

## Extending the legal aid provision system for women, children and Roma

The project activities encompass development of analysis on existing barriers to access justice for vulnerable groups, trainings, and campaigns on gender-based violence and human rights.

Opening conference. (Photo: Ministry of Justice)

### About the project

The project aims to extend the legal aid provision system toward more citizens with vulnerable background. Moreover, it aims to strengthen the role of the state in cases of domestic violence while executing its responsibilities to ensure equal and barrier-free access to justice and legal aid for people whose fundamental human rights have been violated.

The main area of intervention has been to target vulnerable groups living under the poverty line. Special emphasis has been placed on three categories of beneficiaries, namely:

- victims of domestic and gender-based violence;
- children at risk;
- Roma communities, especially in remote and isolated rural areas.

### Project activities

#### Training and awareness raising campaigns on gender-based violence and human rights

The project activities encompass development of analysis of existing barriers to access justice. Furthermore, they involve the creation of mobile units including lawyers and Roma mediators, capacity-building activities for lawyers inscribed into the National Legal Aid register through training and the establishment of a local cooperation mechanism among the municipality, local units of Ministry of Interior (MoI), Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), the courts, the bar and other key units in three pilot counties – Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo and Varna. The synergy of the latter as well as its synchronised work should have the potential for transferability to other municipalities across the country to support vulnerable groups.

*How does this project contribute to combat domestic and gender-based violence?*

The project reflects the priorities of the Memorandum of understanding on the implementation of the NFM 2014-2021 with regards the improvement of the state reaction to:

- protect and support victims of domestic and gender-based violence
- introduction of human rights standards and improvement of the conditions of Roma communities across the country.

It envisages awareness raising campaigns and actions to increase the sensitivity towards the above topics as well as training and preparation of legal professionals.

### Collaborators and process

Many of the activities under the project will be implemented together with its partner – the Norwegian Courts Administration.

Experts from the Ministry of Justice in Bulgaria and Norwegian Courts Administration shall carry out an analysis of the barriers to the access to justice for members of the project target group as well as propose a structure of the mechanism and its line of business including the work load of the experts from the MoI, MLSP, municipalities, the courts, including the work load of the experts from the involved bodies in the three pilot districts. The NLAB team shall, inter alia, conduct meetings with the abovementioned stakeholders in the three pilot districts. The aim of these meetings will be to identify key contacts and members of working groups who will join the coordination mechanism.

It is essential that a systemic approach is in place at the local level in order to ensure substantive improvement in the access to justice, support, counselling and legal representation of the project's target groups. This requires, inter alia, special efforts to be put into cooperation between representatives of civil society organisations/communities and the respective administrative units at local level.

When it comes to results and pitfalls, the project is currently at its initial stage, so no conclusions could be drawn yet as to substantively assess its output.

### SYNERGY Network – Creating a common narrative among the participants

[The Synergy Network](#) is a great means to bring public and civil stakeholders together through a well-developed and adequately funded project network, which effectively contributes to both bi- and multilateral relations, while also helping to achieve the implementation of the international and European human rights standards on protection against domestic and gender-based violence.

The network can be a useful tool for new ideas, awareness raising, mutual learning, advise and support by the other participants in the network. The network can also create a common narrative among the participants concerning the prevention, protection and redress in cases of gender-based and domestic violence and policy development for elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

The Synergy Network is an important asset to rely on, especially in a context where the project is to be implemented without the Istanbul Convention being ratified by the Republic of Bulgaria.

*Reported by: Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Bulgaria (MoJ), Program operator*

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