

EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA FOR 2023/2024 SCHOOL YEAR

The main results from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) annual comprehensive surveys characterizing the activity of educational institutions are as follows:

- In 2023/2024 school year in pre-primary education (kindergartens and preparatory groups at schools) were enrolled 216.9 thousand children.
- In 2023, the number of basic education graduates was 63.4 thousand students and the number of upper-secondary education graduates from general and vocational programmes were respectively 24.2 and 15.4 thousand students.
- In 2023/2024 academic year, there were 190.5 thousand students enrolled at the different tertiary education levels (professional bachelor, bachelor and master's).
- As of 31.12.2023, for acquiring a doctor's educational and scientific degree in the country, 6 095 persons were trained, of whom 651 were foreign citizens.

Pre-primary education

As of 31.12.2023, in the country were functioning 1 827 independent kindergartens. In pre-primary education, conducted in kindergartens and preparatory groups at schools, there were enrolled 216.9 thousand children, of whom 51.5% were boys.

The coverage of children at this education level estimated by the group net enrolment rate¹ for the 2023/2024 school year was 87.9%. The highest it was in Smolyan district (96.8%) and the lowest - in Sliven district (74.8%).

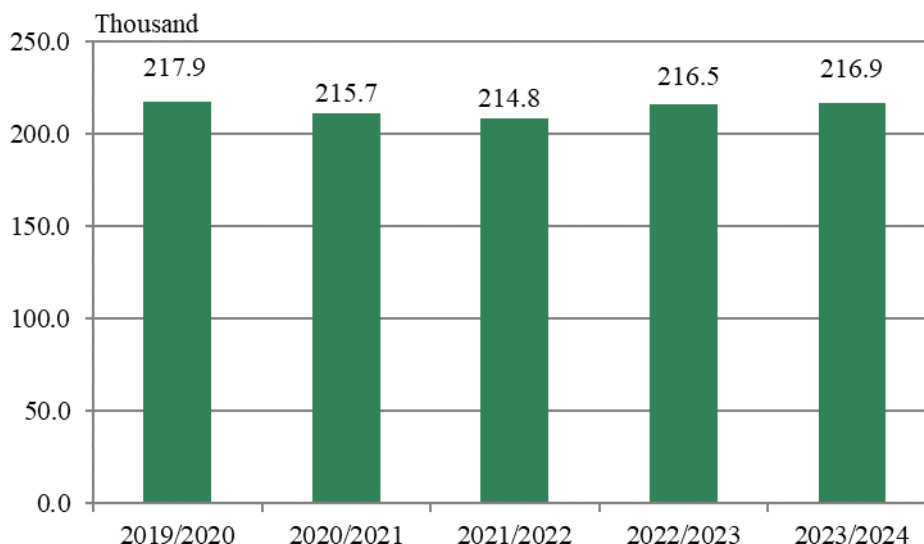
The average number of children in an independent kindergarten in the country was 119 as in the urban areas was significantly larger (152) than in the rural areas (62). A group was formed by average 22 children, respectively - 23 in urban and 20 in rural areas.

In 2023/2024 school year, 123 licensed private kindergartens were functioning in the country. 6 129 children were enrolled there, or 2.8% of the total number of children in kindergartens.

The teaching personnel employed in kindergartens were 20.0 thousand persons and in comparison with the previous school year increased by 254 persons. Kindergarten teachers were 96.2% of all personnel in kindergartens.

¹ The group net enrollment rate of children in kindergartens is calculated as a percentage of the number of children in kindergartens in the age group 3 - 6 years to the number of the population in the same age group.

Figure 1. Children enrolled at kindergartens and preparatory groups at schools



General education

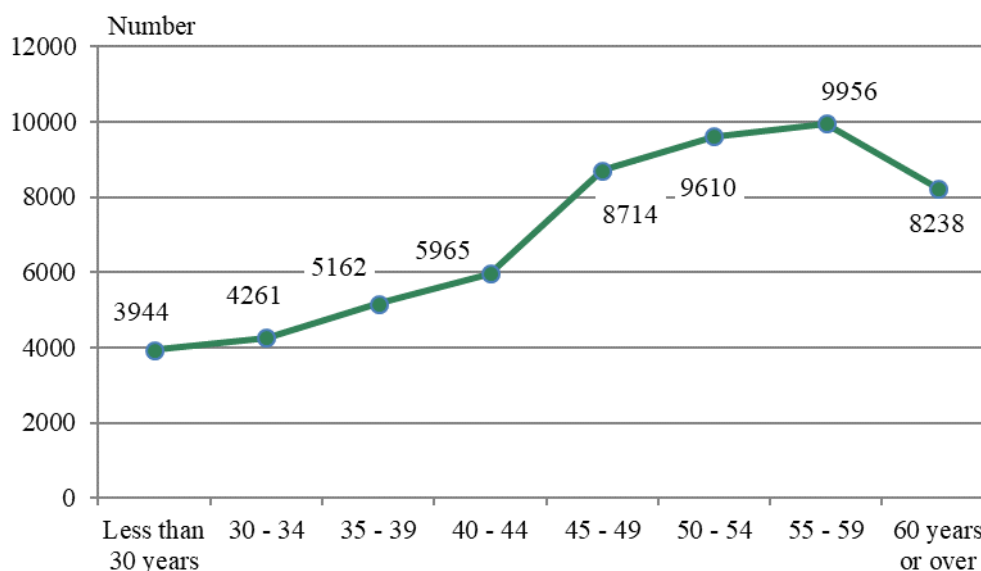
As of 31.12.2023, general education and special profile education were conducted in 1 931 general education schools². Out of them, 128 were primary schools, 1 123 - basic schools, 74 - integrated schools, 115 - upper secondary and 491 - secondary schools. In comparison with the previous school year the number of general education schools decreased by 11. The students enrolled in general education programmes were 544.9 thousand, of which 74.1 thousand - in rural areas. There were 21 pupils on average for one class in the day general education schools.

In 2023, from these schools with basic education graduated 62.0 thousand students and with upper secondary education - 24.2 thousand students.

The total number of teachers (incl. directors and deputy directors with teaching activity) employed in general education schools during 2023/2024 school year was 55.8 thousand. Of whom 95.9% with bachelor's or master's educational qualification degree, 3.2% were with professional bachelor's degree or an equivalent level in the past and 0.8% were with upper secondary education. In the teaching profession women were predominant - 85.4% of the total number of teachers.

² Incl. the Bulgarian schools abroad, financed by the state.

Figure 2. Teaching staff in general education schools by age groups in 2023/2024 school year



As of 31.12.2023, there were 94 active private general education schools in the country, out of them 9 primary schools, 33 basic, 19 special profile gymnasiums and 33 secondary schools. A total of 14 110 students were enrolled there, or 2.6% of the total number of students in general education.

Vocational education and training (VET)

Vocational education and training during the school year 2023/2024 was carried out in 21 art schools, 25 sports schools, 356 vocational gymnasiums and 19 vocational colleges with enrolment after upper secondary education. The total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes was 166.0 thousand.

Boys were predominant in vocational education and were 58.9% of the total number of students in this education programme.

In 2023, 15.3 thousand persons graduated with upper secondary education from art schools, sports schools and vocational gymnasiums.

Level of professional qualification within these learning programmes was acquired by:

- First level of professional qualification - 479 students;
- Second and third level of professional qualification - respectively 2.0 and 17.3 thousand students;
- Fourth level of professional qualification from vocational colleges with enrolment after upper secondary education - 217 students.



From the total number of students who acquired third level of professional qualification, the highest relative share was of those who studied specialties in the field³ of Engineering (24.7%), followed by those in the field of Personal services (17.3%).

The relative shares of students who acquired fourth level of professional qualification were highest in the fields of Public security services - 29.0% and Health - 25.3%.

During the 2023/2024 school year, 1 536 students were enrolled in 30 private vocational gymnasiums and private vocational colleges with enrolment after upper secondary education, or 0.9% of the total number of students in vocational education.

During the present school year, the total number of teachers (incl. directors and deputy directors with teaching activity) in vocational education was 12.8 thousand, of them 96.2% were with bachelor's or master's educational qualification degree.

In vocational training programmes against payment for acquiring a level of professional qualification at vocational training centres and vocational gymnasiums in 2023 were enrolled 8.8 thousand students aged 16 years or more. According to the level of professional qualification, their distribution was as follows: first level - 3.5 thousand, second level - 2.3 thousand and third level - 3.0 thousand persons.

Tertiary education

For the first time, an administrative register was used as a data source for the tertiary education statistics - A register of all students enrolled, students interrupted their studies and graduates, which is maintained as an electronic database by the Ministry of Education and Science through the National Information and Documentation Centre.

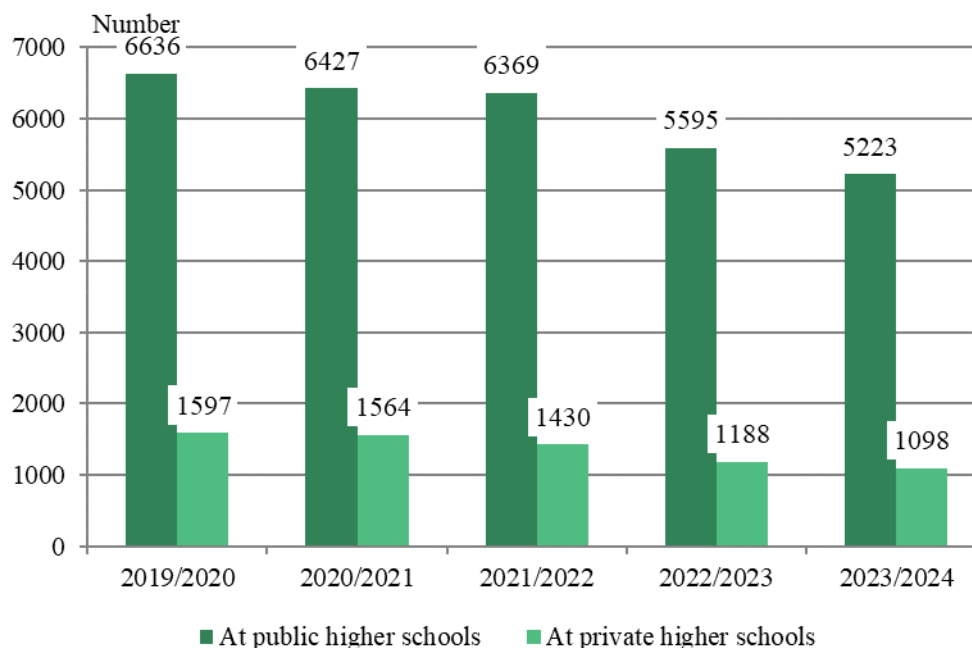
In 2023/2024 academic year, the number of students enrolled in Bulgaria for all educational-qualification degrees (professional bachelor's, bachelor's, master's and doctor's) was 196.6 thousand.

Colleges (Professional bachelor's educational-qualification degree)

In 2023/2024 academic year, for acquiring a professional bachelor's educational-qualification degree, at colleges, there were enrolled 6 321 students of whom 90.2% were Bulgarian citizens. Out of the total number of students at colleges, 1 098 persons or 17.4% were enrolled at private institutions.

³ For vocational education and training the fields of education are presented in accordance with the List of Occupations for Vocational Education and Training (approved by Order № 09-4493/18.11.2021 of the Minister of Education and Science).

Figure 3. Students enrolled at colleges⁴



In 2023, with a professional bachelor's educational-qualification degree graduated 1 603 students, of whom 63.0% were women. The highest number of graduates was in specialities within the following fields of education⁵:

- Health - 684 persons (42.7%);
- Engineering and engineering trades - 298 persons (18.6%);
- Personal services - 188 persons (11.7%);
- Business and administration - 152 persons (9.5%);
- Education - 134 persons (8.4%).

The number of teaching staff in colleges was 625, of them 322 persons or 51.5% were on full-time employment.

Universities and equivalent higher schools (Bachelor' and master's educational-qualification degrees)

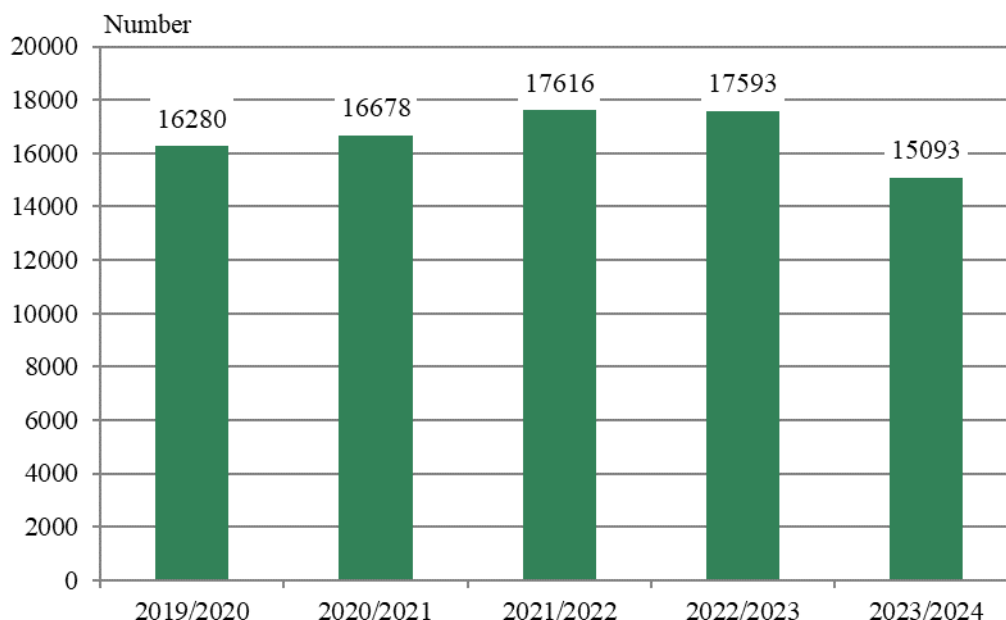
In 2023/2024 academic year, there were 184.2 thousand students at universities and specialized higher schools studying for bachelor' and master's educational-qualification degrees. In private educational institutions were enrolled 20.7 thousand or 11.3% of the students.

Students - Bulgarian citizens were 169.1 thousand or 91.8% of all students enrolled at universities and specialized higher schools. Foreign students were 15.1 thousand.

⁴ 2023/2024 - break in the time series due to a change of the data source and the methodology.

⁵ According to Classification of fields of education and training, 2015 (State Gazette, No. 46/17.06.2016)

Figure 4. Foreign students at universities and specialized higher schools⁶



The largest share of foreign students came from Greece (21.1%), followed by the United Kingdom (14.4%), Germany (9.8%), Ukraine (9.5%) and Italy (6.1%). The foreign students in the country choose mainly health-related studies, as 63.3% of them were studying specialties in this field and 49.5% of the total number were studying Medicine.

In 2023, a total of 42.5 thousand persons graduated from universities and specialised higher schools in the country, of whom 22.1 thousand with a bachelor's and 20.4 thousand with a master's degree.

The number of graduates was highest in the following fields of education: Business and Administration (21.4%), Education (17.2%), Social and behavioural sciences (10.9%), Health (9.7%) and Engineering and engineering trades (8.9%).

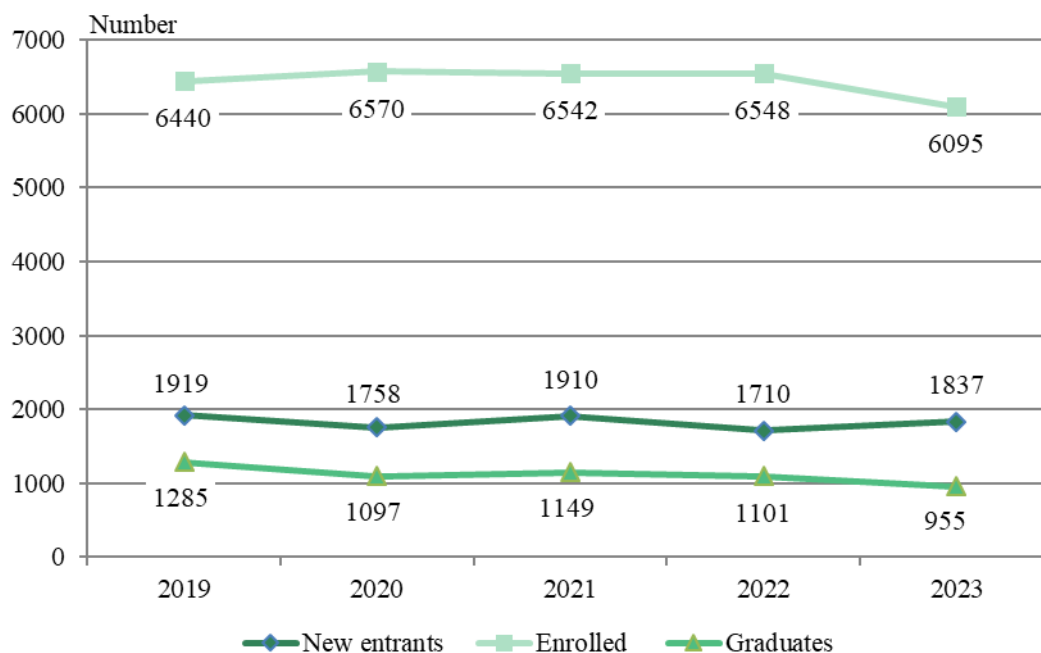
In 2023/2024 academic year, the number of academic staff in universities and specialized higher schools was 20.5 thousand, of which 52.0% were women. On full-time employment were 12.6 thousand or 61.5% of the total.

Doctor's educational and scientific degree

As of 31.12.2023, there were 6 095 PhD students enrolled in the country (Figure 5), of them 53.6% were women. Full-time students were 3 697 persons, or 60.7% of the total.

⁶ 2023/2024 - break in the time series due to a change of the data source and the methodology.

Figure 5. New entrants, enrolled and graduates at doctoral level⁷



The foreign PhD students were 651 or 10.7% of the total number. The largest share came from China - 22.6%, followed by those from Greece (16.6%), the Republic of North Macedonia (7.2%), Israel (6.3%) and Kosovo (6.1%).

In private institutions were trained 2.8% of the PhD students. Out of them 75 persons, or 11.5%, were foreign citizens.

In 2023, doctor's degree was acquired by 955 persons, of whom 517, or 54.1%, were women. The largest shares of graduates were recorded in the following fields of education:

- Health - 156 persons (16.3%);
- Social and behavioural sciences - 121 persons (12.7%);
- Business and administration - 103 persons (10.8%);
- Education - 85 persons (8.9%);
- Engineering and engineering trades - 58 persons (6.1%).

⁷ 2023 - break in the time series due to a change of the data source.



Methodological notes

From the 2021/2022 school year, the National Statistical Institute (NSI) has changed the preschool and school education surveys data source, moving entirely to information from the administrative registers of the Ministry of Education and Science, due to which there is a break in the time series. Additional information is published on the NSI's website within the survey's metadata (<https://nsi.bg/bg/node/3415> and <https://nsi.bg/bg/node/3433>).

From the 2023/2024 academic year, NSI has changed the data source for the students in tertiary education, moving entirely to information from the administrative register of the Ministry of Education and Science, due to which there is a break in the time series.

Education statistics was developed on the basis of Regulation № 452/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning, the current legal basis in Bulgaria in the area of education, the International Standard Classification of Education - revision 2011 (ISCED 2011) and the concomitant methodological instructions.

ISCED was designed to serve as a framework to classify educational activities as defined in programmes and the resulting qualifications into internationally agreed categories.

The National Statistical Institute conducts yearly exhaustive surveys that characterize the activity of educational institutions.

Educational institutions directly conduct teaching via educational programmes to the enrolments in organized classes (groups) or via distance mode of learning. Those programmes lead to the attainment of an education degree and/or level of professional qualification. Non-formal training and informal learning are not covered by the scope of the education system according to the used ISCED 2011 definitions.

With its surveys, NSI aims to determine the number of students in the education system as of a given date of observation. This is the basis for calculating the internationally accepted indicator 'Participation Rate of the Population in the Education System', which represents the relative share of students enrolled from a certain age group in relation to the number of the constant population of the country in the same age group.

For more information and data on education, visit NSI's webpage (<http://www.nsi.bg/en>), section Education and Lifelong Learning as well as information system Infostat (https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/module.jsf?x_2=42).