined in the national youth strategy. The current National Youth Strategy (2021-2030) defines the following themes: promotion of non-formal learning; promotion of employment and support of NEETs; promotion of

engagement, participation and empowerment of young people; development and establishment of youth work at national level; connectivity, tolerance and European belonging; promotion of healthy and environmental-friendly lifestyle; promotion of culture and creativity among young people.

The National Agency for Youth

There is no National Agency for Youth. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has a department dealing with youth policies. The Youth Policies Directorate of the Ministry of Youth and Sports ([дирекция "Младежки политики" в Министерство на младежта и спорта](#)) is responsible for the implementation of the national youth policy and youth programs and projects.

Policy monitoring and evaluation

On annual basis the Ministry of Youth and Sports drafts a youth report. The annual youth report provides a summary of policies, measures and actions aimed at young people in the country implemented by the responsible institutions in pursuance of the objectives of the national youth policy. This report further contains detailed analysis of the status of the Bulgarian young people in terms of economic activity and career development, access to information and quality services, healthy lifestyle, prevention of social exclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, youth volunteering, active citizenship, young people in rural areas, international and intercultural dialogue and role of young people in crime prevention.

The annual report is approved by the Council of Ministers and is then adopted by the National Assembly.

The Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act suggests changes in terms of youth policy monitoring and evaluation. The youth report will be made by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, approved by the Council of Ministers and adopted by the National Assembly every three years instead of every year.

1.5 Cross-sectoral approach with other ministries

Mechanisms and actors

Although there is not permanent inter-ministerial working group, youth policy is developed and implemented according to a cross-sectoral approach. While implementing the national youth policy, the minister of youth and sports is supported by the National Advisory Council on Youth ([Национален консултативен съвет за младежта](#)). The National Advisory Council on Youth is a political body that gives opinions on legal regulations and strategic documents relevant to the youth policy and suggests measures for achieving the objectives of the national youth policy. Its members are appointed at deputy-ministers level dealing with issues in the field of economy, tourism, labour and social policy, healthcare, culture, interior, justice, regional development and public works, finance, education and science and child protection. The council further comprises representatives of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Representation of Student Councils and nationally representative youth organisations.

1.6 Evidence-based youth policy

Political commitment to evidence-based youth policy

The Youth Act provides for that the Ministry of Youth and Sports sets up and maintains a National Youth Information System (NYIS) ([Национална информационна система за младежта](#)) in order to provide up-to-date information on the needs of young people in the country as well as to plan, monitor, manage and evaluate youth policies at national, regional and municipal level.

The National Youth Information System contains information about youth organizations in the country; a list of nationally representative youth organizations; youth status studies and researches, analyses and evaluations of youth policies at national, regional and municipal level; national and European documents related to the implementation of youth policy; up-to-date information on funding opportunities for youth activities.

The portal maintains active communication with youth organizations in the country, providing up-to-date information on activities, initiatives, campaigns and competitions for the youth sector. There are also active online surveys on young people's opinion on current youth topics at national and European level.

Cooperation between policy-making and research

There are no institutionalised mechanisms for cooperation. The cooperation between policy-making and research is on ad-hoc basis. Nevertheless policy-makers in the youth field are often invited by researchers and participate in focus-groups, questionnaires, interviews aimed at conducting an evidence-based research. One of the most recent examples for a research in the youth field conducted in synergy with policy-makers is the report "Youth Policy in Bulgaria – Challenges and Perspectives" ([Младежка политика в България-предизвикателства и перспективи](#)) performed by researchers from the National Youth Forum and Freidriech Ebert Shtifung and published in 2020. This report is dedicated to analysing the implementation of the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) and aims to provide recommendations how to improve the processes of implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the next National Youth Strategy and how to involve more parties in the implementation of the youth policies.

National statistics and available data sources

The [National Institute of Statistics](#) is the body that collects and provides statistical data in general. There are no express statistical data for young people at the age 15-29 years, however some statistics in similar age groups exist in areas such as demography, education, health, employment, culture, etc.).

The Employment Agency ([Агенция по заетостта](#)) maintains annual statistics on unemployment, including of young people. For example, data on the professional and educational structure of registered unemployed young people (up to 24 years of age) can be found on the Employment Agency's website.

Every year the Ministry of Youth and Sports makes annual youth report. It reflects the changes in the social and economic well-being of young people and assesses the extent to which the goals and priorities of the national youth strategy have been accomplished in the relevant year.

The annual youth report is prepared on the basis of data submitted by all governmental institutions in the country related to the development of youth within their competence.

Budgetary allocations supporting research in the youth field

For the purposes of the preparation of the annual youth report, every year the Ministry of Youth and Sports assigns the design of a nationally representative survey on the identification of the effect of youth policy on young people in the country. The sample of the survey comprises 1400 youth people in the following age groups 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years of age. It defines a profile of young people in the country and studies the trends in terms of young people's civic activity and positions, employed young people, young people not in education and employment, young people in education (employed and unemployed), competences and skills, leisure time, promotion of economic activity and career development of young people, youth volunteering, health and healthy lifestyle, intercultural dialogue, development of international dialogue, improvement of the role of young people in the prevention of crimes.

Furthermore, there is a government-funded evaluation of its youth-related programs and of policy outcomes. Examples of these are:

- Impact assessment of the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) carried out in 2018 upon assignment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports;
- Interim impact assessment of the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) and the action plan thereto carried out in 2015 (under project "Information, Coordination and Partnership for Youth Policy Implementation in the Republic of Bulgaria" funded by Administrative Capacity Operational Program, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund)
- [Subsequent impact assessment of the Youth Act](#) carried out in 2020 (under project "Capacity Building for Carrying out Impact Assessments in the Public Administration" implemented by the Council of Ministers Administration under Good Governance Operational Program, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund).

1.7 Funding youth policy

How Youth policy is funded

Youth policies in Bulgaria are funded by the state budget and by the European funds. The [Youth Policies Directorate \(Дирекция „Младежки политики“\)](#) of the Ministry of Youth and Sports organizes, coordinates, controls and implements the management of tools to fund youth activities from the state budget and from European and international financial sources. There are two national youth programs that are administered by the Ministry of Youth and Sports with specifically allocated budget for youth policy.

What is funded?

The National Youth Program (2021-2025) (Национална програма за младежта (2021-2025)) is one of the tools used by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to directly implement the national youth policy in the country.

The program is designed as a response to the witnessed trends with regard to various public processes, whereas its main priority is to ensure supportive and encouraging environment for personal, professional and social realisation of young people in the country.

Its vision is as follows: improved quality of life and realisation of young people through the creation and application of sustainable mechanisms for investing in their potential, which would contribute to the full-value socio-economic development of Bulgaria as a EU member state.

The program is in compliance with the objectives of the National Youth Strategy (2021-2030) as an implementing tool of youth policy in the country. Project proposals in the following thematic areas are funded under the program:

1. Non-formal learning to acquire skills and key competences;
2. Ecology and environment protection;
3. Leisure time, creativity and culture;
4. Promotion of healthy lifestyle;
5. Tolerance and European affiliation.

In 2021, two application procedures were carried out and 28 projects were funded.

The National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities under Article 10a of the Gambling Act ([Национална програма за изпълнение на младежки дейности по чл. 10а](#)

от Закона за хазарта) is another mechanism for funding youth projects as part of the implementation of the national youth policy.

The National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities under Article 10a of the Gambling Act was designed in relation to the reported negative trends regarding the risk behavior of young people related to different forms of addictions and aggressive behavior as well as the identified needs of young people in the country, by providing more opportunities for participation in activities leading to the formation of socially responsible behavior. The program started in 2017. The projects funded under this program comprise activities such as

discussions, campaigns and initiatives, trainings, broadcasting of awareness raising movies and videos, sports initiatives, etc. They reach more than 200 000 young people across the country, including young people with fewer opportunities.

The program is implemented in three priority areas. The main themes are as follows:

1. Prevention of gambling addiction;
2. Prevention of various forms of addictions – drug, tobacco, alcohol, internet, online/ computer games;
3. Prevention of aggression;
4. Promotion of healthy lifestyle.

Until 2020, the available budget was BGN 2 000 000 (approximately EUR 1 022 580) per year. In 2021 the allocated budget is BGN 5 405 000 (approximately EUR 2 763 530). Each priority area has a certain estimated budget, which can be changed within the specified amount upon the necessity and according to the available financial resource. Several application procedures were carried out in 2021 and fifty six projects were approved for funding.

Financial accountability

The Ministry of Youth and Sports monitors and controls the legal and expedient spending of funds. The programs are administered in accordance with Ordinance No 5 of 11.08.2016 on the terms and conditions for financial support of projects under the national youth programs ([Наредба № 5 от 11.08.2016 за условията и реда за финансово подпомагане на проекти по национални програми за младежта](#)) (promulgated in State Gazette no. 68/2016, last amendment effective from 10.03.2017).

The mission of the [Bulgarian National Audit Office](#) is to control the implementation of the budget and the management of other public funds and activities by carrying out effective, efficient and cost-effective audit work to help the improvement of the management and accountability of public resources.

The National Audit Office adopts its annual audit program and carries out four types of audits – financial, compliance, implementation and specific audits in all fields of the public life.

Use of EU Funds

The main source of EU funds dedicated to youth policy are the Erasmus+ program and the European Solidarity Corps. The [Human Resource Development Centre \(HRDC\)](#) is the Bulgarian Erasmus+ National Agency. It is recognized as a successful national structure for managing these European programs. Since 1999, the HRDC is actively involved in the management and implementation of European educational programmes and initiatives.

Another EU fund used for youth policy is the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” administrated by the the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP). The Ministry of Youth and Sports implements two projects funded under Operational

Programme "Human resources development" (2014-2020) through the European Social Fund that have a direct impact over youth policies: "National System for Planning, Monitoring and Reporting of the Implementation of Youth Policies" (completed) and "Development and Implementation of Quality Standards for Provision of Youth Services" (ongoing).

1.8 Cross-border cooperation

Cooperation with European countries

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has signed bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding for cooperation in the field of youth with Portugal, Romania and Serbia. The main areas of cooperation and topics are: exchange of good practices between governmental and nongovernmental associations and organisations dealing with training and research in the field of youth, exchange of information and publications on youth issues, promotion of joint projects, etc.

International cooperation

Bulgaria is a member of numerous international organizations among which the UN, and the Council of Europe. The Ministry of Youth and Sports actively cooperates with these two institutions regarding the youth policies. The National program "Bulgarian Youth delegate to the UN ([Национална програма „Български младежки делегати към ООН“](#)) started in 2006 and it is organized by the UN Bulgaria ([Дружество за ООН в България](#)) with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria. Partners of the Program are other institutions and NGOs like National Youth Forum, National Youth Card Bulgaria, ISIC Bulgaria and Bulgarian forum for international development.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has its representative in the European Steering Committee for Youth, the Joint Council on Youth and the Programming Committee on Youth of the Council of Europe.

Since 2007, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (former State Agency for Youth and Sport) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Republic of Korea on understanding and cooperation in the field of youth policy. The Memorandum seeks to promote partnerships between the two countries on youth issues, focusing on youth policies, key mechanisms and good practice to address problems and meet the needs of young people in areas such as education, employment and participation in civil society. As a result of the Memorandum, regular youth exchange was conducted yearly until 2018. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the current exchanges have been suspended.

In addition to the MoU with the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has signed the following bilateral agreements in the field of youth policy that are currently in force (March 2022): Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Tunisia, Republic of Chile, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Ukraine, the State of Qatar, Nepal, Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Republic of North Macedonia.

1.9 Current debates and reforms

Forthcoming policy developments

In 2021, the Ministry of Youth and Sports started a procedure for adoption of a Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act ([Проект на Закон за допълнение и изменение на Закона за младежта](#)).

The Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act provides for the following amendments and supplements:

- changes to the content of the National Youth Strategy: vision for the youth policy development, leading principles for the strategy implementation and expected results;

- changes to the youth report period (the Ministry of Youth and Sports should prepare the youth report every three years instead of annually) and to the youth report content: it should summarize the changes and trends in the socio-economic position of young people during the three-years' reporting period and should cover at least the following thematic areas: education, employment, health and wellbeing; participation and youth spaces; youth organisations; belonging to the European Union; inclusion and equality; young people from rural and remote areas; awareness;
- inclusion of provision to the Public Council on Youth Issues in addition to the National Advisory Council of Youth as bodies supporting the minister of youth and sports in the implementation of the national youth policy.

The Bill for Amendment and Supplement to the Youth Act is currently in process of review by the National Assembly between the first and the second reading.

The website of the National Youth Information System (NYIS) ([Национална информационна система за младежта](#)) administered by the Youth Policy Department of the Ministry of Youth and Sports is currently subject to renewal and upgrade. The now-existing website will be transformed into advanced functional platform, which will become an online point for cooperation among all stakeholders in the implementation of the national youth policy. The renewed platform will allow all stakeholders to log into the site and to exchange information. The platform will comprise: 1) information website; 2) register of youth organisations that work for and with young people; 3) platform for monitoring the progress of the implementation of the national youth strategy; and 4) online system to apply for funding under the national youth programs. The new NYIS will be an open source, accessible and inclusive platform that meets the international principles of digital development.

2. VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

Volunteering in Bulgaria is not officially governed by a public authority. There are no official regulatory and statutory documents to regulate it.

2.1 General context

Historical developments

The history of volunteering is based on the traditional feeling of community (19th 20th Century). After 1944 (heavy state and ideological regulation under the communist regime), volunteering was associated with physical and strenuous work and political propaganda. Despite the long tradition of solidarity and help, the somewhat negative image of volunteering in Bulgaria still prevailed at the beginning of the democratic reforms in the 1990s. The state of volunteering was additionally aggravated by the sharp political changes and difficult socio-economic conditions in the country. The transition to democracy simultaneously brought about the dynamic development of Bulgarian civil society and the non-governmental sector. Despite the existing prejudices, volunteering is a strong feature of the non-governmental sector. Volunteering has become popular among young people who are willing to contribute to the social and economic development of the country. Significant efforts by various stakeholders have been made to enhance the this sector and to promote volunteering in Bulgaria. In 2000s non-profit organisations initiated a variety of activities, particularly for children and young people aiming at raising public awareness about the voluntary sector and positioning a better image of it in the minds of the Bulgarian people. The connection between democratic participation, active citizenship and volunteering is slowly strengthening. Nowadays, voluntary activities are increasing in

the fields of environment and culture. In addition, non-profit organisations have increasingly become providers of social services.

In 2006, a number of non-profit organisations, among which the Bulgarian Red Cross, the National Alliance Volunteer Action (NAVA), Lale Foundation and the Bulgarian Non-Profit Law Center (NNPLC) initiated a process for regulation of volunteering and as a result they developed the first draft of a Volunteering Act. This first draft, which is not yet ratified by the Parliament, defines volunteering as an activity outside the scope of statutory employment relationships of an individual, which is performed on voluntary basis and without remuneration in non-profit organisations, local and state institutions.

Later on in 2015, the Ministry of Youth and Sports established a working group for drafting another Volunteering Act. The document was developed and the draft was submitted to the National Assembly for voting and committee discussions. The process was not completed and the draft of the Volunteering Act was frozen at that stage. As of March 2021, there is no effective Volunteering Act in Bulgaria.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports organises yearly an initiative "Volunteer Mission - (Not ImPossible)" dedicated to marking 5 December, the International Volunteer Day. The aim is to promote good examples of young people in Bulgaria who have worked for the benefit of society through. The initiative enjoys great interest among young people and youth organizations.

Main concepts

Article 35 of the [Закон за младежта \(Youth Act\)](#) stipulates that "Youth volunteering shall involve activities for the public good carried out free of pay by young people within the Republic of Bulgaria or in another country, as part of programmes and initiatives with social, youth, or sports agendas or other agendas intended to benefit society".

2.2 Administration and Governance of Youth Volunteering

Governance

There is no institution in Bulgaria dedicated exclusively to volunteering administration and management. Article 36 of the [Закон за младежта Youth Act](#) says that the central and local government shall promote youth volunteering through national and municipal youth programmes.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

There is no official mechanism for cross-sectoral cooperation dedicated exclusively to youth volunteering. In Bulgaria there is a [National Alliance for Volunteer Action \(NAVA\)](#) established on 29 June 2000 as a public benefit organization. The mission of NAVA is to promote volunteer traditions in Bulgaria and to change the attitudes of the community towards voluntary work by organizing various initiatives involving maximum number of community members and promoting the values of volunteering.

NAVA Foundation is a member of several large networks, bringing together organizations working in the field of child and youth participation and civic activity, including the European Volunteer Center (CEV) and Eurodesk .

As part of the National Youth Program (2016-2020) (Национална програма за младежта (2016-2020)), a NAVA project for the development of a Youth Information Consulting Center (YICC) is financed at the amount of BGN 38 898.67. [The Youth Information Consulting Center started functioning in January 2017.](#)

2.3 National Strategy on Youth Volunteering

Existence of a National Strategy

There is no separate law regulating volunteering. Draft laws have been written over the years, some of them reaching the Parliament of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Scope and contents

Presently, there is no National Volunteering Strategy in the country. [Youth volunteering is regulated by the Youth Act, thus it is also among the strategic goals in the National Youth Strategy \(2010-2020\)](#). The strategic goal "Youth volunteering development" aims to develop youth volunteering as a driving force for personal development, mobility, learning, competitiveness, social cohesion, intergenerational solidarity and the formation of civic self-awareness. Creating more volunteering opportunities for young people, especially for cross-border mobility by making greater use of the EC Youth in Action Program.

The tasks related to volunteering are as follows: Task 1. To join and ensure the implementation of the European Convention for the Promotion of Long-Term Voluntary Service for Youth of the Council of Europe Task 2. To encourage and support the participation of Bulgarian youth in international youth volunteering.

Responsible authority

The body responsible for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy is the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the local government departments and municipalities.

Revisions/updates

(see [Chapter 1.9 Current Debates and reforms](#))

2.4 Youth Volunteering at national level

National Programme for Youth Volunteering

There is no youth program dedicated exclusively to volunteering. Article 36 of the Youth Act ([Закон за младежта](#)) says that the central and local government shall promote youth volunteering through national and municipal youth programmes. Although there is no standalone program, the National Youth Program (2016-2020) contains a section dedicated to youth volunteering. Under Sub-program 2 – National Youth Initiatives and Campaigns, thematic area "Youth Volunteering and Participation in Volunteering Initiatives" funding is available for projects aimed at establishing good knowledge of volunteering, exchanges of good practices and promotion of volunteering opportunities.

Funding

No public funding is provided in Bulgaria for the implementation of youth volunteer activities only. Through the state budget projects are financed under Sub-program "National Youth Initiatives and Campaigns", subject "Youth volunteering and participation in volunteer initiatives" of the National Youth Program (2016-2020) (Национална програма за младежта 2016-2020).

General characteristics of young volunteers

According to the research conducted for the purposes of the 2019 Annual Youth Report ([Годишен доклад за младежта за 2019 г.](#)), data on volunteering show positive attitude to the participation in volunteering/ charity causes. 68% of young people respond that it is worth participating in such kind of causes, without significant differences in terms of sex.

46% of young people declare their willingness to participate with voluntary work in case of disasters and failures. Topics like environment protection and social activities also attract the interest of young people.

Data show that there are two groups of young people in terms of volunteering: young people who would get involved in a kind of volunteering activity on ad hoc basis, whenever necessary, and young people who may be permanently engaged with volunteering based on their scope of interest.

The level of education influences young people's attitude to volunteering. 81% of young people with higher education state that it's worth participating in volunteering, while 57% of people with secondary and lower education share such opinion.

The participation of young people in charity activities is another key factor for determining their attitude to volunteering. Data show that about 46% of young people have participated with financial donations, including SMS. During the recent years, the SMS donation system in Bulgaria has developed and this is the major mean for donations by young people. In principle, volunteering among young people in Bulgaria is related to money and, to a less extent, with other types of activities. 27% of them have donated things or clothes. Data show that women are more willing to donate clothes and things than men. Only 15% of young people have participated in volunteering with labour.

The percentage of young people who have not participated in charity causes is high – 37%.

Only 2% of young people have participated in volunteering abroad, while 39% of them have been involved in such type of activities in Bulgaria. In terms of young people who have participated in volunteering in Bulgaria, there is no significant difference in terms of sex and age. It is obvious that the higher level of education creates another type of social responsibility.

Available support to young volunteers

There are no official top-level policy measures to support young volunteers and to mitigate the indirect expenses participants might incur in such as transportation, material, meals. However on occasions of volunteer activities with the participation of public authorities the expenses are covered by the organizers. Article 42 of the Youth Act stipulates that when involved in youth volunteering, every young volunteer shall receive health and safety instructions or specialist training, if applicable, from the event organisers.

Mechanisms of quality assurance

Although there is no standalone program, the National Youth Program (2016-2020) contains a section dedicated to youth volunteering. In 2020 the National Youth Program ([Национална програма за младежта](#)) (2016-2020) had opened calls for projects under Sub-program 2 – National Youth Initiatives and Campaigns, thematic area "Youth Volunteering and Participation in Volunteering Initiatives" The projects are aimed at establishing good knowledge of volunteering, exchanges of good practices and promotion of volunteering opportunities. The main mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure the quality of these projects are part of the work of the Ministry of Youth and Sports responsible for this national programme. The quality assurance mechanisms are according to the rules of the programme.

There are no criteria/indicators/standards used to assess the quality of programmes and schemes of youth volunteering as the national programmes are not for volunteering itself but for good practices in volunteering and its promotion. There is no a quality assurance mechanism established on top authority level

Target groups

There are no policies/programmes/projects/initiatives in the field of youth volunteering at national level that identify specific target groups within the youth population, young people

in transition between education and employment, young unemployed, young adults without formal qualifications whose participation in voluntary activities is sought.

2.5 Cross-Border Mobility Programmes

EU programmes

The Erasmus + Fund is the most popular one to fund volunteering activities. The European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), which was adopted as a legislative dossier during the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency, is based on the existing structures, mainly the European Voluntary Service, in order to attract 100 000 young European citizens to participate in activities under European Union Solidarity Fund by 2020. European Union Solidarity Fund is set up to offer young people (aged between 17-30) in Europe the chance to be hired by a non-governmental organization, local government or a private company by working or making volunteer work during social and/or natural challenges in the EU for example: natural disasters; tackling social challenges such as social exclusion, poverty, health and demographic challenges; or working on the integration of refugees.

Legal framework applying to foreign volunteers

No legislative framework for foreign volunteers has been adopted.

2.6 Raising Awareness about Youth Volunteering Opportunities

Information providers

There are no other top-level public authorities and bodies responsible for disseminating information on volunteering opportunities for young people and information providers rather than the Programs funded by the Ministry of youth and sports dedicated to volunteering (see 2.4 Funding).

There are not State-funded national and regional volunteer centres or agencies that support networks of volunteering organizations, assist with young volunteers' placement and promote volunteering opportunities on public level.

One of the main objectives of National Association for Volunteering Activities (NAVA) is to create and support a network of Centers for Volunteer Work. As of September 2017, NAVA included a network of fifty-two Centers for Volunteer Work (CVW) in the territory of over twenty districts in the country. Profile of the organizations hosting the Centers for Volunteer Work, part of NAVA network:

- NGOs,
- Healthcare Establishments,
- Centers for Public Support,
- Schools, Universities,
- Community Centers,
- Libraries,
- Municipalities,
- Business enterprises.

Key initiatives

Key national initiatives for improving the awareness of opportunities for youth volunteering are included in Subprogram 2 "National Youth Initiatives and Campaigns", subject "Youth Volunteering and Participation in Volunteer Initiatives" of the [National Youth Program](#)

(2016-2020). The activities carried out are during the year in the field of promoting volunteering among Bulgarian youth, training young volunteers, stimulating the activity of young people and forming the sensitivity to the needs of civil society, activating the local authority for work with volunteers. There is no specific target group in the youth population that is addressed. In 2018 the concrete results are 39 volunteering campaigns with the participation of 5 502 young people, 56 educations in the field of volunteering with 1063 young people involved in them; 17 campaigns and initiatives towards popularization of youth volunteering with 336 participants; 14 efficient methods developed towards the work with young volunteers with the involvement of 336 participants in this process.

Information on how to apply for the program can be obtained by organizing open information days organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and through the [Youth Information System website](#). This is mainly on the National Youth Day (12 August) when there is annual festival organized by the Ministry of youth and sports during which NGOs and The National Agency for Erasmus+ are promoting volunteering and are presenting different volunteer opportunities.

2.7 Skills Recognition

Policy Framework

Legally, the manner to prove the knowledge and skills acquired through volunteering is not yet regulated.

Existing arrangements

There is still no system in Bulgaria for recognition of skills acquired as a result of volunteering activities.

2.8 Current Debates and Reforms

Forthcoming policy developments

Discussion with the National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA), which has developed an online system for validating the volunteer skills, with the aim of possible future partnership and popularization of the platform is expected to be held together with the Ministry of youth and sports. In addition to that the overall youth policies are under development in 2019.

A key working method in the Ministry is to involve young people and their representatives in the processes of youth policy development and implementation. To implement youth policies in Bulgaria the Ministry works on the basis of the 2012 Youth Act and the 2010-2020 National Youth Strategy. With the current strategy coming to an end, the Ministry is currently drawing up a new Strategy for the period 2021-2030. It uses innovative methods focused on the direct involvement of young people in the process, engaging them in a dialogue in order to identify together the most relevant priorities and objectives of the draft document.

At present the management of the Ministry holds meetings with young people and NGOs in various cities and regions of the country. These meetings are aimed at discussing challenges as identified by young people themselves and at seeking possible solutions. So far 12 field consultations with young people and youth organisations have been held in the following cities: Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Blagoevgrad, Sandanski, Stara Zagora, Sliven, and Kardzhali. About 2200 young people at the age of 15-29 years have taken part in the consultations.

With view of the cross-sectoral approach of youth policies and the need to consult on specific thematic fields with experts in different areas, in March 2020 the Ministry of Youth

and Sports established an interministerial working group to develop the operational goals and measures for implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports plans a closing conference to be held in Sofia when the first official draft document will be presented. The closing conference will be an opportunity for the participants in the meetings across the country to meet and discuss with young people from the rest of the country, representatives of all national institutions responsible for the creation and implementation of policies targeted at young people in Bulgaria, the business and NGOs.

Good practices at European and international level serve as an inspiration for the new National Youth Strategy. The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) is the actual starting point for the work of the dedicated team at the Ministry. Observations show that many of the priorities suggested by young people in Bulgaria coincide with the priorities set out in the EU Youth Strategy.

3. EMPLOYMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The aim of the working plan of the Bulgarian government is to ensure that every citizen is able to provide for themselves. The possibilities for entrepreneurship in the country is changing. A key point in creating opportunities for young people to find their place in society, to achieve economic independence and to develop is to find a suitable job. Society should offer opportunities for young people to work on the labour market, prevent long-term unemployment, marginalization and social exclusion. By implementing different opportunities for young people to enter the labour market, it contributes to the achievement of social cohesion. This in turn is a prerequisite for achieving economic growth.

3.1 General context

In 2021, the recovery of the labour market from the crises caused by the coronavirus shows delay. The measures implemented by the government have limited the unemployment growth rate, however the pre-crisis levels of the main labour market indicators in terms of employment and unemployment are not achieved. In 2021 the number of the economically active population at the age of 15-64 is 3 155.3 thousand. The economic activity ratio is 72.0% in comparison to 72.2% in 2020. The number of employed persons at the age of 15-64 is 2 986.7 thousand, in comparison to 3 024.3 thousand in 2020. The employment rate is 68.2% and is 0.3% and 1.9% lower than 2020 and 2019, respectively. The employment rate for the age group 20-64 is 73.1% and is also lower than 2020 and 2019. In terms of age structure of employed persons, the biggest share is for 45-54 years old (27.7%) and 35-44 years old (26.5%), and the lowest share is for young people at the age of 15-24 (3.4%). In comparison to 2020, the structure of employed persons by age shows decrease of the share of employed persons in the age groups 15-24 and 25-34 (by 0.3%) whereas the shares of employed persons in the age groups 45-54 and 55-64 increase (by 0.7% and 0.1%, respectively). In the structure of employed persons (at 15+) by economic sectors, the biggest share are employed in the "processing industry" (18.6%) and "sales, repair of cars and motorcycles" (16.7%). In comparison to 2020, the biggest increase is reported in the share of employees in the construction sector (by 0.7%), which reaches 8.7% in 2021. The share of employees in the economic activities "transport, warehousing and posts" (6.8% of all employees) and "creation and distribution of information and creative products; telecommunications" (3.3% of all employees) increases. The increase of the share of employees in some economic sectors is associated with decrease in other sectors. More significant decrease is reported in one of the coronavirus crisis most affected economic activities, and namely "hotel and restaurant management" (by 0.7%) the share of which is 4% in 2021. The

relative share of those employed in agriculture, forestry and fishery decreases by 0.3% to 6.3%. The shares of those employed in “sales, repair of cars and motor cycles”, “administrative and auxiliary activities” and “extraction industry” decrease by 0.2%.

The trend of unemployment decrease that has been witnessed since 2014 was interrupted in 2020 because of the measures implemented to restrict the spread of COVID-19. In 2021, unemployment decreases on quarterly basis as absolute and relative values. The number of unemployed persons is 171.1 thousand in comparison to 168.6 thousand in 2020. The unemployment rate is 5.3% in comparison to 5.1% in 2020 and 4.2% in 2019. In 2021, the value of this indicator for men is 5.5%, and for women – 5.0%.

In the age group of unemployed persons, those in the age group 25-34 have biggest share (24.1%), and those in the age group 15-24 have the lowest share (11.4%). Decrease on annual basis is recorded in the share of unemployed at the age of 25-34 (by 0.3%) and in the share of 35-44 years old (by 1.9%). The share of unemployed persons from other age groups increases in comparison to 2020, with the biggest increase in the age group 45-54 (by 1.5%), and the lowest increase – in the age group 15-24 (0.1%).

Young people at the age of 15-29 years are significantly affected by the crises caused by the pandemic. In 2021, the number of unemployed young people at the age of 15-29 is 40.6 thousand in comparison to 36.7 thousand in 2020. The unemployment rate for the same age group is 10.4% in comparison to 8.8% in 2020. The trend of decrease in the number of young people at the age of 15-29 who are neither in employment, nor in education and training is interrupted in 2020. As reported by Eurostat, the value of this indicator for the EU is 13.2% in comparison to 17.5% for Bulgaria on average for the three quarters of 2021. The data reported by the Employment Agency show that in 2021, youth unemployment in the country decreases in comparison to the same period of the previous year. Unemployed young people in the two age groups (up to 24 and up to 29) that are subject to monitoring decrease in number and relative share of all registered unemployed persons. In 2021, unemployed persons up to 29 years are 20 230 on average monthly basis, which is 10 624 less than in 2020. Their relative share of registered unemployed persons is 11.1%. Unemployed persons up to 24 years decrease by 4 162 persons to reach 8 343 persons on average monthly basis, and their relative share is 4.6%.

All activities with young people on the labour market in Bulgaria are carried out in the context of the Youth Guarantee, which has been implemented since 2014 by encompassing young people up to 29 years (inclusive). In response to the updated Youth Guarantee, the scope of young people in the NEETs group will be expanded, high-quality offers for employment, training or return to education will be made, and the partnership approach in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee will be enhanced. The work with young people is subject to the guidelines of the new Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, structured in four working stages:

- Mapping: identifying the target group, available services and skills needs and enabling prevention through tracking and early warning systems;
- Outreach: raising awareness and targeting communication and stepping up the outreach to vulnerable groups;
- Preparation: using profiling tools to tailor individualized action plans, performing counselling, guidance and mentoring, enhancing digital skills with preparatory training, and assessing, improving and validating other important skills;
- Offer: making employment and start-up incentives work, aligning the offer to existing standards to ensure quality and equity, ensuring support after employment based on an offer and feedback.

3.2 Administration and Governance

Governance

[Ministry of Labour and Social Policy \(MLSP\)](#) conducts state labour market policy, protecting the national labour market, training the labour force and integrating disadvantaged groups into the labour market. This includes analyses of the information on the labour market and the results of the active labour market policy, organizes the study of the needs of the employers from the labour force with specific qualifications.

It has a leading role in the development of labour market regulations, the [Employment Strategy](#), the [National Reform Program](#) and the [National Employment Action Plans](#). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy updates and maintains the [National Classification of Occupations and Positions](#) (Национална класификация на професиите и длъжностите). Among the key commitments are the following: - to carry out an information campaign on the objectives and essence of the [National Youth Guarantee](#) (Младежка гаранция) in the context of the European Youth Guarantee; distribution of materials, brochures, information through the media, Internet pages, social networks.

At local level, upon the initiative of the Employment Agency, partners have been identified (mayors, NGOs and other institutions and organizations) in the context of local cooperation agreements to implement activities to activate NEETs and bring young people to the labor market. Joint activities include: organizing and conducting information events and meetings with young people; exchange and publication of up-to-date information on youth, through the partners' information sites; provision of youth employment services through outsourced forms of service provision and activation of inactive ones; meetings with employers on youth employment issues and to promote job creation; implementation of joint projects with the social partners to provide opportunities for young people to acquire professional qualifications, key competencies and employment, etc.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

[Employment Agency](#) (EA) (Агенция по заетостта) collects and summarizes data on the work with registered unemployed youths up to 24 years and up to 29 years of age. The data provide information on all actions (services, programs and measures) implemented by the EA as well as those implemented by the social partners in the context of the annual [National Employment Action Plans](#) (NEAPs). The EA also collects and summarizes data on registered unemployed youths at the labour offices, depending on the duration of their registration, their educational and professional structure, up to 24 years of age inclusive and up to 29 years of age inclusive.

3.3 Skills Forecasting

Forecasting system(s)

The [model for forecasting the supply and demand for labour in Bulgaria](#) is implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The forecasting model has been developed on a modular basis.

The forecast horizon is medium-term (2020-2024) and long-term (2020-2034).

Forecast scope:

Medium-term employment forecasts by: 34 levels of education, 18 economic activities, 9 classes of professions.

Long-term forecasts by: 43 levels of education, 38 economic activities, 120 groups of professions.

Sources of information - National Institute of Statistics ([Национален статистически институт](#)), National Revenue Agency ([Национална агенция за приходите](#)), National

Social Security Institute ([Национален социално-осигурителен институт](#)), Employment Agency ([Агенция по заетостта](#)) and Eurostat.

3.4 Career Guidance and Counselling

Career guidance and counselling services

The [National Portal for Career Guidance](#) was created under the Project BG051RO001-4.3.02-0001 "Career Guidance System in School Education" of the Ministry of Education and Science with the aim of: creating an integrated system for realization and employment on the acquired qualification of secondary school graduates in line with labor market requirements. The project was created under the Operational Program "Science and Education for Smart Growth" by the Ministry of Education and Science. ([MoES](#))

As a result of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria, more than 200 000 young people under 30 years of age have started work during the 2014-2021. Bulgaria has legislatively regulated and has gained experience in implementing various measures and actions to increase the chances of employment and future labor market integration, applying these with better quality and wider scope in order to achieve the desired effect of the Youth Guarantee. In order to implement the Youth Guarantee from the beginning of 2014, programs and measures targeting young people who have proven their effectiveness and for which the interest of the employers and young people is high are implemented.

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[Ministry of Labor and Social Policy](#), through the Employment Agency ([Агенцията по заетостта](#)), offers service for professional information, consultations and guidance, which aim to assist in: choosing the right profession/specialty according to the psychophysical features and personal interests of the clients; choice of career path; choice of appropriate training, including training institutions.

The possible services one can take, depending on their individual profile can be:

- Professional guidance;
- Motivational training that will be provided both in employment offices and by external licensed organizations;
- Training for acquiring professional qualification and/or key competencies demanded on the labour market;
- Measures for job creation through financial subsidies for employers;
- Internship programs and measures aimed at young people with secondary or higher education and vocational qualifications;
- Subsidizing of temporary employment;
- Promoting territorial mobility in the country when looking for and starting work;
- Providing services from the European Employment Services network (EURES);
- Support for starting your own business by young people with high education and qualifications who have motivation and business ideas.

Career centres in the higher education system

The intensification of the dialogue between educational and business institutions in Bulgaria is also supported by career guidance and development centers, which operate in 49 out of 52 higher education institutions. They play a significant role in modern education and training and are an essential means of overcoming barriers in communication between business, academia and students. Their main function, together with student guidance and preparation, is support in student selection processes for internships and jobs and providing feedback between stakeholders. Every year the Ministry of Education and Science collects aggregated information for reporting the activities of career centers according to indicators approved by the Minister of Education and Science.

The first Center for Career Development was established in 1994 at the American University in Bulgaria – Blagoevgrad. In 1999 at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” was established a career center under a project with the financial assistance of the Employment Agency and the British Embassy. The other career development centers were established in the period 2002 – 2010. Today, career centres are among the most important universities structures and are included in accreditation and quality assessment procedures.

The main activities carried out by the career development centers are mainly directed to students and to employers. The activity aimed at students is mainly related to providing information about jobs, consulting and assistance in the preparation of CVs and motivational letters, consultations for preparing for an interview, interviewing students on various issues, collecting information about the professional realization of graduate students, maintaining information boards and websites with up-to-date materials for students, as job advertisements, advertisements for events related to professional realization, scholarships for training abroad, training seminars in the country and abroad.

An important strand in the activities of career development centers is cooperation with employers. It includes, first of all, holding company presentations, conducting internships, maintaining relationships with employers wishing to use the services of career centers, etc.

The main activities of the career development centers are:

- Registration of students and graduates in career development centers in order to find suitable positions for learning practices and work and to track the professional realization of the graduates;
- Meetings with users of staff organized by career development centers – state institutions, companies, non-governmental organizations;
- Presentations of companies to students for presentation of educational and working positions;
- Organization and conduct of student internships and practices;
- Participation in national and international fora;
- Seminars with students for preparation of CV and cover letters

3.5 Traineeships and Apprenticeships

[The Program for summer student internships in the state administration](#) is organized by the Council of Ministers.

All students who study at a university in the country or abroad with continuous student rights regardless of the degree, the form of the training or the course can take part in the program for summer student internships in the state administration this year.

The program focuses on acquiring professional experience, new knowledge and skills in a real work environment, and professional orientation of students.

There are internships in 42 professional fields as the most demanded of the administration with the most internships positions are Economics (486), Administration and Management (188), Law (185), Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (153) and Social Activities (68).

3.6 Integration of Young People in the Labour Market

Youth employment measures

The main purpose of the Career Start Program ([Програма „Старт на кариерата“](#)) is to provide opportunities to unemployed young people who have completed their higher education to acquire employment experience aimed at facilitating the education to job transition.

The immediate goals of the program are as follows:

- Prevention of dequalification of young people;
- Prevention of “brain drain”;
- Provision of opportunities to renew the public administration;
- Provision of opportunities for subsequent employment of some of the young people at permanent jobs;
- Achievement of flexible combination of knowledge and experience corresponding to the requirements of the market economy.

The target group of the program comprises young people under 29 years without employment experience for the university specialty they have completed who have registered in the Labour Office Directorates.

The employers are public administrations – central government authorities, including their secondary budget units and their territorial divisions within the executive power administration in accordance with article 36 of the Administration Act, the district and municipal administrations.

After the selection in accordance with the criteria approved by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and an interview with the employer, the unemployed young people who are registered in the Labour Office Directorates are employed under employment contract for a period of 12 months. The Program is implemented by the Employment Agency ([Агенция по заетостта](#)) throughout the country.

As a result of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria, nearly 100 000 young people under 25 years of age have started work during the 2015-2019. Bulgaria has legislatively regulated and has gained experience in implementing various measures and actions to increase the chances of employment and future labour market integration, applying these with better quality and wider scope in order to achieve the desired effect of the Youth Guarantee. For the target group of the programs, measures and schemes there is applied set quota for young people up to 25 years of age. In order to implement the Youth Guarantee from the beginning of 2014, programs and measures targeting young people which have proven their effectiveness and for which the interest of the employers and young people is high are implemented.

Contributions to youth employment have the following:

- [Program For Training And Employment of Long-Term Unemployed Persons](#) (Програма за обучение и заетост на продължително безработни лица).

The program aims to increase the knowledge and qualification of long-term unemployed persons registered at the Labour Offices by including them in vocational training upon request by an employer. The program is implemented on the territory of the whole country, with priority for regions with unemployment above the national average for the

previous year. The program subsidizes the employment of full-time or part-time workers for a period of up to 12 months in the private sector.

- National Program Activation of Inactive Persons ([Активизиране на неактивните лица](#)).

The Employment Agency implements the National Program Activation of Inactive Persons. The main objective of the program is to activate and engage on the labour market inactive people, including discouraged and young people up to 29 years of age (inclusive) who are not in employment and education and are not registered in the Labour Office Directorates, and of unemployed people, by means of individual or group application of tools and services for their attraction and motivation to register in the Labour Office Directorates, and by means of their involvement in training, return to the education system and/or employment. The program further strives to motivate unemployed working-age people who are subject to monthly social assistance, to become employed under municipal programs for community service.

The program is aimed at:

- Social integration of economically inactive working age people and of unemployed people from vulnerable groups on the labour market and mitigating the risk of poverty.
- Supporting the labour and social integration of unemployed persons through the provision of intermediation services, identification of any other services (social, medical, educational, etc.), they need, and by assisting their provision.
- Supporting the organization and provision of community service by unemployed working age persons who receive social assistance, for the purposes of restoration/acquisition of labour habits and by motivating them to search for a job and gain employment earnings in order to improve the living conditions in the municipalities.

Flexicurity measures focusing on young people

There are no top-level measures focusing especially on young people.

Reconciliation of private and working life for young people.

There are no specific measures on reconciliation of private and working life for young people.

Funding of schemes/initiatives

[Trainings and Employment for Young People project](#) (проект „Обучения и заетост за младите хора“) under the Human Resources Development Operational Program provides opportunities for integration of unemployed young people under 29 years of age inclusive, who are registered in the Labour Office Directorates at the Employment Agency, in employment at an employer by providing trainings and subsidy for continuous employment. Project activities are realised on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria since 2016. The project funding is in the amount of BGN 115 854 936 (approximately EUR 59 235 688), including BGN 98 476 695,60 (approximately EUR 50 350 334) EU funding and BGN 17 378 240,40 (approximately EUR 8 885 353) national co-funding.

The project is implemented in two components

Component I

Information and orienteering directly to vacant jobs for individuals from the target group for whom the job does not require to participate in training.

Carrying out trainings for professional qualification and/or key competence 4 “Digital competence” and key competence 2 “Foreign language training”.

Ensuring tutor for young people who are directly employed at vacant jobs for which young people do not need to participate in training – for maximum period of 3 months.

Employment of individuals from the target group at jobs within the scope of single groups of professions in class 2 to 9 of the National Classification of Occupations and Jobs 2011, for a period of up to 12 months.

Component II

Information and orienteering directly to vacant jobs for individuals from the target group for whom the job does not require to participate in training.

Provision of training, including by issue of vouchers for obtaining key competences to unemployed persons with permanent disability.

Ensuring tutor for young people with permanent disability for maximum period of 3 months.

Employment of individuals with permanent disabilities at full-time and part-time jobs (at least 4 hours) within the scope of single groups of professions in class 2 to 9 of the National Classification of Occupations and Jobs 2011, for a period of up to 24 months. Provision of one-off incentives in the amount of six minimum salaries applicable for the country for employers who have kept the job of the disabled employee for 6 months after the period of the subsidy.

Target groups

Component I

Inactive and unemployed persons under the age of 29. As a priority, support is provided to unemployed young people under 29 years of age who are with primary or lower education and are registered as continuously unemployed individuals in an Labour Office for 12 and more months

Component II

Inactive and unemployed persons under the age of 29 with permanent disability. As a priority, individuals with certified disability of 75% and more than 75% are involved. The implementation period of the program is: 2015-2023

Quality assurance

The youth employment measures implemented during the period 2015-2023, which are described in Funding of schemes/initiatives are funded by the Human Resources Development Operational Program

According to Decision No 792 of the Council of Ministers of 17.12.2013 (last amendment 2015) ([Решение № 792 на МС от 17.12.2013 г.](#)) on nominating the authorities in charge of the management, control, coordination and audit of the funds for the youth employment initiative are managed, controlled and coordinated by European Funds, International Programs and Projects Directorate General at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy – managing authority of the Human Resources Development Operational Program.

The main [mechanisms](#) in place to monitor and ensure the quality of employment schemes and projects fall within the responsibilities of the authority, which is nominated to control the implementation of the Human Resources Development Operational Program, and namely, the European Funds, International Programs and Projects Directorate General at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy European Funds, International Programs and Projects Directorate General at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. It performs inspections on the spot with regard to the implementation of the contractual activities in order to verify that:

- funded products and services are actually delivered (for example, subsidized employment, trainings, social services, consultations, etc.) and correspond to the projects approved for funding, the rules of the operation and the applicable legislation;
- representatives of the target groups have actually participated and the result from the interventions is available;

- the conditions for ensuring sustainability of each individual project are met.

In pursuance of their obligation, the Managing Body and the Employment Agency – in its capacity of specific beneficiary, perform scheduled and unscheduled audits of all projects, including interviews with the target groups, in order to verify the achievement of specific objectives and outcomes for the respective priorities of the Operational Program.

This ensures the monitoring and quality assurance of the youth employment measures and schemes implemented in the country.

3.7 Cross-Border Mobility in Employment, Entrepreneurship and Vocational Opportunities

Programmes and schemes for cross-border mobility

Cross-border mobility in the area of employment, entrepreneurship and professional opportunities is mainly supported by cross-border programs and projects between Bulgaria and Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, and Bulgaria and Greece. Such programs are:

1. The program for cross-border [cooperation Interreg-IPA Bulgaria Serbia](#) finances projects related to the development of sustainable tourism, youth and the environment and is implemented with the financial support of the EU. From the Bulgarian side, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria is determined to perform the functions of the Managing Authority under the Program.

An example of a cross-border project between the two countries is: Enhancing the entrepreneurial potential and employment prospects of young people through capacity building and networking (Start-up Academy Bulgaria-Macedonia). The project focuses on the development of young entrepreneurship and the promotion of start-ups that can help improve the competitiveness of the regional economy. The implementation of the project activities motivates young people to start their own business ventures.

Legal framework

3.8 Development of Entrepreneurship Competence

There is not a standalone strategy/legal framework on development of entrepreneurship competence. Националната стратегия за младежта 2010-2020 (National Youth Strategy) has one key area of interest Active economic participation and entrepreneurship of young people. Under the Национална програма за младежта (the National program of youth.) different projects for developing entrepreneurship skills and competence in the young people have been developed.

Annually, the Ministry of Economy implements the „stARTs“ 3 Project - entrepreneurship education for students from art schools and sports schools. The aim is to promote the entrepreneurial abilities of students in arts schools and gradually to teach entrepreneurship training as an integral part of the curricula of these schools as they are under the guidance of the Ministry of Culture and in their curricula there is no entrepreneurship education. Students in these schools have a future for entrepreneurs and participation in the creative industries, whose potential is growing and their share in the gross added value is increasing.

3.9 Start-up Funding for Young Entrepreneurs

Access to information

In April 2021, the Council of Ministers adopted a National Strategy for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises 2021-2027 ([Национална стратегия за малките и средните предприятия \(2021-2027\)](#)).

The main objective of the strategy is to support the Bulgarian small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in their efforts to be competitive, digital, sustainable and export-oriented enterprises, which manufacture goods and services of high added value.

Measures aimed to young people are foreseen in two impact areas of the strategy, and namely: Entrepreneurship and Digitalisation and Skills.

The specific objectives in these two impact areas in terms of young people are as follows:

Increase of the share of youth entrepreneurship activity;

Maintaining information database of employers that employ and train school students, young people and persons under 29 years of age in dual training form (on the job training).

The specific actions to be undertaken for the achievement of these objectives are:

Support for young people who want to start up a business as self-employed persons and in SME in key types of entrepreneurship through trainings, consultancy and mentorship services.

Distinguishing SME employers active in the field of dual training of school students, young people and persons under 29 years of age; establishment and awarding of annual prizes for SME employers with achievements in dual training.

Access to capital

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) manages the Operational Program for Human Resources Development in Bulgaria and, as an executive agency, assigns projects on the topic [„Encouragement of Entrepreneurship“](#) (Насърчаване на предприемачеството). This project is funding new enterprises. The whole amount of the grant is 67 227 768.06 BGN. The minimum amount of funding is 50 000 BGN. The maximum amount for funding is 200 000 BGN. The maximum amount of the money dedicated only from this grant to the new projects is 80% of the whole investment.

Annually, the Ministry of Economy implements the project [„Техностарт 3- Насърчаване на иновационната активност на младите хора в България“](#) ("Technostart 3 – Promotion of Innovation Activism of Young People in Bulgaria"). This project is implemented in line with the National Strategy for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises 2014-2020. The project aims to encourage young entrepreneurs – students, PhD and graduates in the earliest stage of the entrepreneurial cycle as the establishment of students' companies is funded under the project. In order to obtain the funding each applicant, after approval of his business plan, must register a company at the Registry Agency and provide his own contribution of 10% of the grant amount in the form of funds and/or assets or up to 2 200 lv for every successful business plan separately. Currently, this project is the single initiative in Bulgaria that is financed entirely with public funds and provides grants for start-ups with business ideas in the field of industry and research and development. Although the initiative refers to entrepreneurship, innovative ideas and start-ups are also supported.

3.10 Promotion of Entrepreneurship Culture

The [Bulgarian Center of Training Firms](#) is a state specialized unit for organizational and methodological support at the Ministry of Education and Science. It is funded by the state budget, EU funds and programs and other sources.

It organises annual TF Fest – International Practice Enterprises Trade Fair Young Entrepreneur. This is a professional competition with the participation of school and university students. The forum presents the results of the integrated training in economics, information technologies, business administration and foreign languages. The participants demonstrate their competences in real business environment by carrying out negotiations, entering into transactions, presenting products and services and performing payments (fictitious).

Acceleration and Star-up Financing Fund (Фонд за ускоряване и начално финансиране) supports entrepreneurship and growth capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises. It improves young and developing entrepreneurs' access to funding and supports the transition of the Bulgarian economy to a knowledge-based economy. Projects are funded under Innovations and Competitiveness Operational Program with resources from the European Regional Development Fund and national resources.

3.11 Current Debates and Reforms

Forthcoming Policy Developments

The National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 ([Национална стратегия за младежта 2021-2030](#)) is approved by the [Council of Ministers](#) on 22.07.2021 and is pending adoption by the [National Assembly](#).

In contrast to the previous national youth policy, promotion of employment and support of NEETs is among the main strategic objectives of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030.

The following measures are foreseen for the next ten-years' period:

- ensuring opportunities for training, professional qualification and key competences, depending on the labour market demand;
- encouraging opportunities for employment, including high-quality paid traineeships, internships and apprenticeships of young people with fewer opportunities;
- encouraging the outreach and activation of young people in the group of NEETs;
- development and implementation of services for social inclusion of young people in the group of NEETs.

Furthermore, the government increases the minimum wage to BGN 710 (EUR 363) as from the 1st of April 2022. The government believes that such increase is necessary in order to take into account the occurred changes and to support the realisation of positive changes in terms of employment and competitiveness. The amount of the minimum wage has influence on the determination of remunerations of most of employees and is the major tool for the income policy. The update of the minimum wage will have positive effect on real income of employees and the ability of the Bulgarian business to successfully shape the management models in accordance with the economic development and perspective.

Ongoing Debates

There are no ongoing debates in terms of labour market initiatives aimed at young people.

4. SOCIAL INCLUSION

As a member state of the European Union, Bulgaria is part of the common European efforts to create a working and modern vision for a social Europe, taking into account the challenges in the area of poverty and social exclusion. In the context of the European Semester and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the field of social inclusion and

social protection, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) participates in different formats of meetings at European level as well as in the development and presentation of National Social Reports, questionnaires, positions and opinions on social inclusion. An essential aspect of social inclusion policy is to participate in the development and reporting of the National Reform Program and in the development of a national opinion on Specific Recommendations to Member States on Poverty Reduction and Promoting Social Inclusion within the European Semester.

4.1 General Context

Main challenges to social inclusion

By Resolution No. 466 of 21 August 2017 the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted an Action Plan for the period 2017-2018 for the implementation of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020. An Action Plan was subsequently adopted for the period 2017-2018 for the implementation of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) is also developing Strategic Plan by 2021, which states that within the period up to 2021 the vision for the development of the policy on social inclusion as a multisectoral policy will be directed towards taking focused and purposeful actions to achieve long-term priorities and goals for guaranteeing the rights of all children, ensuring equal access to quality social services and deinstitutionalization. An important element in this area remains the promotion of social inclusion and the reduction of poverty among vulnerable groups of population. The main strategic tasks will be to improve policy formulation, implementation and coordination in order to achieve national targets to improve the system of guaranteeing the rights of all children with a view to effectively supporting children and families; continuing the process of deinstitutionalization of childcare and implementation of the National Long-Term Care Strategy, as well as promoting social inclusion.

Definitions and concept

By Resolution No. 466 of 21 August 2017 the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted an Action Plan for the period 2017-2018 for the implementation of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020. An Action Plan was subsequently adopted for the period 2017-2018 for the implementation of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020.

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4.2 Administration and Governance

Governance

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is a state institution which, based on the principles of the European social model with a focus on social solidarity, is called upon to create

conditions for decent work, social realization and development, as well as adequate social protection for all Bulgarian citizens and for all citizens of another country located on the territory of Bulgaria.

The Minister of Labor and Social Policy manages, coordinates and controls the implementation of state policies on income and living standards, social security, unemployment protection and employment promotion, the labor market, labor migration and free movement of workers, safety and health at work, social investment, social protection, social inclusion, child and family support, demographic development, integration of people with disabilities, equal opportunities and antidiscrimination in accordance with the laws of the country and the Governing Program for the country adopted by the Government.

The activities are carried out independently or jointly with other state bodies and/or public organizations.

A National Council on Social Inclusion Issues was established at the Council of Ministers to carry out coordination, cooperation and consultation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the state policy in the field of social inclusion. Its main functions are to formulate proposals for drafting strategies, programs, action plans and other strategic documents, as well as delivering opinions on drafts of strategic documents in the field of social inclusion. The Chairman of the Council is the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, who manages its activity and represents the Council.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

In the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020, which is a key strategic document defining directions for development of the the policy of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/> in the field of social inclusion for reduction of poverty and promotion of social inclusion, with the main focus being the integration of different sectoral policies.

4.3 Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Young People

Existence of a National Strategy on social inclusion

The Council of Ministers on 06 February 2013 adopted the [Национална стратегия за намаляване на бедността и насърчаване на социалното включване 2020 г.](#) (National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020), which is oriented towards building and implementing a unified, consistent and sustainable policy in the field of social inclusion, based on the integrated approach and cross-sectoral cooperation at national, regional, municipal level. It identifies the vision, priority directions and activities for the development of the policy on poverty and social exclusion in Bulgaria by 2020.

Scope and contents

The strategy is based on the [National Goal of Reducing People at Risk of Poverty](#) (by 260 000 people till 2020) as mentioned on page 15 of the strategic document and its four sub-targets focused on children, including young people under the age of 29, the unemployed persons, working poor and the elderly people.

On the basis of the outlined challenges that Bulgaria is facing in the area of poverty and social exclusion and in fulfilling the commitments made to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the key priorities of the Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion by 2020 are:

1. Ensuring employment opportunities and increasing labor income through active labor market inclusion;
2. Ensuring equal access to quality pre-school and school education;
3. Ensuring equal and effective access to quality healthcare;

4. Eliminating the institutional model of care and developing cross-sectoral services for social inclusion;
5. Ensuring sustainability and adequacy of social benefits;
6. Improving capacity and interaction in the fields of education, healthcare, employment and social services in the implementation of common objectives for social inclusion;
7. Providing an accessible environment - physical, institutional and informational and accessible transport;

Social inclusion is also included in the [Национална стратегия за младежта 2010-2020](#) (National Youth Strategy 2010-2020). It outlines nine key priorities for youth development. Social inclusion and measures are being developed under the fourth priority of the same strategy "Prevention of social exclusion of disadvantaged young people" as follows:

Strategic objective: Prevention of social exclusion of disadvantaged young people - young people in specialized institutions; young people with disabilities; young people leaving specialized institutions; young people suffering from different addictions; former prisoners and other groups at risk.

Operational objectives:

- Operational objective: Integrating Youth Policy with the measures to protect children.
- Operational objective: Providing social services to young people with fewer opportunities.
- Operational objective: Limiting the transmission of social exclusion between generations.

Expected results:

- Increasing the programs for targeted measures for social assistance and social services for young people aged 18 to 25 years of age in social risk under [the Social Assistance Act](#).
- Developed community-based social services (including support, accompaniment, mentoring) suitable for young people aged 18-25 years of age at risk, especially for their integration with child protection measures.
- Orientation of social services for young people in specialized institutions towards preparation for their bringing out of institutions and integration into the community.
- Increasing the number of young people brought out from the specialized institutions and effectively integrated into the community.

The youth age group in Bulgaria is 15-29. The young people under 18 are under the scope of the [Национална стратегия за детето](#) (National Strategy for Children) [Закон за защита на детето](#) (Child Protection Act). The Strategy is adopted in implementation of Article 1, paragraph 3 of the [Child Protection Act](#) and is based on the basic principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations). The Strategy aims to provide conditions for the effective exercise of rights and improvement of the quality of life of children as a condition for their free and full personal development.

Revisions/Updates

[The Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) coordinates the development and implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2010-2020 and the corresponding Annual Action Plan; coordinates the preparation of the Annual Youth Report; develops draft legal acts related to youth policy; interacts with youth organizations in the implementation of National Youth Policy.

4.4 Inclusive Programmes for Young People

Programmes specific for vulnerable young people

General objective 2 Providing free access for disabled people and people with special educational needs to public service buildings designed for education by building an accessible architectural environment in accordance with the requirements of the Integration of People with Disabilities Act and Ordinance No. 4 of 01 July 2009 on the design, execution and maintenance of the constructions in accordance with the requirements for an accessible environment for the population, including for people with disabilities (Ordinance No. 4). Ensuring the lives, health and safety of students, teachers and staff in school buildings and adjacent areas and terrains.

- [National Program "Creating an Affordable Architectural Environment and Security in School"](#)
- [National Program "Activation of Inactive Persons"](#)

Its main objective is to activate and include on the labor market inactive, including discouraged persons and young people up to 29 years of age (inclusive), who do not work, do not study and are not registered with the Labor Office Directorates and to the unemployed persons by means of individual and group application of attraction tools and services and motivating them to register with the Labor Office Directorates and encourage their inclusion in training, returning to the education system and/or employment. Motivation of unemployed persons of working age, subject to monthly social assistance, for work employment, by organizing their work under municipal programs for socially useful work.

- [Integration of People with Disabilities Act](#)
- [National Program for Child Protection 2017](#) - reducing child poverty and creating conditions for social inclusion of children; improving children's health; ensuring the child's right to life and development in a safe and secure environment; ensuring equal access to quality pre-school and school education, etc.
- [National Youth Program \(2016-2020\)](#)

Facilitating the access to quality services for special support of the full personal and social development of young people in accordance with their needs and interests.

Creating a favorable, encouraging and supportive environment for quality professional realization of young people in Bulgaria.

- [Program "Sport for Children at Risk 2018"](#)

The program was developed in accordance with the Physical Education and Sports Act, with the priorities, objectives and measures set out in section 19 "Youth and Sport" in the Governing Program of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021. It is also in line with the goal and the main tasks of the National Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sport in the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2022.

The main objective of the Program is to support the social integration, adaptation and full realization in the public life of children at risk by creating conditions and opportunities for their inclusion in free sports activities in order to improve their quality of life, their physical and mental fitness.

- [Program for the development of sport for people with disabilities for 2018](#)

The Program was developed in pursuance of the Concept for Encouraging the Development of Sport for All - a basic document for realization of one of the priorities in the activity of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) and according to the requirements of the Law on Physical Education and Sport to Promote Sport for People with Disabilities. The aim of the Program is to create conditions and opportunities for supporting sports organizations and

their activities for people with disabilities in order to overcome social exclusion, integration and their faster adaptation in society, with a focus on children and young people.

Funding

National programs are funded by the state budget.

Quality assurance

The main mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure the quality of the programs implemented is an obligation of [The National Audit Office](#). It is the public body to control the spending of public funds. In this number the funds for vulnerable young people described above.

The ministries responsible for the respective program carry out inspections, analyzes, prepare reports and statements based on direct relations and feedback between the persons and organizations concerned with the implementation of the programs, monitor and control the implementation of the financial, content and organizational part of the beneficiaries' projects with regard to the lawful and expedient use of the funds.

4.5 Initiatives Promoting Social Inclusion and Raising Awareness

Intercultural awareness

A campaign entitled "[Sofia – City of Tolerance and Wisdom](#)" was launched in the Bulgarian capital on September 11 2018 with the signing of a manifesto committing the signatories to combat intolerance and hate speech. The campaign was initiated by Sofia municipality and the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom" in partnership with the Sofia Development Association and NGOs, and is intended as a long-term project to unite institutions and civic organizations in opposition to hate speech and negative discrimination.

Young people's rights

UNICEF Bulgaria works on the issues of adolescences and young adolescence is defined as the period of life spanning between the ages 10-19. Which undercover with the youth age in Bulgaria 15-29 in the age group 15-19. In September 2017, UNICEF Bulgaria have organized [Национална конференция за юношеството - възрастта на възможностите](#) (National Conference for the adolescence - the age of the possibilities). It included specialists in different areas and representatives of top level authorities such as The Ministry of youth and sports and The Ministry of education and science. UNICEF also organizes Human Rights campaign and initiatives for the young people in this age group.

Key initiatives to safeguard democracy and prevent radicalization which lead to violent extremism

4.6 Access to Quality Services

Housing

Within the framework of the policy on social inclusion, a number of programs and measures are being implemented which are aimed at improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable groups in society, children and young people. Young people in vulnerable situations are much more in need of support linked both to their transition to independent living and to the opportunities for realization and full participation in society. Young people who, due to health, age, social, and other reasons beyond their control, can not satisfy their basic vital needs, can also benefit from the provision of social benefits.

Community social services aimed at supporting young people in vulnerable situations are: Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration, Center for Public Support, Day Care Center for Children and Seniors with Disabilities, Social Education and Professional Center, Family-Type Housing Center, Observed Home, Transitional Home, Protected Home and Temporary Housing Center.

In some of the services, such as the Observed Home, support and counseling is provided to persons aged 18 and over who leave the care system and are about to lead an independent way of life, as well as to prevent their placement in a specialized institution.

Social services

Social Assistance Act

Objectives of social assistance:

- helping citizens, including young people, who, without the help of others, can not meet their basic life needs;
- strengthening and developing social solidarity in difficult life situations;
- support for the social inclusion of persons receiving social assistance and those who benefit from social services;
- supporting the employment of unemployed persons who meet the requirements for receiving monthly social benefits;
- promoting entrepreneurship in the social sphere by providing social services to individuals and legal entities.

Implementation of social assistance:

1. Providing cash and/or in kind benefits to satisfy citizens' basic vital needs when this is impossible for them through their labor and their possessions:
 - under the procedure of the Regulations for Implementation of the Social Assistance Act - monthly, targeted and one-off benefits;
 - under the procedure of Ordinance No. ПД 07-5/2008 - targeted benefits for heating according to heating type;
 - through the [Social Protection Fund](#) – one-off benefits.
2. Provision of social services.

Characteristics of assisted persons:

The right to social assistance shall be granted to Bulgarian citizens, families and cohabitants who, due to their health, age, social and other reasons beyond their control, can not themselves or through their own income or the income received from property owned or with the help of the persons under Art. 140 of the Family Code, support them and guarantee meeting their basic vital needs.

The right to social assistance shall be also granted to foreign nationals possessing a long-term or permanent residence permit in the Republic of Bulgaria, foreign nationals who have been granted a refugee, refugee status or humanitarian status, and foreign nationals enjoying temporary protection, and the persons for whom this protection is granted is provided for in an international treaty to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party.

The system of social assistance is built on the principle of the subjective will, i.e. the explicit statement of the person in critical condition for search of assistance, on the basis of which the whole procedure for verification, evaluation and decision-making for each particular case is commenced.

Social services are activities in support of persons for social inclusion and independent living, which are based on social work and are provided in the community and in specialized institutions.

The types of social services in the community and specialized institutions are defined in the [Regulations for the Implementation of the Social Assistance Act](#)

If necessary and in accordance with the needs of the population of each municipality, other types of social services may be initiated. Social assistance is adaptable to the changes occurring in the economic environment and provides a quick response in terms of adequate social protection, depending on the country's financial capabilities at that time.

Health care

Young people up to 29 years of age, if they attend a school or a higher educational institution and are registered as full-time students, can benefit from state health insurance.

The vision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy for the development of the policy on integration of people with disabilities in recent years is closely related to the implementation of an integrated approach to policy management. The policy on integration of people with disabilities is related to the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the need that people with disabilities are ensured with full enjoyment of the rights without any discrimination. This policy applies a personally oriented approach based on human rights, aimed at ensuring the integration and full participation of people with disabilities in public life.

Financial services

Funding of social assistance shall be financed by:

1. the state budget;
2. municipal budgets;
3. national and international programs;
4. donations from local and foreign natural persons and legal entities;
5. funds from the Social Protection Fund;
6. other sources.

Quality assurance

Quality is ensured through support, monitoring and control of funds and activities.

4.7 Youth Work to Foster Social Inclusion

Policy/legal framework

Закон за младежта **THE YOUTH ACT**, Article 18, paragraph (1) states that the state and the municipalities encourage and support the implementation of youth activities and services, which are expressed in:

Encouraging non-formal learning to broaden the knowledge, experience and skills of young people for their inclusion to the values of civil society, science, culture, arts, entrepreneurship, healthy lifestyles, sports, road safety and the prevention of anti-social manifestations of young people;

Main inclusive Youth-Work programmes and target groups

- [National Program for Child Protection 2017](#)
- [National Program for the Prevention of Violence and Child Abuse](#)

- [National Youth Program \(2016-2020\) for 2018](#)
- [Program for Implementation of Youth Activities under Article 10a of the Gambling Act 2018](#)
- [Национален план за изпълнение на Европейската гаранция за младежта 2014-2020 \(National Plan for Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee 2014-2020\)](#)
- [Програма за развитие на спорта за всички \(Program for the Development of Sport for All" for 2018 \)](#)
- [Програма „Развитие на студения спорт \(Program "Development of the Students' Sport"\)](#)
- [Програма на мерките за закрила на деца с изявени дарби от държавни и общински училища през 2018 г. \(Program of Measures for Protection of Children with Proven Gifts from State and Municipal Schools in 2018\)](#)
- [Национални програма през 2018 г. на Министерство на образованието и науката \(National programs in 2018 of the Ministry of Education and Science\)](#)

Youth work providers in the field of social inclusion for young people

The Ministry of Youth and Sports, in compliance with the Youth Act, has set up a [Национална информационна система за младежта](#) (National Youth Information System) in which were registered as youth organizations these organizations that meet the requirements of the Youth Act. But the Ministry does not have accurate information on how many of them work primarily on the social inclusion of young people. Most of them work on projects targeting young people at risk and disadvantaged young people.

[Youth mediators](#) act as intermediaries between inactive youths, subject to the Program and the institutions that provide appropriate social, health, educational and other services that effectively complement the mediation services provided by the Labour Offices Directorates.

In order to promote the active behavior on the labor market of the inactive persons, including discouraged persons, Roma mediators are also appointed, whose task is to shorten/terminate the period of unemployment of people without work and to direct them towards realization in the labor market by motivating them to look for work and to work, to study, including to be educated, to register with the Labour Offices. To achieve these goals, the Roma mediator works in neighborhoods with population of a predominantly Roma ethnic background.

Training and support for youth workers engaged in social inclusion programmes

There are not legal possibilities offered to youth workers to validate professional qualifications at universities, higher education institutions and training institutions. There is not established Youth-work foundation or Institute of Youth work funded by the country's public authorities.

In the Master program "[Youth Activities and Sports](#)" at the [National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski"](#) are studied modules addressing the socio-pedagogical and psychological aspects of the youth groups, the management of youth activities, European policies and programs in the field of youth and sport, and project development and management, cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organizations.

Internships are being organized in various state and educational institutions for youth activities and sport, where students share experience and learn skills in a real work environment.

Program graduates can work as civil servants, to hold different management and expert positions in public administration, public service organizations, non-governmental

business and non-profit organizations, national and international organizations, and others, to be heads, experts, consultants and trainers under projects in youth management, physical education and sports.

As of 2008/2009 academic year, at the Faculty of Pedagogy with [the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"](#) a new specialty was opened in the Bachelor's degree program called [Неформално образование](#) Non-formal education. It aims to prepare staff with university degree for the needs of the intensely developing field of complementary and alternative educational services for children and adults provided by specialized state, private and non-governmental organizations outside the official (formal) educational system (schools, colleges, universities, etc.) providing educational degree.

Financial support

Funding under the national programs is provided from the state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria. European projects are respectively funded under EU programs.

Quality assurance

The main mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure the quality of the implementation of these programmes are done by the high level authorities implementing them and the National authorities for National audit for the financial part.

4.8 Current Debates and Reforms

In the end of 2019 the [Национална стратегия за намаляване на бедността и насърчаване на социалното включване 2020 г.](#) (National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020), is still active. However the last year of its functioning is close enough for the new one to be on the way.

The drafting of the renew National Youth Strategy post 2021 has already begun. The management of the Ministry holds meetings with young people and NGOs in various cities and regions of the country. These meetings are aimed at discussing challenges as identified by young people themselves and at seeking possible solutions. In this process 12 field consultations with young people and youth organizations have been held in the following cities: Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Blagoevgrad, Sandanski, Stara Zagora, Sliven, and Kardzhali. About 2200 young people at the age of 15-29 years have taken part in the consultations.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports presented the final draft of the renewed strategy in the end of 2020 to the National Youth Council and the Advisory Council on youth. There was a meeting for presentation of the draft document and discussion between the Ministry of youth and sports and the National Council of the municipalities in Bulgaria.

5. PARTICIPATION

The participation of the Bulgarian young people in democratic life at national, local and regional level is a priority of the [Governing Program \(2017-2021\)](#), and takes place with the active collaboration with local and national authorities. Municipal youth councils and Children's Parliaments have been established in many of the Municipalities on the territory of the country as subsidiary and consultative bodies to the local authorities in the field of youth policy. Thus, the opinions of the young people are considered with encouragement of the general climate of public dialogue, critical thinking and active contribution by using the instruments, means and capacities provided by the representative democracy and the democracy of the participation at all public levels.

5.1 General context

Main concepts

The youth representation in the country is determined by the of [the National Youth Strategy](#). In Bulgaria the implementation and monitoring of the interests of young people in the formation, fulfillment and evaluation of the public policies may be structured via youth councils. Youth organizations support the development and interests of young people in different fields: education, culture, sports, ecology, healthcare, labor and social policy, informal training, leisure time and development of the local communities, through: $\frac{3}{4}$ participation in the formation, implementation and evaluation of youth policy, intercession campaigns; the international youth communication; collaboration with municipal and government bodies and administration. Upon ensuring representation, publicity and reporting as regards the activity of youth councils.

Institutions of representative democracy

Bulgaria is a uniform parliamentary republic with local self-government and with distinct distribution of powers: legislative, executive, and judicial. The country is ruled by virtue of the supreme law – the Constitution adopted in 1991, and the laws of the country, and political life is based on the principle of political pluralism. The voting is not compulsory.

Government institutions representing democracy

- Президент на Република България [President of the Republic](#)
- Народно събрание [National Assembly](#)
- Министерски съвет [Council of Ministers](#)

Judicial power:

- Върховен Административен съд [Supreme Administrative Court](#)
- Върховен Касационен съд [Supreme Court of Cassation](#)
- Прокуратура на Република България [Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria](#)
- Конституционен съд [Constitutional Court](#)

President

The President is the head of the State who embodies the unity of the nation and represents the Republic of Bulgaria in the international relations. The presidential activity is supported by the Vice President. The President is elected directly by the nation for a term of 5 years with the right to one reelection. The President is the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the Chairman of the Consultative Council on National Security.

Constitutional Court

The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria (CC) was established in 1991 by the Constitution of Bulgaria. The Court gives interpretations of the Constitution, rules anticonstitutional cases, resolves disputes connected with the competence of authorities, etc.

Executive Power

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers is the main body of the executive power of the Republic of Bulgaria. It is composed of a Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and members – resource ministers, minister for different sectors.

The Council of Ministers heads and implements the domestic and foreign policy of the country, ensures the public order and national security, manages the state administration via the ministries, agencies and commissions established by it.

Legislative Power

National Assembly of Bulgaria

The Bulgarian single-chamber Parliament called National Assembly implements the legislative power in the country and exercises parliamentary control. The National Assembly consists of 240 Members of Parliament elected for a term of 4 years. The vote is for lists of candidates from parties or coalitions for each of the 31st multi-mandate election regions. Only political parties with at least 4% of the votes can be presented in the National Assembly. The National Assembly is responsible for the passing of laws, approval of the government budget, the establishment of taxes and their amount, the setting of presidential elections, the election and recall of the Prime Minister and the other members of the Council of Ministers, declaration of war, disposition of troops outside Bulgaria, and the ratification of international treaties and agreements.

Judicial System

The judicial power protects the rights and legal interests of citizens and of the State. [The Supreme Judicial Council \(SJC\)](#) of Bulgaria consists of 25 members elected for a term of 5 years and forming a plenum, through which they exercise their powers. Their sessions are chaired by the Minister of Justice.

The justice in Bulgaria is put into practice by the following:

- Supreme Court of Cassation
- Supreme Administrative Court
- Regional courts
- District courts
- Appellate courts
- Military courts – military-district and military-appellate courts
- specialized courts

According to the Constitution the judicial power also includes the Prosecutor's Office and the National Investigation Office.

Local self-government and administration

Administrative division of Bulgaria

In order to have efficient management of the country, the State makes administrative and territorial division by determining the borders of the so-called administrative and territorial units. From a historical point of view, this division has undergone multiple changes.

Bulgaria has a two-level administrative division – municipalities and regions.

Since 1999 the Republic of Bulgaria has been divided into 28 regions from an administrative point of view. As at 2019 Bulgaria has 265 municipalities.

A municipal council is a body of the local self-government within the Municipality, as it is elected by the population of the respective municipality for a term of 4 years. The regional government is implemented by a regional governor supported by regional administration.

5.2 Youth participation in representative democracy

Young people as voters

The Bulgarian legislation ([The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria](#)) gives the right to vote at elections upon attaining one's majority (18 years) in all elections and referendums. There are not imminent plans to lower the voting age limit, or if the age limit has been

lowered recently or any special provisions for young people in the electoral law or rules. Despite the increased levels of lack of interest as regards political life, the research used in the [Годишен доклад за младежта за 2017](#) (Annual Report on youth 2017) shows that nearly 46% of young Bulgarians vote always or frequently. As their no specific devotion in the type of elections they participate in. The fact that makes an impression are the higher declarative levels of participation of girls in the process of voting in contrast to boys. Data show that young people possessing a higher level of education show higher levels of engagement in the process of exercising one's right to vote.

Young people as political representatives

The age limit for standing as a candidate, for the assembly is 18 years old. For president of the republic is 40 years of age. There is not any quota of seats reserved for young people and there is not an existing provisions aiming at facilitating young people standing as political candidates; the average age of the members of the representative assembly in the current term is 47 years old.

The assembly has 240 representative, 5 of them are in the age group 25-29 years old. They represent different political parties. There are not any functions within the representative assembly reserved for young people.

The study on the youth activity in the country reports a low level of engagement of the young Bulgarians in such a type of activity

- 1% are members of a political party;
- 2% are members of an association, a non-governmental organization (NGO) or another type of organization;
- 2% are members of a professional association;
- 4% have taken part in international exchanges, meetings and initiatives;
- 5% have taken part in projects under international programs;
- 4% have taken part in a debate club;
- 2% have been a part of a youth council at the Municipality/region;
- 8% have taken part in school or university councils;
- 1% in a youth/children's parliament.

5.3 Youth representation bodies

Youth parliament

Youth parliament does exist in the country but every structure is responsible for its own developing. There is nothing universal on national level.-There is no legal framework establishing the youth parliament and no national legally synchronized national rules for the composition, their role or their funding. The existing Youth Parliaments in the country differ in their structure, rules and funding on local level.

Youth councils and/or youth advisory boards

[National Public Council for youth issues to the Minister of Youth and Sports](#), [Обществен Съвет по въпросите на младежта](#) as its functions include as follows:

To discuss and make proposals under draft enactments of the Minister of Youth and Sports upon determination of policies and the policies implemented by him/her; 2. To discuss and make proposals under projects of strategic and program documents, as well as plans, statements and reports regarding the implementation of the youth policy in the country; 3. To propose specific initiatives in the field of the policy for young people in the country; 4. To consult the execution of the actions undertaken by the Minister of Youth and Sports,

as well as to discuss the achieved results and to propose measures for the optimization of the realized actions. 5. To make recommendations to the Minister of Youth and Sports upon settlement of issues connected with specific problems in the field of the youth; 6. To coordinate the interaction between the Ministry of Youth and Sports and representatives of the non-government sector upon the development and application of youth policies.

The Council consists of representatives of organizations registered under **ЗАКОН ЗА ЮРИДИЧЕСКИТЕ ЛИЦА С НЕСТОПАНСКА ЦЕЛ** the Non-profit Legal Entities Act for the execution of a public benefit activity and aimed at the execution of youth activities. Each organization that corresponds to the conditions and wishes to become a member of the Public Council should send its nomination letter to the Minister of Youth and Sports.

Higher education student union(s)

National Representation of Student Councils (NRSC) is the biggest union of student youth with a purpose to be a representative functionality of all over 235 thousand students studying in the country. The main priorities of the founders upon the formation of this large-scale forum are the common grounds for common ideologies upon the formation of national student and youth policies.

5.4 Young People's Participation in Policy-Making

Formal Mechanisms of Consultation

Actors

The **National Public Council for youth issues to the Minister of Youth and Sports**, **Обществен Съвет по въпросите на младежта** with the Minister of Youth and Sports is headed by the relevant Deputy Minister and consists of representatives of organizations registered under the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act for the purpose of carrying out activities in the public interest and aiming at the implementation of youth activities. Currently, twenty-seven organizations are included in the Council. The Public Council operates under strictly defined rules. In 2019 12 more were included. This is the full list of participants: The Council with its current structure started operations in 2017. The Public Council is an advisory body to the Minister of Youth and Sports to form positions, opinions, problem-solving initiatives from the special competency of the Minister of Youth and Sports, as defined in the Youth Act, observing the principles of publicity and transparency.

5.5 National Strategy to Increase Youth Participation

Existence of a national strategy to increase young people's political and civil society participation

There is no National strategy in Bulgarian to increase youth participation in the political and social life in the public. A great part of the Bulgarian municipalities exert efforts to engage more and more young people in the public life of the respective town. Young people themselves need to take an active part in the decision-making process when it comes to decisions connected with their problems, to take a direct part in the definition of youth policies by places. The fact that most of the work is among school-age children is a good precondition for the formation of active civic engagement, but is yet insufficient for the attraction of young people in the decision-making process. Obviously, it is necessary to work towards the engagement of young people after school age in order to them to find their place in the process of local self-government and to take an active part in the process of formation of youth policies.

Despite the fact that there is NO National strategy to increase youth participation in the political and social public life, as the respective mechanisms have been set in the National Youth Strategy.

Contents and scope

The contents and scope of the [National Youth Strategy](#) are given in Chapter 1.

Bodies responsible for the application of the Strategy

The body responsible for the application of the Youth Strategy is the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Revisions and novelties

There is forthcoming preparation of a new Youth Strategy after the expiry of the period of validity of the current one (2010-2020).

5.6 Supporting Youth Organisations

Legal/policy framework for the functioning and development of youth organisations

The role of youth organizations in the [National Youth Strategy](#) 2010-2020 states as follows:

Youth organizations ensure youth participation and representation upon formulation and implementation of youth policies. Youth organizations work in close collaboration with the central, regional and local bodies. Chapter Four of the Закон за младежта [Youth Act](#) determines the organizations that may be entered into the Register of National Youth (Национална информационна система за младежта) [Information System](#) of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The budget for these national programs is EUR 1,5 million.

Public financial support

The financing by the Ministry of Youth and Sports is mostly through the two national programs of the Ministry via project proposals under the [National program for implementation of youth activities and the National Youth Program](#) (NPIYA and NYP).

5.7 “Learning to participate” through formal, non-formal and informal learning

Policy Framework

There is no specific national strategy to be implemented in the field of learning how to participate. The legal framework is Regulation of the Ministry of education and science. НАРЕДБА № 13 от 21 септември 2016 г. за гражданското, здравното, екологичното и интеркултурното образование (Ordinance 13 from 21 September 2016 for civil, health, ecological and intercultural education. It determines educational standards for these topics.

Formal learning

As in the school year 2019/2020 there is no mandatory school subject for Democracy or Civil rights in the public schools. There is existing [Проект на учебна програма по Гражданско образование](#) project of a curriculum for Civil rights class for the students from 11th and 12th grade of the public school system.

5.8 Raising political awareness among young people

Information providers / counselling structures

Promoting the intercultural dialogue among young people

1. [National Youth Report, 2017](#)) **Годишен доклад за младежта 2017.**

In 2017 the institutions in the country implemented activities in support of the encouragement and support for the familiarization with the separate ethnic communities and their cultures. The Ministry of Culture provides financial support to artistic projects of organizations of ethnic communities, as well as of other cultural institutions working in the field of international dialogue. In 2017 the following events were subject to support: the

- ["Шофар" от еврейската организация "Шалом"](#) "Shofar" Annual Tolerance Awards of the "Shalom" Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria (OJB),
- organization and holding of an official concert and activities on the occasion of celebration of the Roma New Year "Vasilica",
- the celebration of April 8 – the International Roma Day, at "Sredets" Gallery of the Ministry of Culture,
- the National Ethnic Festival with international participation in the town of Vidin,
- the Regional Carnival "Zlatnoto Magare" – Municipality of Dulovo,
- the National Festival of Ethnic Groups "Bulgaria For All" – Varna

Promoting transparent and youth-tailored public communication

In Bulgaria many departments work towards transparent and youth public communication. An example of this is the Министерство на околната среда и водите ([Ministry of Environment and Water \(MoEW\)](#)). The campaigns and educational initiatives held by the MoEW and its divisions in 2017 covered more than 30 000 students and students of over 20 universities and 650 schools in the country. There is an expressed tendency towards an increase of the number of participants. There is an increased interest by local communities and groups, which initiate their own events and seek for partnership for their implementation in the person of the regional divisions of the MoEW. There is also innovation seen in the initiatives themselves, as the search here is for actual effect and sustainability.

5.9 E-participation

There are no national legal frameworks, programs, projects or initiatives aiming to promote young people's e-participation. There are no available national data or studies on the relationship between e-participation and youth political engagement.

5.10 Current debates and reforms

The National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 ([Национална стратегия за младежта 2021-2030](#)) is approved by the [Council of Ministers](#) on 22.07.2021 and is pending adoption by the [National Assembly](#).

Promotion of engagement, participation and empowerment of young people is among the main strategic objectives of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030.

Encouraging the engagement, high-quality participation and empowerment of young people is a prerequisite for the efficiency and full-value implementation of youth policies. Ensuring high-quality engagement of young people at all levels of decision-making – local,

national and European, will contribute to the establishment of democratic culture and key civic competences and should be therefore adequately supported by national youth policy.

For this purpose, the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 foresees measures to encourage the partnership for high-quality youth participation and empowerment in decision-making processes at local level, improvement of the existing mechanisms for high-quality youth participation in the decision-making processes at national level, and promotion and development of forms of participation in decision-making processes at European level.

6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Bulgarian school system (formal education) secures the compulsory education until the age of 16 and the gratuitous primary and lower secondary education in the municipal and state schools. In the subsection Youth Wiki/Bulgaria 6.1 General Context you can find the results of OECD PISA and the Education and Training Monitoring Analysis of the European Commission. In addition, you can find the data from National studies such as the National representative study "Children's Voices" („Гласовете на децата") carried out by Market Links Agency upon assignment of UNICEF Bulgaria and the Annual Youth Report (Годишен доклад за младежта).

The results from these studies are taken into account in the national policy making process in a fair knowledge-based policy approach. For example Bulgaria was one of the first countries in the EU which, apart from recognizing the existence of the problem with early school leaving, has developed special policies for reducing the share of the early school leavers and plans to achieve reduction of this share to 11% as of the year 2020. More can be found in the subsection Youth Wiki/Bulgaria 6.3 Preventing early leaving from education and training (ELET). The dynamic political environment in the country in 2021 is a prerequisite for new Governmental Programme starting late 2021 and the measures planned and implemented in the field of youth and education following the renewed program can be followed in the subsection Youth Wiki/Bulgaria [6.10 Current debates and reforms](#).

6.1 General context

The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria sets forth the right of each Bulgarian citizen to education; it secures the compulsory education until the age of 16 and the gratuitous primary and lower secondary education in the municipal and state schools. Bulgaria was one of the first countries in the EU which, apart from recognizing the existence of the problem with early school leaving, has developed special policies for reducing the share of the early school leavers and plans to achieve reduction of this share to 11% as of the year 2020.

Main trends in young people's participation in education and training

According to the 2019 Annual Youth Report ([Годишен доклад за младежта за 2019 г.](#)), the percentage of young people who continue their full-time education in university after they graduate high school is high.

Bulgaria develops rapidly in terms of information technologies. 54% of young people at the age 16 – 24 have basic or better digital skills.

The percentage of young people who hold certificates for any kind of professional qualification or a document issued with regard to non-formal education is low, however more and more young people start realizing that any additional qualification would provide them with better opportunities for successful realisation.

92% of young people with higher or college education, 66% of young people with secondary education, and 67% of young people with basic education speak a foreign language. More than 80% of young respondents say they speak English language. Data for high percentage of foreign language study are given in the [OECD PISA 2018 study](#). In 2018, Bulgaria registered a small proportion of students who do not learn foreign languages at school (0.4 %, rank 62/64).

37% of young people have participated in training or practice during their course of study. These are an important factor for the professional development and the career orientation of every young person.

According to the Education and Training Monitoring 2019 of the European Commission, the percent of early school leavers in 2019 is 12.7%

Even though school and education rank high among the values of young people at the age of 15-17 (82% go to school to obtain knowledge and to educate, 60% - to have a profession) as stated in the national representative study "Children's Voices" („Гласовете на децата") carried out by Market Links Agency upon assignment of UNICEF Bulgaria.

Young people are critical in terms of used teaching methods, curriculum, school organization, and believe that the training they get is not sufficient for their future professional and personal realisation, that practical classes at school are not enough and there is no connection between education and labour market.

13,9% of young people at the age of 20-29 complete their higher education in the field of technologies, technical studies and mathematics, the EU average being 19,1%.

Organisation of the education and training system

According to the stage or degree of education, non-specialised schools are as follows:

1. primary (1st – 4th grade inclusive);
2. elementary (1st – 7th grade inclusive);
3. high schools (8th – 12th grade inclusive);
4. joint (1st – 10th grade inclusive);
5. secondary schools (1st – 12th grade inclusive).

(2) According to the education content of the high schools, they are:

1. profiled high schools;
2. professional high schools.

Pre-school education

Preschool education is provided by nursery schools. The compulsory preschool education, in addition to nursery schools, may be also provided by schools that may ensure conditions to this effect in accordance with the terms and conditions of the state standard on preschool education and the state standard of education for physical environment and information and library service provision for nursery schools, schools and personal development support centers, and in terms of children at the age of 4 – only if there is no nursery school in the town/city/village. By decision of the mayor of the respective municipality, compulsory preschool education is provided by nursery schools only.

Pre-school (pre-primary) education in Bulgaria is compulsory from the school year beginning during the year in which the child reaches 4 years of age, where the parents choose one of the above options, and the state and the municipalities are obliged to ensure conditions to enroll children in nursery schools and preschool education groups.

School education

School education is compulsory until the age of 16 and starts during the school year in which the child reaches the age of 7. School education may start during the school year

in which the child reaches 6 years of age at parent's discretion and if ready to go to school, which is verified in accordance with a procedure determined in accordance with the state standard of preschool education. Compulsory preschool and school education in state and municipal nursery schools and schools is free of charge for children and school students.

In the course of the school education, the school student may study the subject Mother Language. In the course of the school education, the school student may study the subject Foreign Language, other than the foreign languages according to the state standard of general education and the state standard of profiled education. In the course of the school education, the school student may study the subject Choreography. In the course of the school education, religions are studied in historic, philosophic and cultural aspect through the content of other subjects. In the course of the school education, the school student may study the subject Religion as well. In the course of the school education, the school student may study subjects in the field of global, civic, health and intercultural education, entrepreneurship, personal finance management and programming, protection of the country, population and environment, subjects that establish childrens' and school students' national self-esteem, patriotic spirit and love of the country. Extended education comprises competences that develop and improve specific general education competences. Extended education is obtained by studying general education subjects within the course of the school education and subjects that complement the content integrated in other subjects.

Upper secondary general education

General education comprises the following groups of competences: 1. Competences in the field of Bulgarian language; 2. Competences in foreign languages; 3. Competences in mathematics and basic competences in the field of natural sciences and technologies; 4. Digital competences; 5. Learning skills; 6. Social and civic competences; 7. Initiative and entrepreneurship; 8. Cultural competences and creativity skills; 9. Skills to support sustainable development and skills for healthy lifestyle and sports. General education is obtained through studying general education subjects.

Profiled education covers enhanced competences for the respective profile determined by the state standard of general education. Profile means a complex of profiling subjects two of which are determined by the state standard of education and the other are determined by the school in the curriculums and are the same for 11th and 12th grade. Profiles are as follows: 1. Foreign languages; 2. Humanitarian studies; 3. Social studies; 4. Economic development; 5. Software and hardware studies; 6. Entrepreneurial studies; 7. Mathematics; 8. Natural studies; 9. Arts; 10. Music; 11. Physical education and sports. Profiled education is obtained in the upper secondary level by studying the profiling subjects for the respective profile.

Vocational education covers competences that are necessary for obtaining professional qualification and for obtaining license for professions that require such license, including for pursuing regulated professions. Vocational education ensures the achievement of the state standard of education for acquiring qualification for professions at both the lower and upper level of secondary education. Vocational education for each profession comprises general, sectoral, specific and extended training as well as training for the profession's theory and practice. The objectives, content and characteristics of types of vocational education are governed by the Vocational Education and Training Act.

Supplementary training covers competences that correspond to school student's interests and support the development of their talents. Subjects, modules and activities for obtaining supplementary training are offered by the school, depending on its capacity, are chosen by the school students, depending on their interests, and are determined in the school curricula. The content of the supplementary training is determined in the curricula approved by the school principal.

Specialized training is obtained in specialized schools through education in the field of sports, culture or arts, respectively, or through religions education. Specialized training is

obtained by studying specialized subjects determined in the respective standard curriculum approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The content of the specialized training for the respective specialized subject for each grade is determined in curricula approved by: 1. the Minister of Culture for schools of arts and culture; 2. the Minister of Youth and Sports for sports schools. The content of specialized training for specialized subjects of religious education in theological schools is determined in curricula approved under the terms and conditions of the religion in coordination with the Minister of Education and Science.

In order to obtain general education in foreign language schools, at least three subjects, other than the Foreign Language subject should be studied in the respective language in the 9th and 10th grade.

Higher education

The Republic of Bulgaria is also among the first countries which signed the Joint Declaration for European Higher Education Area in 1999 in Bologna. The higher education governance is performed at state and institutional level. The state is responsible for the development and the implementation of a long-term national policy and establishment of conditions, which guarantee the academic autonomy of higher education institutions, the quality of education, and the provision of adequate conditions for performing scientific research. The institutional management is performed according to the rights for an academic autonomy of the higher education institutions, but the state assists for development of modern institutional

governance through distribution of resources on a competitive basis. Bulgaria works actively towards building up of a favorable environment for modernization of higher education, in line with the needs of the society and of the business. Good practices are studied and multiplied. Possibilities for introduction of new models, which are related to application of modern approaches for institutional governance leading to better financial management, are studied.

Main concepts

School leaving "Отпадане от училище" means signing off a school of a student under 18 before enrolling the last course of the higher education course if the same student is not enrolled in another school.

Bulgaria defines early school leavers „Превременно напуснали училище“, as persons between 18 and 24 years old with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training.

Special educational needs (inclusive education) for children with special educational needs. There are seven categories outlined for children with special educational needs.

- intellectual disabilities;
- hearing impaired;
- visually impaired;
- language-speech disorders;
- physical disabilities;
- learning difficulties;
- multiple disabilities.

Non-formal education (Неформално образование) is the form of education not obtained in the official educational system but rather through the method of non-formal education such as role model games; volunteering and other activities.

6.2 Administration and governance

Cross-sectoral cooperation

Cross-sectoral cooperation between ministries, departments, agencies involved in defining policies and measures on education and training for young people is happening through interministerial working groups.

Governance

The [Ministry of Education and Science \(MES\)](#) is the [ministry](#) charged with the administration of education. It determines and implements state policy in the field of education; forecasts and plans the activities pertaining to the development of education by drafting long-term programmes and operational plans; organizes and coordinates the work of the administrative units and education establishments; monitors the activity of all types and levels of schools (including nursery schools) in the country; approves school documentation and planning of school places; ensures the implementation of innovations, the supply of textbooks, curricula and teaching staff; and carries out international activities in the field of education.

The central administration of the MES approves the obligatory school documentation – guidelines, compulsory curricula, programmes, state education requirements, textbooks, handbooks, etc., with the assistance of a large circle of experts from research institutes and higher education institutions, experts from regional and community administrations, head teachers, teachers, etc.

At regional level Bulgaria has 28 Regional education governance bodies ([Регионално управление на образованието \(РУО\)](#)) responsible for the overall educational policy, set out by the Ministry of Education and Science, within the territory of the respective district. Regional education governance bodies are territorial administration of the Ministry of Education and Science for management and control of the public education system. They create conditions for the state education policy in the region and are funded by the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science

6.3 Preventing early leaving from education and training (ELET)

National strategy

There is existing national strategy called Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers (2013 – 2020) ([Стратегия за намаляване дела на преждевременно напусналите образователната система \(2013 – 2020\)](#)). The main ways of achieving the policy goals of the strategy are prevention, intervention and compensation.

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the processes connected to the implementation and coordination of the Strategy. An important milestone in the Strategy is the establishment of a Coordination mechanism ([referred to as the Mechanism \(back2school\)](#)) to tackle early school-leaving, involving the educational, social, health and administrative services as well as municipalities.

Shared responsibilities among different institutions are ensured through the mechanism partnership agreement and the coordination unit.

The coordination unit supports the Minister of Education and Science in the process of organization, coordination and control of the implementation of the Strategy with the help of other ministries, institutions and social partners.

Since its introduction for the time period 2013 – 2020, the strategy has not been amended. Action plans are prepared on annual basis and a two-year action plan was drafted for the period 2018-2020.

A report for the implementation of the Strategy was published in 2019. This interim report presents the results from the implementation of introduced policies and measures reported by the stakeholders – ministries and institutions, directorates and departments of the Ministry of Education and Science. The purpose of this report is to inform all stakeholders about the progress of the Strategy implementation in 2019 measured in accordance with the indicators of the Action Plan.

During the period 2013 – 2016, the share of early school leavers in Bulgaria increases from 12,5% in 2013 to 13,8% in 2016. For the first time since 2013, in 2017 the indicator decreases by 1,4% in comparison to 2016, thus reaching 12,7%. This is due both to the efficient policies for reducing early school leaving during the previous years and to the effective relevant policies aimed at inclusion in forms of education and training of those who have not completed secondary education. In 2018, the share of early school leavers remains at the 2017 level – 12,7%, i.e. no progress is reported in 2018.

Formal education: main policy measures on ELET

National Program "Together for Every Child" ([Национална програма „Заедно за всяко дете“](#))

One of the priorities of the work of the Ministry of Education and Science is to cover and involve children and school students at compulsory school age in the education system and to ensure equal access to education for all children and school students. The program consists of 2 modules:

1. Module 1 – Support of the Coverage Teams – BGN 100 000 (about EUR 50 000)
2. Module 2 – Good Practices for Interaction of Preschool and School Institutions with Parents – BGN 100 000 (about EUR 50 000).

The program is effective until 2020. Its total budget is BGN 200 000 (about EUR 100 000).

Eligible beneficiaries under Module 1 comprise schools, nursery schools, regional inspectorates on education, and under Module 2 – state and municipal nursery schools and schools.

The activities under the program should ensure interaction between institutions and parent community for the purposes of applying an integrated approach to the realisation of measures for improving the coverage of children and school students and their inclusion in the system of preschool and school education. The activities should also ensure active cooperation in accordance with the Coverage Mechanism model established with Council of Ministers' Decree No 100/08.06.2018, amended and supplemented by Council of Ministers' Decree No 259/14.10.2019.

Principles for funding under Module 1:

- Ensuring support for the implementation of the work of the coverage teams, including expenses for business trips of the coverage team with regard to the implementation of the Home Visit measure;
- Holding interinstitutional meetings at regional and/or municipal level organised by the Regional inspectorates on education with the participation of coverage teams to discuss and solve organizational and methodological issues to improve the effectiveness of the teams' work;
- Preparation and dissemination of information materials supporting the work of the teams to communicate the measures for coverage and keeping children and school students in the education system among parents and within the community – printed materials, videos, audio materials. The maximum amount of the grant per application is BGN 3500 (about EUR 1800).

Eligible beneficiaries under Module 2 comprise state and municipal nursery schools. The funds under this module are intended for the interaction of the coverage teams with the parents and other family members; for organization of activities to attract and engage all

stakeholders in the process of coverage and keeping children and school students in the system of preschool and school education. Eligible activities comprise:

- Awareness raising campaigns for the role of education of children and school students among parents and within the community children live in;
- Activities aimed at involving parents/ families in the school life and motivating them for the education of their children through trainings, group training courses, lectures, etc.;
- Training of parents on how to recognise, prevent and avoid adverse manifestations among children and school students – discrimination, aggression, bullying, etc.;
- Organisation of initiatives for promoting best practices for interaction of institutions for coverage and inclusion of children and school students in education.

The maximum amount of the grant under any application submitted by the beneficiary is BGN 2000 (about EUR 1000).

Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

Ready for Tomorrow – mentorship program for work with children of Ela Association ([Менторска програма за работа с деца „Готови за утре“ на Сдружение „Ела“](#)). The team of Ela Association for Shared Learning developed a mentorship program for work of young volunteers with children. The program addresses all stages and processes within the interaction between the mentor and the mentee, offers a structure and responds to the main demands of young people who are willing to spend time for being mentors.

The mentorship program comes as a natural continuation of the long-term work of the association with students in Pedagogy and other humanitarian programs and their training to work directly with children. With this program, the team of Ela offers a structured process with clearly defined roles, principles of work and proper relationship limits. The program considers targeting an important aspect of the mentorship process. The skill to set targets, to define steps for their achievement and the ability to analyze the results are important both for everyday and school life and for the professional development of children in future as well. Targeting is addressed as a tool to find school students' strengths and their actual use in life.

The program is presented in a handbook available on Ela Association's website. The handbook further addresses the challenges that a mentor could face and the ways to overcome them.

The program was developed with the help of student volunteers and school students from the 5th grade in 156th School of General Education "Vasil Levski", Kremikovtsi. Children's feedback is totally positive. Almost all of them state they they loved the communication with students. More than 80% believe that they set targets more easily after these meetings, and 70% share that it was nice to find out and discuss their own strengths and that they feel more confident in doing plans for themselves. The training program and the handbook for volunteering mentors are developed under project "Ready for Tomorrow – program for young volunteers as mentors of children from vulnerable groups". The project was funded by the National Youth Program (2016-2020) of the Ministry of Youth and Sports under contract No 25-00-25/02.06.2020.

The main topic of the new free online handbook developed by the [Center for Inclusive Education](#) is how to make school make sense again. It is aimed at supporting teachers and principals across the country to cope with the constantly increasing lack of motivation among school students to go to school.

The Handbook is a collection of the experience of the Center for Inclusive Education during the intermediate stage of the [School Makes Sense Program](#), implemented with the support of Velux Foundation in two Bulgarian schools – Secondary School Georgi Benkovski in the town of Teteven and Secondary School Hristo Smirnenski in the town of Brezovo. Only for a year the program managed to increase the motivation for learning of more than 70% of

the participating children and even to decrease the number of unauthorized absences by 20% in comparison to the previous year by focusing on the link between learning and life.

Namely the broken link between school and life turns out to be among the key problems in the Bulgarian education – children do not understand how what they study in class would be useful for their future and therefore lose their interest in school. According to the national representative study of the Center, 30% of 6th grade students in Bulgaria are at risk of school leaving and 45% of them believe that the basic subjects, such as mathematics, history and natural sciences, are not interesting at all.

Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions

There is a Coordination unit for performance of the Agreement for implementation of the Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early School Leavers (2013 – 2020). The Unit is responsible for the implementation of the [Coordination mechanism \(referred to as the Mechanism\) \(back2school\)](#) to tackle early school-leaving, involving the educational, social, health and administrative services as well as municipalities.. The rules of procedure set out the functions, structure and organization of the work of the Coordination unit for performance of the Agreement for implementation of the Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early School Leavers (2013 – 2020).

The unit supports the Minister of Education and Science in the process of organization, coordination and control of the implementation of the Strategy with the help of other ministries, institutions and social partners. It works in accordance with the proposed measures and actions and the competences of every government authority and organization – party to the agreement.

It comprises the ministers of: education and science, labor and social policy, interior, healthcare, regional development and public works, finance, the director of the National Agency for Children, the director for the Agency for Social Development and the president of the Commission for Anti-Law Crime of Youngsters, three mayors and representatives of the regional authorities, who are invited by the national committee of the municipalities. The official start of the Mechanism was on 08.06.2018.

6.4 Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

There are no established procedures for validating competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings.

Young people can have the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. They cannot be officially validated and no qualification can be obtained on the basis of those learning experiences. The system of Youth Pass is used in Bulgaria but the national authorities do not offer a validation scheme on competences obtained by non-formal learning and qualifications cannot be legally obtained.

Information and guidance

There are no established procedures for validating competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Quality assurance

There is no system of quality assurance of the arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal competences.

6.5 Cross-border learning mobility

Personalised services providing counselling, guidance and information, with established mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation on cross-border learning mobility are provided by different schools and universities. However, they are not centralized or funded by public top-level authority. There are no policy measures or initiatives by top-level public authorities to support cross-border learning mobility in the context of non-formal learning and youth work.

Policy framework

The bilateral agreements in the field of education, science and culture constitute the policy framework of different scholarship schemes development, students' admission facilities improvement, co-operation between educational institutions, mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods undertaken abroad. The existing bilateral cooperation is often complemented by multilateral initiatives, thus reaching both European dimension and context. An emphasis is put on project and research development.

Bulgaria has bilateral agreements for cooperation in the field of education with: USA, Republic of Vietnam, Kingdom of Morocco, Republic of India, Republic of Armenia, the United Mexican States, Republic of Argentina, Republic of Cuba, Hashemites Kingdom of Jordan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kingdom of Thailand, Organization for Liberation of Palestina, Republic of Belarus, Mongolia, Peoples Republic of China, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, Japan, Russian Federation, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Turkey, Republic of Albania.

The most common cooperation is exchange of students and academic staff.

Main cross-border mobility programmes for students in formal education

The Erasmus+ sectoral programme is the main source of funding for student mobility in the country. Mobility is also carried out through short-term or long-term programmes for bilateral and multilateral cooperation at either national or institutional level.

There are two types of international mobility under the Erasmus+:

- training - it focuses on academic training for a period of 1 to 2 semesters in a higher education institution in a EU-member country;
- internships - it focuses on practical training at a European company for a period of 3 to 12 months.

Responsibility for the proper execution of a mobility program is shared between the sending organization (higher education institutions) and the hosting organization (higher education institution or a company).

Programmes for learning mobility are recognized in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Internship mobility is a relatively new activity and the process of recognition depends on the hosting organization and whether it is allowed to issue certificates that are recognized on the labor market.

Promoting mobility in the context of non-formal learning, and of youth work

There are no actions – either directly organised or funded – by top level authorities in support to cross-border mobility of young learners engaged in non-formal education and youth work.

In 2019, Free Youth Center, Vidin (Свободен младежки център, Видин) and Association for Development of Children and Youth – Open Club, Serbia, implemented the project "Region of Youth Participation" under CBC Program Interreg – IPA Bulgaria-Serbia 2014-2020. One of the activities of the project is training for youth leadership. It comprises

training of school students on youth leadership on the basis of developed common methodology for school self-governance. This contributed to the development of youth leadership by training school students how to work in a network of school parliaments for the purposes of promoting young people's participation in the representative democracy and civil society. The grant under the project is BGN 143 075 (about EUR 73 000).

Quality assurance

According to its rules of organization, the Human Resources Development Center (ЦРЧР) is obliged to oversee the strict and effective application of the rules for administration of the funds under the Erasmus+ Program, the European Solidarity Corps Program and other programs and projects. The Human Resources Development Center is the Bulgarian National Agency for the Erasmus+ program.

6.6 Social inclusion through education and training

Educational support

Assessment and guidance of children with special educational needs towards integrated education or towards training in special nursery schools and special schools are carried out after initial assessment by the complex pedagogical assessment teams at the regional inspectorates on education. These teams include various experts:

- special pedagogues;
- resource teachers;
- psychologists;
- speech therapists;
- teachers from general education kindergartens and schools;
- representatives of the Child Protection departments;
- other specialists if required, as well as parents of children.

Assessment is carried out at the request of parents or guardians. The head of the regional inspectorate on education approves by an order in writing the children and pupils who will be trained within the environment of general education with the appropriate resource support.

In addition to educational support for the children and pupils with special educational needs, the legislation provides measures for gifted children although they are not determined as a separate category of children with special educational needs.

The next group of people which is not legally included in the standard group of children with special educational needs, however, for which special measures are provided, are the children of migrants, the children of citizens of European Union member states, the European Economic Area and Switzerland.

Social cohesion and equal opportunities

Programmes/projects/initiatives organised by public authority and funded by the EU Fund [Процедури и проекти в процес на изпълнение по Оперативна програма „Наука и образование за интелигентен растеж“](#) (Project and procedures part of the Operational Program Education and science for intelligence growth) are operated by the Ministry of education and science. **Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in multicultural environment** under Priority Axis 3 for the period 2017-2019 with main activities: updating the curricula in higher schools, preparing pedagogical specialists for training for effective work in multicultural educational environment (higher education only); conducting short-term trainings for teachers, pedagogical specialists and school principals and kindergartens to work in a multicultural educational environment.

6.7 Skills for innovation

Innovation in formal education

Available data show that Bulgaria continues to have one of the highest percentage of graduates in social sciences, business and law, while the number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) remains low, according to the Education and Training Monitor 2019 of the European Commission.

Fostering innovation through non-formal and informal learning and youth work

According to the School and Preschool Education Act ([Закон за предучилищното и училищното образование](#)) (effective from 01.08.2016, last amendment and supplement of 18 September 2020) innovative schools are schools that achieve improvement of the quality of education by:

1. developing and implementing innovative elements in terms of organization and/or content of education;
2. organise the management, education and school environment in a new or improved way;
3. use new teaching methods;
4. develop education content, programs and curricula in a new way.

The government grants BGN 20 million (about EUR 10 million) for the National Program "Establishment of STEM School Environment" ([Национална програма „Изграждане на училищна STEM среда“](#)). The funds are used for establishment and equipment of advanced centers at schools that develop innovations in the field of natural sciences, digital technologies, engineering and mathematics. 113 state and municipal schools will receive grants under this program in 2021. In 2020 the funds were allocated among 153 schools. The STEM centers are a learning model that facilitates mathematics and natural sciences training.

6.8 Media literacy and safe use of new media

National strategy

There is no national strategy on media literacy and safe use of new media or other public normative act. However, there is a [Media Literacy Coalition](#) in Education.

In terms of national documents, media literacy is provided for in the Ordinance of 2016 on civic education ([Наредбата от 2016 г. за гражданското образование](#)). Media literacy was included in this ordinance in 2018.

Media literacy and online safety through formal education

The skill to search for and use information is directly related to the young people's ability to think critically and to be full-value and active citizens. Today, only 50% of school students may assess the authenticity of information.

During the school year 2018/2019, classes in media literacy were introduced for the first time in order to establish digital and media competences including 5 key skills – information literacy, communications and cooperation, creation of digital content, safety and problem solving. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science, school students and teachers need adequate resources for training and teaching in these classes. This applies especially to disadvantaged areas where the environment is worse.

According to the Media Literacy Coalition in Education, inclusion of new classes is a positive step but this must be accompanied by appropriate teacher training. With regard to media

literacy classes, the Coalition issued its position as early as the end of August 2018 stating that the introduction of digital literacy elements should be on all subjects and not in a limited number of hours as a separate discipline. At the same time, teachers should be supported to acquire the knowledge and skills that will make them more effective in delivering this knowledge to the students, the members of the coalition insisted. [The conference "How to Teach Media Literacy at School - Methods and Practices"](#), which took place on November 10th 2018 in Sofia, provided an opportunity to more than 80 teachers from all over the country to get acquainted with practice-tested methodologies for media literacy training for students from 1st to 12th grade.

The lack of a methodology for media literacy training has led members of the coalition to unite their expertise and support the process of introducing media literacy classes in schools. Several of the organizations involved in the coalition have already developed and established methodologies or are in the process of developing such ones on ongoing projects. Overall, they manage to cover all classes from 1st to 12th grade.

A good example of a particular project on the topic is the CLAS Project ([КЛАС \[Критични:Любознателни:Активни:Смели\]](#)) implemented by European Institute Foundation ([фондация „Европейски институт“](#)) for a period of 30 months. The start date of the project was 19.09.2019 . The project is aimed at promoting the media literacy and civic education. It comprises 7 interrelated activities, including initiatives for training on civic education and media literacy for teachers and school students, three-days training camp on media literacy for school students, and establishment of local partnerships between civic organisations and educational institutions/ organisations. 3 educational materials and tools will be developed and disseminated – 2 handbooks (on civic education and media literacy) and online platform with educational blog/ vlog. Target groups comprise teachers and lecturers from disadvantaged areas across the country (14 towns), and the final beneficiaries comprise children and young people and school students at all ages from selected towns. As a result of the project, the media literacy and the quality of civic participation in the target towns are expected to improve.

Promoting media literacy and online safety through non-formal and informal learning

Under the National Campaign "I Will Not Be Hacked ([„Национална информационно-образователна кампания „Няма да ме хакнат“](#))" the [State e-Government Agency](#) organizes a number of online and event initiatives, with the support of other government institutions and NGOs. In 2018, within the 6-month period of the campaign and the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, lessons took place for primary and secondary schools, educational materials and business workshops.

Some of the supporters of the Campaign "I Will Not Be Hacked" are the Ministry of Education and Science; the Ministry of Transport, Information Technologies and Communications, [the Ministry for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU](#); [the General Directorate Combating Organized Crime](#); [CoderDojo Bulgaria](#), [Digital National Coalition](#); the [State Agency for National Security](#).

[Media Literacy Days](#) is a campaign that promotes the need to introduce media literacy into education. It is organized by The [Media Literacy Coalition](#), started for the first time in 2018. It is organised by the NGO's coalition for Development of Media Literacy of Bulgarian children.

How to make the best in a creative way while maintaining their security and that of others on the Internet? The 17 teenagers between the ages of 15 and 18 in an online hackathon: ["Digital Media Literacy Solutions: My Right to an Opinion"](#) on May 9, 2020 looked for the answers to this question.

The hackathon is part of the project "Academy for Teenagers: My Right to an Opinion", implemented by UNICEF and the Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria in partnership with Teen Station and the Media Literacy Coalition.

IN-EDU PROJECT - Inclusive communities through Media literacy & Critical Thinking Education - is a 24-month project run by 7 European partners based in Italy, Bulgaria, France, Croatia and Slovenia. It focuses on developing good practices in media literacy and critical thinking education via inclusive, non-formal learning programmes which combine training and events at community level.

The main aim of the project is to reinforce media literacy and critical thinking among students. The IN-EDU engagement programme does this through interactive activities at local level that encourage action and participation from teachers, parents and families, and other stakeholders – thus increasing also their awareness, knowledge and competences on the subject. By working at local level the project intends to have an impact on the wider communities and play a part in preventing marginalization and countering inequality.

Media Literacy Changes the World is part of the project. The event was organised at the end of January 2021.

Raising awareness about the risks posed by new media

In February, 2019, the rapporteurs in the National Eurochild Forum – Bulgaria (NEF) and the children from Megaphone worked on the topic “[How to cope with online bullying?](#)” 75 children – representatives of the National Children Network, at the age of 10 and 18 years (37 boys and 38 girls) took part in the survey.

6 questions were asked:

1. Have you ever experienced or witnessed online bullying? If yes, what happened?
2. What would you do if someone insults or bullies you online?
3. What would you do if you see that someone insults a friend of yours or someone you know online?
4. How do teachers react when a schoolmate of yours shares that they experience or witness online bullying?
5. What should teachers do with the online bullies over a peer?
6. How can we prevent children and young people online bullying over peers?

The conclusions from this study reflect the opinions of children and young people:

To the question “How do teachers react when a schoolmate of yours shares that they experience or witness online bullying?”, most of the children respond that teachers would help, however the sum of the answers, according to which children do not refer to the teachers, teachers know a little about online bullying, teachers would do nothing, or the “I don’t know” answers, is higher than the answers that teachers would help. Furthermore, children say that teachers would help by forwarding the issue to a psychologist/ pedagogic councillor and that they would try to talk. There are few answers that teachers would talk about online safety or would involve specialists from this area.

One of the most common forms of online bullying, as children’s answers show, is among peers and quite frequently online bullying transforms in physical form of violence at school. The above considerations show that the involvement of teachers in the issue by means of trainings and increasing the children’s trust to them is crucial for reducing the online bullying and raising the awareness among children.

When children speak about what they would do if somebody insults them online, most of them put an emphasis on technical settings and on “blocking”, which also corresponds to the individual measures recommended by the Safe Internet National Center.

Many respondents say that they would not mind and will cope with this themselves, sometimes by violence as well. Few children say that they will ask for help from adult relatives or specialists. The predominant positions of children are a prerequisite to suggest

that online bullying is a topic encompassed among children and adults intervene only in case of crisis.

In November 2020, the [United Nations Association of Bulgaria](#) organised online discussion on: [Online and Offline Violence against Children and Young People](#).

The participants in the discussion comprised representatives of the [National Safe Net Center](#), a lecturer from the Faculty of Law of Plovdiv University and the Bulgarian Academy of Science, as well as a representative of the multinational team in the regional office of [Plan International – an organisation for development and humanitarian activities in the Asian-Pacific region](#). The participants discussed the situation in Bulgaria and across the world, the legal framework in Bulgaria and how to react in case of online bullying.

The statistics of the National Safe Net Center ([Националният център за безопасен интернет](#)) show sharp increase of alerts. There are 8825 alerts for 2019 in comparison to 323 in 2016. 1/4 of young people at the age of 9 to 17 become victims of any kind of bullying by their peers, and 1/5 of them confess that they have performed such actions.

Data show that the reasons for increase of online bullying is that the digital generation grows in "sexually poisoned culture full of violence and that children and young people are not enough aware of the internet hazards.

Online environment enhances the opportunities for violence and exploitation of children by the closest circle – friends, partners and schoolmates. Most often, committers of online bullying are minor – 33% of the online content is generated by the children.

There are many institutions and organisations that play crucial role for the prevention of and protection against online bullying. The Criminal Code ([Наказателният кодекс](#)) provides for certain defence, as far as the crime may be established and proven. Non-profit organisations are most active in terms of violence against children.

According to the specialists who participated in this event, the Bulgarian society is not familiar with the topic of online bullying. Families and parents are not familiar with the risks in the internet and do not know how to react. The state should also become an assistant, trainer and guarantor for the protection of children.

Successful example for prevention is the Cyberscouts program of the National Safe Net Center. Cyberscouts teach students in the 5th grade how to protect themselves online by developing skills of the 21st century. As a result, school students teach their peers in class and manage to find pedophilic profiles and send alerts.

The [National Safe Net Center](#) was established in 2005. It is coordinated by the non-governmental Applied Researches and Communications Fund in partnership with Parents Association ([Асоциация "Родители"](#)) and DeKoni Advertising Agency (рекламна агенция ДеКони). The center deals with alerts for children pornography and online bullying, organises trainings, consultations of children, teachers, parents.

Plan International is an organization for development and humanitarian activity, which strengthens the rights of children and equality of girls. In 2019 it is active in 77 countries and reaches 21,6 million girls and 18,9 million boys worldwide.

6.9 Awareness-raising about non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

Information providers / counselling structures

A Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Innovations in Non-Formal Education ([Център за интердисциплинарни изследвания и иновации в неформалното образование](#)) was established to cooperate for the further development and establishment of non-formal education as a field of active policy and practices in global, regional, national and institutional context.

The Center has the status of academic and scientific laboratory at the Social Work Department of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", which operates as a voluntary association of lecturers, PhD students, students and administrators at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

The objective of the Center is to integrate research, educational, methodological, production, information and consultative activities and services through innovation researches and practices and to provide expertise for the development of products, environments, resources, organisations and networks for the needs of non-formal education.

Awareness raising initiatives

In accordance with the Youth Act ([Закон за младежта](#)), the Ministry of Youth and Sports develops and maintains National Youth Information System (Национална информационна система за младежта ([НИСМ](#))) for the purposes of ensuring updated information for the needs of youth in the country and planning, monitoring, managing and assessing youth policies at national, regional and municipal level.

The National Youth Information System contains:

1. details of youth organisations in the country;
2. list of national representative youth organisations;
3. researches on the status of youth, analysis and assessments of the implementation of youth policies at national, regional and municipal level;
4. national and European documents related to the youth policy implementation;
5. updated information about the youth activity funding opportunities.

The National Youth Information System is publicly available through the website of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The NGO Portal ([НПО Портала](#)) publishes information from and for civic organisations:

- Latest news;
- Forthcoming events;
- Job, apprenticeship and volunteer announcements;
- Announcements for funding, contests, scholarships, etc.

The Human Resources Development Center ([Център за развитие на човешките ресурси](#)) is the Bulgarian Erasmus+ Agency. Information about all programs administered by the Center can be found on its website.

6.10 Current debates and reforms

Forthcoming policy developments

Since January 2021, on the Public Consultations Portal ([Портал за обществени консултации \(strategy.bg\)](#)) there is an open debate for the Digital Qualification National Program.

The Digital Qualification National Program meets the need of targeted efforts and investments for ensuring high quality of preparation of school and university students, teachers and lecturers with view of the digital transformation of education.

The program is aimed at lecturers from the state higher education establishments accredited under the Higher Education Act, at teachers in secondary schools and at representatives of the business who are willing to start practicing teacher and lecturer activity. This will ensure enough staff for the education system who have high level of

digital competence and who are motivated to improve it throughout their professional life. This will also contribute to the reinforcement of the connection between education, researches, employers and various institutions in the education system, including at European level, in the field of digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

For the purposes of achieving the objectives of the national program, qualification trainings of teachers, lecturers and business representatives will be organised. In order to improve the team interactions between lecturers, qualification trainings in the context of competence approach will be organised. Existing and future lecturers and teachers in subjects, disciplines and modules related to the work in digital environment, as well as business representatives who are willing to start teacher and lecturer career will be a priority group of the program.

Ongoing debates

In May 2020, the National Youth Forum (NYF) ([Национален младежки форум](#)) – the biggest youth platform in Bulgaria with more than 50 member organisations countrywide, sent the Minister of Education and Science an [open letter on the role of non-formal learning and youth organisations in the achievement of learning results](#). With this letter, NYF and another 11 youth NGOs – members of NYF, working with non-formal learning methods, expressed their readiness to help for overcoming the consequences of the changes and measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With their letter, the authors of the letter called for:

- Recognition of youth organisations and youth work as key providers of trainings in the field of non-formal learning – proven method for personal development and acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences;
- Involvement of youth organisations and all nongovernmental organisations and youth workers active in the field of non-formal learning, for the purposes of facilitating the process of overcoming the challenges in the education system through consultations and provision of innovative methods from long-term practice with young people;
- Development and application of standards in the education system on formal and non-formal trainings for acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences, together with representatives of nongovernmental organisations working the field;
- Recognition of the Council of Europe’s standards on non-formal learning for the purposes of ensuring adequate and quality environment and infrastructure for the effectiveness of the education system, especially in the current Covid-19-related situation.

7. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Improving the health of young people and their well-being is one of the major priorities of the [National Youth Strategy 2010 – 2020](#) ([Национална стратегия за младежта 2010 – 2020](#)).

In 2011 the [Ministry of Health](#) established the [National Center of Public Health and Analyses](#), which, together with the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) and other stakeholders and organisations, develops youth-related policies in this field. The main fields of action institutions are operating in are encouraging physical activity, improving sexual culture, access to health education and mental health.

According to a [study](#) carried out in 2018 by [Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bulgaria office](#), 54% of young people determine their health condition as “Excellent”, 29% say it is “Very good”, 15 – “Good”, and hardly 1% - “Fair”. [2018 Annual Report on Youth](#) ([Годишен доклад за младежта за 2018](#)) shows that hardly 1/3 of young people in the country practice sport.

7.1 General context

Main trends in the health conditions of young people

During the recent years we are witnessing alarming trends with regard to young people's health in Bulgaria. [2018 Annual Report on Youth \(Годишен доклад за младежта за 2018\)](#) shows that more than half (53%) of young people at the age of 25 and 29 years drink spirits, and 14% of them have administered light drugs. As a comparison, 52% of young people drink alcohol in 2010.

In 2016 the [National Center of Public Health and Analyses](#) and several NGOs participated in the international initiative [ACT!2030](#). According to the published data it is clear that the use of cigarettes is widely disseminated among young people. Bulgaria ranks first among European countries with regard to smoking in teenage. The trend of high use of alcohol remains unchanged. 86% of students at the age of 16 have used alcohol; almost 60% of them have drunk during the last month, and 46% have got drunk at least once during this period.

The following negative trends can be seen with regard to sexual health and behavior:

- Start of sexual life at the age of 16;
- Wide practice of unsafe sexual contacts (30% of young people do not use condoms for their first sexual intercourse);
- Use of drugs and alcohol before and during sexual intercourse;
- Maintaining parallel sexual relations;
- 10 and more years older sex partners.

As per the data of the [Ministry of Health](#), the number of young people infected with HIV is relatively higher, and 34% of newly registered HIV-positive individuals are at the age of 20 to 29 years.

Main concepts

The [health status](#) of people in Bulgaria has improved more slowly than in other EU countries, as shown by persistently low life expectancy. Several recent reforms have attempted to shift the Bulgarian health system away from over-reliance on hospital care and to increase efficiency. Nevertheless, challenges in terms of access and quality remain substantial. The concept of health and wellbeing includes state of physical and mental stable condition of the individuals.

7.2 Administration and governance

Governance

The major institution that takes care of and governs the national health policy is the [Ministry of Health](#). It is supported by the [National Center of Public Health and Analyses \(NCPHA\)](#) especially established in 2011, and by the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#). NCPHA is a structure of the national healthcare system and works for the protection of public health, promotion of health and prophylaxis of diseases, information provision for healthcare management. The center manages, controls and coordinates the information activities in healthcare by:

- Developing and unifying medical and statistics documents for the health status of the population and for the resources and activity of healthcare establishments;
- Developing mathematical models and forecasts for the demographic and health status of the population;
- Ensuring operational and annual medical-statistics and economic information;

- Carrying out activities for development of common health information system and e-healthcare;
- Developing and introducing a system for classification of patients and reporting and payment technologies;
- Maintaining, updating and publishing health information standards;

Cross-sectoral cooperation

The main objective of the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) is to implement common, consistent and sustainable youth policy in the country.

The wide scope of problems affecting young people requires multi-sectoral approach in the youth policy. To this end, it could not be successful without the appropriate cooperation with other sectors, such as education, employment, gender equality, healthcare, competitiveness, etc. This multi-sectoral approach needs to be developed at national, regional, district and municipal level by including targeted actions supporting the development of young people in the sectoral policies, and by ensuring opportunities for constructive dialogue with them when formulating, implementing and evaluating the youth policy.

7.3 Sport, youth fitness and physical activity

National strategy(ies)

The main focus of both the [National Youth Strategy 2010 – 2020](#) (Национална стратегия за младежта 2010 – 2020) and in the [National Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Republic of Bulgaria \(2012 –2022\)](#) (Националната стратегия за развитие на физическото възпитание и спорта в Република България (2012 –2022)) is sports and physical activity among young people.

[2018 Annual Report on Youth](#) (Годишен доклад за младежта за 2018) shows that hardly 35% of young people practice sports, and the other two thirds state they do not practice physical activity. The trends show that men are more active than women, however the share of young people who do not practice sport increase with the increase of the age.

Data show that gyms are the main place where young people practice sport – 42%, followed by outdoor sports grounds/ facilities – 33%. The gym is the main place for practicing sports in Sofia and district cities, while outdoor sports grounds/ facilities are mostly used in small towns and villages. According to the enquiry among young people, the lack of time is outlined as the major reason for young people not to practice sport – more than one third. 28% of them state that they are not interested, not willing, or do not need to be physically active.

The main priorities of the [National Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Republic of Bulgaria \(2012 –2022\)](#) (Националната стратегия за развитие на физическото възпитание и спорта в Република България (2012 –2022)) are as follows:

- Physical education and sports in leisure time;
- Physical education and sports for students;
- Physical education and sports for people with disabilities;
- Top level sports.

Promoting and supporting sport and physical activity among young people

Promoting physical activity of children and young people and ensuring opportunities for their involvement in sport activities are among the major priorities of the [Ministry of Youth](#)

and Sports (MYS). MYS policy, measures and activities in this area are determined by taking into account the role of sport as an important factor of human development and the need to ensure opportunities for choice and access of people to practice physical exercises and sports. They are developed in accordance with the objective and the main tasks of the [National Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Republic of Bulgaria \(2012 –2022\)](#) (Националната стратегия за развитие на физическото възпитание и спорта в Република България (2012 –2022)) and are in pursuance of the measures as set out in the [Governance Program of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria 2017-2021](#) (Програмата за управление на правителството на Република България 2017-2021), and in accordance with the EU guidelines and recommendations for promotion of health enhancing physical activity of young citizens.

With regard to ensuring better conditions and opportunities for physical activity and practicing sport by children and young people, the objectives, measures and activities of MYS are aimed at:

- Motivating children to participate in sports activities with view of improvement of their physical capacity, diversification and full-value use of leisure time.
- Ensuring conditions for children and young people to be physically active by practicing sports and opportunities for performance and development in sports.
- Using the role of sport for prevention against diseases, obesity, spine curvature disorders, intolerance, aggression, violence, use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.
- Formation and development of social qualities of children – teamwork skills, tolerance, leadership, discipline, confidence, observing the rules and principles of fair play.

MYS funds the implementation of [Grassroots Sport Development Program \(Програма за развитие на спорта за всички\)](#) to support the activity of multisport organisations. The program provides opportunities for sport of representatives of different social groups, mainly children and young people. More than 200 sport events and competitions in more than 50 sports disciplines are realized on annual basis, involving more than 170 000 participants. The funds ensured for grassroots sports, children and young people are about BGN 5 000 000 per year.

Since 2016, MYS implements a new program for people for disabilities – [Program for Development of Sports for People with Disabilities \(Програма за развитие на спорта за хората с увреждания\)](#). MYS main objective is to improve the conditions and to provide opportunities for adapted physical activity and sports by people with disabilities as a factor for improvement of their living quality, rehabilitation and social integration. More than 60 sport events and competitions are realized under this program involving about 1500 participants in different towns and cities across the country.

Physical education in schools

In pursuance of the policy for promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyle of students from first to twelfth grade in the Bulgarian schools, in addition to the compulsory physical education and sports classes, another class for organizing and staging sport activities approved by the Minister of Education and Science by proposal of the Minister of Youth and Sports is put on the weekly curriculum. There is an option to organize school teams that motivates students to participate in school games and other sport activities.

Two programs are implemented with regard to sport for students: [Development of Students' Sports Program \(програма „Развитие на спорта на учащите“\)](#) and [Sports for Children at Risk Program \(програма „Спорт за деца в риск“\)](#). They provide opportunities to multisport organisations operating in the field of school, university sport and sport for children at risk, and to sport clubs to realise sport projects and to develop their activity on the territory of all municipalities in the country.

The [Development of Students' Sports Program \(програма „Развитие на спорта на учащите“\)](#) ensures conditions for encouraging students to physical activity and systematic

practice of sport. Programs objectives are to increase the number of school and university sport clubs subject to registration by the licensed multisport federations and associations for the purposes of improving their sport activity, and to increase the number of school and university students who practice sport actively. For the realization of this program, MYS ensures funds in total amount of BGN 350 000 which are distributed among the three projects – the one of the [Bulgarian Student Sports Association \(Българска асоциация спорт за учаци\)](#), [Academic Association of University Sports \(АУС „Академик“\)](#), and [Bulgarian Sports Federation for Children and Youth at Risk](#). The government, municipalities, education establishments and sports organisations have initiated actions for full value and efficient use of sports facilities and venues by students. The number of school students, university students and children at risk involved in the project activities of the multisport federations and associations for 2018 is more than 10 600 in 26 sport disciplines.

[Sports for Children at Risk Program \(програма „Спорт за деца в риск“\)](#) is funded and implemented in 2018. The program is aimed at increasing the number of children at risk involved in sports activities by expanding the services offered in the field of sports and by extending the scope of involvement in sports activities. The program’s objectives are to encourage the government and local authorities, sports and non-governmental organizations to create appropriate and accessible conditions for sport, to ensure sports specialists, to improve the physical, mental and functional condition, and the social integration and adaptation of children at risk. The program activities create optimal conditions for improving the opportunities for practicing physical exercises and sports.

On annual basis, the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) provides financial support for staging School Games for students from 5th to 12th grade and School Games for adolescents with impaired hearing, vision, those with physical disabilities and central nervous system disorders. Their participation in school teams and competitions is a tool for engaging their leisure time, directing their emotions and energy to sport activities, establishment of healthy habits and prevention of aggression.

During the academic year 2018/2019 88 000 students in 8 sport disciplines participated in the competitions for students from 5th to 12th grade. The funds provided by MYS for the organization and staging of these School Games are in the amount of BGN 508 000. The number of participants in the School Games for students with impaired hearing, impaired vision, those with physical disabilities and central nervous system disorders in 2018/2019 is 330 in 11 sport disciplines, and the funds provided by MYS are in the amount of BGN 32 510.

Collaboration and partnerships

The [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) works actively and cooperates successfully both with institutions and civil and nongovernmental organisations. The [Ministry of Education](#) and all sports federations play a key role and facilitate the preparation and implementation of strategies and programs described in the previous chapters.

Last but not least, MYS also works with civil and nongovernmental organisations active in the field of youth, which give feedback, share ideas, opinions and views, and realise very successful projects in this field.

7.4 Healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition

National strategy(ies)

One of the main strategic objectives of the [National Youth Strategy 2010 – 2020 \(Национална стратегия за младежта 2010 – 2020\)](#) is to promote healthy lifestyle among young people. The main fields of action with this regard are as follows:

- Prevention of factors causing risks for young people’s health. This can be achieved by promoting and supporting the cooperation between youth workers, health specialists,

young people and sports organisations for the establishment of healthy lifestyle among young people. Furthermore, MYS has set the goal to ensure effective application of the EU physical activity guidelines among young people, especially those with disabilities.

- Improvement of the sexual culture of young people. The main focus here is on the development and dissemination of health information corresponding to the needs of young people through mobilisation of youth information networks. In partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth and Sports works for the development and application of new forms of health education at schools, as well as promotion of health education in culture clubs (читалища), youth centers, sports and youth organisations, including by applying the “peer-to-peer learning” approach, for the purposes of obtaining knowledge, attitudes and skills for healthy lifestyle, safe behaviour and avoiding health endangering practices. Last but not least, the focus is on improvement of the access of young people to high quality services appropriate for them and to updated scientific information on the issues of sexual and reproductive health, prevention of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The other strategic document aimed at young people is the National Program for Prevention of Chronic Non-Infectious Diseases 2013-2020 (Националната програма за превенция на хроничните незаразни болести 2014-2020) of the Ministry of Health. Target groups comprise babies, children and young people up to 29 years of age, women in fertile age, pregnant and breastfeeding women, active population, elderly people, medical specialists and associated medical specialists/ healthcare professionals, non-medical specialists and partners.

Encouraging healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition for young people

The Youth Policies Directorate (Дирекция „Младежки политики“) at the Ministry of Youth and Sports implements National Youth Program /2016-2020/ (Национална програма за младежта /2016-2020/) with two subprograms: “Development of Youth Information and Consultative Centers Network” and “National Youth Initiatives and Campaigns”. One of the 6 thematic areas of the second subprogram is “Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle among Young People”.

The other program funded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports aimed at promotion of healthy lifestyle and nutrition is the National Program for Youth Activities under article 10a of the Gambling Act (Националната програма за изпълнение на младежки дейности по чл.10а от Закона за хазарта). During the period 2017 – at present 14 projects in total have been funded with the amount of up to BGN 100 000.

During the reporting period a significant number of activities aimed at health prevention and prophylaxis of diseases among children and students have been realized within the frames of the National Program for Prevention of Chronic Non-Infectious Diseases 2013-2020 (Националната програма за превенция на хроничните незаразни болести 2014-2020) of the Ministry of Health. Activities have been aimed at restricting the lifestyle-related risk factors (smoking, harmful nutrition, low physical activity, use of alcohol, etc.); the biological factors of risk to chronic non-infectious diseases. Different training methods and training forms have been used: lectures, talks, discussion, trainings, TV and radio shows, audio and video films, video displays, exhibitions, quizzes, thematic days, health celebrations, sports competitions, contests, campaigns, etc.

Organizing the European Week of Sport #BeActive, which is part of a pan-European policy for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. National coordinator of the initiative for Bulgaria is the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Health education and healthy lifestyles education in schools

Elementary, high education (high school, vocational school) and universities in Bulgaria provide various possibilities for encouraging modern built health literacy, lowering the

risky to health conduct and helping kids and adolescents for their future "navigation" in the system of healthcare. According to the research on the topic of [Health literacy](#).

The age group of young people 13-14 are in 7th or 8th grade of the educational system. The subject [Биология и здравно образование](#) (Biology and Health Education) is mandatory part of the curriculum of the private and public schools in the country. That includes knowledge of body functioning, main concepts of health care, prevention and deceases.

Peer-to-peer education approaches

- [National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities](#) under Article 10a of the Gambling Act 2018.
- In pursuance of these policies, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has developed a National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities under Article 10a of the Gambling Act 2018 as a tool for building socially responsible behavior in line with the principles of the Youth Act, the priorities of the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) and the European Youth Policy.
- The program was developed in response to observed negative trends in various forms of aggression, addictions and risk behavior among young people.
- The main priority of the Program is to provide a supportive and encouraging environment for the personal, professional and social realization of the young people in the country by building socially responsible behavior and prevention of various forms of dependence and/or aggression, thus improving the quality of life and the environment in which young people live and communicate.

The aim of the program is to create conditions for socially responsible behavior by promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing aggression and various forms of addiction among young people. Peer-to-peer education approaches might be included in the activities of the program.

Collaboration and partnerships

The collaboration and partnership on top-level is appearing in the implementation of the following National Programs:

- National Program for Prevention and Control of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2020
- National Program for Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2020
- National Program for the Prevention of Oral Diseases in Children from 0 to 18 years of age in the Republic of Bulgaria 2015-2020
- National Program for the Improvement of Maternal and Child Health 2014-2020_

Raising awareness on healthy lifestyles and on factors affecting the health and well-being of young people

[National Program for the Implementation of Youth Activities](#) under Article 10a of the Gambling Act 2018 is the program under which projects for raising awareness on healthy lifestyle can be developed, especially in the field of addiction prevention, active lifestyle and well-being.

7.5 Mental health

National strategy(ies)

There is not stand alone strategy for mental health of young people or mental health. The strategic document covering the overall healthcare matter in the country is the

[Национална здравна стратегия 2020](#) National Health strategy 2020. In Bulgaria, one of the policies of the general National Health Strategy 2014-2020 'Creating conditions for health for all through the lifespan' dedicated to mental health, is 'Protecting and improving mental health'. The focus of this mental health policy is on mental health promotion, starting from early childhood and continuing through the lifespan.

Improving the mental health of young people

There are not specifically target available top-level policies, programmes, projects or initiatives addressing the mental health of young people and suicide prevention.

7.6 Mechanisms of early detection and signposting of young people facing health risks

Policy framework

There is not a policy framework dedicated only to early detection and signposting of young people facing health risk.

Stakeholders

There is no mechanism on national level to involve different stakeholders in detecting young people at health risk at early stage.

Guidance to stakeholders

Target groups

Funding

7.7 Making health facilities more youth friendly

On top level there is no policy framework, program or initiative aiming more youth friendly healthcare. The NGO sector is organizing campaigns and initiatives concerning youth health.

7.8 Current debates and reforms

There is a project of a normative [Проект на Постановление на Министерски съвет](#) [act](#) by the Council of Ministers aiming the opening of a children hospital in 2020 for children with chronic illnesses and children with disabilities in the city of Burgas. The topic will also influence the young people in the age group 15-18 who will be covered by the target group of the eventual facility.

8. CREATIVITY AND CULTURE

In accordance with the approved structure in the country, the governmental cultural policy in Bulgaria is implemented at two levels – national and local. At national level, the responsibility for the establishment and implementation of cultural policy is allocated between the legislative authority – the [National Assembly](#), and the executive authority – the [Council of Ministers](#). (see Subsection Youth Wiki/Bulgaria 8.1 General Context). [The National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage \(Национален институт за недвижимо културно наследство\)](#) supports the Minister of Culture in the implementation of the governmental policy in the field of protection of the immovable cultural heritage. (See Subsection Youthwiki Bulgaria 8.2 Administration and governance).

More information about the opportunities offered by the Institute such as the [Cultural Heritage Program](#) (програма „Културно наследство“) can be found in Subsection Youthwiki Bulgaria 8.4 Promoting culture and cultural participation. The program has a module where the priorities for funding includes projects that actively involve educational institutions through children, school and student audiences in the process and ensure their engagement through communication of new knowledge about the value of cultural heritage. With available funding for this module is up to about BGN 10 000 (EUR 5000) per project. Young people and youth organizations also can be beneficiaries under the [program Socially Engaged Arts](#) (програма „Социално ангажирани изкуства“) aimed at projects in all fields of art and culture addressing social problems and causes and applying creative approaches when dealing with disadvantaged communities and groups. More information could be found in Subsection Youthwiki Bulgaria 8.9 Enhancing social inclusion through culture.

8.1 General context

Main trends in young people's creativity and cultural participation

According to the [Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria](#) (Конституция на Република България), the state establishes conditions for free development of science, education and arts and supports them. It takes care for the protection of the national historic and cultural heritage. According to article 54 of the Constitution everyone shall have the right to avail himself/herself of the national and universal human cultural values and to develop his/her own culture in accordance with his/her ethnic self-identification, which shall be recognised and guaranteed by the law. Artistic, scientific and technological creativity shall be recognised and guaranteed by the law.

In accordance with the [Culture Protection and Development Act](#) (Закона за закрила и развитие на културата) (promulgated in 1999, last amendment and supplement of 9 June 2020) the main principles of the national cultural policy are as follows:

1. democracy of cultural policy, freedom of artistic creativity and not allowing censorship;
2. decentralization of governance and funding of cultural activities;
3. equality of authors and cultural organisations;
4. protection and enrichment of cultural and historic heritage, preservation of Bulgarian literary language, traditions and customs;
5. protection of national cultural identity and the culture of Bulgarian communities abroad;
6. promotion of cultural diversity while preserving the unity of the national culture;
7. encouragement of cultural industry and market of works of art and supporting producer's work in the field of culture;
8. finding, supporting and training of young talents in the field of culture;
9. encouragement of donorship, patronage and sponsorship in the field of culture;
10. development and improvement of education in the field of arts and culture.

Main trends in young people's creativity and cultural participation

The [National Institute of Statistics](#) provides statistics for the participation of population at the age of 25 – 64 years in cultural activities and events.

INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE VISITED LIVE PERFORMANCES BY AGE (2016)

	Total – pcs.	1-3 times during the last 12 months		4-6 times during the last 12 months		More than 7 times during the last 12 months		Never during the last 12 months	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Total	3 852 978	1 119 292	29.1	297 605	7.7	169 452	4.4	2 266 629	58.8
By age									
25 - 34	915 011	279 033	30.5	83 980	9.2	45 540	5.00	506 457	55.3

INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE GONE TO CINEMA BY AGE (2016)

	Total – pcs.	1-3 times during the last 12 months		4-6 times during the last 12 months		More than 7 times during the last 12 months		Never during the last 12 months	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Total	3 863 951	949 901	24.6	323 609	8.4	189 001	4.9	2 401 441	62.1
By age									
25 - 34	931 504	286 450	30.8	137 437	14.8	95 412	10.2	412 204	44.3

INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE VISITED CULTURAL SIGHTS BY AGE (2016)

	Total – pcs.	1-3 times during the last 12 months		4-6 times during the last 12 months		More than 7 times during the last 12 months		Never during the last 12 months	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Total	3 829 172	998 225	26.1	233 391	6.1	160 377	4.2	2 437 178	63.6
By age									
25 - 34	909 790	260 669	28.7	59 091	6.5	43 986	4.8	546 045	60.0

POPULATION WITH REFERENCE TO BOOK READING BY AGE (2016)

	Total – pcs.	Individuals who have read at least one book during the last 12 months		Individuals who have not read any books during the last 12 months	
		number	%	number	%
Total	3 892 607	2 067 269	53.1	1 825 338	46.9
By age					
25 - 34	926 243	491 071	53.0	435 172	47.0
35 - 54	1 997 597	1 091 465	54.6	906 132	45.4

POPULATION WITH REFERENCE TO NUMBER OF BOOKS READ BY AGE (2016)

	Total – pcs.	Less than 5 books during the last 12 months		5-10 books during the last 12 months		More than 10 books during the last 12 months	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
Total	2 057 433	1 072 432	52.1	569 546	27.7	415 455	20.2
By age							
25 - 34	490 375	249 189	50.8	138 643	28.3	102 543	20.9

According to the publication of the National Institute of Statistics *2018 Key Data about Culture in the Republic of Bulgaria (Основни данни за културата в Република България през 2018 година)*, as at 31.12.2018:

- There are 174 museums operating in the country, which are registered in accordance with the [Cultural Heritage Act \(Закон за културното наследство\)](#). The number of visits to museums in 2018 is 5 084 thousand.
- In 2018, 15 155 performances were organised in the 75 *theaters* operating in the country visited by 2 389 thousand spectators.
- In 2018, 51 *music groups* develop their creative work – 5 philharmonic orchestras, 25 professional ensembles for folk songs and dances, and 21 orchestras.
- In 2018 the number of libraries with book stock of more than 200 thousand library units remains unchanged in comparison to the previous year (47).
- At the end of 2018, there are 69 cinemas in the country with 226 screens.

- In 2018, 83 registered and licensed radio operators work in the country. In 2018, there are 116 registered and licensed Bulgarian TV operators functioning in the country, and their number decreases by 1 in comparison to the previous year.

Upon assignment of [Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bulgaria office](#), a sociological study *Bulgarian Youth 2018/2019* („Българската младеж 2018/2019“) was conducted in 2018. Data were collected at the beginning of 2018 and the study involved more than 10 000 people at the age of 14 – 29. The study report describes the main results and conclusions of the national sociological study on the Bulgarian youth, which is a representative study of young people at the age of 14 to 29 years.

According to the study, frequency of *creativity activities* (writing, drawing, playing a music instrument) in leisure time is different for a little bit more than one third of Bulgarian young people. Here young women prevail as almost half of them are involved in arts. Teenagers are more frequently involved in creativity than young people at the age of 20 and more years, and unemployed individuals form the group of those least involved in arts. One third of Bulgarian young people *visit a youth center or a club of interests* during leisure time.

Main concepts

In accordance with the approved structure in the country, the governmental cultural policy in Bulgaria is implemented at two levels – national and local.

At national level, the responsibility for the establishment and implementation of cultural policy is allocated between the legislative authority – the [National Assembly](#), and the executive authority – the [Council of Ministers](#).

At local level, cultural policy is implemented by the local self-governance authorities – the municipalities. According to the [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#) (promulgated in 1999, last amendment and supplement of 9 June 2020) municipalities define and implement their policy for the protection and development of culture by harmonizing the principles of the national cultural policy with the local conditions and traditions.

8.2 Administration and governance

Governance

The [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#) sets out that the [Ministry of Culture](#) implements policy for protection and development of culture in accordance with its functions and powers and in observance of the principles of law.

The [Ministry of Culture](#) is in charge of the national policy of culture, cultural organisations and bodies for protection of culture, its national identity, and the ways for supporting and funding cultural work and authors.

The [Ministry of Culture](#) is the supreme central executive authority in the field of culture, which has the right of legislative initiative. It is empowered to formulate and implement the main principles of governmental cultural policy. Furthermore, authors, as well as nongovernmental organisations operating in the field of culture, are another direct and active participant in the process of formation of the cultural policy.

The [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) is in charge of the national youth policy. Taking into account the multi-sectoral nature of youth policy, the [Youth Act \(Закон за младежта\)](#) (effective from 20.04.2012, last amendment 13 March 2020) stipulates that one of the main principles of the governmental policy in this field is the coordination of youth policies in the field of education, social policy, healthcare, culture, sports, justice, internal affairs and defence.

The [Ministry of Education and Science](#) is in charge of the national policy in the field of education and science. The [Ministry of Education and Science](#) develops and adopts state standards of education and curriculums. General education in school is the same for all types of schools and is obtained in the course of the entire course of study at schools, covering, among other things, key competences, such as initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural competence and skills for expression through creativity.

A [Culture and Media Committee](#) is established at the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, which reviews bills and other acts of the National Assembly in the field of culture and media. It is in charge of ex-post impact assessment of laws falling within its jurisdiction, which is aimed at identifying their efficiency and level of achievement of objectives.

Municipalities and local self-governance authorities implement their culture and art programs at local level. Municipalities formulate and implement their policy for protection and development of culture combining the principles of the national cultural policy and the local conditions and traditions. In accordance with the [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#), municipal councils, among other things, adopt resolutions for granting creative scholarships to support young authors of culture.

[National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) is the Bulgarian organization that supports at national level the creation, development and dissemination of Bulgarian culture and arts in the country and abroad. [National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) is established by the [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#) and starts its work in November 2000. Its main objective is to support the development of culture by raising, managing and spending funds intended for the implementation of the national policy in the field of culture as set out in the programs of the government of the Republic of Bulgaria for the respective period and in the [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#). Some of the resources of the Fund are spent for creative scholarships supporting young and distinguished authors and other young specialists in the field of culture for a period of 2 years, as well as for programs and projects aimed at expanding the access of children and young people to cultural activities.

The [National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage \(Национален институт за недвижимо културно наследство\)](#) supports the Minister of Culture in the implementation of the governmental policy in the field of protection of the immovable cultural heritage.

Schools of arts and culture (Училища по изкуствата и по културата) have their own specificity that gives them a status of cultural institutes mainly aimed at ensuring professional training and education in the field of arts and culture (article 13 of the [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#)). They are located proportionately across the territory of the country, some of them being situated in the big cities, and others – in regions with strong traditions in the respective field of art. See section 8.5.

Cultural institutions comprise museums, theaters and musical groups (stage arts), and libraries.

[Chitalishta /Culture clubs/ \(Читалища\)](#). In accordance with article 2(1) of the [National Culture Clubs Act \(Закон за народните читалища\)](#), national chitalishta (culture clubs) are traditional self-governing Bulgarian cultural and educational associations in settlements, which perform governmental cultural and educational assignments. All natural persons, irrespective of their age and sex, political and religious beliefs, and ethnical background, may participate in their activities. Chitalishta (culture clubs) are non-profit legal entities.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

As part of the general governance in the country, the [Ministry of Culture](#) actively interacts with all governmental and municipal authorities in the implementation of the cultural policy

at national level. Furthermore, active cooperation is also established with a number of foreign cultural institutes established and operating on the territory of the country, among which: [British Council](#), [Institut Francais](#), [Goethe Institut](#), [Instituto Cervantes](#).

While performing its functions, the [Ministry of Culture](#) is supported by public expert councils and committees comprising representatives of creative societies, interested authorities and organisations, as well as individual authors and experts. (article 16 of the [Culture Protection and Development Act \(Закон за закрила и развитие на културата\)](#))

An [Ordinance on the terms and conditions for protection of children with distinguished talents \(Наредба за условията и реда за осъществяване на закрила на деца с изявени дарби\)](#) is adopted (effective from 01.01.2004, last amendment – 31 March 2020). Protection of children with distinguished talents is a system of measures that ensures the development of children's talents by ensuring financial support and opportunity for expression.

In coordination with the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Youth and Sports, every year, not later than the 31st of January, the Minister of Culture submits to the Council of Ministers a [Program of measures for protection of children with distinguished talents from state and municipal schools \(Програма на мерките за закрила на деца с изявени дарби от държавни и общински училища\)](#) for the current calendar year. The program covers the national and international contests, Olympiads and competitions for which protection measures under the Ordinance are implemented by means of lump-sum financial support and scholarships.

In coordination with the [Ministry of Education and Science](#), the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) and the [National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria](#), on annual basis and within the respective time periods for preparation of the draft state budget for the next year, the [Ministry of Culture](#) submits to the [Ministry of Finance](#) a summary proposal for funding of the program. The funds allocated for protection measures in 2020 are as follows:

- [Ministry of Culture](#) – BGN 502 710 (about EUR 257 000)
- [Ministry of Education and Science](#) – BGN 793 050 (about EUR 405 000)
- [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) – BGN 504 240 (about EUR 257 000).

In accordance with the [Youth Act \(Закон за младежта\)](#) (effective from 20.04.2012, last amendment 13 March 2020), the Minister of Youth and Sports is supported by the National Consultative Council on Youth with regard to the implementation of the governmental youth policy. The National Consultative Council on Youth:

1. gives opinions on draft legal regulations and strategic documents relevant to the youth policy;
2. proposes measures for achievement of the objectives of the governmental youth policy;
3. discusses other issues relevant to the implementation of the youth policy.

The National Consultative Council on Youth comprises the following members:

1. deputy minister of youth and sports, deputy minister of economy, deputy minister of tourism, deputy minister of labour and social policy, deputy minister of healthcare, deputy minister of culture, deputy minister of interior, deputy minister of justice, deputy minister of regional development and public works, deputy minister of finance, deputy minister of education and science, deputy chairperson of the Child Protection State Agency;
2. representative of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria;
3. representative of the National Representation of Student Councils;
4. one representative of each nationally represented youth organisation.

8.3 National strategy on creativity and culture for young people

Existence of a national strategy

There is no particular national strategy on the creativity and culture for young people.

The [National Youth Strategy 2010 – 2020 \(Национална стратегия за младежта 2010 – 2020\)](#) covers a ten-years' period and is published on the website of the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#)

(http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Documents/Strategii/strategy_youth_2010-2020.pdf).

Scope and contents

In pursuance of the [National Youth Strategy 2010 – 2020 \(Национална стратегия за младежта 2010 – 2020\)](#), the main tasks of youth policy in the field of culture and creativity are as follows:

- to expand the opportunities for non-formal education of young people through public support and provision of services for broadening the knowledge, experience and skills of young people aimed at their inclusion to the values of civil society, science, culture, arts, healthy lifestyle, safety of road traffic and prevention of antisocial behaviours;
- improvement of opportunities for realisation of social and creative skills of young people, depending on their interests, and encouraging initiative, youth creativity and expression by means of:
 - supporting young debutants in arts and different cultural industries;
 - encouraging the contribution of youth work for the realisation of creative abilities of young people;
 - supporting the development of young Bulgarian authors and their participation in the European and world cultural exchange.

Responsible authority for the implementation of the strategy

The [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) is in charge with the implementation of the [National Youth Strategy 2010 – 2020 \(Национална стратегия за младежта 2010 – 2020\)](#). The implementation of the Strategy is assessed with the annual National Youth Report.

Revisions/updates

There are no previous strategies for development culture, youth strategies, or any other strategic documents relevant to creativity and culture for young people.

8.4 Promoting culture and cultural participation

Reducing obstacles to young people's access to culture

In March 2019 the [Ministry of Culture](#) and the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) signed an Agreement for Cooperation between Schools and Preschools and State Cultural Institutes (Споразумение за сътрудничество между училища и детски градини и държавните културни институти) in the country. This agreement provides for that preschools and schools will organise visits to state cultural institutes in the country, and they will develop and propose drafts educational programs, performances, concerts and other stage arts. The aim is to enhance children's and students' interest in Bulgarian identity, traditions, history, and modern forms in the field of theater, music and dancing art. At the beginning of every school year, cultural institutes will announce the forthcoming events on their websites and will receive orders for visits from schools and preschools.

Disseminating information on cultural opportunities

In accordance with the [Youth Act \(Закон за младежта\)](#) (effective from 20.04.2012, last amendment 13 March 2020), the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) develops and maintains a [National Youth Information System \(Национална информационна система за младежта\)](#) for the purposes of ensuring updated information for the needs of youth in the country. Among other things, the National Youth Information System provides information about the youth organisations in the country, researches, analysis and assessment for the implementation of youth policies at national, regional and municipal level, updated information for the opportunities for funding of youth activities.

There are four youth centers operating in the country [Youth Center Dobrich \(Младежки център Добрич\)](#), [Youth Center Vratsa \(Младежки център Враца\)](#), [Youth Center Plovdiv \(Младежки център Пловдив\)](#) and [Youth Center Stara Zagora \(Младежки център Стара Загора\)](#). The work of the youth centers is funded by the [Norway Grants](#) and with subsidies from the budget of the respective municipality.

The main purpose of the youth centers is to improve the wellbeing of young people and to provide youth services. Their tasks comprise ensuring equal access to education, training and employment, organization of different initiatives in various fields young people are interested in, dissemination of information among young people, etc. Youth workers and external specialists work with young people, their parents, youth organisations.

Knowledge of cultural heritage amongst young people

[National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) implements a number of programs, one of which is the [Cultural Heritage Program \(програма „Културно наследство“\)](#).

The program is implemented in two modules.

Cultural Industries and Cultural Tourism Module supports projects for promotion of Bulgarian cultural heritage through cultural tourism and development of cultural organisations' capacity via establishment of cross-sectoral partnerships, sustainable practices and development of business models for successful cultural industries at local level.

Some of the objectives of this module are:

- to support the preservation of crafts and to stimulate industries being developed on the basis of cultural heritage and values
- to stimulate cultural organisations to use cultural tourism as an entrepreneurship tool;
- to establish multisectoral partnerships and exchange of experience and good practices;
- to stimulate innovative and ethnical practices in the development of cultural tourism, etc.

The priority projects funded under this module are as follows:

- projects that actively involve educational institutions through children, school and student audiences in the process and ensure their engagement through communication of new knowledge about the value of cultural heritage.
- projects establishing cross-sectoral partnerships between organisations in the field of culture and tourist industry, local organisations and institutions and/or representatives of local community, voluntary civil associations, private sector, and media, etc.

Available funding for this module is up to BGN 10 000 (about EUR 5000) per project.

Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage Module supports projects for preservation, research and promotion of intangible cultural heritage of Bulgaria and development of means for improved access to cultural heritage through digital technologies and delivery of cultural content. This module is aimed at highlighting the contribution of cultural

heritage to cultural diversity, identity and significant historic processes in Bulgaria and Europe.

Some of the objectives of this module are:

- to create innovative projects (including researches) presenting cultural values in an accessible way;
- to encourage better understanding of vivid cultural heritage and the specificity of its transfer between generations, etc.

The priority projects funded under this module are as follows:

- projects for development of means for improved access and promotion of cultural heritage through digital technologies;
- projects that study and promote local cultural heritage, etc.

Available funding for this module is up to BGN 20 000 (about EUR 10 000) per project.

The program is annual and the annual budget of the whole program is BGN 180 000 (about EUR 90 000).

To promote and support culture clubs (читалища) as centers of information, non-formal education, cultural performance and civic education, the [Ministry of Culture](#) implements a program for development of amateur creativity and protection of intangible cultural heritage. The program provides financial support to creative projects of culture clubs (читалища), which are implemented jointly with other nongovernmental organisations and municipalities. One of the priorities of the [Ministry of Culture](#) is to support events aimed at children and young people, including festivals, summons, celebrations, contests and other forms for development of creative potential, for manifestation of talents, for promotion of the achievements of children and youth schools of art, for preservation and promotion of traditional knowledge and skills (intangible cultural heritage), as well as for exchange of effective practices to attract children and youth audiences in the activities of culture clubs (читалища) and other cultural institutions.

55 projects of municipalities, culture clubs (читалища) and other nongovernmental organisations in total amount of BGN 140 000 (about EUR 70 000) have been supported in 2019. Some of the financially supported projects are: national contests for bagpipe players ("Magic Rhythms"), for accordion players ("Dancing Keys") and classical guitar players ("Academic Marin Goleminov"), National Folklore Festival of Two-Voice Singing – municipality of Nedelino, International Festival of Masquerade Games "Surva 2019" – municipality of Pernik, National School Folklore Feast "It was Born, It was Reborn" („Родило се, преродило“) – city of Yambol, Days of National Revival and Patriotic Song "The Gun Shot" („Топчето пукна“) – town of Klisura, Week of Arts – municipality of Samokov, etc.

The governmental subsidy for the culture clubs (читалища) was increased by 10% in the 2020 budget. The funds are allocated to 174 culture clubs (читалища) in 58 municipalities in all administrative districts across the country. They are intended for artistic and creative, organizational, library and information activity and research in the area of cultural heritage. The purpose is to support the culture clubs' libraries, art and foreign language schools, building-up and establishment of new learning forms, maintenance and creation of drama groups, creation and maintenance of collection of cultural values. The aim of the governmental subsidy is to engage more children and young people from all groups within the community in various activities of the culture clubs (читалища).

8.5 Developing cultural and creative competences

Acquiring cultural and creative competences through education and training

Ordinance No 5 of 30 November 2015 on general education (Наредба № 5 от 30 ноември 2015 г. за общообразователната подготовка) issued by the Minister of Education and Science and effective from 08.12.2015 defines the state standard of general education. General education is obtained during the entire course of school education and among other covers key competences in the field of culture and skills for creative expression. Music, Arts, Technologies and Entrepreneurship are among the subjects comprised in the general education.

Specialised training for professionals in the education, culture and youth fields

In accordance with Ordinance No 7 of 11 August 2016 on profiled education (Наредба № 7 от 11 август 2016 г. за профилираната подготовка) issued by the Minister of Education and Science and effective from 26.08.2016, the state standard of education for profiled education is a set of requirements to the results from the course of study on compulsory modules of each profiled subject, and determines the competences – knowledge, skills and attitudes, expected to be acquired at the end of the upper secondary education.

The specific objectives of music training are:

- to expand and deepen the knowledge and skills on musical culture of students by mastering competences of theory and history of music arts;
- to develop skills for cultural and creative expression;
- to establish behavioural models for active musical culture of students as part of the system of modern culture;
- to realise the role of musical culture as an important factor in the globalization of contemporary world.

The specific objectives of fine arts training are:

- to develop artistic culture of students through mastering fundamental knowledge about the theory and history of fine arts;
- to stimulate abilities for creative self-expression through the application of basic means of expression;
- to comment visual culture as part of the system of modern culture;
- to understand the role of visual culture as an important factor in the globalization of contemporary world.

There are 23 profiled secondary schools of arts and culture across the country. In terms of territorial scope, schools of arts and schools of culture are located in 12 administrative districts in the country. There are 10 artistic schools that educate students for the professions artist and designer – in Sofia, Plovdiv, Kazanlak, Sliven, Troyan, Tryavna, Smolyan and Kunino; 6 music schools, including 4 schools for classical music instruments, singing and classical dances – in Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, Stara Zagora; 2 schools for folk instruments and folk singing and Bulgarian dances – in Kotel and Shiroka Laka; 3 art schools – in Ruse, Varna and Pleven, for music, painting and dancing arts; National School of Dancing Arts in Sofia; National Secondary School of Ancient Languages and Cultures “Konstantin Kiril Filosof” in Sofia; National School Complex of Culture with Italian Language and Culture College in Gorna Banya /Sofia/ with the participation of the Republic of Italy; National Vocational Secondary School of Polygraphics and Photography in Sofia.

Upon graduation students in the schools of arts sit state exams on theory and practice of profession in accordance with national examination programs approved by the Minister of

Culture. There are national examination programs approved for obtaining the professional qualifications for the following professions: musician-instrumentalist and musician-vocalist for classical instruments, classical singing, pop and jazz singing; musician-instrumentalist and musician-vocalist for folk instruments and folk singing; artist; designer; ballet-dancer; dancer – Bulgarian dances; dancer – modern dances; actor – drama theater; actor – puppet theater; stone-cutter.

The University of Veliko Tarnovo (Великотърновски университет) offers master's program [Social and Educational Work with Young People \(Социалнопедагогическа работа с младежи\)](#). The master's program is aimed at ensuring extended general theoretical, methodological and practical training of future specialists for their successful professional work as youth workers. It is based on modern socio-economic needs and the specificity of work with young people from different social groups.

The master's program ensures:

- training for pursuing the youth worker profession through development of professional competences;
- improvement of educational, social, pedagogical, psychological and research potential of future pedagogic specialists.

Knowledge:

- profound theoretical knowledge of legal and regulatory foundations of the organization of youth policies and the governance of these policies from the perspectives of governmental sector and regional priorities;
- knowledge about youth policy in Bulgaria, its actual status and priorities, with specific focus on social and educational aspects;
- knowledge of youth as sociodemographic group, focusing on its demographic profile, education structure, attitudes to family and marriage;
- knowledge of specificity of professional work in support of young people with regard to education, employment, creation of family and full-value realisation.

Skills:

- skills for social and educational, and consultancy activity in different sectors of social sphere, of educational system and in youth-related nongovernmental and public structures;
- general and special skills to work for developing young people's abilities;
- skills for adaptation, for making mobile and adequate decisions in accordance with advanced scientific achievements and the changing social environment and with the social context of young people;
- skills for organizing and holding integrated and individual training;
- skills for work in multicultural educational environment;
- skills for identification and formation of cultural needs of varied social groups;
- skills for development and implementation of cultural and educational programs;

National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" offers [master's degree program "Youth Activities and Sport"](#). The main skills and competences provided by this master's degree program are as follows:

- Work in national and international teams
- Preparation and analysis of normative documents
- Insurance and management of information
- Development of ideas, projects and scientific data

- Organization and management of project activities
- Interrelation between different state, private, public and non-governmental youth organizations

[Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv \(Академия за музикално, танцово и изобразително изкуство "Проф. Асен Диамандиев" – Пловдив\)](#) is an accredited higher education institution providing training for bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees in various specialties of different arts: music or fine arts pedagogy, performing art (classical, folklore or pop and jazz instruments or singing), conducting (classical or folklore choir and orchestra), Bulgarian folklore choreography, ballet art, graphics design and photography, scenography, church painting, costume and fashion, graphics, sculpture, multimedia and virtual reality, art management, etc.

[Creative Development Program \(програма „Творческо развитие“\)](#) of the [National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) has two modules: Long-Term and Short-Term Events.

This program is aimed at:

- participation of Bulgarian artists, cultural figures and professionals in international, national and local training events and professional development activities;
- ensuring scholarships for organisations that carry out training events and professional development activities (for Bulgarian participants only).

The priorities of the program are:

- upgrading mastered practices and skills and high quality exchange;
- active participation in debates and new trends in the field of development of the candidates.

Target groups:

- artists, cultural managers, critics who are in process of study;
- realized artists, cultural managers and critics who are looking for opportunities to develop their skills.

Eligible projects:

- projects for participation of Bulgarian authors in training events and professional development activities (seminar, workshop, planner, practice, studio, etc.) with duration of more and less than one month, respectively (long- and short-term);
- projects ensuring scholarships for participation of Bulgarian artists in training events.

The maximum amount of long-term project funding is BGN 8000 (about EUR 4000), and for short-term project funding – BGN 4000 (about EUR 2000).

The program is annual and the total amount of funds available under this program per year is BGN 60 000 (about EUR 30 000) for the two modules.

Providing quality access to creative environments

The [Ministry of Culture](#) provides support for the development of creative skills and inclusion of young people in stage arts by means of the [Program for Support of Creative Projects in the Field of Stage Arts \(Правила за условията, реда и процедурите за провеждане на сесии за подпомагане на творчески проекти в областта на сценичните изкуства – 2020\)](#). In particular, this program focuses on the inclusion of young people and enhancing their interest in the theater, music and dancing arts and supports the new generation of authors who are directly engaged in creation and development of stage arts. The program supports festivals of stage arts. As a priority, the program considers youth festivals and active participation of young performers. 41 festivals and contests in the field of theater, music and dancing arts were supported in 2019 with funds in the amount of

BGN 361 538 (about EUR 185 000). For example, some of the events funded under the program are Festival of Young People in Theater that promotes debutant artists, Small Season Festival that presents the achievements and supports the development of youth creativity in different fields of art.

In accordance with the [2019 Annual Report on Youth \(Годишен доклад за младежта за 2019\)](#), for the purposes of developing the talent, creative skills and cultural expression of young people, the [Ministry of Culture](#) has implemented a [Program of Measures for Protection of Children with Distinguished Talents from State, Municipal and Private Schools \(Програма на мерките за закрила на деца с изявиени дарби от държавни, общински и частни училища\)](#) aimed at children and young people at the age of 14 – 18 years. 1 024 young people in total have received scholarships and single financial grants by proposal of the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Youth and Sports. The funds for the implementation of the program are provided by the national budget and are in the amount of BGN 1 800 000 (about EUR 900 000).

In 2019 the [Ministry of Culture](#) has granted 277 scholarships and 74 single financial grants to students from state and municipal schools.

8.6 Developing entrepreneurial skills through culture

Developing entrepreneurial skills through cultural activities

The National Culture Fund (Национален фонд „Култура“) implements the Debuts Program (програма „Дебюти“). The aim of program is to attract high quality debut projects and to train candidates in basic skills in the area of project management and public funding in the following fields: · visual and digital arts; · for creation of feature, documentary, animation and experimental cinema; · publication, dissemination and promotion of literature content; · creation of music content; · stage arts.

This program comprises 5 modules and namely: • Visual and Digital Arts • Screen Arts • Literature • Music • Stage Arts

The program is annual and the total budget of the program for all five modules is BGN 300 000 (about EUR 150 000) per year. It funds projects in the amount of up to BGN 20 000 (about EUR 10 000) inclusive (up to BGN 10 000 (about EUR 5 000) for the Literature and Music modules).

This program supports the professional realisation of Bulgarian artists at the age of up to 35 years in the field of visual arts, screen arts, literature, music and stage arts. Definition of DEBUTANT In accordance with the terms and conditions of the Debuts Program, debutant refers to any natural person or a group of natural persons at the age of up to 35 years who realise up to their third independent professional attempt in the respective field.

The eligible candidates under this program are: · Bulgarian natural persons – artists at the age of up to 35 years who realise their first independent professional attempt in the respective field; · creative/ production/ publishing organisations or curators/ art managers, who support and present debutants in the realisation and dissemination of their debut projects (including, state, municipal, private)

New Bulgarian University offers master’s degree program Art Management (Management of Cultural Institutes and Creative Industries). The program is aimed at developing specialists who are able to create and develop own cultural institutions and to manage cultural/ creative industries. While trying to provide students with opportunities to obtain entrepreneurial and managerial knowledge and skills in the field of cultural management, the program offers courses in the field of funding in culture; project development and management; policies and legislation in the field of culture and cultural management; strategic planning; human resource management, intellectual property management, etc.

The University offers many other programs in the field of creativity and culture. Some of these are: · Archeological Researches · Exposition Design and Creative Industries · Painting

· Classical Music · Composition and Conducting · Cultural Tourism · Cultural and Social Anthropology · Literature, Book Publishing, Media · Fashion and Styling · Music Performance · Music Sciences · Musical – Music Drama and Comedy · Pop and Jazz · Stage Design and Media · Dancing · Creative Writing, etc.

Support young entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors

In accordance with [Ordinance No 7 of 11 August 2016 on profiled education \(Наредба № 7 от 11 август 2016 г. за профилираната подготовка\)](#) issued by the Minister of Education and Science and effective from 26.08.2016, profiled education on entrepreneurship is aimed at developing principal knowledge, skills and attitudes for successful continuation of education in a university, or for starting own business. Education focuses on the development of entrepreneurship culture and the pertaining qualities, skills and attitudes to entrepreneurship. This culture is based on the proactive behaviour, development of innovation and initiative of young people, of their teamwork skills, of their sense of responsibility and motivation for success. The main purpose of profiled education on entrepreneurship is to outline the economic culture, managerial skills, competences and behavioural models in the field of entrepreneurship.

As a result of such profiled education, students:

- are encouraged to improve their self-confidence by taking responsibility;
- develop their inventiveness and creativity through appropriate methodologies for training tailored to their age;
- upgrade important skills, such as making informed decision, teamwork skills, problem solving, establishment of partnership networks, etc.

8.7 Fostering the creative use of new technologies

New technologies in support of creativity and innovation

The [Ministry of Education and Science](#) implements a program for innovations in the field of secondary education called [Innovative Schools \(Иновативни училища\)](#). Every year non-specialised schools may submit projects to apply for innovative school. The program for innovations in the field of secondary education is aimed at creating a network of innovative schools in Bulgaria. Innovative schools are a model of modern school where students improve their education performance and enhance their ability for critical thinking and creativity through innovative education processes, teaching techniques, school leadership and curricula. The list of innovative schools for every academic year is subject to approval by the Council of Ministers by proposal of the Minister of Education and Science. The innovative elements may be embedded in the teaching methodology, the organization, school environment, quality of education, academic content, and/or in 10% of the curricula and programs for the respective stage of education.

Facilitating access to culture through new technologies

The [National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) implements a [Cultural Heritage Program \(програма „Културно наследство“\)](#).

The program is implemented in two modules.

Cultural Industries and Cultural Tourism Module supports projects for promotion of Bulgarian cultural heritage through cultural tourism and development of cultural organisations' capacity via establishment of cross-sectoral partnerships, sustainable practices and development of business models for successful cultural industries at local level.

Some of the objectives of this module are:

- to support the preservation of crafts and to stimulate industries being developed on the basis of cultural heritage and values
- to stimulate cultural organisations to use cultural tourism as an entrepreneurship tool;
- to establish multisectoral partnerships and exchange of experience and good practices;
- to stimulate innovative and ethnical practices in the development of cultural tourism, etc.

The priority projects funded under this module are as follows:

- projects that actively involve educational institutions through children, school and student audiences in the process and ensure their engagement through communication of new knowledge about the value of cultural heritage.
- projects establishing cross-sectoral partnerships between organisations in the field of culture and tourist industry, local organisations and institutions and/or representatives of local community, voluntary civil associations, private sector, and media, etc.

Available funding for this module is up to BGN 10 000 (about EUR 5000) per project.

Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage Module supports projects for preservation, research and promotion of intangible cultural heritage of Bulgaria and development of means for improved access to cultural heritage through digital technologies and delivery of cultural content. This module is aimed at highlighting the contribution of cultural heritage to cultural diversity, identity and significant historic processes in Bulgaria and Europe.

Some of the objectives of this module are:

- to create innovative projects (including researches) presenting cultural values in an accessible way;
- to encourage better understanding of vivid cultural heritage and the specificity of its transfer between generations, etc.

The priority projects funded under this module are as follows:

- projects for development of means for improved access and promotion of cultural heritage through digital technologies;
- projects that study and promote local cultural heritage, etc.

Available funding for this module is up to BGN 20 000 (about EUR 10 000) per project.

The program is annual and the annual budget of the whole program is BGN 180 000 (about EUR 90 000).

8.8 Synergies and partnerships

Synergies between public policies and programmes

There is no single document that covers the participation of young people in culture and creativity. Synergies between public policies and programs are ensured through the interministerial consultative bodies supporting the development and implementation of governmental policies in the field of youth, culture and education.

For example, in 2019 the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) and the [Bulgarian Academy of Science](#) developed a joint program "Education with Science" („Образование с наука"). Under this program students from all schools in Sofia are able to have out-of-class activities in museums and institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Science. There they will study mathematics in online classrooms, program robots, offer solutions for coping with climate challenges, carry out anthropological researches, chemical experiments, projects in mechanics and holograms, apply cosmic technologies in ecology. 26 projects for the

amount of BGN 500 000 (about EUR 250 000) are approved under this program through which the museums of the Bulgarian Academy of Science will develop educational programs and activities for the students. The program further plans to organise summer schools for the children and their teachers.

The program is aimed at provoking interest in mathematics, technology, natural sciences, and to expand educational environment. Similar programs are implemented with cultural institutions as well. Every school excursion comprises a visit to sites of educational and cultural importance, thus providing career orientation. The program "Education with Science" („Образование с наука“) will help to motivate more students to engage in science and to obtain better knowledge of mathematics and natural sciences. Initially, it will be directed mainly to the children from Sofia, but during the next years its scope will be expanded. The [Bulgarian Academy of Science](#) has its own traditions in working with young people. The program is more focused on STEM disciplines, however it promotes the profession of "researcher".

See section 8.2 – Cross-sectoral cooperation.

Partnerships between the culture and creative sectors, youth organisations and youth workers

The Youth Fair Festival (фестивал „Панаир на младите“) has been launched in 2007 as an initiative of the [Youth Theater "Nikolay Binev" \(Младежки театър „Николай Бинев“\)](#). The idea of the forum is to be a platform for expression of young theatre actors in their stage attempts and projects. Every year, at the beginning of the new theater season, the stages of the Youth Theater host the young people for a week.

[The Youth Fair Festival – SITE-SPECIFIC Theatre 2019 \(Фестивал „Панаир на младите – SITE-SPECIFIC Theatre 2019“\)](#) is organized with the kind support of [Sofia Municipality](#) and the [Ministry of Culture](#) of the Republic of Bulgaria. Annually, the event was part of the Calendar of cultural events of [Sofia Municipality](#). The yearly editions of the one and only SITE-SPECIFIC theater festival in Bulgaria offer the audience unique theater experiences and magnificent performances within the untraditional theater spaces of the [Youth Theater "Nikolay Binev" \(Младежки театър „Николай Бинев“\)](#).

The [National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) implements [Mobility Program \(програма „Мобилност“\)](#), [Amateur Cultural Organisations and Artists Module \(модул „Непрофесионални културни организации и артисти“\)](#).

The objectives of this program are as follows:

- projects that contribute to the enhancement of contacts of the representatives of the Bulgarian amateur cultural sector at international level and establishment of long-term partnerships;
- projects supporting the decentralization and diversity of the cultural life in the country;
- promotion of the Bulgarian amateur culture and art at international cultural events and forums;
- projects for sharing and mastering good practices in short- and long-term perspective;
- projects involving young people (up to the age of 30) and engage them on long-term basis in the amateur cultural sector.

The program funds project expenses in the amount of up to BGN 1500 (about EUR 750) inclusive for individual trips, and up to BGN 5000 (about EUR 2500) for group trips. The annual budget of the program is BGN 250 000 (about EUR 125 000).

Eligible candidates are as follows:

- all cultural organisations, including non-profit organisations, as well as individual cultural figures residing in Bulgaria;
- Bulgarian natural persons representing non-formal groups of artists;

- Bulgarian cultural organisations representing foreign natural persons – cultural operators and artists invited to participate in cultural events in Bulgaria.

8.9 Enhancing social inclusion through culture

Fostering equality and young people involvement through cultural activities

According to the [Ordinance on the terms and conditions for protection of children with distinguished talents \(Наредба за условията и реда за осъществяване на закрила на деца с изявени дарби\)](#) (effective from 01.01.2004, last amendment – 31 March 2020), the protection of children with distinguished talents is aimed at:

1. encouraging creative talents and needs of children;
2. ensuring opportunities and conditions for admission in sports schools and art schools;
3. financial support and incentives in the form of scholarships and specialized education programs.

Protection under this Ordinance is provided by:

1. the Minister of Culture, Minister of Education and Science, Minister of Youth and Sports;
2. mayors of municipalities;
3. the chairperson of the [Child Protection State Agency \(Държавна агенция за закрила на детето\)](#) and the administration supporting them for the performance of their functions;
4. Social Aid directorates at the [Social Aid Agency \(Агенция за социално подпомагане\)](#).

The [National Culture Fund \(Национален фонд „Култура“\)](#) funds projects under [program Socially Engaged Arts \(програма „Социално ангажирани изкуства“\)](#). The program is aimed at projects in all fields of art and culture addressing social problems and causes and applying creative approaches when dealing with disadvantaged communities and groups.

By funding various projects, the program is aimed at:

- encouraging the work with disadvantaged groups and unrepresented social groups in creative processes;
- developing marginalised groups and communities through arts;
- implementing social design projects;
- generating energy and willingness for positive change through art that affects and addresses social topics of public importance;
- establishing prerequisites for positive change in the public attitudes and engagement in various social cases;
- attracting attention and resources to socially important topics;
- involving socially unrepresented groups and disadvantaged groups in creative processes for creation of cultural product/ event.

The program is annual and budget of the program is BGN 120 000 (about EUR 60 000) per year. The allowed grant per project is in the amount of BGN 15 000 (about EUR 7 500) inclusive.

Combating discrimination and poverty through cultural activities

In accordance with an Agreement for Cooperation (Споразумение за сътрудничество) signed between the [Ministry of Culture](#) and the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) in 2018, the two ministries implement measures and activities involving the institutions of pre-

school and school education and the national, regional and municipal museums and art galleries in the country. They cooperate as follows:

1. The institutions in the pre-school and school education organise visits of children and students to national, regional and municipal museums and art galleries in the country as part of their general education and in the form of out-of-school activities;
2. National, regional and municipal museums and art galleries develop and propose to the pre-school and school education institutions museum educational programs and initiatives for each class or group relevant to their pre-school and school education.
3. The organised visits to national, regional and municipal museums and galleries, as well as the out-of-class activities from early pre-school age are aimed at developing attitudes to culture and general and at obtaining better knowledge and interests in the field of cultural heritage and visual arts, and will be carried out on the basis of the proposed programs and initiatives.

Museums education programs and initiatives are directed to children and students with special educational needs and children and students whose mother language is other than Bulgarian.

The activities and projects implemented under this Agreement for Cooperation are funded by the budgets of the two institutions.

8.10 Current debates and reforms

The National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) expired at the end of 2020. The consultations for the new National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 have begun in late 2018. At the end of 2019 representatives of the Ministry held meetings with young people and NGOs in various cities and regions of the country. These meetings were aimed at discussing challenges as identified by young people themselves and at seeking possible solutions. In this process 13 field consultations with young people and youth organisations have been held in the following cities: Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Blagoevgrad, Sandanski, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Kardzhali and Sofia. More than 2000 young people at the age of 15-29 years have taken part in the consultations.

With view of the cross-sectoral approach of youth policies and the need to consult on specific thematic fields with experts in different areas, in March 2020 the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) established an interministerial working group to develop the operational goals and measures for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030.

The first official draft document was presented at a closing conference held in Sofia. The closing conference gave the participants in the meetings across the country the opportunity to meet and have discussions with young people from the rest of the country, representatives of all national institutions responsible for the creation and implementation of policies targeted at young people in Bulgaria, the business and NGOs.

Good practices at European and international level serve as an inspiration for the new National Youth Strategy. The [EU Youth Strategy \(2019-2027\)](#) is the actual starting point for the work of the team at the Ministry. Observations show that many of the priorities suggested by young people in Bulgaria coincide with the priorities set out in the EU Youth Strategy.

As at the end of 2020, the draft National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 is in process of public discussion and subject to other statutory procedures for approval.

9. YOUTH AND THE WORLD

Global issues are very strongly involved in the Bulgarian Youth Policy, beside the involvement in the European Youth policy process through the Youth Dialogue (see Youth wiki Bulgaria Subsection Youth and the world 9.1 General context) the national authorities are involved in The [National Program Bulgarian UN Youth Delegates \(Национална програма „Български младежки делегати към ООН“\)](#) started in 2006 and is implemented by the [United Nations Association of Bulgaria](#). The [National Youth Forum \(NYF\) \(Национален младежки форум \(НМФ\)\)](#) and [ISIC Bulgaria](#) are partners of the program together with the national authorities (Ministry of youth and sports and Ministry of foreign affairs). The information is available in Subsection Youthwiki Bulgaria 9.3 Exchanges between young people and policy-makers on global issues. In the same subsection you can find additional information about the national support to the youth participation in forums dedicated to global issues.

The National authorities work in regards with the horizontal approach of youth policy and more about their involvement process regarding involvement in Bulgarian youth in the global processes. More about the initiatives that are undertaken can be found in Subsection Youth Wiki/Bulgaria 9.4 Raising awareness about global issues.

9.1 General context

Main concepts

The [National Youth Program /2016-2020/ \(Национална програма за младежта /2016-2020/\)](#) is one of the tools for implementation of national youth policy priorities. It is based on the needs of young people in the country and is in harmony with the priorities of the EU youth policy.

The strategic objectives of the program support the implementation of the following strategic goals of the [National Youth Strategy \(2010-2020\) \(Националната стратегия за младежта \(2010-2020\)\)](#):

- Facilitating the access to high quality service for special support and full-value personal and social development of young people in accordance with their needs and interests;
- Promoting healthy lifestyle among young people;
- Developing volunteer activities among young people as a driver for personal development, mobility, learning, competitive power, social cohesion, solidarity between generations and formation of civic self-awareness;
- Creating attractive environment for development of young people in small towns and in rural areas;
- Creating favourable, encouraging and supporting environment for professional realisation of young people in Bulgaria.

With the adoption of the new [European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#) the process currently known as “Structured Dialogue” was transformed into “EU Youth Dialogue”. The new framework of the process defines the new priorities – Engagement, Inclusion and Empowerment. The purpose of the forthcoming Dialogue-related activities is to reach the so called unorganised youth – young people who are not members of youth organisations and are not part of informal groups. For this purpose the [Structured Dialogue \(Структурирен диалог\)](#) website was created with online platform for participation.

The National Youth Forum (NYF) (Национален младежки форум (НМФ)) is the National Youth Council of Bulgaria. Together with the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) and the members of the National Working Group for implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue – youth organisations and institutions, NYF actively develops the theme of effective

participation of young people in decision-making processes at national and European level. **The National Youth Forum** is the biggest youth platform in Bulgaria, which unites 50 youth organisations across the country. It is a full member of the [European Youth Forum](#) and active partner of national and European institutions for the establishment and advocacy of youth policies. Its mission is to represent the interests and needs of young people in Bulgaria focusing on the importance and significance of youth organisations, their development and participation in social and sociopolitical processes, and to ensure efficient structured dialogue through cooperation with the respective stakeholders and institutions making decisions in the field of youth policy.

The Public Council on Youth Issues is a consultative unit at the Minister of Youth and Sports for the establishment of positions, opinions and initiatives for solving problems within their jurisdiction. The Public Council discusses and makes proposals for draft legal regulations and strategic documents and proposes specific initiatives in the field of young people in the country, gives recommendations to the Minister of Youth and Sports for solving issues within the youth sector, coordinates the interaction between the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) and nongovernmental sector representatives when developing and implementing the youth policies. The members of the Council are representatives of organisations registered under the [Non-Profit Legal Entities Act \(Закон за юридическите лица с нестопанска цел\)](#) for pursuing activities in public benefit and for implementation of youth activities.

The National Consultative Youth Council is a consultative body supporting the Minister of Youth and Sports in the implementation of the national youth policy.

Youth interest in global issues

According to the data in [Flash Eurobarometer No. 455](#) (published in 2018) in Bulgaria:

- 12% of young people are involved in a political organisation or a political party;
- 3% of young people are involved in an organisation promoting human rights or global development;
- 3% of young people are involved in an organisation active in the domain of climate change or environmental issues;
- 71% of young people have voted in any political election at local, regional, national or EU level during the last 3 years;
- 22% of young people have participated in organised voluntary activities.

According to the same study 65% of young people in Bulgaria believe that the environment protection and fight against climate change should be a priority of the EU, 28% believe that EU should have the management of migratory flows and integration of refugees as a priority, and another 6% state that this should be the democratic participation.

As stated in the [2018 Annual Report on Youth \(Годишен доклад за младежта за 2018\)](#):

- Young people at the age of 15 – 19 are least interested in politics (3% - I am very interested, 22% - I am rather interested). The share of young people interested in politics increases with the age increase.
- 35% of young people in the country do not spend time to read latest news (15-19 years of age – those who are still not politically active).
- A 63% majority of young people believe that Bulgaria has rather benefitted of its EU membership. As a tradition, young people in Bulgaria have positive attitude to the EU membership.

9.2 Administration and governance

Governance

The [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) implements the national youth policy, which is aimed at targeted and consistent actions of the government, municipalities, youth organisations and society for the purposes of establishing favourable conditions for full-value personal development of young people and their participation in the public and economic life, as well as their inclusion in the governance at local, district and national level. It coordinates the youth policies in the field of education, social policy, healthcare, culture, sports, justice, internal affairs and defence, and is in charge with the synergies between the national youth policy and the policy for young people implemented by and within the frames of the [European Union](#), the [Council of Europe](#) and the [United Nations](#).

The [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) is the major government authority charged with all issues of the foreign politics and international relations.

The [Human Resources Development Center \(HRDC\)](#) administers, promotes, advises, organises and coordinates the participation of the Republic of Bulgaria in [Erasmus+](#) - the EU Program in the field of education, training, youth and sports, and its related horizontal programs and activities, in the [European Solidarity Corps Program](#), and in other EU and international educational programs and initiatives. It is subordinated to the Minister of Education and Science.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

Despite the strong cross-sectoral and horizontal nature of youth policy, there is no specific body for cross-sectoral cooperation. However, there are mechanisms for cross-sectoral cooperation ensured through the National Consultative Youth Council, the Public Council on Youth Issues, the members of which represent different ministries, agencies, youth organisations and other stakeholders. (see subsection 9.3)

9.3 Exchanges between young people and policy-makers on global issues

Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the domestic level

The Public Council on Youth Issues is a consultative unit at the Minister of Youth and Sports for the establishment of positions, opinions and initiatives for solving problems within their jurisdiction. The Public Council discusses and makes proposals for draft legal regulations and strategic documents and proposes specific initiatives in the field of young people in the country, gives recommendations to the Minister of Youth and Sports for solving issues within the youth sector, coordinates the interaction between the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) and nongovernmental sector representatives when developing and implementing the youth policies. The members of the Council are representatives of organisations registered under the [Non-Profit Legal Entities Act \(Закон за юридическите лица с нестопанска цел\)](#) for pursuing activities in public benefit and for implementation of youth activities.

The National Consultative Youth Council is a consultative body supporting the Minister of Youth and Sports in the implementation of the national youth policy. The National Consultative Council on Youth comprises the following members:

1. deputy minister of youth and sports, deputy minister of economy, deputy minister of tourism, deputy minister of labour and social policy, deputy minister of healthcare, deputy minister of culture, deputy minister of interior, deputy minister of justice, deputy minister of regional development and public works, deputy minister of finance, deputy minister of education and

- science, deputy chairperson of the [Child Protection State Agency \(Държавна агенция за закрила на детето\)](#);
2. representative of the [National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria](#);
3. representative of the [National Representation of Student Councils \(Национално представителство на студентските съвети в Република България\)](#);
4. one representative of each nationally represented youth organisation.

In Bulgaria a National Working Group for implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue is currently in process of establishment. (See subsection 9.7.)

As part of the administration of the Erasmus+ program, in 2018 HRDC has funded projects for structured dialogue between young people and youth policy-makers at local level. 1 956 young people have taken direct participation in these projects (more than 40% increase in comparison to 2017), which shows strong interest on the youth policy topics and active involvement in the civic society.

Furthermore, in 2018 two meetings of the national children’s consultative body – the Council of Children, were held in the city of Haskovo and the city of Plovdiv. The procedure for selection of children – members of the Council, with the cooperation of the municipal authorities and district administrations, was carried out in 15 districts and 28 members were selected (main and substitute members). During their meetings, young people discuss topics related to the closing of penitentiaries, child’s mental health, the national child helpline 116 111, amendments in the Council’s By-Laws for inclusion of children looking for and receiving international protection, thematic fields in the new Child National Strategy, planning of campaigns and discussion for establishment of awards for media engaged with the child care quality.

Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the international level

Twice a year young people from Bulgaria participate in the political debates of the youth ministers within the frames of informal lunches or breakfasts organised during the regular sessions of the [EU Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council](#). They have the opportunity to discuss with policy-makers various themes on important issues set out by the [Presidency of the Council of the EU](#).

The EU Youth Conferences organised twice a year are another mechanism for exchange of views with politicians. The official Bulgarian delegates who participate in these conferences are selected by means of contest organised by the [NYF](#) and the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#). Candidates need to be young people or representatives of youth organisations experienced in the field at the age of 15 to 29 years, or youth workers (without age limits).

Numerous activities were implemented in 2018 with regard to the increase of young people’s civil activity. This year was rich of youth participation in the youth policy development and implementation processes in Bulgaria, having in mind that our country was charged with the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Meetings of the Public Council on Youth Issues at the Minister of Youth and Sports were held to discuss the calendar of Presidency events. The key event was the EU Youth Conference held in Sofia, which was attended by more than 200 participants from Europe, the Western Balkans and the East Partnership. The main purpose of the conference was to give opportunity for direct participation of young people in the development of the new [European Union Youth Strategy](#). The major deliverable of this conference is the establishment of the first youth goals, which are currently part of the new [European Union Youth Strategy](#).

In 2019, the Bulgarian UN youth delegate took part in the Climate Summit in September in New York. The [National Program Bulgarian UN Youth Delegates \(Национална програма „Български младежки делегати към ООН“\)](#) starts in 2006 and is implemented by the [United Nations Association of Bulgaria](#). The [National Youth Forum \(NYF\)](#)

(Национален младежки форум (НМФ)) and **ISIC Bulgaria** are partners of the program. For a thirteen year in a row, two young persons are official delegates of our country in the UN. The main vision of youth delegates is to be a bridge between young people in Bulgaria and the institutions – both at national and at international level. This is ensured through regular meetings with young people countrywide and enquiries among them for the purposes of identifying their key issues and needs. These data are summarised and analysed and are then used to prepare the speech of the youth delegates to the UN General Assembly and the **ECOSOC Commission for Social Development**. The Bulgarian government, represented by the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** and the **Permanent Representation of the Republic of Bulgaria to the UN** recognise the **Program Bulgarian UN Youth Delegates (Програма „Български младежки делегати)** as the legitimate voice of the young people in Bulgaria. Thus, every year two young people take part in the decision-making process at the highest international level and practically ensure the youth participation in the development of young people-related policies and strategies.

Structured dialogue is a tool that ensures that young people’s opinion has been taken into account for the formation of youth-related policies within the European Union. In order to achieve this, structured dialogue unites young people, youth organisations, representatives of youth organisations and policy-makers across the EU to jointly discuss issues relevant to young people and to get involved in the youth policy at national and European level.

In 2019 the **Ministry of Youth and Sports** funded the participation of a Bulgarian youth leader in the Youth Model ICPD International Conference organised on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Nairobi Summit on Population and Development and held in Cairo, Egypt. The Cairo Conference was dedicated to the population and development issues, and in particular to extremely important topics such as sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people, gender equality and gender-based, the harmful practices in sexual and reproductive health, and to the global demographic situation.

9.4 Raising awareness about global issues

Formal, non-formal and informal learning

School and Preschool Education Act (Закона за училищното и предучилищното образование), school and school education is aimed inter alia at ensuring:

- Obtaining competences necessary for successful personal and professional realisation and active civil life in modern communities;
- Obtaining competences to apply the sustainable development principles;
- Obtaining competences to understand and apply the principles of democracy and constitutional state, of human rights and freedoms, of active and responsible civil participation;
- Establishing tolerance and respect to ethnical, cultural, language and religious identity of every citizen;
- Establishing tolerance and respect to the rights of children, students and people with disabilities;
- Obtaining competences to understand global processes, trends and their interrelations.

General education at school is equal for all types of schools and is obtained by studying the same general education subjects. General education is obtained in the course of the entire school training and covers the following groups of key competences:

1. competences in the field of Bulgarian language;
2. skills to communicate in foreign languages;

3. mathematic competence and major competences in the field of natural sciences and technologies;
4. digital competence;
5. learning skills;
6. social and civil competences;
7. initiative and entrepreneurship;
8. cultural competence and skills for expression through creativity;
9. skills for sustainable development and healthy lifestyle.

Above key competences are interrelated and represent a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes required for the personal development of an individual through the lifetime, for establishment of active civil position and participation in social life, and for individual's fitness for realisation at the labour market.

Critical thinking, problem solutions, initiative, creativity, taking responsibility, teamwork, are all competences that are obtained through the study of all general education subjects.

The promotion of sustainable development principles, including environmental, economic and social dimensions and aimed at outlining a long-term vision of society is ensured through the study of varied subjects and is aimed at developing skills for taking personal responsibility for the sustainable future.

Youth-targeted information campaigns on global issues

The following campaigns and many other initiatives were organised in 2018 through which the Council of Children members make their peers aware of their rights and how to spend their leisure time usefully:

- City of Games
- Week of Healthy Nutrition
- Healthy and Safe Summer
- Life without Violence for all Children under the moto #ACT!
- Week of Tolerance (12-16 November)
- Week of Child's Rights (19-23 November),

At the beginning of February the International Day of Safe Internet was celebrated together with the Council of Children. In 15 districts across the country the children from the Council organised events dedicated on safe internet. With the support of the [Bulgarian National Television](#) and the [Fight against Organised Crime General Directorate at the Ministry of Interior \(Генерална дирекция „Борба с организираната престъпност“ на МВР\)](#) a movie on this topic was presented and issues about safety of children on the internet and online safety were discussed.

In 2017, together with Italy and Latvia, Bulgaria was part of the second group of countries that implemented pilot projects with the support of the [Council of Europe](#) for assessment of child participation in accordance with the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#). The successful implementation of this project in Bulgaria increased the awareness of child participation and after the initial assessment of the status, the project outlined the good practices and identified measures for better compliance with the requirements of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The assessment results show that Bulgaria has established and develops policies and mechanisms aimed at facilitating the inclusion of children in public life, legislation and all other processes that affect them. The [Child Protection State Agency \(Държавна агенция за закрила на детето\)](#) whose mission is to ensure the right of young people to express their opinion plays a key role in encouraging young people's participation in the processes of policy development, implementation and monitoring.

For the purposes of ensuring sustainability of measures undertaken under [Environment Operational Program 2014-2020](#), three big initiatives were organised, including Green Olympiad. 1 400 students from 25 schools competed in environment quizzes, and more than 5 000 people participated in the online edition of the contest.

In 2018 the information centers within the system of the [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) (33) significantly increased their activity. All of them organise information and educational initiatives for increasing environmental mind and culture of different social groups, publish information materials and carry out training programs in partnership with institutions and nongovernmental organisations in different regions. During the year they have organised 11 national and 14 regional information and educational programs for improvement of environmental mind and culture of young people and various initiatives in partnership with institutions, business and nongovernmental organisations in different regions.

Information providers

The [Ministry of Education and Science](#) develops, updates and promotes information database in the field of civic education, health education, sustainable development education, prevention of violence through the development of curricula and educational materials, collection and introduction of products and good practices as a result of implemented projects. It further supports the interaction between the educational, family, institutional and social environment and carries out activities in the area of civic, health and sustainable development education through cooperation and partnership between teachers, parents, students and representatives of organisations and institutions external for the school.

The [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) actively participates in the process of encouraging non-formal education for environment protection. It publishes educational materials and carries out national campaigns for protection of environment included in the [National Calendar of the Ministry of Education and Science for out-of-class and out-of-school activities](#) (Национален календар на Министерството на образованието и науката за извънкласните и извънучилищни дейности). The centers on the territory of [Pirin National Park](#) (НП „Пирин“) have organised 128 interactive activities with the participation of more than 4800 children and young people, and 8 educational excursions with more than 200 students from different cities.

In 2018, the campaigns and initiatives of the [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) have involved 36 700 children and students from about 700 schools and preschools across the country. To a great extent these initiatives facilitate the establishment of more attractive and favourable environment at school, for increasing students' interest in collective school life and for development of teamwork skills.

[HRDC](#) funds projects for capacity building in the field of youth aimed at a number of fields promoting the cooperation between organisations active in the field of youth, education, training and other socioeconomic sectors from different regions of the world. Such projects are aimed at recognizing and improving the youth work, non-formal education and volunteering and at establishing the connection between them and the educational systems and the employment markets. Furthermore, they support schemes for regional and international informal mobility for educational purposes aimed at encouraging young people's participation in the society.

Key initiatives

The strategic goals of the [National Youth Program /2016-2020/](#) (Национална програма за младежта /2016-2020/) are achieved through the following activities:

Strategic goal: Facilitating the access to high quality service for special support and full-value personal and social development of young people in accordance with their needs and interests.

- Establishment of a network of youth information and consultative centers (YICC) providing high quality services for young people;
- Provision of consultancy services and trainings in support of personal and social development of young people, including for developing vital skills, as well as services for organization of young people's leisure time.
- Development and recognition of youth work.

Strategic goal: Promoting healthy lifestyle among young people

- Carrying out campaigns and initiatives aimed at development of knowledge and skills for healthy lifestyle, safe conduct and avoiding practices harmful for the health;
- Providing opportunities for training of young people on health, sports and physical activity issues, including by developing the peer-to-peer learning approach.

Strategic goal: Developing volunteer activities among young people as a driver for personal development, mobility, learning, competitive power, social cohesion, solidarity between generations and formation of civic self-awareness.

- Introducing and maintaining efficient practices for work with young volunteers, their training, encouragement, monitoring and assessment of their work, and recognition of their achievements.
- Organising the participation of young people in volunteering initiatives;
- Establishment of youth volunteering standards and public control in protection of young volunteers;
- Carrying out campaigns and initiatives for promotion of youth volunteering in society.

Strategic goal: Ensuring opportunities for overall participation of young people in social life and for their cohesion to the main democratic values and standards.

- Improving young people's awareness with regard to EU policies and their implementation at national level;
- Organising campaigns and initiatives on topical issues in pursuance of the EU and Council of Europe policies for young people.

Strategic goal: Creating attractive environment for development of young people in small towns and in rural areas.

- Introduction of mobile forms of youth and social work for young people from small towns, remote and hardly accessible areas;
- Ensuring efficient access to information, training and consultations of young people in small towns and rural areas;
- Promotion of initiatives of young people in small towns and rural areas.

Strategic goal: Creating favourable, encouraging and supporting environment for professional realisation of young people in Bulgaria.

- Promotion of social entrepreneurship among young people.

9.5 Green volunteering, production and consumption

Green volunteering

The [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) implements consistent policy for improvement of environmental mind and culture of young people. In pursuance of the targets for encouraging the participation of young people and their organisations in the protection, improvement and management of natural resources, in 2018 the Ministry has prepared and carried out 11 national campaigns on the occasion of the events of the international

eco-calendar. Another 14 campaigns on environment protection were organised across the country.

Within the frames of these campaigns, the [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) organised round tables, conferences for students and young people, outdoor classes, contests, exhibitions, nature protection initiatives, eco-trail routes, eco shows, cleaning and afforestation activities, separate waste disposal activities, quizzes, training seminars and various forums with the participation of tens of thousands of young people on the territory of the country. These initiatives are a good example for partnership with local authorities, institutions, business and nongovernmental organisations at regional level.

Some of the more popular campaigns are: international contest for young talents "Music and Earth"; educational programs "The Park as a Classroom", and "For the Balkan with Love" of Central Balkan National Park; the traditional "Carnival of Biodiversity" organised by Burgas Regional Inspection of Environment and Water, etc.

In 2018 a big project has been started together with Oceans without Borders Foundation for cleaning the Danube River from plastic waste. In the course of the initiatives, most of the regional units report increased attention to the work with children and young people from disadvantaged and minority groups and enhanced activity of schools and preschools from small municipalities and towns across the country.

Through its regional structures, the [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) actively participates and provides expert, logistic and financial support for the timely collection of wastes on the territory of the country within the frames of the campaign "[Let's Clean Bulgaria for a Day](#)" („Да изчистим България"). During the campaign, the [Ministry of Environment and Water](#) exempts the disposal of collected wastes from charge, and the regional environment and water inspections attract hundreds of young people and partner nongovernmental organisations, eco clubs and schools across the regions.

The national campaign "[For Clean Environment](#)" („За чиста околна среда") takes special place in terms of its scope. During the years it has proven to be an effective mechanism for activity and financial support of municipalities, schools and preschools to undertake actions such as cleaning, afforestation, greening, construction or reconstruction of children playgrounds, recreation areas, etc. The projects implemented within the frames of the campaign ensure that the modern trends in the field of environment protection are taken into account by the educational process. This year's edition of the contest has funded 110 projects of schools, 132 projects of preschools and 232 projects of municipalities.

Green production and consumption

Many of the environmental and human health issues refer to unsustainable consumption and production methods. They result in increased use of natural resources, generation of more wastes, and at the same time in increase of the needs of transport and infrastructure for their transportation and disposal. Experts monitor with concern the overconsumption of pesticides, herbicides and manure in agriculture. Disposal of waste packages is most visible – a problem which has become a global issue for less than two decades.

For the purposes of changing the attitude to nutrition and separate collection of wastes, civic education standards are introduced as a prerequisite for raising awareness among students, their families and the society in general. The state educational standards for educational content comprise basic cores of educational content related to sustainable development education. According to the standard, the environmental education is directed to the development of environmental culture, awareness and conduct with view of the knowledge in the field of environment, protection, improvement, management and rational use of natural resources, environment and environmental balance protection.

The first of its kind training biofarm for children "Sunny Garden" is developed on the territory of the Agroenvironmental center at the [University of Agriculture – Plovdiv](#). The project is funded by the [Norwegian Program for Economic Growth and Sustainable Development Cooperation in Bulgaria](#) (Норвежка програма за сътрудничество). The

purpose of Sunny Garden Biofarm is to contribute to the environmental education of children and to improve school and university students' knowledge on sustainable production, and in particular bio agriculture, on sustainable lifestyle and environment protection.

The Eco-Schools Program (програма "Екоучилища") is an international program initiated and managed by nongovernmental organisations – members of the Environmental Education Foundation. 108 schools and preschools work for the Eco-Schools Program in Bulgaria. 62 educational establishments are awarded with Green Flag.

Litter Less campaign is aimed at decrease of wastes and pollution. It is implemented in 25 countries, including Bulgaria and has the objective to engage and educate children and young people on waste issues and to encourage long-term change of their conduct. Fifteen schools in Bulgaria were granted initial funds to facilitate the campaign activities.

9.6 Intercontinental youth work and development cooperation

Intercontinental youth work cooperation

During the period 01.10.2017 – 30.09.2018 the [National Center of Public Health and Analyses](#) implemented a [project "Youth Leadership for Development and Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals"](#). The project involved participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, Iraq and Afghanistan. The total budget of the project was BGN 188 740. The target group comprised youth leaders, national coordinators and activists of national Y-PEER networks in the Western Balkan countries, the Black Sea region and countries which are characterized by internal instability and are sources of migration flows, potential staff and experts in national and regional institutions of their countries. The overall objectives of the project were:

- To facilitate the exchange of experience in promoting democracy, protecting human rights and supporting civil society in the development of evidence-based youth policies and programs, by building capacity and empowering young people from partner countries in the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region and countries characterized by internal instability and sources of migration flows.
- To contribute to building the administrative capacity for improving the health and education of young people and for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Development Agenda in the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region and countries characterized by internal instability and are sources of migration flows.
- To promote the Bulgarian Development Aid during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Development cooperation activities

The [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) is in charge of the development cooperation policy. It implements a budget program "International Development Cooperation" (Бюджетна програма „Международно сътрудничество за развитие“). The program is aimed at supporting the institutional and administrative capacity building of the partner countries from the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region/ East Partnership and other countries meeting the requirements of the OECD Development Aid Committee.

However not directly targeted at young people, the projects funded under the program should focus on the following priority fields:

- Strengthening democracy and support for better governance, protection of human rights and civil society;
- Environment protection;

- Improvement of the quality of education and protection of the rights of children with disabilities and those with fewer opportunities;
- Sustainable management in the field of agriculture and food;
- Support for higher quality of healthcare;
- Support for initiatives for expanding joint trade and investment activity;
- Protection of cultural diversity;
- Capacity building in support of security and development.

9.7 Current debates and reforms

A National Working Group for implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue is now in process of establishment. In general, the group will perform the following tasks:

- Ensuring consistent and continuous process of implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue throughout all cycles;
- Raising the awareness of the EU Youth Dialogue process at national and local level among the society, young people, nongovernmental organisations and institutions;
- Ensuring efficient cooperation and dialogue between the youth sector and the institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria;
- Discussing proposals for improvement of the Dialogue between young people and institutions;
- Developing and maintaining a database of organisations and institutions;
- Developing common understanding and bottom-up approach with regard to the general thematic priority set out by the Council of the EU;
- Consultations with view of possible solutions that would be brought to the attention of the Council of the EU;
- Identifying specific actions to be brought to the attention of the Council of the EU for further discussion;
- Organising the preparation and dissemination of the regular thematic enquiries within the Trio Presidency of the Council of the EU;
- Summarising and receiving the results of the enquiry replies in a report to be sent to the European working group for the EU Youth Dialogue;
- Monitoring of the information and carrying out the required communication with the respective institutions and authorities of the European Union with regard to the funding possibilities for the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue;
- Preparing and adopting an action plan for the implementation of the Dialogue;
- Preparing project proposals and all required documents to the respective donor for the purposes of carrying out activities in support of the group's functions and the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue.

The National Working Group will comprise representatives of the following institutions and organisations in the country working with and relevant to the work with young people and the development and implementation of youth policies:

1. Ministry of Youth and Sports;
2. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy;
3. Ministry of Education and Science;
4. Employment Agency;

5. Human Resources Development Center;
6. National Center of Public Health and Analyses;
7. National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria;
8. Nationally represented youth organisations;
9. National Representation of Student Councils;
10. National Youth Forum;
11. Youth organisations – members of a professional union;
12. Two youth organisations working for the development of young people and youth work at local and/or regional level.

10. YOUTH WORK

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the main policy-making actor in the field of youth work. The Youth Policy Department of the Ministry of Youth and Sports deals with all aspects of youth policy, including youth work. The main non-public actors are the NGOs (umbrella organizations) such as the National Youth Forum and the youth centers where youth workers are mainly employed.

The Youth Act ([Закон за младежта](#)) provides for a definition of youth worker. They are adults who have been especially trained to work with young people or have acquired professional experience in working with young people and carrying out youth activities. The youth worker supports the activity of youth organisations by analyzing, planning, monitoring and evaluating youth activities based on individual approach and assessment of young people's specific needs.

National and municipal youth programs support the development and special education of the youth worker.

More information about the roles can be found in Subsection 10.2 Administration and Governance of Youth Work.

The profession of the youth worker is also recognized by the national authorities.

Taking into account the importance of the youth work as a tool for development of young people's skills and their involvement in the society, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has established a National Working Group for Youth Work (in November 2021). The recent developments could be found in Subsection 10.8 Current Debates and Reforms.

10.1 General context

Historical developments

High-quality youth work is a prerequisite for ensuring optimal development and practice of young people. Youth organisations, youth services and youth workers, together with relevant stakeholders, plan and implement activities and programmes that are relevant to the interests, needs and experiences of young people. The [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) has been continuously working for the better recognition and improvement of the quality of youth work and the validation of the role of youth workers.

Since 2019, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been implementing a project for development and introduction of quality standards for provision of youth services in Bulgaria funded under the Human Resources Operational Program. The main objective of the project is to improve the accessibility, efficiency and quality of youth services through

the development, introduction and approbation of quality standards, among others, for the following services: mobile youth work and digital youth work.

Experts from the Youth Policy Department take part in various EU level initiatives on youth work, such as the Bonn Process, expert groups of the European Commission, etc.

In November 2021, a National Working Group for Youth Work was established and administered by the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the involvement of various stakeholders – representatives of ministries, youth work researchers and practitioners, representatives of youth organisations, academic society.

National definition or understanding of Youth Work

There is no legal definition of youth work.

10.2 Administration and governance of youth work

Governance

The [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) is the main policy-making actor in the field of youth work. The Youth Policy Department of the Ministry of Youth and Sports deals with all aspects of youth policy, including youth work.

In the process of youth policy governance, which also comprises the youth work area, the minister of youth and sports is supported by the following advisory bodies:

- National advisory council on youth – political body at deputy minister level;
- Public council on youth matters – with representatives of the NGO sector;
- National working group on youth work – dedicated expert body dealing with youth work.

The main non-public actors are the NGOs (umbrella organizations) such as the National Youth Forum, national representative youth organisation and the youth centers. The youth centers are established by and function under the umbrella of the [Ministry of Education and Science](#). They work with young people through the methods of non-formal education.

Youth work is not mandatory area at regional and local level. Regional governors procure for the implementation of the state policy of youth on the territory of the respective region. In doing so, they work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and with the youth organisations that are registered on the territory of the respective region, while dealing with various youth-related issues, including youth work.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

Youth work is related to various youth policy fields, including education, social inclusion, volunteering, etc. The cross-sectoral cooperation between the main public actors is mainly achieved through the advisory bodies to the minister of youth and sports as defined above. The National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria is also involved in the cross-sectoral cooperation on ad-hoc basis.

10.3 Support to youth work

Policy legal framework

There is not existing stand-alone strategy on youth work. Youth work is dealt with in the National youth Strategy 2021-2030.

Development and establishment of youth work at national level is one of the strategic objectives of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030. This strategic objective comprises two operational objectives, and namely: establishment of mechanism for recognition and development of youth work and its dissemination; encouraging innovative approaches in

youth work. Some of the measures and activities for the achievement of these objectives are:

- Establishment of cross-sectoral coordination mechanism for development and expansion of the scope of youth work;
- Support for the recognition, development and establishment of youth work as a factor for personal, social and professional development of young people;
- Support for the development of mobile youth work;
- Promoting the use of digital tools in youth work.

The key partners of the Ministry of Youth and Sports for the implementation of the above measures are: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, Human Resources Development Center, National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, regional governors, municipalities, nongovernmental organisations, youth workers, schools, universities, youth centers and spaces, social partners, international organisations, business, research organisations, etc.

Funding

The main sources of public funding are provided for in the budget of the Ministry of Youth and Sports through the National Youth Programme (2021-2025) /[Национална програма за младежта \(2021-2025\)](#)/. It is one of the tools used for the implementation of youth policy at national level by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The vision of the National Youth Program (2021-2025) is to improve the quality of life and realisation of young people by developing and applying sustainable mechanisms to invest in their potential, thus contributing to the overall socioeconomic development of Bulgaria. It is implemented in accordance with the objectives of the National Youth Strategy (2021- 2030).

The activities under the National Youth Program (2021-2025) are aimed at young people at the age of 15 – 29 who are the direct target group. Indirect participants in the activities may be national and local structures and/or institutions, non-profit organisations and other stakeholders.

The National Youth Program (2021-2025) comprises five thematic areas. In terms of youth work, thematic area 1 refers to non-formal education for acquisition of skills and key competences.

The financial resources ensured for projects funded under the National Youth Program (2021-2025) are in the amount of BGN 800 400 (approximately EUR 409 000) per year.

Cooperation

- In November 2021, a National Working Group for Youth Work was established and administered by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The main objectives of the working group are to make a roadmap for the development and support of youth work at national level; to collect data and analyse the current status of youth work at national and local level, to raise the awareness of the Bonn Process and youth work at national and local level, and to ensure continuous implementation of the Bonn Process. The National Working Group for Youth Work is composed of the following members: representatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Human Resources Development Center, youth centers, national representative youth organisations, National Youth Forum, academic society, civic organisations dealing with youth work and youth work researchers.

10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work

Taking into account the dynamics in the youth field and the need for a competence framework guiding the youth policies in Bulgaria, from 2018 the Ministry of Youth and

Sports of Bulgaria has developed a project under the Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources. The main objective is to improve the accessibility, effectiveness and quality of youth services by developing, implementing and validating quality standards and developing objective performance indicators, taking into account the final result for the young person. The project officially started as from 1st July 2019. The first stage of the project was research and report on the needs of Bulgarian Youth and also included report on the good practices in the European Union and beyond. As part of the research Онлайн проучване В изпълнение на проект „Разработване и внедряване на стандарти за качество при предоставянето на младежки услуги в България“ (online research part of the project “developing and implementing of standards for quality youth services in Bulgaria) available in Bulgarian language was produced. In December 2019, the second phase of the project is still undergoing. It will develop standards for youth services ensuring the quality in delivering services leading to real knowledge, skills and competences, building an effective system for evaluation and control. By establishing a long-term and unified organisation, the project will introduce flexible models of funding and evaluating youth services. Validation of standards and their implementation in the legal framework regulating services will be provided to young people aged 15 to 29 and will improve the processes of planning, management and updating of youth policies. After a process of approbation with the participation of all stakeholders the standards will be available for youth services.

10.5 Youth workers

Status in national legislation

The definition of youth worker exists in the Закон за младежта и спорта (National Youth Act). Youth worker is an adult person who has passed special training for work with young people and/or who has acquired professional experience to work with young people and to implement youth activities. Youth worker supports the youth organizations' work such as analyzing, planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating the youth policy based on individual approach and assessment of specific needs of the young people. The national and the municipal youth programs include activities in support of the development and specialized training of the youth worker.

The possibilities for youth workers to take advantage of mobility opportunities in the European Union are managed by the National Agency for Erasmus +. The educational opportunities and trainings available to youth workers are through educational institutions and through non formal education. The educational institutions that provide education for youth workers set their educational standards for the knowledge, skills and competences which their students are expected to have after completion of the course. For example: - Master's degree programme in socio-pedagogical work with youth, offered by The University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”; Bachelor and Master's degree programmes in non-formal education offered by the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”; • Master's degree programme in youth activities and sport, offered by the National Sport Academy “Vasil Levski”.

- In the academic 2016/2017, the Faculty in Pedagogy of the VTU “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” opened a Master's Program in Youth Work.
- The non-formal education opportunity for youth workers is also available by the National youth Forum. Национална младежка академия (National youth academy) is dividing in different thematic groups and gives the opportunity to the young people participating to develop different type of qualities.

Education, training and skills recognition

The Veliko Tarnovo University “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” is among the first educational institutions in Bulgaria to offer a qualification program for a new profession – Youth Worker. In the academic 2016/2017, the Faculty in Pedagogy of the VTU “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” opened a Master's Program in Youth Work. There are not training for

continuous professional development, either directly organised or funded by public authorities, available to youth workers – volunteers and/or professionals – to reinforce and expand their competences. There is no official legal procedure for the validation of skills and competences gained by youth workers through non-formal and informal learning.

Mobility of youth workers

There are not existing national policies/programmes/initiatives offering the possibility for youth workers to take part in exchange opportunities, cooperation and networking at local, regional, national and international level. Information should refer exclusively to programmes that are funded (at least for 50 %) by the top-level, implemented on a large scale.

10.6 Recognition and validation of skills acquired through youth work

Existing arrangements

There is not a framework for recognition of the skills and competences acquired (e.g. self-assessment tools, documents released by youth work organisers); validation of those skills and competences (e.g. through portfolios, certificates, competence folders) and accreditation towards a qualification (full or partial) within the system of formal education (e.g. credits towards the attainment of a diploma).

Skills

There is not a top-level national policies and/or recognition mechanisms identify specific skills and competences such as social skills, life skills and communication skills that can be acquired through youth work. If so, authors should supply a brief description of them.

10.7 Raising awareness about youth work

There are not specific information providers in the field of youth work. Every year of the occasion of the International Youth Day 12 August, The Ministry of Youth and Sports organized a Youth Organisations Fest. During this event NGOs and the national Agency for Erasmus+; the Youth Centres in the country and youth clubs can advertise and promote the opportunities they can offer regarding youth work trough art, exhibition and advertising materials with information.

Information providers

The information providers funded by public top-level authorities can be NGOs working with young people who can apply for the thematic area 2 – Development and recognition of youth work of the Sub-programme 2 of the National Program for Youth 2016-2020 called National youth initiatives and campaigns. It focuses on funding the implementation of project proposals by non-governmental organisations working in the youth field as well as by informal youth groups in six thematic areas covering main directions for promoting civic positioning and participation in campaigns and initiatives of young people and youth workers in Bulgaria.

Key initiatives

As an Example of a key initiative in the field of informing about youth work is the National confederation and workshop is the workshop for Популяризиране на младежката работа в България. Генериране на идеи за младежка заетост (Promoting youth work in Bulgaria. Generating ideas on youth employment funded by the National Program for Youth. The initiatives and campaigns under this thematic area were not funded in 2017 and 2018. A project on this theme was funded in 2019 but it is still on implementation

phase and the final reporting on concrete numbers of the involved young people will be available at earliest March 2020. There is not any specific target groups identified such as education institutions, sub-groups in the youth population, social services). NGOs working with young people who can apply and implement projects under the National Program for Youth 2016-2020.

10.8 Current debates and reforms

In accordance with Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda, the recommendations in the final declaration of the Third European Youth Work Convention, and in pursuance with strategic objective No 4 "Development and Establishment of Youth Work at National Level" of the National Youth Strategy 2021-2030 ([Национална стратегия за младежта 2021- 2030](#)), the Ministry of Youth and Sports established a National Working Group on Youth Work. It will be a consultative unit at the minister of youth and sports to define positions, opinions and initiatives in the field of youth work.

The main tasks of the working group are as follows:

1. to make a roadmap for development and support of youth work at national level;
2. to collect data and make analysis of the current status of youth work at national and local level;
3. to raise the awareness of the community, young people, nongovernmental organisations and interested institutions about the Bonn Process and youth work at national and local level;
4. to carry out consultations with view of possible decisions with regard to the implementation of the Bonn Process at national level;
5. to ensure consistent and continuous implementation of the Bonn Process by ensuring the communication and the involvement of all stakeholders.

The National Working Group on Youth Work is composed of representatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Human Resources Development Center, youth centers, youth and civil organisations, academic community, youth researchers.

GLOSSARY

The Employment Agency (EA)

Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS)

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

Youth Policies Directorate within the Ministry of Youth and Sports

Council of Ministers (CoM)

National Assembly (NA)

National Youth Information System (NYIS)

National Alliance for Volunteer Action /NAWA/

National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB)

European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

National Statistical Institute (NSI)

National Revenue Agency (NRA)
National Social Security Institute (NSSI)
Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)
Ministry of Economy (MoE)
Labor Office Directorates (LOD)
State Agricultural Fund (SAF)
National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET)
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MoAFF)
National Representation of Student Councils (NRSC)
Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW)
Youth and Sport Act
National Youth Strategy

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[Employment Strategy,](#) (last access on 16 November 2018)

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[Combating Anti-Social Acts of Minors and Juveniles Act \(Title amended - Extract, issue 11 of 1961\)](#)

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[Child Protection Act](#)

[Health and Safety at Work Act](#)

[Labor Inspection Act](#)

[Integration of People with Disabilities Act](#)

[Law on information and consultation of employees in multinational enterprises, enterprise groups and European companies](#)

[Corporate Income Tax Act](#)

[Crediting Students and PhD Students Act](#)

[Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Act](#)

[Employment Promotion Act](#)

[Vocational Education and Training Act](#)

[Family Allowance for Children Act](#)

[Social Assistance Act](#)

[Labor Migration and Labor Mobility Act](#) (last access on 16 November 2018)

[Asylum and Refugees Act](#) (last access on 16 November 2018)

[Settlement of Collective Labor Disputes Act](#) (last access on 16 November 2018)

Ordinance on the conditions and procedure for the implementation of measures to prevent the abandonment of children and their placement in institutions, and their reintegration (last access on 16 November 2018)

Ordinance on the conditions and procedure for financing the training for the acquisition of vocational qualification and motivational training, organized by the Employment Agency (last access on 16 November 2018)

Data and statistics

A working version of the National Youth Report for 2016, based on a statistical study of Trend Research Center

Statistical data from the study "Establishing the Effects of Youth Policies on Young People" conducted by Trend Research Center October-November 2017.

Studies, repots and academic publications

[Prerequisites and necessity of realization of Career Start Program](#) (Program documentation amended by Order No. ПД 01-38 of 18 January 2012 of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy")

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ARCHIVE

Information from previous years can be accessed and freely downloaded through the PDF files below.

2020

[Bulgaria_2020.pdf](#)

2019

[Bulgaria_2019.pdf](#)

2018

[Bulgaria2018.pdf](#)