



National system overview on education systems in Europe

2011 Edition



BULGARIA

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1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2010/11 school/academic year, the number of students in general education schools was 761 956, in vocational schools 104 711 and in schools for children with special education needs 5 128.

In 2011, 31.68 % of population are aged between 0-29 years old.

The number of children attending kindergarten was 223 237. The official language of instruction is Bulgarian.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

The administration of education is organised at four levels, national, regional, municipal and school. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS) is responsible for the implementation of the national education policy, plans and organises the development of education by putting together long-term programmes and operational projects. The municipal bodies in charge of education form part of the national structure, and are entrusted with the implementation of municipal education policy. They are responsible inter alia for the compulsory education of pupils up to the age of 16, pre-school education and are granted substantial financial autonomy. The autonomy of schools has been considerably extended in recent years. The pedagogical council, the board of management and the heads of school are the administrative bodies of schools, and are expected to meet the necessary requirements in the areas of teaching, organisation and methodology. The supervision of the educational process as well as the outcome result, are handled by the respective educational authorities at central and regional level, namely the MEYS and the regional inspectorates.

The state management of the higher education comes down to setting up of general framework and conditions for the system functioning. The Higher Education Act gives full academic independence to higher education institutions. The state encourages the autonomous higher education institutions in their efforts to build strong and sustainable university structures with enough independence and transparency of process of decision making. The MEYS has the authority of coordination, control and management of the higher education system.

Public kindergartens and schools, which are directly supervised and administered by the public authorities, are funded by the state budget. Although private kindergartens and schools are not

dependent financially on the state budget, they are subject to the same national regulations as the public ones, namely the state education requirements, as far as the organization of the learning process is concerned.

All classes in Bulgarian schools are co-educational and boys and girls study together regardless of ethnic, religious or gender differences. There are State Educational Requirements (Standards) (on national level) that determine the minimum level of knowledge and skills acquired by students by grade and subject.

Higher education is provided by higher education institutions that are granted full academic and substantial financial autonomy. They are independent in terms of governance and management of the allocated public funds and of their additional revenues. Higher Education Act creates opportunities for competition among universities and assure external control and transparent of spending of public funds.

3. Pre-primary education

In Bulgaria, kindergartens and schools are public, municipal or private, depending on the type of their funding. In Bulgaria, the early education and care is delivered at two levels: The pre-primary care system in Bulgaria includes: nursery school for children aged 0-3 and kindergarten (*detska gradina*) for children aged 3 to entering the first grade (children aged 6 or 7).

Pre-primary education for five-year-olds is compulsory. According to the regulations in place, from school year 2010/11 onwards, all children are subject to two school year compulsory pre-primary education, either at kindergartens or in preparatory groups at primary schools. The state provides free-of-charge education aids for children enrolled in the compulsory pre-primary group. The compulsory pre-primary education can take place on a half-day basis.

Kindergarten attendance for children aged between three and five years old is still optional and depends on parental choice.

The participation rate for pre-primary education for children aged 3-6, at kindergartens was 74.9 %. The participation rate for pre-primary education of children aged 6 at kindergartens was 81.8 %. The participation rate for pre-primary education of children aged 5 -7 at kindergartens was 80.7 %.

Pre-primary education in Bulgaria is provided at kindergartens which depending on the type of funding are state, municipal or private. Kindergartens cover children aged between 3 and 6 or 7, who study in groups based on an age principle. Children aged between 0 and 3 attend nurseries or nursery groups at kindergartens and receive specialized care on the part of medical and pedagogical staff.

Kindergarten attendance is at the discretion of parents, but the training compliant with state educational requirements for pre-primary education and preparation is funded by the state. Parents pay only a monthly fee for food, whose amount takes into account the family's income, that is reduced for low-income households. From school year 2010/11, parents pay the activities, which are outside of the state educational requirements.

In all kindergartens, 15 to 20 children in a group; all-week kindergartens: 12 to 16 children in a group; pre-school group – 10 to 16 children in a group.

At kindergartens, one and the same teacher with a week workload of 30 hours (for music/rhythm teachers – 24 hours).

4. Compulsory education

Compulsory school education refers to all children aged between 7 (or 6 at the discretion of their parents) to 16.

General Educational institutions: kindergartens, primary schools (pre-school year; 1st to 4th grade), lower secondary schools (5th to 8th grade), basic schools (1st to 8th grade).

(i) Phases

<i>Natchalno utchilishte</i> (primary school)	4 years	1st to 4th grade
<i>Progimnazialno utchilishte</i> (basic school)	8 years	1st to 8th grade

(ii) Admission criteria

Students' admission to basic (primary ISCED 1 and lower secondary ISCED 2) education schools depend on parental choice. Students complete their primary education with primary education certificates, which are required to move on to upper secondary education. In 7th grade all students pass national external assessment on the basis of standardised tests. The assessment is in all major subjects. The scores in Bulgarian language and Mathematics are basic for students' enrolment in different schools.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

Compulsory education is carried out through a fixed minimum number of hours in every grade and subject to which more hours may be added from a fixed for every grade number of hours for core curriculum optional studies depending on the type of school and students' choices. With every grade the hours for core curriculum optional studies grow in number from 64 to 806 per year. Besides there are free optional hours in which students may engage either in core curriculum studies or in extra-curriculum activities if approved by the corresponding financing body.

The school year for the 1st grade students comprises 155 days; 2nd to 4th grade: 160 days; 5th to 8th grade: 170.

Number of school weeks per school year: 31 for 1st grade, 32 for 2nd-4th grade, 34 for 5th-8th grade. The academic year lasts from 15 September to 24 May for grade 1; 15 September to 31 May for grade 4.

All students have classes 5 days a week.

Compulsory classes a week: 1st and 2nd grades: 22; 3rd and 4th grades: 25; 5th to 8th grades: 30.

Duration of a class period: 1st and 2nd grades: 35 min; 3rd and 4th grades: 40 min; 5th to 8th grades: 45 min.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

In schools, 1st: 15 to 22 students in class, 2nd to 4th grade: 16 to 22 students in a class; 5th to 8th grade: 18 to 26 students in a class; for children and students of special educational needs: 6 to 11 students in a class.

At primary schools one and the same teacher, teaching all subjects with a week workload of 21 hours, and in some schools a separate teacher teaches a foreign language. At lower schools, all subjects are taught by a different teacher with a varying year workload between 648 and 864 hours depending on the subject he/she teaches.

(v) Curricular control and content

All students between 1st and 7th grade included obtain textbooks for free. Textbooks and supplementary materials are chosen by teachers themselves (basically from a list of course books and supplementary materials approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science).

For primary school education: I-IV grade, compulsory subjects are: Bulgarian Language and Literature (I-IV grade), Foreign Language (II-IV grade); Mathematics (I-IV grade); Homeland (I grade); Environment (II grade), Man and Society (III-IV grade); Man and Nature (III-IV grade); Music (I-IV grade); Arts (I-IV grade); Household Skills and Technology (I-IV grade); Physical Education and Sports (I-IV grade).

For lower secondary education: V-VIII grade, compulsory subjects are: Bulgarian Language and Literature (V-VIII grade), Foreign Language (V-VIII grade), Mathematics (V-VIII grade), Information Technology (V-VIII grade), History and Civilisation (V-VIII grade), Geography and Economics (V-VIII grade), Man and Nature (V-VI grade), Biology and Health Education (VII-VIII grade), Physics and Astronomy (VII-VIII grade), Chemistry and Environmental Protection (VII-VIII grade), Music (V-VIII grade), Arts (V-VIII grade), Household Work and Economy (V-VI grade), Technology (VII-VIII grade), Physical Education and Sports (V-VIII grade).

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupil knowledge and skills are regularly tested through oral, written, practical etc. exams and tests throughout the school year on a 6 grade qualitative and quantitative scale (poor 2, fair 3, good 4, very good 5, and excellent 6). Pupils in 1st grades are assessed only on a qualitative scale (excellent, very good, good, fair, poor). According to the last amendment at National Education Law, in 2009, a pupil may not repeat grades 1-4 which correspond to ISCED 1. Pupils with special education needs are assessed only on a qualitative scale.

National external assessment is carried out at the end of 4th, 7th and 12th grades of general education through tests. All 8th grade students of special intensive foreign language studies course complete 8th grade with a national foreign language external assessment test, too.

Enrolment at vocational secondary schools after 7th grade takes place according to the students' results at external national exams and their preferences for schools, while after the 8th grade it is not necessarily subject to sitting for national external or any other exams, but based on the student's successful performance during the course of their prior studies. However, there are vocational schools at which enrolment is exam-score based depending on the decision of the particular school at institutional level by the school principal and the Pedagogical Council of the school.

Students need a primary education certificate to get access to a vocational school. However, admission may be granted also upon the final results from the completed successfully 7th grade.

5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

The educational institutions at that level are general upper secondary schools (9th to 12th grade), upper secondary schools of specialized studies profile (including specialized schools – foreign language, art, sport, etc, vocational) at 8th or 9th to 12th grade, general secondary schools (1st to 12th grade). 11th and 12th grades of secondary education can be defined as post compulsory secondary education.

The National Programme of School and the Pre-school Education Development and Preparation (2006-2015) provides for a legal change in the educational structure, following which pupils will complete basic education after 7th grade, while the high school stage will consist of two levels: compulsory for all students from grade 8 to 10 included and grades 11 and 12 for students willing to complete their secondary education with certificates entitling them to continue their education at higher education institutions.

(i) Types of education/institutions

<i>Gimnazia</i> (Upper secondary school)	4 years	9th to 12th grade
<i>Sredno obshtoobrazovatelno uchilishte</i> (General secondary school)	12 years	1st to 12th grade
<i>Profilirana gimnazia</i> (Upper schools of specialized studies profile)	4 or 5 years	8th or 9th to 12th grade
<i>Profesionalni uchilishta</i> (Vocational schools)	4 or 6 years	6th to 12th grade
<i>Professionalni gimnazii</i> (Vocational secondary schools)	4 or 5 years	8th or 9th to 12th grade

(ii) Admission criteria

State school-leaving examination (Matura-matriculation examinations) is in Bulgarian language and literature and one of their choice; they are entitled to sit for another matriculation exam of their choice in the other subject. The results of Matura can rank students in some higher schools were given the option to use their results as an examination mark for the respective subject and not sit an entry examination.

(iii) Curricular content and control

The school year for the 1st grade students comprises 9th – 11th grade: 180 and 12th grade: 155 days.

Number of school weeks per school year is 36 for 9th-11th grade, 31 for 12th grade. For all pupils the academic year begins on 15 September and ends on 24 May for year 12 and 30 June for years 9 to 11.

All students have classes 5 days a week.

Compulsory classes a week are 32 from 9th to 12th grades.

Duration of a class period is 45 min from 9th to 12th grades.

At upper secondary schools all subjects are taught by a different teacher with a varying year workload between 648 and 864 hours depending on the subject he/she teaches.

Upper-secondary education – Bulgarian Language and Literature (IX-XII grade), Foreign Language – first and second (IX-X grade), Computers (IX grade), Information Technology (IX-X grade), Psychology and Logic (IX grade), Ethics and Law (X grade), Philosophy (XI grade), World and Personality (XII grade), Biology and Health Education (IX-X grade), Physics and Astronomy (VII-VIII grade), Chemistry and Environmental Protection (IX-X grade), Music (IX grade), Arts (IX grade), Physical Education and Sports (IX-XII grade).

For upper-secondary education compulsory subjects are– Bulgarian Language and Literature (IX-XII grade), Foreign Language – first and second (IX-X grade), Computers (IX grade), Information Technology (IX-X grade), Psychology and Logic (IX grade), Ethics and Law (X grade), Philosophy (XI grade), World and Personality (XII grade), Biology and Health Education (IX-X grade), Physics and Astronomy (VII-VIII grade), Chemistry and Environmental Protection (IX-X grade), Music (IX grade), Arts (IX grade), Physical Education and Sports (IX-XII grade).

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

On their completing secondary education students receive diplomas (either school leaving certificates, or, if they intend to continue their education at a higher education institution, diplomas, after sitting for secondary school leaving matriculation examinations) required for admission to higher education.

Vocational education has provided terms and conditions for students to acquire qualification degrees in three phases (starting from 6th grade for 1st qualification degree, 7th/8th grade for 3rd qualification degree, and 8th grade for 2nd qualification degree). A qualification degree can be obtained only upon passing successfully national examinations, based on the national examination curricula, approved by the Minister of Education and Science. On their completing, vocational secondary education students receive diplomas (either school leaving certificates or, if they intend to continue their education at a higher education institution, diplomas, after sitting for secondary school leaving matriculation examinations).

There are institutions (colleges), which provide post-secondary education for secondary school graduates who have a diploma. Post secondary education is not compulsory and is delivered by vocational colleges. These educational institutions are not part of Higher Education System. It lasts at least one year and the candidates must have turned 16 years of age in order to be granted access to post-secondary education. The graduates are awarded 4th degree professional qualification and are considered prepared for the labour market. Those who wish to embark on post-secondary education may have graduated from either vocational or any other type of secondary school.

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

Higher schools can be classified according to their type as well as form of ownership. They provide ISCED 5A and ISCED 5 B courses at the Tertiary education. In term of type, higher education institutions are: universities, specialized higher schools and independent colleges, *universiteti, specializirani visshi uchilishta i samostojatelni koleji*). In terms of ownership, they are state-owned and private.

Universities (*Universiteti*) offer studies in a wide range of disciplines in at least three of the four major areas of knowledge (humanities, natural sciences, social and technical sciences) at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees.

Specialised higher schools (*Spezializirani visshi uchilishta*) provide education mainly in one of the major areas of knowledge, which is indicated in the institution's name. These institutions may provide Master and Doctoral programmes with the provisions of the law.

The independent Colleges (*Samostojatelni koleji*) are entities providing more vocational orientated tertiary education. They offer 3-year programmes of training, which completion entitles graduates to the qualification of 'Professional Bachelor in...' – /ISCED 97 – 5B level/. College graduates can continue their education in a Master programme within the same area of knowledge.

The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Agrarian Academy of Sciences, the national public healthcare centres and other scientific organisations can offer studies for the acquisition of a Doctoral degree in research specialties, which programme accreditation assessment was 'very good'.

Higher education institutions and scientific organizations may grant the possibility to acquire Educational and Scientific degree Doctor in certain scientific specialties, of which the institution has obtained programme accreditation whit assessment 'very good' from National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency.

(ii) Access

The admission criteria to the universities are: secondary school diploma with passed the matriculation exams; written examination(s); tests or competitive selection based on the school academic record.

Higher Schools are autonomous, and can thus choose their preferred kind of examination. During recent years, HEIs tend to simplify the models of admission, aiming to attract more students –

participation in preliminary entrance examinations is allowed, double entrance examinations dates have been announced, more rankings have been introduced, entry tests are applied, besides the traditional written examinations. The majority of Higher Schools which have a college within their structure offer college graduates the opportunity to continue their education at Master degree level.

There are different specific groups who do not pay part of the entire fees. For example: people of dual citizenship, including Bulgarian nationality; students and PhD students admitted under intergovernmental agreements which regulate the issue on a reciprocal basis; disabled and of lower occupational capacity; double orphans; mothers of three and more children; the students, doctoral students and postgraduates – citizens of the EU Member States and the EEA.

(iii) Qualifications

According to the Higher Education Act, the Bulgarian higher education system provides education and training after completion of secondary education. It consists of the following degrees:

– Bachelor

- 'Professional bachelor in...' degree (ISCED 97, level 5B) – with a duration of 3 years minimum (180 ECTS credits minimum are required, as 10 out of them are acquired for successfully passed final examination or defended diploma thesis).
- Bachelor's degree (ISCED level 5A) – with a duration of 4 years minimum (240 ECTS credits minimum are required, as 10 out of them are acquired for successfully passed state exam or defended diploma thesis).

– Master (ISCED' 97, level 5A):

- 2-year minimum Master courses (120 ECTS credits minimum, as 15 out of them are acquired by successfully passed final examination or defended diploma thesis), after acquisition of 'Professional Bachelor in...' degree.
- 1-year minimum Master courses (60 ECTS credits minimum, as 15 out of them are acquired by successfully passed final examination or defended diploma thesis), after acquisition of Bachelor degree.
- 5-year Master courses (300 ECTS credits minimum, as 15 out of them are acquired for successfully passed final examination or defence of diploma thesis) – in some specific areas of knowledge (Medicine, Dental Medicine, Law, Architecture, Maritime, etc.), only in case when the training is not recommended to be provided by separate Bachelor's and Master's courses.

Master's courses ensure extended fundamental and theoretical training combined with profiled training within a given specialty or scientific orientation.

Doctoral studies are the last third cycle of the national higher education qualification framework. Doctor degree (ISCED 97, level 6) – with duration of 3 years minimum in full-time form or 4 years minimum in part-time form, as well as self-dependent training. Both of them are accessible after acquisition of Master's degree. Doctorates' training is performed in scientific fields.

7. Special needs

Children and students with special educational needs are children and students with various disabilities and disorders, (sensory and physical disabilities, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, speech-language disorders, learning difficulties), which can lead to difficulties in the teaching process.

According to Public Education act children and pupils with special education needs can be integrated in kindergartens, general and vocational schools or study in special kindergartens and schools.

The resource assistance to children and students with special educational needs when enrolled in mainstream education is provided by resource teachers and experts – psychologists, speech therapist and hearing and speech rehabilitators from the 28 resource centres. The law guarantees that a resource teacher will assist up to 5 children with special educational needs depending on their individual needs.

Data provided by resource centres show that in 2010/11 school year, there were 10 304 children and students with special educational needs who receive integrated training in Bulgaria (1 206 in kindergartens and 9 098 in schools).

The legislation allows other forms of integrated education – formation of special classes in regular vocational schools for children with hearing impairment, classes for children with mental disabilities, who have graduated VIII grade. Students acquire first degree of qualification in certain specialties and profession for one year, but have not received basic education level.

Special schools for children with special educational needs are currently 55. Data provided by resource centres show that in 2010/11 school year, there were 5 360 children and students with special educational needs who are enrolled in special schools (361 children in special kindergartens, 68 children in special group in general kindergartens, 4 772 students in special schools, 227 students in special classes in general and vocational schools).

In Bulgaria, there are 3 schools for children with hearing impairment, 2 schools for children with visual impairment and 50 schools for children with mental disabilities, except these 55 special schools there are 9 healing schools and 4 schools in hospitals.

8. Teachers

In accordance with on the Implementation of the Public Education Act (1999) the position of a teacher shall be held by people of higher education diplomas for Bachelor and/or Master degree and acquired professional qualification – teacher.

Teachers who work in pre-primary and primary education are trained at university level (general teacher and not teach just one subject). In lower and upper secondary schools teachers are subject specialist. They are trained at subject and have professional qualification- teacher.

Teachers work under labour contract and are employed by school heads

English unrevised

Information provided by the Bulgarian Eurydice Unit.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult EURYPEDIA which provides descriptions of educational systems and policies in the Eurydice network countries: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurypedia>