



Annual Activity Report
Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation
2025

Open societies do not support only one conception of “truth”, they rather seek to establish laws and institutions, enabling people with divergent views to live together in peace.

Karl Popper



The building of the Open Society Institute — Sofia Foundation at 56 Solunska Street

The house was built by architect Anton Torniov for the family of Dr. Alexander Radev — one of the most prominent Bulgarian jurists, politicians, and public figures of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1976, it was declared an architectural and construction monument of culture of local significance.



CONTENTS

Mission	4
Summary	5
Financial Profile	14
Active Citizens Fund	19
European Policies Programme	21
Governance and Public Policies Programme	27
Roma Programme	32
Legal Programme	35
Public Debate Programme	38
Project Development	43

Mission

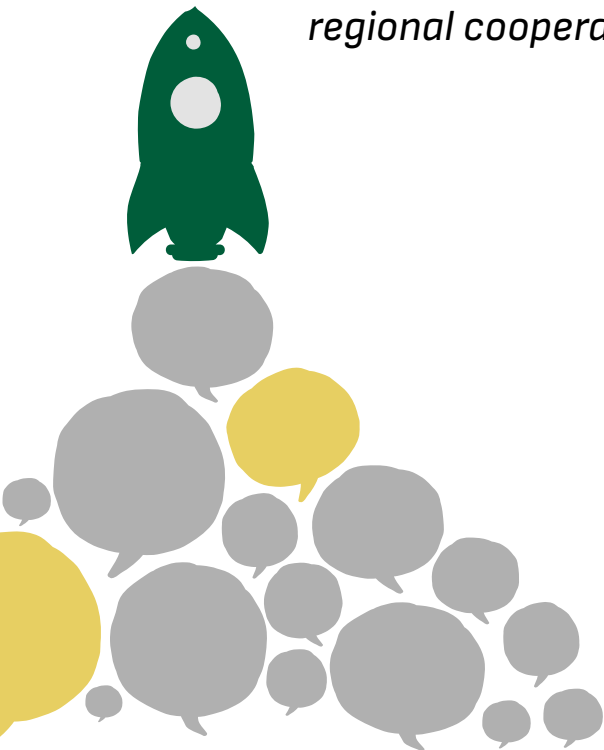
To develop and uphold the values and practices of an open society in Bulgaria

To support the democratisation of public life

To work towards the expansion and safeguarding of civil liberties

To assist in strengthening civil society institutions

To support Bulgaria's European integration and regional cooperation.



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In 2025, the Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation¹ marked the 35th anniversary of its establishment. This milestone came at a time of pressure on democratic values, fundamental rights and civic space on a scale not seen in decades.

According to the [annual report of the V-Dem Institute](#)², the level of democracy experienced by the average citizen worldwide in 2025 had fallen back to its 1978 level, while the level of democracy in Europe and North America reached its lowest point in the past 50 years. Freedom of expression remained the most severely affected aspect of democracy on a global scale.

In a number of European Union countries, including Bulgaria, independent media and civil society organisations continued to face a range of challenges during the year that hindered their ability to operate safely and freely in promoting informed civic engagement and protecting fundamental rights and democracy. As demonstrated by [a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#)³, these challenges included obstacles in the legal environment, growing difficulties in securing funding, persistent threats and even attacks against organisations and individuals, as well as underdeveloped practices for civic participation.

1 Hereinafter referred to for short as “OSIS”, “the Foundation” or “the Institute”.

2 Nord, Marina, David Altman, Tiago Fernandes, Ana Good God, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2026. Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling The Democratic Era? University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.

3 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2026. Civic Space Update: Enabling Civil Society to Uphold EU Values and Strengthen Democracy.

In this environment, in 2025 OSIS supported the work of dozens of civil society organisations, independent media outlets and think tanks in Bulgaria and nine other European countries, contributing to the protection of democratic values, the promotion of media pluralism and informed public debate, countering disinformation, and upholding fundamental rights.

In the implementation of its strategy, OSIS continued to work in four main priority areas:

- Good governance
- Rule of law and human rights
- European policies
- Civic participation.

The Institute carried out its activities through the following programmes:

- Governance and Public Policies Programme
- Legal Programme
- Roma Programme
- European Policies Programme
- Public Debate Programme
- Active Citizens Programme.

In 2025, OSIS supported 43 projects implemented by civil society organisations, independent media outlets and think tanks and implemented a further 11 projects directly, with annual programme expenses reaching EUR 2,600,000.

Support for Media Pluralism

During the year, OSIS supported the work of 33 independent media outlets in Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, Croatia and Slovenia under the project [Media Resilience: Nurturing Quality News Journalism](#). The project is co-funded by the European Union under the Creative Europe (CREA) programme and is implemented in partnership with the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) and ProMedia. Its main objective is to support the freedom, diversity and pluralism of news media by promoting quality journalism and strengthening its ability to reach groups in society that are most vulnerable to disinformation.

Support for European Integration

The Foundation also supported nine projects implemented by think tanks from Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia and the Netherlands. This support was provided within the regional initiative [Think Tanks for the Future of EU Enlargement](#). The initiative is implemented with the support of the Open Society Foundations (OSFs) and aims to foster informed public debate on EU enlargement by supporting the inclusion of perspectives from think tanks in candidate countries and encouraging their cooperation with similar organisations in EU Member States. Implementation of the initiative began in 2024 and it is projected to continue until 2028.

Support for Civil Society

In 2025, a consortium of four civil society organisations led by OSIS was selected as the Fund Operator of the [EEA Civil Society Fund in Bulgaria](#) under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2021–2028. The EEA Civil Society Fund has a total value of more than EUR 23 million and is fully funded by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The programme aims to contribute to the development of a vibrant and resilient civil society that protects and

promotes democracy, the rule of law and human rights. More than 300 initiatives by Bulgarian civil society organisations are expected to receive support under the programme during the 2026–2031 period.

During the year, OSIS continued implementing grant programmes for Bulgarian civil society organisations working to protect and promote fundamental European values. These activities were carried out under the projects [Rights and Values](#) (ProEUvaluesBG), with a budget of EUR 2,856,000 for the 2023–2026 period, and [PACT](#) (Partnership between Civil Society Organisations for Impact on Rights and Values), with a budget of nearly EUR 4,738,000 for the 2025–2028 period. Both projects are co-funded by the European Union under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme and are implemented in partnership with the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (WCIF) and ECAS. In 2025, monitoring continued under the Rights and Values project of the implementation of 65 civic initiatives approved in the previous year. Under the PACT project, an open call for partnership initiatives was conducted, garnering 145 proposals. Contracting of the selected proposals is planned for the beginning of 2026. Over the entire implementation period of the PACT project, approximately 70 civic initiatives are expected to receive support, including 40 partnership initiatives receiving funding of up to EUR 60,000 each under the Partnership Fund, managed by OSIS, and 30 small-scale initiatives with budgets of up to EUR 15,000 each under the Success Code Fund, managed by WCIF.

Contribution to Informed Public Debate

During the year, using its own resources as well as funding from other donors, the Institute supported and implemented a series of research initiatives and public events contributing to informed public debate on the state of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, Bulgaria's geopolitical

orientation, the introduction of the euro, hate speech, the state of civil society, and education in Bulgaria. To mark the 35th anniversary of the Foundation's establishment, the conference [“The Next 10: Bulgaria and the World in 2035”](#) was organised at the end of the year. The conference aimed to outline the challenges and opportunities facing the development of Bulgarian society over the next decade in an increasingly unpredictable world.

35 Years of Open Society in Bulgaria

In 2025, the Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation marked 35 years since its establishment. Founded in 1990, during the first months following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Foundation actively supported Bulgaria's transformation from a closed totalitarian state into an open democratic society. Over its 35 years of existence, the Foundation has supported and continues to support the causes of hundreds of civil society organisations, independent media outlets, academic institutions and individual citizens contributing to the advancement of democratic values, freedom of expression, media literacy, informed civic participation, the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, the inclusion of vulnerable communities, good governance, and the upholding of the rule of law.

Financial Sustainability

As part of its efforts to ensure its long-term sustainable development, OSIS continued to provide consultancy services as part of its economic activities. During the year, the Institute carried out assignments for external clients, primarily in the field of education, including activities related to updating the [Bulgarian University Ranking System](#) and the [National Map of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria](#) for 2025. During the year, the Institute also completed and reported on the implementation of the Active Citizens Fund, while a consortium led by the Institute was selected as

Fund Operator of the EEA Civil Society Fund, whose final reporting is scheduled for the beginning of 2032.

In 2025, OSIS also benefited from institutional funding provided by the Foundation to Promote Open Society – New York and the Stefan Batory Foundation, Poland.



Georgi Stoychev
Executive Director
Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation

Conference "The Next 10: Bulgaria and the World in 2035", 12.12.2025



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I. Revenues



Total revenues in 2025 amounted to EUR 2,860,000, compared with EUR 793,000 in 2024 and EUR 1,521,000 in 2023.

Revenues from Grants

Grant revenues in 2025 amounted to EUR 2,552,000, compared with EUR 345,000 in 2024 and EUR 1,111,000 in 2023. The fluctuation in recognised revenues is related to the timing of grant contracting under schemes managed by the Foundation (revenue recognition), as well as to the final reporting by grant beneficiaries (reductions based on unreported portions of their contracted budgets).

In 2025, revenues from projects coordinated by the Foundation and supported by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) amounted to EUR 1,827,000, including EUR 87,000 under the Rights and Values project (ProEUvaluesBG), EUR 1,625,000 under the Media Resilience project, and EUR 115,000 under the Partnership between Civil Society Organisations for Impact on Rights and Values project (PACT). For comparison, in 2024 total revenues from these projects amounted to EUR 171,000, including EUR 148,000 for the Rights and Values project and EUR 23,000 for the Media Resilience project. In 2023, such revenues amounted to EUR 885,000, for the Rights and Values project.

Revenue recognised in 2025 from the Open Society Foundations (OSFs) network amounted to EUR 588,000, compared with EUR 228,000 in 2024 and EUR 72,000 in 2023.

In 2025, revenue in the amount of EUR 125,000 was recognised from the Stefan Batory Foundation, Poland.

In 2025, programme activities financed by other donors amounted to EUR 7,000, compared with EUR 17,000 in 2024 and EUR 16,000 in 2023.

In 2025, the Foundation recognised EUR 55,000 in revenues from interest and EUR 2,000 in other revenues, compared with EUR 31,000 in revenues from non-profit activity in 2024 and EUR 21,000 in 2023.

Economic Activities

In 2025, the Foundation generated revenue from economic activities amounting to EUR 251,000, comprising:

Management of the Active Citizens Fund under the EEA Financial Mechanism	EUR 129,000
Activities commissioned by the Ministry of Education	EUR 121,000
Other activities	EUR 1,000

The comparative amount was EUR 417,000 in 2024 and EUR 389,000 in 2023.

Financial Result

In 2025, expenses exceeded the total revenue by EUR 85,000, with the negative result covered by the Foundation's financial reserves. For comparison, the negative financial result covered by financial reserves amounted to EUR 179,000 in 2024 and EUR 251,000 in 2023.

Net Assets

At the end of 2025, the Foundation's net assets amounted to EUR 5,808,000, compared with EUR 5,893,000 in 2024 and EUR 6,072,000 in 2023. The decreases reflect the Foundation's negative result for the respective year. As of 31 December 2025, OSIS's net assets included buildings and adjoining land with a carrying amount of EUR 273,000 and investments in subsidiaries amounting to EUR 652,000.

II. Expenses

In 2025, total expenses amounted to EUR 2,945,000, compared with EUR 972,000 in 2024 and EUR 1,772,000 in 2023.

Programme Expenses

Total programme expenses in 2025 amounted to EUR 2,600,000, compared with EUR 440,000 in 2024 and EUR 1,266,000 in 2023.

Programme expenses by programme area (in EUR thousand) for the 2021–2025:

Programme area	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Active Citizens Fund/ EEA Civil Society Fund	5	71	138	313	3,240
European Policies	366	176	79	67	463
Governance and Public Policies	126	63	48	63	60
Public Debate	1,894	59	52	69	50
Legal Programme	202	196	933	24	24
Roma Programme	7	17	16	10	49
Total	2,600	440	1,266	546	3,886

In 2025, the Foundation financed programme expenses of EUR 48,000 from its own reserves, compared with EUR 95,000 in 2024 and EUR 155,000 in 2023.

Projects Supported

In 2025, a total of 54 projects were financed, including 43 projects implemented by external organisations and 11 projects implemented by the Open Society Institute – Sofia.

Programme area	Total projects supported	incl.	
		Other organisations	OSIS
Governance and Public Policies	1	—	1
European Policies and Civic Participation	12	10	2
Legal Programme	2	—	2
Public Debate	38	33	5
Roma Programme	1	—	1
Total	54	43	11

For comparison, in 2024 a total of 22 projects were financed, including 7 projects implemented by external organisations and 15 projects implemented by the Open Society Institute – Sofia. In 2023, a total of 46 projects were financed, including 35 projects implemented by external organisations and 11 projects implemented by the Open Society Institute – Sofia.

Administrative expenses in 2025 amounted to EUR 94,000, compared with EUR 115,000 in 2024 and EUR 117,000 in 2023.

Expenses related to economic activities in 2025 amounted to EUR 251,000, compared with EUR 417,000 in 2024 and EUR 389,000 in 2023.

During 2025, the Foundation employed 18 people. As of 31 December 2025, the Foundation has a headcount of 18.

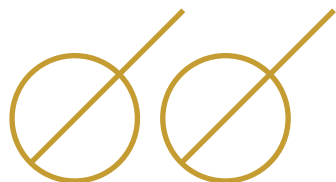
III. Reporting and Control

Financial reporting is maintained in accordance with Bulgarian accounting legislation, International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), and the established standards and requirements of donor organisations. The Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation is registered as a public-benefit organisation and makes its annual activity reports publicly available.

Since 2017, the quality management system of the Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation has been certified in accordance with ISO 9001:2015.



Veliko Sherbanov
Financial Director
Open Society Institute – Sofia
Foundation



Active Citizens Fund

In 2025, the Programme team prepared the final report on the implementation of the Active Citizens Fund – Bulgaria under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism for the period 2017–2024. Over the seven years of the Programme’s implementation, more than 250 civil society organisations were supported, carrying out 211 initiatives in 32 localities, whose results reached nearly one million people. The Programme’s total budget for the entire implementation period exceeded EUR 16 million.

In 2025, a consortium of four civil society organisations led by OSIS was selected as the Fund Operator of the EEA Civil Society Fund in Bulgaria under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2021–2028. The selection was made by the Financial Mechanism Office following an open and competitive tender procedure. Preparations for the implementation of the Programme began in the second half of 2025.

The EEA Civil Society Fund in Bulgaria has a total allocation of more than EUR 23 million and is fully funded by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The objective of the Programme is to contribute to the development of a vibrant and resilient civil society that protects and promotes democracy, the rule of law and human rights. More than 300 initiatives of Bulgarian civil society organisations are expected to receive support under the Programme in the period 2026–2031 in the following priority areas: Democracy and Participation; Human Rights and Social Justice; Organisational Development; and Addressing Challenges Arising from the War in Ukraine. At least 10% of the Programme budget will be used to support the empowerment and integration of Roma.

OSIS performs the functions of Fund Operator of the EEA Civil Society Fund in partnership with the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (WCIF), the Trust for Social Achievement and Civil Society Norway.



European Policies Programme

In 2025, Bulgaria entered its 18th year of membership in the European Union. However, the country continued to face a number of specific challenges. Bulgaria also had two unfinished European integration projects – full membership in the Schengen Area and the eurozone. It joined the Schengen Area in January 2025 and the eurozone in January 2026. Bulgaria continues to face the broader question of the future functioning of the EU, including the prospect of a “multi-speed Europe” and the risk of the country falling behind.

Against this background, the role of the European Policies Programme is to contribute to Bulgaria’s full integration into the EU and to promote informed public debate on the implementation and development of common European policies and on convergence processes within the EU.

The Programme combines research and analytical approaches with monitoring activities and the management of grant programmes. Through the European Policies Initiative, the Programme establishes and develops contacts with research institutes and experts pursuing similar objectives within the EU, particularly in the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Western Balkans and other EU candidate countries.

Main initiatives in 2025

The Programme has published the Media Literacy Index in Bulgarian and English since 2017. The Index measures the potential for resilience to post-truth, fake news and their consequences across a number of European countries. Reports related to the Index continued to receive broad coverage in Bulgaria and internationally. Dissemination of the Index continued in 2025, while preparations began for a new edition to be published in 2026.



In 2025, implementation continued of the [Think Tanks for the Future of EU Enlargement Program](#) (TFEP), launched in June 2023. Its main objective is to contribute to supporting and further improving EU enlargement strategies towards the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova, with a view to preserving peace, security and the democratic order in the Union, its Member States and the European continent in a changing geopolitical

context. During implementation, Georgia and Kosovo were added to the project's geographical scope, as Georgia was granted candidate country status and Kosovo is a potential candidate for EU membership.

Activities in 2025 included: (a) receiving proposals for initiatives from think tanks in candidate countries, reviewed by an international advisory board that also served as the selection committee; (b) maintaining the [website thenextmile.eu](#) as the project's principal communication channel for analyses and recommendations concerning EU enlargement, together with other related activities; and (c) active cooperation with four prominent EU think tanks acting as centres of activity on these issues – DGAP in Berlin, the Jacques Delors Institute in Paris, the Clingendael Institute in The Hague and Carnegie Europe.

One of the most successful forms of this cooperation was support for study visits organised by the four European organisations and OSIS to EU candidate countries, including meetings with public officials, politicians and experts. Following the visits, analytical reports containing policy recommendations concerning the European integration of the respective countries were published. In 2025, two such visits were organised – to Kosovo and Albania. As part of the so-called Balkan Hubs initiative, representatives of participating research centres visited Kosovo from 25 to 28 March 2025. The visit was organised within the framework of ongoing cooperation with the Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans, with the aim of promoting dialogue and informed policy debate on EU enlargement and regional integration. The visit was implemented in cooperation with the Pristina-based Democracy for Development Institute (D4D), with funding provided by TFEP.

A similar visit took place in Tirana, Albania, from 5 to 7 October 2025, with the mission organised by the Jacques Delors Institute. In both cases, the visits resulted in the publication of analytical reports containing recommendations concerning the EU accession process for [Kosovo](#) and [Albania](#).

Within the framework of TFEP, representatives of OSIS took part in the first Ignita 2025: On the Edge forum, held from 8 to 10 October 2025 in Prizren, Kosovo. The forum brings together civil society leaders, young innovators, politicians, researchers and representatives of the business community from different generations and sectors in a sustained strategic dialogue on the European future of the Western Balkans and on regional efforts towards EU accession.



The OSIS delegation at the first forum "Ignita 2025: On the Edge", 8–10 October 2025, Prizren, Kosovo

Projects supported under the Think Tanks for the Future of EU Enlargement Program

Organisation	Project	Amount in EUR
European Policy Centre (CEP Belgrade), Serbia	Altering EU free movement of workers in light of further enlargement: A common interest for the Netherlands and Western Balkans?	3,106
Democracy for Development Institute, Kosovo	BalkanHubs Study Visit (Kosovo)	9,536
Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), Albania	The 3 R's of EU Integration – Rule of Law, Resilience, and Reform	37,042
Centre for Contemporary Politics Serbia (CSP), Serbia	Advancing Democracy through EU Enlargement	32,600
ESTIMA, North Macedonia	How to reach sustainable solutions in bilateral disputes? Contributing to “outside the box”	37,435
Albanian Institute for International Studies, Albania	Mission Possible – enlargement and restoring the Union’s credibility and global influence	38,432
The Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Serbia	Friends or Foes? – The EU and Non-Western Actors in the Western Balkans"	61,908
European Policy Centre (CEP Belgrade), Serbia	Supporting the EU enlargement through the normalisation process between Serbia and Kosovo: Civil society as a driver of progress	37,698
Clingendael – The Netherlands Institute of International Relations	Scoping trip Albania and policy paper	9,517

In 2025, the European Policies Programme continued to participate in joint events and teleconferences aimed at developing proposals and action plans and coordinating joint initiatives within the informal Open Society European Network (OSEN).

Two in-person OSEN meetings were held in 2025. The first took place in Tallinn, Estonia, from 10 to 11 April 2025 and was organised by the Open Estonia Foundation. The second meeting was held in Bucharest, Romania, from 17 to 19 November and was organised by the Center for Public Innovation. Both meetings provided an opportunity to discuss shared challenges and possible solutions relating to democracy and civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The Catch-Up Index online platform (www.thecatchupindex.eu) continued to be maintained. The project tracks the extent to which Central and Eastern European Member States have “caught up” with the older Member States in the areas of the economy, quality of life, democracy and good governance, using data from 47 core indicators covering 35 countries. Publication of the next edition of the Index is planned for 2026.

As part of the Programme’s analytical activities, the analysis [“Public Opinion on EU Membership and Bulgaria’s Geopolitical Orientation”](#) was published on the basis of an OSIS survey conducted in September 2025.

Governance and Public Policies Programme

Through the Governance and Public Policies Programme (GPP), the Institute works to promote evidence-based civic participation in the formulation and monitoring of public policies and informed public debate in the areas of education, social inclusion and economic development.



Greater transparency and informed choice in higher education

The “IOO-S” Consortium, led by the Open Society Institute – Sofia and including Sirma Group, updated the data and prepared the 2025 edition of the Bulgarian University Ranking System. The consortium also updated the data for the National Map of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for 2025. The activities are carried out under an ongoing contract with the Ministry of Education and Science.

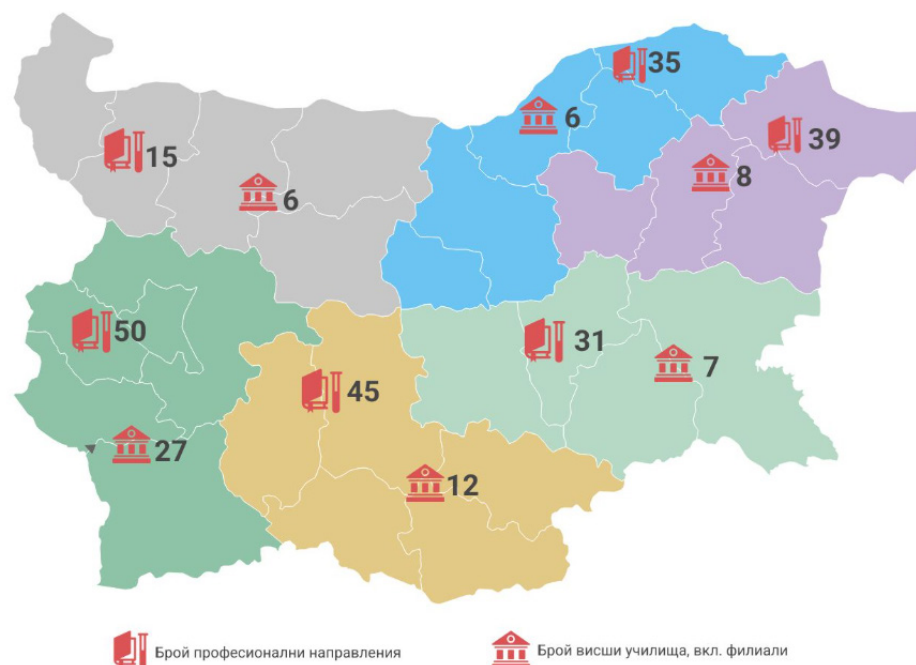
The Bulgarian University Ranking System is a transparency tool that contributes to informed choices by prospective students, as well as to informed debate and the formulation of evidence-based public policies in the field of higher education.

The 2025 edition of the Ranking System, published in November 2025, provides an updated overview of the state of higher education in Bulgaria, combining data on graduate outcomes, research output, international visibility, learning conditions and public perceptions. The new edition continues efforts to provide more detailed profiles of universities by professional field and highlights differences in quality and graduate outcomes among institutions within each of the professional fields existing in Bulgaria. Full data, interactive comparisons and the methodology are available on the Ranking System platform: <https://rsvu.mon.bg/>.



The public presentation of the 2025 edition of the Ranking System was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, the academic community and other stakeholders. The Ranking System is an established instrument in the field of higher education and has been recognised in the specialised literature for its innovative character. Its data are used in government strategic documents and regulations,

including for determining student admission numbers and the funding of public higher education institutions.



The National Map of Higher Education is a tool for the transparent development of evidence-based national policies concerning the subject-area and territorial structure of higher education in Bulgaria. The Map is updated annually by a decision of the Council of Ministers upon a proposal by the Ministry of Education and Science. The 2025 update of the data in the National Map of Higher Education was carried out by an OSIS team.

Civic participation in the formulation of education policies

In 2025, OSIS experts participated in working groups discussing policies in the field of **early learning and early childhood development**. Their contribution included participation in the work of the Standing Interinstitutional Working Group for the Planning and Coordination of Early Childhood Development Policies, chaired by the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as in the working group under the technical support project for Bulgaria and Portugal (2024–2026), “Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care through Strengthened Governance, Monitoring and Evalua-

tion”, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science and UNICEF Bulgaria with financial support from the European Union. In September 2025, a Programme representative moderated a panel entitled “Partnership for the Future” at the national conference “Leading the Future by the Hand”, organised by the Ministry of Education and Science and focused on the preparation of professionals providing education and care for children up to three years of age.

Representatives of the GPP Programme actively participated in discussions on proposals to introduce the subject “Virtues and Religion” in schools and contributed to the development of sample curricula for Grades 1–4 within a working group established by the Ministry of Education and Science. In April, the Programme team published the report [“Religion in School: A Comparative Analysis Based on Data from Selected EU and Balkan Countries”](#), contributing to informed public debate on the issue.

OSIS experts continued their work as members of the Ministry of Education and Science’s Commission on Innovative Schools, established pursuant to the Preschool and School Education Act. Programme representatives also regularly participated in plenary meetings, working groups and the preparation of position papers within the informal Education Community, which brings together non-governmental organisations and experts in education policy and reform.

In June, a Programme representative participated in the Final Conference on Bulgaria’s Accession to the OECD, with a focus on education policies, as well as in a discussion entitled “Package of Measures for More Mathematics and Science in Schools”, organised by the Ministry of Education and Science. In July, a Programme expert took part in discussions within the national forum “The Educational Structure of the School Education System”, also organised by the Ministry.

Contribution to informed public debate on the state of society

The Programme team prepared a series of analyses on key issues concerning the functioning of democracy, European integration and the state of the civil society sector. The analyses are based on OSIS's own quantitative and qualitative research data, including a representative survey of Bulgaria's adult population conducted in autumn 2025 by Alpha Research on the request of OSIS.

The quantitative data from the survey were used to prepare the analytical report ["Bulgaria on the Threshold of the Eurzone"](#). Attitudes towards the adoption of the euro were also the focus of the project "Values and Attitudes towards the Adoption of the Euro in Bulgaria". Following field research in the village of Kurtovo Konare, a public discussion with representatives of the local community was organised jointly with the Centre for Liberal Strategies on 25 June 2025 at the Lyuben Karavelov Community Centre. The discussion focused on the adoption of the euro in Bulgaria and was broadcast on Facebook and by Romani Yag TV. In December, the project report entitled ["Expectations of the Euro – Values and Attitudes towards the Adoption of the Euro as Bulgaria's Official Currency"](#) was finalised and published.

In January 2025, a Programme representative participated in a discussion on Sofia Municipality's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Democracy 2026, organised by the European Capital of Democracy non-governmental organisation (ECoD NPO). In March, a Programme representative took part in an online presentation and debate involving 35 civil society organisations applying for membership of the Council for Civil Society Development.

The GPP Programme, jointly with the Roma Programme, maintained an active presence in the civil society sector on issues related to hate speech, the state of civil society and the educational integration of Roma, with Programme representatives regularly invited to participate in events organised by various NGOs.

Roma Programme

In January, in partnership with the Governance and Public Policies Programme, the research work on the online survey “Young People 2024”, covering 4,624 young people, was completed within the joint project of the Open Society Institute – Sofia and the Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, “Intercultural Academy for Civic Participation and Tolerance”, implemented with the financial support of the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria.

Between January and February 2025, a Programme representative contributed to the preparation of the section on access to education and primary and secondary segregation in the education system in the National Network for Children publication [“Report Card 2025 – What is the State’s Average Grade for Child Care?”](#).

In February 2025, the Programme Director prepared and delivered to an online forum of the Informal Education Community, bringing together non-governmental organisations and experts in education policy and reform, a presentation on Bulgaria’s TIMSS results by socio-economic status, with a focus on a comparative analysis of the achievements of students whose mother tongue differs from the official language.

In March, a Programme representative participated in a discussion meeting on challenges to Roma integration under the project “Fundamental Rights Violations in the Management of EU Funds in Bulgaria” – 101143162-FURI-CERV-2023-CHAR-LITI, organised by the Independent Expert Network Association. In the same month, the Programme Director took part as a keynote panellist in

discussions on challenges to the democratic nature of education during the National Meeting of School Principals from the Amalipe Center's "Every Student Will Be a Winner" school network.

In April, at the invitation of the Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, an expert from the Roma Programme took part in the National Conference "Successful Practices and Models for Overcoming Discrimination in Education". In July, the expert participated in discussions within the project "Beyond Survival: Ending Child Poverty and Institutional Care through Early Support", organised by the European Roma Rights Centre and the Equal Opportunities Initiative Association.

During the second half of 2025, a Programme representative served as the Bulgarian panellist in an international Delphi expert panel under the EQUICARES project, aimed at improving access to mental health services in vulnerable communities and funded under the European Commission's Horizon Programme.

In December, at the House of Europe in Sofia, the Programme Director participated in the national roundtable "From Data to Action: Findings on the Situation of Roma in Bulgaria from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Survey", organised jointly by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Center for the Study of Democracy.

Throughout the year, the Programme prepared opinions and position papers on topics and issues related to the right of access to education, cooperation between educational institutions and civil society organisations working in the field of educational integration, as well as on a project proposal submitted for approval for a printed publication entitled "Zvezden Romol", dedicated to the development of cultural identity and traditions within the Roma community.

In connection with the 35th anniversary of the Foundation's establishment, a review and summary were prepared of the Programme's contribution since its establishment in 1996 to the social,

economic and cultural development and empowerment of Roma, as well as to their equal participation and full integration into Bulgarian society.

Among the Programme's most significant contributions were its participation in numerous national and international initiatives within the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015; the establishment of a Project Generation Platform for the period 2009–2024 and of Bridge to Business – Diversity and Inclusion in the Labour Market (2016–2019); as well as its long-standing scholarship programmes, through which more than 4,000 pupils, university students, postgraduate trainees and interns from Roma communities were supported.

Legal Programme

In 2025, the Legal Programme was engaged in the implementation of major initiatives providing grant funding to support the contribution of civil society organisations to the protection and promotion of European values.

During the year, implementation began of the project [Partnership between Civil Society Organisations for Impact on Rights and Values \(PACT\)](#). The project is implemented by the Open Society Institute – Sofia in partnership with the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation and the European Citizen Action Service – Brussels (ECAS).

The project is implemented with financial support from the European Union under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV), amounting to EUR 4,264,113, or 90% of the project budget. The funding institution is the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The consortium members co-finance the project with an amount corresponding to 10% of its total value.

Implementation of the PACT project began on 1 January 2025 and is expected to continue until 31 December 2028.

The project's main objective is to contribute to bridging the gap between urban centres where democracy is supported as a model of governance and other regions where scepticism towards democracy and vulnerability with regard to EU values persist.

The project provides for two separate calls for proposals under two funds supporting initiatives of civil society organisations – the Partnership Fund and the Success Code Fund.

The Partnership Fund, managed by the Open Society Institute – Sofia, has a total value of EUR 2,400,000. Its objective is to support partnership initiatives based on cooperation between civil society organisations of different sizes – from large, well-established organisations to smaller local organisations – and to bring together their efforts to contribute to embedding European values within different communities. Under the call for proposals launched on 15 April, 145 applications were submitted. Together with the project partners, the Open Society Institute – Sofia organised six information days in different regions of the country, as well as webinars presenting the Guidelines for Applicants, attended by more than 300 participants. More than 40 initiatives are expected to receive support and begin implementation during the first half of 2026.

In 2025, the project [Strengthening the Role of Civil Society Organisations in Bulgaria in Protecting and Promoting Fundamental European Rights and Values \(Rights and Values / ProEUvaluesBG\)](#),



implemented within the Legal Programme, entered its final stage. The project is implemented by the Open Society Institute – Sofia in partnership with the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation and the European Citizen Action Service – Brussels (ECAS) and will continue until 30 April 2026. The Rights and Values project is implemented with financial support from the **European Union under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)**, amounting to EUR 2,570,299 and representing 90% of the project's total budget. The funding institution is the **European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)**. The consortium members co-finance the project with funds corresponding to 10% of its total value.

As the lead partner in the project, OSIS continued to perform its overall management responsibilities, as well as the management of the Action Fund, under which 16 civil society initiatives were successfully implemented. These initiatives achieved impact at national or regional level by raising awareness of EU values and supporting their protection, promotion and implementation in Bulgaria.



The second annual meeting of organisations supported under the Rights and Values project gathered more than a 100 civic activists from around Bulgaria.

Public Debate Programme

In 2025, the Public Debate Programme continued the implementation of the project [Media Resilience: Nurturing Quality News Journalism \(Media Resilience\)](#), with a total budget of EUR 2,222,000 for the period 2024–2026. The project is 90% funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) under the EU Creative Europe Programme (CREA). The project is implemented by the Open Society Institute – Sofia in partnership with the ProMedia Foundation and the Brussels-based international association European Citizen Action Service. Its main objective is to support the freedom, diversity and pluralism of news media by promoting quality journalism that reaches groups in society most vulnerable to disinformation. The project is implemented in five EU Member States – Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia.

On 22 January 2025, a call for project proposals was launched and disseminated in local languages across all five participating countries, reaching more than 30,000 people. A total of 87 proposals were submitted from the countries covered by the project, of which 33 projects with a total budget of EUR 1,560,000 were selected and contracted. Of the supported media outlets, eight specialise in investigative journalism, while 11 are local, regional or community media.

Media Resilience: Nurturing Quality News Journalism, Co-Financed By European Education And Culture Executive Agency Under The Creative Europe Programme (Crea)

Organisation	Initiative	Amount in EUR
TV1 Bulgaria SLtd., Bulgaria	TV1 Bulgaria – Trust, Truth and the European Perspective	40,000
Pro News Bulgaria JSC, Bulgaria	Creation of a mobile application for 24 chasa	59,158
Pro Veritas Association, Bulgaria	Independent regional journalism in support of civic and media scrutiny in four of Bulgaria’s so-called “information deserts”	55,598
Toest Foundation, Bulgaria	Toest.bg Sustainability Project: Enhance, Expand, Engage	59,955
Club Zebra Foundation, Bulgaria	Engaged Audiences, Sustainable Media: A 12-Month Initiative to Launch ClubZ’s Premium Editorial Hub Engaged Audiences, Sustainable Media: A 12-Month Initiative to Launch ClubZ’s Premium Editorial Hub	49,450
Pro News Dobrich SLtd., Bulgaria	The Voice of the Roma in Dobrich Region: Innovations in Reporting News and Stories about the Community	40,000
Documentalistite Foundation, Bulgaria	Innovative communication formats and public interest journalism for a more pluralistic media environment in Bulgaria	31,826
Economedia, Bulgaria	NextGen Resilience Initiative: Empowering Youth Through Trusted Journalism	59,995
42 Foundation, Bulgaria	The Meaning	44,459
Investor.bg JSC, Bulgaria	The Voice of Facts	20,600

Gutenberg 3.0 Foundation, Bulgaria	Online Media for Kids: Investment in Media- and Civic-Literacy	53,503
Anti-Corruption Fund Foundation, Bulgaria	WE CARE! Using quality journalism to engage vulnerable groups	59,922
Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria, Bulgaria	Factcheck.bg Reboot in the Anti-Facts Age	50,000
Off Media JSC, Bulgaria	The Big Picture: Complex Topics, Simple Facts	56,840
Stream Foundation, Hungary	Mission Possible 2025 – Sustaining Free Media in Kecskemét	30,000
Roma Radio Ltd, Hungary	The new alternatives of minority radio broadcasting	50,000
Atlatszo.hu Public Benefit Nonprofit LLC, Hungary	Follow the Story: Strengthening Investigative Journalism from Local Issues to National Impact	59,806
Magyar Jeti Private Limited Company, Hungary	Next-gen Media: Studio & Podcast Development at Magyar Jeti Zrt	33,000
Partizan Alapítvány, Hungary	Telling the Story of Hungary – Live Tour	59,998
Alhambra-Press Bt. / Hungarian Voice, Hungary	Migrate editorial system to an open-sourced platform	59,933
Szegeder Foundation, Hungary	Strengthening Szegeder: Infrastructure, Innovation and Revenue for Sustainable Local Journalism	40,000
Institute Mojaleta.si, Slovenia	Aging with Dignity: Monitoring Long-Term Care in Slovenia	31,618
Institute ZON.si, Slovenia	ZONplay	47,957
Kreativna pika d.o.o., Slovenia	I know how to verify!	22,130

Ostro, Center for investigative journalism in the Adriatic region, Slovenia	Building Resilience for Sustainability	45,973
Institute Časoris, Slovenia	Where Tiktok meets truth	36,347
The Manifold, Greece	Breaking the silence? How Greek authorities treat abuse victims who dare to speak out	39,776
FYI News Single ember SA, Greece	Developing Resilience Through Content and Technological Initiatives	36,000
The Whole Story Publications Single Member S.A., Greece	Inside the Story: Youth Perspectives	54,634
Solomon, Greece	Restoring citizens' trust through community-centered reporting	59,268
Oštro, Center for investigative journalism in the Adriatic region, Croatia	Oštro's Next Chapter: Strengthening Investigative Journalism in Croatia	54,123
Telegram media group, Croatia	AIM 4 TRUTH	58,148
Faktograf – Association for the Informed Public, Croatia	Health Hazard: An Audience-First Approach in Combating Health Disinformation	59,974

Under the Public Debate Programme, the project “Attitudes towards Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights” was funded and implemented in 2025. The project included a field survey of public attitudes towards democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, conducted by the marketing and social research agency Alpha Research. A series of analytical reports and analyses were prepared within the project, including on [public attitudes towards democracy](#), [the rule of law](#), and the [introduction of the](#)

[euro](#). Findings from the reports were also presented at public events, including at the [conference “The Next 10: Bulgaria and the World in 2035”](#). The published analyses received extensive media coverage.

In 2025, the Public Debate Programme also supported the research [project “Assessment of Grant Funding from Non-Bulgarian Sources in Bulgaria”](#), implemented by the Institute for Market Economics (IME), with funding of EUR 7,500. The research report was publicly presented on 15 December 2025 at the House of Europe during an event jointly organised by OSIS, IME and the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria.

To mark the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Open Society Institute – Sofia, the conference “The Next 10: Bulgaria and the World in 2035” was held on 11 December 2025. The aim of the conference was to outline the challenges and opportunities facing the development of Bulgarian society over the next decade in an increasingly unpredictable world. More than one hundred participants, including representatives of civil society, academia and the diplomatic community in Bulgaria, took part in the conference.

In 2025, through the Public Debate Programme, sponsorship support of EUR 1,000 was provided for the [2025 Annual Meeting of the International Network Against Cyber Hate](#) (INACH), entitled “Driving Change – Navigating the Evolving Digital Landscape”.

In 2025, the Project Development Unit worked on coordinating, preparing and submitting several project proposals, including in cooperation with international partners.

Following participation in a competitive selection procedure, the Institute was selected as the Fund Operator of the EEA Civil Society Fund in Bulgaria under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2021–2028. The Programme will be implemented during the period 2026–2031, with preparations for the implementation agreement commencing in the second half of 2025.

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