

3. 2005 REFUGEE INTEGRATION PROGRAM⁴⁹ AND PREPARATORY WORKS

3.1. Refugee Integration Programme in fulfilment of Prime Minister's Order of 21 January 2005 and adopted by the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria on 26 May 2005

Introduction

The right to asylum is a fundamental human right proclaimed in Article 14, paragraph 1 of the Declaration of Human Rights – „Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in another country asylum from prosecution“.

In 1993, the Republic of Bulgaria ratified the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 New York Protocol to it, whereby Bulgaria recognized the right to protection for individuals who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, have left their countries of origin and are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of these countries.

Over the last ten years, there have been substantial achievements in terms of the harmonization of the national legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria with the international law and the EU *acquis* in the area of asylum and refugees, the establishment and development of a functioning system of refugees' international protection.

The accession of the Republic of Bulgaria to the European Union in 2007 implies new challenges to the country in the context of achieving the common goal of the European Union set forth in Article 61 of the Treaty of Amsterdam – the gradual building of a common area of freedom, security and justice.

Ensuring the respect and guarantees for human rights on the basis of shared democratic values, such as equality, solidarity, non-discrimination, respect for cultural and ethnic diversity, are an integral part of this common goal.

By means of the adoption of the Law on Refugees in 1999, the new Law on Asylum and Refugees in 2002, and a number of legislative acts and documents regulating the rights and obligations of refugees, the Republic of Bulgaria has made the first steps towards developing a policy for the integration of refugees in the Bulgarian society.

Over the last four years, substantial positive changes have been achieved in the process of refugees' integration in the Bulgarian society, which are the result of the long cooperation among the State Agency for Refugees, the Representation of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian state agencies and non-governmental organizations working with refugees.

⁴⁹ According to letter No 92 00 117/26.05.2005 by K. Ananiev, Deputy Minister of Finance, 300 000 BGN have been envisaged for the integration of newly recognised refugees in 2006.

This National Program for the Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria has been drafted on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the legal framework and the practice, and contains the main principles and aims with regard to refugees' integration in Bulgaria.

The Program provides a medium-term plan of the actions to be undertaken by state institutions, non-governmental organizations and local authorities aimed at ensuring economic, social, political and cultural prerequisites for the integration of refugees in the Bulgarian society, in line with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 New York Protocol to it and other international and European legal instruments in the area of human rights, the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, and the national legislation.

The Program has been developed by an Inter-ministerial Task Force established by virtue of Order No P – 4 of 21 January 2005 issued by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria. The members of the task force are representatives of state institutions and agencies, as well as local authorities, UNHCR Representation, and non-governmental organizations working with refugees.

These strategic guidelines are adopted for the period 2005-2007, after which, depending on the outcomes, the actions along this line can be carried further on, supplemented or adjusted.

PART ONE: POLICY FOR INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN BULGARIA

The integration of refugees is part of the process of democratization of the society, of the development and strengthening of human rights and freedoms.

The development and implementation of an integration policy is a key condition for refugees to become an integral part of the civil society in Bulgaria.

The integration of refugees is an ongoing, dynamic and multi-dimensional process whose purpose is to ensure refugees' social inclusion and involvement in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country.

Equal rights and opportunities can be achieved only by means of a complex integration strategy aimed at:

- Development of an adequate legal framework;
- Efficient implementation of the legislation and access to rights, freedoms and legal remedies;
- Involvement of refugees in the development of this policy;
- Raising the awareness of the civil society in relation to the goals and principles of the integration policy;
- Respect for the cultural and religious differences and observation of the human rights of any individual residing in the Republic of Bulgaria.

This Program was undertaken with a view to ensuring that refugees have equal access to rights, opportunities for developing their individual potential, active

and equal participation in the development of the Bulgarian society.

The program for the integration of refugees targets any aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Article 6, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of Bulgaria, prohibits any limitations of rights or privileges on grounds of race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, origin, religion, education, beliefs, belonging to a political party, personal and public status or property status.

PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY FOR INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN BULGARIA

CHAPTER I: MEASURES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF NEWLY RECOGNIZED REFUGEES

In the first year after receiving the decision for granting status, the newly recognized refugees need specific measures for social protection and support for their successful integration in the Republic of Bulgaria.

AIM:

Ensure conditions for the integration of newly recognized refugees for a one-year period after they have been granted refugee status.

Ensure that any individual who has been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria, within one year after receiving the status, is provided with shelter, social assistance, health insurance, Bulgarian language training, social and cultural counseling.

A binding condition for the access to financial assistance is the participation of newly recognized refugees in Bulgarian language training courses and social counselling.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Development and implementation of measure for social assistance, renting accommodation, health insurance, Bulgarian language training, social and cultural counselling.

LEADING INSTITUTION: State Agency for Refugees (SAR) with the Council of Ministers (COM)

PARTNERS: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) – Social Assistance Agency (SAA), Ministry of Finance (MOF), the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC)

FINANCING: State budget (annexed financial estimates for 2006)

The funds needed for 2007 will be included in the 2007 budget.

DEADLINE: January 2006 – December 2007

2. Implementing a package of measures for integration of newly recognised refugees – social assistance, financial support for housing, health insurance, Bulgarian language education, social and cultural orientation.

Leading institution: SAR with the COM

PARTNERS: MLSP – SAA, MF, MRDPW, MES, MH, local government bodies, BRC

FINANCING: Within the framework of the approved budget of SAR with the COM for the respective year

DEADLINE: January 2006 – December 2007

3. Involvement of newly recognized refugees in literacy, training and employment programs.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, BRC

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MLSP; project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

4. Establishment of a separate desk for delivering administrative and information services to newly recognized refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW), Ministry of Interior (MOI)

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs

FINANCING: within the budgets approved for SAR with COM, MOI and MRDPW

DEADLINE: 2006

CHAPTER II: LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

The existing legislation which regulates refugees' rights and obligations in the Republic of Bulgaria has been brought in line, to a large extent, with the international and European legal instruments and practice.

Regardless of the progress achieved, there is a need for improving and amending some of the effective legislative acts in order to ensure comprehensive safeguards for the equal treatment of refugees in terms of the access and use of the relevant rights and services.

AIM: Update and improve the legal framework regulating refugees' rights and obligations with a view to facilitating their integration in Bulgarian society.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Analysis of the domestic legislation regulating refugees' rights and obligations and bringing it in line with the EU requirements in this area.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MLSP, Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Education and

Science (MES), MOF, MOI, MRDPW, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), State Agency for Child Protection (SACP), UNHCR, NGOs: BRC, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Association for the Integration of Refugees and Migrants (AIRM), etc.

DEADLINE: ongoing

2. Drafting proposals for amendments to the Law on Asylum and Refugees aimed at regulating the functional competences and responsibilities of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers in relation to the implementation of the National Program for the Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: the ministries and agencies involved

DEADLINE: December 2005

3. Drafting proposals for amendments to legislative acts regulating refugees' rights and obligations.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MLSP, MOH, MES, MOF, MOI, MRDPW, MOJ, SACP, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

DEADLINE: ongoing

4. Development of a reference book containing information about refugees' rights and obligations in the Republic of Bulgaria, the powers and functional competences of the state institutions and non-governmental organizations working with refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MLSP, MOH, MES, MOF, MOI, MRDPW, MOJ, SACP, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

DEADLINE: ongoing

CHAPTER III: HOUSING

AIM: Ensure conditions for the accommodation of refugees.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Including measures that guaranteeing the equal access for refugees to accommodation into the National Housing Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MRDPW, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, local authorities, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

2. Development of projects for the provision of financial assistance to municipalities for the purpose of the construction/renovation of buildings where

refugees could be accommodated for a certain period of time and under specific conditions – payment of rent, renovation and maintenance.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MRDPW, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, local authorities, NGOs: BRC, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: 2006 – 2007

3. Including refugees, as a group of individuals with special accommodation needs, into the measures for the provision of subsidiary housing credits under the National Housing Program of the Republic of Bulgaria.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MRDPW, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: banking institutions, NGOs

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: 2006 – 2007

4. Provision of services for refugees' accommodation: information, assistance with administrative tasks, address registration, legal aid and consultations.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MRDPW, MOF, MOI, local authorities, NGOs: BRC, BHC, Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB), AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

5. Study the best European practices regarding refugees' accommodation and including refugees into housing projects for socially disadvantaged persons.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MRDPW, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – Refugee and Migration Service (RMS), CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

CHAPTER IV: EMPLOYMENT

AIM: Improve the access of refugees to employment and career development.

ACTIVITIES:

1. of the legal framework and the practice in the area of professional qualifications and employment of refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – Employment Agency, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MOF, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

2. Analysis of the outcomes of the pilot program for literacy, qualification and employment of refugees and drafting proposals for amendments to the 2006 – 2007 program.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – Employment Agency,

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, MOF, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

3. Involvement of refugees in the existing employment programs of the directorates „Labor Offices“.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – Employment Agency,

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, MOF, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MLSP

DEADLINE: ongoing

4. Involvement of refugees in crafts training programs of the National Crafts Chamber.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: National Crafts Chamber, MLSP, UNHCR, NGOs: CRWB, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

5. Involvement of refugees who do not have the necessary educational background in vocational training under the D Framework Program.

LEADING INSTITUTION: National Agency for Vocational Education and Training with COM

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, MLSP, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

6. Involvement of refugees who have professional competencies but do not possess a certificate proving these competences in vocational training under the E Framework Program.

LEADING INSTITUTION: National Agency for Vocational Education and Training with COM

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, MLSP, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

7. Training of refugees for the development and implementation of small business projects.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – Employment Agency

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, MOF, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MLSP

DEADLINE: ongoing

8. Conducting educational seminars with social workers and officials from the „Labour Bureau“ directorates on the specific aspects of social work with refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – AE

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MLSP and SAR, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

CHAPTER V: EDUCATION

The involvement of refugees into the educational system of the Republic of Bulgaria is an important condition for their successful integration in our country.

The activities relating to Bulgarian language training, social and cultural counseling are an integral part of the measures aimed at improving the access to education.

AIM: Improve refugees' access to the public education system.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Analysis of the legislative acts in the area of education and undertaking the necessary measures in order to bring the legislation in line with the EU requirements in the area of refugees laid down in the Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MES, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

2. Legal regulation of the access for adult refugees who do not have educational background to the public education system in the Republic of Bulgaria.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MES

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: CRWB, BRC – RMS, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

3. Addressing the practical difficulties refugees are faced with in their integration at school, and identifying measures for overcoming these difficulties.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MES

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: CRWB, BRC – RMS, the UN Society in Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MES, project funds

Deadline: 2006

4. Bulgarian language courses for refugees and social counselling aimed at providing knowledge about Bulgaria's state structure, history, traditions and culture.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MES, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

5. Training seminars for teachers working with refugee children.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MES

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: the UN Society in Bulgaria, CRWB, BRC, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: 2006-2007

6. Development of a pilot project for the introduction of the position of a resource teacher in the schools where there is a greater number of refugee children.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MES

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: the UN Society in Bulgaria, CRWB, BRC, AIRM etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: September 2005 – June 2006

7. Designing a mechanism for the recognition of the education acquired by refugees in their countries of origin, in case they are unable to provide evidence thereof.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MES, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs: CRWB, BRC – RMS, AIRM, etc.

DEADLINE: 2006 – 2007

8. Establishment of a phonetic laboratory for the purpose of Bulgarian language training at the Refugee Integration Centre with SAR.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: 2006 – 2007

CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

AIM: Improve the access of refugees to social aid and services.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Analysis of the legislation in the area of social assistance and, if need be, drafting proposals for amendments.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP, MLSP – SAA, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MOF, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

2. Development and implementation of a pilot program for individual social work with refugees in the city of Sofia.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – SAA

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, Sofia Municipality, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, CRWB, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MLSP

DEADLINE: January 2006

3. Training seminars with social workers on the specific aspects of the social work with refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – SAA

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, CRWB, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

4. Development of a project for the introduction of social mediators into social assistance activities for refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM, MLSP – SAA

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, CRWB, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: 2006

5. Development and dissemination of information materials regarding refugees' rights and obligations in the field of social assistance.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP – SAA

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, CRWB, CAR-

ITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

CHAPTER VII: HEALTHCARE

AIM: Improve the access of refugees to health services.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Analysis of the legislation in the area of public health and health insurance for refugees and, if need be, drafting proposals for amendments.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MOH, National health Insurance Fund (NHIF), SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MOF, National Social Security Institute (NSSI), UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

DEADLINE: December 2005

2. Involvement of refugees into national programs for health prophylaxis and the prevention of contagious, infectious diseases and STDs.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MOH, NHIF

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FUNDING: within the budget approved for NHIF

DEADLINE: ongoing

3. Training seminars with GPs and dentists on refugees' specific health issues and needs.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MOH,

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, Bulgarian Union of Doctors, Union of Dentists in Bulgaria, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, CRWB, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MOH and SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

4. Development of a project for the introduction of social mediators into healthcare activities for refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MOH

PARTNERS: SAR with COM, the Bulgarian Union of Doctors, the Union of Dentists in Bulgaria, UNHCR, NGOs: AIRM, BRC – RMS, CRWB, CARITAS – Bulgaria, etc.

FINANCING: project funds

DEADLINE: 2006

5. Development and dissemination of information materials regarding refugees' rights in the area of health insurance and healthcare.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MOH, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: the Bulgarian Union of Doctors, the Union of Dentists in Bulgaria, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, CRWB, CARITAS – Bulgaria, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for MOH, SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

CHAPTER VIII: REFUGEES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

AIM: Facilitate the access of refugees with special needs to rights and services.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Development of training programs for guardians, tutors and foster families in relation to raising separated refugee minors and juveniles.

LEADING INSTITUTION: MLSP, SACP, SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, CARITAS – Bulgaria, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: 2006

2. Regular training of the staff working with refugees with special needs – separated minors and juveniles, refugees who are victims of torture, physical violence, disabled persons, etc.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

3. Involvement of refugees with special needs in various forms of psychological and social work, healthcare, home services, cultural activities, and other types of services.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MLSP, MOH, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

4. Ensuring social services and consultations to refugees with special needs: information about their rights; assistance before institutions and agencies; legal aid and support for solving problems.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

5. Referral of refugees who are victims of trafficking, torture, physical or sexual violence for assistance, consultations and psychological aid to specialized centres and programs.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, and other NGOs

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

6. Application of alternative forms for Bulgarian language and vocational training, which are consistent with the individual needs and capacity of refugees with special needs – refugee women; single parents raising their children, elderly refugees, disabled refugees.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM, MLSP and MES

PARTNERS: NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budgets approved for SAR with COM, MLSP, MES, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

7. Development of a uniform database with information about refugees with special needs.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: ongoing

8. Development of an operational manual for working with refugees with special needs to be used by employees within the public administration, local authorities and non-governmental organizations.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MLSP, MOH, MES, MOF, SACP, UNHCR, NGOs: BRC – RMS, BHC, ACET, CARITAS – Bulgaria, Nadya Centre, CRWB, AIRM, etc.

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM, project funds

DEADLINE: 2006

CHAPTER IX: PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

In 2003, the National Assembly adopted the Anti-Discrimination Law, which regulates the protection against any forms of discrimination and promotes the prevention thereof. This law is aimed at ensuring for each individual the right to:

1. Equality before the law;
2. Equal treatment and opportunities for participation in public life;
3. Efficient protection against discrimination.

AIM: Ensure refugees' right to protection against discrimination in accordance with the Anti-Discrimination Law.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Cooperation with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination in accordance with the Anti-Discrimination Law.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: ministries, agencies and NGOs involved

DEADLINE: ongoing

2. Development and implementation of a mass media policy aimed at creating a favorable environment within the Bulgarian society, which is supportive of refugees' integration.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: mass media, ministries and agencies involved, UNHCR and NGOs

FINANCING: within the budget approved for SAR with COM

DEADLINE: ongoing

3. Investigation of the need and opportunities for the establishment of the institution of the public defender for refugees' rights in Bulgaria (Ombudsman).

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: ministries and agencies involved, UNHCR and NGOs

DEADLINE: 2006

4. Encouraging the development and introduction of training modules and programs for the purpose of acquainting pupils and students with refugees' rights, culture, traditions and life.

LEADING INSTITUTION: SAR with COM

PARTNERS: MES, higher educational establishments, UNHCR and NGOs

DEADLINE: ongoing

CHAPTER X: MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The effective implementation of the Programme requires constant monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of the objectives.

In the course of the realisation of the activities under the Programme the following will be carried out:

1. Control over the observation of the legislation in the area of housing, health care, social assistance, education, employment, protection from discrimination.

2. Analysis of the results from the integration measures for newly recognised refugees during the first year following the decision for granting refugee status through surveys, expert opinions and others.

3. Annual report on the implementation of the Programme before the Council of Ministers.

3.2. Preparatory Works on Integration of Refugees in Bulgaria⁵⁰

a. Social Assistance for Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee or Humanitarian Status in the Republic Of Bulgaria⁵¹

I. Legal framework

- Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – Article 51, para 1
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – Article 23
- Law on Asylum and Refugees – Article 32, paras 1 and 2
- Law on Social Assistance – Article 2, para 4
- Law on Family Allowances – Article 3, item 5
- Law on the Taxation of the Income of Natural Persons – Article 29, para 1-3
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Social Assistance
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Family Allowances
- Ordinance No 4 of 16.03.1999 Laying down the Conditions and Procedure for the Provision of Social Services – Article 14, item 6 and Article 30, para 3
- Instructive Letter No 9103 – 9/ 05.05.2004 of the Executive Director of the Social Assistance Agency Regarding the Harmonization of the Practice in Providing Assistance to Persons and Families Who Have Been Granted Asylum, Refugee or Humanitarian Status

II. Practical aspects of social assistance

1. Social assistance for aliens seeking protection

The activity related to the provision of social assistance to aliens seeking protection is regulated in Article 29, para 1, item 4 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees.

The State Agency for Refugees assists aliens seeking protection with the solution of social and psychological problems. During the status determination procedure, refugees receive monthly food benefits in the amount of BGN 40, which is in line with the approved guaranteed minimum income (BGN 40) in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The social assistance for asylum-seekers is ensured by the State Agency for Refugees under the conditions and procedure applicable to Bulgarian nationals. Social benefits are granted on the basis of a social interview whose purpose is the assessment of the individual needs of each refugee.

The support rendered to asylum-seekers is aimed at securing the social protection of the most vulnerable groups – the sick, the disabled, the elderly, young children, single parent, etc.

⁵⁰ Prepared by SAR with COM, Dr. Kina Sabeva (UNHCR) and Ms. Marinela Radeva. (AIRM)

⁵¹ Prepared by SAR with COM, Dr. Kina Sabeva (UNHCR) and Ms. Marinela Radeva. (AIRM)

The needy are granted lump-sum benefits funded from the state budget and in-kind aid (food, clothes, shoes, bed linen, etc.) provided as humanitarian aid by charity organizations (BRC, „CARITAS – Bulgaria“, etc.).

In 2002, a new approach in the provision of social assistance to vulnerable groups of asylum-seekers was introduced. Under a project financed by UNHCR and implemented by the State Agency for Refugees, „CARITAS-Bulgaria“ and the Council of Refugee Women, asylum-seekers' needs are subject to an individual assessment and, depending on the needs identified, in-kind aid (food and other essential items) is provided.

The Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC secures humanitarian aid at the Reception-and-Registration Centre in the village of Banya; information and social consultations; assistance with tracing asylum-seekers' relatives.

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee renders free-of-charge specialized legal consultations, representation in the status determination procedure, and other activities.

For the purpose of coordinating the efforts made by the organizations working with refugees, the State Agency, jointly with UNHCR, the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the Council of Refugee Women, has introduced a refugee assistance card on which each organization enters information about the assistance provided: aid, medicines, social services, Bulgarian language courses, and vocational training.

2. Social assistance for aliens who have been granted protection in the Republic of Bulgaria

The aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and who, due to health, age, social and other objective reasons, are not able to meet their basic needs are entitled to social assistance under the conditions and procedure applicable to Bulgarian nationals.

After the submission of the status granting decision, the State Agency for Refugees terminates the payment of monthly food benefits and health insurance contributions; the provision of social aid; and the accommodation at the Registration-and-Reception Centres.

The Agency issues documents certifying both the rights of the aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and the assistance received by them during the status determination procedure.

Social assistance under the Law on Social Assistance

The refugees who do not have any income and subsistence means are referred for registration to the directorates „Social Assistance“ and „Labour Office“ by the State Agency for Refugees and the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC.

The social assistance activities are performed by the directorates „Social Assistance“ at the address of permanent residence, under the conditions and procedure applicable to Bulgarian citizens.

Pursuant to Instructive Letter No 9103 – 9/ 05.05.2004 of the Executive Director of the Social Assistance Agency, the judgment with regard to the right of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status to social assistance is made on a case-by-case basis; there is no requirement, for the purpose of granting assistance to individuals and families, that the beneficiaries present documents certifying the income of the other family members who are not residing in Bulgaria, divorce or alimony decisions, etc.

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are obliged to take care of meeting their needs. The unemployed, including aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, are included in employment programs. An individual who refuses to participate in such a program is deprived of the right to monthly benefits for a period of 1 year.

The Law on Social Assistance regulates the option for mothers raising children aged up to 3; single parents raising their children by themselves; pregnant women after the third month of pregnancy; persons with permanent disability, and other categories of individuals to participate in employment programs at their will.

Bulgarian nationals and aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are entitled to social assistance, which includes:

- Monthly social benefit – granted to individuals and families whose income for the previous month is lower than the differentiated minimum income;
- Lump-sum social benefit – granted once a year for meeting ad hoc health, educational, utility or other urgent needs. The amount of the benefit is up to BGN 200 (fivefold the amount of GMI).

- Targeted benefit for obtaining an ID – granted as a one-off payment in the amount of up to BGN 40 (=GMI) and is determined on the basis of the costs for obtaining an ID, photos and transport costs;

- Refugee women – mothers with many children – are entitled once a year to a free return ticket for a trip by train or bus on the territory of the country.

Refugees who have a disability group certified have the right to use the social benefits, disability aids (wheelchairs, crutches, hearing aids, etc.) and services envisaged for Bulgarian nationals, including a disability pension.

For the purpose of supporting the integration of newly recognized refugees or humanitarian status holders in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Refugee-and-Migration Service (RMS) of BRC provides a variety of support and services: information, social counselling, and, jointly with the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, facilitates the refugees, who need help, with their registration at the directorates „Social Assistance“ and „Labour Office“.

An important component of RMS of BRC is the granting of financial aid for a 10-month period to aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and who meet the conditions for granting assistance to socially disadvantaged Bulgarian nationals. The financing of activities is ensured with funds under the UNHCR Program.

The humanitarian aid (financial integration aid included) provided by the State Agency for Refugees and the Bulgarian Red Cross are not considered as income when establishing the access to social and family benefits under the Law on Social Assistance and the Law on Family Allowances.

The right to family allowances

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status have the right to apply and receive family allowances under the Law on Family Allowances, the conditions and procedure applicable to Bulgarian nationals.

One of the most important conditions for being granted family allowances requires the children to have permanent residence in Bulgaria.

Pursuant to Article 3, item 5 and Article 4 of the Law on Family Allowances, aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and whose average income per family member for the previous 6 months is lower or equivalent to BGN 200 are entitled to:

- A lump-sum benefit for pregnancy in the amount of BGN 150, provided the refugee woman is not entitled to benefits for pregnancy and delivery under the procedure of the Social Insurance Code and has permanent residence in the country;
- Monthly allowances for children till the completion of secondary education but not beyond the age of 20, provided:
 - The child is not placed for raising with full state provision in a specialized institution for children;
 - The child, till the completion of secondary education, but not beyond the age of 20, regularly attends school unless his/her health state inhibit him/her from doing so;
 - The child has permanent residence in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The amount of the monthly allowance which is determined in the 2005 Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria is BGN 18.

- Monthly allowance for raising a child till the age of one in the amount of BGN 100, provided:
 - The refugee mother is not insured and does not receive pregnancy, delivery and child raising benefits under the Compulsory Social Insurance Code;
 - The child is not placed for raising with full state provision in a specialized institution for children;
 - The child has permanent residence in the country.

- Targeted benefits for school children, provided the child is enrolled in the first class of a public or municipal school.

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are entitled to a lump-sum benefit for giving birth to a child, regardless of the family's income, where the child is born on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, alive as of the moment of delivery, and not abandoned for placement and raising at a specialized institution for children.

The amount of the lump-sum benefit for child delivery is:

- For first, second and third child – BGN 200;
- For fourth and any subsequent – BGN 100.

3. Tax alleviations for raising children

Pursuant to the Law on the Taxation of the Income of Natural Persons (Article 29a, paras 1-3), domestic natural persons, including the ones performing an economic activity as sole traders, are entitled to tax alleviations for raising children.

Article 6, para 1 of the Law defines domestic natural persons, regardless of their nationality, as the individuals who have permanent residence in Bulgaria and the ones who reside in the country for over 183 days within each 365-day period.

In order for an alien who has been granted refugee or humanitarian status to avail himself/herself of tax alleviations for raising children, the following conditions have to be simultaneously met:

- As of 31 December of the relevant fiscal year, the individual must have stayed in Bulgaria for more than 183 days;
- As of 31 December of the relevant fiscal year, the child must be a domestic natural person and a Bulgarian national or an alien who has been granted refugee or humanitarian status under the Law on Asylum and Refugees;
 - The child in underage;
 - As of 31 December of the relevant fiscal year, the child is not placed for raising with full state provision in a specialized institution for children.

The total amount of the annual tax alleviation is as follows:

- For one underage child – BGN 360;
- For two underage children- BGN 780;
- For two or more underage children- BGN 1,140.

III. Problems in the area of social assistance for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria

Over the last four years, substantial progress has been achieved with regard to the legal framework and practice in the area of social assistance of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in the Republic of Bulgaria.

This progress is mostly due to the cooperation among the State Agency for Refugees, the Social Assistance Agency with MLSP, the UNHCR Representation in Bulgaria and the non-governmental organizations working with refugees.

Nevertheless, there are some problems, which are specific for the situation of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, particularly in the first year after the receipt of the status granting decision.

1. The Law on Citizens' Registration stipulates that each individual who is liable for citizens' registration is obliged to declare in writing his/her permanent and current address of residence. The permanent address is the address in a settlement where the individual is entered in the register of the population, while the current address is the one where the individual has his/her lodgings.

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are unable to indicate a permanent address in the Republic of Bulgaria. The reasons for this are, as follows:

After the receipt of the status granting decision, aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are obliged to leave the Registration-and-Reception Centres for Refugees and secure accommodation on their own.

Due to the lack of funds, a great part of them are not able to find accommodation and, hence, indicate a permanent address. In most cases, when filling in the application they indicate as permanent address the one where compatriots or friends of theirs live.

The concept „permanent address“ in respect of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status fully coincides with the concept „current address“, as the only address they can indicate in both cases is the address where their current residence is.

Pursuant to Article 8 of the Law on Social Assistance „Social benefits are granted to individuals and families at their permanent address where the social test is conducted“.

It often happens that, due to changes in the rent amount or other reasons, aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status change their accommodation every several months, which inevitably results in changes both in their permanent and current address and in their IDs, which implies costs and difficulties with receiving social benefits.

2. An important condition for the monthly social assistance is the registration of active refugees as unemployed at the directorates „Labour Office“ in residence. Unlike Bulgarian nationals who are required to have registered at the Labour Offices at least 6 months before filing the application, there is no such requirement with regard to aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitari-

an status and who have registered at the Labour Offices within one month after the receipt of the status granting decision.

Practice shows that this one-month period is a very short term within which aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status have to find accommodation, file an application for identity documents before MOI, an application for address registration before the municipal authorities.

The IDs are usually received after the one-month period has expired, which inhibits most of the refugees from receiving their monthly social benefits.

IV. Proposals for improving the legal framework and practice

1. Extend the deadline for the registration at the directorates „Labour Office“ pursuant to Article 10, para 4, item 7 of the Regulation on the Application of the Law on Social Assistance from one to two months as from the receipt of the status granting decision.

2. Article 12a of the Law on Social Assistance regulates the possibility for implementing the social integration of the beneficiaries on the basis of individual projects developed by the directorate „Social assistance“.

In view of the specific needs of the aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, we propose that a pilot program for individual social work with refugees for a 1-year period after status granting should be developed jointly with the Social Assistance Agency.

3. We propose addressing the option of one-stop shop administrative service provision for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in relation to issuing IDs and address registration. This would substantially reduce the time for preparing the necessary documents and filing the application and, hence, facilitate the process of refugees' integration in Bulgarian society.

4. In view of the need to improve the conditions for the social integration of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, we propose the development and implementation of programs for practical training of social workers from the directorates „Social Assistance“ and „Labour Office“ on the various aspects of the social work with this particular group.

5. We propose that, jointly with the higher education establishments, a program be developed for training social workers from refugee communities.

10 February 2005

b. Health Insurance And Health Care For Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee Status Or Humanitarian Status In the Republic of Bulgaria⁵²

I. Legal framework

- Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – Article 52, paras 1-4
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
- Law on Asylum and Refugees – Article 32, para 1
- Law on Health
- Law on Health Insurance – Article 33, item 4, Article 34, para 1, item 3 and para 2, item 2, Article 35, Article 37, paras 1-4, Article 40, para 2, items 4 and 6
- 2005 National Framework Contract between the National Health Insurance Fund and the Union of Bulgarian Doctors and the Union of Dentists in Bulgaria – Article 108, para 2, item 2
 - Ordinance on the Access of health-insured persons to medical institutions for out-patient and in-patient medical assistance
 - Ordinance No 40 of 24 November 2004 r. Laying down the Basic Package of Healthcare Activities Guaranteed with the Budget of the National Health Insurance Fund
 - Ordinance No 2 of 27 April 2000 Regarding the Types of Immunizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Terms for Their Delivery
 - Instructive Letter No 91-01-242 of 15 October 2003 of NSSI Regarding the Activity of NSSI's Territorial Units in Relation to Clarifying and Proving the Current Health Insurance Status of Insured Persons
 - Instructive Letter No 91-01-19 of 19.01.2004 of NSSI Regarding the Payment of Health Insurance Contributions

II. Practical aspects of health insurance and medical services

The issues of ensuring access to medical assistance for aliens who seek or have been granted protection are of key importance in terms of their health status and the quality of their life in the host country. The Bulgarian legislation in this area requires regular payment of health insurance contributions in order to avoid any discontinuation in the rights of health-insured persons.

The health insurance rights and obligations of aliens who seek or have been granted protection are linked to their health insurance situation during the status determination procedure.

1. Health insurance and medical services for asylum-seekers

The activities related to the medical services and health insurance for aliens

⁵² Report drafted by SAR with COM, Dr. Kina Sabeva, (UNHCR) and Ms. Marinela Radeva. (AIRM)

who seek or have been granted protection are regulated in the Law on Asylum and Refugees – Article 29, para 1, item 4 – and the Law on health Insurance – Article 33, item 4; Article 34, para 1, item 3 and para 2, item 2; Article 35; Article 37, paras 1-4; Article 40, para 2, item 6.

The State Agency for Refugees, following the accommodation of asylum-seekers in the Registration-and-Reception Centres for Refugees, conducts compulsory medical checks and examinations in conformity with a Letter by the Ministry of Health (AIDS, Wassermann, parasitizes, malaria).

These medical examinations are aimed both at preserving the health and life of aliens who seek or have been granted protection and at ensuring guarantees and the protection of public health. There are medical facilities at the Registration-and-reception Centres, with isolation wards for persons with contagious diseases and asylum-seekers who need everyday medical care and observation. Where necessary, medicines for the treatment of urgent cases are secured.

As from the date of opening the status determination procedure, the State Agency for Refugees makes the monthly compulsory health insurance contributions for asylum-seekers by using resources from the state budget. In view of this responsibility, software with data regarding the health-insured asylum-seekers has been jointly developed with the National Social Security Institute and the National Health Insurance Fund.

After the receipt of the temporary refugee certificate, asylum-seekers are referred to choosing a GP.

Pursuant to the Law on Asylum and Refugees and the Law on Health Insurance, pending the status determination procedure, the asylum-seekers have the same rights and access to medical assistance and free-of-charge medical services under the procedure applicable to Bulgarian nationals.

There is a special focus on women, children and chronically sick asylum-seekers; where needed, these categories are referred for medical examination and treatment, including dental services, to the medical centre „Pope John Paul II“ with CARITAS-Bulgaria.

There is an agreement between the State Agency for Refugees and the Infectious Diseases Hospital regarding the diagnosis and treatment of asylum-seekers whose state requires specific medical assistance.

The State Agency for Refugees provides the service „social assistant“ for the purpose of accompanying aliens to hospitals. The Council of Refugee Women is also particularly helpful in this respect.

In rare cases, when additional payment for medical services has to be made outside the basic package guaranteed with the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund, the State Agency for Refugees seeks the support of various sponsors.

2. Health insurance and medical services for aliens who have been granted protection in the Republic of Bulgaria

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status have the same rights and obligations as Bulgarian nationals in the area of health insurance and access to medical assistance.

The State Agency for Refugees terminates the payment of monthly health insurance contributions as from the date of submission of the decision granting the status. As from this date, the aliens who have been granted protection are obliged to pay health insurance contributions under the procedure regulated in the Law on Health Insurance.

There are the following options for meeting this obligation:

- The health insurance contributions of those aliens who work on the basis of an employment contract are paid, as from 2005, in the ratio 70 (employer) : 30 (insured person);
- The health insurance contributions of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and meet the conditions for monthly social benefits and targeted benefits for heating under the procedure laid down in the Law on Social Assistance are paid from the state budget;
- The health insurance contributions paid by self-insured aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are calculated on the basis of the relevant minimum income. The 2005 rate of the health insurance contribution is BGN 6.60.

The health-insured aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are entitled to medical assistance within the basic package of health activities guaranteed with the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF).

The basic package of primary out-patient medical assistance includes:

- Health information activities;
- Health promotion;
- Prophylaxis of diseases;
- Follow-up observation;
- Diagnosis and treatment;
- Control of infectious disease, and other activities.

The basic package of dental activities includes a number of activities, some of which are reimbursed by NHIF, while others are paid by the patient.

The health-insured persons, including aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, pay a consumer fee for each visit to the doctor or dentist in the amount of BGN 1.50, and for each day of in-patient treatment (a maximum of 10 days/year) – BGN 3.

NHIF reimburses partially or totally the medicines for home treatment; these medicines are determined by virtue of a special order issued by the Minister of Health.

The Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC supports aliens who have been granted protection by means of cash aid in the amount of BGN 36 for covering their health insurance contributions during the first months after status granting.

In terms of additional medical services, the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC ensures out-patient and in-patient treatment, with the exception of delivery and pediatric care, at the Transport Medical Institute „Kniaz Boris III“; training on family planning and prevention of STDs; psychiatric aid and psycho-therapeutic group work on the basis of a contract with Nadya Centre; other activities.

III. Problems in the area of health insurance and medical services for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria

The legislation regarding health insurance and medical services for aliens who seek or have been granted protection in the Republic of Bulgaria is regulated with details and is in line with the international and European practice in this area.

As a result of the cooperation and coordination among the State Agency for Refugees, the Ministry of Health, the National Health Insurance Fund and UNHCR Representation, a number of legislative changes have been made with a view to ensuring the access and rights in terms of medical services for aliens who seek or have been granted protection.

There are some problems emerging in practice, which relate to the medical services for this group of individuals and their specific needs:

- The majority of the aliens who seek or have been granted protection have a deteriorated health status as a result of malnutrition, unsatisfactory medical care in their countries of origin, the difficult transition conditions in Bulgaria, chronic diseases, stress, etc.;
- Asylum-seekers come from countries with region-specific diseases, which require diagnosis and treatment;
- A part of the aliens who seek or have been granted protection have been subject to persecution and torture in their countries of origin, which has resulted in their deteriorated physical and mental health;
- There are intercultural and religious differences in terms of the provision of medical services to aliens who seek or have been granted protection. These concern, to a great extent, Muslim women who have difficulties in speaking about their health problems and prefer to be taken care of by a lady doctor or nurse;
- A major problem with medical checks, diagnoses and treatment is related to the linguistic barrier between the medical staff and the aliens who seek or have been granted protection;
- The aliens who seek or have been granted protection are not familiar with their health insurance rights and obligations, which does not allow them to

make use of the basic package of health activities guaranteed with the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund;

- A great part of the medical specialists – doctors, dentists, nurses – are not well familiar with the rights of refugees in Bulgaria, in particular with the fact that they have the same medical care rights as Bulgarian nationals.

There are also some gaps in the legal framework:

- The newly adopted Law on Health contains a special provision regulating the equal rights in terms of medical services enjoyed by Bulgarian nationals and aliens who hold a long-term residence permit in Bulgaria. The lack of a similar provision with regard to aliens who seek or have been granted protection sometimes hinders their access to health care;

- A great part of the asylum-seekers are unable to pay the consumer fee for visits to doctors, dentists or a health establishment. During the status determination procedure they have no income, as they are not entitled to gainful employment, but receive monthly allowances in the amount of BGN 40.

- In some cases, there are problems emerging in relation to immunizations for aliens who seek or have been granted protection, as the Ordinance Regarding the Types of Immunizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Terms for Their Delivery stipulates that: „The compulsory immunizations are provided free-of-charge to Bulgarian nationals, foreign nationals who hold a permanent residence permit in the country, and citizens of countries with which the Republic of Bulgaria has agreements for free provision of health care.”

IV. Proposals for improving the legislation and practice

1. Amend Article 83, para 1 of the Law on Health: „Individuals who have been granted refugee, humanitarian status or the right to asylum, and aliens who have been granted long-term residence... are entitled to medical care pursuant to Articles 81 and 82 under the same conditions as Bulgarian nationals“.

2. Add „asylum-seekers“ to the group of persons who are exempt from consumer fees in Article 37, para 3 of the law on Health Insurance.

3. Amend the Ordinance Regarding the Types of Immunizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Terms for Their Delivery by including in its scope aliens who seek or have been granted protection in Article 5.

4. In view of finding solutions to the problems with the health insurance and services for aliens who have been granted protection, address the option of ensuring the health insurance for these persons from the state budget for the first 3 months after the receipt of the decision.

5. Where necessary, address, jointly with the Regional Health Insurance Funds and the Regional Boards of the Union of Bulgarian Doctors and the Union of Dentists in Bulgaria, the option of an ex-officio choice of a GP for individuals pending the status determination procedure.

6. Ensure the provision of a document establishing the period for which SAR has paid the health insurance contributions for aliens who have been granted protection.

7. Organize training seminars for medical specialists working with refugees.

8. Produce and disseminate information materials regarding the rights and obligations of aliens who seek or have been granted protection among specialists and employees within the medical care and health insurance systems.

9. Hold awareness-raising meetings with aliens who seek or have been granted protection with a view to clarifying their rights and obligations with regard to the provision of medical service.

c. Employment and Vocational Training of Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee or Humanitarian Status in the Republic Of Bulgaria⁵³

I. Legal framework

- Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – Article 48, paras 1, 3, 4 and 5
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – Article 17, Article 18, Article 19, Article 24
- Law on Asylum and Refugees – Article 20, Article 32, para 1, Article 36, Article 56, para 1
- Law on Employment Promotion – Article 18, para 3, item 3, Article 70, para 3
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Employment Promotion
- Ordinance Laying down the conditions and procedure for issuing, refusal and withdrawal of work permits for aliens in the Republic of Bulgaria – Article 4, para 1, items 1 and 10
- Instructive Letter No 91-93-0254 of 17 June 2004 r. of the Employment Agency regarding the registration of individuals seeking employment at the Directorates „Labour Office“
- Instructive Letter No 91-01-205 of 06 August 2004 of the National Social Security Institute regarding some issues in the practice of the Regional Social Security Directorates in relation to payment of employment benefits

⁵³ Report drafted by SAR with COM, Dr. Kina Sabeva (UNHCR) and Ms. Marinela Radeva.(AIRM)

- Instructive Letter No 94-E-0013 of 09 September 2004 of the Employment Agency regarding registration at the Directorate „Labour Office“

II. Practical aspects of employment and vocational training of aliens who seek or have been granted protection

One of the major goals in the process of refugees' integration in the host country is ensuring conditions in order for refugees to achieve self-sufficiency, self-subsistence, the capacity to contribute, by means of their potential, labour and skills, to the overall development of the society in which they live.

In accordance with the Law on Asylum and Refugees, the State Agency for Refugees, either independently or jointly with the local authorities and administration, the Bulgarian Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations, can organize auxiliary labour activities, by means of which aliens who seek or have been granted protection are offered access to training with a vocational and labour performance focus.

1. Employment and vocational training of asylum-seekers

Pending the status determination procedure, the aliens who have applied for refugee or humanitarian status are entitled to labour activities at the centres at the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers.

In 2001, by virtue of a Decree of the Council of Ministers No 123 of 14 May 2001, a Refugee Integration Centre was set up. This centre is financed by the Bulgarian state and is a continuation of the Centre for the Integration of Refugee Women, which was built with UNHCR funding in 1997.

In the area of employment and professional qualification, the Refugee Integration Centre facilitates refugees' integration in the Republic of Bulgaria by means of:

- Bulgarian language training;
- Professional training and re-training courses;
- Vocational and motivation training;
- Grants for training aimed at acquiring professional qualifications;
- Other activities.

While the unemployment rate has been on the decrease (12.67% in 2004), aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are among the groups that face the greatest difficulties in finding a job.

In 2004, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers developed a programme for assisting the integration on the labour market for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status.

The 2005 National Employment Action Plan, in its section on integration promotion and combating the discrimination against disadvantaged persons on

the labour market, includes a specialized program for refugees: Program for Literacy, Qualification and Employment of Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee or Humanitarian Status.⁵⁴

The Program envisages activities related to the provision of labour motivation, literacy courses and vocational training for 40 persons. The Program will be implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Agency – Regional Employment Agency in Sofia – in partnership with the State Agency for Refugees.

The financing of the Program will be ensured by the state budget in the amount of BGN 42,800 for:

- Motivation training;
- Literacy;
- Training for unemployed persons aimed at ensuring professional qualifications;
- Grants, accommodation and transport costs for unemployed persons participating in the program.

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status receive additional assistance and support in the process of seeking a job from the Refugee-and-Migration Service of the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria. This support includes: information about vacancies; accompanying and assisting the aliens with filling in the documents for the purpose of registration at the directorates „Labour Offices“; retraining courses; mediation for finding a job with companies managed by aliens working in Bulgaria, etc.

III. Problems in the area of employment and vocational training of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status have the same rights in respect of employment and professional qualification as Bulgarian nationals. The legislation in this area is in line with the international and European legal instruments.

The problems in the area of employment related to aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are specific ones and concern a variety of aspects of their life:

- Lack or insufficient knowledge of Bulgarian;
- Lack of documents certifying their educational background or professional qualifications;
- Lack of documents certifying years of service and, above all, years of service in Bulgaria;

⁵⁴ 2005 National Employment Action Plan, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/docs/index.htm

- Discriminatory attitude by some employers;
- Cultural and religious differences, in particular with regard to women's employment in Muslim families;
- Insufficient knowledge about the rights and obligations set forth in the labour legislation.

Practice shows that most of the aliens are unable to certify their educational background or professional qualifications by means of an official document issued in their country of origin.

For the purpose of registration at the directorate „Labour Office“ the unemployed individual is required to present documents that certify his/her years of service, and/or ex-officio years of service, and/or years of social insurance contribution. Aliens who have acquired their years of service in other countries have to submit to the NSII a document certifying the recognition of these years of service in accordance with social policy agreements concluded with the Republic of Bulgaria.

It is a similar situation with the submission of other compulsory documents – documents certifying the educational background and professional qualifications.

In case the alien fails to provide the above documents, he/she is considered an unemployed person who has no education and professional qualifications. Due to the lack of years of service acquired in Bulgaria, the refugee is not entitled to unemployment benefits; cannot find a job as employers prefer to hire people who have some education and professional experience; therefore, the refugee is not competitive.

IV. Proposals for improving the legislation and practice

1. Introduce compulsory Bulgarian language training for the period following the receipt of the refugee or humanitarian status with a view to improving the conditions for refugees' integration in society and on the labour market.
2. Address options for expanding the range of vocational training courses, in addition to the ones provided at the Refugee Integration Centre.
3. Ensure the involvement of employers' organizations in the process of facilitating employment for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status.
4. Link vocational training and retraining with apprenticeship. Implementing Partners and subsequent employment.

5. Organize training seminars for the staff of the directorates „Labour Office“ with a view to acquainting them with refugee issues and the specific aspects of working with refugees.

6. Address the option of developing a project for the promotion of entrepreneurship among the refugee community and job creation.

7. Publish an information brochure regarding the rights and obligations of refugees in respect of employment and professional qualification.

8. Ensure that specific measures for the qualification and employment of refugee women are undertaken jointly with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

d. Housing For Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee Or Humanitarian Status In The Republic Of Bulgaria

I. Legal framework

- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – Article 21
- Law on Asylum and Refugees – Article 25, para 2; Article 29, para 1, item 3 and para 2; Article 30, item 5; Article 32, paras 1, 2 and 3; Article 35; Article 36; Article 72, paras 2 and 3
- Law on Municipal Property – Article 43, item 1; Article 45, para 1, item 2; Article 45a, para 1
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Municipal Property – Article 5, para 1, Article 17, para 1, Article 18
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Social Assistance – Article 14, para 1, items 1-4 and para 2
- Ordinance Laying down the Procedure for the Acquisition, Management and Disposal with Municipal Property (adopted by virtue of Decision No 2 of Sofia Municipal Council under Protocol No 10 of 03 April 2000, amended by Decision No 9 under Protocol No 26 of 23 May 2001) – Article 13, para 1, Article 14, Article 16, paras 1-3, Article 17, para 1, Article 26, para 1, item 3

II. Practical aspects of housing for aliens who seek or have been granted refugee status

The accommodation of aliens who seek or have been granted protection is an important part of the overall process of the adaptation and integration of these individuals in Bulgaria.

The provision of shelter upon the registration of the status application has social, health and psychological implications related to regaining the feeling of

security and the protection of the rights of aliens seeking protection in the host country.

1. Accommodation of aliens seeking protection

Pursuant to the Law on Asylum and Refugees, pending the status determination procedure, the alien seeking protection is accommodated in a centre (transit or registration-and-reception) or another facility depending on the assessment of the individual's health, family and material status.

The maintenance costs of these centres, including utility costs, food, maintenance, sanitary materials, etc., are covered by the State Agency for Refugees.

The Agency accommodates asylum-seekers at the Registration-and-Reception Centres located in the city of Sofia and in the village of Banya, Nova Zagora Municipality.

Aliens seeking protection who have their own financial means may be allowed to pay for their accommodation at an address chosen by them.

2. Housing of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are obliged to leave the registration-and-reception centre within a certain time limit and ensure their accommodation and registration address by themselves.

Pursuant to Article 35 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees „Any alien who has been granted refugee or humanitarian status shall be obliged, within 14 days after the receipt of the decision granting such status, to appear at the municipality in the area where he/she will establish himself/herself, so that he/she could be entered into the register of population.“

In practice, the majority of the aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are not able to secure accommodation on their own after the receipt of the status granting decision. There are a variety of reasons for this:

- The insufficient financial means for renting a dwelling: refugees do not have income; most of them do not have any money of their own for paying either the monthly rent or the utility costs. A serious obstacle in this respect is the advance payment of the rent for a minimum of 6 months required by landlords.
- The lack of linguistic knowledge makes it impossible for refugees to look for lodgings, to negotiate the rental contracts and sign them;
- In some cases, landlords have a discriminatory attitude and are reluctant to rent their apartments to aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status;
- The time limit for finding lodgings, registering at the municipality (14 days after the receipt of the status granting decision) and filing an application for

an ID is unrealistic and impedes the access to social assistance and registration at the Directorate „Labour Office“.

In most cases, in order to meet the above requirements, aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status register at the address of relatives or compatriots, which provides a temporary solution to their problem.

The Law on Asylum and Refugees contains a special provision – Article 32, para 2 – regulating the possibility for an alien who has been granted refugee or humanitarian status to receive financial assistance for a 6-month accommodation after the receipt of the status granting decision.

As the State Agency for Refugees does not have targeted financial resources for the implementation of this provision, in some cases, the support provided to refugees with special needs is the extension of the term for their stay in the centres with the Agency.

The decision granting the extension of the above term is taken on the basis of an assessment of the health, family and material status of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status.

For the purpose of solving some heavy cases (chronically sick, disabled persons), the option for placement in institutions for social services regulated in Ordinance No 4 of 16 March 1999 of MLSP Laying down the Conditions and Procedure for the Provision of Social Services.

With the support of the State Agency for Refugees and the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC, some refugees and families are accommodated, for a certain period of time, in the homes for temporary accommodation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The above options do not provide a solution to the housing of aliens who have been granted protection in Bulgaria, which, according to the refugees themselves and the organizations working with them, is the greatest obstacle to their integration in Bulgaria.

In 2001, the State Agency for Refugees, in cooperation with the Council of Europe and UNHCR Representation in Bulgaria, organized an international expert meeting on refugees' accommodation issues. This meeting resulted in identifying a number of measures aimed at solutions to this difficult social problem, including: the need for amending the legal framework regarding the housing of refugees in state- and municipal-owned dwellings; sharing responsibilities among the state, the municipalities and NGOs; involving refugees in the process of assessing the accommodation needs; conducting awareness-raising campaigns; developing projects for refugees' accommodation which are to be submitted to donors for financing, etc.

In implementation of the above recommendations, a joint pilot project was designed between the State Agency for Refugees, Sofia Municipality and UNHCR Representation in Bulgaria in relation to the accommodation of 500 vul-

nerable persons – refugees and Bulgarian nationals. Due to the lack of financing, the project has not yet been implemented.

III. Problems in the area of housing for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria

The housing issue with regard to aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria cannot be addressed independently from the general housing policy with regard to socially disadvantaged citizens.

It should be noted that refugees are in a specific situation, which cannot be compared to the situation of any group within Bulgarian society.

The majority of Bulgarian nationals own a dwelling in the settlement where they live or in other settlements. When seeking a solution to their housing problem, Bulgarians seek the support not only of the state, but also of relatives or close friends, sign credit contracts for the purchase or building of a dwelling.

Aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status can neither rely on the support of relatives or friends, nor receive a loan for a dwelling, as they have no income and, hence, are not creditworthy.

The only possibility is for aliens to approach the directorates „Social Assistance“ for social assistance or file an application for municipal housing.

Pursuant to Article 14, para (?), items 1, 2 and 4 of the Regulation on the Application of the Law on Social Assistance, orphans aged up to 25, who have graduated from a social vocational school, single elderly people aged above 70 and single parents are entitled to a monthly targeted aid, in case:

- They pay a rent for a municipal dwelling;
- The accommodation order is in their name;
- Their income for the preceding month is up to 150 percent of the differentiated minimum income.

The above legal option depends, first and foremost, on the requirement for the individuals to have been accommodated in a municipal dwelling by force of an order to this end.

As a result of the 2004 amendments to the Law on Municipal Property, aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are entitled to applying for accommodation in rented dwellings. Pursuant to the previous wording of Article 43, para 1 of the Law, only Bulgarian nationals were entitled to such accommodation.

The latest revision of Article 43 repeals this requirement and allows refugees to also apply for municipal housing in case their accommodation needs have been determined.

The conditions and procedure for determining housing needs and accommodation in rented municipal dwellings are laid down by an ordinance issued by the relevant municipal council.

The effective Ordinance Laying down the Procedure for the Acquisition, Management and Disposal with Municipal Property of Sofia Municipal Council has not yet been revised, which means that the requirements for applicants to have Bulgarian citizenship have not been repealed.

The practice so far shows that the applications filed by aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status have been rejected on the grounds of Bulgarian citizenship.

Another condition, which does not allow aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status to have equal access to accommodation in municipal dwellings, is the requirement set forth in Article 5, para 1, item 6 of the Regulation on the Application of the Law on Municipal Property: „...the citizens and their families must have address registration in the relevant settlement, which, for settlement of 0.1 an II functional types, shall be over 5 years...”

As a result of the adoption of the new Law on Asylum and Refugees in 2002, the term for the status determination procedure was reduced to 6 months, after which period aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status have to meet their housing needs by themselves.

Given the short duration of the status determination procedure, it is not possible for refugees to adapt to the new environment.

Unless they have a permanent and valid address, aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status cannot receive an ID; cannot register as unemployed at the employment offices; cannot register at the social assistance directorates in order to apply for social assistance and other social benefits.

Ensuring accommodation for these individuals is closely related to the access for them to the labour market and employment.

In cities where the unemployment rate is lower, the municipalities usually do not have vacant municipal housing for rental accommodation. The situation in towns is different. There are dwellings available both for renting and for purchasing at very low prices. The problem in this case, however, is related to employment opportunities, which are very limited. Referring aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status to such settlements could have negative implications along several lines:

- Refugees will not integrate, but will be discouraged and alienated, as in spite of the shelter ensured they will not be able to find a job and will rely only on welfare;

- The local inhabitants will regard the refugees as competitors on the labour market, which may provoke a negative attitude.

The lack of a long-term solution to the housing issue of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status results in a number of unfavourable implications for them – frequent changes of lodgings, the schools attended by their children, uncertainty in terms of the amount of the rent, etc.

IV. Proposals for improving the legislation and practice

The issue regarding the accommodation of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status cannot be addressed outside the housing policy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

1. The National Housing Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted in 2004⁵⁶ emphasizes that „...the dwelling has an important role in the development of society and is of key importance to social, economic and cultural progress.“

As regards aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, the issue of ensuring accommodation is vital and is at the core of the integration policy with respect to this category of citizens in our society.

According to the data of the National Statistical Institute, the majority of the dwellings in Bulgaria are owned by natural persons – 96.5 %. There are minimum possibilities for accommodation in state- or municipal-owned dwellings, as they account for only 3.0 % of the total number of dwellings.⁵⁷

There is a negative trend of increasing the rent rates. For a family with an average income, paying for the rent for a two-bedroom flat in an average town would require half of its income.⁵⁸

The National Housing Strategy defines the strategic goals and areas of the national housing policy.

We propose that the specific issues relating to the accommodation of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status should be reflected in the strategy:

- A-1 Program „Building the Institutional Framework“ – envisage measures for improving the legislation; the option of regulating the activity „housing association of refugees“;
- A-2 Program „Improving the Financial-Crediting and Tax System for the Housing Sector“ – develop a system for subsidized housing credits for refugees;
- B-4 Program „Ensuring Access to Accommodation for Low-Income Families“ – ensure equal access and involvement of refugees in various models of accommodation in individual dwellings;
 - Address the option of developing a B-6 Program: Improving Housing Conditions for Refugees, similar to B-5 Program – Improving Housing Conditions for Roma Population.
- B-1 Program „Public Awareness-Raising Campaign“ – develop information materials for the purpose of acquainting the public (including landlords) with the problems of refugees' accommodation and the need for finding a solution to them.

⁵⁶ Adopted by Decision No 395 of 14 May 2004 of the Council of Ministers.

⁵⁷ Source: National Housing Strategy, adopted by Decision No 395 of 14 May 2004 of COM

⁵⁸ : National Housing Strategy, adopted by Decision No 395 of 14 May 2004 of COM

2. Ensure the regulation and financial provision, depending on the capacity of the state budget, for the social assistance delivered to aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status for renting a dwelling. The funds to this end could be allocated in the budget of either the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy or the State Agency for Refugees, or the Bulgarian Red Cross.

3. Draft a program for newly recognized aliens with refugee or humanitarian status for the sole purpose of providing support for accommodation, social assistance, Bulgarian language training and vocational training during the first year after the receipt of the status granting decision.

4. Address the possibility for individual municipalities with vacant housing to receive certain numbers of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status. A part of the funds and activities in the Program for Refugees (Program for Literacy, Qualification and Employment of Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee or Humanitarian Status) included in the National Employment Action Plan could be reallocated to the host municipality.

5. Address the possibility for developing a project for the establishment of a current accommodation fund for refugees where refugees could be accommodated for a certain period and under certain conditions – payment of a fixed rent, delivery of construction or maintenance services, etc.

e. Language Training and Education of Refugees

I. Legal framework⁵⁹

- Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – Article 36, para 2; Article 53, paras 1-3; Article 54, para 1
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – Article 22, paras 1-2
- Law on Asylum and Refugees – Article 26; Article 32, para 1; Article 36; Article 53, items 1 and 4; Article 54, para 4
- Law on National Education
- Law on Vocational Training and Education
- Decree of the Council of Ministers No 4 of 11 January 2005 Regarding the Establishment of a Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities
- Decree of the Council of Ministers No 90 of 26 May 2000 Laying down the Conditions and Procedure for Granting Scholarships to Undergraduate, Doctoral, and Post-graduate Students at State Higher Schools and Research Organizations – Article 1, para 5

⁵⁹ Report drafted by SAR with COM, Dr. Kina Sabeva (UNHCR) and Ms. Marinela Radeva. (AIRM)

- Ordinance No 3 of 27 July 2000 Laying down the Procedure for the Enrolment of Refugees in State and Municipal Schools in the Republic of Bulgaria
- Ordinance No 2 of 08 April 2003 Regarding the Enrolment of Pupils in Arts Secondary Schools – Article 28, para 1, item 3, para 2
- Ordinance No 2 of 2003 Regarding the Recognition of Completed Stages of School Training or Degrees of Education and Vocational Qualification on the Basis of Documents Issued by Schools in Other Countries
 - Ordinance No 3 of 26 March 2004 Regarding the Enrolment of Pupils in Basic and Junior High Schools of Arts – Article 21, para 1, item 3, paras 2 and 3
 - Ordinance Laying down the State Requirements for the Enrolment of Students in Higher Schools in the Republic of Bulgaria – Article 11, para 1, para 3, items 1 and 2
 - Ordinance on the Recognition of Higher Education Acquired and Training Periods Completed at Foreign Higher Schools
 - Ordinance Laying down the State Requirements for the Enrolment and Training of Doctoral Students – Article 17, para 2, item 2
 - Instruction No 3 of 05 July 1999 Laying down the Conditions and Procedure for the Provision of Textbooks to Pupils from Socially Disadvantaged Families – Article 1, para 2

II. Practical aspects of the education of aliens who seek or have been granted protection

The access and active involvement of refugees in the variety of forms and degrees of education is a guarantee for their successful adaptation and integration in the host country. While in most cases education is perceived as related to children, in the case of refugees the access to education – basic, secondary, vocational or higher – concerns, to the same extent, both refugee children and refugee adults.

The legal framework, which regulates the training and education of aliens who seek or have been granted protection, is in line with the international legal acts and requirements.

The right of refugee children to education is regulated in Article 26 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees and in Ordinance No 3 of 27 July 2000 of the Ministry of Education and Science. Refugee children aged up to 18 are entitled to full access, training and education at state and municipal schools in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Pursuant to Article 53, para 3 of the Bulgarian Constitution, the basic and secondary education at state and municipal schools is free-of-charge.

Pending the status determination procedure and after being granted refugee or humanitarian status, refugee children do not pay tuition fees and have the same rights as Bulgarian nationals in respect of training at state and municipal schools in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The regulation of the procedure for the referral of refugees to schools and their enrolment takes into account some specific aspects of their education related to:

- The differences between the Bulgarian educational system and the one in the country of origin;
- The lack of knowledge or insufficient knowledge of Bulgarian language;
- The lack of documents certifying the educational degree completed.

Upon completion of the Bulgarian language training and the examination at the Integration Centre for Refugees with the State Agency for Refugees, refugee children sit for an examination at the Regional Education Inspectorate, which is aimed at determining their level of knowledge and referring them to enrolment in Bulgarian schools.

Commissions of experts, representatives of the Pedagogical Consultation Offices and the State Agency for Refugees are set up with the Regional Education Inspectorates of the Ministry of Education and Science for the purpose of certifying the level of the knowledge acquired by refugee children.

These commissions hold interviews with the refugees; determine the conformity of refugee children's competence to the educational minimum for the relevant school year; refer them to a certain school taking into account the district of residence, their wish, capacity, age and health status.

The commission issues compulsory instructions to the headmaster of the relevant school in relation to arrangements to be made for individual work with refugee children on specific subject areas depending on the knowledge level.

There is an option regulated for refugee children from socially disadvantaged families to receive free-of-charge the textbooks needed for classes II-VIII under the conditions and procedure applicable to Bulgarian nationals.

The Refugee-and-Migration Service of the Bulgarian Red Cross (RMS with BRC) renders financial support and assistance to refugee children and their parents for the provision of the necessary textbooks, training aids and materials. In addition, the following have been secured within the framework of the projects implemented by RMS with BRC:

- Tuition for subject areas where the children have difficulties;
- Monthly food allowances for refugee children attending Bulgarian schools;
- Summer children camps with intensive Bulgarian language learning;
- Preparation for the admission exams for Bulgarian higher schools, and other services.

After graduating from secondary schools, refugees have the right to continue their education at higher educational establishments under the same conditions and procedure as Bulgarian nationals.

The Ordinance Laying down the State Requirements for the Enrolment and Training of Doctoral Students regulates the possibility for refugees to apply for

Ph.D. programs under the same conditions and procedure as Bulgarian nationals.

III. Practical aspects of Bulgarian language training of aliens who seek or have been granted protection

Linguistic competence is an important condition for the more effective and efficient integration of refugees in society.

In view of ensuring the necessary conditions for Bulgarian language learning, the State Agency for Refugees organizes and conducts Bulgarian language courses and vocational training for aliens who seek or have been granted protection.

Bulgarian language training is one of the main activities at the Refugee Integration Centre with the State Agency for Refugees.⁶⁰

Language training is organized in two groups for adults and an afternoon study-room for refugee children attending Bulgarian schools.

For the purpose of the language training, a textbook „Bulgarian for Refugee Children“ is used; it has been produced by the State Agency for Refugees under a project financed by UNHCR with funds from a German Charity Foundation.

An aid to the Bulgarian language textbook for refugee children is being drafted; it will facilitate the more efficient learning of Bulgarian grammar and vocabulary.

The goals of Bulgarian language training are:

- Literacy;
- Creating learning skills and habits;
- Learning spoken Bulgarian;
- Learning written Bulgarian;
- Developing comprehension and communication skills.

Refugee children and adults attending the Bulgarian language courses at the Refugee Integration Centre participate in various forms of Bulgarian language practice: preparation of artistic and musical programs, study tours, summer schools for intensive learning of colloquial Bulgarian, cultural and sports events, etc.

With a view to improving the conditions for the integration of aliens who have been granted refugee of humanitarian status in the Bulgarian society, the Refugee-and-Migration Service of the Bulgarian Red Cross has been organizing and conducting Bulgarian language courses for adults, as a part of the Program for Social Counselling and Integration of Refugees in Bulgaria implemented by the Service.

IV. Problems in the area of education and Bulgarian language training of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria

Regardless of the well-developed legal framework and the regulated procedure for the enrolment in the Bulgarian state and municipal schools, there are a

⁶⁰ Source: Refugee Integration Centre with SAR with the CoM

number of difficulties in the process of training refugee children.

The reason for the above relates to the difference in terms of the subject areas included in the curricula of Bulgaria and those of the countries of origin. Such problems emerge in relation to History, Geography, Biology, and other subjects. The provision of additional training for improving Bulgarian language skills and the knowledge in other subject areas is not a common practice at schools.

A part of adult refugees who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria are illiterate or with a low educational background. Their access to Bulgarian schools is not regulated. The insufficient education and the scarce knowledge of Bulgarian are the main reasons for these refugees to be unable to find a job and integrate in Bulgarian society.

Practice shows that most of the refugees, when fleeing their country of origin, do not take with themselves the necessary documents certifying their educational background.

Pursuant to Article 2 of the Ordinance on the Recognition of Higher Education Acquired and Training Periods Completed at Foreign Higher Schools „The right to the recognition of higher education acquired or training periods completed at foreign higher schools belongs to any Bulgarian nationals, aliens and recognized refugees who have attended higher schools established and functioning in compliance with the legal requirements in the country where the higher education has been acquired or the training periods have been completed.“

There are serious issues with regard to the implementation of this right, as the ordinance does not regulate the procedure for the recognition of higher education acquired by refugees.

The lack of documents certifying the completion of secondary education in the country of origin is an obstacle to those who wish to enrol in a university or seek employment on the basis of their professional qualifications.

The legislation does not contain provisions requiring Bulgarian language training for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status. During the initial months after the receipt of the decision granting refugee or humanitarian status, refugees have no incentive for attending Bulgarian language courses, as they have to rent a dwelling and pay the rent by themselves, seek a job and ensure their income.

There are specific problems in relation to the possibility for refugee girls and women to continue their education, which are determined by social, cultural and other reasons.

In some refugee families, parents are often reluctant to let their daughters attend school and continue their education. This problem has a long-term negative impact on the process of integration for this group of refugees.

V. Proposals for improving the legal framework and practice

1. Conduct an analysis of the existing legal framework and practice in the area of the education and Bulgarian language training of refugees in Bulgaria.

The development of the legislation and practice of the European Union in the area of asylum and refugees sets new requirements with regard to the education and training of refugees.

Pursuant to Article 10 of the Council Directive 2003/9/EO of 27 January 2003 Laying down Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers, the access to the educational system for the children of asylum-seekers should not be delayed by more than three months after the date of filing the asylum application by the minor or his/her parents. This period may be extended by one year, where specific education is to be provided in order to facilitate the access to the educational system.

The above provisions require further harmonization of our national legislation and the relevant amendment to the effective Ordinance No 3 of 27 July 2000 laying down the Procedure for the Enrolment of Refugees in State and Municipal Schools in the Republic of Bulgaria.

2. Improve the legal regulation of the additional training provided to refugee children for Bulgarian language and other subjects on the curricula.

3. Introduce compulsory Bulgarian language training for aliens who have been granted protection in view of improving the integration of refugees in Bulgarian society; it will be part of the Program for the Integration of Newly Recognized Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria. Attending a Bulgarian language course should be a condition for receiving housing assistance, social assistance, health insurance assistance within a one-year period after the receipt of the decision granting the status.

4. Introduce compulsory courses for social and cultural counselling as a part of refugee integration activities.

5. Organize and conduct, jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science, seminars for teachers with a view to improving their knowledge and skills for working with refugee children.

6. Ensure that a training module for providing pupils and teachers at Bulgarian schools with some information and knowledge about the life, rights and obligations of refugees in Bulgaria is developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, jointly with the State Agency for Refugees.

7. Propose that the Ministry of Education and Science, jointly with the State Agency for Refugees ensure the regulation of the procedure for the recognition of educational degrees acquired and professional qualifications of aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria.

8. Ensure the regulation of the possibility for aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and are aged above 18 to have access to the Bulgarian state and municipal schools.

9. Ensure that the Refugee Integration Centre with the State Agency for Refugees and the non-governmental organization working with refugees facilitate organizing training courses for refugee children in their mother tongue with a view to preserving the national culture and customs. Representatives of the refugee communities in Bulgaria who have teaching experience and skills need to be involved in this process.

f. Vulnerable Groups of Aliens Who Have Been Granted Refugee Status or Humanitarian Status in the Republic Of Bulgaria⁶¹

I. Legal framework

- Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
- Convention on Children Rights
- European Social Charter (revised)
- Family Code
- Law on Asylum and Refugees
- Law on Child Protection
- Law on Health
- Law on the Integration of Disabled Persons
- Law on Social Assistance
- Law on Family Allowances
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Child Protection
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on the Integration of Disabled

Persons

- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Social Assistance
- Regulation on the Application of the Law on Family Allowances
- Ordinance No 4 of 16.03.1999 Laying down the Conditions and Procedure for Social Services Delivery
- Ordinance Laying down the Conditions and Procedure for the Application, Selection and Approval of Foster Families and the Placement of Children Thereat

⁶¹ Report drafted by the State Agency for Refugees at COM, UNHCR Representation, The Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC, CARITAS-Bulgaria, the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, ACET, the Association for the Integration of Refugees and Migrants

- Ordinance Laying down the Criteria and Standards for the Provision of Social Services to Children

II. Classification of vulnerable groups of refugees

A great part of the refugees who seek or have been granted protection are confronted with a number of difficulties and problems in the course of their reception, adaptation and integration in the host country.

The experience related to violence, hunger, deprivations, loss of family members and friends, home and homeland has a lasting impact not only on the physical, but also on the health and mental state of refugees. Ensuring protection, conducting a fair procedure and guaranteeing the fundamental rights and freedoms are of vital to asylum-seekers. In the course of the status determination procedure, particular groups of individuals who need special care and attention are identified.

UNHCR Handbook „Social Services for Urban Refugees“ (Geneva, 1994) lists the specific needs and guidelines for the work with special groups of refugees:

- Violence victims;
- Women – heads of households;
- Separated minors;
- Elderly refugees;
- Disabled.

As a result of the experience accumulated in the work with refugees in Europe, the Council Directive 2003/9/EO of 27 January 2003 Laying down Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers introduces the use of the term „individuals with special needs“ for:

- Minors;
- Separated minors;
- Disabled people;
- Elderly people;
- Pregnant women;
- Single parents with minor children;
- Individuals who have been subject to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.

The review of the Bulgarian legislation shows that, in accordance with the Law on Social Assistance and the Regulation on the Application of the Law, certain groups of socially disadvantaged people are entitled to a higher coefficient in determining the amount of the Differentiated Minimum Income (DMI) for social assistance.⁶² These are, as follows:

⁶² **Differentiated Minimum Income** = Guaranteed Minimum Income (as of 14 March 2005 - BGN 40) x coefficient (for refugees)

- Single parent raising a child aged up to 3: coefficient – 1.5; DMI – BGN 60;
- Single parent with a child or children aged up to 16, or 18 – if the children attend school: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Parent raising a child aged up to 3: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Orphan child: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Child with permanent disability: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Pregnant women, 45 days before delivery: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Disabled person with permanently decreased work capacity of 50 percent and over: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Disabled person with permanently decreased work capacity of 70 percent and over: coefficient – 1.5; DMI – BGN 60;
- Person aged from 65 to 75 who lives alone: coefficient – 1.7; DMI – BGN 68;
- Person aged over 70: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;
- Person aged over 75 who lives alone: coefficient – 1.2; DMI – BGN 48;

After the adoption of the Law on the Integration of Disabled people and its entry into force on 1 January 2005, the term „invalid“ has gradually been replaced with the term „person with permanent disability“. Pursuant to § 1, item 2 of the Additional Provisions in the Law, the „**person with permanent disability**“ is a person who, as a result of anatomical, physiological or mental impairment, has a permanently decreased capacity to perform activities in the way and to the extent possible for healthy people, and with regard to whom the medical expert boards have determined a reduced work capacity or a reduced capacity for social adaptation of 50 percent or over.“

The comparison of the national legislation with the international acts shows that the criteria for the differentiation of individuals with special needs are similar. The groups of „separated minor refugees“ and „persons who are victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence“ are typical for individuals who seek or have been granted protection. The task force proposes that the classification provided in the Council Directive 2003/9/EO of 27 January 2003 Laying down Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers should be applied for the purpose of developing measures for the work with individuals with special needs.

III. Practical aspects and problems in the work with vulnerable groups of aliens who seek or have been granted protection

A peculiarity of the work with vulnerable groups of aliens who seek or have been granted protection is the need for the measures for their social adaptati-

on and integration in society to be undertaken as soon as the status determination procedure has been initiated for them.

At this early stage, what is crucial is both the preparation of the employees who conduct the registration and the interviews with the asylum-seekers and their cooperation with the social workers, medical staff and psychologists at refugee centres.

The timely identification of asylum-seekers who have special needs allows undertaking specific measures for the protection and support of these individuals.

The general principle applied in working with individuals with special needs is based on the individual needs assessment in view of developing individual programs for social assistance, medical care, psychological assistance and counselling in order to restore the individual to his/her state of security, improve his/her physical and mental health, and regain the confidence in his/her forces and capacity.

1. Minor refugees

The leading principle in the work with minor refugee children is „the child's best interest“.

Refugee children, to a much greater extent than adult refugees, take to heart the events causing the flight from the homeland, the loss of family members and friends. The long and, often, arduous journey to the host country, the lack of appropriate environment and friends, the initial shock at the clash with the new life style impact the child's mentality and provoke alienation and withdrawal into oneself. While children are quick at learning the language of the host country and often act as mediators between their parents and the staff of the centres, they need specific rehabilitation measures in order to be able to overcome the feeling of fear and insecurity.

Pending the status determination procedure, the parents of minor refugee children who have sought protection in the Republic of Bulgaria are entitled to monthly benefits for food in the same amount as the ones for adult refugees.

The State Agency for Refugees provides in-kind assistance (powder milk, children foodstuffs, clothing, etc.) to the families with children aged up to 1.

The families with more than three children are additionally supported with foodstuffs under a program financed by UNHCR and executed by CARITAS-Bulgaria, the State Agency for Refugees and the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria.

Since 2001, the Centre for Assisting Torture Victims (ACET) has implemented specialized programs for working with refugee children – Fairy Tale Workshop and Theatre Workshop. An ACET team has jointly worked with emp-

loyees of the State Agency for Refugees for the purpose of finding solutions to individual cases of refugee children in need of special care.

As soon as the refugee status application has been registered, refugee children are referred to Bulgarian language courses organized by the Refugee Integration Centre at the State Agency for Refugees.

Refugee children attending municipal or state schools receive teaching materials and a monthly cash benefit for food from the Refugee-and-Migration Service of the Bulgarian Red Cross.

2. Separated minor refugees

Article 19 of the Council Directive 2003/9/EO of 27 January 2003 Laying down Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers regulates the main responsibilities of the EU members-states in terms of refugee children, which require that Member States:

- „...shall as soon as possible take measures to ensure the necessary representation of separated minors by legal guardianship or, where necessary, representation by an organization, which is responsible for the care and well-being of minors, or by any other appropriate representation...“;
- Ensure the accommodation, pending the status determination procedure and after the submission of the status decision, with adult relatives, foster families, in accommodation centres with special provisions for minors, other residential places appropriate for minors;
- Undertake actions aimed at tracing the family members and, if possible, reuniting separated refugee children with their parents;
- Ensure specialized training for those working with separated refugee children.

Article 25, paragraphs 1-4, of the Law on Asylum and Refugees regulates the specific measures which have to be undertaken with regard to separated minor and juvenile aliens who seek or have been granted protection:

- Appointment of a guardian or tutor, under the conditions and procedure laid down in the Law on Child Protection and the Family Code;
- Accommodation at the specialized institutions with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy;
- Ensuring the protection of children against physical or mental torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- Until the placement at the specialized institutions, the State Agency for Refugees provides financial or material assistance to separated minor or juvenile aliens who seek or have been granted protection, equivalent to that provided to adult refugees.

After registration of the protection application, separated minor or juvenile asylum-seekers are ensured:

- Accommodation at the Registration-and-Reception Centres with the State Agency for Refugees;
- Identity documents;
- Legal representation for the status determination procedure pursuant to an agreement between the State Agency for Refugees and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee – Program for the Legal Protection of Refugees and Migrants;
- Medical care and referral to a GP;
- Social aid from the State Agency for Refugees and CARITAS-Bulgaria;
- Psychological counselling from the State Agency for Refugees and the Centre for Assisting Torture Victims (ACET);
- Access to Bulgarian language courses at the Refugee Integration Centre with the State Agency for Refugees, and other activities.

The Council of Refugee Women assists separated minor and juvenile asylum-seekers in the process of their adaptation and integration in our country.

After the initial interview has been conducted, this group of asylum-seekers are referred for placement at the Homes for Raising and Upbringing Children Deprived of Parental Care with the Ministry of Education and Science.

Separated minor refugees receive social assistance and counselling from the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC. The Service supports the organization and financing of Bulgarian language courses for separated children accommodated in the Homes for Raising and Upbringing Children Deprived of Parental Care.

Problems:

- While legislative and practical measures have been undertaken in respect of the work with separated minor and juvenile aliens who seek or have been granted protection, the issue regarding the appointment of a guardian or a tutor has not yet been solved. The legal representation by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee during the status determination procedure is of key importance in a number of cases – the choice of a GP, the provision of appropriate nutrition, the access to the educational system, upbringing, control, etc.

- There is no practice in relation to placing separated minor refugees with foster families. This is due to the relatively new legislation and practice in this area in the Republic of Bulgaria. The requirements with regard to the selection of foster families are extremely high, while the aid granted does not conform to the care these families are required to take.

- The placement of separated minor refugees at the Registration-and-Reception Centre for Refugees in the village of Banya, Nova Zagora Municipality, ensures, to some extent, the provision of initial accommodation and care for these children. In order to meet the requirements in terms of providing social services to children, the activity of the Centre has to undergo a comprehensive change.

- There is no unified information database for separated minor refugees, which would allow monitoring the situation of each child from registration, throughout the status determination procedure, to the accommodation in specialized institutions, the measures provided for social protection, as well as subsequent integration in the Bulgarian society.

3. Disabled persons

A great part of the asylum-seekers come from countries with an underdeveloped system for healthcare and care for disabled persons. Some asylum-seekers in the Republic of Bulgaria have serious chronic diseases, which have resulted in a permanent loss of work capacity.

The state of some of the persons with chronic diseases has been additionally deteriorated due to stress, deprivations and lack of healthcare.

Pursuant to the Law on Asylum and Refugees, upon opening the status determination procedure, asylum-seekers undergo mandatory initial medical checks and examinations. The individuals with heavy chronic diseases are referred to choosing a GP, prescription of treatment, and presentation before a Labour Expert Medical Board (LEMB) for an expert evaluation and certification of the disability degree and permanent work incapacity. The aliens who seek or have been granted protection, who are aged 16 and above and who have been certified by the LEMB as having work incapacity of over 71 percent, are entitled to a social disability pension pursuant to Article 90, para 1, of the Social Assistance Code. The amount of the social disability pension depends on the degree of the loss of work capacity.

The aliens who have been granted protection and have permanent disabilities are entitled to monthly allowances for social integration depending on the type and degree of the disability and their individual needs pursuant to Article 42, para 1, of the Law on the Integration of Disabled Persons.

The State Agency for Refugees and the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC provide support and consultations in respect of the referral of aliens who seek or have been granted protection to expert evaluation and certification of their work capacity. An assistant, an interpreter and, where needed, transport services are ensured for the course of the expert evaluation.

The aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, who are alone and are unable to take care of themselves, are referred to the directorates „Social Assistance“ for accommodation in facilities for social services (centres for social rehabilitation and integration of socially disadvantaged persons, homes for physically and mentally disabled children and adults).

The aliens who have been granted protection and have permanent disabilities have the same rights as the Bulgarian nationals in respect of the right to earmarked assistance and preferential conditions for the purchase and repair of aids,

facilities and devices for disability alleviation and compensation in accordance with a list that is approved on an annual basis by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy.

4. Adult aliens who seek or have been granted protection

The Law on Asylum and Refugees does not include special provisions regarding the social protection of adult refugees who seek or have been granted protection. Nevertheless, in the event of cases with individuals aged over 65 who are unable to take care of themselves, measures are taken for:

- Additional social assistance under a program financed by UNHCR and implemented by CARITAS-Bulgaria, the State Agency for Refugees and the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria;
- Referral to choosing a GP and provision of medical care and medicines;
- Ensuring support and assistance by the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria;
- Where necessary, placement in a home for elderly people.

The aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, who are aged 65 and above and do not have income for self-subsistence are entitled to social assistance pursuant to the Law on Social Assistance and the Regulation on the Application of the Law. After the age of 70, the aliens who have been granted status are entitled to applying for old age social pension pursuant to Article 89, para 1, of the Social Assistance Code.

5. Pregnant women

There are specific practical measures for the support provided to pregnant alien women who seek or have been granted protection in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Pregnant women are referred to specialized medical assistance within the range of the basic package of health services guaranteed by the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund. Where additional consultations and analyses are necessary, outside this range, medical services are provided at the Medical Centre „Pope John Paul II“ with CARITAS-Bulgaria and the Transport Medical Institute „Kniaz Boris III“ on the basis of a contract with the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC.

The State Agency for Refugees provides additional social assistance, counselling, psychological assistance and support for the placement at medical institutions for delivery, the purchase of medicines and sanitary materials.

Pursuant to Article 3, items 5 and 4 of the Law on Family Allowances, alien women who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status and whose average monthly income per family member for the previous 6 months is lower or equivalent to BGN 200, are entitled to a lump-sum pregnancy benefit in the amo-

unt of BGN 150, where the pregnant refugee woman is not entitled to pregnancy and delivery allowances under the conditions of the Social Assistance Code and resides permanently in the country;

Alien women who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status are entitled to a lump-sum benefit for giving birth to a child, regardless of the family's income, where the child is born on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, alive as of the moment of delivery, and not abandoned for placement and raising at a specialized institution for children.

The amount of the lump-sum benefit for child delivery is:

- For first, second and third child – BGN 200;
- For fourth and any subsequent – BGN 100.

6. Single parents with minor children

Alien parents who seek or have been granted protection, who raise their children by themselves need additional support measures in the process of their adaptation and integration in Bulgaria.

In most cases such single parents are women whose husbands are either dead or missing. The state of helplessness, uncertainty, depression and inability to adapt in a new environment is typical for this group of vulnerable refugee women.

The responsibilities in bringing up the children, in combination with the lack of linguistic knowledge, the differences in terms of culture and religious traditions, are a heavy burden on lonely parents.

The practical measures for facilitating the social adaptation and integration of this group of refugees relate to:

- Ensuring additional social assistance by the State Agency for Refugees;
- Social counselling;
- Psychological assistance and support provided by the State Agency for Refugees, the Nadya Centre and ACET;
- Where needed, referral to specialized medical assistance;
- Ensuring participation in Bulgarian language and vocational training courses for the purpose of acquiring professional qualifications and the capacity for self-subsistence;
- Payment of the fees for kindergartens;
- Buying learning aids and sports items under the program of the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC;
- Provision of monthly benefits for children attending school by the Refugee-and-Migration Service of BRC;
- Provision of canteen meals for the children of single mothers by CARITAS-Bulgaria;
- Involving the refugee community in these activities.

CARITAS-Bulgaria ensures the accommodation of single refugee mothers at the Centre for Single Mothers „Rojdestvo Hristovo“ in the city of Sofia.

7. Persons who are victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence

The work for the identification of this group of persons with special needs starts at registration and the status determination procedure. It often happens that people who have been subject to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence are ashamed to share this experience. The degrading treatment, the physical torture and violence have a lasting impact and change the victims' behaviour and their attitude towards the surrounding world. People who have been through such ordeals suffer from heavy chronic diseases and mental disorders.

The specific needs of individuals who are victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence require the development and implementation of specialized rehabilitation programs, which include multi-disciplinary teams of psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, translators.

The early identification of the individuals who belong to this vulnerable group and the identification of the individual needs of any refugee who is a torture or violence victim are at the core of the successful psychological and social work aimed at restoring the feeling of security, self-respect and facilitating the adaptation to the new conditions.

Specific programs along this line are executed by the State Agency for Refugees, the Centre for Assisting Torture Victims, and Nadya Centre.

IV. Proposals for improving the legal framework and practice

1. Minor refugees

- Adopt special measures for the work with minor refugee women from Muslim families and their parents with a view to facilitating their adaptation;
- Secure counselling and referral to various forms of vocational training for minor refugees aged from 16 to 18;
- Ensure full coverage of minor refugees in Bulgarian language courses and involvement in the educational system;
- Ensure the signing of a Code of Ethics for working with children by the staff of the State Agency for Refugees and the NGOs working with refugee children.

2. Separated minor refugees

- Find a solution to the issue of appointing a guardian or tutor for separated minor or juvenile refugees;

- Develop a special program for the selection and training of foster families who wish to take care of separated refugee children;
- Develop urgently a unified database with information about separated minor and juvenile refugees;
- Ensure that the activities carried out at the Registration-and-Reception Centre with the State Agency for Refugees in respect of separated refugee children are in line with the criteria and standards for the provision of social services to children (the Ordinance Laying down the Criteria and Standards for the Provision of Social Services to Children);
- Conduct regular training sessions with the staff of the homes where separated minor refugees are accommodated.

3. Disabled persons

- Produce specialized information materials regarding the rights of disabled refugees;
- Introduce a system of special reporting and inclusion of disabled refugees who are single in various forms of social service provision at home;
- Address the options for designating personal assistants to disabled refugees.

4. Adult refugees who seek or have been granted protection

- Put in place a database regarding elderly refugees aged over 65 and the individual measures for their social adaptation and integration;
- Ensure support for elderly refugees aged over 70 in relation to receiving an old age social pension;
- Ensure the participation of elderly refugees in various forms of social day care and home care;
- Design activities for social communication with elderly refugees.

5. Pregnant women

- Provide support for the timely coverage and care for pregnant refugee women;
- Ensure psychological assistance and support;
- Develop a program for training pregnant refugee women on issues regarding nutrition, cares for the health of the mother and the child.
- Develop information materials regarding the rights of pregnant refugee women, women in child-birth, and mother raising children aged up to 3.

6. Single parents with minor children

- Ensure social counselling, additional assistance and support for raising children;

-
- Develop various forms of domestic employment for refugee women who raise their children by themselves;
 - Design specialized programs for Bulgarian language training and professional qualification in line with the individual needs and capacity of the parents raising their children on their own.

7. Persons who are victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence

- Conduct regular training of the staff who work with aliens who seek or have been granted protection on various aspects of the work with this category of persons with special needs;
 - Develop information materials for encouraging the involvement of refugees from this group into various forms of psychological and social work;
 - Develop various forms of professional assessment of the needs of individuals who have been subject to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, and exchange of information among specialists working in this area.

3.3. Summary of discussions of the Sub-Groups and of the written recommendations received by the SAR both reflected in the Program

3.3.a. Summary of discussions of the Sub-Groups⁶³

Social Assistance

1. The Sofia Municipality to review the legal regulation of social assistance on the territory of Sofia and if necessary to make proposals for amendments, ensuring refugees' access to social services.

2. To invite representatives of MOI, Agency for social assistance and MLSP at the next session of the subgroup.

3. Financing the activities under the Program through:

- Refugee inclusion in the existing governmental programs for social assistance ;

Planning the financial assistance through the state budget – under the budget of SAR or BRC;

- Drafting projects for applying under EU funds.

4. The financial assistance for accommodation of newly recognized refugees to be adequate to the criteria for social assistance provided to Bulgarian nationals and to be linked with compulsory Bulgarian language courses and vocational training.

5. Flexible financial assistance according to refugee needs within one year upon recognition.

6. Financial assistance could be implemented by SAR, MLSP or BRC, or provided through SAR to NGOs.

To discuss jointly with MOI and the Ministry of Regional Development and Welfare the establishment of one-stop-shop for providing administrative services to recognized refugees and humanitarian status holders. It will facilitate their adaptation immediately upon recognition.

Health

1. A proposal should be made for amendment and supplementation of Art. 83 of the Law on Health, aiming to regulate the right to medical help for foreigners who have been granted refugee status or humanitarian status.

2. A proposal for amendment of Art. 26, para. 1 of the Law on Health, aiming to regulate the medical offices with the Accommodation-registration centres and the transit centres with the SAR.

3. A representative of the National Insurance Fund should be invited to the next meeting.

4. A network of mediators form within the refugee circles should be estab-

⁶³ Sub Groups of the Inter-Ministerial Task Force for the Development of the National Refugee Integration Program, Spring 2005.

lished in order to provide assistance in solving the health problems of the foreigners seeking protection or who have been granted such protection.

5. Training of GPs for intercultural communication with the refugees should be envisaged through the Bulgarian Doctors Union and the Dentists Union.

Employment

1. Refugees who are presently employed should be included in various training programmes. .

2. The possibility for encouraging the refugees' entrepreneurship through applying for the so called „king's“ credits should be explored.

3. Following the successful end of the pilot National Programme for Literacy, Vocational Training and Employment of 40 refugees, an analysis should be conducted and new activities in other programmes should be included.

4. Experts from the NIF and the Regional Employment Service should be invited to the next session.

5. Compulsory Bulgarian language education should be a condition for receiving social benefits by the newly recognised refugees.

6. The possibility for the vocational organisations to conduct the exams for recognising professional qualifications should be explored.

7. A programme for acquiring initial working skills and working discipline for refugee women, who have never worked, should be developed.

8. An information leaflet regarding the labour legislation of Bulgaria ought to be published.

9. The possibility for including a larger number of refugees in the activities under the „Beautiful Bulgaria“ project both in the capital and outside of it should be explored.

10. Meetings with employers from different branches of commerce and trade unions should be organised in order to introduce those issues to the refugees.

Accommodation

1. The efforts directed towards solving the housing problems of the refugees should focus on the problems of the newly recognised foreigners who have been granted refugee status or humanitarian status within a period of one year following the decision of approval and who are socially vulnerable as prescribed in the Law on Social Assistance.

2. Social assistance is given as an integration package of social services, which includes:

- Financial assistance for housing;
- Financial assistance for allowance;
- Health insurance;
- Compulsory Bulgarian language education;
- Vocational training;

- Registration in the labour bureau;

3. A meeting in March 2005 should be initiated regarding the planning for the funding received from the ministry of Finance for 2006 as prescribed in Art. 32, para. 2 of the LAR with the participation of Minister Husmenova, Mr. Kiril Ananiev-the relevant Deputy-minister from the MF, Mr. Boiko Antonov and D-r Luise Druke.

4. The development and the implementation of the National programme for refugee integration should be used as a first step towards the development of other programmes which would be proposed to the European Refugee Fund and other EU Funds.

5. The possibility for participation in the project for a National programme for improving the living conditions of the ethnic minorities should be explored.

6. The possibility for renewing the project for a Complex for housing for socially vulnerable persons and refugees in the building of AONSU, which would also have a social integration centre, should be explored.

7. The possibilities for finding premises for SAR's administration and for reconstructing the current administrative wing at 21 Montevideo blvd. to a dormitory which presents one of the cheapest and acceptable solutions of the housing problem of the refugees.

8. The Sofia Municipality should propose amendment to the Regulation for implementation of the Law on municipal property Art. 5, para. 1, p. 6.

Education

1. Compulsory Bulgarian language education even during the refugee or humanitarian status determination procedure.

2. Closer care towards women and children as they present a more vulnerable group.

3. The teachers of refugees should be trained specifically for work with them.

4. The status of the teacher's assistant (mediator) during the education of refugees should be regulated.

5. A network of mediators-refugees should be created which would be involved in the educational process.

6. Refugee children should be educated together with the Bulgarian children and when individual education is necessary it should be a part of the general education.

7. The possibility for the refugee children, who haven't learned Bulgarian yet, to attend schools as listeners should be discussed.

8. Updating the Regulation No3 of the Ministry of Education is needed in the part for accepting refugees in the state and municipal schools in Bulgaria since the Regulation was adopted on the basis of Art. 25, p.5 of the Law on Refugees which was revoked.

Vulnerable groups

1. To examine jointly with the State Agency for Child Protection the programmes opportunities focused on the host families, guardians for separated minors asylum-seekers.
2. To develop programmes for training of staff members working with vulnerable groups.
3. To elaborate a handbook for staff members of the state administration, local authorities and NGOs on their work with the vulnerable groups.
4. To elaborate a network of mediators in all sectors for assisting asylum-seekers with special needs.
5. To investigate jointly with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy the opportunity to elaborate a project for vocational training and homework for women in Refugee Status Determination Procedure.
6. To create information data base regarding the asylum-seekers in the vulnerable group category.
7. To include module training on the guardianship questions in the academic programme of the SU Faculty of Pedagogy.
8. To invite representatives of Ministry of Education and Science, Centre „Nadja“, Directorate „Migration“ to the Ministry of Interior for the next session of the working group.

Budget

1. To prepare a list of activities on the National Program of Refugee Integration in Bulgaria consistent with the new proposals from the working groups session and the deadline for them respectively.
2. Questions with the Ministry of Finance: sharing responsibilities on the execution of the National Program of Refugee Integration in Bulgaria; take into account the principle of collaboration and partnership in order to use the maximum capacity of the governmental and non-governmental organizations.
3. To organise meetings with the Employers Council separately from those of the programme.
4. To clarify the donation sources of the informational materials.
5. Expecting in brief deadline assessment with specific proposals from the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works on the questions in relation to the refugees' accommodation as well as information from the Sofia Municipality regarding the personal assistants.
6. The proposals from different Ministries should be bind with the available special funds covered these activities.
7. To organise a seminar on the assimilation of the EU funds based on the proposal of Mrs. Aired Gjurova from the cabinet of the minister Filiz Husmenova.
8. To study the practices of the countries members of the EC in the field of the refugees protection in order to be applied in Bulgaria.

3.3.b. Written recommendations received by the SAR reflected in the Program

№	Issue	Institution	Proposals
1.	General	Ministry of Regional Development and Welfare <i>Letter of 10 March 2005</i>	1. to define clearly the problems which the Program will solve for the period 2005-2007; 2. to define clearly the aims of the Program and the time needed for its implementation; 3. to define clearly the target group of the Program; 4. to add „Chapter 3“ – Institutional framework, where to describe the organization and control over the implementation of the Program; 5. to organize an information campaign aiming at providing information to refugees and to local communities;
		Ministry of Interior, Migration Directorate <i>Letter HV-2393/ 9 March 2005</i>	1. to establish at SAR a centre providing information on the administrative procedures for facilitation of refugee integration;
2.	Social Assistance	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, „Social protection and Social Integration“ Department <i>Letter 12/748/ 15 March 2005</i>	No proposals on the Social Assistance Chapter. No objections.
3.	Education	Ministry of Education <i>Letter 0308-5/ 11 March 2005</i>	1. to analyse the legislation in the field of education taking measures for its harmonization with the EU aquis and namely the Directive 2003/9/EO of 27 January 2003; 2. to analyse the practical constrains for refugee; integration at school and to identify the necessary measures; 3. to organize trainings for teachers working with refugee children in case that additional funding becomes available; 4. to find out a mechanism for recognition of education acquired in the country of origin, in case that no certificate is available; 5. to provide legal guarantees for access to education of adult refugees; 6. to develop jointly with NGOs a pilot project with external financing for introducing a „resource teacher“ in schools with concentration of refugee children.

⁶⁴ Sub Groups of the Inter-Ministerial Task Force for the Development of the National Refugee Integration Program, Spring 2005.

	Centre for professional qualification	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals who do not possess any document proving their professional competencies could be trained under the E Framework program. An individual training plan could be developed. Theoretical and practical exam upon completing the training. 2. Individuals who do not have any professional competencies could be trained under D Framework Program. No minimum educational level is required. Theoretical and practical exam upon completing the training.
4. Accommodation	Ministry of Regional Development and Welfare <i>Letter of 10 March 2005</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the purpose of Chapter 2 „Accommodation“ could be paraphrased in the following way: „Each person in Bulgaria, who was granted refugee status is provided with shelter for one year upon recognition“; 2. to delete point 2 of Chapter 2 „For solving... and health status of refugees.“; 3. to review the existing legislation in the accommodation field and in particular on refugee housing and to draft proposals for its amendment Institutions in charge: SAR, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Regional Development and Welfare, BRC, AIRM and NGOs; 4. to study the best European practices on involving refugees in accommodation projects for disadvantaged people: 5. Institutions in charge: SAR, UNHCR, AIRM, NGOs 6. to provide financial assistance for refugee accommodation up to one year upon recognition; 7. to provide financial assistance to municipalities for construction/ repairing (revolving housing fund or permanent accommodation); 8. to provide services for refugee accommodation: information/ administrative assistance/address registration/ legal assistance; 9. to ensure financial assistance for refugee accommodation for up to one-year upon recognition.
	Ministry of Interior, Migration Directorate <i>Letter HV-2393/ 9 March 2005</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to obtain the assistance of the Ministry of Finance for refugee accommodation; 2. to take measures so that accommodation not to depend directly on the municipalities, but to provide money to the refugees in the adaptation period;
5. Vulnerable groups	ACET	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Measures for early identification of torture victims and timely approaching ACET; 2. Development of specific programs for children and adolescents adaptation; 3. Development of the capacity of all institutions to communicate and provide services to vulnerable refugees.

3.4. Profile of Refugees in Bulgaria and main results of enhancing competitiveness of refugees

3.4.a. Profile of Refugees in Bulgaria – Prepared by the Bulgarian Red Cross

1. Education.

2004	2005
46 Individual Integration Plans	16 Individual Integration Plans /for 18 persons/
1/ 6 higher education – engineering, music	1/ 3 higher education
2/ 12 secondary education, incl. religious	2/ 5 secondary education
3/ 26 basic education /up to 6 grade/	3/ 9 basic education
4/ 2 no education /Afghanistan, Somalia/	4/ 2 no education /Iraq/

2. DAFI students, enrolled in Institutions of Higher Education during the period 1999 – 2005

Total of 22. Countries of origin: Afghanistan /9/, Congo /7/, Angola /2/, Ethiopia /1/, Iraq /1/, Stateless /1/.

8 medicine;

8 engineer sciences;

4 economics and management;

2 humanities.

3 scholarship students in 2004 and 2 in 2005.

3. Profession.

2004	2005
46 Individual Integration Plans	16 Individual Integration Plans
1/ more than 50% having no profession /Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq/	1/ 1 teacher /Iraq/
2/ mechanic	2/ 2 car mechanics /Iraq, Egypt/
3/ merchants	3/ 3 bakers / Iraq /
4/ soldiers	4/ 1 cooker / Iraq /
5/ construction workers	5/ 2 drivers / Iraq /
6/ others	6/ 1 carpenter /Sudan/ 7/ 1 goldsmith / Iraq /
	8/ 1 biologist / Iraq /
	8/ 6 having no profession/Iraq/

4. Courses organized by BRC.

4.1. Bulgarian language courses, for the period 2001 – March 2005 – 162 graduates, successful graduates in 2004 – approx. 35. In 2005 – 9. Two courses: first and second level, are currently available. During the last 5 years BRC has organized 6 to 7 Bulgarian language courses annually, 10 persons each. An average of 35 to 40 persons have been graduating the courses successfully. The number of participants at the beginning was almost double in comparison to the number of graduates.

4.2. Vocational training – computer literacy, hairdressing, cooking, confectionery, waiters and barmen, floriculture and assessment of tailors' professional qualification. 58 graduates for the period 2002 – 2003. 5 graduates in 2004 and 5 /computer course/ in 2005. One refugee is about to start a barman course.

5. Current frequent refugee employment:

5.1. Merchants /inc. own business/, vendors and loaders at Sofia markets – Women market, Ilianci /Africa, Iraq, Afgh

5.2. Cookers /Iraq, Iran/;

5.3. Car mechanics, tyre mechanics /Iraq, Stateless/;

5.4. Hairdressers /Iraq, Africa.

6. Specific and qualified employment:

6.1. IT experts /Congo, Iraq, Tanzania/ 6.2. Doctors and dentists /Afghanistan/ 6.3. Interpreters /Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia etc, 6.4. Mutes in international movie productions /Africa, Iraq/ 6.5. Accountant /Yemen/

Sofia, 19 April 2005, Refugee-Migrant Service, Bulgarian Red Cross

3.4.b. Main Results of enhancing refugees' competitiveness through the Refugee Integration Centre

(Ms. Maia Kocharkova – Director of the Refugees' Integration Centre in the State Agency for Refugees)

1. The Refugees' Integration Center is a territorial division of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) with the Council of Ministers and facilitates the integration of refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria in compliance with the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, the Protocol to it of 1967 and the Bulgarian Law on Asylum and Refugees. It was created in 1997 with the support of UNHCR and officially opened in 2002 with Ordinance 123 of the Council of Ministers. During the last 3-4 years the Centre has broadened its activity with the financial participation of the UNHCR Representation in Bulgaria and the active support of the initiatives of Dr. Luise Druke, especially in the field of integration of refugee children and refugee women.

2. At this stage the Integration centre is conducting the following activities:

1. Plans and organizes training in Bulgarian language;
2. Organizes and implements jointly with the regional education inspectorates activities for identifying the level of Bulgarian language knowledge of aliens seeking protection or who have been granted protection, and directs them to the relevant educational establishment;
3. Plans and organizes vocational training for aliens in seek of protection or who have been granted protection through the labor offices and through training in the vocational study rooms in the Integration Center;
4. Assists the aliens who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in finding jobs through the labor offices;
5. Implements social protection and integration programs for aliens with specific needs;
6. Plans and organizes sports and health-education activities;
7. Organizes and implements activities for cultural adaptation of aliens who are seeking protection or who have been granted protection;
8. Gives counseling on social assistance matters and directs aliens to the municipal social assistance offices;
9. Prepares and organizes the publishing of information materials about the rights and obligations of aliens seeking protection or who have been granted protection.

3. An important precondition for the integration and adaptation of aliens seeking protection or who have been granted protection is their *knowledge of Bulgarian language*. With a view to improving the competitiveness of the refugees

a program has been developed and language training courses are organized for children and adults. A specialized *Bulgarian Language Textbook for Children and Adults* has been made by the lecturers at the Refugees Integration Center (RIC). In 2005 the training set will be completed with the publishing of a *Self-study Reader in Bulgarian Language* by the same team of authors. In the period 1.01.2002-30.03.2005, **992 trainees** have completed their language training at the RIC.

4. After completion of the Bulgarian language training the children refugees sit for a test at the Regional Inspectorate for determining their level of knowledge, so that they can continue their education in Bulgarian schools, where they can adapt to the Bulgarian living style more smoothly. The student refugees at the RIC receive specialized assistance in preparing their lessons in different study subjects in the afternoon study-room, and their parents receive counseling on all education related matters in Bulgaria. In April a Literacy Module has been launched under the Program for Literacy, Qualification and Employment of Aliens that have received protection or humanitarian status; this program is funded by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

5. A main priority in the integration process for aliens that have been granted protection is to make them self-sustainable and in position to earn their living. Problems related to their equal standing on the labor market and their *labor realization* beside the language barrier is also the lack of documents evidencing their educational background and length of service. Aliens seeking protection come to Bulgaria mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran who have skills in crafts, but have no documents evidencing it. In this connection the National Agency for Vocational Training and Education is considering the possibility of recognizing through a state and practice exam in Bulgaria the professional skills acquired by them in their countries of origin.

6. For improving the competitiveness of the refugees the Refugees' Integration Center has obtained a *license from the* National Agency for Vocational Training and Education /license No. 200412168 dated 19.05.2004/ for the following vocations: tailoring, hair-dressing, cosmetics and computer literacy. The trainees obtain a certificate for a vocation acquired. In the period from 1.01.2002 until 30.03.2005 580 persons have completed their apprenticeship and training, and the acquired skills are applied by the refugees both in Bulgaria and in their native country, when they return there, or in a third country. After the completion of the vocational training course the refugees practice their vocation in the study rooms completely unattended by delivery of free services to refugees. Thus they accrue the professional experience required when they apply for a job.

7. Besides the training courses in the facilities of the RIC vocational training is conducted also through the labor offices. The RIC participates jointly with the labor offices in the conducting of the Qualification and Employment Module under the Program for Literacy, Qualification and Employment for **40** aliens that have been granted refugee status or humanitarian status.

8. The Refugees' Integration Center enriches and expands the scope of *social, upbringing and cultural activities for children of families seeking protection or that have been granted protection*. In the period January 2002-March 2005 **482** children have been included in various children clubs and integration events in accordance with their age, interests and individual capabilities. Training programs have been developed at the *Children Social Club*, which help the children to adapt and overcome the stress resulting from the changing of the cultural environment, to develop their creative talents, to get acquainted with the style of living and folklore of our country.

9. Daily classes are held at the *Artistic Crafts Club and the Artistic Drawing Club*, where the specific drawing techniques are studied. The children from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran drew paintings on the walls of the Children Social Club and titled the large patchwork *The Earth – Home to All*. Over a period of two years more than **400 paintings** were drawn and **10 thematic exhibitions** of children's paintings of over **237 children** were organized. **More than 150** of the paintings drawn by the children were presented as gifts on various occasions to representatives of NGOs, journalists, government bodies in order to publicize the activities of the State Agency for Refugees and for prevention of discrimination against aliens seeking protection or that have been granted protection.

10. In the yard of the Refugees Integration Center next to the specially designed and built children playground the children drew on cement slabs the national flags of their countries of origin thus forming an Alley of Peace, which has turned into a civilized place for recreation and games. Weekly cultural integration events are organized with children refugees – picnics in the country, visits to cultural sights, botanical garden, museums, zoo, etc. Celebrations are held on the occasion of: the New year, 1 March, 8 March – Women's and Mothers' Day, 24 May – the Day of the Slavonic Alphabet and Culture, the International Day of Refugees, thematic exhibitions of children's paintings, participation of children refugees in various festive concerts. The integration activities cover **80%** of the children – aliens seeking protection or that have been granted protection.

11. The experts in the Center conduct social counseling and render assistance in front of the labor offices, *social services*, municipalities, schools and other

bodies. They organize meetings with refugees, who have been granted refugee status, and explain to them their rights and opportunities for continuing their education and professional realization in Bulgaria. Special care is taken of single parents, separated minors, and pregnant women, families with large number of children, people with disabilities and elderly people. In the period January 2002-March 2005, **4220 consultations** have been conducted in the field of education, qualification, employment, special assistance, social services, etc.

12. Of significant importance to good integration is to *preserve the cultural identity* of the different refugee communities. This is achieved by means of the following:

- Celebrations of the national and religious holidays of the different nationalities;
- Joint cultural activities with the Council for Women-Refugees, the Afghanistan Cultural Society, the Association of Arab intellectuals and friends, the Association for Integration of Refugees and Migrants, different NGOs and foundations;
- Encouragement of refugees' creative works – artistic drawing, artistic crafts and others.

13. The Refugees' Club hosts meetings of the different national communities facilitating cultural exchange and preserving their ethnic identity. On various occasions in cooperation with NGOs different cultural events are organized, such as exhibitions, concerts, recitals and other celebration events, which publicize the activities of the State Agency for Refugees relating to the refugees' integration. A cultural integration event is organized on a monthly basis, which is attended by approximately **100 refugees**.

14. Analysing the activities of the Integration centre for refugees, it can be safely said that it reacts in a timely and realistic manner to the refugees' needs.

15. The development of the **National Refugee Integration Programme** completes and defines the actual needs of the refugees, of their problems up to now and helps solving those problems. The National programme will show the way to refugees' integration in a modern and effective manner, it will unite the efforts of the state institutions and the NGOs, coordinate and distribute the responsibilities and it will also give us the opportunity to analyse the results by 2007 and to correctly direct our efforts in the area of asylum and refugee integration of foreigners who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status following the country's EU accession.

3.5. Support expressed for the Refugee Integration Programme recorded at the 10th UNHCR Round Table on 19 April 2005 in the National Assembly

3.5.1 Administration of the President of the Republic⁶⁵

1. We are indeed gathering today for what is unfortunately the last Round Table where we have worked in a great team during the past few years. We have worked hard and today's topic of this Round Table is the National Programme for Refugee Integration.

2. I can safely say is that this Programme is particularly necessary today only a few days before Bulgaria signs the EU Accession Treaty. I hope that, as envisioned in the schedule, we will provide the necessary notes and recommendations and the Programme will be duly submitted to the Council of Ministers. Having in mind the structure of the Programme, I hope it will be adopted as soon as possible and put into effect. Time itself will impose the necessary adjustments to make it more accurate and effective, which is the idea of the Programme.

3. I would like to take the opportunity to talk about this series of ten Round Table not only because of their key relevance to the legal framework whose development started under the previous legislature and government and was revised under the current government, but mostly because this Round Table sets a new, contemporary European beginning of an open, direct dialogue between all the institutions involved in refugee issues, on one hand, and the NGO sector and the international organisations, on the other. And let us all admit wholeheartedly that the driving force behind those Round Tables was Dr. Druke who brought the spirit, the openness, which is symbolically and wittily interwoven in the fact that these events have taken place here, in the building with the front slogan „Unity makes strength“. It is here that the spirit of an open dialogue was born which should be used in deciding a lot of other serious social problems, including yet another painful problem which the Roma issue in our country.

4. I am eagerly recommending this dialogue approach all the more since it is within the competencies of Minister Husmenova. I am sure that Dr. Druke will have this torch continue to shine.

5. Before I conclude I would give a piece of advice or rather a warning. Let us drop the illusion that the adoption of the otherwise necessary National Refugee Integration Programme the work with the refugee will be notably become easier. I would like to send a warning message this is a illusion. First, because the

⁶⁵ Presented by Mr. Nikola Karadimov, Foreign Policy Secretary of the President, taken from the transcript of the 10th UNHCR Round Table at the National Assembly, 19 April 2005, Sofia.

Programme could not possibly be implemented without the necessary institutional, staff and financial capacity. And when the Government adopts the Programme it should pay special attention to ensuring this capacity.

6. I am sure some colleagues live with the illusion that Bulgaria's EU accession and our country's access to the European Refugee Fund will alleviate our financial problems. I agree with my British colleague that our membership in the Union and the access to this Fund implies a shared responsibility in terms of the burden of receiving refugees in Member States. Let us not forget that as a Member State which is already implementing the European standards for refugee protection, Bulgaria will no longer be a transit country but a stable, constant destination and a country of interest to refugees.

7. Unfortunately, the smouldering and the active conflicts are very close to our borders. When we become a member state we will be a border country. The initial goal of refugees is to get to the territory of the European Union and naturally taking advantage of our traditional hospitality, tolerance towards foreigners, the protection of foreigners they will try to find temporary and may be even a lengthy stay here.

8. So let us now start preparing how Bulgaria should reply to such challenge when the country becomes a member state and we will have to share the refugee pressure with the rest of the member states.

9. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Druke for the wonderful cooperation we had between her, the UNHCR Representation and the President's administration. I hope your successors will continue working with us in the same spirit of cooperation.

3.5.2. Office of the Prime Minister⁶⁶

1. On behalf of the Prime Minister I would like to say that he regrets that the serious obligations of state governance in the weeks before the Parliament is adjourned and the forthcoming elections kept him from taking part in this Round Table. The Ministers who are unable to attend cannot leave the priority governmental tasks indeed. As you know the Prime-minister of Bulgaria is in every way supporting your efforts and instead of sending an official greeting which always sounds somehow artificial he asked me to say a few words on his behalf.

2. Let me just briefly say that when the Prime-minister on a Thursday re-

⁶⁶ Presented by Mr. Bill Drysdale, Advisor in the Office of the Prime Minister at the 10th Round Table, and as taken from the transcription of the National Assembly, 19 April 2005, Sofia.

cently gathered all the advisors in his office and asked us to report on our activity I pointed out I am in contact with the UNHCR Representation in Bulgaria. I also said I am happy I am the only foreigner in the Prime-minister's office trying to act as a Bulgarian although my enthusiasm and optimism are not necessarily features of the Bulgarian national character. Then Mr Passy said: „By the way Mr. Drysdale, there are quite a few Bulgarians in Bulgarian, which is why we are fortunate to hear the position of an outside observer.“ By saying this I mean that I know what it's like to an outside person, a foreigner in Bulgaria during the last 8 years.

3. We are now facing a turning point, as the Speaker of the Parliament pointed out, with the signing of the Accession Treaty with the EU next Monday. The whole framework for our future efforts, all the plans developed, with your participation, are in place. There is of course a certain political uncertainty about who will carry out the rest of the activities but the obligations have already been undertaken and those are obligations before the European Union. And as Minister Kuneva has stressed during the past weeks, those obligations are for specific actions and for words promising such. The European Commission is closely following what we are doing. I guess the same can also be said about UNHCR.

4. The refugees seeking asylum in Bulgaria do not always have the freedom to choose their destination. On one hand Bulgaria probably was never the most preferred destination country since it hasn't reached the desired level of welfare. However, other refugees who have or think they have more freedom of choice tend to go to the Western European countries where if allowed in and integrated in society they think they would be better off. The scales would now turn in a different direction because after Bulgaria's EU accession the country would surely become a more attractive destination for the so-called third countries refugees. The world is still unstable and there would undoubtedly be refugees in the future as well.

5. Unlike what I just said however, it is important that we underline that some of the developed economies in the world – Australia, Italy, the U.S., Germany, Holland, Great Britain are under immense pressure to receive more and more asylum seekers and there's a serious debate going on in these countries about the management of the refugee programmes which, by the way, are much less integrated with the UNHCR activities than they are in Bulgaria. And those are big countries which I think are capable of doing much more.

6. I would like to say we are not alone. The argument is going on in a number of countries, in almost every country that I mentioned. And I congratulate

Bulgaria, the Prime-minister shares the same opinion, for paying he necessary attention to the refugee issue. The fact that in Bulgaria we can't afford to do some of the things the more developed countries can underlines the significance of Bulgaria's obligations even more. I am confident Bulgaria will live up to the European Union's expectations. You know this is one of the requirements before the green flag is lifted come January 1st, 2007.

7. Finally I will say I am impressed by Dr. Druke's efforts, by the UNHCR Representation in Bulgaria. I would like to express personal gratitude to Dr. Druke for the efforts.

3.5.3 Filiz Huesmenova, Minister without portfolio, Council of Ministers, overseeing the activities of the State Agency for Refugees⁶⁷

1. A large part of the foreign asylum seekers or those who have been granted protection face a number of difficulties and problems during the process of their reception, adaptation in the host country.

2. The violence experienced, the hunger, deprivation, the loss of loved ones, of home and of native country leave a permanent mark on the physical but also on the health and psychological condition of the refugees. Providing protection, ensuring a fair procedure and guaranteeing the basic human rights and freedoms are of significant importance to the asylum seekers.

3. As a Minister directly overseeing the activity of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, the issue of integration of persons who have been granted refugee status or humanitarian status is among the priorities included in the long term strategy of the Agency.

4. The integration of foreigners who have been granted protection in our country is a main element in the state policy in the area of asylum and refugee protection. The successful integration of the refugees and persons with subsidiary protection is based on support form the society as a whole, from governmental and non-governmental organisations and from the local authorities.

5. It is important that solving the main problems of this group in the areas of social assistance, housing, healthcare, education, and employment is related both with the legislation and financing and with well-prepared experts.

6. On the other hand the foreign asylum seekers or those who have been

⁶⁷ Presented on behalf of the Minister by Mr. Metin Kazak, then Head of the Minister's Office, at the 10th UNHCR Round Table in the National Assembly on 19 April 2005.

granted protection must not only have access to competent and comprehensive information but should also actively participate in the integration process. The contemporary integration process enables the refugees to succeed in the society where they live, to develop their potential while preserving their cultural and ethnic identity and at the same time they are able to accept the Bulgarian society and become a part of it.

7. During the last ten years significant progress was made in dealing with the refugee integration issues. Important part in this process is played by UNHCR and NGOs such as the BRC, BHC, CARITAS-Bulgaria, the Centre for helping victims of torture etc.

8. In the short interval between the 9th and 10th Round Tables an Order of the Prime-minister of 21.01.2005 established an Inter-ministerial Task Force consisting of representatives from the ministries and agencies, from the NGOs, the refugee community and the local authorities aiming to develop a draft National Refugee Integration Programme with outside experts including UNHCR. A version of the National Refugee Integration Programme was prepared as a result of the discussions, proposals and positions given by the members of the Inter-ministerial task force which is now presented to your attention. It is our objective to make sure that the Programme in its current form answers the requirements set before our country for the period until 2007, whereas its implementation in reality will show what needs improvement in the area of integration after Bulgaria's full EU membership.

9. I am especially pleased to recognise the outstanding help, professional presence and expertise of the whole team of the UNHCR Representative for Bulgaria Dr. Luise Druke. I am expressing my sincere gratitude personally to Dr. Druke for the active and systematic assistance in the process of the development of the National Refugee Integration Programme and her personal input for the initiatives directed towards creating a culture for protecting the refugees.

10. I wish you success at this Round Table and thank you to all who have been contributing to the refugee protection and integration in Bulgaria.

3.5.4. Ministry Of Foreign Affairs⁶⁸

1. Allow me first to thank the organisers for the kind invitation to participate in today's meeting. I am very glad to be among you at the 10th UNHCR Round Table on Bulgaria's EU accession, European asylum harmonisation and international refugee protection.

⁶⁸ Presented by Ms. Milena Yotova, Directorate on Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and taken from the transcript of the 10th UNHCR Round Table of the National Assembly of 19 April 2005, Sofia.

2. The ambitious goals set by the Round Table are especially important today in the eve of Bulgaria's EU accession. In this context I think the Round Table is called upon to make its input for acknowledging our country's progress in providing better opportunities and conditions for refugee integration in Bulgaria including through presenting and discussing the draft project for the National Refugee Integration Programme for 2005-2007.

3. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not a participant in the Inter-ministerial Task Force for the development of the national Programme for understandable reasons – because the refugee integration issues are outside the Ministry's competencies. We are nevertheless hoping that a realistic, well balanced and financially secured programme be developed and realised. Such Programme is especially needed in view of our future EU membership which will bring new challenges in the area of asylum and migration. This Programme will help avoid other countries' negative experience and to prevent the social isolation and marginalisation of the refugees. Good luck to all of you who work for the refugee integration in Bulgaria.

3.5.5. Ministry Of Interior⁶⁹

1. It is a great pleasure for me to address you as participants in the 10th Round Table of the UNHCR and greet you on behalf of the Ministry of Interior as well as on my behalf.

2. This 10th and last of these Round Tables is an occasion to give a well-deserved appreciation to the UNHCR Representation in Sofia for organizing these round tables on Bulgaria's EU integration, European asylum harmonization and international refugee protection.

3. The concrete theme of this round table, namely National Program of Refugee Integration in Bulgaria, submits a series of problems of mutual interest and one again directs our attention to the major priorities in our activity relating to the preparation of Bulgaria's EU accession.

4. Indisputably, the achievement of European criteria and standards in the area of justice and domestic affairs is among the priority objectives in the whole Bulgaria's policy for accessing the EU as well as the problems on asylum and refugees, which have a main importance in this process.

5. We could say that our country's follow up and strict implementation of EU policy and legislation in the area of justice and domestic affairs. The European Union has achieved extremely important success in building up a unified area of freedom, security and justice. Notwithstanding this fact, our efforts in this direction will continue in order to respond adequately to the new challenges faced by the European Union with the threats of terrorism and trans-border organised

⁶⁹ Statement presented by Mr. Boiko Kotzev, Deputy Minister of the Interior at the 10th UNHCR Round Table. National Assembly. 19 April 2005. Sofia.

crimes as well as to respond to the expectations of the citizens for providing effective guaranties to their rights and security.

6. We welcome the adoption of the Hague program which in a very clear and comprehensive manner has outlined the further perspective in this domain.

7. The initiatives in the asylum, immigration and border control are of great importance as a future EU external border country, which are related to the principle of solidarity and sharing of responsibilities and burdens between the member states. We are convinced that the elaboration of common EU policy on asylum and migration requires consideration of different possible solutions including more complicated and delicate problems such as treatment of asylum applications outside the territory of EU. It is satisfactory that we will have the opportunity to follow closer and give our opinion by signing the EU Accession Treaty, and after 1st January 2007 – to participate directly in elaborating concrete measures and actions for implementing the main objectives laid down in the Hague program .

8. The Bulgaria's policy in the area of asylum and refugees is focused on ensuring the human rights and freedoms in accordance with the international and European standards, by sustaining an optimum balance between the control of illegal migration and the right of free movement.

9. The strategic objectives laid down in this policy are as follows:

- Develop of regular forms of migration;
- Enhance security – within the territory and beyond the borders
- Share the regional responsibilities in safeguarding the external borders of the European Union;
- Respect the rights of migrants legally residing in Bulgaria and their integration;
- International partnership and implementation of the international commitments in the area of migration and asylum.

10. In its 2004 Regular Report the European Commission acknowledged the progress achieved by Bulgaria in the migration policy and particularly the establishment of a Migration Directorate as a structure within the Ministry of Interior. It should be pointed out that the effective response to illegal migration, in respect of the right of every human being to seek and receive asylum when he/she is persecuted, requires common efforts and active cooperation between the competent national and international institutions and organisations.

11. Bulgaria is a country which during different periods of time has granted asylum to different ethnic groups, forced to leave their home and country because of wars and religious conflicts. The traditional ethnic and religious tolerance of Bulgarian people is a guaranty for accepting and integrating the asylum-seekers in Bulgaria.

12. Over the last few years Bulgaria has established a functioning asylum

system as a result of the cooperation between state institutions and non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the national legislation on refugees and asylum has been developed, the refugee status determination procedure and the necessary administrative structure have been established. This implies both new opportunities and new challenges in relation to refugees' protection.

13. The commitments of the state institutions are not limited to granting refugee protection and status. These people need equal access to housing, food, education, healthcare, and as a second home country, Bulgaria has the responsibility to create the necessary conditions for them in order to live, work and look for their children, – in other words to become a full member of the local communities. I am convinced that the main objective of the participants in this round table is to help refugees, to whom Bulgaria has granted asylum protection, to return one day to their home with dignity.

14. In this respect, I consider that this National Programme of Refugee Integration in Bulgaria, prepared on the basis of a profound analysis of the national legislation and practice, and describing the necessary actions of the state institutions, governmental and nongovernmental organizations and organs for local self-government, will considerably contribute for achieving this objective by establishing economical, social, political and cultural conditions of refugee integration in the Bulgarian society.

15. Let me to conclude by saying that the Ministry of Interior works in the framework of its competence and will continue to conduct active and engaged policy on the asylum and migration problems and to count on the further cooperation with national, international and nongovernmental institutions. We are convinced that this will be a real contribution for the National Programme of Refugee Integration in Bulgaria as well as for the whole implementation of the European integration policy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

3.5.6. Ministry Of Labour And Social Policy⁷⁰

1. Regarding the foreigners who have been granted refugee status registered in the „Labour Bureaus“ Directorates in 2004, the tendency for a solid presence in Sofia is preserved – 53 persons are registered, 47 of which are men. They come mainly from Somalia – 17 persons, followed by 9 Iraqi, 6 Ethiopian, 4 Nigerian and 4 Afghanistan citizens. The rest of the countries – Turkey, Israel, Tunisia, Sudan, Armenia, Tanzania, Congo, Syria, Egypt, Belgium, Lebanon, Iran, and Senegal have registered one person per country. The fact that they are registered in the „Labour Bureau“ directorate shows that in some cases citizens of those countries need assistance by the employment services for their integration on the labour market. 8 persons have university degrees, 3 persons have spe-

⁷⁰ Presented in a letter by Mrs. Liliانا Stankova, Ph.D. Chief State Expert and Mr. Mihail Bachvarov, State Expert, Ministry of Labor and Social Police in the context of the 10th UNHCR Round Table. National Assembly. 19 April 2005. Sofia.

cial high school degrees and the rest have primary or lower education. Seven of them (including 1 woman) have started work which was offered to them by the „Labour Bureau“ directorate, one of them is included in the employment programme and one – in a vocational training course. 27 persons of the registered have been registered in the „Labour Bureau“ directorate for a period ranging from 1 to 4 months. Another 14 persons have been registered in the „Labour Bureau“ directorate for a period of one month.

2. A small number of persons are registered in Blagoevgrad (a man and a woman from Pakistan with a university and a high school degrees), in Plovdiv (2 persons from Iraq), in Varna (a refugee from Iraq) and in Lovech (a refugee from Kurdistan). There are no registered refugees in the „Labour Bureau“ directorates in Ruse, Bourgas, Montana and Haskovo.

3. The Republic of Bulgaria has been conducting a clear and consistent social policy, which not only guarantees refugees equality but is also an active integration policy and is directed towards broadening the opportunities for refugees' adaptation and the improvement of their lives. Although our country ranks only 30th in terms of the number of submitted applications as a host country – 0,1 per 1,000 (for the 1st nine months of 2004), we are aware of the importance of refugee issues and it is our firm belief that finding solutions to them is an integral part of this policy.

4. In 2002-2003, 142 refugees have received social services, 92 of them – on the grounds of the Social Assistance Act and the Regulation for its implementation, 27 of them – on the grounds of the Family Allowances Act, 1 – on the grounds of the Protection, Rehabilitation and Social Integration of Disabled Persons Act, and 22 persons have been accommodated in specialised institutions. At this stage, we do not have data about the number of refugees who received social services in 2004.

3.5.7. Ministry Of Health⁷¹

1. First, I would like to thank for the invitation on behalf of the Minister of Health and for the Ministry's participation in the 10th Round table as a whole, as well as for inviting the Ministry to take part in the development of the Programme in the part concerning the legal provisions on the refugees' health status.

2. The Ministry of Health has committed to making an analysis of the legal framework in the area of social and health insurance of refugees, an important step in this respect being the adoption of the Law on Health which has explicit texts regarding the legal status and health care for vulnerable categories of people. These include refugees and the secondary legislation aims to regulate the situation of these individuals.

⁷¹ Presented by Viktoria Georgieva, Chief Expert, Legal Directorate, Ministry of Health (Para 1-4) Presented by Petar Stoykov, Chief Expert „Directorate " National Healthcare Policy", Ministry of Health, taken from the transcript of the 10th UNHCR Round Table, National Assembly, 19 April 2005, Sofia. (Para 5-7).

3. A problem which is extremely important – the facilities providing services to refugees -is being dealt with, as a regulation on the legal status, operation and activity of health and dental offices is being drafted; it explicitly stipulates the inclusion of facilities providing services refugees, so that such health facilities would acquire an official legal form.

4. It is also provided that refugees are included in the National health prevention programmes organised by the Ministry of Health.

5 As a continuation of the words of my colleague I would like to tell you that we have the assurance of the Ministry of Health that funds from our institution's budget will be allocated for the preparation and dissemination of information materials and leaflets which would introduce the refugees with their health insurance obligations and with their rights a in the field of health care.

6. The Ministry is also taking the engagement, together with the colleagues from the National Health Insurance Fund and the Bulgarian Doctor's Union, to carry out a number of educational seminars with general physicians and dentists in order to introduce them with the specific problems related to the health problems of the refugees.

7. This is what I can say to you. The Ministry of Health is seriously engaged in the process. It will be carried out in cooperation with the State Agency for Refugees.

3.5.8. Ministry Of Regional Development And Public Works⁷²

1. On behalf of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and personally on behalf of Deputy minister Hasan Hasan.

2. I would like to begin by thanking the UNHCR Representation and personally Dr Druke for her immense input in this area, for the exceptional efforts for developing and implementing the refugee integration policies and of course thank the Bulgarian partners supporting those policies and enriching them with new ideas and useful practices.

3. I would also like, if you allow me, to briefly outline the connection existing between the integrated regional development policy and the goals of the refugee integration and assistance policy.

4. The process of reforming the European policy for bringing countries and regions together will be directed towards strengthening convergence, enhancing competitiveness and broadening the territorial cooperation in order to diminish differences and to achieve quicker and more stable progress.

5. The plans and programmes which the member states and regions will prepare and propose for integrated regional development, including Bulgaria after 2007, will be based on the directions outlined by the Commission in the 3rd

⁷² Statement presented by Mr. Valeri Naidenov, Head of Regional Policy and Legal Harmonization, Ministry of Regional Development and Welfare, at the 10th UNHCR Round Table. National Assembly. 19 April 2005. Sofia.

Report on the economical and social rapprochement in the enlarged Union in the period 2007-2013.

6. The implementation of the cohesion policy reform, the policy for approximation in the EU, including by Bulgaria after 2007, at this stage requires an agreement on the strategic priorities at the national, regional and local levels, decentralisation, simplification and defining the set of measures for regional support, as well as the procedures for effective and efficient management of the resources from the structural fund and cohesion funds.

7. It is very important to analyse both sides of the policy in this field in order to prepare the Bulgarian institutions for effective participation and implementation of the structural operations of the European funds after the country's EU accession as well as to follow the development of the EU's legislation in view of the harmonisation and full inclusion of the discussions on its development and implementation.

8. The policy analysis of the legal and institutional framework in the area of regional policy shows the significant progress made in meeting the obligations according to the recommendations made by the European Commission. In relation to this, the regional development policy was reflected in the National Strategy for Regional Development for 2005-2015, which was adopted by the Council of Ministers at the end of last week – on April 14. The national legislation has been further improved and specified in the secondary legislation to the Law on Regional Development.

9. In the meantime the Law on Regional Development itself was amended and supplemented just recently to answer the need for purposeful assistance of the regions which are in the worst economic, social and environmental condition.

10. Parallel to the regional policy the related policies in the areas of competition regulations, public procurement, protecting the environment and antidiscrimination have also made significant progress. One of the main priorities now is the development and strengthening the administrative capacity and partnership on the regional and local level for the implementation of those policies and for an effective future participation and channelling the resources from the European Union funds. Both the Strategy for Regional Development and the legislation at this stage are in compliance with the current European Union legislation and with the projects for new Regalement.

11. In addition to this the developed strategies for developing the regions, the plans for developing the municipalities in Bulgaria in the framework of the regional policy will outline the national specifics, the needs, goals and priorities of the economical and social rapprochement on the territory of the country in the context of an enlarged European Union.

12. The questions related to granting asylum, protection and integration to the refugees in Bulgaria are becoming ever more important, especially after our

EU accession and will be more closely related to the strategies and plans of the municipalities, districts and regions for sustainable integrated regional and local development and to the regional policy in general.

13. The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works is closely following the processes and discussions in the area of asylum and refugee integration, with the Ministry having taken a leading role for cooperation and partnership with all the responsible institutions for solving the refugees' problems, for providing timely, just and sustainable support to all asylum seekers in Bulgaria.

14. The Ministry fully supports the nature and the objectives of the developed National Refugee Integration Programme and has proposed the inclusion of measures in the chapter on housing of refugees on the expert level. The work in this respect has to continue in several main directions:

- Updating the legislation for institutionalising refugee integration both on the regional and the local level;
- Improving the financial-credit and tax systems related to the housing sector to support the vulnerable persons living on the territories of the respective municipalities;
- Guaranteeing equal access and including refugees in various models for assisting and providing housing to vulnerable groups and persons with the participation of the local authorities and the support of the local community and the local civil society organisations;
- Providing more and more effective services to refugees on regional, district and local level in terms of information, assistance during the administrative procedures for providing housing, legal counselling.

15. Naturally, the objectives set in those aspects of asylum and refugee integration cannot be achieved without analysing the good European and national practices in this area and more especially in the area of housing of refugees and the inclusion of refugees in effective housing and international projects.

16. In conclusion, the progress achieved, the goals and tasks set for the refugee integration policy in Bulgaria are obliging all of us, working in different professional areas, to pay more attention and direct more efforts for seeking and developing opportunities for asylum, integration and a better future for the refugees in Bulgaria. This is all the more true when we firmly share the European democratic values and responsibilities in this respect.

3.5.9. Ministry⁷³ Of Education And Science⁷⁴

1. The Ministry of Education and Science has a clear understanding that the access and successful adaptation of the refugees to the educational system of the accepting country are of considerable importance for our activities. We have al-

⁷³ Statement presented by Mr. Julian Nakov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science at the 10th UNHCR Round Table, National Assembly, 19 April 2005, Sofia.

⁷⁴ Prepared by Krasimira Aleksandrova, Chief Expert in Directorate "Professional Education and Training".

ways expressed our readiness for beneficial work aimed at the overcoming the difficulties faced by the refugees in Bulgaria. In this respect a lot of work has been done till now.

2. The national legislation in the area of education and science for the refugees in Bulgarian has been harmonized with the international and European standards. The right to education of the refugees-children in public and community schools has been regulated as well as the opportunity to apply for Ph.D. programmes under the conditions and terms for Bulgarian nationals.

3. We have faced a series of difficulties related to the Bulgarian language training of the refugees which is an important element in their integration in the Bulgarian society. The main causes have their roots in the differences between the syllabus and the master of subjects, such as history and civilization, geography and economics, biology and health education, and so on. A great part of the schools do not have practically supplementary activities for increasing the level of command of Bulgarian language. The problems have been provoked by the lack of official diplomas certified the level of education in the refugee's country.

4. Despite our efforts in this regard and the achievements that have been made, the Ministry of Education and Science, through its representatives in the working groups of preparing the National Programme of Refugee Integration in Bulgaria 2005-2007, recommends the following:

- To analyze the statutory acts in the area of education in order to be harmonized according the requirements of the EU Directive 2003/9 from 27 January 2003
- To examine the practical difficulties faced by the refugees in their integration and to point out the measures for avoiding them
- In case of providing financial assistance – to be organised and conducted training seminars with teachers and support staff working with children
- To elaborate a mechanism of recognising the educational level in the home country in case that the refugees can not provide an official document for this purpose
- To assure on a legislative basis the access to Bulgarian educational system for elderly refugees
- To elaborate a pilot project with the assistance of the non-governmental organizations for financing the introduction of a teacher in schools with concentration of refugees
- To improve the conditions in the special institutions for children deprived of parental rights where the vulnerable groups of refugees have been accommodated, such as the separated children

In conclusion, I would assure the participants engaged in the adaptation of the re-

fugees in Bulgaria that the Ministry of Education and Science has the good will to work in accordance within our competencies to overcome the difficulties faced by the refugees in our country.

3.5.10. Ministry Of Finance⁷⁵

1. I wish to confirm the Ministry's concern about the resolve of the matters related to providing asylum and protection to refugees and creating economic, social, political and cultural preconditions for refugee integration in the Bulgarian society. A number of various governmental, international and non-governmental organisations are part of this process which requires a high level of coordination. Those organisations are the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) in the first place, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Agency for Social Assistance), the Agency for Employment, UNHCR, the BRC, the State Agency for Child Protection and others. The common thing between all of them is that they all need money for their activities especially since the funding for the pilot project provided by UNHCR will gradually phase out and there will be more expectations for funding from the state budget. We are also hoping to receive some assistance from the EU following our 2007 EU accession. We will be relying on the funds envisaged in our budget as well as on funding from the EU funds, one of which is the European Refugee Fund.

2. In March there was a meeting with Mrs. Luise Druke at the Ministry of Finance regarding the development of the National refugee integration programme. The funds required for the implementation of the programme are to be provided in the frameworks of the relevant ministries' and other bodies' budgets and from funds received through various projects. As an exception of this rule, the activities under part II, section I, p. 2 /initial financial help for social assistance, housing, health insurance, Bulgarian language education, social and cultural orientation of the newly recognised refugees/ are to be financed by the state budget. In this relation, there is a financial report attached to the project which is developed in two versions – for 100 and for 150 refugees and the expenditures are respectively 326,000 leva and 489,000 leva. Conversations on the expert level with representatives from SAR and BRC who were informed about the intentions of the MF to spare a certain amount in the central budget for the implementation of the programme were held after the meeting with Mrs. Druke. In the current format of the budget forecast for 2006-2008 that sum so far amounts to 300,000 leva for 2006.

3. Apart from the quoted p. 2, p. 3 of Section III of Part II also provides for funding from the central budget for providing a building or premises for the administration of the State Agency for Refugees and for reconstructing the admi-

⁷⁵ Statement presented by Mr. Stamen Tassev, Deputy Minister of Finance at the 10th UNHCR Round Table, in the National Assembly, 19 April 2005, Sofia.

nistrative wing of the building at 21 Montevideo Blvd. into a Housing centre for refugees. I hope this problem will also be resolved in the course of the year.

4. I would like to clarify that the refugee integration funds provided by UNHCR are channelled mainly through the Refugee and Migrant Service of the BRC but the rights and obligations of SAR make the Agency the responsible body to manage and control the budget provided resources. We have to take into consideration that the possibilities for exercising financial control over the SAR are preferred to those over the NGOs. When delegating SAR's responsibilities for absorbing funds is possible and the respective agreement is reached, then NGOs might also use funds directed to helping and assisting the refugees integrate into the Bulgarian conditions.

5. Finally I would like to express confidence that the revenues in our county's budget will always be sufficient to provide the necessary funding for the refugees in Bulgaria.
