



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

9 June 2024

ODIHR Election Expert Team
Final Report



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REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
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ODIHR Election Expert Team Final Report¹

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an invitation from the authorities of the Republic of Bulgaria, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Expert Team (EET) for the 9 June early parliamentary elections. The ODIHR EET assessed the compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as with national legislation.

The 9 June early parliamentary elections were competitive, with the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association respected. However, elections took place amid declining public trust in state institutions and strong antagonism among the major political forces. The election administration managed the organizational and technical aspects of the preparations adequately and complied with legal deadlines, however a number of malpractices limited meaningful access to the electoral process and to information of public interest, at odds with international good practice and decreasing the overall transparency.

The current legislation provides overall an adequate framework for the conduct of democratic and transparent elections. No changes were made to the electoral legal framework since the last parliamentary elections, and a number of previous ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including on the disenfranchisement of prisoners and persons under guardianship, lack of provisions to promote of women and persons belonging to minorities, and the inability of contestants to directly challenge election results.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) organized the technical and logistical requirements of the electoral process in a professional and effective manner. The CEC held regular live-streamed sessions; however, contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation and in violation of the law, the livestream's audio was often muted and substantial discussions were held outside of public sessions. Concerns were raised about the CEC's lack of a comprehensive mechanism to handle election-related inquiries, leaving some questions, including from lower-level commissions and contestants unaddressed. While the CEC has a training unit, no standardized, user-friendly or interactive training materials were developed, at odds with international good practice. The replacement of PEC members, until and on election day, challenged the election administration's stability and risked the integrity of and public confidence in election day procedures.

The legislation retains restrictions on suffrage rights for those deprived of legal capacity by a final court decision, including those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, as well as those serving a prison sentence, irrespective of the gravity of the crime, at odds with international standards. Despite persistent allegations that the voter register is inflated with voters who *de facto* reside abroad, no other major concerns regarding voter registration were brought to the attention of the ODIHR EET. Political parties did not express any concern related to candidate registration.

ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed no particular concern about the campaign regulatory framework. Contestants were able to convey their platforms to voters and compete on a level playing field, overall. Many opined that the campaign was not based on discussions of policy issues, but rather on releasing

¹ The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial translation is available in Bulgarian.

damaging information about political contestants. Political instability, election fatigue and ensuing concerns about low turnout shaped the political discourse.

Most parties' programmes largely overlooked issues related to the rights of politically-underrepresented groups, such as women, persons belonging to minorities, and persons with disabilities. There are no special legislative measures to promote women's participation, while certain stereotypes about women in politics persist and they are often verbally attacked and stigmatized, particularly women from minority communities. Women comprised some 30 per cent of candidates, and remain underrepresented with some 27 per cent of mandates in the newly elected parliament. Campaign messages often remained inaccessible for individuals with visual or hearing impairments. The public debate on vote-buying tends to falsely portray Roma as the source of the problem, thus reinforcing intolerance and negative stereotypes. Some measures taken by the authorities to tackle alleged vote-buying could have adversely affected campaigning or voting in Roma neighbourhoods.

The campaign finance legislation is comprehensive and most ODIHR EET interlocutors had no major concerns. Nevertheless, most prior ODIHR recommendations on the oversight of campaign financing remain unaddressed. The National Audit Office (NAO) cross-checks the information provided by media outlets with the information reported by contestants but is not required to identify unreported transactions, which potentially weakening the NAO's oversight role and its capacity to ascertain actual campaign spending. Many ODIHR interlocutors expressed concern about the dominance of money in politics, often with unknown sources of financing. The NAO has six months to complete the auditing process on contestant accounts but there is no deadline for publishing its findings, at odds with international good practice.

The media landscape is vibrant with a wide range of broadcast and print media. ODIHR EET interlocutors highlighted a persistent issue of inadequate implementation of media ownership regulations. The legislation guarantees sufficient safeguards for the freedom of expression and the right to information. Defamation remains a crime, contrary to international standards and despite previous ODIHR recommendations, although fines for defaming public officials have been reduced. Independent media and journalists investigating crime and corruption are often vulnerable to abusive litigation. ODIHR EET interlocutors did not report any issues regarding access to the media, although some noted that the requirement for equal participation could hinder meaningful coverage.

The election dispute resolution system generally enjoyed the confidence of stakeholders. The CEC addressed complaints during its sessions and published those in an online register of complaints. Election results can only be contested in the Constitutional Court. Contrary to international standards and good practice, contestants cannot directly challenge the election results to the Court, leaving them without effective and direct legal remedy.

In line with ODIHR's methodology, the EET did not carry out a systematic or comprehensive election-day observation but visited a limited number of polling stations. The election day was calm and voting in the visited polling stations was generally well-organized. However, a number of complex procedural elements, serving as safeguards against electoral fraud, led to a lengthy voting process. The ODIHR EET was denied access to the CEC premises on election night, but was able to observe the tabulation at the DEC level. A significant number of PEC protocols that the ODIHR EET reviewed contained corrections and mismatches. On 11 June, the CEC announced a final turnout of 34.41 per cent.

This report offers a number of recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in Bulgaria closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations focus on the need to increase the transparency and accountability of the CEC, to enhance the implementation of the CEC's mandate and improve its efforts in the field of voter education and training, to promptly and effectively address allegations of vote-buying, to take

legislative measures to protect journalists and media workers from abusive court proceedings, and to allow for individual challenges to the election results. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following an invitation from the authorities of the Republic of Bulgaria and based on the findings and conclusions of a Needs Assessment Mission conducted from 23 to 25 April, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Expert Team (EET) to observe the 9 June early parliamentary elections.² The ODIHR EET consisted of four experts drawn from four OSCE participating States. The EET was based in Sofia.

The electoral process was assessed for compliance with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and with national legislation. In line with ODIHR's methodology, the EET did not observe election-day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner but visited a limited number of polling stations.

The ODIHR EET wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for their co-operation and assistance, as well as to express gratitude to representatives of other state institutions, judicial bodies, election commissions at all levels, political parties, candidates, media, civil society, and other interlocutors for sharing their views.

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The 9 June 2024 early parliamentary elections were the sixth parliamentary elections held in the country since 2021. Six parties and coalitions entered the parliament after the 2023 early elections, with the Coalition of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria, the Union of Democratic Forces (GERB-SDS) and We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB) forming a coalition government.³ The coalition agreement was a result of several months of post-election negotiations and envisaged a rotating model of government with the cabinet changing every nine months.

In December 2023, the parliament approved a set of constitutional amendments which aimed, among other goals, to achieve a solution to the recurring parliamentary crises and limiting the president's discretion in appointing a caretaker prime minister. The parliamentary opposition and the civil society representatives criticized the process as rushed and lacking transparency. In March 2024, nine months after the appointment, the cabinet led by Nikolai Denkov (PP-DB) resigned. Following a few weeks of negotiations, the GERB-SDS proposed a new government led by Mariya Gabriel, which was rejected by the PP-DB. Subsequently, Ms. Gabriel notified the president and the parliament that the new cabinet could not be formed with the first mandate, and the PP-DB subsequently returned the mandate. On 9 April, a caretaker government, headed by Dimitar Glavchev was sworn in and early parliamentary elections were called for 9 June, concurrently with the European Parliament elections.⁴

² See [previous ODIHR reports on Bulgaria](#).

³ GERB-SDS received 69 seats, PP-DB 64, Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) 36, *Vazrazhdane* (Revival) 37, BSP for Bulgaria 23, and There is Such a People (ITN) 11 mandates.

⁴ According to the constitutional amendments, a caretaker prime minister shall be appointed from among the President of the National Assembly, the Governor or Deputy Governor of the Bulgarian National Bank, the President or Deputy President of the National Audit Office and the Ombudsperson or his/her deputy. Initially, the position was offered to the Governor of the National Bank and Ombudsperson; both of whom declined for various reasons. Subsequently, it was offered to the President of the National Audit Office, Mr. Glavchev.

The political landscape is fragmented, lacking stability and trust among political forces, and currently characterised by disillusionment with politics and voter fatigue following numerous elections within a short period of time. The elections took place against a backdrop of declining public trust in state institutions. A lack of fair and transparent rules for the appointment of regulators, free of political influence remained a contentious issue.⁵ ODIHR EET interlocutors and international organizations have raised concerns related to allegations of political corruption, organized crime, and inadequate judicial and anti-corruption reform efforts.⁶ The lack of effective criminal investigation of the Prosecutor General and his/her deputies had been a long-standing issue, which was raised by the European Commission, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Council of Europe.⁷

Women are underrepresented in political life. In the outgoing parliament, women held 61 of 240 seats (25.4 per cent) while in the newly elected parliament, women candidates gained 64 (26.7 per cent) seats including the Speaker and a deputy speaker.⁸ In the last government, 4 of 18 ministerial posts were held by women. There are 6 women among the 12 justices of the Constitutional Court. There are no special legislative measures to promote women's participation. According to ODIHR EET interlocutors, certain stereotypes about women in politics exist and they are often targeted and stigmatized (see also *Election Campaign*).

To enhance women's participation in political life, institutions, political parties and other stakeholders should increase efforts to address existing gender stereotypes and reduce the gender gap both through regulatory measures and advocacy.

IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The 240-member National Assembly (parliament) is elected for a four-year term under a proportional representation system in 31 multi-member constituencies which correspond to 26 administrative districts in addition to 3 districts in Sofia and 2 in Plovdiv.⁹ The number of seats in each constituency is based on the latest census but must comprise at least four seats. The threshold for parties and coalitions is four percent of the valid votes cast nationwide and abroad, whereas independent candidates must surpass the constituency quota.¹⁰ Voters can mark a preference for one candidate in open lists; when no such preference is indicated the vote goes to the candidate listed in the top position.¹¹

⁵ The mandates of about 20 regulatory institutions have expired but new representatives have stalled due to a lack of political agreement. Key positions affected include 5 members of Supreme Judicial Council, 6 members of Supreme Prosecutorial Council, 2 deputy chairpersons and 2 members of the National Audit Office, chief inspector and 10 inspectors of Inspectorate with the Supreme Judicial Council, 5 members including chairperson and deputy chairperson of the Commission for the Protection against Discrimination and 3 members of Anti-Corruption Commissions. Some positions are vacant for about two years. Only the Constitutional Court, the Council for Electronic Media and the Central Election Commission operate currently with fully serving members. Some ODIHR EET interlocutors claimed that GERB and DPS prefer appointments based on party quotas rather than merits.

⁶ In the [2022 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International](#), Bulgaria scored 43/100, ranking 26th in the European Union and 72nd globally. The [2023 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption](#) shows that 81 per cent of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 70 per cent) and 29 per cent feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 24 per cent).

⁷ See [Progress report Bulgaria 2019, COM\(2019\)498](#).

⁸ See 2024 [Inter-parliamentary Union data](#) on women in the Bulgarian parliament.

⁹ By law, the president must define the constituencies' names, numbers and boundaries no later than 56 days before election day, and for these elections, it was done on 9 April 2024.

¹⁰ The constituency electoral quota is calculated by dividing the number of valid votes cast by the number of seats in a given constituency.

¹¹ To obtain a preferential seat, a candidate must receive at least seven per cent of the votes cast for the respective list in the constituency.

The legal framework for parliamentary elections consists of the 1991 Constitution, and the 2014 Election Code, the 2005 Political Parties Act as well as regulations of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Provisions related to resolving electoral disputes are also included in the 2006 Code of Administrative Procedure, the 1969 Administrative Violations and Penalties Act, and the 1968 Criminal Code which lists election offences. Bulgaria is a party to the main international instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.¹²

Overall, the current legislation provides an adequate framework for the conduct of democratic and transparent elections. The electoral legal framework has not changed since the last parliamentary elections.¹³ A number of ODIHR recommendations therefore remain unaddressed, including on provisions for the participation of women and persons belonging to minorities, the possibility for contestants to challenge election results, and voting rights for prisoners and persons under guardianship.

In December 2023, Bulgaria enacted substantial constitutional amendments, mostly related to the judicial system but including a number of changes to certain electoral policies.¹⁴ In line with previous ODIHR recommendations, the amendments removed the prohibition for dual citizens to stand for the parliamentary elections.¹⁵ At the same time, the amendments introduced a residency requirement of 18 months for candidates with dual citizenship, at odds with international standards.¹⁶ The amendments also defined the role of the caretaker government to ensure that “free and fair” elections are held no later than two months following its appointment. The president’s discretion to appoint a caretaker prime minister was curtailed by narrowing the choice for the prime minister’s post to a limited pool of candidates.¹⁷ Following the amendment, the parliament is not dissolved until a newly elected parliament is constituted.

¹² Including the [1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), [the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#), [the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), [the 2003 Convention against Corruption](#), [the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), and [the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights](#). Bulgaria is a member of the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) since 1999 and of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) since 1992. Bulgaria ratified the [2005 Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities \(FCNM\)](#) in May 1999, which expressing the following reservation: “the ratification and implementation...do not imply any right to engage in any activity violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the unitary Bulgarian State, its internal and international security”.

¹³ The Election Code has undergone several amendments since its adoption., most recently in December 2022.

¹⁴ The changes introduced to the judicial system reduced the term of office of the prosecutor general from 7 to 5 years and decreased the number of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) members from 25 to 15. Two councils for the administration of justice were established: the Supreme Judicial Council for judges and the Supreme Prosecutorial Council (SPC) for prosecutors. Chairpersons of the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Administrative Court and the Prosecutor General are appointed by the president upon the proposals by the SJC and SPC, respectively. In March 2024, the president and members of parliament (MPs) challenged certain amendments to the Constitutional Court which at the time of writing this report has yet to render a decision.

¹⁵ See the Venice Commission’s [2023 Opinion on the Draft Amendments to the Constitution](#). The restriction on the right to stand for dual citizens has been preserved for the presidential candidates.

¹⁶ Paragraph 15 of the [UN Human Rights Committee \(CCPR\) General Comment No. 25 on Article 25 of the ICCPR](#) states that “any restrictions on the right to stand for election, such as minimum age, must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria. Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation.” See also paragraph 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) and section I.1.1.c.iii.and 1.1.iv of the Venice Commission’s 2002 [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#).

¹⁷ Previously, after consulting with parliamentary groups, the president ought to appoint a caretaker prime minister nominated by the party with the most seats in the parliament. The president challenged amendments affecting dual citizenship and his powers claiming that parliamentary procedures, including voting timeframes and quorum requirements were not respected. He also argued that substantial changes were introduced between the first and the second readings. The president opined that the parliament lacked the authority to restrict the presidential powers and that the Grand National Assembly should have been convened in accordance with the Article 158 (3) of the Constitution. In January 2024, 48 MPs from Revival and There are Such a People (ITN) appealed to the Constitutional Court arguing that the amendments violated fundamental constitutional principles such as sovereignty, separation of powers and the rule of law.

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections were administered by a three-level structure of election commissions, led by the CEC and comprising 31 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 12,972 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).¹⁸

The CEC is a permanent body composed of 15 members appointed for a five-year term. Eight CEC members, including the chairperson, one deputy-chairperson and the secretary are women. Its current composition was established in May 2021. By law, the CEC should proportionally reflect the composition of the parliament, however due to a series of early elections some parties represented in the outgoing parliament were either not represented in the CEC, or their representation did not correspond to the number of seats in the parliament.¹⁹

The DECs and PECs are appointed for each election by the respective upper-level commissions following consultations among the nominating parties and coalitions within their constituency or municipality.²⁰ Only in 6 out of 31 DECs did nominating parties reach an agreement on DEC composition, subsequently approved by the CEC. Several ODIHR EET interlocutors opined that these decisions were politically aligned and only one DEC was chaired by an opposition nominee. The CEC did not aggregate data on lower-level commissions, including gender breakdown or nominating entities. According to the data that the ODIHR EET compiled from the CEC website, women comprised 58 per cent of DEC members, including almost 70 per cent in leadership positions.

Despite prior ODIHR recommendations, the replacement of PEC members, allowed until and on election day, remained a significant challenge for the stability and performance of the election administration. Unlike the nominees for DEC membership, potential PEC members are not required to provide consent. This discrepancy often led to parties submitting *pro forma* lists of their nominations with the intention of replacing them later with individuals willing to work in the PEC. The late replacements undermined the election administration's stability, diminished the value and impact of the training provided and risked the integrity of election day procedures.

The replacement of election commission members without justification or after a reasonable deadline prior to election day should not be permitted. As with District Election Commission members, Precinct Election Commission member nominations should require the consent of the nominees. The Central Election Commission could consider creating a roster of trained and experienced election administrators to facilitate replacements.

The election administration managed the organizational and technical aspects of preparations adequately, meeting legal deadlines despite the overlapping schedules of the European Parliament elections and the 23 June partial local elections. Many ODIHR EET interlocutors noted that the CEC managed the process well given the unchanged legal framework and the timing of the European

¹⁸ Election commissions at all levels are supported by various central and local government institutions, including, the Directorate General of Civil Registration and Administrative Services (GRAO) of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of e-Government, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the municipalities.

¹⁹ [The civil initiative "Open Parliament" analysis show that](#) the PP-DB was entitled to four members instead of two, the Revival party to two while they had none, the BSP to two instead of three, Raise-Up! should have none, but has one and the ITN should have one member instead of three.

²⁰ DECs have either 13 or 17 members, depending on the number of parliamentary mandates in the constituency. PECs have from five to nine members, depending on the number of registered voters. By law, several polling stations within each constituency should be accessible for voters with visual impairments and reduced mobility. DECs could also establish so called "mobile PECs", based on the request from low-mobility and homebound voters, usually one per municipality.

Parliament elections, which allowed for improved planning and preparations for the early parliamentary elections.

The CEC held regular, live-streamed sessions, with recordings made available online, overall enhancing transparency. However, contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation and despite legal requirements, substantial discussions occurred outside of public sessions, the livestream audio was often muted, and documentation considered during the sessions was not publicly available in advance and was only partially accessible afterwards.²¹ The CEC website presented information in a non-user-friendly format, limiting its usability.²² The relocation of the parliamentary plenaries to the CEC building made attending sessions more difficult due to the additional security clearance and pre-approval requirements. These factors limited meaningful access to the important aspect of the electoral process and information of public interest, decreasing the overall transparency, at odds with international good practice.²³

To increase its transparency and accountability, the Central Election Commission should ensure that it provides election stakeholders with meaningful access to all aspects of the electoral process, including advance publication of session materials, uninterrupted broadcast of its sessions and working group meetings, and access to its premises.

The law requires the CEC to conduct voter awareness campaigns. The CEC produced and broadcast voter education materials, primarily covering voter registration and voting procedures, which were also posted on its web-site. However, the voter education was not comprehensive and did not cover important aspects of the process.²⁴ Some ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed concerns about the CEC's lack of a system to provide comprehensive election information and respond to election-related inquiries. Consequently, some questions, including those from lower-level election commissions and contestants, remained unaddressed. The ODIHR EET observed several instances where CEC did not address stakeholders' requests for clarification on ambiguous or unclear legal provisions, citing that it was not within their purview.²⁵

DECs and municipalities are responsible for training the PECs. The ODIHR EET was informed that in the absence of a mandatory training requirement, a payment was provided for attendance to encourage participation.²⁶ While the CEC has a training unit, with the exception of lengthy methodological

²¹ Article 54. (1) of the Election Code states that “the sessions of the Central Election Commission, including work meetings, shall be broadcasted with sound and image in real time online via the website of the Commission.”

²² Paragraph 19 of the [UN CCPR General Comment on Article 34 of the ICCPR](#) provides that “States parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest. States parties should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information”.

²³ Paragraph 45 of the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018 Guidelines on the Right to Participate in Public Affairs](#) states that “electoral management bodies should be able to function independently and impartially, irrespective of their composition. Such bodies should be open, transparent and maximally consultative in their decision-making and provide access to relevant information for all stakeholders”.

²⁴ Paragraph 11 of [CCPR General Comment No. 25 on Article 25](#) states that “States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right... Voter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of article 25 rights by an informed community”.

²⁵ For example, when asked for guidance on the standards for the voting screens, the CEC stated that it could not provide such guidance as it was not foreseen by the law. On 4 June, CEC considered four questions from a party about the presence of party representatives and observers on election day. The CEC noted during the session that the answers to all questions were already available in previous CEC decisions and thus decided to leave the inquiry without a response. Another inquiry was received from a citizen about not using declarations for proxy registration and whether scanned copies were valid. This inquiry was also not addressed by the CEC. According to Article 57 of the Election Code, the CEC is responsible for overseeing the application of the election code and related regulations and providing methodological guidance to election commissions.

²⁶ PEC members who participated in training received an additional 20 BGN on top of average 250 BGN basic remuneration. 1 EUR is approximately 1.95 Bulgarian Lev (BGN). Additional payments were envisaged for taking part in pre-election day preparations, transferring the election materials and protocols to the DEC and other activities.

guidelines and an online results' protocol simulator, no standardized, user-friendly or interactive training materials were developed, at odds with international good practice.²⁷

To enhance the implementation of its mandate, the Central Election Commission should comprehensively employ its regulatory functions and improve its efforts in the field of voter education and training.

VI. USE OF TECHNOLOGIES

Various election technologies were used in these elections, including touchscreen voting machines in all polling stations with at least 300 registered voters, result management system for tabulating election results and the video monitoring of the counting process at the polling stations.²⁸ The ODIHR EET noted that the use of technologies was less controversial during these elections. Interlocutors attributed this to early procurement and preparations, which coincided with planning for the regularly scheduled elections to the European Parliament. The absence of last-minute changes allowed for earlier certification, configuration and testing of those systems.²⁹

The state-owned company, Information Services (IS), managed the processing of voting results and video monitoring of the count. Prior to election day, IS conducted a public demonstration these systems. The CEC-contracted experts inspected the software of the results management system, but neither the inspection nor its outcome were disclosed.³⁰ The IS argued that certification and verification were unnecessary as it was not required by law, the software processed open data, and security was ensured through a closed network. No other measures were implemented to ensure the integrity, authenticity, or transparency of these solutions, and there was no independent evaluation prior to implementation, at odds with international good practice.³¹

Considerations could be given to conducting independent verification and certification of information and communication technology-based systems to ensure confidence in the process.

VII. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote. Despite previous ODIHR recommendation and the 2022 Constitutional Court decision, the legislation retains restrictions on suffrage rights for those deprived of legal capacity by a final court decision, including those with intellectual or psychosocial

²⁷ Paragraph 48 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “simple tried and tested procedure should be set out in the legislation or permanent regulations which appear in the training manual for polling station officials”. Paragraph 84 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “members of electoral commissions have to receive standardized training at all levels of the election administration”.

²⁸ A total of 9,346 machines in the country and 245 abroad (one per PS) were used. Voters could choose to vote with paper ballot or the machine. According to the CEC instructions, if the voters decided to vote only in one type of elections (parliamentary or the European Parliament) they had to vote with paper ballot.

²⁹ The certification of voting machines was completed in 10 working days instead of 20 days envisaged by the law.

³⁰ On 7 May, the ODIHR EET requested additional information from the CEC regarding this verification. On 18 June, the CEC responded, without providing requested documentation, that the results management systems' software and documentation, along with other components and guidelines, were inspected in line with the contract with the IS. The CEC-contracted experts concluded that products under review “are sufficient for setting up tabulation points on computers with pre-prepared operating systems and there are no indications of external interference in the files of the software package”. The experts also recommended “to ensure its proper storage to guarantee the security of the election process amid the risk of malicious exploration of potential vulnerabilities given the importance of this software product, which is not an open source”.

³¹ See paragraphs 4, 7 and 8 of the [2022 Council of Europe's Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology \(ICT\) in the electoral processes](#).

disabilities, as well as those serving a prison sentence, irrespective of the gravity of the crime, at odds with international commitments and standards.³²

The voter registration system is passive. Before each election, municipal administrations, that maintain voter registers on a permanent basis, compile voter lists using the data extracted from the permanent and continuously updated population register maintained by the Directorate General of Civil Registration and Administrative Services (GRAO) of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. All eligible voters with a permanent address in Bulgaria are automatically added to the voter lists.

Several ODIHR EET interlocutors expressed concerns about the disenfranchisement of voters, particularly Roma, who face administrative challenges in obtaining or renewing identity documents tied to registered addresses.³³ According to some reports, up to 245,000 citizens were disenfranchised for these reasons, contrary to international commitments.³⁴

The law provides for a public display of preliminary voter lists, but does not specify uniform placement requirements.³⁵ Without clear legal provisions or CEC guidance, the lists were placed in various locations, including community centres, libraries, as well as abandoned cafes and shops, and party offices. Voters can request inclusion or correction of their information in voter lists up to seven days before election day. Mayors must review these requests within two days, with any approved changes published on the municipality's website. Voters can appeal the mayor's decision to the respective Administrative Court within two days of its adoption, and the Court is obligated to review the case within two days of receiving the appeal, and its ruling is final. The final voter list included 6,593,275 voters. While many ODIHR EET interlocutors described the voter register as inflated due to voters who *de facto* reside abroad, no other major concerns were raised.

VIII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Eligible voters of at least 21 years of age have the right to stand. In line with prior ODIHR recommendations, the recent constitutional amendments granted citizens with dual citizenship the right

³² In response to the government's request to interpret Article 42(1) of the Constitution, the Court ruled on 18 October 2022 that implementing ECtHR judgements on voting rights of prisoners and persons with mental disabilities would require constitutional amendments. For these elections 8,995 were deleted from the voter lists as deprived of legal capacity and 4,509 citizens as they were serving a prison sentence. According to Articles 12 and 29 of the [CRPD](#), "State Parties shall recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life" and ensure their "right and opportunity [...] to vote and be elected". Paragraph 48 of the [CRPD Committee's General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 of the CRPD](#) states that "a person's decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising [...] the right to vote [and] the right to stand for election". See the ECtHR judgements in [Kulinski and Sabev v. Bulgaria](#), [Marinov v. Bulgaria](#) and [Dimov and others v. Bulgaria](#).

³³ The 21 May 2012 [Ordinance of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works № RD-02-20-9](#) on the functioning of the unified civil registration system introduced additional requirement for registration of a permanent address that is a prerequisite for issuance of an ID. Applicants are required to provide ownership document or documents for the use of the property for residential purposes.

³⁴ See the [2022 ROMACT report on challenges concerning registration at a permanent address and possession of identity documents of persons living in homes without valid lawful basis](#) in Bulgaria. See paragraph 11 of the [1996 UN Human Rights Committee \(HRC\) General Comment No. 25](#) and the [Report of Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area](#).

³⁵ Article 41 of the Election Code provides that "preliminary electoral lists shall be made public by the authorities at a prominent place in the area of the respective polling station".

to stand for election. At the same time, an 18-month residency requirement was imposed on prospective candidates, contrary to international standards and good practice.³⁶

Candidacy restrictions based on residency, criminal conviction, or intellectual or psycho-social disabilities should be reviewed in line with OSCE commitments, international standards and good practice.

Candidates can be nominated on the lists of political parties or coalitions registered by the CEC for each election, or run independently in a constituency supported by nomination committees of three to seven voters.³⁷ The CEC received nominations from 23 political parties and 11 coalitions and registered 20 parties and all coalitions.³⁸ The candidate lists were registered by respective DEC's.

For these elections, the DEC's registered 6,100 candidates, of which 1,506 stood in two electoral districts and 334 ran also for the European Parliament. Women comprised some 30 per cent of candidates.³⁹ There are no special legislative measures to promote women's participation. Political parties met by the ODIHR EET did not express any criticism related to candidate registration.

Measures to encourage the inclusion of women as candidates, such as a system linking public funding of parties to concrete inclusivity measures, could be considered. Political parties should consider internal steps such as conducting a gender audit, with an aim to review current intra-party practices that curb equitable representation of women within party structures.

IX. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The official 30-day election campaign ran from 10 May until 24 hours prior to election day. Political instability, election fatigue and ensuing concerns about low turnout shaped the political discourse. Many parties aligned in their promises to fight corruption and to improve the social welfare, healthcare system and economic situation in the country. Most political parties believed that the campaign agenda for the national elections overshadowed the European Parliament campaign and EU topics.

The election campaign was competitive and pluralistic, yet calm. Political contestants were able to convey their platforms to voters, and the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association were respected. ODIHR EET interlocutors did not raise any concerns about the campaign regulatory framework. While contestants could compete on a level playing field, some noted that incumbent MPs could benefit from the available resources due to the fact that the parliament was not dissolved before

³⁶ Paragraph 15 of the [UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#) states that “any restrictions on the right to stand for election, such as minimum age, must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria. Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation”. See also paragraph 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) and sections I.1.1.c.iii. and I.1.1.iv of the [Code of Good Practice](#).

³⁷ In order to register, political parties and coalitions must submit to the CEC a minimum of 2,500 supporting signatures from voters and a deposit of BGN 2,500. Deposits are refunded to political parties and coalitions which obtained at least one per cent of valid votes.

³⁸ Two parties (Republicans for Bulgaria and *Pravoto*) withdrew their applications and nomination of one party (ATAKA) was cancelled due to an insufficient number of support signatures.

³⁹ The parties with highest number of women candidates were the Green Movement with 45 women out of 127 candidates, Citizens Block Coalition with 70 out of 181 candidates and Blue Bulgaria Coalition with 116 out of 302 candidates.

elections.⁴⁰ Many opined that campaign focused more on exposing damaging information about candidates rather than discussing policy issues. Several ODIHR EET interlocutors mentioned instances of disinformation, both from foreign sources and politicians, primarily related to the war in Ukraine and Bulgaria's potential involvement in military actions.

Contestants used a variety of campaign tools to convey messages to voters in person and via media. Campaign tents in outdoor public spaces were common to directly reach out to voters. Vehicles with party and candidate branding, billboards, and printed leaflets were widely used. Mainstream parties toured the country and held face-to-face meetings with voters. Most parties met by the ODIHR EET described an active use of social networking platforms, mostly Facebook but also TikTok, for their outreach campaigns. Many ODIHR interlocutors expressed concern about the dominance of money in politics, often with unknown sources of financing (see *Campaign Finance* section).⁴¹

By law, all campaign materials must identify the issuer and contain a statement that vote-buying and selling are criminal offenses. The law prohibits campaign materials that are contrary to "good morals" and that damage the honour and reputation of candidates. The campaign must be conducted only in Bulgarian, and campaign materials cannot contain the coat of arms or the flag of Bulgaria or any foreign country.⁴² Two posters of the PP-DB and the DPS were contested and became topics of discussion during the campaign. The PP-DB poster featured a picture of former Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov side by side with the GERB and DPS leaders, Boyko Borissov and Delyan Peevski. The text on the billboard read "What kind of prime minister would you like to have?". The CEC ordered the removal of the PP-DB posters, but found no violations in the DPS posters (see *Complaints and Appeals*).⁴³

Most political parties' campaign programmes did not focus on protecting or promoting the rights of women and persons belonging to minorities. Issues relevant to women were often addressed through their role as mothers and caregivers. While many parties mentioned issues affecting persons with disabilities, these were often only in generic or declarative terms. Campaign messages were generally inaccessible for individuals with visual or hearing impairments. Political parties are not legally obliged to provide campaign materials or messages in accessible formats, such as easy to read formats or provide subtitles or sign language interpretation, and with some exceptions, most of them did not do so.⁴⁴

To strengthen the electoral participation of persons with disabilities, political parties should provide their programmes, campaign messages and materials in formats appropriate, accessible and easy to

⁴⁰ On 16 May, the co-chair of the PP-DB Kiril Petkov had a car accident while travelling in a car owned by the National Security. While Mr. Petkov expressed condolences to the family of the driver and paused his campaign for 24 hours, opponents questioned his use of a state security vehicle. The Minister of Interior clarified that lawmakers may use such vehicles for four years after leaving office. On 2 June, the GERB held a big party event in Plovdiv where the president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen spoke. It was reported that she visited Bulgaria as part of the tour in the EU member states.

⁴¹ On 20 May, [Afera.bg](https://www.fera.bg) published a recording of the PP-DB leaders discussing the need for unofficial cash donations during the 2023 elections. The party subsequently acknowledged the authenticity of the recording but informed the ODIHR EET that it was edited in a way to imply wrongdoings.

⁴² Paragraph 32.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that persons belonging to national minorities have the right "to disseminate, have access to and exchange information in their mother tongue". Paragraph 12 of the UN CCPR General Comment No. 25 states that "information and materials about voting should be available in minority languages". See also Article 9.1 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and Article 27 of the ICCPR.

⁴³ Several days after the CEC decision, the PP-DB re-distributed the billboards again, Mr. Peevski and Mr. Borisov with black silhouettes.

⁴⁴ In Paragraph 62 of October 2018 of [Concluding Observations of the Initial Report of Bulgaria](#), the UN CRPD Committee recommended that "that the State party produce information about elections, in accessible formats, including in Easy Read format, and allocate financial and technical resources to improve physical accessibility to polling stations." Article 38 of the UN CRPD Committee's General Comment on Article 9: Accessibility states that "it is also important that political meetings and materials used and produced by political parties or individual candidates participating in public elections are accessible".

understand by persons with various types of disabilities. Legal requirements or financial incentives could be introduced to encourage accessible campaign content.

The effective participation of persons belonging to minorities, particularly Roma, in public and political life, remains limited.⁴⁵ Intolerant and hurtful rhetoric targeting persons belonging to minorities was not prominent in the campaign. Some interlocutors noted a shift of hateful rhetoric towards the LGBTI community and migrants. Issues of interest to persons belonging to minorities were largely absent from party platforms, and the references made were usually negative. The public debate on vote-buying portrayed the Roma population as the source of the problem, thus reinforcing intolerance and negative stereotypes.⁴⁶ Moreover, some measures taken by the authorities with the stated aim of addressing vote-buying potentially adversely affected campaigning and voting in Roma neighbourhoods.⁴⁷ The MoI informed the ODIHR EET that their work to prevent the practices of vote-buying includes regular operations in “risky” neighbourhoods, predominantly populated by Roma.⁴⁸

No official voter education or get-out-the-vote campaigns were organized to provide balanced information about the electoral process, encourage participation and fight vote-buying. Several civil society organizations took the initiative to prepare educational materials, but they were not widely disseminated.

Allegations of vote-buying should be addressed promptly and effectively, with those responsible held accountable. Authorities should consider implementing a large-scale civic education programme targeting vulnerable communities in close co-operation with relevant civil society organizations, including those representing minority communities.

X. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is regulated by the Election Code, the Political Parties Act, the 2015 National Audit Office Act, and the 2024 Law on the State Budget. The legislation is comprehensive and most ODIHR EET interlocutors did not express major concerns about campaign finance regulations. Nevertheless, most prior ODIHR recommendations, including the lack of reporting on expenditures before election day and the limited scope of oversight by the National Audit Office (NAO) remain unaddressed.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ According to the 2021 census, 84.6 per cent of Bulgaria’s population are ethnic Bulgarians, 8.4 per cent identified themselves as belonging to the Turkish ethnic group and 4.4 per cent identified as Roma.

⁴⁶ See the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) [Concluding observations on the combined twenty-third to twenty-fifth periodic reports of Bulgaria](#). Paragraph 1 of Article 6 of the FCNM provides that states “shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons’ ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media”. Paragraph I.B.6. of the 2010 Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 provides that “[m]ember states should take appropriate measures to combat all forms of expression, including in the media and on the Internet, which may be reasonably understood as likely to produce the effect of inciting, spreading or promoting hatred or other forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. Such ‘hate speech’ should be prohibited and publicly disavowed whenever it occurs”. See also Articles 1 and 2 of ICERD and paragraphs 2 and 30 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

⁴⁷ The MoI conducted raids in Roma neighborhoods to fight vote-buying. The Ministry informed the ODIHR EET that it planned to publish a list of “risky polling stations”, mostly in Roma areas. Some ODIHR EET interlocutors indicated that such raids may potentially intimidate eligible voters and deter them from voting.

⁴⁸ As of 6 June, the Ministry opened 88 investigations into potential vote-buying cases.

⁴⁹ The Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) has previously noted that most recommendations related to party funding and corruption prevention amongst officials, including MPs, have been largely addressed, but criticized the lack of reporting on expenditures before election-day and the limited oversight mandate of the NAO. See 2016 [GRECO final compliance report on the Third Evaluation Round](#) and [the 2019 Fourth Evaluation Round](#) on corruption prevention in respect of MPs, judges and prosecutors.

A. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Public subsidies are available for political parties and coalitions that received at least one and four percent of valid votes, respectively.⁵⁰ Parties and coalitions that have registered candidate lists in all electoral districts but are not entitled to public funding receive BGN 40,000 for their media advertising costs, known as “media packages”. Independent candidates receive BGN 5,000. Campaigning or financing on social networks is not regulated.⁵¹

The campaign may also be financed by the parties’ or candidates’ private funds as well as unlimited monetary or in-kind donations from private individuals. Donations exceeding the minimum monthly wage must be accompanied by the donor’s declaration of the source.⁵² The law does not cap the amount of individual donations but prohibits contributions from legal entities, foreign sources, and religious institutions.⁵³ The ceiling for campaign expenditure is BGN 3 million for parties and coalitions and BGN 200,000 for independent candidates. Third party spending is not regulated, at odds with international good practice.⁵⁴ Donations and expenditures over BGN 1,000 must be made via bank transfer and contestants are required to open and maintain a dedicated campaign account, which must be communicated to the NAO within five days after parties and coalitions register for elections.⁵⁵

B. REPORTING AND OVERSIGHT

During the campaign, contestants are required to submit a detailed report to the NAO within seven days of receiving any campaign income and signing any media contracts. The NAO is only required to publish the information as reported by contestants, without verifying it. No interim report of expenditure is required.⁵⁶

To enhance transparency of campaign finance, consideration could be given to requiring disclosure and reporting of campaign expenditure prior to election-day.

The NAO oversees campaign finance. Contestants must submit detailed reports to the NAO within 30 days after the elections. Media outlets must publish all contracts with contestants online and submit this information to the NAO, which is required to audit compliance of reported funds against the contracts published by the media, within 30 working days after election day. The NAO only cross-checks the

⁵⁰ According to Article 65 of the 2024 State Budget Act, in 2024 the amount of the state subsidy is BGN 8 per vote. According to the Ministry of Justice website, for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2024, state subsidies totaling BGN 4,782,069 were distributed among the following political parties and coalitions: DPS, Revival, ITN, Rise Up!, GERB-SDPP-DB, and BSP for Bulgaria.

⁵¹ According to published data for the period from 9 May to 7 June 2024, the PP-DB spent the most on Facebook advertising, accounting for more than 42 per cent of all expenditures on political advertisement. GERB and ITN follow with 13 and 12.5 percent respectively. Meta’s Ad Library data disclosed the total spending on political ads during this period of campaigning is EUR 367,371, excluding expenditures less than EUR 100.

⁵² See the [Decree No. 193](#) of the Council of Ministers of 12 October 2023, which determined the amount of the minimum monthly wage (BGN 933) from 1 January 2024.

⁵³ According to the [2003 Council of Europe Recommendations Rec\(2003\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states](#) “States should specifically limit, prohibit or otherwise regulate donations from foreign donors”.

⁵⁴ [The 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation \(2nd ed.\)](#) recommends the extension of regulations to third parties involved in the campaign to ensure transparency and accountability, and it states that “Third parties should be subjected to similar rules on donations and spending as political parties to avoid situations [...] to circumvent campaign finance regulations”.

⁵⁵ For every election the NAO must establish and maintain [a public register](#) posted on its website containing information about donors, together with type, purpose and size of the donations; names of candidates and members of nomination committees who have provided funds and the respective amounts; declarations of the origin of the funds donated (if higher than minimum wage); media service providers, opinion poll agencies and advertisement agencies which the parties, coalitions and nomination committees are using..

⁵⁶ See paragraph 263 of the [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#): “Transparency in reporting requires the timely publication of parties’ financial reports”.

information provided by media outlets against contestant reports, but it is not required to identify unreported transactions. This could potentially affect the NAO's oversight role and the capacity to ascertain actual campaign spending.⁵⁷ The NAO has six months to complete the auditing but has no deadline for publishing the final report with audited information, at odds with international good practice.⁵⁸

The NAO can issue warnings, impose fines or refer a case to the prosecutor general in case the possibility of a crime is identified. In case of violations that do not constitute criminal offences, the NAO notifies the competent authorities to take respective measures. Sanctions for campaign finance violations range from BGN 1,000 to BGN 15,000.⁵⁹ There are no expedited deadlines for imposing sanctions, instead the NAO must follow lengthy administrative procedures.⁶⁰ NAO decisions on establishing campaign finance violations are not made public.

To ensure effective campaign finance oversight, the mandate of the National Audit Office should be expanded to include the power to proactively monitor and disclose potential unreported donations and expenditures, and to impose and publish sanctions.

XI. MEDIA

A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The media landscape is vibrant, featuring a wide range of broadcast and print outlets.⁶¹ Television (TV) remains the primary source of news, followed by online media.⁶² Most broadcast and print media also operate online channels and maintain a social media presence, primarily on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and lately on TikTok. The public service media, the Bulgarian National Television (*BNT*) and Bulgarian National Radio (*BNR*), remain the most trusted sources of news.⁶³ However, for over two years the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) has been unable to appoint a *BNT* director, which, according to ODIHR EET interlocutors, might raise concerns about the governance of the *BNT*, potentially affecting public trust.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ See recommendation xiii from the GRECO's Third Evaluation Round: "to provide for an adequate and consistent supervision over the financing of election campaigns of political parties, candidates and other campaign participants, under the clear responsibility and leadership of the National Audit Office." Article 14.b of Recommendation Rec(2003)4 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns advises that: "The independent monitoring should include supervision over the accounts of political parties and the expenses involved in election campaigns as well as their presentation and publication."

⁵⁸ Paragraph 263 of the Guidelines on Political Party Regulation provides: "Transparency in reporting requires the timely publication of parties' financial reports". The audited report of the 2 April 2023 elections was published on 10 January 2024.

⁵⁹ See paragraph 19(16) of the [UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#), which provides that "States should require the infringement of rules concerning the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns to be subject to effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions".

⁶⁰ The Administrative Violations and Penalty Act provides for between three months and two years for initiating administrative penalty proceedings.

⁶¹ According to the [Compulsory Deposit of Printed and Other Works](#) maintained by the Ministry of Culture, there are around 200 media outlets, including around 100 TV and radio channels.

⁶² Internet penetration is at 84 per cent according to [Datareportal](#).

⁶³ According to the 2023 Reuters Institute [Digital News Report](#), the public broadcasters (*BNR* and *BNT*) are the most trusted news sources.

⁶⁴ None of the applicants for the general director of BNT received the required three votes and the CEM suspended the selection process. This was challenged by one of the applicants, and on 23 May 2023 the Sofia Administrative Court declared CEM's decision unlawful. The court decision was appealed, and the case is still pending.

The media market is dominated by two major groups: the PPF Group and the United Group owning two-thirds of the media landscape.⁶⁵ In February 2024, the United Group strengthened its dominance by a series of acquisitions, including Bulsatcom, a satellite TV and telecommunications company, further concentrating the media market, inconsistent with the Council of Europe recommendations.⁶⁶ Several ODIHR EET interlocutors highlighted a persistent issue of inadequate implementation of media ownership regulations.⁶⁷

Authorities should consider implementing measures to limit media concentration, in order to stimulate the development of media pluralism and diversity, including by enforcing existing legislation against media monopolies and dominant market position.

Media outlets primarily rely on income from state and private advertising.⁶⁸ However, as of 1 May 2024, gambling advertising has been banned across broadcast media platforms, significantly impacting their budgets. Previous ODIHR recommendation on the lack of a clear framework for transparency in the distribution of state advertising remains unaddressed, leaving media vulnerable to political influence.⁶⁹

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legislation guarantees sufficient safeguard for the freedom of expression and the right to information.⁷⁰ Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, defamation remains a crime, contrary to international standards. Nevertheless, fines for defaming public officials have been reduced.⁷¹

The ODIHR EET noted that, in recent years, public officials and businesses have increasingly filed defamation-based lawsuits against journalists and reporters, raising concerns about potential abusive litigation, or SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation).⁷² Currently, the Ministry of Justice is working to transpose EU Directive 2024/1069, on the protection of journalists against

⁶⁵ PPF Group owns bTV, five radio stations, several online publications and the telecom company Yettel. United group owns NOVA TV, five radio stations several online publications and print magazines, as well as the telecommunications company Vivacom.

⁶⁶ With this acquisition, United Group gained an additional 500,000 TV subscribers and over 100,000 internet users, amounting to over 60 per cent of market share by the group in telecommunication and TV services, according to the European Center for Press and Media Freedom, [Media pluralism risk alert](#). The Council of Europe [Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec\(2007\)2](#) paragraph 2 advises member states to adopt rules to limit the influence of any single person, company, or group across media sectors, ensuring a diverse range of media outlets. Similarly, the Council of Europe [Committee of Ministers Recommendation R\(99\)1](#) suggests that member states introduce legislation to prevent media concentration that could threaten media pluralism at various levels and consider setting legal thresholds to limit the control of single commercial entities in the media industry.

⁶⁷ Since 2019 the Disclosure of Ownership and Funding of Media Service Providers Act is in effect, however, further regulatory framework is needed for media transparency, competition and media registries. See the Euromedia Ownership Monitor News Media Outlets and Owners, [Country Report 2023](#).

⁶⁸ According to an overview of the media market by the [Media Club Agency report](#) the total advertising market doubled in 2023: 608.9 million Euro, compared to 291.4 million in 2022. The two main media groups own 92 per cent of the advertising market share.

⁶⁹ See European Commission [2023 Rule of Law Report](#) Country Chapter Bulgaria.

⁷⁰ According to the Reporters Without Borders [World Press Freedom Index](#) Bulgaria ranks on the 59th place in 2024 compared to the 71st in 2023.

⁷¹ On 4 June 2024, a prominent defamation case of journalist Rosen Bosev before ECtHR concluded after 10 years of litigation. In its decision, the [ECtHR](#) stated that the Bulgarian state violated the journalist's right to a fair trial as well as freedom of expression.

⁷² On 15 April 2024, Minister of Interior Kalin Stoyanov filed a criminal defamation lawsuit against BIRD's two journalists demanding EUR 33.333 in damages for reporting on a property deal connecting the minister to a person with corruption allegations against him. In April 2024, journalists Dimitar Stoyanov, Atanas Tchobanov and Nikolay Marchenko were targeted by six defamation lawsuits over their reporting on links between a suspected drug lord and Bulgarian police officials. In March, an insurance company filed a defamation lawsuit against independent news website Mediapool claiming a record BGN 1 million.

SLAPPs, in the national legislation and practice. This directive provides safeguards against manifestly unfounded claims and abusive court proceedings.

Legislative measures should be taken to protect journalists and media workers from abusive court proceedings on defamation grounds, including early dismissal of manifestly unfounded lawsuits, the award of legal costs, compensation of damages, and proportionate and dissuasive penalties imposed on the party that initiated abusive court proceedings.

The media regulator, the CEM, monitors audiovisual content during the campaign and reports breaches to the CEC, which can impose sanctions.⁷³ For these elections, the CEM reported 32 instances in 23 alerts to the CEC regarding the violations of campaign rules, including 11 breaches where three national channels and various private channels broadcasted exit poll data before the end of the embargo at 20:00 on election day.⁷⁴ As of 21 July, the CEC decided on two cases and established a violation in one, according to its website.

The legal framework is sufficient for providing protection against offensive language, which was detected mostly online during the campaign.⁷⁵ While some stakeholders noted widespread negative messages in digital media and social networks, especially against the LGBTI community, migrants and Roma, the online media environment remains unregulated.⁷⁶ In addition to the CEM, the National Council for Journalistic Ethics (NCJE) and its executive body, the Ethics Commission, can issue decisions regarding harmful content based on the Code of Ethics, but has no sanctioning power.⁷⁷

C. CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

The Election Code provides for the principle of equal participation for political contestants in public service media.⁷⁸ ODIHR EET interlocutors reported no issues regarding media access. Some interlocutors noted that the requirement for equal participation can hinder meaningful coverage, stating that the rules do not enhance voters' ability to make informed decisions, hinder merit-based debates and as a result reduce the quality and substance of public debates.

To foster the editorial freedom of public service media, consideration could be given to revising the strict equal participation rule or limiting its application to special election broadcasts only, granting

⁷³ CEM monitored 14 private media, 13 public TV and radio channels, and 11 online media during the campaign. Its monitoring report is published 30 days after election day. The alerts received from CEM mostly related to breaching good morals, anti-Semitic messages on BNT, BNR and Alpha TV, anti-migrant and homophobic messages, use of prohibited symbols (flag, icon), and in three cases of paid advertisements not identified as such.

⁷⁴ According to the Election Code “results of public opinion polls about the elections may not be announced in any form 24 hours before the election day until the end of the election day is announced on the territory of the country”.

⁷⁵ The Penal Code stipulates that “Whoever, through speech, printed matter or other means for mass information, through electronic information systems or in any other way propagates or incites discrimination, violence or hatred based on skin color, origin, nationality or ethnicity or sexual orientation, shall be punished by imprisonment from one to four years and by fine from five thousand to ten thousand levs and by public reprimand.” Additionally, the Law on Protection against Discrimination, the Radio and Television Act, and the Journalists' Code of Ethics contribute to the regulation and prevention of harmful speech.

⁷⁶ The parliamentary elections were the first since the Digital Services Act [2022/2065](#) (DSA) took effect on 17 February 2024. The DSA mandates mechanisms at both European and national levels for compliance with Member States designating a national Digital Services Coordinator (DSC). According to the CEM, a draft proposal designating the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) as the DSC, is pending before the parliament.

⁷⁷ On average, each year the [NCJE](#) issues around 100 decisions.

⁷⁸ According to the legislation, parties, coalitions and nomination committees that have registered candidates shall receive TV and radio time for free-of-charge debates on topics agreed upon in advance, with a total duration of not less than 240 minutes. The time shall be evenly allocated among the participants. The Election Code Art. 193 details the use of free airtime on public service media during the campaign.

public service media greater editorial independence in covering the election campaign in regular news and information programmes.

By law, the state allocates BGN 40,000 for media packages to non-subsidized parties and coalitions that have registered candidates in presidential, European Parliament, and parliamentary elections. For coalitions, this funding is proportional to the participation of non-subsidized parties within the coalition. Nomination committees are granted BGN 5,000 for the European Parliament and parliamentary elections. This year, following the court decision, the CEC provided two media packages for both the national and the European Parliament elections.⁷⁹ According to the Institute for Public Environment Development monitoring, contestants' spending doubled in the final 10 days of the election campaign.⁸⁰

XII. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Election disputes are handled by the election administration and courts, with standing limited to those who have a legitimate interest as required by the Code of Administrative Procedure.⁸¹ Any citizen can file alerts, a specific category of complaint, on election-related violations to election commissions.⁸² The law provides for an expedited procedure with deadlines varying from three days to one hour on election day, in line with good electoral practice.⁸³

Decisions of lower-level election commissions are appealed to the superior election administration. The CEC decisions may be further appealed to the local administrative courts under administrative procedure or directly to the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) in specific cases.⁸⁴ The SAC is the final instance for all electoral disputes both in first-instance proceedings and as an appeal body.⁸⁵

The CEC handled complaints and alerts during its sessions and published all related information in a regularly updated public register on its website.⁸⁶ ODIHR EET interlocutors reported no particular concern about the election dispute resolution system.

⁷⁹ The CEC initially decided to allocate one media package for two elections, however following an appeal and the subsequent decision of the Sofia Administrative Court, the [CEC decided](#) to allocate a separate package for the European Parliament elections.

⁸⁰ According to [IPED](#), a total of 2.5 million BGN was spent on political advertising during the campaign.

⁸¹ The Code of Administrative Procedure specifies that “the right to contest an administrative act shall vest in the individuals and organizations whose rights, freedoms or legitimate interests are violated or jeopardized by the said act”.

⁸² According to the Code of Administrative Procedure, any person can file alerts (i.e. “signals” as referred to in the law) regarding abuse of power and corruption, maladministration of state or municipal property, actions or omissions of administrative bodies and public officials whereby state or public interests or rights and legal interests of other persons are affected. It is not required for the person submitting the alert to have a legal interest, as is the case for complaints.

⁸³ The Election Code appears inconsistent in this regard as Article 57.1.26 grants the CEC 24 hours to handle complaints and alerts. However, Article 73 requires the CEC to adjudicate appeals against DEC’s decisions within three days. See the Item II.3.3. of the Explanatory Report of the [Code of Good Practice](#), which recommends that “Time-limits for lodging and deciding appeals must be short (three to five days for each at first instance)”.

⁸⁴ The electoral legislation lists all specific cases in which the decisions of the CEC can be directly appealed to the SAC, as follows, among others: upholding rejections of complaints by the DEC; regulations of some electoral procedures, pre-election campaign, candidate registration, observer accreditation, appointment and dismissal of election staff abroad, procedures related to voting machines.

⁸⁵ The CEC reported that as of 12 June received 46 complaints and 2 alerts. Specifically: 23 complaints and 1 alert concerned different violations of the campaign rules and campaign materials; 11 concerned the distribution of media packages; 3 related to the layout of the ballot paper; 3 to the appointment of DEC members; 3 to the allocation of polling stations abroad; 2 concerned candidate registration; 1 to the allocation of party representatives in mobile polling stations; and 1 alert concerned possible incompatibility of a candidate MP.

⁸⁶ On 15 April, the CEC adopted two regulations: the first one regulated the electronic public register for complaints and alerts submitted to the CEC and the information to be uploaded for every complaint/alert, including links to court judgments. The second regulated the decision-making procedures for complaints at the DEC level.

An Inter-institutional unit, including the Prosecutor's Office, the MoI, and the State Agency for National Security, was established at the start of the electoral campaign to co-ordinate efforts against criminal offences.⁸⁷ Similar units were constituted at the regional and municipal levels.⁸⁸

On 27 May, the GERB-SDS filed a complaint to the CEC about a billboard of the PP-DB portraying images of Mr. Denkov (PP-DB), Mr. Borisov (leader of GERB-SDS) and Mr. Peevski (co-chair of DPS), together with the question 'What kind of prime minister would you like to have?'. The CEC decided that using the image of other party members without their explicit consent violated the legislation and the principles of morality, ordered the removal of the billboards, and fined the PP-DB. On 31 May, the PP-DB appealed the CEC decision to the SAC, which upheld the CEC decision regarding removal of the billboard, and declared part of the appeal regarding the fine as inadmissible, which according to SAC falls under the jurisdiction of the Sofia District Court.

Acting upon a complaint from the PP-DB, on 31 May, the CEC declined to sanction the DPS for billboards that depicted Bulgarian and European Union flags, despite a legal prohibition. The CEC reasoned that the main features of the flag were not easily recognizable on the billboard. The PP-DB challenged this decision in the SAC on 4 June, but their appeal was dismissed due to lack of legitimate interest of the appellants as required by law.

Election results can only be contested in the Constitutional Court, through a complaint challenging the legality of the elections filed within 15 days from the announcement of the results.⁸⁹ Existing provisions preclude contestants from directly challenging election results to the Court, leaving them without effective legal remedy, contrary to international standards.⁹⁰

The legal framework should be reviewed to allow for individual challenge of the election results in line with international standards.

XIII. ELECTION DAY

In line with ODIHR methodology, the ODIHR EET did not observe election-day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner, but visited a limited number of polling stations in Sofia and the nearby region. Voting took place in 12,972 polling stations, including in 769 polling sites abroad, 323 mobile polling stations, 223 special stations in medical and social care institutions, and 25 stations in detention centres.

The election day was calm and generally well-organized in the visited polling stations. A number of complex procedural elements and safeguards against electoral fraud, including two sets of voter lists (for the parliamentary and the European Parliament elections), double stamping of the ballot papers

⁸⁷ The MoI did not participate in the Inter-Institutional Unit in previous elections parliamentary elections by stating that there is no obligation according to the law.

⁸⁸ The Prosecutor General office reported that as of 11 June, 100 pre-trial proceedings were initiated, of which some 77 related to vote-buying.

⁸⁹ One fifth of MPs, the President, the Council of Ministers, the Court of Cassation, the Supreme Administrative Court and the Prosecutor General have the right to address the Constitutional Court. No challenge against election results has been presented to the Constitutional Court since 2013.

⁹⁰ Article 2.3 of the [ICCPR](#) states that "[a]ll persons whose rights or freedoms are violated shall have an effective remedy [...]"; paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states "everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity". The introduction of the right of individuals to directly make petitions to the Constitutional Court was supported by the Ombudsman: see [Ombudsman's opinion](#) sent to the Parliamentary Standing on 3 October 2023.

(before marking the ballot and after), dual voting methods, as well as a restriction of only one voter inside the voting room, led to a lengthy voting process.

Following multiple requests from PECs to clarify the procedures for cases when a voting machine did not print the second ballot, the CEC issued an instruction to provide voters with a paper ballot in such cases.⁹¹ The CEC reported that the machine voting was terminated in 148 polling stations (134 in country and 14 abroad) due to sealing issues and printer malfunctions. In four cases, machines were delivered to wrong polling stations.

In the limited number of observed counts, legal requirements were not consistently followed, as certain procedural steps such as the counting of signatures in the voter lists, counting of ballots for both contests, calculating the preferences and filling in the result protocols were conducted simultaneously. This led to additional time needed to recalculate and reconcile the result protocols.

The PECs delivered voting materials and result protocols to the tabulation centres around the country, and the CEC tabulated voting results from abroad. The ODIHR EET observed tabulation at the DEC 23 and 25 in Sofia, which was managed by the Information Services. The intake of materials and input of results was organized in an efficient manner, but the setup of the centre hindered meaningful observation of the process. The processing of the PEC protocols and election materials was time consuming due to the data that needed to be processed and various mistakes in the protocols. The ODIHR EET was denied the access to observe the tabulation at the CEC on election night.

After midnight on election day, the Information Services began posting online the voting results, disaggregated by polling station, contributing to the transparency. However, the updates of the results were done with long intervals and posting of scanned copies of the result protocols was delayed. A significant number of PEC protocols reviewed by the ODIHR EET (from a small sample size) contained corrections and mismatches.⁹² On 11 June, the CEC announced the turnout at 34.41 per cent, the lowest since 1990.

According to the CEC, it received, reviewed and adjudicated 106 complaints and alerts on election day. Of these, 35 cases related to machine voting (technical malfunction or irregularities with the machine voting procedure), and 18 to unlawful campaigning or presence of campaign materials. In some 20 per cent of cases, the CEC did not take any action or did not publish any response.⁹³

On 13 June, the CEC announced the final results.⁹⁴ By the 20 June deadline for challenging the election results to the Constitutional Court, no such complaint was filed.

After the announcement of the final results and following unsuccessful attempts by the two largest parliamentary groups, GERB-UDF and We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria, to form a

⁹¹ The instruction was adopted some two hours after the opening of polling stations.

⁹² According to the [CEC report](#), 2,175 PEC protocols had 8,161 discrepancies. Majority of the mistakes related to the recording of preferences, as well as cases when the total numbers of votes cast for parties did not reconcile with the total number of votes cast.

⁹³ The CEC maintains a separate election day complaints and alerts registry.

⁹⁴ On 13 June, the PP-DB candidate Tanya Andreeva filed a complaint with the CEC requesting to recount the ballots in 43 polling stations of the DEC 24, Sofia. She claimed that her preferential votes were not taken into account and that following a check of the results data stored in the voting machines and its comparison with the results from the manual count of the machine ballots in the PEC results protocols, a difference of 114 preferential votes was identified. According to the candidate, she was only 82 preferential votes short of overpassing the 7 per cent threshold to win an MP seat. On 14 June, the case was heard by the CEC. While the CEC reporting member proposed to support Ms. Andreeva's request and to recount ballots, the CEC voted against the proposal and rejected the complaint. The CEC decision along with minutes from that session were not published on the CEC website. Ms. Andreeva did not appeal the CEC decision.

government, President Rumen Radev gave a mandate to ITN which reached out to all other parliamentary factions and independent MPs to initiate discussions on forming a government. On 4 August, the parliamentary group of ITN returned the mandate unfulfilled for the third time. On 27 August, President Radev announced early elections for 27 October and appointed a care-taker prime minister.

XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in Bulgaria and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past ODIHR recommendations that remain to be addressed.⁹⁵ ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of Bulgaria to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To increase its transparency and accountability, the Central Election Commission should ensure that it provides election stakeholders with meaningful access to all aspects of the electoral process, including advance publication of session materials, uninterrupted broadcast of its sessions and working group meetings, and access to its premises.
2. To enhance the implementation of its mandate the Central Election Commission should comprehensively employ its regulatory functions and improve its efforts in the field of voter education and training.
3. Allegations of vote-buying should be addressed promptly and effectively, with those responsible held accountable. Authorities should consider implementing a large-scale civic education programme targeting vulnerable communities in close co-operation with relevant civil society organizations, including those representing minority communities.
4. Legislative measures should be taken to protect journalists and media workers from abusive court proceedings on defamation grounds, including early dismissal of manifestly unfounded lawsuits, the award of legal costs, compensation of damages, and proportionate and dissuasive penalties imposed on the party that initiated abusive court proceedings.
5. The legal framework should be reviewed to allow for individual challenge of the election results in line with international standards.

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Election Administration

6. The replacement of election commission members without justification or after a reasonable deadline prior to election day should not be permitted. As with District Election Commission members, Precinct Election Commission member nominations should require the consent of the

⁹⁵ In Paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), all OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”. The follow-up of recommendations provided in the [ODIHR final report on the 2023 early parliamentary elections](#) is assessed by the ODIHR EET as follows: 18 out of 22 recommendations were assessed as not implemented; recommendations 2 and 7 were partially implemented and recommendation 17 was not evaluated. See also the [ODIHR electoral recommendations database](#).

nominees. The Central Election Commission could consider creating a roster of trained and experienced election administrators to facilitate replacements.

7. Considerations could be given to conducting independent verification and certification of information and communication technology-based systems to ensure confidence in the process.

Candidate Registration

8. Candidacy restrictions based on residency, criminal conviction, or intellectual or psycho-social disabilities should be reviewed in line with OSCE commitments, international standards and good practice.
9. Measures to encourage the inclusion of women as candidates, such as a system linking public funding of parties to concrete inclusivity measures, could be considered. Political parties should consider internal steps such as conducting a gender audit, with an aim to review current intra-party practices that curb equitable representation of women within party structures.

Election Campaign

10. To enhance women's participation in political life, institutions, political parties and other stakeholders should increase efforts to address existing gender stereotypes and reduce the gender gap both through regulatory measures and advocacy.
11. To strengthen the electoral participation of persons with disabilities, political parties should provide their programmes, campaign messages and materials in formats appropriate, accessible and easy to understand by persons with various types of disabilities. Legal requirement or financial incentives could be introduced to encourage accessible campaign content.

Campaign Finance

12. To enhance transparency of campaign finance, consideration could be given to requiring disclosure and reporting of campaign expenditure prior to election-day.
13. To ensure effective campaign finance oversight, the mandate of the National Audit Office should be expanded to include the power to proactively monitor and disclose potential unreported donations and expenditures, and to impose and publish sanctions.

Media

14. Authorities should consider implementing measures to limit media concentration, in order to stimulate the development of media pluralism and diversity, including by enforcing existing legislation against media monopolies and dominant market position.
15. To foster the editorial freedom of public service media, consideration could be given to revising the strict equal participation rule or limiting its application to special election broadcasts only, granting public service media greater editorial independence in covering the election campaign in regular news and information programmes.

ANNEX: FINAL RESULTS⁹⁶

| Candidate List | Votes | Per cent | Mandates |
|---|---------|----------|----------|
| There is Such a People (ITN) | 128,007 | 5.96% | 16 |
| Voice of the People | 6,560 | 0.31% | 0 |
| Blue Bulgaria | 33,613 | 1.57% | 0 |
| We the Citizens (Bulgarian Spring, WHO, BRSP, Nation) | 4,662 | 0.22% | |
| Bulgarian Voice Political Party | 3,378 | 0.16% | 0 |
| Coalition of the Rose | 2,206 | 0.10% | 0 |
| Center | 25,664 | 1.19% | 0 |
| Solidary Bulgaria | 31,476 | 1.47% | 0 |
| Union | 5,206 | 0.24% | 0 |
| BNO | 920 | 0.04% | 0 |
| Revival | 295,915 | 13.78% | 38 |
| Mech | 63,992 | 2.98% | 0 |
| Coalition We Continue the Change - Democratic Bulgaria | 307,849 | 14.33% | 39 |
| People's Party the Truth and Only the Truth | 2,483 | 0.12% | 0 |
| Bulgarian Rise | 12,322 | 0.57% | 0 |
| Citizen's Block Coalition | 3,003 | 0.14% | 0 |
| Society For New Bulgaria | 2,249 | 0.10% | 0 |
| The Left! | 15,175 | 0.71% | 0 |
| Party of the Greens | 5,494 | 0.26% | 0 |
| We Are Coming | 5,939 | 0.28% | 0 |
| Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria-Union of Democratic Forces (GERB-SDS) | 530,658 | 24.71% | 68 |
| Bulgarian National Union – ND | 2,128 | 0.10% | 0 |
| BSP for Bulgaria (BSP) | 151,560 | 7.06% | 19 |
| Velichie | 99,862 | 4.65% | 13 |
| VMRO - Bulgarian National Movement | 21,272 | 0.99% | 0 |
| Direct Democracy | 5,207 | 0.24% | 0 |
| Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) | 366,310 | 17.06% | 47 |
| Green Movement | 9,324 | 0.43% | 0 |
| For Great Bulgaria | 1,893 | 0.09% | 0 |
| Bulgarian Union for Direct Democracy | 946 | 0.04% | 0 |
| Coalition Neutral Bulgaria (Russophiles and Communists) | 2,462 | 0.11% | 0 |
| Option 'I do not support anyone' | 63,913 | | |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Total number of registered voters prior to election day | 6,594,076 |
| Total number of voters included in supplementary voter lists | 203,622 |
| Total number of voters who voted on the election day | 2,268,849 |
| Total number of votes cast | 2,269,831 |
| Number of votes cast by voting machines | 815,294 |
| Number of votes cast by paper ballots | 1,454,537 |
| Number of invalid votes (cast by paper ballot) | 58,496 |
| Number of valid votes | 2,211,648 |

⁹⁶ Source: [CEC decision on final results](#).

ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, the ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The OSCE/ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihr).