

Bulgaria

February 2021

Bulgaria acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol in 1992. UNHCR has a presence in Bulgaria since 1993. The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) is responsible for asylum claims.

UNHCR **supports** authorities and civil society concerned with the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR **advocates** for further development of the **national Protection system** within the framework of the Common European Asylum System and in line with international standards.

POPULATION OF CONCERN*

Refugees	20,688
Asylum-seekers	760
Stateless people	1,031

TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Syria	17,832	Syria	164
Iraq	1,269	Afghanistan	150
Stateless	1,000	Iraq	105

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

COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Inclusion: Asylum-seekers and refugees are included in the national vaccination plan under the same terms and conditions as Bulgarian nationals. UNHCR and partners are supporting authorities in information campaigns about the spread and prevention of COVID-19 and the vaccination plan.

Communication with Communities: UNHCR has created a [webpage](#) with information on the epidemic situation targeting refugees and asylum-seekers.

Refugee-Migrant Service at Bulgarian Red Cross has introduced a hotline funded by UNHCR Bulgaria to provide up-to-date information about preventive measures in the country in seven different languages. [Link to video story](#)

HIGHLIGHTS



Legislative processes

UNHCR's contributes to ensuring asylum and integration policy meet international and EU standards.



Capacity-building

for authorities, judiciary and civil society enhances their skills and improves coordination on access to rights



Legal and social programmes

UNHCR informs on rights and obligations, offering **legal and social support** to asylum-seekers and **integration support** to refugees by facilitating access to education, employment, and services.

Statelessness

Following UNHCR advocacy, the Government lifted in 2020 its reservation to Article 31 of the 1954 Convention and committed to reviewing remaining reservations, such as improving the 2017 statelessness determination



Yemeni refugee support Bulgarian families in need

The **story** of Sara Al-Kaf, a Refugee Advisory Board member, who has initiated a charity project to give back to the local society. Watch [here](#)

Key Priorities

- **Protection monitoring:** UNHCR conducts monitoring at border areas and of detention and reception conditions in government-operated facilities as well as integration monitoring which inform its advocacy.
- **Access to territory:** A 2010 tri-partite MOU with the Border Police and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee enables UNHCR to conduct border monitoring, provide legal assistance, and follow-up on protection incidents. UNHCR advocates for a protection-sensitive entry system ensuring asylum-seekers have direct access to the procedure without detention.
- **Detention:** UNHCR supports the government with capacity-building and provides legal assistance and information to persons in immigration detention centres. Based on a 2017 MOU, UNHCR and authorities jointly monitor detention facilities and ensure that no children are detained in the immigration process; the MoU working group addresses challenges including implementation of alternatives to detention, interpretation at immigration detention centres.
- **Asylum procedures:** UNHCR regularly audits the quality of the asylum procedure, provides guidance materials and trainings on European and national asylum case law. UNHCR trains lawyers from the National Bureau for Legal Aid in provision of free legal aid for asylum-seekers and refugees.
- **Resettlement and Complementary Pathways:** As part of EU measures for responsibility-sharing, Bulgaria has resettled 85 refugees from Turkey (out of 110) since 2018 and relocated 67 asylum-seekers from Greece (including 17 unaccompanied children) and 10 from Italy since 2016.
- **Integration:** UNHCR advocates for targeted integration assistance to refugees and access to services, engages in raising awareness, training, and establishing partnerships with employers, social partners and refugees on employment and financial inclusion.
- **Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance:** In June 2020, UNHCR set up the Refugee Advisory Board

(RAB), a group of refugees, empowering them to participate in policies that affect them.

- **Child protection:** UNHCR advocates to ensure that unaccompanied children are identified and have access to safe and age-appropriate care arrangements within the national child protection system and to best interest procedures.
- **Education:** UNHCR supports the government in improving access to education for refugee and asylum-seeking children, and works with social workers, teachers and service providers to enhance their capacity, including with 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, media. UNHCR works with five partner NGOs on legal assistance, social support, cultural mediation, language classes, and integration advocacy.
- **External Engagement:** UNHCR works with opinion leaders and media on key refugee issues by focusing on positive human stories and successful integration.

Statelessness

- Bulgaria acceded to both Statelessness Conventions in 2012 and has a statelessness determination procedure since 2017. Following UNHCR advocacy, Bulgaria lifted one reservation to the 1954 Convention in 2020, pledging to review the remaining ones. Since 2017, 125 persons have been granted statelessness status. Remaining challenges relate to identification, effective access to rights, and improving procedural quality, as pledged at the 2019 ExCom High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

UNHCR Presence in Bulgaria

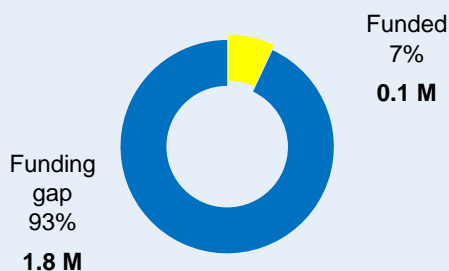
Staff:

12 National Staff

2 International Staff

Financial information (28 February 2021)

Financial Requirements:
USD 1.9 M



UNHCR is grateful to the major donors of unearmarked contributions* to the 2021 global programmes (USD, as of 9 March 2021):

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.