



MONITORING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN BULGARIA SUMMARY OF REPORT 2024

CONTENTS

THE CONVENTION.....	1
CEDAW IMPLEMENTATION IN BULGARIA 2024	1
THE OMBUDSMAN IN DEFENCE OF VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	3

THE CONVENTION

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted in 1979 and has been in force in Bulgaria since 1982. By accepting the Convention, our country undertakes to include the principle of equality of men and women in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria or other relevant legislation; adopt appropriate legislative and other measures prohibiting any discrimination against women; to establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal footing with men and to ensure, with the help of the courts and other state authorities, the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination, etc.

In fulfillment of the international and European commitments undertaken, the principle of equality has been introduced in the Bulgarian legislation. Yet, differences still exist in women's and men's employment, in the amount of remuneration and pensions received, in decision-making, in the distribution of household duties and in caring for dependent family members. For the Ombudsman, the current Equality between Women and Men Act is rather formal and does not propose new arrangements that correspond to the level of development of social relations and does not regulate the basic mechanisms for gender equality. It is rather declaratory in nature, with no significant practical effect.

Equality between women and men is important for achieving national objectives of higher economic growth and employment levels, equal opportunities and social cohesion. Implementing the right to work, ensuring equal access to employment and empowering women are among the priorities of the Republic of Bulgaria.

CEDAW IMPLEMENTATION IN BULGARIA 2024

State policy on equality is determined by the Council of Ministers through the **National Council on the Equal Treatment of Women and Men** chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. In 2024, its functions remain unchanged and there are 28 gender equality coordinators in the country. In accordance with the Equal Treatment of Women and Men Act, the main strategic document is the **National Strategy for Promoting Equality between Women and Men 2021-**



MONITORING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN BULGARIA SUMMARY OF REPORT 2024

2030. Based on this, the **National Action Plan for the Promotion of Equality between Women and Men 2023–2024** has been developed, aiming at ensuring a **unified policy in five priority areas**: labour market and equal economic independence; reducing gender gaps in pay and income; equality in decision-making; combating violence, protecting and supporting victims; and overcoming gender stereotypes in public life and sexism. The measures in the National Action Plan 2023–2024 are accounted for in a **Report on the Equality between Women and Men in Bulgaria** which, for 2023, was published for public consultation on 25 July 2024. Although no public data on the results for 2024 were available as of 5 March 2025, the draft National Action Plan 2025–2026 had already been prepared and was open for public consultation until 4 March 2025.

There are delays in protection measures against domestic violence. The **National Council for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence** is developing a **Coordination Mechanism for Assistance and Support to Victims**. Even though the Coordination Mechanism should be operational from January 2024, **it was not yet adopted in 2024**. On 23 December 2024, the draft decision of the Council of Ministers for its adoption was sent for inter-ministerial coordination and public consultation (for the minimum period of 14 days “*due to the public importance of the matter*” and during holiday periods). When comments are sent, the Council of Ministers expects the process to be repeated (this time for approval within 30 days). The Ministry of Interior cites **the delay as a major obstacle** to the prevention and protection against domestic violence. At the same time, a **National Information System for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence** is being developed. Although its completion is laid down for August 2024, the Council of Ministers indicated that a request was submitted on 16 January 2025 with a deadline of **16 March 2026**. According to the Council of Ministers, the absence of an annual report on the activities of the National Council is the reason why it is not possible to specify the number of administrative areas with a counselling centre for victims and a protected home, as well as the number of administrative areas with a district division with at least three protected homes and three counselling centres. Although **the National Strategy for Promoting Equality between Women and Men 2021–2030 recognises the need for social services for victims of violence and the National Action Plan 2023–2024 provides for them**, the amounts allocated for them are subject to delays and remain too low. According to data from 27 February 2025, **the draft budget for 2025 allocates BGN 450 000 for specialised services under the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, i.e., BGN 37 500 per month for the entire country**. Without a national coordination mechanism, a national information system and timely disclosure of the results prior to the adoption of annual plans, the government policy to combat domestic violence cannot be comprehensive and timely.

Undoubtedly, the victims of domestic violence also include men who encounter stereotypical restrictions and social stigma when reporting to the competent authorities – this should be taken seriously. At the same time, **women suffer from domestic violence significantly more often, especially with fatal consequences**. According to *spasena.bg*, there were at least 20 cases of murders of women in 2024. According to MoI data, in 2024 there were 5252 protection orders issued by district authorities (18% more than the 4429 in 2023). Of the total number of victims in



MONITORING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN BULGARIA SUMMARY OF REPORT 2024

2024, women accounted for 68% (66% in 2023), children for 25% (24% in 2023); while the men were up by 16%. In 2023, men accounted for 89% of perpetrators. **The Ministry of Interior refers to the Methodological Guidelines for Actions under the Protection against Domestic Violence Act of 2 February 2024** and, in the event of a report of domestic violence, police officers separate the victim from the perpetrator and **interview** them separately. The police officers prepare a **report and fill out a questionnaire** on the presence of domestic violence. Upon confirmation, the victim is informed of their rights under the Protection against Domestic Violence Act and **referred to specialised services**. A **warning protocol** is drawn up for the perpetrator of domestic violence. In the event of a **protection order with protection measures issued by the district court**, the police officer **interviews the perpetrator and the victim within seven days**, and the victim fills out a risk assessment questionnaire. **In cases of (extremely) high risk, measures are taken to monitor the perpetrator. The Ministry of Interior does not assess the measures taken for prevention and protection.**

According to the 2024 Gender Equality Index, Bulgaria ranks 17th in the EU with 64.5 out of 100 points (a decline of 0.6 points). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy explains that the Index is based on data from 2022 and that the country is catching up. According to the **2023 Report on Gender Equality in Bulgaria, the gender pay gap in 2022 was 13%**, compared to 15.5% in 2015 – **an improvement of 1.5% in 7 years**. According to the 2024 Index on **Power and Authority**, Bulgaria has **the largest decline (by 3.9 points)**. There is a decline in women in politics with only one woman in the government as of 16 January 2025. With regard to the balance between family and professional life, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy cites a number of measures and results using quantitative indicators (e.g., number of people who have benefited from the measures) without qualitative indicators (e.g., satisfaction). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy acknowledges that guaranteeing the rights of **women of Roma origin, women in rural areas, and women with disabilities** is a prerequisite for the implementation of the country's international commitments, but these groups continue to be marginalised.

Unfortunately, the principle of gender equality is also violated through **public statements**. **Gender-related stereotypes** are a major cause of gender inequality and **affect all areas of society**, including by limiting the opportunities for participation in public life. **As for women, stereotypes often limit their economic independence as well.**

THE OMBUDSMAN IN DEFENCE OF VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Ombudsman has repeatedly insisted on the adoption of more decisive measures to combat domestic violence, including at the legislative level. After several attempts to amend legislation in this area, amendments to the Protection against Domestic Violence Act became a fact in 2023. Already during the discussion of the bills, the Ombudsman supported the proposal to establish a national body to coordinate, monitor and evaluate policies and measures to prevent



MONITORING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN BULGARIA

SUMMARY OF REPORT 2024

domestic violence and improve interaction between the various state bodies and organisations involved in the problem.

According to data from NGOs and media publications (official statistics is not yet available), in 2023 at least 21 women were killed by men in Bulgaria.¹ It is undeniable that in recent years, especially in the context of the global pandemic of COVID-19, cases of domestic violence have been on the rise and it is therefore imperative that more efforts are made to understand why and how violence occurs and to take the necessary measures to address it. Such measures are all the more necessary now to counter the growing problem, and the adoption of legislative changes was imperative.

In her opinion, the National Ombudsman has repeatedly expressed support for the proposed amendments to the legal framework, which:

1. Broadens the range of victims of domestic violence who may seek protection under the Protection against Domestic Violence Act;
2. Facilitates access to justice;
3. Provides for new measures for protection from domestic violence, and introduces mechanisms to prevent abuse of the law;
4. Proposes the establishment of a national body to coordinate, monitor and evaluate policies and measures to prevent domestic violence and improve interaction between the various state bodies and organisations involved in the problem. Its functions, its composition, the institutions and persons who will be able to participate in its meetings are regulated;
5. Provides for the establishment of a coordination mechanism, which establishes rules of action and coordination between the competent authorities and organisations, thus ensuring reliable, timely and adequate protection of persons who suffered violence;
6. Provides for the establishment and maintenance of an information system and, as part of it, a national registry;
7. Sets forth prevention and protection programmes, as well as specialised services providing protection and support to victims of domestic violence;
8. Expands the range of persons who may initiate court proceedings for a protection order;
9. Regulates the possibility of providing free legal aid to victims, strengthening the court's duty of care, and introducing the requirement for the court to carry out a risk assessment;

¹ http://spasena.org/bg/media_monitoring



**MONITORING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN BULGARIA**
SUMMARY OF REPORT 2024

10. Increases the time limit for applying for protection from domestic violence, which under current law is one month.

The Ombudsman insists that the condition of systematicity for the qualification of an act committed in the context of domestic violence should be abolished. The condition of systematicity means that the victim of domestic violence must, in at least three separate cases of domestic violence, take legal action and obtain protection from domestic violence. However, it is undeniable that domestic violence can manifest itself as a single act and that extremely serious harm to the victim can follow. This creates difficulties in protecting the rights of the victim, as she is in a vulnerable position, dependent on the perpetrator, and may not always be able to take action to protect herself.

The Ombudsman's opinion was taken into account during the deliberations on the bill for amendments and supplements to the Protection against Domestic Violence Act and in the latest amendments to the Criminal Code the condition of systematicity was removed, as the legislator gave due importance to the effective fight against all forms of domestic violence and a clear signal to society about the social importance of the problem and that it will not tolerate domestic violence.

It should be noted that after the adoption of the amendments to the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, promulgated in SG No. 66 of 2024, a specialised permanent collective and advisory body for the implementation of the state policy on prevention and protection from domestic violence, i.e. the National Council for Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence (National Council) is created.

The National Council is a collective body whose composition is explicitly specified in the DPAA and includes, in addition to the representatives of the executive and the judiciary, representatives of non-profit legal entities (NGOs) that carry out activities for the prevention and protection from domestic violence. The administrative, technical, organisational, expert and financial services of the National Council are provided by the Administration of the Council of Ministers (ACM) and in this regard the ACM has taken action to prepare and adopt by the Council of Ministers the Regulations on the Structure, Organisation and Activities of the National Council. A new unit was established under the Secretary General of the Council of Ministers, the Department for Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues and Interaction with Civil Society, to act as the Secretariat of the National Council.

At the time of writing, the procedure for selecting the NGOs whose representatives are members of the National Council has already been completed.

By Decision No 606 of the Council of Ministers of 11 September 2023, Ms. Maria Gabriel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, was appointed Chairperson of the National Council. The first meeting of the National Council was held on 21 February 2024.

Technical documentation for the development and maintenance of the National Information System for Victims of Domestic Violence is in the process of being developed, which



**MONITORING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN BULGARIA**
SUMMARY OF REPORT 2024

is of particular importance for the implementation of the interaction between the National Council, the different responsible institutions and NGOs in the implementation of the policy for prevention and protection from domestic violence and the Coordination Mechanism for Assistance and Support to Victims of Domestic Violence.

For the development of the Coordination Mechanism, a working group was formed by order of the Minister of Justice, which completed its work and submitted the draft document to the National Council for consideration and approval.

A working group was formed by order of the Prime Minister to prepare proposals for amendments to the Regulations by 30 April 2024 to bring them in line with the changes to the Protection from Domestic Violence Act.

The preparation of the National Programme for Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence is to be preceded by the identification of priority activities for funding, in accordance with Article 6f, paragraph 6 of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, and stakeholders are expected to submit proposals for priority activities to be considered and approved at the National Council meeting. Information is to be gathered to establish a list of specialised services to provide protection, assistance and support to victims of domestic violence.

Last but not least, the Ombudsman stresses that an important aspect in the fight against domestic violence is to take measures and actions to create a social environment of intolerance towards this offence against the person. Unfortunately, it is a worrying finding, which has been drawn up by a number of experts working in the field of protection from domestic violence, that our society is tolerant of domestic violence.

Domestic violence and its effects on people's lives must be talked about openly and expertly in order to realise that violence in the home is not just one person's problem, one couple's problem, one family's problem, but society's problem. In the fight against domestic violence, more resources and efforts must be put into prevention, because even the practice of other countries shows that increasing the amount of punishment for perpetrators has not had a positive result in the fight against domestic violence and has not led to a reduction in the incidence of domestic violence.