

Beijing + 25

National report of the Republic of Bulgaria
on the implementation of the Beijing
Declaration and Platform for Action in the
context of the 2020 Beijing+25 Global review
and 5 years of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development and its Sustainable
Development Goals

Section One: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks

1. Over the last 5 years, the Republic of Bulgaria achieved a number of milestones in its progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. In the area of legislation, the Gender Equality Act (GEA) was adopted in 2016 in Bulgaria as a framework for the national policy for gender equality. It is aimed at promoting gender equality by creating the prerequisites to build an institutional environment and identifying the bodies and mechanisms implementing the national policy for gender equality. Under the GEA, the national policy for gender equality shall be based on the following principles: equal opportunities for women and men in all public, economic and political areas; equal access for women and men to all social resources; equal treatment of women and men and prevention of gender-based discrimination and violence; balanced representation of women and men in all decision-making bodies; and overcoming the gender-based stereotypes. It shall be implemented by integrating the gender equality principle into all national, regional and local policies, strategies, programmes and plans; application of provisional promotional measures; a horizontal intersectoral approach; a national institutional mechanism of cooperation between central and regional bodies of both the executive branch and civil society; and consistent and sustainable resource allocation and funding for the gender equality bodies and policy. The GEA regulates: (i) the National Gender Equality Strategy and plans thereto; (ii) the National Gender Equality Board ("National Board"); (iii) the Gender Equality Coordinators at the central and regional bodies of the executive branch; and (iv) the Badge of Distinction awarded for significant achievements in the effective implementation of the gender equality policy. It should be further noted that the GEA requires all impact assessments of all legislative decisions and strategy documents to feature an additional gender-based impact assessment and, in their implementation of the national policy for gender equality, the executive bodies to collect, store and process gender-based data for the purposes of the gender equality monitoring system. The GEA further regulates the application of provisional promotional measures — justified and proportional initiatives of a temporary nature aimed at eliminating certain obstacles to the balanced representation of women and men or to the equal treatment of any individual gender or the disadvantaged gender. The provisional promotional measures are provided for in the National Gender Equality Strategy implementation plans. They shall be applied by the executive bodies over a certain period until their balanced representation, equal opportunity and gender equality goals are achieved in the areas with identified disadvantages. These promotional measures shall be financed by the national and municipal budgets as well as by international and European sources. Enforcement of provisional promotional measures shall not constitute discrimination under the provisions of the Protection against Discrimination Act and the Gender Equality Act.

Between 2014 and 2019, the Protection against Discrimination Act was amended by introducing provisions such as: the shift of the burden of proof in cases of discrimination, the inclusion of transgender cases in the definition of gender-based discrimination, the definition of indirect discrimination, unfavourable treatment and provisional promotional measures (which, under this law, shall not constitute discrimination).

At the same time, Bulgaria continues its commitment to combat domestic violence. Amendments to criminal law were introduced, regulating the protection of the rights of the victims of violence, including domestic violence. These legislative changes are intended to improve the Bulgarian legislation and help prevent and adequately and fully counteract these forms of criminal behaviour and adopt the relevant international standards. The amendments were passed by the National Assembly and will be promulgated in the State Gazette. More specifically, the amendments to the Criminal Code were as follows:

- a definition of the term "in the context of domestic violence" was created;
- the corpus delicti of homicide and assault was supplemented to incriminate all forms of domestic violence escalating to an assault on the life or health of any person;
- domestic violence was elevated as a constituent element of a number of offences—aiding and

- abetting a person to commit suicide, abduction, false imprisonment, coercion, criminal threat;
- intimidation was also elevated to a criminal offence, since until now the effective Bulgarian legislation did not provide adequate penalties against perpetrators who, by repeated threatening behaviour against a person, instilled in that person fear for their own safety or the safety of their family and friends;
 - further amendments are expected to be introduced, making certain violent crimes prosecutable without complaint by the victim;
 - more comprehensive and effective protection is provided for potential victims of forced marriages, who are usually members of migrant and/or ethnic minority communities and who may be obligated by their family to leave their country of residence and get married in their family's country of origin in adherence to their community's cultural values;
 - higher penalties are proposed for repeated violations of court orders or domestic violence related restraining orders to provide more substantial and timely protection of the victims and reinforce the preventive effect of the penalty.

It should also be noted that, under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), the Ministry of Justice budget every year allocates funding for non-profit entities' projects for the development and implementation of domestic violence prevention and protection programmes under the same law. Priority funding objectives are the analysis of the problem of domestic violence through monitoring of the application of the legislation, sensitising the young people to the problem through prevention and protection programmes at school, increasing the competence of the judiciary to enforce domestic-violence protection measures and provide timely and adequate protection to the victims of domestic violence and the persons providing protection under the PDVA, protection, recovery and reintegration of victims of domestic violence, and services involving work with perpetrators of domestic violence aimed at providing quality service to the victims and preventing recurrent domestic violence.

In 2016, the Financial Compensation and Support to Victims of Crime Act (FCSVCA) was substantially amended and supplemented to elaborate the existing legislation on the rights of victims of crime, including by introducing the requirements of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA. Some of the more important changes were as follows:

- in order to raise victims' awareness of their rights to receive support and financial compensation from the state, the scope of the bodies, organisations and persons providing such information was expanded;
- free access to organisations providing free psychological counselling and practical support was made available to all victims of crime;
- the scope of the serious offences against the person eligible for financial compensation from the state was expanded to include attempted murder and repeal the requirement for sexual assault and rape to be eligible for financial compensation only where serious injuries were inflicted;
- the size of the financial compensation was increased to BGN 10,000 for all eligible persons under the law and where its recipients are minors, it is up to BGN 10,000 for each eligible individual;
- the adoption of rules for the application of the FCSVCA to elaborate and detail its underlying basics. The Rules for the Application of the FCSVCA (RAFCSVCA) were adopted by Council of Ministers' Decree No 373 of 22.12.2016 (Promulgated SG No 103 of 27 December 2016). Regulated thereunder were the terms and procedure for financing free psychological counselling and support as well as the provision of shelter or other suitable temporary housing provided by law to victims of crime, for whom an immediate risk of secondary and repeated victimisation, intimidation and retaliation exists. Shelter or other suitable temporary housing to victims of crime is provided:
 - by victim support organisations for a period of ten days;
 - immediately, at a safe location away from the usual residence of the victim of crime;
 - in the cases where such measure has not been already applied under another law or regulation, e.g.

the Combat Human Trafficking Act, the Protection of Persons under Threat Related to Criminal Proceedings Act, the Child Protection Act.

A clear and visible example of Bulgaria's achievements in women's empowerment is the active involvement of women in politics and their leadership in high-profile careers. In the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2017, Bulgaria was ranked 18 among 144 surveyed countries (up from 41 in 2016) with 76% of the gaps closed. This is mostly due to the significant progress in the Political Empowerment subindex and, more specifically, the equality of men and women holding ministerial and parliamentary positions. According to information from National Statistical Institute's (NSI) survey Women and Men in the Republic of Bulgaria 2018, by 1 August 2018, 27.1% of the Members of Parliament, 23.8% of the members of the Council of Ministers and 12.8% of the municipal Mayors in Bulgaria were women. It should be noted that the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Mayor of the capital are women.

Eurostat data show a continuous closing of the gender pay gap in Bulgaria — from 15.7% in 2015 to 13.8% in 2017.

Bulgaria shows certain progress in the area of human capital, e.g. 30% of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) professionals in Bulgaria are women (compared to the 17% EU average). The main results of the Women in Digital Technologies index show that, in Bulgaria, women are more active Internet users and have better digital skills compared to men. Nevertheless, businesses report the following challenges related to the acquisition of the required digital competencies to enable both women and men to benefit from the existing and emerging technologies:

- Lack of public interest towards the initiatives and opportunities they create;
- Lack of effective public-private partnership (a promising exception: Sofia Tech Park);
- Lack of awareness of the ICT benefits in terms of employment, leisure, education, science, provision of public services—politicians, regulators and global operators need to be aware that digital skill acquisition will provide long-term benefits in terms of economic development, competitiveness and social inclusion;
- Low level of consistency and sustainability in the implementation of political measures;
- Narrow and underdeveloped market for cost-oriented and affordable technology products and services (promising exception: Pravets phones and laptops).

The following recommendations were made:

- Ensure a steady stream of new education initiatives to enhance digital skills. Coordination and continuity at the horizontal level can easily be ensured by adopting a long-term national policy.
- A more thorough holistic study of the local context-specific barriers for inclusion (prejudice, lack of skills, unattractiveness, etc.)
- Considering the strong interest in, and abundant choice of, private informal education initiatives (CodeDojo, DigiGirlz, RoboPartans, etc.), it is highly recommended to have a policy fostering partnership between schools and such private initiatives, i.e. schools can promote informal education to their students by encouraging their participation in private initiatives as an additional extracurricular activity in the school building after classes.
- The specific needs of the exclusion-prone groups, e.g. women, ethnic minorities, etc., need to be considered as early as at the curriculum creation stage.
- More advanced digital skills and inclusive information society can be achieved through a policy fostering production and distribution of affordable and cost-oriented technology devices. Schools can ensure that each student has their own laptop device to use both for curricular and extracurricular activities.
- In sharp contrast to the technology industry, the academia appears to be rather inactive in its efforts to foster the inclusive environment. Private initiatives in this sector remain quite sketchy and insufficient, which further affects the academia. Therefore, it is recommended to have a policy with proper incentives for public and private action in this area.

Additional challenges include overcoming the right-to-work and rights-at-work discrimination

(e.g. gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression) as well as adequate funding to combat the existing gender-based stereotypes in various areas of public life.

2. In the important area of accelerating progress for women and girls through laws, policies and/or programmes, over the last five years, the Republic of Bulgaria took action on a number of priorities. Considering the complexities of the gender equality policy and the need for the measures to be as wide ranging as possible, Bulgaria has taken action on 5 priorities, including: equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice, elimination of violence against women and girls, access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, right to work and rights at work (e.g. gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression), women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises, unpaid care and domestic work/work-family conciliation (e.g. paid maternity or parental leave, care services), gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions), digital and financial inclusion for women.

With regard to the equality, non-discrimination and access to justice, in 2014, the National Assembly adopted at first reading the Bill to Amend and Supplement the Protection against Discrimination Act. In April 2016, the Gender Equality Act (GEA) was adopted, providing for the implementation of the national policy for gender equality and regulating the national gender equality mechanism, the creation of general programming documents (strategy and plans thereto), the creation of the Badge of Distinction awarded for significant achievements in the effective implementation of the gender equality policy, etc.

With regard to the elimination of violence against women and girls, it should be noted that the support, both emotional and institutional, for women survivors of violence, becomes more and more frequent. An ever increasing number of support centres for women survivors of domestic violence or in need of emotional and psychological support as a result of harassment at the workplace or at home continue to be built in Bulgaria. Crisis centres continue to be established in the country as well. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) is competent to make decisions on gender-based discrimination complaints where gender-based discrimination defines behavioural patterns which could escalate to sexual harassment, which constitutes a form of discrimination under the Protection against Discrimination Act, as well as to an act of violence against women, which falls outside CPD's jurisdiction. Sexual harassment cases are sensitive, which is why the number of such complaints brought before the CPD over the years is not very high. These cases are also difficult to prove and are, quite often, perpetrated without witnesses and the perpetrators are rarely aggressive in the presence of other persons.

Access to healthcare and services, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, is the right of every Bulgarian citizen. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria proclaims the equal right of women and men to health insurance guaranteeing affordable medical care and services free of charge under terms and procedure set forth by law (Article 52, Paragraph 1). The Health Act stipulates that patients shall be treated regardless of their age, gender, background, language, nation, race or politics, education, beliefs, cultural level, sexual orientation, personal, social or financial condition, injury, type or cause of illness. The development and implementation of the general and specific measures related both to the prevention and the diagnostics and treatment again follow the principle of equal opportunities and access for all persons to health services according to the progression and severity of the condition and conformance to the requirements for timeliness, quality and continuity of the diagnostic/treatment process.

The policy of the Ministry of Health is consistently focused on creating better conditions and ensuring equal access for all Bulgarian citizens to health services regardless of their gender, age, ethnic and social background. Some of the general strategic documents based on this principle in the healthcare area include the National Health Strategy 2014–2020, the updated National Demographic Strategy until 2030, the National Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Ethnic-Minority Persons, which has become an integral part of the Republic of Bulgaria's National Strategy for Romani Integration

2012–2020, the National Child Strategy (2008–2018), the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme, financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the National HIV and STI Prevention and Control Programme (2017–2020), the National Mother and Child Health Improvement Programme (2014–2020), the Mother Healthcare and Child Healthcare programmes financed by the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund, the National Cervical Cancer Prevention Programme, etc.

The main objective of the prevention, diagnostics and treatment policy is to ensure equal access to medical care with the required quality for all Bulgarian citizens regardless of their gender, age, ethnic and social background. General system-wide and specific measures are applied to achieve the objectives related to the population's needs of quality and affordable medical care. The principle of equal-opportunity access for everyone in conformance to the requirements for timeliness, quality and continuity is applied to all measures, including development of strategic documents, legislative initiatives and improvement of the legislation regulating prevention, diagnostics and treatment. The gender equality principle is applied in the implementation of the National Programmes by the Ministry of Health. Each national programme has clearly defined population groups targeted by the relevant intervention activities without any gender-based access limitations.

With regard to the right to work and rights at work (e.g. gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression), it should be noted that gender equality is a basic principle covering all aspects of public life. Most often it is associated with the equal opportunities of women and men on the labour market and pay in particular. One important and significant development in the area of equality is the apparent trend of women, and often men, increasingly pursuing careers previously thought of being strictly “male” or “female,” respectively. There is, however, also an apparent feminisation in certain industries, careers and positions within the business hierarchies—the so-called vertical and horizontal gender-based occupational segregation.

The gender-based complaints filed with the CPD in relation to the right of work are predominantly by women. Often, they are discriminated against in terms of unequal pay, lack of recognition of their value as employees, sometimes are treated with mistrust or mockery by a predominantly male staff. Frequent complaints are filed with the CPD by women fired during pregnancy, newly hired young women being presented with an ultimatum by their employers that pregnancy would be undesirable, women experiencing adverse changes to their working conditions upon announcing their pregnancies, for instance, work without lunch breaks, harassment, discomfort, lack of recognition of their full value as employees, even accused of betraying the trust of the management by getting pregnant.

With regard to women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises, the Agency for People with Disabilities (APD) maintains a Register of Specialised Enterprises and Cooperatives of People with Disabilities, wherein, by 08.02.2019, 247 companies and cooperatives were listed. Of those, 103 are represented and managed by women. A total of 2,790 persons were employed in specialised enterprises and cooperatives, of which 50% are people with permanent disabilities and 1,858 of all employees are women. The APD maintains a register of persons providing assistive devices, accessories, facilities and medical devices. By 08.02.2019, it listed 343 retailers, of which 160 were represented and managed by women.

The Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association is actively involved in the working group established within the Ministry of Economy on the role of women's entrepreneurship and women entrepreneurs. The Annual Report on the state and development of small and mid-sized enterprises in Bulgaria and the role of women in Bulgarian small and mid-sized business emphasised the importance of the establishment and successful development of small and mid-sized enterprises as a motivational influence on the entrepreneurial spirit and skills to grow one's own business and the significance of the focused entrepreneurship training. Statistics show stable growth of the number of women entrepreneurs and managers in small and mid-sized businesses.

Women entrepreneurs in Bulgaria run mainly small retail and service businesses with a

significant growth in the number of consultancy firms run by women. There is a positive trend in computer and Internet service usage by women entrepreneurs. Women growing their own businesses, both in Bulgaria and EU countries, are facing a common problem: access to funding, especially for start-ups. More than 62% of the Bulgarian women entrepreneurs state that they have started their businesses with own funds. This points to the need to create organisations supporting women's businesses and to have special support from the industry associations.

The policy in the area of entrepreneurship education and training and fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of women in Bulgaria was outlined in the Human Resource Development Strategy and the National Extended Professional Training Strategy for the period 2010–2020.

More than 60,000 women entrepreneurs and managers work in small and mid-sized enterprises in Bulgaria. The number of women entrepreneurs in Bulgaria is already relatively high. Studies show that, compared to men, women entrepreneurs in our country are much younger and better educated.

The measures related to unpaid care and domestic work/work-family conciliation (e.g. paid maternity or parental leave, care services) should also be noted. In line with the latest trends in the EU's social policy encouraging member states to take the necessary action and ensure equal opportunities for women and men and create a better environment for work-family conciliation, Bulgaria has made changes related to the options to take a leave and receive government-provided social security benefits available to parents (adopters) and foster parents under the procedure of Article 26 of the Child Protection Act (relatives or foster families).

Between 01.01.2014 and 31.12.2018, the legislation was amended to expand the rights of mothers and adopters of small children. Some amendments granted them certain personal rights, while others were related to the cases where other members of the family took over the raising of the children to allow women mothers (adopters) to return to work. In the same period, the following amendments were made to the Labour Code (LC) and the Social Security Code (SSC) related to the maternity benefits:

- As of 1 January 2014, the right of leave for a woman worker or employee adopting a child between 2 and 5 years of age, under the terms of full adoption, was regulated. During such leave, she shall be entitled to a government-provided social security payment, for a period of 365 days as of the day the child was received for adoption but ending no later than the day the child turns 5 years of age, in the amount of 90 percent of the gross salary or social security income on which social security contributions were paid or payable, or, for the self-employed persons, social security contributions for general illness and maternity paid in the period of 24 calendar months prior to the month of adoption. Upon consent of the adoptive mother, after the expiration of 6 months after the day the child was received for adoption, but not later than the day the child turns 5 years of age, this leave may be used by the adoptive father. As of 1 July 2018, this payment (for a period of 365 days) in the same amount (90 percent of the gross salary or social security income) shall be paid upon adoption of a child of up to 5 years of age and, as of this date, it shall no longer matter if the adoption was full or partial, while the adoptive mothers returning to work (but not earlier than 90 days after the child was received for adoption) shall continue to receive payment in the amount of 50 percent for the remainder of the 365-day period.

- As of 1 June 2017, in addition to biological fathers, a leave for adoptive fathers is provided for as well, if they are married to the adoptive mother. They are entitled to a government-provided social security payment in the amount of 90 percent of the gross salary or social security income for the duration of the 15-day leave upon adoption of a child of up to 5 years of age, as of the day the child was received for adoption but ending not later than the day the child turns 5 years of age.

- As of 1 June 2017, a new type of benefit was introduced for the cases where the maternity and childbirth leave was not taken. Any (adoptive) mother (having general illness and maternity coverage) returning to work after the expiration of the periods of childbirth, as authorised by decisions of the healthcare authorities, shall receive 50 percent of the payment.

- As of 1 June 2017, any woman worker or employee with whom a child was placed under the procedure of Article 26 of the Child Protection Act shall be entitled for a childbirth payment in the amount proportional to the difference between the age of the child on the day of their placement and the day of the expiration of the authorised childbirth leave period.

- As of 1 June 2017, the scope of persons entitled to childbirth payments after the child turns 6 months of age, for the remainder of the 410-calendar-day period, was expanded, as follows:

- upon consent by the (adoptive) mother, after the child turns 6 months of age, one of the mother's parents may take the leave, in her stead, for the remainder of the 410-day period, in the cases where the father is unknown. In the cases when the (adoptive) father is deceased, the leave may be taken by one of the (adoptive) mother's or (adoptive) father's parents.

- upon consent by a woman worker or employee who has adopted a child on her own, after the child turns 6 months of age, one of her parents may take a leave, in her stead, for the remainder of the 410-day period.

- in the cases when the child was placed under the procedure of Article 26 of the Child Protection Act with spouses, upon consent of the woman worker or employee, after the child turns 6 months of age, her spouse may take a leave, in her stead, for the remainder of the 410-day period.

The Social Support Agency (SSA) has certain commitments for the execution of one of the programmes for the implementation of the social inclusion policy, significant part whereof is the provision of financial support to families with children and families providing care to children at risk. Under this programme, financial support is provided to families raising the child in a family environment under the procedure of the Family Aid for Children Act (FACA). The programme's objective is to provide family aid under the procedure of the FACA and its Rules of Application. Under the FACA, the aid can be one-time or monthly, provided in cash and/or in kind.

With regard to the gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions), in 2015, the SSC was amended to update and stabilise the parameters of the pension system. Some of the more important parameters promoting longer participation in the labour market and equalising the retirement age for women and men included:

- Gradual increase of the retirement age under Article 68, Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the SSC for women and men, where:

- for women, it shall be initially increased by 2 months each calendar year until 2029 and, after 2030, by 3 months to reach 65 years of age in 2037;

- for men, again, initial increase by 2 months in 2016 and 2017 and, after 2018, by one month to reach 65 years of age in 2029;

- after 31 December 2037, the increase shall follow the increase of the average life expectancy in Bulgaria and shall remain the same for both genders.

- Gradual increase of the required social security service for pension eligibility under Article 68, Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the SSC, by 2 months to reach 37 years of social security service for women and 40 years of social security service for men in 2027.

With regard to the digital and financial inclusion of women, "Women in the Digital World" was one of the priorities in the Bulgarian presidency of the EU in 2018. This was the first presidency focused on a priority of this kind. The professional participation of women in the IT sector has its own specific challenges and prospects and yet, without doubt, with their involvement in this predominantly male industry, women make a tangible contribution to the development of modern society. Furthermore, digital competence becomes increasingly topical in the context of the successful dealing with today's challenges. Technological changes continue to transform the labour market, offering new opportunities for work and, at the same time, hiding potential risks for those less proficient in the field of information and communication technology. The fact that Bulgaria is ranked first in the EU in terms of the share of women in the information technology field deserves a special mention.

This is why the Bulgarian presidency provided a platform for discussion and exchange of practices

in this area aimed at improving the IT companies' competitiveness, increasing the number of women in technology and engineering, boosting their careers, enhancing technological research and transforming the views on the role of women in this field. This topic was featured in all relevant events of the Bulgarian presidency, namely:

- The trio—Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria—presiding the Council of the EU between July 2017 and December 2018 submitted a joint declaration on gender equality of 19 July 2017.
- The Republic of Bulgaria cooperated with the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) focused on “Women in the Digital World.”
- An event was organised during the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
- The Bulgarian presidency worked to create a better environment for the development of the social economy focused on social innovation and equal opportunities, non-discrimination and gender equality and the role of women in the digital world.
- International Conference “The Future of Labour” (with a panel on women in the digital world);
- LeaderSHE@digital conference;
- Conference “Educate to Create”: From digital consumers to digital creators;
- Conference of the Global Forum of Women Leaders;
- The Digital4Her high-level conference featured discussions with a wide variety of stakeholders: politicians, entrepreneurs, representatives of the academia, the digital industry and the public sector.

Some of the important goals under this priority included: encouraging women to acquire digital skills and motivating girls to study STEM disciplines, promoting the development of a network of women entrepreneurs, helping reduce gender stereotypes, including in the media.

3. Bulgaria shares the importance and need for a consolidated effort by all stakeholders to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Development Programme 2030.

The last five years were a time of excellent cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Bulgaria made its contribution to the consolidated effort for cooperation at the national, regional and global level on horizontal issues related to the sustainable development as a co-chair of the Regional Review of the implementation of the Programme for Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and as a deputy chair of the UN Commission on Population and Development since 2019 on a wide range of issues related to the dynamics of population and sustainable development, issues of demographics in Bulgaria and the region, family, sexual and reproductive health, human rights, inequalities and social inclusion. The participation of the country in the Regional and Global Review (ICPD+25) helped promote cooperation, present the achievements at the national level, define the problems and challenges to overcome inequalities and protect universal human rights, share best practices and national policies related to the problem areas as well as to identify possible measures to address them in the context of the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

There is an increased visibility of Bulgarian initiatives and best practices in the areas of youth policies, demographic issues, the fight against HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, the contributions of the International Institute for Youth Development PETRI—Sofia established in 2007 as a joint initiative with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The Bulgarian initiatives and international cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe are intended to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Programme 2030.

With regard to the women with HIV/AIDS, the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme,

financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, is the largest health programme in the Republic of Bulgaria. With a package of low-threshold, specific HIV and sexually transmitted infection prevention services, the programme reaches the groups at highest risk: injected drug users, prostituting women and men, the Romani community, incarcerated persons, men having sex with other men, young women, men and people living with HIV/AIDS. In the implementation of the Programme, the Ministry of Health (MH) took and supported a number of measures to raise the young people's awareness and skills to deal with life situations. HIV and STI prevention programmes and health educational materials were developed, trainings were conducted, municipal programmes for HIV prevention among young people were developed and adopted.

Services provided under the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme and the National HIV and STI Prevention and Control Programme are voluntary, free and anonymous, the approach is respectful and non-discriminatory, conforming to the international standards of quality and protection of the human rights and aligned with the specific needs of each group. The vulnerable groups are reached mainly by field work, providing services where the people of the target groups live or work. Many women are actively involved in the implementation of the programme as chairpersons, coordinators or field assistants to the non-governmental organisations' teams. In this way, women take an active part in public life by planning, executing and monitoring activities aimed at providing equal access to specific health and social services.

These activities were carried out at the national and local level in 21 municipalities, in partnership with more than 30 non-governmental organisations. Operating under this programme are 10 health and social centres for work within a Romani community (Burgas, Varna, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Sofia, Yambol, Kyustendil and Haskovo) and 9 day centres providing health services to prostituting persons in Burgas, Varna, Plovdiv, Ruse, Sandanski, Lovech, Stara Zagora, Haskovo and Sofia. These centres provide low-threshold services to reduce the factors adversely affecting the health and social status of the Romani people. They provide anonymous and free testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as health education to prevent these social diseases.

The HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme has a special focus on the work within a Romani community under Component 5, Reducing the Vulnerability to HIV of the People of a Romani Community at the Highest Risk by Expanding the Scope of the Group with Community-Based Prevention and Referral Services. Between 2014 and 2015, the prevention and free and anonymous consulting and HIV testing services were provided to this vulnerable group by 10 NGOs on the territory of the country.

In 2014, 20,264 persons were reached with HIV prevention and disease protection awareness raising services, of which 5,549 persons received free and anonymous HIV consultation and testing and learned their results. In the same year, 1,991 sexually transmitted infection (STI) diagnostic and treatment examinations were made.

In 2015, 9,729 persons were reached with HIV prevention and disease protection awareness raising services, of which 6,759 persons received free and anonymous HIV consultation and testing and learned their results. In the same year, 1,944 STI diagnostic and treatment examinations were made.

In 2016, the activities continued in 5 of the already covered regions—Burgas, Varna, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv and Sofia. In that period, 6,368 persons were reached with HIV prevention and disease protection awareness raising services.

Component 6 of the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme focused on the prostituting women and men to help reduce the stigma and discrimination and improve their health culture. Workshops organised in 2014 and 2015 trained both members of the community to train other members of the community and members of the local police and health authorities. The number of clients from the group of prostituting women and men reached under the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme and the National HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Programme was 8,070 in 2014, 7,348 in 2015, 4,505 in 2016 and 806 in 2017.

With financing from the Global Fund, 17 mobile medical offices providing low-threshold field services to risk groups were purchased and are currently operating.

13 Free and Anonymous HIV Consulting and Testing Offices (FAHCTO) operate within the Regional Health Inspectorates in the country and 1 within an NGO. These offices provide pre-test and post-test consulting and testing for HIV and other STI by trained medical professionals as well as health education talks to raise awareness of the HIV/AIDS-related issues. Between 2014 and 2018, a total of 47,810 women were tested for HIV and learned their results.

The next adopted National HIV and STI Prevention and Control Programme (2017–2020) ensured the sustainability of the achieved HIV and STI prevention results at the national level. Funds from the MH budget were allocated for diagnostics and treatment of HIV patients, anti-retroviral prophylaxis to prevent virus transmissions from mother to child, post-exposure prophylaxis for medical professionals, ensuring the safety of each unit of donated blood and HIV testing. The creation of a supportive environment for a sustainable national response to HIV and sexually transmitted infections in Bulgaria and the upgrade of the networks and partnerships with the active involvement of the National Board for Prevention of AIDS, Tuberculosis and Sexually Transmitted Infections, the Regional Health Inspectorates, the municipalities and civil society is one of the main objectives of the National HIV and STI Prevention and Control Programme.

The main interventions are additionally aimed at preventing HIV among the groups at the highest risk, implementing an integrated approach for the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections and promoting sexual and reproductive health among young people, preventing HIV and sexually transmitted infections among the general population. The implementation of the HIV testing policy expands the access to voluntary HIV consulting and testing, either by clients' own initiative or recommended by healthcare institutions, to allow the number of HIV infected persons in Bulgaria knowing their HIV status to reach 90%, expands the scope of HIV and STI testing for pregnant women to prevent perinatal transmission of HIV, syphilis and other STI, enhances the preventive measures to contain the HIV infection from spreading among society in general. The implementation and funding of measures for quality monitoring, treatment, care and support for people living with HIV, testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections continue.

Under the National HIV and STI Prevention and Control Programme (2017–2020), HIV and STI prevention activities among groups at risk were carried out, in the Stara Zagora region, by the World without Borders NGO and, in the Varna region, by the S.O.S. Families at Risk Foundation between July and November 2018. These activities included field work with voluntary and anonymous HIV and syphilis testing, distribution of prophylactics for risk-free sex contacts, consulting on the ways to protect oneself from HIV and STI among the group of female sex workers. 352 sex workers were reached in the Varna region, of which 129 were tested for HIV with 43 of them additionally tested for syphilis. 132 sex workers were reached in the Stara Zagora region, of which 81 were tested for HIV with 46 of them additionally tested for syphilis.

Within the group of women and girls refugees, HIV/AIDS and STI prevention activities were carried out by NGOs in three regions of the country: Bulgarian Red Cross Sofia, Bulgarian Red Cross Sliven and Icarus (Haskovo).

With its adopted Ordinance No 47, the MH regulated the terms and procedure for testing, communicating and reporting infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The main objectives of the HIV infection testing are to:

- reduce the risk of HIV spreading;
- have HIV infected persons learn their status and receive timely treatment, care and support;
- provide timely consulting and testing to partners of HIV infected persons.

Under this ordinance, free HIV testing is provided to all women during pregnancy.

Between 2014 and 2018, a total of 686,161 women were tested for HIV.

Women's access to healthcare is expanded by promoting HIV testing among pregnant women, regardless of their social or health-insurance status. This measure, aimed at improving the health of

mothers and children, was regulated by the Methodological Instruction on the Prophylaxis of HIV Infection Transmission from Mother to Child, endorsed by the Minister of Health on 17.03.2016.

Each year, with the support of the Ministry of Health, a national Anti-AIDS campaign is conducted within the MH's National HIV and STI Prevention and Control Programme, in partnership with the Regional Health Inspectorates, municipalities, NGOs, social institutions, media, etc. The campaigns featured measures to raise the public awareness of the routes of transmission and means of protection from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and motivate people to take responsibility for their own and their partner's health and were conducted four times each year—on 14.02.2016 (St. Valentine's Day)—national Anti-AIDS campaign, the third Sunday of May—AIDS Candlelight Memorial, 1 December—World AIDS Day and the summer Anti-AIDS campaign lasting one month.

The Ministry of Health continues its policy to inform young people on the possible dangers involved in the sexual practices and the ways to protect themselves from various sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. This information is provided to the young people in the form of various presentations, talks, discussions and trainings.

In 2017, more than 480 campaign activities related to sexual and reproductive health were carried out. 42,541 persons took part in the campaigns related to safe sex, HIV, STI and drug use prevention; 54,081 condoms were distributed; 20,035 health education materials were handed out; 1,674 persons were tested for HIV and STI, both in the field and in FAHCTO.

In 2018, more than 440 campaign activities on these topics were carried out, with 17,540 persons taking part in the topics related to safe sex, HIV, STI and drug use prevention; 25,041 condoms were distributed; 19,364 health education materials were handed out; 4,011 persons were tested for HIV and STI, both in the field and in FAHCTO.

With regard to the measures taken in the Women Living in Remote and Rural Areas, Indigenous Women, Racial, Ethnic or Religious Minority Women and Younger Women categories, it should be noted that the principles of equality and non-discrimination are laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013. The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014–2020 was also created in accordance with these principles. Under Article 8 of Regulation No 1698/2005, "Member States and the Commission shall promote equality between men and women and shall ensure that any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation is prevented during the various stages of programme implementation. This includes the stages of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation." The Rural Development Programme 2014–2020, in its Ex-ante conditionalities part, includes:

Applicable ex-ante conditionality at the national level:

- G1) Anti-Discrimination: the existence of administrative capacity for the implementation and application of EU anti-discrimination law and policy in the field of European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds.

Criteria:

- G1.a) Arrangements in accordance with the institutional and legal framework of Member States for the involvement of bodies responsible for the promotion of equal treatment of all persons throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes, including the provision of advice on equality in ESI fund related activities.

One of the goals of the RDP is to promote the social and economic development of the rural areas. Supported under this goal are interventions in three priority areas with the common objective to develop the economic potential, preserve the demographic potential and assist in the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, thus helping the economic recovery and addressing the processes of depopulation and social exclusion.

Measures under RDP Priority Area 6B, Promoting Local Rural Development, provide additional support to people at the highest risk of social exclusion, in line with the National Poverty Reduction

and Social Inclusion Promotion Strategy 2020 and the National Gender Equality Promotion Strategy by taking proactive measures to eliminate the causes of poverty and social exclusion.

The State Refugees Agency under the Council of Ministers (SRA CM) implements policies and measures in the areas of migration and asylum, taking into account the special condition of migrants, refugees, women and girls affected by military conflict. The measures are intended to guarantee the adaptation and integration of women and girls seeking asylum as well as to prevent any form of exploitation, abuse, violence or discrimination. The measures to eliminate discrimination against women and girls seeking asylum in the Republic of Bulgaria include:

- Early identification of specific vulnerability, needs assessment and provision of timely care and services to continue throughout the asylum procedure, taking into account the specific needs of women and girls;
- Providing guarantees that, if required by women and girls seeking asylum, they will be provided with an interviewer and an interpreter of the same gender;
- Organising trainings for SRA CM employees and interpreters working with women and girls;
- Provision of psychologists to women and girls subjected to gender-based discrimination;
- Provision of special care for the children of women and girls subjected to gender-based discrimination;
- Provision of safe and supportive environment for women and girls seeking asylum to prevent gender-based violence.

The current priorities of the SRA CM are focused on improving the existing monitoring systems, identifying the policy goals related to the protection of women's and girls' rights and monitoring their impact. In this context, we are doing our best to disseminate more information on the ways to prevent the violation of their rights.

Jointly with UNICEF, UNHCR, etc., with regard to the improvement of the condition of the women and girls seeking asylum in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Agency's efforts are focused on the exchange of best practices, cooperation and communication with the national institutions, local government and non-governmental sector representatives responsible for the protection and recognition of their rights. The protection measures addressing their specific needs include: locating families; providing adequate social, health and psychological services; access to mandatory education, including language courses, access to complaint procedures; legal advice; interpreter; talks and consultations;

In 2018, SRA CM updated and adopted Standard Operating Procedures for prevention of, and response to, sexual and gender-based violence.

Between 2014 and 2018, 110 gender-related cases were opened by the CPD, 60% of which were related to cases of multiple gender-based discrimination. Over the last 5 years, the fight against gender-based discrimination and the cases of multiple gender-based discrimination has had a special place in the CPD's preventive activities through organised trainings, financed under various European projects—trainings of lawyers, representatives of key institutions in the legislative process and judicial authorities, the Ministry of Interior (Mol), education, media. Carried out under the Programme Progress, Project JUST/2012/PROG/AG/AD/3710, Combating Discrimination—for a Fair Society, was a study and an assessment of the impact of the economic crisis and budget cuts on the vulnerable groups. The study researched unemployment and its worsening to a chronic state during the crisis as a factor for the vulnerability and poverty of the Romani women and men. National workshops were held—6 training workshops for representatives of stakeholders (state and local governments, representatives of the social partners, etc.) at a local level on issues of prevention, identification and containment of cases of discrimination. Regional representatives of the CPD held information meetings and delivered educational presentations. Presentations were delivered before school governing bodies, while the *Lessons in Tolerance* educational module was presented before students. The film *Lessons in Tolerance* was part of an interactive educational package developed as a result of the Schools with No Discrimination project implemented by the CPD in partnership with the Danish Human

Rights Institute and with the financial support of EU's Fundamental Rights and Citizenship programme.

A national representative poll was made by territory to identify and create profiles of groups and communities at the highest risk of discrimination, implementing Activity 1 under the Prevention of Discrimination and Creation of Equal Opportunities project, BG05M9OP001–3.003–0001–C001. The project's objective was to create opportunity and prerequisites to reduce the barriers for Bulgarian citizens' full participation in the labour market, access to quality social, health and other services and social inclusion.

4. No, the increasing number of humanitarian crises caused by conflicts, extreme climate conditions or other events did not affect the implementation of the BPfA in Bulgaria.

5. Considering the importance of this topic, Bulgaria has more than five top priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls for the coming five years through laws, policies and programmes, namely: Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice, quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls, elimination of violence against women and girls, access to affordable healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, right to work and rights at work (e.g. gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression), women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises, gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions), unpaid care and domestic work/work-family conciliation (e.g. paid maternity or parental leave, care services) and digital and financial inclusion for women.

With regard to equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice, the Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2014–2021. Projects under this programme include: Improvement of Access to Justice for Persons under the Poverty Threshold with a Special Focus on Women, Children and the Romani Community; and Prevention and Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The first project's beneficiary is the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) in partnership with the Norwegian Judicial Administration. The project aims to improve the access to justice for the Bulgarian citizens living under the poverty threshold. Special attention is paid to three main target groups: victims of domestic and gender-based violence, children at risk and Romani communities, especially in remote and isolated rural areas. The project includes activities to ensure access to legal aid for vulnerable groups by developing a mechanism for cooperation at a local level in response to domestic and gender-based violence as well as the creation of mobile legal aid units. Furthermore, it is planned to strengthen the capacity to provide quality services to vulnerable groups in Bulgaria by raising awareness of the availability and accessibility of free legal aid. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is the Beneficiary of the Prevention and Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence project which is aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Bulgarian authorities, the professionals in the justice sector in particular, to apply the institutional practices and European standards in the area of domestic and gender-based violence. The project will enhance the competence and cooperation between the relevant authorities. There are plans to conduct capacity-building activities through development of training materials, trainings and creation of a case management manual for the cases in the relevant area for judges as well as an assessment of the pilot coordination mechanism for cooperation planned under the programme.

Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls is an area focusing the attention and efforts of everyone: government institutions, non-governmental and employers' organisations, academia and citizens. Over the last few years, the main areas for change in the Bulgarian education system were clearly identified. These are the delegated budget policies, teachers' qualifications, curricula, vocational training, part of the national education standards, with the inclusive education standard being mentioned most often. There are increasing calls to introduce dual

training as means to overcome some pressing labour market issues. It will help overcome the lack of professionals in mechanical engineering, metal processing, electrical engineering, transportation and medicine among others. The main focus is on the objectives related to the reduction of illiteracy and school dropouts (mostly for the young boys and girls), teacher pay increases, higher student test scores as well as various types of external scoring both nationwide and in international comparative studies. A step in the right direction was the recent teacher pay increase and the trend of an increasingly more effective funding of the educational system. The promotion of employment of young professionals and their financial and career incentives also should be considered as a step in the right direction to be continued in the coming years.

With regard to the elimination of violence against women and girls, under the 2019 National Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Programme, the CPD is the institution responsible for the activities related to the organisation of information campaigns for better protection of the victims and prevention of recurrent violence, including prevention and information campaigns at a local level, considering the CPD's network of 24 regional offices.

With regard to the access to affordable healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, it should be noted that the implementation of the activities under the prophylaxis, diagnostics, treatment and rehabilitation policy is aimed at guaranteeing equal access to quality health services at every level of hospital and out-of-hospital care for every Bulgarian citizen. A number of measures were applied under the main strategic documents related to the expansion of the scope and the improvement of the quality of the medical care for children and pregnant women. Child healthcare is a priority in the leading strategic document in this sector—the 2020 National Health Strategy (adopted by 2015 National Assembly Decision) and its Action Plan, laying down specific goals and policies for their achievement. Mother healthcare is another MH policy priority, since women's health, reproductive behaviour and maternal security are of extreme importance.

The mandatory health insurance provides a package of health services guaranteed by the NHIF budget, listed in an ordinance by the Minister of Health and aligned with the specific needs of certain population groups: children, pregnant women and young mothers. The NHIF Budget Act provides funding for the Mother Healthcare and Child Healthcare programmes in line with the modern achievements of medical science guaranteeing covered persons' access to the care they need both in the out-of-hospital and hospital systems. The prophylaxis, diagnostic, treatment and rehabilitation services are updated annually, prioritising child and mother health to guarantee the best possible medical care environment and effective utilisation of public resources.

With the goal to upgrade the NHIF services under the law and improve the scope and access to priority groups, namely children, pregnant women and mothers, in September 2015, the MH launched the National Mother and Child Health Improvement Programme (2014–2020). The programme introduced and financed neonatal hearing screening services which the MH contracted with all hospitals providing childbirth and neonate first care services. It provides timely hearing-problem diagnostics and referrals for all neonates to ensure their full development and integration. The programme provides additional funding for prenatal genetic diagnostics during pregnancy ensuring access to biochemical screening for pregnant women. Opened under the programme were mother and child health consulting centres in all regions of the country to help expand the personal doctor, paediatrician, obstetrician and gynaecologist services for children and pregnant women. These centres provide additional advice on as-needed basis as well as psychological counselling and advice on social issues.

Assured is the consistency of the services provided under the National Mother and Child Health Improvement Programme. In order to ensure risk-free maternity and guarantee access to medical care during pregnancy and childbirth for uninsured women, the MH provides funding for pregnancy and childbirth-related services outside the scope of the mandatory health insurance. The scope and procedure for the provision of obstetric and prophylactic examination services during pregnancy for uninsured women were defined in 2007 Ordinance No 26 on the provision of obstetric services to

uninsured women and testing of children and pregnant women outside the scope of the mandatory health insurance. This guaranteed access to medical services during pregnancy and childbirth for all women, regardless of their health insurance status. In implementing Ordinance No 26, the MH provides reagents and supplies for the testing of children and pregnant women outside the scope of the mandatory health insurance. This includes screening programmes for neonates and pregnant women to provide prophylaxis, early detection and timely treatment of genetic conditions for all neonates and pregnant women, regardless of their health insurance status.

As a result of the amendments to 2009 Decree No 25 adopted by the Council of Ministers on the creation of an Assisted Reproduction Centre, as of the beginning of 2018, there is increased availability of organisational and financial support for partners with reproductive problems.

The Ministry of Health ensures the mandatory preventive immunisations and re-immunisations for vaccine-preventable diseases at a certain age, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social status, etc.

The measures addressing the cervical cancer, one of the most frequent forms of cancer in women, deserve a special mention. Each year, more than 500,000 new cases and more than 250,000 deaths are registered worldwide. The problem is most severe in Eastern Europe where cervical cancer mortality is more than twice higher than elsewhere in Europe. Bulgaria is among the countries with consistently upward morbidity and mortality trends. Cervical cancer is the second most frequent type of cancer in our country after breast cancer, affecting mostly women of active reproductive age. Based on the National Centre for Public Health and Analyses data, every day, a woman dies of cervical cancer and three new cases are diagnosed in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria, cervical cancer vaccines are included in the list of recommended immunisations and are administered against payment. They are recommended for immunisation of girls between 9 and 18 years of age and can also be administered to women of up to 25 years of age in certain cases. Since 2012, the Ministry of Health, jointly with the National Health Insurance Fund and the general practitioners, has developed and applied a mechanism for free and voluntary vaccinations of target population groups against cervical cancer (girls aged 12 and 13). The vaccines were provided with public funds under the National Cervical Cancer Primary Prevention Programme 2012–2016. During the term of the programme, almost 50,000 new doses of vaccines were administered, more than 40,000 information meetings on the risk of cervical cancer and the importance of immunisation for the prevention of the disease were held with parents, more than 14,000 education meetings were held with general practitioners, medical professionals and health mediators on the human papilloma virus and its role in sexually transmitted infections, the importance of primary prevention, tolerance profile and safety of the cervical cancer vaccines, and more than 100 thousand information materials were distributed. To ensure the sustainability and consistency of this effort, a new National Programme for Primary Prevention of Cervical Cancer in the Republic of Bulgaria 2017–2020 with the same target groups and partners was adopted in 2017.

To address the difficulties with the access to healthcare for the Romani population, a network of health mediators was created—a significant achievement for Bulgaria and the Ministry of Health. The Health Mediator position was included in the National Classification of Professions and Positions in the Republic of Bulgaria. Health mediators support both the predominantly Romani communities and the medical professionals providing services to such communities. They are valuable assistants in the education campaigns conducted among young people, expectant mothers and predominantly Romani communities organised by the Regional Health Inspectorates on various topic related to the improvement of their health. The positive results of the work of the health mediators are proof of their value for the improvement of the health status of the Romani people of the isolated minority communities and the closing of the gap with the health status of the remaining Bulgarian population. Furthermore, health mediators significantly helped optimise the scope of the prevention programmes among the Romani population, small children in particular. They also support health education and awareness of the Romani people and are actively involved in social work within the community. They create stable partnerships between disadvantaged communities and local and national institutions.

Between 2007 and 2018, a network of health mediators was established and keeps expanding every year. In 2014, there were 150 health mediators in 79 target municipalities in 25 regions of the country, while, in 2015, there were a total of 170 health mediators. Their numbers kept growing over the next years to reach 195 in 2016, 215 in 2017 and 230 in 2018.

Each calendar year, awareness campaigns are conducted to explain the need of vaccination with the mandatory immunisations in the National Immunisation Calendar and the benefits of the recommended immunisations. Joint work meetings are organised with health mediators and Regional Health Inspectorates to explain the benefits of the immunisations and provide incentives for their regular administrations per the National Immunisation Calendar. Video and audio materials on the importance of the immunisations are played, health education materials on the need for mandatory vaccinations are distributed. Talks and discussions on child nutrition and child raising and the importance of child immunisations are held with young mothers to promote their regular administrations per the National Immunisation Calendar, trainings are organised for persons involved in the raising of children. Prophylactic examinations in certain areas are preceded by, or conducted concurrently with, education activities among the Romani population.

A number of trainings and campaigns to raise health awareness in certain areas of contraception, sexually transmitted infections, breast cancer, cervical cancer, healthy eating, immunisations, patient rights, social diseases, environment and health, osteoporosis and smoking were held between 2013 and 2018.

Within the established network of health mediators for women of ethnic or religious minorities, the health mediator is empowered to:

1. Communicate and define the problem, assess the difficulties for vulnerable minority groups with the access to the corresponding services and develop a specific case action plan;
2. Assist the contacts (accompany, inform, explain) between general practitioners and/or other medical professionals and patients from vulnerable minority groups;
3. Provide support to families, pregnant women and young mothers at risk from vulnerable minority groups;
4. Provide information to persons from vulnerable minority groups on the necessity and importance of the services provided by the NHIF and assist in the completion of the required forms;
5. Provide information and explanations related to the patient's rights and obligations;
6. Support communications with the Social Support Agency, Child Protection Agency and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination by providing information on the work of these institutions and facilitating the persons' access to them;
7. Notify relevant institutions to take measures within their jurisdictions upon identifying violations of the rights of persons from vulnerable minority groups;
8. Advise families and vulnerable minority communities on issues related to:
 - healthy eating and living;
 - hygiene and basic health issues;
 - care for neonates and small children;
 - the benefits of immunisations;
 - family planning and reproductive health;
 - risk factors and prevention of infectious diseases;
 - domestic violence, etc.;
9. Take part in the implementation of national and regional programmes;
10. Provide support and assistance to individuals and families from vulnerable minority groups to better navigate the healthcare and social service systems;
11. Take measures to provide information and prevent high-risk conditions, e.g. HIV/AIDS, among vulnerable minority groups not visiting medical facilities.

With regard to the right to work and rights at work (e.g. gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression): It should be noted that inequality still exists and is mainly related to

the access to resources (pay, incentives, training, promotion). A certain distrust of women's abilities is still evident. Administrative statistics of the Employment Agency show that the average monthly number of registered unemployed persons in Bulgaria for the past year was 202,995 or 33,757 lower than 2017. The average annual unemployment in 2018 was 6.2%, a reduction of one percentage point on an annual basis. As a result of the implementation of the active measures to promote employment among the unemployed persons, 3,139 persons were involved in subsidised employment, of which: 3,069 under the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development," 43 under programmes and 27 under training and employment measures. Year-to-date, a total of 16,119 unemployed persons were involved in trainings to obtain new qualifications and key competencies, of which 14,489 successfully completed the courses. The number of open positions on the primary labour market was 7,526 in December, of which 80.4% were in the private sector. The largest share of open positions was in the processing industry (31.0%), retail, car and motorcycle repairs (15.2%), hotels and restaurants (7.8%), administrative and auxiliary services (7.7%), construction (5.6%), etc. There is an evident trend of women holding an increasing number of executive positions in the businesses.

An important goal in women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises is to achieve an active exchange of information, experience and education practices between women entrepreneurs and their enterprises, additional continual life-long education and practical training, economic and social prosperity in the cross-border regions, analyse and assess the level of equality and activity of women in business, manufacturing and services, develop a plan-strategy for development of priorities and measures related to women's entrepreneurship and businesses, intensify and expand women's employment in a wider range of occupations, improve competitiveness to achieve a higher standard of living in the cross-border regions. The number of women growing and running their own businesses and women willing to start their own businesses keep growing. Many of those willing undergo entrepreneurship trainings on various topics of interest they see as important for their future success. There is an increasing number of specialised online platforms, information publications, policies and programmes encouraging young women's entrepreneurship.

The Ministry of Economy is an associated partner under the DTP2-048-1.2 project, Women in Business, Promoting Entrepreneurship among Young Women in the Danube Region, financed under the Programme INTERREG Danube Transnational 2014-2020. Under this project, the current condition of young women entrepreneurs in Bulgaria based on which the Ministry of Economy plans to create a Strategy to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship 2021–2027 was analysed. With regard to the financial support, a grant award procedure BG16RFOP002-2.024, Promoting Entrepreneurship, was launched in 2018, with specific priority given to women entrepreneurs. The procedure aims to create and grow new businesses in priority sectors of the National Strategy to Promote Small and Mid-Sized Enterprises 2014–2020 and specific areas addressing European and regional challenges. The total grant amount was BGN 67,227,768.06. Currently, the procedure is at the assessment stage, with more than 2,000 project proposals received.

With regard to the gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions), the gender equality principle was applied to the requirements for the retirement age for pension eligibility within the retirement policy for the 2019–2023 period:

- The pension-eligible retirement age continues to be raised on 1 January each year by 2 months for women and 1 month for men until both ages become equal in 2037.
- The social security service required for pension eligibility for both genders continues to be raised by 2 months each year to reach 36 years for women and 39 years for men in 2021.

Raising the retirement age translates into longer participation in the labour market and, respectively, in the social security contributions, which affects the size of the pension benefit. The longer participation of women in social security contributions is a measure to reduce the pension gap between women and men.

With regard to the unpaid care and domestic work/work-family conciliation (e.g. paid maternity or parental leave, care services), a new Directive of the European Parliament and of the

Council is expected to be adopted addressing the work-family conciliation for parents and caregivers and repealing Directive 2010/18/EU. The proposal for the new Directive is a part of the package of measures within the European Pillar of Social Rights and is specifically targeted at the application of the gender-quality principle in terms of employment opportunities and treatment at work. Some of the specific goals being set include better access to work/family conciliation arrangements and increased use of family leave and flexible work arrangements by men. It is believed that the current legislative framework, both at the EU and member-state levels, contains limited provisions related to the involvement of men equal to that of women in the responsibilities to provide care. This results in significant gender-based differences in employment, pay and, correspondingly, pension amounts. This is why the new Directive proposes to update the legislative framework and strengthen the existing rights in certain cases or introduce new rights. More specifically, it envisages the introduction of minimum standards for the determination of individual rights related to the paid paternity leave, parental leave and leave for caregivers as well as flexible work arrangements for working parents and caregivers. The provisions of the new Directive expand the existing rights under Directive 2010/18/EU, transposed into Bulgarian legislation. It will require amendments to national laws and regulations.

The following measures are related to the digital and financial inclusion for women:

National Programme “Digital Bulgaria 2025”¹ (draft). This programme is intended to upgrade and introduce on a large-scale smart IT solutions in all economic and social areas by creating an environment for a wide-ranging application of information and communication technologies (ICT), improvement of the digital skills required for the application of new technologies, innovative electronic services for the businesses and citizens, unified standards and a high level of network and information security and interoperability. It sets the goals, measures and activities with the corresponding commitments of the various institutions related to the application of ICT to achieve the main strategic priorities within their sector strategies organised in six main priority action areas to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive digital growth between 2017 and 2025. The achievements in each priority area will provide balanced support for the ICT demand and supply in order to gain sustainable economic and social benefits both from their wide application in Bulgaria and from the easier access to the digital single market of the EU.

Priority action areas:

- Create appropriate conditions for the development of the digital networks and services and improve access to them;
- Develop a dynamic and innovative digital economy and increase its growth potential;
- Improve digital competencies and skills;
- Ensure effective and high-quality public electronic services for businesses, citizens and government;
- Promote a secure cybernetic ecosystem; address cybersecurity challenges;
- Internet governance.

Forum of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) 2017–2018. The Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (MTITC) took part in the Forum of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) 2017–2018 with a comprehensive presentation summarised by collecting input from the social and economic partners in Bulgaria, titled: Digital Competencies to Benefit from Existing and Emerging Technologies with Focus on Gender and Youth Dimension. Based on the collected information, the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development issued a publication titled: Digital Competencies to Benefit from Existing and Emerging Technologies with Focus on Gender and Youth Dimension.

¹<https://www.mtitc.government.bg/bg/category/85/proekt-na-nacionalna-programa-cifrova-bulgariya-2025-aktualno-sustoyanie-kum-yanuari-2019-g>

The MTITC was actively involved in the creation of UNESCO's Internet Universality indicators and received appreciation from the organisation. UNESCO created a framework of Internet Universality Indicators to help governments and other stakeholders to assess their national internet environments and develop policies for advancement. The indicators are intended to identify the Internet Universality gaps in a given country and make appropriate policy and practice recommendations. They are not intended to rank the countries. Among others, the cross-cutting (interdisciplinary) indicators are related to gender equality and the needs of children and young people, sustainable development, trust and security as well as the legal and ethical aspects of the Internet. The indicators proposed in this framework provide a toolset to be used by diverse national stakeholders, including governments, industry, civil society organisations, academia and other multistakeholder groups concerned with Internet development, access and rights. It can be used both holistically and through its components.

Section Two: Progress across the 12 critical areas of concern

6. Over the last five years, the Republic of Bulgaria took multiple actions to advance gender equality in relation to women's role in paid work and employment with regard to the strengthening/enforcement of laws and workplace policies and practices that prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the public and private sectors, and equal pay legislation. The provisions of the effective Bulgarian Labour Code and Protection against Discrimination Act stipulate equal pay for equal work for members of the various groups and prohibit any form of discrimination in labour relations and sexual harassment at the workplace. The following provisions were adopted over the last 5 years:

Provisions prohibiting discrimination were introduced in the Employment Promotion Act, which regulates the social relations for the promotion and preservation of employment, professional orientation and training for adults and the information and employment agency services. Under Article 2, whenever rights and obligations under said Act are exercised, no direct or indirect discrimination, privileges or restrictions shall be allowed based on nationality, background, ethnicity, personal status, gender, sexual orientation, race, colour of the skin, age, political and religious beliefs, membership in labour and other public organisations and movements, marital, social and financial status and existing mental and physical disability.

The provision of Article 23 of said Act prohibits employers announcing job openings from setting conditions based on gender, age, nationality, ethnicity and health status. Exceptions in terms of gender, age and reduced working capacity are allowed only where, as a consequence of the nature of the work, the gender, age or health status, respectively, is a significant component thereof.

Between 2013 and 2015, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSC) implemented a two-year project titled: Get Equal in Economic Decision-Making (JUST/2012/PROG/AG/GE) financed under the Gender Equality area of the PROGRESS Community programme. The objective of the project was to create a supportive environment to promote balanced participation of women and men holding executive and management positions at various levels in the hierarchy of public companies traded on the Bulgarian Stock Exchange (BSE). The project was focused on the following target groups: social partners; workers and managers in public companies traded on the BSE (private and state-owned); workers and managers in government-owned (state or local) companies; stakeholder partners and the society in general. This project featured an analysis of the current state of affairs in Bulgaria, a number of forums and meetings, promotion of positive models and creation of methodological Company Management Guidance to improve the gender balance where economic decisions are made and action guidance is provided. As a result, the project raised public awareness among the target groups and society in general in relation to the economic decision-making and the need to improve the gender balance among Bulgarian directors as well as the development and distribution of tools to improve the gender balance in economic decision-making which should be beneficial for the economy. This helped create better conditions to promote well-balanced participation of women and men at various

management levels in the public companies traded on the BSE. In this way, prerequisites were created to increase the share of women holding management positions and reduce the gender-based pay gap.

The project featured the following publicity measures:

- three information forums on gender balance in economic decision-making for members of the media, the legislative and executive branches and stock market institutions;
- Creation of a document package for the participants in the public events under the project;
- A closing conference with the participation of all stakeholders to present the project results with a formal ceremony to award companies providing women equality on management positions.

Active gender-responsive labour market policies (e.g. education and training, skills, subsidies) were introduced/strengthened as follows:

In the Employment Promotion Act, a specific provision—Article 53a—was introduced providing financial incentives for employers opening jobs and hiring full-time or part-time single (adoptive) parents and/or (adoptive) mothers with children of up to 5 years of age as well as vocational training opportunities. The financial parameters of the promotional measure are determined annually with the National Employment Action Plan. Between 2016 and 2018, a part of the employers' costs for salaries, additional payments under the labour law and employer's social security contributions for a period of up to 6 months were financed under the terms of this measure. Vocational training opportunities were also provided. Employers are required to provide employment to the above persons for an additional period equal to the subsidised period.

Between 2016 and 2018, 474 mothers and 57 single parents of children of up to 5 years of age were employed under this measure. The funds spent from national budget were BGN 1,125,330.

Under amendments to the Employment Promotion Act (EPA), adopted by the National Assembly on 11.12.2015 (promulgated, SG No 101/ 2015), the following 2 promotional measures were combined into one (still effective—EPA Article 53a):

- Promotional measure under Article 53 of the Employment Promotion Act: incentives for employers to hire unemployed single (adoptive) parents and/or (adoptive) mothers of children of up to 3 years of age;
- Promotional measure under Article 53a of the Employment Promotion Act: incentives for employers to hire unemployed (adoptive) mothers of children between 3 and 5 years of age.

Between 2014 and 2015, 338 mothers with small children and 27 single parents were employed under the terms of both promotional measures. For a period of up to 6 months, a part of the costs of employers opening jobs and providing employment for a period of up to 6 months were financed by the national budget. The funds spent from the national budget were in the amount of BGN 1,149,726.

Measures were implemented to prevent sexual harassment, including at the workplace. For proceedings related to protection against discrimination before the CPD, one permanent panel is gender-specialised, while the larger five-member panel is specialised in cases of multiple discrimination. The total number of cases of sexual harassment over the last 5 years was 14.

Improvements were made to the access to modern (including climate-smart) technologies, infrastructure and services (including agricultural expansion). The objective of the FSC forest certification system is to ensure and promote profitable forest management, respecting the social norms and rights of the local communities and, at the same time, protecting the environment. Forest certification is a direct economic instrument to guarantee sustainable development and management of forest resources. In 2017, a national FSC standard was adopted, reflecting 9 of the 10 main principles and criteria of sustainable forest management applied in 80 countries on 5 continents over an area of 135 million hectares (2010 data). One of these principles, Principle 2, addresses the workers' rights and working conditions. More specifically, one of the six criteria under this principle guarantees gender equality in work practices, provision of training and qualification enhancement opportunities, contract

execution and the processes of allocation of work and management activities in general. Each year, an independent certification authority verifies the adherence to the principles, criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management and publishes reports on the verifications which are publicly available. The information on Bulgaria and the organisations holding an FSC sustainable forest management FM/SoS certificate is available at <https://info.fsc.org/certificate.php#result>.

Bulgaria took a number of other actions as well. For instance, to promote equal pay for equal work for women and men, the MLSP regularly holds roundtables and meetings dedicated to this issue aimed at raising awareness in society and reducing the gender pay gap. A roundtable was held on 27 November 2015 to discuss the gender pay gap trends in certain economic areas of the Bulgarian labour market and the available means to reduce the gender gaps in terms of both pay and pension/social-security models.

In 2016, the MLSP, jointly with the Bulgarian Teachers' Labour Union, the National Commission for Work with Women, Young People and Children with the Confederation of Independent Labour Unions in Bulgaria (CILUB) and the Gender Project in Bulgaria Foundation, held an Equal Pay Information Day in Bulgaria. More than 180 labour activists, members of employer organisations, government institutions, the academia and NGOs took part in this event. The participants were informed of the results of the study and expert analyses carried out within the project titled "*zeroGPG – Gender e-quality: Innovative tool and awareness raising on GPG*". Possible strategies to address the Gender Pay Gap (GPG) issue were discussed. The participants in the discussion supported the presenters' assertion that gender pay equality is part of the social dialogue.

On 11 January 2017, in the MLSP building, implementing the Work Programme on Cooperation 2016–2017 between the MLSP and Kingdom of Sweden's Ministry of Health and Social Issues, a roundtable was held on the topic of Promoting Women's Economic Independence: Achievements and Challenges. Presented at the roundtable were the Bulgarian Legal Framework on Gender Equality, the Gender Equality Act and Bulgarian institutional mechanism, the activities of the National Gender Equality Board to the Council of Ministers, the National Gender Equality Promotion Strategy 2016–2020 and the indicators used to measure its implementation.

On 27.11.2018, MLSP representatives took part in a conference on the topic of Gender Equal Pay Day—the Bulgarian Response with representatives of the CILUB labour union, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, etc. The conference focused on the causes of the gender pay gap and the mechanisms for its reduction.

Within the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 January–30 June 2018), Bulgaria took the following actions in the areas of employment and social policy:

- A meeting of the High-Level Group on gender equality issues between 31 January and 1 February 2018 in Sofia. Closing the gender pay gap, fighting against poverty among women, increasing women's participation on the labour market and gender-equal economic independence, fighting against gender-based violence, protection and support for gender equality and women's rights and the rights of women in the digital world were some of the main topics of discussion during the meeting of the group;

- Cooperation with the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) with a focus on: Women in the Digital World. Bulgaria, as president of the Council of the European Union, commissioned the EIGE to develop a conceptual framework for a study on the topic of: Gender Equality and the Digital World. Digital competence becomes increasingly topical in the context of the successful dealing with today's challenges. Technological changes continue to transform the labour market, offering new opportunities for work and, at the same time, hiding potential risks for those less proficient in the field of information and communication technology.

- Presentation/inclusion of the topic of the participation of women in digitalisation in all relevant events during the Bulgarian Presidency. The topic of women in the digital world was featured in the agenda of several key events during the Bulgarian Presidency.

With regard to the support for the transition from informal to formal work, including legal and

policy measures that benefit women in informal employment, the national policy to combat undeclared employment covers all persons, regardless of their age and gender. The objectives of the measures to prevent undeclared employment are: payment of wages in the actual payable amounts and, as a result, legalising workers in the shadow economy, social and health insurance payments on wages paid in lower than the actual payable amounts; more effective fight against undeclared employment and reducing the share of the shadow economy; using day contracts to legalise the employment of some agricultural workers performing mostly unskilled labour.

Under the Bulgarian labour law, all employment relations shall be legalised in the form of a written employment contract and the employer shall register the employment contract with the National Revenue Agency (NRA). The legal regime for the registration of the employment contracts with the corresponding electronic processing and register access system are measures to ensure clarity, security and accuracy of the numbers of employed persons both locally and nationally. This also helps facilitate the work of the labour inspectorates and the enforcement authorities of the National Social Security Institute (NSSI), the NRA and the NHIF related to the labour and social security law enforcement.

Under the LC, the General Labour Inspectorate Executive Agency (GLI EA) is responsible for the overall enforcement of the labour law. The GLI EA has the authority to decree existing contractual employment relationships upon identifying cases where the employment has not been arranged in accordance with the law. In such cases, the existence of contractual employment relationship can be identified by all evidentiary means. The GLI EA may direct employers to clear any violations. If the employer fails to clear the violation as directed or commits another such violation, enforcement authorities may suspend their business until the violation is cleared.

In addition, as of 1 January 2015, criminal liability (Article 255b of the Criminal Code) was introduced for any person evading mandatory state social security or health insurance payments in large amounts.

Amendments to the LC, effective as of July 2015, regulate a special type of employment contracts for seasonal agricultural work. The main objective was to reduce the undeclared seasonal agricultural employment and more flexibility for the plant-growers to hire workers and harvesters. Amendments to the Labour Code of May 2018 provide for an option to have 8- or 4-hour workdays under short-term seasonal agricultural employment contracts. Short-term contracts incentivise workers to abstain from work without an employment contract because, under the short-term contracts, they have social security rights, i.e. service-based and income-based pension eligibility. They are entitled to workers' compensation upon work accident. In addition, they must have health insurance. Another incentive for having short-term contracts and reducing undeclared employment is the fact that such contracts do not suspend the unemployment benefits the persons may receive. Equally important is the fact that such persons do not lose their eligibility for energy and social assistance. NSSI data showed significant increases in the numbers of employed persons in this sector for the first half of 2016, when the day contracts were already in use, compared to the first half of 2015, when the day contracts were not yet introduced. In April 2016, for the first time since 2004, the number of employed persons in the agriculture exceeded 80,000. In 2016, 186,999 day contracts were used. In 2017, their number was 196,838 and, after the 2018 amendment to the Labour Code, 213,060 contracts were used, of which 16,621 were for 4-hour workdays.

Adopted in 2015 was a Unified National Strategy to Improve the Tax Collection Rates, Address the Shadow Economy and Reduce Enforcement Costs. Its objective was to prevent and restrict informal economy, including undeclared work. The 2018 Action Plan under the Strategy included specific measures to reduce undeclared work in the following main areas:

1. Strengthen the enforcement and increase the labour and social security crime detection rates.
2. Improve the GLI EA's enforcement in the areas of hiring, working hours, leaves, pay and overtime.
3. Strengthen the enforcement in the areas of hiring foreign citizens, including illegal residents,

and accepting workers and employees on international assignments from Member States of the EU and third countries.

4. Strengthen the enforcement in the area of employment agencies and businesses providing temporary employment.

5. Enforcement of Article 255b of the Criminal Code in cases of social security evasion.

The responsible behaviour of the social partners is of significant importance in the fight against undeclared labour. Labour unions may alert the enforcement authorities on violations of the labour law and request administrative penalties for the violators. Labour union representatives may visit businesses and other workplaces at any time and request employers to provide explanations and any necessary information, documents, etc.

In the specific area of promoting women's participation in formal employment, measures were put in place to promote work/family conciliation. Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave was transposed into the Bulgarian legislation to introduce: parental leave and flexible work arrangements for the persons returning to work from parental leave. There are various provisions in the Bulgarian legislation to support and protect contractually employed persons who want to use, are currently using or are returning to work after using maternity, paternity or child-raising leaves. Adoption provisions are also covered.

New provisions in labour and social security law, effective as of 1 June 2017, support mothers' faster return to their professional lives. Any female worker or employee eligible to receive compensation for a paid pregnancy or childbirth leave is entitled thereunder to a payment in the amount of 50 percent of her legal compensation in cases where, after the expiration of the respective post-birth periods allowed by decisions of the health authorities, she does not take a pregnancy or childbirth leave or, if she does, terminates it. The Labour Code and the Social Security Code also contain provisions under which any (adoptive) mother having general illness and maternity social security coverage and eligible to receive compensation for raising a small child of up to 2 years of age shall be entitled to a payment in the amount of 50 percent of said compensation, if she does not take, or terminates, the additional paid leave for raising a small child. The same rights are available to self-employed persons having general illness and maternity social security coverage.

7. Over the last five years, Bulgaria took a number of actions to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and promote work-family conciliation.

For instance, with regard to the inclusion of unpaid care and domestic work in national statistics and accounting (e.g. time-use surveys, valuation exercises, satellite accounts), in 2018, the National Statistical Institute conducted a survey (additional module to the regular Workforce Monitoring) on the topic of Work/Family Conciliation. The questions included in this survey were intended to:

- identify the degree to which the availability of appropriate child or elderly care services affects the individuals' participation on the labour market;
- analyse the degree of flexibility available at work in terms of work/family conciliation;
- identify work suspensions related to child or elderly care and analyse their durations.

Childcare services were expanded or existing services were made more affordable. The "Parents in Employment" operation within the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" ensured better work/family conciliation for parents of small children by providing employment for unemployed persons in the area of childcare. It promotes the return to work for young parents, especially women, since they are engaged in childcare to a larger degree than men. Unemployed persons are hired as babysitters for children of up to 5 years of age. Amendments made in early 2019 expanded the scope of the operation by additionally including unemployed and employed parents/mothers of many children of up to 12 years of age going to day-care centres, kindergartens and school. The maximum period for the "babysitter" service is 18 months or until the child turns 5 or,

respectively, the children turn 12 years of age. Between 2017 and January 2019, 1,303 women were employed as babysitters under this operation.

Expanded support was provided for frail elderly persons and others needing intense forms of care. National Programme "Assistants for People with Disabilities" (NP APD) was developed pursuant to Article 31 of the Employment Promotion Act (EPA) and in accordance with the provisions of Article 12b of the Social Support Act (SoSA) and the Rules for its application, with the provisions of the State Aid Act also being applicable for its implementation. It is consistent with the principles of the National Strategy for Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities, the principles of deinstitutionalisation, European practices and the principles of the employment policy of the EU. A main objective of the NP APD is to provide employment for unemployed persons in services improving the quality of life of persons with permanent disabilities or single persons with serious conditions. Each year, the NP APD provides employment to thousands unemployed persons. In 2014, 3,640 unemployed were hired, of which 876 as personal assistants to children; in 2015, 3,068 unemployed were hired, of which 994 as personal assistants to children; in 2016, 2,967 unemployed were hired, of which 922 as personal assistants to children. In 2017, the unemployed persons hired under the Programme to provide care for their relatives with permanent disabilities were 2,167, including 2,023 as personal assistants and 144 as assistant-tutors. By November 2018, there were 2,428 approved applications for enrolment into the NP APD.

The Operational Programme for Food and/or Basic Material Assistance from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) 2014–2020 was approved by the European Commission on 05.12.2014. The Programme was developed in accordance with the requirements of the FEAD. It is a strategic document establishing the framework for the utilisation of co-funding provided by the Fund and the national budget within the 2014–2020 programming period and covers the territory of the entire country.

The Programme helps achieve the National Goal to reduce the number of persons living in poverty by 260,000 until 2020 consistent with the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. To achieve this goal, the Programme is focused on the persons living in utmost poverty and social isolation. The reviewed state of the poverty level and the groups at risk of poverty justified Bulgaria's decision to use FEAD funds for food assistance considering the urgency of nutritional privation.

Support under the Operational Programme is provided through two basic types of operations: provision of individual food packages and provision of hot meals.

Individual food packages are provided to persons and families eligible for support under the procedure of Ordinance RD-07-5 of 2008 on the terms and procedure to provide targeted heating aid. The packages are provided to the persons of the target group by a partner organisation responsible to deliver the packages to the homes of persons who are unable to go to the food distribution centres.

The hot meals are provided to persons and families eligible for monthly support, i.e. having incomes below the differentiated minimum income level; single parents without social security coverage, supported under the FACA; single persons receiving minimum pensions (service and age, disability, social and next-of-kin pensions); vagrant and homeless children and persons. Partner organisations assisting the hot meal deliveries to the persons from the target group are local or district governments on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria. They receive funding for the period not financed by the Social Protection Fund, i.e. between May and September. Local governments not receiving funding from the Social Protection Fund may apply under the Operational Programme for a year-long delivery of hot meals to the poorest.

Support under the Programme is additionally provided to persons and families affected by disaster- and accident-related emergencies eligible for one-time aid under the procedure of the Rules for the Application of the Social Support Act (RASoSA). Identified for every such person, based on the social assessment, are the individual level of privation and the specific type of support to be received under the Programme—individual food packages or hot meals—as well as the way such support will be provided.

The food provided to persons at high risk of poverty will expand the effective scope of the social support programmes. We believe that the support for the expansions and upgrades of the public kitchens will help reduce poverty and further improve access to social services for persons in need. The expanded scope of the effective social support and the improved access to social services will help reduce poverty in Bulgaria.

With regard to the measures to introduce or extend the maternity/paternity/parental leave, as of the beginning of 2014, the State Social Security provides a new type of payment—for adoption of a child between 2 and 5 years of age. The new Article 53a of the Social Security Code (effective as of 1.01.2014) regulates the right of the adoptive parent to receive payment for the period she/he takes a leave, under the new Article 164b of the LC for adoption of a child between 2 and 5 years of age under the terms of full adoption, of up to 365 days as of the day the child was received for adoption but ending not later than the day the child turns 5 years of age. Under this legislation, the right of leave is related to the age of the child on the date the court decision for adoption becomes effective. During a leave under Article 164b of the LC, the State Social Security entitles (Article 53a of the SSC) persons having general illness and maternity social security coverage to receive payments for adoption of a child between 2 and 5 years of age under the terms of full adoption for a period of up to 365 days but ending not later than the day the child turns 5 years of age. The payment is made, if the child does not go to a care facility, including day-care or school.

Number of persons ² receiving payments for adoption of a child between 2 and 5 years of, 01.01.2014–30.06.2018:	Women	Men
2014	90	1
2015	115	1
2016	105	0
2017	103	0
01.01.2018–30.06.2018	76	0

The amendments to Article 163 and Article 167 of the Labour Code regulating the right of leave upon pregnancy, childbirth and death or serious illness of a parent, effective as of 01.06.2017, expanded the scope of persons eligible, in certain conditions, to take a leave and receive the following related corresponding types of pregnancy and childbirth payments from the State Social Security:

- ✓ As of 01.06.2017, eligible for childbirth payment (410 days) shall be persons having social security coverage with whom a child was placed under the procedure of Article 26, Paragraph 1 of the Child Protection Act (CPA) in the amount proportional to the difference between the age of the child on the day of their placement and the day of the expiration of the authorised childbirth paid leave period (Article 50, Paragraph 5 of the SSC);
- ✓ As of 01.06.2017, adoptive fathers of children of up to 5 years of age are also eligible to receive payments for a period of up to 15 days as of the day the child was received for adoption (Article 50, Paragraph 6 of the SSC);
- ✓ As of 01.06.2017, eligible to receive childbirth payments after the child turns 6 months of age, for the remaining part of the 410-day period (Article 50, Paragraph 7 of the SSC), are also the parents of the (adoptive) mother or father of the child and the spouse of a women worker or employee in the cases of placement of a child with spouses under the procedure of Article 26, Paragraph 1 of the CPA.

² This indicator shows the total number of persons who have received payments for adoption of a child between 2 and 5 years of age.

As of 01.06.2017, a new type of payment was included in the social security legislation (Article 50a of the SSC) for the cases where the pregnancy and childbirth leave was not taken, in the amount of 50 per cent of the pregnancy and childbirth payment for the remaining part of the 410-day period. It is paid in the cases where the (adoptive) mother eligible for pregnancy and childbirth payment has decided to return to work early and not take the whole leave she was entitled to. In these cases, she is entitled to receive payment in the amount of 50 percent of the pregnancy and childbirth payment for the remainder of the 410-day period. If the mother dies or loses custody, the (adoptive) father shall receive the payment.

Number of women receiving payments under Article 50a of the SSC between 01.06.2017 and 30.06.2018:	Women
01.06–31.12.2017	672
01.01 –30.06.2018	695

Amendments and supplements to Article 164b of the LC, effective as of 01.07.2018, guarantee equal rights to persons adopting children of up to 2 years of age and persons adopting children between 2 and 5 years of age by equalising the duration of the leave for adoption of children of up to 5 years of age (365 days as of the day the child was received for adoption) and the payment provided by the State Social Security (90 percent of the daily average social security income of the person for the past 24 months), thereby ensuring equal treatment of adopters.

As of 01.07.2018, the State Social Security provides the following payments for adoption of a child of up to 5 years of age:

- payments upon adoption of a child of up to 5 years of age made to the single adoptive mother or father for a period of 365 days as of the day the child was received for adoption but ending not later than the day the child turns 5 years of age (Article 53c of the SSC). The payment is in the amount of 90 percent of the person's gross salary or daily average income on which social security contributions were paid or payable in the period of 24 calendar months prior to the month of materialisation of the social security risk.
- payments upon not taking the leave for adoption of a child of up to 5 years of age. These payments are in the amount of 50 percent of the payment upon adoption of a child of up to 5 years of age in the cases where the adoption leave was not taken (Article 53d of the SSC).

With regard to the civil proceedings, even if the Code of Civil Procedure does not contain an express provision against discrimination, the claimant's rights exercised under a civil proceeding, the hearing of the case by the court and the court's decision to accept or reject the claim are not in any way influenced by the person's gender. Family relationships, under the Family Code, are also regulated based of a number of fundamental principles, including gender equality, voluntary matrimony and respect for the individual in the family.

8. No, over the last five years, Bulgaria did not introduce any austerity/fiscal consolidation measures, such as cuts in public expenditure or public sector downsizing. Over the last five years, economic growth and revenue-related discretionary measures were the main reasons for any fiscal consolidation. With regard to the social sector, its funding has been a priority over the last five years. Funds were provided in various areas of social policy, education, sport and culture, without any prejudice to the principles of equality of women and girls.

9. Active labour market policy and a number of targeted measures (e.g. job training, skills, employment subsidies, etc.) has promoted poor women's access to decent work. Support for women

is provided in a number of areas:

- Personalised services such as: information and referrals to job openings, job orientation, support by psychologists and case managers, motivation for active behaviour on the labour market and inclusion in employment and training programmes and measures;
- Expanding the opportunities and access to training for the elderly;
- Incentives for employers creating jobs and providing employment.

The objective is to provide effective support to unemployed women and short and quality transitions to employment through a wide variety of services.

Between 2014 and 2018, the annual average number of registered unemployed persons was 351,497. The annual average number of unemployed women was 191,664 or 54.5%. In 2018, there were 165,333 registered unemployed women, down 49,169 or 29.7% from 2014, predominantly women without qualifications and special skills. Their share was down 0.5 percentage points—from 47.3% in 2014 to 46.8% in 2018.

Unemployed women enjoy equal access to, and are actively involved in, all programmes, projects and promotional measures implemented on the labour market with funds from the national budget and the European Social Fund (ESF) under the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” (OP HRD). Various training opportunities are available for women: vocational training, key competence training, job training (traineeship for qualified women without job experience, apprenticeship under the guidance of a mentor for unskilled women with lower or no education), on-the-job training (dual training), etc. Women are more actively involved in the training activities. Between 2014 and 2018, more than 82 thousand women (59.2% of all persons in training) were involved in active labour market policy programmes, projects and measures, of which more than 52 thousand women (65.7% of all persons in training) in measures financed by the national budget and more than 30 thousand women (48% of all persons in training) in measures financed by the ESF under the OP HRD.

The policy for the promotion of employment for young people, including young women, is a priority in the active labour market policies. Since early 2014, Bulgaria implements the European Youth Guarantee—a commitment “to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.” To this end, under the National Plan for the Implementation of the Youth Guarantee 2014–2020, a number of measures were taken to intervene early and involve young people who are not studying, working and registered as unemployed as well as a number of measures to integrate registered unemployed young people in the labour market. Youth mediators are engaged in the outreach toward, and involvement of, young people, including young women, who are not studying or working. Upon registration with the labour office, young people receive access to a wide range of services: information, advice, referrals to subsidised jobs or the primary labour market, diverse training and qualification opportunities, traineeships at actual jobs, apprenticeship, etc. Additional services are provided by case managers and psychologists such as: psychological support, career advice, job orientation, jobseeker workshops, mediation for the resolution of complex issues driving young people away from the labour market, etc. Individual career orientation is provided with an individually developed plan containing steps to find a job consistent with the person’s professional profile and development goals.

Under the Career Start programme, unemployed young people of up to 29 years of age, including young women, with college degrees and no job experience in the areas they have majored in are able to gain experience on jobs in the public administration within 9 months. The objective is to facilitate the transition from education to employment and achieve a flexible combination of knowledge, skills and practice consistent with the requirements of the modern economy. Between 2014 and 2018, 2,742 (74.4% of all persons) unemployed women trainees were enrolled in the programme.

Operation “Youth Employment” under the OP HRD allows unemployed young people under 29 years of age to become more competitive through job trainings facilitating their transition from education to employment and gain the job experience required for the jobs openings announced by employers. Between 2014 and January 2019, 9,081 women were enrolled in activities under this operation.

Operation “Trainings and Employment for Young People” under the OP HRD has the objective to integrate unemployed young people under 29 years of age in employment with an employer by trainings and subsidies provided to employers offering such employment. Between 2016 and January 2019, 12,191 women were enrolled in this operation.

To promote the involvement and improve the opportunities to find a job for young people under 29 years of age, who are not in education or employment and are not registered as unemployed, the operation “Ready to Work” under OP HRD was implemented. It features identification, information and motivation for active behaviour on the labour market for economically inactive young people; jobseeker workshops; psychological support; referrals to appropriate training and education measures consistent with the persons’ individual profiles; organisation of job fairs to have involved young people meet prospective employers. Between 2017 and January 2019, 110 women were enrolled in activities under this operation.

Opportunities for apprenticeship and acquisition of practical skills under the guidance of a mentor and on-the-job training (dual training) are available for unskilled persons, including women, with lower or no education.

Under projects initiated and implemented by representative organisations of the social partners at the national level, training and employment opportunities are provided to unemployed and disadvantaged persons on the labour market, including unemployed women. A combined approach is applied, including trainings for jobs in high demand, trainings on key competences required for successful job performance, subsidised employment or employment on the primary labour market (unsubsidised employment) for a period of at least 3 months. Between 2014 and 2018, 28,845 women (67.5% of all persons enrolled in the training projects) were enrolled in trainings under the projects of the social partners.

Within Operation “Trainings and Employment” under the OP HRD, registered unemployed persons under 29 years of age can take a job with an employer in the real economy or local government through trainings aligned with the specific demands of the job or an employment subsidy. Between 2016 and January 2019, 7,829 women were enrolled in this operation.

The Operation “Vouchers for Employed Persons” provides opportunities for persons with high-school or lower education employed in non-governmental enterprises to acquire new or expand their existing knowledge and skills by enrolment in professional and/or key competence trainings. Between 2017 and January 2019, 10,711 women (46% of all employed persons enrolled under the Operation) were enrolled in voucher-based trainings.

Measures to promote the involvement and return to the labour market with a stable job are implemented for long-term unemployed persons, of which more than 50% are women. Available services include information and motivation for an active behaviour on the labour market, enrolment in jobseeker workshops, job orientation and advice, professional training, subsidised full-time or part-time employment for a period of up to 12 months in the private and public sectors, mentorship for new hires. Employment Integration Agreements are executed with long-term unemployed persons laying down specific goals and actions consistent with the identified problems, time limits and specific responsibilities of the unemployed persons and the employment agencies. Between 2014 and 2018, 58.6% of all persons enrolled in the Programme for Training and Employment of long-term unemployed persons were women (3,159 long-term unemployed women).

Operation “Work” under the OP HRD is focused on intensifying the economic involvement and improving access to employment for unemployed jobseekers as well as on involving uninvolved persons from regions with high unemployment by providing opportunities for enrolment in various

forms of training and employment. Targeted support is provided to long-term unemployed persons to overcome the obstacles and create prerequisites for their employment. This Operation helps address the imbalance in the workforce distribution and unemployment in small communities with adverse demographics which, in turn, helps prevent long-term decreases in population of working age in these regions by providing employment opportunities and creating new jobs. Between 2018 and January 2019, 4,767 women were employed under this Operation.

Women are employed in elderly care services provided under the National Programme “Assistants for People with Disabilities.” Between 2014 and 2018, 9,809 women (68.5% of all enrolled persons) were employed under the Programme.

The National Programme “Retirement Support” assists the transition from unemployment to work or retirement for persons over 58 years of age. Employers creating jobs and providing employment for persons from the target group, including women, receive funds from the national budget to cover their labour costs for a period between 3 and 24 months.

Unemployed women are also actively involved in the National Programme for Employment and Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities, in the promotional measures providing incentives to employers providing “first jobs,” hiring unemployed persons over 55 years of age, long-term unemployed persons, persons with disabilities, creating “green jobs,” etc.

The job fairs with employer involvement organised by the Employment Agency also have a positive effect on women’s employment. Women receive additional support at jobseeker workshops, where they can acquire important job-seeking skills, learn how to prepare their job applications and present themselves to prospective employers.

Between 2014 and 2018, with support under the programmes and measures of the active labour market policies implemented by the Employment Agency, financed by the national budget and co-financed by the European Social Fund, a total of 683,111 women, or 56.2% of all new hires, found a job, of which 35,868 women started work under projects of the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014–2020.

With regard to the broadened access to land, housing, finance, technology and/or agricultural extension services, the National Agriculture Advisory Office (NAAO) is a secondary allocator of budget funds within the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, with a seat in Sofia and 27 regional offices in the country. It is mainly involved in advisory services and trainings for farmers and other interested persons, improvement of the cooperation throughout the Research/Agricultural Advice/Agricultural Business system, improvement of farmers’ qualifications and awareness, support for the implementation of the Programme for Rural Development 2014–2020.

Over the last five years, the NAAO has provided an average of 30,000 consultations annually only for the PRD 2014–2020, to more than 15,000 persons, of which approximately 65% were men and 35% were women. Within the same period, men were more frequently seeking advice, which reflects the fact that in agriculture most of the employed persons and farm managers are men.

The NAAO’s Vocational Training Centre provides training (30 class hours) and information activity courses (18 and 16 class hours) for farmers. In addition, each year, more than 100 information and training events were held with research institutes, applied-science organisations and other institutions, organisations and experts to help transfer knowledge and technologies to the farmers. More than 2,500 persons were trained at such events.

The Ministry of Economy is an associated partner under the DTP2–048–1.2 project. Women in Business, Promoting Entrepreneurship among Young Women in the Danube Region, financed under the Programme INTERREG Danube Transnational 2014–2020. Under this project was analysed the current condition of young women entrepreneurs in Bulgaria based on which the Ministry of Economy plans to create a Strategy to Promote Women’s Entrepreneurship 2021–2027.

With regard to the financial support, a grant award procedure BG16RFOP002-2.024, Promoting Entrepreneurship, was launched in 2018, with specific priority given to women entrepreneurs. The procedure aims to create and grow new businesses in priority sectors of the

National Strategy to Promote Small and Mid-Sized Enterprises 2014–2020 and specific areas addressing European and regional challenges. The total grant amount was BGN 67,227,768.06. Currently, the procedure is at the assessment stage, with more than 2,000 project proposals received.

With regard to the introduced or strengthened social protection programmes for women and girls (e.g. cash transfers for women with children, public works/employment guarantee schemes for women of working-age, pensions for older women), the Social Support Agency implements the national policy in the area of family assistance for children by providing financial support to families with children under the procedure of the FACA. The main objective of such family assistance is to ensure that the children are raised in a family environment. Several assistance categories are provided under the procedure of the FACA with distinguishing criteria according to the purpose of the specific type of family assistance.

✓ One-time family assistance: one-time pregnancy assistance; one-time childbirth assistance; one-time child-adoption assistance; one-time twin parenting assistance; one-time parenting assistance for (adoptive) mothers in regular college education; one-time assistance for first-grade students; one-time assistance for once-a-year free train or bus travel for mothers of many children.

✓ Monthly family assistance: monthly parenting assistance for a child under one year of age; monthly parenting assistance until the child finishes high school but not later than the day the child turns 20 years of age; monthly parenting benefits for a child with a permanent disability.

Four types of family assistance are provided upon income verification. These are: the one-time pregnancy assistance; the one-time assistance for first-grade students; the monthly parenting assistance for a child under one year of age and the monthly parenting assistance until the child finishes high school but not later than the day the child turns 20 years of age.

The Family Assistance Act provides for the option to have the monthly parenting assistance until the child finishes high school, the monthly parenting assistance for a child under one year of age and the one-time assistance for first-grade students provided in kind.

The amounts of the monthly assistance under the FACA are defined in the National Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria Act for the respective year. The monthly income ceiling for assistance eligibility was changed twice within the reviewed 5-year period: in July 2016 it was increased from BGN 350 to BGN 400 and, as of 2018, it was increased to BGN 450. The objective of these increases was to prevent the exclusion of low-income working families from the scope of the family assistance for children.

The one-time assistance under the procedure of Article 10a of the FACA, covering part of the expenses at the beginning of the school year, is provided to families with children starting first grade in a state or municipal school, when the children are permanent residents in the country and are not placed with foster families under the procedure of Article 26 of the Child Protection Act (CPA). They amounts are set by a Council of Ministers decision under a proposal by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy for the respective year.

With regard to the introduced/strengthened low-cost legal services for women living in poverty, notable measures include the guaranteed equal access to justice for all persons, regardless of their gender—e.g. easier filing of complaints by women for violations of their rights by providing effective legal aid regulated by the Legal Aid Act (the LAA).

There are four types of legal aid:

- advice for an out-of-court settlement or going to court, including advice under Chapter Five (a);
- preparation of court filings;
- trial representation;
- representation upon detention under the Ministry of Interior Act, the Customs Act or the State Agency for National Security Act.

In the first two cases, legal aid is free and is provided to natural persons meeting certain non-discriminatory criteria: persons and families eligible for social support; persons residing at specialised social service institutions or receiving some form of resident social service; children placed with foster

families or families of relatives or friends; survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault or human trafficking who do not have means and want to have an attorney; persons seeking asylum under the Asylum and Refugees Act who are not eligible for other legal aid provided under the law, etc.

After 2015, the legal-aid legislation was amended and supplemented several times to guarantee access to legal aid for a broader circle of persons from vulnerable social groups by creating new forms of legal advice provided on simplified terms. A provision was made to make all citizens (regardless of their gender) not meeting the criteria under Article 22(1) and (2) of the LAA but having income under the poverty line for the country eligible to receive legal aid for advice provided either by the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) or the Regional Advice Centres (RAC) with the respective bar associations. The National Primary Legal Aid Hotline (NPLAH) and the Regional Advice Centres were additionally regulated as new forms of legal advice within the legal-aid system and were endorsed as permanent services of the Legal Assistance Bureau. The objective of these new forms was to overcome the formalities in the system making it largely inaccessible for illiterate or uninformed citizens without knowledge of the law, living in remote communities, social isolation, pensioners with disabilities or reduced mobility, persons living alone or without permanent residences. This is why these two forms of legal advice were made available to the citizens on simplified terms, exempted from the general procedure to apply for legal aid, i.e. not requiring a decision to provide legal aid and appoint an attorney by the Bureau's chairperson. In addition, every citizen may receive advice at a RAC upon presenting evidence that their monthly income does not exceed the country's poverty line.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Improvement of Access to Justice for Persons under the Poverty Threshold with a Special Focus on Women, Children and the Romani Community, with the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) as beneficiary in partnership with the Norwegian Judicial Administration. The project aims to improve the access to justice for the Bulgarian citizens living under the poverty threshold. Special attention is paid to three main target groups: victims of domestic and gender-based violence, children at risk and Romani communities, especially in remote and isolated rural areas. The project includes activities to ensure access to legal aid for vulnerable groups by developing a mechanism for cooperation at a local level in response to domestic and gender-based violence as well as the creation of mobile legal aid units. Furthermore, it is planned to strengthen the capacity to provide quality services to vulnerable groups in Bulgaria by raising awareness of the availability and access to free legal aid.

10. A number of measures were taken in the Republic of Bulgaria to improve access to social protection for women and girls.

They include, for instance, measures for introduced or strengthened social protection for unemployed women (e.g. unemployment benefits, public works programmes, social assistance). Each year, 28 regional employment programmes are developed and financed with funds from the MLSP's active policy budget, implementing the National Employment Action Plans. Amendments to the Employment Promotion Act (EPA), adopted by the National Assembly on 11.12.2015, introduce a new approach where the local governments play a key role. Under these changes to the legislation, one regional programme is implemented for each region and includes proposals from the regional and municipal administrations. Diverse activities of local significance are carried out under the regional programmes, including: maintenance and cleaning of municipal parks and gardens, courtyards, environmental activities, landscaping, assistance for home social support services, etc. The national budget provides time-limited funding for the labour costs of persons from the vulnerable groups. Between 2014 and 2018, a total of 5,481 (45.1%) women were employed under regional programmes.

Within its jurisdiction, as a specialised authority for protection against discrimination, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination takes action upon receiving complaints for discrimination in the provision of social services under the mechanism for protection against discrimination within the specialised proceeding:

With regard to the introduced or strengthened non-contributory social pensions, in the Republic of Bulgaria, persons over 70 years of age receive a social pension for old age, regardless of their gender, when the annual income per household member on the day they turned seventy years of age was lower than the sum of the guaranteed minimum monthly income set for the country for the last 12 months (between 01.01.2009 and 31.12.2017, it was BGN 65 and, as of 1.01.2018, BGN 75 per household member). The amount of the social pension for old age and the terms for its payment are set by the Council of Ministers under a proposal by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the National Social Security Institute. Between 2014 and 2018, its amount was increased as follows:

- as of 01.07.2014: from BGN 110.00 to BGN 113.00
- as of 01.07.2015: from BGN 113.00 to BGN 115.15
- as of 01.07.2016: from BGN 115.15 to BGN 118.14
- as of 01.07.2017: from BGN 118.14 to BGN 120.98
- as of 01.07.2018: from BGN 120.98 to BGN 125.58

In addition, under the provision of Article 92 of the Social Security Code (SSC), the Council of Ministers may, under terms and procedure set thereby, in exceptional cases, provide pension to persons not meeting some of the criteria under the SSC. Until 31.12.2018³, personal pensions in exceptional cases were provided to the following categories of persons:

1. children not eligible for a next-of-kin pension from a deceased parent;
2. women over the age under Article 68, Paragraph 3 of the SSC, who had given birth to, and raised, 5 or more children until they become of age (18 years);
3. persons over the age under Article 68, Paragraph 3 of the SSC, who have provided care for more than 10 years to persons with disabilities who are members of their families, constantly needing assistance from a caregiver; members of the family are the spouses and their direct ascendants and descendants.

An additional eligibility criterion was set for these pensions: the persons' annual income per household to be lower than the sum of the guaranteed minimum monthly income set for the country for the 12 months preceding the pension application. For the determination of the annual income, household members are the spouses, the children under 18 years of age, unless married, as well as the children over this age, if they are certified by the respective Regional or National Expert Medical Board as having 50 or more than 50 percent disability/injury type and degree, do not have any other income and are not married.

The personal pension is in the amount of 90 percent of the social pension for old age.

Reformed were certain contributory social protection schemes to strengthen women's access and benefit levels. The financial support provided under the procedure of the FACA and the Rules of its application is an important part of the support for families with children.

✓ Family assistance may be provided in cash or in kind. Family assistance payments are a type of social support. They are not dependent on the parents' employment and do not constitute compensation or allowance. They are a form of additional support by the state for families with children.

✓ When the (adoptive) mother has no social security coverage under the SSC, she is entitled to monthly parenting assistance for a child under one year of age provided in cash and/or in kind. Entitled

³ Under the amendments and supplements to the Ordinance on the Pensions and Social Security Service (OPSSS), more specifically, repealing Article 7, Paragraph 2(1) of the OPSSS, as of 01.01.2019, the Council of Ministers may not provide personal pensions under Article 92 of the SSC to children not eligible for a next-of-kin pension from a deceased parent. Such children are eligible to receive a new kind of monthly assistance (Article 8f of the FACA) from the Social Support Agency.

to such assistance are also persons having general illness and maternity social security coverage but not having the required social security service under the SSC. The monthly parenting assistance for a child with permanent disability is provided until the child turns 2 years of age, regardless of the family income.

✓ Financial support is provided to pregnant women without social security coverage and pregnant women with insufficient or no social security service under the procedure of Article 48a of the Social Security Code.

The access to the above for specific populations (e.g. women in informal employment, including domestic workers; migrant and refugee women; women in humanitarian settings) was improved. The social services providing protection to women survivors of violence, including domestic violence, and their children play an important role in the support provided to survivors of domestic violence. These services include the Crisis Centre, the Mother and Baby Unit, the Social Support Centre, etc. and are provided in the community on terms and procedure regulated under the Social Support Act and the Rules of its application.

The Crisis Centre is a complex of social services for children and/or persons survivors of violence, trafficking or other forms of exploitation provided for a period of up to 6 months and focused on individual support, catering to the daily needs and legal advice or social and psychological support when an immediate intervention is required, including by mobile crisis intervention teams. Currently, Crisis Centres for adults operate in the regions of Varna, Pernik, Plovdiv, Ruse, Stara Zagora and Haskovo (for women and children survivors of violence) and Crisis Centres for children operate in the regions of Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Vidin, Montana, Pazardzhik, Pernik, Pleven, Plovdiv, Silistra, Sofia city, Sofia region and Shumen. By the end of November 2018, 18 state-delegated Crisis Centres for children were operating in the country, with a total capacity of 196 beds, of which 111 were occupied, and 6 Crisis Centres for adults, with a total capacity of 64 beds, of which 46 were occupied.

The Mother and Baby Unit provides temporary placement for up to 6 months to pregnant women and mothers at risk of abandoning their children, promotes parental affection, supports young mothers with social, psychological and legal advice and support. Despite the service being mainly focused on pregnant women and mothers at risk of abandoning their children, some of its users are pregnant women and mothers with children survivors of domestic violence. By the end of November 2018, they were 13, with a total capacity of 85 beds, of which 36 were occupied.

Social Support Centres provide specialised support to persons, including survivors of domestic violence, and work under special programmes for psychological and social support, legal aid and advice. By the end of November 2018, there were 135 Social Support Centres, with a total capacity of 5,378 beds.

In conclusion, there are some additional notable measures taken in the Republic of Bulgaria with regard to the protection and support for survivors of violence. They may seek protection and compensation—in case they haven't received any in a court of law—pursuant to the Support and Financial Compensation to Crime Victims Act (SFCCVA) implementing the requirements of Directive 2004/80/EC relating to compensation to crime victims. Entitled to receive support and financial compensation from the state under the SFCCVA are Bulgarian citizens or citizens of Member States of the European Union as well as foreign citizens in cases provided for under an international agreement to which the Republic of Bulgaria is party. In the cases where the victim has died as a result of the crime, the right to support and financial compensation is passed to their next of kin. The forms of support for crime victims are:

- medical assistance for emergencies under the procedure of the Health Act;
- psychological counselling and assistance;
- free legal aid under the procedure of the Legal Aid Act;
- practical assistance.

The financial compensation is in the form of an amount of up to BGN 10,000 provided by the

state. When the financial compensation is intended as allowance for persons under 18 years of age, the amount is BGN 10,000 per person.

In 2016, the Financial Compensation and Support to Victims of Crime Act (FCSVCA) was substantially amended and supplemented to elaborate the existing legislation on the rights of the victims of crime, including by adoption of the requirements of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA. Some of the more important changes were as follows:

- in order to raise the victims' awareness of their rights to receive support and financial compensation from the state, the scope of the bodies, organisations and persons providing such information was expanded;
- free access to organisations providing free psychological counselling and practical support was made available to all victims of crime;
- the scope of the serious offences against the person eligible for financial compensation from the state was expanded to include attempted murder and repeal the requirement for sexual assault and rape to be eligible for financial compensation only where serious injuries were inflicted;
- the size of the financial compensation was increased to BGN 10,000 for all eligible persons under the law and where its recipients are minors, it is up to BGN 10,000 for each eligible individual;
- a provision was made for the adoption of rules for the application of the FCSVCA to elaborate and detail its underlying basics. Regulated thereunder were the terms and procedure to finance free psychological counselling and support as well as the shelter or other suitable temporary housing provided by law to victims of crime, for whom an immediate risk of secondary and repeated victimisation, intimidation and retaliation exists. Shelter or other suitable temporary housing to victims of crime is provided: by victim support organisations for a period of ten days; immediately, at a safe location away from the usual residence of the victim of crime and is applied in the cases where such measure has not been already applied under another law or regulation, e.g. the Combat Human Trafficking Act, the Protection of Persons under Threat Related to Criminal Proceedings Act, the Child Protection Act.

11. Between 2014 and 2019, the country took a number of actions to enhance the comprehensive sex education in schools or through community programmes. In 2014, within the National Programme for Prevention of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases 2014–2020, representatives from the Ministry of Health, the National Centre for Public Health and Analyses and the 28 Regional Health Inspectorates conducted a nationwide representative survey of the health risk factors. The objective of the survey was to collect reliable information on the distribution of the main risk factors (smoking, alcohol abuse, low physical activity, unhealthy eating) for the development of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD): cardiovascular diseases, malignant neoplasms, chronic pulmonary diseases, diabetes, and assess the situation in the country before launching the interventions under the programme. The data from the survey helped analyse the age and gender specifics of the NCD risk factors and, subsequently, use the results in the development of health information campaigns for risk prevention.

These specifics were reflected in the implementation of the project BG051PO001–5.3.02–001-C0001 “Stop and Check Yourself Up” initially implemented with the financial support of the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2007–2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund), and subsequently through measures under the National Programme for Prevention of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases 2014–2020. Under this project, all Regional Health Inspectorates (RHI) conducted screening tests for early detection of breast cancer, cervical cancer and colorectal cancer. Each RHI had a regional screening coordinator.

Between 2015 and 2018, a total of 1,879 colorectal cancer examinations, 3,890 breast cancer examinations and 3,750 cervical cancer examinations were performed among persons between 18 and 86 years of age.

To ensure equal access for the vulnerable groups (including Romani) to services and measures related to disease prevention and health promotion and implementing the objectives laid down in the Republic of Bulgaria's National Strategy for Romani Integration 2012–2020, priority "Healthcare", the Ministry of Health provides its available mobile offices to perform examinations, immunisations and testing of uninsured Romani persons. This measure is crucial for the health of the particularly vulnerable group of disadvantaged Romani women and girls and those living in remote communities with difficult access to medical assistance. Between 2013 and 2018, the 21 mobile offices performed a total of 324,104 examinations and tests:

- 46,175 immunisations of children with incomplete immunisation status by a general practitioner's mobile office;
- 26,988 fluorographic examinations;
- 75,062 gynaecologic examinations;
- 81,142 paediatric examinations;
- 20,586 mammographic examinations;
- 20,537 ultrasound examinations;
- 53,614 laboratory tests

Concomitant campaigns explaining the importance of preventive examinations are yet another intervention supporting gender equality among the Romani population.

In addition, Bulgaria implements policies focused on the specific needs of pregnant women and mothers. Health services for pregnant women and mothers (until day 45 after birth) are regulated by a number of laws and regulations. The Health Act, the National Health Insurance Act, the National Health Strategy 2014–2020, updated 2015, the National Programme for Prevention of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases 2014–2020, NHIF's Mother Healthcare programme, 2007 Ordinance No 26 on the obstetric assistance provided to uninsured women and the testing outside the scope of the mandatory health insurance for children and pregnant women, thereby providing free care to uninsured pregnant women by all regional SRA offices at specialised maternity wards. Under amendments and supplements to the Ordinance made in 2013, 2014 and 2015, the MH provides an additional prophylactic examination and certain tests during pregnancy for every uninsured woman.

The National Mother and Child Health Improvement Programme 2014–2020 is the main national political document on the issues of the sexual and reproductive health (SRH). It is synchronised with the European Child and Adolescent Health Strategy and integrates the seven priority action areas in Europe: mother's and neonate's health, nutrition, infectious diseases, trauma and violence, physical environment, adolescent health, psychosocial development and mental health. The implementation of the National Mother and Child Health Improvement Programme 2014–2020 is a significant step towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to the sexual and reproductive health. The objective of the mother and child health consultation centres operating within the regional hospitals in the country is to provide health information, training, advisory and medical social services, psychological counselling, coordination and referral services for young people, partners, pregnant women, young mothers and children under 18 years of age. These services are provided by a multidisciplinary team of obstetricians and gynaecologists, neonatologists, social workers and psychologists.

Each year, the 28 RHI, UNICEF and non-governmental organisations organise and hold public breastfeeding support campaigns. In 2018, within the National Programme for Prevention of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases 2014–2020, the National Centre for Public Health and Analyses and the National Breastfeeding Support Association launched a joint initiative to enhance the capacity for advisory services provided to pregnant and breastfeeding women.

After many years of advocacy to provide children and young people with access to comprehensive health and sex education in Bulgarian schools, coordinated by the NCPHA, a significant step was taken in this direction and it was included in the State Education Standard for Civic, Intercultural, Health and Environmental Education, adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science

(MES) Ordinance No 13 of 21.09.2016, which includes expected results related to the regular health and sex education for all education levels.

A good way to summarise all processes and the progress in the equality is to track the development of the EU Gender Equality Index—a unique strategic tool to measure the progress in the equality in a number of areas: work, money, knowledge, power, health, violence and intersectoral inequality. According to the latest data, Bulgaria has moved up 10 places since 2015: in 2013 Bulgaria's index was 37.0, in 2015 it went up to 38.1 and reached 58.00 in 2017, with 66.2 being the European average. Best results were achieved in the Health area: 76.4. The EU-wide results in this area are relatively high: 87.4, but over the last 10 years they have not improved much.

With regard to the sexual and reproductive health services provided to women and girls refugees and women and girls in humanitarian settings, it should be noted that, under the Asylum and Refugees Act (**ARA**), **Article 29(5)**, foreigners shall be entitled to: “health insurance, affordable medical assistance and free care under the terms and procedure available to Bulgarian citizens.” Experts from the SRA CM improve the access to healthcare for vulnerable persons, including women and girls, by informing them of their rights, making doctor appointments and accompanying them to medical facilities as needed.

In 2017, the SRA CM joined the **Re-Health** project implemented by the Regional Office of the International Organisation for Migration in Brussels to create electronic medical records for asylum seekers with full protection of all personal data in accordance with the national legislation and EU legal standards. The general idea of this project is to help integrate migrants and refugees arriving on the territory of the EU into the health systems of the Member States through the application of the Electronic Personal Health Record (**e-PHR**).

As a part of the Social Adaptation of Discharged Military Personnel programme, specialised structures within the Ministry of Defence (MoD) provide psychological support to female and male service members seeking assistance to deal with the stress associated with the transition from the military to the civil occupation.

As a result of the joint effort by the Ministry of Defence, the Military Medical Academy (MMA) and the Association of Women Service Members, a project was implemented to raise the awareness of the Bulgarian Armed Forces women and their families of the breast cancer, cervical cancer, sterility and osteoporosis. All health measures are in addition to the national programmes and are focused on the prophylaxis provided by the MMA through the annual health and prophylactic examinations of the service members and civil employees, men and women, within the system of the MoD and the Bulgarian Armed Forces. Each year the MMA conducts free campaigns for prevention of the diseases causing the highest mortality of the Bulgarian citizens.

12. The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) expressed its support for the project titled Women's Involvement in Engineering and Technology to Achieve Sustainable Development—a joint effort by the Sofia Technical University and UNESCO.

IT Career Education is a national programme developed by the Ministry of Education and Science to enhance high-school education. The objective is to motivate more students to study programming, regardless of their curricula, and to have an additional opportunity to acquire professional skills for a job in high demand. The programme is targeted at tenth- to twelfth-grade students willing to improve their skills in the area of digital technology and acquire, at the end of their training, an additional “application programmer” qualification. The courses are offered at five “software centres” in Bulgaria—high schools cooperating with IT companies and academic institutions and coordinating the efforts of another 10–15 schools in the district. The duration of these trainings is three years and the content was developed jointly with representatives from the IT sector. The theory and practice courses are extracurricular—in school or online. At the end of the training, the students will take a state examination to acquire their “application programmer” certificates. The training is free of charge. The implementation of this programme will be monitored by an organisation established by the Ministry

of Education and Science.

The Digital National Coalition (DNC) is a prominent representation of women involved in digital technologies in Bulgaria. As a digital champion, it dedicates most of its time to projects related to the propagation of digital skills, including among women and children. Project such as “Rails Girls” and “CoderDojo” are already part of the annual calendar of the DNC and have reached hundreds of girls of various ages and children making their first steps in programming. “Rails Girls” has already trained more than 800 women entirely free of charge, while the “CoderDojo” initiative managed to build a network of 80 free programming clubs for more than 1,000 children.

The panel of experts creating the electronic Information Society glossary of the MTITC, <https://www.mtitc.government.bg/glossary>, is composed entirely of women. The glossary was featured at various events related to children and the development of their ICT skills:

- Safer Internet Days;
- The eSkills for Jobs initiative endorsed the International Safer Internet Day;
- Cyberscouts—the best Cyberscouts received awards for their digital skills. The students passed online safety trainings conducted by the Safer Internet Centre jointly with Telenor Bulgaria and the MoI. At the following race, the Cyberscouts took various actions targeted at their peers. The top 3 prizes were awarded to the most interesting and useful ideas. The prizes were presented by the Bulgarian Association of Information Technologies (BAIT)—the national coordinator of the eSkills for Jobs initiative. The Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (MTITC) gave all students disks containing the electronic Information Society glossary. The glossary is additionally available on the MTITC website and is regularly updated. All Cyberscouts received posters they can post in school, booklets and rulers with explanations of the professional technology terms all Internet users should know.

13. Notable priorities and measures for combatting various forms of violence include: sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and in employment, child, early and forced marriages, trafficking in women and girls, etc.

With regard to sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and in employment, the CPD has reviewed a number of cases opened on complaints for sexual harassment (No 123/2010, No 106/07, No 12/2018, No 144/2016) and has imposed the respective penalties.

With regard to child, early and forced marriages, a national representative poll was made by territory to identify and create profiles of groups and communities at the highest risk of discrimination, implementing Activity 1 under the Prevention of Discrimination and Creation of Equal Opportunities project, BG05M9OP001–3.003–0001–C001. The project’s objective was to create opportunity and prerequisites to reduce the barriers for Bulgarian citizens’ full participation in the labour market, access to quality social, health and other services and social inclusion from a gender perspective.

With regard to trafficking in women and girls, it should be noted that Bulgaria is party to all main international agreements related to human trafficking. Bulgaria was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Human Beings (Palermo Protocol) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. As a part of the process of its accession to the EU in the 2000s, Bulgaria reformed and strengthened its legislation in order to fulfil the EU political criteria in the area of human trafficking and is still regularly reporting its progress under the transposed Directive 2011/36/EU. The National Policy for Combatting Human Trafficking and Protecting the Victims was regulated under the Combat Human Trafficking Act adopted in 2003. Another key strategic document is the National Strategy for Combatting Human Trafficking 2017–2021 adopted in 2017 and applied in practice through the annual National Programmes for Prevention and Action against Human Trafficking and Protecting the Victims. Human trafficking is additionally regulated under the Criminal Code.

Pursuant to Article 4 of the Combat Human Trafficking Act, the National Commission for Combatting Human Trafficking (NCCHT) was created in 2004 and, gradually, local commissions for combatting human trafficking were created thereafter. As of the beginning of 2019, there were 10 such commissions with the local governments of Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Montana, Pazardzhik, Pleven, Plovdiv, Ruse, Varna, Sliven and Veliko Tarnovo. The National Commission for Combatting Human Trafficking operates within the Council of Ministers as a national coordinator for the cooperation between the individual authorities, institutions and organisations, including NGOs, for the enforcement of the Combat Human Trafficking Act. Under the law, the chairperson of the commission shall be a Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria, while the members hold mainly deputy-ministerial positions. The National Commission, through its administration, is also coordinator of the National Referral and Support Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking (National Referral Mechanism, NRM) adopted by Council of Ministers Decision in 2016. Operating under the NCCHT is also the Permanent Expert Task Force composed of experts from all institutions represented in the National Commission as well as experts from international and non-governmental organisations involved in the issues of human trafficking and its prevention.

The NCCHT's responsibilities include organising and taking preventive actions, including information and education campaigns for groups at risk of human trafficking; management and supervision over the work of the local commissions for combatting human trafficking, protection provided to victims of trafficking by temporary shelters and support centres; enhancing the experts' capabilities through education forums and involvement in the international cooperation for action against human trafficking and proposals for changes in legislation related to human trafficking. Each year, the NCCHT develops a National Programme for Prevention and Action against Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims, presents it for approval at a joint session of the NCCHT and of the Council of Ministers, together with an annual report containing statistics and analyses. The National Commission is part of the informal network of the EU anti-trafficking coordinator with the European Commission to whom it regularly reports the country's progress. In addition, it coordinates and creates reports related to groups monitoring the country's progress in the implementation of the policies to combat human trafficking. Either within the above-indicated campaigns, or as individual events, the NCCHT organises international conferences, workshops and forums. In 2015 and 2016, these forums were focused on human trafficking in the context of the migration processes, and in 2017 a conference on the new technologies, the Internet and the human trafficking was held.

At the national level, in its additional capacity as a national reporting body, the NCCHT initiates regular surveys on topic related to the diverse aspects of human trafficking and regularly provides information to the competent authorities and the respective stakeholders.

Between 2017 and 2018, the National Commission for Combatting Human Trafficking took specific actions to amend the Combat Human Trafficking Act. The amendments were generally intended to harmonise the Bulgarian legislation with the international regulation of the recovery and reflection period for the victims of trafficking by introducing a definition for the recovery and reflection period and regulating its functions and duration in accordance with Bulgaria's international commitments.

Bulgaria is largely a country of origin and, to a lesser extent, a transit country for human trafficking. The main destination countries for Bulgarian victims of trafficking are the Western European EU Member States, Greece, Germany, the UK, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and Scandinavia. In 2014 and 2015, there was an apparent upward trend in the internal trafficking. Bulgarian citizens are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation (77%), followed by work exploitation (12%) mostly in construction, agriculture and manufacturing. Presented below are data on the victims of trafficking by year, gender and age, from the GRETA report; the figures are cumulative, i.e. including victims under criminal proceedings from previous years that are still pending:

Number of Bulgarian victims of trafficking between 2013 and 2015 by gender and age

Year	Total number of victims	Women		Men	
		Adults	Minors	Adults	Minors
2013	538	427	48	46	17
2014	490	433	29	17	12
2015	383	353	28	23	5

Source: GRETA(2015)32

In Bulgaria, people are trafficked internally from the poorer regions of the country to the large cities, seaside and winter resorts. Most of the victims are women. Other forms of trafficking include forced begging, trafficking of pregnant women selling their new born children and false marriages (2015–2017). Apparent trends include increased registrations of victims of trafficking for work exploitation, including women; traffickers targeting disadvantaged persons, a relative decrease in the violent methods used by the criminals and their replacement by more sophisticated methods such as deception and emotional dependence as well as an increased use of the Internet and social media by traffickers for recruitment and control.

The Bulgarian Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation provided the following statistics (this is the official source of data for the formally identified victims of trafficking):

Victims/Survivors	2014	2015		
Total number of survivors	495	409		
Women, of which	464	381		
minors (14–18 years of age)	23	27		
minors (under 14 years of age)	8	1		
Men, of which	31	28		
minors (14–18 years of age)	0	0		
minors (under 14 years of age)	14	5		
Victim breakdown by purpose of trafficking				
Sexual exploitation	409	314		
Women, of which	398	311		
minors (14–18 years of age)	22	24		
minors (under 14 years of age)	6	2		
Men, of which	11	3		
minors (14–18 years of age)	0	0		
minors (under 14 years of age)	10	1		
Work exploitation	16	26		
Women	3	4		
Men	13	22		
Organ removal	2	1		
Women	1	0		
Men	1	1		
Slavery	11	6		

Women	4	6	
Men	7	0	
Pregnant women selling their new born children	57	59	

The 2018 data show a lower number of newly opened pre-trial proceedings for human trafficking compared to the preceding reporting periods. For the three-year period, the numbers of the monitored pre-trial proceedings were relatively close. The relative share of decided vs. monitored proceedings was higher: 59.7% compared to 56.3% in 2017 and 51.3% in 2016. The relative share of convicted vs. indicted persons was also higher in 2018: 85.3% compared to 70.5% in 2017 and 45% in 2016.

Human trafficking survivors.

Survivors	2016	2017	2018
Total number of survivors	447	508	443
Women, of which	409	444	389
minors (14–18 years of age)	20	36	51
children (under 14 years of age)	1	1	2
Men, of which	38	64	54
minors (14–18 years of age)	1	0	3
children (under 14 years of age)	3	5	1
Survivor breakdown by purpose of trafficking			
lewd acts	329	323	309
Women, of which	318	316	307
minors	19	32	48
children	1	0	1
Men, of which	11	7	2
minors	1	0	0
children	0	0	0
forced labour	31	67	59
Women	8	16	12
Men	23	51	47
organ removal	1	1	2
Women	0	0	0
Men	1	1	2
forced submission	5	17	8
Women	3	14	5
Men	2	3	3
against a pregnant woman to sell her new born and survivors under Article 182b of the CC	80	97	64
	1	3	1

The NCCHT, through its administration, responsible for the coordination of the National

Referral Mechanism (NRM), also receives alerts on potential or formally identified victims. The NRM was developed within a project financed by MATRA, between 2008 and 2010, by the Animus Foundation/La Strada Bulgaria in partnership with the National Commission and the Permanent Expert Task Force with the NCCHT. Before its endorsement by the CM in 2016, the implementation of the NRM was reviewed by the NCCHT and the Permanent Expert Task Force. In 2017 and 2018, the NRM went through an additional monitoring and assessment by the ICMPD under a project of the Animus Association, part of a three-year programme for action against human trafficking (Programme for Identification, Referral and Long-Term Assistance and Support for Victims of Trafficking) implemented by the NCCHT, Animus and IOM-Bulgaria and financed by the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. In order to improve the application of the NRM, in 2017, within the NCCHT project under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, a multi-institutional and multidisciplinary team coordinated by the NCCHT was created to address complex cases of human trafficking.

In 2017, the administration of the NCCHT received a total of 107 alerts on potential cases of trafficking related to 142 persons (it was found later that 14 alerts were unrelated to human trafficking). In 2016, the total number of alerts was 105 related to 136 potential victims. In 2018, the administration of the NCCHT received 96 alerts for 155 persons.

In 2017, Bulgaria almost doubled the capacity of its specialised state services for victims of human trafficking. By the end of 2018, there were a total of 8 services specialised in victims of human trafficking within the NCCHT and managed by NGOs: 5 placement services (three temporary shelters for support, one shelter for long-term integration and one crisis centre for children survivors of trafficking) in Sofia, Varna and Burgas as well as 3 counselling services within the shelters. Until 2018, the state financed and managed through the institutions, local governments and strategic partnerships with NGOs the highest number of services for victims of human trafficking since the adoption of the Combat Human Trafficking Act in 2003. The total capacity of the specialised services financed and methodologically managed by the NCCHT is 34 persons.

In addition to these services and specifically for the support of survivors of human trafficking, with the Social Support Agency and the special regulation on the establishment and operation of social services, the local governments commissioned and provided financial support for the Crisis Centres for survivors of violence and human trafficking—some of which are specialised in children only, others—in both adults and children.

By 31 October 2017, 18 Crisis Centres for children survivors of violence (including human trafficking) with a total capacity of 196 persons and eight Crisis Centres for adult survivors of violence with a capacity of 66 persons operated as state-delegated services, sometimes managed by NGOs. As needed, the children placed in a Crisis Centre may use the accompanying social services for community support based on their individual needs.

The trend continues among most women using social services for survivors of trafficking. Men survivors requesting placement are referred to appropriate offices addressing their needs, including the services provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and/or hospices, because most people seeking placement have health complications, including addictions. In 2018, two men survivors were placed and received support at one of the shelters of the National Commission, including support to start work and receive regular income.

Year	Number of services within the NCCHT	Number of alerts to the NCCHT	Number of persons receiving support in shelters	Number of information campaigns for prevention organised by the administration of the NCCHT	Number of local commissions for combatting trafficking

2014	2	90 alerts related to 125 persons	15 persons	1	9
2015	5	67 alerts related to 200 persons	22 persons, of which 11 children at risk of trafficking	3	9
2016	5	105 alerts related to 136 persons	21 persons	3	9
2017	8	107 alerts related to 142 persons	22 persons	3	10

Source: NCCHT

Data provided by the State Child Protection Agency (SCPA) on the children victims of human trafficking show:

Year	Total number	Gender	Type of exploitation	Destination countries	Number of repatriated children	Number of measures under Article 76 of the BIDA
2014	36 children	21 girls 15 boys	Sexual exploitation: 12 girls Stealing: 9 girls Begging: 14 boys Sell a baby: 1	The UK: 2; Greece: 3; Germany: 4; The Netherlands: 1; Spain: 1; Bulgaria: 7; Sweden: 6; Austria: 5; France: 2; Italy: 2; Slovenia: 3.	11 children Countries of origin: The UK: 1; Austria: 5; Sweden: 1; Slovenia: 1; The Netherlands: 2; Greece: 1.	36 children
2015	34 children	27 girls 7 boys	Sexual exploitation: 12 girls Begging: 19 12 boys and 7 girls Stealing: 4 girls	Sweden, Austria, the UK, Germany, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Serbia	25 children The UK: 5 Sweden: 10 Austria: 5; Germany: 2; Spain 2 Cyprus: 1.	34 children
2016	26 children	18 girls 8 boys	Sexual exploitation: 8 girls Begging: 7 (4 boys and 3 girls)	Germany: 2 Italy: 3 Sweden: 3 Switzerland: 1 England: 1 The Netherlands: 1 Poland: 1	16 children Sweden: 3 Austria: 2 Italy: 3 Denmark: 1 Spain: 2 England: 1	17 children

				Greece: 2 Austria: 2 Denmark: 1 Spain: 3 France: 1 Slovakia: 1 Hungary: 1 Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1 Bulgaria: 3.	Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1 Switzerland: 1 Germany: 2.	
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Source: SCPA, the data were provided to the NCCHT in relation to the reporting on the implementation of Directive 2011/36/EU

Jointly with the mission of the International Organisation for Migration in Sofia (IOM), between 2014 and 2017 the administration of the NCCHT provided support for cases of human trafficking in Bulgarian citizens for the purpose of forced begging, mainly in Sweden and France. In addition, the mission of the IOM in Sofia sees an increasing trend of Bulgarian citizens marrying citizens of third countries intended to legalise the long-term residency of the latter in the European Union, often followed by work exploitation or house slavery.

Each year, the administration of the NCCHT conducts national campaigns for prevention and awareness for the public and the groups at risk, including a number of events raising the awareness of human trafficking, its prevention and the availability of protection for the survivors. Starting in 2016, further strategic measures were taken to survey and analyse vulnerable regions and groups in order to have better targeted prevention measures focused on specific target groups, with targeted methods and messages (surveys and focus groups were carried out in 4 regions of the country) and to map the regions at risk in the country.

The NCCHT is also a partner in joint information and prevention campaigns with other public institutions and/or representatives of the non-government sector. In order to expand the scope and reach the members of the vulnerable groups, information campaigns at a local level were organised and carried out jointly with the local commissions for combatting trafficking. In 2014, the administration of the NCCHT carried out one national campaign, three in 2015 and 2016 and two national campaigns between January and September 2017. Additionally, in 2017, one web-based campaign was carried out on the occasion of 18 October, the EU Anti-Trafficking Day. Each year, the ten local commissions for combatting human trafficking, through their secretaries and the local governments, carry out their own local campaigns. In 2015, more than 30 campaigns for prevention and raising awareness at a local level were carried out focused on different age and target groups. In 2016, more than 70 prevention and information campaigns were carried out at a local level involving more than 10,000 persons between school and retirement age. Better results are reported in terms of reaching the target groups, including highly vulnerable and marginalised persons. In 2017, 26 other initiatives were held at a local level, involving more than 5,200 persons.

The effect of the national and local campaigns was an increased interest from the media and the public in the phenomenon and the fight against human trafficking. Representatives of the administration of the national and local commissions for combatting human trafficking take part in reports and interviews for online and print media. Another direct result was the increased number of alerts for potential victims of trafficking sent to the administration of the NCCHT as well as the interest in receiving more information on the issue.

In 2017, the campaign on the occasion of 18 October—the EU Anti-Trafficking Day—was reviewed in detail. The campaign was focused on the Internet and the new technologies as means to both recruit victims of human trafficking and investigate and prevent human trafficking. The campaign was carried out mostly online. The main conclusions were as follows: 1) The campaign effectively

reached almost identical numbers of persons in the larger and the smaller cities in the country, which the administration of the NCCHT considered to be a resounding success; 2) the total number of visitors to the special website (www.antitraffic.bg) was quite high for these types of campaigns based on the data of the marketing agency partnering with the NCCHT in the campaign (about 321,000 visitors).

In 2015, the administration of the NCCHT created three short videos on trafficking for the purpose of human organ and tissue removal, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of men and trafficking for the purpose for marriage. The videos were instructional, intended for trainings of professionals and were shown to experts, trainees and stakeholders in order to raise their awareness of these less frequent forms of exploitation.

Between 2016 and 2017, the NCCHT launched the production of an information short video on the prevention of trafficking among migrants and asylum seekers. The video was translated in three languages (Pashto, Farsi and Arabic) and was shown in October 2017 at the Mol's houses for temporary placement of foreigners and the placement centres of the State Refugees Agency. After the screenings, experts from the administration of the NCCHT organised focus groups with the viewers. Initial results showed strong interest in the video and the dangers of trafficking explained in it, with some viewers identifying themselves with the victims. A review will be made and targeted actions will be taken in the form of future information campaigns.

Nine academies for volunteers against human trafficking were organised in the reporting period (2012–2018), combining the efforts of the National Commission and the local commissions for combatting trafficking, partners from NGOs, foundations co-funding the activities and other partners such as the UK Embassy, which has consistently supported the prevention measures of the National Commission over the past years (there were also a number of other diplomatic missions, actively involved and supporting the anti-trafficking measures over the years). The academies attracted students from across the country on a three-day training. The total number of trainees in the academies was more than 250.

Each year, the institutional members of the NCCHT announce, in the National Programme for Combating Trafficking and Protecting the Victims, their planned prevention and information measures and campaigns.

In 2018, the local commissions for combatting human trafficking implemented more than 40 projects for prevention at local and regional level, including campaigns and projects for work with vulnerable persons, mostly from the Romani community, as well as work with children and volunteers, reaching more than 30,000 persons.

The NCCHT updated a joint informal document with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) titled "The Fight against Human Trafficking in the Western Balkan Region" (September 2018) with the conclusions of the regional forum on combatting human trafficking in the Western Balkans held within the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in Sofia (May-June 2018) organised by the NCCHT and the discussions held as a part of the regular meeting of the NREM in Brussels between 13 June and 14 June 2018. This action demonstrated the consistency of the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU related to the clear perspective of the EU for in the Western Balkans, including the fight against human trafficking. On 13 December 2018, the NCCHT held its third session for 2018 and endorsed the 2019 National Programme for Action against of Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims. The plan includes more than 50 specific measures to be implemented by the administration of the NCCHT and its partner institutions and organisations as well as by the institutions represented in the National Commission in the areas of capacity building, support for the victims, international cooperation, etc.

The Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications coordinates the implementation of the commitments of the Republic of Bulgaria as a member of the Council of Europe in the area of the information society and the media. Its priorities in these areas include: redefining the standards to promote quality journalism in the digital age and providing an environment for the expression of diverse opinions and ideas advancing the public debate on the social agenda. Engaging

all stakeholders from the professional and non-professional media ecosystem should help restore the trust in the media as a cornerstone of the democratic security and identify solutions for today's challenges facing the journalists. The implementation of the Internet Governance Strategy 2016–2019 of the Council of Europe will continue, with a special focus on the challenges for the governance related to the spreading of intentionally misleading or false information materials inciting hate, discrimination or violence. The updated Data Protection Convention will help ensure the respect of the right to privacy while combatting terrorism and cybercrime.

In implementing the programme for participation in the intergovernmental measures of the Council of Europe, the MTITC is actively involved in the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) and, indirectly, in its subcommittees:

- MSI-AUT Committee of experts on Human Rights Dimensions of automated data processing and different forms of artificial intelligence
- MSI-JOQ Committee of experts on quality journalism in the digital age.

The MTITC conducts the policy to develop an accessible and safer Internet environment for businesses and citizens in accordance with the currently effective international strategic documents, including the Internet Governance Strategy 2016–2019 of the Council of Europe, and represents our country in the respective international organisations, with whom the Council of Europe participates in joint events to strengthen the required synergy between them. In this regard, experts of the Information Technologies Directorate within the MTITC monitor the developments and are actively involved in all significant international events, in which the Council of Europe is also actively involved, in the area of the ICT and Internet governance, such as the IGF (Internet Governance Forum), EuroDIG (Pan-European Dialogue on Internet Governance), SEEDIG (South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance) and GAC (Governmental Advisory Committee) within the meetings of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). In 2015, Bulgaria hosted the EuroDIG and SEEDIG forums (the MTITC was an institutional partner).

In the coming years, the MTITC will continue its active involvement to strengthen the cooperation in the area of the information society. The objective is to ensure effective implementation of the WSIS+10 goals aimed at overcoming the digital divide and full utilisation of the capabilities of the Internet.

Priority for the MTITC is its involvement in the work of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI). The Committee will monitor the implementation of the Internet Governance Strategy 2016–2019 of the Council of Europe, focusing on the right to freedom of expression in the Internet and the right to information to promote freedom of expression and active involvement in the democratic governance; will develop cooperation at pan-European level to promote the protection of the human rights, rule of law and pluralistic democracy in the information society; will coordinate the measures to set standards of work related to the personal data protection and right to privacy, in close cooperation with other bodies of the Council of Europe; will work to promote a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age; will prepare meetings of the Ministers responsible for the media and the information society and will monitor the implementation of the decisions of the Council of Ministers in this area. A new priority in the work of the Council of Europe (CE) is the Artificial Intelligence (AI), focusing on its impact on the media environment and the public, including democratic, process; on the AI-based decision-making systems, the concept of responsibility in relation to the human rights and ethical standards at a European and global level.

The Republic of Bulgaria prioritises action against, and prosecution of, all crimes against women and children, especially involving sexual violence and sexual exploitation as well as child pornography. The Bulgarian legislation in this area conforms to the highest international and European standards—our country has ratified and is applying the following international laws and regulations:

- the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse;

- the Facultative Protocol relating to the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and the Utilization of Children in Pornography;

In 2015, the Criminal Code was amended in relation to the implementation of Directive 2011/92/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. Most notable changes included:

- children victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation shall be exempted from criminal liability and shall receive no punishment for their involvement in criminal activities they were forced to perform as a direct consequence thereof—Article 16a of the CC;

- the definition of “Pornographic Material” was amended and a new one was created for “Pornographic Performance”—Article 93(28) and (30) of the CC;

- any contact with any person over 14 years of age for the purpose of committing a lewd act, sexual intercourse, creation of a pornographic material or participation in pornographic performance was criminalised —Article 155a of the CC;

- any kind of persuading a minor, through force, intimidation or abuse of a position of dependency or supervision, to take part in an actual, virtual or simulated sexual act was elevated to a crime —Article 155c of the CC;

- the provision for criminal liability upon forcing, recruiting, helping or using a person under 18 years of age or a group of such persons to take part in a pornographic performance was elaborated; the performance of the preceding acts against a person under 14 years of age as well as the cases where profit was gained from the preceding acts—Article 158a of the CC;

- the intentional use of any information or communication technology to access any pornographic material created using a person under 18 years of age or a person with such appearance was criminalised —Article 159 of the CC.

It should be emphasised that a special treatment was provided for the cases where sexual exploitation was among the purposes of the crime of “human trafficking.” The Bulgarian legislation in this area also conforms to the international and European standards. The requirements of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA were also implemented.

With regard to the domestic violence, over the last five years, a significant achievement and, to some extent, a challenge in the progress towards gender equality was the adoption of additional measures to prevent and combat domestic violence. Amendments to criminal law were introduced, regulating the protection of the rights of the victims of violence, including domestic violence. These legislative changes are intended to improve Bulgarian legislation and help prevent and adequately and fully counteract these forms of criminal behaviour and adopt the relevant international standards. The amendments were passed by the National Assembly at a second reading with a floor vote and will be promulgated in the State Gazette. More specifically, the amendments to the Criminal Code were as follows:

- a definition of the term “in the context of domestic violence” was created;

- the corpus delicti of homicide and assault was supplemented to incriminate all forms of domestic violence escalating to an assault on the life or health of any person;

- domestic violence was elevated as a constituent element of a number of offences—aiding and abetting a person to commit suicide, abduction, false imprisonment, coercion, criminal threat;

- intimidation was also elevated to a criminal offence, since, until now, the effective Bulgarian legislation did not provide adequate penalties against perpetrators who, by repeated threatening behaviour against a person, instilled in that person fear for their own safety or the safety of their family and friends;

- further amendments are expected to be introduced, making certain violent crimes prosecutable without complaint by the victim;

- more comprehensive and effective protection is provided for potential victims of forced

marriages, who are usually members of migrant and/or ethnic minority communities and who may be obligated by their family to leave their country of residence and get married in their family's country of origin in adherence to their community's cultural values;

- higher penalties are proposed for repeated violations of court orders or domestic-violence-related restraining orders. On the one hand, this will provide more substantial and timely protection of the victims and, on the other hand, will reinforce the preventive effect of the penalty.

With regard to the protection and support for the survivors of violence, it should be noted that women and girls survivors may seek protection and compensation—in case they haven't received any in a court of law—pursuant to the Support and Financial Compensation to Crime Victims Act (SFCCVA) implementing the requirements of Directive 2004/80/EC relating to compensation to crime victims.

In 2016, the Financial Compensation and Support to Victims of Crime Act (FCSVCA) was substantially amended and supplemented to elaborate the existing legislation on the rights of the victims of crime, including by adoption of the requirements of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA. Some of the more important changes were as follows:

- in order to raise the victims' awareness of their rights to receive support and financial compensation from the state, the scope of the bodies, organisations and persons providing such information was expanded;

- free access to organisations providing free psychological counselling and practical support was made available to all victims of crime;

- the scope of the serious offences against the person eligible for financial compensation from the state was expanded to include attempted murder and repeal the requirement for sexual assault and rape to be eligible for financial compensation only where serious injuries were inflicted;

- the size of the financial compensation was increased to BGN 10,000 for all eligible persons under the law and where its recipients are minors, it is up to BGN 10,000 for each eligible individual;

- a provision was made for the adoption of rules for the application of the FCSVCA to elaborate and detail its underlying basics.

14. An important aspect of combatting violence against women and girls were the measures taken to guarantee equal access to justice for all persons, regardless of their gender—e.g. easier filing of complaints by women for violations of their rights by providing effective legal aid regulated by the Legal Aid Act (the LAA). After 2015, the legal-aid legislation was amended and supplemented several times to guarantee access to legal aid for a broader circle of persons from vulnerable social groups by creating new forms of legal advice provided on simplified terms. A provision was made to make all citizens (regardless of their gender) not meeting the criteria under Article 22(1) and (2) of the LAA but having income under the poverty line for the country eligible to receive legal aid for advice provided either by the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) or the Regional Advice Centres (RAC) with the respective bar associations. The National Primary Legal Aid Hotline (NPLAH) and the Regional Advice Centres were additionally regulated as new forms of legal advice within the legal-aid system and were endorsed as permanent services of the Legal Assistance Bureau. The objective of these new forms was to overcome the formalities in the system making it largely inaccessible for illiterate or uninformed citizens without knowledge of the law, living in remote communities, social isolation, pensioners with disabilities or reduced mobility, persons living alone or without permanent residences. This is why these two forms of legal advice were made available to the citizens on simplified terms, exempted from the general procedure to apply for legal aid, i.e. not requiring a decision to provide legal aid and appoint an attorney by the Bureau's chairperson. In addition, every citizen may receive advice at a RAC upon presenting evidence that their monthly income does not exceed the country's poverty line.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Improvement of Access to Justice for Persons under the Poverty Threshold with a Special

Focus on Women, Children and the Romani Community and was aimed at improving the access to justice for Bulgarian citizens living under the poverty threshold.

The Republic of Bulgaria prioritises action against, and prosecution of, all crimes against women and children, especially involving sexual violence and sexual exploitation as well as child pornography. The Bulgarian legislation in this area conforms to the highest international and European standards—our country has ratified and is applying the following international laws and regulations:

- the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse;
- the Facultative Protocol relating to the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and the Utilization of Children in Pornography;
- the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

In 2015, the Criminal Code was amended in relation to the implementation of Directive 2011/92/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.

Over the last five years, a significant achievement and, to some extent, a challenge in the progress towards gender equality was the adoption of additional measures to prevent and combat domestic violence.

At the same time, Bulgaria continues its commitment to combat domestic violence. Amendments to criminal law were introduced, regulating the protection of the rights of the victims of violence, including domestic violence. These legislative changes are intended to improve Bulgarian legislation and help prevent and adequately and fully counteract these forms of criminal behaviour and adopt the relevant international standards. The amendments were passed by the National Assembly and will be promulgated in the State Gazette. More specifically, the amendments to the Criminal Code were as follows:

- a definition of the term “in the context of domestic violence” was created;
- the corpus delicti of homicide and assault was supplemented to incriminate all forms of domestic violence escalating to an assault on the life or health of any person;
- domestic violence was elevated as a constituent element of a number of offences—aiding and abetting a person to commit suicide, abduction, false imprisonment, coercion, criminal threat;
- intimidation was also elevated to a criminal offence, since, until now, the effective Bulgarian legislation did not provide adequate penalties against perpetrators who, by repeated threatening behaviour against a person, instilled in that person fear for their own safety or the safety of their family and friends;
- further amendments are expected to be introduced, making certain violent crimes prosecutable without complaint by the victim;
- more comprehensive and effective protection is provided for potential victims of forced marriages, who are usually members of migrant and/or ethnic minority communities and who may be obligated by their family to leave their country of residence and get married in their family’s country of origin in adherence to their community’s cultural values;
- higher penalties are proposed for repeated violations of court orders or domestic-violence-related restraining orders. On the one hand, this will provide more substantial and timely protection of the victims and, on the other hand, will reinforce the preventive effect of the penalty.

It should also be noted that, under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), the Ministry of Justice budget every year allocates funding for non-profit entities’ projects for the development and implementation of domestic violence prevention and protection programmes under the same law. According to the Guidance for Project Applications under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the PDVA for the 2014–2018 period, in accordance with the National Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Programme adopted by the Council of Ministers, the funding priorities were as follows:

- analysis of the problem of domestic violence through monitoring of the application of the legislation;
- sensitising the young people to the problem through prevention and protection programmes at school;
- increasing the competence of the judiciary to enforce the domestic-violence protection measures and provide timely and adequate protection to the victims of domestic violence in order to achieve effectiveness and high standards in the implementation of measures for prevention and protection from domestic violence;
- increasing the competence of the persons providing protection under the PDVA in order to achieve effectiveness and high standards in the implementation of measures for prevention and protection from domestic violence;
- protection, restoration and reintegration of victims of domestic violence and services involving work with perpetrators of domestic violence aimed at providing quality service to the victims and preventing recurrent domestic violence.

In view of these priorities, 48 NGOs received funding for the following activities:

- programmes for work with the judicial authorities;
- programmes to provide support to survivors of domestic violence: social, psychological counselling and legal advice;
- specialised programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence: social and psychological advice/counselling;
- training for the persons providing protection under the PDVA.
- preparation and approval of programmes in schools

The Ministry of Justice implemented a project titled Improving the National Legal Framework in Accordance with the Standards of the Council of Europe and Strengthening the Capacity of the Competent Institutions Taking Up Cases of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, under Programme BG12 from the prior programming period of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2009–2014. The project was implemented between October 2014 and April 2017 and had a total value of EUR 267,305. Notable results include:

- developed analyses of the Bulgarian legislation and the best practices in Member States of the European Union in the area of domestic and gender-based violence;
- developed project for a Strategy to Reduce Domestic Violence 2017–2020 and created proposals to amend the Protection against Domestic Violence Act;
- developed manuals and conducted trainings of instructors and regular trainings in the area of domestic and gender-based violence (a total of 236 police officers and 273 social workers from across the country as well as 40 legal experts).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the new Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) for the period 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Prevention and Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as beneficiary, and was aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Bulgarian authorities, the professionals in the justice sector in particular, to apply the institutional practices and European standards in the area of domestic and gender-based violence. The project will enhance the competence and cooperation between the relevant authorities. There are plans to conduct capacity-building activities through development of training materials, trainings and creation of a case management manual for the cases in the relevant area for judges as well as an assessment of the pilot coordination mechanism for cooperation planned under the programme.

With regard to the protection and support for the survivors of violence, it should be noted that women and girls survivors may seek protection and compensation—in case they haven't received any in a court of law—pursuant to the Support and Financial Compensation to Crime Victims Act (SFCCVA) implementing the requirements of Directive 2004/80/EC relating to compensation to crime victims. Entitled to receive support and financial compensation from the state under the SFCCVA are Bulgarian

citizens or citizens of Member States of the European Union as well as foreign citizens in cases provided for under an international agreement to which the Republic of Bulgaria is party. Support is available to survivors who have suffered material and non-material injuries from felonies and financial compensation is available to survivors who have suffered material injuries from the following types of crime:

- terrorism; premeditated murder; attempted murder; premeditated grievous bodily harm; sexual assault; rape; human trafficking;
- crimes committed under a direction, or in execution of a decision, of an organised crime group;
- other serious premeditated crimes causing death or grievous bodily harm as prosecutable consequences.

In the cases where the victim has died as a result of the crime, the right to support and financial compensation is passed to their next of kin.

The forms of support for crime victims are:

- medical assistance for emergencies under the procedure of the Health Act;
- psychological counselling and assistance;
- free legal aid under the procedure of the Legal Aid Act;
- practical assistance.

The financial compensation is in the form of an amount of up to BGN 10,000 provided by the state. When the financial compensation is intended as allowance for persons under 18 years of age, the amount is BGN 10,000 per person.

In 2016, the Financial Compensation and Support to Victims of Crime Act (FCSVCA) was substantially amended and supplemented to elaborate the existing legislation on the rights of the victims of crime, including by adoption of the requirements of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA. Some of the more important changes were as follows:

- in order to raise the victims' awareness of their rights to receive support and financial compensation from the state, the scope of the bodies, organisations and persons providing such information was expanded;
- free access to organisations providing free psychological counselling and practical support was made available to all victims of crime;
- the scope of the serious offences against the person eligible for financial compensation from the state was expanded to include attempted murder and repeal the requirement for sexual assault and rape to be eligible for financial compensation only where serious injuries were inflicted;
- the size of the financial compensation was increased to BGN 10,000 for all eligible persons under the law and where its recipients are minors, it is up to BGN 10,000 for each eligible individual;
- a provision was made for the adoption of rules for the application of the FCSVCA to elaborate and detail its underlying basics. The Rules for the Application of the SFCCVA (RA SFCCVA) were adopted by CM Decree No 373 of 22.12.2016. Regulated thereunder were the terms and procedure to finance free psychological counselling and support as well as the shelter or other suitable temporary housing provided by law to victims of crime, for whom an immediate risk of secondary and repeated victimisation, intimidation and retaliation exists. Shelter or other suitable temporary housing to victims of crime is provided by victim support organisations for a period of ten days; immediately, at a safe location away from the usual residence of the victim of crime and is applied in the cases where such measure has not been already applied under another law or regulation, e.g. the Combat Human Trafficking Act, the Protection of Persons under Threat Related to Criminal Proceedings Act, the Child Protection Act.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in partnership with the Social Support Agency, works on a project titled Together against Violence, under the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014–2020, Priority Axis 3, "Modernisation of the Institutions in the Areas

of Social Inclusion, Healthcare, Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination and Working Conditions.” The objective of this project is to plan and provide the required general and special national measures related to the victims of violence nationwide, create analyses, research and collect data for the development of various indicators to be used for the monitoring of the violence among women as a phenomenon; submit specific proposals for changes to the policy of the social services for the victims of violence and, mostly, access to such services; create a gender equality monitoring system, define the needs of the social workers from the Social Support directorates and increase their professional capacity for work on cases of domestic violence, acquisition of additional knowledge and skills by the professionals to prevent potential cases of domestic violence, provide adequate support to, and successful resocialisation of, the survivors, place a special emphasis on certain negative traditional practices such as early marriages, etc., which are an important aspect of the violence against women, domestic violence, etc., and, at the same time, very often remain hidden, create a network of trained professionals and build a sustainable partnership between the institutions and the experts, and raise the awareness of the experts working on cases of violence, especially gender-based violence, and of civil society. The implementation of the project began in November 2017 and is expected to end in December 2020.

A Bulgarian gender equality monitoring system will be created under this project, implementing Article 7 (4) of the Gender Equality Act, together with certain other measures such as:

1. Review, assessment and analysis of the Bulgarian legislation, within the jurisdiction of the MLSP, regulating cases of domestic and gender-based violence;
2. Analysis of the number, cases and causes of violence to be used as a basis to plan and provide general and specific protection measures for the victims of violence;
3. Develop recommendations for the improvement of the legal framework in the social area related to violence as well as specific practical measures to support the victims of violence;
4. Develop practical guidance for the experts in the social area working on cases of violence;
5. National representative survey on: Violence in Bulgaria;
6. Increase the capacity of the experts working on cases of violence, including gender-based violence, information campaigns, etc.

With regard to the introduced or enhanced services for the survivors of violence (e.g. shelters, helplines, dedicated health services, legal, justice service, counselling, housing), it should be noted that the social services providing protection to women survivors of violence, including domestic violence, and to their children play an important role in the support for the survivors of domestic violence. These services include the Crisis Centre, the Mother and Baby Unit, the Social Support Centre, etc. and are provided in the community on terms and procedure regulated under the Social Support Act and the Rules of its application.

The Crisis Centre is a complex of social services for children and/or persons survivors of violence, trafficking or other forms of exploitation provided for a period of up to 6 months and focused on individual support, catering to the daily needs and legal advice or social and psychological support when an immediate intervention is required, including by mobile crisis intervention teams. Currently, Crisis Centres for adults operate in the regions of Varna, Pernik, Plovdiv, Ruse, Stara Zagora and Haskovo (for women and children survivors of violence) and Crisis Centres for children operate in the regions of Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Vidin, Montana, Pazardzhik, Pernik, Pleven, Plovdiv, Silistra, Sofia city, Sofia region and Shumen. By the end of November 2018, 18 state-delegated Crisis Centres for children were operating in the country, with a total capacity of 196 beds, of which 111 were occupied, and 6 Crisis Centres for adults, with a total capacity of 64 beds, of which 46 were occupied.

The Mother and Baby Unit provides temporary placement for up to 6 months to pregnant women and mothers at risk of abandoning their children, promotes parental affection, supports young mothers with social, psychological and legal advice and support. Despite the service being mainly focused on pregnant women and mothers at risk of abandoning their children, some of its

users are pregnant women and mothers with children survivors of domestic violence. By the end of November 2018, they were 13, with a total capacity of 85 beds, of which 36 were occupied.

Social Support Centres provide specialised support to persons, including survivors of domestic violence, and work under special programmes for psychological and social support, legal aid and advice. By the end of November 2018, there were 135 Social Support Centres, with a total capacity of 5,378 beds.

With regard to the monitoring and evaluation of impact, including evidence generation and data collection, including regarding particular groups of women and girls, it should be noted that, in 2018, the National Statistical Institute (NSI), with the financial support of the EC, conducted pilot testing of the tools and methodology for an upcoming harmonised study of gender-based violence (GBV). In accordance with the plans and work of Eurostat in this area, the country (acting through the NSI) will probably be involved in the EU-wide study of gender-based violence.

Each particular case of media content in radio or television programmes featuring violence against women and girls is monitored and assessed by the Electronic Media Council (EMC) for compliance with the law. While respecting the programming and editorial independence of the media, the EMC analyses the media service providers' operations and presents reports on its observations. Upon identifying violations of the Radio and Television Act (RTA), it takes administrative enforcement action.

The EMC reported the completion of the campaign titled Say No to Violence against Women—Walk a Mile in Her Shoes (13.03.2016). Outside the news broadcasts, the BNT1 channel featured original videos in two versions: with men reporters and women of various occupations: 12.03.2016, 18:00, BNT reporters concerned about violence against women.

The EMC conducted large-scale monitoring of programmes of public and commercial media service providers (BNT1, BTV, NOVA TELEVISION, ALFA TV, SKAT and BIT) for existing audio-visual content featuring violence. The survey monitored the themes of domestic crime, criminal acts, traffic accidents, infiltration of radical Islam, terrorism and reports with negative connotations against refugees. The data analysis showed a serious negative bias in the news of high social impact. The reports were largely concentrated in the news—dynamic content with an information-rich stream in short format.

In 2016, under an initiative of the SCPA, the National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Child Abuse 2017–2020 was developed and subsequently adopted by Decision No 115 of 09.02.2017 of the Council of Ministers. The programme is a national framework for coordination related to the violence against children, creating a mechanism for communication between the state authorities, civil society representatives and the non-government sector with regard to the required measures to prevent violence of all kind. The National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Child Abuse was based on an approach focused on the rights of the child instead of on the [child's] welfare. Guaranteeing the dignity, physical and psychological integrity of children as holders of rights, including the non-transferrable right to protection, and not simply thinking of children as "victims."

The implementation of the measures in the programme is expected to help raise the awareness of children and improve the cooperation between the institutions/organisations working on cases of children victims of violence or at risk of violence. In this regard, it included strategic objectives focused on the improved effectiveness of the child protection measures, the creation of the system for prevention of domestic violence against children, prevention of sexual violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, prevention of all forms of violence against children, etc.

Between 2017 and 2018, the SCPA designed and printed posters with the National Children Hotline (NCH) 116 111, with designs proposed by children. Through the 28 Regional Education Administrations (REA) as well as within the meetings organised and held with representatives of educational institutions, and over the course of the supervisory operations, approximately 8,000 NCH 116 111 posters were distributed to every school in the country. Assistance was requested from the

management of the BDZ Holding and the National Railway Infrastructure Company to place Hotline information materials at the main railway stations in the country and inside railway cars. In addition, the SCPA contacted the three mobile operators to publish information about the NCH on their official websites.

Implementing Article 17a(17) of the Child Protection Act, the powers of the Chairperson of the SCPA were extended to create and maintain a harmonised hotline with national coverage providing information, advice and support to children. This is the National Children Hotline 116 111, created under a contract executed between the SCPA and the Animus Association Foundation delegated to manage the hotline.

In 2017, NCH 116 111 provided advice related to violence against children to 698 callers. 610 alerts were sent to the Department of Child Protection (DCP) with the Social Support Directorate (SSD). 277 adult callers reported violence against children in 2017. The number of children who sought help from the NCH on violence-related matters was also high: 200. Of these children, 157 were over 12 years of age and 43 were under 12. Girls were more active reporters of violence—138 compared to 62 boys. 52 alerts were reported by institutions and 5—by teachers. The types of violence were broken down as follows: physical violence was most widely reported: 333, neglect: 150, psychological: 84, sexual violence: 40, other types of violence: 21, incest: 2. 68 children were witnesses of violence reported to the NCH in 2017.

In addition, the hotline provided advice for 158 cases of school bullying at or around schools. In 2017, only 19 alerts for risk of school bullying were reported, many of them—by parents.

In 2017, the NCH 116 111 team submitted 610 alerts of children at risk to the DCP/SSD in the country. The number of alerts was higher than those submitted in 2016 (573). An increasing number of people use the children hotline to report children at risk, many times reporting new information on the same case and submitting new alerts. The children are active users of the hotline and share mostly relationship problems—friends, family, romantic. At the same time, however, they apparently find it difficult to share situations of risk or fail to recognise them as such.

In 2018, the total number of calls received at the National Children Hotline 116 111 was 60,856. Advice was provided in 9,814 cases. 39,407 callers were just testing the hotline. 11,704 calls were “silence and hang up” or wrong number. 27,637 calls were unanswered. The highest number of calls came from children. It was 7,423. Children calling the NCH are most often interested in “romantic and sexual relationships”—such advice was provided in 4,098 cases. The experts provided advice on “family issues” in 1,318 cases.

1,154 parents sought information or support from the NCH. The NCH received thirteen alerts from teachers, 134 from institutions and 1,090 calls from other adults.

The NCH 116 111 provided advice in 699 cases of violence against children. Girls were more active reporters of violence.

The types of violence were broken down as follows: physical violence was most widely reported: 310, neglect: 158, psychological: 117, sexual violence: 44, other types of violence: 67.

Broken down by perpetrator, the number of parents committing violence against children was the highest: 458, other relative: 50, other child: 78, strangers: 20, violence by teacher: 15, acquaintance/neighbour: 51, other: 27.

Based on the NCH 116 111 data, the family was where most children were abused: 507 reports. 60 children were abused on the street, 47 at school, 13 children were survivors of violence in specialised institutions, 9 with a foster family, 22 reports for friends and relatives, 41 in public places.

In 2018, upon consultation, the NCH 116 111 team referred 1,433 reports to the Departments of Child Protection, 245 to the police and 55 to emergency medical services.

Over the last two years, there is an apparent trend for the hotline to be used by multiple persons reporting children at risk, many times reporting new information on the same case and submitting new alerts. It can be said that many children do not communicate with their peers and/or

families and are using the hotline as a communication tool. At the same time, however, they apparently find it difficult to share situations of risk or fail to recognise them as such.

In addition, the SCPA monitors the work on all reports on children at risk submitted by the NCH to the SSD or the Social Support Agency (SSA), in some cases providing methodological guidance to the DCP with the SSD over the phone.

The SCPA collected and summarised best practices from the licenced providers of social services for children, working with problem children in educational institutions and with their families. Practical guidance was developed for the actions teachers and students should take in the event of an incident, violence or other critical situations which, through the 28 Regional Education Administrations, were brought to the attention of the schools in the country and were published on the official websites of the institutions.

In 2017, the total number of children victims of violence placed in resident services licenced by the Chairperson of the SCPA was 294. Most of them were between 12 and 16 years of age: 118. 51 children were between 8 and 11, while 37 were between 17 and 18 years of age. In the 4 to 7 age group, there were 43 survivors of violence, 45 children were under 3 years of age, while 102 were over 18. Most frequent were the cases of emotional violence, followed by neglect of the basic needs of the child, physical and sexual violence. Family continues to be the predominant environment for violence. 291 children became victims at home and are now living in resident services. 48 boys and girls suffered on the street, 14—in houses of relatives or friends, 50—in school, 14—in specialised institutions, 4—in public spaces. The perpetrator of violence was a parent in 249 cases (157 fathers and 92 mothers), in 22—a relative or an acquaintance, 37—a stranger, 11—another child, 8—a neighbour/acquaintance. Victims of trafficking were 21 girls and 3 boys.

In 2017, the number of children becoming victims of violence and using day-care community-based social services by a licenced provider was 1,578. The largest number were children between 12 and 16 years of age: 525. There were 425 children survivors of violence between 8 and 11 years of age, 291—between 4 and 7, and 255—between 0 and 3. The lowest number of children survivors of violence was of those between 17 and 18 years of age: 82. 40 young people over 18 years of age used day-care social services in 2017. The most frequent type of violence was neglect: 747, followed by emotional violence: 446, physical violence: 327, violence on the Internet: 213 and sexual violence: 160. Family continues to be the predominant environment for violence. 1,305 children became victims at home. 2,015 children—at school, 150 children—on the street, 75 children—in public places, and 68 children—with friends and relatives. The father was the perpetrator in 530 cases, the mother—in 422. The perpetrator was unidentified in 129 cases and a stranger—in 127. There were 144 cases of violence against children by acquaintances/neighbours, 77—by relatives, 20—by teachers. Victims of trafficking were 34 girls and 8 boys.

15. In the area of work in primary and secondary education, including comprehensive sex education, over the last five years and earlier, Bulgaria has delivered on its commitments to promote gender equality in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls); the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016–2019, the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011–2020, the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020, etc.

The State Education Standard for Civic, Intercultural, Health and Environmental Education, adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) Ordinance No 13 of 21.09.2016, includes expected results related to the prevention of violence and gender equality. The issue of violence against women and children is comprehensively addressed in Bulgarian legislation and a number of national institutions, non-governmental organisations and local government bodies, outside the healthcare system, are involved in its prevention under projects, programmes and state-delegated measures.

An important aspect of the combatting violence against women and girls were the measures taken to guarantee equal access to justice for all persons, regardless of their gender—e.g. easier filing of complaints by women for violations of their rights by providing effective legal aid regulated by the Legal Aid Act (the LAA). After 2015, the legal-aid legislation was amended and supplemented several times to guarantee access to legal aid for a broader circle of persons from vulnerable social groups by creating new forms of legal advice provided on simplified terms. A provision was made to make all citizens (regardless of their gender) not meeting the criteria under Article 22(1) and (2) of the LAA but having income under the poverty line for the country eligible to receive legal aid for advice provided either by the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) or the Regional Advice Centres (RAC) with the respective bar associations. The National Primary Legal Aid Hotline (NPLAH) and the Regional Advice Centres were additionally regulated as new forms of legal advice within the legal-aid system and were endorsed as permanent services of the Legal Assistance Bureau. The objective of these new forms was to overcome the formalities in the system making it largely inaccessible for illiterate or uninformed citizens without knowledge of the law, living in remote communities, social isolation, pensioners with disabilities or reduced mobility, persons living alone or without permanent residences. This is why these two forms of legal advice were made available to the citizens on simplified terms, exempted from the general procedure to apply for legal aid, i.e. not requiring a decision to provide legal aid and appoint an attorney by the Bureau's chairperson. In addition, every citizen may receive advice at a RAC upon presenting evidence that their monthly income does not exceed the country's poverty line.

The Republic of Bulgaria prioritises action against, and prosecution of, all crimes against women and children, especially involving sexual violence and sexual exploitation as well as child pornography.

Under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), the Ministry of Justice budget every year allocates funding for non-profit entities' projects for the development and implementation of domestic violence prevention and protection programmes under the same law. According to the Guidance for Project Applications under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the PDVA for the period 2014–2018, in accordance with the National Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Programme adopted by the Council of Ministers, the funding priorities were as follows:

- analysis of the problem of domestic violence through monitoring of the application of the legislation;
- sensitising the young people to the problem through prevention and protection programmes at school;
- increasing the competence of the judiciary to enforce the domestic-violence protection measures and provide timely and adequate protection to the victims of domestic violence in order to achieve effectiveness and high standards in the implementation of measures for prevention and protection from domestic violence;
- increasing the competence of the persons providing protection under the PDVA in order to achieve effectiveness and high standards in the implementation of measures for prevention and protection from domestic violence;
- protection, restoration and reintegration of victims of domestic violence and services involving work with perpetrators of domestic violence aimed at providing quality service to the victims and preventing recurrent domestic violence.

In view of these priorities, 48 NGOs received funding for the following activities:

- programmes for work with the judicial authorities;
- programmes to provide support to survivors of domestic violence: social, psychological counselling and legal advice;
- specialised programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence: social and psychological advice/counselling;
- training for the persons providing protection under the PDVA;
- preparation and approval of programmes in schools.

The Ministry of Justice implemented a project titled Improving the National Legal Framework in Accordance with the Standards of the Council of Europe and Strengthening the Capacity of the Competent Institutions Taking Up Cases of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, under Programme BG12 from the prior programming period of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2009–2014. The project was implemented between October 2014 and April 2017 and had a total value of EUR 267,305. Notable results include:

- developed analyses of the Bulgarian legislation and the best practices in Member States of the European Union in the area of domestic and gender-based violence;
- a developed project for a Strategy to Reduce Domestic Violence 2017–2020 and created proposals to amend the Protection against Domestic Violence Act;
- developed manuals and conducted trainings of instructors and regular trainings in the area of domestic and gender-based violence (a total of 236 police officers and 273 social workers from across the country as well as 40 legal experts).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the new Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) for the period 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Prevention and Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as beneficiary, and was aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Bulgarian authorities, the professionals in the justice sector in particular, to apply the institutional practices and European standards in the area of domestic and gender-based violence. The project will enhance the competence and cooperation between the relevant authorities. There are plans to conduct capacity-building activities through development of training materials, trainings and creation of a case management manual for the cases in the relevant area for judges as well as an assessment of the pilot coordination mechanism for cooperation planned under the programme.

In 2014, the National Child Protection Programme was developed by horizontal policies, including the following uniform operational goals which are consistently implemented in all sector policies—education, healthcare, justice, social policy, culture and sport:

- Develop and promote appropriate services for children and families;
- Eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against children;
- Guarantee the rights of children in a vulnerable position, i.e. children placed in institutions; children with disabilities, migrant children; ethnic minority children; children in conflict with the law;
- Guarantee the child's right to live and grow.

In 2014, the SCPA carried out information campaigns on recognising and reporting cases of violence against children, implementing its obligation for assistance—Article 7 of the CPA. Trainings were conducted by professionals working with children. The result was sensitisation of the public and the professionals working with children through targeted messages in the media and over the course of the trainings.

Joint trainings were conducted for the work of police officers and social workers from the Departments for Child Protection related to the assessment of reports on violence against children, case work, including the enforcement of the PDVA, in cases of domestic violence, for children witnesses and victims of emotional violence.

The result was an increased competence of the social workers and police officers in their work on cases of violence against children.

In 2014, the SCPA was a partner in a course to raise the qualification of the health professionals on the subject, titled: Prevention of Violence against Children, which was included in the 2014 NCPHA theme plan for the courses for post-graduate and continuing education. 7 instructors were trained—health professionals from RHI and the NCPHA—and acquired knowledge and skills to train medical and non-medical professionals from child-care facilities (nursery schools, preschools, kindergartens, etc.) and doctor's offices at schools.

In 2015, at a regular session of the National Child Protection Council, the report on the

implementation of the National Plan for Prevention of Violence against Children 2012–2014 was delivered. A review was made of the measures and actions taken by the state to protect the children from all forms of violence as well as all other ways to prevent and detect, report, investigate and monitor cases of child abuse. The monitoring of the implementation of the Coordination Mechanism for Violence was also presented. Based on the conclusions and recommendations in both reports, the National Child Protection Council (NCPC) made the decision to develop and submit for approval by the Council of Ministers a 5-year National Programme for Protection of Children from Violence for the period 2016–2020. By order of the Chairperson of the SCPA, the inter-institutional working group on Prevention of Abuse and Violence against Children within the NCPC was commissioned to develop the strategic document.

Implementing the decision of the National Child Protection Council, the Chairperson of the SCPA created an inter-institutional working group commissioned to develop a Coordination Mechanism for cooperation between the institutions and organisations to guarantee the rights of the unaccompanied minors residing in the Republic of Bulgaria, including those seeking or receiving asylum. Firstly, the Coordination Mechanism details the structure and the commitments of the institutional system at a national and regional level by systematising the general powers of each institution and its regional structures related to the condition of the unaccompanied minors, including those seeking or receiving asylum. Secondly, the document details the three main stages of application of the Coordination Mechanism taking into account the child's condition and the actions and procedures implemented by the institutions at a local level. The finalisation and approval of the Coordination Mechanism by all stakeholders is key for guaranteeing the rights of the children from the target group, especially in the context of the legislation on the legal guardianship for the unaccompanied minors. The new legal solution provided for the Asylum and Refugees Act in relation to the guardianship of unaccompanied minors refugees specifies the authority exercising the powers to appoint the legal guardian.

In 2015, the SRA's efforts prioritised the creation of conditions to protect the children from physical, emotional and sexual violence. A safe space was created to minimise the risk of various forms of violence against this vulnerable category of persons. The (health, social and psychological) care and services provided by the experts from the SRA CM to unaccompanied minors guarantee to a sufficient extent their "best interests." Tools for early identification of children with traumatic experiences were used. Expert assessments of the vulnerability of children were created using psychological standardised and semi-standardised interviews with the child and the family, including unaccompanied minors.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), its Regional Education Inspectorates and the SCPA, in partnership with the Social Support Agency and the MoI, organised and conducted a training for the principals of schools and kindergartens in the city of Sofia to improve reporting and cooperation on cases of violence against children and enhance the capabilities to detect the signs of various types of violence against children. The SCPA presented the main aspects of the work on the prevention of violence against children, the signs of violence against children, the operation and cooperation of the child protection authorities in their work on cases of violence. The training programme focused on the application of the Coordination Mechanism for cooperation in the work on cases involving children victims or children at risk of violence and for cooperation in crisis interventions. The specific commitments of the teaching staff related to the implementation of the commitments under the mechanism, the difficulties in the work and the possible solutions were also discussed.

Implementing the provision of Article 6a of the Child Protection Act, an Agreement of Cooperation and Coordination of the Work of the Regional Structures of the Child Protection Authorities in Cases Involving Children Victims of Violence or Children at Risk of Violence and in Crisis Interventions was signed. The child protection authorities at a national and local level were committed thereunder to apply a Coordination Mechanism for Cooperation and Coordination of the Work of the

Regional Structures of the Child Protection Authorities in Cases Involving Children Victims of Violence or Children at Risk of Violence and in Crisis Interventions.

In December 2018, the report/review of the implementation of the National Child Strategy (2008–2018) was completed. The report covered the entire period of operation of the Strategy between 2008 and 2018. It was based on information provided by the MLSP, the MH, the MES, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, the National Centre of Public Health and Analyses and the National Commission for Combatting Human Trafficking.

An improvement in the indicators for the adherence to the immunisation calendar was reported as a part of the task to improve the prevention measures related to the children's health. Among the other reported results were the contained risk of proliferation of smoking, alcohol abuse, drug use, etc. Maternal mortality also showed a steady downward trend after 2013. Another positive development was the continuing decrease in the number of children with first-time diagnoses of disability by an Expert Medical Board.

The problem with the involvement of children in the formulation and implementation of child-related policies was defined as the fourth operational goal of the Strategy. The development of a system to ensure the involvement of children was a top priority in the work of the State Child Protection Agency (SCPA) where under the Children's Council was created in 2003. It became a unique structure with national representation—a forum allowing children to express their opinion and participate in the formulation of policies affecting them. The children have the opportunity to express their opinion, influence the decisions affecting their lives and futures and make a difference. This is an informed and voluntary involvement of every child, including children from vulnerable and marginalised communities, of diverse ages, in the decisions on all matters affecting their lives.

The review allowed a number of main conclusions to be drawn:

- Firstly, the limited and, in some sectors, the complete lack of, in-depth and comprehensive statistics, including a single information system, is a significant challenge in the planning, implementation and monitoring of evidence-based child protection policies.
- Secondly, the levels of coordination and integration of the efforts of the various participants in the child protection and child welfare improvement policies were relatively low. The measures for the implementation of the Strategy in most cases were aggregations of apparently unrelated sector policies. The sector-based approach in the implementation of the child policies made it harder to achieve sufficiently effective cooperation between the administrations and the responsible institutions. An effective interinstitutional cooperation was needed to guarantee the full implementation of the child protection policies, continual improvement and sustainable results.
- Thirdly, even if the Strategy was intended to cover all children, the measures for its implementation were mostly focusing on the children at risk. Nevertheless, the institutional efforts to support the families and prevent them from becoming at risk as well as the policies aimed at improving the quality of life and development of all children should not be overlooked.

The National Child Rights Strategy 2019–2030 was developed pursuant to Article 1, Paragraph 3 of the Child Protection Act and the decision of Session 39 of the National Child Protection Council (NCPC) held on 9 May 2018. This Council decision provided for the establishment of an interinstitutional working group presided by the Chairperson of the State Child Protection Agency to develop the strategic document. The working group included representatives from government institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the area of child rights. The working group also involved external experts with diverse areas of expertise. The National Child Strategy was created with a transparent and comprehensive approach in line with the best administrative practices for the

creation of national strategic documents. The mechanism included a preliminary consultation process involving professional organisations, the academia, parent organisations, non-governmental organisations and children and discussions within the working group, in two smaller formats, on the themes of Family Environment, Recreation, Access to Justice, Safe Environment and Health, Education, Healthy Living, Early Child Development. Between May and November 2018, the working group held 6 sessions. Members of the Children Advisory Council, composed of experts in various areas of the child policies, were also actively involved at the different states of the creation of the document. The members of the Advisory Council attended the sessions of the Strategy working group and were involved in the discussion of the individual themes as well as in the presentation of the complete strategic document on the working group session held on 30 November 2018 before its approval by the National Child Protection Council at its session of 19 December 2018.

In 2018, the Children Advisory Council was created under the Chairperson of the State Child Protection Agency. It was formed on 17 April pursuant to Article 47, Paragraph 8 of the Administration Act and was endorsed by the Deputy Prime Minister for the Economy and Social Policy. The Council is presided over by the Chairperson of the SCPA, Dr. Eleonora Lilova, and is composed of external experts with advisory functions and diverse expertise who have proved their authority and, most importantly, their dedication to the work with children over the years. The Advisory Council was created to improve and support the Agency's operations and address the dynamic expectations of the public. It operates on sessions and work in smaller advisory groups.

16. The Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications coordinates the implementation of the commitments of the Republic of Bulgaria as a member of the Council of Europe in the area of the information society and the media. The implementation of the Internet Governance Strategy 2016–2019 of the Council of Europe will continue, with a special focus on the challenges for the governance related to the spreading of intentionally misleading or false information materials inciting hate, discrimination or violence. The updated Data Protection Convention will help ensure the respect of the right to privacy while combatting terrorism and cybercrime. Implementing the programme for participation in the intergovernmental measures of the Council of Europe, the MTITC is actively involved in the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) and, indirectly, in its subcommittees:

- MSI-AUT Committee of experts on Human Rights Dimensions of automated data processing and different forms of artificial intelligence
- MSI-JOQ Committee of experts on quality journalism in the digital age.

The MTITC conducts the policy to develop an accessible and safer Internet environment for businesses and citizens in accordance with the currently effective international strategic documents, including the Internet Governance Strategy 2016–2019 of the Council of Europe, and represents our country in the respective international organisations, with whom the Council of Europe participates in joint events to strengthen the required synergy between them. In this regard, experts of the Information Technologies Directorate within the MTITC monitor the developments and are actively involved in all significant international events, in which the Council of Europe is also actively involved, in the area of the ICT and Internet governance, such as the IGF (Internet Governance Forum), EuroDIG (Pan-European Dialogue on Internet Governance), SEEDIG (South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance) and GAC (Governmental Advisory Committee) within the meetings of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). In 2015, Bulgaria hosted the EuroDIG and SEEDIG forums (the MTITC was an institutional partner).

In the coming years, the MTITC will continue its active involvement to strengthen the cooperation in the area of the information society. The objective is to ensure effective implementation of the WSIS+10 goals aimed at overcoming the digital divide and full utilisation of the capabilities of the Internet.

Priority for the MTITC is its involvement in the work of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI). The Committee will monitor the implementation of the Internet Governance Strategy 2016–2019 of the Council of Europe, focusing on the right to freedom of expression in the Internet and the right to information to promote freedom of expression and active involvement in the democratic governance; will develop cooperation at pan-European level to promote the protection of the human rights, rule of law and pluralistic democracy in the information society; will coordinate the measures to set standards of work related to the personal data protection and right to privacy, in close cooperation with other bodies of the Council of Europe; will work to promote a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age; will prepare meetings of the Ministers responsible for the media and the information society and will monitor the implementation of the decisions of the Council of Ministers in this area. A new priority in the work of the Council of Europe (CE) is the Artificial Intelligence (AI), focusing on its impact on the media environment and the public, including democratic process; on the AI-based decision-making systems, the concept of responsibility in relation to the human rights and ethical standards at European and global level.

The Republic of Bulgaria prioritises action against, and prosecution of, all crimes against women and children, especially involving sexual violence and sexual exploitation as well as child pornography. In 2015, the Criminal Code was amended with regard to the implementation of Directive 2011/92/EU in relation to combatting sexual violence and sexual exploitation of children as well as child pornography. The intentional use of any information or communication technology to access any pornographic material created using a person under 18 years of age or a person with such appearance was criminalised thereunder—Article 159 of the CC.

In 2017, the SCPA organised and held, jointly with the Sofia City REA of the MES, a workshop where the issues of improving the children's safety on the Internet were discussed with representatives of more than 60 schools from Sofia. A free mobile app and information on new dangers for the children in the digital environment were presented during the meeting. Representatives of the General Directorate for Combatting Organised Crime (GDCOC) and the EMC also took part. The event attracted a lot of attention and launched a series of workshops on the issues of violence in the media and online safety of children to be held in various regions of the country in cooperation with the REA of the MES.

17. The Republic of Bulgaria has taken the following actions to address the problem of the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, connected to a training for media professionals to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotypical, balanced and diverse images of women and girls in the media, developed or enhanced consumer protection services, strengthened and enforced legal reforms to combat discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, etc.

Over the last five years, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination has been developing a partnership with the Bulgarian Regional Media Association. Trainings on targeted projects were conducted with representatives of the various media genres. Under the specialised proceedings within its jurisdiction, the CPD imposes prescriptions on the development and implementation of self-control methods and mechanisms chosen by the media managers to prevent discrimination; regular reporting to the CPD on the results of the application of the developed self-control methods and mechanisms to prevent discrimination within a set time limit after the notification on the decision; application of specific measures to abstain from certain practices in the future.

Over the same period, some of the CPD's decisions of higher social importance were made public. Closer contacts with regional media representatives and joint initiatives to inform the local communities, considering the need to raise the awareness of an ever increasing number of residents in remote areas of the country about the work of the CPD to allow them to exercise their rights, are

becoming a trend in working with the media. This is further made possible thanks to the good communication and joint action between the CPD and the Bulgarian Regional Media Association (BRMA).

The Radio and Television Act (RTA) in Bulgaria outlines the principles of operation of the media service providers, one of which is the inadmissibility of any programmes inciting gender-based hatred—Article 10, Paragraph 1(6) of the RTA. This provision is fundamental for the protection of women and girls from discrimination in the media. The legal standards guarantee the privacy of citizens and protect from incited gender intolerance in any direction.

Specifically for girls, i.e. “persons of female gender under 18 years of age,” the EMC and the State Child Protection Agency (the SCPA) each year sign an Agreement on Protecting Children from Harmful Content—Article 32, Paragraph 5 and 6 of the RTA. In its verifications of controversial media content, the EMC does not apply any gender-specific criteria to children placed at risk by the media content, thus effectively applying the gender equality principle to the minors. The other cases, involving adult citizens, are reviewed in the same manner. Upon identifying violations of the Radio and Television Act, the EMC takes administrative enforcement measures against the providers.

Each media service provider is free to create and enact its own editorial standards (Article 11, Paragraph 5 of the RTA), freely and independently from the state, on the equal representation of men and women in its media content. The equal gender representation in the radio and television production management is an entirely internal decision within the powers of the owners and managers of the media service providers.

The EMC refers any reports by citizens or any identified controversial content in commercial messages to the National Self-Regulation Council which, based on the National Code of Conduct for Advertising and Commercial Communication in the Republic of Bulgaria, takes a decision on the specific case. The self-regulation standards under Article 76, Paragraph 2 of the RTA are applied by the providers as a part of their Codes of Conduct, together with the Child Protection Criteria.

The work of the EMC in the area of gender equality over the 5-year reporting period (2014–2019) included verifications of reports by citizens and institutions; focused area monitoring; election campaign monitoring. The reports by citizens and institutions as well as EMC’s verifications and monitoring were related to sexism in commercial messages, violations of children’s, including girls’, rights, a girl featured in music videos with an overtly sexual and vulgar content, violations of privacy in cases of violence and aggression, the portrayal of women in music videos and the participation of women in election campaigns for various elected positions: Members of the Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, mayors and city councillors, President and Vice-President of the Republic.

The regular monitoring of the four channels—Hobby TV, Hobby Hunting, Fiesta TV and 24Kitchen—in 2014 confirmed the ongoing trend of absence of gender-discrimination components in the programme content. The results of the monitoring (women and men hosting, jointly and separately, women and children participating in sport coverage and game shows) showed no social and behavioural gender bias in the above-listed channels.

In 2015, gender equality monitoring activities included:

1. Monitoring of radio and television channels with a musical profile. The results showed that, in some (pop-folk) song lyrics, the main character often was a woman portrayed as a sex object. One of the broadcasted music videos featured a storyline offensive to women.

2. Monitoring of five television channels—BTV, Nova Television, SKAT, BNT1, Alfa TV—for media content diversity based on predefined criteria, including gender equality for one month (December 2014): no gender imbalance was found in the programmes. The topics of interest to the reporters included domestic violence, activities of non-governmental organisations, social advice. Reports showing victims of violence did not disclose their identities. In addition to the portrayals of successful women in areas traditionally occupied by men, reporting helped dismantle one of the most resilient stereotypes—on the place of the women in the kitchen.

3. Two other channels—RING (specialised in sports) and BTV LADY (with women as target audience)—were monitored for the compliance of their audio-visual content with the gender-discrimination provisions of the law. No violations of such provisions and no gender bias were identified during the monitoring. The commercials broadcasted on both channels also adhered to the principles elaborated both in the RTA and in the Code of Conduct and did not contain any discriminatory or offensive content.

4. The participation of women and the ratio of men-to-women guests in the programmes was an area of focused monitoring of the news and opinion broadcasts on the BNT1, BTV, Nova Television and SKAT channels under predefined criteria. The main findings confirmed that gender continues to play an insignificant role in the hosts' choice of guests—their expert qualities continue to be the decisive factor. The conclusions were drawn after a number of focused area monitoring activities over several months.

In 2016, the EMC notified the National Self-Regulation Council (NSRC) about a number of viewer signals, where the one directly relevant to the subject is a commercial for Auto.bg broadcast in 2016. The opinion of the Ethics Commission of the NSRC found the commercial communication in violation of the National Code of Conduct for Advertising and Commercial Communication in the Republic of Bulgaria. (<https://www.nss-bg.org/files/ca9561d577caab791f9845eed1c837dc.pdf>)

In 2017, multiple viewer complaints, a formal inquiry by the SCPA and a letter from the Sofia District Prosecutor's Office were received by the EMC concerning videos featuring the 14-year old S.M.-S. The EMC sent a letter to the State Child Protection Agency to verify whether both parents had authorised the participation of S.M.-S. in this video and its broadcasting in the programmes of media service providers, since she was a minor. The EMC launched administrative enforcement proceedings for violation of Article 17, Paragraph 2 of the RTA, in relation to the Content Assessment Criteria under Article 32, Paragraph 5 of the RTA.

In 2015, the Criminal Code, Chapter II, Offences against the Person, Section VIII, Lewd Acts, was amended in relation to the implementation of Directive 2011/92/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The definition of "Pornographic Material" was amended and a new one was created for "Pornographic Performance" thereunder—Article 93(28) and (30) of the CC. In addition, the provision for criminal liability upon forcing, recruiting, helping or using a person under 18 years of age or a group of such persons to take part in a pornographic performance; the performance of the preceding acts against a person under 14 years of age as well as the cases where profit was gained from the preceding acts was elaborated—Article 158a of the CC—and the intentional use of any information or communication technology to access any pornographic material created using a person under 18 years of age or a person with such appearance was criminalised thereunder—Article 159 of the CC.

As a result of the increased flow of migrants in 2016 and the need for a better coordination of the policies related to the unaccompanied minors, certain issues were brought to the attention of the National Child Protection Council, which, on its session on 02.03.2017, decided to form an interinstitutional working group to create a Coordination Mechanism for work on cases of unaccompanied minors to whom (refugee or humanitarian) status has been denied and unaccompanied minors who do not wish to apply for status. The working group was led by the SCPA and the document was developed with the help of all institutions and organisations responsible for children foreigners on the territory of Bulgaria. The objective of the Coordination Mechanism for cooperation between the institutions and organisations on cases of unaccompanied minors or minors foreigners separated from their families on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, including minors seeking and/or receiving asylum was to ensure effective coordination in the performance of the specific obligations of all entities involved in the care and work with unaccompanied minors and minors foreigners located on the territory of the country and guarantee the respect for the rights of the children. Another objective was to clarify and allocate the responsibilities, procedures and approaches of all stakeholder institutions and organisations. The third objective was to apply the system of

interinstitutional approach introduced with the Coordination Mechanism and facilitate the comprehensive, expedient and effective tracking of each particular case of unaccompanied minors and minors separated from their families in our country, including those seeking and/or receiving asylum.

The draft Coordination Mechanism was developed in line with the fundamental strategic document in the area of child protection, the effective national legislation; the 2016 recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child after the defence of the consolidated third, fourth and fifth regular reports on Bulgaria's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The existing international laws, instruments and regulations in the area of human rights and child protection as well as a number of analyses of international organisations and studies of the non-governmental sector were also taken into consideration.

18. Over the last five years, the Republic of Bulgaria took action specifically tailored to address violence against specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination. An independent specialised national body with extensive powers to prevent, protect from discrimination and promote equal treatment—the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD)—was established in the Republic of Bulgaria. It operates pursuant to the special Protection against Discrimination Act (PDA) intended to ensure equal rights under the law, equal treatment and equal opportunities for participation in public life and effective protection against discrimination for every individual. The Act protects all natural persons on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria against discrimination based on 19 protected characteristics, including race, ethnicity, gender, disability, nationality, personal and social status, sexual orientation and any other characteristics established by a law or an international agreement to which the Republic of Bulgaria is party. The practice of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) shows that the sexual harassment complaints are often combined with complaints for other forms of discrimination. Some examples from the practice of the CPD are given below:

The five-member panel of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination reviewed case No 123/2010 opened pursuant to a complaint by a woman employed in a branch of a bank in the country against the branch manager for discrimination with respect to gender, personal status and sexual harassment. The Commission found the defendant guilty of sexual harassment and imposed 3 fines in a total amount of BGN 4,500—the largest fine imposed by the CPD for this type of offence. The fine was paid by the defendant soon after the decision was announced.

By Decision 466/2018 on case No 144/2016 for multiple discrimination pursuant to complaints for discrimination with respect to gender, personal and social status, the five-member panel of the CPD found sexual harassment at the workplace committed against the plaintiff by a union branch president and imposed a fine on the latter in the amount of BGN 1,000. The complaint cited sexual harassment expressed in “regular sexual advances and verbal abuse.”

The Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Improvement of Access to Justice for Persons under the Poverty Threshold with a Special Focus on Women, Children and the Romani Community, with the National Legal Assistance Bureau as beneficiary in partnership with the Norwegian Judicial Administration. The project aims to improve the access to justice for the Bulgarian citizens living under the poverty threshold. Special attention is paid to three main target groups: victims of domestic and gender-based violence, children at risk and Romani communities, especially in remote and isolated rural areas. The project includes activities to ensure access to legal aid for vulnerable groups by developing a mechanism for cooperation at a local level in response to domestic and gender-based violence as well as the creation of mobile legal aid units. Furthermore, it is planned to strengthen the capacity to provide quality services to vulnerable groups in Bulgaria by raising awareness of the availability and access to free legal aid.

Amendments to criminal law were introduced, regulating the protection of the rights of the victims of violence, including domestic violence. The amendments were passed by the National

Assembly at a second reading with a floor vote and will be promulgated in the State Gazette. The amendments to the Criminal Code provide a more comprehensive and effective protection for potential victims of forced marriages, who are usually members of migrant and/or ethnic minority communities and who may be obligated by their family to leave their country of residence and get married in their family's country of origin in adherence to their community's cultural values.

19. The Republic of Bulgaria continues to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making and took the following actions over the last 5 years:

Between 2013 and 2015, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy implemented a two-year project titled: Get Equal in Economic Decision-Making (JUST/2012/PROG/AG/GE) financed under the Gender Equality area of the PROGRESS Community programme. The objective of the project was to create a supportive environment to promote balanced participation of women and men holding executive and management positions at various levels in the hierarchy of public companies traded on the Bulgarian Stock Exchange (BSE). The project was focused on the following target groups: social partners; workers and managers in public companies traded on the BSE (private and state-owned); workers and managers in government-owned (state or local) companies; stakeholder partners and the society in general. This project featured an analysis of the current state of affairs in Bulgaria, a number of forums and meetings, promotion of positive models and creation of methodological Company Management Guidance to improve the gender balance where economic decisions are made and action guidance is provided. As a result, the project raised public awareness among the target groups and society in general in relation to the economic decision-making and the need to improve the gender balance among Bulgarian directors as well as the development and distribution of tools to improve the gender balance in economic decision-making which should be beneficial for the economy. This helped create better conditions to promote well-balanced participation of women and men at various management levels in the public companies traded on the BSE. In this way, prerequisites were created to increase the share of women holding management positions and reduce the gender-based pay gap.

The project featured the following publicity measures:

- 3 information forums on gender balance in economic decision-making for members of the media, the legislative and executive branches and stock market institutions;
- Creation of a document package for the participants in the public events under the project;
- A closing conference with the participation of all stakeholders to present the project results with a formal ceremony to award companies providing women equality on management positions.

According to information from National Statistical Institute's (NSI) survey Women and Men in the Republic of Bulgaria 2018, by 1 August 2018, 27.1% of the Members of Parliament, 23.8% of the members of the Council of Ministers and 12.8% of the municipal Mayors in Bulgaria were women. It should be noted that the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Mayor of the capital are women.

Provide equal opportunities and promote women's participation in decision-making. Women's representation within the administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA):

- 50.78% women in diplomatic service
- 44.65% women with a diplomatic rank
- 41.66% women directors of MFA directorates
- 55.35% women MFA department heads

- 21.42% women Ambassadors and Consuls-General of the Republic of Bulgaria

Number of women holders of senior and high diplomatic positions at the MFA:

- 43.42% women holders of senior diplomatic positions (ranks Counsellor and Minister Plenipotentiary)
- 8.04% women holders of high diplomatic positions (rank Ambassador)

20. The voice of women in the media has grown stronger over the past years. Among the topics most widely covered by the media were the woman's role on the labour market, her health and various

aspects of gender equality. The monitoring of Bulgarian electronic media over the past year has not found, in general, any inadmissible behavioural models with implicit messages or stereotypes placing women in disadvantaged roles.

The EMC conducted a statistical study of the men-to-women ratios in the Management Bodies of the media service providers by 17.05.2016. The Radio and Television Act makes no provision for the regulator (the EMC) to exercise any influence on the appointment of managing directors, executive officers and management bodies of the media service providers. An exception is made in Article 32, Paragraph 1(3) of the RTA: *“The Electronic Media Council shall endorse, upon proposal by the Chief Executive Officers, the members of the Managing Boards of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) and the Bulgarian National Television (BNT).”* The majority of the media service providers operating under Bulgarian jurisdiction and licenced and/or registered under the procedure of the RTA are companies which determine their own management policies. Of the 205 company managers, 83 were women. On 01.02.2019, the women-to-men ratio among the members of the EMC was 4:1, i.e. four times more women.

Election campaigns were monitored under an Agreement signed by and between the Electronic Media Council (EMC) and the Central Election Commission (CEC) defining the principles and criteria of the specific types of monitoring.

In 2014: (i) 2014 European Parliament Elections. Gender equality was set as a separate component in the monitoring conducted by the EMC inspectors on the election campaign for electing Members of the European Parliament from the Republic of Bulgaria. The monitoring did not find any discrimination, both against women running for MEP and in the overall audio-visual content of the monitored programmes. (ii) Monitoring of the election campaign in the snap Parliament Elections. The weak campaigning was in sharp contrast to the larger number of violations of the election and media law in the operations of the electronic media. It also led to a large number of enforcement proceedings. The violations reported by the EMC and penalised by the CEC were concentrated in the areas of morals, portrayal of children and the national flag.

In 2015: As a result of its special monitoring of the media service providers during the local elections and under the Agreement executed on 25.10.2015 between the EMC and the CEC on the monitoring of the local elections, the EMC referred certain election campaign broadcasts involving children. With regard to the 4 referred cases, the SCPA replied to the EMC that it did not find any violations in the involvement of children in political activities, no rights of children related to their protection were directly violated, because the children were not usually asked for their opinion, in some of the campaign reports they were with their parents and, respectively, there was no violation of Article 11, Paragraph 4 of the Child Protection Act.

In 2016: In the 2016 Presidential Campaign and the information campaign for the National Referendum, no cases of discrimination against women were identified.

In 2017: The EMC monitored the participation of women and men during the 2017 Parliament Elections.

Bulgaria deserves a special mention for its number one spot in the European Union (EU) in share of women students of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and women working in this sector.

Media labour unions and professional associations also play a positive role with their strong influence promoting more effective gender equality within the internal structures of the media organisations. These professional associations play a key role in the development of the gender equality strategies in all economic and social areas in Bulgaria.

21. Gender-responsive budgeting is not regulated under the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria. Budgetary organisations describe their policies, programmes and measures in their programme budgets and it is recommended for those whose operations allow their cost breakdowns to be presented, e.g. by gender, age, income, region, etc., to apply alternative cost reporting showing

the financial impact of their policies on various target groups.

22. The main priority areas of the Medium-Term Programme for Development and Humanitarian Aid for the period 2016–2019 include protection of human rights, including gender equality, the rights of children and adolescents, capacity building, elimination of violence against women and girls.

Development and humanitarian aid was provided and projects in the main areas related to the protection of women's rights, protection against gender-based violence, and capacity building received support.

In 2015, a voluntary contribution (BGN 26,649.15) was made to UN Women.

Support was provided to the Ministry of Health's project titled Improving the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Children and Adolescents from the Regions of Central Europe and Central Asia 2015 in the amount of EUR 40 thousand.

The following 2 projects in Georgia received support in 2017: Women-Focused Monitoring of Court Trials in the amount of EUR 20 thousand and Monitoring the Situation in the Prisons for Women and Young People in the amount of EUR 20 thousand.

In April 2018, Bulgaria joined the International Initiative Call to Action on Protection against Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, with commitments to build specialised knowledge on the subject and provide comprehensive support for its inclusion in relevant political processes.

In 2019, there is an ongoing procedure of internal coordination for a contribution to the humanitarian aid for Syria and the region provided by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) related to the issues of protection against gender-based violence.

23. The Republic of Bulgaria has a currently effective national gender equality strategy and a national action plan thereto. They were created under the provisions of the Gender Equality Act regulating the creation of a national strategy and action plans thereto. The National Gender Equality Strategy ("the Strategy") is a general programming document containing the objectives to achieve gender equality in all areas; the authorities responsible for the achievement of these objectives; the priority action areas for the achievement of these objectives and the performance indicators. It is regularly adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria as the body responsible for the national policy for gender equality. The central and local government executive authority bodies implement the gender equality policy in accordance with the above national strategy. The National Gender Equality Promotion Strategy 2016–2020 adopted by CM Decision No 967 of 14 November 2016 is currently in force.

It was developed by an interinstitutional working group formed to create a draft updated National Gender Equality Promotion Strategy by order No RD01–35 of 18.01.2016 of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. The working group involved representatives of 24 government institutions. The Strategy was developed in accordance with the general laws and regulations and certain national, European and international strategic documents, including the SDGs. Before its adoption by the CM, the National Gender Equality Promotion Strategy 2016–2020 was discussed by the National Gender Equality Board within the CM.

The main priority areas and key measures to achieve progress therein, under the National Strategy, were:

Priority Area 1: Increased women's participation on the labour market and equal level of economic independence

Priority Area 2: Reduced gender pay and income gaps

Priority Area 3: Promotion of gender equality in decision-making

Priority Area 4: Combatting gender-based violence; protection and support for the survivors

Priority Area 5: Transformation of the existing gender stereotypes in various areas of society

The National Strategy is implemented through plans including measures, responsible authorities, funds and performance indicators. The achieved results in the area of gender equality are presented in annual gender equality reports on the implementation of the measures and the progress in the implemented policy.

The main sources of funding for its implementation are the national budget of the Republic of Bulgaria, the local budgets, international and European sources.

Between 2014 and 2019, the following plans were developed in our country:

- National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2014;
- National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2015;
- National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2018;
- National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2019–2020.

The National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2019–2020 is the currently applicable gender equality plan in Bulgaria.

24. The Republic of Bulgaria developed and adopted an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Final Recommendations to the Republic of Bulgaria made by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/“the Committee”) with regard to the consolidated IV-VII regular report on Bulgaria’s implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It covered the period between 2013 and 2016. The Action Plan was created by an interinstitutional working group involving representatives of all Ministries, agencies, public authorities, social partners, non-governmental organisations. The Plan was structured in accordance with the Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria and the CEDAW Recommendations. This was made to ensure the Plan’s contents’ alignment with the Recommendations. The Action Plan was in addition to the obligations within each institution’s and organisation’s competence related to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Plan had a framework nature—providing guidance for action in the areas where recommendations were made. It included objectives, measures, budget, time limit, deliverables, performance indicators and responsible institutions. The CM adopted the plan by Decision No 438 of 25 July 2013.

The main measures were related to the increased publicity for the CEDAW, the legal framework on equality, a mechanism for the filing of complaints, the national mechanism to achieve progress of women, provisional special measures, combatting stereotypes and discriminatory measures, combatting violence against women, trafficking and exploitation of women, participation in politics, education, employment, healthcare, economic and social support, women from rural areas, disadvantaged women, marriage and family relations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals, etc.

Within the implementation of the Plan, the draft Gender Equality Act was created regulating the national mechanism for gender equality and the application of provisional promotional measures. The Gender Equality Act was adopted in April 2016 in Bulgaria.

In 2014, as a result of a request by the Committee, an Interim Report was submitted on the measures taken on items 4 and 7 of the Plan related to the national mechanism to achieve progress of women and the violence against women.

In November 2017 the CM adopted the Report on the Measures Taken to Apply the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Final Recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It reflected the results achieved within the adopted Plan.

The Plan, the Interim Report and the Report are available at: <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/index.php?section=POLICIESI&I=409>

With regard to the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), they are regularly reviewed by the National Coordination Mechanism on human rights and the working groups

created thereunder. Bulgaria was featured in the second cycle of the UPR in 2015. In accordance with the best practices and its commitments, the country submitted an Interim Review of its implementation of the recommendations in December 2018. The next cycle will take place in 2020.

25. The national human rights institutions in Bulgaria are the Commission for Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria.

- **The Commission for Protection against Discrimination (the CPD)** is an independent specialised national body for the prevention of discrimination, protection against discrimination and provision of equal opportunities. It supervises the application and enforcement of the anti-discrimination legislation. The CPD is a specialised equality body within the meaning of the anti-discrimination law of the European Union and an active member of the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET). Established in 2005 and operating in accordance with the Paris Principles, the CPD was accredited as a UN national human rights institution. The Commission is composed of nine members—five elected by the National Assembly and four appointed by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria. The equality body of the Republic of Bulgaria has regional representatives across the country. The Commission has extensive powers, both enforcement and prevention. The body reviews and decides cases of protection against discrimination with respect to all protected characteristics provided for by the national legislation and by international acts, to which the Republic of Bulgaria is party. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination was established and operates pursuant to the Protection against Discrimination Act. Its provisions are an essential part of Bulgaria’s anti-discrimination policy, including with regard to the prevention of gender-based discrimination. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination exercises its powers in adherence to the principles of independence, effectiveness and transparency in its operation. These principles are decisive for the appointments and the terms of the members of the CPD.

It should be noted that the Protection against Discrimination Act (PDA) makes provisions for protection against discrimination, including with respect to gender as a protected characteristic, in various areas of public life: Section One: Protection in the Exercising of the Right to Work, Section Two: Protection in the Exercising of the Right to Education and Training, Section Three: Protection in the Exercising of Other Rights. The provisions of Section One: Protection in the Exercising of the Right to Work have a wide scope—job openings, criteria for eligibility and hiring of job applicants, job applications, applicant screening, non-discriminatory and equal working conditions, equal pay for equal work, equal criteria for disciplinary action, termination of employment, exercising of social security rights, vocational training of workers and employees, collective bargaining.

In the proceedings on protection against discrimination before the CPD, the second permanent panel is specialised in: gender, human genome, exercising the right to work, union membership. Most of the cases reviewed by this panel were opened pursuant to complaints of violations of the principle of equal pay for equal work established under the PDA. Cases of multiple discrimination, with respect to more than one characteristic, in the proceedings on protection against discrimination are reviewed by a larger five-member panel, composed personally by a separate order of the Chairperson of the CPD in each individual case.

The regional offices of the CPD in the country perform advisory, supervisory and organisational functions and provide methodological support to improve the access to the CPD and protect the rights of the natural and juridical persons on the territories of their respective regions and the country in general.

Within its jurisdiction as a specialised authority for protection against discrimination implementing the mechanism for protection against discrimination, under specialised proceedings before the CPD, between 2014 and 2018, 110 cases were open with respect to gender as a protected characteristic, 60% of which were related to multiple gender-based discrimination. After the comprehensive “personal status” characteristic, the characteristics appearing most often in combination with the “gender” characteristic were “disability,” “education” and “marital status.” Over

the same period, 14 proceedings on sexual harassment were launched at the CPD.

The CPD was a direct beneficiary under the Prevention of Discrimination and Creation of Equal Opportunities project under Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014–2020. Developed under this project was a practical manual to assist in the training of representatives of the stakeholders (local governments, state administration, employers, etc.) on issues of non-discrimination with the goal to create a common understanding of the issues and the ways to overcome them, including overcoming and action against the gender stereotypes in various areas of public life. The training process took place on six workshops for representatives of stakeholders at a local level on the issues of prevention, detection and reduction of the cases of discrimination in specific areas: healthcare, workplace, services on the labour market and working conditions, social services, focused both on potential groups at risk and on organisations and institutions operating in these areas. The following trainings specifically addressed the issue of gender equality on the labour market and the measures required to overcome the economic vulnerability of women: Specific Aspects of the Protection against Discrimination for the Access to Employment and the Labour Market, Equal Access to Employment and Social Services, Equal Pay for Equal Work. Trainings to enhance the qualifications of the employees of the CPD were conducted in 2018.

Action against the existing gender stereotypes in various areas of public life is taken under one of the key powers of the CPD—prevention of discrimination (Article 40(1) of the PDA). Some of the main measures taken by the CPD to exercise these powers include independent studies (Article 47(10) of the PDA), publication of independent reports and making recommendations on all discrimination-related matters (Article 47(11) of the PDA) and providing information to the public through the media on effective provisions in the area of protection against discrimination (Article 47(12) of the PDA).

The CPD conducted and published a number of studies over the years. The following are some of the more notable ones, including analyses of the protection against gender-based discrimination: Discrimination and Non-Objective Attitudes with Respect to Ethnicity, Gender, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Age and Beliefs (2007); Prejudice and Discrimination against Migrants and Refugees(2009); Prejudice and Discrimination against Minority Children and Children with Disabilities in the Education System (2009); Study and Assessment of the Impact of the Economic Crisis and Budget Cutbacks on the Vulnerable Groups (2014); National Representative Poll by Territory to Identify and Create Profiles of the Groups and Communities Most Affected by Risk of Discrimination (2016). The newest research project addressing the higher level of vulnerability of Bulgarian women was the above-mentioned national representative poll implementing the Prevention of Discrimination and Creation of Equal Opportunities project under Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014–2020 co-financed by the European Social Fund and gradually implemented in 2016 and 2017. The national representative poll was made by territory to identify and create profiles of groups and communities at the highest risk of discrimination, implementing Activity 1 under the Prevention of Discrimination and Creation of Equal Opportunities project, BG05M9OP001–3.003–0001–C001. It identified the trends and prerequisites to reduce the barriers for Bulgarian citizens’ full participation on the labour market, access to quality social, health and other services and social inclusion, from a gender equality perspective.

In 2018, the Cases of Discrimination and Protection of Women in Employment research report was presented at the CPD by the Deputy Chairperson of the CPD, Mr Baki Hyuseinov. The main points of this report were related to the identification and protection of women against discrimination in employment. It pointed out that women’s participation and behaviour on the labour market is currently defined by the development and the demands of the new technologies and information flows with the underlying need for high-quality work by women on a highly competitive labour market, emphasising the special importance of the identification of women at a higher risk of discrimination.

- The institution of **the Ombudsman** as a public advocate promoting and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms was established pursuant to the Ombudsman Act (promulgated in the State Gazette No 48 of 23 May 2003, effective as of 01.01.2004). This law regulated the legal

status, organisation and operation of the Ombudsman. Under the amendments to Article 91a, Paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, promulgated in the State Gazette No 27/2006, the National Assembly shall elect an Ombudsman, who shall defend the rights and freedoms of the citizens.

The institution of the Ombudsman has powers vested therein by the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (Article 91a), the Ombudsman Act (effective as of 01.01.2004) and the Rules on the Organisation and the Operation of the Ombudsman (effective as of 18.09.2012, adopted by National Assembly Decision of 04.09.2012, promulgated SG No 71 of 18 September 2012, amended SG No 53 of 26 June 2018).

After the amendments to the Ombudsman Act made in early June 2012, a new directorate, National Preventive Mechanism and Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, within the administration of the institution started its operation focusing on the locations where persons are incarcerated, detained or otherwise placed under an act, or with the consent, of a state authority and which they are not allowed to leave of their own accord.

The Ombudsman is a constitutional authority and its status is defined under the Constitution, Article 91a, the special Ombudsman Act and the Rules on the organisation of its operation adopted by the National Assembly.

The provision of Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the Ombudsman Act expressly states that the Ombudsman shall be independent and bound only by the Constitution, the laws and the ratified international agreements to which the Republic of Bulgaria is party, led only by their personal conscience and ethics.

Under Article 91a of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Assembly shall elect an Ombudsman, who shall defend the rights and freedoms of the citizens. The powers and the operation of the Ombudsman shall be arranged by a law.

Under the Ombudsman Act, the Ombudsman shall be a public advocate promoting and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall advocate, by the means provided for under the law, where any action or inaction by state or local governments, their administrations, persons commissioned to provide social services and private-law entities prejudices or violates the rights and freedoms of the citizens.

Under this definition, the Ombudsman has the widest possible mandate, including not only advocacy but also promotion of the rights of the citizens as well as promotion, assistance and support related to actions, inactions or omissions in both the private and the public sectors.

The constitutional mandate of the Ombudsman includes all violations of rights of citizens, without limitation. This includes economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights as well as the rights under the EU Charter associated with the membership in the EU. Furthermore, the Ombudsman Act makes no distinction between the types of rights and provides for the protection of all groups of fundamental rights and freedoms, without limitation. Under Article 2 of the Ombudsman Act, these are the rights of citizens threatened or violated by any action or inaction of national and local government bodies, their administrations, persons commissioned to provide social services and private-law entities.

26. The promotion of women's active role in sustaining international peace and security has an important place in the foreign policy and the security and defence policy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Bulgaria is a co-author of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on women, peace, and security. Our country prioritises the issues related to women's equality in all areas of social, political, economic and public life, including women's involvement in efforts at national and international level to prevent and resolve conflict, build and sustain international peace and security.

The first National Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 is being created to help achieve the goals of UNSCR 1325 and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is directly involved in the process. In addition, during a session of the National Coordination Mechanism on human rights

(13 December 2019), a decision was made for the Bulgarian National Plan to be finalised in consultations with Ireland and adopted by a Council of Ministers decision in the first half of 2019.

The adoption of a National Plan on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is in line with the active policy of our country in the area of human rights and the rights of women and girls in particular and will complement the national efforts for the empowerment of women and their more active involvement in the issues of peace and security as well as give a clear political signal for our commitment to achieve the national priorities in the area of gender equality.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) developed and is currently implementing its Plan on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 within the MoD. The progress achieved over the last five years was a result of the consistent cooperation of the MoD with the Association of Women Service Members (AWSM)—a non-governmental organisation focused mainly on the implementation of the international women, peace and security agenda in Bulgaria.

Four of the main objectives within the strategic framework outlined by UNSCR 1325 and its related package of resolutions are being implemented by the Armed Forces (AF) of the Republic of Bulgaria.

- Institutional support—through creating functional responsibilities and coordination within the system of the AF for actual implementation and advancement of the policies on human rights and gender equality;
- Participation—through creating opportunities for the involvement of women on all levels of the system of defence, establishing a balanced approach for women’s participation in decision-making, maintaining a sustainable human-resource management;
- Protection—through establishing transparent system(s) for registration, detection and investigation of cases of discrimination and violence in the AF, both in the country and on missions abroad;
- Prevention—through creating platforms, processes, projects, innovative policies, approaches and practices supporting the implementation and modernisation of the women, peace and security agenda within the MoD.

The active cooperation of the Ministry of Defence with the AWSM led to the implementation of an international project titled Female Leaders in Security and Defence (FLSD) proceeding in parallel within two international organisations—South Eastern Defence Ministerial (SEDM) and NATO. The main objective of the project was to focus on the process of improvement of the capabilities to fully utilise the human potential and integrate gender equality in the strategic, operational and tactical planning processes, the development of the capabilities and the readiness of the forces to strengthen and increase the strategic and operational effectiveness of the armed forces and security systems. The FLSD is an ongoing process where the Member States of the SEDM rotate as hosts of a series of events.

As a result of the years of purposeful work on the project, Bulgaria presided over the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives–NCGP between 2015 and 2017. The main contribution of the Bulgarian presidency was the implementation of a state-of-the-art electronic mechanism to summarise the database inputs from the Member States and partners to the Committee and the creation of the first NCGP review published on NATO’s official website. Records of Decisions for the work of the Executive Committee of the NCGP and the War Gaming method were implemented in the Committee’s work toward a more comprehensive implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. A special focus in the War Gaming method was placed on the understanding of the adverse consequences of violence of all forms, including sexual violence against women, men, girls and boys in conflicts, for the communities.

A special section on gender equality was created on the MoD’s official website . A capacity was built and is being expanded by international trainings each year. In addition, the MoD summarises a database and publishes the summaries in an annual report to the NATO Committee wherein it officially reported an increased participation of women in missions and operations of the UN, EU, NATO and other international organisations.

Institutionalization, as one of the main objectives within the UNSCR 1325 framework, implements the gender equality policies and is essential for the MoD. The achievements over the last five years include the directorate responsibilities formulated in the Statutes of the MoD and the detailed Job Description Requirements implementing the policies on human rights and gender equality. The process of planning, programming and budgeting was implemented to ensure material support for the gender equality measures. After the conducted reviews and ongoing monitoring, a general conclusion was made that further budget funds were needed to more fully and adequately upgrade the training system and programmes with state-of-the-art materials and tools, including the celebrations of anniversaries of international and national events implementing the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.

With regard to the increased number of crises of various natures, there was an increased awareness and **participation** of women in missions and operations under the flag of various international organisations. In every engagement of Bulgarian service members, between 2014 and 2018, the average percentage participation of women was 9.4%. Depending on the objectives of the specific arrangements for national participation, the percentage of women has reached 12.5% for the respective year within the five-year period.

Participation of women service members in missions and operations

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
%	6,5%	10,1%	12,5%	8,3%	9,6%

Women are extremely valuable as military medical personnel, in community outreach as Gender Advisors/Gender Focal Points (GENAD/GFP) and in the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) teams. Currently, Bulgarian combat medics are involved in various humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in Africa, Asia, etc., and have always received outstanding reviews for their performance. With more than twenty rotations, Bulgaria continues its contribution to the efforts of the international community. Compared to the previous five-year period, 2009–2013, when the participation of women was in the 7% range, there is an apparent constant increase of women service members involved the missions and operations of all international organisations.

As a result of the consistent policy to eliminate the discriminatory formal obstacles to training and application within the system of defence, now all positions in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria are open to women and men and there is a gradual increase in the participation of women in defence.

The development of the participation of women service members in the Ministry of Defence, structures directly reporting to the Minister of Defence and Bulgarian Armed Forces, within the five-year period, is presented below.

Women service members in the Bulgarian Armed Forces

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
%	14,8%	15,1%	15,2%	15,9%	16,0%

The MoD continues to maintain its budget-funded MoD kindergartens located in the vicinity of its structures: Sofia—2; Karlovo—1; Plovdiv—1; Kazanlak—1; Veliko Tarnovo—1; Stara Zagora—1 to improve the work/family conciliation.

For the Ministry of Defence, the promotion of gender equality in decision-making and the empowerment of women is especially important for the implementation of international projects within NATO and SEDM led by Bulgaria. The structure of the defence and national security system and the chain-of-command principle, in particular, are key for the active implementation of the integrated approach to gender equality for the service members in the policy, training, planning and execution processes, including the legislation at all levels and in all branches of the AF of the Republic of Bulgaria.

In 2015, the Ministry of Defence and the AWSM, jointly with the Atlantic Club, organised an international workshop titled Women, Peace and Security: What They Do, Why It Matters—15th Anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 to discuss the progress in the implementation of the main objectives of UNSCR 1325, the participation of women in operations under the auspices of the UN, EU,

NATO and other international organisations as well as the women victims of armed conflict.

The FLSD process continues to focus on gender equality in decision-making within the system of defence. The Ministry of Defence, through the SEDM initiative, promotes the implementation of gender equality policies in the regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe. The leadership of the Ministry of Defence endorsed the White Paper and Roadmap of Female Leaders in Security and Defence (FLSD) in 2014.

The Integrity in Defence Procurement, Utilisation, and Public-Private Partnerships project continues as a part of the measures within the Building Integrity (BI) project aimed at providing equal opportunities for career development to women in defence through a project on combatting corruption. Both the FLSD and this project proceed in parallel within the SEDM and NATO. Bulgaria, Norway and the International Secretariat of NATO are co-chairs of the project.

The Ministry of Defence maintains and updates a database of the women's and men's participation in (management/command) decision-making and missions of the UN, EU, NATO, OSCE and other international organisations abroad.

The Ministry of Defence continues to maintain the Gender section in Bulgarian and English on its website. The website also links to the international FLSD project.

A Ministry of Defence hotline (posted on the MoD website) for reports, complaints and grievances by structures directly reporting to the Minister of Defence and the Bulgarian Armed Forces was launched and continues to operate.

27. Over the last five years, the Republic of Bulgaria took a number of actions to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings. Her Excellency, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Ekaterina Zaharieva, took part in a historic Women Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the issues of reinforcing democracy and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, advancing global peace, women's political empowerment and leadership, security and prosperity within the rule-based international order, international cooperation to eliminate gender-based violence, including in conflict and post-conflict regions. The meeting, held in Montréal, Canada, on the eve of the UN General Assembly in September 2018, was co-hosted by Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada. Women Foreign Ministers were present from Andorra, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia, Norway, Panama, Saint Lucia, South Africa and Sweden. It demonstrated their agreement for cooperation on international issues, outlined the significance of the women, peace and security agenda and the upcoming celebration of the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the important role of women in political decision-making, peace negotiations and consolidated effort to employ the full potential of the global population, half of which are women.

Another notable area is the implementation of the environment management policy, where Bulgaria has achieved equal participation of women in decision-making related to disaster response. Within the system of the Ministry of Environment and Water, gender equality is reported in terms of number of employees holding management positions. The current data show: 31 women and 21 men.

28. Under the Bulgarian legislation, each asylum application is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. According to the criteria of the Asylum and Refugees Act (ARA), the existence of armed conflict in the country of origin of the asylum seeker is a prerequisite for the granting of a humanitarian status under Article 9, Paragraph 1(3) of the ARA.

Bulgarian legislation provides special treatment for the cases where sexual exploitation is among the purposes of the crime of "human trafficking." This area was brought in conformity to the

international and the European standards—out country has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and two of the protocols thereto: The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol). The requirements of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA were also implemented. Amendments to the criminal law were made to improve the Bulgarian legislation and help prevent and adequately and fully counteract these forms of criminal behaviour and adopt the relevant international standards. The amendments were passed by the National Assembly at a second reading with a floor vote and will be promulgated in the State Gazette. They provide a more comprehensive and effective protection for potential victims of forced marriages, who are usually members of migrant and/or ethnic minority communities and who may be obligated by their family to leave their country of residence and get married in their family's country of origin in adherence to their community's cultural values.

29. In the Republic of Bulgaria, gender equality is guaranteed at the highest legislative level. Under Article 6, Paragraph 2 of the Constitution, all citizens are equal under the law. No limitations of rights or privileges with respect to race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, background, religion, education, beliefs, politics, personal and social status or financial condition are admissible. The measures taken to guarantee equal access to justice for all persons, regardless of their gender include easier filing of complaints by women for violations of their rights by providing effective legal aid regulated by the Legal Aid Act (the LAA). There are four types of legal aid:

- advice for an out-of-court settlement or going to court, including advice under Chapter Five (a);
- preparation of court filings;
- trial representation;
- representation upon detention under the Ministry of Interior Act, the Customs Act or the State Agency for National Security Act.

In the first two cases, legal aid is free and is provided to natural persons meeting certain non-discriminatory criteria: persons and families eligible for social support; persons residing at specialised social service institutions or receiving some form of resident social service; children placed with foster families or families of relatives or friends; survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault or human trafficking who do not have means and want to have an attorney; persons seeking asylum under the Asylum and Refugees Act who are not eligible for other legal aid provided under the law, etc.

Legal aid, in the form of trial representation, is provided in the cases where the law provides for a lawyer, another advocate or representation as well as in the cases where the defendant or the party to a criminal, civil or administrative proceedings is unable to pay for a lawyer, wants, and it is in the interest of justice to have one.

After 2015, the legal-aid legislation was amended and supplemented several times to guarantee access to legal aid for a broader circle of persons from vulnerable social groups by creating new forms of legal advice provided on simplified terms. A provision was made to make all citizens (regardless of their gender) not meeting the criteria under Article 22(1) and (2) of the LAA but having income under the poverty line for the country eligible to receive legal aid for advice provided either by the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) or the Regional Advice Centres (RAC) with the respective bar associations. The National Primary Legal Aid Hotline (NPLAH) and the Regional Advice Centres were additionally regulated as new forms of legal advice within the legal-aid system and were endorsed as permanent services of the Legal Assistance Bureau. The objective of these new forms was to overcome the formalities in the system making it largely inaccessible for illiterate or uninformed citizens without knowledge of the law, living in remote communities, social isolation, pensioners with disabilities or

reduced mobility, persons living alone or without permanent residences. This is why these two forms of legal advice were made available to the citizens on simplified terms, exempted from the general procedure to apply for legal aid, i.e. not requiring a decision to provide legal aid and appoint an attorney by the Bureau's chairperson. In addition, every citizen may receive advice at a RAC upon presenting evidence that their monthly income does not exceed the country's poverty line.

The Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Improvement of Access to Justice for Persons under the Poverty Threshold with a Special Focus on Women, Children and the Romani Community, with the National Legal Assistance Bureau (NLAB) as beneficiary in partnership with the Norwegian Judicial Administration. The project aims to improve the access to justice for the Bulgarian citizens living under the poverty threshold. Special attention is paid to three main target groups: victims of domestic and gender-based violence, children at risk and Romani communities, especially in remote and isolated rural areas. The project includes activities to ensure access to legal aid for vulnerable groups by developing a mechanism for cooperation at a local level in response to domestic and gender-based violence as well as the creation of mobile legal aid units. Furthermore, it is planned to strengthen the capacity to provide quality services to vulnerable groups in Bulgaria by raising awareness of the availability and access to free legal aid.

In the area of combatting violence against women and girls and protection and support for the victims, the Republic of Bulgaria prioritises action against, and prosecution of, all crimes against women and children, especially involving sexual violence and sexual exploitation as well as child pornography. The Bulgarian legislation in this area conforms to the highest international and European standards—our country has ratified and is applying the following international laws and regulations:

- the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse;
- the Facultative Protocol relating to the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and the Utilization of Children in Pornography;
- the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

It should be emphasised that a special treatment was provided for the cases where sexual exploitation was among the purposes of the crime of “human trafficking.” Bulgarian legislation in this area also was brought in conformity to the international and the European standards—our country ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and two of the protocols thereto: The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol). The requirements of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA were also implemented.

Bulgaria continues its commitment to combat domestic violence. Amendments to criminal law were introduced, regulating the protection of the rights of the victims of violence, including domestic violence. These legislative changes are intended to improve Bulgarian legislation and help prevent and adequately and fully counteract these forms of criminal behaviour and adopt the relevant international standards. The amendments were passed by the National Assembly at a second reading with a floor vote and will be promulgated in the State Gazette. More specifically, the amendments to the Criminal Code were as follows:

- a definition of the term “in the context of domestic violence” was created;
- the corpus delicti of homicide and assault was supplemented to incriminate all forms of domestic violence escalating to an assault on the life or health of any person;
- domestic violence was elevated as a constituent element of a number of offences—aiding and abetting a person to commit suicide, abduction, false imprisonment, coercion, criminal threat;

- intimidation was also elevated to a criminal offence, since, until now, the effective Bulgarian legislation did not provide adequate penalties against perpetrators who, by repeated threatening behaviour against a person, instilled in that person fear for their own safety or the safety of their family and friends;

- further amendments are expected to be introduced, making certain violent crimes prosecutable without complaint by the victim;

- more comprehensive and effective protection is provided for potential victims of forced marriages, who are usually members of migrant and/or ethnic minority communities and who may be obligated by their family to leave their country of residence and get married in their family's country of origin in adherence to their community's cultural values;

- higher penalties are proposed for repeated violations of court orders or domestic-violence-related restraining orders. On the one hand, this will provide more substantial and timely protection of the victims and, on the other hand, will reinforce the preventive effect of the penalty.

It should also be noted that, under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), the Ministry of Justice budget every year allocates funding for non-profit entities' projects for the development and implementation of domestic violence prevention and protection programmes under the same law. According to the Guidance for Project Applications under Article 6, Paragraph 7 of the PDVA for the 2014–2018 period, in accordance with the National Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Programme adopted by the Council of Ministers, the funding priorities were as follows:

- analysis of the problem of domestic violence through monitoring of the application of the legislation;

- sensitising the young people to the problem through prevention and protection programmes at school;

- increasing the competence of the judiciary to enforce the domestic-violence protection measures and provide timely and adequate protection to the victims of domestic violence in order to achieve effectiveness and high standards in the implementation of measures for prevention and protection from domestic violence;

- increasing the competence of the persons providing protection under the PDVA in order to achieve effectiveness and high standards in the implementation of measures for prevention and protection from domestic violence;

- protection, restoration and reintegration of victims of domestic violence and services involving work with perpetrators of domestic violence aimed at providing quality service to the victims and preventing recurrent domestic violence.

In view of these priorities, 48 NGOs received funding for the following activities:

- programmes for work with the judicial authorities;

- programmes to provide support to survivors of domestic violence: social, psychological counselling and legal advice;

- specialised programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence: social and psychological advice/counselling;

- training for the persons providing protection under the PDVA;

- preparation and approval of programmes in schools.

The Ministry of Justice implemented a project titled Improving the National Legal Framework in Accordance with the Standards of the Council of Europe and Strengthening the Capacity of the Competent Institutions Taking Up Cases of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, under Programme BG12 from the prior programming period of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2009–2014. The project was implemented between October 2014 and April 2017. Its main results included:

- developed analyses of the Bulgarian legislation and the best practices in Member States of the European Union in the area of domestic and gender-based violence;

- developed project for a Strategy to Reduce Domestic Violence 2017–2020 and created

proposals to amend the Protection against Domestic Violence Act;

- developed manuals and conducted trainings of instructors and regular trainings in the area of domestic and gender-based violence (a total of 236 police officers and 273 social workers from across the country as well as 40 legal experts).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice is the programme operator of the Justice Programme of the new Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) for the period 2014–2021. One of the projects under this programme was titled Prevention and Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as beneficiary, and was aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Bulgarian authorities, the professionals in the justice sector in particular, to apply the institutional practices and European standards in the area of domestic and gender-based violence. The project will enhance the competence and cooperation between the relevant authorities. There are plans to conduct capacity-building activities through development of training materials, trainings and creation of a case management manual for the cases in the relevant area for judges as well as an assessment of the pilot coordination mechanism for cooperation planned under the programme.

The National Child Protection Programme is an extremely important document. It clearly defines the guidelines, objectives and commitments to develop the national policy in the area of child rights.

In 2014, the SCPA engaged substantial resources in a number of measures to guarantee the rights of these children and their families. In 2014, the SCPA inter-institutional working group commissioned to develop a Coordination Mechanism for cooperation between the institutions and organisations to guarantee the rights of the unaccompanied minors residing in the Republic of Bulgaria, including those seeking or receiving asylum, held two sessions. It discussed the available options for the development of a Coordination Mechanism despite the delayed changes in legislation and detailed the commitments of the members of the working group.

In November 2014, the State Child Protection Agency, jointly with the Bulgarian office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Bulgarian Refugees and Migrants Council, organised a roundtable Advocacy for Protection and Integration of Unaccompanied Minors in Bulgaria. The participants in the roundtable reviewed the existing legislation, social policy and practice for protection and integration of unaccompanied minors seeking or receiving asylum in Bulgaria and discussed opportunities for cooperation and partnership. One of the most significant issues related to the guarantees for the rights of the unaccompanied minors seeking or receiving asylum was the appointment of a legal guardian for these children.

In 2014, the SCPA conducted a total of 200 inspections related to the protection of children's rights and the compliance with the standards for social services for children, of which:

- 154 (one hundred and fifty-four) (76%) were acting on received reports;
- 39 (thirty nine) (20%) were follow-up audits to verify the implementation of measures prescribed after previous inspections;
- 7 (seven) (4%) were scheduled audits for compliance with the standards for social services for children, provided for under Annex 1 to Article 17 of the Ordinance on the criteria and standards for social services for children.
- Nine audits were related to the application of the Coordination Mechanism for cooperation in the work on cases involving children victims or children at risk of violence and for cooperation in crisis interventions. 23

In 2014, 10 hospital follow-up audits were conducted to verify the implementation of the directions prescribed on scheduled audits in 2013 on Early Childbirth and Prevention of Abandonment of New born Children at Maternity Ward Level and 1 inspection was conducted acting on a report for violated rights of a child in a clinic. The hospital follow-up audits conducted to verify the implementation of the directions prescribed by the Chairperson of the SCPA on scheduled audits in 2013 found that the omissions and violations were largely remedied.

The follow-up audits helped raise the awareness of the medical professionals on the effective legislation in the area of child protection and learn how to recognise the signs of various forms of

violence and the need of timely notification where a child at risk requires protection.

With regard to the increased effectiveness of the measures to protect the children from violence, abuse and other forms of exploitation, in 2015 the SCPA was an institutional partner to the Step-by-Step Programme Foundation to promote the SCREAM—Supporting Children’s Rights through Education, Art and Music—programme.

In 2015, the experts from the General Directorate for Child Rights Supervision conducted a total of 218 (two hundred and eighteen) inspections, of which 79 were for violence—an increase of about 10% over the previous year. Of those, 51 (fifty one) inspections were acting on reports from schools and most of them (80%) were related to the child’s right to protection against violence under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the child’s right to protection provided for in Article 10, Paragraph 1 of the Child Protection Act. To address the violations identified thereon, 46 directions were prescribed for implementation by the principals, on 210 items with accompanying methodological instructions and mechanism for cooperation between the responsible institutions. The general conclusion was that the Mechanism for Action against School Bullying among Children and Students endorsed by the MES was not being applied strictly enough; that the school rules and job descriptions did not contain stipulated compliance with the requirement for cooperation under Article 7, Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the CPA; that the teaching staff failed to recognise the signs of a child at risk and, in cases of problem students, did not seek external assistance and did not report children at risk to the DCP/SSD; other identified omissions and violations were related to the security and access control failing to guarantee the security of the children; principals failing to enforce the teachers’ obligations to inform the parents on student’s progress, discipline at school and school communication and integration skills; failures to properly record the school counsellor’s work with students.

The directions prescribed were related to preventive action to ensure the protection of children from violence as well as action to provide for certain special needs of the children, depending on their development, degree of disability and behavioural deviations.

In early 2016, the State Child Protection Agency, jointly with representatives of the Council of Europe, organised and held in Sofia an international high-level conference Reaching the Heights for the Rights of the Child where the Council of Europe’s Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016–2021 was presented. The conference was organised within the Bulgarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. The event was held on 5 April and 6 April 2016 under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria and was attended by representatives of 44 Member States of the Council of Europe, ombudsmen for children, NGOs, the academia and ten young delegates—children between 14 and 17 years of age. The attendees discussed issues related to the guarantees and the achievement of the five priority goals of the Strategy—equal opportunities for all children, participation of all children, life without violence, justice tailored to the needs of children for all children and the rights of the child in the digital environment.

In 2016, the SCPA gave a serious boost to the child rights policies by seeking and applying inputs from young people. The operations of the Children’s Council to the Chairperson of the Agency intensified. The Children’s Council held two sessions in the same year where the children made the following proposals:

- Implement the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s recommendations to the Republic of Bulgaria;
- Update the child labour regulations by allowing children to take part in their family businesses without requiring an authorisation by the Executive Agency General Labour Inspectorate as well as for all children between 15 and 18 years of age who want to work, simplify the procedure and shorten the times for authorisations by the competent institutions;
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the child protection system;

- Update the national and international child adoption procedure by regulating longer protected terms between the adoptive parents and the child, create mutual aid groups and hold meetings between adopted children to share their personal experiences;
- Improve the interactions with the local governments by involving mayors and governors in the elections for the members of the Children’s Council. The members of the children’s advisory body created a proposal for a new mechanism to elect members of the Council.

Between 14 and 20 November 2016, the children from the Children’s Council organised a Week of the Rights of the Children featuring a series of activities to promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child across the country.

With regard to the protection of the rights of the children against violence (Article 11 of the CPA), in 2016 the SCPA made 17 proposals to the Minister of Interior for enforcement under Article 76a from the Bulgarian Identity Documents Act (prohibition to leave the country).

The work in multidisciplinary teams at the national and local levels on each case of children in need is a way to reduce violence and child trafficking. This approach was adopted by the SCPA in its daily work with institutions and non-governmental organisations in Bulgaria to perform one of its main functions, i.e. coordination and monitoring cases related to violations of the rights of the children.

In 2016, the SCPA coordinated the following cases related to exploitation of children: 8 cases (girls)—sexual exploitation, 6 cases (4 girls and 2 boys)—pickpocketing, 7 cases (3 girls and 4 boys)—begging, 2 cases of girls in forced marriages, 1 case (girl)—work exploitation, 2 cases (boys)—human trafficking.

In 2016, the Chairperson of the SCPA initiated an interinstitutional meeting with the managers of the Crisis Centres for children victims of violence, trafficking and exploitation, with the cooperation of the Social Support Agency, to present proposals to improve the interactions in the work on cases of children victims of trafficking. The SCPA created a Methodological Guidance for the workers in the Crisis Centre social service and the Departments for Child Protection for the work on cases of children victims of trafficking and exploitation to improve the level of care for this vulnerable group of children.

In 2016, our country was facing an increased migration of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. This led to the emergence and accumulation of problems and difficulties related to the care they needed. In this regard, representatives of the SCPA conducted monitoring of the Sofia Registration and Reception Centre with respect to the protection of the rights of the children there under Article 22(1) of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Considering the large number of unaccompanied minors on the territory of Bulgaria in 2016, representatives of the SCPA often took part in various international and national forums, conferences, working groups, etc. working to ensure a more effective protection for this target group and care for its needs. The SCPA supports the work of the employees of the Registration and Reception Centres for refugees. In this regard, in the National Child Protection Programme 2017 and the National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Child Abuse 2017–2020 included measures to improve the life of the children seeking asylum and guarantee the protection of their rights.

In 2017, the SCPA conducted a scheduled special audit of 72 medical practices to verify the adherence to the requirement for the general practitioners’ cooperation under Article 7, Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the CPA related to the reporting of the need of protection for minors pregnant and giving birth. A review of the results of this audit was brought to the attention of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria and parliamentary committees of the National Assembly. The review contained specific proposals for changes and improvement of the interinstitutional cooperation. The cooperation with the institutions of higher education in 2018 included the participation of the Chairperson of the SCPA in science and practice conferences discussing issues related to the development of the child policies. On 9 May 2018, the Chairperson of the SCPA took part in a conference Child Rights and the Role of the Professionals to Ensure Safe Relations between Children and Partners: Assessment and Interventions upon Parental Alienation, organised by the New

Bulgarian University in partnership with the Bulgarian Psychologists Association, the Sofia City Regional Education Administration and the SCPA.

Another notable institution is the National Child Protection Council to the State Child Protection Agency having advisory and coordination functions. Its prerogatives include advising the Chairperson of the State Child Protection Agency on the National Child Strategy and the National Child Protection Programme, the programming policy of the Agency and the alignment of the child protection legislation; propose, discuss and coordinate the strategic priorities of the state child protection policy and endorse their funding; issue preliminary opinions on draft regulations containing provisions related to the rights of the children before their submission to the Council of Ministers; support the cooperation with the non-profit entities on the formulation and implementation of the state child protection policy; conduct monitoring of the implementation of national, regional and international child protection programmes, etc.

The SCPA implemented a joint project with the Council of Europe. Bulgaria, Italy and Latvia joined the second group of countries which, in 2017, implemented pilot projects with the financial support of the Council of Europe to assess child participation in accordance with the Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool. The successful implementation of this project helped raise the awareness of child participation in Bulgaria and, after the initial assessment of the condition, best practices were outlined and measures were identified to achieve better compliance with the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The main results of the assessment showed that Bulgaria had created and was implementing policies and mechanisms helping create an environment supporting the participation of the children in public life, the legislation, and all other related processes. The State Child Protection Agency, with its mission to guarantee the right of the young people to express their opinion, has a key contribution in the promotion of the participation of young people in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of the policies.

Another important finding in this assessment in Bulgaria was that the level of actual listening to, and consideration of, the positions expressed by the children needs to be improved. In addition, the institutions must be trained to build partnerships and provide spaces and effective opportunities for participation. After the completion of the project, on 5 and 6 July 2018, in Sofia, a final workshop on child participation assessment was held, hosted by the SCPA. The event was organised jointly with the Council of Europe and presented the following topic for discussion among the attendees: *Why Child Participation Matters? Creating a Solid National Policy Promoting Child Participation*. Representatives from Italy, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Germany, Slovenia and international consultants in this area took part in this event. Within the workshop, representatives from the countries implementing the Tool and other willing to get involved in the process in 2018 exchanged positions and best practices related to the strengthening of the child participation model in their respective national context and discussed proposals to improve the Council of Europe assessment mechanisms and tools based on the results achieved so far.

In 2017 (SG No 64 of 8.08.2017) amendments and supplements were made in relation to the administrative procedure for the employer to obtain an authorisation from the Labour Inspectorate for hiring a person under 18 years of age. An option was provided for the employer to submit the application by electronic means and as well as a procedure for the Inspectorate to request additional information and correct omissions in the application. These amendments were intended to lower the administrative burden by introducing the electronic form for applications in compliance with the provisions of the Electronic Document and Electronic Signature Act. In addition, the time limit for the Director of the Regional Directorate Labour Inspectorate or an official authorised thereby to make a decision on the application was shortened from 14 to 7 days after the day of the submission or the day the identified omissions or irregularities were rectified. Employing persons under 18 years of without an authorisation by the Labour Inspectorate is a criminal offence under the Criminal Code.

The Labour Code makes a provision for lawful employment of a person under 18 years of age

only if the work is not hard, dangerous or harmful to the health and proper development of the child and if the performance of the work does not prevent the child from regularly attending and studying for classes. Persons under 18 years of age are prohibited from performing any work which:

1. exceeds their physical or mental abilities;
2. involves harmful physical, biological or chemical exposure, especially to toxic agents, carcinogens, agents causing hereditary genetic or intrauterine injury;
3. involves any harm having any other permanent adverse impact on the health;
4. involves exposure to radiation;
5. involves exposure to extreme temperatures, noise or vibration;
6. involves risk of work accidents which the minor cannot reasonably be expected to recognise or avoid due to her or his physical or mental immaturity.

Children under 18 years of age can be employed after a medical examination concludes that they are able to perform the work in question and that it will not cause any harm to their health or impede their proper physical, moral and mental development.

The Ombudsman conducted reviews of received complaints, provided an opinion on the draft Gender Equality Act, took part in a working group on gender equality and provided a general position on the adequate action by competent state authorities to ensure inclusion of girls from the vulnerable groups, including minorities.

30. Over the period, various measures were taken in Bulgaria to raise the awareness of gender-specific environmental and health hazards (e.g. consumer products, technologies, industrial pollution), increase women's access to and control over land, water, energy, and other natural resources, enhance women's access to sustainable time- and labour-saving infrastructure (e.g. access to clean water and energy) and climate-smart agricultural technology and ensure that women benefit equally from decent jobs in the green economy.

The priority for that period was the creation of the basic environmental infrastructure—wastewater collection and treatment and waste management in the country's regions—achieved through the general instrument for the implementation of the sectoral policy, the Operational Programme "Environment" (OPE).

During the 2014–2020 programming period, BGN 3,462 million were allocated for the following priorities addressing the identified national needs:

- ✓ Create the potable water and wastewater infrastructure. Funding was provided for projects to build or upgrade water supply and sewerage networks and facilities raising the effectiveness of water use and lowering the water waste in the pipework.
- ✓ Waste management in accordance with the waste hierarchy under the Framework Directive on Waste. These investment measures were intended to gradually reduce the quantities of landfilled waste and increase the quantities of recycled/recovered biodegradable waste. Planned investments include measures for the recovery of household waste to generate energy.
- ✓ Implementation of the National Priority Framework for Action for Natura 2000: improve the protected status of species and habitats in the protected areas in the network and preserve local practices for sustainable use of natural resources.
- ✓ Flood and landslide risk prevention and management, disaster prevention and recovery.
- ✓ Improvement of the ambient air quality. Other projects planned for implementation include measures addressing the problem with excessive levels of particulates and nitrous oxides generated mainly from household heating and transportation.

The implementation of these projects should help reduce the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women; enhance their access to sustainable time- and labour-saving infrastructure (e.g. access to clean water and energy); and, in general, improve the conditions for prevention related to the health of the population of the country, including women and girls.

In implementing the policy to raise public awareness and culture in the area of the protection of the environment, the Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW) and its regional structures allocate each year BGN 4,260,000 for the implementation of its annual national campaigns. Some initiatives within these campaigns are targeted mainly at kindergartens, schools and universities to increase the capacity of the local communities (through the local governments) to take environment-friendly measures. They cover tens of thousands of children and young people across the country and are a good example of partnership with the local governments, institutions, businesses and non-governmental organisations in the regions. During their implementation, most of the regional units of the MOEW reported an increased interest in the work with vulnerable and minority groups and an increased involvement of the smaller communities in the country. Involvement in diverse events within these campaigns (conferences, workshops, open classes, information publications, etc.) helps young people, including young women and girls, to enhance their knowledge in the fields of natural sciences, technology and disciplines related to the environment and become engaged with the process of environmental protection, further guaranteeing the sustainability of the implemented national policy.

Awareness, environmental education and public involvement in decision-making are among the top priorities in the activities of the MOEW to promote sustainable models of social behaviour and provide a high-quality and healthy environment. The MOEW and its regional units maintain and operate 32 environment information centres nationwide, 30 of which are run by women.

Women enjoy equal access to jobs in the green economy, which is evident from the reported progress in the implementation of the promotional measure Green Jobs introduced in the country with the Employment Promotion Act. Under this Act, for each created Green Job taken by an unemployed person with continuously maintained registration for at least 6 months referred by an office of the Employment Agency, the employer is entitled to receive payments for the period of employment of said person (but not more than 12 months).

The Employment Promotion Act regulated the promotional measure Green Jobs—Article 55e. Under the terms of this measure, incentives are provided to employers creating jobs in businesses helping protect the environment. Employers' labour costs for a certain period are financed by the national budget. The target group is that of unemployed persons with continuously maintained registrations at the Labour Bureaus for at least 6 months. Between 2014 and 2018, employment was provided to 227 women (49.2% of all persons employed under this measure).

31. The Republic of Bulgaria took a number of actions to promote access of women in disaster situations to services such as relief payments, disaster insurance and compensation, to strengthen the evidence base and to raise awareness of the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to the impact of environmental degradation and disasters.

In the Republic of Bulgaria, the Social Support Act (SoSA) regulates social relations with regard to the guaranteed right of the citizens in the Republic of Bulgaria to social support through social assistance and social services. Social support is provided in a way respecting the human dignity of the citizens and is based on social work by applying an individual approach and a comprehensive assessment of the needs of the persons and the families depending on the different assessed levels of risk. A higher level of risk is assessed for pregnant women, children, a parent raising a child under 3 years of age and single parents and, therefore, the law provides for higher individual percentages for eligibility for monthly social assistance. It is important to note that no direct or indirect discrimination is admissible in Bulgaria with respect to gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, human genome, citizenship, background, religion or faith, education, beliefs, politics, personal and social status, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, financial condition or any other characteristics under a law or an international agreement to which the Republic of Bulgaria is party, in the provision of social assistance and social services.

The Social Support Agency and its regional offices are among the units providing support to survivors of disasters under the Disaster Protection Act (DPA). An Instruction by the Executive Director of the SSA approved by Order No RD01–1066 of 17.09.2014 defines the obligations and responsibilities of the regional offices for the implementation of the measures to provide assistance to the population. The Regional Social Support Directorates (RSSDs) and the Social Support Directorates (SSDs):

- create conditions to ensure the continuity of the services provided to the population in case of disasters and accidents and catastrophies;
- are involved in the reception and distribution of national and international humanitarian aid for the population in the disaster areas;
- organise, jointly with the regional and municipal Security Councils, the distribution of aid, food and essentials;
- organise distribution centres for hot meals and potable water;
- provide support for the search and recovery operations of the specialised bodies to reunite separated families, children and persons of groups at risk;
- provide psychological support to persons traumatised by the disaster;
- organise the social assistance to the survivors of disasters provided for by the SoSA and the Rules of its application;
- organise the implementation of any other social measures for disaster recovery provided for by a law or a decision of the Council of Ministers;
- representatives of the RSSD and SSDs in the affected areas, jointly with the local government, take part in the assessment of the damages caused by the disaster;
- SSDs in the affected areas assist the persons and families who have lost their homes to be provided with urgent housing in available public buildings, as needed;
- The social workers conduct social surveys of the persons and families survivors of disaster to identify their needs of essential purchases and make proposals for one-time cash assistance or aid in kind;
- The directors of the RSSD and SSDs in the affected areas provide assistance with the available vehicles to transport the survivors to the medical facilities.

With regard to the natural disasters in Bulgaria in 2014, the SSA, under the procedure of Article 16 of the Rules for the Application of the Social Support Act (RASoSA), provided one-time social assistance, available to all survivors, to address the emergent necessities of life of the persons and families.

To cover some of the costs for the flood damages, the SSA provided one-time social assistance, under the procedure of Article 16 of the RASoSA, in the amount of BGN 3,088,423 distributed in a total number of 11,227 one-time payments. An increase of 3,469 persons (almost 45%) in the number of persons receiving one-time assistance was reported, mainly due to the maximum one-time amounts made available to cover some of the costs of the damages caused by natural disasters over the same year. An increase of 6,027 (about 9.5%) in the number of persons who have received support under the SoSA and the RASoSA was reported and the corresponding increase of the amount paid out was BGN 1,144,495. This was due to the natural disasters in 2014 and the need to provide financial support to the affected families.

With regard to the emergent crisis situations in the country, in 2014, the Council of Ministers (CM) of the Republic of Bulgaria issued decrees to provide one-time special assistance to the affected persons and/or families. In implementing the CM decrees, through the regional offices of the SSA, one-time financial assistance was paid to the descendants of deceased persons, as follows:

- ✓ Promulgated, SG No 55 of 04.07.2014, Decree No 176 of 26 June 2014 on the approval of additional spending from the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) for 2014 to make one-time financial assistance payments to the legal descendants of the persons deceased during the flood caused by the torrential downpours on the territories of Varna and Dobrich on 19 and 20 June 2014—BGN 130,000 for 13 deceased persons;

✓ SG No 59 of 18.07.2014, Decree No 192 of 10 July 2014 amending and supplementing Decree No 176 of 26 June 2014 on the approval of additional spending from the budget of the MLSP for 2014 to make one-time financial assistance payments to the legal descendants of the persons deceased during the flood caused by the torrential downpours on the territories of Varna and Dobrich on 19 and 20 June 2014—BGN 10,000 for 1 deceased person;

✓ SG No 69 of 19.08.2014, Decree No 248 of 14 August 2014 on the approval of additional spending from the budget of the MLSP for 2014 to make one-time financial assistance payments to the legal descendants of the persons deceased during the flood caused by the torrential downpours on the territories of the village of Vranilovtsi (Gabrovo region) and the city of Miziya (Vratsa region)—BGN 40,000 for 4 deceased persons;

✓ SG No 80 of 26.09.2014, Decree No 290 of 18 September 2014 on the approval of additional spending from the budget of the MLSP for 2014 to make one-time financial assistance payments to the legal descendants of the persons deceased during the flood on the territory of the Burgas region—BGN 30,000 for 3 deceased persons;

✓ SG No 8 of 14.10.2014, Decree No 320 of 8 October 2014 on the approval of additional spending from the budget of the MLSP for 2014 to make one-time financial assistance payments to the legal descendants of the persons deceased during the accident at the Midzhur explosive substances plant in the village of Gorni Lom (Vidin region) on 1 October 2014: BGN 150,000 for 15 deceased persons;

✓ SG No 94 of 14.11.2014, Decree No 357 of 5 November 2014 on the approval of additional spending from the budget of the MLSP for 2014 to make one-time financial assistance payment to the legal descendants of the person deceased during the flood on the territory of the Burgas region—BGN 10,000 for 1 deceased person.

By 31.12.2014, a total of BGN 342,500 were paid to the descendants of 37 deceased persons, the payments continued in 2015 and the above decrees were implemented by the regional offices of the SSA.

In implementing the country's priority objective to reduce the adverse consequences of floods and landslides and increase the level of security and protection, measures were taken under programmes included in the Flood Risk Management Plans for the 2016–2021 period, for the four basin management areas in the country.

Implemented with funding under the OPE 2014–2020:

✓ Establish Six Centres to Increase the Readiness of the Population for an Adequate Response upon Floods and Subsequent Crisis project with a value of BGN 39.12 million with the objective to increase the capacity of the population at the national level for action upon floods and subsequent crises by creating and developing the required infrastructure and methodological framework for the preparedness of the population on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria for protection and recovery upon emergent floods.

✓ Measures to Deploy Flood Prevention and Risk Management Solutions procedure with a value of BGN 20 million to finance projects intended to improve the technical condition of the municipal dams.

✓ Prevention and Action against the Landslide Processes to Contain the Risk thereof (including the Road Network of the Republic) procedure with a value of BGN 65.5 million. The project is under the National Programme for Prevention and Containment of Landslides on the Territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Erosion and Abrasion along the Danube and Black Sea Watersides 2015–2020.

The implementation of these measures includes initiatives to inform the public of the benefits of the projects. These public awareness events allow to emphasise the specific vulnerability of women and girls to the deterioration of the environment and the natural disasters as well as to raise the awareness of sustainability and recovery with regard to climate change.

Section Three: National institutions and processes

32. The institutional national mechanism for gender equality in the Republic of Bulgaria is regulated in the Gender Equality Act (GEA) adopted on 26 April 2016. It includes two main components: The National Gender Equality Board to the CM and the gender equality coordinators at national and regional levels.

The National Gender Equality Board to the CM (“National Board”) is a permanent coordination and advisory body providing support to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria in the development and implementation of the national policy for gender equality as well as organising consultations, cooperation and coordination between central and local government bodies and civil society structures. The National Board is composed of representatives of Ministries, national and executive agencies and other bodies established by law; the representative organisations of the employers, the workers and the employees at the national level; the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria; and non-profit juridical persons with operations aligned with the priorities of the national policy for gender equality, identified under the terms, criteria and procedure regulated in the Statutes of the National Board (4-year experience in the implementation of programmes and projects in the area of gender equality and operations of national significance in this area).

The National Board:

1. provides positions on draft strategic documents, laws and regulations containing provisions related to gender equality before their submission to the Council of Ministers;
2. is involved in the development of the National Gender Equality Strategy;
3. proposes measures to promote the national policy for gender equality;
4. is involved in the development of quantitative and qualitative indicators required for the gender equality monitoring system

Chairperson of the National Gender Equality Board is the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. The Chairperson manages, coordinates and supervises the implementation of the national policy for gender equality by:

1. developing, taking part in the discussions and proposing the adoption and/or amendment of laws, regulations and strategic documents related to gender equality;
2. organising and managing the operation of the National Gender Equality Board;
3. coordinating the development, implementation and reporting of the National Strategy and the plans for its implementation;
4. organising the creation and maintenance of a gender equality monitoring system and coordinating the creation of a report on gender equality in the Republic of Bulgaria;
5. providing methodological support to the executive authority bodies in the implementation of the national policy for gender equality;
6. representing the state in international organisations and programmes in the area of gender equality;
7. managing and coordinating the involvement in national and international programmes and projects for gender equality, including jointly with other national bodies and organisations;
8. maintaining contacts with similar specialised national bodies in other countries as well as with international organisations operating in the area of gender equality.

The organisational and technical services required for the operation of the National Board are provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Department Equal Opportunities, Non-Discrimination and Social Assistance under Directorate Policy for People with Disabilities, Equal Opportunities and Social Assistance. The Department is the Secretariat of the National Gender Equality Board to the Council of Ministers.

Under its Statutes, the National Board shall hold at least 4 sessions each year, which may be with or without personal attendance required.

More information on the National Board is available at:

The gender equality coordinators are employees appointed by the central and local government executive authority bodies to perform the functions of coordinators for gender equality. Under the GEA, they:

1. are involved in the development and implementation of the national policy for gender equality;
2. are involved in the development of the sectoral and local policies and programmes from a gender equality perspective;
3. are involved in the creation of an assessment of the impact on the gender equality of the laws, regulations and strategic documents proposed by the executive authority bodies ;
4. are involved in the creation, implementation and reporting of the National Strategy and the plans for its implementation within the jurisdiction of the respective executive authority body;
5. coordinate the implementation of the measures within the jurisdiction of the executive authority body and are involved in the creation of reports on gender equality;
6. are involved in the development of the quantitative and qualitative indicators and reviews of gender equality within the respective jurisdiction of the institution;
7. coordinate the collection and distribution of information and best practices and the provision of gender equality data within the jurisdiction of the executive authority body ;
8. are involved in trainings on gender equality as well as in the organisation of such trainings;
9. perform additional other functions in the area of gender equality as directed by the respective executive authority body.

In the Republic of Bulgaria, employees of the central executive authority bodies and all 28 regional administrations are appointed as gender equality coordinators. Between 2017 and 2018, the MLSP conducted introductory and advanced trainings for the coordinators. At these trainings, the coordinators learned the principles of the gender equality policy, increased their professional capacity to work on the gender equality policy and built a network of trained experts working on, and implementing, the gender equality policy where they can share their experience and best practices. Another training for the coordinators is planned in 2019.

33. In the Republic of Bulgaria, there is no special national procedure for SDG implementation. The SDG implementation is reported using specific strategies, programmes and plans aligned with the SDGs. The Minister of Labour and Social Policy, as Chairperson of the National Gender Equality Board to the CM, is involved in the creation of projects under the National Gender Equality Strategy, the plans for its implementation and the reports both on it and on specific jurisdictional measures of it.

Bulgaria has started its preparation for a voluntary national review on the SDGs in 2020.

34. The existing Coordination Mechanism on gender equality in the Republic of Bulgaria allows the stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the BPfA and the SDGs. The National Gender Equality Board to the CM operates as a mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It includes not only representatives of the Ministries and government institutions, but also civil society organisations , women’s rights organisations, the academia, employers’ organisations and labour unions. They are involved on equal terms in the creation of the National Gender Equality Strategy, its action plans and reports. In addition, the National Gender Equality Board to the CM provides positions on draft strategic documents, laws and regulations containing provisions related to gender equality before their submission to the Council of Ministers and proposes measures to promote the national policy for gender equality.

A special interinstitutional the working group was formed for the creation of this national

review by Order No RD01–67 of 28.01.2019 of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. Representatives of Ministries, government institutions, non-governmental organisations, employers' organisations and the academia were involved in the working group. All of them provided valuable inputs, consistent with their capabilities and competences, for the creation of the draft of this national review.

The draft national review will be discussed and endorsed at a session of the National Gender Equality Board to the CM.

35. The SDGs and the BPfA were taken into consideration in the creation of the currently effective National Gender Equality Promotion Strategy 2016–2020.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides support for measures to promote Bulgaria's development policy and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda are promoted in various forms among a wide audience of young people, the academia, schools, etc. They include Information Days, discussions and conferences, workshops on the issues of cooperation for development; social media are used to promote the SDGs and the UN 2030 Agenda.

In 2018, within the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, a successful project was implemented by the Bulgarian Platform for International Development (BPID) with the involvement of participants from the countries of the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans and the Black Sea Region.

The project helped the civil society organisations understand and embrace the role and contribution of the EU to the UN 2030 Agenda, in accordance with the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, focusing on Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5 and 16 (healthcare, education, gender equality and peace and good governance).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs enjoys a successful cooperation with the United Nations Association of Bulgaria on issues of the Human Rights and the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN 2030 Agenda. Bulgarian young people delegates regularly participate in UN sessions. Among the notable initiatives were the Global Issues Forum, Sustainable Cities, the 2018 National Conference "Transform Our World," the Campaign "17 Goals for 2017" under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria where, on various workshops and events, information and Bulgarian case studies related to each of the 17 goals were presented to introduce the initiatives of different institutions, non-governmental organisations and companies to the young people. Meetings and consultations were held with young people in the country and the young UN delegates to address the biggest challenges facing the young people and the ideas to overcome them.

Section Four: Data and statistics

36. When it comes to gender statistics at the national level, the Republic of Bulgaria has made most progress over the past 5 years in the following areas: (i) Existing data (e.g., censuses and surveys) were re-processed to produce more disaggregated and/or new gender statistics, (ii) Knowledge products on gender statistics (e.g., user-friendly reports, policy briefs, research papers) were produced and (iii) A centralized web-based database and/or dashboard on gender statistics was developed.

All data produced by the National Statistical Institute in the areas of demographics and social statistics (poverty, economic activity, remuneration, education, healthcare) are broken down by gender. New statistics on the general practitioners by gender are available as of 2014. The work on the pilot testing of the tools to research gender-based violence began in 2018.

In 2018, a special edition titled "Women and Men in the Republic of Bulgaria" was published, including gender-based data on population and families, education and life-long learning, labour market, wages, income and social inclusion, healthcare, technology, justice and crime, decision-making

and time budgeting.

In 2015, the National Statistical Institute launched its INFOSTAT Information System providing statistics on Bulgaria's demographics, social and economic conditions and development. Users can create their own tables and charts with data by various indicators. Many indicators in the information system allow for breakdowns by gender.

It should also be noted that the Gender Equality Act (GEA) adopted in 2016 provides for "the creation and maintenance of a gender equality monitoring system" (Article 7(4)). The GEA regulates the involvement of all institutions in the creation and operation of this monitoring system. Under Article 9 of the GEA, "in their implementation of the national policy for gender equality, the executive bodies shall collect, store and process gender-based data for the purposes of the gender equality monitoring system..." and the National Gender Equality Board "shall be involved in the development of quantitative and qualitative indicators required for the gender equality monitoring system..." (Article 6, Paragraph 5(4)). The same function was assigned to the gender equality coordinators within the central and local executive authority bodies (Article 8, Paragraph 2(6)) as well as the obligation to "coordinate the collection and distribution of information and best practices and the provision of gender equality data within the jurisdiction of the executive authority body" (Article 8, Paragraph 2(7)). The development of the gender equality monitoring system is currently ongoing.

37. The top three priorities of the Republic of Bulgaria for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five years are: (i) Re-processing of existing data (e.g., censuses and surveys) to produce more disaggregated and/or new gender statistics; (ii) Conduct of new surveys to produce national baseline information on specialized topics (e.g., time use, gender-based violence, asset ownership, poverty, disability); and (iii) Production of knowledge products on gender statistics (e.g., user-friendly reports, policy briefs, research papers).

Specific social surveys in the households will be conducted in the country to provide wide-ranging gender-based datasets:

- In 2019, the European Health Interview Survey will be conducted to provide information on the health status, healthcare use and health determinants of the population;
- In 2021, the Education and Training Survey will provide information on the population's participation in life-long learning;
- In 2021–2022, the National Statistical Institute plans to conduct its fifth survey on the Time Budget of the Bulgarian population. The survey will provide gender-based information on the activities (employment, learning, personal care, household care, etc.) of a person within one day.

38. The Republic of Bulgaria has defined a national set of indicators for monitoring progress on the SDGs. A European list of indicators with data on the EU Member States will be maintained by Eurostat. The available European set of indicators is strongly related to the policies and initiatives of the European Union and, especially, the Europe 2020 Strategy, the 10 priorities of the EC, the Circular Economy Package, etc. A list of selected SDG 5 indicators and gender-specific indicators under other SDGs was created based on the data the NSI regularly sends to the European Commission. More information is available in the respective annex.

39. The Republic of Bulgaria collects and compiles data on SDG 5 indicators and on gender-specific indicators under other SDGs. More information is available in the annex to item 38.

40. The National Statistical Institute surveys regularly provide breakdowns by location, gender, age

and education.

ANNEX TO ITEM 38

SDG 5 indicators: (source: NSI surveys)

EU SDG indicator set 2019

List of indicators used for 2019 monitoring report

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>MPI</i>	<i>Indicator name</i>	<i>Data source</i>	<i>Data provider</i>	<i>UN global list</i>	<i>by sex</i>
5	Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls						
5	05_20		Gender pay gap in unadjusted form	ESS (SES)	Eurostat	8.5.1 (s)	
5	05_30		Gender employment gap	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		
5	05_40	mpi -> 8	Inactive population due to caring responsibilities	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		X

Gender-specific indicators under other SDGs: (source: NSI surveys)

EU SDG indicator set 2019

List of indicators used for 2019 monitoring report

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>MPI</i>	<i>Indicator name</i>	<i>Data source</i>	<i>Data provider</i>	<i>UN global list</i>	<i>by sex</i>
1	Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere						
1	01_10		People at risk of poverty or social exclusion	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	1.2.2 (s)	X
1	01_20	mpi -> 10	People at risk of income poverty after social transfers	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	1.2.1 (s); 1.2.2 (p); 10.2.1 (s)	X
1	01_30		Severely materially deprived people	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	1.2.2 (p)	X
1	01_40		People living in households with very low work intensity	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	1.2.2 (p)	X
1	01_41	mpi -> 8	In work at-risk-of-poverty rate	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		✗
1	01_60	mpi -> 11	Population living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation or rot in window frames or floor	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	11.1.1 (s)	X
2	Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture						
2	02_10	mpi -> 3	Obesity rate	ESS (EHIS)	Eurostat	2.2.2 (p)	X
3	Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages						
3	03_10		Life expectancy at birth	ESS	Eurostat		X
3	03_20		Share of people with good or very good perceived health	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X
3	03_40		Death rate due to chronic diseases	ESS	Eurostat	3.4.1 (p)	X
3	03_41		Death rate due to tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis	ESS	Eurostat	3.3.1 (s); 3.3.2 (s); 3.3.4 (s)	✗
3	03_60	mpi -> 1	Self-reported unmet need for medical care	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X

4	Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all						
4	04_10	mpi -> 5	Early leavers from education and training	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		X
4	04_20	mpi -> 5	Tertiary educational attainment	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		X
4	04_30		Participation in early childhood education	ESS	Eurostat	4.2.2 (s)	X
4	04_50	mpi -> 5	Employment rate of recent graduates	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		X
4	04_60		Adult participation in learning	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat	4.3.1 (s)	X
6	Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all						
6	06_10	mpi -> 1	Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	6.2.1 (s)	X
7	Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all						
7	07_60	mpi -> 1	Population unable to keep home adequately warm	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X
8	Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all						
8	08_20	mpi -> 4	Young people neither in employment nor in education and training	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat	8.6.1 (i)	X
8	08_30		Employment rate	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		X
8	08_40		Long-term unemployment rate	ESS (LFS)	Eurostat		X
9	Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation						
9	09_20		Employment in high- and medium-high technology manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services	ESS	Eurostat	9.2.2 (s)	X
10	Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries						
10	10_30		Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X
10	10_41		Income distribution	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X
10	10_60		Asylum applications	ESS	Eurostat		X
11	Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable						
11	11_10	mpi -> 1	Overcrowding rate	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X
11	11_20	mpi -> 3	Population living in households considering that they suffer from noise	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat		X
16	Goal 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						
16	16_10		Death rate due to homicide	ESS	Eurostat	16.1.1 (s)	X
16	16_20	mpi -> 11	Population reporting occurrence of crime, violence or vandalism in their area	ESS (SILC)	Eurostat	16.1.4 (s)	X

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