

URGENT ACTION

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT RISK IN BULGARIA

The Bulgarian authorities are failing to adequately respond to the needs of the increasing number of refugees and migrants crossing the Bulgarian-Turkish border, many of whom are fleeing the Syrian armed conflict. The asylum-seekers in Bulgaria are exposed to substandard living conditions characterized by overcrowding and a lack of adequate sanitation; in addition to a lack of food supplies and access to health-care.

Despite the European Commission providing Bulgaria with 5,6 million Euros in November, to support “managing the increased influx of asylum seekers and improve the situation on the ground for refugees”, the circumstances of refugees and migrants remains precarious. The Bulgarian authorities have started to improve accommodation, but more needs to be done to ensure conditions are adequate.

The Bulgarian authorities have failed to take sufficient measures to respond to the large number of refugees and migrants crossing the Bulgarian-Turkish border and arriving in Bulgaria. As of July 2013 the number of people arriving in Bulgaria (many of them fleeing the Syrian armed conflict) has sharply increased, reaching 10,200 in November. Hundreds of people in need of protection are currently accommodated in substandard conditions marked by overcrowding, a lack of adequate sanitation, insufficient food supplies and inadequate access to medical and psychological care. This has a particularly negative affect those who have suffered injuries in the war, as well as pregnant women, infants and children.

The authorities have opened “emergency centres for refugees” with people being placed in dilapidated school buildings or houses made from shipping containers, where they have to sleep on worn out foldable beds or on the floor on thin mattresses. One of these centres, in the town of Harmanli, is a “closed centre” in which people are effectively detained.

Please write immediately in Bulgarian or your own language:

■ Urging the Bulgarian authorities to take immediate measures to ensure that conditions for refugees and migrants provide an adequate standard of living, which should include adequate accommodation and access to health care, including psychological treatment; and pointing out that reception centres must allow refugees and asylum-seekers with freedom of movement.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 JANUARY 2014 TO:

Minister of Interior

Tsvetlin Yovchev
Ministry of Interior
29, Shesti Septemvri Str.
Sofia 1000
Bulgaria
Fax: +3592 982 2780
Email: tyovchev@mvr.bg
Salutation: Dear Minister

President of the State Agency for

Refugees
Nikolay Chirpanliev
1233 Sofia
Serdika District
114-B Maria Luiza Blvd
Bulgaria
Fax: +3592 955 9476
Email: sar@saref.government.bg
Salutation: Dear President

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As of July 2013, the Bulgarian media has reported on the rapidly growing numbers of refugees and migrants crossing the Bulgarian border with Turkey. Whereas the total number of people crossing the border in 2012 was around 1,700, it has reached 10,200 in 2013. The increase escalated in October when 3,600 refugees and migrants entered Bulgaria – most of them were from Syria and fleeing the Syrian armed conflict, while the second largest group were Afghani nationals.

Bulgarian authorities failed to take adequate measures to respond to the large number of people arriving and hundreds of people in need of protection have ended up living for months in substandard conditions. The State Agency for Refugees operates three official reception centres (Banya, Ovcha Kupel, Pastrogor) with the capacity to accommodate 1,200 persons. In September 2013, it announced that it had no further capacity to accommodate the growing number of asylum-seekers. In a response to what the Bulgarian authorities called “influx of migrants”, “emergency” reception centres have been opened (Voenna Rampa, Vrazhdebna, Harmanli and Kovatchevtsi). Two of the new centres are located in abandoned schools in Sofia in the districts Voenna Rampa and Vrazhdebna, another one occupies a former military complex in the town of Harmanli and one centre was placed in a former summer camp in the village of Kovatchevtsi.

Because they were not converted into proper accommodation facilities, the “new” centres offer wholly inadequate living conditions. Despite snowy conditions and temperatures dropping below 0 degrees in early December 2013, people were still staying in tents, containers and dilapidated buildings, marked by overcrowding, inadequate heating and inadequate access to sanitation. Pregnant women and infants, as well as men and women of various ages, have had to cope with lack of beds and blankets, lack of access to medicine and food in all centres. In the absence of a government provided supply of food for refugees and migrants, a group of volunteers, called Friends of Refugees, started organizing regular food distribution to the centres. In a response of appalling lack of medical assistance, a humanitarian organization, Mediciens Sans Frontieres announced in November that it will open a health post in the Harmali camp.

Although Bulgarian authorities have started improving the facilities in the emergency reception centres, the refugees and migrants continue to be exposed to inadequate conditions which pose risks to their health. Bulgarian authorities must take urgent and immediate action to ensure adequate reception conditions for refugees.

Amnesty International has recently published the briefing, “Refugees in Bulgaria trapped in substandard conditions”, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR15/002/2013/en>

Name: Refugees and migrants in Bulgaria
Gender m/f: both

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