



Bulgaria

Family Life



Family composition in Bulgaria can be varied but is generally similar to families in U.S. Typically, only the parents and children live in the same household. In some cases, often in rural areas, the grandparent(s) are part of the household, as well. In Bulgaria, it is common for both parents to be professionals, and for both to be financially responsible for the family. Both parents expect to be viewed as equal authority figures in all household decisions.

Meals in Bulgaria may be eaten all together as a family, or separately depending on family members' schedules.

Among siblings, possessions of an individual child are treated as their own, and are not understood to be the shared property of siblings; this includes clothing. When siblings want to borrow something from each other, it is generally understood that they must ask first.

Teen Life: In Bulgaria, teenage dependence on parental advice is typically individual and family-specific. Some parents want to play bigger roles in the children's lives, and while others may leave decisions up to their child, while

still expressing their opinion.

Teenagers in Bulgaria get allowances from their parents. There are not many options for part-time work for students, except for very rare summer jobs. The availability of this type of work depends on the family and the place where the teenager lives (e.g. if there are any options in their town).

Responsibilities: The types of chores given to high school-aged children in Bulgaria are different depending on each family. In general, there are no chores divided between genders. Teenagers are mostly responsible for taking care of their room. It would be very unusual to have a housekeeper in a Bulgarian home.

Cooking responsibilities are not so much gender related as family specific. Cooking as a hobby is becoming trendy among young people in Bulgaria.

Parental Involvement: To monitor students' academic behavior, schools organize parents meetings. Recently, some schools in Bulgaria have introduced electronic diaries, and parents can check their child's school absences, their grades, etc. However, traditionally Bulgarian parents are rarely involved in their student's extra-curricular activities but there is a tendency in the last years that parents get more involved in this especially if it is connected with future career of the child.

Parents in Bulgaria may not limit how much time the child spends on the internet, but likely do not monitor what their child is doing online. It is very common that Bulgarian teenagers go out during the weekend until very late (2 AM), it is considered cultural tradition and for many parents it might be challenging to introduce a curfew.

Pets: Having pets in Bulgaria is very similar to the U.S. Cats and dogs are most common, but people also keep fish, canary birds, small parrots, hamsters.



Personal Interactions

Mixed Gender Socializing: It is perfectly acceptable for Bulgarian teens to have friends of the opposite sex and to socialize with them one-on-one.

Teenagers in Bulgaria sometimes socialize in groups, and sometimes one-on-one; both are considered appropriate, and the choice is left up to the individual.

Friendships: Bulgarian teenagers often think of peers with whom they are only casually associated as friends, much like teens in the U.S. They don't reserve the term "friend" for someone who is very close, although this can change if the student is from a smaller community.

Students in Bulgaria share expenses when they are out together and don't loan money to each other often. It is very typical for friends to go out for coffee, especially in small towns/villages. Some Bulgarian boys may pay for dates when they go out with a girlfriend.

Friendships are usually made at school or at clubs and extracurricular activities. Neighbors tend to be close friends, since it is likely they have known each other since kindergarten.

Communication Styles: Bulgarians communicate directly. Most teenagers in Bulgaria feel comfortable communicating directly with their parents, and they typically will express emotions, even negative ones, quite freely amongst their peers and family.

Physical space when communicating with another person is not as obvious in Bulgaria as it is in America. This can vary between individuals, depending on the teenager and his/her family. In general, physical space in Bulgaria is much closer than in the U.S. Bulgarians may be very tactile- hugging or kissing is a common way of greeting. For instance, Bulgarian students have no problem giving a friend a big hug in the middle of a school hallway.

Eye Contact: Eye contact is not as important in Bulgarian culture as in other YES countries. However, children are often told by parents or teachers "Look at me", when being reprimanded or when discussing a serious issue. This is to show that a student is paying attention, and is also because it's considered harder to tell a lie when one is looking another straight in the eye.

Cultural Norms: Teenagers in Bulgaria show respect to people who they think deserve respect regardless their age. In general, interactions with elder family members and members of the community are much more informal, and adults are typically addressed by their first name.

In Bulgaria, punctuality is valued, but not as respected as it is in the U.S. Being late is not considered an issue, and arriving up to 15 minutes late is excusable.

School



The academic year in Bulgaria starts on September 15th and finishes on June 30th, and is divided into two terms. The bigger schools with many students are usually organized into two shifts – one starts at 7:30 A.M. and finishes around 1:00 P.M., and the second shift starts at 1:30 P.M. and goes until 6:30 P.M. Smaller schools, and those in towns and villages, usually have only the first shift. Schools in Bulgaria are not segregated by gender, and boys and girls attend the same class.

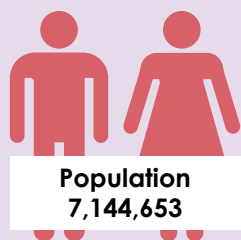
Classes

Classes in Bulgaria are 40 minutes long, with 10 minutes break in between. There is one "big break" of 20 minutes in the middle of the shift.

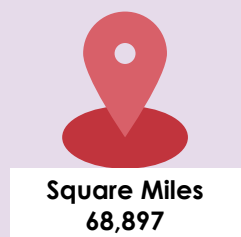
Classes consist of 20-25 students who typically stay in the same group for all of their subjects. However, some classes, like electives that take place in addition to the standard number of classes, may have new groups with some students from the same grade.



Sofia



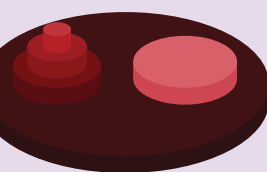
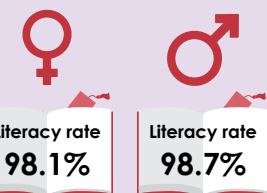
Population
7,144,653



Square Miles
68,897



Currency
Bulgarian Lev



Bulgarian 76.9%
Turkish 8%
Roma 4.4%
Other 0.7%
Unknown 10%



Eastern Orthodox 59.4%
Muslim 7.8%
Other 1.7%
None 3.7%
Unspecified 27.4%

Classroom organization in Bulgaria varies from school to school. In some schools, students have an assigned classroom. In other schools, there are “subject” rooms and students move to different rooms based on the subject.

Students in Bulgaria are evaluated in different ways depending on their class and teacher. However, in general, the most common assignments would be: homework, oral and/or written exams, participation in class, and sometimes presentations (individual or group). Written assignments are regularly given at the begging of the academic year, to check the student’s level from the previous year; there may also be a mid-term or an end-of-term assessment. Some schools in Bulgaria follow a certain number of written and oral evaluations per term.

It is very popular for students to participate in competitions and “Olympiads” in various subjects (including Math, Languages, Literature, Physics, Biology, Philosophy, etc.) These competitions are organized on several levels: school, regional, national. The top students in those competitions get an excellent mark if they score well on a regional or national competition. Academic grading in Bulgaria commonly takes on the form of five numerical grades from 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, where “2” is failing grade and “6” is best possible grade. Roughly, the Bulgarian grade system can be equated to the American one as the following: 6=A, 5=B, 4=C, 3=D, and 2=F.

For examinations and tests in Bulgaria, exact grading is often used, and is represented by two positions after the decimal point. Every passing grade at or above the .50 mark is prefixed with the term of the higher grade.

School Relationships

Student – teacher relationships in Bulgaria are quite formal. Bulgarian students are expected to call their teacher by their family name (Mrs./Mr.). Students would also speak to teachers using the “polite form” that exists in their language. It is very rare to have students in Bulgaria address their teachers (or adults, in general) by their first name.

Extracurricular Activities

Some Bulgarian schools are more active and offer activities to their students using various European Union funded programs. If a student’s school offers fewer activities and the student lives in a city or bigger town, students may look for organizations that offer similar activities, but students may have to pay a fee. If the student comes from a small town, they may have limited options.

School Rules and Attire

Rules in Bulgarian schools are very similar to American schools, with the same challenges present in both school systems. Students must be present at school and must be on time for classes. If not, students will receive an “unexcused absence” from class; having 30 “unexcused absences” will cause a student to be expelled from school. If a student is late up to 15 minutes, they will get a “third” of an unexcused absence. If a Bulgarian student feels sick, he or she must get a note from a doctor. Students must have their parents submit notes to the school in order for other absences to be excused.

Students in Bulgaria are generally not supposed to have their cell phones in class, but some teachers find it challenging to enforce this rule (trying to collect them at the beginning of each class and to give back after the class).

School uniforms used to exist in all Bulgaria, but this rule was abolished some time ago. Recently, schools have started reintroducing school uniforms, primarily in very good schools, mainly as a sign of “belonging” to that school. The uniforms differ from school to school, and have a slight variation in the male/female uniforms. The items and colors are usually chosen by the students and the school board.

Returning from Exchange

Upon returning to Bulgaria after their YES year, students face regulations from the Ministry of Education for all students who have spent an academic year abroad. Although some of classes that students may study in the U.S. are accepted by the Ministry of Education, most of Bulgarian students will still have to sit for exams for most of the subjects their peers studied while they were in the U.S. The only option outside of studying for and taking these exams is to choose to continue studying with the students from a lower class. Some Bulgarian YES students choose to repeat a grade in order to have higher grades overall but this happened rather rarely in the past.

Food and Culture



Dietary restrictions in Bulgaria, other than food allergies or medical conditions, are not very common, including vegetarianism. Dietary restrictions based on religious practices are also uncommon.

Guest Culture

If invited to the Bulgarian home, which would only happen if one was considered a trusted and close friend, a guest would be expected to try the food and drinks offered by the host. Foreigners, may feel they are being “pushed” to eat and drink. After trying the food and drink, it is considered polite to decline offers as long as it is doing in a respectful manner. It is considered respectful and positive to bring something when invited to Bulgarian home.

Lunch and Diets

In Bulgaria, lunch at home is usually a hot meal, but cold sandwiches are becoming more popular for lunch eaten outside of the home. At school, Bulgarian students either bring food from home or buy lunch from cafeterias around the schools.

Religion: In general, people in Bulgaria are not very religious. Religious services are not considered a family affair, as they are in other countries. Unlike the U.S., places of worship in Bulgaria are not automatically community gathering places.

Attendance at religious services is more popular in areas with larger Muslim populations, and the vast majority of Bulgarians are quite secular and do not attend religious services. In youth culture, doctrinal religiosity is not considered popular.

Holidays

The majority of Bulgarians are Orthodox Christians, and celebrate the major holidays of Christmas and Easter. These celebrations are family events, and are celebrated similarly to these holidays in the U.S.

There are representatives of other religions in Bulgaria (including Judaism, Islam, and some Catholics and Protestants), and they celebrate some different holidays.

There are several official holidays in the country like Liberation day (March 3); Culture and Literacy Day (May 24); Reunification Day (September 6); and Independence Day (September 22).

Personal Hygiene



Bathing every day is common practice in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria, bathrooms can be fully tiled, with a drain set in the floor. A student from Bulgaria may have very little experience using a dry bathroom, and may need some guidance upon arrival to learn that shower curtains belong inside the tub and that bathmats are used to keep the rest of the floor dry after stepping out of the shower.

In Bulgaria, some families may have washers and dryers as in the U.S., but in general, students will not be accustomed to doing their own laundry and will need to be taught how to use these machines. Bulgarian teens will usually wear clothes once before they need to be washed.