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SENDI - Special Education Needs and Disability Inclusion

# Bulgaria Country Report



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme

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## **1 The Bulgarian National Qualifications Framework (NQF)**

**The Bulgarian National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** has been approved by the Ministry of Education and then by the Council of Ministers. It has also been mapped to the European qualifications framework (EQF). As P-scales are located below EQF 1, the starting level of the European Qualifications Framework, a proper match needs to be made with the corresponding level(s) of the relevant NQFs. Bulgarian NQF starts at level 0, one level under EQF starting point. This NQF level corresponds to ISCED level 0, reserved to pre-school and preparatory school. The NQF level 0 has the following descriptors:

### *1.1 Knowledge*

The learner:

- has initial knowledge of the environment;
- knows the routine in performing known tasks;
- recognises tools needed for initial education.

### *1.2 Skills*

The learner:

- performs simple tasks with understanding;
- expresses, through his creativity, the established initial ideas for the environment;
- uses known materials while performing tasks.

### *1.3 Attitudes*

Autonomy and responsibility:

The learner:

- participates actively in simple, known activities;
- can perform tasks under guidance from an adult;
- knows the consequences of his own actions.

Communication and social competences:

The learner:

- understands and passes on short, simple information in oral form;
- works in a group demonstrating tolerance to other children in the group;
- begins to express his autonomy as a new social role.

## **2 Context and Legislation**

Current status of the SEN subject matter in Bulgaria is largely a result of actions in response to the Salamanca Declaration(1994). Bulgaria is also a party to the Florence Agreement (1950; BG

accession 1997) which is referenced in the Salamanca document, and to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, BG accession 1991).

Internal legislation has been continuously updated and as of 2006 fully corresponds to abovementioned framework and policy documents related to SEN. As during the accession to EU legislation was harmonised, there is also full correspondence to the *acquis*. Last changes define the statute and role of various institutions, specialised schools, integrated schools, teachers responsible for SEN, resource centers. Integrated education of pupils with SEN has been implemented since 2002. A national framework document is in place - National plan for integration of children with SEN and/or chronic diseases in the system of public education.

#### Important definitions in internal legislation

*Children with SEN* are those who experience different type of difficulties in their education, due to:

- sensory damage (impaired vision or hearing);
- physical disability;
- mental retardation;
- language-speech disorders;
- specific education/learning difficulties;
- emotional and/or behavioral problems;
- communication disorders;
- chronic diseases leading to SEN;
- multiple damage/disabilities.

*Integrated education* of children with SEN is such an education where the child, irrespective of the type of damage/disease is included in the mainstream education environment (general schools). This is achieved through constructing and functioning of a supportive environment, including appropriate architectural and social conditions, individual education programs, teams of experts, special technical means and apparel, didactic materials and tools.

*Note:* Integration policies as a term is used in BG simultaneously and as equivalent to inclusion policies.

*Principles of integrated education* (as laid out by the National plan for integration of children with SEN and/or chronic diseases in the system of public education):

- each child has the right of equal access to education;
- each child is a unique personality with its traits, interests, abilities and education needs;
- each child with special education needs has the right of access to mainstream kindergartens and schools which must provide education focused on the child and his/her needs;
- each child with SEN has the right to be educated based on individual education

- programmes (or individual learning plans), commensurate with his/her abilities and needs;
- mainstream kindergartens and schools with integrated children with SEN create a tolerant society and achieve education for all.

### **3 Institutions engaged in SEN integration in education**

- Ministry of Education, Youth and Science
- Regional inspectorates of education
- Regional resource centers for support of integrated education of children and pupils with SEN
- Kindergartens and schools

Also involved in the process:

- Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (through Agency for People with Disabilities)
- Ministry of Health
- State Agency for Child Protection
- Social Assistance Agency
- Regional and municipal authorities
- large number of NGOs, day centers, etc.

### **4 Studies and Findings**

A very detailed study was prepared a few years ago by the Center for Economic Development (BG), commissioned by Save the Children (UK). Summary of main conclusions:

- The numbers of children with SEN in the mainstream system is increasing.
- Many children with SEN are still kept away from the mainstream education system by being directed to specialized schools where education is, by general consensus, substandard.
- Mainstream schools lack the competencies and resources (such as specialized and psychological help available, safe environment (material), motivation of staff) to deal with SEN and tend to discriminate.
- Numbers show that slightly less than 20% of all children with SEN had been assessed in terms of what their particular educational needs are.
- Mainstream education is not necessarily good for all children with SEN (see above). Parents often tend to have very high expectations which are not always correlated to their children's SEN.
- Lack of contemporary training materials for children with SEN (outdated and boring content).

## 5 SEN in numbers\*

- Total number of specialised schools - 80, 50 of which for children with mental retardedness, 4 for impaired hearing, 2 for impaired vision.
- Number of children in special SEN kindergartens: 876.
- Number of children in special SEN schools (mental retardedness): 483
- Number of children in special SEN schools (hospital and rehabilitation schools): 242
- Total number of children in specialised SEN schools: 4996 (down from 6651 in 2008/2009)
- Total number of children with SEN in integrated schools or in care of a resource center: 10359

\* All data current as of 2011/2012 school year unless otherwise indicated.

The number of children with SEN in specialised institutions is declining fast. Taking 2008/2009 school year as base, the reduction is from 6651 to 4996, or just under 25%. This reflects the move to integrated education and inclusion of more SEN pupils in mainstream schools. As the number of specialised SEN education institutions remains unchanged in the last few years and with the declared policy of promoting inclusion, one would expect that, with reduction in number of children, at least some move toward efficiency is made in reforming these specialised institutions. Moving children out means that, according to the principle of "money follow the pupil", these specialised institutions are even more under-financed. As the number of integrated SEN pupils can never be zero, policy-makers should demonstrate clear vision of reforms in a sector which has been dominated for over a decade by the slogan "let's take the SEN kids out of special schools and into mainstream schools".

## 6. Conclusions

In light of the research data and information, it becomes evident, that there is no special certification scheme for people with learning (SEN) or other disabilities which prevent them from accessing the mainstream qualification frameworks. This means that their achievements remain largely unrecognised, and their aptitude for work – underestimated, if estimated at all.

A certification scheme would provide access and pathway to the mainstream qualifications, and will facilitate employability and social inclusion.

As detailed statistics are not available, it remains unclear what occupations and sectors might be preferred by people with SEN or other disabilities, as they remain "invisible" to most public systems. Still, it is worth trying suggesting several occupations, as decided by the project partners, and closely monitor and evaluate the intake and related comments and feedback.

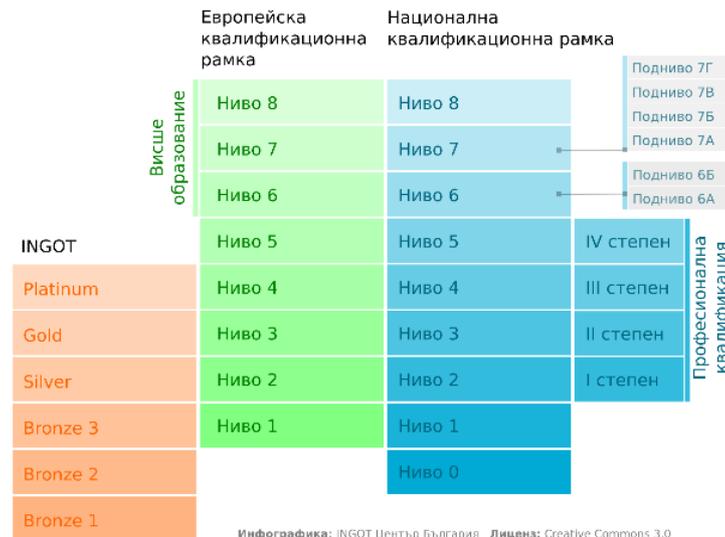
## 7 Graphs

The diagram below contains graphs clarifying the Bulgarian education and training system, and demonstrating the correspondence between the relevant qualification levels.

### Graphical representation of Bulgarian NQF, EQF and INGOT levels

Source: INGOT Centre Bulgaria. <http://ingot.adamsmith.bg>

The graph contains, from left to right, INGOT qualification levels, EQF levels (including EHEA cycles 1-3 at EQF levels 6-8), Bulgarian NQF (expanded for HE levels and sub-levels) and Bulgarian VET system (levels 1-4 at EQF 2-5).



The next diagram provides a representation of the Bulgarian education and training system

