



# Analysing social orientation: the case of Bulgaria

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# I. National law and fundamental rights in social orientation

As noted in the mapping of social orientation in Bulgaria,<sup>1</sup> there are no specific social orientation courses or modules for asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) or other legally residing third country nationals. Moreover, existing guidebooks are rather directed towards municipal officials, responsible for foreigners' integration, and other representatives of institutions and NGOs and do not provide structured training material on non-nationals' fundamental rights and obligations, based on the main principles of the Constitution, values of society and existing legislation.

Therefore, such material should be sought in the following (indirect) sources:

- fragmented sections throughout guidebooks, manuals and information brochures;
- websites, especially in foreign language versions, of institutions, to see if easy to grasp, systematic information about rights, obligations and institutions can be found if non-nationals can at least find some data if they start seeking themselves;
- the (ad hoc) efforts of responsible institutions and service providing NGOs, discussed via targeted interviews;
- a number of websites, giving legal and social information to international protection seekers in Bulgaria, offering sporadic or more systematized information on rights and obligations and structure of the legal and institutional system of the country.

Mention will also be made to Bulgaria's past integration programme functioning until 2013, where social orientation was a component, and the current legal and strategic framework of migration and integration, where the importance of orientation is (in)directly emphasized.

## 1. Main principles of the Constitution and values of society

In the absence of structured social orientation courses or modules, this section will provide an overview of the main avenues through which non-nationals can gain insight on the main principles of the Bulgarian Constitution, other legislation and values of society, as well as the normative principles such orientation lays on. Currently, as regards acquaintance with legislation and institutions, equal emphasis seems to be put on rights and obligations, with a slight prevalence of rights (housing, health insurance, access to labour market, etc) in a more practical aspect.

Historically, integration practitioners recall substantial attention being given to social orientation, in terms of informing about institutions, rights and how to protect them, in Bulgaria's comprehensive integration programme functional until 2013. Social orientation and cultural adaptation were expressly laid as main principles and included in the measures under the programme.<sup>2</sup>

The **current governmental regulation on integration**<sup>3</sup> makes a clear reference to the need for foreigners to have a lawful behavior and abide by the country's traditions, which should presumably be met by the efforts towards social

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<sup>1</sup> Mancheva, M. RACCOMBAT: Preventing and Combatting Racism and Xenophobia through Social Orientation of Non-Nationals, Mapping of social orientation: the case of Bulgaria, 2018, Center for the Study of Democracy

<sup>2</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>3</sup> 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 8 February 2018

orientation. The regulation postulates<sup>4</sup> that foreigners should fulfil their integration obligations, join integration programmes and projects, as well as Bulgarian language courses, make efforts to integrate in the local community and respect its traditions and rites. Notably, they should abide by the law and legal order and are forbidden to take illegal actions, violating public order. Correspondingly, the State Agency for Refugees is obliged,<sup>5</sup> during the asylum/international protection procedure, to provide information materials explaining, in a language understandable to the foreigner, the rights and obligations derived from the integration agreement. The role of international organisations and NGOs is also tackled,<sup>6</sup> whereas they can share with integration authorities and foreigners manuals and guidelines, provide consultations and experts, organize informational events.

The **current national strategy on migration and integration 2015-2020**<sup>7</sup> also speaks of targeted activities to develop social and life skills, change attitudes, values and way of thinking to adapt to a new cultural environment. The strategy sets the integration into the social, cultural and civic life of society as a priority area for future action.<sup>8</sup> However, the recent draft action plan on integration for 2018 does not envisage any measures, related to social orientation.

Currently, the first encounter of asylum seekers with main rights and obligations/principles of Bulgarian law should be sought in the **induction discussions the State Agency for Refugees (SAR)** holds with them upon their reception in the Agency's centres. As per the Law on Asylum and Refugees, rights and obligations during the international protection procedure are discussed and are also enumerated on info posters throughout the centres. Upon submission of their international protection application, with the assistance of an interpreter, foreigners are read guidelines, speaking about the competent authorities giving international protection status, residence in the Republic of Bulgaria, types of proceedings and their rights and obligations as persons seeking international protection. Additional explanations are given, as needed. Straight before registering international protection application, SAR provides foreigners with a written copy of the guidelines about rights and obligations in a language they understand. Information is given about entities, providing legal aid and social assistance. Foreigners are also informed about their right to an attorney at each stage of the proceedings to protect their rights and lawful interests.<sup>9</sup> Asylum seekers sign the copy of the written guidelines, thus certifying that they are acquainted with those rights and obligations,<sup>10</sup> but the extent to which they understand them remains a matter of further study.<sup>11</sup>

A substantial part of SAR integration activities are the integration profiles of foreigners prepared by the Agency's officers. 38 such profiles were prepared in 2017 and 31 profiles were prepared in January-March 2018,<sup>12</sup> but those profiles rather concern foreigners' demographics and labour skills in view of future integration.

The Agency's efforts are complemented by **NGO led initiatives**, most recently information videos in the SAR centres explaining to asylum seekers the international protection procedure, giving them practical information on Bulgaria and what services institutions and organisations can offer.<sup>13</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria and the Foundation for Access to Rights have

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<sup>4</sup> 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 8 February 2018, Art. 17

<sup>5</sup> 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 8 February 2018, Art. 20, item 4

<sup>6</sup> 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 8 February 2018, Art. 28

<sup>7</sup> Bulgaria, Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>, accessed on 8 February 2018, p. 30

<sup>8</sup> Bulgaria, Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>, accessed on 8 February 2018, p. 46

<sup>9</sup> State Agency for Refugees

<sup>10</sup> State Agency for Refugees

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria

<sup>12</sup> State Agency for Refugees

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria

also both published separate information materials and brochures in various languages primarily containing explanations and details of rights and obligations of asylum seekers and BIPs and the procedure for granting asylum in Bulgaria. These materials are regularly distributed in the SAR and migration detention centres.

Social and cultural adaptation is set as priority also in the **Bulgarian language tuition programme developed by Caritas Bulgaria and recently adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science**.<sup>14</sup> According to the Programme's strategic parts, foreigners' personal and professional realisation is directly related not only to their language abilities, but also to them having sufficient information about the country's cultural peculiarities, as this knowledge develops a sense of tolerance and respect towards the unknown and different. Tolerance towards cultural diversity and knowledge about the everyday life, culture, behavioural models and value system of Bulgarians is included among the aims of the programme. Emphasis is also put on the potential teachers' capacity for multicultural education and ability to instill tolerance towards differences and promote diversity. However, apart from basic knowledge for writing a complaint to police in case of theft or another incident (level A2), the programme seems to be dealing with cultural and societal knowledge teaching mainly history and traditions of Bulgaria at level B1 and B2.

Nevertheless, **Bulgarian language courses**, offered to asylum seekers and BIPs, often become a forum to explain the structure of the Bulgarian state, legislation and institutions and talk to foreigners about, for example, the Bulgarian Constitution. Language teachers are reported to prepare substantially for non-nationals' possible questions and give them basic data, as well as additional sources to get more information from. A number of foreigners, on the other hand, are interested in such topics and stimulate teachers towards giving further details.<sup>15</sup>

**Information sessions** are regularly organised by major integration players like the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, where social workers also give status holding foreigners information about main state institutions.<sup>16</sup> Information sessions and individual consultations are also provided to asylum seekers in SAR centres by mobile teams of lawyers, psychologists, social workers and mediators.<sup>17</sup> In addition, cultural orientation courses are offered for foreigners detained in the **migration detention centres in Lyubimets and Busmantsi** with a focus on traditions and norms in Bulgaria, political and constitutional structure as well as providing an opportunity to gain other basic knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to adapt to the differences one meets within a new host country. These are done through a number of non-formal education activities, presentations and information sessions.<sup>18</sup>

In the absence of a structured social orientation curriculum, **individual consultations** on foreigners' rights and obligations turn out to be an important source of their social orientation. Those are provided by human rights NGOs like the Foundation for Access to Rights, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria.

In terms of **internet resources** asylum seekers and BIPs can use, they concentrate on the asylum procedure, while the rights and obligations of asylum seekers after receiving a status are relatively summarily explained and encompass mainly the right to work, education, family reunification and citizenship.<sup>19</sup> In a promising development, the website [refugee.info](http://refugee.info) is currently working on expanding the scope of the information provided and including a more detailed section on the specific rights and obligations of beneficiaries of international protection which will be available in a number of languages commonly spoken by them such as Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Urdu, French, etc. In addition, [refugee.info](http://refugee.info) has a legal advice team comprised of qualified practitioners from the Foundation for Access to Rights who are in charge of following relevant developments in the asylum procedure in the country, updating the content of the website and the FAQ section on a regular basis and replying to chat messages from foreigners directly from the website. Such messages

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<sup>14</sup> For more information, please see <https://caritas.bg/novini/novini-bezhantsi/caritas-obuchenie-balgarski-ezik-bezhantsi/>.

<sup>15</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>16</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>17</sup> IOM Bulgaria

<sup>18</sup> Caritas Sofia

<sup>19</sup> See for example the chapter on refugee or humanitarian status on [asylum.bg](http://asylum.bg) and the section on rights at [refugeeinfo.com](http://refugeeinfo.com).

are responded to within two hours of being identified (during working days). Thus, [refugee.info](http://refugee.info) provides an online forum for foreigners and BIPs to ask any questions requiring legal advice, referrals or general information on rights and obligations that are not already addressed by the website's content.

The main difficulty reported by social orientation providers is **digesting (relatively complex) legal information** and presenting it to foreigners in relatively simple terms.<sup>20</sup> Low language knowledge and awareness about rules and institutions are also generally observed. Easy to grasp information about legal procedures, including criminal justice, and institutions, as well as about rights and obligations is found on websites such as <https://pravatami.bg/>. However, information there is unfortunately not adapted to the needs of asylum seekers and BIPs and is only provided in Bulgarian, so it would not be tackled in detail in the present report.

In terms of **dedicated space** where migrants can obtain social orientation, the UNHCR-funded Information and Integration Centre of the Bulgarian Red Cross provides a space for migrants to engage in different educational and recreational activities, including Bulgarian language courses, and offers regular help with information on administrative processes in Bulgaria.

The St Anna Centre for Integration run by Caritas Sofia offers to BIPs social consultations, psychological support, Bulgarian language courses, support in getting an address registration, a general practitioner, housing and employment, a mentorship programme and other activities supporting migrants' integration process. In terms of getting migrants acquainted with institutions and procedures, with financial support from UNHCR Bulgaria, Caritas Sofia runs an employment (career) centre providing a combination of skills screening, job interview training and CV support as well as guidance on the available opportunities for employment in Bulgaria such as where to look for them and what people's expectations around salaries and contracts should be. Work is also done directly with companies which have suitable vacancies. Financial management trainings are being provided by Caritas Sofia as well. The St. Anna Centre for Integration run by Caritas Sofia also intends to create a computer space with internet connection available, enabling people to use these services for their job searches. There is also a planned expansion of the existing mentoring program (which is currently more focused on befriending and social activities) with the additional aim of targeting skilled professionals in particular areas to provide employment support.

## 2. Prohibition of and protection against discrimination

**Easy to grasp information** on protection against discrimination, appropriate for the needs of non-nationals, **is altogether missing from the public domain**. Major social orientation players<sup>21</sup> report discrimination/harassment mainly in schools on the basis of ethnic differences, which is mainly tackled by individual work with school principals. Discriminatory elements in access to healthcare and employment, as well as housing for foreigners remain anecdotal information. No consideration is given about complaining to the equality body, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, or the competent courts. Therefore, scattered information on anti-discrimination remains fairly theoretical, with newer initiatives to be explored as possible avenues for teaching the topic.

- Main legal norms – protected grounds, prohibition of discrimination in specific areas

Among the older integration works of major stakeholders, **a 2008 guide on rights and obligations of asylum seekers and BIPs by UNHCR**<sup>22</sup> indirectly tackles prohibition of discrimination by speaking about foreigners' religious rights and

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<sup>20</sup> IOM Bulgaria

<sup>21</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross, IOM Bulgaria

<sup>22</sup> Radeva, M., Zh. Donkova Права и задължения на чужденците с предоставен статут на бежанец или хуманитарен статут в РБ, UNHCR, 2008, p. 112 and following

freedoms. Freedom of conscience and religion are looked at on national and international level, together with the obligation of the state to ensure interreligious tolerance and the limitations that can be posed to those fundamental freedoms. An overview of the main registered, and unregistered, religious denominations is also made. Finally, a review of the religious rights and freedoms of asylum seekers and BIPs is made, emphasizing that no limitations could be imposed on their rights, based on, among others, their religion.

The emphasis on religion in countering non-discrimination among foreigners is corroborated by the **focus groups on the needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection regularly conducted by UNHCR**. As previously described, they are often followed up by questions-and-answers sessions, providing to non-nationals relevant information.<sup>23</sup> During the focus groups foreigners are asked whether they feel free to practice their religion.<sup>24</sup> Thus, information on equality and possible discriminatory acts on religious grounds can further be related.

A more recent practical effort is found in the **'Talk with me' youth language mentorship programme**, developed by an international consortium, represented in Bulgaria by the Tulip Foundation.<sup>25</sup> It is designed to gather pairs of young language mentor volunteers from the local population and migrants, who would go, within 10 meetings, over a number of topics in order to give foreigners language knowledge, as well as knowledge of the local society, rules, habits and customs. Although supposed to be implemented by 'lay' representatives of the local population, it opens significant space for relating anti-discrimination content in several aspects. In its guidelines for intercultural training of migrants, the programme emphasizes very much on learning about cultural specifics of society, tolerance towards differences and countering stereotypes. In the information sessions, preceding the meetings of mentor-refugee pairs, the floor is opened for refugees to ask questions about the country and society and mentors are encouraged to gather at least basic information about those aspects in order to enhance refugees' understanding. Further on, in the meetings of the pairs specific topics are discussed, like 'Family and friends' where sensitive aspects like dating and courtship, same sex couples and cultural specifics of friendship and family relations are suggested for discussion. In the meeting on culture and traditions, religious beliefs, holidays and places of worship are shown and discussed, opening the topic of interreligious tolerance.

- Main institutions and other stakeholders – equality bodies, courts, human rights NGOs

No information is systematically or sporadically related to foreigners, concerning the main institutions and other stakeholders in the area of anti-discrimination, although discrimination features as a priority area for legal aid of a major human rights NGO like the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. A list is also given of major human rights institutions and NGOs to which complainants can turn for help.<sup>26</sup>

- Relevant legal and administrative procedures – complaining to equality bodies, police, courts

Notably, as indicator of the general lack of non-nationals-targeted information on anti-discrimination, the website of Bulgaria's equality body, The Commission for Protection against Discrimination, has only an automatically translated foreign language version, which makes finding information about complaining to the Commission virtually impossible. Moreover, procedure before the Commission is considered fairly complicated and, in order to open it, foreigners should have a fairly high education level, although reportedly there were cases of complaints by foreigners until 2013.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mancheva, M. **RACCOMBAT: Preventing and Combatting Racism and Xenophobia through Social Orientation of Non-Nationals, Mapping of social orientation: the case of Bulgaria, 2018**, Center for the Study of Democracy

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria

<sup>25</sup> More information about the project can be found at [http://www.tulipfoundation.net/news/talk\\_final-529/#sthash.u2WTCAdf.dpbs](http://www.tulipfoundation.net/news/talk_final-529/#sthash.u2WTCAdf.dpbs)

<sup>26</sup> Please see <http://www.bgelsinki.org/bg/za-nas/programi/pravna-programa/informaciya-i-koordinati-na-institucii-i-organizacii/?preview>. No English or other language version of the list could be easily found.

<sup>27</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

### 3. Justice and law enforcement

Scarce information is related to foreigners about the structure and functions of Bulgaria's justice and law enforcement structures, mainly in relation to situations they may find themselves into.

- Main legal norms –what a citizen can and cannot do;

The **UNHCR focus groups** on the needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection contain questions are to whether foreigners have been victims of racist and xenophobic attacks and whether Bulgaria can be seen as a friendly state.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the floor is opened for discussing what the law proclaims as prohibited behaviour.

In a recent brochure on integration of third country nationals, **IOM Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Red Cross have listed a number of risks, related to irregular migration**, some being administrative and some being criminal violations. Among those are not having the necessary documents for legal entry into the country, being in violation of the conditions of stay or residence, overstaying visas, engaging in business without proper authorisation, working without a contract. Foreigners are also warned against falling victim to human trafficking and smuggling. A warning in another section concerns rules of good neighbouring relations.

- Law enforcement – structure of police, main powers

In the absence of structured provision of information on Bulgarian law enforcement, the only initiative the authors encountered are the efforts by **UNHCR Bulgaria**, which contribute to acquaintance with justice and law enforcement for a very important group of foreigners – **those detained in the migrant detention centres in Busmantsi and Lyubimets**. For them, an explanatory video on their rights and obligations was produced and is being played on special screens in the centres.<sup>29</sup>

- Judiciary – courts, prosecution, investigation

As mentioned above, Information on the structure and functions of judiciary is mainly given in terms of situations foreigners may find themselves into.

The website **asylum.bg**, created by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) with UNHCR financial support, gives basic information about the country's judiciary via the explanation of the judicial procedures, related to acquiring status. Court instances are reviewed, as well as the system of serving documents and one's rights before the court.

Basic legal information is also given by **mobile teams of lawyers, psychologists and social workers**, visiting SAR centres and migration detention facilities. Judicial and administrative authorities are mainly presented in terms of applicable procedures and especially deadlines, which foreigners often fail to meet due to lack of information.<sup>30</sup>

The **website of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria** has a summarized version in English, nevertheless containing its structure, as well as an English version of the form by which complaints about crimes and other illegal acts can be submitted. No information is available as to whether this option is known to foreigners and whether and how they use it.

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<sup>28</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria

<sup>30</sup> IOM Bulgaria



## 4. Violations of one's rights

As an overall observation, major integration players in Bulgaria generally consider better for, and advise, foreigners to submit complaints about violations of their rights via human rights and other service providing NGOs.<sup>31</sup> Thus, as in other areas, no systematic information is given on how to submit a complaint if one suffers from assault or another crime or if one's rights are violated. This makes possible complaints very much conditional on NGOs' often sporadic, project-based funding and the personnel they manage to maintain to answer migrants' queries and help them approach authorities.

Submission of complaints about thefts or other incidents is part of the **Bulgarian language tuition programme** developed by Caritas Bulgaria and recently adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science,<sup>32</sup> as part of the A2 level theme on health, safety and emergencies. This fairly basic acquaintance with the topic and related terms could potentially be built upon in higher level courses with more terminology and exercises on how to communicate with police and other authorities.

The **youth language mentorship programme 'Talk with me'**, described above, opens space for discussing acts of hate crime and how to counter them in relation to one of its main topics, sports. Parallel to discussing favourite sports, sports venues and events in the city, mentors and refugees are supposed to talk also about sports hooliganism and how to avoid such gangs, including by learning about the places they usually gather at and visit. This provides a significant potential opportunity for local mentors to give migrants at least a basic knowledge on how to complain to police about possible hate acts and what to do afterwards.

A particular aspect of anti-crime work amongst foreigners especially in SAR reception centres and migrant detention facilities focuses on countering human trafficking and advising foreigners not to give ID papers to anybody they do not know.<sup>33</sup>

The Council of Refugee Women and Caritas Sofia are currently also in the initial stages of setting up **projects on human rights education in Sofia and Harmanli** for adult migrants and for migrant children and adolescents, respectively. The projects will be financed and supported by UNICEF Bulgaria and will have a strong focus on women's and girl's empowerment and gender-based violence awareness.

## 5. Rights of suspects and accused

No information is given to non-nationals about rights of suspects and accused.

## 6. Legal aid

Bulgaria's legal aid system is mainly presented to asylum seekers through the legal aid they can receive during their international protection procedure. Notably, the National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB) has an English version of its website, where main relevant norms and procedures are explained.

- Main legal norms – types of cases, conditions

No systematic information is given to foreigners about the main legal norms, concerning legal aid. Still, foreigners wishing to obtain more information may potentially consult the NLAB English language website, where main cases for providing legal aid and groups of eligible persons are explained.

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<sup>31</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>32</sup> For more information, please see <https://caritas.bg/novini/novini-bezhantsi/caritas-obuchenie-balgarski-ezik-bezhantsi/>.

<sup>33</sup> IOM Bulgaria

- Main institutions and other stakeholders – legal aid bureaus, bar councils, human rights and other NGO

The UNHCR funded BHC website **asylum.bg** gives a basic overview of the two main alternative avenues asylum seekers can follow to obtain legal aid in their international protection procedure. Those are, on the one hand, the services of NGOs, such as the Helsinki Committee itself, and the National Legal Aid Bureau, whose working procedure is summarily described. A special emphasis is put on the fact that under both avenues lawyers are free of charge and cannot request additional payment. The website **refugee.info** also provides a detailed listing of legal service providers and a short description of what services they offer which is available in the languages most widely spoken by asylum seekers and BIPs. The **NLAB English language website** gives basic information about the Bureau's powers and responsibilities.

- Relevant procedures – how to apply for and obtain legal aid

Foreigners are generally advised on how to seek the assistance of NGOs. Notably, the NLAB English language website explains the main procedures for obtaining state provided legal aid are explained.

## II. Methodology of teaching basics of national law and fundamental rights

### 1. Profile and qualifications of teachers

In the absence of a structured social orientation going on in Bulgaria, some guidance towards the desired profile of foreigners' teachers of Bulgarian language and culture could be found in the **strategic parts of the Bulgarian language tuition programme** developed by Caritas Bulgaria and recently adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science.<sup>34</sup> The programme states that the Bulgarian language and culture teachers for adult asylum seekers and BIPs should be prepared for that type of training which is considered 'very specific'. They should take into account a number of factors like race, ethnicity, religion and a culture they are not very familiar with. They should demonstrate 'tolerance, calmness and assurance' to relate the same feelings to the trainees, being a model and mediator between their culture and the local one. They should answer each question with due attention and adapt teaching materials to the trainees' specific needs.

In practice, **Bulgarian language teachers**, who often provide basic information about the state and its laws and institutions, are selected, at least in the capital city, for their language qualifications and their experience in teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language. Outside the capital, however, such specific Bulgarian language teaching experience is rare, so teachers from ordinary schools are employed.<sup>35</sup>

The other type of professionals involved in providing social orientation to foreigners are **social workers**. They are mostly recruited among the migrant communities themselves due to their language and societal knowledge about the respective national and ethnic groups and receive professional trainings by service providing institutions and organisations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For more information, please see <https://caritas.bg/novini/novini-bezhantsi/caritas-obuchenie-balgarski-ezik-bezhantsi/>.

<sup>35</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>36</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

## 2. Teaching methods

The **Bulgarian language tuition programme** developed by Caritas Bulgaria and recently adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science<sup>37</sup> contains some guidance about the methods for teaching Bulgarian language and culture to migrants too. Lessons should be planned well and different techniques should be used for teaching, revising and processing the information. Instructions given by teachers should be short, clear, simple and understandable language for students at lower language levels to achieve better focus and concentration of trainees on the content. A strong link is recommended between curriculum, teachers, students, study aids and practice.

**Experts from different institutions** like the Labour Inspectorate, Employment Agency and the Social Assistance Agency, as well as Border Police, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and IOM Bulgaria, the latter on voluntary return issues, have been reported to take part in foreigners' information sessions.<sup>38</sup>

As regards the **information sessions** major integration players organize, ten to twenty people participate in each session, where rights under the asylum legislation are explained, as well as access to the labour market, to identification documents and to health services.<sup>39</sup>

**Individual consultations** are also provided, concerning the rights and obligations of foreigners.

**Excursions and study visits** mainly to historical places of interest are organised as part of NGO initiatives.

## 3. Inclusion of host communities in the social orientation curriculum

The issue of inclusion of host communities in the social orientation of migrants is given quite an importance on policy level, as the UNHCR needs assessment groups expressly ask whether foreigners would take part in activities, bringing together host and migrant communities.

As with other components of social orientation in Bulgaria, **host communities' involvement is rather ad hoc and sporadic**. Nevertheless, a number of events and initiatives have been organised by important actors in the area of integration for the purpose of bringing migrants and local communities together, learning more about one another's culture and breaking existing stereotypes. For instance, a graffiti festival was reported<sup>40</sup> in the SAR centre in Harmanli aimed at bringing together migrants and local population through art and entertainment, changing pre-conceptions and overcoming barriers among communities. Joint sports activities are also organised such as IOM Bulgaria's football tournaments for both children and adults, again in Harmanli, with competing teams comprised of migrants, SAR and NGO employees and local community members.<sup>41</sup>

Given the widespread host community sentiment against refugees, the Caritas network has approached the problem both from an **advocacy standpoint, and through field programmes** by encouraging increased contact between Bulgarians and refugees - from the mentoring scheme where Bulgarian and refugee families are matched and form social bonds, to the Refugee Project – a joint initiative between CVS Bulgaria and Caritas Sofia where young volunteers (Bulgarians and foreigners) teach a variety of skills in the SAR centres, including sessions on the political structure and culture of Bulgaria. Attempts are made to increase the number of Bulgarians involved in these activities to enable such programmes to create greater interest and traction amongst Bulgarians. Caritas Sofia is also reported to have started

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<sup>37</sup> For more information, please see <https://caritas.bg/novini/novini-bezhantsi/caritas-obuchenie-balgarski-ezik-bezhantsi/>.

<sup>38</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>39</sup> Bulgarian Red Cross

<sup>40</sup> State Agency for Refugees, IOM Bulgaria

<sup>41</sup> IOM Bulgaria

doing more social events with staff and volunteers, such as having tea with friends and neighbours, and cultural visits which seek to maximise the interaction refugees have with host community members. The organisation continues to host monthly cultural evenings in Sofia with themes varying from music, typical dance and cuisine of the countries of origin of migrants to traditions and customs in specific regions in Bulgaria. In addition, a number of picnics and outdoor events are being organised in the summer also aimed at providing an opportunity for foreigners to socialise with Bulgarians and thus facilitating their integration process.<sup>42</sup>

In May 2017, a 4-day Solidarity Festival was jointly organised by Multi Kulti and Caritas Sofia, which are currently preparing the 2018 edition. A similar initiative followed in October 2017 which was announced as “Refugee Month” and included a whole month of activities and events aimed at Bulgarian citizens becoming more familiar with refugees’ stories and backgrounds.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, IOM Bulgaria been organising an annual week-long Global Migration Film Festival in Sofia and Harmanli. The Film Festival is open to everyone and is followed by various discussions and events.

The recently started AMIF-funded 4-year IOM Bulgaria project on raising the awareness of Bulgarian host community and migrant groups (2017-2021)<sup>44</sup> presents a very important comprehensive **next step** in the inclusion of host communities in the process of migrants’ social orientation and integration. Its main aim is to facilitate migrants’ integration through raising the awareness and tolerance, reducing intercultural differences and facilitating the cultural adaptation of migrants and their reception in Bulgarian society. Besides information and support to around 3,500 foreigners, including persons from vulnerable groups, a communication strategy will be developed, including 3 videos to be broadcast on national media, and 16 multicultural activities will be held to facilitate cultural adaptation and raise tolerance. The project has the ambition to offer multicultural competence and practical participation in the integration process of civil society, social partners, Bulgarian media, local authorities and international and non-governmental organisations. This will ultimately contribute to addressing the distrust and reducing the xenophobic tendencies having appeared in Bulgaria after 2014. Among the 16 intercultural activities planned are sports events, film and culinary festivals, theater, concert and folklore events with the active participation of the host community.

## 4. Case study

As part of the process for elaborating the present analysis, a representative of the project team attended **an information session organised by the Bulgarian NGO Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria** for a group of around 10 Eritreans, holding an international protection status and having been relocated from Italy. The session took place in a friendly informal atmosphere at the Integration and Information Center of the Bulgarian Red Cross well known to asylum seekers and BIP due to its multiple services.

The two main lecturers were lawyers from the organising NGO. The structure used were short presentations followed by BIPs’ questions and comments. Notably, a representative of the same region, having lived for many years in Bulgaria and holding a Bulgarian citizenship, was invited as interpreter. Thus, he was both a mediator for BIPs’ questions and concerns and a representative of the host society, able to relate legal and social specifics in a way understandable for foreigners and giving them prospects for solutions of their multiple problems. Moreover, another integration oriented organization was invited to offer newcomers food and also encourage them in their integration path. A leaflet containing the main rights and obligations of foreigners by a third integration-related organization was also handed out. Thus, the information session turned out to be a joint effort by a substantial part of the Bulgarian NGO community working in the field of integration and an expat representative, giving important insight into local habits and traditions.

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<sup>42</sup> Caritas Sofia

<sup>43</sup> Humans in the Loop, Bulgarian Red Cross, UNHCR Bulgaria, Caritas Sofia, Council of Refugee Women, IOM Bulgaria, CVS, Beautiful Faces of Syria

<sup>44</sup> IOM Bulgaria

The two main topics discussed at the orientation session were rights and obligations of BIPs and options for integration under the existing legal framework. The rights and obligations of foreigners were explained via a simple table format handout, outlining the following categories of rights: live and move within the country, right to a home, right to work, right to healthcare, family, school, vote, join the army, obligation to obey the law, options to travel and live in another EU Member State, options to obtain Bulgarian citizenship. For each right or obligation, a 'yes/no' answer was given for the cases of a Bulgarian citizen and a BIP. In this way, foreigners were able to easily understand that their rights and obligations, with a few exceptions, resemble very much those of Bulgarians.

Several areas were subject to most concerns by BIPs. They shared their rights to work was effectively hampered by them not being able to move around the city in search for possible jobs. Concerns were raised about health insurance and the high costs of healthcare. Foreigners were very interested in the options to travel and stay in other EU Member States as many stated they had friends and relatives there. What took up a lot of the discussion time were the options for family reunification and the procedure before the State Agency for Refugees was explained. Foreigners were advised to join Bulgarian language courses at the SAR centre they were staying and at the BRC integration centre as soon as possible to increase their communication skills and chances for getting a job.

Integration options under the relevant legislation were presented in detail, but foreigners were not spared the lawyers' assessment that those options were, for the time being, purely theoretical as no municipality had expressed willingness to enter into integration agreements with foreigners although the relocated ones had all signed integration applications. At the same time, BIPs were acquainted with the growing needs of the Bulgarian labour market and were assured of their chances to get proper jobs in areas most in need of workforce.

As an overall impression from the observation, in the absence of a structured social orientation curriculum, information sessions seem one of the few appropriate avenues to share fundamental rights, legal and institutional information with foreigners. Thus, they are and should be used to implement ad hoc social orientation modules and to test new approaches in relating such information to non-nationals. In addition, as in the session observed, opportunities should be used to invite advocates or host community representatives to create a spirit of bridging migrant and local communities and overcoming differences and prejudices.

A representative of the project team was also able to attend **one of the annual UNHCR-led focus groups on needs of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection**. Although no specific social orientation or racism and xenophobia questions were tackled, participants nevertheless showed gaps in their understanding of the dealings of institutions, especially schools, health insurance authorities, asylum actors, which were tackled by focus group facilitators in a timely manner. No information was shared about social orientation information the BIPs present had gotten during and after their international protection proceedings. Thus, the need to integrate legal, institutional and fundamental rights knowledge upon every step of the status and integration process was proven on a practical level.

### III. Assessing impact of teaching law and fundamental rights as part of social orientation

The assessment of the impact of social orientation on the life and actual situation of non-nationals is generally hampered by Bulgaria's lack of a body to analyse, make, harmonise and co-ordinate state policies in the area of migration as a

whole.<sup>45</sup> The country is still to introduce social orientation as part of regular integration effort on the part of institutions and NGOs and then provide assessment of its impact on the lives of non-nationals.

## 1. Existing periodic and ad hoc assessments of social orientation system

No institutional assessments are publicly known concerning the system of social orientation and integration. As reiterated by the present analysis, although there are no specific social orientation courses or modules for asylum seekers and BIPs provided by state actors and NGOs in Bulgaria, there are a number of other activities and initiatives which include elements of social orientation guidance and support. Caritas Sofia has reported conducting regular assessment of all such activities it offers as part of wider projects throughout the whole project cycles – all types of assistance and services are periodically examined against initially set indicators and, if necessary, adapted in line with local capacities to meet the specific needs of the people.

## 2. Indicators used to assess social orientation system

No publicly known institutionalised indicators are in place concerning the system of social orientation and integration, but orientation-related initiatives are nevertheless measured by their coverage in terms of number of participants and their respective profiles.

## 3. Feedback by beneficiaries

There is no institutional system for publicising summarised feedback by beneficiaries concerning the system of social orientation and integration. Nevertheless, organisations like Caritas Sofia ensure that all beneficiaries have access to appropriate and accessible channels for making feedback and complaints, particularly those of a sensitive nature including allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption, but also any general suggestions and comments coming from the beneficiaries with regards to improving the quality and suitability of language courses, mentoring programmes and other social events and activities. Moreover, Caritas is currently working on setting up a formal feedback and complaints mechanism, the adoption of which will further facilitate this process.

# IV. Conclusions and recommendations

## 1. Ability and capacity of social orientation system to raise beneficiaries' awareness and equip them against acts of racism and xenophobia

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<sup>45</sup> Bulgaria, Национална стратегия в областта на миграцията, убежището и интеграцията (2015 - 2020), available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>, accessed on 8 February 2018, p. 34

- In terms of coverage;
- In terms of regularity;
- In terms of areas covered;
- In terms of depth of presentation of material;
- In terms of appropriateness of teaching staff and approach.

All sources, activities, initiatives, trainings and services provided by the main integration actors in Bulgaria, which were mentioned in this analysis, in one way or another do help to raise beneficiaries' awareness of acts of racism and xenophobia and assist them with being equipped with additional knowledge, skills and experience. However, most, if not all, of the times such NGO services are provided sporadically, in a manner that is not sustainable, and do not comprise a regular part of organisations' programming. In addition, although no statistical information could be gathered about the exact number of people covered, practitioners note that it is usually a small part of BIPs living on outside addresses who are already participating in wider integration programmes.

Thus, current sporadic social orientation efforts in Bulgaria do not show sufficient capacity to counter racist and xenophobic acts either **in terms of coverage**, as the groups reached are very small, or **in terms of regularity**, as those are project-based initiatives, most often dependent on EU and other foreign financing. Moreover, **the areas covered are very few in number** compared to the basics of fundamental rights legislation and procedures non-nationals need to know and no easy to grasp, publicly available multi-language information is given on whole sectors of the country's legal and institutional system. Notably, among those are equality and non-discrimination which is considered 'too complex' compared to foreigners' frequent low literacy levels, and law enforcement, which migrants may encounter both as suspects and defendants and as victims of crimes and other violations. Thus, the approach of referring foreigners in need of contacting criminal justice to ex officio and NGO lawyers is not sufficient to truly empower them against all possible acts they may be harmed by. Moreover, learning about fundamental rights and the institutions protecting them would strengthen their ability to prevent acts of hate towards the host community too.

**Depth of presentation of material** is still insufficient to give migrant populations proper legal and institutional knowledge either. Despite low literacy and education levels, established practices should be used to translate complex norms and structures into easy to understand steps to follow if foreigners need to contact a judiciary or law enforcement institution, or the country's equality body.

Bulgarian institutions and NGOs in the social orientation field have fortunately gathered **a diverse body of teaching staff**, comprising teachers, social workers, (volunteer) lawyers, etc. This human resource needs to be kept and further trained to integrate social orientation and fundamental rights knowledge upon every step of communicating with non-national populations. **Teaching approach**, especially on the part of institutions, needs to be simplified and due regard should be given to adapting it to the profile of the audience reached.

## 2. Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be given on **legal, institutional and practical level**.

In terms of **legal and institutional framework**, social orientation should be listed among the express priorities of the interinstitutional bodies managing the processes of migration and integration, with express powers and obligations of all stakeholders concerned – SAR, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education and Science, etc. More express provisions should be included in the regulations on integration, as well as in normative regulation on local level, as local authorities are currently given significant responsibilities concerning integration.

**On practical level**, links should necessarily be sought with the **system of primary and secondary education**. Based on the recently introduced regulations further facilitating the access of asylum seeking children and children BIPs to education, children are often explained basics about the functioning of Bulgarian state and educational system, how their experience in schools will be structured, what graduation exams are in place, etc. In addition, important actors in the area of integration like UNHCR Bulgaria, Caritas, CVS, Bulgarian Red Cross and Multi Kulti have undertaken co-ordination efforts in the sphere of education directed at, among others, the introduction of tolerance modules in schools under which teachers will be trained to explain to students concepts like equal rights regardless of whether persons come from. The ultimate idea behind this joint effort is to suggest the tolerance module to the Ministry of Education and make it part of the regular curriculum.<sup>46</sup> Those efforts should be carefully monitored and built upon and **expanded in the civics education content taught to adults**. Links should also be sought with existing initiatives like Pravodach<sup>47</sup> which seek to deliver lectures and trainings on fundamental rights, crime and punishment, EU law, elections, etc. to students in Bulgarian schools.

Again on educational level, one of the points where space could be sought for citizenship education is the **Bulgarian language exam foreigners take to obtain Bulgarian citizenship**, practically requiring from candidates some societal knowledge as texts given often tackle contemporary social issues like living conditions, renowned historical figures, etc.<sup>48</sup> Thus, a practical idea would be to offer specific language training with a focus on the citizenship exam and combine it with at least some basic citizenship education to prepare foreigners for full-fledged participation in society.

Additionally, there is a great need to **build in tolerance classes in the content related to foreigners in SAR centres**. Responding to that need, there are plans to start running such sessions in Sofia and Harmanli, the main target groups being both children and parents.<sup>49</sup>

As practitioners report distrust in governmental institutions, unreasonably high expectations and a perception that legal proceedings take too long and foreigners are reported to be afraid to complain as they find themselves in difficulty furnishing any evidence for assaults or threats they have suffered,<sup>50</sup> equality bodies, law enforcement and judicial authorities need to develop **specific guidelines for giving information and working with foreigners**, both as defendants or complainants in various proceedings.

The successful combating of racism and xenophobia against foreigners in Bulgaria is dependent not only on strategies and measures in the areas of education, participation and awareness-raising but, more importantly, also on introducing social orientation as part of the regular integration efforts of institutions and NGOs – thus, not only scratching the surface of what social orientation for asylum seekers, BIPs and other legally residing foreign nationals should be, but going into more in-depth presentation of its important aspects.

## V. Resources

Mancheva, M. RACCOMBAT: Preventing and Combatting Racism and Xenophobia through Social Orientation of Non-Nationals, Mapping of social orientation: the case of Bulgaria, 2018, Center for the Study of Democracy

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 8 February 2018

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<sup>46</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria

<sup>47</sup> Pravodach.com

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, the sample tests given at <http://www.ckoko.bg/page.php?c=24&d=19>.

<sup>49</sup> Caritas Sofia

<sup>50</sup> IOM Bulgaria



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

Letter from State Agency for Refugees to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 3 April 2018

Interview with representative of UNHCR Bulgaria

Разработените от „Каритас“ програми за обучение по български език за бежанци са утвърдени от МОН, <https://caritas.bg/novini/novini-bezhantsi/caritas-obuchenie-balgarski-ezik-bezhantsi/> 31 January 2018

Interview with representative of Bulgarian Red Cross

Interview with representative of IOM Bulgaria

asylum.bg

refugeeocean.com.

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

Talk with me Project, Tulip Foundation, [http://www.tulipfoundation.net/news/talk\\_final-529/#sthash.u2WTCAdf.dpbs](http://www.tulipfoundation.net/news/talk_final-529/#sthash.u2WTCAdf.dpbs)

List of institutions and organisations where legal and other support could be sought, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/za-nas/programi/pravna-programa/informaciya-i-koordinati-na-institucii-i-organizacii/?preview>.

Sample Bulgarian citizenship tests, <http://www.ckoko.bg/page.php?c=24&d=19>.

Interview with representative of Caritas Sofia