

Talk with me

Volunteer language mentors
for refugees



Summary Report

General survey of the refugee situation in Bulgaria, Germany, and Romania



Introduction

During the `Talk with me` project a general study of the refugee situation in each partner country was undertaken. This meant gathering the available information, relevant for the last 3 years (2014-2016), on the following topics: number of refugees entering the country, countries of origin of the refugees, age groups of refugees, number of unaccompanied minors, number of asylum requests registered and number of asylum requests approved. Furthermore trying to get a deeper understanding, aspects concerning ongoing programs that address the refugee situation were researched, such as: official procedures, legal provisions, practical and language courses available, volunteering programs offering services to the refugees, etc. The following document contains the results of analyzing all the data collected on these subjects, giving an idea on what the refugee situation is like in the three partner countries: Germany, Romania and Bulgaria.

Overview of the refugee situation in the last 3 years

Year	Country	Total	Age groups				Asylum request	
			0-17	18-34	35-64	65+	Registered	Approved
2014	Germany	202,834	-	-	-	-	202,834	26%
	Bulgaria	11,081	3357	6224	1458	42	11,081	46.5%
	Romania	1,620	-	-	-	-	1,620	42.6%
2015	Germany	476,649	-	-	-	-	476,649	48.5%
	Bulgaria	20,391	5509	12 576	2 239	67	20,391	23%
	Romania	1,266	-	-	-	-	1,266	37.2%
2016	Germany	745,545	261,381	340,862	115,980	4,142	745,545	36.8%
	Bulgaria	19,418	-	-	-	-	19,418	6.9%
	Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

General description of the refugee situation

Most of the people seeking refuge in the last 3 years, and even more, are coming from war and conflict zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The countries in Europe desired as asylum by the migrants fleeing from violence, violation of human rights and others were, in 2015-2016, Sweden and Germany, while others become stops in the refugees' way towards these destinations.

In Germany, a large percentage of the people support both ideologically and through volunteer work the asylum given to the migrants, but prejudices in society have been increasing in the last 3 years. A necessary countermeasure to the rise of extremist right-wing parties is presenting accurate facts and education of the general public about the situation of refugees as a prevention of prejudices and xenophobia.

In Bulgaria the main problems concerning receiving the refugees were: the lack of an established mechanism for identification of individuals belonging to vulnerable groups, inconsistent legal aid and translation, improper living conditions, medical care and social assistance and unaccompanied minors' rights infringing. Other issues encountered concerned the integration of the refugees in the society, and were caused by the limited access the migrants had to language courses and to education for children. The causes that determined this situation are varied, such as: lack of enough information, lack of motivation ensuing from the fact that Bulgaria is regarded as a transit country, impossibility to fully participate, lack of flexible forms of education, lack of transportation and other financial means etc.

Romania, on the other hand, is not a desired country for the asylum seekers. Therefore the situation in Europe does not reflect in Romania, the number of refugees being quite constant over the last years, or even decreasing. This led to little attention given to the issue by the government, and therefore insufficient research on the subject..

Procedures for asylum requests and other relevant official procedures for refugees

Because of the large number of people seeking asylum in Germany in the last few years, the country has a well-established system that also provides special care for unaccompanied minors. Regularly it implies staying in a reception center, being registered in an informatics

system, participating to an interview, and then, if this is successful, being assigned to a certain region of the country. In case the interview is not successful the applicant will have to leave the country.

Bulgaria offers four different types of protection related to persecuted people coming from foreign countries: asylum, refugee status, humanitarian status and temporary protection. The applications are granted on the basis of the individual examination. Once granted asylum or refugee status people have equal rights and obligations, excepting the political ones and the ones related to the army.

Similarly, in Romania one can get three types of protection: refugee status, subsidiary protection and temporary protection. The first step in all three cases is the administrative one which involves the submission of a request from the applicant and an interview intended to determine personal information and relevant details about the person's situation. While the request is being processed, the applicant receives a temporary identification document and in case the status requested is granted the applicant may receive a residence permit and a border-crossing document.

Volunteering programs offering services to refugees

In Germany there are many local initiatives, some supported by the state that complement the protection the government is providing through their institutions. The types of services offered are very different and ranges from simple things such as support in dealing with social services and public institutions to comprehensive support in all aspects of life. Examples of such initiatives are: asylum consulting service, open meetings, charitable offers, 1-to-1 mentoring, self-learning courses and help from volunteers.

In Bulgaria `The Refugee Project` offers refugees language training and other activities and services such as art, English, sport, computer and music classes. Through the same project events and trips are organized. There are also other organizations that work on a more basic level such as legal aid, provision of humanitarian assistance, social mediation during the phase of initial adaptation, social, psychiatric and psychological consultations and psychotherapy, etc. A new Erasmus+ project called Welcomm soon in implementation will aim at raising awareness of the importance of education for social inclusion of migrants from early age and promoting opportunities for equal start in education.

In Romania services that range from language lessons to humanitarian aid are offered by the following organizations, with a great of volunteer work: The UN Refugee Agency in Romania, Association of Jesuit Refugee Service in Romania, Romanian National Council for Refugees,

Call Service Association, Defending Stateless People and Refugees' Rights Association
Romanian Forum for Refugees and Migrants and Save the Children Romania.

Legal provisions and practical courses available for language training

In Germany the state offers refugees a language course comprised of 660-960 lessons, mostly done on a full-time basis that is aimed at teaching the participants to use the language used for aspects of everyday life. This is supplemented by a 60 hours orientation course that concentrates on issues such as German history and culture, the German legal system, rights and obligations, ways of coexisting in German society, important values, e.g. tolerance, equal rights, freedom of worship. Also the German state offers specific courses such as: German language for professional purposes dedicated to people with a migration background, one dedicated for school and kindergarten children that grow up speaking a different language than German.

In Bulgaria three practical language courses are offered on the territory of the Reception centers of the State Agency for Refugees. Two are part of the Refugee project (CVS Bulgaria together with Caritas Sofia) and are separated in a group for beginners and a group for advanced. The third is organized by Caritas Sofia.

In Romania, language classes are offered by the Association of Jesuit Refugee Service in Romania in all the hosting centers together with other NGOs and The West University of Timișoara.

Conclusion

Each of the three partner countries in the `Talk with me` project, showed a different situation related to refugees. Depending on the number of migrants, the government developed more or less complex solutions, while also the civil society showed its support on many levels. One of the main issues in all of the three countries is finding ways to integrate the refugees in the society they are entering, therefore varying actions for this purpose were taken. A slight decline in the acceptance rate of refugees was noticed in Germany and Bulgaria in the most recent time but this didn't stop large numbers of people fleeing conflict



zones to look for protection in Europe. This indicates to the need of long-term solutions in the face of this on-going migration.