

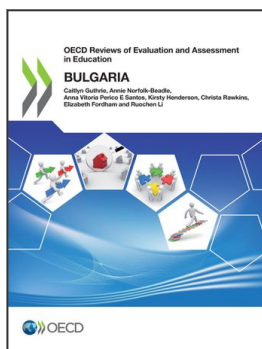
Foreword

Bulgaria has made important economic and governance reforms over the past two decades that have produced impressive rates of economic growth and higher standards of living. At the same time, convergence to average European Union (EU) incomes has been slowing and poverty and other forms of social exclusion persist in rural and remote areas as well as among particular segments of the population.

Bulgaria recognises that education reform is vital. Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 suggest that a significant share of students (almost half) have not acquired baseline levels of reading proficiency by the time they reach 15 years of age. PISA results also indicate that economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) has an important sway on education outcomes. In 2018, ESCS-advantaged students outperformed disadvantaged students in reading by 106 score points in Bulgaria, compared to an average of 89 across OECD countries. Bulgaria's national strategic plan, Bulgaria 2030, highlights education improvement as a priority to reach the country's development goals by 2030.

Efforts to reform the education system have switched to a faster gear since 2016, following the adoption of the Pre-school and School Education Act. We are heartened to see Bulgaria's impressive reform initiatives and hope that the recommendations made in this review will help Bulgaria reach its longer-term objectives. We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has added new challenges to an already-demanding agenda. However, we are convinced that tools such as peer review and mutual learning can help to inform critical policy decisions, leveraging evidence and good practices established in many different contexts around the world.

This review was undertaken in partnership with the EU and the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria. It provides a critical reflection on Bulgaria's present mechanisms for evaluation and assessment in education and the extent to which these mechanisms reinforce a focus on education outcomes. Most importantly, the review reflects on whether existing evaluation and assessment mechanisms help young people to accumulate the skills they need to thrive in 21st century work and life. With this paramount goal in mind, the review provides recommendations on how Bulgaria could adjust structures for classroom assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation, to ensure that all young people have access to quality education.



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