

Belgium

February 2024

Belgium holds the [presidency](#) of the Council of the EU until June 2024. On 26 January, UNHCR presented [recommendations](#) to consider seven priorities.

In 2023, 35,507 people [applied for international protection](#) in Belgium, a decrease of 3.7 per cent compared to 2022. The total recognition rate at first instance stood at 43.5 per cent

The [reception system](#) remains overstressed in Belgium. UNHCR continues to call for adequate reception conditions for all applicants, and published a [statement](#) on the situation.

UNHCR POPULATION STATISTICS (as of mid-2023)*

Refugees	156,921
Asylum-seekers	40,880
Stateless people	939
Others of concern	678

Top three countries of origin*

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Ukraine	66,332	Afghanistan	8,045
Syrian Arab Republic	18,438	State of Palestine	3,745
Afghanistan	7,593	Syrian Arab Republic	2,360

*UNHCR mid-2023 Trends and UNHCR data finder

Socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Belgium

Refugee committees

The first Refugee Committee was established through a pilot project in 2020, aiming to promote refugee self-reliance. Currently, UNHCR supports 10 active refugee committees in Belgium which are aligned with the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#). [Refugee Committees](#) are dynamic, refugee-led spaces where solutions are developed by refugees themselves.

Support to refugee entrepreneurs

With the support of UNHCR and refugee committees, various Belgian public employment actors offered ten information sessions on entrepreneurship and access to employment for refugees in Belgium. The sessions were organised at the community centre, a space run by refugees to come together, learn languages, work, take part in sports and access information and services from the state or private sector.

HIGHLIGHTS

Global Refugee Forum 2023

The government of Belgium submitted eight GRF pledges in the areas of Humanitarian, Development & Peace nexus by mainstreaming forcibly displaced people in sustainable development programs, as well as in the areas of Economic Inclusion, Resettlement, Complementary Pathways, Community Sponsorship, Statelessness, Child Rights and Flexible Funding.

Resettlement

After a two-year suspension, Belgium resumed its resettlement program. Innovative solutions have been implemented by the Belgian government to accommodate reception of resettled refugees, such as a collective centre for resettled refugees.

Statelessness

In December 2023, UNHCR published [comments](#) on the draft law regarding residence permits for stateless people.



Yohannes, an Ethiopian refugee, was reunified with his mother in Belgium. © UNHCR/Olivier van Naemen

Families Belong Together

After Yohannes was evacuated from Sudan, he was reunited in Belgium with his mother thanks to the efforts of UNHCR and IOM.

[Watch](#) the touching moment when Yohannes was reunited with his mother after more than 10 years apart.

Key Priorities

- **Advocacy:** In preparation of local and EU elections in 2024, UNHCR is preparing a Memorandum and is consulting with key stakeholders including political parties, civil society and forcibly displaced people on its key asks.
- **Asylum procedures:** Asylum applications in 2023 decreased slightly (by 3.7 per cent, compared to 2022). Asylum instances are nevertheless facing a significant backlog in first instance and appeal.
- **Reception:** The reception system remains overburdened. UNHCR continues to call for adequate reception conditions for all applicants as insufficient reception opportunities impact the health of asylum-seekers, as well as fair and efficient asylum procedures.
- **Family reunification:** Family reunification is guided by specific criteria which generate obstacles accessing the procedure. Challenges include submission of requests abroad, long waiting times and costs associated. UNHCR continues to advocate for flexibility and supports applicants with implementing partner Myria.
- **Resettlement and complementary pathways:** Belgium has developed innovative reception solutions such as a collective centre for resettled refugees, community sponsorship and partnerships with cities, municipalities and other partners to allow resumption of resettlement.
- **Community empowerment and self-reliance:** Refugee representation in Brussels has expanded to ten refugee-led organizations (RLOs). These entities serve as consultative bodies, supporting relevant stakeholders in optimizing refugee inclusion.
- **Detention monitoring:** Detention of asylum-seekers upon arrival at the border is quasi systematic. UNHCR's partner Nansen provides legal assistance to asylum-seekers in detention. UNHCR takes part in an observer capacity in meetings of MOVE, an immigration detention focused NGO consortium.

Working with Partners

- UNHCR maintains regular contact with authorities, UN agencies, NGOs, lawyers, and academia. UNHCR signed partnerships with Nansen, which provides legal support to lawyers and asylum-seekers, and Myria, the Federal Migration Centre, that provides legal support to beneficiaries of international protection, lawyers, and case workers to facilitate family reunification.
- **External engagement:** In response to the ongoing reception challenges in Belgium, UNHCR published a [Q&A](#) and a [statement](#) on the reception situation. UNHCR calls for a compassionate, more humane and sustainable solutions that safeguard the rights of asylum-seekers in Belgium.

Statelessness

- Belgium is party to the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness, and nationality law contains relevant safeguards. Statelessness is determined by the judiciary. Residence permits are not automatically granted to recognized stateless people, leaving many without rights. A draft law on this matter has recently been adopted in Parliament.

UNHCR Presence in Belgium

Staff:

29 National Staff
 17 International Staff
 1 Affiliated workforce

Offices:

1 Multi-country Office in Brussels

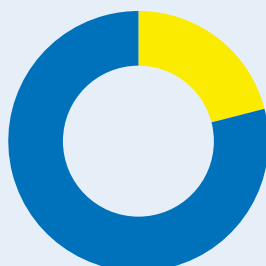
Financial information (31 January 2024)*

*Information relates to Belgium Multi-Country Office

Financial requirements for 2024

\$ 12.2 M

Funding gap 79%
\$ 9.6 M



Funded 21%
\$ 2.6 M

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