

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

February 2025

UNHCR works with authorities and civil society to improve the early identification of those with **protection needs** and to strengthen **asylum procedures**.

The operational footprint of UNHCR in BiH has progressively reduced, shifting focus on core mandate activities related to asylum, inclusion and statelessness, and expanding **advocacy** efforts.

Together with authorities and NGO partners, UNHCR works to resolve all known cases of **statelessness** and to prevent new cases from arising.

POPULATION STATISTICS (as of mid-2024)*

Refugees	437
Asylum-seekers	136
Stateless people	17
Others of concern	1,441

Top three countries of origin

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Ukraine	239	Syrian Arab Republic	30
Türkiye	64	Türkiye	26
Russian Federation	34	Russian Federation	25

*UNHCR Mid-Year Statistical Report 2024 and UNHCR [data finder](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

More than 3,000 people informed on asylum and international protection in 2024

Those arriving irregularly within mixed movements are frequently unfamiliar with the national laws or language. They are often unaware of their rights and obligations to make informed decisions on applying for international protection. With support from the European Union, UNHCR and its NGO partner Vaša prava BiH provide legal counselling on asylum and international protection in BiH.

234 new asylum applications in 2024

In 2024, the Sector for Asylum of the Ministry of Security registered the claims of 234 asylum-seekers, mostly Syrian, Turkish and Palestinian nationals, which is 59 per cent higher than during the same time in 2023.

Supporting refugee inclusion through small business grants

UNHCR, together with its partner the Catholic Relief Services, supports the socio-economic inclusion and self-reliance of refugees in BiH. In 2024, three households benefitted from small business grants to open shops and a restaurant. Such support aims to help refugees establish a sustainable source of income, as well as to become empowered actors in their communities and agents of their own inclusion. Interaction with clients contributes to language skills and understanding of local customs, which are key components for a meaningful social inclusion. Refugee entrepreneurs foster cultural exchange and build connections, proving the power of hospitality and providing meaningful contributions to their host communities.



Shirin, a Syrian refugee entrepreneur, at the opening of her restaurant in the BiH capital Sarajevo ©Vanja Čerimagić

SHIRIN, A REFUGEE FROM SYRIA, MADE HER DREAM COME TRUE BY OPENING “ZAATAR-IA”, A RESTAURANT WITH LEVANT DELICACIES

Learn more [here](#) about the success story of Shirin, a Syrian refugee who found hope in Sarajevo and turned her dream into reality by opening a restaurant.

Key Priorities

- **Access to territory:** UNHCR works with national counterparts to ensure that forcibly displaced people have access to territory and asylum procedures.
- **Free legal aid:** UNHCR continued to strengthen the capacities of public free legal aid offices and support the establishment of a referral mechanism between state and non-state free legal aid providers. This was to ensure representation of forcibly displaced and stateless people, and facilitate the progressive taking over of cases by governmental free legal aid offices.
- **Inclusion:** UNHCR strengthened its partnership with the public employment services, ensuring that unemployed refugees, who are registered with municipal employment offices, are eligible to access public employment programmes and have equal status in the labour market as citizens. Collaboration with public programmes is a step towards the inclusion of people under international protection reducing their reliance on humanitarian assistance.
- **Social cohesion** activities promoted peaceful coexistence between local and forcibly displaced communities. UNHCR partnered with Artolution, an organization that promotes collaborative art-making in vulnerable communities. In Čapljina and Ilidža elementary schools, 40 refugee children and their peers from the host communities were brought together to create murals. By working together, children were empowered to become champions of inclusion through arts.
- **Internally displaced people:** UNHCR has been present in BiH since the 1990s, and still supports the implementation of the Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement to address the protracted displacement situation.

Working with Partners

- Through formal partnerships, UNHCR works with three **government partners**: the Service for Foreigners' Affairs, the Sector for Asylum of the Ministry of Security, and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. UNHCR also has agreements with the **civil society** organizations Vaša prava BiH, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Women's Initiative and the Catholic Relief Services.
- UNHCR engages with authorities at all levels, UN agencies, the European Union and other international organizations, the Red Cross societies, NGOs, the private sector and the broader public.

Statelessness

- BiH acceded to both the 1954 and the 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness. As per the Law on Foreigners, it is possible to determine statelessness under the procedure for temporary residence on humanitarian grounds.
- To mark the end of the #IBelong Campaign, with the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsmen of BiH, UNHCR and Vaša prava BiH organized two events in Sarajevo on 29 November. The **Special Report regarding the prevention of the risk of statelessness in BiH**, prepared by the BiH Ombudsman with support from UNHCR, was presented in the BiH parliament. Since the start of the campaign in 2014, 870 people obtained documents with support from UNHCR and its legal partner. At the end of 2024, UNHCR is aware of only 15 people who are stateless or at risk of statelessness in BiH.

UNHCR Presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Staff:

26 National personnel
 6 International personnel
 3 Interns

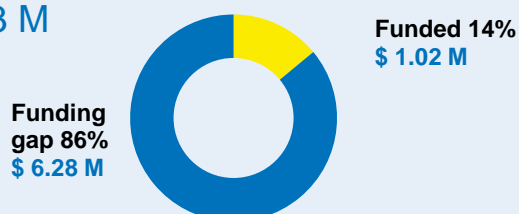
Offices:

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

Financial information (31 January 2025)

Financial requirements

\$ 7.3 M



UNHCR is grateful for the support from our top government donors in 2024 and 2025:

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UNHCR is also grateful for the generous contributions from the private sector and individuals.