

Sept - Dec 2023



KEY FIGURES

as of 11 December 2023

**173,080**

people from Ukraine registered for temporary protection

**55,880**

Children registered for temporary protection

**66,200**

Ukrainians with valid temporary protection registrations in the country

**7,692**

People in state-funded housing

2023 RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

**4,237,068**

people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services

**60,892**

people with access to safe spaces, protection and support hubs

**51,539**

children receiving learning materials

Context

- Key challenges remain for Ukrainian refugees to **find long-term accommodation, livelihoods** (70 per cent unemployed), **school enrollment** (less than 15 per cent enrolled), and integration into the local education system, as well as **access to adequate health and social services**.
- **Access to education** is more critical than ever – with an increased demand from the Ukrainian refugee population, there is a limited capacity of the national system to secure access to formal preschool and school education.
- Since the beginning of the war, 173,080 Ukrainians have been granted temporary protection in Bulgaria, 82 per cent of them being women and children. As of the beginning of December, **66,200 Ukrainian refugees with valid temporary protection status** are registered in the country following the expiration of the initial period in March 2023.
- As of 11 December 2023, **51,690 Ukrainians remain in the country**. The government accommodation scheme is currently hosting **7,692 Ukrainian refugees in hotels and government-owned bases**. For the moment, the duration of this scheme is until the 31 December 2023.
- Most Ukrainian refugees come from frontline regions such as Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Odesa with little perspective of return in the nearest perspective.
- According to [UNICEF Bulgaria's research](#), **Ukrainian adolescent and youth require additional support** in i) out-of-school activities to support their social integration; ii) skills-building to ensure their successful transition to the world of work; and iii) mental health and psychosocial support.

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. From the onset of the Ukrainian refugee crises, UNICEF supports the government to ensure access to services, protection and social assistance for Ukrainian children, their families and host communities.
- UNICEF closely partners with the ministries of interior, education and science, health, 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.
- As part of the Refugee Coordination Mechanism led by UNHCR, UNICEF contributes to the inter-agency Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation in support of the national response and participates in the inter-agency coordination meetings and its technical working groups.
- To support children and families from Ukraine, UNICEF has scaled 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 providing information to caregivers, training of healthcare workers and support to immunization activities.
- During the reported period, UNICEF supported 319 women and children to access to **primary health care services**, and 502 health check-ups.
- During the reporting period, **the partnership with Astra Forum Foundation** was completed. In total UNICEF engaged **4,326 healthcare workers** within the partnership in capacity-building activities on interpersonal communication, immunoprophylaxis, cultural and behavioral insights on vaccine hesitancy, and work with refugee and host communities.

Working with Municipalities

- The learning center established by the Burgas municipality through the MoU with UNICEF continued to provide early learning and education and Bulgarian language classes for 75 children and successfully supported 27 children with enrollment in Bulgarian kindergartens and schools. UNICEF will continue to strengthen the center's preparatory and transition functions, showing the need for such support before the school enrolment.

Child protection

- UNICEF focused on **strengthening systems** to ensure all children have access to appropriate care, protection, and support services. The organization continued to invest in training, supervision and other initiatives to improve the capacity of frontline workers, facilitate exchange of good practices and co-ordination of support.
- **UNICEF supported 6,434 children and 12,545 adults** with key child protection interventions during the reporting period with the support of implementing partners.
- During the reporting period, more than **4,018 children and caregivers** had access to **Mental Health Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) with multilayered interventions** across Child Protection, Education and ADAP (Adolescents Development and Participation) sectors. UNICEF provided community based MHPSS services in partnership with different CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) via interventions such as Blue Dots, and Education Hubs.
- Through UNICEF-supported interventions, 14,694 people had access to five Blue Dots during the reporting period. Children and caregivers received multi-sectoral assistance and protection activities, including MHPSS services, legal counseling, information, recreational and socialization activities for children.
- **Over 19,214 girls, boys, men, and women have accessed GBV (Gender Based Violence) risk mitigation**, prevention, and response services and were provided with safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers through UNICEF-supported interventions, including through the Blue Dots.
- During the reporting period, **various social and cultural events** were organized by the Blue Dots in Bulgaria to foster refugee inclusion and adaptation. Blue Dot staff supported an increased number of children with special needs, interested in specialized state services. In addition, the mobile work of the Blue Dots continued to provide support to children and adults outside the urban centers.
- UNICEF supported training of **111 frontline workers** (104 women and 7 men) on prevention and **protection from violence, sexual exploitation and abuse**.



"This set of winter clothing for my son is very timely," says Natalia, a refugee mother from Ukraine, who lives in the Vedren hotel in Kranevo through the government-funded programme.

UNICEF supported 14,000 children in Burgas, Blagoevgrad, Dobrich, Plovdiv, Ruse, Stara Zagora, Sofia and Varna regions with the clothing through distributions organized by the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Blue Dots. Over 12,550 blankets were distributed to displaced families

Distributions continue in winter 2024 through implementing partners and government counterparts.

Blue Dots

Five Blue Dots operate in Bulgaria, established jointly by UNICEF and UNHCR at the onset of the refugee response in 2022, 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 traveling 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.

UNICEF and UNHCR are jointly analyzing the situation and preparing for the transition of the Blue Dots to address the evolving needs of refugees and focusing on sustainability and continuation of the services provided in these hubs.



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 /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

- In 2023, **over 723 local educational institutions welcomed Ukrainian children** in Bulgaria, including 426 schools and 307 kindergartens. UNICEF-supported refugee-led organizations, in close cooperation with schools and regional education departments, provided **enrollment support to 1,151 children** (669 girls and 482 boys). Among the major **challenges** are the capacity of educators to recognize trauma and their ability to address language
- UNICEF continued its **high-level advocacy with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)** to ensure state support for the continuation of learning for Ukrainian refugee children living in Bulgaria, who enrolled in the Bulgarian education system and continue their studies in the Ukrainian educational system. This advocacy resulted in the Minister's commitment to provide government support to refugee children in the biggest hosting communities and assistance to learning hubs and educational centers. Furthermore, **state funding for transportation** for refugee children to host schools has been confirmed.
- UNICEF, together with ADRA Bulgaria and Fund Good, provided technical support to local authorities, schools, and regional departments of education to **organize transportation for children**, one of the key enrollment barriers last year. UNICEF continues its advocacy with the MoES for the areas where transportation of children remains a challenge.
- UNICEF supports **transition and adaptation programmes in schools** hosting Ukrainian children, such as mediation, Bulgarian language and catching up support. Some 355 children (179 girls and 176 boys) benefitted from catch-up classes during the first 30 days of schooling. Joint learning and mediation sessions also benefited 2,000 Bulgarian children. Additionally, UNICEF supported **catch-up classes and groups for parents** on weekends in the education hubs, to provide counseling on how to support their kids in challenges and to manage cases of bullying at school.
- During the reporting period, UNICEF supported **3,718 children** (1,662 girls and 1,556 boys) **with access to learning**. Moreover, 570 (297 girls, 273 boys) had access to early learning in UNICEF-supported play and learn areas and hubs. UNICEF supported 3,165 children (1,712 girls and 1,453 boys) with **learning materials**.
- Over 1,289 children engaged in non-formal activities with their peers in the largest refugee communities. MHPSS support has been provided to 699 refugees, including 138 (126 women, 12 men) caregivers.
- UNICEF and MoES organized a webinar to present the **second phase of the project on trauma informed practices. Five hundred educators and school managers** participated, including representatives from regional education departments from 28 regions, pre-school directors and teachers. Adapted training materials and training guides were developed to support the scale up and multiplication of the training. Thus, the training package is ready to be submitted for validation by the MoES so that it is available for all professionals in the country.



Social protection and cash assistance

- UNICEF has continued its **cash assistance programme** for vulnerable Ukrainian refugee families with children in the form of pre-paid vouchers for food and non-food items. The programme is implemented by **Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria and Caritas Bulgaria** in Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, Ruse, Varna and other locations.
- The provision of cash assistance is based on a vulnerability assessment.
- For the reporting period, **63 Ukrainian households** have benefitted from the cash assistance program, with 56 children (24 boys and 32 girls) and 95 adults, including 50 adults with disabilities, supported with **320 vouchers**.



Engagement of youth and adolescents

- UNICEF mobilized adolescents and young people as partners and engaging with refugees and local youth to build their competence, confidence and resilience, and strengthen social cohesion and solidarity within communities. UNICEF also worked to strengthen sustainable mechanisms for youth participation in local decision making.
- UNICEF continued to **expand partnerships with youth organizations and networks** in Bulgaria to engage with young people, support them and build their skills in the new context.
- In the reporting period, UNICEF partnered with the Organization of Bulgarian Scouts (OBS), which supported **161 vulnerable children and young people** (incl 112 Ukrainians) with six outdoor camps and activities. Following Scouts' integrational program, many Ukrainian parents decided to engage their children in long-term activities. During the reporting period, OBS concluded **two youth-led projects with Ukrainian and Bulgarian adolescents**, focusing on the social inclusion of young people from marginalized groups and tackling the topic of violence. OBS also trained **27 adults as scouts' leaders** to lead youth groups and activities, 10 leaders of them are focusing on vulnerable groups, including Ukrainian children and adolescents.
- UNICEF partner the Ukraine Support and Renovation Foundation (also known as **Second Home**) has provided **335 children and youth** in Plovdiv with integrational support, sports, skills-building and psychosocial assistance through individual and group consultations. The summer school motivated many parents to enroll their children in Bulgarian schools as they could see the difference in the social skills of children who have already been enrolled in the Bulgarian education system in comparison to those who are studying online.



Promoting social and behaviour change

- UNICEF reached an estimated **1.1 million people** (from the host community) with messages on services, rights and solidarity through TV and online media.
- Some 17,850 refugees were engaged by the UNICEF and partners through social media channels, consultations, edutainment, social cohesion, and non-formal activities



Accountability to affected populations (AAP)

- In September – November, **1,244 people provided feedback for the services** delivered by UNICEF partners in the education sector. During its reporting period, UNICEF Bulgaria completed its draft AAP Strategy.

Communication, Advocacy and Donor relations

- As part of the **Back-to-School campaign**, UNICEF continued communication and advocacy interventions to increase awareness about the situation of Ukrainian refugee children and promote social cohesion. This included media outreach ahead of the new school year focusing on learning gaps and assistance provided by UNICEF through its partnership with Nova TV reaching over 1.1 million viewers.
- During the reporting period, UNICEF also facilitated **three donor visits** with the US Undersecretary of the State Department, the Ambassador of Japan and the Ambassador of Ukraine. The high-level visits helped to advocate for the rights of Ukrainian children to access basic services in the host countries. These visits took place in major hosting communities around Burgas and Varna to see the current needs and assistance required for joint advocacy on access to education.
- To facilitate **the integration of Ukrainian students** into the local education system and **prevent bullying**, UNICEF continued working with partners on peer-to-peer activation that will take place online and in schools hosting the largest number of Ukrainian 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 (CP)

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

Education (EDU)

- Pomosht za Ukraina Foundation (Ukrainian Hive)
- Dokova and Dokov Foundation
- ADRA Foundation
- Burgas International Youth Centre (IYC)
- For Our Children Foundation (FOC)
- Open Doors Situational Center
- Fund Good

Adolescent Development And Participation (ADAP)

- Organization of the Bulgarian Scouts (OBS)
- Junior Achievement Bulgaria (JA)
- The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DoEIA)
- Ukraine renovation and support (Second Home)

Social Policy (SP)

- Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria (CRWB)
- CARITAS

Health

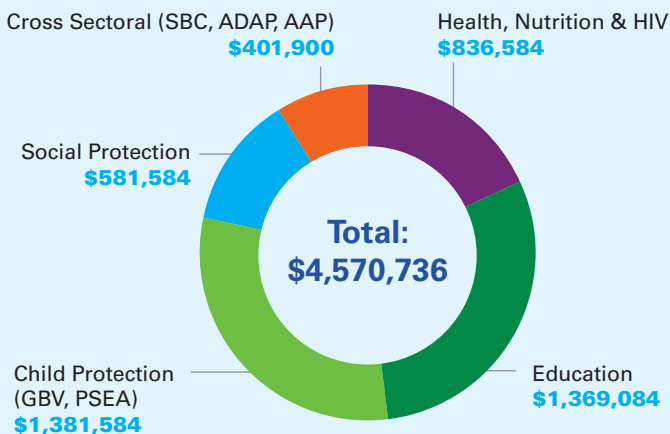
- Diagnostic Consultative Center One (DCCO)

Social and behaviour change (SBC)

- Astra Foundation

UNICEF Appeal 2023 for Bulgaria

All the above-mentioned results were possible thanks to the generous support of partners and donors, governments, private companies, and individuals. UNICEF Bulgaria is part of the 2023 HAC appeal for the Ukraine Refugee Response Appeal, requesting US\$ 4.5 million to support Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria.



In October 2023, the US Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Liz Allen visited the UNICEF-supported learning hub in Golden Sands to meet refugee children and mothers from Ukraine and learn about their needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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