

## ANNEX V

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

<b>CCI</b>	
<b>Title in EN</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b> [255 <sup>1</sup> ]
<b>Title in national language(s)</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b> [255]
<b>Version</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>First year</b>	[4] 2021
<b>1. LAST YEAR</b>	[4] 2027
<b>Eligible from</b>	01.01.2021
<b>Eligible until</b>	31.12.2029
<b>Commission decision number</b>	.....
<b>Commission decision date</b>	.....
<b>Member State amending decision number</b>	.....
<b>Member State amending decision entry into force date</b>	.....
<b>Non substantial transfer (art. 19.5)</b>	Yes/No
<b>NUTS regions covered by the programme</b> (not applicable to the EMFF)	
<b>Fund concerned</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ERDF <input type="checkbox"/> Cohesion Fund <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ESF+ <input type="checkbox"/> JTF <input type="checkbox"/> EMFF
<b>Programme</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> under Investment for jobs and growth goal for the outermost regions only

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers in square brackets refer to number of characters without spaces.

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## 1. PROGRAMME STRATEGY: MAIN DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND POLICY RESPONSES<sup>2</sup>

Reference: points (a)(i) to (viii) and point (a)(x) of Article 22(3) and point (b) of Article 22(3)

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 Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030. The two strategic documents on education define a unified model of policy management and monitoring, in which the various aspects of the education system are consolidated and developed in the context of a common and shared strategic vision.

Taking into account the qualitatively changed social environment and role of education, training and learning in modern societies, as well as the achievements and problems the Bulgarian education is facing, the **Strategic Framework for Education forms a vision which envisages in 2030** all Bulgarian youths to complete school education as functionally literate, innovative, socially responsible and active citizens, motivated to upgrade their competencies through lifelong learning.

**The vision for the development of higher education for the period 2021-2030** is related to the development of a differentiated and flexible system of higher education institutions that function as successful partners and competitors of European universities and fulfill an educational, research and cultural mission for the benefit of society and separate individuals by conducting basic and applied research and by providing quality, accessible and lifelong education and training for successful personal, professional and social realization.

The mid-term review of the objectives of the *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training* (ET 2020) emphasizes that the targets set for 2020 are also relevant for the period after 2020 and continue to be a leading framework for Member States, as complementing national actions towards reform progress.

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 2020, **the COVID-19 pandemic** opened up a new set of challenges for the education system, such as **ensuring the digital transformation of the education system, the transition to distance learning in an electronic environment** for an indefinite period, which is a challenge for all participants: teachers, children, parents. The ubiquitous and high-quality access of pupils to equipment and internet connection, especially of those from vulnerable categories, is a challenge that also affects the levels of drop-outs. **A Mechanism for joint work of the institutions for coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the educational system of children and students of compulsory preschool and school age has been established, but it must be sustainable and strengthened in the future especially in view of the negative consequences of the pandemic in order to create conditions for the reduction of school drop-outs.** In recent years, Bulgaria has shown great

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<sup>2</sup> For programmes limited to supporting the specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation, the description of the programme strategy does not need to relate to challenges referred to in points (a)(i), (ii) and (vi) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation.

readiness to reform its education system, but some of the challenges remain. ESF + funding will play a crucial role in the first years after the stress of COVID-19 and must provide funding for improvements, ideas and reforms in the education system. In this context, the programme will support national efforts to overcome the digital division of students, to create conditions for the development of creative skills and to ensure quality education.

Basis for the innovative and intelligent development of Bulgaria is the provision of quality and inclusive education for all, aimed proactively at changing labour market trends, with a view to improving the quality of skills and forming innovative and active individuals capable of successful realization as professionals and citizens and thus to contribute to their personal well-being, the development of society and the sustainable development of all social spheres.

### **Achievements and main challenges in the education sector, identified by stages and levels of education. Priority investment areas**

According to the *2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria* (EC, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture), the latest available data show that in 2018 the total budget expenditure on education was 3.5% of GDP – significantly below the EU average of 4.6%. 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%. One third of the increase was spent on teachers' salaries.

#### **Pre-school and school education**

##### **Challenge: Improving access to preschool education**

A *World Bank (WB) Report* states<sup>3</sup> that despite the demographic decline, that is lowering the demand for pre-school education and within the trend of nominal increase of budget for pre-school, Bulgaria is still facing **challenges with the accessibility of pre-school services**. In *EC Report on Bulgaria 2020 in the framework of the European Semester (EC Report on Bulgaria 2020)* it is indicated that high-quality education and care in early childhood play a key role in creating equal opportunities and improving cognitive skills and lead possibly to reduce the likelihood of low achievement and early school leaving. At the same time, some large cities lack enough kindergartens.

According to the data cited in the *2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria*, the enrollment rate of children aged 4 to the age of starting compulsory education in 2019 is 82.7% and has increased by 0.4 p.p. compared to 2018 (82.4%), but it still remains below the EU average of 94.8%<sup>4</sup>.

**According to a World Bank Report**, in the 2019/2020 school year, 217.9 thousand children were enrolled in kindergartens, which is “a decrease of 0.4% in the number of children with respect to the previous school year. Despite the decline in absolute numbers, the 2019/2020 school year marked a growth (0.3 percentage points) in the participation rate for the first time since 2014. They also note that the accessibility of pre-school education in Bulgaria is

<sup>3</sup> Reports prepared under Agreement on Consulting Services as of 12 February 2020 for the review of public expenditures in the field of science, technology and innovation and support for building an evidence-based approach to the National Strategic Framework for Education 2030 between the MES and OP SESG Executive Agency

<sup>4</sup> [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ\\_uoe\\_enra10&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uoe_enra10&lang=en)

hampered both by "**fees and hidden costs**" affecting the most vulnerable groups and by the unregistered external migration of children of compulsory pre-school and school age. **The closure of kindergartens in small and remote places, as well as the shortage of places in kindergartens in large cities**, also has an impact.

With the support under Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" (OPSESG) through the project "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education", the costs for fees are paid for children from vulnerable groups, and training programmes for parents and for providing pedagogical, psychological and social support to the children are implemented. Within the project by the end of 2020, 1 778 kindergartens and schools with pre-school training are covered, 40 000 children are involved in activities for inclusion in pre-school education, over 43% of children from vulnerable groups show progress in Bulgarian language.

The modernization of the existing and the construction of new educational infrastructure is especially necessary in the big cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, etc., where as a result of labour and social migration the majority of the country's population is concentrated and the lack of places in kindergartens is most tangible. At present, a Programme for construction, extension, superstructure and reconstruction of nurseries, kindergartens and schools 2020 – 2022, developed on the basis of § 20 of the Final Provisions to the Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2020 (SG, issue .100 from 2019, in force from 01.01.2020) at a total value of BGN 210 000 000.

The South-Western region, due to the influence of the capital, notes a net increase (+ 3.4 %) in the number of kindergartens for the period, while on the opposite is the North-Central Region (-22 %). To reduce the effect of this negative trend, Decree No. 181 of the Council of Ministers as 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, under one of the three pillars of the Recovery and Resilience Facility Plan 2021-2024 support for sustainable resource management in kindergartens and schools, energy efficiency, recycling and waste reduction is foreseen.

Participation in early childhood education is crucial, especially for children with low socio-economic status and those, who speak different language from Bulgarian language at 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 National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Inclusion and Participation (2021 – 2030) stated that the quality of education and care in early childhood is hampered by insufficient training of educators and other staff in areas such as inclusive education, early childhood development, ethnic diversity and special educational needs and abilities. The survey results show that pre-school education and upbringing is decisive for achievements. The longer children have attended kindergarten or pre-school group, the higher is their performance. According to PIRLS 2016, in Bulgaria the achievements of children who attended kindergarten 3 or more years are 53 points higher than those who attended kindergarten or pre-school group 1 year or less and 75 points higher than those who have not visited. Similarly, according to TIMSS 2019, the achievements of children who attended kindergarten for 3 or more years are 76 points higher than those who did not attend mathematics and 116 points more in science.

With the amendment of Pre-school and School Education Act (PSEA) from September 2020, the age of compulsory pre-school education was lowered from 5 to 4. As stated in **the 2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria**, increasing the participation rate and further

improving the quality of services can have a significant positive impact due to the relatively high proportion of pupils who speak another language at home and the decisive role of the early years in language acquisition.

In order to create conditions for access to pre-school education, with the support of the EU Structural Reform Programme<sup>5</sup>, the creation of a national framework for the quality of early childhood education and care began, which confirms the prioritization of pre-school education policies. In connection with the described challenges, the Programme will focus direct investments to support the effective socialization of children in early childhood, as well as measures to improve the accessibility and quality of pre-school education.

### **Challenge: Improving the quality and inclusive nature of the education system**

*In the EC Country Report Bulgaria 2020* it is pointed that the quality and inclusive nature of the education system continue to be challenging, despite ongoing reforms. The report notes that Bulgaria has put in place a series of measures to address challenges related to quality and equity leading to progress towards SDG 4 “Quality education”, but their results are yet to be seen. The coverage of the state subsidy allocated to kindergartens and schools (in place since 2018) with **at least 20% of children from vulnerable groups** has been expanded to secondary and professional schools. Roma inclusion in education remains a challenge, however, due to several factors, including school segregation and barriers induced by severe poverty, **with 34% of Roma completing only primary education and 44% lower secondary** (FRA, 2016).

In the context of efforts to successfully include and prevent school drop-out and inclusive education, Ordinance on Inclusive Education is adopted, which creates conditions for ensuring access to quality and modernized education for every child and student, reducing the share of early school leavers and early childhood care. The established **Mechanism for joint work of the institutions for coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and students of compulsory school age** also has a significant impact.

In the *EC Country Report Bulgaria 2020* is reported, that the inter-institutional mechanism is bearing some fruit, focused to prevention of drop-out. More than 11 000 people from different institutions participate in the Inter-institutional Outreach Teams and an Information System for the Realization of the Mechanism (ISRM) has been established. From 2017 to 2020, **52 104 children and students up to and including the age of 18 were returned to school and kindergarten or enrolled for the first time, out of which 2 386 were not retained and 22 986 were newly dropped out.** For the first time, the Mechanism establishes various dimensions of the problem, as well as the leading reasons for dropping out and not enrolling children and students in compulsory pre-school and school age in kindergarten and school. As of the beginning of 2020/2021, the outreach team could not find by address registration in the country about 114 000 children and pupils who are not included in the system of pre-school and school education due to departure of the families abroad.

The comparison of the share of dropped out and non-enrolled children and pupils in the educational system by reasons invariably puts the cultural reasons in the first place (reluctance, lack of commitment and support from parents and family) – between 34 and

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<sup>5</sup> Project REFORM/SC2020/059 "Creating a National Framework for the Quality of Education and Care for Early Childhood"

56%. Only then are dropped out for economic reasons, which vary from 10 to 14% over the years, and for educational reasons – between 1 and 12%.

The coefficient of those covered at the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year is 94.69%. **The coefficient of the covered 5- 6- and 7-year-old children in the second term of 2019/2020 has a particularly large increase** compared to the beginning of the same school year (by 12.65%, 9.93% and 3.71%, respectively). Another effective practice applied is the introduction of educational mediators to work with parents.

This is eloquent evidence that it is necessary to expand and upgrade the activities of the Mechanism in the next programming period, supporting measures to strengthen the territorial and institutional scope of the mechanism, training and enhancing the capacity and skills of the outreach teams, as well as information activities on the benefits of education within certain communities, such as Roma to overcome not only social but also ethnocultural reasons for early school leaving with an emphasis on working with parents to increase the motivation of their children to attend school.

### **Challenge: Improving and upgrading the conditions for personal development and reducing the share of early school leavers**

Education statistics draw attention to another challenge, which is reflected in the indicators for early school leavers (aged 18-24). According to *2019 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria*, the value of this indicator in 2019 is 13.9%, and although for 2020 it decreased by 1.1 percentage points, reaching 12.8%, it exceeds the EU average value by 10.2%. It is noted that there are also challenges regarding the completion of secondary education (only 85% of the students enrolled in the twelfth grade in 2017/2018 graduated: 75.5% – in vocational high schools and 94.7% – in general education schools). In this regard, there are challenges related to overcoming social and economic inequalities, with migration processes affecting the educational infrastructure. It is also necessary to take into account the specifics of the demographic structure of the population.

**According to the EC Country Report Bulgaria 2020**, the share of early school leavers (ESL) is particularly high in rural areas – 26.2%, in smaller cities it is 12.2% and the lowest in larger cities – 5.9% and that **67% of Roma students** dropped out of school early. 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.

The implementation in 2018 of measures for educational institutions with a concentration of children and pupils from vulnerable groups allowed the direction of resources to the so-called segregated or secondarily segregated kindergartens schools. The implementation of measures for desegregation at local level, for the promotion of active interaction between all stakeholders and for overcoming the self-segregation of certain community groups should be continued.

As stated in the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030), parents are also directly involved in the educational process. The implementation of targeted policies for interaction with parents is expected to lead to significantly better results in education, as well as to the formation of values and motivation for learning. The work with parents will be in the focus of the measures for effective inclusion of the children and the pupils in the educational process, for the

development of the competencies and talents of the children and the pupils, for the promotion of value-oriented behavior. Measures under the programme will support the achievement of objective 4.2 "Consolidation of the resources of the family and the kindergarten/school for the full development of the child/student" of the Strategic Framework.

In support of the reforms in the educational system in the field of inclusive education during the programming period 2014-2020, 191 520 children and pupils of Roma origin are included in activities under Priority axes 2 and 3 of OPSESG, and they are supported by procedures aimed at all areas of pre-school and school education.

Additional investments from the programme will support the continuation of measures for the inclusive education of children and pupils from vulnerable groups aiming to achieve sustainability of educational reform in this area.

The *2019 EC Country Report Bulgaria* also states that, more than half of people with disabilities drop out of education early and only 34 % have jobs. The percentage of higher education graduates among them is also very low – 13.5%.

Significant progress has been made under the project "Support for equal access and personal development" under OPSESG in the area of pre-school and school education: over 2 664 children with special educational needs have received specialized support. 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.

The most significant impact on the representatives of socially vulnerable groups was exerted under the project "Development of pupils' abilities and increase in their motivation to learn through activities that develop specific knowledge, skills and competencies (Your class)" under OPSESG – 451 498 pupils, out of which 105 660 Roma pupils from over 2 300 schools across the country are involved in extracurricular activities of interest and in activities to overcome learning difficulties. This largest project within OPSESG has contributed to reducing the proportion of early school leavers in long-term. 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 under the project "Your class". In continuation of the good practices under the "Support for Success" procedure within the OPSESG, it is planned 120 000 pupils with learning difficulties and at risk of leaving the education system to be covered. The achievement during the programming period 2014-2020 creates a prerequisite for continuing and upgrading the results achieved, supporting the personal development of children and pupils, development of their skills and abilities, as well as activities of interest.

There are also challenges related to dealing with manifestation of aggression and intolerance in school. According to a study by the **Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 87% of teachers witnessed verbal aggression, 77% of indirect aggression, and 49% of physical aggression** between students. Nearly 2/3 of the surveyed teachers (64%) say that they need specialized training. Also, the results of the surveys conducted by UNICEF found that Bulgarian pupils are among the top 10 of the 43 countries surveyed in terms of the impact of the problem of bullying at school. These conclusions are confirmed in *2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria*, adding that this type of problem affects the results of pupils. This shows the need for support aimed at preventing aggression and violence in educational institutions.

**Challenge: Improving the results at all levels of education**

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, as according to the 2011 Census, respectively 93 % and 70 % of the representatives of these ethnic groups are not completing their secondary education, compared to about 30 % for ethnic Bulgarians. 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 according to the quality of the education system. In addition in the last ten years, the country has declined 19 positions down. Although in studies such as **PIRLS** and **TIMSS** Bulgarian fourth-graders show above-average skills for the participating countries, the results of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) PISA study, conducted in 2018, remain worrying. show that 47% of 15-year-olds are functionally illiterate, 46.5% have under-critical achievement in science, and 44.4% have insufficient math skills, lagging behind the EU by more than double in all areas of research. In addition, the **performance of students of Roma and Turkish ethnicity shows a significant lag behind ethnic Bulgarian children, equal to 3 educational years in terms of reading and 2 educational years in terms of mathematics and science.**

In recent years, the Bulgarian education system has undergone changes aimed at the "competence approach" and the acquisition of key competencies and skills development of the 21st century, which are set out in the *Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021 – 2030)* – increasing the results at all levels of education by strengthening the competence approach aimed at the formation and development of key competencies – functionally literate, innovative and socially responsible and active citizens. Taking into account the importance of the implemented policy, the Programme envisages measures to support this process.

**Challenge: Increasing the motivation for practicing the teaching profession and improving the qualification of pedagogical specialists**

In *2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria* states that the workforce in the teaching sector is rapidly aging, **as 49% of teachers in schools** (i.e. from primary to secondary school) are over the age of 50, as 11% of teachers are already at least 60 years old.

Regardless of the registered data for the period 2015 – 2020, the average age of teachers decreases from 52 to 49. In 2016, 4 350 young teachers started working in the system, in 2019 they are already 4 913 and in 2020 – 5 339. For the five-year period, 27 421 pedagogues have entered the system of pre-school and school education, but there is still a shortage of **teachers in kindergartens and primary teachers, for teachers of foreign languages, information and communication technologies (ICT), mathematics, physics and in 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. 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.

The *2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria* reports that working conditions for teachers are improving, and that in recent years salaries have increased significantly in order to increase the attractiveness of the profession. Between January 2016 and January 2020, the average salary of pedagogical staff in preschool and school education increased in nominal terms by almost 79%, and non-teaching staff – by 45%. Thus, the average gross salary of teaching staff has increased from 94% of the national average to 117%.

According to the *2020 Education and Training Monitor for Bulgaria*, teacher training is still a problem, as theoretical training prevails at the expense of pedagogical practice. It should be noted that under the OPSESG under the procedure "Qualification of pedagogical specialists" training is provided for 4 000 pedagogical specialists under the age of 34, 30 000 pedagogical specialists between the ages of 35 and 54 and 5 000 pedagogical specialists, included in trainings for application of modern assessment methods. Also under the projects "Student Scholarships – Phase 1" and "Student Internships – Phase 1 and 2", implemented under OPSESG, 14 590 students in the field of higher education "pedagogical sciences" were supported. In connection with these challenges, the programme envisages activities aimed at teachers everywhere as horizontal measures.

Over the last five years, policies to increase the social status and attractiveness of the teaching profession, development and academic experience, as well as the qualification of pedagogical specialists have been a priority. One of the main measures to overcome the shortage of pedagogical specialists and motivate young people to choose the teaching profession, which has been applied since 2017, is the policy of increasing the funds for remuneration. A process of reforming education in pedagogical specialties has also started, applying measures to stimulate interest in the teaching of professional disciplines in higher education by offering more vacancies, better funding, additional scholarships for students in the professional discipline "Pedagogy of education in...".

In connection with the activities for development and reform of teachers' policy in 2020 within the project "Roadmap for development and reform of policy towards teachers in Bulgaria", funded by the European Union through the Programme for Support of Structural Reforms and implemented by the World Bank in cooperation with the European Commission, a review was made of the activities aimed at the workforce and the results of the education system.

The World Bank's analytical report highlighted the need for systemic workforce programmes in education, which can be achieved through the deployment of networking practices to support school development in the context of general and complementary measures support and integration of measures for monitoring and planning the need for teachers in relation to the whole system, in the context of the needs of the labour market.

**Challenge: Improving the digital skills of teachers and pupils, incl. creating appropriate digital content for all levels of education for learning in an electronic environment.**

A serious problem characterising human resources in the country is the **low level of digital skills**, which hinders the widespread use of ICT and ICT-based 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 (*European Education Area Progress Report 2020*). In view of the state of emergency in the country, all schools have introduced distance learning in e-learning environments and the education system has quickly created a cloud infrastructure for e-learning with profiles of all students and teachers. Wi-fi networks have been built in all schools, covering all classrooms, investments are being made in computer equipment and e-learning equipment in the classrooms. The construction of modern STEM centers in over 260 schools is funded. 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.

According to the results of a study by the Ministry of Education and Science to assess the impact of distance learning in e-environment or other absentee forms on the effectiveness of school education<sup>6</sup> conducted during the crisis with COVID -19, key factors have been identified that hinder the effectiveness of distance education in electronic environment: limited access of pupils to technology and the Internet; lack of confidence for effective work in an electronic environment with platforms and applications; insufficient provision of electronic devices; low motivation and commitment of students; insufficiently developed functionalities of the used platforms and insufficient support from the parents, etc. The identified factors have a particularly large impact on students from vulnerable groups. According to *a World Bank report*, on average, at all levels, schools in the country have around two times lower chances to be highly digitally equipped and connected than the European average (European Commission, DG CNECT, 2019). According to the same report, the economic shock following the COVID-19 crisis could increase the school dropout rate in the medium term, particularly for students from vulnerable groups.

In order to overcome the consequences of the crisis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic under REACT-EU under OPSESG 2014-2020, additional funds have been provided for 2021 under the ESF. They will support the purchase of additional devices for teachers and pupils to provide conditions for distance learning in an electronic environment. These measures will be accompanied by support for training of pupils, teachers, educational mediators, parents, in order to prevent interruption of the educational process and inclusive education in crisis conditions, especially for pupils from vulnerable groups.

Given the impact of COVID-19 on all levels of the education system and on all students and especially students from vulnerable groups, REACT-EU support under OPSESG 2014-2020 will be upgraded through appropriate activities under the Programme.

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<sup>6</sup><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/>

With the adopted PSEA for the first time it was possible to create textbooks not only as printed editions, but also as printed editions with electronic version, and cognitive books used in pre-school education – as printed editions, printed editions with electronic version or electronic editions. With the amendments in 2018 to Decree № 79 of the Council of Ministers as of 13.04.2016 for providing free use of textbooks, textbooks and study sets, it was possible to use electronically readable textbooks of approved textbooks – printed publications, for pupils from I to VII class including. "Electronic readable textbook" is an electronic product whose content is completely identical to the content of the approved textbook, created as a printed edition.

In 2019, a major ESF funded project under the OPSESG on the introduction of digital education in a school started — **“Education for tomorrow”**, 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 and the Recovery and Sustainability Plan.

**Challenge: Increasing the motivation for learning and striving for high achievements of children and students**

One of the challenges to the effectiveness of the reform is to support **gifted children and students**. 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, requirements for establishment of working teams for diagnostics and improvement of their abilities, methodology for working with them, as well as specific methods for evaluating their achievements. It is necessary to continue creating conditions for the support of gifted children and pupils in order to carry out the process of reproduction of the intellectual potential of society.

**Challenge: Support for literacy and learning content in order to acquire qualifications of adults from vulnerable groups for better realization on the labour market**

The *EC Report on Bulgaria 2020* 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 is 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 shall be noted that progress has been made, as under the procedure "Adult Literacy – Phase 1" through project of the Ministry of Education and Science 10 723 people over 16 years in literacy courses and courses for learning content from the lower secondary school stage of basic education are covered, out 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 labour market.

### **Vocational education**

#### **Challenge: Improving VET, increasing the share of dual training and adapting VET to labor market dynamics**

*National Statistics Institute* data 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. Vocational high schools are located mainly in the district centers and in the larger municipalities, where the larger number of students is concentrated.

According to data from the *Review of Education and Training for 2020 of the EC*, enrollment in the high school stage of VET has increased to 52.9% in 2018, which is above the EU average of 48.4%. This trend continues in the school year 2019/2020 as the increase is 56.47%, and for 2020/2021 it reaches 59.19%. In the last three years, the admission of STEM profiles and technical specialties has been encouraged. As a result of this sustainable trend in the school year 2020/2021, a little over 60% of students in VET are admitted to technical specialties. There is also a steady increase in the admission of specialties in the professional fields related to computer and information technology, as for the period from 2018 to 2020 the number of students in these specialties increased by 3000, and in percentage terms the increase is 9 % to 13% of all students in vocational education and training.

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 in order to create appropriate conditions for increasing the performance at the completion of secondary education and acquiring professional qualification; the lack of a system for increasing the competencies of teachers in professional training for work in an increasingly digital and high-tech environment. In recent years, these challenges have been addressed through targeted government policies, supported by ESF funds, as a result of which a number of positive trends have been noted. 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 Mid-Term Evaluation of the Implementation of the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (ISSS) 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 ties) , as the highest rated by the beneficiaries is the level of compliance of education with the needs of the labor market and the opportunities for vocational training and lifelong learning.

With the adoption of the PSEA, new framework documents and training documentation are introduced. The developed curricula, study programs and national examination programs in accordance with the State Educational Standards (SED) for acquiring qualifications in

professions are maximally adaptive and effective, in order to facilitate the transition from school to the labor market and make training an attractive opportunity for professional development.

The ongoing efforts of the government to increase the applicability of VET to the labor market are reflected in the *EC Report for Bulgaria 2020*, indicating the published in 2018 list of state-protected professions and a list of specialities by professions for which there is an expected shortage of specialists in the labor market. It is also noted that additional funds have been allocated for all these specialties, and students receive additional individual scholarships, which has contributed to an increase in the number of students trained in these specialties.

In order to ensure the sustainability of reform policies, to promote trends of increased interest in VET, and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure the quality, relevance and improvement of results by creating conditions for training in the professions of the future, offering opportunities for raising skills, social inclusion and returning to learning dropouts, as well as the transition to higher education and better realization in the labor market.

Modernization of the curriculum and the availability of highly competent teachers, trainers, mentors and other specialists in the field of VET are the two main factors for ensuring its high quality.

In compliance with the legal provisions in the forthcoming programming period, curricula should be changed, including on the basis of the envisaged optimization of the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training (VET). The work on updating the curriculum is carried out in partnership with business, with an emphasis on the sectoral approach, as well as the promotion of all forms of cooperation at national, regional and school level.

According to a *World Bank report*, the qualification of teachers in the VET system is a challenge, as the category of teachers consists of general education teachers, VET-specific teachers and the continuing professional development needs of these different groups often differ significantly. *The World Bank* recommends the development of a training and retraining program for teachers in specific VET subjects. The applicability of the skills developed in the VET system is largely determined by the provision of practical training opportunities.

Since 2015, and many other Member States, Bulgaria focuses its efforts on promoting learning through work (dual training system). From 2017 the popularity of learning through work grows, the number of students enrolled for training in classes in this form of training is as follows: 2017-2018. – 751 students (1.96% of all students admitted to VET); 2018-2019 – 2 030 students (7.38%); 2019-2020 – 2 433 students (8.41%) and for the academic year 2020-2021 – 3 137 students (9.3%). It should be noted that although the legislation promotes dual training, the implementation of dual training at this stage is mainly implemented within various projects<sup>7</sup>.

In support of the expansion of the dual system of education in 2020 under OPSESG launched the project "Support for the dual system of education", which provides for 147 vocational high schools / schools with classes for vocational training to introduce the dual system in to

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

include 9,800 students for training in the dual education system according to the existing legislative framework

Despite the positive trends in expanding the scope of the dual training system and in order to achieve the objectives of the Council Recommendation (2019 / C 301/02) on the applicability of VET by enhancing on-the-job training, further efforts are needed in this direction and during the next programming period. According to a *World Bank report* 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 positive trends in the policies from the previous programming period can be supported by the funds from the program, aimed at increasing the attractiveness of VET and offering innovative and flexible methods and pathways for reaching diverse groups of students and increasing their achievements.

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

A special target group that requires targeted policies is the group of students with lower educational attainment who, according to a *World Bank report*, are more concentrated in VET. The main emphasis in the work with this group of students should be the balanced and attractive offer of educational content and forms of education, which will prevent discouragement and dropping out due to failure to meet the high content requirements, and to ensure a higher percentage of successful graduates .

#### **Challenge: Improving the employment rate of VET graduates**

The main goal of VET in the coming years will be to continue the trend of increasing the employment rate of recent VET graduates from the current **64.2%, which is still lower by 10.8% than the EU average**.

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**, 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**. In this regard, the Council Recommendation (2019 / C 301/02) states that the applicability of VET to the labor market and the availability of dual vocational education and training remain insufficient. As recommended in the *EC Report for Bulgaria 2019*, targeted investments can help increase

the attractiveness, quality and adequacy to the labor market of vocational education and training.

A positive trend is observed in the analysis of the employment rate of recent VET graduates. This trend is indicated in the *EC Report for Bulgaria 2020*, which states that in 2018 the employment rate of VET graduates was 66.4% and although it is rising, it remains significantly below the EU average of 79,5%. This trend is indicated also in the *Education and Training Monitoring 2020, of the EC* where is pointed out that the employment rate of recent VET graduates has increased significantly in 2019 reaching 73,5%, but remains below the EU average.

A *World Bank report* also points out that VET graduates in Bulgaria are 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 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.

In 2020, within the framework of the project “Pilot model for monitoring the graduates of vocational education and training” № 609397-EPP-1-2019-1-BG-EPPKA3-EQAVET-NRP cwith the financial support of Erasmus+ programme a prototype of a mechanism was developed to monitor the realization of VET graduates, which is piloted in three districts – Burgas, Stara Zagora and Vratsa. The established and piloted mechanism is a reliable basis for implementation at national level through the support of the program.

### **Tertiary education**

In recent years, the tertiary education system has been reformed in accordance with the Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014 – 2020. The aim of the applying policy is to achieve a system of higher education that is able to respond to the dynamics of social processes. The expansion of the institutional network of higher education is limited through the gradual closure of non-traditional professional fields and specialties for different higher education institutions, for which there is no shortage of staff on the labor market. In 2016, with legislative changes, a new methodology of admission of students in higher education was introduced in order to limit its irrational increase for some professional fields. A List of priority professional areas and a List of protected specialties have also been adopted. As a result of the introduced changes in terms of admission, the admission of students (on subsidized education) approved by the Council of Ministers for the academic year 2020-2021 has been reduced by 34%, compared to 2015-2016; the relative share of admissions in the priority professional areas compared to the total number of admissions (on subsidized training) in the academic year 2020-2021 has increased by 14%, , compared to 2015-2016. The share of students in higher education and professional fields, where there is a better realization on the labor market, has increased. The unemployment among graduates decreased from 4.15% in 2013 to 2.79% in 2020. The first-year students admitted in the academic year 2020/2021 in 18 of the protected specialties and in 8 priority professional fields are also exempt from fees. The share of foreign students is increasing from 4.12% in 2014 to 7.84% in 2020.

Through legislative changes, the scientific results of the higher education institutions significantly increase and gradually they catch up to the results of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. It should be noted that the number of scientific publications of Bulgarian universities in the bibliographic database Web of Science in the period 2015 – 2019 exceeds

17,600 which is twice as large as for the previous five-year period 2010-2014. Five Bulgarian universities are already full partners in the consortiums of European Universities, and one university is an associate partner.

In order to attract the best students to apply in certain professional fields have been implemented the changes in the policy for providing scholarships. As a result of the project implementation "Maintenance and improvement of the developed rating system of higher education institutions – phase 1", financed under OPSESG, the share of the funds for the maintenance of education in higher education institutions from the state budget, which is obtained on the basis of an assessment of the quality of training and compliance with the labor market, has increased from 25% in 2016 to 60% in 2020. Three national programs in the field of the higher education are being implemented, addressing at digital qualification, increasing the competencies of teachers and popularizing Bulgarian higher education and applying for persons of Bulgarian nationality living abroad.

The following changes were achieved with the amendment of the Higher Education Act: approval of a policy for the development of each state higher education institution with strategic goals and objectives, target values and indicators for their implementation; concluding a management contract between the Minister of Education and Science and the rector of the respective higher education institution; preparation of a National Map of Higher Education; establishing a moratorium on the opening and transformation of higher education institutions; improving the model of accreditation of higher education institutions; exemption from fees in state higher education institutions for students in professional fields and protected specialties with the highest expected shortage on the labor market according to the List approved by the Council of Ministers; concluding agreements between state higher education institutions and state or municipal schools from the system of pre-school and school education; providing an opportunity to acquire the status of a research university and others. An Ordinance on the terms and conditions for ensuring the payment of tuition costs for students with contracts with an employer has also been adopted. The amount of the minimum wage for the lowest academic position has also been increased. The policies set out in the Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030 are oriented towards ensuring constant adaptation to the current challenges at the training and in particular digitalization and the subsequent professional realization and development. Priority topics are what and how students learn, the connectivity of higher education through networking and the promotion of research and international cooperation. The universities are encouraged to reduce bachelor's degrees at the expense of deeper master's degrees and to increase study requirements along with providing access to higher education and lifelong learning, which supports personal development and professional realization. The main goal of the Strategy is to link admission with the labor market and develop a sustainable mechanism for updating existing and creating new curricula. Along with the creation of a number of incentives to intensify research and networking of higher education institutions, specific incentives are envisaged for building an effective education-science-business link.

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 %. According to Eurostat, the best educational characteristics of the population in the country are observed in the South-West region, where the population with higher education reached 40.5% in 2019, significantly surpassing the EU

average of 33.3%. The North-Eastern region is with relatively good indicators for higher education (23.2%). The worst indicators are in the North-West and South-East regions, respectively only 19.2% and 21.4% of the population aged 25-64 have completed higher education by 2019.

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 %.

According to *NSI data*, the higher education system in the Republic of Bulgaria comprises 52 higher education institutions, the majority of which are relatively small and closely specialized.

According to the *EC Report for 2020*, in 2018 the share of higher education graduates among **people aged 30-34 reached 33.7%, but it is still below the national target of the Europe 2020 strategy of 36%**.

According to data from the *European Commission's Education and Training Monitor 2020* in 2019 the number of students enrolled in universities has decreased at all levels of higher education. In comparison to 2014, 21% fewer students were enrolled in bachelor's programs, 16% less in master's programs and 3% less as PhD students. At the same time, as a result of the targeted policy for attracting a larger number of our compatriots for education in Bulgarian state higher education institutions, during the period the number of admission plans increased from 400 to 2000, as a result of which for 7 years the number of admitted students has increased from 383 in 2014 to 1101 in 2020. The share of foreign students is increased from 4.12% in 2014 to 7.84% in 2020.

According to a *World Bank report*, 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

In *European Commission's Education and Training Monitor 2020*, it is stated that in Bulgaria the socio-economic situation influences the aspiration of students to receive higher education. A total of 64.3% of adolescents in the country expect to complete higher education (EU average: 62.4%). However, only 42.8% of the poorest students do so compared to 83.3% of their peers, who are in a more favorable socio-economic situation. Still there is gender inequality, with 39% of women aged 30-34 completing higher education compared to 26.4% of men.

Bulgaria is one of the 49 countries in the European Higher Education Area in which people from the most vulnerable groups are the least represented in the higher education system. These data are also confirmed in the *European Commission's of Education and Training Monitoring 2019*. In order to achieve the national goals, it is necessary to encourage the participation of people from vulnerable groups, as well as to provide adequate conditions for their graduation. This implies targeted action and support for these population groups.

The *EC Report for 2020* states that the share of graduates in **science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is still small (20.5% in 2017 at an EU average of**

25 , 8%). The report also states that there is still a significant gender gap, with only 37% of higher education graduates in the field of STEM being women, compared to 61% of all higher education graduates. The unattractiveness of science, technology, engineering and mathematics can be partly explained by the poor performance of Bulgarian students in mathematics and science, the limited opportunities for vocational guidance and the gender imbalance in these areas.

**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. 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 as a new methodology of admission of students in higher education institutions has been introduced and a List of priority professional areas and a List of protected specialties have been adopted.

As a result of the introduced changes, the admission of students approved by the Council of Ministers for the academic year 2020-2021, subsidized education, compared to 2015-2016, has been reduced by 34% and the share of students in higher education and professional fields, where there is a better realization on the labor market, has increased, as well as reducing the number of students in universities and vocational fields with lower realization. Exempted from fees are freshmen admitted in the academic year 2020/2021 in 18 of the protected specialties and in 8 priority professional areas. The changes in the scholarship policy have been implemented in order to attract the best students to apply for students in certain professional fields. The amount of scholarships for Bulgarian and foreign students, doctoral students has been increased, a new type of scholarships for students in 8 professional fields has been introduced, as well as the opportunity to receive a second scholarship from students in priority professional fields who have achieved certain results in their studies.

The focus of the activities in the field of higher education 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.

**Challenge: Improving the applicability on the labor market and the quality of higher education**

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. 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. 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). An Ordinance on the terms and conditions for ensuring the payment of tuition fees for students with contracts with an employer has been adopted, which provides an opportunity for the state to cover the tuition costs for students who have a contract with an employer to provide student experience in the respective specialty for the period of on-the-job training after its successful completion.

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. Within the support to improve the labor market relevance of higher, the Program also provides for investments to support the professional development of PhD students to conduct PhD studies directly related to the current needs of specific economic sectors, businesses and employers.

With regard to the challenges related to the accelerating dynamics of the labor market, the Program for Education envisages a range of activities that reflect the following challenges identified in the *Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030*:

- Mismatch between the needs of the labor market and the nature of the training received in HE in terms of both knowledge and skills and competencies;
- 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;

- 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.

**Challenge: Improving the conditions for more successful distance learning in higher education and creating appropriate digital content**

The *European Commission's Education and Training Monitoring 2020* notes that universities have been more successfully transitioned to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it is necessary for the digitalization process to continue, including and through targeted investments to provide the necessary resources and quality training of the academic staff.

Focus in the Programme Education is also aimed at solving the challenges identified in the *Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030*, 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;
- A small number of provided specialties and programs in a foreign language and in distance learning in many HE institutions.

**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**. 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, including costs by achieving the objectives of the programme in a much more explicit way than competitive selection procedures.

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 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 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.

Based on the above analyses and studies in the Programme for Education 2021-2027, a balanced approach to providing grants has been adopted in terms of direct award procedures and competitive selection procedures.

### **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.

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. . 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. PHRD 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 its efforts on supporting:

- Early childhood development, increasing the scope and improving the quality of 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;
- Providing 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;
- Improving quality of education through modernization of the curriculum, based on analysis and data, application of the competency model, improving skills and implementation of digital transformation in education, in order to expand the scope of distance learning in an electronic environment, promoting pursuit for excellence in education, support the talented children, implementation of innovations;
- 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 and school education with special focus on upgrading 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 specialists and non-pedagogical staff, 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, mentor programmes, student practices 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, strengthening the link with science, modernization of management systems, introduction of entrepreneurial thinking and innovative practices;
- 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;
- Professional development of PhD students for conducting PhD studies directly related to the current needs of specific economic sectors, businesses and employers.
- 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.
- Under the Programme measures will be supported, 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.
- Throughout the measures to update curricula and practical training aimed at increasing knowledge and developing skills for transition to a green economy will be responded to the Country specific recommendation 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 lecturers 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 “ Number of pre-school children with improved educational outcomes from the received general and additional support for personal development" ” and “ Number of children and pupils enrolled in pre-school and school education through the mechanism for joint work of the institutions”.

**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” (DESI), 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 "Number of pedagogical specialists who apply the acquired skills in teaching 1 year after receiving the training", "Number of students who after passing the exam have acquired a certificate of knowledge and skills”.**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 will be monitored through specific result indicators “Degree of satisfaction of students who have completed student practice with the acquired knowledge and skills, and of teachers, attracted representatives of business and science, and employers with the acquired knowledge and skills of students who have undergone student practice” and “ Number of students who, as a result of ESF + support, have improved their practical work skills”.

*For the Investment for jobs and growth goal:*

<b>TABLE 1</b>		
<b>Policy objective or JTF specific objective</b>	<b>Specific objective or dedicated priority*</b>	<b>Justification (summary)</b>

<p><b>PO 4</b></p> <p><b>A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</b></p>	<p><i>ESF+ Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation improving the quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems including validation of non-formal and informal learning, to support acquisition of key competences including entrepreneurial and digital skills, and by promoting the introduction of dual-training systems and apprenticeships;</i></p>	<p>[2 000 per specific objective or dedicated ESF+ priority or JTF specific objective]</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"> <li>- creation of quality inclusive school education; ensuring the acquisition of basic and digital skills and promoting inclusion in the field of education and training;</li> <li>- support teachers' and trainers' professional development and promote innovative teaching methods and content to best support disadvantaged school students;</li> <li>- increasing the attractiveness, quality and applicability of vocational education and training programmes and promoting participation in adult learning;</li> <li>- improve quality and labour market relevance of higher education, including joint research actions and traineeships in companies.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>- Strengthening employability by reinforcing skills, including digital skills.</li> <li>- Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups.</li> <li>- Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>- 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.</li> <li>- Population with basic digital skills – an increase from 29% in 2019 to 44% in 2030.</li> </ul> <p>As well as the indicators included in the Partnership Agreement:</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase of the net enrollment rate in higher education of persons aged 19-23 from 44% in 2019 to 50%</li> <li>- Increase of the share of 30-34-year-olds with completed higher education to 40% compared to 32.7% in 2019;</li> </ul>
<b>PO 4</b> <b>A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</b>	<i>ESF+</i> <i>Point (f) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation 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, to tertiary level, as well as adult education and learning, including facilitating learning mobility for all and accessibility for persons with disabilities;</i>	<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"> <li>- improve inclusive, accessible and quality early childhood education and care, including relevant infrastructure and equipment;</li> <li>- prevent early school leaving with a targeted approach and promote flexible second chance programmes;</li> <li>- creating quality inclusive school education, including investments;</li> <li>- support teachers' and trainers' professional development and promote innovative teaching methods and content to best support disadvantaged school students;</li> </ul> <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"> <li>- Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups.</li> <li>- Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>- 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.</li> <li>- Increase in the average number of years spent in education from 11.8 in 2019 to 15 in 2030.</li> </ul>
<b>PO 4</b>	<i>ESF+</i>	[2 000 per specific objective or dedicated priority]]

<p><b>A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</b></p>	<p><i>Point (g) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility;</i></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"> <li>- creation of quality inclusive school education;</li> <li>- improving the quality and applicability of higher education to labor market requirements, including joint research activities and traineeships in enterprises.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>- Strengthening employability by reinforcing skills, including digital skills.</li> <li>- Improving the quality, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups.</li> <li>- Improving access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education.</li> <li>- 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.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>- 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.</li> </ul> <p>The interventions are aimed at overcoming the following challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-In 2018, the participation in adult education is at a level of 2.5%, which is significantly below the EU average of 11.1%;</li> <li>- The share of low-skilled adults participating in training amounts to about a quarter of the total population.</li> <li>- Progress in the quality, labor market relevance and the inclusive nature of education and training, despite reforms, is still limited.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the programme will support policies for the professional development of PhD students to conduct</p>
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		PhD studies directly related to the current needs of specific economic sectors, businesses and employers.
<b>PO 4</b> <b>A more social Europe by implementing the European pillar of social rights</b>	<i>ESF+</i>  <i>Point (j) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation promoting the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as Roma people;</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: - 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; 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: - 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. The specific needs identified for marginalized groups, such as the Roma, will also be addressed: - 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; - 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. - 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; - 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>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"> <li>- 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.</li> <li>- Reduction of the share of early school leavers from 13.9% in 2019 to 9.5% in 2030.</li> </ul>
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*\*Dedicated priorities according to ESF+ Regulation*

## 2. PRIORITIES

REFERENCE: ARTICLE 22(2) AND POINT (C) OF ARTIKLE 22(3)

### 2.1. PRIORITIES OTHER THAN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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

**PRIORITY 1 — INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION**

<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 support to the most deprived under the specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation*
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to support to the most deprived under the specific objective set out in point (l) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation <sup>8</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to urban mobility specific objective set out in point (viii) of Article 3(1)(b) of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to ICT connectivity specific objective set out in point (v) of Article 3(1)(a) of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation

*\* If marked go to section 2.1.1.2*

#### *2.1.1.1. Specific objective point (f) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation<sup>9</sup> (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance)*

**Point (f) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation: 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, to tertiary level, as well as adult education and learning, including facilitating learning mobility for all and accessibility for persons with disabilities**

#### **2.1.1.1.1. Interventions of the Funds**

<sup>8</sup> In case resources under the specific objective set out in point (l) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation are taken into account for the purposes of Article 7(4) ESF+ Regulation.

<sup>9</sup> Except for a specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation.

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*Reference: points (d) (i), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) of Article 22(3);*

*The related types of actions – point (d)(i) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation; Article 6(2) ESF+ Regulation:*

*Text field [8 000]*

**1. Expanding the scope of pre-school and primary education, by supporting the effective functioning of the mechanism for joint work of outreach institutions, and the inclusion and prevention of drop-out 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 increase the number of 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 in primary school education, and will be implemented with a horizontal territorial scope, covering the whole country in order to maximize the coverage of children and school students from vulnerable groups in pre-school education and in 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 specialists and non-pedagogical staff for the implementation of general and additional support for personal development;
- Intensive work with parents to form positive attitudes towards education and to turn them into full participants in the educational process such as:

- training of parents from vulnerable groups to realize and fulfill their responsibilities for the upbringing, development, education and upbringing of their children / students;
- motivational seminars for parents for active participation in the life of the educational institution of the children / students and for formation in them of motivation for active inclusion of their children in the system of pre-school and school education;
- survey of parents' opinions on important topics for school life through surveys, questionnaires, etc. to create conditions for dialogue, trust and equality in decision-making for the education and development of children and students.
- Increasing participation in education of children and school students from vulnerable groups by working with target groups at the community level with participation of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators;
- Support for access and permanent inclusion 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:
  - Providing additional pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff based on the assessment of individual needs of the children and students, 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 with the aim of preparing for an independent and autonomous life and for personal realization;
  - Implementation of programs for psychomotor, cognitive and language development of children in kindergartens; individual and group work in case of established language and / or emotional-behavioral and / or sensory difficulties;
  - Application of methods /models/programs/flexible forms of training, incl. stimulating the mastery of key competencies and for easier passability between educational stages of the supported children and school students;
  - Providing specialized equipment and furnishing of resource and others cabinets to provide specialized supportive environment;
- Support for access and permanent inclusion 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 kindergartens;
  - Training through additional modules for children in kindergartens, 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 content (for example due to absence or asynchronous distance learning in an electronic environment), additional training and support for preparation of VII grade students for national external assessment, 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", foreign languages;
- Enrichment of the applied 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 effective programmes related to health education, healthy diet, first aid, road safety;
- Improving physical culture and developing the skills of children and students by providing support for conducting 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;

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 and educational institutions with a high concentration of vulnerable groups. The activities will be focused at children in pre-school education and school students up to completing basic education (grade VII), and high school students will also be supported.

Training of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff 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.

Horizontal support for intensive work with parents aims to change attitudes towards education and form motivation in them for active inclusion of their children in the system of preschool and primary education.

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 permanent inclusion 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 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 "Support for 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 and with outstanding gifts, 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 children and 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 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 SO under Art. 4, paragraph 1, point (f) 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.

*The main target groups – point (d)(iii) of Article 22(3):*

*Text field [1 000]*

Children, students, parents, teachers, pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical persons, incl. educational mediators; children and students with special educational needs, at risk, and with chronic diseases and with outstanding gifts; children and students from marginalized groups, such as the Roma, as well as those seeking or receiving international protection from other vulnerable groups. Children and students with gaps in the acquisition of educational content, children and 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 budget managers, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, the institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, municipalities, non-governmental organizations.

*Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – point (d)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

In the process of preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the procedures under the SO under Art. par. 4 (1) (f), appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

All planned activities under the SC procedures are aimed at ensuring equality, inclusion and non-discrimination.

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

Career guidance in school education will be aimed at all 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 problem behavior.

During the preparation and implementation of all activities in the procedures, special measures will be provided to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, including in the context of information and communication technologies.

*Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – point (d)(v) of Article 22(3)*

Text field [2 000]

N/A

*The interregional, cross-border and transnational actions – point (d)(vi) of Article 22(3):*

Text field [2 000]

N/A

*The planned use of financial instruments – point (d)(vii) of Article 22(3)*

Text field [1 000]

NA

#### 2.1.1.1.2. Indicators

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation, , Article 8 ERDF Regulation, Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

Table 1: Output indicators								
Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</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>	4839	8176
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</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>	14518	24526
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of parents supported by raising awareness of the</i>	<i>number</i>	4839	8176

					<i>benefits of education</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of parents supported by raising awareness of the benefits of education</i>	<i>number</i>	14518	24526
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children and students in pre-school and school education with special educational needs (SEN), at risk, with chronic diseases and with outstanding gifts, who received additional support for personal development</i>	<i>number</i>	1925	4362
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children and students in pre-school and school education with special educational needs (SEN), at risk, with chronic diseases and with outstanding gifts, who received additional support for personal development</i>	<i>number</i>	5775	13088
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children and students from vulnerable groups, and / or those with learning difficulties, in pre-school and school education, who received general support</i>	<i>number</i>	17750	40158

					<i>for personal development</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children and students from vulnerable groups, and / or those with learning difficulties, in pre-school and school education, who received general support for personal development</i>	<i>number</i>	53250	120474
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of pedagogical specialists trained to work with children and students with learning difficulties and from vulnerable groups</i>	<i>number</i>	600	2246
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of pedagogical specialists trained to work with children and students with learning difficulties and from vulnerable groups</i>	<i>number</i>	1800	6736
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of participants in community campaigns for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	0	45043
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of participants in campaigns for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	0	135129

<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of schools that introduce school plans for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	0	250
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of schools that introduce school plans for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	0	750
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical specialists for application of methods for counteracting violence</i>	<i>number</i>	0	1354
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</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>	0	4060
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including</i>	<i>number</i>		

	<i>Article 4(1)</i>				<i>marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>				
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with disabilities</i>	<i>number</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with disabilities</i>	<i>number</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants below 30 years of age</i>	<i>number</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants below 30 years of age</i>	<i>number</i>			

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR and Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

<b>Table 2: Result indicators</b>											
<b>Priorit y</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Categ ory of region</b>	<b>I D [ 5 ]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Me asurement unit</b>	<b>Baseli ne or refere nce value</b>	<b>Refere nce year</b>	<b>Target (2029)</b>	<b>Sourc e of data [200]</b>	<b>Comm ents [200]</b>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transi tion</i>		<i>Number of children and students enrolled in pre-school and school education through</i>	<i>Nu mbe r</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>7742</i>	<i>MES, MA</i>	

					<i>the mechanism for joint work of the institutions</i>					
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children and students enrolled in pre-school and school education through the mechanism for joint work of the institutions</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>23224</i>	<i>MES MA</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children and students from pre-school and school education with improved educational results from the received general and additional support for personal development</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>0</i>		<i>40069</i>	<i>MA</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children and students from pre-</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>		<i>120205</i>	<i>MA</i>

					<i>school and school education with improved educational results from the received general and additional support for personal development</i>						
<i>PI</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of schools reporting reduction of aggression after two school years implementation of the plan for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>		<i>200</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>PI</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of schools reporting reduction of aggression after two school years implementation of the plan for tolerance and reduction of aggression</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>		<i>600</i>	<i>MA</i>	

<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transi tion</i>		<i>participan ts in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>nu mber</i>	<i>0</i>			<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>SO point (f) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less develo ped</i>		<i>participan ts in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>nu mber</i>	<i>0</i>			<i>MA</i>	

**2.1.1.1.2. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention (not applicable to the EMFF)**

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

<b>Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (f) of Article 4(1)	111	11 794 360
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (f) of Article 4(1)	111	35 383 080
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (f) of Article 4(1)	112	20 564 200
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (f) of Article 4(1)	112	61 692 600
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (f) of Article 4(1)	117	9 003 165
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (f) of Article 4(1)	117	27 009 495

<b>Table 2: Dimension 2 – form of financing</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>

Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (f) of Article 4(1)	01	41 361 725
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (f) of Article 4(1)	01	124 085 175

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

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (f) of Article 4(1)	48	41 361 725
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (f) of Article 4(1)	48	124 085 175

**Table 4: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes**

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

**Table 5: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension**

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

\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

**2.1.1.2. Specific objective point (g) of Article 4(1)<sup>10</sup> (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 point (g) of Article 4(1)** – promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility;

**2.1.1.2.1 Interventions of the Funds**

*Reference: points (d) (i), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) of Article 22(3);*

*The related types of actions – point (d)(i) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation; Article 6(2) ESF+ Regulation:*

*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 (motivation for participation in education, work of educational mediators, etc.);
- 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

<sup>10</sup> Except for a specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation.

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appropriate tool for their implementation is the approach to Integrated Territorial Investment. Encouraging participation in lifelong learning through the ITI approach ensures 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. 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.

*The main target groups - point (d)(iii) of Article 22(3) :*

*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.

*Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – point (d)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

In the process of preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the procedures under the SO under Art. 4, para. 1 (g) appropriate appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The activities envisaged under the SC procedure are aimed at ensuring equality, inclusion and non-discrimination.

Concentrated efforts to expand the scope of the education system, especially in the main level, 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 the prevention of early school leaving (18-24 years), especially for vulnerable groups and regions with declining levels of enrollment in the education system and a high proportion of early school leavers, through a targeted approach and the promotion of flexible second chance programs.

During the preparation and implementation of the activities under the procedure, special measures will be envisaged to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, including in the context of information and communication technologies.

Equality between men and women will be ensured in the organization and conduct of adult literacy courses and learning content courses for different educational stages and levels for persons with low or no education.

*Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – point (d)(v) of Article 22(3)*

*Text box [2 000]*

The activities under specific objective **under Art. 4, para. 1, point g)** 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, cross-border and transnational actions – point (d)(vi) of Article 22(3)*

Text field [2 000]

N/A

*The planned use of financial instruments – point (d)(vii) of Article 22(3)*

Text field [1 000]

N/A

#### 2.1.1.2.2. Indicators

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation, , Article 8 ERDF Regulation, Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

Table 1: Output indicators								
Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)

<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of persons over 16 years of age included in literacy and / or learning courses intended for study in lower secondary school grades or included in a procedure for validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1 686</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of persons over 16 years of age included in literacy and / or learning courses intended for study in lower secondary school grades or included in a procedure for validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>15 172</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Minority actors (including marginalized communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Minority actors (including marginalized</i>	<i>number</i>		

					<i>communities such as the Roma)</i>				
<i>PI</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants who are unemployed, including the long-term unemployed, inactive</i>	<i>number</i>			
<i>PI</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Les developed</i>		<i>Participants who are unemployed, including the long-term unemployed, inactive</i>	<i>number</i>			

**Table 2: Result indicators**

<b>Priorit y</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>ID [ 5 ]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Measurement unit</b>	<b>Baseline or reference value</b>	<b>Reference year</b>	<b>Target (2029)</b>	<b>Source of data [200]</b>	<b>Comments [200]</b>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of persons over 16 years of age who have received a document for completed class, stage or degree of primary education</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>0</i>		<i>1 349</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Les developed</i>		<i>Number of persons over 16 years of age who have received a document for completed</i>	<i>number</i>			<i>12 137</i>	<i>MA</i>	

					<i>class, stage or degree of primary education</i>					
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (g) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants, leaving the operation, start looking for a job</i>	<i>number</i>			<i>5,516</i>	<i>MA</i>
<i>PI</i>	<i>SO under Art. 4, para. 1, point g)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants, leaving the operation, start looking for a job</i>	<i>numbers</i>				<i>MA</i>

**2.1.1.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention (not applicable to the EMFF)**

Reference: point (d)(viii) of Article 22(3)

<b>Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	<b>point (g) of Article 4(1)</b>	116	6 838 675
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (g) of Article 4(1)	116	20 516 025

<b>Table 2: Dimension 2 – form of financing</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (g) of Article 4(1)	01	6 838 675
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (g) of Article 4(1)	01	20 516 025

<b>Table 3: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus</b>					
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Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (g) of Article 4(1)	17	6 838 675
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (g) of Article 4(1)	17	20 516 025

**Table 4: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes**

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

**Table 5: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension**

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

\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

**2.1.1.3. Specific objective point (j) of Article 4(1) – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance**

**SO point (j) of Article 4(1)** – promoting the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as Roma people;

**2.1.1.3.1. Interventions of the Funds**

*Reference: points (d) (i), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) of Article 22(3)*

*The related types of actions – point (d)(i) of Article 22(3) of CPR; Article 6(2) ESF+ Regulation:*

*Text field [8 000]*

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

- 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 to overcoming non financial barriers in least accessible areas, through providing transport, meals, student dormitory; teacher mobility and adaptation to the work environment in different areas and with different groups of school students, incl. adaptation programmes and social packages for young teachers.
- Support for inclusive educational environment through providing textbooks, educational books for children of compulsory preschool age, 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;

**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);
- 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 main 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 vulnerable 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 activities of interest, 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.**

- Diversity of the forms and means for effective implementation of intercultural education, through activities of interest, 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 main target groups – point (d)(iii) of Article 22(3):*

*Text field [1 000]*

Children, school students, parents, teachers, pedagogical specialists non pedagogical staff; children and school students with special educational needs; children and school students from vulnerable groups, such as Roma, children and students seeking or receiving international protection and from other vulnerable groups. Children and school students with gaps in the assimilation of educational content, 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, higher education

institutions and research organizations, 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.

*Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – point (d)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

In the process of preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the procedures under the SO under Art. 4, para. 1 (j), appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The activities envisaged under the SC procedures are aimed at ensuring equality, inclusion and non-discrimination. In their implementation, measures will be envisaged to counteract the feminization of poverty and discrimination based on gender in the labor market and in the field of education and training.

The activities under SO under Art. 4, para. 1 (j) aims to include 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 any child by enhancing the participation of target groups in a single educational process and their interaction with other target groups and provides combined activities that are not aimed only at vulnerable groups, in which the main focus is intercultural education, through intercultural interaction in an educational environment, between educational institutions with concentration of children and students from vulnerable groups with those without concentration of children and students from vulnerable groups. The activities under SO under Art. 4, para. 1 (j) also aim at the acquisition of knowledge about the different dimensions of cultural identities and the positive perception of differences and intercultural relations, creating skills for constructive interactions in a multicultural environment.

During the preparation and implementation of the activities under the procedure, special measures will be envisaged to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, including in the context of information and communication technologies.

In performing the activities related to increasing the capacity and qualification of the pedagogical specialists and the non-pedagogical staff, incl. educational mediators to work in a multicultural educational environment will ensure equality between men and women.

*Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – point (d)(v) of Article 22(3)*

*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, cross-border and transnational actions – point (d)(vi) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

N/A

*The planned use of financial instruments – point (d)(vii) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [1 000]*

NA

### **2.1.1.3.2. Indicators**

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR, Article 8 ERDF Regulation, Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

**Table 1: Output indicators**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>ID [5]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Measurement unit</b>	<b>Milestone (2024)</b>	<b>Target (2029)</b>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of children and students from vulnerable groups, and those with learning difficulties, in pre-school and school education, who received general support for personal development (through the CLLD approach)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1840</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of children and students from vulnerable groups, and those with learning difficulties, in pre-school and school education, who received general support for personal development (through the CLLD approach)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5519</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</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>0</i>	<i>584</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of trained pedagogical</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1750 1,876</i>

					<i>specialists for work in a multicultural educational environment</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of parents trained for inclusion in a multicultural educational environment (CLL + intercultural)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7502</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of parents trained for inclusion in a multicultural educational environment (CLL + intercultural)</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>22508</i>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma) (ITI)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma) (ITI)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with upper secondary education (ISCED 3) or post-secondary</i>	<i>number</i>		

					<i>education (ISCED 4)</i>			
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>				<i>number</i>		

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR and Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

<b>Table 2: Result indicators</b>											
<b>Priorit y</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>ID [ 5 ]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Measur ement unit</b>	<b>Baseli ne or refere nce value</b>	<b>Refere nce year</b>	<b>Targ et (2029 )</b>	<b>Sourc e of data [200]</b>	<b>Comm ents [200]</b>
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transi tion</i>		<i>Number of minority participants (including marginalized communities such as Roma) remaining in education (ITI)</i>	<i>Nu mbe r</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>7578</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Les develo ped</i>		<i>Number of minority participants (including marginalized communities such as Roma) remaining in education (ITI)</i>	<i>Nu mbe r</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>2273 6</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transi tion</i>		<i>Participa nts who, upon leaving the operation, are engaged</i>	<i>nu mbe r</i>				<i>MA</i>	

					<i>in education or training</i>						
<i>P 1</i>	<i>point (j) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants who, upon leaving the operation, are engaged in education or training</i>	<i>number</i>					<i>MA</i>

**2.1.1.3.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention** (not applicable to the EMFF)

*Reference: point (d)(viii) of Article 22(3)*

<b>Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (j) of Article 4(1)	117	6 978 310
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (j) of Article 4(1)	117	29 917 890

<b>Table 2: Dimension 2 – form of financing</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (j) of Article 4(1)	01	6 978 310
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (j) of Article 4(1)	01	29 917 890

<b>Table 3: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (j) of Article 4(1)	17	2 740 575

Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (j) of Article 4(1)	17	8 221 725
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (j) of Article 4(1)	27	1 497 160
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (j) of Article 4(1)	27	13 474 440
Priority 1	ESF+	Transition	point (j) of Article 4(1)	48	2 740 575
Priority 1	ESF+	Less developed	point (j) of Article 4(1)	48	8 221 725

**Table 4: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes**

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

**Table 5: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension**

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

\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

## 2.1.2. 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 youth employment
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to innovative actions
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to support to the most deprived under the specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation*
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to support to the most deprived under the specific objective set out in point (l) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation <sup>11</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to urban mobility specific objective set out in point (viii) of Article 3(1)(b) of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation
<input type="checkbox"/> This is a priority dedicated to ICT connectivity specific objective set out in point (v) of Article 3(1)(a) of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation

\* If marked go to section 2.1.1.2

#### 2.1.2.1. Specific objective Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation – repeated for each selected specific objective or area of support, for priorities other than technical assistance

Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation - improving the quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems including through validation of non-formal and informal learning, to support acquisition of key competences including entrepreneurial and digital skills, and by promoting the introduction of dual-training systems and apprenticeships;

##### 2.1.2.1.1. Interventions of the Funds

Reference: points (d) (i), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) of Article 22(3);

The related types of actions – point (d)(i) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation; Article 6(2) ESF+ Regulation:

Text field [8 000]

#### 1. Effective implementation of the competency model, through introduction of school methodological action plans for development of key competences , 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 literacy, literacy in mathematics, science and digital skills, etc. by modernizing the methods of teaching, developing and applying competency-based teaching materials and textbook and implementing interdisciplinary links;

<sup>11</sup> In case resources under the specific objective set out in point (l) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation are taken into account for the purposes of Article 7(4) ESF+ Regulation.

- Updating the methods and means of internal assessment, incl. preparation of examination materials and developing a system of tools for measuring the achievement of key learning outcomes;
- Improving the qualification of teachers to apply the competency approach and value-oriented approach in the educational process, including for updating the knowledge about the transition to a green economy;
- Creating conditions and support for the team work of teachers for widening the scope of school methodological action plans for the development of key competencies by applying the concept of resource sharing.

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 methods of teaching, development and application of competency-based teaching materials and aids, implementation of interdisciplinary links, updating the methods and means of internal assessment and increasing the capacity of pedagogical professionals to improve the quality of education by more effective implementation of 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 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 elaboration of digital educational resources, for analysis and evaluation of educational outcomes, based on using computer modeling, algorithms and artificial intelligence, creation of a library with shared electronic resources for teaching and learning for all profiles, all subjects and all grades in the school education, introduction of personalization of learning 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, school students and parents) for digital transformation of school education through: increasing digital competence and skills of pedagogical specialists for the creation and application of digital educational content in the learning process; classes of interest for students to upgrade the acquired general education in the field of digital skills at the relevant stage of education, incl. for achievements at the level of digital skills under the Digital Competence Framework; training parents to work with open access electronic resources and web-based applications aimed at increasing their involvement in the education of their children; 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;
- Encouraging digital creativity in school students by providing programming and robotics equipment outside the STEM centers;
- 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 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 of learning 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. Support for talented school students, including:**

- Activities for preparation of talented school students for participation in regional rounds of competitions, Olympiads and contests;
- Support for talented school students for participation in national rounds of competitions, Olimpiads and contests in the field of science, culture and sport by providing scholarships and conducting training camps and summer academies.

The activities for talented school students will upgrade the module "Providing training for talented students to participate in student Olympiads" of the National Program "Student Olympiads and Competitions", where based on the number of students ranked for participation in the last round of various Olympiads and competitions from the respective school are provided funds for the school students preparation in the respective field during the next year, and the criterion for inclusion of the school is the presence of students ranked for the national rounds of Olympiads, the presence of winners of national Olympiads and / or medalists of international Olympiads and Balkan Olympiads. The activities under Programme "Education" are aimed at training individual talents in certain areas that are outside the profile of the school and, accordingly, it would not receive adequate support through the national program.

### **4. Support the creation and implementation of a culture of innovation, innovative kindergartens and schools, including:**

- Encouraging educational innovations in pre-school and school education by developing innovative training packages, 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 training of pedagogical specialists for introduction of educational innovations in pre-school and school education, extracurricular activities for school students in the field of STEM and complementary innovative activities for children for applying innovative learning content, innovative teaching and learning methods, innovative models for

assessing educational outcomes and involving an innovative learning environment in the learning process;

- 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;
- Creating networks to change the school environment and 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.**

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 Point (e) of Article 4(1) 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.

*The main target groups - point (d)(iii) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [1 000]*

Children, school students, parents, pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical 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, higher education institutions and research organizations.

*Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – point (d)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

In the process of preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the procedures under the SO under Art. par. 4 (1) (d), appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

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

With the under the SO addressed at educational institutions and participants in the educational process (pedagogical specialists, non-pedagogical staff, students and parents), actions aimed at ensuring equality, inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as equality between men and women will be envisaged.

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

In performing the activities related to increasing the capacity and qualification of the pedagogical specialists and the non-pedagogical staff, incl. educational mediators to work in a multicultural educational environment will ensure equality between men and women.

*Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – point (d)(v) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

N/A

*The interregional, cross-border and transnational actions – point (d)(vi) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

N/A

*The planned use of financial instruments – point (d)(vii) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [1 000] NA*

### **2.1.2.1.2. Indicators**

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR, Article 8 ERDF Regulation, Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

<b>Table 1: Output indicators</b>								
<b>Priority</b>	<b>Specific objective (Jobs and growth goal) or area of support (EMFF)</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>ID [5]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Measurement unit</b>	<b>Milestone (2024)</b>	<b>Target (2029)</b>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of schools that implementsd methodological action plans for the development of key competences</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>360</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of schools that implementsd methodological action plans for the development of key competences</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>216</i>	<i>1079</i>

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of pedagogical specialists who completed training to improve teaching skills</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>3998</i>	<i>9105</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of pedagogical specialists who completed training to improve teaching skills</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>11994</i>	<i>27315</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of school students who received support for upgrading the knowledge and skills acquired in general education</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>56954</i>	<i>83592</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of school students who received support for upgrading the knowledge and skills acquired in general education</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>170861</i>	<i>250777</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of parents trained with open electronic resources and web-based applications aimed at increasing their involvement in the education of their children</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>28115</i>	<i>40164</i>

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of parents trained with open electronic resources and web-based applications aimed at increasing their involvement in the education of their children</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>84345</i>	<i>120493</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of innovative training packages developed</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of innovative training packages developed</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of highly qualified professionals who are attracted to the teaching profession through alternative access measures</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>47</i>

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of highly qualified professionals who are attracted to the teaching profession through alternative access measures</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)</i>	<i>number</i>		
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>		

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ESF+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)</i>	<i>number</i>		
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*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR and Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

<b>Table 2: Result indicators</b>											
<b>Prior ity</b>	<b>Specif ic object ive (Jobs and growt h goal) or area of suppo rt (EMF F)</b>	<b>Fu nd</b>	<b>Catego ry of region</b>	<b>I D [ 5 ]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Measure ment unit</b>	<b>Baseli ne or refere nce value</b>	<b>Refere nce year</b>	<b>Targ et (202 9)</b>	<b>Sou rce of data [200 ]</b>	<b>Comm ents [200]</b>

<b>P 2</b>	<b>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</b>	<b>ES F+</b>	<b>Transition</b>		<b>Share of schools that implemented methodological action plans with an extended set of key competences 2 years after their introduction</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>12.50%</b>	<b>MA</b>	
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<b>P 2</b>	<b>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</b>	<b>ES F+</b>	<b>Less developed</b>		<b>Share of schools that implemented methodological action plans with an extended set of key competences 2 years after their introduction</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>37.50%</b>	<b>MA</b>	
<b>P 2</b>	<b>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</b>	<b>ES F+</b>	<b>Transition</b>		<b>Number of pedagogical specialists who apply the acquired skills in teaching 1 year after receiving the training</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7284</b>	<b>MA</b>	

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of pedagogical specialists who apply the acquired skills in teaching 1 year after receiving the training</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>21852</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of students who, have acquired a certificate for the achieved level of knowledge and skills, after passing an exam</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>23301</i>	<i>MA</i>	

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of students who, have acquired a certificate for the achieved level of knowledge and skills, after passing an exam</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>69903</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of educational institutions introducing shared innovative training packages</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of educational institutions introducing shared innovative training packages</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>342</i>	<i>MA</i>	

<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of highly qualified professionals attracted to the teaching profession through alternative access measures teaching pupils regularly during the school year</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of highly qualified professionals attracted to the teaching profession through alternative access measures teaching pupils regularly during the school year</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving</i>	<i>όποῦ</i>				<i>MA</i>	
<i>P 2</i>	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	<i>ES F+</i>	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving</i>	<i>όποῦ</i>				<i>MA</i>	

**2.1.2.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention**  
(not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: point (d)(viii) of Article 22(3)

<b>Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	108	37 429 000
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	108	112 287 000
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	112	13 728 400
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	112	41 185 200

<b>Table 2: Dimension 2 – form of financing</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	01	51 157 400
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	01	153 472 200

<b>Table 3: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 2	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	48	51 157 400
Priority 2	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	48	153 472 200

<b>Table 4: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>

**Table 5: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension**

<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>

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\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

**2.1.3. 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\*\*

\* If marked go to section 2.1.1.2

**2.1.3.1. Specific objective Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation <sup>12</sup>(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 Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation - improving the quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems including through validation of non-formal and informal learning, to support acquisition of key competences including entrepreneurial and digital skills, and by promoting the introduction of dual-training systems and apprenticeships;**

**2.1.3.1.1. Interventions of the Funds**

*Reference: points (d) (i), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) of Article 22(3);*

*The related types of actions – point (d)(i) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation; Article 6(2) ESF+ Regulation:*

*Text field [8 000]*

**1. VET adaptation to labour market dynamics:**

- Introduction of a sectoral approach in VET, 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
- Development and implementation of a new List of Vocational Education and Training (LVET), creation of a mechanism for its adaptation and for an open format of the standards for professional qualification, 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 introducing 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,

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

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

- Introduction of 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::**

- Improving the qualifications for 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 priority occupations and specialities in key economic sectors with identified labor market shortages and for strengthening the relationship of students-parents-employers-schools-local authorities;
- Systemic 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 implementation of the concept for resource sharing in VET, incl., sharing equipment, infrastructure, 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 in VET, 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:**

- Systematization and updating of survey results of international experience within the EU;
- Providing up-to-date data on the the attitudes of business and universities in the country for the introduction of a dual form of education in HE;
- Preparation and dissemination of methodologies, manuals, training materials, samples of agreements between higher education institutions, 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;
- Introduction of dual training in applicable specialties in higher education and other forms of joint training (incubators, summer schools, career events, etc.) incl. with the participation of 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 approach 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 with a focus on the concept of resource sharing between higher education institutions.

**6. Professional orientation of students through practices and development of entrepreneurial skills, including:**

- Encouraging the entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education institutions in the digital economy conditions, supporting and stimulating socially engaged activities of students and teachers within the region, incl. increasing the project competence of university teachers to work in European and other projects and networks, incl. in a multicultural and multilingual environment;
- Organizing a unified network for career guidance and support of vocational guidance, in accordance with the needs of the labour market, including career centers operating in the systems of higher and secondary education;
- Implementation and development of systems for monitoring graduates, development of the graduates' clubs, creating a platform for exchange of experience and support;
- Providing enhanced practical training of students to acquire competencies and qualities sought in the labor market by providing student practices based on assessment of career guidance of students, including through providing practical training in universities, research organizations and employers;
- Development and implementation of a model for validation of results from previous non-formal and informal learning, applicable to Bulgaria, including through: study of international experience, preparation of an applied pilot model, preparation of manuals, etc. Establishment of joint centers between business and universities for assessment and validation of competencies for professions, including those that require higher qualification, as well as knowledge, skills and competencies acquired as a result of non-formal and informal learning. Development and implementation of a model for training of the "microcredit" type, including indicators related to the assessment and accreditation procedures;
- Development and implementation of a mechanism for anticipating the needs and tools for assessing compliance with the requirements of the labour market by introducing competency profiles of specialties in higher education, involvement in the planning of places for state-subsidized training and monitoring of professional realization.

In the activities to support the practical training of students and PhD 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.

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

#### **7. Support for modernization and quality improvement in higher education through digital transformation, resource sharing and qualifications:**

The activities will build on the results of the procedure "Modernization of higher education institutions", launched in 2020, as well as several national programmes, including "Promotion of Bulgarian higher education and application of Bulgarians living abroad for training in Bulgarian higher education institutions", "Digital qualification" and "Increasing the competences of teachers in public higher education institutions preparing future teachers".

It is envisaged:

- Implementation of modern management and control systems in higher education and the creation of incentives for structural change in university administration, incl. by upgrading and integrating existing electronic systems in HEIs and introducing new ones, including those related to more efficient human resources management; Integration of systems in HEIs with external organizations, incl. with MES, NEAA, NACID, etc., with which it is necessary to exchange data both at national and European level, including a common electronic platform for higher education, NACID, NEAA and MES, containing the data necessary for accreditation procedures;
- Promoting connectivity between higher education institutions in the country and sharing common resources for training and research by building consortia for higher education. This will be a key element for the development of the network of HEIs in the country in support of raising the qualification of teachers and creating an attractive environment for learning and reproducing skills in a real environment in support of society;
- Support for increasing the capacity and skills of the academic staff in higher education;
- Establishment of a cloud system for data exchange between various electronic platforms and resources at the national level, in order to regulate and optimize the higher education system and introduce an electronic management model, incl. creation of an electronic national map of the higher education system, unification of

the registers and the various electronic systems and platforms for higher education, facilitation of the network connectivity between the individual institutions and others.

The activities of the Programme for Education focus on the implementation of modern management and control systems in higher education and the creation of incentives for structural change in university administration, including by upgrading and integrating existing electronic systems in HEIs and introducing new ones, including related with more efficient human resources management; integration of systems in HEIs with external organizations, including the Ministry of Education and Science, NEAA, NACID, etc., with which data exchange is necessary, both at national and European level. One of the leading policies for improving the quality of higher education is related to promoting connectivity between higher education institutions in the country and sharing common resources for training and research by building consortia for higher education. This will be a key element for the development of the network of higher education institutions in the country in support of raising the qualification of teachers and creating an attractive environment for learning and reproducing skills in a real environment in support of society. In connection with this, activities related to attracting specialists with extensive practical experience and foreign teachers in Bulgarian universities will be stimulated.

#### **8. Digital change of higher education**

- Expanding the scope of digital education by developing and introducing new programs with fully digital educational content, in line with the trend of digital transformation and the increasing use of artificial intelligence in many areas of our lives, and new programmes for electronic training, incl. transformation of existing curricula into programs with digital educational content or programs for e-distance learning; development and introduction of new interactive educational resources and digital and software solutions for application, training, reviewing and assessment of students;
- Expanding access to higher education by developing and introducing distance learning courses for students and PhD students (MOOCs) with open access by Bulgarian teachers, incl. in English;
- Promoting training and teaching in modern digital technologies through the introduction of training in artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), artificial reality (VR), etc., as well as basic training to develop skills for algorithmic thinking and solving of algorithmic problems;
- Training of teachers in information processing skills, visual literacy, problem solving and thinking at a higher level, adhoc cooperation and deep understanding of how technological tools can improve the learning process.
- Building digital platforms, including together with other higher education institutions and research organizations, to integrate their systems and resources for the implementation of interactive approaches to learning and teaching ,, promoting the development of key competencies for lifelong learning and maintaining a high level of qualification of the academic and administrative staff.

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 and financial opportunities. Bulgaria has traditions and potential in the field of digital technologies and through the activities for promotion of education and teaching in modern digital technologies the goal is to create expert staff in this field. To cover the needs at the national level, as well as to turn Bulgaria into a leading country on the Balkan Peninsula in the field of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, augmented and artificial reality, the creation of digital hubs and supercomputers. In this way, integration into the digital transformation of Europe, which is underway and changing European society, will take place and concrete steps will be taken in the implementation of the European Union's policies set out in a number of European programs, such as "Digital Opportunities" and " Digital Europe.

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 education institutions" 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 professional fields, according to the needs of the regions and their real opportunities.

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

- Elaboration and implementation of models for competency-based student learning, incl. in interaction between universities and business;
- Establishment of joint training courses, bachelor's and master's programs between higher education institutions and / or between higher education institutions and research organizations in Bulgaria, aimed at the development of key competences for lifelong learning, competence in foreign languages, civic and social competences, common digital

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competencies and strengthening the interdisciplinary approach in the preparation of curricula, introduction of hybrid disciplines and specialties, which include teachers from different scientific fields and professional fields, use of common resources - teachers, training base, curriculum and issuance of common general / double / joint diplomas;

- Creating curricula in a foreign language;
- Creating conditions for the development of students, PhD students and researchers in areas identified as priorities in national and European strategic documents by providing individual support from higher education institutions;
- Expanding international cooperation and academic partnerships with foreign universities and participation in university networks. Creation of joint educational programs between Bulgarian and foreign universities, as well as new forms of educational exchange within the framework of European cooperation and issuance of joint / double / joint diplomas. Improving the systems for recognition of credits obtained in foreign higher education institutions and the mechanisms for facilitated recognition of diplomas;
- Short-term mobility and internships in foreign universities of students and PhD students;
- Introduction of innovative curricula and teaching methods and hybrid specialties, combining disciplines from two or more professional fields, which are carried out by two or more universities;
- Implementation of joint programs 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;
- Development of joint PhD programs, incl. between HEIs, research organizations and employers in professional fields with identified needs of the labor market
- Support for the establishment and development of PhD schools, such as preparation of courses for PhD students, incl. multidisciplinary, providing training for the acquisition of skills and competencies, incl. preparation of literature references, methodologies for conducting research; work with electronic databases, bibliographic and citation reference, skills for academic writing and presentation, support for publications in national and international publications, necessary for conducting the respective PhD studies; participation in seminars, courses in connection with the training requirements of PhD students; Creation of electronic content of modern systems for electronic and distance learning of PhD students
- Support for the preparation and publication of textbooks, teaching aids, and monographs in foreign languages;
- Attracting teachers from abroad in order to exchange experience and improve teaching skills in higher education;
- Attracting practitioners from business and government institutions and scientists in academic classes;
- Introduction of new methods for assessing students' knowledge and skills not on the basis of reproduction of what is memorized, but through skills for debate, conducting scientific experiments or theoretical modeling, solving real problems, digital creativity, presenting information to specialized and non-specialized audiences , as well as the ability to

understand the nature of the problem / topic, including through various digital tools and the development of skills for self-regulation of learning

- Supporting and stimulating the development of training programs for postgraduate qualification and retraining, incl. increasing the readiness of the academic staff, the employees in the administration and the students for work in a multicultural and multilingual environment;

#### **10. Activities for access of vulnerable groups to higher education**

- Supporting school students with good educational results from hard-to-reach or underdeveloped settlements and school students from vulnerable groups from the second high school stage for continuing their education in higher education institutions through: preparation for state matriculation examination and entrance exams, mentoring / tutoring, incl. for first year students; providing additional teaching materials and aids, working with representatives of the academic (including student) community, etc.
- Popularization the opportunities and admission conditions and training of young people with good educational results from hard-to-reach or underdeveloped settlements and young people from vulnerable groups in order to continue their education in higher education through joint activities of career centers in schools and universities, such as information campaigns, volunteer campaigns, "open doors", etc.; encouraging the participation of parents in the educational process and the benefits of education and higher education;
- Development and implementation of models for social inclusion and adaptation of different groups of students, incl. with different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, students in mobility programs and international agreements, students with disabilities, etc.]
- Supporting non-pedagogical staff (educational mediators, teacher's assistant, etc.) with secondary 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 students with good educational results from hard-to-reach or underdeveloped settlements and those from vulnerable groups for social inclusion by creating conditions for transition from secondary to higher education. The measures will provide access to higher education in Bulgaria for a wider range of students and will improve the conditions for their realization on the labor market.

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 point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation in condition that the purchase of furniture and equipment (including ICT 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.

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*The main target groups - point (d)(iii) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [1 000]*

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

Higher education institutions, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Agricultural Academy, scientific organizations with accreditation for training in educational and scientific degree "doctor", the Ministry of Education and Science and its secondary budget managers, schools teaching in the secondary stage of secondary education; ;

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

*Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – point (d)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

In the process of preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the procedures under the SO under Art. par. 4 (1) (d), appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

All planned activities under the SO procedures are aimed at ensuring equality, inclusion and non-discrimination.

In the implementation of the activities under SO under Art. 4, para. 1 (d) with a focus on marginalized groups, at-risk groups and Roma provides for the provision of opportunities for an integrated approach to overcome barriers to learning – social and learning deficits, measures to prevent dropouts, measures to identify needs skills, guidance and counseling, compensatory measures to achieve a higher level of skills and degree, as well as providing flexible ways to return to training and provisions for more individualized training, bridge programs and shorter pathways to the labor market .

According to the SO under Art. 4, para. 1, letter (d) provides for activities aimed at supporting students with good educational results from hard-to-reach or underdeveloped settlements and such students from vulnerable groups for social inclusion by creating conditions for transition from secondary to higher education, such as focuses on the concept of resource sharing and the role of career centers in schools and universities and building an effective relationship between them in the process of motivating and deciding on the professional realization of students.

There will be a special focus on access to higher education for educational mediators, thus encouraging them to become pedagogues / psychologists / social workers. 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 others. vulnerable groups and increase their confidence in the system.

During the preparation and implementation of the activities under the procedure, special measures will be envisaged to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, including in the context of information and communication technologies.

The implementation of the measures under the SO, which will provide support for access to higher education for a wider range of young people and will improve the conditions for their realization on the labor market, will ensure compliance with the principle of equality between men and women.

*Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – point (d)(v) of Article 22(3)*

*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, cross-border and transnational actions – point (d)(vi) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

N/A

*The planned use of financial instruments – point (d)(vii) of Article 22(3)*

*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.

**2.1.3.1.2. Indicators**

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR, Article 8 ERDF Regulation, Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

Table 1: Output indicators								
Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)

P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of vocational schools having introduced modernized vocational training programs	Number	15	96
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of vocational schools having introduced modernized vocational training programs	Number	46	288
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of school students underwent apprenticeships in a real work environment	Number	1773	11,080
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of school students underwent apprenticeships in a real work environment	Number	5,318	33,239
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of trained pedagogical specialists and teachers in vocational training	Number	136	847
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of trained pedagogical specialists and teachers in vocational training	Number	407	2,542
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of CoEs built	Number	1	4
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of CoEs built	Number	5	20
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of vocational schools having introduced a dual system of education	Number	0	48

P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of vocational schools having introduced a dual system of education	Number	0	111
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of professional fields for which, with the support of the ESF +, methodological guidelines for the introduction of dual training have been developed	Number	0	1
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of professional fields for which, with the support of the ESF +, methodological guidelines for the introduction of dual training have been developed	Number	0	4
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of students received support for practical training	Number	0	16666
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of students received support for practical training	Number	0	24999
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of higher education institutions that have developed curricula with the support of ESF +	Number	0	6
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of higher education institutions that have developed curricula with the support of ESF +	Number	0	10

P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of persons supported by activities for transition to higher education	Number	308	1540
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of persons supported by activities for transition to higher education	Number	924	4619
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)	Number		
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		participants with lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)	Number		
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)	number		
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Participants from minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)	number		

Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR and Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation

Table 2: Result indicators											
Prior ity	Specific objectiv e (employ ment and growth)	Fund	Categ ory of region	I D [ 5 ]	Indicator [255]	Measure ment unit	Baseli ne or refere nce value	Refere nce year	Tar get (202 9)	Sou rce of data [200 ]	Comm ents [200]
P 3	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Not applicable		Degree of satisfaction of students who have completed student practice with the acquired knowledge and skills, and	%				MA	

					<i>of teachers, engaged represent atives of business and science, and employers with the acquired knowledg e and skills of students who have undergon e school student practice</i>						
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Transi tion</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 environm ent</i>	<i>Number</i>			3,675	MA	
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Less develo ped</i>		<i>Number of school students in the second high school stage who have concluded a contract with an employer for</i>	<i>Number</i>			8,575	MA	

					<i>practical training in a real work environment</i>					
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of professional fields for which dual training has been introduced, 1 year after receiving ESF + support</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	-	1	MA
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of professional fields for which dual training has been introduced, 1 year after receiving ESF + support</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	-	4	MA
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of students who, as a result of ESF + support, have improved their practical work skills</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	-	149 99	MA
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Number of students who, as a result of ESF + support, have</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	-	224 99	MA

					<i>improved their practical work skills</i>						
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Number of higher education institutions that introduced new curricula 1 year after the end of the operation</i>	<i>Number</i>	0	-	13	MA	
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants engaged in job searching upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019		MA	
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants engaged in job searching upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019		MA	
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Transition</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019		MA	
P 3	<i>Point (e) of Article 4(1)</i>	ES F+	<i>Less developed</i>		<i>Participants in education or training upon leaving</i>	<i>Number</i>		2019		MA	

**2.1.3.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention (not applicable to the EMFF)**

*Reference: point (d)(viii) of Article 22(3)*

<b>Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	112	23 305 433
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	112	79 897 367
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	113	70 865 573
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	113	116 279 427

<b>Table 2: Dimension 2 – form of financing</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	01	78 441 347
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	01	184 653 853

<b>Table 3: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	17	9 135 250
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	17	27 405 750
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	48	69 306 097
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	Point (e) of Article 4(1)	48	157 248 103

<b>Table 4: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes</b>					
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Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)

**Table 5: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension**

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

\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

**2.1.3.2. Specific objective point (g) of Article 4(1)<sup>13</sup>(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 point (g) of Article 4(1) – promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility;**

#### **2.1.3.2.1. Interventions of the Funds**

*Reference: points (d) (i), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) of Article 22(3);*

*The related types of actions – point (d)(i) of Article 22(3) of this Regulation; Article 6(2) ESF+ Regulation:*

*Text field [8 000]*

#### **1. Support for project PhD studies:**

- Supporting the professional development of PhD students for conducting PhD studies directly related to the current needs of specific economic sectors, businesses and employers, primarily focused on Industry 4.0, green transition, blue growth and / or Innovation Strategy for Intelligent Specialization;
- Support for the development of the presentation skills of PhD students through participation in international conferences for sharing scientific results.

*The main target groups - point (d)(iii) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [1 000]*

PhD students

Higher education institutions, scientific organizations with accreditation for conducting training in the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

<sup>13</sup> Except for a specific objective set out in Article 4(1)(c)(vii) of the ESF+ Regulation.

*Actions safeguarding equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – point (d)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

In the process of preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the procedures under the SO under Art. 4, para. 1 (g) appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

*Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of territorial tools – point (d)(v) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

N/A

*The interregional, cross-border and transnational actions – point (d)(vi) of Article 22(3)*

*Text field [2 000]*

N/A

*The planned use of financial instruments – point (d)(vii) of Article 22(3)*

*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.

### 2.1.3.2.2. Indicators

*Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR, Article 8 ERDF Regulation, Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation*

<b>Table 1: Output indicators</b>								
<b>Priority</b>	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>ID [5]</b>	<b>Indicator [255]</b>	<b>Measurement unit</b>	<b>Milestone (2024)</b>	<b>Target (2029)</b>
P 3	point (g) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Number of PhD students who received ESF + support	Number	0	320
P 3	point (g) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Number of PhD students who received ESF + support	Number	0	480
P 3	point (g) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Transition		Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)	Number		

P 3	point (g) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Less developed		Participants with tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8)	Number				
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Reference: point (d)(ii) of Article 22(3) of CPR and Article 23(2) ESF+ Regulation

Table 2: Result indicators												
Priority	Specific objective	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	point (g) of Article 4(1)	ESF+	Not applicable		Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving	Number				MA		

### 2.1.3.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the programme resources (EU) by type of intervention (not applicable to the EMFF)

Reference: point (d)(viii) of Article 22(3)

Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	point (g) of Article 4(1)	113	9 561 920
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	point (g) of Article 4(1)	113	14 342 880

Table 2: Dimension 2 – form of financing					
Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	point (g) of Article 4(1)	01	9 561 920

Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	point (g) of Article 4(1)	01	14 342 880
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**Table 3: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus**

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
Priority 3	ESF+	Transition	point (g) of Article 4(1)	48	9 561 920
Priority 3	ESF+	Less developed	point (g) of Article 4(1)	48	14 342 880

**Table 4: Dimension 6 – ESF+ secondary themes**

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

**Table 5: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension**

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

\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

## 2.2. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PRIORITIES

### 2.2.1. Priority for technical assistance pursuant to Article 36(4) (repeated for each such technical assistance priority)

*Reference: point (e) of Article 22(3)*

#### 2.2.1.1. Intervention from the Funds

*The related types of actions – point (e)(i) of Article 22(3)*

*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 education institutions;

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.

**4. Support for publicity of the programme, including:**

- 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;
- 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.;

- 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.

The main target groups – point (e)(iii) of Article 22(3),

Text field [1 000]

MA employees performing functions of planning, management, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, provision of information and publicity and control of the program;

Other structures supporting the implementation of the program, in order to ensure and maintain high levels of competence;

Beneficiaries and their partners under the program, as well as potential beneficiaries;

Key beneficiaries and partners in system operations under the program: Ministry of education and science, incl. Regional departments of education and its secondary budget managers, higher education institutions.

### 2.2.1.2. Indicators

Output indicators with the corresponding milestones and targets

*Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 22(3)*

**Table 1: Output indicators**

Priority	Fund	Category of region	ID [5]	Indicator [255]	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
Technical Assistance	ESF+	Transition		Employees of the MA, trained	Number		109
Technical Assistance	ESF+	Transition		Performed program evaluations, analyzes and studies	Number		15
Technical Assistance	ESF+	Transition		Conducted information events	Number		80

Technical Assistance	ESF+	Transition		Trained beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	number		280
Technical Assistance	ESF+	Transition		Number of MA staff whose salaries are financed by Technical Assistance	Full time equivalent		109

2.2.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the programmed resources (EU) by type of intervention  
*Reference point (e)(iv) of Article 22(3)*

<b>Table 1: Dimension 1 – intervention field</b>					
<b>Priority No</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Category of region</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Amount (EUR)</b>	
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Transition	<b>140</b> Information and communication	1 134 000	
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Less developed	<b>140</b> Information and communication	3 066 000	
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Transition	<b>141</b> Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control	6 809 940	
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Less developed	<b>141</b> Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control	18 412 060	
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Transition	<b>142</b> Evaluation and research, data collection	1 134 000	

4	<b>ESF+</b>	Less developed	<b>142</b> Evaluation and research, data collection	3 066 000
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Transition	<b>143</b> Strengthening the capacity of Member States' authorities, beneficiaries and relevant partners	1 240 110
4	<b>ESF+</b>	Less developed	<b>143</b> Strengthening the capacity of Member States' authorities, beneficiaries and relevant partners	3 352 890

**Table 2: Dimension 5 – ESF+ secondary themes**

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Code	Amount (EUR)

Table 3: Dimension 7 – ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension

Priority No	Fund	Category of region	Code	Amount (EUR)

\* In principle, 40 % for the ESF+ contributes to gender tracking. 100 % is applicable when Member State chooses to use Article 6 ESF+ Regulation as well as programme specific actions in gender equality.

### 3. FINANCIAL PLAN

*Reference: points (g)(i), (ii) and (iii) of Article 22(3), Article 112(1), (2) and (3), and Articles 14 and 26*

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### 3.1. Transfers and contributions<sup>14</sup> - N/A

Reference: Article 14; Article 26 and 27; CPR

Programme amendment related to	<input type="checkbox"/> contribution to InvestEU
	<input type="checkbox"/> transfer to instruments under direct or indirect management
	<input type="checkbox"/> transfer between ERDF, ESF+, Cohesion Fund or to another Fund or Funds

### 3.2. JTF: allocation in the programme and transfers – N/A

### 3.3. Transfers between categories of region resulting from the mid-term review

Table 1: Transfers between categories of region resulting from the mid-term review, within the programme (breakdown by year)

Transfer from	Transfer to	Breakdown by year			
Category of region	Category of region	2025	2026	2027	Total
More developed	More developed / Transition / Less developed				
Transition					
Less developed					

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<sup>14</sup> Applicable only to programme amendments in accordance with Articles 14 and 26 except complementary transfers to the JTF in accordance with Article 27. Transfers shall not affect the annual breakdown of financial appropriations at the MFF level for a Member State.

**Table 2: Transfers between categories of region resulting from the mid-term review, to other programmes (breakdown by year)**

Transfer from	Transfer to	Breakdown by year			
Category of region	Category of region	2025	2026	2027	Total
More developed	More developed / Transition / Less developed				
Transition					
Less developed					

### 3.4. Transfers back<sup>15</sup> - N/A

### 3.5 Financial appropriations by year

*Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 22(3) of CPR and Articles 3, 4 and 7 JTF Regulation.*

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<sup>15</sup> Applicable only to programme amendments for resources transferred back from other EU Union instruments, including elements of AMIF, ISF and BMVI, under direct or indirect management, or from Invest EU.

Table 1: Financial appropriations by year

Fund	Category of region	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026		2026 for EMFA F only	2027		2027 for EMFA F only	Total
							Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		
							ERDF*	More developed					
	Transition												
	Less developed												
	Outermost and northern sparsely populated												
Total													

Table 1: Financial appropriations by year

Fund	Category of region	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026		2026 for EMFA F only	2027		2027 for EMFA F only	Total
							Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		
							ESF+*	More developed					
	Transition	-	11 898 299	23 796 599	35 694 898	47 593 197	23 796 599	23 796 599		35 694 898	35 694 898		
	Less developed	-	27 441 451	54 882 901	82 324 352	109 765 803	54 882 901	54 882 901		82 324 352	82 324 352		
	Outermost and northern sparsely populated												
Total			39 339 750	78 679 500	118 019 250	157 359 000	78 679 500	78 679 500		118 019 250	118 019 250		

Table 1: Financial appropriations by year

Fund	Category of region	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026		2026 for EMFA F only	2027		2027 for EMFA F only	Total
							Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		
							JTF*	Article 3 JTF Regulation resources					
	Article 4 JTF Regulation resources												
	Article 7 JTF Regulation resources (related to Article 3 JTF Regulation resources)												

Table 1: Financial appropriations by year

Fund		Category of region	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026		2026 for EMFA F only	2027		2027 for EMFA F only	Total
								Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		Financial appropriation without flexibility amount	Flexibility amount		
	Article 7 JTF Regulation resources (related to Article 4 JTF Regulation resources)													
Total														
Cohesion Fund		N/A												
EMFAF		N/A												
Total														

### 3.6. Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (g)(ii) of Article 22(3), Article 22(6) and Article 36

For programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal where technical assistance in accordance with Article 36(4) was chosen in the Partnership Agreement.

Policy/ JTF specific objective number or technical assistance	Priority	Basis for calculation Union support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	Fund	Category of region*	Union contribution (a) = (g)+(h)	Breakdown of Union contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of national contribution		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)**
						Union contribution less the flexibility amount (g)	Flexibility amount (h)		public (e)=(a)+(b)	private (d)		

	Priority 1		ESF+	More developed								
				Transition	55 178 710	41 384 033	13 794 678	23 648 019	23 648 019		78 826 729	70%
				Less developed	174 519 090	130 889 318	43 629 773	30 797 486	30 797 486		205 316 576	85%
				Outermost and northern sparsely populated								

	Priority 2		ESFΦ+	More developed								
				Transition	51 157 400	38 368 050	12 789 350	21 924 600	21 924 600		73 082 000	70%
				Less developed	153 472 200	115 104 150	38 368 050	27 083 329	27 083 329		180 555 529	85%
				Outermost and northern sparsely populated								

	Priority 3		ESF+	More developed								
				Transition	103 732 927	77 799 695	25 933 232	44 456 969	44 456 969		148 189 895	70%
				Less developed	210 519 673	157 889 755	52 629 918	37 150 531	37 150 531		247 670 204	85%
				Outermost and northern sparsely populated								
TII	Priority 4 TA art. 36 (4)		ESF+	More developed								
				Transition	10 318 050	7 738 538	2 579 513	4 422 021	4 422 021		14 740 071	70%
				Less developed	27 896 950	20 922 713	6 974 238	4 922 991	4 922 991		32 819 941	85%
				Outermost and northern sparsely populated								

TII	Priority 4 TA art. 36 (4)		ESF+										
			Total ERDF	More developed									
				Transition									
				Less developed									
				Outermost and northern sparsely populated									
			Total ESF+	More developed									
				Transition	220 387 087	165 290 315	55 096 772	94 451 609	94 451 609		314 838 695	70%	
				Less developed	566 407 913	424 805 935	141 601 978	99 954 338	99 954 338		666 362 251	85%	
				Outermost and northern sparsely populated									

		JTF**	Article 3 resources									
			Article 4 resources									
		Total Cohesion Fund										
		Grand total		786 795 000	590 096 250	196 698 750	194 405 946	194 405 946		981 200 946		786 795 000

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

\*\* Indicate the total JTF resources, including the complementary support transferred from the ERDF and the ESF+. The table shall not include the amounts in accordance to Article 7 JTF Regulation. In case of technical assistance financed from the JTF, the JTF resources should be split into resources related to Articles 3 and 4 JTF Regulation. For Article 4 JTF Regulation, there is no flexibility amount.

For the Investment for jobs and growth goal: programmes using technical assistance according to Article 36(5) in accordance with the choice made in the Partnership Agreement.

#### 4. Enabling conditions

Reference: point (i) of Article 22(3)

<b>Table 1: Enabling conditions</b>							
<b>Enabling conditions</b>	<b>Fund</b>	<b>Specific objective</b> (N/A to the EMFF)	<b>Fulfilment of enabling condition</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Fulfilment of criteria</b>	<b>Reference to relevant documents</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Thematic condition  Strategic policy framework for education and training at all levels	ESF +		Partially completed.	There is a national or regional strategic framework for education and training policy, which includes:  Criterion 1  Evidence-based systems for predicting and envisaging skills  Criterion 1a  Graduates monitoring mechanisms and services for quality and effective guidance for learners of all ages	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 compliance with the requirements of the labor market.  A Skills Estimating Roadmap will be presented and integrated into the Education and Training Strategic Framework.  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.

							<p>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 inclusive education and training, as well as the acquisition of key competencies at all levels, including higher education</p>	Yes	<p>Pre-school and School Education Act</p> <p><a href="http://lll.mon.bg/uploaded_files/ZAKON_za_pr educilisnoto_i_ucilisnoto_obrazovnie_EN.pdf">http://lll.mon.bg/uploaded_files/ZAKON_za_pr educilisnoto_i_ucilisnoto_obrazovnie_EN.pdf</a></p> <p>CMD No. 100 of 08.06.2018 for the establishment and functioning</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 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. (<a href="http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&amp;Id=4993">http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&amp;Id=4993</a>)</p>	

					<p>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 and school age</p> <p>(<a href="http://back2school.moe.bg/index.php">http://back2school.moe.bg/index.php</a>)</p> <p>Ordinance on inclusive education</p> <p><a href="file:///C:/Users/m.ninov/Download/s/nrdb_prio">file:///C:/Users/m.ninov/Download/s/nrdb_prio</a></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 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</p>
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						<p><a href="#">bshavashto_izm271219.pdf</a></p> <p>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>
			<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>	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</p>

				<p>Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the strategic policy framework</p>		<p>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 accreditation system; Objective 10. Improving the structure and efficiency of higher education.</p>
				<p>Criterion 5</p> <p>Measures targeted at low-qualified workers and low-qualified adults and those with socio-economic disadvantages and ways improving the skills</p>	Partially completed	<p>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:</p> <p><a href="http://lll.mon.bg/uploaded_files/Proekt1_konsultativen_dokument.pdf">http://lll.mon.bg/uploaded_files/Proekt1_konsultativen_dokument.pdf</a></p>

							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  Ordinance No. 15 of 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists (prom., SG,	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, 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.  3. Policies related to teachers are also supported by adopted national education development programmes	

					<p>No. 61 of 2.08.2019</p> <p>CMD No. 9, prom SG, No. 9/2020).</p> <p><a href="file:///C:/Users/m.ninova/Downloads/PMS9_20_izm-norm-aktove_310_12020.pdf">file:///C:/Users/m.ninova/Downloads/PMS9_20_izm-norm-aktove_310_12020.pdf</a></p>	<p>(<a href="http://pris.government.bg/prin/document_view.aspx?DocumentID=u1WkHlzh9oiPz2mXWkMFug==">http://pris.government.bg/prin/document_view.aspx?DocumentID=u1WkHlzh9oiPz2mXWkMFug==</a>)</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> <p>Priority area 6 "Motivated and creative teachers"</p>
			<p>Criterion 7</p> <p>Measures promoting mobility of learners and staff and transnational cooperation between education and training providers, including through the recognition</p>	<p>Partially completed</p>	<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</p>	

				of learning outcomes and qualifications			<p>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><a href="http://hrdc.bg/%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%8F/">http://hrdc.bg/%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%8F/</a></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> <p>Objective 4. Internationalization of higher education and inclusion in international educational and scientific networks</p>
Thematic condition	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	No		<p>Update and adoption of the National Roma Integration Strategy after 2020, including an Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy</p> <p>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</p>

				measurable milestones and target values			<p>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.</p>
				Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and review of Roma integration measures	Partially completed		<p>Provided monitoring and review of the implementation of the National Roma 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</p>

							administrative monitoring report on the implementation of the National Roma Strategy is presented and summarized in the monitoring system.
				Mechanisms for including Roma integration at regional and local level	Partially completed		Updating regional strategies and municipal action plans in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the strategy.  Updating of the regional strategies and municipal action plans will be done within the partnerships developed within the project under criterion 4.
				Mechanisms ensuring that development, implementation, monitoring and review are carried out in close cooperation with Roma civil society and all other stakeholders, including at regional and local level	No		Development of the consultation and coordination process at national level through the National Council for Cooperation on the 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.  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.
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## 5. Programme authorities

Reference: point (k) of Article 22(3) and Articles 71 and 84

<b>Table 1: Programme authorities</b>			
<b>Programme authorities</b>	<b>Name of the institution [500]</b>	<b>Contact name [200]</b>	<b>e-mail [200]</b>
Managing authority	Executive Agency “Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth”	Ivan Popov	i.popov@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

## 6. Partnership

Reference: point (h) of Article 22(3)

<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>
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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 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.

## **7. Communication and visibility:**

*Reference: point (j) of Article 22(3)*

*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.

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

*Reference: Articles 94 and 95 CPR*

**Table 1: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs**

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95	YES	NO
From the adoption programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under the priority according to Article 94 (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
From the adoption programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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



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**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 94)**

Date of submitting the proposal	

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. Description of the operation type including the timeline for implementation <sup>1</sup>	
2. Specific objective(s)	
3. Indicator triggering reimbursement <sup>2</sup>	
4. Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	
5. Standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
6. Amount per unit of measurement or percentage (for flat rates) of the SCO	

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<sup>1</sup> Envisaged starting date of the selection of operations and envisaged final date of their completion (ref. Article 63(5)).

<sup>2</sup> For operations encompassing several simplified cost options covering different categories of costs, different projects or successive phases of an operation, the fields 3 to 11 need to be filled in for each indicator triggering reimbursement.

7. Categories of costs covered by the unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
8. Do these categories of costs cover all eligible expenditure for the operation? (Y/N)	
9. Adjustment(s) method <sup>3</sup>	
10. Verification of the achievement of the units - describe what document(s)/system will be used to verify the achievement of the units delivered - describe what will be checked and by whom during management verifications - describe what arrangements will be made to collect and store relevant data/documents	
11. Possible perverse incentives, mitigating measures <sup>4</sup> and the estimated level of risk (high/medium/low)	

<sup>3</sup> If applicable, indicate the frequency and timing of the adjustment and a clear reference to a specific indicator (including a link to the website where this indicator is published, if applicable).

<sup>4</sup> Are there any potential negative implications on the quality of the supported operations and, if so, what measures (e.g. quality assurance) will be taken to offset this risk?

12. Total amount (national and Union) expected to be reimbursed by the Commission on this basis	
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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.).

2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 94(2) is relevant to the type of operation.

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, if requested, provided in a format that is usable by the Commission.

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 95)**

Date of submitting the proposal	
Current version	



## List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable

(Article 22(3))

Text field [2 000]

*Priority 1*

*Specific Point (f) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation 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.

*Priority 2*

*Specific objective Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation includes the following operations 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.

*Priority 3*

*Specific objective Point (e) of Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation includes the following operations of strategic importance:*

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.