

# Country profile 2026: Bulgaria

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## Introduction

Bulgaria's digital landscape in 2025 showed a strong performance in infrastructure and sector growth alongside significant challenges in human capital and research investment. According to the [Digital Decade 2025: Country reports](#), the ICT sector is a major economic driver, contributing 7.4% to the national gross value added, which notably exceeds the EU average. A critical bottleneck for Bulgaria is its digital skills gap; only 35.5% of the population possesses basic digital skills, well below the EU average of 55.6%. This gap extends to public services, where only one-third of citizens use e-government tools due to limited online availability and exclusion in remote areas. Regarding public sentiment towards digitalisation, according to the [State of the Digital Decade Eurobarometer 2025](#), 84% want secure digital infrastructure prioritised, and 90% demand urgent action on online child safety. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan has allocated EUR 5.7 billion toward digital and green transitions. In relation to BIK topics, policy development is fragmented across different institutions, with initiatives and measures emerging within individual policy domains rather than under a unified strategic or governance framework led by a designated authority.

## BIK policies

### Policy frameworks

Policy frameworks describe the overarching goals that shape policies for a better internet for kids.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Policy priority			X	
Integrated policy			X	
Influence of the BIK+ strategy			X	
Recognition of children's rights			X	

*Table 1: Policy frameworks - Bulgaria*

- ***This topic is present in national/regional laws, regulations and policies, but it is not a priority.***
- ***This topic is covered by broader policies rather than in separate dedicated policies. Not all elements may be covered.***
- ***The BIK+ strategy informs national policies but is not the main influence.***
- ***Children's rights in the digital environment are implied rather than explicitly recognised in policies. While they are becoming more visible in national policies, but children's rights still lack explicit recognition within a dedicated legal framework***

### **Key developments and policy frameworks**

- The National Programme for the Prevention of Violence and Abuse against Children (2023–2026) that was adopted in 2023, with the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) designated as the coordinating authority, continued to be implemented in 2025. The programme aims to prevent violence and abuse against children, improve inter-institutional coordination, develop integrated support services for victims, strengthen the capacity of professionals working with children, establish unified data collection, and raise public awareness on child protection.
- An Action Plan for 2025–2026 has been adopted under the programme, defining concrete implementation steps. This provides a structured policy framework at the national level for the prevention, detection and response to child abuse, both offline and online.

- The national programme "Digital Bulgaria 2025" includes "Ensuring the rights of children in the digital environment" as a core goal. It moves beyond "implied" protection by setting specific targets for digital literacy and online safety.
- The Draft Strategy for the Digital Transformation of the Republic of Bulgaria 2026–2030 went into public consultation at the end of last year. Operational Objective 3 envisages as outcomes: improved child safety in the digital environment and increased awareness among children and parents regarding online risks; supported development of digital literacy and promotion of young people’s rights in the online environment through children’s active participation in building a safe digital culture; expanded access for children to online counselling and psychological support services; reduced opportunities for online abuse and more reliable protection for the most vulnerable users through measures to combat the sexual exploitation and abuse of children via computer systems; increased internet accessibility for children in a safe and secure environment, greater awareness of risks, and strengthened capacity of institutions and communities to prevent and protect children in the digital environment.
- By the end of 2025, there was an [active public debate](#) in Bulgaria regarding the restriction of access to social media for children below a certain age (e.g. under 15 years), driven by concerns related to mental health, addictive use patterns and exposure to harmful content.

## Policy design

Policy design asks whether evidence and research support BIK-related policies and whether systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating those policies.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Regular data collection			X	
Data on risks, harms, well-being		X		
Information systems			X	

National research fund	X
Monitoring and evaluation	X

Table 2: Policy design - Bulgaria

- **Surveys of children’s digital activities** are undertaken, but only irregularly.
- **Some but not all aspects of children’s experiences** of risks, harms and digital well-being are included in regular surveys.
- **Information to support policy development** is irregular and ad hoc.
- **There are occasional special initiatives** to gather evidence about children and the digital environment.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** are ad hoc, infrequent and not systematic.

### Key national research studies

- The most comprehensive benchmark source remains the [EU Kids Online survey \(2020\)](#), which provides detailed insights into children’s online behaviour and related risks and opportunities.
- In addition, civil society organisations and sectoral stakeholders contribute valuable evidence through ad-hoc studies, including surveys conducted by Roditeli.org (Parents Association) and [research initiatives by the Council for Electronic Media](#) that have addressed aspects of children’s digital engagement and safety.
- In 2025, the State Agency for Child Protection conducted [a large-scale survey](#) covering nearly 7,000 schoolchildren across major cities, documenting online behaviour, social network use, time spent online, experiences of uncomfortable online situations, and the incidence of online bullying.
- The [national Safer Internet Centre](#) is currently conducting an exploratory study to map levels of awareness, perceptions, and practices related to online behaviour and online bullying among students, teachers, parents, and institutions, which should serve as a basis for the development of

future policies affecting children's well-being online. The results of the research will be ready in Q1 2026.

- The SIC is also currently conducting a national self-assessment using the WeProtect Global Alliance “**Model National Response**” methodology, with funding support from UNICEF. This exercise provides a structured, cross-sectoral assessment of the national response to online child sexual exploitation and abuse, including aspects related to prevention, governance, victim support and the digital environment.

## Policy governance

Policy governance examines how policies are coordinated at the governmental level, whether other implementation bodies are involved in their delivery and coordination.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Lead ministry for policy development				X
National coordination body			X	
National action plan or strategy				X

*Table 3: Policy governance - Bulgaria*

- **There is no specific leadership** in policy development on this topic.
- **Policy coordination and implementation** are spread across multiple entities without a clear central coordination mandate or mechanism.
- **There is no action plan available** or under development.

## Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement enquires how different stakeholders can participate in policy development.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Stakeholder forum			X	
Public consultation on BIK topics				X
Youth involvement in policy		X		

*Table 4: Stakeholder involvement - Bulgaria*

- **Stakeholder participation** in policy discussion and development is infrequent or informal.
- **There are no formal mechanisms** or practices for consulting the public on BIK topics.
- **Children are listened to directly** in the policy development process but are not formally involved in decision-making.

### Stakeholder mechanisms

- A **Council of Children** operates under the Chair of the **State Agency for Child Protection** (SACP), composed of children from all administrative regions of Bulgaria. The Council functions as a national child advisory body, with members meeting under the coordination of SACP to discuss issues related to children’s rights and to issue opinions or messages.
- At the end of 2025, the **State Agency for Child Protection** (SACP) convened a special meeting of the national child advisory body, the **Council of Children**, dedicated to children's and young people's online safety, with a particular focus on emerging challenges related to artificial intelligence and social media.
- In Bulgaria, children and young people are directly listened to in policy processes through established participatory mechanisms, most notably the **Council of Children**, which provides a formal platform for expressing children’s views on issues affecting them. However, children are not formally involved in decision-making, and there are no dedicated structures to ensure their systematic participation in the development of policies on children’s digital activity or online safety.

## BIK+ actions

### Pillar 1 – Safe digital experiences

Actions to promote a safe, age-appropriate digital environment that respects children’s best interests.

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Content rating systems for online/video games	X			
DSC measures protection of minors		X		
DSC-SIC working relationship	X			
Definition of harmful online content	X			
Complaints handling mechanism	X			
Intimate image abuse laws	X			
Cyberbullying laws				X
Age verification requirements		X		
Digital wallet for minors		X		
EU harmonised age verification		X		
Laws on online marketing	X			
Protecting mental health and well-being	X			

Table 5: Safe digital experiences - Bulgaria

### Implementing EU laws

- On 6 November 2025, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted amendments to the [Electronic Communications Act \(ECA\)](#) to fully implement the Digital Services Act into the national legal framework. These amendments

entered into force on 25 November 2025 and complete the national implementation of the DSA.

- The [Communications Regulation Commission \(CRC\)](#) is confirmed as Bulgaria's national DSA Coordinator, granting it the authority and supervisory role under the DSA. This includes powers to supervise most intermediary service providers (excluding video-sharing platforms, which are supervised by the [Council for Electronic Media](#)), and to enforce DSA obligations at the national level.
- The main legal framework relevant to the classification of video and online games includes provisions in the [Electronic Commerce Act](#) and the [Consumer Protection Act](#) that require accurate product information, as well as references to age-appropriate labelling. PEGI is widely used in Bulgaria.
- The authority primarily responsible for enforcing consumer information requirements is the [Commission for Consumer Protection](#), with relevant competences also exercised by the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) in relation to online distribution and digital services.
- National authorities have engaged in inter-institutional discussions on issues closely linked to the DSA and child protection in the digital environment, including age verification, online platform responsibilities, and safeguards for minors. These discussions contribute to the gradual operationalisation of the DSA framework at the national level. In addition, the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) held a dedicated working meeting with the CRC on the implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) in Bulgaria, including discussions on the designation of trusted flaggers.
- There is a continuous working relationship between the Digital Services Coordinator and the national [Safer Internet Centre \(SIC\)](#). The cooperation is based on regular communication and the exchange of expertise, particularly on issues related to children's online safety, emerging risks in the digital environment, and the preparatory phase of implementing the Digital Services Act, including discussions on future cooperation mechanisms.

## Addressing online harms

- Under current Bulgarian and applicable EU law, there is no general, universal legal definition of “harmful online content” as a standalone concept. The regulatory framework operates with partial and functional categories, depending on the purpose of the regulation.
- In November 2025, [Europol](#) and the CENTRIC project launched [Help4U](#), a new digital platform designed to support children and adolescents facing sexual abuse and online threats. Bulgaria joined the initiative through the partnership of the Cybercrime Directorate of the General Directorate for Combating Organised Crime (GDBOP). The [Help4U](#) platform provides clear and structured guidance, including trusted advice, legal information and contacts with professionals, and is specifically adapted for children and young people under 18, using age-appropriate and accessible language.
- In 2025, the [State Agency for Child Protection](#) introduced new digital reporting tools as part of national prevention initiatives, aimed at lowering barriers for children to report violence and abuse, including in online contexts. The national campaign “Be Brave, Be Kind!”, launched in 2024 to combat violence against children, was continued in 2025. As part of the campaign, SACP introduced a new mobile application, Cyberkidz Patrol, designed to enable children to report violence or abuse they have experienced or witnessed.
- Cyberbullying continues to be addressed indirectly through existing legal provisions (e.g. harassment, threats, coercion, hate speech, discrimination) and through child protection and online safety policies, rather than through a dedicated legal framework.
- Preventive activities continued nationwide through school-based lectures and awareness-raising initiatives under the national preventive programme “[Protecting Young People from Crime](#)”, implemented for the third consecutive year with the involvement of cybercrime specialists. Law enforcement authorities also participated in multi-stakeholder forums and public events on combating online sexual abuse,

cyberbullying and trafficking in children, in cooperation with the [Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre](#) and civil society organisations.

### **Age assurance**

- Bulgaria does not currently have a comprehensive national law or policy mandating age assurance or age verification mechanisms to restrict minors' access to adult or age-restricted online content. However, during 2025, there were active policy discussions and proposals concerning the restriction of access to social media for children below a certain age (e.g. under 15 years), driven by concerns related to mental health, addictive use patterns and exposure to harmful content.
- In parallel, national authorities engaged in inter-institutional and EU-level discussions on age verification, including the potential future use of EU-level tools, such as the European Digital Identity Wallet, to support reliable age verification mechanisms. In 2025, the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) coordinated several working meetings with representatives of the European Commission, the Ministry of e-Government and the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC), focusing on age verification for children and the possibilities for its introduction in Bulgaria.

### **Supporting digital well-being**

- The national [Safer Internet Centre](#) (SIC), in partnership with A1 Bulgaria, has established a [Influencers](#) to develop ethical standards, raise awareness of responsible influencer behaviour, and encourage the creation of positive, age-appropriate content.
- In February 2025, the [Council for Electronic Media \(CEM\)](#), together with the National Council for Self-Regulation, organised the [first dedicated training for influencers](#) on the regulation and ethical standards of influencer marketing. The training covered advertising self-regulation, audiovisual content regulation, consumer and competition protection, and copyright, and was delivered with the support of key media, advertising and communications industry organisations.
- In December 2024 CEM adopted non-binding ["Recommendations on Screen Time for Children and Guidelines for the Use of Media and Online](#)

**Content**". The recommendations aim to support parents and children in balancing screen use, raising media literacy and mitigating risks related to excessive screen time, including impacts on mental health, well-being and social development.

## Pillar 2 – Digital empowerment

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Teaching online safety	X			
Digital skills training	X			
Policies on digital use in schools	X			
Adequate teacher training	X			
Non-formal online safety education	X			
Critical media literacy	X			
Creative digital skills	X			
Supports for parents				X

*Table 6: Digital empowerment - Bulgaria*

### Digital empowerment in formal education

- Online safety education has been integrated into the national curriculum as part of broader digital literacy and citizenship programmes.
- Children’s digital creativity is supported within the formal education system through curriculum components that promote digital content creation, coding, multimedia work and problem-solving, delivered across subjects such as Information Technologies and Computer Modelling.
- The **Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre (SIC)** also conducts educational programmes on respectful online communication and responsible digital engagement, integrated into school activities. Through awareness campaigns like Safer Internet Day, Teacher-Leader in the Digital Era,

and Back to School, SIC reached thousands of children, parents, and educators with key messages on online safety. The [Cyberscouts Programme](#) trained children aged 11-13 to educate their peers on digital risks, fostering a youth-led approach to online safety.

- [UNICEF and FANTASTICO's Steps Together](#) initiative aims to enhance children's online safety and digital literacy by reaching 2,000 children, including those outside the formal education system. The programme focuses on teaching safe online practices, addressing hate speech, and identifying fake news. Additionally, it plans to train 500 education specialists and 300 parents on digital literacy and online safety, ensuring a supportive environment for children's digital education.

### ***Digital empowerment and lifelong learning***

- The [Media Literacy Coalition](#) in Bulgaria is a prominent non-profit organisation established in 2017, which serves as a central hub for experts, journalists, and educators dedicated to improving how Bulgarian citizens consume, analyse, and create media content. Regarding lifelong learning, the coalition is the leading organisation developing and implementing media literacy training programmes for older adults.
- In 2024, at the initiative of the [Council for Electronic Media \(CEM\)](#), a national audio and audiovisual awareness campaign entitled "[Check before you trust](#)" was implemented, focusing on media literacy, disinformation, online fraud and cyberbullying. The campaign was broadcast widely through public and commercial media, including Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) and Bulgarian National Television (BNT).
- Civil society initiatives also contribute to combatting disinformation and strengthening media literacy. The [Engaging Youth in Countering Disinformation](#) programme implemented by [Partners Bulgaria Foundation](#) aims to increase young people's skills to spot and counter disinformation and misinformation, through educational materials, youth workshops and tools for critical analysis of online content.
- Regarding support for parents, the Parents' Association, which coordinates the EU-funded Digital Children projects related to the National Centre for Safe Internet (the Bulgarian SIC), has been

supporting parents for years through training sessions, parent meetings, educational materials, and more.

- Parent-focused support, beyond the activities of the SIC, has been provided through initiatives such as the “Steps Together” programme, implemented with the support of UNICEF and in cooperation with schools, local authorities and civil society partners. Within this framework, parents have been engaged through training sessions, awareness activities, and practical resources that address online safety, digital parenting, and children’s well-being in the digital environment.

### Pillar 3 – Active participation, respecting children’s rights

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Promoting civic engagement	X			
Promoting children's rights	X			
Child-friendly policy documents	X			
Addressing digital inequalities	X			
Positive digital content	X			

*Table 7: Active participation, respecting rights - Bulgaria*

#### Active participation

- The Council of Children to the Chair of the State Agency for Child Protection continues to function as a formal consultative mechanism, providing children and young people with opportunities to express views and contribute to discussions on policies affecting their rights and well-being, including issues related to the digital environment.
- Activities under the National Programme for the Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children (2023–2026) have progressed according to plan, continuing to address children’s rights and protection in both offline and online contexts.

### ***Addressing digital inequalities***

- The **Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)** aims to bridge the digital divide, strengthen digital inclusion, and enhance digital literacy, ensuring equal access to digital technologies for all citizens, including marginalised groups.
- Ongoing challenges remain, particularly regarding regional disparities between urban and rural areas, differences in school-level capacity, and the need for additional targeted support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, indicating that addressing digital inequalities continues to require sustained policy attention.
- Key efforts continue within the framework of the National Strategic Document “**Digital Transformation of Bulgaria for the period 2024–2030**”, adopted by the Council of Ministers. The strategy sets out objectives related to digital inclusion, digital literacy and equal access to digital technologies, including for children and young people from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, in line with the EU Digital Decade targets.

## Best practices

### Example 1

#### ***Interactive Online Safety Lessons for Schools (developed in cooperation with Bulgarian SIC, publication company Klett/IZZI, telecom Yettel)***

The Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre (SIC), in partnership with the educational publisher Klett Bulgaria/IZZI and Yettel Bulgaria, has developed and implemented a comprehensive online safety programme for children comprising 12 interactive e-lessons for children from Grade 1 to Grade 10. Delivered over three consecutive school years, the initiative provides age-appropriate, curriculum-compatible digital lessons that address online safety, digital media literacy, responsible online behaviour, protection against online risks, and emerging challenges in the digital environment.

The lessons are designed as a practical instrument for teachers and parents, enabling easy integration into classroom activities and home learning. The programme has national coverage and supports consistent delivery of online safety education and skills development across all school levels. Its user-friendly, modular structure, pedagogical quality and public-private partnership model make it a scalable and transferable practice worth sharing with other countries.

### Example 2

#### ***School for Responsible Influencers (Bulgarian SIC & Telecom A1 Bulgaria)***

In 2025, the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre (SIC), in partnership with A1 Bulgaria, implemented the **School for Responsible Influencers** – an innovative national initiative aimed at promoting ethical standards, transparency and positive content creation among influencers and digital content creators whose audiences include children and young people. The programme addresses risks related to influencer marketing, hidden advertising, harmful content, and online pressure, while raising awareness of influencers' responsibility for children's rights, mental well-being, and safe online participation.

The **School for Responsible Influencers** consists of six structured learning modules, and influencers who successfully complete all modules receive an “Ethical Influencer” certificate, recognising their commitment to responsible content creation. In parallel, the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre continued its broader school-based awareness-raising activities, delivering over 50 training sessions for children and young people on online safety, positive online participation, and critical engagement with digital content. By combining education, certification and self-regulatory approaches, the initiative represents a forward-looking practice worth sharing that responds to emerging digital risks and complements regulatory efforts.

### Example 3

#### ***National Council for Child Protection (Governance, Coordination and Civil Society Engagement)***

The **National Council for Child Protection** is an inter-institutional advisory and coordination body attached to the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP), bringing together deputy ministers and senior representatives from all key ministries and national institutions responsible for child protection, alongside representatives of all key ministries and national institutions responsible for child protection, alongside representatives of civil society organisations active in the field.

The Council plays a key role in ensuring coordination, transparency and dialogue between government authorities and non-governmental actors in the development and implementation of child-related policies. It advises on national strategies and programmes, provides opinions on draft legislation affecting children’s rights prior to submission to the Council of Ministers, and supports the alignment of policies with EU priorities. By enabling structured participation of civil society and facilitating regular exchange between public authorities and NGOs, the Council ensures that the voice of the civil society sector is heard and contributes to more inclusive and coherent policy-making, including on issues related to children’s rights in the digital environment.

## BIK+ index 2026: Bulgaria

The BIK+ index has been developed to provide an aggregated at-a-glance overview of the levels of implementation across the two dimensions, BIK policies and BIK+ actions, in Bulgaria compared to the EU27+2 average. Values are shown in per cent.

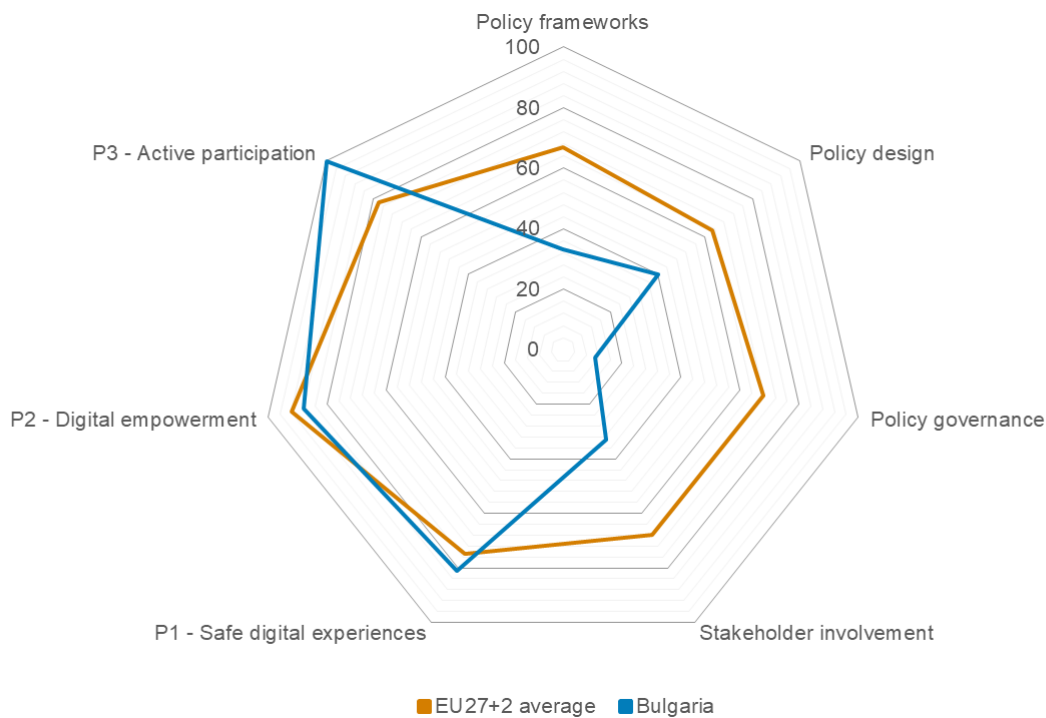


Figure 1: BIK+ index 2026: Bulgaria - EU27+2 average comparison