Focus on the programme ‘Action Against Gender-Based Violence Affecting Refugee and Migrant Women and Children in Greece, Italy, Serbia and Bulgaria.’

October 2019 – December 2020

Refugee and Migrant Situation Analysis

Bulgaria is primarily considered a transit country for refugees and migrants; however, as a direct effect of COVID-19, more refugees and migrants are remaining in Bulgaria. This is evidenced by the increased rates of migration in 2020: a total of 3,487 migrants were detained in 2020 by the Bulgarian authorities, an increase of 59.7% compared to the same period in 2019 (2,184). This is also reflected in the increased number of requests for asylum in 2020: a total of 3,525 people applied for international protection, mainly from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, marking the first annual increase in the number of asylum-seekers since 2015. Out of all asylum-seekers in 2020, 32% (1,125) were children; over 70% (799) were unaccompanied and separate children (UASC). Already vulnerable, refugee and migrant women and children in Bulgaria are facing challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic: stress and uncertainty, movement restrictions, difficulty in meeting basic needs, limited access to services including health and psychosocial support, and economic hardship. During this time of isolation and uncertainty, the loss of income and shelter has exacerbated risks, including gender-based violence (GBV) risks for women and girls. UNICEF partners in Bulgaria have seen an increase in demand for support, with increased reports of GBV cases and an increase in the severity and complexity of cases.

UNICEF Priorities and GBV Strategy

UNICEF’s programme in Bulgaria has been addressing some of the most critical gaps in relation to the provision of GBV and protection services, integrating the support for refugee and migrant children into the national child protection and welfare system. The strategy to work on addressing emergency protection needs of GBV survivors and at-risk individuals is combined with capacity strengthening for professionals and services and the long-term vision to ensure sustainability for its work. As part of this, UNICEF supports governmental and non-governmental bodies in the delivery of a minimum set of lifesaving GBV prevention and response services, while focusing on upstream partnerships with national institutions to achieve change at multiple levels.

GBV Programme Updates and Achievements

Between October 2019 and December 2020, UNICEF and partners provided psychosocial support, case management and referrals to GBV survivors in Bulgaria, as well as emergency material support. Due to COVID-19, UNICEF’s work with the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB) and Mission Wings Foundation (MWF) was expanded to provide medicine, accommodation, rent and food vouchers for single parents and families with many children, amongst others in need. MWF also provided counselling and other material assistance to women and families, including via the Mother and Baby Unit in the city of Stara Zagora. UNICEF also started to support Crisis Centres with Animus Association, to provide shelter support for women and children who are survivors of GBV. Following the closure of many GBV services due to the pandemic, UNICEF and partners scaled up remote assistance, including psychosocial, case management support and referrals, while maintaining and expanding critical in-person support. The beneficiary satisfaction survey undertaken

KEY POPULATION FIGURES

3,525 refugees and migrants applied for international protection in 2020

1,125 of all asylum-seekers in 2020 were children and 799 of these were unaccompanied

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

(Oct 2019 – Dec 2020)

346 people in need accessed GBV prevention and response services

Target June 2021 350

Reached Dec 2020 346

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

Beneficiary Feedback

Did the service provider help you to adjust to remote service delivery? 91%

Did the staff express themselves clearly? 100%

Did the staff treat you in an open, non-judgemental way? 100%

Was the staff friendly? 100%

Did you feel that the staff respected your privacy and that they were trustworthy? 100%

5 GBV service delivery points supported by UNICEF

Percentage of services that meet GBV minimum standards

The community is aware of the existence of support services 100%

Outreach activities or mobile response are sensitised on GBV issues 100%

Appropriate group activities are offered 75%

Trained staff/volunteers can provide relevant information and referral 100%

Is the service easily accessible 97%

% Met (2020) % Met (2019)
through partners found 87% of survivors were satisfied with the support they had received.

During this period UNICEF and partners made it a priority to diversify communication channels to reach refugee and migrant women and girls with critical lifesaving information, and raise awareness of the different risks arising from COVID-19. UNICEF reached 1,970 people with information on GBV prevention and response, including gender friendly COVID-19 related risk communication. UNICEF has worked with CRWB and other partners to develop 2,000 information leaflets in Arabic and Farsi covering various themes, including the health risks related to COVID-19, and disseminate them across Bulgaria.

UNICEF and partners have also facilitated knowledge sharing, capacity strengthening and training. In partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF provided training materials and conducted a webinar for frontline workers on GBV and organized a roundtable discussion “Accommodation and Provision of Support to Migrant and Refugee Women and Children in Social Services in Bulgaria” to exchange experiences, challenges and good practices. UNICEF also delivered training for linguistic and cultural mediators on GBV against women and girls and sexual violence against men and boys in collaboration with the Women’s Refugee Commission, 25 frontline workers participated in the training.

“I am not only a refugee; I am much more than that. It’s only one part of me, not my identity”, Sisila, Afghanistan, 25, currently in Bulgaria.

In partnership with the Animus Association, UNICEF Bulgaria is developing a structured and practical GBV training curriculum to raise the capacity of frontline workers, experts and decision-makers in Bulgaria. UNICEF and the Animus Association will continue development of this curriculum in 2021, to enable it to be rolled out further.

**Endnotes**

2 Ibid.
3 Phase III of the programme is October 2019 - June 2021, therefore this factsheet does not cover the entirety of Phase III of the programme.