

Overview: Gender-based violence programme

Bulgaria – Refugee and migrant response

September 2021

Focus on the programme: Action Against Gender-Based Violence Affecting Refugee and Migrant Women and Children in Greece, Italy, Serbia and Bulgaria, supported by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, October 2019 – June 2021²

Situation of refugees and migrants

Bulgaria has been seen primarily as a transit country for refugees and migrants, but more are now remaining in the country as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April and June 2021, 2,278 migrants arrived in Bulgaria – more than five times the number who arrived in the same period in 2020 (429).³ There was also an increase in the number of people applying for international protection. Children accounted for 906 (836 boys and 70 girls) of the 2,277 asylum-seekers in Bulgaria as of end of June 2021.⁴ Of all the children who applied for protection during that period 82 per cent (742) were unaccompanied and separated children (UASC): 738 boys and 4 girls.⁵

Already vulnerable refugee and migrant women and children in Bulgaria are facing additional challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic: greater isolation, stress and uncertainty; movement restrictions; difficulties in meeting basic needs; limited access to services (including health and psychosocial support); and economic hardship. The loss of income and shelter has exacerbated risks for women and girls, including gender-based violence (GBV). UNICEF partners in Bulgaria have seen growing demand for support, with more reports of GBV cases, as well as cases that are more severe and complex.

UNICEF priorities and strategy on gender-based violence

UNICEF’s programme in Bulgaria has been addressing some of the most critical gaps in the provision of GBV and protection services, integrating support for refugee and migrant children into the national child protection and welfare system. The strategy to meet the 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. As part of this work, UNICEF supports governmental and non-governmental bodies in the delivery of a minimum set of life-saving GBV prevention and response services, while focusing on upstream partnerships with national institutions to achieve change at multiple levels.

Programme achievements

Between October 2019 and June 2021, UNICEF and partners provided psychosocial support, case management and referrals to GBV survivors in Bulgaria, as well as emergency material support, reaching 213 women, 137 girls, 148 boys and 13 men. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF’s work with the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB) and Mission Wings Foundation (MWF) was expanded to provide medicine, hygiene materials, clothes, accommodation, rent and food vouchers for single parents and families with many children, among others in need. MFW 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 supported the Crisis Centre St. Petka in Sofia, managed by Animus Association, to provide shelter support for women and girls who are survivors of GBV. In addition, UNICEF provided direct support, such as clothes, shoes and hygiene materials, for the state Safety Zones managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) where unaccompanied and separated children are accommodated.

Following the closure of many GBV services as a result of the pandemic, UNICEF and partners scaled up remote assistance, including psychosocial, case management support and referrals, while maintaining and

KEY POPULATION FIGURES¹


1,698 refugees and migrants applied for international protection in the first half of 2021

624 of all asylum-seekers in the first half of 2021 were children, and **487** of these were unaccompanied and separated

2,278 irregular migrants were detained in Bulgaria as of the end of June 2021⁶

RESULTS AT A GLANCE


(Oct 2019 – June 2021)

511 people in need accessed GBV prevention and response services 

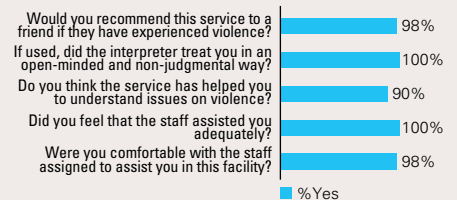
TARGET June 2021 **350**

REACHED June 2021 **511**



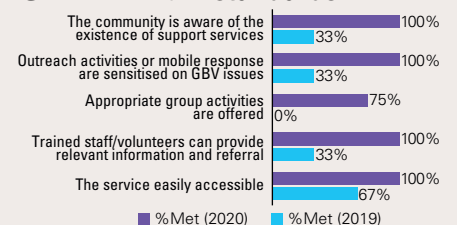
97% of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others 

Beneficiary Feedback



5 GBV service delivery points supported by UNICEF 

Percentage of services that meet GBV minimum standards



expanding critical in-person support. The beneficiary satisfaction survey undertaken through partners found that 87% of survivors were satisfied with the support they had received.

UNICEF and partners made it a priority to diversify communication channels to reach refugee and migrant women and girls with critical life-saving information and raise awareness of the different risks arising from COVID-19. In all, 2,637 people were reached 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 information leaflets in Arabic and Farsi on 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, reaching 248 frontline workers between October 2019 and June 2021. In consultation with various stakeholders, including focus group discussions with refugee and migrant beneficiaries, UNICEF and Animus have finalized the adaptation of a structured and practical GBV training curriculum for frontline workers, experts, and decision makers in parallel to the delivery of a series of workshops, some of which were conducted jointly with IOM. [Building from the joint technical work](#),



Mother and baby units

UNICEF Bulgaria has been working with government-led facilities for GBV survivors to make these state services more accessible for refugee and migrant women and girls. Mother and baby units, for example, are state-delegated residential facilities run by municipalities that working in cooperation with child protection departments. As well as providing safe shelter and basic services for women and girls, the units promote parenting skills and provide psychosocial support.

With UNICEF support, the services of two mother and baby units in Sofia and Stara Zagora have been expanded to reach refugee and migrant women and their children through the provision of information about the service; ensuring additional social workers and interpreters; and ensuring responses to urgent individual needs. Similar support has also been given to the Crisis Center in Sofia, led by the CSO Animus, to enhance its ability to accommodate refugee and migrant survivors of GBV.

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 UNICEF regional team and Women's Refugee Commission.

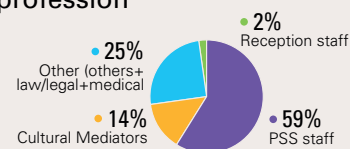
2,637 people accessed information on GBV prevention and response

248 frontline workers trained

TARGET June 2021 **75**

REACHED June 2021 **248**

Frontline workers trained, by profession



93% of previously trained frontline workers report knowing how and where to make a GBV related referral

UNICEF Partners

State Agency for Refugees



Animus Association Foundation, Mission Wings Foundation, Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria



"I want to learn Bulgarian, to translate and certify my diploma, to find a job and place for my daughter in a kindergarten... I want to start my life all over again..." a 36-year-old refugee woman

In Focus: Multi-Country coordination and technical assistance to train linguistic and cultural mediators

The UNICEF Bulgaria Country Office has been working within a multi-country approach, collaborating closely with the UNICEF GBV coordination team and other country offices in Greece, Italy and Serbia. This multi-country approach has included technical support, joint technical work and coordinated programming across the different countries.

One of the key joint technical products produced through the multi-country approach was a dedicated training

curriculum on GBV for linguistic and cultural mediators (LCMs), developed with the Women's Refugee Commission. ['Supporting survivors of violence: the role of linguistic and cultural mediators'](#) aims to equip LCMs with the foundational knowledge they need to respond supportively to female survivors of GBV and male survivors of sexual violence, including in the context of COVID-19. Using a multi-country approach to develop the training curriculum increased efficiency because it ensured that work

was not duplicated by individual country offices. Instead, country offices could use the basic training curriculum and adapt it to their own context and language.

The LCM curriculum was translated into Bulgarian in early 2021 and incorporated into a structured and practical GBV training resource for frontline workers, experts and decision-makers. The curriculum will be further developed in 2021 for scaling-up in close collaboration with academia.

Endnotes

- ¹ UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report #40 (www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021).
- ² The Programme officially started in October 2017. This factsheet, however, focuses on the last phase of the Programme, which ran from October 2019 to June 2021.
- ³ UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report #40 (op cit).
- ⁴ Official data provided by the State Agency for Refugees as of end June 2021 (www.eref.government.bg/bg/node/238).
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Official data from the Ministry of Interior (Moi) as of end of June 2021 (no breakdown of the data is available from the Moi): (www.mvr.bg/docs/default-source/planiraneotchetnost/spravka_june_2021_internet.pdf?sfvrsn=fc9c052c_2).