

EQUITABLE ACCESS COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS: BULGARIA

Section I: Country setting

Basic information

POPULATION	7.1 million
AREA	110,994 km ²
GDP	€ 42.6 billion
GDP PER CAPITA	€ 6,000
ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER (2016)	Total: 99.3% ²⁰
ACCESS TO SANITATION (2016)	Total: 75.7% ²¹

Protocol on Water and Health. Bulgaria signed the Protocol in 1999 but it is not yet ratified.

Water sector context. Access to safe water is high at 99.3 per cent. The legislative framework is well developed and administrative capacity is reasonable, but action plans and funding are inadequate to ensure the implementation of national strategies and policies. The provision of water and sanitation services is carried out in accordance with the Strategy for Development and Management of Water Supply and Sanitation in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014–2023 and its Action Plan.

Section II: Self-assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation

II.A. Key findings²²

Governance framework

- The sources of funding to achieve equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation have been identified only to a limited extent.
- Mechanisms to encourage service providers to implement investment plans that favour the provision of access to rights-holders who lack these services are insufficient.

Geographical disparities

- A National Strategy for Regional Development 2012–2022 was adopted to reduce geographical disparities, but implementation is not satisfactory. There is no national policy to address illegal neighbourhoods.
- Public subsidies are targeted to those areas that face higher service prices, but only to a limited extent.
- There are no mechanisms in place to support the implementation of appropriate technical solutions for the self-provision of services by households in areas with no service provider.
- Funds foreseen to improve the quality of the water supply and sanitation services in rural areas under the 2014–2023 Operational Programme for Rural Development are insufficient.
- The sector is not sufficiently organized to enable cross-subsidization between localities with high-cost and low-cost of service provision.

Vulnerable and marginalized groups

- Overall, the National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2020 guides policies when working with vulnerable and marginalized groups. However, the water and sanitation policies recognize the special and differentiated needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups, but only to a limited extent.
- There are insufficient mechanisms to identify (in a participatory manner) and address the water and sanitation needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

²⁰ Bulgaria self-assessment country report, 2018, p.50

²¹ Bulgaria self-assessment country report, 2018, p.50

²² For more information on the findings of the self-assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation, see the country report available at <https://bit.ly/2IMSZrt>

- Integrated approaches, involving different administrations, have not yet been adopted.
- Data on the levels of access to safe drinking water and sanitation by persons with special physical needs, homeless people and those in refugee camps and centres are inexistent or insufficient.
- Public policies address only in a limited way access to safe drinking water and sanitation by homeless people, travellers, nomadic communities, and households living in neighbourhoods without access.
- Specific public funding to support access to safe drinking water and sanitation by persons with special physical needs, homeless people and households living in neighbourhoods without access is insufficient or non-existent.
- Complaint mechanisms in health, education and refugee facilities are insufficient.

Affordability

- Social policy addresses affordability of water and sanitation services, but only to a limited extent.
- Policies only address affordability of self-provided water and sanitation services to a limited extent.
- There is no specific public funding to address affordability concerns.
- Tariff measures have been included in a strategy to address affordability issues, but they have been implemented only to a limited extent.
- Social protection measures have been included in a strategy to address affordability issues, but they have been implemented only to a limited extent.

II.B. Process of self-assessment

Brief description. The process started in April 2017 when the Ministry of Health decided to support the NGO Earth Forever Foundation as leader of the self-assessment. Other partners include the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the National Ombudsman, the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Enterprise for Management of Environmental Protection Activities, the National Statistical Institute, and the World Bank. Earth Forever Foundation engaged a group of national consultants to develop the first draft of the score-card, which was discussed at a national workshop in mid-2018. Two press conferences were organized at the launch and at the conclusion of the process. The actual process of self-assessment took nine months from November 2017 to July 2018. The results have been published in the form of a situational analysis report, including the score-card as an annex.

Key lessons learned from the process:

- There is political will, also prompted by ongoing discussions about the integration of a possible equity dimension in the recast of the EU Drinking Water Directive, and persons at a high administrative level in adequate institutions are sensitive to the issues and motivated.
- The self-assessment process strengthened the link among partners.
- The self-assessment process increased awareness about the Protocol and the SDGs.

Section III: Actions taken to improve equitable access to water and sanitation

In the new law on water supply and sanitation, in line with the Strategy for Development and Management of Water Supply and Sanitation in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014–2023, legally defined concepts and measures directly related to equitable access to water and sanitation will be introduced for the first time, such as affordability, vulnerable user data, guaranteed minimum water consumption, protection of vulnerable consumers, and solidarity fee. The new law will thus implement a mechanism to guarantee access for vulnerable consumers or users and it will ensure the most effective spending of public funds, as well as the maximum limitation of risk of transferring the financial burden to the highest risk groups.

Section IV: Financing equitable access to water and sanitation

There is a chronic shortage of financing in the water and sanitation sector due to the unrealistic assessment of the potential of resources and the needs of the sector to meet the requirements and standards of European and Bulgarian legislation, as well as the unrealistic expectation of 95 per cent external financing to sustain the reform of the sector.

The sector strategy estimates investments to reach €12.4 billion by 2038, of which two-thirds are expected to be financed by water and sanitation operators through internally generated funds and loans. This will require a significant increase in the price of water and sanitation services, which might impact affordability for large groups of the population.

In May 2017, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works announced that it was working on a fund to finance water and sanitation projects in municipalities that cannot benefit from European funding. It is envisaged that this will introduce a constant fee as a component of the price of the services based on the principle of solidarity. With a consumption of 500 million m³ of water per year and a solidarity fee of 5 cents per m³ of water consumed, about €25 million per year will be accumulated in a fund to improve the infrastructure in the poorest regions.

It is unclear how the actions prioritized as part of the self-assessment could be funded.

