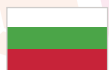
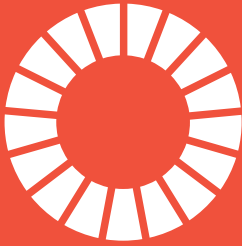


# Voluntary National Review

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Bulgaria 2020



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

# VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Voluntary National Review Reflects  
the Views of Different Stakeholders



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## ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER



Bulgaria is presenting its first Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in trying times.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda is more important than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed challenges to sustainable development. It has highlighted multiple problems that existed before.

The Voluntary National Review coincides with celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations and the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accession of Bulgaria to the UN.

Bulgaria has supported the implementation of the 17 Goals since their adoption. We view them as integrated and indivisi-

ble and we will continue to work for their implementation in national, regional and international perspective. We ascribe equal importance to the economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainable development. Our country is a defender of multilateralism and a rules-based international order. In our actions, we are guided by the rule of law.

We believe that human rights are universal and indivisible and should be respected everywhere. Gender equality is our priority. We pay special attention to the vulnerable groups in the achievement of sustainable development, so that no one is left behind.

Our country has proven to be a reliable partner not only in European, but also in international affairs. We are conducting a sensible, reliable and predictable foreign policy.

We highly appreciate the importance of the UN and the leading contribution of the EU for achieving our common strategic goals. We pay particular attention to the regions that surround us – the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the Black Sea region, and we provide official development assistance in accordance with the sustainable development principles.

The Voluntary National Review outlines policies and strategies adopted by the government for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals on the local, national and world levels. We are happy to note that civil society and businesses united around the importance of the 17 Goals by getting involved in the preparation of the review.

Bulgaria continues to invest efforts in the 2030 Agenda implementation. Improving quality of life for everyone, achieving a high living standard and mitigating inequalities are among the priorities of the government. We will work for better health and social services, as well as clean environment. The demographic picture remains a challenge.

Our country is undertaking concrete steps for reporting the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals implementation. In December 2019, the National Statistical Institute launched Monitorstat, a platform with 2030 Agenda indicators.

As the Chair of the Development Council at the Council of Ministers, I am to approve a National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 that contains a commitment at the highest level of the executive authority to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Three strategic goals serve as a foundation of the document: Accelerated Economic Development, Demographic Upswing and Reduction of Inequalities.

The next 10 years will be extremely important not only for Bulgaria, but also for Europe and the whole world. Only with common efforts can we manage the challenges of today and tomorrow. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains our roadmap in this undertaking.

**BOYKO BORISSOV**

**Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria**



## PREFACE

The First Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Bulgaria of the implementation of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development “Transforming our World” (2030 Agenda) coincides with the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations (UN), the 65th anniversary of Bulgaria’s accession to the UN and the fifth anniversary of the historic decision of the international community to adopt 17 global Sustainable Development Goals, which are comprehensive, large-scale, integral and are oriented toward peace and sustainable development, well-being of people, protection of the planet and the establishment of a multilateral partnership to achieve them.

75 years ago, world leaders expressed the political will to create the UN, building an organization based on the values of peace, dialogue and international cooperation over the vast destruction. Today, the peoples of the UN, united by the principle of “leaving no one behind”, are consolidating the efforts of all stakeholders – governments and parliaments, civil society, business, non-governmental sector, academia, youth and local authorities, to accomplish the 2030 Agenda at national, regional and global level.

As a member of the European Union (EU) and the UN, Bulgaria shares the responsibility of governments and all stakeholders for the planning, development and adaptation of measures, actions and policies aimed at accomplishing the most ambitious roadmap for peace and sustainable development.

The Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Bulgaria has been prepared in accordance with the UN Guidelines and aims to analyze and share the results and good practices achieved, to highlight the challenges and gaps, lessons learned and perspectives to accelerate the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through specific policies, programs, plans and strategies.

Consultations, meetings, and discussions were held with a wide range of stakeholder representatives to prepare the Review, including ministries, governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations, trade unions’ representatives, business, academia, National Assembly representatives, young people and local government.

The Review outlines policies, strategies and activities of the Government, as well as the commitment of both business and civil society to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria and the implementation of an integrated approach to accomplish the 2030 Agenda at the local, national, regional and global level.

At the national level, an institutional mechanism has been developed to coordinate the activities of public institutions regarding strategic planning, implementation and monitoring of development activities and policies.

The National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 is in the process of being drafted. It is a strategic framework document of the highest order, which engages all ministries and integrates conceptually the interplay of national priorities with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Republic of Bulgaria shares the principles of multilateralism and participates fully in the EU and UN bodies on issues related to the global Sustainable Development Goals, to improving coordination, coherence and effectiveness of the repositioning of the development system and the reform of UN management. The country is a Party to most international human rights instruments and multilateral environmental conventions and regimes developed within international organizations such as the International Maritime Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal Postal Union, the International Labour Organization, etc.

National legislation is harmonized with EU legislation. Strategies, national plans and programs have been adopted that reflect the fundamental principles of the 2030 Agenda in the areas of co-operation for the implementation of the 17 UN global Sustainable Development Goals. Collaboration is encouraged to implement projects aimed at one or more of the goals. Opportunities are sought for sustainable economic growth, attention is paid to vulnerable social groups.

The Voluntary National Review analyzes and identifies the areas of progress and challenges and proposes possible solutions for all 17 Goals, taking into account economic, social and environmental indicators of particular importance to Bulgaria.

Our country has to find strong competitive advantages in order to promote sustainable economic growth and at the same time to prevent leaving behind certain social groups. In order to make progress by 2030, a balance, integration and synergy are sought between a high value-added economy, a circular economy and a social/solidarity economy, as well as the appropriate integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in Bulgaria.

The Review outlines the progress on the most important indicators related to poverty and inequality reduction, as well as to the care for the most vulnerable in the fields of education, health and social protection. The Review also presents various examples that in Bulgaria all stakeholders who have declared the UN Sustainable Development Goals as their commitment are working to achieve them at the local, national, regional and global level.

The Review also presents the progress on the priorities set out in the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020, which have outlined the focus of public policies on education, poverty, integrated regional development, better management of the agricultural sector and natural resources, enhancing the competitiveness of the economy and strengthening the institutional environment, energy security and better transport connectivity. The priorities formulated within this period are related to the potential for economic growth and the necessity for an effective functioning of public sector safeguards in terms of social inclusion and combating poverty.

The Review outlines the links between strategic documents of the Republic of Bulgaria and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The links are reflected in the vision, goals and priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. These address three main strategic goals: accelerated economic development, demographic upswing and reduction of inequalities. The National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 outlines 13 national priorities in five development areas (axes). Their implementation will contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Review also outlines the relation between some of the key priorities set out in the Government's Programme for the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals – achieving a higher standard of living through partnerships with business, citizens and social partners; improving the health of the nation; a sustainable policy for a healthy environment; adaptation to adverse climate events.

Bulgaria is a country with a wide variety of natural resources. A responsible approach is needed in their use, as well as in unlocking people's potential having the future in mind. Cooperation with our Western Balkan neighbors, the Eastern Partnership, the Black Sea region and all other partners can make a significant contribution to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals – a shared mission of peoples today.

Bulgaria is developing capacity and allocating resources to participate in International Development Cooperation and to provide development assistance and humanitarian assistance. The Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending is still 0.11% of Gross national income (GNI) and is still far from the 0.33% EU commitment, but the measures taken for the completion of an institutional and legal mechanism is a step toward a more active involvement of the country both at bilateral and multilateral level. The achievement of Bulgaria's desire to become a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will increase our contribution to international efforts for sustainable development.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bulgaria considers the 2030 Agenda and its 17 global Sustainable Development Goals a long-term commitment of the country. "In preparing the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 special attention has been paid to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development "Transforming our World" and to the 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals included therein. The Agenda and the Goals are regarded as a framework for the national development policies, while the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 itself – as the Government's response for their implementation."<sup>1</sup>

Bulgaria shares the main message of the 2030 Agenda for "leaving no one behind" and strongly advocates the link between the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the protection of human rights. On such a basis, with particular attention to the poor and with a high sensitivity to gender equality and the rights of the child, the country is working to fulfill the principle of "leaving no one behind". This principle is at the heart of the most important strategic documents aimed at the inclusion of persons with disabilities, vulnerable citizens, Roma, young people, people from high mountain areas, the elderly, disadvantaged children, etc.

Bulgaria as an EU Member State considers it important to promote multilateralism, a rules-based international order and the rule of law as fundamental principles in multilateral cooperation. We support the key role of the EU as a leader in strengthening multilateralism at the global level. In September 2019, Bulgaria joined the Alliance for Multilateralism. As a member of the Alliance, Bulgaria supports the initiatives for compliance with international humanitarian law, for cooperation in cyberspace, for an international partnership for information and democracy, for the Group of Friends on Climate and Security, for putting equality at the center of all actions, for the principles on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

At all levels of participation in international forums, Bulgarian representatives advocate the protection and promotion of human rights in the context of the 2030 Agenda, within the set priorities, taking into account national interests and the role of the country in the EU. During the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the topics of the rights of the child, young people, inclusive education, gender equality, freedom of religion and belief, rights of disabled persons and combating all forms of discrimination were also actively included in the agenda.

Bulgaria is an active member of the EU and the UN, fully participating in the regional and the global review of the Cairo Programme of Action, adopted in 1994 by the International Conference on Population and Development, and in the preparation for the Nairobi Summit on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+25). Bulgaria actively participated in the regional review of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 (Beijing+25). Bulgarian representatives actively participate in international forums and formats of cooperation at the global and regional level such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Southeast European Co-operation Process (SEECP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the forums and working groups of the EU related to the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), etc.

The election of Bulgaria as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021 is a recognition of the country's active human rights policy at the national and global level. Bulgaria is committed to promoting the independence of UN human rights structures and is working to protect the rights of the child, gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities, the creation of tolerant societies, etc., taking into account the country's commitments toward the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. This is reflected by the country's support for the selec-

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<sup>1</sup> Vision, Goals and Priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. Ministry of Finance, Sofia, 2019, p. 2.



tion of two independent experts as members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (Associate Professor Velina Todorova for the 2017-2021 period) and of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Mrs. Genoveva Tisheva for the 2019-2022 period).

To Bulgaria, the 2030 Agenda is an up-to-date benchmark for monitoring efforts to tackle poverty and inequality, as well as to achieve a prosperous, peaceful and inclusive society. As a Member State of the EU, Bulgaria shares the commitments to improve social outcomes, combat climate change and achieve sustainable economic growth. The relatively high proportion of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion is worrying.

To respond to the challenges, it is necessary to efficiently use resources, create equal opportunities and promote investment in science, quality education and high technologies, develop a circular economy and support smart, lasting, inclusive and sustainable economic growth – to help combat poverty and inequality, protect the environment, promote peaceful and inclusive communities for sustainable development, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Children and young people are the focus of all stakeholders in meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As a co-chair of the UN Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs, Bulgaria works to integrate the rights of the child in all aspects of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Bulgaria is among the few countries in the world that has been developing the UN Youth Delegate program and sending youth delegates to the UN since 2007, as part of the country's effort to empower young people to meet global challenges. During the sixth cycle of the Structural Dialogue "Youth in Europe – What's Next?", Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria, as the trio Presidency of the Council of the EU, created and adopted the 11 European Youth Goals, which served as the basis for the elaboration of the newly adopted EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027). The objectives correspond to the SDGs and have been developed with the participation of young people. The Council conclusions of April 9, 2019 "Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030" recall the 11 youth goals. The Council recognizes in particular the importance of the youth dimension in the 2030 Agenda and the key role young people can play in achieving the SDGs.

When participating in international forums, Bulgaria organizes side events thematically related to the 2030 Agenda as a contribution to international efforts. A significant event was the discussion "Investing in Sustainable Development", jointly organized by the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Germany and the EU at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on Financing for Development in April 2018. Bulgaria organized a formal side event on "Putting Children at the Heart of the 2030 Agenda" at the High Level Political Forum in July 2019. Bulgaria presented the deinstitutionalization process (the process of replacing institutional care for children with care in a family or family-like environment in the community)<sup>2</sup> and the inclusive education for children with disabilities as key national priorities. The opinion was expressed that it is important to direct children's energy in a productive direction, which is why children should be active partners in the decision-making process. It was noted that at the global level, Bulgaria is active in sharing experience and good practices in these areas, including through ODA. During the event, all participants came together to the understanding that it is possible to put an end to violence against children and welcomed the presentation of a report by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on "Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence against Children by 2030".

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria to the United Nations in New York hosted an event on "How Sustainable Development Goals can ensure no child is left without parental care". During the High Level Political Forum in July 2019, Bulgaria presented the country's experience in deinstitutionalization of children, focusing on the changes in the regulatory framework and legislation adopted over the last 15 years. The fact that the number of children in institutions has declined by more than 90% since 2010, was highlighted as a significant achievement. At the same time, it was noted that the total number of foster homes has been reduced by more than 80% in the last ten years.

Bulgaria has fruitful cooperation with UN agencies, programs, funds and bodies. In 2019, Bulgaria was elected a member of the Joint Executive Board of the United Nations Development Pro-

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<sup>2</sup> National Strategy "Vision for Deinstitutionalization of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria", 2010.

gramme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS) and in 2020 is a Vice-President of the Joint Executive Board. A Bulgarian representative is the Vice-Chair of the 52nd and 53rd Sessions of the Commission on Population and Development. Bulgaria's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York participated in the International Steering Committee for the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25: Accelerating the Promise, held on Nov. 12-14, 2019, during which Bulgaria announced its commitments. This Summit marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the landmark Programme of Action of the ICPD in Cairo in 1994. Bulgaria co-chaired the Regional Review (ICPD+25) for the UNECE region and is developing an active cooperation with UNFPA at the regional and global level.

Bulgaria's commitments to the Paris Agreement further develop our strategic positions in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol. Bulgaria is working with all partners in the field of climate change to fully implement the Paris Agreement.

Regional cooperation plays an important role in the country's foreign policy. In the year of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Speaker of the National Assembly stated that "the Republic of Bulgaria has the will and competence to develop and deepen the regional dimension of the UN Sustainable Development Goals through active interaction within the Interparliamentary Union".<sup>3</sup> A number of regional initiatives have been carried out under the Black Sea Economic Co-operation Organization (BSEC) and the EU Danube Strategy, as well as under the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, in particular in the Western Balkans.

Bulgaria is a strong supporter of development cooperation as a powerful tool of the transformative power of the SDGs.

Development cooperation policy is inextricably related to policies for peace and stability, climate change, human rights, education, demographic challenges, investment, etc. The Bulgarian approach to planning and indicative allocation of development assistance is in line with the internationally accepted standards of good governance and efficiency set out in the 2005 Paris Declaration, the 2011 Busan Declaration, the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, and the international agreements related to Bulgarian development assistance, as well as in the Council conclusions on a new Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015. Bulgarian development assistance fits into the efforts to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.<sup>4</sup>

Bulgaria is actively involved in international efforts to support the less developed countries and countries in need. Our country acknowledges that the Global Partnership for Development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are a sign of a sensible evolution from development aid to global development cooperation.

Moreover, Bulgaria adheres to the principles of the OECD for providing ODA and strives to increase its contribution.

The Vision, Goals and Priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 states that Bulgaria remains committed to achieving SDG 17 and will intensify its efforts in the framework of development assistance to the less developed countries.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE REVIEW**

The Voluntary National Review monitors Bulgaria's progress in meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in their broad scope and as well as in their interlinkages. The Review follows the principles of systematic follow-up and review recommended in paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda,

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<sup>3</sup> Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Documents. United Nations Association of Bulgaria, Sofia 2016, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Mid-term Program for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2016-2019, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Vision, Goals and Priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. Ministry of Finance, Sofia, 2019, p. 2.

as well as in the UN Secretary-General Voluntary common reporting guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews, updated in 2019. The efforts on integrating social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development are monitored and reported. A number of specific examples and good practices illustrate the interlinkages between the various UN Sustainable Development Goals. For the purpose of tracking and review of individual Goals, the Review uses data by the National Statistical Institute and statistical bodies, other public institutions and agencies (Social Assistance Agency, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, etc.), of international organizations and agencies, as well as by informal surveys of young people, business and the private sector. The Review uses the latest statistical information available as of Jan. 31, 2020. The indicator list adopted by the European Commission (EC) on April 25, 2017, available on the Eurostat thematic website, has been used to illustrate the progress made.

A methodology for functional analysis of sectoral and horizontal policies aimed at achieving national strategic goals has been used to develop the Review. The purpose of the analysis is to identify the challenges, the measures taken and the progress made, and to assist to the formulation of policies for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

To a large extent, the analysis is oriented toward vulnerable groups, toward people at risk of being excluded from the processes of social and economic development. It follows equally each of the three main dimensions of sustainable development and focuses on those policies that contribute most to the integration of its economic, social and environmental aspects.

Considering the broad scope of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the benefits of including them in the country's strategic planning by 2030, Bulgaria's progress toward each of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals is presented in the Voluntary National Review. The Review presents consistently the challenges, measures taken and results achieved in the implementation of the important indicators for Bulgaria in the 2030 Agenda. The Review illustrates the compliance of the SDG priorities with a number of national strategic programs, which is a prerequisite for Bulgaria's good performance and contribution to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, both nationally and internationally.

The Review outlines the actions of the Government, business and civil society to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria, focusing on those areas where it is particularly important to interpret and implement the integrated approach proposed in the 2030 Agenda.

The Review is prepared after extensive consultations with all parties concerned with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The limited volume does not allow for many interesting initiatives at national and international level, carried out by the governmental and non-governmental sector, academia, business structures, etc. to be presented. The Review identifies best practices mainly from major associations, coalitions and platforms actively involved in SDG implementation activities.

For the purpose of this Review, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria has taken action to collect relevant information from government institutions and other stakeholders on policies and activities related to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as on individual indicators.

The information and analytical material collected is at the heart of this Review. The interconnections between the economic, social and environmental aspects of Bulgaria's development have been analyzed. Roundtables and discussions were held with the participation of experts from the non-governmental sector and the academic community. A wide range of stakeholders were consulted: an online survey of non-governmental organizations through the database of the Bulgarian NGO's Information Portal; focus groups with business representatives; individual interviews with trade union representatives. The review also contains the results of an online survey of Bulgarian Youth Delegates to the UN on the priorities of young people, which they fill out at the beginning of each term.



The Review takes into account the assessments of Bulgaria in EC reports, such as “The Environmental Implementation Review 2019: COUNTRY REPORT – BULGARIA”, as well as the recommendations to Bulgaria made by the periodic reports for the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Consultative meetings were held with representatives of the UN and UNICEF, the situational analysis of UNICEF published in 2017 on the state of child protection in Bulgaria is also taken into account.

### 3. POLICIES AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#### a) Stakeholder engagement

In order to implement the 2030 Agenda and to maximize the fulfillment of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, it is important that all actors in public life are aware of them and believe that the Goals can be reached with joint efforts.

After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Bulgaria has initiated a series of initiatives to raise awareness among citizens, businesses, institutions at all decision-making levels, students, teachers and trainers, media representatives, etc. Actions have been taken to fulfill the UN Sustainable Development Goals with the widest involvement of stakeholders.

#### **Government**

In September 2015, Bulgaria made a political commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a comprehensive roadmap in response to global challenges.

Our country is actively cooperating with the EU Member States, the UN and other partners to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. On Oct. 18, 2018, the EU Heads of State or Government adopted European Council conclusions in which they reaffirmed their full commitment to the 2030 Agenda and its implementation.

Bulgaria actively participates in EU and UN multilateral cooperation, in the preparation of EU common positions for UN forums and bodies, including on economic, financial and administrative issues, as well as on sustainable development issues.

There are 42 specialized councils at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria working on the problems of demography, gender equality, economic development, environmental protection and other issues that are thematically related to the SDGs.

In 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mapped the responsibilities of the public institutions for the respective Goals and the targets and indicators related to them. A detailed indicative table on the responsibilities of ministries and institutions for meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria has been developed. The responsible ministries outlined sectoral policies and related strategies, concepts, plans and reports relevant to the implementation of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. The ministries' reviews provided opportunities to monitor and analyze the processes of integrating the SDGs into national policies.

In 2018, the Government approved an institutional framework for the preparation of the draft National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030, which should be adopted by the end of 2020.<sup>6</sup>

The National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030, like the previous National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020, will be a strategic framework document of the highest order in the hierarchy of national programming documents. This document determines the vision and the overall goals of development policies in all sectors of state governance, including their territorial dimensions.

The "Concept for the development of a national strategic document for the development of the country with a horizon until 2030", proposed by the Ministry of Finance and approved by the Development Council at the Council of Ministers, states that "in the preparation of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 particular attention should be paid to the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development "Transforming the World" and to its 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific targets".<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the social and economic development of the country after its accession to the EU was adopted in May 2019, reflecting the interconnections of policies in the economic, social and environmental aspects of development with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This analysis was prepared as a starting point in the drafting process of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. After a wide-ranging public discussion, the vision, goals and priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 were approved.

Bulgaria actively participates in the global Open Government Partnership initiative. The Government runs an electronic Portal for Public Consultations, which, according to the Law on Normative Acts, is a central public web-based information system that provides opportunity for publishing draft normative acts developed by the executive power or local authorities, for public consultation. The visits have increased since its inception: from 37,932 in 2008 to 472,668 in 2018. The number of comments increased from 7 in 2008 to 1,509 in 2018. While drafting the Fourth National Action Plan for this global initiative in 2018, 54 proposals came from state institutions and civil organizations focused on e-government, access to information and use of open data, e-justice, digital growth, reducing administrative burdens for citizens and businesses. An Open Data Portal has been operating as part of this initiative since late 2014.<sup>8</sup>

The National Statistical Institute (NSI) is one of the leading institutions involved in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In January 2019, the NSI presented to the users of statistical information the summary publication "Sustainable Development of Bulgaria 2005-2016". The publication contains statistical indicators developed in accordance with the Eurostat sustainable development indicator system. Topically selected current data are published periodically – the "Statistical Reference Book 2019" in Bulgarian and English, the "Employment and Unemployment – Annual Data 2018", the "Crimes and Persons Convicted 2018", the "Education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019", etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Council of Ministers Decree No. 167 of Aug. 9, 2018 to Amend and Supplement Council of Ministers Decree No. 110 of 2010 on the Establishment of a Development Council at the Council of Ministers, State Gazette, Issue no. 67, 08/14/2018.

<sup>7</sup> Concept for the development of a national strategic document for the development of the country with a horizon until 2030.

<sup>8</sup> Open Data Portal of the Republic of Bulgaria. Available at: <<https://data.egov.bg>>

Since December 2019, the MonitorStat information system has been put into operation, based on a statistical database of surveys of the National Statistical Institute and other statistical bodies. The system is centralized, web based, bilingual, with two main modules providing access to indicators and metadata from statistical surveys for national, European and international strategies and programs. The system is expected to play an important role as a national platform for monitoring of the performance on the indicators set out in key national strategy documents, including the implementation of the SDGs, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, etc.

The Government maintains good communication channels with other stakeholders. Advisory councils are operating at most of the ministries and at the National Assembly.

In order to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Government is actively participating in different forms of cooperation at the national and international level.

## **Municipalities**

The National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, which includes all 265 municipalities in the country, assists in directing public financing to fulfill the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including through European funds. The National Association of the Municipalities is represented in a number of advisory councils to the Council of Ministers, including the Consultative Council on Promotion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, the National Council on Social Inclusion, the National Council for Child Protection, the National Council on Gender Equality, etc. which work toward achieving the principle of “leaving no one behind”.

The vision of the municipalities for the 2021-2027 programming period is that our country should have a real national development programme and adequate national resources for its implementation instead of hundreds of strategies for each sector and subsector.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most effective approaches to planning and financing local sustainable development programs and projects is the “community-led local development” approach. This is an approach aimed at creating employment by using local potential. It seeks to improve the quality of life and to reduce underdevelopment of local communities in territories with specific characteristics, for example in rural and fishery areas. The approach is applied bottom-up through the creation of Local Action Groups for territories with 10,000 to 150,000 inhabitants. These groups include representatives of local community stakeholders who jointly, while maximizing publicity, set territorial development priorities and integrate them into community-led development strategies.

### **Good practices:**

The Association of Danube Municipalities – ADO Danube, together with partners from Bulgaria and Romania, developed an integrated ecotourism route “Protected natural heritage within the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria”. The route brings together 60 sites with protected status and corresponds with several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals – partnership, biodiversity conservation, local tourism development. The project is presented as a local stakeholder “engagement” initiative. Another cross-border project – “Clean Access in Calarasi-Silistra cross-border area”, is focused entirely on the environmental goals of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda – building a network of bicycle lanes, purchasing electric bicycles, solar parking for electric cars.

**Sofia Municipality** has been participating since the beginning of 2018 in an international project on “Mobilizing European young people in support of the Sustainable Development Goals” (Walk the Global Walk) under the Europe Aid Programme of the European Commission. The project aims to strengthen cooperation between local authorities, the civil sector and educational institutions in countries within and outside the EU. One of the objectives is to create a common educational framework on the UN global Sustainable Development Goals, in particular on sustainable cities, climate change, peace and justice. An interactive training package for teachers has been developed, and trainings are being held to integrate topics from the UN Sustainable Development Goals into school curricula.

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<sup>9</sup> First plenary session of the final three-day conference for the term 2015-2019, organized by the National Association of the Municipalities (NAMRB) in June 2019.

**Burgas Municipality** has built a system for lending bicycles, intelligent video surveillance of the urban environment and transport sites, integrated intelligent systems for public transport – ticket system, real-time monitoring system and information for public transport, priority ensuring system for city buses. The municipality can also be complimented for the results achieved under the Energy Efficiency of Multi-Family Residential Buildings National Programme, as well as for the created regional waste management system. In 2018, the municipality launched a pilot smart parking solution in the city. The technology partner of the project is one of the national telecommunications operators. The innovative system was launched with 30 parking spaces in the paid “blue zone” in the city center. Information is collected about the congestion of the area, an analysis is made and specific measures are taken. Magnetic sensors are used, as well as an operating system for paying the parking time, and the collected information can be provided upon request to the authorized institutions concerned, as well as to people who wish to develop innovative mobile and web applications with information about the city.

Strategic documents indicate that municipalities can play the role of contact points for measures which stimulate the production and consumption of energy from renewable sources. The Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria envisages legislative initiatives in this direction, insofar as the municipal authorities are the ones obliged to issue part of the permits for the production of electricity from renewable sources, as well as in the planning of their use on the territory of the municipality.<sup>10</sup>

## NGOs

The non-governmental sector plays an important role in our country regarding the promotion and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Coalitions of non-governmental organizations and many individual non-profit organizations work on the main topics of the 2030 Agenda within national or international projects.

The Bulgarian Platform for International Development assists the promotion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It brings together 15 organizations with various fields of activity: global citizenship education, health care, gender equality, childcare, Roma integration. A series of projects and activities covered nearly 700 teachers from across the country, 42 young scientists, more than 500 representatives of local authorities, 38 politicians and more than 30 journalists. After a national competition, 40 schools obtained a Global School status – a recognition as a school with a tradition in development education and global citizenship education. The Platform has worked successfully to promote the Sustainable Development Agenda, aiming to deepen the understanding of the individual 17 SDGs by using the National educational standard for civic, health, environmental and intercultural education introduced on the basis of the Law on Pre-school and School Education (approved by Regulation 13 of Oct. 11, 2016).

Among the members of the Platform is the National Network for Children, which encompasses 152 organizations in the country, spread across eight regions. The Childhood 2025 Coalition operates within this network. Its members work to actively replace the existing institutional care for children with family or family-like care.

There are two major coalitions operating in the area of environmental SDGs – the ForTheNature Coalition and the Bulgaria Climate Coalition. By bringing together more than 80 non-governmental organizations, they are working for strengthening citizens' involvement in environmental issues, for sustainable development-oriented business and for a law-abiding state. They help to stop deforestation, illegal construction or attempts to change the status of protected areas. Their representatives are involved in the development of climate standards at the national and international level.

The National Youth Forum gathers the energy of 50 international, national, local and political youth organizations from across the country with the motto “It's time for the youth to take the floor!” The organization is working to create and adopt a new National Youth Strategy, in which the UN Sustainable Development Goals should be clearly outlined.

The Coalition for the Development of Media Literacy is an informal voluntary association of nearly 20 organizations and networks working in the fields of education, media and civil society. Its aim is to stimulate public debate on topics related to media ethics, hate speech prevention and discriminatory messages.

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<sup>10</sup> Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Energy, 2019, p. 67.

The Alliance for Protection Against Gender-Based Violence is an association of organizations from across the country working professionally to prevent and protect against all forms of gender-based violence by providing support (psychological, legal, social) to more than 2,000 women and their children during the last year. The Alliance operates a 24-hour toll-free helpline for professional support in cases of domestic violence. The Academy for Violence Prevention, which was created by the Alliance, has trained over 250 professionals. In its programs, the Alliance pays special attention to vulnerable groups of women and girls from ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, women seeking and in the process of international protection.

The Citizen Participation Forum is a network of Bulgarian civil society organizations from all over the country, working to increase citizen and NGO involvement in policy formulation and decision-making. Amalipe – one of the most active organizations working to reduce the number of Roma school dropouts, participates in the Forum.

The United Nations Association of Bulgaria works in a national network of UN clubs to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It advocates for increasing Government and parliamentary engagement with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Bulgarian Youth Delegates to the UN Program is implemented with the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Through networking, the ideas of civil society organizations reach the most isolated settlements and contribute to the implementation of the principle of “leaving no one behind”.

Community centers, which are traditional cultural centers in Bulgaria, play a major role. The Global Libraries – Bulgaria Foundation (GLBF) is working to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals under the motto “The library – a place for everyone”. In partnership with the public libraries, the Foundation reaches even the smallest settlements with acting community centers.

In 2019, a survey among 42 NGOs was conducted regarding the way they implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Nearly 55% of them indicate that they work in the field of education and youth activities; 30% declare legislation, advocacy, and public policies as their field of operation; 30% are committed to human rights; just over one fifth declare commitments to health and social services. All 42 respondents state that they collaborate with the private sector, while 26 claim that they have partnerships with the public sector.

## **Academia**

Some of the leading Bulgarian Universities and the Institutes at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals through scientific discussions and research projects, as well as by introducing new educational programs at different educational levels.

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, in partnership with other Bulgarian and foreign universities, Institutes at the BAS and other associated partners, implements the project “Clean technologies for sustainable environment – waters, waste, energy for circular economy” (Clean & Circle) for the period until 2023. In 2019, the scientific teams presented the first technologies they have developed – for water detoxification and purification.

A series of scientific forums with international participation were held at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) in the period 2016-2018. In September 2019, a training seminar for students from the region and a Scientific Conference on SDGs and Bulgaria were held. The UNWE provides an open, accessible academic environment for students with visual impairments, in the spirit of the principle of “leaving no one behind”. There are reading rooms equipped for blind readers.

In June 2019, the Technical University in Varna organized the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Sustainable Development 2019” with sustainable use of resources, climate change and monitoring, sustainable development of tourism, etc. as thematic areas.

Many universities are introducing new educational programs and disciplines related to sustainable development. VUZF University (Finance, Insurance, Business and Entrepreneurship) specializes in corporate social responsibility programs. Students in undergraduate and Masters’ programs are offered a course in Globalization and Sustainable Development.



The Climate, Atmosphere and Water Research Institute was established at the BAS in 2018. In October 2019, the Institute organized the First Scientific Conference on Climate, Water Resources, Water Balances and Water Quality.

The development of informal platforms for broader collaboration and broader public response is a good practice. The “Iniciativa Edinenie” Association, which brings together renowned Bulgarian scientists and intellectuals, presented in 2017 the document “Some Views on the National Goals and Priorities for Sustainable Development of Bulgaria” for public discussion.

### **Private sector**

The private sector has the resources to make many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals come true. The private sector is interested in engaging with the ethical principles of corporate social responsibility and accordingly expects an improved business environment and quality education.

The private sector’s commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals is mainly related to the adoption of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In the fall of 2018, nearly 40 corporate social responsibility professionals established the Bulgarian Association of CSR Professionals. Business representatives express their interest in the concept of the relationship between Business and Human Rights.

Initiatives of business associations have been developed to create a suitable environment for sustainable economic development. The Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association announced at the end of 2018 the creation of the Institute for Sustainable Economic Development. Its aim is to work for sustainable economic development and improving the business environment and investment climate in Bulgaria through research and specialized programs. Its mission is to actively encourage entrepreneurship and to support the development of industrial relations and social dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the initiatives in the private sector are carried out by the Bulgarian Network of the UN Global Compact. The association, which brings together more than 30 organizations, presented its Strategic Plan 2015+ just 5 months after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in New York. Eight of the UN Sustainable Development Goals have been selected, namely: good health and well-being (Goal 3); quality education (Goal 4); decent work and economic growth (Goal 8); industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9); sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11); responsible consumption and production (Goal 12); peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16); partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17). In 2020, the progress will be reviewed and the document will be updated.

After signing the European Pact for Youth, the Bulgarian Network of the UN Global Compact officially presented the Bulgarian National Action Plan. The first 27 organizations that have adopted the document unite on six priorities for change: improving skills, fostering vocational skills and practices, career guidance, attracting talent, supporting schools, teachers and principals and meeting the needs of the future.

The forums organized by the Network which are entitled “Business as a force for good” have been successful. Their aim is to make visible the successful local partnerships between businesses and non-profit organizations. A good practice developed by the Bulgarian Network of the UN Global Compact is the “Bazaar of professions” initiative, which has been implemented every year since 2015 with the aim of early career guidance for children and young people.

The Bulgarian Network of the UN Global Compact was an active partner in creating a National Plan for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Republic of North Macedonia in the period 2018-2019. As a result of this partnership, a Toolkit for Selecting and Implementing Collective SDG Actions Based on Best Practices of the EU Countries has been created and is available in three languages and promoted among the 80+ Global Compact Networks worldwide.<sup>12</sup>

In May 2019, during the preparation of the Voluntary National Review, a study was conducted in focus groups with business representatives. The results show that business is largely guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, it expects the coordinating role of the state, it is motivated to

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<sup>11</sup> Institute for Sustainable Economic Development Foundation. Available at: <<http://www.ised.bg>>

<sup>12</sup> Toolkit for Selecting and Implementing Collective SDG Actions Based on Best Practices of the EU Countries. Developed under “Building cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development”, (EuropeAid / 138660 / ID / ACT / MK). Available at: <http://konekt.org.mk/sdgs/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Toolkit-SDGs-ENG.pdf>

work for the achievement of the SDGs, which is evidenced by many national and international awards. For example, two Bulgarian companies have won the EC Awards for the environment – “Shift-IDEAS Biomik” develops an economical and biodegradable alternative to Styrofoam from agricultural waste and mushrooms; “Enova” has developed a water pollution monitoring system based on a new generation of biosensors.<sup>13</sup>

In a broader national survey of 300 leading companies in Bulgaria conducted by CSR AdviceBox at the end of 2018 (to assess corporate social responsibility of businesses in Bulgaria), some interesting conclusions are drawn about the business attitude toward the SDGs. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents state they are aware of the SDGs; more than half have organized one, while more than one-third have organized more than one event on an SDG related topic in 2018. More than two-thirds of the companies have defined the significant goals for their business. 40% cited Goal 4 first, followed by Goal 13. Climate change is cited as a higher risk by those companies that provide goods and services to other industrial users. Respondents are also more excited about the implementation of Goal 16, which addresses access to justice for everyone and the establishment of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. On the contrary, eradicating poverty and ensuring good health for all, at all ages, have been identified as more significant risks for companies providing to end-users.

Another influential group of business companies have formed a “Green Circle” around the “Manager” monthly business magazine. It defines itself as a circle of companies with responsible environmental policies. The “Green Circle” already has 230 companies operating in Bulgaria as its members. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its founding, new goals have been formulated in line with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Among them are forming of a sustainable ecological culture among employees; raising environmental education and intelligence among adolescents and the general public; promoting the development and use of environmentally friendly technologies and contributing to the achievement of the general national goals until 2030.

## **Trade unions**

### **– Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (CITUB)**

In 2019, CITUB joined the International Trade Union Confederation campaign “An ILO for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Time for a New Social Contract”. The aim is for millions of people around the world to demand change and a new social contract between workers, Government and business, which will contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 8 – the promise of decent work for all.

CITUB participates in international projects for experience exchange and for development of regional cooperation. In 2018, CITUB participated in the Labor-INT project to support cooperation between partners from Southern Europe and the Balkans in order to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the labor market. The European Trade Union Confederation is leading the Labour-INT in partnership with nine other organizations.

The Federation of Transport Trade Unions in Bulgaria is particularly active. On the International Earth Day in 2019, union members planted Damascena Bulgarian roses in the center of Sofia as a symbol of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, creating a symbolic “Garden of Earth and Peace”.

### **– Confederation of Labour Podkrepa (Podkrepa CL)**

In its strategic documents, Podkrepa CL states that it works for a strong and social Bulgaria, a prosperous and welfare country with stable democratic institutions – through advocacy for accessibility of social systems, through more and better social laws, through more social policy funding, etc.

As a member of the European Trade Union Confederation, Podkrepa CL declares its commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to the Confederation's position on the need for EU decarbonization by 2050.

In March 2019, Podkrepa CL signed a contract with the National Employment Agency for the implementation of the “Horizons 4” project under the National Employment Action Plan 2019. The

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<sup>13</sup> The Diplomas are awarded annually to start-ups from EU Member States that offer innovative solutions in the fields of green energy, air and water protection.

project envisages improving access to the labor market for disadvantaged groups through the implementation of a set of trainings in key professional competences.

The regional dimension is an important part of the activities of Podkrepa CL. In June 2019, an international conference was held on “Strengthening the Capacity and Deepening Cooperation for the Integration of the Western Balkans in a Competitive Social Europe”. The European social model and trade union values were discussed, as well as the question how the interests of workers in the Western Balkans could be protected in a better way through a European perspective.

## **b) Interplay of SDGs with national strategic documents**

The topic of sustainable development and creating links between economic, social and environmental targets is long present in national strategic documents. Appropriate strategies and programs have been adopted that reflect the basic principles of the 2030 Agenda and allow for coherence in the implementation of its goals.

Bulgaria has actively participated in the negotiations on the Council conclusions “Towards an Ever More Sustainable Union by 2030” adopted on April 9, 2019, and on the Council conclusions “Building a Sustainable Europe by 2030 – Progress Thus Far and Next Steps” adopted on Dec. 10, 2019. In 2018, Bulgaria prepared and held the Presidency of the Council of the EU. All government institutions were committed to the Presidency and the priorities were in line with the global Sustainable Development Goals.

The principles and policies laid down in the Government’s Programme for the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021 are in line with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda on good governance and guaranteeing the rights, security and well-being of citizens, tolerance, non-discrimination and non-disintegration. The priorities of Bulgaria’s foreign policy as an EU and UN Member State are in line with the fundamental European principles – freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, protection of human rights and multilateralism for effective bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Among other foreign policy priorities are the sustainable solution of migration issues, as well as the ambition to pursue the realization of the European policy to deepen bilateral political, economic and cultural relations with the countries of Southeast Europe. At the national level, priorities have been identified to address social issues with a clear commitment to children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Ambitions in the fields of education, health, environment, economic stability and growth have been declared.

The main strategic document that forms the framework of national policies in the priority areas for the country is the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020. The vision and goals of the Programme outline 8 priority areas that correspond to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Bulgaria. These priorities reflect the national ambition to produce high value-added products through better education, sustainable management of natural resources, innovation in an improved institutional environment, energy security through improved resource efficiency and improved transport links.

The National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020 and the related to it action plans establish some quality standards:

- a) to have an operating system of indicators to monitor the performance;
- b) to bind the planned interventions with the financial (including budgetary) resources necessary for their implementation;
- c) to include an impact assessment of the implementation of the measures envisaged.

There are also some weaknesses. According to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessment of public investment management, a significant weakness is the lack of a clear link to the Mid-term Budgetary Forecast. Another weakness identified by the IMF assessment is the quality of lower-rank strategic documents – sectoral strategies.<sup>14</sup>

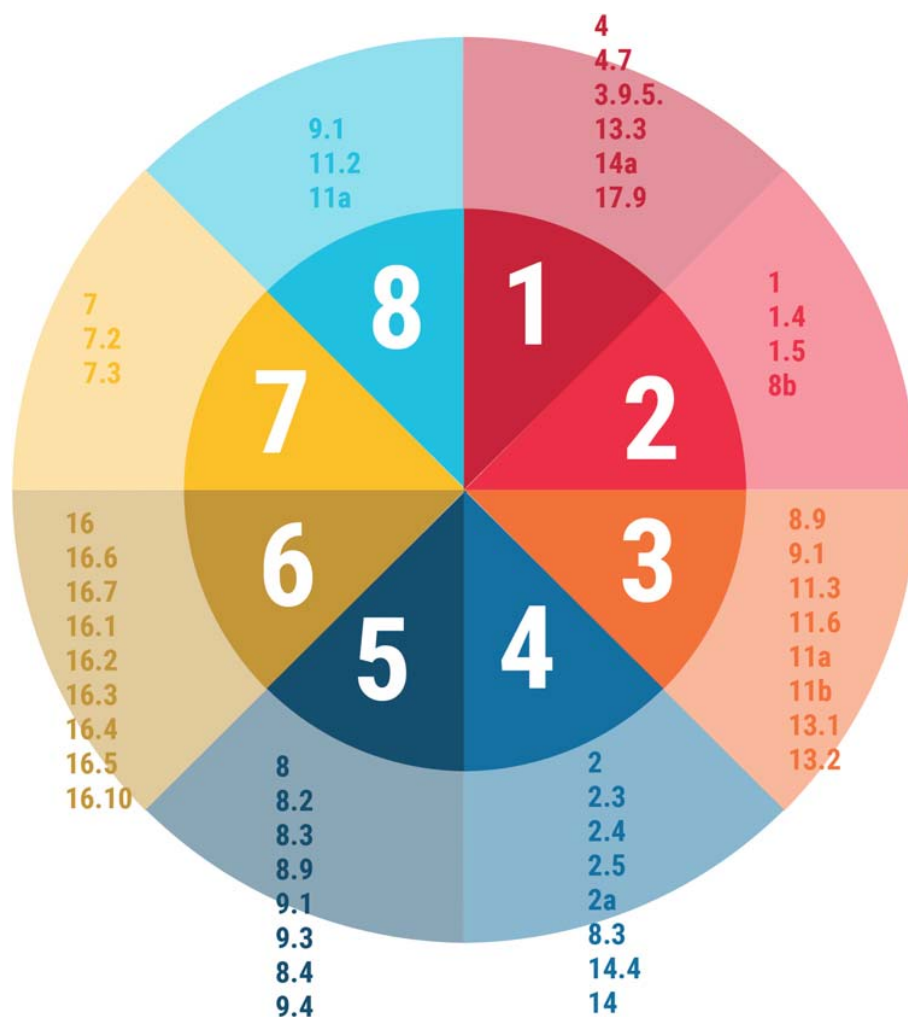
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<sup>14</sup> Concept for the Development of a National Strategic Document for the Development of the Country with a Horizon until 2030. p. 3.

For the period until 2030, we are striving to build on what has been achieved. This is the aim of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030.

The coherence between the national vision for development and the 2030 Agenda framework is reflected in the relation between the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the key objectives of the National Development Program: Bulgaria 2020. Some of these correspondences are presented in the graph below:

## Interrelation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals with the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020



### National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020 – main priorities:

1. Improving the access to and increasing the quality of education and training and the qualitative characteristics of the workforce.
2. Reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion.
3. Achieving sustainable integrated regional development and use of the local potential.
4. Development of the agricultural sector to ensure food security and production of products with high added value through sustainable management of natural resources.
5. Supporting the innovation and investment activities for increasing the economics competitiveness.
6. Strengthening the institutional environment with view of higher efficiency of public services provided to citizens and business enterprises.
7. Energy security and increasing resource efficiency.
8. Improving transport connectivity and access to markets.

The upgrades in drafting the strategic document for development by 2030 are in line with the already adopted sectoral strategies for the period after 2020. Among them are: the Updated National Scientific Research Development Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2017-2030; the Integrated Transport Strategy for the period until 2030; the Updated National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria 2014-2030 and the Action Plan for it for the period 2017-2020; the Updated National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2030); the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria; the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2017-2030. Adherence to the UN Sustainable Development Goals has been declared in many sectoral strategies.



The National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 is based on a deliberate Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU, which has been discussed and agreed with the social and economic partners within the Economic and Social Council and the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation. The Programme's vision, goals and priorities outline three main goals – accelerated economic development; mitigating adverse demographic trends; achieving more inclusive and more sustainable growth by reducing social and territorial inequalities and promoting shared prosperity.

### Young people propose:

A successful plan to integrate the UN Sustainable Development Goals into the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 should include the ideas of young people – the future politicians, businesspersons and active citizens, about the priorities of society. In the online consultation among Bulgarian young people held in the Summer of 2019 by the Bulgarian Youth Delegates to the UN, five major areas of development were outlined, namely education, employment, health, environmental protection and participation of young people in the processes of decision-making. These are followed by eradication of poverty and hunger, sustainable economic growth and civil society development.

415 young people aged 15-35 also point out similar priorities during the consultations in Bulgaria, which were part of the sixth cycle of the Structured Dialogue “Youth in Europe – What’s next?”. Respondents point out as extremely significant quality education, participation in environmental protection initiatives, participation in decision-making processes, internships and support to promote youth employment, rural development and providing access to opportunities for young people in such regions, support for young migrants, guaranteeing gender equality, ensuring participation of young people from marginalized social groups, access to youth spaces and understanding and support of young people for the EU.

## National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 – 3 Goals, 5 Axes and 13 Priorities



### Objectives:

**Accelerated economic development**

**Demographic upswing**

**Reduction of inequalities**

### Axis 1. Innovative and intelligent Bulgaria

1. Education and skills (SDG 4)
2. Science and scientific infrastructure (SDG 8, 9)
3. Smart industry (SDG 8, 9)



### Axis 2. Green and sustainable Bulgaria

4. Circular and low-carbon economy (SDG 7, 8, 12)
5. Clean air and biodiversity (SDG 3, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)
6. Sustainable agriculture (SDG 2, 14, 15)



### Axis 3. Connected and integrated Bulgaria

7. Transport connectivity (SDG 3, 11)
8. Digital connectivity (SDG 9, 11)
9. Local development (SDG 2, 6, 11)



### Axis 4. Responsive and just Bulgaria

10. Institutional framework (SDG 16)
11. Social inclusion (SDG 1, 2, 5, 8, 10)



### Axis 5. Spirited and Vital Bulgaria

12. Health and sport (SDG 3)
13. Culture, heritage and tourism (SDG 8, 11, 12)



## ***There are many examples of inclusion of the 2030 Agenda Goals and principles in national strategic documents***

Some of the UN Sustainable Development Goals are included in the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria, which sets out the main goals, stages, means, actions and measures for the development of our national energy and climate policy. The main objectives set out in this plan are stimulating low-carbon development of the economy; competitive and secure energy; reducing dependence on fuel and energy imports; guaranteeing affordable energy for all consumers.

The Integrated Transport Strategy for the period until 2030 has an even broader scope of interlinkages with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It aims at improving transport connectivity and accessibility and thus reaffirms the care for vulnerable groups – children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Its priorities include modernization and development of transport infrastructure; development of intermodal transport; increasing the energy efficiency of transport; ensuring quality and easily accessible transportation in all regions of the country; limiting the negative impact of transport on the environment and human health; achieving a high level of safety and transport security. These priorities are fully in line with Goal 3 - increased road safety, Goal 7 – energy, Goal 8 – decent work and economic growth, Goal 9 – sustainable infrastructure, Goal 11 – sustainable cities with access to extended public transport, Goal 12 – sustainable consumption and production and Goal 14 – the oceans and seas.

The development of ecosystem value assessment and reporting systems implemented under the BG03 Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Programme funded by the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism of the 2009-2014 has contributed to the implementation of eight of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 15). Within this project, the MetEcoSMap was developed – a National Methodological Framework for Mapping and Biophysical Assessment of Ecosystems and Ecosystem Services in Bulgaria, consisting of methodologies for the mapping of nine types of ecosystems and ecosystem services. Guidelines for monitoring and economic evaluation have been prepared. With six other six projects funded under the BG03 Programme, the nine types of ecosystems identified in Bulgaria have been mapped. Mapping and evaluation of ecosystems and ecosystem services could inform decision-making in a number of related policies, such as water and agriculture related measures, territorial planning, cohesion policy, planning of the development and maintenance of green infrastructure, etc.

Besides other legislative acts and strategic programs, environmental protection is regulated in the Law on Defence and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria and in the Statute for the Military Service of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria. The Law assigns to the Minister of Defence the functions to organize the activity for the protection and restoration of the environment in the areas of deployment of military formations and in conducting military exercises. The Statute defines the specific responsibilities and activities for environmental protection. The Act provides for the maintenance and use of the armed forces in case of disasters and participation in disaster management.

Policy-making respects the principles of coherence in identifying priorities, objectives, contractors and target groups. The development of the National Prioritised Action Framework for Natura 2000 has been carried out with wide public participation of all stakeholders. Thus, the formulated set of priorities contributes both to the status of priority species and habitats, as well as to meeting the needs of local communities for sustainable social and economic development and improved quality of life.

An example of successful policy coordination in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda is the practice of providing employees to the changing structure of the labor market through “lifelong learning”. A National Coordination Group is operating since 2014, encompassing representatives of various ministries, agencies, educational and cultural institutions, employers' organizations, trade unions, civil society, etc. All operational documents are created through meaningful and functional links with other strategic and operational documents in the field of labor market, employment, youth and sport, culture, as well as with other social and economic sectors.

Another example of strategic and operational coordination is in the area of resource conservation, and in particular water management. The water management policy is implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW). Regional Inspectorates of Environment and Water shall

monitor and control wastewater within their respective territorial scope. Other stakeholders are the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Health, the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission, etc. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MAFF) is the institution responsible for pollution in agriculture. The support from local communities in improving the management of water and sanitation facilities is of great importance.

To coordinate the actions on chemicals and waste management, an interagency synergy group was established in 2013 by an Order of the Minister of Environment and Water, with representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, the Executive Environment Agency and various directorates at the MoEW. The aim of the group is to implement the decisions adopted at the Conferences of the Parties to international agreements, as well as to ensure a coordinated and effective chemicals and waste management legislation.

Coordination is a good practice in partnership with business as well. With the assistance of the most active business associations, in 2019 the Government adopted a Strategy on Corporate Social Responsibility for the period 2019-2023. The document addresses the political commitment of the Government to improve the quality of life of the population through transparent, socially responsible business practices.

Research projects contribute to different sectors, as well as to the implementation of many of the Goals. In 2018, 11 national research programs were approved in Bulgaria and around 30.5 million EUR were reserved for research projects until 2022. Two of these programs address environmental challenges – the National Science Program “Low-carbon Energy for Transport and Households” and the National Science Program “Protecting the Environment and Reducing the Risk of Adverse Events and Natural Disasters”, with envisaged funding of respectively 3.7 million EUR and 3 million EUR.<sup>15</sup>

### **c) Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development**

The concept of sustainable development implies that economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection are complementary.

The Government prioritizes education and investment in early childhood development, devotes funds to social protection and to reducing inequalities and poverty, but at the same time looks for the path to sustainable economic development through a focus on high value-added economy, circular and social/solidarity economy.

Environmental policies are horizontal and are included in the definition and implementation of other policies. Plans and programs include measures to control economic and environmental parameters. EU funding for specific projects requires observing the principles of sustainable development and resource efficiency. All this contributes to the balance between economic, social and environmental benefits.

The country actively supports The Green Initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) with the idea that combating climate change is an integral part of the fight for social justice.

Environmental assessments are made in accordance with the Law on Environmental Protection. When implementing the Operational Programme “Regions in Growth” 2014-2020, an environmental assessment is obligatory. The reports on its implementation indicate the measures taken in order not to damage the environment when implementing projects under this regional development programme.

An example of a detailed analysis and recommendations is the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Integrated Transport Strategy for the period until 2030 (ITS), presented in May 2017.<sup>16</sup> The assessment made in the report suggests that when implementing the ITS, one could expect the existing negative impacts on environment components to be reduced, while no new environmental problems emerge. The envisaged measures in the transport strategy are considered unlikely to have a significant negative impact on natural habitats, populations and habitats of species subject to conservation in the Natura 2000 network sites.

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<sup>15</sup> Republic of Bulgaria, National Scientific Programs. The document is adopted by Council of Ministers Decision No. 577 of 17.08.2018. Portal for public consultations.

<sup>16</sup> Development of an Integrated Transport Strategy for the period until 2030. Report № 7 “Strategic ecological assessment”, May 2017.



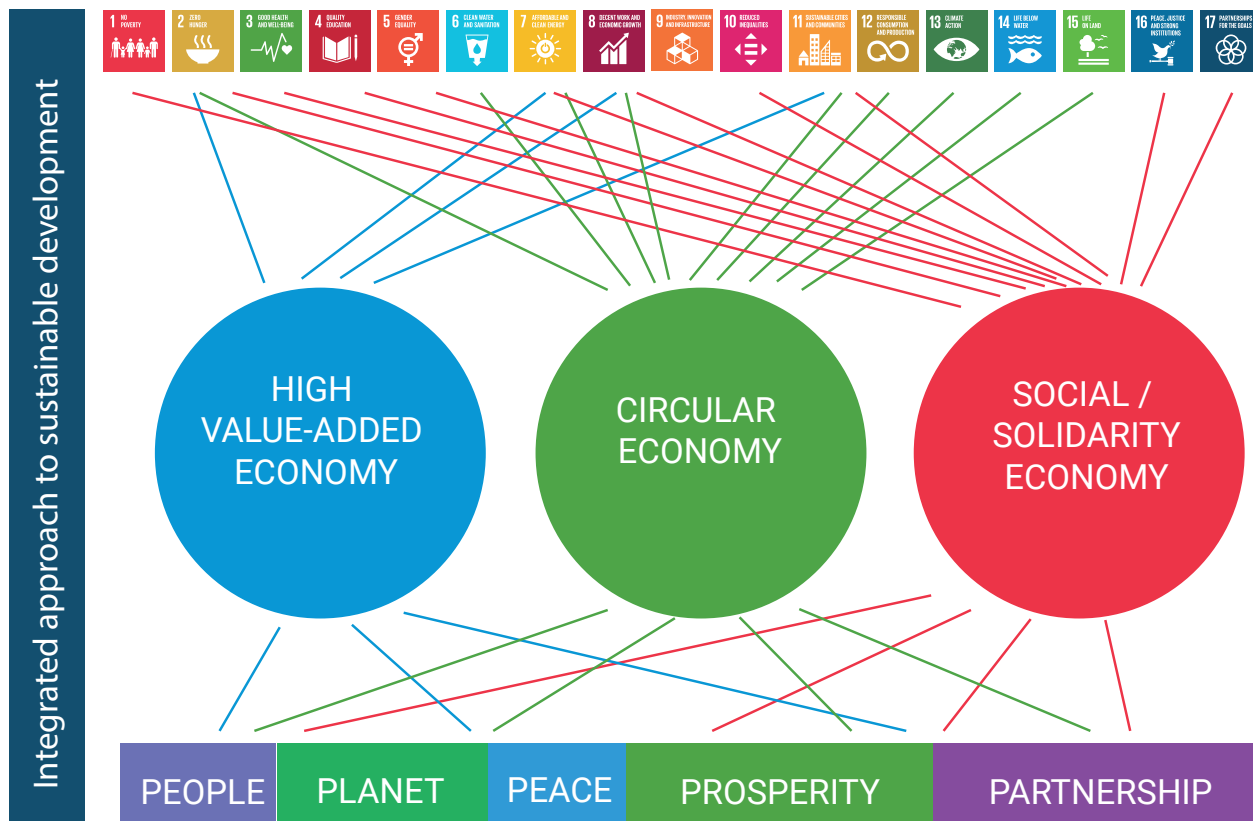
When selecting a contractor within the framework of the Investment Climate Program of the National Trust EcoFund, it must be guaranteed that the environmental compliance criteria are met. The monitoring of green public procurements is, in principle, carried out on the basis of statistics from the national Public Procurement Register. The Centralized Automated Electronic Procurement Information System (CAIS EOP) maintained by the Public Procurement Agency allows for regular monitoring.

For the first time, a National Waste Prevention Program was developed and incorporated in the preparation of the National Waste Management Plan 2014-2020. Waste prevention is given the highest priority in the waste management hierarchy.

The biggest challenge for the successful integration of the three dimensions of Bulgaria's sustainable development policies is the stated national intention to keep the coal sector with its significant share in the country's energy balance. The reasons for this are related to job retention and greater energy security for the country.

A solution to this problem is sought through the preparation of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria, including a perspective until 2050. For the purposes of the Plan, a forecast energy balance has been developed, which envisages maintaining the role of local coal until 2050, developing nuclear energy and generating electricity from renewable energy sources (RES), under market conditions and focusing on own consumption. Bulgaria's Integrated National Plan covers the five dimensions of the Energy Union for Europe – decarbonization, energy efficiency, energy security, Internal Energy Market and research, innovation and competitiveness.

Another similar challenge is the fact that the structure of the economy is dominated by energy-intensive industries, while relatively low labor costs are seen as a comparative advantage by investors. Experts and politicians recognize that the economy is gradually approaching the limits of its potential in terms of available natural resources, geographical and political location, human capital, technology and financial capital.



## High value-added economy

According to the Government's strategic intentions, maximum efforts are needed to develop high value-added economic sectors. Some economic data show positive trends in this direction. While in 2007 our exports were dominated by raw materials, in 2018 goods with higher added value already prevail, such as machinery, apparatus, equipment, parts and components. An integration into the supply chains of leading global manufacturers is observed. The trend is toward re-industrialization, targeted at export-oriented sectors.

The Government's plans for economic transformation toward high value-added sectors are related to the expectation of major changes in the structure of production factors. Long-term demographic trends lead to a steady decrease in the working-age population – by nearly 420 thousand by 2030, according to NSI demographic projections.<sup>17</sup> The pressure on the level of wages and salaries is growing in the context of participating in the European labor market, thus the country is losing the usual comparative advantages of its goods. This loss can be offset by incentives to invest in the high segments of priority sectors, such as eco-tourism or cultural tourism and the development of science and technology innovation centers for promoting innovations in small and medium-sized enterprises grouped in growing industrial clusters.

This is one of the Government's main goals for 2030: “to accelerate the economic convergence with the EU standard, through targeted and focused government support for increasing specialisation in products and industries characterized by a high technological and research intensity, which will facilitate gaining better and more prestigious positions in the global value chains”.<sup>18</sup>

These aspirations are reflected in the creation of three Centers of Excellence and eight Centers of Competence. The creation of Regional Innovation Centers is forthcoming, located in the 6 NUTS-2 statistical regions of Bulgaria, with the exception of the Yugozapaden (South-West), in which Sofia (the capital city) is located. Concepts and strategies for digital transformation of Bulgarian industry are being implemented.

One of the eight EU supercomputers will be located in Sofia. The supercomputer will be available for use by the scientific community, business and the government for developments in the fields of health, climate, disaster simulation, pharmaceuticals, aerodynamics analysis, nuclear reactor simulations, cybersecurity, etc.

### Good practices:

Eco-innovation is encouraged by organizations such as CleanTech Bulgaria, which is a business network established in 2012 to promote sustainable economic development through clean technology and ecological innovation.

A virtual ecological innovation laboratory has been set up as part of the “Ecolnn Danube” project co-financed by the Interred Danube Program (European Territorial Cooperation). Its main objective is to improve cooperation between ecological innovation professionals, with a particular emphasis on the development and the implementation of ecological technologies in the Danube region. CleanTech Bulgaria is the official and exclusive partner of the two largest public-private partnerships in the EU in the field of climate and sustainable energy.

The successful transition to a value-added economy is not possible without higher and more effective expenditure on applied research and science. Efforts to strengthen higher-level research institutions with the stated ambition for successful commercialization of their research results are expected to continue for the period until 2030. The integration of the Bulgarian research community into the international community is even stronger, more intersectoral links are being developed and the cooperation between higher education institutions, scientific institutes and business is improved.

The intersection point in completing this task is education. It is important to achieve results in the fight against early school leaving, in vocational education and, most importantly, in lifelong learning. The Law on Vocational Education and Training establishes a system for validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal education and informal learning. Improved employment

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<sup>17</sup> NSI. Population Projections by Sex and Age. Available at: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/6727/population-projections-sex-and-age>

<sup>18</sup> Vision, Goals and Priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. Ministry of Finance, Sofia, 2019. Approved by Council of Ministers Decision No. 33 of January 20, 2020. Ministry of Finance, Sofia, 2020, p. 4.

rates of low-skilled workers would free the welfare state from its redistributive functions and would provide resources for the sustainable development of a larger number of business sectors.

The IT Career Education Program helps bring digital technology into the economy and society. This National Program offers training in programming for students from all over the country to gain professional qualification as an “applied programmer”. The training is intended for students in secondary schools, specialized gymnasiums and vocational gymnasiums who do not study for this profession. Training is organized in the students' free time during the week, on Saturdays and Sundays or during the holidays, with the learning process being conducted both in-person and online.

Innovative Suggestions: A student project from the Sofia Vocational High School of Electronics “John Atanasov” proposes an electric bicycle with solar panels, which students use to get to school, while the bicycle is charged by the Sun during stopovers.

Another student project from the same gymnasium offers an innovative design system that uses plastic waste material to cover walls and ceilings. The project protects nature, while freshening up the interior of homes and improving their thermal insulation. The Technocrats – a Bulgarian center for educational programs and courses for students focusing on renewable energy, pollution and alternative sources like hydrogen, is also working with students.

In 2019, two out of six approved innovative Bulgarian projects for participation in the European finals for tackling energy poverty (Social Innovation to Tackle Energy Poverty) are developed by students, which is particularly indicative of the role of education and innovation.

### **Circular economy**

The second direction of the sustainable economic development of the country is the implementation of the principles of the circular economy. A guiding principle of the circular economy is that the value of products, materials and resources should be maintained for as long as possible in the economic cycle, leading to sustainable production and consumption, as well as achieving sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.

Orientation toward the principles of the circular economy is extremely important for Bulgaria, because the resource productivity in the country remains relatively low.

That is why the focus in the strategic planning until 2030 is on transforming the country's linear economy into a circular one. Actions are planned to increase the rate of circular use of materials in the economy. Support is provided for businesses intending to implement ecological innovation activities, including new ecological products and technologies.

Private investment in the economic sectors in Bulgaria relevant to the circular economy is estimated by Eurostat at around 90.5 million EUR, which is about 0.17% of the country's GDP in 2017. 60,750 people are employed in these sectors and this number increased by 1.72% for a year, while the added value created in 2017 amounts to around 636.9 million EUR.<sup>19</sup>

Progress is made on the “Circular material use rate” indicator. It measures the share of recovered material that is sent back for use in the economy, thus reducing mining and extraction of primary raw materials. A higher indicator value means that more by-products replace primary raw materials, thus reducing the environmental impact of their extraction. According to Eurostat data, the share of recovered material in Bulgaria increased from 2.1% in 2010 to 5.1% in 2017.

A Strategy and Action Plan for the Transition to Circular Economy of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2027 are being developed. A significant task is creating an effective monitoring framework at the EU level with 10 key indicators to reflect the main elements of the Strategy. The Strategy will contain a national framework with relevant indicators and a methodology for measuring them, which will ensure the provision of reliable national data to Eurostat.

There is a delay in the implementation of the “polluter pays” principle. Bulgarian legislation provides for specific measures for the implementation of the principle since 2015. The Law on Amendment and Supplement to the Law on Corporate Income Tax of November 2018 amended the Law on Local Taxes and Fees, the main motive being the ability to appropriately use the data from the 2021 population and

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<sup>19</sup> Eurostat. Private investments, jobs and gross value added related to circular economy sectors. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/cei\\_cie010/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/cei_cie010/default/table?lang=en)

housing census on the number of users of services in the property for determining the fee for municipal waste. This will make possible the use of the resource allocated for the population and the housing census in 2021. Based on the collected data from the census and the records from the managers of condominiums for the number of users of services in the property, it will be possible for the municipal administration to determine the number of users administratively.

There are some good examples of promoting or completing the transition from a linear to a circular economy, both in the public and the private sectors:

– The MOVECO project is implemented by 16 organizations from 10 countries in the Danube Region and aims to promote the transition of small and medium-sized enterprises from linear to circular economy. A circular economy platform has been developed that provides its users with four main types of tools – information, qualification, financial and cooperation tools. There is a virtual marketplace that enables companies and research organizations to exchange products, materials and resources for re-use.

– In 2005, in the Chelopech underground mine was introduced a chamber system with the subsequent filling of the seized mining spaces with a solidifying material that includes all sterile rock masses and much of the cement-contaminated flotation waste. In addition, a pyrite flotation system was put into operation in 2014, enabling the extraction of gold concentrate from ores that were previously discarded. As a result, a more complete extraction of metals from the mine and recovery of a large part of the mining waste was achieved.

There have been successful examples of industrial symbiosis where companies partner so that waste from one production is used as a resource in another. Such industrial symbiosis is present in the system of Aurubis Bulgaria. At the Pirdop plant (part of Europe's largest copper producer – Aurubis), a significant proportion of the intermediate products are returned to production instead of being disposed of. These include various types of slag, dust, scrap, gypsum, etc. This means that raw materials have been saved, which has reduced the costs of the company for purchasing them, as well as for waste management. Similar projects have been implemented in other Bulgarian metallurgical plants, such as KCM AD – Plovdiv.

A good practice observed is manufacturers of mineral water and soft drinks reducing the density of bottles and to bottle water in unlabeled bottles. Technologies are being developed in the field of batteries and accumulators to ensure that battery life is better matched to the expected life of the product, or to make the replacement more affordable and proportionate to the price of the product. Measures are being taken to enable the goods to be repaired, thus extending their life cycle.

The National Trust EcoFund (NTEF) coordinates the project “Towards Introduction of Climate Action in the Educational Curriculum of Bulgarian Schools” 2018-2020 (TICA), which is implemented under the Project Financing Program of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety “European Climate Initiative”. It includes as partners the Independent Institute for Environmental Issues (UfU) in Berlin and the National Centre for Improving the Qualification of Pedagogical Specialists at the Ministry of Education and Science. The aim of the project is to develop and implement an ongoing training program for teachers of all disciplines across the country on climate change and energy efficiency. Teaching programs for 120 teachers from all over the country are prepared by university professors. It is envisaged that in the course of the implementation of the project activities, a partnership will be established with several ministries and with the municipalities in whose schools the new teaching materials will be applied.

Good practices are also being introduced in the field of education, which prepare young generations for the challenges of sustainable development and the sustainability approach in various aspects of its implementation, including in the areas in which they will work in the future. A good example is the first educational organic farm for children “Sunny Garden”, built on the territory of the Agroecological Centre at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv. The aim of “Sunny Garden” organic farm is to contribute to ecological education of children and to raise the awareness of students about sustainable production, especially organic farming, sustainable way of life and preservation of the environment.

### ***Social and solidarity economy***

The third direction of the country's sustainable development is the successful introduction of incentives and regulation for building a social and solidarity economy. Complemented by the ideas of a “just transition” to a low-carbon economy, it can provide a good foundation for realizing bene-

fits in many dimensions. The just transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient development has the political intention of minimizing social and economic disadvantages and maximizing benefits by reallocating labor, creating “green” jobs, combined with appropriate social protection and responsive labor market policies. For its part, the social and solidarity economy is a possible path to sustainable development of society, i.e. it is an appropriate tool to strengthen its social pillar.

The regulations and instruments for the implementation of the principles of social economy in Bulgaria are established by the Law on Social and Solidarity-based Enterprises adopted in 2018. The strategic objective of the Law is to identify, develop and promote an economic sector which is predominantly socially oriented, and which generates social added value in terms of employment and social inclusion of vulnerable population groups.

For the purposes of the Law, a “social enterprise” is an enterprise which, regardless of its legal organizational form, has the main object of its activity the production of goods or the provision of services and combines economic results and social goals. The profit generated by its activity is predominantly spent on the implementation of social activity and/or toward a social goal. It is particularly important that the Law enables the identification of social enterprises, their recognition and promotion as economic entities which are beneficial for the sustainable development of the country. Firstly, they have explicitly stated economic and social (and often environmental) goals. Secondly, they involve different forms of cooperative, joint and solidarity relations.

The most important feature of social entrepreneurship is the visible social effect, which is reflected in the investment of the revenue generated to support the target groups; the participation of part of the target groups in business activities (employment creation) and the provision of services to disadvantaged people, which are unattractive for the business; the creation of opportunities for professional and social integration; the creation of social added value and the saving of social costs. Social entrepreneurship is considered an important tool for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, mostly these related to poverty eradication, reducing social inequality, and providing inclusive and equitable quality education.

#### **Good practices:**

– The “BACB Challenge” is a joint competition program for social entrepreneurs between the BCause Foundation and the BulgarianAmerican Credit Bank, with a focus on green and sustainable initiatives. It provides start-up entrepreneurs with the opportunity to participate in structured training, independent work, coaching sessions, as well as in personalized activities with leading professionals and entrepreneurs in all areas of business. At the end of the program, selected projects receive funding for business projects focused on the concept of ecological and sustainable development.

– The “Academy for local entrepreneurs” is a training program specially designed for people with entrepreneurial ideas who want to start their own business. The program is targeted at the tobacco-producing regions in the country – the districts of Kardzhali, Haskovo, Blagoevgrad and Silistra. It is carried out by the Rinker Entrepreneurship and Training Center at the BCause Foundation as part of the “Funny Summer, Caring Autumn 2019” program. Three successful editions of the Academy have already been held.

An important step with great potential for good results is the establishment of a National Database for Social Enterprises in Bulgaria, as well as the registration and maintenance of a distinctive certification mark for them, which distinguishes them from other companies on the market and encourages consumers to use their goods and services. The implementation of national training programs for the development of the management capacity of social enterprises is also part of the measures to stimulate and support them.

Among the most active stakeholders in realizing social and solidarity economy in the country, directed to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, are the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Social Assistance Agency, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the National Association of Employers of Persons with Disabilities, the Open Society Institute, the Trust for Social Achievement, etc. The “Social Enterprises in Bulgaria” Forum, an informal association of people and organizations working in the field of social entrepreneurship is operating to improve the environment. It facilitates the exchange of information and the development of policies to support social entrepreneurship in the country.

## d) “Leaving no one behind”

The most important strategic principle of the 2030 Agenda is “leaving no one behind”. The realization of the SDGs according to that principle requires special care and attention to vulnerable people and groups of people who fail to gain access to or to benefit from the opportunities offered by the society and the economy, or are in a risk of marginalization and social exclusion. It is necessary to identify the causes and to find adequate solutions.

The reasons are different in origin and nature but are interrelated - low income, inaccessible environment, health problems, problems of the elderly, lack of social skills and education, discrimination and inadequate services, etc.

The solutions are to provide access to social, health and educational services, the labor market, quality education, as well as guarantees for full participation in all spheres of public life.

The principle of “leaving no one behind” is manifested at the national level in the efforts to integrate the Roma population. In 2017, within the project “External Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy - 2016” a study examined the impact of long-term deep poverty among segregated minority groups on the parents' learned helplessness and their inability to motivate children for educational achievements. Based on the findings of such studies, measures are being taken to bind social policy with education policy. In 2017, amendments to the Rules for the Implementation of the Law on Social Assistance were adopted in order to reduce the school dropout rate. The amendments are related to the implementation of the Mechanism for collaboration of institutions for the coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and students in compulsory pre-school and school age. The amendments regulate the binding of the monthly targeted assistance for rent of municipal housing with regular pre-school and school attendance.

A cross-sectoral approach is being implemented in Bulgaria that brings together the resources of the public systems for education, health and social protection.

– The National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2020 is a comprehensive and multi-sectoral strategic document, which brings together measures in different policy areas. The specific plans for its implementation focus on providing employment opportunities and increasing labor earnings through active inclusion in the labor market. Other important measures include: providing material support to families with children, providing quality and affordable social services in the community and in a family environment, an integrated approach to the provision of early childhood development services, ensuring equal access to quality education and healthcare, ensuring sustainability and adequacy of social payments, housing, etc.

– Caring for the elderly is an important priority for institutions and society. The National Strategy for Long-Term Care aims to establish conditions for independent and dignified life for elderly people and persons with disabilities by providing high-quality, accessible and sustainable long-term care services in accordance with their individual needs. The Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 includes four main groups of measures: measures to provide home- and community-based support to persons with disabilities and elderly dependent on care; measures for the provision of quality community social services to people accommodated in specialized institutions with poor living conditions and quality of care.

– Low pensions are one of the reasons why a significant number of citizens remain below the poverty line. In this regard, raising pensions is an important priority in the Government’s Programme for the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is pursuing a policy aimed at providing legal and financial opportunities to do so. A new way of calculating the amount of pensions was introduced in 2017, giving each year of contributory service a higher weight in the pension formula. The percentage for each year of contributory service has been increased to 1.126 in 2017 and 1.169 in 2018, while for 2019 the value of the percentage for one year contributory service in the pension formula has been increased to 1.2.

– Intermediaries are hired to improve communication with parents of children at risk of dropping out of the school system. To this end, an Order of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of 2017 includes the position of “Educational Mediator” in the National Classification of the Professions and Positions. The educational mediator is an intermediary between families, local communities, children, students, kindergarten and school, who facilitates the inclusion of children and pupils from vulnerable groups in educational institutions and the full-bodied involvement of the parents and the local community in education.

– In accordance with the implemented policies for support of children and families in our country, a network of new type of services for children and families has been established, which is an example of an integrated approach in the provision of early childhood development services. The results of the Social Inclusion Project, which was implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in the period 2010-2015 with funds from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development are particularly useful and fundamental in this regard. The project supported Bulgaria's efforts to develop and implement an integrated early childhood development policy. Since the beginning of 2016, the "Early Childhood Development Services" scheme has been implemented under Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020 to continue the activities of these services. After the operation is completed, the services will be financed by the state budget.

– The process of deinstitutionalization of childcare continues until 2025. During this phase of the reform, all remaining specialized childcare facilities will be closed. The network of supportive social, health and integrated health and social services for prevention, early intervention, support and preventing the need for residential care for children up to three years of age will be further developed, while this form of care will only target children with severe disabilities who need permanent medical care. Efforts are being made to strengthen the capacity of the system and of the professionals, to improve coordination and the implementation of the integrated approach.

– More than 65 health care facilities in hard-to-reach and/or remote areas receive annual subsidies to maintain their capacity. The National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) provides additional funding for general practitioners in hard-to-reach and disadvantaged areas to provide primary health care for the population in these areas.

Many sustainable development policies are subject of regional development strategies and are implemented by municipalities within municipal development plans and integrated urban reconstruction and development plans. When applying for residential building renovation projects under Operational Programmes co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the municipalities prioritize the sites of intervention according to the specifics of the cities, also taking into account economically disadvantaged urban areas and socially vulnerable groups.

The state takes special care to protect the rights of the most vulnerable among refugees and migrants – the children, especially unaccompanied minors and underage persons. Bulgarian institutions, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the Bulgarian Red Cross and non-governmental organizations, work to integrate them into social, educational and health programs, protecting them from violence and discrimination and providing them with expert and psychological assistance in the process of integration. A mechanism for interaction between institutions and organizations was established in March 2017 for cases of unaccompanied children or children separated from their families.

### ***Special attention is paid to persons with disabilities:***

– Since the beginning of 2019, two new Laws have been in force - the Law on Personal Assistance and the Law on Persons with Disabilities. A horizontal state policy on the rights of persons with disabilities is outlined, which broadens the responsibilities of the central government and local authorities in coordinating the policy in this field.

– The Law on Persons with Disabilities defines new forms of support and identifies the specific type through an individual assessment of the needs of each person with disabilities. The assessment is complex and examines the functional difficulties and the existence of barriers to every-day and other activities of the person with disabilities.

– A new approach has been laid down in determining the amount of financial assistance for persons with disabilities and creating conditions for their active participation in all areas of public life. The amount of financial assistance depends on the degree of disability and is determined and updated according to the poverty line in Bulgaria, determined by a Decree of the Council of Ministers for the respective year.

– A "quota" has been introduced to guarantee and increase the employment of people with permanent disabilities in normal working environments. This provides better conditions and motivation for persons with disabilities to enter the labor market, in order to enable them to earn employment income, make social security contributions, realize social contacts, etc.

– The Law on Persons with Disabilities creates opportunities to guarantee conditions for equal access to education and vocational training, to provide employment conditions in normal, specialized and sheltered work environments, as well as to provide adequate support for workers with disabilities and their employers.

– The Law on Personal Assistance creates a more detailed legislative framework and ensures financial sustainability of assistance services. It aims to regulate the conditions and procedure for the provision and use of personal assistance by persons with disabilities. The mechanism of personal assistance is based on state-guaranteed financial support.

– For the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, a national programme is implemented to provide employment for unemployed people as personal assistants and as a means to provide care to people in need in a family environment – the National Programme for Employment and Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities.

Care for persons with disabilities is also reflected in the country's international activities. Bulgaria chaired the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the period 2017-2018 and contributed to the successful conduction of the 10th and 11th Sessions of the Conference (with over 1,500 participants). In March 2018, Bulgaria joined the Charter on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, presented at the World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul, May 23-24, 2016).

The accession of our country to the Charter is a clear political signal of our strong commitment to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

During the first Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2018, steps were taken toward establishing the EU as the largest market in the world for affordable products and services. It is Bulgaria that launched the trialogue process on the European Accessibility Act, which is expected to improve the lives of more than 80 million Europeans with disabilities.

### ***A number of measures are being taken to integrate people of the Roma ethnic community in the education and health sectors:***

– Cognitive books, textbooks and training kits are provided free of charge in the system of compulsory pre-school and school education (age 5 to 16). This measure helps overcome the social burden for children from socially disadvantaged families and serves to encourage school attendance.

– The establishment of focal and sheltered kindergartens and schools is among the measures to reach and ensure equal access to education for all children and pupils. For the children in the kindergartens and for the pupils in elementary and secondary schools, a day-long organization of the school day, lunch and transport are provided.

– Integrated schools in which pupils up to and including the 10th grade are enrolled provide opportunities for a fuller school coverage of pupils. Integrated schools may also provide vocational training – on a first grade vocational qualification or on part of a profession.

– Among the measures and activities for reaching and retaining children and pupils in the pre-school and school education system are the granting of scholarships to students in full-time, individual or combined form of education and in work-based training (dual training) after completing elementary education.

– The Law on Pre-school and School Education provides for penalties for unscrupulous parents. Parents who do not enroll or do not ensure the attendance of their children subject to compulsory pre-school or school education in kindergarten or school shall be punished by a fine. The fines are collected in the budget of the respective municipality and are spent only on activities related to promoting equal access to kindergartens, schools and centers for personal development support, as well as to improving services in them.

– Interinstitutional coordination and cooperation in the application and implementation of the measures envisaged in specific legislation to better bind regular school attendance to social and family benefits for children are refined through the Mechanism for collaboration of custody and retention institutions for children and pupils in compulsory pre-school and school age.



- Campaigns on the importance of immunizations of children are carried out. Children with incomplete immunization status are sought and found through the Regional Health Insurance Funds (RHIFs) and the general practitioners on the territory of each district.
- Preventive examinations are performed with mobile pediatric offices in neighborhoods with a predominantly Roma population and in remote settlements. In 2017, a total of 1,799 examinations were performed with mobile pediatric offices.
- In areas with a predominantly Roma population, early diagnostics and screening tests are carried out with mobile mammography offices to prevent breast cancer. In 2017, a total of 1,018 examinations were carried out with the mobile mammography offices and 681 people were diagnosed with diseases.
- In 2017, 2,980 representatives of the Roma community from high-risk groups were covered by appropriate services under the National Program for Prevention and Control of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections 2017-2020.
- Prevention of tuberculosis diseases is carried out in the Roma community through field work.
- Measures are being taken to reduce Roma unemployment, primarily through the active mediation of Labor Offices, supported by the activities of Roma mediators (labor mediators at the Labor Office Directorate, who are registered unemployed people and who self-determine themselves as Roma, with at least a gymnasium diploma) and case-managers (specially trained specialists, mediators between people and institutions that supplement the consultations of the Labor Offices). Projects are being implemented in cooperation with the social partners.

Besides the national programs, 28 district Roma integration strategies have been developed.

Statistical data are crucial to achieving the task of “leaving no one behind”. Since mid-2019, a system for monitoring, evaluation and control of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) is in operation to monitor progress in this policy. Data for monitoring, evaluation and control of the social and economic status of Roma people in its various dimensions will be used in the development, update and implementation of strategic and programming documents related to Roma integration.

Steps have been taken to develop innovative methods and approaches to collecting the data needed to formulate and implement policies targeting representatives of vulnerable populations. The implementation of the project “Novel Approaches to Generating Data on Hard-to-reach Populations at Risk of Violation of Their Rights” started in 2019. The project is implemented by the NSI in cooperation with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The work will be directed in three main areas: “Increased social and economic development of disadvantaged municipalities”; “Improved social inclusion of children and young people”; “Improved Roma inclusion”. The successful implementation of the project is expected to provide sufficiently disaggregated data to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda.

## e) Institutional mechanisms

Bulgaria is a parliamentary Republic. The National Assembly embodies the legislative power and exercises parliamentary control. In the framework of parliamentary control, Members of the National Assembly raise topical questions related to issues in healthcare, education, social policy, etc. The Members of the National Assembly have the opportunities and tools to actively participate in our country's efforts to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of “leaving no one behind”.

The Council of Ministers formulates, develops and implements state policy through the adoption of strategic documents prepared by the respective Ministers. Some strategic documents are subject to adoption by the National Assembly – the National Health Strategy, the National Strategy on the Child, the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Strategy for Energy Sector and Energy Efficiency Development, the National Scientific Research Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Environmental Strategy, the National Programme for the Development of School and Pre-school Education and Training, etc.

The Law on Administration also regulates the coordination mechanisms in the strategic planning process – state-public advisory committees, councils and working groups.

The Development Council at the Council of Ministers, established by Decree No. 110 of 2010 for the purposes of strategic planning in the country is engaged with the development of the National Del-

opment Programme BULGARIA 2030. It has the important function of coordinating a unified position on strategic issues related to the country's sustainable development – issues in the fields of economic and social relations, health, culture and sport, education and pensions, development of small and medium-sized enterprises, agriculture and food and other issues in their interconnectedness.

A Coordination Committee for Management, Monitoring, Control, and Implementation Reporting of the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020 is set up at the Development Council and is chaired by the Minister of Finance. The Committee provides information on the implementation of sectoral strategy papers and monitors progress in the implementation of the priorities and horizontal policies of the strategic programs.

The Coordination Committee prepares the draft National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030. The sectoral ministries, within their competence, work on detailing the strategy. A well-established procedure for inter-agency discussion of the document is followed, and stakeholder consultation meetings are held. The Development Council shall propose a draft National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 for adoption by the Council of Ministers by Dec. 31, 2020.

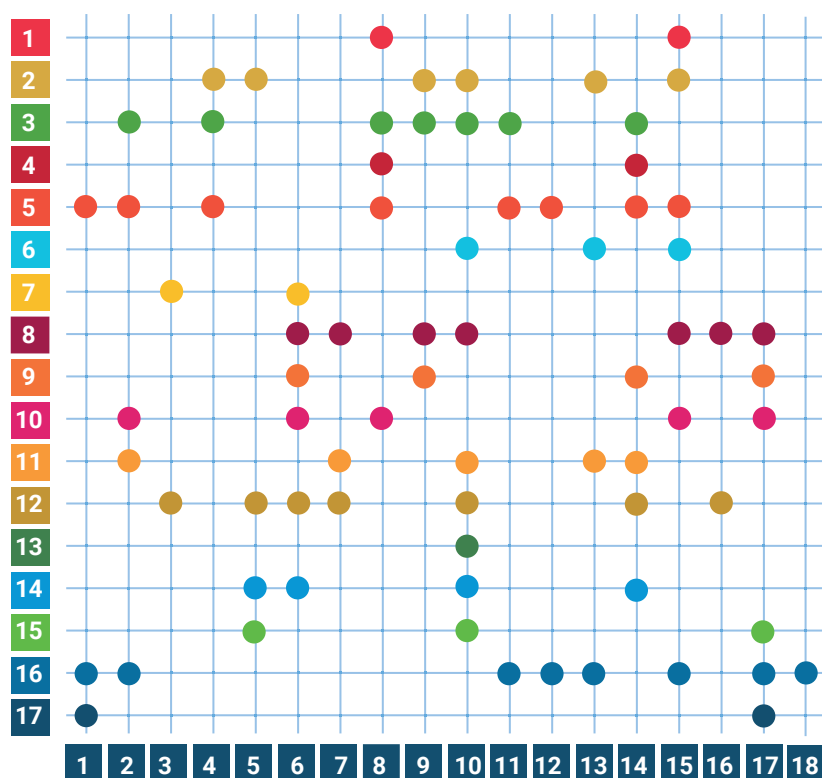
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a leading role and contributes to the successful participation of Bulgaria in international forums and policies of the EU and the UN on the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is directly committed to meeting Goal 17 for the implementation of the global partnership for sustainable development by formulating and implementing the development cooperation policy, which is an integral part of the country's foreign policy (see the Figure on page 34).

More than 70 advisory and coordination councils function to coordinate activities between individual public institutions and other stakeholders.

- The Advisory and Coordinating Council for Environmental Protection in the Marine Waters of the Black Sea is a body at the Council of Ministers for the management, coordination and control of the implementation of the Marine Strategy and a program of measures for achieving a good ecological status of the marine environment.
- The National Council for Persons with disabilities is a consultative body which encompasses state representatives appointed by the Council of Ministers, nationally representative organizations of persons with disabilities, nationally representative organizations of workers and employees, nationally representative organizations of the employers and the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. Legislation on persons with disabilities is adopted after a preliminary opinion of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities.
- The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues coordinates and conducts public consultations between public bodies and NGOs of Bulgarian citizens belonging to ethnic minorities and other NGOs working in the field of inter-ethnic relations and the protection of human rights.
- The National Council on Anti-Corruption Policies is an interinstitutional body with advisory, coordination and control functions in the field of the development and implementation of corruption prevention and anti-corruption policies.
- The National Council on Social Inclusion discusses proposals for strategic priorities, makes proposals for the development of strategic documents and assists in monitoring the implementation of the state social inclusion policy.
- The National Gender Equality Council is a coordination and advisory body that assists the Council of Ministers in the development and implementation of the state policy on gender equality.
- The National Council for Child Protection is a body within the State Agency for Child Protection with advisory and coordination functions. The Council supports the cooperation with NGOs in the development and implementation of the state policy on child protection, monitors the implementation of national, regional and international child protection programs.
- The National Council for Science and Innovation assists the Minister of Education and Science in the implementation of the state policy for promoting research. The Council participates in the drafting of strategic documents, gives opinions, prepares analyzes on the state of research and scientific cooperation in Bulgaria.

Guaranteeing the rights of individuals, their dignity, prosperity and security are among the main goals of Bulgaria's foreign policy. Bulgaria is a Party to the main universal international treaties of the UN in the field of human rights and to the most important conventions adopted within the Council of Europe. The country is an active participant in EU activities in this field both internationally and in third countries, as well as in the Human Dimension of the OSCE.

**Commitments made by agencies on the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>20</sup> under the specific priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 (each priority relates to the implementation of certain SDGs)**



1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2. Ministry of the Interior
3. Ministry of Energy
4. Ministry of Health
5. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry
6. Ministry of Economy
7. Ministry of Culture
8. Ministry of Youth and Sports
9. Ministry of Education and Science
10. Ministry of Environment and Water
11. Ministry of Defence
12. Ministry of Justice
13. Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
14. Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications
15. Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
16. Ministry of Tourism
17. Ministry of Finance
18. Administrative Modernization Directorate at the Council of Ministers

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a leading role in our country's participation in international organizations and in the fulfillment of our commitments to international human rights control and monitoring mechanisms. A constant dialogue is maintained and periodic reports are submitted.

<sup>20</sup>The table was compiled based on the mapping of responsibilities of the state institutions under the respective SDGs proposed in 2016 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as on the approved by the Council of Ministers allocation of leading agencies on the individual priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 (each priority relates to the implementation of certain SDGs).

In line with the increasing commitments to the protection of human rights and the improvement of horizontal coordination between public authorities and independent institutions dealing with various aspects of human rights, a National Coordination Mechanism on Human Rights was set up in 2013, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. A report on the work of the National Coordination Mechanism on Human Rights is published annually.

The interinstitutional relations in the field of international humanitarian law are carried out by the National Committee on International Humanitarian Law established in 2019. It includes representatives of all institutions involved in the observance of international humanitarian law in cases of armed conflict (in relation to the protection of the cultural heritage, of the environment, of humanitarian and healthcare personnel, as well as to the provision of medical care in cases of emergency, including natural disasters).

Good practices have been adopted to attract external experts to address issues related to sustainable development. According to the requirements of many laws, expert councils have been established, such as the National Expert Council for Coordination of the Implementation of the National Plan for Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings, the National Expert Council for Territorial Development and Regional Policy, the National Expert Council on Climate Change, etc.

There is also a large number of Agencies involved in the implementation of state policy, which attract well-trained experts. For example, the Sustainable Energy Development Agency is an administration at the Minister of Energy, which implements the state policy on energy efficiency improvement, as well as on promoting the production and consumption of energy from renewable sources.

The Council of Children enables children to express their opinions and to participate in the drafting of legislation and the formulation of policies that affect them. It operates at the State Agency for Child Protection. Children from across the country of different ages including children from vulnerable and marginalized communities participate on a voluntary basis.

The National Platform of Partners for Good Democratic Governance at Local Level was created in 2019. The National Platform is a public body for the implementation of the Council of Europe's Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the local level and is a form of partnership between state bodies at the national and regional level, bodies of local government and local administration and the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the organizations and structures of the economic and social partners, civil organizations, academia, the mass media and the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria.

## **f) Structural issues**

Besides all efforts to integrate the measures for economic, social and ecological development of our country, some areas where additional actions and policies are needed may be outlined.

The unfavorable demographic trends continue, regional disparities persist, problems with the quality of education at all levels are identified, public health spending is increasing, but the quality of services remains unsatisfactory. Poverty and social exclusion continue to be serious challenges. Economic growth is not sufficiently inclusive to help reduce social inequalities. Ensuring reliable implementation of nature protection legislation remains a major challenge. Satisfactory results have not been achieved in the efforts for a reform of the judicial system.

The negative trends in the development of demographic processes in recent decades and the changes in the number and structure of the population have influenced the stability and functioning of the fundamental systems of society. Population aging has a serious social and economic impact on the health care system. There is a significant shortage of appropriately qualified employees. At the same time, the characteristics of the economic and social environment have a great impact on demographic development.

There is a serious discrepancy between the structure and profile of students and the dynamics of the labor market. It is necessary to quickly catch up in the field of citizens' digital skills. The main problems that need to be addressed are: the growing shortage of employees; the lag in training in new professions needed for the green economy and for high-tech and innovative activities; the lack of digital skills; the technological backlog in services and manufacturing, with most SMEs mainly working as subcontractors of large European and transnational companies (the dominant

demand for staff is for low-skilled and routine activities); the discrepancy between expected competencies and actual practice.<sup>21</sup>

An important structural problem related to poverty and inequality is the state of agriculture. In the period 2007-2018, the downward trend in the share of agriculture in the country's Gross value added (GVA) continued, reaching 4.2% at the end of the period, compared to 5.5% at the time of the country's accession to the EU. Moreover, the sector's weight in total employment in the economy is also reduced – by 1.7 percentage points over the period considered, to 17.7% in 2018. There is also a negative trend in labor productivity, the value-added of one person employed in the sector reaching 25.9% of the average for the economy, compared to 30.7% in 2007.<sup>22</sup> In the absence of sufficient investment in the maintenance and rehabilitation of secondary and tertiary roads, rural communities suffer from difficult access to the main centers of economic activity in the country.<sup>23</sup>

Tourism is of strategic importance for Bulgaria. The total contribution of the sector and its related industries to GDP in Bulgaria has decreased during the period of the Global economic crisis, but after 2012 it began to recover.

The development of the cultural sector is of much interest to potential investors, but it is hampered by the lack of a national strategy for the development of culture, which has been missing for more than 10 years. It is expected that the draft Strategy for Development of Bulgarian Culture, discussed in 2019, will successfully identify the paths for the development of Bulgarian culture.<sup>24</sup> Problems exist in the rational utilization of the rich cultural and historical heritage of the country. "There is a lack of adequate targeting for cultural heritage conservation activities and monitoring of their implementation, which does not allow for the effective management of the sector."<sup>25</sup>

Digitization is an important element of the economy, contributing to higher added value. A project of the Ministry of Culture, implemented in partnership with the National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage is in this spirit. They prepare a specialized information system for the registration, collection, digitization, processing and storage of the National Documentary Archive of the National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage and the creation of an electronic public register of immovable cultural heritage. The register will contain the necessary information and metadata for the sites, including geospatial data, when they are determined to uniquely locate them. The register will maintain an Internet portal providing access to the digital public archive.

When looking over the comparative advantages of our country in the globalized world and in relation to environmental challenges, a good strategic choice would be the development of cultural industrial clusters integrating the supply of mass tourism with the supply of protected sites of the world cultural heritage, of renowned music institutes and other centers of the contemporary creative industry, with the help of small technological and marketing points.<sup>26</sup>

There are unresolved issues in childcare. According to NSI data, under 80% of children aged 3-6 attend kindergarten. Enrollment of Roma children remains a challenge: just 60% of children between 4 and the compulsory school enrolment age attend kindergarten.<sup>27</sup> In 2018, underage persons and minors who became victims of crime were 1,634, according to NSI data. The number of perpetrators of anti-social acts was 6,866 and the perpetrators of crimes were 4,857.

To overcome these issues, in 2018, an inter-ministerial working group of experts from 9 line ministries, representatives of public organizations, professional associations, academia, etc. developed a draft National Strategy for the Child 2019-2030, which is fully synchronized with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Public consultations with stakeholders were conducted and the interna-

<sup>21</sup> Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the 2014-2020 Period, p. 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Bulgaria 2030. Part I. Analysis of the social and economic development of the country after its accession to the EU. Ministry of Finance, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> County Partnership Framework for the period 2017-2022 FY - the Republic of Bulgaria. Document of the World Bank Group. April 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Draft Strategy for the Development of Bulgarian Culture 2019-2029.

<sup>25</sup> Functional analysis of the sectoral policy in the field of immovable cultural heritage conservation and presentation. The analysis was performed under project BG05SFOP001-2.001-000. p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> A Vision for the European Industry until 2030, Final Report of the Industry 2030 high level industrial roundtable. Luxembourg, 2019, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Commission staff working document. Country report Bulgaria 2020. COM (2020) 150 final, p. 38.

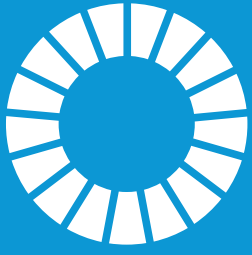
tional commitments of Bulgaria were taken into account when drafting the strategy. The strategy declares as its mission “the mobilization, financial provision, integration and direction of efforts of state institutions and civil society to improve the environment, as well as to increase the chances of each child to realize his or her abilities by building a certain degree of social competence and support to his parents.”

The concept is built around the so-called “child-centered” approach, which puts the child at the center of the attention of parents and the professionals who care for it.

The draft envisages the establishment of a Roadmap for the implementation of the Strategy, mechanisms for its monitoring and evaluation, as well as the ratification of the Third Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The draft Strategy was approved by the National Council for Child Protection and was published for public consultation. Considerable public resistance to the principles enshrined in the National Strategy for the Child, initiated by highly conservative and religious civil groups and associations and populist political parties, continues. This resistance necessitated the withdrawal of the document and the need to conduct a broad awareness campaign on child protection mechanisms in Bulgaria. There is also resistance to changes in the Law on Child Protection, the Law on Social Services and the child protection system. The fight against fake news and manipulative allegations about strategic documents in the field of children's rights continues.

It is also important to point out the great challenge faced in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and their monitoring. Bulgaria does not have a national sustainable development strategy as a stand-alone document. A number of sectoral strategies lack a clear reference to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Coordination is difficult because of the lack of a coordination mechanism to periodically review progress on the basis of agreed priorities and indicators.

The Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals highlights the issues and challenges, the measures taken, the achieved results and the progress made in the various areas, which are presented in the section on progress toward meeting each of the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals.



## 4. PROGRESS TOWARD MEETING THE GOALS



## END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

Fight against poverty is one of the most important goals in the 2030 Agenda and is related to its basic principle of “leaving no one behind”. Progress actions are multidimensional and include measures to increase employment, investment in education, social assistance, improvement of housing, etc.

### Challenges

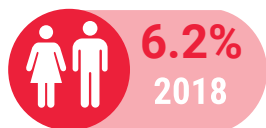
Bulgaria is among the countries where the risk of poverty for the population is above the EU average.



PEOPLE BELOW POVERTY LINE



UNEMPLOYED AT-RISK-OF POVERTY



IN-WORK AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION



IN-WORK AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY WITH PRIMARY OR WITHOUT EDUCATION

The divergences in the territorial distribution of poverty remain. The manifestation of poverty in the “city-village” section is only one of the possible aspects, while a more serious problem is the uneven development of the regions.

There are problems with the distribution of agricultural land – 0.1% of all landowners own 21% of the land. This concentration trend “makes farming more expensive and to some extent restricts access to this activity.”<sup>28</sup>

Government expenditure on social protection amounts to 12.6% of GDP on average over the last 10 years, according to Eurostat data. According to national legislation, everyone has equal access to benefits and social assistance. At the same time, most of the elderly live in rural areas, which results in some restrictions on their access to social and health services. Similar are the problems in provid-

ing quality and affordable social services for persons with disabilities.<sup>29</sup>

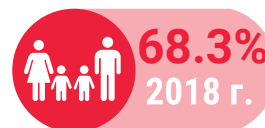
According to the NSI, the relative share of poor with income below 60% of median equivalent income in 2018 is:



PEOPLE OVER 65



CHILDREN AGED 6-17



ROMA ETHNICITY (ACCORDING TO SELF-DETERMINATION)

### Measures taken

Increasing the minimum wage is a measure to reduce poverty among the “working poor” and addresses the income policy on low-income groups and the minimum wage-related social assistance. The starting point for these practices is the established international labor standards in this area – the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention No. 131 of the International Labor Organization of 1970, which was ratified by Bulgaria on Jan. 24, 2018.

The new minimum wage of 311.89 EUR for 2020 (an increase of 8.9% over the previous minimum wage and 68% above the poverty line) is in line with the macroeconomic environment and will contribute to an increased motivation of the labor force, in particular of the lowest income group, to look for work, to realize themselves and remain at the labor market, to raise the standard of living of this group and to reduce the risk of poverty among workers.

In 2018, an increase in the guaranteed minimum income was introduced, thus creating objective legal prerequisites for expanding the coverage of people and families assisted and for increasing the amount of social assistance and integration allowances.

<sup>28</sup> Report. Analysis of the condition of agriculture and food industry. Agricultural Academy. Institute of Agricultural Economics. Sofia, 2020, pp. 124-125.

<sup>29</sup> Bulgaria 2030. Part I. Analysis of the social and economic development of the country after its accession to the EU. Ministry of Finance, 2019, p. 81-82.



A large part of the measures is aimed at promoting employment. The National Activation of Inactive Persons Programme, the National Programme “From Social Assistance to Employment”, and the National Programme for Employment and Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities are being implemented. Employment for job training of unemployed people is encouraged, as well as mobility of unemployed people and reduction of regional disparities. Support is provided to unemployed people with disabilities in order to secure self-employment.

In Bulgaria, the social protection system is essential for reducing poverty. Data for 2018 show that if household income includes pension income but excludes other social transfers (compensations, social and family allowance and supplements), the poverty rate rises from 22.0% to 29.5%. Accordingly, with the exclusion of pensions and other social transfers, poverty rate increases up to 45.2%.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the minimum size of the contributory-service and retirement-age pension and, respectively in the minimum size of employment pensions, which are defined as a percentage of it. The minimum pension increased by 5.7% in 2019 compared to 2018.

**2019**

**5.7% increase**  
of the minimal pension compared to 2018

The Law on Persons with Disabilities, which came into force on Jan. 1, 2019, regulates the specific types of financial support for persons with disabilities: monthly financial support for persons with permanent disabilities over the age of 18, according to their disability, and targeted assistance, according to the type of disability (for auxiliaries and medical devices, balneotherapy and/or rehabilitation services, etc.), through the stated and identified need for individual assessment.

An important priority in the country's social policy is the reform of the social services system. The Law on Social Services was adopted in 2019. It ensures equal access to social services, guaranteeing their quality and effectiveness, as well as the right to live at home and in the community. The Law created the opportunity for use of public social services not only by vulnerable groups, but by all people.

In 2018, amendments were made to the Law on Family Allowances for Children introducing a new type of monthly child allowance, which is provided without an income test – for children who do not get a survivor's pension from a deceased parent.

Assistance for children with disabilities and their families is provided without an income criterion and is differentiated according to the degree of disability or the degree of reduced working capacity of the child and according to its purpose.

### Achieved results

In 2018, the poverty line remains the same as in the previous year, and the relative share of the poor has decreased from 23.4% to 22.0%.

Indicators for the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion population are steadily declining in the five-year short-term trend.

**2014**

**2018**

**2,908.6 thousand < 2,315.2 thousand**  
People at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion

Good results have been achieved through employment and unemployment measures. The unemployment rate on an annual basis in Bulgaria since 2015 has been lower than the average for the EU Member States. According to Eurostat data, in November 2019 the average rate for Bulgaria is 3.7% compared to 6.3% for the EU.

At the end of 2019, the number of unemployed registered at the Labour Offices was 194,715, which is 6,751 less compared to the same period in 2018 (-3.4%). For the first time in the history of the Employment Agency, the number of registered unemployed in December is below 200,000<sup>30</sup>. Long-term and youth unemployment continue to decline on an annual basis.

Data on social services through Government delegated activities are improving. At the end of December 2019, the number of community-based social services for children is 630, with a total capacity of 14,450 places. At the same time, the number of community-based social services for adults is 559, with a total capacity of 14,679 places.

The Targeted Energy Assistance Programme contributes to overcoming the so-called energy poverty. The amount of the targeted aid fully compensates for the increase in the price of electricity.

The level of poverty is directly dependent on the solution of many interlinked problems. That is why our country's efforts to achieve this Goal are aimed at better integrating measures to achieve all other Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

<sup>30</sup> Data relevant as of Jan. 31, 2020.

## 2 ZERO HUNGER



# END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION, AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Food security is related to the availability of and access to food to ensure an active and healthy lifestyle. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop coherent policies to increase agricultural production without damaging the environment and without increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

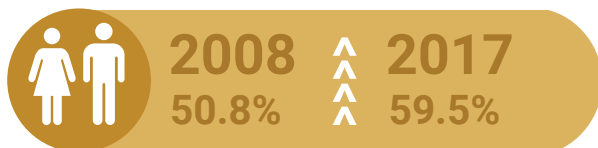
Solutions are usually sought in organic farming, short chains between producers and consumers, developing a good regulatory framework for quality control of foods, communicating with consumers to promote healthy eating. However, the greatest contribution would come from agricultural research and innovation and the building of sustainable food systems.

The objective for Bulgaria can be formulated as development of a comprehensive food policy to ensure healthy nutrition patterns from sustainable food systems. This objective is linked to other Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda – maintaining biodiversity, green agriculture and access to genetic resources.

### Challenges

	It is important to control food quality in a free market and to maintain a good care for child nutrition
	It is important to control advertising of food and beverages contributing to an unhealthy eating pattern for children
	It is important to work for the prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases caused by unhealthy eating
	More measures are needed for reallocation of unsold food and care for homeless and starving people

The proportion of overweight people aged over 18 is increasing, according to Eurostat data.



There is a decrease in the share of agriculture in the country's GVA and a decrease in the sector's weight in the total employment in the economy. The existing irrigation infrastructure in the country remains in a critical physical condition and is functionality degraded, which leads to significant losses of irrigation

water in the linear infrastructure and therefore to its high cost. There are challenges in the use of modern digital technologies for precision agriculture, such as farmers' lack of awareness of the essence and benefits of using them and the lack of digital skills.<sup>31</sup>

The challenge for Bulgaria is to direct investment to rural areas and agriculture.

### Measures taken on healthy nutrition and against hunger

The framework, in which national measures are implemented, includes the Health Act, the National Health Strategy 2014-2020, the National Program for Prevention of Chronic Non-communicable Diseases 2014-2020, programs for prophylaxis and early diagnosis of chronic non-communicable diseases. As of Jan. 1, 2019, a new Law on Food has been introduced for reading at the National Assembly. Its primary purpose is to ensure a high level of protection of health and consumer interests regarding foods. The Law also covers the aspects of the promotion of food and beverages that contribute to an unhealthy diet of children.

Regulations are in force for healthy nutrition for children in kindergartens and children's kitchens, as well as for healthy nutrition for pupils. In 2018, a Regulation on the Physiological Norms of Nutrition for the Population was adopted. In addition to the regulations, collections of recipes for the preparation of healthy foods for the three age groups have been published. Those collections ensure the implementation of the regulations. Recommendations for the nutrition of the population have been developed and published – "Recommendations for healthy nutrition for pregnant and lactating women", "Recommendations for healthy nutrition for breast-fed children", "Recommendations for healthy nutrition for children 3-6 years old", "Recommendations for the nutrition of pupils aged 7-19", "Recommendations for healthy eating for the population over 19 years old".

The recommendations are disseminated in the country through the Regional Health Inspectorates (RHIs) and are used in public awareness campaigns.

To provide food for the people in need, VAT was eliminated in 2016 on goods subject to food banking

<sup>31</sup> Analysis of the social and economic development of the country after its accession to the EU. Ministry of Finance, 2019.

according to a list announced in 2017. A positive example are the food banks built by the Bulgarian Red Cross, which are a reliable mechanism for collecting donated food and financial resources. Food packages or meals are prepared and delivered directly to the target groups of the vulnerable local population with the active recruitment and participation of volunteers from different age groups.

Another good example is the activity of the Bulgarian Food Bank (BFB), which has provided food industry companies since 2012 with the opportunity to save and donate excess food to organizations that care for people in need. In 2018 alone, the BFB saved the destruction of over 156,000 kg of food donated by 50 companies and distributed to 54 partner organizations, helping over 16,000 people in need.

Between May 2017 and April 2018, the MAFF and the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency conducted three studies on the existence of a “double standard” in the supply of foods at the Bulgarian and European markets. The studies identified a number of differences in the composition of products offered under the same brand in the markets of Eastern and Western Europe. Differences in product composition have raised the issue of consumer equality in the EU and the need for legislative changes at EU level. In March 2019, the European Parliament voted on the New Deal for Consumers package. The new requirements will be incorporated into the national legislation of the EU Member States.

In October 2018, an Advisory Board was established at the “For the food” Foundation, which attracted experts in the field of dietetics, nutrition and prevention of obesity in Bulgaria and abroad: doctors who are involved in this issue and are very knowledgeable about scientific trends in the field.

### Measures taken on sustainable agriculture

Land is a national wealth of strategic importance for the Bulgarian state. The Law on the Protection of Agricultural Land regulates the conditions and order by which the constitutional norm for particular protection of agricultural land is fulfilled.

A National Strategic Plan for Agriculture will be developed after 2020, with measures against rural depopulation and in particular for the attraction of young people in such regions. The preconditions for good training of young employees are in place. Budgetary expenditure on agricultural research and development is increasing – from 13.869 million EUR in 2010 to 21.484 million EUR in 2018, according to Eurostat data.

A National Strategy for Conservation of Biological Diversity has been adopted, in line with the Strategic

Plan for Biological Diversity 2011-2020, as well as with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020.

Strategic priorities and measures related to the management of Natura 2000 have been identified within the National Prioritised Action Framework (NAPD) in order to be able to adapt to climate change and realize other ecosystem benefits, including measures on agricultural and forest habitats and species.

Pursuant to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources, to which Bulgaria is a Party, and to Regulation (EU) 511/2014 on compliance measures for users from the Nagoya Protocol in the EU, the Law on Biological Diversity sets out the conditions for access to the Bulgarian genetic resources by the National Gene Bank for Plant Genetic Resources in the city of Sadovo, the “National Bank for Industrial Microorganisms and Cell Cultures” and the National Genetic Reserve of Bulgaria in Cattle Breeding, and indicates the competent authorities responsible for compliance with them.

In recent years, there has been an uptake of digital technologies in agriculture. The Strategy for Digitization of Agriculture and Rural Areas of the Republic of Bulgaria until 2027 sets out the medium-term strategic framework of the policy for digital transformation of agriculture.

The Law on Support to Farmers is important for maintaining a balance between the economic, environmental and social aspects of this Goal. The Law regulates the implementation of the measures of Programme “Rural Development” 2007-2013, as well as of Programme “Rural Development” 2014-2020. Aid is granted to farmers who operate and are registered in disadvantaged areas or areas covered by the Natura 2000 network.

### Achieved results

Intensive processes of restructuring the production structures in agriculture and the processing industry are underway. Some good results are observed due to the direct payments of the First pillar of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, in particular through targeted support for cattle, fruit, vegetables, protein cultures and cotton.<sup>32</sup>

There is dynamic development of organic production, which is a result of both the favorable climatic conditions and the presence of ecologically preserved areas, as well as the increased demand and interest of consumers in healthy foods.

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<sup>32</sup> Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020 in the Period 2019-2020, October 2018, p. 53.

Areas with organic farming are increasing – from 0.5% of the arable land in 2010 to 2.6% in 2018, according to Eurostat data.

The agricultural factor income per annual work unit (the labor productivity indicator) increased – at index=100 in 2010 to 241.82 in 2019, according to Eurostat data.

In the end of 2018, the number of registered organic operators is 6,660, increasing more than eight times compared to 2010. The areas to which organic production methods are applied increase more than six times and reach 162,332.4 ha. In 2018, the number of operators in the organic production control system represents 7.2% of the total registered farmers.<sup>33</sup>



According to the Executive Agency of Fishery and Aquaculture, there are 739 aquaculture farms in operation at the beginning of 2019. There is a broad range of research activities aimed at integrating research into agricultural activities.

The Agricultural Academy holds and maintains 350 certificates of protected products issued by the Patent Office. In 2017, 16 applications were filed in the Patent Office. The Academy's institutes have implemented 29 projects funded and supported by various international institutions.

Local civil initiatives include activities for the sustainable use of municipal grassland. Several municipalities have become involved in the so-called "knowledge area" (Godech, Berkovitsa, Varshets and Chiprovtsi). They participate in the international "HNV-Link" project. The project aims to work for high nature-value farming: training, innovation and knowledge within a network of organizations and people interested in promoting high nature-value farming systems and areas.

"Business Incubator" Association – Gotse Delchev, which is an entrepreneurship promotion center, is a partner in the "New Entrant netWork: Business models for innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European agriculture" (NEWBIE) funded under Horizon 2020. In 2019, the first Bulgarian winner of the Innovative New Farmer Award – "NEWBIE of the Year" was selected. The award winner cultivates more than 1,200 acres of land in a border area and produces fodder for the farms in the region. He has overcome one of the biggest challenges in Bulgaria – very fragmented land with many owners and heirs. Thanks to his tenacity, he has signed 200 contracts with more than 1,000 heirs in order to consolidate and cultivate the land effectively.

Training center and production base for sustainable agriculture began to operate in 2019 in the village of Nadarevo, Targovishte municipality. It is developing as a center for vocational training and social enterprise. The project focuses on training of young people who do not study, work or attend other forms of vocational education and training.

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<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Annual report on the situation and development of agriculture (Agricultural Report 2019), p. 51.



## ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

The protection of citizens' health is a national priority and is guaranteed by the state through the implementation of the principles of equality, provision of accessible and quality health care, health promotion and disease prevention, reduction of the risk of adverse impact of environmental factors. Efforts are aimed at improving the quality of health care, optimizing outpatient and hospital networks according to the needs of the population, introducing mechanisms to improve access to quality and safe medicines, implementing national preventive programs to promote healthy lifestyles with a special focus on the socially significant diseases that are the most common cause of death and disability, as well as at the effective and transparent spending of public health funds.

Work is underway to improve the efficiency of the health insurance system, including real-time information sharing.

For this purpose, a National Health Information System is being created, in which 95 health information standards, 35 standard information systems and 74 electronic administrative services have been integrated and electronic health records have been introduced. It will reduce the time needed to provide health care to patients, improve the quality of health care, diagnosis and treatment through the use of new technologies in e-Health.

A cooperation agreement is concluded every two years between the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO). The purpose of the agreements is to increase the capacity of our country to promote the health of the population and reduce inequalities in health care.

The objectives of the European Health Policy Framework 2020 are in line with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda by promoting inclusive and participatory governance, adopting a holistic approach at both society and government level, as well as by the strategic mobilization and use of resources.

As a result of efforts, a large share of the population at the age of 16 and over perceive their health as good or very good

2008	2010	2018
62.6	67.3	66.5

%/Eurostat

There is a continuing trend of increasing life expectancy, albeit at a slow pace

2010-2012	2012-2014	2016-2018
74.02	74.89	74.83

number of years

### Challenges

Although tending to decrease, mortality from chronic diseases in people under the age of 65 remains high, thus more prevention and measures are necessary.

2010	2015	2016
202.4	206.3	193.9

number per 100,000 people/Eurostat

The problem is compounded by additional risk factors, including smoking, alcohol use and increased obesity, as well as inefficiently used health care expenditure.

The rate of premature mortality is alarming, especially in men (relative share of deaths below 65 years of the total number of deaths).

2017	2018
20.9	21.0

%/NSI

The incidence of newly registered cases of HIV infection per 100,000 population in Bulgaria is 3.4 in 2017 and 4.4 in 2018, which is below the EU average, according to the Ministry of Health.



The problem of active tuberculosis incidence remains – 18.4 per 100,000 in 2018. Vulnerable groups are drug users, prostitutes, the elderly, children at risk, Roma, prisoners, migrants and asylum seekers.

More and more cases of measles are reported.



Ambient air quality is another significant health risk factor. According to estimates by the European Environment Agency, about 14,200 premature deaths in 2015 were due to fine particulate matter concentrations.



**2015**  
14,200 cases of premature death due to high fine particulate matter concentration

Serious health challenges remain among the Roma community, such as the lack of self-awareness about health and the lack of health insurance.<sup>34</sup>

### Measures taken

The National Health Strategy 2014-2020 is the main Bulgarian strategic document that specifies the goals for the development of the health care system by 2020. Measures are being taken to reduce the mortality rate and to increase the average life expectancy.

A priority area for health policies is maternal and child health. The implementation of the National Program for Improvement of Maternal and Child Health 2014-2020 started in 2015. The Program finances over 100 medical establishments for activities outside the scope of health insurance, for which there are no other sources of funding, but which have significant health effect associated with early diagnosis and comprehensive treatment of certain diseases.

The National Health Insurance Fund implements the Maternal Health Care Programme for early detection of diseases and complications of the pregnant woman and fetus. The compulsory payment of health insurance contributions provides access to a package of health services, which includes preventive examinations and examinations during pregnancy. It covers prophylactic examinations for the period from pregnancy diagnosis to the 42nd day after birth.

It includes examinations and pregnancy monitoring studies paid by the NHIF. In case of a risk pregnancy, the Maternal Health Care Programme is obligatory implemented by a specialist obstetrician-gynecologist.

In Bulgaria, all children under 18 are health insured and have guaranteed access to health care within the scope of compulsory health insurance, with health insurance contributions being paid by the state budget.

Apart from the scope of compulsory health insurance for Bulgarian citizens, there is also an opportunity for financial support for treatment abroad when the respective type of treatment cannot be provided in Bulgaria in a timely manner.

The Ministry of Health also provides annual subsidies to more than 65 hospitals established by municipalities in hard to reach and/or remote areas. Funds are provided for the maintenance of the capacity of the medical establishments and for the provision of diagnostics and treatment of patients, including the continuous treatment of patients with cardiovascular, neurological and pulmonary diseases.

The NHIF provides additional funding annually for general practitioners working in hard-to-reach and disadvantaged areas, thus stimulating primary care in places that are unattractive to physicians and other medical staff to provide primary care for the population of these areas.

Preventive health care activities in certain areas are preceded or accompanied by awareness campaigns about the importance of preventive care among vulnerable groups, including the Roma population, through the involvement of health mediators. Activities to support them improve access to health care and disease prevention services for vulnerable populations.

Immunoprophylaxis is a priority. Immunization calendars, policies and programs have been developed in accordance with the recommendations of the WHO. The guidelines for future national immunoprophylaxis actions coincide with those of the WHO – maintaining a sufficiently high immunization coverage to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable infectious diseases on the territory of the country upon import of the relevant agents, in particular diphtheria, poliomyelitis, etc.

Measures are taken to reduce diseases or premature mortality associated with risk factors such as smoking, alcohol abuse, unhealthy eating habits and low physical activity (National Program for Prevention of Chronic Non-communicable Diseases 2014-2020).

Healthy lifestyle campaigns are conducted on a regular basis. In 2018, the Ministry of Health in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Culture and the Representation of the European Commission to Bulgaria celebrated the tenth anniversary of the National Student Competition “Ambassadors of Health” for the 2017/2018 school year. To increase physical activity in the country, thematic days and campaigns are marked – World Movement Day, European School Sport Day, World Day dedicated to the WHO initiative “Move for health!”

Prevention and early diagnosis of major chronic non-communicable diseases is being carried out. Screening for three types of cancer is performed – cervical cancer, breast cancer and colon cancer.

Drug policy, as a sectoral health policy, aims to provide access to safe, effective and quality vital medicines for all at affordable prices.

<sup>34</sup> Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019. COM (2019) 406 final, p. 9.

A National Programme for the Prevention and Control of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases for the period 2017-2020 is implemented in Bulgaria. The main interventions are aimed at the prevention of HIV among the groups at the highest risk.

The aim of the National Program for Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis 2017-2020 is to reduce the incidence and mortality of tuberculosis by 40% in 2025 compared to 2015. The main interventions are aimed at timely diagnosis and control, successful treatment, raising public awareness of the risks and symptoms of the disease.

Several interlinked national programs have been developed to address the issue of ambient air quality – National Program for the Improvement of Ambient Air Quality 2018-2024; National Programme for Restricting Overall Annual National Emissions of Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrous Oxide, Volatile Organic Compounds and Ammonia 2007-2019; National Air Pollution Control Program 2020-2030.

Mental health and wellbeing are regulated by the Law on Health. A National Strategy for Mental Health until 2030 is under development.

Municipal Councils for Drugs have been set up for the fight against drugs. They provide effective interaction between institutions, NGOs, youth associations and the media at the local level in their efforts to limit the distribution and use of psychoactive substances.

A new Anti-Drug Strategy is under preparation for the period 2019-2023.

The National Strategy for the Improvement of Road Safety (2011-2020) has set a specific goal – to reduce the number of deceased by 50% and of wounded by 20%, compared to 2010. A new Law on Roads is being developed.

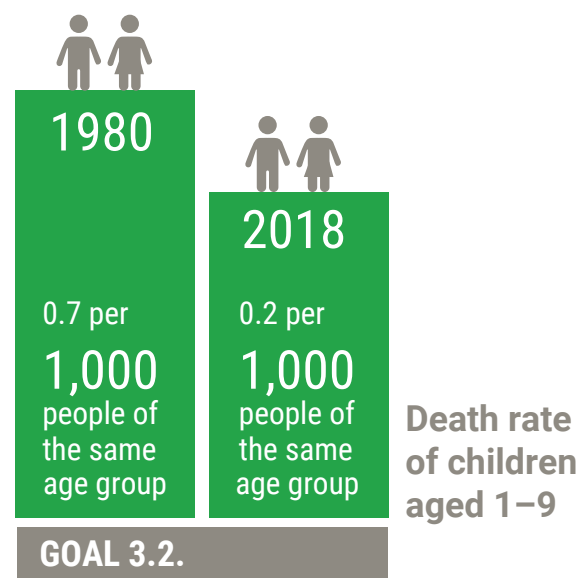
The Road Infrastructure Agency is responsible for maintaining the transport network through the Regional Road Departments, according to the Law on Roads.. Based on the 2013 Road Infrastructure Safety Management Guidelines (2011), road safety inspections are regularly carried out to prevent road defects.

### Achieved results

NSI data for 2018 indicate that there is a long-term trend of reduction of infant mortality, with the lowest level in the demographic history of Bulgaria – 5.8 under one year old per 1,000 live births. The mortality rate for children aged 1-9 is one of the indicators on which Bulgaria has made great progress.

As a result of the extensive implementation of high-coverage immunoprophylaxis over the last 50 years, no serious infectious diseases have occurred in the

country<sup>35</sup> (rabies – since 1974, poliomyelitis – since 2002, diphtheria – since 1993, tetanus – isolated cases in unvaccinated people). Mandatory immunizations and reimmunizations relate to 11 infectious diseases, according to data from the National Center for Public Health and Analyzes (NCPHA).



When purchasing vaccines for children up to 2 years of age, a reserve is set at the national level, which guarantees the stability and continuity of the immunization process. The risks of unforeseen circumstances decline and the measures envisage a rapid response to an adverse epidemic threatening public health.

Diagnosis and treatment of all tuberculosis patients and people with latent tuberculosis infection is completely free of charge, regardless of their health insurance status. In 2018, over 34,500 individuals were screened for tuberculosis risk – 6,384 drug users, refugees, migrants, children at risk, youth at risk and 24,501 Roma community representatives.



Access to treatment for drug addicts has been improved. Nine state programs were developed with 1,350 patients, 14 private programs subsidized by the Ministry of Health with 1,900 patients, and 13 private programs with 694 places funded otherwise.

Nine to 10 AIDS-related deaths occur per year in the last three years. The number of newly reported cases of HIV infection is 241 in 2017 and 311 in 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Data relevant as of Jan. 31, 2020.

### Improved Eurostat results:

Share of people aged 16 or over reporting unmet need for medical examination and care – 15.3% in 2008 and 1.9% in 2018

The share of fatal accidents at work per 100,000 employees decreased from 5.34 in 2008 to 3.4 in 2017.

The share of people living in households considering that they suffer from noise decreased from 16.9% in 2008 to 9.4% in 2018.

### Road accident fatalities



2010	2015	2017
10.5	9.9	9.6

per 100,000 population/Eurostat

### International Development Cooperation

ODA contributed to the construction of health infrastructure in Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia and Georgia. A project aimed at improving the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young people in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia has been implemented. Significant social initiatives include a project to provide equipment for the “New Clinic for Children” in Tbilisi, as well as a center for children with disabilities in Borjomi, Georgia.

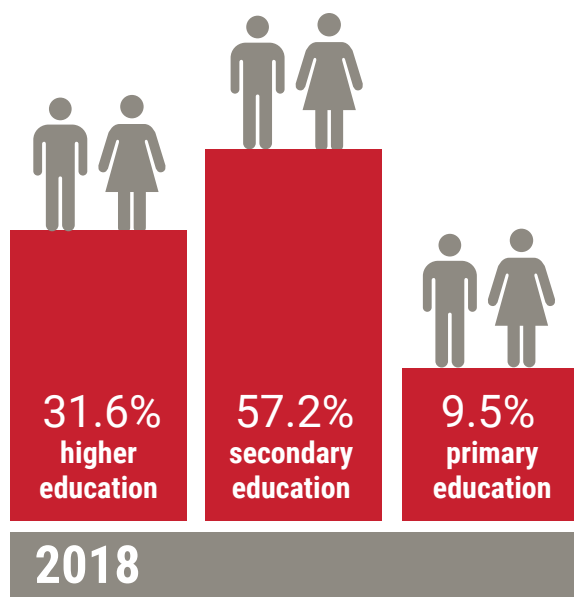


## 4 QUALITY EDUCATION



# INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Education is a national priority and a prerequisite for achieving all UN Sustainable Development Goals. When considering the level of education in our country, one should take into account the fact that according to NSI data, in 2018 31.6% of the employed had higher education, 57.2% were with secondary education, and only 9.5% were with primary.



Education in Bulgaria is compulsory from 5 to 16 years of age, with elementary, primary and secondary education being free.

In 2019, the funds for free breakfast were increased in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Health for quality food. In 2018/2019, 84,000 pupils have been provided free transportation if they study in another settlement.



Since 2006

children in primary education have free breakfast

84



thousand students travel free if they study in another settlement

Measures are being implemented to increase the number of children and pupils aged 3-6 in compulsory pre-school age to enroll in pre-school educa-

tion, so as to promote their early childhood socialization, mastering the Bulgarian literary language for quick and hassle-free adaptation and participation in the educational process when entering school, especially for children whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian.

The number of special schools in the period 2000/2001–2018/2019 decreased from 138 to 9 due to the conversion of a large number of them into centers for special educational support.

### Challenges

According to NSI data, the group net enrollment rate of children in pre-school education for the academic year 2018/2019 is 78.4%, while the national target is 90%.

In the academic year 2017/2018, 16.3 thousand students dropped out of general education schools, of which 13.9 thousand were enrolled in elementary education. The highest share of those who left before the 7th grade is of those traveling abroad – 48%, followed by those who left for family reasons (39%).

### Early leavers from education and training

16.3 thousand

2017-2018 students left general education schools

2010	2015	2018
12.6	13.4	12.7

% of the population aged 18-24/NSI

There is a need to improve students' achievements in reading, mathematics and science.

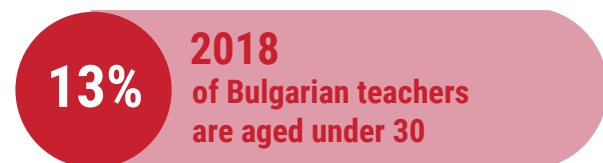
Significant challenges remain for children from vulnerable groups. School fails to offset social inequalities, and poverty is replicating from one generation to the next.<sup>36</sup>

There is a discrepancy between the needs of the business and the quality of academic and vocational educa-

<sup>36</sup> EU-MIDIS II. Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings. FRA, 2018.

tion. According to a survey conducted in February 2019 among 85 companies – members of the German-Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bulgaria, only 56% of them assess academic education in Bulgaria positively. There is a need for better vocational education and training in order to achieve greater employment of vocational education graduates.

Increasing the attractiveness of the teacher's profession is essential, given the aging of teachers. According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science from the beginning of 2018, only 13% of Bulgarian teachers are under 30 years old, while almost half of them are over 50 years old.



### Measures taken

In 2016, a new Law on Pre-school and School Education was adopted, which began the implementation of the education reform and initiated amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training. The latest amendments to the Law on Higher Education of 2016 outline priority professional fields and protected specialties to better meet the country's needs.

The main objective of the reforms is to achieve greater flexibility and permeability of educational paths through the transfer of educational credits and validation of knowledge and skills. Priorities help to achieve inclusive education and in particular to reduce the number of early school leavers; to improve the quality of vocational education and training; to increase the professional qualification of teachers and trainees. "Inclusion" in the field of education also means a close interconnection to the principle of lifelong learning.

The Law on Pre-school and School Education introduces a whole new component – support for personality development. This paves the way to support children and students from several specific groups – with special needs, with chronic diseases, at risk and with outstanding talents. The Law prioritizes inclusive education as part of the right to education in all kindergartens and schools, and creates conditions for more comprehensive and effective citizenship education. The amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training focus the efforts on promoting work-based learning (dual system of instruction). Accompanying policies are being developed in parallel.

In order to reduce the number of school leavers, inter-institutional cooperation is being implemented to cap-

ture and retain children and pupils in compulsory school and pre-school age in the education system.

In addition, the National Program "Together for Every Child", approved by the Council of Ministers in April 2018, is developed and is being implemented. It aims at the full coverage and inclusion of children and pupils in compulsory pre-school and school age in the education system, as well as at ensuring equal access to education to all children and pupils.

The implementation of the "Support to Success" project started in 2019. The project aims to support all children who have difficulty learning the content of various subjects.

Mechanisms to support lifelong learning are being developed for the professional realization of early school leavers and for increasing the employment of all citizens. All operational documents have been created through content and functional links with other strategic and operational documents in the field of labor market, employment, youth and sport, culture, as well as other social and economic sectors.

The Ministry of Education and Science and UNICEF-Bulgaria have developed a project for a comprehensive school program for safe school environment and prevention of violence and bullying in schools. The program includes theory of change, as well as goals, expected results, indicators and tools for impact assessment. It differs from similar developed documents, because it is based on a comprehensive school approach to work and involves all participants in the educational process – pupils, teachers and parents, representatives of the local community and other stakeholders. Moreover, the project integrates the measures, activities and programs developed so far and builds on them with new approaches and activities.

The Coordination Council of the National Platform "United for adult learning" was established to coordinate stakeholder interaction at the local, regional and national levels in the formulation of lifelong learning policies.



A mechanism has been introduced for validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal learning or informal learning. Validation provides access to training to gain professional qualifications and facilitates access to the labor market.

The Government is fulfilling its clear commitment to improve the quality of education by raising the status and payment of teachers. All teachers' salaries were increased in 2019, and by 2021 the average salaries of teachers will be higher than the national average.

Among the current approaches of the Ministry of Education and Science, one may outline: leaving no one behind; ensuring relevant learning outcomes; expanding educational content and respect for the value contribution of diversity; enhancing the perspective of life-long learning; extending multi-sector planning; promoting peer learning mechanisms ("peer education").

At the beginning of each academic year, the Ministry of Education and Science in partnership with UNICEF organizes in approximately 1/3 of all schools in the country the teaching of the "Greatest Lesson in the World" – an initiative by UNICEF and partners to promote the Global Sustainable Development Goals. Since 2017, Bulgaria implements an intensive and focused policy in support of its educational professionals, which the country has developed and implemented effectively, with the support of the social partners and in close coordination with them.

### Achieved results

New unified state educational standards are being developed, focused on learning outcomes in the form of competencies. A national external assessment has been introduced to measure basic reading and math skills in the early stages and the level of functional literacy in the same areas at the end of pre-gymnasium and at the first gymnasium stage. A regular assessment of the digital competences of the students in the gymnasium course is organized.

The state educational standard for civic, health, environmental and intercultural education guarantees in-school and out-of-school training opportunities.

Good results have been achieved since the launch of an interinstitutional mechanism to retain learners at risk of dropping out in education in July 2017. As of November 2019, according to data from the Ministry of Education and Science, 1,280 teams with a total of 15,862 representatives of different institutions are conducting on-field work, while in the previous year, there were 1,239 teams with 10,030 representatives of different institutions. 17,294 address visits have been performed.

6,500 children and pupils of compulsory school age, who were not in the educational system in the second term of the 2018/2019 academic year but were enrolled for the new 2019/2020 school year have been returned to the educational system. Of these, 4,076 were returned after dropping out and 2,424 are newly enrolled children.

The dual system of instruction introduced after 2014 enables trainees to acquire vocational qualifications in real work environment. According to the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) data, the highest number of certificates issued in 2018 by vocational training centers was in the profession of "computer operator" (2,211), "landscaping worker" (1,829), "technician" (1,420) and "transport equipment mechanic" (1,512).

During the 2017/2018 school year, 1,742 students in 79 classes at 45 vocational schools were enrolled in the dual system of instruction. The MAFF has fulfilled its commitment to perform major repairs, reconstruct and improve the material and technical facilities of vocational schools in the agricultural sector. Funding of 13 vocational schools has created the conditions for updating the material and technical base and for conducting a quality educational process. Training is provided in classes on "training firm" in 70 schools and three universities annually. Nearly 2,000 training firms have been registered where innovative forms of vocational education are being implemented and education programs are being linked to the real needs of the economy.

Students from the town of Shabla create virtual companies, in which they acquire business skills not only in theory, but also in practice. The experience they accumulate while running a training company prepares them for real life. Adults (35% of whom are Roma) develop their own entrepreneurial ideas.

Progress has been made in the efforts to involve the 25-64 year old population in formal or non-formal education and training – 2.5% in 2018, while the target for 2020 is 5%. (Target 4.3.).

### Share of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training

2010	2015	2018
1.6	2.0	2.5

%/Eurostat

### Share of young people aged 15-29 neither in employment nor in education or training

2010	2015	2018
23.5	22.2	18.1

%/Eurostat

### Employment rate of recent graduates aged 20-34 years, with at least secondary education of 1 to 3 years

2010	2015	2018
69.7	74.6	78.6

%/Eurostat

Activities have been undertaken to provide and maintain a database of the number of children and pupils seeking or granted international protection enrolled in state and municipal kindergartens and schools. As of Sept. 15, 2018, 137 children and students seeking or granted international protection have been enrolled for training. For the 2019/2020 school year, 13 children enrolled in pre-school education groups and 128 enrolled in school, 42 of whom enrolled for the first year.

The number of schools enrolling students seeking or granted international protection increased from 18 in 2015/2016 to 28 in 2019/2020. They are provided with additional training in Bulgarian. Qualification activities of pedagogical specialists for work with children and pupils seeking or granted international protection are being carried out.

Together with the UNHCR, 3 trainings were held for the effective social inclusion in the Bulgarian educational system of children seeking and granted international protection. Three trainings were held for a total of 90 pedagogical specialists in 2017, two trainings in 2018 and two trainings in 2019. In April 2019, a stakeholder meeting was held in the field of inclusive education for children seeking or granted international protection – policy-makers, refugee organizations and organizations of parents, schools, government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, research centers. The topic of the meeting was “Positive development and steps forward in inclusive education for children seeking or granted international protection: good practices from Bulgaria and Europe”.

Ministry of Education and Science representatives participate annually in focus groups organized by UNHCR to study the needs of applicants for status and people granted international protection differentiated by age, gender and affiliation to a social group.

## International Development Cooperation

37% of the ODA projects funded in 2015-2019 are in the field of education and the implementation of Goal 4.

The Mid-term Program for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Bulgaria until 2019 provides for scholarships for young people from the priority countries for Bulgaria in Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees in various specialties, as well as secures funds to cover the daily expenses for food and accommodation, health insurance and travel to Bulgaria once a year.

ODA projects have been implemented in the countries of the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region, including for upgrading and construction of new educational infrastructure. In 2017, the project “Major repairs of the unit for feeding and replacement of the electrical installation of the kindergarten “Iskra” in the village of Korten, Taraclia region, Republic of Moldova” was completed, worth just over 13 thousand EUR.

The International Institute for Youth Development PETRI – Sofia, implemented in 2017-2018 the “Youth Leadership for the Development and Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals” project for young leaders from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Iraq and Afghanistan in order to develop the capacity of active young people in the field of project development and management and fundraising in the fields of youth policy, youth participation and development.



## ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ensuring gender equality is a guarantee for the realization of the rights of all. This means eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, recognizing and assessing the role of women in building sustainable societies, and promoting equal access for women to education, political, economic and social activities.

The Bulgarian legislation guarantees full gender equality in all spheres of social, political and economic life.

The legal guarantees for the equality and equal treatment of women and men are contained in the current Bulgarian legislation – the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and a number of sectoral and special laws. The principle of non-discrimination is horizontal and is covered by all relevant legislation acts.

Bulgaria has good achievements in the field of equal rights for women and men to participate in economic, social and political life. The country is ranked 18th in 2018 among 149 countries according to the Global Gender Gap Index, while according to the World Bank's "Women, Business and the Law" Report 2019: "A Decade of Reforms", Bulgaria occupies one of the leading positions on gender equality with index 93.75 out of 100.

### Challenges

Bulgaria ranks 19<sup>th</sup> in the EU, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality Index, with 58.8 out of 100 points. Bulgaria's result is 8.6 points lower than the EU result. Bulgaria is moving at a slower pace than other EU Member States. Between 2015 and 2017, there was an increase of only 0.8 points.

The main challenges are related to the achievement of the highest international standards in the fields of health, employment and education. Bulgaria is developing appropriate policies aimed at improving the life development of the socially weak and vulnerable groups of society.

The disparity in employment and women's earnings remains in different sectors and is reflected in the level of pensions. The payment gap is mainly due to professional profiling and limited opportunities for women's professional and career advancement.

### Gender pay gap

2010	2015	2018
13.0	15.4	13.5

% difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and female paid employees/ Eurostat

Women still have less free time than men. They are extremely occupied with childcare and the care for adult and dependent family members.

### Share of females aged 20-64 years, inactive due to looking after children or incapacitated adults and other family or personal responsibilities

2010	2015	2018
27.1	31.1	37.4

% of inactive population aged 20 to 64/Eurostat

In Bulgaria, 30% of information and communication technology (ICT) professionals are women. However, there is an urgent need to attract more women to study STEM/exact sciences,<sup>37</sup> as only 11 women per 1,000 people between 20 and 29 have graduated in STEM/exact sciences (13 in the EU).

A significant problem is violence against women. In 2018, 371 girls aged 14-17 were victims of crime, according to NSI data. In 2018 alone, 33 women (according to Ministry of the Interior data) were killed by their intimate partners. By October 2019, the number of women killed by men in 2019 is 24.

Women are more often victims of trafficking in human beings. Trafficked people are mostly representatives of poor economic regions and small settlements where job opportunities are limited. There is a direct correlation between degree levels and the risk of trafficking.

### Measures taken

A legal and institutional framework for human rights and equal opportunities for women and men has been developed.

The Bulgarian Government pays special attention to the development of measures for equal gender participation in the labor market and economic activities, reconciliation of work and family life, access to vocational training and qualifications, equal payment for equal work, including through counseling, motivation and training tailored to the specific needs and perspectives of the development of women and men. Support for women is tailored to the specific difficulties they face in

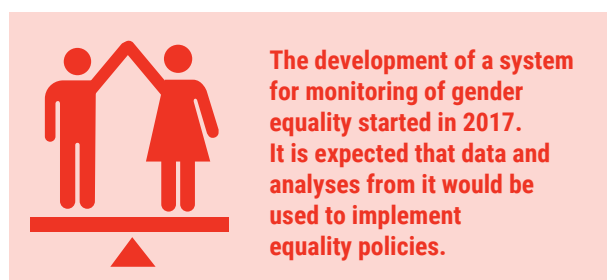
<sup>37</sup> STEM – education through the methods of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

the labor market. Measures are being taken to increase women employment: developing opportunities for flexible employment and occupational mobility; promoting self-employment, professional development and key competences; providing special protection to working women – pregnant women, mothers of children up to 3 years of age and in advanced in-vitro treatment; improving the effectiveness of control over the compliance with labor law; promoting the role of the father in sharing family responsibilities, including through legal incentives to take parental leave; expanding the system of affordable and quality social services, including services for looking after children and dependent family members, etc.

The Law on Equality between Women and Men of 2016 regulates the mandate, functions and specificity of the institutional mechanism for conducting state policy in the field of equal opportunities for women and men. The Law regulates the adoption of the National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality and the plans related to it. The National Strategy is a key strategic document that sets out the goals for achieving gender equality in all areas.

**The established priorities for 2016-2020 are aimed at increasing women's participation in the labor market, reducing the gender pay gap promoting equality in decision-making processes, combating gender-based violence, changing the stereotypical thinking in different spheres of public life.**

The National Council on Equality between Women and Men (NCEWM) operates at the Council of Ministers. The Council is a body for consultation, cooperation and coordination between central and territorial executive bodies and civil society structures. Equality coordinators for women and men working in central and territorial executive bodies are also part of the institutional mechanism.



The institutions relevant to prevention and combating discrimination are: the Ombudsman Institution, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. Gender anti-discrimination provisions are contained in the Law on Employment Promotion, the Law on Social Assistance, the Law on

Higher Education, the Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, etc.

In the field of prevention and combating domestic violence, the Government's actions are aimed at improving the legislative framework both in protecting and providing adequate care for victims of violence, as well as at introducing more severe punishment for gender-based crimes and domestic violence.

The Law on Protection against Domestic Violence was adopted in 2005 and lays down measures for the protection and support of victims. An implementing rule has been adopted and a permanent committee has been appointed. The National Programme for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence, Law on Crime Victim Assistance and Financial Compensation, the inter-agency working group for developing amendments to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, as well as proposals for amending texts of the Criminal Code are examples of the attitude and commitment of the state in the fight against domestic violence.

A positive step are the amendments to the Criminal Code adopted by Parliament in 2019, which now declare all clearly defined by the Code forms of domestic violence as a crime.

The principle of non-discrimination also applies to the exercise of health insurance rights, including as regards the provision of medical care and sexual and reproductive health. Each patient is provided with health care regardless of their age, gender, origin, language, national, racial or political affiliation, education, beliefs, cultural level, sexual orientation, personal, social or material status, disability and type and cause of disease.



**In July 2017, Bulgaria adopted the National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2017-2021**

The Law on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings is in force. Legal provisions are also laid down in the Criminal Code. The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) annually develops and submits for approval to the Council of Ministers a National Program for Preventing and Counteracting Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting Victims. In a Resolution of 2016, the Council of Ministers approved a National Mechanism for Referral and Support of Trafficked Persons.

Labor legislation entitles fathers to a paid parental leave. Flexible working hours are envisaged, which can be used by both men and women. Measures in this direction are also taken by the Ministry of Defence, where the rules for leave are amended by a Regulation, so that military men can use childcare leave.

A National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2020-2025 has been adopted in fulfillment of the commitments made to implement the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Its adoption is also seen as a development of national policies and activities in the field of gender equality.

An Action plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 for women, peace and security has been developed within the Ministry of Defence and has been implemented for several years within the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria.

### Achieved results

In conducting policies in this area, the Government is actively working to adopt and implement measures for equal participation of women and men in the labor market and economic activities, reconciliation of work and family life, access to vocational training and qualifications, equal pay for equal work opportunities, including through counseling, motivation and training, according to the specific needs and perspectives for the development of both genders.

The accelerated dynamics, globalization and digitalization require new knowledge and technologies to meet the new social and economic challenges.

According to Eurostat data, Bulgaria holds the leading position in Europe in the number of women working in the IT sector – 27% (17.2% in the EU). Women among the scientists and engineers in our country are 53%.

The proportion of women with higher education is higher than that of men in all age groups except among those over 65 years.

The progressive presence of women in the country's political leadership remains. In 2019, 39.1% of the members of the Council of Ministers and 14% of the mayors of municipalities are women. The Speaker of the National Assembly and the Mayor of the capital are women.

According to data from the European Institute for Gender Equality, in 2019 Bulgaria ranks sixth in the EU in terms of gender equality in the domain of power.<sup>38</sup>

### Proportion of women in national parliament

2010	2015	2019
22.1	19.6	26.4

% of seats/Eurostat

The number of women in the defense system tends to increase gradually. In terms of military personnel, data from the last five years are indicative of this: 2014 – 14.8%; 2015 – 15.1%; 2016 – 15.2%; 2017 –

15.9%; 2018 – 16%. Female servicemen participate in peacekeeping operations and missions abroad – an average of 9.4% for the period 2014-2018. All positions in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria are open for the appointment of women.

Bulgaria is a leading nation in the international project “Female Leaders in Security and Defense”, implemented within NATO. The project aims to enhance the capabilities and effectiveness of the Armed Forces by utilizing all human potential and integrating gender equality in the planning, development and training of forces.

In 2018, 26.7% of the employers were women, as well as 38.5% of the employed in professional class “Managers”.



The number of women employed in the “Information and communication” sector increased from 27.4 thousand in 2010 to 36.6 thousand in 2018

### Positions held by women in senior management positions

2010	2015	2019
11.2	19.0	14.3

% of the positions/Eurostat

“Women in the Digital World” was a priority of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2018. During the 62nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York (March 12, 2018), Bulgaria organized a side event of the Presidency Trio (Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria) on “Women in the Digital World”, including the notion that it is important to encourage all women and girls to acquire digital skills and competences, which will contribute to their economic independence and the prevention of violence against women.

The Technical University of Sofia implements the project “Participation of Women in Engineering and Technical Areas of Sustainable Development” with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science and UNESCO. There are numerous women and girls involved in NGO projects and trainings. Digital National Alliance projects (“Rails Girls” and “Coder-Dojo”) annually attract hundreds of women and children for training in digital and programming skills.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-bulgaria>

<sup>39</sup> There are already 13 issues of Rails Girls – a free two-day workshop aimed at women with zero or minimal programming and technology experience.

### **International Development Cooperation**

In April 2018, Bulgaria joined the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. Initiated in 2013 by the United Kingdom and Sweden, the Call aims to mobilize a wide range of governments, international and non-governmental organizations to create specialized gender-based violence programs to be available from the very beginning of the emergency.

In May 2019, Bulgaria also joined the Nexus initiative, which aims to support and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights within the UN. The initiative is seen as part of women's empowerment, health care and the promotion of gender equality in the context of common goals.

Our country has become involved in the activities of the "Group of friends – combat sexual harassment", which was launched by Israel, Kenya, France and the Netherlands. The Group's main objectives are to share good practices and discuss challenges, including with NGOs and the private sector.

Under ODA, the project "Supporting social inclusion through empowerment of girls from the Yezidi minority group in Armenia" was implemented in 2019.



## 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



# ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

The Government water management policy aims at achieving and maintaining the good status of all underground, surface and marine waters as a resource of particular importance to the life of the planet, as well as at limiting the adverse effects on human life and health, on the environment, on cultural heritage and on economic activity.

### Access to water



14.5 m<sup>3</sup> of fresh water resources available per person on average/Eurostat, long-term annual average, last available data

Population connected to public water supply – 99.54% in 2018/NSI data

Good quality of drinking water supplied according to microbiology indicators – more than 96-98%

As a Party to a number of international conventions in the field of water (the Convention on Co-operation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the River Danube, the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes), Bulgaria fulfills its obligations under international environmental regimes in good faith. We are actively involved in regional cooperation in Southeastern Europe aimed at sustainable management of water and water resources, environmental protection and biodiversity.

As a Member State of the EU, Bulgaria has transposed the Water Framework Directive into its national legislation in the field of water management, as well as other sectoral directives, namely on drinking water, on bathing water, on urban waste water treatment, on nitrates and on floods.

### Challenges

The environmental potential of the country is rated as “good” or “very good” in the European Commission 2019 Report for only 46% of all classified river bodies of water. The pressure on rivers and groundwater sites comes mainly from pollution from agriculture and from discharges that are not connected to the sanitation network. Problems in river basin management are reported – regarding the monito-

ring system, pressure assessment and methodologies for classification of the status of water bodies.

In 2018, about 427 million m<sup>3</sup> of wastewater and 3,618 million m<sup>3</sup> of wastewater from cooling processes were generated by the economy and households – a total of 87.1% of the water used.

Although water supply is sufficient for the population, losses occur due to leaks, vapors, measurement inaccuracies and other physical losses. In 2018, the losses reached 56.4% of the supplied water. The reason for the huge losses is the old pipes – over 50% of the water supply network has been in operation for more than 35 years/NSI.

The goal of “sanitation for all” is not achieved everywhere. In many settlements the sanitation networks have not been completed and the existing ones are mostly outdated. Some settlements have no sanitation system built.

### Share of population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their home

2010	2015	2018
14.6	11.1	8.9

%/Eurostat

Still, in some settlements a seasonal or year-round water supply regime is required due to the lack of sufficient water storage facilities, as well as to internal losses in the distribution network. The relative share of the population with water supply regime in the country amounts to 1.1% in 2018, according to NSI data. The existence of such a regime has negative social and economic effects.

### Measures taken

Water management is carried out in accordance with the national legislation – the Law on Environmental Protection and the Law on Waters. A large number of strategies and plans have been adopted to guide policies toward long-term problem-solving. In order to comply with the European directives on the sustainability and accessibility of water and sewerage services, strategic and planning documents for the water and sewerage sector have been developed.

Related to the requirements of Article 151 of the Law on Waters, a National Strategy for Management and Devel-

opment of the Water Sector has been developed. The implementation of the Strategy for Management and Development of Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2023 contributes to supplying the population with quality drinking water. The document defines a number of strategic objectives, namely a financially, technically and environmentally sustainable water supply and sanitation sector providing value for money and affordable services to customers.

Regional Master Plans for Water Supply and Sanitation (RMPs) have been prepared for the whole country, assessing water supply and sewerage systems and identifying investment needs. Investment programs have been developed for the RMPs by periods as follows: short-term 2014-2020, med-term 2021-2028 and long-term 2029-2038, and the most appropriate technical, economically acceptable and affordable options for the development of water and sanitation systems are proposed.

The planning processes examined and analyzed the sources of financing for the implementation of the measures, which include mainly European funds, the national budget, loans, own resources of the respective water and sanitation operator, funds from the Enterprise for management of environmental protection activities, etc.

Investment measures have been identified for settlements with a population of more than 50 inhabitants for drinking water and with over 2,000 equivalent inhabitants for wastewater treatment and the possible sources for their financing have been considered.

To restore the ecological status of wetlands, work is underway on the "National Action Plan for Conservation of Wetlands of High Significance in Bulgaria (2013–2022)". The plan covers, in priority, the 11 wetlands included in the list of the Ramsar Convention (with a total area of 49,912.43 ha, representing 0.45% of the territory of the country – "Atanasovsko Lake", "Belene Islands Complex", "Durankulak Lake", "Ibisha Island", "Shablensko Lake", "Poda Area", "Pomorie Lake", "Ropotamo Complex", "Srebarna Lake", "Vaya Lake" and "Dragoman Marsh Karst Complex"). All Ramsar sites in Bulgaria are declared to be protected areas under the Law on Protected Areas.

The main tools for achieving the objectives of good water status are the River Basin Management Plans and the Flood Risk Management Plans. The measures envisage achieving the objectives of good status of surface water bodies from 72% to 95% in the different river basin districts by the end of 2021.

A National Plan for the Management of Sewage Sludge from Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plants 2014-2020 has been developed. Investments of

2,145 million EUR are envisaged for the appropriate collection and treatment of urban wastewater. The final projects are planned to be completed by 2023.

The National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) envisages the design and construction of infrastructure – water supply, sanitation, street network and rehabilitation, etc.

The World Bank-funded "Municipal Infrastructure Development" project is underway to rehabilitate and complete the construction of water and sanitation networks to improve service delivery and reduce health risks, as well as of waste treatment systems compliant with EU directives. Two of the eight priority dams for water supply (Luda Yana and Plovdivtsi) are included in this project, and a third dam (Studena) is included for rehabilitation. Upon completion of this project, it is estimated that 170 thousand Bulgarians will receive more reliable and higher quality water supply.

### Achieved results

The number of facilities for monitoring and exploitation of the ecological status of rivers, transitional and coastal waters has increased.

In 2018, 170 municipal wastewater treatment systems were in operation. The share of the population connected to urban wastewater treatment plants is increasing – from 47.8% in 2010 to 63.9% in 2018, according to NSI data.

### Share of population connected to wastewater treatment plants with at least secondary treatment

2010	2015	2018
47.8	62.3	63.9

% of the population/NSI

### According to NSI data for the 2010-2018 period

**872 km**  
of new water supply pipelines were built

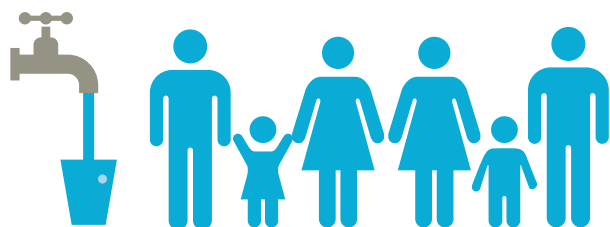
**3,410 km**  
of the water supply network was reconstructed

New methods are being sought to deal with the sediments formed, in addition to the current opportunity for their utilization over agricultural land. New approaches may include good practices, such as the "Kubratovo Waste Water Treatment Plant", which has been in operation for 30 years and has returned more than 4.2 billion m<sup>3</sup> wastewater clean to nature during that time.

Another example is the “beVermi” system for utilization and composting of sludge from sanitation and organic wastewater treatment plants, which works through vermotechnology and achieves complete treatment of sludge and other organic waste.

Projects have been implemented related to solving an important social problem – the water supply of Roma neighborhoods. At the end of 2017, 42,582 EUR was paid for the project “Reconstruction of the water supply system of the town of Dalgopol”. The facility has been put into operation, with the number of beneficiaries being around 550 people.

At the end of 2018, 19,437 EUR was paid for the project “Completing the water supply of the village of Portivtotsi and replacing the pipeline in the Roma neighborhood in the village of Vladimirovo – second stage, Boychinovtsi municipality”. The facility has been put into operation, it is used by 1,836 inhabitants of the municipality and to date it operates without a fault.



Projects are being implemented by NGOs to protect the rivers and the habitats around them. “Adapt the ships to the river, not the river to the ships” is a WWF pilot project. Solutions for environmentally friendly navigation on the Danube River are being sought to prevent the river from becoming a transit channel with destroyed natural resources. Another pilot project of this organization is putting into practice the principle of “more space for rivers, greater security for people” and the organization is working to restore riverside habitats to reduce the risk of floods along the Rusenski Lom and Beli Lom rivers.

### **International Development Cooperation**

3 projects in Moldova and Serbia have been funded under ODA in order to build capacity to implement European waste and water management legislation and to develop infrastructure. In 2015, in cooperation with the UNDP, the “Clean Water” project was implemented in eight settlements in the Taraclia region of Moldova, which resolved the acute problem of drinking water quality and eliminated the root causes of the high level of kidney and liver diseases among local population.



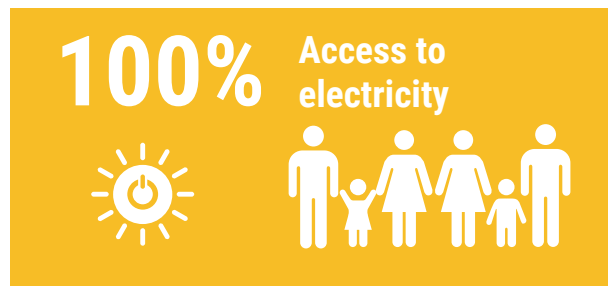
## ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

The priorities of Bulgarian energy policy are aimed at achieving the targets for energy from renewable sources, improving energy efficiency, reducing energy intensity and improving energy security.

Bulgaria supports the creation of a European Energy Union and the pursuit of a coordinated and balanced policy as a prerequisite for creating a sustainable and predictable environment for investors, generating benefits for citizens and businesses, and providing conditions for a competitive energy market.

25 Bulgarian municipalities have joined the European Covenant of Mayors initiative, which commits local and regional authorities to improving energy efficiency and the use of energy from renewable sources on their territory.

According to data from the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), 100% of the population have access to electricity in Bulgaria, 91% have access to cooking with clean energy, and 18% have access to renewable energy. The national energy efficiency rating is 6 points with an average global rating of 5.27 points.



### Challenges

In the context of economic growth, primary energy consumption is increasing. A high energy intensity of 426.18 kg/1,000 EUR is maintained. This is one of the factors for the lower competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy.

### Primary energy consumption

2010	2015	2018
17.44	18.04	18.45

million t of oil equivalent/NSI

Bulgaria's energy dependency is lower than that of many European countries – 36.5% in 2018 according

to Eurostat data, but it is important to diversify energy sources and supply routes and complete the reverse links with neighboring countries guaranteeing the country's energy security.

The energy sector accounts for the largest share of total greenhouse gas emissions, if sectors are considered within the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). The production of electricity and heat from coal and other fossil fuels contributes to over 90% of the sector's greenhouse gas emissions – a trend that has remained virtually unchanged over the last two decades.

A major challenge is the step-by-step implementation of the so-called just energy transition to ensure an affordable and diversified energy mix for industry and end users, which is needed to avoid structural disruptions and social problems.

### Measures taken

The main national strategic documents and legislative acts are aimed at solving the challenges in the sector – the Law on Energy, the Law on Energy Efficiency, the Law on Energy from Renewable Sources, the Energy Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria till 2020, as well as programs and plans in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy until 2020.

In 2020, the Council of Ministers adopted the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria. Its main objectives are to stimulate low-carbon economic development; to provide competitive and secure energy; to reduce dependence on fuel and energy imports; to guarantee affordable energy for all consumers. The Integrated Plan sets specific objectives in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy and system interconnection.

National priorities in the field of energy include: enhancing energy security through sustainable energy development; developing an integrated and competitive energy market; using and developing energy from renewable energy sources (RES), according to the available resource, network capacity and national specifics; improving energy efficiency by developing and implementing new technologies to achieve a modern and sustainable energy sector; protecting consumers by guaranteeing fair, transparent and non-discriminatory conditions for the use of energy services.

According to the EU “Clean Energy for All Europeans” legislative package related to the management of the Energy Union, Bulgaria is preparing to submit a working version of its Long Term Decarbonisation Strategy for 2050, which should state the time when the energy sector will be decarbonized, as well as under which of the proposed EC scenarios this will be implemented. The country must also submit its new Building renovation strategy to the EC, again under the same Regulation.

The Law on Energy Efficiency established the Energy Efficiency Fund. After the adoption of the Law on Energy from Renewable Sources, it was renamed to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Sources Fund. Its main objective is to manage investment projects to improve energy efficiency.

– Since the beginning of the Fund's activity, 207 loan agreements for projects in this field have been signed.

– According to the Law on Energy Efficiency, Bulgaria should take measures every year to improve the energy performance of at least 5% of the total building floor area of state-owned buildings.

– At the end of 2015, a National Plan for Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings was adopted, which offers a modern alternative to the construction and renovation of buildings with proven cost-effectiveness.

In 2019, Bulgaria initiated legislative changes to liberalize the gas market and the first deliveries of natural gas from a country other than the Russian Federation were made.

A targeted policy for the development of the renewable energy sector is being implemented, and the support to the production of electricity from renewable sources through preferential prices and premiums on already signed contracts will continue until the deadlines set for this purpose.

In the context of a liberalized market and higher prices of energy services, support measures for people who meet the criteria for income and property poverty are implemented – during the heating period these people are provided with targeted assistance for heating by the social assistance system.

An example of using new financial instruments is the JESSICA (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas). It is a joint initiative of the EC, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Development Bank. Among the most supported are projects in the field of energy efficiency, transport, renewable energy sources, etc. The Fund has been operational since 2009 and over

36 projects have been implemented, with a total funding of more than 210 million EUR.

The Ministry of Energy is implementing the project “Energy Efficiency Measures for Natural Gas End Users through Gas Distribution Companies in Bulgaria” (DESIREE) to create incentives for increasing the level of domestic gasification in the country.

### Achieved results

Cumulative savings of 5,675.7 Gwh were achieved in 2014-2018 as a result of the measures to fulfil the National Energy Efficiency Target.



**More than 2,000 buildings are put in operation under the Energy Efficiency of Multi-Family Residential Buildings National Programme**

Funding from auctioning within the ETS is used to finance the Investment Climate Program of the National Trust EcoFund and the following results have been achieved: implemented measures to reduce energy consumption in 105 sites, including 38 schools, 20 day nurseries and kindergartens, 15 administrative buildings, eight community centers, six public buildings, five universities, seven health service offices, three municipal hospitals and three city street lights systems. Emission savings are 762,211 tCO<sub>2</sub>eq. Twenty-three electric and seven hybrid vehicles were purchased, as well as three all-electric vehicles, category L7e with optional attachments. The greenhouse gas savings are 3,540 tCO<sub>2</sub>eq.

More than 50% of the energy costs of the 79<sup>th</sup> Indira Gandhi High School of Technology in the Lyulin metropolitan area are saved through the efforts of the so-called energy teams made up of pupils and teachers. They monitor whether a room is used or not and thus save 5 to 10% of the energy. Teams of children and teachers are trained in good energy-saving practices.

### The proportion of the population unable to heat their home sufficiently is declining

2010	2015	2018
66.5	40.5	33.7

%/Eurostat

### Energy productivity tends to increase

2010	2015	2018
2.1	2.2	2.4

EUR per kg of oil equivalent/Eurostat

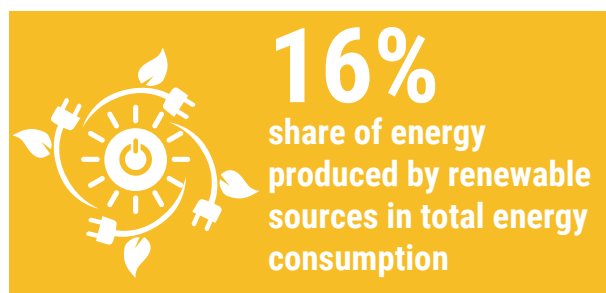
### Import dependency decreases

2010	2015	2018
40.2	36.5	36.5

### % of total energy consumption/Eurostat

There is an increase in the share of electricity produced by renewable sources in the gross final consumption of electricity – from 12.4% in 2010 to 22.2% in 2018, as well as in the share of renewable energy in the consumption of fuels in transport – respectively from 1.4% in 2010 to 8.1% in 2018 according to NSI data.

The national target for a 16% share of energy from renewable sources in gross final energy consumption by 2020 has been met. The national target for the share of energy from renewable sources in the gross final energy consumption in the country in the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria is set to 27% for 2030.



### International Development Cooperation

In the energy sector, Bulgaria works with a number of European and international organizations – the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER), the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER), the Energy Regulators Regional Association (ERRA), the Energy Community.

The first serious steps have been made to create a regional electricity market, and it is expected that after 2020, an initiative between Bulgaria and Greece may be launched in the day-ahead exchange trading. The next country that has expressed interest in participating is the Republic of North Macedonia.

The Faculty of Agriculture at the Trakia University of Stara Zagora participated as a partner in the project “Energy Efficiency and Better Milk Quality for Bulgarian Dairy Farms”, together with the Foundation for Organic Agriculture “Bioselena” and the oldest non-governmental organization in Norway – Norges Vel. Three pilot plants for combined heat and power generation from renewable sources have been introduced within the project.

A project for the supply and installation of a solar energy system for water heating in the “Vietnam-Bulgaria” kindergarten in Hanoi, Vietnam was funded through Bulgarian ODA. Energy efficiency programs have been introduced in schools in Moldova and in the Republic of North Macedonia.



## PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

In recent years, a model of sustainable economic growth supported mainly by exports has been established in Bulgaria. The Currency board and sound macroeconomic policies contribute to reducing the impact of external imbalances. Between 2014 and 2019, the economic growth rate remains stable at around 3%.

The predictable macroeconomic environment is one of the main advantages of the country. The Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018 survey of the World Economic Forum places Bulgaria 25th in the world and 11th in the EU on this indicator. In the last 10 years, the country has managed to improve its performance by more than 20 positions globally.

There are good prerequisites for increasing investment. Bulgaria is among the countries with the lowest tax rates in Europe. International rating charts confirm the stable outlook for the country's long-term credit rating.

There is a growing interest in Bulgaria as an investment destination in high value-added manufacturing and business services. The share of foreign direct investment in GDP is increasing and is expected to be 2.8% in 2020 compared to 2.2% in 2016.

It is encouraging that the ICT sector is responsible for more than one-third of the new jobs created by small and medium-sized enterprises in the period 2011-2017, while foreign demand for computer programming and communication services and counseling is a major driver of growth.<sup>40</sup>

### Challenges

A major issue is the reduction in the rate of demographic replacement caused by the intensive emigration process of working age people and the aging of labor force, as well as the insufficient use of the potential of persons with disabilities. Another problem is the negative natural growth – 6.5‰.

The share of unemployed young people remains high, despite its declining rates over the last 3 years. Just 12% of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) aged 15-24 have enrolled in the “Youth Guarantee” during 2016, which is less than in 2014, while only 40.5% of the participants in the scheme accepted a job offer in the next four months.

Regional disparities in the social and economic development of the country are increasing. The Severen (North-West) region remains the least developed with only 5,238 EUR GDP per capita in 2018, compared to 12,916 EUR in the Yugozapaden (South-West) region.

Despite the good prerequisites for investment in Bulgaria, the relative share of investment in GDP is at its lowest level in recent years.

### Measures taken

The Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization 2014-2020 proposes measures to increase competitiveness and meet the challenges of a globalizing world.

Administrative and financial incentives are offered for the implementation of investment projects in industry and services in Bulgaria in accordance with the specialized legislation for the promotion of investments.

Investors who meet the requirements of the Law on Investment Promotion receive a certificate enabling them to use incentive measures.

As a matter of priority, investment is encouraged in the regions with the highest unemployment, as well as in high-tech industries and services such as mechanical engineering, electronics and electrical engineering, automotive, medical equipment, optical products, medicines, information technology and research, technology and industrial parks for high-tech manufacturing and innovation.

Measures are being taken to increase the general labor force potential through lifelong learning or through active aging of the elderly who continue to work. Much attention is paid to research leading to the development of technology industries. A National Strategy for Improving Financial Literacy is being prepared.

Innovative ICT infrastructure is being built. The Foundation “Cluster Information and Communication Technologies” is a cluster initiative that supports and encourages the creation and development of clusters in the field of ICT in Bulgaria. The organization is a member of several European cluster platforms and networks and maintains very good relations with a number of European and global partners. The main goal of the organization is to increase the competi-

<sup>40</sup> Analysis of the social and economic development of the country after its accession to the EU. Ministry of Finance, May 2019.

tiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises in the ICT industry by promoting cooperation and creating new business opportunities.

Diversification of leading industries is underway. The National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2030 (updated in 2017) makes the sector a priority with a diverse product palette. The Strategy envisages reducing the seasonality of tourism.

The National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2016-2020 envisages a series of measures for employment of persons with disabilities in a normal or specialized work environment. Incentives are planned for employers to recruit persons with disabilities, to adapt jobs, to provide healthy and safe working conditions, etc. This enables people with entrepreneurial spirit to start an independent business by applying for certain financial resources.

For the young people, a National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2014-2020) is in force since 2014, aiming at providing young people with good job offers, continuing education, apprenticeships or internships within four months after they lose their job or leave the formal education system. The Guarantee covers young people aged 15-24 years.

To reach the NEETs and to activate them, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and the National Employment Agency are taking a new approach by appointment of youth mediators in municipalities with a high number of inactive young people, within the framework of the National Programme "Activate Inactive Persons". Their main activity is mediating between economically inactive young people and institutions that provide them with appropriate social, health, educational and other services complementary to the mediation services by the Labour Offices.

### Achieved results

In the period after the economic crisis, labor productivity per person employed in Bulgaria increased cumulatively by 14%, significantly exceeding the average growth in the EU (4.1%), which allows for a greater real convergence and success in catching up.

### Long-term unemployment as a percentage of the economically active population is declining

2010	2015	2018
4.7	5.6	3.0

%/Eurostat

There is a steady downward trend in youth unemployment. As of 2018, over 107 municipalities have

signed agreements with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and are implementing the National Programme "Activate Inactive Persons".

### Unemployment rate by age groups / NSI / %

	2010	2015	2018
Total (15+)	10.3	9.1	5.2
15-24	21.9	21.6	12.7
25-34	11.5	10.0	6.2

In addition to the interest of new investors, we also observe a pronounced trend of expansion of the presence of foreign companies already established in Bulgaria, as they gradually increase their production capacity.

**Bulgaria's investment attractiveness remains.**  
**New projects realized:**  
 2018 – 43  
 2017 – 33  
 In 2018, 7,398 new jobs were created through them, which is 37% higher than in 2017

Tourism revenue in 2019 increased by 4.6% compared to 2018, according to NSI data. This is also confirmed by Bulgarian National Bank data, according to which the total contribution of tourism, together with the indirect effects of related industries, is estimated at 11.5 % of GDP in 2017, while jobs generated are about 10.7% of employment across the economy.

Small and medium-sized enterprises remain the backbone of the economy. According to NSI data for 2018, 74.6% of the total employed in non-financial enterprises are employed in micro, small and medium-sized non-financial enterprises.

The NSI, the National Association of Small and Medium Business and the Institute of Information and Communication Technologies at BAS are partners in the international "SME Innovation Capacity Boost" (SMEInnoBoost) project implemented within the framework of the Transnational Programme "Balkans-Mediterranean 2014-2020" (Interreg – Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020) which aims at enhancing the innovation potential of small and medium-sized enterprises in the region.

Bulgaria holds a decent place in fundamental scientific research. In February 2019, a law has been adopted to ratify the Supplementary Agreement to the Memorandum of Understanding on the maintenance and opera-



tion of the Compact Muon Solenoid detector between the Ministry of Education and Science and the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). The most important result of the Bulgarian participation in CERN is that integration and cooperation in the study of the structure of matter have an extremely fruitful impact on the development of many scientific fields in our country, such as high energy physics, nuclear physics, computer science, electronics, medicine, etc.

An "Aerospace Technology Transfer Center" has been established at the Space Research and Technology Institute (SRTI) at BAS, which is intended to shorten the path from innovation to production, both for SRTI, as well as for innovations from across the country and from abroad. The Center is included in the network of all similar innovation and transfer centers from Europe and the world.

### **International Development Cooperation**

Bulgaria is very active in posing the problems of young people to the Council of the EU. Within the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the legislative file on the "European Solidarity Corps" has been closed, thanks to which 100 thousand young European citizens will participate in the Corps' activities and will develop their civil and professional potential.

Small and medium-sized entrepreneurship projects have been implemented in underdeveloped municipalities in Southeast Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia as a part of ODA. A project was implemented in Georgia on citizenship education to protect consumer rights in the food sector. A project for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and women's entrepreneurship was implemented in Armenia in 2019.

The project "Entrepreneurship development among small and medium-sized businesses in less developed municipalities in Southeast Serbia" can be considered a good practice. Within the project, an in-depth field study has been conducted about the status and needs of small businesses in 13 municipalities in Southeast Serbia with below-average economic development. The situation of local business climate in the specific municipalities has been examined. A study entitled "Problems in the Development of Small Business in Southeast Serbia" has been published. There have been a number of events – roundtables and discussions. Establishment of clusters for agriculture, food production, ethno- and ecotourism and transport in Southeast Serbia is being prepared.



## BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION, AND FOSTER INNOVATION

Bulgaria considers this Goal critical for achieving sustainable development and empowering communities through its three main components – infrastructure, industrialization and innovation. They are interconnected and can support the social, economic and environmental development of the country. Each of these components can contribute through proper planning and action for health, air cleanliness, climate change, and conservation of natural resources. It is precisely in pursuit of this Goal that the synergy between the actions of the private and civil sectors, the academic community and the state can be most sought after in our country.

Bulgaria  
2018



37th place in the world according to the Global Innovation Index ranking.  
19th place in innovation effectiveness (achieved results to created innovation conditions ratio)

Fast-growing industrial clusters contribute to the development of innovation. The Global Competitiveness Report ranks the country 19th in the EU in cluster development in 2018, with a positive trend from previous years.

### Challenges

The lack of comprehensive network connections with Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia creates significant barriers to trade. Navigation on the Danube River is hampered by low water levels, and cross-border connectivity between Bulgaria and Romania through the Danube River remains difficult due to the small number of bridges built or upgraded.

Weaknesses in the railway infrastructure are a major challenge. The competitiveness of railway transport development to other modes of transport is diminishing.

### The share of buses and trains in total passenger transport is decreasing

2010	2015	2017
20.0	16.9	15.2

% of total inland passenger traffic - passenger kilometers/Eurostat

### The share of trains and inland waterway transport in total freight transport is decreasing

2010	2015	2017
50.6	45.3	43.4

%/Eurostat

Our economy is highly dependent on European funds and improved demand-oriented labor market supply. Bulgarian mechanical engineering and electrical engineering are extremely competitive at global markets, but over 30% of key personnel in these sectors are at retirement age, according to the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association (BICA).

The share of people with at least basic digital skills is approximately 29% of the Bulgarian population. Only 11% of people have above basic skills. Businesses are not yet taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by e-commerce, according to data from the Digital Economy and Society Index 2019 for Bulgaria.

### Measures taken

An Integrated Transport Strategy for the period until 2030 has been adopted. It is a framework for investment and a comprehensive plan for the sustainable development of all aspects of the Bulgarian transport system. Some of the goals and priorities of this strategy have direct environmental focus, i.e. with more care for the environment, human health and less risk of accidents.



The Program for Development and Operation of Railway Infrastructure 2019-2023 provides long-term planning and funding.



Although challenged as an approach, the deepening of the Danube waterway has begun. The first activities are in the region of Vardim Island where because of the thresholds the route for vessels is in the most critical condition.

According to the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020, the

solution to the challenges lies in attracting leading investors in high-tech industries and services to invest in research units in the priority areas of the strategy. Based on the analysis of the strengths of the economy and the expectations of the business, several product and technological niches, services and industries have been outlined – ICT, mechatronics and clean technologies, industries for healthy living and biotechnology, new technologies in creative and recreational industries.

The Concept for the Digital Transformation of Bulgarian Industry has been adopted in good cooperation with business. It will serve as the basis for the Industry 4.0 Strategy. A Digital National Programme “Digital Bulgaria 2025” has been adopted taking into account the achievements of the “Digital Bulgaria 2015” Programme and the new European strategic and programming guidelines for achieving a smart, inclusive and sustainable digital growth for the period 2018-2025.

The Law on Electronic Communications Networks and Physical Infrastructure adopted in 2018 aims to increase the provision of broadband internet by promoting competition, simplifying approval procedures and promoting infrastructure investments.

Non-governmental organizations are helping to increase the use of the Internet. A project by the Global Libraries – Bulgaria Foundation supports digital economy in Bulgaria through the development of public libraries. The idea is to transform libraries into modern spaces for equal access to information and communication, lifelong learning, collaboration and meetings, new product development, creativity and inspiration, appearances and events.

The Government's priorities include the pursuit of the development of high-tech industrialization and a high value-added economy.

### Achieved results

The road network in Bulgaria has expanded significantly in recent years. With the help of EU funds, more than 300 km of new motorway sections were constructed, thus doubling the pre-2007 motorway network. The complete construction of the Trakia and Maritsa motorways was finalized, and 69 km of the Struma motorway have been constructed.

About 20 multimodal infrastructure projects are underway. The railway lines Sofia-Septemvri, Plovdiv-Burgas, Plovdiv-Svilengrad, and Sofia-Gyueshevo have been modernized. Hemus motorway is being built and the Sofia-Kalotina road is being modernized. Concession procedures are underway for the ports of Vidin and Ruse and the airports in Sofia, Plovdiv and Balchik.

The EU is investing 293.4 million EUR through the Cohesion Fund in more modern, faster and safer rail links between the cities of Plovdiv and Burgas, connecting some of Bulgaria's largest cities to one of the most important Black sea ports. “BDZ - Tovarni prevozi” EOOD (BDZ Cargo) continues the trend from 2019 and plans to carry more than 7.5 million t of cargo based on conducted talks and signed contracts with shippers in 2020 – 500 thousand t more than in 2019.

### Investment in R&D as a share of GDP is increasing

2010	2015	2018
0.57	0.95	0.75

%/Eurostat

### Patent applications to the European Patent Office

2010	2015	2017
16.97	31.88	29.33

per million inhabitants/Eurostat

Financing of applied research in the private sector is more significant. The number of patents registered through the World Intellectual Property Organization is increasing (about 33.5 per million inhabitants).

Bulgaria is among the EU Member States where the share of the ICT sector in the formation of GVA is relatively high, ranking 5th in the EU. The trend of the last decade indicates an almost doubling of this share and an exceeding of the average European level, which in turn is beneficial for increasing the added value of Bulgarian production.

Registered export growth has seen an increase in the importance of the ICT sector. High-tech products almost double their share in exported output (to 7.2% in 2017), albeit from an extremely low starting position.

Bulgaria has made remarkable progress in terms of ultra-fast broadband coverage, reaching 75%, with an EU average of 58%. At the same time, however, internet usage is lower than the EU average.

### Employment in high- and medium-high technology manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services

2010	2015	2018
32.2	34.4	34.7

% of total employment/Eurostat

Projects of local importance are supported in line with the principle of “leaving no one behind” and in order to reduce regional disparities. 246 municipalities (92.8% of the municipalities in the country) have registered on the WiFi4EU portal for free access for citizens to wireless internet connection in public places. The project “Development of High-speed Broadband Access in Bulgaria by Building a Critical, Protected, Secured and Reliable Public ICT Infrastructure” is implemented under Operational Programme “Regional Development”. The project covers 29 municipal centers and 24 small settlements. The “Next Generation Broadband” project is to be implemented, funded under Operational Programme “Rural Development” 2014-2020.

Some new private initiatives meet the business demand for highly skilled employees, such as the Digital National Alliance projects and corporate academies created by some IT companies. Successful partnerships with the private sector are expected, such as the IT Career Education Program of the Ministry of Education and Science.

### **International Development Cooperation**

Bulgaria has provided ICT equipment to schools and universities in Moldova, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina under ODA.

In 2016, ODA funds financed projects at the “V. N. Karazin” Kharkiv National University, the “Bogdan Khmelnytsky” Melitopol State Pedagogical University, the 293rd Kiev Lyceum, the Izmail State University of Humanities, and the Berdyansk State Pedagogical University. The implemented projects provided facilities for interactive language training.

In 2017, grant agreements were signed in Ukraine for providing financial support to the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kiev, the “Seaside Regional Ukrainian-Bulgarian Multidisciplinary Lyceum of the ii-iii degrees”, and the Gorodnenian School. The project resulted in the purchase of an interactive language training equipment similar to the language classroom at the Bolhrad High School equipped with Bulgarian funding.

An online language classroom has been purchased for the 31st Secondary School in Odessa to enhance the knowledge and skills of students learning foreign languages, including Bulgarian. The project worth 32,674 BGN was implemented in the period October 2017 – January 2018 and helped to significantly improve the quality of foreign language education at the school.

## 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



# REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

In the process of deep social and economic changes in Bulgaria over the last 30 years there has been an increase in inequality among the population. Growth is not yet inclusive enough to reduce poverty and economic and social inequalities.

The main objective of the policies until 2030 is to achieve more inclusive and more sustainable growth, while reducing social and territorial inequalities and promoting shared prosperity.

Inequality is related to many of the other Sustainable Development Goals. It can be observed in health and education, including access to justice, information or energy security. The most direct relation is between inequality and the risk of poverty that exists for vulnerable groups and people at risk of social exclusion. Measures to overcome it are undoubtedly intertwined with the Goal of reducing inequality.

Inequality can be observed regarding both income and opportunity.

### Challenges

#### – Regarding income inequality

Inequality, measured as the ratio between the income of the poorest 20% and the richest 20% of households, tends to increase, by a coefficient of 7.7 in 2018, compared to 5.9 in 2010 according to the NSI data. When measured with the Gini coefficient, it was 39.6 in 2018. Inequality in Bulgaria is also measured according to the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI). The IHDI calculated for 2018 decreases from 0.816 to 0.714 after accounting for inequality (with perfect equality, the index is the same, but it decreases as inequality increases). This places Bulgaria among the countries with very high human development, but at the last place in the EU.

#### Income distribution (income quintile share ratio - S80/S20 index)

2010	2015	2018
5.9	7.1	7.66

/Eurostat

#### Income share of the bottom 40% of the population – % of total disposable household income

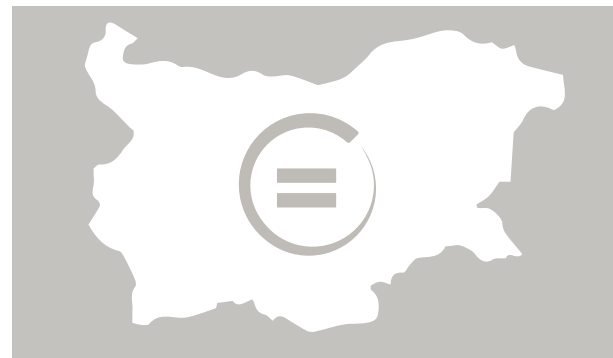
2010	2015	2018
19.5	17.8	17.0

%/Eurostat

Differences between NUTS 2 statistical regions are observed.

#### Income distribution inequality among NUTS 2 regions/NSI data

NUTS 2	2018
Severozapaden	7.6
Severen tsentralen	6.8
Severoiztochen	6.2
Yugoiztochen	6.2
Yugozapaden	8.5
Yuzhen tsentralen	6.7



There are examples of poor districts where income inequality is relatively stable – for example Kardzhali and Lovech. In cities and regions with good economic growth, such as Sofia and Stara Zagora, there is a growing inequality rather due to the rising income of only a small part of the population. In general, inequality is higher in statistical regions which experience economic growth and increase in the incomes of a small part of the population.

#### Regarding inequality of opportunity

It is measured by data on unemployment, access to education and information, health care and participation in social activities. This kind of inequality presupposes a vulnerable social situation for children and may affect their achievement at school, especially if their mother tongue is different from Bulgarian and if they do not speak Bulgarian at the age of enrolling in school. Low employment rates among young people are also among the prerequisites for inequality, and are related both to the level of edu-

cation, as well as to the quality of education and to the needs of business. Younger people with lower education experience serious difficulties to realize themselves in the labor market compared to their peers with higher educational attainment.

### Measures taken

All measures related to poverty eradication, education, employment and decent work for all, gender equality, or the pursuit of steady and sustainable economic growth, can be used to influence **income inequality**. Many of the measures taken to meet other Goals are valid for fulfilling this one.

The measures of the Government for setting minimum wage and differentiated minimum income are important for the income size and its increase. Measures to increase pensions, which are an important part of social transfers and reduce poverty and inequality, are also included. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the minimum amount of contributory-service and retirement-age pension and, respectively, in the minimum size of employment pensions, which are defined as a percentage of it.

The measures to increase employment, access to the labor market for persons with disabilities, and to train people needed by business are also important. For example, the Career Start Programme has the primary objective of providing job opportunities for unemployed young people, who have completed secondary or higher education, in order to facilitate the transition between education and employment. The Programme "From Social Assistance to Employment" aims to encourage unemployed and inactive social assistance recipients to take up employment, improve their skills or acquire skills and restore their employment habits in order to increase their employability.

All measures in the field of education and the fight against poverty, access to information, and protection of human rights interact regarding **inequality of opportunity**.

The National Employment Agency is implementing the "We can too – 2", project, which aims to improve access to the labor market for unemployed people from disadvantaged groups by providing services to enhance their skills, competences and qualifications.

Bulgarian legislation guarantees equal opportunities and prohibits discrimination. The Law on Protection Against Discrimination obliges employers, where this is necessary to achieve the aims of the Law, to encourage the application of people belonging to the less represented gender or ethnic groups to perform a given job or to occupy a given position, as well as, other things being equal, to promote the

vocational development and participation of employees belonging to a specific gender or ethnic group, when they are less represented among employees performing a given job or holding a given position.

In the 2016-2018 period, efforts have been directed toward increasing labor market participation and decreasing the number of inactive people through activation and training for acquiring knowledge, skills and competences that the employers seek. Access to the labor market for disadvantaged groups is provided through active behavior motivating services, information and job placement, vocational guidance and counseling, as well as through enhancing skills and competences through participation in training tailored to employers' needs and subsidized employment.

In mid-2019, the Ministry of Education and Science launched the "Active inclusion in the pre-school system" project directed toward broadening access to pre-school education for children from vulnerable groups and children living in poverty.

**With regard to refugees and migrants**, Bulgaria has not joined the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, but is practically taking measures for orderly migration. Bulgaria supports the Global Compact on Refugees and strictly complies with international humanitarian and human rights law.

In 2015, Bulgaria adopted a National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration. Persons with refugee or humanitarian status have the right to work, as well as the rights to social and health insurance similar to Bulgarian citizens. They are also entitled to elementary and secondary education, including vocational education and training. Underage and minor refugees are entitled to elementary and secondary education, including vocational education and training, both after obtaining status and during the process of obtaining status.

### Achieved results

The transfers to the municipalities from the state budget for financing social services, which are state delegated activities, have been increased. For 2019, their amount is 130 million EUR, 15 million EUR more than in 2018.

### Social benefits that are important to reduce inequalities are increasing:

The minimum wage increased in 2020 and will reach 325 EUR in 2021.

Labor pensions increased by 5.3% in 2020 and will increase by another 4.5% in 2021.

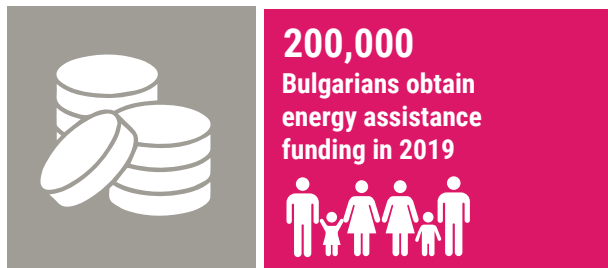
60% of retirees in Bulgaria have received a Christmas bonus in 2018 and 2019.

As of Jan. 1, 2019, all adults with permanent disabilities over the age of 18 are eligible for monthly support under the Law on Persons with Disabilities.

One-time assistance is paid for pupils enrolled in the first grade.

In the first nine months of 2018, 32,035 unemployed who self-determined themselves as Roma were covered by activities related to the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy. The employment of 14,804 people is ensured.

In 2019, energy support has increased by 20 million EUR, which is 50% more compared to the amount foreseen in the 2018 budget. Thus, 200 thousand Bulgarians receive energy support.



For the period January-October 2019, there were 1,965 asylum seekers, refugee status was granted to 168 persons, humanitarian status – to 257 persons, 1,080 applications were refused.

## 1993-2019

Asylum seekers	85,846
Refugee status granted	13,540
Humanitarian status granted	11,774

### International Development Cooperation

ODA projects that improve access to social services and education for children and children with disabilities in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia are implemented.

The “Reforming of child care system in Armenia: lessons learnt from Bulgarian experience” project is a pilot initiative that replicates the model of homes built in Bulgaria for small children as a permanent or transitional form for their adoption or accommodation in foster families.

The “Sensory Therapy Center” project was implemented in Skopje in 2015. Funds have been provided to open an operating center with a sensory room and a sensory integration room, which will help children with autism spectrum disorders and other disabilities to increase their capacity for independent life. A partnership with a cognate organization in Bulgaria has started. The Center is in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia.



## MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE

Transforming cities is a daunting task that requires long-term policies taking into account the increasing level of urbanization and the need to simultaneously meet the emerging economic, social and environmental demands of people in these settlements.

The functionally improved characteristics of cities make it possible to develop new economic activities that diversify the local economy and reduce risks to the environment.

One of the key goals of regional policy in Bulgaria is the development of a balanced polycentric network of sustainable urban centers. Thirty-nine of the cities in the country receive support from European funds. Many are involved in a number of regional and European initiatives.

### Challenges

According to NSI data, as of Dec. 31, 2018, 73.7% of the population live in cities. The challenges cities face are related to the improvement of the current housing conditions, supporting infrastructure and transport links, the construction of green urban spaces, recreation and sports areas, the involvement of different social groups in the active life of the city and the overcoming of the ghettoization of minority communities.

The majority of Bulgarian cities were designed and planned to maintain good living conditions for 10 times less population than today. Urbanization gained momentum in the second half of the 20th century and the population of Sofia increased from about 500 thousand in 1946 to about 1.3 million registered citizens in the capital today. In addition to catching up on infrastructure, attention should also be paid to alternatives to urban life in settlements close to major cities.

At the same time, human-health-related pollution and especially air pollution should be reduced.

### Measures taken

The Law on Spatial Development is the main law that regulates the development of urban environment and guarantees its quality and sustainability in relation to climate challenges. Pursuant to it, the purpose of existing landscaped areas cannot be changed.

#### Other adopted documents that are important for the development of cities and settlements:

- National Regional Development Strategy (2012-2022)

- National Concept for Spatial Development (2013-2025)

- Decentralization Strategy (2016-2025)

- Strategy for Development of the Road Infrastructure (2016-2022)

Given the importance of housing policy as a basic policy of public governance and the need to accelerate the procedures for drafting and approving strategic documents in the housing sector, a draft National Housing Strategy (NHS) has been developed. The overall process was supported by an inter-agency working group with extensive public participation.

The NHS draft has been developed on the basis of the findings and conclusions made by the project contractor, and they completely overlap with the "Bulgaria – Housing sector assessment" made by a World Bank team.

The NHS draft sets the overall framework for housing development. It will be implemented with national/targeted programs aimed at meeting the specific objectives. The planned program package will focus on developing a national housing system framework and addressing its priority problems, some of which include the implementation of specific activities to improve the housing conditions of vulnerable population groups.

In 2015, the Council of Ministers adopted the Energy Efficiency of Multi-Family Residential Buildings National Programme. The Programme is aimed at renovating multi-family residential buildings with the main purpose to provide better living conditions for citizens in multi-family residential buildings, thermal comfort and higher quality of living environment by implementing energy efficiency measures.

There are 2,022 buildings approved for renovation, and as of April 1, 2019, 1,669 buildings have been renovated and put into operation. The renovation of all 2,022 buildings is expected to result in energy



savings of 958,358 MWh/year and in annual greenhouse gas emission reductions (CO<sub>2</sub> and equivalent) – including saving ktCO<sub>2</sub>/year, of 317 kt/year.

In order to tackle air pollution as a health risk, Bulgaria has accepted the achievement of clean urban air as a top priority. The National Program for the Improvement of Ambient Air Quality (2018-2024) includes measures targeting sectors identified as having a major contribution to fine particulate matter pollution – domestic heating and transport. The implementation of the measures should lead to improvement of the quality of the ambient air and should contribute to the achievement of the norms set by the legislation in the municipalities with excessive pollution. In 2019, the National Air Pollution Control Program (2020-2030) was adopted, which should contribute to the achievement of levels of air pollution that do not lead to significant negative impacts and risks to human health and to the environment.

For the direct control of ambient air quality, automatic monitoring stations (AMS) of the National Air Quality Monitoring Network are used. Data from these AMSs are made available to the public on the internet in real time and are combined with local government actions to stimulate pollution reduction (increase in public transport vehicles, decrease in the cost of public transport or even free tickets). These measures, together with the active stance of the citizens, are expected to have a long-term impact on the results in the field of air quality.

Plans for traffic management and the creation of intelligent transport systems (ITS) have been developed and funded by the Operational Programme “Regions in Growth” 2014-2020. Those include automated traffic management systems, priority systems for urban public transport vehicles, real-time passenger information systems, automated ticketing systems, communication subsystems, video surveillance systems to be used by urban mobility centers, etc. Measures are taken for parking arrangements near public transport hubs outside the city center. Intermodal transport links have been implemented.

With the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works contributes to the social integration of the Roma minority by improving housing conditions through providing a cadastral and urban development basis. Work is underway to build the technical infrastructure for neighborhoods with a compact Roma population and open up new terrains for low housing and social infrastructure sites.

## Achieved results

Interaction between local authorities, NGOs and civil society has led to a reduction in building in interurban spaces and an increase in park spaces in major cities.

The conditions for waste collection and processing are improved.

-Modern systems for waste collection and processing in Sofia, Plovdiv, the Vratsa-Mezdra region, etc.

-In 2017, 99.7% of the population was covered by systems for organized waste collection.

-More than 6.5 million people are included in the systems for separate collection of packaging waste.

## Recycling rate of municipal waste – % of total waste generated

2010	2015	2018
24.5	29.4	36.0

%/Eurostat

Private resources are raised through the established Urban Development Funds. For example, the Sustainable Cities Fund with a total resource of 170 million EUR has been selected to work for the urban development in the Sofia and Southern Bulgaria regions. The Fund provides loans with embedded guarantees aimed at a wide range of potential final beneficiaries for urban development and cultural heritage projects.



The Green City Initiative is increasingly popular. The Sofia Green City Action Plan, funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), envisages an electronic registry for the city's green system. Darik Radio's “The Best City to Live” campaign distinguishes one city in Bulgaria each year with the Green City Award, such as Sliven for 2017 and Dobrich for 2018.

Sliven has been honored with the special Green City Award in the Darik Radio ranking for processing the largest share of its household waste. The city also has the lowest excess of fine particulate matter compared to the previous year, and more and more citizens are taking advantage of the best technologies for waste treatment.

Sofia, for its part, is distinguished for its care for protected areas. There is a total of six protected areas within the territory of the Sofia Municipality which are within the Natura 2000 network. The Sofia Municipality "Vision for Sofia" initiative group surveyed biodiversity on the territory of Sofia Municipality and found that 1,195 species of animals and plants and 47 types of natural habitats are identified in the zones.

Bulgaria is working toward the fulfillment of Target 11.4 related to the conservation and preservation of the world cultural and natural heritage. The seven intangible cultural assets in the World Heritage List are being conserved and developed.

The ancient town of Nessebar is one of the sites of world importance that UNESCO and National Geographic have included in their special issue of "World Heritage Journeys: Discovering the History and Culture of Europe". The aim is to raise awareness on the European cultural heritage. The campaign is funded by the EU and encourages tourists to travel in a different way – to travel slower, to visit less known destinations and to experience Europe more unexpectedly and more deeply.

Each country that is a party to the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage undertakes to ensure the identification, protection, preservation, presentation and transmission to the future generations of cultural and natural heritage in its territory. The Convention requires parties to take the necessary legislative, administrative, scientific, technical and financial measures to ensure the identification and conservation of World Heritage Sites on their territories, while ensuring the long-term preservation of their exceptional global value for future generations worldwide.

Currently, Bulgaria has three natural sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage List as UNESCO World Heritage sites – "Pirin National Park", "Srebarna Nature Reserve" and the transboundary property "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and

Other Regions of Europe", in which Bulgaria participates with the most representative beech forests in the nine reserves in the "Central Balkan" National Park (incl. "Boatin", "Tsarichina", "Kozya Stena", "Steneto", "Sokolna", "Peeshti Skali", "Stara Reka", "Dzhendema" and "Severen Dzhendem"). The "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe" includes 78 components and is located in 12 European countries – Austria, Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Ukraine and Slovakia.

Other 5 natural sites in Bulgaria are included in the so-called indicative (preliminary) list, i.e. to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. These are the "Belogradchiski Skali", the "Pobiti Kamani" Natural Landmark, the "Central Balkan" National Park, the "Rusenski Lom" Nature Park and the "Vrachanski Karst" Nature Reserve.

The representative list of the elements of the intangible cultural heritage individually lists four Bulgarian elements, as well as one multinational element with the participation of Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and the Republic of North Macedonia – "Cultural Practices Associated to the 1st of March".

Bulgarian municipalities participate in initiatives related to environmental protection and climate change. Under the "Covenant of Mayors" initiative, plans are being prepared for climate change adaptation in the cities of Sofia, Burgas and Dimitrovgrad. Four municipalities (Burgas, Smolyan, Sofia Municipality and Varna) participate in the URBACT initiative to support sustainable urban development through six of its various thematic networks. The CIVITAS initiative includes seven municipalities that represent Bulgaria through joint efforts to achieve cleaner and better urban transport. The Yugozapaden (South-West) region is participating in the Mild Home initiative together with partners from seven countries to develop a concept for eco-settlements that can meet the needs of middle- and low-income families.



## ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS

Many environmental or human health issues are related to unsustainable consumption and production patterns. They lead to an increased use of natural resources, to the generation of more waste, and at the same time to an increase in transport and infrastructure needs for transportation and disposal. Experts are watching over with concern the excessive use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers in agriculture. The disposal of packaging waste is most visible – an issue that has become global in less than two decades.

Bulgaria as a member state of the EU has introduced in its legislation the mandatory European approaches related to environmental protection, consumer protection, waste management, etc. A number of initiatives and strategic programs aim at shifting society toward a circular economy model, efficient use of resources, reducing generated waste and increasing recycling.

### Challenges

According to a survey conducted by the BFB in 2017, over 670 thousand t of food per year are being destroyed in Bulgaria. Households discarded the largest share, amounting to 44%, restaurants – 33% and grocery stores – 11% of the food destroyed.

The EC 2019 Environmental Implementation Review indicates that Bulgaria is losing 63 million EUR due to insufficient waste recycling, while the lost benefits amount to 53 million EUR.

High levels of hazardous waste generated are retained, mainly due to the maintenance of hazardous tailings from copper ore processing.



**14,011 thousand t of hazardous waste generated in 2017**

### Measures taken

With the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Transition to a Circular Economy of Bulgaria 2021-2027, which is yet to be adopted, our country will have the opportunity to be among the countries with ambitions for an actual strategic direction of development.

Bulgaria is one of the few countries in Europe that has a specialized law on the use of herbs, outside the general Law on Biological Diversity. It regulates the management of the activities for the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants as part of the country's biodiversity. 13-15 thousand t of herbs worth tens of millions of EUR are collected annually in the country. The herbivore sector employs around 300 thousand people, most of whom are from the poorest sections of the population, mainly Roma. Most of the herbs are exported as raw material and then returned to the country as high-priced end-user products. Our country is Europe's leading exporter of herbs and competes for global leadership with India and China, which have a much larger territory. The conditions and methods of collecting herbs, season for activities, primary treatment, storage and labeling, etc., are observed.

Target 12.3 requires: "By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses". In order to fulfill the resulting commitments for Bulgaria, an inter-agency working group has prepared a draft National Programme for Prevention and Reduction of Food Loss (2019-2024). It covers the most important measures for the prevention and reduction of spoilment and waste of food produced for consumption, including measures for the redistribution (donation) of edible food to people in need. An Action Plan for the National Programme has also been developed. It contains measures and activities that will contribute to the achievement of the operational goals of the National Programme.

Tax reductions have been introduced to increase the volume of donated foods. The BFB is actively working to collect and distribute over 275 t of food to 22,000 people a year.

With the amendments to the Law on Local Taxes and Fees adopted in 2018 (in force since Jan. 1, 2019), a new concept for determining the tax on vehicles has been introduced.

**There are tax reductions related to the environmental performance of vehicles.**

Vehicles with power up to 74 kW, Euro 3 and 4 – 50%

Vehicles with power up to 74 kW, Euro 5 and 6 – 60%

Buses, trucks, etc., Euro 3 and 4 – 40%

Buses, trucks, etc., Euro 5 and 6\* – 50%



It is envisaged that by 2020 the landfill tax will be gradually increased to 48.6 EUR/t. Regarding this tax an incentive scheme for municipalities has been introduced – it will exempt those who meet their recycling targets.

The enforcement of the measure is expected to stimulate the market. The procedure “Support for pilot and demonstration initiatives for efficient use of resources” under Operational Programme “Innovation and Competitiveness” 2014-2020 is acting to achieve economic and environmental balance. Its purpose is to increase the recovery of waste and reduce its generation, as well as to reduce raw materials consumption. In order to receive funding, projects must result in the implementation of technological solutions and methods that are pilot for Bulgaria (i.e. applied for the first time) and represent a product or production innovation. They must lead to an improvement in the resource efficiency of the enterprise and have a positive environmental effect.

“Green procurement criteria” have been introduced, a well-established means of reducing the negative impact of public consumption on the environment and stimulating the use, supply and development of greener goods and services of higher “public value”. Under the project “Study and forecasting of the potential of the national market for green public procurement in Bulgaria and preparation of a practical tool for their awarding” acts in different countries have been studied, and among those in Bulgaria, for example, procurements for street lighting, for improving energy efficiency of buildings, for paper recycling and for the construction of a near-zero energy consumption hall.

Funds from the ESIF will also finance “waste reuse for energy generation” solutions. A major project is planned to be financed with funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – the construction of a cogeneration facility in Sofia with the use of refuse-derived fuel (RDF). The project enables

Sofia District Heating company to save more than 10% of the currently consumed natural gas and will cover the needs for providing base load – in the low consumption intervals it will accumulate the produced heat, which will be then used in the hours of increasing consumption.

The MoEW, as the competent authority for the implementation of Regulation 1907/2006 on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) in Bulgaria, cooperates with a number of executive bodies entrusted with the implementation of the Regulation according to the Law on the Protection against the Harmful Impact of the Chemical Substances and Mixtures. The MoEW organizes annual training and information exchange seminars between the competent authority and law enforcement authorities, as well as seminars with the industry to raise awareness of and responsibility about chemical manufacturers, importers and suppliers.

A National Chemical Information Bureau was set up at the MoEW in 2010 as part of the European Help-Net network to provide information and assistance free of charge to the industry on their obligations to implement harmonized European legislation.

For the efficient management of chemicals, an Expert Council on the Evaluation of Priority Substances has been set up to work on the implementation of the EU Roadmap on Substances of Very High Concern 2020 and of the Community rolling action plan (CoRAP). The screening and evaluation of substances at the European level, the implementation of processes for the authorization or restriction of the use of substances of very high concern, as well as the implementation of the EU Roadmap 2020 – activities in which the chemical team is directly involved, aim at introducing the most appropriate regulatory measures to manage the risk of the production and/or use of chemicals to protect human health and the environment.

The MoEW implements multilateral environmental agreements targeting chemicals, including the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals.

Target 12.4 is achieved through the implementation of national, European and international environmental legislation in the field of chemicals and other hazardous waste. Our country participates in all global environmental agreements in the cluster of chemicals – the Rotterdam, Stockholm, Basel and Minamata Convention on Mercury, as well as in the Strategic Approach to International Chemical Management (SAICM). The synergy between the conventions ensures improvement of the coordination and cooperation in the implementation of information

exchange for banned or severely restricted substances by introducing a procedure for preliminary informed consent for international trade in certain hazardous chemicals, as well as reducing the risk of the harmful effects of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and mercury.

Bulgaria is also a party to the ECE Convention on the Transboundary Impacts of Industrial Accidents. Pursuant to the Stockholm Convention, a National Action Plan for Management of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the Republic of Bulgaria has been developed and implemented, including its updates. A new National Action Plan for Management of Persistent Organic Pollutants in Bulgaria 2020-2030 has been developed and is to be adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2020. It covers another 6 new POPs included in the Convention.

The Permanent interagency synergy group has been established by an Order of the Minister of Environment and Water in 2013, with representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, the Executive Environment Agency and various directorates in the MoEW. The purpose of the group is to implement the decisions adopted at the Conferences of the Parties to international agreements, and to coordinate and effectively manage chemicals and waste management legislation.

For the effective management of chemicals, guidance, information and training for chemical importers and suppliers are provided, as well as monitoring of the environment and human health. Public access to information on POPs and other hazardous chemicals is provided through the MoEW website.

Standards for citizenship education have been introduced as a prerequisite for raising the awareness of students, their families and the general public to change the attitude toward nutrition and separate waste collection. The state standards include the core of educational content related to education on sustainable development. According to the standards, environmental education is aimed at shaping ecological culture, environmental awareness and environmental behavior in their mutual connection with regard to knowledge of environmental laws, protection, management and rational use of natural resources, as well as of environmental protection and environmental balance.

The number of companies working in the country that report on their responsible corporate governance is increasing. The number of enterprises in Bulgaria that have adopted the ten principles of Corporate Social Responsibility of the UN Global Compact has increased by more than 150% in just five years (until 2018). The number of companies that have committed themselves to comply with the princi-

ples of the National Corporate Governance Code applicable to public companies has reached 53. Several economic sectors in Bulgaria have established tools for sustainable development of industries. For example, the Bulgarian Chamber of Mining and Geology has created its own industry standard for sustainable development. The Union of Brewers in Bulgaria has adopted a Code of Responsible Commercial Communications and Ethical Standards.

### Achieved results

The share of small and medium-sized enterprises with more than 50% of their turnover from environmental products and services in Bulgaria is higher than in most European countries. Small businesses that take resource efficiency measures receive more public support than the EU average.<sup>41</sup>

There is an increase in the value of resource productivity in the country, compared to 2000 – taken as the base year with index = 100. The value for 2018 is 137.268 according to Eurostat data.

### Circular material use rate – percent of total materials used

2010	2015	2017
2.1	3.1	5.1

%/Eurostat

As a result of the implementation of the Investment Climate Program of the National Trust EcoFund, measures have been implemented to reduce energy consumption in 105 facilities with greenhouse gas emission savings in the amount of 762,211 tCO<sub>2</sub>eq.

### Progress has been made in waste management.

**In 2017, the generated municipal waste in Bulgaria equaled 435 kg per person, compared to the 486 kg EU average**

**After 2007 the share of landfilled biodegradable waste has declined, which contributes to reducing the pressure on the environment**

**Significant progress has been made in the share of composting, which reached 8% in 2017 compared to 0% in 2010**

<sup>41</sup> The Environmental Implementation Review 2019. Country report – Bulgaria. SWD (2019) 113 final.

There is a 10% reduction in pesticide use in agriculture in 2017 compared to the previous year. Air spraying with pesticides is steadily reduced. In recent years, the MoEW has been actively seeking sources for the financing of the disposal of obsolete pesticides.

An example of a good practice is the "Environmentally sound disposal of obsolete pesticides and other crop protection products" project, funded under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. The project is pilot and aims to provide environmentally sound disposal of over 4,000 t of unusable pesticides and other crop protection products stored in warehouses throughout the country.

Another example of a good practice is the real system for collecting empty plastic pesticide packaging set up by the Bulgarian Crop Protection Association (BG CPA) in order to reduce the risks associated with

the use of plant protection products (PPPs) and to meet the requirements of the legislation in this field. Through this system in 2019 over 97% of the packaging used by national producers was collected and processed.

Bulgaria is successfully working to recycle specific waste streams – packaging waste, obsolete electrical and electronic equipment, obsolete motor vehicles, and unusable batteries and accumulators.

Research projects are also being developed. The National Innovation Fund and the European Regional Development Fund have approved innovative projects for environmentally friendly treatment of hazardous waste, recovery of waste rubber products, heat production from waste pyrolysis, analysis of exhaust emissions, conversion of conventional to electric vehicles, etc.



## TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

Bulgaria's national policy on climate change is determined, on the one hand, by the country's international commitments to the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol (KP) and the Paris Agreement, and, on the other, by obligations arising from EU membership and the existing European legislation in this field.

Our country fulfills all international agreements related to these commitments in the field of climate change.

### Challenges

Bulgaria is located in a region sensitive to climate change. According to data from the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology, temperatures in Southeast Europe are expected to rise in all seasons and regions.

Lack of mapping of risks related to climate change

Cross-sectoral disaster risk management cooperation does not account for climate change related disasters.

The funding of risk prevention actions, especially on lower levels of territorial governance, remains limited and inconsistent.

There is a lack of a strong coordination mechanism to undertake, prescribe, monitor and control the necessary system optimization interventions.

Bulgaria is exposed to a number of natural threats such as floods, landslides, earthquakes, forest fires, droughts, strong winds, insufficient snowfall, hot flushes, extreme temperatures and frequent hailstorms. The disasters caused by these phenomena have adverse economic impacts on the country. According to data from the NSI, the damage caused by crisis events (including fires, floods, etc.) for the period 2010-2018 amounts to almost 880 million EUR. During this period, more than 640 million EUR was spent on restoration, while more than 102 million EUR were used on rescue and emergency operations.

The risks of disasters faced by the country are expected to increase due to increasing urbanization and industrial development and climate change.

### Measures taken

Bulgaria is actively involved in the common efforts to mitigate climate change and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

At the global level, Bulgaria is a party to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement and participates in the second Kyoto period of legally-binding emission commitments until 2020. Under the second Kyoto period together with the other Parties, Bulgaria strives to meet the overall target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% until 2020. With respect to greenhouse gas emissions, Bulgaria has the necessary reserve to ensure that the commitments made with signing the Kyoto Protocol are fulfilled.

At national level, the Law on Climate Change Mitigation regulates government policy for mitigating climate change and for fulfilling the country's international obligations.

The Law on Climate Change Mitigation regulates the implementation of the EU ETS and the activities related to the allocation of greenhouse gas emission allowances and the issuance and amendment of greenhouse gas emissions permits. This law regulates the links between national legislation and EU standards.

Following the ratification of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol thereto, the Bulgarian Government has successively adopted three national action plans on climate change. The third national plan envisages specific measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in all sectors, which are in line with the country's policy and the potential of the national economy.

In order to improve the country's capacity to adapt to the inevitable negative impacts of climate change, in October 2019 a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan for the Republic of Bulgaria were approved, outlining the strategic framework and priority areas for adaptation to climate change at the national and sectoral levels until 2030. The Strategy is accompanied by an Action plan for the main 9 sectors of the economy (agriculture, biodiversity and ecosystems, energy, forests, human health, transport, tourism, urban environment and water). Disaster risk management is considered as a cross-cutting topic. The Strategy also proposes a preliminary risk analysis of the vulnerability of the sectors of the Bulgarian economy to

climate change and is the only strategic document in Bulgaria that includes an analysis of the macro-economic consequences of climate change.

**44.6% of the total budget of the “Rural Development” Programme addresses climate change and its mitigation.<sup>42</sup>**



Disaster risk management is a top priority of the Bulgarian Government. The first flood risk management plans under the EU Floods Directive have been adopted. Considerable and effective efforts have been made to set goals and develop prevention, protection and preparedness measures. Flood risk management plans for the second cycle – 2022-2027, are under preparation.

The National Trust EcoFund is operating to finance climate change adaptation and actions on mitigating climate change impact. It manages earmarked funds provided by the state budget, including through “Debt-for-environment” and “Debt-for-nature” swaps. Funds are also generated via the Assigned Amount Units (AAUs) international trade deal(s), from the sale of greenhouse gas emission quotas for aviation activities, as well as from other international or national sources. Work is being done on climate investment programs related to mineral water, energy efficiency, electric vehicles and education.

As an EU Member State, Bulgaria can apply for financial assistance following a major disaster under the Solidarity Fund. Such funding is intended to help restore vital infrastructure and services, recover emergency and rescue expenses and cover some of the cost of clean-up in disaster-prone areas.

### Achieved results

A good institutional network of bodies, agencies and advisory boards has been established. For 30 years, the National System for Environmental Monitoring in Bulgaria has been a reliable source for

monitoring environmental components. It is recognized that this is one of the few sectors in the country to have such a continuous database, useful for analyzes and comparisons.

### Greenhouse gas emissions intensity of energy consumption

2010	2015	2017
117.8	111.5	107.9

index 2000 = 100/EEA and Eurostat

Another institutional success is demonstrated by the National Expert Council on Climate Change with the Minister of Environment and Water. The Council's functions are clarified in the Law on Climate Change Mitigation of 2014. The Council contributed to the development of the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy with the participation of academia, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Results are achieved in education for sustainable development. The state standards adopted in 2017 envisage that as a result of their education, pupils understand the importance of natural resources for human life, they realize the connections between the state of the environment and employment, they can provide examples of human-nature interactions, etc.

Many higher education institutions have developed curricula, Masters' courses and doctoral theses related to renewable energy, energy efficiency, hybrid and electric vehicles. Measures have been taken to increase the knowledge and skills on climate change issues of the teaching staff.

In October 2019, the 12th Scientific Conference “Climate Changes – A Global Threat for the Food Chain” was held, organized by the Risk Assessment Center on Food Chain.

The Scientific Conference “Climate, Atmosphere and Water Resources in the Face of Climate Change” was organized by the Climate, Atmosphere and Water Research Institute at BAS with the assistance of the National Scientific Program Environmental Protection and Reduction of Adverse Events and Natural Disasters Risk 2019-2023.

Expenditure on research is increasing. In 2018, 11 national research projects were approved in Bulgaria until 2022. Two of these programs address the environmental challenges associated with research – the “National Scientific Program Low Carbon Energy for Transport and Households” and the National Scientific Program Environmental Protection and Reduction of Adverse Events and Natural Disas-

<sup>42</sup> Proposal for a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, May 4, 2018, p. 44.



ters Risk, with an estimated budget of 3.7 million EUR and 3 million EUR, respectively.

### **International Development Cooperation**

In 2015, Bulgaria provided 100 thousand USD to the Green Climate Fund. A partner network has been established under the Environment protection and Climate Change Programme, funded through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area 2014-2021. In May 2019, a platform for successful partnerships between Bulgarian and foreign beneficiaries was established. The event was attended by representatives of Bulgarian municipalities, scientific organizations and representatives of the business from Bulgaria and Norway. The Norwegian Environment Agency took active participation in the event, as well as the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, the Institute for Marine Research, the Norwegian forestry group.

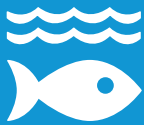
The Bulgarian branch of the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) is implementing the project "Just Transition in Eastern and Southern Europe", which is implemented through the European Climate Initiative Programme of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>43</sup>

The project also includes partners from Greece, Poland and Germany, and its main objective is to develop specialized energy transition plans aimed at the economic transformation of individual pilot regions in Bulgaria, Greece and Poland. For Bulgaria this region is Yugozapaden (South-West) Bulgaria, in particular the cities of Bobov dol and Pernik. These plans for a just energy transition in coal mining regions are in fact an in-depth analysis of sustainable economic activities that could be an alternative to coal in the target regions. The experience of Germany and the successful process in Greece are the project's working model, which is considered possible and relevant for Bulgaria and Poland, which are the two most dependent on the burning of coal for electricity and heat production EU Member States.

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<sup>43</sup> WWF. Annual Report 2017, p. 22.

## 14 LIFE BELOW WATER



# CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In Bulgaria, this Goal regards the maintenance of the Black Sea ecosystem. Independent expert estimates suggest that the Black Sea ability to recover from over-exploitation of ecosystems is close to its critical limit.

The Black Sea is the only sea in the EU for which no regional strategy at the EU level has been adopted. Although the process started in 2009 as a Black Sea Synergy and was among the priorities of the Bulgarian and Romanian Presidencies of the Council of the EU in 2018 and 2019, no progress has been made on developing a Black Sea Strategy.<sup>44</sup>

### Challenges

The most serious environmental problems of the Black Sea are pollution and chaotic building at the coastal zone.

In a volume unit, pollution in the Black Sea is higher than in the Mediterranean. Almost all rivers flowing into the Black Sea are rich in organic matter, nitrogen and phosphorus compounds and heavy metals. Most of the Bulgarian rivers flowing into the Black Sea are polluted by industrial and sewage effluents.

The challenge is that not all bordering countries are bound by EU rules and the EU's decision-making framework, as well as that the Black Sea is largely a closed sea with a single link to the oceans, which hinders the dispersion of pollutants.

Each year, approximately 350 km<sup>3</sup> of water from the rivers of more than twenty countries flows into the Black Sea.

The Black Sea has a water intake of a huge amount of wastewater generated in its catchment area as a result of the activity of more than 162 million people.

The untreated domestic and industrial wastewater is added to the diffuse pollution from the agricultural areas treated with fertilizers and plant protection products.

Intensive maritime transport and activities related to oil and natural gas exploration are contributing to pollution.

The reduction of the natural flow of a number of rivers flowing into the sea due to the construction of hydro-power and irrigation systems has a negative impact.

According to data from the National Automated System for Environmental Monitoring (NASEM), pollution from the rivers of the Bulgarian part of the Black Sea has been decreasing over the last two decades, but progress on sea quality has been slow. In 2017, coastal waters were categorized predominantly as moderate. No body of water meets the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive for a good status of surface waters. The water body of the Bay of Varna is particularly problematic.

The accelerated and large-scale chaotic building of new hotel base and resort areas is characteristic of the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. This leads to over-utilization of communal and utility infrastructure, engineering facilities, transport and environmental infrastructure.

### Measures taken

The condition of the Black Sea depends on the measures taken throughout its catchment area. The coordinated or joint activities of the Black Sea Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River are good examples. The EC's declared interest in the Black Sea region gives a significant impetus to the development of Black Sea processes.

An important strategic document at the regional level is the Strategic Action Plan for the Environmental Protection and Rehabilitation of the Black Sea (1996), drafted in the framework of the 1992 Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution signed by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine. An updated Strategic Plan has come into force in 2009. It has set long-term objectives for the quality of the Black Sea ecosystem and has outlined specific measures to reduce pollution, improve the management of living resources and promote human development in a way that does not harm the environment.

At the national level, efforts are coordinated based on the Marine Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>44</sup> State of the Black Sea coastal ecosystems, threats and risks. <https://species.bluelink.net/sastoyanie-na-chernomorskite-kraybrezhni-ekosistemi-zaplahi-riskove/>

The National Prioritised Action Framework for Natura 2000 (NPAF) 2014-2020, the Law on Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Maritime and Fisheries Programme (2014-2020) are of great importance.

National documents related to biodiversity, wetlands, rural areas, forestry, tourism, combating desertification and landslides which have been adopted are very important for the implementation of this Goal. Of particular importance are the National Waste Management Plan (2014-2020) and the Law on the Black Sea coast spatial development, which defines specialized rules and regulations for territorial development and construction along the coast.

The 2001 Regulation establishing indicators and standards for the quality of coastal marine waters has been adopted to combat pollution. The coastal marine environment is monitored at 26 monitoring points by the National System for Environmental Monitoring. The water quality of the rivers flowing into the Black Sea is also monitored. A National Plan for the Contamination of the Black Sea with Petroleum Products has been prepared. It is part of the National Black Sea Contingency Plan.

To reduce pollution from land-based sources along the Black Sea coast, 26 urban sewage treatment plants are in operation, not including those for small tourist sites. The entire Black Sea catchment area on Bulgarian territory has been declared a “sensitive zone”, which requires the removal of nitrogen and phosphorus in the process of wastewater treatment.

In order to preserve the sustainability of fish stocks, a National programme for collection, usage and management of data in the fisheries sector has been developed. For example, turbot stocks in Bulgarian Black Sea waters are evaluated. According to the Institute of Fishing Resources in Varna data from 2019, there are signs of stabilization of turbot population.

To achieve Target 14.4.1, Bulgaria complies with the measures taken within the framework of the EU Common Fisheries Policy. Each year a Council Regulation fixes catch limits in the Black Sea for Romania and Bulgaria. In 2019, a total quota of 11,475 t for both countries has been set for sprat, while for turbot a total allowable catch (TAC) and an EU quota of 114 t have been set to be shared equally between Bulgaria and Romania. Fishing is limited to 180 days annually and is completely banned for 2 months between April 15 and June 15 in order to allow the population to recover.

### Achieved results

Bulgaria has developed a methodology for assessing the condition (status) of Bulgarian marine ecosystems and the potential of Bulgarian marine ecosystems to supply ecosystem services (biophysical as-

essment). The methodology applies to marine ecosystems throughout the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, although implementation differs between Natura 2000 and non-Natura 2000 sites.

Within Natura 2000, natural habitats in all marine and coastal territories are protected in areas of the following types: coastal and halophytic habitats, coastal sand and continental dunes, marine natural habitats, as well as all target species, including birds inhabiting marine and coastal territories. The efforts are directed toward the completion of the network of protected areas in Bulgarian aquatory. The “Natura 2000 in the Black Sea” project implemented under the Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020, will complete the Natura 2000 network in the marine environment in accordance with the requirements of the European Habitats Directive.

### Surface of marine sites designated under NATURA 2000

2011	2015	2018
926	2,827	2,827

km<sup>2</sup>/Eurostat

### Bathing sites with excellent water quality - number

2011	2015	2018
89	90	91

/EEA

Research is being conducted to assess the environmental status of the Black Sea. The Institute of Oceanology in Varna is the scientific unit of BAS that monitors, models and forecasts processes and phenomena in the marine environment in order to assess the natural risk. Scientists are exploring the geology and geomorphology of the seabed, mineral resources and alternative raw materials and energy sources.

According to national law, all fishing vessels used for commercial fishing must first be registered in the Ship register at the Executive Agency Maritime Administration, as well as in the Fishing fleet register kept by the Executive Agency of Fisheries and Aquaculture, which is responsible for the control of fishing activities.

The basic principle is that fishing capacity cannot be increased before at least the same or more fishing capacity is seized from the Bulgarian fishing fleet. An information and statistical system for registering data on the fishing fleet is functioning, monitoring of fishing vessels fishing for turbot is maintained.

The country is trying to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities.

The fishing capacity has been reduced in 2007-2018.

For the period 2007-2018, a total of 103 ships with a fishing capacity of 1,594.77 GT and 7,550.82 kW power were scrapped.

A register of alien and non-native aquaculture species has been published to assess and minimize their potential impact on aquatic habitats, thereby supporting the sustainable development of the Aquaculture subsector.

### International Development Cooperation

At the proposal of Bulgaria, the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Black Sea was developed and adopted in 2018 within the framework of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution.

A Black Sea NGO Network in partnership with institutes and civil organizations from four other countries in the region launched the project "Improved online public access to environmental monitoring

data and data tools for the Black Sea Basin supporting cooperation in the reduction of marine litter" (MARLITER), funded by the "Black Sea" Basin Joint Operational Programme for Cross-border Cooperation 2014-2020, part of the European Neighbourhood Instrument.

The project "Marine Litter Transnational Legislation Enhancement and Improvement" (MELTEMI) is implemented with the participation of eight organizations from Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus and aims to propose improvements to the legal framework and to engage the public in achieving reduction of litter pollution in the marine environment. MELTEMI is funded by the European Regional Development Fund under the "Balkans – Mediterranean 2014-2020 Transnational Cooperation Programme" and addresses a serious transboundary environmental problem with marine litter, which is a global matter of concern.

The Black Sea NGO Network and the Burgas Association of Ecological and Rural Tourism are working on the project "Reduction of Litter in the Marine and Coastal Environment and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources", which is implemented with co-financing by the NGO Programme in Bulgaria under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area 2009-2014.



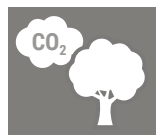
## PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Terrestrial ecosystems act as a buffer against temperature increase and help adapt to climate change. Well-maintained ecosystems preserve biodiversity and improve the living environment.

Due to the extremely diverse climatic, geological, topographical and hydrological conditions, Bulgaria is characterized by rich biodiversity as well as preserved nature. 26% of all species described in Europe are present on the country's territory, representing more than 2% of the world's species.<sup>45</sup>



More than 1/3 of the country land area is covered by forests.



Approximately 1/5 of the greenhouse gases in Bulgaria are absorbed by forests.

Unfortunately, forests, as well as all other ecosystems in Bulgaria, are located in one of the most affected by climate change latitudes, which will make them especially vulnerable in the coming decades and will jeopardize their functions, status and conservation and development opportunities.<sup>46</sup>

### Challenges

Changes in the composition and humidity of the soil are expected, hence in the possibility for agricultural production. There is a risk of severe desertification, soil degradation, erosion, increased fires, loss of habitats and biodiversity, especially of valuable and rare species.

The climate scenarios for Bulgaria, developed by the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology within the framework of the CECILIA project, show that in the coming decades the average annual temperatures are expected to increase and the an-

nual precipitation will decrease. The risk of all types of drought will increase – atmospheric, soil, soil-atmospheric, hydrological. Ecosystems will need to adapt.

In Bulgaria, there is already a trend of increasing average temperatures and increasing rainfall in winter at the expense of those in summer, when vegetation is most in need of moisture. There is also an increase in the frequency of extreme events, such as windthrow and heavy wet snow, which cause significant damage to forest areas. The most sensitive trees are conifers, which have been withering massively since the 1980s.

Other negative impacts are associated with an increased risk of dry winds as a result of warming, reduced rainfalls and change of their manifestation. In the case of dry wind, the topsoil dries quickly, the soil dryness deepens and results in wind erosion.<sup>47</sup>

Last but not least, in recent years there has been a confluence of seasons, which means that we will have a period of the year with very little or no precipitation, as well as a period of the year with many rainfalls.



Erosion processes affect approximately 85% of the soils in the country, while 30% are subject to wind erosion.

Threats to disturb soil functions are emerging: erosion, acidification, salinization, sealing, soil organic matter reduction, contamination, sealing and landslides.

### The soil sealing index is increasing

2009	2012	2015
100.9	103.0	104.5

At 2,000 base = 100/Eurostat

<sup>45</sup> Bulgaria 2030. Part I. Analysis of the social and economic development of the country after its accession to the EU. Ministry of Finance, 2019, p. 96.

<sup>46</sup> National climate change risk and vulnerability assessment for the sectors of the Bulgarian economy. Available at: [https://www.moew.government.bg/static/media/ups/tiny/file/Climate/Specialna\\_chat.pdf](https://www.moew.government.bg/static/media/ups/tiny/file/Climate/Specialna_chat.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> National Action Program on sustainable land management and combating desertification (Update for the 2014-2020 programming period), p. 35.

The risks to biodiversity in Bulgaria are related to the loss of habitats as a result of urban and infrastructure development, unsustainable agriculture, polluted air and the exploitation of species of economic importance.

Bulgaria has not made any progress concerning the establishment of Natura 2000 management bodies. Such bodies are only available for those areas that overlap with the three National parks and the eleven Nature parks.

Since 2014, there has been a steady trend of declining financing for environmental activities and measures, measured by share of GDP.

### Relative share of expenditure on protection and restoration of the environment of GDP

2014	2015	2016	2017
3.97	3.46	2.01	1.91

%/NSI

Expenditures on waste management are at a good level, but for other priorities, including biodiversity, climate, etc., only 9% of the funding provided remains, which is far too insufficient for achieving the global goals.

In 2019, the MoEW has launched the implementation of the Natura 2000 Knowledge project. The main objective of the project is to raise the level of awareness of the population and the capacity and contribution of stakeholders to the European ecological network Natura 2000. Within the project, a document for the purposes of Natura 2000 has been developed and adopted, and the National Prioritised Action Framework (NPAF) has been updated. More efficient management of the network is expected.

### Measures taken

Under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Bulgaria has declared that it is affected by desertification on the basis of self-assessment, together with 12 other EU Member States.

Bulgaria demonstrates significant progress in mapping and assessment of ecosystems, as well as determining the services they provide.

Our country is the only one in the EU where ecosystems are mapped. A map of nine types of ecosystems has been developed, with calculated areal allocation of ecosystem types in the area of the country. Among them, agricultural ecosystems occupy the second place in terms of area (and percentage), following forest ecosystems.

The national legislative framework includes the Law on Protected Areas, the Law on Biodiversity, the Law

on Forestry, the Law on Waters, the Law on Climate Change Mitigation, the Law on Waste Management and the Law on Protection against the Harmful Impact of the Chemical Substances and Mixtures.

The Law on Agricultural Land Conservation, the Law on Agricultural Land Ownership and Use, as well as the relevant by-laws to them, provide the legal basis for the protection of agricultural lands and the improvement of their productivity.

The National Action Program for Sustainable Land Management and Combating Desertification in the Republic of Bulgaria (Update for the Programming period 2014-2020) has been adopted. The Environmental Executive Agency conducts annual monitoring on land at risk of degradation.

The National Strategy for the Development of the Forestry Sector in Bulgaria 2013-2020 and the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Forestry Sector 2014-2023 are in accordance with internationally valid criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Forest management plans and programs set the permissible level of use of forest resources and guidelines for the achievement of forest management goals for a period of 10 years. The Law on Forestry prohibits the reduction of the overall percentage of forest land in the country and is extremely restrictive in terms of changing the designation of forest territories.

In the 2014-2016 period, a partial experimental district forest territories development plan has been developed under the project "Development and model implementation of sectoral policies focused on ecosystem services" – PoliciES. District plans are part of the planning in the forest territories and aim at developing a single forestry map for the forest territories for the district, functional zoning of forest areas, making good use of the public ecosystem benefits; forest management and hunting management objectives and environmental and socio-economic assessment.

The partial district plan has been implemented on the territory of Berkovitsa Regional Forest Directorate. On this basis, the Executive Forests Agency commissioned the preparation in 2017 of the first 3 regional plans for Montana, Dobrich and Smolyan, which were finalized at the end of 2019.

As early as 1998, a National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy has been adopted, accompanied by National Biodiversity Conservation Action Plans until 2010. For the period 2011-2020, a Biodiversity Strategic Plan has been adopted with the mission "to take action to reduce the pressure on biodiversity, restore ecosystems, and use biological resources in a sustainable way".

Bulgaria has adopted and implements legislative and administrative mechanisms that ensure the effective conservation of the country's important biodiversity, including by ensuring its territorial protection by building the National Ecological Network (NEN). NEN includes protected areas declared under national law (Law on Protected Areas) and protected areas declared under the Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora and the EU Birds Directive (transposed into the Law on Biological Diversity). NEN prioritizes Ramsar sites, sites that are important for plants and ornithological sites.

Biosphere parks, declared under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme and in line with the Seville Strategy, are an important tool for achieving sustainable development in the regions concerned, based on clean and preserved nature and on the production and supply of certified local products and regional high value brands.

In the period 2013-2019, 61 action plans for priority species of animals and plants have been approved and are in force, which outline the framework of the necessary actions for their conservation.

Bulgaria applies the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), including the relevant EU regulations introducing stricter legislation and management. Bulgaria has put in place more stringent national measures regarding the registration of specimens found in few EU countries. Customs and border authorities are being trained in dealing with CITES, risk assessment and ship detention. CITES Rescue Centers for Plant and Animal Species have been set up and protected under the Law on Biological Diversity. The threat of spread of invasive alien species has been met by amendments to the Law on Biological Diversity, which set stricter control and sanctions.

A strategy, legislative measures and specific actions are envisaged to introduce ecosystem services for the conservation, restoration and promotion of sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, forests and biodiversity.

### Achieved results

Bulgaria is making progress in mapping and evaluating the different types of ecosystems and related services, as well as in developing natural capital reporting systems.

In the last decade, no new soil pollution with heavy metals and metalloids from agricultural activities has

been registered. There is a trend for reduced consumption of fertilizers and plant protection products.<sup>48</sup>

In 2013-2015, the total area of afforested deserted agricultural land, bare land, eroded land, and land threatened by erosion was 768.2 ha more than the target value.

The Sufficiency Index of "Natura 2000" network is near 100%.

Under the "Future-oriented integrated management of European forest landscapes" INTEGRAL (2011-2015), pilot project forests and forest territories management plans have been developed in the forests and forest areas of three municipalities – Velinograd, Teteven and Sarnitsa. The plans are applicable in other municipalities.

The project "Connecting nature conservation with sustainable rural development", implemented in nine Natura 2000 sites in the Western and Central Stara Planina mountains, tested a model for creating legal mechanisms and instruments for sustainable use and long-term conservation of territories with high nature-value, including payment for ecosystem services and more efficient management of protected areas. A balance is sought between economic development and environmental protection.

Within the framework of the project "Conservation and restoration of 11 Natura 2000 Riparian and Wetland habitats in 10 SCI's in Bulgarian Forests", five forest types of habitats have been restored by planting saplings of native species on an area of 80.6 ha in seven nature parks.

Currently, there are 10 biosphere parks in Bulgaria, declared under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme, which are part of the Global network. Four of these sites: "Central Balkan", "Chervenata Stena", "Srebarna" and "Uzunbudzhak" represent contemporary post-Seville biosphere parks that meet the requirements and principles of the Seville Strategy (1996) and the legal framework on biosphere parks.

The six other old-type biosphere parks, incl. "Bistrishko Branishte", "Mantaritsa", "Parangalitsa", "Chuprene", "Ali Botush", and "Bayuvi Dupki-Dzhindzhiritsa" will only be able to retain their status as UNESCO biosphere reserves if they comply with the zoning requirements and functions set out in the Seville Strategy.

In order to maintain biodiversity, actions are being taken to restore the populations of three bird species,

<sup>48</sup> National Report on the State and Protection of the Environment in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2019 <http://eea.government.bg/bg/soer/2017/soer-bg-2017.pdf>

locally or completely extinct from the territory of the country. Work is underway to restore the wild goat population at Vitosha Nature Park, where the species has disappeared.

For the period 2015-2018, the customs authorities have prevented 27 attempts of trade with protected species. The most significant cases are the detainment of 37 kg of European eel, 15,960 ampoules with aloe extract, 77 pieces of various types of corals, 35 kg of African cherry, as well as Greek tortoise (*Testudo graeca*).

A well-developed network of protected areas has been established and operates on the territory of the country with the objective to provide territorial protection and conservation of the unique for the country biodiversity in the natural ecosystems and the natural processes occurring in them, as well as of characteristic or remarkable objects of inanimate nature and landscapes. Under the Law on Protected Areas, protected areas are divided into six categories of protection (in accordance with the requirements of the International Union for Conservation of Nature – IUCN).

At the end of 2018, the total number of protected areas designated under national law is 1,016, with a total area of 584,861.5 ha, or 5.3% of the country's territory, including 55 reserves, 35 managed nature reserves, 3 national parks, 11 nature parks, 568 protected areas and 344 natural monuments.

Natura 2000 is a network of protected areas in Europe. Its aim is to ensure the long-term conservation of well-defined plant and animal species and habitats.

There are 341 Natura 2000 protected areas in Bulgaria (354 in number, as the borders under the two directives are the same for 13 of the areas), covering a total of 34.9% of the country's territory:

- 234 Natura 2000 protected areas under the Habitats Directive, which cover approximately 30.3% of the country's territory with a total area of 36,119 sq. km;

- 120 Natura 2000 protected areas under the Birds Directive covering 23.1% of the country with a total area of 26,165 sq. km.

In order to ensure the conservation of natural habitats and the habitats of species, plans, programs, projects and investment intentions, which alone or in combination with others may have significant adverse effects, are evaluated for their compatibility with the subject and the conservation objectives of the relevant protected area.

The main mechanisms for the management of the protected territories are the orders for declaration, which regulate specific regimes of activities to ensure effective conservation, as well as the management plans that make the functional zoning of the respective territories and provide for regimes and regulations of activities depending on their conservation significance.

The development of protected area management plans is regulated in the Law on Protected Areas, and for this purpose a special Regulation on the terms and Procedure for Development and Approval of Management Plans for Protected Areas has been developed.



## 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



# PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS

Goal 16 is dedicated to the rule of law, non-violence, peace and good governance. There is a very close interconnectedness of the tasks faced by Bulgaria, which are important for the fulfillment of this Goal. The fight against violence and trafficking of girls and women for sexual exploitation is linked to combating corruption and the creation of a working judicial system, including access to information, access to justice and, ultimately – a functioning human rights system. Fulfilling this Goal is crucial for the implementation of all other UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### Challenges

Bulgaria remains mainly a country of origin of victims of trafficking in human beings, and given the global migration situation, the country is also becoming a transit and destination country for victims of such crimes. According to the official statistics of registered pre-trial proceedings, data of the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation for 2018 show that the trend of girls and women being the majority of victims of trafficking is continuing. During the three-year period 2016-2018, the trend of a significantly higher number of women is maintained – 87.8% of all victims in the observed 295 pre-trial proceedings for trafficking in human beings in 2018. There is an increase of identified victims that are minors and underage persons – 57 in 2018 compared to 25 in 2016. There is a continued trend of increase in the number of trafficked people for forced labor, numbering 59 in 2018, compared to 31 in 2016.<sup>49</sup>

Violence against children remains a serious challenge. According to the General Directorate National Police, in 2016 17.27% of young people aged 18-24 had experienced violence before they reached the age of 18. For 2017, they are 13.81% and for 2018 – 14.74%. In 2018, the Social Assistance Agency received 1,106 reports of violence against children, on 347 of them cases have been opened and action was taken. According to the Prosecutor's Office, for 2018 2,379 minors and 1,941 underage persons were crime victims. According to data from the Ministry of

Education and Science, in the academic year 2017/2018, there were 3,616 cases of aggression.

#### NSI 2018 data are worrying:

**4,547 children and young people aged 8-17 grow up in a „criminogenic“ environment.**

**Crime victims in 2018 are 1,634, which is more than in 2017 – 1,463.**

**Three minors and one underage person were homicide victims in 2018.**

There is data of violence and disproportionate punishment at juvenile detention centers, social pedagogical boarding schools, boarding schools and homes for temporary accommodation of underage persons and minors.

The illegal use of force by law enforcement officials poses a serious challenge. According to a 2016 survey by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 34% of all interviewed recently imprisoned report that force was used over them either during detention or at the police station.

The independence, efficiency and transparency of the judicial system are among the most serious problems identified by society. Problems in Bulgarian justice can be assessed by the large number of European Court of Human Rights cases against Bulgaria, as well as by the delay in the enforcement of the decisions on some of them. In 2016, the total number was 290, and in 2015, it was 272. Complaints communicated with the Bulgarian state from the beginning of 2009 to 2019 were 901, according to the Ministry of Finance.

### Measures taken

#### Against human trafficking

Bulgaria has a good legal framework in place to combat trafficking in human beings, in line with international law, and a comprehensive institutional system to prevent such crimes and to protect crime victims. The 2002 Criminal Code amendments ex-

<sup>49</sup> 2018 Annual Report for the implementation of the 2018 National Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of Victims. pp. 23-24.

PLICITLY criminalized trafficking in human beings and all forms of exploitation, including trafficking in pregnant women for the purpose of selling babies and the deliberate use of a victim of trafficking for profane acts, forced labor, organ harvesting or to be held in compulsion, regardless of their consent.

The Law on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted in 2003, with its most recent amendment in 2019 strengthening the provisions for the protection of crime victims. In 2006, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was established at the Council of Ministers as the main coordinating body. The Law on Crime Victim Assistance and Financial Compensation has been in force since 2007. In 2017, a National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2017-2021 was adopted, which sets out the priorities and objectives related to effective and long-term response – both to the crime itself as well as to its consequences, and aims at early prevention, support and reintegration of victims, taking into account the vulnerable situation of women and children and the prosecution of perpetrators. These activities involve local authorities, the non-governmental sector, businesses and volunteers.

In 2017, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings launched a mapping process for regions with groups that are vulnerable to human trafficking, including minors. Currently, ten local anti-trafficking coordinators operate to assist the National Commission – Local Commissions for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the municipalities of Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Montana, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Pleven, Ruse and Sliven.

### **To combat violence against children and trafficking in children**

Violence against children is a cross-cutting issue between areas such as child protection, education and justice. The main legislative act is the Law on Child Protection, adopted in 2000. The Law on Protection against Domestic Violence protects children against various forms of domestic violence, with the possibility for the court to issue protection orders.

All child protection institutions deal with the problems of children victims of violence or trafficking. The State Agency for Child Protection develops the state policy in this direction and carries out the control and analysis of its implementation. The parameters of public policy are set out in the National Strategies for the Child, the National Programme for Child Protection and the Action plans.

To improve the protection of children from violence and abuse, in 2017 the Bulgarian Government approved a National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children 2017-2020 and a two-year Action plan.

Since 2010, there has been a Coordination Mechanism for interaction in cases of children – victims of violence or children at risk of becoming victims of violence and interaction for crisis intervention.

The structure of the mechanism provides a multidisciplinary approach to addressing specific cases of violence.

The main service facilitating detection and reporting of violence against children is the Bulgarian National Help-line for Children, operated by the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP), opened in 2009. Since February 2020, the SACP has fully taken over its management.

The National School Policing Programme works to prevent violence against school-age children, to build safe behavior models, and to create a positive attitude toward the police.

In 2014, the Prevention of Violence against Children Programme was implemented, aimed at training general practitioners, medical and non-medical specialists from childcare facilities and specialists from health offices in schools to improve their professional competence.

More than 140 Community Support Centers with a total capacity of 5,699 places and 19 Crisis Centers for Children with a total capacity for 196 children are available to combat violence and child trafficking. Sixteen special facilities for sparing hearing of children, victims of violence and crime have been built. There are 32 licensed non-public providers of social services for children.

**From 2010 to 2015 the number of children accommodated in crisis centers increased more than two times – from 205 to 473.**

**The share of children who are victims of violence remains 50% for the whole period and is followed by the share of children who were subject of trafficking.**

In the context of the problem of trafficking in human beings, in 2010 the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the “Animus Association” Foundation established a National mechanism for referral and support to victims of human trafficking as a framework for cooperation and coordination between individual state institutions as well as with NGOs.

## For effective access to justice

The updated Strategy to Continue the Reform of the Judicial System adopted in 2015 gives priority to the child justice system. A Roadmap for the implementation of the updated strategy has been approved in April 2016. In the period 2017-2019, the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Judicial Council implemented the "Effective Access to Justice" project. Within the framework of this project, the Supreme Judicial Council organized a series of public discussions on "Methodology for the Analysis of Factors Leading to the Dependency of the Judicial System". A model of access to justice is being created to serve as a standard of implementation to ensure equal access to justice for all citizens in the country.

### General government total expenditure on law courts

2010	2015	2018
210	304	341

million EUR/Eurostat

In January 2018, Bulgaria adopted a comprehensive reform of the anti-corruption legislation. The adopted Law on Anti-corruption and Forfeiture of Assets regulates the procedure for the prevention of conflicts of interest, illegal enrichment and corruption.

The Committee for Combating Corruption and the withdrawal of illegally acquired property has been created according to the new Law - an independent, specialized permanent state body that reports its activities to the National Assembly.

### To combat illicit financial flows

By adopting a new Law on Measures against Money Laundering, Bulgaria has implemented in its legislation Directive (EU) 2015/849 – the so-called Fourth EU Directive on preventing the use of the financial system for money laundering or terrorist financing. Regarding the preparation for participation in the ERMII (Exchange Rate Mechanism II) and the Banking Union, Bulgaria is pursuing a policy of accelerated transposition of EU Directive 2018/843 – the so-called Fifth EU anti-money laundering directive. The leading transposition agencies are the State Agency for National Security and the Ministry of the Interior.

From the point of view of non-taxation and combating tax evasion, in addition to the measures taken at the national level by the Bulgarian tax administration, Bulgaria also actively participates in the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes at the OECD. The country is a member of the Inclusive Framework on Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS).

## For effective access to information

The right of information is guaranteed by the Constitution, the Law on Access to Public Information, the Law on Environmental Protection, the Law on Classified Information Protection and a number of other special laws. The "Access to Information Programme" Foundation is in place to monitor the implementation of the Law, under which a report is prepared every year.

In 2019, together with this report, the first audit report of the Court of Auditors on the implementation of "Transparency and Publicity in the Activities of the State Administration and Access to Information" for the period Jan. 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018 was published. It recommends the establishment of an independent body responsible for enforcing the law and coordinating the process, making appeals possible at second instance and taking steps to join the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents.

### Achieved results

Due to the changes in the legislation, in the last 5 years there has been a relative stability and a slight increase in criminal proceedings for trafficking in human beings in Bulgaria.

According to the Customs Agency, in the 2015-2018 period, Bulgarian customs officers prevented 363 attempts of illegal drug trafficking. In 2018, customs officers discovered a total of 19 cases of attempts at trafficking weapons, ammunition, explosives, accessories and weapons parts.

### Very good or good perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public – percentage of population

2016	2017	2018	2019
23	26	30	34

%/Eurostat

Access to justice has made progress in several areas, the most important of which is the reform of the Implementation of Penal Sanctions and Law on Detention in Custody. Material conditions in prisons and the regime and judicial control over the acts of the prison administration are covered.

According to police statistics and perceptions of people over the last ten years, crime in the country has decreased.

### Population reporting occurrence of crime, violence or vandalism in their area

2010	2015	2018
27.7	26.3	21.8

%/Eurostat

Progress has been made on access to information. Cases may be cited where initial denials of access have been corrected by court decisions at various instances. The “Access to Information Programme” Foundation report for 2018 indicates that there are positive developments related to the ever-increasing proactive publication of information on the websites of the institutions that are obliged to do so by the law.

Inspections by the General Labour Inspectorate have not identified the use of child labor in its most serious form in breach of explicitly prohibited national legislation on exposure of young people to risk and harmful working conditions.

Amendments to the Law on the Ombudsman of 2018 have made it possible to accredit the institution with the highest UN human rights “A” status. Through it, the institution is given the opportunity to participate and to express a position in the meetings of the UN Human Rights Council.

### **International Development Cooperation**

In 2017, Bulgaria was Vice President of the Third Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. Bulgaria is aware of its responsibility as a manufacturer and exporter of defense-related products and, to that

end, applies the highest standards in its arms export control policy to prevent illegal trafficking and trade. Bulgaria is also a contributor to the Treaty's ATT Voluntary Trust Fund, aimed at assisting third parties in the implementation of the Treaty, including the suppression of illegal diversion and arms smuggling. In 2017, the “Internal Security” Directorate at the Ministry of the Interior participated as a partner in a project entitled “Improving cross-border cooperation to prevent and combat fraud, corruption and illegal activities in Southeast Europe” under the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) Hercule III Program.

Regional cross-border cooperation continues in the framework of the Network for Enhanced Regional Cooperation of Internal Security Units – NERCISU, involving the Ministries of Interior and/or Police from Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia.



## STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Bulgaria supports UN efforts to formulate integrated responses to global challenges related to poverty reduction, ensuring access to education, enhancing economic growth, protecting the environment, sustainable management of water and energy and building democratic institutions based on the rule of law.

For Bulgaria, achieving this Goal means promoting the principles and good practices of development cooperation and ODA established within the OECD.

As a Member State of the EU, Bulgaria participated in the development of strategically important documents reflecting the path toward a global partnership – the European Consensus on Development, the Agenda for Change, and the New European Consensus on Development, related to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In this regard, our country supports the principle of the effectiveness of development assistance, ownership of the recipient country's decisions, providing aid without conditions, the coherence of all policies of the country with the idea of supporting development in the less developed regions of the world in the pursuit of achieving the overarching goals.

Development cooperation policy is an integral part of the country's foreign policy. It is expressed in the commitment that ODA should reach 0.33% of Gross national income by 2030, while the current levels are 0.08-0.13%.

### Official development assistance as a share of GNI

2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
0.09	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.13	0.11	0.11

(%/OECD)

### Shares of environmental and labor taxes in total tax revenues

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
10.6	10.59	10	9.9	9.61	10	9.57	9.07

(%/OECD)

### Challenges

Without having fully overcome the differences in the level of economic, social and democratic develop-

ment compared to most EU Member States, Bulgaria has committed to providing ODA to less developed countries in the world. This commitment has a hard time finding supporters among voters and the general public.

The awareness of Bulgarian business organizations about the political steps and the potential of development policy as a part of the foreign policy of the country is too low.

There is no framework law for development policy. Such law can be a prerequisite for building an effective coordination mechanism between the various actors in development policy at the national level, and its lack does not contribute to increasing the effect of public finance invested.

There is a lack of an administrative structure and capacity that are adequate to our commitments. This is also reflected in the Minister of Finance's report on the review of the spending in two thematic areas of the 2019 MFA budget, which states that streamlining the process of providing and managing ODA funds and humanitarian aid could be achieved through the establishment of a separate Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through internal restructuring of the existing administrative units. The Directorate will be responsible for the procurement and implementation of development programs and projects, will carry out activities for providing technical assistance and will select and manage programs and projects funded by the MFA budget.

### Measures taken

Over the last few years, the Government has been systematically striving to build national capacity to pursue an effective international development cooperation policy. In 2011, Decree No. 234 of the Council of Ministers was adopted, outlining the goals and principles and defining the institutional mechanisms of development policy.

The goals and objectives are specified in the Mid-term Program for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid. The first Mid-term Program was for the period 2013-2015. Strategic Cooperation Programs for cooperation with Georgia, Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia and Vietnam were also adopted during this period. The International

Development Cooperation Council and a Development Policy Interinstitutional Working Group have been established to coordinate the activities.

The second Mid-term Program was for the period 2016-2019. It included the LDCs and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries as priority countries. They have been identified as a priority for the EU development assistance, including for Bulgaria, with a view to achieving progress in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Work is underway to develop the next Mid-term Program 2020-2024 and to draft a Law on International Development Cooperation.

The Mid-term Programs for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid are drafted by the MFA with the participation of all relevant ministries and agencies, as well as representatives of civil society within the Development Policy Interinstitutional Working Group and the International Development Cooperation Council in the format of "International Development Cooperation". According to the existing regulations, the Mid-term Program is adopted by a Resolution of the Council of Ministers based on a proposal by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

### Achieved results

In June 2018, Bulgaria has been granted the status of "participant" in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, which contributes not only to better compliance with established donor standards, but also to improving the efficiency and quality of the Bulgarian ODA. In the long term, the cooperation aims to develop skills, instruments and institutional frameworks, which will contribute to considering Bulgaria's full membership in the Committee. In line with these ambitious goals, Bulgaria and the DAC Development Co-operation Directorate at the OECD have agreed a roadmap for cooperation outlining the following priority areas of interaction for the period 2019-2020 – strategic planning and programming, monitoring and evaluation of implementation, statistics on development financial flows, raising awareness.

Bulgaria is making a targeted effort to gradually increase its participation scope in international development cooperation. Development assistance provided is increasing annually from a total of 40.93 million USD in 2015 to 68.50 million USD in 2018. Most of the assistance is provided in the form of contributions to the UN and its specialized agencies, the EU and international financial institutions.



Within just a few years, Bulgaria has provided ODA for financing projects for the development of administrative capacity, quality education and socially significant infrastructure in the countries of the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Middle East and North Africa, Vietnam, Mongolia.

In 2014-2019, approximately 283 projects in priority geographical areas have been approved for funding. The individual projects implemented with the support of Bulgaria contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the partner countries.

Most of the funded projects are related to the improvement of socially significant infrastructure (reconstruction of community centers and libraries), to education and development of civil society, local authorities or government.

The project "Enhanced Access to Justice and the Rule of Law by Strengthening the Ombudsman Office Capacity in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region" has been implemented in Georgia. The administrative capacity of the Ombudsman regional office has been strengthened, and local people's awareness of human rights and the Ombudsman's powers have increased. The regional office has become a local hub for interaction between local authorities and civil society in the search for effective solutions for current social and infrastructural problems and improving the situation in the field of human rights.

The project "Building and Strengthening the Capacity of the National Food Agency of Georgia for Risk Assessment and Risk Management" has been implemented over the following two years with the participation of the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency. Technical assistance has been provided and a series of trainings have been conducted in Georgia and in Bulgaria on the preparation and implementation of procedures for risk assessment and risk management in health care and trade with animals and animal products and on creating a link between the public and private sectors.

In 2016, the NSI organized the first training for young statisticians from Azerbaijan within the framework of cooperation agreements between the statistical institutions of the two countries, which was funded by the NSI budget. In fulfillment of its policy for the development of cooperation with the countries of the Euro-

pean Neighbourhood Policy – Eastern Partnership, and the countries of the Balkan region, in the period 2017-2019, the NSI hosted three trainings aimed at young statisticians from six countries from the European Neighbourhood Policy – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and officials from the statistical institutions of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The trainings were implemented with funding from the MFA Development Cooperation Program. In the period 2016-2019, Agreements for cooperation in the field of statistics have been signed with the statistical institutions of Georgia, Belarus, Moldova and Serbia.

A Joint Action Plan for the period 2019-2021 has been signed with the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus. Joint Action Plans with the statistical services of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are to be developed or renewed. The NSI also pursues a policy of cooperation with the countries of the European

Neighbourhood Policy – Southern Neighbourhood, after Cooperation Agreements were signed with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Department of Statistics in 2011 and with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2019. In 2018, the NSI hosted a training in the field of business statistics and macroeconomic statistics under the MEDSTAT IV Program (2016 – 2019) for nine European Neighbourhood Policy – Southern Neighbourhood countries – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.

Bulgaria has joined the UNICEF “Education Cannot Wait” initiative and implements projects in Armenia and Georgia to share lessons learned in protecting the rights of children and childcare with other countries in the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region, which face similar challenges in protecting and promoting the rights of the child. Our financial contribution is also related to our country's commitment as a Member State of the EU to support the less developed countries, as well as to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



## 5. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

An important condition for the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals is the availability of sufficient financial resources and the involvement of all stakeholders. Bulgaria seeks to build an appropriate framework and a supporting environment to mobilize both resources and participants. Government expenditure has a key role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the Government's 2020 Budget approved at the end of 2019, priority is given to education, health care and persons with disabilities. The key objectives remain fiscal sustainability and the implementation of a consistent, transparent and predictable fiscal policy, which facilitates the improvement of the business environment, fosters investment and creates incentives for the development of the labor market to achieve economic growth and employment, while in the same time adhering to EU rules.

Private capital plays an important role. In 2013 a Law on Public-Private Partnership was adopted, which was updated in December 2017 in relation to the proposal for an entirely new Law on Concessions. The Law upholds private investment in infrastructure activities and in the realization of activities of public interest.

Public investment has increased by nearly 60% in 2018. Private investment is expected to continue growing at about 4% annually. The banking sector remains stable. Lending continues to grow at a high rate. At the end of 2018 loans to non-financial enterprises increased by 5.4% for a year.<sup>50</sup>

The country formally launched the process of joining the ERM II (the Euro waiting room) in July 2018. It is recognized that the simultaneous accession to the ERM II and to the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) would contribute to a sound macroeconomic policy and further strengthen the institutions.

The ERM II and SSM Accession Action Plan, as well as the efforts to deepen Bulgaria's cooperation with the OECD, are expected to encourage the adoption of further reforms to improve effectiveness of corporate governance, budgetary planning and public administration.

Various financial instruments are being introduced and they are directed to projects with potential to develop successfully. They provide investment support through loans, guarantees or equity. Thus, business and public institutions are supported to achieve the objectives of economic development. Financial instruments enable the return (recycling) of reusable funds. As a result, public support sources are becoming more diverse.

For example, the Fund of Funds manages 606.3 million EUR under four operational programmes: OP "Human Resources Development", OP "Innovation and Competitiveness", OP "Environment" and OP "Regions in Growth". The main activity of the Fund of Funds is the structuring and management of financial instruments co-financed by the ESIF during the 2014-2020 programming period. The Fund of Funds selects financial intermediaries – banks, funds, crediting and other financial institutions. The selected financial managers, in turn, mobilize additional private capital and significantly increase the public resource, which reaches the final recipients through them.

Resources are being channeled to address local challenges. Following the launch of the financial decentralization process in 2003, the activities related to organizing and providing public services financed through the budgets of municipalities are divided into state delegated and local activities.

Much of the main activities for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as health and education, social security and care, are carried out on the basis of state delegated budgets with clear standards. Specific tasks are carried out on a project basis using the EU Operational Programmes and beneficiaries' own contributions. Through these grants, municipalities can fund initiatives such as infrastructure, culture, social activity, etc.

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<sup>50</sup> Country Report Bulgaria 2019 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances. SWD(2019) 1001 final.



Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014-2020 is an important source of grants for municipalities. The main priorities of this Programme are improving job quality and access to employment, reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion, modernizing labor market institutions, social inclusion and health, as well as transnational cooperation.

Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020 aims at carrying out scientific research and technological development, creating an appropriate educational environment for active social inclusion, as well as providing education and lifelong learning.

One of the main programmes providing opportunities for financing the municipalities is Operational Programme “Environment” 2014-2020. The Programme finances measures under 5 priority axes: 1. Water; 2. Waste; 3. Natura 2000 and biodiversity; 4. Floods and landslides risks prevention and management; and 5. Improvement of ambient air quality.

One of the main programmes of which the municipalities are beneficiaries is Operational Programme “Regions in Growth” 2014-2020. The main priorities of the Programme are sustainable and integrated urban development, development of regional educational, health and social infrastructure, development of regional tourism and improvement of the regional road infrastructure. Municipalities also receive grants under the Programme “Rural Development” 2014-2020.

In April 2019, the Government approved an indicative list of programmes and responsible institutions for their development, as well as the policy objectives to be financed by the ESIF for the next programming period 2021-2027. The focus is likely to be put on investment fostering an innovative and competitive economy producing high value-added products.

The priority policies highlighted in the Review are science and innovation for competitiveness, education and training for a highly skilled labor force, improving the connectivity and digitization of the economy, promoting employment and social inclusion, reducing poverty and harnessing local potential.

The delayed negotiations on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for the 2021-2027 period could be a potential issue, because it will take some time between the absorption of funds under the old programming period (2014-2020) and the start of the absorption for the new period.

Public financing will be relied upon to a large extent to fulfill the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria. The capital expenditure for the next three years set out in the 2020-2022 Mid-term Budgetary Forecast will increase by 46% compared to the 2016-2018 period. A World Bank analysis shows that there has been a steady progress in managing such financing in the country over the last few years. Measures have been taken to strengthen internal control of public finances, transparency in the development and implementation of budgets, and streamlining of certain procedures (notably to speed up the implementation of EU-funded projects).

There are high expectations for the contribution of the private sector. According to the World Bank, the emergence of a new vibrant local private sector, successfully competing on international markets such as mechanical engineering and information and telecommunications services shows the potential of the Bulgarian economy. Encouraged and credited with many new and diverse financial instruments, the private sector will continue to participate in the implementation of the economic, environmental and social parameters of sustainable development in Bulgaria.



## 6. CHALLENGES AND FURTHER STEPS

The first Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the SDGs in Bulgaria gives an opportunity to analyze the challenges, measures taken and achieved results in areas concerning the whole society, which are present in a large number of national strategies, programs and plans that are consistent with a wide range of UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030, which will be adopted by the end of 2020, will be the main strategic document related to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the national level. Efforts are aimed at applying an integrated approach in strategic planning to achieve greater coherence with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Based on the findings of the Voluntary National Review, steps will be taken to more effectively implement the 2030 Agenda and broaden the involvement of all stakeholders in Bulgaria. In parallel, the existing thematic legislation, strategies and policies will be reviewed and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The work of all stakeholders will include the promotion of traditional and development of new horizontal cross-sectoral integration mechanisms, which will provide special added value for the SDGs' implementation process in Bulgaria. Given that broadly approved priorities for the development of the country exist and are detailed in the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030, it is extremely important to work toward achieving its main goals – accelerated economic development, demographic upswing and reduction of inequalities.

The development axes outlined in this Programme (Innovative and Intelligent Bulgaria, Green and Sustainable Bulgaria, Connected and Integrated Bulgaria, Responsive and Just Bulgaria, Spirited and Vital Bulgaria) coincide very much with the five areas identified in the 2030 Agenda as critically important for humanity and the planet – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. This means that without duplication of strategic documents, it is possible to successfully work to optimally link the SDGs to the national goals. There must be clear links between the Development axes and the priorities of the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030, on one hand, and the specific implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets, on the other. This also means that planning and reporting on the progress made on the new and adopted sectoral strategies by 2030 will be coordinated by the Development Council at the Council of Ministers. Sectoral strategies should follow the principle of clearly and directly identifying the links between the policies which they contain and the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets. It is necessary to set realistic and feasible target values, through which our country can make satisfactory progress on all dimensions of sustainable development and catch up with other European countries on key indicators.

The broad range of participants in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria over the past five years, which have proven their commitment to the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, will ensure a dialogue, as well as the implementation of a bottom-up approach and participatory governance.

It is this dialogue that will support and stimulate the institutionalization of planning, coordination, monitoring and control over the implementation of national programs and will ensure quality and timely reporting of our country's progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The creation of a high-level specialized coordination mechanism within the executive power, responsible for supervising the effective implementation of the SDGs in the country, as well as for coordination and communication between various stakeholders in their actions to implement the 2030 Agenda, will ensure wide participation and representation, including of the National Statistical Institute, the National Assembly, local authorities, vulnerable groups, business, academia, the non-governmental sector, young people and representatives of charitable organizations.

Already existing executive structures should be used in order to avoid administrative burden and duplication. It is appropriate to set up a Working group within the Coordination Committee for

Management, Monitoring, Control and Implementation Reporting of the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020, with designated contact points on sustainable development issues from each of the agencies that are members of the Committee. The Working group should meet periodically and perform the following functions:

- monitor the various aspects of the implementation of sustainable development at the local, national, regional and international level;
- monitor Bulgaria's progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, identifying gaps and areas where further efforts are needed to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- ensure coordinated dialogue aimed at the development of sustainable development policies and analyzing the synergies and tradeoffs between these policies;
- deepen Bulgaria's partnership with the EU Member States and with all other countries with which we are working jointly to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- maintain regular communication with all stakeholders.

The important role of both the Government and the stakeholders is to consistently raise public and government agencies awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This is only possible through effective coordination and communication. Recognizing the Goals and adopting their principles can serve to broaden the consensus in society and institutions on the short- and long-term priorities and measures that should pave the way for the country's sustainable development over the next 10 years, declared as the Decade of Action on the Sustainable Development Goals.

In order to promote the 2030 Agenda among as many stakeholders as possible, a communication strategy should be developed to increase the visibility of the Sustainable Development Goals through the effective use of the resources of government agencies.

The implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals also has a legislative dimension. A stronger commitment of the National Assembly is necessary.

The National Statistical Institute will continue to play an important role as a key institution for measuring progress toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including through disaggregated data, in order to objectively, comprehensively and thoroughly reflect the indicators for the widest possible range of social groups, so that no one is left behind. According to its stated mission, it strives to provide impartial, objective, timely and accurate information on the status and trends of economic, social, demographic and environmental development. The NSI should adapt the national sustainable development indicator framework to the global and European sets of indicators on SDGs implementation. This commitment includes regular updates of the national indicator framework and the development of indicators of particular importance in the context of Bulgarian policy.

Bulgaria should also commit more efforts to the external implementation of the SDGs. This includes:

- a gradual increase in the funds allocated to ODA;
- a more active participation in the formulation of EU policies related to the implementation of the SDGs and incorporation of these policies into national strategies and programs;
- a more active participation at the international and regional level in UN and other multilateral initiatives aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda;
- a more active participation in initiatives related to the promotion of human rights and the values of multilateralism.

Bulgaria needs to develop and maintain administrative capacity to develop policies for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The country's next actions for the fulfillment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals will take into account the achievements and will aim at developing measures to address the identified challenges, in an equal social dialogue with all stakeholders.

Policies will continue to put the person and his rights first, with a strong focus on the most vulnerable groups, guided by the principle of "leaving no one behind".



## 7. ANNEXES

### Statistical Monitoring

Eurostat, together with the statistical institutions of the Member States, selected a list of indicators, with a source of data the statistical survey included in the European Statistical Program and based on the principles and criteria in "EU SDG indicator set criteria and process". The list was adopted by the EC on April 25, 2017.

The NSI is actively involved in the activities of defining the European list of indicators and provides national data for the European Indicator System "Sustainable Development Goals 2030" available at the Eurostat website.

According to their competences, data is also provided by the bodies of the national statistical system in the field of environmental statistics, agriculture, health care, etc.

In order to optimize the processes of data exchange and accessibility and publicity of information for regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of national and international strategies, the NSI has developed the information system Monitorstat, in which information can be found on key global indicators and indicators from the European list of indicators for all SDGs. Monitorstat is implemented with the financial support of Operational Programme "Good Governance" 2014-2020, co-financed by the EU through the European Social Fund, and is available in Bulgarian and English on the NSI website.

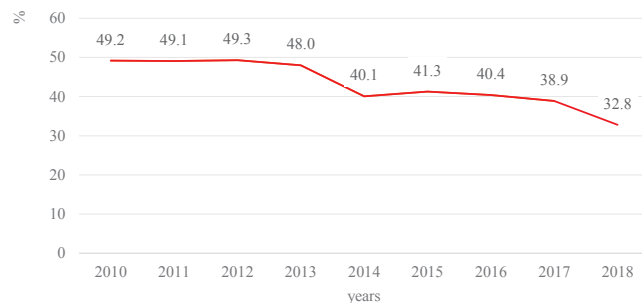
The implementation of the system aims at improving access to up-to-date statistics, raising awareness of government institutions, business and society about the implementation of national and European strategies and programs and the opportunity for active participation of the civil society and media in decision-making processes by providing a reliable and accessible source of information.

Data on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and Indicators for Bulgaria and the EU are available at: [https://monitorstat.nsi.bg/en/Strategy?GroupId=b2f70ffc-d61f-4caf-99b6-2cb39c3dbf19&ObjectTypeId=e7692c5dde\\_e6692c5d5e5-9ca8-aeb-3da2511ba](https://monitorstat.nsi.bg/en/Strategy?GroupId=b2f70ffc-d61f-4caf-99b6-2cb39c3dbf19&ObjectTypeId=e7692c5dde_e6692c5d5e5-9ca8-aeb-3da2511ba)



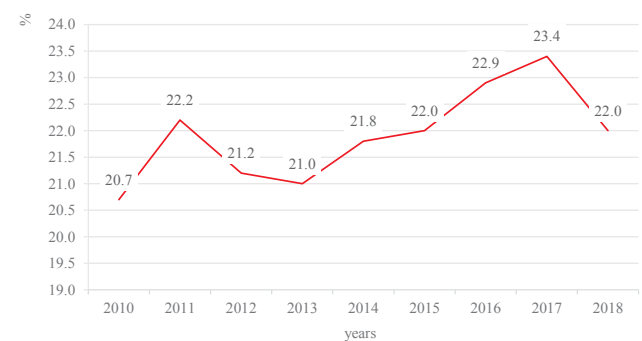
## END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

### 01\_10. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (% of the population)



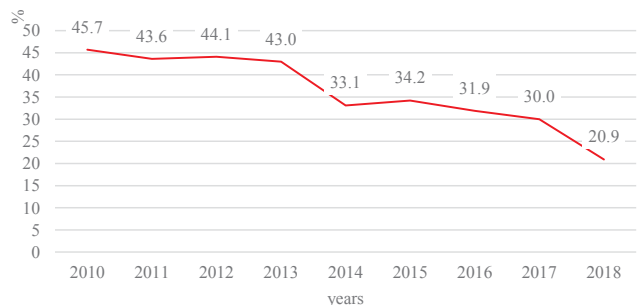
Relative share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion as a % of total population. The indicator corresponds to the persons who are: at risk of poverty after social transfers; severely materially deprived or living in households with unemployed persons and with very low work intensity. Persons are counted only once even if they are affected by more than one of these phenomena

### 01\_20. People at risk of income poverty after social transfers (% of the population)



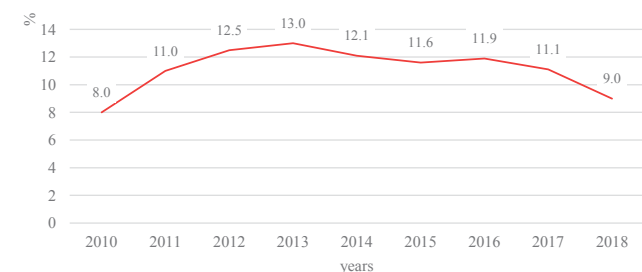
Relative share of the population with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) below the risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income

### 01\_30. Severely materially deprived people (% of the population)



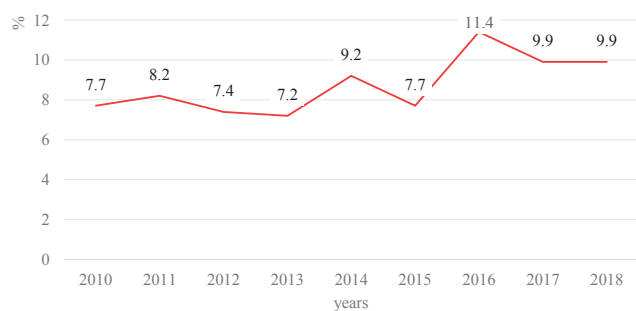
The common indicators for assessing poverty include subjective indicators related to material deprivation. For the estimation of material deprivation of households, nine issues related to the consumption of specific goods and services are used. The indicator refers to the relative share of the population living with material deprivation, with at least four out of the nine material deprivation indicators

### 01\_40. People living in households with very low work intensity (as a % of the population under the age of 60)



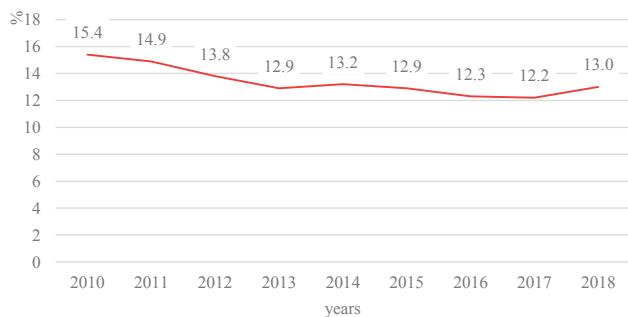
Share of people living in households with very low work intensity are those aged 0-59 living in households where on average the adults (aged 18-59, excluding students) work 20% or less of their total work potential during the reference period (the past year)

### 01\_41. In work at-risk-of-poverty rate (% of employees aged 18 years and over)



Relative share of persons who are employed and have an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers)

### 01\_60. Population living in poor housing conditions (% of the population)

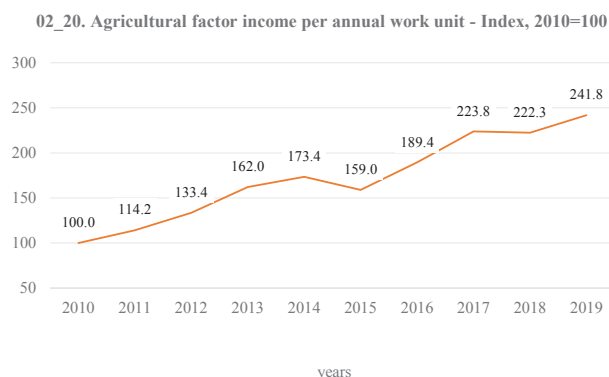


Relative share of the population living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation or rot in window frames of floor



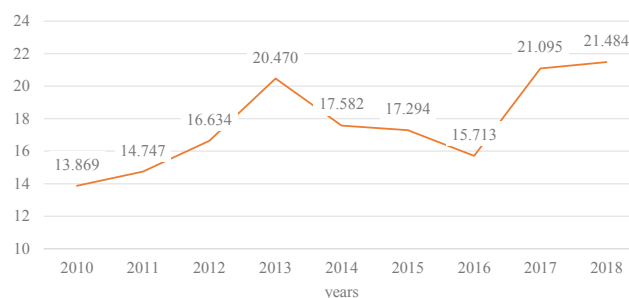
## END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION, AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

### 02\_20. Agricultural factor income per annual work unit - Index, 2010=100



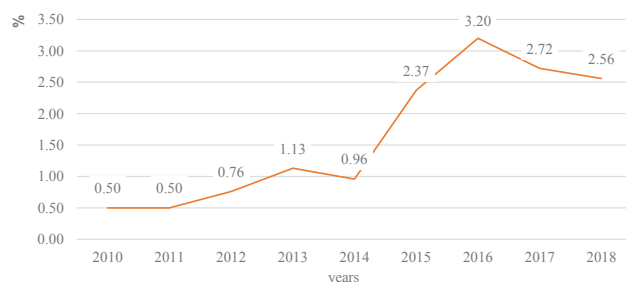
The indicator is a partial labour productivity measure of the agricultural sector. Agricultural factor income measures the income generated by farming, which is used to remunerate borrowed or rented factors of production (capital, wages and land rents) as well as own production factors (own labour, capital and land). Factor income corresponds to the deflated (real) net value added at factor cost of agriculture. The implicit price index of GDP is used as deflator

### 02\_30. Government support to agricultural research and development - Million euro



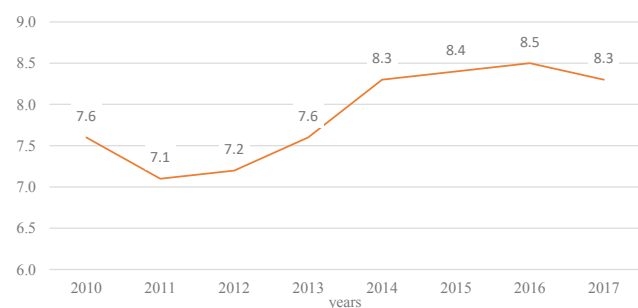
The indicator refers to Government Budget expenditures to research and development (R&D) activities, and measures the state support for research and development (R&D) in agriculture. The data are developed using the guidelines set out in the proposed standard practice for research and experimental development and the Frascati Manual of the OECD for the year 2002

### 02\_40. Area under organic farming - % of total utilised agricultural area



The indicator measures the share of total utilised agricultural area occupied by organic farming (existing organically-farmed areas and areas in process of conversion)

### 02\_60. Ammonia emissions from agriculture - (kg per hectare), source: EEA

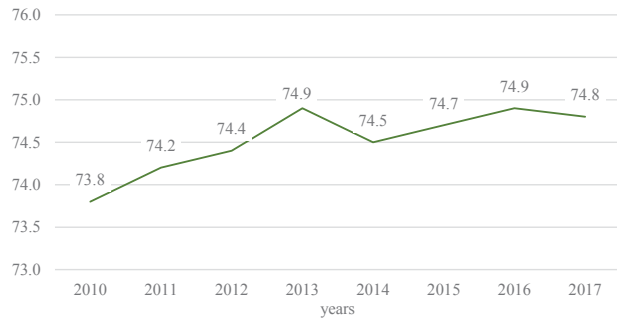


The indicator measures the ammonia emissions as a result of agricultural production



## ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

### 03\_10. Life expectancy at birth (in years)



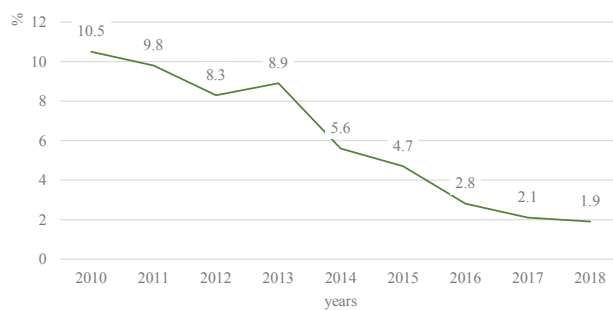
Life expectancy at birth indicates the average life expectancy of the new-born under the hypothesis for a constant intensity of the age specific mortality observed for the respective year

### 03\_20. Share of people at the age of 16 and over with good or very good perceived health by sex



Relative share of the population aged 16 and over who assessed their health as good or very good

### 03\_60. Self-reported unmet need for medical examination and care (% of the population at the age of 16 and over)



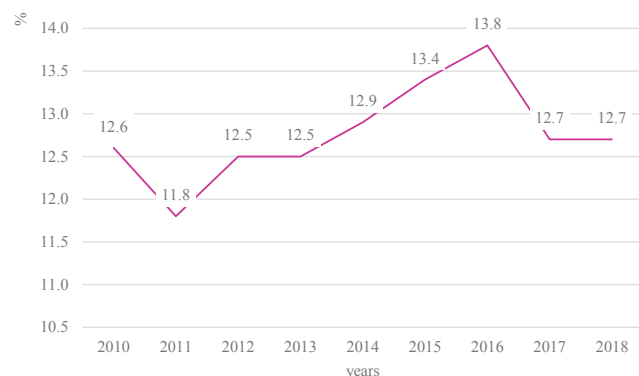
Self-reported unmet needs concern a person's own assessment of whether he or she needed medical examination or treatment (dental care excluded), but did not have it or did not seek it. The data stem from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC)





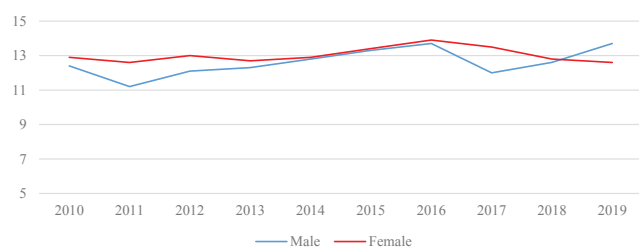
## INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

### 04\_10. Early leavers from education and training (% persons aged 18-24 years)

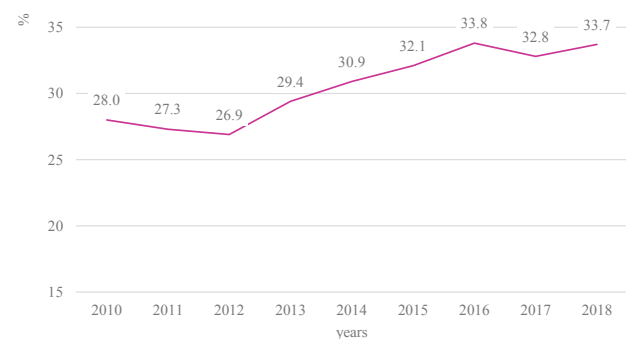


A relative share of persons aged 18-24 years with at most lower secondary education and who were not involved in education and training during the four weeks preceding the survey, (% of the population of the same age). The lower secondary education refers to level 2 according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) - 2011, in use from 2014 onwards, and to level 2 according to the ISCED 1997, used until 2013. According to the ISCED 2011, vocational training after completed primary education, leading to the acquisition of I degree professional qualification, is also concerned. From 2007 to 2013, persons who completed this educational programme were not included in the calculation of the indicator for Bulgaria

### 04\_10. Early leavers from education and training (% persons aged 18-24 years) by sex

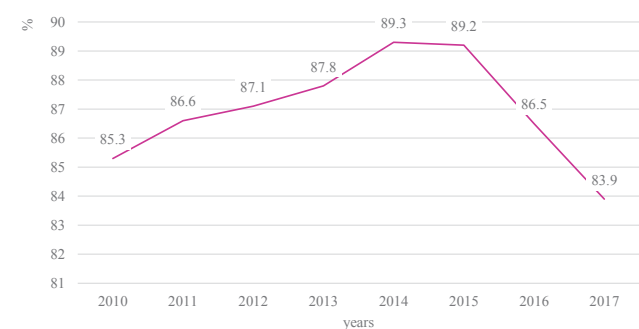


### 04\_20. Tertiary educational attainment - % of the population aged 0-34 years with completed tertiary education



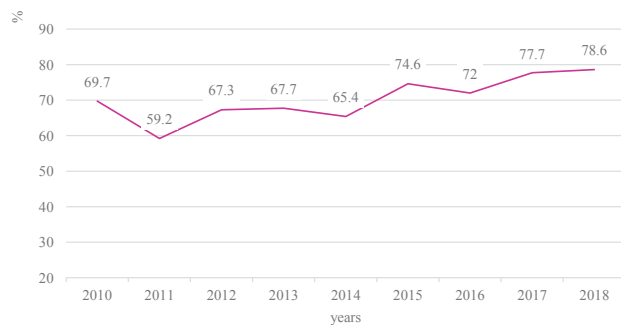
A relative share of persons aged 30-34 years who have completed tertiary education from the population of the same age. Higher education corresponds to level 5-6 according to the ISCED 1997 and to level 5-8 according to the ISCED 2011

### 04\_30. Participation in early childhood education by sex



The indicator measures the share of children aged between four years and the initial age of compulsory primary education who participated in early childhood education

#### 04\_50. Employment rates of recent graduates by sex aged 20-34 with at least secondary education

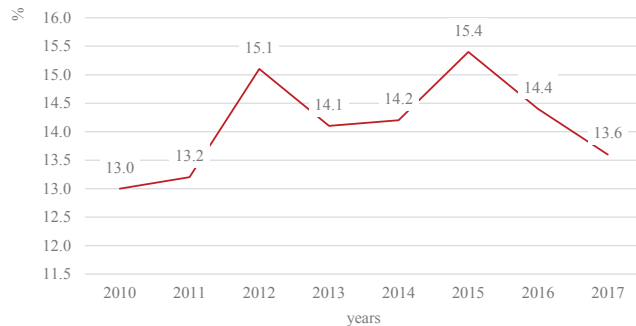


The indicator measures the employment rates of persons aged 20 to 34, which meet the following conditions: first: Be employed in accordance with the ILO definition, second: Having completed at least secondary education (ISCED 3) as the highest educational Level, third: who have not received education or training during the four weeks preceding the study and fourth: having completed their highest level of educational attainment 1, 2 or 3 years prior to the study. The indicator is calculated on the basis of the EU labour Force Survey data (LFS)



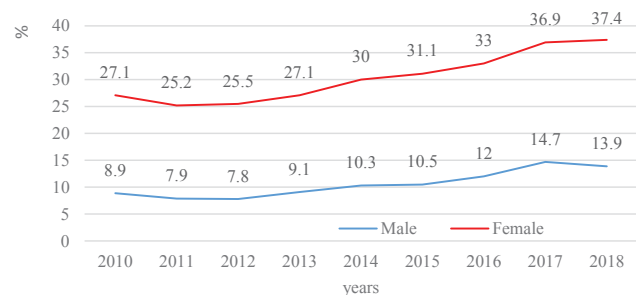
## ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

### 05\_20. Gender pay gap in unadjusted form (% of average gross hourly earnings of male employees)



The indicator measures the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. The sample consists of employees with employment and work relations in enterprises with 10 or more employees from all economic activities, except for "agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing"

### 05\_40. Inactive population aged 20-64 years due to caring responsibilities by sex

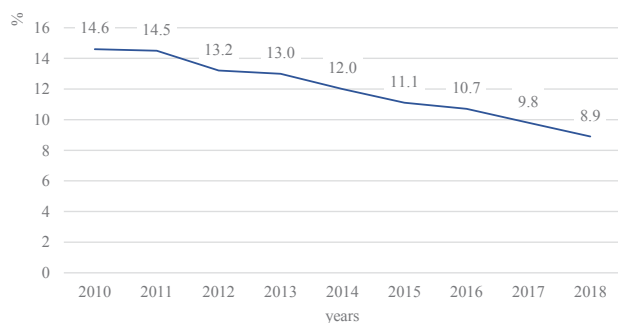


The indicator measures the share of persons aged 20 - 64 years who are not actively seeking work, due to the caring responsibilities, so they are neither employed nor unemployed and considered to be outside the labour force. "Inactivity due to caring responsibilities" refers to the reasons 'looking after children or incapacitated adults' and 'other family or personal responsibilities'



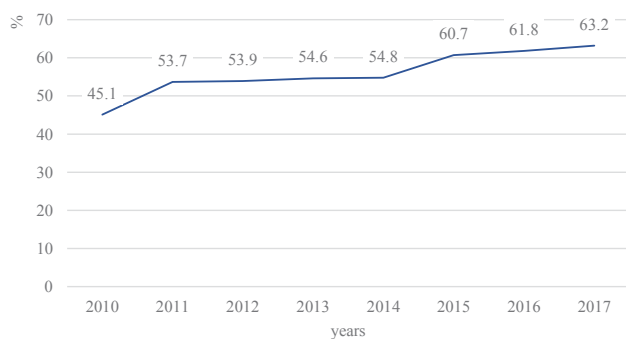
## ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

### 06\_10. Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household (% of the population)



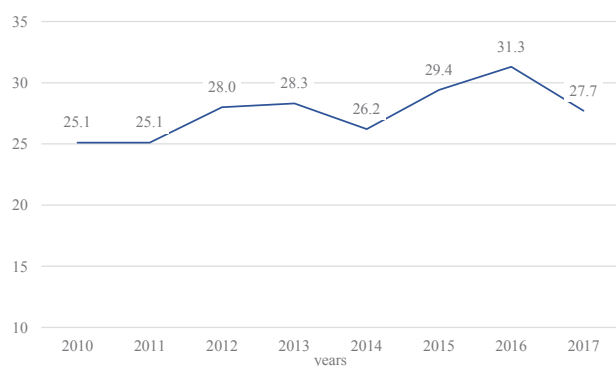
Relative share of the population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household

### 06\_20. Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment



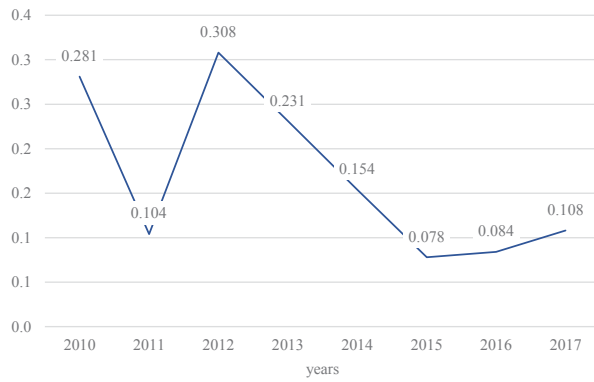
The indicator measures the percentage of population connected to wastewater treatment systems with at least secondary treatment. Thereby, wastewater from urban sources or elsewhere is treated by a process generally involving biological treatment with a secondary settlement or other process, resulting in a removal of organic material that reduces the biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) by at least 70% and the chemical oxygen demand (COD) by at least 75%

### 06\_40. Nitrate in groundwater (mg NO3 per litre), source: EEA



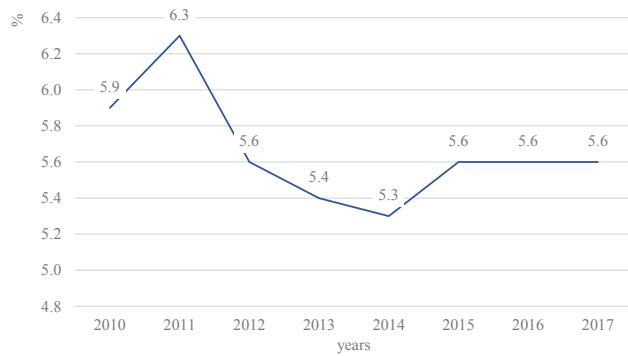
The indicator refers to concentrations of nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>) in groundwater, measured as milligrams per litre (mg NO<sub>3</sub>/L). Data are taken from well samples and aggregated to annual average values. Only complete series after inter/extrapolation are presented

### 06\_50. Phosphate in rivers (mg PO4 per litre), source: EEA



The indicator refers to concentration of phosphate (PO4) in the dissolved phase of water samples, measured as milligrams per litre (mg PO4/L). Data are taken from river stations and aggregated to annual average values. At high levels, phosphate can cause water quality problems, such as eutrophication, by triggering the growth of macrophytes and algae. Only complete series after inter/extrapolation are presented

### 06\_60. Water exploitation index by type of water source

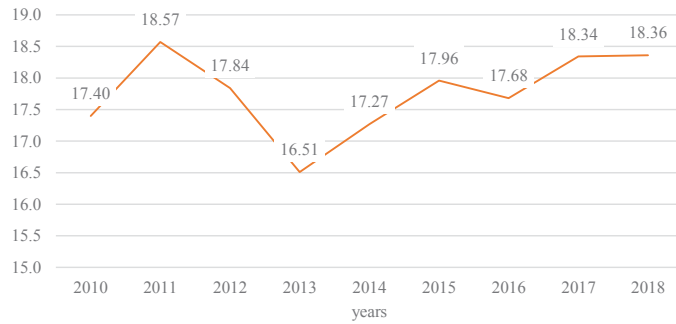


The indicator measures the annual total fresh water abstraction in a country as a percentage of its long-term annual average available water (LTAA) from renewable fresh water resources (groundwater and surface water). Total fresh water abstraction includes water removed from any fresh water source, either permanently or temporarily. Mine water and drainage water as well as water abstractions from precipitation are included, whereas water used for hydroelectricity generation (in situ use) is excluded



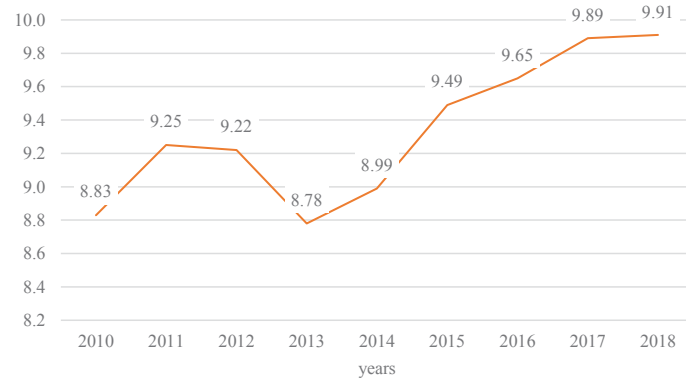
## ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

### 07\_10. Primary energy consumption- million tonnes of oil equivalent



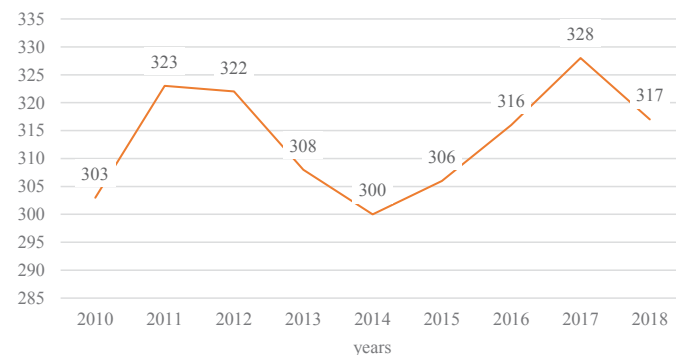
Primary energy consumption means the gross inland consumption excluding all non-energy use of energy carriers

### 07\_11. Final energy consumption - million tonnes of oil equivalent



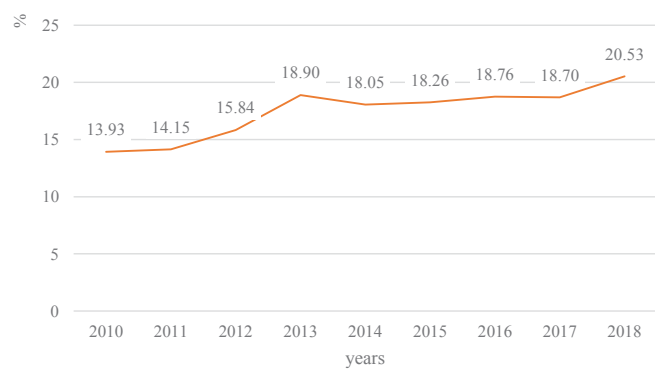
"Final energy consumption" only covers the energy consumed by end users, such as industry, transport, households, services and agriculture; it excludes energy consumption of the energy sector itself and losses occurring during transformation and distribution of energy

### 07\_20. Final energy consumption in households per capita - kg of oil equivalent



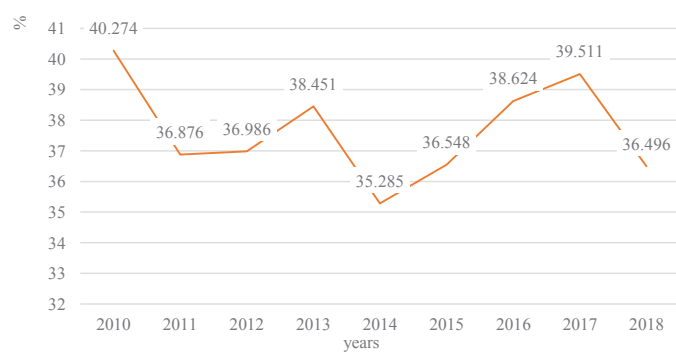
The indicator measures how much electricity and heat every citizen consumes at home excluding energy used for transportation. Since the indicator refers to final energy consumption, only energy used by end consumers is considered. The related consumption of the energy sector itself is excluded

### 07\_40. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption by sector

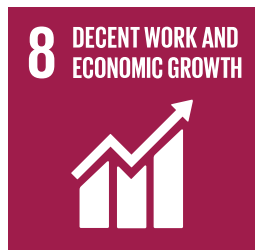


The indicator measures the share of renewable energy consumption in gross final energy consumption according to the Renewable Energy Directive

### 07\_50. Energy dependency - % of import in gross inland energy consumption

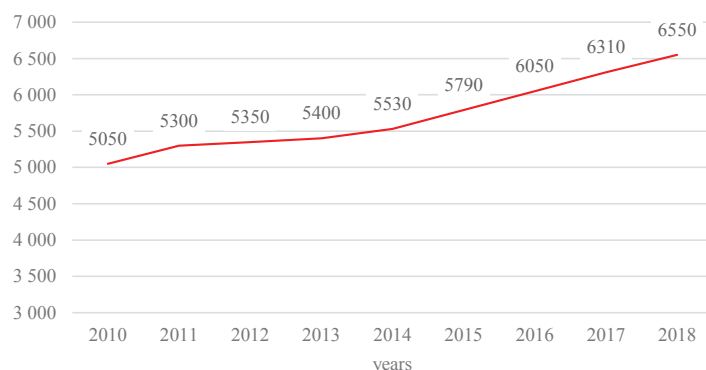


The indicator measures the country dependency of import in order to meet its energy needs. The net import of all energy products is assessed



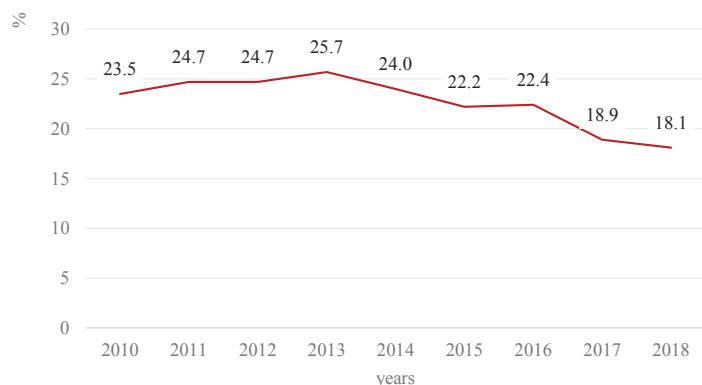
## PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

### 08\_10. Real GDP euro per capita - chain linked volumes (2010)



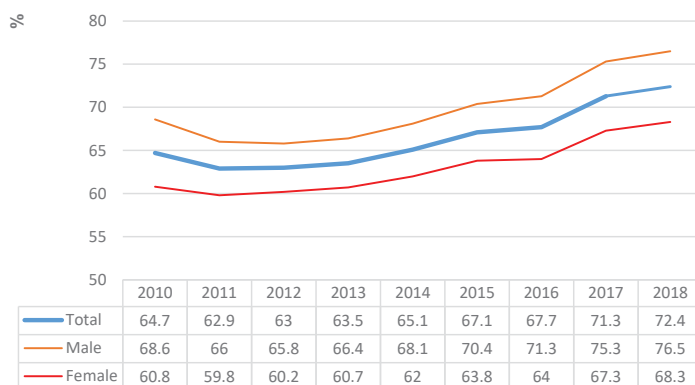
The indicator is calculated as the ratio of real GDP to the average population of a specific year

### 08\_20. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex - % of population aged 15 to 29



The indicator measures the share of the population aged 15 to 29 who is not employed and not involved in education or training

### 08\_30. Employment rate by sex - % of population aged 20 to 64



The indicator is taken from the EU 2020 strategy, where it is used to monitor progress towards the EU's target of "increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20 to 64 to at least 75 %" by 2020



**08\_40. Long-term unemployment rate by sex - % of economically active population aged 15 to 74**

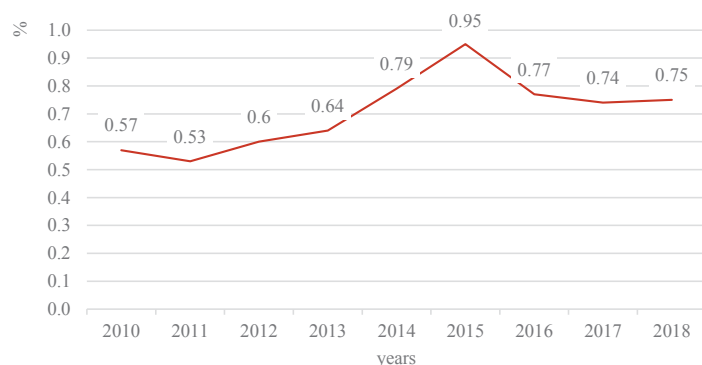


The long-term unemployment rate measures the share of the economically active population aged 15 to 74 who has been unemployed for 12 months or more. The economically active population comprises employed and unemployed persons



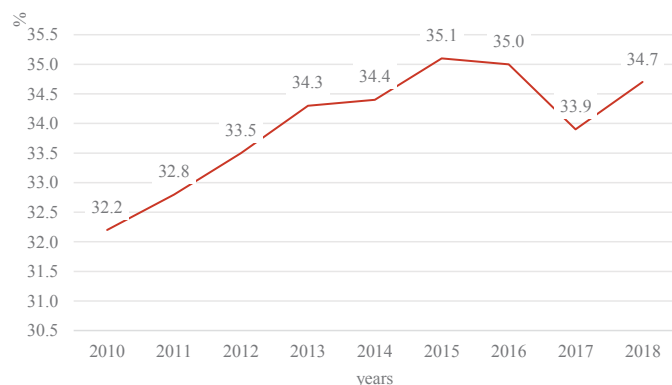
## BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION, AND FOSTER INNOVATION

### 09\_10. Gross domestic expenditure on R&D by sector - % of GDP



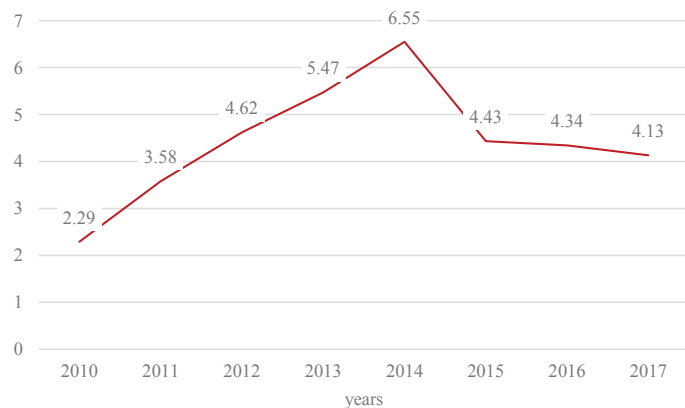
Gross domestic expenditure on R&D as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) regardless of the source of funding

### 09\_20. Employment in high- and medium-high technology manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services - % of total employment



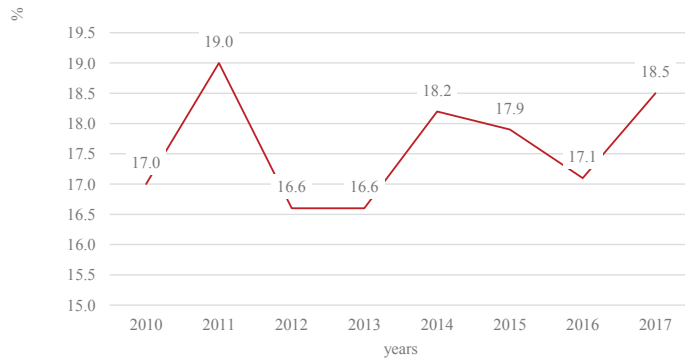
Employment in high- and medium-high technology manufacturing sectors and in knowledge-intensive service sectors as a share of total employment. The definition of high- and medium-high technology manufacturing sectors and of knowledge-intensive services is based on a selection of relevant items of NACE Rev. 2 on 2-digit level and is oriented on the ratio of highly qualified working in these areas

### 09\_40. Patent applications to the European Patent Office (number per million inhabitants), source: EPO



Number of the requests for protection of an invention directed either directly to the European Patent Office (EPO) or filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty and designating the EPO (Euro-PCT), per one million of inhabitants

### 09\_60. Share of rail in total freight transport - tonne-kilometres (tkm)

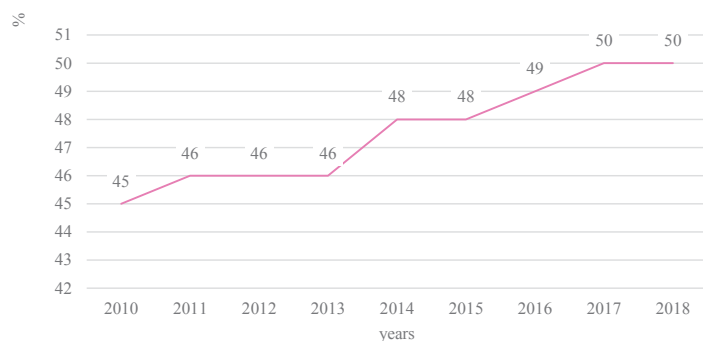


Share of rail in total freight transport expressed in tonne-kilometres (tkm)



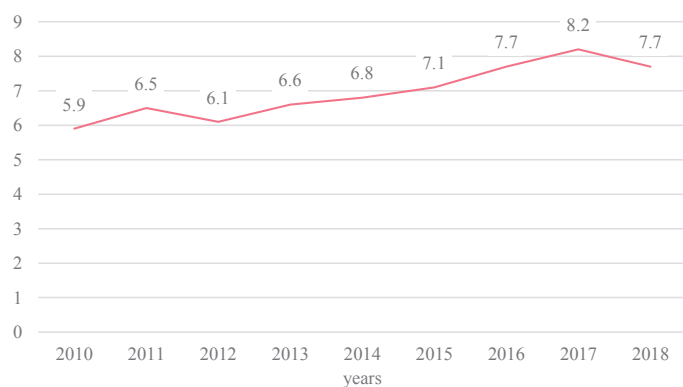
## REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

### 10\_10. Purchasing power adjusted GDP per capita - EU = 100



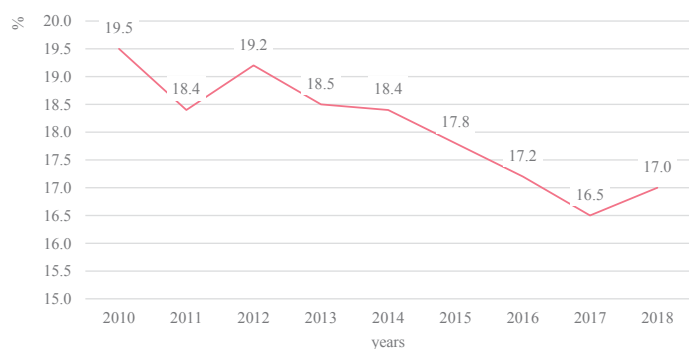
Purchasing power adjusted GDP per capita - EU = 100

### 10\_41. Income distribution - Quintile share ratio



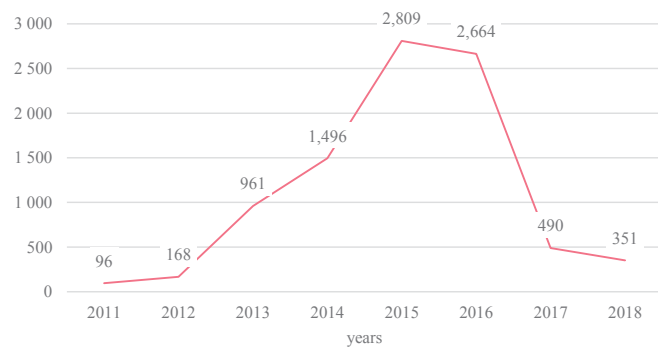
The indicator is a measure of the inequality of income distribution. Ratio of total income received by the 20% of the population with the highest income (the top quintile) to that received by the 20% of the population with the lowest income (the bottom quintile)

### 10\_50. Income share of the bottom 40% of the population



The income share received by the bottom 40% of the population - % of the total disposable household income

## 10\_60. Number of first-time asylum applicants per million inhabitants

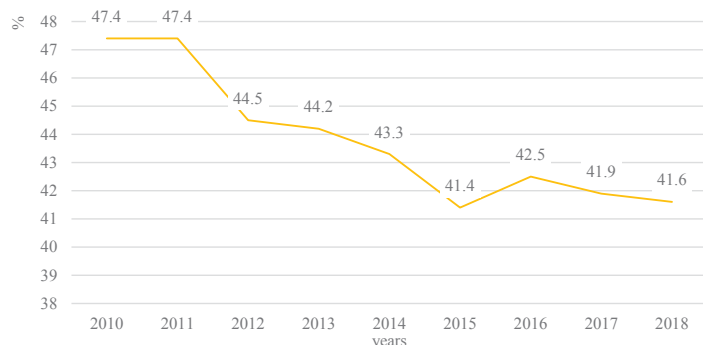


Number of first-time asylum applicants per million inhabitants. A first-time applicant for international protection is a person who lodged an application for asylum for the first time in a given Member State. Source data are supplied to Eurostat by the national Ministries of Interior and related official agencies



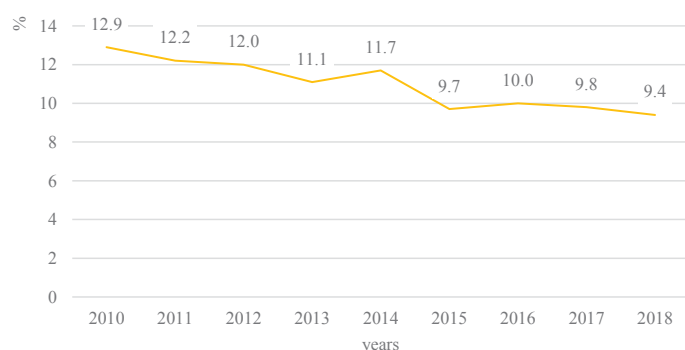
## MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE

### 11\_10. Overcrowding rate by poverty status - % of population



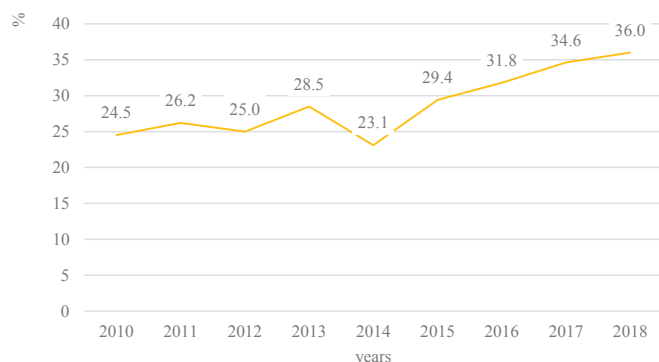
Share of people living in overcrowded conditions in the country. A person is considered to be living in an overcrowded household if the house does not have at least one room for the entire household as well as a room for a couple, for each single person above 18, for a pair of teenagers (12 to 17 years of age) of the same sex, for each teenager of different sex and for a pair of children (under 12 years of age)

### 11\_20. Population living in households considering that they suffer from noise



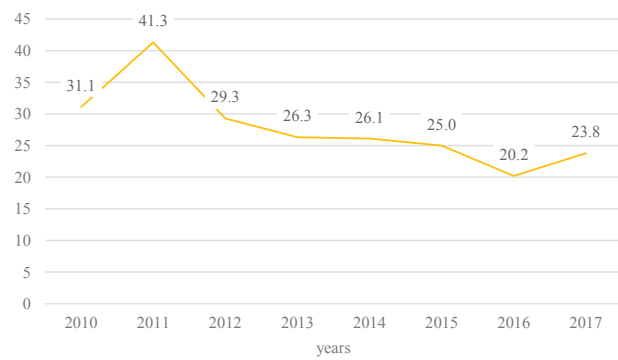
The indicator measures the proportion of the population who declare that they are affected either by noise from neighbours or from the street. Because the assessment of noise pollution is subjective, it should be noted that the indicator accounts for both the levels of noise pollution as well as people's standards of what level they consider to be acceptable

### 11\_60. Recycling rate of municipal waste



The indicator measures the tonnage recycled from municipal waste divided by the total municipal waste arising. Recycling includes material recycling, composting and anaerobic digestion. For areas not covered by a municipal waste collection scheme, the amount of waste generated is estimated

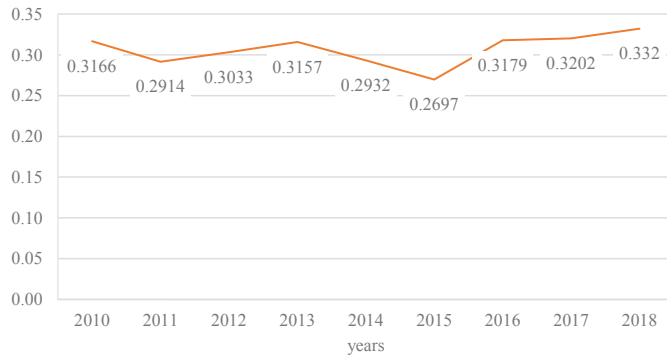
### 11\_50. Exposure to air pollution by particulate matter fine particulates <2,5 µm (source EEA)





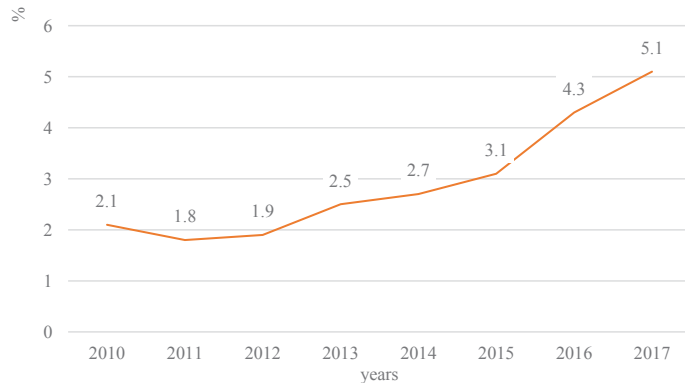
## ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS

### 12\_20. Resource productivity and domestic material consumption (DMC) - euro per kilogram, chain linked volumes (2010)



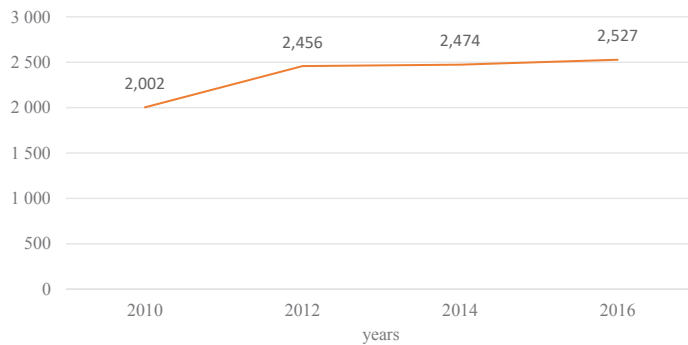
Resource productivity is gross domestic product (GDP) divided by domestic material consumption (DMC). DMC measures the total amount of materials directly used by an economy. It is defined as the annual quantity of raw materials extracted from the domestic territory of the focal economy, plus all physical imports minus all physical exports

### 12\_41. Circular material use rate



The circular material use rate (CMR) measures the share of material recovered and fed back into the economy in overall material use. The CMU is defined as the ratio of the circular use of material to the overall material use

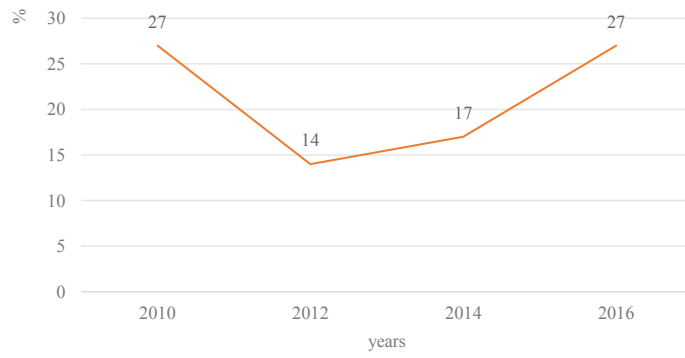
### 12\_50. Generation of waste excluding major mineral wastes by hazardousness - kg per capita



The indicator measures all waste generated in a country in kg per capita



### 12\_60. Recycling rate of waste excluding major mineral wastes - % of total waste treated

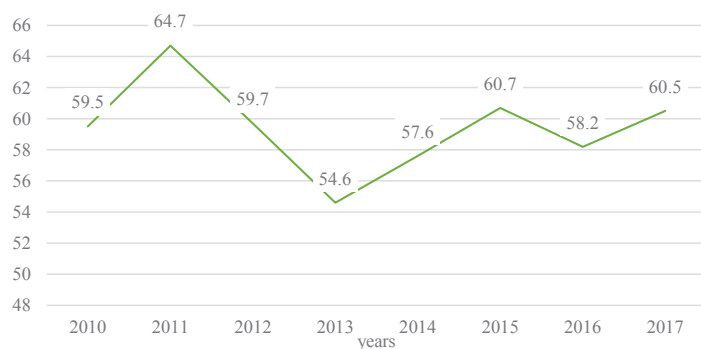


The data reflect the treatment of national waste and exclude waste that is imported from other EU countries; on EU total level the waste imports from non-EU countries are excluded



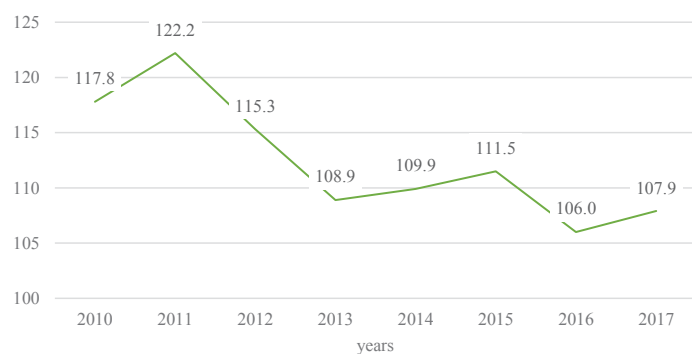
## TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

### 13\_10. Greenhouse gas emissions CO2 equivalent, (source: EEA) base year 1990 = 100



Greenhouse gas emissions in CO2 equivalent base year 1990 = 100

### 13\_20. Greenhouse gas emissions intensity of energy consumption, source: EEA and Eurostat

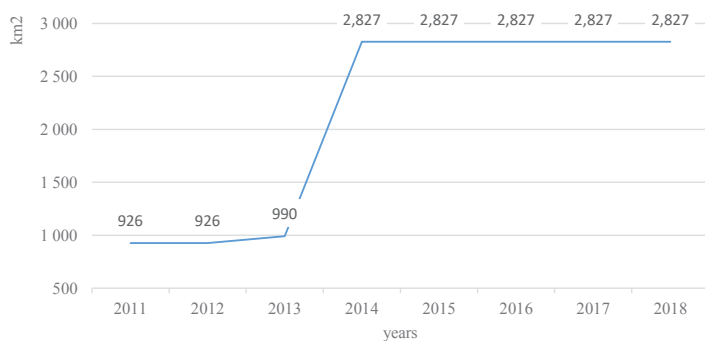


The indicator is calculated as the ratio between energy-related GHG emissions and gross inland consumption of energy. It expresses how many tonnes CO2 equivalents of energy-related GHGs are being emitted in a certain economy per unit of energy that is being consumed. The data on energy emissions are being sourced from the GHG emissions reported to the UNFCC



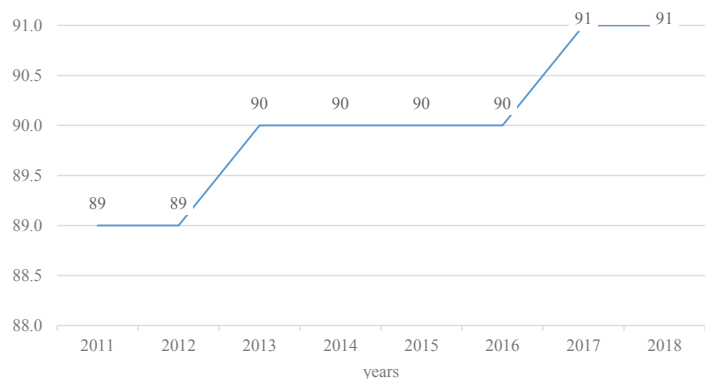
## CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### 14\_10. Surface of marine sites designated under NATURA 2000 (source: DG ENV)



The indicator measures the surface of marine sites designated under Natura 2000. Source EEA

### 14\_40. Bathing sites with excellent water quality by locality - number (source EEA)

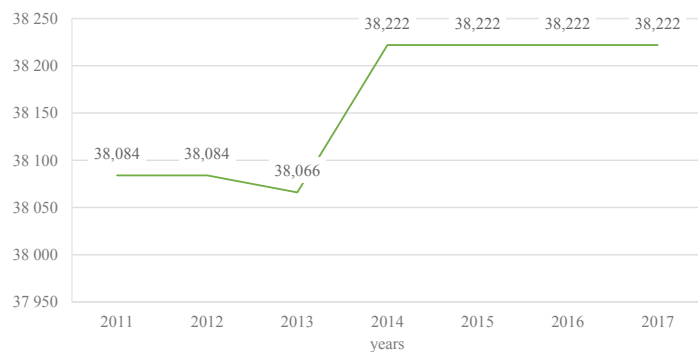


The indicator assessment is based on microbiological parameters (intestinal enterococci and Escherichia coli). The new Bathing Water Directive requires Member States to identify and assess the quality of all inland and marine bathing waters and to classify these waters as "poor", "sufficient", "good" or "excellent"



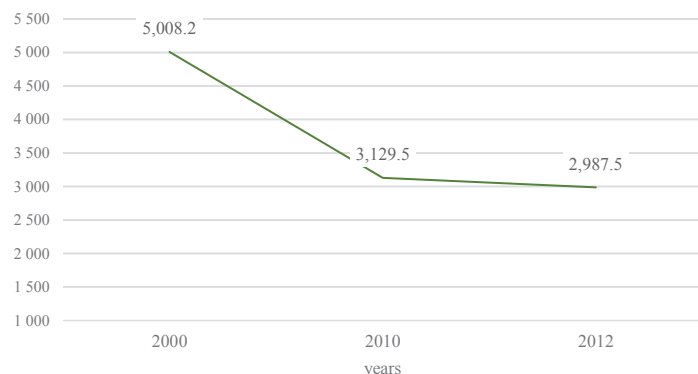
## PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS

### 15\_20. Surface of terrestrial sites designated under NATURA 2000 (km<sup>2</sup>), source: DG ENV, EEA



The indicator measures the surface of terrestrial sites designated under Natura 2000. The Natura 2000 network comprises both marine and terrestrial protected areas designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives with the goal to maintain or restore a favourable conservation status for habitat types and species of EU interest

### 15\_50. Estimated soil erosion by water - area affected by severe erosion rate (km<sup>2</sup>), source: EC

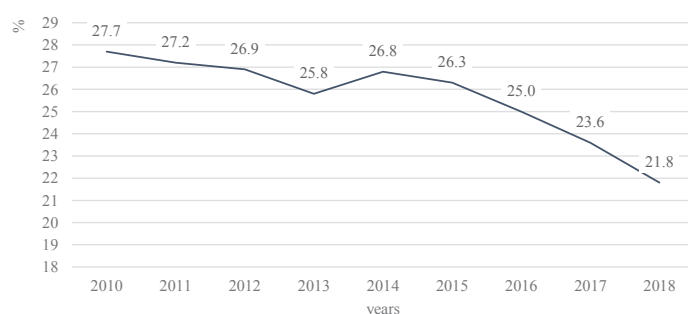


The indicator estimates the risk of soil loss by water erosion processes (rain splash, sheetwash and rills) and gives an indication of the area affected by a certain rate of soil erosion (severe soil loss,  $E > 10$  tonnes/hectare/year). This area is expressed in km<sup>2</sup>



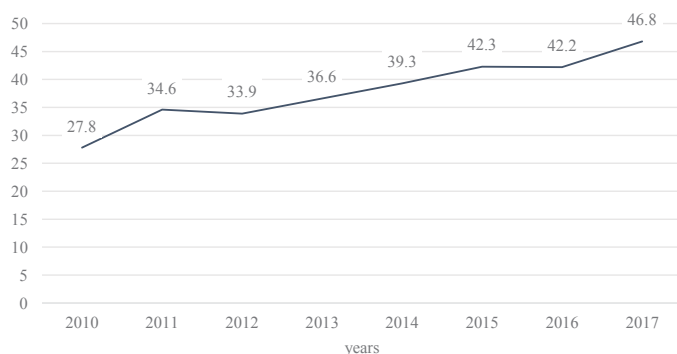
## PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS

### 16\_20. Population reporting occurrence of crime, violence or vandalism in their area by poverty status - % of population



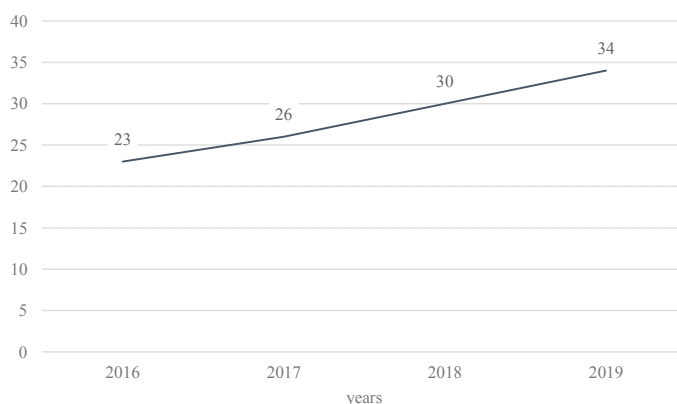
Share of the population who reported that they face the problem of crime, violence or vandalism in their local area. This describes the situation where the respondent feels crime, violence or vandalism in the area to be a problem for the household, although this perception is not necessarily based on personal experience

### 16\_30. General government total expenditure on law courts - euro per capita



The indicator measures the general government total expenditure on law courts according to the classification of the functions of government (COFOG). This includes expenditure on administration, operation or support of civil and criminal law courts and the judicial system, including enforcement of fines and legal settlements imposed by the courts and operation of parole and probation systems; legal representation and advice on behalf of government or on behalf of others provided by government in cash or in services. Law courts include administrative tribunals, ombudsmen and the like, and exclude prison administrations

### 16\_40. Perceived independence of the justice system - very good or fairly good (as % of the population), source: DG COMM

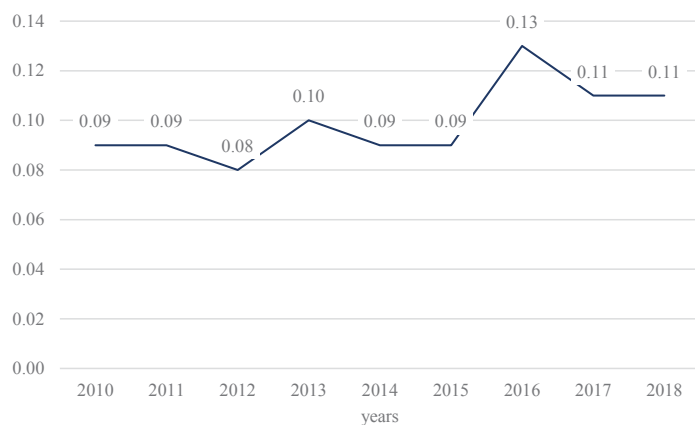


Respondents' perceptions about the independence of the judiciary across EU Member States, looking specifically at the perceived independence of the courts and judges in a country. Data on the perceived independence of the justice system stem from annual Flash Eurobarometer surveys starting in 2016 on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers



## STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**17\_10. Official development assistance as share of gross national income - % of gross national income GNI, source: OECD**



Official development assistance (ODA) consists of grants or loans that are undertaken by the official sector with the objective of promoting economic development and welfare in recipient countries. Disbursements record the actual international transfer of financial resources, or of goods or services valued at the cost of the donor. ODA is here presented as a share of Gross National Income (GNI). GNI at market prices equals Gross Domestic Product (GDP) minus primary income payable by resident units to non-resident units, plus primary income receivable by resident units from the rest of the world. The list of countries and territories eligible to receive ODA is determined by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## ***2020 Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Bulgaria: A Chapter on COVID-19***<sup>51</sup>

Bulgaria has taken adequate and timely measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and address its consequences, so that no one is left behind in the fight against the novel coronavirus.

The first 2 cases of COVID-19 were registered on March 8, 2020 and as early as March 13, 2020 and 23 registered cases, the National Assembly introduced a one-month state of emergency on all of the country's territory, while respecting human rights and in accordance with the Constitution. The state of emergency was later extended with an additional month. After its expiry on May 13, 2020, the Government declared an emergency epidemic situation, until June 14, 2020, which is now extended to 30 June 2020. The emergency epidemic situation has lighter measures in place than the previous state of emergency.

The National Operative Headquarters (NOH) for combating the spread of COVID-19 and the National Center of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases (NCIPD) have been instrumental in proposing measures and consulting the executive authorities on recent developments during the pandemic. After receiving the first information about spread of COVID-19 in EU Member States, the Security Council at the Council of Ministers met on February 24, 2020, to discuss the arising situation, expected developments and necessary urgent actions. As a result, the NOH was created as a consultative and coordinating structure by the Council of Ministers on February 26, 2020 before any cases were registered. The NOH includes the Chief State Health Inspector and the director of NCIPD, the Minister of Economy, representatives from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NOH will continue to function until December 31, 2020.

On March 23, 2020, a Medical Council was created with the task of preparing recommendations in the cases of COVID-19 patients and organ complications. The Medical Council concluded its work with the adoption of an extensive report with strategies for managing the pandemic at the end of March 2020, presented to the NOH. The report was distributed to medical professionals.

A National Logistical Coordination Center operates at the Ministry of Interior. It is tasked with organizing the reception and distribution of equipment, materials and gear necessary for combating COVID-19.

Thanks to the sensible behaviour of the Bulgarian citizens and the timely actions of the government and the parliament, the impact of the disease has been mitigated. The COVID-19 cases have not exceeded the capacity of the health system.

**Anti-epidemic measures introduced in regard with the state of emergency and the emergency epidemic situation are applicable to the entire population and they aim to control the epidemic spread of coronavirus infection, protect the health of the population and minimize the hardships of the crisis.**

1. **Measures to cope with the pandemic of COVID-19 were introduced by the Law** on Measures and Actions during the State of Emergency, and to overcome the consequences - <https://coronavirus.bg/bg/148>.
2. The Law on Health was amended in regard to the declared emergency epidemic situation has been made, **effective from May 14, 2020** - <https://coronavirus.bg/bg/346>.
3. **In order to provide information to all citizens, a single web portal dedicated to COVID-19 with free and unrestricted access has been created** (<https://coronavirus.bg/>). It contains up-to-date epidemiological data, comprehensive information on measures taken, related documents, information for citizens, questions and answers on topics, statistics and important phone links. The portal can provide real-time information in a social network chat.

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<sup>51</sup> As of June 10, 2020

4. **By an Order of the Minister of Health, the bed stock was reorganized, and by another Order of the Minister of Health, the medical establishments for hospital care for active treatment and their respective structures to treat and monitor the patients with COVID-19 were defined** (<https://www.mh.government.bg/bg/informaciya-zagrazhdani/informaciya-otnosno-noviya-koronavirus-2019-ncov/>).
5. **All orders of the Minister of Health regarding the measures related to COVID-19 are available on the following website:** <https://www.mh.government.bg/bg/informaciya-zagrazhdani/informaciya-otnosno-noviya-koronavirus-2019-ncov/>.

### ***Anti-epidemic measures***

The measures in this section have contributed to the implementation of SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being, and SDG 4 – Quality Education.

Testing continues at a rate of 1,000+ tests daily. PCR tests are available in sufficient capacity. Tests are conducted also for confirmation of unclear results and tracking of COVID-19 antibodies.

The state of emergency saw the most restrictive measures. Pharmacies, food stores, banks, hair salons, ironware, appliance stores and clothes stores have been open for the general public throughout the pandemic, except for those located in shopping malls. They could conduct business in compliance with strict hygienic and sanitary measures. Access to parks was prohibited, with fines for violators. From April 12 to May 13, 2020, people had to wear protective masks everywhere. For a month and a half, police control was located at the entrances and exits of district capitals. Social distancing measures were in place, which prohibited assemblies and imposed minimal distance between people.

Restrictive measures have been gradually lifted. Open-air markets, parks, outdoor and indoor spaces of cafes and restaurants, hotels, sports halls, stores, shopping malls and kindergartens have reopened. The organization of conferences and seminars was permitted again in at the end of May, provided that strict hygienic measures are observed. The use of indoor spaces is subject to strict hygienic and distancing requirements. Masks are currently only required in indoor public spaces and public transportation.

Classrooms are open only for exams. Schools and universities have successfully managed to migrate to online education.

Tourist travels within and outside the country were prohibited during almost the entire duration of the state of emergency. Border control has been strict and entry of all foreign citizens was prohibited, irrespective of their country of origin (diplomats, medical personnel and long-term residents being exempt). The Bulgarian authorities have been regularly updating the normative framework, in accordance with timely data from around the world. All persons entering the country were subject to 14-day quarantine, which is currently in place for persons entering from eight EU Member States and all persons entering from third countries, except for arrivals from the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Third-country nationals are still prohibited from entering Bulgaria, with the exception of nationals of the United Kingdom, Schengen countries (including the Republic of San Marino, the Principality of Andorra, the Principality of Monaco, the Holy See), the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

Medical professionals and humanitarian personnel are exempt from the prohibition and the quarantine. Bulgaria supports the Global Humanitarian Response Plan of the UN Secretary-General. Bulgarian authorities are putting efforts to ensure the necessary support for the initiative through facilitating the global supply chains in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has purchased or commissioned large numbers of important medical items, such as tests, ventilators and protective masks, and medications.

Planned surgeries and diagnostics are already allowed.

The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is in the early stages of developing a vaccine against COVID-19.

### ***Social measures***

The measures in this section have contributed to the implementation of SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).



The social measures have a broad scope to ensure that no one is left behind. They target various vulnerable groups. Several measures are in place for financial support of families with children. On July 1, 2020, all pensions will be raised by 6.7%.

Assisted reproduction actions were allowed again at the end of April.

### **Employment retention:**

The state will cover, for the period of the state of emergency but no longer than three months, 60% of the sum of the social security income plus social contributions payable by the employers for workers and employees of undertakings which were obliged to suspend entirely or partially their activities due to the declared state of emergency and containment measures enforced by the State authorities, while employers will pay the remaining 40%.

Regarding social and solidarity economy entities, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) has taken measures to promote the goods and services offered by the entities of the social and solidarity economy in order to preserve the employment of persons belonging to vulnerable groups. Employees in the social and solidarity economy are among the most vulnerable groups on the labour market and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 may have great impact on them.

- Financial support for up to 5,000 EUR for micro-enterprises and businesses of people with disabilities. The scheme is implemented under the procedure "Supporting Micro and Small Enterprises in Overcoming the Economic Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic", funded by the Operational Programme "Innovation and Competitiveness". The total amount of financial support for providing operational capital for enterprises and maintaining job stability is up to BGN 173 million.

### **Access to paid leave during the state of emergency:**

The employer is obliged to allow the use of paid annual leave or unpaid leave at the request of: a pregnant employee, as well as an employee in an advanced stage of in vitro treatment; mother or adoptive mother of a child under the age of 12 or a disabled child, regardless of its age; an employee who is a single father or adoptive father of a child under the age of 12 or a disabled child, regardless of its age; an employee who is under 18 years of age; an employee with a permanent disability of 50 and more than 50 percent; an employee with the right to protection upon dismissal (employed or suffering from tuberculosis, diabetes, ischemic disease, cancer, mental and occupational disease).

### **Supporting vulnerable groups and people in need**

In the framework of the operation "Patronage care for older people and people with disabilities", an additional amount of 22.5 million EUR is allocated with a special target to help older people and people with disabilities and chronic diseases. Municipal mobile care units deliver to the homes of the vulnerable people service such as food and medicine deliveries, support for bills payments, access to urgent administrative services, etc.

Distribution of food packages for over 58,000 people in need - more than 58,000 people receive packages of the 16 most essential foods. On May 18, 2020, the distribution of 450 t of food packages started for over 26,000 of them (16,900 in a difficult situation, identified by the municipal administrations, and 9,230 are users of social services).

The programme for providing warm lunch for people in need has been extended until the end of June 2020. Currently, 214 contracts worth approximately 3 million BGN have been concluded. Warm lunch can be received by older people, who live alone, people with disabilities and people with income below the poverty line.

### **The following measures in the social services sphere were introduced:**

Extension of the period of validity of the issued documents for placement in social services for residential care which expire after March 1, 2020, until December 31, 2020 (this will provide opportunity for people to benefit from these services at their request, after the removal of the restrictions);

- The fees for using the social services Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration, Center for Temporary Accommodation, Mother and Baby Unit and Day-Care Center, including for weekly care, in case they are delegated by the state, shall not be paid by persons for the period from March 13, 2020 to August 31, 2020. These services are especially needed for homeless people, people who have an urgent need for rehabilitation or psychological counseling, people in a crisis situation, etc.

### **The following measures in the family benefits for children sphere were introduced:**

- Extension until 30 June 2020 for granting monthly family benefits for a child until graduation from high school, but not after the age of 20, as well as the monthly benefits for a child who is ineligible for a survivor pension from a deceased parent, which was valid within the period February 1 – May 31 2020.
- Monthly family benefits for a child until graduation from high school, but not after the age of 20, as well as the monthly benefits for a child who is ineligible for a survivor pension from a deceased parent, are provided irrespective of whether the children/students attend compulsory preparatory groups or school.

### **The following measures addressing the most vulnerable groups in social assistance and people with disabilities were introduced:**

- All social payments, including one-time assistance, are guaranteed for persons with disabilities. Social workers will continue to make assessment of the needs of persons with disabilities via phone or e-mail.
- The determined deadlines for an individual assessment of the needs of people with disabilities, issued on the basis of for-life expert medical decisions certifying disability, were extended by one month as from the lifting of the state of emergency.
- The determined deadlines for an individual assessment of the needs of people with disabilities, issued within the time limit specified in the expert medical decisions certifying disability, were extended by two months as from the lifting of the state of emergency.
- All administrative proceedings concerning submitted declarations for an individual assessment of the needs of people with disabilities, including for inclusion in the personal assistance mechanism, continued also during the state of emergency. The needed documents for individual needs assessment were submitted by post or e-mail.

At present, parents of children under 14 years who have been on unpaid leave for at least 20 days due to their inability to work from home during the state of emergency are entitled to receive lump sum assistance. Single parents, as well as families in the case where one or both parents have lost their jobs but are not entitled to unemployment benefits, have the same rights. There is an income criterion for receiving the assistance. It is compulsory for their children to have attended kindergarten or school before March 13, 2020, and for parents to have been part of the social security system for the last six months.

After lifting the state of emergency, the provision of the lump sum for support to parents with children up to 14 years, who are on unpaid leave as well as to people who have lost their job and income due to the COVID-19 crisis, will continue.

### ***Economic measures***

The measures in this section have contributed to the implementation of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

As in many other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has had repercussions on economic activity, taking its toll on employees, employers and enterprises. Unemployment has gone up from 4.3% a year ago to 6.2% in April 2020, according to Eurostat. Youth unemployment is standing at 20.8%.

The sound public finance and the budget surplus have “opened up” some fiscal space for crisis management.

The Bulgarian government has introduced a variety of economic measures to mitigate the negative impact, with a special focus on SMEs and the sectors that have been hit the hardest.

Grants are provided to micro, small and medium enterprises under the Operational Programme “Innovations and Competitiveness” of the EU funds.

Preferential crediting measures are mainly aimed at providing liquidity for SMEs.

Four funds with a total budget of over 75 million EUR will provide start-ups in innovation and digitalization with growth capital through equity and quasi-equity investment. Large enterprises are also eligible for financing under that measure.

The “Financing for Urban Development” measure can direct funding to public-private partnerships and companies that have been struck by the crisis.

At the end of May 2020, the National Assembly approved the reduction of VAT to 9% for books, hotels, restaurants and catering and baby food and diapers, down from 20%.

Self-employed persons and agricultural producers are also eligible for financial support.

On June 2, 2020, the Scientific Research Fund announced a competition for financing fundamental scientific research of social challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The total budget for the competition amounts to around 920,000 EUR.

The Bulgarian National Bank approved a document for private moratorium on payments of credits related to COVID-19 on April 10, 2020. Banks in Bulgaria now offer debtors affected by the pandemic a postponement of contractual obligations. The maximum period of postponement is six months and this term should expire not later than December 31, 2020.

### ***Information and assistance***

The measures in this section have contributed to the implementation of SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing, and SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

The National Operative Headquarters have conducted daily briefings since their establishment. As of June 4, 2020 those briefings are discontinued but the information is made available daily on the online portal.

All line ministries regularly update their websites with relevant information. The Ministry of Health has published both simplified and extended guidance on how to avoid and prevent the disease. The recommendations are based on the advice of the WHO and the international community. Bulgarian policies for managing the pandemic are grounded in science. They are the result of a careful research of best practices in other countries.

A mobile application allows users to report their health condition daily. The information facilitates the preparation of a more accurate statistical model, which is necessary for a swift return to normalcy. The National Statistical Institute has launched a COVID-19 rubric on its official website (<https://www.nsi.bg/en>), with timely statistical information about the impact of the pandemic on the socio-economic life in the country.

The Government has published a list with the most important phone numbers on the COVID-19 web portal. Multiple ministries and state agencies have dedicated lines for the provision of current information about COVID-19. The Situation Center at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assists with guidance about restrictive measures in other countries.

Volunteers can sign up for hospitals, government agencies or the Bulgarian Red Cross. The Ministry of Health has launched donation campaigns for medical gear and equipment. The Social Protection Fund is gathering donations for food packages to people and families in need. The Bulgarian Red Cross and several municipalities have also started campaigns.

### ***Education and science***

The measures in this section have contributed to the implementation of SDG 4 – Quality Education, and SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities.

The conditions for tele-education have been ensured, without disrupting the integrity of the educational process. The Ministry of Education and Science launched a National Electronic Library of Teachers.

Some of the normative adjustments target children from vulnerable groups. The Ministry of Education and Science has proposed additional education for pupils who did not take part in tele-education via ICT because of the anti-epidemic measures. The proposed legislation should also allow for additional extracurricular modules for children whose native language is not Bulgarian or do not speak Bulgarian.

Those measures should be implemented until the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, including during the summer vacation. Additional modules of pedagogical interaction should be carried out individually or in groups of up to 10 children or pupils, including children from vulnerable groups, under strict observance of anti-epidemic measures.

The proposed act should prevent educational difficulties, which are often causes of children dropping out of school, including pupils from vulnerable groups.

Rectors of higher education institutions provided opportunities for tele-education in digital platforms and ensured conditions for quality education, safe conduct of semester exams, practices, state exams and theses defence, while respecting the principles of equality and objectivity.

Tele-access to scientific publications and free use of science journals on COVID-19 have been provided to the scientific community. Profiles of science organizations have been developed in relation to the execution of projects for prophylaxis, diagnostics and treatment of COVID-19. There are conditions for swift information exchange between Institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and medical universities in Bulgaria.

### ***International cooperation***

The measures in this section have contributed to the implementation of SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals.

Bulgaria supports intensifying global cooperation to tackle the pandemic, with the UN and the WHO at the forefront.

Increasing efforts and resources for scientific research is crucial in order to develop vaccines and medicines, and to ensure wide access to tests, protective equipment and other medical supplies.

We realize that the COVID-19 pandemic has put a strain on the implementation of the SDGs. We remain committed to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development as our roadmap to recovery and building back better.

The Bulgarian Prime Minister participated in the online pledging conference organized by the President of the European Commission on May 4th to raise funds to speed up the work on the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 and vaccine research. We announced a contribution of EUR 100,000 for the creation and global deployment of a vaccine against COVID-19.

Bulgaria is actively involved in the coordinated response of the European Union and EU Member States to the external challenges of the crisis and the programme Team Europe, aiming to support priority sectors such as health and mitigation of socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We consider the EU-wide initiative as a timely and essential response to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes in the partner countries.

In support of the common EU-wide approach, Bulgaria underwent a process of reassessing and redirecting available financial resources to respond to and assist the most vulnerable in the best possible way taking into account UN Secretary General's appeal and the UN-coordinated *COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan*.

We are contributing a total of 340,000 EUR for the implementation of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement emergency appeal and the IOM's COVID-19 Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan by contributing to the budgets of several international organizations, earmarking them according to Bulgaria's geographical priorities.

Additionally, we have provided contributions to partner countries from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership through bilateral projects, as well as in kind humanitarian aid. In this respect, we have developed concrete initiatives based on providing protective medical equipment produced in Bulgaria.