

PROJECT APPLICATION FORM UNDER THE INSTRUMENT FOR RECOVERY AND RESELIENCE

1. Name of the operation.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABLE REHABILITATION OF MUNICIPALITIES

2. Description of the operation (objectives, main activities).

In the **annual report of the European Commission for Bulgaria** in the framework of European Semester 2020, Assessment of progress of structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances and results of in-depth reviews in accordance with Regulation (EU) 1176/2011, the following findings have been made:

- By 2030, the labor force in Bulgaria will decrease by 10%, with the largest reduction (by 26.7 % by 2030) expected in the age group 25-49 years (average economic activity rate of 86 %). This reduction could pose a risk to the sustainable future growth. Positive results may be achieved through measures aimed at reducing the outflow of the working age population (15-64 years) by helping them to find work and increase their skills and workforce productivity;
- The share of young people who do not participate in any form of employment, education or training (NEET), and students who leave school early, remains high (19.1 % and 12.7 %, respectively in 2018).
- The level of digital skills is low, with only 29 % of the population (aged 16-74) indicating that they have basic or more in-depth skills in digital technologies, compared to 57 % in the EU. Of the young people aged 16-19, only 53 % rate their level of digital skills as basic or above basic, compared to the EU average of 83%.
- Roma continue to face numerous challenges. The overall unemployment rate among Roma is 55 %, but it is even higher (65 %) among young Roma between the ages of 16 and 24. The percentage of early school leavers continues to be high (12.7 %), and its value among young people of Roma origin is alarming (67 %).

In this regard, the **main challenges** that arise are:

- 1) To the Bulgarian municipalities: the processes of internal migration reduce the share of young people who stay in the small and medium municipalities; a significant challenge is the lack of motivation for work and commitment to the implementation of development goals at the local level; the level of

participation and involvement in the development of local communities is low; young people rarely initiate or participate in local initiatives related to entrepreneurship, knowledge accumulation or skills development. Passivity among young people, lack of civic involvement in local development and the inability to initiate activities useful to the community leads to a delay in the social and economic development of many municipalities.

- 2) The education system faces a number of challenges, in particular the reintegration of drop-outs into the learning process (formal and non-formal); increasing the share of successful high school graduates among vulnerable groups (especially Roma); increasing the interest of students and young people in acquiring knowledge and key competencies in various fields, which will support their realization in the labor market;
- 3) The business at the local level face problems such as lack of qualified staff, low or no computer literacy among the newly employed, lack of financial literacy, lack of knowledge of foreign languages; the general literacy and basic competences of young people are often low-level, there is a great lack of the ability to manage working hours, prioritize tasks, observe work discipline and work culture. The lack of civic activity and a mentality for engagement among young people leads to a lack of skills to cope with the work environment and tasks;
- 4) The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the demands of students, young people and workers to know and work with new technologies. The state of emergency in the country has created a practice of working and learning from a distance, which has proven to be successful and much of the business continues to apply it after the restrictions are removed. The new way of working requires improving the digital skills for the usual training and/or work activities, applying flexible communication approaches and working with programmes as alternative to paper documents, when looking for work and interviewing, using and knowing a wide range of communication tools, Internet applications, etc. Secondary effects of the pandemic were the Bulgarian emigrants who returned from abroad, which increased the unemployment rate, social exclusion and mental health problems.

This is exactly the intention of **Recommendation 4** of the Specific Recommendations of the European Commission (given in the abovesaid Report), namely:

- **to improve employability** by strengthening the skills, including digital skills;
- **to increase the quality, applicability to the labor market and the inclusive nature** of education and training, in particular for the **Roma** and other vulnerable groups.

This operation has been developed in accordance with the above Recommendation, as well as with Council **Recommendation 3** on the National Reform Programme 2020 of May 20, 2020, in its part “to allocate investments in the field of green and **digital transition**”.

Promoting physical spaces for young people to interact and receiving support for non-formal learning from youth workers is largely in line with the key objectives of youth policy at EU and national level. Young people need access to physical spaces in their communities to support their personal, cultural and political development; it is also key to the EU’s contractual objective to support the democratic participation of young people (Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU]). The Council Conclusions on Promoting Democratic Awareness and Democratic Engagement among Young People in Europe (adopted on November 20, 2020) call on the Member States to “promote and support accessible physical and digital structures for youth work and smart solutions for youth work, especially as a result of COVID-19, to provide young people with free, open and safe spaces and opportunities for personal development.”

In addition, youth centers are especially important given the high emigration of young people from Bulgaria and the fact that due to socialization restrictions due to COVID-19 young people are vulnerable to mental health problems. This may eventually lead to dropping out of school and detachment from the education system.

- **Objectives of the operation**

- (1) Main objective

Establishment of centers for personal development of students and young people, which provide a variety of activities (including international activities) and comprehensive services in support of personal development and employability of students and young people up to 29 years of age. The provided activities shall meet the highest standards in the field of youth activity and overcoming social isolation and unsuitability for the labor market.

The centers for personal development of students and youth will be based on a model proposed by the European Youth Steering Committee, which is developing a project to promote the European Youth Centers of the Council of Europe (CoE) as tools for setting standards and examples of best youth policy practices. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe welcomes the initiative to share and introduce knowledge and networking at national level between youth centers across Europe. A key element of the supported activities should be compliance with the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centers, a comprehensive model developed on

the basis of the following criteria: education as a high value, multiplication of social impact; commitment to youth policy; development of knowledge and educational innovations and international cooperation.

The Centers for Personal Development of Students and Youth model offers an approach to addressing the challenges faced by municipalities, education and business by:

- 1) Purposeful engagement of students and young people in building civic activity, which leads to an increase in their detention in small and medium-sized municipalities; supporting and increasing the motivation for realization on the labor market, stimulating the participation and involvement in the development of the local communities; a clear focus on developing initiative and participation in local initiatives related to entrepreneurship, acquisition of professional skills and knowledge. Encouraging civic activism and focusing on participation in local development and community-based activities.
- 2) Support for students and young people who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of the education system, targeted activities with vulnerable groups to increase the share of successful high school graduates and continuing education, increase the interest of students and young people in acquiring knowledge and key competencies in various areas to support their implementation on the labor market;
- 3) Coordination and cooperation with the local business to overcome the lack of qualifications, activities to increase computer literacy, financial literacy, foreign language skills, approaches to increase the basic competencies of young people.

There are currently four youth centers in the country, i.e. in Dobrich, Vratsa, Stara Zagora and Plovdiv, which are actively working to address the above problems in the respective municipalities. All four centers meet the requirements of the Council of Europe, and two of them (in Plovdiv and Stara Zagora) have been awarded the Quality Label of the Council of Europe (which happens for the first time in the history of the EU, Bulgaria is the first country, in which there are two centers with that Label).

The available information about the effect of the work of the centers is comparable between the period of external project funding (2014-2017) and the period ending December 2020:

- ☐ Number of young people involved in the centers' activities:
 - by April 2017: 9 322
 - by December 2020: 43 000
 - > 10 % of young people are of Roma origin
- ☐ Number of young people who have completed non-formal training (both short-term and long-term):
 - by April 2017: 2 172

- by December 2020: 4 865
- > 28 % of the trained young people are of Roma origin

Data available for the period 2014-2020:

- ☐ Total young people who returned to the education system through activities of the centers: 179 of which 148 of Roma origin;
- ☐ Young people who continued to the next level of education due to the support of the centers: 306 of which 28 of Roma origin;
- ☐ Young people who have undergone formal training, i.e. vocational courses, and have acquired qualification: 212
- ☐ Young people who found a job after acquiring qualification: 25
- ☐ Personal consultations/services provided to young people for psychological support by psychologists/social workers at the centers: 270;
- ☐ Partnerships established with companies working in the IT field: 6;
- ☐ Young people who were trained and have acquired computer literacy/digital skills: 730

More detailed information about the activities of these four centers may be found through the following links:

<http://youthcentre.plovdiv.bg/bg>

<http://ycd.bg/>

<https://youthcentervratza.com/>

<https://youthcentervratza.com/https://bg-bg.facebook.com/InternationalYouthCenterStaraZagora/>

<https://bg-bg.facebook.com/YouthCentrePlovdiv/>

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthCenterDobrich/>

<https://www.facebook.com/youth.center.vratsa/>

In addition, four new municipalities (Montana, Pernik, Burgas and Gabrovo) have received financial assistance from the EEA FM to establish modern centers according to the model of the Council of Europe on their territory. The centers are successfully implementing the EU policies by working to achieve the highest European standards. At the national level, a National Network of Youth Centers has been established, acting as a mechanism for effective cooperation, exchange of knowledge, skills, experience and good practices in order to improve the quality of youth work in Bulgaria. The activity of the centers follows the approved direction to adapt and upgrade the successful model proposed by the Council of Europe and introduced by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). According to this model, the youth center is an educational institution that provides knowledge and skills through non-formal education methods, introduces young people to basic

European values and prepares them for active participation in economic and social life (for more information: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/mission-and-mandate>). The centers aim to encourage students and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, both to develop their abilities and talents and to acquire new competencies and skills that will support their future personal and professional realization. The exchange of experience with young people from other settlements and other countries significantly contributes to the motivation of young people and their personal development. In order to provide appropriate conditions for non-formal training and exchange of youth groups, as well as for organizing conferences, trainings and other events with short-term accommodation of participants, the centers have a place(s) for meals and their own accommodation facilities (minimum 35 beds). The availability of accommodation and meals is a good practice in the implementation of non-formal education of students and young people, while allowing for some self-support and expanding opportunities for a variety of activities.

According to one of the main requirements of the Council of Europe model for a clear mandate by the local authorities and close cooperation with the governing bodies, all centers in the country have been established by the municipalities, which after the completion of external funding will take over the support of the work.

The new model of Centers for Personal Development of Students and Youth builds on the best practices in the field and already emphasizes the competencies and skills of young people that would be most useful in relation to the specific challenges faced by the municipalities and business. The proposed activities will be focused on coordination and cooperation with the local business, development of training programmes and internships, building basic skills and competencies among young people to support not only the development of the individual's personality, but also their adequate involvement in community development.

(2) Specific objectives:

1. Support for formation, development and realization of students and young people through the establishment of multifunctional centers that provide both modern facilities and the implementation of innovative approaches (especially non-formal education) to develop competencies and skills for successful implementation, including on the labor market;
2. Create a safe, inclusive, motivating environment for students and young people, supporting their participation and aspiration for development;
3. Development of specific activities and policies aimed at young people to improve their digital skills, development of entrepreneurial literacy, general and financial literacy, development of specific soft skills that support social inclusion and employability;

4. Maintain the interest of students and young people in education and the acquisition of new skills, participation in joint initiatives and sharing common values with their peers including participation in national and international initiatives;
5. Determine a long-term priority of development of partnerships between education and business, especially by involving the social partners in this process;
6. Preparation and implementation of activities and approaches that will enable the adaptation of students and young people to the new conditions and possible changes in order to increase educational qualifications, reduce unemployment and increase labor productivity;
7. Exchanges of good practices and organizing joint activities at national level with the National Network of Youth Centers, exchanges of good practices at European level with similar structures in different EU member states.

According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for 2020, Bulgaria ranks last in Europe in terms of introduction and use of digital technologies, despite the active transformation and provision of electronic services by the state administration in 2020, due to the emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Bulgaria ranks the 26th in terms of human capital skills in the field of IT, with less than 30 % having basic skills in the field of digital technologies and only 11 % having digital skills above the basic ones.

In connection with the priorities of the state for overcoming the differences, the Centers for Personal Development will be equipped with modern equipment and services will be provided to acquire and/or improve the digital skills of young people in Bulgaria. The youth centers that are already operational in Bulgaria, already provide a wide range of formal and non-formal trainings for the acquisition of digital skills, cyber security, children's and youth rights on the Internet, and are currently developing regulatory requirements and a methodology for non-formal education in the field of digital media literacy, which will be provided free of charge in the newly established Centers for Personal Development of Students and Youth.

- **Target groups:**

- (1) Main target group:

- Students/young people aged 13-29;
 - Students at risk of dropping out or who have dropped out of school;
 - Young people who are 'neither in employment, nor in education or training' (NEET);
 - Young people from other vulnerable groups (including Roma).

- (2) Secondary target group:

- Center's employees: youth workers, educational mediators, other personnel;
- Public authorities: administration, schools, social services, labor offices;
- Non-governmental sector: organizations working in the fields of youth, protection against discrimination, digitalization, professional competencies;
- Business representatives – formal and informal partners in the implementation of activities.

• **The Centers for Personal Development of students and young people will provide:**

1. Modern and accessible infrastructure by building new or reconstructing key municipal buildings that meet the needs and interests of young people;
2. Modern multifunctional furniture and equipment for the center, in accordance with the activities, needs and prospects of activities;
3. Specialized equipment for digital classrooms (digital hubs) for conducting trainings to increase the digital literacy of young people, as a way to deal with the challenges in the digital environment – digital identity, digital rights, security, ways of communication, search and understanding of information, work with Internet applications and their use in everyday life, recognizing fake news, raising digital skills above the basic level;
4. Targeted measures to support students and young people who have dropped out of school or are still in school but are at risk of dropping out, through non-formal and formal learning, counseling, mentoring, working with parents. Offering a variety of language courses, both for improving the knowledge of Bulgarian and for learning English, especially in connection with improving the digital skills of students and young people, as a basic requirement for hiring staff and working with digital equipment.
5. Building soft skills through methods of non-formal education: developing communication and presentation skills, financial literacy, presentation to employers including preparation of CV and cover letter, coping with stressful situations, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, teamwork, learning about diversity and ethnic tolerance, initiative and entrepreneurship;
6. Activities related to the knowledge and observance of fundamental human rights, democratic values, formation of civil position and active participation in public life;
7. Information on job opportunities, qualification and retraining, providing assistance to young people in working with institutions and business representatives. Activities to support vocational guidance and development by providing opportunities for the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills, including people over 30 years of age who have not completed a degree, in accordance with the current needs of the labor market;

8. Active cooperation with local public authorities, businesses, institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop coordinated policies and work with students and young people. Provision of services for social inclusion of young people from vulnerable groups, empowerment and activation of students and young people, especially representatives of vulnerable groups, emigrants and Bulgarians who have returned from abroad;
 9. Cooperation with the representatives of the local business in connection with the professional orientation and training of the young people, as well as with increasing their motivation to look for opportunities for realization at the local level. Organizing events for presentation of employers, meetings between jobseekers and other forms of mediation. Organization of events to present successful practices of young entrepreneurs;
 10. Organization of joint trainings and events in a network with other youth centers in Bulgaria and internationally, aiming at exchanging ideas, experiences and good practices.
- The operation will be implemented through the following **main activities**:

Activity 1: Establishment of centers for personal development of students and youth (in regional towns) - 10 centres

These centers will follow the model of youth centers proposed by the Council of Europe and introduced by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Dobrich and Vratsa, with the support of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM), with an emphasis on the development of the skills of students and young people to deal with the challenges of job seeking and social realization in specific municipalities. In addition to the rooms and offices constructed and equipped for personal and professional competencies, the centers will have accommodation facilities to accommodate young people from the district, from different regions in Bulgaria or abroad to exchange experiences and implement joint initiatives. The centers will work in close cooperation with all interested parties: business organizations, NGOs, public and educational institutions, to provide quality services and create conditions for the development of young people in the region. Personal development services will be provided to increase professional competencies, according to the needs of the labor market and with a focus on vulnerable groups, mediation services will be provided between young people and public authorities; the Regional Education Inspectorates and schools will be assisted in working with students, who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of the education system. The partnership with the business will aim to provide conditions for the young people to meet the requirements of the labor market or to develop successful business ventures themselves. The stakeholders will look for an option for the business

representatives to prepare their own staff by conducting free trainings or internships and giving young people the opportunity to succeed. The work of the center will be ensured by employing youth workers, Roma educational mediators and psychologists/social workers who will apply the principles of non-formal learning and education and conduct the necessary training for the acquisition of soft skills, as well as to guarantee successful communication in the Roma target group.

According to the age structure of the population from the latest National Statistical Institute (NSI) data (percentage of young people in the settlements) and the possibility to achieve a wider range of students and young people, it will be most appropriate for these centers established according to the CoE model to be located in regional towns.

The selection for funding will be done through a competitive procedure, following the good practices and the regulatory framework for obtaining external funding on competitive grounds. Centers of this type will be established in 10 municipalities, with priority being given to those who have already developed similar projects and are ready for a quick start of project activities.

Each of the newly established centers shall provide at least 10 jobs (including 5 youth workers, 2 Roma educational mediators, a psychologist/social worker) and include in its activities and clubs at least 1 200 young people from the region.

Activity 2: Establishment of centers for personal development of students and youth (in non-regional towns)

– 10 centres

Centers of this type will be established in 10 smaller settlements (project promoters will again be the municipalities), which are not regional centers and in which there live at least 2 000 students and young people up to 29 years of age. According to the latest NSI data (age structure and migration processes) and the requirements for efficiency and effectiveness of public funding, it was determined to establish a “small-scale” centers only in 10 towns (in this case, the total number of eligible beneficiaries where such a number of young people and students live is not more than 40 towns in the country).

The establishment of these 10 centers will be piloted for Bulgaria. These will also be based on the model proposed by the Council of Europe, but will be its “scaled-down copy” both in terms of infrastructure and the activities and services provided. The centers will have rooms and offices equipped for the activities, will act as an intermediary between local businesses and young people in the area, will provide conditions for personal development, to increase professional and digital competencies according to the needs of the labor market, and

with focus on vulnerable groups, will provide mediation services between young people and public authorities, will assist the schools and Regional Education Inspectorates in working with students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of the education system. The work of the center will be ensured by hiring youth workers, Roma educational mediators, psychologist/social worker to apply the principles of non-formal learning and education and to conduct the necessary training for the acquisition of soft skills, as well as to be a guarantor of successful communication in the Roma target group. Each of these centers will create at least 7 jobs (of which at least two youth workers, one Roma educational mediator and a psychologist/social worker) and shall ensure the participation of at least 300 students and young people in the activities and clubs organized by the center.

If this model proves to be successful and well accepted by the local communities, it will be multiplied in the future in other small settlements in the country.

The municipalities in which centers of this type will be established will also be determined through a **project selection procedure**.

Activity 3: Project management and monitoring

The operation will be managed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) through a structure determined by the Minister (internal or external).

This activity will be carried out through the following sub-activities:

- ▬ Development of Application Guidelines
- ▬ Announcement of the project submission procedure
- ▬ Evaluation of the submitted project proposals
- ▬ Conclusion of contracts with the beneficiaries (municipalities)
- ▬ Development of a Project Implementation Manual for the beneficiaries
- ▬ Training of the beneficiaries on the project implementation requirements (on the one hand, for the establishment and operation of the big centers, and on the other hand, for the establishment and operation of the small centers).
- ▬ Control on the implementation of individual projects including risk analysis and control, on-site inspections, prevention of irregularities.
- ▬ Verification of expenditures and activities including examination of the public procurements conducted.
- ▬ Receipt of regular payments of funds from the EC (every 6 months) and payment to beneficiaries for the achieved results.
- ▬ Information and communication activities including organizing and conducting information events

(one in Sofia and one in each of the 6 planning regions in the country), major public events (one opening event to start the operation, one event to report the operation progress and for exchange of experience between the teams of the centers, and one closing event to report the results of the operation).

- **The socio-economic result** of the project implementation will include:

- Establishment of 20 new centers for personal development of students and youth;
- Creation of at least 170 jobs in the centers (10 jobs in each big center and 7 jobs in each small center);
- Involvement of at least 15 000 students and young people in the activities of the centers (minimum 1 200 in the big centers and minimum 300 in the small centers);
- At least 2 000 young people who have undergone specialized training to increase their professional competence (minimum 150 in the big centers and minimum 50 in the small centers), including digital, financial, entrepreneurship.
- Partnerships established and implemented with the local business, NGOs and public authorities.

3. Beneficiary/Beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries under this operation will be the municipalities on which territory the centers will be established. These municipalities will be selected through a project selection procedure.

- for the big centers, eligible beneficiaries will be 10 municipalities, which are regional centers and where such a center has not yet been established (ineligible beneficiaries: Vratsa, Dobrich, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Montana, Burgas, Pernik, Gabrovo)

- for the smaller centers, eligible beneficiaries will be 10 municipalities that are NOT regional centers and have at least 2000 students and young people living permanently there.

Eligible partners of the municipalities in the implementation of the projects: Establishment of formal and informal partnerships with the business, educational institutions, local authorities and non-governmental organizations are mandatory for the successful operation of the center.

The exchange of information with the educational institutions is aimed at providing assistance by the center in supporting and implementing measures for returning to the education system children and youth at risk of dropping out or who have dropped out of the formal education, as well as providing support for further education. Close cooperation with the community centers (libraries/cultural clubs) in Bulgaria will also be promoted, as regardless of the differences in approaches, methods and activities of the two types of organizations, there is a serious overlap in the target group, which implies successful partnership in the implementation of joint initiatives,

events and various cultural activities.

The support from the local NGOs will aim to develop volunteering and youth initiatives, empower young people and activate students and young people.

Successful cooperation with public authorities is a key requirement for recognizing the Center as a place where policies are introduced and developed by and for young people, and for ensuring the sustainability of the Centre's activities following the completion of the project, as the municipal authorities will be directly responsible for providing the financial resource to maintain sustainability.

Partnerships with the business will aim to create successful practices in communication between job seekers and job providers, providing trainings by the business, to motivate young people to start entrepreneurial initiatives. The centers for personal development of students and young people could be a successful partner in attracting stakeholders and disseminating information, good practices and experience in implementing the activities of the established STEM offices and FabLab in the country.

When selecting partners, and in order to eliminate doubts about the existence of state aids in the events where the municipalities outsource certain activities to other contractors and/or institutions, and/or act in partnership with such parties, the municipalities will strictly follow the procedures of the Public Procurement Act.

This operation is not a state aid procedure, as the end beneficiary will be the municipalities. Municipalities and municipal regions were established as territorial authorities of the executive power for implementation of the state policy in the interest of the territorial community, which is of a local significance. The municipalities and municipal regions (with the exception of municipal enterprises of independent legal personality) are public entities, i.e. structures of local government and the main administrative and territorial unit in which local self-government is carried out.

In the implementation of the local policy, the municipalities and municipal regions support the activity of the central executive power in exercising public authority and perform primarily non-economic functions. When assigning the implementation of certain activities to other contractors, the municipalities shall strictly follow the procedures of the Public Procurement Act.

The services provided in the Centers will be free of charge for all students and young people, i.e. they will be publicly available to all users. The activities of the Centers do not bring economic benefits to the enterprises and are provided non-selectively, free of charge to all end users (students and young people).

The availability of accommodation and/or meals is a part of the European-approved model (Quality Label for Youth Centers: <https://rm.coe.int/quality-label-brochure-en-2015>), and will be used after the end of the project funding to support the self-sufficiency of the Centers. Revenues are not treated as profit, but are returned to the planned budgets of the Centers for use in the implementation of their activities.

With regard to the expenditures of the Bulgarian partners related to the implementation of activities specified in the project proposal, these shall be non-economic in order to be considered eligible under the procedure. If the partner has economic and non-economic activity, he should prove that he keeps analytical accounting and the costs of the economic and non-economic activity are separated, visible and traceable. Non-governmental organizations participating as project partners shall not be allowed to participate in construction and repair works or in the purchase of materials, equipment/furniture.

4. Time schedule for operation implementation, incl. activities, stages¹.

Period of operation implementation: **60 months**

Concrete activities	Implementation in 6-month's periods since the start of the operation									
	2021	2022		2023		2024		2025		2026
	H2	H1	H2	H1	H2	H1	H2	H1	H2	H2
Developed and published Application Guideleines (A1)	2									
Information and publicity (A1)		4	3							
Evaluation and contracting (A1)		60%	40%							
Beneficiaries' trainings (A1)			1	1					2	

¹ The timetable will be relevant for setting intermediate targets under the Recovery and Sustainability Plan and is directly related to the release of tranches of financial support under the Recovery and Sustainability Fund.

Control and monitoring of the projects (A1)		10	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Closing event for the completion of the operation (A1)										1
Starting the individual projects, reconstruction/construction activities started (A2, A3)			10	10						
Choosing executors of equipment and furniture deliveries (A2, A3)					20					
Implementation of construction/reconstruction activities (A2, A3)					20					
Hiring and trainings of the youth workers and other personnel (A2, A3)					170					
Hiring and trainings of the youth workers and other personnel(A2, A3)					170					
Activities to attract pupils and young people (A2, A3)					1700	2100	2500	3000	3500	4200
Activities for development of soft skills (A2, A3)						500	1000	1500	2000	

Activities to develop vocational skills and consultations (A2, A3)						200	400	800	1000	
Activities for acquiring / improving digital skills and competences (A2, A3)						400	400	400	400	400
Activities to stimulate the entrepreneurship (A2, A3)					10	20	20	20	20	10
Activities for empowering the young people (A2, A3)					10	10				
Activities for improving the partnerships(A2, A3)		10	10							
Joint partnership initiatives and sustainability improvement (A2, A3)						20			20	

Activity 1 (A1): Establishment of centers for personal development of students and youth (in regional towns)

Activity 2 (A2): Establishment of centers for personal development of students and youth (in non-regional towns)

Activity 3 (A3): Management and monitoring of the operation

4.1. When can the implementation of the project start at the earliest after its approval?

The Ministry of Education and Science is ready to start the implementation of the operation immediately after

its approval and receipt of advance payment.

5. Indicative financial resource by activities including sources of funding (state budget, European funding, private funding, IFIs).

Total for the whole operation: 60 000 000 BGN

National co-financing is not foreseen.

Co-financing by the beneficiary **is not required**, but at its discretion such may be provided (e.g. if the beneficiary is willing to establish a facility for which the project funding will not be sufficient).

Distribution of funding by activities:

Activity 1: “Establishment of Centers for Personal Development of Students and Youth (in regional towns)”:
40 000 000 BGN

(Individual grant: 3 700 000 – 4 000 000 BGN)

Activity 2: “Establishment of Centers for Personal Development of Students and Youth (in non-regional towns)”:
16 000 000 BGN

(Individual grant: 1 400 000 – 1 800 000 BGN)

Activity 3: Operation management and monitoring: 4 000 000 BGN

(max. 7 % of the total operation budget)

Payment schedule:

10 % advance payment upon the start of the operation

25 % [1st 6-month period]

15 % [2nd 6-month period]

10 % [3rd 6-month period]

10 % [4th 6-month period]

5 % [5th 6-month period]

5 % [6th 6-month period]

5 % [7th 6-month period]

5 % [8th 6-month period]

5 % [9th 6-month period]

5 % final payment

5.1. Indicative allocation of the financial resource according to the type of expenditure:

The indicative distribution of the total financial resource by activities is, as follows:

- Max. 4 000 000 BGN for management of the whole operation
- Max. 3 640 000 BGN of the funds for management costs
- Max. 33 600 000 BGN of the funds for construction/reconstruction of a building, equipment and furniture
- At least 18 760 000 BGN of the funds for targeted project measures including staff costs, training, exchange of experience, development of partnerships, informational campaigns, etc.

The indicative distribution of the standard costs and the individual amounts of the grant are determined based on **historical data**:

- Establishment of four youth centers of a book value over 10 million BGN was funded under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area 2009-2014;
- Four new projects for establishment of youth centers of a book value over 16 million BGN have been funded under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area 2014-2021².

These centers meet the standards approved by the Council of Europe.

The practice with funding the eight centers shows that in order to ensure the successful start of the construction and/or repair works, which are usually the first activities in the implementation of such type of projects, the **municipalities need an advance of at least 30% of the total project value.**

6. Indicators

6.1. Targets/Milestones

ОБЩО: индикатори за резултат (targets)

Подобрен достъп на младите до услугите на центровете:

Брой подкрепени центрове – 20

Брой наети служители в центрове – 170

Брой на ученици / младежи, обхванати от проектните дейности - 17 000

Етапни индикатори (milestones)

² <https://umis2020.government.bg/#/contracts?programmId=8010572&programmePriorityId=8010574&search=true>

Activity	Stage Indicators	Base values	Base Year	Intermediate values (no accumulation)	Target	Term
Management Activities in regard with the whole operation	Developed Applicationa Guidelines	0	2021	N/A	2	H2 2021
	Conducted information and awareness campaigns	0	2021	4 - H1/2022 3 - H2/2022	7	H1 2021
	Contracted financing	0	2021	60% - H1/2022 40% - H2/2022	100%	H2 2022
	Beneficiaries' trainings implemented	0	2021	1 - H2/2022 1 - H1/2023 2 - H2/2025	4	H2 2025
	Contol and monitoring missions impemenyed	0	2021	10 - H1/2022 20 - H/2022 20 - H1/2023 20 - H2/2023 20 - H1/2024 20 - H2/2024 20 - H1/2025 20 - H2/2025 20 - H1/2026	170	H2 2025
	Publicity Closing Event	0	2021	N/A	1	H1 2026
Creation of modern and accessible environment for developing the skills of the pupils and young people	Public Procedures for construction/reconstruction of the centres published	0	2021	10 - H2/2022 10 - H1/2023	20	H2 2022
	Public Procedures for equipment deliveries of the centres published / Contractors selection	0	2021	N/A	20	H2 2023
	Built/renovated centres	0	2021	N/A	20	H2 2023
	Number of hired employees in the centres	0	2021	N/A	170	H2 2023
	Number of trained personnel for youth work of the centres	0	2021	N/A	170	H2 2023

Подобрено социално и икономическо включване на ученици и младежи	Брой на младежи, обхванати от проектните дейности	0	2021	1700 - H2/2023 2100 - H1/2024 2500 - H2/2024 3000 - H1/2025 3500 - H2/2025 4200 - H1/2026	17 000	H1 2026
	Брой ученици и младежи, преминали неформални обучителни курсове	0	2021	500 - H1/2024 1000 - H2/2024 1500 - H1/2025 2000 - H2/2025	5000	H2 2025
	Брой ученици и младежи, получили професионална подкрепа, консултация, ориентирани и/или преминали професионален курс	0	2021	200 - H1/2024 400 - H2/2024 800 - H1/2025 1000 - H2/2025	2400	H2 2025
	Брой ученици и младежи, придобили /доразвили дигитални умения и компетентности	0	2021	400 - H1/2024 400 - H2/2024 400 - H1/2025 400 - H2/2025 400 - H1/2026	2000	H1 2026
Повишаване дела на младежкото участие в социално-икономическо развитие на общината и младежко овластяване	Брой подкрепени ученически/младежки инициативи в целевите общности	0	2021	10 - H2/2023 20 - H1/2024 20 - H2/2024 20 - H1/2025 20 - H2/2025 10 - H1/2026	100	H1 2026
	Създадени ученически/младежки консултативни съвети към центровете	0	2021	10 - H2/2023 10 - H1/2024	20	H1 2024
Подобрено сътрудничество с бизнеса, местните власти, НПО	Създадени партньорства	0	2021	10 - H1/2022 10 - H2/2022	20	H2 2022
	Реализирани партньорски инициативи	0	2021	20 - H1/2024 20 - H2/2025	40	H2 2025

6.2. Effect indicator(s)

Enhanced social and economic inclusion of students and young people:

- Level of satisfaction with the services offered at the youth centers: 75%;

- Students and young people who have completed non-formal training courses: 5 000
- Students and young people who received professional support, counseling, guidance and/or completed a professional course: 2 400
- Students and young people who acquired/further developed digital skills and competencies: 2 000

Enhanced rate of youth participation in the socio-economic development of the municipality and youth empowerment:

- Number of supported student/youth initiatives in the target communities: 100
- Student/youth advisory councils established at the centers: 10

Enhanced cooperation with the business, local authorities, NGOs:

- Partnerships established: 20
- Partnership initiatives implemented: 40

7. Does the implementation of the project require a procedure under the Public Procurement Act?

A competition procedure for selection of contractors will be conducted for the implementation of the projects. The procedure will follow all rules of broad awareness, transparency and lack of conflict of interest during the selection and evaluation of project proposals.

7.1. If a procedure under the Public Procurement Act is required, what part of the activities and financial resources will be the subject of the public procurement?

No procedure under the Public Procurement Act is envisaged. The projects will be selected through a competitive procedure.

1. Open call for project proposals under Activity 1: 40 000 000 BGN
2. Open call for project proposals under Activity 2: 16 000 000 BGN

7.2. If a procedure under the Public Procurement Act is required, what is the indicative schedule for its implementation?

The Application Guidelines will be finalised within three months of receiving an approval.

8. Demarcation and complementarity.

8.1. If similar projects have been implemented (regardless of their source of funding), describe how

this project builds on/complements the achievements of previous projects.

The operation will provide a continuation of the successful practice of establishing youth development centers in the country according to the model proposed by the Council of Europe and introduced by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Dobrich and Vratsa, with the support of the Financial mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM).

These centers have quickly proved their social impact and have been recognized by young people as a preferred place for personal development and leisure, and by the local authorities as a reliable partner for working with young people.

The indicative values of results and effects are based on the data collected and processed by the youth centers established in Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Vratsa and Dobrich. Project activities for those centers started in January 2014 and ended in April 2017, and have been successfully continued with the financial support of the municipalities over the period 2017-2020.

Currently, four more centers of the same type are being established and again, with the financial support of the EEA FM, in Burgas, Gabrovo, Montana and Pernik.

With the 20 new centers that will be established under this operation, the network of these centers will significantly expand, which will enable young people to acquire new knowledge and skills, develop their interests, get acquainted with the common European values and actively stand up for their actions. With these centers, the opportunities for young people in the country to participate in international initiatives and exchange of experience will significantly increase.

The newly established centers will upgrade and complement the model from which they take an example, expanding their scope not only in terms of participants (to include also students/youth at the age of 13-14), but also in terms of the scope of activities they offer; they will include a wider choice of activities related to the improvement of digital skills, as well as vocational guidance and training.

In addition, the “pilot model” of the 10 small centers will definitely upgrade the current model of youth centers and may be applied in other appropriate settlements in the future.

8.2. If any similar projects are envisaged for implementation under the Partnership Agreement programmes, EU centrally managed instruments or Fair Transition Fund, outline the demarcation with this project.

N/A

9. Does the project directly contribute to the implementation of any of the Council Specific Recommendations addressed to Bulgaria in the framework of the European Semester in the period 2017-2020? Please describe.

By supporting the improvement of the general and professional competencies of students and young people, this operation will contribute to their future professional realization and thus, contribute to the implementation of **Recommendation 4** of the EC Specific Recommendations included in its annual report for Bulgaria in the framework of the European Semester, as well as Recommendation 2 of the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS on Bulgarian National Reform Programme 2020, containing Council's Opinion on Bulgarian Convergence Programme 2020 to provide adequate social protection and basic services for all, an strengthen the active policies related to the labor market, as well as improve the access to teleworking and promote the digital skills and equal access to education, namely:

- **improve employability** by strengthening the skills including digital skills;
- increase the quality, **applicability to the labor market and the inclusive nature** of education and training, in particular **for Roma** and other vulnerable groups.

10. Does the project contribute to the implementation of a reform in a given sector? Please describe.

The implementation of the **competence approach** is one of the main tasks of the **education system reform** in the country. The establishment of these centers will complement the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) to implement this approach at all stages and forms of education and upbringing.

This operation will also complement the activities of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) to improve the work with students and young people and will assist in the implementation of the uniform **national standards for youth work** that are currently developed by the MYS.

The newly established centers with modern facilities and innovative approaches to work with youth will help the formal education system in providing extracurricular support to students and young people to develop their potential, acquire new competencies, share opportunities for realization, development and success.

The centers will help increase the interest and motivation of young people to acquire new knowledge and skills and to participate in joint activities with other young people, including internationally.

The centers will provide an opportunity to work more effectively with young people at risk of dropping out of school, as well as with young people who do not study or work (NEET).

The services and activities provided by the centers will improve the skills and abilities of young people to meet the requirements of the modern labor market. The work of local business representatives with young people will support their motivation for professional realization “on the spot”, i.e. for their detention in the region.

The centers will work in close cooperation with the local authorities to involve young people in public life at local, regional and national level, in implementation of the local youth work strategies and minority inclusion strategies.

11. Does the project contribute to the development of any aspect of the sustainable economic development? Please describe.

The centers to be established under this operation will contribute to the professional orientation of young people, as well as to their overall preparation for entering the labor market at local and national level.

In addition, the centers will promote the inclusion of youth in the public life in the respective settlement, which is an important prerequisite for their retention also after graduation.

The functioning of these centers will also provides employment conditions in the respective municipalities (by creating at least 170 jobs).

The teams of the centers will work in active dialogue with the local authorities to provide comprehensive support for the successful development and realization of students and young people up to 29 years of age from the respective region in conformity with the municipal strategy for youth work. The centers will be one of the main partners of the local authorities in the implementation of the municipal plans for integration of ethnic minorities.

After the end of the projects, the municipalities on which territory the centers are established, shall provide sufficient financial resources for the continuation of the activities and maintenance of the buildings and equipment.

12. Does the project contribute to the implementation of the objectives of BULGARIA 2030 National Development Programme? Please describe.

The project is in line with **BULGARIA 2030 National Development Programme**, which Priority 1 “Education and Skills” is related to increasing the digital competencies and skills of human resources in the country in order to widely use information and communication technologies. Building these skills from an early age will help prepare young people for the modern requirements of the labor market and will contribute to improving the quality of the workforce in the country.

13. Does the project contribute to the implementation of the objectives and priorities set out in the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan? If “yes”, please describe.

The construction and repair of the specific infrastructure of the centers will meet the modern energy standards and the priorities defined in the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan.