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European Migration Network

The integration of applicants for international protection in the labour market

Common Template for EMN Study 2022

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NATIONAL CONTRIBUTION FROM MEMBER COUNTRY*¹

***Disclaimer:** The following information has been provided primarily for the purpose of contributing to this EMN Study. The EMN NCP has provided information that is, to the best of its knowledge, up-to-date, objective and reliable within the context and confines of this study. The information may thus not provide a complete description and may not represent the entirety of the official policy of the EMN NCPs' Member Country.*

Top-line factsheet [max. 1 page]

*The top-line factsheet will serve as an overview of the **national contribution** introducing the study and drawing out key facts and figures from across all sections, with a particular emphasis on elements that will be of relevance to (national) policy-makers. Please add any innovative or visual presentation that can carry through into the study as possible infographics and visual elements.*

Please provide a concise summary of the main findings of Sections 1-5:

In the Republic of Bulgaria, the number of applications for international protection has been decreasing during the period from 2017 to 2020, when it started to rise again to reach 10255 in 2021 and 7855 in the first six months of 2022.

Nationals of Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq represented the biggest proportion of international protection seekers. The majority of the applicants were men aged between 18 and 34.

In the Republic of Bulgaria a foreigner seeking international protection has the right to access the labour market, including, to participate in programmes and projects financed from the State budget or under international or EU funding, if the determination procedure takes longer than 3 months from the lodging of the asylum application. If an applicant wants to access the labour market, the State Agency for Refugees issues an

¹ Replace highlighted text with your **Member Country** name here.

official notice. The official notice verifies the duration of the status determination procedure and whether it is still pending.

Once issued, the official notice allows access to all types of employment and social benefits, including assistance when unemployed. A permit for access to the labour market is not required. Applicants for international protection are entitled to vocational training. They can register as a jobseeker at a labour office and benefit from employment services.

Section 1: Integration of applicants for international protection - data and debates

This section aims to provide an overview of the main trends with regard to international protection applicants, as well as present information on public debates (if any).

Q1. Please provide an overview of the main trends (number of all applications for international protection, age, sex, citizenship) in working-age² international protection applicants,³ in your country in the period January 2017-June 2022 as extracted from Eurostat and included in the statistical Annex.

The total number of asylum seekers in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period from 2017 to June 2022, according to data from Eurostat, is as follows: 3005 in 2017; 2205 in 2018; 1955 in 2019; 3220 in 2020; 10255 in 2021 and 7855 by 30 June 2022.

Number of applicants for international protection (annual, rounded) total						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	June 2022
Total	3005	2205	1955	3220	10255	7855
Number of applicants for international protection (annually, rounded) - by gender						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	June 2022
women	645	315	230	230	575	10 65
men	2355	1890	1730	2985	9680	68 25
unknown	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of applicants for international protection (annually, rounded) - by age						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	June 2022
Years 14-17	505	515	535	820	2990	1565
Years 18-34	1990	1450	1195	2130	6445	5170
Years 35-64	490	230	215	270	805	1080
Age 65 and over	20	10	10	0	15	90

² Covering all international protection applicants aged 14 years old and beyond, as per Eurostat's age ranges.

³ The files shared with NCPs also present data on first time international protection applicants. This information is available for NCPs' reference and information. The analysis, however, should focus on **all** working-age asylum applicants.

Source: Eurostat

After the drastic increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2013 - 2016, there was a downward trend in the period from 2017 to 2020, when it started to rise again to reach 10 255 in 2021 and 7 855 in just half a year in 2022.

In 2017 the number of asylum seekers in Bulgaria was 3005, of which 26% were citizens of Syria, 31% of Afghanistan, and 28% of Iraq. Compared to 2016, the number decreased fivefold. 33% were children, 54% were aged between 18 and 34 and 14% were over 34. The gender breakdown is as follows – 52% men, 16% women and 33% children.

In 2018, the number of asylum seekers was 2 205, of which 43% were citizens of Afghanistan, 20% of Syria and 25% of Iraq. Of all asylum applicants, 33% were children, 57% were aged between 18 and 34 and 10% were over 34. The breakdown by gender is as follows – 56% of applicants are men, 11% are women, and 33% are children.

In 2019, the trend of weakening migration pressure continued. The number of applicants for international protection was 15% less compared to 2018. The number of applications from unaccompanied minors has increased - 524, compared to 2018, when they were 481. There was a higher proportion of applicants from Afghanistan (46%), Syria (23%), Iraq (14%), Pakistan (4%) and Iran (4%). The same countries of origin were in the top 5 in 2018 as well, with Iraqi nationals second in number of applications (25%), followed by Syrians (20%). The trend observed in the previous years has continued, with the highest number of applications for international protection being submitted by men aged between 18 and 34.

In 2020, the extraordinary situation related to the spread of COVID-19 led to a drop in applications for protection in the first half of the year - only 390, 56% less than the same period in 2019 but in the second half of the year there was a significant increase and they amounted to 3220. The highest number of asylum seekers in 2020 was for nationals of Afghanistan (49%), Syria (31%), Iraq (7%), Morocco (3%) and Pakistan (2%). There has been an increase in the number of nationals from Morocco placing them in the top 5 countries of origin. Also in 2020, the trend observed in previous years, was maintained, and the largest number of applications for international protection were submitted by men aged between 18 and 34. There was also an increase in the number of applications from unaccompanied minors - 799.

In 2021, 10 999 applications for international protection were submitted, refugee status was granted to 143 persons and humanitarian status (subsidiary protection) - to 1 876. There were 1256 refusals and 2870 terminated proceedings.

In the first half of 2022, despite the ongoing emergency situation related to the spread of COVID-19, there was a noticeable increase in the number of applicants for international protection - 8,840 by 30.06.2022. The highest percentage of the applications for international protection was submitted by citizens of Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine and Morocco.

Throughout the period from 2017 to 2022, Afghan nationals represented the largest share of international protection seekers in the Bulgaria. In 2022 there

was a significant increase in the number of applicants from Morocco. Countries that traditionally have the highest number of applications for protection, such as Iraq and Pakistan, have been displaced by applications for international protection from Ukrainian nationals. By order of the Chairman of the State Agency for Refugees dated 8 April 2022, the registration and initiation of proceedings for international protection on applications from displaced persons from Ukraine was suspended, and instead they registered and received temporary protection. By the end of the reporting period (June 2022) there were 78000 Ukrainian citizens present in Bulgaria, 5600 were employed under an employment contract.

Year	Number of persons seeking protection	Granted refugee status	Granted humanitarian status	Refusal	Terminated proceedings	Total number of decisions
2017	3700	804	900	3048	9662	14414
2018	2536	317	413	1362	860	2952
2019	2152	181	300	1134	1041	2656
2020	3525	105	716	1374	452	2647
2021	10999	143	1876	1256	2870	6145

Source: The State Agency for Refugees

Q2. Is the labour market situation⁴ of international protection applicants monitored with official data (gathered by the authorities and reliable)? If so, please provide an overview in terms of indicators that are used in your country, focus on specific groups, data collection intervals etc.

No, except for applicants registered as unemployed jobseekers. The small number of persons registered in accordance with Article 18 (3) item 4 of the Law on Employment Promotion does not affect the processes of the Bulgarian labour market and they are not specified into a separate statistical group in analysis.

⁴ For example: participation rates/unemployment rates of applicants for international protection.

Q3. Are statistics available on applications/grants/refusals of the applications to access the labour market/self-employment as well as the employment rates of applicants for international protection? Yes/No If yes, then please provide the totals per year in the period 2017-2022.

For the last 5 years, the number of registered at the Employment Agency persons asylum seekers, registered as unemployed, is as follows:

2017г.	2018г.	2019г.	2020г.	2021г.	Until 31.10.2022г.
0	0	1	8	2	9

Of the 20 persons registered for the period 2017 - 2022, 12 have been referred and started work, and only 1 person has been placed under an employment programme financed with funds from the European Social Fund.

According to data from the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), in 2018 there were 101 foreigners who wished to exercise their right to access the labour market after the third month of lodging the application; in 2019, they were 77, and 61 started work; in 2020, in the conditions of an extraordinary epidemic situation, the experts assisted in the inclusion in the labour market 48 persons seeking international protection. In 2021, the State Agency for Refugees issued 146 official notices to asylum seekers and reported 97 asylum seekers to have engaged in employment following the issue of the notice.

Q4. What are the main public and policy debates regarding applicants for international protection’s labour market integration (e.g. time frame for access, opportunities and challenges)?

The main debate regarding the integration of applicants for international protection into the labour market was in relation to the period for access to the labour market. Until 2015, when the Law on Asylum and Refugees was amended (Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Asylum and Refugees, Official Gazette No. 80 of October 16, 2015), those seeking international protection had the right to access the labour market if the proceedings are not completed within one year of the lodging of his application for status due to reasons beyond his control. Currently, "The foreigner has the right to access the labour market, including to participate in programmes and projects financed from the State budget or through international or European funding, if the proceedings are not completed within three months from the lodging of his application for international protection due to reasons beyond his control." In 2018, an amendment to the legislation was discussed, which would make the access of asylum seekers to the labour market subject to additional requirements. The draft was not adopted and the current provision is maintained.

Section 2: Integration policies in the EMN Member and Observer Countries

This part of the study describes the Member Country's organisational approach towards labour-market integration policy and analyses how applicants of international protection are addressed in national labour market integration policies for third-country nationals.

Q5. Does your state have a specific policy/ strategy to support the labour market integration of third-country nationals? Yes/No^{5 6}

Yes.

The main strategic document in the field of migration and integration of third-country nationals, including persons seeking and persons granted international protection, is the National Migration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (NMS) 2021-2025. The current strategy was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 25 March 2021 with Decision No. 256. The integration policy for legally residing third country nationals is conducted in accordance with the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union.

The Strategy forms the political framework for building a complex and sustainable legislative and institutional basis for the successful management of legal migration and integration, for providing the necessary care for persons seeking and receiving international protection in Bulgaria, as well as for the prevention and counteraction of illegal migration.

With regard to the integration of one of the categories of foreigners, namely beneficiaries of international protection, a separate and targeted policy on their integration was developed by applying the requirements of the *Ordinance on the terms and conditions for concluding, implementing and terminating the agreement on the integration of foreigners granted asylum or international protection* and by the development of separate annual National Integration Action Plans.

The integration of third-country nationals into Bulgarian society and especially in the national labour market is an integral part of the Bulgarian migration policy since 2008. These issues were envisaged in the first National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2008-2015) and were indicated as priority I "Balanced reception of third country nationals and achievement of their successful integration".

In 2015 a National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015-2020), was approved by Decision No. 437 of the Council of Ministers. The document developed the strategic aspects of the national policy for the integration of third country nationals. The document was valid until the end of 2020.

A National Strategy for Integration of Beneficiaries International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020, adopted by Decision No. 474 of the Council of Ministers of 04.07.2014, was developed with a view to the successful integration into the Bulgarian society of beneficiaries of international protection and the effective use of their potential for the socio-economic development of the country. The document states that the integration of persons granted international protection shall be carried out through measures and services in several priority

⁵ Please note that measures aimed at supporting labour market integration of applicants are discussed in section 4.

⁶ Please note that regional/local level strategies/policies should be reported only if national is not available.

areas, such as: access to information, access to education and training in Bulgarian language, employment, recognition of qualifications, health care, social assistance, housing, integration in the social, cultural and civil life of society. The measures taken in the identified priority areas shall ensure opportunities for a dignified life and personal fulfilment of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status.

**a. if yes, does it encompass applicants of international protection?
Yes/No**

Yes. One of the target groups included in the strategies, mentioned above, is "persons seeking or granted international protection".

i. if yes, please provide a brief outline of the strategy / policy in place in your country to integrate applicants of international protection into the labour market.

The current National Migration Strategy 2021-2025 outlines four goals:

- To provide conditions for the reception of migrants, highly skilled workers who arrive legally in the country for the purpose of work, study or other reasons and have legal grounds to stay (taking into account the needs of the labour market); to establish a facilitated regime for entry and residence, under the conditions of mobility, in order to attract highly qualified third-country workers.
- To strengthen the processes of return for foreigners residing in the country without legal grounds, in accordance with the established standards for the protection of human rights; strengthening measures to prevent undocumented migration and illegal residence on the territory of the country.
- To contribute to the adoption of a Common European Asylum System in accordance with the principles of solidarity and responsibility, thus ensuring adequate reception of persons in need of protection, while "preventing the uneven distribution of the burden of refugee flows and abuses of the asylum system and prevention of secondary movements".
- To participate in the processes of development and strengthening partnerships with third countries and to actively contribute to partnerships with key third countries of origin and transit - a source of illegal migration flows to the Republic of Bulgaria.

The implementation of the Strategy is carried out through the established procedures for coordination between state institutions, local authorities, as well as non-governmental and other organisations, which can be brought in if necessary for additional expertise and deeper knowledge in a given area. Integration is one of the areas of active cooperation with non-governmental organisations.

The integration chapter highlights that the Republic of Bulgaria has modern, well-developed and effective legislation in the field of equal opportunities, social inclusion and non-discrimination, which is in full compliance with European standards.

The implementation of the policy on the integration of migrants will be supported by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

In the chapter on expected results it is written that *"the integration of migrants is a prerequisite for stable economic growth, but only in the conditions of social unity and fruitful multicultural dialogue in society. This is achieved only with active participation in the integration processes on both sides of the process - legal migrants and the host society. It is necessary to strengthen the information exchange and cooperation between the competent institutions, local*

governments, academia, social partners, non-governmental and international organisations at the national level."

For the implementation of the strategic objectives of the Strategy a national action plan is drawn up and adopted every year by the Council of Ministers. The plan contains different activities that cover different aspects of the national migration policy. Each activity is proposed by the competent institution and aims to respond to the specific strategic objective laid down in the Strategy. On 16 November 2022, the Council of Ministers approved a report on the implementation of the National Strategy on Migration in the period April 2021 - June 2022 and a Plan for 2022 for the implementation of the priorities of the National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2025. The documents were prepared in implementation of the reporting mechanism of the Strategy. The plan includes 70 measures for implementation. The report emphasizes the following priorities: what has been achieved to overcome the consequences of the war in Ukraine; Bulgaria's preparation for full Schengen membership; successes in managing legal migration and countering illegal migration.

- ii. if no, please answer question 5b below
- b. if no, how is the labour market integration of applicants for international protection addressed? Is there a mainstreaming labour market integration approach applicable? Yes/No
 - i. if no, please provide a reason, if available, and describe briefly how international protection applicants are treated in practice with regard to labour market integration.

N/A

- Q6. Have there been any major changes in the strategy/policy to support the labour market integration of third-country nationals within the temporal scope of the study (January 2017 – June 2022)? Yes/No**
- a. If yes, please explain briefly the content, including what was the driver and objective for these changes?**

On July 19, 2017, the Council of Ministers adopted an *Ordinance on the terms and conditions for concluding, implementing and terminating the agreement on the integration of foreigners granted asylum or international protection*. The Ordinance assigns responsibilities for coordination of integration processes to the Deputy Prime Minister. According to the Ordinance, the integration process begins with the conclusion of an integration agreement. With this agreement, the mayor of the respective municipality and the beneficiary of international protection voluntarily declare their desire to carry out specific integration activities in relation to education, employment, training, housing, health care, social assistance and social services.

Amendments in 2018 to the Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility (LLMLM) introduced changes to reduce the administrative burden for employers to hire migrant workers, for example: no work permit is required for family members of the beneficiaries of international protection; third country nationals victims of trafficking were included in the scope of LLMLM, and their access to the Bulgarian labour market was regulated; the requirement to conduct a labour market test for the issuance of an EU Blue Card was removed; the requirement to elaborate a List of professions for which there is a shortage of highly qualified specialists is no longer required; the limitation of the number of third country workers to 10% of the average size of a Bulgarian enterprise for the previous 12 months was

changed to 20%, and for small and medium-sized enterprises – to 35%; an opportunity was introduced for third country nationals of Bulgarian origin to work without permission, after registration in the Employment Agency until obtaining the residence permit; the necessary amendments were made regarding employment only with registration (without a work permit) of students and researchers; the conditions for access to the labour market without a work permit for trainees were also arranged; the conditions for equal treatment of researchers, students, trainees, pupils and volunteers, as well as family members of Bulgarian, European and foreign citizens, including beneficiaries of asylum or international protection, have been introduced; the equal treatment of foreigners admitted under international agreements for regulation of labour migration, as well as in cases of registration of short-term employment, was regulated.

Amendments and supplements to the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility were introduced, related to the regime for issuing residence and work permits to third-country nationals (State Gazette No. 21 of 12 March 2021), effective from 1 June 2021. They refer to part of the procedures applied by the Employment Agency in connection with the access to the labour market of third country nationals. For four of them, a single application procedure is regulated, leading to the issuance of a combined act, including a residence permit and a work permit in a single administrative act.

With the amendment to the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria (SG No. 41 of June 3, 2022) a new provision was included (Art. 9, Para. 5) according to which a permit for access to the labour market is not required for workers - third country nationals benefiting from temporary protection, for the period of temporary protection, determined by an act of the Council of Ministers.

With the amendment to the Law on Employment Promotion (SG, No. 41 of 2022, in force from 03.06.2022), job seekers may also use:

- Inclusion in a procedure for validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences;
- Scholarship, allowances for transport and accommodation for the duration of the procedure for validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences.

Q7. Are specific governance structures in place to support the labour market integration of international protection applicants? If yes, please provide an organigram or overview of the institutional framework for developing and implementing relevant strategy/policies/measures on the labour market integration of applicants for international protection.

- a. describe the key stakeholders and their role (government departments, public authorities, trade unions, employers' associations, NGOs, others?)**
- b. indicate the responsibilities of the different key actors, noting whether their role is specific to international protection applicants or more general.**

Include national / regional /local structures where relevant.

There are no specific governance structures in place to support the labour market integration of applicants for international protection. The institutional framework includes various institutions, organisations and other actors. A key role in the development and implementation process is played by:

The National Council for Migration, Borders, Asylum and Integration. It was created by a Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, No.

226 of 10 September 2019. The National Council is a collective advisory body for formulating and coordinating the implementation of state policies in the field of migration, borders, asylum and integration.

The Council consists of a chairman and members. The Council is chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs. Council members are:

1. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs;
2. Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy;
3. Deputy Minister of Justice;
4. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;
5. Deputy Minister of Finance;
6. Deputy Minister of Education and Science;
7. Deputy Minister of Health;
8. Deputy Minister of Defence;
9. Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications;
10. The Chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection;
11. The Chairman of the State Agency for Refugees;
12. Deputy Chairman of the State Agency "National Security";
13. Deputy Chairman of the State Intelligence Agency;
14. The director of the "Customs" Agency;
15. The secretary of the National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking;
16. Representative of the Management Board of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria;
17. The secretary of the Council.

The Council:

1. develops, updates and proposes to the Council of Ministers (CoM) strategic documents in the field of migration, borders, asylum and integration;
2. proposes to the Council of Ministers annual plans for the implementation of strategic documents, reports on their implementation, as well as measures to increase efficiency in the management of migration, borders, asylum and integration;
3. gives guidelines on the implementation of policies in the field of migration, borders, asylum and integration at the national, regional and European level;
4. coordinates the activities of state bodies, local self-government bodies and local administration, non-governmental and international organisations on the territory of the country in determining and implementing the policy in the field of migration, borders, asylum and integration and in the implementation of the relevant strategic documents;
5. makes proposals for amendments to legislative acts with the aim of more effective implementation of policies in the field of migration, borders, asylum and integration;

6. examines and discusses programmes and initiatives to strengthen the administrative capacity of officials who work in the field of migration, borders, asylum and integration.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) coordinates the implementation of the policy for the integration of third country nationals in the Republic of Bulgaria. The MLSP is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the national policy for access of third-country nationals to the national labour market.

The State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers (SAR) implements the state policy in the field of international protection in the Republic of Bulgaria. SAR is competent for examining and deciding on applications for international protection. The Agency has registration-and-reception centres in Sofia and in the country where asylum seekers are accommodated while their applications are being examined. SAR implements a complex of measures for cultural orientation and social adaptation of asylum seekers.

The Employment Agency is an executive agency under the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and is responsible for the implementation of labour market policy and the access of third-country nationals to the national labour market. The Employment Agency provides:

1. registration as jobseekers in "Labour Bureau" directorates;
2. information and employment mediation;
3. inclusion in training and employment programmes and measures.

The Executive Agency General Labour Inspectorate under the Minister of Labour and Social Policy has the main responsibilities for controlling the legality of the work performed at any workplace in the country, including by foreigners.

Different organisations in Bulgaria, such as the UNHCR Representation, the Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas Sofia, the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants, are implementing different initiatives with a view to helping access to labour market.

Section 3: Accessing the labour market (employment and self-employment)

This part of the study describes how applicants of international protection can access the Member and Observer Countries' labour markets as well as enter self-employment.

Section 3.1. Procedures for accessing the labour market

- Q8. Please describe the procedure required to enter the labour market/self-employment for an applicant for international protection in your state.**
- a. Does your state regulate differently access to employment or self-employment?**
 - b. Please provide in your response an overview of the applicable legal framework and make a clear distinction between what is prescribed in laws, policy documents and practice.**

According to Art. 29 (3) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR), an applicant for international protection has the right to access the labour market, including to participate in programmes and projects financed from the State budget or through

international or European funding, if the proceedings are not completed within three months from the lodging of his application for international protection due to reasons beyond his control.

In order to exercise this right the applicant has to file a written application to the director of the centre where the applicant is accommodated or, if he is accommodated outside a centre, to the director of the centre where his procedure is conducted. Then the State Agency for Refugees issues an official notice. The official notice verifies the duration of the status determination procedure and whether it is still pending. Once issued, the official notice allows access to all types of employment and social benefits, including assistance when unemployed. A permit for access to the labour market is not required.

To facilitate access to the labour market, applicants for international protection have the right to register with the Employment Agency. Pursuant to Article 18, Paragraph 3, Item 4 of the Law on Employment Promotion, the Employment Agency registers and provides services to applicants for international protection. Applicants for international protection have the right to use all the services of the Employment Agency for an unemployed person. Applicants for international protection have equal access and enjoy all rights under the Law on Employment Promotion.

After registration in the Labour Bureau directorates of the Employment Agency, job seekers can use:

- information on announced vacancies;
- information on programmes and measures to preserve and promote employment;
- information and employment mediation;
- psychological support;
- professional orientation;
- inclusion in adult education;
- motivation for active behaviour on the labour market and inclusion in programmes and measures for employment and training (SG, No. 41 of 2022, in force from 03.06.2022);
- scholarship for training, allowances for transport and accommodation for the duration of the training (SG, No. 41 of 2022, in force from 03.06.2022);
- inclusion in a procedure for validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences, (SG, No. 41 of 2022, effective from 03.06.2022);
- scholarship, allowances for transport and accommodation for the duration of the procedure for validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences (SG, No. 41 of 2022, effective from 03.06.2022).

The services provided by the Employment Agency and the territorial divisions are free of charge. The employees of the Employment Agency apply an individual approach to each unemployed person, providing appropriate employment services tailored to their specific needs, state of health, acquired education and qualifications.

Section 3.1.1. Employment (If the access is regulated differently for employment and self-employment)

Q9. What is the minimum period from lodging an application for international protection after which an applicant has access to the labour market?⁷

⁷ According to the Reception Conditions Directive Recast (2013/33/EU) article 15(1) Member States shall ensure that applicants have access to the labour market no later than 9 months from the date when the

Three months from lodging an application for international protection, if the proceedings are not completed due to reasons beyond the applicants control. (art. 29, paragraph 3 LAR).

Q10. Please describe the reasoning related to the minimum period of accessing the labour market and conditions of access to the labour market/self-employment.

Granting the right to access the labour market to applicants for international protection at an earlier stage promotes the applicants' independence, they do not rely on social assistance, the process of integration into society is facilitated, and their motivation to stay in the country increases.

Q11. Is the right to access the labour market automatic after a specified period? Yes/No

Yes.

Q12. What kind of documents is necessary in order to access the labour market?⁸

The State Agency for Refugees issues official notice which verifies the duration of the status determination procedure and whether it is still pending. Once issued, the notice allows access to all types of employment and social benefits, including assistance when unemployed.

Q13. Is a work permit or another type of administrative application/decision necessary for accessing the labour market? Yes/No

No. A work permit is not required, (Art. 9, paragraph 1, item 9 Law on Labour Mobility and Labour Migration)

a. if yes, please specify:

- i. who is required to submit the application, the applicant/employer/jointly by both?**
- ii. which authority is responsible for granting access to the labour market?**
- iii. what are the criteria for obtaining the work permit?**
- iv. what is the average duration of the procedure to grant access to the labour market? If applicable, please also add any official time limits according to law/policy.**

Section 3.1.2. Self-employment (if the access is regulated differently for employment and self-employment)

Q14. Is self-employment of international protection applicants permitted in your state? Yes/No

application for international protection was lodged if a first instance decision by the competent authority has not been taken and the delay cannot be attributed to the applicant.

⁸ According to Reception Conditions Directive Recast (2013/33/EU) article 6, Member States shall ensure applicants have a document that proves they are applicant.

- a. if yes:
 - i. what is the minimum period from lodging an international protection application after which an applicant has access to self-employment?
 - ii. which authority is responsible for granting access to self-employment?

N/a

Section 3.2. Conditions and limitations in accessing the labour market

Please provide a reference to the legal base (where relevant, linking it to what is described in Q8, if applicable, and make a clear distinction between what is prescribed in laws, policy guidance and practice).

Q15. If applicable, please describe the period of validity and conditions of the authorisation to access the labour market/self-employment.

N/a

Q16. Is the authorisation limited to certain employment sectors or occupations? In other words, are applicants for international protection excluded from some labour market sectors or from certain occupations? Yes/No.

No.

If yes, from which ones?

Q17. Is employment restricted to a single employer?

No.

Q18. If applicable, please describe the conditions and procedures of the renewal of the authorisation to access the labour market. Are they the same for all employment sectors and occupations?

N/a

Q19. Does your Member Country give priority to EU and EEA citizens (Art. 15/2 clause 2 of the Reception Conditions Directive Recast (2013/33/EU)) and to other legally resident third-country nationals in accessing the labour market? Yes/No

- a. if yes, please specify how priority is given in law/policy and in practice (labour market test, minimum share of employment by EU/EEA nationals, occupations lists etc.)?

No.

Q20. Are there any other limitations in place, either in law or in specific measures relating to applicants of international protection for accessing labour market / self-employment?

No.

Section 4: Support measures to enhance labour market integration and self-employment

This part of the study looks at examples of labour market integration measures targeting applicants of international protection.

Please indicate (where applicable) in the table below the main policy or legislative measures,⁹ and their rationale and aims, that make up your policy / strategy (according to answer to Q5 above) to support the labour market integration/self-employment of applicants for international protection, by integration area. Please focus on measures that specifically aim at facilitating labour market access for the international protection applicants.¹⁰

Area/component	Overview of the main measures	Stakeholders	Target group
1. Language acquisition	Training in Bulgarian language is of key importance for integration of refugees and asylum seekers, for their professional fulfilment, for continuation of their education, for their cultural and social adaptation.	<p>The State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers (SAR), NGOs, other organisations.</p> <p>SAR organises and conducts Bulgarian language training courses at the Agency's registration-and-reception centres.</p> <p>Students enrolled at state or municipal schools are entitled to additional Bulgarian language training.</p> <p>Bulgarian language classes</p>	<p>Applicants for international protection</p> <p>Additional Bulgarian language training for students enrolled at a school.</p>

⁹ Please make sure legislative and policy actions are distinguished from each other.

¹⁰ Thereby, please focus on: either (1) specific measures tailoring international protection applicants or (2) general measures that also include international protection applicants (in those cases where specific measures are not available/relevant).

Area/component	Overview of the main measures Please describe the rationale, scope and aim under each area.	Stakeholders Please describe the stakeholders involved, where applicable at state, regional and local level (public authorities, trade unions, employers' associations, NGOs, others?)	Target group Please indicate whether the measures address applicants for international protection in general or particular categories of applicants for international protection (e.g. women or minors of working age)?
		and non-formal education is provided by NGOs.	
2. Vocational education and training (including reskilling schemes)	<p>A Refugee Employment and Training Programme is developed and implemented. The main objective of the programme is to support the integration into the labour market of foreigners who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, or who are candidates for international protection, by providing them with training in Bulgarian language and/or vocational training, and subsidised employment.</p> <p>The programme is implemented throughout the country.</p>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Agency	Foreigners who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status, or applicants for international protection.
3. Civic integration courses			
4. Support for recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of	An amendment to the Law on Employment	The services referred to in Art. 17, para 1 and 2	Applicants for international protection registered

Area/component	Overview of the main measures Please describe the rationale, scope and aim under each area.	Stakeholders Please describe the stakeholders involved, where applicable at state, regional and local level (public authorities, trade unions, employers' associations, NGOs, others?)	Target group Please indicate whether the measures address applicants for international protection in general or particular categories of applicants for international protection (e.g. women or minors of working age)?
<p>formal qualifications including those formal qualifications that cannot be documented (lost or destroyed in the context of existing procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications) Please note in the overview column if the procedure is a general one or specific to international protection applicants.</p>	<p>Promotion (SG, N 41, 2022, in force from 3 June 2022, provides an opportunity asylum applicants registered with the Employment Agency to benefit from inclusion in a procedure for validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences-art.</p>	<p>of the Law on Employment Promotion are provided to jobseekers by the relevant employees of the Labour Office Directorate of the Employment Agency.</p>	<p>with the Employment Agency.</p>
<p>5. Skill assessments to validate prior (non-accredited) learning and experience</p>	<p>Integration profiles are prepared with summary personal information, education, and profession of applicants wishing to stay in Bulgaria after receiving status.</p>	<p>SAR</p>	<p>Applicants for international protection wishing to stay in Bulgaria after receiving status.</p>
<p>6. Information and counselling (labour market orientation, tailored advice, other)</p>	<p>Regular information sessions are organised with the applicants for international protection accommodated in SAR centres to support the process of employment, social adaptation and cultural orientation.</p>	<p>MLSP, Employment Agency</p>	<p>Beneficiaries and applicants for international protection</p>

Area/component	Overview of the main measures Please describe the rationale, scope and aim under each area.	Stakeholders Please describe the stakeholders involved, where applicable at state, regional and local level (public authorities, trade unions, employers' associations, NGOs, others?)	Target group Please indicate whether the measures address applicants for international protection in general or particular categories of applicants for international protection (e.g. women or minors of working age)?
	Initiation of joint actions with the Bulgarian businesses to employ beneficiaries of international protection.		
7. Incentive measures for employers (e.g. tax reductions, labour matching services, recruitment support)	Programme for employment and training of refugees has been developed. Within its framework, the Labour Bureau pays employers who have employed asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection a part of their monthly remuneration.	MLP, Employment Agency	Asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection
8. Support for self-employment (for example preferential taxation and social security contributions, administrative support with establishing a company etc, business plan development, other). Please note in the overview column if the support differs from the regular support to self-employment available to national population, EU citizens or other third-country nationals.			

Area/component	Overview of the main measures Please describe the rationale, scope and aim under each area.	Stakeholders Please describe the stakeholders involved, where applicable at state, regional and local level (public authorities, trade unions, employers' associations, NGOs, others?)	Target group Please indicate whether the measures address applicants for international protection in general or particular categories of applicants for international protection (e.g. women or minors of working age)?
9. Indirect support (e.g. childcare, transport)	Transportation is provided for school-going children, provided by the provision of personalised student public transport cards and one card for the parents of the child.	State Agency for Refugees	Asylum seekers attending school and for a parent of a child attending school.

Section 5: Good practices and challenges

What integration support programmes, projects, legislative or other practical initiatives are available that specifically facilitate effective access to the labour market for applicants of international protection and have been identified by experts as a “good practice” in accordance with the definition provided in paragraph 3 “Scope of the study”? Please provide up to three examples (see the templates below and please adjust accordingly).

Measure 1	
Overview	
Name	<i>Please insert name of the measure here.</i>
Type	<i>Programme and systematic measures (multi-year / long term)</i>
Area	Language acquisition
Access	all applicants for international protection and additional language courses for students
Target group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tailor-made labour market integration measure (only applicants for international protection) <input type="checkbox"/> Mainstream labour market integration measure (for all) If the measures is for all, please describe how applicants for international protection benefit
Coverage	<i>Choose an item.</i> <i>If “other”, please add further information here</i>
Link	<i>Please provide hyperlink to source/project here, if available</i>
Source and justification	Please indicate the source/who proposed the practice as good and explain why the measure is considered a “good practice” (see Section Methodology).
Description	
<p>M1.Q1. Please describe how third-country nationals can access the measure, notably:</p> <p>a) <i>Elabourate in brief on the conditions and process of accessing the measure for applicants for international protection</i></p> <p>b) <i>Is the measure voluntary or compulsory? Is it provided free of charge?</i></p> <p>c) <i>If applicable, indicate if the measure is different from the regular support available to national population, EU citizens or third country nationals?</i></p> <p>d) <i>Are there any reasons for to be excluded/to lose access to the measure? If so, which ones?</i></p>	

M1.Q2. Please describe briefly the context in which the measure has started:

- a) *When was the measure introduced and what was/is its duration?*
- b) *What was the need/purpose to start/implement such measure (e.g. labour market needs in the Member Country, need for integration, changes in integration policies)?*
- c) *When is the measure provided (e.g. upon arrival, upon arrival until (please add till when), no determined time limitation)?*
- d) *Key activities*

M1.Q3. Please briefly describe the implementation modalities, notably:

- a) *By whom is it implemented (agency, government institution, NGOs, private sector etc.), and what are the coordination structures?*
- b) *If applicable, are there any reimbursement (totally or partially)/cost sharing possibilities?*
- c) *How and by whom is it promoted?*

M1.Q4. Please briefly describe the impact of the measure and notably:

- a) *Did it meet the anticipated objectives? YES/NO/Partly*
- b) *What are the main outcomes*
- c) *Monitoring and evaluation of impact (please describe the evaluation tools and methodology, if possible specify what indicators have been adopted and how those were measured)*
- d) *Challenges during implementation and remedies applied*
- e) *Likelihood of continuation of the measure. If discontinued, please explain why*

Measure 2	
Overview	
Name	<i>Please insert name of the measure here.</i>
Type	<i>Choose from drop down menu here</i>
Area	<i>Choose from drop down menu here</i>
Access	Please describe who has access to the measure, i.e. all applicants for international protection or particular categories

Target group	<input type="checkbox"/> Tailor-made labour market integration measure (only applicants for international protection) <input type="checkbox"/> Mainstream labour market integration measure (for all) If the measures is for all, please describe how applicants for international protection benefit
Coverage	Choose an item. If "other", please add further information here
Link	Please provide hyperlink to source/project here, if available
Source and justification	Please indicate the source/who proposed the practice as good and explain why the measure is considered a "good practice" (see Section Methodology).

Description

M2.Q1. Please describe how third-country nationals can access the measure, notably:

- a) *Elabourate in brief on the conditions and process of accessing the measure for applicants for international protection*
- b) *Is the measure voluntary or compulsory? Is it provided free of charge?*
- c) *If applicable, indicate if the measure is different from the regular support available to national population, EU citizens or third country nationals?*
- d) *Are there any reasons for to be excluded/to lose access to the measure? If so, which ones?*

M2.Q2. Please describe briefly the context in which the measure has started:

- a) *When was the measure introduced and what was/is its duration?*
- b) *What was the need/purpose to start/implement such measure (e.g. labour market needs in the Member Country, need for integration, changes in integration policies)?*
- c) *When is the measure provided (e.g. upon arrival, upon arrival until (please add till when), no determined time limitation)?*
- d) *Key activities*

M2.Q3. Please briefly describe the implementation modalities, notably:

- a) *By whom is it implemented (agency, government institution, NGOs, private sector etc.), and what are the coordination structures?*
- b) *If applicable, are there any reimbursement (totally or partially)/cost sharing possibilities?*
- c) *How and by whom is it promoted?*

M2.Q4. Please briefly describe the impact of the measure and notably:

- a) *Did it meet the anticipated objectives? YES/NO/Partly*
- b) *What are the main outcomes*

<p>c) <i>Monitoring and evaluation of impact (please describe the evaluation tools and methodology, if possible specify what indicators have been adopted and how those were measured)</i></p> <p>d) <i>Challenges during implementation and remedies applied</i></p> <p>e) <i>Likelihood of continuation of the measure. If discontinued, please explain why</i></p>

Measure 3	
Overview	
Name	<i>Please insert name of the measure here.</i>
Type	<i>Choose from drop down menu here</i>
Area	<i>Choose from drop down menu here</i>
Access	Please describe who has access to the measure, i.e. all applicants for international protection or particular categories
Target group	<input type="checkbox"/> Tailor-made labour market integration measure (only applicants for international protection) <input type="checkbox"/> Mainstream labour market integration measure (for all) If the measure is for all, please describe how applicants for international protection benefit
Coverage	<i>Choose an item.</i> <i>If "other", please add further information here</i>
Link	<i>Please provide hyperlink to source/project here, if available</i>
Source and justification	Please indicate the source/who proposed the practice as good and explain why the measure is considered a "good practice" (see Section Methodology).
Description	
<p>M3.Q1. Please describe how third-country nationals can access the measure, notably:</p> <p>a) <i>Elabourate in brief on the conditions and process of accessing the measure for applicants for international protection</i></p> <p>b) <i>Is the measure voluntary or compulsory? Is it provided free of charge?</i></p> <p>c) <i>If applicable, indicate if the measure is different from the regular support available to national population, EU citizens or third country nationals?</i></p> <p>d) <i>Are there any reasons for to be excluded/to lose access to the measure? If so, which ones?</i></p>	

M3.Q2. Please describe briefly the context in which the measure has started:

- a) *When was the measure introduced and what was/is its duration?*
- b) *What was the need/purpose to start/implement such measure (e.g. labour market needs in the Member Country, need for integration, changes in integration policies)?*
- c) *When is the measure provided (e.g. upon arrival, upon arrival until (please add till when), no determined time limitation)?*
- d) *Key activities*

M3.Q3. Please briefly describe the implementation modalities, notably:

- a) *By whom is it implemented (agency, government institution, NGOs, private sector etc.), and what are the coordination structures?*
- b) *If applicable, are there any reimbursement (totally or partially)/cost sharing possibilities?*
- c) *How and by whom is it promoted?*

M3.Q4. Please briefly describe the impact of the measure and notably:

- a) *Did it meet the anticipated objectives? YES/NO/Partly*
- b) *What are the main outcomes*
- c) *Monitoring and evaluation of impact (please describe the evaluation tools and methodology, if possible specify what indicators have been adopted and how those were measured)*
- d) *Challenges during implementation and remedies applied*
- e) *Likelihood of continuation of the measure. If discontinued, please explain why*

Q20. Are there any specific protocols, synergies between agencies/institutions to support labour market integration of international protection applicants that have been identified as good practices?

The State Agency for Refugees and the Employment Agency cooperate closely to ensure access to the labour market for applicants for international protection.

Q21. What kind of challenges have been identified in your country when it comes to access to the labour market by applicants for international protection? Please provide a distinction¹¹ between legislative challenges and challenges in practice and specify how those challenges have been identified.

Difficulties in finding employment are specific and are due to the particular situation in which applicants for international protection find themselves: they do not speak Bulgarian language; they do not have documents proving their education and professional qualifications and work experience.

¹¹ Where applicable

Section 6: Conclusions

This part of the study compiles the main findings from sections 1-5.

Q22. Please synthesise the findings of your national report by drawing conclusions from your responses:

- a) What are the main trends with regard to the situation of international protection applicants in the context of labour market integration and what are the main debates regarding their labour market integration identified in your country (Section 1)?

Applicants for international protection have the right to access the labour market three months after lodging the application for protection. Not all of them enter the labour market. Bulgaria is still considered a transit country and relatively few refugees are willing to settle and stay permanently in the country. Labour market integration is not a topic of public debate in the Republic of Bulgaria.

- b) If at all and to what extent are international protection applicants specifically addressed in national integration policies with regard labour market integration (Section 2)? What are the key characteristics of the national integration policies for promoting labour market participation for the applicants of international protection (Section 2) and how is the access to employment and self-employment for applicants of international protection regulated/supported (Section 3)

Please describe.

Both applicants and beneficiaries of international protection are included in one of the target groups in the national strategies on migration. Measures for their integration are included in the annual plans for implementation of the strategies. Currently there is not a separate strategy on asylum seekers' employment and access to the labour market. The national legislation regulates an easy access and a simple procedure to access the labour market but it is still difficult for applicants for international protection to find job mainly due to the language barrier. In the Republic of Bulgaria a foreigner seeking international protection has the right to access the labour market, including, to participate in programmes and projects financed from the State budget or under international or EU funding, if the determination procedure takes longer than 3 months from the lodging of the asylum application. They can register as a jobseeker at a labour office and benefit from employment services. Employers are obliged to inform the Labour Bureau about the commencement of employment. Applicants for international protection are entitled to vocational training.

- c) To what extent are targeted measures to support labour market participation available in your country, specifically addressing applicants for international protection (Section 4) and what has been identified as challenges as well as good practice in this area (Section 5)?

Regarding the measures specifically focused on facilitating access to the labour market for applicants for international protection, they include mainly the provision of Bulgarian languages courses, activities for social adaptation and cultural orientation, provision of information on their rights, job counselling. Different organisations in Bulgaria, such as the UNHCR Representation, the Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas Sofia, the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants, are implementing different initiatives and projects to help asylum seekers' access to the labour market.

Annex: Eurostat statistics

Eurostat Data for each EU Member State will be extracted centrally by the Service Provider and an Excel-Sheet prepared for each country and shared with the NCPs.

The Statistical Annex consists of the following:

Annex 1.1: Eurostat data asylum and first time asylum applicants
[[MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA](#); [MIGR_ASYAPPCTZM](#)]