

Bulgaria Inter-Agency Meeting Minutes

Date	14 March 2023	Location	Hybrid – in person at UNHCR premises and online on Teams
Chair & Co chair	UNHCR	Note taking / minutes	Aleksandra Vicheva-UNHCR
Participating organizations and members	UNHCR (Hayoung Kim, Shoira Ruzybaeva, Rukiya Abdul Aziz, Petya Karayaneva); UNICEF (Carole Vignaud, Nina Sorokopud; Lyuba Batenbergaska); WHO (Andrea Paiato, Dr. Michail Okoliyski); IOM (Mariya Samuilova); BRC (Dr. Sofia Stoimenova, Nela Vamporova); USRF (Natalia Ellis, Dmitro Burdin); Reachout Foundation (Kristina Gologanova); Situation Centre Open Doors (Joana Bestuic, Radina Dimitrova, Fanny Atanasova); Aid for Ukraine ; Caritas (Konstantin Ivanov); FAR (Rositsa Atanasova); AKNO (Johannes Muller); SAR (Vyara Teneva); Pituary foundation (Vanya Dobрева); BCRM (Vladimir Milev); Energy Association (Galya Georgieva); Za Dobroto (Nadejda Rangelova);		
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Updates • Brief updates from Working Groups (Cash, Education, MHPSS, PSEA) • Mapping of community groups • AOB 		
Agenda Point	Summary of Discussion	Agreed Decisions / Follow-Up Actions	
Operational Updates	<p>UNHCR Inter-Agency Coordination officer provided an update on RRP developments:</p> <p>1) 2022 RRP End of Year report has been shared onwards with the Regional Refugee Coordination Forum for final review and redline comments. Good practice from Varna on volunteerism has been included in the report.</p> <p>2) 2023 Monitoring framework: Indicators incorporating all feedback from RRP partners will be shared with RRP partners following the meeting. It will be broad enough to incorporate all activities of RRP partners. Partners are invited to share their questions or comments on the indicator descriptions. There will be training on the Activity Info database and funding reporting on 21 March 9.30AM-12.30PM. Invite will follow, and each organization is requested to designate a focal point and alternative focal point.</p> <p>3) Regional level engagement with municipalities: UNHCR has been reaching out to various municipalities, with the aim to strengthen the cooperation and coordination. Meeting with Varna municipality took place together with the Refugee Coordinator last week, and the municipality has expressed willingness to host the next IACWG. The next IACWG will be held in Varna on 28 March 2023, to discuss regional level specific issues and concerns.</p> <p>Education Working Group chair/Lyuba and MHPSS TWG chair/Michail raised concerns echoed by participants over:</p> <p>1) Upcoming end of the accommodation program (24 Mar);</p>		

Bulgaria Inter-Agency Meeting Minutes

2) **Serious food issues for elderly people in Nessebar, Sunny Beach, Golden Sands** as the humanitarian program does not cover the expenses.

This affects both the mental health and educational planning for refugees. UNHCR/Petya informed that this week the Government is considering discussing the possible extension of the humanitarian program, however with yet unknown conditions and parameters. UNHCR and the Refugee Coordinator on behalf of the Inter-Agency organizations has offered support to provide expertise and knowledge.

USRF/Nata briefed that 1) USRF is distributing NFIs in Blagoevgrad. 2) On a positive note, USRF coordinated with NGO Ja Bulgaria on a teenager's camp, established to teach teenagers about innovations in ecology. USRF/Nata recommended such camps to be established on a multi-cultural level in Varna, including UKR and BG children. 3) USRF will organize a food fair for different cuisines, to gather members of the communities present in Bulgaria. 4) USRF will meet the education department in Sofia and the Minister of Education regarding bullying in schools, confirmed by a survey USRF had conducted recently.

Pituary Foundation/Vanya updated on their project, funded by JDC, with the Varna Organization of General Practitioners and Burgas Paediatric Association, for Bulgarian and Ukrainian practitioners to work together in governmental facilities. The matter will be further explored in the next IACWG meeting.

WHO/Michail updated that the launch of the inter-agency health needs assessment will take place in Astoria Grand Hotel, with the participation of the Ministry of Health as well as Senior WHO staff from Copenhagen and Geneva. The recommendations from the report will be presented. More information can be obtained from WHO/Michail.

BRC/Dr. Sofia informed that the work on the IFRC appeal continues. BRC distributed the first grant and the winterization grant has reached to 23, 654 persons. BRC is in process of finalising the selection criteria for vulnerable Bulgarians (5,000 people) that will receive cash assistance by 17 March. BRC has opened a new humanitarian service point and has received 15, 000 hygiene kits and 3,000 food parcels to be distributed to the humanitarian service points. With regards to the MHPSS program, BRC has commenced 150 consultations and 170 face to face consultations.

- BRC/Nela also informed that tomorrow (15 Mar) is her last day as head of BRC's refugee service department and thanked the I-A forum for the fruitful cooperation.
- Pituary Foundation/Vanya also enquired from BRC whether regional branches are working with refugees in Silistra and paying health contributions. Dr. Sofia replied that she will enquire about Silistra, but certainly BRC is there to help. About BRC health related activities and psycho-social support BRC coordinates with partners and has programs in collaboration with IFRC and within these programs BRC can support UKR refugees.

Bulgaria Inter-Agency Meeting Minutes

Brief updates from Working Groups (Cash, Education, MHPSS, PSEA)	<p>1) Cash Working Group: UNHCR/IA Officer updated that the priority of the CWG has been working on aligning humanitarian cash assistance with national programs and social safety nets. Meetings are held on a monthly basis (ad-hoc), with the attendance of the Agency for Social Assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CWG chair contacts: Lea Kraitem, kraitem@unhcr.org. <p>2) Education Working Group: UNICEF/Lyuba updated that currently over 20 NGOs and volunteers, together with the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MoES) participate in the group. EWG meets monthly with thematic sessions, such as psychological support in educational settings anti bullying etc. EWG is oriented to specific issues, exchange of resources and support. The next meeting is 15 March 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education Working Group chairs: Maria Yankova myankova@unicef.org / Lyuba Batembergskaja, lbatemala@unicef.org <p>3) MHPSS Technical Working Group: WHO/Andrea updated that the participants provide a wide range of MHPSS activities – community based -recreational, cultural, formal education, socialization – which have good impact on the mental health of refugees. It is very important for refugees to seek psychological support. Ministry of Health has recently endorsed the MHPSS TWG. MHPSS TWG is also connected with Education Working Group, to find common grounds to work together. MHPSS TWG will be defining an action plan and work plan, to operationalize the ToR. Upcoming priorities include information campaigns and primary prevention (self-care). The TWG is still looking for any national NGO who would be interested to co-chair the TWG.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MHPSS TWG chair: Andrea Paiato, paiatoa@who.int. <p>4) Protection Working Group: UNHCR/Shoira informed of the plans to revive the Protection Working Group in line with Refugee Coordination Model, with the participation of Governmental authorities. ToR will be prepared, and the frequency of the meetings decided upon. Participants will identify common protection gaps and develop relevant recommendations, for all refugees (UKR & non-UKR). Various capacities will be strengthened, including of the national authorities. Participants will be further informed about the next meeting.</p> <p>- Re issues to be discussed, Za Dobroto/ Nadejda commented that there should be stronger push towards the government and institutions for organising children’s day-care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protection Working Group chair: Shoira Ruzybaeva, ruzybaev@unhcr.org <p>5) PSEA network: UNHCR/Rukiya provided an update on the inter-agency PSEA network related developments – PSEA network has been established on 8 March, it will be placed under inter-agency umbrella, looking for a national NGO to come onboard as a co-lead of the network. PSEA is a cross-cutting component in responding to needs and requirements. The</p>	
---	--	--

Bulgaria Inter-Agency Meeting Minutes

	<p>network will be providing technical coordination and oversight of PSEA activities in line with action plan and strategy, which will be developed within the network with the input of all actors. Actors who have not yet nominated focal point, should nominate focal points for the PSEA network. PSEA will focus on activities for minimising the risk of SEA and ensure there is effective response when such incidents arise. The meetings will be on a monthly basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSEA network co-chairs: Rukiya Abdul Aziz, abdulazi@unhcr.org / Diana Yovcheva, dyovcheva@unicef.org 	
<p>Mapping of community groups</p>	<p>UNHCR Inter-Agency Coordination officer pointed out that timely information to communities has been one of the challenges identified in the response. UNHCR proposes to conduct mapping of different community groups and structures. It could be done on a regional level in different locations. Communication for advocacy messages should be spread by relevant actors consistently in a well-structured way. Under the Protection Working Group, UNHCR would like to establish a Communications with Communities Task Force, to deal with variety of issues in relation to the communities. Further information will be provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WHO/Michail added that WHO in 2023 will develop a strategy for risk communication and community engagement, regarding the needs and challenges of refugees and society. 	
<p>AOB</p>	<p>Pituary Foundation/Vanya enquired about the upcoming IOM-European Commission project on the establishment of a network of UKR medical professionals, making a remark that UKR can legally work in Bulgaria only as support staff in Bulgarian hospitals. IOM/Mariya replied that the project is regional and is still in preparatory phase (project proposal has been submitted, with activities on inter-cultural mediation, support with visiting medical centres, translation of documents, access to health services, creating a network of health professionals) as a framework for UN agencies. WHO/Michail commented that it is too early to discuss the details for this project.</p> <p>On the question of AKNO/Johannes whether MHPSS activities are provided to non-Ukrainian refugees, WHO/Andrea explained that MHPSS related services are provided in reception centres and other settings. On the question of AKNO/Johannes whether it is known how many of non-Ukrainian asylum seekers are remaining in Bulgaria, UNHCR/ Shoiria explained that the numbers increased in 2022 compared to 2021. There is no effective system in place to track how many of the asylum-seekers remain in Bulgaria, especially those who receive refugee or humanitarian status. There is also high number of absconding among the applicants for international protection, due to minimal access to integration and socio-economic inclusion.</p>	
<p>Next Meeting</p>	<p>Date: 28 March 2023. Location: Varna municipal building and online – hybrid form Time: 10.00-11.00 hrs.</p>	