

Bulgaria Inter-Agency Meeting Minutes – General Protection sector discussion

Date	17 January 2022	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, Mariya Shisheva, Petya Karayaneva, Christine Pirovolakis); UNICEF (Carole Vignaud, Elena Atanassova, Nina Sorokopud; Denitsa Krasteva); WHO (Andrea Paiato); IOM (Maria Samuilova); BHC (Iliana Savova) BRC (Dr. Sofia Stoimenova); USRF (Olena Burdina); Reachout Foundation (Nikol Karapeeva); Pituary Foundation (Vania Dobрева); Situation Centre Open Doors (Joana Bestuic); Aid for Ukraine (Ksenia Zajigina); Energy Association (Galya Georgieva); State Agency for Refugees (SAR)		
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of 2023 RRP General Protection key activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Aid for Ukraine, BHC, BRC, Dignita Foundation, FAR, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, USRF, Za Dobroto</i> • Protection Working Group • AOB 		
Agenda Point	Summary of Discussion	Agreed Decisions / Follow-Up Actions	
Introduction of new participants	The new participants: Ksenia Zajigina -Aid for Ukraine, Olena Burdina USRF - participated in the meeting on behalf of their organizations – SAR representative, also participated and informed participants should they have questions for SAR, to share via email for further discussions.		
Introduction of 2023 RRP General Protection key activities <i>Aid for Ukraine, BHC, BRC, Dignita Foundation, FAR, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, USRF, Za Dobroto</i>	<p><u>Inter-Agency Coordination Officer</u> provided a brief overview of the 2023 RRP Bulgarian chapter General Protection section: It captures the key protection activities, includes identifying persons at heightened risk and facilitating their access to legal information, assistance protection, as well as includes monitoring, provision of information on access to social and basic services and activities on adolescent and youth engagement. Activities also contain capacity building for local authorities, mainstreaming mental health and psychosocial support. Once the inter-agency Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) findings are finalised, the needs/gaps identified will also inform the key areas for general protection actors’ interventions.</p> <p><u>Energy Association/Galya</u> informed that in 2023 Energy will continue with their project on the Daily Centre for Ukrainian Children and will extend some of the activities for the parents.</p> <p><u>BHC/Iliana</u> outlined BHC protection activities for 2023 which include legal advice, representation, and legal protection to approximately 5,000 persons. BHC will continue with individual legal consultations and interventions, as well as with advocacy with the government for providing humanitarian aid and to restore the provision of food within the</p>		

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humanitarian aid program for the Ukrainians. BHC also continues with their hotlines. BHC is actively advocating for the new government decision to extend the temporary protection deadline for Ukrainians.

BRC/Dr. Sofia informed about BRC protection activities for 2023 (all information is also available on the [BRC webpage](#)): BRC will operate three helplines (for MHPSS in Plovdiv, a child helpline with the government); provide cash assistance; provide psychosocial support, restoring family links services and child protection services; capacity building on inclusion, language and legal support. BRC branches throughout the country also provide consultation and referrals. Cash assistance was also provided to 7,833 children (3,828 boys and the 4,005 girls). BRC will continue with trafficking prevention activities and services in the Blue Dots.

Aid for Ukraine/Ksenia updated that in 2022 they opened an integration centre in Sofia. In 2023 they will continue implementing projects in cooperation with UNICEF and WHO. Aid for Ukraine has access to several UKR Facebook groups that bring together more than 50,000 Ukrainians and seeks feedback from Ukrainians through the digital platform. In the Center, there are languages courses for children as well as psychosocial support and art therapy. (Aid for Ukraine also assists UKR women with employment support/opportunities and with the provision of medicines under the Livelihoods and Basic Need sectors.)

FAR provides legal aid to asylum seekers, stateless persons, migrants and refugees, including children, through its lawyers in the regions of Bourgas, Dobrich, Plovdiv, Varna and Sofia, including legal aid at the Blue dots in Dobrich, Bourgas and Varna. FAR complements traditional legal aid with digital legal aid channels via the online platform [Migrantlife.bg](#).

UNHCR/Maria updated that in 2023 UNHCR will continue activities with regards to UKR access to Bulgarian territory, focusing on monitoring reception conditions, accommodation, access to rights, and identification of persons with specific needs, as well as the referral to services and ensuring the effective access to all these services. UNHCR will also continue with cash for protection program. UNHCR will also focus on integration activities, looking for more long-term solutions. UNHCR will continue with UNICEF jointly to further expand the Blue Dots. UNHCR will also work on youth engagement and empowerment.

UNICEF/Carole: informed that UNICEF in 2023 will further expand their partnerships with line ministries as well as with the State Agency for Refugees, State Agency for Child Protection, local authorities – providing technical and financial support, advice, policy, advocacy, training, supervision, exchange of good practices and coordination. Child protection includes legal assistance knowledge and access to social services, also the distribution of core relief items, especially during the winter. UNICEF will be engaged with MHPSS activities, youth engagement and cash for

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	<p>protection assistance – as well as continued service provision through the Blue Dots. UNICEF will ensure a multi-sectoral approach and focus on cooperation with Ukrainian and Bulgarian civil society actors.</p> <p><u>USRF/Olena</u> shared that USRF will continue to work on receiving and assisting vulnerable Ukrainians in their centre. There are also other projects as psychosocial support, day-care centre for children, in cooperation with UNHCR and UNICEF.</p> <p><u>IOM/Mariya</u> briefed the participants about the activities in 2023 which include access to medical service, cash, MHPSS related activities, translation of documents ad hoc support. IOM has closed the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund projects with the Ministry of Interior. Two safety zones – in Ovcha Kupel and Voenna Rampa – will remain till the end of 2023. IOM sub-office in Harmanly will also remain open.</p> <p><u>Participants discussed the IACWG forum and government’s Task Force meetings</u> : On the question of BHC/Iliana what would be the difference between the IACWG (with the government’s participation/eventual co-lead) and government operational task force meetings, , the <u>Inter-Agency Coordination Officer</u> reiterated on the importance of the government-led response and humanitarian actors’ support to this, hence the objective to bring together all relevant actors as to have one dialogue and work jointly on the crisis response. Then BHC/Iliana suggested that the IACWG forum should also strongly advocate with the government Operational Task Force to organise meetings with UN agencies and NGOs on a more regular basis.</p> <p><u>UNHCR/Petya</u> added that the decision on the extension of Temporary Protection is expected to be adopted during the meeting of the Council of Ministers, and the government will start extending the Temporary Protection registration cards. Some employers do not want to employ Ukrainians whose temporary protection is expected to expire by 24 February. The Government might adopt a decision for a three-month extension.</p>	
<p>Protection Working Group</p>	<p><u>Re the proposal of bringing the Protection Working Group under the Inter-Agency Refugee Coordination Forum:</u></p> <p><u>UNHCR/Mariya</u> briefed on the existing Protection Working Group: It has been set up as a national coordination mechanism in the context of the Syrian refugee situation, to bring together NGOs working on the response and discuss specific issues. It was chaired jointly by UNHCR and BHC. SAR has been present at these meetings. Various issues of relevance to asylum seekers and refugees were discussed and the findings were presented to the regular coordination meeting chaired by SAR, monthly.</p> <p><u>BHC/Iliana</u> added that the working group has sub-groups: integration, and communication groups. This was an effective forum as it preceded the Government meeting, for humanitarian actors to convene and discuss, and feed</p>	

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	<p>into the Government meetings. The best proposed way would be to re-establish the groups and convince the government to set up working groups to ensure coordination and information sharing from/with the Government.</p> <p><u>UNHCR/Petya</u> reiterated that Protection Working Group is a very useful tool and has brought practical results. Thinking on the format of the working groups a broader approach should be considered and strategized on which groups should be kept; modalities should also be discussed with SAR and the National Task Force.</p> <p><u>UNICEF/Carole</u> expressed full support for the advocacy with the government to establish more regular meetings with the UN agencies and NGOs. As regards the integration and communication sub-working groups: they are very relevant to the refugee situation and UNICEF stands ready to support the continuation of these groups, as well as the sectoral IACWG discussions. It is important to not to duplicate, the forums they should be made strategic and oriented towards finding solutions and making decisions. A mapping on the existing coordination structures will be very useful for all the participants.</p>	
AOB	The next IACWG will be held in present at UNHCR 1 st floor conference room and online on teams – hybrid	
Next Meeting	<p>Date: 24 January 2023 Location: UNHCR Office 1st floor conference room and online on teams – hybrid Time: 10.00-11.00 hrs.</p>	