

## Gender-based Violence Programme Overview

# Refugee and Migrant Response

February 2021

Focus on the programme 'Action against Gender-based Violence affecting Refugee and Migrant women and children in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia', October 2019 – December 2020.<sup>3</sup>

## Refugee and Migrant Situation Analysis

While most European countries witnessed a decrease in arrivals of refugees and migrants in the first half of 2020 due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the numbers increased again in the second half of 2020.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the year, 94,800 refugees and migrants had arrived in Europe through Italy, Greece, Spain, and Bulgaria – 18.5 per cent of whom were children.<sup>5</sup> Among all children seeking asylum in Europe in 2020, 53 per cent were boys and 47 per cent girls.<sup>6</sup> Most unaccompanied children are boys, with girls accounting for 24 per cent of this group, increased from 15 per cent in 2019.<sup>7</sup> In addition to this increase in official numbers, girls who are unaccompanied or separated from their families are one of the most invisible groups in refugee and migrant statistics as well as response, and face unique risks related to gender-based violence (GBV) at all stages of their migration journey.<sup>8</sup>

COVID-19 has exacerbated challenges for refugees and migrants across the region, many

of whom were already facing economic hardship and poverty, limited access to even basic services, and poor living conditions. For refugee and migrant women and girls, COVID-19 has also contributed to increased risk for multiple forms of GBV. While prevalence data on GBV against refugee and migrant women and girls remains limited, numerous anecdotal reports from UNICEF partners and other sources have highlighted concerns around increased risks of intimate partner violence (IPV), as lockdown measures have confined women and girls with their abusers and made it harder for them to access support.<sup>9</sup> Rising economic insecurity and challenges in finding and keeping safe accommodation have contributed to increased risks of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>10</sup> Women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting discriminations, who are often more marginalized, appear to be at greatest risk of GBV with more barriers to accessing services; including adolescent girls, unaccompanied and separated girls, and women with disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

## KEY POPULATION FIGURES<sup>1</sup>

**94,800 arrivals** in Europe through Italy, Greece, Spain and Bulgaria in 2020.



**17,500 children** were among all arrivals through Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria in 2020.



**12,000 unaccompanied and separated children<sup>2</sup>** were registered in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020.



## UNICEF Priorities and GBV Strategy

UNICEF works to meet the needs of women and children seeking asylum in Europe, as well as those on the move, stranded or being pushed back. UNICEF's multi-sectoral response to the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe aims to ensure that protection, care and support is provided for refugee and migrant women and children through the provision of life-saving GBV services in partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs) and institutions, with a complementary focus on systems building and advocacy.

With support from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), UNICEF is working to improve GBV prevention and response programming for refugee and migrant women and girls through the Action Against Gender-Based Violence Affecting Refugee and Migrant Women and Children in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia. The overall objective of the programme is to ensure that GBV survivors and at-risk individuals receive age and gender-appropriate information, referrals and support, with a strong focus on strengthening local and national systems based on UNICEF's Global [Theory of Change](#) for GBV in Emergencies (GBViE) programming. The three outcomes in UNICEF's GBViE programming are to:

- 1. Provide life-saving, coordinated multisectoral services** for GBV survivors, including through ensuring **referral mechanisms** are available and updated, and that **capacity for GBV service delivery** is increased.
- 2. Mitigate the risk of GBV** across humanitarian sectors to ensure services are delivered in a safe and inclusive manner, prioritizing empowerment, safety and resilience of women and girls through [safe spaces](#).
- 3. Prevent GBV** by addressing its root causes and underlying conditions, engaging directly with governments and relevant ministries to **create an enabling legal, policy and institutional environment** that promote girls' and women's rights and addresses GBV, and that strategies to **transform harmful social norms** are in place, including through continuous knowledge generation and advocacy.

The programme in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia has been operating since September 2017 and prioritizes women and girls because of their systematic exposure to GBV. It also reaches at-risk adolescent boys and young men and survivors of sexual violence along the migration routes, recognizing that the response environment in these countries is characterized by a high number of boys and young men arriving.

## GBV Programme Updates and Achievements

As of December 2020, **5,739 women and 1,362 girls accessed GBV prevention and response services**. 671 boys and 616 men also accessed services, bringing the total number of people who accessed services between October 2019 and December 2020 to **8,388** – 90 per cent of the target of 9250 for June 2021. These services include case management, psychosocial support, material assistance and referral to specialised services. A recent assessment of the quality of GBV services, shows that 91 per cent of the services meet UNICEF’s standards for support.

Since March 2020, efforts to promote access to up-to-date information on GBV in the context of COVID-19 have accelerated. Cumulatively from October 2019 to December 2020, **208,230 people were reached with information on GBV, including messages on GBV related risks during the pandemic, what to do if someone experiences violence or is worried about someone at risk of violence, and how to access support and remote services such as hotlines**. This included innovative approaches and tools Viber, like [U-report on the Move](#) in Italy, Facebook and WhatsApp Groups in Serbia and Bulgaria, production and dissemination of podcasts in Greece in multiple languages and beyond.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on GBV service provision, UNICEF’s **capacity strengthening efforts** have continued. Between October 2019 and December 2020, **1,119 frontline workers were trained in GBV prevention and response**. The trainings included health care workers, reception site staff, social workers, teachers, and linguistic and cultural mediators, and were often adapted for remote delivery. In

addition, UNICEF provided technical guidance and support, for example through the in-depth learning series (see box).

UNICEF continues to **advocate** for a stronger national legal, policy and institutional environment and continues to provide **technical support** to relevant ministries and institutions. For example, in Greece UNICEF have developed a strategic partnership with the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) in the context of which guidance for the operation of safe shelters during the COVID 19 period was developed. In Italy and Serbia UNICEF has worked with universities and other stakeholders to strengthen the capacity of professionals on GBV through curriculum development and implementation.

**Evidence generation and dissemination** of knowledge and learnings of what works in addressing GBV remains a priority for UNICEF. In 2020, UNICEF focused on the situation of unaccompanied and separated girls, in order to raise awareness about their situation and the challenges reaching them in the migrant response, as well as to strengthen the capacity of linguistic and cultural mediator and interpreters to support GBV survivors. The report [‘Making the Invisible Visible: The identification of unaccompanied and separated girls in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia’](#), highlights the diverse experiences and risks faced by unaccompanied and separated girls, while emphasizing the persistent data gaps



At the regional level, UNICEF focuses on collaboration among GBV programmes, promoting learning exchanges and sharing of good practices within and across countries. As part of the roll out of the UNICEF Gender Based Violence in Emergencies Resource Pack, **an in-depth learning series on GBV in emergencies** was organized between April-July 2020 to help partners respond and adapt GBV services to the COVID-19 context. The training had a specific focus on the impact of the pandemic on refugee and migrant populations and GBV support. This included facilitated sessions by experts, online and offline discussions and group assignments. The training was attended by 21 participants from 5 countries, including Bosnia Herzegovina. This training included country specific action plans to help participants apply learning into practice.

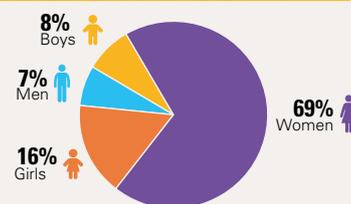


## RESULTS AT A GLANCE (Oct 2019 – Dec 2020)

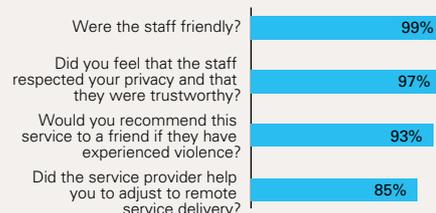
**8,388** Refugees and migrants accessing GBV prevention and response services

TARGET - June 2021 **9250**

REACHED - December 2020 **8388**



### Beneficiaries’ feedback (December 2020)



**208,230** women, girls, men and boys accessing information on GBV

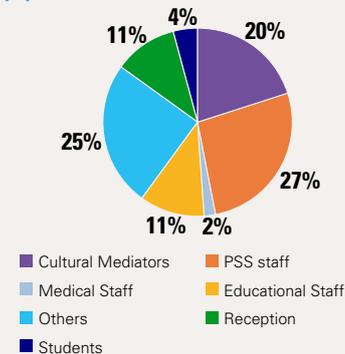
**91%** of polled beneficiaries would know how to respond if a friend told them they have experienced GBV

**1,119** frontline workers trained

TARGET - June 2021 **1045**

REACHED - December 2020 **1119**

### Frontline workers trained, by profession



**29** GBV service delivery points supported by UNICEF

Percentage of services that meet 80% of GBV minimum standards

End December 2020 **91%**

End September 2019 **57%**

and lack of expertise on how to identify and support them. The report has been widely disseminated, including through a [podcast](#) episode and a [training video](#) and continues to be instrumental both for programming and advocacy efforts to improve the protective environment for unaccompanied and separated girls.

As part of joint technical work under the programme, UNICEF, in partnership with Women's Refugee Commission, is producing a **Pocket Guide on Sexual Violence Against Boys**.

The pocket guide will provide programmatic guidance for staff working with adolescent boys who are survivors or at high risk of sexual violence in the European refugee and migrant context. A wide range of stakeholders were consulted in developing the resource (to be finalized in early 2021), including frontline workers, refugees and migrants, and adolescent boys.

### **Training Curriculum for Linguistic and Cultural Mediators on GBV**

Despite extensive exposure to GBV and sexual violence along migration routes, survivors who arrive in Europe face a variety of barriers that prevent them from accessing appropriate care, including lack of linguistic and cultural mediators (LCM) and interpreters who are equipped to provide effective support to GBV survivors in line with their role.

In this context, the Women's Refugee Commission and UNICEF developed a dedicated training curriculum on the role of LCMs in supporting survivors, tailored to the Europe refugee and migrant context. The course equips this group of professionals with knowledge to apply a survivor-centred approach in their work. The curriculum was developed over the

course of several months and was informed and adapted by LCMs and interpreters working in Italy and Bulgaria, where pilot trainings took place, and with the support of experts from Greece, Serbia and globally.

The curriculum was used as guidance for UNICEF's partners in Italy, Bulgaria and Greece to help them integrate GBV within ongoing trainings of LCM and interpreters, including online trainings. For example, over the past year Italy trained almost **100** LCMs.

**'Taking part to the training allowed me to deeply change my attitude towards issues related to violence, and this had a great impact on my work.'** - Moussa, an LCM from Guinea who participated to the online training in Italy.

## **In Focus: Programme Adaptations and Response to COVID-19**

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent measures to contain the virus, including lockdowns, border closures, movement and travel restrictions, and social distancing and isolation measures, presented UNICEF and partners with an unprecedented and rapidly changing situation that had significant impact on the safety and well-being of refugee and migrant women and children.

**UNICEF and its partners had to quickly adapt to new ways of working, including how they deliver GBV services.** Many UNICEF partners in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia were forced to either close safe spaces or limit their in-person activities. This required a rapid shift to remote service provision. With UNICEF's support – not only in terms of flexible financing, but also training staff on the use of online platforms, operating hotlines and procedures and protocols for remote modalities – **all partners found ways to adapt their GBV services and integrate aspects of remote support. A number of partners were also**

**able to maintain their critical in-person activities**, including outreach work, as part of delivering permitted 'essential services' in their country, such as food distribution and healthcare.

**Partners were creative in developing a variety of online and digital strategies** to maintain contact with existing clients and reach new ones, for example setting up social media groups. Several partners organised online social activities where refugee and migrant women and girls could interact; these were delivered within 'digital safe spaces,' which were created with the aim of replicating support provided in physical safe spaces. Recognising that many refugee and migrant women and girls have limited access to digital devices and varied levels of digital literacy, partners assessed the needs of women and girls and some were able to subsequently provide online literacy and skills training in the period between the first and second wave of

lockdowns in Europe. Some partners also provided tablets, data bundles and SIM cards for refugee and migrant women in order to support their access to remote services. Other partners worked closely with women who already had access to technologies to take on the role of sharing GBV information to others in the community.

As is the case in any emergency, **regular listening to, consultations and engagement with refugee and migrant women and girls were key to effective programming adaptations**, assisting partners to understand evolving GBV risks, key concerns and priorities, and how to continue to reach women and girls even amidst the challenging circumstances. One example of many good practices generated as a result of COVID-19 is that some partners engaged with clients more frequently than before COVID-19 in an effort to generate feedback on adaptations and make on-going adjustments.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report # 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Phase III of the programme is October 2019 - June 2021, therefore this factsheet does not cover the entirety of Phase III of the programme.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report # 38.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat (2021) <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF (2020) [Making the Invisible Visible: The identification of unaccompanied and separated girls in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia](#).

<sup>9</sup> Impact of COVID-19 on Gender-based Violence Refugee and migrant Response, UNICEF Multi-Country Case study, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Erskine, [D. Double Jeopardy: The European Refugee and Migrant Crisis and COVID-19: Insights into the Emerging Impacts on Women and Girls](#).

<sup>11</sup> Impact of COVID-19 on Gender-based Violence Refugee and migrant Response, UNICEF Multi-Country Case study, 2020.

## Results per country at a glance

### BULGARIA

**346** refugees and migrants accessing GBV prevention and response services 

TARGET - June 2021 **350**  
REACHED - December 2020 **346**

**97%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others 

**5** GBV service delivery points supported 

Percentage of services that meet 80% of GBV minimum standards

End December 2020 **100%**  
End September 2019 **33%**

**100%** of services surveyed met 80% of GBV minimum standards<sup>1</sup> 

**UNICEF Partners:**  
State Agency for Refugees  
Animus Association Foundation,  
Mission Wings Foundation, Council  
of Refugee Women in Bulgaria 

**52** frontline workers trained 

TARGET - June 2021 **75**  
REACHED - December 2020 **52**

UNICEF and Animus Association work on a structured capacity development program, for a sustainable support to GBV practitioners working in the field. 

### GREECE

**4,187** refugees and migrants accessing GBV prevention and response services 

TARGET - June 2021 **4,800**  
REACHED - December 2020 **4,187**

**89%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others 

**16<sup>2</sup>** GBV service delivery points supported 

Percentage of services that meet 80% of GBV minimum standards

End December 2020 **100%**  
End September 2019 **50%**

**100%** of services surveyed met 80% of GBV minimum standards<sup>3</sup> 

**UNICEF Partners:**  
General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE)  
Iliaktida, Melissa Network of Migrant Women, KETHI (Research Centre for Gender Equality), Diotima, METAdrasi, Solidarity Now 

**495** frontline workers trained 

TARGET - June 2021 **500**  
REACHED - December 2020 **495**

UNICEF continues its strategic partnership with the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality and seconded a GBV Information Management expert to the Secretariat 

### ITALY

**1,273** refugees and migrants accessing GBV prevention and response services 

TARGET - June 2021 **1,600**  
REACHED - December 2020 **1,273**

**100%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others 

**3** GBV service delivery points supported 

**100%** of polled beneficiaries report knowing how to respond if a friend told them they have experienced GBV

**UNICEF Partners:**  
Ombudsperson of Palermo, IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA  
Medicines du Monde, Intersos, Centro PENC 

**418** frontline workers trained 

TARGET - June 2021 **400**  
REACHED - December 2020 **418**

UNICEF, in partnership with IOM and UNHCR, launched the adapted version of the IASC GBV [Pocket Guide](#), to support non-GBV specialists in providing first-aid support to GBV survivors 

### SERBIA

**2,582** refugees and migrants accessing GBV prevention and response services 

TARGET - June 2021 **2,500**  
REACHED - December 2020 **2,582**

**92%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others 

**5** GBV service delivery points supported 

Percentage of services that meet 80% of GBV minimum standards

End December 2020 **100%**  
End September 2019 **100%**

**100%** of services surveyed met 80% of GBV minimum standards<sup>4</sup> 

**UNICEF Partners:**  
Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs  
Commissariat for Refugees and Migration  
ADRA, Info Park 

**134** frontline workers trained 

TARGET - June 2021 **70**  
REACHED - December 2020 **134**

UNICEF together with the National University in Serbia has developed a dedicated Protection of the Children Affected by Migration course, where GBV is also integrated. 

<sup>1</sup> Based on 4 services in 2020, 3 services in 2019  
<sup>2</sup> In Greece, UNICEF supports various accommodation sites and Reception and Identification Centers (RICs)  
<sup>3</sup> Based on 3 services in 2020, 2 services in 2019  
<sup>4</sup> Based on 2 services in 2020, 2 services in 2019