Whistleblower Empowerment & Support Initiative

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BULGARIA

Should I Speak Up?

A simple guide for anyone thinking about reporting wrongdoing at work

This guide gives you information. It is not legal advice.

About this guide

You're reading this because something isn't right at work, and you're wondering what to do about it. This guide is here to help you understand your options, in plain language.

A few important things before you start:

- This guide gives you information and points you in the right direction. It cannot act as your lawyer, your therapist, or file a report on your behalf.
- It is not legal advice. If a decision feels legally risky, talk to a qualified professional first.
- Every fact in this guide comes directly from VoiceGuard's research on Bulgarian law. Where something isn't confirmed yet, we say so honestly instead of guessing.

1. Are you protected?

Yes -if you found out about the problem through your work. This covers far more people than just "employees":

You could be...	For example...
An employee	In a private company or the public sector
Self-employed	A freelancer, contractor, or consultant
In management	A manager, board member, or shareholder
A volunteer or trainee	Paid or unpaid

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A job applicant	Even if you found out during the interview process
A former employee	Even if you no longer work there

You're also protected if you help someone else report (a facilitator), or if you're closely connected to the person reporting and could be affected too.

You do NOT need proof

You just need a genuine, honest belief that what you're reporting is true.

Knowingly reporting something false is not protected -but an honest mistake is fine.

2. What can you report?

You can report:

- **Breaches of EU rules:** public money misused, unsafe products, environmental harm, data-privacy breaches, financial fraud, unfair public contracts, and more
- **Breaches of Bulgarian legislation, criminal offences of a general nature, and labour-law violations**.

What you can't report through these channels

Purely personal grievances or interpersonal conflicts that don't involve any rule-breaking aren't covered. These need a different route, such as your organisation's HR process.

3. Where and how do you report?

You have three options. You do NOT have to start with the first one -go with whichever feels safest for your situation.

Option	Best if...	Main risk
1. Internal -inside your organization	you trust it to handle things safely and independently	may be conflicted or ineffective if the wrongdoing involves people at the top
2. External -to the CPDP	internal reporting feels unsafe, or you'd simply rather not go through your	process can be slower or feel less

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	organization	personal
3. Public -e.g. to media (last resort)	specific legal conditions are met (see warning below)	you lose legal protection if those conditions aren't met

Not sure which to choose? Work through these questions

1. Is there immediate danger to the public? → If yes, seek urgent advice -public disclosure may be protected. If no, continue.
2. Do you trust your organisation to handle this safely? → Yes: internal reporting may work. No: external reporting may be safer.
3. Is your internal channel compromised (e.g. the person you'd report to is involved)? → If yes, consider external reporting.
4. Have the legal deadlines already passed without action? → If yes, ask about escalating or going public.
5. Does this involve EU funds or crimes against the EU's financial interests? → If yes, OLAF or EPPO (see Section 8) may also be relevant.

⚠ Before you go public

Going to the media only keeps your legal protection in specific situations -for example, if reporting first didn't work, or there's danger to the public.

Talk to a qualified adviser BEFORE doing this. Acting outside these conditions could cost you your protection.

Bulgaria's national authority

Name	Commission for Personal Data Protection (CPDP / КЗЛД)
Website	cpdp.bg (English section: cpdp.bg/en/whistleblowers-protection/)
What they do	Central national authority for external reports; administrative oversight of the Whistleblower Protection Act

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Language	Bulgarian; an official English translation of the Act exists but only reflects the 2023 amendments, not the 2025–2026 updates
Independent oversight	The Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria reviews the CPDP's handling of cases. If you're unhappy with the CPDP's action or inaction (for example, delays), you can complain to the Ombudsman -ombudsman.bg

Common pitfalls

- An informal conversation with a manager may not count as a formal report, and may leave no record.
- If the person you'd report to is implicated, internal reporting may not be safe.
- If you don't hear back within the legal timeframes, that can be relevant to deciding whether to escalate.
- Reporting in anger or haste, before preparing, can create evidence or confidentiality problems.

EU-level channels: OLAF and EPPO

If your case involves EU funds or crimes against the EU's financial interests, two extra channels may be relevant: OLAF (the European Anti-Fraud Office) at anti-fraud.ec.europa.eu, and EPPO (the European Public Prosecutor's Office) at eppo.europa.eu. These can be used alongside, or instead of, Bulgaria's national channels. If in doubt, seek advice first.

Before you report: a short checklist

I got this information through my work	☐
I honestly believe it's true	☐
I've checked it fits what I can report (Section 2)	☐
I understand my anonymity options (Section 4)	☐
I haven't accessed or copied anything unlawfully	☐
I have a simple written timeline of events	☐

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I know who I can turn to for support (Section 8)	☐

Protecting yourself online

- Don't use your work email, phone, or computer to prepare your report, unless the official channel requires it.
- Use a personal device and your home or mobile internet -not work Wi-Fi.
- Documents can carry hidden information (author name, timestamps) -keep this in mind.
- Consider encrypted apps like Signal or ProtonMail instead of standard email or text.
- Keep your copies stored somewhere separate from work systems.

Protecting your evidence

Keep a chronological record of events, a record of the report itself (date, channel, reply), and notes of relevant conversations. Only use documents you already have lawful access to through your normal work.

⚠ Important

Before copying, removing, recording or forwarding sensitive material, seek advice first. Acquiring information through a separate criminal offence (like hacking into a system you're not authorised to use) is not protected, even if your intentions are good.

4. Can you stay anonymous?

Confidential	Your name is known but kept private. It won't be shared without your consent, except where the law requires it -and even then, you should be told first.
Anonymous	You don't give your name at all.

In Bulgaria, authorities and employers are not legally required to investigate anonymous reports. However, if you report anonymously and are later identified, you remain entitled to full legal protection against retaliation.

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5. What if something bad happens to you?

It is illegal for your employer to punish you for reporting in good faith. This is called retaliation, and it includes things like:

Suspension, dismissal, or similar measures	☐
Demotion or being passed over for promotion	☐
Change of duties, location, hours, or a cut in pay	☐
Being denied training	☐
A negative performance review or reference	☐
A disciplinary measure, reprimand, or financial penalty	☐
Coercion, intimidation, harassment, or exclusion	☐
Discrimination or unfair treatment	☐
Your contract not being renewed	☐
Damage to your reputation, including online	☐
Blacklisting within your industry or sector	☐
A contract, licence, or permit being cancelled	☐
An unnecessary psychiatric or medical referral	☐

This list isn't complete -retaliation can also be a pattern of smaller things (being excluded, sidelined, or subjected to unexplained new complaints) rather than one big event.

The law is on your side

If you report and then something bad happens to you, the law assumes it's connected to your report - your employer has to prove otherwise.

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The first 48 hours after retaliation

If you notice any of the signs above:

1. Write down exactly what happened -when, where, and who was involved.
2. Preserve relevant records lawfully and securely.
3. Avoid angry written responses or social-media posts.
4. Seek advice quickly from a qualified professional, trusted NGO, trade union, or support pathway.
5. Check national limitation periods and complaint deadlines.
6. Seek psychological or emotional support if you need it (see Section 7).

What NOT to do

Don't resign impulsively -it may affect your legal rights.

Don't sign any settlement agreement without independent legal advice.

Don't delete communications or records, even ones that feel embarrassing -they may be evidence.

Don't confront the person you believe is retaliating, in writing, before getting advice.

Don't post about the situation on social media.

Don't miss deadlines -complaints about retaliation often have to be filed within a short period. Check your national time limits and record them.

Bulgaria fines both individuals and organisations that retaliate: currently €205–€5,124 for individuals, and €512–€15,372 for organisations (figures following the 2023 and 2025 amendments).

6. What happens after you report?

Stage	Internal channel	External channel (CPDP)
Acknowledgment	Within 7 days	Within 7 days, unless exceptions apply
Feedback	Within a reasonable time, generally not exceeding 3 months	Generally within 3 months, up to 6 months in justified cases

Heard nothing? Here's what to do:

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1. Write to whoever you reported to and ask for an update. Keep a copy.
2. If it was an internal report and nothing's happening, consider reporting to the CPDP instead.
3. If the CPDP isn't responding either, you can complain to the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria about the CPDP's action or inaction.

If things don't go back to normal

Legal remedies can restore your job or compensate you, but sometimes going back isn't realistic -trust may be broken, or the environment may stay difficult. If that happens, specialist NGOs and, where available, career counsellors can help you think through practical next steps: managing employment gaps, planning finances, and finding your way to a new role.

7. Taking care of yourself

Reporting wrongdoing can be stressful, especially if you face a difficult reaction. Feeling anxious or overwhelmed is a completely normal response -it doesn't mean you did anything wrong.

Signs worth paying attention to

Trouble sleeping or constant exhaustion	☐
Low mood, anxiety, irritability, or feeling numb	☐
Thoughts you can't switch off	☐
Trouble concentrating or remembering things	☐
Dreading work or avoiding reminders of it	☐
Headaches, fatigue, or physical tension	☐
Pulling away from friends and family	☐
Losing confidence or feeling hopeless	☐

If several of these last more than a few weeks, or affect your daily life, it's worth speaking to a qualified professional.

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A few things that can help

- Stay connected to people you trust
- Talk to people who understand whistleblowing or workplace retaliation
- Try to keep your normal routine -sleep, meals, movement
- Set boundaries around how much time and energy you give the situation
- Remember: this situation doesn't define your worth
- Reach out for support early, rather than waiting until things feel unbearable

Money worries

Job loss or a long process can strain your finances. If this is a concern, ask early about legal aid, trade union support, and whether an emergency measure (such as blocking a dismissal) is possible in your case.

Your family and people close to you

This can affect the people close to you too -financially and emotionally. Talking openly with people you trust, at a pace that feels right, usually helps. If someone close to you also works at the same organisation, they may be protected too -a qualified adviser can explain how.

In immediate danger or crisis?

Contact Bulgaria's emergency services on 112 right away. Don't wait.

8. Where to get help

Who	What they do	Contact
Commission for Personal Data Protection (CPDP)	Bulgaria's national whistleblower authority	cpdp.bg
Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria	Independent oversight -complain here if unhappy with the CPDP's handling of your case	ombudsman.bg
Transparency International Bulgaria	VoiceGuard's partner in Bulgaria	transparency.bg
National Legal Aid	State body funding legal assistance through	Hotline 0700 18 250 (weekdays);

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Bureau (NLAB)	bar associations. Note: whistleblowers aren't automatically covered -aid is assessed case by case, and if you later find paid work you may need to repay it.	nbpp@nbpp.government.bg; nbpp.government.bg
Local bar associations	28 regional bar associations (one per province) -full list below	See directory below
Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (CITUB)	Trade union support	1 Macedonia Square, Sofia 1040; +359 2 40 10 505; cabinet@citub.net
Confederation of Labour Podkrepa	Trade union support	2 Angel Kanchev Street, Sofia 1000; +359 988 34 05; office@podkrepa.org
Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD)	Anti-corruption research, integrity policy and governance reform	5 Alexander Zhendov St., Sofia 1113; +359 2 971 3000; office@csd.eu
Access to Information Programme (AIP)	Transparency, access to information and government accountability	76 Vasil Levski Blvd., fl. 3, Sofia 1142; (02) 988 50 62; office@aip-bg.org
Emergency	National emergency number	112

If your case involves EU funds or crimes against the EU's financial interests, you can also contact OLAF (anti-fraud.ec.europa.eu) or EPPO (eppo.europa.eu) -see Section 3.

Full directory of regional bar associations (legal aid)

- Blagoevgrad -+359 73 884494 / 0877 87 44 94; akbl_centar@abv.bg; akblagoevgrad.bg
- Burgas -+359 56 815081; sak_bs@abv.bg; bak.vas.bg/bg
- Varna -+359 52 634856 / +359 878 556417; office@varnalaw.org; varnalaw.org
- Veliko Tarnovo -+359 62 577277; ak_tarnovo@abv.bg; vtak.vas.bg/bg
- Vidin -+359 877 088522; vdak@abv.bg; bar-register.bg/barassociation/vidin/attorneys
- Vratsa -092 62 33 25 / 0879 34 04 51; akvraca@abv.bg; vrak.vas.bg/en
- Gabrovo -+359 66 807327; ak.gabrovo@gmail.com; gak.vas.bg/en
- Dobrich -+359 58 602466 / 0876 100331; akdobrich@mail.bg; dak.vas.bg/bg

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- Kardzhali -+359 361 62536; adv.kak.31@gmail.com; kak.vas.bg/bg
- Kyustendil -+359 78 547048 / 0885 000438; advokati_kn@abv.bg; ksak.vas.bg/en
- Lovech -+359 68 623502; office@lak.lex.bg; aklovech.com
- Montana -+359 96 305437; advokatimontana@gmail.com; mak.vas.bg/en
- Pazardzhik -+359 34 445853 / +359 878 777781; pzak@abv.bg; pzak.vas.bg/en
- Pernik -+359 76 602791 / 0898 470498; akpernik@gmail.com; prak.vas.bg/en
- Pleven -+359 64 803321; ak_pleven@abv.bg; plak.vas.bg/en
- Plovdiv -+359 32 398355; office@plovdivlaw.org; plovdivlaw.org
- Razgrad -+359 84 662039 / 0886 093505; akrazgrad@abv.bg; rzak.vas.bg/en
- Ruse -+359 82 870348 / 0894 606333; ak_ruse@abv.bg; akruse.org
- Silistra -+359 877 371351 / +359 86 821625; ak_ss@mail.bg; slak.vas.bg/bg
- Sliven -+359 44 622602; ak_sl@abv.bg; svak.vas.bg/bg
- Smolyan -+359 301 65661 / 0884 334264; k_smolyan@abv.bg; smak.vas.bg/bg
- Sofia -02 987 0519 / 02 989 0937; register@sak-sas.bg; sak-sas.bg/bg
- Stara Zagora -042 625526 / 088 4135450; office@ak-sz.eu; ak-sz.eu
- Targovishte -+359 601 98992; office@advokatite.org; advokatite.org
- Haskovo -+359 38 664330 / 0886 785906; office@hslaw.bg; hslaw.bg
- Shumen -+359 54 800458 / 0887 206078; akshumen@gmail.com; shak.vas.bg/bg
- Yambol -046 664277; kantora_408@abv.bg; yak.vas.bg/bg

9. Common questions

Do I have to prove the breach before reporting?

No. You need reasonable grounds to believe the information was true and within scope at the time of reporting. Knowingly false reports are not protected.

Must I report internally first?

No. You can choose to go straight to the CPDP. Internal reporting is encouraged where it can be handled safely and effectively, but it isn't mandatory.

Can I report anonymously?

Yes, though the CPDP isn't legally required to investigate an anonymous report. If you're later identified, you remain fully protected against retaliation.

How quickly should I hear back?

Internal: acknowledgment within 7 days, feedback generally within 3 months. External (CPDP): similar timeframes, feedback up to 6 months in justified cases.

Can I go to the media?

Only under specific conditions -for example, if reporting first didn't work, or there's imminent public danger. Seek advice first; going public outside these conditions can cost you your protection.

Can I copy documents as evidence?

Only if you can do so lawfully and safely, using information you already have lawful access to. Seek advice before copying anything sensitive.

Will my employer find out I reported?

The authority must protect your identity and not disclose it without your consent, except in narrow legal circumstances where you'd normally be told first. That said, in some cases people may guess who reported based on context. Reporting factually and avoiding unnecessary identifying detail can reduce this risk.

Is legal aid free for whistleblowers in Bulgaria?

Not automatically. Whistleblowers aren't specifically named as a beneficiary category under Bulgaria's Legal Aid Act, so National Legal Aid Bureau assistance is assessed case by case -and if you later find paid employment, you may be required to repay aid you received. Ask NLAB or a local bar association about your specific situation.

Does VoiceGuard provide legal advice or therapy?

No. VoiceGuard provides information, orientation and referral only -not legal representation, therapy, or an official reporting channel.

I reported and heard nothing -what now?

See Section 6 -ask for an update in writing, then consider escalating to the CPDP or the Ombudsman.

10. Words explained

Word	What it means
Reporting person	You -someone reporting a problem you learned about through work
Facilitator	Someone who helps you report -their help is also protected
Retaliation	Being punished, in any way, for reporting

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Anonymous	Reporting without giving your name
Confidential	Reporting where your name is known but kept private
CPDP	Commission for Personal Data Protection -Bulgaria's national whistleblower authority
Competent authority	The official body responsible for handling your report (the CPDP)
Burden of proof	Who has to prove what -in retaliation cases, it's your employer who has to prove they did nothing wrong

Where this information comes from

- Bulgaria, Whistleblower Protection Act (2023, as amended 2025, 2026) -lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137231156
- Commission for Personal Data Protection (CPDP) -cpdp.bg/en/whistleblowers-protection/
- Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria -ombudsman.bg
- National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB) -nbpp.government.bg
- Transparency International Bulgaria -transparency.bg
- EU Whistleblower Protection Directive (EU) 2019/1937

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