

Gender-based Violence Programme

**Bulgaria – Refugee and Migrant Response**

November 2019

Focus on Phase II of the programme *Action Against Gender-Based Violence Affecting Refugee and Migrant Women and Children in Greece, Italy, Serbia and Bulgaria*  
October 2018 – September 2019

**Situation Analysis**

Bulgaria has experienced a growing influx of refugees and migrants since 2013, who see it primarily as a transit country. However, as a result of changing European Union (EU) migration and asylum policies, refugees and migrants are increasingly staying in the country. As of the end of September 2019, the number of newly arrived applicants for international protection in Bulgaria had reached 1,742 (a 23 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2018). Over a third of them were children (628), of whom the vast majority – 75 per cent – were unaccompanied or separated. They came mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Syria,<sup>1</sup> to seek safety, protection and better opportunities.

Despite the efforts of the Bulgarian authorities to improve reception and protection conditions, challenges remain, particularly in terms of access to social services for refugees and migrants at risk or survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). In 2018, a UNICEF mapping of GBV services in Bulgaria found that the national capacity to prevent and respond to GBV was not fully equipped to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of a diverse refugee and migrant population. As a result, GBV survivors still experience significant individual and system barriers to access services (where these services are available).

**Strategy**

UNICEF invests continuously in the integration of GBV prevention and response activities within Bulgaria's broader child protection system. Aiming to ensure protection and empowerment for women and girls on the move, UNICEF supports governmental and non-governmental bodies in the delivery of a minimum set of GBV prevention and response services.

UNICEF's approach emphasizes the importance of strengthening national systems, from initial response through

recovery efforts, to promote national ownership, capacity and long-term changes.

UNICEF's response in Bulgaria has addressed some of the gaps and challenges to improve access to social services for GBV survivors, including through mappings, capacity-building for practitioners, as well as awareness raising campaigns on GBV. Direct support to refugees and migrants, survivors of GBV or at risk, has been provided by UNICEF's partners.

**Achievements**





In the 12 months to October 2019, 380 beneficiaries received psychological support, material assistance and referral to existing specialized services, mainly through two Mother and Baby Units<sup>2</sup> and one drop-in centre. Notably, 81 per cent of polled beneficiaries reported satisfaction with the competency of the staff and said they would recommend the services to others.

Partners and UNICEF are constantly working to improve the standard of services. In the first quarter of 2019, 74 per cent of UNICEF's quality criteria were met, a percentage that rose during the third quarter of the same year to 84 per cent.

Measures also continue to increase access for refugee and migrant women and girls to available services.

**KEY POPULATION FIGURES<sup>3</sup>**


**1,742** asylum applicants during the year

**145** Women  **85** Girls   
**969** Men  **543** Boys 

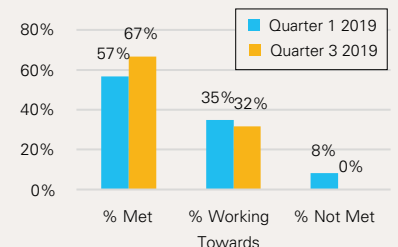
**KEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE<sup>4</sup>**

**380** GBV survivors and people at risk accessed services 

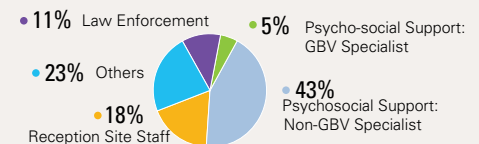
**TARGET 200**  
**REACHED 380**

**81%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF services to others 

**Minimum Standards**





**74** frontline workers trained 



**93%** of training participants reported positive feedback on the trainings 

UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR developed a GBV referral pathway, complementing the rules of the State Agency for Refugees.

**UNICEF-BPRM<sup>5</sup> Partners**

State Agency for Refugees   
Animus Association Foundation,  
Mission Wings Foundation, Alliance  
Protection from GBV, Council of  
Refugee Women in Bulgaria 

These include the use of structured activities to create a safe environment for women and girls, improving GBV awareness activities in reception centres and disseminating appropriate information in multiple languages.<sup>6</sup>

***“Speaking out about GBV is a big achievement for us, and to make it possible we have to use all the available platforms.” – UNICEF Partner***

Thanks to the collaboration between UNICEF’s partners, Alliance for Protection from GBV and Animus Association Foundation, a training curriculum has been adapted on safe disclosure of GBV and referrals for GBV survivors. The training has covered law enforcement actors, such as police and lawyers, as well as frontline workers. Four training sessions were conducted between March and April 2019, covering 74 frontline workers.

After a significant amount of time had passed since the training, 67 per cent of participants polled expressed their

confidence in continuing to use their role to support GBV survivors. UNICEF also worked in partnership with the Alliance and Animus to produce short videos on specific GBV-related topics, and developed an e-learning approach.

Building on experiences in other countries, particularly in Greece, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) worked together to develop a joint GBV referral pathway to guide frontline workers, complementing the internal rules of the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees. UNICEF contributed to the development of the Social Services Act through provision of technical input and support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other stakeholders.

In addition, UNICEF and IOM organized a roundtable in October 2019 for all mother and baby units in the country, as well as municipalities and child protection department’s representatives to exchange experience, challenges and examples

of good practice on ways to accommodate and address the needs of refugee and migrant women and children in Bulgaria, with a special focus on integration and support for GBV survivors.



**Mother and Baby Unit is a state-delegated residential facility run by municipalities and working in co-operation 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 migrant and refugee 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.**

## In focus –Providing comprehensive care

The Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB) is a non-governmental organization, established in May 2003 by nine refugee women from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq to help refugees and asylum seekers integrate into Bulgarian society. Its partnership with UNICEF began in 2018 and has enabled the CRWB to mainstream a GBV focus into its core activities.

***“All is ok for me at the moment, but I felt very bad a month ago. I was alone with my two little children and there was no way for me to work without them going to the kindergarten. My situation changed with so many things I needed. I know I can find these things from you. I know all I want to speak about, I can share with you.” – A refugee beneficiary***

GBV prevention and response activities are conducted by CRWB in the three registration and reception centres in Sofia. The programme follows a community-based approach, with social workers and cultural mediators working together to meet the medical, social and educational needs of refugees and migrants in a way that is informed by cultural and linguistic diversity. Social workers play a crucial role in this model, as they navigate (and advocate within) the Bulgarian social system to ensure that refugees and migrants can access the services they need, while the cultural mediators support effective and culturally appropriate communication. The joint model was first initiated by the UNICEF GBV programme in 2018 and will be expanded by CRWB within the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) – a clear signal

that the model is recognized as a good practice that improves the quality of service delivery and can contribute to the sustainability of services.

In addition to the UNICEF-supported expansion of this model, CRWB is working towards the licensing of the provision of these services as state-recognized social services. The recognition of CRWB’s services by the Agency for Social Assistance and the State Agency for Child Protection will enable the organization to access state funding to sustain and improve the services provided, and to receive official referrals from state institutions. The model developed through UNICEF GBV programming will support the organization in this endeavour.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report # 33

<sup>2</sup> For further details visit <https://animusassociation.org/en/social-services-center-for-children-and-families/> and <https://www.facebook.com/%D0%A4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%9C%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%9A%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B5-Mission-Wings-Foundation-2198038120246941/>

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report # 33.

<sup>4</sup> All data are drawn from UNICEF’s regular Monitoring and Evaluation System

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration

<sup>6</sup> For further details please visit: [http://www.crw-bg.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Dip\\_contact.pdf](http://www.crw-bg.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Dip_contact.pdf)