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European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides independent scientific support to the Commission's policy unit responsible for disability issues. It aims to mainstream disability equality in EU policy processes, including implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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¹ For an introduction to the Semester process, see:
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1 Executive summary and recommendations

1.1 Key points and main challenges for Bulgaria in 2022

Disability and the labour market

Statistics published on the Eurostat database indicate a disability employment gap of 33 percentage points in 2020, using a slightly different methodology than in previous years, but falling significantly to 22.1 points in 2021. There is a reliance on EU funded projects for vocational training and employment of persons with disabilities. National policies fail to support effective measures in the open labour market. There is significant public spending on outdated sheltered employment, a lack of progress regarding accessibility / universal design and digital skills and a lack of vocational training for persons with disabilities matching the needs of the labour market. New data on implementation of the mandatory hiring quotas showed that employers implement their obligations to announce job vacancies but the rate of persons hired is very low.

Disability, social policies and healthcare

Recent data from Eurostat indicates the relative risk of poverty for the working age disabled population falling in 2021 to 18.8 %, and for the older age group to 40.8 %. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities in the age range 18-64 was 5.9 % (falling to 3.9 % in 2021). A personal assistance mechanism included around 50 000 people with disabilities in 2021 but training of the assistants and quality assessment of the service are lacking. Assistive support was provided to another 20 000 users in 2021. Financial support for persons with disabilities was slightly increased and provided mainly to persons with severe disabilities to meet their basic survival needs, not for integration / compensation purposes. Deinstitutionalisation of children has turned into reinstitutionalisation in new family-type accommodation centres because adequate community-based social and health services supporting family care are lacking; staffing in the new services is insufficient in number and qualification, and is extremely underpaid, unsupported and unsupervised. Deinstitutionalisation of adults follows the same model as the deinstitutionalisation of children and would further (2022-2027) continue to develop residential services rather than support for independent living. Ambitious e-healthcare, new technologies, diagnostics methods and service development projects are set out in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Disability, education and skills

Little data is published about the number of children enrolled in mainstream schools (primary and secondary schools) and in centres for special educational support, or about those who are not involved in any education. Quality inclusive education is still a challenge as functional assessment of the children is still not routinely applied and human and financial resources are still inadequate. Digitalisation of education for children with disabilities started in 2021 at a slow speed and with EU funding.

Investment priorities for inclusion and accessibility

EU-funded projects related to people with disabilities are the biggest investment in their support. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan earmarks funding only for residential and counselling services, personal mobility, new technologies and diagnostic methods for early prevention of and intervention on disability.

1.2 Recommendations for Bulgaria

These recommendations are based on the evidence and analysis presented in the following sections of our report.

Recommendation: Design active labour market policies targeted to include persons with disabilities. Improve access to distance working and promote digital skills.

Rationale: Currently few measures are implemented or planned and persons with disabilities are not provided with flexible employment opportunities and training. Eurostat indicates a disability employment gap of 33 percentage points in 2020, using a slightly different methodology than in previous years, but falling significantly to 22.1 points in 2021.

Recommendation: Ensure adequate social protection for persons with disabilities.

Rationale: Eurostat indicates the relative risk of poverty for the working age disabled population falling in 2021 to 18.8 %, and for the older age group to 40.8 %. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities in the age range 18-64 was 5.9 % (3.9 % in 2021). Financial support is extremely low and provided only to a limited number of people. Social services supporting independent living are not well developed.

Recommendation: Speed up e-healthcare and introduce functional assessment of disabilities, as well as new technologies and diagnostic methods in treatment.

Rationale: People with disabilities have difficulty in accessing healthcare due to social isolation, stigma, poverty and inaccessible architectural environments, especially in small towns. Other challenges are also timely diagnosis and primary and secondary prevention of disabilities, due to an insufficient number of medical professionals.

Recommendation: Ensure sufficient human, expert and financial resources as well as options for digitalisation for inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Rationale: Data about inclusive education is limited, scarce reports highlight the need to support it. The early school leaving rate among young people with disabilities (aged 18-29) in Bulgaria is 44.3 % while the rate of non-disabled early school leavers is 20.5 %. Only 17.3 % of the people with disabilities aged 30-34 have completed tertiary education (the share of non-disabled people is 30.5 %).

Recommendation: Speed up deinstitutionalisation of babies and toddlers, transparently and in cooperation with other social services supporting early child development. Focus deinstitutionalisation of adults with disabilities on development of mobile independent living services, social housing and services for those in need.

Rationale: The Ministry of Healthcare in charge of admission to institutions for children has significantly delayed deinstitutionalisation of babies and does not publish adequate information about its plans. Currently, deinstitutionalisation of adults is mainly focused on setting up residential family-type centres which violate the right to independent living of the people placed there.

Recommendation: Mobile and flexible services supporting education, training, employment and social inclusion of persons with disabilities should be the main focus of future investment, as well as wider accessibility of public infrastructure.

Rationale: To date, investment in buildings and offices meant to serve persons with disabilities have led to further social exclusion.

2 Mainstreaming disability equality in the 2022 Semester documents

2.1 Country Report (CR) and Country Specific Recommendation (CSR)

The following key points highlight where a disability perspective was considered, or should be considered, in the CR/CSR. We address the most relevant of these in the next sections. There was no direct reference to disability in the 2022 CSR, although some of the general recommendations are of clear relevance to people with disabilities such as:

- targeted support to households most vulnerable to energy price hikes;
- investment for the green and digital transition;
- implementation of recovery and resilience plan and previous CSRs, which includes actions on labour market relevance of education and lifelong learning systems and widening healthcare services.

There were no new recommendations addressing labour market or social policy issues in 2022.

2022 Country Report

p. 7 Bulgaria is one of the worst performers in the EU on SDG 1 ‘No poverty’, with Roma communities bearing the brunt of this. This is further exacerbated by adverse developments in the area covered by SDG 10 ‘Reduced inequalities’, and by relatively weak performance in the area covered by SDG 4 ‘Quality education’.

p. 10 Key deliverables under the RRP in 2022-2023 (among others) are:

- Put the National Health Strategy and related action plan in place;
- Ordinance on the quality of social services to define the quality standards for the provision of social services;
- Publish a report making evidence-based recommendations to expand effective coverage and better target the minimum income scheme;
- Action plans for the Higher Education Strategy and the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning 2021-2030;
- Adopt the Social Support Code, addressing the fragmentation of the legislation in the area of social benefits and services.

The share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains high (33.6 % in 2020). Vulnerable groups, such as older people, Roma and people with disabilities, are disproportionately at risk of poverty. The RRP includes measures for adult learning, encompassing the provision of digital skills courses for adults. However, additional efforts to provide effective active labour market policies tailored to the challenges of vulnerable groups would help Bulgaria deal with labour shortages, given the likely regional developments and adverse demographic trends.

p. 45 The disability employment gap is well above the EU average (33 people vs 24.3 people), with an employment rate of people with disabilities of 43.1 % in 2020, compared to 76.1 % for those without disabilities. These figures point to the need to strengthen the provision of more tailored active labour market policies for vulnerable and underrepresented groups (e.g. people with disabilities and Roma), while taking

into account the significant regional differences in labour market outcomes. The need to integrate vulnerable groups into the labour market is made all the more pressing by the fact that the working-age population is expected to have decreased by 12.5 % by 2030. Bulgaria will focus its European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) investments on improving access to employment, upskilling and reskilling, improving the capacity and effectiveness of public employment services and improving social services.

p. 11 The RRP does not address high out-of-pocket payments for healthcare services. Employment and social services could also be integrated further and more attention could be given to the provision of employment services better targeted to individual needs. Albeit increasing, Bulgaria's spending on overall active labour market policies is among the lowest in the EU and mismatches between skills and labour market needs are higher than both those of other Member States in similar situations and the EU average.

Bulgaria submitted its Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) on 15 October 2021. The Commission's positive assessment on 7 April 2022 and the Council's approval on 4 May 2022 paved the way for disbursing EUR 6.3 billion in grants under the RRF over the period 2022-2026.

CSR 2 from 2020 – Ensure adequate social protection and essential services for all and strengthen active labour market policies. Improve access to distance working and promote digital skills and equal access to education. Address the shortcomings in the adequacy of the minimum income scheme.² CSRs from 2021 do not address labour market or social policy issues.

2.2 National Reform Programme (NRP) and Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)

The following key points highlight where the situation of people with disabilities or disability policies is relevant to the NRP/RRP. We analyse the most relevant of these in the next sections.

National Reform Programme (NRP) 2022

Employment

p. 19 It is envisaged to provide employment to 8 900 unemployed persons under programmes and measures for subsidised employment under the Employment Promotion Act and training to 11 000 employed and unemployed persons. The funds for the implementation of the active labour market policy in 2022 amount to BGN 123 million.

p. 21 A priority in the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030), approved in 2021, is to increase the supply of labour, as more and more economically inactive people from disadvantaged groups in the labour market join the labour market as job seekers.

² Council Recommendation of 12 July 2022 on the 2022 National Reform Programme of Bulgaria and delivering a Council opinion on the 2022 Convergence Programme of Bulgaria.

p. 22 In the short term, the implementation of the RRP in 2022 will support the maintenance and increase of employment through the acquisition of new skills by unemployed people.

In 2022, the implementation of the Regional Employment Programmes in the 28 districts of the country continues, which will contribute to reducing employment disparities and regional unemployment.

Social Protection

p. 19 The Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) for 2021-2027 envisages financing the construction of new services for residential care of the elderly, infrastructure for the creation of other types of services (emergency accommodation, advisory services, etc.), the improvement of the environment in existing services, including in relation to integrated services, early childhood development services, prevention and early intervention services for children with disabilities and creation of other types of services. The provision of accommodation and adequate housing conditions will also be supported.

The Council of Ministers (CoM) Decree No. 257 of 28 July 2021 amending the Regulations for the Implementation of the Social Assistance Act (RISAA) changed the percentages in determining the differentiated minimum income for the different categories of persons or families applying for a monthly allowance by the order of Article 9 of the RISAA. The changes came into force on 1 January 2022, and for 2023 and 2024 a subsequent increase in interest rates is regulated. At the beginning of 2022, a Social Assistance Code was drafted, in which the linking of social benefits to the official poverty line in Bulgaria is regulated. The proposed amendments are in the public consultation phase.

From 1 April 2022, the minimum monthly wage increased by 9.2 % and reached EUR 355 (BGN 710). With the latest changes in 2021 the minimum pension for length of service increased by 20 % and from 1 January 2021 was EUR 150 (BGN 300) and from 25 December 2021 EUR 185 (BGN 370). In 2021 the poverty line was set at EUR 184.50 (BGN 369), the government's aim is for the amount of the minimum pension for length of service and age to exceed the defined poverty line.

Education

The support provided under the RRP 2021-2027 in the field of education is aimed at ensuring equal access to quality and modern education for every child and student, as well as reducing the share of early school leavers, with a focus on children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.

p. 20 The policies set for implementation in 2022 under Framework Programme 2 continue to implement comprehensive educational reform in the field of pre-school provision, school education and lifelong learning, including:

- promoting equal access to education and inclusive education / successful inclusion of children in the school education system and reduction of early school leaving;
- digital transformation in education / formation and development of digital competencies and digitalisation of the educational environment;

- education for the professions of the present and the future / improving the quality and applicability of vocational education and training;
- legislative and structural changes aimed at large-scale reform in the field of pre-school, school (including vocational) and higher education / improving the quality of education / resource sharing;
- prevention of early school leaving is also implemented through activities under the projects of the Operational Programme ‘Science and Education for Smart Growth’ (OP SESG), ‘Active inclusion in the system of preschool education’, ‘Support for success’, ‘Education’ for tomorrow’, ‘Equal access to school education in times of crisis’, etc.

2.3 Semester links to CRPD and national disability action plans

It is important that Semester plans align with national disability strategy. In Bulgaria, this refers to the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030). A new National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 was adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2020.³ An action plan for 2021-2022 was adopted by Decision No. 741 of the Council of Ministers in October 2021.⁴ There is also a National Programme for Accessible Housing and Personal Mobility of People with Disabilities.⁵ This National Action Plan is not mentioned in the 2022 NRP.

Relevant recommendations arising from participation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are highlighted in the following sections. The last UN CRPD Committee recommendations to Bulgaria were in 2018, the most recent submission by Bulgaria was in 2018 and the most recent response from the Committee was the 2018 Concluding Observations.

³ Council of Ministers, National Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021-2030, <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/38/khu/20rh957pr.pdf>.

⁴ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/strategicheski-dokumenti>.

⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2022 National Programme for Accessible Housing and Personal Mobility of People with Disabilities, adopted on 6 April 2022, <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/38/khu/normativni-dokumenti/142022-okonchatelen.pdf>.

3 Disability and the labour market – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2018, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Bulgaria:

[Article 27 UN CRPD](#) addresses 'Work and employment'.

'58. The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Adopt a policy framework and a strategy to promote employment for persons with disabilities in the open labour market, including by increasing resources for it, with the aim to facilitate transition from sheltered employment to the open labour market; (b) Recognize in its legal and policy framework the right of persons with disabilities to reasonable accommodation at the workplace; (c) Raise awareness among public and private companies about reasonable accommodation at work; (d) Strengthen training programmes for persons with disabilities on skills that are required in the open labour market and skills in entrepreneurship and collect disaggregated and targeted data about the participation of women and men with disabilities in programmes and the outcome of training for them.'

The most recent CRPD development is the 2018 Concluding Observations and the State's submission in 2018.

3.1 Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities

According to the Social Scoreboard indicator, cited in the Semester package, the disability employment gap in Bulgaria is considered to be a 'Critical situation'.

Data from the EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) indicate an employment rate for persons with disabilities in Bulgaria of 43.6 % in 2020, compared to 76.0 % for other persons. This results in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 33 percentage points (estimated EU27 average gap 24.5, see Tables 2-4) or an employment chances ratio of 0.6. Statistics published on the Eurostat database indicate a disability employment gap of 33 percentage points in 2020, using a slightly different methodology, but falling significantly to 22.1 points in 2021.⁶ This apparent drop requires some investigation and should be treated with caution.

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 18.2 % and 12.5 % respectively in 2020 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in Bulgaria was 53.3 %, compared to 86.8 % for other persons (see Tables 8-10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in the Annex.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on employment in 2020-2021, some caution is needed when interpreting trend data.

The average monthly number of registered unemployed persons with established type and degree of disability for the period January-December 2021 was 11 996 persons, and compared to the same period in 2020 their number decreased by 3.5 %. The

⁶ Eurostat, Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex (source EU-SILC), 2022 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_dlm200/default/table.

relative share of the total structure of the unemployed reported an increase of 1.5 percentage points compared to 2020, set at 6.6 %.⁷

3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Bulgaria and the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030).

The NRP identifies that it is a priority in the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030), approved in 2021, to increase the supply of labour, as more and more economically inactive people from disadvantaged groups in the labour market join the labour market as job seekers (p. 21). To increase labour supply, activating policies will be implemented in accordance with the individual characteristics and needs of both economically inactive and disadvantaged people in the labour market, as well as all jobseekers.

It also notes that, in the short term, the implementation of the RRP in 2022 will support the maintenance and increase of employment through the acquisition of new skills by unemployed people and will contribute to ensuring rapid transitions to new jobs, primarily for disadvantaged groups in the labour market. It will promote employment by bearing part of employers' labour costs (p. 22).

Implementation of the Regional Employment Programmes in the 28 districts of the country continues. They are an effective tool of active labour market policy that supports the regions and ensures employment of unemployed people from vulnerable groups. During the current year, financial resources of over EUR 24 million (BGN 48 million) (approximately four times more than in 2021) have been assured for the provision of employment for 9 150 unemployed persons from disadvantaged groups on the labour market. The implementation of the regional programmes will contribute to reducing employment disparities and regional unemployment.

As noted in the 2022 Country Report, the disability employment gap is well above the EU average.⁸ This points to the need for more tailored active labour market policies for vulnerable and underrepresented groups (including people with disabilities), while taking into account the significant regional differences in labour market outcomes. The need to integrate vulnerable groups into the labour market is made more pressing by the fact that the working-age population is expected to have decreased by 12.5 % by 2030. Bulgaria will focus its European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) investments on improving access to employment, upskilling and reskilling, improving the capacity and effectiveness of public employment services and improving social services.⁹

Specific employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities are provided for in the Employment Promotion Act and one national programme. However, they do not seem to be effective and popular either among persons with disabilities or with

⁷ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 9: <https://www.az.government.bg/pages/otchet-za-deinostta-na-az/>.

⁸ 2022 Country Report, p. 45.

⁹ 2022 Country Report, p. 45.

employers. The greatest efforts for adequate training and employment of persons with disabilities seem to be put into the implementation of the two EU-funded projects described above. Questions about the very small number of persons with disabilities employed through the Employment Agency Departments and the high number of vacancies registered by employers for such people remain unanswered. Serious accessibility issues hindering persons with disabilities from having access to employment also remain. No mention about trends in regular vocational training of persons with disabilities has been identified in the State reports for 2021.

Quota obligation for employers

As of 31 December 2020, 16 095 unemployed persons with permanent disabilities were registered at the Employment Agency Departments. Of these 8 683 were employed, of whom 6 274 on the open labour market, 1 102 under employment programmes, 408 under the Employment Promotion Act measures and 899 under Operational Programme Human Resources Development (OPHRD) projects. During 2020, the total of 574 employers have sought the assistance of the Employment Agency to find suitable candidates, with 1 778 job vacancies suitable for people with permanent disabilities. In total, 349 people were referred to them and 45 people with disabilities were employed.¹⁰

In 2021, implementing their quota obligation for hiring persons with disabilities,¹¹ 549 employers sought the assistance of the Employment Agency to find suitable candidates, with 1 807 job vacancies for persons with disabilities, to which the Employment Agency Departments referred 321 persons, out of whom only 44 persons with disabilities were hired.¹² According to the Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) the indicative number of employers affected by the quota under Article 38 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, including those that used the mediation services of the Employment Agency Departments for its implementation for 2021, is about 5 000 employers (medium and large enterprises). The indicative number of employed persons with permanent disabilities according to the quota is about 20 000 on an annual basis and the number of specialised inspections of employers for the implementation of the quota for the appointment of people with permanent disabilities is 2 000 annually.¹³ This prognosis was obviously very ambitious and was not realised during 2021.

In 2021, those aged over 50 represent the majority of unemployed persons with disabilities (64.8 %). More than half of the persons with disabilities have secondary education (58.7 %) and most of them have acquired secondary vocational education. Their professional structure includes 42.4 % without qualifications or specialty, 33.5 % who have acquired a working profession and 24.1 % who are specialists. The long-term unemployed persons among those registered persons with disabilities in 2021 were 3 145 on average per month or 26.2 %, while in 2020 their number was 2 559 on

¹⁰ Employment Agency, 2020 Annual report, p. 18, <https://www.az.government.bg/pages/otchet-za-deinostta-na-az/>.

¹¹ Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 38, para. 1.

¹² Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 21.

¹³ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 20: <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/strategicheski-dokumenti>.

average per month or 20.6 %.¹⁴ The numbers of registered persons with disabilities who were involved in employment during 2020 and 2021 are presented in Table A: Numbers of registered persons with disabilities involved in employment (2020-2021).¹⁵

According to the Employment Agency the large share of people with permanent disabilities among the long-term unemployed in 2021 shows that businesses in the open labour market are still not flexible enough to attract this segment of the workforce to fill the gap in such sectors as administrative services, information creation and dissemination and creative products, and telecommunications, despite the relatively good educational and qualification characteristics of a large proportion of registered persons with disabilities.¹⁶ A total of 9 095 people with disabilities were in employment in 2021.¹⁷

According to the Employment Agency's 2021 annual report, in practice, the idea to advertise job positions for persons with disabilities seems not to function and the reasons are complex. On the one hand, according to the Agency, there is reluctance or misunderstanding on the part of employers who believe the job positions created under Article 38 of Persons with Disabilities Act¹⁸ do not overlap with job positions provided for in Article 315 of the Labour Code.¹⁹ The employers also have too high and often unrealistic requirements for the job applicants and provide inadequate or inconsistent working conditions given the fact that the job position is for a person with a permanent disability. On the other hand, sometimes there is a lack of interest from persons with disabilities. Jobs suitable for homeworking or remote working are not advertised. One of the possible solutions for employment of persons with disabilities, according to the Employment Agency, is the determination of separate operations that should be performed in one workplace, so that people with disabilities, with different abilities, can perform some of them.²⁰

Subsidised employment

According to the Employment Agency, in 2021, interest continued to be extremely high in the incentive regimes aimed at people with disabilities (the National Programme for Employment and Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities, Article 51, paragraph 2²¹ and Article 52²² of the Employment Promotion Act (EPA)), providing

¹⁴ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 22.

¹⁵ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 22.

¹⁶ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 22.

¹⁷ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 22.

¹⁸ Employers with 50 to 99 employees are obliged to hire one person with a permanent disability and employers with 100 employees or over – 2 % of the total number of employees.

¹⁹ Every employer who has hired over 50 employees must reserve and announce annually job positions appropriate for persons with various types and levels of disabilities equivalent to 4 to 10 % of all positions.

²⁰ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 23.

²¹ Employment Promotion Act, Art. 51, para. 2: For each job opening in which an unemployed person with permanent disabilities, referred by the Employment Agency, is employed the employer receives funding for the salary and social and health security contributions (without paid leave) for the period while the person is hired but this period cannot be shorter than 3 months or longer than 12 months. The subsidies for the employer are for an open job position / vacancy where a person with a disability is employed, amounting to 75 % of the eligible costs for the subsidy period.

²² Employment Promotion Act, Art. 52: For each job opening in which unemployed persons with permanent disabilities, referred by the Employment Agency, are hired full or part-time the employer receives funding for the salary, all social and health security contributions (including for paid leave)

employment to a total of 1 956 unemployed people, of whom 1 209 were newcomers. The funds spent for the period in total under the programme and the two measures under the EPA amount to EUR 6.5 million.²³ In 2020 a total of 2,204 unemployed persons were employed, of whom 927 were newcomers. The State budget spent on the Programme's implementation and for incentives under Article 51, paragraph 2 and Article 52 was EUR 5.2 million.²⁴

According to the Employment Agency, interest in the Programme continues to be extremely high due to the full funding of employers, which covers the risk associated with limited physical capabilities of the employed persons and their frequent absences due to illness. In addition, the unemployed people with disabilities appreciate it due to the income and the two years of employment which for them is their only opportunity for employment.²⁵

The same 2021 annual report of the Employment Agency concludes that there is reduced interest on the part of both businesses and the unemployed in a large proportion of the incentive regimes regulated in the Employment Promotion Act (EPA). There may be multiple reasons for this, according to the Agency.²⁶

for the period while these employees are hired but not for more than 12 months. The employer receives the funding if they ensure employment of unemployed persons, referred by the Employment Agency, for an additional period equal to the period of subsidised employment.

²³ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 29.

²⁴ Employment Agency, 2020 Annual report, p. 20.

²⁵ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 29.

²⁶ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, pp. 35-36. The projects under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme 'Employment for you' and 'New opportunity for youth employment' are more attractive, as the subsidy is higher than for the employment measures under the EPA. Apart from the amount of the remuneration, the other conditions are also better.

- The projects under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme provide an opportunity for both internship and training, remuneration is paid to the interns at the level of the minimum insurance threshold, as well as for a mentor, and additional financing of employers for social security contributions for another six months if the employment contract becomes permanent. At the same time, the salary under the measures for young people under the Employment Promotion Act is lower than the minimum wage for the country, and some of them require a long period to maintain employment after the end of the subsidised period.
- In an uncertain economic situation, employers are afraid to make long-term commitments to hire new staff and prefer to keep their current ones. The requirement to keep employment in the job position for the duration of the contract on incentives (for most of them for 12 months or more) has a demotivating effect on employers and some of the unemployed, many of whom prefer short-term employment.
- Significant fragmentation of the EPA measures, leading to measures that are very small in scope, increases the Employment Agency's costs for management, spending unjustifiably large administrative resources and creating confusion among jobseekers and employers. For example, in 2021, out of the total of 26 employment measures, 16 have a target natural value of up to 100 persons – i.e. to subsidise the employment of less than 100 unemployed people.
- It is clear that, with such low targets and wasted resources, the impact on the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market will be limited. In order to provide financial support for the unemployed from vulnerable groups and for business during the economic crisis period, financial resources from the State budget (through redistribution prepared and approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in July and at the end of October), were redirected to employment and training programmes and measures in which the employers and the unemployed are interested and which can subsidise jobs with a greater impact on the labour market for vulnerable groups.

Notwithstanding the possibility of reallocating funds from one programme or measure to another, which is more preferable, it is necessary to evaluate each measure separately, to review their

According to the Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) under the National Programme for Employment of People with Disabilities, as of 31 August 2021, employment was provided to 1 213 persons, of whom 301 were newcomers. The funds paid from the State budget amount to EUR 3 million (BGN 6 million). The indicative / target number of persons to be included in employment under the programme was a total of 260 persons with disabilities, with 100 in 2021 and 160 in 2022, at a cost of EUR 4.5 million (BGN 9 million).²⁷

The same Plan announces that, under the incentive of Article 36, paragraph 2 of the Employment Promotion Act,²⁸ as of 31 August 2021, only five persons (all newcomers) were employed, at a cost of EUR 4 411 (BGN 8 821). The indicative / target numbers are 50–30 persons in 2021 and 20 persons in 2022. The allocated funding for 2021 was EUR 58 376 (BGN 116 753).²⁹

Under the incentive of Article 51, paragraph 2 of EPA,³⁰ as of 31 August 2021, a total of 371 persons were employed of whom 126 newcomers. The funds paid from the State budget amount to EUR 0.5 million (BGN 1 million). The target number of persons with disabilities included in employment was a total of 300–110 persons in 2021, at a cost of EUR 0.7 million (BGN 1.4 million) and 190 persons according to the budget forecast for 2022.³¹

large number and to consolidate them in order to increase their attractiveness and the effect of their impact. The measures, as well as the employment programmes, should offer conditions no less attractive than those of the projects under the OPHRD. In addition, measures to promote employment should be combined with purely economic measures, as in recent years there has been a concentration of people from vulnerable groups in some municipalities and at the same time the municipality is the only employer or there are no employers at all. This creates problems in directing resources to people in need and the inability to take full advantage of them due to lack of employers

²⁷ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 24:

<https://www.mlsp.government.bg/strategicheski-dokumenti>.

²⁸ For each job opening for which an unemployed person up to 29 years of age with permanent disabilities, as well as a young person from specialised institutions or user of community-based residential social services who finished their education and is referred by the Employment Agency, is hired, the employer receives funding for the salary and all social and health security contributions (including for paid leave) for the period while these employees are hired but not for more than 18 months. The employer receives the funding if they ensure employment for unemployed persons, referred by the Employment Agency, for an additional period equal to the period of subsidised employment.

²⁹ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 24.

³⁰ For each job opening in which an unemployed person with permanent disabilities, referred by the Employment Agency, is employed the employer receives funding for the salary and social and health security contributions (without paid leave) for the period while the person is hired, but this period cannot be shorter than 3 months or longer than 12 months. The subsidies for the employer are for an open job position/vacancy where a person with a disability is employed, amounting to 75 % of the eligible costs for the subsidy period.

³¹ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 24.

Under the incentive of Article 52 of EPA,³² as of 31 August 2021, employment of 109 persons was provided, of whom 53 were newly recruited. The funds paid from State budget amounted to EUR 93 275 (BGN 186 551). The target number of persons with disabilities included in employment was a total of 220-100 persons in 2021, at a cost of EUR 0.25 million (BGN 0.5 million) and 120 persons according to the budget forecast for 2022.³³ Under the OPHRD 2021-2022 the number of persons involved in training and employment was planned to be 3 100.³⁴

Funding of EUR 1.75 million (BGN 3.5 million) for 2021 and EUR 1.5 million (BGN 3.0 million) for 2022 was allocated to encourage and assist employers to employ people with permanent disabilities by financing activities to ensure access to the workplace, adaptation and / or equipment of the workplace for persons with permanent disabilities under the National Programme for Employment of Persons with Disabilities.³⁵ The planned number of adapted workplaces was 1 000 for 2021 and 500 for 2022.³⁶

For implementation of projects of people with disabilities for starting and developing independent economic activity for each of the years 2021 and 2022, State funding of EUR 300 000 (BGN 600 000) was earmarked. The indicative number of funded projects for people with disabilities for starting and developing self-employment per year is 27.³⁷

According to the 2021 annual report of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, two tender procedures took place for funding of projects by employers who hired persons with disabilities. A total of 28 employers from the active / open labour market applied. Of these, a commission composed of external expert evaluators approved 18 project proposals for funding. Contracts for the total amount of EUR 112 516 were concluded. With the implemented total of 18 projects, 40 adapted and equipped workplaces for people with permanent disabilities were provided. In 2021, a total of 10 projects successfully completed their investment phase. The funds actually paid by the Agency under this programme amount to EUR 85 555. In 2022 the investment phase for eight projects continues. Beneficiaries of the tenders in 2021 are municipal administrations and enterprises, health, childcare and cultural centres as well as an institution for adults with psychosocial disorders. For the first time for several years in a row there was an increase in the number of private employers funded – a total of six employers.³⁸

³² For each job opening in which unemployed persons with permanent disabilities, referred by the Employment Agency, are hired full or part-time the employer receives funding for the salary and all social and health security contributions (including for paid leave) for the period while these employees are hired but not for more than 12 months. The employer receives the funding if they ensure employment of unemployed persons, referred by the Employment Agency, for an additional period equal to the period of subsidised employment.

³³ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 24.

³⁴ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 24.

³⁵ Persons with Disabilities Act, Article 44, paragraph 1.

³⁶ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 21.

³⁷ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 25.

³⁸ Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2021 Annual report, pp. 9-10:
<https://ahu.mlsp.government.bg/home/>.

Sheltered employment

The Action Plan for 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) includes the implementation of projects in support of specialised enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities, including for the development of supported employment. For 2021 and 2022 the budget for this activity is EUR 1.05 million (BGN 2.1 million) annually. The indicative number of technologically renovated, specialised enterprises and cooperatives for people with disabilities per year is 10, the indicative number of jobs created for people with permanent disabilities per year is 30, the indicative number of people with disabilities with improved working conditions per year is 360, the indicative number per year of specialised enterprises for people with disabilities benefiting from the funds is 72 and the annual number of centres for supported employment is 2.³⁹

In 2021, the implemented projects ensured healthy and safe working conditions for 362 workers, of whom 60 % were persons with permanent disabilities. About 25 % of the persons with permanent disabilities had psychosocial disorders. During the same period, through the funded projects, 35 new jobs were opened for long-term unemployed persons with permanent disabilities in 18 specialised enterprises for people with permanent disabilities. In 2021, the funding of two job-specific supported employment centres to support the creation and maintenance of supported employment with the possibility of providing a minimum package of support services continued. Through the development of work activities and practices, employment has been ensured for 30 persons with multiple permanent disabilities, with psychosocial disorders and/or intellectual disabilities.⁴⁰

The Action Plan for 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) for the first time also envisages carrying out three information campaigns / events / webinars (including seminars) in 2022 to promote social entrepreneurship, as well as opportunities and conditions for entry in the Register of Social Enterprises and hiring people from vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities (budget EUR 4 000 (BGN 8 000)), as well as three campaigns for raising awareness about the benefits of corporate social responsibility practices (budget EUR 3 000).⁴¹ Under the OPHRD 2021-2027 the Plan includes supporting activities for activation, vocational guidance and career counselling for people with disabilities and development of measures for the development of social enterprises (but there are no indicators for these activities).⁴²

Lastly, the Plan envisages that in 2022 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy will implement the project 'Digital skills training and building an online platform for adult education (over 16) in an electronic environment' with funding from the Recovery and Resilience Plan amounting to EUR 189.75 million (BGN 379.5 million). Component 1 of the project envisages the development of a national online platform for conducting

³⁹ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 26.

⁴⁰ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, draft Final Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 6.

⁴¹ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 28.

⁴² Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 28.

training in an electronic environment with adapted training opportunities for people from vulnerable groups (including persons with disabilities). Component 2 covers training for 500 000 registered unemployed and employed people for basic and intermediate levels of digital skills and competencies, including persons with disabilities.⁴³

Since 2019, the EU-funded Project No. BG05M9OP001-1.010 Training and Employment has been implemented in two components and has a total budget of EUR 100.5 million (BGN 201 million), for a total of 7 400 unemployed persons over 29 years of age, registered in the Employment Departments (Component I)⁴⁴ and another 8 510 unemployed and inactive persons and unemployed persons with permanent disabilities over 29 years of age (Component II).⁴⁵ Under Component II, since its launch, 2 693 contracts had been signed by the end of 2021, at a total of EUR 73.25 million for 8 670 job vacancies. Of the concluded contracts, 174 were terminated. A total of 64 persons with permanent disabilities were employed under Component II. The set target indicator for 2021 of 8 670 employees is in compliance with 0.73 %. During 2021 there were no persons involved in training.⁴⁶

⁴³ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 29.

⁴⁴ The purpose of Component I is to integrate inactive and unemployed persons over 29 years of age registered with the Employment Department, into employment with an employer (up to 12 months) in the active labour market or local government institutions, through training tailored to individual workplace needs and employment subsidy.

⁴⁵ The purpose of Component II is to integrate inactive and unemployed persons with permanent disabilities over the age of 29, registered with the Employment Department, into employment with employers from the active labour market or local government institutions, through training tailored to individual workplace needs, employment subsidy (up to 24 months) and a one-off incentive for long-term employment.

⁴⁶ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 51.

4 Disability, social policies and healthcare – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2018, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Bulgaria:

[Article 28 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Adequate standard of living and social protection’.

‘60. The Committee recommends that the State party revise the criteria for assessing the degree of impairment, incorporate the human rights model of disability in the assessment process, and ensure that persons with disabilities continue to enjoy an adequate standard of living. It also calls upon the State party to intensify its efforts to ensure that all persons with disabilities can meet the additional costs of disability, including by increasing budget allocations and resources accordingly.’

[Article 19 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Living independently in the community’.

‘40. The Committee, in accordance with its general comment No. 5, recommends that the State party:

- (a) Accelerate the transition process to ensure that all persons with disabilities living in any form of institution, such as psychiatric hospital units or in small community-based group homes, have the right to live independently within the community with choices equal to those of other persons; in the de institutionalization process, the State party should focus on the situation of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and children and elderly persons with disabilities;
- (b) Allocate greater resources for developing individualized support services for persons with disabilities, regardless of the type of impairment or age; such services should include peer support and personal assistance;
- (c) Adopt legislation on individualized and self-managed personal assistance and social and support services, recognizing the right to live independently and be included in the community as a subjective right for all persons with disabilities, regardless of their impairment or required level of support;
- (d) Implement a procedure to consult in a meaningful and disability-sensitive manner with organizations of persons with disabilities on all aspects of the implementation of article 19, including deinstitutionalization strategies and processes;
- (e) Allocate national financial resources and those provided by the European Union to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, and introduce efficient remedies and guidelines to avoid spending national and international funds on establishing infrastructure, housing and/or services that are not accessible or affordable to all persons with disabilities.’

[Article 25 UN CRPD](#) addresses ‘Health’.

‘52. The Committee recommends that the State party raise awareness of the human rights model of disability among all health professionals, including by providing training on the right to free and informed consent, and take note of article 25 of the Convention in the implementation of target 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also recommends that the State party adopt a policy framework and a time-bound strategy to provide women with disabilities with accessible sexual and reproductive health care and information, and with services appropriate to their age.

54. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that persons with disabilities, in particular those with chronic, genetic and rare diseases, have access to diagnostics, health care and medical rehabilitation.’

The most recent CRPD development is the 2018 Concluding Observations and the State's submission in 2018.

4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities in Bulgaria was 23.3 % in 2020, compared to 18.7 % for other persons of a similar age – an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 5 percentage points (see Table 14). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 12.5 points (46.4 % for older persons with disabilities and 33.9 % for other persons of a similar age). The tables in the Annex also indicate the respective rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion and break these down by gender as well as age. Recently updated data from Eurostat indicates the relative risk for the working age disabled population falling in 2021 to 18.8 %, and for the older age group to 40.8 %.⁴⁷

For persons with disabilities of working age in Bulgaria (aged 18-64) the risk of poverty before social transfers was 51.1 % and 23.31 % after transfers. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities in this age range was 5.9 % (falling to 3.9 % in 2021).⁴⁸

Of interest regarding health policy are the data on self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (too expensive or too far to travel or waiting lists). Disability equality gaps are evident here too and, on this basis, the rate for persons with disabilities in Bulgaria was 3.8 %, compared to 1.0 % for other persons.

The Commission's 2022 Country Report observes that Bulgaria is facing very high levels of income inequality and risks of poverty or social exclusion, which have worsened as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, the income of the richest 20 % of the population was 8 times higher than that of the poorest 20 % (versus 4.9 times higher in the EU). The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion stood at 33.6 % in 2020, among the highest in the EU. In addition, 14.4 % of the population experience housing overburden cost. Bulgaria recorded one of the lowest impacts of social transfers (other than pensions) on poverty reduction in the EU (20.4 % in 2020), well below the EU average (33.2 %). The coverage of home care for older people is one of the lowest in the EU (11.6 % versus 28.6 % in the EU in 2019). As part of the RRP, Bulgaria plans to reform minimum income support. A recent study simulates the social impacts of minimum income support reform, planned to be gradually implemented until 2024, showing a decrease of 5.8 % in the depth of poverty, measured by the at-risk-of-poverty gap, but only very modest impacts on severe material deprivation and risk-of-poverty rates. Further efforts will therefore be needed, in other areas as well, to have a significant impact on the country's consistently high poverty rates.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Eurostat, People at risk of poverty by level of activity limitation, sex and age, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_DPE020_custom_3348056.

⁴⁸ Eurostat, In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by level of activity limitation, sex and age, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_DPE050_custom_3394174.

⁴⁹ 2022 Country Report, p. 46.

4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Bulgaria and the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030).

The 2022 NRP envisages continued measures aimed at improving social infrastructure, providing social housing and measures to support deinstitutionalisation of children and adults under OPRG 2014-2020 (p. 19). The support will also continue in the period 2021-2027 under the RRP, which envisages financing the construction of new services for residential care of the elderly, infrastructure for the creation of other types of services (emergency accommodation, advisory services, etc.) and the improvement of the environment in existing services, including in relation to integrated services. To ensure the social inclusion of children and their families, the RRP will support investments in the infrastructure of the network of early childhood development services, prevention and early intervention services for children with disabilities and creation of other types of services, including integrated services, as well as in improving the environment of existing services for children. The provision of accommodation and adequate housing conditions will also be supported.⁵⁰

The Council of Ministers Decree No. 257 of 28 July 2021 amending the Regulations for the Implementation of the Social Assistance Act (RISAA) changed the percentages in determining the differentiated minimum income for the different categories of persons or families applying for granting a monthly allowance by the order of Article 9 of the RISAA (NRP p. 21). The amendments came into force on 1 January 2022, and for 2023 and 2024 a subsequent increase in interest rates is regulated. By adjusting the increase in individual percentages, the access limit and the amount of assistance received are widened for the most vulnerable groups of the population. The set of social indicators in support of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) shows that Bulgaria is in a very difficult position to meet the indicators 'People at risk of poverty or social exclusion' and 'Impact of social transfers (other than pensions) to reduce poverty'.

At the beginning of 2022, a Social Assistance Code was drafted, in which the linking of social benefits to the official poverty line in Bulgaria is regulated. The proposed amounts are in the public consultation phase.⁵¹ The amount of social benefits (monthly, one-off, targeted heating benefits, etc.) and their effective targeting are important in reducing poverty among the most vulnerable groups. The budget effect for 2022 would be EUR 117.1 million (BGN 234.2 million). The average monthly number of persons supported by monthly social benefits as of 28 February 2022 was 19 695 persons and the target value is 34 802 persons for 2022. The number of persons assisted by targeted heating aid would be 300 000 people and families for the heating season 2022/2023.⁵²

From 1 April 2022, the minimum monthly wage increased by 9.2 % and reached EUR 355 (BGN 710). With the latest changes in 2021 the minimum pension for length

⁵⁰ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 19.

⁵¹ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 21.

⁵² 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 35.

of service increased by 20 % and from 1 January 2021 was EUR 150 (BGN 300) and from 25 December 2021 EUR 185 (BGN 370). In 2021 the poverty line was set at EUR 184.50 (BGN 369), the government's aim is for the amount of the minimum pension for length of service and age to exceed the defined poverty line.

Under the RRP 2021-2027, the development of the achievements in the previous years in the field of social activities will continue in order to ensure equal access to quality and effective social services for all persons in need of support, including poverty reduction and promotion of social inclusion. RRP 2021-2027 plans targeted support in the health infrastructure for the provision of integrated health and social services in the community, for vulnerable groups, the elderly, people with disabilities or children, including nurseries.

New legislation

In view of the Ordinance adopted in 2020 on the standards for remuneration of employees providing social services, which are financed from the State budget (enforced on 1 January 2022), the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in a letter No. 04-16-686 dated 18 October 2021, made a proposal to the Ministry of Finance to provide additional funds to increase the standards for financing social services delegated by the State. The decision of the Council of Ministers on the standards for the activities delegated by the State was adopted on 3 February 2022 and was enforced on 1 April 2022. It provides for a significant increase in the standards for financing of all social services delegated by the State in 2022. For assistive support service the increase is 26.5 %, i.e. the standard of EUR 2 000 in 2021 rose to EUR 2 500 for 2022.

Other important legislative acts related to social services were adopted during the period 2020-2021.

- Rules of Procedure of the Agency for the Quality of Social Services (AQSS) were adopted on 18 August 2020 and the Agency was structured on 1 September 2020. The Agency's functions are to monitor the quality of social services and to license all private providers of social services.
- The Ordinance on the Planning of Social Services was adopted on 6 April 2021, which is part of the by-laws to the Social Services Act.⁵³
- On 28 May 2021 the Code of Ethics for employees providing social services was approved.
- The Ordinance on the Quality of Social Services adopted by the Council of Ministers on 22 June 2022 provides a new procedure for regulating all issues concerning the quality provision of social services, including the various types of social services for people with disabilities.

⁵³ The Ordinance regulates: the criteria for determining the services and the maximum number of users in the National Map of Social Services; the criteria, the order and the conditions for development of needs analysis by municipalities and proposals of the municipalities for service development as a result of the analysis at municipal level; the procedure for the development and updating of the National Map of Social Services; the procedure for implementation, cooperation and coordination at national, regional and municipal level regarding the development of the National Map of Social Services and the procedure for the coordination of the municipal annual plans for social services.

The National Programme for Affordable Housing and Personal Mobility continues to be implemented in 2021. Under the 'Affordable Housing' component contracts have been concluded for the funding of 45 approved projects – by 16 individuals and 29 legal entities (housing associations) at a total value of EUR 0.9 million (BGN 1.8 million). Under the 'Personal Mobility' component, five project proposals were approved at a total value of EUR 10 000 (BGN 20 000). A total of EUR 1.25 million (BGN 2.5 million) was allocated for the Programme for 2022.⁵⁴

Under Operational Programme 'Regions in Growth' 2014-2020 the implementation of procedures is planned for 'Support for deinstitutionalisation of childcare' and 'Support for deinstitutionalisation of social services for adults and people with disabilities'. It is to be done through construction, repair, reconstruction and renovation of buildings to ensure appropriate infrastructure for social services in the community. A total of 61 contracts have been fulfilled and another 20 contracts are ongoing. They are focused on provision of grants for deinstitutionalisation of care for children and care for the elderly and people with disabilities, totalling EUR 42 million (BGN 84 million), with a deadline of the end of 2023. The number of supported social infrastructure sites in the process of deinstitutionalisation is currently 142 and the target number is 214. The capacity of the supported infrastructure intended for childcare or education is currently 6 411 units, and the target value is 6 093 units (there is an over-implementation).⁵⁵

A total of EUR 261.15 million (BGN 522.3 million) has been allocated for 2022 for financial support for people with disabilities (under Article 68 of the Persons with Disabilities Act), according to their needs, established on the basis of individual assessments carried out by the Social Assistance Agency after 1 January 2022. The average monthly number of people with permanent disabilities who are to receive the support is 672 000 for 2022. As of 28 February 2022, the monthly financial support was provided to 651 365 people (average monthly number).⁵⁶ In the Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) the monthly number of persons with permanent disabilities who were planned to be supported with monthly financial support in 2021 and 2022 was 670 000. In addition, 2 000 were planned to be supported with targeted assistance (adaptation of house/vehicle or rent) and 230 000 persons should benefit from a free-of-charge electronic annual highway vignette (permit). The total amount planned for these activities is EUR 235.8 million (BGN 471.6 million) for 2021 and EUR 246.9 million (BGN 493.8 million) for 2022.⁵⁷

During 2021, under an EU-funded project of EUR 400 000, it was planned that a comprehensive analysis of the current system for disability assessment in Bulgaria would be undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and a new tool for individual functional assessments of the needs of people with disabilities in the social assistance system (WHODAS) would be tested among about 3 000 potential

⁵⁴ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 26.

⁵⁵ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 35.

⁵⁶ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 27.

⁵⁷ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 42.

beneficiaries.⁵⁸ No information had been found about the implementation of these activities as of July 2022.

The number of personal assistance beneficiaries under the Personal Assistance Act (persons with permanent disabilities) was 34 043 persons as of the end of December 2020, and the number of appointed assistants was 34 917. As of 31 December 2021, the number of personal assistance users grew to 49 505, and the number of assistants for the same period was 54 552. For the period January-December 2021, EUR 140.25 million (BGN 280.5 million) was transferred to the municipalities / regions of municipalities for this service.⁵⁹ According to the Council of Ministers' Action Plan for 2021-2022, the planned number for 2022 was 41 250 persons. The allocated budget for each year for 2021 and 2022 was EUR 107.3 million (BGN 214.6 million).⁶⁰

In 2021-2022, it was planned that social service 'assistive support'⁶¹ provided in the home environment as a delegated State activity would be provided to 19 993 subsidised users in 265 municipalities. For 2021, EUR 40 million (BGN 80 million) was allocated for this.⁶²

Under 'Social Inclusion of Persons with Psychosocial Disorders and Intellectual Disabilities' within the OPHRD 2014-2020, the establishment of ten centres for social rehabilitation and integration (CSRI) for 380 persons with psychosocial disorders and persons with intellectual disabilities was planned. They were intended to provide supportive social services in the community in order to create or restore independent living skills and full inclusion of the users in the community. Four municipalities signed contracts in 2020 and are implementing their projects. Two such centres with a total capacity of 40 places have been set up and are already functioning as of July 2022. They operate with funding from the OPHRD.⁶³

Under 'Support for Persons with Disabilities' within the OPHRD 2014-2020 funding, the development of 16 centres for complex care for persons with severe multiple disabilities and their families in 16 municipalities was to be carried out. The indicative number of users is 995.⁶⁴ The first component of the operation is BG05M9OP001-2.008 'Support for persons with disabilities'. Under it five contracts were concluded totalling EUR 2.5 million (BGN 5 million). Two daycare centres to support persons with

⁵⁸ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 42.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, draft Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 44.

⁶¹ The social service 'assistive support' is regulated in the Social Services Act, which entered into force on 1 July 2020. By financing this social service under the Decision of the Council of Ministers on the standards for the activities delegated by the State, funds are provided for assistants and persons who do not have the right to assistance under the Personal Assistance Act (PAA) or have not exercised this right.

⁶² Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 44.

⁶³ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 45.

disabilities and their families with a total capacity of 70 users had been already set up and are functioning. They operate with funding for OPHRD projects.⁶⁵ The second component is BG05M9OP001-2.061 'Support for persons with disabilities' and has total funding of EUR 5.5 million (BGN 11 million). Under it eight contracts were concluded with a total value of EUR 4 million (BGN 8 million). The purpose of the operation was to set up 11 daycare centres. In 2020-2021, financing agreements were concluded with eight municipalities.⁶⁶

Under 'Patronage care for elderly people and people with disabilities' within the OPHRD 2014-2020, funding was earmarked for the creation of a patronage care model⁶⁷ for elderly people and people with disabilities and a network of hourly mobile integrated health and social services in the home environment. The indicative number of users was 12 600 people, including persons with disabilities. The number of those who were provided with services because of the pandemic situation was 18 450 people, including persons with disabilities.⁶⁸ The procedure is implemented in four components with a total budget of EUR 38.4 million (BGN 76.8 million). Over 14 690 adults and people with disabilities in 156 municipalities receive health and social services at home. For 34 543 persons in need from 225 municipalities, food and medicine supplies and assistance for urgent administrative services were provided. Integrated services are provided for at least 12 months, and everyone in need receives health and social services for up to 2 hours a day. In 2021, additional agreements were concluded with 99 municipalities to extend the term of services by 6 months, in response to the needs of the population for services in the home environment for older people and people with disabilities. Under Component 1, a total of 201 contracts were concluded in 2021 with a total value of EUR 36.8 million (BGN 71.7 million). They provided opportunities for over 45 000 elderly people and people with disabilities to receive services, and for 14 994 employees providing social services, delegated and State activities – personal protective equipment and tests for COVID-19. Component 2 was announced in October 2021 and provides an opportunity for some of the municipalities that have contracts under Component 1 to continue providing services for six months within the general budget of the procedure.⁶⁹

Under 'New long-term care for the elderly and people with disabilities' within the OPHRD 2014-2020, the development of several preparatory activities for deinstitutionalisation was planned and performed.⁷⁰ Individual assessments and

⁶⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 19.

⁶⁷ The 'patronage' service is provided by municipalities and includes delivery of food, medicines and other essential goods to elderly people and people with disabilities, who pay for this with their own money.

⁶⁸ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 45.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, draft Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 21.

⁷⁰ They are: elaboration of a methodology for conducting individual needs assessments and support plans for people with disabilities and a methodology for closing the institutions for people with disabilities and for reforming the institutions for the elderly; establishment of 22 assessment teams that will carry out individual needs assessments and support plans for over 700 persons from 10 specialised institutions designated for closure and over 200 persons residing for a long period in

support plans for 750 users were expected to be completed and 10 institutions to be closed down with funding of EUR 2 million.⁷¹ The individual assessments started in July 2021 and by 31 March 2022 the teams had performed 967 assessments.⁷² The process of moving residents out of institutions and state psychiatric hospitals started in October 2021 and is ongoing at the time of writing of this report. Three institutions for persons with psychosocial disorders and intellectual disabilities had been closed down as of July 2022. The residents had been moved to newly established small residential services in other villages and small towns.

Under 'New long-term care for the elderly and people with disabilities – Stage 2 – provision of new services', within the OPHRD 2014-2020, a total of 28 municipalities should receive EUR 10 million to move people with disabilities and the elderly out of specialised institutions and to prevent the institutionalisation of these people by provision of social services in the community for daily and hourly care and support and provision of residential social services. The current number of beneficiaries is 1 215 persons over 18 years of age. They are supposed to be provided with services to be developed under OPRD 2014-2020, as follows: six daycare centres for people with dementia and their families and 65 residential care centres for people with psychosocial disorders, people with intellectual disabilities, people with dementia and elderly people unable to care for themselves.⁷³ In 2021, a total of 17 contracts were concluded under the procedure at a total value of EUR 5.5 million (BGN 11 million). Three of the six daycare centres for people with dementia and their families with a total capacity of 120 places are already functioning. Two centres are in the process of implementation. Within the framework of these contracts, 35 residential care centres were also to be created. Of these, 18 social services for residential care already serve 270 users.⁷⁴ Five municipalities had already developed residential and daycare services for persons with disabilities under the same procedure. So far, a total of EUR 18.5 million (BGN 37 million) has been spent on this.

In the draft Action Plan for the period 2022-2027 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Long-term Care⁷⁵ the following measures are planned:

state psychiatric hospitals for social indications; preparation of training materials for training of specialists from the health and social care systems, providing social and integrated health and social services, development of plans for closure of the 10 specialised institutions; preparatory work with the users of institutions for their removal and relocation to new services.

⁷¹ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 48.

⁷² Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p.15.

⁷³ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 49.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, draft Final report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, p. 17. Contracts for the implementation of projects with 30 municipalities for the infrastructure construction for a total of 71 social services had been concluded under this procedure as of 31 December 2021 (including those mentioned above): 6 daycare centres for persons with dementia and their families; 28 care centres for persons with psychosocial disorders; 21 care centres for persons with intellectual disabilities; 7 care centres for persons with dementia; and 9 care centres for elderly persons unable to care for themselves (p. 12).

⁷⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Draft Action Plan for the period 2022-2027 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Long-term Care, p. 8.

- construction of 100 social services for 2 140 users (already contracted during the 2018-2021 phase of the Plan);
- provision of quality care and support in new community-based services for a minimum of 750 deinstitutionalised persons with psychosocial disorders and intellectual disabilities;
- provision of day, hourly and residential care and support for over 2 000 persons with disabilities and elderly people dependent on care;
- provision of social services in the home environment for over 17 000 persons with disabilities and elderly people dependent on care;
- provision of aforementioned patronage care to over 17 000 persons with disabilities and elderly people dependent on care;
- closure of 10 specialised institutions for people with psychosocial disorders and intellectual disabilities;
- development of new legislation regulating health and social care services;
- increasing the capacity of employees in the long-term care system.

The analysis of the current situation in Bulgaria in the Plan for Long-term Care states that about 9 000 people with disabilities and elderly people are living in 161 specialised institutions for the provision of social services. In addition, 2 300 people are waiting for accommodation in these institutions, of whom 1 023 are people with psychosocial disorders and intellectual disabilities and dementia. There are about 1 390 people waiting for emergency placement in 273 community-based social services for residential care, almost all of whom are people with social disorders and intellectual disabilities and dementia. These services are financed entirely from the State budget. The number of persons with psychosocial disorders (272 as of 30 June 2021) who are permanently accommodated (over one year) in state psychiatric hospitals is not small. These are people who do not need active treatment, but cannot be discharged due to lack of housing, lack of close relatives or due to the unwillingness of the latter to take care of them after their discharge from the hospital. These are mainly people with schizophrenia – 82 %, plus 7 % with intellectual disabilities and 3 % with bipolar disorder and dementia.⁷⁶ The number of people waiting to be accommodated in a specialised institution in Bulgaria continues to be high, which necessitates the development of alternatives for support for living in the community, which would eliminate the need for institutional care. The demand for institutional care continues to be mainly due to the increased demand for long-term care services as a result of the aging of the population; insufficient provision of services in the community and at home, existing stereotypes and attitudes, which sometimes lead to discrimination against people with psychosocial disorders and intellectual disabilities, and the unreformed system of legal capacity, which gives too many rights, especially to the guardians of persons placed under full guardianship, but does not offer adequate measures to support these individuals.

Universal design

The Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) includes the adaptation of public buildings to improve the accessible environment for people with disabilities. A total of 1 009

⁷⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Draft Action Plan for the period 2022-2027 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Long-term Care, p. 11.

buildings are planned to be adapted with 274 contracts with funding from Operational Programme Regional Development 2014-2020, Priority Axis 1 ‘Sustainable and integrated urban development’ and Priority Axis 2 ‘Support for energy efficiency in support centres in peripheral areas’ (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and national co-financing). The planned funds amount to EUR 156 million (BGN 312 million).

Healthcare

The Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) includes several measures regarding healthcare for persons with disabilities:

- allocation of funding and provision of aids, medical devices and equipment for persons with disabilities outside the scope of compulsory health insurance – planned total budget of EUR 19 million (BGN 38 million) for 2021;
- establishment of 14 centres for complex services for children with disabilities and chronic diseases;
- establishment of 26 centres for specialised health and social care for children with disabilities in need of permanent medical care and centres for specialised health and social care for children with high-risk behaviour and special healthcare needs.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), p. 18.

5 Disability, education and skills – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2018, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Bulgaria:

[Article 24 UN CRPD](#) addresses 'Education'.

'50. The Committee recommends that the State party, in accordance with general comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education: (a) Replace segregated education systems with quality inclusive education; (b) Raise awareness of the advantages of quality inclusive education for society, in particular for teachers and other education staff, and also for parents of children without disabilities; (c) Intensify its efforts to ensure quality inclusive education and the provision of reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities in mainstream schools, including by allocating sufficient human, technical and financial resources for it; (d) Collect data on the number of children and young people with disabilities not currently enrolled in any form of education, disaggregated by age, sex, type of impairment and place of residence, and develop a strategy to include these children in the mainstream education system.'

The most recent CRPD development is the 2018 Concluding Observations and the State's submission in 2018.

5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC 2020 estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with caution due to relatively wide confidence intervals but they consistently indicate disability equality gaps (an average of 2-3 years provides a more stable indication). Table 16 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status in Bulgaria. Young people with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school early significantly more than their non-disabled peers in the same age groups (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to age 18-29). Table 17 shows completion rates of tertiary education disaggregated by disability and age group. Persons with disabilities (aged 30-34) are less likely to complete tertiary education than their peers (and this is reinforced in the wider age range 30-39).

5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see the 2022 National Reform Programme, the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Bulgaria and the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030).

According to the National Network for Children (umbrella NGO), despite the increasing number of resource specialists in kindergartens, schools and Regional Centres for Support of the Inclusive Education Process, no balance has yet been found for each child or student with special educational needs (SEN) (especially in small settlements and remote schools) to receive all the necessary common and additional support in the quantities and intensity they need to be able to develop their strengths and overcome obstacles to learning and development. There are still great difficulties in

providing teams of specialists who can sufficiently meet the needs of children who require long-term and systematic additional support.⁷⁸

During 2021 the Ministry of Education and Science continued its efforts to support the process of inclusive education. Under one of the national programmes, six manuals and six methodological handbooks were produced on adapting educational content for students with SEN in primary, lower secondary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education and Science supported the process of launching the online platform 'Support Me'⁷⁹ with tools for teachers, parents and children with SEN. The Ministry of Education and Science also provided opportunities for additional remote support in the electronic environment – 75 % of children and students with SEN were involved in remote learning assisted by their parents.⁸⁰

The Guidelines for the organisation of remote learning in an electronic environment provide opportunities for students with SEN to conduct face-to-face individual activities for their personal development, as well as group activities, depending on the request and readiness of parents and the opportunities of the kindergarten or school. However, efforts to build a supportive educational environment in kindergartens, schools and regional centres for support of inclusive education need to be continued. The allocated funds must match the number of children and students in need of resource support and the different types of special educational needs, as well as the envisaged measures for general or additional support from the assessment of the specific child or student.

Special attention should be paid to the proper targeting of the funds that kindergartens and schools receive for children with SEN. They should be used for the purchase of appropriate tools and materials for individual and group work with children and students, according to the model through which they are provided in kindergartens and schools that are included in the Ministry of Education and Science project 'Support for Inclusive Education' under OP Science and Education for Intelligent Growth. Currently, there are no procedures in place to clearly agree on how to spend these funds between the principal, teachers and resource specialists at the beginning of the school year. Despite the general increase in resource specialists, there are still extreme difficulties in providing teams of specialists who can sufficiently meet the needs of children who require longer and systematic additional support.⁸¹

According to the National Network for Children, most mainstream schools remain inaccessible for children with physical and multiple disabilities. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, the number of state schools in Bulgaria with accessible elements is as follows: 34 schools with lifts, 147 schools with ramps, 199 schools with accessible toilets, and 70 118 platforms.⁸² All of these facilities are built under the National Programme 'Creating an accessible architectural environment'. In

⁷⁸ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 95, https://nmd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Belejnisk2022_web_low_res_compressed2.pdf.

⁷⁹ UNICEF, Ministry of Education and Science and Regional Centre for Inclusive Education in Sofia, On-line platform with resources for inclusive education for teachers, parents and children <https://podkrepime.mon.bg/>.

⁸⁰ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 95.

⁸¹ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 95.

⁸² National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 99.

addition, the Ministry of Education and Science is implementing seven projects under the Operational Programme ‘Regions in Growth’, through which 101 vocational high schools will be renovated, and accessible toilets and lifts will be installed in them.⁸³ For 2021, in 18 schools activities were funded under the National Programme ‘Creating an accessible architectural environment and security at school’. Under the same programme for 2021 repairs have been carried out and an accessible environment has been provided in three sports schools – in Plovdiv, Ruse and Burgas. For the municipal schools and kindergartens, data about accessibility is not being collected and processed. The accessible environment often consists of a ramp at the entrance to the ground floor. There is still a lack of understanding of the accessible environment as providing the ability to freely use every functional part of the buildings – specialised offices, library, dining room, etc., as well as the playgrounds and sports facilities adjacent to the buildings.⁸⁴

There are still no detailed and practically useful statistics on children with disabilities and chronic diseases. Despite the projects implemented and the responsibility assumed before the public, neither the register of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, that of the Territorial Expert Medical Commissions or Social Assistance Agency, nor that of the National Statistical Institute can provide up-to-date information about the number of children with disabilities in Bulgaria and the nature of their needs.⁸⁵

The National Network for Children produced the following recommendations regarding inclusive education:

- To synchronise the procedures for collecting data on the number of children with SEN at the different stages and levels of education. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring access to adequate vocational training for different groups of students with SEN. These data should be carefully analysed in view of the situation related to the spread of COVID-19 and its impact on access to education and support, especially for children and students with SEN;
- To build capacity to provide quality online education for students with SEN and maintain the inclusive nature of school policies and practices by:
 - creating various digital resources and content for training students with SEN;
 - training of teachers and resource specialists for the use of digital resources and content;
 - creation of digital resources for assessment and self-assessment in the process of teaching and learning.
- To create a system for tracking the ratio between the number of children and students in need of resource support and the number and type of resource specialists who are responsible for the additional support.⁸⁶

The 2022 National Reform Programme includes the implementation of activities under the National Programme ‘Creating an accessible architectural environment and safety

⁸³ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 99.

⁸⁴ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 99.

⁸⁵ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 100.

⁸⁶ National Network for Children, 2021 Notebook, p. 101.

at school' for 2022, Module I 'Creating an accessible architectural environment'.⁸⁷ The procedure for ensuring support for inclusive education of children and students and the development of specialised teaching materials for work with children and students with SEN or chronic diseases, children who are at risk and children with outstanding gifts is in progress. Specialised training is planned for personal development support teams to provide additional support and purchase equipment for additional support. The deadline is 2023 and the number of children and students with SEN involved in activities is currently 2 427, against a target of 4 100. It is planned that a total of 220 kindergartens will be supported, while currently support is provided to 117. It is planned that a total of 430 schools will be supported, while currently support is provided to 211. The allocated budget is EUR 15.5 million (BGN 31 million).⁸⁸

The Council of Ministers' Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030) includes the following measures regarding inclusive education:

- conducting trainings for the specialists from the personal development support teams in kindergartens and schools, included in the project 'Support for inclusive education' under OP Science and Education for Intelligent Growth, and from the centres for special educational support for application of a card for functional assessment through International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: Children and Youth Version (ICFCY) and for introduction with a cross-sectoral approach between the educational, health and social care spheres. It is expected that 1 164 pedagogical specialists will be trained, including: 220 specialists from the personal development support teams from the kindergartens, 860 specialists from schools and 84 specialists from the centres for special educational support. In addition, 346 speech therapists from the personal development support teams will be trained to work with a child and student on a case-by-case basis, to determine the levels of additional support needed and to provide additional support and apply standards for speech therapy support;
- carrying out of scientific research in the field of Bulgarian sign language for the development of a digital online thematic dictionary in Bulgarian sign language;
- design and construction of two covered ramps, adaptation and construction of five toilets, seven repairs to adjacent infrastructure, implementation of three lift systems, delivery and installation of platform equipment at two sites and signage on two routes. The activities will be implemented in 18 state educational institutions;
- under OPRD 2014-2020 improvements are planned for the capacity of the supported infrastructure intended for childcare or education at educational sites with a capacity for 201 026 persons. A total of 96 contracts have been concluded for support of educational sites with municipalities and other institutions.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 30.

⁸⁸ 2022 National Reform Programme, p. 31.

⁸⁹ Council of Ministers, Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 for Implementation of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), adopted on 28 October 2021, pp. 13-16.

6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

The draft National Recovery and Resilience Plan declared that the measures earmarked in it are in compliance with the 2019 and 2020 Specific Recommendations and mentions people with disabilities in the following sections:

- Green component – the plan envisages ongoing support for the deinstitutionalisation of care for the elderly and people with disabilities and increased energy efficiency of social infrastructure for the provision of social services delegated by the State.⁹⁰
- The social inclusion section includes:⁹¹
 - improvement of the overall system for social assistance by adopting a Social Assistance Code and secondary legislation;
 - continuing the reform of the system of long-term care social services, which started in 2014, with approximately 60 % of the specialised institutions for persons with disabilities envisaged to be closed, and all existing institutions for the elderly to be reformed in compliance with the new quality criteria;⁹²
 - construction and equipping of new social and integrated health and social services for residential care and accompanying specialised and consultative social services for people with disabilities;⁹³
 - provision of personal mobility and accessibility for people with permanent disability (technical aids, specialised software programmes, electronic technical tools to compensate for sensory deficit, adapted motor vehicles, technical and medical devices and other similar aids and devices will be provided according to specific needs);⁹⁴
 - development of regional administrative capacity for modernising the enterprises in the social care and solidarity economy and introducing individualised solutions (the project envisages a survey of at least 200 social enterprises for the opportunity to digitise their work processes and support the implementation of the recommendations in at least 100 of them, as well as training for their employees in connection with the implemented digital solutions);⁹⁵
 - modernisation of the buildings of the Social Assistance Departments and Employment Departments which is expected to increase their accessibility for persons with disabilities;⁹⁶
 - modernisation and development of psychiatric care.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Council of Ministers, National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 27, <https://www.nextgeneration.bg/14>.

⁹¹ Council of Ministers, National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 221.

⁹² Council of Ministers, National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 234.

⁹³ Council of Ministers, National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 227.

⁹⁴ Council of Ministers, National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 228.

⁹⁵ Council of Ministers, draft National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 230.

⁹⁶ Council of Ministers, draft National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 231.

⁹⁷ Council of Ministers, draft National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, p. 249.

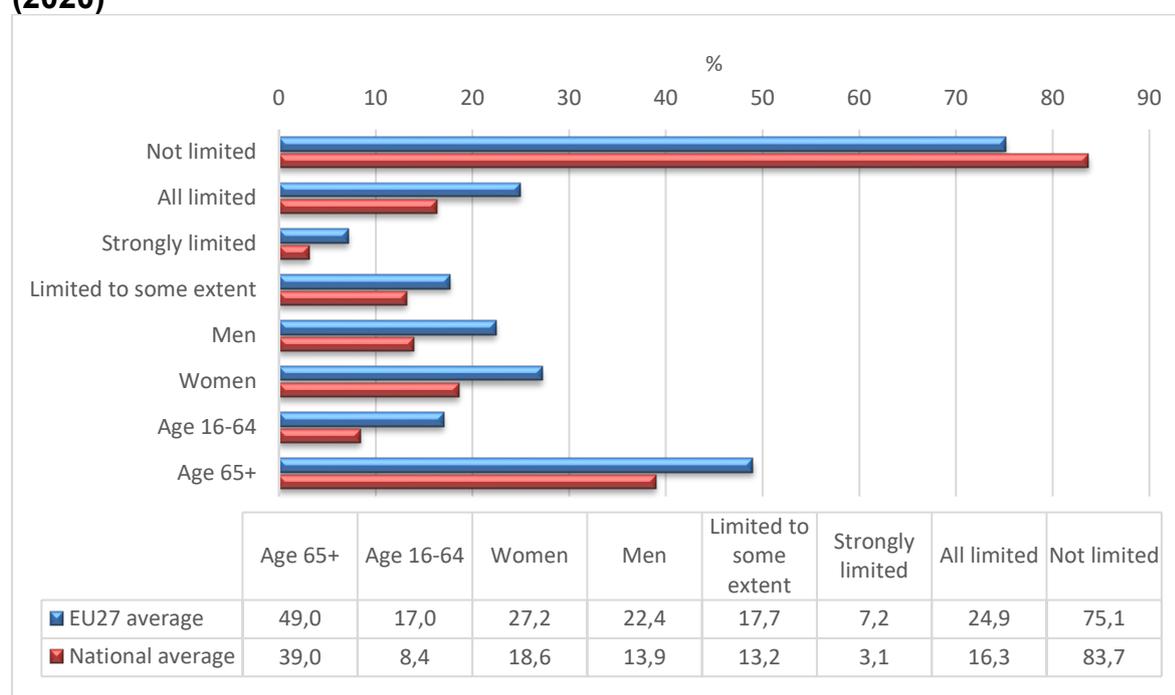
7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database⁹⁸ and statistical reports.⁹⁹

Unless specified, the summary statistics are drawn from the most recent EU-SILC data available to researchers from Eurostat. The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions (congregative households). The sampling methods vary somewhat in each country.

The proxy used to identify people with disabilities (impairments) is whether ‘for at least the past 6 months’ the respondent reports that they have been ‘limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do’.¹⁰⁰

Table 1: Self-reported ‘activity limitations’ as a proxy for impairment / disability (2020)



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022

In subsequent tables, these data are used to indicate ‘disability’ equality gaps and trends relevant to the analytical sections – for the labour market, social policies and healthcare, and education – by comparing outcomes for persons who report and do not report ‘activity limitations’.¹⁰¹ National estimates for Bulgaria are compared with EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

⁹⁹ Eurostat (2019) Disability Statistics: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics.

¹⁰⁰ The SILC survey questions are contained in the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_\(MEHM\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_(MEHM)).

¹⁰¹ This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at: <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

¹⁰² The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU changed the EU average. EU27 averages have also been affected by time series breaks in other large countries, such as Germany.

7.1 Data relevant to disability and the labour market

Table 2: EU and Bulgaria employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)

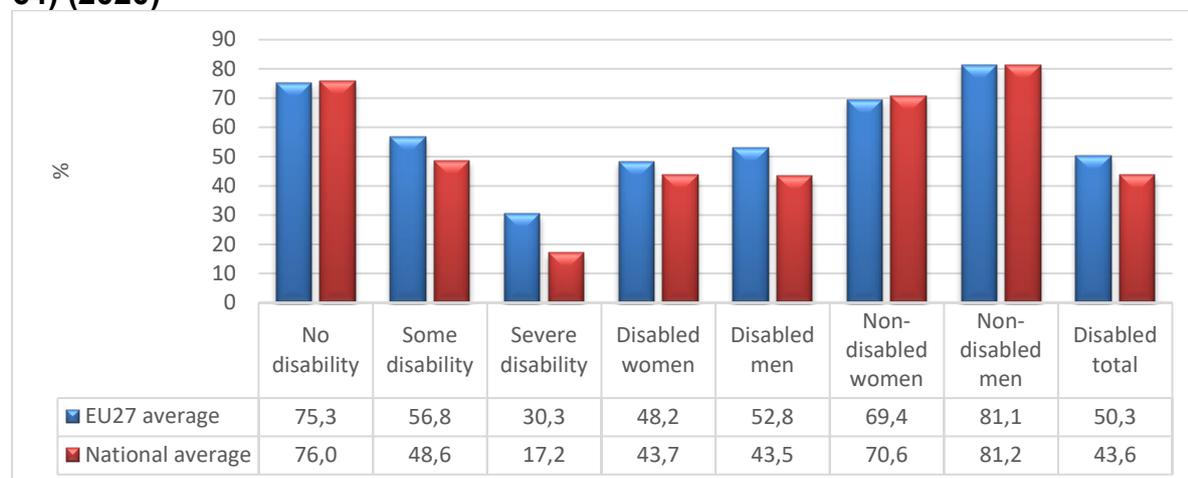


Table 3: Employment rates in Bulgaria, by disability and age group (2020)

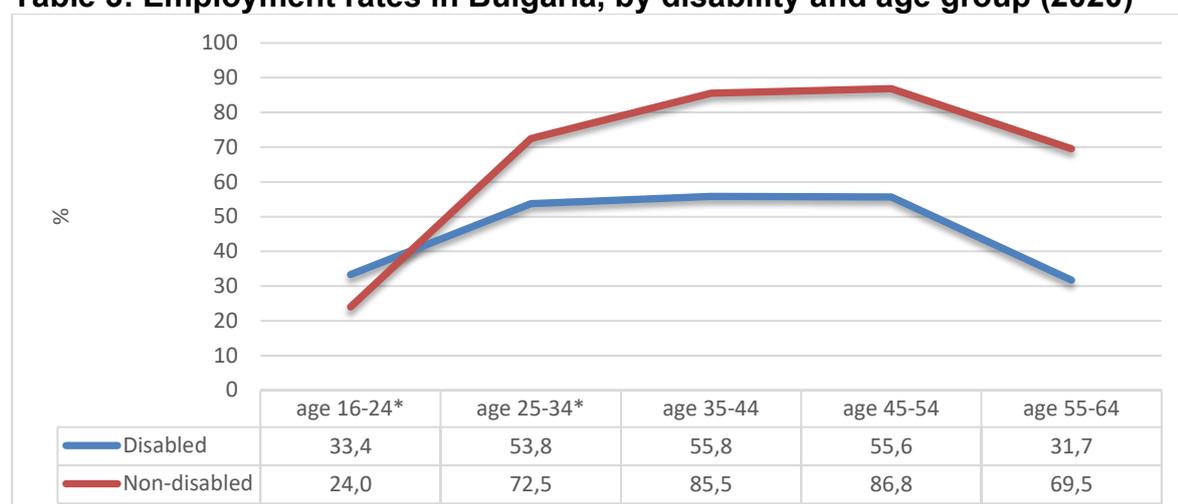
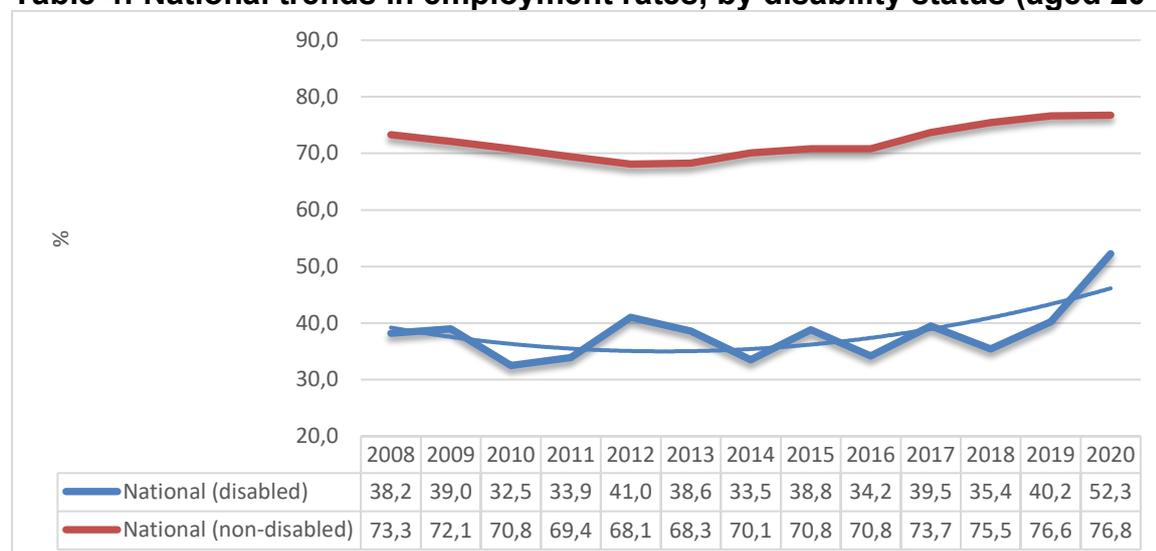


Table 4: National trends in employment rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Microdata concerning employment status was not available for Germany and Italy in this data release, which affects the EU27 average (which is therefore estimated). There were fewer than 50 observations in the younger age groups for Bulgaria in 2020, which should be treated with caution.

7.1.1 Unemployment

Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)

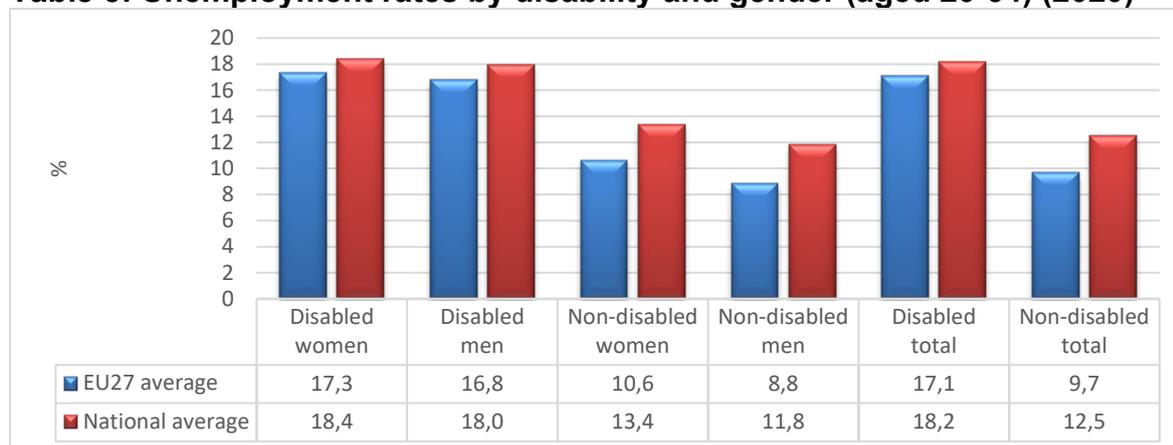


Table 6: Unemployment rates in Bulgaria, by disability and age group (2020)

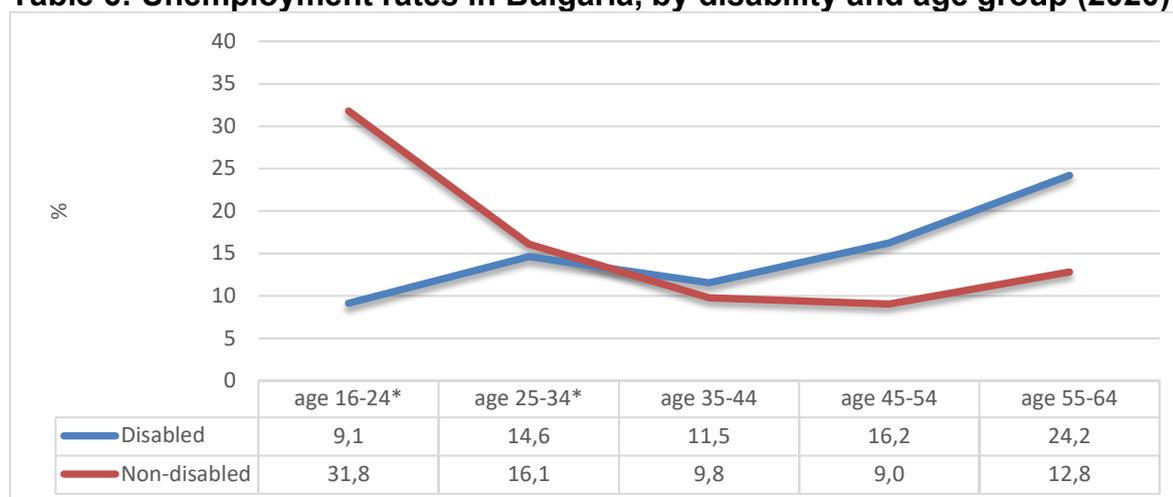
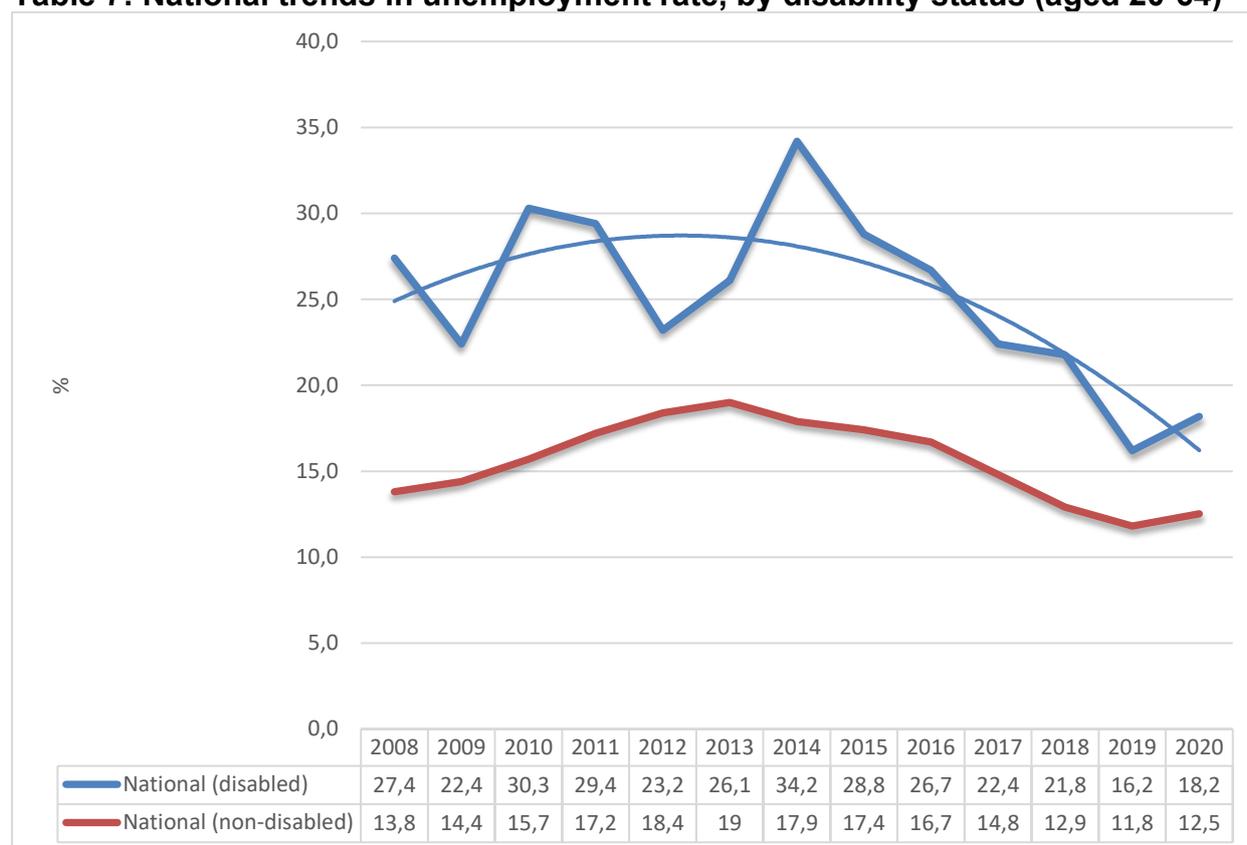


Table 7: National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64)

Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.2 Economic activity

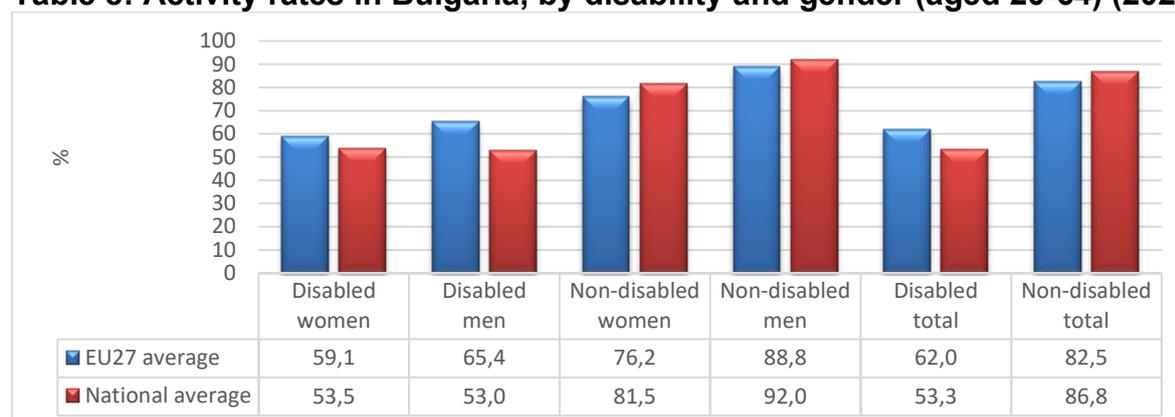
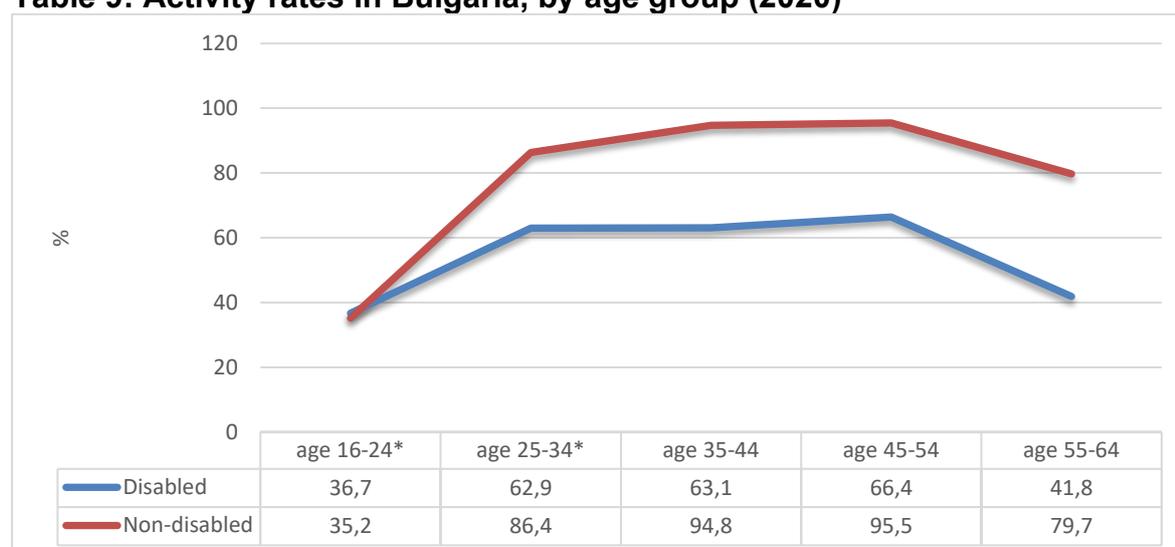
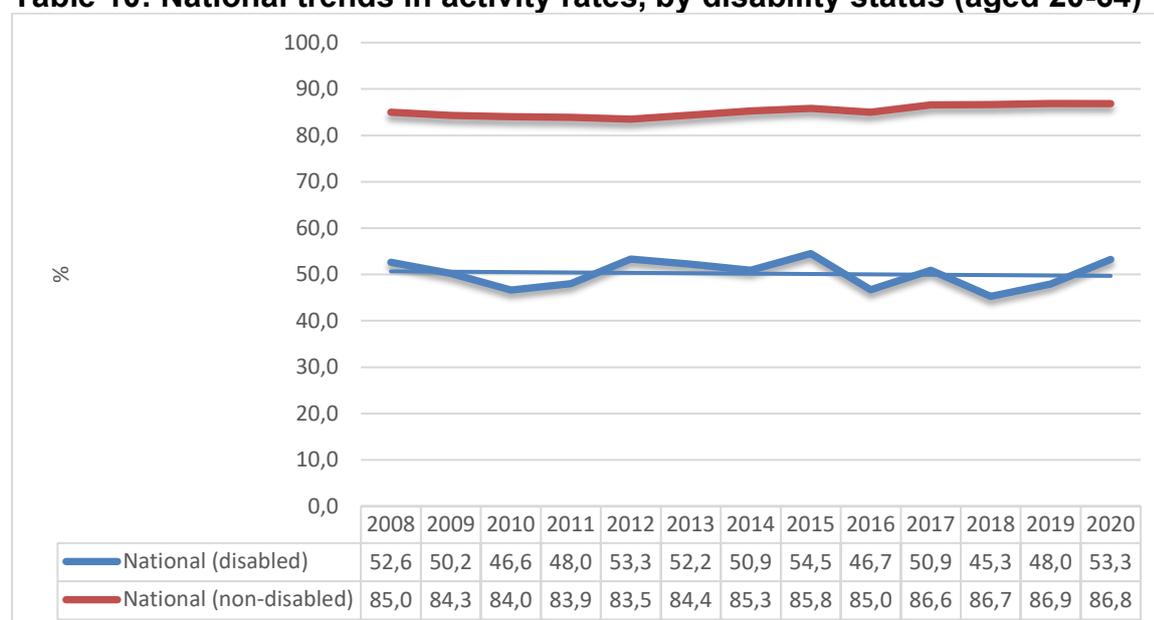
Table 8: Activity rates in Bulgaria, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2020)

Table 9: Activity rates in Bulgaria, by age group (2020)**Table 10: National trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64)**

Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Bulgaria

Disability data are not yet available from the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Bulgaria were disaggregated from ad modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.¹⁰³

Table A: Registered persons with disabilities who were involved in employment

Type of employment	2020	2021
Active/open labour market	6 274	5 869
Employment promotion programme	1 102	1 513

¹⁰³ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

Employment promotion measures	408	367
EU-funded projects	899	1 346

The table below summarises implementation of the National Programme for Employment and Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities and the incentive measures under Article 52 and Article 36 of the Employment Promotion Act during 2018-2021.

Table B: implementation of the National Programme

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total number of employed persons under the National Programme for Employment and Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities	2 367 ¹⁰⁴	1 819 ¹⁰⁵	1 632 ¹⁰⁶	1 350
Newcomers	581	679	567	905
State funding spent on the programme	NA	EUR 4.6m	EUR 4.5m	EUR 5.5m
Total number of employed persons under Article 51, paragraph 2, EPA	478 ¹⁰⁷	363 ¹⁰⁸	439 ¹⁰⁹	466 ¹¹⁰
Newcomers	186	193	276	220
State funding spent on the measure	EUR 0.7m	EUR 0.6m	EUR 0.6m	EUR 0.8m
Total number of employed persons under Article 52 of EPA ¹¹¹	126 ¹¹²	140 ¹¹³	133 ¹¹⁴	140 ¹¹⁵
Newcomers	92	122	84	84
State funding spent on the measure	EUR 138,455	EUR 144,000	EUR 125,000	EUR 186,000
Total number of employed persons under Article 36 of EPA	NA	NA	294 ¹¹⁶	429 ^{117 118}
Newcomers	NA	NA	182	278
State funding spent on the measure	Na	NA	EUR 280,000	EUR 0.75m

¹⁰⁴ Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁵ Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁶ Employment Agency, 2020 Annual report, p. 21.

¹⁰⁷ Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁸ Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁹ Employment Agency, 2020 Annual report, p. 21.

¹¹⁰ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 29.

¹¹¹ Labour costs for a period of up to six months were financed for employers who created jobs and provided employment to persons with disabilities.

¹¹² Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, pp. 21-22, <https://www.az.government.bg/pages/otchet-za-deinostta-na-az/>.

¹¹³ Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, pp. 21-22.

¹¹⁴ Employment Agency, 2020 Annual report, p. 21.

¹¹⁵ Employment Agency, 2021 Annual report, p. 29.

¹¹⁶ Employment Agency, 2020 Annual report, p. 33.

¹¹⁷ Employment Agency, 2019 Annual report, p. 42.

¹¹⁸ It is not clear what the share of persons with disabilities is.

7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2020)

Table 11: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and risk (aged 16-64)¹¹⁹

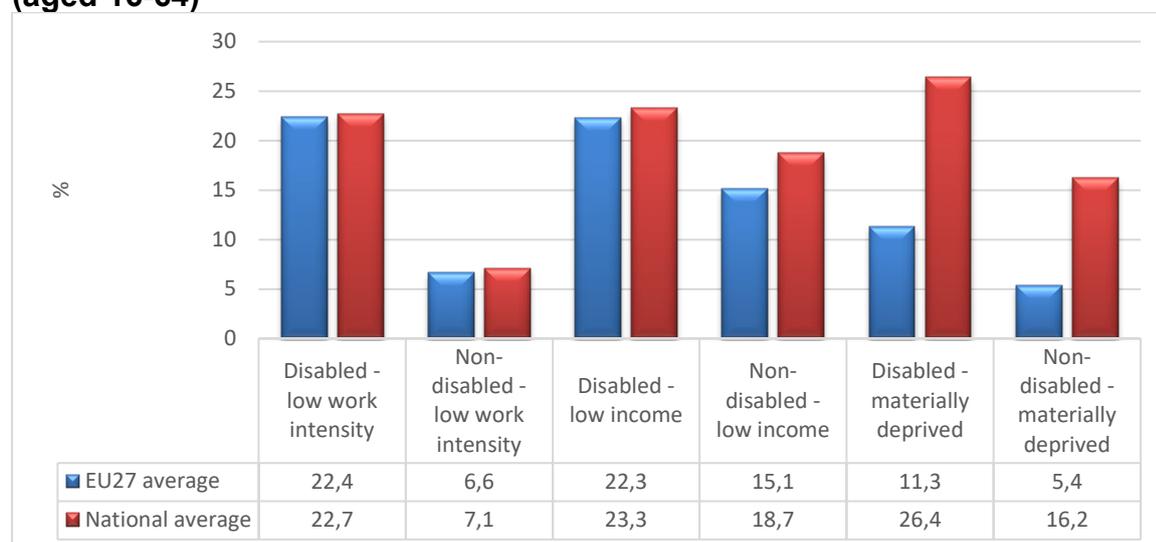


Table 12: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)

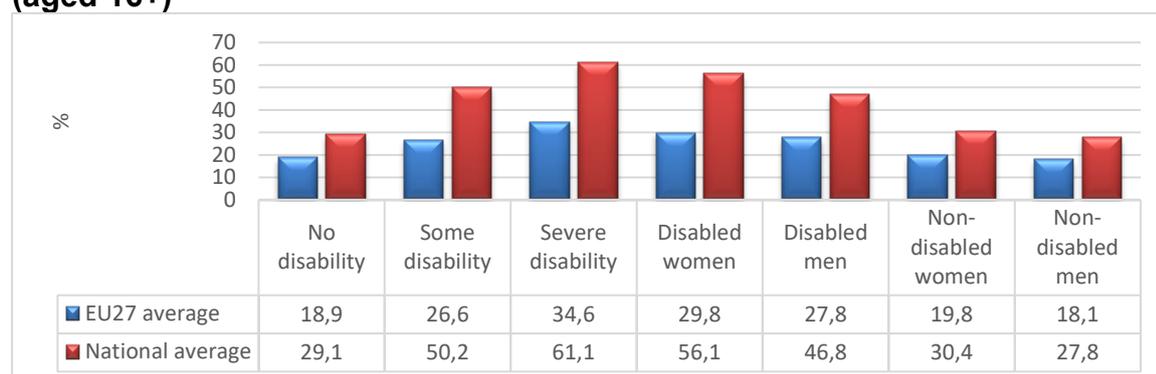
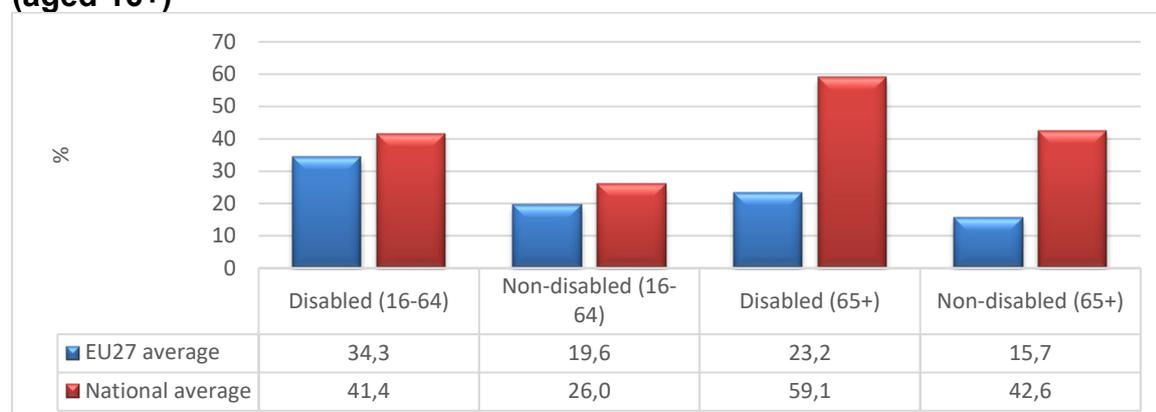
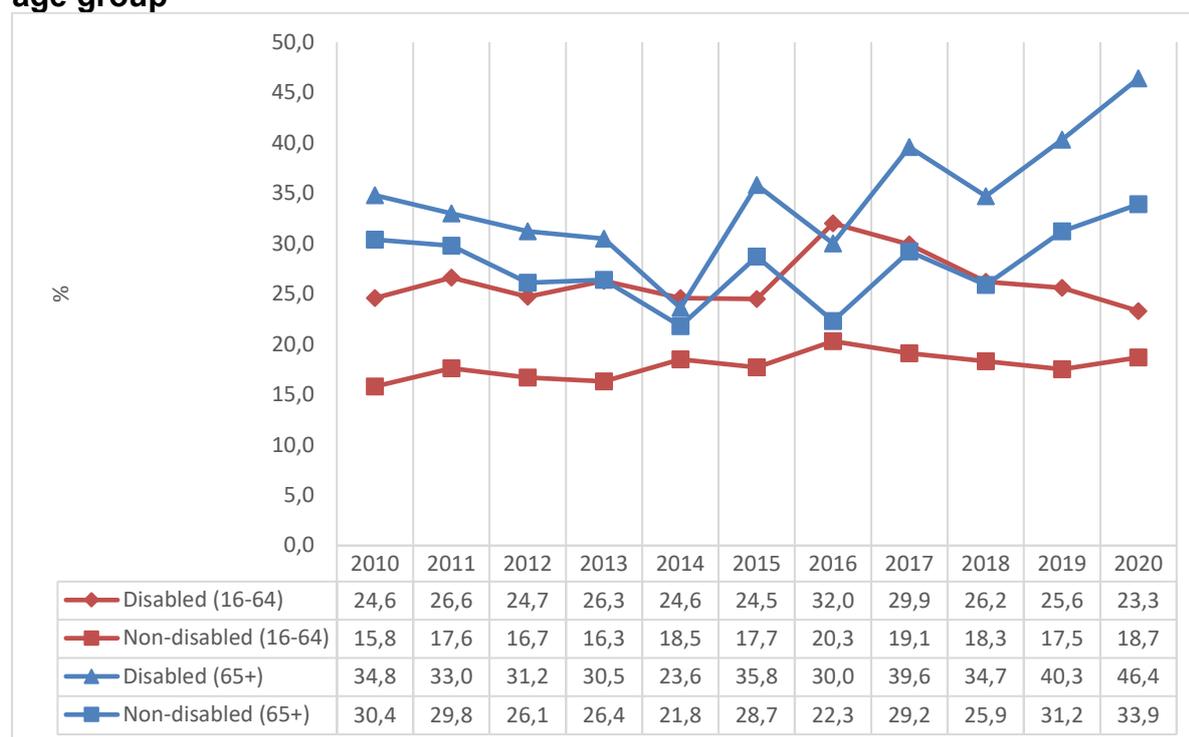


Table 13: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)



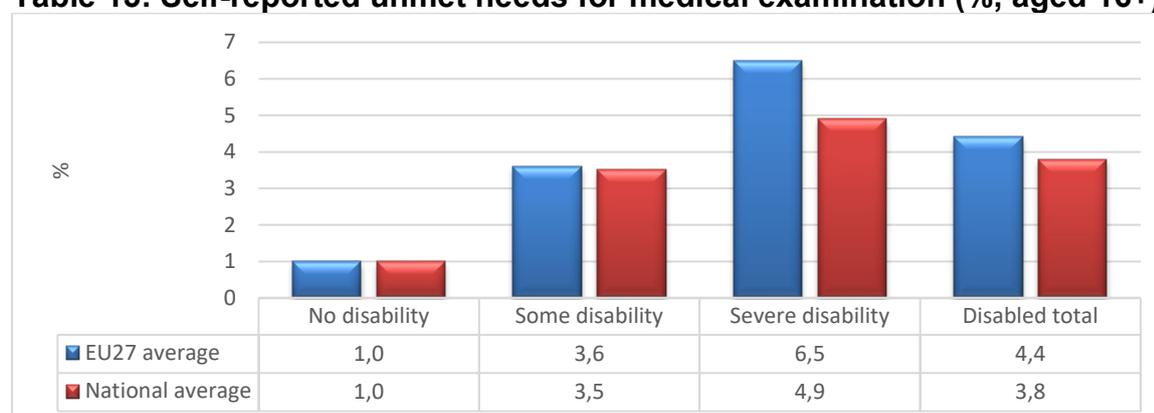
Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and previous UDB)

¹¹⁹ Aged 16-59 for Low work intensity.

Table 14: Trends in the risk of poverty after social transfers, by disability and age group

Source: Eurostat Health Database [hlth_dpe020] – People at risk of poverty

Note: This table shows national trends in financial poverty risk, rather than the general AROPE indicator (which is not as comparable between age groups due to the effect of paid employment); the survey does not distinguish 'activity limitation' for children under 16.

Table 15: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (% , aged 16+)

Source: Eurostat Health Database [hlth_dh030] – 'Too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list'

Note: EU mean averages are also skewed by high values in a minority of countries within disability groups but median averages for the total disability and no disability groups in 2020 are consistent with the three-year mean values.

7.2.1 Alternative sources of poverty or healthcare data in Bulgaria

The EU-SILC data provide a comprehensive and reliable source concerning poverty and social exclusion rates. In addition to the summary tables presented so far, the Eurostat disability database also contains breakdowns concerning disability and poverty before and after social transfers, as well as in-work-poverty.¹²⁰

7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

Table 24: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)¹²¹

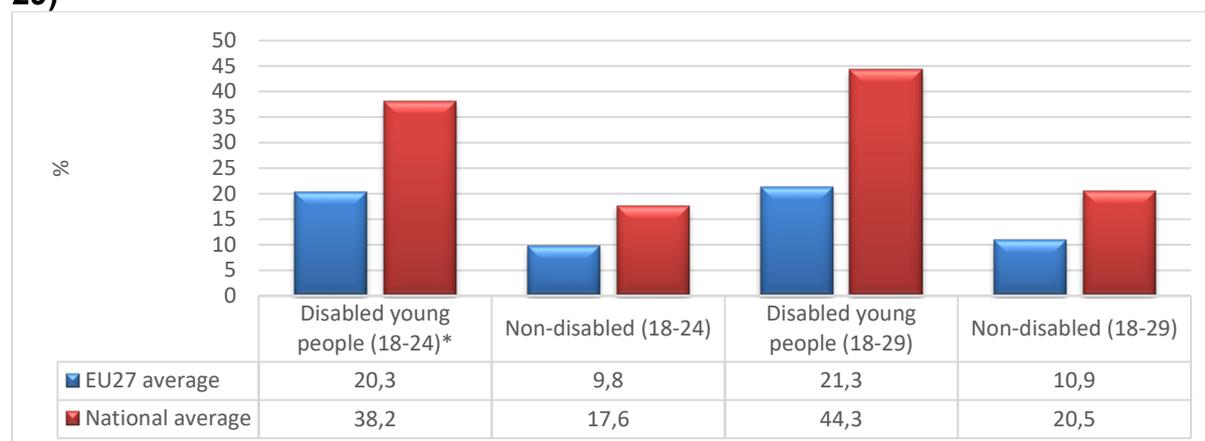
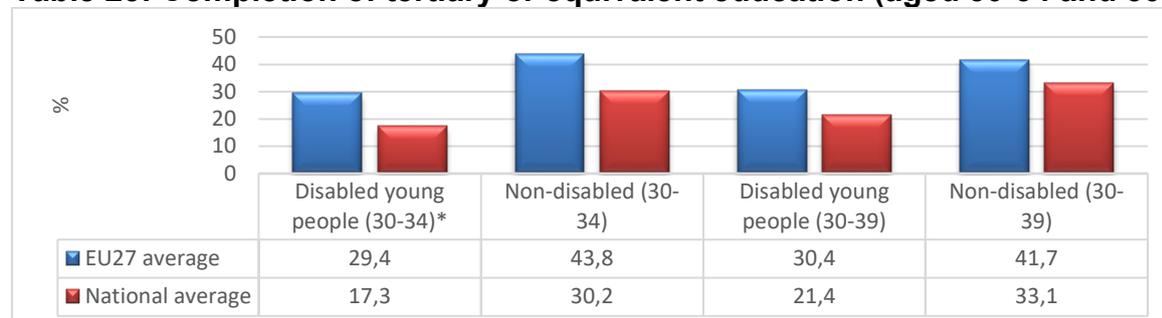


Table 25: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)



Source: EU-SILC 2020 Release April 2022 (and preceding UDBs)

Note: Confidence intervals for the disability group are large and reliability low (due to the small sample size in the target age group). An average of several years may be needed to establish trends or to compare breakdowns by gender. There were fewer than 50 observations in some of the groups with disabilities in Bulgaria, which should be treated with caution.

7.3.1 Alternative sources of education data in Bulgaria

No alternative sources of data were identified for these measures.

¹²⁰ Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

¹²¹ There was a change from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 qualification definitions in 2014, although some Member States continued to use the older definition after this time.

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