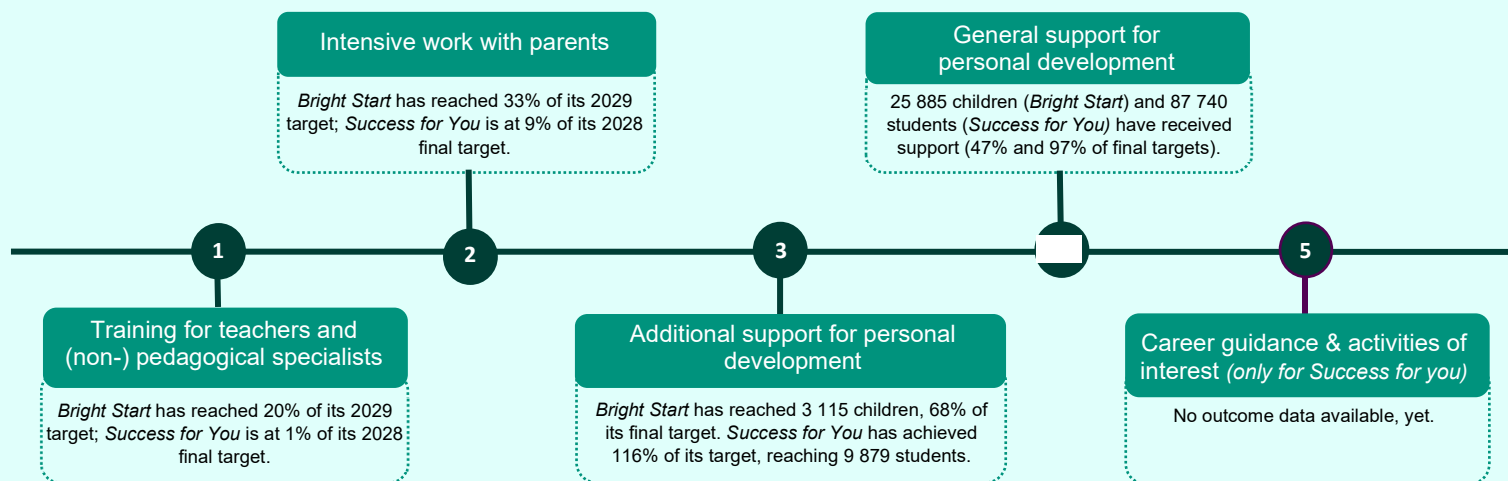


Implementing inclusive education projects in Bulgaria: Lessons from an evaluation of *Bright Start* and *Success for You*

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECTS

Bright Start (BG05SFPR001-1.003-0001) and *Success for You* (BG05SFPR001-1.001-0001) aim to support the personal development (i.e. academic progress, emotional well-being, social skills and cognitive growth) of learners from early childhood to upper secondary education.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS (APRIL 2025)



STRENGTHS OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

RELEVANCE

A universal model for inclusive education

Bright Start and *Success for You* are built on the premise that inclusive practices benefit all learners, starting early. This aligns with international principles.

RELEVANCE

Highly relevant interventions for inclusion

Efforts to build professional capacity for inclusive education and enhance parental engagement are relevant to the needs of key stakeholders in Bulgaria and the major barriers to inclusion.

COHERENCE

Coherence with previous and current EU projects

Both projects build on previous EU-funded initiatives, institutionalising earlier diagnostic instruments and creating a coherent continuum of support across compulsory education.

EU ADDED VALUE

Operating at an unprecedented scale

The projects show strong alignment with national and European policy priorities and operate at a scale that exceeds national programmes, significantly broadening access to inclusive education.

EFFECTIVENESS

Creating the conditions for learner-centred interventions

Bright Start and *Success for You* have established clear, structured processes that enable a learner-centred approach; stakeholders perceive this as leading to positive outcomes for learners.

EFFICIENCY

Efficient communication and extensive reporting and control

National and regional teams effectively ensure activities are delivered as planned through efficient cross-level communication and extensive reporting and control activities.

SUSTAINABILITY

Spreading awareness of inclusive practices

Bright Start and *Success for You* build strong awareness of inclusive practices across administrations and institutions, laying solid foundations for inclusive education long term.

SUSTAINABILITY

Broader scope of data collection

The collection of monitoring data under *Bright Start* and *Success for You* has expanded as compared to previous projects, incorporating outcome data for learners.

REMAINING CHALLENGES FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The educational effectiveness of project activities can be strengthened

Capacity

- Training under Activity 1 is small in scale and, under *Success for You*, narrow in scope. National programmes can complement, but only if staff accurately identify their needs and relevant training exists.
- There is no capacity-building for kindergarten/school leaders despite their critical role.
- Recruitment of specialist professionals overlooks structural barriers in their availability.

Support

- There is a lack of clarity across project levels on what intensive work with parents, and support for gifted learners or those whose first language is not Bulgarian should entail.
- Methodological guidance and support for implementing inclusive pedagogies are not embedded in project design.
- Reporting and control are the focus of project implementation, creating some inefficiencies.

Data

- Efforts to allocate resources by need can only cover kindergartens and schools who apply to participate in the projects.
- Data on the outcomes of work with parents and staff training is not being collected.
- School visits are typically compliance-oriented, creating a missed opportunity for project learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Enhance measures to strengthen professional capacity for inclusive education**, including among kindergarten and school leaders, by expanding the scale, scope and format of training.
- 2 Improve activity guidance** by better defining relevant practical approaches to parental engagement, supporting gifted learners and those whose first language is not Bulgarian, and general support in schools.
- 3 In the next programming period, create the conditions for national activity coordinators, regional project teams and other public institutions to provide methodological support** by assigning responsibility, developing expertise and making time.
- 4 Strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes to facilitate more learning** across the system.
- 5 Develop targeted efforts to increase project participation** starting with key districts before expanding nationally.

Information about the evaluation



This summary is based on findings published in OECD (2026), *Implementing inclusive education projects in Bulgaria: Lessons from an evaluation of Bright Start and Success for You*. The full report is available via the QR code below and at <https://doi.org/10.1787/030e0717-en>.

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

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