Bulgaria

September 2024

UNHCR supports the government to provide **essential aid and protection services** to refugees and asylum seekers, with a focus on facilitating **socioeconomic inclusion** and **social cohesion**.

UNHCR assists Bulgaria to strengthen its asylum system in line with international and EU standards. In the second half of the year, following the release of the European Commission's common implementation plan,

UNHCR will focus its support for the development of the Government's **national implementation plan** for the **EU Asylum and Migration Pact.**

KEY FIGURES

67,542

Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria with valid registration for temporary protection by 20 September 2024

8,261

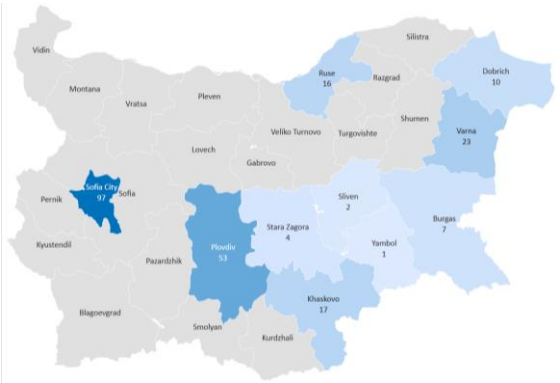
Number of asylum new applications in 2024

1,780

Number of unaccompanied children applying for asylum in 2024

33

Number of unaccompanied children with valid temporary protection by July 2024



**This map shows partner staff whose costs are supported by UNHCR, which may be for a full time or a part time engagement depending on the specific agreement with the partner*

FUNDING (RECEIVED AS OF 25 SEPTEMBER 2024)

USD 17 MILLION

Funded 61%
10.3 million

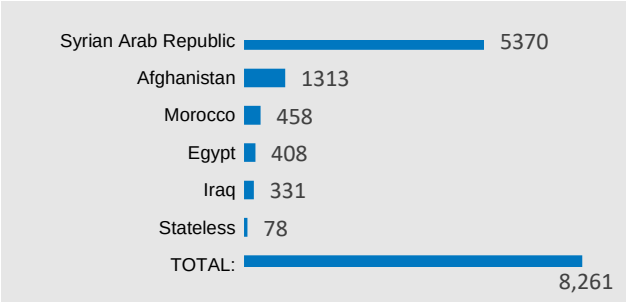
Unfunded 39%
6.6 million

TP REGISTRATIONS IN BULGARIA BY REGION

**This map shows the districts where TP holders are located*

ASYLUM SEEKERS

Countries of Origin



Asylum applications registered in 2024 (State Agency of Refugees data)

Update on Achievements

Operational Context

The evolving situation in Ukraine and the changing needs of refugees have led to a realignment of UNHCR's areas of intervention. UNHCR's efforts are accelerating in fostering inclusion through access to socio-economic inclusion opportunities and to national social protection system and promoting community resilience and mobilization.

Prevailing protection gaps with respect to international protection applicants and beneficiaries necessitates reinforcement of UNHCR's work in several key areas. These include facilitating access to territory and status, improving reception conditions, enhancing access to the national social protection system, and bolstering community mobilization and support. Our aim is to create a more supportive environment for protection and inclusion from the moment individuals arrive and throughout their integration process after their status is recognized. Refugees, in particular unaccompanied children and other vulnerable persons should have access to protection and solutions regardless of considerations about their assumed intentions.

UNHCR is committed to identifying and addressing the risk of statelessness among displaced populations. We are collaborating closely with national authorities and the civil society to map out stateless populations and those at risk, while also supporting the Government's capacity to find sustainable solutions and mitigate the risk of statelessness.

On September 29, UNHCR's Refugee team took second place in the 9th Ambassadors' League football tournament for diplomats, organized together with the United Nations Association of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Football Union. © UNHCR/ Dobrin Kashavelov

Key Highlights

Ahead of the parliamentary election on 27 October 2024, the 7th in three years, the political situation in Bulgaria remains challenging. Although the pre-election campaign has started, preliminary polls see difficulties in forming a stable government amid deep divisions between pro-European, anti-European, reformist, and status quo parties. Following changes in the Ministry of Interior and raised concerns about electoral integrity, police operations have been launched throughout the country to uncover irregularities and vote-buying schemes. The Central Election Commission has announced that the organization process is running on time, although lower turnout than the previous elections is expected. With regard to the developing situation in the Middle East, the President had a meeting of the National Security Consultative Council on4 October and six action points were agreed..

Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijtens met with UNHCR Bulgaria to discuss cooperation amidst political instability. UNHCR stressed the need for an independent Monitoring Mechanism and outlined priorities on the EU Pact and Schengen accession. Frontex emphasized expanding its role and cooperation with UNHCR, including staff training and proposed VEGA deployments to improve child protection at borders including airports.

UNHCR met with the Ombudsperson's office to explore collaboration on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.and the role of the institution to safeguard the rights of the displaced people. Despite the fact that the Ombudsperson and Deputy Ombudsperson's posts are vacant since April 2024, the National Preventive Mechanism continues to function and process complaints.

On 29 September UNHCR Bulgaria organized together with the United Nations Association of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Football Union the 9th Ambassadors' League football tournament for diplomats. In Sofia, the World Sport Capital 2024, the event brought together diplomatic missions, youth organizations and a team of refugees on the field. The initiative aims to foster a spirit of cooperation for a common cause - the protection of human rights. The refugee team reached the finals, taking the prestigious 2nd place.

Key Priorities in 2024

- **Access to territory and legal status:** UNHCR and partners regularly monitor borders, reception centres, 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, monitors international protection procedures and provides guidance and recommendations.
- **Child protection:** UNHCR works with institutions to strengthen the national child protection system in early identification, access to adequate reception conditions, and ensuring representation and guardianship, and expansion of alternative care arrangements for asylum-seeking and refugee children at risk. UNHCR also provides education and child protection services through partners.
- **Education**: UNHCR will continue to support children in their academic, language, and inclusive education and psychosocial support to integrate into the Bulgarian school system. UNHCR and the Ministry of Education and Science will promote enrolment in the Bulgarian school system by removing institutional, sociocultural, and economic barriers and support development of preparatory classes and availability of language courses. UNHCR will also work with authorities and academic institutions to promote access to tertiary education and diploma recognition.
- **Community Based Protection:** UNHCR launched together with partners a joint initiative for the opening of a network of 6 Protection and Inclusion Centers called Compass.
- **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, a Refugee Employment Platform has been launched, as part of a regional UNHCR initiative, to facilitate refugee employment.
- **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS):** UNHCR and partners provide family and community support activities, including through awareness raising and psychoeducation, arts based psychosocial support groups and support groups for parents, amongst others. Likewise, partners provide individual counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees, including 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 multi-stakeholder, "whole-of-society" approaches that includes refugees, local authorities, international organizations, civil society, private sector, and other stakeholders. UNHCR in 2024 works with seven partner NGOs to safeguard the rights and well-being of people forced to flee, deliver assistance, and promote refugees' social protection and access to livelihoods, education and inclusion.
- **Statelessness:** Bulgaria 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 of Statelessness in 2019, the Government has improved the quality of statelessness determination procedure and included stateless people in the 2021 Census. During the 2023 GRF, Bulgaria pledged to regularly review the remaining reservations to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.
- **External Relations:** UNHCR works with whole-of-society partners to showcase the hopes, dreams, diverse talents, and the positive impact of refugees on their host communities, and to promote solidarity, support, and inclusion for refugees.
- **PSEA Network:** An inter-agency Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) network was established by UNHCR and UNICEF in 2023, involving funded partners and authorities to prevent and mitigate SEA risks. A national NGO is also part of the network chairing arrangements. 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.

UNHCR Presence in Bulgaria

Staff:

32 National Staff (UNHCR contract, AWF and UNHCR vacant positions)

10 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Sofia

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UNHCR is also grateful for the generous contributions from the private sector and individuals.