

Country	Bulgaria
SIGI 2019 Category	Low
SIGI Value 2019	23%

Discrimination in the family		27%
	Legal framework on child marriage	0.5
	Percentage of girls under 18 married	1%
	Legal framework on household responsibilities	0.5
	Proportion of the population declaring that children will suffer if mothers are working outside home for a pay	56%
	Female to male ratio of time spent on unpaid care work	2.0
	Legal framework on inheritance	0
	Legal framework on divorce	0.25

Restricted physical integrity		16%
	Legal framework on violence against women	0.75
	Proportion of the female population justifying domestic violence	18%
	Prevalence of domestic violence against women (lifetime)	23%
	Sex ratio at birth (natural =105)	105.8
	Legal framework on reproductive rights	0
	Female population with unmet needs for family planning	14%

Restricted access to productive and financial resources		30%
	Legal framework on working rights	1
	Proportion of the population declaring this is not acceptable for a woman in their family to work outside home for a pay	6%
	Share of managers (male)	61%
	Legal framework on access to non-land assets	0.25
	Share of house owners (male)	-
	Legal framework on access to land assets	0.25
	Share of agricultural land holders (male)	77%
	Legal framework on access to financial services	0.25
	Share of account holders (male)	48%

Restricted civil liberties		20%
	Legal framework on civil rights	0
	Legal framework on freedom of movement	0
	Percentage of women in the total number of persons not feeling safe walking alone at night	64%
	Legal framework on political participation	0.5
	Share of the population that believes men are better political leaders than women	44%
	Percentage of male MP's	76%
	Legal framework on access to justice	0
	Share of women declaring lack of confidence in the justice system	56%

Note: Higher values indicate higher inequality. Percentages range from 0 to 100, while legal variables are categorised as 0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.

Source: OECD (2019), Gender, Institutions and Development Database, <https://oe.cd/ds/GIDDB2019>.

Bulgaria

Accession to the European Union in 2007 accelerated Bulgaria's adoption of gender equality legislation in line with the obligation to abide by the 'acquis communautaire' (the body of EU law which acceding countries must implement). A series of new legislation over the past decade has helped to diminish inequality in employment and political participation. In addition, Bulgaria's National Assembly adopted in 2016 a Law on Gender Equality, which will regulate state policy on gender equality. The law affirms the competency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as the body who will manage, coordinate and control gender equality policy in Bulgaria. The main principles of the state policy are: equal opportunities of women and men, equal access to resources, equal treatment and non-discrimination, elimination of gender-based violence, balanced representation of women and men in decision-making bodies, and elimination of stereotypes based on sex. In 2016, Bulgaria also ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Despite such progress, challenges remain in the areas of violence against women, domestic violence, restricted workplace rights, political voice, and access to justice.

1. Discrimination in the family

a) Overarching legal framework for marriage

Women have equal rights as men to enter into marriage and Article 47 of the Constitution stipulates that marriage is a voluntary union between a man and a woman. The Bulgarian Criminal Code includes a specific provision on forced marriage. Article 177 criminalises situations in which a person 'induces another in a compulsory manner to enter in marriage'. No further clarification is provided as to what is considered a 'compulsory manner'. However, the second section of the same article criminalises the abduction of a woman for the purpose of forcing her into marriage and provides for a prison sentence from three to five years. In addition, Article 178 criminalises arranged marriages that refer to circumstances where a parent or relative receives a dowry.

Only civil marriages are legally recognised in Bulgaria; religious marriages have no legal standing (Constitution, Article 46; CEDAW, 2011). Family law as well as other legal documents contain specific legislative provisions regulating some aspects of informal unions. Where regulated, the informal relationship between a heterosexual couple is equated with a marriage, as a consequence of living together. In particular, parents, irrespective of the type of relationship (marriage or informal), acquire parental rights and duties (joint parental responsibilities) and exercise them together or based on mutual consent (Articles 122 and 123 of the Bulgarian Family Code). If the couple separate the law provides for a mechanism to rearrange the exercise of parental rights and duties by agreement or by a court decision if parents are not able to reach an agreement (Art. 127 of the Bulgarian Family Code).

The CEDAW committee has expressed concern over a lack of information on the definition and scope of intangible joint marital property, in particular whether pension and insurance benefits and other career assets form part of the property to be equally divided upon divorce. There are reports that, in practice, women have no access to effective remedies enabling them to claim child maintenance from their former husbands or partners and about the failure of the State party to enforce maintenance orders. The Committee further notes the lack of information on the implementation by the State party of subsidy payments with regard to child maintenance (CEDAW, 2012; CEDAW 2014).

b) Child marriage

Article 6 of the Family Code provides the legal age of marriage as 18 for both women and men in Bulgaria. However, in exceptional circumstances, this can be lowered to 16, at the decision of a regional judge (Family Code, Article 6). Cohabitation with a child aged under the age of 16 is a criminal offence and Articles 190 and 191 of the Criminal Code penalise parents or adult males who persuade or force children younger than 16 years of age to cohabit. Furthermore, Article 191 (4) states that a person living in a marital relation - without having concluded a marriage - with a girl under 16 years of age, is subject to criminal proceedings and up to two years of imprisonment. However, an older partner can escape prosecution if he marries the younger partner (Criminal Code of Bulgaria, Article 158).

Early and forced marriage seems to continue to be prevalent among Roma communities in Bulgaria and has been mentioned as a source of concern by the UN. For example, the UN Committee against Torture (CAT, 2011) expressed concern over the practice of early and forced marriage of Roma girls as young as 11 years old. The CEDAW Committee has showed similar concern and has urged Bulgaria to prohibit early marriages in Roma communities. It appears that this problem primarily occurs due to ineffective use of existing criminal legislation under Article 177 where the prosecutors mostly dismiss such cases on grounds of customs and cultural practices (Council of Europe, 2016).

The CEDAW Committee notes that the National Roma Integration Strategy (2012-2020) does not provide for specific measures or actions to combat this practice (CEDAW 2012). In such cases, marriages are not registered with the civil authorities, but are often solemnised in a religious ceremony, which has no legal value. One of the shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee, by the Gender Alternatives Foundation, also draws attention to high rates of early marriage within Roma communities, and to the fact that Roma girls are often taken out of school to be married, or to help out at home (Gender Alternatives Foundation, 2012).

c) Household responsibilities

Women have equal rights as men to be recognized as head of household and there is no law requiring that a married woman obey her husband. Article 46 of the Constitution stipulates that the spouses have equal rights and obligations in a marriage and in the family. In addition, Article 47 of the Constitution declares that the care and education of children until they reach the age of majority represent a right and obligation of their parents, with the support of the state. In addition, under the Family Code, women and men are equal within marriage, including in regard to decision-making authority over children. Women have the same legal right as men to choose where to live, regardless of their marital status (no restrictions found). However, the most recent official report to the CEDAW

Committee notes that according to national statistical data, women change their place of residence four times as often as men, usually as a result of marriage (CEDAW, 2011). Moreover, while there have been efforts to eliminate entrenched gender stereotypes that overemphasize the traditional roles of women as mothers and spouses, such views persist (CEDAW, 2012).

Amnesty International and the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights note that members of the Roma community have faced forced evictions and dispersal, including from settlements where they had been resident for decades. As such, Roma women appear to face de facto restrictions on where they can live, along with other members of their communities (Amnesty International, 2013).

d) Divorce

Articles 49 and 50 of the Family Code establish that either spouse can initiate divorce. According to the CEDAW Committee, mothers most often gain custody of children following a divorce, especially if the children are young and/or female. This is the case in situations where the couple has reached a mutual agreement amicably, and where the court has intervened and awarded legal custody (CEDAW, 2011). However, in its Concluding Observations, the CEDAW Committee raises concerns that the state routinely fails to enforce child maintenances orders, and that divorced and separated women have no access to effective remedies enabling them to claim maintenance from former partners and husbands (CEDAW, 2012; see also below section on Restricted Access to Productive and Financial Resources).

e) Inheritance

Women have the same inheritance rights as men, both as widows and as daughters (CEDAW, 2011; Inheritance Act, Articles 9 and 5) in terms of land and non-land assets. Information related to customary, religious, or traditional practices that may discriminate against female spouses' and daughters' legal rights to inherit is limited. Available research suggests that in rural areas, youngest sons typically inherit parents' land and house and are expected to care for aging parents. However, high rural to urban migration has changed such patterns (Dossa and Coe, 2017).

2. Restricted Physical integrity

a) Violence against women

In 2016, Bulgaria ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). This convention takes precedence over domestic legislation (Constitution of Bulgaria, Article 85). Bulgaria does not have a specific law that addresses violence against women, although it has taken a number of steps in recent years to improve the protection and support of women who are victims of violence.

At present there is no system in place for support to relevant NGOs working against violence against women or gender based violence, nor any special policy encompassing all forms of violence (European Commission, 2016). However, a National Strategy for Promoting Equality between Women and Men (2016-2020) was launched in 2016; priority Area 4 of the Strategy is focused on addressing gender-based violence and the protection of and support to victims. A National Program for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence for 2017-2018 was also implemented.

b) Domestic violence

In 2005, Bulgaria adopted the Law on the Protection against Domestic Violence (thereafter LPADV), which defined domestic violence and established a series of protection measures and rights for victims of domestic violence. In 2009, the Bulgarian Criminal Code was amended, criminalising the failure to comply with a protection order granted to a victim. Limitations were also introduced on the right of domestic violence perpetrators to possess weapons. Moreover, the Legal Assistance Act was amended in 2013 with a view to ensuring that free legal assistance is provided to survivors of domestic and sexual violence unable to afford legal counsel.

The Article 2 (1) of the LPADV defines domestic violence as ‘any act of physical, mental and sexual violence as well as any attempt of such violence, coercive restriction of personal liberty and privacy, committed against persons who are or who have been in a family relationship or kinship, in a de facto co-habitation, or who reside in one and the same dwelling’. Article 3 further covers abuse both from former partners and within the family. In 2010, amendments to the Law widened the definition of domestic violence to include emotional and economic violence (Council of Europe, 2016; CEDAW, 2011).

Under the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, protection orders of between 3 and 18 months can be imposed; these include temporary allocation of custody of any children to the victim, and the requirement that the perpetrator attend specialised counselling to address their violent behaviour (LPADV, Article 5; CEDAW, 2014; Council of Europe, 2016). Survivors must, however, apply for a protection order within 30 days of an act of violence; after 30 days it is time-barred and the survivor must experience a new act of violence before seeking protection (LPADV, Article 10). The CEDAW Committee has criticised this provision and has called for its elimination (CEDAW, 2012). Moreover, the LPADV does not create criminal responsibility for any of the acts it offers protection for (except when the perpetrator violates the court-mandated protection order and/or the European Protection Order under Article 296 of the Criminal Code) nor does the Criminal Code specifically address domestic violence (Council of Europe, 2016).

Amendments to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence made in 2010 included the requirement that each year, a National Programme for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence would be adopted. These Programmes have included awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building initiatives such as training of policy officers and prosecutors, and the development of a national coordination mechanism for victim assistance (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). There is a national helpline operating 24 hours a day, run by Animus Association Foundation, a women’s rights NGO (WAVE, 2015) and funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (CEDAW, 2014). There are seven women’s shelters in Bulgaria (72 beds), which are accessible 24/7 and free of charge (WAVE, 2015). The shelters are run by NGOs, but receive some State funding. Concerns have, however, been expressed that funding is insufficient for both the hotline and the shelters. Women’s rights organisations continue to insist the country lacks strong gender equality and domestic violence policies, despite having an annual action plan in both areas (US Department of State, 2016).

Bulgarian authorities work together with national human rights institutions, relevant non-governmental organizations and the media to carry out regular public campaigns and initiatives aimed at raising the general awareness of domestic violence and about the existing protection procedures.

Such activities are regularly included in the annual National Programmes for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence funded by the State budget (UN Human Rights Council, 2012). In addition, in 2013, a 4-year, 2 million euro Norway Grants programme was launched to address domestic and gender-based violence in Bulgaria through supporting the creation of a strong legal framework that ensures the protection of victims and enhances the capacity of professionals and relevant institutions in dealing with cases of such violence (Council of Europe, 2016).

Despite these steps taken over the last decade, violence against women, including domestic violence, remains widespread in Bulgaria (Council of Europe, 2016). The Gender Alternatives Foundation argues that domestic violence is treated as a private matter, and that protecting ‘family integrity’ is seen as more important than helping women who are affected. This, and the considerable barriers that women face when they try to bring cases of domestic violence, mean that they are rarely reported (Gender Alternatives Foundation, 2012). Fear of stigma and retaliation may also stop women from reporting violence, or make them more likely to seek help from friends or relatives than from the police (*idem*).

The Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation states that although domestic violence cases can be brought under the Criminal Code, this rarely happens. For instance, the Prosecutor’s Office in Sofia routinely redirects domestic violence cases to the Family Court, on the grounds that these are ‘family’ matters. In addition, Protection Orders are sometimes granted in cases where a criminal prosecution would be more appropriate. Cases are often investigated as one-off incidents, failing to take into account previous acts of violence and abuse. Police often underestimate the danger that a woman may be in, and fail to provide information on what legal options and support services may be available to her (Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, 2012). The Ministry of Interior Centre for specialisation and professional training (Pazardzhik) does, however, offer a one-week course on “Prevention and protection from domestic violence” (CEDAW, 2014).

c) Rape

The Criminal Code governs offences related to sexual violence (Articles 149-159), with Article 152 specifically criminalizing rape, but does not include marital rape. A wife can, however, file a complaint (Article 152). The constituent elements of rape under this provision are that the victim is “unable to defend herself and without her consent,” that the act is committed “by compelling her by force or threat,” and that the act renders her “into a helpless state” (Article 152). The word “force” and “threat” may be interpreted as implying physical force and physical resistance by the victim; also, the wording of Article 152 seems to suggest that one of the constitutive elements of this criminal offence is some degree of violence, threats of violence and/or the use of force (Council of Europe, 2016). The provision is not gender neutral, that is, rape can only be committed against a female person and the sexual act requires sexual intercourse, meaning that it must include a vaginal penetration with a bodily organ. In 2015, the provision that criminal proceedings would be dropped if the perpetrator marries the victim was repealed (Council of Europe, 2016). The penalties for rape are between two and eight years of imprisonment, rising to up to ten years if the victim is under the age of 16, in cases of incest, or if it is a second offence.

According to the Advocates for Human Rights, the laws on rape are inadequately implemented in practice, with prosecutors only willing to pursue cases when there is evidence that the victim has

fought back against the attacker (Council of Europe, 2016; US Department of State, 2016). Moreover, the social stigma attached to rape seems to constitute a barrier for many victims to come forward after being assaulted (Council of Europe, 2016).

d) Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is addressed under the Law on Protection against Discrimination (Article 5). The law includes civil remedies (Article 74). In theory, it is also possible to prosecute severe sexual harassment cases (involving coercing someone into sexual intercourse through exploiting a situation of material or official dependence) under the Criminal Code (Article 153); however, a report by the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation notes that no cases of sexual harassment have been brought under the Criminal Code (Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, 2012).

The Law on Protection against Discrimination covers sexual harassment in the workplace and in higher education institutions (Articles 17 and 31), but does not cover sporting establishments nor public places. The Criminal Code, after amendments for 2007, addresses cyber harassment (Articles 155 and 159). It defines sexual harassment as ‘any unwanted conduct of sexual character expressed physically, verbally or in any other manner, which violates the dignity or honour or creates hostile, degrading, humiliating or intimidating environment and, in particular when the refusal to accept such conduct or the compulsion thereto could influence the taking of decisions, affecting the person’.

The Law on Protection against Discrimination states that employers and directors of education institutions should impose sanctions and act to ensure the harassment is not repeated (Articles 17 and 31). Perpetrators of sexual harassment shall be fined by at least BGN 250 to 2 000 (Article 78). There is no effective mechanism in place to support women in making complaints of sexual harassment, nor in accessing legal and counselling support services, and there are no incentives for employers to take effective measures against sexual harassment in the workplace (Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, 2012). The state Commission for Protection against Discrimination is responsible for investigating cases of sexual harassment, but it does not have the legal expertise necessary to successfully pursue cases and is under-resourced (Gender Alternatives Foundation, 2012). Furthermore, the justice system has not been entirely sensitized on the law.

Women rarely report sexual harassment, because they fear losing their jobs and/or being blamed for having brought the harassment on themselves (Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, 2012). Other barriers include the negative attitudes of those within the judiciary, and the time it takes to bring a case to justice (US Department of State, 2016; Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, 2012). The law on sexual harassment is poorly implemented in practice, and does not provide effective protection for women experiencing sexual harassment (idem).

e) Female genital mutilation

There is no evidence to suggest that female genital mutilation is practised in Bulgaria.

f) Abortion

Abortion is available on request during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy if the abortion does not pose a danger to the woman’s health (Decree No. 2 of 1 February 1990 of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare). Between the twelfth and twentieth weeks of pregnancy, abortion is permitted only if the

woman is suffering from a proven, documented case of a disease that could endanger her life or the foetus', as determined by a special medical commission. After the twentieth week, abortion is permitted only if the woman's life is in danger or evidence is found of severe foetal impairment. Women do not require the approval of a medical practitioner or the approval of the father to seek a legal abortion. Up until the age of 18, women need the permission of a parent or guardian for an abortion (Decree No. 2 of 1 February 1990 of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare).

3. Restricted Access to productive and financial resources

a) Secure access to land and assets

Under the Land Ownership and Use Act and the Family Code, married and unmarried women have equal rights as men on land and non-land-assets, including ownership, use, decision-making power and use as collateral (CEDAW, 2011; The World Bank 2016). Land ownership and property rights are governed solely by civil law (CEDAW, 2011). The default marital property regime is partial community of property (Family Code, Arts. 19-20) and both spouses must agree on the administration of property (Family Code, Art. 22).

Bulgaria's Rural Development Programme (2014-2020) affirms the principle of equality between men and women and includes training activities aimed at improving rural women's technical expertise, in part as a response to the low percentage of rural women who own land. However, there is little information on the programme relative to promoting female entrepreneurship in agriculture (State Fund Agriculture/Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2017).

While women and men have equal rights in regard to land ownership, in practice, men are usually registered as the official owners of land (CEDAW, 2011). Roma women appear, in particular, to face frequent violations of their rights to property, along with other members of their communities, in the form of forced evictions, often to make way for new housing developments (Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2012).

b) Secure access to formal financial resources

Married and unmarried women have the same rights as men to access formal financial resources, including opening a bank account and obtaining credit (no restrictions found). The law specifically prohibits discrimination by creditors on the basis of gender or marital status in access to credit (Law on Protection against Discrimination, Article 37). It is, however, difficult for anyone working in agriculture to obtain credit, male or female, due to complicated and time-consuming procedures, and the need to provide collateral for loans (The World Bank, 2016; CEDAW, 2011). Traditional practices which see women's role as in the home as well as women's own self-perceptions and lack of information and training also discriminate against women's rights to obtain credit (Asanovich and Ananyeu, 2013; Burova and Yanchuk, 2014).

There are some international programmes and projects in Belarus which support women in business and female entrepreneurship, notably the 'Women in business' programme initiated by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 2016, which aims to improve access to finance and mentorship for women-run SMEs, providing credit lines, risk mitigation and technical assistance to partner financial institutions to improve the supply of financing.

c) Workplace rights

Bulgaria has ratified ILO Conventions 100, 111, 156 and 183, but not 189.

Women are protected from discrimination in employment under the Labour Code and the Law on Protections from Discrimination, as well as under the European Union Directives on gender equality in the workplace. Article 12 of the Law on Protections from Discrimination (PADA) lays down the principle of non-discrimination in the fields of job advertisements, selection criteria, recruitment, and hiring; Article 13 ensures the right to equal working conditions; Article 14 mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value; Article 15 covers training, assignments, and promotions; Articles 20 and 21 cover equal conditions for the termination of employment. Upon finding a discriminatory act, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination can impose coercive administrative measures and penal administrative sanctions. Coercive administrative measures are imposed according to Article 76 of the PADA and include: obligatory orders to employers or other staff to stop the discriminatory practices, as well as impeding the enforcement of unlawful decisions and orders of the employer that might lead to discrimination. Penal administrative sanctions are regulated in Articles 78-82 of the law and amount to fines and pecuniary sanctions for legal entities for identified acts of discrimination and breaches of the Anti-Discrimination Law. The basic sanctions range from BGN 250 to 2 000. Increased sanctions are provided for repeated acts of discrimination, and also for non-compliance with the decisions of the Equality body.

Pregnant women are entitled to 410 days of paid maternity leave, 45 of which must be taken before the birth of the child (Labour Code, Article 163). During maternity leave, the woman receives 90% of her wages (Social Insurance Code of Bulgaria, Article 49). The entirety of Maternity leave is financed through the state Public Insurance scheme (Social Insurance Code of Bulgaria, Articles 2, 18, 25). The law also mandates paternity leave of 15 days (Labour Code, Article 163), where 90% of wages are covered (Social Insurance Code, Article 50) by the government (Social Insurance Code, Article 2). Partially paid parental leave (Social Insurance Code, Article 53) of up to 365 days (Social Insurance Code, Article 164) is available and paid for by the government (Social Insurance Code, Article 2). The European Commission Gender Equality Country Report (2016), notes that parental leave continues to be predominantly used by mothers, which may create unbalance in family and professional life for both parents.

The Law on Protection against Discrimination ensures that mothers are guaranteed an equivalent position after maternity leave (Articles 13 and 15) and employers are prohibited from asking about a woman's pregnancy or her intention to have children during the recruitment or promotion process (Law on Protection against Discrimination, Articles 4 and 12).

While there are no restrictions on women working the same night hours as men, the law does prohibit women from entering certain professions (Ordinance No. 7 of 16 June 1993). For example, women cannot work in mining, construction, or metalworking in the same way as men. Women do not need permission from their husband or legal guardian to choose a profession (Family Code, Article 17).

The government generally enforces these laws effectively. According to the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the majority of discrimination complaints received throughout the year were related to employment, predominantly with regard to unfair treatment under collective bargaining

agreements. The government has funded programmes to encourage employers to overcome stereotypes and prejudice when hiring members of disadvantaged groups, such as women and persons with disabilities. There are, however, reports that some companies hire women only if they sign declarations that they will not become pregnant for at least two years. In addition, a wage-gap persists between men and women for work in the same positions (CEDAW 2012; US Department of State, 2016), and no specific legislative or policy measures have thus far been adopted to address the gender pay gap (European Commission, 2016) or to promote wage transparency. Moreover, there do not appear to be any penalties for companies who discriminate against women in recruitment and promotion. The CEDAW Committee (2012) has expressed concern over the increased rate of female unemployment, the exclusion of Roma women from the formal labour market, the lack of information on complaints related to labour discrimination based on sex, the low number of reported cases of sexual harassment, and the low number of men taking paternity leave.

4. Restricted Civil liberties

a) Citizenship rights

Married and unmarried women have the same rights as men to acquire, change, and retain their nationality. The same is true of conferring nationality to their children (Citizenship law, Article 8; Constitution of Bulgaria, Article 25). Married and unmarried women also have equal rights as men to register the birth of their children. The law requires the registration of all births within seven days without discriminating between boys and girls and birth registration rates are high (UNICEF, 2013; US State Department, 2016). Discriminatory practices do not seem to be an issue in relation to acquiring, changing, or retaining nationality, nor to conferring nationality, or registering the birth of a child.

Married and unmarried women have equal rights as men to apply for a passport and national ID card (Passport Application Procedures; Law for Bulgarian Identification Documents, Articles 16 and 18). To apply for a national ID card, applicants are required to fill out a form and provide a valid birth certificate if applying for the first time (ID cards are obligatory from the age of 14). Married and unmarried women have the same rights as men to travel outside the country (no restrictions located; The World Bank, 2016).

b) Voting

The Bulgarian legal framework provides women with equality with men in voting, irrespective of marital status (Constitution, Articles 10 and 42).

c) Political voice

Women and men have equal rights to hold public and political office in the legislature, executive and judiciary (Constitution, Articles 65, 93, and 110). However, neither the election laws nor the Political Parties Act provide for quotas for women in elected public positions (European Commission, 2016; CEDAW, 2011). Moreover, there are no temporary special measures, such as targeted recruitment and promotion, incentives and preferential allocation of funds, or generally efforts to encourage and promote participation of women in the electoral process (OCSE, 2017; CEDAW, 2012).

Women's involvement in electoral activities and presence in high and medium-level decision-making positions in the judiciary and within ministries is relatively high (OCSE, 2017; CEDAW, 2012). However, women, particularly Roma women, continue to be underrepresented at the municipal level, in the National Assembly, and in high-ranking posts in the diplomatic service. The CEDAW committee and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OCSE) have expressed concern over the lack of proactive and sustained measures taken to promote and accelerate an increase in such representation (OCSE 2017).

d) Access to justice

Married and unmarried women have the same capacity as men to sue and be sued. Furthermore, a married or unmarried woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's in all types of court cases including civil, criminal, family courts and tribunals (The World Bank, 2016; no restrictions found). While the Bulgarian legal framework does not provide for the creation and maintenance of courts/tribunals to facilitate women's and girl's access to justice, the Law on Protection against Discrimination (2004) introduced a system of sanctions and established a Commission for Protection against Discrimination (2005) as an independent body which reports to the National Assembly. This Commission appointed permanent panels, dealing amongst others with ethnic and racial discrimination and gender equality (European Commission, 2016; Article 47 of Law on Protection from Discrimination). The commission is not a body that deals specifically with the promotion, monitoring or analysis of equal treatment based on sex, but rather discrimination broadly, including sex.

More

The CEDAW committee notes the extremely limited information and statistics available on disadvantaged groups of women, such as women belonging to ethnic minorities, elderly women and women with disabilities. The CEDAW Committee furthermore expressed concern over the vulnerability and marginalization of such women, who often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination, especially with regard to access to education, employment, adequate housing and health care, protection from violence, access to justice and lack of information on the use of temporary special measures to improve their situation (CEDAW, 2012).

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