



2022 - A YEAR IN REVIEW



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria



IOM IN BRIEF



photo: IOM

Founded 72 years ago in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration. With 175 member states and presence in over 100 countries, IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. The Organization works with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration and uphold the well-being and human rights of all migrants.

Bulgaria became a Member State of IOM in 1999. IOM's Mission in Bulgaria was established in 2000 after the entry into force of a Cooperation Agreement between Bulgaria and IOM. In 2009, IOM Bulgaria and the Ministry of Interior signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the voluntary return and reintegration of third-country nationals (TCNs). In 2015, a new and more detailed Cooperation Agreement for long-term partnership between IOM and the Ministry of Interior was adopted.

The Mission consists of a central office in Sofia and a sub-office in the State Agency for Refugees' (SAR) Registration and Reception Center (RRC) in the city of Harmanli. In 2019 and 2020, IOM set up the first of their kind in Bulgaria Safety Zones for unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in RRC Sofia, in close coordination and partnership with the SAR. In mid-2022, IOM established a field presence in Varna and Burgas, along the Black Sea coast, to provide support to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine.



IOM IN BULGARIA






photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Following the challenges to global mobility brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last several years, the world faced a new calamity in 2022 - the war in Ukraine. Over 1,1 million conflict-affected people from Ukraine entered Bulgaria in 2022, of whom over 154,000 were registered for temporary protection and slightly more than 50,000 remained in the country at the end of the year.



TEMPORARY PROTECTION REGISTRATIONS IN BULGARIA

	77 112 women
	53 381 children
	24 649 men

Starting at the beginning of March 2022, when the first wave of refugees from Ukraine arrived in Bulgaria, IOM staff stood ready to provide in-person and phone consultations and referrals, including social support and psychological counselling, as well as legal and administrative information.

In June 2022, IOM secured funding from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and the Council of Europe's Development Bank (CEB), through its Global Appeal. This allowed IOM Bulgaria to launch targeted activities in support of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, including cash-based interventions (CBI), interpretation, purchase of medicines and payment of medical expenses, emergency accommodation, Bulgarian language classes and distribution of educational materials.



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

IOM Bulgaria's main areas of intervention



Providing emergency support and early adaptation services to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine



Providing care and support to UAMs through the management of two Safety Zones



Protecting the rights of migrants, with a focus on the most vulnerable, through legal, social, and psychological support, and other types of direct assistance



Combatting trafficking in human beings, in coordination with local partners



Strengthening the capacity of national institutions in the fields of asylum and migration management



Providing integration support for legally residing migrants, including job counselling, multicultural and information sessions related to their social and cultural adaptation, and Bulgarian language courses



Providing support for return and reintegration of TCNs and capacity building for national institutions in the field of return, reintegration and readmission



Raising awareness on labor migration opportunities



PROTECTION PROGRAM



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Safety Zones for unaccompanied minors

In June 2019, IOM Bulgaria established the first of its kind in Bulgaria Safety Zone for UAMs in the SAR's RRC Sofia - Voenna Rampa. The Safety Zone accommodates mainly minors from Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Bangladesh.



In January 2020, IOM Bulgaria set up a second Safety Zone for UAMs in SAR's RRC Sofia - Ovcha Koupel. UAMs from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, North Africa, and the Palestinian territories, as well as other countries where Arabic and Kurdish are spoken, are accommodated in this Safety Zone.





photo: IOM Bulgaria

Both zones were created with funding through the Emergency measures of the European Union's (EU) Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF). The work in the Safety Zones is structured based on the "Methodology on the Conditions and Organization of the Social Support Provided in the Safety Zones for Unaccompanied Minors". Established as a good practice, IOM Bulgaria has continued managing the two Safety Zones within the framework of two further projects, funded under the National AMIF program and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2020 under the "Home Affairs" Programme.



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

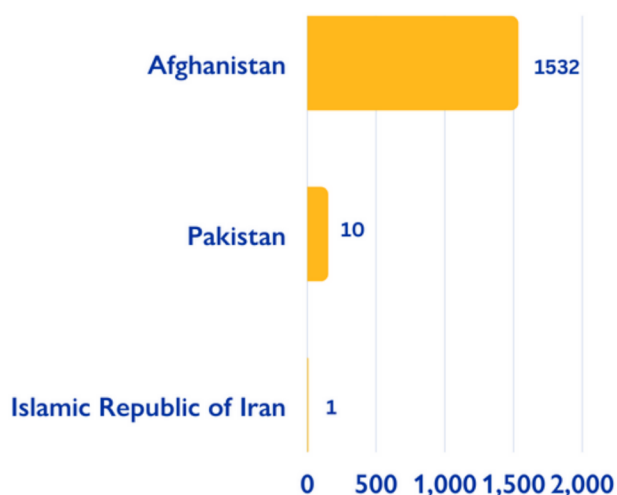
Teams of IOM social workers, supported by interpreters/cultural mediators, provide 24/7 care and support to the UAMs accommodated in the two zones overseen by two Safety Zone coordinators. The social workers include native speakers of Arabic, Kurdish, Dari, and Pashto languages. The Safety Zone staff closely cooperate with IOM Bulgaria's mobile protection teams. A security company ensures 24/7 safety and security.

Support provided by IOM to the UAMs accommodated in the two zones includes registration and accommodation, social support (consultations, accompaniment to medical facilities and purchase of medication and/or payment for medical interventions), psychological and legal consultations, non-formal education, organization of various sports, art and other recreational activities.

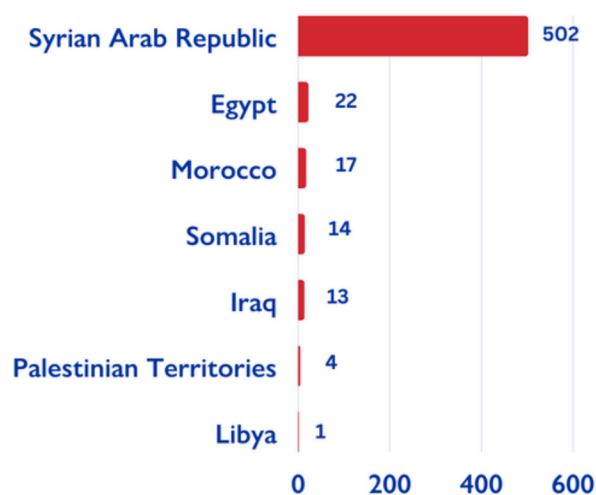
The Safety Zone staff maintain daily contact with the legal representatives of the UAMs appointed through the National Bureau for Legal Aid (NBLA), including to support the UAMs, together with SAR and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), to reunify with family members, in accordance with the EU's Dublin III Regulation.

In 2022, the number of UAMs who were registered and accommodated, and received 24/7 care and support in the two zones, broken down by location and nationality, are as follows:

Registered and accommodated UAMs in the Safety Zone in RRC Sofia - Voenna Rampa



Registered and accommodated UAMs in the Safety Zone in RRC Sofia - Ovcha Kupel



The average age of the UAMs accommodated in both zones is 16. All UAMs accommodated in 2022 were boys.



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Mobile Protection Teams

The year 2022 was the sixth year in a row, during which IOM Bulgaria, within the framework of its Protection program, provided direct support to beneficiaries accommodated in SAR RRCs and the Special Homes for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (SHTAFs), managed by the Ministry of the Interior's (Mol) Migration Directorate. The program was implemented by IOM's mobile protection teams and funded under the National AMIF Program.

During the past year, the mobile protection teams, comprising 1 legal counsellor, 3 psychologists, 3 social workers, and a cultural mediator, provided a wide array of services and support to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees:



Consultations and information sessions related to the beneficiaries' legal status, rights and obligations – in Sofia and Harmanli



Facilitating access to public and health services



Psychological support - individual and group



Distribution of hygiene items, including health protection items in RRC Sofia, RRC Harmanli, Transit Center (TC) Pastrogor



Continuous individual social, psychological and legal support to the UAMs accommodated in the Safety Zones in RRC Sofia - Voenna Rampa and Ovcha Kupel



Distribution of third-party donations of clothes in coordination with partner organizations

Apart from the legal counsellor on the mobile teams, 1 other legal counsellor based in RRC Harmanli and 2 legal Counsellors based in the Sofia main office provided legal support and consultations, as necessary.

In 2022, IOM's mobile protection teams carried out a total of 2,876 consultations in SAR RRCs and Migration Directorate's SHTAFs.



1591 legal consultations:

Provision of information on rights and obligations, legal procedures, assistance with paperwork and general administrative support



782 psychological consultations:

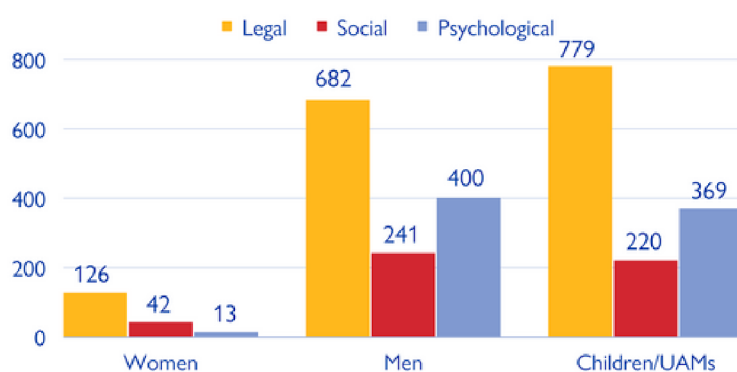
Mental health support, specialized individual discussions with UAMs and other vulnerable persons.



503 social consultations

Facilitating family doctor/GP registration, accompaniment to medical and other appointments, hospitalizations, purchase of medicines and other medical items for vulnerable persons, support with observing long-term medical treatments, payment for medical interventions.

Number of consultations conducted
by IOM's mobile protection teams by gender



Consultations conducted by IOM's
mobile protection teams by year and type

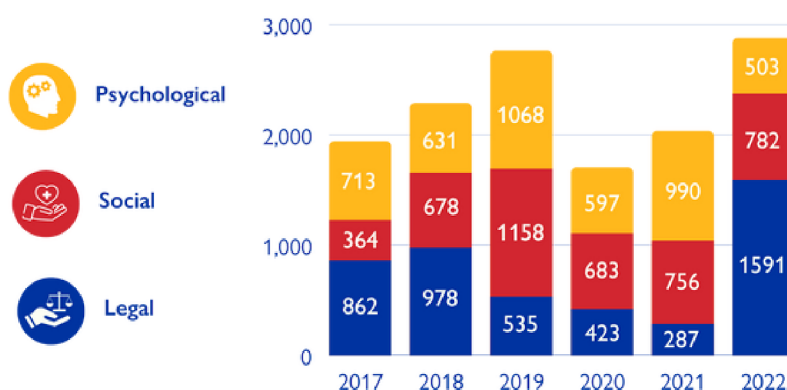
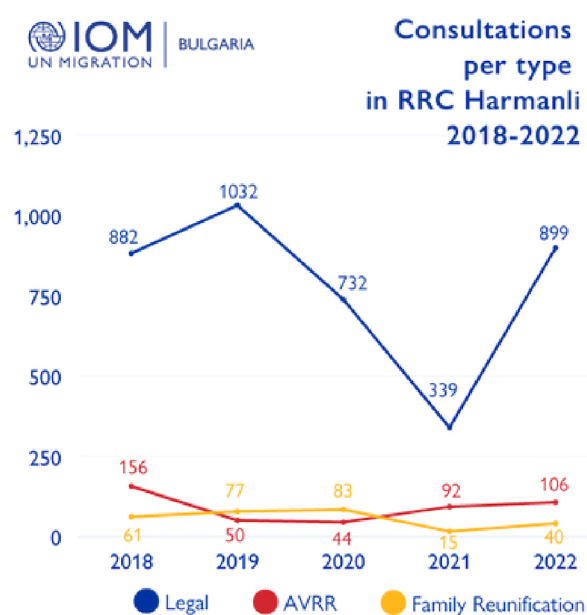




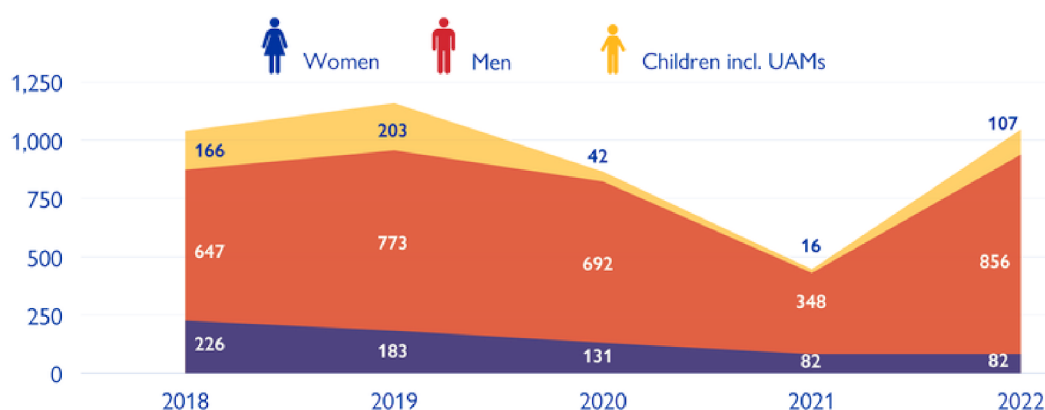
photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Harmanli sub-office



IOM Bulgaria has been operating a sub-office in RRC Harmanli since 2017, with a full-time legal counsellor and interpreters, assisted by IOM's mobile protection teams, who have provided support to migrants and asylum seekers accommodated in RRC Harmanli, TC Pastrogor and SHTAF Lyubimets. During this period, the legal counsellor based in IOM's office in RRC Harmanli has carried out consultations with more than 4,500 migrants and asylum seekers.

Legal consultations by gender in RRC Harmanli 2018-2022





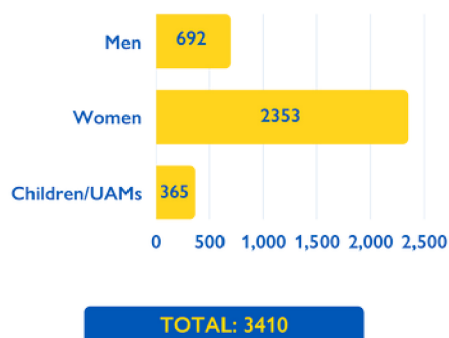
UKRAINE RESPONSE

photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

With the financial support from PRM, FCDO and CEB, IOM Bulgaria scaled up its protection and integration program to include provision of support to refugees from Ukraine. In 2022, IOM Bulgaria assisted more than 3,000 persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, mainly women with children and elderly, by addressing their most pressing needs: provision of information and direct support, access to medicines and medical consumables, emergency accommodation, multipurpose cash assistance, and Bulgarian language courses for adults (A1 and A2).



Number of persons assisted by mobile protection teams and field staff in Varna and Burgas in 2022 by gender



Number of persons consulted by mobile protection teams and field staff in Varna and Burgas in 2022 by type of assistance

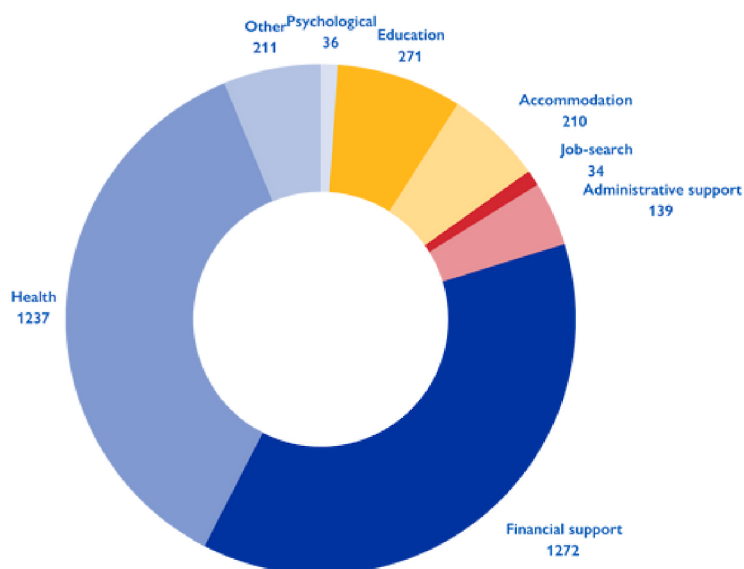




photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

In terms of emergency accommodation, IOM Bulgaria covered the individual short-term needs of 32 vulnerable Ukrainian refugees for a total of 165 nights. After discussions with several hotels accommodating vulnerable persons (elderly, people with chronic medical conditions, single mothers with children, etc.), IOM covered the accommodation for 304 persons (34 men, 171 women and 99 children) for the month of December (additional 9,424 nights).



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

538 Ukrainian refugees, predominantly elderly with serious chronic conditions (133 men and 405 women) received support with purchase of medicines, based on full medical documentation.

From September to December 2022, more than 1,400 Ukrainian children attending Bulgarian school or Ukrainian school online, received school materials. In December, more than 2,000 children participated in Christmas recreational and art activities, supported and organized by IOM field staff in Varna and Burgas regions.

367 adult students attended online Bulgarian language classes as part of IOM Bulgaria's integration activities.

1,389 persons received multi-purpose cash assistance based on vulnerability criteria, following needs assessments carried out by IOM's mobile protection teams and field staff in Varna and Burgas.



COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Combatting human trafficking remains one of IOM Bulgaria's priority fields of action. With its years-long expertise, IOM continued to support the Government of Bulgaria (GoB) and its main structure in the field - the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB), to address and tackle trafficking challenges nation-wide.

In 2022, IOM Bulgaria's counter-trafficking (CT) efforts were focused on the early identification and provision of assistance to VoTs, and, when possible, organizing their safe return and reintegration. Assistance included pre-departure and arrival support, flight escort, reintegration-related activities, and reintegration monitoring.

In terms of return assistance, 9 people received return support in 2022 compared to 16 in 2020 and 41 in 2021. In 2022, IOM continued to support open cases from previous years and completed 1 escort from a country of destination to Bulgaria, as well as 1 on-site monitoring visit to evaluate the reintegration process of beneficiaries who have returned from Sweden and received support from IOM.

47 Number of individuals who were provided with assistance (28 men, 19 women)

Countries of destination of returned individuals:



9 Number of individuals who received return support (4 men, 5 women)

8 Number of individuals who received reintegration support (4 men, 4 women)

Types of exploitation:



84 Number of VoTs supported by IOM Bulgaria between 2020 and 2022 of whom 66 received return support and 68 received reintegration support.

Countries of destination of assisted individuals:





photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

IOM's project "Awareness raising of local communities in areas with significant share of Roma population on asylum and migration issues" promotes informed decisions on migration, considered to be the main instrument to fight poverty in Roma neighborhoods. Information on risks related to human trafficking and irregular migration is scarce in these communities, which results in high vulnerability to human trafficking.

IOM strives to contribute to raising awareness and knowledge among the Roma population on regular mobility pathways, legal channels to migrate and seek asylum, and the risk of abuse and exploitation in Bulgaria, the EU and the European Economic Area.

In 2022 the project team conducted 53 information sessions with 1,527 participants on topics such as "Identification of victims of crime and human trafficking. Specifics of working in a Roma community" and "Raising awareness on issues related to work in Europe and the EEA, risks and protection from trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation, forced begging or sexual exploitation."



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria



INTEGRATION PROGRAM



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Bulgarian language courses

In 2022, IOM Bulgaria continued providing free Bulgarian language courses – A1 and A2 levels, as part of its active program for the early adaptation and integration of TCNs. Since the spring of 2020, the Bulgarian language courses are organized online through Zoom by trained professionals with considerable experience in providing language education online. The highly positive participant feedback received is indicative of the success of and need for this activity. 1,466 TCNs took part in the online language classes between 2019 and 2022.

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine and the significant refugee flow to Bulgaria, IOM focused its Bulgarian language integration measures on persons fleeing the war. Between February and December 2022, a total of 547 Ukrainian refugees successfully completed A1 and/or A2 level Bulgarian language courses and received certificates. According to the feedback received at the Integration Center for Migrants (ICM) in Sofia, the certificates provided to successful students were very well perceived by prospective employers. In 2023, it is expected that at least 450 additional Ukrainian refugees will receive the opportunity to attend free Bulgarian language courses, levels A1 and A2.

The ability to communicate and understand the language of the host country is very important for the early adaptation and integration of TCNs. The new language skill increases the possibilities of access to the labor market and reduces the risks of labor exploitation and abuse, as well as laying down a more sustainable path to settling down in the host country.



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Information and integration Events

In 2022 ICM Sofia organized a total of 11 information sessions for Ukrainian citizens in the capital and other big cities with the objective of providing up-to-date information on access to the labor market and Bulgarian labor legislation, access to health and inclusion in the National Medical Insurance Plan, paying taxes in Bulgaria, the different types of residence permits in Bulgaria, access to education, etc.

ICM Sofia started organizing information sessions for Ukrainians as early as April 2022, and was one of the first organizations providing support in the region of the Black Sea coast (Varna, Burgas, Pomorie, Sunny beach, etc.). During the period February – October 2022, 1,104 persons were reached through information sessions, individual and/or group consultations. Around 60% of them were Ukrainians.



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Several multicultural events were organized to facilitate the cultural inclusion of migrants, including a presentation of Afghan and Bulgarian cuisines, the first exhibition of the artworks of the talented migrant artist - Amira, a concert sung by migrant children, and others.



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

IOM joined MENAR film festival 2022

IOM Bulgaria participated as a partner in the annual edition of Sofia MENAR Film Festival with a total of five screenings of three films on the topic of migration - Aydinlar, Hamtramck - USA and Mercy. The movies were shown in several theatres and cultural centres in Sofia and Harmanli. During the opening event in Sofia, a student from New Bulgarian University presented the photo exhibit "The Faces of Diversity", prepared jointly with a Bulgarian journalist from the city of Harmanli. The exhibit focused on the stories of migrants now living in the area of Harmanli but who originate from Afghanistan, Chad, Finland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the UK and other countries.



photo: IOM Bulgaria



ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

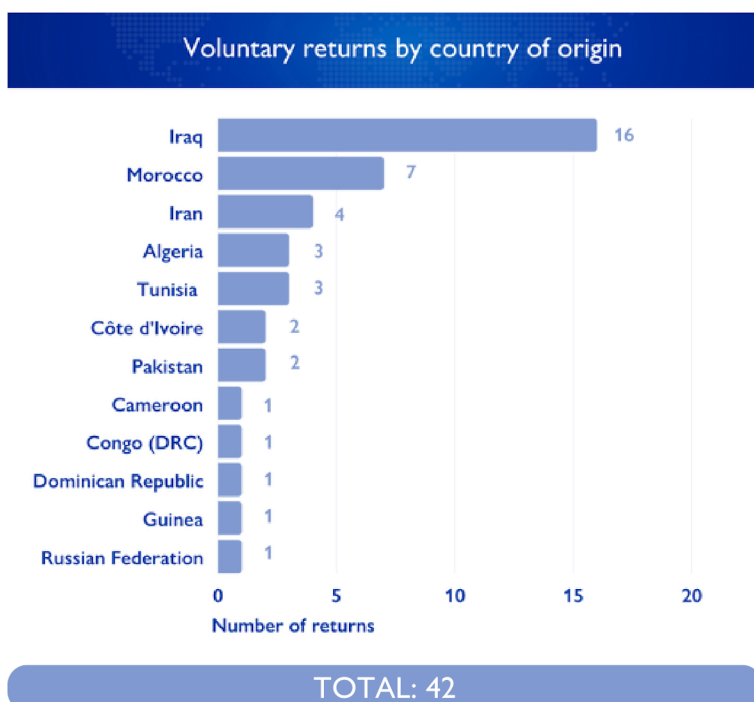


photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program also persevered through the challenges of the last several years. In 2022, the AVRR team managed to organize the voluntary return of 42 TCNs to their respective countries of origin.

The AVRR team provided support to TCNs through consultations and online meetings presenting the opportunities for voluntary return; organized the safe and dignified return of applicants to their countries of origin; arranged and covered the costs of medical examinations, including relevant testing required for travel; provided support with the acquisition of necessary travel documents; assisted during transit and landing; and provided reintegration support to eligible applicants in their countries of origin.

Additionally, in 2022, IOM Bulgaria granted and fulfilled 19 reintegration packages to TCNs who were assisted in returning to their countries of origin. The provided reintegration support was mostly related to home repairs and procurement of basic household appliances; agricultural development; cattle-breeding; trading; finding employment; opening small businesses such as barbershops; attending language courses and vocational training.





CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES



photo: IOM Bulgaria

Within the framework of its capacity building activities, IOM carried out 11 trainings in Sofia, Varna, Burgas, Haskovo and Harmanli, on topics such as “Conflict mediation and de-escalation of conflicts”, “Prevention of gender-based violence (GBV)”, “Working with unaccompanied children”, “Health and sexual education”, “Prevention of trafficking in human beings (THB)” and “Public speaking and media skills”. A total of 150 professionals from national institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) took part in the training sessions. With the objective of improving coordination between stakeholders working in the fields of asylum and migration management, six workshops were organized on the topics of combatting THB, promoting closer cooperation for the prevention of and response to GBV, sharing of experiences and good practices, etc. A total of 100 participants benefited from the workshops.

Furthermore, IOM carried out two training seminars on migration management for representatives from the Mol's Border Police General Directorate and Migration Directorate, the SAR and IOM for a total of 57 participants. A study visit to Mongolia was also organized, with the participation of the Mol's Border Police General Directorate, Migration Directorate and International Projects Directorate. The Bulgarian delegates had the chance to meet counterparts from the Mongolian Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to learn about the migration context in Mongolia, including the main challenges and success stories.

In November 2022, psychologists from IOM Bulgaria's mobile protection teams organized an online training on “Psychological First Aid” for international medical students, studying at the Medical University in Varna, who provide medical support to Ukrainian refugees in the Varna region on a voluntary basis.



HIGHLIGHTS



photo: Nikolay Kolev, IOM Bulgaria

Graffiti Festival Harmanli 2022

The sixth edition of IOM Bulgaria's Graffiti Festival was held from the 5th to the 7th of October. Students from the "Ivan Vazov" Primary School, as well as UAMs accommodated in RRC Harmanli took part in painting the wall of the center. The event took place in cooperation with Caritas Sofia.



photo: Nikolay Kolev, IOM Bulgaria



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Seminar on Hate Speech for journalists

In June, IOM Bulgaria, in partnership with the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria (AEJ-Bulgaria), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR Bulgaria) and Multi Kulti Collective (MKC), organized a seminar on "Migration and Refugees - Media Coverage and Prevention of Hate Speech".



photo: Dimitar Kutmanov, IOM Bulgaria

Round table "Social services and support for children asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection in Bulgaria"

In April, IOM Bulgaria together with UNHCR and UNICEF organized a round table in the city of Plovdiv to discuss the good practices and challenges relation to the accommodation in social services and provision of social support to children asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

IOM Bulgaria will continue providing support to migrants and refugees in 2023, with a focus on persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, UAMs in the two Safety Zones, VoTs, including Bulgarian citizens, and the needs of other migrants and TCNs arriving through Bulgaria's southern borders.

Within its programming, IOM Bulgaria will maintain a close working relationship with national and local authorities, supporting efforts to strengthen their capacity in the fields of asylum, migration management, and combatting THB, and promoting better coordination between state actors, CSOs and UN agencies for the benefit of migrant and host communities.

While drafting its country strategy 2022-2025, IOM Bulgaria paid particular attention to broader topics affecting migration such as demography, natural disasters, and integrated border management. In 2023, the Mission will be actively approaching various donors to ensure funding diversity and stronger program impact, and to provide knowledge, support and services to migrants, the Government and host community.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING SOUGHT BY IOM BULGARIA :

- Humanitarian border management - strengthening frontline reception capacity at the border to ensure humanitarian border and migration management, and responding to emergency needs of migrants while respecting national sovereignty.
- Protection assistance and direct emergency response at border areas - provision of tailor-made emergency support and protection assistance to migrants entering Bulgaria, starting from border areas. IOM has established mobile protection teams and rapid response units to address the needs of stranded migrants and needs funding to continue these activities.

MAIN FUNDING CHALLENGES:

Bulgarian state resources and EU funding for addressing rising migration trends are fully directed towards the most urgent needs of Ukrainian refugees and of UAMs in the Safety zones. This increases the odds that TCNs coming from the Middle East and Africa through Bulgaria's southern borders are at risk of being left behind.

Bulgarian authorities do not have sufficient funds to respond to the trifold increase in migratory flows from the Middle East and Africa, and address the needs of refugees from Ukraine at the same time.

The new national AMIF program, co-financed by the EU, is to start funding new projects by the end of 2023. However, its indicators and main areas of intervention were based on the local context at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021, and do not take into account the current migration situation and intense dynamics in number of entries that took place in late 2021 and 2022.

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