

# Ukraine Refugee Response in Bulgaria

Factsheet - December 2022

unicef   
for every child



Ukrainian and Bulgarian children prepare Christmas decorations at the UNICEF supported Education Hub in Sofia

## KEY FIGURES



**148,873**  
people from Ukraine  
registered for temporary  
protection



**52,772**  
Children registered for  
temporary protection



**50,150**  
Ukrainian refugees  
in the country



**9,773**  
People in state-funded  
housing



**589**  
Unaccompanied or  
separated children

## RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS



**3.4 million**  
people reached through  
messaging on prevention  
and access to services



**57,401**  
people benefitted from  
access to safe spaces,  
protection and support  
hubs



**4,940**  
Refugee children  
accessing formal and  
non-formal education  
with UNICEF support

## Context

- The war in Ukraine, recent attacks on critical civilian infrastructure and harsh winter have continuously increased humanitarian needs and economic hardship, inhibiting returns and triggering new refugee movements.
- Since the beginning of the conflict, **148,873 Ukrainians have been granted temporary protection (52,772 children, 74,181 women and 21,920 men)**. With the volatile situation inside Ukraine and worsening living conditions affected by power cuts, any escalation of fighting in the eastern and southern parts of the country may result in a new influx of refugees in Bulgaria.
- As of 22 December, **50,150 Ukrainian refugees** are recorded in the country, including **9,773 accommodated in hotels and government bases**.
- The ability of refugees to sustain themselves is shrinking with increasing challenges related to **accommodation, access to health care, education and childcare, as well as lack of financial means and job opportunities**. On top of the psychological stress from the war and displacement, the lack of clarity and prospects induces stress for children and women, who face new challenges and are in even greater need of psychosocial support.
- As temperatures continue to drop and winter sets in, UNICEF and partners are focusing on **winterization support**, as well as scaling up assistance programmes to expand existing services on child protection, education, health, WASH and social protection schemes in strategic locations, in order to provide a multi-sectoral humanitarian response to children and families on the move at the peak of the winter season.

## Humanitarian Response and Coordination

- Since the opening of its office in Sofia in 2005, UNICEF has been assisting the government in promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of every child in Bulgaria.
- UNICEF is now supporting the government to ensure access to services, protection and social assistance for Ukrainian children, their families and host communities.
- UNICEF participates in the inter-agency coordination mechanism together with UNHCR, WHO, IOM and IFRC, and contributes to the work of technical working groups on 'Education', 'Children' and 'Prevention of trafficking'.
- UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and other national partners such as the State Agency for Refugees, State Agency for Child Protection, district administrations and municipalities. UNICEF leverages its strategic partnerships with line ministries and local authorities to support a broader multi-sectoral humanitarian response and strengthen the capacities of national systems through technical and financial support, advice, policy advocacy and engagement for longer-term and sustainable results.
- To reach affected children and families from Ukraine, UNICEF is scaling up its humanitarian support by providing supplies and services, building the capacity of frontline responders and supporting national systems in close coordination with the government, UN agencies, donor community and civil society organizations.



## Health and Early Childhood Development

- UNICEF's response is focused on the provision of information to caregivers, training of healthcare workers and support to vaccination activities.
- To address the lack of access to primary health care and administrative bottlenecks, UNICEF will facilitate access to essential health services for children and women in major hosting areas by supporting mobile health services provided by local health authorities, and by building the capacity of health professionals.
- Parenting counseling for families with young children, including children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, has been provided through digital tools and face-to-face counseling.



## Child protection

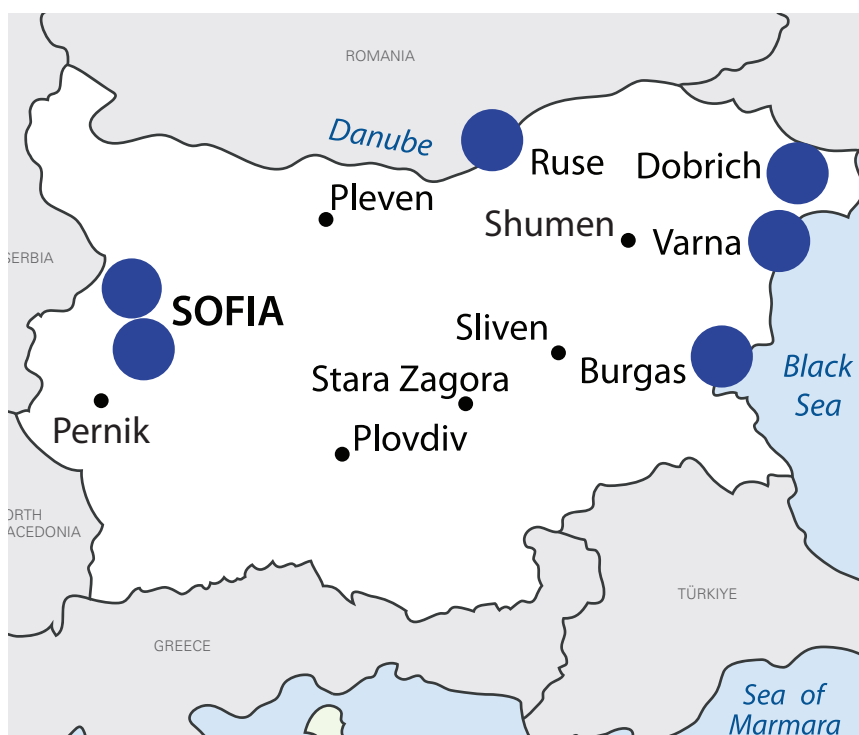
- UNICEF supports **child protection interventions**, including the safe spaces, Child and Family Protection and Support Hubs known as 'Blue Dots', which have reached more than **57,401** children and adults with mental health and psychosocial support, legal aid and counseling, a gender-based violence mitigation response, and information on prevention and access to services.
- UNICEF focuses on **strengthening systems** to ensure that all children have access to appropriate care, protection and support services. The organization has invested in training, supervision and other initiatives to improve the capacity of frontline workers, the exchange of good practices and co-ordination of support.
- UNICEF has contributed to developing national Guidance on **working with unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)**, developing the Rules for placement of UASC in social services adopted by the State Agency for Refugee in October 2022, and is a member of the Permanent Expert Working Group set up to monitor the coordination and joint work in this area.
- UNICEF is also working with the State Agency for Child Protection to promote the **National Child Help Line** as a resource for mental health and psychosocial support and a first contact point to share information about children at risk, including unaccompanied Ukrainian children.
- UNICEF continues to support the national and local authorities' capacity to provide appropriate **protection and care to refugee and migrant children**, with a focus on asylum-seeking children and families.



## Blue Dots

Six Blue Dots were established jointly by UNICEF and UNHCR in Bulgaria, in collaboration with local authorities and partners. They provide safe spaces for children and families, enabling access to cross sectoral services, identification, registration and connection to protection services for children travelling on their own. They also offer referral services for women, including support on gender-based violence, legal aid, mental health support, provision of information and support to access social services in Bulgaria.

Developed by UNICEF and UNHCR, the Digital Blue Dot ([www.bluedothub.org](http://www.bluedothub.org)) is an online platform that complements physical Blue Dot Safe Spaces, Protection and Support Hubs, aimed at improving access to information on rights, protection and services and available for refugees from Ukraine.



The map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

**Ruse** (Border Crossing Point with Romania)

**Address:** 10 General Gurko Str. Ruse

**Services:** Information and Advice Desk, Family and Child Friendly Space, and Psychosocial support (PSS)

**Sofia Central Train Station**

Information and Advice Desk

**Sofia /BRC Headquarters**

**Address:** 76 James Bouchier Blvd;

**Services:** Full service Blue Dot (Information and Advice Desk, Family and Child Friendly Space, Legal Aid and Psychosocial support)

**Dobrich**

**Address:** 19 Otets Paisii Str. Dobrich,

**Services:** Information and Advice Desk, Family and Child Friendly Space, and Psychosocial support.

**Burgas Railway Station Service**

**Services:** Information and Advice Desk, Family and Child Friendly Space, Legal Aid and Psychosocial support

**Varna, BRC**

**Address:** 3 Bratya Shkorpil, Str. Varna

**Services:** Information and Advice Desk, Family and Child Friendly Space, legal Aid and Psychosocial support.



## Education

- UNICEF, in partnership with local authorities, promotes **the continuity of education for Ukrainian refugee children** through their inclusion in Bulgarian schools and the establishment of learning hubs for children.
- UNICEF reached **4,940 Ukrainian refugee children with informal education and learning opportunities** by supporting Ukrainian refugee teachers and educators, providing learning materials, improving access to the internet and providing additional catch-up support for primary grade students. UNICEF continues to expand its network of partners in the education sector. With new partnerships established and extended in November – December 2022, **over 4,000 children in major hosting areas**, such as Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Bansko, Pernik, Ribaritzha and the coastal towns of Nessebar, Sunny Beach, Sveti Vlas, Golden Beach and Kranevo, **will have continuous access to education** with support of 16 UNICEF-funded play and learn centers **through the 2022/2023 school year**.
- UNICEF continues to work closely with the Ministry of Education and Science and municipalities to **expand opportunities for refugee children to enroll in school and pre-school education**. This includes access to an online education curriculum and building the capacity and skills of teachers and early childhood educators to create welcoming, inclusive learning environments that address every child's learning and developmental needs.



Over 20 small Ukrainian companies and entrepreneurs, as well as Ukrainian cooks, bakers and young craft-makers presented their products at the winter Christmas market in Sofia, with support from the UNICEF.

UNICEF's seasonal tolerance campaign 'Christmas is possible for every child' was launched in December to help Ukrainian refugees to present their cuisine, arts and culture. The campaign aims to give a voice to Ukrainian families who have found refuge in Bulgaria, and to further promote their integration and solidarity in local society, targeting over 80,000 people through two weeks activation in downtown Sofia and additional 1.8 million people through TV and digital channels.

## Social protection and cash assistance

- **To support the provision of adequate and timely assistance**, UNICEF started a **cash assistance programme** for vulnerable families with children, through the provision of vouchers for food and non-food items. Initially, 456 households received cash assistance via the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB) and based on a vulnerability criteria, including 228 children (114 girls and 114 boys, including 33 with disabilities) and 732 adults (209 with disabilities). In addition, vulnerable families were provided with support to cover other emergency needs (such as access to medical services) through a special Vulnerability Fund. The programme will continue in 2023.
- Implementing partners have reported increased demand for food vouchers and cash assistance, and UNICEF is exploring opportunities for scaling up cash assistance support through other mechanisms and partners.
- Building on the initiative of the European Child Guarantee, UNICEF is designing new **partnerships with municipalities** to support their efforts in the provision of social services to Ukrainian refugees.



## Promoting social and behaviour change

- Over 3.4 million people were **reached through messaging on prevention and access to services**. Furthermore, 75,346 people participated in engagement actions for social and behavioral change.
- UNICEF Bulgaria supported the development of the **national communication strategy on vaccination**, focusing on increasing immunization rates among the Ukrainian refugees and host community. Together with the Ministry of Health and the Astra Forum Foundation, UNICEF organized the first series of online trainings (called "Vaccines School") for over 2,000 healthcare workers.
- The First **National Conference on Vaccine-Preventable Diseases** was held on 11-13 November in Sofia. A common declaration about the course of action needed to address the dropout in immunization coverage in the country will be signed by shareholders, and a draft National Immunization Strategy for every child, including refugees, is expected in December.
- To assist Ukrainian mothers and primary caregivers in providing the best care for their young children, UNICEF adapted and translated **the Bebbio application**, a free mobile application that is now available in Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Russian, benefitting over 23,000 caregivers in Bulgaria, including refugees from Ukraine.
- UNICEF Bulgaria is launching an **online programme for social listening and social cohesion** to address misinformation and properly assess people's evolving needs for further adjustment of programme planning. The programme will also help to identify and promote inspiring stories of inclusion, integration and solidarity.



## Engagement of youth and adolescents

- UNICEF is **mobilizing adolescents and young people as partners and engaging** with both refugee and local youth to build their competence, confidence and resilience, as well as strengthening social cohesion and solidarity within communities. UNICEF is also strengthening sustainable mechanisms for youth participation in local decision making.
- UNICEF is **expanding partnerships with youth organizations and networks** in Bulgaria, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Organization of the Bulgarian Scouts, in order to engage with young people, support them and build their skills in the new context.
- Through the UPLIFT partnership, UNICEF and Junior Achievement organized **five innovation camps** for 400 adolescents and youth from 29 high schools across the country. The camps built innovative thinking and entrepreneurial skills and encouraged social inclusion and tolerance among the participants, **half of whom were vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including Ukrainian refugees**. In addition, during Global Entrepreneurship Week from 14 to 25 November, around 4,100 students from 70 educational institutions across Bulgaria took part in entrepreneurial activities, such as competitions and challenges, innovation camps and open lessons.
- As part of the World Children's Day celebration, **UNICEF co-organized a 'Mini World Cup' football tournament for 400 children aged 8-10 years**, in partnership with Sofia Municipality and the Bulgarian Football Union. The tournament engaged refugee children from Ukraine and reached over 1 million viewers through media reports covering the event.
- UNICEF is strengthening **the U-Report Europe chatbot** to engage young Ukrainian refugees and provide up-to-date critical information on services in Bulgaria. UNICEF plans to extend digital opportunities for resilience building, self-care and online counseling to Ukrainian adolescents and parents via locally developed innovations like the 'Razkazhi Mi' mobile app, will be also available for Ukrainian users.



## Winterization

- As winter temperatures continue to plummet, UNICEF is scaling up its assistance for the most vulnerable refugees and has started distributions of **warm clothes, blankets, educational materials and hygiene kits** through its partner organizations, starting in Sofia, Varna and Burgas. UNICEF plans to reach 15,000 children this winter with blankets, winter clothing and hygiene kits through community centers, schools, learning hubs and municipalities.
- Additionally, UNICEF and partners are taking action to **preposition supplies and increase the capacities of local responders** for the provision of accommodation, meals, legal assistance and protection for another 10,000 people, in case of a massive influx of Ukrainian refugees from Romania.



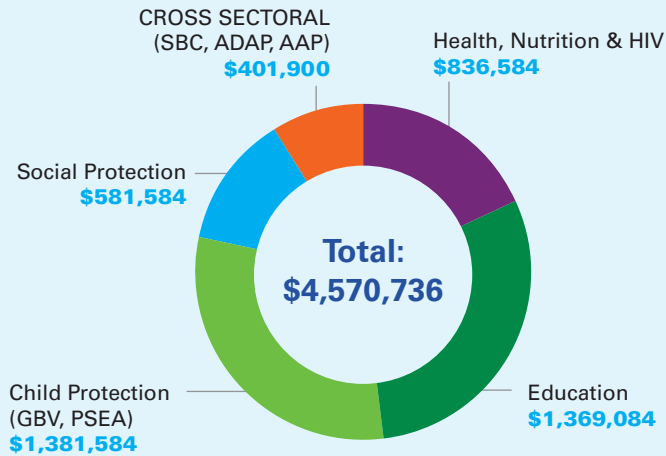
## Accountability to affected populations

- To ensure refugees can provide feedback on received services, UNICEF supports the development of complaints and feedback mechanisms. To date, over 1,399 people have shared their concerns and questions with UNICEF and partners on existing refugee response programmes.

UNICEF has launched a new HAC appeal for the **Ukraine Refugee Response Appeal for 2023**, requesting a total of US\$ 1.05 billion for both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2. UNICEF is seeking US\$ 229.5 million to respond to the needs of refugee children and families fleeing Ukraine in 2023 (Pillar 2), including US\$ 4.5 million million to support refugees from Ukraine in Bulgaria.

## UNICEF Appeal 2023 for Bulgaria

Funding requested against sector (USD)



UNICEF partnered with Sofia Municipality and the Bulgarian Football Union to organize a “Mini World Cup” football tournament for over 400 children between 8-10 years in Sofia. A team of Ukrainian children joined the event to encourage inclusion and friendships as enablers for social cohesion. UNICEF media partners reached over 1,000,000 people through media reports with messages of tolerance and solidarity towards Ukraine refugee children.

## UNICEF Implementing Partners for Ukraine Refugee Response

UNICEF is expanding its partnership with NGOs in child protection, education, social protection, SBC and ADAP in strategic locations, in order to provide a multi-sectoral humanitarian response to children and families, displaced by the war in Ukraine.



### Child protection

- Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC)
- Nadja Centre Foundation (FCN)
- Mission Wings Foundation
- Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)
- Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB)



### Adolescent Development And Participation

- Organization of the Bulgarian Scouts
- Junior Achievement Bulgaria
- The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award



### Education

- Pomosht za Ukraina Foundation (Ukrainian Hive)
- Dokova and Dokov Foundation
- ADRA Foundation
- For Access to Rights Foundation
- For Our Children Foundation
- Open Doors Situational Center
- Fund Good



### Social and behaviour change

- Astra Foundation



### Cross sectoral

- Za Dobroto
- Ukraine renovation and support (Second Home)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Christina de Bruin | UNICEF Representative in Bulgaria | cdebruin@unicef.org  
 Carole Vignaud | Emergency Coordinator | cvignaud@unicef.org  
 Nina Sorokopud | Communication Specialist | nsorokopud@unicef.org