

Bulgaria

September 2021

Poor reception conditions and lack of integration prospects contribute to the perception of Bulgaria as **transit country**. UNHCR supports authorities in further developing the asylum system in line with international and EU standards.

While UNHCR advocates for establishing an effective protection-sensitive border management and continuing its protection monitoring, **challenges related to access to territory** at the border continue to persist.

UNHCR supports the government through **capacity-building** and provides **legal assistance** to ensure that persons in need of international protection have access to territory and asylum procedures.

POPULATION OF CONCERN*

Refugees	21,168
Asylum-seekers	1,938
Stateless persons	1,141

TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN*

Refugees	Asylum-seekers
Syria 18,310	Afghanistan 942
Iraq 1,235	Syria 593
Stateless 1,001	Pakistan 83

*Data source: UNHCR 2020 Global Trends Report and UNHCR [data finder platform](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

Increase in asylum arrivals

The number of asylum applications registered by the end of August 2021 (4,670) increased by 344% compared to August 2020 and 221% compared to August 2019.

Cooperation with Border Police

In July 2021, UNHCR, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, and Border Police signed the Addendum to the 2010 Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding that allows UNHCR to monitor the readmissions and returns.

Information Center

Sofia Municipality opened an Information and Services Office for third-country nationals, including refugees and asylum-seekers, following UNHCR advocacy. The Center is the first point of contact for asylum-seekers and refugees with the Municipality.

COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Advocacy: Thanks to UNHCR advocacy, refugees and asylum-seekers accommodated in the reception centres of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) are included in the National Vaccination Plan of Bulgaria.

Inclusion: While the vaccination of refugees and asylum-seekers accommodated at SAR reception centres commenced in May 2021 with J&J/Janssen vaccine, the overall interest in vaccination remains low with only 17% of the persons being vaccinated by the end of August 2021.

Communication with Communities: UNHCR has created a [webpage](#) with information on the epidemic situation targeting refugees and asylum-seekers. Since April 2020, a dedicated hotline for refugees and asylum-seekers on COVID-related measures and available services is operating in several languages.

THE GIRL WHO BELIEVES THAT LEARNING IS FOR EVERYONE



“We are all human beings and everyone deserves to have access to education” says Behnaz, asylum-seeker from Afghanistan. Thanks to the support of her teachers in Bulgaria she has learned the local language and enrolled in a prestigious high school. Watch the [story](#).

Key Priorities

- **Access to territory:** UNHCR regularly monitors the borders and immigration detention centres to ensure that people in **need** of international protection access asylum information and procedures. As a result, 1,341 individuals who applied for asylum at the borders and in detention by the end of August were assisted with legal aid.
- **Asylum Procedures:** UNHCR is engaged in regular joint audits of the asylum procedure quality as well as in capacity-building activities of the authorities to address identified challenges. In addition, UNHCR provides guidance materials and summaries in Bulgarian of European and national asylum case law, enabling administrative and judicial authorities to consider the adjudication of asylum claims consistently.
- **Integration:** UNHCR advocates for the targeted integration assistance of refugees, their access to mainstream services, and supports authorities to host and **integrate** refugees. UNHCR works closely with employers, social partners, and refugees to help find employment, including start-up initiatives and financial inclusion. UNHCR provides Bulgarian language classes for adults in addition to refugee education through advocacy and teacher support.
- **Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance:** In June 2020, UNHCR set up the Refugee Advisory Board (RAB), empowering refugees participation in decisions that affect them. While RAB actively multiplies refugees' voices on regional and global levels, it was awarded an innovation grant to launch an anti-rumor campaign in 4 languages. Some of the featured articles address the rumors related to COVID-19.

- **Education:** UNHCR supports the government to improve access to education for refugee and asylum-seeker children and works with social workers, teachers, and service providers to enhance their capacity, including providing guidance materials.

Working with Partners

- UNHCR works with authorities on policies and legislation at the inter-ministerial level and the National Assembly with relevant committees and has established a good working relationship with the judiciary, academia, civil society, regional authorities, and media.
- UNHCR works with five partner NGOs – providing legal assistance, social support, cultural mediation, language classes, and integration advocacy.

Statelessness

- Bulgaria acceded to both Statelessness Conventions in 2012 and has a statelessness determination procedure (SDP) in place since 2017. Following UNHCR advocacy, in 2020, Bulgaria lifted one of its reservations to the 1954 Convention, pledging to review the relevance of the remaining ones. The remaining challenges are related to identifying stateless persons, adequate access to rights, and further improving the quality of SDP, in line with a pledge made by Bulgaria during the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

UNHCR Presence in Bulgaria

Staff:

12 National Staff
2 International Staff

Offices:

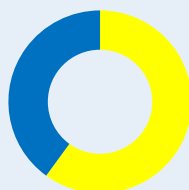
1 Branch Office in Sofia

Financial information (28 September 2021)

Financial requirements

USD 1.9 M

Funding gap
41%
0.8 M



Funded
59%
1.1 M

UNHCR is grateful to the donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the 2021 global programmes. Donors of USD 10 million or more are:

Norway | Sweden | Private donors Spain | Netherlands | Denmark | Private donors Korea | United Kingdom | Germany | Private donors Japan | Japan | France | Switzerland | Private donors Italy | Private donors Sweden | Ireland | Belgium | Italy | United States of America