

Migration and Sustainable Development Goals

Case analysis





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The main goal of the research is to show the link between the UN Sustainable Development Goals and how they can help meeting migration challenges. The research will be used for informing the community and giving a wider point of view for the migration processes from European and global perspective. The methodology of developing the materials includes documental research, as well as information gathered from in-depth interviews with refugees and migrants. The proposed recommendations, are to be included in the report and to be focused onto viable alternatives for the prevailing negative tendencies towards the refugees and the migrants.

Introduction

The number of international migrants on a world scale continues to grow fast in the last years, reaching approximately 272 million, with 51 million more in comparison to 2010. While many of them migrate because of their choice, the number of the forcibly displaced people reaches 70 million, among which 26 million are refugees and 41 million are internally displaced people.¹

The data for Bulgaria indicates that in 2019 the total number of international migrants is 168.5 thousands, and out of them the number of refugees is 21.8 thousands.² For the first time, upon population census in 2019, information about the people granted international protection will be gathered: about the type of granted status, and which municipalities they are established. This data will serve to improve the integration policy of refugees and migrants.

1 United Nations. Shaping future together. Migration. Online – <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html>

2 UN DESA. International migration. Country Profiles. Bulgaria.
<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/countryprofiles.asp>

Global perspective

In order to combat the growing flows of refugees and migrants on a global scale, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for refugees and migrants on September, 19, 2016 calling for the development of two global compacts – one for the refugees and one for the migrants. The two Compacts were adopted in December 2018. These Compacts ‘provide an opportunity in strengthening the norms, principles, rules and processes of decision making, which will allow for more effective international cooperation in response to the phenomenon that is a matter of crucial importance’. While the Refugee Global Compact does not provoke any arguments and Bulgaria joined it³, the Global Pact for a safe, organized and legal migration controversy and doubts. Bulgaria abstained upon the signing of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration under the pressure of anti-immigrant attitudes expressed by coalition partners in the government and from the opposition.

However, it is important for the public to know that this is a legally non-binding framework for more international cooperation on migration issues. The purpose of the Global Compact on Migration is to carry out migration in a safe, organized and legal manner. It contains concrete actions which will help the countries to decrease the illegal migration, for example by enhanced cooperation for dealing with the reasons for migration, combat human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, border management and facilitating the return to the countries of origin. It will also help focus the attention to the legal channels of migration.

3 The Global Refugee Pact does not replace existing international legal instruments; it has four main objectives: to reduce the pressure on countries that have received a large number of refugees; to help refugees get back on their feet; expand access to third countries through displacement or other options; to support processes that allow refugees to return to their homes.

European perspective

The European Union (EU) manages migration through a variety of legal and policy instruments. Following the high levels of migration flows to Europe in 2015, this policy is mainly based on the European Migration Program. Measures include the return and readmission of irregular migrants who are not allowed to enter or reside in the EU, the fight against migrant smuggling, the protection of the EU's external borders, the creation of legal routes for people in need of international protection, the creation of a stable EU asylum policy based on a balance between solidarity and responsibility, as well as taking action on migration in cooperation with third countries through political and financial means.

The EU has set detailed common standards in several regulations and directives, but the actual

The four Pillars of the 2015 European program for migration

Reducing the incentives for irregular migration, enhancing Frontex's role in the return of migrants; a new action plan with measures aimed at making human trafficking a high-risk, high-profit activity and addressing the causes that lead to migration through development cooperation and humanitarian aid.;

Border management – saving human lives and ensuring security at the external borders, notably by enhancing Frontex's role and capacity; assistance to strengthen the capacity of non-EU countries to manage their borders; further integration of certain EU-level coast-guard functions, where necessary.;

European duty to protect through a strong common asylum system; The priority is to ensure the full and consistent application of the common European Asylum System, notably by promoting the systematic identification and fingerprinting and by making efforts to reduce abuses by reinforcing the safe country of origin provisions of the Asylum Procedures Directive; evaluation and eventual revision of the Dublin Regulation in 2016.;

A new policy on legal migration: The focus is on preserving the attractiveness of Europe as a destination for migrants amid observed in its demographic decline. This will happen mainly through modernization and reform of the 'blue card' by changing policy priorities in the field of migration and maximize the benefits of migration policy for individuals and countries of origin, including by facilitating cheaper , faster and safer money transfers.



European perspective

implementation of asylum and migration policy is the responsibility of the Member States, which have to ensure that their national legislation is in line with both EU law and the international agreements.

Global perspective

The EU's policy on migration is a part of the EU's overall approach to migration and complements EU foreign policy and the EU development cooperation policy. It is based on common objectives set by the Member States and is reflected in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Cooperation with third countries is embedded in the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), through which the EU has initiated political dialogue and established partnerships with third countries.

Due to the remaining differences between countries with regard to the reform of the Dublin Regulation which determines the Member State responsible for examining an application by an asylum seeker, and because of internal pressure in some countries, the European Council conclusions give priority to strengthening the EU's external borders.

All EU leaders who took place in the debates for the Europe's future in the European Parliament during the already expired mandate in 2019 agreed that the migration is one of the major challenges facing the EU, and agreed that it can only be addressed at EU level. There was consensus on the need to strengthen the cooperation with countries of origin or transit of migrants. Some European leaders support increased funding, or more ambitious and concrete initiatives, such as the Marshall Plan for Africa. The funds in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027 for migration-related questions are almost three times higher than before, reaching over EUR34.9 billion compared to EUR 14 billion for 2014-2020.

Integration measures are within the competence of the Member States and are tailored to their needs, history and legal framework. These measures have to be implemented in accordance with the *acquis* (Article 79, paragraph 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU



Global perspective

(TFEU), the Stockholm Programme, The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU and etc.).

Legal framework in Bulgaria and national institutions

Following the unprecedented pressure of mixed flows of migrants and asylum seekers facing the Republic of Bulgaria at the end of 2013, emergency measures were taken in the country. National procedures have been improved, given that border protection and surveillance is a legally binding obligation. Nevertheless, the country has striven to respect the principles of non-discrimination and non-repudiation as defined in the UN Refugee Convention, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU TFEU, the Schengen Borders Code and other related instruments. Bulgaria offered all persons the opportunity to apply for humanitarian protection and asylum. In the period after 2016, a series of measures have been implemented in Bulgaria for transportation the newly adopted EU directives into the national legislation in the area of legal migration, regulating the right of residence and mobility within the EU of third-country nationals. National provisions transposing Directive 2014/36 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers, Directive 2014/66 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer and Directive 2016/801 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of research, study, internship, volunteering, programs for scientists student exchange programs or educational projects and work programs “au pair” have been adopted and are already in force.

In the period 2014-2019, Bulgarian Government activities were aimed at increasing the capacity to receive and accommodate

Legal framework in Bulgaria and national institutions

foreigners applying for international protection. Funds from the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) were also being used. . In 2015, the Bulgarian Government adopted a National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration for the period 2015-2020. It aims at creating a comprehensive and stable legal and institutional framework for managing legal migration and preventing illegal migration, for integration and care for asylum seekers and persons granted refugee or humanitarian status. In July 2017, an Ordinance was adopted on the terms and conditions for the conclusion, implementation and termination of an Agreement on the integration of foreigners granted asylum or international protection. The Pre-school and School Education Act guarantees the possibility for refugee and migrant children to attend Bulgarian schools under the same conditions as Bulgarian children. Foreigners who have been granted permanent residence receive medical treatment on an equal basis with Bulgarian citizens. Children under 18 years who attend school as full-time students until they finish secondary or higher education are covered by the state budget and are entitled to free medical and social care. The regular migrant has equal rights with the Bulgarian citizens in the field of employment. The Professional Qualifications Recognition Act adopted in 2016 provides for foreigners and persons with refugee or humanitarian status who have practiced a profession abroad but are unable to submit documents, are eligible to take an exam, confirming their qualifications

In 2016, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted the Labor Migration and Labor Mobility Act. Its provisions focused mainly on providing access to the Bulgarian labor market; issuing a single residence and work permit; The EU Blue Card and the regulation of self-employment.

In July 2017, a National Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking

Legal framework in Bulgaria and national institutions

was adopted. The document set out the government's long-term vision for combating trafficking, focusing on the early prevention, support and reintegration of victims, taking into account the vulnerable situation of women and children and the persecution of perpetrators. The Commission on Protection against Discrimination (OPC) and the Ombudsman have been working to improve the state's human rights protection systems. In 2019, the Government adopted Decree No. 226 establishing a National Council on Migration, Borders, Asylum and Integration. This body has the responsibility to formulate and coordinate the implementation of state policies in the field of migration and integration of third-country nationals, including persons granted international protection in Bulgaria. Local authorities are also represented in the Council. In Bulgaria, the managing body of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund is the International Projects Directorate (DMP), a structure of the Ministry of the Interior managing programs and projects financed by European Union funds and other international programs and treaties.

Specific problems in the refugees' integration in Bulgaria

The total number of third-country nationals legally residing on the

Specific problems in the refugees' integration in Bulgaria

territory of the Republic of Bulgaria has steadily growing in recent years. The mobility of the population is increasing. The interest for employment in Bulgaria is also increasing and this fact changes the ratio between immigrants and emigrants, reducing the net migration rate respectively from -2.2 in 2010 to -0.7 in 2019. In order to support this process, measures are being taken to stimulate employers and state efforts for attracting qualified specialists in Bulgaria. The process of integration of third-country nationals who have received international protection (ie. the integration of the refugees) is much more difficult. Experts have been talking about “zero years” in refugee integration since 2014, and reported inconsistency and spontaneity in the adoption of strategic documents and programs 6.⁴” Instead of adopting a new three-year program plan in compliance with the standard model of Integration program, the Government adopted two National Strategies, respectively in 2014 and 2015, who shift the responsibility for the integration of refugees from SAR to the municipalities⁵. In the 2015-2020 National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration, which according to the government unites three other similar strategies adopted respectively in 2008-2014, is focused on ensuring the security of the EU's external borders, effectively combating trafficking, fair and transparent procedures in processing requests for protection, promotion of voluntary return as a priority policy. Inconsistency is seen in the search for practical solutions. For example, on August 12th 2016 the Council of Ministers adopted a Decree for adopting Ordinance on the terms and conditions for concluding, implementing and terminating an agreement on the integration of foreigners granted asylum or international protection

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⁵ There again, p. 34

Specific problems in the refugees' integration in Bulgaria

The Ordinance was cancelled on March 31st 2017. On July 19, 2017, the government adopted a new Ordinance on the terms and conditions for concluding, implementing and terminating the agreement on the integration of foreigners' granted asylum or international protection. This new integration policy shifted the focus to local authorities - mayors and municipalities. Unfortunately, due to the "lack of interest and even the refusal of municipalities to commit to integration with even a small number of refugees" integration did not happen. "The lack of political will to take responsibility at the state level, transferring this responsibility to local authorities, without the necessary preparation, is a fundamental problem."⁶ The negative public and media discourse that contribute to anti-immigrant sentiment and political resonance must also be taken into consideration. According to Anna Krasteva, the specifics of the Bulgarian case relate "not so much to a lack of legislation or a specific policy like access to education or business opportunities, but to the political context of populist securitization, which mines the very possibility of integration policies and forms negative public opinion."^{7 8} The aggressive and powerful-sounding public anti-immigrant discourse and the invisibility of rare good integration practices will slow down and hinder refugee integration for a long time

Last but not least is the problem with the mobility of asylees or people in the process of procedure in Bulgaria. Due to the level of development of Bulgaria, because of the opportunities to offer good services and social support, or because of the attitude of the local population towards the refugees, Bulgaria is a transit country in terms of asylum seekers

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⁷ Иларева, В. (2017) Нулева интеграция за бежанците. Икономист, 1.01.17 Цитирано по Кръстева, Анна, цит. Произведение, с. 33.

⁹ Кръстева, Анна. Изследовател и автор – Българският миграционен парадокс. Миграция и развитие в България. НФФ „Каритас България“, София, 2019, с. 31.

⁸ There again, p. 36

Specific problems in the refugees' integration in Bulgaria

and “80-90% of the applicants for protection in Bulgaria, continuing or planning to continue their journey to Western Europe”.

Last but not least is the problem with the mobility of asylum seekers in Bulgaria or those in the process of procedure. Due Bulgaria's level of development, because of the offered opportunities to services and social support, or because of the attitude of the local population towards the refugees, Bulgaria is mostly a transit country in for the asylum seekers and “80-90% of the applicants for protection in Bulgaria, continue or their journey to Western Europe or have such plans ”^{11.10.}⁹

⁹ Илиев, С. (2017) Има ли желание, има и начин. Ангажираност на частния сектор в заеитостта на получили международна закрила лица. Sofia: UNHCR Bulgaria. Цитирано по Кръстева, А. цит. Произв., с. 32

Analysis of the results from the in-depth interviews

Three in-depth interviews were conducted using the questionnaire attached in this document. Two third-country nationals entering and legally residing (short and long term) in Bulgaria for work and educational purposes and one asylum seeker are covered by the survey.

The first case is about a young Palestinian woman of origin, married, with a small child. Her husband is a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship. They decided to migrate under the family ties influence, having employment opportunities in a family company. The main reason for deciding to emigrate from Israel and immigrate legally to Bulgaria is the search for a more peaceful and secure political environment, suitable employment and good living conditions.

After questioning her the following conclusions can be drawn:

- In cases where migrant workers are hired by a foreign company with a local branch in Bulgaria, they have no difficulty in obtaining decent work. The company and its lawyers take care of overcoming administrative obstacles when dealing with the necessary procedures. The respondent can easily find information on one or the other procedure :
- Migrant workers have no barriers to enroll their children in school, in such cases they prefer international private schools in order to be prepared for possible migration of the family to another country Migrant workers are looking for a sustainable social environment, in this case found in migration of a group of relatives.
- To obtain Bulgarian citizenship is not a priority for them.
- Health care is very expensive; in this case using health insurance is not mentioned.
- Integration into the local environment is hampered by the stereotypical attitude towards women wearing headscarves.

Analysis of the results from the in-depth interviews

The second case is of a young man from a mixed marriage of a Bulgarian and a Syrian. Although having Bulgarian citizenship, he prefers to enter Bulgaria as a foreign student because he has completed secondary education in a third country. He enrolled in medicine, but because of the high fees he transferred and completed International Relations at Sofia University

After questioning him, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Foreign students receive very good education in the first preparatory year.
- International students need more support and access to services, such as students' hostels. The respondent suggested improvements in the mechanism for applying for foreign students, for example while calculating the cost of paid education to include the students hostel service. A good level of knowledge in Bulgarian is a great advantage. Foreign students or foreigners with good Bulgarian language and knowledge of other languages are useful for organizations such as IOM to work in reception centers for migrants and asylum seekers from third countries.
- Good education and qualification give opportunity for decent job; in the concrete case the respondent currently works in a foreign company as a representative for the Arab world.

The third case is about a young man from Afghanistan, passing the difficult path of a refugee fleeing insecurity in his homeland, where he said there are 40 years hostilities.

- After entering Bulgaria, he stayed at a Refugee Reception Center near Sofia -Busmantsi for 2.5 months and 3.5 years at the Harmanli Registration and Reception Center. He studied

Analysis of the results from the in-depth interviews

Bulgarian independently, helped as a translator of the International Organization for Migration and as a profiler for the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee during his stay in Harmanli. He is not granted refugee status and he lives in Greece now, attempting to get such status there. He commented very negatively on the procedures in Bulgaria and Greece. In Bulgaria, he has been refused three times, by receiving such arguments that there is no evidence of a martial law in Afghanistan and there is no danger for his life. While he stayed in an open-type reception center, there was no way of working officially. The deadlines are too long to receive such a right. He does not take the interpretation of the Bulgarian institutions for an official and unofficial war in Afghanistan.

- He reports poor treatment of the staff at the reception centers, including the medical staff. He has witnessed violence, including being the victim of violence by police officers and staff.
- He recommends to be offered more training and activities while staying in reception centers. "You sit and wait for the food, it makes you feel like a cheap human being. Recommends a more active presence of non-governmental organizations. According to him, asylum seekers need the help of a lawyer, a social worker, a psychologist.
- From his own experience and observations, he defines Bulgaria as a "transit country" for the majority of persons applying for protection in Bulgaria.

Conclusion and recommendations

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is a task for a wide range of stakeholders, not just the government. In this regard, the main recommendation is:

1. To Make efforts to build a network for cooperation and operational interaction between the widest possible range of stakeholders from state institutions, representatives of local authorities and the non-governmental sector in the process of adaptation and social inclusion of all target groups related to migration policy in Bulgaria. The small sample does not allow us to draw conclusions.

This little sample does not allow us to make conclusions on the whole range of topics covered in the first part of this report. We can make several recommendations related to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bulgaria.

With regard to the foreign students:

2. To improve communication channels to attract foreign students and ensuring their employment during the training, including the creation of prerequisites best prepared to stay and work in Bulgaria.

With regard to migrant women or women from migrant workers' families:

3. To build working women's networks from the communities of migrant workers and to be able to monitor the process of their social integration in Bulgaria, in order to create different prerequisites for the creation of a positive impact of the immigration processes in Bulgaria.

4. To offer purposefully diverse paid and free courses and programs to migrant women for achieving a positive image for Bulgaria and the opportunities our country offers for long-term co-existence and intercultural communication.

Conclusion and recommendations

With regard to applicants for international protection:

1. Improvement of the qualification and sensitivity of the employees in the reception centers and border checkpoints.
2. Ensuring an environment that protects human rights and human dignity in reception centers.
3. Improving the educational integration of refugee children through the exchange of good practices between schools and kindergartens that accept a larger number of refugee children.
4. Active and permanent measures to change attitudes in Bulgarian society through intercultural education and in particular to integrate human rights education and global education topics into educational standards and programs.

Annex 1

Questionnaire

Data: name, sex, age, status

Questions:

- What are you doing and where do you currently live? Since when are you in Bulgaria? Why did you leave your country? What were the reasons? How did you leave your country?
- What did you encounter when you arrived at the procedures and the system - finding a job, finding a place to live, access to healthcare and the education system? Please indicate what works and what difficulties have you encountered in relation to the abovementioned domains? Has anything improved in your life since you live in Bulgaria? What is it and in what domain?
- What was the biggest challenge that you faced?
- Which are the areas you consider that need to be changed? \?
- How can the system, mechanisms and procedures be improved according to you ?
- Are you familiar with the documents that protect your rights? Which are they?
- Would you go back to your country? Yes/no – why?

Objective: To identify the main causes and consequences of migration processes and their relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Annex II

Full text of the interviews

Name: Wala Musa

Sex: woman

Age: 27

Origin: Palestine

Status: migrant

Wala is married and has a daughter a couple of months old. The three with her husband have lived in Sofia for 2 years.

Wala has graduated public administration in Palestine, works as a saleswoman consultant before moving in Bulgaria. The firm in which her husband (Israel citizenship) works opens a branch in Bulgaria a few years back. The two discussed whether to move in and after comparing the living conditions and the political situation in Palestine and Bulgaria, they decide that it would be better for both of them to live in Bulgaria. Her husband's sister also lives in Bulgaria together with her family; her husband-in-law is the owner of the company which is in the area of marketing and financial markets.

Before giving birth she tried to find a job in Bulgaria but she had no opportunity to work because her accompanying visa (permission for residing) is for accompanying her husband and doesn't allow that. She shares that she is not familiar with the conditions on acquiring a labor visa, but thinks that it isn't hard.



Annex II

Full text of the interviews

The two haven't got big problems with the administrative procedures and labor documentation in Bulgaria, since the lawyer of the firm takes care of these affairs for them and the family.

Wala's daughter has Israel nationality only, since she is not allowed to have a Bulgarian one. The two of them decide that it is better for the child to have only Israel nationality, because it allows them to travel more easily to Palestine and Israel. Wala is familiar to some degree with the procedure of acquiring citizenship and the acquired period of residence, but thinks the procedure hard.

On answering how palpable the consequences form the lack of Bulgarian citizenship are, she says that for her it doesn't matter mostly regarding traveling with Palestine passport. Since her husband has Israel citizenship, he can fly directly from Bulgaria to Palestine by passing through Israel, while she has to go through Turkey and Jordan to get to Palestine. Her daughter cannot travel with her, only with her father, since he has Israel citizenship, because when they cross the border between Jordan and Palestine there are two separate exists for Palestinians and Israelis.

Wala shares that they plan to stay in Bulgaria in the future. On answering whether she knows what will happen with her daughter's Israel citizenship when enrolling in kindergarten and in school, she says there is no problem. Her sister-in-law has three children and they study in private schools in Bulgaria without a problem.



Annex II

Full text of the interviews

They had preferred to enroll them in private international school, so they can be prepared to leave Bulgaria and move to live in another country if they decide so.

Both she and her husband do not have difficulties in finding a place to stay because the firm takes care of it before they arrive in Bulgaria. They have an additional health insurance from the company, however according to her the health care in Bulgaria isn't very good and is expensive. She shares that when she had to take her daughter in the hospital, when she had fever, she had to pay 250 BGN for tests and an examination.

Regarding the administrative procedures in Bulgaria she says that they are too slow. Rarely do they have to deal with them alone, since the lawyer of the firm, in which her husband work, prepares all necessary documents for her.

When asked where and how does she find information for the different rules and procedures in Bulgaria, she replies that she checks everything in Google, where, according to her, there is plenty of information in English. If there is no such information, she translates from Bulgarian to English using Google translate. Her husband, on the other hand, counts on his colleagues to understand this information.

According to Wala, living in Bulgaria isn't hard. It is similar to Palestine, but the political situation there is not good. She shares that if they come back, her husband will have to work in the branch of the firm in Tel Aviv,


Annex II

Full text of the interviews

while she will have to stay in Palestine and they will not be able to see each other. In order to get a permission to remain in Palestine, she goes on, she has to go through a lot of documentation. Wala describes life in Palestine not as different as in Bulgaria until they have to go through the checkpoint, when they feel they are under military occupation.

If the situation in Palestine changes, they would go back there. Wala shares a part of the hardships led by the political environment back at home. For example, the requirements and the permissions for mobility and residing between and in Palestine and Israel. Palestinians can go in Israel only with a permission, in which a concrete time period of residence is stated, while Israelis can go in Palestine without much difficulty. She explains that traveling between the two borders is complex because of the days which have to be taken into account for the widening. She adds that precisely these small details hinder happiness. Her mother has Israel documents, but when they were born, their father decided that there would be no need for them because back then it was easy to get one and they did not think that the political situation would worsen so much and would matter.

When asked if she could share some problems that arose from the political situation for them, she gives an example of her brother, who was shot in the pelvis and has walked with a limp till today. The irony is, she



goes on, that Israelis shot him, but he has to go to a hospital in Israel to be treated, because there are no proper doctors in Palestine. He stayed for a month or so in military hospital in Israel and had to pay half a million for the stay.

The woman believes that there is a difference between her and her husband and the other migrants because with the firm taking care of them her family has it much easier. Not all employees are cared for in such a way, Iranians and Syrians have problems.

She thinks that Bulgarians act awkwardly when they see the headscarf, but doesn't see a problem with that. Upon their arrival her husband warns her because people here are not used to seeing a lot of people with headscarves. Her mother-in-law wears a more traditional headscarf and she had warned them before they came that people would look at them funny. She believes that the reason for people's awkwardness is that they do not know some things or that they know the wrong things.

Name: Shadi Mahmud

Sex: male

Age: 30

Origin: Bulgaria/Syria

Status: migrant

At the moment Shadi lives in Varna, but he grew up in Kiev (6 years) and Syria (12 years). He finished secondary education in Syria and came in Bulgaria to study medicine. He pursued medicine for one year in MF of SU “St. Climent Ohridski”, but the taxes were raised (from 4000 Euro to 8000 Euro for foreign students) and he decided to study international relations (IR). He graduated IO in 2014 and worked at a few places while studying and afterwards.

He worked in Call centers and then in International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Bulgaria as a data collector – he investigated the flow of people, where they go through and how they reach to Bulgaria. He did this on a project for the organization for a year and a half; he worked in almost every camps in Bulgaria – closed and open. After the project ended he went to Cyprus for one year, where he tried to work for a similar type of organization, but the main activity in this sphere is AVR (assisted voluntarily return) and he did not find a job, for he hadn't know a language and he needed one in order

to visit the camps. He found another job opportunity, and after it he returned in Bulgaria. He has been working in a Slovenian company agency for one year, where he works around steel and iron. He is a representative for the whole Arab world, including Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania and Cyprus.

At the moment, his mother lives in Cyprus with his brother, which is the reason for his staying there one year to help out. His father lives in Syria and is a Dean in the University of Damask, so he cannot leave the country.

Shadi has a Bulgarian citizenship, too, which is why when he came in Bulgaria there was no problem. He enrolled in the University as a foreign student though he has citizenship, because his secondary education isn't a Bulgarian one and he does not know Bulgarian. As a foreign student he began learning the language using the program for foreign students (PFS), in which they study Bulgarian for one year and afterwards go in and begin going to lectures for the specified subject in university. He rented an apartment and began working in order to support himself.

Studying in Bulgaria is easier because of his Bulgarian citizenship, yet after finishing secondary education he had another option – Russia, where his uncle lives. Shadi chose Bulgaria, so that he could have a European diploma when he returned in Syria. He had wanted to work in Syria's MFA when he came back, but with the

4 QUALITY
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16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
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situation in there he decided against it. He travels there every year or every two years. There are direct flights to Lebanon in the summer, and he travels with car from Beirut to Damask.

The hardships he faced when he came to Bulgaria were about him now knowing the language. However, he speaks Russian and according to him it is easier to break through the language than learning another one anew.


Finding an apartment is very hard. The difference of the currency turns out to be very important, because the prices in Bulgaria are very high and constantly go higher. Finding a job in Bulgaria is hard too because experience is being sought everywhere, which, he believes, is a big step-back for young people, no matter if they are refugees and migrants or not.

Foreign students go in university without an entry examination, because the programs are paid. According to him, this is easier when it comes to the procedure, but it is a whole lot more expensive. The rest of the students pay around 500-600 BGN per year, while the foreigners annually pay 3500 BGN.

His parents cannot send him money because of the high inflation in the beginning of the events in Syria. This is why he uses credit in Bulgaria, which he pays back as he studies thanks to him working.

When asked what can be improved in social point of view for people in his situation, he shares that given the students apply from abroad, there someone responsible





must be sent to take care of them, to pick them up from the airport, to provide them with rooms on campus. During the first 2 years there is a big problem with living on campus because during that time, according to the procedures, paid students don't have the right to an apartment. The Syrian embassy comes in to help him and 4-5 Syrian students to get an apartment, because they have no place to live, and their parents cannot support them or send them any money for the inflation. If Syrian employees were paid 2000 dollars before the inflation, now they are paid around 120 dollars. Shadi emphasizes that in here these money are not so special, even if his father sends some to him. His father lives with them for a whole month. Before they go to the Dean, in order to convince him to allow them an apartment, they research where and how many rooms are free, in which buildings. They go to him with a concrete declaration for a specific building and room, so that he cannot refuse them and say that the room is taken. This happens in second year. For the foreign students from Europe is easier, according to Shadi, because they come with a different currency and can rent any apartment they wish for 200-300 euro. For the students from the Near East that is a lot of money. In his specialty (IO) and in his year there are a few foreign students – there are people from Turkey, himself, from Syria, as well as Russians, and in most cases they are children of diplomats and have a place to live.

When asked whether he can give some suggestions for changes in the system, which changes are to address some of the challenges he met, he explains that there must be someone to help with foreign students. They must have access to living in campus, because they are an income to the country, no matter if they are paid or not. If the student is paid, he says, the housing can be included in the education tax and the university would directly receive the money for the room, regardless of the student's choice to live or not live there. This, he believes, is the best option, because this way all foreign students will live in one place, can be found easily and this is most functional.

According to him, the preparation for Bulgarian for this 1 year the university provides is very good and enough, so that afterwards you continue on studying, but one has to put in effort. Otherwise, you cannot draw from it fully. It depends on the student, he finishes.

When he was looking for a job, Shadi always looked for opportunities for one with languages, as well as connected to his diploma on IO, because it is easier to find one. In the Slovenian firm he works in he uses all languages that he knows: Arabian, English, Russian and Bulgarian.

When asked whether he knows his rights and where from, he says that he knows of the framework mostly because of the university and because many legal disciplines are studied in his specialty. He is somewhat familiar with his rights and obligations.

Shadi shares that he would go back to Syria. For him, the goal of his coming to Bulgaria and studying there was to graduate and come back to serve in his country. The crisis in Syria makes him give this plan up, and besides his father does not want him in Syria, because the situation isn't good – he can come out and not return. For this reason, he encourages him to seek realization abroad and Shadi decides to take advantage of the opportunity at hand.

Name: Omid Niazi

Sex: male

Age: 22

Origin: Afghanistan

Status: seeking protection

Omid spend two and a half months in the closed camp in Busmanci, after which he was transferred in Harmanli. The camp in Harmanli is populated with 3000 people for 2016; he spends about three and a half years. While he abode in Harmalni, he was active and knows everyone from the town. He worked in different roles for some of the humanitarian organizations, which help the people in the camps.

He was a translator for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from April 2016 to December 2018,

and for 4 months he worked as a data collector for them. In the meantime, he worked as a paralegal counselor for BHC in the period 2016-2018. He is currently in Greece.

He left for Greece after he is refused a refugee status in Bulgaria. He says that he fought for staying in Bulgaria for a long time, but lost the battle. He was refused by the protection agency in Harmanli. He advocated in the Administrative Court which adjudicated in his favor. However, the decision was questioned by the agency in Harmanli, which is why the case made it to the High Court. There the final decision was made, and he had no right to advocate it, or, if he had, he had to stay in a closed camp until it was made. This is the order. He says that the loss of this battle is extremely hard for him because this is not just a refusal of a status and administrative procedure, but humiliation. He handed in documents 3 times in a row and every time he is refused. He didn't understand why. The reason proposed for the status refusal was that the war in Afghanistan isn't considered official and that the proofs Omid had presented to prove his life had been in danger are not enough. During that time, in Bulgaria, he was on bail and had to provide information of his address of residence to the migration authorities. He went to the police station every Monday to sign and to prove his presence, but he has no right to officially work. Harmanli is a small town, but he was integrated in society and knew everyone, tried to accommodate and go through

that bad period. Regardless that he couldn't work, the police stations and migration authorities used him as a translator. However, the lack of payment made life hard. One morning he woke up, picked up his rucksack, left Bulgaria and left his whole life behind. It was hard to leave Bulgaria. He says that he didn't leave just the town, but the people, the language. He went to another country, where he knows not a soul, not the language and the culture and has no idea how he was going to live there.

In the moment he lives in Pyrgos. He left for Greece alone. The procedure of seeking protection in Greece is similar to the one in Bulgaria. The environment in the reception centers was very harsh. There are conflicts every day, girls were in risk of being raped. It was very chaotic and hard. Luckily, he arrived in Athens having used his knowledge of Bulgarian, so they do not recognize him on the station. He arrived in the city at 4 o'clock in the morning. He tried to seek out someone who speaks English, so that he can ask of the procedure. He searched in Google for maps of humanitarian organizations that work on spot. He meets a lot of people from Afghanistan and he found out that Athens is something like a migration center and there are areas, in which refugees from different countries – Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran – stay. One has to call a skype number, to whom different people answer, every one of whom speaks with all of the different nationalities in a specified day of the week.




Once or twice per week one can call the number so that they pick up, because usually the line is very busy and there are many arrivals. He has luck – they picked up after a couple attempts. After that they snapped a picture of him online and appoint a meeting, so that he can be registered. After this procedure they usually give the person a concrete date, on which he has to go to one of the protection agencies, for example in Pygros. Just like in Bulgaria, they take a photo of you in the agency, take fingerprints and ask if you have been in another EU country. He explained that he had been in Bulgaria and came from there. After that he was given a map for asylum, called “a white map” in Greece. One must renew it every 6 months while one is in search for asylum.

He believes that it would be easier to find a job in a humanitarian organization and in Greece because of his experience as a translator, but that also turns up to be just as hard.

The challenges are again related to ensuring the documents needed – those which allow those seeking protection and the refugees work. He explained that upon one’s arrival at Greece, one must acquire a number for social security, as well as a tax registry number. In order to get those documents one needs an address, and in order to have an address one has to rent a room. He lived in motels for around 2 months, due to financial problems. After that he found a person to help him with moving to an address. However, when he had address,






he just lost his white card. In the protection agency they told him that they could get him a new one after 2 months. Until that he worked as a volunteer and was trying to support himself. Till the 2 months pass and he got a new card, the right party wins the elections in Greece and getting a social security number of refugees and those seeking asylum (the so-called AMKA) became limited, and without such a card he couldn't work. Of course, he could get it at some places and after 2 days he found a job as a translator in Solidarity Now – partners of UNHCR and IOM. He worked there in one of the camps, which is a 2.5 hour drive from Athens and he travels every day back and forth, as he got up at 5 o'clock in the morning. Since he traveled for 5-6 hours a day, he decided to leave in late November. He comes back to IOM. He is currently in Pygros and works in a women's asylum as a translator for IOM.

He said that he is one of the few who really want to stay in Bulgaria. Most of his acquaintances all the way from 2016 have left to Germany, Switzerland, France – these are the main destinations. A big part of the people leave at that time, since Bulgaria is a transit country. The people who were willing to stay in Bulgaria after their first refusal of asylum by the agency are little. A lot of them even before that went to Serbia and after that to Western Europe. If they had financial difficulties, they prefer going to Greece. It is closer and there is a big chance of finding work. When he started working

in the area of humanitarianism, the work touched his heart and he wasn't thinking of leaving. He believes that he will stay in Bulgaria. He tried to learn the language, though there are no lessons on Bulgarian in Harmanli. He doesn't know whether he would be given asylum in Greece, for the regulation "Dublin III" is still in force in his case. The Dublin procedure says he has to go back in Bulgaria, so he fights to stay in Greece.

He said that Afghanistan was a country which is in war for the last 4 decades and this is not hidden to the world. He knew that to consider oneself a refugee, according to EU legislation, one has to have a personal problem, to be chased personally. He explained that the situation in Afghanistan had always been intense. Omid has finished only secondary education, but at the age of 15 he could already speak English. His home town, at that time, is one of the zones of discomfort in Afghanistan, and later the town falls under the control of an Islamic country. He explained that his family and he had been chased on the base of social activity they committed, for his sister then worked in NGO (at the moment too, but in Kabul), and his brother was in the army. After finishing high school he became a teacher in English in his town. Most people from Afghanistan run away because of the situation. He remembered that there were 2-3 clashes in the town. He said he wouldn't want to live there, nor would he want that for his children. He isn't personally chased down, but he isn't sure if it is good for him and for his children






to see experience traumatic situations. He isn't sure that he wants to let his child go outside when bombs fall on the pavement. People aren't chased, but the situation in Afghanistan is really forcing them to go away. According to him it is very pitiful that when they arrive they have to explain all of that and that such a thing as an official and unofficial war exists. This is something to be argued in Bulgaria's Court – which is an official and which is an unofficial war. He presented reports and data, but he couldn't win the case. According to him the decision of refusing him his status is based on discrimination. He thinks that he was used, that someone didn't want him to be there, because he had been active and worked for a humanitarian organization.


When asked if he knew other people from Afghanistan who have received a refugee status, he tells of the only ones he has information on – a woman and her daughter. He also remembers there was a man, who is part of the Bulgarian croquet team, whom he met in a competition in Greece.

The route that leads to Bulgaria begins with Afghanistan, then passes through Pakistan and Iran, until it reaches Turkey. The trip is scary, one has to walk through the desert without water. He walked through Iran for 7 days, then by a car for a while, then walked again, going through a forest and a desert. He reached Turkey and stays there for 4-5 months. Then he comes in Bulgaria through the border. He is sent back 12 times,



and manages to enter in the country on the 13th time. In Turkey he didn't do anything, because the labor market in there manipulates the people. One worked 12-14 hours, they paid you 200-300 dollars per month with which living in Turkey is hard. One had no access to health, social, and legal services. His income came from playing croquet.

While he was still in the closed camp in Busmanci, he really wanted to learn Bulgarian. He remembered that in there he was given more food, because he knew some Bulgarian in the first couple of days. He knew his number, said good morning. Because of that, the migration service workers' attitude is also a little better, which is not unusual. He explained that there are good service workers, but most of them are not such. He added that the service workers in the camp make fun of people there, he was shocked from the medical personnel. He said he had heard things from Europe, but he was in total shock from the things he had seen. He remembered of a case, when he had a rash and they gave him medicine he thought hadn't been enough and his doctor yelled at him. He thought that this is done on purpose, to maintain the scary environment – a tactic used to propel people. He said he was kicked by a policeman and other service workers 2-3 times in the retention center because of bad communication. He said that the feeling was of total control over you and this is why they can do anything they want. The first 2-3 months from his arrival he didn't meet



any organization, only representatives from BHC one time. He was interviewed by Frontier, when he was still in Busmanci. He didn't know why he was so interesting for them, but he understood that they were very impressed from his knowledge of so many languages with him being only 19 years old. They tell him that he isn't quite an Afghanistan and he had to reveal his identity. He was scared and didn't know what was going on. Omid was taken to the Afghanistan Embassy where he was asked a series of questions, which would help prove his origin – questions about the regions in Afghanistan, the colour of the flag and others. After that he was released together with other people held there with no reason.

The food in Busmanci was bad, the service workers were acting awful; they had only 30 minutes to be outside. He felt like a prisoner. They told him that they will be sent in a camp on the Turkey border – in Harmanli. He went on to say he really wanted to see a European setting, what the people and the language were like, but that never happened.

He arrived in Harmanli at 4 o'clock in the morning, feeling that he was moved from one prison to another. They take their fingerprints, the reason for which he didn't know, as well as he didn't know who the people were – no information at all. After that he had no idea of his rights, what he would be doing there and how much would he have to wait. He came to realize he would be very useful for that community and the humanitarian activity, because

he is one of the few who spoke English in there. He was always very curious on meeting foreigners and was excited to be there in the beginning. IOM are active there, but held no office – they had a team which sometimes came. BHC weren't there at that time, they came later. Because he wanted to learn Bulgarian, he talked to the guard every night and he practiced to count in a notebook by his side, friendly, so they treat him the same way.


When the Red Cross brought provisions for give-away, he was one of their trusted people, who give the needed materials away to the people in the camp. He met people in Sofia, joined a few groups online and understands of a couple of opportunities to becoming a translator. In some of the groups he wrote a post, saying that he speaks a couple of languages, his whereabouts and was looking for a job. A social worker from Haskovo sees the post and organized a meeting for the two of them to meet, including the only other Afghanistan IOM translator, who has a humanitarian status and lives in Sofia with his family. He meets IOM's criteria. The problem was that he had to wait 9 months to get a labor permission, and he had been there only for 2 months. He met with other IOM employees, who were impressed by his language, but, unfortunately, cannot hire him, as he had to wait. Right now he is missing what he used to do in order to help the people there. He travels, takes part in different activities; helps the abovementioned social worker. His work gives him a lot of comfort.

He told a story of a rebellion in the camp in Harmanli that started out as a peaceful protest and grows into a commotion. At that time there were 3000-3500 people in the camp. They were closed in and not let in the town, asked why – there was a shortage of resources; people's needs couldn't be met. They were told that the locals suffered from skin rashes. Those infected were few, but everyone must be examined before they can be released. A week passed. The medical staff didn't show. According to him, the translator didn't translate correctly, said something completely different. The people got angry and began rebelling. They set fires, threw rocks at their service workers. He and others tries to stop the rebels. He was one of the few, who can speak 3-4 languages in there. Some of the people recorded everything on cameras, someone tried to set the Bulgarian flag on fire, he took it from them and they surrendered it to a scared service worker. The situation is horrid. Special Forces were called for – they didn't strike back, only protected themselves. There was only one supermarket in the camp and all 3000 people were trying to supply themselves with food. The Special Forces were trying to impose order. This was the night after the rebellion. They used blanks. It serves as a translator for the Special Forces, but everyone were desperate and were pushing through, in order to supply themselves food. The police starts beating the people, boys fell unconscious after which were dragged away in cars. According to Omid,



they must have received permission to beat people and arrest them. The people were hiding in their rooms, but the police steps foot inside and continue on beating them and then drag them away in cars. There was blood on the floor of the corridor. He hid under a bed. A lot of people were actually in their rooms, non-protesting, cooking, talking on their phones, while shrieks and bangs come from outside. This was in Harmanli, 2016. Around 500 people were arrested, some run away to the mountains near Harmanli. The arrested were undressed and doused with water. He heard terrible stories of closed camps, that they beat people, didn't give them food, that they deport people without signing anything – forcedly. The people in the camp are scared, Special Forces come in every day and check the cameras to see who had thrown stones. They were terrorized every day by being forced outside. A few fires occurred after that. He woke up at night from a smoke of a fire that had broken out from the corridor. An investigation is done to find out who started it. Omid explained that the whole experience was psychologically exhausting. He goes on that he needed psychological support, but at that time there was none.

When asked what other support could be ensured for the people in the camps, he says that the refugee community and the migrants must be left to have more independence. People come from different places and integration opportunities must be created – language lessons, different activities, sport, and other activities. He



said that if one had somewhere to live and had something to do it is harder to get angry and rebel. Life would be similar to a normal man's life and one wouldn't think of oneself as a refugee. Instead, people in the camp wait, go to the office every day; wait for the food. He claims that this makes you feel like a cheap human being. If one had activity, this shapes you psychologically and physically and is very useful, especially in open camps.

The other specialists that are needed are a lawyer and a social worker. A psychologist, however, is mandatory. For the refugees and migrants the situation is very hard. For the young people there were trainers, who came and played football with them. According to him, socializing between the refugees and the locals is a very good idea. Thus, the refugees and the local boys can communicate and dispose all rumors the locals had heard, but weren't true. He went to local schools to talk with the locals about cultural differences. He explained that the children had a great number of questions, because they had heard and had seen different things in the media. At the moment they understand reality, they act friendly, become curious and want to communicate. This way racism and the differences, as well as the fear people feel around refugees is uprooted. According to him, the governments and the authorities have interest to keep a distance between the refugees and the locals – this is a political decision. Omid believes that the humanitarian organizations must expand their activities, add well


integrated refugees in the team, as well as experts on different spheres. There must be an opportunity for the locals to meet the refugees and talk to each other.

According to him, education is another important issue. With it, the refugees can develop their skills. They can also find it easier to enroll in school and integrate. He said that people find a way to communicate, provided they had the conditions. The people in Harmanli were very curious in the beginning. The teachers in schools are impressed by the refugee children, even the conservative ones. Omid adds that the teachers are impressed by those wearing a hijab, but they learn that regardless of skin color people are the same, it is just lifestyle that is different.

He enjoyed life in Harmanli, he had nice experiences with the local community; he was active. After work he goes to fitness, plays croquet, goes out with the local boys. He misses it, because he had good relations with the neighbors – they provided him with food. He ran in a marathon and did a lot of different things. Of course, he had good and bad memories, but the people were very kind to him and his colleagues – very encouraging. Despite that he believes that at the end they had used him, for when he needed help all of them stood back and didn't lobby for him and his status.

In the moment he is close to his family, but he would never go back in Afghanistan. He would like to get out his family from there.





He knows his rights and the documents that govern them because of his work with the humanitarian organizations. He often communicates with lawyers, delegations from other EU countries, media groups as a part of his job. He had always been interested in the topic of European legislation.



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