

Information by the NIJ on the subject: “Training of professionals within the justice system (including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, judicial staff, administrative personnel/trainees)”

The training activities of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in 2025 reflected the objectives set out in the NIJ Annual Training Plan for 2025, with a focus on independent, effective, and European-oriented justice and on ensuring a lifelong learning environment, in line with national and European priorities.

A total of 10,447 participants (3,921 judges, 1,239 prosecutors, 435 investigators, 572 judicial assistants, 84 prosecutorial assistants, 2,990 court clerks, 114 state enforcement officers, 52 judges of registration, 466 lay judges, 115 foreign participants, and 270 other representatives of the professional community) took part in 348 training activities organized by the NIJ. The mandatory nine-month initial training was completed by 20 candidates for junior judges, 19 candidates for junior prosecutors, and 12 candidates for junior investigators, while the new academic year commenced for 38 candidates for junior judges, 32 candidates for junior prosecutors, and 16 candidates for junior investigators.

Key thematic priorities of the 2025 training programme included: European law and international judicial cooperation; case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and preliminary ruling procedures; artificial intelligence; cybercrime and electronic evidence; financial and economic crime (money laundering, terrorist financing, protection of the EU’s financial interests, tax offences); protection of fundamental rights as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including the rights of vulnerable groups; leadership skills; stress management; and prevention of professional burnout.

A total of 208 representatives of the professional community (64 judges, 95 prosecutors, 27 investigators, 11 judicial assistants, 1 prosecutorial assistant, and 10 court clerks) participated in seven training activities dedicated to the protection of intellectual property and the fight against piracy.

In 2025, a total of 419 magistrates (including 197 judges, 148 prosecutors, and 74 investigators), 44 court clerks, and 139 other representatives of the professional community and competent institutions participated in training activities organised by the NIJ focusing on respect for the procedural rights and guarantees of children who are offenders, witnesses, or victims of crime, as well as children involved in proceedings under the Family Code.

With a view to improving the public image of the judiciary and increasing public trust therein, a blended-format training entitled “Crisis PR: Prevention of Reputational Crises in the Judicial System” was organised, with the participation of 3 judges, 3 prosecutors, 22 public relations officers, and 1 representative of the Ministry of Justice.

In connection with the amendments to the Civil Procedure Code and the digitalisation of order-for-payment proceedings, on 30 September 2025 a total of 115 judges and court clerks took part in a hybrid-format training entitled “Current Issues in Order-for-Payment Proceedings”, focusing on the new electronic procedures, the use of the centralised case allocation module, the application of the new rules on ex officio review and issuance of enforcement orders, the electronic enforcement order, and the functioning of the electronic module within the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice(UPEJ).

As a result of the established cooperation with the Registry Agency and following the identification of a need for training related to freedom of association under Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, three training sessions were conducted on the topic “Legal Framework of Non-Profit Legal Entities: Current Issues”. A total of 174 representatives of the professional community participated, including 48 judges, 121 registration officials, and 51 judicial assistants.

In partnership with the National Judicial Network for International Cooperation in Criminal Matters, the NIJ organised a series of webinars dedicated to the use of various instruments for international cooperation in criminal matters. A total of 682 representatives of the professional

community participated (312 judges, 232 prosecutors, 43 investigators, 35 judicial assistants, 9 prosecutorial assistants, and 51 court clerks).

At the initiative of Judge Lada Paunova, Deputy President of the Supreme Court of Cassation and Head of its Criminal Chamber, the NIJ hosted the forum “Judicial Review in Pre-Trial Proceedings – Practical Challenges”. With the aim of unifying judicial practice and ensuring consistent application of the law, 126 judges from across the country took part in a two-day discussion on proceedings under Articles 64 and 65 of the Criminal Procedure Code and judicial review of a prosecutor’s refusal to initiate pre-trial proceedings under Article 231 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Regional meetings were organised for judges from the five appellate regions, with a total of 529 judges and court clerks participating.

Within the framework of the Regional Training Programme, a total of 27 training activities were conducted jointly with 21 judicial authorities, including 4 administrative courts, 9 regional courts (including the Sofia City Court), 1 regional prosecution office, 5 district courts, and 2 district prosecution offices. The total number of participants was 949, comprising 407 judges, 59 judicial assistants, 53 prosecutors, 2 prosecutorial assistants, 6 investigators, 404 court clerks, 3 Ministry of Justice officials, 2 judges of registration, 8 state enforcement officers, and 5 lawyers.

New cooperation agreements in judicial training

In May 2025, the National Institute of Justice signed a Grant Agreement with the America for Bulgaria Foundation, aimed at enhancing magistrates’ practical skills in working with financial and economic data and accounting documents.

On 27 February 2025, the National Institute of Justice signed a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation with UNICEF, aimed at improving access to justice and the institutional framework for children at risk and children in contact with the law, by developing and strengthening the capacity of Bulgarian judges, prosecutors, and investigators to apply children’s rights in civil, criminal, and administrative proceedings.

On 4 December 2025, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the National Institute of Justice and the Representation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bulgaria, in the field of professional training and capacity-building of the professional community on topics related to international protection, refugee rights, prevention of trafficking in human beings, and protection of children and other vulnerable groups. The first two joint initiatives under this cooperation were implemented in October 2025. On 6 October 2025, an in-person training entitled “Investigations and Legal Remedies in Cases of Violations of Fundamental Rights” was conducted, with a focus on investigations and legal remedies in the context of alleged violations of fundamental rights at external borders. The teaching team included representatives of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Frontex Fundamental Rights Office (FRO), and UNHCR.

A Memorandum of Cooperation was also signed with the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB), aimed at establishing a long-term and sustainable partnership to strengthen the capacity of the judicial system in applying labour legislation and protecting trade union rights. The parties committed to enhancing professional competence in labour law, the right to trade union organisation, the right to remuneration and social security, and the promotion of equality and non-discrimination in the workplace.

The latest four self-learning resources from the series “Knowledge Is Power” were also published: “Handbook for a Criminal Court Panel – First Instance Proceedings, Book Two”, “Substantive Criminal Law – Handbook for Judges, Prosecutors and Investigators, Book Four”, “Handbook for a Civil Court Panel, Book Three”, and “Handbook for the Administrative Judge – General and Special Part, Book Two”. These publications were issued under the initiative “Promoting a Culture of Self-Learning among Professionals in the Judicial System”, financed by the Bilateral Relations Fund of the Justice Programme, EEA and Norway Grants 2014–2021. Copies were

distributed to all Bulgarian judges, prosecutors, and investigators according to their procedural role, and the electronic versions are available through the NIJ E-Learning Portal.

Digitalisation (e.g. the use of digital technologies, including electronic communication tools and artificial intelligence, within the judicial system and in interactions with court users, procedural rules, and online access to judicial decisions).¹¹

Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems, including those based on artificial intelligence, for case management, judicial statistics and their transparency, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, surveys among court users or legal professionals).

Geographical distribution and number of courts/jurisdictions (the “judicial map”) and their specialization, in particular specific courts or court panels designated to deal with fraud and corruption cases.

Specialisation (of judges/specific courts/court panels) and training of the judiciary for the adjudication of commercial cases, as well as alternative dispute resolution methods and mediation in commercial cases.

The National Institute of Justice applies a comprehensive approach in developing training programmes for systematic training related to the implemented legislative reform providing for the introduction of mandatory mediation in proceedings concerning certain civil and commercial cases, as well as the entry into force of amendments to Ordinance No. 11 of 30 October 2023 on the structure and organisation of the activities of court mediation centres as of July of the current year, and the adoption of Ordinance No. 12 of 28 July 2025 on mediators and procedures in court mediation centres, targeting the following groups:

- presidents of courts with court mediation centres;
- judges adjudicating civil and commercial cases, in relation to the court’s powers to require the parties to personally participate in an information meeting on mediation procedures in certain cases (Article 140a(1), items 1–11 of the Civil Procedure Code) or to refer cases to mediation, taking into account all circumstances related to the dispute (Article 140a(2) and (3) of the Civil Procedure Code);
- judges designated by court presidents to organize the activities of court mediation centers;
- coordinators and/or designated court staff of court mediation centers entrusted with specific functions;
- court staff from the specialized administration of the Supreme Judicial Council.

In connection with the development and delivery of the training activities, a questionnaire was circulated to the presidents of the regional courts at the end of December 2025.

Within the framework of the Regional Training Programme, 17 judges, 4 judicial assistants, and 5 court clerks from the jurisdiction of the Blagoevgrad Regional Court participated in training on “Mediation”. In addition, 107 judges adjudicating civil and commercial cases took part in the zonal meeting of the Plovdiv appellate region, which included a module dedicated to the recent legislative amendments to the mediation procedure.

A need was identified to update the Handbook of Judicial Procedures for Stabilisation and Commercial Insolvency Proceedings, and its updated electronic version will be published on the NIJ E-Learning Portal in 2026.

With expert assistance from the Bulgarian Competition Law Association, a hybrid training course entitled “Protection against Unfair Contract Terms and Unfair Commercial Practices in Consumer Credit Agreements in Order-for-Payment and Contentious Proceedings” was organised on 16–17 October 2025.

In response to legislative amendments concerning the Individual Insolvency Act, promulgated in the State Gazette, Issue No. 54 of 4 July 2025, a series of webinars was organised presenting a comprehensive overview of the procedure—from the opening of proceedings to the discharge of

obligations and termination of the proceedings. One webinar was also organised specifically for an audience of state enforcement officers. Within this training initiative, the total number of participants was 513 (401 judges, 1 prosecutor, 17 judicial assistants, 2 court clerks, 86 state enforcement officers, and 6 judges of registration).

^{i 1} The information is presented in a Commission Staff Working Document of 2 December 2020, SWD(2020) 540 final, accompanying the Communication on the Digitalisation of Justice in the European Union, COM(2020) 710 final, and other EU-level information in the field of justice digitalisation as of 2024; no repetition is required.