

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

February 2024

UNHCR has been present in BiH **since the 1990s**, and still supports the implementation of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement to address the **protracted displacement situation**.

UNHCR works with authorities to resolve all known cases of **stateless** people in BiH. While significant progress has been made, a sustainable prevention mechanism is needed.

BiH is characterized by high numbers of mixed and onward movements. UNHCR works with authorities to identify asylum-seekers and enhance the efficiency of the **asylum procedure**.

UNHCR POPULATION STATISTICS (as of mid-2023)*

Refugees	310
Asylum-seekers	65
Stateless people	31
Others of concern	1,299

Top three countries of origin*

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Ukraine	172	Russian Federation	34
Türkiye	51	Türkiye	16
Serbia and Kosovo**	35	Afghanistan	5

*UNHCR mid-2023 Trends and UNHCR data finder
**S/RES/1244 (1999)

HIGHLIGHTS

Reduced waiting times for asylum processing

Asylum processing timeframes have improved significantly in BiH, when compared to prior years. The average time from registration to first-instance decision dropped by 30 % in 2023 when compared with 2022, from 306 days to 211, and by more than 50 % compared with 2021.

Over 80 per cent protection rate in 2023

While the number of decisions issued in 2023 remained stable compared with 2022, excluding suspensions, the proportion of positive decisions increased. Thus, protection rate was 86 % (67 positive decisions out of 78). Additionally, suspensions were significantly reduced, suggesting that as processing times decreased, fewer people abandoned the procedure prior to receiving a decision. These developments indicate effective identification and prioritization of people in need of international protection.

Socio-economic inclusion of refugees in BiH

Holistic inclusion support through integration plans

UNHCR, and its partner the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), promote a comprehensive integration approach for people under international protection in BiH. Bespoke inclusion plans equip refugees with the necessary skills and resources to integrate and achieve self-sufficiency. Tailored plans cover education, language learning, basic needs, accommodation, employment and others.

Small business grants for refugee entrepreneurs

By the end of 2023, two households benefitted from small business grants to support them establishing a sustainable source of income. In addition to socio-economic empowerment, refugees become empowered actors in their communities and agents of their own inclusion. Interaction with customers also contributes to language skills and understanding of local customs, which are key components for meaningful social inclusion.



Kader, a 33-year-old refugee from Türkiye, in front of her newly opened clothing shop in Iliđža, near Sarajevo. © Communis

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Kader's shop is more than a business, it's a symbol of empowerment, inclusion, and the strength of the human spirit. Her story is a perfect example of the transformative power of solidarity, and of the enduring resilience of those seeking a safe and dignified life in BiH. Read more [here](#).

Key Priorities

- State free legal aid:** In November, UNHCR and its partner Vaša prava BiH organized a roundtable on free legal aid (FLA) for people under international protection. The event hosted 39 participants, including national authorities and the civil society. The current governmental FLA system is unable to respond to the needs, with staffing, funding, expertise and interpretation gaps. In the last 25 years, UNHCR has invested in developing the capacities of civil society FLA providers. However, in the context of transition to state-owned mixed migration management, UNHCR advocates for the strengthening of the authorities' capacities to grant quality FLA to forcibly displaced and stateless people country-wide.
- Child protection:** Following an increase in the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in BiH, UNHCR advocates on best interest procedures (BIP) for children seeking, or granted, asylum with relevant State and civil society actors. UNICEF and UNHCR aim to jointly organize a capacity-building workshop to cover the gaps of the current BIP in BiH.
- Education:** UNHCR and its partners intensified support for the inclusion of forcibly displaced children in the regular education system in BiH. As a result, the majority of refugee children from Ukraine, who used to follow the Ukrainian curriculum online, were enrolled in local schools in BiH.
- Social cohesion:** Country-wide activities encouraged dialogue between local communities, migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR emphasized empowering children to become champions of inclusion in their communities through arts, sports and literature. By 15 December, 140 children from local communities and families on the move attended school workshops centered on a picture book that explores a refugee girl's perspective.

Working with Partners

- Through formal agreements, UNHCR works with **government counterparts** including the Service for Foreigners' Affairs, the Sector for Asylum of the Ministry of Security and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. Additionally, UNHCR engages with **civil society** actors such as Vaša prava BiH, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Women's Initiative and the Catholic Relief Services as well.
- UNHCR **engages externally** with BiH authorities at all levels, sister UN agencies, the EU Delegation, the Red Cross societies, NGOs, private sector actors as well as 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.
- The OSCE-UNHCR regional conference on preventing statelessness and accessing civil documentation in South-Eastern Europe was held in Skopje, on 17 October. BiH is expected to record its latest pledge: to resolve the remaining known statelessness cases by the end of the **#iBelong** campaign in 2024. Since the start of the campaign in 2014, 864 people obtained documents with support from UNHCR and its legal partner.

UNHCR Presence in BiH

Staff:

23 National Staff
 2 National Affiliate Workforce
 4 International Staff
 2 International Affiliate Workforce
 1 Intern

Offices:

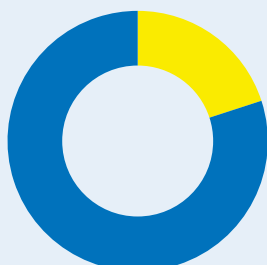
1 Country Office in Sarajevo
 1 Field Unit in Bihać
 1 Field Unit in Tuzla

Financial information (31 January 2024)

Financial requirements for 2024

\$ 8 M

Funding gap 80%
\$ 6.4 M



Funded 20%
\$ 1.6 M

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