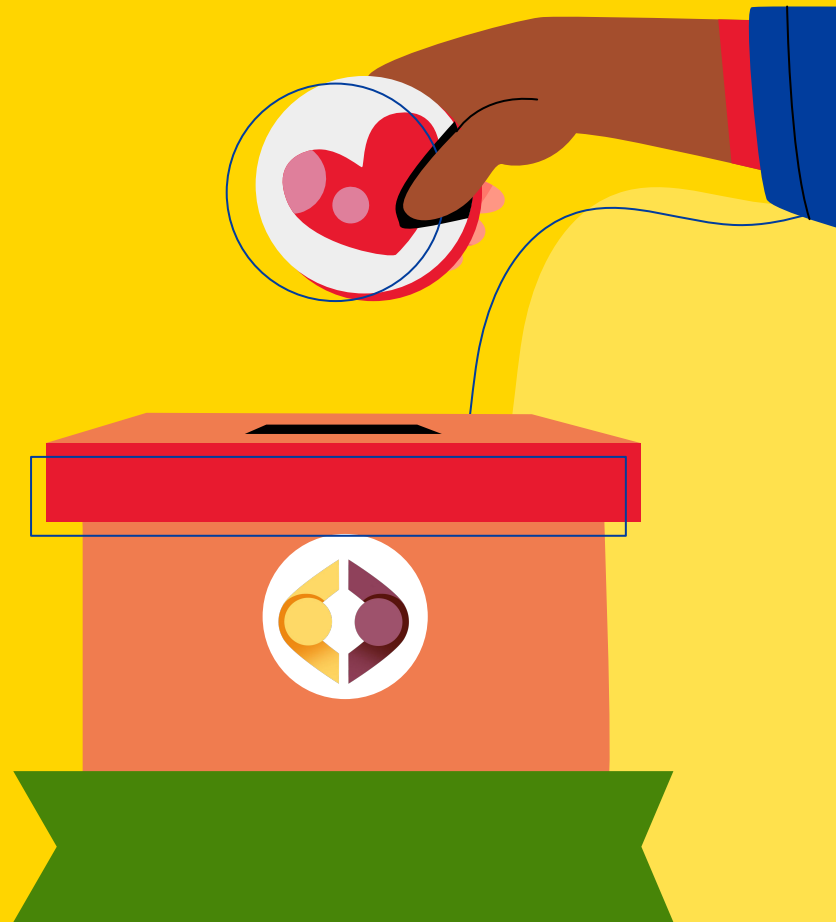


ANNUAL REPORT

ARMS WIDE OPEN ASSOCIATION



2024



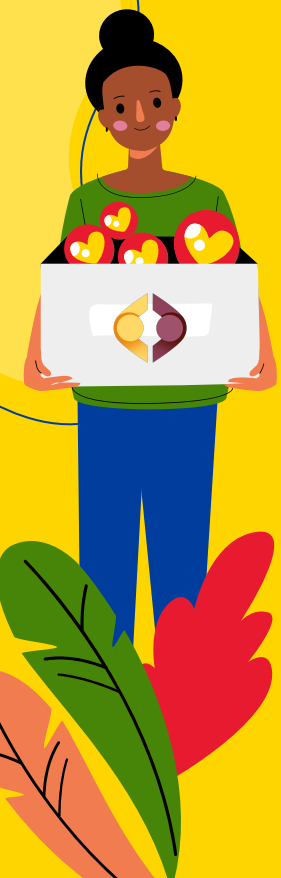
The year was filled with challenges and lessons for us—as a team, as an organization, and as individuals. We grew, found new allies and partners, became more united, and once again proved that there is no challenge we cannot overcome.

We learned, created, communicated, developed, cried, and celebrated together. Emotions have always run high for us, and that's what sets us apart—because in just three years, we have managed to create a safe and welcoming space for open dialogue, support, learning, exchange, and growth.

This year marked a key moment in our development and reaffirmed our ongoing efforts, as we launched a long-anticipated project that we had been working on since 2022. In 2024, in partnership with Sofia Municipality – "Oborishte" District, we opened the *"Arms Wide Open" Integration, Cultural, and Educational Center for Refugees and Migrants*, made possible through financial support from the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

This is a significant and responsible step forward—one that motivates us to continue working toward giving children the childhood they deserve.

On behalf of our entire team, we thank everyone who trusts us, supports us, and works alongside us!



OUR TEAM



Anna Hakman – Founder, Chair of the Management Board

Vasil Tretyakov – Founder, Deputy Chair and Board Member

Biser Smilenski – Founder and Board Member

Maria Kacharava – Founder

Milena Georgieva – Founder and Administrative Director

Natali Todorova – Founder and Program Director

Thea Denolyubova – Founder

Lyudmila Ivanyuk – Financial Director

Alexander Marchenko – Director of Youth Programs

Dimitar Dimitrov – Youth Programs Coordinator

Lalita Koshe – Coordinator of Methodological Programme

Liliya Levitska – Creative Programs Lead



2024 IN DIGITS



500+

**Refugees Who Participated in Our Educational
Programs in 2024**

PROJECT: "CENTER FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS"

In 2024–2025, the *"Arms Wide Open"* Integration, Cultural, and Educational Center for Refugees and Migrants is being implemented with financial support from the EEA and Norway Grants 2014–2021.

The project is carried out in partnership with **Oborishte District of Sofia Municipality** and **Prios Kompetanse**.

- **Total Project Budget:** €382,000
- **Duration:** December 2023 – April 2025



DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND BULGARIAN LANGUAGE PREPARATION



Implementation Period: February 2024 – June 2024

Budget: 25,817 BGN

In collaboration with specialists from the Regional Department of Education – Sofia, we developed a targeted curriculum with a detailed teaching plan for Bulgarian language instruction tailored to school-age children.

The curriculum was aligned with the official Ministry of Education (MoE) school programs, while also addressing the specific needs and learning levels of the target group.

The program reached **138 students**, aged **7 to 17**, and was delivered by a team of educators from both Bulgaria and Ukraine—providing an opportunity for Ukrainian teachers granted protection in Bulgaria to actively contribute to the integration process.

All teachers participated in training and worked together to develop progress reports for each child across the various student groups throughout the course of the program.



BULGARIAN LANGUAGE COURSES FOR STUDENTS



Implementation Period: February 2024 – February 2025
Budget: 117,226 BGN

For the third consecutive year, we provided Bulgarian language instruction for children at the elementary level, with a focused effort to build on the knowledge acquired in previous phases of the program. The courses included both general language instruction and targeted preparation for mandatory national exams and external assessments in 4th and 7th grade.

The most intensive part of the program was preparing 7th-grade students, who faced the difficult task of learning a substantial volume of Bulgarian literature and writing narrative essays in a non-native language.

In 2024, we successfully worked with **two 7th-grade groups**. The first group completed the course with **exam results above the national average**. At the beginning of the 2024–2025 school year, a **new group of seven students** began classes with our experienced instructors, continuing their preparation with proven educational support.



CREATIVE WORKSHOPS AND ART THERAPY



Implementation Period: February 2024 – April 2025

Budget: 100,533 BGN

We conduct weekly creative workshops and professional sessions in music and vocal training, classical and modern dance, visual and applied arts, and movement-based psychotherapy.

Objectives:

- To develop the creative skills of children and young people
- To provide professional support to students pursuing or interested in pursuing arts-related education
- To offer a space for stress relief and healing from psychological trauma through artistic expression
- To encourage socialization and personal support in a safe, open environment for free communication and self-expression

The program has engaged **180 participants**.



“ARMS WIDE OPEN”

SUMMER SCHOOL



Implementation Period: May 2024 – September 2025

Budget: 68,294 BGN

From **July 8 to August 30, 2024**, we held the third edition of our **Summer School**, which has become a tradition and a model for a successful and innovative integration initiative. The program spanned **8 intensive weeks**, totaling **40 days** of activities. **Number of Children Enrolled:** 121 students.

The curriculum was carefully tailored to each age group, taking into account their specific characteristics, interests, and needs. Each week was organized around a central **theme**, which guided the design of all activities—including **Bulgarian language lessons** and **art workshops**. The weekly themes aimed to foster a sense of unity among the children and encourage collaborative learning across mixed age groups.

Core Activities During the Program:

- **Bulgarian language lessons**
- **Arts activities** – including music, dance, singing, and sports
- **Targeted sessions with a child psychologist**



"ARMS WIDE OPEN"

SUMMER SCHOOL



Implementation Period: May 2024 – September 2025

Budget: 68,294 BGN

Extracurricular

Activities:

The program also included visits to key cultural and historical landmarks in the city. These outings were tailored to the weekly themes and provided opportunities for experiential learning and social interaction.

Children visited:

- **National Galleries and Museums**
- **House-Museums of prominent Bulgarian writers** such as Ivan Vazov and Petko Slaveykov
- **Walltopia Climbing Center**
- **Historical landmarks in downtown Sofia**
- As well as **parks, nature sites, swimming pools, and mountains**

These trips provided valuable context to the weekly themes, enriched learning experiences, and supported the integration and emotional well-being of participants.



YOUTH PROGRAMME



Implementation Period: March 2024 – April 2025

Budget: 113,568 BGN

In March, we launched a **Youth Program** aimed at young people aged **15 to 29**, designed to meet their needs and interests while developing their personal and social skills.

Participants engaged in a variety of **educational projects, cultural and social initiatives**, and **outdoor adventures**—including mountain hikes and visits to multiple cities across Bulgaria. They also attended **Religious Education (RE) classes** as part of their preparation for national exams.

- **Three participants** received personalized support from our teachers to prepare for their **high school graduation exams** and **university entrance** in Bulgaria.
- Another **three young people (aged 17–24)** took part in a **youth internship program** within the association. They created and led their own **educational programs** for younger students and were actively involved in the **planning and preparation** of the upcoming Summer Program.



YOUTH PROGRAMME



Implementation Period: March 2024 – April 2025

Budget: 113,568 BGN

This initiative not only empowers youth with knowledge and experience but also strengthens their leadership potential and involvement in community development.

The main goals of the Youth Program are to **empower young people** by providing access to meaningful resources, support the **development of personal potential**, and offer **non-formal education** focused on building new skills. The program also aims to expand youth knowledge across various aspects of life, foster **civic education**, **tolerance**, and **democratic values** through **collaborative activities with local youth and partner organizations**.

As part of the “Arms Wide Open” Summer School, a specialized **Leadership Program** was conducted for young people aged **14 to 17**. This career-oriented initiative focused on developing leadership qualities and practical skills that participants can apply in their **academic and professional journeys**.

A total of **134 young participants** completed the program.



"INTERNS" - A PATHWAY TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



Implementation Period: March 2024 – April 2025

Budget: 113,568 BGN

As part of our **Youth Program**, the "*Interns*" initiative provides opportunities for **professional development** for young people, supported and mentored by the Arms Wide Open team.

During the implementation of several program activities—especially the *Summer School*—**four young women aged 18 to 25** joined as interns. They participated in training sessions organized by the association, developed and led their own educational activities and projects, and played a key role in preparing and running the summer program.

One of the interns had been a participant in our Summer School for the past two years. This year, she joined the team on equal footing and served as a **powerful role model** for her peers in the youth group, inspiring them to become more actively involved in the school's program.

INFORMATION SESSIONS



Implementation Period: 03/2024 – 03/2025

Budget: 23,470 BGN

We conducted **12 information sessions** with the support of invited experts from various fields, alongside members of the project team. The sessions were held in an open format, allowing for free communication, social interaction, and exchange.

The primary goal of these sessions was to provide accessible and up-to-date information on the following topics:

- Financial literacy
- Employment opportunities and career development in Bulgaria
- Labor rights and workplace relations
- Health insurance
- Legal matters
- Education – opportunities for children and students
- Starting your own business

Most sessions were hosted at our partner venue **Toplocentrala**. Approximately **300 people** participated in the meetings.





**“Education is the most powerful
weapon you can use to change the
world”**

— NELSON MANDELA



PROJECT “TEAM CAPACITY-BUILDING TRAINING”



Funding organization: Bulgarian Fund for Women

Implementation period: 07/2024 – 09/2024

Budget: 4,800 BGN

For the first time, we received targeted support aimed at strengthening the development of the Association's team, increasing organizational capacity, and preventing burnout.

A total of **16 training sessions** were conducted for the core team, including teachers, specialists, and experts involved in the Association's various programs — a team consisting of **33 people**. We also held our **first-ever team-building event**.

By organizing targeted trainings, we ensure that the organization continues to operate at an optimal level in delivering meaningful, relevant, effective, and high-quality programs to our beneficiaries — a key priority.

Thanks to the opportunity for both group and individual development sessions, we succeeded in motivating and uniting the team in a new and meaningful way. Each team member was given space in a safe environment to share their experiences, concerns, difficult situations, ideas, and challenges they had encountered, while also encouraging mutual support and shared learning.



MASTER ART CLASSES “eqUAlity”



Funding Organization: Bulgarian Fund for Women

Implementation Period: November 2024 – February 2025

Budget: 14,991 BGN

The program offered a series of master art classes led by Ukrainian and local professionals with many years of experience in their respective fields. Over the course of three months, we conducted weekly creative sessions for **children, youth (ages 15–29), and adults**.

The initiative aimed to develop personal and social skills, while also providing a safe space for communication, interaction, and growth. The target group included approximately **40% Ukrainian refugees** and **50% local residents** interested in either professional or amateur development in the fields of vocal, performing, and visual arts.

By bringing these groups together, the program sought to foster inclusion and smooth integration in a safe, supportive, and non-discriminatory environment.

The program concluded with an **interactive exhibition-concert** hosted at the space of our partners, **RCCA “Toplocentrala”**.



ONLINE LEGAL CONSULTATIONS FOR WOMEN



Funding Organization: Urgent Action Fund

Implementation Period: November 2024 – April 2025

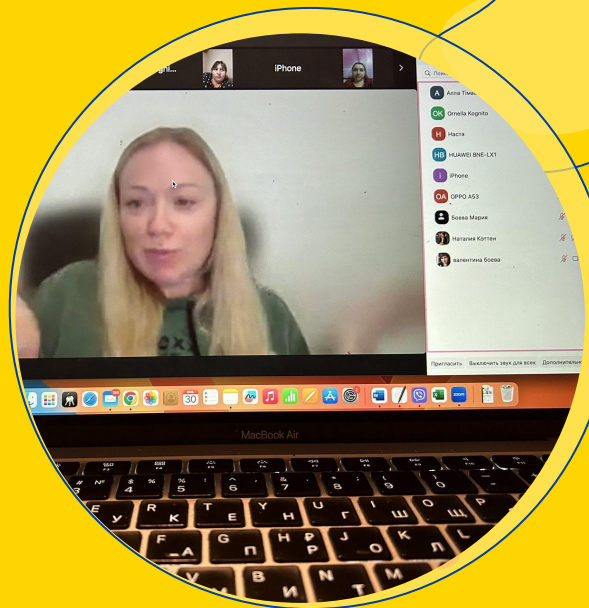
Budget: 7,000 USD

In the spring of 2024, a mother reached out to us with a request to issue a letter of recommendation for her son, who had been attending our programs. Through this contact, we learned about her difficult personal situation—after surviving **domestic violence**, she was granted permission to see her **2-year-old daughter** only once a week and was engaged in a **difficult legal battle for custody rights**.

Through **crowdfunding efforts**, we managed to raise the necessary funds to cover the **legal fees for her defense**. This case prompted us to reflect on how we could better support and protect women facing similar challenges in the future.

In 2023, we launched a Viber group for mothers who gave birth in Bulgaria. Based on the data we collected, approximately **10% of women in such "mixed" families** (with Bulgarian spouses) reported experiencing **domestic violence**.

This initiative aims to **provide accessible online legal consultations** to women in vulnerable situations, empowering them with information, support, and pathways to justice.



ONLINE LEGAL CONSULTATIONS FOR WOMEN



Funding Organization: Urgent Action Fund

Implementation Period: November 2024 – April 2025

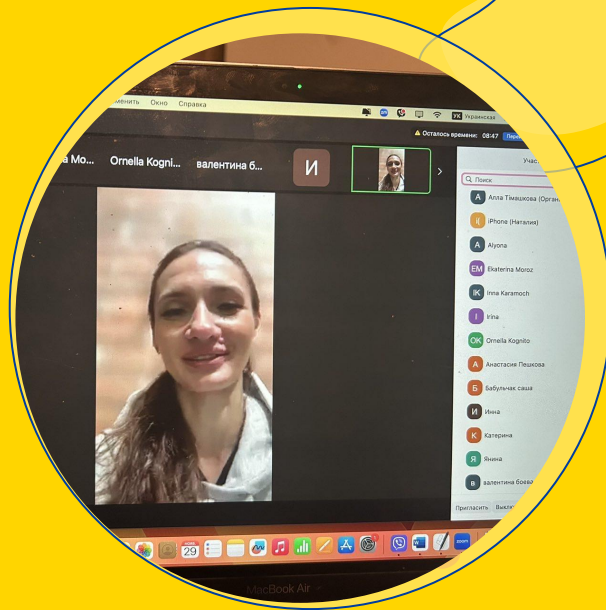
Budget: 7,000 USD

Due to limited knowledge and lack of awareness of their rights, many survivors of domestic violence in Bulgaria submit only isolated reports to law enforcement and courts.

The **Istanbul Convention** highlights the need to protect **vulnerable groups of women**, recognizing that it is nearly impossible to seek protection from **gender-based violence** without proper documentation, language skills, or understanding of local laws. However, **Bulgaria only applies those parts of the Convention** that align with its national legislation.

As part of the project, we conducted a series of webinars where local and Ukrainian women and girls gained essential legal knowledge under **Bulgarian, Ukrainian, and international law**. Topics included: forming relationships, cohabitation and marriage, shared property, and ending partnerships.

These sessions aimed to **empower women** with the tools to protect themselves, understand their rights, and navigate legal challenges.



IMMERSIVE EXHIBITION “FACEBOOK CHOREOGRAPHY”



Funding Organizations: The CIVICS Innovation Hub and Porticus Amsterdam C.V.

Implementation Period: March 2024 – October 2024

Budget: €10,000

The Russian art collective *Mira Zimka* and Ukrainian director-choreographer Roman Blazhkiiv, in collaboration with Bulgarian artists and performers, presented the **first joint Russian-Ukrainian performance in Bulgaria** since the beginning of the war. The production explores the complex dialogue between two nations involuntarily drawn into a global conflict.

Social media—serving as a metaphor for our globalized society—offers a lens through which to reflect the breakdown of communication, ongoing destruction, and increasing censorship on both sides. The project draws directly from the **words and experiences of individuals on both sides of the conflict**, who find themselves trapped in a state of **powerlessness and trauma**.

Art cannot end wars. But with this work, we sought to lay the groundwork for an impossible but necessary dialogue—**here and now—beyond** the distorted and censored narratives of social networks and media.



“ARMS WIDE OPEN” CHRISTMAS RELAY



Fundraising Campaign via [Platformata.bg](https://platformata.bg)

Implementation Period: December 2023 – March 2024

Budget: 2,095 BGN and numerous gifts donated in person

The most meaningful gifts are often not what's under the wrapping, but the gesture itself. And just as often, giving can be as joyful as receiving. That's why we launched a particularly heartfelt initiative: to give both children and people in need the joy of receiving and the fulfillment of giving.

We reached and brought joy to:

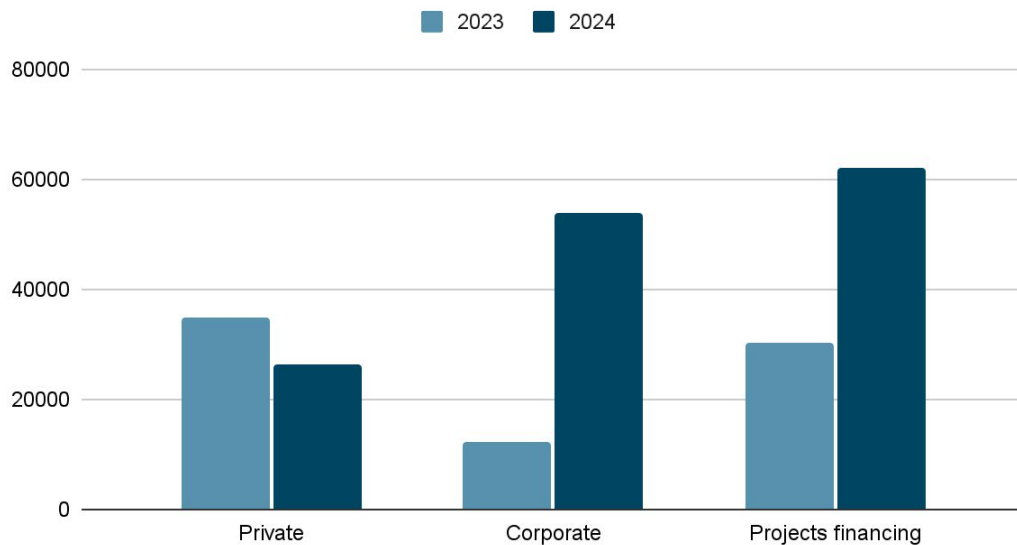
- **15 children** from the “*Karapuz*” early childhood group at Open Arms
- **32 young people** from “*Blagoveshtenie*”, a Caritas center for social rehabilitation and integration of people with disabilities
- **80 Ukrainian refugee** children supported by the **Volunteer Center** in Pomorie
- **224 children** (including 62 unaccompanied minors) at the **Registration and Reception Center** in Harmanli
- **50 children** aged 4 to 20 from the *Complex for Social Services for Children and Families* in the town of Roma





ACHIEVED REVENUE

Revenues in the last 2 years

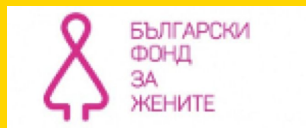


PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all our partner organizations whose trust and support make our work possible!



Организация на евреите
в България

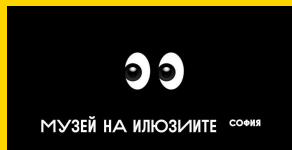
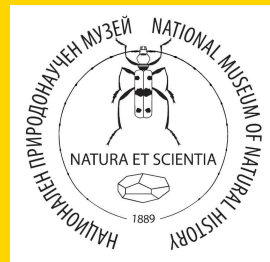


PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all our partner organizations whose trust and support make our work possible!

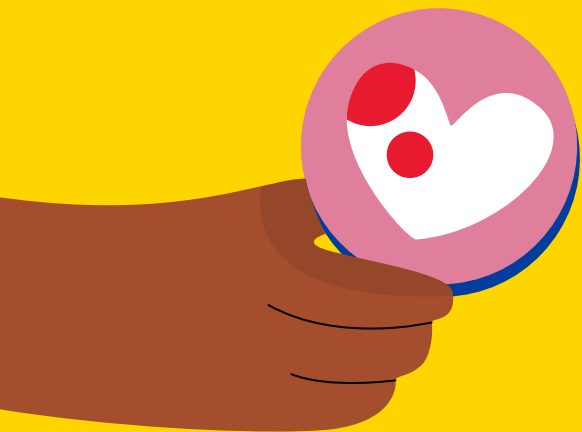
НАЦИОНАЛНА
ГАЛЕРИЯ
/ ДВОРЕЦА

НАЦИОНАЛНА
ГАЛЕРИЯ
/ КВАДРАТ
500



WE APPRECIATE FOR YOUR TRUST!





AND YOUR ATTENTION!

If you have any questions, we'll be
happy to answer them:

info@armswideopen.bg

+359 889932233

www.armswideopen.eu

