

2023

# ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT



Foundation for  
Access to Rights - FAR



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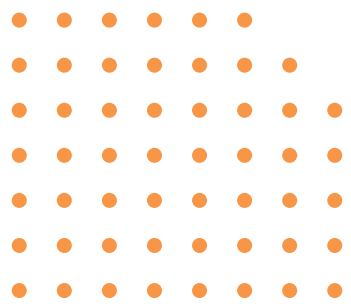
FOUNDATION FOR ACCESS TO RIGHTS - FAR

2023

Bullstat: 176553638

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the team of the Access to Rights Foundation - FAR continued its active work in the field of migration and refugee law, driven by its mission to ensure access to rights.

The core work of the team was to provide free legal aid and legal information face-to-face and through multiple digital channels to reach the widest possible range of beneficiaries and ensure their safety. The training of young professionals and lawyers has once again found a place among FAR's flagship activities and the already established mutual assistance network continues to operate in different regions of Bulgaria.

The FAR team was able to successfully complete old and develop new projects, opening up new opportunities for direct beneficiary outreach, advocacy and support to asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and stateless persons. This has allowed FAR to continue to establish itself as a leading organisation in the field of human rights advocacy and the defence of the rule of law and human rights in Bulgaria.

In 2023, the team of the Foundation for Access to Rights - FAR has significantly expanded its activities to include new areas of work such as employment mediation, which allows it to work even more thoroughly for the successful integration of its beneficiaries into Bulgarian society.

This Activity Report details all the activities and initiatives of the FAR implemented in 2023 and their results.

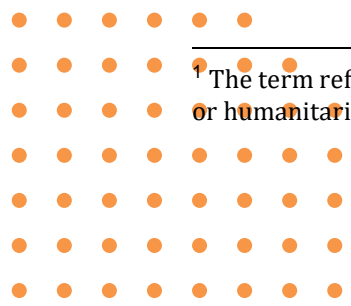
## II. LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND INFORMATION

### 2.1. Legal assistance and information

In pursuit of one of its main objectives - establishing effective mechanisms and safeguards for access to rights in practice and protection against arbitrary deprivation of rights, in 2023 the FAR team continued to provide free **legal assistance and information to refugees<sup>1</sup>, migrants and stateless persons**. This was primarily made possible through the support of

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<sup>1</sup> The term refugee in this report has a broader scope and includes asylum seekers, persons granted refugee or humanitarian status and persons granted temporary protection.



UNHCR, Sigrid Rausing Trust and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) through partnership agreements.

The FAR team, consisting of lawyers, translators, cultural mediators, digital community liaison experts, hotline experts and others, was available daily to provide reliable, up-to-date and useful information and assistance - online and offline. Thus, in 2023, **legal assistance** was provided in individual cases to approximately **6,000 beneficiaries** and **information** was provided to over **2,600 people**, including persons with specific needs whose potential vulnerabilities and cultural specificities were given special attention.

The **hotline**, which provides information in English, Bulgarian, Russian and Ukrainian, handled **2 137 unique calls** in 2023.

In addition, together with UNHCR, FAR produced a report on refugees' access to social assistance and printed **infographics in Bulgarian, Arabic, English and Russian, Ukrainian, Farsi and Pashto languages explaining** the procedure for applying for social assistance.



## 2.2 Strategic cases

In the past year, FAR has also brought a number of **strategic cases** related to:

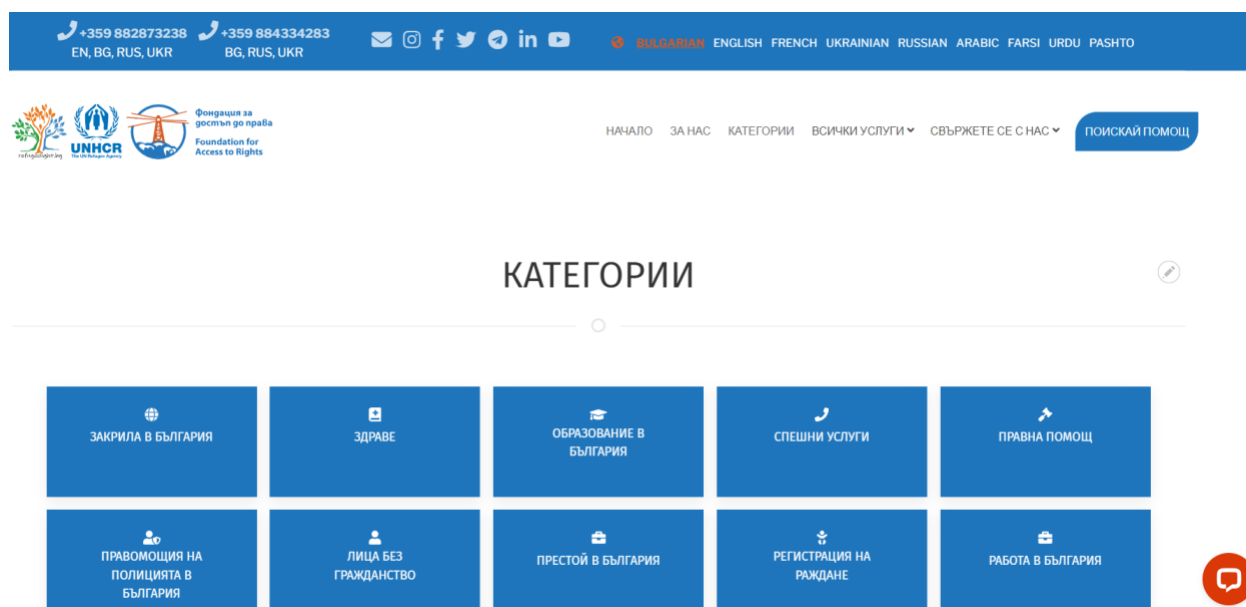
- Rights of stateless **persons**;
- The rights of **Palestinian refugees and the application of Article 1D of the 1951 Convention**. FAR continues to provide legal assistance in the pending case C-563/22 before the European Court of Justice. The case concerns a stateless mother and her 5 year old daughter from the Gaza Strip who have made a subsequent application for international protection containing information about the family's registration as refugees by UNRWA and the deteriorating conditions in Gaza.
- Rights of **persons subject to immigration detention**.



- **The right to family life.** In 2023, FAR assisted a number of families to reunite in Bulgaria. Bulgarian embassies and consulates abroad (in particular in Turkey) are extremely difficult to communicate with and arbitrarily deny access to consular services. Beneficiaries are denied appointments and visas, as well as temporary travel documents, even though they have been approved for family reunification by FAR. FAR attorneys successfully fought some of the visa denials (Cases Nos. 6598/2023 and 9518/2023 before the ACLU).
- **Legal residence of beneficiaries from Ukraine.** Following a negative Decision No 7885/14.07.2023 in Administrative Case No 1992/2023 of the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC), which found that the SAR could issue a general ban on Ukrainian nationals covered by temporary protection from applying for international protection, FAR has submitted a report to the European Commission on a systematic violation of EU law committed by the Bulgarian authorities, which do not correctly apply Directive 2001/55/EC.
- **Qualification for international protection of beneficiaries from Russia.** FAR lawyers in different regions (Dobrich, Varna, Burgas, Plovdiv and Sofia) continued to provide legal assistance to Russian nationals, forming a diverse and polarizing case law. Negative court decisions included reasoning relating to individuals avoiding conscription and how their fear of military service was "hypothetical" due to the lack of a draft from the Russian army, despite the applicant being eligible for conscription (ACSG Case No. 7706/2023; Case No. 1804/2023 before the Administrative Court - Burgas ("ACSG")). There are also positive judgments (Cases No 199/2023 and No 2186/2023 before the ACSG; Case No 2303/2023 before the Administrative Court of Varna).
- In the FAR case on 29.05.2023. The ACLU sent a preliminary reference to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on the fundamental human rights of **migrants who have been residing for decades without documents and without legal possibility to leave** Bulgaria and the legal vacuum in which they find themselves.
- The rights of **women seeking protection in Bulgaria who have been victims of domestic violence and honour crimes.** In a case brought by FAR before the ACG, on which a reference for a preliminary ruling has been made, the [opinion of Advocate General Richard de Latour in case C-621/21](#) was published on 20 April 2023. It states that a woman who is a victim of forced marriage and domestic violence may be granted refugee status on the basis of her membership of a "particular social group". The opinion

is the result of a reference for a preliminary ruling from the Administrative Court of Sofia-City (ACCC) on whether international protection is available and, if so, what type, given the specific nature of the acts of violence to which these women are exposed in their countries of origin.

## 2.3 The platform Migrantlife.bg/Refugeelight.bg



We continue to maintain and update the content of the Migrantlife.bg platform ([www.refugeelight.bg](http://www.refugeelight.bg)), which changed its name to **Refugeelight.bg** in September. The platform is a self-help tool for refugees and migrants with up-to-date and accessible information on various aspects of their lives in Bulgaria. The site offers instructions for dealing with various daily challenges in **9 different languages**, and in 2023 we added French.

In 88 articles, even the most complex judicial and administrative procedures are explained in plain language so that the content is accessible to all users. From 1 January to 31 December 2023, the platform was visited by **86 953 unique users**.



Refugeelight.bg also has an **interactive map** ([www.refugeelight.bg/bg/map](http://www.refugeelight.bg/bg/map)) that provides detailed contact information for **61 service providers** for refugees and migrants - hospitals, lawyers, language centres, vocational training, financial support, night schools, etc.

The platform also provides the possibility to digitally connect with the FAR team through the **"Request Assistance" module**, which triggers legal consultations and virtual appointments with a qualified lawyer and translator, depending on the translation needs. The Request Assistance module is available in 9 languages - Bulgarian, English, Ukrainian, Russian, French, Arabic, Persian, Pashto, Urdu. It is particularly suitable for beneficiaries who cannot access professional legal assistance due to their location, as well as for vulnerable persons such as victims of trafficking, domestic violence, people with disabilities, etc.

In 2023, FAR also introduced a new **chat service (LiveChat)** on the platform through which users can ask their questions in the chat box and receive real-time answers from the organisation's experts.

From autumn 2023, we have also added the **Employment** section of Refugeelight.bg, which allows job-seeking refugees and migrants to contact employers who have vacancies in Bulgaria. As a registered employment intermediary with the Employment Agency, FAR publishes job advertisements and useful information on socio-economic issues on the platform and in the digital channels of the communities, and mediates communication between job seekers and employers to better integrate refugees and migrants in Bulgaria.



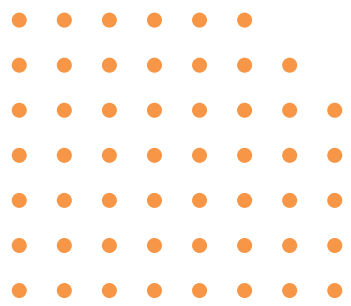
### III. TRAINING

#### The training programme "*Current Issues in Refugee Law*"



On 11 April 2023, FAR launched the training programme "*Current Issues in Refugee Law*", dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Foundation. It was supported by the Sigrid Rausing Trust, who also co-sponsored the publication of an anniversary collection of articles and a related conference in September.

The training lasted 10 weeks with 3 hours per week. During the training course, led by practitioners and prominent specialists in the field of refugee and migration law, the participants had the opportunity to get acquainted in depth with the main issues, as well as to explore current issues in the field of refugee law.







## IV. NEW PROJECTS

### **SUN Project: Ensuring the rights guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights for unaccompanied and separated refugee children (SUN)**

Foundation for Access to Rights - FAR is the lead organisation in the project "Ensuring the rights guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights to unaccompanied and separated refugee children (SUN)" funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, which started on 1 April 2023 and will run for 24 months. Partners in the project are ARSIS, Greece; Tdh, Romania; NIDOS, Netherlands; Sirius Network (an international network based in Belgium); Volontarius, Italy and CCAR, Spain.

The main objective of the project is to improve the effective exercise of the rights set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union by unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children.

The project is aimed at all people working with or caring for unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children, such as: lawyers, guardians, representatives of civil society and human rights institutions and organizations, social workers and other professionals working on the front line with refugee and migrant children, teachers, school and social services directors, representatives of refugee and migrant communities, parents and other family members of refugee children, students. In the framework of the project, professionals working on the frontline and involved in the daily care of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children will gain basic knowledge on the rights of this group of children guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and their practical implementation. Legal professionals will have the opportunity to build on their knowledge with information on bringing cases of strategic importance for the rights of unaccompanied refugee children.

The project partners will:

- carry out a training needs assessment, identifying and analysing good practice;
- take part in a mentoring programme and study visits, thereby building their capacity;
- develop a training curriculum and a manual for training professionals on the rights of unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children as set out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and strategic cases;



- Hold events to present the training and the Handbook to stakeholders at national level;
- hold an international training of trainers in Barcelona with the participation of lecturers from the Hungarian Helsinki Committee;
- Implement national trainings for professionals working with unaccompanied refugee and migrant children (for Bulgaria trainings are planned in Sofia and Pazardzhik).

The final activities of the project will take place in Sofia, Bulgaria in early 2025 and include a workshop with professionals and experts from across the European Union and a final study visit by the project partners.

## Finding Agreement in Return (FAiR)

The FAiR (Finding Agreement in Return) project will address the legitimacy gaps and dilemmas of forced return of migrants, and the alternatives for return to Europe. The aim of FAiR is to support EU policy on the return of migrants to Europe by addressing the lack of legitimacy that impedes return policies and alternatives.

FAiR contributes to rational choice by systematically assessing the norms, frameworks and common meanings of intergovernmental cooperation in the field of return. Together with both EU and non-EU stakeholders, FAiR fights for guarantees in the quantity and quality of research in this field, focusing on 5 non-EU countries (Georgia, Iraq, Niger, Nigeria, Turkey) and 5 EU member states (Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Switzerland).

FAiR contributes with: Econometric models to reduce bias in the calculation of Eurostat data on return of migrants; better estimation of European return policies through the Migration Return Policy Index (MIREX); analysis of the effects of policy-driven and non-policy-driven reasons for forced return; conducting a large-scale experimental study of public support for return policy alternatives in 10 EU member states; clearer guidelines on the protection of human rights in forced return FAiR offers multidisciplinary expertise, bringing together organisations from Europe, Africa and the Middle East, from academia and government, and organisations fighting for the rights of irregular migrants.

The project 101094828 - FAiR is funded by the HORIZON-CL2-2022-TRANSFORMATIONS-01 programme of the European Union. The project coordinator is Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam (The Netherlands). The project partners are Access to Rights Foundation



(Bulgaria), Instytut Nauk Prawnych Polskiej Akademii Nauk (Poland), Migration Policy Group (Belgium), Universitat Fur Weiterbildung Krems (Austria), Universita Degli Studi Di Milano (Italy), Samuel Hall East Africa (Kenya), International Centre For Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Koc University (Turkey) and Platform For International Cooperation On Undocumented Migrants (PICUM).

The project starts on 1 May 2023 and will last 42 months.

Follow the project on social media:

- Website - [fair-return.org/](https://fair-return.org/)
- X (Twitter) - [fair\\_return](https://twitter.com/fair_return)
- LinkedIn - [fair-return](https://www.linkedin.com/company/fair-return)
- YouTube - [HEIrregularMigration](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIrregularMigration)

## V. ONGOING PROJECTS

### **Building an accessible network for legal assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine in Bulgaria and preventing and counteracting human trafficking**

In 2023, the Access to Rights Foundation - FAR continued to implement the project with the support of the **International Rescue Committee**, with which FAR contributes to Bulgaria becoming part of an international [RefugeeInfo network](#).

The project "Bulgaria as part of the Accessible Information Network" builds on the experience of FAR in several areas:

- FAR's lawyers team is expanding its geographic reach to provide on-the-ground information in localities where there is the greatest concentration of people in need.
- By expanding the functionalities of [Migrantlife.bg](#) (now [Refugeelight.bg](#)) and through new communication channels, enabling two-way communication, our team will be able to reach a wider range of people in need online.
- There is also a hotline for this purpose.
- FAR also continued its advocacy work to ensure the best interests of refugees.



## **Additional routes to South East Europe - COMP4SEE**

In 2023, FAR continued active work on the European Union-supported project "Complementary Pathways to Southeast Europe - COMP4SEE", which, in addition to research and advocacy on possible legal entry routes, provided financial support for the legal reunification of nine refugee families in Bulgaria. More about the project can be found on the [FAR website](#).<sup>2</sup>

## **VI. COMPLETED PROJECTS**

### **Building an accessible network for legal assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine in Bulgaria and preventing and counteracting human trafficking**

FAR continued its work on this project, which ended in 2023. Information brochures were produced within its framework (see section "VII.PUBLICATIONS"). The aim of the project is to ensure the provision of accessible legal assistance and to help respond quickly and effectively to the needs of those displaced by the war in Ukraine through FAR's legal team and the training of new lawyers and the establishment of a mutual assistance network working on the basis of common standards.

### **Alternatives to Detention for Children in Europe (CADRE) project**

On 24 January 2023, the closing event of the project took place together with the European Parliament and the European Commission, focusing on current legislative proposals, alternatives to child detention and the way forward.

### **Project ACF/729 "Effective legal aid for refugees and migrants in Bulgaria - continuation"**

At the end of 2023, the implementation of the project "Effective Legal Aid for Refugees and Migrants in Bulgaria - continuation", which was implemented by FAR in partnership with the Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria and Mission Wings Foundation, ended. Alongside the legal aid and advocacy activities, the project also included the "HERE - for safe access to

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.farbg.eu/bg/projects/comp4see>



protection for refugees" campaign. For this purpose, a special VR event was organized in partnership with the experts from LENS2LENS.

## VII. PUBLICATIONS

In 2023, FAR published the following materials on its website, developed by the Foundation's expert team:



[Jubilee Collection: Current Issues in Refugee and Migration Law](#)<sup>3</sup>



[Recommendations for improving the family reunification system in Bulgaria](#)<sup>4</sup>



[Final analysis of legal and administrative practice for the period 2019-2023.](#)<sup>5</sup>



[Migrant Detention Centres and Detention Facilities: a Comparative Analysis of the Legal Framework and Practices in the Republic of Bulgaria](#)<sup>6</sup>

Under the project "Establishment of an Accessible Legal Aid Network for Displaced Persons from Ukraine in Bulgaria and Prevention and Counteraction of Trafficking in Human Beings",

<sup>3</sup> More information at: <https://farbg.eu/index.php/bg/publications/yubileen-sbornik-aktualni-vprosi-na-bezhanskoto-i-migracionnoto-pravo>

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://www.farbg.eu/bg/publications/preporke-za-podobryavane-na-sistemata-za-sbirane-na-semeystva-v-blgariya>

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://farbg.eu/index.php/bg/publications/zaklyuchitelen-analiz-na-pravna-i-administrativna-praktika-za-perioda-2019-2023-g>

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://farbg.eu/index.php/bg/latest/centrove-za-zadrzhane-na-migranti-i-mesta-za-lishavane-ot-svoboda-sravnitelnen-analiz-na>





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FAR has produced an information brochure, which can be found in [Bulgarian](#)<sup>7</sup> and in [Ukrainian](#)<sup>8</sup> on the FAR website.

In 2023, FAR continued the periodic publication of its newsletter:



[BULLETIN NO. 5/2023](#)<sup>9</sup>



[BULLETIN NO. 4/2023](#)<sup>10</sup>



[BULLETIN NO 3/2023](#)<sup>11</sup>



## VIII. VIDEOS

In 2023, within the framework of the project "Building an Accessible Legal Aid Network for Displaced Persons from Ukraine in Bulgaria and Preventing and Counteracting Human Trafficking" (ACF/944), implemented by the Access to Rights Foundation - FAR with

<sup>7</sup> Available at: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H1PeB\\_ZpfSUKBTPBjwW0W2qew\\_spQ1M/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H1PeB_ZpfSUKBTPBjwW0W2qew_spQ1M/view)

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BxKdlEgk7tQeZ-ViOcNTgwPkuHhYTrFF/view>

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <https://farbg.eu/index.php/en/newsletter/far-newsletter-no-52023>

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <https://farbg.eu/index.php/bg/newsletter/byuletin-broy-42023>

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <https://farbg.eu/index.php/en/newsletter/newsletter-issue-32023>



the financial support of the Active Citizens Fund Bulgaria, we prepared a series of short videos on topical issues of refugee law, presented by FAR experts.



***Factors for Successful Integration***<sup>12</sup>, presented by project expert and FAR hotline officer, Dr Olga Kolot.

On the topic of ***Withdrawal of International Protection and Expulsion for National Security Reasons***<sup>13</sup> we spoke with Kaloyan Stoyanov, a lawyer with FAR in Sofia.



We were introduced to the current issues of ***Temporary Protection***<sup>14</sup> by Valeri Pekov, a lawyer of FAR in Sofia.

Lawyer Magdalena Miteva talked about the ***Return and its alternatives***<sup>15</sup>.



<sup>12</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxvwkBPEnek&t=61s>

<sup>13</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHTCqflrtz0>

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9XBSuiymnw>

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khB0lwLTYfE>



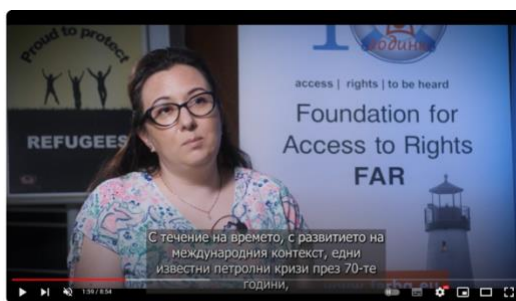
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The main issues related to the *Access to Territory and Access to Procedure*<sup>16</sup> were explained by Valeria Ilareva, FAR Manager.



The last video in the series is on the topic of *Securitisation of EU Policy*, presented by Dr. Ildiko Otova, Programmes and Projects Expert at FAR. The video is available with subtitles in [Bulgarian](#)<sup>17</sup> and [English](#)<sup>18</sup>.



In addition to this series of videos, FAR also produced a video about the Ask for Help digital tool, which we published on social media.



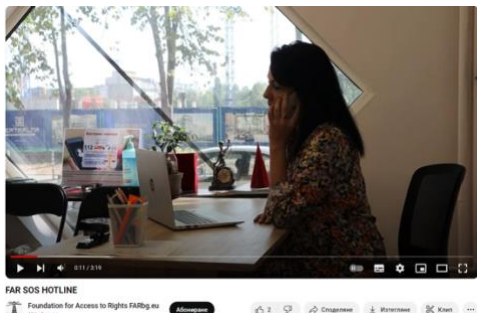
The video is available in [Bulgarian](#)<sup>19</sup>, [English](#)<sup>20</sup>, [Russian](#)<sup>21</sup>, [Ukrainian](#)<sup>22</sup>, [Arabic](#)<sup>23</sup>, [Farsi](#)<sup>24</sup> and [Pashto](#)<sup>25</sup>.



<sup>16</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyG\\_ygtfmuU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyG_ygtfmuU)  
<sup>17</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXPtnAeOsPY>  
<sup>18</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDJCpV\\_KF](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDJCpV_KF)  
<sup>19</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P0px-z4P0I>  
<sup>20</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8FKJh9tTgU>  
<sup>21</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-0Sefx1igE>  
<sup>22</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udtclMb6flo>  
<sup>23</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-HK2oLgLeo>  
<sup>24</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1BfV-ltB1A>  
<sup>25</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wSHpPGI2IU>







We also promoted the ***FAR hotline with a video***<sup>26</sup> on a Global Giving campaign that shows the work of the hotline staff.

In addition, we have published ***recordings of the Current Issues in Refugee Law conference held in Pomorie on 12 -13 September 2023***<sup>27</sup>, which allow anyone interested to read the discussions and panels.

In connection with our job placement activities, ***we answered some of the most frequently asked questions by employers related to the employment of refugees and migrants in Bulgaria***<sup>28</sup> and urged them to apply with a job advert.



We also continued to work on the cases of stateless persons and in 2023 we produced short videos in which stateless persons tell their stories about their life in Bulgaria.

<sup>26</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg6X94v0AM0>

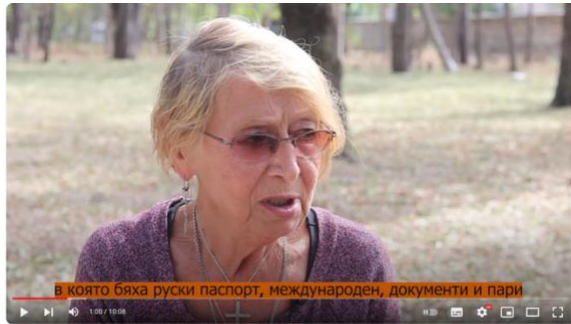
<sup>27</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMI\\_eZ1KJdc&list=PLYp6p2sqqg\\_FbW0wszSn4Cd0KNqrfazNs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMI_eZ1KJdc&list=PLYp6p2sqqg_FbW0wszSn4Cd0KNqrfazNs)

<sup>28</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juUecbd9T6g>





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Life without a nationality: the story of Lydia

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134 subscribers



Life without a nationality: the story of Rade/Живот без гражданство - историята на Раде

Foundation for Access to Rights FARBg.eu  
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### Lydia's Story<sup>29</sup> Rade's Story<sup>30</sup>

Within the COMP4SEE project we participated in videos on:

- *What are additional pathways for legal migration and why do we need them?*<sup>31</sup>, which was attended by Anna Martinić, Project Manager and Adv. Valeria Ilareva, FAR project manager.



Какво представляват допълнителните пътища за легална миграция и защо имаме нужда от тях?

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Какво е съотношението днес между бежанци и нередовни мигранти?

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- *What is the ratio today between refugees and irregular migrants?*<sup>32</sup> - Video with Goranka Lalić Novak, President of the Croatian Legal Centre and Lana Tuccorić, from the HLC - Asylum Improvement Programme and Kalina Slavova, Legal Assistant at FAR

<sup>29</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHkRvSk9R6w>

<sup>30</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8GnBwDUva0&t=2s>

<sup>31</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWE-r8mPAOs>

<sup>32</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZwfy7-aYI>



## IX. 10 YEARS FAR

On 26.07.2023 FAR became 10 years old. To celebrate this milestone, the FAR team organized various initiatives during the year. [Videos](#) were made [with members of the team](#) and we published an anniversary book on topical issues of refugee and migration law (see Publications section). Finally, to celebrate its anniversary together with supporters and partners, we held a conference on 12 and 13 September 2023 in the city of Lviv. The conference was held in Pomorie on "Current Issues in Refugee and Migration Law" on 12 and 12 December 2023.

*Social media channels:*

*Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/farbg.eu>*

*Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/farbg.eu/>*

*LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/farbg>*

*Twitter - [https://twitter.com/far\\_bg](https://twitter.com/far_bg)*

*Telegram - <https://t.me/farbgeu>*

Date. 28.06.2024.

Signature:

/Valeria Ilareva/