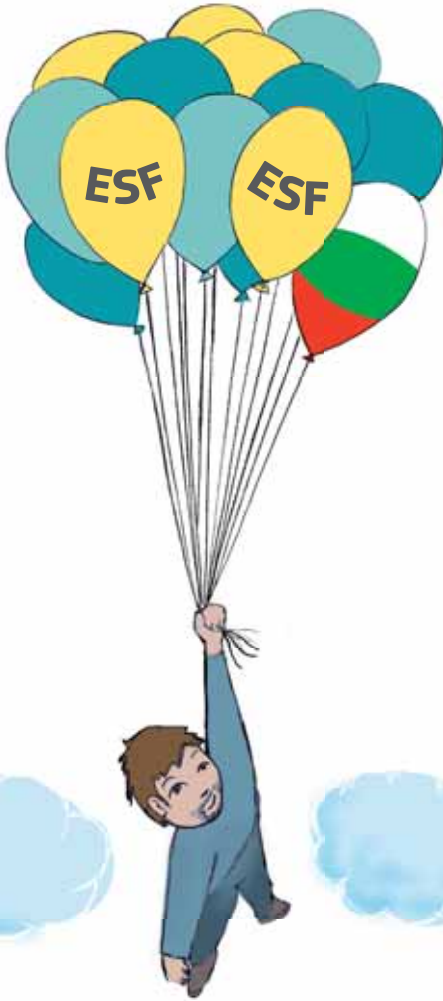




European  
Commission



# BULGARIA

## AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

Thanks to ESF support, Bulgaria is spending nearly EUR 1.4 billion on measures to support education and training, strengthen its public administration and reduce poverty. This investment is helping Bulgaria boost workers' skills and prospects and improve public services – particularly those supporting business and employment – thus ensuring all of its citizens, including vulnerable groups like the Roma, can benefit from future growth.

*Social  
Europe*

**BULGARIA**

# INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND JOBS: THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BULGARIA

The economic crisis interrupted a period of strong economic growth for Bulgaria, causing unemployment to rise sharply. However, with growth restored, employment is forecast to rise and Bulgaria has set an employment level target of 76% as part of its Europe 2020 commitments – representing an extra 213 000 jobs compared to 2010. To achieve this, some important challenges must be addressed. One of these is to bring substantial improvements to public administration, including the health and education systems. Better health services will give a boost to social cohesion, while improvements in education will help provide more people with the skills they need to find work and avoid the trap of long-term unemployment or precarious employment. To this end, Bulgaria must reduce the share of early school leavers – particularly among the Roma where the drop-out rate reaches 43%. It is also aiming for a higher share of graduates in its labour force, which will support employment in a more innovative and R&D-focused economy. And Bulgaria is also making significant efforts in e-government services, to raise productivity, to serve citizens better, and to reduce the administrative burden on businesses.

Another challenge is to get more people into work and raise productivity. This requires opening up employment opportunities to sections of the population who have found it difficult to get work in the past, such as young people, older workers, the disabled and job-seekers from minority groups like the Roma in particular. In addition, the occurrence of unrecorded employment in the ‘grey economy’ must be reduced to improve job security and health provision.

## *“Building social cohesion and fighting exclusion”*

Bulgaria is also taking measures to reduce poverty, and giving people the skills to get work is an important tool for building social cohesion and fighting exclusion. Poverty levels are above the EU average, so Bulgaria aims to lift 260 000 of its citizens out of poverty by 2020. Among these are the unemployed, older people, Roma, and many children in poor families – by focusing on education, skills and jobs as a way out of poverty, Bulgaria aims to make real and lasting improvements to their lives.

## ESF spending in Bulgaria

Each Member State manages its ESF funding according to the particular challenges it faces. For 2007–2013, Bulgaria is receiving EUR 1.18 billion of ESF funds. With national co-funding, this brings the total ESF spending in the country to nearly EUR 1.4 billion. This budget is shared between two Operational Programmes: the first to ensure ‘Human Resources Development’ and the second to boost ‘Administrative Capacity’.



# BULGARIA'S ESF PRIORITIES

## Better skills and better social integration

Bulgaria is raising skill levels and productivity among its workers by providing better training and easier access to lifelong learning. It is also taking positive steps to make sure that no one is left on the fringes of society. ESF programmes are addressing this problem by providing more opportunities for flexible working conditions, tailored training schemes for vulnerable groups, and work placements. Efforts are also under way to give a better start in life to the nearly 8000 parentless and/or disabled children living in institutions, such as through the 'For our children' project which is encouraging more foster parenting.

*“Better training and access to lifelong learning”*

ESF funds are also supporting training opportunities for all, such as the 'Development' scheme which offers training and jobs to unemployed people, and the highly successful 'I Can' scheme providing training opportunities to 140000 employees through an innovative voucher system.

## Better public services in support of jobs

Here, ESF funding is focusing on building a more advanced public administration, capable of developing and implementing employment policies more efficiently and providing fair and open access to the services that people and businesses want. A wide range of actions are improving the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the Bulgarian public administration and judicial system, and making them more responsive to the needs of both business and citizens. These include providing better training for civil servants and facilitating the exchange of best practice with other Member States, for example through new computer-based systems for recognition of international student qualifications based on similar systems in the Netherlands and Germany. Projects are also developing e-Government systems to offer better services to business and the general public, such as facilities for online job searches and related employment and training services for job-seekers and workers.

# THE ESF IN BULGARIA: SOME EXAMPLES

## Doing it better

Helping workers build their knowledge and skills gives them the power to improve both their own professional prospects and the contribution they can make in the workplace. The 'I Can' operation, launched by the National Employment Agency and co-funded by ESF, introduced an innovative voucher system through which any employed person could apply and receive a voucher for a key-competences or professional training course of their choice – delivered by one of over 720 training centres throughout the country. In the first two phases, 140000 employees took part. A further 81000 participants are expected to sign up for the follow-on 'I Can Do Better' operation.

## Making school attractive

Keeping children in school longer and increasing the value of the education they receive are key goals in improving the employment prospects of young people in Bulgaria – especially those from minorities such as the Roma. The ESF-supported 'Making school more attractive' operation involves some 1880 Bulgarian schools which are all implementing projects to reduce the number of early school leavers and improve social integration among the young. In one school, for example, they are doing this by encouraging participation in extra-curricular activities designed to develop the personal, intellectual and physical abilities of the students – building team-working capacities, improving self-expression and teaching presentation skills. The operation is very popular and expects to reach over 330000 young people in total.



### Do you want to...?

- ...learn more about the ESF in Bulgaria?
- ...understand better how the ESF works?
- ...see video clips on projects from across the EU?

Then visit the ESF website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/bulgaria>

**TRAINING**  
**NEW JOBS**  
**SKILLS**  
**INNOVATION**