



Mapping of social orientation: the case of Bulgaria

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Content

Introduction.....	3
I. Legal and institutional framework	4
1. Legal framework of social orientation	4
2. Course/module providers and audience.....	5
II. Courses/modules' characteristics and content.....	8
III. Conclusions: unaddressed orientation needs of non-nationals.....	10
References	13

Introduction

The present report deals with the question of the provision of social orientation to different categories of non-nationals in Bulgaria. The report maps the legal and institutional framework for orientation provision, the availability of particular modules and how they are used to facilitate the adaptation and integration of non-nationals. The report also discusses the unaddressed social orientation needs of non-nationals in Bulgaria and also the strengths and weaknesses of information and orientation training provision.

The presented data was collected by way of desk research and short talks with relevant authorities and service providers. Exploratory conversations in person or by telephone were conducted with representatives of the State Agency of Refugees, UNHCR Bulgaria, CVS Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas Bulgaria as well as the Council of Refugee Women. In addition, the issue of social orientation was put under discussion at two meetings in December 2017 - January 2018 of the inter-institutional working group on integration presided by UNHCR Bulgaria and including representatives of all related state institutions and service providing NGOs.

The volume and profile of non-nationals residing in Bulgaria

Regular migration of third country nationals

Between 2014 and 2016, the number of TCN in Bulgaria increased with nearly 45 percentage points, from 40614 to 58807 people. Still, they form less than 1 % (0.82 %) of the country population. Women TCN represent a slightly 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 main countries of origin of TCN population residing in Bulgaria as of 2016 include Russia (19 653 persons), Turkey (9074 persons or 25 %) and Ukraine (4339 persons or 21 %). Due to asylum migration as of 1 January 2016 Syrian citizens represent the second biggest TCN population in Bulgaria (11 008 persons).

Asylum related migration

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 23 685 persons were granted international protection, of them 12 780 persons refugee status and 10 905 humanitarian protection.¹ The main countries of origin of asylum seekers are Afghanistan (8 830 persons), Iraq (5 350 persons), Syria (2 640 persons) and Pakistan (1790 people). 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.

¹ 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.

I. Legal and institutional framework

1. Legal framework of social orientation

The Bulgarian Law provides more clear provisions with regard to the provision of information and orientation of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection than of the general TCN population. According to the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR)² the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) has an obligation to provide information, in writing or, if need be, orally, 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 Art. 58(8)). A particular provision is made for the asylum seekers, placed in a centre of closed type, which should be informed of their rights and obligations in a comprehensible language (LAR, Art. 45d (1), item 5). As for the Beneficiaries of international protection (BIP), 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)).

The only policy document referring to the need of providing orientation to BIPs is the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015 – 2020). The Strategy foresees the provision of orientation courses for BIPs to acquaint them with the country's social and political system and its cultural traditions³ as well as the planning of measures for provision of legal consultations as an instrument to prevent discrimination and xenophobia.⁴

Finally, the Law on Encouraging Employment⁵ provides that BIPs (refugee and humanitarian status holders) have access to the standard vocational education and training for unemployed persons, provided by the Employment Agency. Actual access to this type of training however is precluded as it is provided in the Bulgarian language without the possibilities for translation, with the requirement to have at least elementary or secondary education certificates, which BIPs are usually lacking. In the absence of relevant diplomas BIPs can be issued only certificates for completed professional training but not for acquired professional qualification.⁶ In any case there are hardly any examples of beneficiaries of international protection who have enrolled at and attended professional courses in the framework of Bulgaria's Employment Agency programs even in the context of the training programme specially designed for members of this group.⁷

It has to be stressed that apart from these legal provisions the asylum seekers or BIPs are not obliged by any legal or policy regulation to attend social orientation courses. Partially this could be explained with the fact that since 2014 there is no state run integration programme for BIPs as was the case between 2005 and 2013.

² Bulgaria, Law on Asylum and Refugees, 31 May 2002, <https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2135453184>, accessed on 18 January 2018

³ Bulgaria, Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), p. 31-32, available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>, accessed on 18 January 2018

⁴ Bulgaria, Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), p. 48, available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>, accessed on 18 January 2018

⁵ Bulgaria, Law on Encouraging Employment, 29 December 2001, <https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/-12262909>, accessed on 29 January 2018

⁶ Vankova, 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.

⁷ Action Employment Plan, 2014, List of Programmes and Projects Financed by the State Budget, p. 11. The programme for employment and training of refugees was renewed till December 2016 by MLSP Order ПД01-845 from 15 October 2015; and again till December 2017 by MLSP Order ПД01-918 from 28 December 2016. According to the last Order the period of subsidised employment is increased from six to twelve months.

The Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration stipulates that Bulgarian language training (600 school hours to reach level A2), including social orientation to acquaint BIPs with the country's social and political system and cultural traditions is to be part of Integration agreements to be concluded between BIPs and Municipalities.⁸ The respective Council of Ministers Regulation⁹ on Integration Agreements of Municipalities with beneficiaries of international protection provides for the rights and obligations of TCN from this group to be part of the integration agreement (Art. 4, par. 1, item 5) and for the provision of Bulgarian language training they should attend (Art. 17, item 4). It also provides that information and consultation should be provided with regard to access to the labour market, orientation at the housing market and GP registration (Art.7, par.1; Art. 9, par.1; Art. 14, par.10).

When it comes to other legally residing third country nationals there are no explicit provisions in national legislation for the provision of information or orientation courses to facilitate their adaptation in the host society. Respectively, third country nationals have no obligation to attend social orientation courses as part of integration facilitation process.

2. Course/module providers and audience

Orientation on asylum procedure rights and obligations and access to services

Information to asylum seekers is provided most systematically with regard to the asylum procedure and their respective rights and obligations.¹⁰ The main institutions providing this type of information involve SAR and NGOs such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Council of Refugee Women.¹¹ 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's social workers either individually or through group information sessions held at SAR's reception centres.¹²

Information relating to the social and health rights of asylum seekers and the access to respective services is provided by UNHCR Bulgaria through 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, sporadic information sessions for adults are being organized in the refugee reception centers (under the auspices of SAR) aiming to respond to individual information needs as much as possible.¹³ 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 focus groups on the needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection regularly conducted by UNHCR. Usually after the focus groups UNHCR officers transform them into questions-and-answers sessions, providing relevant information.

*According to UNHCR Bulgaria in 2016 there was **general 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.*

⁸ Bulgaria, Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), p. 31-32, available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>, accessed on 18 January 2018

⁹ Bulgaria, Наредба за условията и реда за сключване, изпълнение и прекратяване на споразумението за интеграция на чужденците с предоставено убежище или международна закрила, 25 July 2017, <https://www.lex.bg/en/laws/ldoc/2137169844>, accessed on 18 January 2018

¹⁰SAR provides information to newcomer asylum seekers about the Regulation and internal regime of the reception centres where they are accommodated.

¹¹ State Agency for Refugees, Доклад за дейността на Държавната Агенция за Бежанците при Министерския съвет за 2016 г., p. 5-6. Asylum Information Database, *Country Report: Bulgaria*, 2016 update, ECRE, 2016, p. 40. Interviews with representatives of reception centres and service providers.

¹² Asylum Information Database, *Country Report: Bulgaria*, 2016 update, ECRE, 2016, p. 40.

¹³ Interviews with representatives of reception centres and service providers.

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.¹⁴

According to experts from service providing institutions who are directly engaged in providing legal advice and consultations to refugees and migrants, when they need to contact officers in respective state institutions they do rely on informal networks of acquaintances from their own community (already speaking Bulgarian) or to Bulgarian acquaintances. Some NGOs such as the Council of Refugee Women and the Bulgarian Red Cross provide language mediation in such cases. These services however are not sustainable as they are dependent on project funding.

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 private parties (e.g. lawyers) for the access the necessary information.

Two **specific problems** have been identified with regard to the provision of this type of information. First, it is mostly provided in a written way although information provision through oral communication, by way of consultations and group sessions, is proven to be more efficient.¹⁵ Social workers in close contact with asylum seekers find the use of written material for information provision too complex to be understood by the beneficiaries especially as some of them have low educational level or are even illiterate. They stress that information should be provided in a simple and practical way so as to be legible for asylum seekers and BIPs. Therefore, there is an acute need to start providing information using visual materials, including films, interactive maps of services available across the city; online platform¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

Second, the practice is that information of this type is not provided within the 15 days period set by the Law.¹⁸ 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 reception centres were provided regularly in 2015 but in 2016 were retained in only one center – that of Vrazhdebna.

Language tuition

Since 2014 NGOs provide language training courses in Bulgarian, English and in some cases in German. The language training is provided at SAR's reception centres. 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 either asylum seekers or BIPs.¹⁹ Even when provided, the capacity of language training groups is limited and only a small share of those who live at the centres 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.²⁰

Social and cultural orientation

¹⁴ Iliev, St (2017) Ангажираност на частния сектор в заетостта на получили международна закрила лица. UNHCR – Sofia, p. 21.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ At the beginning of 2018 the Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants presented its portal <http://www.refugee-integration.bg/en/>.

¹⁷ Interviews with service providers and reception centre representatives

¹⁸ Asylum Information Database, *Country Report: Bulgaria*, 2016 update, ECRE, 2016, p. 51-51.

¹⁹ The BRC Info Centre starts a B1 course at the beginning of 2018.

²⁰ Interview with a reception centre representative.

There is no standard or regular course for third country nationals, asylum seekers or BIPs on social and cultural orientation (the traditions, geography, institutional and political system of Bulgaria as a host country).²¹ 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).²²

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 organises 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 programme covering 40 beneficiaries.

In 2016 Caritas organised cultural orientation sessions for the inmates of the migrant detention centre at Busmantsi. The sessions were conducted with groups and facilitator who provided information about the geography, history and traditions of Bulgaria. According to feedback from Caritas experts the orientation sessions have had high attendance and helped foreigners feel better oriented in the host society.²³

Vocational Training Provision

Since 2014 a targeted programme for professional training and job placements was introduced for BIPs by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Programme 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 subsidised job placements to Bulgarian citizens in the country's reception and transit centers. Since February 2014 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) approves each year a year-long targeted training and employment programme for BIPs who are registered with the Labour Bureaus of the Employment Agency, and other beneficiaries of international protection who have "appropriate qualifications and professional experience". The programme is to be implemented across the country and envisages: 1) Bulgarian language training: 180 class hours 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 class hours for 100 unemployed persons; 3) subsequent subsidised employment for 200 persons over a period of up to 6 months, etc.²⁴ It has to be pointed however, that this programme 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 subsidised employment scheme.²⁵ During the period 2015-2016 only two BIPs took part in the programme.²⁶ In addition, only small number of BIPs keep registering as unemployed at Labour 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.

In terms of **problems faced**, many of the information topics pointed by experts and members of the target groups as needed (such as cultural orientation on country's traditions, institutions, access to services, including the labour market,

²¹Interview with a service provider.

²²Vankova, 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.

²³ Interview with a service provider.

²⁴Action 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 ПД01-845 from 15 October 2015; and again till December 2017 by MLSP Order ПД01-918 from 28 December 2016. According to the last Order the period of subsidised employment is increased from six to twelve months.

²⁵Mancheva, M, Sl. Ivanova and K. Dimitrova (2015) Оценка на интеграцията на уязвими групи мигранти в България. CSD, p. 77.

²⁶Iliev, St (2017) Ангажираност на частния сектор в заетостта на получили международна закрила лица. UNHCR Sofia, p. 20.

rights to travel abroad) 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 programme 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.

When it comes to other third country nationals legally residing in Bulgaria the provision of information in their language has not yet become a standard practice. Moreover, there is no practice of provision of social orientation courses to these target groups. There are no standard procedures and practices for provision of information materials available at the offices of the main institutions such as the Employment Agency and the network of labour bureaus, the Agency for Social Assistance. Information materials in Bulgarian, Russian and English have been prepared and are disseminated only through the three Information centers for Migrant Integration that are run by the International Organisation for Migration.

II. Courses/modules' characteristics and content

There are no information and orientation guides targeting directly third country nationals or beneficiaries of international protection. A few guides have been produced providing guidance to different categories of professionals working with beneficiaries of international protection and TCN - persons providing social assistance and orientation services to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

By way of example, a guide by **Caritas Bulgaria**²⁷ from 2017 is seen to serve two purposes, covering themes as described below:

On one hand, it is promotional material explaining in detail the specific social services provided by Caritas Integration Centre St Anna to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. This part of the guide could be used by other service providers for referral of clients to the St. Anna Centre. The Guide presents in detail the type of integration services provided at the centre which include: Bulgarian language classes, social consultations and mediation including translation in contacting institutions, support for address registration and house search, support for labour orientation, public school registration, mentorship programme, intercultural events and festivals including cultural trips, training on the management of family/ personal finances, financial support in the form of vouchers for food for vulnerable asylum seekers and BIPs. On the other hand, it provides guidance on the administrative set up and procedural steps to be taken with regard to house/apartment search, access to public school education, social services, health care, employment. The guide is in the Bulgarian language. It could serve as reference material for social workers at service providing institutions rather than as a structured training material that could be used for standard training of social workers entering the field of refugee support. The guide is not accompanied by lesson plan and provides for no particular length of training. It does not provide for the conduct of exam (for social workers) neither is tied to certification of participation.

²⁷ Еднакви в различieto. За интеграцията като реалност и възможности през погледа на хората търсещи и получили международна закрила и хората от „Каритас“, които ги подкрепят, Caritas Bulgaria, 2017.

Another guide, prepared by the **Bulgarian Red Cross**,²⁸ targets the municipalities and aims to provide information and guidance on the process of integration of beneficiaries of international protection. The main theme of the Guide is the provision of practical step-by-step information on the conclusion and implementation of integration agreements between a given municipality and a beneficiary of international protection. The guide provides clear orientation of the integration responsibilities on the part of the Municipality and the procedural steps that municipal officials need to follow in order to facilitate the social, health care, labor market integration needs of beneficiaries of international protection. The Guide provides a pack of sample documents to be used by Municipalities in the process of conclusion and implementation of integration agreements. It is in Bulgarian and targets officials in Bulgaria's 265 municipalities. The Guide is designed to serve as orientation material for those officials. It is not designed as structured training material providing lesson plans and length of training. It does not contain any guidance on methods to use in the training process. It does not provide for the conduct of exam (for social workers) neither is tied to certification of participation.

A guide by the **Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants**²⁹ aims to provide detailed and reliable information about the integration provisions and measures for BIPs, including their rights and obligations. The Guide is oriented in particular to respective officials in the 265 Bulgarian Municipalities which are responsible for concluding and implementing Integration Agreements with beneficiaries of international protection.³⁰ As the policy of channeling integration through the network of Bulgaria's Municipalities is relatively new in the country, municipal officials have no knowledge on refugee law, rights and obligations and are in acute need of capacity building and training in this regard. The Guide offers:

- *Detailed explanation of the procedures for conclusion and implementation of integration agreements between a Municipality and a beneficiary of international protection;*
- *A description of Integration sectors and their legal and institutional framework – address registration and identity documents; housing, health care, education, employment, social assistance, family unification, Bulgarian citizenship. The contents include list of titles and summary of the major laws and provisions in the respective sector and links to the respective regulations, plus a summary of the main state institutions and NGOs with responsibilities in the integration field and their particular functions in this regard.*

The guide targets officials in Municipalities, central state institutions and NGOs responsible for providing support to BIPs and is in the Bulgarian language. It is designed to serve as reference material for social workers at service providing institutions and especially in Municipalities. It is not designed as a structured training material providing lesson plans and length of training. It does not contain any guidance on methods to use in the training process. It does not provide for the conduct of exam (for social workers) neither is tied to certification of participation.

Somewhat before the large influx of asylum seekers, **FICE – Bulgaria**³¹ provided a needs analysis of BIPs. It was aimed to help social workers responsible for providing integration services and assistance to beneficiaries of international protection understand the context of refugee migration and individual refugee experiences:

- the main demographic profiles of asylum seekers and refugees in Bulgaria;
- the needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, their feeling, aspirations and plans for the future.

The Guide provides a well structured orientation into the practical and emotional process of integration into the host society, the attendant practical and emotional needs of beneficiaries of international protection and how social workers

²⁸ 13. Наръчник за интегриране на лица с предоставено убежище или международна закрила в общините, Bulgarian Red Cross, 2017.

²⁹ Наръчник за интегриране на лица с предоставено убежище или международна закрила в общините, Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants, 2017.

³⁰ Bulgaria, Наредба за условията и реда за сключване, изпълнение и прекратяване на споразумението за интеграция на чужденците с предоставено убежище или международна закрила, 25 July 2017, <https://www.lex.bg/en/laws/ldoc/2137169844>, accessed on 18 January 2018.

³¹ Анализ на потребностите и планиране на работа в екип с бежанци и търсещи закрила, FICE – Bulgaria, 2012.

should work with them while facilitating their integration, techniques for analysis of problems and formulation of aims in the work with concrete cases, guidance on psychosocial consultation of beneficiaries of international protection. The guide is in Bulgarian and targets professionals, social workers at NGOs providing integration services to beneficiaries of international protection. It is designed as consultative material for social workers at working directly with beneficiaries of international protection. It is not designed as a structured training material providing lesson plans and length of training. It does not contain any guidance on methods to use in the training process. It does not provide for the conduct of exam (for social workers) neither is tied to certification of participation.

A number of guides exist on Bulgarian Language Training for Migrant Children and adults. One of them, published under an **educational project**,³² is to help teachers in Bulgarian public schools compose and conduct Bulgarian language lessons with migrant children. The Guide is composed of shared methodological practices, including tests of public school teachers. It is designed to provide concrete methodological examples of how to conduct Bulgarian language lessons for migrant children, including tests. It is not designed as a structured training material providing lesson plans and length of training. It does not provide for the conduct of exam (for public school teachers) neither is tied to certification of participation. **Caritas Sofia** has developed a number of language curricula and guides for Bulgarian language training, which are in process of adoption by the Ministry of Education and Science.³³

Finally, again before the large asylum seeker influx, **UNHCR** prepared a guide on rights and obligations of BIPs.³⁴ It was to provide detailed information on the rights and responsibilities of beneficiaries of international protection as stipulated in related legal acts and regulations. The main themes of the Guide covered the rights and obligations of beneficiaries of international protection in view of their: civic registration; identity documents issuance; housing and accommodation; access to health care; social assistance; access to education; access to the labour market; religious rights and freedoms; Bulgarian citizenship; family reunification. It targeted officials working in institutions and NGOs with responsibilities in integrating beneficiaries of international protection. It was developed in Bulgarian and was designed to serve as a reference material for social workers at state institutions and NGOs with responsibilities of facilitating the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. It was not designed as a structured training material providing lesson plans and length of training. It did not contain any guidance on methods to use in the training process. It did not provide for the conduct of exam (for social workers) neither was tied to certification of participation.

III. Conclusions: unaddressed orientation needs of non-nationals

In terms of the **international protection procedure**, 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.³⁵ Regarding their everyday needs, BIPs need to receive clear and legible information about access to the labor market

³² Krumova O (ed) Обучение по български език на деца-мигранти. Сборник с материали в помощ на учителя.

³³ Please see <https://caritas.bg/documents-2/lizdania-bezhantsi/dostap-manual/>.

³⁴ Radeva, M., Zh. Donkova Права и задължения на чужденците с предоставен статут на бежанец или хуманитарен статут в РБ, UNHCR, 2008.

³⁵ Interview with a service provider. Indeed, people with rejected asylum applications remain confused and distressed as they often are not been provided with the necessary information.

and employment services, social assistance, health care system, education, the rental market, rights and possibilities to travel outside Bulgaria.³⁶ For both asylum seekers and BIPs there is the need to increase the information on healthcare outside reception centres. This information should include also details related to the Bulgarian healthcare system as well as health insurance.³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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 programme or scheme for integration facilitation to provide the framework and clear funding mechanisms the provision of services and the update information will remain unstable.

The **need for cultural orientation** appears strong for both asylum seekers and BIPs. Both groups 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**.⁴⁰ A 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 have been identified as potential hindrance to more comprehensive integration of women.⁴¹ For example, many of the women 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 labour 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.⁴²

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 labour 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 push women to stay at home and limit their contacts with the host population; escalating conflicts in the family stemming from transformations in the behavior of some women (who start perceiving the role of women in their origin societies as submissive) and the unwillingness of some husbands to allow their wives to work.

As concerns the **provision of language and vocational trainings**, there is need to guarantee the continuity of those trainings as well as to increase them in number. While presently language sessions are provided by NGOs in Bulgarian, and in some instances in English and in German, there is no consistent Bulgarian language programme for asylum seekers and BIPs. Classes are provided often by volunteers who do not necessarily have pedagogical qualifications and levels A1 and A2 are only offered. 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 labour market.⁴³ Further, vocational trainings have to be increased in number diversified in terms of professional focus.

³⁶ Interviews with reception centre representatives, service providers, a single female asylum seeker and a family of asylum seekers.

³⁷ Interviews with reception centre representatives, service providers, a single male and a single female asylum seeker.

³⁸ Interviews with a single female and a single male asylum seeker, an asylum seeking family and a service provider.

³⁹ Interviews with service providers and reception centre representatives.

⁴⁰ Interviews with service providers, reception centre representatives and a single male asylum seeker.

⁴¹ Interviews with service provider and reception centre representative.

⁴² Interview with a service provider.

⁴³ Interviews with: service providers, reception centre representative and a single male asylum seeker.

According to experts from both governmental institutions and NGOs **information should be 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 is 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.⁴⁴ While the social workers in the Vrazhdebna reception centre have organised historical movies screenings and dialogues on history as cultural orientation activities,⁴⁵ the use of interactive means of provision of information is still only sporadic.

Finally, it could be concluded that there is a need in Bulgaria to put the provision of information and orientation services for non-nationals from different categories under a **coherent framework and under the auspices of a coordinating body**. While this need is far more acute with regard to BIPs and other legally residing third country nationals, improvements could be promoted also for asylum seekers. 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 centres and on an ad hoc basis depending on project funding.

The absence of targeted programme for facilitation of the integration of BIP, of a 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, including with regard to informing and orienting themselves in the host society and the access to services available to them by law.

Both asylum seekers and BIPs and other categories of legally residing third country nationals will benefit from the design of a coherent information and orientation programme 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.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ Interview with reception centre representative.

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