BULGARIA

EUROPE

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Bulgaria is a parliamentary democracy and a unitary country. It has a single-tier subnational structure divided into 265 municipalities.[1]

Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Review (VNR).[2]

1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The principles and policies laid down in the **Government's Programme for the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021** are in line with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda on good governance and guaranteeing the rights, security and well-being of citizens, tolerance, non-discrimination and nondisintegration. Adopted by the end of 2020, the **National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030** addresses three main strategic goals: accelerated economic development, demographic upswing and reduction of inequalities. It outlines 13 national priorities in five development areas. Their implementation will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

A **Development Council** at the Council of Ministers was established and, for consultation, a working group within the Committee for Management, Monitoring, Control, and Implementation of the National Development Programme 2020. The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** leads the international commitments and reporting. More than 70 advisory and coordination councils function to coordinate activities between individual public institutions and other stakeholders. The **National Platform of Partners for Good Democratic Governance at Local Level** was created in 2019 as a public body for the implementation of the Council of Europe's Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the local level. The **Bulgarian Platform for International Development** assists the promotion of the SDGs in the country. Its activities include teachers, young scientists, politicians and LRG representatives.

1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

As part of the 2020 VNR process, roundtables and discussions were held with the participation of experts from the non-governmental sector and the academic community. An online survey was sent to non-governmental organizations through the database of the Bulgarian NGO's Information Portal; focus groups were organized with business representatives; individual interviews were held with trade union representatives. The review also contains the results of an online survey of Bulgarian Youth Delegates to the UN on the priorities of young people, which they fill out at the beginning of each term. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs collected information from government institutions and other stakeholders on policies and activities related to the SDG implementation.

1.3 MONITORING

The **MonitorStat** information system, based on a statistical database of surveys of the National Statistical Institute and other statistical bodies, is a national platform for monitoring of the performance on the indicators set out in key national strategy documents, including the implementation of the SDGs and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
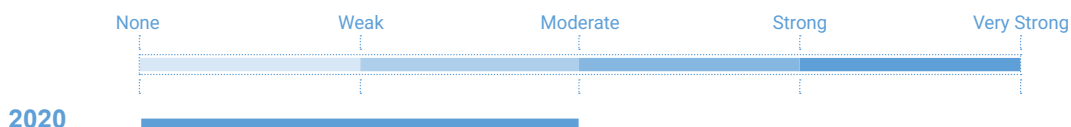
2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG LOCALIZATION

The **National Association of Municipalities (NAMRB)** is not represented in national coordination mechanisms, but participates in a number of advisory councils to the Council of Ministers (e.g. SMEs, Persons with disabilities, social inclusion, child protection, gender equality) and in the **National Platform of Partners for Good Democratic Governance at Local Level.** The Platform is a form of partnership between state bodies at the national and regional level, local governments and the NAMRB, the organizations and structures of the economic and social partners, civil organizations, academia, the mass media and the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria.

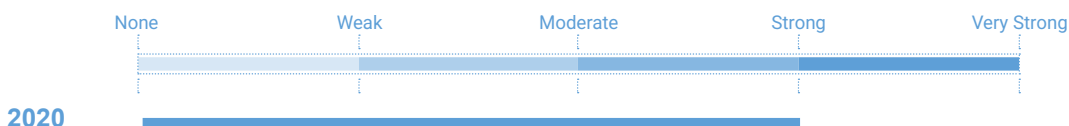LRGs participated in consultations as part of the 2020 VNR process.

2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

► **In the VNR process**

None	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong

2020

Comments: LRGs are not mentioned as participants of the discussions, interviews or roundtables. The National Association of Municipalities (NAMRB) mentions that it was not directly consulted (GTF Survey 2021), although the 2020 VNR mentions the NAMRB and includes examples of LRGs.

► **In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation**

None	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong

2020

Comments: The NAMRB is partially involved in advisory councils, but not in the coordination mechanism.

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNRs and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

2.2 VNR REFERENCES

In the 2020 VNR, there is a subsection on municipalities as part of the presentation of the national policies and coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation, which includes specific examples (see the VNR, 2020, p. 14). Other examples are provided throughout the report.

2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

► As an output of the first plenary session of the final conference for the term 2015-2019, organized by the **National Association of the Municipalities (NAMRB)** in 2019, a general vision from the municipalities was established: for the 2021-2027 period, it is scheduled to have a national development programme and adequate national resources for its implementation instead of hundreds of strategies for each sector and subsector.

► Modern systems for waste collection and processing have been set up in **Sofia, Plovdiv** and the **Vratsa-Mezdra region**, and others.

► 25 Bulgarian municipalities have joined the European Covenant of Mayors initiative: plans are being prepared for climate change adaptation in the cities of **Sofia, Burgas** and **Dimitrovgrad**.

► Four municipalities (**Burgas, Smolyan, Sofia** and **Varna**) participate in the URBACT initiative to support sustainable urban development through six of its various thematic networks.

► The **Jugozapaden region** is participating in the Mild Home initiative together with partners from seven countries to develop a concept for eco-settlements that can meet the needs of middle and low-income families.

► In order to reduce regional disparities, 246 municipalities (92.8% of the municipalities in the country) have registered on the WiFi4EU portal for free access for citizens to wireless internet connection in public places.

► The **Association of Danube Municipalities (ADO Danube)**, together with partners from Bulgaria and Romania, developed an integrated ecotourism route "Protected natural heritage within the cross-border region Romania- Bulgaria". The route brings together 60 sites with protected status and corresponds with several of the SDGs: partnership, biodiversity conservation, local

tourism development. The project is presented as a local stakeholder engagement initiative. Another cross-border project, "Clean Access in Calarasi-Silistra cross-border area", is focused entirely on the environmental goals of the 2030 Agenda, building a network of bicycle lanes, purchasing electric bicycles, and solar parking for electric cars.

► **Sofia** has been participating since the beginning of 2018 in an international project on "Mobilizing European young people in support of the Sustainable Development Goals" (Walk the Global Walk) under the EuropeAid Programme of the European Commission. The project aims to strengthen cooperation between local authorities, the civil sector and educational institutions in countries within and outside the EU.

2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

Not applicable.

2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Resources are being channeled to address local challenges. Following the launch of the **financial decentralization process** in 2003, the activities related to organizing and providing public services financed through the budgets of municipalities are divided into state delegated and local activities. Much of the main activities for the implementation of the SDGs, such as health and education, social security and care, are carried out on the basis of state delegated budgets with clear standards. Specific tasks are carried out on a project basis using the EU Operational Programmes and beneficiaries' own contributions. Through these grants, municipalities can fund initiatives such as infrastructure, culture, social activity, etc.
The Operational Programme "**Human Resources Development**" 2014-2020 is another important source of grants for municipalities. The main priorities of this programme are: improving job quality and access to employment, reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion, modernizing labor market institutions, social inclusion and health, as well as transnational cooperation. The Operational Programme "**Environment**" 2014-2020 is also one of the main programmes providing opportunities for financing the municipalities. In addition, municipalities are beneficiaries of the Operational Programme "**Regions in Growth**" 2014-2020. The main priorities of the programme are sustainable and integrated urban development, development of regional educational, health and social infrastructure, development of regional tourism and improvement of the regional road infrastructure. Municipalities also receive grants under the Programme "**Rural Development**" 2014-2020.
The transfers to the municipalities from the state budget for financing social services, which are state delegated activities, have been increased. In 2019, their amount was 130 million EUR, 15 million EUR more than in 2018.
To plan and finance local sustainable development programs and projects the government has developed a "community-led local development" approach, creating employment by using local potential. The approach is applied bottom-up through the creation of **Local Action Groups** for territories with 10,000 to 150,000 inhabitants.[3]

3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

General comments: The 2020 VNR analyzes and identifies the areas of progress and challenges and proposes possible solutions for all 17 SDGs. It outlines the progress on the most important indicators related to poverty and inequality reduction, as well as to the care for the most vulnerable in the fields of education, health and social protection.

3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Regarding women participation in politics, the 2020 VNR mentions that 14% of the mayors of municipalities are women, including the mayor of the capital city.

3.2 COVID 19

The laws, policies and measures decided by the national government to minimize the hardships of the crisis are summarized at the end of the 2020 VNR. Presented by themes (anti-epidemic, social, economic, information and assistance, education, and international cooperation), the measures are linked more generally to the SDGs in which they participate. There is no specific reference to initiatives led by local governments.

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3. These groups include representatives of local community stakeholders who jointly, while maximizing publicity, set territorial development priorities and integrate them into community-led development strategies.

4. SDG INDICATORS[4]

5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments		27.2 (2019)
6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%)	**Urban**	-
	Rural	-
6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%)	**Urban**	76 (2020)
	Rural	60 (2020)
11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%)		-
11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%)		100 (2011, Sofia)
11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted)		19 (2016)
11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%)		0 (2017)