

Public attitudes towards legal aid



The study was conducted on behalf of the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives (BILI). It was carried out by the Global Metrix sociological agency and is part of the project "Mediation and Legal Aid", which BIPI implements with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bulgaria.

Characteristics of the study

Method of data collection: standardized face-to-face personal interview with tablet-assisted personal interviewing (TAPI).

Sample size: 1016 interviews with adult Bulgarian citizens.

Sampling method: two-stage cluster quota sampling, stratified by age, sex, education and settlement type.

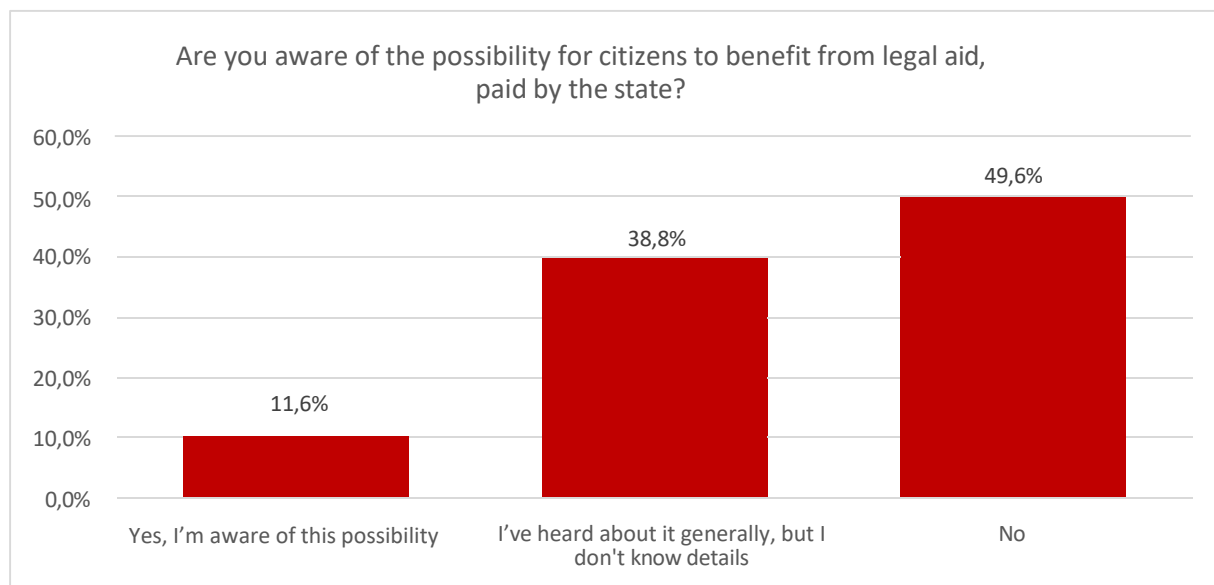
Fieldwork: 13 - 31 May 2024

Representativeness: Representative survey of the adult population of the country by attributes:

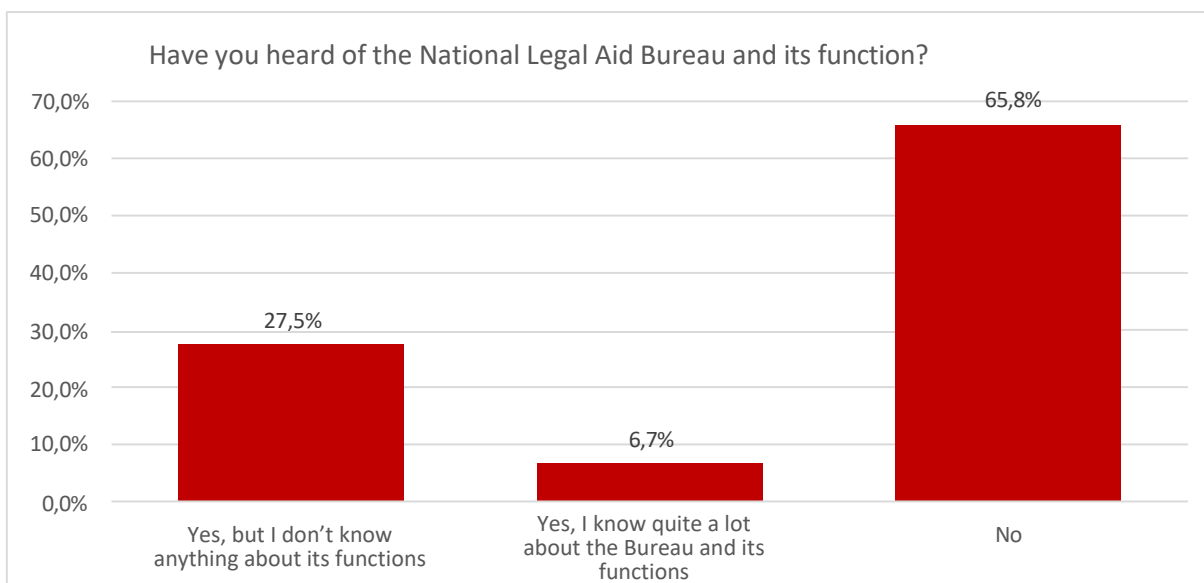
- gender
- age
- education
- settlement type

Familiarity with the possibilities of using legal aid

Legal aid remains poorly known in Bulgaria. Only 12 percent of the respondents indicated that they know the possibility for citizens to use legal aid paid by the state. Nearly half of the respondents are not familiar, and about two-fifths of adult citizens indicate that they have only a general idea that such a possibility exists but do not know the details.

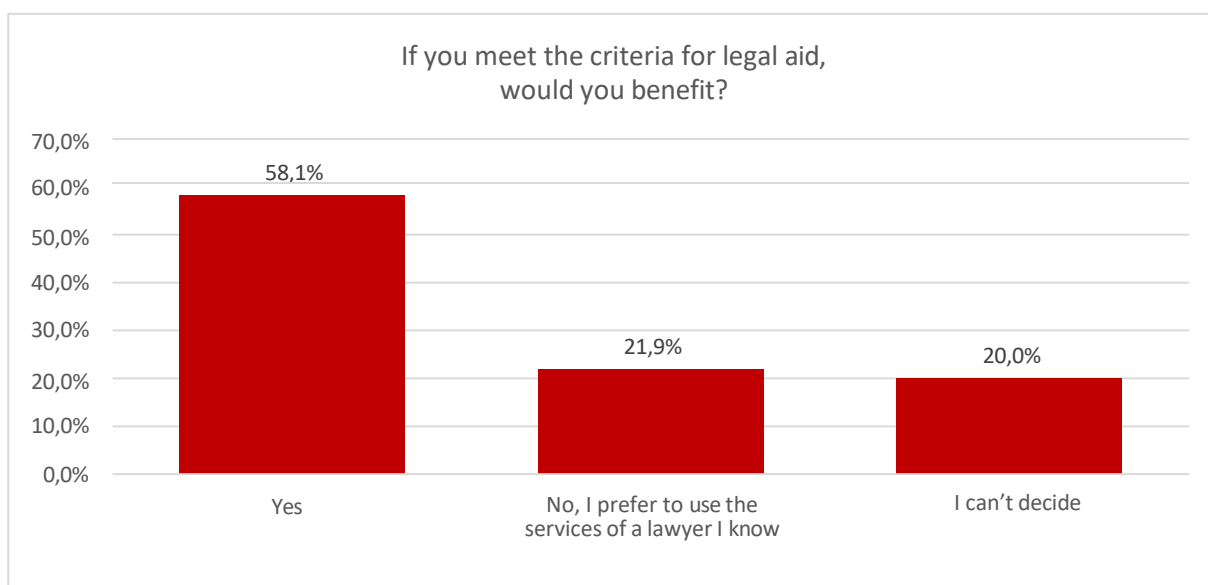


It is interesting to note that the groups that potentially have the greatest need - and could fall into the category of those eligible for legal aid - are the least aware of this possibility. By more than 10 percentage points above the average level of unfamiliarity are mainly groups with lower education and lower social status. This category includes people with household incomes below BGN 800 per person (60% share of those unaware), the unemployed and pensioners (61% share of those unaware), people with basic income or who cannot afford basic necessities (62% and 58%) and young people with higher-than-average awareness of the possibilities of receiving legal aid from the state (28%).



The National Legal Aid Bureau is known to about a third of adult Bulgarians. About a quarter, however, have only heard of it but do not know its functions, and about 7% are better acquainted. There are no significant differences in the level of familiarity between different socio-demographic groups. Again, Roma stand out among the most familiar (about 28% well acquainted and another 22% generally acquainted).

Interest in using legal aid

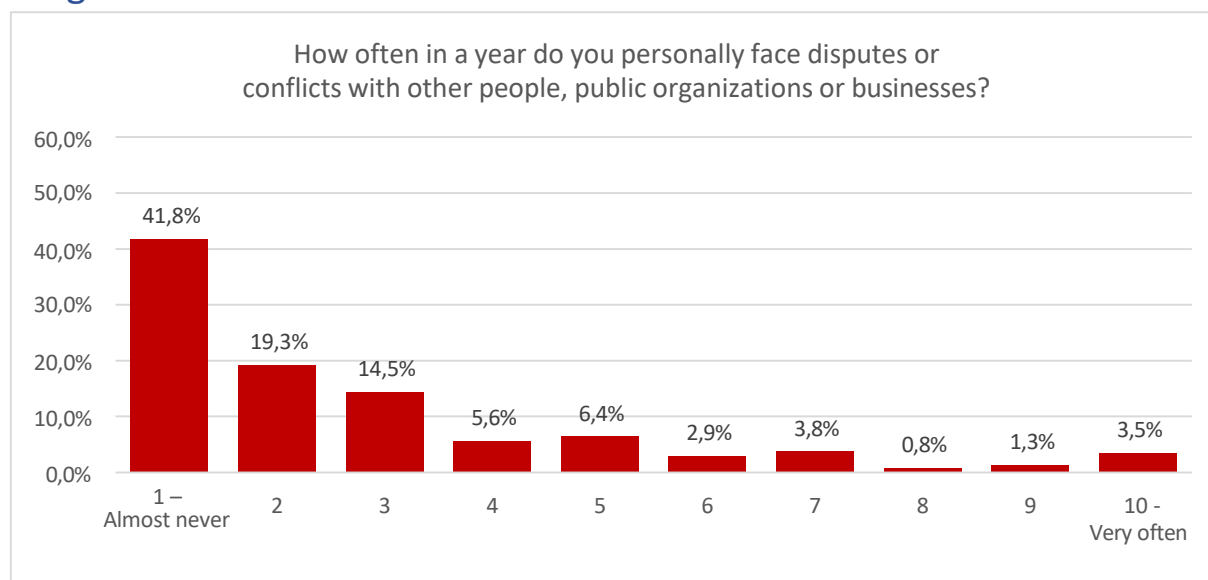


Public attitudes towards the use of legal aid are positive - 58% would use legal aid if they met the criteria. This indicates that overall, the majority of the population has no reservations about the provision of state-funded legal services. Only 22% would not use legal aid as they prefer to use the services of a lawyer they know. These are mainly members of the higher income groups and those with a high level of education - all groups that would be less likely to meet the criteria for users of state-funded legal aid. Among the lowest status groups there is a higher than average proportion of people who cannot decide whether they would use legal aid.

If you are eligible for legal aid, would you benefit?				
		Yes	No, I prefer to use the services of lawyer I know	I cannot judge
		Row %	Row %	Row %
Thinking about your personal standard of living (e.g. the goods and services that you can afford), which of these statements is closest to your personal situation?	You can't afford many necessities	55,6%	<u>5,6%</u>	38,9%
	Having difficulty meeting the costs of some basic daily needs	63,0%	<u>12,3%</u>	24,7%
	For now, you can still afford most necessities	55,6%	<u>25,5%</u>	19,0%
	We can easily afford the necessities	61,2%	<u>28,2%</u>	10,6%
	TOTAL	58,1%	21,9%	20,0%

Alongside questions about legal aid in general and citizens' awareness of the National Legal Aid Bureau, questions were asked about disputes and conflicts between people more generally and the ways in which they try to resolve them.

Degree of prevalence of disputes and conflicts in the everyday life of Bulgarians

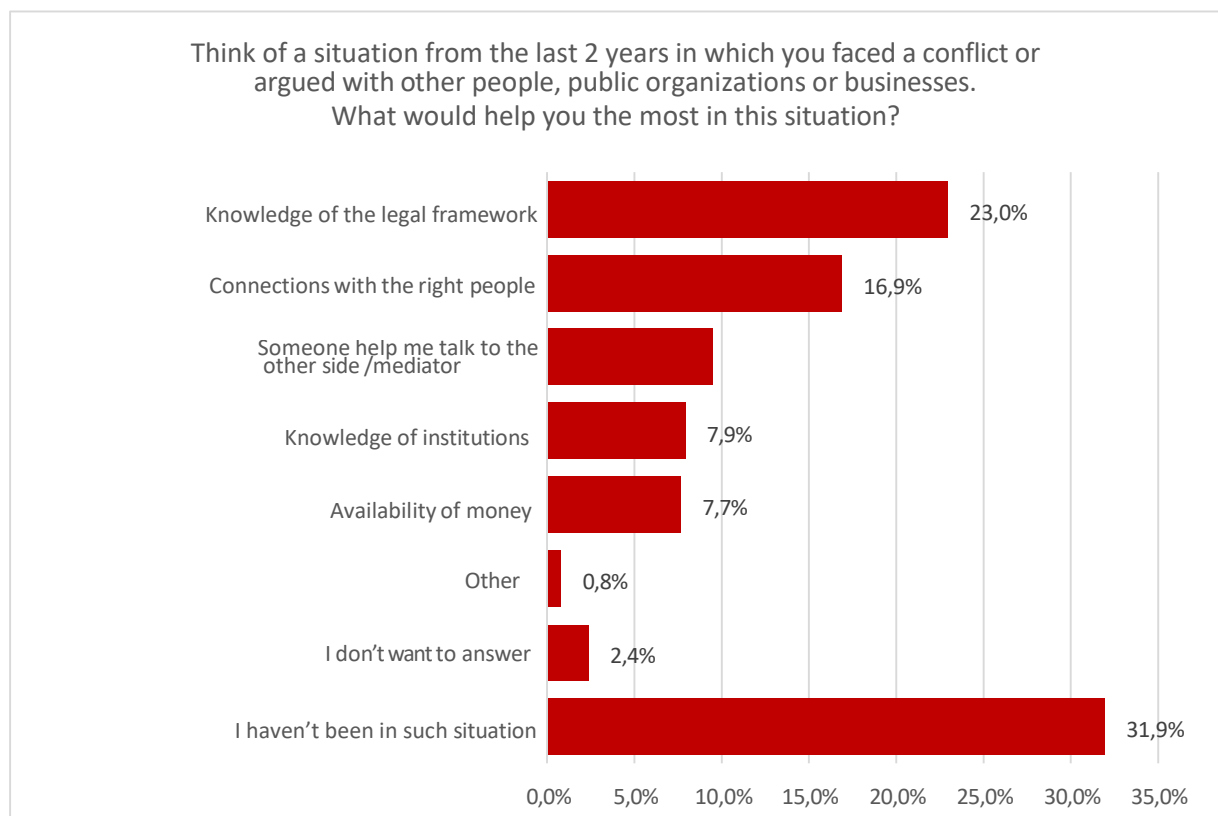


A small proportion of adult Bulgarians report disputes or conflicts with other subjects. These are mainly residents of the capital, people working in the private sector, middle-aged people.

Men are more likely than women to report that they have disputes and conflict situations with public organizations and businesses in their daily lives. There is a higher-than-average incidence of conflict among both the highest and lowest income groups. Roma are characterized by a 3.5 times higher than average concentration of responses for higher frequency of conflicts and disputes with public organizations and businesses.

Factors that would help in resolving disputes and conflicts

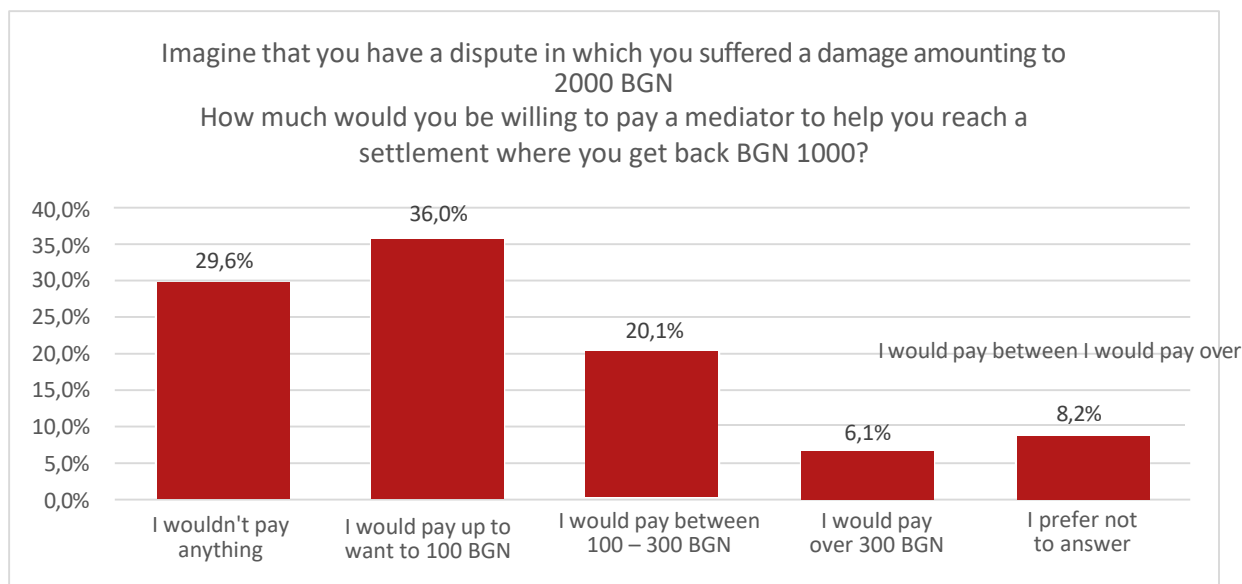
The highest proportion of respondents indicated that in a situation of conflict or dispute, it is important for them to have knowledge of the legal framework. People with high education, residents of the capital, middle-aged people more often fall into this category. Interestingly, Roma more often than other groups indicate that it is important to have money and someone to help them talk to the other side or to step into the role of a mediator. This shows that legal aid could play an essential role in settling relations between citizens and institutions and citizens and businesses by providing both legal knowledge information and a mediation procedure, which the different target groups need the most.



Willingness to pay a mediator to resolve a specific dispute

Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that they would pay for a mediator, but their cost should be less than 10% of the compensation they would receive (36% of respondents were of this opinion) or between 10 and 30% of the compensation (20% of interviewees fell into this group). Only 6% of Bulgarians would pay more than 30% of the compensation. We should also keep in mind that about 30% would pay nothing.

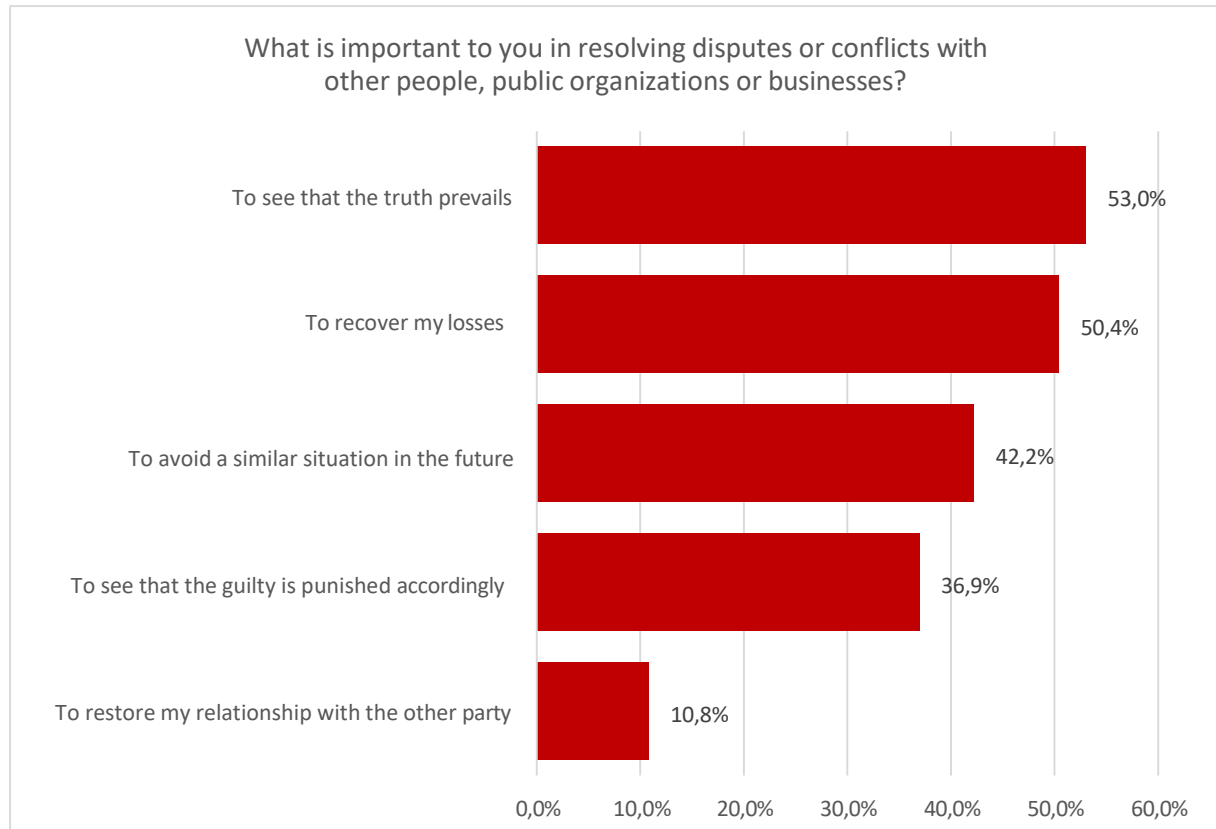
People with higher-than-average incomes and those with optimistic expectations about their economic situation would spend more on a mediator. Conversely, people with low incomes would abstain or pay a small amount of money.



Imagine that you have a dispute in which you suffered a damage amounting to 2000 BGN. How much would you be willing to pay a mediator to help you reach a settlement in which you get 1000 BGN back?						
		I wouldn't pay anything	I would pay up to 100 leva	I would pay between 100-300 BGN	I would pay over 300 leva	I do not wish to answer
		Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %
Thinking about your personal standard of life (e.g. goods and services, that you can afford), which of these statements is closest to your personal situation?	You can't afford many necessities	57,9%	31,6%			10,5%
	Having difficulty meeting the costs of some basic daily needs	39,5%	27,2%	16,0%	3,7%	13,6%
	For now, you can still afford most necessities	26,0%	45,5%	19,5%	6,5%	2,6%
	We can easily afford the necessities	21,2%	32,9%	29,4%	7,1%	9,4%
	TOTAL	29,6%	36,0%	20,1%	6,1%	8,2%

Societal expectations of the effects of dispute resolution

The deficit of justice in our society is among the main reasons why the majority of respondents indicate that the main thing for them in resolving disputes is that the truth prevails (53%). For about half of respondents it is important to recover their losses and two in five would like to avoid a similar situation in the future.



There are some differences in the responses of different socio-demographic groups. For people expecting income deterioration, it is important to recover their losses to a greater extent than other groups. For people with secondary and lower education it is more important that the guilty party is punished, while for people with higher education it is more important to avoid a similar situation in the future. Graduates and people with secondary education are more likely to indicate that they would like the truth to prevail.

The research clearly shows that there is a correlation between social, economic status and motivation that determines how a dispute/conflict is resolved, or the reasons for it. The better off a person is economically, the more they move away from wanting revenge and want to resolve the conflict in order to avoid similar situations in the future. A positive trend is the attitude towards the mediation procedure and its recognition as one of the possible ways to deal with the conflict. The search for justice and truth also prevails among this group.

The questions exploring the awareness of legal aid provided by the state clearly show the need for a campaign to promote legal aid and the National Legal Aid Bureau as the institution that is overall responsible for the organization, provision, reporting and quality of legal aid in Bulgaria.