

Bulgaria

05 August 2022

Since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, Bulgaria has received over half a million refugees at its borders and has given temporary protection to approximately 124,000 Ukrainian refugees, 92 per cent of whom are women and children.

Between 85-86,000 Ukrainian refugees remain within the country as of 5 August 2022.

During the first half of 2022, Bulgaria witnessed an increase in asylum applications from non-Ukrainian caseloads. 8,840 persons applied for international protection with the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), which represents an increase of 288 per cent compared with the same period in 2021, which saw 2,277 persons apply for international protection at SAR.

Most originate from Afghanistan, Syria, and North Africa.

UNHCR has stepped up its operations and capacity in Bulgaria and is leading the inter-agency response in alignment with the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP).

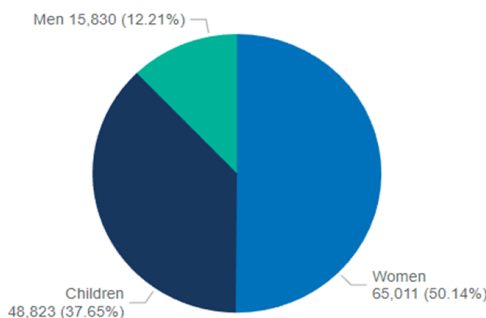
Key Figures* [5 August 2022]

85,231

Individual refugees from Ukraine that have remained in Bulgaria

127,104

Refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection in Bulgaria
 TP Age & Gender



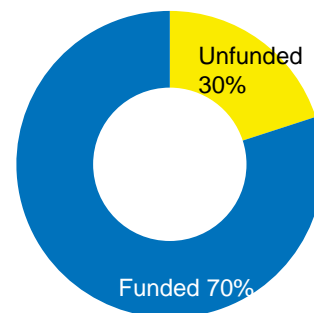
92%

of refugees remaining in Bulgaria are women and children

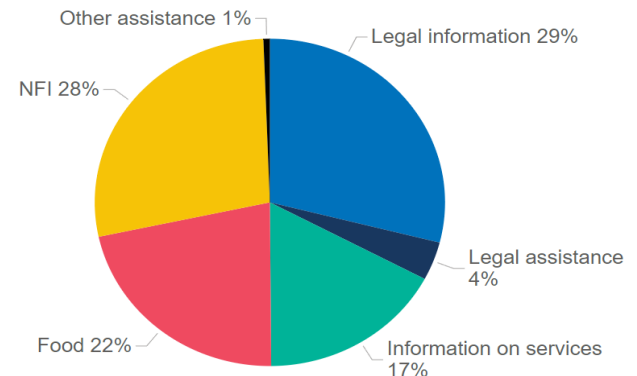
FUNDING (AS OF 5 AUGUST)

USD 19.9 million

requested for the Bulgarian Operation



Breakdown of UNHCR Assistance



TOTAL NUMBER OF ASSISTED INDIVIDUALS: 37,828

*See the [Operational Data Portal](#) for the Ukraine Refugee Situation for more information.

Operational Context

In July, UNHCR observed an increase in the number of Ukrainians arriving (mostly via Romania), averaging between 3-4,000 daily. It should be noted that on a daily basis the number of Ukrainians that arrive from Romania nearly equals the number that are recorded leaving Bulgaria for other countries.

Refugee movements to Bulgaria via Romania, and especially of Ukrainians of Bulgarian origin – the Bessarabian Bulgarians - are expected to increase further if there is an escalation of hostilities. Bulgarians in Ukraine make up the fifth largest minority in the country and reside in southern Ukraine, namely around Odesa Oblast.

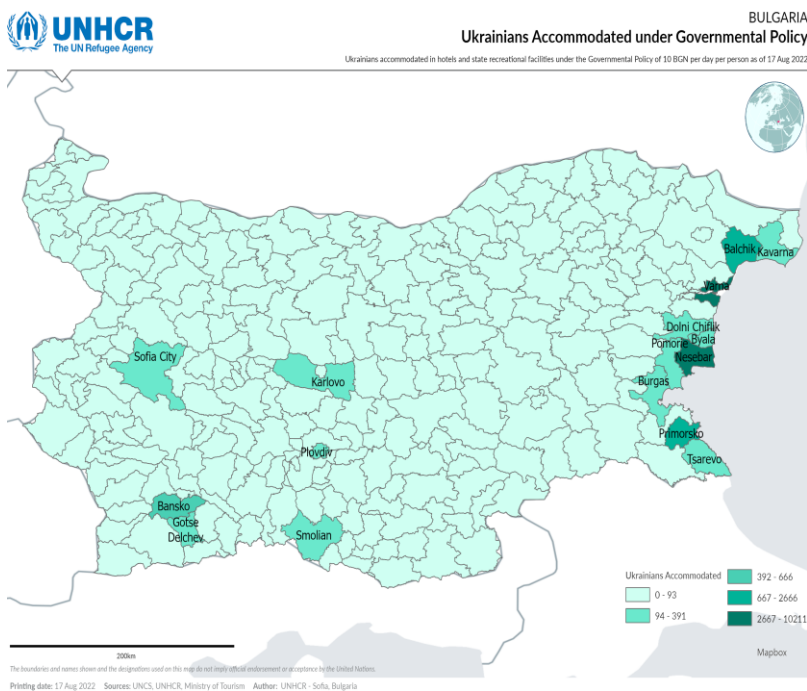
While refugees from Ukraine have unhindered access to Bulgarian territory and enjoy temporary protection, non-Ukrainians face challenges in entering the country.

UNHCR advocates for the equal access to territory and protection for all refugees, regardless of their origin and background.



Accommodation and Emergency Relief

The government hotel accommodation scheme, which currently hosts some 25,178 persons, or 27 per cent of all



Ukrainian refugees that have remained in the country, has been extended until 30 September following a decision on 29 July by the Bulgarian Council of Ministers.

UNHCR has been actively advocating with the government for a more durable, long-term solution to meet the accommodation needs of refugees, especially with the winter season fast approaching.

Nearly 70 per cent of Ukrainians who remain in Bulgaria do not currently reside in the Government subsidized hotels or state-owned accommodation centres. However, as their stay in Bulgaria continues, it is likely that many of them may also require winterisation support.

As part of its preparedness actions towards the start of the winter season, UNHCR has stepped up its operations and capacity in Bulgaria. Specifically, UNHCR has prepositioned core relief items¹ such as pillows, mattresses, kitchen sets, diapers, baby food/formula, in addition to women and children’s clothing. These items will be distributed across all regions in Bulgaria within the months of September and October. Furthermore, UNHCR is extending its Cash for Protection programme to cover the winter period - with an initial target of 10,000 vulnerable persons.

UNHCR is coordinating the joint inter-agency winterisation response, within the framework of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) recalibration.



UNHCR staff receive a delivery of core relief items at the BRC Central National Warehouse in Lozen @UNHCR



Children and Family support

UNHCR has scaled up its protection and monitoring activities together with UNICEF and other partners by opening its sixth Blue Dot on 14 July in Varna. Together, UNICEF and UNHCR have already opened such centres in the cities of Sofia and Burgas as well as in Ruse and Durankulak at the Bulgarian-Romanian border, all of which host large numbers of Ukrainian refugees.



Counseling session at the Blue dots facility in Sofia @UNHCR

Blue Dots provide a safe space, support, and referrals for health care, legal, education and psychosocial support. They bring together critical protection services and information for refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, with a particular focus on children and those at greatest risk, including unaccompanied and separated children, persons with disabilities, cases of suspected trafficking, survivors of sexual or gender-based violence and refugees from LGBTIQ+ community.

UNHCR and UNICEF have trained Blue Dot staff and are also in the process of deploying the KoBo² Collection and Monitoring tool, for monitoring, identification, and referral of persons with specific needs.

Collectively, 11,710 people have received protection support through the Blue Dots initiative from its inception on 9 May to the end of July 2022.

¹ Breakdown of numbers of core relief items in stock includes: - 1,976 kitchen sets, 5,000 quilts, 5,440 mattresses, 3,000 bed linens, 10,000 pillows, and 4004 hygienic family kits are already stored and ready for distribution, and 10,000 hygiene parcels and 5,000 body towels are expected to arrive in the next week.

² <https://kobo.unhcr.org> – KoBo is a free toolkit for collecting and managing data in challenging environments and is the most widely-used tool in humanitarian emergencies. It allows data collection using mobile devices and computers.



Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

UNHCR distributes PSEA posters at Crisis Centres and entry points. Information on PSEA is also included on Bulgaria's newly established [help page](#). UNHCR developed the leaflets and posters on the risks of trafficking jointly with the National Commission for Combating Trafficking of Human Beings.

Four regional training sessions on Risks of Trafficking in the context of the Ukrainian Situation, for community-based and NGO volunteers have been conducted jointly with the National Commission for Combating Trafficking of Human Beings.

UNHCR and UNICEF have jointly initiated the mapping of the PSEA reporting channels among the UN agencies. As a way forward, risk assessment on SEA will inform the development of the Joint PSEA Plan of Action.



Cash for Protection

UNHCR, together with the Bulgarian Red Cross, started rolling out financial, one-time cash assistance, or Cash for Protection programme (CoP) to the most vulnerable Ukrainian households on 2 August in Burgas, where most refugees currently reside. UNHCR is working to increase the number of referrals in Varna and Sofia as well. In addition, UNHCR plans to conduct mobile visits for households with mobility issues. UNHCR anticipates that the CoP will help approximately 10,000 of the most vulnerable refugees currently living in Bulgaria.

The CoP will be extended until the end of the winter period.



Self-Reliance and Livelihoods

Economic inclusion enables refugees to provide for themselves and their families and be net contributors to economic development as consumers, workers, and entrepreneurs. It is one of the most important keys to enhancing protection and unlocking solutions for refugees.

Over the last four months, there has been continued advocacy by UNHCR and efforts by the Government of Bulgaria (GoB) to assist refugees and to promote their access to livelihoods and economic inclusion. This has mainly been through the Government's [Solidarity Project](#). As a result, over 5,600 Ukrainian refugees have been [employed](#) in Bulgaria by 15 June, 2022 - representing more than 6% of refugees reported as currently remaining in Bulgaria and more than 15% of the working population of those fleeing the war in Ukraine. This is a remarkable achievement, considering that on average, it takes five years for a quarter of refugees at working age to be employed in Europe.

In most cases, however, this employment is only temporary, as most are employed as low-skilled seasonal workers in hotels, albeit 65 per cent having completed higher education. Lack of childcare and difficulty to legalize diplomas remain key obstacles to descent employment.

Refugees need long-term solutions. UNHCR is contributing to these efforts by working together with the public and private sector and refugees themselves to strengthen refugees' socio-economic inclusion. In May and June, the

operation organized job fairs in Sofia and Varna where over 60 employers met with Ukrainian refugees offering jobs in a range of sectors from tech, trade and finance to manufacturing services.

 **Education**

With the new school year approaching and the conflict in Ukraine still ongoing, parents of Ukrainian children in refugee hosting countries are looking to what comes next. Many have started enrolling their children in local schools in host countries in the European Union, like Bulgaria, to ensure the continuity of their education. Overall, however, we are noticing that the enrolment rates of Ukrainian children in national school systems across Europe are still very low and parents are very reluctant to enrol their children in host countries.

Over 1,300 enrolment applications for kindergarten and schools have been submitted to the Bulgarian national authorities by Ukrainian nationals; 82 children are already enrolled in kindergarten, while 439 are enrolled in schools.

UNHCR, together with the Ministry of Education and Science and UNICEF, has initiated a large-scale information campaign on school enrolment - ahead of the school year starting in September. NGOs and local representations of the educational and health authorities will provide information sessions in most hotels and recreational bases, as well as online. UNHCR will fund 15 such sessions in the big hotels and organize online sessions. Videos and information materials have been developed, including vaccination requirements and diploma recognition procedures.

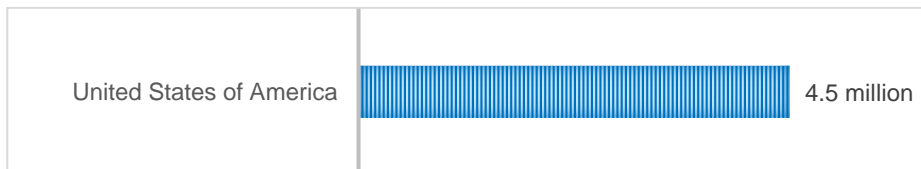
Currently, there is no comprehensive state plan for Bulgarian language classes. UNHCR is providing 15 language courses to Ukrainian refugees through partners in several locations and will expand to 17 classes.

Financial Information

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programs with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Earmarked contributions for the operation amount to some **US\$ 4,500,000 million**.



SOFTLY EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of broadly earmarked contributions that can potentially be used for this operation due to their earmarking to a related situation or theme, or to the region or sub-region.

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For more information, please visit the [Global Focus page for the Ukraine Situation](#) here.

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