

# Bulgaria

February 2024

UNHCR assists the government of Bulgaria to strengthen its asylum system in line with international and EU standards, amid increasing arrivals of **Afghan and Syrian asylum-seekers**.

UNHCR supports the government to provide assistance, protection and socio-economic inclusion to **refugees from Ukraine**.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, UNHCR reached over **70,000 refugees from Ukraine** with assistance and protection services, while supporting their inclusion.

## UNHCR POPULATION STATISTICS (as of mid-2023)\*

Refugees	<b>189,577</b>
Asylum-seekers	<b>9,595</b>
Stateless people	<b>998</b>

### Top three countries of origin\*

Refugees		Asylum-Seekers
Ukraine	<b>160,541</b>	Syrian Arab Rep. <b>5,656</b>
Syrian Arab Rep.	<b>25,768</b>	Afghanistan <b>2,650</b>
Iraq	<b>1,062</b>	Morocco <b>463</b>

\*UNHCR mid-2023 Trends and UNHCR [data finder](#)

## UKRAINE REFUGEE SITUATION RESPONSE

As of 15 February 2024, **67,770 refugees from Ukraine** have obtained Temporary Protection in Bulgaria.

**Safe space, protection and support hubs:** UNHCR and partners have established **five Blue Dot Hubs** which reached over **84,356** people in 2023. These centres served **12,251** refugees by providing child-friendly and family-friendly spaces, offering psychosocial support to **9,366** individuals, and delivering information on education to **8,273** refugees. Additionally, **55,295** individuals were provided with information and referral to specific to services.

**Cash assistance:** In 2023, UNHCR with the Bulgarian Red Cross provided **cash for protection** to support over 14,000 refugees from Ukraine.

From the inter-agency **2023 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment** for the Ukraine Situation, UNHCR Bulgaria identified that refugees' top three priority needs included **access to health** (45 percent), **food** (39 percent), and **accommodation** (26 percent).

## HIGHLIGHTS

### PSEA Network

A Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) network was established by UNHCR in 2023, involving funded partners and authorities to prevent and mitigate SEA risks. This initiative aimed to ensure a robust complaints mechanism, establish PSEA focal points, conduct joint risk assessments, build partner capacity, and engage in community outreach on trafficking and SEA risks.

### Socio-economic inclusion

With the support of partners, throughout 2023 UNHCR reached 9,539 refugees with inclusion support. This included mentorship programs, employment support, technical and vocational training to enhance financial inclusion.

### Counselling

UNHCR and partners reached 21,367 individuals with information on services and refugee rights, including through helplines, thus strengthening UNHCR's protection response.



### Refugees from Ukraine support other displaced people in Bulgaria through volunteering

Refugees from Ukraine who are volunteering at the Red Cross assist UNHCR with the distribution of hygiene kits to other refugees from Ukraine at the **Blue Dot hub** in Ruse, northern Bulgaria, near the border with Romania.

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## Key Priorities

- **Access to territory and legal status:** UNHCR and partners regularly monitor borders and detention centres to ensure asylum-seekers can [access fair and efficient procedures](#) through [information](#), [legal counselling](#) and [assistance](#).
- **Asylum procedures:** UNHCR supports Bulgaria in enhancing the quality of the asylum system through [capacity-building activities](#) for authorities to ensure fair and efficient procedures, including Bulgarian-language guidance materials and summaries of EU and national asylum case law for administrative and judicial authorities.
- **Child protection:** UNHCR works with institutions to strengthen the national child protection system in early [identification](#), [access to adequate reception conditions](#), [comprehensive services](#), and [alternative care arrangements](#) for asylum-seeking and refugee children at risk. UNHCR also undertakes trainings for border and national police, social workers on child rights and best interest procedures, and provides education and child protection services through partners.
- **Community Based Protection:** UNHCR is advancing its community-based protection programme through participatory planning with refugees, asylum-seekers, partners, and host communities. UNHCR is strengthening outreach and awareness-raising through [mapping of communication channels](#) and information needs of communities.
- **GBV:** UNHCR works with State, humanitarian partners, and community members to prevent and mitigate risks, and provide a comprehensive and safe response to gender-based violence (GBV). This includes [raising awareness](#), [strengthening referral pathways](#), and [implementing safety audits](#).
- **Inclusion:** UNHCR fosters refugee [socio-economic inclusion](#), collaborating with local stakeholders on job-matching, employability, and small business initiatives. Additionally, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, UNHCR has developed the inaugural supplementary Bulgarian language textbook for

teachers, while reinforcing access to Bulgarian language classes for both children and adults.

- **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS):** UNHCR and partners provide individual counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees and provides [referrals to specialized services](#), while working to improve access to quality MHPSS services.

## Working with Partners

- UNHCR supports the government to ensure policies and legislation are in line with international standards, and promotes a comprehensive refugee response, grounded in a multi-stakeholder, “whole-of-society” approaches that includes refugees, local authorities, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.
- **External Relations:** UNHCR works with partners to showcase the positive impact and contributions of refugees on their host communities, and to promote awareness, solidarity, and inclusion.

## Statelessness

- **Statelessness:** Bulgaria has acceded to both the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness, and introduced a statelessness determination procedure in 2017, granting stateless status to 161 people so far. Following pledges at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019, the Government has improved the quality of statelessness determination procedures and included stateless people in the 2021 Census.

## UNHCR Presence in Bulgaria

### Staff:

23 Local Staff  
12 International Staff

### Offices:

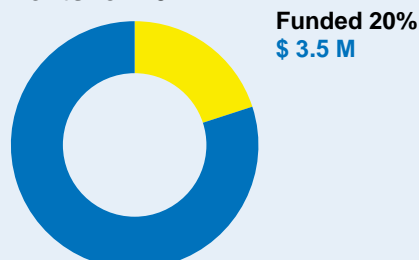
1 Country Office in Sofia

## Financial Information (31 January 2024)

### Financial requirements for 2024

**\$ 17 M**

**Funding gap  
80%  
\$ 13.5 M**



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