

THE OVERALL PICTURE

In the summer of 2013, Bulgaria accepted an unprecedented number of Syrian refugees, fleeing from a devastating war that has now lasted for more than four years. From 01/01/13 to 03/01/14 the country received more than 9000 applications for international protection, most of them filed by Syrians¹. The number of incoming Afghani and Iraqi refugees is also steadily increasing. According to

governmental statistics, Bulgaria is receiving more asylum-seeker's applications per year today than the overall amount submitted in the previous ten years². As the poorest country in the EU, Bulgaria is ill-prepared both financially and administratively to accommodate the needs of those seeking asylum. Consequently, all eight state refugee camps are overcrowded, which further exacerbates the already poor living conditions inside the camps.

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NEED ASSESSMENT AND PROJECT GOALS

The goal of this project is to alleviate the dire situation inside Bulgaria's biggest refugee-integration center by fully upgrading its outdoor facilities and providing a welcoming and stimulating environment for its residents. The refugee camp in Ovcha Kupel neighborhood is located on the outskirts of Sofia and accommodates more than 800 displaced people. The vast majority of them are still awaiting documents which would grant them a refugee or humanitarian status and allow them to leave the camp and integrate in the society. With such limited mobility, more than 800 men, women and children inside the camp are unable to obtain a job or receive proper education. While waiting for documents they may never receive, many of them feel isolated and helpless. In this situation, it is particularly important that we keep the children and the adolescents in the center occupied with physical and social

activities. They are some of the most vulnerable members of society and their physical and mental health is of utmost importance. Unfortunately, at this point, the only outdoor space in Ovcha Kupel refugee camp available for sports or any kind of recreational activity are two run down gravel-covered courts. The sole basketball hoop present on the court is visibly worn off and its poles and backboard - rusty. The lack of maintenance has made the space unusable and even dangerous. Upgrading the outdoor sports facilities in the refugee camp will directly benefit all currently hosted and incoming asylum seekers in Ovcha Kupel. Furthermore, it will greatly enhance the work of local organizations, volunteers and community members who have the necessary training but not the space and equipment to organize games and activities for children and youngsters in the camp.

1."Bulgaria as a Country of Asylum - UNHCR Observations on the Current Situation of Asylum in Bulgaria -2014 April", UNHCR Position paper

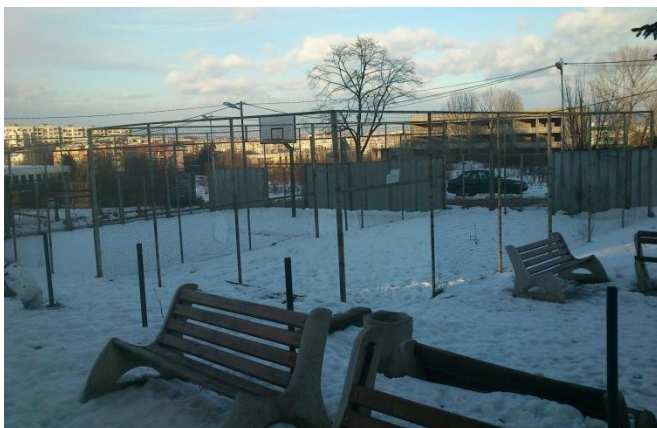
2.Charts 30.11.2014, State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers - <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=21>

PLAN OF ACTION

Having researched the problem in detail, I contacted Bulgaria's most successful initiative addressing the refugee crisis. "The Refugee Project" is a joint effort of CVS-Bulgaria and Caritas Sofia and a 2014 recipient of the Presidential Award for a Volunteer Initiative of the Year. Together we developed a comprehensive plan to transform the outdoor space in the Ovcha Kupel center, while actively engaging members of the local community, volunteers, and refugees themselves into the renovation process. We want to renew the two courts flooring, install two basketball hoops, two mini soccer goals and a portable volleyball net. We contacted several companies and combined their offers in order to complete the maximum number of improvements in the center at the lowest cost possible.

The estimated time for completing the process is one month. In the meantime, we will recruit volunteers from the local community to take part in a series of activities following the renovation. Together with the volunteers and the refugees themselves we will clean and paint the newly upgraded outdoor space. For this purpose, I plan on spending one week of fundraising on campus. I will collect and personally transport all donated art materials. The project will be completed with a weekend of sport games and competitions between the children in the camp. I am confident that our joint efforts can make a positive difference in the lives of all refugees living in Bulgaria's largest reception center.

Date	Action
May 4 - May 10, 2015	Fundraising for art materials on campus
May 11, 2015	Place the order to the selected company and pay the initial deposit
July 18, 2015	Arrive in Sofia, transport art materials to the office of The Refugee Project
July 20, 2015	Expected start of the project
July 20-Aug 9, 2015	Company begins work on installing the new court flooring
Aug 3-Aug 9, 2015	Recruit local volunteers through the network of The Refugee Project
Aug 10-Aug 14, 2015	Begin cleaning; transport purchased and collected art materials, organize daily workshops with volunteers and refugees to refresh the outdoor space
Aug 15-Aug 16, 2015	A weekend of organized sport games with the children from the camp
Aug 17, 2015	Expected end of the project



Recent pictures illustrating the current state of the outdoor space in the Ovcha Kupel refugee camp, Sofia, Bulgaria. Photo Credit: Tonia Patrikiadou, January 2015