

Belarus

February 2021

Mandate in the country: UNHCR has been working in Belarus since 1995 helping people of concern and supporting the Government in strengthening its asylum system and policies.

International legal framework: Belarus is a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol since 2001.

Advocacy: UNHCR advocates for Belarus' accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions in the framework of #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

Asylum-seekers	111
Refugees*	2,823
Stateless people	6,296

*includes holders of refugee status and complementary protection

TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Refugees**		Asylum-seekers	
Ukraine	2394	Ukraine	56
Afghanistan	220	Syrian Arab Rep.	6
Syria	64	Kazakhstan	5

Data source: UNHCR 2020 Mid-Year Statistical Report and UNHCR [data finder](#)

COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Advocacy: UNHCR produced 6,000 leaflets with basic information on COVID-19 and distributed them across all regions of Belarus among people of concern and partner organizations.

Inclusion of persons of concern: UNHCR provided special assistance to people of concern who have been affected by COVID-19, including medical personnel. UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons into national vaccination plans for COVID-19.

Communication with Communities: UNHCR coordinated an SMS campaign to inform people of concern of COVID-19 and where to go for counselling and assistance.

Health: UNHCR distributed protective masks and sanitizers to people of concern and partners (10,000 items in 2020, more than 250 beneficiaries), facilitated access to medical care and medicaments for those in need.

HIGHLIGHTS

9,235

Persons of concern were in Belarus as of mid-2020.

589

people applied for asylum in 2020, which is lower than in previous two years.

28,160

USD was spent in 2020 to help people of concern who have lost their job due to the spread of COVID-19.

Statelessness

Belarus is expected to accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions in 2021 upon completion of all national procedures, as pledged in 2019.



Refugees receive clothes from UNIQLO

11 tons of clothing were distributed in three regions of Belarus through Belarusian Red Cross Society. Items included winter clothing and daily basics for all age groups.

Key Priorities

- **Protection (monitoring):** UNHCR conducts regular missions to the regions to meet with people of concern, state authorities and local NGOs. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2020 these consultations were done remotely via telephone and online messengers.
- **Access to territory:** UNHCR visits detention facilities to counsel apprehended foreigners on the possibility to apply for asylum in Belarus. Together with Refugee Counselling Service UNHCR interviews foreigners at Belarus-Poland border (90% are citizens of the Russian Federation from Chechnya) after non-admission to the EU to inform them about their right to seek asylum in Belarus.
- **Asylum Systems Quality Initiative in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus:** UNHCR enhances the Belarusian asylum system and quality of state Refugee Status Determination procedure through capacity building and regional best practices exchange. Despite COVID-19 UNHCR has enjoyed unhampered access to asylum-seekers and their cases from the authorities.
- **Education and Health:** UNHCR supports refugee children to attend IT classes during weekends. Through the Belarusian Red Cross Society, UNHCR provides school grants (100 grants in 2020) and school supplies (1,117 children in 2020) to vulnerable families. UNHCR facilitates access of people of concern to medical services and covers medical expenses for those in special need.
- **Food Security and Basic Needs:** UNHCR provides monthly allowances and emergency financial assistance to most vulnerable families (740 beneficiaries in 2020), food and hygiene kits (251 beneficiaries in 2020). In 2020, it coordinated quarterly donations of dairy products from *Danone* and distribution of clothes from *UNIQLO*.
- **Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance:** UNHCR advocates with local actors to help people of concern to get education and employment (in 2020, 12 people were employed) and supports the creation of sustainable livelihood conditions (4 small-scale projects and 7 micro-initiatives were financed and supported in 2020).

- **Advocacy:** Together with its partner organizations UNHCR works to raise awareness on the refugee and statelessness causes in the country through press events, trainings, thematic competitions and contests, educational events, Model UN conferences, media interactions and publications, outdoor advertising, social media accounts, public campaigns and fundraisers (> 20 total in 2020)

Working with Partners

- UNHCR cooperates with the Government of Belarus: its main partner is Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as the State Border Committee and the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Health, Education, Labour and Social Protection. It has 4 implementing partners among NGOs - Belarusian Red Cross Society, Refugee Counselling Service as UNHCR project with "Belarusian Movement of Medical Workers", Centre for Children and Adolescents "Evrika" and International Public Association "Evolutio".
- UNHCR is part of UN Country Team engaging in bilateral and joint activities with UN entities.

Statelessness

- Belarus is not yet party to the UN Statelessness Conventions. In October 2019 it pledged to accede to the 1954 and the 1961 Conventions, which is expected in 2021 after the new edition of the Law on Citizenship of Belarus comes into force on 18 June 2021 (accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions is not possible if at that moment a country's legislation is in the process of amendments).
- Together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, UNHCR provides free of charge legal counselling and financial aid to stateless people to pay state duties required to apply for citizenship and permanent residence on the way to naturalization (111 people assisted in 2020).

UNHCR Presence in Belarus

Staff:

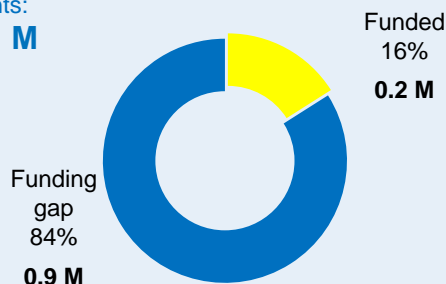
5 National Staff
 1 International Staff
 2 Affiliated Work Force

Offices:

1 Branch Office in Minsk
 6 Refugee Counselling Service Offices (UNHCR project)

Financial information (28 February 2021)

Financial requirements:
USD 1.1 M



UNHCR is grateful to the major donors of unearmarked contributions* to the 2021 global programmes (USD, 28 February):

Norway 80 M | Sweden 66.9 M | Netherlands 36.1 M | Denmark 34.6 M | Germany 22.1 M | Switzerland 16.4 M | Ireland 12.5 M | Belgium 11.9 M

*Unearmarked contributions allow UNHCR for critical flexibility in how best to reach populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Above are donors of USD 10 million or more.

UNHCR Belarus is also grateful to the private sector and international donors for assistance in 2020 and continued support for 2021

Danone | Epam | IBA Group | Priorbank | UNIQLO | A1 | MTC | Life: | UK Embassy in Belarus