

# **DRUG POLICY AND HEALTH IN BULGARIA**

*A Profile Prepared by the Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network*

*22 February 2002*

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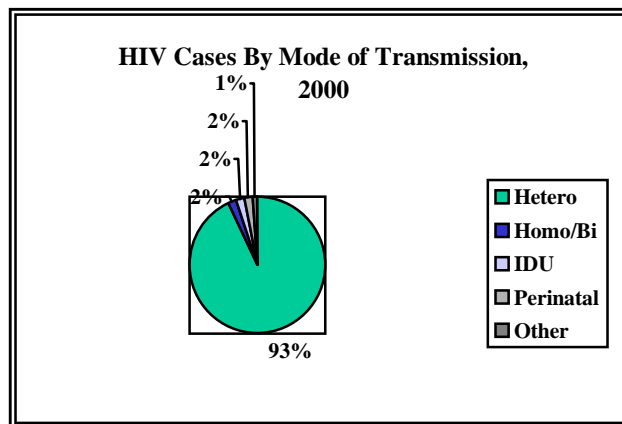
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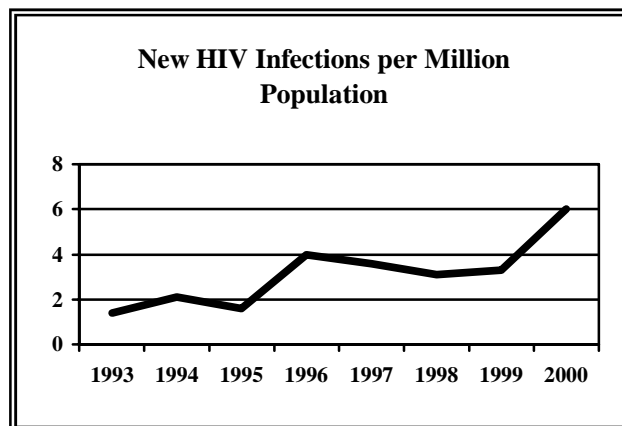
## Summary

### I. HIV/AIDS

Although data are incomplete, Bulgaria is in danger of experiencing a dramatic increase in HIV/AIDS. It is feared that the public may be lulled into a false sense of security because they have not seen much of the disease thus far. However, it is feared the epidemic will grow in the North and in the hard to reach Roma community. Current data do not show HIV spreading among injection drug users, but the social and behavioral conditions are in place for an explosive epidemic of injection-related HIV.



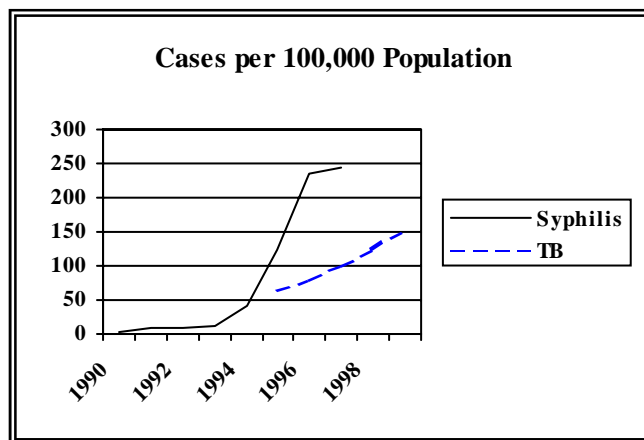
Source: (11)



Source: (11)

The subject of AIDS is taboo, therefore people are afraid to be tested. Officials wish to ignore the subject. (6)

## II. OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES



Source: (12) (13)

## III. INJECTION DRUG USE

**Drug Use.** Bulgaria's drug problem is small but increasing. The current number of heroin users has expanded from only a couple of hundred in the early 80's to about 50,000. (1)(10)

**Risk Behavior Information.** Bulgaria has the potential to rapidly spread disease among the IDU population. Half of all IDUs reported sharing needles within the past month. (8)

**Social Attitudes.** Drug use is considered negative and against national values. (4)

## IV. LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

Drug use and possession is not criminally punishable. However, selling or distributing drugs is illegal.

### Law on the Books

- Methadone treatment is not prohibited
- Syringe purchase and possession, as well as SEPs, are not prohibited
- Drug possession is not illegal
- Those accused of crimes have the right to an attorney and to participate in their criminal proceedings

### Actual practice

- Methadone treatment is currently being implemented
- OSI funds 4 needle exchange programs in the country; however the Roma population remains hard to reach
- If someone possesses a larger quantity of drugs than the law says are for sufficient for personal use, they are considered a drug trafficker

## V. PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

**Harm Reduction Programs Generally.** A 1999 law gave official support to harm reduction programs. Open Society Institute now funds four needle exchange programs across the country. Some are specifically targeted to reach the commercial sex work and Roma population. (20)

**Drug Treatment.** There are 35 outpatient units and 10-12 inpatient facilities nationwide. As of 1995, drug treatments were only conducted in psychiatric hospitals, where people were hospitalized until they were considered drug free. (1)(24)

## VI. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

The Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. In 2001, Bulgaria was ranked 47 of 91 countries, with a score of 3.9 of a possible 10.

The Human Development Index value is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. In 1999, Bulgaria ranked 63 of the 174 countries measured.

The GINI index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditures) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. The GINI index of zero equals perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. The GINI index for the most recent reported year for Bulgaria was 26.4 in 1997.

Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country. Bulgaria's unemployment rate saw a rise from 1997 at 13.7% to 17.7% in 2000.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total of all economic activity in one country, regardless of who owns the productive assets. The average annual growth of the economy from 1990 to 1999 was -3.8%.

# DRUG POLICY AND HEALTH IN BULGARIA

*A Profile Prepared by the Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network*

## Full Report

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network is an international research collaboration designed to improve data collection and policy analysis on drug policy and health in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. The information in this report was gathered by staff at Temple University's Beasley School of Law and the University of Connecticut Health Sciences Center. It will be augmented by further research in 2002 by network collaborators in the study region.

This Report presents available information in six domains: HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases, injection drug use, law and law enforcement practices, public health interventions, and economic and social indicators. It concludes that Bulgaria is in the early stages of a serious HIV epidemic driven primarily by injection drug use. With sufficient external support and dramatic internal changes in drug policy and law enforcement practice, a public health effort against HIV and other blood-borne diseases could be successful.

### II. HIV/AIDS

Accurate and complete data on HIV in Bulgaria are not available. The data presented here are from a variety of sources and may not entirely agree. These data generally do not represent HIV incidence, and depend heavily upon patterns of HIV testing and reporting that remain very incomplete in the most severely affected countries. HIV infection is defined as an individual with HIV infection confirmed by a laboratory according to country definitions and requirements. AIDS cases are reported according to a uniform AIDS case definition originally published in 1982 and revised in 1985, 1987 and for adults and adolescents (age >13) in 1993. The 1993 European AIDS surveillance case definition differs from that used in the United States in that it does not include CD4 lymphocyte criteria.

**Overall Data.** Only 300 cases of HIV have been reported in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian people are at risk of being lulled into a false sense of security. Other STDs are gaining ground in the country. Usually when this happens HIV is not far behind. (6)  
83% of all cases are by heterosexual contact. (17)

### Data from The European Center for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS

Year	Reported AIDS cases		Reported New HIV infections		Homo/bi Contact #		Injection Drug Use #		Heterosexual Contact #		Perinatal Transmission #	
	#	Rate/ Million	#	Rate/ Million	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS
1993	6	0.7	12	1.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	10	1.2	18	2.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	1	0.1	14	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1996	10	1.2	34	4.0	4	3	0	0	25	6	1	0
1997	8	1.0	30	3.6	3	1	1	0	26	5	0	0
1998	3	0.4	26	3.1	2	0	2	0	22	3	0	0
1999	11	1.3	27	3.3	0	1	1	0	25	10	1	0
2000	16	1.9	49	6	1	3	1	0	46	13	1	0

Source: (11)

**Regional Distribution.** It is feared that the epidemic in the North may spread the quickest. (6) Also, the Roma community is particularly vulnerable. They are isolated and subject to much discrimination. (17) They possess a number of characteristics consistent with the spread of HIV/AIDS. They experience high unemployment, low education, poor health standards and have few outreach programs. Also, Roma sexual customs contribute to the spread of disease. For example, use of condoms and discussions about sex are socially taboo. Men are allowed to engage in sexual activities while women are not, putting women at risk. (9)

**Stigma and Social Attitudes toward HIV/AIDS.** The subject of HIV/AIDS is socially taboo. This is causing people to be afraid to be tested. This attitude also extends to officials who wish to ignore the subject. (6) Studies of adolescent behavior show that Bulgaria's young people are not concerned about HIV/AIDS. (18)

### III. OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The spread of HIV is related in important ways to the incidence of other infectious diseases. Non-sterile injection drug use is a risk factor not only for HIV, but also Hepatitis. Incarceration in many countries in this region is a risk factor for tuberculosis. Sexually transmitted diseases may increase the likelihood of HIV transmission during sex.

Bulgaria appears to be in the midst of a seriously growing epidemic of TB. Syphilis increased significantly between 1993 and 1999, but may be stabilizing.

Data from (12) (13)

Year	TB		Syphilis	Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis C
	#	Rate/100,000	Rate/100,000	#	#	#
1993	-	-	10	-	-	-
1994	-	-	14	-	-	-
1995	3,245	38.1	20	-	-	-
1996	3,109	36.7	27	-	-	-
1997	3,437	40.8	26	-	-	-
1998	4,559	42.6	33	5,925	-	66
1999	3,530	54.4	32	-	-	-
2000	-	-	19	-	-	-

#### IV. INJECTION DRUG USE

This section reports available information about drug use levels, trends and risk behaviors, as well as social attitudes about drug use and information about the problem of drug overdose. Drug treatment and other interventions to reduce the morbidity and mortality of drug use are discussed in section V, below. Data about drug use come primarily from unofficial sources, including more or less rigorous rapid assessments, consultant reports and the news media.

**Summary of situation.** Bulgaria's drug abuse problem is small but saw a mild increase in 2000. Experts estimate that there are approximately 50,000 heroin users in the country (pop. 8 million). Fewer than 10% of heroin users are currently receiving treatment. (1) The current number of drug users has expanded from only a couple of hundred drug users in the early 80's. (10)

**Trends in Drug Use.** Cocaine is too expensive for all but the wealthy. Marijuana is traditionally limited to rural areas. Ecstasy use is growing among university students. Historically, drug consumption is more significant among the marginalized Roma, where glue sniffing is of serious concern. There is also drug abuse in prisons, localized geographic areas and among drug traffickers. Bulgarian police are concerned about a recent surge in the use of amphetamine by the country's youth. (1)

**Risk Behavior.** Studies report high-risk behavior among Injecting Drug Users. More than 50% of Injecting Drug Users reported sharing syringes and/or needles during

the last month. (8) Hepatitis B prevalence among IDU's is 20 % and hepatitis C prevalence is above 50%. (1) As one report said:

"Bulgaria has the potential for a rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. Profound social changes over the past ten years have increased the presence of vulnerable groups-youth, who are disheartened and disillusioned by the severe economic and social hardship, drug users, commercial sex workers, and mobile populations. In addition, there are a considerable number of ethnic minorities who continue to be marginalized from society (the Roma community)." (9)

**Drug Traffic Information.** Centrally located on Balkan routes leading through Romania or Serbia, Bulgaria is an important transit route between Turkey and Western Europe for Southwest Asian heroin and Southeast Asian marijuana. Authorities have also seized maritime deliveries of South American cocaine. Bulgaria is not a major transit country for drugs coming to the United States. Drug seizures in 2000 were comparable to those of the rest of Europe combined and represented a major increase over previous years. Small quantities of opium poppies and cannabis are grown in Bulgaria. Secret labs produce amphetamines and diverted acetic anhydride is transported to Turkey. Heroin from the Golden crescent and Southwest Asian sources (e.g., Afghanistan) is the main illegal drug transiting Bulgaria. The northern Balkan route from Turkey through Bulgaria to Romania is the most frequently used overland route. Other overland routes include Serbia and TFYR of Macedonia. Government officials have recently noted increasing amounts of Brazilian cocaine. (1)

**Social Attitudes Toward Drug Users.** Bulgarian National Television has cancelled programs depicting drug dependant people. Its director, Ivan Granitski grouped drug dependency in with propagating, violence, homosexuality, prostitution and gambling. He said he would ban programs discussing those topics to go "against those who oppose national interests." (4)

**Drug Overdoses.** No information was available.

## V. LAWS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

### A. Drug Law

This section describes what is known about both the drug-related laws on the books and the way these laws are enforced. The section covers syringe access, drug possession, drug treatment, drug trafficking, and the handling of drug arrestees and prisoners within the criminal justice system. It also lists the international drug-related instruments to which the country is a signatory.

**Syringe Access/Needle Exchange Programs - Law.** A law passed in 1999 gave official support to needle exchange programs. It also regulated the needle exchange

programs. However, the registration process and paperwork is still in preparation, which causes management problems for the organizations. (17)

**Syringe Access/Needle Exchange Programs - Practices.** One major needle exchange program is the Sophia Needle Exchange Program. The project started in 1999 at two locations with one doctor, a nurse and a social worker. Since then the project has expanded to include the training of university students and former IDU's as volunteers. Now three teams operate at six centers. The project also engages in mobile outreach work. (17)

**Drug Possession Law.** Possession for personal use is not prohibited. According to Bulgarian Penal Code, "It is not punished a person, who is dependant on drugs and their analogues if the quantity, which he/she obtains, stores, keeps or carries is in amounts showing that it is for single use." (19)

**Drug Possession Law-Practices.** No information was available.

**Compulsory Drug Treatment Law and Practices.** No information was available.

**Drug Trafficking Law.** If someone is deemed to be carrying more than the quantity of drugs specified for personal consumption, they are subjected to heavy fines and/or jail sentences. Punishments are even more severe for those that distribute drugs in school areas. They may be sentenced to from 15 to 20 years in prison and fined from two hundred thousand leva to five hundred thousand leva. (19)

**Drug Treatment Regulation.** Methadone treatment is legal and is currently being implemented. (25)

**Criminal Justice System- Law.** The government is divided into the executive branch, legislative branch and judicial branch. The legal system is based on a civil law system, with Soviet law influence. The accused is presumed innocent. The accused has the right to counsel, to face his accusers and to have access to any proof against him. (16)

**Criminal Justice System- Practices.** No information was available.

**International drug conventions signed.** The country is a party to the following international drug agreements.

- 1988 UN Drug Convention
- 1972 Protocols
- 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances
- 1961 Single Convention
- 1990 Convention on Laundering, Search, seizure and Confiscation of Proceeds from Crime

- UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, December, 2000
- 1924 US/Bulgarian Extradition Treaty and its 1934 Supplemental treaty still in effect
- 1957 Council of Europe Convention on Extradition
- 1959 European Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Penal measures
- 1983 Council of Europe Convention on Transfer of Sentenced Persons
- Bilateral treaty with Turkey for Transfer of Convicted Persons
- Bulgarian Customs Agency has memoranda on understanding of mutual assistance and cooperation with several European counterparts
- Cooperation Agreement with the United States, 2000

The Government of Bulgaria coordinates with INTERPOL and EUROPOL.  
(1)

## **B. Public Health and Human Rights Law**

This section describes what is known about public health and human rights law on the books, as well as the way these laws are enforced. The section covers the rights to healthcare, privacy, reportability and anti-discrimination generally and for HIV/AIDS patients. It also lists the international human rights instruments to which the country is a signatory.

**Right to Health Care/ Right to HIV Treatment –Law.** No information was available.

**Right to Health Care/ Right to HIV Treatment –Practice.** Health services currently comply with WHO and EC standards. However, UNDP feels that the centralized medical services will not be able to handle an increase in HIV/AIDS cases. All those with HIV/AIDS who meet CDC criteria are offered free treatment using anti-retroviral drugs and free hospital treatment. Doctors Without Borders has opened an STD clinic in Sofia.  
(9)

**Reportability of HIV, AIDS, HCV, HBV – Law and Practice.** No information was available.

**HIV Testing Provisions–Law and Practice.** Compulsory testing for HIV was introduced in 1986, but dropped in 1990. HIV testing is still mandatory among blood donations and systematic in many subgroups of the population. Since 1992, HIV testing is mandatory for pregnant women, STD patients and IDU's in treatment centers.  
(8)(24)

**Anti-Discrimination Provisions based on HIV or drug use – Law and Practice.** Anti-discrimination measures and requirements of confidentiality have yet to be guaranteed. (9)

**Privacy Generally and HIV in Particular –Law.** People with HIV are required to report twice a year for medical examinations. They are legally liable for spreading HIV. Their sexual partners are tracked down and tested. During the period of compulsory testing, foreigners found to be HIV positive were expelled. (24)

**Privacy Generally and HIV in Particular –Practice.** No information was available.

**Criminal Penalties for Exposing/Transmitting HIV.** As of 1995, one who transmitted HIV was held legally liable. (24)

**Criminalization of Prostitution –Law and Practice.** Commercial sex work is currently illegal. (9)

**Criminalization of Homosexuality –Law and Practice.** There are no anti-discrimination laws for homosexuality. This makes them difficult to reach with regard to HIV prevention. The gay men in the Roma community are particularly difficult to reach. (9) There is a minimum age requirement on homosexual activity. The age of consent for same-sex activity is 18, while it is 14 for heterosexual activity. Homosexual acts done in public may be punished by up to two years imprisonment. (4)

**Status of International Human Right Conventions.** Bulgaria's status in relation to major international human rights instruments follows.

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): **signed September 21, 1970**
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR): **signed September 21, 1970**
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Optional Protocol (CCPR-OP1): **signed March 26, 1992**
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Second Optional Protocol (CCPR-OP2-DP): **signed August 10, 1999**
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD): **signed August 8, 1966**
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): **signed February 8, 1982**
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Optional Protocol (CEDAW-OP): **signed June 6, 2000**
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT): **signed December 16, 1986**

(2)

## VI. PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

This section provides information on interventions to reduce HIV transmission and other health problems among drug users, the availability of drug treatment, and HIV prevention programs.

### A. Interventions to Reduce Disease and Other Injuries Associated With Drug Use

**Government Position.** The Bulgarian government has mainly focused on reducing drug trafficking and distribution. In 1999, the government began examining alternatives to prison and prosecution for drug addict offenders. (19)

**Needle Exchange Programs.** OSI currently funds four programs in Bulgaria, two of which focus on commercial sex workers and under-served Roma population. (20)

### B. Drug Treatment Programs/Availability

**Summary of Situation.** For drug treatment there are 35 outpatient units and 10-12 inpatient facilities nationwide. The National Center for Addictions has psychiatric units in 20 regional centers. Specialized training in drug treatment and demand reduction has been provided through programs sponsored by UNDCP (funded by the US, Italy and the Council of Europe's Pompidou Group). Demand reduction has received government attention for several years. The Ministry of Education requires that schools nationwide teach health promotion modules on substance abuse. The World Health Organization has a program for health promotion in 30 target schools. The Bulgarian National Center for Addictions provides training seminars on drug abuse for school teachers nationwide. There are also municipal demand reduction programs co-sponsored by the National Center for Addictions and the Institute of Public Health in six major cities and a number of smaller communities. Three universities provide professional training in drug prevention. (1)

**Drug Treatment Regulation-Practices.** As of 1995, drug treatments were only conducted in psychiatric hospitals. They basically hospitalize patients until they are considered drug free. (24)

According to UNDP, existing programs are insufficient when it comes to the volume and focus of their work. Also, the programs do not have the right mechanisms to accurately determine how effective they are. (9)

**Substitution Therapies.** Methadone treatment therapy is available.

### C. Public Health Measures to Prevent HIV and other Significant Diseases

**Government Efforts/Attitudes.** In May 1998, the Bulgarian government teamed up with the United Nations Development Program to create a National HIV/AIDS strategy. The project involves a huge cross section of Bulgarian society, health care workers, government and non-government organizations, educators and social workers working together to prevent the spread of the virus. (9)

**Programmatic Details.** All blood donations have been tested for infections since 1991. However, in many cases, old diagnostic tools are being used. A World Bank program is currently updating blood centers to meet international standards. (9)

Total number of HIV tests performed, excluding unlinked anonymous testing and testing of blood donations by year (1996 – 2000) and rate of testing per 1,000 population:

1996:	72,000
1997:	85,000
1998:	96,000
1999:	106,000
2000:	102,000

Totals/1000 population:      **12.4**

## VII. SOCIOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

A variety of data and data indices are commonly used to characterize social, political and economic factors in a country. The following are several of these for Bulgaria.

Perceived corruption in government is measured by the Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranked countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. The most recent measure was in 2001.

- Country Rank:      **47 of 91 Countries**
- 2001 CPI Score:    **3.9 of a possible 10**
- Surveys Used:      **6**
- Standard Deviation: **0.6**
- High-Low Range:    **3.2 – 5.0**

(14)

The GINI index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditures) among individuals or households within an

economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The GINI index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and the hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. This the GINI index of zero equals perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality

- GINI Index, 1997: **26.4**

The Human Development Index is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

- Human Development Index Rank (HDI) in 1999 – **63/174** (8)

Unemployment rates refer to the share of the labor force without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country.

- Unemployment rate (1997) - **13.7 %** (8)
- Unemployment rate (2000) - **17.7 %** (16)

Standard & Poor's Insurer Financial Enhancement Rating is a current opinion of the creditworthiness of an insurer with respect to insurance policies or other financial obligations that are predominantly used as credit enhancement and/or financial guarantees. The ratings range from 'CC', which is defined as "currently highly-vulnerable" to a rating of 'AAA', which is defined as "extremely strong" capacity to meet its financial commitments.

Bulgaria's long-term currency ratings is BB- which means that the government "faces major ongoing uncertainties and exposure to adverse business, financial, or economic conditions which could lead to the insurer's inadequate capacity to meet its financial commitments." The short-term currency rating is B, which means that the government faces "adverse business, financial, or economic conditions will likely impair the insurer's capacity or willingness to meet its financial commitments." The long term and short-term foreign currency rating are comparable.

Local Currency:

Long-Term rating: **BB-**

Outlook: **Positive**

Short-Term Rating: **B**

Foreign Currency:

Long-Term rating: **B+**

Outlook: **Positive**

Short-Term Rating: **B**

The Social Indicators of Poverty represents the health status of individuals in different socioeconomic groups within countries for the last survey year (1995).

- Infant Mortality Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- Child Immunization Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- Prevalence of Child Malnutrition:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- Low Mother's Body Mass Index:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- Total Fertility Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:

The National Poverty Line is the measurement of the percentage of the population below the defined income level of poverty. In Bulgaria, 35% of the population has an income below the poverty line.

- Population Below the Poverty Line, (BPL), 1996: **35%**

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total of all economic activity in one country, regardless of who owns the productive assets. The GDP per capita is the total output divided by the population. This value is then adjusted to convert to a common currency, which adjusts for national variations in the process paid for goods and services. There has been a precipitous decline in GDP in Bulgaria during the last decade with an average annual growth rate in the economy of -3.8%.

Gross Domestic Product per Capita (PPP US\$): Bulgaria **\$6200** (2000)] (21)

Gross Domestic Product - Average Annual Growth:

1980-1990:  
1987-1997: **-3.8%**

Gross Domestic Product in \$ USD Millions:

1990:  
2000: **48,000** (15)

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