

# Bulgaria

February 2022

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

While UNHCR advocates establishing effective protection-sensitive border management and continues to conduct protection monitoring, **challenges related to access to territory** at the border persist.

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

## POPULATION OF CONCERN\*

Refugees	<b>21,770</b>
Asylum-seekers	<b>1,691</b>
Stateless persons	<b>1,143</b>

## TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN\*

Refugees	Asylum-seekers
Syrian Arab Republic <b>19,014</b>	Afghanistan <b>731</b>
Iraq <b>1,180</b>	Syrian Arab Republic <b>628</b>
Stateless <b>1,000</b>	Pakistan <b>89</b>

\*Data source: UNHCR 2021 Mid-Year Statistical Report and UNHCR [data finder platform](#)

## COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

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

**Inclusion:** The vaccination of refugees and asylum-seekers accommodated at SAR reception centres commenced in May 2021. By the end of January 2022, 1,421 persons had been vaccinated through the campaign.

**Communication with Communities:** UNHCR created a [webpage](#) for refugees and asylum-seekers with information on the COVID-19 situation; the page has received 9,612 views since its inception in April 2020. Over the same time, UNHCR has supported a dedicated hotline available in several languages for refugees and asylum-seekers on COVID-19 containment measures and available services; 5,064 calls were received in 2021.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Increase in asylum applications

10,999 asylum applications were registered in 2021, representing an increase of 212 per cent from 2020 (3,525) and 411 per cent from 2019 (2,152).

### Cooperation with Border Police

In July 2021, UNHCR, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) and Border Police signed an addendum to the 2010 Tripartite MoU that allows UNHCR and BHC to monitor readmissions and returns. Since then, UNHCR and BHC have monitored 122 people under readmissions and returns procedures to ensure that no persons in need of international protection are refouled.

### Engaging the business community

UNHCR and partners developed a network of companies interested in providing employment to refugees or including them in Corporate Social Responsibility policies. In December 2021, five companies received recognition awards jointly by Sofia Municipality, UNHCR and Caritas Sofia for their long-term support.

## AFGHAN FAMILY STARTS A NEW LIFE IN BULGARIA



“The biggest enterprise for production of handbags and leather accessories in Bulgaria “Prolet Ltd” has helped Habibullah and his family from Afghanistan find a job and a new home. [Watch the story.](#)”

## Key Priorities

- **Access to territory:** UNHCR regularly monitors borders and immigration detention centers to ensure that people in need of international protection have access to asylum information and procedures. In 2021, 8,626 individuals who applied for asylum at the borders and in detention were assisted in accessing the asylum procedures.
- **Asylum procedures:** Bulgaria received 10,999 asylum applications in 2021. UNHCR is engaged in regular joint audits of the quality of asylum procedures and in capacity-building activities for authorities to address identified challenges. UNHCR also 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 accordingly.
- **Integration:** UNHCR advocates for the establishment of a State-led integration programme for refugees. UNHCR leads a consultative process for developing an Integration Manifest to envision how this system should be coordinated and funded. The Office 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 and refugee awareness through advocacy and support for teachers.
- **Communicating with Communities:** UNHCR coordinates the annual age, gender and diversity (AGD) participatory assessment on refugee needs in Bulgaria. In 2021, 228 people took part in 25 in-person groups across all detention and reception centres, with the complaints, ideas and recommendations of participants communicated to authorities and partners to inform programming.
- **Education:** UNHCR works closely with the Ministry of Education and Science to facilitate access and improve the quality of school education for refugee children. UNHCR produces guidance materials,

organizes training for teachers and funds additional educational support for pupils.

## 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 relate to identifying stateless persons, ensuring adequate access to rights, and further improving the quality of the SDP in line with a pledge made by Bulgaria during the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness. Bulgaria had granted status to 148 stateless persons by the end of 2021.

## UNHCR Presence in Bulgaria

### Staff:

12 National Staff  
2 International Staff

### Offices:

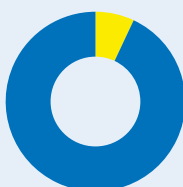
1 Branch Office in Sofia

## Financial information (22 February 2022)

### Financial requirements

USD 1.9 M

Funding gap  
93%  
1.8 M



Funded  
7%  
0.1 M

UNHCR is grateful to the donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the 2022 global programmes. Donors of USD 10 million or more are:

**Sweden | Norway | Netherlands | Denmark | Germany | Switzerland | Belgium | Ireland**

Unearmarked contributions provide UNHCR with vital flexibility in determining how best to protect and assist persons of concern who are in the greatest need or at the greatest risk.