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DEMOCRACY

MAPPING THE TRAINING NEEDS OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND THE EXISTING MECHANISMS FOR TRAINING PROVISION IN FIVE EU MEMBER STATES

SCOPING STUDY – BULGARIA

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¹ The present report was drafted based on data collection and preliminary data processing, conducted by the following team: Mila Mancheva, Slavyanka Ivanova, Lillya Dragoeva and Calina Mladenova.



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INTRODUCTION

From 1993, when Bulgaria ratified the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the attendant Protocol from 1967, till 2012 the country has faced a relatively low refugee inflow with an annual average of 1000 asylum applications. Significant change in this trend took place since 2013 with the increase in the inflow of persons seeking international protection mainly due to the wave of displaced persons fleeing from the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Between 1993 and May 2017 a total of 81 134 asylum applications were filed in Bulgaria of which 74 % (59 867) were submitted after 2012. In the same period a total of 23 68 persons were granted international protection, of them 12 780 persons refugee status and 10 905 humanitarian protection.² The sharp changes in both the volume and the demographic structure of asylum migration has put Bulgaria into a new policy situation requiring urgent development and restructuring of the systems of reception and integration in the country.

The aim of the present report³ is to present the results of a study of the information and (orientation) training needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection and the gaps in the mechanisms for information and (orientation) training provision.

The objectives of the study are:

- To review the dynamics in the numbers and the structure of the target groups in Bulgaria;
- To summarise the institutional framework providing information and orientation trainings to the target groups;
- To identify potentially unmet needs of information and orientation training, as well as opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and usefulness of currently provided information and trainings;
- To identify factors potentially hampering the proper implementation of information and (orientation) training programmes;
- To identify adequate ways for addressing the unmet needs.

The research methodology used involves desk research and in-depth interviews. The *desk research* encompassed analysis of statistical information provided by Eurostat, National Statistical Institute and the State Agency for Refugees; legal and policy documents concerning integration policies and programmes; policy and academic reports on the development of asylum migration and the asylum regime in Bulgaria. In addition, a total of 13 *in-depth interviews* were conducted with asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international protection (3 males, 2 women and 2 families) and experts working in the field of asylum integration – representatives of state institutions (2 interviews with social workers at

² Official data provided by the State Agency for Refugees at the Council of Ministers, available at: <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=8>, accessed on: 22 May 2017.

³ The current Scoping study is part of the project „*Enhancing the Integration of Women, Beneficiaries of International Protection by Development and Implementation of Multifaceted Integration Trainings*“, co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union, aimed at fostering the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and women among them by design and conduct of comprehensive integration trainings.

SAR) as well as of NGOs (4 interviews, including one with UNHCR representative). In addition, 4 follow up telephone interviews were conducted with NGO social workers directly involved in working with the target groups.

The study identified a number of data limitations regarding data on asylum trends. The statistical data on the education of asylum seekers does not encompass all applicants, because of lack of reliable data (lacking or not proved documents). The statistics for 2016, for instance, encompass 53.46 % of male and 45.54 % of the female asylum applicants. The respective shares among the beneficiaries of international protections are higher, but still insufficient to adequately represent the entire groups: 67.48 % and 69.05 % for the male and female BIPs respectively. In addition, the topic of information and (orientation) training provision to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection has not been subject of any targeted research prior to the conduct of the present study and it has been only a periphery subject in few policy reports. Respectively, in the present report the topic is discussed and analysed based on primary data gathered through expert interviews.

The report is structured in 3 parts. *Part one* discusses the main trends in refugee and migrant inflows in Bulgaria including a discussion of the demographic profile of the incoming asylum seekers and the curve of the country's recognition rates. *Part two* provides an overview of the institutional and policy regime in the asylum field in Bulgaria paying attention to the provision of reception and integration services, including the provision of information and orientation trainings to members of both study groups (asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection). *Part three* discusses the addressed and unaddressed information and training needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

MAIN FINDINGS

I. SCOPE AND TRENDS IN REFUGEE AND MIGRATION INFLOWS (2014 – 2016)

Regular migration of third country nationals

Between 2014 and 2016, the number of TCN in Bulgaria increased with nearly 45 percentage points, from 40,614 to 58,807 people (Table 1). Still, they form less than 1 % (0.82 %) of the country population. Women TCN represent a higher share of the overall female population than men TCN of the overall male population (0.84 % compared to 0.81 %); however, the male TCN population marks faster growth than the TCN female population (52, compared to 39 percentage points). For this reason, the share of women among TCN slightly dropped from 54.49 % to 52.29 %.

In this two-year period, the proportions of TCN coming from different countries of origin, dramatically changed. In 2014, the biggest TCN population originated from Russia (15, 321 people), followed by Turkey (7229), Ukraine (3582) and Syria (2027). Fifth in number were the stateless people (1669) who in Bulgaria have predominantly Palestinian background. Between 2014 and 2016, the numbers of TCN from all these nationalities increased, but with different scales that rearranged their ranking. The number of Russian citizens increased with 28 percentage points, to 19, 653 persons, forming again the biggest national group among TCN. The numbers of Turkish and Ukrainian citizens increased with

similar scales, with 25 pp (to 9074 people) and 21 pp (to 4339 people) respectively. Simultaneously, the number of Syrian citizens raised with 443 percentage points, or approximately four times and a half. As a result, currently they represent the second biggest TCN population in Bulgaria with 11, 008 people as of January 1, 2016.

The general profile of TCN remains almost unchanged in this three-year period. The share of children slightly increased from 11.11 % to 11.93 % of the TCN population. The share of women among TCN adults fluctuates about 53 %; and the share of girls among TCN children also slightly increased, from 46.30 % to 46.81 %. The gender distributions among different nationalities, however, vary substantially. Although their shares decreased with about 3.5 percentage points each between 2014 and 2016, Russian and Ukrainian women constitute the predominant part of their nationalities in Bulgaria, with 70.85 % and 76.01 %, respectively. The groups of Syrian and Turkish TCN represent the opposite example. Although increasing in the observed period (with 5.24 % and 5.67% respectively), the shares of women from these groups is far from the ratio in their home countries⁴: 37.21 % for the Syrian women and 29.23 % for the Turkish women, as of January 1, 2016.

Asylum related migration

The number of asylum applications in Bulgaria sharply increased between 2014 and 2015. According to annual rounded data of Eurostat, as well as according to the exact data provided by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), about 11, 000 applications were received, compared to over 20, 000 in 2015 (Tables 4a and 4b). The figures for 2016 show a slight decrease, but still the scales of the asylum-seeking in the country were the same: almost 19, 500 applications. The shares of female applications remain low during the period: 23.12 % in 2014, 20.88 % in 2015 and 22.48 % in 2016. However, the shares of statuses granted to women are significantly higher, and also they substantially increased between 2014 and 2016. While in 2014, 37.85% of Geneva Convention (refugee) statuses and 35.96 % of Subsidiary statuses (humanitarian protection as per Bulgarian Law on Asylum and Refugees) have been granted to women, in 2016, these shares were 50.79 % and 45.66 % respectively. Simultaneously, the shares of the rejections given to women are lower than the shares of female applications, and hence, the gender was a factor for the final decisions. The share of Rejections given to women also increased slightly: from 17.60 % in 2014 to 20.55 % in 2015 and 18.13 % in 2016.

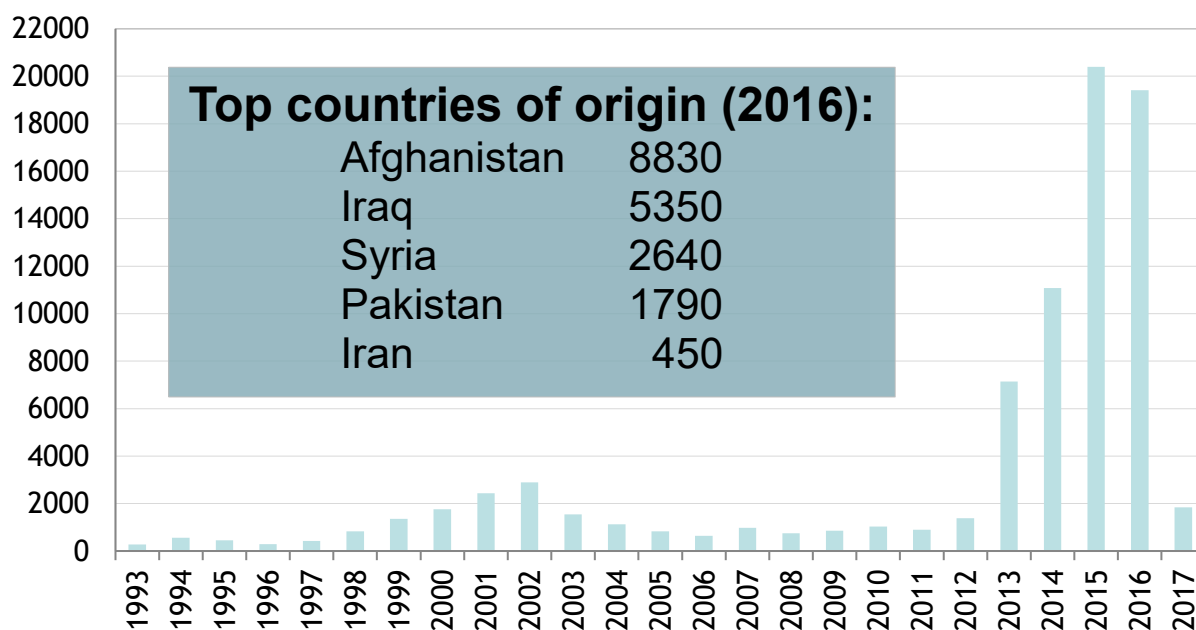
Generally, the positive decisions given to female applicants represent shares substantially bigger than the shares of positive decisions given to male applicants. However, the shares of positive decisions given both to male and female applicants dropped dramatically between 2014 and 2016: from 59.90 % to 7.61 % for the male applicants and from 86.25 % to 22.73 % for the female applicants. Simultaneously, the share of the rejections from all decisions increased three times in the three-year period, both for male and female applicants (from 5.63 % to 15.53 % and from 2.90 % to 10.88 % respectively); but as a whole, this increase could not explain the scale with which the positive decisions dropped. The main reason is the reciprocal increase of the shares of terminated procedures (from 34.48 % to 76.85 % for male and from 10.85 % to 66.39 % for female applicants). These are the cases of people who applied for protection, but actually are not willing to receive it in Bulgaria. While their applications are seen, they leave the reception centres and try to cross illegally the Bulgarian border,

⁴ 1.01 male(s)/female (2016 est.) for the both countries, according The World Factbook (website of the Central Intelligence Agency of USA), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook> - last seen in June 5, 2017

on their way to Western European countries, among which Germany is the most desired destination. Also, while in 2014, the share of terminated procedures of male applicants was nearly thrice bigger than the respective share of female applicants, in 2016 the difference between these two shares is about ten percentage points.

Similarly to the TCN population, the top 5 nationalities of the asylum seekers also underwent significant changes between 2014 and 2016. In 2014, the biggest number of asylum seekers came from Syria (6245 people), followed by Afghani people (2965). The number of Iraqi citizens was almost five times smaller – 610 people. Merely 185 people came from Pakistan and 120 – from Iran. In 2016, the number of the Afghani asylum seekers raised almost three times to 8830, while the number of Syrians dropped with a similar scale to 2640 people. The Iraqi-national asylum seekers raised about nine times to 5350 people, rating them second in terms of number. The increase in the number of Pakistani asylum seekers was of the similar scale: to 1790 people. The asylum seekers coming from Iran also increased significantly (to 450 people).

Figure 1 Number of applications for international protection in Bulgaria



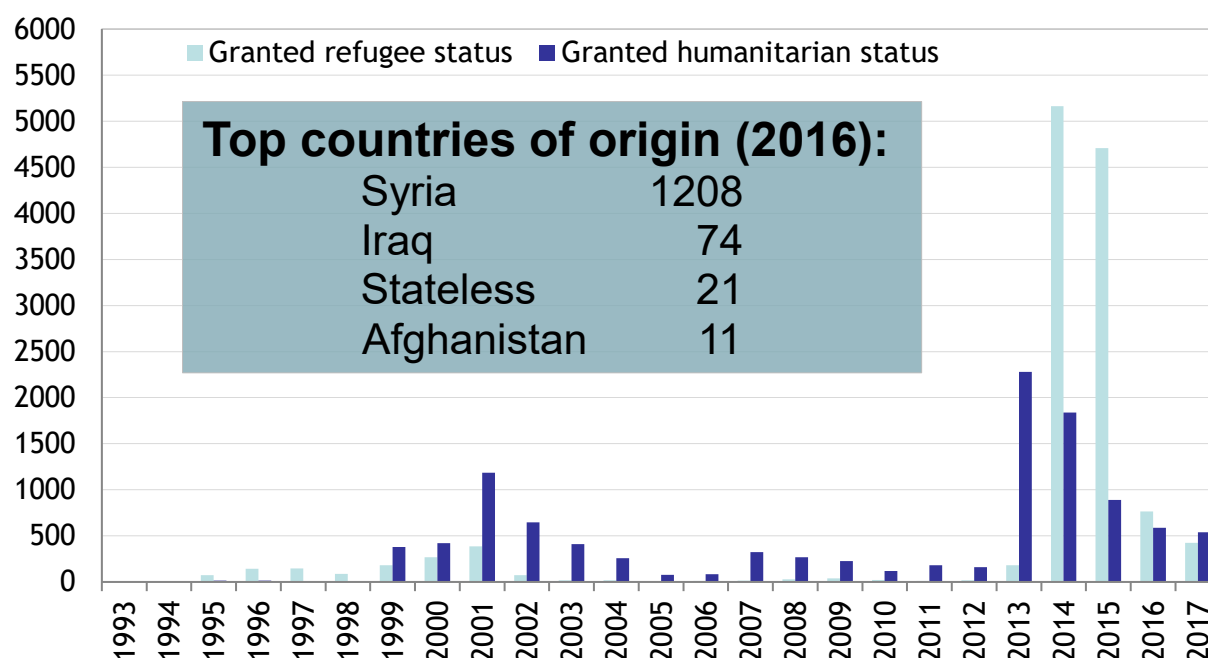
The gender profile of the asylum seekers in Bulgaria differs significantly from those of TCN as a whole. The share of women varies about 17-19 % and remains stable between 2014 and 2016. The lowest is the share of the Pakistani women: it varies between 0 and 3 per cent in the observed period. The share of women among Afghani asylum-seekers is also very low, but it slightly increased to 8.66 % in 2016. Relatively higher are the shares of women among Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers and they increased gradually between 2014 and 2016, to 40.37 % and 47.16 % respectively.

Another difference between the asylum-seekers and the TCN population in Bulgaria is the share of children. Children represent approximately three times bigger share among the asylum-seekers, than among TCN, and this share reached 33.86 % in 2016. Also, the share of girls among children-asylum

seekers is higher than those of women among adult-asylum seekers, although it dropped from 31.74 % in 2014 to 28.29 % in 2016.

The profile of BIP, in its turn, also differs from those of the asylum seekers. The share of women among adult BIP increased substantially from 32.81 % in 2014, to 48.78 % in 2016. The share of girls among children BIP was significantly higher in 2014 than those of women among adults: 44.96 %, but in 2016, it reached the same level: 48.22 %. The general share of children among all BIP is also a bit higher than among the asylum-seekers: 37.43 % in 2014 and 39.45 % in 2016. These comparisons indirectly evidence that the applications of women and families have been more successful in general than those of single males. Also, despite of the dramatic changes in the top 5 nationalities of the asylum seekers, the Syrian citizens remain the predominant nationality among the BIP: 91.51 % in 2014, 95.09 % in 2015 and 89.42 % in 2016.

Figure 2 Numbers of granted refugee and humanitarian statuses in Bulgaria



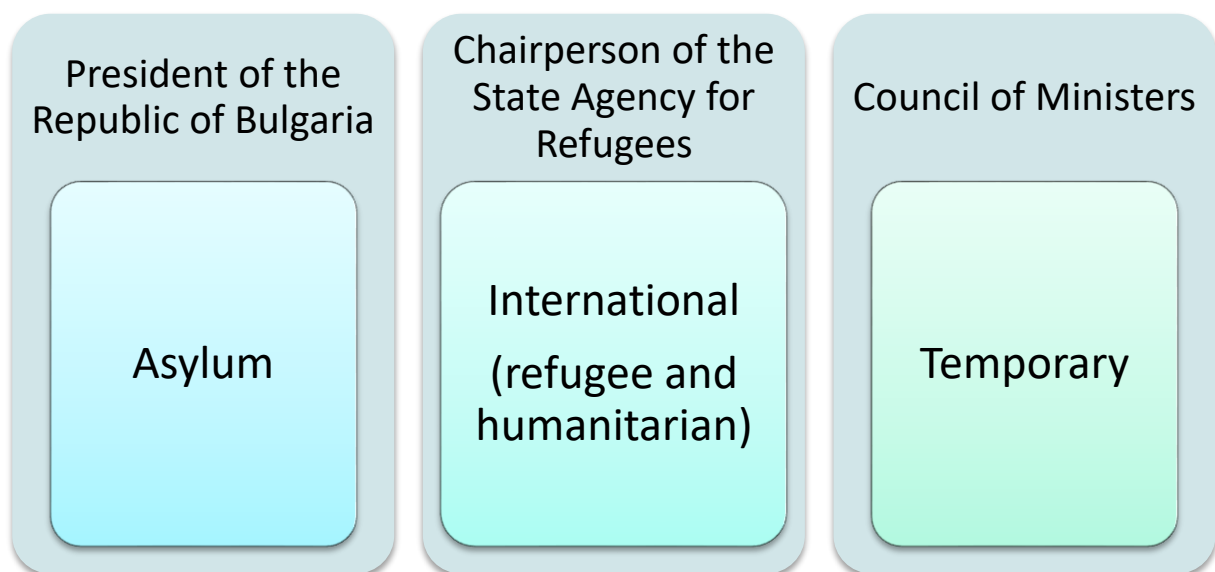
The groups of the asylum seekers and the BIP diverge also by their educational levels. Among the asylum seekers, the people with primary or without educational level attained represent the majority: 51.29 % of men and 54.48 % of women in 2016; and those with lower or upper secondary education were 43.56 % of men and 36.77 % of women. Moreover, the average educational level of the asylum seekers in Bulgaria decreased in the three-year period: in 2014, the majorities both of the male and female asylum seekers were with lower-secondary or upper-secondary education (52.15 % and 49.06 % respectively). Among the group of BIP, the ratio is the opposite: predominate people with lower-secondary or upper-secondary education (50.32 % of men and 49.01 % of women in 2016). Those with primary or without educational level attained represent substantially lower shares than among the asylum seekers: 34.33 % of men and 39.74 % of women. The average educational level of BIP also decreased between 2014 and 2015, similarly to those of the asylum seekers, and the shares of people with lower- or upper- secondary education, on the one hand, almost leveled with those of people with

primary or without education, on the other. Between 2015 and 2016, however, the average educational level of BIP almost reached back the values of 2014; while the average educational level of asylum seekers slightly improved in comparison with the previous year but generally stayed substantially lower in comparison with 2014. Regarding the people with higher education, their shares are comparatively low to the background of the Bulgarian society. In 2014, the differences between the two groups were insignificant: 6.05 % of men-asylum seekers and 6.87 % of men-BIP had completed higher education, and 5.30 % women- asylum seekers and 4.91 % of women- BIP, respectively. In the observed three year-period, the differences between the two groups and the two genders deepened. It was most substantial in regards to men BIP: the share of those among them with higher education raised to 11.51 %, compared to the decrease of 2.27 percentage points (to 3.78 %) of the share of men-asylum seekers with higher educational level attained. The differences between the women with higher education in the two groups are smaller but of the same nature: while the share of women-asylum seekers with higher education slightly decreased between 2014 and 2016, with 0.32 percentage points, the respective share of women-BIP raised with 2.05 percentage points.

II. NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

Following the increased inflow of refugees since 2013, the asylum reception and integration systems in Bulgaria are undergoing an expansion and reform. While the reception system has been developing at quicker pace, the integration system remains at a rather generic state especially with regard to BIPs. Serious expert attention and political will are needed so as to transform the asylum integration system into well running institutional mechanism for the provision of integration support to asylum seekers and BIPs.

Figure 3 Types of protection and granting bodies in Bulgaria



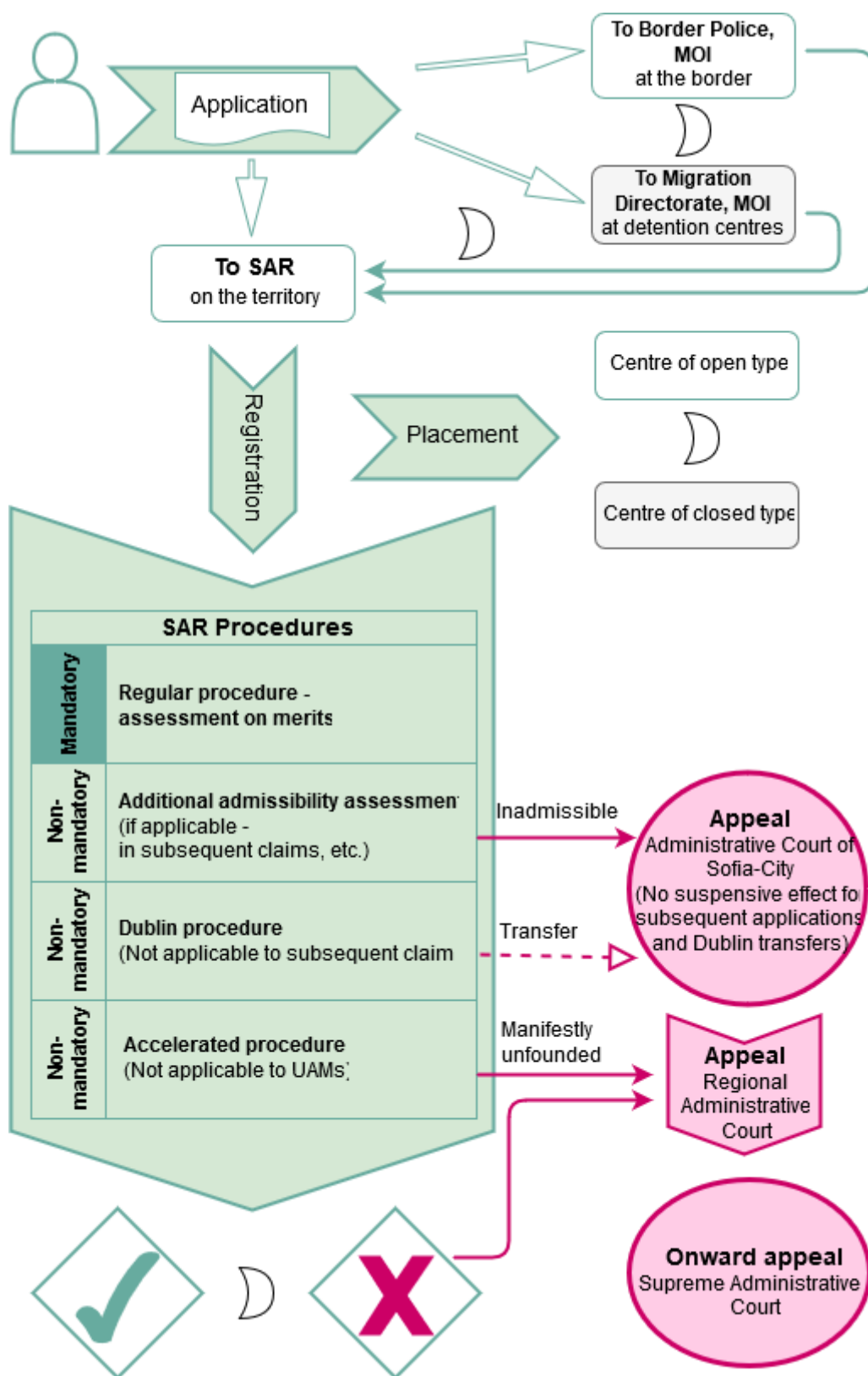
According to the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR) Bulgaria grants three types of protection: 1) international protection, granted by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) with two statuses (refugee status and humanitarian status (identical to subsidiary protection)); 2) temporary protection, granted by the Council of Ministers in cases of mass inflow of foreigners running from their country of origin as of armed conflict, war, etc. (LAR, Art. 1a (2) (3)); 3) asylum, granted by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria (LAR, Art. 2). The prevailing form of protection granting in Bulgaria is the international protection given by SAR in accordance with the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the attendant Protocol from 1967. Between 1993 and May 2017 a total of 23 68 persons were granted international protection, of them 12 780 persons refugee status and 10 905 humanitarian protection.⁵ Persons with refugee status have the same rights and obligations as Bulgarian citizens, excluding the rights to vote in national and local elections and referendums and be member of political party and to hold occupations requiring Bulgarian citizenship (LAR, Art. 32(1)). Persons with humanitarian status have the same rights and obligations as foreigners with permanent residence (LAR, Art. 32 (2)). Respectively they have access as Bulgarian citizens to the labor market and employment services, the educational and health system as well as to social assistance with the exception of child care benefits.

In Bulgaria the submission of asylum application may be done before the specialized asylum administrative authority – the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), or before any other government institution. Asylum can be claimed at border before Border Police staff, or while in detention before the staff of the Migration Directorate of Mol. Both the Border Police and the Migration Directorate are obliged to refer the application to SAR. When the asylum application is made before authority different from SAR, the status determination procedure can start only after the person is transferred to any of the SAR reception premises for registration to lodge the claim in person (LAR, Art. 61, 2).⁶

⁵ Official data provided by the State Agency for Refugees at the Council of Ministers, available at: <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=8>, accessed on: 22 May 2017.

⁶ Savova, I. Country Report: Bulgaria. 2016 Update. AIDA Asylum Information Database, p. 19.

Figure 4 International protection application procedures



II.1. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION MECHANISMS IN BULGARIA

The institutional framework in the sphere of asylum in Bulgaria encompasses governmental, international and non-governmental institutions. The framework at the reception phase involves the **State Agency for Refugees (SAR)** as the institution with prime responsibility of managing the reception of asylum seekers in Bulgaria charged with registering, processing and determining decisions on asylum claims, managing and operating the country's reception and registration centers (RRCs) for asylum seekers, including the provision of social and adaptation services within the framework of the RRCs. The **Ministry of the Interior** through its **Border Police** and **Migration Directorate** are concerned with asylum migration in what might be termed a pre-reception phase. According to the Bulgarian Penal Code, Art. 279 (1) the irregular entry into Bulgarian territory is a criminal act and any foreigner without legal travel documents, apprehended at border or within the territory of the country is subject to detention until the person expresses desire to file an asylum claim. Respectively such foreigners are accommodated at Border Police's detention facilities or in the detention centers of the Migration Directorate until they submit an asylum claim. Additional to the state institutions a number of NGOs provide various social services within the framework of SAR's RRCs. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BNC) together with UNHCR conducts monitoring of borders (the access to territory and protection) based on official Cooperation Agreement with Mol. In addition, UNHCR conducts monitoring of living conditions in SAR's RRCs as well as in Mol detention centers for third country nationals. BHC and Foundation Voice in Bulgaria – FAR provide legal consultations to asylum seekers. NGOs such as the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC), the Association of Refugee Women (ARW), Caritas and CVS Bulgaria provide various social support activities to asylum seekers and BIPs.

The framework at the integration phase is presently in the making. The National Council on Migration and Integration (NCMI) was established by Council of Ministers ordinance N 21/ 05.02.2015 as the collective consultative body formulating and coordinating the implementation of state policies in the sphere of migration and integration of asylum seekers and BIPs. In terms of integration NCMI has not yet dealt with issues of integration apart from those relating to Bulgaria's engagements with respect to the EU solidarity mechanism for refugee relocation and resettlement.⁷

Until 2013 the main body concerned with the integration of BIPs was SAR. However, since 2014 SAR is no longer directly responsible for the direct provision of integration services to BIPs and a transition of responsibility to the network of 265 Bulgarian Municipalities is under way.⁸ While it is expected that Municipalities will start playing key role in facilitation of the integration of BIPs, integration is also to be provided through state institutions responsible for respective sectoral policies – Ministry of Education and Science – education; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Agency for Social Assistance and the Employment Agency – social support and employment respectively.

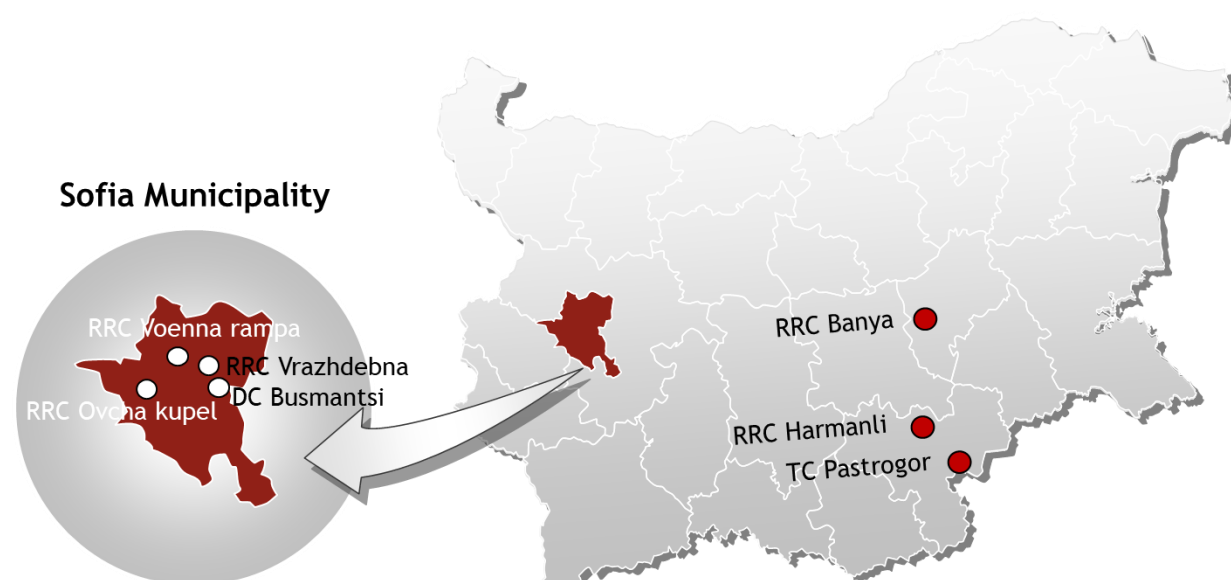
⁷ By February 2017 Bulgaria has accepted a total of 29 persons relocated from Greece, EC Factsheet – Relocation and Resettlement - State of Play, 8 February 2017.

⁸ Постановление № 144, 19.07.2017 г. за приемане на Наредба за условията и реда за сключване, изпълнение и прекратяване на споразумение за интеграция на чужденци с предоставено убежище или международна закрила.

The reception phase

The main responsibilities of SAR include the registering and the processing of applications of international protection, deciding on asylum applications and granting or rejecting either of the two types of international protection (refugee status and humanitarian status). The registration and reception centers for asylum seekers (RRC) operated by SAR are a total of six. Three RRC are located in the capital of Sofia and two in the countryside (the village of Banya and the town of Harmanli); and one transition center (TC) is located in the village of Pastrogor. All these are open type facilities, while the TC in Pastrogor is presently being transformed from an open to a closed type center. Following a decision of the Council of Ministers, from September 2016 SAR was given the authority to establish closed regime spaces at its territorial divisions.⁹ Following this decision an additional SAR managed facility of closed type, with the capacity of up to 60 places, was designated within the Busmantci detention center which is run by the Bulgarian Mol. The facility in question is under the management of the RRC division in Vrazhdebna and receives subsistence and social support of type identical to that provided in the open type RRCs.

Figure 5 Reception, transit and detention centres operated by SAR



As of April 2017 the accommodation capacity in Bulgaria's RRCs is 5 190 places with 52% being occupied (2 705 accommodated persons).¹⁰ In 2016 a total of 17 197 persons were accommodated in the reception and registration centers of SAR, of them a total of 15 142 persons left the centers within

⁹ Държавен вестник, бр. 70, 9.09.2016 г. Публикувано Постановление на МС № 230 от 2.09.2016 г. за изменение и допълнение на Устройствения правилник на ДАБ при МС, приет с Постановление № 59 на МС от 2008 г.

¹⁰ МВР, Месечна информация относно миграционната обстановка в Република България към месец март 2017 г. [Monthly information regarding the migration situation in the Republic of Bulgaria at the month of March 2017], available at: http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/3BFDD98B-84B0-4906-96BD-52697D8CDB44/0/Mesechna_spravka_dekemvri_2015.pdf, visited on: 22 June 2017 г.

the same year on their own accord, of them 626 were beneficiaries of international protection.¹¹ Alternative accommodation outside the RRCs is allowed by the law but is not subsidised by the state.

Assistance for asylum seekers while in reception phase

According to the Law (LAR, Art. 29, 1, 2, 3) asylum seekers are entitled to the following rights during all types of asylum procedures: shelter and food; social assistance under the same conditions as Bulgarian citizens; access to medical and psychological assistance (LAR, Art. 29, (1) 3 – 6). In addition, they have access to the labour market in case the procedure is not completed three months after the registration of the asylum claim (LAR, Art. 29 (3)). Within the framework of SAR's RRCs asylum seekers are provided with accommodation, food, social assistance, health care and psychological assistance. Alternative accommodation outside the RRCs is allowed by the law but is not subsidised by the state. Basic medical care in the RRCs is provided through their own medical staff or by referral to emergency care units in local hospitals.

Under the framework of SAR's Directorate "Social Activity and Adaptation" programs for social adaptation and cultural orientation for asylum seekers are being implemented together with activities for social, health and psychological assistance, provision of Bulgarian language courses and referral of asylum seeking children to the public school system. However, from February 2015 SAR terminated the provision of monthly social allowance (to the amount of BGN 65) to asylum seekers accommodated in reception centers.¹² While support such as social and medical assistance and referral of children to public schools is being implemented by SAR staff, all other orientation and integration activities such as the provision of language classes (Bulgarian, English or German), cultural orientation and mediation, psychological assistance and recreational activities are being provided by various NGOs on a more or less ad hoc basis (as they are project dependent).

The main NGOs providing services to asylum seekers at the reception phase include the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC), the Association of Refugee Women (ARW), Caritas and CVS Bulgaria.

The assistance services provided within SAR's RRCs in 2015 include: Bulgarian language courses and various integration activities (sport, child care activities, ect.) provided by NGOs such as "Arabis", CVS Bulgaria, Caritas Sofia, the "Right to Choice" Association and FICE Bulgaria.¹³ The services provided within the SAR's RRC in 2016 and 2017 include 1) social assistance for initial adaptation and integration of asylum seekers provided by permanent social workers of SAR and social workers of the Bulgarian Red Cross placed in all RRCs; 2) social mediation to facilitate social assistance and help asylum seekers and BIPs in visiting institutions and hospitals, job search, search of housing, school registration of children (provided by ARW, BRC, and occasionally Caritas); 3) occupational activities for children provided by Caritas, BRC, CVS Bulgaria and for adults provided by CVS Bulgaria; 4) language classes in

¹¹ MBP, Месечна информация относно миграционната обстановка в Република България към месец декември 2016 г. [Monthly information regarding the migration situation in the Republic of Bulgaria at the month of December 2016], available at: http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/3BFDD98B-84B0-4906-96BD-52697D8CDB44/0/Mesechna_spravka_dekemvri_2015.pdf, visited on: 22 June 2016.

¹² Order N03-310 of 31 March 2015 of the Chairperson of the State Agency for Refugees (enforced retroactively as of 1 February 2015) – cited in: Savova, I. (Oct. 2015) Country Report: Bulgaria, Aida Asylum Information Database, p. 13.

¹³ Отчет за стратегическите цели на Държавната агенция за бежанците при Министерски съвет за 2015 г. [Report on the Strategic Goals of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers for 2015], София, available at: <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=8>, last visited on: 24 March 2015.

Bulgarian and English provided by Caritas, BRC and CVS Bulgaria. The number of those who would like to attend Bulgarian language classes however, is much bigger than the available places.¹⁴ It has to be stressed that the provided language courses are informal and not certified under a program approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.¹⁵ The language provision in English by CVS Bulgaria is provided based on a mentorship program in cooperation with the English-American school with professional teachers providing advice and mentorship to volunteers on class organization and training techniques; Since January 2017 Caritas Sofia started providing monthly vouchers to the price of 30 BGN (15 EUR) to each person accommodated in SAR's RRC thus compensating for the lack of any financial assistance in cash to asylum seekers on the part of the state.

In the absence of state run integration program for BIPs, since April 2016 UNHCR introduced a pilot integration program for 40 BIPs which is run by BRC and involves the provision a package of basic services.¹⁶

The integration phase (support to beneficiaries of international protection)

In terms of integration support, the Bulgarian Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that BIPs can be given financial support for housing for up to 6 months after status determination; can take part in programs and projects including integration measures (LAR, Art. 35 (3), (5). According to art. 37 of the same Law Municipalities where BIPs register have to make possible the implementation of their rights. In addition, the Law stipulates that BIPs integration should be supported through integration agreements (LAR, Art. 37a).

The integration components of the asylum system in Bulgaria are presently undergoing a reform with shift of responsibilities from SAR to local Municipalities. Between 2005 and 2013 the Bulgarian state was providing integration to BIP (up to 100 persons annually) through the tri-annual National Program for Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria (NPIRRB). The program was run by SAR and involved the provision of a package of integration measures such as social assistance, health insurance, Bulgarian language training, financial support for housing, social orientation and cultural adaptation and vocational training.¹⁷ Presently SAR through its "Social Activity and Adaptation" Directorate has the authority to assist state and local institutions in the process of adaptation of beneficiaries of international protection but the Agency is no longer directly responsible for the direct provision of integration to this target group as was very much the case until 2013. SAR is providing help to some beneficiaries of international protection as long as they stay in the Agency's RRCs. As of severe lack of housing assistance measures in 2016, SAR accepted a provision to allow BIP to stay in its RRCs up to 6 months after the granting of status. In addition, as of mid-August 2015 SAR started short-term accommodation of newly recognized refugees and humanitarian status holders, the support lasting in

¹⁴ ВКБООН (2017) Проучване на нуждите на търсещите и получили международна закрила лица по възраст, пол и принадлежност към социална група за 2016 г., с. 13.

¹⁵ UNHCR (2014), *Bulgaria as a Country of Asylum: UNHCR Observations on the Current Situation of Asylum in Bulgaria*, p.12, available at: www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/pdf/where-we-work/bulgaria/bulgaria-as-a-country-of-asylum.html.

¹⁶ ВКБООН (2017) Проучване на нуждите на търсещите и получили международна закрила лица по възраст, пол и принадлежност към социална група за 2016 г., с. 11.

¹⁷ Национална програма за интеграция на бежанците в РБ (2011 – 2013); Monitoring Reports Z. Vankova

an average up to 3 months with other incumbent expenses such as rent deposits, clothing, mattresses and bed linen, kitchenware and utilities (heating, electricity, water) not being covered.¹⁸

With the promulgation of the *National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015-2020) (NSMAI)*¹⁹ the integration of BIPs was rendered for the first time to the Municipalities (“mechanisms should be established for responsibility sharing within the network of Bulgarian Municipalities”).²⁰ As per Council of Ministers Ordinance²¹ the conditions and regulations were set for the conclusion and implementation of integration agreements between BIPs and local Municipalities. The Ordinance is the regulation that effectively renders the responsibility for provision of integration provision to the Bulgarian municipal administrations based on the development of individual integration plans and the conclusion of integration agreements between the Municipality and the beneficiary. The participation of Municipalities in the integration of BIPs is set on a voluntary principle and between August 2016, when the first Ordinance was issued and July 2017, when the project for the second Ordinance was announced, none of the 265 Municipalities in the country expressed willingness to take BIPs on their territory and engage with the provision of concrete integration measures.²² There is a plethora of reasons for this failure and they involve: the lack of financial back up for this new institutional set up²³; no methodological guidance for the development of individual integration plans; no foreseen trainings of municipality administrations which are stark inexperienced in dealing with refugees; overall hostile climate towards asylum seekers and refugees in the whole of the country and attitude of resistance to accepting people from this group.

All service providing and monitoring NGOs and IOs in the country term the situation since 2014 “zero integration” referring to the effective absence of targeted integration measures for BIPs on the part of the state. This reality effectively contributes to the diversion of both asylum seekers and BIPs from Bulgaria as potential final destination. Between 2014 and 2016 the shares of terminated procedures among all decisions taken on applications for international protection increased from 34.48 % to 76.85 % for male and from 10.85 % to 66.39 % for female applicants. These are the cases of people who applied for protection, but actually are not willing to receive it in Bulgaria. While their asylum procedure is still ongoing, they leave the reception centres and try to cross illegally the Bulgarian border, on their way to Western European countries, among which Germany is the most desired destination.

¹⁸ Savova, I. (Oct. 2015) Country Report: Bulgaria, Aida Asylum Information Database, p. 13.

¹⁹ NSMAI was approved in 2015 by the National Council on Migration and Integration (NCMI) as the framework document setting country’s priorities and goals in migration management, including in the area of asylum and is grounded in the understanding that the migration phenomenon is a source of work force needed for the national economy but also a potential threat to the national security.

²⁰ Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), с. 47.

²¹ Постановление № 144, 19.07.2017 г. за приемане на Наредба за условията и реда за сключване, изпълнение и прекратяване на споразумение за интеграция на чужденци с предоставено убежище или международна закрила.

²² Приложение № 1 към чл. 16 на Проект за Наредба за условията и реда за сключване, изпълнение и прекратяване на споразумението за интеграция на чужденците с предоставено убежище или международна закрила, МС, 7.04.2017 г., available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=2635>

²³The Ministry of Finance failed to approve the distribution of EU funding through the National Association of Municipalities which in practice blocked the implementation of the Integration Ordinance.

In the absence of a working institutional mechanism and programs for the integration of BIPs between 2014 and present (June 2017) integration assistance is provided only for those BIPs who continue residing in the RRCs after the status decision. In such cases BIPs can benefit from the same assistance measures that NGOs are providing for asylum seekers, described in the previous section. In addition to that, some NGOs provide some social assistance services to BIPs out of the auspices of SAR RRCs. In particular, Caritas operates a refugee Integration Center St. Anna providing social consultations, psychological support, Bulgarian language classes for children and adults, art work for women – for BIPs living out of the RRCs as well as financial support for flat rent or temporary hostel accommodation. The Association of Refugee Women provides social mediation in visiting institutions and hospitals, job search, search of housing, school registration of children; campaigns for gathering of school textbooks and materials. The Bulgarian Red Cross operates one integration-information center where it implements a pilot integration program for 40 persons (30 adults and 10 children). The program includes the provision of Bulgarian language course – level A1 and A2 of 120 hours; individual Bulgarian language lessons for children; vocational training; summer school for children; translation and legalisation of documents; coverage of health insurance; translator present at the Center. The services described above encompass only a small share of potential beneficiaries. Being dependent on project funding those services remain inconsistent in terms of duration. Last but not least the services provided by the different NGOs are not part of a coherent program and need better coordination and synchronisation.

II.2. THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION AND INTEGRATION TRAININGS TO BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION (AND ASYLUM SEEKERS)

Information provision

According to LAR SAR has an obligation to provide information in a language comprehensible to the asylum seekers within 15 days from filing their application which has to include information on the terms and procedures and the rights and obligations of asylum seekers during procedures as well as on the organisations providing legal and social assistance (LAR 58 (8)). Generally, the SAR and the NGOs provide this information²⁴ both at the reception and at the integration phase. It is most commonly provided through brochures and leaflets translated into several languages spoken by the main nationalities of people seeking international protection in Bulgaria - Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Pashto, Kurdish, English and French. It is also provided orally by SAR social workers either individually or through group information sessions held at SAR's RRCs.²⁵ Information on asylum procedures and the rights attached to refugee and humanitarian status is available online at a dedicated website developed by UNHCR, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.²⁶ In addition, UNHCR Bulgaria has published a carnet containing five different brochures, one on citizenship, another one on social assistance, on employment, on health insurance and finally, on civil registration. In addition to that, sporadically

²⁴ ДАБ, Доклад за дейността на Държавната Агенция за Бежанците при Министерския съвет за 2016 г, р. 5-6. Asylum Information Database, *Country Report: Bulgaria*, 2016 update, ECRE, 2016, p. 40. Interviews with: Expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; Expert, CVS Bulgaria; Expert, BRC.

²⁵ Asylum Information Database, *Country Report: Bulgaria*, 2016 update, ECRE, 2016, p. 40.

²⁶ www.asylum.bg

information sessions for adults are being organized in the RRCs aiming to respond to individual information needs as much as possible.²⁷ One other channel of provision of information on the rights and obligations of asylum seekers in the course of status determination procedure is through the regularly conducted by UNHCR focus groups on the needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Usually after the focus groups UNHCR officers transform them into questions-and-answers sessions, providing relevant information.

Two problems have been identified with regard to the provision of this type of information. First, it is mostly provided in a written way while information provision through oral communication, by way of consultations and group sessions is proven to be more efficient.²⁸ Social workers in close contact with asylum seekers find the use of written material for information provision as too complex to be understood by the beneficiaries. Second, the practice is that information of this type is not provided within the 15 days period set by the Law.²⁹ Monitoring by NGOs shows that in 2016 oral guidance on determination procedure is not being provided by case workers in most of the cases. According to UNHCR Bulgaria information sessions for newcomers to the SAR RRCs were provided regularly in 2015 but in 2016 were retained in only on RRC – that of Vrazhdebna.

SAR provides information to newcomer asylum seekers about the Regulation and internal regime of the RRC where they are accommodated.

As for the BIPs, the Law stipulates that SAR has the obligation to inform BIPs about the rights and obligations they have respective to the status granted (refugee or humanitarian) in a language comprehensible for the person (LAR, Art. 31 (1)). According to UNHCR Bulgaria in 2016 there was lack of information for BIPs about their rights and obligations. In spite of the presence of NGOs such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Council of Refugee Women as well as volunteers, who provide such information, UNHCR identified that in many cases BIPs have no clarity as per the available assistance for access to education, the labor market, and the social assistance schemes. The insufficiency of information is deeper for BIPs who live outside the SAR reception centers and especially among those who live outside of Sofia. They tend to get information from the networks of co-nationals, friends and volunteers. In fact they often have to pay to access the necessary information.

Orientation provision

The only policy document referring to the need of providing orientation to BIPs is the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015 – 2020).³⁰ The Strategy foresees the provision of orientation courses for BIPs to acquaint them with the country's social and political system and its cultural traditions.

²⁷ Interviews with: Expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; Expert, CVS Bulgaria; Expert, BRC; Expert, UNHCR.

²⁸ Temple and Moran, *Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines*, Temple and Edwards, Chapter three "Limited exchanges: approaches to involving people who do not speak English in research and service development", The Policy Press University of Bristol, 2011, pp. 38-40.

²⁹ Asylum Information Database, *Country Report: Bulgaria*, 2016 update, ECRE, 2016, p. 51-51.

³⁰ Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), p. 31-32, available at: http://www.airm-bg.org/Nacionalna_strategiq_po_migraciqta.pdf

However, there is no standard orientation course or training developed and implemented in the country neither for asylum seekers nor for BIPs. Orientation is provided in the form of various cultural and orientation activities implemented under the auspices of SAR and in cooperation with various NGOs. Such activities are usually provided to both asylum seekers and BIPs. The type of measures provided since 2014 under the auspices of SAR include visits to museums, Sofia city tours and excursions in the country (Caritas, CVS Bulgaria).³¹ In addition, social and cultural orientation is provided to beneficiaries of international protection traditionally by the Refugee and Migration Service (RMS) of the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC). Such activities range from individual consultations to cultural activities for both children and adults. Annually BRC organizes 4 information sessions for asylum seekers and BIPs focusing on different topics. In addition, BRC plans to introduce 10 hours of social and cultural orientation in the framework of their pilot integration program. In 2016 Caritas organized cultural orientation sessions for the inmates of the closed RCC at Busmantsi. The sessions are conducted with groups and facilitator who provides information about the geography, history and traditions of Bulgaria. According to feedback from Caritas experts the orientation sessions have had high attendance and helped asylum seekers feel better oriented in the host society.³²

Training Provision

According to the Law BIPs (refugee and humanitarian status holders) have access to the standard vocational education and training for unemployed persons among the general population, provided in the network of the Employment Agency. True access to this type of training however is precluded as they are provided in the Bulgarian language without the possibilities for translation as well as due to the requirement to have at least elementary or secondary education certificates, which BIPs are usually lacking. In the absence of related diplomas BIPs can be issued only certificates for completed professional training but not for acquired professional qualification.³³

Since 2014 a targeted program for professional training and job placements was introduced for BIPs by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. The Program pursues two aims: to help integrate refugee and humanitarian status holders in the labour market and to build the capacity of regional and local administrations to work with refugees by offering subsidized job placements to Bulgarian citizens in the country's reception and transit centers. Since February 2014 the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) approves each year a year-long targeted training and employment program for BIPs who are registered with the Labor Bureaus of EA, and other beneficiaries of international protection who have "appropriate qualifications and professional experience". The program is to be implemented across the country and envisages: 1) Bulgarian language training: 180 classes for 200 persons; 2) courses for acquiring the first degree of professional qualification or qualification for components of the profession needed for specific jobs: 300 classes for 100 unemployed persons; 3) subsequent

³¹Vankova, Z. (2014), *Monitoring Report on the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2014*, Sofia, Bulgarian Council of Refugees and Migrants, p. 26, available at: http://multikulti.bg/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/monitoring_integration-refugees_2014-EN.pdf.

³² Interview with Expert, Caritas.

³³Vankova, Z. (2014), *Monitoring Report on the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2014*, Sofia, Bulgarian Council of Refugees and Migrants, p. 43, available at: http://multikulti.bg/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/monitoring_integration_refugees_2014_final1.pdf

subsidized employment for 200 persons over a period of up to 6 months, etc.³⁴ It has to be pointed however, that this program is not working in practice which is demonstrated in the fact that between February and September 2014 only 12 BIPs and 48 Bulgarian citizens started work along the subsidized employment scheme.³⁵ During the period 2015-2016 only two BIPs took part in the program.³⁶ In addition, only small number of BIPs keep registering as unemployed at EA Labor Bureaus (31 persons in 2010; 20 persons in 2011; 18 persons in 2012; 18 persons in 2013 and 20 persons in 2014). A detailed study needs to be conducted in order to establish the reasons for the non-use of this program on the part of BIPs.

Since 2014 NGOs do provide language training courses in Bulgarian, English and some times in German. The language training is provided at SAR's RRCs. The training is not provided by professional language teachers and is dependent on available project funding. The levels of instruction include A1 and A2 – upper language levels are not offered to neither asylum seekers nor BIPs. Even when provided the capacity of language training groups is limited and only a small share of those who live at RRCs can attend. In addition, there is a high dropout rate from the language courses due to various reasons such as low motivation to learn Bulgarian, need to work, leaving the country, or other.³⁷

III. THE TRAINING NEEDS OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

The key *information needs* as identified through interviews with experts and asylum seekers and BIPs concern the type of information and the means of information provision. The main types of information mentioned include the asylum procedure; the rights and obligations stemming from status, including the rights to travel within the EU³⁸; procedures for access to the health system, the labor market, social assistance, education and other standard services and programs provided by state institutions; type of services provision by NGOs³⁹; the type of educational and healthcare system in the country and the procedures for public school enrollment, registration at general medical practitioner and visits to medical specialists; available trainings, including both language and

³⁴Action Employment Plan, 2014, List of Programs and Projects Financed by the State Budget, p. 11. The program for employment and training of refugees was renewed till December 2016 by MLSP Order РД01-845 from 15.10.2015; and again till December 2017 by MLSP Order РД01-918 from 28.12.2016. According to the last Order the period of subsidized employment is increased from six to twelve months.

³⁵ Манчева, М, Славянка Иванова и Камелия Димитрова (2015) Оценка на интеграцията на уязвими групи мигранти в България. ЦИД – София, с. 77.

³⁶ Илиев, Стана (2017) Ангажираност на частния сектор в заетостта на получили международна закрила лица. ВКБООН – София, р. 20.

³⁷ Interview with Expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel.

³⁸ Interviews with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; family of asylum seekers at RRC Ovcha Kupel; asylum seeking mother and daughter at RRC Ovcha Kupel; asylum seeking woman at RRC Ovcha Kupel; asylum seeking single man at RRC Vrashdebna; asylum seeking man Yazid from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupel. The lack of information about the rights and obligations of different status holders is indicated in the UNHCR Report: Проучване на нуждите на търсещите и получили международна закрила лица по възраст, пол и принадлежност към социална група за 2016 г., с. 13. In spite that such information is offered by various NGOs – BRC, Association of Refugee Women, BHC as well as volunteers – refugee or humanitarian status holders often do not know much about their rights and obligations.

³⁹ Interview with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, UNHCR; single Yazid man from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupel.

vocational trainings as well as access to the labor market and employment orientation sessions⁴⁰; last but not least information on transportation information within the cities and the country.⁴¹ A recent study on the engagement of the private sector in the employment of BIPs points that they do not have access to the necessary information and translation services to help them register at the country's employment services.⁴² Stressed was also the need to provide information on the traditions and geography of Bulgaria as host country.⁴³

Rather important is the means of information provision which has to be provided in simple and practical way so as to be legible for asylum seekers and BIPs. All experts working directly with asylum seekers and BIPs stressed that the provision of information through written material and leaflets is usually hardly legible for the target groups as some of them have low educational level or are even illiterate. Therefore, there is an acute need to start providing information using visual materials, including films, interactive maps of services available across the city; online platform and social media providing systematic information about available services and attendant schedules; personal interactive communication through group sessions and group work, as well as through the social media and internet in general.⁴⁴ One recommendation involves the creation of web platform and social media communication tool providing systematic information to be combined with group sessions for training asylum seekers and refugees on how to use the tools and access information themselves.⁴⁵

The provision of comprehensive information of this type and by means understandable for the beneficiaries would improve the integration process by giving them the possibility of being more self-reliant in the host society.

The key *training needs* as identified through interviews with experts and asylum seekers and BIPs include: the provision of systematic and coherent Bulgarian language training program, including advanced classes beyond levels A1 and A2 to encompass all asylum seekers and all BIPs and specialized language training for children.⁴⁶ Provision of language training should be accompanied with strategies for day care for children to allow their mothers attend classes.⁴⁷ Training in other languages such as English and German for the purpose of meeting the needs of the people that do not intend to stay in Bulgaria⁴⁸; more systematic provision of vocational trainings adapted to the needs of the labor market

⁴⁰ Interviews with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, BRC; expert, Caritas; expert, UNHCR; expert, RRC Vrashdebna. Confirmed also in the UNHCR Report: Проучване на нуждите на търсещите и получили международна закрила лица по възраст, пол и принадлежност към социална група за 2016 г., с. 13.

⁴¹ Interview with single woman. Interview with family from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupel.

⁴² Илиев, Стана (2017) Ангажираност на частния сектор в заетостта на получили международна закрила лица. ВКБООН – София, р. 21.

⁴³ Interview with expert, CVS Bulgaria.

⁴⁴ Interviews with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, UNHCR; expert, RRC Vrashdebna.

⁴⁵ Interview with expert, BRC.

⁴⁶ Interviews with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna; expert, UNHCR; expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; asylum seeking mother and daughter at RRC Ovcha Kupel; single man – Yazid from Syria at RRC Vrashdebna.

⁴⁷ Interviews with: expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna; expert, UNHCR.

⁴⁸ Interviews with: expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, BRC.

to ease access to the Bulgarian labor market;⁴⁹ systematic provision of occupational and recreational trainings for children and women.⁵⁰

III.1. ADDRESSED TRAINING NEEDS

In fact many of the information topics pointed by experts and members of the target groups as needed are provided by different NGOs. However, such information is provided on an ad hoc basis depending on project funding, respectively there is no particular continuity in information provision. In addition, the information when provided does not necessarily reach all members of the target groups and even more importantly it is provided in a form that is often not understandable for the beneficiaries.

Similarly while language training in the Bulgarian language is provided it is not part of a systematic program certified by the Ministry of Education and Science but based on project funding and often inconsistent in terms of duration. Not least advanced language classes beyond levels A1 and A2 are missing.

III.2. UNADDRESSED TRAINING NEEDS

The provision of information to asylum seekers must be improved regarding application and procedure as well as regarding what happens if their asylum application is rejected.⁵¹ BIPs need to receive clear and legible information about access to the labor market and employment services, social assistance, health care system, education, the renting flats market, rights and possibilities to travel outside Bulgaria.⁵² For both asylum seekers and BIPs there is the need to increase the information on healthcare outside RRCs. This information should include also details related to the Bulgarian healthcare system as well as health insurance.⁵³ Last but not least both asylum seekers and BIPs will benefit from the provision of practical daily life information relating to the culture of daily life and social relationships in the host country, including on gender roles.⁵⁴ In addition, there is an acute need of orientation information regarding the services provided by different NGOs. Very often asylum seekers and BIPs remain confused on the role of the different NGOs and the services they provide.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Interviews with: expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, Caritas; Single man at RRC Vrashdebna; family from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupel.

⁵⁰ Interviews with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel.

⁵¹ Interview with expert, BRC. Indeed, people with rejected asylum applications remain confused and distressed as they often are not been provided with the necessary information.

⁵² Interviews with: expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, CVS Bulgaria; Single woman; Family at RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna.

⁵³ Interviews with: expert, RRC Vrashdebna; expert, BRC; expert, CVS Bulgaria; single man from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, UNHCR; Single woman.

⁵⁴ Interviews with: expert, Caritas; expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna; single man from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, UNHCR.

⁵⁵ Interviews with: Single woman from Syria; Family at RRC Ovcha Kupel; single man from Syria t RRC Ovcha Kupel; expert, UNHCR.

In this regard, a database comprising clear and correct information on all ongoing integration projects and the attendant services by NGOs will be very helpful to social workers who then would be in the position to provide it orally to beneficiaries from both target groups.⁵⁶ It has to be stressed that one of the reasons for the lack of clear cut information materials for the types of services provided by NGOs is the fact that the concrete services they provide differ from year to year as they are dependent on project funding. In the absence of a governmental program or scheme for integration facilitation to provide the framework and clear funding mechanisms the provision of services and the update information will remain unstable.

According to experts from both governmental institutions and NGOs information should be better provided to asylum seekers and BIPs in an interactive way. Due to low educational levels and illiteracy among members of the target groups the use of written materials and leaflets if not an effective means of communication. More relevant means of information and orientation provision should include oral communication in group or individual sessions and visual materials, including videos and films, or internet platforms or communication tools.⁵⁷ While the social workers in RRC Vrazhdebna have organised historical movies projections and dialogues on history as cultural orientation activities,⁵⁸ the use of interactive means of provision of information is still only sporadic.

The need of *cultural orientation* appears strong for both asylum seekers and BIPs. Better understanding of the Bulgarian society and its gender roles has the potential to ease the cultural transition process. Different approaches to gender roles in the Bulgarian society and the home countries of asylum seekers and BIPs has been identified as potential hindrance to more comprehensive integration of women.⁵⁹ For example, many of the woman seeking asylum have a difficulty in comprehending why they are offered vocational trainings. In addition, after attending such trainings it is quite rare that they enter the labor market. The majority of women of both groups tend to rely on their male relatives and exclude themselves from the public life of the host society.⁶⁰

Some specific problems relating to gender identified by UNHCR Bulgaria in 2016 that could to some extent be addressed by orientation sessions relate to the lack of understanding of the equal role of women in Bulgarian family and society (the practice of women actively engaging in the labor market and partaking equally in family's financial support); lack of professional experience in the countries of origin, which bears low motivation to find employment on the Bulgarian labor market; real and perceived hostility and negative attitudes in the host society, which pushes women to stay at home and limits their contacts with the host population; escalating conflicts in the family stemming from transformations in the behavior of some women (who started perceiving the role of women in their origin societies as submissive) and the unwillingness of some husbands to allow their wives to work.

⁵⁶ Interviews with: expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna.

⁵⁷ A good example is the UNHCR funded website that was launched in 2014, asylum.bg. However, the information on this website needs to be updated as it does not include the 2015 LAR amendments.

⁵⁸ Interview with expert, RRC Vrashdebna.

⁵⁹ Interviews with: expert, UNHCR; expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna.

⁶⁰ Interview with expert, BRC.

As it concerns the provision of language and vocational *trainings*, there is a need to guarantee the continuity of those trainings as well as to increase them in number. While presently language sessions are provided in Bulgarian, and in some instances in English and in German by NGOs, there is no consistent Bulgarian language program for asylum seekers and BIPs. Classes are provided often by volunteers who do not necessarily have pedagogical qualifications and levels A1 and A2 only. Both asylum seekers and BIPs should be provided with language trainings from beginning to advanced level in order to increase integration and give them the possibility to enter the labor market.⁶¹ Further, vocational trainings have to be increased in number diversified in terms of professional focus.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a need to put the provision of services at both the reception and the integration phase under a coherent framework and under the auspices of a coordinating body. While this is far more needed at the integration phase, service provision at the reception phase could be improved. At the reception phase SAR is naturally the institution responsible not only for the asylum procedure but also for the coordination of service provision to asylum seekers. Such coordination presently is not well implemented as most services are provided by NGOs in the framework of SAR's RRCs and on an ad hoc basis depending on project funding.

The absence of targeted program for facilitation of the integration of BIP, of respective coordinating body, funding and referral mechanisms and of methodological guidance for service provision at the level of Municipality presently hinders any process of integration and leaves BIPs more or less on their own.

In both phases (reception and integration) asylum seekers and BIPs will benefit from the design of a coherent information and orientation program with clear guidance for trainers, well defined communication means and training techniques as well as well delineated topics with consistently developed contents. What is also needed in this regard is the provision of standard training to respective social workers and trainers from GO and NGO sector who will be the ones providing respective information and orientation services.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARW	Association of Refugee Women
BIP	Beneficiary of international protection
BRC	Bulgarian Red Cross
LAR	Law on Asylum and Refugees

⁶¹ Interviews with: expert, CVS Bulgaria; expert, BRC; expert, RRC Vrashdebna; Single man from Syria at RRC Ovcha Kupe I.

MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
Moi	Ministry of Interior
NCMI	National Council on Migration and Integration
RRC	Registration and Reception Center
SAR	State Agency for Refugees

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ATTACHMENT – STATISTICAL TABLES

Table 1: Number of Third country nationals

Year	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	Share from the overall population	Number	Share from the overall male population	Number	Share from the overall female population
2014	40,614	0.56	18,484	0.52	22,130	0.59
2015	51,246	0.71	24,153	0.69	27,093	0.73
2016	58,807	0.82	28,056	0.81	30,751	0.84

Source: Eurostat - Population on 1 January by age group, sex and citizenship [migr_pop1ctz], Last update: 20-04-2017

Table 2: Profile TCN

Year	Adults - Number		Share of women from the overall TCN population	Children (0-17) - Number		Share of girls from the overall number of TCN children	Share of children from overall TCN population
	men	women		boys	girls		
2014	23,151	26,418	53.30	3327	2869	46.30	11.11
2015	26,954	30,271	52.90	4184	3642	46.54	12.03
2016	29,511	33,248	52.98	4523	3981	46.81	11.93

Source: National Statistical Institute, response to information request from April 26, 2017.

Table 3: Countries of TCN – top countries of origin – in numbers

Year	Russia		Syria		Turkey		Ukraine		Stateless	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
2014	3 944	11,377	1 379	648	5 526	1 703	736	2 846	909	760
2015	5 005	12,938	4 784	2 724	6 007	2 150	837	3 037	1043	832
2016	5 728	13,925	6 912	4 096	6 422	2 652	1 041	3 298	1049	854

Source: Eurostat - Population on 1 January by age group, sex and citizenship [migr_pop1ctz], Last update: 21-04-2017

Table 4a: Asylum related migration – in numbers (Eurostat data)

Sex	Asylum Applications		Geneva Convention status		Subsidiary protection status		Rejected asylum applications	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
Year								
2014	8 520	2 560	3 215	1 955	1 185	665	365	70
2015	16, 120	4 250	2 865	1 840	600	295	460	125
2016	15, 055	4 365	375	390	325	275	1 400	310

Source: Eurostat - Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded) [migr_asyappctza], Last update: 13-03-2017; First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex Annual aggregated data (rounded) [migr_asydcfsta], Last update: 26-04-2017; Final decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded) [migr_asydcfina], Last update: 26-04-2017

Table 4b: Asylum related migration – in numbers (national data)

Sex	Asylum Applications		Granted refugee status		Granted subsidiary protection		Terminated procedures		Rejected asylum applications		Stopped procedures	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	Male	female
Year												
2014	8 519	2 562	3 208	1954	1177	661	2 524	329	412	88	1 928	268
2015	16, 134	4 257	2 867	1 841	593	296	12, 597	1 970	495	128	2 140	331
2016	15, 053	4 365	376	388	319	268	7 016	1 916	1 418	314	6 463	1 804

Source: State Agency for Refugees, response to information request from April 28, 2017.

Table 5: Age profile of asylum seekers

Year	Adults - Numbers		Share of women from the overall number of adult asylum seekers	Children (0-17) - Numbers		Share of girls from the overall number of child asylum seekers	Share of children from the overall number of asylum seekers
	men	women		boys	girls		
2014	6 240	1 500	19.38	2 280	1 060	31.74	30.14
2015	12, 375	2 505	16.83	3 740	1 740	31.75	26.92
2016	10, 340	2 505	19.50	4 715	1 860	28.29	33.86

Source: Eurostat - Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded) [migr_asyappctza]. Last update: 13-03-2017

Table 6: Countries of origin asylum seekers – top countries of origin – in numbers

Sex Year	Afghanistan		Iraq		Pakistan		Syria		Iran	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
2014	2 775	190	490	120	180	5	4 230	2 015	100	20
2015	6 020	165	5 180	1 770	580	0	3 820	2 155	150	25
2016	8 065	765	3 190	2 160	1 775	15	1 395	1 245	360	90

Source: Eurostat - Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded) [migr_asyappctza]. Last update: 13-03-2017

Table 7: Age profile of beneficiaries of international protection (BIP) – in numbers

Year	Adults - Numbers		Share of women from the overall number of adult BIP	Children (0-17) - Numbers		Share of girls from the overall number of child BIP	Share of children from the overall number of BIP
	men	women		boys	girls		
2014	2 943	1 437	32.81	1 442	1 178	44.96	37.43
2015	2 253	1 252	35.72	1 207	885	42.30	37.38
2016	419	399	48.78	276	257	48.22	39.45

Source: State Agency for Refugees, response to information request from April 28, 2017.

Table 8: Countries of origin of beneficiaries of international protection – top countries of origin – in numbers

Year	Syria		Iraq		Stateless		Afghanistan	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
2014	4 020	2 386	55	37	272	155	12	12
2015	3 310	2 012	85	71	50	44	9	2
2016	617	591	42	32	12	9	8	3

Sources: State Agency for Refugees, response to information request from April 28, 2017.

Table 9: Educational profile of asylum seekers

Level Sex Year	No formal education		Primary		Lower-secondary		Upper-secondary (incl. vocational)		Semi-higher (college)		Higher	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
2014	725	326	1 711	490	1 931	557	1 360	405	202	79	382	104
2015	3 564	740	4 619	849	3 742	610	2 269	467	276	129	453	115
2016	2 014	579	2 113	504	2 139	430	1 366	301	111	75	304	99

Sources: State Agency for Refugees, response to information request from April 28, 2017.

Table 10: Educational profile of BIP

Level	No formal education		Primary		Lower-secondary		Upper-secondary (incl. vocational)		Semi-higher (college)		Higher	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
Year												
2014	168	235	971	415	1 008	493	752	335	151	70	225	80
2015	155	222	990	435	720	352	517	267	82	74	134	65
2016	34	87	127	93	147	129	89	93	18	24	54	27

Sources: State Agency for Refugees, response to information request from April 28, 2017.