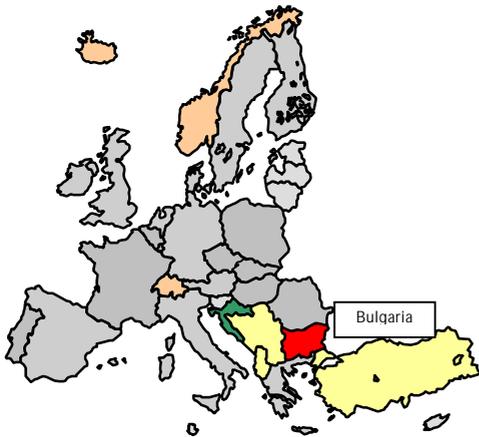


Bulgaria



Date of last revision: 1st October 2008

In the EU/EEA since	2004
Population (2008)	7,640,238
GDP PPP per capita (2007)	€9,802
Currency	Bulgarian Leva (BGN) 1.95 BGN = €1.00 (2008)
Main languages	Bulgarian

General health care is mainly funded by deductions from salaries. The system is designed as a state monopoly although voluntary health insurance which is at its initial stage. It operates through a National Health Insurance Fund.

Number of dentists:	7,987
Population to (active) dentist ratio:	957
Members of Dental Association:	100%

The use of specialists is widespread but there has been no development of dental auxiliaries. Continuing education for dentists is mandatory.

Government and healthcare in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is in South-Eastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea to the East, Romania to the North, Serbia and FYROM to the West, and Turkey and Greece to the South. The land area is 110,550 sq km. The capital is Sofia. The country is divided into 28 districts.

The head of state is the President and the head of government the Prime Minister. The Council of Ministers is nominated by the prime minister and elected by the National Assembly. The President of the Republic is elected by direct popular vote for a term of four years.

There is a unicameral National Assembly or Narodno Sybranie (240 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)

The minimum age for voting and standing for election is currently 18.

Healthcare in Bulgaria is based on mandatory health insurance, governed by the Health Insurance Act (1998, State Gazette #70), also encompassing the voluntary health insurance which is at its initial stage. It creates legislative framework for the organisation of the mandatory health insurance.

The mandatory health insurance system is designed as a state monopoly. It has the exclusive right to grant mandatory health insurance and to guarantee the observance of the insurance rights in respect of all nationals, following a public contract model. A National Framework Contract is to be signed every year between the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) on one side, and the Bulgarian Medical and Dental Associations – on the other. The Contract comes into force upon sanction of the Minister of Health. The contracted annual package of activities in dental medicine varies according to the age.

	Year	Source
% GDP spent on health	8.0% 2004	OECD
% of this spent by governm't	57.6% 2004	OECD

The Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA) reports that in 2007, the proportion of public resources spent on general healthcare, including dental medicine, was 4% of GDP (2.3 billion BGN or €1.2 billion).

The total budget for the mandatory health insurance system for 2008, adopted by the Parliament, amounted to 1.68 billion BGN (€850 million).

Oral healthcare

The proportion of the total budget for the mandatory health insurance that was spent on dental medicine in 2008 was 4%.

	Year	Source
% GDP spent on oral health	0.16% 2008	BgDA
% OH expenditure private	No data	

The Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA) has drafted a National programme for prevention of oral diseases in children 0-18 (see section *Quality of Care*). The Programme comprises a national epidemiological survey of oral health which has not been conducted since the 1980s. Some partial data have been summarised in 2002 in a report by the Expert Committee of the Bulgarian Dental Association.

Here is a link to the Bulgarian text of the report:
<http://www.bzs.bg/REPORT%20EXPERT%20COMMITTEE.pdf>

About 98% of dentists in Bulgaria work in general (liberal) practices. Thus, the dental services are delivered on this basis, either through the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) or privately. Among all Bulgarian dentists, over 5,500 have contracts with the NHIF.

The dental procedures in the mandatory health insurance sector are on a co-payment and fee-for-service base. The scope and the extent of co-payment are different for children and adolescents on one hand, and adults on the other.

The Bulgarian Dental Association has drafted a National programme for prevention of oral diseases in children 0-18. The draft has been discussed in the Ministry of Health and the Parliament, and informally endorsed. The Minister of Health has established a working group with representatives of both the Ministry and the Bulgarian Dental Association in order to finalise the Programme during 2008. The final draft will be presented to the Council of Ministers.

There is no available information about domiciliary care, "list" sizes and frequency of patient re-examination periods in Bulgaria.

Quality of Care

The NHIF monitors the quality of dental care in the system of mandatory insurance, according to criteria negotiated with the BgDA and included in the National Framework Contract.

The quality of dental care in private practice is not actively monitored. Some control is being carried out by BgDA on the base of the Ethical Code and the Rules of Good Medical Practice in Dental Medicine.

Patient complaints are generally managed by the Ministry of Health, and the regional and national Ethical Committees of BgDA.

Health Data

	Year	Source
DMFT at age 12	3.03 2002	OECD
DMFT zero at age 12	2002	OECD
Edentulous at age 65	2002	OECD

"DMFT zero at age 12" refers to the number of 12 years old children with a zero DMFT. "Edentulous at age 65" refers to the numbers of over 64s with no natural teeth.

There are no later figures available.

Fluoridation

Milk fluoridation schemes for prevention of dental caries in children are being implemented in kindergartens in 8 Bulgarian cities (Plovdiv, Varna, Shumen, Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, Burgas, Sevlievo and Drianovo). Over 30,000 children are covered by these schemes. The schemes are based on joint protocols of WHO, the Bulgarian Ministry of Health, the respective municipalities, local NGOs, and the Borrow Foundation (a UK registered charity, a non-profit making organisation, actively involved in promoting milk as a vehicle for fluoride for the benefit of children's oral health).

Education, Training and Registration

Undergraduate Training

To enter a faculty of dental medicine of the university, a student has to have completed secondary school (usually at the age of 18). There is an entrance examination, which is similar to that of medical students. The undergraduate course lasts for 5.5 years and was fully "EU compliant" on Bulgarian accession to the EU in 2007.

The following table shows the official number of students ordered by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Year of data:	2008
Number of schools	3
Student intake	170
Number of graduates	126
Percentage female	50%

The school in Varna is new, having been opened in 2005. By 2008 there had been no graduates, but the other two schools historically graduate 90% of their students, so the total number of graduates will increase from 2010, when the first students in Varna graduate.

Qualification and Vocational Training

Primary dental qualification

The primary degree in Bulgaria is *Physician of Dental Medicine with a Master Degree* (Лекар по дентална медицина с образователна степен Магистър).

Vocational Training (VT)

Dental graduates in Bulgaria are entitled to registration immediately upon graduation. There is no postgraduate vocational training. There is a 6 months mandatory pre-graduate practical training in the faculties of dental medicine.

Quality assurance for the dental schools is provided by the Ministry of Education.

Registration

Cost of registration (2008)	€ 51
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The prerequisite for registration in Bulgaria is a primary degree in dental medicine. The registration of *dental practitioners* is administered by the Bulgarian Dental Association by means of its Regional Colleges.

The registration of the *dental practices* as medical institutions is administered by the Ministry of Health by means of its regional bodies – the Regional Centres of Healthcare.

Diplomas from other EU countries are recognised without the need for vocational training.

Language requirements

According to the *Law of Health*, the Ministry of Health shall assist EU citizens in acquiring the necessary knowledge of Bulgarian language and professional terminology.

Non-EU foreign citizens are required to have a command of Bulgarian language and professional terminology.

Further Postgraduate and Specialist Training

Continuing education

Continuing education is mandatory. A credit system has been introduced and administered by BgDA. A minimum of 30 points is to be covered in 3 years. The CE is delivered by BgDA, or by other institutions, accredited by BgDA.

Specialist Training

Specialists train in the faculties of dental medicine, and in accredited medical institutions. Specialisation is administered by the Ministry of Health, with the support of BgDA.

Training lasts for 3 years and concludes with a State examination

The types of specialist are:

- ✚ General dental medicine
- ✚ Orthodontics
- ✚ Oral Surgery
- ✚ Paediatric dental medicine
- ✚ Operative dental medicine and endodontics
- ✚ Periodontology and oral mucosa diseases
- ✚ Prosthetic dental medicine
- ✚ Dental image diagnostics
- ✚ Social medicine and dental health organization
- ✚ Dental clinical allergology

The titles obtained by specialists in orthodontics and oral surgery, the two specialities recognised by the EU, are:

- ✚ Специалист по ортодонтия (Specialist in Orthodontics)
- ✚ Специалист по орална хирургия (Specialist in Oral surgery)

Workforce

Dentists

Most dentists practice in general practice – although some also work in hospitals and dental faculties.

Year of data:	2005
Total Registered	7,987
In active practice	7,987
Dentist to population ratio*	957
Percentage female	66%
Qualified overseas	66

* this refers to the population per active dentist

There is a significant ratio discrepancy between the big cities (with an excess of dental practitioners), and the rural areas (where there is a deficiency of dental practitioners).

Therefore, under the pressure of BgDA, in the last few years the National Framework Contract with NHIF stipulates special incentives for contractors practising in remote and deprived areas.

There is no reported information about unemployment amongst Bulgarian dentists.

Movement of dentists across borders

There is no distinct movement into Bulgaria by overseas dentists. In 2008, 85% of the overseas dentists working in Bulgaria were citizens of non-EU countries.

As at July 2008, and since the beginning of 2007, approximately 120 Certificates of Good standing had been issued to dentists by the BgDA (these are for registration with other EU regulatory bodies).

Specialists

Patients have free access to specialists.

Year of data:	2005
Orthodontics	35
Oral Surgery	226
Endo & Restorative	417
Paedodontics	577
Periodontics	31
Prosthodontics	115
Oral Radiology	2
OMFS	45
Dental Public Health	17
Dental Clinical Allergy	1
General Dental Medicine	2,264

The "Specialty" of General Dental Medicine is unique to Bulgaria and stems from an earlier era – being an automatic analogue with the medical system. It was a mandatory pre-requisite to train and qualify for this "specialty" to open a dental practice. The law has now been amended to abolish this duty.

Auxiliaries

There is no system of use of dental auxiliaries in Bulgaria, other than dental technicians.

Year of data:	2005
Hygienists	0
Technicians	1,200
Denturists	0
Assistants	No data
Therapists	0
Other	0

Dental technicians

Dental technicians in Bulgaria graduate from a 3 years' special education with a degree *Professional Bachelor*. The training is 3,240 hours, including 1,275 hours theoretical training, 1,365 hours practical training and 600 hours pre-graduate practice.

The dental laboratories are 100% private and must register with Ministry of Health. The scope of their activities comprises elaboration of dental and orthodontic appliances. Dental technicians are not entitled to undertake any form of clinical work.

Denturists

Denturism is unknown in Bulgaria and there are no reports of (illegal) denturists.

Dental Chairside Assistants

After 1989, no specific training has been available for dental assistants (dental nurses). Currently, general care nurses are being registered by the respective professional association, and an unknown number of them are working in the field of dental medicine.

In 1989 there were about 6,000 dental assistants, but there were very many fewer by 2008 – the number in dental clinics is very small.

Practice in Bulgaria

Oral health services are provided on the base of general (liberal) practice in the mandatory health insurance system or privately.

Year of data:	2005
General (private) practice	7,700
Public dental service	
University	258
Hospital	35
Armed Forces & Police	48
Police	70
General Practice as a proportion is	98%

Working in General Practice

Virtually all Bulgarian dentists are working in the private sector on a self-employment base, ie in general (liberal) practice; most of them are in individual practices for primary care. A small amount of group practices are also registered.

Most specialists practice in specialised centres of dental medicine; there are also a few in individual or group specialised practices.

Among general practitioners, over 5,500 (2008) have contracts with the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). Insured patients are entitled to a specific package and volume of dental procedures, covered by the Fund. The additional dental services are fully paid by the patients.

Fee scales

As stated earlier, dental procedures in the mandatory health insurance sector are based on co-payments and fee-for-service base. In 2008, the annual scope for children and adolescents comprised 1 extensive check + 4 curative procedures (incl. fillings, endodontics and extractions). The annual scope for adults comprises 1 extensive check + 2 curative procedures (incl. fillings and extractions).

BgDA does not regulate or recommend any fees in the fully private sector, and prices are set by the market.

Joining or establishing a practice

There are no rules which limit the size of a dental practice or the number of associate dentists or other staff working there.

The practice has to be registered with the Regional Centre of Healthcare – a division of the Ministry of Health. The location, size, structure etc, of the premises, are regulated by Bulgarian law.

The state offers no assistance for establishing a new practice, and generally dentists rely on their own investments, or bank credits.

The dentists work on self-employed basis, and (rarely) may be employed. Their auxiliaries are always employed.

Working in the Public Dental Service

There is no public dental service in Bulgaria.

No special home care system exists. Physicians in dental medicine may provide home care at their discretion, by patient request.

Working in Hospitals

A very small number of dentists work in hospitals as employees, salaried by the Ministry of Health. They undertake mostly surgical treatments.

These dentists are entitled to treat other patients outside the hospital.

Working in Universities and Dental Faculties

Dentists working in faculties of dental medicine are salaried employees of the university. They are allowed to combine their work in the faculty with private practice.

The academic titles in the faculties of dental medicine are Professor, Associate Professor, and Assistant Professor.

The faculties of dental medicine are involved in graduate education, as well as postgraduate special education.

Working in the Armed Forces

There are physicians in dental medicine working in the Armed Forces, and in the Police Forces.

Professional Matters

Professional associations

	Number	Year	Source
Bulgarian Dental Association	7,987	2008	FDI
Association Médicale Scientifique Républicaine de Stomatologie	150	2007	FDI

The Bulgarian Dental Association was among the first dental professional organisations in Europe: it was founded on December 20th 1905, and for more than 40 years has been a powerful and authoritative representative of the interests of the profession.

However, the communist regime banned the medical and dental associations in 1947, and replaced them with what are now described as "obedient and toothless trade-unions", uniting artificially the alleged interests of the so-called "health workers" – doctors and auxiliary staff together. The centralised healthcare system transformed the doctors from independent specialists to salaried state employees, with no real responsibility and stimulus. Private practice was prohibited from 1971.

All this lasted until 1989, when the government regime ceased. The Bulgarian Dental Association was "resurrected" on March 11th 1990 in the city of Plovdiv, by a widely drawn national conference of Bulgarian dentists, which actually turned out to be the constituent assembly of the renewed organisation. The Association quickly gained popularity and new members, although membership was voluntary. Highly intensive activities were immediately undertaken in several directions: *reestablishment of private practice, cost evaluation of dental procedures, professional ethical standards, defence of the profession, information and qualification of the members.*

This initial period was characterised by the co-existence of the old, discredited public system and the renewed private dental care, which was quickly gaining power and overtaking the modern standards. This co-existence raised some specific problems: *disloyal competition, price dumping, dual standards* etc.

In 1999 the *Law of the Professional Organisations of Physicians and Stomatologists* (Later: *Physicians in Dental Medicine*) established the new professional organisation: The Association of Stomatologists in Bulgaria (ASB). After the accession of Bulgaria in the EU, the Association regained the title *Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA)*.

The law entrusts to the Association functions, typical of the similar professional organisations in the democratic world:

- To negotiate and contract with the National Health Insurance Fund.
- To keep and update the register of the profession. Registering with the Association is a compulsory prerequisite for practising dental medicine in Bulgaria.
- To enforce the ethic principles of the profession and penalize their infringement.
- To inform and qualify its members.
- To defend its members, etc.

The Constituent Congress adopted the Constitution of BgDA, which develops further the stipulations of the law in the spirit of the professional self-government.

The Constitution introduced the "functional field" principle in the central management of the Association, via the establishment of 7 Standing Working Committees (SWC), intended to perform its basic functions. Each Chairman of a SWC is elected by the Congress, and holds also the office of a Vice-President of the Association.

The Constitution stipulates a territorial representation in the Managing Board by including in the Board representatives of all the 28 Regional Colleges of BgDA.

The Law of the Professional Organisations and the Constitution of BgDA constitute also the control bodies of the Association as independent commissions:

- The *Commission of Professional Ethics* supervises the moral, ethical and deontological issues in practising the dental profession.
- The *Control Commission* controls the decisions of the Managing Board, as well as their implementation, in terms of their adherence to the law and the Constitution of BgDA.

The English text of the Constitution of BgDA is available at: http://www.bzs.bg/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=84&Itemid=105

Ethics and Regulation

Ethical Code

Bulgarian dental practitioners are subject to the *"Code of professional ethics of the physicians in dental medicine in the Republic of Bulgaria"*, adopted by the Congress of BgDA, signed by the Minister of Health and published in the State Gazette.

The Code contains the duties of the physicians in dental medicine ensuing from the practicing of the dental profession. It reflects the moral principles and criteria of professional conduct of the members of the dental profession.

The Code contains regulations on:

- The duties of the members of the dental profession during practice;
- Promotion of the dental services;
- Relationships with the patients;
- Patients' referral;
- Medical documentation and professional secrecy;
- Payment of the dental services;
- Qualification;
- Infringements and penalties.

The English text of the Code is available at: http://www.bzs.bg/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=85&Itemid=106

Fitness to Practise/Disciplinary Matters

The Commission of Professional Ethics has 9 members, all dentists.

The penalties for infringement of the Ethical Code vary in severity, from censure, financial penalty to erasure from the register (for a term from three months to two years).

Data Protection

In 2002, two laws came into force: the *Law on Protection of Personal Data*, and the *Law on Protection of Classified Information*.

In 2006, the *Law on Consumer's Protection* was been adopted. These laws stipulate the use of personal and classified data.

Advertising

According to Bulgarian law, no commercial advertising is permitted in healthcare activities. Dental practitioners are permitted to promote their services in accordance to the law and the Ethical Code.

Websites can be used provided they are absolutely factual and contain no commercial elements.

Insurance and professional indemnity

Professional indemnity insurance is mandatory according to the *Law of Health*, and the Regional Colleges of BgDA cover the insurance of their members. It does not cover for Bulgarian dentists working overseas.

Corporate Dentistry

Individual and group dental practices may be owned and managed only by physicians in dental medicine. Dental and Medico-dental centres may be owned by any person, but has to be managed by a specialist in the respective field, either physician or physician in dental medicine with an additional specialty in Health Management or Business Administration.

There are no limited companies owning Bulgarian dental practices.

Tooth whitening

Tooth whitening is being practiced in the last few years by some physicians in dental medicine.

The BgDA was propagating changes on the issue of tooth whitening in 2008.

Health and Safety at Work

This issue is regulated by the *Law of Health* and secondary legislation. There are no mandatory vaccinations.

Regulations for Health and Safety

Ionising radiation	Government Agency of Nuclear Regulation
Electrical installations	Government agency
Infection control	Ministry of Health – Inspectorate of Preservation and Control of Public Health
Medical devices	Ministry of Health – Executive Agency on Drugs
Waste disposal	Ministry of Environment and Water Supplies and Ministry of Health

Ionising Radiation

Ionising radiation is regulated by the *Law of Health* and the *Law of the Safe Use of Nuclear Energy*, plus secondary legislation.

During their dental education, physicians in dental medicine take examinations in radiology, with an emphasis on dental diagnostics. Those who would like to have x-ray equipment in their offices, have to acquire a corresponding certificate issued by the Ministry of Health, according to the Medical Standard "Image Diagnostics", following a specialised education and a successful exam. The certificate has 5 years' validity.

All x-ray equipment has to be licensed by the Agency of Nuclear Regulation. The Regional Inspection for Preservation and Control of Public Health issues a certificate for entry in the Register of establishments with public function, according to the Law of Health.

The equipment is inspected annually. The maintaining services perform an annual prophylaxis and technical examination.

Hazardous waste

The disposal of hazardous waste is regulated by the *Law of Waste Management*, plus secondary legislation.

Amalgam separators are only advised and they are not yet mandatory.



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Financial Matters

Retirement pensions and Healthcare

The retirement ages in Bulgaria are 63 for men and 60 for women. There are no restrictions for the physicians in dental medicine to continue practicing after this age.

Health care in the mandatory health insurance system is funded by mandatory health insurance payments amounting to 6% of the income due by all Bulgarian citizens.

Taxes

National income tax:

Since the beginning of 2008, a flat income tax has been introduced amounting to 10% of incomes.

VAT/sales tax

VAT in Bulgaria is 20%, and does not apply to healthcare services; however, it applies to drugs, medical devices, instruments, equipment, consumables and other products used in medicine and dental medicine

Various Financial Comparators

Zurich = 100	Sofia 2008
Prices (excluding rent)	55.2
Prices (including rent)	54.0
Wage levels (net)	7.3
Domestic Purchasing Power	17.7

Source: UBS January 2008

Other Useful Information

<i>Important Contacts::</i>	
<p><i>Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA)</i> 49, Kniaz Dondukov Blvd. 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria Tel.: +35 929874797 Fax: +35 929888724 Gateway: +359888407226 E-mail: ssbcentur@abv.bg Website: www.bzs.bg</p>	<p><i>Ministry of Health:</i> 5, Sveta Nedelya Square 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria Tel.: +35 929301152 Tel./Fax: +35 929811820 E-mail: press@mh.government.bg Website: www.mh.government.bg</p>
<p><i>National Health Insurance Fund</i> 1, Krichim Str. 1407 Sofia, Bulgaria Tel: +35 929659130 Tel./Fax: +35 929659124 EU integration: +35929659130 Email: jvatkova@nhif.bg Website: www.nhif.bg</p>	

Dental Schools:

<p>Sofia Medical University Faculty of Dental Medicine 1, Sveti G. Sofiiski Blvd. 1432 Sofia, Bulgaria Tel: +35 929522818; +35 929541247; +35 929523548 E-mail: info@stomfac.org E-mail: d.ziya@abv.bg</p> <p>Numbers of annual intake: 80 Dentists graduating each year: about 90%</p>	<p>Plovdiv Medical University Faculty of Dental Medicine 3, Hristo Botev Blvd. 4002 Plovdiv, Bulgaria Tel: +35 9896610286 E-mail: doz_kukleva@abv.bg</p> <p>Numbers of annual intake: 60 Dentists graduating each year: about 90%</p>
<p>Varna (established in 2005) Medical University Faculty of Dental Medicine 55, Marin Drinov Str. 9002 Varna, Bulgaria Tel: +35 9888226863 E-mail: svechtarov@yahoo.co.uk</p> <p>Numbers of annual intake: 30 Dentists graduating each year: not yet know</p>	