

Bulgaria

Country name	Bulgaria
State title	Republic of Bulgaria
Name of citizen	Bulgarian
National official language	Bulgarian
Country name in official language	България (Bulgaria) (<i>bul</i>) ¹
State title in official language	Република България (Republika Bulgaria)
Writing system	Cyrillic script
Romanization System	BGN/PCGN Agreement for Bulgarian
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	BG/BGR
Capital (English conventional name)	Sofia
Capital in official language	София (Sofia)
Population/Area	6,948,445 ² / 110,993km ²

Introduction

Bulgaria lies in the eastern Balkans on the Black Sea and shares land boundaries with Serbia, Romania, Greece, North Macedonia and Turkey. The Danube river forms most of the boundary with Romania and the country's topography is characterised broadly by mountains in the west and plains in the east towards the Black Sea. Bulgaria is the poorest member state of the EU, and is facing population decline.

Geographical names policy

PCGN policy for Bulgaria is to use official sources from Bulgaria and romanize these according to the agreed [BGN/PCGN romanization system for Bulgarian](#). In 2013 BGN and PCGN agreed to adopt Bulgaria's 2009 national romanization system, so that any official mapping and sources produced in Roman script in Bulgaria should align with US and UK government products.

Official mapping is produced by Bulgaria's Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency. The Agency maintains a geoportal at: <https://gkf.cadastre.bg/> and a Register of geographical names: <https://geonames.cadastre.bg/> Names in the latter are shown in Bulgarian language (see more in *Languages*, below) and should be used as the authoritative source.

The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server](#) (GNS) database is also a good source for geographical names.

¹ ISO 639-3 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

² UN data as of 2022. Bulgaria's population has been diminishing since the end of the Communist regime at which time it was over 9 million.

Languages

Bulgarian (*bul*), written in the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet, is the national official language; it is a southern Slavic language, close to Macedonian. A number of minority languages are spoken, the most widespread being Turkish (*tur*) (almost 10% as native language) and two Romani (*rom*) languages (together about 4%)³. Minority languages do not have official status; minority names can be collected and used on HMG products if deemed useful, though official Bulgarian sources are unlikely to include these⁴.

Writing systems and romanization

Bulgarian is written in the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet, which PCGN and BGN romanize using the Bulgarian national romanization system approved for US and UK use in 2013.

The romanization system is a straightforward ‘one for one’ representation between the original Cyrillic and Roman scripts; there are two exceptions: when in final position, /ия/ is romanized as /ia/ (София = Sofia) and /ъ/, elsewhere romanized /a/, is represented with /u/ in the country name. These exceptions allow for the romanized form: България = Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian romanization system does not use any special characters or diacritical marks in addition to the basic Roman alphabet (characters /ж/, /ц/, /ч/ and /ш/ are represented with digraphs /zh/, /ts/, /ch/ and /sh/ in their romanized form).

If encountered, Turkish names will be written in Roman script (and these names should be reflected as found, retaining any diacritical marks). Romani has traditionally been unwritten, and Romani language variants usually follow the orthography of the relevant national language (e.g. Romanian or Hungarian). There is little recognised use in Bulgaria, though if it is encountered it is likely to be written in Roman script.

Ethnicity

Over 78% of the population recorded itself as Bulgarian in the 2021 Census; other significant groups are Turkish, 8%, and Romani, 4%. It is possible, however, that this number under represents the Romani population, given the group has suffered discrimination which often affects self-identification.

³ Romani or Romany (*rom*) is considered a macro-language with divergent variations: the forms mostly spoken in Bulgaria are Balkan Romani (*rmn*) and Vlax Romani (*rmy*) with some 600,000 speakers (SIL International estimate) across the Balkans.

⁴ For example, the province with the highest Turkish population density is Kardzhali. This is Kircaali in Turkish, but this name does not appear on official maps or the geoportal.

Administrative structure

Bulgaria is divided into 28 units at the first-order level of administration: 27 provinces (oblast) and 1 city province: Sofia-grad. Each of the provinces takes the name of its administrative centre and the provinces may be seen with the specific name in an adjectival form (e.g. *Blagoevgradska oblast*). The nominal form without the generic term is shown in the table below.

ADM1	ISO 3166-2	Administrative centre (Bulgarian Cyrillic)	Administrative centre (Romanization)	Location of centre
Blagoevgrad	BG-01	Благоевград	Blagoevgrad	42°01'00"N 23°06'00"E
Burgas	BG-02	Бургас	Burgas	42°30'22"N 27°28'04"E
Dobrich	BG-08	Добрич	Dobrich	43°34'00"N 27°50'00"E
Gabrovo	BG-07	Габрово	Gabrovo	42°52'29"N 25°20'03"E
Haskovo	BG-26	Хасково	Haskovo	41°56'25"N 25°34'10"E
Kardzhali	BG-09	Кърджали	Kardzhali	41°39'00"N 25°22'00"E
Kyustendil	BG-10	Кюстендил	Kyustendil	42°17'02"N 22°41'28"E
Lovech	BG-11	Ловеч	Lovech	43°08'00"N 24°43'00"E
Montana	BG-12	Монтана	Montana	43°24'45"N 23°13'30"E
Pazardzhik	BG-13	Пазарджик	Pazardzhik	42°12'00"N 24°20'00"E
Pernik	BG-14	Перник	Pernik	42°36'00"N 23°02'00"E
Pleven	BG-15	Плевен	Pleven	43°25'00"N 24°37'00"E
Plovdiv	BG-16	Пловдив	Plovdiv	42°09'00"N 24°45'00"E
Razgrad	BG-17	Разград	Razgrad	43°32'00"N 26°31'00"E
Ruse	BG-18	Русе	Ruse	43°51'23"N 25°58'15"E
Shumen	BG-27	Шумен	Shumen	43°16'36"N 26°55'45"E
Silistra	BG-19	Силистра	Silistra	44°07'00"N 27°16'00"E
Sliven	BG-20	Сливен	Sliven	42°41'09"N 26°19'45"E
Smolyan	BG-21	Смолян	Smolyan	41°35'07"N 24°41'31"E
Sofia	BG-23	София	Sofia	42°41'00"N 23°19'00"E
Sofia-grad	BG-22	София	Sofia	42°41'00"N 23°19'00"E
Stara Zagora	BG-24	Стара Загора	Stara Zagora	42°25'58"N 25°38'31"E
Targovishte	BG-25	Търговище	Targovishte	43°15'33"N 26°35'21"E
Varna	BG-03	Варна	Varna	43°13'00"N 27°55'00"E
Veliko Tarnovo	BG-04	Велико Търново	Veliko Tarnovo	43°05'09"N 25°39'20"N
Vidin	BG-05	Видин	Vidin	43°59'24"N 22°52'21"N
Vratsa	BG-06	Враца	Vratsa	43°12'36"N 23°33'45"N
Yambol	BG-28	Ямбол	Yambol	42°29'00"N 26°30'00"N

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Approved Name ⁵	Name in Bulgarian	Conventional name	Other names	Location	Feature Type
Black Sea	Черно море / Chernomore	Black Sea	Chernoye More (<i>rus</i>), Chorne more (<i>ukr</i>), Karadeniz (<i>tur</i>), Marea Neagră (<i>rum</i>), შავი ზღვა (Shavi Zghva) (<i>geo</i>)	43° 00' 00"N 35° 00' 00"E	Sea (littoral states: Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine)
Danube or Dunav	Дунав / Dunav	Danube	Donau (<i>deu</i>), Duna (<i>hun</i>), Dunaj (<i>slk</i>), Dunărea (<i>rum</i>), Dunav (<i>ser</i>), Dunai (<i>ukr</i>)	45° 20' 00"N 29° 40' 00"E	River (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine)
Musala	Мусала / Musala	-		42° 10' 47"N 23° 35' 12"E	Highest mountain
Pirin	Пирин / Pirin	-		41° 45' 49"N 23° 23' 58"E	Mountain range
Rhodope Mountains or Rodopi	Родопи / Rodopi	Rhodope Mountains (<i>sometimes</i> Rhodope)	Rodópi (<i>gre</i>)	41° 36' 04"N 24° 34' 27"E	Mountain range (Greece, Bulgaria)
Rila	Рила / Rila			42° 06' 00"N 23° 33' 00"E	Mountain range

⁵ PCGN usually recommends use of conventional names for international features where they exist. If there is no conventional name, or if a product requires local forms, then the relevant name can be shown on the appropriate side of the international boundary on cartographic products.

Useful references

- BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17202996>
- Bulgaria's official geoportal: <https://gkf.cadastre.bg/>
- Bulgaria's official register of geographical names: <https://geonames.cadastre.bg/>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/bulgaria/>
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui>
- Languages: <https://www.ethnologue.com/>, www.omniglot.com
- National Register of Populated Places: <https://www.nsi.bg/nrn/index.php?ezik=en>
- National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria: <https://www.nsi.bg/>
- Unicode Consortium: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names Server: [Geographic Names Server](#)

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