

25 YEARS



ANNUAL REPORT



Bishop Hristo Proykov

Apostolic Exarch

Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the prophecies of Fatima, saying that: “anyone who thinks that the prophetic message of the Virgin Mary of Fatima is over, has been misled.” The message of Fatima must be understood by all as a strong call to holiness to protect us from the devastation that sin and evil cause for all mankind. Namely, the separation of man from God. The prophecies of Fatima send a message of hope, salvation and peace if we put God at the centre of our lives. Caritas means merciful love - God's love. We love God as we love ourselves. Whatever we do for the oppressed, we do it for God, and thus ourselves. This is why the motto of Caritas Sofia is “Christ's love for everyone”.

Caritas is one such organised forms of charity in the Catholic Church, for whom it is important to not only collect and distribute material support, but above all, with our actions and purposeful efforts, to listen to the voices of the sufferers. In a spirit of solidarity and charity, we are their support, helping them to regain their dignity and to take their lives into their own hands.

In his message on the World Day of the Poor, launched on 19th November 2017, Pope Francis reminded us: “We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our occasional volunteer work, or of impromptu acts of generosity that appease our conscience. However good and useful such acts may be for making us sensitive to people's needs and the injustices that are often their cause, they ought to lead to a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a way of life.”

In 2017, Caritas Sofia continued to build bridges with poor and vulnerable people, so that this coming together of sharing, that the Holy Father talked about, became our work and purpose. For only when faith is expressed in works, we can find God in the suffering, the sick and the outcast. Only then does our outstretched hand become a real support for our brothers and sisters. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the new Board of Directors of Caritas Sofia, who started their mandate in 2017, to all volunteers, to the individual care and services teams in our Exarchate, to the parish priests and to all of you who share Christ's love and your professional care to those in need. Let us thank our partners and donors for helping us to continue and develop our activities in support of the needy. I believe that our joint actions will help overcome the social injustice in our country so that all people can rediscover the message of the Fatima prophecies: hope, salvation and peace.

+ *Kristian Hristov*
Апостолски Екзарх

At the beginning of 2018, Pope Francis presented the book, 'Il vangelo guancia a guancia' which emphasised that "even today, evangelisation takes place through the testimony of closeness and compassion, prompting us to come face to face with those in suffering." By sharing this idea and the conviction that all members of our society have the right to a decent and just life, Caritas Sofia helps those in greatest need, regardless of religion, race, gender or other differences. In 2017, the employees and volunteers of Caritas Sofia met with children, young people and elderly people, and together with professional support, gave their love.

Thanks to the efforts of the workers to carry out the mission of the organisation, in 2017 Caritas Sofia continued to develop 14 long-term programs in partnership with 12 state institutions and 26 Bulgarian and foreign non-governmental organisations. We acknowledge the support of all our friends, partners and donors, because together we can go further and offer even more.

A good example of this was the expansion of a long-standing activity of Caritas Sofia - the support of refugees and migrants. In February 2017, we opened the new building of our Centre for Integration of Refugees and Migrants, 'St. Anna'. We are grateful to CRS and H. Stepic CEE Charity for their support and assistance in developing new activities, team building, and improving the capacity of the centre.

In 2017, a new social enterprise of Caritas Sofia started. This undertaking was prepared with much love and expectation from the previous Board, and we accepted the challenge of implementing it both with uncertainty, as it is new for the organisation, yet also with the belief that the social enterprise is yet another opportunity for us to be useful to society. I am full of gratitude to the Executive Director Tsvetomir Doumanov and the rest of the team for their optimism that overcame the obstacles, and we continue to develop this important activity for Caritas Sofia.

At the end of the year, the organisation's social centre received recognition and support from a state institution. We are grateful to the Kuklen municipal authorities, which commissioned Caritas Sofia to carry out social rehabilitation and integration activities to benefit the people of the entire municipality.

In 2018, Caritas Sofia celebrates its 25th anniversary. This is an occasion to express our gratitude to all who have worked for the organisation's development, through the realisation of the Catholic Church's social impact. We thank our parish priests, the parishioners and collaborators. We also thank all the people who, with hope, trust in our care and make us that much better!



Rositsa Nikolova

Chairperson of the
Board of Directors

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'R. Nikolova'.



Caritas Sofia is a charitable organisation of the Catholic Apostolic Exarchate in Bulgaria, established to do good deeds in its name and create love and respect.

Showing love and kindness to our neighbour leads us to those in need. Leaning on Christian values as our guidance, we, the employees and volunteers of Caritas Sofia, assist the most vulnerable members of our society in finding their way to dignity and justice regardless of their religious beliefs, race, gender and other differences. Caritas Sofia is a voice and example of the Social teaching of the Catholic Church.

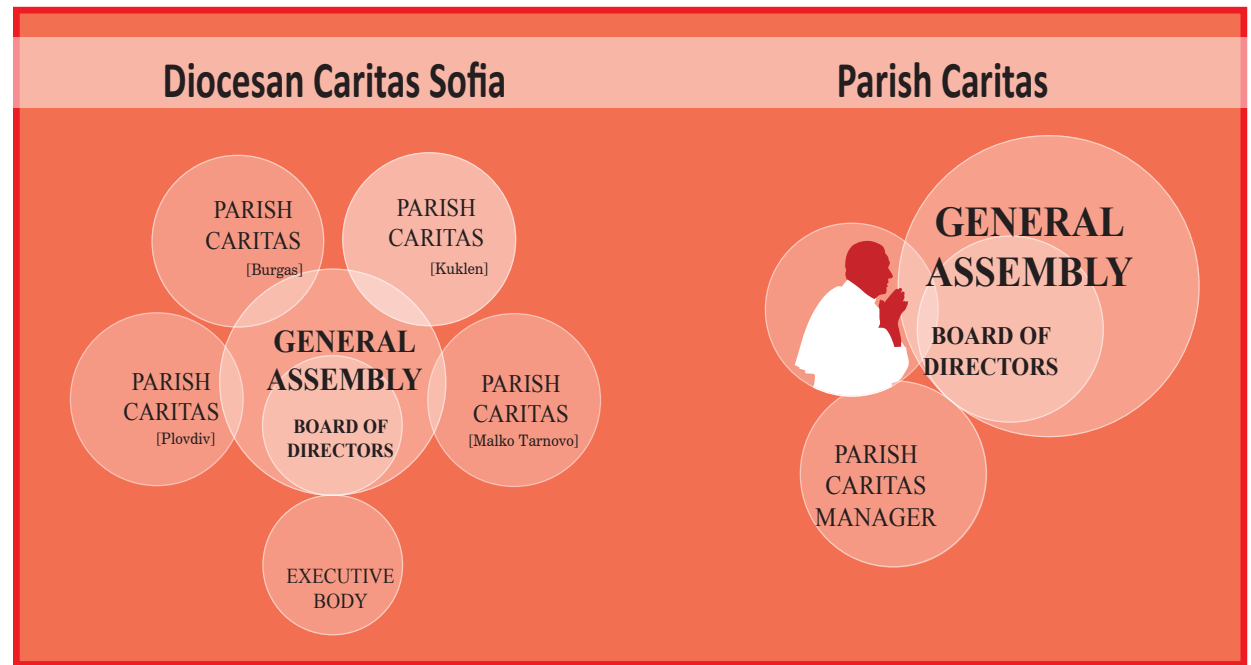
Caritas Sofia was founded on 31st August 1993 and registered as a non-profit charitable organisation at the Sofia Court of Justice on 20th April 1994 (no. 20030416009). The 1990s saw Caritas Sofia exclusively focused on providing urgent humanitarian aid to help people survive the deep economic crisis. Long-term care and assistance provision began in early 2000 as Caritas Sofia registered at the Agency of Social Inclusion and at the State Agency for Child Protection, which enabled the licensed provision of a range of social services.

Every person is created in God's image and in their faces we see God. Inspired by the words of Jesus; "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me", we help the most vulnerable and suffering in the same way that we would care for Him. Having no means of our own and heavily relying on project funding, unfortunately we cannot cater for the needs of individual cases. Even so, elderly people, vulnerable families and children, refugees, addicts of narcotic substances, women in need and homeless people, all form our target group. Additionally, we also support people wanting to volunteer.

The organisation is based in Sofia and assistance is provided in cities and towns where the Catholic Church is present: Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, Malko Turnovo, Kuklen, Pokrovan, Banya, Veselinovo, Harmanli and Lyubimets.

The General Assembly forms the main decision-making function of the organisation and consists of two representatives of our volunteer structures in Plovdiv, Burgas, Kuklen and Malko Turnovo. The General Assembly elects a 3-member Board of Directors, which appoints an Executive Director.

120 employees and over 280 volunteers delivered our activities in 2017. As with our target groups, religious beliefs play no role in the selection of employees or volunteers. It is simply important that our people share Christian values.



Social centres

- A day centre for elderly people in Pokrovan
- A day centre for adults with disabilities in Veselinovo
- A centre for social rehabilitation and integration for young people and adults with disabilities in Sofia
- A centre for social rehabilitation and integration for children and adults at risk of social exclusion in Kuklen
- Centres for vulnerable children and families in Malko Turnovo, Banya, Kuklen and Sofia
- A social centre for disadvantaged women in Sofia
- A centre for integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Sofia
- Centres for educational activities for children and adults at the registration and reception centres for refugees in Sofia, Harmanli and Lyubimets
- A drop-in centre for support of homeless people in Burgas

Mobile assistance

- Home based care to elderly, sick and lonely people in Malko Turnovo, Plovdiv and Sofia
- Street assistance to homeless people in Burgas and Sofia
- Prevention and control of tuberculosis amongst Roma, drug users, youngsters at risk, the homeless and alcohol addicts in Sofia.

25 years

"It was hard for people to believe that a church organisation was helping everyone without an ulterior motive"

Charity is a testimony of faith, and believers accept it as their daily duty. There are a number of examples illustrating this tradition since the creation of the Catholic Apostolic Exarchate in Bulgaria in 1860, such as in schools and boarding schools; public aid associations giving interest-free loans to the needy; orphanages; cultural and educational institutions; hospitals; the social kitchens; home visits and care for sick people. During the Cold War (1945-1989), the Catholic Church in Bulgaria was oppressed and its charity institutions were liquidated. However, the spirit of the church did not give up, and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, charities were restored. In 1993, by the will of the Catholic Apostolic Exarchate and with the active participation of the believers, Caritas Sofia was established, which grew into the largest charitable institution of the Catholic Church from the Eastern rite in Bulgaria.

For a quarter of a century, the association has gone through various stages of development. Its beginning was characterised by the strong enthusiasm of the parishioners and their desire to help their brothers and sisters in trouble. Even then, the leading principle was clear - suffering people are equal, never mind their religion, ethnicity or any kind of affiliation. In search of the right path, Caritas Sofia found support in Caritas Austria, creating a lasting partnership that continues to this day. Mentoring, funding, and the experience of Austrian colleagues were invaluable in the 1990s when the organisation faced a complex environment of deepening poverty escalating in 1997, a hostile public attitude brought about by the lack of religious culture or knowledge and the mass influx of sectarian movements. At that time, civil associations were perceived negatively and as a symbol of financial abuse, and the lack of adequate legislation was a clear sign that the state underestimated their importance and role.

Anesia Vangelova, Director of Caritas Sofia 1993-1999, shared that, "The beginning was filled with enthusiasm and an endeavor to cover all parishes in the country. We did not want to focus on Sofia. We relied only on volunteers as there were only two employees. At that time there were many hungry people, so our main job was to deliver humanitarian aid. We established a social kitchen and organised care for old people in their homes. We supported children by providing textbooks, teaching aids, and paying for extra lessons and summer camps. The biggest challenge was the mistrust from the state and municipal authorities as well as from society as a whole. It was hard for people to believe that a church organisation was helping everyone without an ulterior motive. Over the years, Caritas Sofia has completely refuted these doubts and I am delighted to see that the organisation is one of the largest and most reliable civilian associations that take care of people in need."



At the beginning of the new century, Caritas Sofia began to create models for meeting social needs. Ours is the first mobile team to work with drug addicts in Sofia, and is the only one to date, providing free medical assistance to homeless people living on the streets. We have also succeeded in encouraging children from the Roma community in Banya to attend school, through meals, excursions and scholarships, as well as improving educational resources there by investing in the school's repairs, as well as equipping and enhancing the qualification of the teachers. Centres for disabled people in Sofia and Yambol and the Day Care Centre for the elderly in Pokrovan were intuitively created, supported by external expertise at a time when the institutional care in large, closed and isolated homes still prevailed in the state. Our Social Centre for Disadvantaged Women also celebrates 20 years of positive experience in complex care and social entrepreneurship. Another innovative approach that Caritas Sofia introduced and which unfortunately is not supported by the state is the German model for medical and social care for the elderly in their homes which we have now been implementing for the past 15 years.

The adoption of the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act (2000) and the creation of a regulation by the state to delegate social activities (2005) opened up new opportunities, from which Caritas Sofia benefits and already has three social centres with state and municipal funding. The organisation continues to create new practices in response to the real social needs on our doorstep, thanks to our network across ten areas of Southern Bulgaria. We support vulnerable children and families in Malko Tarnovo, Kuklen, Banya and Sofia. We make efforts to integrate refugees, including through our volunteer programs, which have been repeatedly awarded for their contribution to society.

We acknowledge the Bishops and Priests of the Catholic Apostolic Exarchate for their Spiritual Support, the members of the General Assembly and the Board of Directors for volunteering their wisdom in taking responsibility for basic decisions, our partners and donors for their trust and support, our colleagues from the Caritas Bulgaria network for sharing their experiences, our volunteers for their personal empathy towards the fate of the poor and our employees for their inspired dedication in their everyday work. We thank everyone from the heart!





Caritas Austria has been our leading partner since the establishment of Caritas Sofia in 1993. In 2018 Caritas Graz provided funds for the maintenance of centres for children and families at risk, for the daycare centre for the elderly and for the start of the social enterprise Caristo.



Catholic Relief Services are our leading partner in the field of adaptation and integration of asylum seekers and refugees.



Together with UNICEF we facilitate educational and recreational activities for children and youngsters at the registration reception centres of the State Agency for Refugees.



The H. Stepic CEE Charity supports us in the integration of refugees and children at risk who we care for in Sofia, Kuklen, Banya and Malko Tarnovo.



The Medicor Foundation provides long-term financing of the homecare we deliver to elderly people in Sofia, Plovdiv, Malko Tarnovo and Pokrovan.



The 'Yona' parish in Switzerland provides long-term financing of the 'Rojdestvo Hristovo' Social Centre for Disadvantaged Women in Sofia.



The Communitas Foundation supported the centre for people with disabilities in Sofia and our projects for the homeless in Burgas and Sofia.



Experian Bulgaria provides funding for the 'Refugee Project', through which we give the opportunity to volunteers to organise education, sports and cultural activities and events in the refugee centres.



Funding through the National Home Care Programme, supports the 'Let's Achieve More' capacity-building project for the Caritas network and for the international cooperation on social entrepreneurship.



Each year, Scouts de la Region de Cluses collect and transport food, sanitary materials, clothes and shoes that we give to the Sisters of the Eucharist; they distribute them as humanitarian aid to the neediest people.



The bank ensured food for direct distribution and for cooking for the disadvantaged women visiting our social centre in Sofia and for the daycare centre for the elderly in Pokrovan.



International Women's Club of Sofia
Since 1989

Pro Banya



Santé Mentale et Exclusion Sociale
Mental Health and Social Exclusion



Мрежа Хлебни Къщи

The International Women's Club of Sofia finances our outdoor activities of the centre for disabled people in Sofia.

The 'Pro Banya' association supports us in improving the school facilities and equipment in Banya village.

The association Sentieri di Pace Onlus and Parish San Giorgio provide funding for some of the activities at the Blagoveshtenie (Annunciation) Centre for Children and Youth with disabilities in Sofia.

Our services for vulnerable children were included in the fundraising campaign of Raiffeisen Bank. The employees of the bank collected donations for the children and organised events for them and for their parents.

Dreamix Ltd. co-finance the home care services for elderly people in Sofia.

We took part in an international conference on issues of socially excluded marginalised groups organised by 'Mental Health and Social Exclusion'.

We take part in monthly bread making therapy for disabled people who visit our Blagoveshtenie(Annunciation) centre.



The Tundzha Municipality provides state funding for the St. Francis Centre for People with Disabilities in Veselinovo.



The Municipality of Sofia provides state funding for the Blagoveshtenie (Annunciation) Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities.



The municipality of Kuklen provides funding for our centre for social rehabilitation and integration of people at risk.



The Municipality of Burgas provides 10% of our budget for mobile and drop-in care for homeless people in Burgas. We partner in accommodation of the homeless.



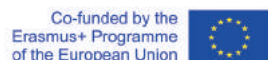
The Municipality of Malko Tarnovo provides the premises for the Centre for Community Support for Children and Families at Risk in Malko Tarnovo and participates in the maintenance of the Centre by covering the costs of heating, lighting, water and partial repair expenses.



The Municipality of Ivailovgrad provides free rental of premises for our daycare centre for elderly people in Pokrovan.



In partnership with the Municipality of Nova Zagora we deliver hot meals to students of socially disadvantaged families in Banya.



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Our partnership with the Ministry of Health on the national program for improvement of control and prevention of tuberculosis enabled us to support vulnerable groups in Sofia.



The State Agency for Refugees provides access to our staff and volunteers to the reception centres for asylum seekers to organise educational activities.



Together with the 'Indi Roma' Foundation we organise additional education activities for children of ethnic minorities in Kuklen.



The 'Stoyanka Sokolova 1999' Cultural Institute provides us premises for our 'Ready for School' centre where we care for Roma children in Sofia.



At our Blagoveshtenie (Annunciation) centre we provide specialised training for students from the National Art Academy. Young people from our centre participate free of charge in the 'Summer Art Academy for Children and Students'.



The donation platform TimeHeroes is our partner in raising donations for helping homeless people in Sofia. We also find much needed volunteers through this platform.



The Foundation donates food for socially disadvantaged and homeless people in Sofia.



Our partners from the Reto Hope Foundation (an organisation that helps drug addicts and alcoholics) always respond to our need for help for heavier physical needs such as carrying loads, pellets, furniture and more. In return we donate clothes, shoes, toys and products to them.



A contract was signed between Sofia University and Caritas Sofia to provide a training base for students in the Social Work field.



We gained a new partner this year - the Grand Hotel Sofia. Since the beginning of October, our souvenirs produced by disadvantaged women have been sold at the hotel.



We participated in bazaars organised by the Hilton Hotel: Martenitsa (traditional Bulgarian spring holiday), Easter, Halloween and Christmas bazaars. We also took part in a special event at the Hilton Hotel, organised by the Association of Parents of Children with Down's Syndrome. We taught the children to make souvenirs from felt.



For three consecutive years, Gaitani organised the 'Different but Together' concert to celebrate the International Day of People with Disabilities, at which the users of our 'St. Francis' centre actively participated.



The Ministry of Interior provides access, premises and assistance for carrying out educational activities in the Special Home for temporary accommodation of foreigners in Busmantsi.



Together with the Children for the World Foundation, we work with mothers and children from the refugee community. In our integration centre 'St. Anna', we held early childhood sessions.



Together with the Multi Kulti Collective we organised a Solidarity Festival. The aim of the festival is to direct people's attention to solidarity between people, cultures and generations.



BULTEX 99 LTD donated blouses, t-shirts and slippers to homeless and socially vulnerable people in Burgas.



We collaborate with the Municipality of Kameno in the preparation of documents for accommodation in houses for homeless people with physical disabilities.



Our collaboration with the Municipality of Sredets is in the preparation of documents for accommodation in houses for homeless people with physical disabilities.



Partnership with CVS Bulgaria for the implementation of the Refugee Project.



On 28th February 2017, we held the official opening of the new Centre for Integration for Refugees and Migrants, 'St. Anna'.



For the third year running, the charity fun run 'Baba Marta in a hurry' was held at the Borisova Garden Park in Sofia.



Introductory training for new employees of Caritas Sofia took place, introducing the basic principles of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church.



Caritas Sofia's Mentoring Program for refugees was one of our most successful and innovative projects.



This year, Caritas Sofia waved goodbye to the old, and welcomed in the new Board of Directors.



A large part of the Caritas Sofia workforce gathered for a 3-day camping trip at Batak Dam to reinforce our team spirit.



In March, the 'We Play and Learn' project expanded, with the support of UNICEF, to working in the reception centre for asylum seekers in Harmanli, which is home to more than 700 children.



In May, with the Multi Kulti Collective and with support of the Sofia Municipality we organised the Solidarity Festival.



This year, Caritas Sofia organised a one-week summer camp for children at risk from our supports.



We joined the 'Share the Journey' campaign, unifying with people fleeing their homes in search for asylum.



On 13th November 2017, we celebrated the Day of Caritas, together with the whole team.



In Caritas Sofia's day centre in the village of Pokrovan, employees gathered together for spiritual team building exercises led by Michał Szlachciak – spiritual leader for Caritas Sofia



If Caritas Sofia was a human body, then our volunteers would be the blood running through its veins. We are proud that we at Caritas Sofia have enabled hundreds of volunteers to fulfill their desire to help those in need in Bulgaria and we are equally grateful for all the many hours that they contribute each day and week into our services and projects.

Caritas Sofia supports many vulnerable and needy children, adults and elderly people each week, but what is often overlooked, is how we also support people in our community who have the desire to help but do not know how or where. When a person gets the sense that they want to give something back to society and that they have something to share, Caritas Sofia endeavors to be able to reach out to them and match them with the ideal volunteering opportunity. Such volunteers really benefit and are able to gain valuable experience, feel an increased sense of worth and emotional wellbeing from the connections they make with the beneficiaries and the knowledge that they have contributed to improving someone's life. This reward is indescribable, personal and even addictive! Volunteers have come from as far as Japan and have ranged from school-age to 77! If you are reading this and are wondering how you too can contribute, get in touch!

As part of the Caritas Sofia mission, volunteers in 2017 contributed to a range of successful and completed 'missions' in our community: Volunteers have created art classes for refugee women in Sofia, led Zumba classes for people with disabilities in Veselinovo, taught English to Roma children, sold crafts at stalls to raise funds, played cricket with asylum seekers in refugee camps, rescued the elderly in the times of desperation and much more! In fact, 76 refugees were partnered with a Bulgarian mentor to support them and guide them with their integrated life in their new country. Some of these mentors in particular developed really positive relationship with their mentees and they socialised together at the theatre, shopping and with art activities. Some refugees were welcomed into the homes of local Bulgarian families, even at New Year and have really become a genuine part of the Sofia community.

Furthermore, in partnership with CVS Bulgaria, 130 volunteers from the 'Refugee Project' impacted many lives in the reception centres. More children than ever were enrolled in Bulgarian schools which has had a huge impact on the integration of all the family into the local community. Our volunteers played a crucial role in supporting the children's 'homework club' and in this way, children had a better chance at succeeding in the school. This also gave them increased structure and routine in their lives in the centres which can often be very chaotic and undisciplined. We believe this will continue to inspire Bulgarian volunteers in particular to get involved in 2018. The impact is so clear, for example when you see a child's grades improve in their school after having taught them how to write in Bulgarian. And this was just one part of the wider impact the Refugee Project volunteers had this year.





Three volunteers in 2017 also became full-time staff members! The UNICEF Bulgaria-supported 'We Play and Learn' project employed three previous volunteers from the Refugee Project to become full-time Facilitators of educational and recreational activities in the reception centres for asylum seekers in Sofia. The unique set of skills that the volunteers learned, including the valuable experience of going into the refugee centres, often a tough working environment, and delivering meaningful sessions to a challenging group of students, prepared these individuals and inspired them to want to commit themselves full-time. Often, it can be a challenge to recruit for such a unique and undesirable role and the quality of our staff is of utmost importance. Therefore, it was a blessing that the excellent volunteer program had produced such a high quality array of applicants, who were already passionate about our mission here in Bulgaria.

In 2017, we again welcomed two volunteers from the European Voluntary Service program as part of Erasmus+. Lucia joined us from Italy and Andrea from Slovakia. Together they worked on a range of different projects across Caritas Sofia's services and centres. They told us: "I chose to volunteer in Bulgaria because I was curious about the refugee situation there and other ethnic groups in the community...Before, I had a huge prejudice, like a wall in my mind against the Roma community. In Italy the stereotypes this community faces were similar but there was no opportunity for me to access the real situation. I wanted to challenge myself and felt that to still hold such prejudices, especially as a social worker, was not acceptable! Now, having spent time in Caritas Sofia's project with Roma children, my attitude has completely changed. Now I really appreciate the contact we have shared and I want to learn even more about their culture."



These heroes also told us how they designed a new project for asylum seekers living in a closed camp, the 'Human Centre Design' project, as well as having redesigned the art class for women which they hope will be their legacy after they leave Bulgaria. "The combination of skills has made us a great team... I feel privileged to have been able to access the voluntary program and to have had the opportunity to apply my skills and to make a real impact on different communities here." So, why volunteer? "Because you will become rich! Not with money, but with relationships, skills, experiences...", they shared. They concluded by saying that, "volunteering brings together generations, people aged 18 to 60 can volunteer side-by-side". This really enriched their experience and they feel privileged that they have been able to give something back. The Caritas Sofia team is so honoured to have these individuals serve alongside us and we look forward to welcoming more EVS volunteers in 2018 to build upon their great work.

You are never too old to volunteer! Meet Ivanka, or Auntie Vania as she is called by the Caritas family. Ivanka has been a volunteer for more than 20 years and at 77 years old is possibly our oldest volunteer! Every day of the week, Ivanka visits elderly, sick and struggling members of the community in Plovdiv. First inspired by a church in France who were helping bed-ridden, elderly people, Ivanka got her local church involved upon return and the parishioners agreed to do the same and to start regularly volunteering their time to the sick and elderly in their community. Ivanka looks after ten individuals, and having been trained as a medical nurse before retiring, assists with a range of different needs: accompanying them to doctor's appointments, personal care, bringing them food and being someone to talk to as many of the beneficiaries are very lonely after their children moved overseas. Motivated by Christ's teachings to hold out one's hand to the needy, Ivanka sees how those she visits are so grateful for the love she shares and for not feeling like they have been forgotten. She knows that when she is in need, someone from the Caritas family around her will be there to extend their hand too. Ivanka hopes that more younger people will continue to volunteer their time and energy to those in need. After all, the word 'volunteer' in Bulgarian translates as 'goodwill'. Indeed, "no one tells you to do it, but you give freely from your own heart", she shared. Ivanka, and the other volunteers just like her are so important to the Caritas Sofia family and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their love.





151 beneficiaries in Sofia, Plovdiv,
M.Tarnovo and Pokrovan

42 bedridden people

18 963 home visits

40 860 medical manipulations

42 069 social care

46 025 personal (hygiene) care

How do elderly people who are unable to care for themselves and cannot rely on their relatives live? – Poorly and subjected to genocide and humiliation in the ailment of their life. Why? There is no state care system for these people. There is no political will to be humane with the older members of our society, to ensure they are not abandoned as though they were animals. There are only a few state institutions and expensive private homes for the elderly, as well as expensive home care business agencies. In the last few years, the state has announced an Independent Living Program for home care. However, only municipalities can apply for it and they employ unskilled social assistants - in most cases they are unemployed people without the necessary knowledge, experience and motivation. There is no information about the exact number of elderly people in this helpless situation. According to data from the social ministry, in March 2018 in Bulgaria, 1.2 million (out of 2.2 million) pensioners live below the poverty line, i.e. they have a monthly income below 160 EUR. They can only count on the help from their children. However, there are 400,000 working poor people (out of 3 million employed) in the country, with a household income of below 160 EUR.



Poverty forces elderly people to be deprived of food, heating, medicine, and even medical treatment, not to mention other kinds of costs for a decent life. The deterioration of their health status as a result of the advanced age puts them in a difficult situation with their relatives who want to help but have no financial opportunity. General medical care may only be used if they are ensured with transportation to their medical doctor and upon payment of a fee. Some do not have any close relatives or even neighbours. Hence their material deprivation also leads to loneliness.

Our mobile teams of nurses and social assistants in Sofia, Plovdiv and Malko Tarnovo help as much as they can with what they have. They treat wounds after surgery, treat bed sores, provide injections, provide support and personal, hygiene care and care for the home, help with movement, nutrition, shopping, walks and mediate with different institutions for them.

Our day care centre in Pokrovan gathers elderly people from the village for meetings and lunch, and for the immobile individuals, our social assistants bring hot meals to their homes and help in the household. Above all, however, our staff listen to people, give them the opportunity to share joy and grief. After all, caring for the soul is what makes Caritas different.



Emilia (aged 67) is a professor of political economics. She has been using the 'Home Care' services in Sofia for five years now. In 1995, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer and underwent radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Due to imperfections of the apparatus, it caused softening and crushing of vertebrae on the spine, leading to paralysis of the lower limbs and complete immobilisation. Fragile bones caused other fractures to follow, leading to a complete collapse of her immune system and weakening of her body. Before appealing to us, Emilia sought help from a number of private companies, but she was left disappointed with their poor service (delays, theft and disrespect) that was totally inconsistent with the high cost incurred. In the early years, we bandaged the wounds on her legs every day as they gradually healed, and now our nurses visit her only when the wounds reoccur. Emilia lives with her daughter who is raising her 5-year-old girl by herself and is away from home all day. Her son lives in Sofia, but is always busy working and taking care of his family. Our social assistant, Alexandrina, visits her every morning. She takes her from the bed to the wheelchair. She prepares her meals for the day. She takes care of her hygiene, changing a urinal bag and bathing her, washes and changes the sheets, and twice a week she takes her for a walk, shopping or to the hairdresser. When Emilia is alone at home, she can move herself from the wheelchair to the bed, but not back again. Two years ago, Emilia spent a couple of months in a hospice because of broken fractures, but she did not want to stay there permanently because she was afraid to follow the fate of her husband who died in a hospice after being there for two weeks, four years ago.





- 3 072** people supported by the Migration and Integration Unit
- 218** volunteers participated in our programs
- 72** mentoring pairs
- 436** people visited the information office in Harmanli
- 1 824** people participated in recreational and educational activities in Sofia and Harmanli
- 75** excursions
- 2** labour exchanges with 6 employers and 24 people employed
- 95** people found paid employment
- 207** people successfully completed a Bulgarian language course
- 2 518** social mediation sessions
- 242** people benefited from emergency and long-term accommodation
- 52** people received psycho-social support



All too often refugees and asylum seekers are looked down upon. They are often considered to be a drain on the social system, with little ability to contribute to society. We at Caritas Sofia believe that they have the potential and the opportunity for successful integration. Children show a great desire and diligence in studying the Bulgarian language, and adults often have extensive experience in different sectors, and despite their difficulties they show great initiative. That is why our approach is special, tailored to their specific needs and existing coping mechanisms.

We work in the registration and reception centres; the temporary, closed accommodation centres; and at our integration centre 'St. Anna'. We offer specialised assistance to people with specific needs and we have an integrated approach to each case.



In the centres, our dedicated facilitators and volunteers use modern methods to educate people in an informal setting. The recreational activities and various classes allow the children to develop different skills and abilities, as well as our excursions for both young and old where our beneficiaries discover the beauty, culture and history of Bulgaria. Regular training sessions for our facilitators allow them to get up-to-date knowledge from experts across various fields, such as early childhood development and protection, and the supportive environment allows them to implement what they have learned in practice.

At our integration centre, 'St. Anna', we welcome people with respect and understanding. Here, our trained social mediators carefully listen and direct them to other services whether provided by Caritas Sofia or other organisations. We provide the most vulnerable with money and shelter, and give jobseekers individual support in finding the right job. Our Bulgarian courses are appropriate for both beginners and those with some knowledge, and our friendly teachers are always ready to help overcome any challenge.



We are proud that Bulgaria's first mentoring program for Bulgarians and refugees is ours. Through it, as well as the many events we organise, we lay the foundations for lasting friendships between our beneficiaries and their Bulgarian hosts.



Caritas Sofia is the only organisation providing educational and recreational activities in the closed centre, Busmantsi. Our team on site may not be numerous but they work with great dedication and aspiration.

Keihan is a refugee from Iran. However, the word 'refugee' certainly does not define him. In Iran, Keihan was a well-known political reporter. In 2008, he was forced to leave the country, fearing his freedom and safety. He then lived and worked in Iraq, where he continued to write on political subjects. After he was threatened for his life, he fled for Europe.

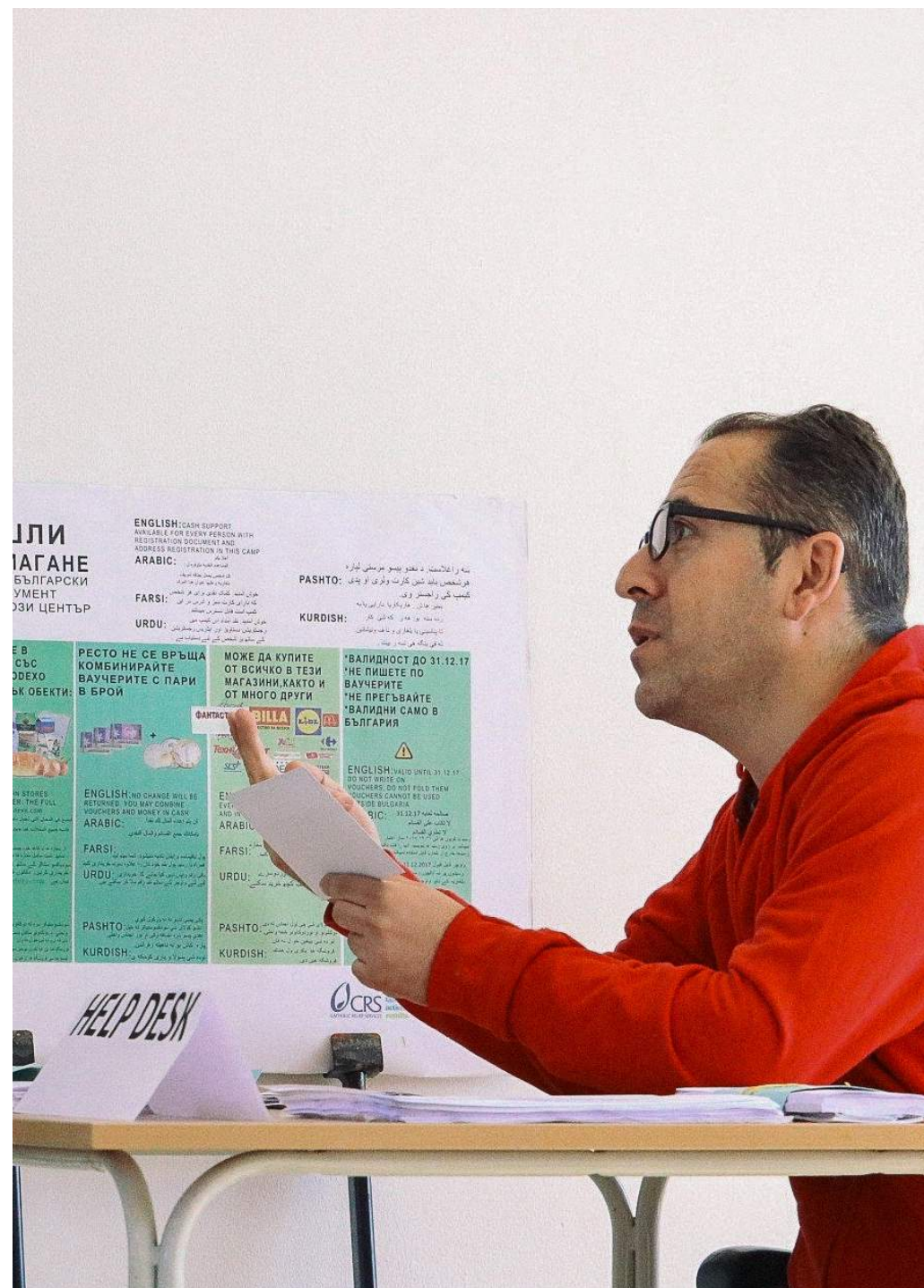
His first stop was Bulgaria. "When I arrived in Bulgaria in August 2015, I had no idea what to expect. My friends who lived in Sweden told me that life was better there, so after only a day in the country I decided to leave Bulgaria." After four months, Keihan was deported back to Bulgaria.

Keihan's first encounter with Caritas Sofia was in the Voenna Rampa Registration Centre, where he participated in our classes in Bulgarian and English in 2016. A few months later, he started working as a machine operator but continued to volunteer to support our operations in the centre. Keihan is a very ambitious and determined man who speaks Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi, and English. He is progressing quickly with the Bulgarian language and it is no coincidence that he was our first choice candidate for our social work at the Centre for Integration of Refugees and Migrants, 'St. Anna'. Right away he fitted in with the team in which he works and continues to today.

After expressing the wish to settle in Bulgaria on a long-term basis, Keihan became our beneficiary under the Accommodation Program. We provided him with a subsidised home for several months. Keihan was also involved in the mentoring program, which extended his social circle by connecting him with Bulgarians and other refugees. He continued to study Bulgarian and completed level A2. He feels good here.

Keihan has great expectations for 2018. He has found a well-paid job in a leading organisation in the country and he expects his wife to join him after a long separation. He wants to continue his education at one of the renowned Bulgarian universities.

"Caritas is my family, my home. The organisation helped me to learn the language, to discover and to love Bulgarian culture and traditions, and to live an independent life. Now I can contribute to society. Despite the difficulties I am glad I stayed in Bulgaria."





242	beneficiary children
60	beneficiary families
136	children get daily food
13	specialists
15	volunteers
58	thematic learning groups

What are the risks for children and families?

- Illiteracy and limited opportunities for social integration.
- Early drop out from school due to lack of knowledge and motivation, irregular school attendance, forced marriages, gaps in the education system itself.
- Neglect and stigmatisation by the public as hopeless cases.
- Children are subjected to violence or children themselves present with violent behaviour.
- Unhealthy lifestyle due to malnutrition, poor domestic and hygiene conditions.
- Parents who do not realise the need for specialised help for their children at an early age.
- Fear of losing parental rights.

What do we do to limit these risks?

- We maintain specialised centres in Sofia, Kuklen, Banya and Malko Tarnovo, where we create a positive environment:
- We organise a variety of activities that are close to the interests of the children and provoke their curiosity.
- With a lot of love and innovation, we are targeting new knowledge and skills, aiming at forming a lasting interest in education.
- We give children the opportunity to initiate and organise activities to help themselves and society, such as at charity events to support their peers.
- We provide specialised assistance (psychological, speech therapy, rehabilitation, social) to build skills for independent living.
- We combat negative public attitudes, by including volunteers, through public events where children can show creativity.
- We provide healthy food.
- We meet and talk to parents and family members, involving them in organising and conducting many of our activities.
- We help them learn Bulgarian when needed, and to prepare for school.
- We help build better hygienic habits, household skills and orientation of the world of adulthood.





S. (aged 3) and A. (aged 4) are brothers in the largest Roma ghetto in Sofia, the Faculteta district. They live with their parents in the poorest neighbourhood of the district and their father works in construction. Their mother is pregnant and has an older son and daughter from her first marriage. It is extremely difficult for her to raise and educate her children. There are no grandparents to help her. While the two older children are at school, the mother takes the boys to 'Ready for School', our centre for supporting children and families. Their sister has mobility problems as a result of a road accident and she also suffers from epilepsy. The family struggles to survive in their modestly furnished, small room, below the poverty line.

S. and A. have been visiting our centre since September 2017 and are our most regular beneficiaries. Both initially only spoke and understood the Romani language. A. wanted to constantly attract the attention of our colleagues, and sometimes even aggressively, leading to tantrums of crying and weeping, without understanding the cause. S. did not stop crying and refused to communicate with the others. He did not eat and could not stay in one place. He had an indescribable phobia of water. The brothers did not have any hygiene routine. They had difficulty communicating with other children and the team, felt fear and insecurity and fought for toys and other materials. Often they were scarcely dressed without underwear, jackets, hats or scarves in the cold weather, and sometimes they came with head lice which made them feel embarrassed.

Despite all of this, within a few months there have been some positive changes. A. began to play with other children and not just his brother. He already understands many things in Bulgarian and tries to speak Bulgarian with us. His tantrums significantly decreased and became more relaxed. We strive to constantly engage him in some responsible activity. He is interested in everything related to construction and technical activities; cutting with scissors, gluing, painting and also horse games. He is a leader and does not give up the lead role in his fictional plot. The other children in the group always agree with him!

S. also began to play with the other children, stopped crying for his mother, shows greater trust towards our colleagues and seeks their help. He already understands Bulgarian well, but he still has difficulty speaking. He began to try some foods that were previously unknown to him and he is no longer afraid of water, but only of some paints.





- 67** people with disabilities, who we took care of in 2017
- 58** adults
- 9** children
- 36** people with full-time care, the other use hourly care
- 37** people use our specialised transport
- 13** people work in the two Caritas Sofia centres

People who visit our two centres have physical and mental disabilities from mild to moderate degrees, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, Autism, muscular dystrophy, and others.



Our centres for support of people with disabilities are located in Sofia and Veselinovo. Both were opened in 2000, and our teams include social workers, kinesiotherapists, physical therapists, art therapists, psychologists, nurses, and bus drivers. Our equipment is very high level and we have our own specialised, albeit aging, minibuses. Where possible we try to provide individual help to the needy and their families. Along with the obligatory specialised individual activities, we organise a wide range of group activities to ensure beneficiaries acquire basic living skills and vital habits. Examples of this in the workshop in Veselinovo include: 'daily skills', creativity, cooking, computer literacy, activities with Zumba dancing, participation in festivals and concerts, fishing, outdoor sports, cinema. In Sofia, we have a creative workshop for ceramic works, a multisensory hall and a parental self-help group. We include volunteer and student activities as well. Among our external activities are hippotherapy (horseback riding), bread making therapy and adapted tennis. The teams at both centres tirelessly organise excursions, walks, museum visits, cultural events and charity bazaars.



We are happy to see the smiles on the faces of the people we care for, to know that we have given parents and their relatives the opportunity to take care of themselves and their families. The support we receive from small and large organisations, even from individual people, gives us a sense of happiness and a hope to break the traditional stereotypical views of people who are born with or now have a disability.

Rada began to visit the Blagoveshtenie (Annunciation) Centre when she was 18 years old. She is the oldest in a family with three other children. She was very timid and it was a miracle to get her to go inside the centre. Our psychologist and social worker had been playing for hours with her around the centre building, and Rada did not mind but would still not enter the building. One day her mother shared with us that she likes to paint so we started painting in front of the entrance, even in the minibus when it was cold. But Rada refused to enter the centre. In the words of her parents, she stayed at the door of her grandmother's apartment all night. She suffers from a severe mental disability, uses only a few recognisable words, and ones she invented herself. She is a sunny and beautiful girl and she says "no" with a charming smile. Finally, one day, Rada entered the centre and found it a very interesting and enjoyable place. She still prefers independent activities, but she is happy to be among the others in the common room. Since then we have been working with her gently. We hope everything is okay now, because Rada does not want to leave the centre now, with the same stubbornness she showed when not wanting to enter.





- 4 689** supported in Sofia
- 1 363** supported in Burgas
- 1 058** medical examinations and sexually transmitted disease tests
- 356** Microbiological tests and Mantou tests for Tuberculosis (Sofia)
- 344** long-term and follow-up treatment of prolonged wounds
- 98** escorts to a hospital and payment for treatment
- 1 898** homeless people received medicines
- 181** homeless people received clothes and shoes
- 10 541** provided food and refreshments (including 3,751 hot meals in Burgas)
- 2 354** cases in personal hygiene support (showers, haircuts, shaving, laundry)
- 127** mediation sessions with institutions
- 38** new ID cards issued
- 220** referrals to employers

Problems facing the homeless

- Life without a roof over one's head. Though not all homeless people face this actual problem, many are in need of a permanent place to settle.
- Hunger and eating food from rubbish bins.
- Absence of basic personal hygiene.
- No access to medical care.
- Mass alcoholism, psychiatric illness and criminal behaviour.
- Inability to meet the needs of the labour market and discrimination by employers.
- Lack of planning and money management skills.

Drop-in centre in Burgas

This is a place where homeless people visit without limit but for a short time. They are warmly welcomed and given a refreshing drink. We have a bathroom and a washing machine they can use and the consultations that began on the streets continue here as well.





Mobile Care

Our nurses, social workers and psychologists make daily trips across Sofia and Burgas to meet with people living on the street. We run this service with specialised vans, which are our mobile reception centres. First of all, we show these individuals that they are important. We listen to their stories, advise them how to use existing opportunities to improve their condition. Although difficult, due to their lack of discipline, we strive to keep to the goals we set in their individual plans for personal development. We help them get identification documents. We mediate in their contacts with state or municipal social and health institutions for shelter accommodation and specialised treatments. We provide on-site help, detoxifying against tics and scabies, treating wounds, testing for tuberculosis and blood-borne diseases and providing emergency medication. We distribute hot meals, clothes and shoes. We look for relatives who could helping, as well as referring the homeless to employers and help them to perform well at interviews. We also provide opportunities for visits to sports and cultural events.

Milen (aged 40) is homeless. He has used drugs since he was a child when he was a victim of domestic violence and often ran away from home. He got into the company of a group of boys who were using drugs and decided to try it himself. He smoked heroin and liked it. Initially, he thought everything was under control, but then he found that he was increasingly thinking of, and eventually did, increase the dose of heroin. To get money, he joined various gangs and ended up in jail for theft and fighting. The drug problems were getting worse. Once out of jail, Milen found himself homeless and became a dealer, which then led to being convicted again. During his second imprisonment, his parents died and his sister deprived him of his inheritance. Again, on his own and homeless, Milen decided to try treatment and rehabilitation at the only state hospital. This was unsuccessful and after further thefts and fights, again he went to jail. Overall, Milen spent 11 years behind bars. Furthermore, as a result of long-term usage of dirty needles, wet sores appeared on his legs.

We first met Milen on our street visits in Sofia. His wounds were infected and smelt strongly. After one month of bandages, the wounds began to heal and close. We helped him to get an ID card issued and to be admitted to a temporary accommodation centre. Twice a week we visited him to change his leg bandages. Despite our diligence, Milen's health had deteriorated and eventually with a lot of effort, we managed to get him hospitalised. At the hospital his legs were saved from being amputated and his health improved significantly. Whether it was the fear of amputation or because of his immobility at that time, Milen decided to stop using drugs. He returned to the shelter where he had hallucinations for two months, but managed to fight off his addiction to amphetamines and remained only on methadone. At that time we prepared his documents to register him as certified disabled and helped him to extend his stay at the shelter to avoid going back on the streets. We await the decision regarding his certification of disability and will assist in accommodating him in a sheltered home.



- 83** supported women
- 90** supported children
- 24** women work in our social enterprise
- 23** women eat in our social dining room
- 3** mothers at risk sheltered in our centre
- 39** students supported with school aids
- 9** children in our social summer school
- 29** prescriptions for medicines and patients visits

At the Rojdestvo Hristovo (Nativity) centre we take care of single mothers and their children. We prepare a needs assessment, an individual work plan and conduct psychological and social consultations. At the art-therapy workshop, women produce products that we sell at charity bazaars. Women get hot meals and sometimes take food home with them too. We provide medicines and food vouchers to their children's schools and we help them find a job.



C. is raising her 8-year-old son on her own. They live in a rented room. She works in a supermarket but the money is not enough for her. Her son's father does not pay any child support. Although her mother lives alone and could host her, she refuses because she fears her daughter could sell her apartment. The mother even does not agree to register C. at the address so she can apply for a council home.

We helped C. to survive the stress after she separated from the man with whom she suffered serious scandals and physical and psychological harassment. C. turned to us in search of a place for her son in the summer, and we provided free day care and meals for him. She is able to sew and has a desire to learn and work in our art workshop. When she is not at work, she comes to the social centre and learns to make art souvenirs. We pay her for the hours worked, which gives her extra income. With our help, she rents a room in a apartment. We covered the deposit and the first rent payment, and C. commits to return the sum in small instalments. The landlady made a discount for her on the rent because she uses our social kitchen and food products. The landlady also liked our centre and the art workshop, and she often comes to us to make felt together with the women. C. Still intends to apply for a council home.





In April 2017, the General Assembly of Caritas Sofia elected a new Board of Directors because of the expiry of the two consecutive mandates (six years) of the previous Board. In the new board we have representatives from Sofia - Prof. Dr. Rositsa Nikolova (Chairman), Plovdiv - Vesela Cholakova and Burgas - Father Michał Szlachciak CR (priest of the Order of the Resurrection).

The leadership of Caritas Sofia made decisive preparatory steps in 2017 to open up social enterprises to provide secure employment for people in need and additional funding for our social projects. The results of this are seen in the beginning of 2018, when we started with the Caristo bistro and the CaritArt workshop for people with disabilities.



A large number of Caritas Sofia employees (75 people) gathered for a camping weekend near Batak Dam, coming from Malko Tarnovo, Sofia, Pokrovan, Kuklen, Burgas, Plovdiv, Banya, Harmanli and Yambol. We met many new colleagues and we made many new friendships, especially as the first challenge of putting up tents brought the teams closer. The program contained entertainment, games and fun races, as well as, exploratory activities and leadership skills. Together, we prepared our food and took care of one another. Evenings around the campfire were an opportunity for expression of unknown talents, whilst the event reinforced our sense of organisational unity.



Under the motto 'Go and proclaim', the day care centre of Caritas Sofia in the village of Pokrovan brought together employees of the organisation for spiritual exercises. The leader, Father Michał Szlachciak, presented lectures about trust and doubt about the response to God. The participants also heard the presentation of the Order of the Resurrection to which the priest belongs. He also revealed many of the liturgical symbols during his liturgies. 46 staff members from Pokrovan, Malko Tarnovo, Burgas, Kuklen, Harmanli, Plovdiv and Sofia participated. The event was a good opportunity to share and reflect, to meet the local elderly people we care for, to meet Sister Vassillia and Sister Bernadette from the Eucharistic Sisters community and to visit local attractions.

The large expansion of our activities in support of people seeking protection in Bulgaria has led to the creation of the Migration and Integration Unit and the increase in the number of employees (by 50%), volunteers (by 59%) and the budget (by 107%). Our partners from CRS, UNICEF and STEPIC Charity have given a strong impetus to our activities in our integration centre 'St. Anna', in state refugee camps and detention centres.

We organised two introductory trainings for new employees. The trainers Emanouil Patashev, General Secretary of Caritas Bulgaria, and the theologian Bogdan Patashev acquainted the participants with the roots and the essence of the organisation.

44 FINANCIAL REPORT

TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES: 1 166 952 EUR

47%	543 741 EUR	Caritas network
24%	275 006 EUR	Local private donors
12%	137 324 EUR	Foreign private donors
9%	103 562 EUR	Municipal authorities
3%	31 807 EUR	State funds
2%	18 867 EUR	Caritas Bulgaria
1%	16 475 EUR	Donations from beneficiaries
1%	13 377 EUR	Humanitarian aid
1%	14 244 EUR	Fixed assets and other financial income
1%	12 548 EUR	General reserves

TOTAL RESOURCES EXPANDED: 1 298 316 EUR

60%	777 825 EUR	Refugees and asylum seekers
9%	112 305 EUR	People with disabilities
7%	90 804 EUR	Children and families at risk
6%	82 136 EUR	Elderly, sick and lonely people
5%	62 413 EUR	Homeless
4%	57 884 EUR	Disadvantaged women
2%	20 102 EUR	Spiritual and organisational development
1%	16 966 EUR	Humanitarian aid
1%	6 739 EUR	Social entrepreneurship
1%	10 132 EUR	Administration and fundraising
5%	61 011 EUR	Depreciation, bank taxes, debts written off and others

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