

Education in Bulgaria

Context

As of 2007, Bulgaria is one of the two European Union (EU) member countries in the CEE/CIS region, along with Romania. That said, it has much progress to make if it is to achieve the five EU-level benchmarks in education and the EFA goals.

Bulgaria has a GNP (PPP) per capita of \$9,140 USD, which is by far the highest in South-eastern Europe and the second highest in the region outside of Central Europe.¹ It has an annual growth rate of 6.1%. Bulgaria is ranked 53rd out of 177 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index, with a score of 0.82.² Despite its increasingly strong economy, 12.5% of Bulgarians live below the national poverty line and 6% of the population lives on less than \$2.00 USD per day.³ National unemployment stands at about 12% with youth unemployment more than doubling the national rate at 26%.

Education Reforms

Bulgaria has carried out a number of education reform projects to improve the country's education quality. Some of the most recent are summarized below.

- The government is implementing a demonstration project on preventing school dropouts at the municipal level.
- The government raised teachers' salaries by 22.5% in 2008 and has introduced a three pillar system for differentiated payments of teachers based on teachers' performance and school rating.
- As of January 2008 a system of "delegated budgets", where schools are funded on the basis of the number of students, has been implemented nationwide.
- The government is implementing a number of measures for improving access of children to education (provision of free textbooks for children from grades 1-7, school meals, and transportation to schools, etc).



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- The policy for optimization of the school network has been further promoted, leading to closure of a number of small schools in the country.
- In 2008 the government administered the first state matriculation exams for secondary education. The first external testing after 4th grade also took place in all schools in 2008.

Access

Access to education at the national level in Bulgaria is high for the region among the general population; for minority populations access to all levels of education is significantly lower. At the national level, the primary school net enrolment ratio is 97.8%, which is above the sub-regional and regional average. The secondary school net enrolment ratio is 78.3%. Access to early childhood education is 73.2%, which surpasses both the sub-regional and regional average. Access to tertiary education is also among the highest rates in the region at 44%.⁴

Equity

Minority ethnic groups suffer severe inequities in both access and quality of education, especially the Roma. While Bulgaria is 'on track' to meet EFA

Quick Facts about Education in Bulgaria

| | Bulgaria | South-Eastern Europe |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Total Population | 7.7 | 50.7 |
| Youth unemployment rate as percentage of unemployment rate | 214% | x |
| Percentage of GDP spent on Education | 4.20% | 4.07% |
| Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2007 (<i>Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys)</i>) | 73,2 | 55 |
| Net Enrolment in Primary School (grades 1-4), 2007 (<i>GPI</i>) | 97.8% | 92 |
| Net Enrolment in Secondary School (9-12), 2007 (<i>GPI</i>) | 78.3% | 82 |
| Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Education, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>) | 44 (1.14) | 35 |
| Student/Teacher Ratio, primary education, 2007 | 16.1 | 18.2 |
| Student/Teacher Ratio, lower secondary school, 2007 | 12 | - |
| Student/Teacher Ratio, upper secondary school, 2007 | 11.5 | - |
| School drop-outs (% girls) | 29, 348 | 80,000 |
| Number of refugees and internally displaced persons of concern | 5,470 | 690,000 |
| PISA Score (mathematics ((regional rank/17), reading (""), science ("")) | 413 (12), 402 (15), 434 (12) | x |

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008; Innocenti Research Centre

Figure 2. Distribution of Overall Science Achievement on TIMSS over time 1999-2003, grade 8

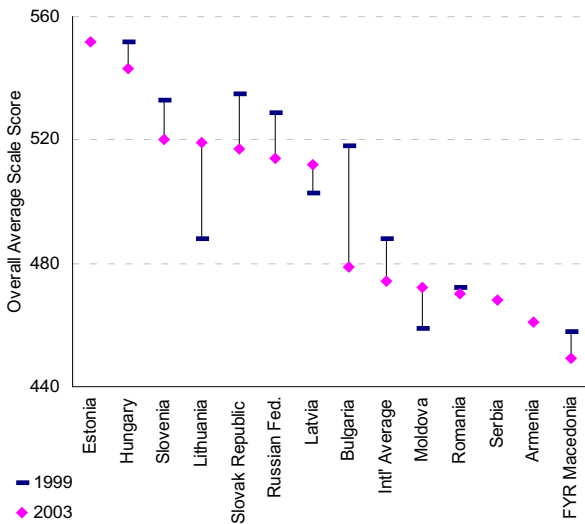
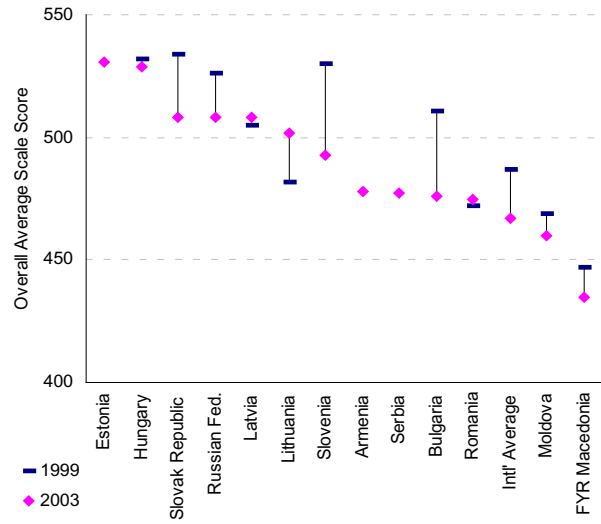


Figure 3. Distribution of Overall Mathematics Achievement on TIMSS Over time, 1999-2001, grade 8



goal five calling for gender parity in primary and secondary school, it is far from ensuring that all minority children have equitable access to schooling of good quality. See Box 2.

Learning Outcomes

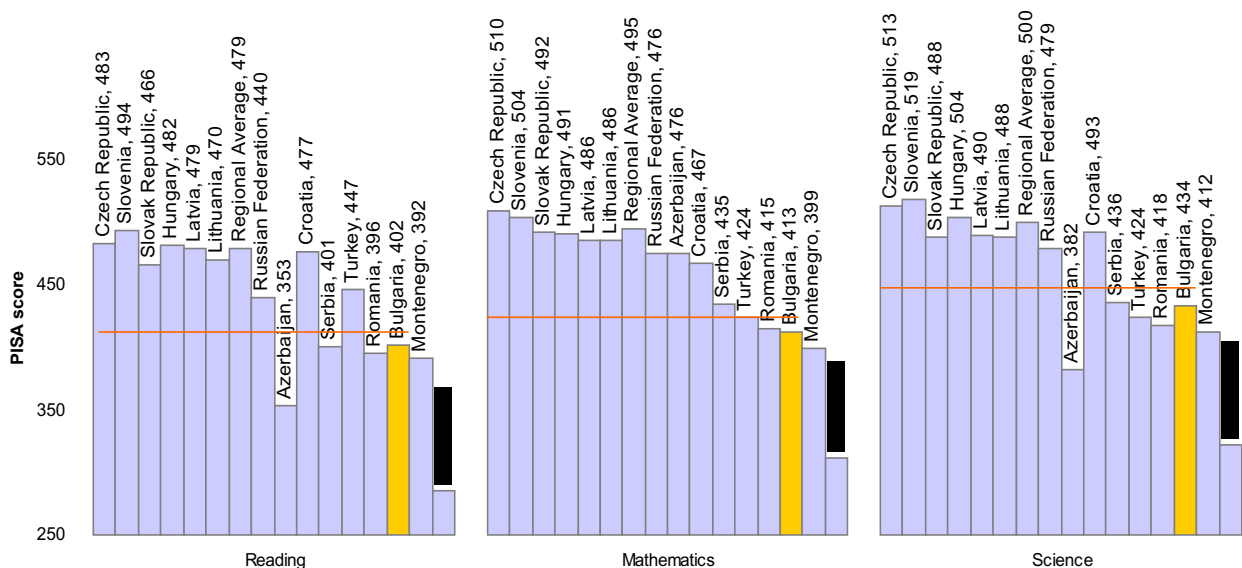
The EU education benchmarks call for all EU countries to halve the number of under-performing students by 2010. Bulgaria's performance on recent international learning assessments shows that it has not yet met this benchmark. In fact it has shown reverse progress, performing worse in reading, science and math over time.

International assessments of learning outcomes show mixed findings in Bulgaria. Results from PIRLS 2001 and 2006 show that Bulgarian students achieved high learning outcomes in reading. In 2001, Bulgaria scored the highest out of the 12 countries in the region that participated. It was ranked

4th out of a total of 35 countries in reading, outperforming Canada, the United States and Germany. In 2006, again Bulgaria scored in the top third in reading, ranking 14th out of 45 countries. However, between 2001 and 2006, Bulgaria's performance on the reading assessment did not improve. In fact, it maintained the same level, dropping slightly from an average scale score of 550 to 547. Bulgaria did not show the same high performance in reading on the OECD's PISA test. In 2006, it scored 44th of 57 total participating countries, which placed it 10th out of 15 countries in the region, scoring just behind the Russian Federation and Turkey.

Bulgaria's performance in mathematics and science falls far below that of its reading achievement. In mathematics, Bulgaria's achievement in math seems to have declined sharply over time. In 1999, Bulgaria scored above average in mathematics on the TIMSS assessment, scoring 17th of 35 participating coun-

Figure 1. Performance of Bulgaria on the PISA 2006 in Participating Countries in the CEE/CIS Region



Source: PISA International Report 2006. OECD.

Figure 4. Distribution of Reading Achievement on PIRLS Assessment Overtime, 2001-2006

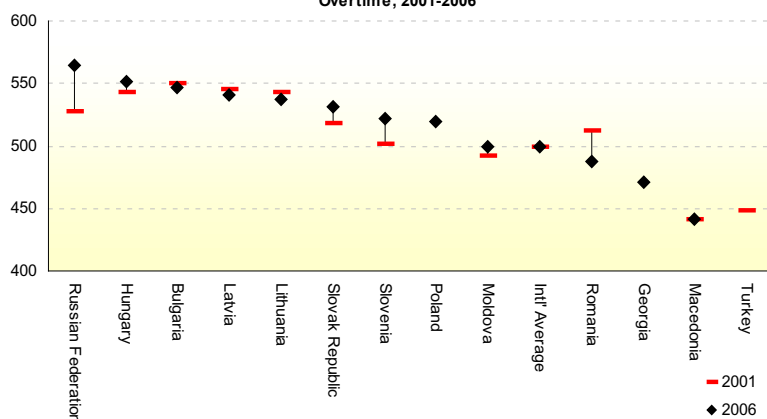
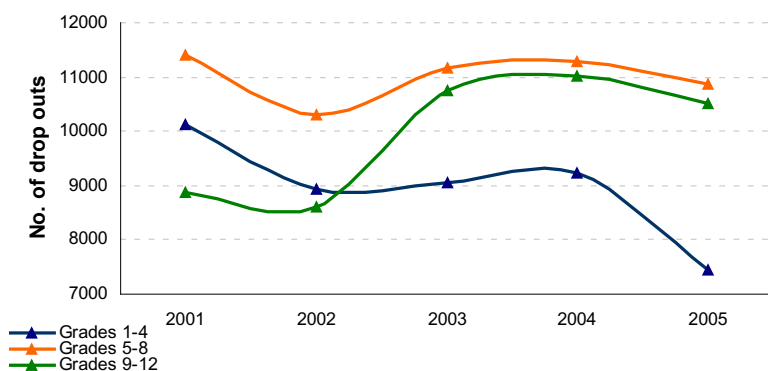


Figure 5. The number of drop outs in Bulgaria, by year and grade level



tries worldwide. This was on par with its neighbours' performance; Bulgaria ranked 6th out of 12 participating countries in the region. However in 2003, Bulgaria's average mathematics scale score showed the largest decrease in the CEE/CIS region, dropping by 35 points, although the country still scored above average. On TIMSS 2003, Bulgaria ranked 25th of 46 participating countries in mathematics and fourth to last in the CEE/CIS region. This downward trend continued. In 2006, Bulgaria participated in PISA, on which it scored third to last in the region and 46th of 57 participating countries worldwide. Bulgaria's low performance in mathematics in 2006 and its declining performance on TIMSS show that learning outcomes in mathematics in Bulgaria may be deteriorating, which moves Bulgaria farther from achieving the EU education benchmarks.

In science, Bulgaria scored about average for the region on both the TIMSS and PISA. On TIMSS 2003, Bulgaria scored 24th of 45 total participating countries, which made it 8th of 13 countries from the region, and on PISA 2006 it scored 42nd out of 57 total countries, placing it in the third quartile overall, and 10th out of 17 countries from the region. As in mathematics, Bulgaria's

Box 1. School Dropouts in Bulgaria

Each year about 20,000 or 3% of students in Bulgaria drop out of school. 'In the 2004/2005 school year, about 21,000 students left the general schools for different reasons, 17,100 of them being in primary education. The biggest share of dropouts consists of those who left due to family problems – 9,800, or 47% of the total number of dropouts. The largest share – 87.6% – of children drop out after 4th grade. Primary school dropouts (1-8 grade) constitute more than half of all dropouts, and high school (1-12 grade) students are nearly 25% of the total number. In both the professional high schools and the elementary schools the share of dropouts is about 5%.

'Educational difficulties are mentioned as a main reason for dropping out of school by the children aged 12-16 who took part in a survey of school dropouts. A little over a third (34%) point out they did not want to study because it was difficult for them and 22% declare school was not interesting for them. The economic reasons, which parents perceive as most important, came second in children's answers. One out of five 12-16 year-olds works to financially support his/her family. Their main occupations are collecting and handing over waste materials or construction work'... In summary, the three most important contributors to children's decision to drop out of school are the following:

- **The economic situation** of the family in which the child lives as presented by a number of indicators brought together in a complex and powerful factor for dropping out of school. To a great extent, the economic situation of the households is associated with the ethnic background of their members.
- **The ethnic background**, which entails adherence to definite cultural stereotypes that can be very influential when the family lives in a compact group among representatives of its own ethnicity. The ethnic background can be conducive to dropping out both by way of economic motives for leaving school (low incomes, low standard of living and poor living conditions, unemployment, etc), as well as through the so-called family reasons (early marriages, incomplete families, etc.).
- The third main group of motives for dropping out of school are determined by the **school environment and the related educational factors**. On the one hand, these are motives related to difficulties encountered by the child in school; on the other hand – the value attached to education, the interest in the education process and the resultant eagerness/reluctance to go to school; thirdly – conflict-ridden relations with classmates and/or teachers. On the whole, these motives are less dependent on the economic characteristics of the schoolchildren.'

Source: UNICEF. 2006. *Reasons for Children Dropping Out of School in Bulgaria*.

Box 2. Desegregation of Roma Schools in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is home to almost a million Roma, who make up about 8% of the country's total population, which is one of the highest percentages in South-eastern Europe. Poverty is high among the Roma population in Bulgaria. 'A recent survey found that nearly 80% of Roma in Bulgaria and Romania were living on less than \$4.30 per day.' Public services for the Roma are more scarce and of lower quality than for the general population.

School enrolment rates are extremely low for Roma children compared to their non-Roma peers. In primary school, only 47% of Roma children enrol in school and less than 47% of those who enrol complete primary schooling. By secondary school, only 12% of Roma 16-19 year olds are enrolled compared with 81% of the national population. Only 7% of Roma children complete secondary education and even fewer complete tertiary education. These statistics are made worse by the fact that the schools that Roma students attend are largely located in Roma-majority neighbourhoods and are well-known to be of lower quality than non-Roma majority schools. Thus, the low percentage of Roma who make it through secondary school still lag behind their non-Roma peers that complete the same level of schooling.

Bulgaria is a member of the Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015). One program it has implemented in cooperation with local non-governmental organizations is the Roma Participation Program (RPP). This initiative aims to eliminate Roma ghetto schools. Roma students in the program are bussed from their homes to integrated schools outside their neighbourhoods.

In order for the programme to be more successful: teachers must be prepared to teach in integrated classrooms; work needs to be done to reduce the ethnic tensions between Roma and non-Roma parents and students; regular monitoring of pedagogical and psychological needs of Roma students is needed; and a national anti-discrimination campaign is necessary to raise the issue at a national level and prepare all stakeholders.

Sources: OSI. (2006). *Monitoring Education for Roma*. Kyuchukov, Hristo. (2006); *Desegregation in Roma Schools in Bulgaria*. C.E.G.A.

performance in science showed a steep decline between 1999 and 2003, indicating that education quality in Bulgaria may actually be deteriorating.

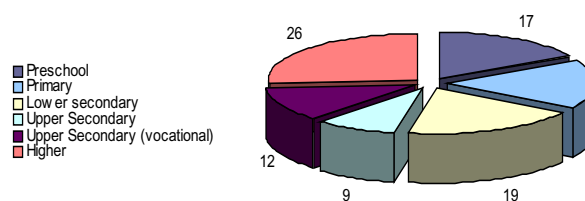
Education Financing

Data shows that Bulgaria spends an average of 4.2% of its GDP on education over the past four years. This is just below the CEE/CIS regional average, which is 4.4% but far below the average spending on education in the EU, which is about 6%. Education spending in Bulgaria is more decentralized than in other countries in the region, with only 32% of funds coming from the central budget, 11% coming from extra-budgetary funds and 67% coming from local budgets.⁵ The distribution of funds is relatively even between different levels and types of education.⁶ About two thirds of total expenditure is spent on personnel, with only 4% being spent on scholarships and another 4% on capital expenditure, which is a common trend.⁷

In 2007, teachers went on a six-week strike in protest of low wages and low national expenditure on education. It was the biggest national protest in Bulgaria since the beginning of the transition. The strike ended when the government announced a 22.5% increase in salary for all education employees.

As of January 2008 a system of "delegated budgets" was introduced in all schools in the country. According to this system schools are funded based on the number of students enrolled multiplied by a common financial standard for a child. Although the new approach is a step towards decentralisa-

Figure 6. Distribution of public expenditure on education in Bulgaria, by level and type,



tion of the financial management of the secondary education and greater financial independence of schools, there are serious concerns that it will negatively affect the access of all children to quality educational services.

- 1 World Bank Statistics Online.
- 2 UNDP Human Development Report Online. 2008.
- 3 UNDP Human Development Report Online. 2008.
- 4 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.
- 5 UNICEF. 2007. Education for Some more than Others.
- 6 UNICEF. 2007. Education for Some more than Others.
- 7 UNICEF. 2007. Education for Some more than Others.