Reception - Bulgaria

Reception system

Overview

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Relevant EU legislation

Bulgaria is bound by the recast Reception Conditions Directive and has transposed its provisions through the Asylum And Refugees Law, Promulgated in SG No 54 of 31 May 2002 | ЗАКОН ЗА УБЕЖИЩЕТО И БЕЖАНЦИТЕ Обн. ДВ. бр.54 от 31 Май 2002г and its amendments.

National legislation

16/10/2015: Bulgaria transposed the recast Reception Conditions Directive by the Asylum and Refugees Law, Promulgated in SG No 80 of 2015 | ЗАКОН ЗА УБЕЖИЩЕТО И БЕЖАНЦИТЕ Обн. ДВ, БР. 80 ОТ 2015 Г

April 2008: Organisational Regulations of the State Agency for Refugees at the Council of Ministers | УСТРОЙСТВЕН ПРАВИЛНИК НА ДЪРЖАВНАТА АГЕНЦИЯ ЗА БЕЖАНЦИТЕ ПРИ МИНИСТЕРСКИЯ СЪВЕТ

Competent authority and stakeholders

Authority responsible for reception	The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) within the Council of Ministers is in charge of reception at the national level.

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Other actors involved	Other actors involved include the Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas Sofia, UNHCR, IOM and NGOs (e.g. Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, Cooperation for Voluntary Service, Nadja Centre Foundation, Foundation for Access to Rights, etc.) which carry out various activities in reception centres based on agreements signed with SAR. Their involvement is governed by Article 53(1), Item 1 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees.

Organisational aspects

Reception is managed at both central and territorial levels by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR). SAR and its four territorial units in Sofia, Banya, Pastrogor and Harmanli have executive and financial responsibility over reception facilities.

The reception system is based on collective centres and consists of one transit centre and 3 registration and reception centres. All of the centres are state-owned and managed by SAR.

SAR with the Council of Ministers receives operational support from the EUAA with the aim to increase institutional and response capacity of the national authorities in the field of reception in line with the CEAS, under the operational plan between the EUAA and Bulgaria 2023–2026.

SAR held a meeting with the EUAA's Reception and Vulnerability Sector on 28 March 2024 to develop a strategy for the reception of asylum applicants. The main objective of the strategy is to continue to enhance cooperation, openness and flexibility among various stakeholders. The strategy outlines the need for a system where beneficiaries of international protection have a clear vision of their future and can begin to integrate. The focus is also on the general direction of policies on refugees in EU countries so that refugees have an equal position in the society that receives them.

Allocation of applicants to geographical areas within the territory

In line with Article 30(1) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR), an applicant for international protection cannot exit the dedicated geographical area to which they have been allocated. “Area” in line with the additional provisions of LAR

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(paragraphs 1 and 14) is an administrative area determined by an act of the Council of Ministers upon a proposal from the SAR Chairman, which the foreigner seeking international protection cannot leave and which provides sufficient opportunity for movement to guarantee the exercise of rights under this Act.

The Council of Ministers adopted Decision No 550 of 27.09.2017 which establishes the areas of movement for persons seeking international protection and who are accommodated in a SAR reception facility. For foreigners accommodated in the RRC-Harmanli and TC-Pastrogor, the the designated area of movement is the territory of the Haskovo Disctrict without the border zone. During registration in the reception facility, applicants are informed of their obligation not to leave their designated area of movement without permission. For repeated violations of the obligation not to leave the designated area of movement without permission, applicants are accommodated in a closed centre or premises until the completion of the asylum proceedings. Applicants are informed in a language understood by them about their obligation, and they receive a copy of the instructions and a map of Bulgaria with the designated zones.

The permission to leave the designated area is given by the director of the reception facility upon an applicant's request which must include a valid reason. The permission is granted only for a specific period of time. If the applicant does not return after the permission expires, they may be considered as having absconded and this would count as a violation of their obligations.

Staff and training

The Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that the State Agency for Refugees organises the reception and temporary accommodation of foreigners who have applied for international protection, provides assistance in their adaptation to Bulgarian conditions in cooperation with the Bulgarian Red Cross and other NGOs, and organises Bulgarian language courses, including jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science, pursuant to Article 53(1).

Article 51 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees stipulates that transit and registration and reception centres must be managed by directors. The latter are competent to adopt decisions on rights and obligations of the applicants under Article 29(4) (allocation to a reception centre after medical assessment) and (9) (possibility to stay in a private accommodation), except for a decision on

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placement in closed-type centres (detention centres).

According to Article 25 of the Organisational regulations of the SAR under the Council of Ministers, the directors of reception centres must plan, organise, coordinate and supervise their activities. They decide on access to accommodation and food for applicants for international protection. The directors have the obligation to submit an annual report to the Chairperson of SAR. The duties of the director can be performed, on a case-by-case basis, by a Head of Unit or an employee designated by him/her, when a director is absent.

Article 26(2) of the Organisational regulations of the SAR under the Council of Ministers provides that transit and registration and reception centres, if necessary, must operate under a 24-hour regime according to a schedule approved by the Secretary-General.

The SAR report on the conduct of the procedure for international protection in 2024 and the SAR report on its activities in 2024 provide information on training offered to reception centre staff.

SAR under the Council of Ministers is implementing the project "Operational support by hiring additional staff and providing ongoing support", financed under the AMIF fund, during 2021-2027. The main goals of the project are to provide operational support to the agency in its work with third-country nationals, in accordance with the commitments undertaken by Bulgaria to provide international protection. The activities carried out within the project are aimed at providing additional personnel to work within SAR to strengthen the administrative capacity of the agency, as the additional employees will support the activities of reception, accommodation, registration, medical care, interviewing and social activities in relation to third-country nationals, as well as technical activities directly related to accommodation in the centres.

The SAR report on its activities in 2024 provides information on projects and activities implemented under the framework of the operational plan with the EUAA, which was extended until end of 2026.

Reception phases

The provision of reception conditions is triggered upon making an application for international protection and on the basis of an issued registration card. The SAR Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection

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provides details on the reception phases.

The director or head of a department in the territorial division must take a decision on whether to accommodate or not an applicant for international protection in a SAR reception facility, by taking into account the state of health, the family and material situation of the foreigner, membership of a vulnerable group and the existence of special needs. For unaccompanied minors, the best interests of the child are assessed and their opinion must be taken into account. The best interests of the child are assessed by a social worker/social expert (Article 34 Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection). The accommodation officer has specific tasks related to practical arrangements of the accommodation of applicants (Article 34(5-7) Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection).

When a person has submitted an application for protection to the General Directorate "Border Police" Ministry of the Interior and the General Directorate "National Police" Ministry of the Interior, these authorities must refer the applicant for registration in a territorial division of the State Agency for Refugees. During non-working hours, weekends or holidays, the applicant is temporarily accommodated in an isolation room. The admission of an applicant is carried out based on the Rules for the Conditions of Accommodation and the Internal Order in the Transit and Registration and Reception Centres of the State Agency for Refugees (Article 35 Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection).

Reception is provided until the final decision is received or until the 4-week deadline for a voluntary departure has expired. When the procedure for international protection has been concluded with a final decision, the applicant is informed, in a language that he/she understands, through a notice issued by the accommodation officer that he needs to leave the facility within 14 days (Article 36(1) Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection). If the final decision is under the accelerated procedure or a negative decision under the regular procedure, an officer of the territorial unit must inform the person that they no longer have the right to be accommodated or they will be transferred to the Migration Directorate (Article 36(4) Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection).

Applicants for international protection may opt to reside in private accommodations, under certain conditions. Article 29(9) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that a foreigner can request and receive permission to

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reside in a private accommodation without receiving financial and material assistance from SAR, provided that the person has the means to satisfy basic living needs and the application is under the regular procedure.

The practical steps to get approval to reside in private accommodations is regulated by Articles 37–39 of the Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection. The decision to grant or refuse private accommodation is taken within 3 days after obtaining information from the relevant authority under the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior carries out an inspection of the address and whether the owner of the private accommodation has given permission for the applicant to reside at the property. The decision on private accommodation can be appealed within 7 days from receipt, before the administrative court at the current address from the registration card of the foreign national.

Contingency planning

In accordance with Article 9(3) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard, Bulgaria has developed and adopted a number of contingency plans at its external borders, in accordance with its obligations as an EU Member State. Such plans have been prepared for the Bulgarian-Turkish border, the Bulgarian-Greek border (in the context of a possible reintroduction of border controls), and the border with the Republic of North Macedonia.

In response to the specific risk of a sharp increase in migratory pressure at the southern borders, two specialised contingency plans have been prepared - at the border with Türkiye (adopted in 2018) and the border with Greece (adopted in 2020). The main strategic objective of these plans is to create effective organisation, coordination and interaction between state authorities in order to prevent and control the risks associated with the mass entry of illegal migrants onto the territory.

Among the key elements of the plans are: mechanisms for rapid mobilisation of human and technical resources, building and maintaining additional capacity for accommodation and reception of persons who have crossed the border illegally, creating conditions for accelerated consideration of applications for international protection under the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as implementing procedures for returns to the country of origin, transit country or

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safe third country, under the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria. The plans also provide for measures to ensure security, maintain public order and provide timely protection and support to vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied children.

In accordance with the national contingency plans, SAR has developed its own operational plans for responding to increased migratory pressure on the borders with Türkiye and Greece. These plans aim to ensure an effective organisation for the implementation of the agency's tasks, expand the capacity for reception and accommodation of asylum seekers, as well as to ensure conditions for the timely examination of applications for international protection in an emergency.

In accordance with Article 32 of Directive (EU) 2024/1346 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), Bulgaria has developed a National Contingency Plan in the field of international protection. The aim of the plan is to increase the country's preparedness to respond to a sudden and significant increase in the number of applicants for protection, by ensuring appropriate reception, including effective provision of representatives for unaccompanied minors.

The plans include the main measures and actions in emergency situations, both in the field of migration and in the field of international protection.

Facilities

Overview of different types of reception facilities according to national classification

There are two types of reception facilities, as provided under Article 47(2), Items 1 and 2 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, as ‘territorial divisions of the State Agency for Asylum’:

1. Transit centres - for registration, accommodation, medical examination and conducting proceedings to determine the state competent to examine the application for granting international protection and for proceedings to grant international protection.
2. Registration and reception centres - for registration, accommodation, medical examination, social and medical assistance and conducting proceedings for determining the state competent to examine the

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application for granting international protection and for proceedings for granting international protection to foreigners; for accommodation of foreigners who have submitted an application for asylum.

These centres may be open or closed type. In open-type centres, separate premises may be created for unaccompanied minors and foreign minors seeking international protection. There are also separate parts in closed-type centres, pursuant to Article 47(4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees.

Article 47(3) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that the Council of Ministers upon a proposal of the SAR Chairman opens or closes the transit and registration and reception centres, in coordination with the Minister of Finance, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, the Chairman of the State Agency for National Security and the mayor of the respective municipality.

Reception centres are administered by the State Agency for Refugees and comprise (see also Article 8(2) of the Organisational regulations of the SAR under the Council of Ministers):

- **Transit centre**, which is currently operating also as a registration and reception centre: one located in Pastrogor (south-eastern Bulgaria), the centre is a territorial division of SAR used to accommodate applicants in the Dublin or accelerated procedure. The activities conducted in the transit centre are defined by Article 22 of the Organisational regulations of the SAR under the Council of Ministers.
- **Registration and reception centres (ROC)**: 3 collective accommodation centres in different part of the country where SAR accommodates applicants for international protection, including minors and vulnerable applicants. The centre in Sofia is divided into three separate sites: Ovcha Kupel, Vrazhdebna and Voenna Rampa shelter. The other centres are located in Banya in central Bulgaria and Harmanli, which is the biggest one, in south-eastern Bulgaria. The activities conducted in registration and reception centres are defined by Article 23 of the Organisational regulations of the SAR under the Council of Ministers.

Premises at the border

Name of the reception facility	n/a

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Access description	n/a
Management	n/a
Type of applicants accommodated	n/a
Number of centres	n/a
Capacity	n/a
Location of the centres within the country	n/a

Initial reception centres

Name of the reception facility	n/a
Regime	n/a
Management	n/a
Type of applicants accommodated	n/a
Number of centres	n/a
Capacity	n/a
Location of the centres within the country	n/a

Collective accommodation centres

Name of the reception facility	Transit centre | ТЦ – Пъстрогор Registration and reception centres (ROC) | РПЦ
Regime	Open
Management	State Agency for Refugee (SAR)

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Type of applicants accommodated	Transit centre: applicants in the Dublin or accelerated procedure Registration and reception centres (ROC): all applicants waiting for the final decision, including vulnerable individuals
Number of centres	Transit centre: 1 Registration and reception centres (ROC): 3
Capacity	3225 places in total
Location of the centres within the country	Transit centre: Pastrogor (South-Eastern Bulgaria) – 300 places Registration and reception centres (ROC): • Sofia (Ovcha Kupel – 213 places, Vrazhdebna – 300 places and Voenna Rampa – 650 places shelters and 16 places in premises of a closed type) • Banya (Central Bulgaria) – 70 places, • Harmanli (South-Eastern Bulgaria) – 1676 places

The State Agency for Refugees report on international protection in 2024 mentioned that while in 2023 the average occupancy rate of the centres was 58%, in 2024 the average occupancy rate was 48%.

Individual accommodation centres (such as private houses, flats, hotels)

Name of the reception facility	n/a
Regime	n/a
Management	n/a

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Type of applicants accommodated	n/a
Number of centres	n/a
Capacity	n/a
Location of the centres within the country	n/a

Temporary solutions when housing capacities is temporarily exhausted

Name of the reception facility	n/a
Regime	n/a
Management	n/a
Type of applicants accommodated	n/a
Number of centres	n/a
Capacity	n/a
Location of the centres within the country	n/a

Article 23a of the Organisational Regulations of the State Agency for Refugees at the Council of Ministers provides for the possibility to establish temporary accommodation facilities for foreigners applying for international protection at the transit and registration and reception centres, when necessary. Such temporary facilities can be opened or closed by decision of the Council of Ministers, upon proposal from the Chairperson of SAR. The Chairperson of SAR organises the activities and arranges for accommodation in temporary facilities.

Reception facilities for applicants with special needs

Unaccompanied children can be accommodated with relatives or close acquaintances, foster families, specialised institutions (e.g. child shelters of

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residential type, specialised orphanages) or other facilities with conditions for the needs of unaccompanied children (Article 29(10) Law on asylum and refugees).

There are two secure areas for unaccompanied minors at the Sofia Registration and Reception Centre (Voenna Rampa and Ovcha Kupel shelters) operated by the IOM with a combined capacity of 238 beds. The safe zone has 24/7 video surveillance. The team working in this area consists of a coordinator; social workers who work on the basis of a schedule, including night shifts; interpreters; a psychologist and a lawyer providing on-site services.

A third secure area for unaccompanied minors was opened in May 2024 in the Harmanli registration and reception center by SAR. The safe zone has a capacity of 98 places with the possibility of increasing capacity in the event of a crisis. It was built through the joint efforts of SAR under Council of Ministers, UNICEF Bulgaria, the IOM in Bulgaria and with the financial support of the Swiss State Department for Migration (SEM). SAR informed that as of 16 May 2024, 58 unaccompanied children who have been separated from their families are accommodated there. The area has separate rooms for girls and children with disabilities.

Accompanied minors: Accommodation in mainstream reception centres, same as other applicants for international protection. Members of the same family are accommodated together.

Elderly: Accommodation in mainstream reception centres, same as other applicants for international protection. Dependant elderly adults are however not separated from family members.

Medical and psychological needs: Accommodation in mainstream reception centres, same as other applicants for international protection. Applicants with serious illnesses are however accommodated in isolation, if necessary. For people with mental disorders, private housing is also provided, if necessary.

Victims of human trafficking: Separate facilities tailored to their needs exist (crisis centre).

Gender-related needs: Female and male applicants are accommodated separately unless with family members' consent.

LGBTIQ: Accommodation in mainstream reception centres, same as other applicants for international protection.

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Material reception conditions provided in kind and cash

Definition of material reception conditions

Material reception conditions are provided under Chapter 4, Section II of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, Articles 29–30a. Material reception conditions comprise: accommodation, access to healthcare, social assistance, psychological assistance and access to employment and education.

Material reception conditions provided in kind

Type and purpose	Meals, clothing, transportation, welcome package (worth 6 BGN = 3 EUR) containing bedding and personal hygienic supplies. The content of the packages takes into account the specific needs of the asylum seekers (e.g. shaving tools for men, diapers for babies).
Duration and recurrence	Meals are provided in kind in all reception centres (3 per day, packaged food), and unaccompanied minors are served with 3 hot meals per day. The duration of material reception conditions is for as long as an applicant is accommodated in a reception centre.

Financial allowances and vouchers

Type and purpose	With an order of the Chairperson of SAR, the monthly allowance has been determined at 30 BGN. The allowance is proportionally adapted depending on the actual days the applicant lives in the reception facility.
Duration and recurrence	The allowance is proportionally adapted depending on the actual days the applicant lives in the reception facility.
Calculation and amount	The amount of the monthly allowance is 30 BGN.

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Applicants granted allowance	All applicants receive the allowance excluding those who submitted subsequent applications, those for whom a Dublin procedure is ongoing and those residing outside of the reception system.
Modalities of provision	The allowance is received in cash through the director of the reception facility.

Material reception conditions for vulnerable persons

Unaccompanied minors: They have the right to the same care as Bulgarian children (full healthcare through the national healthcare system). They are also referred to a paediatrician. Applicants with special reception needs are provided additional healthcare, depending on the results of the initial medical examination. Psycho- and psychosocial support is provided by psychologists and psychiatrists in reception facilities. There is also support provided by civil society organisations.

Accompanied minors: Same as for unaccompanied minors. In addition, families with babies are provided with special hygienic supplies (e.g. nappies).

Elderly: They have the right to the same care as Bulgarian citizens (full healthcare through the national healthcare system). Applicants with special reception needs are provided additional healthcare, depending on the results of the initial medical examination.

Applicants with medical or psychological needs: They have the right to the same care as Bulgarian citizens (full healthcare through the national healthcare system). Applicants with special reception needs are provided additional healthcare, depending on the results of the initial medical examination. The examination of applicants with serious illnesses is prioritised. Psycho- and psychosocial support is provided to applicants with post-traumatic stress disorder by psychologists and psychiatrists in reception facilities. Specific support is also provided by NGOs to persons who have been subjected to torture, rape, female genital mutilation or other forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.

Victims of trafficking in human beings: They have the right to the same care as Bulgarian citizens (full healthcare through the national healthcare system). Applicants with special reception needs are provided additional healthcare,

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depending on the results of the initial medical examination. Psycho- and psychosocial support is provided by psychologists and psychiatrists in reception facilities. National referral mechanism-related support is also provided.

Applicants with gender-related needs: They have the right to the same care as Bulgarian citizens (full healthcare through the national healthcare system). Applicants with special reception needs are provided additional healthcare, depending on the results of the initial medical examination. Psycho- and psychosocial support is provided to applicants who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence by psychologists and psychiatrists in reception facilities. There is also a specific support provided by NGOs to persons who have been subjected to rape, female genital mutilation or other forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.

LGBTIQ+ applicants: They have the right to the same care as Bulgarian citizens (full healthcare through the national healthcare system). Applicants with special reception needs are provided additional healthcare, depending on the results of the initial medical examination.

Rights and obligations during reception

Provision of information and counselling

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Modalities of information provision on benefits and obligations related to reception conditions	According to legal provisions, SAR has an obligation to provide information in a language comprehensible to the asylum applicant within 15 days from filing their application (Article 58(6) Law on Asylum and Refugees). The information must cover the terms and procedures and rights and obligations of asylum applicants during procedures, as well as legal and social assistance. Information on reception conditions is provided in writing and orally by a SAR officer when the applicant registers the application and upon arrival at the reception centre by staff (a brochure is available in different languages). In addition, there are information boards/posters displayed in reception facilities. Animated video information is available at reception centres to provide introductory information on the rights and obligations during the determination procedure. The animated videos are available in Arabic, Pashto, Dari and Kurdish Kurmanji. The web platform asylum.bg provides legal and practical information on the determination procedure and is also available in audio format to ensure for illiterate asylum applicants. NGOs who have signed cooperation agreements with the asylum administration offer counselling activities. For example, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee has held specific sessions with newly accommodated applicants with the aim to brief them on the internal rules at the reception centres and their rights and obligations during the procedure, this occasion being also used to carry out an initial identification of their health or social needs and potential vulnerabilities.

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Provision of legal assistance on the reception conditions available	The refusal to provide accommodation can be appealed before the relevant Regional Administrative Court within 7 days from the notification, pursuant to Article Article 84(2) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. Legal aid is available for representation before the court once the appeal is submitted and is the same as for appeals submitted in the regular procedure.
House rules	The rules for the accommodation of asylum seekers were amended in March 2024 in order to further specify their rights and obligations. The changes were due to cases of unprovoked attacks on persons of non-Bulgarian origin and in order to ensure peace of mind for both residents and asylum seekers.

Freedom of movement within the territory

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Assignment of a particular area of residence to applicants	The freedom of movement can be restricted to a particular area or administrative zone within Bulgaria, if such limitations are deemed necessary by the asylum administration and without any legal prerequisites. The permitted zones of free movement should be indicated in each individual asylum identification card. For repeated violations of the obligation to stay within the designated area, the foreigner is accommodated in a closed reception centre until the end of the asylum procedure. The applicant can apply for permission to leave the allocated zone and, if the request is refused, it needs to be motivated. Permission is not required when the applicant must appear before a court, a public body or administration or if emergency healthcare is required. SAR territorial units provide explanations about the restrictions on movement in specific areas, the rules for exiting such an area and consequences for non-compliance with rules. In addition, information boards were placed in all reception centres indicating the respective movement zones applicable for the asylum seekers accommodated therein. 188 – 193 of the Internal rules for conducting the procedure for granting international protection provide the detailed procedure for restricting the freedom of movement while in reception centres.

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Reporting obligations	There is no reporting obligation for applicants accommodated in reception facilities. There are designated employees at the facility who are tasked with making additional checks every day and night whether all accommodated applicants are in the facility. They report to their respective heads of unit/directors about all applicants who have left the facility and have not returned to the reception facility. For applicants living outside of the reception centre, whenever they change address, they must notify the reception centre of the new address as soon as possible.

Employment and vocational training

Time limit to access the labour market	According to Article 29(3) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, applicants may access the labour market 3 months after filing an application if the proceedings are not completed due to reasons beyond their control.
Criteria to access the labour market	Work permits are not required for applicants for international protection. The official note issued SAR under the Council of Ministers clarifying the status of the applicant is sufficient to access the labour market. The employer is required, when hiring an applicant for international protection, to submit a declaration within 7 days of concluding the employment contract to the Labour Office Directorate. A copy of the foreigner's registration card and an official note issued by SAR certifying the right to work are attached to the declaration.
Employment support for applicants	Once issued, the permit allows access to all types of employment and social benefits, including assistance when unemployed. SAR organises dedicated information sessions on the right to access the labour market. SAR social experts may refer asylum seekers to interested employers.

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Adults' access to vocational training	Access to vocational training is provided under the same rules and conditions applicable to Bulgarian nationals. In addition, there are training courses (e.g. hairdressing, beauty, computer) organised by the SAR Integration Centre and accessible to applicants. Information on such activities is provided on the SAR website and in its activity reports here.
Access to tertiary education	Article 26(3-4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that minors and foreigners who applied for international protection must have access to education no later than 3 months from the date of submission of the application. The right to education of persons seeking or granted international protection in state and municipal schools shall be exercised under conditions and in accordance with the procedure determined by the Minister of Education and Science, in coordination with the Chairman of the State Agency for Refugees.

Healthcare

Medical screening	Before being accommodated in a registration and reception centre, an asylum applicant undergoes a health assessment, which according to Article 29(4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees includes general prophylaxis and blood tests. The medical examination, carried out by a doctor, nurse or medical assistant, determines whether an applicant for international protection belongs to a vulnerable group and whether they have special needs.

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Level of healthcare	Asylum applicants are entitled to the same healthcare as nationals, free of charge. Different forms and levels of medical services are provided in all reception centres, but their scope and duration vary depending on the availability of funding for these services, but also of medical service providers in the particular centre or location. All reception centres are equipped with consulting rooms and provide medical services. The medical units in reception centres perform initial medical screening, ongoing medical monitoring, provide first aid; and prepare and keep medical records for each applicant. The reception centres employ their own medical staff. The costs for the provision of emergency health care are ensured by the state The health offices of the territorial divisions of the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers, and provides the following activities: • initial investigations upon registration of persons who have applied for protection; • constant medical supervision; • providing first aid; • control over the hygienic condition of persons; • current control for compliance with hygiene requirements; • preparation and maintenance of medical documentation for each person. Social experts of SAR under the Council of Ministers support access to healthcare for persons seeking international protection by: advising persons on health issues; registering them with a personal physician; accompany persons to hospital facilities; issue official notices to the National Revenue Agency for health insured persons, etc.

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Access to healthcare	Health insurance for applicants is paid by the State Agency for Refugees with funds from the state budget. Every health-insured person has the right to register with a general practitioner (GP) under the terms and following the procedure for Bulgarian nationals.

Education for minors

All unaccompanied minors have the right to attend kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and vocational training (through the state education system). Article 26(3-4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that minors and foreigners who applied for international protection must have access to education no later than 3 months from the date of submission of the application.

Applicants for international protection who are of school age are provided free education in state and municipal schools under the conditions and according to the order concerning Bulgarian citizens. The admission of a minor third-country national seeking international protection in a certain class in a state or municipal school is carried out after an application has been submitted by a parent or the representative for an unaccompanied minor or minor seeking international protection to the head of the relevant regional education administration.

Within 7 working days, the respective head of the relevant regional education department assigns the minor to a specific school according to the place of residence and the wish of the parent/representative. The registration of minors and minors seeking international protection is carried out during the entire school year, but no later than 30 school days before the end of the second school term.

The director of the school, on the proposal of the coordinating team, appoints by order a committee to conduct an interview and direct the child to a certain class of school, within a period of 7 working days.

Students seeking international protection who are admitted to the state or municipal schools have access to additional modules in the Bulgarian language.

At each stage of the determination procedure, employees of SAR work with parents of children accommodated in territorial units to inform them about the educational system in Bulgaria. Newly arrived parents are encouraged to enrol their children in schools and kindergartens. Information material on the right of access the education system and a notification form are available.

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Information on access to education is available here:

- Information Sur Les Conditions d'admission Et d'inscription Aux Écoles Bulgares Pour Les Mineurs Demandeurs d'asile, Qui Sont Logés Dans Les Centres d'hébergement, Gérés Par l'agence Gouvernementale Bulgare Pour Les Réfugiés.
- Information for conditions and regulations accepted and for education.
- Information about the conditions and procedures for registration and education of foreign children and juveniles, international protection seekers, who reside in the regional offices of the National Refugee Agency, affiliated to the Cabinet.

Socio-cultural orientation and language learning

Access to socio-cultural orientation	Applicants are offered activities in 3 main areas: education, art and sport. There are also several voluntary activities, including recreational and educational activities, as well as language courses for asylum-seeking children organised by civil society organisations on an ad hoc basis. Several activities, such as cultural orientation events, participation in national festivals or sports event, are organised by SAR through partnership with local communities or civil society organisations to present Bulgarian culture and traditions to applicants for international protection.
Language classes	Free language courses are organised in reception centres, which are accessible on a voluntary basis. Civil society organisations offer similar activities. Article 53(4-5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that the State Agency for Refugees organises, in cooperation with Red Cross and other civil society organisations, activities for refugees, including on access to social, medical and psychological assistance.

Sufficient means

Arrangement of private accommodation

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According to Article 29(9) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, applicants have the possibility to live outside of the centre. In this case, they do not receive money to cover their stay and they must consent to waive their right to the monthly social allowance. However, access to health care, the labour market and education is not precluded.

Applicants living outside of the centre generally include applicants whose financial condition allows them to reside outside of reception centres and Dublin returnees, who are exempt to receive social benefits, including accommodation, as a measure of sanctions.

Contribution to reception and healthcare costs

Information is not currently available.

Sufficient means test

Information is not currently available.

Sanction regimes, reduction or withdrawal of material reception conditions

Circumstances for reducing or withdrawing material reception conditions

Circumstances under which reception conditions could be reduced or withdrawn with regard to a particular applicant include:

- **Withdrawn**: if the applicant abandons the place of residence determined by the competent authority without informing it or, if requested, without permission (applied in practice due to attempts at secondary movements). It can be reinstated, if the applicant returns and presents plausible arguments and reasons for abandoning the residence. (The SAR applies this ground of withdrawal in practice to persons returned under the Dublin Regulation. In their majority they are refused accommodation in the reception centres, although this approach is usually not applied to families with children, unaccompanied children and other vulnerable applicants, who

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are provided shelter and food.)

- **Withdrawn**: if an applicant does not comply with reporting duties or with requests to provide information or to appear for personal interview concerning the asylum procedure during a reasonable period laid down in national law.
- **Reduced access to health care and labour market**: if applicable, when an applicant has lodged a subsequent application (this occurs frequently).
- **Reduced:** in cases of serious breaches of the rules of the accommodation centres, as well as in cases of seriously violent behaviour (applied in practice in isolated incidents). The applicants are required to pay a fine between BGN 50 to 200 (€25.50-102) plus the value of the destroyed property, if by their actions they damage the property of the SAR (Article 93 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees). Due to breaches of the rules of centre, including violent behaviour, the applicant may be removed from the centre, losing access to material provisions. Serious breaches may include: knowingly damaging property of the agency, actions by which the foreigner endangers the safety of other residents or staff members, systematic violation of obligation to clean rooms, corridors, common areas and external areas surrounding the center.
- **Reduced:** if an applicant is accommodated at their own expenses (access to healthcare, the labour market and education is not reduced).

The grounds laid down in Article 20(2) and (3) of the recast Reception Conditions Directive are not transposed into national legislation.

Possible sanctions and procedure

Reception conditions could be reduced or withdrawn, or a fine can be imposed. Reduction or withdrawal of material conditions comes through a formal decision and is generally linked to the termination of the asylum procedure. In the event of a decision to withdraw or reduce material reception conditions, the applicant can write a request to the head of the accommodation centre, requesting a review of the decision. After examining the statement of the applicant on the reasons for withdrawing the material conditions, a resolution is given to deny or grant the request.

Sanctions (see above) are used when an applicant does not comply with the rules in the reception centre.

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Article 29(4) of LAR provides that the Chairperson of SAR approves the Rules of Procedure (RoP) on the accommodation of asylum seekers in the territorial units of SAR and Article 30(1)(4) of LAR specifies the obligation of the asylum seeker to comply with the rules of transit and reception centres.

In line with the RoP, if an applicant does not comply with the rules in the reception centre, they are warned that they may be transferred to another reception centre, removed from the centre or obliged to find another accommodation. If the applicant cannot find a place, they are accommodated in a closed-type facility. If the non-compliance results in a violation of public order, the applicant may be moved to a closed-type premises, depending on the severity of the violation.

These rules are presented to asylum applicants during their registration through a certified translator or interpreter. A written copy in their mother tongue is provided and they sign that they have received a copy and have agreed to comply. Upon a breach of the Rules of Procedure by an asylum seeker, the employees at the centre write a warning protocol with details of the violation, which is presented to the applicant.

According to Article 51(2) of LAR and Article 59(2) of the Administrative Procedure Code, the directors of transit/reception centres are competent to decide on whether an asylum applicant should be provided accommodation, and the decision should be provided in written form.

Review of the sanction decision

The refusal to provide material conditions can be appealed before the relevant Regional Administrative Court within 7 days from its communication to the respective applicant, as provided under Article 84(2) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. There is an automatic suspensive effect under Article 84(5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. The time limit for deciding on an appeal is 1 month from the initiation of the case, which is within 3 days from the receipt of the appeal, pursuant to Article 85(1) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. The judgment of the administrative court is final and is not subject to a cassation appeal before the Supreme Administrative Court (Article 84 in conjunction with Article 51(2) and (9) Law on Asylum and Refugees). Procedural safeguards, namely legal assistance and interpretation, are the same as for the regular procedure.

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