

22BG06

Objectives, actions and benchmarks for Bulgaria's Skills Action Plan

Output 1: 22BG06 – Technical support for the development of
a National Skills Strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria

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Foreword

The OECD and the Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG Reform) are cooperating to provide technical assistance to Bulgaria as part of the Project “Technical support for the development of a National Skills Strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria”. The project will enable the Bulgarian Government to implement a national skills action plan with a comprehensive set of skills policy actions, in line with their national priorities. This report is one intermediary output in the framework of the Project, and aims to identify relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in the national skills strategy, building on the findings and recommendations of the OECD Skills Strategy: Assessment and Recommendations Bulgaria report (the OSS Bulgaria Report). As part of the present report, the OECD will undertake desktop analysis, identify good practices from other European Union (EU) Member States, and define and engage virtually with up to 30 national and regional stakeholders to test and refine results from the desktop analysis. Activities and results from this report will serve as a basis for the development of subsequent outputs during the Project.

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Summary

Skills are vital for enabling individuals and countries to thrive in an increasingly complex, interconnected and rapidly changing world. In Bulgaria, as in other EU and OECD countries, megatrends such as digitalisation, globalisation, demographic change and climate change are transforming jobs and the way society functions and people interact. Bulgaria faces immediate challenges stemming from these megatrends including low skill levels, inequality problems, low participation in adult education and training, high skills imbalances, a lack of high-performance work practices in places of work, and fragmented coordination between key stakeholders.

The “Technical support for the development of a National Skills Strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria” (TSI) Project aims to support Bulgaria in its efforts to implement reforms aimed to encourage investment, increase competitiveness and achieve sustainable economic and social convergence, resilience and recovery, in the area of developing and using skills. Building on the previous *OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Assessment and Recommendations Project* (OSS), the TSI Project will contribute to the ongoing reform on the development of a comprehensive set of skills policy actions in Bulgaria. This report is Output 1 of the TSI Project. It identifies relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in an action plan for skills for Bulgaria, building on the findings and recommendations of the OSS Bulgaria Report. Subsequent Outputs will identify specific activities, instruments, timelines, and stakeholder roles and responsibilities for an action plan for skills; develop a monitoring and reporting framework for measuring implementation progress for these activities; and advise on a communication campaign and capacity building to promote an action plan for skills.

The OECD has drawn on the draft the OSS Bulgaria report, as well as a range of existing strategies in Bulgaria, to propose objectives, actions and benchmarks for Bulgaria’s action plan for skills policy. The OSS Bulgaria report comprehensively covers skills policies, takes into account key Bulgarian strategies, and reflects the insights of Bulgarian officials and stakeholders provided during consultations in 2022 (OECD, 2023^[1]). Other Bulgarian documents and strategies have been incorporated where they cover topics outside of the scope of the OSS Bulgaria report (e.g. early childhood education), or provide further details on skills policy objectives, actions and benchmarks. These existing Bulgarian strategies taken into consideration include the National Development Strategy 2021-2030, the Education Framework 2021-2030, the Employment Strategy 2021-2030, the Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021-2027, the National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027, the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education 2021-2030, the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Partnership Agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-2027, and the National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030.

Although the documents considered use different terminology and structures, this Output maps relevant components onto the framework used for this project. For the purposes of this project, “objectives” are Bulgaria’s medium-term goals for skills policy, while “priority policy actions” are policy measures that Bulgaria plans to implement to achieve these objectives. “Benchmarks” are indicators of the implementation of policy actions and/or the achievement of objectives, which can establish baseline performance in the first instance and be monitored over time.

In addition to desktop research on Bulgaria's relevant strategies, this Output along with future Outputs incorporates good practices for developing skills strategies from other EU Member States, including objectives, governance, target groups, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, funding, risks and lessons learned, which could be taken into consideration in the Bulgarian context. Three case studies that can inform the development and implementation of an action plan for skills for Bulgaria are the Norway Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021, the Ireland National Skills Strategy 2025, and Latvia's Educational Development Guidelines (EDG) 2021-2027. Norway, Ireland, and Latvia's strategic skills documents vary in terms of scope and structure of the priority areas, objectives and actions that have been included in each. These result in different types of strategic documents that each have trade-offs. For example, Norway's strategy is high-level with greater flexibility, while Ireland's is comprehensive with targeted goals but limited flexibility, and Latvia's has complex cross-cutting terminology while also acknowledging the inter-connectedness of policy actions and their implementation.

Following desktop research, the OECD identified and engaged virtually with over 30 relevant national and regional stakeholders to test and refine a preliminary proposal for relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in a Bulgaria action plan for skills. In general, consulted stakeholders provided positive feedback on the project and its overarching goals, as well as on the OECD proposal for the objectives, policy actions and benchmarks to include in Output 1. In addition to more specific feedback that was incorporated into the proposed objectives, actions and benchmarks, there were a number of broad comments that were repeated by multiple stakeholders across the benchmarks. This cross-cutting feedback includes:

- A number of the benchmarks measure quantity (e.g. number of sectoral skills councils, number of consultations held, number of trainings offered, etc.), but should also measure the quality of these bodies/events rather than the number in operation. Indicators related to quality could come from focus groups, seminars, surveys, etc.
- The benchmarks (and future instruments and monitoring/reporting mechanisms) need to be as clear as possible to effectively measure implementation (e.g. for the share of individuals of different labour market status it needs to be clear what age group forms the basis).
- It will be important to specify what is meant by key terms in the benchmarks to make them as clear as possible (e.g. vulnerable population groups).
- It might be worthwhile to consider if and how to introduce benchmarks that are relevant across multiple objectives and/or policy actions (e.g. benchmarks on validation instruments could be relevant both for actions on encouraging individual adult and employer participation in education and training).

As a result of the desktop research and stakeholder engagement, the OECD proposes the draft objectives, policy actions and benchmarks in Table 1 to be incorporated in a future action plan for skills in Bulgaria. The Roman numerals used in Table 1 show how objectives and actions from existing relevant Bulgarian strategy documents (see the Note under Table 1) have been integrated into the findings of the OECD Skills Strategy report to reach the draft objectives, policy actions and benchmarks.

As the outputs in this project are meant to build on one another, the objectives, policy actions and benchmarks presented in Output 1 may be adapted and refined in future outputs. Please refer to the most recent output for updated details.

Table 1. Draft objectives, policy actions and benchmarks

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
Developing relevant skills over the life course		
In early childhood education and care		
1.1 Improving early childhood development ^{II} , participation and outcomes	1.1.1 Increasing the coverage of young children in childcare and pre-school education ^{II} 1.1.2 Improving the quality of childcare and pre-school education ^{II}	1.1.1 Enrolment rates in childcare (up to age 3) and pre-school education (age 4-7) ^{II} (EMIS/ NSI, Children enrolled at kindergartens by age) 1.1.2 Share of children (age 6,7) who are prepared to begin school (EMIS); staff-to-student ratio in childcare and pre-school (EMIS); share of ECEC teachers who have participated in ongoing education and training (*)
In formal education (primary education, secondary education, initial VET and higher education)		
2.1. Ensuring that curriculum reform and assessment practices improve students' skills	2.1.1. Building awareness and capacity for competency-based ^{II} curriculum implementation 2.1.2. Aligning external assessments with the competency-based curriculum	2.1.1. Students' performance in PISA in reading, maths and science (PISA, mean score in reading, maths and science; PISA average 3 year trend in reading, maths and science); effective implementation of the competency-based curricula in schools (*) 2.1.2. National external assessments are updated to reflect the competency-based curricula (*); Levels of investment in psychometric resources to strengthen the national assessment system (*)
2.2 Improving equity in formal education ^{II}	2.2.1 Promoting more equitable participation in formal education ^{II} 2.2.2 Improving the equity of learning outcomes ^{II}	2.2.1 Participation rates and early dropout rates (*) in primary, secondary, initial vocational and higher education, for students from different socio-economic backgrounds (EMIS/ NSI, Students in general schools; NSI, Students enrolled at vocational schools; NIS, Students enrolled in tertiary education by educational-qualification degree) 2.2.2. Gaps in TIMSS/PIRLS/PISA results between top and bottom performers (TIMSS, Percentage of students reaching international benchmarks in math and science, grades 4 and 8; PIRLS, results by school composition and resource; PISA, ESCS parity index, reading performance)
2.3. Developing a highly skilled teaching workforce	2.3.1. Selecting and preparing high-quality teaching candidates ^{II} 2.3.2. Monitoring and improving the development of teachers' skills ^{II} and knowledge	2.3.1. Share of candidates admitted into ITE (*) ; hours spent in practical learning during ITE (*) 2.3.2. Share of continuing professional development programmes (CPD) aligned with teachers' needs (TALIS, relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy and participation in impactful professional development); participation rates of teachers in CPD (TALIS, Participation in professional development activities)
2.4. Making the vocational and higher education more responsive to labour market needs	2.4.1. Strengthening the role of stakeholders in the development and provision of initial VET programmes, including skills related to the digital and green economy ^{II} 2.4.2. Increasing the relevance of higher education to labour market and student needs	2.4.1. Number of updated state educational standards for acquiring professional qualification by profession, on an annual basis (MES); number of contracts between business representatives and training institutions in the field of VET (*); Number of annual apprentices (MES/MLSP); share of IVET students receiving career guidance services (*) 2.4.2. Enrolment rate in higher education study programmes in areas on Bulgaria's list of "protected specialties" and "priority professional fields" (EMIS/ NSI, Students enrolled in tertiary education by educational-qualification degree and narrow field of education); Average transition time between education and employment (BURS/EMIS/NSI), employment rate of HE graduates (LFS, Employed and employment rates by level of education); share of HE students receiving career guidance services (*)

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
In adult education and training (AET)		
3.1. Increasing motivation among adults and employers to participate in adult learning	3.1.1. Improving non-financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers (including SMEs ^{vi}) to participate in adult education and training	3.1.1. Participation rate in AET (AES, Participants in formal or non-formal education and training); % of individuals/enterprises reporting a willingness to participate in AET (European AES, Share of the population who did not and did not want to participate in AET); % of individuals/enterprises reporting non-financial barriers to AET (European AES, Percentage of individuals wanting to participate in AET, by reason for not); number of individuals/employers that use the non-financial support for AET (e.g. receive guidance from centres for information and vocational guidance, actively engaged by a public awareness campaign to promote lifelong learning) (various ministries); share of adults receiving career guidance services (*)
	3.1.2. Improving financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers (including SMEs ^{vi}) to participate in adult education and training	3.1.2. Participation rate in AET (AES, Participants in formal or non-formal education and training); % of individuals/enterprises reporting a willingness to participate in AET(European AES, Share of the population who did not and did not want to participate in AET); % of individuals/enterprises reporting financial barriers to AET (European AES, Percentage of individuals wanting to participate in AET, by reason for not); share of adults eligible for financial benefits (e.g. the “voucher for employees”, the “flexible employment opportunities” subsidy, the “training for employees” subsidy, etc.) for AET (various ministries); number of individuals/employers that use financial benefits for AET (various ministries)
3.2. Making education and training more flexible and accessible for adults and employers	3.2.1. Improving the flexibility of adult education and training offers	3.2.1. Participation rate of adults in flexible forms of education and training (e.g. non-formal, relatively short length/few hours, online or blended, offered on work premises) (*); share/number of adults receiving certificates for learning by type of certificate (e.g. full qualification, partial qualification, micro-credentials) (NAVET, annual statistics by course type)
	3.2.2. Improving the equity and accessibility of adult education and training	3.2.2. Share of participants with low qualification levels in adult education and training (AES, Participants in formal or non-formal AET, by educational attainment); share/number of adults acquiring certificates through the recognition of prior learning (*).
3.3 Improving the quality and relevance of education and training for adults and employers	3.3.1. Improving the quality of adult learning opportunities, and the quality of workforce skills ⁱⁱⁱ	3.3.1 Share of adults reporting that the quality of adult education and training is good/very good (CEDEFOP, Benefits: quality of learning, country); share of AET participants reporting positive outcomes from AET (e.g. measurable skill gains, career development or income) (*)
	3.3.2. Making adult learning more relevant to learners' and labour market needs, including through the promotion of digital skills.	3.3.2 Employment outcomes of participants in AET by sector (*); improved perceived value of training by employers (European Company Survey, Perceived value of training); share of individuals with above-basic digital skills (DESI, individual's level of digital skills)
Using skills effectively in work and society		
4.1. Activating the skills of vulnerable groups in the labour market	4.1.1. Connecting more vulnerable adults to employment services	4.1.1. Share of unemployed and inactive in adult population (LFS) and share of those who are registered with the NEA (NEA Registry); registered unemployed persons consulted individually by an NEA employee ⁱⁱⁱ (NEA Registry); number of vulnerable adults receiving counselling (NEA Registry, NAVET Registry)
	4.1.2. Expanding and tailoring employment services for vulnerable groups of adults	4.1.2. Employment outcomes of participants in NEA services/programmes targeted at specific population groups (*); share of unemployed and inactive in education and training (NEA Registry, LFS); share of unemployed and inactive (LFS), by population group/region ⁱⁱⁱ /etc.; NEET rate ⁱ (LFS); duration of working life in years ⁱ (National Social Security Institute (NSSI))
	4.1.3 Ensuring gender equality in the labour market ⁱⁱⁱ	4.1.3. Gap in average hours worked between women and men ⁱⁱⁱ (LFS); gender pay gap ⁱⁱⁱ (LFS).

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
4.2. Fostering return emigration and skilled immigration to Bulgaria	4.2.1. Prioritising return emigration of qualified specialists and skilled immigration in Bulgaria's skills agenda	4.2.1 Annual net migration rates ^{ix} , by age group/skill-level/etc. ^{viii, ix} (NIS)
	4.2.2. Reaching and supporting return migrants and skilled immigrants	4.2.2. Number of return emigrants and skilled immigrants receiving targeted support measures (e.g. rent, childcare, transport, training for family members, etc.) (*)
4.3. Supporting enterprises to utilise workers' skills more effectively	4.3.1. Raising awareness of effective skills use in Bulgarian workplaces, including SMEs ^{vi}	4.3.1. Share of employers aware of HPWP (*)
	4.3.2. Supporting employers to improve skills use and adopt high performance workplace practices (HPWP), including SMEs ^{vi}	4.3.2. Share of employers implementing HPWP (including flexible work arrangements ⁱⁱⁱ) (European Company Survey and European Working Conditions Survey)
	4.3.3. Driving innovation within firms by improving human resource capacity and strengthening R&D collaboration in fields designated for smart specialisation ^v	4.3.3 Innovation performance of the country and the share of innovative enterprises from the total number of enterprises ^{xi} (Eurostat)
Strengthening the governance of skills systems		
5.1. Developing a whole-of-government and stakeholder-inclusive approach to skills policies	5.1.1 Developing a whole-of-government approach to skills policies	5.1.1. New structures for promoting whole-of-government approach (e.g. Skills Policy Council) (official approval from Council of Ministers); Number of bilateral ministerial meetings on skills policies per year (self-report by ministries); Inter-ministerial coordination indicator (SGI, Inter-ministerial coordination indicator); survey responses from stakeholders on quality of whole-of-government collaboration on skills policy (*)
	5.1.2. Engaging stakeholders effectively for skills policy making at the national, sectoral and local levels ^{iv, v}	5.1.2. Non-governmental stakeholder involvement in national structures for skills policy design (e.g. Skills Policy Council) (self-report of Skills Policy Council); number of active Sectoral Skills Councils; improved outputs of Sectoral Skills Councils (e.g. number of curricula updated by SSCs, number of individuals trained in courses designed and funded by SSCs; etc.) (*); number of regional/local centres of vocational excellence with active stakeholder engagement (*)
5.2. Building and better utilising evidence in skills development and use	5.2.1. Improving the quality and use of skills needs information	5.2.1. The existence of at least one platform compiling skills evidence data (self-report of relevant ministries); Evidence-based instruments indicator (SGI, Evidence-based instruments indicator)
	5.2.2. Improving the quality and use of performance data and evaluation evidence in skills policy	5.2.2. The existence of a cross-ministerial protocol for conducting integrated skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises (qualitative assessment with relevant ministries); the existence of a plan for regular skills policies assessments (qualitative assessment with relevant ministries)
5.3. Ensuring well-targeted and sustainable financing of skills policies	5.3.1. Increasing and reallocating spending on skills development and use	5.3.1. Government expenditure on education and training by level of education (EMIS/ NSI, Public and private expenditure by education level); government expenditure on Active Labour Market Programmes, particularly for training, per unemployed person (MLSP)
	5.3.2. Effectively sharing the costs of skills development	5.3.2 Level and share of expenditure on skills development by source (State, ESF, employers, individuals) (*)

Note:

- I. National Development Strategy 2021-2030
- II. Education Framework 2021-2030
- III. Employment Strategy 2021-2030
- IV. Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030
- V. Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027
- VI. National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027
- VII. Migration Strategy 2021-2025
- VIII. National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens Abroad and Historic Bulgarian Communities
- IX. National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030
- X. Recovery and Resilience Plan
- XI. Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-2027

EMIS: Bulgaria's Education Management Information System.

NIS: Bulgaria's National Institute of Statistics.

LFS: Bulgaria's Labour Force Survey.

AES: Bulgaria's Adult Education Survey.

DESI: The Digital Economy and Society Index of the EU.

SGI: Sustainable Governance Indicators.

The * symbol indicates benchmarks that may currently lack data.

1 Background

Context

Skills are vital for enabling individuals and countries to thrive in an increasingly complex, interconnected and rapidly changing world. In Bulgaria, as in other EU and OECD countries, megatrends such as digitalisation, globalisation, demographic change and climate change are transforming jobs and the way society functions and people interact. The digital transformation significantly impacts on all aspects of life, including the development and use of skills. Information and communications technologies (ICT), advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics are profoundly changing the way people learn, work, communicate and live across the OECD (OECD, 2019^[2]), and the Covid-19 pandemic only accelerated this process.

In particular, Bulgaria is thought to be highly at-risk of future job automation, and its workers – whose vast majority lack basic digital skills - are not well prepared to cope with it. Contributing further to the uncertainties associated with technological change is the continuing expansion of international trade and global value chains. Bulgaria's integration into international trade and global value chains continues to influence the structure and competitiveness of its economic sectors, which in turn has an ongoing impact on skills supply and demand in the labour market. The green transition will also bring major changes to Bulgaria's economy which is still very reliant on energy coming from increasingly unprofitable coal-fired powerplants. Even more specific to Bulgaria are the challenges related to demographic change. Persistently high migration rates and low fertility rates will cause Bulgaria to experience a major decline of its population, with the worst impact on its working-age population. This process is expected to exacerbate skills imbalances on the labour market, which are already beginning to be felt. Finally, the drastic rise of inequalities in the last two decades combined with high poverty levels undermine efforts in the skills area, with vulnerable groups facing major obstacles to access and use Bulgaria's skills system.

Skills performance and policy in Bulgaria

Bulgaria faces immediate challenges stemming from these megatrends. To begin with, Bulgaria faces major difficulties in developing skills. It registers low participation rates in formal education and its young people have low levels of skills, as shown by their low performance at OECD's Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) 2018. The education system faces inequality problems, with both trends affecting disproportionately young people from vulnerable groups. Available data also suggests that adults also have low skills levels, but do not – and do not wish to – participate in education and training. Bulgaria also faces challenges in using skills. Despite low unemployment levels, Bulgaria's labour market faces high skills imbalances and lacks inclusiveness, with vulnerable groups performing much worse than others in most indicators. In addition, data suggests that adults use their skills much less frequently at work and life than most adults in the EU, and that high-performance work practices (HPWP) are relatively uncommon in Bulgarian firms. Finally, Bulgaria also faces governance issues, as skills policy design is fragmented, coordination between ministries is very limited, and data and information collection is inconsistent.

Aware of these megatrends and their resulting challenges, Bulgaria has developed various national strategic documents setting policy directions in the skills area for the near future. The National Development Programme 2030 is Bulgaria's highest level strategic document prioritising policies in all

sectors of government and addressing education and skills as its first priority. In addition, the Recovery and Resilience Plan published in October 2020 adds more detail to the country's reform commitment to develop digital skills, strengthen skills relevance and promote adult learning. In the area of education, the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning 2021-2030 is the main document defining policy priorities. In the area of employment and the labour market, the National Employment Strategy 2021-2030 sets policy priorities for the decade. It is complemented by annual National Employment Action Plans. In addition to these major documents, skills are also touched upon by various other strategic documents: the Strategy for the development of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030, The Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027, The National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-27, The Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU Commission 2021-27, The National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-30, The National Migration Strategy 2021-25, The National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens and Historical Communities Abroad.

In addition to these strategic documents, the OECD has conducted an assessment of the performance of the Bulgarian skills system through the OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Assessment and Recommendations project (Q1 2022 – Q2 2023). OECD Skills Strategy projects provide a strategic and comprehensive assessment of countries' skills challenges and opportunities in order to build more effective skills systems, including the institutions, actors, policies, laws etc. that have an impact on the development and use of people's skills. The Bulgaria Skills Strategy assesses Bulgaria's skills performance and provides recommendations for improving the skills of young people and adults, using skills effectively and strengthening the governance of Bulgaria's skills system. It is intended that the "Technical support for the development of a National Skills Strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria" Project will build on the findings and recommendations of the OSS Bulgaria Report and support their operationalisation.

Developing a skills action plan for Bulgaria

The Technical Support Instrument (TSI) Project aims to support Bulgaria in its efforts to implement reforms aimed to encourage investment, increase competitiveness and achieve sustainable economic and social convergence, resilience and recovery, in the area of developing and using skills. The Project should also strengthen Bulgaria's institutional and administrative capacity, including at regional and local levels, to facilitate socially inclusive, green and digital transitions, to effectively address the challenges identified in the country-specific recommendations and to implement Union law.

The implementation of the TSI Project will contribute to the ongoing reform on the development of a comprehensive set of skills policy actions in Bulgaria. The expected long-term impact of this Project is that the Bulgarian Government implements actions for skills policy in Bulgaria in line with their national priorities. In addition, the Project is expected to produce additional outcomes in short and / or medium term, notably, the Bulgarian Government is expected to use the Project outputs to develop an action plan for skills policy in Bulgaria.

This report is Output 1 of the TSI Project. It identifies relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in the national skills strategy, building on the findings and recommendations of the OSS Bulgaria Report. As part of this report, the OECD will undertake desktop analysis, identify good practices from other EU Member States, and define and engage virtually with up to 30 national and regional stakeholders to test and refine results from the desktop analysis.

Subsequent Outputs will build on Output 1. Output 2 will identify specific activities, instruments, timelines, and stakeholder roles and responsibilities for the priority policy actions designated in Output 1. Output 3 will then develop a monitoring and reporting framework for measuring implementation progress for these activities.

2 Results of the desktop research

A methodology for identifying objectives and actions for the strategy

The OECD has drawn on the draft the OSS Bulgaria Report, as well as a range of existing strategies in Bulgaria, to propose objectives, actions and benchmarks for Bulgaria's action plan for skills policy. The OSS Bulgaria Report comprehensively covers skills policies, takes into account key Bulgarian strategies, and reflects the insights of Bulgarian officials and stakeholders provided during consultations in 2022 (OECD, 2023^[1]). Other Bulgarian documents and strategies have been incorporated where they cover relevant topics outside of the scope of the OSS Bulgaria Report (e.g. early childhood education), or provide further details on skills policy objectives, actions and benchmarks (e.g. specific vulnerable groups to be targeted by policies).

The Advisory Group (AG) for this project, comprising the OECD, DG Reform and the Ministry of Education and Science, agreed to include the following Bulgarian documents in this exercise, in addition to the OSS Bulgaria Report:

- National Development Strategy 2021-2030
- Education Framework 2021-2030
- Employment Strategy 2021-2030
- Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027
- National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027
- Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030.

The OECD has also considered a few other documents that included skills-related content (see the section “Additional consulted strategies”).

The documents considered by the OECD in this review use different terminology and structures, which often do not neatly fit into the framework used for this project. Therefore, this report displays the relevant content from each document in separate tables using each document's original terminology and structure (see the section “Skills objectives, actions and benchmarks from Bulgarian strategies”). The report also maps the content of each key document to the framework for this project (Table 2). Columns 2 to 4 on objectives, actions and benchmarks are the focus of the current Output 1 report, while columns 5 to 7 will be the focus of the subsequent Output 2 report. For the purposes of this project, “objectives” are Bulgaria's medium-term goals for skills policy, while “priority policy actions” are policy measures that Bulgaria plans to implement to achieve these objectives. “Benchmarks” are indicators of the implementation of policy actions and/or the achievement of objectives, which can establish baseline performance in the first instance and be monitored over time.

Table 2. Mapping the OSS Bulgaria Report and Bulgarian strategies to the Output 1 and 2 framework

Document	1	Output 1			Output 2		
		2. Objectives	3. "Priority Policy Actions"	4. "Benchmarks"	5. "Activities"	6. Instruments	7. Responsibilities, timelines, funding
OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Assessment and recommendations (draft report)	4 Priority areas (chapters)	12 Opportunities for improvement	24 Sub-opportunities for improvement	Assessment underlying each opportunity and sub-opportunity	~50 High-level policy recommendations	Detailed sub-recommendations for each high-level policy recommendations	Responsible actors sometimes named.
National Development Program 2030 (NDP)	13 Priorities	Sub-priorities	Areas of impact	Indicators	Measures	-	Financing
National Education Framework 2021-2030	-	9 Priority areas	31 Objectives	Benchmarks at document level	Measures	-	Broad discussion of funding
National Employment Strategy 2021-2030	Broad discussion of objectives	5 Priorities (general discussion)	11 Actions	Benchmarks at priority action level	Detailed discussion of actions	-	Funding & Responsibilities.
Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-27	-	2 strategic objectives	3 operational objectives / 5 thematic areas	Broad discussions on indicators	~63 activities (unclear) / 57 sub-themes	Detailed discussion at high level	Broad on Funding, Detailed on Responsibilities
SME Strategy 2021-27	3 strategic objectives	6 impact areas + 1 on the Covid-19 pandemic	19 strategic objectives	At sub-measure level (input & output)	32 measures	117 sub-measures	Responsibilities + Funding in detail Timelines are broad
Higher Education strategy 2021-30	-	10 objectives	28 Actions	Benchmarks at measure level	159 measures	At action level	Responsibilities + Funding broad

Document	1	Output 1			Output 2		
		2. Objectives	3. "Priority Policy Actions"	4. "Benchmarks"	5. "Activities"	6. Instruments	7. Responsibilities, timelines, funding
National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030	-	5 priorities	12 policy directions	79 across 7 themes	85 measures (sometimes sub-measures also)	Discussions	Responsibilities. Funding is not specific
Recovery and Resilience Plan	4 Pillars	12 Components	Reforms	Few, in the last 3 pages	Sub-reforms (do not have a name)	Discussions	Funding, yes Responsibilities, yes.
Partnership agreement with the EU Commission 2021-27	-	Policy objectives	Not coherent across document	Numerous, at policy objective level	Not coherent	Not coherent	Funding yes.

In addition, to produce this Output 1 report, the OECD has identified and engaged virtually with up to 30 relevant national and regional stakeholders to test and refine preliminary results from desktop research on relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in a national skills strategy.

The objectives, priority policy actions, and benchmarks discussed in Output 1, as well as the activities, instruments, responsibilities, timelines and funding sources that will be identified in future outputs, will be used to develop action plan(s) for skills policy in Bulgaria. As can be seen in Box 1, Bulgaria has established a taxonomy for its strategic planning documents, to facilitate long-term, medium-term, and short-term planning. This action plan, unlike many others in Bulgaria that emerge from one particular strategy, will draw on multiple relevant national strategies in order to operationalise policy actions related to skills.

Box 1. Bulgaria's taxonomy for strategic planning documents

Strategy

National strategies in Bulgaria are the highest level of governance documents. Strategies have a period of implementation of 10 years or more. The decision to develop a strategy is taken by the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister, or the minister of a particular ministry.

Programme

Programmes in Bulgaria are intended to be a means towards the realisation of strategies. National programmes are operational documents for the implementation of a national strategy and is more detailed than a national strategy. Generally, a national programme has a timeframe of about 3-4 years.

Action plan

In Bulgaria, action plans are more detailed descriptions to specify the implementation of national programmes. To do so, action plans specify more specific operational objectives, activities, timeframes, expected results, performance indicators, and responsible institutions in line with relevant national programmes and strategies. Generally, action plans are developed over a one-year period.

Source: Council for Administrative Reform (2010^[3]), МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ ЗА СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКО ПЛАНИРАНЕ В РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ [Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria], www.strategy.bg/Publications/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=90.

International good practices for strategies

Various countries have gone through the process of developing skills strategies and action plans, and Bulgaria can learn from their experiences. This project will incorporate throughout its Outputs good practices for developing skills strategies from other European countries and EU Member States, including objectives, governance, target groups, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, funding, risks and lessons learned, which could be taken into consideration in the Bulgarian context.

Three case studies that can inform the development and implementation of an action plan for skills for Bulgaria are the Norway Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021, the Ireland National Skills Strategy 2025, and Latvia's Educational Development Guidelines (EDG) 2021-2027. Given the different timelines of these strategies, they are each at different stages of implementation and/or evaluation. This has an impact on what can be learned from each example as Bulgaria embarks on the process of developing an action plan for skills policy.

Norway's skills strategy development process began in 2013 when Norway participated in an *OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report* followed by an *OECD Skills Strategy Action Report* (OECD, 2014^[4]; OECD, 2014^[5]). These reports analyse the strengths and challenges of Norway's existing skills ecosystem and detailed how actions proposed by stakeholders could be implemented. These preliminary documents were then used to develop Norway's Strategy for Skills Policy in 2017. The process to develop the strategy involved extensive stakeholder engagement, including a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify "strategy partners". The resulting Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021 is a binding agreement that commits strategy partners to common priorities in the area of skills (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017^[6]). To reach this goal, the strategy designates three priority areas for skills policy with 4-6 objectives under each priority area (see Box 2). Stakeholders have been further engaged since the publication of the strategy through the formation of two governance structures: the Skills Policy Council to oversee follow up on the strategy and the formation of the Future Skills Needs Committee to improve information systems and provide policymakers with common data (OECD, 2020^[7]). Since 2021, a white paper on "The Skills Reform – Lifelong Learning" was recommended by Norway's Ministry of Education and research and approved by the Council of State to build on the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021. The white paper provides an update on which actions from the government's skills policy have been implemented, which are in progress, and which are in need of further development. In addition, the mandate of the Skills Policy Council was renewed in 2022 and the Future Skills Needs Committee has been extended to 2027.

Box 2. The structure of the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021

High-level with greater flexibility

The Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021 commits strategy partners to the document's stated goal to "ensure that individuals and businesses have the skills that give Norway a competitive business sector, an efficient and sound public sector, and an inclusive labour market" (**Ministry of Education and Research, 2017^[6]**). To reach this goal, the strategy designates three broad priority areas:

1. Contribute to making informed choices for the individual and for society
2. Promote learning in the workplace and effective use of skills
3. Enhance skills among adults with weak labour market attachment.

The strategy has 4-6 objectives associated with each priority area for a total of 16 objectives to which the strategy partners have agreed. These objectives are more detailed than the priority areas but remain relatively high level. For example, the four objectives under the priority area "contribute to making informed choices for the individual and for society" are:

1. Establish a Future Skills Needs Committee consisting of researchers, analysts and representatives of all the main social partners and ministries. The Committee shall compile and analyse sources of knowledge about Norway's skills needs, both nationally and regionally.
2. Strengthen the regional elected level's skills policy responsibility and coordinating role, and improve conditions for regional cooperation between different skills actors.
3. Provide access to career guidance and a coherent system for career guidance with particular emphasis on the regional career centres. Strengthen the expertise of guidance counsellors, including knowledge of the labour market, labour market skills needs, the senior perspective, the integration perspective and Sami culture and business.
4. Further develop cooperation between education and training providers and the social partners, to make education relevant and to provide better access to qualified labour in all regions.

The relatively high level of the most specific objectives in the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021 can make progress on the strategy's objectives difficult to measure. While some of these objectives are more concrete (e.g. establish Future Skills Needs Committee), others could have a very broad range of interpretation (e.g. further develop cooperation between education and training providers and the social partners). However, an advantage of these broad objectives is that they are quite flexible, with future substantive policy reforms based on the framework of the strategy to be introduced by the two governance structures set up by the strategy (the Skills Policy Council and the Future Skills Needs Committee) rather than the strategic document itself (OECD, 2020^[7]).

Unlike some other skills and lifelong learning strategies that have dedicated funding for the strategy (e.g. Estonia, France, Germany), Norway's Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021 does not have a dedicated funding source (OECD, 2023^[8]). Nonetheless, the largest share of funding in Norway for adult learning (on which the strategy focuses) is from public funds (OECD, 2019^[9]). Programmes with different purposes are funded by different sources (e.g. the development of basic skills is funded through the Ministry of Education and Research while second-chance school education for adults is funded by municipal or county authorities (OECD, 2019^[10]). Experts in Norway have argued that there is a need for a designated joint budget for the actions laid out in the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy because financing issues make horizontal cooperation on these measures challenging (OECD, 2020^[7]).

Source: Ministry of Education and Research (2017^[6]), *Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021*, www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/norwegian-strategy-for-skills-policy-2017---2021/id2527271/.

The *National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future* was launched in 2016 by the former Department of Education and Skills (DES). The strategy builds on findings from the advisory report "Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy" by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) as well as various national and international policy papers, evaluations, skills forecasts, etc. The process of defining the National Skills Strategy (NSS) 2025 is comprehensive and took a life course and holistic perspective on skills policy. A broad range of stakeholders were actively involved in developing the NSS, including non-governmental stakeholders. The National Skills Strategy 2025 was created in conversation with other strategic documents in Ireland and, in fact, is linked to 32 other government strategies (Department of Education and Skills, 2016^[11]). The Strategy identifies a wide array of stakeholders whose cooperation is required to realise the strategy's objectives. As a follow up to the National Skills Strategy 2025, Ireland is participating in an *OECD Skills Strategy Assessment and Recommendations* project in 2022-2023 to review how Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 might need to be adapted to ensure that it is still fit for purpose.

Ireland's Skills Strategy 2025 goes into much greater detail than Norway's strategy. In page length alone, Norway's strategy is under 30 pages while Ireland's is over 100. Ireland's strategy also covers a longer time period and is framed as a 10-year plan guiding the country's skills agenda as opposed to Norway's 5-year-long strategy. Unlike other skills strategies that are more labour-market focused, the Ireland Skills Strategy 2025 also adopts a life course perspective, covering lifelong learning from early childhood education through every stage of education including adult education and training (see Box 3).

Box 3. Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025

Comprehensive with targeted goals

Ireland's National Skill Strategy 2025 is a 10-year strategic plan towards the expressed goal that "Ireland will be renowned at home and abroad as a place where the talent of our people thrives" (Department of Education and Skills, 2016^[11]).

To reach this goal, the strategy identifies six overarching objectives: 1) education and training providers placing a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy; 2) employers participating actively in the development of skills and making effective use of skills in their organisations; 3) quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education and training continually being enhanced and evaluated; 4) people across Ireland engaging more in lifelong learning; 5) active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market; and 6) support an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market.

Each of the six objectives has 3-5 “key actions” that relate to that objective, and each action has a number of measures (which can range from 2 to 15 or more) associated with that key action. Thus, the strategy has a number of layers of detail built into it, with the most detailed layer (measures) describing very detailed goals.

The specificity of key actions and measures is best exhibited through examples. Examples of key actions (22 total) include:

- Students at all stages will learn 21st Century Skills.
- Employers will participate in skills development through active collaboration with education and training providers.
- The benefits of lifelong learning will be promoted and communicated to the full population of Ireland.
- International migrants with in-demand skills will be attracted to Ireland.

Examples of measures (over 140 total) include:

- Ensure that assessment supports learning and provides evidence of learning transversal skills and knowledge across the sector.
- Ensure appropriate indicators for employer engagement are included in the Higher Education System Performance Framework.
- Promote and support engagement with continuing professional development across the public sector.
- Provide a supportive Employment Permits system to respond to the requirements of enterprises where specific skill cannot be sourced from within the EU/EEA.

Given this structure, the National Skills Strategy 2025 is extremely comprehensive and lays out a very clear and detailed vision for the future of Ireland’s skills system. However, at the same time, consulted stakeholders have reported that this comes together with limited flexibility to update the actions and measures in the NSS on an ongoing basis in reaction to new developments. For example, there was not a clear mechanism for updating NSS actions and measures in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (OECD, 2023^[12]).

Similar to Norway (see Box 2), Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025 does not have its own dedicated funding (OECD, 2023^[8]). Measures outlined in the NSS are primarily funded through a mixture of government funding and the National Training Fund (NTF), which is financed through a levy on employers of 1.0% of the reckonable earnings of employees in certain employment classes, as of 2020. Funding allocation is associated with specific programmes under different ministries or agencies rather than attached to the overarching strategy. This makes it difficult to evaluate how much of a budget was intended for and/or has been used thus far for the implementation of the NSS.

Source: Department of Education and Skills (2016^[11]), *Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland’s Future*, www.gov.ie/en/publication/69fd2-irelands-national-skills-strategy-2025-irelands-future/.

Latvia's Educational Development Guidelines 2021-2027 was developed following the 2020 *OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Latvia* and building off of Latvia's previous EDG 2014-2020 (OECD, 2020_[13]). The proposed policy actions for Latvia's EDG are based on the policy actions that emerged from the preceding *OECD Skills Strategy Latvia: Assessment and Recommendations* report (see Box 4). As in Bulgaria, these policy actions were then refined by incorporating policy actions from other relevant national strategies and stakeholder feedback. Proposed actions for improving the development of Latvia's EDG include giving consideration to policy actions at the system level, clearly defining responsible actors and timelines that distinguish between short-term and long-term policy actions, estimating the financial resources required for each policy action and the party responsible for funding, and strengthening strategic planning by considering multiple possible future scenarios, conducting risk assessments on these possible future scenarios and conducting resilience systems analysis to help Latvia prioritise skills policy actions. Latvia's process also includes strengthening the indicator system for the EDG by linking indicator databases, improving the quality of indicator data, setting benchmark indicators, raising the capacity to make use of indicator data and improving the dissemination of indicator data.

Policy objectives for the EDG 2021-2027 were chosen by Latvia through internal consultations. Subsequently, in collaboration with the OECD, Latvia convened workshops with representatives from various ministries and stakeholders to discuss and identify policy actions under each of the objectives for the EDG. Stakeholders considered which actions from the prior EDG (2014-2020) should continue into the new EDG and also discussed adding new actions. Following these consultations, the OECD proposed a list of policy actions, organised by stage of education (OECD, 2020_[13]). The list of proposed policy actions was consulted in drafting the Educational Development Guidelines.

Box 4. The structure of Latvia's Educational Development Guidelines 2021-2027

Cross-cutting themes and focus on policy outcomes

The structure of Latvia's EDG 2021-2027 has many layers of policy objectives, actions, and measures. The EDG 2021-2027 identifies four policy objectives:

1. Highly qualified, competent and excellence-oriented teachers and academic staff.
2. Modern, high-quality and labour market oriented education.
3. Support for everyone's achievement.
4. Sustainable and effective governance of education system and resources.

Each objective has a number of actions underneath it, and each action has a number of measures included within that, each of which have greater specificity. An example of a policy action is "educator preparation, attraction and development" which examples of measures within this policy action include "develop a system of teacher training" and "provide competitive remuneration".

At the same time, the EDG document identifies four broad priority areas that cut across the four objectives. These 4 priority areas correspond with the four priority areas identified by the OECD in the *OECD Skills Strategy Latvia: Assessment and Recommendations* report:

1. Strengthening the skills outcomes of students (related to Objectives 1, 2, 3)
2. Fostering a culture of lifelong learning (related to Objectives 2 and 3)
3. Reducing skills imbalances in the labour market (related to Objectives 2, 3, 4)
4. Strengthening the governance of the skills systems (related to Objectives 3 and 4).

In addition to these cross-cutting themes, a feature of Latvia's EDG 2021-2027 is a greater focus on policy outcomes and performance indicators in addition to specific goals. While indicators and tracking outcomes will be discussed further in other Outputs, it is important to note that each specific measure in Latvia's EDG 2021-2027 is linked to multiple specific policy outcomes and performance indicators. Many of the policy outcomes and performance indicators are relevant to more than one specific measure.

With both its cross-cutting themes and cross-cutting policy outcomes and performance indicators, Latvia's EDG 2021-2027 has an abundance of terminology that can be challenging to dissect, but also highlights the inter-connectedness of the various actions and measures in the strategy which reflects their inevitable inter-connectedness when it comes to policy implementation.

Latvia's EDG 2021-2027 has dedicated funding from a combination of national, municipal, private sector, and European sources that together amounts to EUR 4.5 billion (Latvia Cabinet of Ministers, 2021^[14]). The designated funding is mapped out to a high level of detail in an annex of the EDG. The budget is broken down across years between 2021 and 2027, across sources (e.g. state budget, local government budget, EU policy instrument, etc.) and, within the state budget, even across budget departments (e.g. Ministry of Education and Science budget, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of the Interior, etc.). Not only do these budget lines exist for the overall EDG, but also for each action outlined in the strategic document, and even for more specific measures underneath each action. For example, the budget for the action "training of teachers, attraction and development" under the first objective ("highly qualified, competent and excellence-oriented teachers and academic staff") is reported in total across years, and also breaks down the budget for each year by how much should come from the Ministry of Education and Science, how much should come from the EU, etc.

Source: Latvia Cabinet of Ministers (2021^[14]), *Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027*, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitiba-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>; OECD (2020^[13]), *OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Latvia: Developing Latvia's Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ebc98a53-en>.

As can be seen from the analysis above, Norway, Ireland, and Latvia's strategic skills documents vary in terms of scope and structure of the priority areas, objectives and actions that have been included in each. These result in different types of strategic documents that each have trade-offs. For example, Norway's strategy is high-level with greater flexibility, while Ireland's is comprehensive with targeted goals but limited flexibility, and Latvia's has complex cross-cutting terminology while also acknowledging the inter-connectedness of policy actions and their implementation.

An important step towards identifying relevant objectives, actions and benchmarks for a skills action plan, in addition to deciding on the document's scope and structure, is determining which stakeholders to engage in the process. To develop the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021, Norway conducted a stakeholder mapping exercise to accomplish this goal (OECD, 2020^[13]). As a result of the mapping, specific strategy partners were identified across public institutions (e.g. Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs, Local Government and Modernisation, and Education and Research), social partners (e.g. employers' and employees' associations), and non-governmental organisations (the Norwegian Association for Adult Learning) (OECD, 2020^[7]). The coordination with these various stakeholders is conducted by Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge), a directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research that served as the main coordinator of the skills strategy (OECD, 2020^[7]). Similarly, Latvia's process for developing the Educational Development Guidelines incorporated the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including EU institutions, ministries, sectoral councils and associations, municipalities, educational and scientific institutions, non-governmental organisations, and social partners (Jākobsone, 2022^[15]). In Ireland, stakeholder involvement was very comprehensive including the circulation of a detailed consultation paper in November 2015 that resulted in feedback from over 120 individuals and groups to inform the development of the skills strategy.

With regard to assigning responsibility for objectives or actions in strategic skills documents, Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 clearly allocates responsibility among relevant actors for implementing the NSS. Each of the six overarching objectives of the NSS 2025 is associated with actions and concrete measures as described in Box 3. For each measure the strategy explicitly assigns a leading actor or actors to be responsible for implementation of that measure (OECD, 2020^[13]). This is an important step for ensuring clear ownership of each specific action described in skills policy strategic documents. Furthermore, it can help to ensure that each skills-related entity is aware of the full scope of its responsibilities that emerge from the strategic document.

The financing of actions and measures included in these strategic documents varies across Norway, Ireland and Latvia. Latvia is the only of these three countries that has funding specifically dedicated to the strategy and that has a detailed budget outline across years and budget sources. In Norway and Ireland, by contrast, the strategies reflect an over-arching vision for skills policy in the country, but financing is linked to specific programmes rather than to the strategic document itself. Funding for the proposed actions in Norway and Ireland come primarily from public funds (notably, in Ireland, they come largely from funds in the National Training Fund which is funded from a levy on employers), while in Latvia a large source of funding is from the EU.

Both Latvia's and Ireland's strategies are accompanied with a detailed framework and set of indicators for monitoring implementation. Latvia, in collaboration with the OECD, underwent a comprehensive process of evaluating and choosing indicators for the EDG 2021-2027. This process included mapping existing available indicators and understanding their considerations and limitations, incorporating previously designated indicators for the EDG 2014-2020 or other relevant strategies, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative indicators, identifying missing indicators, drawing on existing international indicators, and developing new indicators where necessary (OECD, 2020^[13]). Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 establishes measurable indicators both for the medium and long term which is important for assessing the progress of the implementation of the strategy at different points in time (Department of Education and Skills, 2016^[11]). At the same time, Ireland has found the lack of built-in accountability mechanisms in the National Skills Strategy 2025, such as clear monitoring and reporting norms, to be a central challenge to its implementation. The NSS calls for the use of "existing governance and performance structures and process" for monitoring purposes (Department of Education and Skills, 2016^[11]). However, in practice, ministries and agencies designated as "leads" on measures outlined in the NSS do not systematically report on their progress and, for the little reporting that has taken place, results have not been evaluated. Consulted stakeholders have explained that this makes it hard to assess progress on the objectives and actions outlined in the NSS 2025 (OECD, 2023^[12]).

Norway's Strategy for Skills Policy clearly outlines reporting mechanisms to follow up on progress made on the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy. Each of the strategic partners identified in the creation of the Strategy for Skills Policy is represented on the Skills Policy Council. The Skills Policy Council is a governance structure that was established with the mandate to follow up on the strategy and to continue to promote cooperation between the strategy partners on implementation. Specific measures for follow up of the Strategy for Skills Policy were created separately for the members of the Council and are all presented together on the Ministry of Education and Research website (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019^[16]). Furthermore, reporting at the half-way mark of the strategy (2019) was also formally collected and is available on the Ministry's website (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019^[16]). In addition, the Ministry of Education and Research compiles a yearly report on the implementation of the policy measures in the Strategy for Skills Policy by strategy partners (OECD, 2020^[7]). The Skills Policy Council holds regular discussions on matters related to skills policy and is seen by many stakeholders as improving coordination and collaboration in the

area of skills. It also has the ability to revise the strategy if needed (OECD, 2020^[7]). While this governance body was originally established only for the duration of the Strategy for Skills Policy 2017-2021, its mandate has since been extended due to its perceived success.

Existing skills objectives and actions for Bulgaria

Objectives, benchmarks and actions from the OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria report

The draft OSS Bulgaria Report provides the basis for a comprehensive set of skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions to include in Bulgaria's National Skills Strategy. The OSS report includes four priority areas, which are grouped under three pillars:

1. The pillar of "Developing skills" includes the priority areas "Improving young people's skills" (P1) and "improving adult skills" (P2)
2. The pillar of "Using skills effectively" includes the priority area "Using people's skills in the labour market and workplaces" (P3)
3. The pillar of "Strengthening the governance of the skills system" includes the priority area "Improving the governance of the skills system" (P4).

The following three tables are organised according to these three pillars, and show the relevant objectives and actions identified in the OSS report. Given that the OSS report does not identify benchmarks, these are not shown in the table. Rather, benchmarks are included in the proposed skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions in Chapter 4.

Developing relevant skills over the life course

To ensure that countries are able to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world, all people need access to opportunities to develop and maintain strong proficiency in a broad set of skills. This process is lifelong, starting in childhood and youth and continuing throughout adulthood. It is also "life-wide", occurring not only formally in schools and higher education, but also non-formally and informally in the home, community and workplaces.

Table 3. OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Developing skills

Objectives (Opportunities)	Policy Actions (Sub-opportunities)
Developing youth skills	
2.1. Ensuring that curriculum reform and assessment practices improve students' skills	2.1.1. Building awareness and capacity for curriculum implementation 2.1.2. Aligning external assessments with the competency-based curriculum
2.2. Developing a highly skilled teaching workforce	2.2.1. Selecting and preparing high-quality teaching candidates 2.2.2. Monitoring and improving teachers' continuing professional development
2.3. Making vocational and higher education more responsive to labour market needs	2.3.1. Strengthening the role of employers and local actors in vocational education and training 2.3.2. Increasing the relevance of higher education to labour market needs
Developing adult skills	
3.1. Increasing motivation among adults and employers to participate in adult learning	3.1.1. Improving non-financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers to participate in adult education and training 3.1.2. Improving financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers to participate in adult education and training

Objectives (Opportunities)	Policy Actions (Sub-opportunities)
3.2. Making education and training more flexible and accessible for adults and employers	3.2.1. Improving the flexibility of adult education and training offers 3.2.2. Making learning more accessible for low-skilled adults
3.3 Improving the quality and relevance of adult education and training for adults and employers	3.3.1. Improving the quality of adult learning opportunities 3.3.2. Making adult learning more relevant to learners' and labour market needs

Source: OECD (2023^[1]), *OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Assessment and Recommendations*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c2eb2f34-en>.

Using skills effectively in work and society

Developing a strong and broad set of skills is just the first step. To ensure that countries and people gain the full economic and social value from investments in developing skills, people also need opportunities, encouragement and incentives to use their skills fully and effectively at work and in society.

Table 4. OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Using skills effectively

Objectives (Opportunities)	Policy Actions (Sub-opportunities)
4.1. Activating the skills of vulnerable groups in the labour market	4.1.1. Connecting more vulnerable adults to public employment services 4.1.2. Expanding and tailoring employment services for vulnerable groups of adults
4.2. Fostering return emigration and skilled immigration to Bulgaria	4.2.1. Prioritising return emigration and skilled immigration in Bulgaria's skills agenda 4.2.2. Reaching and supporting return migrants and skilled immigrants
4.3. Supporting enterprises to utilise workers' skills more effectively	4.3.1. Raising awareness of effective skills use in Bulgarian workplaces 4.3.2. Supporting employers to improve skills use and adopt high-performance workplace practices (HPWP)

Source: OECD (2023^[1]), *OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Assessment and Recommendations*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c2eb2f34-en>.

Strengthening the governance of skills systems

Success in developing and using relevant skills requires strong governance arrangements to promote co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across the whole of government; engage stakeholders throughout the policy cycle; build integrated information systems; and align and coordinate financing arrangements.

Table 5. OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Strengthening the governance of skills systems

Objectives (Opportunities)	Policy Actions (Sub-opportunities)
5.1. Developing a whole-of-government and stakeholder-inclusive approach to skills policies	5.1.1 Developing a whole-of-government approach to skills policies 5.1.2. Engaging stakeholders effectively for skills policy making
5.2. Building and better utilising evidence in skills development and use	5.2.1. Improving the quality and use of skills needs information 5.2.2. Improving the quality and use of performance data and evaluation evidence in skills policy
5.3. Ensuring well-targeted and sustainable financing of skills policies	5.3.1. Increasing and reallocating spending on skills development and use 5.3.2. Effectively sharing the costs of skills development

Source: OECD (2023^[1]), *OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria: Assessment and Recommendations*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c2eb2f34-en>.

Skills objectives, actions and benchmarks from Bulgarian strategies

Bulgaria's own strategic documents provide additional skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions of relevance for the action plan for skills. These include objectives that were out of scope of the OSS report (e.g. early childhood education and care), as well as actions and benchmarks that can provide further detail to the OSS Bulgaria Report. Several Bulgarian strategic documents include objectives, actions and benchmarks for its skills system.

National Development Strategy 2021-2030

The National Development Strategy is Bulgaria's most important strategic document and guides the implementation of other strategies. The NDP includes 4 objectives which are related to skills use. Each one of these objectives includes between 2 and 5 policy actions, and each policy action corresponds to at least one benchmark monitoring its implementation. Priority 1 of the National Development Strategy provides additional content to the OSS Bulgaria report in the area of improving equity and inclusion across lifelong learning. The indicators from Priority 11 also provide benchmarks for using skills effectively, while Priority 10 reinforces the OSS Bulgaria reports content on strengthening the governance of skills system.

Table 6. National Development Strategy 2021-2030

Priorities (Приоритети)	Sub-priorities (Подприоритети)	Indicators (Индикатори)
P1: Education and Skills	1.1 Inclusion in education 1.2 Attractiveness and prestige of the teaching profession 1.3 Quality of education 1.4 Lifelong learning 1.5 Digitalisation and educational innovations	1.1. Enrolment in early education from age 4 to the starting age of compulsory education at primary level 1.1. 7-years-old pupils in primary education,% of corresponding age population 1.1. Share of population aged 30- 34 with tertiary educational attainment 1.2. Classroom teachers working full-time and part-time in primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education,% of total active population 1.2. Share of secondary teachers who felt "(very) well prepared" to use of ICT for teaching, % 1.2. Share of secondary teachers who felt "(very) well prepared" for teaching in multicultural or multilingual setting, % 1.2. Classroom teachers less than 35 years,% of all teachers 1.3. Employment rate of recent graduates with a vocational upper secondary or postsecondary non-tertiary education 1.3. Share of 4th grade students' reading scores below intermediate benchmark, % 1.3. Share of 4th grade students mathematics scores below intermediate benchmark, % 1.4. Relative share of young people (20-24 years of age) with at least upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary education, % 1.4. Mean years of schooling 1.5. Share of individuals (aged 16-74) achieving at least basic digital skills, %
P3 Smart industry	3.1 Digitalisation of the economy and industry 3.2 Technological intensity and innovation environment	3.1. Small and medium-sized enterprises selling online, % 3.1. Small and medium-sized enterprise turnover from ecommerce, % of total turnover 3.1. Share of SMEs that carried out electronic sales to other EU countries, % 3.1. Software expenditure, % of GDP

Priorities (Приоритети)	Sub-priorities (Подприоритети)	Indicators (Индикатори)
		3.2. Innovative enterprises, % of all enterprises 3.2. Gross fixed capital formation, % of GDP 3.2. Opportunity-driven entrepreneurship 3.2. Intellectual Assets 3.2. Innovative SMEs collaborating with others 3.2. R&D expenditure in the business sector 3.2. Innovation linkages
P10 Institutional framework	10.1 Good governance in the public sector 10.2 to 10.6 are not related to skills	10.1. Future orientation of government 10.1. Governance 10.1. Executive capacity 10.1. Government effectiveness
P11 Social inclusion	11.1 Promoting employment 11.2 Inclusion of vulnerable groups Not skills related: 11.3	11.1. NEET rate 15-29, % 11.1. Employment rate 15- 64, % 11.1. Activity rate 15-64, % 11.1. Duration of working life, years 11.2. Share of beneficiaries of community social services in relation to the total number users of social services, % 11.2. Share of GDP of social and solidarity economy entities, % 11.2. Sites with accessible environment, annual average 11.2. Employment rate for persons with a certain degree of disability aged 15- 64, %

Source: Ministry of Finance (2020_[17]), *National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030*, <https://www.minfin.bg/en/1394>.

Education Framework 2021-2030

The Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030) is the main Bulgarian document in the area of education. All of its 9 priority areas are displayed in the table below, since they all relate to skills. The Education Framework features a whole section with 24 indicators, yet they do not correspond to any specific priority area or objective, and are therefore not included in the below table. The Education Framework adds to the OSS Bulgaria report by providing objectives and policy actions related to early childhood development. It also adds further details to the objectives, actions, and benchmarks related to improving equity, strengthening the teaching workforce and making VET more responsive to the labour market.

Table 7. Education Framework 2021-2030

Priority areas (Приоритетни области)	Objectives (Цели)
1. Early childhood development	1.1 Increasing the coverage of young children in early education and childcare 1.2 Improving the quality of early education and childcare
2. Competencies and talents	2.1. Education oriented towards the formation and development of key competences and skills for life and work in the 21st century 2.2. Education in values 2.3. Development of abilities and talents
3. Motivated and creative teachers	3.1. Raising the attractiveness and prestige of the teaching profession and providing the education system with teachers in all educational institutions and in all disciplines in the long term 3.2. Develop competences in line with the changing role of teacher
4. Cohesive school communities and systematic work with parents	4.1: Creating and developing effective school communities 4.2: Bring together the resources of the family and the kindergarten/school to the full development of the child/student

Priority areas (Приоритетни области)	Objectives (Цели)
5. Effective inclusion, sustained inclusion and educational integration	5.1. Overcoming regional, socio-economic and other barriers to access to education 5.2. Interact with children and parents to create positive attitudes towards education 5.3. Support the development of professionals in the pre-school and school education system 5.4. Taking an individual approach to the needs of each child and each pupil 5.5. Supporting the full participation in the educational process of children and pupils with special educational needs 5.6. Educational integration of children and pupils from vulnerable groups, including Roma, asylum seekers and migrants; 5.7. Support for the full participation in the educational process of children and students with outstanding gifts 5.8. Prevention and reduction of aggression and bullying and non-discrimination in educational institutions 5.9. Expanding the educational function of educational institutions
6. Educational innovation, digital transformation and sustainable development	6.1. Fostering and developing a culture of innovation 6.2. Innovation in the educational process 6.3. Innovation in the educational environment 6.4. Development of education in digital environment and through digital resources 6.5. Education for sustainable development 6.6. Upgrading educational infrastructure towards sustainable development
7. Realization in the professions of the present and the future	7.1. Vocational education and training relevant to labour market dynamics 7.2. Formation and development of skills for the professions of the present and the future 7.3. Development of vocational education and training based on the transition to digital and green economy
8. Lifelong learning	8.1. Expanding lifelong learning opportunities 8.2. Provide conditions to promote lifelong learning
9. Effective management and participation in networks	9.1. Transition from a standardized approach in the management of educational institutions to management based on creativity and innovation 9.2. Collaboration between institutions and networking

Source: Ministry of Education and Science (2021^[18]), *Стратегическа рамка за развитие на образованието, обучението и ученето в република България (2021 - 2030)* [Strategical Framework for the development of Education, Training and Learning in Bulgaria 2021-2030], <https://mon.bg/bg/143>.

Employment Strategy 2021-2030

The Employment Strategy 2021-2030 is the main Bulgarian document in the area of employment and skills use in the labour market. Each one of its 4 Priorities and 11 Actions have been included in Table 8 since they all relate to skills. Objectives and Actions are not explicitly linked to each other, and benchmarks have been defined at the level of actions. Action 1 from the Employment Strategy provides further details to the OSS Bulgaria report via its policy actions on adult skills. Furthermore, actions 2-11 in the strategy provide further details for the actions and benchmarks related to using skills, including on gender equality in the labour market.

Table 8. Employment Strategy 2021-2030

Priorities (Приоритети)	Actions (Дейности)	Benchmarks
<p>1. Improving the quality of the workforce according to job requirements</p> <p>2. Increasing labour supply and supporting increasing labour demand</p> <p>3. raising incomes</p> <p>4. promoting the implementation of new forms of work and protecting workers in pandemic settings</p>	<p>1.Activities to improve the quality of the workforce as required by jobs based on labour demand forecasts with certain skills, digitalisation and new technologies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Population aged 15-64 years by degree of Education -Proportion of early leavers from education and training, 18 - 24 years -Proportion of people in formal and non-formal education and training, 25-64 -Relative share of tertiary graduates, 30-34 -Employed persons by level of education, 15 - 64 -Proportion of the population with basic or higher level digital skills -Labour shortages in industry -Registered unemployed persons enrolled in key competences training -Registered unemployed persons in training for vocational training
	<p>2.Activities to increase labour supply by activating inactive and disadvantaged groups in the labour market</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Population aged 15-64 years by degree of education -Proportion of early leavers from education and training, 18 - 24 years -Proportion of people in formal and non-formal education and training, 25-64 -Relative share of tertiary graduates, 30-34 -Employed persons by level of education, 15 - 64 -Proportion of the population with basic or higher level digital skills -Labour shortages in industry -Registered unemployed persons enrolled in key competences training -Registered unemployed persons included in training for vocational qualification
	<p>3.Activities to increase labour supply through social inclusion, improving working capacity, developing social services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Economically active population (labour force), 15-64 -Economic activity rate, 15-64 -Employment rate, 55 - 64 -Youth unemployment rate, 15 – 29 -Difference between total employment rate and employment rate for persons with disabilities -Persons employed for a fixed period of time due to inability to find permanent employment, aged 15 and over -Unemployment rate, 15 - 74 -Long-term unemployment rate (over 1 year) -Persons outside the labour force willing to work, 15-64 -Discouraged persons, 15-64 -Proportion of persons outside the labour force willing to work out of total economically inactive persons, 15-64 -Proportion of persons aged 15-29 not in employment or education and training out of the population aged 15-29 -Registered unemployed persons who have found a job as a result of employment mediation -Registered unemployed persons included in employment under: measures, programmes and schemes under HRD Programme -Inactive persons registered as unemployed with the State Labour Office, in as a result of the work of youth and Roma mediators

Priorities (Приоритети)	Actions (Дейности)	Benchmarks
	4. Conduct policy on income, benefits and allowances for stimulate employment and active labour market behaviour	-Registered unemployed persons consulted individually by a case manager -Proportion of people outside the labour force willing to work out of the total number of economically inactive persons, 15 - 64
	5. Effective management of free movement and migration processes in order to ensuring a workforce in line with labour market needs	-Compensations per employee, % -Employers' labour cost index, % -Labour productivity, % -Unemployment trap, % -Relative share of unemployed persons receiving unemployment benefit out of the number of persons registered in the labour offices for up to 12 months, nb
	6. Ensuring gender equality in the labour market, creating conditions for reconciling personal and professional life	-Employment rate gap between women and men (20-64 years) -Difference between the relative shares of part-time work for women and men -Gender pay gap
	7. Activities to increase labour demand in economically less developed regions	-Variation of the employment rate by statistical, regions % -Unemployment rate by districts, % -Unemployed persons included in regional employment programmes
	8. Activities to promote job creation in small and medium-sized enterprises firms, the social economy, the environmental economy and tackling environmental problems, business start-ups in innovative and application of new technologies	-Employed persons in micro-enterprises, nb -Employed persons in small enterprises, nb -Employed persons in medium-sized enterprises, nb -R&D personnel, general, nb -R&D personnel, researchers, nb
	9. Activities to promote the application of new forms of work, improve flexibility and security in the workplace, ensure healthy and safe working conditions and develop corporate social responsibility	-Part-time employees, nb -Temporary employees, nb -Share of people working from home
	10. Activities to tackle undeclared work and raise social security	-Persons employed without a contract, nb
	11. Adaptation of workplaces and protection of workers in pandemic settings	-Workers and employees received support to maintain jobs in a pandemic, nb

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2022^[19]), *СТРАТЕГИЯ ПО ЗАЕТОСТТА НА РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ: 2021 - 2030* *година* [Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria: 2021-2030], www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/26/zaetost/employment-strategy-2021-2030-2022.pdf.

Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027

The Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027 is Bulgaria's main strategy in the area of innovation, and includes an operational objective related to skills (Table 9). This strategy complements the OSS Bulgaria report though its focus on supporting enterprises to utilise workers' skills more effectively, and on effective stakeholder engagement at the local level.

Table 9. Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027

Operational objectives (Оперативни цели)	Activities (Дейности)
3: Improve human resource capacity in the field of new technologies and innovation. Improving the overall environment for skills development and high-tech human resources in the thematic areas for smart specialisation and technologies of Industry 4.0 and Industry 5.0.	-Activities for training in key competences, with a focus on digital skills and literacy of the population from an early age, as well as adapted acquisition and upgrading of competences, knowledge and skills according to the needs of the Bulgarian economy and the transition to more innovative industries

Source: Ministry of Innovation and Growth (2021^[20]), *Иновационната стратегия за интелигентна специализация 2021-2027* [Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027, www.mig.government.bg/politiki-i-strategii/inovaczii/].

National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027

The National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-27 is a very thoroughly developed strategy in the area of SMEs and entrepreneurship. Three of the six areas of impact are clearly skills related, and each of them include measures and activities. Due to their high number and degree of precision, only some examples of indicators are included below. This strategy reinforces the content in the OECD Bulgaria report by its strong focus on targeting SMEs in the areas on adult education and training, and in implementing high-performance work practices and utilising workers' skills more effectively.

Table 10. National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027

Area of impact (Област на въздействие)	Measure (Мярка)	Indicators (Индикатори)
1. Entrepreneurship	1.2 Promote entrepreneurship education in schools and the entrepreneurial transformation of Bulgarian higher education institutions	
4. Digitalisation and skills	4.1. Bulgarian SMEs to be aware of the importance of, and take advantage of, the opportunities available for ICT and digital technologies in order to implement digital business transformation. 4.2. Bulgarian SMEs to take advantage of the available demand for skills and actively participate in the vocational education and training system to improve and enhance skills and competences. Promote dual training (training through work) in digital and STEM-related occupations and specialisations 4.3. Bulgarian SMEs to actively upskill their employees through providing in-house training and more opportunities for online training opportunities.	Selected benchmarks: -Regular training needs assessments -Training courses conducted:
5. Better regulation and business environment	5.1. Bulgarian SMEs to be well informed and have at their disposal a single information point and an improved consultation process.	-Digital services provided by municipalities and central administration

Source: European Commission (2020^[21]), *Deliverable 4: Technical report including in-depth analysis of the SMEs in Bulgaria and preliminary recommendations for the directions of action of the new strategy*, www.mi.government.bg/files/useruploads/files/sme/FINAL_DG_Reform_SME%20Strategy_Technical%20Report_2020-04-27.pdf.

The Recovery and Resilience Plan

The Recovery and Resilience Plan aims to facilitate economic and social recovery from the COVID crisis as well as to create a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous economy. It includes 4 pillars, containing 12 components, which themselves contain numerous reforms or investments. Only skills relevant components and reforms/investments from pillars Innovative Bulgaria and Fair Bulgaria have been included into the table below. The plan proposes 15 very high-level indicators and targets that are not specific to any component or reform/investment and are therefore not included in Table 11. Only few of the high-level indicators are skills-related (e.g. employment rate, unemployment rate, average salary).

Table 11. The Recovery and Resilience Plan

Components	Reform/Investment
2.A.1 Education and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reform in pre-school, school education, and lifelong learning -Reform in higher education -STEM centers and innovations in education -Modernization of educational infrastructure -Provision of digital skills trainings and set-up of a platform for adult learning -Youth centers
2.A.3 Smart Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Investment 2: Economic transformation program
2.D.1 Business environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anti-corruption -Digital reform of Bulgarian construction sector -Digitalization of information arrays in administration that contain register data and e-certification from registers; - Improving state enterprise management framework; - Improving money-laundering combat framework -Instrument for a better strategic planning and strategic management of the implementation -Ensuring an adequate information and administrative environment for the implementation of the Recovery and Sustainability Plan -Economic Analysis Council
2.D.2 Social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reform in the field of minimum income -Reform in the area of social services -Modernization of long-term care -Provision of assisting devices to persons with permanent disabilities -Social economy development -Modernization of the Social Assistance Agency -Modernization of the Employment Agency

Source: Government of Bulgaria (2021^[22]), *National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria*, <https://nextgeneration.bg/14>.

The Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-27

The Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU Commission 2021-27 defines the distribution of the Cohesion Policy Funds across the period. The document includes 5 policy objectives, and numerous lower-level dispositions. However, these dispositions are not developed uniformly across the document, making their naming and classification in the table below complicated (only skills-related objectives and dispositions have been included). The strategy includes benchmarks and targets at the policy objective level under the name "Ambitions". Since these are numerous, only a selection has been included in Table 12.

Table 12. The Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-27

Policy Objectives	Sub-objectives (No name in strategy)	Ambitions (selected ones)
PO1: A smarter Europe by promoting an innovative and smart economic transition	-Sustainable growth of enterprises and development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and business	-Increasing the innovation performance of the country and moving from an "emerging" innovator to a "moderate" innovator -Increase in the share of innovative enterprises from the total number of enterprises -Increase in the share of high-tech exports in total exports
PO 4: A more social Europe by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	-Priorities defined in the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria -A road map for teacher policy development and reform -Improving the inclusive nature of the education system Improving quality and outcomes at all levels of education Adaptation of VET to the dynamics of the labor market Improving the applicability of the labor market and the quality of higher education Improving students' digital and STEM skills, incl. providing appropriate digital content for all levels of education for e-learning Applying systems approach and bottom-up approaches Improving the skills, competences and qualifications of human resources	-reaching a level of 7% of the relative share of the population (between the ages of 25 and 64) participating in education and training compared to 2.5% in 2018 -reducing the proportion of students scoring below critical, averaged across the three PISA domains, from 46% in 2018 to 25%; -An increase in the relative share of people aged between 20 and 24 who have completed at least the second high school stage of secondary education from 84.4% in 2019 to 92% in 2030

Source: European Commission (2022^[23]) *Partnership Agreement with Bulgaria – 2021-2027*, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/partnership-agreement-bulgaria-2021-2027_en.

National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030

The National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030 is the main Bulgarian strategy in the area of the demographic development of the population. It is composed of 5 priorities, and 12 policy directions. Only the ones related to skills are included in Table 13. A whole section of the strategy is dedicated to “Composite indicators”, which are classified in 7 sub-sections, not directly related to any priority or policy direction. Skills relevant “Composite indicators” are included in the table below. In the beginning of every box is indicated the title of the indicators’ sub-section, while indicators are listed underneath.

Table 13. National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030

Main directions (Основни направления)	Directions (Направления)	Composite indicators by category (съставен показател)
I. Slowing down the negative demographic processes and population decline	1. Promoting fertility by creating an environment conducive to the birth, upbringing and education of children	Indicator: <i>Adapting policies for families and children to ageing populations. equity between gender equality in the family and reconciliation of family and work life.</i> Employment rate, women 55-64 Employment rate, men 55-64 years Employment rate, women 55-59 years Employment rate, men 55-59 years Employment rate, women 60-64 years Employment rate, men 60-64 years Employment rate, women 65-69 years Employment rate, men 65-69 years

Main directions (Основни направления)	Directions (Направления)	Composite indicators by category (съставен показател)
		Average exit age from the labour market, women Average age of labour market exit, men Inactive for health reasons, population 50-64 years Internet use, population 55-64 years
	4. Improving the general health of the population and reduce overall, premature, child and maternal mortality	
	5. Development of adequate migration (external and internal) and immigration policy	Indicator: Migration and integration Share of foreign nationals in the population Employment rate of citizens, women, 25-54 Employment rate of citizens, men, 25-54 Employment rate of non-EU-27 nationals, female 25-54 Employment rate of non-EU citizens EU-27, men, 25-54 Educational level (tertiary), citizens, 25-49 Years Educational level (less than secondary), citizens, 25-49 years Educational level (tertiary), citizens from countries non-EU-27, 25-49 Educational level (less than secondary), non-EU-27 citizens, 25-49 years, %
	6. Significant reduction in the number of emigrants young people of reproductive age	
II. Overcoming the negative effects of population ageing and improving the quality characteristics of human capital	7. Adopting a comprehensive cross-sectoral approach for promoting active and productive ageing in good health. Adaptation of social systems to demographic change and population ageing – namely labour market, pension system, social assistance and care, health, education, culture, etc.	Indicator: Adapting education policy to the ageing of population. increasing the contribution of education the contribution of the education system to increasing productivity and mobility of the population in the labour market Early exit from education and training, women 18-24 Early exit from education and training, men 18-24 Educational attainment, women with tertiary education aged 30-34 Educational attainment, men with tertiary education aged 30-34 Graduates - 20-29 years per 1 000 population of this age Employment rate by level of education (tertiary), ages 20-64 Employment rate by level of education (upper secondary), 20-64 Employment rate by level of education (secondary and below secondary), 20-64 Total share of public expenditure on education Lifelong learning (population aged 25-64 in education and training), % Percentage of working population employed in high-tech sectors Internet use Labour productivity per employee
	9. Enhancing the general educational, spiritual and cultural level, qualifications, abilities and skills of the population of all age groups	

Main directions (Основни направления)	Directions (Направления)	Composite indicators by category (съставен показател)
III. Achieving social cohesion and creating equal opportunities for all social groups to lead a full social and productive life	10. Creating conditions for equal opportunities for full social and productive life for all social groups	

Source: Council of Ministers (2012^[24]), АКТУАЛИЗИРАНА НАЦИОНАЛНА СТРАТЕГИЯ ЗА ДЕМОГРАФСКО РАЗВИТИЕ НА НАСЕЛЕНИЕТО В РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ (2012 г. - 2030 г.) [Updated National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2030)], www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bq-BG&Id=778.

European strategies

The above Bulgarian strategies are themselves informed by a number of European strategies including the European Skills Agenda, the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, and the European Green Deal Industrial Plan.

The European Skills Agenda includes 12 actions around four building blocks related to skills. The actions include: (1) a Pact for Skills (under building block “a call to join forces in a collective action”), (2) strengthening skills intelligence, (3) EU support for strategic national upskilling action, (4) proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET), (5) rolling out the European Universities Initiative and upskilling scientists, (6) skills to support the twin transitions, (7) increasing STEM graduates and fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills, (8) skills for life (actions 2-8 are under the building block “actions to ensure that people have the right skills for jobs), (9) initiative on individual learning accounts, (10), a European approach to micro-credentials, (11) new Europass platform (actions 9-11 are under the building block “tools and initiatives to support people in their lifelong learning pathways”), and (12) improving the enabling framework to unlock Member States’ and private investments in skills (under the building block “a framework to unlock investments in skills) (European Commission, n.d.^[25]). The proposals in the European Skills Agenda have been incorporated into the strategic skills documents of many Member States including Bulgaria.

The New Industrial Strategy for Europe (2020) includes a section on the fundamentals of Europe’s industrial transformation and, in that, a focus on skilling and reskilling. Actions laid out by the strategy include updating the Skills Agenda for Europe in 2030 and including a recommendation on Vocational Education and Training, launching a European Pact for Skills (which was launched in 2020), developing communication on a European Education Area Strategic Framework, devising a Digital Education Action Plan (adopted in 2020 for the 2021-2027 period), and implementing the EU Gender Strategy adopted in March 2020 (European Commission, 2020^[26]).

Pillar 3 of the European Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023), which emerged following the European Green Deal (2019), focuses on green and digital skills, at all levels and inclusively for all people. This Pillar of the Plan builds on the European Skills Agenda and the European Pact for Skills. Actions in the European Green Deal Industrial Plan include working with Member States to set targets and indicators to monitor the supply and demand for skills for the green transition, to assess the skills needs and promote upskilling and reskilling in strategic industries for the green transition, to provide financial support for the development of future skills including in the green and digital sectors, and to improve the validation of skills including green skills (European Commission, 2023^[27]).

3 Results of the stakeholder consultations

Background on stakeholder consultations

Engaging with stakeholders is a central element of the project to aid Bulgaria in developing an action plan for skills policy. Given that the effective implementation of a skills policy action plan in Bulgaria would require the involvement and collaboration of a number of different ministries, agencies, and stakeholders, it is important to involve these stakeholders in the design of such an action plan from the earliest stages of the project.

Therefore, the OECD identified and engaged virtually with over 30 relevant national and regional stakeholders to test and refine preliminary results from the desktop analysis on relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in a skills policy action plan.

To ensure the smooth continuation of the activities and results achieved within OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria project, the following selection of key stakeholders consulted during that project were invited to participate in the TSI project activities: relevant ministries and agencies (including the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Innovation and Growth, National Agency for VET, Employment Agency, etc.); sub-national authorities (such as the regional structures of MES); enterprises; social partners; employers and employees associations; education and training providers at national and regional level; academic institutions; students associations; civil society organisations; and others with a stake in skills policies.

Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria 2021-2030

The Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria 2021-30 is a well-developed strategy, with 10 objectives defining 28 actions. Due to the high number of “Expected results” defined in the strategy, only the first three targets for each objective are presented in Table 14. The objectives and activities outlined in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education add to the content of the OSS Bulgaria report on making higher education more responsive to labour market needs. Some objectives in the strategy are less directly related to skills (e.g. research activities and regional development), and so could be excluded from Bulgaria’s action plan for skills.

Table 14. Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria 2021-2030

Objectives (Цели)	Activities (Дейности)	Expected Results (selected benchmarks) (Очаквани резултати)
1. Develop a sustainable mechanism for update existing and create new learning	1.1 Strengthening the understanding of competences as a dynamic system of knowledge, skills and attitudes and of the competence approach as a priority in higher education. 1.2 Enhance training in modern digital technologies and interdisciplinary links in curricula and programmes.	-Mechanism developed and implemented for regular update existing and create new learning curricula and programmes in each HEI -Improved competency profiles of each specialisation and achieved a balance between the different types of competencies -Integrated curricula and hybrid curricula introduced. disciplines that involve faculty from different scientific fields and professional fields

Objectives (Цели)	Activities (Дейности)	Expected Results (selected benchmarks) (Очаквани резултати)
curricula and programmes	1.3 Strengthen cooperation between higher education institutions, business, professional organisations and the state in the discussion of curricula and programmes, practical training and career guidance of students. 1.4 Activation of sports activities in higher education institutions, improving the quality of training and competitive activities, and building a modern sports facilities.	
2. Introduce modern, flexible and effective forms and methods of learning	2.1 Introduce standards for good teaching, guided by European experience and traditions 2.2 Establishment of material and financial base, enabling the application of modern and flexible methods of teaching and research. 2.3 Use of educational forms, methods and technologies tailored to the specific needs of the learner generation of students.	-Functioning Learning Resource Centres in HEIs, in which train at least 50% of current students and the establishment of a sustainable system for training teachers in modern methods teaching, testing and assessment; -Visualization of more than 50% of educational materials; -Increased technical, technological and information level of the teaching staff and employees in HEIs;
3. Improve the organisation and effectiveness of education in HEIs	3.1 Increasing the effectiveness of internal internal quality management systems, research and academic staff 3.2 Ensure financially efficient high quality educational activities.	-Increased funding for HE - by 20% per year for training and by BGN 10 million per year for research annually until 2030 -Financial model in place to incentivise quality education and high research performance -Reduced enrolments in the lowest quality HEIs within the strand;
5. Stimulating the participation of young teachers	5.1 Creating a better age match between faculty and students by encouraging more young people to participate in faculty competitions. 5.2 Create conditions to increase research initiatives and research capacity of young academics. 5.3 Create better working conditions and pay.	-Improved communication between lecturers and students, according to the specific characteristics of different generations of students -Well-motivated young professors united in flexible inter-university academic, cultural and sports programmes -High degree of expert involvement of young lecturers, directed towards local and central government
7. Building an effective education-science-business link	7.1 Establish a system for regular updating the curriculum in accordance with the latest developments in science and technology 7.2 Activate HEI partnerships with employers and the state in educational activities and continuing education 7.3 Strengthen HEIs' partnership with business and the state in research	-Developed dual training in higher education in technical NPs, where at least 50% of all active students in technical NPs are trained -Lifelong learning centres established for at least 50 % of HEIs -A system in place in each HEI to regularly update the curriculum in line with the latest developments in science and technology
9. Improve governance and the system for accreditation of HEIs	9.1 Ensuring academic responsibility and public interest in HEIs. 9.2 Make accreditation an objective an objective instrument of external evaluation.	-Strategic development programmes for each HEI adopted and implemented -Clearly regulated powers of the Boards of Trustees of HEIs in the Education Act; -Contracts concluded between the Minister of Education and Science and the rectors of all state HEIs
10. Improve the structure and efficiency of higher education of education	10.1 Developing connectivity between senior schools in the country and sharing common resources for training and research. 10.2 Define research, educational and professional higher education institutions with a clearly delineated Specificity. 10.3 Introduce a more flexible system for the duration of degrees. "Bachelor and Master degrees.	-Developed a system for shared use of facilities and faculty from HEIs, which ensures higher quality and efficiency of training -A legally regulated and developed system for the provision of training in interdisciplinary curricula and hybrid courses delivered by two or more HEIs -A well-functioning system of research and education HEIs and stand-alone colleges with clearly delineated specificities established and optimised.

Source: Ministry of Education and Science (2020^[28]), *Решение за приемане на Стратегия за развитие на висшето образование в Република България за периода 2021 - 2030 г.* [Decision to adopt the Higher Education Development Strategy education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021 - 2030], <https://web.mon.bg/bg/143>.

Overview of stakeholder consultations

The OECD held six virtual stakeholder consultations related to Output 1 of the project with a range of stakeholders (Table 15).

Table 15. Output 1 stakeholder consultations

Type	Participants
Bilateral	Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and National Agency for VET (NAVET), 8 participants
Bilateral	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and the National Employment Agency (NEA), 11 participants
Bilateral	Ministry of Innovation and Growth (MIG), 3 participants
Bilateral	Ministry of Economy and Industry (MEI), 2 participants
Group discussion	Social partners (employers organisations, trade unions), 7 participants
Group discussion	Others: Sub-national authorities, education providers, academic institutions, civil society, student organisations, 4 participants

In addition to testing preliminary results from desktop analysis on relevant skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions for inclusion in a skills policy action plan, the consultations served to introduce stakeholders to the project and build buy-in amongst relevant stakeholders for continued engagement throughout the process. Furthermore, the OECD sought feedback from stakeholders on the goals of the project more generally, the methodology with which the OECD is approaching the project, the whole-of-government nature inherent to moving the project forward.

Format of stakeholder consultations

Following a brief introduction to the project, the OECD shared with stakeholders the methodology used to draw on the draft OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria report, as well as a range of existing strategies in Bulgaria, in order to propose objectives, actions and benchmarks for Bulgaria's action plan for skills policy.

The OECD then guided stakeholders through a handout distributed prior to the meeting that presented the OECD's interim proposal of objectives, priority policy actions and performance benchmarks (see Annex A) for inclusion in Bulgaria's action plan for skills policy based on the OECD desktop research in Activity 1.2.

Participants in the stakeholder consultations were asked to share general feedback on the OECD approach to mapping existing documents and strategies onto the framework of the Output 1 report and to reflect on the OECD's interim proposal. More specifically, the OECD asked officials and stakeholders the following questions during consultations:

1. Should any proposed objectives, actions or benchmarks in the interim proposal be revised? Why? How?
2. Should any proposed objectives, actions or benchmarks in the interim proposal be removed? Why?
3. Are there any missing objectives, actions or benchmarks in the interim proposal that should be added? Why? How?
4. For benchmarks that currently lack data (indicated in the handout), how could Bulgaria collect this data?

Outcomes of stakeholder consultations

Cross-cutting feedback

In general, consulted stakeholders provided positive feedback on the project and its overarching goals, as well as on the OECD proposal for the objectives, policy actions and benchmarks to include in Output 1. When asked about potential risks of the project, stakeholders responded that it is important to ensure the project does not result in a mechanical gathering of existing priorities identified by Bulgaria without leading to policy

implementation. However, stakeholders did not see this a major risk and emphasised that it is important to try and undertake this exercise because Bulgaria is sorely missing integration and complementarity across ministries and existing strategies. This lack of coordination and collaboration results in the emergence of policy overlaps between ministries in certain areas and policy gaps in others – both of which lead to sub-optimal policy change. Multiple stakeholders highlighted the importance of including skills objectives from different ministries in one single document. As they expressed, this is particularly fitting in the area of skills which affects many different groups in the population and inherently requires the involvement of various ministries and key agencies. Furthermore, one participant noted that bringing these disparate objectives together could lead to a novel strategy, and other echoed that cross-ministerial action plans are notably lacking in Bulgaria.

No stakeholders expressed concerns about the OECD’s methodology of starting with the OECD Skill Strategy Bulgaria report to identify objectives, policy actions and benchmarks, and using other existing Bulgarian strategies to “fill in the gaps” where relevant. Stakeholders agreed with the Bulgarian strategies identified and incorporated by the OECD, noting also European strategies that have a big impact on policy in Bulgaria such as the European Skills Agenda, the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, and the European Green Deal Industrial Plan. Given that these European strategies appear to be sufficiently reflected in the Bulgarian national strategies, they are not included separately in the tables in Chapter 2.

Stakeholders provided positive feedback about the whole-of-government approach to this project. Participants shared that promoting coordination across ministries engaging in skills policies is of the utmost importance. A document that emphasises this necessary coordination could contribute both to better implemented policy and to building bridges between ministries. While stakeholders acknowledged that this challenge is not unique to Bulgaria, they also noted that Bulgaria is missing integration and complementary actions, as well as coordination on financing mechanisms, between ministries in the area of skills. Collaborating on a “larger picture” of skills actions and how they are linked to one another, would be of added value in Bulgaria and could lead to greater synergies and better results. The discussion of cross-ministerial collaboration also resulted in feedback from multiple stakeholders on the need to assign roles clearly as part of the project. Effective co-ordination and collaboration should lead to clear responsibilities for each of the involved institutions. It is important to characterise these roles and responsibilities accurately and to make sure that each institution knows what is expected of it and is not surprised by the project outcomes.

Across the board, consulted stakeholders provided feedback that the OECD proposal for Output 1 largely aligned with their own priorities. However, there was more alignment between stakeholders and the OECD team on the stated objectives and policy actions than on the benchmarks. Stakeholders noted that the objectives and policy actions presented were quite general and clearly captured Bulgaria’s needs and challenges related to skills, though a few recommended more precise formulations for these objective and actions. They expressed interest in seeing the more detailed outputs later in the project where they may have more specific comments and feedback. Most comments by stakeholders were directed at the benchmarks. While the detailed feedback will be presented below, there were a number of comments that were repeated by multiple stakeholders across the benchmarks. The cross-cutting feedback includes:

- A number of the benchmarks measure quantity (e.g. number of sectoral skills councils, number of consultations held, number of trainings offered, etc.), but should also measure the quality of these bodies/events rather than the number in operation. Indicators related to quality could come from focus groups, seminars, surveys, etc.
- The benchmarks (and future instruments and monitoring/reporting mechanisms) need to be as clear as possible to effectively measure implementation (e.g. for the share of individuals of different labour market status it needs to be clear what age group forms the basis).
- It will be important to specify what is meant by key terms in the benchmarks to make them as clear as possible (e.g. vulnerable population groups).

- It might be worthwhile to consider if and how to introduce benchmarks that are relevant across multiple objectives and/or policy actions (e.g. benchmarks on validation instruments could be relevant both for actions on encouraging individual adult and employer participation in education and training).

Though the responsibility for specific actions will be addressed in later outputs of this project, there was some initial discussion during the consultations about which ministry or entity would be most fitting to be responsible for the objectives, policy actions, and benchmarks proposed. Stakeholders provided some clarifications throughout the consultations about topics or tasks that might fit well or might not fit well under the purview of their ministry or institution.

Specific feedback

During the consultations, stakeholders provided more specific feedback on the objectives, policy actions and benchmarks in each of the three pillars of the OECD proposed framework (see Annex A): developing relevant skills over the life course, using skills effectively in work and society, and strengthening the governance of skills systems.

Developing relevant skills over the life course

The pillar on developing relevant skills over the life course has been divided into three stages of learning: early childhood education and care, formal education, and adult education and training. The interim OECD proposal of objectives, priority policy actions and performance benchmarks presented to stakeholders for this pillar are displayed in Table A A.1.

Early childhood education and care

With regard to early childhood education and care (ECEC), stakeholders suggested amendments to the proposed benchmarks for assessing the quality of ECEC, which included TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA results of children later in life. Multiple stakeholders doubted whether these were appropriate benchmarks to assess the quality of ECEC, and proposed a few other possible benchmarks while also acknowledging that there are a lack of benchmarks for effectively measuring the quality of ECEC. Proposed alternative benchmarks for assessing the quality of ECEC included the share of children receiving a certificate for school readiness and the share of ECEC staff participating in continual professional development. Stakeholders also mentioned that it may be helpful for policy actions and benchmarks in this area to take into account that ECEC is not mandatory until age four in Bulgaria.

Formal education

In the section on formal education, stakeholders recommended that the section refer to “formal education” as opposed to the proposed formulation of “initial education” to avoid confusion in Bulgaria where the term “initial education” is used to describe primary education. Stakeholders also thought that reference to “lifelong learning” or “learning throughout the life course” should be removed from this section because these terms have connotations in Bulgaria of being related specifically to adult education and training. Stakeholders further requested that the stakeholders mentioned in Policy Action 2.4.1. not be limited to local stakeholders as the initial formulation suggested. Beyond refining terminology, consultation participants shared that some of the proposed benchmarks were not feasible, as they would not accurately reflect whether progress had been made in that area (e.g. “share of schools that have fully implemented competency-based curricula” as all schools will implement competency-based curricula and it is more meaningful to measure the outcomes of this implementation). As a result, the benchmark was changed to “students’ performance in PISA in reading, maths and science” to reflect the outcomes of implementing a competency-based curriculum.

The revised and/or new benchmarks that have been included in Chapter 4 include:

- 2.1.1. Students' performance in PISA in reading, maths and science; effective implementation of the competency-based curricula in schools
- 2.1.2. Levels of investment in psychometric resources to strengthen the national assessment system
- 2.4.1. Share of IVET students receiving career guidance services
- 2.4.2. Share of HE students receiving career guidance services.

Adult education and training

While stakeholders generally agreed with the objectives and policy actions outlined in the section on adult education and training, they commented that there should be a greater focus on both equity and digital skills in this section, as there is in the section on formal education. These elements have been added accordingly to the proposed tables in Chapter 4, and the OECD also clarified that equity is a cross-cutting priority that spans across all of the objectives, policy actions and benchmarks identified in the Output. Stakeholders also made a number of suggestions for amendments to the proposed benchmarks for the section on adult education and training. Suggested changes to benchmarks in this area included adding new benchmarks or aspects of benchmarks (e.g. adding a benchmark on the validation of prior skills to Policy Action 3.2.2.) and clarifying terms to make benchmarks more precise (e.g. changing the wording in Benchmark 3.2.2 from “share of low-skilled participants in adult education and training” to “share of individuals with low qualification levels in adult education and training”).

The revised and/or new benchmarks that have been included in Chapter 4 include:

- 3.1.1. Share of adults receiving career guidance services
- 3.2.1. Share/number of adults receiving certificates for learning by type of certificate (e.g. full qualification, partial qualification, micro-credentials)
- 3.2.2. Share/number of adults acquiring certificates through the recognition of prior learning.

While future outputs will discuss in further depth how to utilise existing data and collect new data to determine the degree to which benchmarks have been reached, stakeholders began to comment already at this stage about how data related to the benchmarks could or should be collected. These insights will be incorporated into future outputs.

Using skills effectively in work and society

The interim OECD proposal of objectives, priority policy actions and performance benchmarks presented to stakeholders for the pillar on using skills effectively in work and society are displayed in Table A A.2.

There was broad consensus among stakeholders on the objectives and policy actions related to skills use. One important exception is that stakeholders shared that Policy Action 4.1.1. about connecting vulnerable groups with employment and education and training guidance should be made broad enough to include guidance services provided beyond those provided by the public employment service. With regard to the benchmarks in this section, stakeholders shared benchmarks already available and widely used in Bulgaria that could be relevant in the context of this project (e.g. for Policy Action 4.1.1. Bulgaria already tracks the “average transition time between education and employment”) and suggested some more qualitative benchmarks (e.g. for Policy Action 4.3.1. assessing “survey responses on employers’ awareness about and use of HPWP”). They also suggested specific types of support measures (e.g. rent, childcare, transport, training for family members, etc.) for return emigrants and skilled immigrants that could be tracked to assess Benchmark 4.2.2.

The revised and/or new benchmarks that have been included in Chapter 4 include:

- 4.1.1. Number of vulnerable adults receiving counselling in information and vocational guidance centres
- 4.1.2. Employment outcomes of participants in NEA services/programmes targeted at specific population groups
- 4.3.1. Share of employed individuals participating in education and training.

Strengthening the governance of skills systems

The interim OECD proposal of objectives, priority policy actions and performance benchmarks presented to stakeholders for the strengthening the governance of skills systems pillar are displayed in Table A A.3.

In discussions on the governance of skill systems, stakeholders across consultations emphasised the importance of broadening the language to include as many types of relevant stakeholders as possible at the national, sectoral, and local levels. As in other sections, there was also broad consensus on the need to focus benchmarks on substantial outcomes. The clearest example of this is reflected in adding a new clause on improved outputs of Sectoral Skills Councils to the formulation of Benchmark 5.1.2. which originally only assessed the number of Sectoral Skills Councils. In addition, Benchmark 5.2.2. on improving skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) systems was developed in greater detail in response to stakeholder feedback to include separate plans for how to conduct SAA exercises such that they are effective tools for future policymaking as well as a plan for the logistics of the technical details of conducted SAA exercises, including how often they should be conducted.

The revised and/or new benchmarks that have been included in Chapter 4 include:

- 5.1.2. Improved outputs of Sectoral Skills Councils (e.g. number of curricula updated by SSCs, number of individuals trained in courses designed and funded by SSCs; etc.).
- 5.2.2. The existence of a cross-ministerial protocol for conducting integrated skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises; the existence of a plan for regular skills policies assessments.

4 Suggested skills objectives, performance benchmarks and priority policy actions

This section presents the OECD’s proposal for objectives, actions and benchmarks for inclusion in Bulgaria’s action plan for skills, based on the desktop analysis (Chapter 2) and stakeholder consultations (Chapter 3) (see Table 17 below). The Roman numerals in Table 16 are used in Table 17 to show how the original objectives and actions from the OECD Skills Strategy report have been augmented with content from Bulgaria’s key strategy documents.

Table 16. Bulgarian strategies

Strategy/document	Roman numerals
National Development Strategy 2021-2030	I
Education Framework 2021-2030	II
Employment Strategy 2021-2030	III
Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030	IV
Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027	V
National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027	VI
Migration Strategy 2021-2025	VII
National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens Abroad and Historic Bulgarian Communities	VIII
National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030	IX
Recovery and Resilience Plan	X
Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-2027	XI

The number of benchmarks per policy action in Table 17 varies across policy actions. Multiple benchmarks for a single policy action are generally attempting to capture different elements of the policy action. For example, a policy action may require both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks or may include benchmarks that capture a similar assessment across different target groups. For all benchmarks included in Table 17, data sources have been identified where possible and benchmarks where the preferred benchmark does not have a known data source are indicated with an asterisk. Through the development of performance indicators in Output 3 of the project, the OECD plans to adapt and expand upon the sources and feasibility of all proposed benchmarks through the framework depicted in Table A B.1. As the outputs in this project are meant to build on one another, the objectives, policy actions and benchmarks presented in Output 1 may be adapted and refined in future Outputs. Please refer to the most recent Output for updated details.

Table 17. Draft objectives, policy actions and benchmarks

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
Developing relevant skills over the life course		
In early childhood education and care		
1.1 Improving early childhood development ^{II} , participation and outcomes	1.1.1 Increasing the coverage of young children in childcare and pre-school education ^{II} 1.1.2 Improving the quality of childcare and pre-school education ^{II}	1.1.1 Enrolment rates in childcare (up to age 3) and pre-school education (age 4-7) ^{II} (EMIS/ NSI, Children enrolled at kindergartens by age) 1.1.2 Share of children (age 6,7) who are prepared to begin school (EMIS); staff-to-student ratio in childcare and pre-school (EMIS); share of ECEC teachers who have participated in ongoing education and training (*)
In formal education (primary education, secondary education, initial VET and higher education)		
2.1. Ensuring that curriculum reform and assessment practices improve students' skills	2.1.1. Building awareness and capacity for competency-based ^{II} curriculum implementation 2.1.2. Aligning external assessments with the competency-based curriculum	2.1.1. Students' performance in PISA in reading, maths and science (PISA, mean score in reading, maths and science; PISA average 3 year trend in reading, maths and science); effective implementation of the competency-based curricula in schools (*) 2.1.2. National external assessments are updated to reflect the competency-based curricula (*); Levels of investment in psychometric resources to strengthen the national assessment system (*)
2.2 Improving equity in formal education ^{II}	2.2.1 Promoting more equitable participation in formal education ^{II} 2.2.2 Improving the equity of learning outcomes ^{II}	2.2.1 Participation rates and early dropout rates (*) in primary, secondary, initial vocational and higher education, for students from different socio-economic backgrounds (EMIS/ NSI, Students in general schools ; NSI, Students enrolled at vocational schools ; NIS, Students enrolled in tertiary education by educational-qualification degree) 2.2.2. Gaps in TIMSS/PIRLS/PISA results between top and bottom performers (TIMSS, Percentage of students reaching international benchmarks in math and science, grades 4 and 8 ; PIRLS, results by school composition and resource ; PISA, ESCS parity index, reading performance)
2.3. Developing a highly skilled teaching workforce	2.3.1. Selecting and preparing high-quality teaching candidates ^{II} 2.3.2. Monitoring and improving the development of teachers' skills ^{II} and knowledge	2.3.1. Share of candidates admitted into ITE (*); hours spent in practical learning during ITE (*) 2.3.2. Share of continuing professional development programmes (CPD) aligned with teachers' needs (TALIS, relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy and participation in impactful professional development); participation rates of teachers in CPD (TALIS, Participation in professional development activities)
2.4. Making the vocational and higher education more responsive to labour market needs	2.4.1. Strengthening the role of stakeholders in the development and provision of initial VET programmes, including skills related to the digital and green economy ^{II} 2.4.2. Increasing the relevance of higher education to labour market and student needs	2.4.1. Number of updated state educational standards for acquiring professional qualification by profession, on an annual basis (MES); number of contracts between business representatives and training institutions in the field of VET (*); Number of annual apprentices (MES/MLSP); share of IVET students receiving career guidance services (*) 2.4.2. Enrolment rate in higher education study programmes in areas on Bulgaria's list of "protected specialties" and "priority professional fields" (EMIS/ NSI, Students enrolled in tertiary education by educational-qualification degree and narrow field of education); Average transition time between education and employment (BURS/EMIS/NSI), employment rate of HE graduates (LFS, Employed and employment rates by level of education); share of HE students receiving career guidance services (*)

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
In adult education and training (AET)		
3.1. Increasing motivation among adults and employers to participate in adult learning	<p>3.1.1. Improving non-financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers (including SMEs^{vi}) to participate in adult education and training</p> <p>3.1.2. Improving financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers (including SMEs^{vi}) to participate in adult education and training</p>	<p>3.1.1. Participation rate in AET (AES, Participants in formal or non-formal education and training); % of individuals/enterprises reporting a willingness to participate in AET (European AES, Share of the population who did not and did not want to participate in AET); % of individuals/enterprises reporting non-financial barriers to AET (European AES, Percentage of individuals wanting to participate in AET, by reason for not); number of individuals/employers that use the non-financial support for AET (e.g. receive guidance from centres for information and vocational guidance, actively engaged by a public awareness campaign to promote lifelong learning) (various ministries); share of adults receiving career guidance services (*)</p> <p>3.1.2. Participation rate in AET (AES, Participants in formal or non-formal education and training); % of individuals/enterprises reporting a willingness to participate in AET (European AES, Share of the population who did not and did not want to participate in AET); % of individuals/enterprises reporting financial barriers to AET (European AES, Percentage of individuals wanting to participate in AET, by reason for not); share of adults eligible for financial benefits (e.g. the “voucher for employees”, the “flexible employment opportunities” subsidy, the “training for employees” subsidy, etc.) for AET (various ministries); number of individuals/employers that use financial benefits for AET (various ministries)</p>
3.2. Making education and training more flexible and accessible for adults and employers	<p>3.2.1. Improving the flexibility of adult education and training offers</p> <p>3.2.2. Improving the equity and accessibility of adult education and training</p>	<p>3.2.1. Participation rate of adults in flexible forms of education and training (e.g. non-formal, relatively short length/few hours, online or blended, offered on work premises) (*); share/number of adults receiving certificates for learning by type of certificate (e.g. full qualification, partial qualification, micro-credentials) (NAVET, annual statistics by course type)</p> <p>3.2.2. Share of participants with low qualification levels in adult education and training (AES, Participants in formal or non-formal AET, by educational attainment); share/number of adults acquiring certificates through the recognition of prior learning (*).</p>
3.3 Improving the quality and relevance of education and training for adults and employers	<p>3.3.1. Improving the quality of adult learning opportunities, and the quality of workforce skillsⁱⁱⁱ</p> <p>3.3.2. Making adult learning more relevant to learners' and labour market needs, including through the promotion of digital skills.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Share of adults reporting that the quality of adult education and training is good/very good (CEDEFOP, Benefits: quality of learning, country); share of AET participants reporting positive outcomes from AET (e.g. measurable skill gains, career development or income) (*)</p> <p>3.3.2 Employment outcomes of participants in AET by sector (*); improved perceived value of training by employers (European Company Survey, Perceived value of training); share of individuals with above-basic digital skills (DESI, individual's level of digital skills)</p>
Using skills effectively in work and society		
4.1. Activating the skills of vulnerable groups in the labour market	<p>4.1.1. Connecting more vulnerable adults to employment services</p> <p>4.1.2. Expanding and tailoring employment services for vulnerable groups of adults</p> <p>4.1.3 Ensuring gender equality in the labour market ⁱⁱⁱ</p>	<p>4.1.1. Share of unemployed and inactive in adult population (LFS) and share of those who are registered with the NEA (NEA Registry); registered unemployed persons consulted individually by an NEA employeeⁱⁱⁱ (NEA Registry); number of vulnerable adults receiving counselling (NEA Registry, NAVET Registry)</p> <p>4.1.2. Employment outcomes of participants in NEA services/programmes targeted at specific population groups (*); share of unemployed and inactive in education and training (NEA Registry, LFS); share of unemployed and inactive (LFS), by population group/regionⁱⁱⁱ/etc.; NEET rateⁱ (LFS); duration of working life in yearsⁱ (National Social Security Institute (NSSI))</p> <p>4.1.3. Gap in average hours worked between women and menⁱⁱⁱ (LFS); gender pay gapⁱⁱⁱ (LFS).</p>

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
4.2. Fostering return emigration and skilled immigration to Bulgaria	4.2.1. Prioritising return emigration of qualified specialists and skilled immigration in Bulgaria's skills agenda 4.2.2. Reaching and supporting return migrants and skilled immigrants	4.2.1 Annual net migration rates ^{ix} , by age group/skill-level/etc. ^{viii, ix} (NIS) 4.2.2. Number of return emigrants and skilled immigrants receiving targeted support measures (e.g. rent, childcare, transport, training for family members, etc.) (*)
4.3. Supporting enterprises to utilise workers' skills more effectively	4.3.1. Raising awareness of effective skills use in Bulgarian workplaces, including SMEs ^{vi} 4.3.2. Supporting employers to improve skills use and adopt high performance workplace practices (HPWP), including SMEs ^{vi} 4.3.3. Driving innovation within firms by improving human resource capacity and strengthening R&D collaboration in fields designated for smart specialisation ^v	4.3.1. Share of employers aware of HPWP (*) 4.3.2. Share of employers implementing HPWP (including flexible work arrangements ⁱⁱⁱ) (European Company Survey and European Working Conditions Survey) 4.3.3 Innovation performance of the country and the share of innovative enterprises from the total number of enterprises ^{xi} (Eurostat)
Strengthening the governance of skills systems		
5.1. Developing a whole-of-government and stakeholder-inclusive approach to skills policies	5.1.1 Developing a whole-of-government approach to skills policies 5.1.2. Engaging stakeholders effectively for skills policy making at the national, sectoral and local levels ^{iv, v}	5.1.1. New structures for promoting whole-of-government approach (e.g. Skills Policy Council) (official approval from Council of Ministers); Number of bilateral ministerial meetings on skills policies per year (self-report by ministries); Inter-ministerial coordination indicator (SGI, Inter-ministerial coordination indicator); survey responses from stakeholders on quality of whole-of-government collaboration on skills policy (*) 5.1.2. Non-governmental stakeholder involvement in national structures for skills policy design (e.g. Skills Policy Council) (self-report of Skills Policy Council); number of active Sectoral Skills Councils; improved outputs of Sectoral Skills Councils (e.g. number of curricula updated by SSCs, number of individuals trained in courses designed and funded by SSCs; etc.) (*); number of regional/local centres of vocational excellence with active stakeholder engagement (*)
5.2. Building and better utilising evidence in skills development and use	5.2.1. Improving the quality and use of skills needs information 5.2.2. Improving the quality and use of performance data and evaluation evidence in skills policy	5.2.1. The existence of at least one platform compiling skills evidence data (self-report of relevant ministries); Evidence-based instruments indicator (SGI, Evidence-based instruments indicator) 5.2.2. The existence of a cross-ministerial protocol for conducting integrated skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises (qualitative assessment with relevant ministries); the existence of a plan for regular skills policies assessments (qualitative assessment with relevant ministries)
5.3. Ensuring well-targeted and sustainable financing of skills policies	5.3.1. Increasing and reallocating spending on skills development and use 5.3.2. Effectively sharing the costs of skills development	5.3.1. Government expenditure on education and training by level of education (EMIS/ NSI, Public and private expenditure by education level); government expenditure on Active Labour Market Programmes, particularly for training, per unemployed person (MLSP) 5.3.2 Level and share of expenditure on skills development by source (State, ESF, employers, individuals) (*)

Note:

- I. National Development Strategy 2021-2030
- II. Education Framework 2021-2030
- III. Employment Strategy 2021-2030
- IV. Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030
- V. Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027
- VI. National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027
- VII. Migration Strategy 2021-2025
- VIII. National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens Abroad and Historic Bulgarian Communities
- IX. National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030
- X. Recovery and Resilience Plan
- XI. Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-2027

EMIS: Bulgaria's Education Management Information System

NIS: Bulgaria's National Institute of Statistics

LFS: Bulgaria's Labour Force Survey

AES: Bulgaria's Adult Education Survey

DESI: The Digital Economy and Society Index of the EU

SGI: Sustainable Governance Indicators

The * symbol indicates benchmarks that may currently lack data.

5 Next steps

Following Output 1, the remaining outputs in the project to develop an action plan for skills in Bulgaria include:

- **Output 2:** Report providing guidance on implementing a whole-of-government national skills strategy, including agreed relevant activities, instruments timelines and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities
- **Output 3:** Report providing guidance on developing a monitoring and reporting framework, including performance indicators for measuring the implementation progress
- **Output 4:** Outline for a communication campaign to raise awareness of the national skills strategy for Bulgaria
- **Output 5:** Follow-up report and capacity building workshop for implementation
- **Output 6:** Public closure event and communication outputs at the conclusion of the project.

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Annex A. OECD interim proposal of objectives, priority policy actions and performance benchmarks

Table A A.1, Table A A.2 and Table A A.3 below present the interim objectives, policy actions and benchmarks for Bulgaria’s action plan that the OECD proposed to stakeholders during consultations. The proposed objectives, actions and benchmarks are displayed in tables according to three categories: (1) Developing skills, (2) Using skills effectively, and (3) Strengthening the governance of the skills system. This interim proposal has since been revised in response to stakeholder consultations to result in the final proposal of objectives, policy actions and benchmarks in Table 17.

Table A A.1. Developing skills – Draft objectives, actions and benchmarks

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
In early childhood education		
1.1 Improving early childhood development [!] , participation and outcomes	1.1.1 Increasing the coverage of young children in early education and childcare [!]	1.1.1 Enrolment in organised early childhood education [!]
	1.1.2 Improving the quality of early education and childcare [!]	1.1.2 Children’s TIMSS, PIRLS, and/or PISA results in later years
In initial education		
2.1. Ensuring that curriculum reform and assessment practices improve students’ skills	2.1.1. Building awareness and capacity for competency-based ^{!!} curriculum implementation	2.1.1. Share of schools that have fully implemented competency-based curricula*
	2.1.2. Aligning external assessments with the competency-based curriculum	2.1.2. Share of competencies, as defined in the competence-based curriculum, assessed in external assessments*
2.2 Improving equity across lifelong learning ^{!..}	2.2.1 Promoting more equitable participation in learning throughout the life course ^{!!}	2.2.1 Participation rates in learning throughout the life course, by population group
	2.2.2 Improving the equity of learning outcomes across the life course ^{!!}	2.2.2. Gaps in PISA results between students from different population/socioeconomic groups
2.3. Strengthening the teaching workforce	2.3.1. Ensuring the quality of future teachers in Bulgaria across the life course ^{!!}	2.3.1. Share of candidates admitted into ITE* [*] ; hours spent in practical learning during ITE* [*]
	2.3.2. Monitoring and improving the development of teachers’ skills, competences ^{!!} and knowledge	2.3.2. TALIS data on share of CPD programmes aligned with teachers’ needs

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
2.4. Making vocational and higher education more responsive to labour market needs	2.4.1. Strengthening the role of local stakeholders in the development and provision of initial VET programmes, including skills related to the digital and green economy ^{II} 2.4.2. Increasing the relevance of higher education to labour market and students needs	2.4.1. Number of stakeholders participating in local-level initiatives to develop VET*; Employment rate of VET graduates 2.4.2. Enrolment rate in higher education study programmes in areas on Bulgaria's list of "protected specialties" and "priority professional fields"; employment rate of HE graduates; presence of flexible methods of updating curricula and teaching/learning ^{*IV}
In adult education and training		
3.1. Raising adults' and employers' motivation to participate in adult learning	3.1.1. Improving non-financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers (including SMEs ^{VI}) to participate in adult education and training 3.1.2. Improving financial mechanisms to increase motivation among individuals and employers (including SMEs ^{VI}) to participate in adult education and training	3.1.1. Number of individuals/employers that use the non-financial mechanisms; share of adults aged 25-64 who do not participate and do not want to participate in education and training; share of enterprises who report having the skills they need or not needing training (AES, CVTS) 3.1.2. Number of individuals/employers that use the financial mechanisms; Share of adults/enterprises reporting costs as a barrier to training (AES, CVTS); share of adults aged 25-64 who do not participate and do not want to participate in education and training; Share of enterprises who report having the skills they need or not needing training (AES, CVTS)
3.2. Making education and training more flexible and accessible for adults and employers	3.2.1. Improving the flexibility of the adult education and training offer 3.2.2. Making learning more accessible for low-skilled adults	3.2.1. Participation rate in non-formal courses; average length of adult education and training courses offered*; share/number of adult education and training courses offered online or blended (partially online)*; share/number of adult education and training courses offered on work premises* 3.2.2. Share of low-qualification/low-skilled participants in adult education and training
3.3 Improving the quality and relevance of adult education and training for adults and employers	3.3.1. Improve the quality of adult learning opportunities, and the quality of workforce skills ^{III} 3.3.2. Make adult learning more relevant to learners' and labour market needs	3.3.1 Participation rate in adult education and training; Share of adults reporting that the quality of adult education and training is good/very good (CEDEFOP); Employment outcomes of participants in adult education and training* 3.3.2 Employment outcomes of participants in adult education and training, by sector*; Improved employer perceived value of training in the European Company Survey

Note:

- I. National Development Strategy 2021-2030
- II. Education Framework 2021-2030
- III. Employment Strategy 2021-2030
- IV. Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030
- V. Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027
- VI. National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027
- VII. Migration Strategy 2021-2025
- VIII. National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens Abroad and Historic Bulgarian Communities
- IX. National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030
- X. Recovery and Resilience Plan
- XI. Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-2027

The * symbol indicates benchmarks that may currently lack data.

Table A A.2. Using skills effectively – Draft objectives, actions and benchmarks

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
4.1. Activating the skills of vulnerable groups in the labour market	4.1.1. Connecting more vulnerable adults to the public employment service 4.1.2. Expanding and tailoring employment services for vulnerable groups of adults 4.1.3 Ensuring gender equality in the labour market ^{III}	4.1.1. Share of unemployed and inactive registered with the NEA; Registered unemployed persons consulted individually by a case manager ^{III} 4.1.2. Share of NEA services/programmes targeted at specific population groups*; Share of unemployed and inactive in education and training; Share of unemployed and inactive, by population group/region ^{III} /etc.; NEET rate ^I ; Duration of working life in years ^I 4.1.3. Gap in average hours worked between women and men ^{III} ; Gender pay gap ^{III}
4.2. Fostering return emigration and skilled immigration to Bulgaria	4.2.1. Prioritising return emigration and skilled immigration in Bulgaria's skills agenda 4.2.2. Reaching and supporting return migrants and skilled immigrants	4.2.1 Annual net migration rates ^{IX} , by age group/skill-level/etc. ^{VIII, IX} ; Integration of return emigration and skilled immigration into skills strategies and policies 4.2.2. Number of return emigrants and skilled immigrants receiving targeted support measures*
4.3. Supporting enterprises to utilise workers' skills more effectively	4.3.1. Raising awareness of effective skills use in Bulgarian workplaces, including SMEs ^{VI} 4.3.2. Supporting employers to improve skills use and adopt HPWP, including SMEs ^{VI} 4.3.3. Driving innovation within firms by improving human resource capacity and strengthening R&D collaboration in fields designated for smart specialisation ^V	4.3.1. Share of employers aware of HPWP* 4.3.2. Indicators from the European Company Survey and European Working Conditions Survey on share of employers implementing HPWP (including flexible work arrangements ^{III}) 4.3.3 Innovation performance of the country and the share of innovative enterprises from the total number of enterprises ^{XI}

Note:

- I. National Development Strategy 2021-2030
- II. Education Framework 2021-2030
- III. Employment Strategy 2021-2030
- IV. Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030
- V. Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027
- VI. National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027
- VII. Migration Strategy 2021-2025
- VIII. National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens Abroad and Historic Bulgarian Communities
- IX. National Demographic Development Strategy 2012-2030
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The * symbol indicates benchmarks that may currently lack data.

Table A A.3. Strengthening the governance of the skills system – Draft objectives, actions and benchmarks

Objectives	Policy Actions	Benchmarks
5.1. Developing a whole-of-government and stakeholder inclusive approach to skills policies	5.1.1 Developing a whole-of-government approach to skills policies	5.1.1. Structures for promoting whole-of-government approach (e.g. Skills Policy Council); Number of bilateral ministerial meetings on skills policies per year; SGI's Inter-ministerial coordination indicator
	5.1.2. Engaging stakeholders effectively for skills policy making, including at the local level ^{IV, V}	5.1.2. Number of active Sectoral Councils; SGI's Societal Consultation indicator
5.2. Building and better utilising evidence in skills development and use	5.2.1. Improving the quality and use of skills needs information	5.2.1. The existence of at least one platform compiling skills evidence data; SGI's Evidence-based Instruments indicator
	5.2.2. Improving the quality and use of evaluation evidence in skills policy	5.2.2. The existence of a plan for a streamlined skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) system
5.3. Ensuring well-targeted and sustainable financing of skills policies	5.3.1. Increasing and re-allocating spending on skills development in Bulgaria	5.3.1. Government expenditure on education and training by level of education; Government expenditure on Active Labour Market Programmes per unemployed person by type of programme
	5.3.2. Effectively sharing the costs of skills development	5.3.2 Level and share of expenditure on skills development by source (State, ESF, employers, individuals)

Note:

- I. National Development Strategy 2021-2030
- II. Education Framework 2021-2030
- III. Employment Strategy 2021-2030
- IV. Higher Education Strategy 2021-2030
- V. Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021–2027
- VI. National Strategy for Small and Medium Enterprises 2021-2027
- VII. Migration Strategy 2021-2025
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- X. Recovery and Resilience Plan
- XI. Partnership agreement between Bulgaria and the EU 2021-2027

Annex B. Benchmark mapping

The table below proposes a framework for mapping out the benchmarks identified to realise the objectives and policy actions proposed in Table 17. The table proposes the following framework for each benchmark/indicator:

- The name of the benchmark/indicator
- The description and explanation for what the benchmark/indicator is calculating
- The demographic categories for which the benchmark/indicator can be calculated (transforming each principal indicator into a number of sub-indicators)
- The source of the data
- The feasibility level of collecting and using this data.

An example has been provided in Table A B.1 to illustrate how the table will be used for all benchmarks/indicators in subsequent project Outputs.

Table A B.1. Benchmarks for an action plan for skills in Bulgaria

Name	Description	Demographic categories	Data Source	Feasibility
Enrolment rates in childcare (up to age 3) and pre-school education (age 4-7)	Share of children of the given age group enrolled in childcare institution out of total age group	Children ages 0-3; children ages 4-7	NSI, Children enrolled at kindergartens by age	Feasible

The feasibility of benchmarks/indicators will be evaluated according to the below explanations, adopted from *Incentives to Business Investment in Skills: Elements for monitoring and evaluating the proposed instruments* (OECD, 2021^[29]).

- **Feasible indicators**, i.e., indicators that can be built via the Administration/responsible party's usual internal administrative system, i.e. that which is set up to implement the policies in question.
- **Semi-feasible indicators**, i.e., indicators that can be provided through organisational/management/procedural changes that are relatively easy to implement. These data can be readily sourced by the Administration/responsible party (possibly, asking them to the beneficiaries), but would normally not be considered essential for policy implementation purposes. Collecting this information should take priority, because of its importance and simplicity to collect. For this to be the case, however, the monitoring and evaluation questions must have been stated at the outset.
- **New indicators**, i.e. indicators requiring ad hoc collection. There are two ways in which these indicators can be constructed: first, the Administration/responsible party can amend the organisational, management or procedural set-up for the policy, such as e.g. modifying the tool used to receive applications. Secondly, the Administration/responsible party can leverage external

data sources: official sources, publicly-available databases, commercial databases, or ad hoc surveys the Administration/responsible body may decide to put in the field, such as a satisfaction survey on the policy instrument. The focus of this set of indicators is on systematic data collection. In the first case (changing the Administration/responsible party's internal procedures or tools), periodic data availability is guaranteed, as is the case with the use of official sources. However, this may not be the case with external databases or ad hoc surveys and initiatives, as they are costly and, by nature, intermittent.