

# Legal assistance and representation - Bulgaria | DIP EUAA

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## Overview

## National legislation

The relevant national provisions are found in the Law on Legal Aid, specifically Article 22 (1) item 8 and the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#).

## Competent authority and stakeholders

Area	National authority/stakeholder
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<p><b>Provision of legal and procedural information on the applicant's rights and obligations</b></p>	<p><a href="#">National Legal Aid Bureau</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)</a></p>
<p><b>Legal assistance at first instance determination</b></p>	<p><a href="#">National Legal Aid Bureau</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)</a></p>
<p><b>Legal counselling provided by civil society organisations or other organisations</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)</a></p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Legal assistance at second instance determination</b></p>	<p><a href="#">National Legal Aid Bureau</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)</a></p>
<p><b>Legal assistance for other related procedures</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)</a></p>

## **Access to legal assistance and representation**

### **Provision of information on legal assistance and representation**

According to Article 58 (8) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), asylum applicants must be informed in writing, within 15 days from the submission of their application, about their rights and obligations. This information must include details about organisations providing legal and social assistance, and it may also be provided verbally.

According to Article 23 (1) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), applicants for international protection or beneficiaries of international protection have the right to

assistance from the UNHCR and other governmental or non-governmental organizations at any stage of the proceedings and after the granting of international protection.

The Law on Asylum and Refugees does not mention information about legal aid funded from the state budget or the procedure before the National Legal Aid Bureau for legal assistance during the first-instance procedure, but it stipulates under Article 23 (2) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#) that the State has an obligation to ensure conditions for obtaining legal assistance for foreigners seeking international protection in Bulgaria.

Legal and procedural information can be provided also by the [National Legal Aid Bureau](#), through the National legal aid hotline, served by lawyers from the Sofia Bar Association, registered in the National Legal Aid Register and the 12 Regional counselling centres with Bar Councils.

## **Access to premises**

According to Article 23 (3) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), lawyers, representatives of civil society organisations, and UNHCR should have access to borders, transit zones, and detention facilities during visiting hours, and also ad hoc without prior permission when necessary or requested by asylum applicants.

Under Article 45e of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), applicants for international protection accommodated in closed-type centres are entitled to meet with persons providing legal aid and agency, representatives of UNHCR, civil society organisations and international organisations.

On 29 July 2022, the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers updated the [rules on access](#) to and operation in the territorial units of the SAR by national and international non-governmental organisations, and it introduced [a temporary restriction of access](#) due to an increase of COVID-19 cases in the respective unit.

According to the Article 23 of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), asylum applicants who are seeking or benefiting of international protection can receive legal assistance from the UNHCR, other governmental or non-governmental organisations, under the conditions provided by law.

## **Requirements: Means test and merits test**

The provision of legal aid is subject to general rules that apply to any request for legal assistance, including compliance with the means test, both for first instance and second instance determination. Article 22 (8) of the [Legal Aid Act](#) stipulates that legal aid is not granted if the applicant is already receiving legal support from another source or on another basis. The means test is based on the applicant's declaration of unemployment and insufficient resources, corroborated by competent authorities. Additionally, being an applicant for international protection and the lack of alternative legal assistance must be certified through documents issued by the relevant competent authorities and a declaration of family and property status, as per a form approved by the National Bank of Bulgaria – see Article 22(2) of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

For appeals, Article 23 (3) of the [Legal Aid Act](#) provides that legal aid in civil and administrative cases is provided when the court or the chairman of the National Bureau for Legal Aid determines, based on evidence, that the person cannot afford legal representation. In order to prove that they are unable to afford legal representation, applicants must submit a request for legal aid accompanied by a [declaration of family and property status](#) as part of the application process. The evaluation considers factors such as: income of the individual or their family; property status, certified through a declaration; marital status; health condition; employment status; age and any other relevant circumstances.

## **Modalities to submit a request for legal aid**

In Bulgaria, the process for obtaining legal aid in asylum-related procedures is provided by the [Law on Legal Aid](#) and the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#) which outline the specific modalities for requesting and granting assistance at both first and second-instance determinations.

Asylum applicants are eligible to request legal aid from the moment their asylum application is registered, as defined in Article 22 of the [Legal Aid Act](#). To initiate the process, applicants must submit proof of their status as applicants for international protection under the Law on Asylum and Refugees and a declaration confirming that they meet the means test and are not receiving legal assistance from another source. These requirements are formalised through a [standardised application form](#), provided by the National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB), which is specifically designed to address the needs of asylum seekers, including their potential vulnerabilities. A dedicated form is available for [application for legal aid to the court in an initiated case](#).

Applications for legal aid can be submitted either in paper form or digitally. For digital submissions, the National Legal Aid Bureau offers [specific guidelines](#), and applicants may need to use a designated platform, which could require the creation of an account. The application form covers all necessary details, including the applicant's personal circumstances and any vulnerabilities. The time limits for submitting requests are the same for both first and second-instance procedures and must align with the procedural deadlines for the case.

## **Outcome of the request for legal aid**

Decisions on legal aid requests are made by the Chairman of the National Legal Aid Bureau within 14 days of receiving the required documentation – see Article 25 (2-3) of the [Legal Aid Act](#). These decisions pertain to legal counselling or the preparation of documents for initiating legal proceedings, as outlined in Article 21(1) and (2) of the [Legal Aid Act](#). Each decision is issued in writing and includes essential details such as the name of the issuing authority, the factual and legal grounds for the

decision, the type of legal aid granted, and the method of appealing the decision – see Article 25 (5) of the Legal Aid Act. Additionally, the Bar Council is notified of positive decisions and is tasked with appointing a lawyer from the National Register of Legal Aid.

Applicants have the possibility to request a specific lawyer, or to change their appointed lawyer at a later stage, subject to approval by the relevant Bar Council. This option promotes individualised representation and flexibility within the legal aid system. The applicant is notified of the outcome of their legal aid request in writing, with clear instructions on the decision, including its factual and legal basis, and information on how to appeal if necessary.

Legal assistance is not granted in cases where it is deemed unnecessary or unjustified. Specifically, legal aid will not be provided if it does not benefit the applicant or if the claim is clearly groundless, unjustified, or inadmissible- see Article 24 of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

Applicants who are granted legal aid have a legal obligation to notify the National Legal Aid Bureau of any changes in their circumstances that may affect their eligibility for assistance. Failure to do so could result in the termination of legal aid and a requirement to reimburse expenses incurred from the time of the change, as specified in Article 25 of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

Once legal aid is granted, recipients must immediately notify the authorities of any changes in their circumstances that could impact their eligibility. Failure to provide such notification may result in the termination of legal aid and a requirement to reimburse the National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB) for expenses incurred from the time of the change.

If legal aid is denied, the applicant has the right to contest the refusal through an appeal to the relevant administrative court under the Administrative Procedure Code. The administrative court's decision on such appeals is final – see Article 25 (2) of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

For appeals, according to Article 22(8) of the [Legal Aid Act](#), asylum applicants are entitled to free legal aid if they are unable to afford legal representation and if they

make such a request by submitting a Declaration of Family and Property Status as part of the application process. The court or the chairman of the National Bar Association, determines that the person does not have the means to pay lawyer's fees – see Article 23 (3) of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

## **Legal assistance and representation at first instance determination**

### **Service provider**

Legal aid at first instance determination can be provided by state funded lawyers, civil society organisations or by private lawyers, at the cost of the applicants.

### **State funded lawyers**

Legal assistance and representation can be provided at first instance determination by state funded lawyers registered in a dedicated list of the [National Legal Aid Bureau](#), as enshrined in Article 22(8) of the [Law on Legal Aid](#) and Article 23 of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#). The National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB) is the national authority competent for managing the access to and provision of legal aid in Bulgaria for everyone, including for asylum applicants. According to the [National Legal Aid Bureau Annual Report 2021](#), The NLAB has signed an agreement with the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) in 2021 to ensure that asylum seekers are provided with legal assistance under the Asylum and Refugees Act.

### **Civil society organisations**

Legal assistance can also be provided by UNHCR and civil society organisations.

In practice, legal assistance at first instance is mainly provided by civil society organisations.

The civil society organisations providing legal assistance at first instance determination are:

- The [Bulgarian Helsinki Committee](#).
- The [Center for legal assistance - Voice in Bulgaria](#).
- The [Foundation for Access to Rights](#) (PHAR).

In 2021, [UNHCR Bulgaria](#) and other national civil society organisations offered traineeships to students to engage them in legal, social and integration assistance for asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. Students were involved in communicating with asylum applicants, drafting legal analysis and preparing studies on countries of origin of applicants.

## **Scope of legal assistance**

According to Article 21 of the [Law on Legal Aid](#), legal aid consists of the following activities:

1. advising clients to help them reach an agreement before legal proceedings begin or to guide them in filing a lawsuit and consultations via a national telephone number for legal assistance or regional counselling centres.
2. preparing the necessary documentation required for filing a lawsuit.
3. providing full representation for the client in court or legal proceedings.

The content of free procedural/legal advice/counselling during the administrative asylum procedure is in relation mainly to international protection.

According to the Article 63a (11) (12) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), the legal counsel or adviser has the right to be present during the asylum interview and submit their arguments at the end of the interview. However, the absence of the legal representative does not prevent the conduct of the personal interview.

## **Procedural aspects**

Pursuant to Article 76 (1) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), the decision of the Chairperson of the State Agency for Refugees must be notified to the asylum

applicant or to his legal representative or lawyer. The content of the decision and information on the rights and obligations arising from it must be communicated in a language that the applicant understands.

Access to information is guaranteed under Article 29a of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#). The law allows the applicant or their representative to request access to all information collected by the determining authority regarding the asylum claim. The law ensures that state-funded lawyers, private lawyers, and civil society representatives have the right to access this information.

There are exceptions to this right of access, and information may be withheld if its disclosure could endanger national security, the security of individuals or organizations involved, or the safety of the applicant. It may also be withheld if revealing it would interfere with the asylum process or affect international relations between member states.

## **Representation**

Representation is the same as legal assistance in Bulgaria.

## **Aspects related to special procedures**

Legal assistance for special procedures is the same as for the regular procedure.

## **Aspects related to applicants with special needs**

The National Legal Aid Bureau has a [monthly schedule](#) for duty lawyer under Article 25 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, which concerns the legal representation and assistance of unaccompanied minors in Bulgaria. The lawyers designated as representatives for unaccompanied minors can benefit of [dedicated trainings organised](#) by the NLAB and participate in [discussions](#) on issues related to such

representation.

The National Legal Aid Bureau [has opened in March 2025](#) the first regional center for free legal aid in Burgas, where lawyers from Burgas, registered in the register of the National Bureau of Legal Aid (NBLA), will be able to provide free legal aid inter alia to victims of domestic violence, children at risk, persons seeking international protection, as well as foreigners temporarily placed in detention.

The Ministry of Interior and the National Bureau for Legal Aid (NLAB) concluded a partnership agreement financed from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, for provision by NLAB of legal aid and administrative assistance for vulnerable groups in status determination procedures, project called ["Providing legal assistance to vulnerable groups of third-country nationals" under Grant Agreement HOME/2016/AMIF/AG/EMAS/0046](#). According to the NLAB Annual Report 2021, the abovementioned project was implemented jointly with the Ministry of the Interior and the State Agency for Refugees. The NLAB ensured provision of legal assistance under Article 22 (8) of [Legal Aid Act](#) for persons seeking international protection under the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR). The NLAB also draw instructions on the applicable remuneration modalities for representation of persons referred to in Article 25 of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#) (legal representation of unaccompanied minors) and Article 1 (17) of the Additional Provisions of the LAR. The State Agency for Refugees had the responsibility to identify a person as belonging to a "vulnerable group" based on the data gathered during the applicant's registration, the initial or subsequent medical screening, psychiatric consultation or expert examination for age determination, as well as by any other means laid down in SAR or the Administrative Code of Procedure [according to Article 61 (2, 5, 6) and Article 63a (6) of LAR].

When the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) identifies a person belonging to a vulnerable group and if the applicant expresses her/his will to receive legal aid, the responsible official from SAR will immediately draft and send an information note to the director of SAR's relevant territorial unit where the applicant is accommodated. Then, the director of SAR's relevant territorial unit where the applicant is accommodated or a person authorised thereby, will send, within 3 days from

receiving the information note, a letter by post, fax or e-mail to NLAB's Chairperson with the request to designate a lawyer who will provide legal aid within the framework of the agreement.

## **Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings**

### Legal and procedural information provision

The National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB) provides information on the rights of human trafficking victims prior to the commencement of legal proceedings and in the form of consultation, legal advice and preparation of documents before the relevant investigative bodies or a court for the opening of criminal or civil proceedings.

The information is provided through the NLAB's functioning:

- National legal aid hotline, served by lawyers from the Sofia Bar Association, registered in the National Legal Aid Register;
- 12 Regional counselling centres with Bar Councils: Vidin, Sliven, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Varna, Haskovo, Kardzhali, Stara Zagora, Blagoevgrad, Pernik, Pazardzhik, served by lawyers from the relevant Bar Association, registered in the NLAR;
- Public defenders assigned and appointed on requests for legal aid by trafficked persons;
- Information brochures;
- Videos.

When identifying victims of trafficking in human beings, the competent structures of the Ministry of Interior (Moi) inform victims that they are entitled to medical, psychological and legal aid as well as financial compensation and protection of their safety, in accordance with the respective statutory instruments. In this activity, police officers are guided by the provisions of the [National Mechanism for Referring and Support of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings](#).

### Provision of legal aid

The NLAB provides legal aid for consultation with a view to reaching an agreement before the commencement of legal proceedings or the filing of a case, as well as the preparation of the filing documents. Legal aid is provided from the moment when the NLAB is approached with a signal from the Crisis Centre where the victim of trafficking is placed or with an application filed by the trafficked person. On the basis of these applications, the Chairman of the Bureau [adopts a decision on the provision of legal aid](#) and informs the person concerned.

The investigative authorities and the court are the bodies that provide legal aid for procedural representation in criminal and civil proceedings.

All victims of trafficking who have expressed their wish to use legal aid due to lack of financial means to contract a private a lawyer or who have been notified to the authorities, are entitled to [free legal aid provided by a state funded lawyer](#). The conditions for granting legal aid are cumulative, as follows:

- the person is identified as a victim of trafficking in human beings;
- the person wishes to use lawyer defence;
- the person did not authorise a lawyer.

The proceedings in which such legal assistance and representation can be ensured are criminal and civil.

[Legal aid is free of charge for all child victims of trafficking in human beings](#). There are no conditions for provision of legal aid to children – see Article 22 (1, 4 and 5) of the [Legal Aid Act](#), Article 4, Item 11, Article 15 (8) of the [Child Protection Act](#), and the same applies for all the victims of trafficking who do not have the means and wish to use legal defence where the interests of justice require this – see Article 22 (1), item 7 and Article 23 (1), sentence 2 of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

## Scope

The [types of activities](#) are the same as for legal assistance at first instance: 1. consultation in view of reaching an agreement out of the court room before the beginning of the judicial proceedings or before submitting a case to the court; 2. drafting documents necessary for submitting a case; 3. representation in court; 4.

representation in cases of detention under art. 70 (1) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Act.

Children are entitled to legal aid and appeal in all proceedings affecting their rights or interests (Article 15, paragraph 8 of the [Child Protection Act](#)). The Social Assistance Directorate provides legal aid to the child and the parents, guardians, custodians or carers by providing advice and consultations on issues related to the rights of the child (Article 31 of the Regulations on the Application of the Child Protection Act).

### Qualifications and specialisation

The National Legal Aid Bureau has a [list of lawyers registered](#) in the National Legal Aid Register who are trained to advise and represent victims of trafficking in human beings. Minimum standards and unified procedures have been developed in order to provide legal aid to victims of trafficking. These standards and procedures are applied by all authorities in the legal aid system - bar councils, investigative bodies, courts and lawyers.

## **Legal assistance and representation in appeals**

### **Service provider**

Legal assistance and representation in appeals can be provided by lawyers, either through the state funded scheme or by private lawyers. Civil society organisations can provide support to draft and submit appeals.

### **State funded lawyers**

The court decides on the provision of free legal aid and representation as provided in the Legal Aid Act.

According to Article 6(2) of the [Legal Aid Act](#), legal aid is organised by the National Bureau for Legal Aid (NBLA) and the Bar Councils. Pursuant to Article 18 of the Law

on Legal Aid, legal aid is provided by state-funded lawyers during the appeal process.

The National Bureau for Legal Aid is the central authority that manages the allocation of state-funded lawyers to asylum seekers. According to Article 31 of the Legal Aid Act, the National Legal Aid Bureau must keep a National Legal Aid Register of lawyers appointed to provide legal aid in the judicial districts of the relevant district courts.

### **Civil society organisation**

Civil society organizations may provide information and legal support to applicants, in the process of drafting and lodging an appeal. When a decision is made by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), rejected applicants are given a list of resources that can assist them in obtaining free legal aid.

According to Article 23 of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), asylum applicants who are seeking or receive international protection can receive legal assistance from UNHCR, other governmental or non-governmental organisations, under the conditions provided by law.

### **Scope of legal assistance**

The role of the legal counsel or lawyer in the appeal process is to assist the asylum applicant in preparing and submitting the appeal, as well as providing representation during the hearing before the court or tribunal. The lawyer's responsibilities include advising the applicant on the legal aspects of the case, ensuring the appeal is correctly filled out, and representing the applicant in the legal proceedings. This support is provided in accordance with the provisions of the [Legal Aid Act](#).

There is no specific information available regarding the preparatory time between the lawyer and the asylum applicant for the appeal. However, the legal counsel plays an essential role throughout the entire appeal procedure, from the filing of the appeal to the court hearing.

## **Procedural aspects**

Persons who do not speak Bulgarian may use their native language or another language indicated by them, and in these cases, an interpreter is appointed. Interpretation may take place by videoconference pursuant to Article 14(1) of the [Administrative procedure code](#). Interpretation is always available at the reception facilities.

Access to information is guaranteed under Article 29a of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#). The law allows the applicant or their representative to request access to all information collected by the determining authority regarding the asylum claim. The law ensures that state-funded lawyers, private lawyers, and civil society representatives have the right to access this information.

There are exceptions to this right of access, and information may be withheld if its disclosure could endanger national security, the security of individuals or organizations involved, or the safety of the applicant. It may also be withheld if revealing it would interfere with the asylum process or affect international relations between member states.

Regarding access to classified information in national security matters, the legal adviser may not have direct access to such information, or its essence and the system has specific protocols to handle such sensitive information.

## **Type of appeal**

Free legal assistance and representation by state funded lawyers are provided at all appeals once the case has been initiated.

As for the legal support that can be received by civil society organisations, it may differ by from one organisation to another and their involvement at different stages and types of appeal.

## **Representation**

Legal representation is the same as legal representation in appeals and it is provided by state funded lawyers.

## **Aspects related to applicants with special needs**

The same rules apply as for regular procedure, with specific arrangements for minors and victims of trafficking in human beings, see Aspects related to applicants with special needs.

## **Right to counselling in the Dublin procedure**

Legal assistance for the Dublin procedure follows the same framework as the regular procedure.

Legal aid for appeals against decisions on Dublin transfers is the same as in appeals in the regular procedure.

## **Access to legal aid while in detention**

State-funded legal aid is provided through the [National Legal Aid Bureau](#) (NLAB) for third-country nationals subject to detention who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. This includes representation in legal proceedings related to detention measures, appeals, and other aspects of their case.

Article 22(9) of the [Law on Legal Aid](#) provides for the right of detained applicants to access legal aid. Legal assistance can be provided by the state funded lawyer through the [National Legal Aid Bureau](#) for third country nationals subject to detention measures and who cannot afford to pay a lawyer, at every stage of the

procedure.

According to Article 45a of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), the asylum detention decision must be issued in writing and contain the factual and legal grounds for the accommodation, the procedure and deadline for an appeal, as well as the possibility of receiving free legal assistance and representation.

Pursuant to Article 45d (7) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), if the applicant is moved from one detention center to another and benefits of legal assistance, his/her legal representative must be informed of such change of detention center.

Article 23(3) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#) provides that civil society organisations and legal aid providers have access to asylum applicants in detention as well as those at border-crossing points and transit zones. Some civil society organisations have signed official agreements with the Migration Directorate for the purposes of monitoring and assistance through visits once a week (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Bulgarian Red Cross, Nadya Centre, Center for Legal Aid-Voice in Bulgaria, Foundation for Access to Rights).

Lawyers as well as representatives of civil society organisations and UNHCR have access under the law and in practice to the detention centres during visiting hours but also ad hoc without prior permission when necessary or requested by asylum seekers. According to Article 45e of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#), applicants for international protection accommodated in close type centers, shall be entitled to: meetings with persons providing legal aid and agency, representatives of UNHCR, NGOs and of international organizations.

In 2019, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee provided free legal aid to persons accommodated in temporary shelters for refugees (detention centers) and illegal migrants through the [Program for Legal Protection of Refugees and Migrants](#). A lawyer from the program periodically visited the Busmantsi facility and the centres outside of Sofia to meet with the residents. Also, reception hours with an Arabian translator for [legal advice were organised](#) every Friday in the office of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.

## Quality assurance

### Selection, qualifications and training

The [National Bureau of Legal Aid](#) (NLAB) is responsible for selecting and appointing lawyers from the relevant Bar Associations for providing legal aid under the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR). Only lawyers included in the National Register for Legal Aid are eligible for appointment. This inclusion follows the Rules for the Selection and Organisation of the Activities of Lawyers entered in the National Register, effective from 31 December 2017.

To qualify as a legal adviser, the following criteria must be met: lawyers must have at least five years of legal experience, be registered in the National Register for Legal Aid, have no disciplinary sanctions, possess computer literacy, and have undergone certified training in Refugee Law. Lawyers with additional qualifications, such as a postgraduate degree in refugee law, previous participation in EU-funded legal aid projects, or language skills in English, French, or common languages of asylum seekers, are given preference.

The [Bulgarian Bar Act](#) governs the rules for the right to practise as a lawyer in Bulgaria.

In 2018 a statutory requirement was adopted for lawyers, and they are required to upgrade their qualifications was introduced, in Ordinance No. 4 of 2006 on maintaining and raising the qualification of lawyers and lawyers from the European Union. The Ordinance provides that for the maintenance and improvement of their qualifications, lawyers are required to participate annually in no less than eight training hours in a form and subject chosen by them. The enforcement of the lawyers' duty to maintain and increase their qualification is exercised by the Bar Councils at the Bar Associations in an order determined by the [Supreme Bar Council](#).

The National Legal Aid Bureau offers [trainings yearly](#) on refugee law for lawyers and dedicated session for designated legal representatives for unaccompanied minors.

Civil society organisations are also providing trainings for lawyers within the framework of various projects about which they provide information on their websites, for example the Foundation for Access to Rights.

In addition, the Foundation "[Center for the Training of Lawyers - Krastyu Tsonchev](#)", established by decision of the Supreme Bar Council in 2005, organises training for lawyers on all subjects, including on asylum law.

## **Mechanisms for quality assurance**

The National Legal Aid Bureau has established [guidelines](#) and [uniform standards for quality and evaluation of legal aid services](#). Lawyers' skills are further enhanced by mandatory training requirements, introduced in 2018, under Ordinance No. 4 of 2006. Lawyers must complete at least eight hours of training annually to stay qualified, with oversight by their respective Bar Councils.

## **Inter-institutional cooperation**

According to the National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB) [Annual Report 2021](#), since March 2021 the administration of primary legal aid has been streamlined through a [single electronic legal aid system](#). The system facilitates electronic document exchange between the NLAB, Bar Associations, and appointed lawyers. The Single Electronic Legal Assistance System has been integrated also with the Unified Court Information System.

The Ministry of the Interior and the NLAB cooperate and conclude agreements on provision of legal aid, for example for a project on ["Providing legal assistance to vulnerable groups of third-country nationals" under Grant Agreement HOME/2016/AMIF/AG/EMAS/0046](#). The agreement covered cooperation for establishment of methods for identification of vulnerable applicants for whom legal aid was needed.

The National Legal Aid Bureau mentioned in its [annual report for 2024](#) that it has been part of activities related to asylum and migration and its members participated inter alia in: i) the Working Party on Migration and Asylum Management, ii) an interdepartmental expert working group for the implementation of the actions set out in Objective 8 of the Implementation Plan of the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum in the Republic of Bulgaria and iii) interdepartmental Working Party on Asylum and Reception Procedures.

## **Legal assistance and representation for related procedures**

### **Reception conditions**

The refusal to provide accommodation can be appealed before the relevant Regional Administrative Court within 7 days from the notification, pursuant to Article Article 84(2) of the [Law on Asylum and Refugees](#). Legal aid is available for representation before the court once the appeal is submitted and is the same as for appeals submitted in the regular procedure.

### **Family reunification**

Legal assistance for procedures related to family reunification is the same as for regular procedure.

Civil society organisations, such as the Foundation for Access to Rights, had specific project on [free legal assistance](#) to refugees who wish to start or have already initiated the family reunification procedure in Bulgaria under the framework of a 2 years project [“Additional routes to South-Eastern Europe - COMP4SEE”](#).

### **Temporary protection procedure**

Pursuant to Article 22 (1) item 8 of the [Legal Aid Act](#), foreigners applying for or having been granted international protection or temporary protection can benefit of legal assistance.

Ukrainian citizens seeking protection in Bulgaria are eligible for [free legal aid](#) through lawyers registered in the National Register of Legal Aid. Legal services are available at regional counselling centers across the country.

The [Center for Legal Aid](#) and the [Foundation for Access to Rights](#) offer legal assistance and training for refugee law lawyers, focusing on temporary protection and human trafficking. The Access to Rights Foundation also provides support in multiple cities (Dobrich, Varna, Burgas, Plovdiv, Sofia) via a hotline and [online](#) requests for legal help. The foundation assists with health services, social and financial aid, education, childcare, housing, and employment.

Many services, including inter alia legal information, was initially provided in the [Blue Dots](#) opened in 2022, but after their closure in 2023, the services were replaced by [Compass centers](#), funded by UNHCR.

The National Legal Aid Bureau [provides information on legal assistance for displaced persons from Ukraine](#).

## **Beneficiaries of international protection**

Pursuant to Article 22 (1) item 8 of the [Legal Aid Act](#), foreigners applying for or having been granted international protection or temporary protection can benefit of legal assistance. Legal assistance can be provided by the state funded lawyer through a request made to the [National Legal Aid Bureau](#) for a person with a refused or withdrawn status of a stateless person in the Republic of Bulgaria or whose procedure for granting such a status has been terminated and who cannot afford to pay to a lawyer.