

# 2020: 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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Front cover photo: IOM Officer and an adolescent from the Safety Zone greet each other.

© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV

Back cover photo: IOM staff facing a graffiti artwork created as part of the celebration of Refugee Day 2020 organized by IOM in Harmanli RRC.

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# 2020: A YEAR IN REVIEW







# Foreword

## Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends!

Migration is the megatrend of our times. It is the oldest known means to fight poverty. Global migration routes are interdependent on the economic, social, political and technological transformations the world currently undergoes.

In 2020, COVID-19 pandemic was the main factor for insecurity, anxiety and fear all over the world. It is not surprising that the most vulnerable are those most affected by crises. Regardless of pandemic, migrants face many difficulties in pre-departure, on the route and in destination countries. Presently the virus and quickly imposed border restrictions, cancelled flights and lockdown of economic and social life hindered millions of people to go back to their countries of origin. Others lost their job, were left with no livelihoods, no health insurance and found themselves separated from their loved ones.

COVID-19 tested our ability to face crises as a community, to take care for one another and unite efforts for a better life for all of us and so that we all be safe. Pandemic reminded us how dependent we are on each other and that the most important is the humane attitude and the mutual support.

International Organization for Migration changed its way of work in accordance with limitations during the period of emergency. Yet it stayed close to migrants and people in need. Our team made sure that each and every person who had sought our help received support, cooperation and essential items to make life easier during this tough year. More important than donations, counselling, trainings and information events – our team offered hope, courage and did its best to preserve the habitual daily routine of migrants.

In the next pages you will read stories of hardship and surviving. Pictures will show you how COVID-19 impacted not only our economies but also the tiniest aspects of our everyday lives. We keep distance from one another, wear masks and limit our social contacts. Yet the pandemic gave us a chance to get closer.

In times of crises we can show who we are, what our values are and how we stand by them united. We believe that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Decisions we make today and how we act today will impact the future of humanity and human mobility tomorrow.

I wish you a healthy, calm and successful 2021 year!

Enjoy reading!

**Radoslav Stamenkov**  
*Head of Office*

## 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.

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. 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 in Busmantsi (SHTAF) and Ovcha Kupel Registration Reception Centre (RRC), and a sub-office in Harmanli RRC. In mid-2019, IOM set up and began running a Safety Zone for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Voenna Rampa RRC in Sofia, the first of its kind in Bulgaria. In the beginning of 2020, a second Safety

Activities in Ovcha Kupel Safety Zone  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV







Zone – this time in Ovcha Kupel RRC in Sofia – opened its doors and to the present day is being run by IOM Bulgaria, in close coordination and partnership with the State Agency for Refugees (SAR).

The activities carried out by IOM Bulgaria spread over several key areas: assisted voluntary return and reintegration; counter-trafficking in human beings; strengthening the national capacity of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of migration; provision of support to applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection; and integration of legally residing migrants in Bulgaria.

Despite a tumultuous 2020 and the numerous challenges it posed, IOM managed to keep implementing its programme activities. In the following pages, you will find an account of our accomplishments during the past arduous for all year.



## IOM Bulgaria in 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis. The pandemic is borderless: people are affected regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, religion or status. And yet, the pandemic is having an unprecedented and devastating impact on migration, human mobility, and displacement, both in terms of regimes for border and migration management, and the situation of all people on the move.

As an immediate impact, travel restrictions and border closures have left thousands of migrants stranded around the world, from labourers to international students, in need of assistance and in often precarious situations.

The pandemic has further brought to the fore existing inequalities and made rights violations more visible. Migrants, including displaced persons, often fall outside of social safety nets and lack access to basic services.

Regretfully, Bulgaria has not been left aside by the pandemic. IOM office activated its business continuation plan and switched to remote working conditions as of 13 March 2020. Yet the staff kept supporting migrants, asylum seekers and victims of trafficking who turned to us in need of support.



Donation at Voenna Rampa RRC.  
© IOM 2020

In an extraordinary 2020 year like, IOM retained operation of its Head office in Sofia, its sub-office in Harmanli RRC, and its Office in Busmantsi SHTAF, although not uninterrupted. In contrast, notwithstanding practical difficulties, IOM kept running both Safety Zones for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) without interruption.

IOM Bulgaria's staff stood by the beneficiaries and provided first line support, donations in food packages, non-food items, clothing and shoes, as well as information sessions and consultations.

During the initial lockdown period and later on, IOM counsellors – psychologists, legal counsellors, and social workers – offered and provided online consultations via several widely used social media and communication platforms, as well as on the phone.

The Mission provided all its staff with personal protective equipment and adapted its office premises with safe working conditions.

Despite the COVID-19 restrictions on airplane flights and movements, AVRRC and counter-trafficking teams of the organization managed to carry out tens of voluntary returns to the country of origin of migrants, as well as escorts to Bulgaria of victim of trafficking (VoT) and reintegration services.

Apart from posing challenges in everyday lives of all, the pandemic also made us rethink our priorities. We became more creative in reaching out to beneficiaries and relying more on Internet and online communications for daily tasks, counselling of migrants, Bulgarian language teaching classes, capacity-building events and information sessions.

Above all, the pandemic taught us that sometimes challenges could promote strength.





# Protection programme

## Opening of second Safety zone in Bulgaria

In the beginning of 2020, IOM celebrated the opening of the second Safety Zone for unaccompanied migrant children in Bulgaria. It is located within the premises of Ovcha Kupel RRC in Sofia. It employs 9 social workers (including native speakers of rare languages) who communicate directly with the children and organize various activities. They Safety Zone staff closely cooperate with their fellow social workers, legal counsellors and psychologists of the mobile protection teams, as well as with interpreters and 1 cultural mediator. More details are to be found in *IOM's Safety Zones booklet*.

## Mobile protection teams

In 2020, IOM continued to implement its Protection programme for a fourth year in a row by means of mobile teams working on the field. The mobile teams did scheduled visits of SAR centres and special homes for temporary accommodation of foreigners of the Migration Directorate, which host persons seeking or granted international protection. In addition, the teams responded to requests for consulting beneficiaries accommodated at a private address. IOM's Protection programme will carry on in 2021 with the financial support of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union (AMIF) and the Bulgarian Government.

During the past year, the mobile protection teams included 2 legal experts, 3 psychologists, and 3 social workers, as well as a cultural mediator. The teams provided support and planned activities in vigorous defiance of 2020:

- Consultations and information sessions relating to the beneficiaries' legal status, rights and obligations;
- Assistance in accessing public and health services;
- Psychological support during the months of lockdown as the cases of built-up anger and frustration soared partly as a result of quarantine periods of migrants entering Bulgaria;
- Distribution of food packages and hygiene items including health protection goods in Sofia, Harmanli, Svilengrad, Pomoshtnik village (between Stara Zagora and Harmanli);
- Continuous support and assistance to the unaccompanied minors accommodated in the Safety Zones in Voenna Rampa RRC and Ovcha Kupel RRC;
- Distribution of private donations of clothes and Christmas gifts for children in coordination with partner organizations;
- Information sessions on the cultures of the Syrian Arab Republic, The Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan, and the Kurdish people to pupils in 4 schools in Sofia.

Next to the legal experts in the mobile teams, IOM's Harmanli RRC and Busmantsi



Group activities in the Safety Zone in Ovcha Kupel RRC.  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV



Food donation during the COVID-19 lockdown  
in Svilengrad, Bulgaria.  
© IOM 2020



SHTAF offices, 2 other legal counsellors provide consultation on site as necessary.

IOM was reliant on the vital support provided by a pool of interpreters from Farsi/ Dari, Pashto, Arabic, Kurdish, Urdu, Armenian, Russian, and Turkish.

In 2020, IOM provided a total of **2,552 consultations**.

- **1,304** legal consultations: providing information on rights and obligations, legal procedures, assistance with paperwork and general administrative support.
- **597** psychological consultations: mental health support, specialized individual discussions with unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable persons;
- **683** social consultations: 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.

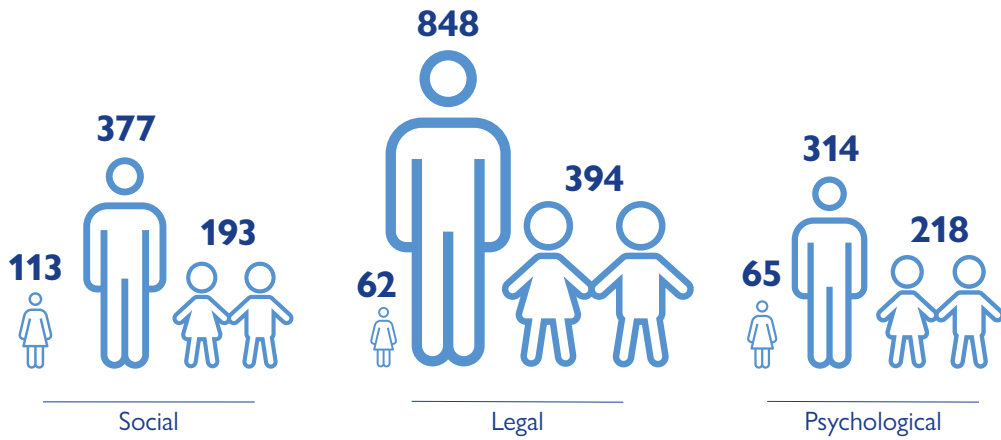


Clothes and non-food items donation in Harmanli RRC.  
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DATA

Consultations in 2020 by gender and type



DATA

Consultations by type and year



\* The number of legal consultations includes consultations provided by all legal counsellors working with IOM Bulgaria (mobile teams, Head office, Busmantsi SHTAF, Ovcha Kupel RRC, and Harmanli RRC).

## Combating trafficking in human beings

Combating human trafficking has been one of the main fields of action for IOM Bulgaria. For more than 16 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 VoTs, their protection, and prevention of repeated trafficking. 2020 marks the 20th Anniversary since the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The anniversary renews the efforts of the international community to eradicate such a crime without borders.

Apart from the habitual challenges to counter-trafficking in persons, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought severe restrictions to mobility, impacted livelihoods and limited access to vulnerable people. With its devastating impact on the household security and health of people all over the world, the pandemic inevitably further exposed vulnerabilities and increased the risk of exploitation. So the emphasis in 2020's efforts in counter-trafficking of IOM Bulgaria was placed on assisting VoTs

Monitoring visit on reintegration of victims of trafficking.  
© IOM 2020



return home and reintegration. Assistance included pre-departure and arrival support, flight escort, reintegration-related activities and reintegration monitoring.

Beneficiaries are also assisted with referrals to medical care: IOM covers the costs of health insurance fees, medicines, hospital/hospice stay, among other. Beneficiaries are also advised in searching employment and finding the most sustainable ways of reintegrating in Bulgaria. IOM provides household appliances, as well as renovation of houses, as necessary. Our team has purchased professional tools and working equipment, agricultural equipment, infant care items, and various first need items.

In 2020, IOM completed several escorts from the relevant country of destination to Bulgaria and performed 3 on-site monitoring visits to evaluate the reintegration process of assisted individuals who have returned from Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland.

The video clip on counter-trafficking produced on the initiative of IOM Bulgaria was part of the information materials on the occasion of the EU Anti-Trafficking Day



Escort of a victim of trafficking.  
© IOM 2020



observed on 18 October annually.

**2020:**

- Number of individuals who were provided with assistance: **37 (18 men, 19 women)**.
- Number of individuals who received return support: **15 (7 men, 8 women)**.
- Number of individuals who received reintegration support: **10 (4 men, 6 women)**.
- Number of individuals who received flight escorts: **8 (4 men, 4 women)**.
- Types of exploitation: begging (**6**), sexual (**14**), labor (**17**).
- Countries of destination of assisted individuals: Sweden (**14**), Norway (**6**), the Netherlands (**5**), Switzerland (**4**), Belgium (**2**), Germany (**2**), Poland (**2**), Slovenia (**1**) and Spain (**1**).

In the period from 2017 to 2020, IOM Bulgaria has supported 278 victims of trafficking, of whom 133 received return support and 107 people got reintegration support.



Survivors of trafficking in human beings share their stories in a short movie of IOM Bulgaria.  
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## Integration programme

2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic posed a series of challenges concerning the implementation of the activities under IOM's Integration programme.

### Bulgarian language lessons

The lessons in Bulgarian language aroused great interest among migrants and continued to be implemented although in a new format. Immediately following the imposition of a state of emergency in the country in mid-March 2020, IOM carried the traditional face-to-face teaching process over to a popular digital communication platform. This way of teaching of legally residing migrants proved to be appropriate and successful as the lessons became available to many migrants residing outside of Sofia and Bourgas where in-person teaching used to take place. IOM Bulgaria and the experts involved facilitated the smooth transition and the successful outcome.

In 2020, a total of 261 persons successfully completed their Bulgarian language training and received their A1 and A2 language level certificates. IOM anticipates that in 2021 another 200 third-country nationals legally residing in the Republic of



Bulgarian language classes in Sofia.  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV

Bulgaria, as well as applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection will benefit from the initiative.

### **Information and integration events**

In light of the imposition of epidemic emergency measures within the country, the planned events were considerably affected. Despite all difficulties the 2020 brought, IOM organized a total of 7 information and cultural events with migrants in compliance with all anti-epidemic measures. The events acted as a forum for providing migrants with relevant information on topics and issues related to their successful and sustainable integration as part of Bulgarian society. Among the topics discussed were migrant rights and obligations in Bulgaria, their insurance rights, including health insurance. Attendees were acquainted with partner organizations offering services in the area of employment, support for victims of domestic violence and more.



Information event for legally residing migrants in Bourgas.  
© IOM 2020



## Bulgaria – second home

Ukrainian Yulia Krasovska and Armenian Eriknaz Kapantsyan live in Bulgaria. They graduated in Bulgarian language courses within the Integration centre for migrants in Bourgas and take part in the information events organized by IOM there. Eriknaz is a pastry chef and owner of a pastry and bakery shop, and Yulia is an architecture and artist. IOM organized the first painting exhibition of Yulia in Bulgaria and an exhibition of her students – children of Russian and Ukrainian origin, as well as Yulia's participation in a local TV show.

## Culinary workshops – tastes of the Middle East

As part of the latest edition of the KvARTal Festival, IOM organized an event to present Persian and Arabic traditional dishes from Afghanistan, Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. The guests of the festival visited the IOM display tent and tasted delicious



Yulia Krasovska from Ukraine.  
© Yulia Krasovska



Culinary event organized by IOM Bulgaria.  
© IOM 2020

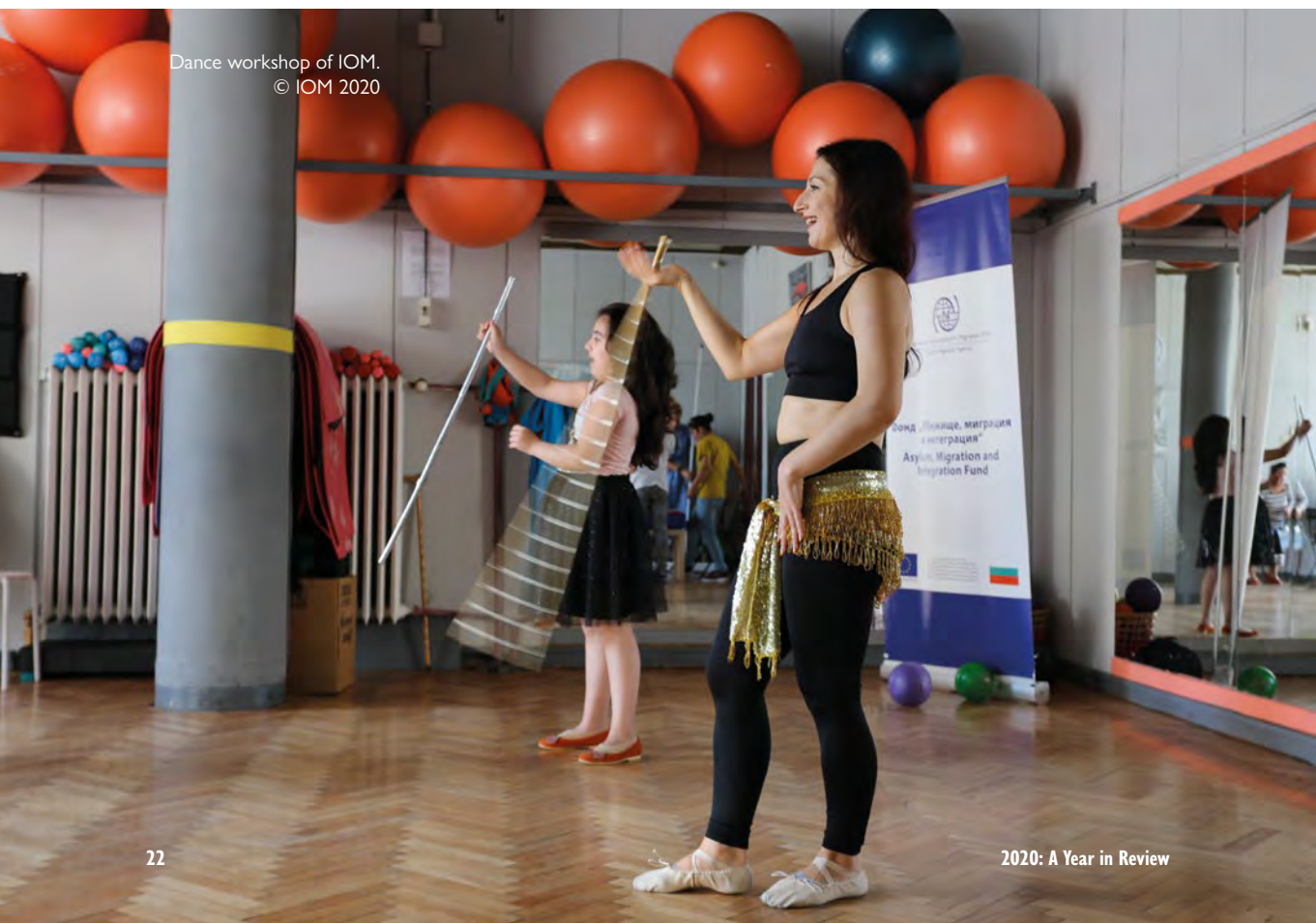
oriental dishes prepared by professional chefs – kubbe, samosa, rice biryani and others, and had the opportunity to enjoy a live demonstration of the cooking.

### **Dance workshops**

IOM also organized four oriental dance workshops. Participants were trained in oriental traditional dancing styles by Violeta Valcheva (Badriya Oriental Dance School), a certified Oriental dance instructor and performance artist. In cooperation with the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, we also organized a dance sessions for refugee women. Unaccompanied minors from the Safety Zones also enjoyed dancing in a special session for them.

### **East meets West in music**

IOM did not leave aside multicultural events in 2020. We organized a music event in the fall of 2020 in Sofia. Virtuosos Ivan Penchev (violin) and Denitsa Dimitrova (harp) performed interpretation of traditional Arab folklore songs. Apart from the concert programme, the audience enjoyed the documentary film “Guest” and



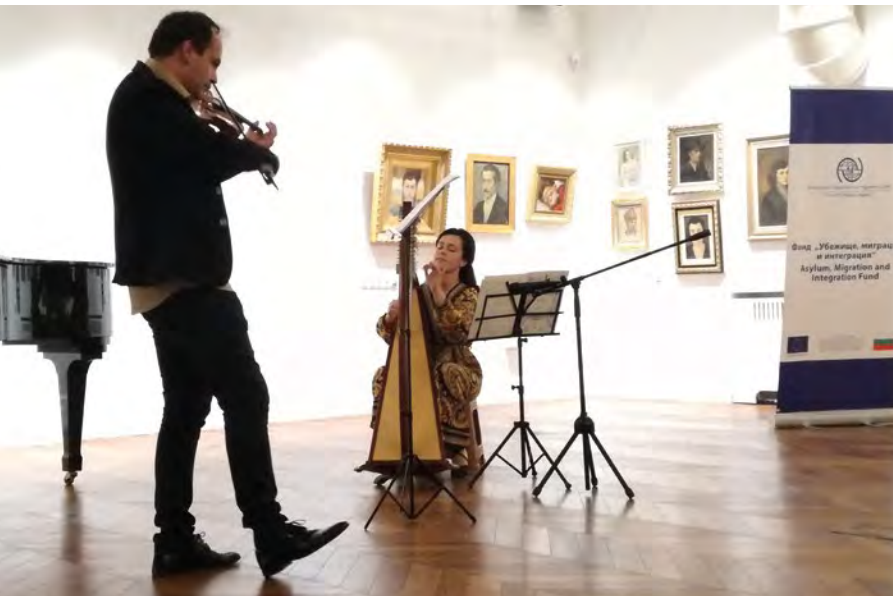
Dance workshop of IOM.  
© IOM 2020

then tasted authentic Middle Eastern dishes for full immersion in the atmosphere.

### **Global Migration Film Festival 2020**

IOM Bulgaria took part for a fourth year in a row in the Global Migration Film Festival. In 2020, for the first time, the GMFF was celebrated virtually, with on-line screening conducted for a global audience watching features and documentary works via computer. IOM Bulgaria presented four movies that explore the themes of migration and human mobility. The movies featured challenges and promises of migration, with the overall message of the basic human rights such as freedom of movement, of free association and personal development. The goal of the Festival is to open audiences to a larger discussion concerning the megatrend of our time: migration. The 2020 Global Migration Film Festival concluded on 18 December, as in previous years, in conjunction with the United Nations' observance of International Migrants Day.

The integration and multicultural events were funded by the National Programme of Bulgaria under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014–2020.



IOM Music event  
© IOM 2020



Global Migration Film Festival 2020 Poster



## Assisted voluntary return and reintegration

IOM's Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programme also persisted the challenges of 2020. The AVRR team managed to successfully organize the voluntary return of 40 third-country nationals to their respective country of origin.

The AVRR team kept on providing support through consultations and online meetings discussing the opportunities for voluntary return; organizing the safe and dignified return of applicants in their countries of origin; arranging and covering the costs of medical examinations including relevant testing required for travel of all persons; providing support with the acquisition of the necessary travel documents; providing assistance during transit and landing; and providing reintegration support to eligible applicants.

The emergency epidemic situation in Bulgaria with the borders closed, countless flights cancelled, new restrictions introduced by the day, and unclear travel requirements represented quite a challenge to the voluntary return team of IOM Bulgaria and to those wishing to return.

IOM supports migrants at Sofia Airport.  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV



During that period, IOM escorted a vulnerable Ukrainian national to his country of origin. The AVRR team planned the escort for more than 2 weeks which was being postponed due to COVID-19-related restrictions and the altered conditions for entry into Bulgaria.

In addition, IOM Bulgaria successfully managed to grant and fulfil 10 reintegration programmes. The provided reintegration support mostly concerned plans for 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.

#### **2020:**

- Number of TCNs who benefited from AVRR support: **40\***
- Number of reintegration packages: **10\*\***

*\* Nationals of Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Benin, Cameroon, the Islamic Republic of The Islamic Republic of Iran , Iraq, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Ukraine.*

*\*\* Nationals of Iraq, Ukraine, and Armenia.*

## **Capacity-building activities**

Even though 2020 was overshadowed by the pandemic, IOM was able to adapt its activities and to continue building the capacity of national institutions and NGOs in the areas of migration, borders, social welfare, and education.

In 2020, IOM Bulgaria organized the following capacity-building events for state institutions and NGOs:

### **Training on conducting social discussions and information sessions with third-country nationals**

On 20 and 21 January 2020, a training on “Conducting social discussions and information sessions for third-country nationals” was held in Sofia. It was attended by experts of the Child Protection Departments of several districts, experts of the Employment Agency, employees of Sofia Municipality, Temporary Accommodation Centres, the Agency for Social Assistance, among others.

The city of Rousse in the north region of Bulgaria hosted another training on the same topic on 25 and 26 February 2020. It was attended by officers of the Border Police, the Social Assistance Directorates, the Municipality of Rousse and local NGOs. The event was organized with the financial support of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, co-financed by the European Union.

## Trainings on gender-based violence among migrants and refugees

In February, an IOM Bulgaria team organized trainings on “Gender-based violence among migrants and refugees”, as part of the regional project PROTECT, in Ruse, Varna and Burgas. The topics discussed during the trainings included GBV in emergencies, cultural specificities of the countries of origin of migrants and refugees in Bulgaria, LGBTI migrants and GBV, and services available in Bulgaria for migrants and refugees GBV survivors. Representatives from state institutions, NGOs and health mediators working with vulnerable groups participated in the trainings. Within the framework of the same project, IOM organized a stakeholders’ meeting in Ruse where challenges in the Bulgarian context and possible solutions in working with migrants and refugees GBV survivors were discussed.

To wrap up the project, IOM Bulgaria experts developed a Guide on working with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, with a special focus on migrant women. The guide is addressed to all professionals working in the spheres of migration, health care and social welfare. Its main goal is to provide more information for early identification of gender-based violence cases, how to offer support and access the existing resources.

The project PROTECT – Preventing sexual and gender-based violence against migrants and strengthening support to victims – is funded by the European Union’s DG Justice and Consumers.

Trainings of IOM in Sofia.  
© IOM 2020





## Online events

In the context of the pandemic, the computer screen turned into a window to the world and a way to meet and communicate with relatives, friends, and colleagues.

In a state of emergency, which was later converted into a state of epidemic emergency, IOM's team began holding its planned events and trainings online – turning the defect into a strength – and managed to reach participants from various cities who would not be otherwise visited.

On 24 June 2020, the organization held an online training on “Mental Health of Staff.” It was attended by employees of the Social Assistance Directorates from the cities of Vratsa and Gabrovo.

On 28 July 2020, the teams of IOM Bulgaria and UNICEF Bulgaria jointly held an online training on “Prevention of sexual and gender-based violence” with participants from the Social Assistance Directorates, Mother and Baby Units (with the Agency for Social Assistance), NGOs and crisis centres from all over country. Further, on 24 November 2020, IOM held a webinar on “Managing Safety Zones for Unaccompanied Children Applying for International Protection.” The webinar was hosted by colleagues from IOM Greece who manage fourteen (14) Safety Zones for unaccompanied minors. The training was attended by representatives of the State Agency for Refugees, the Bulgarian Red Cross, IOM Bulgaria and the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria.

A total of 114 participants from national institutions and NGOs benefited from the capacity-building events of IOM Bulgaria, carried out in 2020 and financed under the National Programme of Bulgaria under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014–2020.



Online trainings of IOM.  
© IOM 2020

# Highlights

## World Refugee Day

On the World Refugee Day, IOM Bulgaria and SAR organized a football game with the participation of the boys accommodated in the Safety Zones for UASC in RRC Sofia – Voenna Rampa and Ovcha Kupel.

At the invitation of the SAR, IOM Bulgaria participated in the celebration of World Refugee Day in RRC Harmanli as well. It was a wonderful festivity with many participants and lots of good vibes. The graffiti artist Metin Golesh covered the inner wall of the centre with proverbs from the countries of origin of the asylum seekers. And with the help of the artist Ina Valentinova, we drew several new games on the playground, like Hopscotch, Twister and a fun labyrinth for children.



Celebration of Refugee Day in Voenna Rampa RRC.  
© IOM 2020



## IOM Graffiti Festival 2020

A sparkle in otherwise grim times, IOM Graffiti Festival took place for a fourth consecutive year in the period 30 September – 2 October 2020 having earned another endorsement by Harmanli Municipality and SAR.

Seven graffiti artists from Bulgaria participated in the event. Six artists painted 25 panels of the external side of Harmanli RRC's wall. Local school students painted 4 panels. On the inside of the RRC, a graffiti artist painted various entertaining games on the asphalt alleys for the children accommodated in the Centre.

More than 500 meters of the more than 1 km-long RRC wall are now covered in colorful graffiti artworks. It shows how a wall can bring migrants and locals together rather than set them apart, and can symbolize mutual respect and appreciation for diversity. The festival also attracted a significant interest from the local and national media, the event being covered by a national TV channel, local TV channels, local and national media. The regional governor of Haskovo area came to meet the artists and IOM staff and to talk of migration priorities in the region.



Graffiti Fest 2020 in Harmanli.  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV











The transformation of the walls in Harmanli continued in November as well, celebrating the Refugee month and the 100th anniversary of our kind partners from Ivan Vazov Primary School. IOM Bulgaria and graffiti artist Lazo transformed the lobby area of the school with finishing touches by the students.

### **Relocation of unaccompanied minors from Greece to Bulgaria**

IOM Bulgaria provided support to the SAR in escorting 15 of the 17 newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Greece, to their new home in RRC Harmanli.

Following their accommodation and orientation by the SAR, IOM carried out an information session for the UASC on their rights and obligations while in procedure for international protection, Dublin family reunification procedure, and access to services and other social aspects during their stay in Bulgaria. The UASC received clothes and hygiene materials from SAR, and IOM Bulgaria provided them with jackets and additional clothes, as well as tea, sugar, biscuits and other food items donated by the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria. The activities were funded by Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the EU.



IOM staff together with unaccompanied minors relocated from Greece.  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV



## Nine people went home thanks to AVRR programme of IOM Bulgaria

The AVRR team of IOM successfully accomplished the return of nine people from Iraq in their country of origin. The flight took place on 20 August 2021. This is one of several voluntary returns of a large number of people, organized by IOM AVRR Bulgaria, after the set off of the state of emergency due to COVID-19 pandemic. Just before the successful ??, flights to Iraq had been fully banned as a result of COVID-19 and the country had imposed border restrictions.

The returnees are a family of seven from Dohuk, a woman from Sulaymaniyah and a man from Erbil. IOM AVRR Bulgaria team carried out many meetings and consultations with the migrants to prepare them for the journey and gather information on the post-arrival situation in Iraq and their living conditions there. In view of the pandemic, IOM Bulgaria assisted returnees in getting PCR tests so as to avoid mandatory quarantine upon return to Iraq.

Returnees will receive reintegration assistance in their country of origin, in coordination with the team of IOM AVRR Iraq.



Airport departure assistance during voluntary return.  
© IOM 2020/Nikolay DOYCHINOV



Reintegration assistance of Iraqi citizen who had voluntary returned from Bulgaria. © IOM 2020

## Concluding remarks

IOM Bulgaria is continuing its activities in 2021, starting three new projects, financed by the National programme of Bulgaria, part of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), namely “Capacity Building in AVRR”, “Raising Awareness on Labour Migration to Bulgaria in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova” and “Support for Asylum-Seeking Third Country Nationals”. The Mission will keep working on implementation of its main programmes in the fields of assisted voluntary return, counter-trafficking of human beings, migrant protection and integration, as well as capacity-building.

The organization is looking forward to a better, healthy and successful 2021 year. It will keep making efforts to ensure migrants’ support, including access to social and healthcare services

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Celebration of Refugee Day in Harmanli RRC.  
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