

Tr@ck-in Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural NEETs



WP 2 - MAPPING Overview on rural NEETs - BULGARIA

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Preface

This report is an output of Track-IN | Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural NEETs whose aim is to deliver an evaluation model of the effectiveness of Public Employment Services (PES) tracking support types. The goal is to respond to the challenges of the mismatch between broadband policy package aims and the needs of NEETs in rural areas and contribute to a greater visibility of the constraints and needs that young people face in rural areas.

The Track-IN project comprises a comparative 6-country case study (Portugal, Italy, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain, and Bulgaria), approached by three studies. In Work package 2 (WP2) the propose is to map the best practices in tracking young people aged between 25-29 years old, living in rural areas, and who are currently in a NEET situation (not in employment, education, or training). Methodologically, WP2 includes a comparative case study of different PES tracking support types programs foreseeing several steps: mapping (identifying all rural PES across the beneficiary countries, using Eurostat Labour Force Survey (2018) collapsed by degree of urbanization to delimit the territorial research scope); Screening (through a short survey, to target rural PES tracking practices fitting the project); Data collection (including in-depth analysis of selected cases using a multi-informant approach (PES administrative data; program documentation analysis; interviews with PES managers; world-café sessions with NEETs).

This report is the result of the phase of WP2 – mapping - an overview on rural NEETS, outlining in detail the situation of rural NEETs aged between 25 and 29 years old, over the last decade (2011-2021) in each beneficiary partner country. The overview will include indicators on youth population, youth employment and unemployment, education, and NEETs distribution. The characterization of all indicators will adopt the degree of urbanization as a central criterion, enabling proportional comparisons between rural areas, towns and suburbs, and cities. These analyses are further collapsed into age subgroups and, when possible, in sex groups for greater detail.

The statistical procedures adopted across the different selected dimensions where: descriptive longitudinal analysis; using graphical displays (e.g., overlay line charts); and, whenever relevant, the calculation of proportional absolute and relative changes between 2011, 2015 and 2021, and finally 2011 and 2021. These time ranges were chosen to capture the indicators evolution before and after the economic and financial crisis which hit European countries in the beginning of the decade and, more recently, to capture the impact of COVID19 pandemic crises. All data was extracted from Eurostat public datasets.

Ana Sofia Ribeiro and Tatiana Ferreira (ICS-ULisboa)

Introduction

This report outlines in detail the situation of the youth employment aged between 25 and 29 years old, over the last decade (2011-2021) in Bulgaria. To do this, the report utilised indicators of: youth population; youth employment and unemployment; education; and, NEETs distribution. It proceeds with three parts - starts with an introductory contextualisation with the most relevant information about the Bulgarian social, economic, and political situation in the country, and key youth policies based on a review of relevant literature. Following this, a methodological note explains the database used and the statistical operations carried out. The most extensive part of the report refers to the analysis carried out, with a specific focus on young people, by degree of urbanisation, concerning four main topics: population; employment; education; and NEETs. These analyses are further divided into age subgroups and, where possible, into sex groups for greater detail. The statistical procedures adopted across the different selected dimensions involve: descriptive longitudinal analysis; using graphical displays (e.g., overlay line charts); and, the calculation of proportional absolute and relative changes between 2011 and 2015, 2015 and 2021, and finally 2011 and 2021. These time ranges were chosen to capture the indicators evolution before and after the economic crisis unfolded after 2008 which hit European countries. All data was extracted from Eurostat public datasets. The report concludes with a brief summary which highlights the main results.

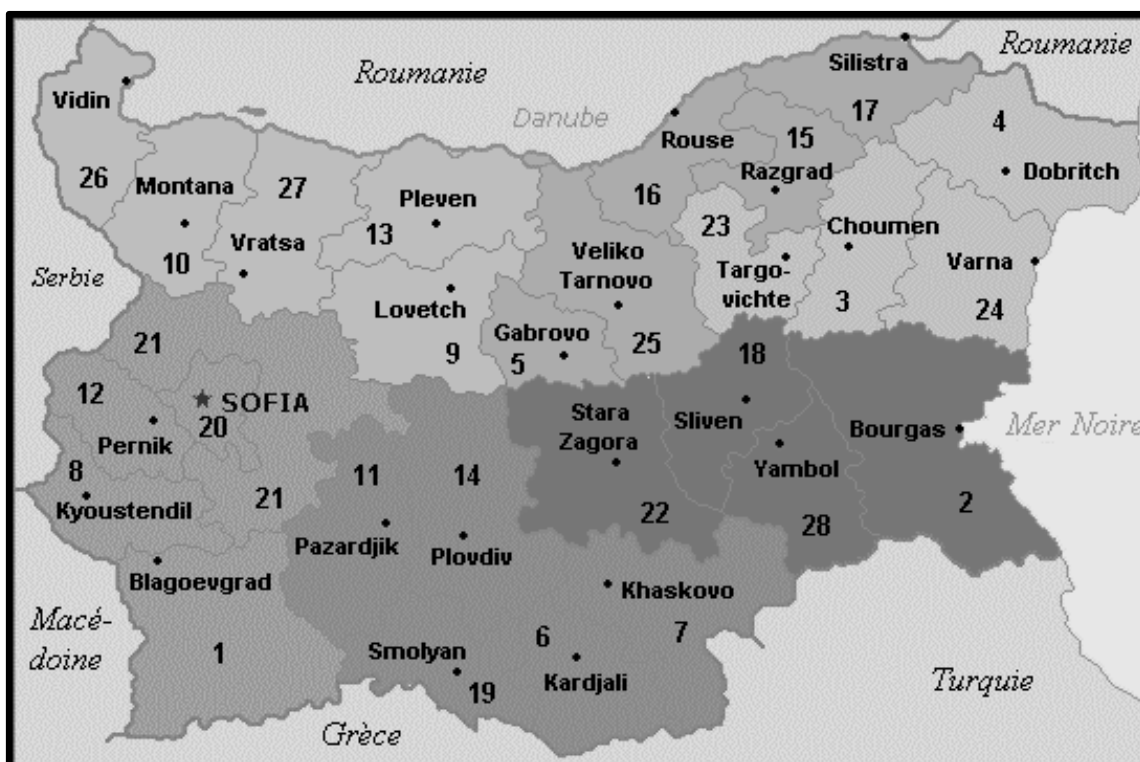
Contextualization

Geographical characterization

Bulgaria is situated in the Balkan peninsula of South-Eastern Europe. It has land borders with Romania to the North, Serbia and Macedonia to the West, and Greece and Turkey to the South. Its eastern border of 378 Km is formed by the Black Sea. Bulgaria is the 15th largest country in Europe at over 110,000 km² in size. Around 30% of Bulgaria's land is made up of plains, while a further 41% consists of plateaux and hills.

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Figure 1- Map of Bulgaria, by regions



Legend: Distribution of provinces by NUTS: Level 1 (regions): Northern and South-Eastern, South-Western and South-Central (that are logistical regions too, the area covered by a truck from its logistic center in a day go and back); Level 2 (planning regions)

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_of_Bulgaria

Population

The current population of Bulgaria is 6,948.254 as of June 2020 (Worldometer elaboration, United Nations data, 2020). Bulgaria is a democratic republic, and the country has been part of the European Union since January 1st, 2007.

The youth policy in Bulgaria is a horizontal policy.

Administrative structure of the country

Bulgaria has a unitary system of government with three government levels – central, regional and local. The structure of the public administration reflects the three-level governance, with a clear distinction between central and territorial governance, the latter of which comprises both regional and local government structures. The central administration consists of the administration of the Council of Ministers (CoM), which includes: the Chief Inspectorat; Ministries (currently 17 and varying with each government); State Agencies (currently 11 and varying over time); Executive Agencies (currently 29 and varying over time); the administrations of State Commissions (currently five and varying over time); and, numerous administrative structures created by law (currently 43 and varying over time) or by means of a decision of the Council of Ministers (currently 19 and varying over time). Territorial administrations have three levels – regional, municipal and district. Bulgaria has 28 regions and regional administrations which oversee policy coordination. Strategic National legislation for youth.

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Youth policy

The youth policy is featured in different strategic documents. In its Governing Program (2017-2021), the Bulgarian government has declared one of its main priorities as “providing a supportive and encouraging environment for the social, professional and personal realisation of young people in the country”. (Youth Wiki, 2020). In Bulgaria, the common minimum age to enter into an employment relationship is 16 years (Article 301 (3) of the Labour Code). This requirement for the minimum age is obligatory, and a violation of this requirement leads to the contract’s nullification. Exceptions are provided by the law and there are numerous clauses dealing with this. The institution responsible for the implementation and development of youth policies is the Bulgarian Ministry of Youth and Sports. The institution coordinates the establishment and implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the corresponding (2010-2020) Annual Action Plan. There are national laws that are part of different ministries. One of the laws under the purview of the Ministry of Youth and Sport is the National Youth Act. This Act defines the basic principles, management and financing of the activities carried out in pursuance of the state policy on youth. It contains topics such as: youth organisations; youth volunteering; youth policies; and other pertinent information. The Youth Act which is effective at present was adopted on 2.08.2013. There is not a specific time limit for the national law. State policy on youth is a purposeful and consistent activity of the state, municipalities, youth organisations and society. It aims to create favourable conditions for the full personal development of young people and their

participation in social and economic life, as well as their involvement in management at the local, regional, and national level through activities encouraging the development of young people in the country. The adoption of the Youth Act sets out the basic principles for the planning and management of the national youth development policy through management of the national youth policy; clear definition of the powers of the governmental authorities; representation and participation of young people in the social and public life of the country; promotion of youth volunteering; and, defining the concepts of “youth” and “youth organisation”. The National Youth Strategy sets out the long-term goals and priorities of the governmental youth policy of Bulgaria for a period of 10 years. The strategy that is currently active is for the period (2010-2020). Education. The Bulgarian Constitution gives each Bulgarian citizen the right to education. It secures compulsory education until the age of 16 and gratuitous primary and lower secondary education in Municipal and State schools. Bulgaria was one of the first countries in the EU which, apart from recognising the existence of the problem with early school leaving, to have developed special policies for reducing the number of early school leavers. It plans to achieve reduction of this share to 11% as of 2020.

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Education system

The Bulgarian educational system is centralised at all levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. (Milenkova, V., Kovacheva, S. 2020). One of the main consequences is that policies at regional level are fully consistent with the policies at national level. Education in Bulgaria is mainly supported by the State through the Ministry of Education and Science. The Bulgarian education system falls within the continental European tradition. Private schools are also being established and they are beginning to compete successfully with public schools. School education is free and compulsory for children from 7 to 16 years of age. The education system consists of the following levels: pre-primary education; primary education; secondary education; and higher education (Milenkova, V., Kovacheva, S. 2020). The modernisation of the education and training system continues while challenges of quality, labour market relevance and inclusiveness remain. Demographic trends and rising skill shortages suggest that Bulgaria needs to invest more effectively in the skills of its current and future workforce. Education and training systems in Bulgaria are organised as follows: pre-school education (pre-primary) education in Bulgaria comprises children from the age of 3 to 6/7. Two years of pre-primary education are also compulsory. School education in Bulgaria begins at the age of 7. Six-year-olds may also enter school, if their physical and mental development allows for it and after their parents’/ guardians’ explicit consent. School education is divided into primary and secondary, general, or vocational. Upper secondary general education is provided at non-specialised schools (3 or 4 courses of study) and at profiled

(specialised) schools (4 or 5 years of study). The Bulgarian system of higher education is autonomous. According to the Higher Education Act, higher schools enjoy academic autonomy which includes: academic freedoms; academic self-government; and, the inviolability of the territory of the higher schools. Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is being recognised as an instrument for human resource development in several strategy papers and national plans in Bulgaria. The main goal of ALE is aiming to improve the qualification level of the unemployed and employed persons and thereby enable them to adapt to a rapidly changing working and living environment. Dropping out of school is the signing off a school of a student under 18 before enrolling the last course of the higher education course if the same student is not enrolled in another school. Bulgaria defines early school leavers as persons aged between 18 and 24 years old with only lower secondary education or less, and no longer being in education or training. There is also non-formal education in Bulgaria. It is the form of education not obtained in the official educational system, but rather through the method of non-formal education such as role model games, volunteering, and other activities. The cross-sectoral cooperation between ministries, departments and agencies involved in defining policies and measures on education and training for young people is transpiring through inter-ministerial working groups. There is an existing national strategy called the Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early School Leavers 2013-2020. The main ways of achieving the policy goals of the strategy are prevention, intervention, and compensation. An important milestone in the Strategy is the establishment of a coordination mechanism to tackle early school-leaving. It involves the educational, social, health and administrative services as well as the municipalities. 206,387 children and pupils aged 5 to 18 who have dropped out of the education system, or have never been enrolled, were identified (Ministry of Education and Science 2018). In terms of formal education, the main policy measure is to prevent Early living from education and training (ELET). One of the policy measures for formal learning for ELET is implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science, a project called “Involving in Education and Training”. Programs, projects, and initiatives organised through public authority and funded by the EU Fund (the project and procedures part of the Operational Program Education and Science for Intelligence Growth) are operated by the Ministry of Education and Science. One of these is the “educational integration of ethnic minority students and / or seeking or receiving international protection”. Nearly 3,000 children and students from ethnic minorities, including Roma, participate in educational integration activities. They work with teachers and representatives of non-profit legal entities in partnership with municipalities to ensure sustainability of the results. Employment. The economic crisis from 2008 and the resulting slow economic recovery led to a significant increase in youth unemployment across Bulgaria. The national youth guarantee of Bulgaria provides that every young person aged 15 to 24 years inclusive will receive a good job offer,

continuation of education, apprenticeship, or internship within 4 months of being out of work or leaving the formal education system. The National Portal for Career Guidance was created under the Project BG051RO001-4.3.02-0001 “Career Guidance System in School Education” of the Ministry of Education and Science. It aims at creating an integrated system for realisation and employment on the acquired qualification of secondary school graduates in line with labour market requirements. The project was created under the Operational Program “Science and Education for Smart Growth” by the Ministry of Education and Science. Owing to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria, nearly 100 000 young people under 25 years of age have started work during the years 2015-2019.

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Labour market

European Union’s (EU) policy agenda has long been focused on the youth employment (Simões, Tosun & Rocca, 2022). As a member of EU Bulgaria has legislatively regulated and has gained experience in implementing various measures and actions to increase the chances of employment and future labour market integration and has begun applying these with better quality and wider scope in order to achieve the desired effect of the Youth Guarantee. For the target group of the programs, measures and schemes a set quota is applied for young people up to 25 years of age. In order to implement the Youth Guarantee, from the beginning of 2014 programs and measures targeting young people who have proven their effectiveness (and for which the interest of the employers and young people is high) are implemented. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy MLSP - through the Employment Agency - offers services providing professional information, consulting, and guidance. This aims to assist in: choosing the right profession/specialty according to the psychophysical features and personal interests of the clients; aiding in the choice of a career path; and, choice of appropriate training, including training institutions. Contributions to youth employment benefit from the National Program “Activation of Inactive persons”. This is a program for training and employment of long-term unemployed persons. The program aims to increase the knowledge and qualification of long-term unemployed persons registered at the Labour Office by including them in vocational training upon request by an employer. The program is implemented on the territory of the whole country, with priority given to regions with unemployment above the national average for the previous year. The program subsidises the employment of full-time or part-time workers for a period of up to 12 months in the private sector. Since 2008, the Employment Agency has implemented the National Program “Activation of Inactive persons”. Its main objective is to activate and integrate inactive persons to the labour market, including discouraged and unemployed ones, by means of individual and group application of tools and

services to attract and motivate them to register at the Labour Offices and to encourage them to engage in training and/or employment. The unemployed, including disadvantaged groups within the labour market, are supported by case managers, psychologists, labour, and career counsellors during their period of unemployment. This support is aimed at motivating active labour market behaviours to accelerate their access to jobs and improve employability. The experience so far shows that this is how quick transitions from unemployment to employment are made for those who want dynamic career development. Cross-border mobility in the area of employment, entrepreneurship and professional opportunities is mainly supported by cross-border programs and projects between Bulgaria and Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Turkey and Greece. Such programs include the program for “cross-border cooperation Interred-IPA”. Bulgaria and Serbia finance projects related to the development of sustainable tourism, youth and the environment and these are implemented with financial support from the EU. On the Bulgarian side, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria is determined to perform the functions of the Managing Authority within the Program. An example of a cross-border projects between the two countries is the enhancing of the entrepreneurial potential and employment prospects of young people through capacity building and networking (e.g., the Start-up Academy Bulgaria-Macedonia). The project focuses on the development of young entrepreneurship and the promotion of start-ups that can help improve the competitiveness of the regional economy. The implementation of the project activities motivates young people to start their own business ventures. In Bulgaria, a singular State-only strategy on youth work does not exist. Youth work is legally established under the National Youth Strategy and in the Youth Act in 2010-2020. Each of the legislative documents are under the scope of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In the text of the National Youth Strategy, youth workers are defined as: “a necessary resource for implementation of the strategy. These are the specialists, prepared to support the personal, social and economic development and stimulating the young people to fully participate in the society, in a way appropriate for their age. They (the youth workers) fulfil the duties of professional consultants for the young people, responding their needs and interests and are present at youth, therapeutic and consulting centres, schools, helping by providing advice and directing the youngsters to solve various issues. The role of youth workers is particularly important for assuring special support for personal, social and economic development and empowerment of young people in order to assure their full participation in society, in accordance with their age.” Since 2015, the category of “youth worker” is included in the Official List of the Professions in Bulgaria. It is therefore an official profession and labour contracts for this position can be signed by employees. This is a very important step, as those youth workers who are employed and get paid for this job usually have the position of “project co-ordinator” or

“specialist/expert”. These are the categories of youth work providers. In addition, there are activities undertaken by the National Youth Forum (an umbrella organisation of youth organisations in Bulgaria) in order to make the profession of youth worker more recognised, both by the government and society. One example of this, the seventh annual National Meeting of the Youth Organisations in Bulgaria, which took place in Varna from 24 to 28 June 2015, was dedicated to this matter (i.e., youth work and youth workers). There was even a Facebook campaign “I am a Youth Worker” – youth workers from all over Bulgaria were invited to upload a photo of themselves on the official Facebook page of the event so they could show who youth workers are and where they work. In Bulgaria, there are four International Youth Centers established under the initiative of the Norwegian Fund and the Council of Europe. Together the four centres created a National Network of Youth Centres in October 2016 by signing a co-operation agreement between the managers of the four Bulgarian youth centres – Vratsa, Dobrich, Plovdiv, and Stara Zagora. The main goal of the network is to advocate for the recognition of youth work at national level and to work towards common quality standards. The four centres all employ youth workers. Their target is the general youth group including young people with fewer opportunities, young migrants and refugees and young people at risk of exclusion.

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Covid-19 pandemic crisis

In Bulgaria, the state of emergency, declared by the parliament on 13 March 2020 and extended on 7 April 2020,¹ expired on 13 May 2020 and automatically ceased to apply as no decision for its further extension was adopted. One day before the end date of the state of emergency, on 12 May 2020, the parliament adopted an extensive set of legislative amendments, which were aimed to replace the temporary legal provisions that applied during the state of emergency. The new legal framework was consolidated in one single piece of legislation, the Amendment to the Health Act, but incorporated three different categories of provisions: (a) core changes to the health legislation, (b) extension of the application of some of the provisions of the special law governing the measures during the state of emergency, and (c) other provisions addressing the consequences of the state of emergency.

In terms of policymaking during the pandemic, the agenda-setting role was played by the Bulgarian parliament altogether with the Ministry of health. The official government documents predominantly served a regulative and delegate purpose. There is a lack of other actors such as NGO’s offering support to the government in the pandemic crisis.

In Bulgaria, stay at home was never applied as a general measure and was imposed only on persons placed in mandatory home isolation (quarantine). All persons who tested

positive for COVID-19, but were not hospitalized, were subject to mandatory home isolation for a period of 28 days, and all persons who were in close contact with an infected person, were placed under quarantine for 14 days. According to official statistics, as of the end of May 2020, a total of 18,552 persons were staying home due to mandatory home isolation (quarantine).

In Bulgaria, restriction of work was never implemented as a mandatory measure and therefore no specific measures were introduced in relation to return to work. Since the beginning of the state of emergency until its expiry on 13 May 2020, employers were instructed to introduce, as far as possible, distance working for their employees, or, where this was not possible, to apply anti-epidemic measures at the workplace.

The socioeconomic measures in the area of employment (financial support to persons whose employment was affected by the state of emergency) continued to apply, including the compensation scheme for covering a share of 60 % of the remuneration of employees. No measures were implemented specifically targeting people in precarious work situation apart from the general financial support measures targeting all businesses and employees affected by the anti-epidemic restrictions.

Having to implement unprecedented and extreme measures of social distancing and lockdown, Bulgarian educational system has been being challenged to produce the fastest and most fitting policy responses to ensure the continuity of quality educational provision to all.

Methodological note

The Bulgarian national report uses information gathered by the ICS-ULisboa team (working package2 coordinator) of the **Track-IN** project via the Eurostat platform. The main data presented and analysed in this report are from the following Eurostat database:

- Population Statistics: [yth_demo_020];
- EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS): [lfst_r_pgauwsc]; [lfst_r_ergau]; [lfst_r_urgau]; [edat_lfs_9913]; [edat_lfse_30]; [edat_lfse_29]; [edat_lfse_34]; [trng_lfs_14].

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Selected indicators were extracted from the different databases according to two criteria:

Time range: the previous decade (2011-2021) to have a sufficiently long period of time to capture the main changes and continuities in young people's trajectories in education, training, and employment and to capture the impact of the economic and financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008 and the first impact of the pandemic crisis.

Age group: 25-29 years old (the target group) and other age groups (15-24; 25-29; 30-34 years old) to make a comparable analysis within age groups - according to available data in each indicator.

In addition to a descriptive analysis, and in order to compare the main data changes and continuities in different time periods, absolute and relative change were calculated by considering the 3 main time points that were selected, namely 2011, 2013 and 2021. Absolute change refers to the simple difference in the indicator over two periods in time and is expressed in percentage points (pp). Relative change expresses the change of a value of an indicator during an earlier period and is expressed in percentage terms.

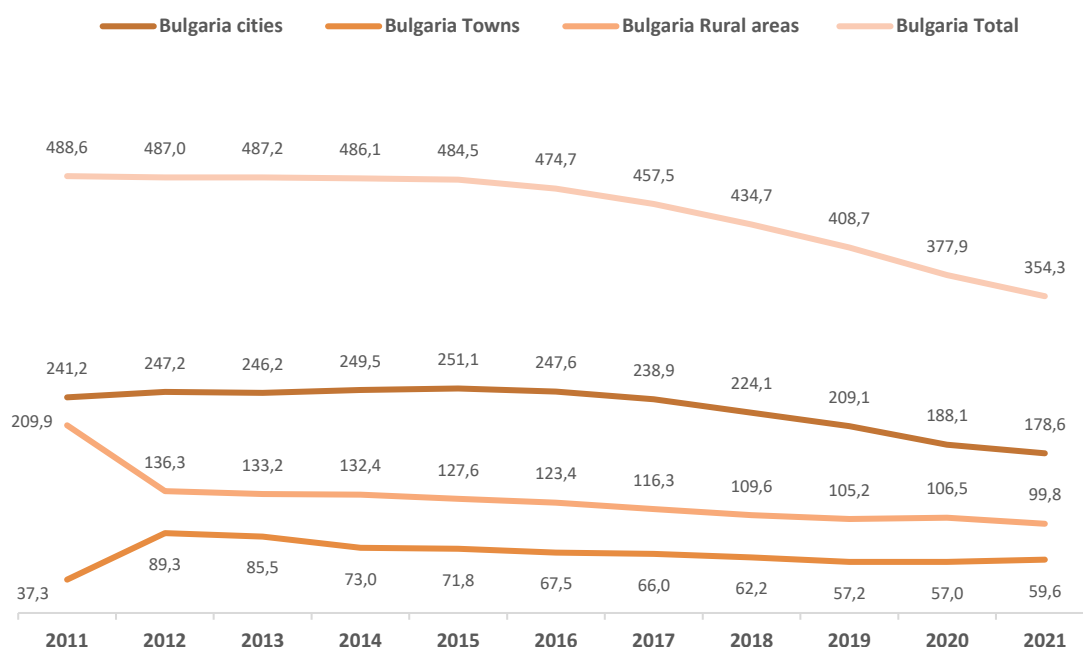
Data analysis

Youth population

Chart 1 presents the tendencies of the Bulgarian youth population aged between 25-29 years old by degree of urbanization for a period of 10 years (2011-2021). As reported by the chart, the total youth population is variable during the researched years. In 2011 the total of population aged between 25-29 is 488.6 people. In 2017 the number decreased to 457.5 and continued declining in 2021 to 354.3. In Bulgarian cities, the number of youths between 25-29 years' old in 2011 was 241.2, in 2015 this number increased a little to 251.1, while in 2021 the population from this subgroup decreased again to 178.6 people.

This trend remains in Bulgarian towns and suburbs, where in 2011 the population between 25-29 years old was 37.3, by 2015 it had more than doubled to 71.8 while in 2021 the population from this age group decreased a little to 59.6. In Bulgarian rural areas the youth population from the researched subgroup was 209.9 people in 2011. Youths living in rural areas decreased to 127.6 in 2015 and continuing decreasing in 2021 to 99.8. It can be concluded that youth population aged 25-29 is decreasing in Bulgaria.

Chart 1-Youth population (25-29 years) 2011-2021, by degree of urbanisation (thousands)



Source: Eurostat (lfsa_pgauws) – data extracted on 9.05.2022

From 2011 to 2021, youth population (25-29 years) continuously declined in Bulgaria, including in rural areas. In Bulgarian rural areas there was an increase in the young population in this age group, with greater incidence between 2014 and 2015 (with an increase rate of 1,6 points).

Table 1. indicates the ratio of youth population by age subgroups and absolute and relative change in Bulgaria. According to the results in the table the ratio of Bulgarian youth population is decreasing in the different age subgroups between 2011 and 2015. The absolute and relative change by the age subgroup of 15-19 was (32.6 pp;10.4%) between 2011 and 2015. Between 2015 and 2021 the absolute and relative change decrease to (1.5 pp; 0,5%), while between 2011 and 2021 the ratio of youth population in Bulgaria increased by (61.1 pp; -19.4%). For the whole time period of 2011-2015, 2015-2021 and 2011-2021 the absolute and relative change for the 20-24-year-old subgroup and for those aged 25-29 was negative.

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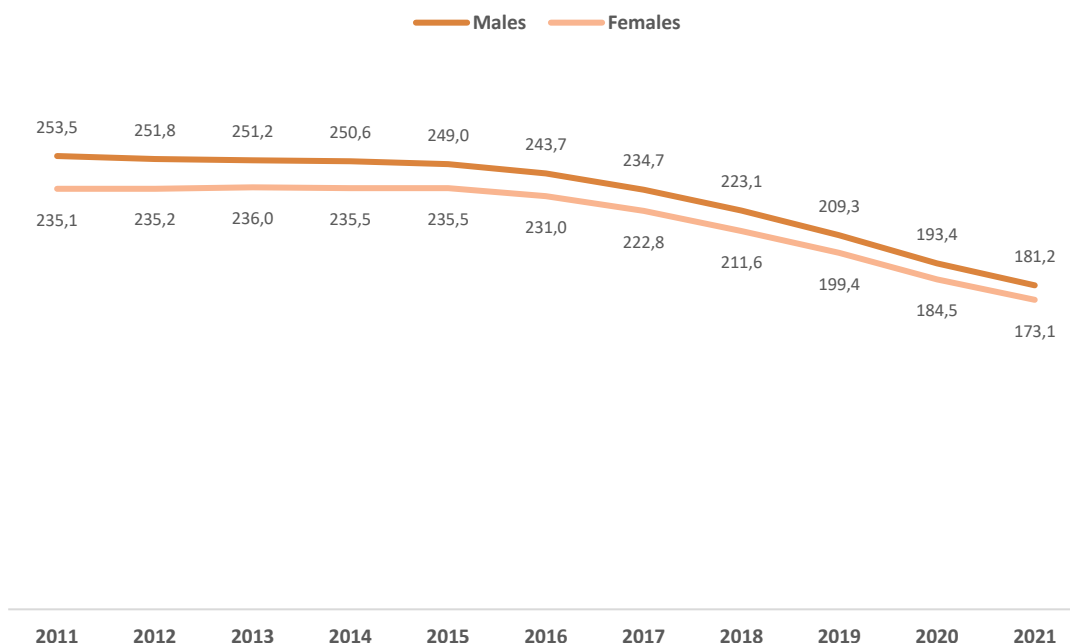
Table 1-Youth population, absolute and relative change, by age (2011-2015, 2015-2021, 2011-2021)

	2011	2015	2021	Absolute change 2011-2015 (Relative change 2011-2015)	Absolute change 2015-2021 Relative change 2015-2021	Absolute change 2011-2021 Relative change 2011-2021
15-19	374.6	312.0	313.5	32.6 pp (10.44%)	1.5 pp (0.47%)	-61.1 pp (-19.4%)
20-24	486.5	392.2	305.2	-94.3 pp (-24%)	-87 pp (-28.5%)	-181.3 pp (-59.4%)
25 - 29	488.6	484.5	354.3	-4.1 pp (-0.85%)	-130.2 pp (-36.7%)	-134.3 pp (-37.9%)
30 - 34	531.7	484.4	468.7	-47,3 pp (9.76%)	-15.7 pp (-3.68%)	- 63 pp (-13.4%)

Source: Eurostat [lfsa_pgauws] - data extracted on 9.05.2022

Chart 2 shows the ratio of Bulgarian youth population in the last ten years between 2011-2021, aged 25-29. It is clear that in this period there is a decrease of the youth population both for males and females from 253. 5 (males), 235.1 (females) in 2011 to 181.2 (males), 173.1 (females) in 2021.

Chart 2-Youth population (25-29 years), by sex, 2011-2021 (thousands)



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Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_020] - data extracted on 9.05.2022

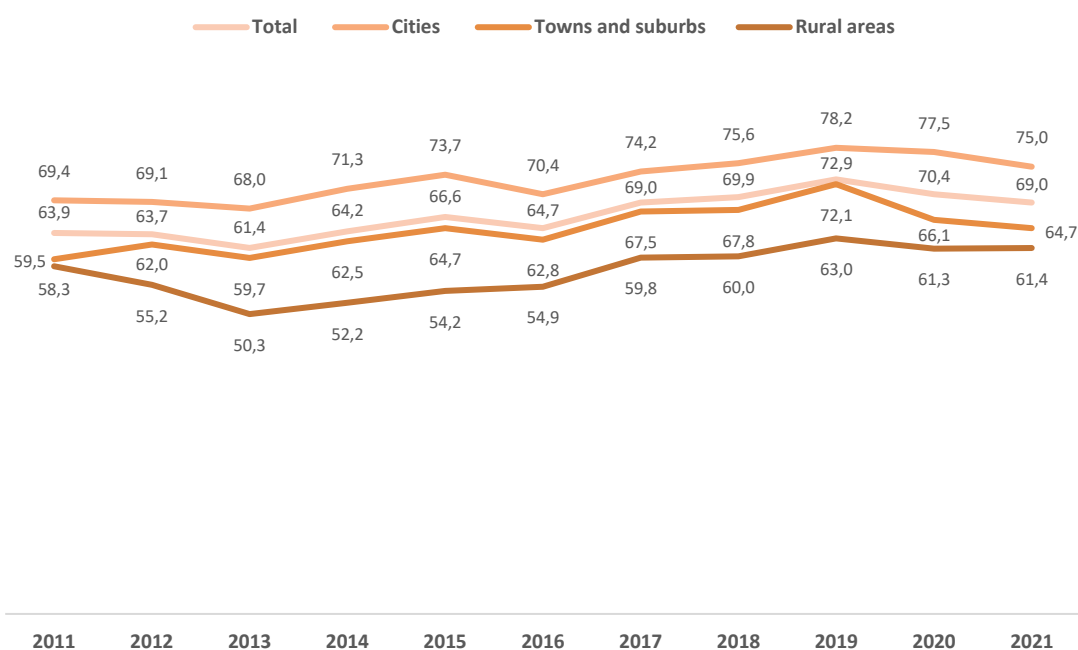
From 2011 to 2021, youth population (25-29 years) continuously declined in Bulgarian rural areas. It is clear that in this period there is a decrease of both for males and females from 253. 5 (males), 235.1 (females) in 2011 to 181.2 (males), 173.1 (females) in 2021.

Employment and unemployment

Youth employment

Chart 3 indicates employment across the country among youths by degree of urbanization. The employment increased from 59.5% in 2011, to 66.6% in 2015, and decreased again in 2021 (64.7%). The same tendency is observed in the Bulgarian cities for that period. The employment increasing from 58.3% in 2011, to 64.7% in 2015 and decreasing to 61.4% in 2021. In towns and suburbs and rural areas the trend is the same.

Chart 3 - Youth employment, by degree of urbanization, 2011-2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat [lfst_r_ergau] – data extracted on 8.05.2022

From 2011 to 2015, youth employment increased in Bulgaria, and decreased again in 2021.

Table 2-Youth employment, absolute and relative change, by age (2011-2015, 2015-2021, 2011-2021)

	2011	2015	2021	Absolute change 2011-2015 Relative change 2011-2015	Absolute change 2015-2021 (Relative change 2015-2021)	Absolute change 2011-2021 Relative change 2011-2021
Country						
15-19	2.7	3.3	3.2	0.6 pp (18.2%)	-0.1 pp (-3.1%)	0.5 pp (15.7%)
20-24	37.0	33.9	30.8	-3.1 pp (-9.1%)	-3.1 pp (-0.1%)	-6.2 pp (-20.1%)
25-29	63.9	66.6	69.0	2.7 pp (4.1%)	2.4 pp (3.5%)	5.1 pp (7.4%)
30-34	71.4	74.3	79.6	2.9 pp (3.9%)	5.3 pp (6.7%)	8.2 pp (10.3%)
Cities						
15-19	2.3	2.5	3.2	0.2 pp (8%)	0.7 pp (21.9%)	0.9 pp (28.1%)
20-24	36.6	32.0	26.8	-4.6 pp (-14.4%)	-5.2 pp (-19.4%)	-9.8 pp (-36.6%)
25-29	69.4	73.7	75.0	4.3 pp (5.0%)	1.3 pp (1.8%)	5.6 pp (7.5%)
30-34	78.4	83.2	86.2	4.8 pp (5.8%)	3 pp (3.5%)	7.8 pp (9%)
Towns and suburbs						
15-19	:	:	:	:	:	:
20-24	44.3	35.8	34.9	-8.5 pp (-23.7%)	-0.9 pp (-2.6%)	-9.4 pp (-26.9%)
25-29	59.5	64.7	64.7	5.2 pp (8.0%)	0 (0)	5.2 pp (8.0%)
30-34	70.3	70.7	78.8	0.4 pp (0.6%)	8.1 pp (10.3%)	8.5 pp (10.8%)
Rural areas						
15-19	3.0	5.2	:	2.2 pp (42.3%)	:	:
20-24	36.3	36.1	35.7	-0.2 pp (-0.5%)	-0.4 pp (-1.1%)	-0.6 pp (-1.7%)
25-29	58.3	54.2	61.4	-4.1 pp (-7.6%)	7.2 pp (11.7%)	3.1 pp (5.0%)
30-34	62.9	60.4	66.3	-2.5 pp (-4.1%)	5.9 pp (8.9%)	3.4 pp (5.1%)

Data from towns and suburbs, age group 15-19 (2011, 2015, 2021) is not available

Data from rural areas, age group 15-19 (2021) is not available

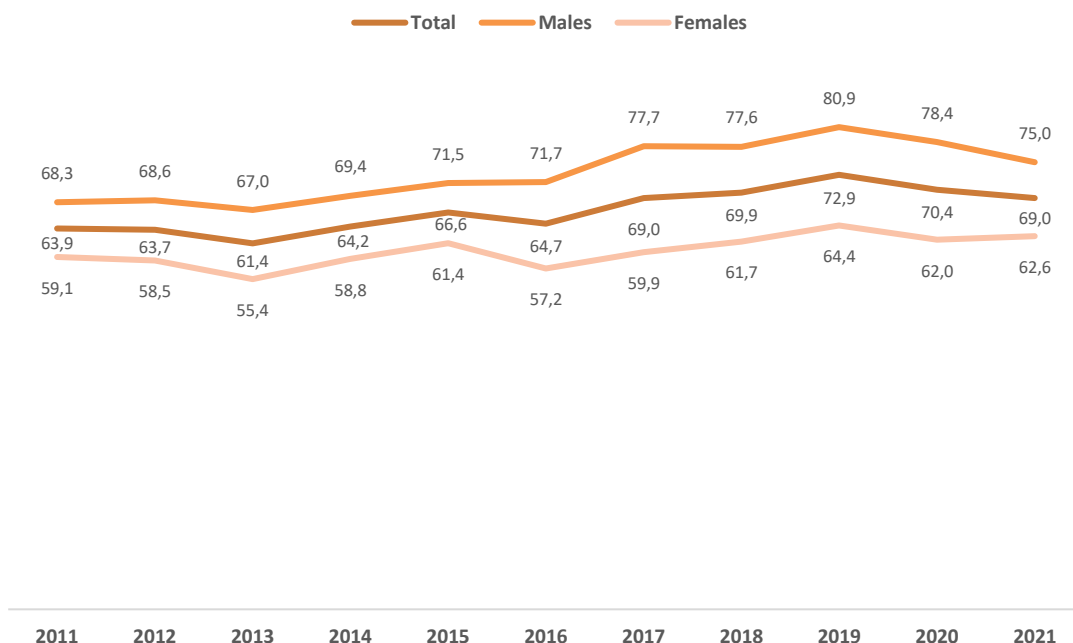
Source: Eurostat [lfst_r_ergau] – data extracted on 8.05.2022

Table 2 shows youth employment in Bulgaria for different age subgroups between 2011 and 2021. Youth employment across Bulgaria by all age subgroups and the degree of urbanization is variable. In the period between 2011 and 2021 for the overall country the employment rates in all age subgroups are as follows: 15-19 (0.5 pp; 15.5%), 20-24 (-6.2 pp; -20.1%), 25-29 (5.1 pp; 7.4%), 30-34 (8.2 pp; 10.3%).

The same tendency retains in the Bulgarian cities where between 2011 and 2021 there is a negative absolute and relative change among 20-24 (-9.8 pp; -36.6%).

In rural areas youth employment in Bulgaria is decrease for those in age 20-24 (-0.6 pp; 57%), while it is increase for those in age 25-29 (3.1 pp; 5.1%) and 30-34 (3.4 pp; 5.1%).

Chart 4-Rural youth employment (25-29 Years), by sex, 2011-2021 (%)



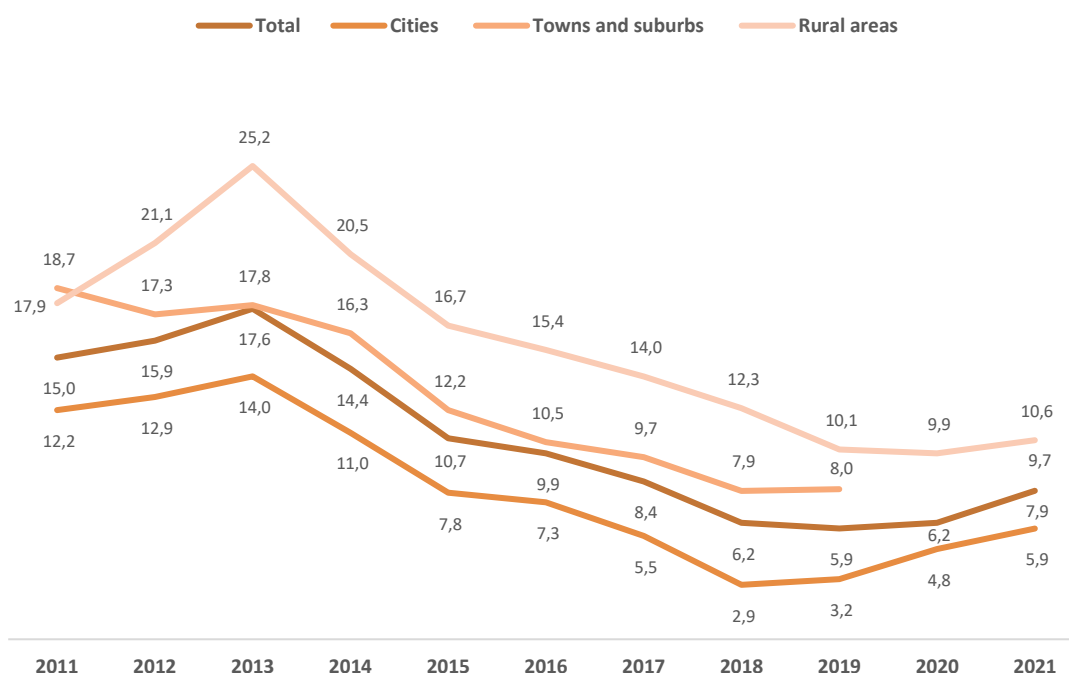
Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_ergau) – data extracted on 8.05.2022

The highest rate of youth employment in Bulgaria in rural areas is between 2019 and 2020. The same tendency is for both males and females.

Youth unemployment

Chart 5 indicates unemployment rates across the country among youths aged 25 - 29 years old. The unemployment increased from 12.2% in 2011, to 14% in 2013, and decreased again in 2021 (5.9%). The same tendency is observed in the Bulgarian cities and rural areas for that period of time. In towns and suburbs and rural areas the trend is the same, where in 2020 the unemployment rate is 0.

Chart 5-Youth unemployment (25-29 Years), by degree of urbanisation, 2011-2021 (%)



Data from towns and suburbs (2020) is not available
Source: Eurostat [lfst_r_urgau] - data extracted on 9.05.2022

The highest rate of youth unemployment among youths aged 25 - 29 years in Bulgaria is in 2013, especially in Rural areas. After 2013 the unemployment rate is decreasing.

Table 3. shows youth unemployment in Bulgaria for different age subgroups between 2011 and 2021. Youth unemployment across Bulgaria by all age subgroups and the degree of urbanisation is variable. In the period between 2011 and 2021 for the overall country the unemployment rates are negative in all age subgroups: 15-19 (-25.8 pp; -83.8%) 20-24 (-8 pp; -57.5%), 25-29 (-7.1 pp; -89.9%), 30-34 (-6.9 pp; -135.3%) and for those 15-64 (-6.1 pp; -115.1%)

The same tendency retains in the Bulgarian cities and towns. For those aged 15-19 data is missing.

In rural areas youth unemployment, the rates are negative for all age subgroups: 20-24 (-7.6 pp; -41.3%), 25-29 (-7.3 pp; -68.9%), 30-34 (-7 pp; -83.3%), 15-64 (-5 pp; -56.2%). For those aged 15-19 data is missing.

Table 3-Youth unemployment, absolute and relative change, by age (2011-2015, 2015-2021, 2011-2021)

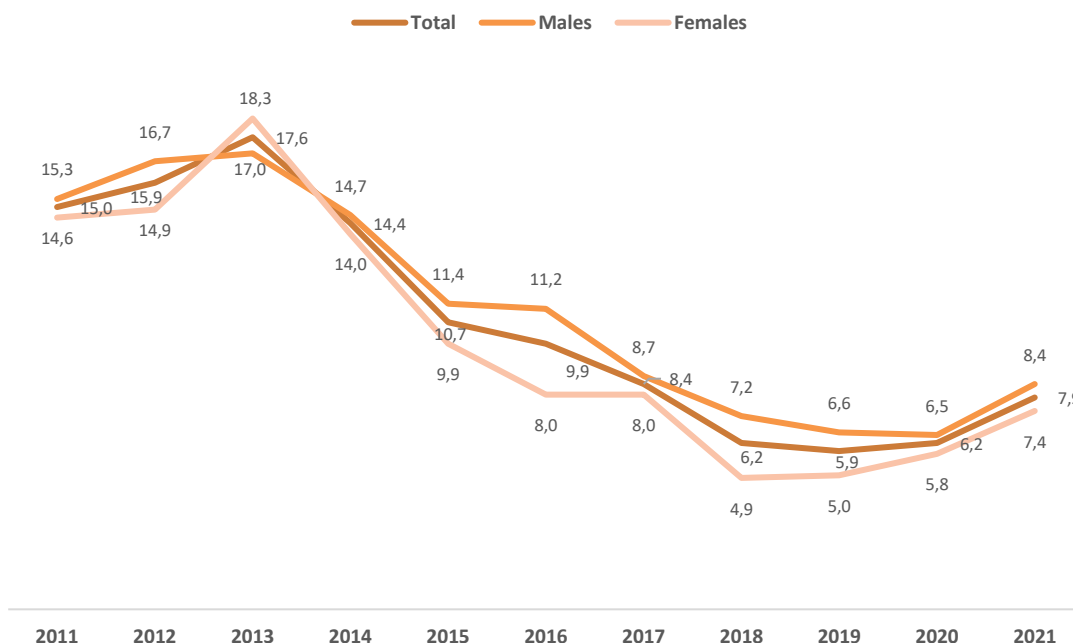
	2011	2015	2021	Absolute change 2011-2015 Relative change 2011-2015	Absolute change 2015-2021 Relative change 2015-2021	Absolute change 2011-2021 Relative change 2011-2021
Country						
15-19	56.6	41.7	30.8	-15.6 pp (-37.4%)	-10.9 pp (-35.4%)	-25.8 pp (-83.8 %)
20-24	21.9	19.5	13.9	-2.4 pp (-12.3%)	-5.6 pp (-40.3%)	-8 pp (-57.5%)
25-29	15.0	10.7	7.9	-4.3 pp (-40.2%)	-2.8 pp (-35.4%)	-7.1 pp (-89.9%)
30-34	12.0	9.3	5.1	-2.7 pp (-2.5%)	-4.2 pp (-82.4%)	-6.9 pp (-135.3%)
15-64	11.4	9.2	5.3	-2.2 pp (-23.9%)	-3.9 pp (-73.7%)	-6.1 pp (-115.1%)
Cities						
15-19	52.2	:	:	:	:	:
20-24	19.0	15.7	9.5	-3.3 pp (-21%)	-6.2 pp (65.3%)	-9.5 pp (-100%)
25-29	12.2	7.8	5.9	-4.4 pp (-1.1%)	-1.9 pp (-32.2%)	-6.3 pp (-105.8%)
30-34	9.6	4.8	3.5	-4.8 pp (-100%)	-1.3 pp (-37.1%)	-6.1 pp (-174.3%)
15-64	9.1	6.2	3.5	-2.9 pp (-46.8%)	-2.7 pp (-77.1%)	-5.6 pp (-160%)
Towns and suburbs						
15-19	:	:	:	:	:	:
20-24	18.7	20.7	15.6	2 pp (9.7%)	-5.1 pp (-32.7%)	-3.1 pp (18.6%)
25-29	18.7	12.2	9.7	-6.5 pp (-53.3%)	-2.5 pp (-25.8%)	-9 pp (-92.8%)
30-34	13.4	13.3	6.0	-0.1 pp (-0.6%)	-7.3 pp (-121.7%)	-7.4 pp (-123.3%)
15-64	11.6	9.3	5.3	-2.3 pp (-24.7%)	-4 pp (-75,5%)	-6.3 pp (-118.9%)
Rural areas						
15-19	59.4	42.6	:	-16.8 pp (-71.6%)	:	:
20-24	26.0	24.3	18.4	-1.7 pp (-6.9%)	-5.9 pp (-32%)	-7.6 pp (-41.3%)
25-29	17.9	16.7	10.6	-1.2 pp (-2%)	-6.1 pp (-57.5%)	-7.3 pp (-68.9%)
30-34	15.4	15.9	8.4	0.5 pp (3.14%)	-7.5 pp (-89.3%)	-7 pp (-83.3%)
15-64	13.9	14.9	8.9	1 pp (6.7%)	-6 pp (-67.4%)	-5 pp (-56.2%)

Data from cities (2015, 2021), towns and suburbs (2011, 2015, 2021) and rural areas (2021) is not available

Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_urgau) – data extracted on 8 May 2022

Chart 6 shows the unemployment levels by sex and shows that there are no wider differences in the rates between male and female unemployment. The unemployment rates increase in 2013 for both males and females and decrease between 2014 and 2019. During the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2019 and 2021 the unemployment rate is increasing again for both males and females in Bulgaria.

Chart 6-Youth unemployment (25-29 Years), by sex, 2011-2021 (%)



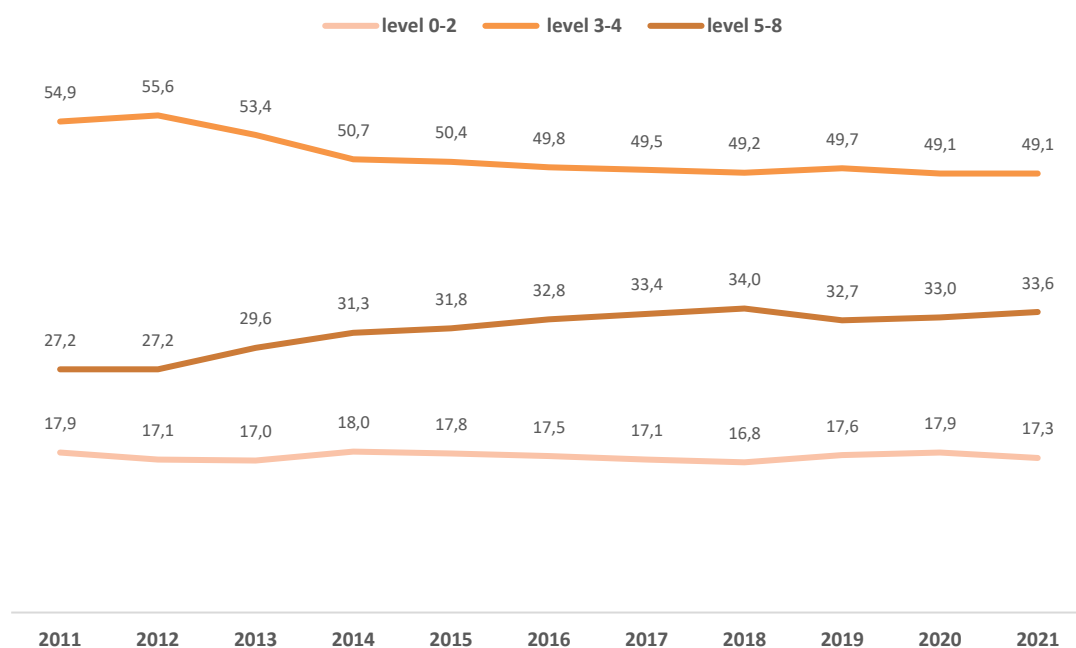
Source: Eurostat [lfst_r_urgau] – data extracted on 8 May 2022

For the period between 2011 -2021 in Bulgaria the unemployment rates increase in 2013 for both youth males and youth females and decrease between 2014 and 2019. During the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2019 and 2021 the unemployment rate is increasing again for both males and females in Bulgaria, however the rates are lower than in 2013.

Education

Chart 7 shows the rate of Bulgarian youth population, aged 20-34 by educational attainment in the period between 2011 and 2021. The tendency for level 0-2 retains with no change for the period. For level 3-4 it decreases in 2014 and stay in same rate until 2021. For those youths in level 5-8 the rate increases in 2018 and 2021.

Chart 7-Population by educational attainment (20-34 years), by educational level, 2011-2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_lfs_9913] – data extracted on 8.05.2022

In the period between 2011 and 2013 the rate of youth population in Bulgaria aged 20-34 by educational attainment is highest for those youths in level 3-4. This rate is continuously increasing during the whole period (2011-2021) for all educational levels.

Table 4 indicates the Bulgarian population, aged 20-34 years old, by **ISLED**, during the period of 2011 and 2021 by degree of urbanization including absolute and relative change. For those aged 20-34 that reached ISCED-2, the absolute and relative change are negative between 2011 and 2021(-0.6 pp; -3.5%). The variation is positive for the ISCED 5-8 level (6.4%; 19%).

In Bulgarian cities the absolute and relative change remains negative for level ISCED 3-4 (-4.5 pp; -9.1%), while it increased for ISCED 5-8 (9 pp; 18.9) between 2011 and 2021.

In the Bulgarian towns and suburbs among ISCED 0-2 the rate is negative (-0.8 pp; -4.2%), as well as among ISCED 3-4, (-4.3 pp; -7.8%). The data shows positive rate for level ISCED 5-8 (4.8 pp; 18.6%).

In rural areas, the trends remain negative for level ISCED 3-4 (-0.5 pp; -0.9%) and ISLED 5-8 (-1.1 pp; -8%) between 2011 and 2021

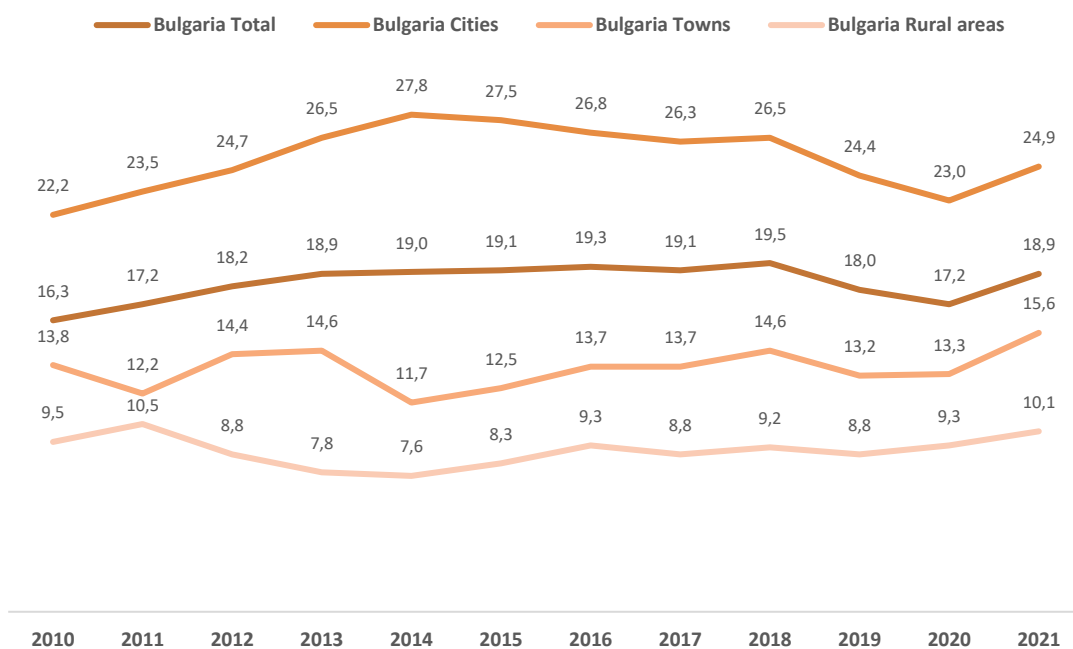
Table 4-Youth population (20-34 years), by ISCED levels and degree of urbanisation, absolute and relative change (2011-2015, 2015-2021, 2011-2021)

	2011	2015	2021	Absolute change 2011-2015 Relative change 2011-2015	Absolute change 2015-2021 Relative change 2015-2021	Absolute change 2011-2021 Relative change 2011-2021
Country						
ISCED level 0-2	17.9	17.8	17.3	-0.1 pp (-0.6%)	-0.2 pp (-1.1%)	-0.6 pp (-3.5%)
ISCED level 3-4	54.9	50.4	49.1	-4.5 pp (-8.9%)	-1.3 pp (-2.6%)	-5.8 pp (-11.8%)
ISCED level 5-8	27.2	31.8	33.6	4.6 pp (14.5%)	1.8 pp (5.3%)	6.4 pp (19%)
Cities						
ISCED level 0-2	7.8	5.0	9.4	-2.8 pp (-56%)	4.4 pp (46.8%)	1.6 pp (17%)
ISCED level 3-4	53.8	49.3	43.2	-4.5 pp (-9.1%)	-6.1 pp (-14.1%)	-10.6 pp (-24.5%)
ISCED level 5-8	38.4	45.7	47.4	7.3 pp (15.9%)	1.7 pp (3.5%)	9 pp (18.9)
Towns and suburbs						
ISCED level 0-2	19.6	18.9	18.8	-0.7 pp (-3.7%)	-0.1 pp (-0.5%)	-0.8 pp (-4.2%)
ISCED level 3-4	59.7	55.6	55.4	-4.1 pp (-7.4%)	-0.2 pp (-0.4%)	-4.3 pp (-7.8%)
ISCED level 5-8	20.7	25.5	25.8	4.8 pp (18.8%)	0.3 pp (1.1%)	4.8 pp (18.6%)
Rural areas						
ISCED level 0-2	29.7	41.3	31.3	11.6 pp (28%)	-10 pp (-31.9%)	1.6 pp (5.1%)
ISCED level 3-4	55.5	48.2	55.0	-7.3 pp (-15.1%)	6.8 pp (12.4%)	-0.5 pp (-0.9%)
ISCED level 5-8	14.8	10.4	13.7	-4.4 pp (-42.3%)	3.3 pp (24%)	-1.1 pp (-8%)

Source: Eurostat [edat_ifs_9913] – data extracted on 8 May 2022

Chart 8 indicates the rate of participation in education of Bulgarian youths between 2011 and 2021, for those aged 20-34 by degree of urbanization. From the chart it is clear that participation in education in rural Bulgaria is decreasing between 2011 (10.5%) and 2016 (9.3%). After 2016 it is increasing to 10.1% in 2021. In the Bulgarian rural areas, the rates of youths' participation in education are the lowest for the whole country.

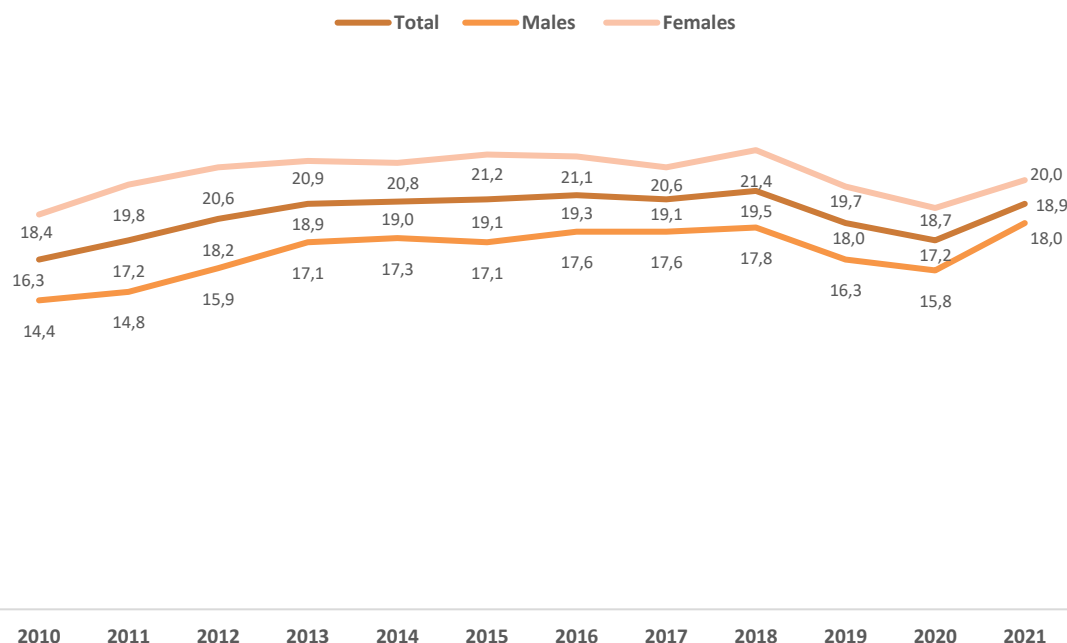
Chart 8-Participation in education or training in previous 4 weeks (%) 2011-2021 in Bulgaria by degree of urbanisation (20-34 Years)



Source: Eurostat [trng_lfs_14] - data extracted on 8 May 2022

The rate of participation in education of Bulgarian youths between 2011 and 2021, for those aged 20-34 is the lowest in rural areas comparing with those youths living in the towns and cities.

Chart 9-Participation in education or training in previous 4 weeks (20-34 Years), by sex, 2011-2021 (%)



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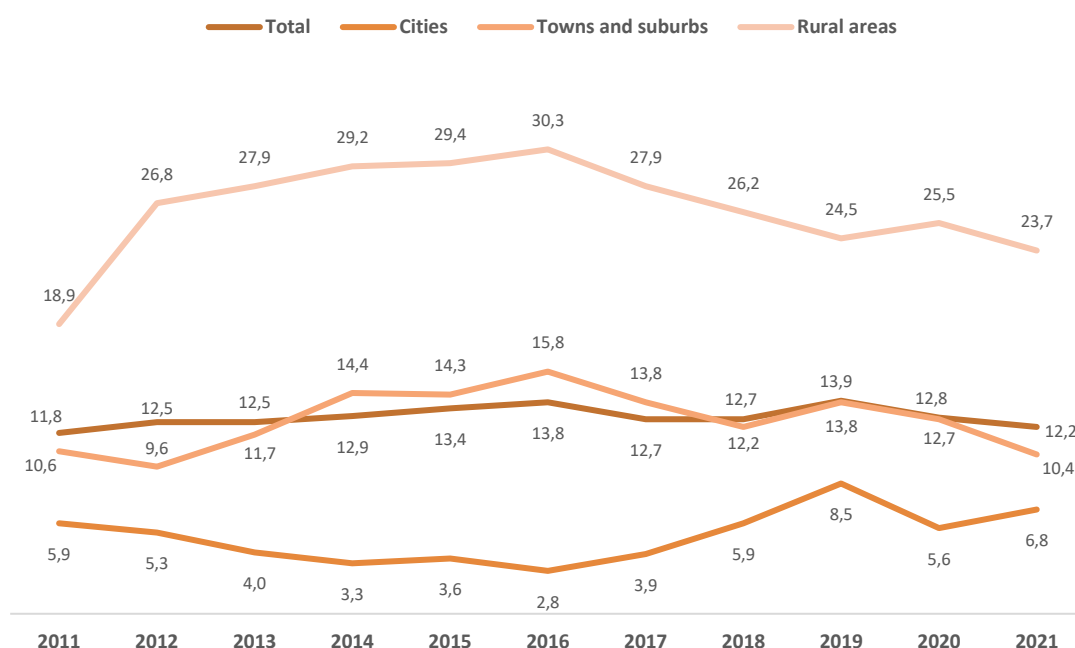
Eurostat [trng_lfs_14] - data extracted on 8.05.2022

According to the differences between males and females in their participation in education, there is no big differences in the rates for the period (2011-2021). It continuously increases form 2010 and the highest rates are between 2018 and 2021 for both males and females.

Early leavers from education and training

Chart 10 describes ESLET rates by percentage in Bulgaria by degree of urbanisation between 2011 and 2021. The chart indicates that there has been an increase in this indicator overall in the country (from 10.6% to 12.2%). However, the rate has come up from 12.7% in 2018 to 13.8% in 2019% in Bulgarian cities, with similar variations in terms of direction and strength in towns and suburbs (from 11.8% to 12.2%) and in rural areas (from 18.9% to 23.7%).

Chart 10-Early school leavers from Education or training (ESLET), 18-24 Years - by sex and degree of urbanisation, 2011-2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_30] - data extracted on 8 May 2022

For the period 2011 and 2021 ESLET rates by percentage in Bulgaria by degree of urbanisation increasing overall in the country.

Table 5-Early school leavers from Education or training (ESLET), 20-34 Years - absolute and relative change (2011-2015, 2015-2021, 2011-2021)

	2011	2015	2021	Absolute change 2011-2015 Relative change 2011-2015	Absolute change 2015-2021 Relative change 2015-2021	Absolute change 2011-2021 Relative change 2011-2021
Total	11.8	13.4	12.2	1.6 pp (11.9%)	-1.2 pp (-9.9%)	0.4 pp (3.3%)
Cities	5.9	3.6	6.8	-2.3 pp (-63.9%)	3.2 pp (47%)	0.9 pp (13.2%)
Towns and suburbs	10.6	14.3	10.4	3.7 pp (25.9%)	-3.9 pp (-37.5%)	-0.2 pp (-1.8%)
Rural areas	18.9	29.4	23.7	10.5 pp (35.7%)	-5.7 pp (-24%)	4.8 pp (20.2%)

Source: Eurostat [edat_lfs_30] – data extracted on 8 May 2022

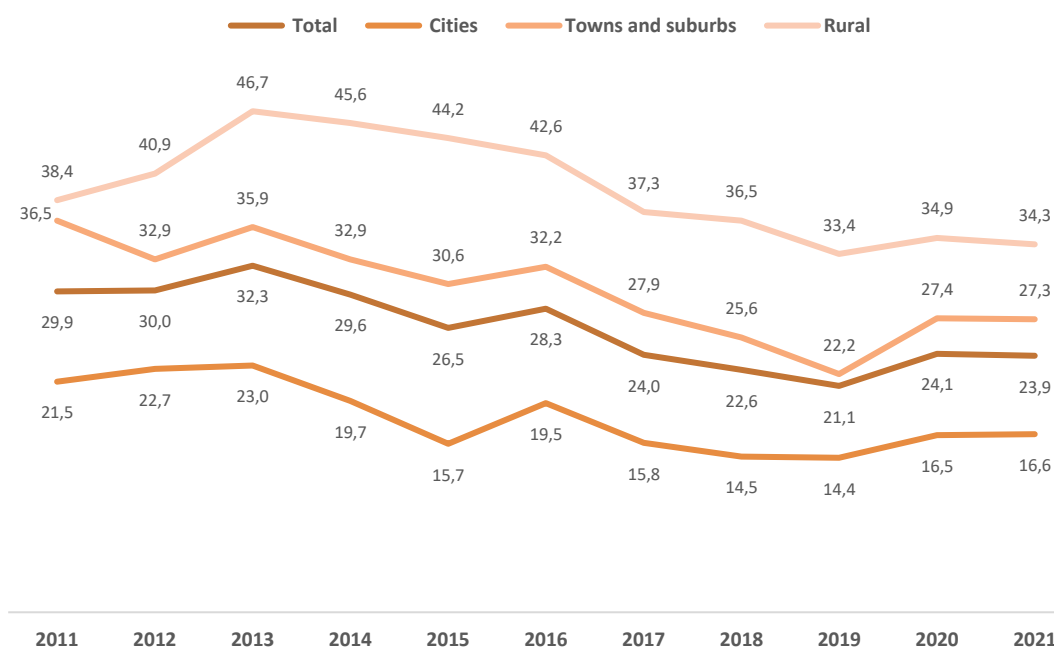
Table 5 indicates the rate of early school leavers (ESLET), aged 20-34 between 2011 and 2021. The ESLET rate in towns and suburbs retains negative (-0.2 pp; -1.8%) for that period, while in cities it is positive (0.9 pp; 13.23%). The highest rate for the period for ESLET is in the rural areas (4.8 pp; 20.25%)

NEETs

Charts 11 and 12 indicate the growth of NEETs proportion in Bulgaria and all degree of urbanisation levels and by sex, between 2011 and 2021. According to the charts, the NEETs rate in Bulgaria for those aged 25-29 decreased from 29.9%, in 2011, to 26.5% in 2015 and 23.9% in 2021. In Bulgarian cities, the rates are similar with those of the Bulgarian towns and suburbs. They decreased in cities from 21.5% (2011) to 16.6% (2021) and in towns and suburbs from 36.5% (2011) to 27.3% (2021). The same is the rate of Bulgarian rural areas where the NEETs rate decrease from 38.3% to 34.3% between 2011 and 2021.

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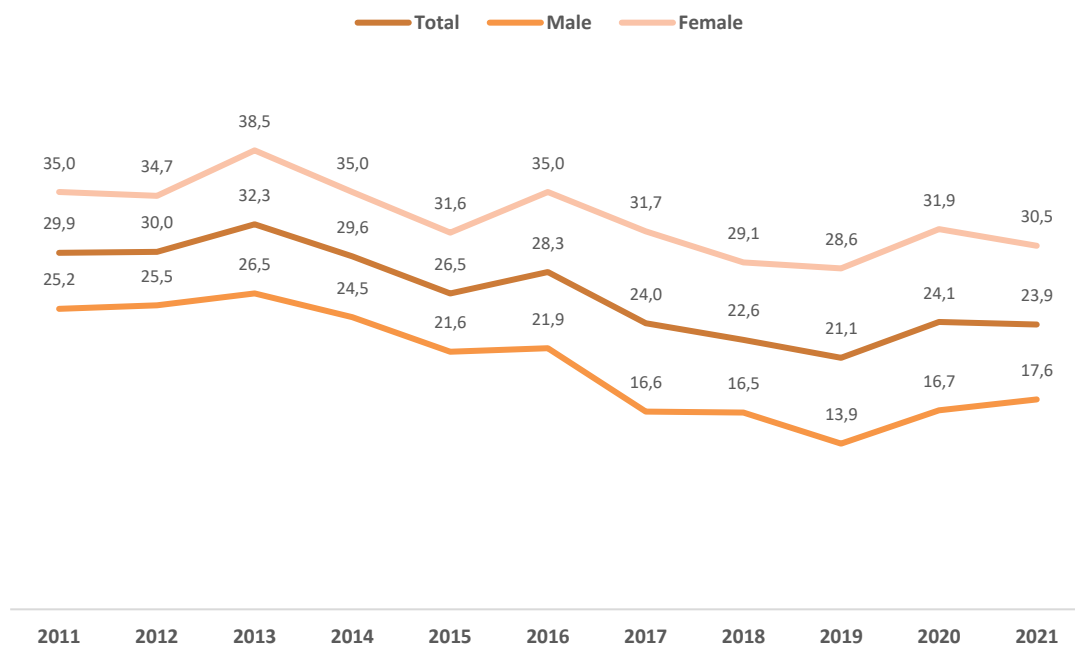
Chart 11- Youth NEET rate (25-29 Years), by degree of urbanisation, 2011-2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_ifs_29] – data extracted on 8.05.2022

NEETs rate in Bulgaria for those aged 25-29 continuously decrease between 2011 and 2021 in all cities, towns and rural areas.

Chart 12-Chart 11. Youth NEET rate (25-29 Years), by sex, 2011-2021 (%)



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Source: Eurostat (edat_lfs_29) – data extracted on 8.05.2022

According to the differences between NEETs males and NEETs females, there is no big differences in the rates for the period (2011-2021). The rate is high in 2013 and 2020, for both sexes, and is low in 2019.

Conclusions

In conclusion and according to the data the NEETs rate in Bulgaria by degree of urbanization has decreased between 2011 and 2021. It is higher in rural areas in comparison with Bulgarian cities and towns. Some of the biggest challenges facing Bulgaria in this period are related to demographic trends and the development of processes associated with these. The deepening demographic crisis and its associated unfavourable quantitative changes in demographic parameters have been characterized by a very high intensity over the past three decades. They are presently reaching the point of thresholds where permanent destabilization can be observed in the area of natural reproduction. The youth population in Bulgaria has decreased throughout the period in consideration. Data shows that young people are a category at risk in the Bulgarian labour market, with a high unemployment rates. Youth unemployment in Bulgaria is a low-skill and regional problem that mostly affects those between 15-19 years old. The unemployment rate in the age group up to 25-29 years old retains high for the 10-year period.

Like many Eastern European countries, the education in Bulgaria is the area where the greatest progress has been made, but there are still systemic challenges such as insufficient attention to “second chance” schools and the lack of NEETs skills matching the needs of the labour market and digitalization of the teaching process. In this sense, what has been achieved in the field of education has not yet developed into employment. The percentage of ESLET in Bulgaria by degree of urbanization has decreased throughout the period in consideration. The trends remain negative according to all levels of education.

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Important links

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[Bulgaria | YouthWiki \(europa.eu\)](https://youthwiki.europa.eu/Bulgaria/)

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https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Bulgaria_2010_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf

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<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/overview-bulgaria>

Labour Code Bulgaria

<https://www.mlsp.government.bg/eng/legislation-1>

The Youth Act

<http://mpes.government.bg/Pages/Documents/Law/default.asp>