

2019: A YEAR IN REVIEW



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IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in the meeting of operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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Children posing as Superman in Harmanli Registration and Reception Centre
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Foreword

Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends!

Migration is one of the most significant phenomena of our time. Over 270 million persons are in the process of migrating and living outside of their country of origin in 2019, whereas in our increasingly interconnected world, many more millions are affected by migration through family and cultural ties and economic exchange. Migration is a strong factor in sustainable development - for migrants, their communities, and their countries of origin, transit, and destination.

If managed properly, migration brings undeniable benefits to all. Migrants are carriers of knowledge and skills and a factor for increased productivity of the labour market, stability, and prosperity. Migrants represent a relatively small percentage of the world's population; however, according to various studies, they produce more than 9 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) - significantly more than they would have produced had they remained in their countries of origin.

IOM staff works to support migrants who are transiting or residing in Bulgaria and those who are applying for international protection; assist those wishing to return to their country of origin; and assist Bulgarian citizens who find themselves trafficked and exploited to return home.

IOM Mission in Bulgaria invests efforts in increasing the migration management capacity of national institutions and non-governmental organizations by providing training as well as regular donations in the form of equipment and supplies. In 2019, IOM created two Safety Zones for the accommodation of unaccompanied children, providing sheltered environment, care, and daily activities.

IOM operates with due regard to not only migrants, but also Bulgarian society, while recognizing the need to maintain a balance between the principles of national sovereignty and security and the right of free movement of all people.

The way migrants travel, stay, and begin a new life with their host society is key not only to the success of their integration, but also to achieving greater social cohesion. Bringing together members of society and creating more people-to-people connectedness is also the 2019 theme for the International Migrants Day, December 18.

In light of increasingly divided societies and deepening social divisions, IOM believes that migration can be a driving force not only towards progress and economic development, but also towards greater social cohesion and cultural exchange.

I hope that as you become acquainted with our work in Bulgaria and the satisfaction it brings us, we will pass on our conviction to you!

Happy reading!

Radoslav Stamenkov
Head of Mission

IOM in brief

Founded in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration, dedicated to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits both people seeking a new beginning and host communities. IOM assists migrants and their host countries with facing the growing challenges linked to migration in order to increase the understanding of the issues connected to this process, encourage socioeconomic development through migration, and sustain the well-being and human rights of migrants.

Bulgaria became a Member State of IOM in 1999. IOM 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 (Moi) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the voluntary return and reintegration of third-country nationals. 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 Head office in Sofia, Information and Integration Centres for legally residing migrants in Bourgas and in Sofia (located in the Head office), as well as offices in the Special Home for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners with the Moi (SHTAF) in Busmantsi and Ovcha Kupel Registration Reception Centre (RRC) of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), and a Sub-office in Harmanli RRC. Until 2019, IOM operated a Canada Visa Centre within the premises of the Head office. As of mid-2019, IOM is running a Safety Zone for unaccompanied minors in Voenna Rampa RRC, the first of its kind in Bulgaria. A Safety Zone in Ovcha Kupel RRC is about to be opened in early 2020, again run by IOM Bulgaria.

The field of action of IOM Bulgaria is focused around several key areas: assisted voluntary return and reintegration of third-country nationals; counteracting trafficking in human beings; strengthening the national capacity in the field of migration; provision of support to applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection through mobile protection teams; integration activities; and operating a Canadian Visa Centre. IOM continued its activities in those areas in 2019. More information can be found in the following pages.

IOM offices

In 2019, IOM Sub-office in Harmanli RRC, as well as its offices in Ovcha Kupel RRC and Busmantsi SHTAF continued operating.

A legal counsellor offers support with regard to legal matters including consultations on Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) once a week in Ovcha Kupel RRC, and the rest of the weekdays in Busmantsi SHTAF.

In IOM Sub-office in Harmanli RRC, another legal counsellor provides legal assistance regarding international protection proceedings including information on voluntary return and reintegration opportunities. The same counsellor pays regular visits to Lyubimets SHTAF and Pastrogor Transit Centre (in Svilengrad and Haskovo Provinces), in order to provide support to third-country nationals accommodated there. She is supported by interpreters from relevant languages on site or by phone.



IOM Sub-office in Harmanli RRC
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Canada Visa Centre (CANVAC)

IOM Mission in Bulgaria managed the Canada Visa Centre (CANVAC) from 6 August 2013 until 29 November 2019. The Centre, located in the Head office of the Mission, used to receive applications from visa candidates (both Bulgarian and foreign citizens) for temporary visas and residence permits for Canada. In addition, IOM Bulgaria offered medical examinations for Bulgarian citizens departing for Canada. The latter assistance was available until the end of 2019.

In 2017, the new, lighter visa regime for Bulgarian citizens visiting Canada came into force. This change eliminated the need for Bulgarian citizens to apply for a Tourist Visa for short-term stay in Canada (the majority of applications received in Bulgaria), which was replaced by the eTA - Electronic Travel Authorization for citizens of visa-free countries arriving in Canada by air.

The Visa Centre in Sofia retained its functions even after the coming into force of the new visa regime for Bulgarian citizens. It was providing continued assistance to foreign citizens residing in Bulgaria in their application process for temporary visas and permits. It was also assisting with applications for eTAs and work and student permits for Bulgarian and foreign citizens, including the implementation of biometric protocols as per the requirements of the Canadian government.

The programme underwent a transitional closing phase in the period 2-29 November 2019. On 2 November 2019, the Canada Visa Centre ceased to offer services related to visa/permit applications for Canada. On 30 November 2019, the CANVAC closed indefinitely.

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration

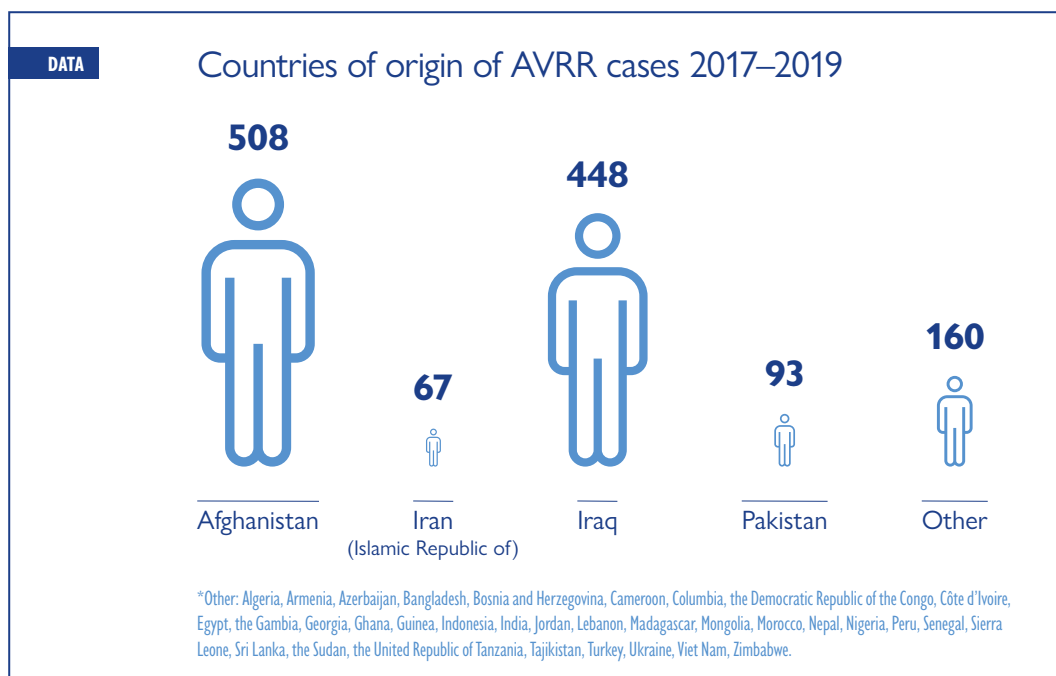
In 2019, IOM Bulgaria is completing its tenth year since it first started implementing Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) projects in 2009.

The purpose of such projects has been to provide extensive assistance and support to third-country nationals (TCNs) who wish to return to their country of origin. In addition, some applicants may qualify for reintegration assistance depending on their individual situation. IOM Bulgaria's AVRR team continues to offer services such as consultations on AVRR opportunities; arranging for the safe and dignified return of applicants in their respective country of origin; pre-departure medical assistance and/or medical examinations for vulnerable persons; support in obtaining necessary travel documents; assistance during transit and upon landing; and reintegration assistance to eligible applicants. Reintegration cases are subject to monitoring, and data point toward ca. 95 per cent successful reintegration among assisted beneficiaries. Most of the granted reintegration support involves plans of house renovation and supply with household appliances, agriculture, cattle-breeding, trading, opening of barbershops, committing to language courses and professional trainings, and so on. Some reintegration plans stand out, such as the Organic Horticulture and Solar Farming plan of a beneficiary from Zimbabwe.

In the past year, IOM Bulgaria AVRR projects have been funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and co-funded by the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior.

2017 - 2019:

- Number of TCNs who benefited from AVRR support: **1205**
- Number of reintegration packages: **200**



Taadad, a mother of two daughters from Iraq. She was granted reintegration support so that she could finish construction of their house.
Photo credit: IOM Iraq



Nyasha from Zimbabwe, who plans to make an Organic Horticulture and Solar Farm
Photo credit: IOM Zimbabwe



Round table hosted by the NCCTHB bringing together representatives of the Council of the Baltic Sea States
Photo credit: NCCTHB

Counter-trafficking in human beings

Combating human trafficking has been one of the main fields of action for IOM Bulgaria. For more than 15 years now, IOM has been a partner to the Bulgarian government and the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB). Currently, IOM Bulgaria's efforts are focused on the safe return and reintegration of victims of trafficking (VoTs), their protection, and prevention of trafficking. As IOM has organized information campaigns aimed at awareness-raising in the past years - the latest one being in 2018, last year emphasis was placed on assisting VoTs return home and reintegrate. Assistance included pre-departure and arrival support, flight escort, reintegration-related activities (for example, consultations, referrals to medical care, covering costs of medicines, hospital stay) and reintegration monitoring. Many received household equipment of first need, as well as renovation of their houses. We managed to buy 2 houses, agricultural equipment, infant care products, and other items as needed.

At the end of 2018, IOM Bulgaria successfully completed a 4-year project for support of VoTs funded by the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. A new project is being anticipated to further support IOM activities in the field.

2017 – 2019:

- Number of individuals who were provided with assistance: **241** (129 men, 112 women).
- Number of individuals who received return support: **118** (73 men, 45 women).
- Number of individuals who received reintegration support: **97** (42 men, 55 women).
- Types of exploitation: begging (**104**), sexual (**61**), labour (**29**), child (**10**), medical (**1**).
- Countries of destination of assisted individuals: Sweden (**101**), France (**40**), the Netherlands (**16**), Germany (**15**), the United Kingdom (**9**), Spain (**7**), Cyprus (**7**), Switzerland (**6**), Poland (**5**), Belgium (**4**), Italy (**4**), Austria (**3**), Czechia (**2**), Hungary (**2**), as well as single cases from Ireland, Norway, Slovenia, Greece, Peru, Cambodia, Burkina Faso, Viet Nam and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
- **1** round table hosted by NCCTHB bringing together representatives of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Total number of participants: **23**.
- **1** monitoring visit under an AVRR project funded by Sweden, following up on the reintegration of **12** beneficiaries who had returned with IOM assistance (5-6 June 2019).

Protection programme

IOM Bulgaria is close to reaching its third year since the launch of its protection programme via mobile protection teams. As this format for providing assistance and support to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection has proven successful, the mobile teams continue their work funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union (AMIF) and the Government of Bulgaria. Until now, it has been 2 legal counsellors, 3 social workers, 3 psychologists, and a cultural mediator who provide a number of services: consultations and information sessions, vulnerability assessments, assistance in accessing various services, and referral to partner organizations, among others. They engage in the distribution of seasonal clothing, hygiene items, and donations by third parties. The teams visit all Registration and Reception Centres (RRCs) of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), namely SAR's RRCs in Sofia, Harmanli, and Banya village (Sliven Province), as well as the Transit Centre in Pastrogor when the need arises as well as upon request. They also pay visits to the Special Homes for the Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (SHTAFs) in Busmantsi and Lyubimets.

Apart from the legal counsellors in the mobile teams and IOM offices, there are 2 other legal counsellors who are based in the Head office and visit SHTAFs and RRCs according to a schedule and upon request.

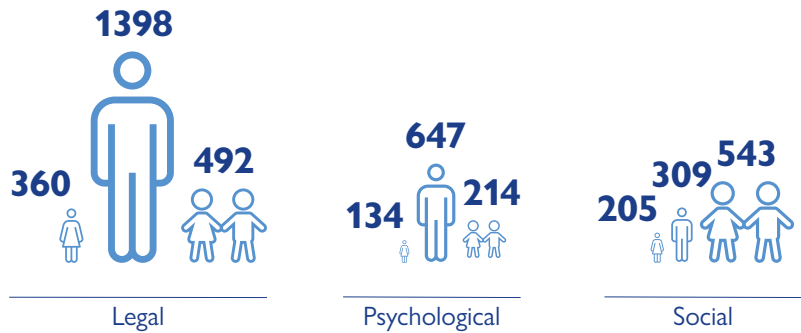
Invaluable support is provided by a pool of interpreters from Farsi/Dari, Pashto, Arabic, Kurdish, Urdu, Panjabi, and other languages. IOM Bulgaria presents its pool of interpreters at the disposal of partner government institutions such as the Migration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, and Mother and Baby Units with the Agency for Social Assistance, among others.

Up to November 2019, the mobile teams, including the legal counsellors in Head office, Busmantsi SHTAF and Ovcha Kupel RRC offices, and Harmanli RRC Sub-office, have provided **4302** individual consultations to migrants and asylum seekers, including **2704** primary consultations and **1598** follow-ups in SAR RRCs and SHTAFs. Despite the drop in numbers of asylum seekers in Bulgaria, similar to the European Union as a whole, the amount of primary consultations outpaces the corresponding amounts of follow-ups, because Bulgaria continues to be perceived as a transit country by asylum seekers first registered here.

- **2250** individual legal consultations: providing information on rights and obligations, legal procedures, assistance with paperwork and general administrative support (**512** consultations by the mobile team counsellors, of which 269 primary and 243 follow-ups; **275** consultations by the legal counsellors based in the Head office; **434** consultations by the counsellor in Busmantsi SHTAF and Ovcha Kupel RRC; and **1029** consultations by the counsellor in Harmanli, of which 517 primary and 512 follow-ups);
- **995** individual psychological consultations (768 primary consultations and 227 follow-ups): mental health support, specialized individual discussions with unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and other vulnerable persons;

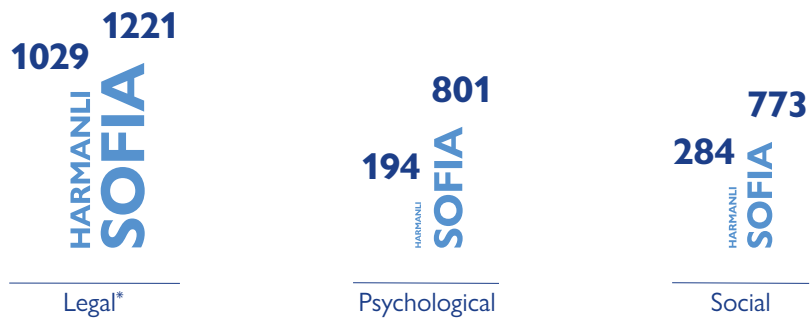
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Consultations per gender



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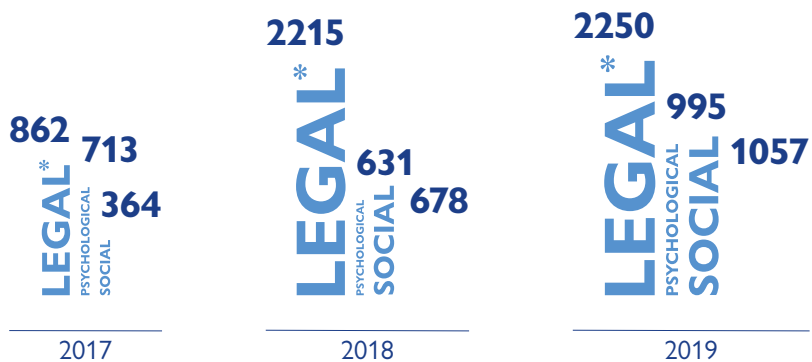
Consultations by location



* All legal consultations in Harmanli were carried out by the legal counsellor based in IOM Sub-office.

DATA

Consultations 2017–2019



* Numbers for 2017 include consultations provided by all legal counsellors working with IOM Bulgaria (mobile teams, Head office, Busmantsi SHTAF/Ovcha Kupel RRC, and Harmanli RRC) as of April 2017.

IOM cultural mediator speaking with unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria



Awareness-raising campaign on counter-trafficking in human beings
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

- **1057** individual social consultations (441 primary consultations and 616 follow-ups): assisting in the enrollment with a family doctor/GP, accompanying to medical and other appointments, hospitalizations, purchase of medicines and other items of need to vulnerable persons, support with observing long-term medical treatments, among others.

The mobile teams presented the following **50 information sessions** before ca. **320 beneficiaries**:

- 18 sessions introducing the services provided by IOM Bulgaria;
- 17 sessions on the topic of “Asylum seekers: procedures, rights and obligations” presented to unaccompanied and separated minors and adults;
- 11 sessions on the topic of “Myths and realities when seeking asylum in Europe” presented to unaccompanied and separated minors and newly arrived adults;
- 3 sessions on the psychological attitudes in the context of border crossing;
- 3 sessions on Bulgarian culture;
- 1 session on the topic of “Good hygiene practices”.

The mobile teams also organized **15 workshops for women and children**, including doll- and mask-making workshops, cooking workshops, a drawing/painting workshop together with National Academy of Art students, and a diary-making. Sewing workshops brought out quite some craftsmanship from participants who presented their handmade Christmas decorations at a traditional Christmas Bazaar in Sofia.

In addition, a **theatrical performance** based on a popular Kurdish tale, was given by women seeking asylum accommodated in Ovcha Kupel RRC with the support of the mobile teams and a film director/psychologist.

IOM Bulgaria **supported partner organizations** in the preparation of cooking and festive gatherings in Sofia and Harmanli.

Demand for specific items such as a bicycle, a TV, baby carriages/strollers, and a sewing machine, led IOM Bulgaria to organize **calls for donations**. All of them were successful.

Girl posing with the doll she made at an art workshop organized by IOM mobile teams
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria



Drawing workshop with children accommodated in a SAR RRC and students from the National Academy of Art
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Integration programme

IOM Bulgaria continues implementing an Integration Programme through its Information and Integration Centres for Migrants in Sofia and Bourgas. The past year marked the launch of **language courses** for TCNs lawfully residing in the country, including applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. The free-of-charge courses teach Bulgarian at A1 and A2 levels. So far, **98 persons** have successfully completed the courses and received their language certificates, and 24 are on their way to do the same. Participating migrants come from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Belarus, Armenia, China, the United States of America, Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, and Israel, among others. The courses were financed by the National Programme of Bulgaria under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020, and co-financed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior.

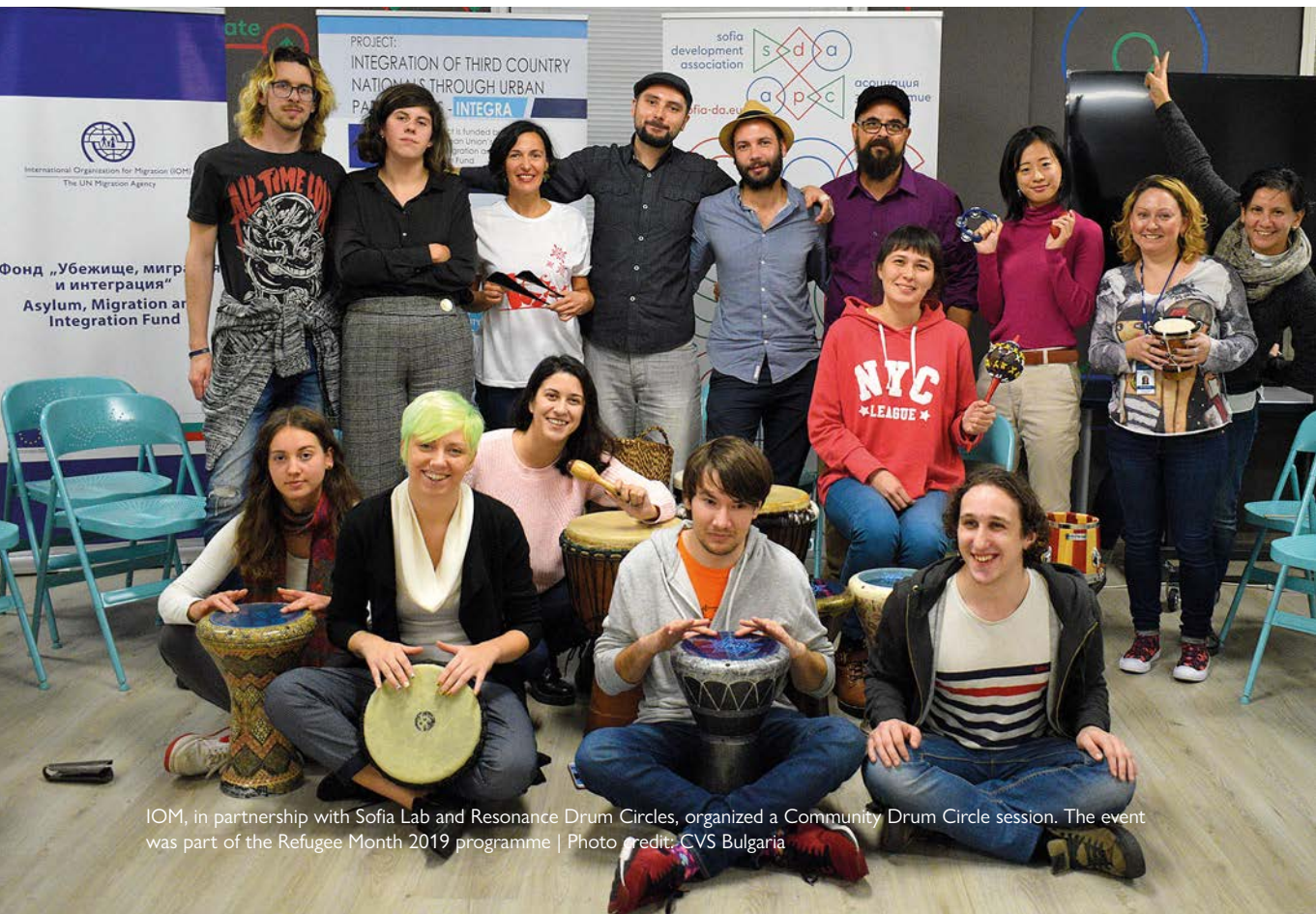
In 2019, the Information and Integration Centre in Bourgas provided **77 individual consultations** to lawfully residing in Bulgaria nationals of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, among others. The Centre also organized the following **activities**:

- 1 information session on the topics of “Entry and residence in Bulgaria: Risks of irregular migration” and “Access to the labour market by migrants who are lawfully residing in Bulgaria”;
- 1 group visit to a job market in the field of tourism where migrants spoke to potential employers;
- 2 information sessions on the history, culture and geography of Bulgaria;
- 1 group visit to the “Ancient Nessebar” Archaeological Museum;
- 1 meeting among students and teachers of the Roman Languages High School and migrant students from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, on the International Day for Tolerance;
- Meetings with experts from the Centre for Personal Development Support at the beginning of the new academic year with a view to familiarize migrant parents with free-of-charge class on topics of interest to children such as languages, photography, sports, singing, folk dance, IT, career orientation and counselling.

In 2019, IOM Bulgaria, through our partners from Concordia Bulgaria Foundation, continued providing **career counselling** to beneficiaries, as well as assistance in searching and applying for employment vacancies.

In partnership with Storycatchers Association, the **drum circle** sessions have now been renewed. In November 2019, by means of a Drum Circle event, IOM Bulgaria took part in the Refugee Month 2019 initiative which unifies efforts by organizations on the field to shed light on the culture of refugees and migrants in Bulgaria.

IOM organized Bulgarian language courses for lawfully residing third-country nationals
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria



IOM, in partnership with Sofia Lab and Resonance Drum Circles, organized a Community Drum Circle session. The event was part of the Refugee Month 2019 programme | Photo credit: CVS Bulgaria

Capacity-building activities

IOM continues to actively support the institutional capacity-building of the Republic of Bulgaria. IOM Bulgaria organizes training sessions, workshops, round tables, and seminars on relevant topics in the field of migration alongside with and among government institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other key stakeholders in the field.

In 2019, IOM Bulgaria organized the following capacity-building events for government institutions and NGOs:

Work meeting on progress of emergency measures projects

In the period of 16-18 April 2019 IOM Bulgaria organized a Strategic Stakeholders' meeting within the framework of the "Strengthening of the national capacity of the Republic of Bulgaria in the fields of asylum and migration" project funded by the Emergency Assistance (EMAS) under the European Union's AMIF.

The meeting was attended by representatives of SAR, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the World Health Organization, the Agency for Social Assistance, the State Agency for Child Protection, and the Public Prosecutor's Office. The meeting had for an aim to discuss the activities and the results achieved within the framework of the EMAS projects implemented by IOM Bulgaria, as well as providing a forum for the representatives of the said institutions to share experiences and best practices.



Work meeting on the progress of EMAS0044 and EMAS0050 projects
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Migration health

On 14 and 15 March 2019, IOM organized a roll-out workshop on Migration Health for health professionals, law enforcement officers, and social workers working at the local level with migrants and refugees. A total of 22 representatives of SAR, Mol's Migration Directorate, Mol's Border Police General Directorate, the Agency for Social Assistance, the State Agency for Child Protection, and Mol's Medical Institute participated.

The training was organized as part of TRAIN4M&H project funded by the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety of the European Commission.

Training on interpretation and intercultural mediation

IOM Bulgaria organized two training seminars for interpreters and cultural mediators in Sofia and Haskovo in early April 2019. Guest speakers from Belgium and Greece - Mr. Hans Verrept and Mrs. Katerina Noumta - shared experience and led lively discussions with the participants. The training was aimed at presenting interpretation rules and techniques, intercultural norms and peculiarities, which are key to an open communication, guides for interpreters, as well as the applicable code of ethics.

The event was organized with financial support from the National Programme of Bulgaria under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020.



Roll-out workshop on Migration Health
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Training on representation of and work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors

Between 10 and 11 June 2019, IOM Bulgaria, together with UNICEF and UNHCR, organized two training seminars in Sofia and Plovdiv on legal representation and working with UAMs. Trainers presented migration situation in Bulgaria and in Europe and the route of unaccompanied children, legal framework for international protection in Bulgaria, social and cultural paradigms in the countries of origin. Identification of psychological trauma, specific risks of violence and trafficking in human being, as well as possible durable solutions, were additional topics addressed during the seminars.

The training was practice-oriented and participants were offered the opportunity to discuss case studies and share challenges based on their experience as legal representatives of UAMs, social workers, interviewers, and so on.

The event was organized with financial support from the National Programme of Bulgaria under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020.

Re-Health² project

Between 10 December 2018 and 30 January 2019 IOM Bulgaria facilitated Ovcha Kupel RRC's Medical Officer to carry out medical consultations and discuss medical



Trainings on representation of and work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

history with 42 beneficiaries from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, the Russian Federation and Ghana. An electronic Personal health record (e-PHR) was generated for each beneficiary, incorporating the information available on their medical history.

On 31 January 2019, the concluding conference of the Re-Health 2 project pilot phase was held in Athens. IOM invited and supported the travel and participation of two SAR staff members, including the Medical Officer of Ovcha Kupel RRC. Presented were, among others, the outcomes and methodology followed regarding the implementation of the e-PHR as a tool of integration of migrants in European Union Member States' health systems.

Overall the project was well-accepted and had an added value of raising awareness of the importance of keeping a medical record; enhancing knowledge among stakeholders about refugees' and migrants' health needs; ensuring that migrant health assessment records are available at transit and destination countries; and strengthening national and cross-border disease surveillance and response capacities.

National stakeholders' meeting - PROTECT project

In March 2019, IOM organized a national stakeholders' meeting in the framework of the "PROTECT: Preventing SGBV against migrants and strengthening support to victims" regional project funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020 of the European Union. The meeting was attended by representatives



Concluding conference of the Re-Health 2 project's pilot phase
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

of SAR, the Agency for Social Assistance, the National Agency for Child Protection, Mol's Migration Directorate, UNICEF, UNHCR, as well as colleagues from the NGO sector working directly with migrants and refugees.

At the meeting were identified the results achieved in the field of prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) until now, remaining gaps, and possibilities for further cooperation among stakeholders towards improving existing referral and response mechanisms. Overall within the project, information materials (brochures, posters and a video) were produced with the aim to familiarize asylum seekers accommodated in SAR RRCs on the topic of GBV.

Round table - Stara Zagora

In October 2019, IOM Bulgaria, in cooperation with UNICEF, organized a round table on the topic of accommodation and provision of support to migrant and refugee women and children in social services in Bulgaria. Among the participants were staff from Mother and Baby Units and Complexes for social services for children and families under the auspices of the Agency for Social Assistance, staff from the Agency itself, Child Protection Departments, the State Agency for Child Protection, SAR, the Ministry of Education, municipalities, the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Red Cross. The objectives of the event were the exchange of information and good practices among the participants regarding the



National stakeholders' meeting in the framework of the "PROTECT: Preventing SGBV against migrants and strengthening support to victims" regional project | Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

accommodation and provision of support to women and children migrants and refugees during their stay in social services in Bulgaria, presenting international and European standards on the topic. Participants discussed and formed recommendations for the improvement of the latter services in Bulgaria.

The event was organized with the financial support of the National Programme of Bulgaria under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020.

Global Municipal Forum 2019

IOM Bulgaria identified and invited participants from Bulgarian local authorities to take part in the 2019 edition of the International Forum on Local Solutions to Migration and Displacement. The Forum took place in Gaziantep, Turkey on 26-27 November 2019 under the slogan “From emergency to resilience and development”.

The Mayor of Sofia’s Vitosha district, Mr. Teodor Petkov, and the Head of the Sports, Culture and Education Department at Vitosha Municipality, Mrs. Milena Madzhirska, took part in the event.

The event focuses on the exchange of experience and good practices in the context of migration among Turkish and other municipalities from all over the world, with participants from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Australia.



Round table on the topic of accommodation and provision of support to migrant and refugee women and children in social services in Bulgaria | Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Highlights

Safety zones for unaccompanied minors in Voenna Rampa and Ovcha Kupel RRCs

In July 2019, for the first time in Bulgaria, a Safety Zone for the accommodation of UAMs seeking asylum became fully operational. It is located on the second, third, and fourth floors of Voenna Rampa RRC's Block B. IOM renovated all three floors, including rooms, corridors, common toilets, and showers: furnished and conforming to everyday needs of UAMs in the Zone.

IOM Bulgaria recruited 10 social workers who, under the supervision of the Safety Zone Coordinator, provide 24-hour, 7-days-per-week care and support to the UAMs accommodated in the Zone, in coordination with the SAR. They are supported by mobile team staff, a cultural mediator, and interpreters from Pashto and Farsi/Dari. They work in day, night, and weekend shifts. All of them received pre-deployment training. The services of a security team were contracted to ensure the safety of UAMs and staff, respond to incidents, and monitor video surveillance.

The Zone's capacity stands at 100 minors, and it currently accommodates minors from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Pakistan.

The Safety Zone's social workers, alongside the mobile teams and cultural mediator, organize various group activities in the RRC (volleyball, football, cricket, morning exercises, guitar lessons, art workshops) to keep minors engaged. In addition,



Bedroom in the Safety Zone for UAMs in Voenna Rampa RRC | Photo credit: Nikolay Doychinov



Bathroom in the Safety Zone for UAMs in Voenna Rampa RRC | Photo credit: Nikolay Doychinov

staff and minors gather on a weekly basis at Community meetings to discuss current issues and provide a forum for giving a voice to the accommodated teenagers. In September, 12 boys accommodated in the Safety Zone took part in the “Let’s Clean Bulgaria Together” national campaign.

IOM Bulgaria is due to open a second Safety Zone, this time in Ovcha Kupel RRC. By the end of September 2019, renovation works of the fourth floor of the RRC were completed: corridors, common rooms, bed- and bathrooms. The Zone is bound to become operational as soon as January 2020. It is to accommodate minors from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, with a capacity of 138 UAMs.

Donation of passenger vans and ambulances to the Ministry of Interior

IOM Bulgaria donated to the Ministry of Interior (Mol) nine 5-seat Volkswagen Transporter **vans**, four 23-seat Iveco **buses**, and two Volkswagen Crafter **ambulances**. The vans and buses were handed over to the Migration Directorate, and the ambulances - to the Ministry’s Medical Institute. The donation forms part of the operational support of IOM Bulgaria to Mol.

The purchase of vehicles was funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Commission, as part of the Emergency Measures to Bulgaria for improved management of the migration flow.



Ambulances' interior
Photo credit: Nikolay Doychinov



IOM donated two ambulances to the Mol
Photo credit: Nikolay Doychinov

Harmanli Graffiti Festival 2019

For a third year in a row, IOM Bulgaria organized Harmanli Graffiti Festival between 2 and 4 October 2019 in partnership with Harmanli Municipality and SAR. A total of **26 panels** of the external side of Harmanli RRC's wall were painted by **7 graffiti artists**, who gathered from all corners of Bulgaria.

The graffiti added a pinch of colour to the wall thus transforming the RRC into a more welcoming place. The graffiti artworks aim to bring together the migrants accommodated in the RRC and the local community, calling for open-mindedness, acceptance, respect, and regard for diversity.

Further to their participation in 2018, **enthused students** from two local high schools also took part in the Festival by painting on 6 panels.

On the other side of the wall, activities were organized for children accommodated in the Centre. Most notably, children selected cartoon and real-life characters to be painted, with an artist helping them to sketch the characters together first.

Global Migration Film Festival 2019

From 28 November until 18 December 2019, IOM Bulgaria participated for a third consecutive year in IOM worldwide initiative: Global Migration Film Festival. IOM



Bulgaria showed **7 full-length features** and **5 short films** in Sofia, Varna, Blagoevgrad, Stara Zagora, and Pleven. We were partnering with state and private universities and NGOs in relation to the organization of this edition of the Festival.

Sports events

For a third consecutive year, IOM Bulgaria organized, with the support of SAR and Harmanli Municipality, a **football tournament** for children and adults in Harmanli on 17 and 18 April 2019. Children aged 10-15 years from Harmanli RRC and students from local high schools (from the cities of Harmanli and Lyubimets) formed 6 football teams.

Adults formed 4 football teams: 2 teams from Harmanli RRC, the Hebar 1921 team (Harmanli), and a team formed by IOM, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, and Bulgarian Red Cross staff members.

In addition, IOM Bulgaria organized a 3-day **cricket event** in November 2019 at the Lokomotiv Stadium in Sofia, in partnership with the National Sports Academy (NSA). The aim was to popularize this uncommon for Bulgaria sport by teaching over 170 participants between 10 and 16 years of age techniques of throwing and batting. Students from 15th Adam Mitskevich High School as well as UAMs accommodated in Voenna Rampa RRC participated.



Cricket event for school students
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria



Football tournament for children and adults in Harmanli
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Information sessions on the cultures of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Iraq to school students

In 2019, IOM Bulgaria continued to organize and give presentations to school students on the cultures of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Adding Iraq and the Kurdish culture to the portfolio of topics, IOM experts gave a total of **11 presentations** to students of different ages at **4 schools** in Sofia.

The purpose of the initiative is to familiarize students with the cultures of those countries, and to encourage youngsters to question stereotypes about migrants and their countries of origin.

Refurbishing projects

In 2019, the mobile teams successfully completed refurbishing projects in Harmanli and Sofia.

In Harmanli RRC, the **children activities room** in the Hall 11 building was entirely refurbished after an illustrator covered the walls in fairy tale paintings, adding coziness to the room and making it more child-friendly.

In Voenna Rampa RRC in Sofia, together with some of the teenagers accommodated in the RRC the mobile teams transformed part of the common areas into a **relax zone**.





Some of the common areas in Voenna Rampa RRC were turned into a relax zone
Photo credit: IOM Bulgaria

Conclusion

IOM Bulgaria is continuing its activities, implementing more than 10 projects in the fields of assisted voluntary return, counter-trafficking of human beings, migrant protection and integration, as well as capacity-building, among others. It will supplement its portfolio by running the new Safety Zone for unaccompanied minors in Ovcha Kupel RRC which is due to be opened in January 2020, in parallel with the already functioning Safety Zone in Voenna Rampa RRC.

Apart from the events which are becoming a tradition for IOM Bulgaria such as the Global Migration Film Festival, a number of multicultural events, trainings, and activities are to take place in 2020.

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Drum circle session with UAMs
Photo credit: CVS Bulgaria

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