The right to political participation of persons with disabilities ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections

Bulgaria

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1. Data on persons with disabilities exercising their right to political participation

Table 1

| Indicator | Answer  (Choose one of the answers provided below) | Source and brief description/assessment |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Do national disability strategies include political participation? | National disability strategies do not address political participation | In Bulgaria, the National Disability Strategy 2021 – 2030 (*Национална стратегия за хората с увреждания 2021 – 2030 г.*)[[1]](#footnote-2) lists among its main principles “full and effective participation in community life”. Nonetheless, there are no priorities or measures specifically targeting political participation. |
| Can persons deprived of legal capacity vote? | Exclusion | In Bulgaria, people deprived of legal capacity do not have the right to vote in European Parliament elections, national parliamentary elections, local elections and referendums.[[2]](#footnote-3) People deprived of legal capacity by final court decision are deleted from voting lists.[[3]](#footnote-4) |
| Is there a requirement under law to register to vote? | No, automatic registration | Each municipality draws up electoral lists of people with voting rights whose permanent address is on their territory.[[4]](#footnote-5) The lists are made public and anyone who is not on the list but wants to be added should contact the local authorities and prove their right to be on the list (by presenting evidence for their permanent residence, for restoring their legal capacity or for completion of serving a sentence). People who wish to vote in the municipality of their current address (if their current address is different from their permanent address) should file a request to the local authorities to be moved to the electoral list of this municipality.[[5]](#footnote-6) |
| Are alternative ways of voting available to persons with disabilities? | Yes, disability-specific alternatives | People with permanent disabilities (people for whom medical expertise has established a type and degree of disability or a degree of permanently reduced working capacity of 50 % or more)[[6]](#footnote-7) whose disability does not allow them to exercise their voting right in a polling station can vote using a mobile polling box at home. To be able to do so, they should file a written request 14 days before the elections. People with permanent disabilities, who have missed the 14-day deadline, can still request a mobile polling box up to five days before the elections, if the use of a mobile polling box on the territory where they live has already been arranged.[[7]](#footnote-8) The local administration verifies ex officio the applicant’s eligibility (disability certificate) or requires the applicant to present such a certificate if the ex officio verification was not successful.[[8]](#footnote-9) The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) issues a decision defining the terms for allowing the use of mobile polling boxes for each particular round of elections. For example, for the last local elections, held in October 2023, mobile polling boxes were made available in localities, in which 14 days before the election day at least ten requests had been submitted.[[9]](#footnote-10) |
| Is there legislation regulating how people living in long-term institutions may vote? | Yes, specific legislative provisions | The Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) states that at national parliamentary elections, European Parliament elections and presidential elections, polling stations are established in hospitals, homes for older persons, and other specialised institutions providing residential social services if there are at least ten voters accommodated there. For local elections, the minimum number of voters is also ten, but there is an additional requirement that they should have lived in the same locality where the institution is located in the last six months before the elections.[[10]](#footnote-11)  The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) defines the concrete procedures for establishing polling stations in such places for each particular round of elections. For example, for the last local elections, held in October 2023, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) determined the deadlines for compiling the electoral lists and the conditions for adding to the lists the people admitted to the hospital or institution and the personnel on shift during the election day.[[11]](#footnote-12) |
| Is there a legal duty to provide assistance in voting to persons with disabilities? | Yes, for people with physical and sensory disabilities | In buildings with more than one floor, in which there are polling stations on the upper floors, the district or municipal election commission should locate the polling station with the smallest number of voters on the electoral list on the first floor (ground floor) and designate it for voters with visual impairments or mobility difficulties. In front of such polling stations, a signboard and other marking signs should be placed to indicate their additional purpose.[[12]](#footnote-13)  The law also provides that people with sensory or other disabilities that do not allow them to perform the necessary voting actions themselves, may vote with the assistance of a support person of their choice. One support person cannot assist more than two voters with disabilities. Members of electoral commissions, representatives of parties, coalitions and nominating committees, advocates and observers cannot be supporting persons of people with disabilities.[[13]](#footnote-14)  The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) defines the concrete voting procedures of people with disabilities and other voters in need of support for each particular round of elections and specifies the measures to enable voters with visual impairments or mobility difficulties to vote. For example, for the last local elections, held in October 2023, local electoral commissions and local authorities were instructed to ensure that voting stations and voting tables are accessible, there are available parking slots, and citizens are informed through the media about the location of dedicated polling stations and the contacts of support organisations. For the same elections, municipal administrations were advised, in coordination with the municipal election commissions, to place, where possible, an audio player and a Braille template with the list of candidates in front of the polling stations designated for voters with physical or sensory disabilities.[[14]](#footnote-15)  Despite these measures, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria (*Омбудсман на Република България*) reports that people with visual disabilities face certain obstacles in accessing voting instructions, particularly concerning machine-assisted voting, while the lack of sound signals from the voting devices sometimes leads to failed votes.[[15]](#footnote-16) |
| Are all persons with disabilities legally able to access complaints mechanisms if they have not been able to exercise the right to political participation? | No, only persons with legal capacity | People with disabilities, with the exception of those deprived of legal capacity, can submit complaints to the competent bodies responsible for organising the elections. These competent bodies are respectively the polling stations, the regional/municipal electoral commissions and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК).  People deprived of legal capacity are not able to access the complaints mechanisms because having the right to vote is a mandatory condition for accessing the review mechanism in case of exclusion from the electoral lists.[[16]](#footnote-17) |
| Is information on complaints mechanisms regarding political participation accessible to persons with disabilities? | Partially – some accessibility measures are in place | The Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) provides that complaints can be submitted by email, by telephone, by regular mail and on-site at the premises of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК). Information about accessing the complaint mechanism is published in the contacts section of the website of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК).[[17]](#footnote-18)  Under Bulgarian law, the content of all websites and mobile applications of administrative authorities, public service providers, and persons performing public functions must comply with the harmonised standard EN 301 549 V2.1.2 (2018-08).[[18]](#footnote-19)  An online accessibility check carried out by the Web Accessibility Initiative’s Alfa Semi-automated test tool[[19]](#footnote-20) shows that the website of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) does not comply with WCAG 2.1 AA standard.[[20]](#footnote-21) |
| Have national courts considered cases related to the right to political participation of persons with disabilities? | Yes, cases considered | In 2023, the Administrative Court of Pazardzhik (*Административен съд Пазарджик*) considered three identical cases related to the right to political participation of persons with disabilities. In all of them, the court upheld the decisions of local mayors to organise mobile polling boxes in localities where the minimum number of applications from persons with disabilities were received within the statutory time limit. The mayors’ decisions were appealed before the court by one of the political parties participating in the elections, which argued that the mayors should not only have verified the existence of the applicants’ disability certificates, but should also have checked whether their disabilities practically prevented them from voting in a regular polling station. In all of the cases, the court dismissed the appeal noting that local authorities were obliged by law to verify only the existence of a valid disability certificate without examining further the nature and implications of the particular disability.[[21]](#footnote-22) |
| Have non-judicial complaints mechanisms considered cases related to the right to political participation of persons with disabilities? | Yes, cases considered | The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) considers complaints for violations of the Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*), including complaints related to the participation of persons with disabilities. During the last local elections, held in October 2023, out of about 160 complaints received, two were related to the legal provisions concerning the right to political participation of persons with disabilities. One of them was about assigning a number to a polling station in an institution for older persons and the other was related to the right of a member of an electoral commission to accompany a family member with disability.[[22]](#footnote-23)  In the period 2020 – 2023, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria (*Омбудсман на Република България*) received six complaints from persons with disabilities concerning their participation in elections. They were related to: (1) the need for more information on the voting process for persons with permanent disabilities; (2) facilitating the administrative procedure for certifying the existence of a disability when adding a person to the lists for voting with a mobile polling box, and (3) the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities when using technical devices for machine voting that are not adapted to their needs.[[23]](#footnote-24)  The national equality body, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) (*Комисия за защита от дискриминация*, КЗД) has not registered any complaints related to the right to political participation of persons with disabilities.[[24]](#footnote-25) |
| Are persons with disabilities members of the current national parliament? | Some MPs identify as having a disability (official data) | Four members of the current national parliament have presented disability certificates to the parliament’s administration.[[25]](#footnote-26) |
| Is data available on the number of members of municipal/regional governments who have a disability? | No data available | Data on the number of members of municipal councils who have a disability is not collected.[[26]](#footnote-27) |
| Is training for election authorities and officials on non-discrimination on the grounds of disability, accessibility and accommodation required by law? | No training required by law/No information | In Bulgaria, the Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) provides that all regional and municipal electoral commissions, jointly with the training unit of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК), should train the members of all electoral commissions on their territory.[[27]](#footnote-28) However, the law does not explicitly require training to address non-discrimination on the grounds of disability, accessibility or accommodation. The training material made available by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) do not address these topics either.[[28]](#footnote-29) |
| Are there mechanisms in place to ensure consultation and involvement of DPOs in the development of laws and policies which affect them? | Yes, mechanisms established by law | When drafting laws and regulations all public bodies should hold public consultations with citizens and legal entities. Legal acts drafted by the government or another central executive authority are published on the Public Consultations Portal (*Портал за обществени консултации*).[[29]](#footnote-30) Legal acts drafted by local authorities are published on the website of the respective municipality.[[30]](#footnote-31) Public authorities, legal entities and individuals can also make proposals to improve legislation.[[31]](#footnote-32)  An additional consultation mechanism is the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCIPD) (*Национален съвет за интеграция на хората с увреждания*, НСИХУ).[[32]](#footnote-33) The council is a consultative body with the government and is composed of representatives of public authorities and civil society organisations, including DPOs. Its main function is to serve as a platform for cooperation in the development and implementation of policies for persons with disabilities. |
| Do national authorities provide guidelines on how to make polling stations accessible? | Yes, detailed guidance available | The regional and municipal electoral commissions are obliged by law to ensure the provision of facilities for persons with disabilities to exercise their right to vote.[[33]](#footnote-34)  The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) defines the concrete procedures for voting of persons with disabilities and other persons in need of support for each particular round of elections, and determines the measures to be taken to enable voters with visual impairments or mobility difficulties to vote on the election day. For example, for the last local elections held in October 2023, the recommended measures included: (1) construction of sidewalks and stair ramps with a slope of no more than 5 %, with double-sided barriers to prevent falls (a scheme is enclosed as an annex); (2) installation of voting privacy screens with dimensions of not less than 210/170 cm and a table plot no higher than 85 cm for paper ballots; (3) voting booths with dimensions of not less than 210/170 cm and a top not higher than 85 cm for machine devices voting.[[34]](#footnote-35) |
| Does the website which provides instructions for voting and information on candidates meet accessibility standards? | Partially, some accessibility measures are in place | The website of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) provides instructions for voting and information on candidates.[[35]](#footnote-36)  Under Bulgarian law, the content of all websites and mobile applications of administrative authorities, public service providers, and persons performing public functions must comply with the harmonised standard EN 301 549 V2.1.2 (2018-08).[[36]](#footnote-37)  An online accessibility check carried out by the Web Accessibility Initiative’s Alfa Semi-automated test tool[[37]](#footnote-38) shows that the website of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) does not comply with WCAG 2.1 AA standard.[[38]](#footnote-39) |
| Are some television programmes providing instructions for voting and information on candidates subtitled? | Yes, some key programmes are subtitled | In Bulgaria, accessible programmes for persons with sensory disabilities offer sign language interpretation rather than subtitled content.  The Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) provides that, during the preparation and holding of elections, all media service providers with national coverage may provide the Central Election Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) with free airtime of not less than 15 minutes per week for an explanatory campaign on the voting.[[39]](#footnote-40) For example, during the campaign for the last local elections, held in October 2023, a series of animated videos produced by the Central Election Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) were broadcasted by some of the TV channels with national coverage.[[40]](#footnote-41) The videos were subtitled and included sign language interpretation. |
| Do some television programmes providing instructions for voting and information on candidates have national sign language interpretation? | Yes, some key programmes have sign language interpretation | In Bulgaria, accessible programmes for persons with sensory disabilities offer sign language interpretation rather than subtitled content.  The Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) provides that, during the preparation and holding of elections, all media service providers with national coverage may provide the Central Election Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) with free airtime of not less than 15 minutes per week for an explanatory campaign on the voting.[[41]](#footnote-42) For example, during the campaign for the last local elections, held in October 2023, a series of animated videos produced by the Central Election Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) were broadcasted by some of the TV channels with national coverage.[[42]](#footnote-43) The videos were subtitled and included sign language interpretation.  In addition to the official explanatory campaign of the Central Election Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК), most national media, in accordance with their internal policies, include sign language interpretation in some of their own election-related programmes, such as the news broadcasts, debates between candidates, etc.[[43]](#footnote-44) |
| Are some television programmes providing instructions for voting and information on candidates audio described? | No information | There is no publicly available information on television programmes providing election-related content audio described. The Council for Electronic Media (CEM) (*Съвет за електронни медии*, СЕМ) does not collect data on audio described programmes.[[44]](#footnote-45) |
| Were some political party manifestos provided in accessible formats during the most recent elections? | No political parties provided accessible manifestos | During the last local elections, held in October 2023, no political party manifestos were provided in accessible formats. Most political parties disseminated subtitled videos explaining in accessible language certain aspects of their manifestos. During the campaign for the last parliamentary election, held in April 2023, one political party disseminated a paid election video with sign language interpretation.[[45]](#footnote-46) |
| Are there legal accessibility standards for public and private providers of internet and web-based public information? | Yes, covering public and private | The operation public providers of internet and web-based public information is governed by the E-Governance Act (*Закон за електронното управление*)[[46]](#footnote-47) and secondary legislation.[[47]](#footnote-48) According to the secondary legislation, the content of websites and mobile applications of administrative authorities, public service providers, and persons performing public functions must comply with the harmonised standard EN 301 549 V2.1.2 (2018-08).[[48]](#footnote-49) There is a list of exceptions to this rule, which includes public broadcasters and media service providers operating under the Radio and Television Act (*Закон за радиото и телевизията*), some civil society organisations, schools and kindergartens, etc. as well as all cases, in which the compliance with these standards is considered of “excessive burden” for the provider.[[49]](#footnote-50) |
| Are there legal accessibility standards for public and private providers of media? | Yes, covering public and private | In Bulgaria, the Persons with Disabilities Act (*Закон за хората с увреждания*) provides that the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) (*Българска национална телевизия*, БНТ), the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) (*Българско национално радио*, БНР) and the Bulgarian News Agency (BNA) (*Българска телеграфна агенция*, БТА) must provide information accessible to persons with disabilities and include programmes and information related to persons with disabilities.[[50]](#footnote-51)  Since 2020, the Radio and Television Act (*Закон за радиото и телевизията*) envisages that public and private broadcasters must ensure that the content of their services is gradually made accessible to people with sensory disabilities. Means of making the content of audiovisual media services accessible may include, but not be limited to, sign language interpretation, subtitling, speech subtitling and audio description. Radio broadcasters should make programmes and broadcasts accessible to persons with sensory disabilities through the internet, mobile applications or other technical means at their disposal, within the time limits and in the ways specified in their own action plans.[[51]](#footnote-52) As of December 2022, of all private media service providers (about 130 audiovisual media providers and 80 radio broadcasters), the majority have submitted such action plans. This includes the Association of Bulgarian Broadcasters (ABBRO) (*Асоциация на българските радио и телевизионни оператори*, АБРО) and most of its members as well as 22 other broadcasters not members of the association.[[52]](#footnote-53)  The Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) provides that political parties and coalitions can receive subsidies for media packages during elections to the amount of BGN 40,000 (approximately €20,000). Eligible to receive the subsidy are all parties and coalitions, which have nominated candidates in presidential and European Parliament elections and in all electoral districts in national parliamentary elections, and that are not entitled to an annual subsidy under the Political Parties Act (*Закон за политическите партии*). However, the subsidies for media packages are not linked to any accessibility requirements.[[53]](#footnote-54) |
| Are there mandatory accessibility standards for national and local authority buildings in the election context? | Partially | The regional and municipal electoral commissions are obliged by law to ensure the provision of facilities for persons with disabilities to vote.[[54]](#footnote-55)  The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) defines the concrete procedures for voting of persons with disabilities and other persons in need of support for each particular round of elections, and determines the measures to be taken to enable voters with visual impairments or mobility difficulties to vote. |
| Are there legal accessibility standards for polling stations in place? | Yes, for some polling stations | The law provides that regional and municipal electoral commissions are obliged to ensure the provision of facilities for persons with disabilities to vote.[[55]](#footnote-56)  The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) defines the concrete procedures for voting of persons with disabilities and other persons in need of support for each particular round of elections, and determines the measures to be taken to enable voters with visual impairments or mobility difficulties to vote. For example, for the last local elections, held in October 2023, such measures included: (1) construction of sidewalks and stair ramps with a slope of no more than 5 %, with double-sided barriers to prevent falls (a scheme is also enclosed as an annex); (2) installation of voting privacy screens with dimensions of not less than 210/170 cm and a table plot no higher than 85 cm for paper ballot; and (3) voting booths with dimensions of not less than 210/170 cm and a top no higher than 85 cm for machine voting.[[56]](#footnote-57) There are no specific standards for mobile polling boxes. |
| Is data available on the proportion of polling stations that are accessible to persons with disabilities? | No data identified | Data on the proportion of polling stations that are accessible to persons with disabilities is not available.[[57]](#footnote-58) Each municipality publishes on its website information about the polling sections on its territory.[[58]](#footnote-59) Still, the media regularly report cases of persons with disabilities who have experienced difficulties accessing the polling stations.[[59]](#footnote-60) |
| Is data available on the proportion of public buildings that are accessible for persons with disabilities? | No data identified | There is no aggregated information on the accessibility of public buildings.[[60]](#footnote-61) |

1. Political participation of persons with disabilities in practice
   1. Positive and negative key development as regards political participation of persons with disabilities

In Bulgaria, during the reporting period, the political participation of persons with disabilities has not been a topic of great public attention and there were only a few key developments. They are related the adoption of standards for the accessibility of the online content published by public bodies and measures to ensure accessible media content.

The E-Governance Act (*Закон за електронното управление*)[[61]](#footnote-62) and the relevant secondary legislation[[62]](#footnote-63) regulate the operation of public providers of web-based public information, including the public institutions responsible for administering the electoral process. According to the secondary legislation, the content of all websites and mobile applications of administrative authorities, public service providers, and persons performing public functions must comply with the harmonised standard EN 301 549 V2.1.2 (2018-08).[[63]](#footnote-64) There is a list of exceptions to this rule, which includes public broadcasters and media service providers operating under the Radio and Television Act (*Закон за радиото и телевизията*), some civil society organisations, schools and kindergartens, etc. as well as all cases, in which the compliance with these standards is considered of “excessive burden” for the provider.[[64]](#footnote-65)

The adoption of the Persons with Disabilities Act (*Закон за хората с увреждания*) in 2018 significantly improved persons with disabilities’ access to information. The law obliged public media to provide information that is accessible to persons with disabilities and to include programmes and information related to persons with disabilities.[[65]](#footnote-66) Consequently, an amendment to the Radio and Television Act (*Закон за радиото и телевизията*), adopted in 2020, obliged public and private media service providers to ensure that the content of their services is gradually made accessible to persons with sensory disabilities. Radio broadcasters were obliged to offer programmes and broadcasts accessible to persons with sensory disabilities through the internet, mobile applications or other technical means at their disposal. All media service providers were also obliged to develop action plans for continuously and progressively increasing the accessibility of their services to persons with disabilities.[[66]](#footnote-67) By the end of 2022, of all private media service providers (about 130 audiovisual media providers and 80 radio broadcasters), the majority have submitted such action plans to the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) (*Съвет за електронни медии*, СЕМ). This includes the largest national association of media service providers – the Association of Bulgarian Broadcasters (ABBRO) (*Асоциация на българските радио и телевизионни оператори*, АБРО) and most of its members, as well as 22 other broadcasters not members of the association.[[67]](#footnote-68) In addition to complying with these mandatory requirements, most national media, in accordance with their internal policies, include sign language interpretation in some of their election-related programmes (news broadcasts during elections, debates between candidates, etc.).[[68]](#footnote-69)

Another positive development is the change in the requirements for opening polling stations in hospitals and other specialised institutions. The Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*), adopted in 2014, provides that at national parliamentary elections, European Parliament elections and presidential elections, polling stations are established in hospitals, homes for older persons, and other specialised institutions providing residential social services if there are at least ten voters accommodated there. For local elections, the minimum number of voters is also ten, but there is an additional requirement that they should have lived in the same locality where the institution is located in the last six months before the elections.[[69]](#footnote-70) Under the previous Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*), applied until 2014, the minimum number of voters in such facilities was 20. The change was made in response to the increasing number of group homes for older persons and persons with disabilities, which replaced the bigger institutions as a result of the deinstitutionalisation process.[[70]](#footnote-71)

Despite these positive developments, there are a number of persisting challenges. Persons fully or partially deprived of legal capacity continue to be deprived of their rights to vote or be elected. The European Court of Human Rights has already ruled that this restriction is violating Article 3 of Protocol 1 to the European Convention of Human Rights Despite.[[71]](#footnote-72) Since the rule prohibiting persons deprived of legal capacity from voting is laid down in Constitution, the government asked the Constitutional Court (*Конституционен съд*) to issue an interpretative decision limiting the scope of this ban. However, the Constitutional Court (*Конституционен съд*) ruled that the issuance of such a decision is not withing its competence and the only way to overcome the problem is through a constitutional amendment.[[72]](#footnote-73)

The frequent changes of the legislation[[73]](#footnote-74) and the practice of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) (*Централна избирателна комисия*, ЦИК) to introduce new rules before each round of elections make it difficult for persons with disabilities to actively participate in the electoral process, as they do not always easily adapt to the new rules. Furthermore, the electoral rules do not provide adequate access to the electoral process for a significant number of persons with disabilities. Adequate conditions have not been created for these vulnerable persons and the requirements of a number of international instruments to ensure universal, equal and secret voting have not been fully met.[[74]](#footnote-75)

* 1. Political participation: Promising practices

Positive practices in ensuring the accessibility of the electoral process can be found at the local level. The Municipality of Burgas (*Община Бургас*) has taken a series of actions for accommodating the needs of visually impaired persons in the voting process. For the last local elections, held in October 2023, the municipality launched a dedicated sub-section on its website informing visually impaired persons about the candidates.[[75]](#footnote-76) The list of candidates is audio described and each candidate’s number in the ballot is mentioned. Additionally, the municipality organised specialised transportation on the election day for all persons with reduced mobility or visual disability. The service included transportation from the persons’ homes to the polling station at the price of a regular ticket and could be requested by phone. The municipal website published information about all accessible polling stations and the accessibility aids they offered, so that people can choose the most convenient for them.[[76]](#footnote-77) In addition, on the election day, boards with Braille text, QR codes, and sound information were placed in front of 35 polling stations in Burgas to assist visually impaired voters. [[77]](#footnote-78)

1. Bulgaria, Council of Ministers (*Министерски съвет*) (2020), National Disability Strategy 2021 – 2030 ([*Национална стратегия за хората с увреждания 2021 – 2030 г.*](https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=1342)), 23 December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Bulgaria, Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria ([*Конституция на Република България*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/521957377)), 13 July 1991, last amended 18 December 2015, Art. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 38 (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 24 (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Bulgaria, Persons with Disabilities Act ([*Закон за хората с увреждания*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137189213)), 18 December 2018, last amended 25 January 2023, additional provisions, § 1 (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 37 (3a). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Bulgaria, Central Electoral Commission (*Централна избирателна комисия*), Decision No 2599-НС Sofia ([*Решение № 2599-НС София*](https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/2599/2023-10-05)), 5 October 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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12. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Bulgaria, Central Electoral Commission (*Централна избирателна комисия*), Decision No 2545-МИ Sofia ([*Решение № 2545-МИ София*](https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/2545/2023-09-29)), 29 September 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Bulgaria, Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria (*Омбудсман на Република България*), Letter No 74-14 to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 21 November 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. For more information, see the [website](https://www.cik.bg/bg/contacts) of the Central Electoral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Bulgaria, Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services ([*Наредба за общите изисквания към информационните системи, регистрите и електронните административни услуги*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136995819)), 17 January 2017, last amended 24 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. For more information, see the [website](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/act/implementations/) of Web Accessibility Initiative [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. For more information, see the [accessibility report](https://userway.org/accessibility-checker/?scanner=true&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.cik.bg%2f). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Bulgaria, Administrative Court – Pazardzhik (*Административен съд – Пазарджик*), Decision No 173 in administrative case No 308/2023 ([*Решение № 173 по административно дело № 308/2023 г.*](https://legalacts.justice.bg/Search/Details?actId=p7sAb8LtZso%3D)), ECLI:BG:AD715:2023:20230700308.001, 29 March 2023; Bulgaria, Administrative Court – Pazardzhik (*Административен съд – Пазарджик*), Decision No 174 in administrative case No 309/2023 ([*Решение № 174 по административно дело № 309/2023 г.*](https://legalacts.justice.bg/Search/Details?actId=SoHutcq%2BFmI%3D)), ECLI:BG:AD715:2023:20230700309.001, 29 March 2023; Bulgaria, Administrative Court – Pazardzhik (*Административен съд – Пазарджик*), Decision No. 175 in administrative case No. 310/2023 ([*Решение № 175 по административно дело № 310/2023* *г.*](https://legalacts.justice.bg/Search/Details?actId=uWMXw4je%2BRc%3D)), ECLI:BG:AD715:2023:20230700310.001, 29 March 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. For more information, see the [registry of complaints](https://www.cik.bg/bg/complaints?p=1) on the website of the Central Electoral Commission. An exemplary decision is available [here](https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/2796/26.10.2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
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24. Bulgaria, Commission for Protection against Discrimination (*Комисия за защита от дискриминацията*), Letter No 12-20-56 to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 14 November 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Bulgaria, National Assembly (*Народно събрание*), Access to Public Information Decision No 49-31-37, 16 November 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria (*Национално сдружение на общините в Република България*), Letter No И-1844(2) to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 10 November 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 72 (for regional commissions) and Art. 87 (for municipal commissions). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. For more information, see the [website](https://www.cik.bg/bg/mestni_izbori_2023/edu) of the Central Electoral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Bulgaria, Statutory Instruments Act ([*Закон за нормативните актове*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2127837184)), 3 April 1973, last amended 3 May 2016, additional provisions, § 1; for more information, see the Public Consultations Portal [Strategy.bg](https://www.strategy.bg/). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Bulgaria, Statutory Instruments Act ([*Закон за нормативните актове*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2127837184)), 3 April 1973 (last amended 3 May 2016), Art. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Bulgaria, Statutory Instruments Act ([*Закон за нормативните актове*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2127837184)), 3 April 1973 (last amended 3 May 2016), Art. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. For more information about the composition and functions of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, see the [administrative register](https://iisda.government.bg/ras/executive_power/council/2873) of the government’s Integrated Public Administration Information System. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 72 (for regional commissions) and Art. 87 (for municipal commissions). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Bulgaria, Central Electoral Commission (*Централна избирателна комисия*), Decision No 2545-МИ Sofia ([*Решение № 2545-МИ София*](https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/2545/2023-09-29)), 29 September 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. For more information, see the [lists of candidates](https://www.cik.bg/bg/ns02.04.2023/canlist) and the [voting instructions](https://www.cik.bg/bg/mestni_izbori_2023/campaign) on the website of the Central Electoral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Bulgaria, Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services ([*Наредба за общите изисквания към информационните системи, регистрите и електронните административни услуги*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136995819)), 17 January 2017, last amended 24 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. For more information, see the [website](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/act/implementations/) of Web Accessibility Initiative [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. For more information, see the [accessibility report](https://userway.org/accessibility-checker/?scanner=true&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.cik.bg%2f). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 199a. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. For more information, see the [website](https://www.cik.bg/bg/mestni_izbori_2023/campaign/subtitles-video) of the Central Electoral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 199a. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. For more information, see the [website](https://www.cik.bg/bg/mestni_izbori_2023/campaign/subtitles-video) of the Central Electoral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Bulgaria, Council for Electronic Media (*Съвет за електронни медии*) (2022), Specialised Monitoring of the 49th National Assembly Electoral Campaign ([*Специализирано наблюдение на предизборната кампания за 49 -то Народно събрание*](https://www.cem.bg/controlbg/1462)), 27 April 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Bulgaria, Council for Electronic Media (*Съвет за електронни медии*) (2022), Report of the Council for Electronic Media – Bulgaria on the implementation of Art. 8a of the Radio and Television Act and Art. 7 of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 for January 2021 – December 2022 ([*Отчет на Съвета за електронни медии – България за изпълнението на чл. 8а от Закона за радиото и телевизията и чл. 7 от Директива (ЕС) 2018/1808 за периода: януари 2021 г. – декември 2022 г.*](https://www.cem.bg/activitybg/2253)), 22 December 2022; Bulgaria, Council for Electronic Media (*Съвет за електронни медии*) (2022), Specialised Monitoring of the 49th National Assembly Electoral Campaign ([*Специализирано наблюдение на предизборната кампания за 49 -то Народно събрание*](https://www.cem.bg/controlbg/1462)), 27 April 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
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46. Bulgaria, E-Governance Act ([*Закон за електронното управление*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135555445)), 12 June 2007, last amended 19 September 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Bulgaria, Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services ([*Наредба за общите изисквания към информационните системи, регистрите и електронните административни услуги*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136995819)), 17 January 2017, last amended 24 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Bulgaria, Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services (*[Наредба за общите изисквания към информационните системи, регистрите и електронните административни услуги](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136995819)*), 17 January 2017, last amended 24 June 2022, Art. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Bulgaria, E-Governance Act ([*Закон за електронното управление*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135555445)), 12 June 2007, last amended 19 September 2023, Art. 58c. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Bulgaria, Persons with Disabilities Act ([*Закон за хората с увреждания*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137189213)), 18 December 2018, last amended 25 January 2023, Art. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Bulgaria, Radio and Television Act ([*Закон за радиото и телевизията*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2134447616)), 24 November 1998, last amended 6 October 2023, Art. 8a. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Bulgaria, Council for Electronic Media (*Съвет за електронни медии*) (2022), Report of the Council for Electronic Media – Bulgaria on the implementation of Art. 8a of the Radio and Television Act and Art. 7 of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 for January 2021 – December 2022 ([*Отчет на Съвета за електронни медии – България за изпълнението на чл. 8а от Закона за радиото и телевизията и чл. 7 от Директива (ЕС) 2018/1808 за периода: януари 2021 г. – декември 2022 г.*](https://www.cem.bg/activitybg/2253)), 22 December 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 72 (for regional commissions) and Art. 87 (for municipal commissions). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
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56. Bulgaria, Central Electoral Commission (*Централна избирателна комисия*), Decision No 2545-МИ Sofia ([*Решение № 2545-МИ София*](https://www.cik.bg/bg/decisions/2545/2023-09-29)), 29 September 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria (*Национално сдружение на общините в Република България*), Letter No И-1844(2) to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 10 November 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. For example, see the [website](https://www.plovdiv.bg/announcements/mi-29-10-2023/) of Plovdiv Municipality. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. For example, see bTV (2023), ‘Even a brace and crutches did not stop her: a woman with an immobilised leg did not give up and managed to vote’ (*['Дори шината и патериците не я спряха: Жена с обездвижен крак не се отказа и успя да гласува'](https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/dori-shinata-i-patericite-ne-ja-sprjaha-zhena-s-obezdvizhen-krak-ne-se-otkaza-i-uspja-da-glasuva.html?fbclid=IwAR1VzrbKTQQnAQZxC6wTbaoxW2Y-tshwqlFpk4JOWNx9GPAngddKPm8Le5E)*), 6 November 2023, and Bulgarian National Television (*Българска национална телевизия*) (2023), ‘Police officers helped a woman with disabilities to vote’ ([*'Полицейски служители помогнаха на жена с увреждания да гласува'*](https://bnt.bg/news/policeiski-sluzhiteli-pomognaha-na-zhena-s-uvrezhdaniya-da-glasuva-v341922-316722news.html)), 5 April 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria (*Национално сдружение на общините в Република България*), Letter No И-1844(2) to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 10 November 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Bulgaria, E-Governance Act ([*Закон за електронното управление*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135555445)), 12 June 2007, last amended 19 September 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Bulgaria, Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services ([*Наредба за общите изисквания към информационните системи, регистрите и електронните административни услуги*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136995819)), 17 January 2017, last amended 24 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Bulgaria, Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services (*[Наредба за общите изисквания към информационните системи, регистрите и електронните административни услуги](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136995819)*), 17 January 2017, last amended 24 June 2022, Art. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. Bulgaria, E-Governance Act ([*Закон за електронното управление*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135555445)), 12 June 2007, last amended 19 September 2023, Art. 58c. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Bulgaria, Persons with Disabilities Act ([*Закон за хората с увреждания*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137189213)), 18 December 2018, last amended 25 January 2023, Art. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. Bulgaria, Radio and Television Act ([*Закон за радиото и телевизията*](https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2134447616)), 24 November 1998, last amended 6 October 2023, Art. 8a. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Bulgaria, Council for Electronic Media (*Съвет за електронни медии*) (2022), Report of the Council for Electronic Media – Bulgaria on the implementation of Art. 8a of the Radio and Television Act and Art. 7 of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 for January 2021 – December 2022 ([*Отчет на Съвета за електронни медии – България за изпълнението на чл. 8а от Закона за радиото и телевизията и чл. 7 от Директива (ЕС) 2018/1808 за периода: януари 2021 г. – декември 2022 г.*](https://www.cem.bg/activitybg/2253)), 22 December 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. Bulgaria, Council for Electronic Media (*Съвет за електронни медии*) (2022), Specialised Monitoring of the 49th National Assembly Electoral Campaign ([*Специализирано наблюдение на предизборната кампания за 49 -то Народно събрание*](https://www.cem.bg/controlbg/1462)), 27 April 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022, Art. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. For more information about the deinstitutionalisation process, see the [website](https://www.mlsp.government.bg/deinstitutsionalizatsiya-na-grizhata-za-vzrastni-khora-i-khora-s-uvrezhdaniya) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), [*Anatoliy Marinov v. Bulgaria*](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22languageisocode%22:[%22ENG%22],%22appno%22:[%2226081/17%22],%22documentcollectionid2%22:[%22CHAMBER%22],%22itemid%22:[%22001-215603%22]}), No. 26081/17, 15 February 2022; European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), [*Genchev v. Bulgaria*](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-218468%22]}), No. 57868/16, 5 July 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. Bulgaria, Constitutional Court (*Конституционен съд*), Ruling No 8 on constitutional case No 15/2022 ([*Определение № 8 по конституционно дело № 15/2022*](https://www.constcourt.bg/bg/act-9390)), 18 October 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. Since 2019, the Electoral Code (*Изборен кодекс*) was amended 13 times. For more information, see Bulgaria, Electoral Code ([*Изборен кодекс*](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596)), 5 March 2014, last amended 30 December 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
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75. For more information, see the [website](https://www.burgas.bg/bg/za-nezryashti) of the Municipality of Burgas. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. For more information, see the [website](https://www.burgas.bg/bg/vazhni-saobshteniya/saobshtenie-za-glasuvane-na-izbirateli-s-uvredeno-zrenie-ili-sas-zatrudneniya-v-predvizhvaneto-v-izborite-za-obshtinski-savetnitsi-i-kmetove-na-29-oktomvri-2023-g) of the Municipality of Burgas [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. Stamatis, L. (2023), ‘Braille boards help the blind to vote in Burgas’ (‘[*Табла с брайлов текст помагат на незрящите да гласуват в Бургас*](https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/tabla-s-brajlov-tekst-pomagat-na-nezrjashtite-da-glasuvat-v-burgas.html)’), *bTV News*, 29 October 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)