

ANNEX V

Template for programmes supported from the ERDF (Investment for Jobs and growth goal), ESF+, the Cohesion Fund and the EMFF – Article 16(3)

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1. PROGRAMME STRATEGY: MAIN DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND POLICY RESPONSES

Reference: Article 17(3)(a)(i)-(vii) and 17(3)(b)

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The Programme Education 2021-2027 is one of the main tools for the implementation of Priority 1 "Education and Skills" of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 (NDP 2030), as well as the strategic goals set in the Strategic Framework for Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030) and the

¹ Numbers in square brackets refer to number of characters.

Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030. A basis for innovative and smart development of Bulgaria is the provision of **quality and inclusive education for all**, proactively aimed at evolving **labour market** trends, with a view to enhancing the **quality of skills** and the formation of highly educated, innovative and active individuals capable of being successful as professionals and citizens and thus contributing to their personal well-being, development of society and the sustainable development of all social fields.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way school and higher students are taught. COVID-19 has become a catalyst for educational institutions to seek innovative solutions in a relatively short period of time and has shown the importance of digitizing education and ensuring equal access to technological resources and distance learning in an electronic environment for all school students. In this context, the programme will support national efforts to bridge the digital gap of school students and ensure quality education.

Main challenges in the education sector, identified by stages and levels of education:

Pre-school and school education

The EC Report on Bulgaria 2019 in the framework of the European Semester (EC Report on Bulgaria 2019) calls on Bulgaria to **improve the quality, labour market relevance and inclusiveness of education** and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups.

The report points out that significant labour force and skills shortages point to the need to **invest more in training and re-qualification**, aligning education with the needs of the labour market. The persistently high level of early school leaving and low educational outcomes underline the need for significant investment, **especially in early childhood education, school and vocational education and training**.

The 2020 EC Report on Bulgaria notes limited progress in this regard, noting that the quality and inclusive nature of the education system remains a challenge, despite ongoing reforms. This poses challenges to disadvantaged groups such as the Roma and children in rural areas or in vulnerable situations. The persistently high levels of early school leaving and poor educational attainment, confirmed by the results of the 2018 PISA survey, underlines the need for more targeted measures. Vocational education and training (VET) reform continues but the employment rate of VET graduates is still below the EU average, and the level of participation in adult learning programs is among the lowest in the EU.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular Objective 4 “Quality Education”, indicate that a key priority should be to **ensure inclusive and equitable quality education** and to stimulate **lifelong learning** opportunities for all. In this regard, the findings for Bulgaria are that there is still inadequate education system that does not meet the current requirements: **outdated curricula based on unification and needs from the time of the industrial revolution**, not taking into account the dynamics of the emergence of new professions and specialties, low uptake of non-formal learning opportunities, **a one-size-fits-all approach, non-recognition of the specifics of each child** — every child is a special, undeveloped system of inclusive education for children with special educational needs and vulnerable groups, **insufficient level of integration of educational institutions in the market economy**, late career orientation. It is also pointed out that there is a misunderstanding of the term ‘equitable’ — **there is no distinction between equal opportunities and equal/equitable education for all**, regardless of the abilities and the

social and educational background and family status of parents, and that young people choose the most attractive or easy specialty, rather than choosing professions according to their personal achievements and interests and employability. According to the findings in Bulgaria, there are unrealistic expectations for the large and independent role of the education system in forming education, values and culture.

Given the country's negative demographic trends, the level of educational characteristics of the population is a key prerequisite for the quality of human resources. *The EC Report on Bulgaria 2019* states that Bulgaria has invested insufficient resources in pre-school and primary education, which are crucial to laying the foundations for equal opportunities. In 2016, expenditures for these levels of education amounted to only 0.7 % of GDP, less than half the EU average of 1.5 %. In general, expenditures on education as a percentage of GDP is among the lowest in the EU (3.4 % vs 4.7 %). However, the Education and Training Monitor 2019 Bulgaria Report states that in 2018 the total budget expenditure on education is 3.5% of GDP - well below the EU average of 4.6% and among the lowest in the EU. However, compared to 2010, spending on education in Bulgaria increased by 14% in real terms, which is significantly higher than the EU average (3.7%). The increase is mainly in favor of secondary education (+23%), as well as pre-school and primary education (+ 18%), while higher education expenditure has decreased by 11%.

The analysis of the socio-economic development of Bulgaria 2007-2017 for the definition of the national priorities for the period 2021-2027, adopted by Decision No 196/11.04.2019 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, shows the worrying trend, in the last five years, of constantly reducing the scope of pre-school education. The group **net enrollment rate** for children aged 3-6 is decreasing steadily from the highest figure reached in **2013 (83.6 %)** and reaches **78.4 % for the 2018-2019 academic year**. There is a negative trend despite recent reforms in the field, which make pre-school education compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 6. The explanation could partly be sought in the **unregistered external migration of children** in compulsory pre-school and school age, as well as the inability of the most vulnerable groups to secure the inclusion of their children in early childhood programmes on **purely financial grounds**, due to the fees and hidden costs. Among the likely causes is the limitation of children's physical access linked, on the one hand, to the **closure of kindergartens in small and remote areas, as well as to the scarcity of places in kindergartens in big cities**, as a result of their population concentration. The number of kindergartens in the country decreased by 11.4 % over the last five years, **with 283 closed kindergartens in small and medium-sized municipalities and 47 new kindergartens were opened** (24 in Sofia City).

Only the South-Western region, due to the influence of the capital, notes a net increase (+ 3.4 %) in the number of kindergartens in the period, while the opposite is the North-Central Region (-22 %). However, the number of places in kindergartens is still insufficient. To reduce the effect of this negative trend, Decree No. 181 of the Council of Ministers of 31.07.2020 approved an additional transfer of BGN 50,000,000 under the budget of the Sofia Municipality for 2020 for construction, furnishing and equipment of kindergartens and nurseries. Also, one of the three pillars of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in the Next Generation EU Mechanism for Recovery and Sustainability for the period 2021-2024 provides support for sustainable resource management in kindergartens and schools, energy efficiency, recycling and waste reduction through a project aimed at implementing Recommendation 3 of the Council Specific Recommendations addressed to Bulgaria in the framework of the 2020 European Semester to focus investment in the field of green and

digital transition. This type of activities will also have an impact to implement the recommendations to Bulgaria to increase the inclusive nature of education and training.

The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Inclusion and Participation (2021 - 2030) recognizes that the quality of education and care in early childhood (ECEC) is hampered by insufficient training of educators and other staff in areas such as inclusive education, early childhood development, ethnic diversity, second language acquisition and special educational needs and abilities. There are only few well-trained Roma mediators and associates who provide ECEC-related services. The participation and success of Roma children in pre-school education is often undermined because Roma parents are not seen and engaged as equal partners; in general, Roma parents are not encouraged to be actively involved in the educational process. It is necessary to further develop and improve the understanding of complex prevention, which should be a three-component process: primary (general), secondary (in groups in a specific risk situation) and tertiary (prevention of recurrence). The introduction of educational mediators has proved to be an effective practice with a good impact in this respect, which the Ministry of Education and Science has successfully dealt with, but mediators are only an element of prevention and cannot be relied upon to solve the scope and dropout problems.

Participation in early childhood education is crucial, especially for children with low socio-economic status and those, who speak different language from Bulgarian language in home environment. EU Fundamental Rights Agency's survey shows that **only 66% of Roma children in 4-6 years visit a kindergarten in 2016**. The results of PISA 2012 for Bulgaria show that participation in at least two years of pre-school education before entering school increases the mathematical results in PISA with an average of 7, reaching 10 for children with lower socio-economic status and 19 points for children speaking other language than Bulgarian in home environment. Despite this negative result, there is also a positive change, which is expressed in the project implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020 (OPSESG). Within the project, by the end of 2020, 1,778 kindergartens and schools with pre-school preparation have been covered, 40,000 children are involved in activities for inclusion in pre-school education, over 43% of children from vulnerable groups show progress in the Bulgarian language..

The 2020 EC Report on Bulgaria also acknowledges that attendance at early childhood education and care facilities is low and declining. This trend is of particular concern in some areas and for vulnerable children. High-quality education and care in early childhood play a key role in creating equal opportunities and improving cognitive skills, and to a large extent lead to a reduction in the likelihood of low achievement and early school leaving. At the same time, some large cities lack enough kindergartens. The attendance rate for children aged 4 to compulsory school age is 83.9%, well below the EU average of 95.4%, with a downward trend since 2014. Only 60% of Roma children between the ages of 4 and compulsory school age attend kindergarten.

Bulgaria has made significant efforts to ensure access to education for every child and school student with a change in regulations. With the adopted Pre-school and School Education Act (PSEA) measures have been taken to change the negative trend, as it regulates compulsory preschool education for all children aged between 5 and 6 years of age. Also, with the adoption of the Ordinance on Inclusive Education, efforts are concentrated in ensuring access to quality and modernized education for every child and school student, reducing the share

of early school leavers, and early childhood care. The principles of inclusive education, enshrined in the ordinance, are an integral part of the right to education and are implemented in accordance with the principles in Art. 3, para. 2 of the PSEA. The Mechanism for joint work of the institutions for coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and school students of compulsory school age adopted by the Council of Ministers Decree No. 100/08.06.2018 also has a significant impact as in the period from 2017 to April 15, 2020 the coverage teams returned back to school and kindergarten or enrolled for the first time 51,460 children. This is eloquent proof that it is necessary to expand and upgrade the activities of the Mechanism in the next programming period. The coefficient of the covered in 2020 marks an increase by 3.73 compared to 2019 and by 3.62 compared to the beginning of the previous school year.

The *Analysis of the socio-economic development of Bulgaria 2007-2017* also outlines other significant negative trends, such as: the group net enrolment rate of grade I to IV pupils has been steadily decreasing in the last 10 years and over, with **each tenth child not covered** by (otherwise compulsory) primary education in the 2017-2018 school year. Even lower is the scope of **lower secondary and secondary education, reaching 82.6% in the 2017-2018 academic year**, or 17.4% of children in school age are not covered/dropped out of **lower secondary and secondary education**. The demographic challenges and reforms underway in the field of education have led to the closure of more than 1 000 schools since the beginning of the century. The number of pupils during the same period fell by just over 1/3 or around 300 thousand people. **The closure of educational institutions**, especially in small towns, together with other factors such as **social and family reasons**, negative attitude to education and lack of motivation, learning difficulties in mastering the school subjects, etc., reflects also on a significant proportion of early leavers from education and training. In 2017, for the first time since 2013, the value of the indicator marked a positive change, decreasing to 12.7% or 1.1 percentage points compared to 2016. This is due to both effective policies from previous years to reduce dropping out of school, as well as effective current policies implemented in order to include in forms of education and training those who have not completed secondary education.

According to the *2019 EC Report for Bulgaria*, despite recent improvements, the percentage of early school leavers (ESL) remains high - 12.7%. It is estimated to **be significantly above the national average among Roma (67 %), in rural areas (27.9 %) and in the North-Western (21.6 %) and South-Eastern (22 %) regions**.

The concentration of disadvantaged school students in schools with low performance is relatively high in Bulgaria, driving further the skills gap. Several international surveys confirm that socio-economic status has a significant impact on school students' performance. **According to the estimations 60 % of Roma pupils study in Roma-majority or Roma-only schools (FRA, 2016)**. The duration of the child being included in pre-school education, the educational status of parents and language spoken in the family are indicated as the most significant factors for educational outcomes. The longer the child has visited pre-school education, the better their educational outcomes are at school. Children who grow up in a low educated parents' environment, and when the language spoken by the family is not Bulgarian, mostly drop out of school. Despite the change in the funding model for kindergartens and schools with concentrated children from vulnerable groups and other measures taken for inclusive education of children and pupils from vulnerable groups, the promotion of ethnic

joint schools and desegregation measures remains a challenge. Further investment could help to offset this phenomenon.

These negative trends are also confirmed by the 2020 EC Report on Bulgaria.

The *EC Report on Bulgaria 2019* also states that, in 2016, the level of poverty and social exclusion among people with disabilities was 55.9 %, i.e. 18.4 percentage points higher than for people without disabilities. More than half of people with disabilities drop out of education early and only 34 % have jobs. Their tertiary education attainment rate – 13.5 %, is also very low. Social transfers have a low impact on poverty reduction. Major challenges for the education and training system remain, including **providing quality inclusive education and tackling early school leaving**.

One of these challenges is dealing with the forms, factors and motives for aggression and intolerance in the Bulgarian school. In a study prepared by the Institute for Population and Human Studies (IPHS-BAS), funded by the Ministry of Education and Science in connection with the preparation of a Program for Prevention (and Intervention) of Aggression and Violence at School (2018-2019), 87% of teachers indicate that they have witnessed verbal aggression, 77% of indirect aggression, and 49% of physical aggression between school students. According to teachers, the main reason for aggression at school are the child-rearing practices in the family that encourage violence. Nearly half of the students surveyed (45%) say that they have participated in school fights at least once or more often. About 70% of the students surveyed admit that verbal aggression is the most common form of aggression in school. Half of the surveyed teachers share that they meet not only with isolated cases of students who are difficult to social control and impact, but also with whole classes, in which there are frequent conflicts between students, between students and teachers, manifestations of group bullying and aggression, as well as violation of discipline and school order by a large number of students. Nearly 2/3 of the surveyed teachers (64%) say that they need specialized training to work with such classes. Frequent displays of aggression and rejection of the various are serious obstacles to inclusive education and lead to demotivation for school visits, poor results and reporting by the education system and are the average factors for non-attendance and dropping out of school. One of the most powerful pedagogical techniques for creating a positive environment is the involvement and empowerment of children in relation to the environment they live in. It is important for adults to hear their opinions and stories about how they feel about the atmosphere at school and to think over the suggestions they make. It is necessary to provide more opportunities and responsibilities for children to organize the space they inhabit. Working policies to involve parents in the values and vision of the respective educational institution need to be encouraged.

According to Eurostat data for 2019, the value of the share of ESL is 13.9%, which is well above the level of 12.7% in 2018 and 2017, i.e. no progress is made in 2018. The highest values of the ESL rate in 2018 were observed in the North-Western Region — 19 % and in the South-Eastern — 22.6 % (these two regions have the highest values of this share for the whole period 2013-2018).

However, significant progress has been made in the area of pre-school and school education: over 2,664 children with special educational needs have received specialized support from psychologists, pedagogues, therapists and others under the project "Support for equal access and personal development" under OPSESG. Within the framework of the same project in 34 kindergartens are trained both children with special educational needs and children at risk of

learning difficulties, with which prevention measures are implemented in order to fully integrate them into the educational system.

In support of the reforms in the education system launched with the adoption of the Pre-school and School Education Act in the programming period 2014-2020, 191 520 Roma participants are included in activities under Priority Axes 2 and 3 of OPSESG, and they are supported by procedures aimed at to all areas of pre-school and school education and higher education.

The most significant impact on the representatives of socially vulnerable groups was exerted under the project "Development of school students' abilities and increase in their motivation to learn through activities that develop specific knowledge, skills and competencies (Your class)" under OPSESG – 451,498 students, as of these 105,660 Roma school students from over 2,300 schools across the country are involved in extracurricular activities of interest and in activities to overcome learning difficulties in order to increase their motivation to learn and develop their skills. This largest project within OPSESG has contributed in the long run to reducing the proportion of early school leavers. To a large extent, the increase in the share of ESL in 2019 compared to 2018 coincides with the period of completion of the activities of the project "Your class". In continuation of the good practices under the "Support for Success" procedure within the OPSESG, it is planned to cover 120,000 school students with learning difficulties and at risk of leaving the education system. The achievements in the programming period 2014-2020 create a prerequisite for continuing and upgrading the results achieved in the next programming period.

The share of early school leavers in large cities in Bulgaria is **3.9 % and almost 2.5 times lower than the EU average (9.7 %)**, while the value of the **indicator in rural regions of Bulgaria reaches 27.9 % while it is 10.9 % on average in the EU**. A survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that **7% of Roma do not attend any level of education, and about 45% of Roma do not complete secondary education**. Although the problem of leaving education and training is addressed with targeted interventions during the period considered, including a special focus on vulnerable groups, where the problem is particularly acute, the evolution of the indicator value and its still high level indicates a need to refine the measures taken and/or to expand their scope.

In recent years there has been a steady trend towards improving the population's educational structure, with an increase in the share of tertiary graduates and a reduction in the number of people with primary and lower education, but the country is still lagging behind the EU average. In **2018, 28.2% of the population had a tertiary level of education (31.4 % in the EU)** and the relative share of the population with basic and lower education reached 17.4 %. According to the latest national census, the **relative share of the population in the villages with at least secondary education (40.1 %) is almost twice as lower than the value of the indicator in the towns and cities**. The educational structure of the Roma and the Turkish ethnic communities is a reason for concern, with 93 % and 70 % respectively of the representatives of these ethnic groups not completing their secondary education, compared to about 30 % for ethnic Bulgarians, according to the 2011 census data. Every fourth Roma child and every ninth Turkish child aged 7-15 have never attended school, compared with 5.6 % of children in the Bulgarian ethnic group. Despite the improvement of the educational structure of the population, there are still worrying signs of the quality of education. In the *Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018 study of the Global Economic Forum* Bulgaria is ranked 83 in the world (and 26 in the EU, surpassing only Hungary and

Croatia) according to the quality of the education system. In addition in the last ten years, the country has declined 19 positions down. **Between 2001 and 2011, Bulgaria falls from the 4th to 22nd place in the International Reading Skills Survey of the 4th grade school students PIRLS**, and is between only the four countries showing a net decrease in results in the decade. Although the performance of Bulgarian school students is improving in the last survey in 2016, when the country moves up to the 14th place, the achievements of the beginning of the century cannot yet be reached. Similar trends are also observed in the presentation of the country in the International Study “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study”, **TIMSS**. The average mathematical result of the Bulgarian school students notes a sharp decrease in the period 1999-2007, partly compensated in the latest edition of the survey (2015). The results of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (**PISA**) survey conducted in 2018 show **that 47 % of 15-year-olds are functionally illiterate, 46.5 % are with achievements below the critical threshold in the field of science and 44.4 % are under-skilled in mathematics, and the gap compared to the EU is more than double in all areas of the survey. Moreover, the achievements of Roma school students and Turkish ethnic backgrounds shows a significant gap with ethnic Bulgarians equal to 3 education years in terms of reading and 2 years in terms of mathematics and sciences.**

In the *2019 Education and Training Monitoring*, the EC indicates that the workforce in the education sector is ageing, which generates a shortage of teachers. **Almost half of the teachers are over the age of 50** and are likely to reach the retirement age within the next 10 years; **10% are already older than 60**. A shortage is emerging and it is expected to deepen. **This is especially true for kindergarten and primary school teachers, teachers of foreign languages, information and communication technologies (ICT), mathematics, physics and some subjects in the field of vocational education and training (VET)**. The specific need of replacement by subject and educational level is not known, since only recently (with the support of the EU) in Bulgaria has started the creation of a forecasting instrument regarding the teaching profession. However, even in a declining number of pupils, an acute need to replace large groups of retiring teachers is expected to arise. In addition, **the number of professionals in charge (such as resource teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, etc.) is also insufficient**, and with the progress of the reform in the field of inclusive education the unsatisfied demand is expected to increase. It is necessary to take into account the fact that under OPSESG under the procedure "Qualification of pedagogical specialists" training is provided for 4,000 pedagogical specialists under the age of 34, for 30,000 pedagogical specialists aged between 35 and 54 and for 5,000 pedagogical specialists involved in training for the application of modern assessment methods. Also under the projects "Student Scholarships - Phase 1" and "Student Internships - Phase 1" and "Student Internships – 2", implemented under OPSESG, 14,590 students in the field of higher education "pedagogical sciences" were supported. The implementation of the policy for sustainable increase of the incomes of the pedagogical specialists also continues. In 2020, the amount of the minimum basic salary has been increased by about 65% compared to the beginning of the mandate of the government (the relevant changes have been made in Ordinance No. 4 on rationing and remuneration of labor promulgated SG, No. 34 of 2017, SG , No. 7 of 24.01.2020).

A serious problem characterising human resources in the country is the **low level of computer and digital skills**, which hinders the widespread use of ICT and their own services and the achievement of digital growth. Bulgaria continues to lag behind the EU average.

According to the Digital Economy and Society Index **DESI in 2017 only 29 % of the population has at least basic digital skills (57 % EU average)**, ranking the country 27th in the EU. **Only 75.1% of the population aged 16-74 use the Internet, compared to the EU average of 87%**. According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018 (TALIS), 44% of Bulgarian secondary education teachers report that they use ICT in most or every lesson, which is slightly below the EU average - 47%. At the same time, Bulgarian teachers have less confidence in their digital skills than the EU average. The need for training on how to integrate IT technologies in teaching became apparent during the transition to the distance form of the educational process due to COVID-19, as two thirds of teachers in a study reported that they had no prior training to work with educational platforms or distance learning (*European Education Area Progress Report 2020*). Interventions at all levels of the education system, as well as of the system of qualification and re-qualification of employed, unemployed, disadvantaged people and disadvantaged groups, are necessary to enhance citizens' digital literacy and to avoid so-called digital exclusion. Given the state of emergency in the country, all schools have introduced distance learning in an electronic environment through cloud platforms or other means of interaction. Under the project of OPSESG "Education for Tomorrow" in 461 schools in the country were purchased and delivered a total of 1,986 laptops, 500 Internet access devices with 500 prepaid internet packages for teachers, which were credited as assets to schools with less financial means, and thanks to which the teachers in them were able to adapt the learning process to the new reality.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed the education system at all levels in Bulgaria in force majeure circumstances, in which for a very short period of time it was necessary for all participants in the process to switch to an atypical way of learning. According to the results of a study by the Ministry of Education and Science for assessment of the impact of distance learning in e-environment or other absentee forms on the effectiveness of school education² conducted during the crisis with COVID-19, key factors have been identified that hinder the effectiveness of distance education in electronic environment: limited student access to technology and the Internet; low level of digital competencies of students and teachers; insufficient provision of electronic devices; low motivation and commitment of school students; insufficiently developed functionalities of the used platforms and insufficient support and commitment from the parents, etc. The identified factors have a particularly large impact on disadvantaged students belonging to vulnerable groups and socially disadvantaged families. According to a World Bank report³, the number of digital devices used in classroom teaching in Bulgaria still lags behind other European countries. On average, at all levels, schools in the country have about twice lower opportunities to be highly digitally equipped and connected as the European average (European Commission, DG CNECT, 2019). According to the same report, the economic shock following the COVID-19 crisis could increase the drop-out rate in the medium term, especially for disadvantaged school students.

² <http://ire-bg.org/%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82/>

³ Prepared reports in accordance with the Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement of 12 February 2020 on Public Expenditure Review in Science, Technology and Innovation and Support for building evidence-based approach for the National Strategic Framework in Education 2030 between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Executive Agency "Operational Programme Science and Education for Smart Growth"

Students who fall behind in education are expected to be demotivated and at higher risk of dropping out of school.

In order to overcome the consequences of the crisis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic additional funds under REACT-EU (Regulation (EU) 2020/2221 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23.12. 2020) have been provided for 2021 under OPSESG 2014-2020 under the ESF. The provided additional funds will support the purchase of additional devices for teachers and students to provide conditions for conducting distance learning in an electronic environment. These measures will be accompanied by support for training of students, teachers, educational mediators, parents, in order to prevent interruption of the educational process and inclusive education in crisis conditions and to counteract the risk of dropping out in a situation of distance learning especially for students from vulnerable groups.

Given the impact of COVID-19 on all levels of the education system and on all students and especially disadvantaged groups and the Roma, REACT-EU support under OPSESG 2014-2020 will be upgraded through appropriate activities under the Programme for Education 2021-2027. The *2020 EC Report on Bulgaria* states that despite the measures taken in Bulgaria, participation in adult education remains among the weakest in the EU. In 2018, participation in adult learning was at a low level of 2.5%, which is significantly below the EU average of 11.1%. It is important to note that the share of low-skilled adults in adult education is about a quarter of the total population. The quality of adult education provided and the limited capacity for effective quality monitoring are an obstacle to more effective adult participation in the learning process.

It should be noted that progress has been made, as a project of the Ministry of Education and Science under the procedure "Adult Literacy - Phase 1" covered 10 723 people over 16 years in literacy courses and courses for learning content from the lower secondary school stage of basic education, of which 7,878 have successfully completed certificates for primary stage and/or grade of basic education. It is expected that the announced new procedure "Adult Literacy-2" under OPSESG 2014-2020 will strengthen the effect of working with the target groups to complete the stage/level of basic education and focus on higher stage of education and better realization on the labor market. In recent years, attempts have been made to integrate modern technology into the learning process, but the experience is contradictory. For example, from the 2018-2019 school year, e-textbooks are available to first to seventh grade school students, but the e-textbooks themselves are scanned copies of the paper ones and are free. At the same time, the electronically readable versions of the textbooks, which in addition to the teaching material have included interactive games and exercises, remain paid, with all the resulting negative consequences in terms of equal access to quality education. In 2019, a major ESF funded project on the introduction of digital education in a school started — “**Education for tomorrow**” under the OPSESG, which aims at creating a single cloud environment in the education process with an implemented platform for educational services and content, the creation of digital educational content and the upskilling of teachers and pupils for its use. It is planned to upgrade the project "Education for Tomorrow" by upgrading the cloud environment created by the project, developing algorithms for preparing analyses of student outcomes, personalization of student learning, etc., which will be done through complementarity between the Programme for Education and the Recovery and Resilience Facility of the Next Generation EU Recovery and Sustainability Mechanism.

Although measures have been taken in recent years to modernise the education system (such as the consecutive inclusion of information technology training into pupils' curricula in the first, fifth and seventh grades), there are still no concrete results in the overall performance of the country, which calls for a thorough critical analysis of the effectiveness of the reform undertaken, with a focus on its results. One of the challenges to the effectiveness of the reform is to support talented and gifted children. In many cases, in order to develop the talents of these children, it is necessary to often move to another school, as well as to study material that does not meet their individual needs, which is a prerequisite for social exclusion, need for advanced education and lack of equal opportunities and active participation. In the last school year, only 101 students with outstanding gifts and talents received scholarships. In the study "Working with gifted children in the education of Bulgarian language and literature at the initial stage of the basic educational degree", prepared by Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" (2019), it is stated that the legislative documents lack reference to current problems to the pedagogues in their work with gifted children, as well as requirements for establishment of working teams for diagnostics and improvement of their abilities, methodology for working with them, as well as methods for evaluating their achievements. Active and targeted work with talented children is carried out in specialized schools and profiled gymnasias, i.e. mainly in the age range of 15-19 years. The study indicates that children's giftedness manifests itself very early and requires to be discovered and developed, i.e. to create conditions for preservation and improvement of the child's gift from an early age and in the best possible way in order to carry out the process of reproduction of the intellectual potential of society.

According to the *EC Report on Bulgaria 2019*, the introduction of a revised curriculum focusing on digital skills is underway. However, available data show that there are **still significant gaps in the acquisition of basic and digital skills and knowledge of the Bulgarian language**. These circumstances call for additional investments and policy measures in improving basic and digital skills. With the support of the ESF, career guidance centers have been set up, but the provision of career guidance and individual approaches to each student needs to be strengthened.

Vocational education

Social and economic analysis data on NUTS Level 2 regions⁴ show that vocational education and training (VET) in the school year 2019/2020 takes place in 21 art schools, 25 sport schools, 358 vocational and 23 vocational colleges with post-secondary education. The total number of schools is 427 and the total number of school students in them is 135 117. In comparison with the school year 2014/2015, vocational schools have fallen by 51, with at the most a reduction in the vocational secondary schools. In 2019, secondary education in the arts, sports and vocational schools with a diploma graduated 21,588 people. Vocational secondary schools are mainly located in the regional centres and in larger municipalities, where the higher number of pupils is concentrated.

The number of trainees in vocational education and training is higher than that of learners in the general education system. In 2017, VET learners are 117 130 learners, which represents

⁴ See: <httpswww.eufunds.bg/bg/oprd/node/2816>

51.7 % of the total number of school students in the secondary education system. But this is a decrease compared to 52.5 % in 2012.⁵

According to a World Bank report, girls are less likely to enroll in VET and their share has been declining in recent years. In the school year 2018/19, 37.2% of VET students were girls. A *CEDEFOP* report states that there are also gender differences in programme choices, noting that boys prefer programmes related to computer systems and coding (the most popular options), transportation, agriculture, economics, construction, and girls enroll more often in economic and administrative programmes (the most popular options), services (tourism, hotels and restaurants), as well as design and clothing.

The NDP 2030 states that the **trend of a decrease in the relative share of VET learners**, although still higher than the EU average, continues. **Every fourth school student in the last grade in vocational schools does not complete secondary education at the ordinary or corrective session of the national university examinations, as well as each second school student, studied in programmes to acquire the second degree of professional qualification. One out of three school students graduate without the acquired professional qualification and the employment rate of recent VET graduates (64.2 %) is 10.8 percentage points below the EU average.**

According to a World Bank report on VET, the results of both the national external assessment examinations and PISA show a higher concentration of students with lower results in VET than in general education. At the same time, VET students are expected to study more extensive curricula, as VET education in Bulgaria covers both general and VET curricula. The combination of challenging curricula and low achievement can ultimately lead to discouragement and disunity of students and increase the risk of dropping out, which is a challenge and can be addressed by supporting additional VET training.

The analysis of the effectiveness of the current state of the VET system, prepared within the project BG051PO001-3.2.03 "Management for effective vocational education" of the Ministry of Education and Science under OPHRD 2007-2013, shows that vocational education is unequal with the education received in general education and specialized high schools in terms of several key factors and in general it is less and less prestigious and more and more difficult to complete. Nevertheless, actions have been taken to change the negative trend, as under the project "Student Internships – Phase 1" of OPSESG nearly 8,351 school students from vocational schools in the country have undergone practical training in a real work environment within 240 hours, and 406 training companies and 2,477 school students are supported in areas of priority importance for the economy.

In the Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of RIS3 2014-2020 conducted in 2020, a high assessment was given of the contribution of the procedures implemented under OPSESG (support for internships, scholarships, practical skills, strengthening business relations) under the sub-objective "Development of quality human resource" of Operational Objective 1 of RIS3, as the highest rated by the beneficiaries is the level of compliance of education with the needs of the labor market and opportunities for vocational training and lifelong learning.

In Bulgaria, VET is mainly implemented in the school education system. Since 2015, as well as many other EU Member States, Bulgaria focuses on promoting learning through work experience (dual learning system), enabling learners to gain real work experience,

⁵ According to Cedefop in cooperation with the Bulgarian team of ReferNet (2018). Vocational training in Bulgaria, <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/728903>

familiarising them with skills demanded by employers and with skills that would facilitate their realisation on the labour market. The availability of dedicated and competent teachers, trainers, mentors and other VET professionals is essential to ensure its high quality.

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Although legislation promotes dual learning and new curricula and dual vocational education curricula for school year 2017/18, the implementation of dual training at this stage is mainly realised within different projects⁶.

In the 2017/2018 school year, 1,742 pupils in 79 classes in 45 vocational schools were involved in a dual training system. In support of the expansion of the dual system of education in 2020, the implementation of the project "Support for a dual system of education" has started under OPSESG, which envisages the introduction of the dual system in 147 vocational high schools/schools with vocational training classes and to include 9,800 school students for training in the dual education system according to the existing legislative framework. The main challenges for VET in Bulgaria are traditionally related to: **the need for even closer cooperation with the socio-economic partners; the still insufficient popularity of vocational education; insufficient compliance of the provided VET with the requirements and needs of the labor market; insufficient flexibility of the system for dealing with early school leaving** before acquiring professional qualification, **lack of flexible opportunities for re-inclusion in vocational training**; the lack of a system for increasing the competencies of teachers in professional training for work in an increasingly digital and high-tech environment. A positive trend of the last two years is the active participation and commitment of representative employers' organisations at national level, as well as a number of industry organisations to increase the profile of VET. In this regard, social partners will be recognised as a key partner in the development of policies and measures to improve the recognition and enforceability of VET, including the dual form of training.

According to the findings of the *2019 EC Report on Bulgaria*, **the employability of graduates with vocational education and training remains a challenge**. While the share of school students in vocational education and training in Bulgaria is slightly above the EU average (51.3 % compared to 49.3 % in 2016), their employability is 17.1 percentage points lower. This may be partly due to **low participation in work-based learning schemes** (only 22 % of vocational education and training graduates aged 15-34), the lack of universal career guidance from the earliest age and the slow uptake of vocational education and training, **only 1 % of school students in vocational secondary schools participated in such dual programmes in the school year 2017/2018**.

Most learners go to a vocational education programme at the age of 14 (7th grade). Since for general and vocational education currently the same compulsory matriculation exam should

⁶ According to Cedefop in cooperation with the Bulgarian team of ReferNet (2018). Vocational training in Bulgaria, <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/728903>

be passed, the main factors in the choice of VET are family traditions and personal preferences. Career guidance is still evolving and does not have a real influence on the choice of learners. On the other hand, the choice of a profession must be responsible and informed. For that purpose, children should be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with different professions and recognise their future development path.⁷

In the Education and Training Monitoring 2019, the EC points out that the employment rate of recent VET graduates has increased significantly in 2018 (66.4 % compared to 2017 (59.1 %)), but remains below the EU average of 79.5 %.

A World Bank report on VET also points out that VET graduates in Bulgaria are significantly less likely to be employed than their EU peers, while at the same time throughout the EU the employment rate of VET graduates has been improving consistently and steadily in recent years. These challenges require support for measures both to monitor the progress of VET graduates and to improve VET aiming to train and develop skills in order to better meet labor market demand.

The government's efforts to increase the applicability of VET to the labor market continue. For the first time for the 2018/2019 academic year, a Decree of the Council of Ministers adopted a List of specialties of professions protected by the state and a List of specialties of professions with an expected shortage of specialists on the labor market. In 2019, school students in these areas and school students from the dual education system will receive additional scholarships and travel expenses will be covered.

According to the *Council Recommendation (2019/C 301/02)*, the relevance of vocational education and training to the labour market and the availability of dual vocational education and training remain insufficient.

Tertiary education

According to data from the Analysis of the socio-economic development of Bulgaria 2007-2017 in 2018, **24.9 % of the working age population has attained a tertiary level of education, increasing by 6.4 percentage points since 2007**, however, the country is increasing its lag towards the Community, because the recorded improvement of the EU average is 8 percentage points reaching 28.5 %. At the same time, there is an increase in the number of doctoral students by 7% and the number of enrolled foreign students. Achieving the national target for 2020 of a 36% share of higher education graduates in the 30-34 age group is still a challenge. According to NSI data for 2019, the share of persons with higher education reached 32.5% for the age range from 30 to 34 (draft Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030). At the same time, **the relative proportion of the low educated working-age population decreased from 28.7 % (in 2007) to 21.3 % (provisional data for 2018), remaining significantly lower than the European average (25.6 %).**

The best educational characteristics of the population in the country are the **South-Western region, where the population with tertiary education reached 39.2 % in 2017**, significantly surpassing the EU average. The **North-Eastern region** is with relatively good indicators for higher education (26.9 %). The worst performing indicators are in **North-**

⁷ According to Cedefop in cooperation with the Bulgarian team of ReferNet (2018). Vocational training in Bulgaria, <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/728903>

Western and South-Eastern region, respectively, where only 19.9 % and 21.7 % of the population aged 25-64 have completed tertiary education by 2017.

The working-age population in **predominantly rural areas is characterised by a declining share of higher education (from 11.1 % in 2007 to 8.1 % in 2017)**, while at EU level the proportion of the high-educated population in predominantly rural areas is increasing (by 4.9 percentage points over the period) and up to 20 %. At the same time, the **low educated labour force in the villages increased its share to 39.4 % (compared to 38.3 % in 2007), with a clear reduction in EU of up to 27.6 %.**

Also, according to the *European Commission's Education and Training Monitor 2019 Bulgaria Report* , the enrollment of disadvantaged students is still low.

According to a World Bank analysis, the available data show that enrollment levels fall from secondary to higher education, but this cannot be attributed solely to barriers to entry in higher education. In the 2019/2020 school year, 82% of the age group for lower and upper secondary education were enrolled in these levels of education, while only 42% of the respective age group for higher education were enrolled in higher education in 2019/2020. Thus, enrollment in higher education is reduced by more than half compared to the previous level of education. This decrease is not entirely due to entry barriers, as many students leave their education before completing their degree or choose not to take the matriculation exam at the end of their secondary education. In addition, in the last ten years, high school graduates have increasingly chosen to continue their studies abroad.

In Bulgaria, every year the government determines the number of vacancies that will be available for each public university per professional field. This number allows for the public HE system to absorb most of secondary graduates for each year. For instance, for the academic year 2019-2020, 47,403 students out of 48,582 that sit the matriculation exam passed it. The state approved for that year 41,170 places in public universities - including for state-funded (33,477) and self-funded (7,693) students. Thus almost every secondary school graduate has the possibility to access higher education disregarding of his or her grades in the matriculation exam. The matriculation exam's grades determine, however, which public universities candidates can access. This is so because universities that receive more applications than the places they have had approval for will select candidates on the bases of those grades. Students who fare less well in national matriculation exams due to low quality of pre-university education in their local schools, for instance, will have less chance to access the most sought after degrees or universities. This may be closing access to otherwise talented individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected entry into HE for the 2020/2021 school year. The number of applicants for university entry for 2020/2021 increased compared to previous years. This may be the result of reconsiderations about studying abroad, which for several years had been the option for many secondary graduates. The uncertainties associated with the pandemic context, including travel restrictions, may have made the option of remaining in Bulgaria to study appear as the most sensible choice.

The leading universities in Bulgaria had planned lifting entry exams for almost all specialties, except for subjects such as medicine or pharmacy. This decision could have had some equalizing effects since private tutoring is the main tool for candidates to prepare for the most competitive university entrance exams. Without entry exams, therefore, lower socio-economic groups could have had more chances to access those specialties. Differences in

quality of pre-university education, however, still may be reflected in national matriculation exams and thus may be precluding these equalising effects, especially in the case of increased competition for places.

Bulgaria is a country in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), where those from the most socially disadvantaged sectors are the least represented in its HE student population. In 2015, only 1.8 percent of HE students in Bulgaria were from families whose parents had low level of education (less than lower secondary). The majority of students came from families whose level of education was medium (up to upper secondary tertiary non-university education) and 46.5% from parents with high levels of education.

There is also a level of gender imbalance in participation in tertiary education, especially by fields of study. Around about 54% of the students enrolled were women between 2012 and 2017. While this is in line with the share of female in tertiary enrolments in the EU on average, there are significant gender imbalances in particular fields. Data on graduates by field of study show that men are highly overrepresented in engineering related degrees. In Education and Health women are overrepresented. In addition, women are overrepresented in master's degrees.

In order to meet the national goals for higher education, it is necessary to expand the scope and participation in higher education not only for vulnerable groups, but also for wider groups of learners.

According to the data from the NDP Bulgaria 2030, the system of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria covers 52 higher schools, the predominant part of which are relatively small and closely specialized. **According to data from the Rating System of Higher Education Institutions for 2019, only half of the graduating students are realized in the respective profession. There is a shortage of skilled ICT staff, pedagogical and engineering and health professionals in the labour market.** The number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics or related studies is 13.730 per 1 000 inhabitants aged 20-29, compared to 18.7 per 1 000 inhabitants in the EU on average in the EU. The reasons for this are to some extent due to the initiation of many economic and humanitarian specialties over the past 20 years, which are more attractive to students because of the traditional prestige of the profession or for other reasons. This trend has led to an increase in the number of students in the 'humanitarian sciences' and 'social, economic and legal sciences' fields, for which there is no demand on the labour market, at the expense of the number of professional backgrounds in the field of 'Natural sciences, mathematics and computing' and 'Technical science'.

As stated in the NDP Bulgaria 2030 in recent years, targeted actions have been taken to limit the number of students in specific professional fields with a surplus of staff, as well as to increase admission to specialties with a proven shortage of qualified specialists. To this end, specific measures are already being implemented to support students in these areas, in parallel with the increase in the number of state-subsidized places.

A major problem in hiring HE graduates is that they are overqualified for the work they do. In Bulgaria, the percentage of graduates working in positions requiring higher education is 50.3% in 2019, which is a slight increase compared to the previous year, when it was 49.3% and by 4.3 percentage points higher than in 2014. More than 60% of master's degree graduates work in positions that require higher education, for the graduates of the bachelor's degree the share is 36%.

One of the biggest challenges for higher education is to ensure that it is in line with the skills and professions needed in the labor market. In one of the most prestigious world rankings of the best universities in the world, **QS World University Ranking 2021, is included only one Bulgarian university - Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**, and for the last year a jump in its ranking was registered from the last group of universities, occupying **800-1,000** to the group of universities, occupying 601-650 place.

As stated in the *2019 EC Report on Bulgaria*, higher education is not sufficiently tailored to the needs of the labour market. **In the period 2012-2017, the number of students in higher education dropped by 17 %** as a result of demographic factors and students' preference to study abroad. The share of higher education graduates is increasing, but remains below the EU average (according to NSI data **33.7% in 2018 compared to 40.7% for the EU**). Enrolment of students in ICT-related fields is increasing, but the overall **attractiveness of science, technology, engineering and mathematics has not increased significantly** and tertiary education attainment rates remain low (**19.7 % in 2019**). Employers often identify knowledge and skills deficiencies, in particular the lack of soft skills among graduates (*CEDEFOP, 2018*).

According to the *NDP Bulgaria 2030*, increasing coherence between the needs of businesses and society on the one hand and programmes in higher education and vocational education and training on the other will remain a key aspect of policies. Closer cooperation and communication between the private and public sectors in the learning process will be encouraged. Improving the relevance of the labor market and the quality of higher and vocational education remains key for Bulgaria in the context of the situation after the COVID-19 pandemic (European Education Area Progress Report 2020). These activities will also be key to improving the quality of higher education, stimulating the relevance of curricula in a global context. In order to increase the economic realization of the results of research and intellectual property in 2020, as well as to promote institutional development, a Decree of the Council of Ministers was adopted, which regulates the terms and conditions for the establishment of companies by public universities.

In support of efforts to improve employability by strengthening skills, including digital skills, the OPSESG in 2020 launched the "Modernization of Higher Education" procedure. The main objective of the procedure is to achieve a dynamic match between the supply and demand of specialists with higher education, by introducing a competency model, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity in student education, including through the widespread application of digital transformation of education. The procedure is aimed at modernization of curricula and introduction of digital educational content, electronic resources and cloud technologies in the educational process; professional development of teachers and improvement of their skills for using ICT-based innovative educational technologies; internationalization of higher education institutions and participation in networks.

Despite the rapid transition of HE institutions to e-learning based during the Covid-19 pandemic, the digitalization process needs to continue, incl. and through targeted investments to provide the necessary resources and quality training of the academic staff.

The focus of the activities in the field of HE has been identified in connection with the planned measures for implementation of the objectives of the Strategy for Development of

Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030, which are aimed at solving a number of challenges.

With regard to the challenges related to the accelerating dynamics of the labor market, the Programme for Education envisages a range of activities that reflect the following challenges identified in the Strategy:

- Mismatch between the needs of the labor market and the nature of the training received in HE in terms of both knowledge (need for interdisciplinary knowledge and interdisciplinary training) and skills and competencies (need to focus the educational process on acquisition of analytical, digital and social competences);
- Need to create a permanent and effective mechanism for timely changes in curricula in view of the dynamic labor market and social development;
- Need for development of more flexible forms of training, as well as forms of training with active participation of business representatives;
- Lag in time and lack of flexibility in the introduction and management of up-to-date disciplines and specialties;
- Need to promote lifelong learning as a priority in the development of HE.

Focus in the Programme Education is also aimed at solving the challenges identified in the Strategy, related to the overall digitalization and development of the education system, demographic problems and insufficient internationalization of the Bulgarian HE, such as:

- Need to take into account the provided HE - both in content and form - with the specific features and needs of up-to-date generations of young people;
- Need for orientation of HE not only towards the immediate graduates of secondary schools, but also to non-traditional trainees through development of forms of lifelong learning, opportunities for combining learning and work and/or family commitments, etc .;
- A small number of provided specialties and programs in a foreign language and in distance learning in many HE institutions.

The activities in Programme for support of the academic staff are aimed at addressing the following challenges identified in the Strategy:

- Need to ensure high qualification of the entire academic staff by constantly updating the knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers;
- Insufficient language training of some of the Bulgarian academic teachers, which hinders the creation of programs and courses in a foreign language, attracting foreign students;
- Insufficient skills to work in an international environment by some teachers in higher education;
- Insufficiently effective and often formal implementation of the Bologna Process instruments, incl. the European credit accumulation and transfer system and the opportunities for academic mobility.

According to a World Bank report on HE, during the COVID-19 pandemic the rapid transition to online learning has contributed to the development of capacities in terms of teaching resources and pedagogical approaches but has also exposed pending needs and shortcomings in the system that that can exacerbate exclusion and require additional support

for distance learning. The World Bank report on HE also identifies another challenge related to the aging of academic staff. Overcoming this challenge will require increasing the attractiveness of academic careers for young people in terms of better career prospects, which can be addressed by supporting promotion of increase of qualification and updating of teaching skills for young teachers, as well as to update knowledge and skills of habilitated teachers.

Applying a systemic approach and bottom-up approaches. Lessons learned.

In 2019, an internal assessment was performed by the Managing Authority of the direct award procedures and the competitive selection procedures under OPSESG. The evaluation analyses the achievement of the objectives of procedures implemented through a systemic approach and those of competitive selection, which aim to support the reduction of **the share of early school leavers**, as the geographical focus of both procedures is localized mainly to school students who are at risk of leaving the education system, as well as participants from vulnerable socially disadvantaged groups and those who have gaps in learning aimed at overcoming learning difficulties, retaining and inclusion school students into the education system. The subject of the analysis are several key components, such as: cost-effectiveness of the target groups, territorial scope of the participants included in the measures under the procedures, comparative indicators of the implementation of the indicators and the relevance of the implemented activities according to the objectives of the procedures. The key recommendations made by the evaluation regarding the choice of a systemic approach or competitive selection show that projects with a specific beneficiary achieve much higher efficiency and effectiveness, incl. costs by achieving the objectives of the programme in a much more explicit way than competitive selection procedures. This in turn minimizes the levels of risk of non-fulfillment of the objectives and indicators of the programme and is a prerequisite for sustainability and high levels of impact.

The analyzed data in terms of cost efficiency compared to the target groups show that in some of the procedures performed through competitive selection, the average cost per participant from vulnerable groups is BGN 1,526.02. In a procedure performed with a specific beneficiary with a similar type of activities, the average cost is BGN 233.08. When comparing the indicators with the budget of the project implemented with a specific beneficiary, the competitive selection procedure would achieve the inclusion of an average of only 68,962 participants. For comparison with the same financial resource, 451,498 participants are included and supported in the system project.

A significant advantage of a systemic approach is the denser regional and territorial scope. The system project considered in the analysis covered participants in all 28 districts of the country, while the considered procedure for competitive selection in the districts of Vidin, Gabrovo and Sliven (in which according to NSI data there is a large concentration of participants from vulnerable socially weak groups) did not cover one participant, and in Silistra district one participant is covered. For comparison, the systemic approach has localized and covered 5,944 participants in Vidin district, 6,371 participants in Gabrovo district, 16,404 participants in Sliven district and 7,693 participants in Silistra district. The difference in geographical distribution is typical for all other areas, and for some of them the differences are huge.

Regarding the relevance of the performed activities in both procedures the leading activity is the additional training in Bulgarian language, as it is much more reliable to follow the educational results from a specific beneficiary - Ministry of Education and Science (MES),

in which the registers for the movement of school students and the information could be checked.

Pursuant to §6 of the Additional Provisions of the European Structural and Investment Funds Management Act, the Regional Inspectorates of Education, state and municipal kindergartens, schools and service units may participate in the technical and/or financial implementation, including expenditure on projects with a specific beneficiary. This contributes to the quality and effective implementation of the procedures and projects under the Programme, because with a systemic approach the specific beneficiary will be able to provide and guarantee the costs of schools/kindergartens in case financial corrections and/or fulfillment of other conditions in the European and national legislation, while allowing schools to incur expenditure and be effectively involved in the implementation of project-specific activities.

The conclusions of the internal evaluation are also confirmed by the evaluations of the ESF support for the promotion of social inclusion, the fight against poverty and all forms of discrimination (Thematic objective 9) and of the ESF support for education and training (Thematic objective 10). The research shows as a positive result the development of national standards after the implementation of a project under OPSESG in Bulgaria. The ESF funds financed the development of methodologies for working with children with special educational needs. The study concludes that the methodologies developed under the OPSESG project have been further developed into national standards precisely due to the condition that the project is managed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of the operations in the special study for Bulgaria, it was confirmed that the system operations of the MES are more effective than the operations of a competitive approach due to their scale and method of implementation. The Investment Priority (IP) 9i and IP 9ii operations under OPSESG have a lower price per participant than the EU average. The costs per participant in IP 9i operations are EUR 851, which is 41% less than the EU average. The cost per participant in IP 9ii operations is EUR 308, which is approximately 63% of the EU average. The added value of the support of the ESF under OPSESG is also taken into account with the developed methodologies for working with children with special educational needs, which become the basis for the development of national standards.

With regard to the support under Thematic objective 10, the role of local, regional and national authorities is mentioned in the EC assessment as one of the success factors of the ESF-funded projects under Investment priority 10i. When these bodies play a central role in the implementation of projects, especially in the field of inclusive education and reducing the share of ESL, this helps to ensure that approaches are developed and coordinated at a wider level. It does not rely on specific organizations, such as project implementation management schools. The systemic approach allows for longer-term training and sustainability of results, including through changes at system level. Another factor for the success of operations that are implemented as systemic is the possibility of enhanced coordination and participation of local and regional stakeholders, in cases where it is necessary to adapt programmes to specific needs, such as early school leaving or lifelong learning.

Based on the above analyses and studies in the Programme for Education 2021-2027, a balanced approach to providing grants has been adopted, taking into account the objectives of the programme, the needs of the target groups, the need to continue structural reforms in certain areas of education or the need of strengthening the capacity at territorial and local

level and at the level of educational institutions, introducing new models and approaches or encouraging activity.

For operations aimed at, for example, enrolling in the education system and ensuring equal and inclusive access to education, reducing the proportion of early school leavers, digital transformation of school education, introduction of a competency model of teaching and learning, through modernization of curriculum, as well as modernization of horizontal policies at national level, a systemic approach to the implementation of operations will be sought, in which the MES will have a leading coordinating role in the implementation of activities so as to cover the entire territory of the country and ensure equal access to education. In the implementation of systemic operations opportunity will be provided to participate in the technical and financial implementation of the activities of a maximum range of educational institutions, which will be included on the basis of identified, justified and protected by them specific needs of target groups or such related to the capacity for conducting educational policies. An appropriate form of partnership with the social and economic partners and civil society representatives will be sought.

It is envisaged that operations aimed at stimulating the introduction of new or innovative approaches in education or those encouraging activity, participation and competition to generate better ideas between beneficiaries will be carried out through project selection procedures, and those that are aimed at specific needs at the territorial level, to overcome local barriers to access to education or to promote the partnership between educational institutions, social and economic partners and civil society at the local level to be implemented through the tools for integrated territorial development.

Complementarity of the Programme Education with other programs and tools

The investments under the Programme Education 2021-2027, aimed at measures to support inclusive education, improve the quality of education and labor market relevance, which cover pre-school education, all educational stages of school education and higher education, will be mutually supplemented for the implementation of the envisaged reforms in the education sector, by the interventions under OPSESG under REACT-EU, other Cohesion policy programmes for the programming period 2021-2027, by interventions under the National Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

REACT-EU support under OPSESG, which aims to address the effects of the crisis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and covers a range of activities to support the educational process in crisis and distance learning in an electronic environment, will be complemented and continued through appropriate activities under the Programme Education 2021-2027 and in particular through activities aimed at digital transformation of school education.

Through the projects under the **Recovery and Resilience Plan** under the pillar "Education and Skills" will be implemented investments aimed at modernizing the educational environment - building a STEM environment, attractive and quality learning environment. Through the projects under the RRF Plan on the basis of the undertaken mapping investments will be implemented in a certain number of schools, which have technical readiness within the period of implementation of the plan.

Despite the investments made in improvement of energy efficiency and renovation of school and university buildings during the programming period 2014-2020, the analyzes of the regional development of the country show that additional resources are needed to improve

the bases for education and training with innovative tools for providing conditions for construction of an adequate learning environment, corresponding to the level of up-to-date technologies and creating conditions for implementation of the measures for modernization of the educational process.

The planned activities under the *Programme for Development of the Regions 2021-2027* will provide support for educational infrastructure for preschool, school and higher education, including VET schools and the planned VET Centers of Excellence. The support for educational infrastructure in 10 urban municipalities will be within Priority 1 "Integrated Urban Development" and through the approach of Integrated Territorial Investments for 40 urban municipalities under Priority 2 "Integrated Territorial Development of the Regions".

The educational infrastructure on the territory of the municipalities in the rural areas will be supported through the interventions under Specific objective 8 "Promotion of employment, growth, social inclusion and local development in the rural areas, including the bioeconomy and sustainable forestry" of the *Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Rural Development for the period 2021-2027*.

As in the programming period 2014-2020, in the period 2021-2027 as well investments in educational infrastructure will be made on the basis of specifically developed methodologies for prioritization of educational infrastructure facilities in the country and relevant lists prepared by Ministry of Education and Science.

Support for modernization of curricula and strengthening the labor market relevance of HE under the Programme for Education will be complemented by measures under the *Research, Innovation and Digitization Programme for Smart Transformation 2021-2027* to support development of research in universities, development of scientific career of teachers, doctoral students and postdoctoral students, which will support the efforts of HE institutions in Bulgaria to apply the results of R&D in student education.

The HE measures in the Programme for Education will be complemented by the project for Accelerating Economic Recovery and Transformation through Science and Innovation under the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* through investments to create a network of research universities, support for expanding Bulgaria's participation in Framework Programme Horizon Europe and supporting the process of creating digital innovation hubs on a regional basis.

Complementarity and demarcation with the Programme for Human Resources Development 2021-2027

Complementarity between PE and PHRD is focused on interventions aimed at early childhood development and validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in a non-formal and informal way.

The PHRD activities aimed at early childhood development envisage measures to support the improvement of work-life balance of parents, incl. raising children, aimed at promoting flexible working and teleworking by facilitating access to or improving the quality of childcare services. The PHRD also covers social and integrated social and health services in the community or at home for children, people with disabilities, the elderly and people unable to self-care, as well as supporting deinstitutionalisation of children and adults and providing long-term services for home care and increasing access to health services. The planned activities under the Programme Education will ensure access to quality education at all educational stages. The activities under the program cover formal education, which is carried

out under the conditions and in accordance with the state educational standard for preschool and school education, while the activities supporting the involvement of parents in the educational process are aimed primarily at changing attitudes towards education, awareness and motivation to increase participation in education from an early age. The support under the PE will be implemented within the educational institutions and providing access to educational services provided in them, according to the regulations. In this regard, the PE will focus its efforts on ensuring access to quality pre-school education, while the PHRD - on social inclusion and tackling child poverty. The PHRD will support access to health services for children, and the PE will support curricula for a healthy lifestyle. HRDP will support the development of parenting skills and counseling and support for parents on early childhood development and parenting, while the PE will support intensive work with parents in the context of education.

Complementarity between the two programs will also be ensured through the measures for validation of knowledge, skills and competencies. The PHRD will support measures for validation of professional skills through Vocational Training Centers under the Vocational Education and Training Act, acquired in a non-formal and informal way outside the formal education, incl. by establishing Centers for validation/certification/of non-formally and informally acquired skills and competencies outside the formal education and validation of the acquired skills at the workplace in the social enterprise. At the same time, the PE will support validation activities carried out by educational institutions according to Pre-school and School Education Act for acquiring a stage/class/degree of education with a focus on primary education. , aiming to ensure access to and increase of education.

Programme strategy:

Based on the identified needs, the programme will focus on:

Early childhood development, enrollment and attainment in pre-school and school education and decrease of the share of early school leavers:

- A more comprehensive coverage of children in pre-school education and the primary stage of school education, including a more comprehensive coverage of children in kindergartens from the age of 4;
- Comprehensive inclusive education in primary education through general and additional support for personal development, early diagnosis of learning difficulties and individual approach, focusing support on children and school students from vulnerable groups, with learning difficulties and at risk of dropping out of school, incl. those whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian or whose parents have lower than secondary education, as well as additional measures aimed at reducing the share of early school leavers, such as those aimed at reducing aggression at school;
- Promoting inclusive education, within the socio-economic integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma and migrants, through partnership and funding for local needs, with a focus on areas with a concentration of vulnerable groups;
- Providing access to career guidance for children and adolescents, including as a means of preventing school failure, absenteeism, dropping out of school, anti-social behavior of children and school students in primary education;

- Ensuring quality of inclusive education by modernizing the curriculum, introducing the competency model and improving skills, digital transformation of education, with opportunities to expand the scope of distance learning in an electronic environment, promoting pursuit for excellence in education, by supporting talented children and school students, innovative curricula and content, innovative kindergardens and schools;
- Within the support of activities of interest to stimulate the development of personal qualities, social and creative skills and manifestations of children's abilities in pre-school education and additional training for students in school education, special focus will be placed on obtaining additional knowledge and skills aimed at transition to a green economy;
- Ensuring flexible planning of vocational education and training, adequately reflecting changing labour market trends, including the development of digitalisation and technology, the future of occupations and new forms of organisation and the development of the labour market, demographic trends and trends towards a green economy and sustainable development;
- Improving the attractiveness, accessibility, quality and applicability of vocational training and education in relation to the needs of the labor market, and its link to specific territorial characteristics, taking into account global, national and sectoral trends, by modernizing the content together with employers, introducing flexible models and forms of training, enhanced participation in learning schemes in the work process, increasing the share of the dual form of training in VET, creating systems for tracking graduates. Strengthening the connection of VET with higher education and science and creating common spaces for learning – VET, HE and science with a connection to the needs of the labor market, as well as participation in regional, sectoral, national and European networks;
- Horizontally at all stages and levels of education, the improvement of skills, capacity and continuous qualification of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, teachers and educational leaders/managers in pre-school and school education, incl. vocational education and training will be supported, with emphasis on teacher training, digital competencies, work with children and school students with problem behavior and those from vulnerable groups, incl. updating the curricula for teacher training in higher education;
- Increasing the scope and applicability of higher education and labor market relevance by increasing innovation and entrepreneurship, providing systems for tracking graduates at university level, career guidance, student placements and the transition to a dual system of higher education, including through enhanced partnerships with nationally representative organizations of employers;
- Modernization of higher education, by updating the training documentation, introducing a competence-approach in teaching and learning, digital transformation and strengthening the link with science;
- Internationalization and consolidation of higher education, by promoting the circular and incoming mobility of teachers and students, participation in building university networks, joint curricula and resource sharing;

- Improving the qualification and improving the skills of teachers and academic staff in higher education.
- Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 of the Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030 will be supported.
- The program will support measures, especially in the field of VET and higher education, to create a skilled and sustainable workforce that is prepared for both the digital economy and transition to a green economy.
- Measures to update curricula and practical training aimed at increasing knowledge and developing skills for transition to a green economy will respond to the Country specific recommendations for 2020 adopted by the Council to focus investment in the field of green and digital transition.
- In addition to updating curricula for students, both in VET and HE, to promote their awareness and participation in creating a green future, measures will be supported to create appropriate qualifications and update of the knowledge of pedagogical specialists in VET and teachers in HE.

Priority 1 will contribute to the achievement of the following contextual indicator of the Social Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights:

- “Early leavers from education and training, as a share of population aged 18-24” – 13.9% [2019]

The priority will contribute to the achievement of the following contextual indicator, set out in the Partnership Agreement: “Increasing the share of people aged 20-24 with secondary education”.

The contribution to the achievement of these indicators will be monitored through specific result indicators “Share of children and school students with learning disabilities who have received additional support for personal development and enrolled in a higher group grade” and “Share of children covered in preschool and school education, through the mechanism for joint work of institutions, enrolled in a higher group or grade”.

Priority 2 will contribute directly to the achievement of the following contextual indicator of the Social Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights:

“People with basic or above basic level of digital skills, as a share of the population aged 16-74” – 29% [2019]:

The priority will also contribute to the achievement of the following contextual indicators:

- “Quality of the education system”, “Reduction of the share of school students with lower than critical results, on average for the three areas of PISA”, set out in the Partnership Agreement;
- “Share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy”, set out in the Partnership Agreement and the Bulgaria 2030 Strategy.

The contribution to the achievement of these indicators will be monitored through specific result indicators “Increase in the average final annual grade in reading, mathematics and science of supported lower secondary school students” and “Improvement of the national score in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).”

Priority 3 will contribute directly to the achievement of the following contextual indicator of the Social Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights:

“Tertiary educational attainment as a share of population in the age group 30-34” – 32,5% [2019]

The priority will also contribute directly to the achievement of the following contextual indicator: “Participation in lifelong learning for people aged 25-64” set out in the Partnership Agreement.

The contribution to the achievement of these indicators will be monitored through specific result indicators “Share of supported school students with improved practical skills” and “Share of students who have undergone practical training in a real work environment”.

For Jobs and growth objective:

TABLE 1		
Policy objective	Specific objective or dedicated priority*	Justification (summary)
PO 4 A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights	<i>ESF+</i> <i>(iv) improving the quality, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems, to support acquisition of key competences including digital skills</i>	[2 000 per specific objective or dedicated priority]] Support under this specific objective will focus on addressing the following high priority investment needs, outlined in Annex D of the 2019 European Semester Report for Bulgaria: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- creation of quality inclusive school education; ensuring the acquisition of basic and digital skills and promoting inclusion in the field of education and training;- support teachers' and trainers' professional development and promote innovative teaching methods and content to best support disadvantaged school students;- increasing the attractiveness, quality and applicability of vocational education and training programmes and promoting participation in adult learning;- improve quality and labour market relevance of higher education, including joint research actions and traineeships in companies. Support for this specific objective will address the necessary actions recommended to Bulgaria in the Country specific recommendations (CSR) for 2019 and 2020 adopted by Council in the field of education: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strengthening employability by reinforcing skills, including digital skills.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups. - Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education. <p>Under this specific objective, the Program will contribute to the achievement of the indicators included in the Strategic Framework for Education 2021-2030:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing the employment rate of recent VET graduates (1-3 years) who do not continue their education from 68.6% in 2019 to 80% in 2030. - Population with basic digital skills - an increase from 29% in 2019 to 44% in 2030. <p>As well as the indicators included in the Partnership Agreement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase of the net enrollment rate in higher education of persons aged 19-23 from 44% in 2019 to 50% - Increase of the share of 30-34-year-olds with completed higher education to 40% compared to 32.7% in 2019; <p>According to the EC Report on Bulgaria 2020, the quality of the education system continues to be a challenge, despite ongoing reforms. The weak achievements in the field of education, confirmed by the results of the PISA survey for 2018, underline the need for more targeted measures.</p> <p>VET reform continues, but the employment rate of VET graduates is still below the EU average. The share of higher education graduates is still below the target of the Europe 2020 strategy, and the provision of higher education is only partially in line with the needs of the labor market. The level of participation in adult learning programs is among the lowest in the EU.</p> <p>The programme will support the transformation of Bulgarian education by modernising education institutions, improving the quality of education, introducing innovative teaching methods, updating curricula and introducing digital change in learning and teaching, as well as ensuring equal access to quality and inclusive education for all.</p> <p>To address the weaknesses in the quality of the educational service provided and the reform of the education sector, the Programme will strengthen the focus on learning the key competences for lifelong learning (including digital,</p>
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		<p>linguistic, social) from an early age in the framework of the formal education and at the same time to raise awareness of the value of education, training and learning. Important emphases in this regard are the acquisition of functional literacy, relevant (inter) disciplinary and practice-oriented knowledge and skills, as well as the development of creative and critical thinking, responsibility and problem-solving skills, civic engagement.</p> <p>Funding will focus on improving the quality and relevance of school education for achieving professional fulfilment. In this respect, of key importance will be the updating of educational plans and curricula and content modernization, flexible pathways and programmes for second chance, the acquisition of professional skills, the training of teachers and the introduction of innovative teaching methods, the maintenance of a modern educational environment, the development of partnership formats with business and higher education, effective management of VET, as well as the extension of the geographical scope of the dual training and the increase of the possibilities for its implementation in a variety of occupations adapted to the needs of the business at regional and local level.</p> <p>Increasing coherence between the needs of business and society, on the one hand, and curricula in higher education and in VET, on the other, will remain a key aspect of the policies supported by the programme. Closer cooperation and communication between the private and public sectors within the learning process will be encouraged, incl. the involvement of the social partners in the formulation and implementation of policies in these areas. The focus will be on training in professions and specialties in demand on the labor market. Support will be linked to the contribution to the labour market and learning outcomes.</p>
<p>PO 4 A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</p>	<p><i>ESF+</i> <i>(v) promoting equal access to and completion of, quality and inclusive education and training, in particular for disadvantaged</i></p>	<p>[2 000 per specific objective or dedicated priority]]</p> <p>Support under this specific objective will focus on addressing the following high priority investment needs, outlined in Annex D of the 2019 European Semester Report for Bulgaria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve inclusive, accessible and quality early childhood education and care, including relevant infrastructure and equipment; - prevent early school leaving with a targeted approach and promote flexible second chance programmes;

	<p><i>groups, from early childhood education and care through general and vocational education and training, and to tertiary level, as well as adult education and learning, including facilitating learning mobility for all</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creating quality inclusive school education, including investments; - support teachers' and trainers' professional development and promote innovative teaching methods and content to best support disadvantaged school students; <p>Support for this specific objective will address the necessary actions recommended to Bulgaria in the Country specific recommendations (CSR) for 2019 and 2020 adopted by the Council in the field of education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups. - Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education. <p>According to the 2020 EC Report on Bulgaria, the inclusive nature of the education system remains a challenge, despite ongoing reforms. This poses challenges to disadvantaged groups such as the Roma and children in rural areas or in vulnerable situations. Persistently high levels of early school leaving underline the need for more targeted measures.</p> <p>Sustained implementation of policies to cover and include children and pupils in the pre-school and school education system and reduce the share of early school leavers will be continued. In this context, priority will be given to integrated and targeted policies to ensure the right of each child to quality education and to prevent dropping out of school, with a focus on children and pupils from vulnerable groups. They will be implemented with policies and measures aimed at increasing the share of secondary graduates and encouraging young people's participation in formal and non-formal education and training.</p> <p>The programme will address the following main needs and challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing proportions of enrolled children aged 3-6 years; - Reducing group net enrollment ratio of school students from I to IV grade; - Low coverage in the different educational stages. - High relative share of the population with primary and lower education;
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A significant share of early school leavers; - More than half of people with disabilities drop out of education early and only 34 % have jobs. - Almost half of the teachers are over the age of 50 and are likely to reach the retirement age within the next 10 years; 10% are already older than 60. - The percentage of teachers for whom there is a significant need for training in the field of student behavior and classroom management, as well as in the field of teaching in a multicultural or multilingual environment, is also higher than the average values for the surveyed 23 European countries (22% compared to the EU-23: 12.5% and 21% compared to the EU-23: 13%). <p>The program will contribute to the achievement of the indicators included in the Strategic Framework for Education 2021-2030:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing the share of covered children aged 4 years in pre-school education compared to the total number of children aged 4 years from 76.6% in 2018 to 91% in 2030. - Increase in the average number of years spent in education from 11.8 in 2019 to 15 in 2030.
<p>PO 4</p> <p>A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</p>	<p><i>ESF+</i></p> <p><i>(vi) promoting lifelong learning, notably flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting</i></p>	<p>[2 000 per specific objective or dedicated priority]]</p> <p>Support under this specific objective will focus on addressing the following high priority investment needs, outlined in Annex D of the 2019 European Semester Report for Bulgaria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creation of quality inclusive school education; - improving the quality and applicability of higher education to labor market requirements, including joint research activities and traineeships in enterprises. <p>Support for this specific objective will address the necessary actions recommended to Bulgaria in the Country specific recommendations (CSR) for 2019 and 2020 adopted by Council in the field of education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening employability by reinforcing skills, including digital skills. - Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups. - Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education.

	<p><i>professional mobility</i></p>	<p>- Improving the employment rate of low-skilled people (from primary to lower secondary stage of primary education - 46% according to the 2020 EC Report on Bulgaria) by supporting second chance and passability between educational stages and degrees.</p> <p>The program will contribute to the achievement of the indicators included in the Strategic Framework for Education 2021-2030:</p> <p>- Increase in the relative share of young people (aged 20-24) with at least secondary education from 84.4% in 2019 to 89% in 2030.</p> <p>The programme will continue to support policies to increase literacy at all levels of education and to promote lifelong learning. Measures aimed at adult literacy and learning content courses for the various educational stages and degrees and the acquisition of professions will be implemented. The promotion of the need to increase and promote literacy and draw public attention to the benefits of literacy will be encouraged.</p> <p>The focus of measures to promote lifelong learning is to increase relevance to the labor market, especially for disadvantaged groups, through opportunities for "second chance" and validation of skills and competencies from non-formal learning and informal learning for acquiring a stage/basic degree of education.</p> <p>The interventions are aimed at overcoming the following challenges:</p> <p>-In 2018, the participation in adult education is at a level of 2.5%, which is significantly below the EU average of 11.1%;</p> <p>- The share of low-skilled adults participating in training amounts to about a quarter of the total population.</p> <p>- Progress in the quality, labor market relevance and the inclusive nature of education and training, despite reforms, is still limited.</p> <p>The quality and inclusive nature of the education system remains a challenge, despite ongoing reforms, and emphasizes the need for more targeted measures.</p> <p>The progress achieved under the procedure "Adult Literacy - Phase 1" completed in 2020 through the inclusion of 10,723 persons over 16 years of age in lifelong learning activities and the expectations under the announced new procedure "Adult Literacy-2" under OPSESG 2014-2020 year, which will end in 2023, prove</p>
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		<p>the need to continue efforts to complete the stage / level of basic education and move to a higher level of education for better realization in the labor market. Given the unfavorable demographic changes and the changing needs of the labor market, raising education as a key factor for the qualification and re-qualification of the workforce remains a priority. In this regard, efforts will be focused on primary education and motivation for upper secondary education.</p> <p>In addition, the programme will support policies related to continuing education of academic staff in higher education. The increase of their digital skills, specializations abroad, qualification of the academic staff and the employees will be stimulated, incl. foreign language teaching, development of soft skills, improvement of teaching skills, attracting teachers from abroad.</p>
<p>PO 4 A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</p>	<p><i>ESF+</i> <i>(viii)</i> <i>Promoting socio-economic integration of third country nationals and of marginalised communities such as the Roma</i></p>	<p>[2 000 per specific objective or dedicated priority]]</p> <p>Support under this specific objective will focus on addressing the following high priority investment needs, outlined in Annex D of the 2019 European Semester Report for Bulgaria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve inclusive, accessible and quality early childhood education and care, including relevant infrastructure and equipment; - prevent early school leaving with a targeted approach and promote flexible second chance programmes; <p>Support for this specific objective will address the necessary actions recommended to Bulgaria in the Country specific recommendations (CSR) for 2019 and 2020 adopted by the Council in the field of education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups. - Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education. <p>The specific needs identified for marginalized groups, such as the Roma, will also be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only 66% of Roma children aged 4-6 attend kindergarten in 2016; - 7% of Roma do not attend any level of education, and about 45% of Roma do not complete secondary education;

		<p>- According to the FRA EU-MIDIS II survey, 60% of Roma children study in a classroom with only Roma school students or a predominant number of Roma school students. This is happening not only in rural areas, but also in large cities, where <i>de facto</i> segregated schools operate;</p> <p>- The educational structure of the Roma and Turkish ethnic communities, as according to data from the last national census 93% and 70% of the representatives of these ethnic groups do not complete their secondary education, respectively, compared to about 30% for ethnic Bulgarians;</p> <p>- Every fourth Roma child and every ninth Turkish child aged 7-15 have never attended school, compared with 5.6 % of children in the Bulgarian ethnic group.</p> <p>The program will contribute to the achievement of the indicators included in the Strategic Framework for Education 2021-2030:</p> <p>- Increasing the share of covered children aged 7 in school education compared to the total number of children aged 7 from 90.5% in 2018 to 98% in 2030.</p> <p>- Reduction of the share of early school leavers from 13.9% in 2019 to 9.5% in 2030.</p>
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**Dedicated priorities according to ESF+ Regulation*

For the EMFF:

2. PRIORITIES OTHER THAN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Reference: Article 17(2) and 17(3)(c)

Table 1 T: Programme structure*

ID	Title [300] [300]	Techn ical assist ance	Basis for calculation	Fund	Category of region supported	Specific Objective selected
1	Priority 1 "Inclusive education and educational integration"			ESF+	Transition Less developed	SO 1 <i>ESF + (v)</i> SO 2 <i>ESF + (vi)</i> SO 3 <i>ESF+(viii)</i>

2	Priority 2 "Modernization and quality of education"			ESF+	Transition Less developed	SO 1 <i>ESF + (iv)</i>
3	Priority 3 "Relevance of education with the labor market"			ESF+	Transition Less developed	SO 1 <i>ESF + (iv)</i> SO 2 <i>ESF + (vi)</i>
4	Priority "Technical assistance"	Yes		ESF+		NA

** Information on this table will serve as technical input to prefill other fields and tables in the template in the electronic format. Not applicable to EMFF.*

2.1. Title of the priority [300] (repeated for each priority)

PRIORITY 1 — INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

This is a priority dedicated to a relevant country-specific recommendation

This is a priority dedicated to youth employment

This is a priority dedicated to innovative actions

This is a priority dedicated to addressing material deprivation**

*Table applicable to ESF+ priorities.

** If marked go to section 2.1.2

2.1.1. Specific objective V⁸(Jobs and growth goal) or Area of support (EMFF) – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance

SO V — Promoting equal access to and completion of, quality and inclusive education and training, in particular for disadvantaged groups, from early childhood education and care through general and vocational education and training, and to tertiary level, as well as adult education and learning, including facilitating learning mobility for all

2.1.1.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi);

The related types of actions – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [8 000]

1. Extension of pre-school and primary education, by supporting the cooperation mechanism of the institutions involved in the coverage and participation in the education system of children and pupils in compulsory pre-school and school age, including:

- Expanding the territorial and demographic scope of the mechanism, by supplementing the scope teams at the local level, incl. by expanding the participation of educational mediators;
- Training and enhancing the capacity and skills of the scope teams;
- Targeted information activities and work with parents to explain the benefits of education and the obligations for inclusion in pre-school and compulsory school education, incl. by engaging community-based NGOs;
- Promoting the creation of sustainable partnerships between schools, kindergartens and non-governmental organizations to ensure full coverage and prevention of dropping out.

The group of activities will be focused on expanding the participation of children and school students from vulnerable groups in pre-school education and primary school education, and will be implemented with a horizontal territorial scope, covering the whole country in order

⁸ Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

to maximize the coverage of children and school students from vulnerable groups in pre-school education and primary stage of school education. Demarcation and complementarity with the National Programme "Together for each child" will be ensured. The National Programme will support activities for organizing, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the work of the teams with participation of representatives of various institutions, development and implementation of a set of measures for each child and school student, identified as not covered, dropped out or threatened by dropping out of the education system, and interaction with the competent institutions for application of an integrated approach, support and promotion of the work of the scope teams members and of the achieved specific results from the work of these teams. The Programme for Education will support activities to expand and train scope teams to work with children and school students from vulnerable groups, to build partnerships between schools, kindergartens and NGOs related to ensurance of access to and retention of children and school students from vulnerable groups in education and intensive work with parents and families of children and school students from vulnerable groups.

2. General and additional support for personal development in pre-school and school education, including:

- Increasing the capacity, qualification and skills of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists for the implementation of general and additional support;
- Increasing the scope and participation in education of children and school students from vulnerable groups by working with target groups and parents at the community level with participation of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, including educational mediators;
- Support for access and retention of children and students in pre-school education, primary (I-IV grade) and lower secondary education (V-VII grade), by providing additional support for personal development, including:
 - Assessment of the individual needs of children and school students;
 - Providing additional pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists based on the assessment of individual needs, such as psychologists, pedagogical advisors, speech therapists, resource teachers, sports coaches and other specialists according to the needs of children and school students in kindergartens and schools;
 - Support for stimulation of mastering key competences and for shaping personality qualities and social competences through application of the competence approach with the aim of preparing for an independent and autonomous life and for personal realization;
 - Application of models/programs/flexible forms of training, incl. for easier passability between educational stages of the supported children and school students, through innovative adaptive approaches for inclusion in the educational process and for implementation of inclusive education;
 - Providing specialized equipment and furnishing of resource cabinets to provide specialized supportive educational environment for children with special educational needs;

- Support for access and retention of children and students in pre-school education, primary (I-IV grade) and lower secondary education (V-VII grade), by providing general support for personal development, including:
 - Early needs assessment and prevention of learning difficulties of children in kindergardens;
 - Implementation of programmes for psychomotor, cognitive and language development of children in kindergardens; individual and group work in cases of established language and/or emotional-behavioral and/or sensory difficulties;
 - Training through additional modules for children in kindergardens, who do not speak Bulgarian language, psychological support and additional training in Bulgarian language.
 - Additional learning in individual training subjects with a focus on the teaching of Bulgarian language to school students for whom Bulgarian is not the mother tongue, additional synchronously training for school students with gaps in learning the material (for example due to absence or asynchronous learning in an electronic environment), counseling on subjects and career guidance of school students;
 - Increasing the language culture and knowledge by learning a foreign language and overcoming gaps in learning, stimulating creative expressions and increasing motivation to learn, through activities of interest focused on thematic areas: "Digital Creativity", "Natural Sciences", "Mathematics", "Technology", "Arts and Culture", "Civic Education", "Environmental Education and Healthy Living";
 - Introduction of educational programmes and practical classes for environmental education, aimed at formation of environmental culture, environmental awareness and environmental behavior in order to get acquainted with the environmental laws, protection, improvement, management and rational use of natural resources and conservation of natural resources and ecological balance;
 - Health care through implementation of modern programmes related to health education, healthy diet, first aid, road safety;
 - Developing the physical qualities and skills of school students by ensuring the conduct of training sessions in sports and sports activities in kindergartens and schools.
 - Encouraging high achievements in the educational activity, in the activities of interests and contribution of the school students to the development of the institutional community, by encouraging with moral and material rewards;
 - Support for intensive work with parents: short trainings for parents from vulnerable groups on their rights and obligations related to the education of their children and for forming in them motivation for active inclusion of their children in the system of pre-school education.

Group of activities 2 will be implemented through a systemic approach with a horizontal territorial scope, covering the entire territory of the country with priority on rural, mountainous, border areas and areas with a high concentration of vulnerable groups. The activities will be aimed at children in pre-school education and school students up to completing basic education (grade VII).

Training of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists will be supported horizontally, according to the identified needs for improving the capacity to provide general and additional support for personal development, according to the individual needs of each child and school student.

Activities for additional support for personal development are focused on work with children and school students with special educational needs (SEN), at risk and with chronic diseases. Activities for general support for personal development focus on vulnerable groups, children and school students with learning difficulties and school students at risk of dropping out of the education system. General support activities by providing activities of interest to stimulate creativity and increase motivation to learn will cover not only vulnerable groups, children and school students with learning difficulties and school students at risk of dropping out of the education system but also a wider range of school students aiming to provide a holistic approach and inclusion of the main target groups.

Additional training in subjects will be aimed at students who have systemic gaps in a specific subject, who have learning difficulties and who have been absent from school for a long time for valid reasons, as well as school students with gaps in learning the content caused by unforeseen circumstances such as COVID -19 with a focus on basic skills development. Subject counseling will be aimed at all students with a focus on retaining school students from vulnerable groups in the education system and revealing interests, attitudes and motivation for choosing education and profession, developing skills for planning school and personal time, developing skills for career development planning, overcoming mistakes related to the choice of education and profession by students, resolving internal and external conflicts related to opportunities for educational, professional and personal realization. Career guidance in school education will be aimed at all school students with a focus on students from vulnerable groups at risk of dropping out of school, talented students, students with special educational needs, students with problematic behavior and will include information, diagnosis, counseling, mediation and follow-up actions in order to assist school students in their independent and conscious choice of education and/or profession and to establish a link between the school and the labor market.

The group of activities will upgrade the project "Active Inclusion in the Pre-school Education System" under the OPSESG in the period 2019–2021, aimed at supporting the policies of the Ministry of Education and Science to improve access to education, early socialization with a focus on children from vulnerable groups. The growing need to address issues such as social exclusion, discrimination and low educational attainment shows that work must continue to ensure equal access to quality early childhood education and care, as the most important basis for successful lifelong learning.

Activities for general and additional support in school education will build on the extremely effective and large-scale projects under OPSESG - "Your class", which focuses on the individual needs of school students and development of their talents and abilities in selected areas and to increase their success and retention in the education system and "Support for Success", which is aimed at reducing the share of early school leavers, as well as their

reinclusion into the educational process. The activities for additional support for personal development will build on the project "Inclusive Education" under OPSESG implemented in the period 2020-2023, aimed at supporting the policies of the Ministry of Education and Science to promote and develop the potential for personal development of children and students with SEN, at risk and with chronic diseases, with a view to their successful realization and socialization. The tools and mechanisms developed in the period 2014-2020 will be used in order to focus on direct work with students.

3. Preventing harassment and reducing aggression in schools, including:

- Conducting of campaigns for tolerance and reduction of pupils' aggression, as well as impact on internal motivation, as well as psychological support focused on children and pupils, pedagogical specialists and parents;
- Support for the use of facilitators in resolving conflict at school, counselling of children or pupils with a psychologist/pedagogical advisor;
- Increasing the competences and skills of teachers to use and implement forms and methods to counter harassment, violence, etc. to work with children and pupils with SEN, work with parents, counter negative events such as aggression/anger — recognition, reasons and prevention.
- Involving school students with problem behaviour in groups for raising social skills for communication and for resolving conflicts in a non-violent way, targeting the child or pupil to activities tailored to their needs; mentoring;
- Participation of school students in school governance and support for volunteering initiatives.

Limited ancillary investments in improvement of learning environment will be eligible under SOv in condition that the purchase of furniture and equipment is necessary for achieving the objective of the operation, or these items are fully depreciated, or the purchase of these items is the most economic option.

List of planned operations of strategic importance – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [2 000]

Specific objective V includes the following operations of strategic importance:

1. The extension of pre-school and primary education, by supporting the cooperation mechanism of the institutions involved in the coverage and participation in the education system of children and pupils in compulsory pre-school and school age;

The operation is aimed at expanding the territorial and demographic scope of the mechanism for joint work of institutions for coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, by supplementing the scope teams at the local level, expanding the participation of educational mediators, aiming to address more focus on the target groups, training for the scope teams, raising the awareness and motivation

of the parents for inclusion of the children and school students from vulnerable groups in education.

2. General and additional support for personal development in pre-school and school education.

The operation provides a targeted approach with national coverage to provide additional support for children and school students with SEN, at risk and with chronic diseases and general support for personal development for vulnerable groups and children and school students at risk of dropping out of school.

The listed operations of strategic importance have been selected due to their significant systemic contribution to the achievement of the objectives of Priority 1, focused on reducing the share of early school leavers and increasing the share of people aged 20-24 with secondary education. These measures are foreseen to be implemented as long-term operations, with a large effect and long-term impact on the education system, therefore special monitoring and communication measures are envisaged to be provided for them, as well as impact assessment. These operations will have a significant effect on the whole educational system in the respective educational levels and will be carried out on the territory of the whole country. Therefore, for these operations a specific evaluation and monitoring plan is foreseen, which to allow for an impact assessment in the course of implementation and a flexible update mechanism will be established, depending on the results of the assessment and monitoring.

The systemic effect on the education system and for the achievement of the objectives of the programme of operations of strategic importance is set in the significantly high target values of the result indicators listed in Table 3: Result Indicators.

The main target groups – Article 17(3)(d)(iii):

Text field [1 000]

Children, school students, parents, teachers, pedagogical and other professionals and other staff; educational mediators; children and school students with special educational needs and with chronic diseases; children and school students from marginalized groups, such as the Roma, as well as those seeking or receiving international protection from other vulnerable groups. Children and school students with gaps in the acquisition of educational material, children and school students at risk of dropping out of the education system, parents of children from vulnerable groups, incl. Roma, early school leavers, etc.

Participants in the educational process, the Ministry of Education and Science and its secondary authorising officers, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, municipalities, non-governmental organizations.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – Article 17(3)(d)(iv)

Text field [2 000] The following groups of activities are planned:

N/A

The interregional and transnational actions – Article 17(3)(d)(v):

Text field [2 000] NA

The planned use of financial instruments – Article – 17(3)(d)(vi)

Text field [1 000] NA

2.1.1.2. Indicators⁹

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(ii)

Priority	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children covered in pre-school and school education through the mechanism for joint work of the institutions</i>	<i>number</i>	6,004	30,018
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children covered in pre-school and school education through the mechanism for joint work of the institutions</i>	<i>number</i>	14,009	70,043
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children with learning difficulties received additional support for personal development</i>	<i>number</i>	2,317	18,532
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children with learning difficulties received</i>	<i>number</i>	5,405	43,242

⁹ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

					<i>additional support for personal development</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children with special educational needs included in pre-school education</i>	<i>number</i>	193	1,544
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children with special educational needs included in pre-school education</i>	<i>number</i>	450	3,604
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for working with children and school students with learning difficulties</i>	<i>number</i>	331	2,649
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for working with children and school students with learning difficulties</i>	<i>number</i>	773	6,180
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of pupils with learning difficulties received additional support for personal development</i>	<i>number</i>	6,397	51,179
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of pupils with learning difficulties received</i>	<i>number</i>	14,927	119,419

					<i>additional support for personal development</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of pupils with special educational needs included in school education</i>	<i>number</i>	610	4,877
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of pupils with special educational needs included in school education</i>	<i>number</i>	1,422	11,380
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of participants in campaigns for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	3,662	29,298
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of participants in campaigns for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	8,545	68,362
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of schools with introduced school plans for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	54	89
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of schools with introduced school plans for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	125	209
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for application of methods for</i>	<i>number</i>	402	670

					<i>counteracting violence</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for application of methods for counteracting violence</i>	<i>number</i>	938	1 564
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>	15,520	99,730
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>	36,214	232,704
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>	7,146	40,959
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>	16,674	95,571
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with disabilities</i>	<i>number</i>	803	6,421
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with disabilities</i>	<i>number</i>	1,873	14,983
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>	733	3,319
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education</i>	<i>number</i>	1,711	7,744

					(ISCED 5 to 8)			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants below 30 years of age</i>	<i>number</i>	7,139	56,654
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants below 30 years of age</i>	<i>number</i>	16,658	132,192

Table 3: Result indicators

Priorit y	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fu nd	Categ ory of region	I D [5]	Indicator [255]	Me asu rem ent unit	Baseli ne or refere nce value	Refere nce year	Target (2029)	Sourc e of data [200]	Comm ents [200]
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applic able</i>		<i>Proportio n of children covered in pre-school and school education through the mechanis m for joint work of institutions enrolled in a higher group or grade</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>MES, MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applic able</i>		<i>Proportio n of children and school students with learning difficultie s who received additional support for</i>	<i>%</i>			<i>90%</i>	<i>MA</i>	

					<i>personal development enrolled in a higher group/grade</i>					
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Proportion of trained pedagogical specialists with at least one qualification credit</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>90%</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>89,757</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO V</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>209,433</i>	<i>MA</i>	

2.1.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention¹⁰ (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(vii)

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	V	111	12,277,776
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	V	111	28,648,144
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	V	112	22,801,584
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	V	112	53,203,696
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	V	117	9,866,070

¹⁰ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	V	117	23,020,830
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Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	V	01	44,945,430
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	V	01	104,872,670

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	V	48	44,945,430
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	V	48	104,872,670

Table 7: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

2.1.2 Specific objective addressing material deprivation

Reference: Article 17(3); CPR

Types of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Main target groups

Text field [2 000 characters]

Decryption of the national or regional schemes of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Criteria for the selection of operations¹¹

Text field [4 000 characters]

¹¹ Only for programmes limited to the specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation

**2.1.2. Specific objective VI¹²(Jobs and growth goal) or Area of support (EMFF)
– repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for
priorities other than technical assistance**

SO VI – Promoting lifelong learning, notably flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility

2.1.2.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi);

The related types of actions – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [8 000]

1. Adult literacy, including:

- Reintegration into the educational system of persons over age 16, dropped out of school and/or without primary education, through educational mediation activities;
- Organizing and conducting adult literacy courses and learning content courses for different educational stages and levels for persons with low education or no education in coordination with the Employment Agency and the MLSP, in order to be subsequently included in acquisition opportunities for obtaining professional qualification;
- Promoting the need to enhance and encourage literacy and to raise social awareness of the benefits of enhancing literacy;
- Inclusion in flexible forms of education of those, who have not completed secondary education and providing conditions for a second chance through career guidance and counseling, volunteering, mentoring, etc .;
- Validation of non–formal learning and informal learning outcomes by assessing and recognizing the correspondence between competences acquired through non–formal and informal learning and the requirements for completing a grade, stage or level of primary education;
- Supporting the transition from education to realization at the labor market.

The positive effect achieved from the implementation of the project "Adult Literacy – Phase 1" under OPSESG shows that it is necessary to continue working with the target groups to complete a degree of basic education and focus on higher education degree. In this regard, the activities will be focused taking into account the experience of implementing adult literacy measures and raising their education through a targeted approach coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science and in applying a competitive selection procedure – Adult Literacy – 2, which is foreseen to complete in 2023. In view of the established need for wider partnership at the regional level in the implementation of adult literacy activities in lifelong learning and facilitating access to the labor market, it is necessary to conclude that the most appropriate tool for their implementation is the approach to Integrated Territorial Investment. Encouraging participation in lifelong learning through the ITI approach ensures

¹² Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

complementarity and demarcation between the Programme for Education and the Programme for Human Resources Development Programme - the focus of the Programme for Education is to facilitate access to and increase education as a necessary prerequisite for the realization of the labor market in synchrony with the regional needs and the educational structure of the local population, while the PHRD focuses on qualification and re-qualification through trainings in the Vocational Training Centers (VTC) of unemployed and working people for employment. Efforts concentrated to expand the scope of the education system, especially in primary education, through the planned activities provide conditions for equal access to educational services and more flexible mobility between educational stages at the regional level and promote lifelong learning. The focus of the planned activities is also prevention of early school leaving (18-24 years), especially for vulnerable groups and regions with declining enrollment in the education system and a high proportion of early school leavers, through a targeted approach and promotion of flexible second chance programmes.

The activities will contribute to increasing the participation of the population aged 25-64 in education and training; reduction of early school leavers; reducing the share of young people aged 15-29 who do not work or study.

List of planned operations of strategic importance – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [2 000] NA

The main target groups – Article 17(3)(d)(iii):

Text field [1 000]

Pupils, young people, adults outside compulsory school age, parents, teachers, educators and other staff, people with special educational needs, young people and adults from marginalized groups such as the Roma, as well as those seeking or receiving international protection from other vulnerable groups.

Participants in the educational process, the Ministry of Education and Science and its secondary budget managers, Employment Agency, State Agency for Refugees, Agency for Social Assistance, institutions in the school education system, municipalities, non-governmental organizations.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – Article 17(3)(d)(iv)

Text box [2 000] The activities under specific objective vi of "Inclusive Education and Educational Integration" priority will be implemented at regional level, through the instrument for Integrated Territorial Investment.

The specific needs and operations at local and regional level will be identified in the Integrated Territorial Development Strategies (ITDS) of the NUTS Level 2 regions approved by the Regional Development Councils. The activities of the programme within the ITI approach will be implemented on the basis of integrated concepts, to achieve a specific goal or priority of the integrated territorial strategy of the region. They will be prepared and implemented in partnership between various local stakeholders (municipalities, NGOs, educational institutions, etc.) and in which, according to the identified needs of the respective region, activities set in the municipal action plans for integration of participants from vulnerable groups will be included. The identified PE projects within the ITI concept will be implemented in coordination

with the projects under the other programmes providing funding under the concept. In this way, the specific territorial needs will be taken into account and the principle of partnership–cooperation between the various stakeholders and participants in the socio–economic life of the specific territory/region will be applied and a better focus of investments will be achieved.

The interregional and transnational actions – Article 17(3)(d)(v):

Text field [2 000] NA

The planned use of financial instruments – Article – 17(3)(d)(vi)

Text field [1 000] NA

2.1.2.2. Indicators¹³

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(ii)

Table 2: Output indicators								
Priority	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Persons over 16 years of age, included in literacy courses or in courses for mastering curricula intended for study in classes of the lower secondary stage of primary education</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5,253</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Persons over 16 years of age, included in literacy courses or in courses for mastering curricula intended for study in classes of the lower secondary stage of primary education</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>12,257</i>

¹³ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants who are unemployed, including long-term unemployed, inactive</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2,626</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants who are unemployed, including long-term unemployed, inactive</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>6,128</i>

Table 3: Result indicators

Priorit y	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Baseline or reference value	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data [200]	Comments [200]
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Proportion of participants aged 25–64 involved in formal education or non-formal learning</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>17.0%</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>19.32 %</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants engaged in job searching upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>2,364</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VI</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants engaged in job searching upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>5,516</i>	<i>MA</i>	

2.1.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention¹⁴ (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(vii)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VI	116	7,673,610
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VI	116	17,905,090

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VI	01	7,673,610
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VI	01	17,905,090

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VI	17	7,673,610
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VI	17	17,905,090

Table 7: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

¹⁴ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

2.1.3. Specific objective VIII¹⁵(Jobs and growth goal) or Area of support (EMFF) – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance

SO VIII – Promoting socio-economic integration of third country nationals and of marginalised communities such as the Roma

2.1.3.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi);

The related types of actions – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [8 000]

1. Enabling access to education by addressing demographic, social and cultural barriers, including:

- Overcoming non-financial barriers to access to education by providing transportation, meals, and school student dormitories;
- Increasing the skills of children and school students for learning and communication in a multicultural environment, including psychological support and additional training for children/ school students with educational difficulties, incl. additional trainings in Bulgarian language, sharing of cultural identity and values;
- Increasing the capacity and qualification of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, incl. educational mediators to work in a multicultural education environment;
- Encouraging the participation of parents in the educational process in a multicultural educational environment; Support for intensive work with parents: short term trainings for parents about their rights and obligations related to the education of their children and for forming in them motivation for active inclusion of their children in the system of pre-school and school education, incl. through participation of educational mediators.
- Promoting inter-school exchange and sharing of educational resources, including joint activities between schools and kindergartens, with concentration of vulnerable groups and those without concentration of vulnerable groups, including exchange visits, excursions, green schools, etc.;
- Support for ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in least accessible areas, through teacher mobility and adaptation to the work environment in different areas and with different groups of school students, through adaptation programmes and social packages for young teachers.
- Support for inclusive educational environment through providing textbooks, teaching aids and materials; additional work of pedagogical specialists with school students from marginalized groups (including in the summer);
- Support for involvement of local communities with the educational institution, through initiatives such as volunteer campaigns in support of the respective school;

¹⁵ Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

2. Comprehensive programmes at municipal level for desegregation of schools, prevention of secondary segregation and against discrimination, including:

- Prevention and non-discrimination in educational institutions towards trainers and learners, through the preparation of practical guides, information campaigns, training seminars;
- Promoting desegregation of schools and classrooms, forming a supporting public environment through interschool activities, securing partnership with local communities and the civil sector, further working with pupils in host schools, further working with parents and others;
- Addressing negative societal attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity (including by conducting information campaigns aimed at preventing discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity or religion);
- Measures for validation of knowledge and skills and inclusion in the educational system of school students, incl. and for school students studying and/or received a stage/degree of education abroad;
- Synergy with Erasmus+ – mobility of teachers, student mobility, with a focus on socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups;
- Preparation and introduction of adapted teaching materials and aids for school students whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian language;
- Promoting inter-school exchange and sharing of educational resources, including joint activities between schools and kindergartens, with concentration of vulnerable groups and those without concentration of vulnerable groups, including exchange visits, excursions, green schools, etc.;
- Organizing volunteer campaigns in support of the respective school;

Desegregation approach in education is a commitment at national level. The Ministry of Education and Science pursues systemic policies, with precautionary means to guarantee the right to education in accordance with the fundamental principles in the Pre-school and School Education Act. The group of activities under the Programme for education will be implemented with a view to engaging in the decentralization process to build the capacity of local governments and linking them to the education of marginalized groups and will be implemented based on proven territorial needs at local/regional level. The activities will be aimed not only at supporting children and school students from marginalized groups, but also at increasing their social perspectives through their joint education with children and school students from non-marginalized groups in the conditions of extracurricular and out-of-school activities, but also at encouraging local communities towards desegregation policies. In this regard, the support of the programme will be directed to municipalities with a developed municipal plan/strategy for Roma integration.

3. Validation of intercultural education through culture, science and sports, incl.

- Introducing intercultural education through extracurricular activities and education for tolerance, through joint activities between kindergartens and schools with concentration of children from vulnerable groups, and those in which there is no

concentration of children from vulnerable groups, incl. exchange visits, excursions, green schools, etc.;

- Organizing and conducting the learning process in a real environment through outdoor activities in museums, art galleries, cultural institutions, those related to cultural and natural heritage, visual arts, sports and music events;
- Popularizing opportunities for professional development and personal development of the school students through education, by organizing thematic meetings and talks of school students with representatives from different professional backgrounds, scientists, artists, cultural figures, athletes;
- Conducting cultural and educational initiatives promoting reading and literacy in libraries, as part of training in educational strands;
- Developing attitudes towards culture and acquire knowledge about cultural and literary heritage, reading, creative thinking, environmental, natural and exact sciences;
- Organizing visits to acquire knowledge and interests in the field of theater, music and dance and organizing study trips to visit important historical and cultural sites with presentation of the educational content on a specific topic;
- Support for intensive work with parents: short trainings for parents related to the education of their children, incl. through participation of educational mediators;
- Conducting information campaigns aimed at preventing discrimination based on race, ethnic origin or religion;
- Support for inter-school initiatives.

According to the legislation, inclusive education is realized through general and additional support for personal development of each child or school student according to his individual needs. Therefore, Specific Objective V provides for a holistic approach to inclusive education, aimed at helping children and students to develop all their intellectual, social, physical, creative and spiritual skills, and which emphasizes the diversity of needs of all children with a focus on those from vulnerable groups, by increasing participation of children and school students with different needs and reducing their isolation by providing general and additional support for personal development. The activities under Specific objective V are envisaged for implementation as long-term operations with a systemic effect to ensure that each child and school student will not be hindered and impossible to participate in the educational process, as well as to reduce barriers to learning and participation of each child and student and ensuring the participation of children and students from vulnerable groups in all planned activities. The activities under Specific objective VIII are aimed at the inclusion of children and students from marginalized groups in education, through a bottom-up approach, which aims to remove barriers that may hinder the learning and participation of each child by activating the participation of target groups in a single educational process and their interaction with other target groups and foresees combined activities that are not only targeted at vulnerable groups, with the main focus on intercultural education, through intercultural interaction in an educational environment, between educational institutions with a concentration of children and students from vulnerable groups without concentration of children and students from vulnerable groups. Activities under Specific objective viii also aim at the acquisition of knowledge about the different dimensions of cultural identities and

positive perception of differences and intercultural relations, creating skills for constructive interactions in a multicultural environment.

List of planned operations of strategic importance – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [2 000] NA

The main target groups – Article 17(3)(d)(iii):

Text field [1 000]

Children, school students, parents, teachers, pedagogical and other specialists and other staff; children and school students with special educational needs; children and school students from marginalized groups, such as Roma seeking or receiving international protection and from other vulnerable groups. Children and school students with gaps in the assimilation of educational material, children and school students at risk of dropping out of the education system, parents of children from vulnerable groups, incl. Roma, early school leavers, students from vulnerable groups, etc.

Participants in the educational process, the Ministry of Education and Science and its secondary authorising officers, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, incl. private schools as regards activities for affirmation of intercultural education through culture, science and sports, municipalities, non-governmental organizations.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – Article 17(3)(d)(iv)

Text field [2 000] The following groups of activities are planned:

- **Creating conditions for access to education by overcoming demographic, social and cultural barriers** to be realized at territorial level, using the approach of **Community-led local development (CLLD)**.
- **Comprehensive programmes at municipal level for desegregation of schools, prevention of secondary segregation and anti-discrimination to be implemented through ITI**

The operations of the Programme Education under the CLLD approach will be implemented on the basis of the proven territorial needs at the local municipal level, laid down in the strategies of the Local Action Groups developed after a thorough analysis. The Programme Education will fund operations under the CLLD approach of the LAG's multi-fund strategies, thus ensuring synergies and complementary effects between the various operational programmes, which is extremely applicable to PE given the role of all stakeholders in the education process – teachers, parents, children and school students, educational institutions, civil society, other institutions and stakeholders. Coordination between programmes and funds will ensure the integrative element of the CLLD approach in multi-fund strategies, while the establishment and operation of LAGs by municipalities and local communities on a bottom-up basis will complement national policies in ensuring access to education and overcoming local segregation on initiative and with the participation of local communities.

The CLLD approach will be applied on a territorial basis at the sub-regional level - the level of a municipality, part of a municipality or a group of neighboring municipalities, with a population between 10,000 and 150,000 inhabitants. The approach will be applied throughout the country (including rural areas and areas with specific characteristics defined in the National

Spatial Development Concept for the period 2013 - 2025), except for cities with a population of over 30,000 inhabitants, within their construction boundaries.

The success of the CLLD approach is related to the provision of good coordination with the implementation of the Integrated Territorial Investment Approach, which will be implemented in the regions of NUTS 2 Level. The implementation of the two territorial approaches will be carried out with provided complementarity, contributing to the complex development of the territories to which they are applied.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is the leading fund in applying the CLLD approach. The relations between the Managing Authority of the Strategic Plan for Rural Development and the MA of the other programs for the multi-fund implementation of the approach will be subject to provisions of a legal act of the Council of Ministers.

– Validation of intercultural education, through culture, science and sports to be implemented at national level, through a competitive selection procedure.

The interregional and transnational actions – Article 17(3)(d)(v):

Text field [2 000] N/A

The planned use of financial instruments – Article – 17(3)(d)(vi)

Text field [1 000] NA

2.1.3.2. Indicators¹⁶

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(ii)

Table 2: Output indicators								
Priority	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of participants from vulnerable groups involved in education</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>12,158</i>	<i>20,263</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of participants from vulnerable groups</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>28,369</i>	<i>47,281</i>

¹⁶ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

					<i>involved in education</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for work in a multicultural educational environment</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>482</i>	<i>804</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for work in a multicultural educational environment</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>1,126</i>	<i>1,876</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of participants from vulnerable groups involved in courses and training for applying in higher education institutions</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>4,896</i>	<i>8,159</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of participants from vulnerable groups involved in courses and training for applying in higher education institutions</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>11,423</i>	<i>19,038</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>17,054</i>	<i>28,423</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>participants from minorities (including</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>39,792</i>	<i>66,320</i>

					<i>marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>482</i>	<i>804</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>1,126</i>	<i>1,876</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with upper secondary education (ISCED 3) or post-secondary education (ISCED 4)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>5,378</i>	<i>8,963</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with upper secondary education (ISCED 3) or post-secondary education (ISCED 4)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>12,549</i>	<i>20,915</i>

Table 3: Result indicators

Priorit y	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Baseline or reference value	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data [200]	Comments [200]
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ESF+</i>			<i>Proportion of participants from vulnerable groups enrolled in a higher grade six months after the</i>	<i>%</i>			<i>80%</i>	<i>MA</i>	

					<i>end of the operation</i>					
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Proportion of participants from vulnerable groups enrolled in tertiary education</i>	<i>%</i>			<i>50%</i>	<i>MA</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>25,580</i>	<i>MA</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO VIII</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>59,688</i>	<i>MA</i>

2.1.3.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention¹⁷ (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(vii)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VIII	117	8,039,020
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VIII	117	28,501,980

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VIII	01	8,039,020
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VIII	01	28,501,980

¹⁷ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VIII	17	3,288,690
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VIII	17	7,673,610
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VIII	27	1,461,640
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VIII	27	13,154,760
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	VIII	48	3,288,690
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	VIII	48	7,673,610

Table 7: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

2.1.2 Specific objective addressing material deprivation

Reference: Article 17(3); CPR

Types of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Main target groups

Text field [2 000 characters]

Decryption of the national or regional schemes of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Criteria for the selection of operations¹⁸

¹⁸ Only for programmes limited to the specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation

2.2. Title of the priority [300] (repeated for each priority)

PRIORITY 2 — MODERNIZATION AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION

<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to a relevant country-specific recommendation
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to youth employment
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to innovative actions
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to addressing material deprivation**

*Table applicable to ESF+ priorities.

** If marked go to section 2.1.2

2.2.1. Specific objective IV¹⁹(Jobs and growth goal) or Area of support (EMFF) – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance

(iv) improving the quality, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems, to support acquisition of key competences including digital skills

2.2.1.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi);

The related types of actions – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [8 000]

1. Introduction of the competency model, through modernization of the curricula and content, preparation of individual curricula and individual curricula of school students with special educational needs and school students with outstanding talents and increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists, including:

- The development of key competences at all educational levels, including by promoting different learning approaches and learning environments in the field of education, including reading, maths, digital literacy, key competences in the fields of science, civic activism, teamwork, career guidance, socio-emotional skills; Updating the curricula plans aiming to balance the learning time for the acquisition of key competencies and skills for life and work in the 21st century and for development of the talents and interests of the individual; Updating the curricula by presenting competence-oriented, realistic, clear and understandable results from the school students' education based on data, measurement and analysis;
- Updating the assessment practices by developing a system of tools for measuring the achievement of key learning outcomes in the course of internal assessment, based on descriptors (keywords); orienting the exams at the end of the separate stages and degrees towards assessment of the functional literacy in the field of reading, mathematics, natural sciences;
- Training and increasing the capacity and skills of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists to work with modernized learning content through focus on preparing

¹⁹ Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

teachers to apply the competency approach and value-oriented approach in the educational process; Implementation of specialized trainings for teachers for effective pedagogical interaction in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, aimed at raising the qualification and updated knowledge about the transition to a green economy;

- Creating conditions and support for the team work of teachers to integrate the modernized learning content, to effectively implement interdisciplinary links and to work on the acquisition of connecting (transversal) competencies in school students.

According to a recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 22 May 2018, the key competences are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, with an emphasis on basic skills (literacy in reading, foreign languages and basic digital skills), transferable skills, entrepreneurship, skills development in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), democratic citizenship, sustainable development, etc. It should be noted that all key competences are considered equally important, they overlap and are interconnected. And more importantly, they are acquired in an integrated way through the teaching of all subjects. All this brings out the need of modernizing the curricula and increasing the capacity of pedagogical professionals to improve the quality of education by introducing the competency model. In this regard, the systemic approach will have a full and targeted scope of the target groups and will be essential in improving the quality of education and improving the educational outcomes of school students.

After the entry into force of the Pre-school and School Education Act, the state educational standards, curricula and programs have been approved, the implementation of which aims to introduce the competence approach in school. The orientation of the training towards acquisition of a complex of key competencies is related to the change of the focus to mastering of knowledge and skills and their application in life. This also changes the role of the teacher from a source of information into a partner and mentor. The main goal of teaching process is to make learning more attractive and practice-oriented and to build attitudes towards lifelong learning by applying new methods and approaches. Optimization of standards, curricula and programmes is carried out in order to more closely link the knowledge and skills acquired in school with their practical application.

The educational system seeks sustainable and effective solutions for successful inclusion and lasting inclusion of each child/school student, regardless of regional characteristics, socio-economic status of the family and mother tongue.

The planned activities support the achievement of objective 1.1. "Training focused on the formation and development of key competencies and skills for living and working in the 21st century" from Priority Area 1 "Competences and talents", objective 2.2. "Development of competencies in accordance with the changing role of the teacher" from Priority Area 2 "Motivated and creative teachers" and goal 3.5. "Support for full participation in the educational process of children and school students with special educational needs" from Priority Area 3 "Effective inclusion and sustainable inclusion" of the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030).

2. Digital transformation of school education, including vocational education and training, by:

- Upgrading and development of the cloud environment in the education system through the use of more complex and innovative solutions, including introduction of specialized software solutions for analysis and evaluation of educational outcomes, based on using computer modeling, algorithms and artificial intelligence and integration of platforms for distance learning in an electronic environment;
- Improving the conditions for teaching and learning in virtual classrooms by expanding the scope of digital learning content with open access, conducting distance learning in an electronic environment and applying a hybrid form of learning;
- Support of educational institutions and participants in the educational process (pedagogical specialists, non-pedagogical staff), school students and parents for digital transformation of school education through: skills for safe use of Internet, for recognizing risks, threats, fake news, etc.; increasing digital competence and skills of pedagogical specialists and students, incl. skills for computer modeling and skills for creating and using artificial intelligence; enhancing the qualification of the pedagogical specialists to work with digital technologies for introduction of digital forms of teaching in subjects; conducting information campaigns on the dangers of the Internet, the negative effects of fake news and developing skills for using social networks as a platform for self-expression and participation in decision-making processes;
- Improving partnership between parents and schools in the context of digital transformation of school education by developing open-access electronic resources and web-based applications aimed at increasing parental involvement in their children's education.

Ensuring modern quality education inevitably requires the development, adaptation, implementation of digital educational content, as well as the introduction of innovative approaches by updating curricula for education and training, using ICT-based approaches and methodologies that promote the modernization of the learning process, identifying and validating valuable digital educational resources, providing opportunities for blended learning, distance learning in electronic environment (both synchronous and asynchronous), use of augmented and virtual reality, and artificial intelligence for learning purposes. This is also related to the need of provision software or ICT equipment needed to develop and implement digital educational content and programmes.

The success of digitization of education and training is inconceivable without the development of the "human factor" – participants in the educational process will be encouraged to acquire and improve and upgrade digital skills and the use of innovative teaching and learning methods while combining at the same time a diverse set of technologies, including by supporting and promoting the lifelong learning process.

The digitalization measures taken so far have provided an opportunity not to interrupt the learning process after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the announced state of emergency in 2020, which allowed the education system to switch to online work successfully. This provided a basis for moving to the next stage of development of the entire system, in which modern teaching methods and technologies will be available to students and teachers in every school in the country.

The activities under the Programme education will build on the support of the project "Education for tomorrow" and the procedure "Equal access to school education in crisis situations" under OPSESG 2014 - 2020 by focusing on providing modern quality education that provides transition from teaching, storing and reproducing information to the use of interactive methods, active interaction between participants in the educational process, personalization of learning content and orientation to results, through improving the digital competences of participants in the educational process, use of augmented and virtual reality, and artificial intelligence for the purposes of distance learning in an electronic environment and hybrid forms of learning as part of the digital transformation of schools caused by the dynamics of a changing world in order to allow conducting a continuous educational process of students in cases of various epidemics, natural disasters and crises, and transition to hybrid face-to-face learning in an electronic environment and distance learning in an electronic environment.

Given the expected impact and the crisis with COVID-19, a systemic approach is needed, in order to ensure equal access to distance learning in an electronic environment and national coverage of interventions..

3. Activities to increase motivation to learn and pursuit of excellence by supporting talented children and school students with outstanding talents, including:

- Training in courses, summer academies, etc. of art and science and training camps for participation in national and international competitions organised by schools, personal development support centres, scientific and creative unions, foundations, associations and companies, sport clubs;
- Support for participation in national and international competitions, Olympic games and science, culture and sport competitions;
- Excellence awards;

4. Support for innovative curricula and content, kindergartens and schools, including:

- Support for innovative learning content, innovative classrooms and innovative kindergartens and schools, including:
- Encouraging educational innovations in pre-school and school education by developing innovative tools and models in the organization and content of education in kindergartens and schools, incl. innovative methodologies for assessing the educational results of children and students; Developing mutual learning and provoking innovative solutions through qualification of pedagogical specialists for introduction of educational innovations in pre-school and school education ;
- Improving educational outcomes, motivation for learning, participation in school life and development of creative thinking, different competences and emotional intelligence through application of innovative learning content, innovative methods of teaching and learning, innovative models for assessment of educational outcomes and involvement of innovative learning environment in the learning process, incl. by implementing innovations in extracurricular spaces such as green classrooms; by introducing project-based training of students; by creating student research communities together with representatives of business, science and technology;

- Encouraging the sharing of resources between kindergartens and between schools by creating and implementing a package of methods and tools for tracking and multiplying good innovation practices.

It is envisaged that the activities will upgrade the national programme "Innovation in Action", which supports the policy of building an innovative educational environment, which is related to creating conditions and support for developing a culture for creating and implementing innovations in all spheres of school life in all kindergartens and schools, incl. the creation of professional communities in and between schools, in which teachers from different fields of knowledge join forces and time to achieve common goals and multiply good innovation practices. To achieve this goal it is necessary to stimulate the establishment of links, exchanges and networks between innovative schools and kindergartens, as well as with other schools and kindergartens in the country that are ready to create and implement innovations, the availability of information platform and implementation of mobility for innovation and good practice. The activities under Program for Education focus on the introduction of innovative methods of learning, teaching and assessment in kindergartens and schools in order to achieve better educational results for children and students, improving their motivation to learn, developing creative thinking, emotional intelligence and different competencies, encouraging the sharing of resources between kindergartens and between schools in order to achieve a systemic effect of the funding provided under the Programme.

5. Activities in support of the promotion of alternative access to the teaching profession, by attracting and ensuring the access of highly qualified human resources to the teaching profession – applicable to each group of activities above under Priority 2.

The activities will upgrade the results of the Motivated Teachers National Programme, which has been operating since 2019 and thanks to which about 150 people have already taken their way to the classrooms, as well as the project "New Way for New Talents in Teaching" (NEWTT) funded under Key Objective 3 (Support for innovative policies in the field of education) of Erasmus+. Between 2016 and 2019, the project attracted successful graduates, graduating students and professionals from various fields, with diverse academic and professional experience, who would not enter the teaching profession through traditional ways of teaching teachers. The main reasoning for entering the profession of the participants in the innovative training programme are the desire to work with children and youth and the sense of social responsibility. After the end of the two-year programme, which includes theoretical training and teaching in school, the participants in the innovative path to access to school in Bulgaria have more pedagogical knowledge than traditionally trained teachers from the control group. The schools have welcomed the new teachers. In their face, they recognized valuable support in tackling the growing challenges in the classroom and in the communities in which they work. An innovative pathway to accessing the profession has successfully helped schools meet the needs of the underprivileged communities in which they operate by giving them access to competent and committed teachers with a range of knowledge.

Limited ancillary investments in improvement of learning environment will be eligible under SOIV in condition that the purchase of furniture and equipment is necessary for achieving the

objective of the operation, or these items are fully depreciated, or the purchase of these items is the most economic option.

List of planned operations of strategic importance – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [2 000]

The following operations will be performed as such of strategic importance:

1. Introduction of the competence model, through modernization of the curricula and content, preparation of individual curricula and individual study programmes of school students with special educational needs and school students with outstanding talents and increasing the capacity of pedagogical professionals;

The operation is aimed at developing key competencies at all educational levels, updating assessment practices by developing a system of tools for measuring the achievement of key learning outcomes and training and increasing the capacity and skills of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists to work with modernized learning content through focus in preparing teachers to apply the competency approach.

2. Digital transformation of school education, incl. vocational education and training;

The operation is aimed at upgrading and developing the cloud environment in the education system, improving conditions for teaching and learning in virtual classrooms, hybrid face-to-face learning in electronic environment and distance learning in electronic environment and increasing digital competences of teachers and school students.

These operations of strategic importance have been selected due to their expected significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the programme, and therefore they will be subject of special monitoring and communication measures. These operations will have a significant effect on the whole educational system in the respective educational levels and will be performed on the territory of the whole country. It is envisaged that these operations of strategic importance will be implemented as long-term operations with a systemic effect, ensuring equal access to education throughout the country. These operations will provide for a specific evaluation and monitoring plan to allow for an impact assessment in the course of implementation and a flexible update mechanism will be established, depending on the results of the assessment and monitoring. The two operations of strategic importance in Priority 2 will make a major contribution to achieving the objectives of the priority, aimed at raising the level of digital skills and increasing the educational results of school students.

The main target groups – Article 17(3)(d)(iii):

Text field [1 000]

Children, school students, parents, pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists and other staff.

Participants in the educational process, the Ministry of Education and Science and its secondary authorising officers, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, incl. private schools in terms of support activities for innovative curricula and content, kindergartens and schools, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, .

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – Article 17(3)(d)(iv)

Text field [2 000] The following groups of activities are planned:

N/A

The interregional and transnational actions – Article 17(3)(d)(v):

Text field [2 000] N/A

The planned use of financial instruments – Article – 17(3)(d)(vi)

Text field [1 000] NA

2.2.1.2. Indicators²⁰

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(ii)

Priority	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of supported school students with outstanding gifts and talents</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>1,065</i>	<i>1,775</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of supported school students with outstanding gifts and talents</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>2,485</i>	<i>4,142</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of schools having introduced modernized educational content based on development of key competencies</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>194</i>	<i>648</i>

²⁰ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of schools having introduced modernized educational content based on development of key competencies</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>453</i>	<i>1,511</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for:</i> <i>- work with modernized educational content;</i> <i>- work with digital technologies for introduction of digital forms of teaching</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>3,680</i>	<i>16,354</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for:</i> <i>- work with modernized educational content;</i> <i>- work with digital technologies for introduction of digital forms of teaching</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>8,586</i>	<i>38,160</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of schools having introduced digital forms of teaching</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>648</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of schools having introduced digital forms of teaching</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>1,511</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of school students trained to work</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>21,101</i>	<i>140,674</i>

					<i>with new technologies and acquiring digital competencies</i>			
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of school students trained to work with new technologies and acquiring digital competencies</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>49,236</i>	<i>328,240</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of educational institutions that have introduced innovative curricula</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of educational institutions that have introduced innovative curricula</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>251</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>22,166</i>	<i>142,449</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>51,721</i>	<i>332,382</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>3,680</i>	<i>16,354</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>8,586</i>	<i>38,160</i>

Table 3: Result indicators

Priorit y	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Baseline or reference value	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data [200]	Comments [200]
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Improving the national result in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>427</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>448</i>	<i>B2030 , OECD (PISA)</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Proportion of trained pedagogical specialists with at least one qualification on credit</i>	<i>%</i>			<i>60%</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Increase in the average final annual grade in reading, mathematics and natural sciences for junior high school students</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>B2030 , OECD (PISA)</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>128,204</i>	<i>MA</i>	

<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>299,144</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>14,719</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>SO IV</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving</i>	<i>number</i>		<i>2019</i>	<i>34,344</i>	<i>MA</i>	

2.2.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention²¹ (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(vii)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	IV	108	32,886,900
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	IV	108	76,736,100
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	IV	112	28,501,980
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	IV	112	66,504,620

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	IV	01	61,388,880
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	IV	01	143,240,720

²¹ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	IV	48	61,388,880
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	IV	48	143,240,720

Table 7: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

2.1.2 Specific objective addressing material deprivation

Reference: Article 17(3); CPR

Types of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Main target groups

Text field [2 000 characters]

Decryption of the national or regional schemes of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Criteria for the selection of operations²²

Text field [4 000 characters]

²² Only for programmes limited to the specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation

2.3. Title of the priority [300] (repeated for each priority)

PRIORITY 3 – RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION WITH THE LABOR MARKET

This is a priority dedicated to a relevant country-specific recommendation

This is a priority dedicated to youth employment

This is a priority dedicated to innovative actions

This is a priority dedicated to addressing material deprivation**

**Table applicable to ESF+ priorities.*

*** If marked go to section 2.1.2*

2.3.1. *Specific objective IV²³(Jobs and growth goal) or Area of support (EMFF) – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance*

(iv) improving the quality, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems, to support acquisition of key competences including digital skills

2.3.1.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi);

The related types of actions – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [8 000]

1. VET adaptation to labour market dynamics:

- Support for establishment of Sectoral Councils for Skills, development and implementation of sectoral skills strategies and sectoral qualification frameworks, including digital and green skills and professions of the future in the List of Vocational Education and Training (LVET), upgrading of curricula and school programmes, including learning content in vocational training, in cooperation with employers and social partners. Establishing a system for tracking graduates in vocational education and training;
- Introduction of flexible modular curricula and programmes by professions, taking into account the real needs of the labour market and flexible pathways for reintegration into vocational education or training jointly with employers, including through part-time, evening and distance learning;
- Modernisation of VET by developing digital educational materials on vocational schooling with interactive learning content, open educational resources; E-learning, management of applications, creating and sharing content, forming literacy and culture for working with digital learning resources, creating virtual laboratories and classrooms using the capabilities of artificial intelligence to contribute to management and individualisation of the process of learning and home preparation

²³ Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

according to the level and pace of learning of students, including the preparation of individualised lesson plans;

- Introduction of national examination programmes and credits in VET, in the context of the European credit transfer system in vocational education and training (ECVET).

2. **Support for skills development for the professions of the present and future::**

- Introduction of competence profiles of teachers and trainer from the VET system and attracting vocational trainers in the VET system from business, science and technology and young pedagogical specialists;
- Qualification of pedagogical specialists, including methodology educationalist and methodology teacher and vocational trainers for the use of modern digital technologies, skills for interactive teaching techniques, new developments in the professions they teach, including studies of the learning needs of teachers and trainers in the VET system; Training of the pedagogical specialists to create digital educational content and trainings in real working environment;
- Support for improving the basic skills of students in vocational high schools by including in bridge programmes to overcome identified deficits in general education disciplines;
- Increasing awareness among parents, employers and schools in the VET system about opportunities to increase VET attractiveness and professional fulfilment in occupations and specialities in key economic sectors and for strengthening the relationship of students-parents-employers-schools-local authorities;
- Early career and professional guidance to typical professions, of the trends in the development of the regional economy in cooperation with representatives of employers;
- Strengthening the practical training of school students through additional vocational training in educational institutions through support for school training companies and additional practices in real working environment.

In supporting the activities to modernise vocational education, practical training and improvement of career guidance with the aim to prepare qualified and sustainable workforce, there will be a focus on appropriate vocational training, through which graduates are prepared for the challenges linked to the transition to carbon-neutral economy and blue economy, as well as related to diversification, modernisation and increasing the competitiveness of the economy. Activities for VET school students to promote their awareness and participation in the creation of a green future, this topic will be also focused on the activities to enhance the qualifications of pedagogical specialists in the vocational education system.

With the implementation of the project "School Student Practices – Phase 1" under OPSESG in the period 2016–2018 a basis was created for improving the links between VET and business as 78 schools in partnership with over 250 companies have implemented activities under the project. The project activities have improved the practical skills of 8,350 school students, of which 2,510 in priority professions for the state, to operate in a real work environment with the support of over 2,000 mentors from companies in close connection

with over 1,000 supervising teachers from schools, 1,861 partnerships with enterprises were established. There is an increased interest in certain areas of vocational education, as well as an increase in admission to vocational education during the implementation of the project. The results show the need to continue supporting school students' practical training in a real work environment.

3. Establishment of VET Centers of Excellence

- Support for the establishment and functioning of partnerships between vocational schools and enterprises, including clustering them on a territorial and/or sectoral principle as a basis for their functioning as VET- Centres of excellence for sharing equipment, exchange and enhancement of staff and teachers competences, conducting trainings in innovative methods, including project-based training, interdisciplinary approach, and partners' participation in real-life initiatives and partnerships Promoting partnership, including with small and medium-sized enterprises, and developing entrepreneurial skills, including by developing products and services involving school students;
- Active involvement in the "Knowledge Triangles" in cooperation with universities, research centers and businesses; Support for introduction of scientific approaches and innovations in VET, for promotion of continuing education and orientation of students towards R&D, as well as high-tech, digital and green skills for the professions of the future
- Support the functioning of Centres of excellence as centres for lifelong learning: Combining the provision of initial VET with continuing training for upskilling and reskilling, provision of career guidance services, etc.
- Activities on good practices research, exchange of information, networking, including cross-border cooperation.

These centers aim to link vocational education and training with innovation systems as part of the Innovation Smart Specialization Strategy. The transformation of some of the existing vocational high schools into centers of excellence is the core of that idea. Thus vocational high schools may become high-tech training centers for the respective regions, creating conditions for interconnecting VET with the updated Innovation Smart Specialization Strategy and technology transfer and innovation. It is envisaged that about 4 centers will be established in each NUTS 2 Level region. The inclusion and establishment of lasting relationships between centers and businesses at both local and cross-border levels will improve the development of 'skills ecosystems' and contribute to the acquisition of high-quality skills and competences that meet the needs of the economy. The operation will be complemented by the infrastructure measures for modernization of educational infrastructure under the Programme for Development of the Regions.

4. Development of the dual training system, including:

- Additional vocational training for school students from the first stage of secondary education and the opportunity to move from daily to dual form for school students from the second stage of secondary education, information campaigns and awareness campaigns for employers, parents and students, creating networks, trainings of teachers and mentors, support, including methodical for mentors, preparation of

learning content, adequate up-to-date and relevant to the labour market demand, career guidance and trial internshipM sharing experience.

The support for the activities of the dual system of training will be focused on dual training in economic sectors related to the transition to carbon-neutral economy and blue economy, as well as related to diversification, modernisation and increasing the competitiveness of the economy.

The planned activities will upgrade and further develop the support for the expansion of the dual training system, launched in 2020 with the implementation of the OPSESG project "Support for a dual training system", which is expected to end in 2023. One of the objectives of the support for the dual system is related to the improvement of the connection "student – school – parent – employer" and promotion of the dual system of education. Involving more employers requires activities to be implemented at least at the planning area level to reflect the specific needs of the local economy. This determines the need to implement the activities through the ITI approach.

5. Introduction of forms of dual education in applicable specialties in higher education, including:

- Research of international experiences within the EU;
- Survey of the attitudes of business and universities in the country for the introduction of a dual form of education in HE;
- Preparation of methodologies, manuals, training materials, samples of agreements between higher education institutions and employers and trainees for conducting dual training in higher education with the participation of the social partners;
- Preparation of normative documents for the introduction of dual training in higher education;
- Organizing a unified network for career guidance, in accordance with the needs of the labor market and upgrading the system for monitoring graduates at national level.
- Introduction of dual training in applicable specialties in higher education and other forms of joint training (incubators, summer schools, career events, etc.) between HEIs and employers; Training for teachers and mentors;

In 2019, the implementation of the EU-funded EDU–LAB project (under the Danube Cross–Border Cooperation Programme) was completed. The activities were aimed at improving the professional opportunities of young people in the Danube region. The main objective of the project is the development of capacity and the development of new approaches in education with the support of a dual form of education. EDU–LAB brings together partners from the higher education sector, business organizations and national public authorities from different countries in the Danube region. With the activities envisaged in the programme for introduction of dual education, the project activities will be upgraded and expanded.

6. Professional orientation of students through practices, including:

- Implementation and development of systems for monitoring graduates, at higher education level and maintenance of graduates' clubs.

- Supporting the professional orientation of students through career centers.
- Providing enhanced practical training of students to acquire competencies and qualities sought in the labor market by providing student internships and practices based on assessment of career guidance of students in priority professional strands, including through providing practical training in universities, research organizations and employers.
- Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education in the digital economy, supporting and stimulating the entrepreneurial activity of students and teachers, incl. support for startups of students and PhD students, including through the development and implementation of mentoring programmes with the participation of business representatives.

In the activities to support the practical training of students and doctoral students, the focus will be on increasing knowledge and creating skills for the transition to a green economy.

In 2019, the implementation of the project "Student Internships – Phase 1" under OPSESG was completed, which provided practical training to over 46 thousand students in a real work environment. In the course of the students' practical training, the academic mentors received feedback from the employers to what extent the students' academic preparation corresponds to the needs of the labor market and in which aspects improvement is needed.

Taking into account the positive impact of the project and in support of the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science aimed at improving the quality of higher education and creating a sustainable connection with the labor market, in early 2020 the implementation of the project "Student practices -2" was launched expecting to involve a total of 44 thousand students. Priority inclusion in practical training is envisaged by setting quotas for students studying in the fields of higher education Pedagogical Sciences, Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics and Technical Sciences.

One of the significant effects of these projects is that better career guidance of students and more informed selection of staff by employers is achieved, which justifies the need to continue in the same direction.

Based on the experience of the mentioned projects under OPSESG and with regard to the condition to provide equal access to practical training to all students, the planned activities under the Programme for Education will be implemented through a systemic approach.

7. Strengthening the competence approach in priority professional fields, in partnership with business, through modernization of curricula, teaching methods and the learning process in accordance with current and future needs of the labor market and by introducing and developing T-skills and development of creative and universal skills, internationalization and participation in international networks and resource sharing, including:

- Establishing joint between business and higher educational institutions centers for assessment and validation of competencies for professions requiring higher qualification, as well as knowledge, skills and competencies acquired as a result of non-formal and informal learning;
- Creating a mechanism for anticipating the needs and trends of the labor market by developing and introducing competence profiles of the specialties in the higher

education institutions; tools to assess the relevance of curricula to skills needs in the labour market; Competence-based training models for students in interaction between higher education institutions and business;

- Introduction of competency model in the curricula by creating joint courses, bachelor's and master's programmes for competency-based training between higher education institutions in Bulgaria and attracting prominent business practitioners and government institutions and scientists in academic classes; Development and introduction of curricula for application of new methods of teaching and assessment of students' knowledge and skills, introduction of hybrid disciplines and specialties, strengthening of the interdisciplinary approach and wider use of common resources (teachers, teaching base, teaching content and issuance of general / double / joint diplomas), incl. developing and introducing curricula in a foreign language and attracting teachers from abroad;
- Promoting the development of civic, social and foreign language competences short-term mobility and internships in foreign universities of students and doctoral students studying in priority professional strands;
- Encouraging the development of key competences for lifelong learning through development and implementation of joint programmes for continuing education between HEIs and employers for qualification and re-qualification as a main tool for adaptation to the changing requirements of the labor market and the dynamics of high-tech professions;

The curriculum update activities will focus on increasing knowledge and creating skills for the transition to a green economy.

In 2020, started submission of project proposals under the procedure "Modernization of higher education" under OPSESG, which lays the foundations for modernization of teaching and learning systems in higher education, encouraging them to share the HEI's resources (human, financial and material), make better use of digital and blended learning, introduce flexible teaching methods and improve lifelong learning opportunities.

Through the activities of the Programme for Education, the support for higher education institutions will be upgraded and expanded, based on the experience of the already established partnerships between Bulgarian higher education institutions, but it will focus on the introduction of competence-based learning, promoting the development of key lifelong learning competencies, foreign language competence, civic and social competences, general digital competences and introduction of new methods for assessing students' knowledge and skills, based on skills for debating, conducting scientific experiments or theoretical modeling, solving real problems, digital creativity, presenting information to a specialized and non-specialized audience, as well as the ability to understand the nature of the problem topic, including through various digital tools and developing skills for self-regulation of learning. The developed competency profiles, tools for assessing the compliance of curricula with the needs of skills on the labor market and models for competency-based training of students are a mechanism for anticipating the needs and trends of the labor market, including at the regional level, which provides possibility to be applied both to the new curricula developed with funds from the Programme for Education and to the existing curricula of the higher education institutions, incl. of those that higher education institutions will develop in future.

The support under the Programme will provide balanced territorial distribution, encouraging the participation of regional higher education institutions, which train students in priority professional fields, according to the needs of the regions and their real opportunities.

8. Digital transformation in higher education

- Expanding the scope of digital education by creation and introduction of programmes with a purely digital content, in line with the trend towards the development of digital transformation and artificial intelligence and new programs for e-distance learning, incl. transformation of existing curricula into programs with digital educational content or programs for e-distance learning; Creation and introduction of new interactive educational resources and digital and software solutions for applying, training, reviewing and evaluating students;
- Expanding access to higher education through creation and introduction of massive open online courses for students and doctoral students (MOOCs) by Bulgarian teachers, incl. in English;
- Promoting the teaching and learning of modern digital technologies through training in artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), etc., as well as basic training to develop skills for algorithmic thinking and solving algorithmic problems;
- Building an environment for creation of digital higher education institutions by integrating learning and teaching systems and resources into unified platforms, including joint platforms, for implementation of interactive learning and teaching approaches.

In recent years, digitalisation has become a key tool for providing access to better quality higher education, for greater internationalization and for modernizing teaching methods in line with the attitudes and interests and needs of the younger generations. Digitalization can address one of the most difficult problems of modern higher education, namely to provide quality education at lower costs, which are within the capabilities of a much larger number of students of different social backgrounds.

The activities under the Programme for Education will upgrade and expand the support for higher education institutions to provide a quality digital environment, improve the skills of teachers to use ICT-based innovative educational technologies, internationalization and participation in networks, launched with the implementation of the project "Modernization of higher schools" under OPSESG. The support under the Programme for Education focuses on creating an integrated platform for students and PhD students as a part of the process of creating digital universities by expanding the range of existing digital resources and training programs for students and PhD students and integrating them into a uniform learning and teaching platform. The integrated platform will be targeted at students and PhD students and will include a centralized database, e-application platform, academic e-learning platform, blended learning platform (including training in new digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), artificial reality (VR), etc., as well as basic training for developing skills for algorithmic thinking and solving algorithmic problems), a platform for career guidance of students, a platform for lifelong learning and establishing a competency-based approach, online libraries, digital educational resources, etc.

The support under the Programme will provide balanced territorial distribution, encouraging the participation of regional higher education institutions, which train students in priority professional fields, according to the needs of the regions and their real opportunities.

9. Activities for access of vulnerable groups to higher education

- Supporting low performing school students including ones from vulnerable groups from second stage of secondary education to continue their education in higher education institutions by: providing vouchers for candidate student courses, mentoring/tutoring, providing additional teaching materials and aids, etc.
- Supporting the training of students, doctoral students, postgraduates from vulnerable groups by providing teaching materials, programs, incl. technical tools/means and software for distance learning purposes.
- Popularization the opportunities and admission conditions and training of young low performing people ore from vulnerable groups in order to continue their education in higher education through information campaigns, volunteer campaigns, "open doors",etc.; encouraging the participation of parents in the educational process and the benefits of education and higher education
- Supporting non-pedagogical specialists (educational mediators, teacher's assistant and social worker in education) for continuing their education from the second high school stage in higher education institutions, incl. teaching/pedagogical professions.

The activities of the Program aim to support low performing students and vulnerable groups by creating conditions for transition from secondary to higher education. The measures will ensure access to higher education in Bulgaria for a wider range of young people including from vulnerable groups and will improve the conditions for their realization on the labor market. Special focus will be placed on the access to HE of educational mediators. The requirement for an educational qualification according to the job description of the profession "Educational Mediator" is secondary education. At the same time, educational mediators can be encouraged to become educators / psychologists / social workers - these are positions with a high potential for transformation into educators from the community (knowing the culture, traditions and language and enjoying its trust). This will contribute to solving one of the biggest deficits in terms of educational inclusion - more Roma teachers (Turks, etc.), which can be a strong motivating factor in combating prejudice in the education system against minorities and other vulnerable groups and more confidence in the system.

The Program for Education will build on the results of procedure "Access for vulnerable groups to higher education" under OPSESG, which is planned to be implemented in the period 2021-2023.

Limited ancillary investments in improvement of learning environment will be eligible under SOiv in condition that the purchase of furniture and equipment is necessary for achieving the objective of the operation, or these items are fully depreciated, or the purchase of these items is the most economic option.

List of planned operations of strategic importance – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [2 000]

Group of activities:

- 1. Adaptation of VET to the dynamics of the labor market**
- 2. Support for skills development for present and future professions**
- 5. Introduction of forms of dual education in applicable specialties in higher education**
- 6. Professional orientation of students through practices**

These operations of strategic importance have been selected on the condition that they make a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the programme, and will be the subject of special monitoring and communication measures. These operations will have a significant impact on the vocational education and training system and on the higher education system in terms of the main challenges related to strengthening the labor market relevance. In this regard, the operations will be carried out throughout the country. It is envisaged that these operations of strategic importance be implemented as long-term operations with a systemic effect, ensuring equal access to the supported activities throughout the country. A specific evaluation and monitoring plan will be provided for them, allowing an impact assessment in the course of implementation and a flexible updating mechanism will be set up, depending on the results of the evaluations and monitoring.

Strategic operations under Priority 3 will make a systemic contribution to achieving the objectives of the priority, aimed at increasing the employment of VET graduates and increasing the share of higher education graduates.

The main target groups – Article 17(3)(d)(iii):

Text field [1 000]

Pupils, pedagogical specialists, teachers of professional training, coaches, parents, students, PhD students, teachers in higher education;

Higher schools, scientific organizations with accreditation for training in educational and scientific degree "doctor", the Ministry of Education and Science and its secondary budget managers;

Employers, nationally representative organizations of employers and employees, municipalities, NGOs.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – Article 17(3)(d)(iv)

Text field [2 000]

Activities targeting the following groups of activities are planned:

— **Development of the dual learning system;**

The specific needs and operations at local and regional level will be identified in the Integrated Territorial Development Strategies (ITDS) of the NUTS Level 2 regions; approved by the Regional Development Councils. The programme's actions under the ITI approach will be implemented on the basis of integrated concepts, which will be developed and implemented in partnership between different local stakeholders (municipalities, NGOs, education institutions, employers, etc.), with a view to maximising the impact on the territory. Each concept will

include a set of interrelated and complementary projects/conceptual projects targeting a territory with common characteristics and/or development potential, incorporating the most appropriate combination of resources and measures to be used purposefully to achieve a specific objective or priority of the ITDS. In this way, the identified PE projects under the ITI concept will be coordinated with the projects under the other programs providing funding under the concept.

The interregional and transnational actions – Article 17(3)(d)(v):

Text field [2 000] NA

The planned use of financial instruments – Article – 17(3)(d)(vi)

Text field [1 000] The final decision of the MA for financing measures for support through financial instruments will be based on the results of the ex-ante assesment in accordance with Art. 52 of the draft CPR.

2.3.1.2. Indicators²⁴

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(ii)

Table 2: Output indicators								
Priority	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		Number of vocational schools having introduced modernized vocational training programs	Number	46	115
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Less developed		Number of vocational schools having introduced modernized vocational training programs	Number	108	269
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		Number of school students underwent	Number	10,247	25,618

²⁴ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

					<i>apprenticeships in a real work environment</i>			
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of school students underwent apprenticeships in a real work environment</i>	<i>Number</i>	23,910	59,774
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists and teachers in vocational training</i>	<i>Number</i>	407	1,017
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists and teachers in vocational training</i>	<i>Number</i>	949	2,372
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of CoEs built</i>	<i>Number</i>	1	5
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of CoEs built</i>	<i>Number</i>	4	13
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of vocational schools having introduced a dual system of education</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	48
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of vocational schools having introduced a dual system of education</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	111
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of higher schools having introduced a dual system of education</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	3
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of higher schools having introduced a dual system of education</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	1

P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		Number of students practices	Number	9,570	31,900
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Less developed		Number of students practices	Number	4,101	13,671
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		Number of joint educational programmes between Bulgarian and foreign universities, as well as specialties and programmes in a foreign language	Number	3	23
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Less developed		Number of joint educational programmes between Bulgarian and foreign universities, as well as specialties and programmes in a foreign language	Number	2	10
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		Number of courses taught through digital educational content	Number	9	60
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Less developed		Number of courses taught through digital educational content	Number	4	26
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)	Number	10,247	25,618
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Less developed		participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)	Number	23,910	59,774

P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)	Number		203	508
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Less developed		participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)	Number		474	1,186

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective (employment and growth)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Baseline or reference value	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data [200]	Comments [200]
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Not applicable		Proportion of supported school students with improved practical skills	%			80%	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Not applicable		Proportion of supported pedagogical specialists with at least one qualification credit	%			80%	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ESF+	Transition		Number of school students in the second high school stage who have concluded a contract	Number			3,675	MA	

					<i>with an employer for practical training in a real work environment</i>						
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of school students in the second high school stage who have concluded a contract with an employer for practical training in a real work environment</i>	<i>Number</i>			8,575	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Proportion of students who underwent practical training in a real work environment</i>	<i>Number</i>			21%	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of students enrolled in foreign language courses</i>	<i>Number</i>			757	MA	

					<i>taught jointly with foreign universities</i>						
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of students enrolled in foreign language courses taught jointly with foreign universities</i>	<i>Number</i>			324	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of students enrolled in courses taught through digital educational content enrolled in a higher course</i>	<i>Number</i>			2,560	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of students enrolled in courses taught through digital educational content enrolled in a higher course</i>	<i>Number</i>			1,097	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants</i>	<i>Number</i>	2019		2,573	MA	

					<i>engaged in job searching upon leaving</i>						
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants engaged in job searching upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019	6,003	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019	23,056	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019	53,797	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019	1,423	MA	
P 3	SO IV	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019	610	MA	

2.3.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention²⁵ (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(vii)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

²⁵ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO IV	112	30 450 833
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO IV	112	93,788,567
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO IV	113	68,989,408
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO IV	113	69,866,392

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO IV	01	99,440,241
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO IV	01	163,654,959

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO IV	17	10,962,300
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO IV	17	25,578,700
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO IV	48	88,477,941
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO IV	48	138,076,259

Table 7: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

2.1.2 Specific objective addressing material deprivation

Reference: Article 17(3); CPR

Types of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Main target groups

Text field [2 000 characters]

Description of the national or regional schemes of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Criteria for the selection of operations²⁶

Text field [4 000 characters]

²⁶ Only for programmes limited to the specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation

2.3.2. *Specific objective VI²⁷(Jobs and growth goal) or Area of support (EMFF) – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance*

SO VI – Promoting lifelong learning, notably flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility

2.3.2.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi);

The related types of actions – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

Text field [8 000]

1. Continuing education of the academic staff in higher schools, including:

- Improving the digital skills of lecturers through short-term specializations in the country and abroad in information processing skills, visual literacy, problem solving and thinking at a higher level, etc.;
- Increasing the readiness of the lecturers in HEIs to work in a multicultural and multilingual environment through short-term specializations in the country and abroad, incl. foreign language teaching;
- Providing systematic technological training to help lecturers in mastering basic and additional methods, techniques and technologies for teaching through short-term specializations in the country and abroad, including for development of moderation skills.

Apart from the activities for updating the curricula for students in higher education to promote their awareness and participation in creating a green future, this topic will also focus on the activities for creating appropriate qualifications and updating the knowledge of lecturers in higher education institutions.

The support under Programme for Education focuses on updating the knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers in higher education in order to provide an opportunity to apply new teaching approaches in line with trends in the development of the education system, both nationally and international level. The proposed activities have a complementary effect to the measures for modernization of curricula, teaching methods and the learning process and to the measures for digital change in higher education, planned in the Programme, and should be considered as an important prerequisite for ensuring sustainability of the results under the measures for modernization and digital change of higher education institutions.

The support under the Programme will provide balanced territorial distribution, encouraging the participation of regional higher education institutions, which train students in priority professional fields, according to the needs of the regions and their real opportunities.

List of planned operations of strategic importance – Article 17(3)(d)(i):

²⁷ Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

Text field [2 000]

N/A

The main target groups – Article 17(3)(d)(iii):

Text field [1 000]

University lecturers

Higher education institutions

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – Article 17(3)(d)(iv)

Text field [2 000]

N/A

The interregional and transnational actions – Article 17(3)(d)(v):

Text field [2 000] NA

The planned use of financial instruments – Article – 17(3)(d)(vi)

Text field [1 000] The final decision of the MA for financing measures for support through financial instruments will be based on the results of the ex-ante assesment in accordance with Art. 52 of the draft CPR.

2.3.2.2. Indicators²⁸

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(ii)

Priority	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
P 3	SO VI	ESF+	Transition		Number of trained lecturers and doctoral students in higher education to build new skills	Number	1,807	6,023
P 3	SO VI	ESF+	Less developed		Number of trained lecturers and	Number	774	2,581

²⁸ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

					<i>doctoral students in higher education to build new skills</i>				
P 3	SO VI	ESF+	Transition		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>Number</i>		1,807	6,023
P 3	SO VI	ESF+	Less developed		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>Number</i>		774	2,581

Table 3: Result indicators

Prio rity	Specifi c objecti ve (emplo yment and growth)	Fu nd	Cate gory of regio n	I D [5]	Indic ator [255]	Measur ement unit	Basel ine or refer ence value	Refer ence year	Tar get (20 29)	Sou rce of dat a [20 0]	Com ments [200]
P 3	SO VI	ESF+	Not applicable		<i>Proportion of trained lecturers in higher education institutions engaged in teaching activities 6 months after the end of</i>	%			80 %	MA	

					<i>the operat ion</i>						
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2.3.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention²⁹ (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)(vii)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO VI	113	25,067,126
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO VI	113	26,090,274

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO VI	01	25,067,126
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO VI	01	26,090,274

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	SO VI	48	25,067,126
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	SO VI	48	26,090,274

Table 7: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

2.1.2 Specific objective addressing material deprivation

Reference: Article 17(3); CPR

²⁹ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, breakdown for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

Types of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Main target groups

Text field [2 000 characters]

Description of the national or regional schemes of support

Text field [2 000 characters]

Criteria for the selection of operations³⁰

Text field [4 000 characters]

³⁰ Only for programmes limited to the specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation

2.T. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PRIORITY

Reference: Reference: Article 17(3)(e); Article 29, Article 30, Article 31, Article 89 CPR;

Description of technical assistance under flat rate payments – Article 30

Text field [5 000]

For the successful implementation of the Technical Assistance (TA) in the period 2021 – 2027 will be used the accumulated experience and good practices and approaches in Programming, implementation, monitoring, control and evaluation during the 2014 – 2020 Programming period. The TA will support all actions of the MA of the PE on planning, implementation, monitoring, control and evaluation of the PE, necessary for the effective, efficient and appropriate implementation of the set goals and achievement of indicators.

The planned investments will provide adequate systems, a good working environment and motivated human resources by highly qualified employees, thus achieving quality management and control of software, and hence more efficient utilization of EU funds. Investments will also be supported by technical assistance from external sources and instruments, taking into account the positive effect of exchange of experience and other best practices. Through the implementation of the envisaged measures, better administrative management of the PE will be achieved, which in turn will reflect on the development of the policies supported by the programme.

To achieve the set objectives, adequate and timely actions will be implemented in the following main strands:

1. Support for improving the administrative capacity of the MA and providing external expertise related to the planning, management, implementation, monitoring, control and evaluation of PE, including:

- Financing of remuneration costs, including additional remuneration for achieved results, for employees performing functions of planning, management, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, provision of information and publicity and control of PE, incl. the related insurance contributions and other surcharges due under the applicable national law;
- Holding and participating in trainings, study visits, seminars, workshops, exchange of experience and best practices, etc. attendance and remote / online forms of the employees of the MA and other structures supporting the implementation of the PE, in order to ensure and maintain high levels of competence;
- Supporting the capacity of the MA by providing additional expertise in the field of information technology, state aid, legal services, effective organization of work processes, simplification of rules and minimization of administrative burdens, services supporting the activities for the implementation of PE, etc.;
- Collection, summarization and analysis of information and statistical data, preparation of reports and documents, conducting research and carrying out other activities aimed at supporting the implementation of the functions of the MA;
- Providing the material base, technical equipment, information systems and software programmes, necessary for management of the PE;

- Support for the activities for management and implementation of PE, including monitoring, control and risk assessment, measures to combat fraud, irregularities, measures preventing corruption;
- Support for the evaluation and project selection processes (organization of evaluation committees, hiring external experts, etc.);
- Providing external expertise, incl. preparation of expert reports, analyzes, studies, research and evaluations at programme and operation level related to PE management;
- Logistical and technical support of the activity of the MA of PE;
- Activities related to the completion of the Programming period 2014 – 2020, as well as the preparation of a programme for the next Programming period 2028 – 2034;
- Other activities related to ensuring the implementation of the PE.

These measures are expected to achieve effective and efficient management of the PE in accordance with the principle of sound financial management, as well as with European and national legislation. The successful implementation of the MA is directly dependent on the qualification and motivation of the MA staff, so one of the key objectives of the Technical Assistance is to support the upgrading of the MA's expertise.

2. Support for improving the administrative capacity of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, including:

- Organizing and ensuring participation in trainings, information days, round table discussions, practical seminars, workshops and other forms of raising awareness, knowledge and skills of beneficiaries (under PE and other EU programmes such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+) and their partners as well as potential beneficiaries;
- Strategic support for increasing the capacity of key beneficiaries and partners in system operations, such as support for organizing and participating in trainings for development, management and sustainability of PE projects, for sharing experience with other EU Member States, etc.: MES, incl. Regional Education Departments and its secondary budget managers, higher schools;

The funds from the technical assistance will be used to finance activities aimed at increasing the capacity of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries to participate in the PE, both with a view to preparing quality project proposals and their successful implementation and reporting. The investments will support the capacity of key beneficiaries of the programme and their partners with a view to the preparation and successful implementation of the planned strategic operations under the PE.

3. Ensuring the functioning of the Monitoring Committee on PE, incl.

- Logistical and technical support of the activity of the MA of the PE for organizing and conducting the meetings of the PE Monitoring Committee;
- Trainings for the PE Monitoring Committee.

- 2. Support for publicity of the programme, including:**
3. Implementation of the measures set in the Communication Plan of the PE and implementation of the requirements for transparency of the implementation of the funds and communication of the programmes set in the CPR;
 4. Organization of public events; production and distribution of advertising and information materials; work with media; development and distribution of audio–visual formats; outdoor advertising; communication through social networks; communication with stakeholders; developing and conducting communication campaigns, acquiring licenses and copyrights, conducting sociological surveys, etc.;
 5. Other activities related to the implementation of transparency and communication measures.

Activities will be carried out to increase the information awareness of the target groups and beneficiaries regarding the investments by the PE, as well as to increase the opportunities for dissemination of the achieved results and good practices.

These measures will ensure the promotion of the PE, transparency in its implementation, as well as wide awareness of the contribution of the ESF+; applications for funding under the programme will be encouraged.

Description of technical assistance under payments not linked to costs – Article 31

Text field [3 000]

N/A

Table 8: Dimension 1 – intervention field				
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ESF+	Transition	140 Information and communication	2,260,000
4	ESF+	Transition	141 Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control	13,500,000
4	ESF+	Transition	142 Evaluation and research, data collection	2,250,000
4	ESF+	Transition	143 Strengthening the capacity of Member States' authorities,	2,440,000

			beneficiaries and relevant partners	
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Table 9: Dimension 5 – ESF+ secondary themes				
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Code	Amount (EUR)

3. FINANCIAL PLAN

Reference: Article 17(3)(f)(i)-(iii); Article 106(1)-(3), Article 10; Article 21; CPR,

3.A Transfers and contributions³¹

Reference: Article 10; Article 21; CPR

<input type="checkbox"/> Programme amendment related to Article 10, CPR (contribution to Invest EU)
<input type="checkbox"/> Programme amendment related to Article 21, CPR (transfers to instruments under direct or indirect management between shared management funds)

Table 15: Contribution to InvestEU* – N/A

	Category of region	Window 1 (a)	Window 2 (b)	Window 3 (c)	Window 4 (d)	Window 5 (e)	amount (f)=(a)+(b)+(c)+(d)+(e))
ERDF	More developed						
	Less developed						
	Transition						
	Outermost regions and Northern sparsely populated regions						
ESF+	More developed						
	Less developed						
	Transition						
	Outermost						

³¹ Applicable only to programme amendments in line with Article 10 and 21, CPR.

CF							
EMF F							
Total							

*Cumulative amounts for all contributions during programming period.

Table 16: Transfers to instruments under direct or indirect management* N/A

Fund	Category of region	Instrument 1 (a)	Instrument 2 (b)	Instrument 3 (c)	Instrument 4 (d)	Instrument 5 (e)	Transfer amount (f)=(a)+(b)+(c) +(d)+(e)
ERDF	More developed						
	Transition						
	Less developed						
	Outermost regions and Northern sparsely populated regions						
ESF+	More developed						
	Transition						
	Less developed						
	Outermost						
CF							

EMF F							
Total							

* Cumulative amounts for all transfers during programming period.

Table 17: Transfers between funds under joint management* – N/A

		ERDF				ESF+				CF	EMFF	AMF	ISF	BMVI	Total
		More developed	Transition	Less developed	Outermost regions and Northern sparsely populated regions	More developed	Transition	Less developed	Outermost						
ERDF	More developed														
	Transition														
	Less developed														
	Outermost regions and Northern sparsely														

	populated regions														
ESF +	More developed														
	Transition														
	Less developed														
	Outermost														
CF															
EMFF															
Total															

* Cumulative amounts for all transfers during programming period.

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Reference: Article 17(3)(f)(i)

Table 10: Financial appropriations by year									
Fund	Category of region	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total

ESF+	Less developed	-	24,213,285	48,426,569	72,639,854	96,853,139	96,853,139	145,279,708	484,265,693
	More developed								
	Transition	-	13,350,215	26,700,431	40,050,646	53,400,861	53,400,861	80,101,292	267,004,307
	Outermost								
Total		-	37,563,500	75,127,000	112,690,500	150,254,000	150,254,000	225,381,000	751,270,000

3.2 Total financial appropriations from the Fund and national co-financing¹

Article 17(3)(f)(ii), Article 17(6)

For Jobs and growth goal:

Table 11: Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Policy objective No or TA	Priority	Priority Basis for calculation EU support (total or public)	Fund	Category of region*	EU contribution (a)	National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of national contribution		(e)=(a)+(b)**	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)**
							public (c)	private (d)		
PO 4	Priority 1		ESF+	Less developed	151,279,740	26,696,425	26,696,425		177,976,165	85%
				More developed		-	-		-	
				Transition	60,658,060	25,996,311	25,996,311		86,654,371	70%
				Outermost		-	-		-	
PO 4	Priority 2		ESF+	Less developed	143,240,720	25,277,774	25,277,774		168,518,494	85%
				More developed			-			
				Transition	61,388,880	26,309,520	26,309,520		87,698,400	70%
				Outermost			-			
PO 1	Priority 3		ESF+	Less developed	189,745,233	33,484,453	33,484,453		223,229,685	85%
				More developed		-	-		-	
				Transition	124,507,367	53,360,300	53,360,300		177,867,668	70%
				Outermost		-	-		-	
Technical assistance			ESF	Less developed						
				More developed						

¹ Prior to the mid-term review in 2025 for the ERDF, the ESF+ and the CF, financial appropriations for the years 2021 to 2025 only.

			Transition	20 450 000	8 764 286	8 764 286		29 214 286	70%
			Outermost						
Total ESF+			Less developed	484 265 693	85 458 652	85 458 652	-	569 724 344	85%
			More developed				-		-
			Transition	267 004 307	114 430 417	114 430 417	-	381 434 725	70%
			Outermost			-	-		-
Grand Total				751,270,000	199 889 069	199 889 069	-	951 159 069	79%

* For the ERDF: * For ERDF: less developed, transition, more developed, and, where applicable special allocation for outermost and northern sparsely populated regions. For ESF+: For ESF+: less developed, transition, more developed and, where applicable, additional allocation for outermost regions. For CF: not applicable. For technical assistance, application of categories of region depends on selection of a fund.

** Where relevant for all categories of region.

For the EMFF:

Reference: Article 17(3)(f)(iii) – N/A

Table 11 A						
Priority	Type of area of support (nomenclature set out in the EMFF Regulation)	Basis for calculation of EU support	EU contribution	National public	Total	Co-financing rate

1. Enabling conditions

Reference: Article 19(3)(h)

Table 12: Enabling conditions							
Enabling conditions	Fund	Specific objective (N/A to the EMFF)	Fulfilment of enabling condition	Criteria	Fulfilment of criteria	Reference to relevant documents	Justification
Thematic condition Strategic policy framework for education and	ESF +		Partially completed.	There is a national or regional strategic framework for education and training policy, which includes: Criterion 1	Partially completed	[500]	[1,000] By agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and CEDEFOP (European Center for the Development of Vocational Training) a national review is being developed on the topic: "Management of the system for estimating skills and their

training at all levels				<p>Evidence-based systems for predicting and envisaging skills</p> <p>Criterion 1a</p> <p>Graduates monitoring mechanisms and services for quality and effective guidance for learners of all ages</p>			<p>compliance with the requirements of the labor market.</p> <p>A Skills Estimating Roadmap will be presented and integrated into the Education and Training Strategic Framework.</p> <p>For the period April 2018-March 2021, the Ministry of Education and Science is implementing E+ KA3 project for piloting a mechanism for monitoring VET graduates – in three areas. The outcomes may lie in a future mechanism for VET graduates monitoring. Analyzes of the connection of VET with the labor market in three regions have been prepared. The development of a methodology for VET graduates monitoring by an external contractor has been assigned.</p> <p>In the field of higher education, the main developed tool in Bulgaria, based on integrated data and containing data for tracking graduates, is the Rating System in Higher Education.</p>
				<p>Criterion 2</p> <p>Measures to ensure equal access to, participation and graduation of quality, accessible, respectively, non-segregated and</p>	Yes	<p>Pre-school and School Education Act</p> <p>http://lll.moe.bg/uploaded_files/ZA</p>	<p>The Pre-school and School Education Act brings forward the principle of prevention of learning difficulties and early assessment of their risk.</p> <p>In 2018, changes were made in the PSEA (SG, No 99 of 2017) regarding the mechanism for financing educational institutions. Additional</p>

				<p>inclusive education and training, as well as the acquisition of key competencies at all levels, including higher education</p>	<p><u>KON za pr educilisnoto i ucilisnoto obrazovane EN.pdf</u></p> <p>CMD No. 100 of 08.06.2018 for the establishment and functioning of a Mechanism for joint work of the institutions for coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and school students of compulsory pre-school</p>	<p>criteria have been introduced to reduce the differences in funding and additional funding (for working with children and students from vulnerable groups, etc.) in order to ensure equal access to education. In September 2020, the Council of Ministers approved a draft ASA of PSEA. It shall regulate the compulsory pre-school education from the age of 4 and the support of the state for the payment of fees for the use of kindergartens, due by the parents. (http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=4993)</p> <p>The measures under the Mechanism have been expanded to include activities related to the prevention of dropouts. Since 2017, coverage teams have sent back to school and kindergarten or enrolled for the first time 51,460 children and school students. The proportion of non-covered school students aged 5 – 16 in the 2019/2020 academic year decreased almost twice compared to the previous 2018/2019 (from 8.47% to 4.73%). An opportunity has been created to share good practices in the implementation of the Mechanism by various institutions involved in the process.</p> <p>The competence approach for mastering key competencies and practical orientation in the</p>
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					<p>and school age</p> <p>(http://back2school.moe.bg/index.php)</p> <p>Ordinance on inclusive education</p> <p>file:///C:/Users/m.ninova/Downloads/nrdb_prioritization271219.pdf</p>	<p>training and its interconnection with the labor market has been introduced in the PSEA.</p> <p>The admission of school students is being restructured and gradually increasing in vocational education and in the professional fields and profiles related to mathematics, engineering, natural sciences and information technology.</p> <p>Strategic framework for the development of education and training in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 (draft): Priority Area 1 "Effective and Sustainable Inclusion"; Priority Area 2 "Motivation for learning and comprehensive participation"; Priority Area 3 "Knowledge, skills, values, talents and potential"; Priority area 8 "Educational innovation".</p> <p>Strategy for development of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2020-2030 (draft):</p> <p>Objective 1. Development of a sustainable mechanism for updating the existing and creating new curricula; Objective 2. Introduction of modern, flexible and effective forms of education; Objective 3. Improving the quality of higher education; Objective 5. Stimulating the participation of young teachers; Objective 7. Building an effective education–science–business connection;</p>
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				<p>Criterion 3</p> <p>A coordination mechanism covering all levels of education and training, including higher education, and a clear division of responsibilities between the relevant national and/or regional authorities</p> <p>Criterion 4</p> <p>Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the strategic policy framework</p>	Partially completed	<p>One of the main components set out in the agreement on criterion 1 (agreement between the MES and CEDEFOP) is the definition of a system of indicators for measuring the results and achievements of educational policy and developing a methodology for monitoring educational policy and information management related to these objectives. The methodology will also include methods for calculating indicators and regularity of indicator development. In this regard, an Interinstitutional Mechanism for monitoring the implementation and development of impact assessment of educational policies will be adopted by an act of the Council of Ministers. It is planned the draft of the said Mechanism to be prepared by September 2020 and to be proposed for public discussion.</p> <p>Strategic framework for the development of education and training in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 (draft):</p> <p>Priority area 10 "Governance and connectivity"</p> <p>Strategy for development of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2020-2030 (draft):</p> <p>Objective 8. Increasing the role of HEIs as an active factor for regional development; Objective 9. Improving the management of HEIs and the evaluation and</p>
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						accreditation system; Objective 10. Improving the structure and efficiency of higher education.
			Criterion 5 Measures targeted at low-qualified workers and low-qualified adults and those with socio-economic disadvantages and ways improving the skills	Partially completed		The first draft of the National Advisory Document with mechanisms and measures for improving the skills of adults has been prepared in implementation of the Council Recommendation of 19.12.2016. The document is available at: http://lll.mon.bg/uploaded_files/Proekt1_konsultativen_dokument.pdf Strategic framework for the development of education and training in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 (draft): Priority Area 5 "Making lifelong learning a reality"
			Criterion 6 Measures supporting teachers, trainers and educators in appropriate teaching methods, assessment and validation of key skills	Yes	Ordinance No. 4 on rationing and remuneration of labor prom. SG, No. 34 of 2017, SG No. 7 of 24.01.2020	The implementation of the policy for sustainable increase of the incomes of the pedagogical professionals continues. In 2020, the amount of the minimum basic salary has been increased by about 65% compared to the beginning of the government's mandate (the relevant amendments have been made in Ordinance No. 4 on rationing and remuneration of labor prom. SG, No. 34 of 2017, SG No. 7 of 24.01.2020). 2. Ordinance No. 15 of 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers,

					<p>Ordinance No. 15 of 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists (prom., SG, No. 61 of 2.08.2019</p> <p>CMD No. 9, prom SG, No. 9/2020).</p> <p>file:///C:/Users/m.ninov/Downloads/PMS9_20_izm-norm-aktove_310_12020.pdf</p>	<p>principals and other pedagogical specialists has been adopted (prom., SG, No. 61 of 2.08.2019), creating conditions for increasing the authority and social status of pedagogical professionals, building a system for continuing qualification, for professional improvement and career development.</p> <p>3. Policies related to teachers are also supported by adopted national education development programmes</p> <p>(http://pris.government.bg/prin/document_view.aspx?DocumentID=u1WkHlzh9oiPz2mXWkMFug==)</p> <p>and projects funded under OPSESG, such as the project "Qualification for the professional development of pedagogical professionals"</p> <p>4. The state encourages the interest in these professional fields and specialties by determining more vacancies, with better funding and by granting scholarships (CMD No. 9, prom. SG, No. 9/2020). Exemption from fees for students in the field of "Pedagogy of teaching in..." is provided as an additional incentive to increase interest thereto.</p> <p>Strategic framework for the development of education and training in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 (draft):</p>
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							Priority area 6 "Motivated and creative teachers"
				Criterion 7 Measures promoting mobility of learners and staff and transnational cooperation between education and training providers, including through the recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications	Partially completed		<p>In 2018 and 2019, a total of 38 information events were held to clarify the opportunities for applying under the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps programme, administered by the Center for Human Resources Development as part of the work programme for the year and the invitation of organizations / institutions in the field of education and training. The Center is constantly updating its plans for holding information events based on the feedback received and the activity observed in the respective calls for applications for the various activities it administers. The information events are available at:</p> <p>http://hrdc.bg/%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%8F/</p> <p>Strategic framework for the development of education and training in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 (draft):</p> <p>Priority Area 4 "Carrier in the professions of the present and the future"; Priority area 8 "Educational innovation".</p> <p>Strategy for development of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2020-2030 (draft):</p>

							Objective 4. Internationalization of higher education and inclusion in international educational and scientific networks
Thematic condition National Roma Integration Strategy	ESF +	viii Promoting socio-economic integration of third country nationals and of marginalised communities such as the Roma		Measures accelerating Roma integration, preventing and eliminating segregation, taking into account gender equality and the situation of young Roma, and setting baseline indicators and measurable milestones and target values	No		Update and adoption of the National Roma Integration Strategy after 2020, including an Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy As a first step in the development of the new strategy, an analysis of the period 2012-2020 will be made. It will help highlighting the best practices and lessons learned and will serve as a basis for the development of a National Strategy for Roma Integration after 2020. The first element of the analyses from the period 2012-2020 has already been prepared by a team of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Meetings were held with the team of analysts and the next steps were outlined. The organization of local meetings with the participation of regions of the country was discussed. Discussions have already been launched with relevant stakeholders, including political officials, on the new elements and the specific structure of the new strategic policy framework for Roma national inclusion.
				Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation	Partially completed		Provided monitoring and review of the implementation of the National Roma

				and review of Roma integration measures			<p>Integration Strategy through special functions of the monitoring, evaluation and control system</p> <p>A system for monitoring and control of the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012-2020 has been developed. The respective functionalities of the System have been developed and are fully operated. Data on the implementation of the 2018 action plan of the Strategy have already been collected. The information required for the new administrative monitoring report on the implementation of the National Roma Strategy is presented and summarized in the monitoring system.</p>
				Mechanisms for including Roma integration at regional and local level	Partially completed		<p>Updating regional strategies and municipal action plans in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the strategy.</p> <p>Updating of the regional strategies and municipal action plans will be done within the partnerships developed within the project under criterion 4.</p>
				Mechanisms ensuring that development, implementation,	No		Development of the consultation and coordination process at national level through the National Council for Cooperation on the

				<p>monitoring and review are carried out in close cooperation with Roma civil society and all other stakeholders, including at regional and local level</p>		<p>ethnic and integration issues and at local level through regional and municipal councils for cooperation on ethnic and integration issues and monitoring at local and regional level.</p> <p>A Grant Agreement has been signed between the National Council and the European Commission (DG Justice) for the implementation of the T.E.A.M. (Together wE Achieve More) project. The implementation of the project has started on 1 November 2019. Its objective is to support the active partnership between stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the National Strategy for Roma Integration by maintaining and developing the National Roma Platform as a process of dialogue, exchange of many stakeholders, participation and cooperation at all levels.</p>
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2. Programme authorities

Reference: Article 17(3)(j); Article 65, Article 78 CPR

Table 13: Programme authorities			
Programme authorities	Name of the institution [500]	Contact name [200]	e-mail [200]
Managing authority	Executive Agency "Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth"	Kiril Geratliev	k.geratliev@mon.bg
Audit authority	Executive agency "Audit of European Union Funds"	Lyudmila Rangelova	l.rangelova@minfin.bg
Body which receives payments from the Commission	National Fund Directorate, Ministry of Finance	Manuela Milosheva	m.milosheva@minfin.bg

3. Partnership

Reference: Article 17(3)(g)

<p><i>Text field [10 000]</i></p> <p>By Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 196 of 11 April 2019 <i>approving the analysis of the socio-economic development of Bulgaria 2007-2017 to define the national priorities for the period 2021-2027, a list of the policy objectives to be supported during the program period 2021-2027, and a list of programs and a leading institution for their development</i> an Indicative List of programmes and leading institutions for development of each programme for the programming period 2021-2027 was approved. In the Decision, the Ministry of Education and science has been designated as the lead institution for the "Operational Programme for Science and Education". By Decision No. 495 of the Council of Ministers of 21 July 2020 <i>amending and supplementing Decision No. 196 of the Council of Ministers of 11 April 2019</i>, the name of the "Operational Programme for Science and Education" was replaced by "Programme for Education".</p> <p>Decree No. 142 of the Council of Ministers of 7 June 2019 <i>on the development of strategic and programming documents of the Republic of Bulgaria for management of European Union funds for the Programming period 2021 – 2027</i> (CMD No. 142/2019) states that thematic task forces are established for the development of the programmes financed by the funds for the Programming period 2021 – 2027, as in the document the conditions for drawing up thematic task forces, the tasks and basic procedures for the task forces are indicated.</p> <p>By Order No. RD09-1942 of 01.08.2019, as amended by Order No. RD09-1654 of 31.07.2020 the Minister of Education and Science assigned to the Executive Agency "Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" (EA OPSESG) to organize the activities for the development of " Programme for Education" for the 2021-2027</p>

programming period, as well as the activities for the formation of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) for its development.

Pursuant to the provisions of the CMD No. 142/2019 and in implementation of the above-mentioned order of the Minister of Education and Science, EA OPSESG formed a TWG for development of the Programme for the Programming period 2021–2027. As a Managing Authority of the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020 EA OPSESG has used its experience acquired in the previous programming period in terms of involving the widest possible range of institutions, organizations and various stakeholders in the process of preparation of the Programme.

As regards the inclusion in the composition of non-profit legal entities acting for public benefit, which representatives to participate in the composition of the TWG, the procedure for selection of non-profit legal entities acting for public benefit stipulated in CMD No. 142/2019 was applied.

On 2 August 2019, EA OPSESG has launched a procedure for selection of non-profit legal entities acting for public benefit, which representatives are to participate in the composition of the TWG. The call was published on the websites of the Ministry of Education and Science (www.mon.bg), EXECUTIVE AGENCY SCIENCE AND EDUCATION FOR SMART GROWTH OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME (<https://opnoir.bg>) and the ESIF Single Information Portal (www.eufunds.bg). The call specified the criteria to be met by the applicant organizations, as well as the application deadlines and the required package of application documents.

The invited groups of non-profit legal entities acting for public benefit activities, which representatives to participate in the composition of the TWG were:

- Organizations working in the field of equality between men and women, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities;
- Organizations working in the field of social inclusion and integration of marginalized groups;
- Organizations working in the field of education, science and culture;
- Organizations working in the field of youth policies;
- Environmental organizations;
- Organizations of local action groups and local fisheries action groups to implement the Community-Led Local Development Approach.

During the procedure no representatives were elected for two of the groups, due to which a second procedure was held according to the requirements of item 11 of Annex No. 2 to Art. 9, para. 4 of CMD No. 142/2019 with regard to the groups of non-profit organizations acting for public benefit, for which no applications for participation in the election have been received or all persons who have submitted an application for participation in the election do not meet the requirements for the specific group (for a **group** of organizations working in the field of gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities and for a group of organizations of local action groups and local fisheries action groups to implement the Community-Led Local Development Approach).

The call for the second procedure was published on 12.09.2019 on the websites of the Ministry of Education and Science (www.mon.bg), EXECUTIVE AGENCY SCIENCE AND

EDUCATION FOR SMART GROWTH OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME (<https://opnoir.bg>) and the ESIF Single Information Portal (www.eufunds.bg). It reiterated the criteria to be met by the applicant organizations, as well as the application deadlines and the required package of application documents.

Subject to the provisions of the Council of Ministers Decree No. 142/2019 and after the first procedure for selection of non-profit legal entities for public benefit, which representatives to participate in the TWG, the nominal composition of the working group was determined by the Minister of Education and Science by Order No. RD09-2726 of 22.10.2019. After the completion of the second procedure for selection of non-profit legal entities for public benefit and after the expressed interest in participating in the TWG by the State Agency for Road Safety, the order was amended and supplemented by Order No. RD 09-666 of March 26.03.2020.

The composition of the TWG for the preparation of the Programme for the 2021–2027 Programming period includes representatives of various departments and organizations:

- Ministry of Education and Science
- Executive Agency Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme
- Administration of the Council of Ministers
- Ministry of Economy
- Ministry of Environment and Water
- Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications
- Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
- Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
- Social Assistance Agency
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Youth and Sports
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry
- State Fund “Agriculture”
- 'Audit of EU Funds' Executive Agency
- Executive Agency "Certification Audit of EU Agricultural Funds"
- State Agency for Child Protection
- Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- State e-Government Agency

- National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues
- National Agency for Vocational Education and Training
- National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency
- Assessment Center for Pre-school and School Education
- Center for Information Provision of Education
- Center for Educational Integration of Children and School Students from Ethnic Minorities
- National Center for Professional Development of Pedagogical Specialists
- National Information and Documentation Center
- Center for Human Resources Development
- National Statistical Institute
- Commission for Protection against Discrimination
- The six regional development councils at NUTS 2 level
- Confederation of Employers and Industrialists of Bulgaria
- Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association
- Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce
- Union for Business Initiative
- Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria
- Confederation of Labor "Podkrepa"
- National Council for Integration of Persons with Disabilities
- National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria
- Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
- Council of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria
- Agricultural Academy
- Fund of funds
- A group of organizations working in the field of social inclusion and integration of marginalized groups
- A group of organizations working in the field of ecology
- A group of organizations working in the field of education, science and culture
- A group of organizations working in the field of youth policies
- A group of organizations working in the field of gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities
- Group of local action groups and local fisheries action groups to implement the "Community-Led Local Development" approach

- State Agency for Road Safety

According to the adopted internal rules for the activity of the TWG for the development of the Programme for the 2021–2027 Programming period, the TWG has the following functions:

- in charge for the preparation of the draft programme for the 2021–2027 Programming period;
- submits through the Minister of Education and Science the priorities of the respective programme for consideration by the Council for coordination in the management of the European Union funds;
- analyzes the priorities of the Republic of Bulgaria and the sectoral strategies in the field of the respective programme and, if necessary, prepares a motivated proposal to the Council for coordination in the management of the European Union funds for inclusion of additional priorities and measures in the programme;
- ensures that the programme complies with the principles of partnership and multilevel governance, as well as with applicable European and national legislation;
- monitors the implementation of the thematic enabling conditions in the relevant sectors and provides information on the progress in their implementation to the working group for the development of the Partnership Agreement for the period 2021–2027;
- monitors changes in European legislation, reflecting the necessary changes and updating the draft programme;
- submits, through the Minister of Education and Science, the draft programme for consideration by the Council for Coordination in the Management of EU Funds;
- performs other tasks assigned to it by the respective order for its establishment.

In carrying out its functions, the task force interacts with the thematic working groups for the development of other programmes and the task force for the development of the Partnership Agreement for the Programming period 2021–2027, regularly exchanging information on progress in developing the Partnership Agreement and programmes.

TWG reports its work to the Minister of Education and Science and to the Deputy Prime Minister under Art. 5, para. 1, item 2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers and of its administration.

The Minister of Education and Science is the one who is in charge for the quality and timely preparation of the draft programme.

The TWG performs its functions until the official approval of the programme by the European Commission.

The coordination, administrative and organizational–technical work related to the activities of the TWG is performed by the Secretariat of the thematic task force. The functions of the Secretariat are performed by the Programming, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate of the EA OPSESG under the Minister of Education and Science.

According to the practice from the 2014–2020 Programming period, after the approval of the Programme, the MA will form a Programme Monitoring Committee, the main objective of which is to review all issues that affect the progress in the implementation of the programme in

achieving its objectives. The composition of the Monitoring Committee includes a broad representation of all stakeholders, including representatives of ministries and Managing Authorities, regional development councils, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Statistical Institute, nationally representative organizations – of employers, of employees, of and for persons with disabilities, as well as representatives of the academic community and non-profit legal entities and departments responsible for the policies under which measures are funded by the programme. In its work, the Programme Monitoring Committee will be guided by internal rules of operation, including a detailed description of the objectives, tasks, composition, functions, procedures, coordination measures, etc. in full accordance with the provisions of the General Regulation for the period 2021 – 2027.

The MA of the programme will continue to be guided in all its actions by the partnership principles set out in COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) No. 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds, which according to the General Regulation will continue to apply.

4. Communication and visibility:

Article 17(3)(i) CPR, Article 42(2) CPR

Text field [4 500]

The framework for communication and transparency of the PE for the Programming period 2021–2027 covers the responsibilities of the MA in terms of the visibility of the PE, the transparency and awareness of the target audiences about the implementation and the achieved results.

Objectives

- Promoting the role of the European Union and informing about the activities, implementation, results and good practices of the programme;
- Informing the potential beneficiaries about the possibilities for financing from the programme;
- Informing and supporting the beneficiaries in the implementation of projects under the programme.

Target audiences

- General public – citizens at national and regional level
- Beneficiaries of the programme
- Potential beneficiaries – eligible beneficiaries eligible for support under the Programme
- Non – profit legal entities
- Administration engaged in the management of EU funds in Bulgaria
- Mediators/disseminators of information

Communication channels

Communication channels and implementation activities The communication and transparency activities will be selected according to the specifics of the message, the characteristics of the target group or subgroup.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of communication in the planning and implementation of communication campaigns and activities, an integrated communication mix will be used, both as activities and forms, and as channels. The main communication channels that will be used include:

- Website of the Programme;
- Electronic Media;
- Print media;
- Online media and social networks and file sharing platforms;
- Direct communication (events, information days, seminars, trainings, etc.).

Monitoring and evaluation

The effectiveness of the communication and transparency activities under the PE will be assessed according to standardized criteria and indicators, including:

- measurement of achieved quantitative parameters of physical performance/progress;
- measuring effect/result, as well as lasting impact through sociological surveys.

5. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 88 and 89 CPR

Table 14: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Indication of use of Articles 88 and 89: *	Priority No	Fund	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)
Use of reimbursement of eligible expenditure based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 88 CPR	Priority 1		V; VI; VIII
	Priority 2		IV
	Priority 3		IV; VI

Use of financing not linked to costs according to Article 89 CPR	Priority		
	Priority		
	Priority		

* Full information will be provided according to the models annexed to the CPR.

APPENDICES

- Reimbursement of eligible expenditure based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates (Article 88 CPR)
- Financing not linked to costs (Article 89 CPR)
- EMFF action plan for small-scale coastal fishing
- EMFF action plan for each outermost region

Appendix 1: Reimbursement of eligible expenditure from the Commission to the Member State based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 88)

Date of submitting the proposal	
Current version	

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Category of region	Estimated proportion of the total financial allocation within the priority to which the SCO will be applied in % (estimate)	Type(s) of operation		Corresponding indicator name(s)		Unit of measurement for the indicator	Type of SCO (standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates)	Corresponding standard scales of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (in national currency)
					Code	Description	Code	Description			

B. Details by type of operation (to be completed for every type of operation)

Did the managing authority receive support from an external company to set out the simplified costs below?

If so, please specify which external company: Yes/No – Name of external company

Types of operation:

1.1. Description of the operation type	
1.2 Priority /specific objective(s) concerned (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	
1.3 Indicator name	
1.4 Unit of measurement for indicator	
1.5 Standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
1.6 Amount	
1.7 Categories of costs covered by unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
1.8 Do these categories of costs cover all eligible expenditure for the operation? (Y/N)	
1.9 Adjustment(s) method	
11.10 ¹ Verification of the achievement of the unit of measurement - what document(s) will be used to verify the achievement of the unit of measurement? - describe what will be checked during management verifications (including on-the-spot), and by whom. - what arrangements to collect and store the data/documents described?	
1.11 Possible perverse incentives or problems caused by this	

¹ Several complementary indicators (for instance one output indicator and one result indicator) are possible for one type of operation. In these cases, fields 1.3 to 1.11 should be filled in for each indicator.

indicator, how they could be mitigated, and the estimated level of risk	
1.12 Total amount (national and EU) expected to be reimbursed	

C: Calculation of the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates

1. Source of data used to calculate the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (who produced, collected and recorded the data; where the data are stored; cut-off dates; validation, etc.).

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2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation is relevant to the type of operation:

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3. Please specify how the calculations were made, in particular including any assumptions made in terms of quality or quantities. Where relevant, statistical evidence and benchmarks should be used and attached to this annex in a format that is usable by the Commission.

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4. Please explain how you have ensured that only eligible expenditure was included in the calculation of the standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate.

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5. Assessment of the audit authority(ies) of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data.

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Appendix 2: Financing not linked to cost – N/A

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 89)

Date of submitting the proposal	
Current version	

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)	Category of region	<i>The amount covered by the financing not linked to cost</i>	Type(s) of operation	Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved	Corresponding indicator name(s)		Unit of measurement for the indicator
							Code	Description	
The overall amount covered									

B. Details by type of operation (to be completed for every type of operation)

Types of operation:

1.1. Description of the operation type			
1.2 Priority /specific objective(s) concerned (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)			
1.3 Conditions to be fulfilled or results to be achieved			
1.4 Deadline for fulfilment of conditions or results to be achieved			
1.5 Indicator definition for deliverables			
1.6 Unit of measurement for indicator for deliverables			
1.7 Intermediate deliverables (if applicable) triggering reimbursement by the Commission with schedule for reimbursements	Intermediate deliverables	Date	Amounts
1.8 Total amount (including EU and national funding)			
1.9 Adjustment(s) method			
1.10 Verification of the achievement of the result or condition (and where relevant, the intermediate deliverables) - describe what document(s) will be used to verify the achievement of the result or condition - describe what will be checked during management verifications (including on-the-spot), and by whom. - describe what are the arrangements to collect and store the data/documents			
1.11 Arrangements to ensure the audit trail Please list the body(ies) responsible for these arrangements.			