

Bulgaria

Marina Mavrodieva
Center for Assessment in Pre-School and School Education

Adriana Damyanova
Sofia University

Introduction

Overview of Education System

The Bulgarian education system is centralized. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), a specialized body of the Council of Ministers, is charged with determining and implementing a unified government policy in the fields of education and science. The main functions of the Ministry are to:

- Exercise control over all types of schools and kindergartens in the country
- Participate in forming the national strategy for the development of education
- Approve education documentation
- Manage the introduction of innovations and the supply of textbooks and manuals
- Define unified state education standards
- Establish, transform, and when necessary, close state and municipal schools
- Approve the establishment of private schools and kindergartens
- Appoint the heads of each Regional Division of Education

Each of Bulgaria's 28 administrative regions has a Regional Division of Education, a specialized body of the Ministry that administers the education system regionally. These offices plan, coordinate, and monitor the functioning of each region's schools and kindergartens. The heads of these offices appoint the school principals in the different regions.

Each municipality has education departments that implement local education policy. Municipal departments are the supporting and managing bodies for preschool education but have only a supporting role in primary through upper secondary education.

Structure of the Education System

Schooling in Bulgaria begins at age 7 with primary education and is compulsory through the age of 16. Children may begin at age 6 with parental approval if they are deemed ready for school. The school year begins in September and ends in June, comprising 31 to 36 weeks, depending on the level and grade.

According to the Pre-School and School Education Act¹ (effective as of August 1, 2016), the Bulgarian education system is organized into the following stages:

- Kindergarten (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED]2 Level 0) is for children ages 3 to 6 or 7. Preprimary education is now compulsory starting at age 5. These “preparatory classes” may be organized both in kindergartens and in schools.
- Basic education comprises primary and lower secondary education:
 - Primary education (ISCED Level 1), which includes Grades 1 to 4, is for children ages 6 or 7 to 10 or 11.
 - Lower secondary education (ISCED Level 2) includes Grades 5 to 7. After completing seventh grade, students can apply for admission to specialized upper secondary schools or profiled classes (with additional instruction hours on specific subjects, such as foreign language or mathematics) in general schools.
- Upper secondary education (ISCED Level 3) comprises two stages:
 - Stage one includes Grades 8 to 10.
 - Stage two includes Grades 11 and 12.
- Postsecondary education is offered at universities and colleges. A bachelor’s degree requires four years of study with an additional year or two for a master’s degree. A doctoral degree requires three or four years of study beyond a master’s degree.

According to the National Statistical Institute, in the 2020–2021 academic year, there were 1,823 kindergartens in Bulgaria and 2,347 schools, of which 1,948 were general and 399 were vocational schools. There were 54 colleges and universities. Included in these numbers were 120 private schools: 97 general, 6 vocational, and 17 colleges and universities.³ Depending on the funding, schools are overseen by the government, by the municipality, or privately, though most are municipal.

Instructional Materials

Student textbooks differ by subject and grade level. All textbooks must be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. One criterion for approving a textbook is that it follows the topics outlined in the national curriculum. Schools select textbooks at the beginning of the school year. Typically, a textbook comes with supplements for teachers that outline didactical and methodological guidelines. For each subject and grade level, there usually are two or three sets of approved textbooks and supplements. Textbooks and corresponding supplements for Grades 1 to 4 are distributed to schools and made available free of charge.

The materials used in first grade include an alphabet book, a reader, and workbooks. At Grades 2 and 3, students use a Bulgarian language textbook, a reader, and workbooks. Materials for fourth grade include the Bulgarian language textbook, a literature textbook, and workbooks. Various handbooks and reference books can be chosen for home reading and studying.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Bulgaria has participated in PIRLS since its inception in 2001. Bulgaria also has participated four times in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) at Grade 8 and, after skipping the TIMSS 2011 cycle, participated in TIMSS 2015 and TIMSS 2019 at Grade 4. Another important study that Bulgaria has participated in every three years since 2001 (except 2003) is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA frameworks focus on the practical application of student knowledge, and study results suggest that education in Bulgaria is very theoretically oriented with little practical application.

The Pre-School and School Education Act⁴ outlined the groundwork for education reforms in Bulgaria by aiming to improve the quality of school education and student outcomes, and to ensure students are well prepared when they eventually enter a competitive job market. Since education reform takes time to show effects, recent international studies still show that education in Bulgaria needs modernization. According to these studies, the school year in Bulgaria was one of the shortest among participating countries, and the average number of hours per year students spent studying was lower than other countries.

Bulgaria's participation in TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA, among other international education studies, has also allowed its education professionals to develop expertise in assessment, evaluation, educational research, and testing. Many publications, including articles, workshop publications, and media commentary, have discussed Bulgarian participation in PIRLS, and research connected with the achievement of Bulgarian students in PIRLS has been presented at conferences and meetings.

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

Following the Pre-School and School Education Act,⁵ Bulgaria introduced a range of new policy documents related to the organization and content of teaching and learning:

- State education standards for general education set expected learning outcomes by the end of each education phase in every subject.
- The curriculum framework sets out organizational aspects for program type at each education phase and for each subject.
- The grade-level subject syllabi are intended to guide teachers' classroom planning.

These documents provide first-time expected learning outcomes related to subject competency, as well as suggested activities that teachers can do to support the development of these competencies, the allocation of time dedicated to assessing students, and the different modes of assessment to employ (e.g., continual assessment, examinations, homework, projects). They also identify links between subject competencies and the nine transversal competencies.

The *Strategic Framework for Development of Education, Training and Learning in Bulgaria (2021–2030)*⁶ aims to modernize teaching and learning in line with international trends, emphasize

the mastery and practical application of skills, as well as reorient the teacher’s role from a source of information to that of a mentor or learning partner. Introduction of the new curriculum has been gradual, and the 2021–2022 academic year is the first time that all students have followed it. The competency-based curriculum provides a foundation for improving the educational outcomes of all students and enabling the country to be more competitive. Although these developments have the potential to enhance the quality of education, schools and classrooms are not yet fully implementing them and considerable gaps remain among the intended curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the assessed curriculum.

Further curriculum updates are included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026)⁷ with the goals of developing and implementing more flexible educational programs to better promote the key competencies, along with further developing core cognitive skills and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) skills.^a

Reading Policy

The official Bulgarian policy on reading literacy requires all students to be able to read by the end of first grade. However, many children begin learning at home or in preparatory classes and can read when they start school.

The national curriculum is taught in Bulgarian in all educational programs and textbooks. In addition, the Bulgarian Language curriculum has adapted the following key factors from the Conceptual Framework of the Council of Europe:⁸ contemporary language education, language behavior, successful communication and the rules regulating it, and the sociocultural context of communication. These concepts describe the outcomes of teaching and learning the Bulgarian language.

Emphasis is placed on the development of positive attitudes toward school and motivation for studying in kindergarten and primary education. However, primary teachers still focus on memorization and reproduction instead of stimulation of thought and independence, formation of practical skills, and personality development. Recent changes to the new law of education, which will shift teaching priorities and practices and challenge teachers’ beliefs about education and teaching, are expected to support the development of practical skills and critical thinking among students via the national external examinations.

The new *Bulgarian State Education Content Standards*⁹ emphasize the need for inclusion of information and communication technologies and development of extracurricular activities, especially in the early grades. These standards are being developed according to the National Qualifications Framework, which is based on the European Qualifications Framework, and have been implemented at different grade levels gradually since 2016, starting with Grades 1 and 5.

^a The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026) is part of the European Commission (EC)’s NextGenerationEU recovery instrument, through which the EC supports member countries to repair immediate economic and social damage resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of National Curriculum

Reading is part of Bulgarian language instruction in the primary grades. The *Bulgarian State Education Content Standard for Bulgarian Language and Literature*¹⁰ is an interdisciplinary cultural-education domain that includes reading instruction and reading skills. The Bulgarian language component comprises linguistic and communication competencies, while the literature component comprises literature and sociocultural competencies.

The reading curriculum is a major part of the standards for Grades 1 to 4. Bulgarian language and literature receives 6½ hours of classroom instruction per week: two hours for Bulgarian language, three hours for literature, and 90 minutes for communication skills (writing and speaking). Beyond classroom instruction, Bulgarian legislation recommends an additional 30 minutes per week of home reading, although there is no regulation or institution monitoring the frequency or the length of time students read outside of normal classes.

The grade-to-grade structure that covers reading instruction in primary school is for Grades 2 to 4. Reading instruction starts in second grade when students master reading techniques. The main purpose of language instruction in first grade is to develop the following basic literacy skills:

- Learn letters and connect them to sounds
- Learn to read letters, syllables, words, and sentences
- Write parts of letters and whole letters
- Write syllables, words, and sentences

According to the *Bulgarian State Education Content Standard for Bulgarian Language and Literature*, at the end of fourth grade, students should have mastered the following language, sociocultural, and communicative competencies:

- Reading with adequate intonation and comprehension of meaning
- Finding synonyms and antonyms
- Explaining, asking questions, and replying analytically
- Using different word order patterns
- Speaking logically and critically
- Respecting the speech of others
- Analyzing and comparing literary texts
- Planning and creating self-generated written texts

The *Bulgarian State Education Content Standard for Bulgarian Language and Literature* considered the analyses of the results of Bulgarian students in PIRLS and the national external assessments. The main improvements include:

- Clear differentiation of the core topics, included in both parts of the subject Bulgarian language and literature
- More concrete formulations of the expected results from instruction

- An explicit link between expected results and the key competencies for lifelong learning
- More balance between the systematically structural approach and the communication approach in learning language and literature
- Inclusion of communication competencies by using the internet and other electronic means
- Textbook authors' and teachers' freedom in the selection of literature texts

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Initial Teacher Preparation

Several Bulgarian universities offer initial teacher education through bachelor's and master's degree programs. In Bulgaria, state requirements for teacher qualification include a bachelor's degree (as a minimum) and several mandatory academic courses (e.g., pedagogy, psychology, information technology [IT] in education, and subject matter pedagogy), as well as school observation, school practice, and an internship.

Teaching at the primary school level requires at least a four-year bachelor's degree in primary pedagogy. In their program of study, students must conduct guided observations, deliver observed lessons in schools, and complete pregraduation school practice. After successfully completing theoretical and practical state examinations, teachers receive a diploma that serves as a teaching certificate of professional qualification.

Teaching at the secondary school level requires at least a four-year bachelor's degree in a subject specialty in addition to a teaching certificate of professional qualification. Graduates or students who have completed their second year at university in any relevant specialty may obtain a teaching certificate after successfully passing examinations in pedagogy, pedagogic psychology, IT in education, and methodology, in addition to passing theoretical and practical state examinations.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development for Teachers

In Bulgaria, there are five levels of postgraduate professional qualification for actively employed teachers, the first level being the highest and the fifth the lowest. These qualifications are not mandated and can be completed at any time at the teacher's discretion. The requirements for completing each level are regulated nationally. The qualifications are conferred by the Departments for In-Service Teacher Training, affiliated with three of Bulgaria's universities.

Several universities in Bulgaria have departments for professional development and enhancing teacher qualifications. These departments offer qualification courses and conduct qualification degree examinations for teachers. Teachers primarily receive professional development through periodic updates on pedagogical knowledge, new instruction methods, and the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education. Teachers may then take examinations to acquire professional qualification degrees, which lead to salary increases. Master's degree

programs generally are designed for actively employed teachers as part of their ongoing professional development, but they also are open to applicants who are not actively teaching.

Ordinance No. 12 of September 2016¹¹ regulates teachers' continual professional development and allows other educational and training institutions to offer qualification courses and programs for teachers after being approved by the MoES.

Teachers' continual professional development opportunities usually are limited once teachers enter the profession. They may attend one or two short-term courses (one or two days each) during the academic year on various topics such as teaching methods, student assessment, and Bulgarian language and literature content materials. Teachers rarely attend long-term education courses, as they would have to take a temporary leave of absence (i.e., one term) to do so.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The Public Education Act (1991)¹² prioritized a need for a national assessment of the education system. Tasked with the development of national assessment standards, the MoES created the Center for Assessment in Pre-School and School Education (CAPSE), the official national testing agency.

Assessment throughout the education system is carried out both internally and externally. While internal assessments are administered by teachers, external assessments are administered locally by school principals, regionally by Regional Divisions of Education, and nationally by the Ministry of Education and Science. The regulations of the System of Evaluation stipulate the types of assessment to be used for each subject. Assessments may include oral, written, and/or practical examinations.

Examinations designed to test academic subject knowledge may be administered to individual students, groups of students, or entire classes. The required number of examinations depends on the number of hours spent studying a particular subject. Subjects with only one hour of instruction time per week or every two weeks use an annual grade but no term grade.

Over the last few years, standardized national tests have become the leading form of external assessment. The results of these tests provide policymakers with indicators regarding the state of the education system as a whole. Student achievement is evaluated according to the objectives outlined in the curriculum for each grade and subject.

At the beginning of first grade, students are evaluated to determine their level of readiness for school. These results help teachers differentiate students' individual needs. Until the end of third grade, only qualitative indicators are used for entry and exit level evaluations of students at the beginning and end of the school year, respectively.

In Grades 4 to 12, student knowledge and skills are evaluated on a scale with five levels based on qualitative and quantitative indicators: Excellent (6), Very Good (5), Good (4), Fair (3), and Poor (2). Students complete their grade level if their annual grades average Fair (3) or higher. Term

and annual grades reflect students' academic performance throughout the year. Upon completing fourth grade, students receive a certificate of completed primary education. Upon completing seventh grade, students receive a certificate of completed basic education.

At the end of primary education, students who receive a final grade of Poor (2) in a subject still progress to the next grade level, during which teachers will work with them individually. In Grades 5 to 12, students who receive a grade of Poor (2) are required to pass a correction examination. Students who fail the examination must repeat the grade level. The MoES launched a program financing additional school hours for students falling behind, as well as for talented students, to encourage all students to take an active role in their education.

During the 2006–2007 academic year, national assessments based on the Bulgarian state education content standard were introduced for all fourth grade students in public and private schools in four subjects: Bulgarian Language and Literature, Mathematics, Man and Nature, and Man and Society. As of the 2019–2020 academic year, national assessments in fourth grade are conducted only in Bulgarian Language and Literature and Mathematics. The MoES also conducts a national assessment in seventh grade in the core subject areas of Bulgarian Language and Literature and Mathematics. These national examinations are also used for enrollment in specialized secondary schools.

During the 2007–2008 academic year, national matriculation examinations were introduced as a requirement for receiving a secondary education diploma. Students are required to take an examination in Bulgarian Language and Literature and another from among eight subjects (mathematics, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, history, philosophy, foreign languages) or in their vocational qualification subject. In addition to conducting their own entrance examinations, some colleges and universities offer admission based on national matriculation examination results. Students who wish to attend an institute of higher education are required to pass the two compulsory matriculation examinations to receive a diploma of completed secondary education.

Student assessment policies in Bulgaria have undergone several changes in the last several years as part of broader reform efforts introduced by the Pre-School and School Education Act. Bulgaria introduced a new student assessment framework in 2016, the *State Educational Standard for the Evaluation of the Results of Student Learning* (Ordinance No. 11 of September 2016),¹³ which provides detailed instructions regarding the organization and administration of assessments. This document includes aims to align student assessment practices with a competency-based approach, namely by encouraging a greater focus on diagnosing and monitoring student progress throughout the school year. The framework establishes the main types (normative, criterion, and mixed) and forms (diagnosis, prognosis, certification, information, motivation, selection) of assessment, as well as how to organize classroom- and school-level assessment, national external assessments, state matriculation examinations, and the certification of learning across education phases.

Ordinance No. 11 of September 2016¹⁴ introduces some important changes to Bulgaria’s more traditional student assessment approaches, including the use of qualitative grading and diagnostic assessments in classrooms. However, student assessment continues to focus on traditional summative tests with a narrow emphasis on achievement over learning. This has important implications for Bulgarian students, as it encourages an education approach that undermines progress in the classroom.

Special Reading Initiatives

Enhancement and Increasing Literacy

Students’ achievement results on national and international assessments and the correlation between the level of literacy and socioeconomic and demographic factors prompted the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science to develop the *National Strategy for Enhancement and Increasing Literacy (2014–2020)*.¹⁵ This document aims to coordinate and consolidate the efforts of all stakeholders as a result of identifying the following key literacy policy areas for improvement:

- Instruction is still oriented more toward memorizing and reproducing information rather than mastering metacognition strategies for learning and problem solving.
- Despite including many innovative methods and techniques in school education, the priority is still assessing learned facts rather than acquired skills and competencies.

Policies for enhancing and increasing literacy include:

- Expanding the inclusion of 5-year-old children in preschool education
- Expanding the all-day organization of the learning process in more schools
- Improving the state education content standards and curriculum by including key competencies for increasing literacy
- Developing and providing additional materials for preschool education of children with a mother tongue different than Bulgarian
- Providing extra instruction hours for students with reading difficulties and monitoring their progress
- Facilitating access to books and other reading materials
- Integrating ICT in preschool and school education
- Increasing motivation to learn by making school more attractive and engaging
- Conducting national competitions and other national initiatives for promoting literacy
- Providing opportunities for teachers’ professional development and qualification in teaching students with reading difficulties and in teaching in a multicultural/multilingual setting
- Assessing literacy by conducting national external assessments and participating in international studies like PIRLS and PISA

The strategy identifies groups “at risk” (e.g., socioeconomically disadvantaged, bilingual, and Roma students) and focuses on closing the gaps in literacy and improving inclusion in education. Ensuring equal and inclusive participation in literacy learning should start in early childhood by supporting children who are at risk. To achieve this, the following changes should be made:

- Identify students’ needs through language screening
- Provide flexible language learning opportunities and individual support for students with reading difficulties
- Place every child in the center of the learning process
- Change the direction of pedagogical synergy from the language learned by the student to the student learning the language
- Increase student motivation by including e-reading

Students with Reading Difficulties

A national program integrates children with special education needs into mainstream education. Most students with special education needs are in classrooms with other students but follow an individualized program.

Very few schools have specialists in reading disabilities (e.g., speech therapists, psychologists). Preprimary or primary teachers usually are responsible for identifying students with reading difficulties. Once identified, these students receive support such as individual instruction from the teacher, small-group instruction, or art therapy. Students who do not make progress while receiving such support are advised to visit a specialist, and those with symptoms of a disability are taught individually by pedagogical, psychological, and medical specialists. In addition, speech therapy and resource centers assist children with disabilities who are enrolled in mainstream schools.

Second-Language Instruction

A special instruction program in Bulgarian language is offered for immigrant students in Grades 1 to 4. However, no such program exists for nonimmigrant Bulgarian children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. Additional classes are available to help students learn formal communication; extend their vocabulary; learn syntax structures; and improve their handwriting, speaking, and writing. Language minority students also can study their mother tongue at public schools as part of elective instruction.

One of the main goals outlined in the Program for Development of Education, Science and Youth Policies in Bulgaria (2009–2013)¹⁶ is to grant equal access to education to all children. External assessment results have asserted that additional actions should be taken for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. In addition to pedagogical assistance, these children must be placed in an integrative environment that does not allow discrimination relative to any linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or other characteristic. The new Ordinance No. 6 from 2016 on

acquiring Bulgarian Literary Language¹⁷ regulates how children with a mother tongue different than Bulgarian can be educated in kindergarten or school groups where they can communicate in Bulgarian daily.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Similar to other European countries, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Bulgaria in March 2020. At first, there were relatively few cases, but much panic and uncertainty. The National Operational Headquarters for Combatting the Coronavirus Infection was formed to monitor the pandemic (both domestically and internationally), help organize immediate safety measures, and update the population on recent changes. A national lockdown on March 16, 2020, led to the closure of all kindergartens and schools. The lockdown was lifted before the end of the 2019–2020 academic year, and all primary students were able to return to school while secondary students rotated distance and in-person learning on a weekly basis depending on their grade levels.

The next school year started normally, but only a month later, the second COVID-19 wave struck, causing another school closure from November 27, 2020, until the end of winter school vacation on January 4, 2021. In 2021, the national lockdown closed all schools for two weeks (from March 22)—exactly during weeks 3 and 4 of the PIRLS administration period. After spring vacation (which ended on April 11), the school year for primary students continued without any disruption while secondary students again rotated distance and in-person learning on a weekly basis.

After April 2021, there were no national closures of schools or kindergartens, and regional health services and school principals could make local decisions on whether to quarantine only classes or grades or to close the school entirely. Additionally, all students began to be tested for COVID-19 at least once per week.

Bulgarian schools had to switch to remote learning in 24 hours without any specific training or preparation by using an existing platform—Shkolo, Zoom, Google Classroom, Teams (recommended by the MoES)—or any communication software like Viber or Skype. Most students were able to participate in online lessons immediately, but many vulnerable children could not due to a lack of technical equipment or internet connection in their homes. After identifying where there was a need for technical equipment, the MoES immediately called for a supply of laptops to those schools. As of March 2021, 45,000 digital devices were delivered to schools and only 6 percent of students had difficulties accessing the internet.

Many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) started developing or translating digital educational resources to support teachers. The national television scheduled time each morning for video lessons on main subjects for all primary grades.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

In the middle of 2021, the Ministry of Education and Science, in a joint effort with governmental and nongovernmental organizations and institutions, published a comprehensive national report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Bulgarian education system called *Distance Learning in Electronic Environment 2020–2021: Consequences and Looking Ahead*.¹⁸ The report indicated that the pandemic clearly sped up the process of digitalization and required flexibility and creativity to combine synchronous and asynchronous learning, use digital textbooks, develop original teaching materials, and apply specific methods to motivate and activate students to learn independently.

Distance learning made more visible and to some extent deepened some pervasive structural problems, such as significant educational inequalities, lack of well-developed learning skills and in-depth understanding of learning content, insufficient qualification of teachers for effective classroom management, a high proportion of students with low learning motivation and a tendency to miss classes, high levels of professional stress, and emotional exhaustion of teachers. Appendix 2 in the national report¹⁹ shows that “only 24% of students say that during distance learning it was easier for them to understand the learning material than in-person learning. For 53% of the students, the in-person training was much more effective and complete in terms of their preparation.” In addition, 40 percent of teachers reported deterioration in students’ knowledge of the subject area in which they teach.

In mid-2020, the sociological agency Global Metrics conducted a national survey as part of an initiative by UNICEF Bulgaria. UNICEF Bulgaria produced several reports and summarized the research results among different stakeholder groups on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on preschool and school education by conducting a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) analysis of the effects of distance learning.²⁰ The biggest positives identified in the analysis were students’ improved digital skills, parental involvement in their child’s learning, and increased appreciation of teachers’ work. The biggest negatives were the lack of contact with peers and loss of social skills, high levels of distraction and lack of motivation for learning during online lessons, and insufficient preparation for teachers to work remotely.

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

The original assessment window was four weeks—between March 8 and April 2. After the first week, it was clear that all ISCED Level 1 schools would be closed for an unknown period. This required immediate intervention by the National Research Coordinator (NRC) at CAPSE. The 72 schools that selected a test date during week 3 or 4 were asked to move their test date to the second week. Almost every school accepted and worked to administer PIRLS in week 2 and in some cases even managed this after receiving their testing materials a day before the administration.

At the same time, many school coordinators reported many sick/quarantined students or even entire classes. Students’ absences increased quickly: For example, two or three students would be

absent on one day; the day after that, 50 percent of students in the class would be absent; and on the third day, all students would be absent. If the school didn't administer PIRLS before or on that first day when most students were in class, it had to postpone the administration. All ISCED Level 1 schools were open again in the middle of April, so every sampled school managed to participate in PIRLS. However, very few schools administered PIRLS on their preselected test date.

During the COVID-19 pandemic Bulgarian parents are allowed to keep their children in a distance learning environment even if schools are open for instruction. These students were invited by the school coordinators to take part in PIRLS, but many parents refused.

Suggested Readings

Dachkova, L., Georgieva, N., & Tzvetkova, M. (2016). *Literacy in Bulgaria*. European Literacy Policy Network (ELINET). Retrieved from http://orbi.ulg.ac.be/bitstream/2268/203603/1/Bulgarian_Short_Report.pdf

National Statistical Institute. (2021). *Education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021*. Retrieved from <https://nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/publications/education2021.pdf>

UNICEF Bulgaria. (2021). *Rapid assessment of COVID-19 impact on education in Bulgaria*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/stories/rapid-assessment-covid-19-impact-education-bulgaria>

References

- ¹ Pre-School and School Education Act. (2016). Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/23949/zkn_PedUchObrazovanie-izm092020.pdf
- ² UNESCO. (2012). *International standard classification of education ISCED 2011*. Retrieved from <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>
- ³ National Statistical Institute. (2016). *Statistical reference book 2021*. Retrieved from https://nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/publications/StatBook2021_en.pdf
- ⁴ Pre-School and School Education Act. (2016). Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/23949/zkn_PedUchObrazovanie-izm092020.pdf
- ⁵ Pre-School and School Education Act. (2016). Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/23949/zkn_PedUchObrazovanie-izm092020.pdf
- ⁶ Government of Bulgaria. (2020). *Strategic framework for development of education, training and learning in Bulgaria (2021–2030)*. Retrieved from https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/strategicheska_ramka_za_obrazovaniето_obuchenieto_i_ucheneto_v_republika_blgariya_2021_-_2030l.pdf
- ⁷ Government of Bulgaria. (2021). *National recovery and resilience plan of the Republic of Bulgaria*. Retrieved from <https://www.nextgeneration.bg/upload/39/npvu-en-08022021.pdf>
- ⁸ Council of Europe. (2001). *The common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ⁹ Ministry of Education and Science. (2015). Ordinance No. 5 of November 2015 on the general education. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/24101/nrd5-2015_OPP_izm102020.pdf

-
- ¹⁰ Ministry of Education and Science. (2015). Ordinance No. 5 of November 2015 on the general education. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/24101/nrdb5-2015_OPP_izm102020.pdf
- ¹¹ Ministry of Education and Science. (2016). Ordinance No. 12 of September 2016 on status and professional development of teachers, directors, and other pedagogical specialists. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/4173/naredba_12_01.09.2016_prof_razvitie_uchiteli.pdf
- ¹² Public Education Act. (1991). Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/27593/otmenen_zkn_narodnata_prosveta_akt310821.pdf
- ¹³ Ministry of Education and Science. (2016). Ordinance No. 11 of September 2016 for the evaluation of the results of student learning. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/27986/nrbd11-2016_ocenjavanje-izm24092021.pdf
- ¹⁴ Ministry of Education and Science. (2016). Ordinance No. 11 of September 2016 for the evaluation of the results of student learning. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/27986/nrbd11-2016_ocenjavanje-izm24092021.pdf
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Science. (2014). *National strategy for enhancement and increasing literacy (2014–2020)*. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/6545/strategy_literacy_22.10.2014.pdf
- ¹⁶ Ministry of Education and Science. (2009). *Program for development of education, science and youth policies in Bulgaria (2009–2013)*. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/6596/programa_MOMN_2009_2013.pdf
- ¹⁷ Ministry of Education and Science. (2016). Ordinance No. 6 of August 2016 on acquiring Bulgarian literary language. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/4179/naredba_6_11.08.2016_bg_ezik.pdf
- ¹⁸ Ministry of Education and Science. (2021). *Distance learning in electronic environment 2020–2021: Consequences and looking ahead*. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/27137/ORES-20_21.pdf
- ¹⁹ Institute for Research in Education, assigned by Ministry of Education and Science. (2021). Analysis of the consequences for the learning process, students and teachers from distance learning in the electronic environment in the school year 2020/2021 as Appendix 2 in *Distance learning in electronic environment 2020–2021: Consequences and looking ahead*. Retrieved from https://www.mon.bg/upload/27176/2.Appendix_IIO.pdf
- ²⁰ UNICEF Bulgaria. (2021). *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the preschool and school education – SWOT analysis of the effects of distance learning*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/media/11006/file>