

# **5**

## **Outreach activities to the out-of-work population**

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This chapter discusses outreach activities to unemployed and inactive people in Bulgaria. While the National Employment Agency (NEA) has the leading role in reaching out to people who do not work and need support, further institutions implement outreach activities, often in co-operation with the NEA, such as the Social Assistance Agency (SAA) and municipalities. Registering with the NEA is a requirement for receiving unemployment benefits and social assistance benefits. While Bulgaria has stepped up efforts to establish a contact with unemployed and inactive people, there is a large pool of people who do not work but do not register with the NEA. In an international comparison, the share of the out-of-work population registering with the NEA is low. Unemployed and inactive people belonging to some specific groups of the population are particularly difficult to reach for the NEA, including young people, people close to retirement age and Roma.

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## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses how the National Employment Agency (NEA) and other institutions reach out to the out-of-work population in Bulgaria, which comprises unemployed and inactive people of working age. Outreach to people who do not work and, more generally, people in need of support plays an important role in active labour market policy systems, as an adequate provision of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) can only be achieved if a sufficiently large share of unemployed and inactive people register with the NEA.

In order to discuss and analyse outreach to the out-of-work population, the chapter starts by identifying the institutions that are involved in reaching out to people who do not work. After this, it analyses financial incentives to register with the NEA, which are a strong driver for some (but not all) groups of unemployed and inactive people to register with the NEA, followed by a discussion of specific outreach activities the NEA carries out. The chapter then reports estimates of the share of the unemployed and of the out-of-work population (comprising both unemployed and inactive people) that registers with the NEA, highlighting that there is a large pool of people who do not work but have no contact with the NEA, especially among vulnerable groups. The final section summarises the key findings.

## 5.2. Institutions involved in outreach to inactive and unemployed people

As the central institution implementing policies to promote employment, the NEA has the leading role in approaching people who need support to find work.<sup>1</sup> This function of the NEA, which exceeds the responsibility of public employment services (PES) in a number of other European and OECD countries, is of particular importance in the light of looming labour market shortages and the need for a more inclusive labour market. The outreach strategies the NEA develops and puts into practice correspond to the labour market priorities set by the MLSP. In addition to the NEA, further public institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private actors contribute to reaching people in need of support, often in co-operation with the NEA.

### 5.2.1. National Employment Agency (NEA) and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)

The NEA is an executive agency of the MLSP. Both institutions are jointly responsible for ensuring an adequate provision of ALMPs according to the legal regulation in force (Republic of Bulgaria, 2001<sup>[1]</sup>).

While the MLSP holds general and strategic responsibilities regarding the provision of ALMPs, the NEA has partial decision power or is consulted on strategic decisions, in addition to delivering ALMPs (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[2]</sup>). This general division of responsibilities between the MLSP and the NEA implies that the NEA has a direct responsibility for outreach to unemployed and inactive people, as it is in charge of the daily implementation of ALMPs and outreach activities. In particular, NEA's 106 local employment offices and 145 affiliated offices/branches play a central role in approaching people in need of support. NEA staff working in local offices regularly engage in specific outreach activities, which can be permanent or temporary, including in small settlements far from economic centres (see Section 5.3). In 2020, more than 35 000 economically inactive people were activated by the NEA (NEA, 2021<sup>[3]</sup>).

The MLSP influences outreach to the unemployed and inactive indirectly, most notably by setting the general rules regulating ALMP provision. In particular, it takes budgetary decisions on ALMPs and defines target groups for support, thereby laying out general priorities and the scope of outreach activities. For instance, by setting up, approving and co-ordinating the national programme “Activation of Inactive Persons”, the MLSP put a specific focus on targeting and outreach to young people, Roma people and other vulnerable groups (NEA, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>). Under this programme, more than 11 000 inactive people

belonging to vulnerable groups were activated in 2019 and 11 650 in 2020.<sup>2</sup> The MLSP co-ordinates the implementation of the module on co-operation of youth mediators and municipalities.

### **5.2.2. Further key stakeholders involved in outreach to the inactive population**

Beyond the NEA and the MLSP, further stakeholders take on important functions in the outreach to the inactive. Several public institutions co-operate with the NEA in order to identify and establish a contact the out-of-work population and vulnerable groups, most notably the Social Assistance Agency (SAA) and municipalities. In addition, private employment agencies operate and connect unemployed and inactive people with employers and the work of NGOs permits to approach inactive people.

#### *Social Assistance Agency (SAA)*

The Social Assistance Agency (SAA), which administers the payment of social assistance and other benefits (see Chapter 4), is a common entry point into Bulgaria's social system for people in need of income-support. For most claimants, registration with the NEA, followed by a 6-month waiting period, is a pre-condition to become eligible for social assistance. Beyond SAA claimants themselves, family members of social assistance beneficiaries must also register with the SAA as an eligibility requirement. The SAA and NEA work closely together at the local level, thereby favouring the outreach to inactive and unemployed people. The SAA commonly redirects inactive persons wishing to file for social assistance to the NEA, in order to permit them to register with the NEA and receive specific support.

The SAA and NEA both use the inter-institutional Registry Information Exchange System RegiX (see Box 5.1) and have set up an automated data exchange once per month, including on sanctions and de-registrations of claimants. This data exchange facilitates the identification of people who are out of work and are not registered with the NEA. It is among the closest collaborations between the NEA and another institution in terms of data exchange, even though data exchanges also take place on an ad-hoc basis between the NEA and further institutions, e.g. the National Revenue Agency and the Ministry for Public Works. While the automated data exchange between the NEA and the SAA facilitates the work of both institutions, a higher frequency of the exchanges (e.g. on a daily basis) could potentially accelerate and further support outreach to the inactive.

The SAA and the NEA run joint Centres for Employment and Social Assistance (CESAs) in order to simplify access to services and provide holistic support through so-called “one-stop-shops”, thereby favouring the activation of inactive people who wish to claim social assistance (see Section 5.3). Beyond data exchange and running joint centres, the SAA and the NEA also co-operate to organise meetings and information campaigns, which, among other things, aim to increase awareness of NEA services and access to people in need of support.

A close co-operation between the NEA and the SAA is a key element to well-functioning outreach to vulnerable people with a large distance to the labour market and both organisations should continue their collaborative efforts. Nevertheless, take-up of social assistance is low in Bulgaria (OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>), e.g. due to long waiting periods and low benefit levels, limiting the pool of inactive people that can be reached through the co-operation between the NEA and the SAA (see Chapter 4). Therefore, outreach would benefit most if the close co-operation between the institutions was complemented by measures to increase social assistance take-up (see Section 5.6).

### Box 5.1. Bulgaria's inter-institutional Registry Information Exchange System (RegiX)

Bulgaria's inter-institutional Registry Information Exchange System (RegiX) is a digital infrastructure permitting automated information and data exchanges across registers from different public institutions using machine-to-machine (M2M) communication. RegiX is hosted by the State e-Government Agency (SEGA) and it part of Bulgaria's central e-government system.

The main objectives of RegiX are to favour holistic service provision through an enhanced and better use of client data and to increase the efficiency of administrative processes (e.g. providing personal data only once to a public institution rather than to each institution or service separately).

As of September 2021, more than 70 registers are included in RegiX, such as the Population Database, the Property Register and the Register of Identity Documents, and information from these registers can be accessed by authorised users. According to RegiX website statistics, several hundred information exchange requests are sometimes filed per hour within RegiX.

Source: <https://regix-service.egov.bg/>; European Commission (2020<sup>[6]</sup>), "Digital Public Administration Factsheet Bulgaria", [https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Digital\\_Public\\_Administration\\_Factsheets\\_Bulgaria\\_vFINAL\\_0.pdf](https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Digital_Public_Administration_Factsheets_Bulgaria_vFINAL_0.pdf).

### *Municipalities*

Municipalities have a high potential to identify and reach inactive and unemployed people and direct them towards the NEA, as they are often in closer contact to people in need than other institutions that are less rooted at the local level. For example, municipalities are bound to provide assistance services at no cost to people with no income according to the Social Services Act, which permits to establish ties with people in need (OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). Especially in remote settlements, the involvement of municipalities is a crucial factor permitting to identify inactive people with no contact to the NEA (and SAA), and possibly motivate them to register. Among youth activators and Roma mediators that were interviewed for this study, 86% co-operate with mayors of small settlements on a regular basis to reach out to inactive or unemployed people (Annex 5.B).

Municipalities also contribute to the activation of inactive people due to their contacts with social assistance recipients. In particular, social assistance recipients are required to perform community work, which is organised and supervised by municipalities, in order to remain eligible for social assistance. Community work can help to build up regular working habits and may allow municipalities to identify inactive or unemployed people who have some or full work capacity. In order to facilitate the organisation of community work and the motivation of social assistance recipients, municipalities with high numbers of social assistance recipients employ special community service organisers. In 2020, municipalities in Bulgaria employed 167 of such organisers (yearly average).

The role of municipalities in the outreach to unemployed and inactive people depends on the capacity, and sometimes willingness, of mayors and municipality staff to co-operate with NEA's local offices and NEA mediators and activators. In many cases, the ability of municipalities to co-operate and co-ordinate with other institutions, including the NEA, is compromised due to budgetary reasons or weak governance (World Bank, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>).

The national programme "Activation of Inactive Persons" (NEA, 2021<sup>[8]</sup>) reinforced the role of municipalities in the outreach to the inactive. Under the programme, many municipalities hired youth mediators to carry out specific outreach activities to vulnerable groups (see Section 5.4). In 2019, 93 youth mediators worked for municipalities around the country under the programme, aiming to establish a contact

with inactive youth and activate them. Further municipality staff, in particular staff specialising on social activities, employment programmes and education, support youth mediators in their work.

### *Private employment agencies*

There are a number of private employment agencies in Bulgaria that contribute to the outreach to people who are out of employment. In 2020, close to 13% of the unemployed (i.e. people actively looking for work) were in contact with a private employment agency to find work according to the European Labour Force Survey, which is relatively little compared to other countries (see Figure 5.3). The use of private employment agencies among the unemployed was persistently lower than on average in the EU over the last years (Eurostat, 2021<sup>[9]</sup>).

In light of the comparatively limited role of private actors in outreach to unemployed and inactive people and the delivery of ALMPs, recent National Employment Action Plans have formulated objectives for intensified public private partnerships. Experiences from OECD and EU countries show that such partnerships can largely contribute to an efficient and effective provision of ALMPs (European Commission, 2021<sup>[10]</sup>). However, setting-up well-functioning private public partnerships takes time and requires mutual trust, regular communication and exchanges on what works and what does not. For example, in the case of outcome-based outsourcing, setting appropriate prices is challenging and requires from the PES the development of governance instruments and a deep understanding of labour market challenges (see Chapter 6) (OECD, 2019<sup>[11]</sup>). In some EU and OECD countries, PES have engaged in narrow partnerships with a broad set of public and private actors focusing on different activity areas, including outreach to jobseekers and the implementation of ALMPs (see Box 5.2).

#### **Box 5.2. The role of partnerships between the PES and public and private actors in France**

The French PES, *Pôle Emploi*, has a longstanding history of partnerships with both public and private actors, aiming to permit integrated and tailored service provision. One specific focus of these partnerships lies on reaching vulnerable groups and integrating them into employment.

One notable example of partnerships between the PES and other actors are the so-called “local communities without long-term unemployment” (*territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée*). This programme offers long-term unemployed individuals a permanent contract for a job with a social enterprise, in line with their skills. Jobs provided under this scheme must be useful for society and address unmet needs while they may not stand in direct competition with the unsubsidised private market. The approach relies largely on narrow partnerships at the local level e.g. between the PES, municipalities and social enterprises. The different actors involved in these partnerships need to co-operate at various stages of the programme, e.g. developing an outreach strategy to motivate long-term unemployed people to participate and identifying unmet needs in the municipality. The programme has so far been tested in 10 local areas and will be rolled out in at least 50 additional local areas between 2021 and 2026. The experiment and its activities are closely monitored and evaluations are under way. According to intermediary evaluations, out of 1 849 jobseekers wishing to participate in the programme, 1 112 were hired in one of the local areas between 2016 and 2019. Despite promising results, the intermediary evaluations also point to scope for improvements, including better and more explicit regulations (e.g. regarding the role of each stakeholder and the identification of eligible participants) and the need for more upskilling of participants.

A second example of partnerships is the co-operation between *Pôle Emploi* and private employment agencies. In May 2021, *Pôle Emploi* signed a three-year general agreement with a federation of temporary work companies, *Prism'emploi*, which represents more than 600 temporary work companies.

The agreement contains a commitment of both partners to improve communication and information exchanges and intensify existing co-operation practices. For instance, regular meetings between the staff of both the PES and *Prism'emploi* are planned, and the two organisations agreed to co-operate in terms of access to data banks containing profiles of jobseekers. Beyond this national agreement, *Pôle Emploi* has specific agreements with regional federations of temporary work agencies as well as with individual temporary work companies. These agreements can include e.g. the commitment to share data and information (e.g. regarding planned activities) on a regular basis, or to co-operate to improve methodological approaches (e.g. sharing profiling methods).

Note: Pôle Emploi presented and discussed its most important partnerships with the Bulgarian PES during an [international workshop](#) and a [study visit](#) in September and October 2021.

Source: TZCLD (2021<sup>[12]</sup>), “Territoire zéro chômeur de longue durée”, <https://www.tzcld.fr/>; ETCLD-TZCLD (2019<sup>[13]</sup>), “Territoire zéro chômeur de longue durée - rapport d'analyse”, [https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport\\_d\\_analyse\\_etcl-d-tzcld.pdf](https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport_d_analyse_etcl-d-tzcld.pdf); Pôle Emploi and Prism'Emploi (2021<sup>[14]</sup>), “Accord cadre national entre Prism'Emploi et Pôle Emploi”, <https://www.prismemploi.eu/sites/default/files/2021-08/Accord%20Prism%27emploi%20-%20P%C3%B4le%20emploi%20-%2012%20mai%202021.pdf>.

### *Social partners*

The social partners contribute to outreach to unemployed and inactive people, including through their participation in tripartite bodies at the national, regional and local level. As members of the National Council for Employment Promotion, the social partners contribute to the development and implementation of Bulgaria's employment policy (Republic of Bulgaria, 2001<sup>[11]</sup>), which includes responsibilities related to outreach. For example, the social partners are involved in developing the National Employment Action Plan, which determines the funding that is available for hiring activators and mediators. The social partners are also members of the Council to the NEA Executive Director, monitoring the implementation of employment policy and making proposals for improving the activities of the NEA.

Every year, the social partners' national organisations can submit project proposals to the MLSP to apply for funding under the National Action Plan for Employment for their training and employment projects. Projects involving outreach to the inactive can be among these projects. For example, in recent years, projects on outreach and activation of inactive people submitted by employers or trade unions have received such funding.

### *NGOs*

Several NGOs are involved in the outreach to the out-of-work population. In particular, this is the case for NGOs working with youth, long-term unemployed or ethnic minorities and co-operating with the NEA. For example, NGOs working with youth can help identify NEETs in need of support, in particular in small settlements. For example, due to its youth activities, the Bulgarian Red Cross has close ties to young people and is in a good position to identify young people in need and accompany them throughout the labour market integration process (Bulgarian Red Cross, 2021<sup>[15]</sup>). Similarly, NGOs working with Roma people on the local level can largely facilitate interactions with unemployed and inactive Roma using their contacts to this community. In some cases, the NEA sets up formal agreements with NGOs to specify their co-operation in outreach activities and the activation of the out-of-work populations. In the context of the programme “Ready for work”, for example, the NEA signed formal contracts with several NGOs<sup>3</sup> and associations on their contribution to the outreach to inactive people, including work to identify and subsequently activate inactive people.

### *Schools*

Schools are in direct contact with young people who are about to finish their education and may face challenges to enter the labour market for a number of reasons, such as a low number of job offers, no previous work experience, or a lack of motivation to engage in a recruitment process. Using their close contact to young people who might become inactive or unemployed, many schools co-operate with the NEA, e.g. by working with youth activators. Among the activators and mediators interviewed for this study, almost all co-operate with schools to identify and reach out to young inactive people (see Annex 5.B).

In addition to the stakeholders discussed above, other institutions contribute to reaching inactive and unemployed people in need of support, either directly or indirectly. For example, community centres, with which labour offices co-operate at the local level, facilitate contacts with people who do not work. The vast majority of community centres around the country, including in rural settlements, have implemented the project “Global Libraries”, which attracts inactive and unemployed people by providing access to the internet. This offers the possibility to identify and approach people who might need support and are currently not in contact with the NEA, in particular NEETs in small settlements. Further important stakeholders involved in outreach activities include Local Probation Commissions, which play a role in reaching and activating inactive people who have committed criminal offenses, and pedagogical experts, who are of great importance in reaching minors who have left school.

### **5.3. Financial incentives can be a strong driver to register with the NEA, but less so for people who are far off the labour market**

Reaching out to inactive people and unemployed jobseekers in need of support is one of the NEA’s key functions. In order to achieve this objective, the NEA carries out a range of outreach activities, which often target vulnerable groups and people that are particularly difficult to approach (see Section 5.4).

Such outreach activities have to be seen in the wider context of Bulgaria’s social benefit system, taking into consideration that it creates strong financial incentives to register with the NEA by making unemployment benefits and social benefits conditional on NEA registration (see Chapter 4). More specifically, registration with the NEA is a prerequisite for benefits in the following cases:

- People who lost employment will only receive unemployment benefits if they register with the NEA.
- People in need with little financial resources are required to register with the NEA in order to become eligible for social assistance, in general after a waiting period of 6 months. Only in some specific cases, no registration and waiting period are required, e.g. in the case of a parent caring for a child under three years, a person caring for one or more sick family members and pregnant women.
- People with an assessed disability of less than 50% are still required to register with the NEA to be eligible for social benefits.
- Unemployment benefit and social assistance recipients are granted free health insurance in addition to receiving benefits, as contributions are covered by the state budget according to the Health Insurance Act. Gaining access to free health insurance can be a strong incentive to register with the NEA.

While making benefits conditional on NEA registration risks leaving people in need behind, in particular people with a large distance to the labour market, it is a major incentive for many unemployed and inactive people to establish a contact with the NEA and therefore receive employment support. According to NEA micro data, 43% of the jobseekers who were registered with the NEA at the end of 2019 received unemployment benefits, and 10% registered (mainly) to become eligible for social benefits from other institutions.<sup>4</sup> The remaining half (47%) registered for reasons unrelated to unemployment benefits and



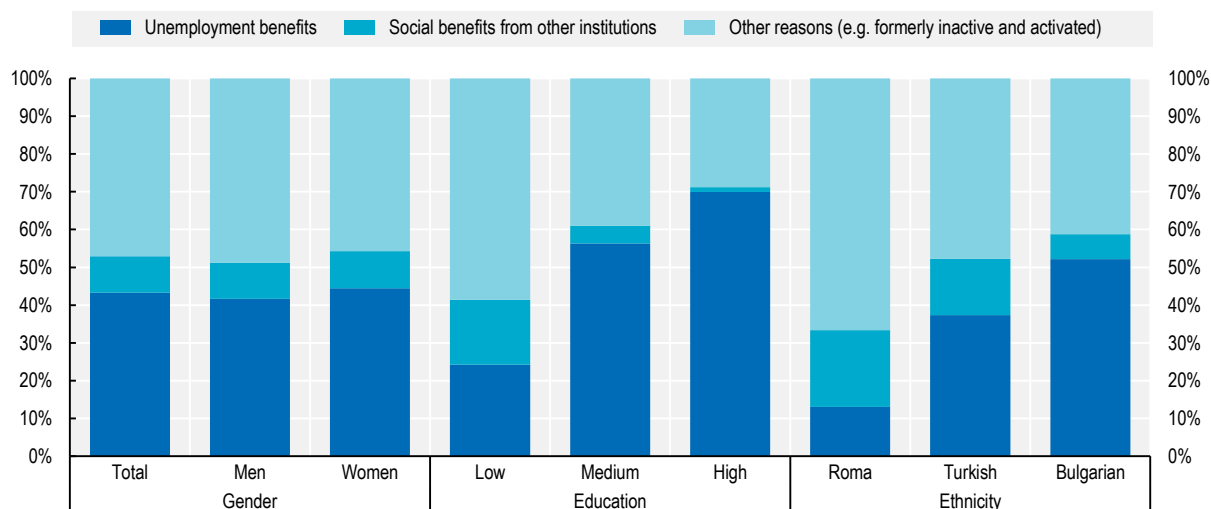
social benefits, e.g. they were activated by activators or they were inactive and registered on their initiative to find employment (Figure 5.1).

Access to unemployment benefits is a strong driver to register with the NEA for people who are eligible for them, i.e. for people who have recently stopped working. The vast majority (70%) of high-educated registered jobseekers receives unemployment benefits, while among the low-educated, unemployment benefits play a role in one in every four NEA registrations only (Figure 5.1), reflecting their missing contribution records. This pattern highlights that requiring jobseekers to register with the NEA as a pre-requisite for unemployment benefits is a very useful tool to get hold of jobseekers with existing ties to the labour market, but it rarely permits to reach the most vulnerable groups.

Conversely, registration requirements for the receipt of social assistance and other social benefits are more often a driver to register with the NEA for disadvantaged groups than for jobseekers with lower vulnerability. According to the NEA micro-data, about 17% of the low-educated register with the NEA to receive social benefits, against 5% among people with medium education and 1% among highly educated job seekers. Similar patterns hold for other vulnerable groups, including Roma (20%) and people living in remote areas (14%), who register more commonly with the NEA to receive social benefits than other groups.

**Figure 5.1. Gaining access to unemployment benefits is a strong driver in Bulgaria to register with the NEA for some groups of jobseekers, but not for the most vulnerable**

Main reason for registration among jobseekers who were registered with the NEA on 31.12.2019



NEA: National Employment Agency.

Note: *Unemployment benefits* refers to people who received unemployment benefits at one point in 2019. *Social benefits from other institutions* refers to jobseekers who were classified by caseworkers as registering mainly to receive social benefits from other institutions. *Other reasons* include formerly inactive who registered with the NEA mostly to find a job or were activated by activators or mediators.

Source: OECD calculation based on National Employment Agency micro data.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/nlejka>



## 5.4. Bulgaria has introduced a number of specific outreach activities to reach people in need of support

The NEA carries out specific outreach activities to approach people in need of support, with a focus on inactive people with a large distance to the labour market, recognising that many unemployed and inactive people, do not register as jobseekers on their own initiative, in particular those belonging to vulnerable groups. For example because they are not aware of the NEA support that is available or are not convinced that they would benefit from support. Among the most important outreach activities by the NEA are Mobile Labour Office Workplaces, Mobile Labour Offices, Family Labour Consultants, Career Centres at regional NEA directorates, the work of activators and mediators and the organisation of job fairs.

### 5.4.1. Mobile Labour Office Workplaces (MLOWs)

The NEA sets up Mobile Labour Office Workplaces (MLOWs) to reach out to disadvantaged groups and inactive persons living in small and remote settlements with no access to regular labour offices. MLOWs are organised in public premises (e.g. town halls) for a limited amount of time (e.g. one day) and offer unemployment registration and labour mediation. Thereby, they permit people who cannot afford to travel to the labour office to enter in contact with the NEA and prolong existing registrations as unemployed. MLOWs aim to identify inactive and unemployed people in need of support and to raise awareness of the different types of support the NEA offers, in order to increase jobseekers' motivation to register with the labour office. The staff working in MLOWs typically consists of a labour counsellor and a youth or Roma mediator who closely co-operate with local actors (e.g. local administration) to facilitate the identification of people in need of support.

### 5.4.2. Mobile Labour Offices (MLOs)

In 2019, the NEA introduced Mobile Labour Offices (MLOs) to extend and complement the services of MLOWs (NEA, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>). MLOs offer the full range of services that is on offer in regular labour offices, including services to ensure access to training, which is not the case in MLOWs. MLOs are organised by local labour offices, and MLO teams typically consist of a head of unit, a labour counsellor, a psychologist or caseworker, a youth/Roma mediator and an IT expert (all from the labour office), and sometimes a youth mediator from the municipality. The focus of MLOs lies on counselling, providing information and motivating job seekers to register and use the NEA's services. MLOs also target employers willing to hire workers in remote areas, including both employers who operate locally and employers who are ready to ensure transportation between the place of work and the small settlements where people live. In most cases, MLOs are organised once a month in bigger settlements, and every two to six months in small settlements. MLOs are organised in all districts (oblasts) except Sofia city, where no MLOs take place because they are not truly remote areas. The NEA is working to set up a full tracking of the results of MLOs in the National Data Base Information System.

### 5.4.3. Family Labour Consultants (FLC)

In 2019, following a pilot programme and an analysis of its efficiency, the NEA rolled out the use of Family Labour Consultants (FLC) as a reorganisation of NEA services across the country (MLSP, 2019<sup>[17]</sup>). FLCs aim to provide holistic support to families in need, offering tailored services to each family member, taking account of individual circumstances. For example, the services FLCs can provide include vocational counselling and employment information services for adults, as well as services targeted at students enrolled in lower or upper secondary education for the children living in the same household. Providing consultations to entire families permits to reach unemployed and inactive family members who were not registered with the NEA previously.

FLC services are usually provided by labour counsellors at local labour offices, i.e. FLCs are typically not additional staff, but rather counsellors who were already employed and took on this role. Each local labour office determines the staff members that should act as FLCs, often choosing staff with long work experience or education in social activities and/or psychology. Depending on the profile of the family, psychologists, mediators (e.g. Roma mediators) and caseworkers may also be involved in the family labour consultations (Table 5.1). The exact composition of the team that is available for FLCs depends on the staff profile that is available at local labour offices. In total, 630 labour market experts carried out family labour consultations in 2019, with the vast majority being labour counsellors and labour mediators, comparing to a total of about 2 400 client facing NEA staff at the end of 2019.

**Table 5.1. A high number of NEA staff act as Family Labour Consultants**

Staff providing family labour consultations, by region in Bulgaria

Oblast	Labour counsellors and labour mediators	Roma mediators	Psychologists	Caseworkers	Total
Blagoevgrad	68	0	0	0	68
Burgas	70	0	0	2	72
Haskovo	46	2	3	3	54
Lovech	69	0	4	3	76
Montana	46	6	4	3	59
Plovdiv	89	1	2	1	93
Ruse	63	0	4	2	69
Sofia	63	3	2	1	69
Varna	63	1	2	4	70
Total	577	13	21	19	630

NEA: National Employment Agency.

Source: Non-publicly available information provided by the National Employment Agency.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/0em4ia>

#### **5.4.4. Career Centres at regional labour offices**

Since 2015, ten Career Offices have been operating in the NEA's regional employment service directorates in order to reach and support unemployed and inactive people, as well as employees and self-employed people wishing to improve their professional development (NEA, 2015<sup>[18]</sup>). The Career Centres, which were introduced as part of the project "Career development of employees", offer vocational counselling to registered jobseekers and, at least in some centres, non-registered jobseekers. At the centres, jobseekers can receive information on the labour market situation and employment opportunities, and participate in workshops and "Career Days". The centres are located in the regional directorates in bigger cities (Sofia, Burgas, Haskovo, Lovech, Montana, Plovdiv, Ruse, Sofia, Varna), i.e. they mainly reach inactive and unemployed people living in or close to these cities or having access to transportation.

#### **5.4.5. Centres for Employment and Social Assistance (CESA)**

Across Bulgaria, the NEA and the SAA run 76 joint Centres for Employment and Social Assistance (CESA). The major objective of these centres, which were introduced under the ESF/OP HRD-funded project "Face to Face Services in the Centres for Employment and Social Assistance", is to offer a comprehensive and individualised set of services (comprising both NEA and SAA services) to people from disadvantaged groups. The services aim to prevent social exclusion and favour the reintegration of social assistance

recipients into the labour market. While the Centres are located at NEA's or SAA's local premises, they are separated from the rest of the premises (e.g. an individual office in which both NEA and SAA services are provided), aiming to create a confidential environment. The close co-operation of NEA and SAA permits to provide vulnerable groups with the services that correspond best to their individual needs and favour the activation of social assistance recipients. In order to reach out to people living in remote areas, CESA staff also offer mobile services. An evaluation of CESAs was carried out in 2017, which identified scope for improvements in the functioning of the centres. As a result, the set of services available in the CESAs was extended in early 2018 as well as in 2020, when it was extended.

#### **5.4.6. Youth activators, Roma mediators and youth mediators**

Youth activators and Roma mediators are NEA staff specialising on the outreach to young people and Roma people, respectively, whereas youth mediators are employed by municipalities to approach inactive or unemployed young people.<sup>5</sup> The OECD carried out a qualitative survey with youth activators, youth mediators and Roma mediators on their work processes (see Annex 5.B) to gain specific insights for this section.

Youth and Roma activators/mediators were hired under the national programme "Activation of Inactive Persons" (NEA, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>) to strengthen outreach to vulnerable groups and the NEA programme "Ready for Work" (NEA, 2021<sup>[19]</sup>) to activate NEETs. In 2020, there were 78 Roma mediators and 92 youth mediators working for the NEA or municipalities under the national programme "Activation of Inactive Persons", down from 92 Roma mediators and 101 youth mediators in 2015. In addition, the NEA hired youth activators under the programme "Ready for work" (up to 100 until the end of the project), which will run until 2023.

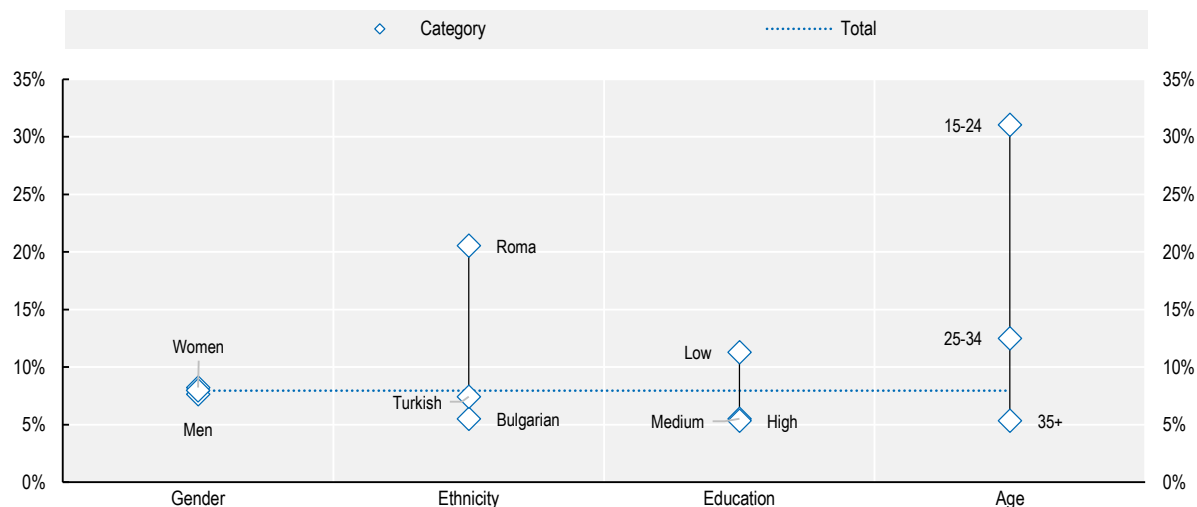
Although their affiliation and main target groups differ, the main duties of all three types of activators/mediators are similar and involve fieldwork activities, such as the identification of inactive persons and raising awareness about the benefits of registering with the local labour office. In addition, activators and mediators working for the NEA often carry out labour counselling, e.g. they can themselves register the inactive and subsequently offer adequate employment support.

For the work of activators/mediators, a solid co-operation with local stakeholders is indispensable, in particular to facilitate the identification of inactive people facing a large distance to the labour market (e.g. people who have never worked or have been out for employment for a long time). According to the in-person and online interviews with activators/mediators the OECD carried out for this project, co-operation practices with schools, local social assistance offices, mayors of small settlements and NGOs are very common (see Annex 5.B). Beyond physical onsite visits aiming to reach out to the inactive, activators/mediators sometimes rely on digital tools to establish a contact with their target groups. For example, some youth mediators create dedicated Facebook pages to increase the visibility of current job opportunities and raise awareness about upcoming events (e.g. Youth Job Fairs).

Activators and mediators play a crucial role in reaching out to groups facing particular challenges to integrate the labour market (Figure 5.2). Among 15-24 year-olds registered with the NEA at the end of 2019, many of whom do not possess any previous work experience, (at least) 31% were identified and activated by activators/mediators, against 8% among all NEA clients and 5% among the NEA clients aged 35+ years. Similarly, (at least) 21% of NEA clients belonging to the Roma community were activated by activators/mediators, exceeding the corresponding shares among other ethnic groups by far (7% among Turkish, 6% among ethnic Bulgarians). These estimates suggest that the work of activators and mediators is important to establish a contact with groups that are difficult to reach. Nevertheless, young people and Roma remain groups with particularly high inactivity and unemployment rates (see Chapter 3) and groups the NEA reaches less than others (see Section 5.5).

**Figure 5.2. Many young people and Roma are activated by activators and mediators in Bulgaria**


Share of NEA clients who are known to have been activated by activators/mediators, 2019, by category



NEA: National Employment Agency.

Note: The term “activators” refers to: Roma mediators, youth mediators, other NEA intermediaries and activators that work with other organisations. Due to the structure of the data, estimates should be interpreted as lower bounds and the role of activators/mediators may be higher for some or all groups. In particular, in some cases, registered jobseekers may be activated through activated or mediators, but state a different reason for their registration (e.g. access to benefits).

Source: National Employment Agency micro data.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/mcyfa2>

#### 5.4.7. Job fairs and information campaigns

The NEA organises job fairs and information campaigns, in some cases in co-operation with other organisations, to raise awareness about the benefits of registering with the labour office and connect jobseekers with jobs. For example, as part of the “Ready for Work” programme (NEA, 2021<sup>[19]</sup>), more than 100 information events for activation were organised between 2018 and 2020, aiming to identify, inform and motivate NEETs below 30. In addition, about 90 job fairs were organised under the same programme to promote the activation of young people.

### 5.5. How effective are outreach strategies to reach and active the inactive in Bulgaria?

This section presents estimates of the share of the out-of-work population that is in contact with the NEA, thereby providing insights on how well the NEA reaches people in need of support. The first part of the section focuses specifically on unemployed people, i.e. on people who do not work, but are available for work and actively look for employment, while the second part compares the number of NEA clients to the total number of people who neither work nor study (i.e. comprising inactive and unemployed people). Estimates are based on survey data (EU-SILC; EU-LFS) and on a rich NEA micro dataset. The results indicate that among the unemployed, the NEA reaches a higher proportion than many other EU countries. In contrast, there is a large pool of inactive people who are out of the NEA’s reach, in particular among vulnerable groups, and additional efforts are necessary to establish a contact with them. Bulgaria is among

the countries where the number of registered jobseekers relative to the out-of-work population (consisting of unemployed and inactive) is lowest.

### **5.5.1. Outreach to the unemployed**

This section presents estimates of NEA outreach to unemployed people,<sup>6</sup> i.e. on the group of jobseekers who still have comparatively close ties to the labour market. The European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) contains information on the share of active jobseekers who declare having contacted the public employment service to seek employment. In line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of unemployment, jobseekers must have actively looked for employment at some point during the last 4 weeks preceding the survey interview in order to be classified as unemployed.

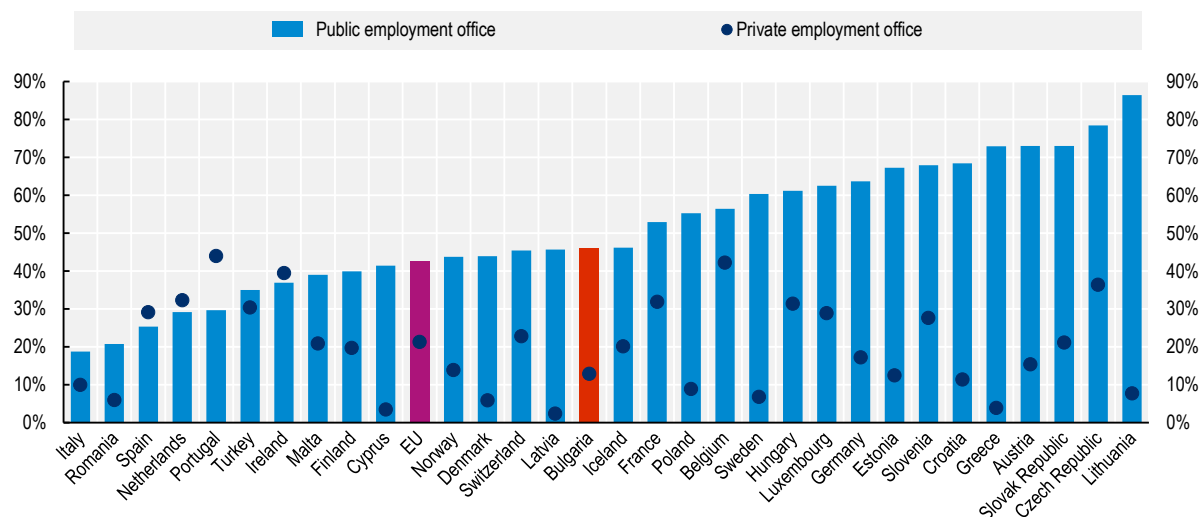
In 2020, 46% of the unemployed were in contact with the NEA to seek employment in Bulgaria, comparing to an EU average of 42.5% (Figure 5.3). The value for 2020 is a significant increase compared to 2019 (39.6%) and the first time since Bulgaria's access to the EU that the share of unemployed contacting the PES is higher in Bulgaria than on average in the EU. This number suggests that the NEA is a central contact point for jobseekers who wish to work. While outreach to people with a very large distance from the labour market is challenging (see next section), outreach to the unemployed performs better. Nevertheless, further improvements are still possible, as shown by a number of countries in which PES outreach to the unemployed is higher, with the PES reaching more than 70% of active jobseekers in five EU countries (Greece, Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and Lithuania).

NEA outreach to the unemployed performs better among women than among men in Bulgaria. In 2019, which is the last year for which this detailed information is available, 47% of unemployed women contacted the NEA to look for employment, against 32% of unemployed men. In addition, contacting the NEA to look for a job is more common among unemployed people with a high level of educational attainment (42% in 2019) than among unemployed with a low level of education (35%) according to the European Labour Force Survey data. Outreach to the unemployed performs better in rural areas (48%) than in cities (32%) and towns and suburbs (30%). This latter finding highlights the important role of local labour offices.

Compared to other EU countries, the role of private employment offices/agencies in reaching active jobseekers is relatively limited in Bulgaria (Figure 5.3). In 2020, 12.9% of active jobseekers contacted a private employment office to look for work, against 21.3% on average in the EU. This low level contrasts with countries like Portugal and Belgium, where more than 40% of the unemployed were in contact with a private employment office to seek work.

**Figure 5.3. Close to half of jobseekers in Bulgaria are in contact with the PES to look for employment**

Share of jobseekers who declare having contacted the public employment office or a private employment office to seek employment, 2020



Note: The European Union (EU) is a weighted average. Jobseekers refer to people stating that they have been seeking work during the four weeks preceding the interview.

Source: European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/kfjtn1>

### 5.5.2. Outreach to the out-of-work population (inactive and unemployed)

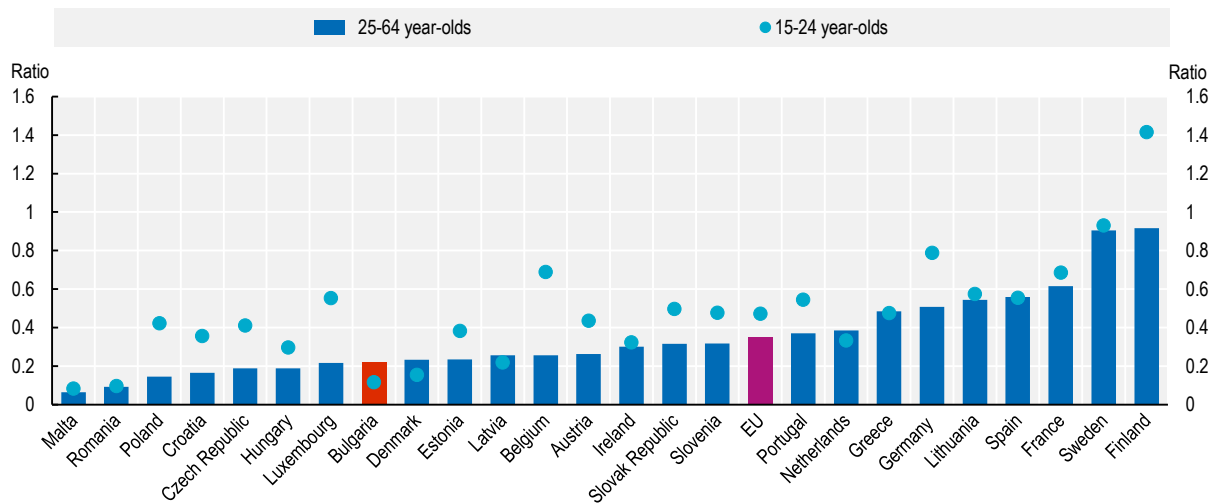
While the previous part of Section 5.5 focuses entirely on unemployed people, the statistics presented and discussed below put the number of registered jobseekers in December 2019 in relation to the size of the out-of-work population, which comprises both unemployed and inactive people. Therefore, this part provides approximate estimates of the share of unemployed or inactive people that is reached by the NEA. All estimates exclude students from the out-of-work population, i.e. people who are enrolled in regular long-term studies, accounting for the fact that students are generally not available for the labour market.

In December 2019 (the reference month for the analysis in this section), there were approximately 195 000 registered jobseekers (see Chapter 3). The number of registered jobseekers has been relatively stable over the last few years, apart from a very significant influx of jobseekers triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018, there were 203 000 registered jobseekers on a yearly average, against 185 000 in 2019 and 241 000 in 2020 (NEA, 2021<sub>[20]</sub>).

Compared to other countries, outreach to the out-of-work population is low in Bulgaria. Among 25-64 year-olds, the number of registered jobseekers relative to the number of people who neither work nor study amounts to 22% in Bulgaria (as of 2019), against an EU average of 35%, and more than 90% in Sweden and Finland (Figure 5.4). Only in one-quarter of EU and OECD countries, the share of unemployed and inactive people reached is lower than in Bulgaria. These estimates indicate that there is a large pool of inactive people who have no contact to the NEA. Many of these inactive people are likely to be off the radar for other public institutions (e.g. SAA), too, given that registration with the NEA is a precondition for many different kinds of social benefits. In light of these numbers, more outreach to inactive people is needed to ensure that people with a large distance to the labour market receive the support they require to integrate into the labour market. In addition, services need to be tailored to the needs of jobseekers so that they motivate people to register with the NEA.

**Figure 5.4. The NEA reaches comparatively few jobseekers in Bulgaria, especially among young people**

Number of registered jobseekers compared to the number of people who neither work nor study, 2019



NEA: National Employment Agency.

Note: The European Union (EU) is an unweighted average of the 25 member countries shown. The ratio number of registered jobseekers over number of people who neither work nor study can exceed 1, in particular if people who work register with the Public Employment Service.

Source: European Commission Labour Market Policy indicators; European Union Labour Force Survey; United Nations World Population Prospects 2019.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/f95ni7>

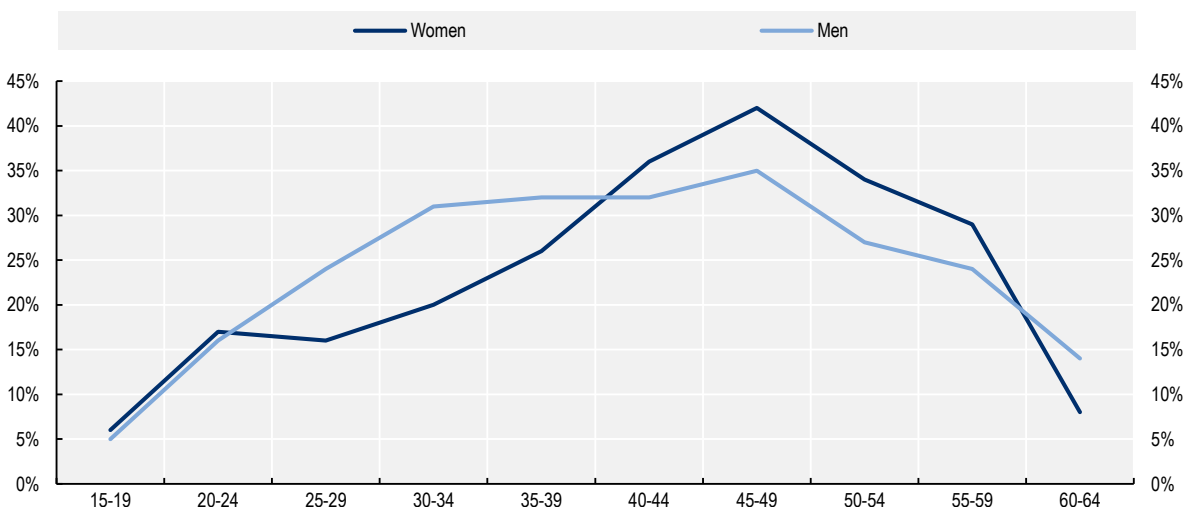
The proportion of unemployed and inactive people registering with the NEA is much lower among young people under 25 than among older people in Bulgaria. In this age group, the number of registered jobseekers amounts to less than 12% of people who neither work nor study, placing Bulgaria among the countries with the lowest values (Figure 5.4). Although Bulgaria has recently intensified its outreach to young people in need of support, e.g. through the programme “Activation of Inactive Persons”, more needs to be done to reinforce outreach to young people, in particular to NEETs who often face significant barriers to employment, and to make registration with the NEA more attractive.

In addition to young people, low NEA registration is also the case for older unemployed and inactive people (Figure 5.5). Even among men, who have an official retirement age of over 64, only 13% of unemployed and inactive 60-64 year-olds are registered with the NEA, suggesting that the vast majority of older unemployed and inactive people do not register with the NEA. Especially in light of rapid population ageing and the risk of labour shortages down the road, more should be done to reach out to older people who do not work, as part of a wider strategy to support employment at older ages. While outreach activities targeting specifically (or exclusively) older workers are uncommon in EU and OECD countries, some countries have introduced programmes that strongly favour the registration of older workers with the public employment service. For example, in the Netherlands, a measure to reach and activate older jobseekers called “Perspective 50 plus” (*Perspectief voor vijftigplussers*), has been in place since 2007 (European Commission, 2018<sub>[21]</sub>). Within this initiative, networking groups of older jobseekers are set up to provide them with the tools needed to complete a successful recruitment process. The strong focus on networking among participants also permits to reach out to other older inactive or unemployed people, using the personal contacts of participants. The programme is accompanied by a media-campaign with the goal to improve the overall image of working at older ages.



**Figure 5.5. Young jobseekers and jobseekers close to retirement age rarely register with the NEA in Bulgaria**


Number of jobseekers registered with the NEA compared to number of people who neither work nor study, by gender



NEA: National Employment Agency.

Note: Students are excluded, i.e. people enrolled in the educational system are not considered to be “non-employed”.

Source: National Employment Agency administrative data; European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/2r36q9>

A large share of Bulgaria’s unemployed and inactive who are not in contact with the NEA belongs to vulnerable groups (Table 5.2). According to estimates based on NEA micro data and EU-LFS, there are close to 700 000 working-age adults who are out of employment (and studies) and are not registered with the NEA. Among these “out-of-reach jobless”, about 40% (287 000) have only a low degree of education, and close to half (330 000) have a medium degree of education, whereas only a small share has tertiary education. This pattern persists, most importantly because employment rates among the low-educated are much lower than among other groups (see Chapter 2).

A sizeable share of the unemployed and inactive who are not reached by the NEA belongs to ethnic minorities (Table 5.2).<sup>7</sup> In particular, outreach to the Roma community proves more challenging than to other ethnic groups even though the NEA employs Roma mediators who specifically target unemployed or inactive Roma. According to the estimates reported in Table 5.2, only 13% of unemployed or inactive Roma are registered with the NEA, against 23% in the Turkish community and close to 27% among ethnic Bulgarians. The low share of inactive and unemployed Roma who are reached by the NEA is in part related to the fact that the share of Roma who are not employed is particularly high (see Chapter 3). Other countries too face difficulties in reaching out to vulnerable groups and have introduced specific approaches to address this challenge (see Box 5.3).

**Table 5.2. Many unemployed and inactive who are out of reach for the NEA belong to vulnerable groups**


Number of registered jobseekers in Bulgaria as a share of 15-64 year-olds who neither work nor study, and estimated number of unemployed or inactive people not registered with the NEA

	Share of unemployed or inactive registered			Estimated number of unemployed or inactive <b>not registered</b>	Estimated number of unemployed or inactive <b>registered</b>
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Total
<b>Total</b>	22.6%	23.9%	21.8%	699 000	204 000
<b>By education</b>					
Low	23.6%	24.1%	23.3%	287 000	89 000
Medium	21.8%	23.0%	20.7%	330 000	92 000
High	22.1%	27.1%	20.0%	84 000	24 000
<b>By ethnicity</b>					
Ethnic Bulgarian	26.6%	28.4%	25.3%	399 000	145 000
Turkish	23.0%	24.5%	22.2%	88 000	26 000
Roma	13.3%	13.0%	13.5%	204 000	31 000
<b>By location</b>					
Severozapaden	27.2%	27.9%	26.6%	100 000	37 000
Severen tsentralen	25.5%	27.6%	24.0%	76 000	26 000
Severoiztochen	20.5%	24.2%	18.6%	110 000	28 000
Yugoiztochen	20.0%	20.2%	19.9%	116 000	29 000
Yugozapaden	22.9%	24.3%	21.9%	139 000	41 000
Yuzhen tsentralen	21.2%	20.9%	21.4%	157 000	42 000

NEA: National Employment Agency.

Note: Calculations refer to jobseekers registered with the NEA on 31.12.2019. Calculations are based on: a) NEA administrative data for the number of registered jobseekers by education, ethnicity and location b) EU-LFS to estimate the share of unemployed or inactive people by education and location; c) EU-SILC to estimate the share of unemployed or inactive people by ethnicity; d) United Nations World Population Prospects 2019 for total population size by age. Ethnicity other than ethnic Bulgarians, Turkish and Roma are not tabled.

Source: OECD calculations based on NEA administrative data, EU-LFS, EU-SILC and United Nations World Population Prospects 2019.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/v3h2jk>

### Box 5.3. Reaching out to vulnerable groups

#### Reaching unemployed and inactive people with health problems: The Work Ability Reform in Estonia

In 2016, Estonia implemented a large-scale policy reform called “Work Ability Reform” to increase outreach to people with long-term health problems, optimise the support on offer for this group and improve the labour market situation of people with reduced work capacity (OECD, 2021<sup>[22]</sup>). The Work Ability Reform strengthened the incentives to register with the PES, in particular for people with health impediments. Besides changes to the work ability assessment, the reform introduced new ALMPs targeting people with health problems and adapted service concepts to the needs of people with health problems, thereby rendering the support for people with reduced work ability both more attractive and more effective. For example, a new staff category, disability employment counsellors, was introduced at the PES to specifically focus on jobseekers with disabilities. In addition, registration with the PES was made a pre-condition for disability benefit receipt, creating strong financial incentives for people entitled to such benefits to establish a contact with the PES. The outcomes of the reform are promising.

While the share of registered jobseekers with reduced work ability stood at 15% at the end of 2015, it grew to over 30% by the end of 2019, suggesting that the Work Ability Reform had a significant impact on outreach to the people with long-term health problems.

### Reaching unemployed or inactive Roma in Sweden

Since 2012, Sweden has run a programme called “Bridge-building” to reach out to Roma people in need of support as part of a wider strategy to improve the social inclusion of Roma people. The programme has similarities with the work of Roma mediators in Bulgaria, as it aims to mobilise people with Roma language skills to reach out to socially excluded Roma people. Within the programme, so-called bridge-builders (i.e. mediators) first follow a 2-year university programme to sharpen their intercultural competences, improve their knowledge on Roma culture and learn about mediation practices. After that, bridge-builders are hired by public institutions, including the PES but also other institutions (e.g. schools or health care facilities), to establish a contact with Roma people, using awareness-raising campaigns and carrying out motivational conversations. The objective of bridge-builders is twofold: improving knowledge and the image of public services among the Roma population to facilitate outreach, but also, vice versa, increasing knowledge and the understanding of Roma minorities within public organisations. Bridge-builders organise a variety of events to establish a contact with Roma people, e.g. information campaigns in shopping malls, events in schools and colleges and also use social media to reach out to Roma people. The outcomes of the work of bridge-builders are monitored on a regular basis through quarterly status reports.

Source: European Commission (2019<sup>[23]</sup>), *Work ability reform: A way to enhance employment opportunities for people with long-term health problems or disabilities*, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21923&langId=en>; OECD (2021<sup>[22]</sup>), *Improving the Provision of Active Labour Market Policies in Estonia*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/31f72c5b-en>; European Commission (2018<sup>[21]</sup>), *The Role of PES in Outreach to the Inactive Population*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ce86219d-2d84-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

## 5.6. Key findings

The NEA is the central institution reaching out to unemployed and inactive people in Bulgaria. In addition, several other institutions contribute to reaching out to people in need of support, such as the SAA and municipalities, often in co-operation with the NEA.

For some groups of unemployed and inactive people, there are strong financial incentives to register with the NEA. Most importantly, unemployment benefits and social assistance benefits are only paid out to people who are registered as jobseekers. However, these incentives do not concern all unemployed and inactive people, as many are not entitled to unemployment benefits and take-up of social assistance is low.

Bulgaria has stepped up efforts to reach out to inactive and unemployed people, including people belonging to vulnerable groups, such as NEETs and Roma, and people living in remote areas. For example, the NEA and municipalities employ activators and mediators who specifically reach out to young people who do not work and inactive Roma.

Nevertheless, the share of the out-of-work population (comprising unemployed and inactive people) registering with the NEA is low compared to other countries, at only about 22% among 25-64 year-olds and less than 12% among young people under 25. In addition, the share of unemployed making use of private work agencies is comparatively low. While there is scope for more outreach for all types of inactive people, vulnerable groups are particularly difficult to reach. In particular, this is the case for NEETs, people close to the retirement age and unemployed and inactive Roma. A number of new initiatives have recently been introduced to reach out to more inactive and unemployed people, but thorough evaluations of these approaches are not yet available.

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## Annex 5.A. Further statistics

**Annex Table 5.A.1. Outreach by oblast (NUTS 3 level)**

Share of non-employed 15-64 year-olds in Bulgaria who are registered with the National Employment Agency, 2019

	Both genders	Men	Women
Blagoevgrad	30.4%	32.4%	28.8%
Burgas	13.9%	11.5%	15.7%
Dobrich	14.7%	15.8%	14.0%
Gabrovo	11.2%	11.7%	10.8%
Haskovo	17.7%	16.3%	18.9%
Kardzhali	15.1%	15.4%	14.9%
Kyustendil	19.5%	15.6%	23.9%
Lovech	24.6%	22.6%	26.7%
Montana	18.5%	18.6%	18.5%
Pazardzhik	19.4%	19.4%	19.3%
Pernik	13.5%	11.2%	15.7%
Pleven	19.2%	20.4%	18.1%
Plovdiv	11.5%	11.4%	11.5%
Razgrad	20.5%	20.9%	20.2%
Ruse	15.6%	15.1%	16.0%
Shumen	20.6%	22.1%	19.7%
Silistra	19.9%	22.6%	18.1%
Sliven	19.8%	22.2%	18.2%
Smolyan	25.6%	21.5%	30.0%
Sofia (region)	21.9%	24.3%	20.6%
Sofia (city)	6.4%	6.1%	6.6%
Stara Zagora	14.1%	13.0%	15.1%
Targovishte	20.8%	20.5%	21.0%
Varna	10.4%	10.2%	10.6%
Veliko Tarnovo	21.4%	23.8%	19.6%
Vidin	25.2%	24.7%	25.7%
Vratsa	22.4%	22.2%	22.6%
Yambol	12.4%	12.9%	12.1%

Note: Students are included as non-employed.

Source: NEA administrative data; National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/cmliix>

## Annex 5.B. Qualitative interview results

The OECD carried out qualitative interviews with youth activators, youth mediators and Roma mediators for this chapter to gain in-depth insights on the day-to-day work of mediators and activators. In total, seven youth mediators, eight youth activators, seven Roma mediators and one (general) counsellor participated in the interviews. During the interviews, respondents provided information on their work procedures, frequent co-operation practices with other institutions and the type of support their clients typically receive once they register with the NEA.


**Annex Table 5.B.1. Answers to the qualitative interview with youth mediators, youth activators and Roma mediators**

Answers to interview questions, by type of activator/mediators, Bulgaria

	Youth mediators	Youth activators	Roma mediators
Total number of interview participants	7	8	7
<i>With which organisations (other than yours) do you frequently work with?</i>			
Local labour offices	7	1	1
Regional labour offices	2	6	6
Local social assistance offices	4	6	6
Municipal administrations	1	4	5
Trade unions	1	6	3
Employer organisations	1	5	3
Employers	6	7	6
NGOs	5	4	4
Schools	5	8	6
Training provider	1	6	3
<i>Which type of support do your clients usually get once activated?</i>			
Intensive counselling	7	8	6
Vocational orientation and motivation assistance	7	6	6
Group career guidance	4	8	5
Job search atelier	5	8	6
Psychological support	3	7	6

Note: Answers of interview partners other than youth activators, youth mediators and Roma mediators are not shown. Not all interview questions are included.

Source: Qualitative OECD interview with youth mediators, youth activators and Roma mediators.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/wf0vaq>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Large parts of the analysis in this section and other parts of the chapter are based on fact-finding meetings the OECD and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG-Reform) held with the NEA, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), social partners, NGOs and further institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Information based on answers to OECD questionnaire.

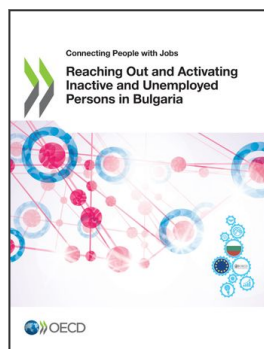
<sup>3</sup> Formal agreements were signed with the NGOs/associations "Strategy – Balkan Institute", "House of Ideas", "Easter 2015" and others.

<sup>4</sup> The NEA classifies registrations depending on the main reason for the registration. One of the possible reasons is "access to social benefits from other institutions". Classification is based on the conversation between caseworkers and jobseekers.

<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, youth mediators are remunerated by the NEA through the budget of the national programme "Activation of Inactive Persons".

<sup>6</sup> According to the ILO definition, i.e. people who do not work, but are available for work and look for employment.

<sup>7</sup> Ethnic groups are self-defined. There may be significant under-reporting of some ethnic groups.



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