



ANNUAL REPORT
2025



We connect
technology
to human rights
and care for the planet.

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Colour Key to the Strategic Areas



About BlueLink



Strengthening Civic Interaction



Information and Research



Civic Participation and Access



Digital Empowerment

The People at BlueLink

BlueLink Executive Board

BlueLink's Executive Board comprises Milena Dimitrova (Chair), Natalia Dimitrova-Popova and Managing Editor Pavel Antonov, PhD, who leads the Foundation's operational team.



Milena Dimitrova

Chair of BlueLink's Executive Board



Natalia Dimitrova-Popova

Member of BlueLink's Executive Board



Pavel Antonov, PhD

Member of BlueLink's Executive Board and
Managing Editor of the Foundation

HISTORY, CO-FOUNDERS AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The BlueLink network was created in 1998 by ECO-CLUB 2000, Za Zemyata, the Information and Training Centre for Ecology, SDP Balkani, Terra Eco Club, Akademika Geo-Eco Club, the Public Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development – Varna, and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Biodiversity Semperviva.

The concept and initial development of the network were the work of architect Vasil Byazov, journalist Pavel Antonov, and Dutch conservationist and expert Willem Oostenbrink. In 1999, the same organisations, without Semperviva, together with the three individual co-founders, established the BlueLink Foundation.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Since 2023, the Foundation's supreme governing body has been the Board of Trustees, which continues the link with the creation of BlueLink. Its members are:

- Milena Dimitrova
- Natalia Dimitrova-Popova
- Pavel Antonov
- Willem Oostenbrink
- Dimitar Vasilev-Velin
- Kamelia Dzhanevetska
- Iliyan Iliev
- Za Zemyata and SDP Balkani



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The People at BlueLink

The BlueLink Team

BlueLink's team members in 2025 were Zoya Borisova, Head of Administration and Project Coordinator; Ivan Koutzaroff, Project Manager (since July 2024); Nacho Strigulev, Journalist and Researcher (since February 2025); environmental and climate policy adviser Plamen Peev, PhD; and IT systems adviser Nikolai Genov. BlueLink's accountant was Simeon Borisov. The team combines expertise in project management, environmental and climate policy, law, journalism, digital systems and civil society development, supporting BlueLink's work.



Zoya Borisova

Head of Administration / Project Manager

Zoya Borisova, Head of Administration and Project Manager, has extensive experience in project administration within Bulgarian public institutions and non-governmental organisations.



Ivan Koutzaroff

Project Manager

Ivan Koutzaroff is a project manager with more than 18 years' experience in the non-governmental sector as a volunteer, project manager and head of strategic development. At BlueLink, he coordinates projects and supports programme develop-



Nacho Strigulev

Journalist and Researcher, with BlueLink since February 2025

Nacho Strigulev joined BlueLink as a journalist and researcher in February 2025. He has more than 25 years' experience in print and online media, specialising in science and technology.



Nikolai Genov

Web and IT Adviser



Plamen Peev, PhD

Senior Legal Expert, Law and Environment

Plamen Peev has been BlueLink's Senior Expert in Law and Environment since 2008. He is a senior legal advisor and an author of research on environmental law, public participation and access to justice. His work also covers climate policy, environmental governance and the protection of environmental and human rights defenders.



BlueLink: Mission and Strategic Objectives

BlueLink is registered under Bulgaria's Non-Profit Legal Entities Act as a public-benefit foundation with the following non-profit objectives:

To contribute to the protection and preservation of the environment.



To promote the development of democracy and civil society in Bulgaria by advancing the values of a united Europe.



To support the development, effectiveness and cooperation of the civil society sector.



To create an independent forum for the free exchange of information within civil society in pursuit of the Foundation's objectives.



To facilitate connections between civil society organisations and other stakeholders in public life through an online platform.



In 2025, this mission was pursued in accordance with BlueLink's Strategy for 2024-2027, which reflects the dynamic and often polarised public environment. In the face of growing disinformation and hybrid threats targeting European policies, the Foundation identified several critical areas for action.

These include maintaining a platform for the independent exchange of information among civil society organisations working in the fields of democratic development and environmental sustainability. Another strategic priority is connecting civic groups through an electronic network that enables them to plan and undertake joint initiatives.

A further key element of the Strategy is improving meaningful civil society participation in decision-making processes and ensuring access to information and justice.

The BlueLink team welcomed a landmark publication by green policy researcher Daniela Bozhinova.



In a historic ruling that will resonate across Europe for years to come, on 12 June 2025 the Hungarian Constitutional Court struck a decisive blow against state inaction on climate change. The judges declared the existing legal framework inadequate and ordered Parliament to adopt much stricter and more specific measures to address the climate crisis by mid-2026.

The significance of this legal precedent became the central topic of a webinar organised by environmental and legal organisations. Associate Professor Katalin Sulyok of Durham University and Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) explained the legal details of the ruling. Constitutional Court Justice and judge-rapporteur Marcel Szabó stressed that the principle of intergenerational justice requires institutions to look beyond their short-term mandates. The discussion was chaired by Dr Ákos Eger of Friends of the Earth Hungary, the organisation behind the campaign that led to the court ruling.

The case was initiated by the Deputy Ombudsman for the Rights of Future Generations and supported by more than 10,000 citizens and dozens of organisations. In their 2020 petition, they challenged the Hungarian Climate Act adopted that year, arguing that its target of reducing emissions by 40% by 2030 fell far short of the European requirement of at least a 55% reduction. The petition framed inadequate climate ambition as a matter of constitutional rights.



Constitutional Court Justice Marcel Szabó (right) explains the reasoning behind the ruling of the Hungarian Constitutional Court.

According to Plamen Peev, legal adviser that the state has a duty to guarantee the constitutional right to a healthy environment without shifting the burden of climate change onto future generations.

According to Plamen Peev, legal adviser to the BlueLink Foundation and senior expert for Justice & Environment :

“This ruling by the Hungarian Constitutional Court is significant for the role of constitutional courts in ensuring more binding legislative and strategic measures to address the climate crisis.”

“It establishes constitutional obligations relating to environmental protection and intergenerational equity, and requires the legislature to adopt more ambitious and specific climate policies in accordance with constitutional principles.”

By striking down key provisions of the Climate Protection Act, the Hungarian Constitutional Court did more than require national legislation to comply with constitutional standards for the protection of nature and the climate. The June 2025 ruling by Hungary’s highest judges signalled a deeper shift in European legal culture: climate inaction is no longer regarded merely as weak policy - it may constitute a serious violation of fundamental human rights. For BlueLink, the case offered a practical entry point for STELLAR Rights, connecting climate action and fundamental rights through legal analysis and training.



“Fundamental Rights, Climate and the Environment” (Budapest, 25-27 November 2025)

It was no coincidence that this court ruling became the intellectual and emotional starting point for exploring the issue through storytelling. This took place at the “Fundamental Rights, Climate and the Environment” seminar, fittingly held in Budapest from 25 to 27 November 2025. The event formed part of the STELLAR Rights - Strategic Litigation for Environmental Rights project and was jointly organised by BlueLink, the Sofia-based network for civic thought and action, and the European network Justice & Environment (J&E). The project builds on advocacy for environmental justice by supporting strategic litigation and training journalists to turn complex legal cases into stories that are accessible to the public. The seminar brought together near-

ly 40 journalists, editors, communications professionals, lawyers and environmentalists from 11 EU Member States and Ukraine. Their shared aim was to understand how the language of fundamental rights is increasingly shaping climate and environmental disputes - and how it can be translated into powerful public-interest journalism. “By empowering journalists to report on climate rights, STELLAR strengthens democracy and accountability,” J&E coordinator Csaba Kiss stressed at the opening.

The three-day programme was led by BlueLink Managing Editor Pavel Antonov and leading Hungarian climate communications expert Réka Nagy. Rather than offering conventional training, its approach built a narrative bridge between courtrooms, university lecture halls, newsrooms, and media and digital channels. Participants exchanged perspectives on strategic litigation, public-interest reporting and practical uses of fundamental rights arguments in environmental and climate-related cases across Europe and beyond.



Sirpa Rautio, Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

FRA Director to Journalists: “Fundamental Rights Are Key to Addressing Crises”

The discussions in Budapest quickly moved beyond the Hungarian context. In a video address to the seminar participants, Sirpa Rautio, Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), urged journalists to view climate conflicts through the broader lens of European law. She described the Charter of Fundamental Rights as “the EU’s bill of rights” - one of the most modern and comprehensive catalogues of human rights. The Charter extends far beyond freedom of expression and information, Rautio said. Her contribution gave participants a common legal reference point for discussions and practical exercises.

Continued on page 8.



Outside the Hungarian Parliament: participants in the “Fundamental Rights, Climate and the Environment” seminar on their way to Central European University in Budapest.



Continued from page 7.

In her video address, Sirpa Rautio, Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, urged journalists to view climate conflicts through the broader lens of European law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

“The Charter contains many rights of direct relevance to journalists, ranging from freedom of assembly and association to the right of access to documents. It also includes rights that are particularly relevant to your discussions today: for example, Article 37, which recognises the need for a high level of environmental protection.”

Investigative journalists play an essential watchdog role in protecting and promoting fundamental rights. By exposing violations, corruption and negligence related to environmental policies and practices, they help ensure transparency and accountability.



Supporting civic action: Ákos Eger (pictured above right), Executive Director of the National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary.

Their work, however, often encounters significant obstacles, including the growing wave of strategic lawsuits against public participation, known as SLAPPs. These are increasingly used as a tactic of intimidation to silence critical voices and undermine democratic debate, Rautio warned.

Defending European Values through Information, Rights and Civic Action

In 2025, the public environment in Bulgaria and across Europe continued to be marked by growing tensions surrounding democratic institutions, the rule of law, climate policies and free public debate. The continuing war against Ukraine, intensifying disinformation, pressure on civil society and environmental

and human rights defenders, and the deepening climate crisis created new challenges for organisations working in the public interest. For BlueLink, this was a year in which our In Defence of European Values strategy took on more concrete substance through work at the intersection of independent journalism, human rights, civic participation, digital democracy and nature conservation.

Independent journalism remained our principal means of turning scientific knowledge, civic perspectives and European policies into public debate. One of the most visible results was the creation of the weekly segment Climate: The Hot Truth within Bulgarian National Television's Around the World and at Home news programme. Following the training and expert support we provided to journalists and editors, climate change gained a regular weekly presence in BNT's main news



bulletin. At the same time, we continued to tell stories about civic initiatives, digital rights and the protection of human rights, including through a series of seven stories about organisations from the Ravn BG alliance of non-governmental organisations, showing how civil society organisations use communications and internet technologies to defend the public interest.



A participant receives a certificate following the STELLAR training.

The connection between human rights and climate policy assumed an increasingly central place in our work. The Time for Action - Climate Rights 2025 Forum brought together the publications, training activities and international exchanges that followed, focusing on the place of fundamental rights in the European Green Deal, the role of journalism in reporting on strategic litigation, and the need for climate policies to be grounded in the principles of the rule of law.

In this way, BlueLink consolidated an approach that regards climate justice as an inseparable part of defending democracy.

A major national focus of STELLAR Rights in 2025 was BlueLink's traditional Time for Action forum, held in Sofia on 24–25 April under the theme Climate Rights 2025. Since 2009, the forum has provided a space for civil society organisations, experts, institutions and citizens to think and act together on issues connecting nature conservation, democracy and European values. The opening Civil Forum for Climate, Environment and Fundamental Rights explored how the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights can be used in relation to European climate and energy policies. A keynote contribution from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights placed climate action and the just transition within the wider framework of rights-based democracy. Plamen Peev presented the project's legal analysis, followed by discussion of relevant legislation, judicial practice and practical barriers to invoking Charter rights.

Participants then worked in groups to identify opportunities for applying fundamental rights in environmental matters and to consider legislative and administrative changes that could make those rights more effective in practice. This participatory format reflected a central aim of STELLAR: not simply to explain legal provisions, but to connect them with the experience of civil society, journalists and affected communities.

Beyond the forum, BlueLink continued national stakeholder and communication work under STELLAR throughout the year. Particular attention was given to translating rights-based legal approaches into accessible public narratives and strengthening interaction between legal experts, journalists and civil society actors.

An important legacy of STELLAR Rights was the development of practical legal and communication resources that could continue to be used beyond the project's events. These materials brought together national legal analysis, examples of relevant case law and guidance on the use of fundamental rights in environmental and climate-related disputes.

The project also helped BlueLink consolidate knowledge that had previously been scattered across individual cases, expert discussions and advocacy work. By bringing this material into a more structured form, STELLAR created a stronger basis for future training, reporting and support for organisations and individuals seeking to defend environmental rights. This work is reflected in a dedicated publication presented on the following page, which includes an analysis by attorney Alexander Kodjabashev. The publication is intended as a practical reference for legal practitioners, civil society organisations, journalists and environmental defenders working with strategic rights and litigation.



This and other BlueLink
publications are available at
www.bluelink.net

Под редакцията на:

Пламен Пеев

Иван Куцаров

Павел Антонов

Пътеводител

за стратегически права и дела,
свързани с околната среда и климата

Харта на основните права на ЕС и други инструменти
за достъп до информация, правосъдие и участие на обществеността

Продължение на „Нашите климатични права“

Religion and Climate: An Ecology of the Soul and the Earth



Ivan Koutzaroff of BlueLink presented the historic role of the Church in helping people at the conference held at Sofia University.

In 2025, the BlueLink Foundation took a new step in its development by organising an event that was innovative not only for Bulgaria, but also in a global context. The academic and practitioner conference *Climate Change and Religion: Reflection and Interaction*, held at Sofia University on 7 October, demonstrated the organisation's capacity to build bridges between traditionally disconnected areas of public life. Organised jointly with the Faculty of Theology, the forum opened a new space for interdisciplinary dialogue on the moral dimensions of the climate crisis. The event directly reflected the Foundation's strategic objective of fostering cooperation within the civil society sector.

The gathering opened a rare space for dialogue between environmental expertise, religious traditions, academic reflection and civic responsibility and action.

Metropolitan Naum presented *Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's book Encountering the Mystery*, published by the Holy Metropolis of Ruse.



Some of the participants in the meeting, from left to right: BlueLink Managing Editor Dr Pavel Antonov; Dr Zlatina Karavalcheva of the Dveri Foundation; Metropolitan Naum of Ruse; Father Ventsislav Nikolov of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University; and Mladen Shishkov, Chair of the National Assembly's Committee on the Environment.



In 2025, BlueLink expanded its efforts to involve children and young people in climate policy through the ENRICH project (Environment, Rights, Children). Co-funded by the EU under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, the project focuses on protecting children's rights in the context of the climate crisis. ENRICH runs from May 2024 until the end of April 2026 and covers eight EU countries. Justice and Environment (J&E) is the lead organisation, working with its partners EMLA (Hungary), BlueLink (Bulgaria), ÖKOBÜRO (Austria), Zele na akcija (Croatia), PIC (Slovenia), EELC (Estonia) and UfU (Germany). BlueLink contributes to ENRICH by organising a series of events aimed at building lasting dialogue among institutions, experts, civil society organisations and school students.

At an expert seminar held by BlueLink in Sofia on 18 June 2025, the Foundation's Project Manager Ivan Koutzaroff presented the results



of a specialised European survey. With more than 220 responses from Bulgaria, the survey showed that over 70% of respondents were aged between 45 and 64. This challenges the idea of a generational divide and illustrates the strong support provided by teachers and educators.

BlueLink legal expert Plamen Peev noted that, although children's rights are enshrined in the Paris Agreement, the Child Protection Act and the Environmental Pro-

tection Act, the administration lacks good practices for taking their voices into account. He proposed introducing specific rules to encourage children's participation in environmental procedures.

Eva Zhecheva, Director of the Child Rights Directorate at the Ombudsman's Office, stressed that children are several steps ahead of adults and presented an online platform for submitting reports. Kliment Mindzhov, pictured left, presented the Klimadapt portal, which contains 22 educational games. Participants agreed that institutional mechanisms such as student councils are essential for the meaningful involvement of children in climate decision-making.

The event also helped place children's perspectives more firmly within Bulgaria's climate debate, linking participation rights with decisions that will shape their communities, education, health and future living conditions for decades.





A moment from the programme of the Time for Action - Climate Rights Forum in Sofia, featuring a round-table discussion on protecting children amid the climate crisis, 25 April 2025.

One of the principal initiatives under the ENRICH project was the discussion event Education for Climate, Nature and Children's Rights, held by the BlueLink Foundation on 25 April 2025. The forum brought together more than 40 representatives of public institutions, international organisations and civil society.

Participants included representatives of the State Agency for Child Protection, the Ministry of Environment and Water and the Ombuds-

man's Office. The discussion involved Eva Zhecheva of the Ombudsman's Office and UNICEF Representative to Bulgaria Kristina de Bruin. Civil society was represented by experts from the BlueLink Foundation, environmental associations and human rights organisations, who highlighted the barriers to youth participation.

The forum reaffirmed BlueLink's role in building lasting dialogue among public authorities, international institutions and young people in Bulgaria.

Deputy Minister of Environment and Water Reneta Koleva stressed:

“The generation growing up today will inherit all these problems, and it is our responsibility to prepare them. Education is the most affordable and effective technology for mitigating climate change.”

The discussions identified the main obstacles to children's participation: complex legal language and the absence of established procedures through which they can exert a direct influence. Representatives of public authorities and civil society organisations agreed on the need for specific steps: introducing mandatory child impact assessments for new legislation, making public consultations accessible and understandable, and strengthening climate education.



Гражданско взаимодействие и образование
за климат, природа и права на детето

18 ЮНИ 2025, СЕРДИКА 20, ЗАЛА НОВАТОР, СОФИЯ

СЕМИНАР



Съфинансирано от
ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ СЪЮЗ



Support for Climate Coalition Bulgaria (CCB)

In 2025, BlueLink continued to support Climate Coalition Bulgaria (CCB). BlueLink has provided the Coalition with organisational and communications support since its establishment. During 2025, we held regular communications meetings for Coalition members and maintained the CCB website. BlueLink's support for the Coalition's long-standing advocacy on climate policy also remained essential.

One of the greatest successes of this advocacy was achieved during the past year. On 3 October 2025, important amendments to the Climate Change Mitigation Act entered into force, following years of advocacy by Climate Coalition Bulgaria. The amendments established an overarching long-term national target of achieving climate neutrality and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, in accordance with the Paris Agreement and the European Climate Law.

The amendments reflected recommendations from institutional and legal analyses conducted by WWF and BlueLink experts. On the basis of these analyses, CCB submitted both general and specific proposals for amendments to the Climate Change Mitigation Act to the Ministry of Environment and Water and Parliament Members. Two of these proposals were adopted: the long-term climate-neutrality target and the development and implementation of a long-term national strategy for climate change mitigation.

Bulgaria Now Has a National Climate-Neutrality Target for 2050

"These legislative changes are an achievement not only for Bulgaria, but for the entire civil society climate community across Europe. At a time when we are witnessing a retreat, both globally and across Europe, from the strategic priorities of a just and sustainable transition towards a low-carbon economy and climate neutrality, these changes show that Bulgaria is moving in the right direction," commented Plamen Peev in his capacity as BlueLink's Senior Legal Expert.

CCB prepared a national comparative analysis of the climate adaptation readiness of all 265 Bulgarian

municipalities. Designated as the 2025 edition, the study covers ten areas: energy, buildings, mobility, forests, agriculture and food, waste, water, climate literacy, inequalities and administrative capacity.

As a member of CCB, the Za Zemjata association presented the cycling expedition to COP29, pictured below. Coalition members also remained active in public advocacy and communication on a wider range of climate issues.

Joint statements and press releases addressed political responsibility for climate action, adaptation and prevention, energy and the just transition, while Coalition experts appeared in the media. During the ECF-supported work, joint communication generated around 40 media publications, helping climate policy arguments reach audiences beyond the environmental sector.



Photo: Vlaykova Cinema



For Science-Based Climate Policies



Scientists and representatives of public institutions discussed how science can inform environmental decision-making.

On 12 September 2025, BlueLink organised a working meeting of Climate Coalition Bulgaria (CCB) in Sofia, bringing together leading figures from the scientific community and civil society. Participants discussed the current challenges facing national climate policy and the coordination of civil society efforts towards a sustainable transition. The dialogue involved numerous experts from national institutions and established non-governmental organisations, including climatologist Antoaneta Yotova, Lilia Boicheva of the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology, Georgi Stefanov and Borislav Sandov. Plamen Peev, legal adviser to BlueLink; Meglena Antonova, Head of Greenpeace Bulgaria; and Radoslava Slavkova of the environmental association Za Zemiata participated online.

Prof. Diana Ürge-Vorsatz, Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),

was a special guest. She shared international experience of the role played by scientific advisory councils in Europe, stressing that objective science is essential to the sustainability of the energy transition. BlueLink and CCB called for the establishment of a strong and independent climate advisory body in Bulgaria, modelled on councils already operating in Europe and elsewhere in the world. The aim is to ensure that the country's climate policies are based on the highest scientific standards and meaningful public engagement.

Prof. Ürge-Vorsatz was a Coordinating Lead Author of the IPCC's Fourth and Fifth Assessment Reports and was a member of the Panel when it received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. She teaches at Central European University and advises governments and international institutions. The meeting continued CCB's efforts to develop common positions in support of independent climate science.

It built on the satellite event held on 31 July 2024 during the IPCC's 61st session and organised by CCB, BlueLink, Climateka and Gorichka.

BlueLink presented Climate Policy Councils: Success Factors and Lessons Learned, pictured below - a Bulgarian translation of a report by Mathilda Miliand, a political science researcher at Stockholm University, and Karin Bäckstrand, Professor of Environmental Social Science in the university's Department of Political Science. The report identifies five factors for the success of climate advisory bodies. Her contribution connected the Bulgarian discussion with European practice and reinforced participants' call for stronger, independent scientific advice to guide national climate policy and public decision-making in the years ahead. The meeting also strengthened links between climate science and civic advocacy, giving Coalition members a stronger evidence base for policy advocacy.





In 2025, the BlueLink Foundation launched one of its most significant media initiatives – the Climate Change Capacity for Television (3CTV) project. At a time when climate change is no longer a distant threat but an everyday reality, public-service media have a key role in translating complex scientific knowledge into language that citizens can understand. The project was created with the ambition of building a lasting bridge between the scientific community and national media and encouraging professional, accessible and science-based coverage of the climate crisis.

The initiative was implemented in close partnership with Bulgarian National Television (BNT). On 11 and 12 September 2025, ten BNT journalists, editors and producers took part in two intensive information and training sessions. The programme brought together public-service television professionals with leading Bulgarian and international scientists and experts, helping transform

dry statistics into credible and engaging television stories.

The scientific framework was provided by Prof. Diana Ürge-Vorsatz, Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and Dr Maria Trifonova from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University. The programme also involved specialists from the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the National Centre of Public Health and Analyses, the Bioselena Foundation and the University of Sheffield, as well as experts in climate and energy policy.

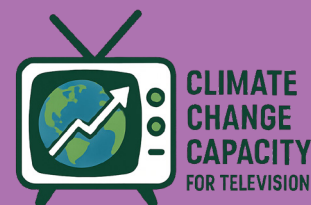
From the launch of the programme at the end of September until the end of 2025, 13 original television reports were produced and broadcast, covering different aspects of climate change. The first two reports alone reached more than 245,000 and 220,000 television viewers, respectively. This helped anchor the training firmly in scientific evidence and real-world reporting needs.

This helped anchor the training firmly in current scientific evidence and real-world reporting needs. Climate crisis as a multifaceted societal challenge linked to the economy, energy, agriculture, health, migration and social justice. Participants also worked on practical challenges facing journalism: verifying claims and sources, working with scientific data, identifying misleading messages, and presenting complex processes through concrete human stories.

The discussions presented the climate crisis as a multifaceted societal challenge linked to the economy, energy, agriculture, health, migration and social justice. Participants also worked on the practical challenges facing journalism: verifying claims and sources, working with scientific data, identifying misleading messages, and presenting complex processes through concrete human stories. Following the training sessions, a practical phase began, with ongoing expert and mentoring support from BlueLink. The most visible result was the creation of the weekly “Climate – the Hot Truth” segment in BNT1’s flagship evening news programme



New Standards on National Television



“Around the World and at Home”. It explored climate change through issues such as drought, water supply, forest fires, extreme heat, health, energy poverty and the just transition.

3CTV demonstrated that targeted cooperation between journalists, scientists and civil society organisations can achieve lasting change in national television content.

The lectures highlighted the links between climate change and key areas of public life. Prof. Diana Ürge-Vorsatz presented the latest scientific findings of the IPCC and explained how global processes manifest themselves at the local level. Dr Maria Trifonova examined the impact of climate change on the energy sector, business and Europe’s transition towards climate neutral-

ity. Assoc. Prof. Veska Georgieva and Dr Stoilko Apostolov discussed drought, agrometeorological risks and the challenges facing agriculture. Assoc. Prof. Teodora Peneva and Dr Dimitar Sabev focused on the economic and social dimensions of decarbonisation, energy poverty and the just transition. Assoc. Prof. Lilia Bocheva presented scientific data on extreme weather events in Bulgaria, while Dr Zornitsa Spasova examined the effects of heatwaves on health and working conditions. Iva Alexandrova explored the link between climate and migration, while Borislav Sandov explained European and national climate targets, policy instruments and the timelines for their implementation.

The results went beyond the training itself. Climate reporting gained a more regular and visible place in



Professor Diana Ürge-Vorsatz, Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, speaking to BNT journalists.

BNT’s main news output, supported by stronger links between journalists and experts.

“The real challenge is to translate this complex subject into language people can understand and to show how it affects their lives.”



A working session with some of the leading reporters from Bulgaria’s public-service broadcaster.





Be LIFE: Defending the Defenders

A key pillar of our work in 2025 was supporting activists who are increasingly subjected to pressure because of their work to protect nature. BlueLink worked actively to identify the legal and institutional barriers faced by environmental defenders within the framework of the European Be LIFE project – an initiative led by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and co-funded by the EU LIFE Programme. Be LIFE aims to improve the resources available for exercising environmental democratic rights and to build capacity to counter pressure against civic participation.

The project promotes public access to justice, information and participation in decision-making processes on environmental matters, as well as

the implementation of the UN Aarhus Convention. At the height of the summer, on 30 June 2025, the results of a European survey of environmental and climate defenders were published. The survey was organised by the Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) network within the Be LIFE project. It targeted young people engaged in environmental causes across Europe, who shared their vision for the future and their motivation to remain on the front line of efforts to protect nature.

BlueLink Foundation – the Bulgarian partner in the Be LIFE project – actively supported the dissemination of the survey in Bulgaria and encouraged young activists to take part. To build on these efforts, on 29 and 30 October 2025 BlueLink organised a two-day training seminar, pictured

below, entitled “Tools and Skills for the Legal and Communication Protection of Environmental and Climate Defenders”. The event was held as part of the Be LIFE project, in partnership with J&E and YEE, with co-funding from the British Embassy in Sofia. Its aim was to prepare environmental defenders for legal and media self-defence by providing them with practical tools for responding to pressure.

During the legal panel, lawyer Summer Kern explained the mechanisms of the Aarhus Convention, while Bulgarian environmental lawyers Regina Stoilova and Ivan Velov provided practical advice on litigation in Bulgaria. Protection against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) was presented by lawyer Alexander Kashumov,



Participants in the Be LIFE training in Bulgaria





A working moment from the Be LIFE event in Sofia

while media law expert Prof. Nelly Ognyanova analysed the role of European regulations in tackling disinformation. Strategies for dealing with digital threats and cyber harassment were presented by Pavel Antonov and Vasil Kanev.

The seminar also created space for exchange among activists, lawyers, journalists and representatives of European institutions. Participants shared specific cases of administrative pressure, legal prosecution, online harassment and smear campaigns. The practical exercises helped them assess risks, document violations and build a coordinated legal and communication response. The training laid the foundations for a lasting mutual-support network through which defenders can access expert assistance and public visibility. In this way, Be LIFE connected individual security with the broader task of protecting civic participation, access to justice and democratic debate.

An important gesture of institutional support was the meeting held during the event between participants and Jan Dusík, Deputy Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), pictured on the right. He expressed his personal appreciation to the activists, describing them as key ambassadors for addressing environmental and climate challenges. "We would not be able to do what you do from our offices in Brussels," the European Commission representative added. This dialogue sent a clear signal that the voice of civil society is heard in Brussels and that the European institutions stand behind those who defend nature.

The experience gained and the needs identified will guide the next Be LIFE activities, including the preparation of practical resources, further training and advocacy towards the European institutions. The project continues to connect Bulgarian defenders with partner organisations

across Europe. BlueLink brought an additional dimension to BeLIFE by expanding the concept of threats against environmental defenders beyond legal and institutional pressure. Drawing on its media and digital expertise, the Foundation highlighted online smear campaigns, disinformation, hostile media narratives and other forms of digital pressure that increasingly affect activists and civil society organisations. These issues were integrated into the Sofia training programme alongside legal protection and digital security.





Milena Dimitrova, Chair of BlueLink's Executive Board (centre), presents the Audience Award.

In the spring of 2025, BlueLink held its traditional nomination and voting campaign for the Free Electron Awards. Established by the civic network, the award has been presented annually since 2009 and

recognises outstanding digital initiatives and individuals who use the internet to defend democracy, human rights and the environment. The award ceremony took place on 24 April 2025 as part of the Time for Action – for Climate Rights 2025

Forum. The event brought together friends and allies of the civic network for an informal conversation and discussion over a glass of wine. The informal format also helped reconnect members of BlueLink's wider civic community.



Сигналин
ОБЩИНА БЛАГОЕВГРАД



**Свободна
Европа**

Laureates of the Free Electron Award in 2025



The Free Electron Awards 2025



Following a closely contested vote, the Audience Award of Free Electron 2025 went to SignalIn – an innovative online reporting platform for Blagoevgrad Municipality that promotes transparency and civic participation at the local level. The certificate was accepted by the platform's co-founder, Daniel Stoyanov. A Special Award for Digital Communication on Climate and Environmental Policies went to Rumen Karamihalev (pictured right) for the Eco-Eco project. He was recognised for his strategic use of social media for advocacy on issues such as renewable energy and environmental protection. The Bulgarian service of Radio Free Europe was also recognised for strengthening free journalism in the digital environment. The award was presented by BlueLink co-founder Pavel Antonov.

The other nominees put forward by BlueLink's civic and expert community were journalist and content creator Lyubomir Zhechev, Yurukov's Blog, environmental activist Atanas Rusev, and the digital initiative Zemlevezh. The traditional Free Electron Awards have been presented annually by BlueLink since 2009. They recognise strategic civic tools and methods of digital communication that contribute to protecting the environment and democracy and to promoting the values of a united Europe.

Free Electron 2025 was held as part of the STELLAR (Strategic Litigation

and Environmental Rights) project, co-funded by the EU's CERV Programme, and was included in the calendar of the European Climate Pact. The initiative aims to empower civil society to use legal mechanisms and digital tools in defence of environmental rights. The award ceremony reaffirmed the key role of free media and digital activism in transparent governance.

As an enthusiastic communicator, Karamihalev is developing Eco-Eco as a practical communication model that links environmental protection with people's immediate economic interests. Under the motto "Ecology is good for both your health and your wallet", he explains complex issues related to the energy transition, renewable energy sources and the sensible use of resources in accessible and understandable language. His messages reach audiences through the website eco-eco.bg, live meetings and lectures, as well as short videos on Facebook and TikTok.

It is precisely his ability to turn expert arguments into content closely connected to people's everyday experience that distinguishes his approach. In a short period, Eco-Eco's videos accumulated millions of views, averaging around 180,000 views per video, while its channels attracted more than 25,000 followers in one year. Behind this communication work lies extensive professional experience as well – Karamihalev has three decades of experience managing European projects for the Swedish steel industry.



By presenting this distinction, BlueLink highlighted the importance of positive climate communication grounded in practical benefits. Eco-Eco demonstrates how digital platforms can broaden public understanding of the green transition by linking personal choice, economic efficiency and responsibility towards nature. In this way, the award recognised not only the popularity of the content, but also its ability to encourage informed decisions and sustainable social change.

In a digital environment increasingly shaped by disinformation, hostility, manipulation and polarisation, it is equally important to make constructive examples visible. The Free Electron Awards serve precisely this purpose by recognising people and organisations that use digital technologies responsibly, creatively and in the public interest. By highlighting positive models of online communication, the award shows that digital platforms can support cooperation, democratic participation and informed public debate rather than deepen division. It gives visibility to practices that combine technological innovation.



Digital Rights and Civic Activism



The APC delegation before the opening of IGF 2025. Photo: APC

From 23 to 27 June 2025, BlueLink's Managing Editor and co-founder Pavel Antonov took part in the twentieth anniversary edition of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Lillestrøm, near Oslo. He participated as a representative of BlueLink and as a member of the Board of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) – a global network of which the Foundation has been a member since 2000.

IGF brought together more than 10,000 registered participants from governments, international institutions, business, the technical community and civil society. Under the motto “Building Digital Governance Together”, the programme included more than 200 sessions focusing on trust and resilience in the digital environment, responsible innovation, universal access and digital rights, as well as international cooperation.

APC participated with a strong international delegation and placed

at the centre of the forum the rights of marginalised communities and human rights defenders, internet access during conflicts and crises, technology-facilitated violence, environmental justice, and the need for the Global South to have an equal voice in shaping digital policies. Particular importance was also attached to the review, twenty years on, of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.

As an APC Board member, Antonov took part not only in the public programme but also in the network's internal strategic discussions. He contributed the perspective of civil society organisations and independent media from Bulgaria and Eastern Europe – regions where freedom of expression coexists with concentrations of media and platform power, disinformation, and growing dependence on commercial digital intermediaries. This perspective helped connect global internet governance debates with the everyday challenges.

BlueLink will continue pursuing the development and implementation of the CIRDA initiative as a practical response to the growing dependence of civil society on commercially controlled digital platforms. Building on the discussions initiated within APC and at the Internet Governance Forum, the Foundation will seek partners, expertise and resources to develop approaches that strengthen civil society's digital autonomy while preserving openness, pluralism and meaningful public communication.

CIRDA - Civic Initiative for Reclaiming Digital Autonomy

It was during the forum that the idea emerged for a new BlueLink initiative aimed at reclaiming civil society's digital autonomy. The working concept, subsequently developed under the name CIRDA – Civic Initiative for Reclaiming Digital Autonomy, was based on the observation that organisations increasingly reach their audiences through private platforms whose algorithms, business models and rules do not serve the public interest. As a result, access to audiences, the visibility of causes of public importance, and even the preservation of accumulated knowledge remain dependent on decisions over which civil society has no control. The initiative offers a framework for bringing BlueLink's long-standing experience together.





Environmental Justice in Albania

In 2025, BlueLink continued its participation in the Environmental Justice in Albania (EJA) project, funded by the European Union under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III). The project has been implemented since the beginning of 2024 and runs until June 2026, under the leadership of the Regional Environmental Center – Albania (REC Albania), in partnership with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN Albania) and BlueLink, with the support of the OSCE Presence in Albania.

The aim is to improve access to justice in cases involving environmental violations and crimes. To achieve this, the project brings together three interconnected strands of work: data collection and analysis; capacity development for law-enforcement and judicial institutions; and mobilisation of civil society organisations, the media and affected local communities.

Albania has environmental legislation and institutions responsible for its implementation, but practice reveals serious gaps throughout the entire enforcement chain – from identifying and documenting violations to investigation, sanctioning and enforcement of penalties. Diagnostic work under the project, covering data up to May 2025, identified fragmented institutional responsibilities, insufficient coordination and an extremely low collection rate for imposed fines. These gaps weaken enforcement.

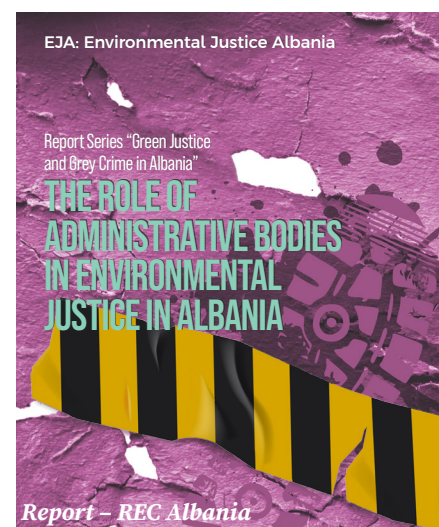
The data collected show that, during the period examined, the various inspection bodies imposed 3,317 fines with a total value of approximately EUR 14.58 million. Only around EUR 445,000 was collected in 275 cases. The problems are compounded by lengthy court proceedings, incomplete archives following institutional reorganisations and a lack of consistent accountability.

As a result, administrative sanctions often lead neither to effective accountability nor to restoration of the damage caused. BlueLink's contribution in 2025 focused on connecting Albanian institutions, journalists and civil society organisations with European knowledge and practical experience. The Foundation developed criteria and a methodology for identifying and selecting specialists and continued building a European database of experts in environmental crime, investigation, prosecution and law enforcement.

Professional networks and institutions of environmental prosecutors, inspectors and police structures, Europol, academic centres and civil society organisations were researched. The selected experts are assessed according to their professional competence, practical experience and the relevance of their knowledge to Albania's needs. The database contains their areas of specialisation, professional profiles and work contacts and is intended as a lasting resource for institutions and communities in the country.

BlueLink also contributed to the preparation of follow-up training for representatives of the media, civil society and the justice sector. Particular attention was paid to cooperation between journalists and organisations in uncovering environmental violations, accessible reporting mechanisms for local communities, and monitoring institutional responses.

Through EJA, BlueLink brings to Albania its experience in access to information and justice, civic participation and socially responsible journalism. Through its participation in EJA, BlueLink contributed experience in environmental law, civic participation, access to justice and public-interest communication to a regional effort with direct relevance beyond Albania. The project showed how stronger cooperation between institutions, legal professionals, journalists and civil society can improve the identification, investigation and public understanding of environmental violations and their prosecution.





**This and other BlueLink
publications are available at
www.bluelink.net**

СЕДЕМ ИСТОРИИ ЗА СВОБОДИ И ПРАВА

Countaring Tobacco and Nicotine Addiction



BBlueLink is a co-founder of the Coalition for a Life Without Tobacco and Nicotine (“Say No”) and provides ongoing communication and analytical support in the fight against nicotine addiction. In 2025, the Foundation consolidated its role as a key actor in efforts to combat nicotine addiction in Bulgaria. BlueLink built on the work carried out in 2024, when efforts focused on exposing manipulative messaging and lobbying in favour of the tobacco industry. At that time, the organisation publicised a key study by economist Chief Assistant Professor Dr Dimitar Sabev of the Institute for Economic Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, conducted in partnership with the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies. The study found that faster alignment with European excise duty rates could generate between EUR 1.4 and 1.9 billion in additional revenue over three years and could prevent the premature deaths of 48,000 Bulgarians.

In 2025, BlueLink expanded its analytical and media pressure, placing particular emphasis on protecting young people from emerging forms of nicotine addiction. On 31 May 2025, BlueLink.net published the article “Apples, Not Tobacco Addiction for Children!”, authored by Pavel Antonov. The analysis followed public and institutional reactions after a tragic case linked to vape use and served as a critical civil society platform against aggressive and unregulated

marketing targeting young people.

The culmination of BlueLink’s advocacy work against nicotine addiction came at the end of the year. On 9 December 2025, the Coalition for a Life Without Tobacco and Nicotine (“Say No”), in partnership with the World Health Organization Country Office in Bulgaria, organised a round table entitled “Urgent Measures Against the Nicotine Crisis in Bulgaria”. Active participants in the discussion included the Coalition’s Chair Dr Gergana Geshanova, Kristina Maurer-Stender, Head of Tobacco Control at WHO/Europe, Prof. Dr Plamen Dimitrov, Director of the National Center of Public Health and Analyses, Assoc. Prof. Dr Mihail Okoliyski, Dr Masha Gavrailova, Chief Assistant Professor Dr Dimitar Sabev of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and Coalition co-founder Pavel Antonov.

The good news is that, despite the negative statistics, the analytical material from the round table identified a strong social basis for change.

78.7% of pupils support a ban on smoking in enclosed public places, while nearly 60% of smokers among them had tried to quit during the previous year. This demonstrates the urgent need for specialised support and constitutes a call for help that Bulgarian society must hear. By giving this data media visibility and expert backing, BlueLink Foundation provides civil society with a powerful tool for exerting institutional pressure.

BlueLink helped the coalition use the 2025 Tobacco Industry Interference Index an advocacy tool. The updated assessment documented the continued influence of tobacco-industry interests on public policy in Bulgaria and highlighted weaknesses in transparency, prevention and enforcement. The Index also provided a common reference point for civil society organisations working on tobacco and nicotine control and strengthened their ability to challenge narratives promoted by the industry.



Solidarity Beyond Borders

At the end of 2025, BlueLink expressed solidarity with European representatives and civil society organisations affected by US visa restrictions because of their involvement in implementing EU digital legislation. The Foundation supported the European Commission's firm response and insisted that the Digital Services Act and other European rules should continue to be applied confidently and consistently. In its position, BlueLink defended the EU's right to regulate the digital space independently in the interests of citizens, democracy, media freedom and public oversight of major technology platforms.

In 2025, BlueLink also supported several international civil society initiatives linking environmental protection with the defence of democracy, freedom of expression and public participation.

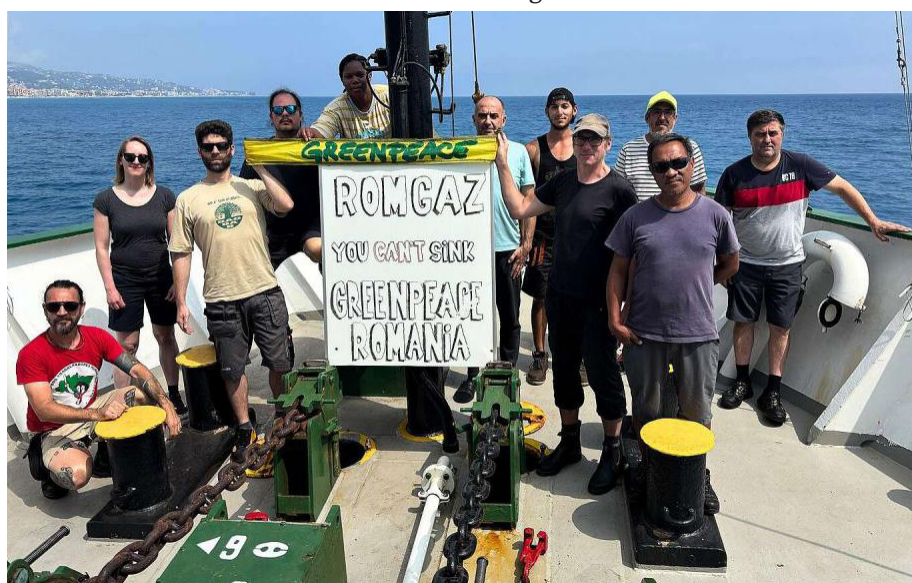
In March, the Foundation joined more than 135 organisations from the EU and South-East Europe in a joint statement against the growing repression of civil society in Serbia. The signatories condemned police actions against non-governmental organisations and pressure on students, academics and activists, and called on the EU to defend civic space and democratic values in the country more decisively. They linked environmental protection with the defence of democracy.

In July, BlueLink supported an international appeal for the Ohrid Region in North Macedonia and

Albania to be placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. Its unique natural and cultural heritage is threatened by illegal construction, mass tourism, pollution and insufficiently effective protection.

The Foundation also gave publicity and support to Greenpeace Romania in response to an attempt by Romgaz Black Sea Limited to have the organisation dissolved because of its actions opposing the Neptun Deep gas project. On 11 June the company withdrew its claim. The appeal also underlined that protecting Ohrid's exceptional natural and cultural heritage requires effective institutions and public participation.

Solidarity with the "For the Nature to Remain in Bulgaria" coalition



As a result of the campaign, Romgaz withdrew its claim against Greenpeace Romania.

Photo: Greenpeace

On 2 July, BlueLink joined the European Day of Action Against SLAPPs together with 40 organisations from more than 15 countries. The initiative defended journalists, activists and civil society organisations against the use of court proceedings as a means of pressure and intimidation.

As part of the Democracy for Transition coalition, the Foundation also supported a letter to the European Commission calling for civil society organisations to be involved in shaping the European Democracy Shield and the EU's future civil society policy.

BlueLink joined Ravnibg members' position against the treatment of Mission Wings and attempts to associate its work in support of refugees with alleged foreign influence by interior minister Daniel Mitov and law enforcement authorities in Bulgaria.

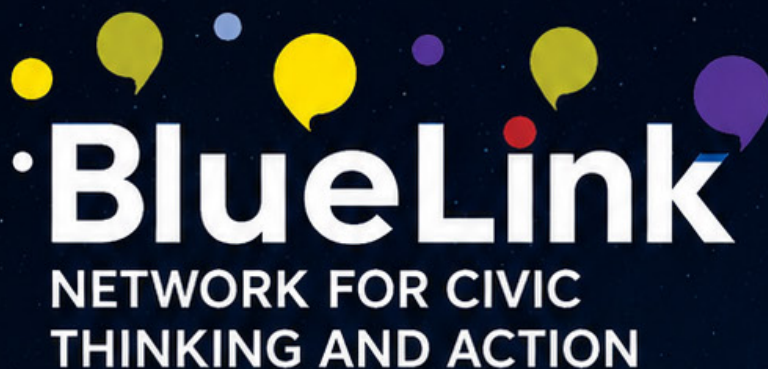
BlueLink: Financial Report 2025

Income by Source in 2025

Source	Income (BGN)	Share
Cash balance as at 01.01.2025	250 752,94	60,01%
European Climate Foundation (ECF)	95 003,34	22,74%
EU LIFE Programme through J&E	46 235,80	11,07%
Co-financing from the British Embassy under LIFE	3 590,60	0,86%
Bulgarian Fund for Women (BFW)	9 640,00	2,31%
Danube Transnational Programme	9 282,22	2,22%
Coalition "For a Life Without Tobacco Smoke"	2 174,50	0,52%
Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES)	650,00	0,16%
EU CERV Programme through J&E	218,29	0,05%
Reimbursed bank charges	68,50	0,02%
Donations	223,78	0,05%
TOTAL	417 839,97	100,00%

Expenditure by Area and Cash Balance in 2025

Area	Amount (BGN)	Share
Journalism in the public interest	27 957,57	6,69%
Civic participation and access to justice	143 700,62	34,39%
E-communications for civil society	29 182,91	6,98%
Network and partnership promotion	66 962,07	16,03%
Research	86 505,74	20,70%
Administrative expenses	4 236,84	1,01%
Cash balance as at 31.12.2025	59 294,22	14,19%
TOTAL	417 839,97	100,00%



Support BlueLink!

To continue using the internet for constructive exchange of opinions and analyses in defence of the environment, European values and democracy — and to give a voice to people who are heard less and less often in the mainstream media — we need independence.

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