



Bulgaria – ANED country profile

The information contained in this summary was compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) in April 2009.

Academic networks and resources

There is currently no academic research network on disability studies in Bulgaria.

The [Centre for Independent Living](#) (CIL) is a disability NGO focusing on policy monitoring, advocacy and empowerment of disabled people. It is the key research setting for systematic analysis of disability policies from a social inclusion perspective

The [Bulgarian Helsinki Committee](#) is engaged in monitoring mental health institutions.

Policy and enforcement bodies

The key national bodies with responsibility for disability law and policy implementation include:

The [Ministry of Labour and Social Policy](#) is the key policy making body with legislative initiative and law enforcement responsibilities.

The [Social Welfare Agency](#) (or Agency for Social Assistance) is the executive agency of the MLSP with a large portion of its budget spent on disability allowances

The [Agency for Disabled People](#) is the special government agency responsible for assistive technologies and technical aids, as well as for funding disability-related projects.

The [Antidiscrimination Commission](#) (with a panel on discrimination on the grounds of disability)

The [National Ombudsman](#) (with an Anti-discrimination Committee and Disabilities Subgroup)

Organisations of disabled people

The national organisation representing disabled people at the European level (European Disability Forum) is:

National Council of Organisations of and for Disabled People – Bulgaria is comprised of seven nationally represented NGOs of and for disabled people (email ncpdb@abv.bg)

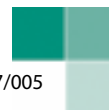
Other significant national organisations of disabled people include:

[Union of Disabled People in Bulgaria](#)

[Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria](#)

[Union of the Blind in Bulgaria](#)

[Bulgarian Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities](#) (BAPID)



[Centre for Psychological Research](#) (lead organisation in a network of organisations of and for disabled people)

National law and strategy

Without any further commitments for ratification Bulgaria has signed the [United Nations Convention](#) on the 27th September 2007. More than a year later – on the 18th December 2008) Bulgaria signed also the [Optional Protocol](#).

Important national laws, policies and strategies concerning disabled people include:

[Law on Integration of Disabled People](#) (with enforcement regulations) (BG version) enacted in 2005

[Social Assistance Act](#) (1998, last amendments – 1 July 2008) (with enforcement regulations) (BG version)

[Antidiscrimination Act](#) (2004, last amendments – 19 December 2008) (BG version)

Policy Documents (in Bulgarian)

National Strategy on Equal Opportunities for Disabled People (2008-2015)

Joint Inclusion Memorandum (30 May 2006)

National Social Inclusion Plan

(all available at: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/docs/index.htm>)

Facts and figures

Data on population indicate that:

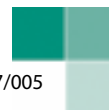
The last national census of 2001 indicates that 263,143 Bulgarians had a medically identified disability (3.3% of the population).

The National Social Security Institute (NSSI) data for the same year (2001) showed that disability pensions had been paid to twice as many disabled pensioners. Data provided by NSSI – which could be considered the most reliable source of information – upon request under the Access to Information Act showed that in 2007 payments of disability pensions have been made to over 800,000 beneficiaries..

Data on employment indicate that:

The [2007 Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy](#) states that unemployment among disabled people dropped by 31.5% compared to the previous year and accounts for 5.0% of the total unemployment rate against 5.9% in 2006.

The National Action Plan on Employment for 2008 reports that the average number of unemployed disabled people for the first nine months of 2007 was 14,928 and for the whole year – 14,414, which is 9.4% less than in 2003. Most of the reported numbers include people with health problems who do not encounter environmental barriers.



The majority of employed disabled people are accommodated in special enterprises or through subsidised employment programmes, see [MLSP Annual Report](#) . Financial data and reports have not been published yet.

Data on education indicate that:

Since 2002 the education of disabled students in mainstream classes has been regulated by law. This was barely enforced until the school year 2006/07, when 28 Resource Centres providing support to students with special needs on the basis of individuals plans were opened (Ministry of Education and Science, 2007).

The number of disabled students in mainstream educational settings has grown, from 717 students supported by 129 resource teachers in the 2004/05 school year, to over 4.000 students and 900 resource teachers in 2006/07 (Ministry of Education and Science). The process of inclusion through schooling is still in progress. Official data for the school year 2007/08 is expected in April – May 2009.

Data on accessibility indicate that:

Growing attention is paid to physical access though official data on progress is not available. National and municipal public institutions , schools, kindergarten and cultural institutions have numerous opportunities to apply for funding (under Operational Programmes for EU Structural Funds and national programmes) to make buildings accessible.

Progress on accessible public transport is very slow. Only a few intra-city buses in Sofia, Varna, Bourgas and several other places, and even fewer trains are usable by people with mobility problems. No research has been carried out on this.

The [2008 MLSP Report](#) admits that the target of having 25 “important public facilities” adjusted for accessibility requirements has not been reached – 16 public facilities are reported as made accessible

Bulgaria was not included in the [MeAC accessibility survey](#) (2007), which was carried out before EU membership

Data on poverty and incomes indicate that:

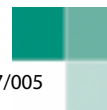
Most disabled people’s income is made up of disability pensions and disability allowances, which places them in the low-income strata of society.

A poverty line was introduced in Bulgaria in 2008 by an Ordinance of the Council of Ministers dated 31 October 2008, which for 2009 will be worth BGN 194 (€90) a month. Comparison of various disadvantaged groups against it is still to be done.

Data on attitudes indicate that:

The medical model of disability is still dominant in Bulgaria and public attitudes to disabled people are still shaped by it.

The overwhelming majority of disabled people perceive themselves as “victims of fate”, “society outcasts” and “deprived of life chances”. ([Sofia CIL, 2001](#)) There is a need for targeted research on these issues in order to properly shape awareness raising efforts in the future.



The [2007 Special Eurobarometer on Discrimination in Europe](#) showed that 55% of people knew someone who was disabled (compared to 55% EU average) and 84% acknowledged that being disabled tended to be disadvantage in society (EU average 79%).

Disability discrimination was viewed as widespread by 45% (EU average 53%); 34% thought that disability discrimination was more widespread than five years ago. 38% thought that not enough was being done to combat discrimination in general in Bulgaria (EU average 51%).

78% thought that more disabled people should be in the workplace (EU average 77%) and 87% thought specific measures on equal opportunities were needed in this field.

Data on public spending indicate that:

The 2008 Annual Financial Report of the [MLSP](#) shows that a total of BGN 775 mln. was allocated for “administered transfers, compensations and household allowances”, of which the Integration of Disabled People Programme accounts for nearly BGN188 mln. compared to BGN 131 mln. in 2007. BGN 74 mln. was spent on “welfare allowances under differentiated approach”, which includes means testing for eligibility.

Disabled people make up a significant group of welfare payments’ beneficiaries – in 2006 they accounted for 63% of the eligible supported group.

The Equal Opportunities Programme (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, not dated) does not show any expenditure except for institutional costs. Detailed reports on public spending are expected later in 2009.

Social protection

Key features of the national system include (including adapted items from the [MISSOC](#) database December 2008):

Disability benefits

Disability pensions and related top-ups constitute the main disability benefits package. Disability status brings 25% of the social disability pension on top of any retirement payments due to time spent working and age.

As of 31st March 2008 the National Social Security Institute (NSSI) reports 850,959 disability pensions paid. (NSSI, Statistical Bulletin, Pensions as of 31st March 2008, Sofia). In 2007 a slight increase in disability-pension beneficiaries was reported. The number of assistance allowance beneficiaries in 2007 was 118 292.

For some people assessed by a medical panel as having more than 90% impairment, there is an assistance allowance worth BGN 57.17 (Euro 29.00) per month. The number of assistance allowance beneficiaries in 2007 was 118,292 out of the overall population entitled to disability pensions.

Detailed information about disability pensions and social security allowances is released on monthly, quarterly and annual basis by the NSSI.

Disability status is an eligibility criterion for: monthly integration allowances for transport, medication and special diets, communication, access to information and accessible information and for training. (Law on Integration of Disabled People). The rate of the different benefits is determined with reference to the monthly subsistence cost established by the Government on year-by-year basis. The size of the individual benefit depends on the type and severity of the impairment.

People with mobility problems and visual impairments are entitled also to assistance services (of only 10 hours per year) paid at a rate of BGN 5 (Euro 2.5) per hour. The 2007 reports of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies reveal spending for this purpose at the level of BGN 183.634 (Euro 91.817) in benefit of 9 665 people. The MLSP report "[Accomplishment of 2008 Goals](#)" reveals that disability integration allowances have been paid to 469 255 individuals, of which 247 000 have also received "targeted allowance for sign language and mobility assistance"

Eligible disabled people are entitled to 14 types of medical appliances and technical aids for which the Government grants a fixed amount of 'targeted cash benefit'. The rates of these cash benefits are so low that modern technical solutions – wheelchairs, computer technologies, etc. – are inaccessible for disabled people.

Rehabilitation and re-training

There are no special rehabilitation programmes funded by the government, though most new community services – day-care centres, protected housing, rehabilitation centres – include rehabilitation programmes and focus on physical aspects of "recovery". The [National Statistical Institute](#) reports that over 11.000 clients received rehabilitation services (2008).

Training of disabled people is provided as a part of Active Labour Market Measures in the framework of special programmes, with the objective of raising disabled people's competitiveness on the labour market. Programmes are based on targeted projects for unemployed disabled people and usually cover computer skills, specific professional skills (for example, accounting), foreign languages, etc. Their duration is limited to 2 – 3 months. The effectiveness and efficiency of these disability-targeted programmes need to be evaluated carefully.

Mainstream training programmes do not report on attendance of disabled participants.

Preferential employment and quotas

The Law on Integration of Disabled People (2004) briefly mentions mainstream employment and special enterprises and the quota system are regulated in a comprehensive manner.

There are 91 specialised enterprises employing 14.572 disabled people (Strategy to Provide Equal Opportunities for Disabled People 2008-2015).

Special employment schemes are run by the Employment Agency, which provides support to the demand side of the labour market. Under these programmes, employers may apply for funding to employ disabled people with a commitment to

maintain it for 24 to 36 months. The allocated money is earmarked for 12 months to pay for a minimum monthly salary plus the social security contributions of the employer. As the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy reports, under these programmes

1.327 people with disability status acquired jobs, of which 324 were young people up to 29 years of age;

41 projects of mainstream employers received funding worth nearly BGN 400.000 to adjust special work places and hire disabled people;

Another 30 socially-oriented projects submitted by special enterprises were funded with BGN 1 mln.

The quota system applies to businesses with over 50 employees and requires employers to reserve 4% of jobs for “people with reduced working abilities”. In 2007 836 employers complied with the requirement. The number of “reserved” jobs for disabled people is close to 10.000, of which 3.135 are occupied by people with disability status. For further details, see [MLSP Report on Policy Implementation in 2008](#) (Bulgarian version)

Long-term support and care

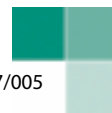
This takes place predominantly in institutional settings – mostly residential, but also community based (day-care centres, rehabilitation centres, etc.)

The 2007 [Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy](#) shows that 205 social services in the community have become operational as government-delegated services. Of these, 47 new alternatives to institutionalised care have been set up with capacity to serve 992 beneficiaries. In 2008 the number of new services grew to 132 with capacity to serve 4.096 clients ([Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2008](#)). It is not clear what “new services” mean but it could be interpreted as “newly established facilities” where traditional services are provided.

Several disability assistance schemes have been set up in the last years although none allow disabled people to be in control of their lives – they are managed by service providers and disabled people are just clients, not employers of their assistants. The Assistant for Independent Living Scheme is an exception, partially based on the principles of a personal budget for disability assistance – individual assessment of the hours assistance needed, flexible working hours and possibility of choosing the assistant. It is targeted at disabled people who need help and is funded by the Municipal Budget of Sofia. Beneficiaries are children and adults with more than 90% lost ability to work and who encounter difficulties in performing daily activities. In 2008 the annual budget for the scheme was BGN 3 mln, serving 252 users.

Additional information

Useful sources of more detailed information about the situation of disabled people, and the policies and support available, include:



Information on accessible institutions and businesses from the Agency for Disabled People

<http://ahu.mlsp.government.bg/cat/store/listclass.asp>

[All legislation referring to disabilities](#)

[Centre for Independent Living, Sofia](#): for current developments in disability policies from human rights perspective