

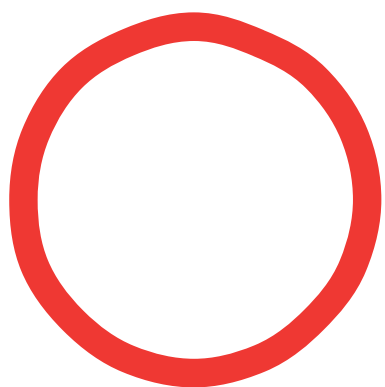


# Bulgaria's long road on the implementation of SDGs - progress and challenges

## Background document

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# FACES OF MIGRATION

The publication is part of the three-year project „Faces of Migration, SDGs and Migration – Multipliers and Journalists Addressing Decision Makers and Citizens in the EU“, Contract N° CSO-LA/2018/401-798, funded by the European Commission. It aims to raise public awareness on the sustainable development goals, migration and the relationship between them.

The following organisations are involved in the Faces of Migration project:

Leading partner - Diakonie ECCB;

**partnering organizations:**

Global Call to Action Against Poverty (Belgium);

Bulgarian Platform for International Development (Bulgaria);

Federazione Organismi Cristiani Internazionale Volontario (Italy);

ActionAid Hellas (Greece);

Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations (Slovakia);

Povod (Slovenia).

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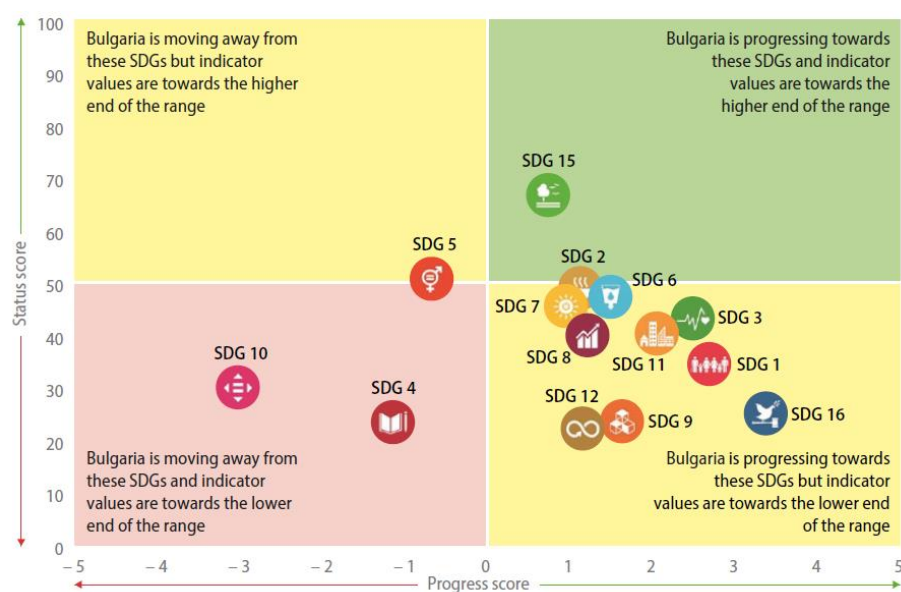
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Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is a task of all UN member states. In this context, Bulgaria is working on their implementation as the main horizons of activity are outlined in the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2030<sup>1</sup>. The document defines three strategic national goals - I) accelerated economic development, II) demographic upswing and III) reduction of inequalities. However, let's see how Bulgaria is doing in these few aspects.

Placed in a common European context, Bulgaria registers significant potential and at the same time a clear necessity for catching up with the rest of EU's member states - for example, in 2019 the country ranks 26th out of 28 EU member states in terms of meeting the UN SDGs by 2030. Bulgaria ranked 26 out of 28 member states in 2019. This performance reflects also the progress on all SDGs that focus on migration in general and mobility in particular.

The country is moving away from SDG 4 (Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) as the values of the relevant indicators tend to lower on the scales, while under SDG 8 (Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all). Bulgaria registers progress, although the values of the indicators also tend to the lower part of the measurement scales.

**Figure 1. Progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by Bulgaria for 2020**



Source: Sustainable development in the European Union Monitoring Report on Progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2020 edition Eurostat, p. 324

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.minfin.bg/en/1394>

## Where do our children and their knowledge go?

### Low school results, poverty and migration of Bulgarians abroad are some of the main problems in our country

This is indicated by the data from a number of documents cited in the monitoring report for 2020 "The link between the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria and the migration" of the Bulgarian Platform for International Development.

According to data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) for the 2018-2019 school year, a total of 8,390 children of school age from 1st to 12th grade have dropped out of school due to the family's departure abroad. The data are as of April 24, 2020. For the period 2016 – 2019 an average of 8 400 students went to another country. In the three years, the share of students in the primary school age is the highest and this trend continues also in the last three years.

According to the Ministry of Science and Education, in the period 2003-2020<sup>2</sup> a total of 53,304 children of compulsory preschool and school age left the education system due to the departure of the family abroad. In the last three years, the proportion of children leaving the country since 2003 is the highest. Some of them return to their homeland after a while, but they need additional classes, as for most of them the Bulgarian language is a second language.

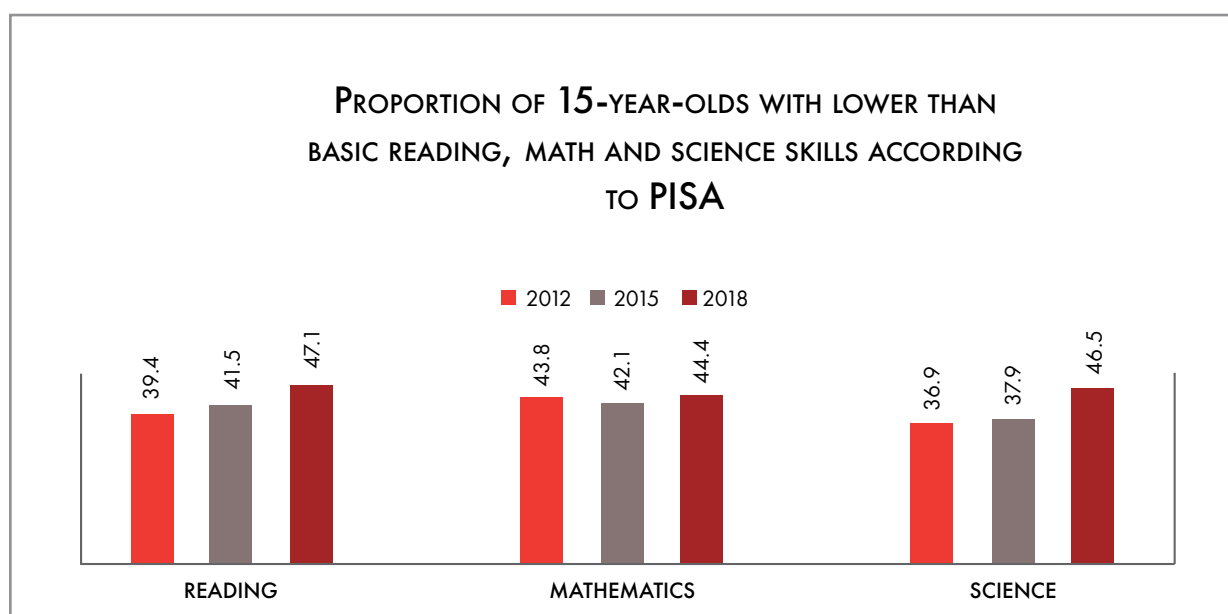
In Bulgaria, the tendency to increase the share of students who do not cover basic competencies in reading, mathematics and science continues<sup>3</sup>. The number of students who do not cover basic reading skills has increased by almost 8 percent for the period from 2012 to 2018. Bulgaria is on one of the last places in the EU and candidate countries, followed by the Republic of Northern Macedonia and Albania with results of 55.1% and 52.2%, respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> The accumulated data are current as of 06.02.2020 (beginning of the second term of the academic year 2019-2020) and are provided by the Ministry of Education and Science to the Bulgarian Platform for International Development under the Access to Public Information Act.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat

Table 1.



Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Bulgaria ranks fourth in the EU with 14 percent in terms of the share of graduates with lower secondary education (first high school stage 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade) who are not covered in another form of education.<sup>4</sup>

The highest share of adults participating in lifelong learning in our country is only 2.5% in 2018. - For comparison, in Switzerland, Sweden and Finland, one third of adults participate in a lifelong training, and in Sweden they are 38.8 percent in 2018.

One of the main advantages of living abroad according to Bulgarians living outside Bulgaria is the opportunity to acquire new qualifications through various courses and programs every day. *You may find more of their conclusions in this year's case studies "Effective migration for sustainable development: Benefits and disadvantages for Bulgaria" within the project "SDGs and Migration" of BPID.*

Although the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2030 also envisages the improvement of the educational infrastructure and the building stock, there is no commitment to provide an accessible and safe educational environment (physical and emotional) for all children, including those with special educational needs. There is no commitment for the country's participation in international development policies - increasing scholarships for enrollment in university education and the qualification of teachers from developing and least developed countries.

<sup>4</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>

## SDGs and the labor market in Bulgaria

According to data from the National Statistical Institute, as of 31.12.2019 people aged between 15 and 29 are 1,005,227, which amounts to 14.5% of the total population. According to Eurostat, a significant proportion of these young people are outside the employment, education or training systems and form the so-called NEET group. In 2019, nearly 168 thousand young people or 16.7% of young Bulgarian citizens aged 15-29 fall into this group.

In recent years, the share of people aged between 15 and 29 who have left the country is traditionally over 30% of all those who have declared to the administrative authorities a change of their current address from the country abroad. Young people studying and working abroad believe that higher education in our country needs a change in the structure of education and an emphasis on more practice and technological innovation. Lack of decent payment is one of the factors forcing young people to emigrate. Another attraction for leaving the country is the lack of multiculturalism and a competitive environment to motivate and inspire them (*see also the case studies within the "SDGs and Migration" project, implemented by BPID*).

It is also interesting that in the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2030 it is reported that: "realized economic growth is not sufficiently inclusive to contribute to reducing social inequalities, and the relative share of people at risk of poverty is among the highest in the EU.

Some of the Bulgarians living abroad who were interviewed within the project share that the lack of a middle class and the great division of rich and poor forced them to leave Bulgaria. The interviewed foreigners living in our country also shared their impressions of the way of life of Bulgarians, especially in the countryside, where many people are forced to live with income below the poverty line.

In 2019 the poverty line for the country as a whole is BGN 413.04 per month per household member. With this size of the line below the poverty line were 1,586.2 thousand people, or 22.6% of the country's population. Since 2016, the income inequality between the richest and the poorest in Bulgaria is the largest within the EU. According to Eurostat data, income inequality is deepening in Bulgaria.

Table 2. Main indicators of poverty - Bulgaria

|   | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Poverty line - average monthly amount - BGN   | 325,8 | 308,2 | 351,1 | 351,1 | 413,0 |
| Persons below the poverty line - thousand   | 1586  | 1639  | 1665  | 1551  | 1586  |
| Relative share of the poor -% of the population   | 22,0  | 22,9  | 23,4  | 22,0  | 22,6  |
| Relative share of the poor before receiving social transfers -% of the population                     | 42,9  | 45,5  | 44,8  | 45,2  | 42,2  |
| Relative share of the poor before receiving social transfers, including pensions -% of the population | 28,4  | 27,9  | 29,2  | 29,5  | 29,6  |
| Relationship between the incomes of the poorest and the richest 20% of the population (S80 / 20)      | 7,1   | 7,7   | 8,2   | 7,7   | 8,1   |
| Gini coefficient  | 37,0  | 37,7  | 40,2  | 39,6  | 40,8  |

Source: NSI

It seems that, although with some progress, Bulgaria still has a long way to go in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2030 is a key action, framing the forthcoming steps for our country, but it is undoubtedly necessary to set clearer, measurable and long-term criteria for achieving it. The implementation of the SDGs does not simply aim to address the obligations of our country as a member of the UN, but also provides an opportunity for us to become a more acceptable, equal and sustainable society.





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