

THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND



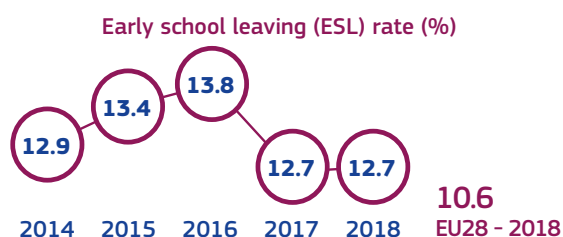
Support to Education and Training: 2014-2018

BULGARIA

SUMMARY

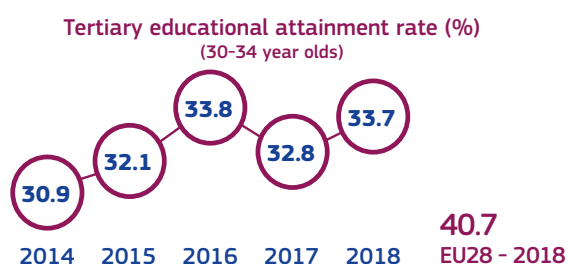
ESF Thematic Objective 10 funding is used to support education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning. Over 345 653 791 million euro has been allocated to such operations in Bulgaria, with 673 352 participations having taken place by the end of 2018. This factsheet summarises the main actions, outputs, results and lessons learned so far in the use of this funding in Bulgaria.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



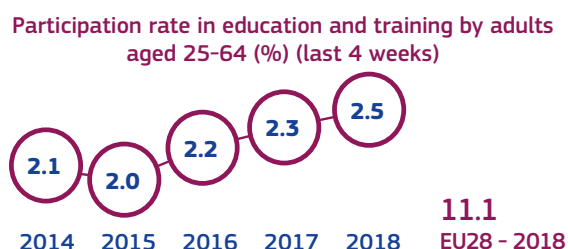
► The **early school leaving (ESL) rate** in Bulgaria has not improved in the last five years and has remained between 12% and 14%. This is higher than the EU28 average and does not meet the EU 2020 target of 10% or lower. There are significant regional disparities in the country, with the highest rates in the southeast.

► OECD PISA results indicate that educational quality and **achievements in reading, mathematics and science** are among the lowest in the EU.



► The **tertiary educational attainment rate** is increasing slowly, but it is still below the EU28 average and the EU 2020 target of 40%. Women have a significantly higher attainment rate than men (40.8% compared to 27% in 2018). The employment rate of graduates is below the EU28 average, with the lowest rates in northwest and southcentral Bulgaria.

► The qualification level of the labour force is affected by the very limited **participation of the adult population in education and training**, and the poor quality and content of available programmes.



► Government **expenditure on education** as a percentage of GDP was 3.6% in 2017, significantly below the EU28 average of 4.6%. Government expenditure was particularly low in pre-primary and primary education at 0.7% of GDP (EU28 average was 1.5%).

EXPLANATORY NOTES

ESF European Social Fund

TO10 Thematic Objective 10

OP Operational Programme

IP Investment Priority

* Figures present the situation for ESF operations under Thematic Objective 10 and its four Investment Priorities (IPs) for the programming period 2014-2020 implemented up to the end of 2018, as reported on 1 October 2019. In many instances, operations are not yet complete at this stage, or have only recently started.

* As one person could participate more than once in ESF operations over time, the number of participations is reported. These figures exclude Technical Assistance.

* Where the breakdown of participants according to employment status, age, and level of education does not add up to 100%, it means that it was not possible to include characteristics of a number of participants in some OPs.

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ESF PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS IN BULGARIA

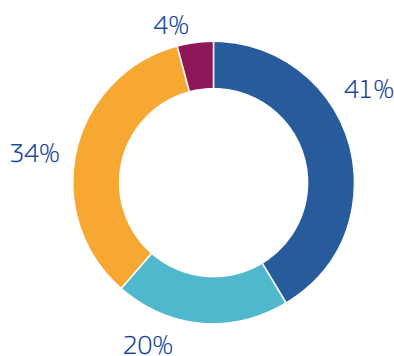
- ▶ There are **two** ESF Operational Programmes (OP) in Bulgaria that are relevant to Thematic Objective 10 (TO10).
- ▶ The **Science and Education for Smart Growth OP** has the following priorities:
 - ▶ Improving the **quality of school education** through greater use of modern technologies and improving teacher training;
 - ▶ Improving the **quality and access to higher education** by improving the management, funding and performance frameworks of higher education institutions and by funding student scholarships and exchanges;
 - ▶ Support for **lifelong learning**;
 - ▶ Reforming **vocational education and training** to respond better to labour market needs;
- ▶ Integrating **disadvantaged groups** into education and training.
- ▶ The **Human Resources Development OP** has the following priorities:
 - ▶ **Training opportunities** for the unemployed, including youths;
 - ▶ **Training opportunities for employees** over 54 years of age and for employees for improvement of their qualifications and skills;
 - ▶ **Skills and qualifications training** for employees in the ICT, green economy, healthcare, and creative and cultural sectors.

20% of total ESF funding¹...

€345 653 791

...is allocated to the following TO10 investment priorities: **early school leaving (41%)**, **access to quality tertiary and equivalent education (20%)**, **enhancing access to lifelong learning (34%)**, and **improving the labour market relevance of education and training (4%)**.

Allocation of ESF TO10 funds



- Reducing and preventing early school leaving - IP10.i
- Improving quality and access to tertiary education - IP10.ii
- Enhancing access to lifelong learning - IP10.iii
- Improving the labour market relevance of education and training - IP10.iv

STATE OF PLAY

32% of planned resources under TO10 had been allocated in 2018, with 26% spent.

Number of overall participations in TO10 operations by the end of 2018:

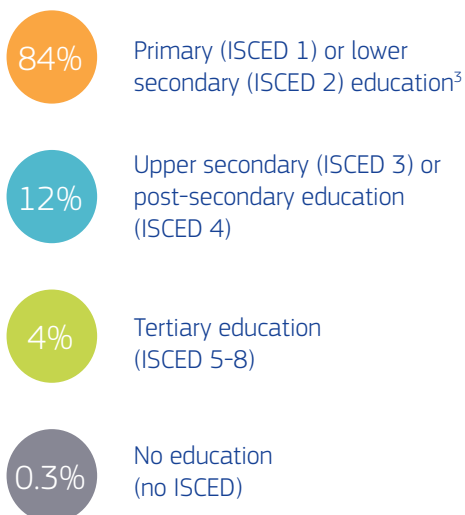
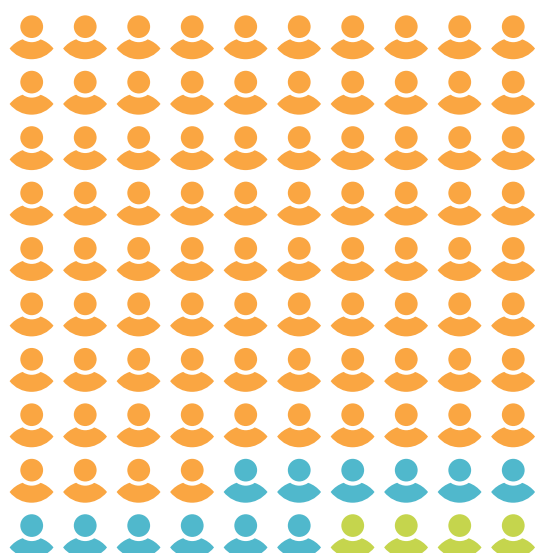
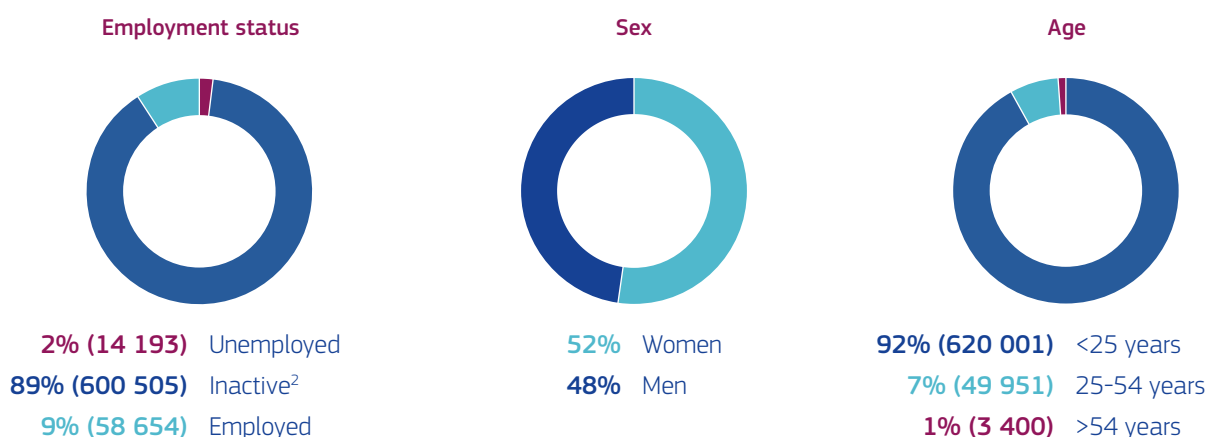
673 352

- ▶ **451 498** participations in operations to reduce and prevent early school leaving
- ▶ **23 414** participations in operations to improve the access to, and quality of, tertiary and equivalent education
- ▶ **144 695** participations in operations to enhance access to lifelong learning
- ▶ **53 745** participations in operations to improve the labour market relevance of education and training

¹ This includes EU-only funding and co-financing from the Member State.

Support to Education and Training: 2014-2018

PARTICIPANT PROFILES WHEN RECEIVING SUPPORT

116 616
Migrants32 318
Other disadvantaged6 367
Participants with disabilities4 500
HomelessKey achievements to date of ESF T010 activities in Bulgaria include⁴:

- ▶ **423 251** successful results have been achieved to date following participation in an activity funded by ESF T010, of which:
 - ▶ **1 183** inactive participants went on to engage in job searching
 - ▶ **385 271** participants went into education or training
 - ▶ **36 794** participants gained a qualification
 - ▶ **3** participants moved into employment upon leaving
- ▶ Good progress has been reported on the number of students having received scholarships to access higher education - the target was overachieved at 173%. The number of supported young researchers aged up to 34 years was at 93% of the target. However, more challenging targets may need to be set for these indicators in the future.

² The inactive population can include pre-school children, school children, students, pensioners and housewives or -men, for example, provided that they are not working and not available or looking for work.

³ ISCED is the UN reference classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by education levels and fields.

⁴ Participants' data are collected when starting an operation. Data on results are collected at the end of an operation or even later. Because of this time lag the two sets of data (participations and results) should not be directly compared.

LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR

► Regional disparities

Regional disparities in Bulgaria could be better addressed by designing more specific regional measures. The implemented measures cover the whole country and thus it is difficult to target specific disadvantaged areas such as northwest and southcentral Bulgaria.

► Lifelong learning

The adult participation rate in education and training is one of the lowest in the EU. Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning is very challenging due to the lack of existing experience in this area.

► Impact at upper secondary level

The most successful ESF operations are those consisting of scholarships to access tertiary education and practical employment training for upper secondary education pupils and students, as well as unemployed youths. However, the contribution of these operations to improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems is limited without structural reforms, for example, getting businesses to invest in dual learning/apprenticeship programmes.

► Relevance and effectiveness

ESF operations are relevant to the target groups' needs, but not necessarily the most effective for achieving the objectives. In some cases, legislative and structural reforms to the education and social care systems may be a necessary condition for sustainable change.

► Coherence with ERDF

ESF operations are well complemented by ERDF investments in educational infrastructure, equipment and facilities, and by the Erasmus+ programme. The ESF and ERDF, for example, support over 1-500 researchers in new centres of excellence for high-quality research and innovation.

► Efficiency savings

The Science and Education for Smart Growth OP has taken steps to reduce the administrative burden related to reporting and verification of ESF project management costs by introducing simplified costs.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

► Your Class

This holistic operation seeks to reduce early school leaving and improve the quality of education. It has developed networks between schools and parents, NGOs and municipalities. Special attention is given to vulnerable groups (i.e. Roma pupils, pupils with special educational needs etc.) who participate in theatre classes, painting workshops, robotics, coding clubs, civic education projects and health-related activities.

► Qualification of Pedagogical Specialists

This operation directly addresses the quality and competence of teachers, long seen as a major challenge. It is a large-scale project, aiming to help approximately 50-000 teachers (a majority of the profession) to acquire or raise their qualifications. There is a strong focus on digital skills, modern pedagogy and student assessment.

► Student Work Experience

This operation, funded under the Science and Education for Smart Growth OP, enabled approximately 7-600 students in secondary schools and 46-000 university students to successfully complete training in companies in a real work environment.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Evaluation page of the Human Resources Development OP: <https://esf.bg/otsenka/>

European Commission, Study supporting the evaluation of ESF support to education and training (Thematic Objective 10)

The ESF in Bulgaria: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=372&langId=en>

Website of the ESF in Bulgaria: <http://esf.bg/>

