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**Human Rights Council**

**Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review**

**Fiftieth session**

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**National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 and 16/21**

**Bulgaria**

# Introduction

1. At the 36th session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which took place on 6 November 2020, Bulgaria received 233 recommendations. After careful consideration, the Government decided to accept 193 of them and marked another 24 as noted. There were 16 recommendations that Bulgaria generally approves and supports, but due to constitutional or legal obstacles, can only commit partially to their implementation[[1]](#endnote-1).
2. Bulgaria has also accepted an additional recommendation by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights[[2]](#endnote-2) and has elaborated an Action Plan for the implementation of the recommendations, received and accepted during the Third Cycle of the UPR. The Action Plan was adopted by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 324 on 20 May 2022.
3. In December 2023, Bulgaria submitted a voluntary interim report on the implementation of accepted recommendations two years after the adoption of the UPR outcome report[[3]](#endnote-3). Bulgaria also prepared and submitted an updated Common Core Document in December 2024[[4]](#endnote-4). Both documents supplement the information presented in the current report.
4. The Fourth report of Bulgaria under the UPR covers recent significant developments that have occurred since the submission of the interim report. Preparation of the report began in January 2025 and followed the general guidelines outlined in UN Human Rights Council Decision 17/119.
5. The report was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in coordination with all relevant ministries, state bodies and institutions, the Ombudsman’s Office and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. The report was published on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for public consultation and was later approved by the National Coordination Mechanism on Human Rights.
6. The Fourth Cycle of the UPR process coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Following the adoption of the outcome of the review of Bulgaria at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council on 21 March 2021, the State has also undergone one parliamentary election and seven consecutive early parliamentary elections. This has added to the existing challenges, but nevertheless, the authorities have taken appropriate measures to fulfil the accepted recommendations during the Third Cycle of the UPR.

# II. Implementation of recommendations from previous cycles

1. **International obligations[[5]](#endnote-5)**

**1. Acceptance of international norms**

1. In 2024 Bulgaria ratified Convention No.155 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning Occupational Safety and Health and Convention No. 187 of ILO concerning the Framework for the Promotion of Occupational Safety and Health.
2. Preparations are currently underway for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
3. In 2023, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Article 144b of the Criminal Code was amended to extend the scope of the act of torture to the definition in Article 12 of the Convention and criminalise as precisely as possible the act of torture under the Convention.
4. Draft amendments to the Criminal Code were prepared to bring it in compliance with the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The amendments focus on expanding the crimes falling under its jurisdiction.

**2. Cooperation with international institutions and mechanisms**

1. Bulgaria served twice as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, first from 2019 to 2021 and currently from 2024 to 2026. Bulgaria was a member of the Human Rights Council’s Bureau in 2021.
2. Bulgaria has also been a member of the Executive Board of UNICEF (2023–2025) and the Executive Board of UN Women (2023–2025). In 2022, the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN in New York was elected and served as a President of ECOSOC.
3. Bulgaria extended standing invitations to special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council.
4. Bulgaria continued its successful dialogue with the United Nations treaty bodies dealing with human rights. The State presented its consolidated XXIII, XXIV and XXV reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 28-29 November 2023, and its VI and VII periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on 17-18 January 2024.

**3. International cooperation and development cooperation**

1. Bulgaria pursues a consistent policy of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition to our active participation in UN human rights bodies, Bulgaria contributes to regional bodies with a focus on human rights, such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
2. The engagement of Bulgaria with international initiatives such as the Alliance for Multilateralism, the Alliance for Religious Freedom, the Coalition for the Safety of Journalists, etc. is an expression of the importance that the country attaches to current and emerging human rights issues.
3. Every year Bulgaria provides voluntary national contributions to the core budgets of the UN OHCHR, the UNHCR, the UNICEFF, the UN-Women, the OSCE/ODHIR and OSCE Media Freedom Representative.
4. Development cooperation is an integral part of the foreign policy of the Republic of Bulgaria. With its accession to the European Union on 1 January 2007, Bulgaria made important commitments to participate in the Union's Common Foreign Policy, including development policy. Through development cooperation, Bulgaria contributes to a more balanced and equitable global development, taking its share of responsibility in efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development worldwide.
5. Bulgaria provides a major share of its official development assistance through multilateral organisations (earmarked and core contributions). In 2023, the country’s programmable aid amounted to 3.2% of Bulgaria’s gross bilateral development assistance.
6. The Mid-Term Programme for Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid 2020-2024 prioritised activities related to mitigating the health, economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It expanded the range of beneficiaries, with additional countries from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. The next mid-term programme for the period 2025-2030 is currently being prepared through an inclusive process with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.
7. The main task of the Bulgarian development cooperation policy is to implement the commitment made upon Bulgaria's accession to the EU to achieve levels of 0.33% of gross national income in allocated official development assistance funds by 2030.

**4. Implementation of commitments undertaken under the Agenda for Sustainable Development**

1. Bulgaria continues to invest efforts in the implementation of the commitments undertaken under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Plan. Improving quality of life for everyone, achieving a high living standard, mitigating inequalities and providing clean environment are among the priorities of the Government. In 2023, by Council of Ministers Decree № 52, an institutional mechanism was developed and implemented regarding the organization and coordination of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of sustainable development activities and policies.
2. In July 2025 Bulgaria will present its Second Voluntary National Review of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Voluntary Review outlines policies and activities of the Government, as well as the commitment of business, civil society, youth and local communities to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria.
3. A draft Law amending the Climate Change Mitigation Act has been prepared with the goal of regulating new and updated approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in response to the increased pan-European ambition for 2030. The draft includes the establishment of a national long-term target to achieve climate neutrality and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, in alignment with the Paris Agreement.

**B. Legislative and institutional framework for human rights protection[[6]](#endnote-6)**

**1. Legislative changes in the field of human rights**

1. Major new legal acts and amendments to the legislation in the field of human rights have been adopted since the Third cycle of the UPR.
2. On 21 January 2021, the National Assembly adopted the Bulgarian Sign Language Act, which recognizes the linguistic status of Bulgarian Sign Language and the right of deaf and deaf-blind persons to expression.
3. The Anti-Corruption Act, adopted by the National Assembly on 21 September 2023, leads to the improvement of the institutional system for fighting and preventing corruption.
4. The Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, adopted on 28 July 2023, provides for the introduction of racist, xenophobic and homophobic motives as constituent elements in other criminal provisions.
5. The Radio and Television Act was amended in 2020 to introduce stronger measures against the use of hate speech and prohibited incitement to violence, hatred or terrorist acts in audio-visual media services.
6. In 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code reduced the minimum fines for aggravated insult and eliminated the harsher penalties previously imposed for insulting and defaming officials. The amendments allow for greater discretion in the court’s assessment of the individualisation of the sentence in order to make a balanced assessment of proportionality in the individualisation of the sentence.
7. In 2023 the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedural Code and the Aid and Financial Compensation for Victims of Crime Act were amended to provide victims of domestic violence with additional rights and enhance coordination in preventing and combating this violence.
8. The 2022 amendments to the Labour Code promote more balanced parental involvement in childcare and work-life balance of parental commitments for employees with family responsibilities.
9. In 2022 the Legal Aid Act was amended to extend the categories, including persons seeking or receiving international protection or enjoying temporary asylum, entitled to free legal aid.
10. Other amendments to the legislation in the field of human rights are reflected in the relevant sections and subsections of this report.
11. **Intuitional framework**
12. The institutional framework for human rights was strengthened when the Government adopted Decree No. 59 on 21 March 2024 and established a Council under the existing National Coordination Mechanism for Human Rights. The Council ensures coordination and cooperation between state authorities, other public institutions and civil society organizations working on human rights issues, to fully implement policies related to the promotion and protection of human rights. The Council is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The changes have improved interdepartmental coordination in the field that was established in 2013.
13. The overall increase in the workload of national human rights institutions – the Ombudsman Institution and the CPD is a result of high public trust, support provided to the citizens and organisations and consistent policy of openness. The budgets of the Ombudsman Institution and the CPD are updated annually to adequately cover their needs for effective performance of their duties. State funding ensures the provision of administrative capacity, with adequate employees’ salaries, compared to salaries in both the public and private sectors.
14. In 2024 the National program of prevention and protection of domestic violence 2024-2026 was adopted to outline the main goals and priority activities for financing institutions in the field of prevention and protection from domestic violence.

**3. Judicial reform**

1. In 2023, amendments were made to the Criminal Procedure Code, which were aimed to ensure control over the actions of the prosecutor in the investigation of crimes committed by the Prosecutor General. The figure of the supervising prosecutor was introduced to exercise control over the actions of the prosecutor under investigation.
2. The Minister of Justice set up a working group to prepare a draft amendment to the Judicial System Act, which will fine-tune the provisions on competition procedures to ensure timely regular promotion competitions to avoid the long-term secondment of judges to fill vacant posts, taking into account European standards on secondment of judges. The amendments also aim to improve the reporting framework, the functioning of the Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council to prevent political influence, in particular by involving judicial authorities in the selection of its members, and the effectiveness of training activities at the National Institute of Justice, as well as to introduce comprehensive e-Justice.

**4. Law enforcement**

1. The NIJ provides systematic training in the field of the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights as part of its mandatory initial (for candidates for junior judges, junior prosecutors and junior investigating magistrates), induction and continuous training curriculum.
2. Upholding human rights, practicing tolerance, combating racism and working in a multi-ethnic environment are integrated into courses and specialized lectures of the Academy of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) - "Protection of Human Rights" (core discipline in bachelor's and master's programs), "Protection of the rights of victims of crime", "Protection of human rights in the exercise of police powers" and "Protection from discrimination", etc.
3. The Academy of the MoI implements a project "Increasing the capacity of police officers working in a multi-ethnic environment, including in Roma communities and preventing excess of the powers of police officers". The Academy, in cooperation with the "Youth LGBTI Organization Action", has been providing training on a regular basis on investigating hate crimes for homophobic and transphobic reasons since 2019.
4. Every newly appointed police officer during their introductory training at the Academy of the MoI undergoes specialised training on the application of the Methodology for Social Work with Accommodated Foreigners. The Academy also conducts thematic trainings related to the rights of foreigners.
5. The Ministry of Interior Act and the regulations for its implementation comprehensively provide for the cases in which police authorities have the right to use physical force and auxiliary means. The Ministry is making consistent efforts to conduct awareness-raising campaigns among police officers against police violence and address each such case. The procedure for the use of physical force and compliance with the code of ethics is included in periodic briefings and ongoing professional training of police officers at their workplace. The Inspectorate Directorate of the MoI conducts inspection on signals for unlawful use of weapons, physical force and unlawful detention.

**5. Counteraction to corruption**

1. On 21 September 2023 the National Assembly adopted the Anti-Corruption Act, aimed at improving the institutional system for fighting and preventing corruption. The law provides for structural and administrative reform and separation of the existing Commission for Combating Corruption and Forfeiture of Illegally Acquired Assets in two administrative bodies. The new Anti-Corruption Commission specialises in prevention and analysis of corruption risk; detection and investigation of corruption offences; identification of conflicts of interest and imposition of sanctions and other measures in case of established conflicts of interest; acceptance and verification of declarations of persons holding public office and public disclosure of the names of persons who have not submitted declarations or whose declarations have been found to be non-compliant and the names of persons for whom a conflict of interest has been established; referral to the competent authorities in the cases provided for by law, etc. The Commission for Forfeiture of Illegally Acquired Property freezes and confiscates illegally acquired property, manages, storages and protects the property on which precautionary measures have been imposed in the proceedings initiated by it.
2. On 29 June 2023 amendments to the Measures Against Money Laundering Act were adopted, which introduce an effective mechanism for identifying persons providing corporate governance services and procedures for verification of persons engaged in the provision of corporate governance services such as lawyers, accountants, tax consultants and others, in accordance with the requirements of Directive (EU) 2018/843[[7]](#endnote-7) and standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
3. The National Strategy for Prevention and Counteraction to Corruption in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2027) was adopted on 19 May 2021 by Decision No. 235 of the Council of Ministers. It includes priorities, such as strengthening capacity and increasing transparency in the work of anti-corruption bodies and units, counteracting corruption crimes, strengthening the capacity and improving the work of bodies entrusted with control and sanctioning powers in the administration, etc. The Strategy is implemented through legislative, administrative and institutional measures. A Roadmap was approved for the Strategy, which provides measures for each priority, implementation actions, indicators and deadlines for implementation, expected results, financing and responsible institutions.
4. The NIJ conducts systematic trainings on preventing and combating corruption within the compulsory initial, induction and ongoing training of magistrates. Such issues are also integrated into judicial training on the application of standards of ethical conduct for magistrates and court staff. The Supreme Judicial Council conducts trainings on anti-corruption, integrity and independence of judges, prosecutors and investigating magistrates and conflict of interest.

**6. Human rights education**

1. Human rights education is included in the curricula of preschool, primary, secondary and vocational education institutions. A leading role in implementing human rights education in primary and secondary schools is played by subjects such as "Homeland", "Man and Society", "History and Civilization", "Ethics and Law", "Philosophy", "World and Personality".
2. Starting from the 2020/2021 academic year, a separate subject "Civic Education" was introduced in the curricula for the 11th and 12th grades. The subject covers topics such as "Human Rights", "Democratic Citizenship", "Identities and Differences in Society", etc.
3. The Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" began a new master's program "Teaching Civic and Intercultural Education in Secondary School" from the academic year 2022/2023, which responds to the need to deepen the knowledge and improve the qualifications of teachers in the subject "Civic Education" in the secondary school course.
4. On 6 July 2022 the Government adopted an Ordinance on the Unified State Requirements for Acquiring Higher Education in the specialty "Law" and the professional qualification "Lawyer", which introduced the study of a new mandatory discipline "Protection of Human Rights".

**C. Non-discrimination and elimination of hate speech[[8]](#endnote-8)**

**1. Preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination**

1. The Government pursues a consistent policy aimed at preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination. The Bulgarian society itself has a solid record for creating conditions of mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. Bulgaria is a country where people with different ethnical, racial or religious background have been living peacefully for centuries.
2. In 2020 amendments to the Radio and Television Act strengthened the powers of the media regulator - the Electronic Media Council. The amendments introduce strengthened measures against the use of hate speech and prohibited incitement to violence, hatred or acts of terrorism in audio-visual media services, which also apply to video sharing platforms.
3. In July 2023 the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Criminal Code providing heavier penalties for hate crimes with a homophobic motive. Murder, bodily harm, kidnapping and unlawful deprivation of liberty will be punishable by heavier penalties when committed for reasons related to the victim's sexual orientation. Heavier penalties are also provided for inciting discrimination, violence or hatred on this ground. The amendments concern: inclusion of the victim's sexual orientation as an independent qualifying characteristic in the aggravated forms of murder, bodily harm, kidnapping, unlawful deprivation of liberty, unlawful destruction or damage to another's movable or immovable property and incitement to commit a crime; addition of qualifying characteristics to include "colour", "sexual orientation" and "origin"; introduction of racist and xenophobic prejudices as qualifying characteristics in other criminal offenses of the Special Part of the Criminal Code. The legislator has determined that such prejudices can prompt the commission of crimes such as kidnapping; unlawful deprivation of liberty; coercion; threat; stalking; insult; desecration, destruction or damage to a religious temple, prayer house, sanctuary, graves or tombstones, unlawful destruction or damage to another's movable or immovable property, incitement to commit a crime and arson. The aggravated forms governing the above-mentioned crimes have been supplemented with new provisions foreseeing heavier penalties when the act is committed "based on racist or xenophobic motives".
4. In addition to legislative changes, administrative capacity building and training, information campaigns and monitoring mechanisms are in place to ensure effective implementation of the legislation on elimination of discrimination, intolerance, racism, xenophobia and homophobia.
5. The two national human rights institutions – the Ombudsman Institution and the CPD – continue efforts to raise public awareness of tolerance and non-discrimination. In 2024, 4 information campaigns were implemented by CPD on the rights of vulnerable groups and protection from discrimination. CPD has provided trainings in the education system to 3,000 principals and teachers. To counteract discriminatory practices in the field of employment, CPD has prepared brochures on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.
6. The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) at the Council of Ministers organizes social orientation and adaptation programs for migrants and refugees to raise their awareness and ensure they are not subject to discrimination. Persons seeking international protection attend weekly sessions such as "No to Discrimination" and "I am like you".
7. The Supreme Prosecutor’s Office collects statistical information on convicted and acquitted persons, disaggregated by offences, including on racist, xenophobic and homophobic motives. The Ombudsman Institution and the CPD also keep their respective registers of complaints of unequal treatment and discrimination.

**2. Combating Antisemitism**

1. Combating antisemitism is one of the priorities of Bulgaria’s foreign policy in the field of human rights. Bulgaria actively participates in the efforts of the EU, the OSCE, UNESCO and the Council of Europe to fight modern antisemitism. Bulgaria is a fully-fledged member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and has adopted its Working Definition of Antisemitism.
2. Bulgaria adopted its first National Action Plan on Combating Antisemitism 2023-2027 in 2023. The National Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism – Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, coordinates and implements the National Plan. To provide continuity and effective coordination of the efforts of all stakeholders, the National Coordinator is assisted by a Contact Group on Combating Antisemitism, including all responsible institutions and organizations of Bulgarian Jews.

 **D. Civil and political rights[[9]](#endnote-9)**

**1. Freedom of religion or belief**

1. The Religious Denomination Act aligns with international human rights standards, such as ICCPR and ECHR, and recognises the right to practise a religion or belief as fundamental human right and emphasizes equality among denominations. In January 2025 the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Religion Denomination Act, which designate the self-governing unified Bulgarian Orthodox Church-Patriarchate of Bulgaria as the sole expression and representative of the country's traditional religion.
2. Bulgaria remains steadfast in its respect for freedom of religion and belief. The State does not intervene in the internal organization of religious communities, nor in their public manifestations. All religious denominations remain free and equal under the law, with the ability to obtain legal personality as non-profit entities. More than 230 religious institutions have been registered in Bulgaria over the last 20 years.

**2. Media Freedom**

1. In 2020 the Radio and Television Act was amended to require the Council for Electronic Media to include in its registers information on the structure and ownership of media service providers and video-sharing platform services in the Public Registry. In 2024, 345 media companies disclosed information on their ownership.
2. On 28 July 2023, amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted to ensure freedom of expression of journalists, particularly in cases involving allegations of defamation against public officials. Exemptions from criminal liability and administrative punishment may also apply in cases where insults or defamation are directed towards power holders.
3. In 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code reduced the minimum fines for serious insult and eliminated the harsher penalties previously imposed for insulting and defaming officials.

**E. Economic, social and cultural rights[[10]](#endnote-10)**

**1. Poverty Eradication**

1. Bulgaria has set a national target to reduce the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 787,000 people and the number of children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion - by 196,750 persons (25% of the general national target) by 2030. Compared to the base year 2019, in 2023 the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased by 394 000 or 3.2 %.
2. Substantial revisions to the Social Assistance Act (SAA) came into force on 1 June 2023, redefining social aid calculations based on the poverty line established by the Council of Ministers. The line has gradually risen from 504 BGN in 2023 to 526 BGN in 2024 and 638 BGN in 2025. In 2024, social aid payments amounted to 99.8 million BGN, doubling the levels seen in 2023.
3. The SAA introduced two new forms of social assistance: social aid for unemployed people (already receiving aid) for three months after they find work, and social aid for 3 months for young people aged 18 - 21 who are leaving institutional care. In June 2023 heating allowances were adjusted to take into account the poverty line.
4. The Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) continues to help disadvantaged children under the Food and Basic Material Assistance Programme (2021-2027), which includes the "Packages for New-borns" initiative providing essential childcare items to new-borns in low-income or at-risk families and the "Children's kitchen" initiative providing subsidized meals to children aged from 10 months to 3 years.

**2. Right to health**

1. In April 2024 the National Assembly adopted the National Health Strategy 2030, outlining a long-term vision for healthcare development. It addresses maternity and child health, mental health, chronic illnesses via prevention, improved healthcare access and sustainable finance.
2. The implementation of the National Mental Health Strategy for 2021-2030 is ongoing. Psychiatric services are integrated into general medical care and training sessions are carried out on suicide prevention and early intervention for psychosis prodromes.
3. The ASA funding provided free hospital treatment to 3,251 persons without health insurance in 2024. The State provides health insurance to persons who receive monthly social benefits and heating benefits, users of residential care as a social service, parents or grandparents who take care of persons with a 50 % disability and over 50% permanent reduced working capacity. In 2024, 117 975 persons were provided health insurance through ASA.

**3. Right to education**

1. The "Success for You" project under the 2021-2027 Education Program, co-financed by the European Union and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), enables schools to help pupils with a complex of activities to improve their educational results. The additional training under the "Success for You" project began in the second term of the 2023/2024 academic year when 48,720 pupils received support.
2. The "Success for You" project focuses on general support for the personal development of pupils at risk of dropping out, with the aim of their successful performance in national external assessments, but also in the state matriculation exams. The project funds career guidance activities for pupils so that they can make an informed choice about where to continue their education.
3. Recent amendments to the Inclusive Education Regulation provide assistive technology and software to pupils with dyslexia, dysgraphia and other disabilities. In line with the Bulgarian Sign Language Act, sign language education has been integrated in schools. The MES has supported university and NGOs research to develop sign language resources such as guidelines on teaching and interpreting sign language.
4. 7,293 pedagogic experts were employed for the academic year 2024/2025 to support inclusive education in kindergartens and schools. Assistance to 29,155 children with special education needs has been provided for academic year 2024/2025.
5. The Ministry of Youth and Sports ensures the organisation of School Games for pupils with hearing, vision and central nervous system disabilities, aiming to promote inclusive mainstream education for children and youth with disabilities. The Bulgarian Paralympic Federation and the Sports Federation of the Deaf recently coordinated the finals of the 2024 School Games for pupils with disabilities, in which 210 pupils with disabilities participated.

**4. Social services and social assistance**

1. In August 2024 the Council of Ministers adopted a National Map of Social Services, which envisages the establishment of a complete network of social services throughout the country in the long term. The planning of social services at the national level includes all social and integrated health and social services at the municipal and regional levels, for which funding is provided from the state budget, as well as the maximum number of users of these services. All services under the Map should be developed by 2035. Due to the reform in the social services sector, the number of social services continues to increase, reaching 1 879 at the end of March 2025, providing support to 63 651 people.
2. Access to social assistance services has been made easier by a series of amendments to existing regulations, such as changing the minimum period for compulsory registration at Labour Offices as an unemployed person and eliminating or limiting the scope of specific requirements for people entitled to assistance.

**F****. Women and girls’ empowerment[[11]](#endnote-11)**

1. Bulgaria is among the European countries with traditions in policies for equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Women in Bulgaria have equal opportunities with men in all spheres of political, economic and social life.
2. On 30 December 2020 the Bulgarian government adopted the National Strategy for Promotion of Equality between Women and Men 2021-2030. It is built around priority areas such as equality in the labour market and equal degree of economic independence, reducing the gender pay gap and income, promoting equality between women and men in decision-making processes, combating gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims, etc. It is implemented through National Action Plans for Promotion of equality between women and men which follow the principles, goals and priorities of the strategy.
3. A 2021 study by the National Statistical Institute found that over 50% of management positions in specialised local administrations, science organisations and public media are held by women. This percentage is even higher in the judiciary, where 53% of management positions are occupied by women.
4. The comparative analysis for all economic activities shows that in almost all sectors 1/3 of the companies are managed by women. With higher value stand out several economic activities: trade (33.78%), professional activities and scientific research (41.19%), human health care and social work (52.15%) and other activities (56,15%). The share of female entrepreneurs in the last ten years ranges between 27%-32%.
5. As of 2022, Bulgaria had the largest share of women among employed information and communication technologies (ICT) specialists in Europe. Bulgarian women held almost 29% of positions in ICT, representing the highest female-to-male ratio in Europe. Bulgaria has traditions in education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), with one of the highest relative presence of women among graduates - 37%. The state actively encourages girls to pursue degrees in technical fields, leading to better access to technical education for women.
6. Bulgaria has adopted its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) for the period 2020-2025, which is structured around four main priorities: prevention, participation, protection and prioritization within the WPS agenda. In 2023, an interim report was prepared analyzing the degree of implementation of the plan and outlining next steps to achieve its goals.

**G.** **Combating domestic violence[[12]](#endnote-12)**

1. Bulgaria has adopted significant legislative amendments to enhance coordination in preventing and combating domestic violence.
2. In 2023, amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted to remove the previous requirement of “systematic” in relation to the exercise of physical, sexual or psychological violence and other elements of domestic violence. The Criminal Procedure Code and the Aid and Financial Compensation for Victims of Crime Act were also amended to provide victims with additional rights.
3. Amendments to the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, which entered into force on 1 January 2024, include expanding the circle of persons who can seek protection; extension of the deadline for applying for domestic violence from one to three months; increasing protection measures against domestic violence; establishment of a National Information System for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence and a National Register of Cases of Domestic Violence; streamlining court proceedings; establishing prevention and protection programmes providing protection, assistance and support to victims of domestic violence or at risk; and programmes concerning perpetrators as well.
4. Due to the amendments a National Council for Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence was established in December 2023. For the first time a state body monitors the adoption, implementation and evaluation of policies and the coordination of the actions of the ministries and agencies for prevention and response to domestic violence.
5. An automated information system “Domestic Violence and Gender-based Violence” was launched on 1 January 2025.
6. National prevention campaigns are conducted to encourage the reporting of cases of domestic violence.
7. Police officers are trained on the topic of domestic violence at the Academy of the MoI and the Institute of Psychology.
8. The NIJ conducts trainings to enhance the qualification of magistrates in the field of domestic and gender-based violence. With the support of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, the Institute has developed a Case Management Guide on Domestic and Gender-Based Violence for Magistrates, integrating relevant European standards in the context of current legislation and the case-law of the ECtHR and national courts. In its electronic version, the Guide is available to Bulgarian magistrates, other justice professionals and over 15,000 police officers. The NIJ held the first public discussion on the implementation of specialised community outreach programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, with the participation of representatives of competent institutions and NGOs working in the field. The Institute translated in Bulgarian and provided free online access to 36 key decisions of CEDAW.
9. The National Bureau of Legal Aid organises numerous information campaigns and events on discrimination, trafficking and domestic violence prevention for pupils and university students. These campaigns focus on the role of education and ways to receive free legal aid. Trainings have been provided to 2,000 specialists in the field of prevention and support, including psychologists, local administration officials, mediators and teachers. A Pilot centre “You are not alone” has been created to provide support for women and children who are victims of violence. Annual funding is provided for organisations supporting victims of crime to provide free psychological counselling and assistance under the Crime Victim Assistance and Financial Compensation Act, as well as funding of projects of social service providers working to protect victims of domestic violence.

**H. Rights of the child[[13]](#endnote-13)**

1. Bulgaria is actively working to strengthen its child protection system by enhancing legal framework, developing and implementing comprehensive policies and fostering interagency actions across sectors to ensure no child is left vulnerable or exposed to harm.
2. The amendments to the Labour Code adopted in 2022 promote balanced parental involvement in childcare up to the age of 8 and work-life balance of parental commitments for employees with family responsibilities. A number of major changes have been made to the Family Allowances Act, such as the entitlement to a monthly allowance for raising a child until completion of secondary education for children with no right to the deceased parent's pension, irrespective of the family’s income. In January 2024, the amounts of the income criteria that apply to the granting of certain types of benefits under the Family Allowances Act were increased, as well as the amounts of the one-off benefits for pregnancy, childbirth and adoption and the monthly benefits for raising a child with a permanent disability. In April 2025 the amounts of the income criteria were increased again. In 2024 a new draft of the National Strategy for Children was developed by a working group under the National Council for Child Protection. The draft covers early childhood development, health and healthy lifestyle, education, competence building, sports, culture and leisure, safe and secure environment for every child, child-friendly justice, reducing child poverty and social exclusion, child participation and rights of the child in crisis and emergency situations. Consideration of the Strategy in the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly is forthcoming.
3. In September 2023 the Bulgarian Government adopted а National Strategy for Child and Adolescent Health and Paediatric Care 2030 creating a framework for mobilization, financial provision, integration and directing the efforts of state institutions and civil society towards sustainable improvement of children's health in Bulgaria. The Government adopted a National Program for the Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children (2023-2026), which defined the national policy in the field of protecting children from violence and abuse.
4. In February 2025 the 5-year "Strong Start" programme began supporting mental health, language development and physical culture of children in pre-school, including through personalized assistance to children with learning or behavioural deficiencies. Various activities are being carried out under the National Programme “No aggression - safe education environment”.
5. Various programmes are being implemented to create a safe school environment free of violence, encourage children to participate in sports instead of engaging in aggressive behaviour and harmful habits, and provide support to children at risk.
6. A national prevention campaign was held on "Protecting Young People from Crime", targeting 12th grade-students. The aim was to reduce the risk of victimization from property crimes, computer crimes, human trafficking and drug use. The campaign "CODE: Responsible Together", aimed at organizing sports events and interactive activities with children.
7. In the framework of the initiative of the Supreme Judicial Council “Open days” public prosecutors and investigators raise awareness about their work among pupils in schools and discuss topics related to crime and victimization prevention and the risks of alcohol and drug abuse.
8. Bulgaria has strengthened its juvenile justice. The Criminal Procedure Code was amended in 2023 to incorporate the provisions of EU Directive 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings.
9. In 2024 the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) led a multi-institutional working group that developed a Methodology for using "blue rooms" – specialized rooms for hearings of juvenile witnesses and victims. Specialized services were created for children in the justice system, aiming at supporting children at risk and providing access to justice for minors that are victims or witnesses of crimes.
10. The NIJ provides systematic training on child-friendly justice for magistrates and aspiring junior magistrates, which integrates UN, Council of Europe and EU standards and presents the specifics of court proceedings involving children and issues related to child psychology, interrogation techniques and communication.
11. The Academy of the MoI, the Institute of Psychology, UNICEF and other organizations regularly organize training of police officers on topics related to working with children. A new one-week course "Protection of the Rights of the Child", developed jointly with UNICEF, was introduced for police officers at the Academy of the MoI.

**I.** **Rights of persons with disabilities[[14]](#endnote-14)**

1. The Persons with Disabilities Act guarantees protection and promotion of the rights of individuals with disabilities while fostering their social inclusion. Financial assistance is provided through monthly support and targeted aid for home adaptations, vehicle purchases, rehabilitation services and housing.
2. In 2024 an average of 697,525 individuals with disabilities received monthly financial support, while 7,371 benefited from targeted aid. To enhance mobility, 234,206 individuals with disabilities were granted free annual electronic vignettes.
3. The process of deinstitutionalization of child care is in its final stage. Almost all specialized institutions for children have been closed. Compared to 2010, when their number was 137, currently only 3 Homes for Medico-Social Care for Children are still operating and are about to be closed. The number of children in specialized institutions has decreased by over 98% - from 7,587 children in 2010 to 84 children at the end of March 2025. From January 2024 to February 2025 nine new health and integrated health and social services for children were established.
4. The Personal Assistance Act guarantees personal assistance for people with permanent disabilities depending on expert evaluations from the National Expert Medical Commission or the Territorial Expert Medical Commission. In 2024, 64,282 disabled persons received personal assistance services by municipalities at their permanent addresses, 34 disabled persons signed up for vocational or higher education, and 122 found jobs.
5. The Ministry of Health (MoH) and the ASA implement the project "New Opportunities for a Dignified Life for Persons with Disabilities" through which adults with disabilities residing in specialised institutions are placed in suitable living arrangements in the community.
6. In July 2022 an Action Plan for the period 2022-2027 for the implementation of the National Strategy for Long-Term Care was adopted. The key measures in the Plan aim at providing support in a home environment for people with disabilities and elderly people dependent on care, developing quality and accessible social and integrated health and social services, closing 41 homes for people with disabilities and reforming 81 homes for the elderly, increasing the efficiency of the long-term care system and building infrastructure for new services. The plan foresees the provision of quality care and support in new community-based services for at least 2,700 persons with mental disorders, mental retardation, physical disabilities, sensory impairment and dementia. For over 8,300 persons with disabilities and elderly persons unable to care for themselves new day and residential care and support services will be established. Care and support services will be provided for over 50,000 persons in their home environment and in the community, including patronage care, telecare and assistant support.
7. The Bulgarian Sign Language Act stipulates the provision of free interpretation services for deaf and deaf-blind people for up to 120 hours per year. A special subject "Bulgarian Sign Language" was introduced for pupils with hearing problems in schools, and a special educational direction was launched in kindergartens. The Act envisages the provision of sign language interpretation of news and current affairs programs with economic and political themes by providers of audiovisual media services. The ASA offers free interpretation services in Bulgarian Sign Language.

**J.** **Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma[[15]](#endnote-15)**

1. The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma (2021-2030) is the framework document that sets the guidelines for the implementation of policies for socio-economic inclusion and participation of Roma. To achieve the long-term goal of ensuring effective equality and reducing disparities between Roma and the rest of the population, the Strategy sets out three horizontal objectives in the field of equality, inclusion and participation and four sectoral objectives in the fields of education, health, housing and employment. The Strategy is implemented through short-term national action plans. In March 2024 the Council of Ministers adopted the National Action Plan for the period 2024-2027.
2. 28 regional strategies for the equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma have been endorsed and the majority of municipalities have adopted their action plans for the period after 2024.
3. Roma mediators, funded by the state budget, hold meetings with employers, Roma leaders, NGOs and social partners to promote the employment of Roma. In 2024, more than 30,000 unemployed Roma were engaged in vocational guidance, adult training and employment, compared to 28,744 in 2023. In 2024, 17,813 unemployed Roma found work through the mediation services of Labour Offices, 3,704 more than in 2023.
4. Throughout 2021-2025 the National Programmes for the Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis and Tuberculosis have provided risk screening surveys, counselling and field testing to target groups. Mobile medical units conduct preventative screenings, examinations and clinical testing for persons of Roma descent and those living in remote areas. Counselling and field testing throughout 2021-2025 was provided under the National Programme on HIV and AIDS prevention. In 2025 the MoH financed the employment of 352 health mediators in 153 municipalities.
5. To guarantee access to education for children from vulnerable groups, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) consistently applies a series of measures: inclusion and reintegration into the education system, offering additional classes in Bulgarian and other subjects, providing career orientation, and introducing education mediators and social workers into schools. The "Access to Education for Every Child" initiative of the MES which is currently being implemented, aims to maximize attendance and lower dropouts by outreach, teacher training and awareness campaigns, thereby promoting inclusive school communities.

**K. Combatting trafficking in human beings[[16]](#endnote-16)**

1. The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) coordinates the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking, which receives reports of informally and/or formally identified victims of human trafficking.
2. Victims of trafficking are accommodated in the NCCTHB shelters (40 individuals in 2024 and 25 individuals in the period January–March 2025). Victims are provided shelter in Crisis Centres funded by the State (as of the end of March 2025, there are 33 centres with 373 places), as well as information, counselling, advocacy, mediation, therapy and skills training.
3. The NCCTHB holds multidisciplinary capacity-building events for labour officers and inspectors, migration officers, hotline operators and social workers, labour and health mediators working with Roma.
4. The SAR guarantees the necessary housing conditions and support to unaccompanied minors in international protection proceedings. "Safe Zones" for unaccompanied minors have been set up in two reception centres, offering additional security, social workers, psychologists and interpreters. Trainings on counteracting and preventing trafficking, identification of victims and interviewing methods are regularly provided to officials of the MoI, the SACP and other competent institutions.
5. Trainings on combating crimes related to human trafficking are regularly held at the Academy of the MoI. The new master's program "Human Rights Protection" at the Academy, launched in 2024, deals exclusively with human trafficking.

**L. Migration and international protection[[17]](#endnote-17)**

1. The Bulgarian government continues to work on measures to improve the asylum system and the reception of asylum seekers. The national legislation framework applies the relevant EU acts in the field of migration, integration and asylum.
2. In compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, persons who have entered the country to exercise their right to asylum are exempted from criminal liability for entering or leaving the national border without the permission of the competent authorities or outside the designated entry or exit points.
3. In 2022 the Legal Aid Act was amended to expand the categories, entitled to free legal aid and the grounds for its admission, to include persons seeking or receiving international protection or benefiting from temporary asylum.
4. Vulnerability assessments during registration identify asylum seekers with health problems or who may have been mistreated or tortured. In such cases, follow-up measures are taken.
5. Every child seeking asylum is assigned a consultant who represents them in international protection procedures and before administrative and judicial institutions.
6. Article 29, paragraph 1 of the Asylum and Refugees Act stipulates that during the procedure for granting the relevant status, a foreigner is entitled to health insurance, accessible medical assistance and free use of medical care under the conditions and procedures for Bulgarian citizens.
7. State and municipal schools of the Republic of Bulgaria provide free education to people who are seeking or have been granted international protection under the same terms and conditions for Bulgarian citizens.
8. A refugee employment and training programme supports the labour market integration of unemployed persons with a refugee or humanitarian status by enrolling them in Bulgarian language courses, vocational trainings and providing employment.
9. The National Preventive Mechanism carries out regular unannounced and planned inspections in the structures of the MoI and the SAR.
10. The SACP regularly visits the territorial units of the SAR to monitor the rights of unaccompanied minors. In 2024, a safe zone for unaccompanied minors was established on the territory of the Harmanli Refugee Centre.
11. The NIJ provides judicial training on the implementation of European asylum and migration law and the protection of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, including unaccompanied minors.

# III. Fulfilment of voluntary commitments

1. Bulgaria fulfilled its voluntary commitments[[18]](#endnote-18) it made in 2018 prior to its election to the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021.
2. During its current membership of the UN Human Rights Council Bulgaria strives to carry out its voluntary commitments[[19]](#endnote-19) for the promotion and protection of human rights for all it made prior to its election to the Council in 2023.

# IV. Conclusion

1. The Republic of Bulgaria will continue its consistent efforts to ensure full compliance with all international human rights treaties to which the State is a party and implementing the recommendations it has accepted from Universal Periodic Review Cycles. Bulgaria will remain committed to promptly addressing the remaining challenges in the field of promoting and protecting human rights, and sharing good practices and achievements.
1. Document A/HRC/46/13/Add.1 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Document No A/HRC/46/13 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The report is available here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-implementation> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The Common Core Document is available here: <https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/CoreDocuments.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Recommendations 134.7, 134.8, 134.9, 134.10, 134.11, 134.12, 134.14, 134.16 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Recommendations 134.17, 134.27, 134.53, 134.69, 134.73, 134.75, 134.78, 134.79, 134.80, 134.81, 134.83, 134.107, 134.170 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Directive (EU) 2018/843 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive (EU) 2015/849 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, and amending Directives 2009/138/EC and 2013/36/EU [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Recommendations 134.18, 134.19, 134.20, 134.22, 134.24, 134.26, 134.28, 134.29, 134.31, 134.34, 134.37, 134.41, 134.43, 134.45, 134.46, 134.49, 134.50, 134.52, 134.56, 134.58, 134.61, 134.96, 134.136, 134.153, 134.157, 134.159, and 134.201 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Recommendations 134.85-134.93, 134.95-134.97 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Recommendations 134.43, 134.117, 134.119, 134.122-134.125, 134.129-134.131, 134.132-134-137 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Recommendations 134.138-145 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Recommendations 134-146-134.155, 134.158-134.173, 134.175,134.176 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Recommendations 134.68, 134.70-134.72, 134.77, 134.178-134.186 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Recommendations 134.178, 134.183, 134.185, 134.186, 134.212-134. 134.222-134.228, 221 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Recommendations 134.187, 134.188, 134.190, 134.195, 134.196, 134.198-134.200, 134.200, 134.202, 134.204, 134.207, 134.208 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Recommendations 134.98-134.115, 134.134, 134.223 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Recommendations 134.222-134.228, 134.230-134.233 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Document A/73/316 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Document A/78/78 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)