

# Ukraine Refugee Response in Bulgaria

Fact sheet — June 2023

unicef   
for every child



## KEY FIGURES



**159,540**

people from Ukraine registered for temporary protection



**53,827**

Children registered for temporary protection



**54,001**

Ukrainian refugees in the country



**8,362**

People in state-funded housing



**589**

Unaccompanied or separated children

## 2023 RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS



**843,338**

people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services



**22,660**

people with access to safe spaces, protection and support hubs



**40,988**

children receiving learning materials

## Context

- The war in Ukraine continues to trigger refugee movements across Europe, with many Ukrainian families facing significant challenges in meeting their needs.
- Since the beginning of the conflict, 159,540 Ukrainians have been granted temporary protection in Bulgaria, 84% of them being women and children. As of 31 May 2023, 30,771 Ukrainians had registered to extend their temporary protection status following the expiration of the initial period.
- As of 31 May, 53,811 Ukrainians remain in the country, including 8,362 accommodated in hotels and government bases.
- Key challenges remain for Ukrainian refugees to find long-term accommodation, school enrollment, and integration into the local education system, as well as access to adequate health and social services, especially for the most vulnerable refugees.

## 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 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.
- 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 reach affected 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 vaccination activities.
- In the Varna region, 72 children and women received **primary health care services** through UNICEF-supported mechanisms and 99 health check-ups in Q1. 17 women received infant and young child feeding counseling sessions.
- In March, the Report of **the Joint Assessment of the Bulgarian Health System** in the context of the crisis in Ukraine was officially presented by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health, in partnership with UN agencies and partners. UNICEF is engaged in implementing several recommendations, such as embedding risk communication and community engagement activities into the health system.
- UNICEF with the Ministry of Health and Astra Forum Foundation continued to build interpersonal **communication skills of healthcare workers** through the "Vaccines School" initiative by focusing on routine child **immunization support** and fostering immunization in schools.
- UNICEF together with Astra Forum Foundation organized **information sessions on health services for Ukrainian parents**, including vaccination and immunization requirements for enrollment in educational institutions in Bulgaria.
- In partnership with Astra Forum Foundation, UNICEF is piloting a long-term and sustainable model for **improving the well-being of medical professionals** through small group or individual psychotherapy and strengthening duty of care and interpersonal communication. To substantiate the advocacy goals, a survey is conducted among the participants to assess the quality of life and individual performance at the workplace.
- UNICEF conducted a nationally representative sociological **survey on vaccine hesitancy**, at the request of the Ministry of Health. The survey was done among parents of children between 0 and 4 and primary care, as well as focus groups and in-depth interviews of Ukrainian refugees with children about their attitudes to immunization. The study was conducted at the request and expert support of the Ministry of Health and will inform the creation of a National Vaccination Strategy. The study is part of UNICEF's support in the efforts of the Bulgarian health authorities to improve immunization.

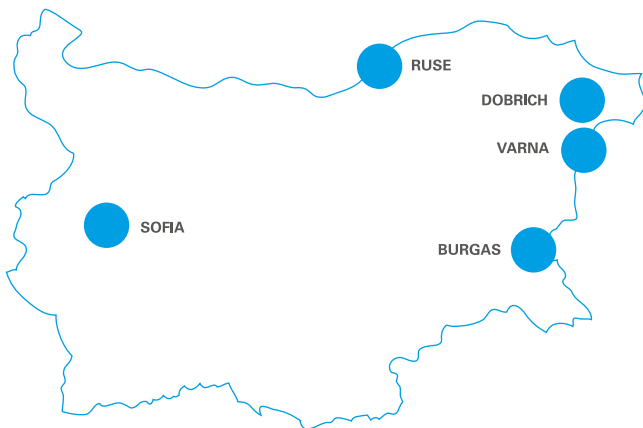


## Child protection

- UNICEF focuses 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, the exchange of good practices and co-ordination of support.
- Since January 2023, UNICEF and partners supported 21,343 adults and 5,019 children with **child protection interventions**, including 18,804 adults and 3,856 children reached by Blue Dots, Child and Family Protection and Support Hubs. 2,511 adults and 1,069 children were provided with mental health and psychological support services, and 84 (38 boys and 46 girls) children were identified as unaccompanied and separated and received multi-sectoral support.
- UNICEF together with Child Helpline International organized **a three-day workshop in Sofia to build the capacity of frontline workers on standards and guiding principles for child helplines** responding to emergencies, gender-based violence and trafficking, skills in providing trauma-informed care and mental health and psychosocial support as well as how to address the specific needs of Ukrainian children and young people.
- Information sessions for refugees on GBV were organized in the Blue Dots in Ruse, Sofia and Varna with the support of the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation.
- 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 Refugees 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 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. It remains a challenge to address equal treatment to both Ukrainian and other refugees and migrants from other countries such as Afghanistan and Syria.


## Blue Dots


Five Blue Dots operate in Bulgaria, established jointly by UNICEF and UNHCR, 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.



UNICEF and UNHCR are jointly analyzing the situation and preparing for transition of the Blue Dots to address the evolving needs of refugees, while trying to ensure 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

- UNICEF, in partnership with the local authorities, promotes **the continuity of education for Ukrainian refugee children** through their inclusion in Bulgarian schools and establishing learning hubs for children.
- 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 preschool 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
- UNICEF **co-chairs the Working Group on Education** to support the Ministry in the coordination of the education response, through the mapping of needs and available services and good practices, capacity-building of teachers and educators, provision of Bulgarian language, support to children with trauma in educational settings, as well as prevention of bullying and school dropouts.
- Advocacy and **planning for the 2023 – 2024 school year** is now a priority. UNICEF is working with the municipalities, CSOs and regional departments of education, and refugee parents in Burgas and Varna regions, focusing on areas where the number of refugee children **exceeds the hosting capacity of the local education system**.
- UNICEF supports the continuation of learning for Ukrainian refugee children in municipalities with stretched educational systems such as Sofia, Varna, Nessebar, Sveti Vlas, and Plovdiv through a **network of play and learning hubs**. In 2023, UNICEF-supported learning and play hubs engaged over 5,366 children aged 3 to 17 in **learning, sports, and social cohesion events**. Along with access to early learning and preschool preparation, students can receive catch-up classes in mathematics, physics, geography, and biology, as well as Bulgarian, Ukrainian, and English language classes.
- UNICEF with ADRA Bulgaria provides **access to education for 900 children** aged 3 – 18 (434 girls, 466 boys) residing in 17 accommodation centers in **Golden Sands, Sveti Konstantin and Elena and Kranevo**. In addition, 285 refugee children, aged 7-17 and living in remote areas of **Ribaritza and Bansko**, received additional learning support via online and mobile learning services, supported by the Situational Center Open Doors. The Blue Dots in Ruse, Varna, Burgas, and Dobrich delivered non-formal learning and socialization activities for 182 children and adolescents.
- In 2023, over **40,000 children received learning materials from UNICEF**. In particular, UNICEF distributed learning materials for group work to Bulgarian educational institutions hosting Ukrainian children, supporting over 28,400 children aged 7-18 in schools and 5,280 preschool children in kindergartens. UNICEF delivered learning materials to 14 organizations and local service providers engaging over 2,300 adolescents in non-formal education and skills-building activities. Furthermore, 5,008 refugee children (2,495 girls, 2,513 boys) were provided with learning materials, including access to the Internet, to continue online education.
- To support system strengthening and capacity building of **early childhood education and care (ECEC)** professionals for trauma-informed practices, 9 master trainers were trained. The national roll-out reached 103 professionals and 1,270 children.



## Social protection and cash assistance

- UNICEF continues to allocate additional funding to its implementing partners for the emergency and vulnerability fund targeting the emergency needs of particularly vulnerable refugee families with children.
- UNICEF scaled up its program for the provision of pre-paid vouchers for food and non-food items to vulnerable Ukrainian refugee families with children
- UNICEF started a new cash assistance programme for the provision of multi-purpose humanitarian cash transfers to vulnerable Ukrainian refugee families with children.
- UNICEF is expanding its collaboration with municipal authorities to secure additional humanitarian support to Ukrainian communities for the provision of social services, childcare, education, and Bulgarian language courses, as well as activities for adolescents. The newly signed MoU with Burgas and Ruse municipalities will model future partnerships with Sofia, Varna, Dobrich, Plovdiv, and Pomorie.

## Promoting social and behaviour change

- 843,388 refugees and host community members were reached with social behaviour change (SBC) **messaging on prevention and access to services** and 33,106 people (online and offline) were engaged in community actions.
- To mark the first year of the Ukraine war, UNICEF Bulgaria presented a documentary on 24th February 2023 as a reminder about the importance of solidarity and support for displaced children and caregivers who have found their new home in Bulgaria. The **“Childhood 2.0” documentary** follows the stories of Ukrainian families who sought refuge in Bulgaria after the start of the war. In addition to the official premiere, the documentary was also broadcasted by NOVA News TV channel and featured in the nationwide TV marathon dedicated to the tragic anniversary of the conflict, with over 310,000 views.
- To support the integration of Ukrainian children in Bulgaria, UNICEF co-hosted **the Ukrainian Easter Festival** on 15 April in Sofia, welcoming over 2,000 guests and reaching over 350,000 online with messages of solidarity and tolerance towards the Ukrainian refugees.
- UNICEF Bulgaria is working on a **tolerance campaign** to boost acceptance and support in the society through traditional media, social media and outreach events. The campaign in particular will promote inspiring stories of inclusion, integration, and solidarity of and with the Ukrainian refugees.



*“I woke at 4.20 a.m. when the bomb exploded,” recalls Lena. “It was a horrible morning, so we didn’t say ‘good morning’ but instead: ‘Boys, get up – it is war.’”*

*Lena, a photographer from Kyiv, fled home with her three young sons and found sanctuary in Bulgaria. She is one of four women featured in a new UNICEF documentary about Ukrainian families finding refuge in Bulgaria.*

*The documentary “Childhood 2.0” draws the public’s attention on the enormous efforts and support offered to Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria. It also sheds light on problems related to education, health care, shelter, and the labor market.*

*These extraordinary stories show that integration is possible and that, by building bridges and believing in a better future, all of us have the power to change the world.*



## Engagement of youth and adolescents

- UNICEF is **mobilizing adolescents and young people as partners and engaging** with both refugees 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 to engage with young people, support them and build their skills in the new context.
- In March, UNICEF and the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award announced a **new project "Stand By Me"** that will support over 2,000 Ukrainian and Bulgarian youth in building civic participation and 21-st century skills through peer-to-peer support and working with experienced mentors. Since the start of the programme, 186 Ukrainian and local youth delivered a total amount of three weeks of volunteering, skills development, and physical activities in their communities.
- Since the start of the year, over 110 Ukrainian and local children and youth were introduced **to the Scouts movement** and 252 children and youth participated in civic engagement activities such as volunteering or community engagement.
- In 2023, nearly 700 children and youth participated in innovation camps and competitions through the **UPLIFT partnership** between UNICEF and Junior Achievements. The camps and activities are designed to build innovative thinking and entrepreneurial skills and to encourage social inclusion and tolerance among the participants.



## Supplies

- UNICEF supported 1,855 children in Burgas, Blagoevgrad, Dobrich, Plovdiv, Ruse, Stara Zagora, Sofia and Varna regions with **clothing** through distributions organized by the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Blue Dots. Furthermore, 1,557 adults and children in 5 regions were reached with **hygiene kits and essential supplies**. Distributions continue through implementing partners and government counterparts.
- Together with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF distributed **educational supplies** (science teaching, recreational, and sports kits) to **schools hosting Ukrainian refugees**, covering over 28,400 children aged 7 to 18. Additionally, 5,280 preschool children nationwide will benefit from distributions of early childhood development kits.
- UNICEF delivered **learning materials** to 14 organizations and local service providers engaging over 2,300 adolescents in non-formal education and skills-building activities.



## Accountability to affected populations

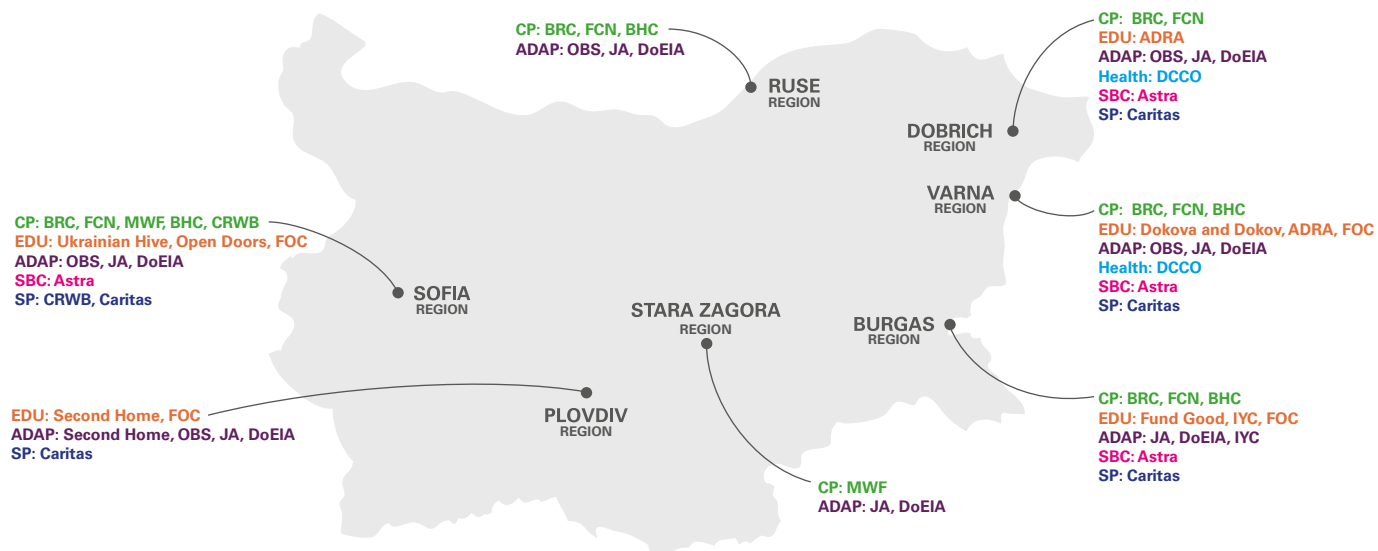
- To ensure refugees can provide **feedback on received services**, UNICEF supports the development of complaints and feedback mechanisms. In 2023, 1,606 people shared their feedback through established mechanisms. Additionally, **consultations with refugees on their needs and the relevance of Blue Dot services** were conducted in Ruse, Dobrich, Varna and Burgas as part of a UNICEF-UNHCR Blue Dots analysis.

To support the integration of Ukrainian children in Bulgaria, UNICEF co-hosted the Ukrainian Easter Festival on 15 April in Sofia, welcoming over 2,000 guests and reaching over 350,000 online with messages of solidarity and tolerance towards the Ukrainian refugees.



## 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)

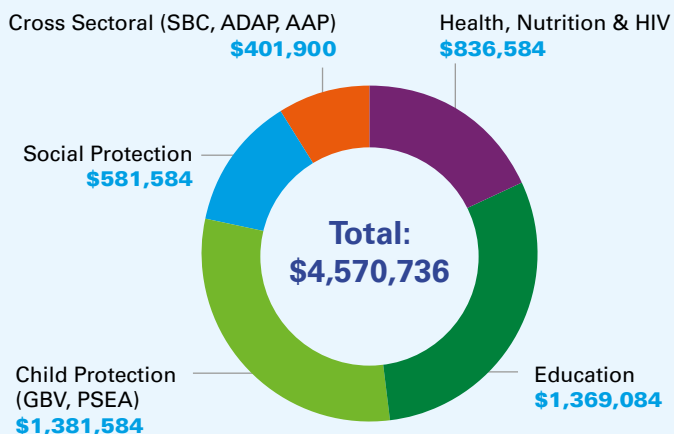
### Social and behaviour change (SBC)

- Astra Foundation

## UNICEF Appeal 2023 for Bulgaria

Funding requested against sector (USD)

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.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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