

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

September 2023

UNHCR has been present in BiH **since the 1990s**, when it led a large-scale humanitarian operation during the Yugoslav Wars, and continues supporting the implementation of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement to address the **protracted displacement** situation.

UNHCR also works with authorities to end **statelessness** in BiH. While significant progress has been made, the establishment of a sustainable prevention mechanism remains crucial.

Today, BiH is mainly characterized by a **mixed movements** context, with high numbers of irregular arrivals and turnover. UNHCR cooperates with the authorities notably to improve the efficiency of the **asylum procedure**.

UNHCR POPULATION STATISTICS (as of mid-2023)*

Refugees	313
Asylum-seekers	70
Stateless people	33
Others of concern	1,299

Top three countries of origin*

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Ukraine	172	Russian Federation	34
Türkiye	51	Türkiye	16
Serbia and Kosovo**	35	Afghanistan	4

*UNHCR 2023 Mid-Year Trends and UNHCR data finder
**S/RES/1244 (1999)

HIGHLIGHTS

Improvements in asylum processing

Asylum processing has improved significantly in BiH when compared to recent years. For example, the average time from registration to first-instance decision dropped by a third in 2023 so far (213 days) compared with 2022 (306), and more than half compared with 2021 (444 days).

The end of the Regional Housing Programme (RHP) and remaining people in need

The RHP ended on 30 June and brought durable housing to an estimated 2,700 families of refugees, displaced persons, and returnees in BiH. However, there are still people without a housing solution. UNHCR advocates with the authorities to assist those who remain in need more than 28 years after the war ended. The RHP's Final Conference is scheduled to take place in Sarajevo later this year.

UPDATE ON THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM (GRF)



9 pledges registered for BiH since 2019

in the areas of **statelessness**, **protection capacity** and **solutions**. UNHCR welcomes the planned participation of two BiH ministers to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and hopes that BiH institutions will incorporate pledges when amending the Law on Asylum. UNHCR notably commends the Ministry of Security's intention to introduce travel documents and family reunification for persons under subsidiary protection, as well as to facilitate access to the labour market for asylum-seekers.

Language courses

UNHCR offers local language lessons and organizes events to get acquainted with the BiH social and cultural values for forcibly displaced persons in the country. In 2023, there was a high increase in participation in those activities, which are contributing to the GRF objective 2 "**enhance refugee self-reliance**".



SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH FOOTBALL

80 children from local clubs and from vulnerable groups, including from refugee, asylum-seeking, and migrant families, took part in a football match in July through a social integration initiative in Bihać. Sports activities were organized by UNHCR with the National Football Association of BiH, with support from UEFA. [Read more here.](#)

Key Priorities

- **Capacity-building:** UNHCR, together with the Ministry of Security, initiated a series of trainings for BiH border police to improve access to asylum for persons in need of international protection. Similar sessions are also being held for police offices located at key entry and exit points in the country.
- **Advocacy:** For example, a three-day training on advocacy for international protection was organized by the San Remo International Institute of Humanitarian Law for UNHCR staff, its legal partner and the BiH Ombudsmen.
- **Protection monitoring:** UNHCR published its [2022 Participatory Assessment Report](#), which identifies the main concerns of forcibly displaced people in BiH and key recommendations on protection and integration. A key finding is that BiH authorities maintain a restrictive approach to assessing asylum claims, granting refugee status in a very limited number of cases. There is a need to improve the quality of asylum decisions, such as recognizing refugee status when criteria are met.
- **Integration:** UNHCR stepped up its work with the private sector to identify companies willing to provide employment to refugees in BiH. For example, six persons under international protection attended job interviews with the Inditex company in Sarajevo, while five were hired starting in August.
- **Internally Displaced Persons:** To progress on the closure of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement, updated data on the needs of vulnerable displaced persons is required. Through a prioritized approach, this would allow to implement targeted reforms and to better measure progress, being complementary with the current status-based approach for access to rights.

Working with Partners

- Through partnership agreements, UNHCR works with various **government counterparts**, namely the Service for Foreigners' Affairs, the Ministry of Security's Sector for Asylum and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, as well as with civil **society partners**, namely Vaša prava BiH, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Women's Initiative and the Catholic Relief Services.
- UNHCR also **engages externally** with BiH authorities at all levels, sister UN agencies, the EU Delegation and other international organizations, the Red Cross societies, NGOs, private sector actors, as well as the broader public. For example, UNHCR partnered with the Sarajevo Film Festival for the second year running. In addition and for the first time, UNHCR BiH cooperated with the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) for the organization of social integration activities through sporting events.

Statelessness

- BiH is a party to both the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness. While significant progress has been made, the establishment of a sustainable prevention mechanism remains crucial. As per the Law on Foreigners, it is possible to determine statelessness under the procedure for temporary residence on humanitarian grounds.
- Since the start of the [#iBelong](#) campaign in 2014, 861 persons obtained documents with support from UNHCR. As of end-August, 31 pending cases were remaining.

UNHCR Presence in BiH

Staff:

27 National Personnel
 8 International Personnel
 1 Intern

Offices:

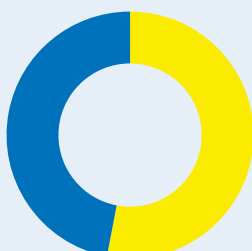
1 Country Office in Sarajevo
 1 Field Unit in Bihać
 1 Field Unit in Tuzla

Financial information (September 2023)

Financial requirements

\$ 8.7 M

Funding gap 47%
 \$ 4.1 M



Funded 53%
 \$ 4.6 M

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