

What lessons does the “Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions” procedure (2020-23) provide for current and future programming in Bulgaria?

Key findings



RELEVANCE

The procedure was well-aligned to Bulgaria’s higher education strategy, but a broad scope paired with relatively modest funding inhibited systemic impact.

EFFECTIVENESS

Digitalisation and professional development activities had tangible benefits, especially when well-matched to needs.

Stakeholder and expert consultation revealed diverse perspectives and knowledge.



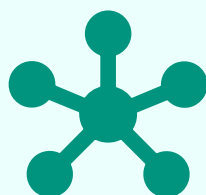
EFFICIENCY

Despite simplification efforts, reporting caused a heavy administrative burden. While important, excessive administrative tasks divert attention from quality implementation.



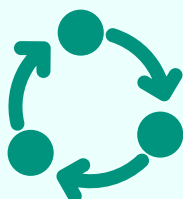
COHERENCE

Reliance on quantitative criteria ensured project selection was transparent but limited capacity to ensure project alignment with key priorities.



SUSTAINABILITY

Over 90 new joint programmes were developed under the procedure but there is some uncertainty about how long some will continue due to legal, funding and motivation constraints.



EU ADDED VALUE

EU funding played a key role in enabling the scale of implementation for certain initiatives, such as competency-based and joint programmes.



Recommendations and suggested actions

1 Design future procedures to target a narrower set of well-integrated priority objectives through early consultation on the scope with key stakeholders, and an iterative process to develop a clear theory of change.

2 Engage experts and institutional stakeholders early on to identify and navigate regulatory challenges and improve policy alignment. This could include establishing a Higher Education Technical Advisory Panel and using structured Requests for Information to gather deeper insights.

3 Integrate qualitative criteria into the project selection process to achieve greater balance between quantitative approaches that help deliver fairness, transparency and impartiality and a quality-oriented assessment process aligned with strategic priorities for the sector.

4 Make monitoring and evaluation more strategic by developing clear theories of change, engaging experts and evaluation partners in planning data collection aligned with evaluation needs and using more innovative evaluation methods.

5 Organise peer learning to support efficiency and sustainability by encouraging beneficiaries to share their knowledge and experience, fostering community practice to sustain ESF+ activities and address shared challenges even after funding ends.

Information about the project

Technical Report

Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions Procedure in Bulgaria
Interim Evaluation and Lessons for education programming



OECD
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This summary is based on findings published in OECD (2025), *Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions Procedure in Bulgaria: Interim Evaluation and Lessons for Educational Programming*. The full report is available via the QR code below at <https://doi.org/10.1787/cddcd19e-en> or <https://sf.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=3860>.

The report is an output of the OECD's agreement to support the Evaluation Plan of Bulgaria's Programme "Education" 2021-2027. Under this agreement, the OECD will conduct a series of interim and final evaluations of initiatives in five key thematic areas: 1) inclusive education, 2) integration of marginalised communities, 3) digitalisation and competency-based education, 4) vocational education and training, and 5) higher education.

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