

Bulgaria

About

The EU and international agreements have had a substantial influence on gender mainstreaming policy in Bulgaria. Pressure from the EU accession process in the 2000s saw significant development of the gender equality field in Bulgaria, partly because of the alignment of Bulgarian legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire*.

The principle of equality predates EU accession, however, as it was already enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. [Article 6\(2\) of the Constitution](#) states that ‘All citizens are equal before the law. No restrictions on rights or privileges based on race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, origin, religion, education, beliefs, political affiliation, personal or social status or property are allowed’.

Bulgaria adopted the Law on Equality between Women and Men in 2016. It also adopted the National Strategy for Promoting the Equality of Women and Men 2016–2020. In addition, gender mainstreaming is included in the 2017 National Action Plan (NAP) for the period 2019–2020 [1].

The Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) is the highest body responsible for gender equality. Within the Ministry, the Department for Equal Opportunities is dedicated to equal opportunities and social assistance.

Legislative and policy framework

The Law on Equality between Women and Men (Закон за равнопоставеност на жените и мъжете) sets out a legal obligation to implement gender mainstreaming [2]. However, this is without provisions for their enforcement or sanctions. There is also a legal obligation to undertake gender impact assessment when drafting laws, policies, plans and programmes.

The Law on Equality between Women and Men provides guarantees of equality through long-term state policy. By bringing the national legislation in line with the EU standards, it establishes the foundations for state policy in this field. The concept of gender mainstreaming is included in the Law, with coordination entrusted to the MLSP and the National Council on Equality between Women and Men.

Since 1 January 2004, the Law on Protection from Discrimination prohibits discrimination on a broad range of grounds: sex or gender, race, ethnicity, human genome, nationality, citizenship, origin, religion and belief, education, conviction, political affiliation, personal or social status, disability, age, sexual orientation, family status, property status and any other grounds defined by law or an international treaty to which Bulgaria is a party.

The National Strategy for Promoting the Equality of Women and Men 2016–2020 (Национална стратегия за насърчаване на равнопоставеността на жените и мъжете 2016–2020 г.) is the key policy document in the field of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The Strategy promotes a dual approach to gender equality by including a gender perspective in all policies and at all levels, together with specific actions targeting groups of women and men who may find themselves in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations.

The Strategy is implemented through annual national plans for promoting gender equality, which include concrete actions and measures, responsible bodies and performance indicators. The plans cover the measures to be implemented by institutions, social partners and NGOs working on the implementation of state policy on equality between women and men. The national plans cover five priority areas, as per the Strategy:

- Increasing women's participation in the labour market and equality of economic independence;
- Reducing the gender pay gap and income gap;
- Promoting equality between women and men in decision-making processes;
- Combating gender-based violence and protection and support for victims;
- Changing gender stereotypes in society in different spheres of public life.

The activities of the Strategy are primarily funded by the state and municipal budgets, European programmes and other international sources. [The MLSP](#) coordinates and controls the implementation of state policy on equality between women and men, including the implementation of the Strategy and the national plans.

The plans are assessed annually, with the 'Report on Equality between Women and Men in Bulgaria' (Доклад за равнопоставеността на жените и мъжете в България) published each year. These reports include a focus on sex-disaggregated data.

Finally, the Law for Protection against Domestic Violence (Закон за защита от домашното насилие,) [3] has been in force since 22 December 2009. In 2019, the National Assembly amended the Law to criminalise all forms of domestic violence.

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Structures

Government responsibilities

Since 2000, gender equality policy has been developed and coordinated by the MLSP, according to the Decree of the Council of Ministers No. 155 of 2000, prom. 65 of 2000. A specialist unit in the MLSP – the Department for Equal Opportunities, Anti-discrimination and Social Assistance at the Directorate of Disability Policy, Equal Opportunities and Social Assistance – has held this responsibility since 2004. The Department's mandate for gender equality issues is combined with related mandates, including for other equality grounds.

The Department is also the secretariat for gender equality. With the adoption of the Law on Equality between Women and Men (2016), a new [position was introduced](#): gender equality coordinators of women and men involved in the development and implementation of overall national gender equality policy.

An interdepartmental coordination structure organises gender mainstreaming within the government. This meets quarterly, with contact persons nominated in the ministries and other relevant structures to promote gender mainstreaming across the government.

A national institutional mechanism for cooperation between the institutions and civil society – the National Council on Equality between Women and Men, reporting to the Council of Ministers [4] – has been in place since 2004. [The Council](#) is the permanent body for consultation and cooperation between institutions and civil society on the development of gender equality policy.

Independent gender equality body

The Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) (Комисията за защита от дискриминация) is the independent equality body established in 2005 by the Protection from Discrimination Act (PaDA). The CPD is an independent semi-judicial body which aims to prevent discrimination and ensure equal opportunities by implementing the [Law on Protection from Discrimination](#).

The CPD deals with cases of direct or indirect discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, human genome, nationality, origin, religion or belief, education, belief, political affiliation, personal or social status, disability, age, sexual orientation, family situation, property status and any other grounds established in laws or international treaties to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party.

The CPD is a legal entity with budget support and is a first-level budget-spending unit. Members are elected or appointed in line with the principles of balanced participation of women and men, and the participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities. At present, there are nine members - five women and four men – serving a five-year term. The CPD is headquartered in Sofia and has its own regional representatives. It submits an annual report on its activities to the National Assembly, including information on the activities of each of its permanent specialist committees.

Parliamentary bodies

Much like representative elected bodies, parliamentary bodies report regularly to the government on their progress on gender equality initiatives. Annual reports on equality between women and men are prepared by the Department for Equal Opportunities, Anti-discrimination and Social Assistance at the Directorate for Disability Policy, Equal Opportunities and Social Assistance in the MLSP.

No parliamentary committee includes gender equality as a specific part of its activity. Rather, different committees receive or seek information on the progress of gender equality.

Regional structures

Article 8 of the Law on Equality between Women and Men provides that the central and territorial bodies of the executive power designate employees to coordinate equality between women and men. According to Article 10 of the Law, state policy on equality of women and men is implemented by the regional governors and local self-government bodies, together with the territorial units of the ministries, state and executive agencies and other bodies established by law, representative organisations of employees and employers, NGOs working on gender issues and other organisations. Employees in all regional administrations are therefore involved in the development and implementation of regional policy on gender equality and contribute to overall national policy.

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Methods and tools

Note: the methods and tools listed under this section were the focus of EIGE's 2018-2019 assessment. If certain methods and tools are not mentioned in this section, this does not necessarily mean that they are not used at all by Bulgaria.

Gender awareness-raising, gender equality training, gender planning and gender stakeholder consultation have all been pursued as part of gender mainstreaming. The last three years show some evidence of awareness-raising initiatives and sharing of guidelines, toolkits and other material related to gender equality within government bodies. Government employees have participated in gender equality training (three women and one man in 2018). A small proportion (less than 33 %) of employees overall were involved in training focused on general sensitivity to gender issues and specific training on gender mainstreaming. Training is organised for the gender equality coordinators at regional level.

Gender statistics

There is a national legal obligation to disseminate statistics disaggregated by sex. This is primarily fulfilled by the [National Statistical Institute](#) (NSI), although there is no specific unit in charge of promoting the production of sex-disaggregated data, either within the NSI or elsewhere.

NSI data on the development of economic, social, cultural, health, education and other processes track progress on women's positions compared to men's, by year. Sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics are more evident in labour market and social statistics, such as population and demography, health, education and poverty. There are areas where the level of disaggregated data is lacking, including finance, business, processes of innovation such as digitalisation, and the social status and conditions of pensioners.

The NSI issues publications (irregularly) on the development of the situation of women and men, online, in brochures, flyers and books. Its website also has a section on gender statistics. These data are similarly published on the websites of individual ministries and NGOs.

The [National Social Security Institute](#) (NSSI) is another important source of sex-disaggregated data, and has a gender equality section on its website. The National Centre for Public Health and Analysis at the Ministry of Health manages, controls, monitors and coordinates information activities in healthcare. It develops and unifies medical-statistical documentation on the health status of the population, including disaggregated data by sex, as well as developing mathematical models and forecasting the demographic and health status of the population. It is an important source of sex-disaggregated data and undertakes its activities at state level in cooperation with the NSI. Some ministries also work in collaboration with the NSI to generate sex-disaggregated data for their sectors. The [MLSP](#) and the [National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria](#) are other sources of such data. Finally, business organisations, trade unions and NGOs also collaborate with the NSI in their analyses, surveys and projects to further increase the sex-disaggregated database.

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Good practices

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Endnotes

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[2] The Law on Equality between Women and Men (Закон за равнопоставеност на жените и мъжете) sets out a legal obligation to implement gender mainstreaming. Promulgated in State Gazette No. 33 of 26 April 2016.

[3] Law for Protection against Domestic Violence (Закон за защита от домашното насилие, amended title, SG 102/10). SG No. 99 of 17 December 2010, supplemented, SG No. 50 of 3 July 2015 and SG No. 24 of 22 March 2019.

[4] Decree of the Council of Ministers No. 313 of 17 November 2004.
