



**International Human Rights
Instruments**

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**Common core document forming part of the
reports of States Parties**

Bulgaria*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Introduction

1. The Republic of Bulgaria is pleased to present a new revised version of its Common Core Document, which replaces the Bulgarian Common Core Document submitted in 2014¹. The document is prepared based on the Compilation of guidelines on the form and content of reports to be submitted by States parties to international human rights treaties².
2. The Core Document should be read in conjunction with Bulgaria's periodic reports under the core United Nations human rights treaties and the reports prepared in response to the recommendations received during the Universal Periodic Reviews monitoring cycles. Together, these documents outline the legislative, judicial, administrative and other measures that implement Bulgaria's international human rights treaty obligations.
3. Bulgaria recognises and appreciates the important role played by non-governmental organisations in promoting and implementing the rights specified in the UN human rights treaties.

I. General information about the reporting state

4. Bulgaria is a country in southeastern Europe on the Balkan Peninsula. Nearly rectangular in outline, Bulgaria is bordered by Romania to the north, with most of the border marked by the lower Danube River. The Black Sea lies to the east, Türkiye to the southeast, Greece to the south, Republic of North Macedonia to the southwest and Serbia to the west. The capital city is Sofia, which lies in the west.
5. Bulgaria is one of the oldest countries in Europe, whose ancient history witnessed the development of the early Eneolithic, the Thracian and the Greek civilizations, followed by the Roman and Byzantine civilizations. The First Bulgarian Empire on the Balkan Peninsula was founded in 681 A.D and played a significant role in the region for over four centuries. During the 9th century, the Preslav Literary School developed the Cyrillic script and Old Bulgarian literature, which later on significantly influenced the other Slavic cultures.
6. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Second Bulgarian Empire was of great importance for the culture of the Balkans and Eastern Europe. After the conquest of Bulgaria by the Ottoman Empire in 1396, its population and territories fell under Ottoman rule for nearly five centuries. Bulgaria was liberated from Ottoman rule in 1878 and the Third Bulgarian State was founded. The following decades saw several wars of Bulgaria with its neighbours.
7. The outcome of the Second Balkan War, in 1913, was in loss of territories with a predominant Bulgarian population, leading Bulgaria to align with Germany in both World Wars. In 1947, Bulgaria became a socialist state with a single-party system. In 1989, Bulgaria began transition to democracy and a market-based economy. With the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria in 1991, Bulgaria became a republic with a parliamentary form of government.
8. Since 2001, political, economic and social conditions in Bulgaria have significantly improved. Bulgaria became a member of NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007. The country has been a member of the United Nations since 1955. Bulgaria has been President of the 47th session of the UN General Assembly in 1992–1993, three times non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (in 1966–1967, 1986–1987, 2002–2003) and twice a member of the UN Human Rights Council (between 2019–2021 and 2024–2026). The country has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1992 and a founding member of the OSCE. Bulgaria is currently conducting negotiations for accession to the OECD.
9. Bulgaria covers an area of 110,993.6 sq. km. Its total frontier is 2,245 km in length, of which 1,181 km are land borders, 686 km are frontier rivers and 387 km are coastline.

¹ Doc. HRI/CORE/BGR/2014.

² Doc. HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6 of 3 June 2009.

10. Geographically, Bulgaria is divided by the Stara Planina (the Balkan Range) mountains into two parts: northern, the Danube plain and southern, comprising the upper Thrace lowland as well as several mountains and highlands including Rila, Pirin, Sredna Gora and the Rhodopes. Sixty per cent of the total area is covered by hills and mountains. The highest mountain is Rila at 2,925 m.

11. Bulgaria climate conditions are influenced by the continental and Mediterranean climates, diverse landscapes, and a fragmented coastline. The climate is temperate, with four distinct seasons and few altitudinal zones. The average temperature for July is around 21–24 °C in the plain areas and significantly lower in the high fields of West Bulgaria (19–20 °C). The average temperature in January is negative in the Danube plain and in the high fields of Western Bulgaria (from -2.3 °C to -1 °C).

A. Demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics

12. The 18th population and housing census in Bulgaria was conducted from 7 September to 10 October 2021. According to the data received, the population of the country was 6,519,789 persons. As of 31 December 2023, the population of Bulgaria was 6,445,481 persons, representing 1.4% of the EU population. Compared to 2022, the country's population decreased by 2,229 persons or by 0.03%. Male population was 3,097,698 (48.1%) and female – 3,347,783 (51.9%), or 1,000 males corresponded to 1,081 females. Males prevailed among the population, aged up to 55 years.

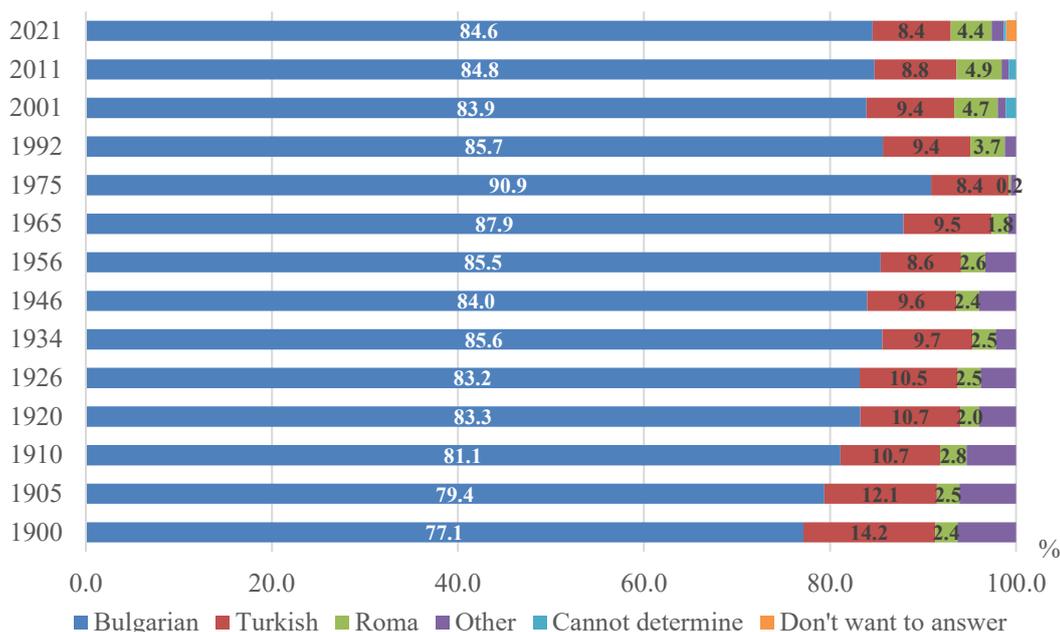
13. During the period between the last two censuses, which took place in 2011 and 2021, the population of the country decreased by 844,781 people, or 11.5%. The natural growth for the years of the period between the censuses in 2011 and 2021 was negative, while the highest population decrease was in 2021 (– 90,317 people). 59,3 % of the population decrease was due to negative natural growth. The remaining 40.7% of the decrease was a result of external migration, or the number of people who left the country during the period 2011–2021 (344,000 people).

14. Other demographic data include:

- The population ageing over the years lead to an increase of the population mean age. It has increased from 40.6 years in 2002 to 45.2 years at the end of 2023. The mean age of the population is 44.4 years in urban areas, compared to 47.5 years in rural areas.
- The birth rate (number of live born children per 1,000 persons of the average annual population during the year) is 8.9 per thousand and the crude death rate is 15.7 per thousand. As a result, the natural increase rate was – 6.8 per thousand.
- The total fertility rate (average number of live born children per woman) in 2023 was 1.81 and the infant mortality per 1,000 live births was 4.9 per thousand;

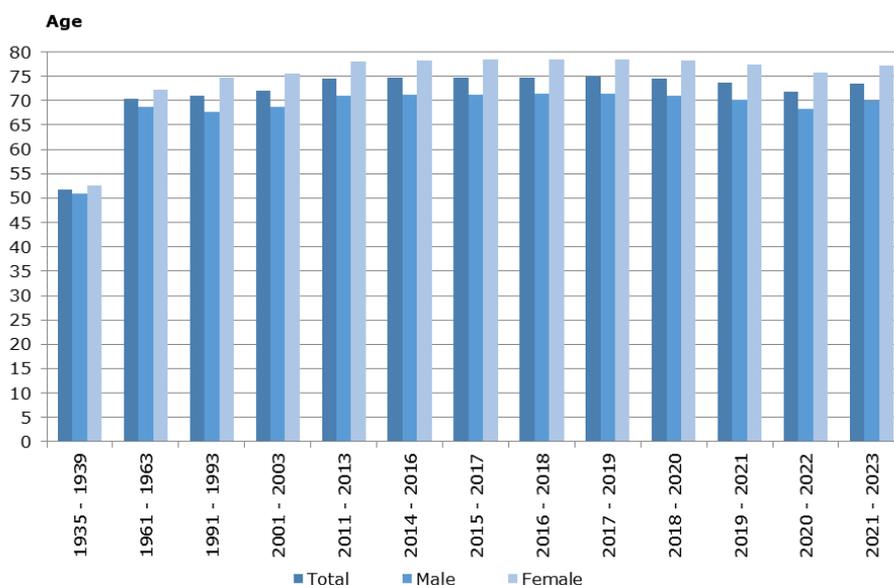
15. As of 7 September 2021, the Bulgarian ethnic group comprised 5,118,494, or 84.6% of the persons who answered the question about ethnicity in the census. 508,378, or 8.4% of the respondents, identified themselves as belonging to the Turkish ethnic group. 266,720, or 4.4% of the respondents, identified themselves as the traditionally third-largest Roma ethnic group. 79,006 people, or 1.3%, identified themselves as belonging to other ethnic groups. 15,746 (0.3%) persons indicated that they could not self-determine. 63,767, or 1.0% of respondents, answered 'I do not want to answer'. In comparison with census 2011, there is a decrease in numbers affecting all groups.

Figure 1
Structure of the population by ethnicity and census years³



16. The life expectancy for the entire population of the country, calculated for the period 2021–2023, was 73.5 years. The average life expectancy for men was 69.9 years, while for women it was 77.3 years.

Figure 2
Life expectancy at birth by sex and periods



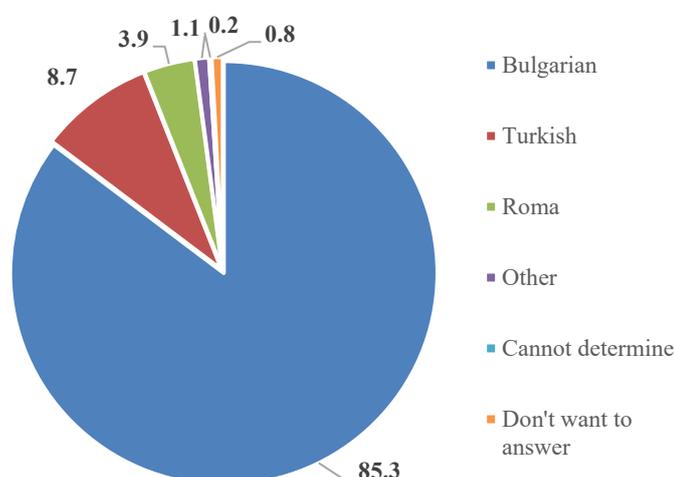
³ By 1992 including, those who have not declared their ethnic group were also included in the group 'Other'. In 2001, those who have not declared their ethnic group were also included in the group 'I cannot determine'. Due to the voluntary nature of the ethnic self-determination question in 2011 and 2021, the structure was calculated for the total number of persons who answered this question, and not for the entire population. In the presentation of the structure of the population by ethnicity and the calculation of the relative shares of the respective categories, the persons added from administrative sources, for whom there is no information in the registers used in the census, are not included.

17. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (1991) stipulates that the official language is Bulgarian and the study and use of the Bulgarian language is right and an obligation of every Bulgarian citizen. Article 36, paragraph 2 of the Constitution provides for the right of everyone to study and use his/her mother tongue, when it is different from the official language. Article 53, paragraph 5 provides that citizens and organizations are free to found private schools. Article 54, paragraph 1 declares the right to everyone to develop his/her own culture in accordance with his/her ethnic self-identification, which shall be recognized and guaranteed by the law.

18. Mother tongue is the second ethno-cultural characteristic traditionally studied in censuses. The mother tongue is the first language learned at home in early childhood. Bulgarian is the mother tongue of 5,037,607 people, or 85.3% of the population, Turkish – for 514,386 people, or 8.7%, and Romani – for 227,974 people, or 3.9% of those who answered the question. Another mother tongue was indicated by 62,906 people, or 1.1%. The persons who indicated that they could not determine their mother tongue were 10,633 (0.2%). 49,602, or 0.8% of respondents, answered, ‘I do not want to answer’.

Figure 3

Population structure by mother tongue as of September 7, 2021⁴



19. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is guaranteed under the Constitution, which stipulates that religious institutions are separated from the State and shall not be used for political purposes. The Religious Denominations Act entered into force on 1 January 2003.

20. The traditional religion in Bulgaria is Eastern Orthodox religion. After the beginning of the democratic changes in 1989, public interest in religion increased considerably and a number of new religious denominations and movements appeared, while the traditionally existing ones became more active. As a result, there are 238 religious communities officially registered in Bulgaria.

21. According to 2021 census, 4,219,270, or 71.5% of those who answered the question, self-identified as Christians. Eastern Orthodox Christians predominate among them – 4,091,780, or 97.0% of those who indicated a Christian religious denomination, followed by persons with a Protestant religious denomination – 69,852 (1.7%), Catholic religious denomination – 38,709 (0.9%), and 5,002 (0.1%) indicated the Armenian apostolic creed. The answer ‘other Christian’ was chosen by 13,927, or 0.3% of those who answered the question. 638,708 persons, or 10.8%, indicated Muslim religious denomination, 1,736 Jews, and 6,451 persons professed other religions.

⁴ In the presentation of the structure of the population by mother tongue and the calculation of the relative shares of the respective categories, the persons added from administrative sources for whom there is no information in the registers used in the census are not included.

22. As of 7 September 2021, 305,102 (5.2%) individuals responded that they did not have a religion, 259,235 (4.4%) had difficulty identifying their religion, and 472,606 (8.0%) indicated that they did not want to answer.

Table 1
Structure of the population by religion

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Total	6 519 789	100.0
Eastern Orthodox	4 091 780	69.3
Catholic	38 709	0.7
Protestant	69 852	1.2
Armenian Apostolic	5 002	0.1
Another Christian	13 927	0.2
Muslim	638 708	10.8
Jewish	1 736	0.03
Other	6 451	0.1
No religion	305 102	5.2
Cannot determine	259 235	4.4
Don't want to answer	472 606	8.0
Unknown ⁵	616 681	-

Source: 2021 census.

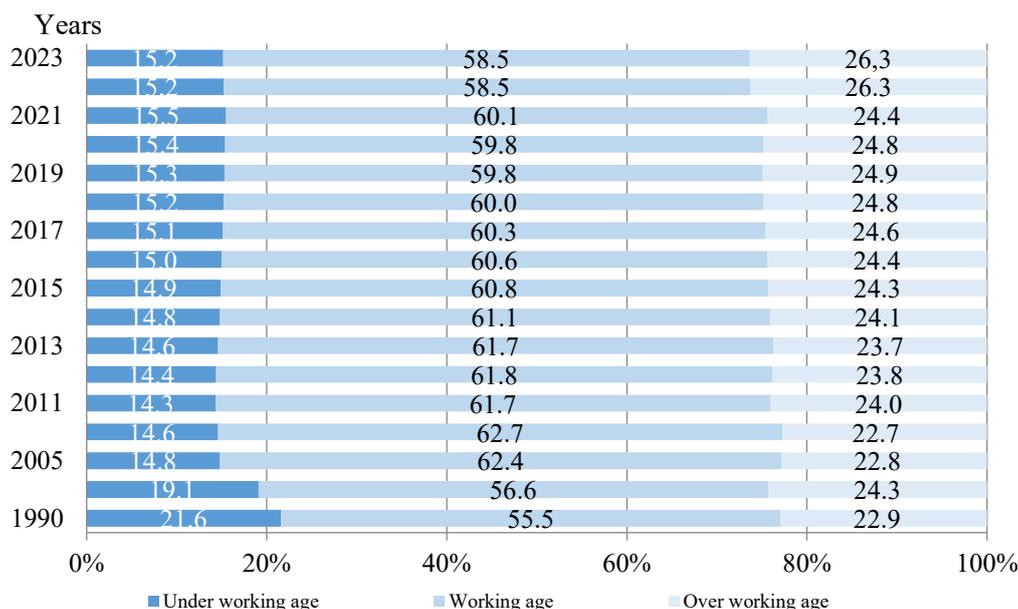
23. Despite the global crises of economic, health and political nature, Bulgaria has preserved and strengthened one of its main competitive advantages – a stable and predictable macroeconomic environment. According to World Bank data, in 2023 GDP per capita in Bulgaria was USD 9,780 or 85% of world average. For comparison, in 2020 this ratio was 75%, which is an indicator for positive development of the Bulgarian economy.

24. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and the military conflicts in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip have brought negative consequences, Bulgaria's economy is stable.

25. COVID-19 health crisis hit the Bulgarian economy stronger than the world economy. In 2020 the Bulgarian economy shrank by 4% on annual basis, compared to decline by 2.9% of the world economy. In the next 2021 Bulgarian economy recorded strong recovery by 7.7%. In 2022 and in 2023, Bulgarian GDP grew by 3.9% and 1.8% respectively. The economic growth of Bulgaria in the coming years will depend on the development of the global economic situation, which is currently unstable and poses many challenges. In 2023, at working age were women up to completion of 62 years and men up to completion of 64 years and 6 months. The number of the population at working age as of 31 December 2023 was 3,769,000 persons, or 58.5% of the total population, of which males were 1,971,000 and females – 1,798,000 persons. By the end of 2023, the number of the population over working age was 1,698,000 persons, or 26.3%, and under working age were 977,000 persons, or 15.2% of the country's population.

⁵ The category "Unknown" includes persons added from administrative sources, for whom there is no information in the registers used for the census.

Figure 4
Population under, at and over working age as of 31.12.2023



26. Economic processes at the national and international level had a significant impact on the inflation in recent years. In 2022, the harmonized index of consumer prices (HICP) rose by 13% compared to the previous year. The significant impact on inflation had the increase of the raw materials' prices and especially prices of energy carriers on international markets. In addition, inflation was influenced by strong domestic demand. In 2023, HICP rose by 8.6%. According to the macroeconomic forecast of the Ministry of Finance, in 2024 inflation will remain relatively low or 2.4%.

Table 2
Economic indicators

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
						Q1	Q2
Gross domestic product (annual real growth rate, %)	4.0	-4.0	7.7	3.9	1.8	1.9	.
Consumer price index, average annual change (%)	3.1	1.7	3.3	15.3	9.5	-	-
Industrial production index (annual change, %)	0.5	-5.9	12.1	10.4	-8.4	-8.0	.
Base interest rate	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.20	2.90	3.79	3.78
Budget Deficit(-)/surplus(+), % of GDP	2.1	-3.8	-3.9	-2.9	-1.9	-0.8	.

27. In 2022, unemployment rate reached 4.1%, as demand for personnel increased in most economic sectors. In 2023, the unemployment rate slightly increased to 4.3%. According to the most recent forecast of the Ministry of Finance, unemployment rate will remain on the same level, reaching 4.2% in 2024 and 4.1% in 2025.

28. Bulgaria's foreign trade recovered in 2022, with exports growing by 37.0% and imports by 40.0% on year-on-year basis. Influenced by the world markets, especially by the European markets, in 2023 Bulgarian exports decreased by 8.1% and imports by 10.1% on annual basis.

29. In 2022, Bulgaria recorded inflow of foreign direct investments (FDI), amounting EUR 2.6 billion. In the next 2023, this indicator rose to EUR 3.6 billion. In the period January–May 2024 the FDI amounted EUR 591 million. Despite the current international situation, FDI are significant amount for the Bulgarian economy, indicating that the country is an attractive place for investments.

B. Constitutional, political and legal structure

1. The Constitution

30. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (1991) is the supreme law of the country. No other law should contradict it. The provisions of the Constitution apply directly. Since its adoption, the Constitution has been amended six times, respectively in 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2015 and 2023.

31. The Constitution defines Bulgaria as a unitary parliamentary republic. The executive power is rested upon the Government of Bulgaria, the legislative power is within the National Assembly and the judicial power is distributed through the judicial institutions, headed by the Supreme Judicial Council. The President is the head of the state.

32. The Constitution proclaims the equality before the Law principle for all Bulgarian citizens, expressly stating that all are born free and equal in dignity and rights; and there shall be no privileges or restriction of rights on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic self-identity, sex, origin, religion, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status, or property status.

2. The National Assembly

33. The National Assembly (Parliament) consists of 240 members elected for a four-year term. Every Bulgarian citizen of 21 or above, including those who holds another citizenship, but has lived in Bulgaria for the last 18 months and is not under a judicial interdiction or is not serving a prison term, is eligible for Member of the National Assembly. While holding their seat, Members of Parliament cannot occupy a State position or engage in any activity defined in Law as incompatible with their status. They are considered to represent not only their constituencies but the entire nation and cannot be held criminally liable for their votes or opinions expressed in the National Assembly.

34. The Parliament is assisted in its work by standing or ad hoc commissions. The latter may also conduct inquiries and investigations. In any case, any official or citizen summoned by a Parliamentary commission is under the obligation to testify and present any document that may be required. With rare exceptions sessions of the National Assembly are held in public.

35. According to the Bulgarian Constitution, the National Assembly could amend all provisions of the Constitution except those within the prerogatives of the Grand National Assembly. The Grand National Assembly has the right to adopt a new Constitution, to resolve on any changes in the territory of Bulgaria and ratify any international treaty envisaging such a change, and to resolve on any changes in the form of State structure or form of Government, etc.

36. The Constitution stipulates that Parliament may pass laws, resolutions, declarations and addresses. It adopts the State budget bill, establishes taxes, schedules the elections for the President of the Republic, elects and dismisses the Prime Minister and on their motion Members of the Cabinet. Parliament also elects and dismisses the Governor of the National Bank and the heads of other institutions established by law.

37. Elections for a new National Assembly are conducted no later than one month before the expiry of the mandate of the currently acting National Assembly.

3. The President

38. The President of the Republic of Bulgaria is the head of State, who embodies the unity of the nation and represents the State in international relations. He/She is elected by direct popular vote for five years and does not belong to any of the three branches of power – legislative, executive and judicial, but interacts with each of them. In his activities, the President is assisted by a Vice President. The Vice President is elected directly by the people on the same ballot-paper as the President and can exercise a limited range of constitutional powers expressly devolved by the President by a decree.

39. Eligible for President is a Bulgarian citizen by birth, who has reached the age of 40, who has no other citizenship, is not placed under interdiction, is not serving a sentence of deprivation of liberty and has resided in the country during the five years preceding the elections. The President and the Vice President cannot engage in any other State, public or economic activities or participate in the leadership of a political party. They are not to be held liable for actions committed in the performance of their duties except for high treason or a violation of the Constitution (in such cases the Constitution provides for a procedure of impeachment). No criminal proceedings can be initiated against them and they cannot be placed under detention.

40. The President has the right to address the nation and the National Assembly and is perceived as the unifier of the nation. In addition to elections for a National Assembly, the President shall schedule the elections for Members of the European Parliament from Bulgaria and for Local Government authorities in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Election Code. He/She has the right to initiate legislation to amend the Constitution, participates in the legislative process by promulgating laws and can return a bill to the National Assembly for further debate.

41. Should no agreement be reached on the formation of a government, the President, following consultations with the parliamentary groups and acting on a motion by the caretaker prime minister-designate, shall appoint a caretaker cabinet, and shall schedule new elections within two months. A caretaker prime minister shall be appointed from among the Chairperson of the National Assembly, the Governor or a Deputy Governor of the Bulgarian National Bank, the President or a Vice-President of the Bulgarian National Audit Office, and the Ombudsman or a deputy thereof.

4. The Council of Ministers

42. The Council of Ministers (Government) consists of a Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and ministers. The Prime Minister is to head, coordinate and bear responsibility for the overall policy of the Government. He/She also appoints and dismisses deputy ministers. Usually, each Member of the Council of Ministers heads a ministry. The Constitution, however, provides for exception to this rule if the National Assembly so decides.

43. The Council of Ministers directs and conducts State's domestic and foreign policy; ensures the public order and national security, and exercises overall guidance over the state administration. It also informs the National Assembly on issues concerning the obligations of Bulgaria resulting from its membership in the European Union.

44. Eligible for election to the Council of Ministers is any Bulgarian citizen qualified to be elected to the National Assembly. Members of the Council of Ministers cannot hold posts or engage in any activity incompatible with the status of a Member of Parliament.

45. The Council of Ministers adopts decrees, directives, and decisions. By decree, the Council of Ministers adopts regulations and ordinances. In accordance with its relevant constitutional provisions it manages the implementation of the state budget; organizes the management of the state's assets; concludes, confirms or denounces international treaties when authorized to do so by Law, etc.

46. In accordance with the Constitution, the authority of the Government expires upon a vote of no confidence on the Council of Ministers or the Prime Minister, the resignation of the Government or the Prime Minister or the latter's death. After parliamentary elections, the outgoing Council of Ministers submits its resignation to the newly elected National Assembly. In any case, the outgoing Government continues to act until the election of a new Council of Ministers.

47. The Constitution provides for the possibility of establishing a caretaker Government. This might happen if following consultations of the President the biggest, the second largest and one of the minor parliamentary groups consecutively fail to form a Government within the period established by Law (seven days per parliamentary group). In the case of such a lack of agreement, the President shall appoint a caretaker Government, and schedule new parliamentary elections.

5. The Judiciary

48. Justice in Bulgaria is administered by the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Administrative Court, courts of appeal, district courts, military courts, and regional courts. There are no extraordinary courts. Specialized courts, however, can be established. The courts are to secure transparency, accessibility and perspicuity of their actions. They interact with the legislature and the executive power for comprehensive and complete safeguard of the rights of citizen and legal entities and realizing the criminal politics of the state. Jurors participate in the administration of justice in cases specified by law.

49. Judiciary includes also the Prosecutor's Office and investigating magistrates.

50. The Prosecutor's Office ensures observation of legality by indicting the perpetrators of criminal offences and prosecuting criminal cases of general nature for publicly prosecutable offences, by overseeing the enforcement of penalties and other measures of compulsion, by acting for the rescission of illegal acts and by participating in other court cases in defence of a significant public interest or in the interest of persons who need special protection in the cases provided by law.

51. Investigating magistrates are included in the Judiciary system as provided in Article 117 of the Constitution. Investigating magistrates are part of the investigative bodies (other bodies with investigative functions are in the Ministry of the Interior, the Customs Agency and the Anti-Corruption Commission) provided for in the national legal framework.

52. Justices, prosecutors and investigating magistrates are elected, promoted, demoted, reassigned and dismissed by the Supreme Judicial Council. The Supreme Judicial Council is chaired by the Minister of Justice and consists of 25 members.

6. The Constitutional Court

53. The Constitutional Court is composed of twelve members. One third of them are elected by the National Assembly, one third are appointed by the President and one third are elected by the General Assembly of the judges of the Supreme Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court. They are elected/appointed for a nine-year term and cannot be re-elected or reappointed. Eligible for membership in the Constitutional Court are Bulgarian citizens who have no other citizenship and who meet the requirements of being jurists of high professional and moral integrity and with at least fifteen years of professional experience. The status of the Members of the Constitutional Court is incompatible with a representation mandate, or any State or political post, or membership in a political party or trade union, or with the practising of a free, commercial, or any other paid occupation. The Members of the Constitutional Court enjoy the same immunity as Members of the National Assembly.

54. The Constitution vests the Bulgarian Constitutional Court to provide binding interpretations of the Constitution. The second substantial competence of the Court is to rule on challenges to the constitutionality of the Laws and other acts passed by the National Assembly and the acts of the President. Such control is in fact the Constitutional Court's major competence. The Constitutional Court rules on the compatibility of domestic Laws with the universally recognized norms of International Law and the international instruments to which Bulgaria is a party. Further the Constitutional Court rules on challenges of the constitutionality of political parties and associations, on challenges to the legality of the election of the President and Vice President or of a Member of Parliament. The Constitutional Court shall rule on impeachment brought by the National Assembly against the President or the Vice President for treason or violation of the Constitution.

55. The Constitutional Court cannot act on its own initiative; it becomes active only on an initiative from at least one fifth of the Members of the Parliament, the President, the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Administrative Court or the Chief Prosecutor. The Ombudsman can communicate to these organs its opinion on the need for the Constitutional Court to be seized of the constitutionality of a particular international treaty on human rights before its ratification.

7. Non-Profit legal entities

56. The conditions for constitution, registration, the structure, the activity and the termination of the non-profit corporate bodies are regulated in the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act (2001). The non-profit legal entities are associations and foundations. The non-profit legal entities freely determine their goals and can identify themselves as organisations carrying out activities to the public or private benefit. The determination can be made by the statutes, the constituting act or by amendments to them. The determination of carrying out socially useful activity is irrevocable after the entering of this circumstance in the Register of the non-profit legal entities. The non-profit legal entities determined for carrying out socially useful activity are subject to entry, upon their establishment, in a special Register at the Registry Agency to the Minister of Justice.

57. The state can support and encourage the non-profit legal entities registered in the Register at the Registry Agency to the Minister of Justice in carrying out socially useful activity through tax, credit interest, customs and other financial and economic relief, as well as financing, under conditions and by an order determined by the respective special laws.

II. General framework for the protection and promotion of human rights

A. Acceptance of international human rights instruments

58. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria declares allegiance to the universal human values of liberty, peace, humanism, equality, justice and tolerance and guarantees the life, dignity, and rights of the human being and the creation of conditions for the free development of the individual and of civil society. The Constitution stipulates that the international treaties which have been ratified in accordance with the constitutional procedure, promulgated and having come into force with respect to the Republic of Bulgaria, are part of the legislation of the State and have primacy over any conflicting provision of the domestic legislation.

59. Bulgaria is a Party to the core international instruments on human rights, to other United Nations human rights instruments and to the International Labour Organization Conventions on labour rights. As a Member of the Council of Europe, Bulgaria is a High Contracting Party to more than 90 Council of Europe Conventions and Protocols. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is directly applicable to Bulgaria as a Member State of the European Union.

60. The legal framework of Bulgaria on protection and promotion of human rights is based on the core international human rights instruments, in particular:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948);
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (signature in 1968, ratification in 1970) and its two Optional protocols (ratification in 1992 and in 1999);
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (signature in 1968, ratification in 1970);
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (signature in 1966, ratification in 1966);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (signature in 1980, ratification in 1982);
- The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (signature in 1986, ratification in 1986) and its Optional Protocol (signature in 2010, ratification in 2011);
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (signature in 1990, ratification in 1991) and its two Optional Protocols (signature in 2001, ratification in 2002);

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (signature in 2007, ratification in 2012);
- The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two Protocols (signature in 2000, ratification in 2001);
- United Nations Convention against Corruption (signature 2003, ratification in 2006).

61. Bulgaria ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1992 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 2012. Bulgaria confirms its commitment to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

62. Among the Council of Europe conventions and protocols, to which Bulgaria is a High Contracting Party, are the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its protocols (Protocols Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 14 and has signed Protocol 15), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁶, the European Social Charter (revised) as well as the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Bulgaria is a founding Member of the Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

63. Bulgaria actively participates in the work of the UN General Assembly and its Third Committee. Bulgaria was elected President of the 47th session of the UN General Assembly in 1992–1993 and President of the Third Committee in 1980 and 2013. Bulgaria was twice member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2019–2021 and 2024–2026. In 2021, Bulgaria was one of the four Vice-President of the Human Rights Council. Bulgaria extended standing invitations to special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council. Bulgaria has succeeding dialogue with the United Nations treaty bodies dealing with human rights, namely the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Committee Against Torture, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

64. Bulgaria is strongly engaged in the fight against domestic violence and violence against women. In 2018, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted a decision stating that the Council of Europe’s Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) includes legal concepts related to non-binary and non-biological notion of “sex” that are incompatible with the main principles of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Pursuant to Constitutional Court’s Decision 13/27.07.2018, Bulgaria is not in a position to ratify the Council of Europe’s Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

65. This does not undermine the State’s commitment to combat all forms of violence, including domestic violence. The Republic of Bulgaria has taken significant legislative and organizational measures in the field of prevention and countermeasures against domestic violence in accordance with the basic principles of the Istanbul Convention, compatible with the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

66. In recent years, a number of actions aimed at improving the legal framework for combating violence against women and domestic violence has been taken. All forms of domestic violence have been criminalized, thereby guaranteeing adequate and comprehensive criminal legal protection against any acts of violence against women,

⁶ The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has been ratified by Bulgaria with the following declaration: “Confirming its adherence to the values of the Council of Europe and the desire for the integration of Bulgaria into the European structures, committed to the policy of protection of human rights and tolerance to persons belonging to minorities, and their full integration into Bulgarian society, the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria declares that the ratification and implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities do not imply any right to engage in any activity violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the unitary Bulgarian State, its internal and international security”.

including domestic violence. Measures have been taken to pursue and punish the perpetrators. Legal mechanisms have been introduced to protect victims of violence, including free legal aid before all courts at the expense of the State budget for persons who have suffered from domestic or sexual violence, who do not have the means and wish to use a lawyer's protection; compensation to victims; protection services incl. in cases with an international element.

67. By order of 12 July 2023 of the Minister of Interior, a "Domestic Violence" sector was established in the staff of the General Directorate of the National Police of the Ministry of Interior. The sector develops, proposes and implements the policies of the Ministry of Interior in the field of prevention of crimes committed in the conditions of domestic violence. The "Domestic Violence" sector also carries out methodical guidance, assistance and control in its field of activity in the Metropolitan Directorate of Interior and Regional Directorates of Interior, as well as cooperates with other state bodies, local authorities and local self-government, legal entities and individuals to build long-term domestic violence prevention programs at the local, regional and national level.

68. In 2023, the Help Me mobile application developed by the National Legal Aid Bureau was created. The application contains information on the coordinates of the Regional Counseling Centers opened in the country to the Bar Councils, as well as all the institutions and organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria that are related to the protection and support of the victims of domestic violence – governmental and non-governmental.

69. At the end of 2023, a Coordination Mechanism for assistance and support to victims of domestic violence was established.

70. Bulgaria has recognized the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

B. Legal framework for the protection of human rights at the national level

71. The national legal framework for protection in the field of civil and political rights includes the Protection against Discrimination Act (2004), the Domestic Violence Protection Act (2009), the Radio and Television Act (1998), the Religious Denomination Act (2002), the Family Code (2009), the Election Code (2014), etc. The Penal Code (adopted in 1968 and last amended in May 2024), the Criminal Procedural Code (2006), and Enforcement of Sentences and Custody Act (2009) provide for the protection of the rights of detainees, accused and sentenced persons.

72. A number of other Acts of Law, such as the Labour Code (adopted in 1986 and last amended in August 2024), the Employment Promotion Act (2002), the Social Insurance Code (1999), the Health Insurance Act (2000), the School and Pre-School Act (2016), the Higher Education Act (1995), etc., recognize and expressly regulate the fundamental economic, social and cultural rights. The legal framework in the social sphere includes the Labour Code, the Social Insurance Code, the Economic and Social Council Act (2001), the Employment Promotion Act, the Health Act (2005), the Settlement of Collective Labour Disputes Act (1990), the Health and Safety at Work Act (1997), etc.

73. The protection of the rights of persons belonging to specific groups is provided for in the Equality between Women and Men Act (2016), the Protection of the Child Act (2000), the Protection of the Disabled Persons Act (2019), the Asylum and Refugees Act (2002), etc.

74. From the beginning of 2024, the implementation of new Methodological Guidelines for the actions of the employees of the Ministry of Interior under the Domestic Violence Protection Act has been started, in which action mechanisms are detailed at each stage of receiving the signal, visiting the place, talking to the victims, working with the perpetrators, etc. A questionnaire measures the degree of risk of increased severity of injury or death in a subsequent violent incident. It is designed to be completed by the victim of violence and assesses his/her experiences and perceptions regarding the situation of violence in which he/she finds herself. Depending on the degree of risk, specific measures are taken to ensure the victim's protection from violence.

Access to justice and remedies

75. Every Bulgarian citizen enjoys free and unrestricted access to justice. The Civil Procedure Code (2007) provides for the types of courts that are competent to hear civil cases. The procedure takes place in three instances. At each instance court the proceedings take usually one to one and a half year. In civil cases, a state fee is to be paid by the applicant for the proceedings to be opened and in most of the cases it is the equivalent of four percent of the claimed compensation.

76. According to the Legal Aid Act (2006) and Civil Procedure Code, applicants are entitled to legal aid for their representation in civil cases, which would include discrimination cases. In principle, the Legal Aid Act provides that legal aid might be provided in civil cases when evidence from the relevant authorities are presented to prove that the party has not financial means to pay for legal aid. The court considers the income of the person or the family, property status certified with a declaration, family, healthcare and employment status, age and other circumstances. The court specifies the type and scope of the legal aid granted in its ruling. The latter has effect as from the submission of the application, unless the court decrees otherwise. In practice, most of the reviewed discrimination cases were initiated and led by attorneys-at-law who work for human rights NGOs and provide in principle pro bono legal aid to the applicants.

77. Legal aid is not provided for the parties in non-judicial procedure before the equality body, the Protection Against Discrimination Commission. The fees for the procedure before the equality body as well as the expenses are paid by the state budget.

78. According to Bulgarian law, courts can award compensation for damages in criminal and civil matters. There is no maximum amount of compensation. The courts can award any amount that is fair. The courts can establish discrimination and award compensation for damages, as well as order the respondent to take remedial action, or to refrain from or terminate particular action or inaction found to be in breach of the law. In the event that victims have not received compensation within the framework of a legal process, they can also seek compensation under the Assistance and Financial Compensation for Victims of Crime Act (2006).

79. The equality body, too, can make a finding of discrimination, and order preventive or remedial action. Under the Protection Against Discrimination Act, the equality body has power to impose financial sanctions between the equivalent of €125 and €1,250. These sanctions are administrative fines and are not awarded to the victim as compensation but go to the state budget.

C. Framework within which human rights are protected at the national level

80. The national institutional framework for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms rests with the administrative, legislative and judicial power.

1. National Assembly and its Commissions

81. The human rights issues are dealt with by the Parliamentary Commissions of the National Assembly: The Commission on Legal Affairs; the Commission on Labour and Social Policy; the Commission on Children, Youth and Sport; the Commission on Interaction with Civil Organizations and Movements; the Commission to Combat Corruption, Conflict of Interests and Parliamentarian Ethics; and the Commission on Culture and Media.

2. Constitutional Court

82. The Constitutional Court is vested with the powers to provide binding interpretations of the Constitution itself, to control the constitutionality of the Laws and other acts taken by the National Assembly, as well as the acts by the President of the Republic, to pronounce itself on the consistency of any international treaties signed by the Republic of Bulgaria with the Constitution prior to their ratification, as well as on the consistency of any domestic Laws with the universally recognized standards of international law.

83. Applying strictly and consistently the provisions of the Constitution, the Court guarantees the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in Bulgaria. The Court has rendered consistent decisions in defence of human rights and legal interests of the Bulgarian citizens, separation of powers, inviolability of private property, freedom for economic initiatives, independence of the mass media and prohibition of any censorship.

3. Courts

84. The Bulgarian court system comprises Regional Courts, District Courts, Courts of Appeal, and Supreme Courts (Supreme Court of Cassation and Supreme Administrative Court).

85. Courts of Appeal hear appeals against decisions delivered by District Courts, while District Courts hear appeals against rulings of Regional Courts. The Supreme Court of Cassation hears appeals against second instance judgments.

86. Claims in respect of administrative acts (e.g. disputes with local and central administration, licenses, residence permits, real estate matters, etc.) are brought before the Administrative Courts, which act as courts of first instance. The decisions of the Administrative Courts may be appealed before the Supreme Administrative Court.

87. The Supreme Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court are entitled to issue interpretative decisions aimed at providing final solutions where disputes as to the application of certain statutory provisions arise, and at eliminating and preventing inconsistencies and contradictions in the judicial practice.

4. Prosecutor's Office

88. The Prosecutor's Office of Bulgaria is part of the Judiciary and its structure follows that of the courts that hear criminal cases. It ensures that legality is observed and administers criminal investigations. Prosecutors have the power to initiate criminal proceedings if there is sufficient evidence of a crime of a general nature.

89. The Prosecutor General supervises legality and provides methodological guidance of the activity of all prosecutors and may approach the Constitutional Court.

5. Ombudsman

90. The institution was established under the Ombudsman Act (2003), with the mandate of being public defender, as an additional form of protection of citizens' rights and freedoms. Under the 2006 amendments to the Constitution, the status of the Ombudsman was raised to a constitutional level thereby further strengthening his/her independence.

91. The Ombudsman is elected by the National Assembly. The Ombudsman's Act settles the legal status, organisation and activity of the institution to intervene when the rights and freedoms of citizens are violated by state authorities or by natural or legal persons subject to private law. In accordance with Article 150, paragraph 3 of the Constitution, the Ombudsman may approach the Constitutional Court with a request for declaring as unconstitutional a law which infringes human rights and freedoms.

92. In 2019, following changes in the Ombudsman Act, the institution of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria was accredited with the highest UN status "A" ("Fully compliant") of the Paris Principles, the international standards that frame and guide the work of the National Human Rights Institutions.

93. Chapter IV.A of the Ombudsman Act (promulgated in State Gazette No. 29/2012, in force from 11 May 2012) regulates the competences and the rights of the Ombudsman as a national preventive mechanism. Article 28c of the Act provides that the Ombudsman as a National Preventive Mechanism may assign in an order his functions, fully or partially, to officials of his administration. A separate organizational structure operates within the Ombudsman Institution, the National Preventive Mechanism Directorate. The Ombudsman assigns to the National Preventive Mechanism Directorate's experts the implementation of specific tasks on the prevention of torture and all forms of degrading treatment or punishment of persons in custody, institutions and places for serving sentences.

94. Articles 11 to 15 of the People with Disabilities Act provide for the establishment of Monitoring Board that shall carry out the functions of promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) in accordance with Article 33, paragraph 2 of the CRPD. The Monitoring Board consist of 9 members – two representatives, designated by the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria, two representatives designated by the Chairperson of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, four representatives of the organizations of the persons with disabilities, designated by them, and one representative of the academic community, designated by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The Monitoring Board performs periodic review and evaluation of the national legislation, practices and draft regulations for compliance with the provisions of the CPRD. The activity of the Monitoring Board is provided administratively through the administration of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination on a rotation basis. The Monitoring Board reports annually to the National Assembly on its activities.

95. The Ombudsman is free and independent in planning inspections as National Preventive Mechanism and in implementing prevention policy. Inspections are carried out on site by a multidisciplinary team of experts from the National Preventive Mechanism Directorate, who strictly follow the methodology of the UN Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

96. Complaints and reports to the Ombudsman may be submitted by all individuals. The official language of complaints and signals, and the answers compiled by the Ombudsman, is Bulgarian. Exceptions are allowed for citizens who do not speak Bulgarian.

6. Commission for the Protection against Discrimination

97. The Commission for the Protection against Discrimination is established under the Protection against Discrimination Act (2004).

98. The Commission comprises of 9 members, with at least four being jurists. The National Assembly shall elect five members, including the Commission's Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson. The President shall appoint the remaining four of the members. The term of the Commission members is five years. During the election or appointment of Commission members, the principles of gender balance and representation of ethnic minorities shall be upheld. Currently, the Commission has five female members and four male members with four members belonging to ethnicities other than Bulgarian.

99. According to the Protection against Discrimination Act, the Commission is an independent specialized state organ for the prevention of discrimination, protection against discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities. The Commission shall exercise control over the implementation and compliance with the Act and other Laws regulating equality of treatment.

100. Proceedings before the Commission can be initiated on the basis of a complaint by a victim of discrimination, or by a signal from natural persons or legal entities, or by the Commission itself. The proceedings before the Commission are free of charge. An important step in the process of establishment of the violation is the reversed burden of proof, introduced by the Protection against Discrimination Act.

7. Council for Electronic Media

101. The Council for Electronic Media (CEM) is an independent specialized authority that regulates media services and video-sharing platforms as outlined in the Radio and Television Act. CEM consists of five members. Three of them are appointed by the National Assembly and the rest – by the President. The mandate of the Council is six years, limited to two non-consecutive terms. The Council members elect a Chairperson from among themselves for a one-year term.

102. CEM's responsibilities include ensuring compliance with human rights standards, such as prohibitions against hate speech, discrimination, and content harmful to children. The Council monitors media services for violations like incitement to violence or hatred based on specific characteristics, including race, sex, religion, and nationality, ensuring that media

providers adhere to these standards. CEM regularly supervises media services, prioritizing cases of potentially sexist, xenophobic, or intolerant content. Media providers are required to avoid distributing material that incites hatred, promotes intolerance, or harms the moral, mental, or physical well-being of children. To address violations, CEM can issue written warnings to media providers and has the authority to impose fines, with stricter penalties for repeat offenses.

103. Whenever cases of gender inequality and discriminatory treatment are identified, the Council works in cooperation with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. In case violations of the Child Protection Act are detected, CEM informs and cooperates with the State Agency for Child Protection. CEM also cooperates with bodies like the National Council for Journalism Ethics and the National Council for Self-Regulation to enforce ethical standards in media, including the prevention of hate speech and harmful content.

8. State Agency for Child Protection

104. The State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) was established in 2000 under the Child Protection Act. The Agency is a specialized body of the Council of Ministers for guiding, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the state policy for child protection. The Children's Council to the President of the SACP is registered as a member of the EU Platform for Children's Participation.

9. National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings

105. The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was established by virtue of the Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Act (2003). It determines and administers the implementation of the national policy and strategy in the area of combating trafficking in human beings. The National Commission under the Council of Ministers organises and coordinates the interaction between separate institutions and organisations executing the Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Act. It works to prevent trafficking in human beings and to protect, assist and reintegrate victims of trafficking.

106. The National Commission develops annually a National Programme for Prevention and Counteraction of Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of the Victims, which is approved by the Council of Ministers. It researches, analyses and reports statistical data on human trafficking. It carries out information, awareness and education campaigns aimed at potential victims of trafficking. It manages and supervises the activities of the Local Commissions for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the centres for protection and support of victims of trafficking.

107. Bulgaria has set up a National Mechanism for Referral and Support of Trafficked Persons which is a co-operative framework through which state actors discharge their duties to provide care for trafficked persons, and coordinate their efforts with non-governmental and international organizations. It offers uniform guidance for the identification of victims of trafficking and determines common principles of support for the victims. Since 2022, the National Mechanism for Referral and Support of Trafficked Persons is accessible online.

10. National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues

108. The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NSCEII) under the Council of Ministers is a coordinating and consultative body that supports the activities of the Council of Ministers in the development and implementation of state policy on ethnic and integration issues. The role of the NCCEII is to support the formation of a stable and consistent policy aimed at resolving the basic problems of Bulgarian citizens belonging to ethnic communities, ensuring interrelation and coordination between the policies of integration. Particular attention is focused on the Roma.

109. Chairperson of the NCCEII is a nominated Deputy Prime Minister. Members of the Council are representatives of all ministries at the level of deputy minister, some governmental institutions represented by their chairpersons, as well as the head of National Statistical Institute, representative of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria. The composition of the NCCEII includes representatives of non-profit legal entities created by persons belonging to different ethnic

groups, including Roma, as well as NGOs carrying out activities related to development of the interethnic relations and tolerance.

110. Since 1994, the subsequent governments of the Republic of Bulgaria have established special units within the Administration of the Council of Ministers to deal with the problems of ethnic communities. The current one is the “Prevention and protection from domestic violence, cooperation on ethnic and integration issues and interaction with civil society” unit under the General Secretary of the Administration of the Council of Ministers. The unit is Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues.

111. In May 2022, the Council of Ministers adopted the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma (2021–2030). The Strategy establishes three horizontal goals – equality, inclusion, and participation within six spheres of action – education, health, housing, employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, and culture and media. The fight against discrimination is a horizontal priority in all six spheres.

11. National Human Rights Coordination Mechanism

112. In March 2024, the Council of Ministers adopted a Decree to improve the interdepartmental coordination in the field of human rights through a national coordination, implemented by a national coordination mechanism. The existing coordination, in place since 2013, has been improved.

113. The Council of Ministers also established a Council to ensure the implementation of the National Coordination Mechanism for Human Rights. It clearly allocated the obligations of the state institutions, in accordance with their constitutional and statutory powers, to the international human rights treaties to which Bulgaria is a party.

114. The National Coordination Mechanism is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and includes national human rights institutions, executive authorities as well as non-governmental organizations. It monitors the improvement, protection and promotion of human rights in Bulgaria. The participation in the Council of the bodies and institutions that are outside the composition of the executive power is on a voluntary basis, with their expressed consent and is an expression of cooperation and dialogue between the authorities.

12. National Council for the Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence

115. The National Council for the Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence was established in 2023 with the amendments to the Domestic Violence Protection Act.

116. The National Council is chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister. Members of the Council are ministers, heads of state agencies, representative of the Supreme Court of Cassation, chairpersons of state agencies, etc. The composition of the National Council includes representatives of non-profit legal entities that carry out activities on prevention and protection from domestic violence.

117. The National Council is a specialized permanent collective and consultative body for the implementation of the state policy on the prevention and protection from domestic violence through coordination, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to limit and protect from domestic violence. It develops a national program for the prevention and protection of domestic violence based on the determined priority activities for funding and submits it for adoption by the Council of Ministers, making proposals for updating it if necessary.

13. National Council on Equality of Women and Men

118. The National Council on Equality of Women and Men is a coordinating and advisory body that assists the Council of Ministers in the development and implementation of the state policy on the equality of women and men. It carries out consultations, cooperation and coordination between central and territorial bodies of the executive power and civil society organizations.

119. The Council is headed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and its members are deputy ministers, heads of agencies, and other authorities set up by law, representatives

of the social partners and the National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria. NGOs working in the field of equality of women and men are also included.

120. In December 2020, the Council of Ministers adopted National Strategy for Promoting of Equality between Women and Men 2021–2030. Its strategic goal is to contribute to the achievement of de facto equality between women and men in Bulgaria by implementing a unified, consistent and sustainable state policy, focused on: equality between women and men in the labour market and equal degree of economic independence, reducing the gender pay and income gap, promoting equality between women and men in decision-making processes, combating violence and protecting and supporting victims, and overcoming gender stereotypes in various spheres of public life and sexism.

14. National Council for Child Protection

121. The National Council for Child Protection is a body under the State Agency for Child Protection with advisory and coordination functions. The council carries out its activity in accordance with the provisions of the Child Protection Act and specific regulation. The National Council for Child Protection has the right to give a preliminary opinion on draft legal acts that contain provisions related to children's rights.

122. It is headed by the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child protection and its members are deputy ministers, heads of agencies and representatives of NGOs carrying out activities related to child protection.

15. National Council for Persons with Disabilities

123. The National Council for Persons with Disabilities is an advisory body to the Council of Ministers for cooperation in the development and implementation of policy for the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Council gives opinions on draft legal acts, strategies, programs, plans and other acts that affect the rights of persons with disabilities.

124. Members of the Council are representatives of the state, designated by the Council of Ministers, the nationally representative organizations of and for persons with disabilities, the nationally representative organizations of workers and employees, the nationally representative organizations of employers, and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. The National Council is headed by a Deputy Prime Minister.

125. In December 2020, the Council of Ministers adopted the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. The strategic document contributes to the creation of better conditions and opportunities for persons with disabilities to exercise their rights and participate in various spheres of public life on an equal footing with other Bulgarian citizens.

16. National Council for Assistance and Compensation to Victims of Crime

126. The National Council for Assistance and Compensation to Victims of Crime is established under the Minister of Justice for the purposes of implementing and coordinating the activities covered under the Assistance and Financial Compensation for Victims of Crime Act (AFCVCA), which entered into force on 1 January 2007. An Expert Commission has been established for the National Council for Assistance and Compensation of Victims of Crime to support its activities.

127. The National Council consists of permanent members⁷ and reserve members who are appointed to replace the permanent members in their absence. Chairman of the National Council is the Minister of Justice or a deputy minister authorized by him. The activity of the National Council is supported by the administration of the Ministry of Justice.

⁷ Permanent members are a judge of the Supreme Court of Cassation appointed by its Chairman; prosecutor from the Supreme Court Cassation Prosecutor's Office, designated by the Chief Prosecutor; one employee each from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as determined by the relevant ministers; one representative of the State Agency for Child Protection, the National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking, the Supreme Bar Council and the Association of Support Organizations of Victims of Crimes.

128. Under the terms and procedure of the AFCVCA, the right to assistance and financial compensation from the State is granted to victims of crime who are Bulgarian nationals or nationals of European Union Member States, as well as to foreign nationals in the cases stipulated in an international treaty to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party. Assistance may be provided to victims and their family members who have suffered pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages as a result of crimes of a general nature, and financial compensation may be awarded to victims who have suffered pecuniary damages from serious premeditated crime explicitly listed in the law.

129. Under the AFCVCA, the forms of assistance to victims of crime are medical assistance in emergency situations in accordance with the procedures established by the Health Act, psychological consultation and assistance, free legal aid provided in accordance with the Legal Aid Act, and practical assistance.

130. In 2023, the AFCVCA was amended by establishing an entirely new chapter to regulate the procedure for carrying out the individual assessment of victims. The purpose of the individual assessment is to establish the existence of specific needs for protection and to determine the measures to be taken in relation to the victim.

17. Dissemination of human rights instruments

131. Official Bulgarian translation of the texts of all international instruments, ratified under Article 85, paragraph 1 of the Constitution, as well as all domestic legal acts including the text of the Constitution and the decisions of the Constitutional Court, are promulgated in the Official State Gazette.

132. A United Nations Information and Documentation Centre, established within the National Library, provides access to a number of United Nations documents. Official United Nations publications are also available through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

133. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other ministries regularly issue and distribute a wide range of printed and electronic materials on the protection of human rights.

134. Information on the presentation by Bulgaria of its national report to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council, which took place during the 36th session of the Working Group in Geneva on 6 November 2020, was published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

135. Concluding observations and recommendations received during the considerations of the national reports of Bulgaria presented to the United Nations human rights treaty bodies are published on the website of the ministry in lead of the implementation of the respective international human rights instrument.

18. Raising human rights awareness among public officials and other professionals

136. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Academy of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) continue to provide appropriate education and training in human rights.

137. The subject of human rights has been present in all full-time curricula of the NIJ for initial and continuing training of magistrates. Police officers are acquainted with the decisions of the European Court on Human Rights in the framework of the discipline “Human Rights Protection”.

138. The topics of protection of human rights, protection from discrimination, hate crimes prevention and countermeasures against domestic violence are included in the curriculum of the MoI Academy. Annually, in the Academy, over 3,000 police officers undergo training on prevention and countermeasures against domestic violence and gender-based violence, and measures to protect victims. Human rights are also an integral part of the ongoing training of the staff in qualification courses or within the framework of field training. The topic is part of the curricula for the initial training of police officers.

139. Training on the protection of human rights is also included in a number of projects that the General Directorate of the National Police implements in cooperation with international partners and NGOs.

140. Within the framework of the project “Improving the effectiveness of policing in the field of domestic violence and gender-based violence”, funded under the Home Affairs Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the period 2014–2024, for the period from 24 April 2023 to 22 March 2024, 23 trainings were held on topics related to domestic violence, and a total of 1,030 police officers, public officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations were trained. Under the General Directorate of the National Police project “Improving the effectiveness of police activity in the field of domestic violence and gender-based violence”, funded under the Home Affairs Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, trainings were conducted with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including the Roma and the fight against Roma stereotypes. 700 employees of the Ministry of the Interior have been trained.

141. The Social Assistance Agency also conducts trainings for social workers in order to improve their skills in working with representatives of ethnic communities and to promote their social inclusion.

19. Education in Human Rights in the general school system

142. Formal civic education in Bulgarian schools is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Reference Framework for Key Competences, etc.

143. According to the State Education Requirements for civic education, human rights are regarded as a basis for the overall personal development of youth, in view of their social realization.

144. The training package “Human Rights Training” was developed by the Ministry of Education and Science in partnership and with the support of UNICEF. The training package includes a Curriculum Framework for Child Rights Education in the Bulgarian Education System, a Handbook for Children’s Rights Education and 75 integrative lessons, distributed by educational stages. The lessons are practically written out and ready for direct application in the classroom, class time or extracurricular activity.

D. Reporting process at the national level

145. The Council to the National Coordinating Mechanism for Human Rights monitors the progress of implementation of the recommendations adopted by Bulgaria, received as a result of the submission of the periodic national reports to the international control mechanisms on human rights, including the Working Group on UPR of the UN Human Rights Council, examines the problems encountered during the implementation and makes proposals to overcome them.

146. The Council adopts guidelines for the preparation of the periodic national reports and answers to questions addressed to Bulgaria, which are submitted to the international control mechanisms on human rights, and distributes the duties of participation in this preparation among the institutions according to their competences.

147. The Council to the National Coordinating Mechanism for Human Rights approves the periodic national reports and the answers to the questions addressed to Bulgaria, which are submitted to the Working Group on UPR of the UN Human Rights Council and the international control mechanisms on human rights, after consultations with all interested parties, including representatives of civil society.

148. Bulgaria attaches particular importance to its cooperation with the NGOs in the field of reporting process on human rights. NGOs actively participate in the preparation of the national reports for the respective UPR cycles, as well as the periodic national reports on the implementation of the United Nations core international instruments on human rights. They are regularly invited to present their comments and suggestions on these national reports before their submission to Working Group on UPR of the UN Human Rights Council and the monitoring bodies of the UN human rights treaties.

E. Other related human rights information

149. The human rights policy pursued by the Republic of Bulgaria is part of a wider European Union drive to promote and defend human rights. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are core values of the European Union, enshrined in its founding treaty and reinforced by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU. Bulgarian policy is part of the European Union Common policy and follows its fundamental document - the European Consensus on Development.

150. The Bulgarian policy is also based on the development objectives agreed at the multilateral level, with the focus on sustainable human development and combating poverty, including within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

151. Bulgaria has made a political commitment to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals. In April 2023, the Council of Ministers adopted Decree No. 52/2023, establishing a coordination mechanism to monitor and report on SDG progress at the national level. A Development Council, chaired by the Prime Minister and comprising cabinet members, coordinates the management, monitoring, control, and reporting of the implementation of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. Additional functions related to SDG progress reporting were delegated to the Development Council through Decree No. 77/2023.

152. In the context of multilateral cooperation, Bulgaria participates in the European Development Fund, a major instrument of financial support to the developing countries in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The regions that struggle with instability and countries in transition from the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Mediterranean region and the Middle East are seen as a priority in Bulgarian development policy.

153. Bulgaria regularly provides voluntary financial contributions to OHCHR. Bulgaria also supports and financially contributes to UN specialized agencies, other bodies and funds involved in the field of human rights, such as the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Children's Fund. The country makes financial contributions to international financial institutions such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Financial Corporation, and the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank.

III. Information on non-discrimination and equality and effective legal remedies

A. Prevention of discrimination and inequality

154. Article 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria proclaims that all persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights and all citizens shall be equal before the law. It declares that there shall be no privileges or restriction of rights on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity, sex, origin, religion, education, beliefs, political affiliation, personal and social status, or property status.

155. The Protection Against Discrimination Act sets as its purpose to ensure to every person the right to equality before the law, equal treatment and opportunities for participation in public life, and effective protection against discrimination. Article 4 (1) specifies that any direct or indirect discrimination on grounds of sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, human genome, citizenship, origin, religion or belief, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, property status, or on any other grounds established by law or by an international treaty to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party, is prohibited.

156. The Protection Against Discrimination Act further defines direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination is any less favourable treatment of a person on the protective grounds than the treatment another person is receiving, received, or would receive

in comparable similar circumstances. Indirect discrimination is putting a person on the protective grounds in a less favourable position compared to other persons through an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice, unless the said provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified in view of a legal aim and the means of achieving this aim are appropriate and necessary.

157. Amendments to the Film Industry Act (2021) provide in Article 35j, paragraph 1 that reimbursement of costs under the scheme under Article 26, paragraph 1, item 2 of the Act is not allowed for projects which incite racism and acts of religious hatred or encourage acts of discrimination.

158. The national legislation, human rights institutions, policies and practices have long standing traditions of preventing, combatting and eradicating all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and addressing different manifestations of inequality. Bulgaria is committed to take further targeted and effective measures to affirm the national values of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding.

159. With a view to strengthening the legal framework for protection against discrimination and inequality, and their prevention, major amendments to the national legislation were adopted. In 2022, the Legal Aid Act was amended in order to extend the categories of persons, entitled to free legal aid and the grounds for its admission, with persons seeking or receiving international protection or enjoying temporary protection. In 2020, the amendments to the Radio and Television Act provided for stricter measures against the use of hate speech and prohibit incitement to hatred and violence in audiovisual media services.

160. The national human rights institutions, namely the Commission for the Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman, strengthen their role on preventing, combatting and eradicating all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and addressing inequality. Both institutions continue to register an increase in the number of complaints submitted and processed, as well as actions taken and decisions adopted. The Bulgarian Government updates on an annual basis the budgets of the Ombudsman and the Commission for the Protection against Discrimination in accordance with the needs for effective performance of their duties.

161. Periodically, the Bulgarian Government elaborates and adopts strategic documents to address racism, racial discrimination, and intolerance. Their implementation is provided through annually adopted national action plans. In the beginning of the current decade, the Government has adopted the National Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2030, National Strategy for Mental Health of the Citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021–2030, National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma (2021–2030), and National Action Plan on Combatting Antisemitism (2023–2027). They all have expanded the framework for further efforts to guarantee non-discrimination and equality.

162. The Bulgarian Government takes measures in priority areas to improve the social status of persons from vulnerable social groups:

- In 2018, a special Permanent Mechanism for joint work of the institutions for coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the education system of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age has been introduced. The Mechanism covers all children, regardless of their ethnic origin, citizenship and nationality, as well as to stateless children, regardless of their usual place of residence.
- In 2023, the Council of Ministers approved amendments to the Ordinance on the Financing of Educational Institutions in the System of Preschool and School Education which provide for specific financial resources for the appointment of educational mediators, social workers and teacher's assistants to kindergartens and schools with a predominant number of children and students from vulnerable groups.
- In 2022, the Employment Promotion Act has been amended to establish an electronic register with data on economically inactive persons, which help the labour mediators to reach the economically inactive persons more easily and to involve them in labour activities.

B. Effective remedies

163. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria stipulates in Article 56 that every citizen, whose rights or legitimate interests are violated or jeopardized, shall have the right to defence. The legislation provides for investigation and prosecution of all complaints of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, punishment for the perpetrators, and provision to victims with effective remedies and adequate reparation.

164. In 2023, the Bulgarian National Assembly adopted a Law on Amendments to the Penal Code, which provided for the introduction of racist, xenophobic and sexual orientation-related motives as constituent elements in other criminal provisions and heavier punishment when an act is committed “based on racist, xenophobic motives or sexual orientation-related motives”.

165. The Penal Code, in Article 162 provides that anyone who, by speech, press or other means of mass media, by electronic information systems or in any other manner, advocates or incites discrimination, violence or hatred on the grounds of race, skin, colour, origin, nationality or ethnic affiliation or sexual orientation, shall be punished with imprisonment of one to four years and with a fine that is provided for in the law, as well as with public reprimand. Anyone who uses violence against another or damages his property because of his race, skin colour, origin, nationality, ethnicity, religion, political views or sexual orientation shall be punished with imprisonment from one to four years and a fine that is provided for in the law, as well as public reprimand.

166. Article 164 of the Penal Code stipulates that whoever preaches or incites discrimination, violence or hatred on religious grounds through speech, print or other means of mass information, through electronic information systems or in any other way, shall be punished with imprisonment for up to four years or with probation, as well as with a fine that is provided for in the law.

167. The Penal Code in Article 172 provides that anyone who knowingly prevents another person from entering employment or forces him out of employment because of his nationality or ethnicity, race, colour, religion, social origin, sexual orientation, membership or non-membership in a trade union or other organization, political party, organization, movement or coalition with a political objective or because of his close political or other beliefs, shall be punished by imprisonment for up to three years or a fine that is provided for in the law.

168. Other remedies in cases of discrimination or hatred based on race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation are available through the means provided in the Protection against Discrimination Act (see paragraphs 99–100), as well as those provided for in the same Act through the State and Municipal Liability for Damages Act (2006).

169. Particular attention is paid to preventing and addressing all forms of discrimination and xenophobia against persons in vulnerable situations, including migrants, refugees, stateless persons and asylum seekers, ensuring accountability for perpetrators of human rights abuses against such persons, and ensuring access to effective remedies and reparations for victims.

170. Public awareness-campaigns are conducted among persons in vulnerable situations and non-citizens on their rights under the Bulgarian legislation on protection against the discrimination and equality, on how to file complaints of acts of racial discrimination and on remedies available.

Annex

1. Population by ethnicity and by districts as of September 7, 2021

Districts	Total	Ethnic group				I cannot determine	I do not want to answer	Unknown
		Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Other			
Total	6 519 789	5 118 494	508 378	266 720	79 006	15 746	63 767	467 678
Blagoevgrad	292 227	236 951	14 028	12 318	11 197	1 210	2 558	13 965
Burgas	380 286	280 388	47 286	14 893	5 992	1 369	4 436	25 922
Varna	432 198	352 886	25 678	9 634	7 664	1 192	4 995	30 149
Veliko Tarnovo	207 371	178 491	11 348	3 655	1 652	598	1 716	9 911
Vidin	75 408	68 143	65	5 055	345	59	247	1 494
Vratsa	152 813	137 587	424	10 132	444	260	1 379	2 587
Gabrovo	98 387	89 394	4 723	792	735	224	844	1 675
Dobrich	150 146	109 041	18 835	10 118	2 035	265	1 039	8 813
Kardzhali	141 177	37 383	83 280	1 354	2 130	640	4 269	12 121
Kyustendil	111 736	101 735	56	6 555	329	107	402	2 552
Lovech	116 394	103 484	2 789	4 999	407	574	1 628	2 513
Montana	119 950	99 539	136	13 130	381	275	709	5 780
Pazardzhik	229 814	184 677	6 782	14 320	4 686	594	1 595	17 160
Pernik	114 162	107 459	128	3 544	388	106	612	1 925
Pleven	226 120	200 197	5 367	6 999	937	611	1 218	10 791
Plovdiv	634 497	513 249	39 585	26 296	5 004	1 220	6 914	42 229
Razgrad	103 223	38 873	49 318	5 806	1 957	367	1 539	5 363
Ruse	193 483	148 845	23 958	7 041	2 060	358	1 957	9 264
Silistra	97 770	51 579	34 392	5 244	694	162	631	5 068
Sliven	172 690	115 607	13 217	23 918	1 861	305	1 386	16 396
Smolyan	96 284	86 818	3 049	483	3 589	236	1 373	736
Sofia	231 989	204 662	342	11 380	742	221	1 238	13 404
Sofia (capital)	1 274 290	1 058 553	5 881	13 960	13 766	2 592	13 494	166 044
Stara Zagora	296 507	239 770	12 170	18 158	2 465	816	2 113	21 015
Targovishte	98 144	46 455	34 729	5 980	2 828	466	1 625	6 061
Haskovo	211 565	154 088	25 555	12 572	1 764	362	1 892	15 332
Shumen	151 465	81 907	44 263	11 268	2 118	424	1 448	10 037
Yambol	109 693	90 733	994	7 116	836	133	510	9 371

2. Population by mother tongue and by districts as of September 7, 2021

Districts	Total	Mother tongue				I cannot determine	I do not want to answer	Unknown
		Bulgarian	Turkish	Romani	Other			
Total	5 037 607	514 386	227 974	62 906	10 633	49 602	616 681	651 9789
Blagoevgrad	254 268	5 252	8 620	1 930	414	1 224	20 519	292 227
Burgas	271 756	48 765	13 702	6 565	1 103	4 044	3 4351	380 286
Varna	342 065	27 898	8 048	8 740	904	4 141	40 402	432 198
Veliko Tarnovo	174 457	11 522	3 601	1 808	405	1 386	14 192	207 371
Vidin	68 040	80	5 030	428	26	165	1 639	75 408
Vratsa	142 732	205	5 311	610	229	920	2 806	152 813
Gabrovo	89 460	4 712	691	935	157	686	1 746	98 387
Dobrich	105 702	215 14	7 694	2 368	179	885	11 804	150 146
Kardzhali	39 062	83 293	1 198	274	335	3 322	13 693	141 177
Kyustendil	101 911	58	6 225	412	68	286	2 776	11 1736
Lovech	104 818	2 536	4 520	458	390	1 036	2 636	11 6394
Montana	100 593	126	9 686	493	240	473	8 339	119 950
Pazardzhik	182 818	7 148	13 090	1 012	503	1 341	23 902	229 814
Pernik	109 992	120	979	584	68	419	2 000	114 162
Pleven	199 213	4 284	5 426	1 171	354	745	14 927	226 120
Plovdiv	498 281	39 581	26 113	5 180	965	6 088	58 289	63 4497
Razgrad	39 653	51 560	3 277	669	244	1 163	6 657	103 223
Ruse	146 537	23 836	6 630	1 900	274	1 650	12 656	193 483
Silistra	50 368	37 366	2 166	866	95	526	6 383	97 770
Sliven	112 350	13 393	23 291	1 633	292	1 315	20 416	172 690
Smolyan	90 526	3 373	443	321	85	731	805	96 284
Sofia	199 087	336	11 762	952	166	1 026	18 660	231 989
Sofia (capital)	1 013 423	5 195	10 842	17 131	1 278	9 825	216 596	1 274 290
Stara Zagora	23 3510	14 063	16 594	1 892	695	1 665	28 088	296 507
Targovishte	47 607	35 457	4 996	622	314	1 413	7 735	98 144
Haskovo	150 186	25 424	12 198	1 831	313	1 450	20 163	211 565
Shumen	81 356	46 271	8 709	1 119	454	1 267	12 289	151 465
Yambol	87 836	1 018	7 132	1 002	83	410	12 212	109 693

3. Population by religious denomination and by districts as of September 7, 2021

Districts	Religious denomination						I cannot determine	I do not want to answer	Unknown
	Total	Christian	Muslim	Jewish	Other	No religion			
Total	6 519 789	4 219 270	638 708	1 736	6 451	305 102	259 235	472 606	616 681
Blagoevgrad	292 227	196 841	52 958	46	127	3 925	66 48	1 1163	20 519
Burgas	380 286	233 008	46 320	85	265	23 746	13 626	28 885	34 351
Varna	432 198	290 407	25 738	90	549	22 905	16 520	35 587	40 402
Veliko Tarnovo	207 371	149 662	12 525	35	155	9 481	7 980	13 341	14 192
Vidin	75 408	64 086	51	8	18	3 406	2 011	4 189	1 639
Vratsa	152 813	107 264	715	7	30	14 673	13 072	14 246	2 806
Gabrovo	98 387	76 802	4 543	7	46	4 683	3 987	6 573	1 746
Dobrich	150 146	96 386	26 207	21	103	4 420	3 835	7 370	11 804
Kardzhali	141 177	19 872	88 705	21	24	1 902	3 518	13 442	13 693
Kyustendil	111 736	96 474	107	20	44	3 662	3 501	5 152	2 776
Lovech	116 394	82 468	3 009	6	50	10 673	7 574	9 978	2 636
Montana	119 950	88 497	83	4	35	10 147	6 876	5 969	8 339
Pazardzhik	229 814	149 934	29 357	33	83	5 316	8 036	13 153	23 902
Pernik	114 162	97 117	165	10	70	4 349	3 919	6 532	2 000
Pleven	226 120	165 004	5 281	33	71	17 763	11 124	11 917	14 927
Plovdiv	634 497	439 779	39 851	156	522	21 980	27 060	46 860	58 289
Razgrad	103 223	34 548	53 121	11	24	1 513	2 120	5 229	6 657
Ruse	193 483	130 955	25 514	40	131	6 599	5 995	11 593	12 656
Silistra	97 770	45 638	35 767	4	13	2 550	2 703	4 712	6 383
Sliven	172 690	103 380	11 341	21	79	15 271	10 481	11 701	20 416
Smolyan	96 284	23 079	39 217	25	43	6 519	8 044	18 552	805
Sofia	231 989	177 956	360	15	102	7 713	8 904	18 279	18 660
Sofia (capital)	127 4290	825 290	9 828	901	3 487	63 607	44 211	110 370	216 596
Stara Zagora	29 6507	203 134	11 899	57	171	16 013	14 612	22 533	28 088
Targovishte	98 144	39 836	39 481	9	31	2 081	3 148	5 823	7 735
Haskovo	211 565	134 343	27 914	39	78	6 900	7 764	14 364	20 163
Shumen	151 465	72 792	47 752	17	65	3 846	7 298	7 406	12 289
Yambol	109 693	74 718	899	15	35	9 459	4 668	7 687	12 212