

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Project name and acronym:	Civil Society Solidarity Movement II - CISOMO II
Participant:	SDRUZHENIE EVROPEYSKI PROEKTI V BALGARIA
PIC number:	949339971

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number :	2		
Event name:	Study Visit in Bulgaria: Exploring Bulgaria's Migrant and Refugee Integration Initiatives for enhancing Integration and Empowerment		
Type:	Study Visit		
In situ/online:	in-situ		
Location:	Sofia, Bulgaria		
Date(s):	31.03. 2025 - 02.04.2025		
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.cisomo.eu/thematic-events		
Participants			
Female:	17		
Male:	13		
Non-binary:	0		
From country 1 [Greece]:	3		
From country 2 [Bulgaria]:	9		
From country 3 [Poland]:	3		
From country 4 [Slovenia]:	3		
From country 5 [Sweden]:	3		
From country 6 [Denmark]:	3		
From country 7 [Germany]:	2		
From country 8 [Romania]:	4		
Total number of participants:	30	From total number of countries:	8
Description			

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

The three-day study visit held in Sofia from March 31 to April 2, 2025, brought together 25 participants from across Europe as part of the CERV project, focused on fostering integration and empowerment for migrants and refugees. The event was designed not just to observe Bulgarian initiatives, but to immerse participants in real-life stories, community efforts, and practical experiences that reflect the country's current integration landscape.

Participants began arriving in Sofia, on the 31st of March, throughout the day and checked into the designated hotel. That evening, a welcome dinner was held at the hotel restaurant. This informal gathering was crucial, since it allowed people to meet each other, exchange first impressions, and begin building a collaborative atmosphere before diving into the study visit's program. There were a variety of participants, including NGO workers, policymakers, migrants, youth representatives, and civil society actors, all of whom shared a common interest in improving integration practices across Europe.

The core of the study visit took place on April 1. At 10:00 AM, participants departed together by organized transport to the Ukrainian Hive, a community center in Sofia that supports Ukrainian refugees.

Upon arrival, everyone was welcomed with coffee and registration, followed by a keynote presentation introducing the Hive's mission, staff, and their ongoing integration initiatives. The presenter, a representative from the Ukrainian community in Sofia, spoke about how the center was founded in response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees and how it has grown into a vital resource offering legal support, Bulgarian language courses, art therapy, and cultural events. Participants were impressed by the grassroots, volunteer-led model of the Hive, which functions on solidarity and cross-community cooperation.

Next, participants engaged in a round of introductions, where each shared their background, where they were from, and what motivated them to join this visit. This moment added a personal layer to the visit, immediately forming bonds across nationalities and professions.

After lunch, the group took part in a sociodrama workshop, facilitated by trained theater practitioners working with refugee communities. Through role-play and improvisation, participants stepped into the lived experiences of migrants navigating bureaucracy, discrimination, and cultural isolation. Many found the experience emotionally powerful—one participant from Italy said it “shook me awake to the emotional reality that numbers and policies can’t show.”

Following a short coffee break, a closing discussion was held where participants reflected on what they saw and experienced. They discussed the Hive's model, the importance of mental health support in integration work, and how cultural expression could be a bridge for empowerment. The session ended with several participants sharing how they might bring similar practices to their home countries.

Before leaving, a guided tour offered a closer look at the spaces where language classes, legal consultations, and creative workshops happen. Participants got to speak briefly with some of the centre's regular visitors, who shared their own stories of starting over in Sofia.

The evening concluded with a group dinner at “Hadjidraganovite Izbi,” a traditional Bulgarian restaurant. The dinner served as a cultural and culinary experience, but also a relaxed moment for informal networking and idea exchange.

On the final morning, the group went on a cultural walk through Sofia, led by a local guide who emphasized the historical backdrop of migration in Bulgaria—from Ottoman times to the present refugee context. Participants visited culturally significant spots, allowing them to see the city not just as a place where integration “happens,” but as a living, historical site of diverse identities.

After the walk, everyone returned to the hotel, completed check-out, and gathered for a farewell lunch. The mood was reflective and inspired. Conversations turned to what comes next, how the lessons from the Ukrainian Hive, the emotional resonance of the sociodrama, and the rich discussions could be translated into action plans back home.

While the visit did not include formal meetings with government policymakers, it deeply immersed participants in the civil society side of integration in Bulgaria. The result was not just increased awareness, but motivation to advocate for more human-centered, creative, and community-led approaches across Europe.

Concluding, this study visit in Sofia offered participants a profound and eye-opening experience that went beyond theoretical discussions, allowing them to engage directly with the human side of migrant and refugee integration. Through immersive activities such as the sociodrama workshop and the visit to the Ukrainian Hive, participants gained a deeper understanding of the emotional and practical realities faced by displaced individuals. The event highlighted the importance of community-led initiatives, empathy-driven support systems, and the role of cultural expression in fostering inclusion. One of the key reflections was that true integration cannot be achieved solely through policy, as it requires meaningful human connections, safe spaces for dialogue, and active participation from both migrants and host communities. The participants left Sofia inspired to adapt the practices they witnessed, with a

renewed commitment to promote solidarity, empowerment, and intercultural understanding in their own regions.

Agenda

Date: 31st of March to 2nd of April 2025

Venue: str. Deliyska vodenitsa 11, Sofia, Bulgaria

Day 1 - March 31 – Arrival and Welcome

All Day: Participant arrivals in Sofia and hotel check-in

19:30: Welcome dinner at the hotel restaurant

An opportunity for informal networking and getting to know fellow participants.

Day 2 - April 1 – Study Visit to the Ukrainian Hive Community Center

10:00 – 10:30: Group departure by organized transport to the Ukrainian Hive (str. Deliyska Vodenitsa 11)

10:30 – 11:00: Coffee and registration

11:00 – 11:30: Keynote presentation introducing the Ukrainian Hive and its mission

Presentation by Hive staff on the center's integration and empowerment work with Ukrainian refugees.

11:30 – 12:15: Participant introductions

A roundtable session where attendees shared backgrounds, motivations, and areas of focus.

12:15 – 13:00: Lunch (on-site)

13:00 – 14:30: Sociodrama session

An immersive and emotionally engaging theater-based workshop simulating refugee experiences to promote empathy and reflection.

14:30 – 15:00: Coffee break

15:00 – 15:40: Group discussion and reflections

Participants discussed integration strategies, the role of cultural sensitivity, and how community models like the Hive could be adapted elsewhere.

15:40 – 15:55: Guided tour of the Ukrainian Hive

Insight into the facilities and services offered, including language support, legal advice, and cultural programming.

16:00: Return to hotel via organized transport

19:30: Group dinner at the traditional Bulgarian restaurant

A social and cultural evening experience in a local setting.

Day 3 - April 2 – Cultural Exploration and Closing**10:00 – 11:30:** Cultural Walk through Sofia

A guided city walk offering insights into Bulgarian history, migration flows, and cultural heritage relevant to integration.

12:00: Farewell lunch

Final gathering with shared reflections, follow-up ideas, and next steps for local adaptation and project planning.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).