



Developing capacities together:
European CSO-university networks for
global learning on migration, security
and sustainable development in an
interdependent world (InterCap)

BULGARIA NATIONAL REPORT ON MIGRATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

Activity 1.1.1: Audit on migration, sustainability and development education



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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Bulgaria is located in the South Eastern corner of the European Union, being one of the gates into Europe along the Balkan and the East Mediterranean migration routes. Prior to 2013, the country was not a preferred entry or transit destination for migrants. Since June 2013, however, the situation in Bulgaria has dynamically changed with regard to the number of undocumented migrants. The majority of undocumented migrants who arrive in Bulgaria try to continue their journey to destination countries in North and Western Europe.

Very often, the positive correlation between the migration and the sustainable development has been underestimated and misunderstood. The migration is seen as a threat, rather than a driving force for sustainable development. There is a need of raising awareness actions to change the negative prejudices about the migration processes and to connect them with the sustainable development.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

According to the InterCap project proposal, the aim of this report is to take stock of gaps, needs and expectations of the target groups, beneficiaries and stakeholders in Bulgaria in terms of security and risk, and influencing the understanding of migration, sustainable development and lifestyles in an interdependent world.

The audit should investigate the national attitudes towards migration, security, correlation between the migration and the sustainable development and how these interrelated topics are presented in the educational system.

1.3 Available data and resources

The report is based on different available sources – National policy and legislation documents, reports, surveys from CSOs and institutions, media response analysis, press publications, Eurobarometer and MIPEX surveys.

Identification of good practices at National and regional level is used as well. Two focus groups and 4 individual interviews were realised with experts, which have outlined and enriched the audit.

1.4 Limitations

The main limitations for this report relate to the lack of information about the links between sustainable development and migration. The two processes are covered separately. There



was a lack of information on any researches about the development education and global education.

In Bulgaria there is a gap concerning the understanding and covering the two aspects: migration and sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public opinion polls

In the autumn of 2013, Bulgaria was the subject of unpredictable and unmanageable refugee flows from the Middle East and mainly from Syria, torn apart by a military conflict with elements of civil, ethnic and religious war. The Republic of Bulgaria proved to be unprepared to meet more than 7,000 human beings seeking protection, food and shelter.

According to a nationally representative survey of the sociological agency Alpha Research (Alpha Research, 2015), conducted on 5–7 September 2015, many Bulgarians (63 %) believe that the refugee wave is a danger for their country. The vast majority of the respondents (89 %) think that Bulgarian state has to fight with the people smugglers and 82 % supports strengthening the border fence. The results indicate that there is strong support for restrictive measures. At the same time, the study indicated greater acceptance of social measures to improve the work of social institutions to ensure better conditions for refugees – 75 %. 44.5 % of the respondents were in favour of the need for coordination between a Bulgarian and European asylum policy. 11% demand a complete closure of borders. Opposite option – to accept refugees without restrictions – was approved by 3.7 % of the respondents. The release of additional money from the state budget for refugees was not supported by the Bulgarian society. According to the survey results, 63 % of the respondents support quotas to distributions of the migrants and 34 % are opposed.

The survey registered growth of the fears, extreme sensitivity to political speeches and solutions, radicalization of public opinion, but within the institutional alternatives. The refugees continue to be perceived as “mass”. A study (Alpha Research, 2015), for the years 2012 and 2013 indicate the refugees were rather unknown, misunderstood, with a negative image in Bulgarian public opinion. The main concerns about the refugees have been associated with rising crime, diseases and infections.

Concerning a research made by Trend agency in Bulgaria, in October 2017 (Trend agency, 2017) the Bulgarians remains highly sceptical about the admission of refugees and migrants to their territory. Moreover, there is no difference in the attitude towards refugees and economic migrants from the Middle East and in both cases just over 80 % of all respondents believe that they should not be allowed on the territory of the country.



Most undocumented migrants who are detected by the Border Police initiate a procedure for seeking international protection. In recent years, there has been a constant increase in the number of migrants seeking international protection. For 2015 and 2016, the top five countries are Iraq; Afghanistan; Syria; Pakistan and Iran. Worthy of note is the increase in 2015 and 2016 of the number of Afghan citizens who represent over 46 percent of the total number of migrants detected by Border Police for 2016 and 40 percent of the new asylum seekers for 2016 (IOM, 2017).

A study, commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representation in Bulgaria was conducted in December 2017 (UNHCR, 2018) with the aim to explore public attitudes towards refugees and people seeking protection in the country, as well as the reasons and motives for the attitude and behaviour of Bulgarians towards them.

Concerning the attitude to the refugees and people searching for protection in Bulgaria, the results show that local people's direct contacts with refugees and people seeking protection are diminishing as well as public awareness of refugees compared to the beginning of the intensified migratory flow in 2013. In 2017, 93.2% of Bulgarians say they have never had a contact with a refugee, while in 2013 they were 81%. There is also a significant drop (from 84% in 2013 to 54% in 2017) in the proportion of people who have come upon news or stories about refugees (UNHCR, 2018).

Considering the lack of direct contact with refugees and people seeking protection, the media is the main source of information for Bulgarians and a major factor in forming opinion. Television is the leading source of information (94%), internet (20%), conversations with friends and acquaintances (19%), printed media (11%), social media (7%), and radio (7%) (UNHCR, 2018).

There is no understanding of who needs protection. As a whole, Bulgarians perceive anyone coming to the country outside the European Union as an illegal migrant without clearly realizing the difference between migrants and people seeking protection.

The survey confirms several recent stereotypes of refugees, seen lately, that can be broken down into the following groups:

- Stereotypes about what people should be accepted in the country: they include the opinion shared by 51% of respondents that Bulgaria should accept people seeking protection coming from countries at war (such as Syria and Iraq) and only 15% declare that people who are persecuted or whose human rights are violated must be admitted. 53.5% of the respondents believe that the majority of people seeking protection in Bulgaria are not fleeing because of persecution or war in their homeland (UNHCR, 2018).
- Stereotypes connected with the fears of the local population: this group includes concerns about the differences in cultural customs and religious beliefs that underlie



fears in Bulgarian society towards refugees. The main concerns are that refugees could commit crimes (60%), spread their cultural customs and religious beliefs (48%) and spread diseases (39%). Concerns about personal security, job losses and disease contamination were most prevalent in 2013 at the start of the increased migratory flow. In 2017, the leading ones are security concerns, differences in culture and religion (UNHCR, 2018).

The majority of the population (55.5%) believes that during the process of granting protection, the state should only provide shelter and food for people seeking protection, while 46.5 % believe that they should not to receive more rights and financial support. Compared to 2013, there is a significant increase in the proportion of people who believe that people seeking protection should be detained during the protection process from 59% in 2013 to 76.8% in 2017. There is also a decline in the proportion of people who believe that government support and work opportunity should be provided - from 77% in 2013 to 62.5% in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018).

2.2 Media response

It is impossible to ignore the role of the mass media in influencing public and elite political attitudes towards asylum and migration. The mass media can set agendas and frame debates. They provide the information, which citizens use to make sense of the world and their place within it. In many countries it has been found that refugees and migrants have tended to be framed negatively as a problem, rather than a benefit to host societies. However, it is also true that, on occasion, media can have positive impacts on public attitudes and policy.

People very often learn about migration or “migration crisis” from the media, where the refugees are present either as a victim of violated human rights, with fates of war-fledged and genocidal fugitives, or at the other extreme, as threatening security and a big issue for the host country.

A small part of the Bulgarian society has a direct daily contact with foreigners in order to be able to build up a personal judgment and mind-set. Therefore, the main source for information that forms opinion and leads to taking certain position, appear to be the media. For this reason, their role is of a great importance. Usually, in order to draw the attention of the public, they somewhat overexpose the topic with the threat of the refugee crisis or they simply turn into an uncritical platform for racial and xenophobic standpoints.

The main instrument for spreading the speech of hatred towards migrants is television. Nearly 75 % of the surveyed who have had an encounter with it, said it has happened through the TV screen, further shows the sociological data. Internet is the second significant media, through which the speech of hatred has gained popularity, especially amongst the youth and the educated (Project TAL, 2014). Analysis (Gancheva, V., 2015) of over 8400 online publications, done by the Association of the European journalists, has found that a



refugee has been presented as a thread, illness, danger. Only some 20 % of the articles pay attention to the Syrian society and culture.

In the forums, social networks and mostly in comments under news and reports on different news websites can be found the aggressive and hostile language towards the “others”. The arsenal, usually used, is made of qualifications like “spawns”, “scum”, “mass murderers”... According to D-r Vyara Gancheva, sociologist and professor at the Faculty of Journalism of Sofia University St. Climent Ohridski, the advantage of the haters in the net space is that they are anonymous and to a great extent they can't be punished (Evdokieva, R., 2015).

At the same time, there is a lack of data on media response to sustainable development and on the coherence with the sustainable development goals and migration. There are many publications, covering different regional and national problems connected with the environment, air pollution, water, safe energy. Media cover sustainable development in a broader sense and mostly climate change and do not connect with the SDGs.

There are different events in the country that media cover – conferences, seminars, workshops covering different aspects of the sustainable development in different industries, for example in tourism, environmental protection, energy, agriculture, but not through the lens of SDG.

To summarise, the prejudices and manifestations of intolerant inclinations towards the migrants, as well the coherence between migration and sustainable development may be overcome through education, upbringing, social politics, equal access to quality education, health care and social assistance. Therefore, more raising awareness actions are needed at different levels. More projects have to be performed with trainings and spreading information on these global topics.

2.3 Research and project production

There is a lack at National level of researches on SDGs, sustainable development and researches on linking the migration and sustainable development. The sustainable development topic is covered very narrowly in some governmental strategy documentation – mostly in the field of tourism, environmental protection, energy, and agriculture.

At the same time, there are many realised projects, mostly from CSO and voluntary initiatives connected with the sustainable development and SDGs. One good example are the projects realised by “The Global Compact in Bulgaria”, a voluntary initiative of the former UN Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, bringing together business and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, cities and UN agencies in a truly global forum to promote sustainable growth and civic responsibility. All projects of UNGC Bulgaria are in accordance to the Global Sustainable Development Goals and are in implementation of the 2015+ Strategic Plan of the Network (Uniglobalcompact 2018).



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Here are some examples of these projects and connection with the appropriate SDG (Uniglobalcompact 2018):

SDG3 - The project “Games for good” aims to show that the responsible companies, the good health of the employees, sports and the meaningful causes can go hand in hand. For that purpose, the Bulgarian network organises sports tournaments where each of the companies participating has pre-selected a charity cause in the name of which they give their maximum effort to win the competition’s prize fund.

SDG4 - The “Proud of my parents’ work” programme aims to demonstrate to children the role of labour as a necessity and value that regardless of one’s the profession, every person is indispensable and useful to the society. The program creates empathy with the values of labour and progress in life as a result of personal qualities, capabilities and gained knowledge.

SDG8 – “Children’s’ Bazaar of Professions”, is an early career orientation expo which meets the children with various professions, experts who tell more about the specifics of each profession, and career-orientation experts. The project gathered more than 1600 visitors in the National Palace of Culture. 35 lecturers from various professional spheres took part in the event, while the children could also visit 13 stands, which presented different models and installations and the professions of some of the specialists.

SDG12 - The “Responsible Choice” Project is an idea stemming from the member-companies of the GC Network Bulgaria. The main objective of the project is to show that the companies can, through transparency in responsible production and supply, demonstrate to the consumers that with their actions the latter have the power to change the production practices, to influence the „fashion“ imposed by advertisers and to nurture anti-consumerist culture in themselves and young people. With this project we wish to provide citizens with an increasingly proactive stance thus imparting to them the confidence and sense of duty, that it is all up to them.

Another set of successful projects that focus more on migrants, their integration and raising awareness among communities are performed from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Bulgaria (IOM Bulgaria, 2018):

- “Provision of information and counselling for voluntary return” - The programme assists undocumented third country nationals (TCNs) staying in Bulgaria. The project activities consist of providing information and counselling on possibilities for voluntary return to TCNs, including rejected asylum seekers and persons provided with international protection.
- “Integrated Border Management” - A cooperation program aiming to build the capacity of the government in border management is being implemented by IOM missions in Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria.
- “Migrant Integration Programme” - Under its migrant integration programme, IOM Sofia has established Integration Information Migration Centres in key locations in



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Bulgaria, which help migrants to successfully integrate into Bulgarian society. It has also conducted integration information days within the country targeting third country nationals residing legally in Bulgaria. A specialised integration website and specialised integration hotline was established.

- "Strengthening the National Capacity of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Field of Asylum and Migration" - the overall objective of the project is to focus on: improving reception conditions, in particular the provision of psycho-social and legal services; assistance to counter the trafficking of vulnerable migrants and protection for unaccompanied minors; providing information and advice to third-country nationals on the possibilities for voluntary return.

In summary, there are many projects – local, regional, national, European, funded by different sources or volunteers. Most of them are executed by CSO. There is a need to develop some initiative, events, trainings, more projects, different actions to raise awareness to the coherence between the migration and the sustainable development, to emphasise on the migration as a driving force for sustainable development.

2.4 Case studies of good practices

In 2018, Eleven European Catholic Caritas charities join forces for a project funded by the European Union to raise the public's awareness of migration issues. "Migration, interaction, development" is a three-year initiative of 12 Caritas organizations from 11 European countries to raise public awareness of sustainable development issues and migration and promote development education in the European Union. The participants are Caritas Bulgaria, Caritas Austria, Caritas Bavaria, Caritas Czech Republic, Caritas Netherlands, Caritas Europe, Caritas Belgium, Caritas Italy, Caritas Portugal, Caritas Slovakia, Caritas Slovenia and Caritas Sweden (Caritas, 2018).

The project is funded by the European Union and is aimed at raising the awareness of civil society and national and European institutions on the complex connection between migration and development.

"Migration, Interaction, Development" will contribute to the active participation of European society in issues and issues related to sustainable development as well as to raising awareness of the link between migration and sustainable development. In each of the three years, Caritas will focus on a specific topic related to the migration flow, including the causes of migration, integration, migrants' contribution to the development of host countries and their countries of origin.

"Migration, Interaction, Development" will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, which is vital to the preservation of our common home and the common good. Caritas is convinced that building progressive societies based on charity, humanity, solidarity and concern for the common good is of key importance to achieving the goals of sustainable development and creating a better world for future generations.



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Another good practice example is UNICEF, Bulgaria, as a part of the Global Initiative "The Biggest Lesson in the World". The aim of this initiative is to familiarize the young generation with the new Global Goals for Sustainable Development and to commit ourselves to the future of children and the whole planet. In the period 2016-2017 more than 422 Bulgarian schools received their Certificate from UNICEF, Bulgaria, because they performed many activities, learning interactively the 17 SDG`s. In addition, more than 40,000 students met the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The web site of the UNICEF – Bulgaria covers extensively the SDGs and the coherence with the migration and sustainable development in a broader sense with publications, projects, examples, news, materials for educators, lesson plans and other useful information (UNICEF, 2018).

A good practice in Bulgaria in the area of integration, established over the years, is working with social mediators. The social mediators supporting asylum seekers and beneficiaries are selected among other migrants, beneficiaries, family members of mixed marriages, foreigners with permitted residence in the country and Bulgarian citizens who are fluent in the most commonly used languages by those seeking protection and familiar with the culture of the countries where the largest groups applying for refugee or humanitarian status come from.

Social mediators play an extremely important role in the cultural orientation and integration of newcomers in the country. They are irreplaceable advisers and consultants in the first integration steps of asylum seekers and beneficiaries.

Sphere of activity of the mediators:

- acquainting asylum seekers with their rights and obligations;
- assisting them in everyday living activities – familiarizing them with the internal order of the housing centres, communicating in a multicultural environment (in the registration and reception centre and beyond), observing personal hygiene, hygiene in the housing and public places, visiting a shop, use of public transport, banking services, etc.;
- medical assistance related to attendance and translation during a visit to a health facility, contact with medical staff, administrative services for the detection of chronic diseases and disabilities, care for pregnant women, young mothers and children, awareness campaigns for the prevention of serious diseases and related to children`s immunizations, etc.;
- mediation in contacts with institutions – issuance and legalization of documents, registration, etc.;
- assistance in children`s enrolment in kindergarten and school and mediation in parents` contacts with school authorities and teachers.

A weak point for the most project activities, funded by programs and projects, is their financing for certain periods of time. This affects the sustainability of the results achieved and the inability of the trained experts to be kept for a longer time in the area of the proposed integration measure.



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2.5 Migration policies and sustainable development

The National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration 2015-2020 (National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration 2015-2020 (2013) aims to formulate effective and integrated national migration management policies. This document is underpinned by the understanding of migration both as a necessary resource for the national economy and as a potential threat to social unity and national security. The document combines three other similar strategic documents adopted in the period 2008-2014 and updates them according to the situation in Bulgaria and EU after the refugee crisis in 2013.

In the strategy there is nothing connecting the sustainable development with the migration processes. The main focus is on administration of the processes.

On 20 March 2018, the Bulgarian government opened a public consultation on the draft 2018 Action Plan for the implementation of the 2015-2020 National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration. Within the framework of the national strategy, which was adopted in response to the "Migrant crisis" in 2015, the Council of Ministers was to adopt annual Action Plans including specific measures aimed at the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. However, there were no national plans neither developed nor implemented in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The Action Plan for 2018 is drafted within the Secretariat of the National Council on Migration and Integration (NCMI) and includes strategic objectives and implementation activities under the priority policies set out in the Strategy, which are the responsibility of all institutions participating in the NCMI.

Perhaps the Bulgarian state sees no connection between sustainable development and migration processes, and even less links them to sustainable development goals and the Agenda 2030.

2.6 Migration policies and international commitments

The National Council on Migration Policy, established under the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on migration, asylum and integration 2011-2020 (2011) is chaired by the Minister of Interior Affairs in view of improving inter-ministerial co-operation and coordination between the structures engaged in the migration processes. The Council functions as a linking unit between the respective ministries, the local authorities and the non-government sector engaged in the management of migration processes.

The Migration Directorate within the Ministry of the Interior Affairs handles the administration of residence of third country nationals (TCNs), removals, coordination, information and analysis and accommodation for irregularly staying TCNs. The State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers is responsible for granting refugee status and subsidiary protection status / humanitarian status. In the Bulgarian Constitution, asylum is granted by the Presidential Institution and is the responsibility of the Vice President. The



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General Directorate "Border Police" is responsible for border control. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for visa matters through the diplomatic and consular services abroad. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy proposes and implements measures for regulation of labour migration, regulates access to the national labour market and is responsible for the coordination of the immigrants' integration measures. The Employment Agency under the Ministry issues work permits. The State Agency for Child Protection is responsible for the development and coordination of the State policy for child protection and implementation of related programmes. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for granting citizenship; the decision is taken by the Presidential Institution under the Vice President.

The Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants, together with the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Association for Integration of Refugees and Migrants, Caritas – Bulgaria, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee etc., as well as ILO, IOM, ICMPD and the UN complement the work of the migration and asylum institutions in Bulgaria.

The Law for the Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria (2017), with amendments, is the key piece of legislation and regulates conditions for TCNs. For EU citizens and their families, the Law for Entering, Residing and Leaving the Republic of Bulgaria of European Union Citizens and Members of their Families with amendments applies. The Ordinance for the conditions and the order of issuing, refusal and revoking work permits settles conditions related to work permits – following the framework set by the Employment Encouragement Law. The Law on Citizenship regulates the process of awarding of Bulgarian citizenship. The Law on Asylum and Refugees lays down the conditions and the procedure for granting refugee status, humanitarian status /subsidiary protection status/ to TCNs, as well as their rights and obligations.

Since Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007, national legislation is harmonized with the EU *aquis communautaire* and is being further developed in line with developments in migration and protection issues at EU level. The National Strategy in the Field of Migration, Asylum and Integration 2011 – 2020 (2011) governs national policy and programmes, for example, for integration of refugees, on legal migration and integration, etc. All stakeholders are represented in the National Council on Migration Policy.

TCNs may enter the territory with the required valid travel document and visa. Visa types include air transit visa, transit visa, short-term residence visa, and long-term residence visa. A visa is not required if the foreigner holds a prolonged, long-term or permanent residence card. Admission requires the fulfilment of specific criteria and the possession of documentation. EU citizens and their family members wishing to stay for more than three months must register to receive a residence permit. Applications for international protection may be lodged with the State Agency for refugees or any other State Authority. During the asylum procedure, accommodation, health care and social assistance are provided to applicants. All applicants, except unaccompanied minors, are determined under an accelerated procedure and receive a decision (whether rejected as unfounded or admitted to general procedure) within three days. Legal aid is available at all stages.



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Short-term residence may not exceed ninety days. Prolonged residence is given for the period up to one year mainly for reasons connected with education, family reunification and labour. Long-term residence is given for a period of 5 years, with a possibility of renewal, for the purpose of e.g.: employment, (freelance) self-employment, commercial activities, study, non-profit activities, medical treatment, and family reunification. Requirements must be met regarding housing, subsistence, compulsory insurance and social insurance. Permanent residence may be granted after five years of uninterrupted residence or in case of certain family ties, investments or Bulgarian nationality.

Regarding the access to the labour market, certain types of short-term employment and study are exempted from work permit requirement. Registration must however be done before entry and employment. Work permits may be issued to a TCN having specialised knowledge, skills and professional experiences, where certain conditions are met. A work permit can be extended for up to 12 months if valid grounds exist and employment is not interrupted. Asylum applicants have access to the labour market if the asylum procedure has not been finalised after one year. Refugees and persons granted humanitarian status have the right to work.

Return can be forced or voluntary with the latter as the preferred option. Centres for temporary accommodation of foreigners anticipating escort to the border and expulsion have been established.

Migration policy is related to other sectors, such as public health, education, commerce, demographics, transport, anti-poverty, and working conditions. Labour market policy and work force characteristics are important elements, as immigration policy is applied in support of economic development.

The main tasks and drivers of the asylum and migration system have been effective prevention of illegal migration and to meet the needs of the national labour market. Moreover, being an external border to the EU entails certain challenges in terms of migration pressure, and the EU accession led to the need to update the mechanisms for control and regulation of migration, including a long-term strategy with a view to national security and economy. Therefore, a need has emerged to develop and apply a successful integration programme. Harmonisation and cooperation at EU level both regionally and nationally are seen as instrumental to overcome existing challenges and to reach set objectives.

Bulgaria's international development cooperation activities are guided by the 'Concept on the Policy of Bulgaria for participation in the international development cooperation' adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2007 (2007). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages Bulgaria's development cooperation activities through its International Development Cooperation Department. The government established an advisory body to the Minister, the International Development Cooperation Council. The Council draws up midterm programmes and annual action plans and promotes the development cooperation policy.



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In terms of linkage with the sustainable developments, migration and SDGs, there is again lack of cohesion. More raising awareness actions should be done to popularise the cohesion.

3. Field research

3.1 Introduction

In Bulgaria, two focus groups and 4 interviews were conducted. The first focus group was realised with 6 experts in Stara Zagora in the premises of the Department of Information and Teacher Training in Trakia University. This institution with its training activities covers Central and South Bulgaria (In Bulgaria there are three departments in three universities, covering all 3 geographical regions in the country). The Department in Stara Zagora is associate partner in the InterCap project. The participants are academic staff /professors, associate professors and assistant professors in different academic subjects: philosophy, psychology, inclusive education, natural sciences, social pedagogy, and special pedagogy.

The second focus group was conducted with 5 experts and it was executed in Varna in the premises of the second in Bulgaria Department of Information and Teacher Training in Shumen University. It covers the East, North East and South East regions in the country with its training activities. The participants are academic staff /professors, associate professors, assistant professors in different academic subjects: environmental education, natural sciences, and social sciences. Two stakeholders from CSO organisations, working in the field of integration and inclusive education, took part in the focus group.

The participants from both focus groups participate regularly at National level in different commissions in the Ministry of Education for curricula development, accreditation, authors of the textbooks and methodological guides.

Four face-to-face interviews were organised and executed with other experts: director of the NGO “Centre for Community Support” in Stara Zagora. They work actively and voluntarily in the field of migration. The other 3 persons are academic staff from the Faculty of Education in Stara Zagora: one expert in inclusive education and member of the National board of the authors of the documentation, concerning inclusive education, the second one is an expert in Intercultural communication and interreligious communication and pedagogy, non-formal education and educational prevention of radicalisation, terrorism and hate speech and the third one – a specialist in civic education and social work. All three of them are academic staff and teach students, who will become teachers as well, students, who will work in the social field – Social Pedagogy, Special Pedagogy, preschool and school education, as well as teaching in-service teacher trainers.



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3.2 Awareness about international migration and sustainable development

In this topic, the respondents answered that the awareness raising actions regarding the sustainable development are very limited, as a whole. The sustainable development is understood in a very narrow sense and is usually related to environmental protection, pollution, climate change and energy saving activities. The Policies Coherent to Development as a concept is not known. They mentioned that there is a lack of public discourse on these topics and very fragmented information.

Concerning the Paris agreement and Habitat III the participants revealed general knowledge – more on the Paris agreement and less on the Habitat III. One of the participants has been working on a 4 years project on Habitat III project "Improving Living Conditions through Interest-free Financing for Housing Improvements for Low-Income Child Care Families".

Almost all participants indicated that they know about the SDG`s. Some of them have been working on different projects connected with the previous MDG`s (2000-2015). They pointed that in many schools teachers include in their subjects many of the SDG`s aspects. However, they regret that in the educational curricula of 9-12 graders there is still a gap. But they pointed that in 2020 a separate subject “civic education” will be compulsory for 9-12 graders, concerning the ordinance from the Ministry of Education. So far, the civic education has been a compulsory subject only from the first to the 8th grade in the schools (Ordinance13, 2016).

At the state level concerning the sustainable development goals, the participants shared the view that there is not strategic approach to the implementation in practice of the SDGs. Concerning the international migration all fully agree that there is a lot of information, but at the same time they regret that the information is distorted.

The respondents mentioned the negative media environment, fake news, influences from the political parties, very often manipulative presentation on information about the international migration. They explained that very often the parties manipulate public opinion. Fake news is growing. Expert opinions are not heard and are deliberately ignored or devalued by the media. People's fears are exploited and the truth is blurred.

3.3 Link between migration and sustainable development

Most of the participants agree that Bulgarians are positively disposed towards Westerners, Americans and Russians, but extremely sharp set against people who have sought refuge in the country because of the wars in the Middle East. Some of them stated that Bulgarian society was not prepared to meet the migrants. The others explained that the society is not well informed about the benefits of the international migration, because media mainly stress on migrants as a threat.



Almost all experts evaluate that the climate changes are linked to migration. But they mentioned that as a whole our society is not well informed, some professionals and other interested groups are aware, mostly NGO`s, but the wide audience is not. The respondents revealed that these topics are covered usually totally separately in mass media and from policy makers. No connection is seen between the migration and sustainable development. This is a problem.

The participants explained that the link between migration and sustainable development in a pedagogical context can be found in the increased interest and rising state requirements for training future educators to work in a multicultural environment, social inclusion of marginalised groups, environmental, health, civic and inclusive education. They quoted as an example the State Educational Standard in the Preschool and School Education Act, which is further elaborated in ORDINANCE No. 13 of 21.09.2016 on Civil, Health, Environmental and Intercultural Education (Ordinance13, 2016) and some other state documentation, too. The participants discussed that there is a need for actions to change the attitude and the way of thinking. There is hope for young people to be the generator of these changes.

3.4 Insecurity

The perception of insecurity is largely spread in the Bulgarian society and it is strongly linked to the social and economy situation. That reflected the discussion on this topic with the experts.

According to some experts the penetration of people from Asia into Europe, especially caused on a religious basis, also leads to uncertainty in the communication of particular groups of society. Sustainable development is not the main reason for migration at the moment, they think.

One participant shared an opinion that the main fears and negative attitudes in Bulgarian society regarding migration come from the previous unsuccessful attempts to integrate and socialise the Roma population in Bulgaria.

Some participants identified as a reason the severe demographic crisis in Bulgaria, which in massive and long-term immigration will significantly change the ethnic and religious composition of the population, which would even endanger the stability and existence of the Bulgarian state in principle.

Other experts explained that the main reason for Bulgarians to feel unsecure first of all is the economic situation – low salaries, not a secure work place, and very big internal migration from the villages to the big cities. They quoted that around 18 % from Bulgarian population live in Sofia – the capital, or almost 1/5 of the population. The least developed region from all 28 EU countries is situated in Bulgaria – the North-West part. There are many small villages with a few people left; some migrated in the big cities, others are working abroad. Many high-qualified persons emigrated to work abroad. This entire picture



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explains why people feel insecure, and why migrants are not so welcome for many Bulgarians, they stated.

Another opinion from the expert was that Bulgaria is mostly a transit country. That is why the Bulgarians do not fear so much that migrants will replace them from their job. Probably the potential crimes are the main reason for many people to feel insecure. And the media “helps” for drawing such a picture, emitting mostly negative messages about the migrants. Another expert in line of the above pointed that probably just 1-2 % of the crimes in Bulgaria are connected with the international migrants.

All experts fully agree that more education and raising awareness activities should be done and more positive messages should be emitted. With support of this conclusion, one good practice was pointed from the interviewed director of the Crisis Centre in Stara Zagora with the informal display of documentary films with social focus in the hall of their organisation and for more viewers in the city library. She observed a big interest and very positive attitudes and feedback from the young people.

3.5 Main factors that shape public opinion and instruments to shape public discourse

All participants found that the main factors shaping public opinion on migration and sustainable development are the media, especially electronic media.

The respondents regret that the wide audience is very often subjected to the populism of politicians (including extreme right and “patriotic” movements / parties). Eventually, the real picture is distorted and the truth remains in the background, recognised only by professionals in the field and active civic society associations. Very often, the topic for the migrants is exploited by politicians and related media and used in the fight with opponents. In this way, the truth is blurred and the ordinary citizen is manipulated in favour of one or another party insinuation.

The experts argue that the society is much polarised and if a media just put some “shocking” title, almost nobody can go deeper to understand actually what is happening, but people immediately react to the news, just by emotion, and are ready to hate the opposite opinion.

One interviewed expert shared the opinion that in Bulgaria there are inherited local dimensions of islamophobia, connected with the Islamic state and the painful memory of Turkish /Islamic slavery. He justified the urgent need of special educational policies for acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes to work in an intercultural environment and in the spirit of the modern inclusive education.

The participants discussed the need of broad implementation of solidarity activities at governmental and non-governmental level with regard to migrants in particular and in the



context of the social inclusion of the marginalised groups in the society as an element of the sustainable development in Bulgaria.

The respondents said that frequent public media debates based on evidence - research, strategies and good practices are needed, but not coloured with politics and emotions from one side only. It requires a national network of experts, national movements in schools - concerts, competitions, shared lessons and more.

3.6 Gaps of information and instruments to fill the gaps

All participants fully agreed that at this stage there is a big gap of adequate information in terms of migration, sustainable development and coherence between them. Logically the wide audience very often is influenced only by the media presentation and not by the competent presentation of information from professional specialised sources, which is difficult to find and follow.

Some participants noted that in the country there is a lack of enough professionals in the field of migration and the sustainable development. Migration, especially in the last years, is a new phenomenon for Bulgaria and because of that reason there is still lack of enough expertise.

One interviewed person shared that there is no general coordination framework and an effective mechanism for inter-institutional information exchange on integration processes, policies and measures, as well as an assessment of their effectiveness, efficiency and economy.

Another opinion is that still there is a lack of possibility of quantitative and qualitative research needed for comparability, qualitative analysis and forecasts, including publicity of data on the migration situation in the country.

One expert shared that there is a gap in institutional activities to promote and clarify steady development and sustainable development goals. There is no information on the links between migration and sustainable development. This is a big problem, he concluded.

Some experts united around the idea of the urgent need for the introduction and development of civic education in Bulgaria which is becoming increasingly acute due to the, rise of racism, nationalism and xenophobia, the stigma of anti-immigrant sentiments and the need to protect freedom and European values.

The respondents agree that the gap in the education for sustainable development can be overcome through implementation of some not too difficult measures and activities in Bulgaria, for example education programs, programmes based on interdisciplinary approach; materials based on the use of interactive methods and information and communication technologies.



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There are good examples and initiatives, they said, for supporting of schools for development of their own programmes and projects in the field of sustainable development; encouraging children and young people to participate in activities, related to elaboration and implementation of the projects in the field; development of programmes suitable for outdoor use, e.g. for Green Schools; establishment of networks for information exchange about the education for sustainable development; public participation in the decision-making process of developing programmes and projects for education for sustainable development on local scale; supporting centres offering educational services focused on children's spare time etc.

3.7 The role of education systems

All participants in the focus groups and the interviewed experts have strongly emphasised the importance of education in different forms and the education system as a whole. They explained that probably many teachers do not know exactly about SDGs, but at the same time, in their everyday work, they include in their subjects elements of the SDGs.

One teacher trainer explained that despite the tense curriculum and the workload she always includes some connections between the topic and the SDGs. At that time it is not compulsory, she regrets, and every teacher is doing it voluntarily and despite of the lack of time.

All participants appreciate the including of the special subject in primary and secondary school concerning the sustainable development goals and civic education as a whole. The process started in 2017, they stated.

Part of the respondents suggested a different point of view, but it is likely that parents can play a significant role in the process of making popular the goals for sustainable development, because the educational system is not the only a possibility to educate pupils. In many cases the good examples from the parents plays a crucial role. The teachers concentrate totally on the curricula topics and pressed by lack of time to extend and mention some social issues, especially some simple pragmatic examples about sustainable development.

Some experts regret that recently in Bulgaria, people lost the moral and human values and that influenced immediately education. The value system was lost, stated some of them and urgent measures should be taken. They argued that the attitudes are slowly changing for better. However, in Bulgarian schools environment / this is a legacy of the past/ is still not very good, there is a lack of empathy. In this field big efforts should be done. At the same time, children are more empathic than the elders and they easily accept the different classmate. However, parents are more conservative and, for example, they do not like their children to play or to communicate with migrant one.

The experts stated that the most problematic areas with regard to the integration of immigrants from third countries in Bulgaria are limited access to education, citizenship and opportunities for political participation. They explained that this shows the measurement



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results of the Migration Integration Policies Index (MIPEX), developed by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group in partnership. The most positive were assessed to be Bulgarian national policies for immigrant integration in areas that are regulated by European law - protection from discrimination on the status of long-term residence and family reunification.

Bulgaria, however, is ranked the penultimate place on the indicator education, followed by only Hungary. Bulgaria is one of the last in terms of immigrants' access to citizenship as well as access to the labour market (MIPEX, 2015).

Some respondents noticed that adapting to a large number of migrant pupils face a range of challenges for group, class, school and educational level education.

Classes and schools need adaptation to the growing number of different mother tongues, cultural perspectives and achievements.

New, adapted teaching skills will be needed, as well as developing new ways to work with migrant families and communities.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 National and local level recommendations for NGOs

In Bulgaria, the NGOs are the most active part of the society raising awareness on the migration, environmental protection, and sustainability. However, there is room for improvements especially for linking the sustainable development and the migration. They should popularise more the sustainable development goals and such key documents like Agenda 2030, Habitat III, and The Paris Agreement.

They should create links with the educational institutions and try to be key factor in civic education, developing mentor partnerships with schools and universities. They may bring their expertise in non-formal training methodologies, which are in many cases more attractive and interactive and this way may enrich the schools /universities didactic tools. Another recommendation is to be more united, to create and participate in thematic networks – national and international with similar CSOs, working in the field to achieve more sustainable positive results raising awareness together and exchanging of good practices.

There are a lot of projects and initiatives from NGOs, realised under the shield of Global Education and Development Education, but still in the country lack a policy in the field, lack of any coordination of the efforts of the different actors, lack of coordination or joint actions between the stakeholders. Public awareness of Global Education and Development Education is also a problem - it is not possible to have built this awareness without pro-



active policy on behalf of the state and of the stakeholders, without enough institutional support.

4.2 National and local level recommendations for governmental institutions

Information provision of the integration process requires additional measures to be taken to feed the migration policy with comparable statistics, analyses, research, opinion polls, and more. It is necessary to effectively inform civil society by making the reports on the migration situation public, presenting the strategic documents and plans in the sector, conducting mandatory public discussions on proposals for legislative changes, organising forums, seminars and other information events on the issues of migration policy, providing for forms of civil control on the implementation of the measures set out in the action plans.

From another point of view, more efforts are needed from governmental institutions to inform immigrants, because it will also improve their activity, efficiency and capacity that is currently being wiped out by the same person several times as it is not prepared or is missing something from the requirements. Here, synergies can be sought with NGOs that are perceived better among migrant communities because of the lack of awareness and the fear of the unknown. This holds true for the host society as well. Information about the other side is a successful step on the path to integration and socialization without disruption.

The achievement of the main national priorities related to the employment and growth of the Bulgarian economy are directly related to the attraction of business, capital, entrepreneurs, qualified specialists coming outside the country, in many cases the migrants and their successful integration into the Bulgarian society are an important prerequisite for this because they are a commercial and cultural channel. This requires the provision of a favourable environment for doing business and good living conditions, accompanied by a working mechanism for integration in the Bulgarian society.

4.2 Local level recommendations for municipalities

The local municipality should create, support and participate in many actions for raising awareness on the migration and the sustainable development and the links between them. They need to support the civic education and include democratic practices like: participation in student self-government; volunteering; maintaining school media; supporting school campaigns; organising school holidays and events; peer education; promote the youth leadership; mediation; solving conflicts and preventing aggression; mentoring; studying the opinions, attitudes and expectations of the wide audience at local level and inform the local community for that. They should connect the topics like SDGs and migration with the local policy and the local strategy for the sustainable development and create a synergy at local level.



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4.3 National and local level recommendations for educational institutions

The most problematic areas with regard to the integration of immigrants from third countries in Bulgaria are limited access to education, citizenship and opportunities for political participation.

The universities should take a responsible role for providing adequate training of students, especially in pedagogical specialities on topics like immigration and sustainable development. Bachelors and Master programs should be developed and included in the curricula connecting the globalisation and interdependent world.

In-service teacher training should be also focused on the development education, sustainability and the link with the international migration.

Creating the links /networks between the educational institutions and the civil society organisations is one possible option for more practise oriented mentorships in the field of sustainable development education. The CSOs can bring their expertise with this collaboration and can motivate students from different level to raise more awareness about the migration and SDGs. This could be done as well with common projects and other practically oriented initiatives.

4.4 Recommendations for future research areas

There are existing researches concerning the migration. But there is a lack of information on any existing or potential links with the sustainable development. This reflects on local and national level. From other point of view, the results of the researches should be presented to the wide audience without any dependencies and populism from the political parties. It is time to look and start the researches with regard to the coherence between the migration process and the sustainable development and connected with the SDGs.



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