

## **Migrant Education in Bulgaria**

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*Authors:*

- *Emiliya Bratanova, integration expert, and*
- *Valeria Ilareva, Ph.D., head lawyer, Foundation for Access to Rights - FAR*  
*For Multi Kulti Collective*

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### **1. Introduction**

Access to education is a fundamental human right and serves as the basis for the realization of other human rights. Relevant skills and knowledge are acquired through quality education in order to enable both migrants and refugees to live productive, self-sufficient lives in safety and dignity.

Specifically for refugees, inclusion in the education system restores a sense of normality and routine to the lives of both refugee children and adults after situations of forced displacement and flight.

Access to educational opportunities helps to promote justice, empowerment and equality for all groups of migrants and their families.

## **2. Beneficiaries of international protection**

### **2a. Background**

Due to the continuing humanitarian crisis in Syria and the geographical location of Bulgaria as an external border of the European Union, the end of 2013 saw a stark increase in the number of asylum seekers in Bulgaria. Unlike the past 20 years when Bulgaria received on average 1000 asylum applications per year, in 2013 a total of 7144 asylum applications were lodged, mainly by Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi nationals. The number of asylum applications until the end of September 2014 reached 6776 and for the same period in 2014, 5015 positive decisions were granted (among them 3320 refugee and 1695 humanitarian statuses)<sup>1</sup>.

As of 16 October 2014, the number of school-age asylum-seeking and refugee children in Bulgaria has increased to 837 (from 616 as of 15 September 2014). Of the 837, 301 (36%) are attending Bulgarian language classes, and 74 are enrolled in local schools (of these 74, 35 were enrolled in 2014, and the rest are continuing their education from previous years)<sup>2</sup>. No data on the number of beneficiaries of international protection registered in higher education institutions is available. Not more than 5 cases of such students are known to the UNHCR.

The reception context is marked by political instability, high unemployment rate and increasing instances of xenophobic manifestations against foreigners, especially persons of darker skin colour. An example of negative public attitude towards refugees took place in a village near one of the temporary accommodation centres for asylum seekers at the opening ceremony of the new school year (15 September). 12 children from Afghanistan and Somalia were enrolled in a local school of 18

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics are compiled and publicly announced by the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers.

<sup>2</sup> The number of refugee children registered at school as of 15/09/2014, the beginning of the school year in Bulgaria, was 97, of whom 82 in Sofia.

students in total. The children were faced with offences, threats and humiliation by the local population, including parents and children enrolled in the same school, who expressed their unequivocal wish that the refugee children are relocated to another school, because they “are contagious”, “our children are far ahead in terms of intelligence and education”, “we do not mind these children, but not in this school together with our children”<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the local municipal council adopted a declaration for the closure of the temporary accommodation centre. As a consequence, the 12 children were relocated to two schools in different towns and the temporary accommodation centre was closed down in the beginning of November, officially for financial reasons.

This incident manifests the risk of hostile reception of refugees not only at large, but also in the education system. However, it should not be taken as representative of the general attitude towards refugees. The refugee influx and the state’s inability to address the emergency situation also created an unprecedented civic energy, resulting in thousands of volunteers working to alleviate the deplorable reception conditions, which characterized the end of 2013.

Another factor which has direct impact on the integration prospects of refugees, including their access to education, is the lack of targeted integration measures. A National Strategy on the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection (2014-2020) was adopted in the beginning of July 2014. However, no Action Plan for its implementation has been approved to date.

The combination of the abovementioned factors could explain to a certain extent the decreased number of refugee children attending schools in Bulgaria and the large number of refugees leaving Bulgaria in search of a brighter future in Western European countries.

## **2b. Legal framework**

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<sup>3</sup> How to Plant Hatred (16/09/2014), Capital newspaper, accessed on 23 November 2014 at [www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/2014/09/16/2381755\\_kak\\_se\\_sadi\\_omraza/](http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2014/09/16/2381755_kak_se_sadi_omraza/) (in Bulgarian).

The procedure on access to municipal and state schools for asylum seeking and refugee children in Bulgaria is regulated by several primary and secondary legislative acts:

- *Law on People's Education* regulates compulsory pre-primary schooling for two years before the beginning of primary education, but not for children under the age of 5 (Art. 20, para. 1)
- *Law on People's Education* further stipulates that schooling is compulsory for all children below 16 years of age and starts at the age of 7 or 6 under certain circumstances (Art. 7, para. 1). Hence enrollment in first grade is not subject to any additional requirements such as Bulgarian language knowledge or an entry test.
- *Law on Asylum and Refugees* (LAR) provides for children who are seeking asylum, to have access to the education system as under the rules and procedures for Bulgarian citizens (Art. 26).
- *Ordinance on "the Admission Procedure for Refugees to State and Municipal Schools"* (Ordinance 3/2000) regulates the access to school for refugee<sup>4</sup> children who have been in the education system of another country, but do not possess a valid certificate for a completed level or degree. According to it, in order to be admitted to school, refugee and asylum seeking children should have successfully completed a Bulgarian language course, approved by the Ministry of Education, and they should pass an exam before a commission at the Regional Inspectorate of Education, determining in which grade they should be enrolled.
- The *Ordinance 2 of 2003 on "the Recognition of Completed School Degrees and Professional Qualification Certificates Issued by Foreign Countries"* regulates the access to school for refugee<sup>5</sup> children in possession of a certificate for completed education degrees. The decision for the recognition of certificates for grades 1-6 is taken by the respective school directors while the decisions for all other grades are taken by the Regional Inspectorate of Education. A legalized translation of the

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<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to § 2 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of Ordinance 3/2000, the category of "refugees" includes both asylum seekers and refugees. However, humanitarian status holders are included implicitly, i.e. in practice the term is not interpreted exclusively.

<sup>5</sup> Ordinance 2/2003 regulates the access to school of all children in possession of educational certificates issued by foreign countries, regardless of their nationality and citizenship.

diploma is required. For grades above 6, a transcript of records for all subjects and the number of hours is required.

- In line with the the transposition of the recast Reception Conditions Directive, in November 2013, a draft Law for the Amendment of the LAR was submitted to Parliament. In February 2014, some amendments on access to school for children of concern were included, according to which “the access to the education system shall not be postponed by more than 3 months from the date of lodging the application for international protection” (art. 26 (3)). The amendments were not voted on a final Plenary session by the previous Parliament. The newly elected Parliament started its activity on 27 October and the process of voting the draft LAR will have to start anew.
- The *Ordinance on the State Requirements in Republic of Bulgaria for Admission of Bulgarian and Foreign Students* provides for equal access to higher education institutions for beneficiaries of international protection (both refugee and humanitarian status holders), namely that: “foreigners can apply for training under the terms and conditions for Bulgarian citizens” (Art. 11, para. 3, it. 1 & 2).

## **2c. Implementation and challenges**

Asylum seeking and refugee children, together with adult beneficiaries of international protection, face various challenges in their access to education. To start with, one should acknowledge the fact that a low number of the target population is enrolled in state and municipal schools. The notably low number of asylum-seeking and refugee children enrolled in state and municipal schools in Bulgaria may be explained by low motivation of parents (mostly among Syrians) to enroll their children in school against the background of their perception of Bulgaria as a transit country, and the lack of an effective refugee integration programme. This, combined with the parents’ understanding of school registration as their long-term commitment to stay in Bulgaria to a large extent defines their unwillingness to benefit from the right to education of their children.

In reality, the number of refugee children attending school is higher, due to the fact that the official statistics do not include the number of refugee children attending private schools, such as the Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi ones. A significant number of the refugee children are enrolled in the Palestinian school for free, in

contrast with the non-refugee students, who pay high tuition fees. The Bulgarian language training in these schools is however not considered a priority.

For those of the refugee parents and children who would like to benefit from their entitlement to access schools, there are various challenges ensuing from inconsistencies, characterizing the legal framework currently in place. For example, the legal provisions specified under points c and d are in contradiction. Whereas Art. 26 of the LAR was amended in 2007, the Ordinance 3/2000 did not see any changes. As a result, the Ordinance is based on a repealed article of the LAR. However, the Ministry of Education is of the opinion that it should still be applied. The interpretation of the Ministry of Education prevails in practice. This means that in order to be registered at school, refugee children could do so only upon a successful completion of a Bulgarian language class, followed by an exam at the Regional Inspectorate of Education.

The first obstacle lies in the limited number of Bulgarian language classes and their lack of sustainability. Pursuant to Ordinance 3/2000, the State Agency for Refugees is supposed to provide licensed Bulgarian language courses. In practice, the last state-provided course took place in June 2014. Since then, UNHCR has been providing informal language courses through Caritas and the Bulgarian Red Cross in all the accommodation centers. It should be noted that the funding for these classes will only continue until the end of 2014. Up to the current moment there have been no identified instances of denied access to school for children of concern to UNHCR on the basis of lacking state-provided and licensed Bulgarian language courses.

The second obstacle is that the knowledge of Bulgarian language acquired during the classes is not sufficient for these children so as to be enrolled in a class corresponding to their age. In addition, there are no standardized language determination tests. The Regional Inspectorate of Education staff can decide on the 'level of difficulty' of the test. As a result, children may be enrolled in a grade which does not correspond to their age, further discouraging them from attending school, and may result in their repeated dropping out.

Refugee children in possession of their educational certificates are in a better position vis-à-vis the possibility to be enrolled in a grade corresponding to their age. Nevertheless, they have to go through a very complicated administrative procedure for legalization of their diplomas, which should include a transcript of records with all

respective grades and information on the number of hours of each subject throughout their previous schooling. Because of the very many procedural requirements, few asylum seeking and refugee children can practically make use of the Ordinance under point e.

Those asylum seeking and refugee children who manage to make it to the school door, face yet further obstacles before they can actually cross the class room threshold. School directors can refuse to admit refugee children under the pretext to have no capacity. The mobility dynamics of the target group represents yet another reason for schools to be reluctant to accept refugee and asylum-seeking children in the schools, as when a student drop out, the school loses its state subsidy.

For the few who get admitted, there are additional challenges for their regular school attendance. Such challenges are the financial difficulties of parents to sustain the schooling of their children, including the inability to cover transportation costs, clothes and educational materials. In addition, as already noted, xenophobic or anti-refugee sentiments may lead to a community outrage against asylum-seeking and refugee children's access to local schools.

As far as access to higher education is concerned, the provision guaranteeing equal access for beneficiaries of international protection as the one for Bulgarian citizens is not applicable in practice. This is the case firstly because it implies not only a near-native mastery of the Bulgarian language, but also a detailed knowledge in a specific subject also in Bulgarian, both of which would require a costly long-term refugee-customized preparation; secondly, if a refugee manages to compete with native speakers and gets admitted after successfully passing a foreign language entry exam, s/he would have to subsequently study in Bulgarian language. No specialized Bulgarian language classes for refugees are provided. The only such courses are meant for foreign students and cost about 3000 EUR for 9 months, an unaffordable sum of money for most of the beneficiaries of international protection. As a result, the few cases of refugees studying at universities take place under the terms and conditions for foreigners, who pay on average three times as much as Bulgarian citizens for their higher education.

## **2d. Good practice and recommendations.**

At present local good practices in the field of work in a multicultural environment could be replicated in or adapted to new target groups, such as refugees and migrants.

Examples of such include:

- Provision of transportation from the accommodation centres to the respective schools where refugee children are enrolled, under a Decision of the Sofia Municipal Council targeting Roma children until their 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Recruitment of cultural mediators, generally native speakers, to facilitate the two-way communication process between the refugee children and the teachers, but also between the parents and the school institutions. A variation of this practice exists for Roma children. In school environments characterized by relatively high numbers of children of Roma origin, the function of a teacher's assistant comes in play. Based on an assessment of its added value, a similar position could be introduced for refugee and migrant children. The practice of cultural mediators has proved successful in various refugee and migrant contexts in Portugal and Poland. In order for it to be introduced in Bulgaria, a source of funding should be secured first.

Positive developments in the area of work in multicultural settings include:

- The completion of the European Refugee Fund-funded "Access" Project, implemented by Caritas in cooperation with the Regional Inspectorate of Education Sofia for the preparation of two curricula for Bulgarian language teaching, one for adult refugees and a second one for refugee children, complemented by a handbook for non-formal education techniques, an analysis of the existing practices for access to the education systems for refugee and migrant children in various European countries and a standardized test for determining the corresponding level of the child.
- Various trainings for teachers of refugee children, provided by NGOs, but also by the Ministry of Education, have taken place in the last two years. The trainings include practical information on the cultural specificities of working with the target group, sensitization about their difficulties and acceptance by other students and methodologies for work in a multicultural setting. The Ministry of Education has

taken the initiative to incorporate the training sessions on work in a multicultural setting in the yearly training agenda for schools across the country.

- Possibility to enroll in universities as “a listener” for free, a status giving the opportunity for equal access and participation in the learning processes, credit acquisition and a final certificate which can be used as the basis for a paid continuation in the same subject. This practice was introduced by New Bulgarian University, a private university, in 2013.

Possibilities for further steps, provided for under the current legislation, but not implemented so far, include:

- Supplementary Bulgarian language classes for children who do not have a sufficient command of Bulgarian language during and at the end of their pre-primary schooling (funded from the school budget).
- Supplementary Bulgarian language classes for children at risk of drop-out (funded from the school budget).
- Full-day schooling for students up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, currently optional and funded from the school budget.
- Possibility for training in the native language of the foreign students, contingent upon the number of the foreign students requesting to benefit from the respective provisions stipulated in the Law on People’s Education.
- Treatment of refugee children as children with special needs, defined by their learning difficulties and need for individual work, and the provision of additional extra-curricular activities.
- Introduction of a quota or reduced fees for refugees for admission in higher education institutions, following the example of foreigners of Bulgarian origin under Decree 103/1993 of the Council of Ministers.

### **3. Migrants**

### **3a. Background**

Currently the only published statistics on the number of foreign nationals in the Bulgarian educational system concerns high education students. According to the National Statistical Institute, the number of foreign students during the academic year 2013/2014 is 10, 7 thousand or 4, 1% of all students in Bulgaria. This number includes EU citizens as well. Most foreign students come from Turkey (36%), followed by Greece (22,7%) and Macedonia (4,7%). The foreign PhD students in Bulgaria are 252 persons, which forms 4,2% of all PhD students in Bulgaria.<sup>6</sup>

The main difficulties for migrants in school education in Bulgaria are the fees that must be paid and the restrictions on access to scholarships. In terms of higher education, there are admission hurdles, lack of subsidies from the state budget, lack of student loans and a limit to the number of hours of paid work while in higher education.

### **3b. Legal framework**

Everyone has the right to education and no person shall be denied this right, regardless of nationality and residence status. This is the Constitutional legal framework regarding education of migrants in Bulgaria, found in Article 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention to Human Rights (ECHR). Furthermore, according to Article 53, Paragraph 2 of the Bulgarian Constitution, school education up to 16 years of age is compulsory. Paragraph 3 of Article 53 provides that primary and secondary school education in state and municipal schools is free of charge. Under certain conditions stipulated in law higher education in state universities is also free. The rights and obligations enshrined in Article 53 of the Bulgarian Constitution concern 'everyone' and make no differentiation between Bulgarian citizens and foreign nationals. According to Article 26, Paragraph 2 of the Bulgarian Constitution, foreign nationals residing in the Republic of Bulgaria shall have all rights and obligations under this Constitution, except those rights and obligations for which the Constitution and the laws require Bulgarian citizenship.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: National Statistical Institute, „Образование в Република България през 2013/2014 учебна година“, [http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Education2013\\_LPN9VVX.pdf](http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Education2013_LPN9VVX.pdf)

According to Article 20 of the Law on Public Education (in Bulgarian: *Закон за народната просвета*) pre-school education of children two years before entering the first year of primary education is mandatory, but not earlier than the year in which the child turns 5 years old. Pre-school education of children is carried out in preparatory groups at kindergartens or preparatory classes in schools. Parents and guardians do not pay tuition fees. This normative basis concerns third country nationals as well, because there is no explicit provision to the contrary. Paragraph 5 of Article 20 of the Law on Public Education only specifies that Bulgarian language training according to 'a specialized methodology for acquiring Bulgarian language' is provided to children who are not fluent in Bulgarian. How this provision is implemented is yet unclear as there is no case law on Article 20, Paragraph 5.

### 3c. Implementation and challenges

Article 25, Paragraph 2, Point 6 of the Implementing Regulations of the Law on Public Education (in Bulgarian: *Правилник за прилагане на Закона за народната просвета*) states that state and municipal kindergartens and schools are free to determine how to admit children, as far as it is in accordance with the law. In view of this autonomy, we reviewed the admission procedures in three major Bulgarian cities - Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna. The rules are adopted by the respective municipal councils. The application forms for pre-school education in Varna and Plovdiv allow for the possibility to fill in both personal number of citizen and personal number of foreign national of the child/parents. The application form in Sofia envisages as the only possibility to fill in data of Bulgarian citizens only. There could be also other difficulties in practice such as, for example, the cases when the child has the right to enjoy priority upon submission of the relevant certificate by the so-called Labour Expert Medical Commission (in Bulgarian: *ТЕЛК*) and the child or his/her parents are not health insured under the National Health Insurance Fund.

The answer to the question whether school education for immigrants in Bulgaria is paid or free of charge is found in §4 (2) of the Additional Provisions to the Law on Public Education (in Bulgarian: *Закон за народната просвета*). It stipulates that school education is free for the third country foreign nationals who have a permanent residence permit, as well as pupils up to 16 years of age who are children of long-term residents in Bulgaria. It is noteworthy that, as a rule, permanent and long-term residence in Bulgaria is granted after the immigrants have resided lawfully and

uninterruptedly for five consecutive years in Bulgaria as continuous residence holders. Continuous residence holders, as well as undocumented immigrants, are excluded from the personal scope of free school education in Bulgaria.

A positive development in this regard is found in the case law of Bulgarian courts. In 2014 by Judgment in case No.1158/2013 the Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria repealed as unlawful Order No.РД-09-698/07.05.2009 of the Minister of Education and Science that defined the size of the fees that migrants shall pay to access school education in Bulgaria. The Court noted that:

*"In this case, from the content of the order in question it is established that the only reason why the applicants should pay a fee for the education is the fact that they are foreign nationals. This undoubtedly constitutes discrimination on "national origin" and violates the applicants' rights as enshrined in Art. 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights in relation to Art. 2 of Protocol № 1 of the same Convention."*

The Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria based its judgment on the prohibition of discrimination under Article 14 of the ECHR in relation to the right to education under Article 2 of Protocol No.1 to the ECHR. The Bulgarian Supreme Court also made a reference to the case of *Ponomaryovi v. Bulgaria*, application No.5335/2005, in which the Strasbourg court had already ruled on the violation of rights by Bulgaria.

However there is lack of legal certainty until the provision in the Law on Public Education is in force. Thus, for example, the recent case law of the Administrative Court of Bourgas<sup>7</sup>, acknowledged by the Supreme Administrative Court<sup>8</sup>, is that the invitation by the school director to pay the fee for education is not an administrative act and therefore the appeal against it in court is inadmissible.

This indicates lack of effective remedies against paid access to education until the current provisions of the Law on Public Education are not amended.

Another important issue in relation to access to school education by migrant children who have been to school in another country is recognition of completed stages of school education in that other country. This matter is regulated by *Ordinance № 2 of*

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<sup>7</sup> Ruling № 585 of 04.04.2014 in case № 575/2014, Ruling № 629 of 11.04.2014 in case № 576/2014; Ruling № 680 of 23.04.2014 in case № 573/ 2014; Ruling № 671 of 22.04.2014 in case № 574/2014

<sup>8</sup> Ruling № 8610 of 23.06.2014 in case 7418/2014 of SAC

2003 on recognition of completed stages of school education or degrees of education and professional qualification according to documents issued by schools in other countries<sup>9</sup>. The practical question in this field is whether the child has to sit an equivalency exam. Since 28 June 2014 Article 9 of Ordinance No.2/2003 has been amended to state that persons who have been recognized class from 1st to 6th grade in accordance with documents issued by a school in a foreign country, do not sit equivalency exams (previously only pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> till 3<sup>rd</sup> grade were exempted from the exams).

The right to scholarships at school is elaborated in *Decree № 33 of 15 February 2013 on the conditions to qualify for scholarships by pupils after completion of 8<sup>th</sup> grade education*<sup>10</sup>. According to Article 1, Paragraph 1(2) of the Decree, unless there is an international agreement or an act of the Council of Ministers to the contrary, only permanent residence holders are entitled to apply for scholarship.

In terms of higher education, third country nationals access to it is regulated by the Law on Higher Education (in Bulgarian: *Закон за висшето образование*) and the *Ordinance on state requirements for admission of students in higher education institutions of the Republic of Bulgaria*<sup>11</sup>. According to Article 95, Para.7 and 10 of the Law on Higher Education, unless otherwise stated in international agreements, “foreign students and postgraduates pay fees that in state high schools may not be less than the differentiated rates for maintenance of education”. This provision shall be read in conjunction with the principle of academic autonomy of universities. Under Article 11 (3) of the cited Ordinance, only the following categories of third country nationals may apply for admission to higher education institutions under the procedure and conditions for Bulgarian citizens: permanent residence holders, refugee status holders and persons of Bulgarian origin.

Furthermore, migrant students must have ‘language and specialized preparation’ in accordance with Articles 16 to 20 from the Ordinance, for which they shall present a certificate in order to be admitted to the high school. The training in Bulgarian language is completed by a written and an oral exam before a Commission.

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<sup>9</sup> In Bulgarian: Наредба № 2 от 2003 г. за признаване на завършени етапи на училищното обучение или степени на образование и професионална квалификация по документи, издадени от училища на други държави

<sup>10</sup> In Bulgarian: Постановление № 33 от 15 февруари 2013 г. за условията за получаване на стипендии от учениците след завършено основно образование

<sup>11</sup> In Bulgarian: Наредба за държавните изисквания за приемане на студенти във висшите училища на Република България

There are a number of obstacles that might hinder the integration of migrant students in Bulgaria. For example, unless otherwise stated in international agreements, Article 91, Para. 5 (4) of the Law on Higher Education stipulates that there are no state subsidies for the maintenance of education of foreign students and PhD students. Third country nationals are further not included in the scope of students who can apply for student loans under Article 3 (1) of the Law on Credits for Students and Doctoral Students (in Bulgarian: *Закон за кредитиране на студенти и докторанти*). The financial challenges are further intensified by the restrictions on the right to scholarship. According to Article 1, Para. 1 of the *Decree № 90 of 26 May 2000 on the terms and conditions for the provision of scholarships to students and postgraduates from state universities and scientific organizations*<sup>12</sup>, only permanent residence holders are entitled to apply for scholarship. In addition to that, foreign students are limited with regard to the number of hours that they can work during their studies. According to Article 4, Para.2 of the *Ordinance on the conditions and procedures for granting, refusal and withdrawal of work permits to foreign nationals in the Republic of Bulgaria*<sup>13</sup>, foreign students can work in the Bulgarian labour market without a need to apply for a work permit for the duration of 20 hours per week during the academic year, as well as during the official vacations of the high school.

### **3d. Good practice and recommendations**

A positive development in 2014 has been the annulment by the Supreme Administrative Court of Bulgaria of the 2009 Order of the Minister of Education that defines the size of the fees that migrants shall pay to access school education.

Another positive development has been the amendment that persons who have been recognized class from 1st to 6th grade in accordance with documents issued by a school in a foreign country, do not sit equivalency exams.

There is no discrimination on ground of nationality with regard to access to free textbooks and manuals at school. The issue is regulated by *Decree № 104 of the Council of Ministers dated 10.05.2003 on the adoption of the Ordinance on textbooks*

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<sup>12</sup> In Bulgarian: Постановление № 90 от 26 май 2000г. за условията и реда за предоставяне на стипендии на студентите, докторантите и специализантите от държавните висши училища и научни организации

<sup>13</sup> In Bulgarian: Наредба за условията и реда за издаване, отказ и отнемане на разрешения за работа на чужденци в Република България

*and manuals*<sup>14</sup>. Article 2 provides that all pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> until 4<sup>th</sup> grade shall receive free textbooks and manuals and all pupils from 5<sup>th</sup> till 7<sup>th</sup> grade shall be supplied with free textbooks.

There have been a number of attempts<sup>15</sup> to introduce changes in the law that give equal treatment in access to school education to all children who are third country nationals. So far neither of the draft laws introduced in this regard has managed to complete the parliamentary procedure in order to be adopted. Hopefully this will happen in the current Parliament.

#### **4. Conclusion.**

Although the Bulgarian educational system still presents significant obstacles to the full exercise of the right to education by migrants, there have been significant positive developments. Hopefully the current Parliament will instigate the legislative overhaul that will create genuine guarantees and effective remedies for the respect of the right to education for all. In terms of implementation, local good practice has been emerging and, with sufficient funding, can be replicated across the country.

These changes would ensure equal access to quality education for all groups of migrants and will contribute to their integration prospects, enabling them to become active and equal members of Bulgarian society.

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<sup>14</sup> In Bulgarian: Постановление № 104 на МС от 10.05.2003г. за приемане на Наредба за учебниците и учебните помагала

<sup>15</sup> Draft Law No.202-01-20 introduced on 25.04.2012 by the Council of Ministers; Draft Law No.354-01-16 introduced on 31.05.2013 by a group of Members of Parliament.