

Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission

Action number: CA18236

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Details of the STSM

Title: **Managing social adaptation of refugees in European countries**

Start and end date: 22/08/2023 to 5/09/2023

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Description of the activities carried out during the STSM. Any deviations from the initial working plan shall also be described in this section.

This STSM was aimed at studying the experience of Bulgaria in the social adaptation of refugees in order to identify the best practices, including innovations in higher education institutions (HEIs), for the formation of an effective mechanism for managing the social adaptation of refugees in European countries.

The following tasks were completed to achieve the mission's aim:

- 1) With the help of the host and Bulgarian colleagues, the legislation and regulations that provide support to refugees arriving and staying in Bulgaria were studied;
- 2) Using local sources, as well as European and UN statistics, the depth of the refugee problem for Bulgaria was realised;
- 3) With the help of contacts with the host, volunteers, local colleagues, it was identified that there are certain programmes in Bulgaria that should help refugees to a certain extent to adapt socially;
- 4) More than 130 refugees from Ukraine who are currently in Bulgaria were surveyed using a specially developed questionnaire.

The completed works turned out to be sufficient for assessing the state of social adaptation of refugees in Bulgaria and understanding its perception by the refugees themselves.

Description of the STSM main achievements and planned follow-up activities

Description and assessment of whether the STSM achieved its planned goals and expected outcomes, including specific contribution to Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the STSM. Agreed plans for future follow-up collaborations shall also be described in this section.

During the mission, it was discovered that despite some support from international organizations, the state, volunteers, and HEIs, the social adaptation of refugees in Bulgaria is not satisfactory. Despite the vast majority of the surveyed refugees consider European values such as freedom, human rights, dignity, equality to be defining for them, they lack many elements that would help them achieve these values. In particular, they consider the introduction of special educational programs for a quick start to work in this country to be the most important among such elements.

Unfortunately, no best practices have been found for implementing innovative educational programs for refugees in Bulgaria. Moreover, refugees were very dissatisfied with the amount and form of state (communal) support, which does not allow them to socially adapt and realize basic values (half of the respondents rated it as very bad, and a quarter as bad). In addition, mostly unsatisfactorily interviewed refugees spoke about support from religious and volunteer organizations. The quality of training courses offered to them by local HEIs and language schools received very low marks from them.

Among the factors of their social adaptation, they named weak social support and difficulty in finding a decent job as the most negatively influencing factors. Only 25% of respondents say that nothing prevents them from adapting socially in Bulgaria.

At the same time, among the most positively influencing factors, favorable natural and climatic conditions, acceptable local culture, and the good attitude of local people turned out to be the most important.

Thus, it can be concluded that the state, local authorities, religious and volunteer organizations mostly do not contribute to the social adaptation of refugees in Bulgaria. With a high demand for special educational programs able to provide opportunities to work and provide basic values for refugees, the local higher education system does not use this chance to introduce social innovations to promote the social adaptation of refugees in this country. However, thanks to the good attitude of the local people, favorable cultural and climatic conditions, the refugees still hope to ensure a decent life for themselves and their families in this country.

Having found understanding among local colleagues from Bulgarian universities, there is a hope for the development and implementation of certain innovative educational programs for refugees. However, their development requires additional research and the search for the best practices that help refugees successfully adapt socially. Hence, an appropriate comparative study is planned in the near future, in which the grantee and representatives of progressively thinking Bulgarian universities will take part.