

Foreword

Developing and using people's skills effectively is crucial for Bulgaria's economic prosperity and social cohesion.

Demographic change, digitalisation, globalisation and climate change are combining to increase and transform the skills needed to thrive in Bulgarian workplaces and society. People will need a stronger and more well-rounded set of skills, including cognitive, social and emotional, and job-specific skills, to flourish in life both in and outside of work. Bulgaria will also need to make better use of people's skills in the labour market and in individual workplaces to minimise skills imbalances and harness the potential of people's skills. The coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has accelerated the digitalisation of learning and work and made upskilling and reskilling even more critical for many adults.

Bulgaria faces several persistent skills challenges. First, many young people lack high levels of cognitive skills, which this has not clearly improved over time. There remain large gaps in skill levels and educational attainment between youth from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds. Skills imbalances are high, with many employers facing skills shortages and many graduates being mismatched to their jobs. Many adults appear to be low-skilled, but relatively few participate in education and training. Finally, employers are not using workers' skills to their full potential to support productivity and innovation.

Bulgaria is at various stages of implementing key reforms to improve its performance in developing and using people's skills. For example, the country has lowered the age of mandatory early childhood education, developed a competency-based curriculum for schools, increased teachers' salaries, increased adults' access to vocational education and training, mapped regional supply and demand in higher education, and increased the retirement age, among other reforms.

Today, Bulgaria has a unique window of opportunity to progress and build upon these reforms to improve performance and equity across its skills system. This OECD's Skills Strategy seeks to support Bulgaria in seizing this opportunity. This review provides a detailed analysis, benefiting from widespread engagement with stakeholders, leading to several tailored recommendations for Bulgaria.

The OECD stands ready to support Bulgaria as it seeks to put skills at the forefront of its development agenda and develop an Action Plan with a comprehensive set of skills policy actions.

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While the report draws upon data and analysis from the OECD, Bulgarian authorities and other published sources, any errors or misinterpretations remain the responsibility of the OECD team. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

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