

# Volume II Appendices. Country Strategy Evaluation Bulgaria 2022 – 2024

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# APPENDIX 1 – TERMS OF REFERENCE

## Evaluation Office Terms of Reference

### Country Strategy Evaluation (CSE) Bulgaria (2022-2024)

Key Information at glance about the evaluation	
Title of the evaluation:	Country Strategy Evaluation for Bulgaria
Timeframe of evaluation:	2022-2024
Type of evaluation:	Centralized
Evaluation commissioned by:	UNHCR Evaluation Office
Evaluation manager's contact:	Joel Kinahan <a href="mailto:kinahan@unhcr.org">kinahan@unhcr.org</a>
Date:	October 2024

## Introduction

UNHCR's country operations around the world aim to work effectively to pursue protection and solutions, to support the inclusion of internally displaced, refugees and stateless people in national and local services, and to contribute to societies and economies, especially in refugee hosting countries. Such efforts require documenting lessons from implementation on the ground. These lessons inform UNHCR's strategic thinking, programme design and programme implementation both at the global and country operation level.

The Country Strategy Evaluation (CSE) for Bulgaria is one of a series of evaluations designed to help inform learning and planning processes. CSEs are intended to generate timely evidence to strengthen operational improvements in protection, solutions, and assistance for Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons, including host communities, in a particular country. CSEs focus on UNHCR's strategic positioning, comparative advantage and organizational performance. While CSEs support organizational learning and accountability from past performance, they are intended to be forward-looking in their orientation. In highlighting lessons learned and operational strengths and challenges at the country level, recommendations from these evaluations help inform future UNHCR guidance for country level operational planning, resource mobilization and implementation.

The evaluation is commissioned by the Evaluation Office following a request by the UNHCR Bulgaria Country Representative and endorsed by the UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Europe. The purpose of this CSE is to provide an independent assessment of the **relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability** of UNHCR's strategies and interventions in Bulgaria over the 2022- 2024 period. The CSE will serve as a mid-term assessment of the progress made under the current 2024-2026 Multi Year Strategy (MYS) and inform Bulgaria's next MYS cycle planned to start in 2027. The evaluation will also look at the period following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and UNCHR's expanded role in the country, to help reflect on UNHCR's strategic positioning in Bulgaria vis-à-vis the Ukraine situation. Additionally, the evaluation will also shed light on some of the operational constraints and sustainability challenges

faced by the Country Office (CO) in promoting inclusion and securing solutions in Bulgaria, outlining potential future directions. Finally, the evaluation should consider regional dynamics including the implications of the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum on Forcibly Displaced and Stateless people.

The evaluation's primary audience is the UNHCR Bulgaria Country Representative, Bureau Director for Europe and country and bureau staff. The secondary audience is in-country partners, including the government and government agencies, local authorities, development actors and the private sector.

These Terms of Reference (TOR) provide key information to UNHCR staff and external stakeholders about the proposed evaluation, as a central component of the Request for Proposals for hiring a suitable evaluation team, and to guide this team on the expectations that the evaluation should address. It outlines the operational context globally and in the country of study; the purpose, specific objectives and key questions that the evaluation seeks to address; the approach, management and timeline for the study.

## UNHCR Global Background

In 2024, UNHCR estimates that the total number of people UNHCR serves will reach more than 130.8 million (126 million in 2022) - refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returnees, and others—a number which has more than doubled over the past decade.<sup>1</sup> These historic levels of forced displacement have highlighted the need to revisit some traditional approaches to protection, assistance and the search for solutions. UNHCR is committed to taking a strategic, evidence-based approach to identify the areas where UNHCR can have the most impact and effectively leverage others in securing protection and advancing solutions.

In recent years, UNHCR has implemented significant internal changes to better deliver on the actions outlined in its Strategic Directions. The CSE for Bulgaria will take place within this context of structural reform at UNHCR corporate level. Please see Annex I – Overview of selected reforms most relevant to the evaluation.

UNHCR's 2024 global needs-based budget stands at USD 10.785 billion. Against this budget, estimated funds available to UNHCR are USD 4.151 billion<sup>2</sup>, or 38%. As of the beginning of July 2024, UNHCR received \$425 million less in new voluntary contributions compared to the same period in 2023. The overall reduction in funds and a diminished proportion of flexible funding have necessitated continuous adjustments and reprioritization of operations to manage the constrained and more rigid financial environment.

## Regional and Country Background

### Regional context

Europe is among the regions with the highest number of forcibly displaced and stateless people globally with nearly 13 million refugees—including over 6 million refugees from Ukraine — and some 5 million internally displaced people as of end-2023. Over 1.3 million asylum-seekers are recorded across the region, in addition to 540,000 stateless people. Türkiye continues to be among the top refugee hosting countries worldwide, with over 3.4 million refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>3</sup>

The escalation of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 led to widespread civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure, forcing many to flee their homes in search for safety and protection. Since then, millions of refugees from Ukraine have crossed borders into neighbouring countries, and millions more have been displaced inside the country. As the war in Ukraine continues, over 6.1 million Ukrainian refugees have been recorded in Europe as of September 2024, with an

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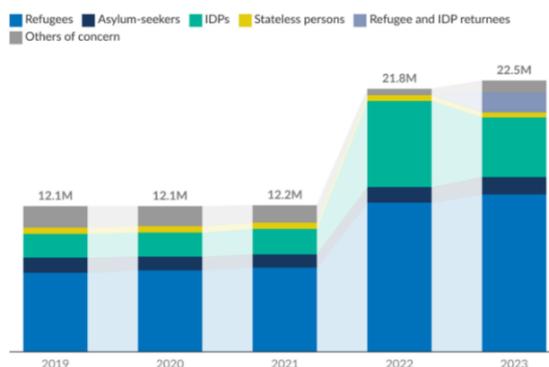
<sup>1</sup> [UNHCR's Global Appeal 2024](#).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Regional Bureau Europe 2025- 27 Strategy Report

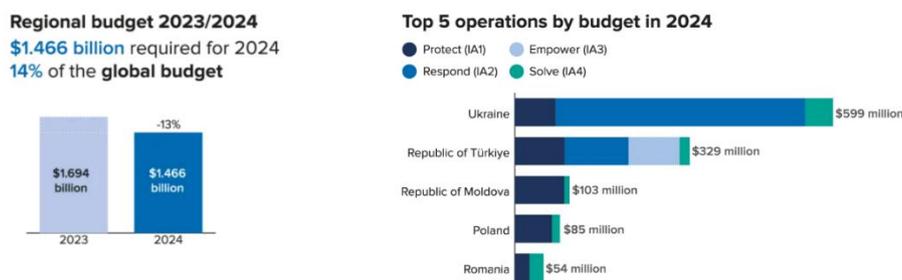
additional 571,300 refugees outside Europe.<sup>4</sup> Other factors contributing to increasing displacement numbers in the region include the devastating earthquakes in south-east Türkiye in February 2023, escalating hostilities in the South Caucasus as well as increasing sea arrivals along the primary Mediterranean and Northwest African maritime routes. As shown below, the overall number of displaced in Europe reached 22.5 million in 2023, marking a 3.2% increase from the previous year.

**Figure 1: Displacement Trends in Europe (2019-2023)<sup>5</sup>**

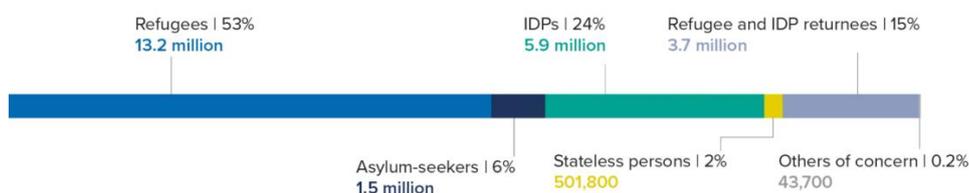


Located in Geneva, Switzerland, the Regional Bureau for Europe (RBE) oversees and supports 33 UNHCR Operations in the region. RB-Europe' regionwide needs-based budget for 2024 (see Figure 2) amounts to USD 1,466 billion (14% of UNHCR's total needs-based budget for field operations for the year) with a total population planning figure of 24.9 million, representing 19% of the number of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in 2024 globally (see Figure 3). As of September 2024, approximately 44% of the total required funding for Europe has been secured.

**Figure 2: Europe Regional Budget Overview (2023-2024) and Top 5 Operations by Budget in 2024**



**Figure 3: Europe Population Planning Figures (2024)<sup>6</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> [UNHCR Operational Portal: Ukraine Situation](#)

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Global Report (2023) – [Regional Overview: Europe](#)

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR Global Appeal (2024) - [Regional Overview: Europe](#)

UNHCR leads or co-leads two Regional Refugee Response Plans (RRP) in Europe. The RRP for refugees from Ukraine—coordinating the response in 11 countries neighbouring or close to Ukraine—and the RRP for refugees from Syria – covering Türkiye. Both these RRP are undergoing a transition in line with the prolonged length of displacement and the increased degree of inclusion of refugees into national systems.<sup>7</sup>

## Country context

Bulgaria has a population of 6.5 million people with a Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.799, placing it under the *high human development* category.<sup>8</sup> Over the past three decades, the country has undergone important changes, shifting from a highly centralized, planned economy to an open, market-oriented, upper-middle-income economy firmly integrated into the EU. Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, and by 2022 the country's GDP per capita in purchasing power parity had reached 62% of the EU average. However, Bulgaria remains the EU's poorest member state. A series of external shocks—including the global financial crisis, the European debt crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine—affected reform efforts and reduced foreign investment, hindering the country's progress toward economic convergence with the rest of the EU.<sup>9</sup>

The country has faced political uncertainty in recent years. Between 2021 and June 2024 Bulgaria experienced six parliamentary elections and is set to host its seventh one in October 2024, after the June election failed to lead to a governing majority. This political uncertainty has inevitably hindered progress in legislation and public policy as well as led to the politicization of refugee issues in the public sphere. Notwithstanding UNHCR's efforts in 2023 and 2024, the draft humanitarian support and integration programme for refugees under Temporary Protection (TP) has not yet been adopted. The absence of a government led integration program for refugees and TP beneficiaries has also limited asylum seeker and refugees rights and potential contributions to the Bulgarian society and economy, which is currently facing important labour gaps.

Bulgaria is a party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, ratified both the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness with some reservations, and introduced a statelessness determination procedure in 2017, granting stateless status to 161 people to date. Following pledges at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019, the government of Bulgaria has improved the quality of statelessness determination procedures and included stateless people in the 2021 Census, and further pledged in the Global Refugee Forum to review and eventually withdraw to its reservation to Article 31 to the 1954 Convention and improve its statelessness status determination procedure.

Bulgaria's location at the edge of the EU's southeastern border makes it a key entry point for migrants and refugees, especially those arriving from conflict zones in Middle East and North Africa. Since 2022, the country has also become a transit and host country to thousands of refugees fleeing Ukraine. In response to the influx, the Bulgarian government quickly implemented TP status for Ukrainian refugees under the EU's TP Directive. As of October 2024, almost 194,000 refugees from Ukraine registered for TP in Bulgaria, more than 68,000 renewed their TP documentation while some of those with Bulgarian heritage obtained citizenship (1,267 individuals in 2023, 1,312 in 2024).<sup>10</sup> Since the onset of the full-scale war in Ukraine, UNHCR's work in the country has significantly intensified to support the government in providing essential services to refugees, including protection, cash assistance and integration support.

The Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR), adopted in 2002 and amended over the years, is the primary legal instrument governing refugee and asylum issues in the country, regulating the reception of asylum-seekers, the assessment of their claims and their rights upon recognition. Bulgaria's State Agency for Refugees (SAR) was established in 1992 and is the central government body responsible for granting international protection. The SAR operates six reception centres for the registration, Refugee Status Determination procedures, and accommodation of asylum seekers.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR Regional Bureau Europe 2025- 27 Strategy Report

<sup>8</sup> HDI estimate from the [UNDP 2023/2024 Human Development Report](#)

<sup>9</sup> World Bank – [Country Overview: Bulgaria](#)

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria Protection Brief #1 July 2024

Currently, Bulgaria does not have a UN Country Team and there are no joint national UN planning processes, such as the Humanitarian Response Plan or the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), aside from the Bulgaria chapter of the Refugee Response Plan which is led by UNHCR under the Refugee Coordination Model and operates under the umbrella of the regional coordination platform.<sup>11</sup> The country currently has a Security Management Team (SMT) chaired by UNICEF and an area Operational Management Team (OMT) chaired by UNHCR.

## UNHCR Operational Response and Strategy

### UNHCR's Operational Presence and Response

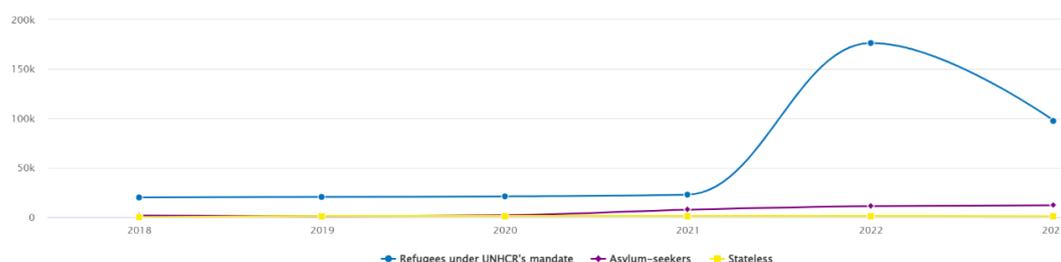
UNHCR has been operating in Bulgaria since July 1993, following the signing of the Accord de Siege with Bulgarian authorities. In response to the outflows from Ukraine in 2022, UNHCR's work in the country rapidly expanded, transitioning from an advocacy-oriented office into one providing assistance, protection and solutions for thousands of refugees fleeing the war. The office operates from one country office located in the capital, Sofia, while covering all key border, transit and reception areas through partner organizations and field visits.

While during 2017-2020, the yearly average number of asylum applications did not exceed 3,000, in 2021 Bulgaria started witnessing a sharp increase in arrivals, especially from Afghanistan. In 2021, 10,999 asylum applicants were registered by SAR, of which the majority were from Afghanistan and Syria. This number doubled in 2023, in the context of the Ukraine war, as more than 20,000 asylum claims were made.<sup>12 13</sup> Since the start of the war in February 2022, the Bulgarian government estimates that over 3.3 million refugees from Ukraine have entered Bulgaria.

As of the end of 2023, there were over 97,600 refugees registered in the country, 11,900 asylum seekers and 817 stateless persons. About 70% of refugees registered in Bulgaria in 2023 were from Ukraine, 28% from Syria and 2% from Afghanistan and other countries.<sup>14</sup> Most Ukrainian refugees are adult women, girls, boys, and vulnerable older adults, while asylum-seekers are mostly men and boys.<sup>15</sup>

See below a graph illustrating population trends in the country over time (2018-2023).

**Figure 4: Population trends over time (2018-2023)<sup>16</sup>**



In a 2023 UNHCR Participatory Assessment, just over 11% among refugees and asylum seekers from Syria and other countries indicated that they planned to stay, while more than half (52%) answered “no” and more than one-third (36%) were uncertain about their plans. By contrast, more than half (53%) of the Ukrainians under temporary protection said they planned to stay in Bulgaria despite limited assistance and socio-economic inclusion, with only 15% saying “no” and about one third (32%) being unsure.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria Multi- year Strategy 2024-26

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria Multi-year Strategy 2024-26

<sup>13</sup> Around 13 273 asylum-seekers cases were however closed in 2023, as the individuals abandoned their cases and moved to other EU countries.

<sup>14</sup> [UNHCR Refugee Data Finder](#). Data extracted on 23 September 2024

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR Annual Results Report 2023

<sup>16</sup> [UNHCR's Refugee Data Finder](#). Data extracted on 23 September 2024

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR Participatory Assessment Report 2023 Voices of Refugees in Bulgaria

Since February 2022, UNHCR has been working closely with the Bulgarian government to provide essential aid and protection services to refugees from Ukraine. Between February 2022 and January 2023, it is estimated that UNHCR reached over 70,000 refugees with assistance and protection services, while also supporting their inclusion. UNHCR's activities in Bulgaria in 2023 as part of the Ukraine refugee response included:<sup>18</sup>

**Safe Spaces and Support Hubs:** UNHCR and its partners established five Blue Dots hubs, reaching over 84,356 individuals in 2023. These centres served 12,251 refugees by providing child-friendly and family-oriented spaces, psychosocial support to 9,366 individuals, and educational information to 8,273 refugees. Additionally, 55,295 individuals received guidance and referrals to specific services.

**Cash Assistance:** In 2023, UNHCR, in partnership with the Bulgarian Red Cross on data collection, provided cash for protection to over 14,000 Ukrainian refugees. In 2023, UNHCR's cash-based interventions in Bulgaria evolved to address the persistent challenges faced by vulnerable households, particularly those with disabilities, serious medical conditions, single parents with dependents and older people without family support. Transitioning from one-off assistance to a multi-transfer approach, the program provided regular support over four months to meet basic needs consistently.

**Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA):** A PSEA network was established by UNHCR in 2023, involving funded partners and authorities to prevent and mitigate SEA risks. This initiative aimed to ensure a robust complaints mechanism, establish PSEA focal points, conduct joint risk assessments, build partner capacity, and engage in community outreach on trafficking and SEA risks.

**Inclusion Support:** Throughout 2023, with partner assistance, UNHCR provided inclusion support to 9,539 refugees. This included mentorship programs, employment support, and technical and vocational training aimed at enhancing financial inclusion and promoting local integration.

**Counselling:** UNHCR and partners reached 21,367 individuals with information on services and refugee rights, including through helplines.

UNHCR has also been regularly monitoring borders and detention centres alongside partners to ensure asylum-seekers have access to fair and efficient procedures through information, legal counselling and assistance. Throughout the response, the organisation has been collaborating with the government and providing capacity-building activities for authorities to enhance the quality of the asylum system, as well as strengthening the National Bureau for Legal Aid. In 2023 and 2024, UNHCR also offered detailed feedback to the Draft Humanitarian Support and Integration Programme for Displaced persons from Ukraine and the proposed draft amendments to the Law on Asylum and Refugees, helping secure several guarantees on accelerated and admissibility procedures and family reunification.<sup>19</sup> However, challenges with family reunification remain due to long delays in processing cases; further advances in protection for unaccompanied and separated children may occur following intense coordination with the Council of Europe.

In 2023 nearly 4,000 unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum arrived in Bulgaria, placing it among the top EU countries receiving children arriving without parents or caregivers. UNHCR has been working with institutions to strengthen the national child protection system in early identification, ensuring access to adequate reception conditions, comprehensive services, and alternative care arrangements for asylum-seeking and refugee children at risk. Additionally, UNHCR has also been providing trainings for border and national police, social workers on child rights and best interest procedures, legal service providers, and education, social work and child protection services directly and through partners. To expand its work in support of the national child protection system, in 2023 UNHCR signed a memorandum of cooperation with the State Agency for Child Protection, aiming to help Bulgaria fulfil its protection duties towards refugee children, particularly unaccompanied or separated children. UNHCR is

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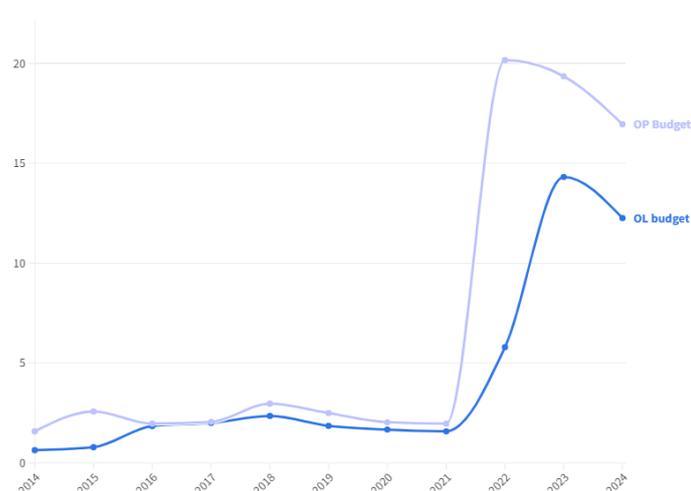
<sup>18</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria February 2024 Factsheet

<sup>19</sup> Bulgaria 2024 Annual Results Report

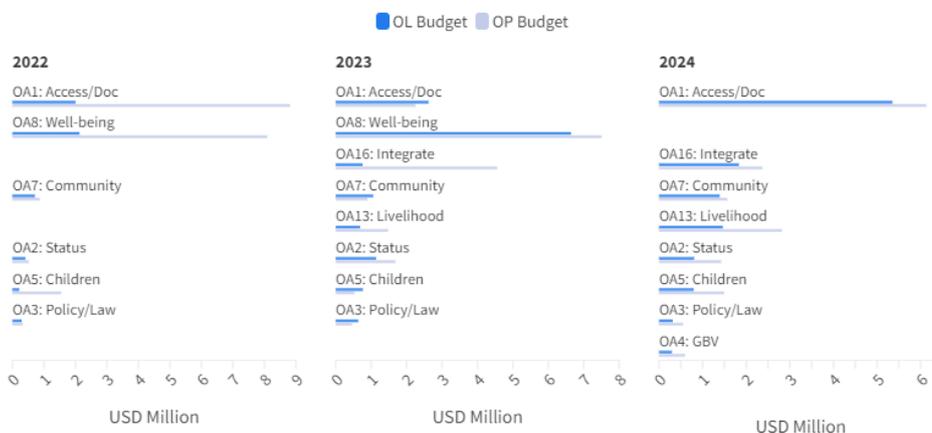
progressively engaging more directly with monitoring and supporting Best Interest Assessments.

UNHCR's budget in Bulgaria saw a rapid increase from 2022, in line with the higher refugee numbers and emerging protection needs but has shown a declining trend since 2023. To date, the operation's needs-based budget (OP)<sup>20</sup> for 2024 is set at USD 16.9 million, marking a 12.4% decrease from 2023. Similarly, the Operating Level (OL) budget for 2024 amounts to date to USD 12.2 million, indicating a decrease of 14% from the previous year.<sup>21</sup> Below is an overview of OP and OL budget trends over the period 2010 -2024 as well as a breakdown of the 2022, 2023 and 2024 budgets by outcome areas to show the reallocation of resources across years.

**Figure 5: OP and OL Budget (in million USD) over time (2014-2024)<sup>22</sup>**



**Figure 6: 2022, 2023 and 2024 OL and OP Budget allocation Across Outcome Areas<sup>23</sup>**



As of September 2024, the operation's needs-based budget is 61% funded. The primary government donors for 2024 are the United States and Switzerland.

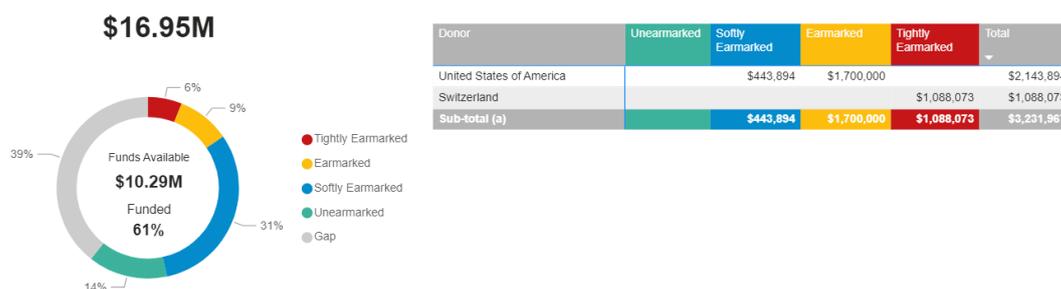
<sup>20</sup> UNHCR's Operations Plan (OP) Budget

<sup>21</sup> Operating Level Budget (or OL) refers to the prioritized budget approved by the High Commissioner. The Operation's Needs-Based Budget (or OP) is higher than the Operating Level Budget due to inadequate funding.

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR Country Profile – [Operation Profile Power Bi Dashboard](#)

<sup>23</sup> [UNHCR Results Data Portal: Budget Download](#)

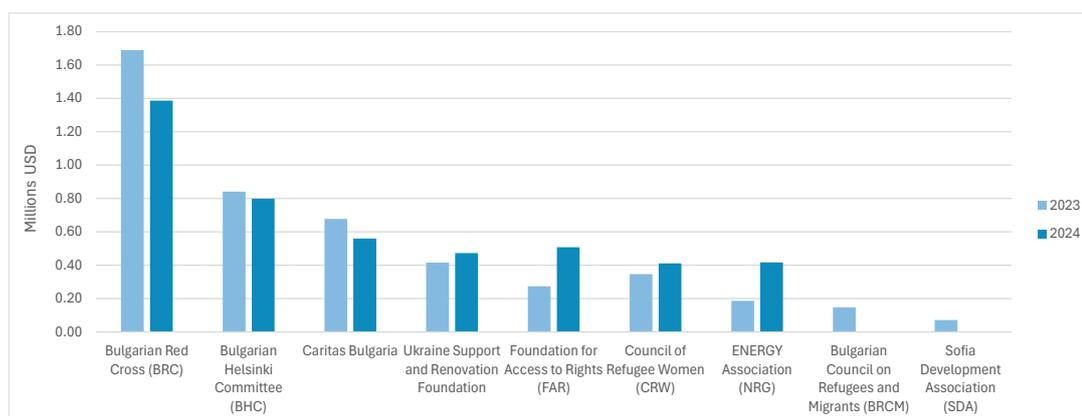
**Figure 7: Funding Overview: Bulgaria (September 2024)<sup>24</sup>**



Over the years UNHCR has worked with the Bulgarian government and maintained a close collaboration with the Border Police and Directorate of Migration under the Ministry of Interior. In 2023, UNHCR also signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, establishing a framework of collaboration, including the co-leadership of the inter-agency Cash Working Group, which promotes better coordination and inclusion, ensuring that UNHCR's and other humanitarian actors' cash assistance is closely integrated into broader governmental plans.

Please find below an overview of UNHCR's 2023 and 2024 funded partners in Bulgaria and corresponding contract values.

**Figure 8: UNHCR Funded Partners and Contract Value (2023-24)<sup>25</sup>**



UNHCR has also been holding regular information exchanges and training with the EU Agencies for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and Asylum (EUAA) and cooperated with FRONTEX Fundamental Rights Officers.<sup>26</sup> It is also cooperating with the private sector to promote economic inclusion, with a strategic alliance with the German-Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce as well as with restaurants and supermarkets through the Food for Thought Campaign.

Please see below an overview of the Bulgaria CO staff from 2022 to 2024. As of October 2024, UNHCR's Country Office in Sofia counts 11 international and 31 national staff positions.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 9: UNHCR Bulgaria CO Staff Over Time (2022-24)<sup>28</sup>**

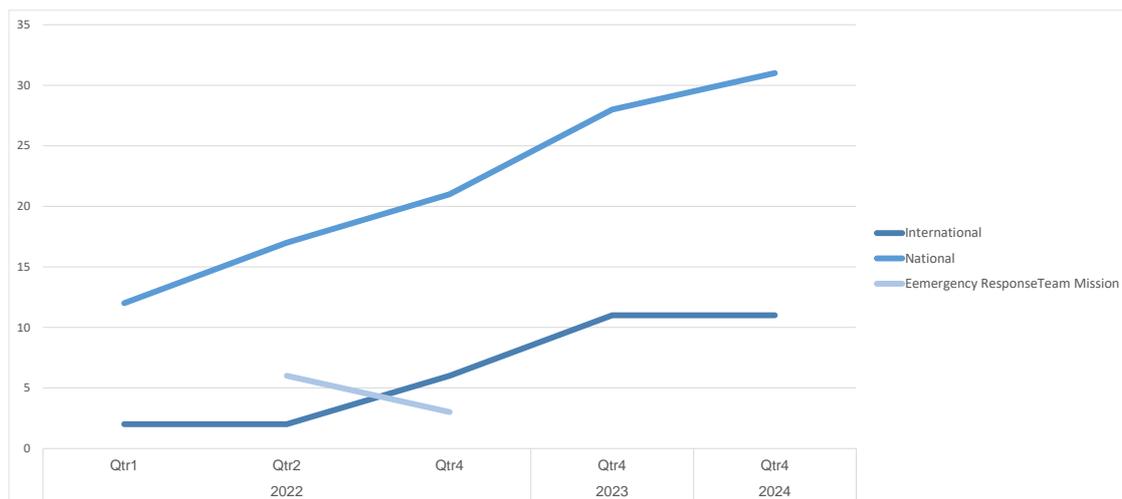
<sup>24</sup> [UNHCR DER DRMM BI Dashboard](#)

<sup>25</sup> [UNHCR Results Data Portal: Budget Download](#)

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria 2023 Annual Results Report

<sup>27</sup> Bulgaria Country Office Data (please note that data also includes affiliate workforce positions).

<sup>28</sup> Aggregated HR data shared by the Bulgaria Country Office covering 2022-24.



### UNHCR 2024-26 Multi-year Strategy

As of June 2024, there has been a significant increase in the number of new arrivals in Bulgaria from Ukraine (the number of Ukrainian nationals in Bulgaria at the end of June 2024 was estimated to be 106,300 compared to 62,900 on May 30, 2024), mostly from Odesa, Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk in southern and eastern Ukraine, confirming that significant returns are unlikely for the time being. This surge is mostly due to the worsening situation in the country as well as the ongoing energy crisis affecting electricity availability.<sup>29</sup>

While in 2023 UNHCR operations in Bulgaria focused on the Ukrainian situation and supporting the government amidst increased arrivals of asylum seekers at the country's southern border, in 2024 UNHCR has shifted its focus from emergency response for refugees from Ukraine to fostering the integration and inclusion of all refugees into Bulgarian society.

The lack of a functional government integration program for refugees and TP beneficiaries limits their rights and potential contributions to the Bulgarian society and economy. This is particularly concerning given Bulgaria's labour shortages and the country witnessing one of the fastest demographic declines globally. Despite the country's need for labour force in various sectors, refugee employment rates remain low, with most refugees working in positions that do not fit their professional qualifications and technical skills. In response, UNHCR has increased its engagement with authorities to improve access to social services and livelihood opportunities, as well as to advocate for access to European capacity support programs. In 2023, as part of its Global Refugee Forum pledges, the Bulgaria government also committed to facilitate the socio-economic inclusion of refugees by facilitating employment, developing a skilled workforce in education, social protection and healthcare provision that ensures a rights-based approach for refugee inclusion, and promoting support for refugees in all spheres of public life.<sup>30</sup>

As per UNHCR's Bulgaria 2024-26 multi-year strategy, the organisation has outlined its commitment to continue strengthening the protection and inclusion ecosystem in the country, through:

**Outcome Area 1 - Access to territory, registration and documentation:** Supporting the government in establishing a protection-sensitive entry system and promoting safe legal channels asylum seekers. This includes working with authorities to develop effective and sustainable mechanisms to identify, register and process those in need of international protection. UNHCR and partners will also work with the SAR and other service providers to enhance reception conditions.

**Outcome Area 2 – Status Determination:** Strengthening the government's refugee status determination procedures by monitoring reception and detention conditions to identify persons in need of international protection, delivering protection information and legal aid, and facilitating

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR Protection Brief: Bulgaria - July 2024

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR Bulgaria 2023 Annual Results Report

access to asylum procedures. For stateless persons, including those in detention, efforts will focus on identification and provision of information about rights and obligations.

Outcome Area 3 – Protection Policy and Law: Assisting the government in complying with international and EU standards regarding national legislation, policy, and practice while advocating for the necessary amendments.

Outcome Area 4 – Gender-based Violence (GBV): Advocating for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in national systems and services, improving coordination and establishment of referral pathways, expanding awareness raising on GBV and available response services. Central to UNHCR's response and risk mitigation efforts is enhancing community participation and empowerment in designing the response and interventions for women, men, girls and boys. With a focus on integrating GBV prevention and risk mitigation activities through all aspects of service provision and sectoral programming, necessary steps will continue to be taken to reduce individuals' exposure to risks and improve organizational capacities on PSEA.

Outcome Area 5 – Child Protection: Strengthening coordination and cooperation with the government and mandated agencies to enhance national systems of child protection and social assistance, supporting the government efforts at the national, regional, and municipal levels to improve the identification and timely response systems for the protection of children at risk across the different mixed migration routes. Through the Memorandum of Cooperation with the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP), UNHCR will enhance its support to the SACP's operational capacity to perform its mandate in relation to children, including unaccompanied and separated refugee and asylum-seeking children through advocacy, collaboration and training.

Outcome Area 7 – Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment: Ensuring that community engagement is integrated in all phases of the operational response and across all sectors by strongly expanding its direct engagement with refugees to build trust, understand their needs and support their own protection and solutions mechanisms. This will involve identifying and supporting existing leaderships in the community, ensuring diverse representation at the leadership level, and integrating community feedback into the programme cycle through regular participatory assessments and consultations throughout the year.

Outcome Area 13 – Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods: Including refugees in national and municipal programs and policies; investing in resilience programmes; and promoting economic opportunities. In doing so, UNHCR will strive to engage in strategic partnerships with development actors. UNHCR will also continue its advocacy with the government for legal provisions that further create a favourable environment for socio-economic inclusion and access to the labour market, including skills recognition.

Outcome Area 16 – Local integration and other local solutions: Working closely with state institutions to enhance the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons. This will entail providing legislative comments, advocating with municipalities<sup>31</sup> to remove unfavourable legislative and administrative provisions impeding access to social benefits for refugees and stateless persons. UNHCR will continue to advocate for the development of a national integration programme for all refugee populations with an allocated state budget and the establishment of an inclusion working group under the Refugee Coordination Mechanism co-chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy that works with all relevant stakeholders towards medium to long-term solutions for the inclusion and integration of refugees. This is a priority area under the current MYS.

## Purpose and scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation will cover a 3-year period from January **2022 to 2024** and will look at the entirety of the CO portfolio. This timeframe coincides with a number of developments in the regional context which have resulted in a substantial expansion of UNCHR's operation footprint in the country, including a raising trend in asylum claims since 2021, the start of war in Ukraine in February 2022, the earthquakes in south-east Türkiye in February 2023, as well as growing

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<sup>31</sup> To date UNHCR has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the following five municipalities: Varna, Ruse, Plovdiv, Burgas, Sofia.

instability in Afghanistan and Syria. Additionally, 2024 marks the year when the CO's first MYS cycle (2024-26) was launched.

With this context in mind, this CSE for Bulgaria will help assess the **strategic and operational relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency and sustainability** of UNHCR Bulgaria's CO over the 2022- 2024 period with a view on identifying challenges and opportunities to inform its future operational design and strategic direction. In doing so, the evaluation will also help extract lessons that can inform UNHCR's strategic positioning and multi-year planning in other similar contexts.

The **objectives of the evaluation** are to:

- a. Strengthen the future design of the Bulgaria operational strategy by reviewing the **challenges and opportunities** faced by the operation during in the period 2022- 2024 and assessing its contribution to regional and national objectives.
- b. Provide evidence of how and why UNHCR interventions did or did not improve the **conditions of refugees and stateless** in Bulgaria.
- c. Determine the extent to which UNHCR's own **capacity, structures and processes** are aligned and fit-for-purpose to carry out the strategy.
- d. Distil **lessons** and formulate **recommendations** to improve UNHCR Bulgaria's actions over the next planning period, as well as any lessons that can be of wider relevance for other UNHCR's operations in similar contexts.

## Evaluation Approach and Methodology

### Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ)

The Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) will be further developed, refined, and prioritized during the inception phase of the evaluation to produce the final set that will guide the research. The final questions will be included in an evaluation matrix and aligned with the [OECD/DAC evaluation criteria](#), as appropriate.

**KEQ1: How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within Bulgaria given the needs of refugees and stateless persons and the national and regional context? (*relevance*)**

#### Sub-questions

To what extent has UNHCR's strategic positioning in the country effectively identified and addressed the needs of refugees and stateless in Bulgaria, taking into account the changing context and available resources (e.g., donor financing, private sector opportunities)?

How well aligned and relevant is the existing UNHCR strategy to national, regional priorities and changes in the wider regional and geopolitical context- including developments related to the EU Migration and Asylum Pact? How well positioned is UNHCR's Bulgaria Country to engage with government stakeholders on the EU Migration and Asylum Pact?

To what extent has programme design and implementation been informed by evidence that capture the needs of refugees and stateless, and the priorities of the government?

**KEQ2: To what extent has UNHCR been able to promote and benefit from synergies with key stakeholders and to play a catalytic role, mobilizing other relevant actors around the cause of refugees and stateless persons so to maximize the leverage of its interventions? (*coherence*)**

#### Sub-Questions:

To what extent is the MYS coherent and complements the work of other partners (e.g., government, development actors, private sector, civil society)? How coherent is UNHCR's MYS in the context of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?

What are the key factors that influence the success of UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts with the government, national authorities and other stakeholders, and how well have these been addressed to optimize collaboration, minimize duplication, and promote sustainable outcomes in Bulgaria?

**KEQ3: To what extent and quality has UNHCR achieved and contributed to envisioned results? (*effectiveness*)**

Sub-Questions:

How effectively has UNHCR achieved intended results in the areas of protection, inclusion and solutions and especially with regard to interventions related to access to services and economic inclusion/ self-reliance?

To what extent has UNHCR Cash Based Intervention contributed to protection dividends for those receiving cash? Has the design of Cash Based Intervention contributed to greater self-reliance?

In what ways has UNHCR facilitated socio-economic integration of refugees in Bulgaria and to what extent these efforts promoted self-reliance, sustained integration into national programs and improved their overall living conditions?

To what extent has UNHCR's policy advocacy contributed to shaping a favourable protection environment for refugees and stateless in Bulgaria?

Under which conditions has UNHCR achieved these results, and what factors have affected achievement/non-achievement of results (contextual, operational etc.)?

**KEQ4: In light of RBE prioritization decisions in resource allocations across operations, to what extent was UNHCR's Bulgaria structure, staffing and resource allocation adequate and fit-to meet the objectives set out in its current strategy? (*efficiency*)**

Sub-Questions:

Have UNHCR's capacity and resources in Bulgaria enabled the organization to fulfil its mandate, effectively address needs and achieve the desired results?

How well does UNHCR's organizational structure and budget allocation align with its strategic objectives, considering the evolving context, changing needs and shifting priorities related to the Ukraine refugee influx?

How efficiently has UNHCR deployed its Cash Based Intervention Programme?

What are the key contextual and operational factors that influence the alignment between UNHCR's organizational configuration, staffing, and resource strategy, and how successfully have these factors been addressed to optimize performance and results?

**KEQ 5: How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, current challenges, and opportunities, to further leverage its strategic position and influence within the country and region to advance collective efforts towards protection and solutions? (*sustainability*)**

Sub-Questions:

How sustainable is UNHCR Bulgaria's programming approach, specifically with regards to strengthening the state reception capacity and building a sustainable and effective national inclusion/integration programme?

To what extent is UNHCR Bulgaria equipped to engage effectively on the EU Migration and Asylum Pact, including on ensuring the maintenance of protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria?

### Evaluation Design and Methodology

Being a learning-focused strategic evaluation that assesses the appropriateness of the portfolio, UNHCR's performance and overall strategic approach, the evaluation will adopt a non-experimental design using a theory-based approach, guided by a **Theory of Change** which the team will reconstruct during the inception phase<sup>32</sup>.

The evaluation methodology should use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. UNHCR welcomes the use of diverse and innovative evaluation methods.

Data from various sources and a representative range of stakeholders will be collected (in-person and/or remotely) and triangulated and cross-validated to ensure the credibility of evaluation findings and conclusions. Data collection should include: 1) Desk reviews and content analysis of relevant background as well as programmatic data and documents; 2) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews and rapid surveys (as appropriate) with UNHCR staff, funded and operational partners, national and local government officials, development partners and donors, forcibly displaced people, and; 3) Field data collection involving a mixed-method approach, which, in addition to the above, may also include surveys. Specific to KEQ 3 Sub Questions 2, the Evaluation Team should test whether the existing Cash Based Intervention data, including post distribution monitoring, can be leveraged for effective analysis on protection outcomes and dividends, at the inception stage and if required consider whether further data collection is necessary to supplement or address constraints of the data.

The Evaluation Team will be expected to refine the methodology and final evaluation questions following the initial desk review and inception phase interviews and preliminary analysis of any secondary data carried out during the inception phase. The final **inception report** will specify the evaluation methodology and the refined focus and scope of the evaluation, including final key evaluation questions, data collection tools and analytical method.

The Evaluation Team will be expected to work with UNHCR to select field site visit locations, as appropriate. This will include the development of selection criteria and contextual factors (including security concerns, access, political considerations, etc.) which may impede or enable the design or data collection for this evaluation. The team will also account for potential challenges related to access to informants, and limitations related to time of year, any intervening holidays or events, or budget.

The evaluation methodology is expected to reflect [Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\)](#) perspective in all primary data collection activities carried out as part of the evaluation – particularly with Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons, as appropriate. This includes referring to and making use of relevant internationally agreed evaluation criteria such as those proposed by OECD-DAC and adapted by ALNAP for use in humanitarian evaluations; referring to and making use of relevant UN standard analytical frameworks; and being explicitly designed to address the key evaluation questions – considering evaluability, budget and timing constraints.

An **Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)** will be established to ensure that there is adequate stakeholder engagement throughout the evaluation process, playing a key role in the evaluation design, validating findings, as well as co-shaping evidence-based recommendations to ensure that they are owned, useful and converted into action. The ERG will be comprised of relevant key internal and external interlocutors (e.g., UNHCR RBE, government, CSOs/NGOs, development actors) and co-chaired by the UNHCR Bulgaria Country Representative and the Evaluation Manager. In particular, members of the ERG will have the opportunity to:

- a. Provide suggestions to identify potential materials and resources to be reviewed and enable access to key contacts;
- b. Participate in interviews with evaluators as relevant;

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<sup>32</sup> The Theory of Change developed for the current MYS will be made available by the CO during the inception phase. The ToC will be discussed with and validated by the CO and will be used by the team to assess the results achieved by UNHCR during the review period.

- c. Review and comment on the inception report, providing suggestion on the final design and questions of the evaluation;
- d. Validate emerging findings and conclusions;
- e. Review and comment on the draft final report;
- f. Advise on the focus of the evaluation recommendations that will form the basis of the Management Response to the evaluation.

UNHCR will seek other opportunities to share key findings, lessons learned and good practices externally. Socializing the evaluation results is critical and goes beyond the feedback to the draft evaluation report. The Evaluation Team should place particular emphasis on incorporating **learning** and creating spaces (in the format of meetings and workshops) aimed at facilitating the acquisition of the emerging findings and strengthening data interpretation, analysis, and validation of the evaluation findings and conclusions; as well as catalyzing stakeholders' engagement and participation in the co-shaping of evidence-based recommendations as a critical first step in the learning transfer process. Validation of recommendations and findings will involve UNHCR and partners including government, UN agencies, donors, funded partners and other relevant stakeholders<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> If the context allows, consultations will also be held with a selected group of people UNHCR serves in the country.

# Organization and Conduct of the Evaluation

## Evaluation Management and Quality Assurance

The evaluation will be managed per the relevant provisions of [UNHCR's Evaluation Policy](#) and [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluations \(2016\)](#).

The Evaluation Officer based in EvO will be the evaluation manager. S/he will be responsible for: (i) managing administrative day to day aspects of the evaluation process (ii) acting as the main interlocutor with the Evaluation Team (iii) facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure evaluators receive the required data (iv) facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure technical guidance on content, and (v) reviewing the interim deliverables and final reports to ensure quality – with the support of UNHCR Bulgaria and the Regional Bureau.

The evaluation is expected to adhere with the '[Evaluation Quality Assurance](#)' (EQA) guidance, which clarifies the quality requirements expected for UNHCR evaluation processes and products. The Evaluation Manager will share and provide an orientation to the EQA at the start of the evaluation. All evaluation products will be shared with an external EQA provider for their comment, in addition to being reviewed by the Evaluation Manager and Reference Group. Evaluation deliverables will not be considered final until they have received a satisfactory review rating and have been cleared by the Head of the Evaluation Service. Adherence to the EQA will be overseen by the Evaluation Manager with support from the UNHCR Evaluation Office as needed.

UNHCR Bulgaria will designate a focal point that will assist the Evaluation Manager and Evaluation Team with logistical and administrative arrangements. The Evaluation Manager will remain in close contact with the focal point for UNHCR Bulgaria.

While the Evaluation Team will be responsible for organizing travel arrangements, booking hotels and setting up interviews, UNHCR Bulgaria will assist the Evaluation Manager and Evaluation Team by facilitating logistical and administrative arrangements as required to ensure the smooth implementation of the evaluation, by:

providing documentation, data and information,  
facilitating in-country data collection, including arranging confidential meetings and interviews with key informants, FGDs and Field visits as appropriate,  
coordinating in-country feedback on key evaluation deliverables,  
including the Evaluation Team in relevant UNHCR meetings in a view to understanding the context, activities and challenges of the operation.

Upon completion, the final evaluation report will be shared with the UNHCR Bulgaria Representative and Senior Management Team with the request to formulate the formal management response, which will also be made available in the public domain.

## Timeline and Expected Deliverables

The Evaluation Team will carry out the evaluation indicatively from January 2024 to July 2025. The management response is planned by October 2025, within 90 days from the issuance of the final evaluation report. The contract is expected to be signed by November 2024.

The table below shows the indicative workplan and timeline which will be further refined and finalized during the inception phase.

Phases/Key Activities	Key Deliverable	Indicative Timeline	Payment Schedule
<b>Inception phase</b> including: - Gathering and desk review of relevant documentation; remote interviews as appropriate - TL inception visit or online meetings including KII, kick-off meeting with ERG, if needed	Final inception report (approx. 20 pp.) – including detailed workplan and methodology, final evaluation questions and evaluation matrix, review of the CO Theory of Change and stakeholder analysis.	January-March 2025	20%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draft inception report</li> <li>- EQA review on the draft inception report</li> <li>- Circulation for comments and finalization</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Data collection phase</b> including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- KII and FGDs (in-country and virtual as required); in-depth document review; exit meeting with ERG</li> <li>- Initial analysis and triangulation,</li> <li>- Validation events on preliminary findings and conclusions</li> <li>- Stakeholder feedback on preliminary findings and emerging conclusions</li> </ul>	Validation event on preliminary findings, and conclusions with stakeholders (incl. ERG)	April – May 2025	30%
<p><b>Data Analysis and Reporting phase</b> including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analysis and write-up</li> <li>- Co-shaping strategic recommendations events</li> <li>- Draft Evaluation Report</li> <li>- EQA review of the draft report, circulation for comments</li> </ul>	<p>Strategic recommendations events with stakeholders (incl. ERG)</p> <p>Draft final report including recommendations (for circulation and comments)</p>	May – July 2025	30%
<p><b>Finalization of the evaluation report</b>, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inclusion of all feedback in the final report</li> <li>- Socializing the evaluation results (virtual and or in-person)</li> <li>- Communication products for maximizing outreach</li> </ul>	<p>Final Evaluation Report, including translation into English.</p> <p>Presentation to UNHCR and in-country stakeholders (virtual or in-person) summarizing key findings, highlighting successes, challenges, and areas for improvement and soliciting feedback for future iterations.</p> <p>Finding shared utilizing various mediums such as reports, presentations, executive summary, infographics, and interactive platforms</p>	July - Aug 2025	20%

### Ethical considerations

The Evaluation Team will be required to sign the [UNHCR Code of Conduct](#), complete UNHCR's introductory protection training module, and respect UNHCR's confidentiality requirements. In line with established standards for evaluation in the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations \(2020\)](#), and the UN Ethical Guidelines for evaluations, evaluation in UNHCR is founded on the fundamental principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility. These inter-connected principles subsume specific norms that will guide commissioning, conducting and supporting the use of the evaluation. This includes protecting sources and data, informed consent, respect for dignity and diversity and the minimization of risk, harm and burden upon those who are the subject of or participating in the evaluation, while at the same time not compromising the integrity of the evaluation.

The evaluation team should adhere to UNHCR's [Data Protection](#) policy, to ensure personally identifiable information is adequately safeguarded, as well as to UNHCR's Supplementary Agreement for Data Sharing. Specifically, the evaluation will follow the newly developed Standard Operating Procedures for Data Management in Evaluations.

UNHCR's Evaluation Office supports the inclusion of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in the evaluation, in line with UNHCR's participatory approach [Age, Gender and Diversity policy](#) and [Framework for Accountability to Affected Persons](#). Therefore, the Evaluation Team will be required to have a clear policy on their participation, outlining the measures to protect those who participate in the evaluation.

## Evaluation team qualifications

The evaluation will be carried out by a team of qualified independent evaluation consultants, comprised of a Team Leader and 2-3 Team Members, including junior consultants or research assistants, depending on the final scope and areas of focus of the evaluation.

Professional integrity, cultural awareness, sensitivity and respect for diversity and the ability to meaningfully involve relevant stakeholders, especially people UNHCR serves, are essential.

The Evaluation Team shall collectively demonstrate the required mix of evaluation competencies, professional background and expertise, and adequate knowledge and experience in subject matters relevant to this evaluation, namely:

- a. Public policy/ political economy expertise with reference to displacement- with experience in European contexts preferred. Experience within the ET in Bulgaria is desirable.
- b. Expertise of refugee inclusion within a Upper Middle Income country
- c. Data analysis related Cash Based intervention, including running effectiveness analysis via quasi experimental approaches
- d. Strong understanding of advocacy approaches within European displacement contexts.

The evaluation team should possess evaluation/research experience in Europe and knowledge of English. Ideally, the Evaluation Team should also contain one individual able to speak Bulgarian. The Evaluation Team should be gender balanced, culturally diverse, and comprised of international and national evaluator(s), if possible. Further, the required skills and qualifications are outlined below:

### Evaluation Team Leader

- A post-graduate or master's degree in social science, development studies, international relations or economics plus a minimum of 12 years of relevant professional experience in humanitarian response settings and/or development interventions.
- Minimum of 7 years of evaluation experience with demonstrated ability in mixed research methodologies, and an excellent understanding of humanitarian/development country operations. Experience in evaluation in humanitarian or development settings preferred.
- Proven experience in successfully leading an evaluation team and managing fieldwork in complex environments.
- Technical expertise in refugee assistance, basic-needs, and protection work. With an emphasis on durable solutions and local integration, including relevant analytical frameworks and programming approaches and standards.
- Proven track record in leading (preferably) or participating as a senior team member in previous large-scale evaluations, preferably country portfolio evaluations, commissioned by a large development, donor, or humanitarian agency.
- Institutional knowledge of UNHCR's protection mandate and operational platform.
- In-depth knowledge of and proven experience with various data collection and analytical methods and techniques used in evaluation and operational research.
- Experience in generating useful and action-oriented recommendations to senior management and programming staff.

## Evaluation Team Members

- A post-graduate or master's degree in social sciences, development studies, international relations, or economics plus a minimum of 5 years of relevant professional experience ideally in humanitarian and/or development settings.
- Minimum of 4 years' experience supporting quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for evaluation purposes (preferably) or operational research in humanitarian and development settings.
- Good knowledge of humanitarian response programming, relevant analytical frameworks and programming approaches and standards, emphasis in age, gender and diversity (ADG) perspective.
- In depth knowledge with various data collection and analytical methods and techniques used in evaluation and operational research.
- Proven expertise in facilitating participatory workshops involving different groups and participants.
- Excellent communication and presentation skills.

### How to apply

This evaluation falls under Lot 2 of the Global Framework Agreement (GFA) dedicated to CSE type of evaluations.

The proposal should include:

**Proposed services:** A short narrative commenting on the context, approach, methodology and objectives proposed for this evaluation, important assumptions, constraints/risks to the evaluation study that should be taken into consideration and mitigation strategies. Furthermore, it should outline measures in place concerning quality assurance, responsible data management and how adherence to evaluation ethical norms and standards is ensured.

**Team Composition and Strength:** The applicant should present the proposed team, their individual role and their experience working together in this type of evaluation. CVs of all proposed members should be submitted as follows: Team Leader; Team Members-Subject Matter Specialists (development economics; international protection; health; education); Data Analyst (junior).

A detailed **budget** for each phase includes consultants (proposed estimate of the number of days and fees), estimated travel costs and other relevant items.

Technical criteria used to evaluate proposals will comprise 70% of the total score, while the remaining 30% is based on the financial offer. The technical offer will be evaluated using the following criteria:

Proposed services: Approach and methodology to the evaluation

Team Composition and Strength: Qualifications and relevant experience of proposed Team Leader and Team Members.

## Annex 1: Global reforms most relevant to the evaluation.

The reform process covers various areas. For this CSE, the most relevant changes relate to regionalization, decentralization and the Business Transformation Programme (BTP). Overall, the change process seeks to better position UNHCR to protect and assist forcibly displaced people, work with others to promote solutions, address future challenges and take advantage of emerging opportunities.

The regionalization and decentralization reform, launched in 2020, brings decision-making closer to the 'point of delivery'. The reform strengthened country operations with enhanced authorities and additional capacities, and Regional Bureaus (RB) moved from headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland) to seven regional hubs. RB set regional strategies and priorities. RB also provide oversight, technical support and guidance to country operations. Under this process, staff and decision-making authority lie closer to forcibly displaced people, allowing for a faster and more effective response.<sup>20</sup> Decentralization is a central component of fulfilling the GCR and the broader UN Reform efforts, allowing for greater collaboration with host countries and development actors, promoting national ownership, and focusing more on people over process.

Another key internal reform entails the Business Transformation Programme (BTP), which includes six main projects:

1. **COMPASS:** UNHCR's Results-Based Management (RBM) system, launched in January 2021, enhances multi-year strategic planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting.
2. **Workday:** A cloud-based HR management solution replacing MSRP, launched in July 2022 to streamline HR processes and enhance the employee experience.
3. **Cloud ERP:** UNHCR's new Enterprise Resource Planning system for financial, contributions, and supply chain management, improving finance reporting, cash management, logistics, and purchasing processes. It was launched in August 2023.
4. **PROMS:** The Project Reporting, Oversight, and Monitoring Solution provide an end-to-end automated solution for effective project delivery, partnership facilitation, and operational data management. It was launched in August 2023.
5. **Synergy:** An external engagement management solution using the Salesforce platform that will improve donor and partner engagement across the organization. It was launched in 2024.
6. **Link:** This will ensure interoperability and interface capabilities between BTP systems and facilitate access to secure, timely information for strategic planning and decision-making. It will be launched in 2024.

The new RBM system, COMPASS, launched in 2021, introduces a new approach to strategic planning and budgeting that aligns more with the spirit of the GCR. Key changes include a shift from an annual to a multi-year planning cycle and a new results framework focusing on collective outcomes and impact. The new RBM also has more user-defined elements in the framework, enabling context-specific operational planning at the country level. RBM also includes risk management, linking it to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for the first time. These measures support UNHCR country operations to be more agile and responsive to evolving contexts and emerging opportunities, as the organization engages more deeply with governments, partners, UN Country Teams and other stakeholders towards collective outcomes.

Multi-year strategies at the country level were introduced in the organization in 2020 and are being progressively rolled out to cover all Field operations. Multi-year strategies are informed by participatory planning exercises, including situational analysis and needs assessments with partner organizations and key stakeholders such as inter-alia, authorities, and UN organizations. I/NGOs, donors, development banks, the private sector and the forcibly displaced people. The planning process further defines country priority actions, develops related results chains and allocates resources against these country priorities, considering the alignment with relevant UNHCR Strategic Directions and regional priorities. Annual strategic reviews are conducted in each country to assess progress and identify corrective actions.

## APPENDIX 2 – EVALUATION MATRIX

The evaluation matrix below sets out the evaluation questions and sub-questions detailed in the ToR and presents the judgement criteria (or analytical parameters) envisaged to guide the data collection (quantitative and qualitative) and analysis, as well as the data collection tools and sources of information identified so far. The judgement criteria and information sources were identified based on the preliminary document review, the scoping interviews conducted during the preparatory phase, and discussions between the evaluation management and the evaluation team.

The proposed judgement criteria are intended to reflect all areas of UNHCR's institutional and programmatic work during the evaluation period, as well as certain aspects of its organisational model in the country (organisational chart, funding model, planning and monitoring tools). However, the judgement criteria proposed in the evaluation matrix are by no means a closed or exhaustive list of the elements or parameters that will underpin the analysis, as some data and parameters will not be available and other unexpected data or parameters will emerge during the data collection phase. Therefore, the analysis and the writing of the evaluation report will consider the analytical parameters proposed in the evaluation matrix, provided that the data supporting them are available, consistent and can be triangulated. The evaluation may also use additional parameters deemed relevant or disregard some of the judgement criteria proposed in the evaluation matrix if they are inconsistent or unavailable.

A large proportion of the judgement criteria proposed for assessing effectiveness (in quantitative terms) and efficiency are based on UNHCR's monitoring and reporting system, and there are virtually no other alternative sources for UNHCR, as these are activities closely linked to the organisation's mandate (e.g. access to territory and non-refoulement, RSD, asylum, statelessness). The data are therefore self-reported by UNHCR or national agencies and have several limitations: (i) difficulties in having sources of verification available to check the credibility and consistency of the data; (ii) risk of bias in self-reported data; (iii) difficulties in triangulating UNHCR and national data with other sources; (iv) weaknesses in UNHCR's own planning, budgeting and monitoring system (e.g. lack of or inconsistencies in baselines, targets, denominators or staffing). The analysis of effectiveness, efficiency (and other aspects where quantitative measurement is limited, e.g. level of coherence, alignment, coordination, positioning, etc.) will be triangulated or complemented by qualitative parameters and data.

The primary and secondary sources of information listed below are expected to provide data for all evaluation sub-questions (to a greater or lesser extent). The specific information sources for an evaluation sub-question indicate the number of the evaluation sub-question to which it relates.

**KEQ1: How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within Bulgaria given the needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons and the national and regional context?**

Sub-questions	Evaluation criteria <sup>34</sup>	Judgment criteria (depending on available data and disaggregation. Non-exhaustive list: parameters may be modified, or others added depending on the development of data collection).	Data collection tools	Sources of information identified <sup>35</sup>
<p>SQ1.1. To what extent has UNHCR's strategic positioning in the country effectively identified and addressed the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless in Bulgaria, taking into account the changing context.</p>	<p>Coherence</p>	<p><b>UNHCR's strategy adaptation to needs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR's strategies and operational design are informed by regular and documented assessments of the needs and priorities of different populations. Focus on documented needs in the following programmatic areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access to territory, non-refoulement and freedom of movement</li> <li>○ Access to asylum procedures, refuge/stateless status determination and quality of the national asylum system</li> <li>○ Access to legal assistance and to documentation</li> <li>○ Community – based protection</li> <li>○ Social cohesion and peaceful coexistence between communities</li> <li>○ Access to naturalisation or long-term residence</li> <li>○ Access to voluntary return</li> <li>○ Access to resettlement</li> <li>○ Inclusion and access to public services (e.g. financial, health, education, social protection, housing).</li> <li>○ Access to the labour market</li> <li>○ Access to land</li> <li>○ Access to entrepreneurial opportunities</li> <li>○ Identification of people with specific needs and vulnerabilities</li> <li>○ Integration of the disability, age, gender and diversity approach into regular programmes</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ The emerging needs due to sudden crises or changes in the operational environment and available resources were promptly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Direct observations</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- Stakeholder mapping and analysis</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Forcibly displaced people and/or representatives</li> <li>○ Host communities or representatives</li> <li>○ Identified key informants</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>UNHCR global documents (corporate policies &amp; strategies)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Global Compact on Refugees</li> <li>§ UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026</li> <li>§ Sustainable programming</li> <li>§ Decentralisation and Regionalisation</li> <li>§ Emergency Preparedness and Response</li> <li>§ Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion</li> <li>§ Durable Solutions</li> <li>§ Global Strategy and Action Plan on Statelessness</li> <li>§ Institutionalisation of cash-based interventions</li> <li>§ Education: a strategy for refugee inclusion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>34</sup> The evaluation is based on th1.3 e definitions of the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian action.

<sup>35</sup> Non-exhaustive identification

		<p>assessed, documented, and integrated into strategic or programmatic adaptations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritisation exercises and mechanisms to adjust UNHCR strategy, plans and programmes considering the needs of different populations, national priorities and resources available conducted and documented on a regular basis.</li> <li>▪ UNHCR emergency preparedness and response plans designed and implemented to respond to short term and immediate needs of different populations, as a result of sudden crisis.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ UNHCR's strategic plan on engaging development actors;</li> <li>§ Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment</li> <li>§ Age, gender and diversity policy</li> <li>§ Strategic Framework for Climate Action</li> <li>§ Solutions for refugees in third countries: Roadmap 2030</li> <li>§ Resettlement and complementary pathways</li> <li>§ UNHCR's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals</li> </ul>
<p>SQ1.2. How well aligned and relevant is the existing UNHCR2022-2023 annual strategies and MYS to national, regional priorities and changes in the wider regional and geopolitical context- including developments related to the EU Migration and Asylum Pact (MAP)?</p>		<p><b>UNHCR's strategies alignment to national and regional frameworks and priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR strategy and plans aligned with Bulgarian government policies and priorities (national and municipal levels)</li> <li>▪ UNHCR strategy and plans aligned with other key stakeholders' strategies (at regional and national levels): UN, EU NGOS, partners, GCR, etc</li> <li>▪ UNHCR strategy and plans aligned with UNHCR corporate global guidelines and strategies</li> </ul> <p><b>UNHCR's strategies alignment to EU Migration and Asylum Pact (MAP)/National Implementation Plan (2024-2026):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR's strategy and plans aligned with the EU and governmental policies embedded in <b>the National Implementation Plan</b> of the MAP for the period 12 December 2024 - 12 June 2026</li> <li>▪ UNHCR engagement with government stakeholders and other partners in creation of <b>new national legislation</b> in line with rights and protection needs of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless people</li> <li>▪ UNHCR engagement in <b>strengthening national institutions'</b> capacity of application of the new legislation and administrative practices in line with the protection needs of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless people, including most vulnerable groups among them</li> <li>▪ UNHCR engagement with the <b>new national monitoring mechanism</b>, prescribed in the implementation plan</li> <li>▪ UNHCR program design and implementation being <b>well informed by evidence for emerging needs and challenges</b> regarding <b>the implementation of the new policies</b></li> </ul>	<p>Desk review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Direct observations</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- Stakeholder mapping and analysis</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Framework for Climate Action</li> <li>§ Solutions for refugees in third countries: Roadmap 2030</li> <li>§ Resettlement and complementary pathways</li> <li>§ UNHCR's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>o <u>UNHCR strategic and planning documents at RBE level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Regional evaluations</li> </ul> </li> <li>o <u>UNHCR documents at CO level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plan ((2022-23 and MYS 24-26)</li> <li>§ Results frameworks (COMPASS)</li> <li>§ Monitoring indicators system</li> <li>§ Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons statistics (CO, Refugee data finder)</li> <li>§ Fact sheets</li> <li>§ Participatory assessments with Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons</li> <li>§ Surveys and analysis (e.g., flow, border, and protection monitoring)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>SQ 1.3 To what extent has programme design and implementation been informed by evidence that capture the needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless, and the priorities of the government?</p>	<p>Relevance</p>	<p><b>UNHCR's use of evidence – based tools to assess the needs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of diverse and robust data collection tools and analytical methods to assess needs on a regular basis, adapted to different population groups and contexts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Post distribution monitoring</li> <li>○ Results monitoring surveys</li> <li>○ Other regular monitoring exercises (border monitoring, protection monitoring)</li> <li>○ Joint needs assessments</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Adoption of Protection Analytical Frameworks (e.g., PIM)</li> </ul> <p><b>Overall application of UNHCR's AGD policy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Age, Disability, Gender and diversity mainstreaming is applied in the development and implementation of UNCHR activities, including data disaggregated by age, sex, and disability at minimum, participatory methodologies and adapted programming and communications, feedback and reporting mechanisms, women and girls inclusion, GBV/PSEA SOPs implemented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ UNHCR programmatic, sectoral or thematic reports (e.g., labour market, fiscal impact, integration of indigenous refugees, interiorisation, Quality Asylum Initiative, others)</li> <li>§ Risk review reports</li> <li>§ Mission reports</li> <li>§ Data on human resources (staff lists and organisational charts)</li> <li>§ Budget data</li> <li>§ Funding (Funding Updates- Intern versions)</li> <li>§ OIOS audits</li> <li>§ CO previous evaluations (e.g., programmatic or sectoral – gender)</li> <li>○ <u>Documents from national partners:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Partnership agreements and project formulations</li> <li>§ Monitoring reports.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ <u>Documents from UN agencies and other international organisations, including EU:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Refugee and Response Plan (RRP)- Bulgaria Chapter,</li> <li>§ Joint Needs Assessment and Common Country Assessments</li> <li>§ Joint evaluations and evaluations of agency strategies,</li> <li>§ Periodic and technical reports from UN agencies (e.g. WHO, IOM, UNICEF) and others</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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				<p>§ EU Migration and Asylum Pact (MAP) and other EU directives</p> <p>§ Common European Asylum System (CEAS)</p> <p><u>o Documents, reports and statistics from government institutions (at central and subnational levels):</u></p> <p>§ Laws and regulations on asylum and international protection</p> <p>§ Public policies of interest for international protection and inclusion (e.g., access of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in public services - documentation, education, health - livelihoods - vocational training, employment), if available.</p> <p>§ National or sub-national development strategies and plans.</p> <p>§ National sectoral statistics (e.g., education, health, employment).</p> <p><u>o Reports published by national CSOs, NGOs, research centres or universities.</u></p> <p><u>o Articles published by the media.</u></p>
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**KEQ2: To what extent has UNHCR been able to promote and benefit from synergies with key stakeholders and to play a catalytic role, mobilizing other relevant actors around the cause of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons so to maximize the leverage of its interventions?**

Sub-questions	Evaluation criteria	Judgment criteria (depending on available data and disaggregation. Non-exhaustive list: parameters may be modified, or others added depending on the development of data collection).	Data collection tools	Sources of information identified
<p>SQ 2.1. To what extent is the 2022-2023 annual strategies and the MYS coherent and complements the work of other partners (government, development and humanitarian actors, UN agencies, EU entities, private sector, civil society)?</p>	Coherence	<p><b>UNHCR coordination with other stakeholders:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNHCR coordination mechanisms with the Bulgarian government (national, state and municipal levels)</li> <li>• UNHCR coordination role and co-leadership of relevant working groups, including the Refugee Coordination Mechanism and other platforms, ensured and sustained over time.</li> <li>• UNHCR participation in joint planning and programming (development oriented) with other UN agencies, EU entities, and others reported.</li> <li>• Partnerships established and maintained with key actors (government institutions at national and municipal levels, UN and EU agencies, humanitarian and development actors, private sector,) to support humanitarian response and durable solutions</li> </ul> <p><b>UNHCR complementarity with other key stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNHCR 2022-2023 annual strategies and the MYS are complementing other key actors strategies (avoiding duplication, gaps and ensuring coherence)</li> </ul> <p><b>UNHCR partnerships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New partnerships developed to adapt to MYS and other priorities</li> <li>• Existing partnership agreements reviewed or adapted to adapt to MYS and other priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- Stakeholder mapping</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Forcibly displaced people and/or representatives</li> <li>o Host communities or representatives</li> <li>o Identified key informants</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <u>UNHCR global documents (corporate policies &amp; strategies)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Global Compact on Refugees</li> <li>§ UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026</li> <li>§ Sustainable programming</li> <li>§ Decentralisation and Regionalisation</li> <li>§ Emergency Preparedness and Response</li> <li>§ Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion</li> <li>§ Durable Solutions</li> <li>§ Global Strategy and Action Plan on Statelessness</li> <li>§ Institutionalisation of cash-based interventions</li> <li>§ Education: a strategy for refugee inclusion</li> <li>§ UNHCR's strategic plan on engaging development actors;</li> <li>§ Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>SQ2.2 To what extent is UNHCR Bulgaria Country Office well positioned to engage with government stakeholders on the EU Migration and Asylum Pact implementation, including on ensuring coherence and the</p>	Coherence	<p><b>UNHCR's positioning, coherence and coordination with other stakeholders on the EU (MAP):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR participation in future governmental working groups on implementation of the national plan and creation of new legislation in protection-sensitive manner.</li> <li>▪ Partnerships established and maintained with key actors (government institutions at central, local and municipal levels, UN and EU agencies (including EUAA and Frontex) humanitarian and development actors, NGOs, private</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desk review</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- Stakeholder mapping</li> </ul>	

<p>maintenance of protection for refugees, stateless, and asylum seekers in Bulgaria in line with the 2022-2023 annual strategies and the MYS?</p>		<p>sector, etc) to support the MAP implementation in rights sensitive manner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partnership with the office of the Ombudsman and other relevant stakeholders regarding creation of new national independent monitoring mechanism.</li> <li>▪ Coordination with other stakeholders in filling in the need of training and other activities for raising the capacity of national institutions on the MAP implementation in awareness of protection needs and rights of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons.</li> </ul>	<p>- SWOT analysis</p>	<p>§ Age, gender and diversity policy  § Strategic Framework for Climate Action  § Solutions for refugees in third countries: Roadmap 2030  § Resettlement and complementary pathways  § UNHCR's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals</p>
<p>SQ 2.3 What are the key factors that influence the success of UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts with the government, national authorities and other stakeholders, and how well have these been addressed to optimize collaboration, minimize duplication?</p>	<p>Coherence</p>	<p><b>Factors influencing UNHCR's partnership model:</b>  <b>Internal factors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR presence in the country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Country office, presence, and staff deployed</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ UNHCR financial and human resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total budget allocated</li> <li>Total budget allocated by outcome area.</li> <li>Number of staff by type of function</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Relations with governments and operational quality of partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordination meetings with governments</li> <li>Workshops and seminars organised</li> <li>Number of officials and employees of institutions trained.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Collaboration with other UN and other organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number, type and results of joint projects/strategies</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Partnerships with NGOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number, type and results of partnerships</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>External factors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political and institutional commitment from the Bulgaria government (national and municipal levels)</li> <li>▪ Support and commitment of host communities and their representatives</li> <li>▪ Other unforeseen factors linked to the context</li> </ul> <p><b>Factors influencing UNHCR coordination with the government and others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR coordination mechanisms with the Bulgarian government (national and municipal levels)</li> <li>▪ UNHCR coordination role and co-leadership of relevant working groups ensured and sustained over time</li> </ul>	<p>Desk review  - Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)  - Timelines  - Reflection workshops  - Stakeholder mapping  - SWOT analysis</p>	<p><u>o UNHCR strategic and planning documents at RBE level:</u>  § Strategic Reports and Operational Plans  § Regional evaluations</p> <p><u>o UNHCR documents at CO level:</u>  § Strategic Reports and Operational Plan ((2022-23 and MYS 24-26)  § Results frameworks (COMPASS)  § Monitoring indicators system  § Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons statistics (CO, Refugee data finder)  § Fact sheets  § Participatory assessments with Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons  § Surveys and analysis (e.g., flow, border, and protection monitoring)  § UNHCR programmatic, sectoral or thematic reports (e.g., labour market, fiscal impact, integration of indigenous refugees, interiorisation, Quality Asylum Initiative, others)  § Risk review reports  § Mission reports</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR participation in joint planning and programming with other UN agencies and organisations reported.</li> <li>▪ Partnerships established and maintained with key actors (government institutions at national and municipal levels, UN agencies, humanitarian and development actors, private sector,) to support humanitarian responses and durable solutions (includes tracking the number and type of agreements and their effectiveness in addressing the needs of different populations).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Data on human resources (staff lists and organisational charts)</li> <li>§ Budget data</li> <li>§ Funding (Funding Updates- Intern versions)</li> <li>§ OIOS audits</li> <li>§ CO previous evaluations (e.g., programmatic or sectoral – gender)</li> <li>§ Minutes of meetings and ToRs for coordination platforms</li> </ul> <p><u>o Documents from national partners:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Partnership agreements and project formulations</li> <li>§ Monitoring reports.</li> </ul> <p><u>o Documents from UN agencies and other international organisations, including EU:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Refugee and Response Plan (RRP)- Bulgaria Chapter,</li> <li>§ Joint Needs Assessment and Common Country Assessments</li> <li>§ Joint evaluations and evaluations of agency strategies,</li> <li>§ Periodic and technical reports from UN agencies (e.g. WHO, IOM, UNICEF) and others</li> <li>§ EU Migration and Asylum Pact (MAP) and other EU directives</li> <li>§ Common European Asylum System (CEAS)</li> </ul> <p><u>o Documents, reports and statistics from government institutions (at central and subnational levels):</u></p>
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				<p>§ Laws and regulations on asylum and international protection</p> <p>§ Public policies of interest for international protection and inclusion (e.g., access to land, access of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in public services - documentation, education, health - livelihoods - vocational training, employment), if available.</p> <p>§ National or sub-national development strategies and plans.</p> <p>§ National sectoral statistics (e.g., education, health, employment).</p> <p>o <u>Reports published by national CSOs, NGOs, research centres or universities.</u></p> <p>o <u>Articles published by the media.</u></p>
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**KEQ3: To what extent and quality has UNHCR achieved and contributed to envisioned results? (protection environment, protection, CBI, inclusion, social-economic integration) (effectiveness)**

Sub-questions	Evaluation criteria	Judgment criteria (depending on available data and disaggregation. Non-exhaustive list: parameters may be modified, or others added depending on the development of data collection)	Data collection tools	Sources of information identified
SQ 3 .1 To what extent has UNHCR's policy advocacy contributed to shaping a favourable protection environment for refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless in Bulgaria?	Effectiveness	<p><b>UNHCR's added value:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UNHCR has been recognised as a reference agency ("authority") on protection in a context of mixed movements by national institutions, the UN and humanitarian and development actors and communities.</li> <li>UNHCR has demonstrated effective governance and informed decision-making processes, along with a comprehensive understanding of the conditions, trends and contextual factors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Direct observations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Forcibly displaced people and/or representatives</li> <li>o Host communities or representatives</li> <li>o Identified key informants</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary sources:</b></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR's MYS and annual strategies show clear linkages between outputs, outcomes, impacts and vision (theory of change)</li> </ul> <p><b>UNHCR contribution to a favourable protection environment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effective application of international conventions on refugees, asylum seekers and statelessness</li> <li>▪ Progress on the commitments (pledges) of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness (HLS)</li> <li>▪ UNHCR's capacity to lobby national institutions to upgrade the legislative, legal or administrative framework of the protection, asylum and statelessness system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Proposals for legislative changes and participation in working groups on legislative amendments/proposals.</li> <li>▪ New legislation (including implementing decrees) adopted to strengthen the protection environment.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Strengthening of national institutions and administrative practices</li> <li>▪ Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in the development of the national asylum system.</li> <li>▪ Implementation of UN and EU tools and guidelines for Common European Asylum System (CEAS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <u>UNHCR strategic and planning documents at RBE level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Regional evaluations</li> </ul> </li> <li>o <u>UNHCR documents at CO level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Theory of change</li> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Thematic concept notes and strategies (eg Protection strategy, etc)</li> <li>§ Results frameworks (COMPASS)</li> <li>§ Monitoring indicators system</li> <li>§ ProGres data (anonymised)</li> <li>§ Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons statistics (CO, Refugee data finder)</li> <li>§ Fact sheets</li> <li>§ Participatory assessments with Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons</li> <li>§ Surveys and analysis (e.g., flow, border, and protection monitoring)</li> <li>§ UNHCR programmatic, sectoral or thematic reports (e.g., labour market, fiscal impact, integration of indigenous refugees, interiorisation, Quality Asylum Initiative, others)</li> <li>§ Risk review reports</li> <li>§ Mission and field visit reports</li> <li>§ Data on human resources (staff lists and organisational charts)</li> <li>§ Budget data</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>SQ 3.2. How effectively has UNHCR achieved intended results in the areas of protection?</p>	<p>Effectiveness</p>	<p><b>Achievements and challenges of UNHCR's actions in protection:</b>  <b>Outcome areas 1, 2,3, 4, 5 and 7 (MYS). (OA1) Access to territory, registration and documentation (OA 2) Status Determination, (OA3) Protection Policy and Law (OA4)– Gender-based Violence (GBV), (OA5) – Child Protection (OA7) – Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strengthening of national institutions and administrative practices (on refugee status determination)</li> <li>▪ Strengthening the human rights of FSPD in the implementation of UNHCR's strategy and interventions, particularly in terms of legal protection and access to services.</li> <li>▪ Disability, age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in the development of the national asylum system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Direct observations</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Non-refoulement, access to territory and information (e.g. annual change in the number of asylum applications) and border surveillance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Annual number of asylum applications received</li> <li>▪ Annual number of asylum applications processed</li> <li>▪ Percentage of requests for information on access processed</li> <li>▪ Frequency and consistency of border monitoring and protection monitoring exercises</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Legal assistance provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number of legal consultations provided and people served</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Access to documentation (RSD, naturalisation) and migration alternatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number of RSD procedures</li> <li>▪ Number of naturalisation certificates issued</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Determination of refugee and stateless status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number of applications for refugee status (resolved, recognised as positive, complementary protection, not recognised)</li> <li>▪ Rate of resolution of applications (%)</li> <li>▪ Average time taken to resolve applications</li> <li>▪ Implementation of UN and EU standards, guidelines and tools related to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Freedom of movement</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Restrictions applied</p> <p>Gender-based Violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Response to gender-based violence (GBV) and mainstreaming PSEA</li> <li>▪ Reported and referred cases of GBV</li> </ul> <p>Child Protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children at risk supported by a best interest's procedure</li> <li>▪ Response to protection needs of unaccompanied and separated children (UAS)</li> </ul> <p>Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Funding (Funding Updates-Intern versions)</li> <li>§ OIOS audits</li> <li>§ CO previous evaluations (e.g., programmatic or sectoral – gender)</li> <li>§ Micro datasets and other CBI data sets</li> <li><u>o Documents from national partners:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Partnership agreements and project formulations,</li> <li>§ Monitoring reports.</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>o Documents from UN agencies and other international organisations, including EU:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Refugee and Response Plan (RRP)- Bulgaria Chapter,</li> <li>§ Joint Needs Assessment and Common Country Assessments</li> <li>§ Joint evaluations and evaluations of agency strategies,</li> <li>§ Periodic and technical reports from UN agencies (e.g. WHO, IOM, UNICEF) and others</li> <li>§ EU Migration and Asylum Pact (MAP) and other EU directives</li> <li>§ Common European Asylum System (CEAS)</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>o Documents, reports and statistics from government institutions (at central and subnational levels):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Laws and regulations on asylum and international protection (and other areas of interest, e.g. naturalisation).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of community leaderships and organisations (including refugee-led organisations)</li> <li>• Social cohesion and peaceful coexistence between Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons and host communities</li> <li>• Family reunification and supplementary protection</li> <li>• Refugee communities are engaged and empowered to meaningfully participate in processes affecting their well-being</li> </ul>		<p>§ Public policies of interest for international protection and inclusion (e.g., access to land, access of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in public services - documentation, education, health - livelihoods - vocational training, employment), if available.</p> <p>§ National or sub-national development strategies and plans</p> <p>§ National sectoral statistics (e.g., education, health, employment).</p> <p>§ SEIS data sets</p> <p><u>o Reports published by national CSOs, NGOs, research centres or universities.</u></p> <p><u>o Articles published by the media.</u></p>
SQ3.3. To what extent has the UNHCR CBI contributed protection outcomes for those receiving cash?	Effectiveness	These SQ are currently being discussed separately as part of the inception process.	Desk review - Exploitation of databases - Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face) -Direct observations - Reflection workshops - SWOT analysis - Stakeholder mapping	
SQ3.4. Has the design of CBI contributed to greater self-reliance?	Effectiveness	These SQ are currently being discussed separately as part of the inception process.	- Desk review - Exploitation of databases - Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face) Direct observations - Reflection workshops - SWOT analysis -Stakeholder mapping	

<p>SQ 3.5 In what ways has UNHCR facilitated inclusion, access to services, self-reliance, and socio-economic integration of refugees, stateless and asylum seekers, in Bulgaria?</p>		<p><b>Achievements and challenges of UNHCR’s support to inclusion, access to services, self-reliance socio-economic integration:</b>  <b>Outcome Areas: (OA 13) – Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods; (O A 16) – Local integration and other local solutions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to civil status documents (Civil Register) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons with legally recognised identity documents.</li> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons children under 5 whose birth is registered with a civil authority.</li> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons s who have received support in obtaining civil status, identity or legal status documents.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Access to social protection programmes or services for families, persons with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children</li> <li>- Access to social benefits for Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons concerned entered in national social registers.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Access to health and psychosocial assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons with access to essential health services</li> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons’ s having received psychosocial assistance</li> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons covered by universal health coverage,</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Access to education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons children enrolled in the national education system</li> <li>- Number of vocational skills certificates issued,</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Multi-purpose cash grants (MPG) and economic self-sufficiency</li> <li>▪ Access to employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons s access to labour market/employment opportunities</li> <li>- Skills recognition for Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons Financial inclusion</li> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons with a bank account</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Direct observations</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons with a mobile money account.</li> <li>▪ Systemic changes to favour inclusion</li> </ul> <p>Progress on the inclusion of a WG under the Refugee Coordination Mechanism (Min of Labour and Social Policy)</p>		
SQ 3.6 What factors have affected achievement/non-achievement of results (contextual, operational etc.)? (referring to all above SQ under EQ3)		<p><b>Explanatory factors of UNHCR's achievements and challenges:</b></p> <p><b>Internal factors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNHCR presence in the country Country office, presence, locations and staff deployed</li> <li>▪ UNHCR financial and human resources Total budget allocated Total budget allocated by outcome area. Number of staff by type of function</li> <li>▪ Relations with governments and operational quality of partnerships Coordination meetings with governments Workshops and seminars organised Number of officials and employees of institutions trained.</li> <li>▪ Collaboration with other UN and EU agencies and other organisations Number, type and results of joint projects/strategies</li> <li>▪ Partnerships with national and international NGOs Number, type and results of partnerships</li> </ul> <p><b>External factors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political and institutional will, commitment from national governments</li> <li>▪ Willingness, support and commitment of host communities and their representatives</li> <li>▪ Evolution of available funding and UNHCR's funding model</li> </ul> <p>Other unforeseen factors linked to the context</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Direct observations</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	

**KEQ4: In light of RBE prioritization decisions in resource allocations across operations, to what extent was UNHCR's Bulgaria structure, staffing and resource allocation adequate and fit-to meet the objectives set out in its current strategy? (efficiency)?**

Sub-questions	Evaluation criteria	Judgment criteria (depending on available data and disaggregation. Non-exhaustive list: parameters may be modified, or others added depending on the development of data collection)	Data collection tools	Sources of information identified
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<p>SQ 4.1. Have UNHCR's capacity and resources in Bulgaria enabled the organisation to fulfil its mandate, effectively address needs and achieve the desired results?</p>	<p>Efficiency</p>	<p><b>UNHCR capacity and resources to fulfil needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Comparison of population flows and patterns in mobility and international protection needs (trend, routes, installation) and case registration with the location of office, presence /number of staff and profiles, and the mapping of UNHCR partners and other service providers</li> <li>▪ Timeliness of UNHCR response, including emergency response (Ukrainian situation and other influx)</li> <li>▪ Resources (equipment, logistics) ready and available for regular programming and emergency response.</li> <li>▪ Functionality and goal-oriented UNHCR's management system (e.g., data systems, monitoring, planning reporting tools)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Forcibly displaced people and/or representatives</li> <li>o Host communities or representatives</li> <li>o Identified key informants</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary sources:</b></p> <p><u>o UNHCR global documents (corporate policies &amp; strategies):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026</li> </ul>
<p>SQ 4.2. How well does UNHCR's organizational structure and budget allocation align with its strategic objectives, considering the evolving context, changing needs and shifting priorities related to the Ukraine refugee influx?</p>	<p>Efficiency</p>	<p><b>UNHCR structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staffing structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o UNHCR organisational charts</li> <li>o UNHCR workforce and partner staff experienced or trained in refugee emergency response.</li> <li>o Internal coordination mechanisms for regular programming and emergency response.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ UNHCR workforce trained to deal with vulnerable groups with specific needs</li> <li>▪ Changes in the workforce at different organisational levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Variations in organisational charts</li> <li>o Changes in the workforce (e.g. profiles, functional groups, types of contracts, geographical/thematic distribution)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>UNHCR funding model:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Performance and budget structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Capacity to adapt budgets, and their operationalisation, to changing contexts,</li> <li>o Adequacy of regular programming and emergency response in relation to needs (identification of needs, mobilisation of emergency resources, coordination and complementarity with other actors).</li> <li>o Access to regular and emergency funds</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Evolution of available budgetary resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Evolution of the OP, OL, IOL, and expenditure by impact area</li> <li>o Consistency between organisational and budgetary priorities (IOL)</li> <li>o Evolution of the Regional Office budget and distribution by country in the region</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Sustainable programming</li> <li>§ Decentralisation and Regionalisation</li> <li>§ Emergency Preparedness and Response</li> <li>§ Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion</li> <li>§ Durable Solutions</li> <li>§ Global Strategy and Action Plan on Statelessness</li> <li>§ Institutionalisation of cash-based interventions</li> <li>§ Education: a strategy for refugee inclusion</li> <li>§ UNHCR's strategic plan on engaging development actors</li> <li>§ Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment</li> <li>§ Age, gender and diversity policy</li> <li>§ Strategic Framework for Climate Action</li> <li>§ Solutions for refugees in third countries: Roadmap 2030,</li> <li>§ Resettlement and complementary pathways</li> <li>§ UNHCR's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Availability of earmarked resources for the CO</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>UNHCR strategic and planning documents at RBE level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Regional evaluations</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ <u>UNHCR documents at CO level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Results frameworks (COMPASS)</li> <li>§ Monitoring indicators system (Excel files)</li> <li>§ ProGressv4 / PRIMES data (anonymised)</li> <li>§ Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons statistics (CO, Refugee data finder)</li> <li>§ Fact sheets</li> <li>§ Participatory assessments with Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons</li> <li>§ Surveys and analysis (e.g., flow, border, and protection monitoring)</li> <li>§ UNHCR programmatic, sectoral or thematic reports (e.g., labour market, fiscal impact, integration of indigenous refugees, interiorisation, Quality Asylum Initiative, others)</li> <li>§ Risk review reports</li> <li>§ Mission reports</li> <li>§ Data on human resources (staff lists and organisational charts)</li> <li>§ Budget data</li> <li>§ Funding (Funding Updates- Intern versions)</li> <li>§ OIOS audits</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
SQ 4.3. How efficiently has UNHCR deployed its Cash Based Intervention Programme?	Efficiency	<p><b>CBI deployment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Performance and structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Capacity to adapt CBI deployment to changing context. Evolution and shift to multipurpose cash assistance</li> <li>○ Adequacy CBI deployment in relation to needs (identification of needs, mobilisation of resources, coordination and complementarity with other actors (especially GoB).</li> <li>○ Funds allocation and deployed</li> <li>○ Timeliness of the CBI deployment</li> <li>○ Staff allocated and availability</li> <li>○ Data collection and its use. Data complementarity with GoB</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	
SQ 4.4. What are the key contextual and operational factors that influence the alignment between UNHCR's organizational configuration, staffing, and resource strategy, and how successfully have these factors been addressed to optimize performance and results?	Efficiency	<p><b>Factors explaining UNHCR's organizational configuration and resourcing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organisational configuration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Workforce and profiles adequate for achieving the objectives in diverse contexts (national, sub-national and evolving)</li> <li>○ Flexibility in workforce management to meet new organisational needs and operational goals</li> <li>○ Logistical and technical resources for achieving the objectives in diverse contexts (national, sub-national and evolving)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Performance and budget structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ UNHCR Funding model</li> <li>○ Ratio of OPS to ABOD/staffing (including AWF).</li> <li>○ Ratio ABOD/staffing cost per Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons (total number and assisted).</li> <li>○ Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons total and assisted per workforce (including AWF).</li> <li>○ Ability to adapt budgets and their implementation to changing contexts.</li> <li>○ Adequacy of the response in relation to needs (identification of needs, mobilisation of emergency resources, coordination and complementarity with other players).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> <li>- SWOT analysis</li> </ul>	

				<p>§ CO previous evaluations (e.g., programmatic or sectoral – gender)</p> <p>§ Micro datasets</p> <p><u>o Documents from national partners:</u></p> <p>§ Partnership agreements and project formulations,</p> <p>§ Monitoring reports.</p> <p><u>o Documents from UN agencies and other international organisations, including EU:</u></p> <p>§ Refugee and Response Plan (RRP)- Bulgaria Chapter,</p> <p>§ Joint Needs Assessment and Common Country Assessments</p> <p>§ Joint evaluations and evaluations of agency strategies,</p> <p>§ Periodic and technical reports from UN agencies (e.g. WHO, IOM, UNICEF) and others</p> <p>§ EU Migration and Asylum Pact (MAP) and other EU directives</p> <p>§ Common European Asylum System (CEAS)</p> <p><u>o Documents, reports and statistics from government institutions (at central and subnational levels):</u></p> <p>§ Laws and regulations on asylum and international protection (and other areas of interest, e.g. naturalisation).</p> <p>§ Public policies of interest for international protection and inclusion (e.g., access to land, access of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in public services - documentation,</p>
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				<p>education, health - livelihoods - vocational training, employment), if available.  § National or sub-national development strategies and plans  § National sectoral statistics (e.g., education, health, employment).  § SEIS data sets</p> <p><u>o Reports published by national CSOs, NGOs, research centres or universities.</u>  <u>o Articles published by the media.</u></p>
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**KEQ 5: How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, current challenges, and opportunities, to further leverage its strategic position and influence within the country and region to advance collective efforts towards protection and solutions? (sustainability)**

Sub-questions	Evaluation criteria	Judgment criteria (depending on available data and disaggregation. Non-exhaustive list: parameters may be modified, or others added depending on the development of data collection)	Data collection tools	Sources of information identified
SQ 5.1 How sustainable is UNHCR Bulgaria's MYS and annual strategies, specifically with regards to strengthening the state refugee's reception capacity and building a sustainable and national inclusion/integration programme?	Sustainability	<p><b>Prospects for the continuity of state refugee's reception capacity and building a sustainable and national inclusion/integration programme without the need for external resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ownership of UNHCR-supported international protection actions or measures (legislation, regulations, means of enforcement) by national institutions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New legislation (and implementing regulations) adopted to strengthen the protections and integration of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons.</li> <li>○ Number of training courses or workshops organised by national institutions to raise awareness among civil servants of their responsibility to protect Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Involvement of national institutions responsible for economic and social development in the integration of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in national policies, plans or services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk review</li> <li>- Exploitation of databases</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews (online and face-to-face)</li> <li>- Timelines</li> <li>- Reflection workshops</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Forcibly displaced people and/or representatives</li> <li>o Host communities or representatives</li> <li>o Identified key informants</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary sources:</b>  <u>o UNHCR global documents (corporate policies &amp; strategies):</u>  § UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026  § Sustainable programming  § Global Strategy and Action Plan on Statelessness  § UNHCR's strategic plan on engaging development actors</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Economic and social development projects or programmes launched by national institutions, including specific activities for Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons, including maintenance of Safe Space and Support Hubs and CBI</li> <li>○ Budgets allocated by national institutions for local authorities for initiatives targeting Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons</li> <li>○ Meetings or consultations between national development institutions and advocacy organisations to integrate their needs into development policies.</li> <li>▪ Potential for sustainability of the results of the cooperation between UNHCR and the main development actors (other UN agencies, EU agencies) and financial institutions (WB, other banks, etc.) present in the country. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collaboration agreements signed between UNHCR and the main development actors, including long-term financial or resource commitments.</li> <li>○ Skills or knowledge transfer initiatives set up by development partners to ensure continuity.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Development of partnerships with the private sector and other economic actors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Approach, typology and results of cooperation agreements signed between UNHCR and the main economic actors (companies, chambers of commerce, financial sector).</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Organisational maturity and autonomy of refugee-led organisations, UNHCR's partners and relevant national civil society organisations.</li> <li>▪ Integration of the disability, age, gender and diversity approach in socio-economic inclusion and national capacity building initiatives.</li> <li>▪ Documented knowledge, tools and results resulting from UNHCR programmes that can be replicable, or scalable</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment</li> <li>§ Age, gender and diversity policy</li> <li>○ <u>UNHCR strategic and planning documents at RBE:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Regional evaluations</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ <u>UNHCR documents at CO level:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Strategic Reports and Operational Plans</li> <li>§ Results frameworks (COMPASS)</li> <li>§ Monitoring indicators system</li> <li>§ ProGres (anonymised)</li> <li>§ FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND STATELESS PERSONS statistics (CO, Refugee data finder)</li> <li>§ UNHCR programmatic, sectoral or thematic reports (e.g., labour market, fiscal impact, integration of indigenous refugees, interiorisation, Quality Asylum Initiative, others)</li> <li>§ Risk review reports</li> <li>§ Mission reports</li> <li>§ Data on human resources (staff lists and organisational charts)</li> <li>§ Budget data</li> <li>§ Funding (Funding Updates- Intern versions)</li> <li>§ CO previous evaluations (e.g., sectoral – gender)</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ <u>Documents from national partners:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>§ Partnership agreements and project formulations,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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				<p>§ Monitoring reports.</p> <p>o <u>Documents, reports and statistics from government institutions (at central and subnational levels):</u></p> <p>§ Laws and regulations on asylum and international protection (and other areas of interest, e.g. naturalisation).</p> <p>§ Public policies of interest for international protection and inclusion (e.g., access to land, access of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in public services - documentation, education, health - livelihoods - vocational training, employment), if available.</p> <p>§ National or sub-national development strategies and plans</p> <p>§ National sectoral statistics (e.g., education, health, employment).</p> <p>o <u>Reports published by national CSOs, NGOs, research centres or universities.</u></p>
<p>SQ 5.2 To what extent is UNHCR Bulgaria equipped to engage effectively on the EU Migration and Asylum Pact implementation, including on ensuring the maintenance and sustainability of protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria?</p>		<p><b>Prospects for the continuity of the EU Migration and Asylum Pact implementation without the need for external resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ability of national institutions to support international protection actions or measures in compliance with established criteria of protection favourable environment (legislation, regulations, means of enforcement).</li> <li>▪ New legislation (and implementing regulations) adopted as part of the implementation plan, able to strengthen the protections and integration of Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons.</li> <li>▪ Number of training courses or workshops organised by national actors (civil society, development and humanitarian actor) for raising awareness among civil servants of their</li> </ul>		

		<p>responsibility to protect Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons in the context of the new administrative procedures introduced with the MAP implementation plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Capacity strengthened as a result of training (behaviour change, engagement, changes in policies and regulation)</li><li>▪ UNHCR recommendations in the preliminary comments to the National Implementation Plan on monitoring mechanism, legal aid assistance, vulnerability screening, counselling and representation, statelessness assessment are observed and introduced</li><li>▪ UNHCR tools developed for vulnerability and assessment are introduced in national administrative practices</li><li>▪ Independent national monitoring mechanism is developed and maintained</li><li>▪ Budget allocation for the implementation of the National Plan</li></ul>		
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## APPENDIX 3 – CONTEXT

### 3.1. Operational Context

#### 3.1.1. National socio-economic context

As of December 31, 2024, the population of Bulgaria was 6,437,360 people, representing 1.4% of the European Union (EU) population, according to the national census. Compared to 2022, the country's population decreased by 10,350 people (0.16%) (National Statistical Institute, 2024). According to national statistics, as of 2021, the most recent measurement, the Bulgarian ethnic group comprised 5,118,494, or 84.6%. A portion of the population in the country identifies as Turkish (8.4%), while 4.4% identify themselves as Roma (National Statistical Institute, 2021).

The Human Development Index (HDI) of Bulgaria reached 0.845 in 2023, placing it in the high human development category, positioning it at 55<sup>th</sup> place out of 193 countries and territories (UNDP, 2025). Between 1990 and 2023, Bulgaria's HDI value changed from 0.706 to 0.845, a change of 19.7%. Among the main factors contributing to this positive trend are the significant reduction of infant mortality rates, increased enrolment rates in education, and some important economic improvements in the last 20 years (especially after accession of Bulgaria in the EU in 2007) such as the overall economic stability, growing per capita income and low unemployment rate in the country (WHO, 2015).

Over the past three decades, Bulgaria transitioned from a centralised economy to an open market system, joining the EU in 2007 (World bank, 2024). By 2023, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity reached 64% of the EU average (€24,200 vs. €37,600), yet Bulgaria remained the EU member state with the lowest GDP per capita, contributing 0.6% to its total GDP (EU, 2024). Per capita income rose 73% between 1990 and 2022 (UNDP, 2024), and growth from 2016–2020 improved living standards and reduced poverty. However, the pandemic, inflation, and unemployment reversed gains in 2021, and by 2024 Bulgaria had the highest income inequality in the EU (World bank, 2024).

The ageing and shrinking workforce, together with a high proportion of economically inactive young people, constrain employment gains. Inactivity is higher among Roma people, persons with disabilities, and those with lower education. By the end of 2024, the employment rate for people aged 20–64 rose to 76.8%, close to the 2030 target of 79%. However, the rate for young people aged 15–29 fell to 33.9%, and although youth unemployment decreased to 6.5%, their labour market participation remains a concern. The proportion of Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETs) aged 15–29 reached 16.5%, above the EU average of 11% (Eurostat, 2024).

Between 2021 and October 2024, there were seven parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, but nevertheless, a governing majority was not achieved. Since then, Bulgaria has faced political instability with frequent changes in government<sup>36</sup>. From the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2025, a new government has been formed. This political situation hindered progress in legislation and public policy, thereby limiting potential advances in asylum and international protection (UNHCR, 2023I).

#### 3.1.2 Overview of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and its implications for Bulgaria

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is a comprehensive legislative package adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in May 2024, consisting of approximately ten legal acts that cover migration management, asylum, integration, and border control. It establishes a common EU asylum system, setting mandatory—and adaptable—solidarity mechanisms to support frontline Member States, streamlining procedures like border screening and asylum processing, and reinforcing cooperation with third countries (European Commission, 2024a, 2024b).

Since the European Commission's proposal of the Pact on Migration and Asylum in September 2020, UNHCR has engaged constructively with the initiative, articulating a cautiously supportive yet critical stance. UNHCR acknowledges the EU Pact's potential to enhance the coordination

<sup>36</sup> Risk Register Extract – Bulgaria (2022, 2023, 2024). Internal document.

and coherence of the European Union's asylum governance structures by fostering a more predictable and harmonised system, in response to past fragmentation and disparities in responsibility-sharing among Member States. In its Practical Considerations for Fair and Fast Border Procedures and Solidarity in the European Union, UNHCR welcomed the Pact's commitment to a common asylum governance framework (UNHCR, 2020a). This is consistent with the GCR's emphasis on cooperative approaches and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing (UNHCR, 2020b). Nevertheless, UNHCR expressed reservations about several core components of the EU Pact (e.g. introduction of accelerated border procedures). UNHCR has advocated for robust safeguards, including access to legal representation, appropriate reception conditions, and meaningful procedural guarantees.

UNHCR has provided support to the implementation of the EU Pact, particularly in Member States along the EU's external borders such as Bulgaria. UNHCR actively contributes to the operational and normative environment in which the EU Pact is applied. This includes technical assistance to national authorities in ensuring access to asylum and legal pathways for forcibly displaced and stateless persons, as well as direct support to improve procedural safeguards at borders and within asylum systems. At the regional level, UNHCR's involvement in coordinated response frameworks—such as the Regional Refugee Response Plans (RRRPs) for the Western Balkans (UNHCR Europe, 2025), Syrian refugees in Türkiye (UNHCR, 2025d) and Ukraine—demonstrates its commitment to fostering a coherent and protection-sensitive approach in line with international standards. Recently, the September 2024 agreement between UNHCR and Frontex reflects efforts aimed at aligning EU border management practices with humanitarian and international protection standards (Frontex, 2024).

In Bulgaria, UNHCR has issued protection notes and briefings identifying risks or gaps in the application of protection standards and suggesting improvements to the national protection environment (UNHCR, 2024j). Concerns about the effective implementation of protection mechanisms and compliance with international standards have likewise been raised by numerous other sources, including Bulgarian and other European civil society actors. See, for instance: (Asylum Information Database (AIDA), 2023a; Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024; International Rescue Committee, 2025).

Bulgaria, as a frontline EU Member State sharing a border with Turkey and situated along the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan migration routes, is often among the first countries to receive asylum seekers and migrants entering the Schengen area. The EU Pact introduces key measures—such as border screening, accelerated asylum procedures, and a mandatory but flexible solidarity mechanism—that directly shape how Bulgaria is expected to manage these arrivals, process asylum claims, and either integrate or return individuals in line with EU standards. The EU Pact establishes common rules and timelines for asylum, returns, and border management, offering a legally binding framework that enables Bulgaria to align its national systems with EU law. These mechanisms are especially critical in contexts of limited national capacity, as they facilitate access to EU resources, financial support, and technical assistance.

In response to the EU Pact's requirements, Bulgaria adopted its National Implementation Plan on December 2024, in line with the European Commission's Common Implementation Plan, which guides Member States in applying EU Pact measures uniformly. Bulgaria's National Implementation Plan outlines reforms across ten legislative areas, including Eurodac usage, reception standards, returns, solidarity contributions, and the introduction of a new Migration and Asylum Law, expected by mid-2025. It also establishes sectoral working groups—led by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) and the Ministry of Interior—to oversee coordination and operationalisation.

### [3.1.3 Overview of Council Directive 2001/55/EC \(Temporary Protection Directive – TPD\) and its implementation in Bulgaria](#)

The TPD was activated by the EU on 4 March 2022 in response to the large-scale displacement from Ukraine establishes a harmonised framework to provide immediate, collective protection to people displaced by the war in Ukraine without requiring individual asylum procedures. In the Bulgarian context, the TPD provided the legal and operational foundation for the state-led refugee

response between 2022 and 2024. It shaped the creation and evolution of the government-led Programme for Humanitarian Assistance—later expanded to include integration elements in 2025<sup>37</sup>—by defining the rights to accommodation, work, education, and healthcare that national institutions were required to guarantee. The State Agency for Refugees, together with sectoral ministries adapted national procedures to comply with TPD provisions. While the TPD framework enabled rapid legal stay and access to services, Bulgarian implementation focused on emergency accommodation and basic assistance, with slower progress on structured, long-term integration mechanisms.

### 3.1.4 The national response to the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, with a focus on refugees from Ukraine.

In March 2022, soon after the escalation of the war in Ukraine, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution urging continued international efforts to de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine and support for the humanitarian response to the resulting refugee crisis (United Nations, 2022). UNHCR and its partners, including other UN agencies, mobilised through the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), first launched in 2022 with a dedicated Bulgarian chapter in 2023 (UNHCR, 2022a), to coordinate support at country and regional levels for refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.

Between the 2023 and 2024 Ukraine Situation RRP, there is a clear strategic shift from emergency response toward medium-term inclusion and resilience. While the 2023 RRP focused on urgent humanitarian assistance—such as protection, legal aid, shelter, and cash-based interventions—the 2024 RRP emphasises integration into national systems, socio-economic inclusion, and localisation. The response architecture in 2024 reflects greater engagement with host governments, refugee-led organisations, and local actors, alongside improved accountability and monitoring mechanisms. Budget requirements declined (from USD 1.7 to 1.1 billion), signalling a more consolidated, development-oriented approach with stronger alignment to public services and national development frameworks (UNHCR, 2023i). As part of the RRP, UNHCR leads and coordinates the implementation of the inter-agency RRP in line with the Refugee Coordination Model<sup>38</sup>, collaborating and consulting with authorities, aid agencies, civil society, and affected populations at both the regional and country levels, including Bulgaria.

In Bulgaria, the Refugee Coordination Mechanism (RCM) was activated in late 2022 and formalised in 2023 (UNHCR, 2023i). Until 2025, the national Refugee Coordination Forum<sup>39</sup> met monthly and included several working groups :

- Cash Working Group: Co-led by UNHCR and the Agency for Social Assistance.
- Protection and Inclusion Working Group: Co-chaired by UNHCR, with an inter-agency PSEA network under it, led by UNHCR, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Animus Association.
- Legal Protection Working Group: Co-chaired by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) and UNHCR, focusing on legal cases.
- Education Working Group: Co-chaired by UNICEF and UNHCR.
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Technical Working Group: Chaired by World Health Organization (WHO).

<sup>37</sup> Renamed the Programme for Humanitarian Support and Integration.

<sup>38</sup> The UNHCR Refugee Coordination Model is a framework that defines how UNHCR leads and coordinates international responses to refugee situations in collaboration with host governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and other partners. Introduced in 2014, it aims to clarify roles, enhance efficiency, and ensure a predictable and inclusive approach. Given the scale, complexity, and cross-border nature of displacement from Ukraine, the Model provides the structural and operational backbone for coordinating the multi-country, multi-actor refugee response across the region.

<sup>39</sup> Following the evaluation field work conducted, the RCM in Bulgaria has been further streamlined. The national Refugee Coordination Forum meets quarterly. The Cash Working Group and MHPSS Technical Working Group are no longer standalone working groups, with their basic needs and MHPSS topics now included into the Protection and Inclusion Working Group.

- The functioning of Bulgaria's national asylum system between 2020 and 2024 was anchored in the Law on Asylum and Refugees, which broadly reflects EU and international standards. The system was administered primarily by the SAR, responsible for registration, status determination, and reception. While the legal framework was structurally adequate, the asylum process suffered from operational and institutional shortcomings, including limited capacity, uneven application of procedural safeguards, and overreliance on external actors. Several procedural inefficiencies and a lack of resources affected both the quality and timeliness of asylum decisions. Coordination between public administrations also revealed challenges, particularly concerning security screenings, detention practices, and the issuance of expulsion orders. Despite improvements in legislation, the use of detention—including for vulnerable persons—remained routine, and alternatives to detention were rarely applied. Access to legal aid was formally guaranteed but hampered by insufficient capacity (UNHCR,2021).

Between 2022 and 2024, the Government of Bulgaria's refugee response architecture evolved through the introduction of sectoral legal, institutional, and programmatic measures—engaging ministries such as Labour and Social Policy, Health, and Education—anchored in changes to the EU legal framework. Additionally, the Government of Bulgaria has an intra-ministerial coordination forum within the Council of Ministers<sup>40</sup>, which does not include UN agencies or civil society. It is worth noting that Bulgaria does not have a UN Country Team (UNCT), a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), or a United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). There is a Security Management Team, chaired by UNICEF, and an Area Operational Management Team, chaired by UNHCR.

In terms of access to asylum, Bulgaria's national implementation plan for the EU Pact (approved in December 2024) provided a strategic roadmap for the reform of asylum and integration processes. Operationally, Programme for Humanitarian Assistance was the most prominent state initiative. The programme was implemented under national leadership and supported by UNHCR and other organisations within the Refugee Coordination Model. Beyond emergency support, Bulgarian authorities gradually expanded their role in inter-sectoral coordination and socio-economic integration efforts. However, state-led initiatives in this area were largely ad hoc, driven by external partners, and still at an early stage of development.

### 3.1.5 Refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people: demographic dynamics in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria's strategic location at the EU's southeastern border makes it a key entry point for refugees and migrants, including refugees from conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa, while also experiencing flows of mixed movements, with asylum seekers arriving primarily from Türkiye and a significant number of Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection. As a frontline state, Bulgaria faces complex mixed movement dynamics, balancing its role in the EU's border management with its obligations under international refugee protection frameworks.

As a result of the escalation of the war in Ukraine, the total number of refugees from Ukraine that have entered Bulgaria is estimated by the government to be over 3.3 million by the end of 2024, most of them transiting to other countries (Government of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2024). According to UNHCR's rapid protection monitoring assessments, since June 2024, there has been a significant increase in new arrivals, with the estimated number of Ukrainians residing in Bulgaria rising from 62,900 at the end of May 2024 to more than 106,000 by the end of June 2024, primarily from southern and eastern Ukraine. This surge in the summer months was due to

<sup>40</sup> At the national level, a Strategic Working Group on Migration and Asylum Management was established within the National Council on Migration, Borders, Asylum and Integration (Report for the activity of SAR for 2024, p. 23)

the worsening situation in Ukraine, the ongoing energy crisis affecting electricity availability, the end of the humanitarian programme in neighbouring refugee-hosting countries (UNHCR, 2024h). Alongside these reasons, seeking job opportunities also emerged as a recurring motive for visiting Bulgaria.<sup>41</sup>

In 2023, the State Agency for Refugees conducted the first re-registration exercise for TP beneficiaries in Bulgaria to renew and extend TP ID validity. At end-2023, with ongoing new registrations throughout the year, there were 51,860 refugees from Ukraine with valid TP.<sup>42</sup> By the end of 2024, some 75,000 refugees from Ukraine remained in Bulgaria (Government Republic of Bulgaria, 2024) requiring international protection and humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2025b), registered under the TPD, of which 75% are women and children, including 31 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) (UNHCR, 2024h). Ukrainian refugees registered under the TPD face different challenges, including limited assistance and socio-economic inclusion. Community outreach and networks are crucial for Ukrainians to access assistance in resolving various issues, including housing, healthcare, employment, and support for vulnerable groups (UNHCR, 2023l, 2023k).

According to data from the SAR, the number of people in need of international protection increased in 2023, reaching record levels. New asylum claims rose from 20,400 in 2022 to 22,500 in 2023 but declined significantly in 2024 (European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 2024b). In 2024, the overall decline in new arrivals from Türkiye led to a significant 45% drop in registered asylum applications, with just 12,250 applicants in 2024 compared to 22,518 in the previous year. 27,775 Ukrainians were registered under the temporary protection scheme during the year.

In 2024, the overall recognition rate decreased to 61%, from 66% in 2023 and 91% in 2022 of all decisions on the merits (UNHCR, 2024b). Both refugee recognition and subsidiary protection rates continued to decrease. Refugee recognition decreased to 0.7% and subsidiary protection ('humanitarian status' under national law) rates fell to 60% in 2024. The rejection rate reached 39%, when considering only decisions issued on the substance of asylum claims.

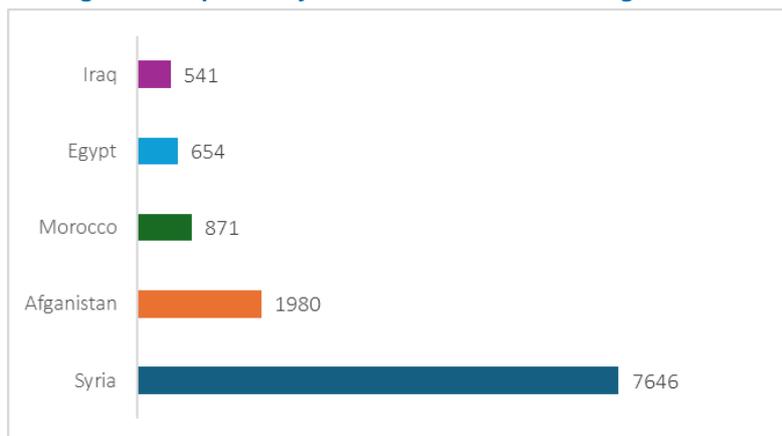
Among the top 5 countries of origin of asylum seekers entering Bulgaria in 2024 remained Syria and Afghanistan. These two nationalities together represented 78% of the total arrivals, – 62% from Syria and 16% from Afghanistan (Figure 10). Between 2014 and 2024, the Syrian refugee population in Bulgaria evolved significantly—from making up over half of asylum applicants in earlier years to a notable, but reduced, caseload in the 2020s. By 2024, Syrians constituted the largest group among applicants, although overall asylum applications more than halved year-on-year (European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 2025). Except for Syrian nationals, recognition rates for other nationalities remained low. The most relevant change in recognition rates related to Syrian applicants. Since 2014, Syrian applicants have been treated as *prima facie* refugees with the majority of them granted subsidiary protection based on the understanding that they flee from internal armed conflict. After the developments in Syria on December 2024, the SAR halted the interviewing and status determination of Syrian applicants until 31 January 2025, when these were resumed on an individual assessment basis (European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 2024a).

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<sup>41</sup> Reported by UNHCR at the time of writing the report.

<sup>42</sup> Reported by UNHCR at the time of writing the report.

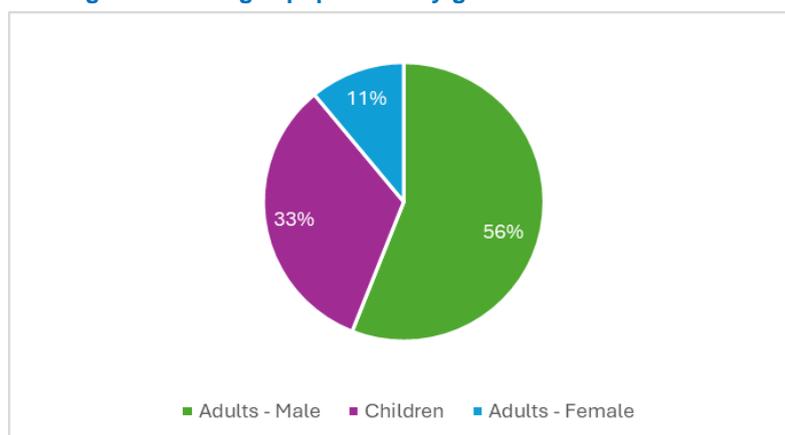
**Figure 10 Top five asylum seeker countries of origin in 2024**



Source: Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees

As of December 2024, the total refugee population in Bulgaria consists primarily of adult men (56%), with children comprising more than one-third, and women accounting for just over 10% (Figure 11). However, the demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees differs significantly from that of other nationalities. According to the 2024 Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS), more than two-thirds of the Ukrainian refugee population are women and children. Additionally, one-fifth are older refugees over the age of 60, and eight per cent of individuals report having a disability that requires the care or support of others (UNHCR,2025b).

**Figure 11. Refugee population by gender in December 2024**



Source: Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees

In 2023, nearly 4,000 UASC arrived in Bulgaria seeking asylum, placing it among the top EU countries receiving unaccompanied children, with 2,601 in 2024. Most of these children only transit through the country. The majority are boys (98%, or 2,548), with most aged 16-17 years old (62%), a smaller proportion aged 14-15 years old (27%), and 8% aged 0-13. Girls represent only 2% (53) of all UASC (State Agency for Refugees and Council of Ministers Republic of Bulgaria, 2024). UNHCR aims to support national institutions in strengthening the child protection system, focusing on early identification, access to adequate reception conditions, and alternative care for asylum-seeking and refugee children at risk. Additionally, UNHCR aims to support national institutions, including border and national police, social workers, legal service providers, and other relevant stakeholders.

Regarding stateless individuals in Bulgaria, according to the Ministry of Interior, 158 people were granted stateless status between 2017 and 2020. The 2021 Census recorded a total of 539 individuals as stateless, while the citizenship of 764 individuals was not indicated. According to

the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, there are also some 50,000 undocumented Roma at risk of statelessness (UNHCR,2025a).

## 3.2 Overview of UNHCR's Operations in Bulgaria

UNHCR has been operating in Bulgaria since July 1993, following the signing of the Accord de Siege with Bulgarian authorities. In response to the outflows from Ukraine in 2022, UNHCR's work in the country rapidly expanded, transitioning from an advocacy-oriented office into one providing assistance, protection and solutions for refugees fleeing the war. UNHCR Bulgaria operates from a single CO located in the capital, Sofia, while covering all key border, transit, and reception areas through partner organisations and field visits.

UNHCR's support for the national response to displacement from Ukraine is set out in three strategy documents. The strategies for 2022 and 2023 were interim in nature, while from 2024 onwards, UNHCR Bulgaria adopted a multi-year strategy covering the period 2024–2026. For evaluation purposes, the 2024–2026 strategy serves as the reference document. An analysis of these three planning documents illustrates how UNHCR's strategy has evolved in response to changes in the operational context and the shifting needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Between 2022 and 2023, UNHCR Bulgaria's strategic vision evolved from a focused protection mandate to a broader, system-oriented, and multi-stakeholder approach. The interim strategies for 2022 and 2023 prioritised legal and procedural compliance with EU and international standards, with an emphasis on access to asylum procedures, dignified reception conditions, alternatives to detention—particularly for children—and socio-economic integration. These strategies explicitly acknowledged contextual challenges, including limited national funding and institutional capacity to assume long-term responsibilities for refugee inclusion. For example, the 2022 strategy aimed to influence national policy through strategic litigation and capacity-building, while highlighting persistent gaps in child protection systems and the need for adequate reception conditions for persons with specific needs. The 2023 update retained this approach but expanded its scope to include the integration of temporary protection holders from Ukraine, leveraging state-led educational initiatives as a potential model for broader refugee inclusion. The core strategic principle in both years was to promote sustainability through increased government ownership and targeted advocacy.

By contrast, the 2024–2026 strategy adopts a layered “protection and solutions ecosystem” model, seeking to consolidate engagement across four levels: refugee communities, service-providing institutions, oversight and support mechanisms, and the broader host society—including academia, the private sector, and digital influencers. This approach signals a repositioning of UNHCR as a convenor, deploying public advocacy, communications, and alliance-building as key tools. It also places renewed emphasis on Bulgaria's outstanding pledges under the Global Compact on Refugees, particularly those related to statelessness, census inclusion, and the withdrawal of reservations to the 1954 Convention. The strategic vision is notably long-term and sustainability-focused, with explicit recognition that system-wide transformation must extend beyond UNHCR's direct engagement—particularly in the absence of a UN Country Team or integrated national UN planning frameworks. A new component of UNHCR multi-year strategy was the incorporation of potential activities to support the voluntary return to Syria, in accordance with UNHCR's position on returns to the Syrian Arab Republic (December 2024). At the programme level, and in line with the priorities set out in the terms of reference of the evaluation, the following interventions stand out:

- **Cash Assistance:** To support vulnerable groups, including single parents, elderly individuals, people with disabilities, and those with serious health conditions, UNHCR collaborated with the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC) to implement CBIs. In 2024, over 10,000 Ukrainians<sup>43</sup> benefited from cash assistance, which helped address their evolving and critical needs.
- **Safe Spaces and Support Hubs:** Five Blue Dots hubs (UNHCR, 2022f, 2022d, 2023g)<sup>44</sup> were established in partnership with UNICEF and local organisations, providing essential services in a safe, family-friendly environment. These hubs offered psychosocial support, educational guidance, and access to specialised services through referrals. Over the years, more than 84,356 people have sought help at these centres.
- **Community-based protection:** Considering the change in needs of Ukrainian refugees from emergency assistance to inclusion and building on the lessons learned from the Blue Dots Initiatives, in February 2024, UNHCR and its local partners launched the Compass Protection and Inclusion network of community centres for protection and inclusion in six cities (UNHCR, 2025d). The greater emphasis placed on economic inclusion in UNHCR's strategy (e.g. the launch of the Refugee Employment Platform in 2024) reflects changes in trends and the majority of Ukrainian refugees' desire to remain in Bulgaria and access livelihood opportunities (UNHCR, MSNA 2022-2023).
- **Inclusion and Integration Support:** UNHCR emphasised promoting self-reliance and integration into local communities. Over 9,000 refugees participated in programs that included mentorship opportunities, vocational and technical training, and job placement assistance, all designed to foster financial stability and inclusion.

Drawing on UNHCR's strategy and planning documents from 2022–2024, as well as complementary sources—including AGD, RDS, Border Monitoring, and Risk Analysis reports—the evaluation team developed a theory of change (Appendix 10) to synthesise and articulate the core components of UNHCR's response in Bulgaria (Appendix 11).

In terms of resources, budget cuts implemented during the first half of 2025 prompted a thorough review of both UNHCR Bulgaria's 2024–2026 multi-year strategy and the structure of the country office. Although the downward trend in available funding for the operation had already been identified in 2024 (see Figure 12 below), the severity of the 2025 cuts<sup>45</sup> necessitated a significant reduction in the country presence—resulting in decreased operational capacity and a narrowed programme focus.

UNHCR's needs-based budget (OP)<sup>46</sup> in Bulgaria experienced a rapid increase from 2022, in line with the higher refugee numbers and emerging protection needs; however, since 2023, it has shown a declining trend. The OP budget for 2024 is set at USD 16.9 million, marking a 15.9% decrease of needs from 2022. Whereas in 2022, only 29% of the required funds had been released, in 2023 and 2024, the average available funds (OL) were 72% (see Figure 3 below).

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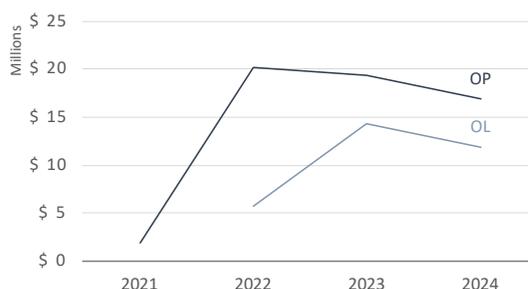
<sup>43</sup> CBI focal point data - Scoping interview

<sup>44</sup> The Blue dot support initiative in Bulgaria was created through a partnership between UNICEF and UNHCR. It began operating in May 2022 in response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine. Blue dots have been established as safe spaces, protection and support centres in strategic locations such as entry points and urban centres. They provide immediate humanitarian and legal assistance, as well as psychosocial support and child-friendly spaces. However, as the emergency phase evolved, a strategic transition began in 2024, moving from Blue Dots to community centres managed by local partners.

<sup>45</sup> Out of the temporal scope of the evaluation.

<sup>46</sup> See definition in Reading notes.

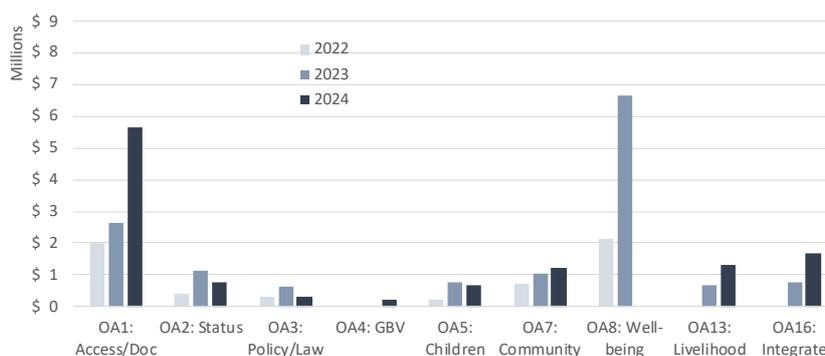
**Figure 12. OP and OL Budget (in million USD) 2022 to 2024)**



Source: Results Data Portal Budget Download 4.6.1 (2022-2023); For OP 2021: UNHCR Focus data.

In 2022 and 2023, given the available funds (OL), UNHCR's operation in Bulgaria mainly focused on supporting border and protection monitoring, documentation, and digital access to services (outcome area 1), as well as providing immediate assistance through cash assistance and non-cash items (outcome area 8), as can be seen in Figure 4, which outlines OL according to UNHCR's global outcome areas. In 2024, resources increased in the Community, Livelihood, and Integrate outcome areas, and a new outcome area 4 was introduced to operationalise gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and risk mitigation (see Figure 13below).

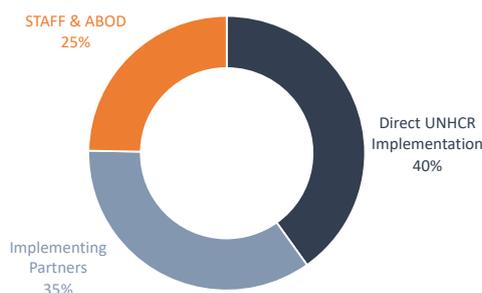
**Figure 13. Available funds (OL) across Outcome Areas (2022-2024)**



Source: UNHCR Results Data Portal Budget Download 4.6.1 (2022-2024).

In 2024, the operation has relied on seven partners to support the implementation of its programme, which accounted for 35% of the available funds (OL) during the evaluated period (see Figure 14 below). Of the remaining funds, 40% were allocated to direct implementation and 25% to administration (ABOD) and staff costs.

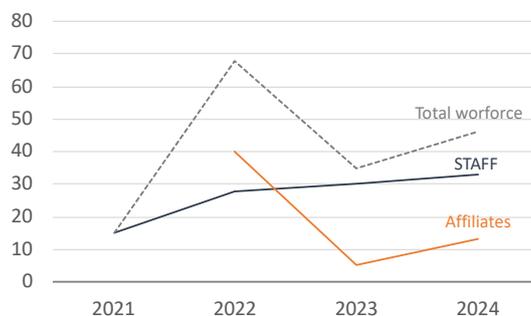
**Figure 14. Distribution of available funds (OL) by type of implementation (UNHCR and funded partners) and staff and administration costs (2022-2024)**



Source: UNHCR Results Data Portal Budget Download 4.6.1 (2022-2024)

Between 2021 and 2024, the workforce in Bulgaria grew by 207%, reaching a peak of 307% in the second half of 2022 (see Figure 15 below), and afterwards declining again.

**Figure 15. UNHCR Bulgaria CO workforces - 2021-2024**



Source: Workforce BG\_22-24 (ver. 13.02.2025), Staff List-Master Sheet\_2021-2024

### 3.2.1 Impact of the new United States of America (USA) administration

The swift and significant policy decisions of the new USA administration, which coincide with the early stages of this evaluation, have global implications for both the funding of UNHCR operations and the international framework for asylum and protection. Within the UNHCR Bulgaria CO, the developments have led to a period of financial uncertainty and reprogramming, as the operation adapts to budget reductions and reprioritises its activities. While this issue falls outside the direct scope of the evaluation, this report considers the potential impact of the USA's foreign policy on UNHCR and, consequently, its programmes in Bulgaria, particularly in the formulation of recommendations.

## APPENDIX 4 – METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Data Collection Methods

#### 4.1.1 Desk review

The non-systematic document review included 306 internal and external documents, 58 of which were coded using key categories to address the evaluation questions (see Appendix 7). The data obtained was triangulated with the interviews conducted under the same categories.

Category	Total
Situation Analysis	140
Strategics	24
Results and End-of-Year Reports	7
Partnerships	36
Financial & HR	28
Organizational Structures, Policy and Guidance	12
Microdata Inputs	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>

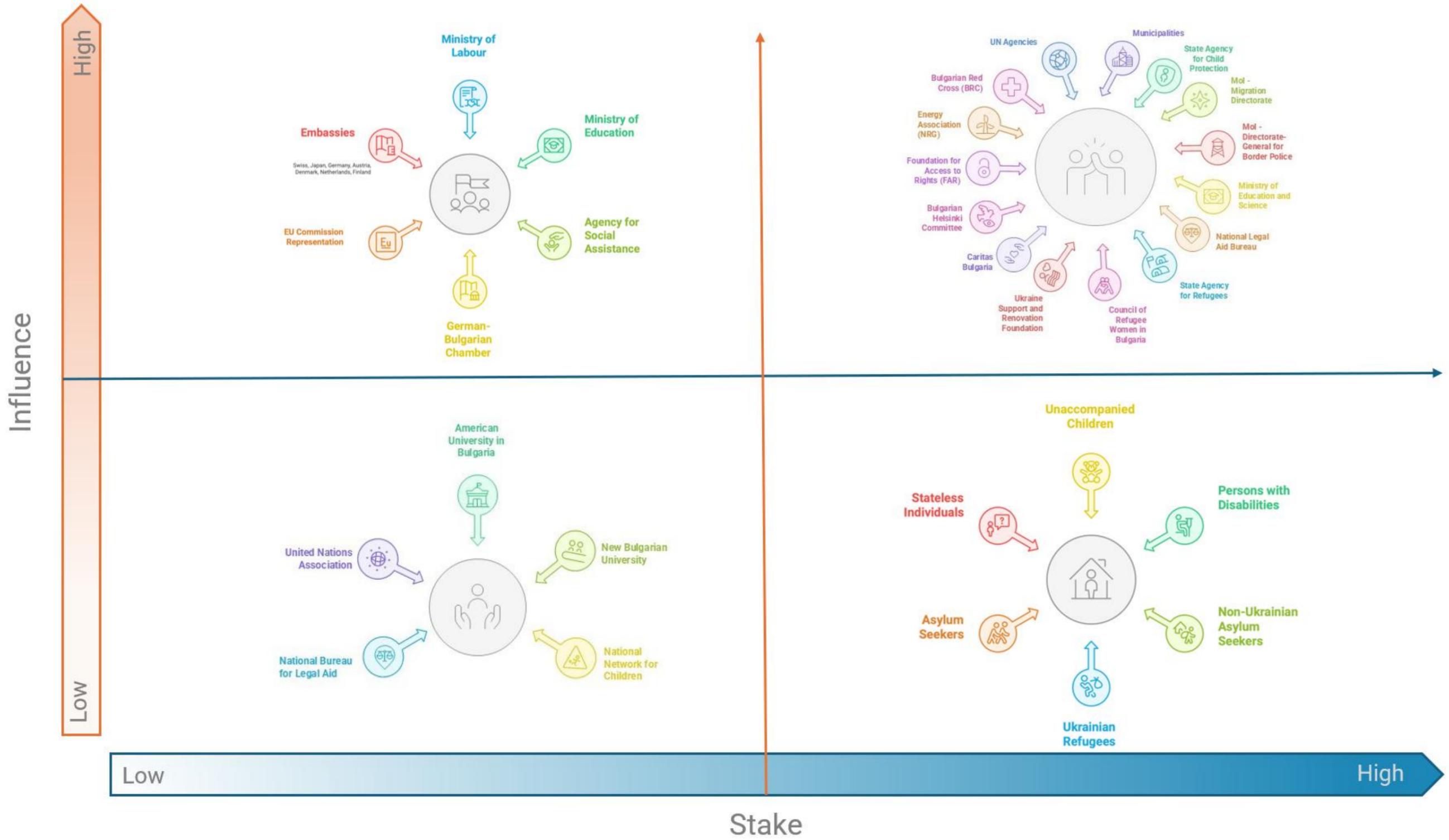
#### 4.1.2 Stakeholder mapping

The selection of key informants was based on a purposive stratified sampling and the selection criteria include: (i) the relevance of the strategic or operational role vis-à-vis UNHCR; (ii) the representativeness of the different types of UNHCR partners; (iii) the complementarity with UNHCR's mission and expertise (international protection and asylum); (iv) the diversity of stakeholders (central and local institutions, humanitarian and development actors, civil society, private sector, EU and UN agencies, donors); (v) the variety of sub-national UNHCR interventions and UNHCR geographical presence.

The following figure has been prepared from information gathered via interviews and desk review to identify and analyse key stakeholders, based on their level of influence (power) and stake (interest)<sup>47</sup> towards UNHCR's mandate and operations in Bulgaria. This analysis provides a nuanced understanding of stakeholder dynamics, enabling UNHCR to prioritise engagement, foster collaboration, and tailor interventions that align with the specific roles and contributions of each stakeholder.

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<sup>47</sup> Influence refers to the capacity of stakeholders to affect decision-making processes and outcomes, while stake represents their interest, involvement, or commitment to addressing issues related to refugees and stateless populations.



### 4.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

Fifty interviews to 58 people were conducted (38% men and 62% women) with UNHCR (CO and RBE), government counterparts, funded partners, UN agencies, donors, and other key stakeholders, representing the seven categories of stakeholders on locations where UNHCR is present.

## Actors and gender distribution

Stakeholders	N° interviews ▲	People interviewed	% Women	% Men
Academia	2	2	100%	0%
Donors	4	4	50%	50%
Local Stakeholders - Municipalities	4	4	75%	25%
National stakeholders	7	10	60%	40%
Implementing Partners / NGO	10	10	80%	20%
UN and EU agencies	10	10	70%	30%
UNHCR staff (HQ, RBE, CO)	13	18	44%	56%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>38%</b>

Created with Datawrapper

## 4.2 Limitations

The evaluation encountered a number of limitations stemming from contextual, corporate, and organisational factors. At the contextual level, political and institutional instability, high staff turnover within national institutions, and the appointment of a new Bulgarian government in January 2025 meant that interviews had to include former staff and partners no longer in post.

At the corporate level, limitations inherent in certain systems and processes affected the evaluation of UNHCR's country strategy in Bulgaria. These constraints—already noted in previous evaluations and by independent oversight bodies—the 2024 OIOS audit of COMPASS implementation, the 2024 MOPAN assessment of UNHCR, and the Inspector General's Office Strategic Oversight Report in 2023, which included Bulgaria CO).

While Country Strategy Evaluations are not designed to assess global systems per se, they do examine whether corporate procedures and tools have been adequate to support country strategy implementation—particularly in relation to evaluation questions on efficiency (i.e. whether the country office's systems and resources were fit for purpose). Although limitations in global systems fall outside the country office's direct control, the UNHCR Bulgaria country strategy evaluation has documented their observed effects—based on available data—on planning, monitoring, and management.

As in previous evaluations, UNHCR Bulgaria's data limitations reflect broader issues identified in independent reviews. Examples of limitations within corporate systems include: i) Multi-year strategies use indicators that vary from year to year, limiting the ability to analyse contributions to outcomes over time; ii) Baseline definitions and targets are not sufficiently documented; iii) Many indicators are not SMART, and output indicators fail to accurately reflect the interventions they are meant to measure; iv) Logical links between outputs, outcomes, and impact are often weak; and v) Organisational markers and adequate disaggregation (e.g. by disability) are not applied systematically. In terms of monitoring and reporting, inconsistencies were observed across data sources—for example, between annual reports, thematic reports, and ad hoc files provided to the evaluation teams. Furthermore, budget prioritisation—and its reflection in programme and strategic priorities—is only partially documented and difficult to trace. This includes the transition from the Operational Plan (OP) to the Operational Level (OL), as well as OL fluctuations throughout the year.

A review of the data available to UNHCR Bulgaria also indicates that some corporate improvements introduced through COMPASS have been reflected in the operation's planning processes. Of particular note is the definition of 'core' output indicators, which contributed to the harmonisation and strengthening of planning and results monitoring at the country office in 2024. At the same time, the available data also reveal specific limitations:

Across the 2022–2024 period, UNHCR modified the allocation of outputs and activities across outcomes in ways that appear inconsistent. These changes resemble formal restructuring exercises rather than reflecting a substantive strategic shift. For example, outputs and their associated budgets often remained unchanged but were reallocated under different outcomes—seemingly to signal a transition from emergency response to inclusion. In practice, however, the outputs themselves did not change. From a planning and accountability perspective, these annual reallocations are difficult to interpret and undermine the credibility of UNHCR's planning system. Although UNHCR provided an explanatory note outlining the rationale behind these changes, it does not fully address concerns regarding the coherence of the adopted approach.

UNHCR Bulgaria's monitoring framework presents difficulties in establishing continuity between indicators for 2022 and 2024 due to annual changes (e.g. UNHCR Annual Reports, MY 2024 – Indicator Report from CO, 2022 Results Framework – GPUD Output Indicators). In addition, the relationship between Impact Areas, Outcome Areas, and Output Indicators is not sufficiently clear.

In terms of budget, the available figures show discrepancies across sources and among the various files provided to the evaluation team (e.g. differences in UNHCR annual reports vs Budget download 2022, 2023; no data in UNHCR Annual report 2024. Also differences in file Budget download (2024) vs Financial Data Tables (PAF)\_BG\_first set\_NEW and Bulgaria Budget (OP and OL) and vs Funding Overview 2010-24. There are also differences in OL targets during the year according to documents (Annual Report 20204, MY 2024 - Indicator Report\_from CO, etc.). The available data show no disaggregation in OP budgets between implementers (Unallocated).

### 4.3 Governance of the evaluation

The evaluation was managed in accordance with the provisions of UNHCR Evaluation Policy and the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluations (2016). The Evaluation Officer was the evaluation manager, in charge of: (i) managing administrative day to day aspects of the evaluation process; (ii) acting as the main interlocutor with the Evaluation Team; (iii) facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure evaluators receive the required data; (iv) facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure technical guidance on content, and (v) reviewing the interim deliverables and final reports to ensure quality – with the support of UNHCR Bulgaria and the RBE

The CO assisted the evaluation manager and evaluation team by facilitating logistical and administrative arrangements to ensure smooth implementation of the evaluation: (i) by providing documentation, data and information, (ii) by facilitating in-country data collection, including the organisation of confidential meetings and interviews with key informants, FGDs and access to the field, as appropriate, (iii) coordinating in-country feedback on key evaluation findings, (iv) supporting the establishment and chairing of the ERG, (v) including the evaluation team in relevant UNHCR meetings to understand the context, activities and challenges of the operation.

The Evaluation Reference Group which comprised representatives of UNHCR partners and stakeholders in Bulgaria, provided input during the inception phase but was unable to fulfil the role initially envisaged for it due to contextual factors.

### 4.4 Data protection

The evaluation team provided subject anonymity by ensuring the evaluation cannot link individual responses with participants' identities. The evaluation team maintained the confidentiality of information collected from participants: only the three core team members who collected and analysed data can identify the responses of individual subjects. The following practices were implemented to ensure a high level of confidentiality:

- The responses of each key informant were anonymized during the analysis.
- Access to data was restricted to the core evaluation team only, and access to data files were provided via a centralized process.
- Face sheets containing identifiers of FGD participants were removed from FGD notes before the notes were uploaded and coded.
- Data stored on paper were either scanned and destroyed, or kept together in a safe, secure location away from public access.
- Data was protected from access by outside/ unauthorized Wi-Fi networks via network-based firewalls.
- Computers used by the review team have regularly updated anti-virus protection; up-to-date versions of all software and media storage devices were maintained.
- All identifiable study data will destroy or deleted two weeks after the Final Report is officially approved by UNHCR's Evaluation Manager.

- All data was stored on Avicena's access-restricted MS Teams; any data that is transported or transferred during the field visit was saved to a password protected device (e.g., USB/ hard drive).
- All data documents were maintained on Avicena's access-restricted secure server.
- All notes from KIIs and FGD results were de-identified. Codes were retained by the lead consultant to ensure an audit trail. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all people involved in the evaluation, based upon advice about how information will be recorded and used.

## APPENDIX 5 – DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

### Key Informant Interview Guide

This list of questions will be used as the semi-structured interview guide. The questions asked during each interview will be chosen according to the respondent's profile.

**Goal:** Provide information from UNHCR, and UNHCR stakeholders in Bulgaria.

**Method:** The questions and sub-questions are mostly open-ended. The interviewer will further investigate if necessary. Interviews will be audio recorded with consent.

The team will track invitations, KIIs performed and send a maximum of 2 reminders after 5 days if the team has not received responses for a request for a KII.

Interviews will last 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted by a single evaluation team member.

**Analysis: Coding** will be done by review consultants & data analysis

The interview results will be complementary to other data collection results, such as the document review to support triangulation of findings.

Date of interview	
Name of Interviewer	
Name of Interviewee	
Sex/ Gender	
Organization	
Position	
Location	

1. **Thank you** – Thank you for your time today. **My name is \_\_\_\_\_**, and I work as a consultant for Avicena, an independent consulting company hired by UNHCR's evaluation unit. We have been contracted to conduct the country strategy evaluation for UNHCR Bulgaria. We would very much appreciate your participation in this evaluation.
2. **Purpose** – I would like to interview you. I have a semi-structured questionnaire, and the main purpose of the interview is to hear your views on UNHCR strategy, operation, and capacity in Bulgaria. This review will focus on issues of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence, and sustainability, and whether it has been successfully implemented and draw learnings for the formulation of strategic and operational direction.
3. **Participation** – Your participation in this evaluation is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can decide not to answer any question and can stop at any time. Your decision about whether to participate in this interview or to answer any specific questions will in no way affect any services that you receive. If you do choose to participate, indicate affirmatively and answer the questions honestly and openly, so that we can understand your experience and find out what you really think and have experienced.
4. **Confidentiality/Consent to Registration** – The information you provide will be strictly confidential and anonymized. We will put information we learn from you together with information we learn from other people in the evaluation. No one will be able to tell what information came from you. When we tell other people about this research, we will never use your name, and no one will ever know what answers you gave. Only a few reviewers will have access to this information, and all information will be stored safely and destroyed. Would it be acceptable for you if I recorded this interview, just as a backup of my notes? If you prefer that we do not use quotes from this interview, please let me know.

5. **Duration** – I expect the interview to last about 60 minutes – is that okay? If you don't have a lot of time, let me know and I can make sure I focus on the most important issues. Also, it's fine if you don't know the answer to a question or prefer not to answer or if the question isn't relevant to your role – let me know and I'll tailor the interview accordingly.
6. **Opportunity to ask questions** – Before you say “yes” or “no” to being in this evaluation, we will answer any questions you have. Do you understand everything I have explained? Do you have any questions before we start? Of course, you are also welcome to ask questions during the interview if something is unclear. Or if there are elements that I did not mention during the interview, do not hesitate to share them towards the end.

## Introduction

Please briefly introduce yourself. How long have you been with XXX and in what positions/functions or offices? How long have you been in your current position? What are your main responsibilities? How do you relate to UNHCR activities in Bulgaria?

## CATEGORY I - Questions for UNHCR Staff

- How would you describe the **evolution** (2022 until now) of the CO in Bulgaria? (assess strategic adaptation to **needs**) (1.1)
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR **strategies aligned** with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)
- To technical staff: CO use of **evidence** to assess needs and **application of AGD** (1.3)
- To what extent do the coordination and synergies between UNHCR and others have helped providing expected outcome (MYS/MAP)? Identify internal/external factors (2.1) (2.2) (2.3)
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection? (OA1) Access to territory, registration and documentation (OA 2) Status Determination (OA3) Protection Policy and Law (OA4)– Gender-based Violence (GBV), (OA5) – Child Protection (OA7) – Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment.** (3.2)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **inclusion, access to services, socio economic integration?** (3.3)
- What, if any, have been protection/ inclusion areas where progress has been more limited than you had hoped for? And why? What **internal and external** factors have either supported or posed challenges to your work? (3.6)
- Given the UNHCR **resources and budget** do you consider UNHCR to have done a commendable job? On reflection, what might have improved the efficiency of the work and its cost-effectiveness? **EQ4**
- Given the UNHCR **team structure** do you consider UNHCR to have done a commendable job? On reflection, what might have improved the efficiency of the work? **EQ4**
- Within the CO / Regional Bureau /Global HQ, how are responsibilities distributed (both formally and informally)? **EQ4**

- To what extent have the partnerships between UNHCR and its partners functioned effectively and efficiently? **EQ4**
- What unintended results (positive or negative), if any, did the partnership process produce? **EQ4**
- Can you comment on the quality of data collection and reporting on engagement, fundraising and partnerships? To what extent did the data collected contribute to decision making regarding the positioning, partnerships and resource mobilization activities? If positive: Can you give examples? If negative: why not? What impeded high quality data collection and reporting?
- To CBI related staff: How efficiently has UNHCR deployed its **Cash Based Intervention Programme?** (4.4)
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support) EQ5

#### **CATEGORY I - Questions for UNHCR HR, Admin, Fundraising/ext comms staff in CO**

- What do you consider your organization's main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to HR, Admin, Fundraising/ ext comms?
- What, if any, have been areas where your progress has been more limited than you had hoped for? And why?
- What internal and external factors have either supported or posed challenges to your work?
- Have UNHCR's capacity and resources in Bulgaria enabled the organisation to fulfil its mandate, effectively address needs and achieve the desired results?
- What if any, internal or external changes are needed to make this happen?
- How well does UNHCR's organizational structure and budget allocation align with its strategic objectives, considering the evolving context, changing needs and shifting priorities related to the Ukraine refugee influx?
- How efficiently has UNHCR deployed its Cash Based Intervention Programme?
- What are the key contextual and operational factors that influence the alignment between UNHCR's organizational configuration, staffing, and resource strategy, and how successfully have these factors been addressed to optimize performance and results?
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share?
- To what extent has the implementation of the BTP (Business Transformation Programme) improved/simplified the processes, systems and tools for processing different data (RBM, HR, Finance, Partnership management, Donor relationship and contribution management)?

#### **CATEGORY I - Questions for UNHCR Regional (RBE)**

- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR **strategies aligned** with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)

- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection** and **inclusion**? ( 3.2 and 3.3)
- To what extent do the coordination and synergies between regional and national teams help providing expected outcomes (MYS and MAP)? (EQ2)
- How could UNHCR further improve at regional and country levels? What, if any, internal or external changes are needed to make this happen? (e.g., guidance, reporting, finances, staffing...) (EQ 4)
- Within the CO/ Regional Bureau /Global HQ, how are responsibilities distributed (both formally and informally)? EQ4
- Can you think of any Lessons Learned or Best Practices from your experiences that should be replicated or emphasized in the last years of the UNHCR Bulgaria?
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share?

#### **CATEGORY I - Questions for UNHCR HQ**

- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR **strategies aligned** with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection** and **inclusion**? (3.2 and 3.3)
- To what extent do the coordination and synergies between global and national teams help providing expected outcomes (MYS and MAP)? EQ2
- How efficiently has UNHCR CO utilised resources whether at the country, regional or international levels to maximize their outcomes in Bulgaria? EQ4
- How could UNHCR further improve at regional and country levels? What, if any, internal or external changes are needed to make this happen? (e.g., guidance, reporting, finances, staffing...) (EQ 4)
- Within the CO/ Regional Bureau /Global HQ, how are responsibilities distributed (both formally and informally)? EQ4
- Within the CO/ Regional Bureau /Global HQ, how are responsibilities distributed (both formally and informally)? EQ4
- Can you think of any Lessons Learned or Best Practices from your experiences that should be replicated or emphasized in the last years of the UNHCR Bulgaria?
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share?

#### **CATEGORY II – Questions for Bulgarian Government**

- Over the period, what are the **changes in political and social dynamics** in Bulgaria that UNHCR efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (1.1)

- Do you feel the UNHCR program targeted the right issues and people? How do you feel UNHCR has been able to support your agency to improve targeting? Could this be improved? How? (1.1)
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR strategies aligned with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)
- Between 2022 and 2024, on an annual basis, how often were you consulted by UNHCR on local needs or support? (1.3)
- What sort of **coordination mechanisms** are in place and how are these performed and aligned to each other? EQ2 (2.3)
- To what extent did the UNHCR program **complement other interventions**, and was it integrated into the community and harmonized with the interventions of other actors? (EQ2) (2.3)
- What have been the key **challenges/ opportunities** in relation to the processes supported by UNHCR, coordination, and complementarity between your agency and UNHCR? 2.3
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes /areas of progress made in relation to **protection? (OA1) Access to territory, registration and documentation (OA 2) Status Determination (OA3) Protection Policy and Law (OA4)– Gender-based Violence (GBV), (OA5) – Child Protection (OA7) – Community Engagement and Women’s Empowerment. (3.2)**
- In what ways has UNHCR facilitated inclusion, access to services, self-reliance, and socio-economic integration of refugees in Bulgaria? (3.3)
- How well were the UNHCR programs integrated into the national and municipal service and program delivery systems? EQ2, 3 and 5
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support) EQ5

### CATEGORY III – Questions for municipalities

- Do you think the UNHCR program **targeted the right issues and people**? How do you feel UNHCR has been able to **support your municipality** to improve targeting? Could this be improved? How? (1.1)
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR strategies aligned with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? 1.2)
- CO use of **evidence** to assess needs and **application of AGD** (1.3)
- Between 2022 and 2024, on an annual basis, how often were you consulted by UNHCR on local needs or support? EQ2 (1.3)
- What sort of **coordination mechanisms** are in place and how are these performed and aligned to each other? EQ2 (2.3)

- What have been the key challenges/ opportunities in relation to the processes supported by UNHCR, coordination, and complementarity between your municipality and UNHCR/others? To what extent did the UNHCR program complement other interventions, and was it integrated into the community and harmonized with the interventions of other actors? EQ2 (2.3)
- How well were the UNHCR programs integrated into municipal service and program delivery systems? EQ2 and EQ5
- Does UNHCR support influence the way UNHCR programs municipality policies and priorities are implemented? If so in what ways? Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection**? (**OA1) Access to territory, registration and documentation (OA 2) Status Determination (OA3) Protection Policy and Law (OA4)– Gender-based Violence (GBV), (OA5) – Child Protection (OA7) – Community Engagement and Women’s Empowerment. (3.2)**
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **inclusion, access to services, socio economic integration**? (3.3)
- What, if any, have been protection/ inclusion areas where progress has been more limited than you had hoped for? And why? What **internal and external** factors have either supported or posed challenges to your work? (3.6)
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support)EQ5

#### **CATEGORY IV - Questions UN Agencies /EU Institutions**

- How would you describe the **evolution** (2022 until now) of the CO in Bulgaria? (assess strategic adaptation to **needs**) (1.1)
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR **strategies aligned** with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)
- To what extent do the **coordination and synergies** between UNHRC and others have helped providing expected outcome (MYS/MAP)? What sort of coordination mechanisms are in place and how are these performed and aligned to each other? Identify **internal/external factors** (2.1) (2.2) (2.3)
- What internal and external factors have either supported or posed challenges to your collaboration with UNHRC? (2.3)
- In terms of complementarities, what are the respective strengths/gaps of the two organizations? What do you see as the main opportunities and challenges EQ2
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection** and **inclusion**? (3.2 and 3.3)

- What, if any, have been areas where progress has been more limited than you had hoped for? And why?
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support) (EQ 5)
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share?
- 

#### **CATEGORY V Questions for UNHCR Funded Partners**

- Do you feel the UNHCR program targeted (or has provided the support to target) the right issues and people? Could this be improved? How? **(1.1)**
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR strategies aligned with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)
- CO use of **evidence** to assess needs and **application of AGD** (1.3)
- How well were the UNHCR programs integrated into the national and sub-national service and program delivery systems? (EQ 2 and EQ5)
- To what extent did the UNHCR program complement other interventions, and was it integrated into the community and harmonized with the interventions of other actors? What sort of coordination mechanisms are in place and how are these performed and aligned to each other? (EQ 2)
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR advocacy efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What were the expected Outcomes and Outputs of the UNHCR programs with your organization? Do you think they were achieved effectively for you? For UNHCR? What support you have received from UNHCR? (EQ3)
- Reflecting on your answers to the previous question, what were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the outcomes/objectives of the UNHCR programs? (EQ3)
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support) (EQ5)
- How, if at all, has your partnership with UNHCR evolved since 2022 (or since it began, if later than 2022)
- To what extent this partnership is aligned to the vision and objectives of your organisation? (EQ4)
- What are the partnership's (actual/envisioned) main benefits (for UNHCR, for beneficiaries, for you the partner) in terms of:
  - income (funding)
  - non-financial values (e.g. knowledge/information, advocacy, shared-values, networks, support)
- What results for Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons have derived, or are likely to derive, from the partnership? (EQ 2 and 4)

- What, if any, have been challenges, limitations, or drawbacks of the partnership in its implementation? In its outcome? What factors have either supported or posed challenges to this partnership? (EQ 2 and 4)
- What is your level of satisfaction on the partnership? Can you explain why? (EQ 2 and 4)
- How, if at all, could the existing partnership be further improved to benefit both UNHCR and you as a partner and effectively support the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers? ((EQ 2 and 4)
- What, if any, internal or external changes are needed to make this happen?

#### **CATEGORY VI – Questions for NGOs and Civil Society**

- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (1.1)
- Do you feel the UNHCR program targeted the right issues and people? Could this be improved? How? **EQ1 (1.1)**
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR strategies aligned with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? (1.2)
- How well were the UNHCR programs integrated into the national and municipal service and program delivery systems? EQ1 (1.3)
- To what extent did the UNHCR program complement other interventions, and was it integrated into the community and harmonized with the interventions of other actors? What sort of coordination mechanisms are in place and how are these performed and aligned to each other? EQ2
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection** and **inclusion**? (3.2 and 3.3)
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support) EQ5

#### **CATEGORY VI – Questions to Donors**

- How would you describe the **evolution** (2022 until now) of the CO in Bulgaria? (assess strategic adaptation to **needs**) (1.1)
- To what extent do you consider the UNHCR strategies aligned with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (related to refugees and asylum seekers, including MAP, and the priorities and policies of the Government / Municipalities). Can you give examples? Also with your strategies /funding priorities in the country or region? (1.2)
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers?1.1

- To what extent did the UNHCR program complement other interventions, and was it integrated into the community and harmonized with the interventions of other actors? EQ2
- What sort of coordination mechanisms are in place and how are these performed and aligned to each other? EQ2
- In terms of complementarities, what are the respective strengths/gaps of the two organizations? What do you see as the main opportunities and challenges EQ2
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR advocacy efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection** and **inclusion**? (3.2 and 3.3)
- What, if any, have been areas where progress has been more limited than you had hoped for? And why?
- What internal and external factors have either supported or posed challenges to your collaboration with UNHCR?

#### **CATEGORY VI– Questions for Academia and Research Institutions**

- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (1.1)
- To what extent do you consider that UNHCR's protection strategy is well aligned with Bulgaria's specific legal frameworks, social dynamics, and political environment affecting refugees and asylum seekers? To what extent do you consider the CO strategies **aligned** with global, regional, local, including government, MAP, UN, EU, IP priorities? (1.2)
- Over the period, what are the changes in political and social dynamics in Bulgaria that UNHCR **advocacy** efforts have contributed to achieve? How significant are these changes for the benefits of refugees and asylum seekers? (3.1)
- What have been the main changes and main areas of progress made or achievements in relation to **protection** and **inclusion**? (3.2 and 3.3)
- What, if any, have been areas where progress has been more limited than you had hoped for? And why?
- To what extent did the UNHCR program complement other interventions, and was it integrated into the community and harmonized with the interventions of other actors?
- How sustainable are the processes that UNHCR has supported? (MYS, MAP)? Any specific resources that have been allocated to these processes from the government / municipality side (with UNHCRS support) EQ5

#### **CATEGORY VII- Questions for Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons**

- To what extent do you consider that UNHCR/funded partners activities are relevant to your protection /inclusion needs?
- What do you think works well? Why?
- What do you think can work better? Why?
- Please provide examples

## APPENDIX 6 – KEY INFORMANTS CONSULTED

GENDER	ORGANIZATION	POSITION
<b>Group</b>	UNHCR CO	Briefing CO
<b>M</b>	UNHCR CO	Ops Officer
<b>F</b>	UNHCR CO	Field Officer
<b>M</b>	UNHCR CO	Admin Officer
<b>F</b>	UNHCR CO	Associate Livelihood and Economic Inclusion Officer
<b>F/M</b>	Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC)	Project Coordinator, Refugee and Migrant Service
<b>F</b>	UNHCR CO	Inter-Agency Coordination Officer
<b>F</b>	UNHCR CO	Associate External Relations Officer
<b>M</b>	UNHCR CO	Senior Protection Officer
<b>F</b>	UNHCR CO	Senior Integration Associate
<b>M</b>	State Agency for Refugees	Chairperson
<b>F</b>	Council of Refugee Women (CRW)	Chairperson
<b>F</b>	Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)	Director, Refugee Program
<b>F</b>	UNICEF	Child Protection Specialist
<b>F</b>	UNICEF	Education Specialist
<b>M</b>	IFRC	Operations Manager
<b>F</b>	Ukraine Support and Renovation Foundation (USRF)	Director
<b>F</b>	WHO	Consultant
<b>M</b>	WHO	Bioengineer
<b>F</b>	WHO	Mental Health Specialist
<b>F</b>	IOM	Protection and Project Development Officer
<b>M</b>	RBE	Regional Controller
<b>M</b>	RBE	Integration
<b>F</b>	German Embassy	Migration/Cooperation
<b>F</b>	Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)	Chairperson
<b>M</b>	Netherlands embassy	Ambassador
<b>F</b>	Japan Embassy	First Secretary, Political Section Head
<b>M</b>	Swiss Embassy	Cooperation Attache
<b>F</b>	German Bulgarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce	Managing Director
<b>M</b>	Frontex	Fundamental Rights Officer
<b>M</b>	Caritas Bulgaria	Secretary General
<b>F</b>	Plovdiv Municipality	Director
<b>F</b>	Energy Association (NRG)	Chairperson
<b>F</b>	Varna Municipality	Deputy Mayor
<b>F</b>	Compass Burgas BRC	Chairperson COMPASS
<b>F</b>	Burgas Transit Center	Coordinator
<b>M</b>	Caritas Career Center	Social worker
<b>M</b>	Burgas Municipality	Deputy Mayor
<b>M/F</b>	Agency for Social Assistance	Experts
<b>M</b>	Chief Directorate Border Police	Expert at Readmission sector
<b>FF</b>	Directorate Migration	Experts
<b>F</b>	Min of Education	Expert
<b>F</b>	National Bureau for Legal Aid	Lawyer

<b>F</b>	SOS Children's Villages	National Director
<b>M</b>	Crisis center Ruse	Director Programme Children's village Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Tryavna
<b>F</b>	Sofia municipality	Deputy Major
<b>F</b>	SACP	Expert
<b>M/F</b>	National Police	Head of Sector Juvenile crime and Inspector
<b>F</b>	National network for children	Expert
<b>F</b>	SDA	Researcher
<b>F</b>	UNHCR CO	Representative
<b>M</b>	UNHCR CO	Associate CBI Officer
<b>M</b>	RBE	Senior Operations Officer
<b>M</b>	RBE	Senior Programme CBI Officer

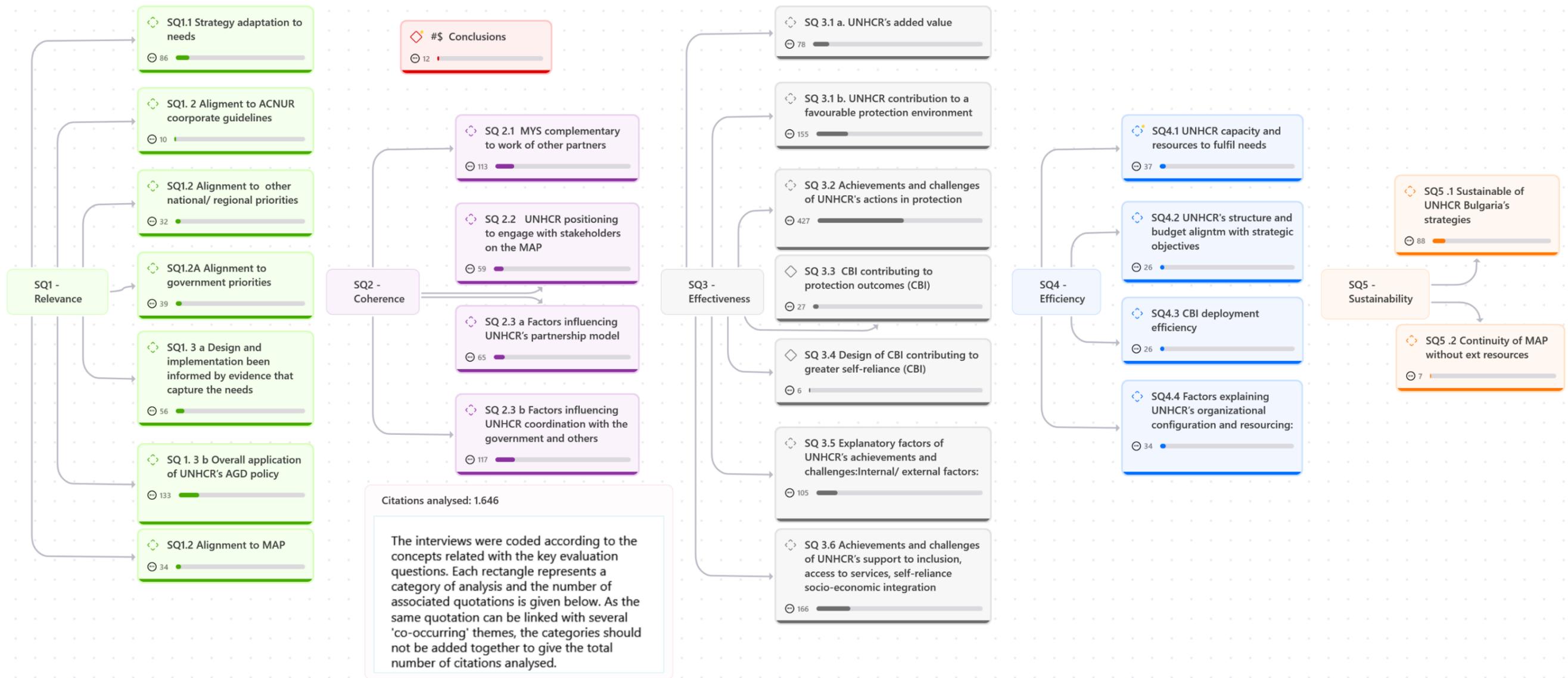
## APPENDIX 7 – QUALITATIVE DATA: KEY INFORMANTS, DATA BY EVALUATION QUESTION AND CO-OCCURRENCE OF EVIDENCE

The qualitative analysis involved 50 interviews (with 58 participants) and 58 documents from the UNHCR library. A total of 1646 citations were categorized based on evaluation criteria and questions. The figures show the evidence for each analysis category and stakeholder input. Data processing used specialized software, Atlas.ti.

### Stakeholders by gender distribution

Stakeholders	N° interviews ▲	People interviewed	% Women	% Men
Academia	2	2	100%	0%
Donors	4	4	50%	50%
Local Stakeholders - Municipalities	4	4	75%	25%
National stakeholders	7	10	60%	40%
Implementing Partners / NGO	10	10	80%	20%
UN and EU agencies	10	10	70%	30%
UNHCR staff (HQ, RBE, CO)	13	18	44%	56%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>38%</b>

# Network of analysis categories and number of citations



## Contribution of information by question according to stakeholders

797 citations analyzed from 50 interviews (58 people)

Stakeholders	KEQ 1	KEQ 2	KEQ 3	KEQ 4	KEQ 5
National Stakeholders	17%	11%	19%	5%	5%
Academia	8%	5%	2%	2%	0%
Donors	2%	1%	2%	0%	0%
Implementing Partners / NGO's	27%	30%	25%	18%	36%
Local Stakeholders - Municipalities	3%	6%	9%	0%	12%
UN and EU agencies	10%	20%	10%	3%	11%
UNHCR staff (HQ, RBE, CO)	33%	26%	33%	73%	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (124)</b>	<b>100% (185)</b>	<b>100% (353)</b>	<b>100% (62)</b>	<b>100% (73)</b>

## Contribution of information by question according to category of documents

849 citations analyzed from 58 documents

Category of documents	KEQ 1	KEQ 2	KEQ 3	KEQ 4	KEQ 5
AGD	18%	3%	17%	0%	0%
Annual Reports	19%	42%	33%	46%	4%
Assessment	15%	3%	5%	28%	4%
Border monitoring	7%	11%	3%	5%	17%
Mission Report	9%	14%	12%	13%	33%
Operational Update	5%	4%	6%	3%	13%
Plans	4%	11%	7%	3%	8%
Protection briefing	1%	3%	4%	0%	8%
RSD	4%	5%	10%	0%	8%
Strategies	17%	5%	4%	3%	4%
<b>Total citations</b>	<b>100% (205)</b>	<b>100% (119)</b>	<b>100% (464)</b>	<b>100% (40)</b>	<b>100% (21)</b>

## Concurrence of concepts

Co-occurrence occurs when two or more concepts appear together in a section of analysed text. The top part of the graph shows the subcategories of analysis for each key question. On the left are the ten most frequently linked concepts from the same or another question.

	SQ 1.3 b Overall application of UNHCR's AGD policy	SQ1.2 Alignment to ACNUR cooperate guidelines	SQ1.3 a Design by evidence	SQ1.1 Strategy adaptation to needs	SQ1.2 Alignment to other national/ regional priorities	SQ1.2 Alignment to MAP	SQ1.2A Alignment government priorities
SQ 1.3 b GBV/PSEA SOPs Implemented	90	0	4	1	1	3	1
SQ1.3 a Asylum Seekers	8	0	32	8	0	0	0
SQ1.1 Asylum Seekers	4	0	7	33	0	1	2
SQ 1.3 b Adapted programming and Communications	24	0	7	3	1	1	2
SQ 3.2 Achievements and challenges Child Protection	13	0	4	7	4	3	1
SQ1.2A Alignment to government priorities: Central	4	0	1	2	2	0	22
SQ 1.3 b Data disaggregated by AGD	25	0	3	0	0	0	0
SQ1.1 Strategy adaptation to needs: Stateless	1	0	7	18	0	0	1
SQ1.2 Alignment to priorities: EU	1	0	2	3	14	2	1
SQ 3.2 Achievements and challenges (OA1) Access to territory	5	0	6	7	2	2	0

**KEQ 1**

	SQ 2.1 MYS complement ary to work of other partners	SQ 2.2 UNHCR positioning to engage with stakeholder s on the MAP	SQ 2.3 a Factors influencing UNHCR's partnership model	SQ 2.3 b Factors influencing UNHCR coordination with the government and others
SQ 2.1 Coordination	54	2	4	13
SQ 2.1 Partnerships	48	2	4	9
SQ 2.3 b Government	9	5	3	37
SQ 2.3 External	5	6	34	7
SQ 2.3 Internal	4	2	38	4
SQ 2.2 Partnerships MAP	3	31	4	5
SQ 2.3b UN	5	0	2	32
SQ 2.3 b Partnerships	6	1	3	24
SQ 3.2 Achievements and challenges: Child Protection	7	4	3	18
SQ 2.1 Complementarity	24	1	1	4

**KEQ 2**

	SQ 3.1 a. UNHCR's added value	SQ 3.1 b. UNHCR contribution to a favourable protection environment	SQ 3.2 Achievements and challenges of UNHCR's actions in protection	SQ 3.3 CBI contributing to protection outcomes (CBI)	SQ 3.4 Design of CBI contributing to greater self-reliance	SQ 3.5 Explanatory factors of UNHCR's achievements and challenges	SQ 3.6 Achievements and challenges of UNHCR's support to (OA 13 - OA 16)
SQ 3.2 Child Protection	9	35	205	0	0	6	8
SQ 3.2 Status Determination	9	20	91	0	0	5	1
SQ 3.6 (OA 13) – Self- reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods	2	10	8	2	0	5	98
Effectiveness	15	12	72	1	0	3	19
SQ 3.6 (OA 16) – Local integration and other local solutions	1	11	15	2	0	3	88
SQ 3.1 b. Strengthening institutions	12	57	30	0	0	4	2
SQ 3.2 (OA1) Access to territory	3	13	82	0	0	4	3
SQ 3.1 b. Lobby capacity	6	55	17	0	0	9	5
SQ 3.1 a. Reference in protection	53	14	19	0	0	2	1
SQ 3.2 (OA3) Protection Policy and Law	4	19	53	0	0	5	3

**KEQ 3**

	SQ4.1 UNHCR capacity and resources to fulfil needs	SQ4.2 UNHCR's structure and budget alignm with strategic objectives	SQ4.3 CBI deployment efficiency	SQ4.4 Factors explaining UNHCR's organizational configuration and resourcing
SQ4.4 Organizational configuration	5	7	5	31
SQ4.1 Resources Available	20	5	0	4
SQ4.2 Structure: staff & workforce	3	14	0	6
SQ4.2 Funding Model: Performance, Budget And Evolution	4	12	1	1
SQ4.3 Adequacy	0	1	16	1
SQ4.1 Flows vs Needs	11	1	0	2
SQ4.1 Management system	9	1	1	0
SQ 3.3 CBI contributing to protection outcomes (CBI)	0	0	8	1
SQ 3.5 Explanatory factors of UNHCR's achievements and challenges: partnerships	2	0	3	4
SQ1.1 Strategy adaptation to needs: Refugees	6	1	0	2

**KEQ 4**

	SQ5.1 Sustainable of UNHCR Bulgaria's strategies	SQ5.2 Continuity of MAP without ext resources
SQ5.1 Ownership by Nat. Institutions	25	0
SQ5.1 Autonmoy of local Orgs	23	0
SQ5.1 Engamenet of Dev. Actors	21	0
SQ5.1 Scalability	15	0
SQ5.1 Partnerships with private sector	11	0
SQ 3.6 Achievements and challenges of UNHCR's support to (OA 16)	6	0
SQ 3.6 Achievements and challenges of UNHCR's support to (OA 13)	6	0
SQ5.1 Involvement	5	0
SQ4.1 UNHCR capacity and resources to fulfil needs: Resources Available	4	0
SQ5.2 Independent monitoring mechanisms	0	3

**KEQ 5**

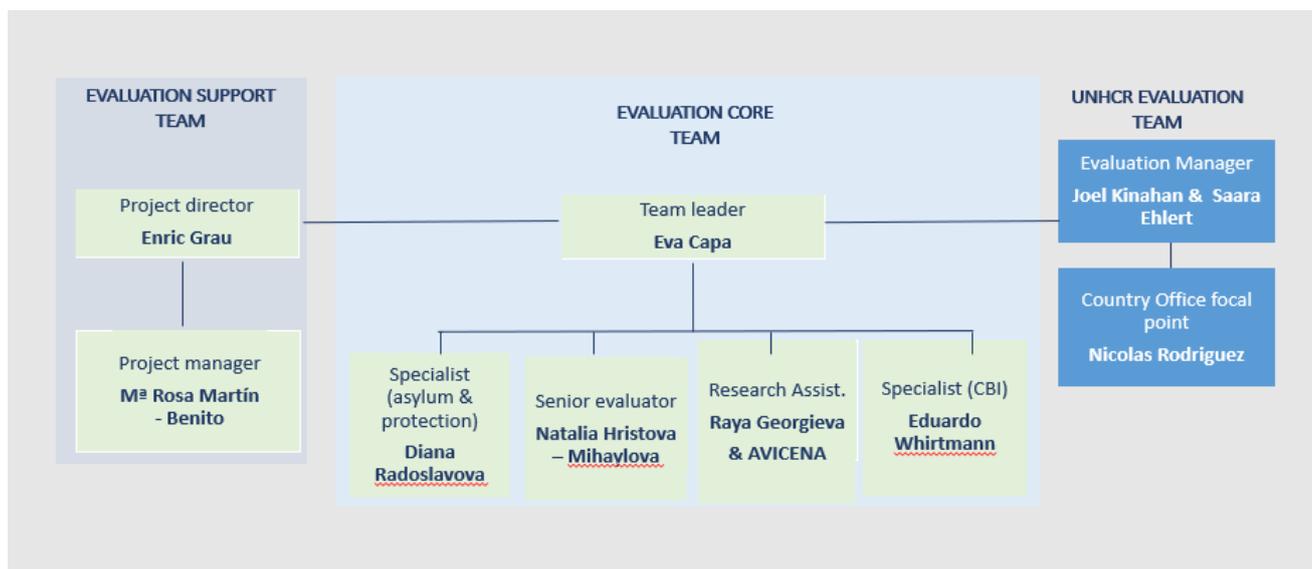
## APPENDIX 8 – EVALUATION TEAM COMPOSITION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was conducted by a core evaluation team of seven people, with varying levels of involvement at different stages of the evaluation process. The proposed composition of the team responded to the specifications in the ToRs. The team consisted of the following experts:

- **Eva Capa**, Team leader and expert in humanitarian affairs and evaluation. She ensured the team leader coordinated with the UNHCR country office and the EvO.
- **Natalia Hristova – Mihaylova**, expert in evaluation, child protection and social inclusion.
- **Diana Radoslavova**, expert in asylum and protection, legal frameworks in EU and Bulgaria.
- **Raya Georgieva** (research assistant, expert in context and data collection
- **Eduardo Whirtmann** quantitative research and data specialist for CBI analysis
- **Enric Grau (project director)** for overall coordination and the quality assurance of deliverables.
- **M<sup>a</sup> Rosa Martín – Benito**, project manager for administration and logistics

The core evaluation team also benefited from *ad hoc* contributions from other members of AVICENA staff. The organisation of the evaluation team and the coordination with UNHCR evaluation management team were presented in the figure 10 below.

**Figure Organigram of the management of the evolution**



## APPENDIX 9 – FUNDED PARTNERS (LOCAL NGO'S) PER OUTCOME AREAS

Funded Partner	Outcome Areas	Activity
<b>Bulgarian Red Cross</b>	OA1 - Access to territory, registration and documentation OA5 – Child Protection OA7 – Community Engagement and Women’s Empowerment OA13 – Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods OA16 – Local integration and other local solutions	Cash Assistance, Inclusion Support, Child protection services, Counselling, Health-related needs, Accommodation, Humanitarian Assistance, Seminars/workshops/other events, Informing and consulting on status determination procedures, Outreach and grassroots activities, Advocacy empowerment, etc.
<b>Bulgarian Helsinki Committee</b>	OA1 - Access to territory, registration and documentation OA2 – Status Determination OA3 – Protection Policy and Law	Border Monitoring and Reporting, Legal Counselling, Legal Information, Refugee Status Determination Monitoring, Detention/Readmission Monitoring, Advocacy, etc.
<b>Caritas Bulgaria</b>	OA13 – Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods	Provision of information, Individual support and integration plans, Career Counselling, Professional trainings, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning, Awareness raising campaigns, etc.
<b>Ukraine Support and Renovation Foundation</b>	OA1 - Access to Territory, Registration and Documentation Outcome Area 5 - Child protection OA7 – Community Engagement and Women’s Empowerment	Individual and group consultations in UNHCR supported mental health and psychosocial support service; shelter and housing assistance; child protection services; awareness raising; cash assistance and in-kind support; etc.
<b>Foundation for Access to Rights</b>	OA1 - Access to Territory, Registration and Documentation OA2 – Status Determination Outcome Area 3 – Protection Policy and Law OA13 - Livelihood; OA 16: Integration	Legal consultations and information; job matching services; provide easy-to-understand and accurate written and audio information; legal assistance and counselling; legal aid provision at the Blue dots; innovative and interactive online legal aid provision tool; etc.
<b>Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria</b>	OA1 - Access to Territory, Registration and Documentation OA7 – Community Engagement and Women’s Empowerment	Access to social protection and consultations; participatory assessments; mental health and psycho-social support; support for housing, education, language classes, social and healthcare services, and cultural orientation; humanitarian assistance; public information and donation campaigns; humanitarian volunteer program; etc.
<b>Energy Association</b>	OA1 - Access to Territory, Registration and Documentation OA5 - Child protection OA7 – Community Engagement and Women’s Empowerment	Maintaining an educational and community centre for refugees; child protection services; capacity building; education support and support of ECD; support to form or strengthen community protection networks; individual consultations; personalized assistance to refugees facing specific challenges in accessing social protection; crisis intervention and support; information campaigns; educational support; etc.

## APPENDIX 10 – RETROSPECTIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC)

The reconstruction of UNHCR's theory of change (ToC) has been developed based on elements identified in UNHCR Annual Strategy Reports from 2022–2024, and complemented by analysis of other documents, including AGD, RDS, Border Monitoring, and Risk Analysis. Since 2022, UNHCR Bulgaria has been adapting and expanding its programming approach and planning structure to align with evolving contextual and regional needs, despite the challenges posed by this dynamic environment. The review identified that in 2023, Impact Area 2 (Assist) was removed, leading to the reattribution of its components, including OA1 and OA5, under Impact Area 1 (Protect), thereby consolidating the strategic focus on protection. In the same year, the "Basic Needs" outcome area (OA8: Well-being) was also removed from the planning framework, with its related activities reorganised under Outcome Area 1 (OA1: Access). This adjustment reflects a shift toward aligning basic needs interventions with broader protection objectives, particularly access to territory and documentation.

The underlying rationale of UNHCR's strategy in Bulgaria is as follows:

**IF** UNHCR supports access to territory and documentation by promoting, together with national authorities, the establishment of an entry system that is sensitive to protection needs.

This includes efforts to address challenges related to the lack of protection guarantees in border procedures, pushbacks, and detention of individuals seeking protection who have entered the country irregularly (OA1). By restructuring the planning framework, UNHCR also supports the achievement of this outcome through cash assistance activities (OA8).

**(Access/Doc).**

**AND** UNHCR supports the improvement of refugee status determination (RSD) procedures by promoting fairness, efficiency, and contextual relevance. This includes advocating for strengthened institutional capacity and equitable access to RSD mechanisms for all asylum seekers (regardless of origin), promoting access to quality legal counselling and reliable information during the asylum process, as well as ensuring adequate conditions in Refugee Reception Centres (RRC), with an emphasis on ensuring the safety of women and girls (OA2).

**(Refugee Status Determination).**

**AND** UNHCR promotes legal and policy reform through engagement with national authorities, including advocacy efforts to reduce negative perceptions of migrants, to ensure a sustainable and inclusive protection system, and works to provide access to safe spaces where information and advice are available to Forcibly Displaced and Stateless People (OA3).

**(Protection policy and law).**

**AND** UNHCR strengthens the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) with the inclusion of a specific outcome in its 2024 results framework. Efforts focus on training UNHCR office staff and SAR Refugee Reception Centres (RRC) staff to mitigate the risks of GBV, as well as building capacity on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) (OA4).

**(Gender-Based Violence).**

**AND** UNHCR promotes child protection by investigating the specific needs of this population. It focuses on improving the admission and custody processes for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), with the aim of reducing detention and prolonged separation. The organisation also directs its advocacy efforts towards state and non-governmental actors to improve children's access to education and language support, and to reduce child labour (OA5).

**(Children).**

**AND** UNHCR strengthens refugee community protection by fostering inclusive participation and supporting the establishment of safe spaces in partnership with United Nations agencies and other local actors. This includes expanding direct engagement with refugees and promoting the

participation and empowerment of families, women, and children in processes that affect their well-being, guided by the AGD and PPA approaches (OA7).  
**(Community).**

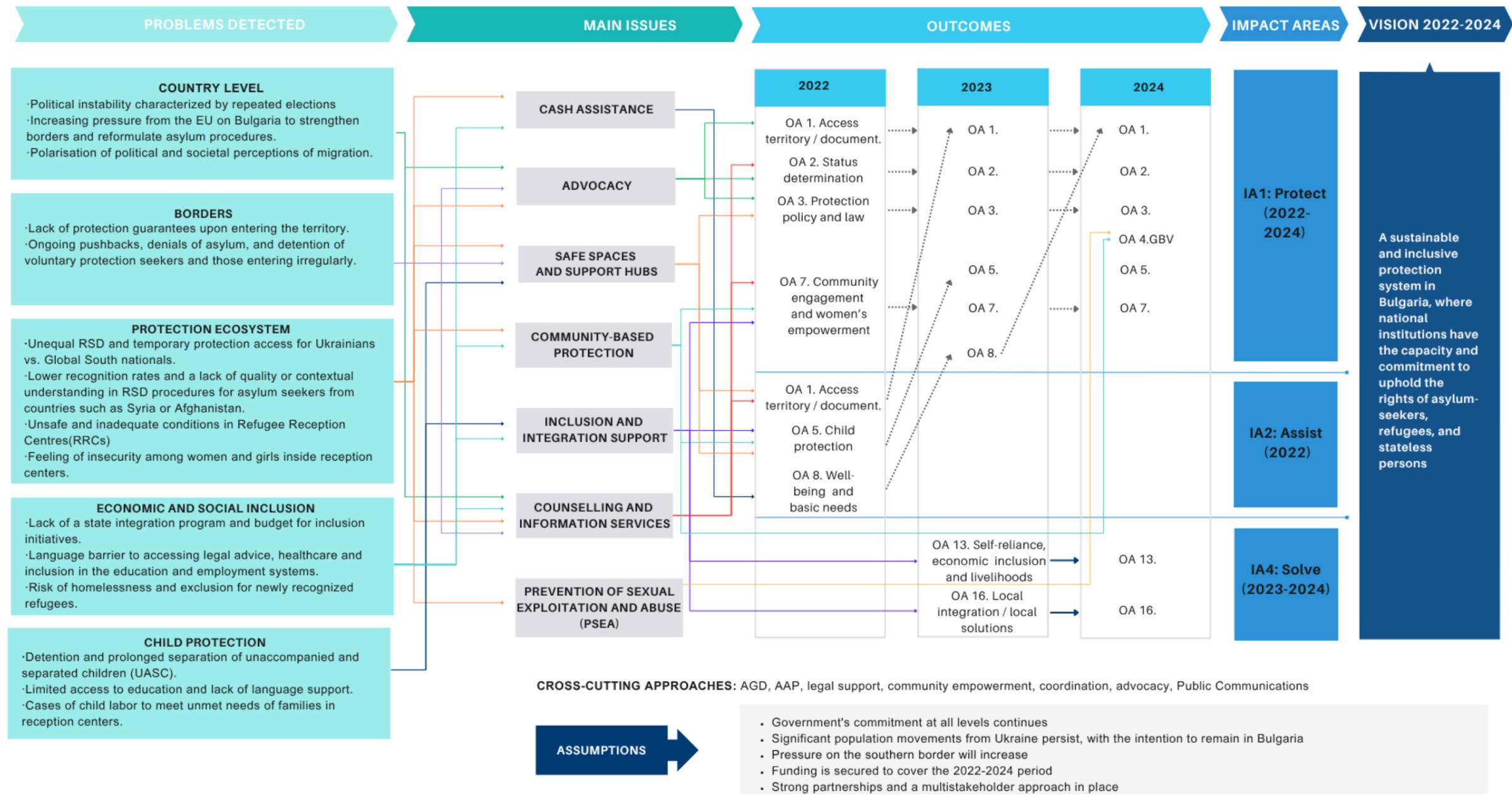
**AND** UNHCR promotes the expansion of livelihoods and integration opportunities by collaborating with national and local authorities to address the lack of state integration programs. Efforts also focus on reducing the language barrier that limits people from accessing education and employment, while advocating for improved access to housing to mitigate the risks of exclusion. (OA13, OA16).  
**(Livelihood and Integration).**

**THEN UNHCR will contribute to a sustainable and inclusive protection system in Bulgaria, where national institutions uphold the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons.**

The main preliminary assumptions are as follows:

- Government's commitment at all levels continues, amid a context of political instability, evolving EU expectations on asylum and border management, and diverse public perceptions of migration;
- Significant population movements from Ukraine persist, with the intention to remain in Bulgaria;
- Migratory pressure will increase on the southern border;
- Funding is secured to cover the 2022-2024 period;
- Strong partnerships and a multistakeholder approach in place.

## Theory of Change UNHCR - Bulgaria 2022-2024



## APPENDIX 11 – OVERVIEW OF CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN BULGARIA

*Addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable or at-risk households in fulfilling their basic needs for food, shelter, medical care, and restoring an adequate level of safety and security. (UNHCR, 2023)*

### Strategy evolution

Throughout the evaluation period, the CBI programme has evolved in terms of coverage and implementation strategies, which has allowed it to expand the programme's scope and maintain effective targeting criteria. Since 2020, the eligibility criteria have covered a broad spectrum of vulnerabilities, prioritising households with elderly people, people with disabilities, those at risk or with serious medical conditions requiring assistance. Additionally, the *dependency ratio* (the ratio of dependents to non-dependents) has also been listed as a key eligibility factor.

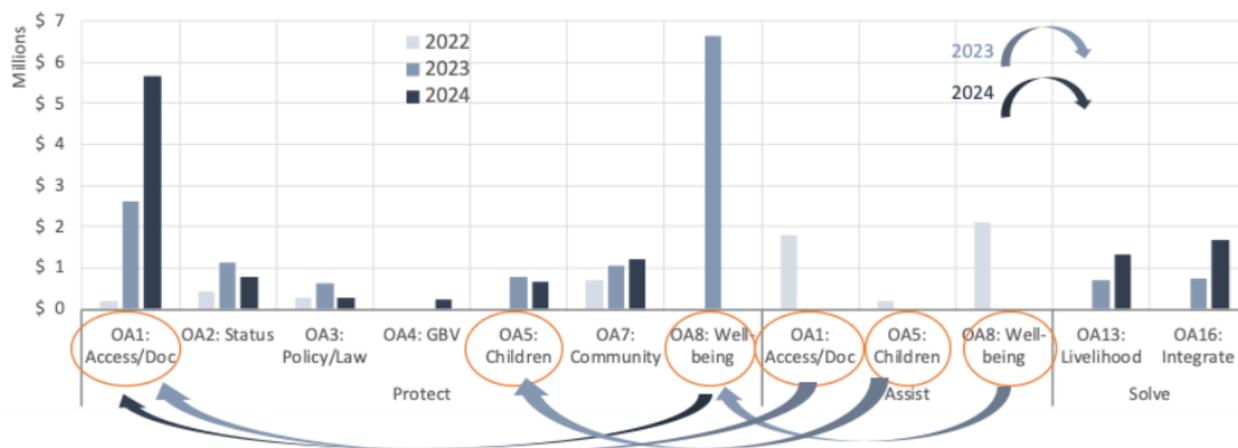
In 2023, the eligibility criteria were expanded to explicitly include households with pregnant women. This expansion coincided with requests expressed by refugees in the participatory assessments conducted the following year, suggesting an alignment or anticipation of the needs expressed by the beneficiary population. In addition, the modality of cash transfers (CBI) changed from a single transfer in 2022 to a monthly support scheme for four months, seeking to ensure continuous support to cover basic needs.

In 2024, the CBI programme initiated a shift towards social inclusion. During this year, cash assistance was introduced to support access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education, in addition to traditional support in the form of multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) and winter assistance. Of a total of USD 2.4 million distributed through the CBI in 2024, 23% was allocated to education (18% to primary and secondary education, 5% to higher education), while 77% was allocated to MPCA (34%) and winter relief (43%).

However, by the end of 2024, the CBI strategy suffered a significant setback in terms of the programme's scope and capacity to support vulnerable households. The eligibility criteria for Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) were drastically reduced to three: the dependency ratio, households with at least one specific need, and households comprising only one person aged 60 years or older. This reduction in criteria implies not only a reduced scope of multi-purpose assistance for people who require it, but also more room for discretion or exclusion. In addition, a fixed amount per household was established for the MPCA, equivalent to 75% of the poverty line, instead of variable amounts that were previously adjusted according to the needs and particular composition of each household, limiting the flexibility of the programme in terms of its ability to accommodate the needs and composition of different households.

On the other hand, constant restructuring of the results chains makes it difficult to track the budget allocated by impact and results areas, as well as to monitor targets and indicators (Figure 10). As part of its results-based management, the UNHCR CO had to revise its structure of impact and results areas for the period 2024-2026. In 2023, at the request of the Regional Office, the impact area "Empowerment" was removed as it was not a priority in Europe, and the result area "Basic Needs" was removed from the plan (where the CBI programme was included), while retaining the same funds and activities, now relocated to Result Area (RA) 1 "Access". Thus, the "Basic Needs" component continued to appear in the Intermediate Strategy 2023 and the draft MYP 2024, before being removed from the final document, resulting in an adaptation of the theory of change and the results chain. At the same time, guidelines on impact and outcome indicators were constantly changing, causing difficulties in tracing CBI-related indicators.

**Figure 16. Evolution of available funds (OL) by Impact area & Outcome and adjustments of the results chain - 2022-2024**



Source: UNHCR Bulgaria Budget\_Download (2022-2024)

### Budgetary developments and COMPASS changes

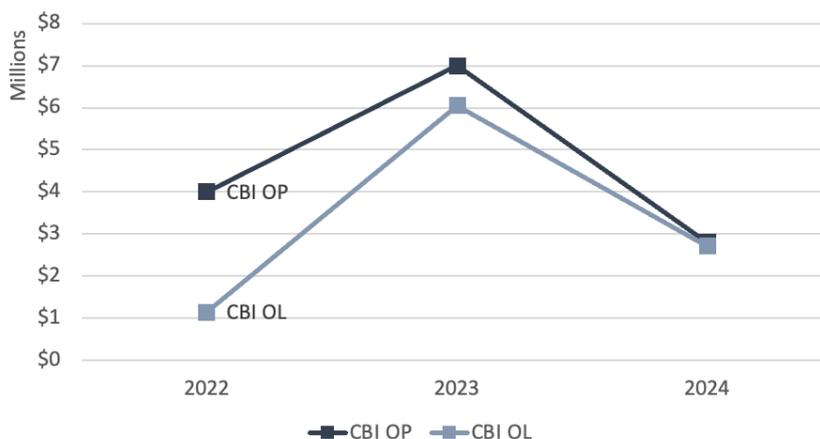
The prioritisation of CBI within UNHCR's operational strategy in Bulgaria was aligned with the difficulties refugees face in meeting their basic needs. Data from the MSNA and SEIS surveys indicated that, in 2022, approximately 66% of the refugee population reported being unable to meet their basic needs, a situation that persisted for 46% of refugees in 2024 and deteriorated for 42%, who perceived greater difficulty in meeting these needs. Against this backdrop, the funds available for the CBI programme between 2022 and 2024 are equivalent to 60% of the total OL for that period (USD 14.4M for CBI out of a total of USD 24M).

The budgetary evolution of the CBI programme shows a capacity for adaptability and value for money as operations are consolidated following the influx of Ukrainian refugees (Figure 11). In 2022, the funds available (OL) for the CBI programme were USD 1,136,319, which constituted 28% of the funds available from the OPS line for that year. This allocation represents 28% of the budget, based on expected needs (OP), indicating a significant resource gap that may hinder an effective response to the needs of the vulnerable refugee population in Bulgaria.

In 2023, in response to the significant increase in the influx of refugees due to the crisis in Ukraine, CBI's prioritisation was drastically intensified. The allocation of funds increased more than fourfold, reaching USD 6,048,799, which represented 54% of the total funds available for the annual operation in the OPS line. In addition, the tension between available funds and the planned budget was reduced to 14%. This strategic shift strengthened UNHCR Bulgaria's capacity to address the needs of the growing migrant population entering the country.

Finally, by 2024, although the funds available for CBI were adjusted to USD 2,713,102 (a 55% decrease from the previous year's peak), the programme reached its maximum efficiency. The gap between planned budget and available funds narrowed to an impressive 3%. Rather than reflecting a cutback, this is evidence of high planning capacity and value for money, allowing the programme to respond with great precision to the projected needs of refugees and maximising the impact of every dollar invested.

**Figure 17 . CBI OP vs OL budget 2022-2024**

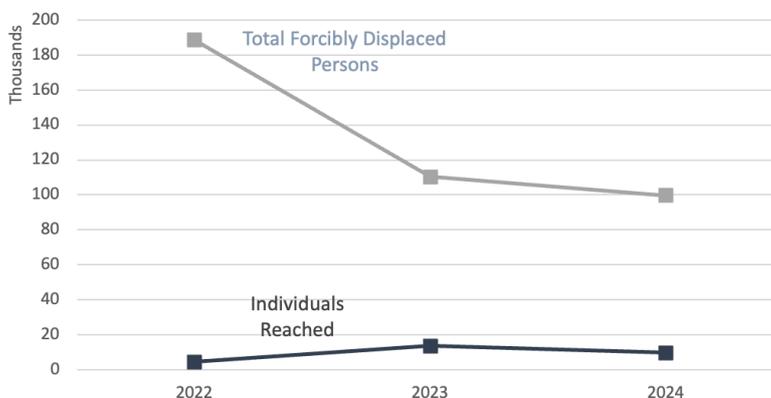


Source: UNHCR BUL\_DATA (OP-OL COMPASS)

### Implementation

Between 2022 and 2024, the CBI programme expanded its coverage to respond to the growing needs of vulnerable households in the face of the continued influx of refugees; however, the proportion of households reached remains insufficient to achieve a widespread impact. In 2022, during the phase of adaptation to the growing refugee influx, CBI transfers benefited 4,321 people in 2,312 households (2% of forcibly displaced persons). By 2023, once the operation had stabilised, coverage had expanded to 13,608 people (12% of forcibly displaced persons); then in 2024, during the downturn phase, it was reduced to 9,696 people in 4,434 households (representing 10%) (see Figure 12).

**Figure 18 . Number of CBI recipients versus the total number of forcibly displaced persons.**



Source: Annual Results Reports (2022-2024); Population Statistics Reference Bulgaria (2021-2024)

The CBI assistance programme had a significant impact in reducing stress and meeting the immediate needs of the refugees who received it, especially those related to food and access to medical services. According to post-distribution surveys (PDM), CBI has been of great help in improving refugees' living conditions, with 82% and 78% of refugees stating that the assistance has helped improve their living conditions in 2023 and 2024, respectively. In addition, the assistance received has significantly reduced the stress level of those receiving assistance by 39% during the 2023 programme; this statistic increases to 61% for the 2024 programme.

As an additional factor, CBI support and individual accompaniment by UNHCR were found to be complementary strategies that significantly enhance the effectiveness of the programme. Access to information from the UNHCR team was found to be significantly related to the likelihood of greater financial inclusion, reduced stress, and a greater ability of households to meet their basic needs.

Still, in 2023, 24% of respondents say they are able to meet more than half of their basic needs (10% meet all of them and 24% meet more than half but not all), a trend that increases slightly in 2024, where 34% say they are able to meet more than half of their basic needs (9% meet all of them and 25% meet more than half but

not all). Despite this improvement, in 2024 the percentage of people who report having met their needs is only one-third of the surveyed population, indicating that while CBI support has helped to improve conditions for a large proportion of households (between 82% and 78%), refugees still struggle to meet their basic needs on a month-to-month basis.

In addition, CBI has failed to significantly reduce the adoption of negative coping strategies, with over 85% of refugees surveyed reporting that they had resorted to at least one of these strategies in both 2023 and 2024, a phenomenon associated with unmet needs, a lack of reliable information, and reliance on informal markets. Such practices include skipping meals, engaging children in work, and participating in risky activities.

Table 1 compiles some of the above and other key findings regarding the effectiveness of the CBI programme between 2022 and 2024, based on the analysis of the post-distribution surveys (PDM), which can be seen in more detail in Appendix 13.

**Table 1 . Key Findings from Statistical Analysis of CBI (2024-2025) related to protection**

Thematic Area	Key Findings
<b>1. Basic Needs Coverage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coverage improved significantly in 2025 compared to 2024.</li> <li>Strongest improvements among respondents who were younger, received higher cash amounts, had reduced stress, used fewer risky coping strategies, and had access to timely/clear information (e.g., via help desks and social media).</li> <li>Most households still reported unmet needs.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Stress Reduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reported stress levels significantly declined.</li> <li>More pronounced among younger and women respondents, respondents with improved basic needs coverage and better living conditions, and respondents who reported satisfaction with CBI.</li> <li>Emotional resilience linked to better access to varied food and communication from UNHCR.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Coping Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 84% still relied on negative coping strategies in both years with no significant year-to-year change.</li> <li>Use of negative coping strategies were linked to unmet needs and lack of reliable information (e.g., reliance of friends/family for info), and use of informal markets.</li> <li>Mitigated by access to varied food, and direct, clear communication from UNHCR.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Living Conditions Perception</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer respondents reported improved living conditions in 2025 compared to 2024.</li> <li>Economic pressures such as inflation, and information gaps, including lack of info on UNHCR services, worsened perceptions.</li> <li>Varna residents reported more positive changes than other regions.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Financial Inclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to financial services-especially bank accounts, productive assets, and loans-dropped significantly between 2024 and 2025.</li> <li>Lack of access to loans, low information access, and informal housing were strong predictors of financial exclusion.</li> <li>There were no major gender disparities across financial inclusion indicators.</li> </ul>

### Limitations and Challenges

The planning of CBI monitoring through Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) surveys presents significant opportunities for improvement, particularly in its sampling practices. Currently, sample selection for these surveys is manual rather than random and lacks an established, replicable process. This methodology prevents ensuring the absence of selection bias and limits certainty about the representativeness of the sample concerning the total population receiving support. It is therefore crucial to adopt transparent and reproducible sampling protocols for future surveys, thus ensuring the validity and reliability of the data obtained.

Additionally, the reporting systems for the CBI programme present inconsistencies in the information between documents. In 2023, discrepancies were observed in the proposed strategy, the results achieved, as well as in the allocated and executed budget. In 2024, inconsistencies are found in the proposed indicators and the approved and used budget; moreover, for this year two SOPs are presented, one in January and the other in November, but the CBI results information seems to coincide only with that established by the last strategy,

which seems to indicate changes in the project strategy that may hinder its implementation and subsequent monitoring.

Furthermore, the absence of a profile with solid technical expertise in cash transfers (CBI) for most of 2024 significantly impacted programme management. Distribution could only begin in the last three to four months of the year, compromising the timetable and forcing the team to reuse the 2023 beneficiary register without adding new cases. Faced with this lack of local capacity, the RBE has provided ongoing support, including field visits, technical reviews, and reports, to fill operational gaps and ensure a minimum level of quality. This external dependence, combined with delays in implementation and the failure to update the register, has limited the programme's coverage, increased the risk of errors (targeting, validation of payment methods), and highlighted the fragility of the system.

### Data and Information Summary

The following tables (Table 2 and Table 3) provide a summary of the information gathered regarding the CBI, based on the submitted data by UNHCR and the Country-level Standard Operating Procedures documents.

**Table 2. CBI Expenditure and Indicators data 2022-2024 (amounts in USD)**

	2022	2023	2024
FSP fees Costs	\$122.319	\$215.019	\$120.000
Workforce Costs		\$156.882	\$32.655
Partners Registration and identification Costs	\$4.618	\$409.400	\$813.442
Other Costs	\$218.446		
<b>Cash delivery Amount</b>	<b>\$1.011.569</b>	<b>\$5.178.321</b>	<b>\$2.355.536</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>\$1.356.952</b>	<b>\$5.959.622</b>	<b>\$3.321.632</b>
% Cash Delivery from Total	75%	87%	71%
Individuals Reached	4.341	13.608	9.696
Households Reached	2.312	6.200	4.434

Table 3 . CBI summary strategy according to the Country-level Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

	SOP 2022-2023	SOP August/2023	SOP January/2024	SOP Nov/2024
Start Validity SOP	1/12/22	7/08/23	15/01/24	12/11/24
End Validity SOP	31/12/23	6/08/25	14/01/26	11/11/26
Outcome Area	-	8: Well-being	8: Well-being	1: Access Doc
Programme start	25-Jul-22	7-Aug-23	7-Aug-23	25/10/24
End of Programme	30-Jun-23	6-Aug-25	6-Aug-25	31/03/25
Target Ind	-	15.000	15.000	12.000
Target HHs	10.000	6.000	6.000	4.000
Target Transfers	10.000	35.000	35.000	4.000
Freq Transfer	1	4 (1 per month)	4 (1 per month)	1
Value Adult	USD 195 to USD 390 (per HH)	USD 84/140	USD 84/140	USD 222 (per HH)
Value Kid		USD 84/101	USD 84/101	
Start Programme	1-Dec-22	1-Dec-23	1-Dec-23	25/10/24
End of Programme	31-Mar-23	31-Mar-25	31-Mar-25	31/03/25
Target Ind	-	7.500	7.500	12.000
Target HHs	10.000	3.000	3.000	4.000
Target Transfers	10.000	3.000	3.000	4.000
Value HH	USD 195 to USD 355	USD 210 to USD 398	BGN 546.95	USD 278
Programme Start				25/10/24
End of Programme				31/03/25
Target Ind				3200
Target HHs				1700
Target Transfers				1700
Freq Transfer				1
Value HH				166 USD per child
Start Programme				25/10/24
End of Programme				31/03/25
Target Ind				300
Target HHs				
Target Transfers				300
Freq Transfer				1
Value HH				USD 1660

# APPENDIX 12 – CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN BULGARIA: AN ANALYSIS OF POST-DISTRIBUTION MONITORING (PDM) DATASETS

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## 1 Executive summary

This analysis assesses the performance and implications of UNHCR Bulgaria’s Cash-Based Intervention (CBI) program across two implementation years<sup>48</sup>—2024 and 2025—drawing from mixed-methods post-distribution monitoring (PDM) data. Going beyond standard PDM reporting, which typically presents descriptive trends and summary statistics, this analytical report applies advanced statistical methods—Random Forest modelling, Propensity Score Matching (PSM), and logistic regression—to examine how the program contributed to protection, self-reliance, and economic resilience outcomes for refugee and asylum-seeking households. The analysis identifies statistically significant associations between cash assistance and key outcomes such as the ability to meet basic needs, stress reduction, use of negative coping strategies, and financial inclusion. These methods enable a more nuanced understanding of the factors that predict variation in results across household profiles, supporting evidence-informed decisions for future targeting, program design, and protection-sensitive delivery models.

According to [UNHCR’s Microdata Library](#), the **2023** PDM focused on one-time payments for protection and winter support, delivered to households registered under Temporary or International Protection. Data was collected via telephone interviews with 258 randomly sampled households from March to May 2023. In **2024**, the program shifted to a multi-transfer approach, targeting 3,054 vulnerable households (7,178 individuals) between July 2023 and January 2024. A follow-up PDM was conducted with 364 households through remote interviews in early 2024. The sample was again selected through a random, probability-based method. The **2025** PDM assessed outcomes of multi-purpose cash assistance, winterisation support, and education grants provided to 4,225 households (9,158 individuals) between October and December 2024. Additionally, the Bulgarian Red Cross supported 194 individuals through cash-for-education grants. Data was collected from 431 households, including 40 BRC beneficiaries, between 16–28 January 2025. Although the surveys report using probability-based random sampling, UNHCR Bulgaria confirmed that no reproducible code or random sequence generator was used to structure the sampling process. As such, while the analysis assumes randomization, the absence of verifiable documentation limits the ability to confirm the sample’s representativeness and methodological rigor.

While initially envisioned as a “**cash for protection**” model linking cash with referrals and services, the program’s implementation was constrained by staffing limitations. Consequently, cash was primarily delivered through categorical targeting and existing beneficiary lists, with reduced systematic implementation of the protection accompaniment measures outlined in the SOPs—such as linking individuals at heightened protection risk with relevant services as a complement to CBI<sup>49</sup>. Despite this, **cash assistance played a central role in household well-being**, helping beneficiaries navigate economic pressure, meet essential needs, and maintain psychosocial stability.

The 2024–2025 PDM dataset is composed predominantly of women (84%), with most respondents aged 36–59 (45%) or 60 and above (43%). While satisfaction with cash assistance was high (98%) and feelings of insecurity<sup>50</sup> were minimal (0.5%), persistent economic vulnerability was evident. Only 20% of respondents reported meeting all their basic needs, and 87% resorted to at least one negative coping strategy. Financial inclusion indicators were low, with just 43% having a bank account, 8.5% owning productive assets, and 4.4% having access to loans. Savings were rare, reported by only 15%. Nonetheless, 54% noted improved living

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<sup>48</sup> While there is thematic alignment across the 2023–2025 datasets, the 2023 tool is structurally and linguistically very different, and merging would require heavy preprocessing and assumptions. For instance, grouped responses and open text fields would need significant harmonization. To reduce comparability risks and focus on the years with aligned formats, the analysis therefore prioritized 2024 and 2025.

<sup>49</sup> This considers information pointed out by the team leader of the evaluation.

<sup>50</sup> The term “safety” refers specifically to respondents’ perceptions of security in the context of receiving, keeping, or spending the cash assistance, as captured by the PDM question: “Did you feel unsafe or at risk of harm receiving, keeping or spending the cash assistance?”

conditions, and 58% reported reduced stress, reflecting some positive impacts amid continued livelihood challenges.

**Cash delivery and value:** In 2024, recipients received **900 BGN (approx. €460)**<sup>51</sup> in multipurpose cash and an education top-up of **300 BGN (€150)** per child. In 2025, only the multipurpose cash was maintained. According to the data, 92% of respondents in 2025 indicated they received the cash when expected (data for 2024 was not available), and over 77% waited less than 15 minutes to receive it, with only <1% waiting more than two hours. These results suggest a relatively efficient disbursement process.

Key findings from the statistical analysis include:

**1. Basic needs coverage improved but remains fragile:** Regression and statistical tests show that respondents were significantly **more likely to meet basic needs in 2025 than in 2024** ( $p < 0.001$ ), with the strongest improvements observed among younger respondents (Age 18-35). Logistic regression highlighted that **higher cash amounts, reduced stress, and fewer risky coping strategies** were positively associated with meeting basic needs. Importantly, **access to timely and clear information**—particularly via help desks and social media—was also critical. However, most households still reported unmet needs, signalling persistent vulnerability.

**2. Financial inclusion declined over time:** Access to financial services—especially bank accounts, productive assets, and loans—**dropped significantly between 2024 and 2025** ( $p$ -values  $< 0.005$ ). Regression confirmed that **lack of access to loans**, low information access, and informal living arrangements predicted financial exclusion. Individuals in private housing had better access, while those in governmental accommodation were more likely to save part of their cash, suggesting different behavioural patterns based on housing status. This decline may be linked to broader economic uncertainty, administrative barriers (e.g. documentation requirements), or reduced engagement with financial institutions over time. However, the exact drivers would require further inquiry.

**3. Reduction in stress was widely reported and improved across years:** Reported reductions in stress **increased from 2024 to 2025** ( $p < 0.001$ ), with younger and female respondents more likely to experience this improvement. Regression results demonstrated that **perceived improvement in living conditions, meeting basic needs, and satisfaction with cash assistance** were strong predictors of reduced stress. Access to varied food and direct communication with UNHCR staff also emerged as important contributors to emotional resilience.

**4. High reliance on negative coping strategies persisted:** Despite cash support, more than 84% of respondents reported using negative coping mechanisms in both 2024 and 2025, with no significant year-on-year change. Regression analysis linked this behaviour to inability to meet basic needs, spending in informal markets, and insufficient access to information. Households using relatives or friends as their main information source were more likely to rely on negative coping strategies, while access to varied food and clear communication helped mitigate this risk.

**5. Perceived living conditions<sup>52</sup> declined between 2024 and 2025:** The proportion of respondents reporting improved living conditions declined significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ). Regression confirmed that reduced stress, satisfaction with cash assistance, and ability to meet basic needs were strongly associated with positive perceptions. Lack of information about UNHCR services and economic pressures, including inflation, negatively influenced these perceptions. Provincial differences were observed, with residents in Varna more likely to report improvements.

Supplementary statistical testing provided further insights:

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<sup>51</sup> The focus of this analysis was on Post-Distribution Monitoring data, which is a sample-based dataset capturing recipient feedback and characteristics. For this specific analysis, we did not review operational documents or action plans that may include more detailed information on targeting figures, planned coverage, or delivery schedules, usually documented in internal planning or implementation records.

<sup>52</sup> The wording “perceived living conditions” is used to reflect that the indicator is based on a subjective, self-reported measure of whether respondents felt that cash assistance contributed to improving their living conditions. This phrasing aligns with the survey question wording (“To what extent has the cash assistance from UNHCR contributed to: improved your living conditions?”) and helps distinguish reported perceptions from objective housing or infrastructure assessments.

- Between 2024 and 2025, financial inclusion dropped, stress levels improved, and basic needs satisfaction increased, while living condition perceptions declined.- By gender, no significant disparities were observed across most indicators, except for stress reduction, which improved more for women ( $p < 0.05$ ).

- Accommodation type mattered: those in governmental housing were more likely to save but had lower access to financial services.

**Methodological limitations** must be acknowledged. The sampling was non-random and manually executed, without a reproducible or coded procedure. This restricts the generalisability of findings and underscores the need for future surveys to adopt **systematic, transparent sampling protocols** (e.g. using `set.seed()` in R or equivalent randomisation tools). Despite this limitation, the models achieved high explanatory power and provided meaningful insights for programming.

The results confirm that UNHCR's CBI contributed to stress reduction, economic relief, and perceived well-being among recipients. However, these gains appear unevenly experienced across population groups—for instance, older respondents and those without access to formal financial services consistently reported worse outcomes. Moreover, the improvements observed, such as in meeting basic needs or reducing reliance on negative coping strategies, often remained partial or vulnerable to external shocks (e.g., inflation, information gaps, limited targeting coverage), indicating that the benefits, while meaningful, are not yet sustained or universally felt. Without strategic adjustments and support, many households may regress into deeper vulnerability, particularly amid anticipated program scale-downs.

Key recommendations:

- **Strengthen basic needs coverage** through sustained MPCA or complementary support—particularly for older adults and households reporting persistent food insecurity.
- **Reinforce financial inclusion efforts**, including access to bank accounts, loans, and digital financial services—especially for those in governmental accommodation or older age groups.
- **Prioritise communication strategies** that ensure timely, accessible, and understandable information about eligibility, assistance, and services.
- **Address persistent negative coping behaviours** by combining cash with protection monitoring, referral systems, and food security interventions.
- **Embed mental health support** into assistance frameworks, leveraging the strong association between psychosocial well-being and improved living conditions.
- **Ensure transition strategies** as CBI is phased out, linking vulnerable groups to government social protection mechanisms, employment opportunities, and shelter programs.
- **Standardise and document sampling procedures** to enable future year-on-year comparisons and evidence-based adjustments.

In conclusion, while the CBI program met many of its immediate objectives and offered crucial relief, sustaining and building on its outcomes will require targeted, data-driven actions that go beyond one-off assistance.

## 2 Introduction

This report presents an analysis of UNHCR Bulgaria's Cash-Based Intervention program, with a specific focus on the program's contribution to protection outcomes, self-reliance, and the efficiency of deployment. The analysis is based primarily on household-level data from Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) surveys conducted between 2024<sup>53</sup> and 2025, complemented by operational records and contextual information. A range of inception meetings, scoping interviews and consultations helped to understand the available data, procedures and focus of this study.

The purpose of this analysis is to generate evidence that can support learning and reflection within UNHCR, particularly considering programmatic adaptations and resource constraints. The main objective of the analytical report was to go beyond descriptive statistics by applying inferential methods (Random Forest, Propensity Score Matching, logistic regression) to explore associations between CBI and key outcomes including ability to meet basic needs, stress reduction, coping strategies, and financial inclusion. These methods allow for a deeper understanding of what predicts variation in outcomes across households.

As part of the initial scoping, UNHCR shared additional datasets—including the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (2022–2023) and Socio-Economic Insights Survey (2024) surveys—with the evaluation team. However, in consultation with the CBI team, it was agreed that the analysis would focus exclusively on PDM data. This decision reflected the closer alignment of PDM with the evaluation's central questions on the performance and outcomes of the CBI program, as well as practical considerations of comparability and feasibility.

According to data available through [UNHCR's Microdata Library](#), which hosts unit-level data from surveys and administrative sources related to Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Persons, three rounds of Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) were conducted in Bulgaria to assess the outcomes of cash-based interventions (CBI) from 2023 to 2025.

The **2023 PDM** focused on one-time payments for protection and winter support, delivered to households registered under Temporary or International Protection. Data was collected via telephone interviews with 258 randomly sampled households from March to May 2023. Sampling was probability-based, with measures taken to mitigate non-response bias.

In **2024**, the program shifted to a multi-transfer approach, targeting 3,054 vulnerable households (7,178 individuals) between July 2023 and January 2024. A follow-up PDM was conducted with 364 households through remote interviews in early 2024. The sample was again selected through a random, probability-based method.

The **2025 PDM** assessed outcomes of multi-purpose cash assistance, winterisation support, and education grants provided to 4,225 households (9,158 individuals) between October and December 2024. Additionally, the Bulgarian Red Cross supported 194 individuals through cash-for-education grants. Data was collected from 431 households, including 40 BRC beneficiaries, between 16–28 January 2025. The sample design maintained a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error and followed the same randomised sampling methodology as previous rounds.

Across all years, the surveys aimed to ensure representative coverage and implemented procedures to minimise bias, offering a consistent basis for evaluating CBI outcomes in Bulgaria.

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<sup>53</sup> While there is thematic alignment across the 2023–2025 datasets, the 2023 tool is structurally and linguistically very different, and merging would require heavy preprocessing and assumptions. For instance, grouped responses and open text fields would need significant harmonization. To reduce comparability risks and focus on the years with aligned formats, the analysis therefore prioritized 2024 and 2025.

## 2.1 Sampling

During scoping discussions with UNHCR Bulgaria, it was clarified that the sample design for the Post-Distribution Monitoring surveys was not documented using reproducible code (e.g. RMarkdown, Python scripts, or equivalent). Additionally, we were informed that no random sequence generator—such as the `set.seed()` function—was used to structure sampling. This limits our ability to assess the sampling strategy, its rigour, and the representativeness of the findings—key factors in determining data quality and the validity of inference.

In the absence of reproducible documentation, this analysis proceeds under the assumption that the sample was drawn in good faith and with minimal bias. However, in practice, sampling processes that are not randomised or systematically recorded often result in unconscious over- or under-sampling of certain population groups. Human-led selection introduces variability that is difficult to track or correct without transparent procedures.

Given that these datasets frequently include over 200 variables per household, triangulation with other data sources is also constrained. We therefore *strongly recommend that future sampling processes be documented in a reproducible format, such as RMarkdown or Jupyter Notebooks*. This would enable full transparency, improve adherence to statistical standards, and enhance the overall credibility and replicability of evidence generated.

## 2.2 Questionnaire structure and comparability (2023–2025)

The PDM survey instruments were provided in XLSForm format, a widely adopted standard for mobile data collection platforms such as KoboToolbox. Each form adhered to a consistent structure, with a survey sheet containing the questions and a corresponding choices sheet defining the response options. The design employs concise, human-readable variable and choice names, which enhances data clarity, minimises errors, and facilitates both internal analysis and external review. This is an example of “best practice”, and especially beneficial compared to legacy approaches using numeric codes for variables—a practice originally intended to conserve storage or accommodate older database systems—which often requires additional decoding steps, increases the risk of misinterpretation, and hampers timely, evidence-based decision-making.

To load and process the forms, we employed a custom R function, `extract_xlsform`, which was specifically developed to streamline the extraction and preparation of the survey and choices sheets from XLSForm files. This function reads the designated sheets from the provided Excel files, ensures consistency in column naming, and incorporates a new “variable” column to reflect how variables will appear in the final dataset. This column aimed at establishing a direct correspondence between the structure of the forms and the resulting datasets, simplifying the subsequent steps of analysis.

The following output shows the resulting survey sheet for the PDM survey 2025, followed by the choices sheet, which includes the answer options for single and multiple selection questions.

*# Display processed PDM 2025 survey sheet as an example*

```
pdm_2025_survey
```

```
# A tibble: 214 × 16
```

```
  type      name `label::english` `label::russian` `label::ukrainian`
  <chr>    <chr> <chr>          <chr>          <chr>
1 start    start <NA>          <NA>          <NA>
2 end      end   <NA>          <NA>          <NA>
3 begin_group mand... A. Location det... A. Информация ... A. Інформація про...
4 note     Intr... To be completed... Заполняется до ... Заповнюється пере...
5 date     mand... A1. Date      A1. Дата      Дата
6 select_one Data_с... Data... Data collected ... Данные, собран... Дані, зібрані за ...
7 text     Data... Other, please s... Пожалуйста, ука... Інше, будь ласка,...
8 text     Enum... A2. Enumerator ... A2. Имя интервь... Ім'я інтерв'юера ...
9 select_one Country mand... A3. Country   A3. Страна    Країна
10 select_one Provin... mand... A3. Province/Di... A3.Провинция/ра... A3. Провінція/рай...
```

```

# i 204 more rows
# i 11 more variables: `hint::english` <chr>, `hint::russian` <chr>,
# `hint::ukrainian` <chr>, required <chr>, relevant <chr>, appearance <chr>,
# choice_filter <chr>, constraint <chr>, default <chr>, calculation <chr>,
# constraint_message <chr>

# Display processed PDM 2025 choices sheet as an example
pdm_2025_choices

# A tibble: 349 × 8
  list_name      name `label::english` `label::russian` `label::ukrainian`
  <chr>          <chr> <chr>          <chr>          <chr>
1 Data_collected_th... At_i... In person inter... Индивидуальное ... Особисте інтерв'ю...
2 Data_collected_th... At_a... In person inter... Индивидуальное ... Особиста співбесі...
3 Data_collected_th... Phon... Phone interview Собеседование ... Телефонна співбес...
4 Data_collected_th... Other Other, specify Другое, указать Ише, вказати
5 Country        BGR Bulgaria Болгария Болгарія
6 Province       20BG... Blagoevgrad Благоевград Благоевград
7 Province       20BG... Burgas Бургас Бургас
8 Province       20BG... Dobrich Добрич Добрич
9 Province       20BG... Gabrovo Габрово Габрово
10 Province      20BG... Haskovo Хасково Хасково
# i 339 more rows
# i 3 more variables: filter_province <chr>, order <chr>, filter_spent <chr>

```

In preparation for merging the 2023–2025 datasets to enable cross-year regression analysis and visualisation, we conducted a detailed comparison of the PDM survey instruments used in each year. This review focuses on the structure of the survey (survey sheet) and the response options (choices sheet) in the XLSForms used for data collection. Our goal was to assess their comparability, identify areas where harmonisation is needed, and recommend an approach for aligning variables across waves. While there are notable differences in structure and granularity—particularly between the 2023 tool and the more recent versions—there is sufficient thematic continuity to support integrated analysis, provided key transformations are applied. The summary table below provides a high-level overview of core structural differences.

## 2.2.1 Summary of structural elements (PDM questionnaires)

Feature	PDM 2023	PDM 2024	PDM 2025
Total Questions	143	210	214
Response Options (Choices)	133 (19 lists)	324 (50 lists)	349 (52 lists)
Question Groups	20	10	10
Instrument Design	Segmented and exploratory	Streamlined and standardised	Same as 2024 for consistency

This section presents a comparative review of the PDM survey instruments, based on a structured extraction of survey metadata. In 2023, the tool consisted of 143 questions organised across 20 question groups, such as `group_Demographic`, `group_Receiving`, and `group_Medium_outcomes`. The design reflected a more exploratory and modular format, suited to broader data capture but less amenable to efficient cross-wave analysis.

From 2024 onwards, the design underwent a significant restructuring. The number of question groups was halved (down to 10), and a standardised schema was adopted, using consistently prefixed section headers (e.g. `mand_Location_details`, `mand_Expenditure`, `mand_Outcomes`). This marked shift not only improved internal consistency but also aligned the questionnaire more closely with commonly used frameworks in cash and protection monitoring.

The breadth and specificity of response options also expanded markedly. The 2023 survey relied on 133 response options across 19 lists—many of which were simple Yes/No or categorical selections (e.g. “Sex”, “Age”, “SourcesIncome”). By 2024, this had more than doubled, with 324 options across 50 lists. The 2025 tool included 349 options over 52 lists, retaining and building upon the standardised response architecture introduced in the previous year.

Several improvements in response option design should be noted. The later tools introduced detailed and context-specific responses to questions about expenditure (e.g. disaggregated categories such as “firewood”, “baby items”, or “legal assistance”), safety risks, complaint mechanisms, and savings modalities. Semantic harmonisation also improved—reducing variation in phrasing and labels for common concepts. At the same time, codified values (name fields) for repeated response sets (e.g. yes/no, age brackets, modality preferences) remained stable or were only marginally adjusted, preserving the potential for recoding and variable matching.

Demographic and protection indicators became more granular and inclusive in the later tools as from 2024, incorporating fields on disability, detailed age segmentation, and intra-household dynamics. The introduction of standardised scales like Severity and expanded modules on access barriers (e.g. mobility, documentation issues, or protection risks) allow for more nuanced modelling of vulnerability and program effects.

To enable integrated analysis across all three waves, we recommend using the 2025 questionnaire as the structural and semantic reference. Variables from 2023 and 2024 can be mapped accordingly through metadata-based recoding. This is particularly important in areas where response options have evolved or split into subcategories.

In conclusion, while the 2023 tool differs significantly in format and vocabulary from its successors, there is a strong degree of thematic alignment across all three years. With systematic preprocessing and variable harmonisation—especially of grouped responses and open text fields—these datasets can be reliably merged for longitudinal and inferential analysis.

## 2.3 Survey Datasets

The datasets were provided in CSV format which helped to ensure consistency and clarity in the data preparation process.

To better understand the structure, completeness, and content of the Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) datasets, exploratory data analysis (EDA) was conducted using the `DataExplorer::create_report()` function in R. This automated profiling generated detailed diagnostics on each dataset's variable types, missingness patterns, memory usage, and distributional characteristics. The results offer a foundational overview of the datasets from 2023, 2024, and 2025, enabling informed decisions around data cleaning, transformation, and analysis readiness. The following sub-section summarises key findings from these reports, highlighting how the structure and quality of data have evolved over time and identifying critical differences that may affect longitudinal comparability.

### 2.3.1 PDM 2023 datasets

For PDM 2023, the primary dataset is contained in *unhcr\_bul\_2023\_pdm\_hh\_data\_v1\_anonymized.csv*. The questionnaire and codebook are in *questionnaire CBI 2023.xlsx*.

The PDM 2023 dataset consists of 258 observations across 119 variables, drawn from household-level survey data. Of these variables, 59 are discrete and 47 are continuous, with an additional 13 columns entirely missing, indicating design elements that may not have been implemented during data collection or were removed during anonymisation.

Notably, the dataset contains no complete rows, with 12,395 missing values out of a total 30,702 possible observations, representing a substantial ~40% missingness rate. This high proportion of missing data—combined with the full absence of values in some variables—signals considerable limitations in data quality or consistency, likely affecting the robustness of certain analyses.

In terms of memory efficiency, the dataset has a lightweight footprint of ~304 KB, which aligns with the modest row count. The structure comprises a mix of character-encoded responses (for qualitative questions), numeric indicators (for income, expenditure, etc.), and binary dummy variables for categorical selections such as risks, coping strategies, and sources of support.

Univariate distributions show typical categorical response frequencies, while continuous variables exhibit heavy skewness and sparsity. Several QQ plots failed to render properly due to non-finite values, underscoring potential concerns with numeric data integrity. Additionally, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and correlation analysis are limited in interpretability given the missing data structure.

Overall, the PDM 2023 dataset appears significantly less standardised and less complete compared to subsequent rounds (2024 and 2025). The inconsistencies in variable structure and value encoding, as well as the level of missingness, suggest that this dataset may not be directly comparable with later datasets without careful cleaning, harmonisation, or imputation strategies.

### 2.3.2 PDM 2024 datasets

For PDM 2024, the primary dataset is in *questionnaire CBI 2024.xlsx*, while the questionnaire and codebook are in *unhcr\_bul\_2024\_pdm\_hh\_data\_v1\_anonymized.csv*.

The PDM 2024 dataset is substantially larger and more structured than its 2023 predecessor, comprising **506 observations** and a total of **324 variables**. This expansion reflects a more granular approach to data collection, with richer encoding of categorical responses and multiple response items. Notably, **137 variables are continuous** (primarily dummy-coded indicators), while **102 are discrete**, indicating a strong emphasis on detailed and disaggregated quantitative data.

However, despite its breadth, the dataset also presents considerable challenges in completeness. Specifically, **85 columns are entirely missing**, suggesting they may be either template placeholders or form elements not used in actual data collection. Furthermore, there are **106,882 missing observations** (across a total of **163,944 cells**), with **no fully complete rows**, resulting in a **missingness rate of ~65%**. This necessitates careful handling in any comparative or statistical analysis, especially for longitudinal or cross-sectional comparisons.

The file's **memory size is 1.4 MB**, reflecting its wider scope and the use of many binary (0/1) columns derived from multiple-choice and select-multiple responses. These cover areas such as cash purpose, safety incidents, barriers to access, and expenditure breakdowns.

The dataset includes more standardised variable naming and formatting than the 2023 data, with more logical groupings (e.g. *Cash\_purpose\_*, *Help\_needed\_reason\_*, *Spent\_1st*, *Save\_money\_where\_*, etc.). This shift supports improved downstream analysis and survey instrument transparency.

Overall, the PDM 2024 dataset marks a **major structural and methodological improvement** compared to 2023. Despite high missingness, its enhanced breadth, thematic structure, and consistent use of dummy variables make it significantly more amenable to standardised cleaning, modelling, and cross-year comparability—particularly with the 2025 round, which follows a similar structure.

### 2.3.3 PDM 2025 datasets

For PDM 2025, the primary dataset is in *unhcr\_bul\_2025\_pdm\_hh\_data\_v1\_anonymized.csv*, while the corresponding questionnaire and codebook are included in *questionnaire CBI 2025.xlsx*.

The PDM 2025 dataset comprises **431 observations** across **329 variables**, showing continued growth in structure and comprehensiveness compared to previous years. It reflects a refinement of the 2024 data architecture, with improvements in logical groupings and consistent variable naming, offering clearer paths for indicator disaggregation and interpretation.

Out of the 329 variables, **167 are continuous**, primarily dummy-coded to reflect select-multiple responses, and **102 are discrete**, supporting a wide array of categorical survey responses. Despite a moderate total size (**1.2 MB**), the dataset delivers highly granular insights across themes such as **cash delivery, access constraints, safety, expenditure, decision-making, food insecurity, and longer-term outcomes**.

Notably, **60 variables are entirely missing**, and **72,726 missing observations** are spread across the dataset's **141,799 total cells**, resulting in approximately **51% missingness**. This represents an improvement in completeness over 2024 (~65% missingness), while maintaining a comparable breadth of indicators. Like in previous years, **no row is fully complete**, reinforcing the need for thoughtful imputation or domain-specific filtering in analysis.

Variable design in 2025 is explicitly modular, with multiple indicators grouped under consistent stems (e.g. Cash\_purpose\_, Help\_needed\_reason\_, Cash\_spent\_on\_, H2\_a\_If\_yes\_what\_t\_ce\_have\_you\_received\_). This modular architecture facilitates automated processing and robust summary statistics across core outcomes and vulnerability dimensions. Additionally, new variables related to **social protection**, **barriers to government assistance**, and **information access preferences** suggest an expanded evaluative scope aligned with broader resilience and accountability indicators.

In sum, the **PDM 2025 dataset represents a maturing and methodologically richer round of post-distribution monitoring**, with a stronger focus on comparability, disaggregation, and thematic completeness. Its structure aligns closely with the 2024 round, enabling credible longitudinal comparisons across key cash outcome indicators—something that remains challenging when including the 2023 round due to structural and semantic inconsistencies.

### 3 Loading, cleaning and merging of datasets

The datasets have been loaded to RStudio from CSV format (comma-separated values). All steps have been documented in R script using a custom function `load_and_clean_data`.

To prepare the dataset for regression analysis, we conducted the following steps:

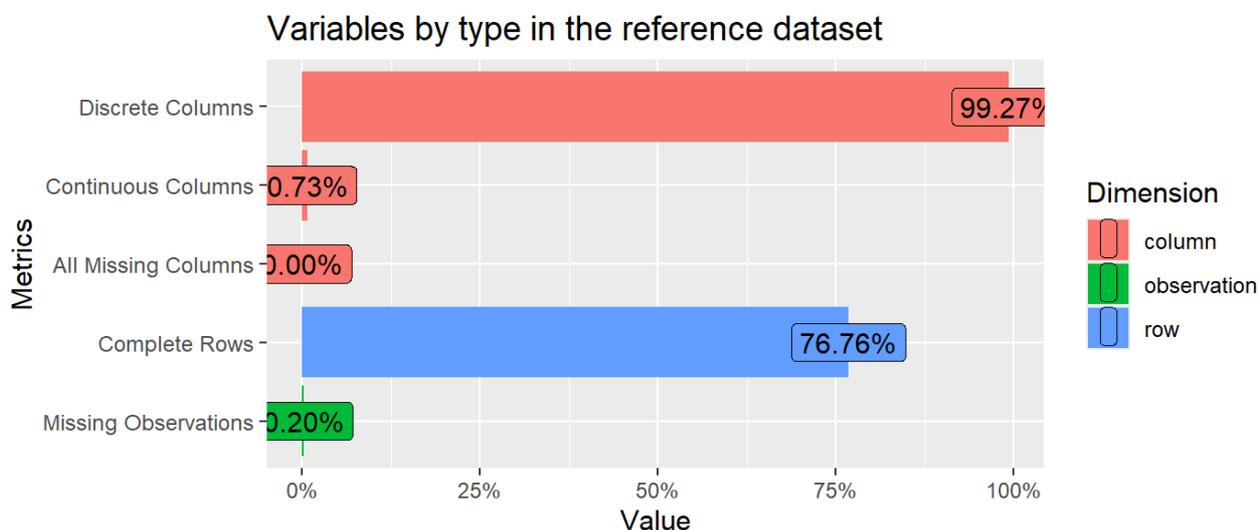
1. **Loading and initial cleaning:** Household survey datasets were imported and pre-cleaned by removing not approved submissions, trimming whitespace, and adding a unique identifier combining respondent ID and survey year.
2. **Standardising variable names:** Variable names were cleaned by removing prefixes, converting them to lower case, and ensuring uniqueness. Index columns were dropped when unnecessary.
3. **Processing select\_multiple variables:** `Select_multiple` fields were one-hot encoded into separate binary columns to allow each selected option to be analysed independently. This transformation ensured compatibility with regression analysis.
4. **Merging datasets:** The 2024 and 2025 datasets were merged based on common variables. Records missing both sex and age were excluded to retain meaningful observations.
5. **Decoding geographical codes:** Province and district codes were decoded into human-readable names by joining with the appropriate labels from the XLSForm choices sheet.
6. **Generating key indicators:** Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as satisfaction with cash assistance, use of negative coping strategies, and access to bank accounts were computed and stored as factor variables with “Yes” and “No” levels.
7. **Handling missing values:** Missing values for household size were replaced with the mode, while missing ages were categorised as “Missing”. Missing cash amounts were imputed using the median of the observed values.
8. **Removing sparse and uninformative variables:** Columns with more than 50% missing values and columns with only a single distinct value were dropped, ensuring a clean, robust dataset for modelling.
9. **Converting binary variables:** All binary numeric variables (containing only 0s and 1s) were converted into factors with levels “Yes” and “No” to facilitate interpretation in regression outputs.
10. **Recoding logical skip patterns:** For follow-up questions (e.g., regarding additional information needs), missing responses were logically recoded as “No” when respondents had indicated no initial need for information.
11. **Final subsetting:** Redundant text fields, aggregated variables, and other unnecessary columns were excluded to streamline the dataset for modelling.
12. **Saving the cleaned dataset:** The fully processed dataset was saved in `.RData` format to allow efficient reloading and reproducibility for further analysis.

### 3.1 Reference dataset

The following graph provides an overview of the characteristics of the reference dataset after preparation and merging the PDM 2024 and 2025 results.

Key takeaways from the exploratory data analysis include:

1. **Variable types:** The dataset is overwhelmingly composed of discrete variables (99.27%), with only a very small proportion of continuous variables (0.73%). This reflects the survey-based nature of the data, where most variables are categorical or binary rather than numerical.
2. **Missing data:** The dataset has a very low proportion of missing observations (0.20%), indicating excellent data completeness. This minimises the need for extensive imputation and strengthens the reliability of subsequent regression analyses.
3. **Complete rows:** A large proportion of the records (76.76%) are complete, meaning they contain no missing values across any variables. This high completeness facilitates robust and unbiased statistical modelling.

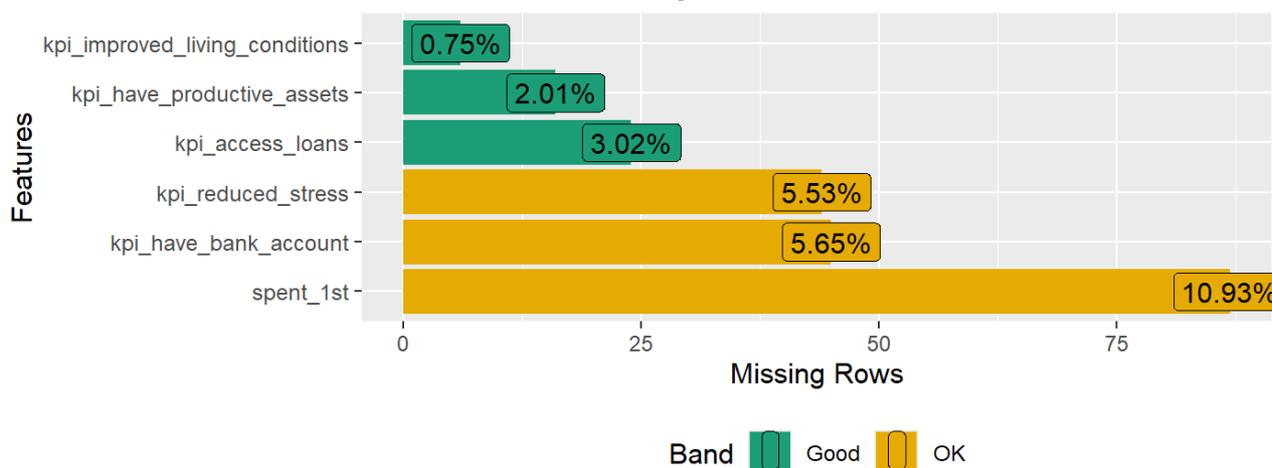


The graph below summarises the extent of missing data among key variables in the reference dataset, based on the `DataExplorer::plot_missing()` diagnostic tool. Each bar represents the proportion of observations with missing values for a given variable, expressed both as a percentage and in raw counts.

Overall, **data completeness is relatively strong**, with all listed variables exhibiting less than 11% missingness. Three indicators—`kpi_improved_living_conditions`, `kpi_have_productive_assets`, and `kpi_access_loans`—fall within the **“Good” quality band**, with missing rates below 5%, and thus pose minimal concern for downstream analysis.

Three other variables—`kpi_reduced_stress`, `kpi_have_bank_account`, and `spent_1st` (the first item households reported spending cash on)—have higher missingness levels, between 5.5% and 10.9%, placing them in the **“OK” quality band**. While these levels are not uncommon in humanitarian datasets, they warrant attention during modelling, particularly for regression and machine learning procedures that are sensitive to incomplete data. In this analysis, these variables were retained given their relevance, but appropriate pre-processing techniques (e.g. case-wise deletion or imputation) were applied as needed to ensure valid results.

## Variables with missing data in the reference dataset



The merged dataset includes 796 respondents, with a median household size of four people, and the most common household size category being 0–4 members. Respondents are geographically distributed across various provinces in Bulgaria, with the highest concentrations in Burgas (34%), Varna (23%), Dobrich (11%), and Sofia (8%), alongside not specified locations (8%).

The dataset is predominantly composed of women (84%), with men representing 16% of the sample. Regarding age distribution, 45% of respondents are aged 36–59, 43% are aged 60 years or above, and 11% are between 18–35 years.

On financial aspects, the median cash amount received is 900 BGN. Only 15% of respondents reported having saved part of their cash assistance. According to the data, 92% of respondents in 2025 indicated they received the cash when expected (data for 2024 was not available), and over 77% waited less than 15 minutes to receive it, with only <1% waiting more than two hours. These results suggest a relatively efficient disbursement process. Ownership of a bank account was reported by 43% of participants, whereas 51% reported not having one. Regarding productive assets, 8.5% of respondents declared owning items enabling income generation, while 4.4% reported having access to loans.

Protection indicators suggest that perceived insecurity is very low, with only 0.5% of respondents feeling unsafe. Satisfaction with cash assistance is remarkably high, with 98% of respondents expressing satisfaction. Positive impacts on living conditions were reported by 54%, and 58% indicated a reduction in stress.

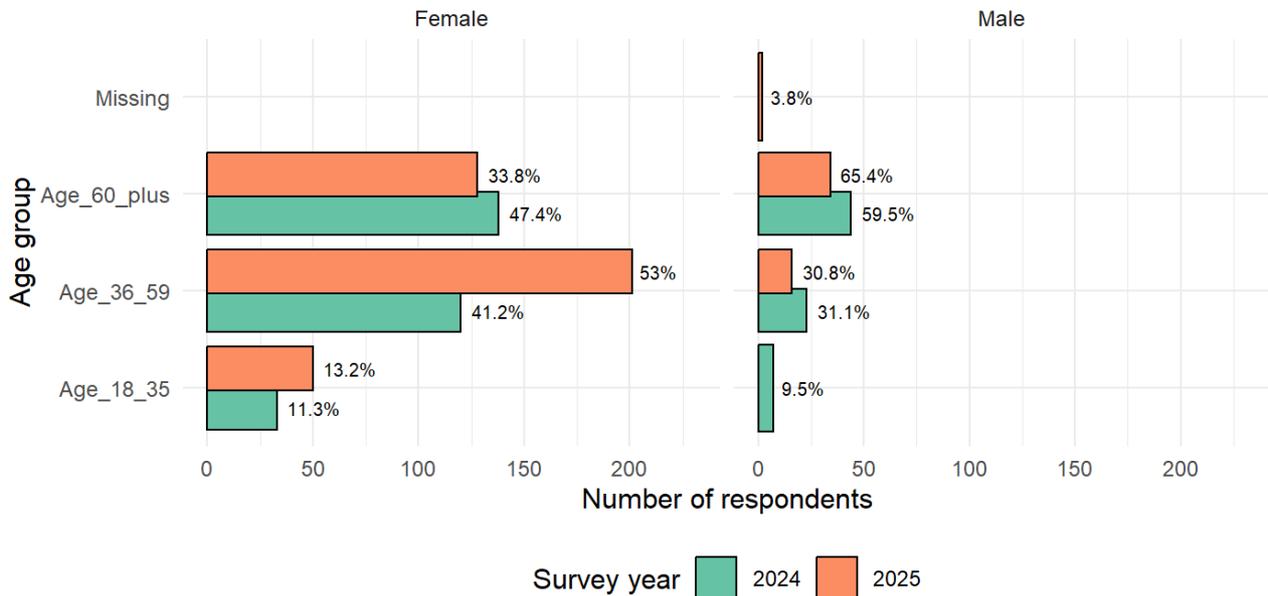
Nonetheless, only 20% of respondents reported being able to meet all their basic needs, highlighting persistent economic vulnerabilities. Furthermore, 87% reported using at least one negative coping strategy, signalling significant resilience challenges. Food insecurity was relatively low, affecting 4% of respondents.

These PDM 2024-2025 dataset illustrate overall positive perceptions about safety<sup>54</sup> and cash assistance, but also reveal ongoing challenges regarding sustainable livelihoods and meeting basic needs among the assisted population.

<sup>54</sup> The term “safety” refers specifically to respondents’ perceptions of security in the context of receiving, keeping, or spending the cash assistance, as captured by the PDM question: “Did you feel unsafe or at risk of harm receiving, keeping or spending the cash assistance?”

### 3.1.1 Age groups

Age group distribution by sex and survey year (source: PDM, UNHCR)  
Proportion of respondents by age group across years



The chart above displays the distribution of respondents by age group, disaggregated by sex and survey year. Across both years and genders, most respondents fall into the **36–59** and **60+** age groups, indicating an older population profile among those surveyed. Among **female respondents**, over half (53%) in 2025 were aged **36–59**, while in 2024 this figure was 41%. The share of **females aged 60+** was also substantial in both years (47% in 2024, 43.8% in 2025), suggesting sustained focus on older women.

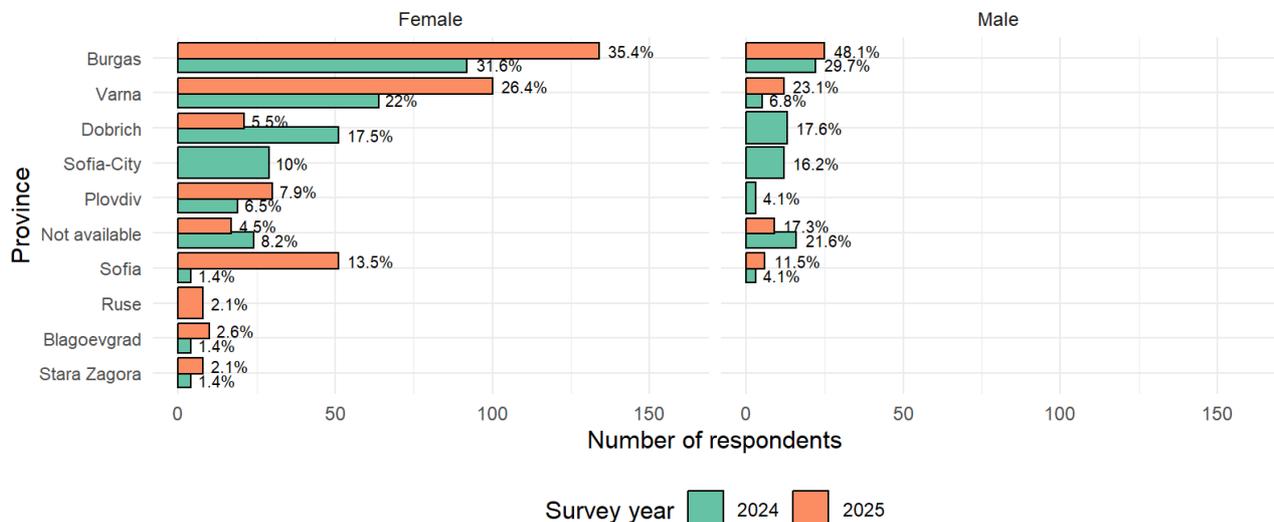
Among **male respondents**, the largest age group was those aged **60+**, accounting for **59.5%** in 2024 and **56.4%** in 2025. Younger males (aged 18–35) represent a small minority, making up only **9.5%** in 2024 and **5.9%** in 2025. The **36–59** age group is relatively stable over time for men, with around **30%** in both years.

These figures highlight a population profile where older adults—particularly older men—constitute a significant portion of cash assistance recipients. This demographic composition may influence programming needs, especially in relation to health, mobility, and accessibility of services.

### 3.1.2 Provinces

Province distribution by sex and survey year (source: PDM, UNHCR)

Proportion of respondents by location and year



The chart above presents the geographical distribution of respondents by province, disaggregated by sex and survey year. Most respondents were concentrated in Burgas, Varna, and Dobrich—urban areas located in northeastern and eastern Bulgaria along the Black Sea coast.

Among female respondents, Burgas was the most common province of residence, accounting for 31.6% in 2024 and increasing to 35.4% in 2025. Varna followed, although its share declined from 28.4% to 22% across the same period. Dobrich, Sofia-City, and Plovdiv also appeared among the main locations, while other provinces such as Blagoevgrad, Ruse, and Stara Zagora were less represented.

For male respondents, the concentration was even more pronounced. In 2025, nearly half (48.1%) of male respondents were in Burgas, compared to 29.7% in 2024. Varna and Dobrich followed, though at lower proportions than among women. The proportion of male respondents with missing location information decreased between survey rounds, indicating an improvement in geographic data completeness.

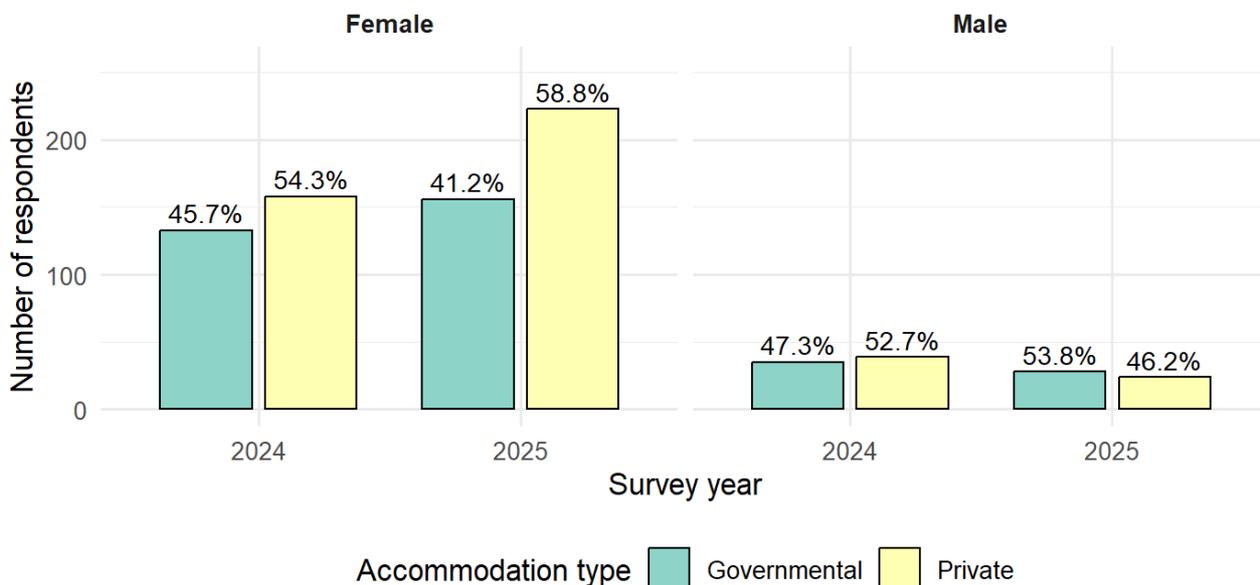
This spatial distribution is consistent with broader displacement patterns linked to the conflict in Ukraine. Burgas, Varna, and Dobrich are situated close to key land and maritime entry points, including the Durankulak border crossing in Dobrich Province. Their strategic position, combined with greater availability of housing, services, and humanitarian infrastructure, likely influenced settlement patterns among displaced persons.

Although nationality was not recorded in the dataset, the clustering of respondents in provinces closer to Ukraine provides indirect support for the assumption that the majority are of Ukrainian origin. The results highlight the relevance of geographically targeted assistance and reinforce the importance of adapting program delivery to regions with the highest concentration of displaced populations, particularly in coastal urban centres.

### 3.1.3 Accommodation types

Type of accommodations by sex and year (source: PDM, UNHCR)

Distribution of respondents by accommodation type (with percentages)



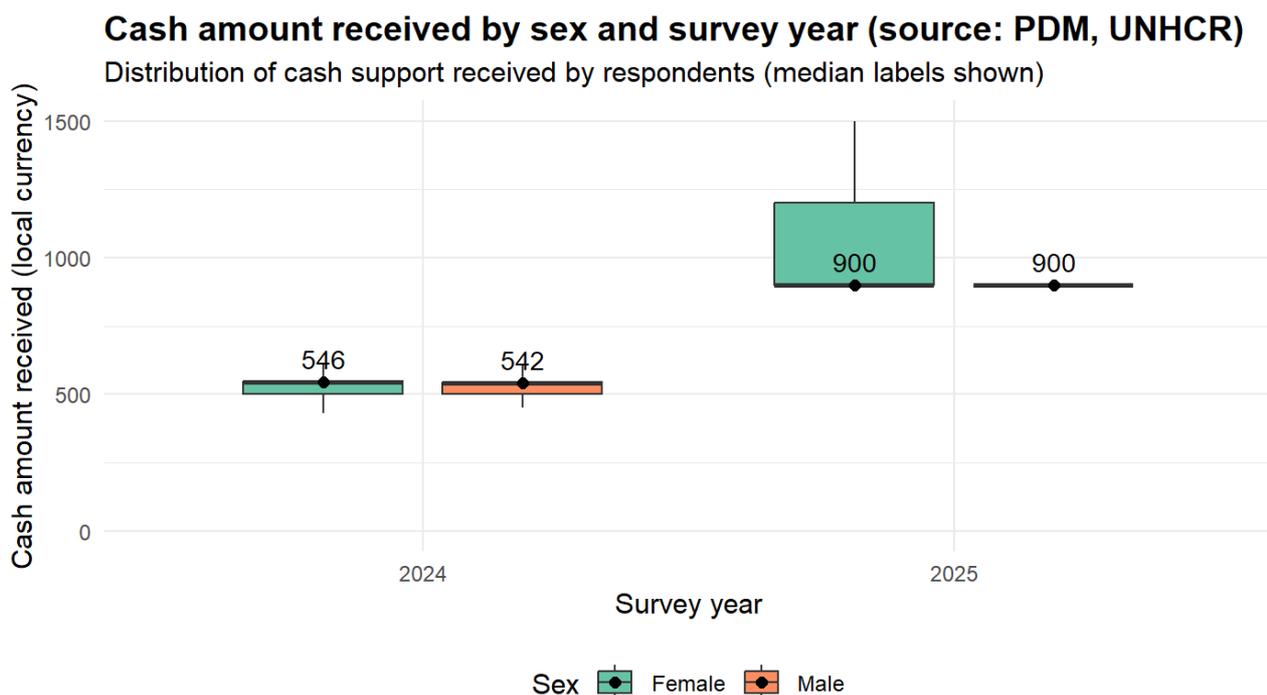
The bar chart above shows the distribution of accommodation types among respondents by sex and survey year (2024 and 2025). Two categories are considered: Governmental accommodation and Private accommodation.

Among female respondents, there is a clear trend towards increased use of private accommodation. In 2024, 54.3% of women lived in private housing, compared to 45.7% in governmental accommodation. This trend became even more pronounced in 2025, with 58.8% residing in private accommodation and only 41.2% relying on governmental housing.

For male respondents, patterns were more stable over time. In 2024, 52.7% of men lived in private accommodation and 47.3% in governmental accommodation. In 2025, a slight shift was observed, with 53.8% of males living in governmental accommodation and 46.2% in private housing.

The findings suggest that women are increasingly transitioning to private housing options, possibly reflecting improved self-reliance or different household support structures. In contrast, men's accommodation patterns remained relatively balanced between governmental and private housing across the two survey years.

### 3.1.4 Received cash amount



The boxplot above illustrates the distribution of cash support amounts received by respondents, disaggregated by sex and survey year (2024 and 2025).

In **2024**, the median cash support amount was similar for both sexes: **546** for women and **542** for men. The distributions were also quite tight, with relatively low variability across recipients, indicating that cash assistance was distributed consistently between male and female respondents during this period.

In contrast, in **2025**, the median amount received remained at **900** for both women and men. However, a noticeable increase in variability is observed among female respondents compared to males. The spread in the amounts received by women suggests greater heterogeneity in the cash assistance distributed in 2025, while cash assistance for men remained much more concentrated around the median value.

Overall, the results indicate that:

**Cash support amounts increased significantly** from 2024 to 2025 across both genders, rising from approximately 540–550 to 900 units of local currency.

**No substantial gender disparities** were detected in the median amounts received.

**Greater variability** in cash amounts among women in 2025 may reflect differentiated targeting, varying program conditions, or needs-based adjustments.

This finding is important for understanding trends in financial assistance, especially to ensure **equitable and consistent support** across gender groups.

## 4 Data analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the dataset compiled from the PDM 2024 and 2025 surveys, with a focus on key indicators related to cash assistance, economic resilience, protection, and information access. The analysis is disaggregated primarily by sex and year, with geographic comparisons by province. The selected indicators were harmonised into a clean analytical dataset (`indicator_subset`), facilitating comparative and regression-based exploration of respondent outcomes.

The first stage of the analysis involves summarising indicator values as percentages or medians, disaggregated by relevant demographic variables such as **sex, age group, province, and year**. These indicators include perceptions of safety, satisfaction with cash assistance, financial inclusion, and coping behaviours. Where applicable, continuous variables (e.g., **cash amount received**) are summarised using median values to reduce the influence of outliers.

Where differences are observed between groups or years, we test their **statistical significance** using parametric tests (e.g., t-tests for continuous variables) and non-parametric alternatives (e.g., Wilcoxon rank-sum tests, chi-square tests for proportions). These allow us to determine whether observed patterns are likely to reflect genuine differences rather than sampling variation.

Beyond descriptive comparisons, we explore the **determinants of key outcomes** using household-level regression models. These models help identify which factors—such as household size, age, financial behaviour, or receipt of information—influence key indicators like food insecurity, use of negative coping strategies, or improvements in living conditions.

The indicators selected for analysis cover several domains:

- **Cash assistance and livelihoods:** total cash received, savings behaviour, bank account ownership, access to loans, and possession of productive assets.
- **Protection and accessibility:** feelings of safety when spending or withdrawing cash, difficulties encountered, and need for help accessing assistance.
- **Outcomes of assistance:** perceived improvements in living conditions and stress levels, ability to meet basic needs, and use of negative coping strategies.
- **Expenditure behavior:** how cash was spent, including spending priorities and categories such as food, rent, health, education, and utilities.
- **Information and preferences:** additional information needs, preferred communication channels, and perceived safety in reporting complaints.
- **Demographic and geographic characteristics:** age, sex, province of residence, type of accommodation, and household size.

## 4.1 Indicators by sex

The table below summarises selected indicators for 2024 and 2025, disaggregated by sex, highlighting differences in perceptions, access, and outcomes.

**SUMMARY OF KEY INDICATORS BY SURVEY YEAR AND SEX**

Survey year	Sex	Saved any cash (%)	Have bank account (%)	Own productive assets (%)	Access to loans (%)	Feeling unsafe (%)	Satisfied with cash assistance (%)	Improved living conditions (%)	Reduced stress (%)	Meeting basic needs (%)	Used negative coping strategies (%)	Food insecure (%)
2024	Female	14.4	50.3	15.6	7.2	1.0	99.0	62.2	56.4	8.6	89.3	4.8
2024	Male	12.2	54.1	10.8	11.3	1.4	95.9	56.2	45.1	9.5	86.5	8.1
2025	Female	15.0	41.9	3.5	1.6	0.0	97.1	49.6	67.9	28.5	84.7	3.2
2025	Male	15.4	32.6	3.9	2.0	0.0	96.2	38.5	62.8	30.8	86.5	3.8
Total		14.6	45.8	8.7	4.5	0.5	97.6	54.1	61.0	19.6	86.7	4.3

Saving behavior shows relatively low rates overall. In 2024, around 14.4% of female and 12.2% of male respondents reported saving part of their cash assistance<sup>55</sup>. In 2025, this proportion remained stable, reaching 15% for females and 15.4% for males. This slight increase suggests modest improvements in financial resilience, but saving rates remain low across the board.

Financial inclusion, as measured by ownership of a bank account, declined between 2024 and 2025 for both sexes. Among females, ownership dropped from 50.3% in 2024 to 41.9% in 2025, while among males it fell from 54.1% to 32.6%. This decline may reflect broader challenges in maintaining formal financial access over time, particularly as emergency support mechanisms evolve.

Ownership of productive assets is also low. In 2024, 15.6% of females and 10.8% of males owned assets to generate income. These figures dropped significantly in 2025, to 3.5% for females and 3.9% for males. Similarly, access to loans was limited, with rates below 12% in all groups and declining further in 2025. Such patterns highlight persistent barriers to livelihood recovery and economic self-sufficiency.

Feeling unsafe when accessing or spending cash was extremely rare across both years, with less than 1% of respondents reporting this concern. This result is reassuring and suggests that the cash delivery mechanisms used were perceived as secure.

Satisfaction with the cash assistance remained high, although it slightly decreased between years. In 2024, 99% of female and 95.9% of male respondents reported being satisfied with the support received. In 2025, satisfaction remained high, at 97.1% for females and 96.2% for males.

Self-reported improvements in living conditions show a decline over time. In 2024, 62.2% of female respondents and 56.2% of males reported improved living conditions, but by 2025, this dropped to 49.6% and 38.5% respectively. Conversely, the proportion reporting reduced stress increased among both sexes, with 67.9% of females and 62.8% of males in 2025 saying they experienced reduced stress thanks to the cash assistance.

Meeting basic needs was a challenge for most respondents. In 2024, only around 8–9% of respondents reported meeting all basic needs. By 2025, the figure rose substantially to around 28–31% for both sexes. While this suggests some improvement, a majority still struggles to cover all essential expenditures.

Use of negative coping strategies—such as selling assets, reducing food consumption, or taking on debt—remained alarmingly high. In 2024, 89.3% of females and 86.5% of males resorted to such strategies, only slightly improving to 84.7% and 86.5% respectively in 2025. This persistent high level of negative coping underlines the ongoing economic vulnerability of households. Food insecurity levels were relatively low compared to other vulnerabilities. In 2024, 4.8% of females and 8.1% of males reported food insecurity, with a small improvement in 2025, falling to around 3–4% for both sexes.

The analysis highlights that while cash assistance has contributed to reducing stress and improving basic needs coverage over time, major vulnerabilities remain. Financial inclusion has deteriorated, with fewer respondents owning bank accounts in 2025 compared to 2024, and access to productive assets and credit remains extremely limited. High levels of negative coping strategies and the low ability to save any portion of the assistance indicate continued economic fragility. Although food insecurity levels are relatively low, broader livelihood stability remains precarious. Programmatic efforts should therefore prioritise strengthening economic resilience through financial inclusion initiatives, expanding access to productive assets and microcredit, and supporting more sustainable livelihoods to reduce reliance on harmful coping mechanisms. Maintaining the strong satisfaction levels with cash assistance delivery mechanisms will also be crucial for future interventions.

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<sup>55</sup> The current PDM form includes a binary question on whether respondents saved any portion of their cash assistance (F5: "Did you save any of the money?"), but does not explore the duration or intended purpose of those savings. To strengthen insights into financial behaviors and economic resilience, future iterations of the form could include follow-up questions such as: (i) "For how long did you manage to save the money?" with response options like less than 1 month, 1–3 months, or more than 3 months; and (ii) "What was the main purpose of the savings?" with options such as rent, education, health, emergencies, or business start-up. These additions would help assess the sustainability and strategic use of financial resources.

## 4.2 Indicators by age group

The table below summarizes key socio-economic and protection indicators by age group for the 2024 and 2025 PDM surveys. Important differences emerge across age cohorts.

**SUMMARY OF KEY INDICATORS BY YEAR AND AGE GROUP**

Year	Age group	Saved any cash (%)	Have bank account (%)	Own productive assets (%)	Access to loans (%)	Feeling unsafe (%)	Satisfied with cash assistance (%)	Improved living conditions (%)	Reduced stress (%)	Meeting basic needs (%)	Used negative coping strategies (%)	Food insecure (%)
2024	Age_18_35	5.00	52.50	7.50	7.89	0.0	92.50	60.00	72.50	12.50	87.50	7.50
2024	Age_36_59	11.19	45.07	16.43	10.37	1.4	98.60	60.99	54.61	8.39	86.71	6.99
2024	Age_60_plus	18.13	55.49	14.84	6.21	1.1	99.45	61.11	49.72	8.24	90.66	3.85
2025	Age_18_35	8.00	47.92	6.38	0.00	0.0	98.00	66.00	77.08	42.00	88.00	4.00
2025	Age_36_59	8.29	47.76	5.29	2.84	0.0	97.70	49.31	68.29	27.65	84.79	3.23
2025	Age_60_plus	25.93	27.21	0.62	0.62	0.0	95.68	40.62	62.04	25.93	83.95	3.09
2025	Missing	50.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.0	100.00	100.00	100.00	50.00	100.00	0.00
Grand Total		14.57	45.81	8.72	4.53	0.5	97.61	54.05	61.04	19.60	86.68	4.27

Savings behavior varies substantially with age. Younger respondents (18–35 years) reported the lowest savings rates, with only 5% saving cash in 2024 and 8% in 2025. By contrast, respondents aged 60 and above had significantly higher savings rates, particularly in 2025 (25.9%).

Access to formal financial systems, measured through bank account ownership, was higher among the 60+ group (55.5% in 2024), but dropped sharply in 2025 (27.2%). Meanwhile, the 18–35 and 36–59 age groups maintained relatively stable bank ownership rates around 48% across both years. The older cohort's decline may reflect economic vulnerability or reporting differences.

Ownership of productive assets followed a similar pattern, with higher rates among middle-aged adults (36–59) in 2024 (16.4%), but a marked decline across all groups in 2025. Particularly among the 60+ group, productive asset ownership dropped to almost negligible levels (0.6%).

Feelings of insecurity were very low across all age groups and both years, with almost no respondents reporting feeling unsafe while accessing or spending cash.

Satisfaction with cash assistance remained extremely high across all groups and years, generally above 95%, with no major discrepancies.

Reported improvements in living conditions were highest among younger respondents (18–35), reaching 66% in 2025, compared to 40.6% for the 60+ group. Similarly, reductions in stress were more commonly reported by the youngest cohort (77.1% in 2025), whereas older respondents showed more moderate improvements.

Meeting basic needs showed significant disparities across age groups. In 2025, 42% of the 18–35 group reported meeting all basic needs, compared to only 25.9% among those aged 60+. This suggests that younger households may have fared relatively better in economic terms, although overall vulnerability remains substantial across all groups.

The use of negative coping strategies remained worryingly high across age groups, particularly among the younger cohort in 2025 (88%), indicating ongoing economic pressures despite improvements in some wellbeing indicators.

Food insecurity was relatively low in all groups, with slightly better outcomes for the 60+ population (only 3–4% reported food insecurity across both years).

These findings point to notable age-related patterns: while younger respondents tend to report greater improvements in living conditions and stress reduction, they also exhibit persistent economic fragility through lower savings and continued reliance on negative coping mechanisms. Older respondents, on the other hand, show worrying signs of economic exclusion, particularly in terms of banking access and asset ownership, requiring closer monitoring and targeted support interventions.

### 4.3 Indicators by province/district

The table below summarizes key indicators by province for the 2024 and 2025 survey years. The analysis highlights marked geographical differences in economic resilience, protection outcomes, and basic needs fulfilment among respondents.

**SUMMARY OF KEY INDICATORS BY YEAR AND PROVINCE**

Year	Province/District	Saved any cash (%)	Have bank account (%)	Own productive assets (%)	Access to loans (%)	Feeling unsafe (%)	Satisfied with cash assistance (%)	Improved living conditions (%)	Reduced stress (%)	Meeting basic needs (%)	Used negative coping strategies (%)	Food insecure (%)
2024	Blagoevgrad	25.00	25.00	0.00	25.00	0.00	100.00	75.00	50.00	25.00	75.00	0.00
2024	Burgas	9.65	44.25	6.14	6.31	1.75	98.25	55.26	49.56	7.02	87.72	5.26
2024	Dobrich	29.69	42.19	67.74	1.61	0.00	100.00	70.49	62.90	7.81	100.00	0.00
2024	Not available	5.00	65.00	0.00	11.43	0.00	97.50	71.79	68.42	5.00	85.00	12.50
2024	Plovdiv	13.64	45.45	9.09	14.29	0.00	100.00	68.18	54.55	13.64	95.45	9.09
2024	Sofia	28.57	42.86	0.00	14.29	0.00	100.00	57.14	28.57	14.29	57.14	14.29
2024	Sofia-City	12.20	68.29	0.00	12.82	0.00	92.68	48.78	36.59	7.32	87.80	12.20
2024	Stara Zagora	0.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	25.00	100.00	25.00	25.00	0.00	100.00	0.00
2024	Varna	11.59	56.52	2.90	8.96	1.45	100.00	62.32	60.87	13.04	84.06	1.45
2025	Blagoevgrad	30.00	50.00	0.00	10.00	0.00	100.00	80.00	90.00	60.00	80.00	0.00
2025	Burgas	18.87	31.91	2.00	1.27	0.00	94.97	35.67	65.52	21.38	84.91	3.14
2025	Dobrich	19.05	61.11	4.76	10.53	0.00	100.00	19.05	41.18	14.29	100.00	9.52
2025	Not available	3.85	34.62	15.38	0.00	0.00	100.00	61.54	84.00	30.77	80.77	3.85
2025	Plovdiv	3.33	43.33	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	93.33	93.33	56.67	86.67	0.00
2025	Ruse	12.50	66.67	37.50	0.00	0.00	100.00	37.50	25.00	0.00	100.00	12.50
2025	Sofia	15.79	41.30	1.82	1.79	0.00	98.25	54.39	60.00	35.09	73.68	1.75

Year	Province/District	Saved any cash (%)	Have bank account (%)	Own productive assets (%)	Access to loans (%)	Feeling unsafe (%)	Satisfied with cash assistance (%)	Improved living conditions (%)	Reduced stress (%)	Meeting basic needs (%)	Used negative coping strategies (%)	Food insecure (%)
2025	Stara Zagora	12.50	62.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	87.50	50.00	62.50	25.00	87.50	12.50
2025	Varna	13.39	46.08	2.70	0.91	0.00	97.32	50.89	67.68	30.36	87.50	2.68
Grand Total		14.57	45.81	8.72	4.53	0.50	97.61	54.05	61.04	19.60	86.68	4.27

Savings rates show considerable variation by province. In 2024, respondents in Dobrich reported a high proportion of savings (29.7%), compared to much lower rates in Burgas (9.7%) and Varna (11.6%). In 2025, savings improved in several provinces, notably Blagoevgrad (30%) and Burgas (18.9%), while in Plovdiv, savings dropped to just 3.3%.

Access to formal financial systems also varies geographically. Sofia-City had the highest share of respondents with a bank account in 2024 (68.3%), while Burgas and Dobrich had lower but still moderate rates (44–56%). In 2025, bank account ownership fell in many provinces, especially in Burgas (31.9%) and Varna (46.1%), suggesting growing financial exclusion in key locations.

Ownership of productive assets was especially variable. Dobrich respondents showed a high percentage in 2024 (67.7%), but most provinces reported much lower figures, and by 2025, productive asset ownership declined sharply across the board.

Feelings of insecurity remained very low, with virtually no respondents across any province reporting feeling unsafe while accessing or spending cash.

Satisfaction with cash assistance was consistently high, with nearly all provinces reporting satisfaction rates above 95%, except for a slight decline in Burgas in 2025 (95%).

Improvements in living conditions varied substantially. In 2024, Dobrich (70.5%) and Not Available (71.8%) areas showed the highest levels of reported improvement, while Sofia-City respondents reported lower improvements (48.8%). In 2025, a significant drop was observed in Burgas (35.7%) and Dobrich (19.1%), suggesting potential worsening living conditions for some areas.

Stress reduction mirrored these patterns: provinces like Blagoevgrad (90%) and Plovdiv (93.3%) reported significant stress reductions in 2025, compared to lower improvements in places like Ruse (25%).

Meeting basic needs remained a challenge. In 2025, respondents in Plovdiv (56.7%) and Blagoevgrad (60%) reported relatively better ability to meet basic needs, while Burgas and Varna stayed around 21–30%.

The use of negative coping strategies remained widespread but high in many locations, particularly in Dobrich, where 100% of respondents resorted to coping mechanisms in both years.

Food insecurity levels were generally low across provinces, but Dobrich and Stara Zagora saw slight increases in 2025, reaching 9–12%.

Although the dataset does not explicitly capture nationality, the high concentration of respondents in provinces such as Burgas, Varna, and Dobrich—located near the Black Sea coast and along key arrival routes from Ukraine—aligns with known patterns of Ukrainian displacement following the escalation of the war in 2022. This geographical clustering, combined with proximity to entry points like the Durankulak border crossing, strongly suggests that a substantial proportion of respondents may indeed be Ukrainian nationals.

Future rounds of data collection would benefit from explicitly including nationality or origin questions, allowing for more precise targeting of assistance and a deeper understanding of protection risks and service needs across different population groups.

## 4.4 Indicators by type of accommodation

The table below presents key outcome indicators for respondents living in different types of accommodation across the 2024 and 2025 survey years. The analysis highlights important differences between individuals hosted in government-supported accommodation and those living in private accommodation not under government management.

**SUMMARY OF KEY INDICATORS BY YEAR AND ACCOMMODATION TYPE**

Year	Accommodation Type	Saved any cash (%)	Have bank account (%)	Own productive assets (%)	Access to loans (%)	Feeling unsafe (%)	Satisfied with cash assistance (%)	Improved living conditions (%)	Reduced stress (%)	Meeting basic needs (%)	Used negative coping strategies (%)	Food insecure (%)
2024	Governmental	17.86	46.43	14.97	7.93	0.60	99.40	63.86	53.61	12.50	87.50	2.98
2024	Private	10.66	55.10	14.36	8.06	1.52	97.46	58.46	54.64	5.58	89.85	7.61
2025	Governmental	19.57	28.40	1.70	1.65	0.00	95.11	38.25	64.56	24.46	88.04	4.35
2025	Private	11.74	49.78	4.96	1.67	0.00	98.38	55.69	69.23	31.98	82.59	2.43
Grand Total		14.57	45.81	8.72	4.53	0.50	97.61	54.05	61.04	19.60	86.68	4.27

Savings behavior was generally higher among those in government-supported housing, particularly in 2025 (19.6% saved cash compared to 11.7% among those in private accommodation). This pattern may reflect lower living costs or greater access to support services in government-managed sites.

Access to formal financial systems showed notable differences. Respondents living in private accommodation reported higher levels of bank account ownership across both years (55.1% in 2024 and 49.8% in 2025) compared to those in government-supported facilities (46.4% in 2024 and 28.4% in 2025). This suggests that private accommodation may be associated with better financial inclusion and administrative independence.

Ownership of productive assets initially appeared similar between the two groups in 2024 (around 14–15%) but declined sharply by 2025, particularly among those in government accommodation, where only 1.7% reported ownership.

Feelings of insecurity while accessing or spending cash remained low across all groups and years, with no respondents reporting insecurity in 2025.

Satisfaction with cash assistance remained very high among all groups but was slightly lower among those in government-supported housing in 2025 (95.1% compared to 98.4% in private accommodation).

Improvements in living conditions and reductions in stress varied over time. In 2024, those in government accommodation reported better improvements in living conditions (63.9%) compared to those in private accommodation (58.5%). However, by 2025, this trend reversed, with only 38.3% of respondents in government accommodation reporting improvements compared to 55.7% among those in private accommodation. Similarly, reductions in stress were consistently higher among residents of private accommodation.

Meeting basic needs was better among those in private accommodation. In 2025, 32.0% of respondents living in private accommodation reported meeting their basic needs, compared to 24.5% among those in government-supported housing.

The use of negative coping strategies remained high across both groups but showed slight improvement among those in private accommodation in 2025 (82.6% compared to 88.0% in government sites).

Food insecurity levels were low across all groups, though slightly higher among private accommodation residents in 2024 (7.6%) compared to those in government-supported accommodation (3.0%). By 2025, the gap had narrowed.

These findings suggest that respondents living in private accommodations tend to fare slightly better in terms of financial inclusion, stress reduction, and ability to meet basic needs, while those in government-supported accommodation may experience greater vulnerability over time. Targeted support strategies may be needed to address these disparities.

## 4.5 Statistical tests

This section explores whether there are significant differences in key indicators between the 2024 and 2025 surveys. Both the t-test and the Wilcoxon rank-sum test are applied to examine differences in indicator values across years. The t-test assesses differences in means under the assumption of normality, while the Wilcoxon test provides a non-parametric alternative that is more robust when this assumption is violated.

However, an **important methodological limitation** must be highlighted at the outset. During the inception phase of the evaluation, it became clear that the survey did not use a formal or reproducible random sampling procedure. UNHCR colleagues responsible for the survey indicated that respondents were manually selected without a documented, coded method, and no sampling frame or randomization process was systematically applied. This lack of a reproducible and transparent sampling strategy significantly affects the ability to objectively assess the representativeness and comparability of the datasets across years.

In rigorous survey practice, the use of coded and reproducible random sampling — for instance, through scripting with `set.seed()` functions or equivalent methods — is critical. Such an approach allows for the verification, replication, and validation of the sampling process. It reduces the risk of selection biases and human error inherent to manual procedures, thereby enhancing the scientific credibility of findings. Without this documentation, it is impossible to guarantee that the samples collected in 2024 and 2025 are truly representative of the target population or that observed differences reflect real trends rather than sampling artifacts.

Given these limitations, the statistical tests performed here assume, for analytical purposes, that the available samples approximate an unbiased random sample. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recommend that future surveys integrate systematic, coded sampling designs and document them thoroughly to strengthen the reliability, comparability, and credibility of the data.

### 4.5.1 Statistical differences between 2024 and 2025

Statistical tests were conducted to examine differences in key outcome indicators between respondents surveyed in 2024 and 2025. Both **t-tests** and **Wilcoxon rank-sum tests** were employed to account for potential deviations from normality in the distribution of the indicators.

Several indicators demonstrated statistically significant differences between the two years:

- **Access to financial services** showed notable changes. The proportion of respondents **with a bank account** significantly declined from 2024 to 2025 ( $p = 0.005$ ). Similarly, **ownership of productive assets** ( $p < 0.001$ ) and **access to loans** ( $p < 0.001$ ) also decreased significantly over time, suggesting potential challenges in sustaining financial inclusion among the target population.
- **Perception of safety** when accessing or spending cash assistance saw a statistically significant improvement ( $p = 0.029$ ), although baseline rates of feeling unsafe were already very low.
- In terms of **living conditions**, respondents in 2025 were significantly less likely to report **improved living conditions** compared to 2024 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a potential deterioration in perceived quality of life.
- **Stress levels** also changed notably. In 2025, a higher proportion of respondents reported a **reduction in stress** compared to 2024 ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting some psychological improvements despite broader living condition challenges.

- A statistically significant change was observed in **meeting basic needs** ( $p < 0.001$ ). Respondents in 2025 were less likely to report that they could fully meet their essential needs, indicating increased economic vulnerability.

On the other hand, some indicators did not show significant differences across years:

- **Savings behavior** (whether respondents saved any portion of their cash assistance), **satisfaction with the cash assistance received**, **use of negative coping strategies**, and **food insecurity** did not change significantly between 2024 and 2025 ( $p$ -values  $> 0.05$ ).

These findings suggest a **mixed pattern**: while some aspects of financial resilience and perceived safety improved, critical areas such as financial inclusion, ability to meet basic needs, and quality of living conditions worsened over time. These trends emphasize the need to adapt programming to reinforce economic resilience and maintain protection outcomes.

### STATISTICAL TESTS FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 2024 AND 2025

Variable	Test	Statistic	P-value
kpi_saved_any_cash	T-test	-0.442	0.658
kpi_saved_any_cash	Wilcoxon	77785.500	0.659
kpi_have_bank_account	T-test	2.833	0.005
kpi_have_bank_account	Wilcoxon	77669.000	0.005
kpi_have_productive_assets	T-test	5.335	0.000
kpi_have_productive_assets	Wilcoxon	84020.000	0.000
kpi_access_loans	T-test	4.013	0.000
kpi_access_loans	Wilcoxon	78533.000	0.000
kpi_feeling_unsafe	T-test	2.008	0.045
kpi_feeling_unsafe	Wilcoxon	79519.500	0.029
kpi_satisfied_cash_assistance	T-test	1.294	0.196
kpi_satisfied_cash_assistance	Wilcoxon	79737.000	0.207
kpi_improved_living_conditions	T-test	3.597	0.000
kpi_improved_living_conditions	Wilcoxon	87261.000	0.000
kpi_reduced_stress	T-test	-3.722	0.000
kpi_reduced_stress	Wilcoxon	61260.000	0.000
kpi_meet_basic_needs	T-test	-7.580	0.000
kpi_meet_basic_needs	Wilcoxon	62923.500	0.000
kpi_used_negative_coping	T-test	1.609	0.108
kpi_used_negative_coping	Wilcoxon	81684.500	0.112
kpi_food_insecure	T-test	1.520	0.129
kpi_food_insecure	Wilcoxon	80412.500	0.121

## 4.5.2 Statistical differences between female and male respondents

Statistical tests were conducted to compare key indicators between female and male respondents. Both **t-tests** and **Wilcoxon rank-sum tests** were used to verify findings and account for non-normal distributions where necessary.

Overall, the analysis revealed very few statistically significant differences between women and men:

- **Reduction in stress** was the only indicator showing a statistically significant difference by sex (Wilcoxon  $p = 0.027$ ; t-test  $p = 0.033$ ). Women reported slightly greater improvements in stress levels compared to men. This may reflect differing coping mechanisms or access to psychosocial support among female respondents.
- For all other indicators—including **savings behavior, bank account ownership, ownership of productive assets, access to loans, feelings of safety, satisfaction with cash assistance, improvements in living conditions, meeting basic needs, use of negative coping strategies, and food security** — no statistically significant differences were found between women and men (all  $p$ -values  $> 0.05$ ).

These findings suggest that, within the surveyed population, gender-based disparities in outcomes are limited across most domains measured. However, it is important to interpret this cautiously. The absence of statistically significant differences does not imply that gender dynamics are unimportant, but rather that they were not detectable in this sample for these specific indicators. Continued attention to gender issues remains critical, particularly given known vulnerabilities affecting displaced women and girls globally.

### STATISTICAL TESTS FOR DIFFERENCES BY SEX (FEMALE VS MALE)

Variable	Test	Statistic	P-value
kpi_saved_any_cash	T-test	0.383	0.702
kpi_saved_any_cash	Wilcoxon	42752.000	0.708
kpi_have_bank_account	T-test	-0.082	0.935
kpi_have_bank_account	Wilcoxon	36936.000	0.934
kpi_have_productive_assets	T-test	0.319	0.750
kpi_have_productive_assets	Wilcoxon	41287.500	0.756
kpi_access_loans	T-test	-1.352	0.178
kpi_access_loans	Wilcoxon	38311.000	0.100
kpi_feeling_unsafe	T-test	-0.414	0.679
kpi_feeling_unsafe	Wilcoxon	42064.000	0.615
kpi_satisfied_cash_assistance	T-test	1.026	0.307
kpi_satisfied_cash_assistance	Wilcoxon	43003.000	0.205
kpi_improved_living_conditions	T-test	1.277	0.203
kpi_improved_living_conditions	Wilcoxon	44155.000	0.199
kpi_reduced_stress	T-test	2.155	0.033

Variable	Test	Statistic	P-value
kpi_reduced_stress	Wilcoxon	40345.000	0.027
kpi_meet_basic_needs	T-test	0.422	0.674
kpi_meet_basic_needs	Wilcoxon	42884.000	0.679
kpi_used_negative_coping	T-test	0.063	0.950
kpi_used_negative_coping	Wilcoxon	42298.000	0.950
kpi_food_insecure	T-test	-1.071	0.286
kpi_food_insecure	Wilcoxon	41168.000	0.209

### 4.5.3 Statistical differences between governmental and private accommodation types

Statistical tests were conducted to assess whether living in **governmental accommodation** or **private accommodation** was associated with differences in key outcome indicators. Both **t-tests** and **Wilcoxon rank-sum tests** were used to ensure robustness of findings.

The results identified a few important differences:

- **Saving behavior:** Respondents living in governmental accommodation were significantly more likely to report saving part of their cash assistance compared to those in private accommodation (Wilcoxon  $p = 0.003$ ; t-test  $p = 0.004$ ). This could suggest greater financial resilience or fewer immediate expenditures among those living under governmental support structures.
- **Bank account ownership:** A significant difference was observed in financial inclusion. Those in private accommodation were much more likely to have a bank account than those living in governmental facilities (Wilcoxon  $p < 0.001$ ; t-test  $p < 0.001$ ). This may reflect differences in socio-economic profiles or better access to financial services among individuals securing private housing.
- For other indicators—including **ownership of productive assets, access to loans, feeling unsafe, satisfaction with cash assistance, improved living conditions, reduced stress, meeting basic needs, use of negative coping strategies, and food insecurity**—there were no statistically significant differences between respondents in governmental versus private accommodation (all  $p$ -values  $> 0.05$ ).

These findings highlight that **accommodation type** is associated with key aspects of financial resilience and financial inclusion, although it appears to have limited influence on broader protection and well-being outcomes. Still, housing conditions may indirectly shape economic opportunities, emphasizing the need to consider accommodation dynamics when designing livelihoods and financial inclusion interventions.

#### STATISTICAL TESTS FOR DIFFERENCES BY ACCOMMODATION TYPE (GOVERNMENTAL VS PRIVATE HOUSING)

Variable	Test	Statistic	P-value
kpi_saved_any_cash	T-test	2.916	0.004
kpi_saved_any_cash	Wilcoxon	83996.000	0.003

Variable	Test	Statistic	P-value
kpi_have_bank_account	T-test	-4.061	0.000
kpi_have_bank_account	Wilcoxon	59267.000	0.000
kpi_have_productive_assets	T-test	-0.489	0.625
kpi_have_productive_assets	Wilcoxon	74203.500	0.627
kpi_access_loans	T-test	0.109	0.913
kpi_access_loans	Wilcoxon	73819.000	0.913
kpi_feeling_unsafe	T-test	-0.813	0.417
kpi_feeling_unsafe	Wilcoxon	77838.000	0.438
kpi_satisfied_cash_assistance	T-test	-0.732	0.464
kpi_satisfied_cash_assistance	Wilcoxon	77508.000	0.455
kpi_improved_living_conditions	T-test	-1.816	0.070
kpi_improved_living_conditions	Wilcoxon	71963.000	0.069
kpi_reduced_stress	T-test	-1.018	0.309
kpi_reduced_stress	Wilcoxon	66794.000	0.308
kpi_meet_basic_needs	T-test	-0.538	0.591
kpi_meet_basic_needs	Wilcoxon	76956.000	0.592
kpi_used_negative_coping	T-test	0.819	0.413
kpi_used_negative_coping	Wilcoxon	79686.000	0.416
kpi_food_insecure	T-test	-0.727	0.467
kpi_food_insecure	Wilcoxon	77334.000	0.473

#### 4.5.4 Key implications of statistical tests for programming

The statistical analyses reveal important insights that can guide future programming to enhance the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of assistance efforts.

First, the deterioration in financial inclusion indicators—such as declining bank account ownership, productive asset ownership, and access to loans—between 2024 and 2025 suggests that economic resilience among cash recipients may be weakening over time. This points to a critical need for **complementary interventions that promote financial inclusion**, such as facilitating access to banking services, supporting livelihoods opportunities, and offering financial literacy programs. Reinforcing these areas would help ensure that cash assistance translates into longer-term economic stability.

Second, the findings show a significant **decline in respondents' ability to meet basic needs** between 2024 and 2025, despite improvements in perceived stress levels. This signals that while psychosocial well-being may have improved slightly, **economic vulnerability remains a persistent and growing concern**. Programs should continue to prioritize addressing basic needs, while also exploring ways to stabilize income sources and prevent negative coping mechanisms.

Third, although **few gender-based differences** were detected in the key outcome indicators, the observed improvement in stress reduction among women highlights the importance of maintaining **gender-sensitive programming**. Even when major gaps are not statistically evident, displaced women and girls often face specific risks and barriers that require targeted support, including in the areas of protection, livelihoods, and psychosocial care.

Fourth, **accommodation type** emerges as a meaningful differentiator. Respondents living in governmental housing reported higher rates of saving cash assistance but were significantly less likely to own a bank account compared to those in private accommodation. These results underscore the need to **design tailored financial inclusion strategies** for those in governmental facilities, where barriers to accessing formal financial systems might be higher.

Finally, the lack of statistically significant differences across many indicators does not negate the importance of continuous monitoring and disaggregated analysis. Rather, it reinforces the value of maintaining **robust, representative, and well-documented sampling methods** in future surveys to ensure that subtle or emerging vulnerabilities are not overlooked. Future programming and evaluations would benefit greatly from the systematic use of transparent, reproducible sampling procedures, increasing the reliability and credibility of the data collected.

Overall, the findings point toward the necessity of **strengthening economic resilience, expanding financial inclusion, and maintaining a strong focus on protection and gender dynamics** to ensure that cash assistance programs effectively contribute to longer-term stability and well-being among displaced populations.

## 4.6 Regression Analysis at Household Level

This chapter presents multivariate analyses to explore the household-level factors associated with key outcome indicators among recipients of cash assistance in Bulgaria.

Given the program's strategic focus on **economic resilience, housing stability, meeting basic needs, and protection**, five key outcome indicators were selected for detailed analysis:

- **Financial inclusion** (kpi\_have\_bank\_account)
- **Reduction in stress** (kpi\_reduced\_stress)
- Ability to meet basic needs (kpi\_meet\_basic\_needs)
- Use of negative coping strategies (kpi\_used\_negative\_coping)
- **Improved living conditions** (kpi\_improved\_living\_conditions)

The analytical approach combines Random Forest variable selection, Propensity Score Matching (PSM), and logistic regression modeling, with oversampling applied where necessary to address class imbalances and improve predictive power.

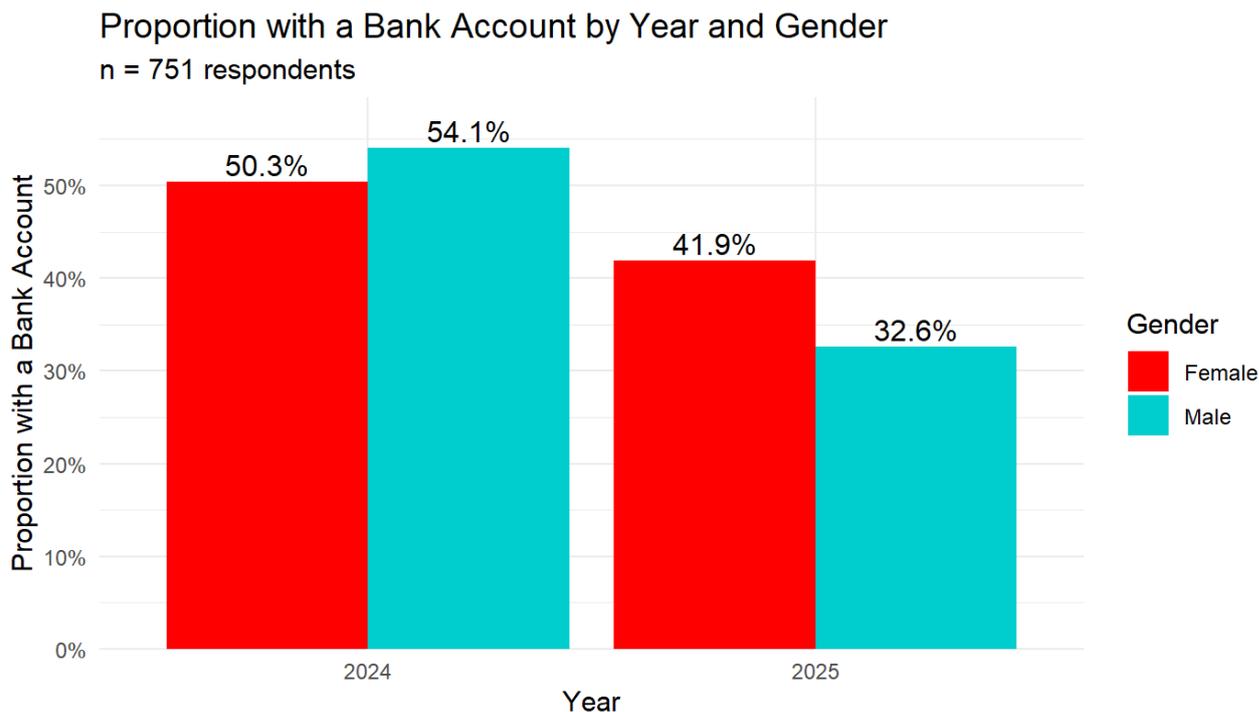
It is important to acknowledge that **UNHCR's sampling approach was not documented through a coded, reproducible method**, and the sample was selected manually without use of a pseudo-random generator. As a result, we cannot verify that the data represents an unbiased or statistically comparable sample across years or groups. This limits the generalizability of statistical inferences and underscores the need for future survey rounds to adopt **coded, reproducible sampling procedures**, including tools such as `set.seed()` in R, to enhance transparency and analytical rigor.

Despite these constraints, the regression models provide insight into **associations** (rather than causal effects) between key demographic or structural characteristics and reported outcomes. The results are intended to support **evidence-informed programming** and guide future efforts

to reinforce resilience, ensure housing adequacy, and enhance protection outcomes among displaced and stateless populations in Bulgaria.

### 4.6.1 Financial Inclusion

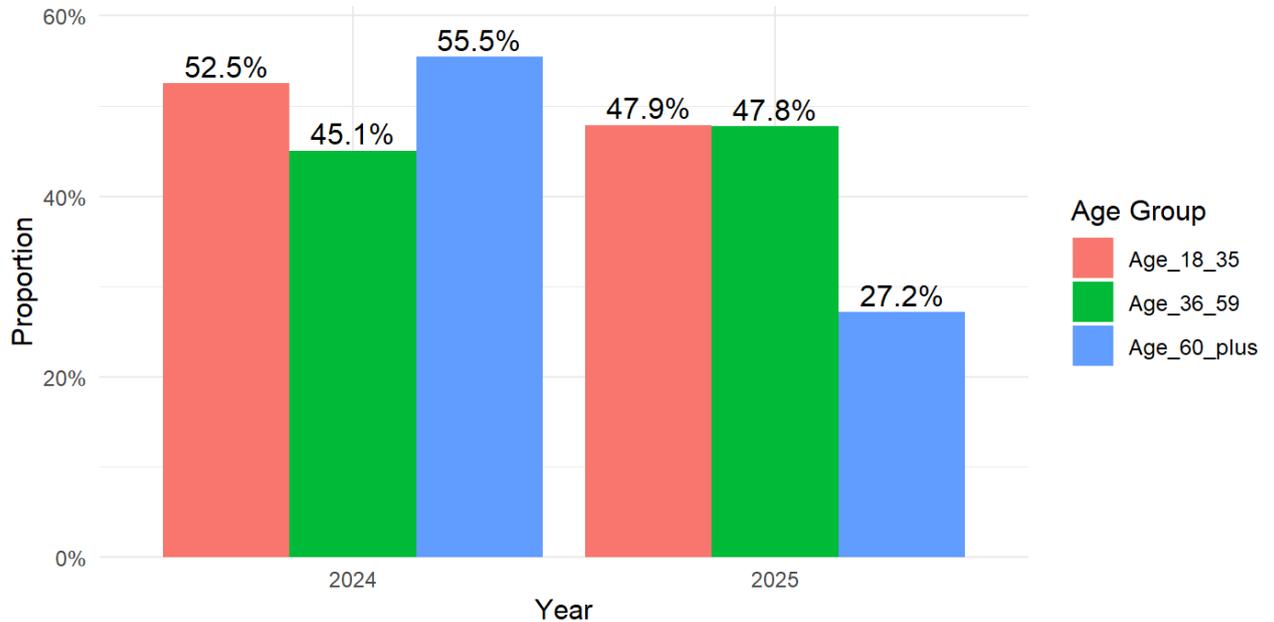
This section presents the analysis of household-level data related to financial inclusion, using the indicator `kpi_have_bank_account`, which reflects whether respondents report having an account at a bank or other financial institution. This is a key proxy for economic inclusion and resilience. The graph below illustrates the proportion of respondents with a financial account, disaggregated by sex and year (2024 and 2025).



The graph above illustrates the proportion of respondents who reported having a bank account, disaggregated by gender and year. In 2024, just over half of both female (50.3%) and male (54.1%) respondents indicated financial inclusion through bank account ownership. However, by 2025, these proportions declined, especially among men, with only 32.6% reporting access to a bank account, compared to 41.9% among women. While the gap between genders narrowed, this shift reflects a broader reduction in financial inclusion between the two survey rounds. The overall drop may suggest reduced access to formal financial services, possibly linked to documentation, mobility constraints, or declining engagement with the banking sector among displaced populations. These trends highlight the importance of investigating the drivers behind financial exclusion to inform more inclusive cash-based interventions.

## Proportion with a Bank Account by Year and Age Group

n = 751 respondents



The graph above shows the proportion of respondents who reported having a bank account, disaggregated by age group and year. In 2024, respondents aged 60 and above had the highest reported access to financial accounts (55.5%), followed closely by the youngest age group 18–35 (52.5%), while the 36–59 group reported the lowest (45.1%). However, by 2025, this pattern changed: the proportions converged for the 18–35 and 36–59 groups, both around 47.8%, while the share among older respondents dropped sharply to 27.2%. This drop among older individuals in 2025 may indicate a deterioration in financial inclusion for this group, possibly due to access constraints or changing support mechanisms. The overall decline across age groups suggests a broader reduction in access to financial services between the two survey years.

Call:

```
randomForest(formula = kpi_have_bank_account ~ ., data = rf_data %>%
drop_na(kpi_have_bank_account) %>% filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = 0.2) %>%
na.omit() %>% select(-have_bank_account), importance = TRUE)
```

Type of random forest: classification

Number of trees: 500

No. of variables tried at each split: 11

OOB estimate of error rate: 29.62%

Confusion matrix:

Yes No class.error

Yes 191 85 0.3079710

No 96 239 0.2865672

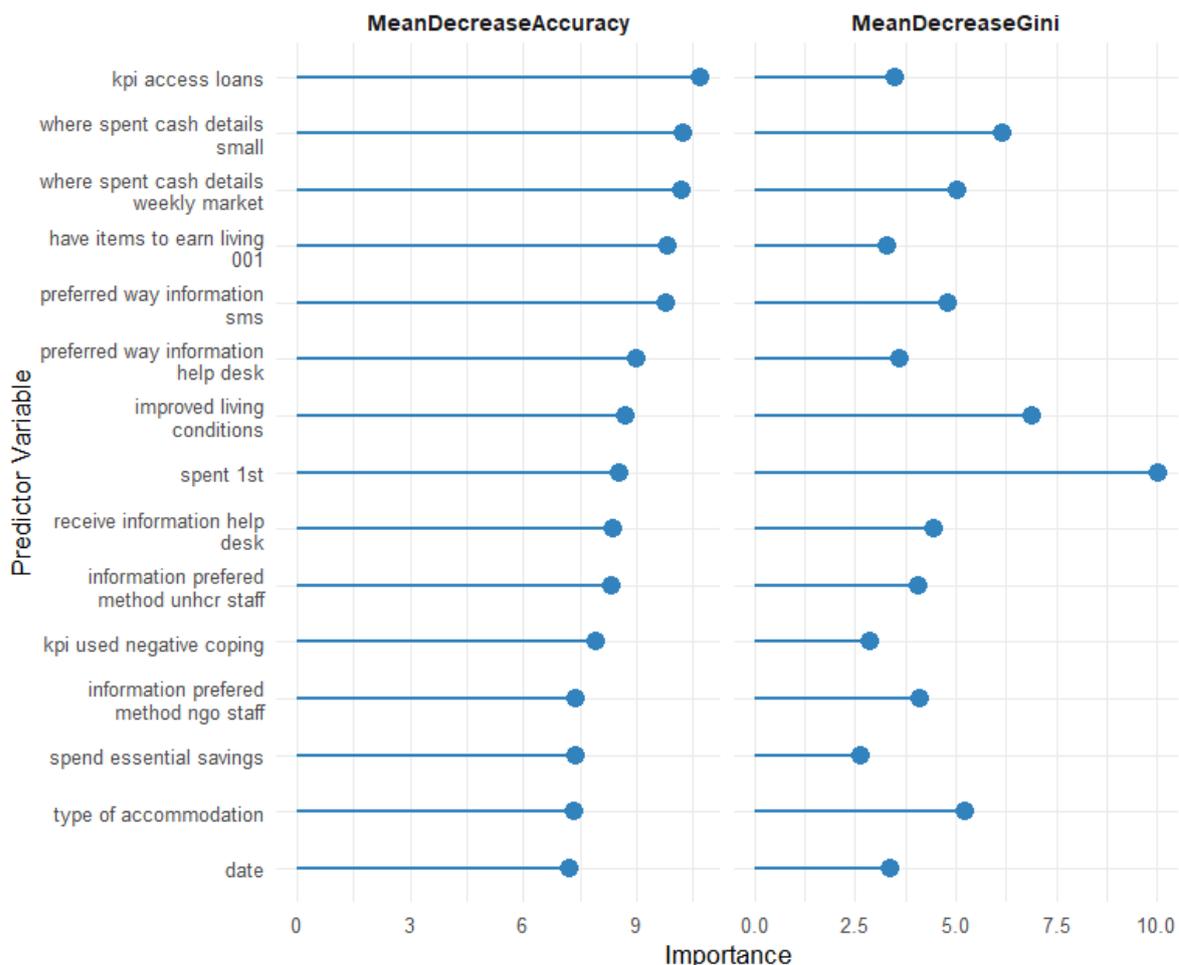
A random forest model was trained to classify the binary variable `kpi_have_bank_account`, which indicates whether a respondent has an account at a bank or financial institution. The model was built using **500 trees**, with **11 variables** considered at each split.

The **out-of-bag (OOB) error rate** was **29.6%**, indicating that the model correctly classifies approximately 70% of cases overall. While this shows moderate predictive performance, there is room for improvement in capturing the full complexity of factors associated with financial inclusion.

The **confusion matrix** reveals that the model correctly predicted **191 respondents** as having a bank account, while **85 were misclassified**. For those without an account, the model correctly classified **239 cases**, with **96 misclassifications**. The class error rates are relatively balanced, at **30.8% for “Yes”** and **28.7% for “No”**, suggesting that the model struggles equally across both outcome categories.

These results suggest that while the model provides useful insights into patterns of financial inclusion, its predictive accuracy is limited. This underscores the importance of identifying and refining key predictors through variable importance analysis and robust regression modelling.

### Top 15 predictors of financial inclusion



The graph above displays the top 15 predictors of financial inclusion, as identified by the random forest model. It uses two importance metrics: **Mean Decrease in Accuracy** and **Mean Decrease in Gini**. These measures indicate how much each variable contributes to the model’s predictive performance. The first reflects the reduction in accuracy if the variable were removed, while the second highlights how effectively the variable helps split the data into more homogeneous groups (i.e. improves decision tree purity). Both metrics help identify the most influential variables in predicting whether a respondent has access to a bank account or similar financial service.

The most influential variables include both **economic characteristics**—such as whether the person had productive assets or accessed loans—and **spending behaviors**, such as where cash was used (e.g. weekly markets, small shops, or permanent marketplaces). Several **information-related variables**—like preferred ways to receive information and interaction with UNHCR or NGO staff—also play an important role, suggesting that financial inclusion may be closely tied to

a person's access to information or their communication preferences. Additional contributing factors include the **amount of cash received**, the respondent's **first spending priority**, and their ability to **meet basic needs**.

These results suggest that financial inclusion is not only driven by economic variables but also shaped by **information access, cash spending behaviors, and possibly the support ecosystem surrounding beneficiaries**. These insights will guide the selection of covariates in the subsequent regression modeling to identify the strongest associations with financial inclusion.

#### 4.6.1.1 Regression Analysis: Financial Inclusion

To better understand the factors associated with financial inclusion among cash assistance recipients, a multistep regression analysis was conducted. The dependent variable, `kpi_have_bank_account`, reflects whether respondents reported having access to a bank account or similar financial service. Given the multidimensional nature of vulnerability and the potential for confounding effects, the analysis followed a structured approach.

A **Random Forest model** was first used to identify the most influential predictors. The top 15 variables ranked by Mean Decrease in Accuracy were then screened for multicollinearity using the **Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)**. Variables with VIF values above 5 were removed to avoid distortions in coefficient estimation.

To reduce selection bias and ensure more balanced comparisons across groups, **Propensity Score Matching (PSM)** was applied. Matching was performed on sex, using a logistic distance metric with nearest neighbour matching. After matching, class imbalance in the outcome variable was addressed using an automated **oversampling procedure**, which improved the representation of the minority class and enhanced statistical power.

A **logistic regression model** was then fitted on the matched and balanced sample. The model showed good overall fit, with a pseudo- $R^2$  of **0.30 (McFadden)** and a likelihood ratio  $\chi^2$  test (df = 23) of **72.83,  $p < 0.001$** , suggesting that the covariates collectively offer strong explanatory power for variation in financial inclusion.

The regression results reveal several key associations. First, households **without access to loans** (`kpi_access_loansNo`) were substantially more likely to lack a bank account ( **$p < 0.01$** ), underscoring the tight link between formal financial access points. Spending-related behaviours also mattered. Respondents whose **first spending priority was food** (`spent_1stFood`,  **$p < 0.05$** ) or **rent** (`spent_1stRent`,  **$p < 0.05$** ) had higher odds of financial inclusion, possibly reflecting more stable or predictable income sources.

Information-related variables were also significant. Those who **did not receive information from help desks** (`receive_information_help_deskNo`,  **$p < 0.05$** ) and those who **did not prefer to interact with UNHCR staff** (`information_preferred_method_unhcr_staffNo`,  **$p < 0.05$** ) had higher odds of lacking a bank account. Conversely, not preferring NGO staff (`information_preferred_method_ngo_staffNo`) was associated with much **lower odds** of financial inclusion ( **$p < 0.001$** ), suggesting potential disparities in trust or information access channels.

Interestingly, respondents living in **private accommodation** were marginally less likely to report bank account ownership (`type_of_accommodationPrivate`,  **$p = 0.06$** ), which may reflect more informal living arrangements or lack of documentation. Several variables related to timing, such as `date02-2024` and `date03-2024`, had negative but statistically non-significant effects, indicating no clear trend over time in access to financial services.

While some predictors such as **information preferences, economic stress signals** (`spend_essential_savingsYes`), and **coping strategies** (`kpi_used_negative_copingNo`) were included in the model, their associations were not statistically conclusive. Additionally, the

presence of large standard errors for rare spending categories (e.g. firewood or hygiene items) suggests sparse data and should be interpreted with caution.

Taken together, the model highlights that financial inclusion is shaped by a combination of financial access, economic priorities, and the effectiveness of information channels. Efforts to improve inclusion could benefit from expanding access to formal credit, enhancing communication strategies, and targeting those in more informal housing arrangements.

The code used for the regression result is as follows:

```
# Load necessary libraries
library(dplyr)
library(car) # For VIF calculation
library(randomForest)
library(MatchIt)
library(ROSE)

## Load custom function to filter out variables with high VIF
source('script/filter_high_vif.R', encoding = 'UTF-8')

## Load custom function to automatically check class imbalance and apply oversampling
source('script/oversample_if_needed.R', encoding = 'UTF-8')

# Step 1: Extract the top variables based on variable importance from Random Forest
top_vars_kpi_have_bank_account <- importance(rf_model_kpi_have_bank_account)
%>%
  as.data.frame() %>%
  rownames_to_column("variable") %>%
  arrange(desc(MeanDecreaseAccuracy)) %>%
  slice(1:15) %>%
  pull(variable)

# Step 2: Apply VIF filtering using the generalized function
final_vars <- filter_high_vif(
  data = rf_data %>%
    ## Remove variables used to calculate the indicator
    select(-have_bank_account) %>%
    drop_na(kpi_have_bank_account) %>%
    filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = .2) %>%
    na.omit(),
  vars = top_vars_kpi_have_bank_account,
  dependent_var = "sex",
  threshold = 5
)

# Step 3: Create a PSM formula using predictors with low VIF
psm_formula_kpi_have_bank_account <- as.formula(
  paste("sex ~", paste(final_vars, collapse = " + "))
)
```

```

# Step 4: Perform PSM using nearest neighbor matching
psm_model_kpi_have_bank_account <- MatchIt::matchit(
  formula = psm_formula_kpi_have_bank_account,
  data = rf_data %>%
  drop_na(kpi_have_bank_account) %>%
  filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = .2) %>%
  na.omit(),
  method = "nearest",
  distance = "logit"
)

# Step 5: Prepare the matched data
matched_data <- MatchIt::match.data(psm_model_kpi_have_bank_account)

# Step 6: Check class imbalance and apply oversampling if needed
response_var <- "kpi_have_bank_account"
balanced_data <- oversample_if_needed(
  data = matched_data,
  response_var = response_var,
  imbalance_threshold = 0.5
)

# Step 7: Ensure response variable is a binary factor
balanced_data <- balanced_data %>%
  mutate(kpi_have_bank_account = factor(kpi_have_bank_account, levels = c("Yes",
  "No")))

# Step 8: Fit logistic regression model
regression_formula_kpi_have_bank_account <- as.formula(
  paste("kpi_have_bank_account ~", paste(final_vars, collapse = " + "))
)

glm_model_kpi_have_bank_account <- glm(
  formula = regression_formula_kpi_have_bank_account,
  data = balanced_data,
  family = binomial(link = "logit")
)

# Step 9: Print the model summary
jtools::summ(glm_model_kpi_have_bank_account)

```

This below is the resulting output of the code above:

```

MODEL INFO:
Observations: 180
Dependent Variable: kpi_have_bank_account
Type: Generalized linear model
  Family: binomial
  Link function: logit

```

MODEL FIT:

$\chi^2(23) = 72.83, p = 0.00$   
Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (Cragg-Uhler) = 0.45  
Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (McFadden) = 0.30  
AIC = 221.49, BIC = 298.12

Standard errors:MLE

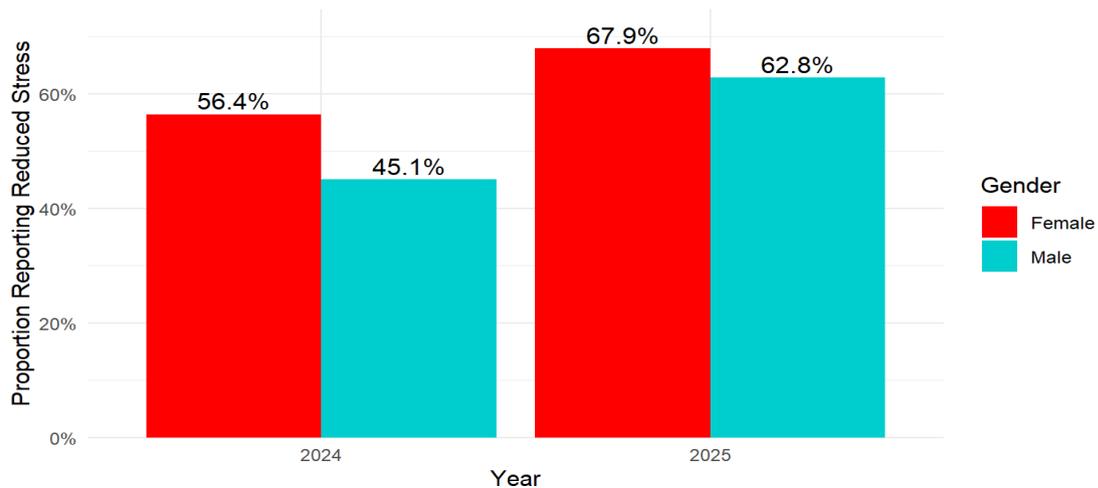
	Est.	S.E.	z val.	p
(Intercept)	-3.01	2.08	-1.44	0.15
kpi_access_loansNo	3.74	1.30	2.87	0.00
where_spent_cash_details_smallNo	0.17	0.48	0.36	0.72
where_spent_cash_details_weekly_marketNo	-1.68	0.96	-1.75	0.08
preferred_way_information_smsNo	0.81	0.46	1.77	0.08
preferred_way_information_help_deskNo	-0.56	0.61	-0.91	0.36
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	-0.96	2.31	-0.41	0.68
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly	0.20	0.59	0.34	0.73
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	1.07	0.67	1.60	0.11
spent_1stEducation	0.67	1.71	0.39	0.70
spent_1stFirewood	18.91	1455.40	0.01	0.99
spent_1stFood	2.28	1.03	2.21	0.03
spent_1stHealth_costs	1.70	1.11	1.54	0.12
spent_1stHygiene_items	17.67	1455.40	0.01	0.99
spent_1stRent	2.91	1.27	2.29	0.02
spent_1stUtilities_and_bills	2.52	1.34	1.88	0.06
receive_information_help_deskNo	1.20	0.57	2.10	0.04
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo	1.10	0.54	2.04	0.04
kpi_used_negative_copingNo	1.13	0.94	1.20	0.23
information_prefered_method_ngo_staffNo	-2.93	1.01	-2.89	0.00
spend_essential_savingsYes	0.67	0.77	0.87	0.38
type_of_accommodationPrivate	-0.84	0.45	-1.87	0.06
date02-2024	-0.57	0.51	-1.11	0.27
date03-2024	-0.76	0.72	-1.05	0.29

### 4.6.2 Reduction in Stress

This section presents the analysis of household-level data related to **stress reduction**, using the indicator `kpi_reduced_stress`, which reflects whether respondents reported feeling less stress after receiving cash assistance. This is a critical proxy for psychological well-being and overall coping capacity in displacement contexts. The graph below illustrates the proportion of respondents who reported a reduction in stress, disaggregated by sex and year (2024 and 2025).

### Proportion Reporting Stress Reduction by Year and Gender

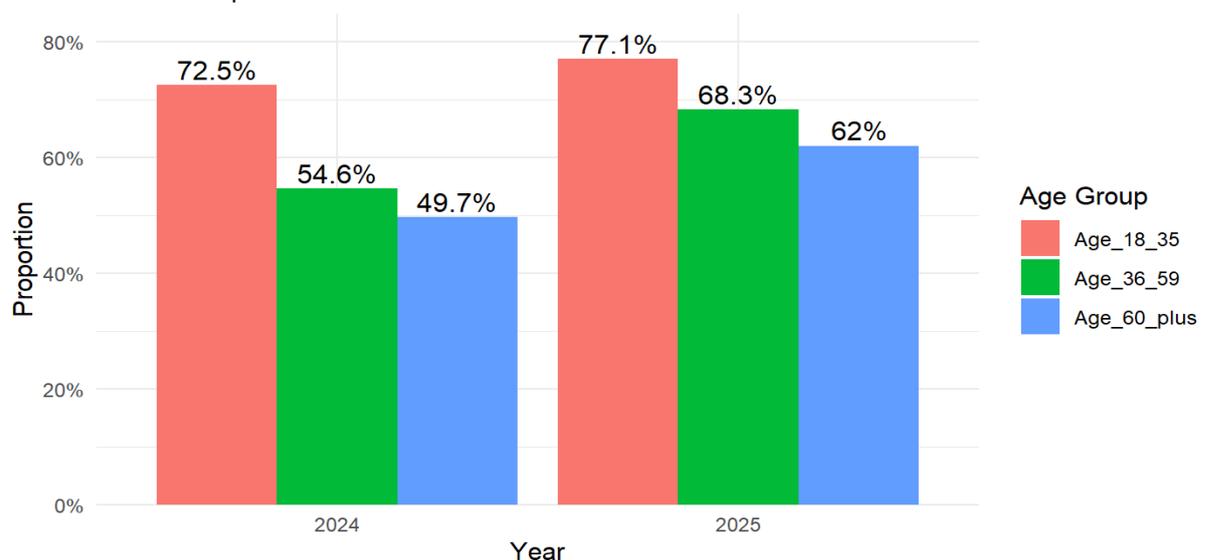
n = 752 respondents



The graph above presents the proportion of respondents who reported a reduction in stress, disaggregated by gender and year. In 2024, 56.4% of women and 45.1% of men indicated feeling less stressed because of receiving cash assistance. By 2025, reported stress reduction increased for both groups, rising to 67.9% among women and 62.8% among men. Throughout both years, women consistently reported higher levels of stress relief than men. The upward trend suggests that, over time, recipients may have experienced greater psychological benefits from the assistance, possibly as they adapted to their environment or developed more stable coping mechanisms. The persistence of a gender gap in reported stress reduction may reflect differing responsibilities, vulnerabilities, or access to support systems between men and women.

### Proportion Reporting Reduced Stress by Year and Age Group

n = 752 respondents



The graph above presents the proportion of respondents who reported reduced stress levels, disaggregated by age group and year. In both 2024 and 2025, younger respondents aged 18–35 consistently reported the highest levels of stress reduction, with an increase from 72.5% in 2024 to 77.1% in 2025. Middle-aged respondents (36–59) also saw an increase, from 54.6% to 68.3%, while those aged 60 and above improved from 49.7% to 62%. These results indicate that perceived reductions in stress became more widespread over time across all age groups, though younger individuals were the most likely to experience this positive outcome in both years. The

increase across groups may reflect improved conditions or greater psychological adaptation over time.

Call:

```
randomForest(formula = kpi_reduced_stress ~ ., data = rf_data %>%  
drop_na(kpi_reduced_stress) %>% filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = 0.2) %>% na.omit()  
%>% select(-reduced_stress), importance = TRUE)
```

Type of random forest: classification

Number of trees: 500

No. of variables tried at each split: 11

OOB estimate of error rate: 14.73%

Confusion matrix:

Yes No class.error

Yes 361 41 0.1019900

No 49 160 0.2344498

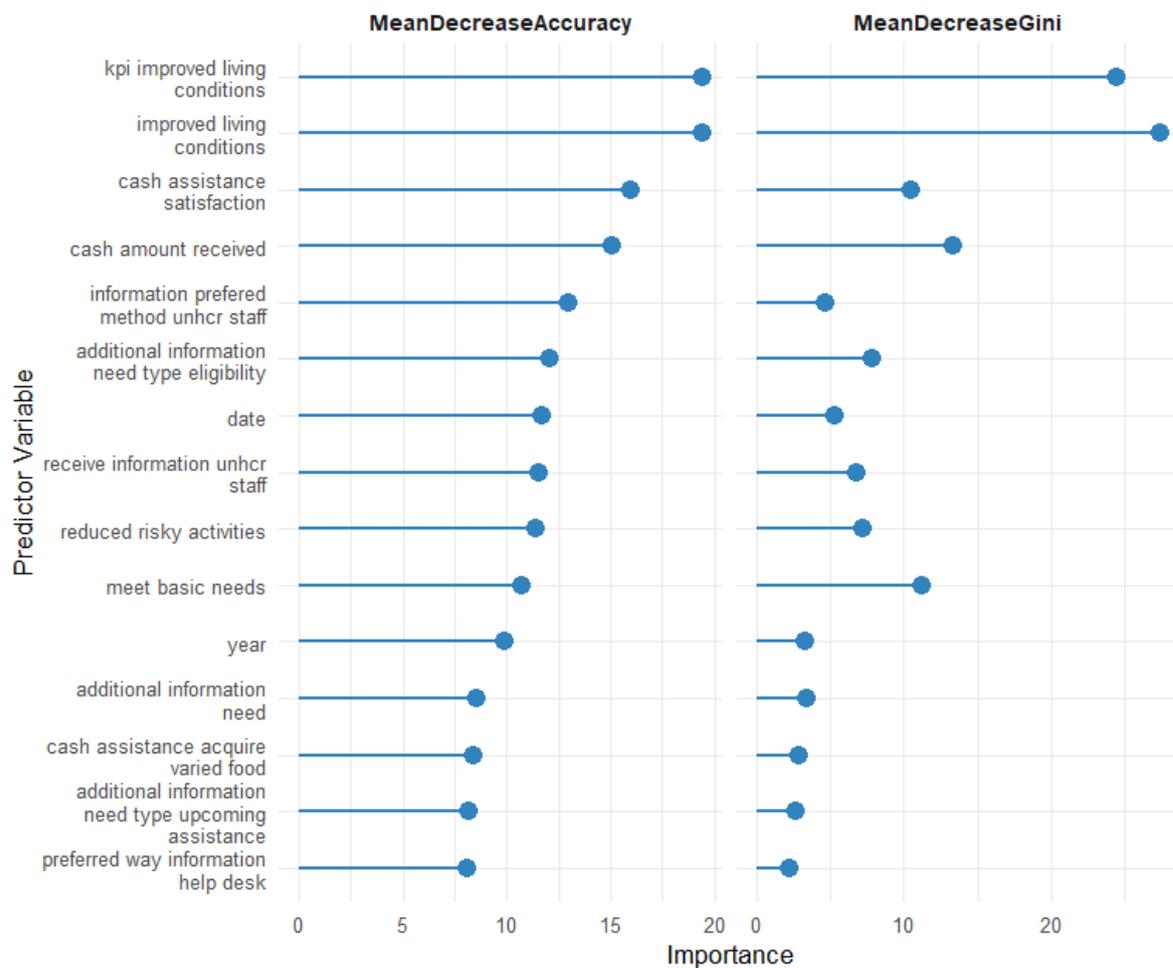
A second random forest model was trained to predict `kpi_reduced_stress`, indicating whether respondents reported a reduction in stress. The model used **500 trees**, with **11 variables** considered at each split.

The **out-of-bag (OOB) error rate** was **14.7%**, indicating that the model correctly classifies about 85% of cases. This reflects good predictive performance overall, though with more classification errors than in the financial inclusion model.

According to the confusion matrix, the model correctly classified **361 respondents** who reported reduced stress, while **41 were misclassified**, resulting in a **class error rate of 10.2%** for “Yes” responses. For respondents who did not report reduced stress, **160 were correctly classified** and **49 misclassified**, giving a **class error rate of 23.4%** for “No” responses.

These results suggest that the model is better at identifying those who experienced stress reduction than those who did not. This imbalance may reflect differences in response patterns or underlying variables, pointing to the need for targeted refinement in future regression modelling.

## Top 15 predictors of reduced stress



The most influential predictors of reduced stress include a combination of **material well-being**, **satisfaction with assistance**, and **access to information**. Key variables such as improved living conditions—both self-reported and KPI-based—cash assistance satisfaction, the amount of cash received, and the ability to meet basic needs, all suggest that stress levels are strongly influenced by a household’s financial situation and perception of support sufficiency.

Information access also plays a prominent role. Receiving information from UNHCR staff and needing clarification on eligibility for assistance are both strong predictors, reinforcing the idea that clear communication and predictability can ease uncertainty and emotional strain. Other important factors include contextual and behavioural variables such as **province of residence**, **price increases**, and **first spending priorities** (spent\_1st), indicating that both macroeconomic conditions and individual coping strategies contribute to stress outcomes. These findings will guide the forthcoming regression analysis in identifying the most consistent contributors to stress reduction across different demographic and contextual profiles.

### 4.6.2.1 Regression analysis: Reduction in Stress

The regression model for predicting self-reported reductions in stress (kpi\_reduced\_stress) shows **strong explanatory power**, with a **McFadden pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.55** and a **Cragg-Uhler pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.70**, indicating that the selected covariates collectively account for a substantial proportion of the variation in reported stress outcomes. The model fit is highly statistically significant ( $\chi^2(20) = 132.66$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and while no warnings were issued, some large standard errors suggest the presence of low-frequency categories or mild multicollinearity.

Several predictors were statistically meaningful. **Perceived improvement in living conditions** (`kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo`,  $p < 0.001$ ) was one of the strongest positive associations with reduced stress, reinforcing the idea that broader household well-being underpins emotional resilience. In contrast, certain dummy levels from the original `improved_living_conditions` variable had extremely large standard errors (e.g. “Not at all”) likely due to sparse data, reducing interpretability.

**Economic and protection-related factors** were also prominent. A higher **cash amount received** was significantly associated with stress reduction ( $p = 0.03$ ), and those who **reported not resorting to risky coping strategies** (`reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti`,  $p = 0.04$ ) were also more likely to report stress reduction. Similarly, the category `reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly` ( $p = 0.005$ ) stood out as positively associated, underscoring how even modest improvements in coping behaviour correlate with improved well-being.

Information-related factors matter as well. **Receiving information directly from UNHCR staff** (`receive_information_unhcr_staffNo`,  $p = 0.006$ ) was associated with **lower likelihood of stress reduction**, suggesting that those lacking direct institutional communication may feel more insecure or ill-informed. Additionally, the **perceived ability to access varied food** via cash assistance (`cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo`,  $p = 0.05$ ) was negatively associated with reduced stress, which may reflect food-related insecurity acting as a source of stress.

Some effects were more ambiguous or imprecise. For example, the variable `cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied` had an extremely large standard error, suggesting singularity or perfect prediction in the data. These issues should be reviewed in future models by collapsing rarely selected response categories or re-specifying reference levels.

The model highlights a consistent pattern: **material adequacy, protective factors, and information access** are key to reducing psychological stress among cash assistance recipients. Programmatic strategies to strengthen these dimensions may yield cross-cutting benefits for both mental health and protection outcomes.



additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.70	
receive_information_unhcr_staffNo	0.82	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		1.31
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	3393.47	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	1.75	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	1.37	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	1.82	
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	1.71	
meet_basic_needsHalf	0.93	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	0.97	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	0.95	
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo	0.60	
preferred_way_information_help_deskNo	0.86	

z val.

(Intercept)	-0.59	
kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo	3.69	
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	0.01	
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly		
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	1.36	
cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied		0.00
cash_assistance_satisfactionVery_satisfied	-1.72	
cash_amount_received	-2.13	
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo	-0.76	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	-0.81	
receive_information_unhcr_staffNo	2.74	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		2.01
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	0.97	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	1.55	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	2.83	
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	-0.38	
meet_basic_needsHalf	0.72	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	1.34	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	0.92	
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo	-1.96	
preferred_way_information_help_deskNo	-1.63	

p

(Intercept)	0.56	
kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo	0.00	
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	1.00	
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly		
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	0.17	
cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied		1.00
cash_assistance_satisfactionVery_satisfied	0.09	
cash_amount_received	0.03	

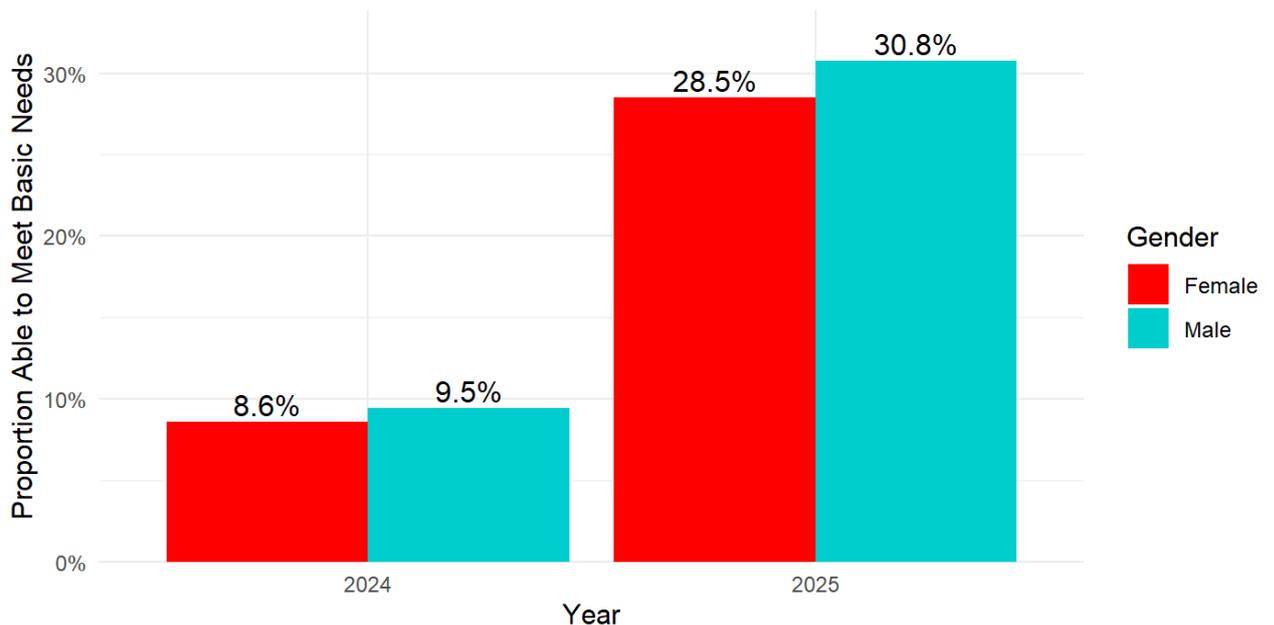
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo	0.44
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.42
receive_information_unhcr_staffNo	0.01
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti	0.04
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	1.00
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	0.33
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	0.12
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	0.00
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	0.71
meet_basic_needsHalf	0.47
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	0.18
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	0.36
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo	0.05
preferred_way_information_help_deskNo	0.10

### 4.6.3 Ability to Meet Basic Needs

This section explores respondents’ ability to meet their basic needs using the indicator `kpi_meet_basic_needs`, disaggregated by sex and survey year. This variable serves as a proxy for economic vulnerability and effectiveness of cash assistance in addressing essential household needs.

#### Ability to Meet Basic Needs by Year and Gender

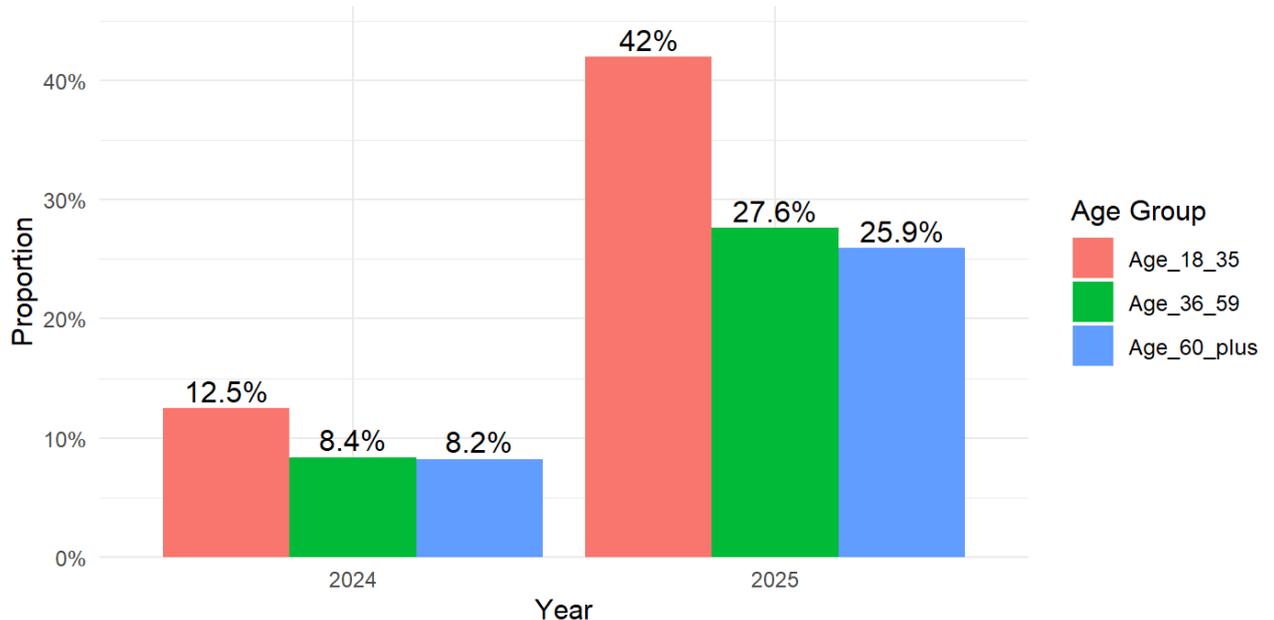
n = 796 respondents



The graph above shows the proportion of respondents who reported being able to meet their basic needs, disaggregated by gender and year. In 2024, very few respondents—8.6% of women and 9.5% of men—stated they could meet their essential needs, indicating a high level of economic vulnerability across the population. By 2025, this proportion increased markedly for both groups, reaching 28.5% among women and 30.8% among men. While this reflects a clear improvement over time, most respondents in both years continued to report unmet basic needs. The small gender gap observed in both years suggests broadly similar levels of material hardship between women and men. These findings highlight persistent challenges in achieving sufficient coverage or adequacy through the cash assistance program.

## Proportion Able to Meet Basic Needs by Year and Age Group

n = 796 respondents



The graph above displays the proportion of respondents who reported being able to meet their basic needs, disaggregated by age group and year. In 2024, the overall proportions were very low across all age groups, with only 12.5% of respondents aged 18–35, 8.4% of those aged 36–59, and 8.2% of those aged 60 and above reporting that they could meet their basic needs. By 2025, there was a marked increase across all groups, most notably among the youngest respondents, where the proportion rose to 42%. Middle-aged and older respondents also improved to 27.6% and 25.9% respectively. Despite these improvements, older adults remained less likely than younger respondents to report that their basic needs were met, suggesting persistent age-related disparities in economic resilience.

Call:

```
randomForest(formula = kpi_meet_basic_needs ~ ., data = rf_data %>%
drop_na(kpi_meet_basic_needs) %>% filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = 0.2) %>%
na.omit()) %>% select(-meet_basic_needs), importance = TRUE)
```

Type of random forest: classification

Number of trees: 500

No. of variables tried at each split: 11

OOB estimate of error rate: 13.42%

Confusion matrix:

Yes No class.error

Yes 91 48 0.3453237

No 34 438 0.0720339

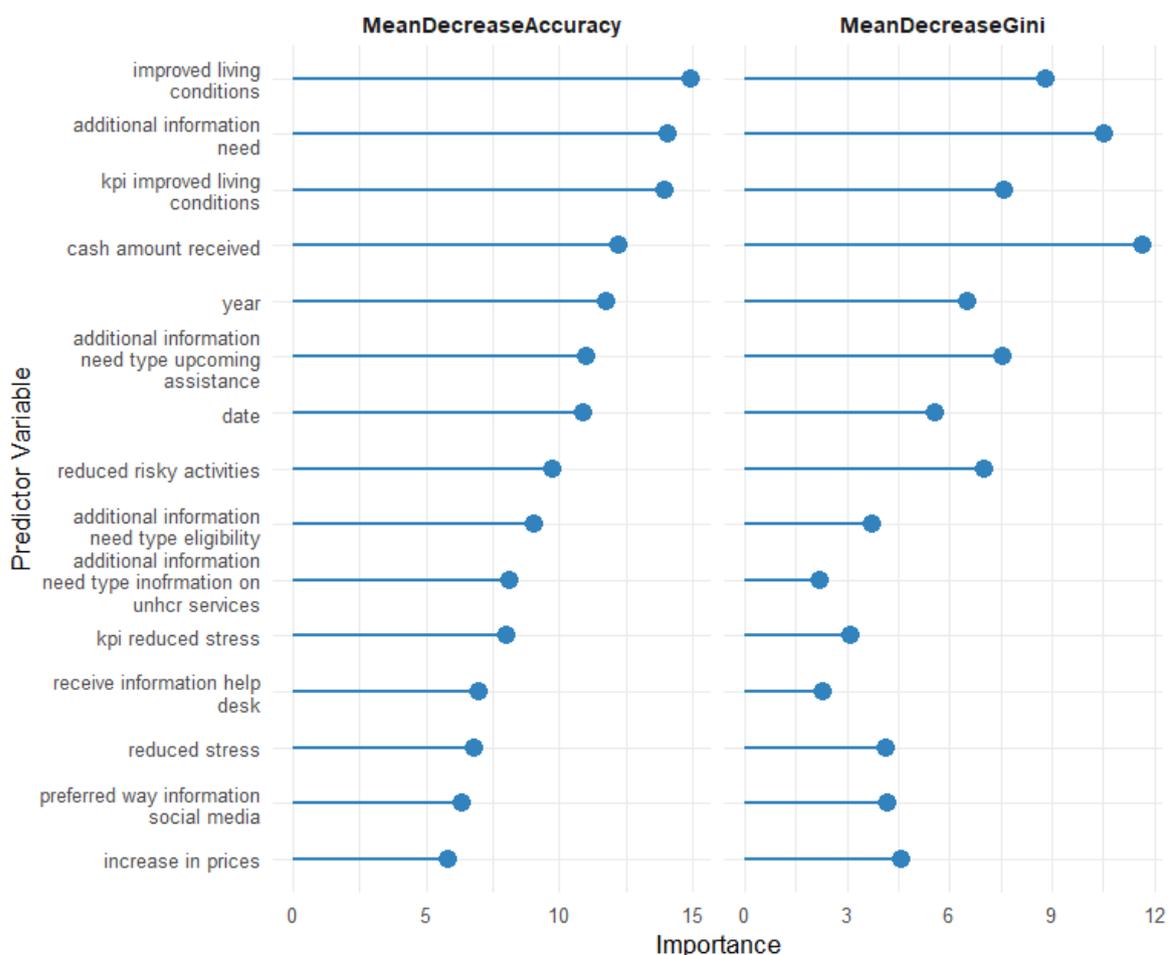
A random forest model was developed to classify the outcome variable `kpi_meet_basic_needs`, representing whether respondents felt able to meet their basic needs. The model was built with **500 trees**, evaluating **11 variables** at each split.

The **out-of-bag (OOB) error rate** was **13.4%**, suggesting strong overall predictive performance. According to the confusion matrix, the model correctly classified **91 respondents who reported meeting their basic needs**, but misclassified **48**, leading to a **class error rate of 34.5%** for the

“Yes” group. In contrast, **438 out of 472 “No” responses** were correctly classified, resulting in a **class error rate of just 7.2%**.

These results indicate that while the model is reasonably effective, it performs better in identifying those who are unable to meet their basic needs than those who can. This asymmetry may be addressed in the next steps through rebalancing or refinement of feature selection.

### Top 15 predictors of meeting basic needs



The most influential predictors of respondents’ ability to meet basic needs reflect a combination of **economic inputs, subjective well-being, and information access**. Among the top predictors are **improved living conditions**, both the general and KPI-specific versions, as well as the **amount of cash received**, highlighting the centrality of adequate financial support and shelter conditions in meeting core household needs.

Several forms of **information needs** appear prominently—particularly general requests for more information, and specific interest in **upcoming assistance** or **eligibility criteria**. These suggest that the capacity to plan and prioritise expenditures may be shaped not only by the assistance provided, but also by how predictably and clearly it is communicated. Relatedly, **preferred communication methods**, such as through social media, also surface in the variable importance rankings.

Other relevant predictors include **price inflation, reduced risky activities, and stress levels**, as well as contextual dimensions like **province of residence** and **survey timing**. These findings point to the multi-dimensional nature of basic needs fulfilment, dependent not only on cash value

but also on a broader enabling environment—both informational and structural—that supports households’ ability to cope and plan.

#### 4.6.3.1 Regression analysis: Basic Needs

The regression model examining predictors of whether respondents were able to meet their basic needs (kpi\_meet\_basic\_needs) achieved a **very strong fit**, with a **pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.54 (McFadden)** and a **Cragg-Uhler R<sup>2</sup> of 0.71**, indicating that the included covariates explain a substantial share of the variation in the outcome. The model was highly significant ( **$\chi^2(18) = 205.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$** ). However, a warning was issued due to fitted probabilities being extremely close to 0 or 1, which may suggest **quasi-complete separation** or the presence of very strong predictors in the model.

Several variables emerged as **statistically meaningful contributors**. First, the **cash amount received** was negatively associated with the likelihood of not meeting basic needs ( **$p < 0.001$** ), reinforcing the centrality of financial support in enabling households to cover essential expenses.

A cluster of predictors associated with **risky coping strategies** was also important. Compared to respondents who reported “Significant” reductions in risky activities, those with only “Moderate” or no reductions were **less likely to meet their basic needs** (e.g. reduced\_risky\_activitiesModerately,  **$p = 0.001$** ). Similarly, the **absence of stress reduction** (kpi\_reduced\_stressNo,  **$p = 0.05$** ) and the self-report of being **“Not at all” less stressed** (reduced\_stressNot\_at\_all,  **$p < 0.001$** ) were associated with lower odds of meeting basic needs, highlighting how economic and psychosocial vulnerabilities are closely intertwined.

Access to timely and relevant information also played a role. Not receiving information through the **help desk** (receive\_information\_help\_deskNo,  **$p < 0.001$** ) and not preferring **social media** as an information channel (preferred\_way\_information\_social\_mediaNo,  **$p < 0.001$** ) were both associated with lower likelihood of basic needs being met. Additionally, needing information about **UNHCR services** (additional\_information\_need\_type\_inofrmation\_on\_unhcr\_servicesNo,  **$p = 0.007$** ) also predicted unmet needs.

Some categorical predictors, such as detailed sub-categories of improved\_living\_conditions, had unstable or extremely large standard errors (e.g. over 5,000), suggesting collinearity or rare category combinations. These singularities may have contributed to the warning about extreme predicted probabilities and should be further assessed. Refining or collapsing rarely observed factor levels might improve model stability in future iterations.

Overall, the findings suggest that **economic assistance, stress reduction, avoidance of risky behaviours, and effective information access** are central to improving households’ ability to meet basic needs. The results will inform targeted adjustments in programming to ensure that the most vulnerable beneficiaries are better supported across these dimensions.

#### MODEL INFO:

Observations: 273  
Dependent Variable: kpi\_meet\_basic\_needs  
Type: Generalized linear model  
Family: binomial  
Link function: logit

#### MODEL FIT:

$\chi^2(18) = 205.95$ ,  $p = 0.00$   
Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (Cragg-Uhler) = 0.71  
Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (McFadden) = 0.54  
AIC = 210.48, BIC = 279.06

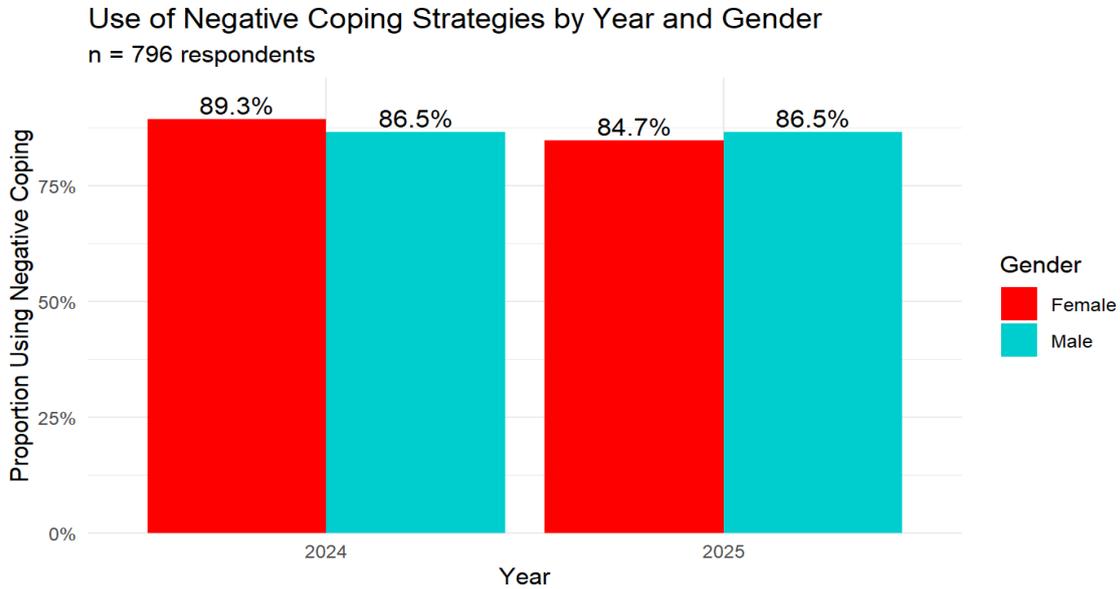
Standard errors:MLE

	Est.	
(Intercept)	10.66	
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	8.91	
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly	-0.85	
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	18.54	
kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo		
cash_amount_received	-0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti	-2.70	
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	-6.98	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	14.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	-3.57	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	-2.58	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.34	
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo	-2.09	
kpi_reduced_stressNo	1.54	
receive_information_help_deskNo	-2.82	
reduced_stressNot_at_all	-3.98	
reduced_stressSignificantly		
reduced_stressSlightly	0.87	
preferred_way_information_social_mediaNo	-2.06	
increase_in_pricesNo	0.08	
increase_in_pricesYes	-0.09	
	S.E.	
(Intercept)	2.13	
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	5121.22	
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly	0.76	
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	1432.32	
kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo		
cash_amount_received	0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti	1.34	
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	2.09	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	3046.76	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	1.38	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	1.60	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.80	
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo	0.77	
kpi_reduced_stressNo	0.78	
receive_information_help_deskNo	0.70	
reduced_stressNot_at_all	1.05	
reduced_stressSignificantly		
reduced_stressSlightly	1.43	
preferred_way_information_social_mediaNo	0.53	
increase_in_pricesNo	0.79	
increase_in_pricesYes	0.75	

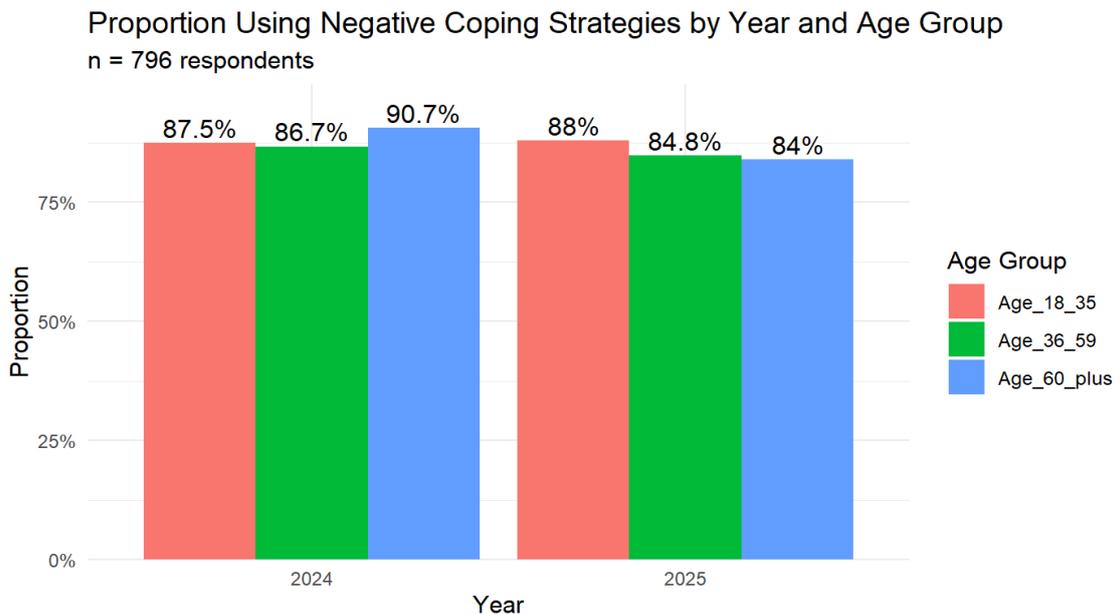
	z val.	
(Intercept)	5.00	
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	0.00	
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly	-1.12	
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	0.01	
kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo		
cash_amount_received	-3.80	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		-2.02
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	-3.34	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	-2.59	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	-1.62	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.43	
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo		-2.72
kpi_reduced_stressNo	1.97	
receive_information_help_deskNo	-4.03	
reduced_stressNot_at_all	-3.79	
reduced_stressSignificantly		
reduced_stressSlightly	0.61	
preferred_way_information_social_mediaNo		-3.90
increase_in_pricesNo	0.10	
increase_in_pricesYes	-0.12	
	p	
(Intercept)	0.00	
improved_living_conditionsNot_at_all	1.00	
improved_living_conditionsSignificantly	0.26	
improved_living_conditionsSlightly	0.99	
kpi_improved_living_conditionsNo		
cash_amount_received	0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		0.04
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	1.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	0.01	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	0.11	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.67	
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo		0.01
kpi_reduced_stressNo	0.05	
receive_information_help_deskNo	0.00	
reduced_stressNot_at_all	0.00	
reduced_stressSignificantly		
reduced_stressSlightly	0.54	
preferred_way_information_social_mediaNo		0.00
increase_in_pricesNo	0.92	
increase_in_pricesYes	0.90	

#### 4.6.4 Use of Negative Coping Strategies

This section presents the proportion of respondents who resorted to negative coping mechanisms, using the indicator `kpi_used_negative_coping`, disaggregated by sex and year. High levels suggest economic stress and insufficient support coverage.



The graph above presents the proportion of respondents who reported resorting to negative coping strategies, disaggregated by gender and year. In both 2024 and 2025, levels of negative coping remained high for men and women alike, with more than 84% of respondents across all groups indicating use of such strategies. While there was a slight decrease among women—from 89.3% in 2024 to 84.7% in 2025—the rate among men remained constant at 86.5% across both years. These consistently high figures suggest that despite receiving cash assistance, many households continued to experience economic pressure, leading them to adopt harmful strategies such as reducing food intake, taking on debt, or deprioritizing education or health expenses. The persistence of these behaviors highlights ongoing gaps in the adequacy or coverage of support mechanisms.



The graph above presents the proportion of respondents using negative coping strategies, disaggregated by age group and survey year. In 2024, reliance on such strategies was widespread across all age groups, with the highest rate observed among respondents aged 60 and above (90.7%), followed by the 18–35 (87.5%) and 36–59 (86.7%) age groups. By 2025, there was a modest decline across all categories, with proportions decreasing to 88% for the youngest group, 84.8% for middle-aged respondents, and 84% for the oldest group. Despite the slight improvement, the data suggests that most households across age cohorts continued to depend on negative coping mechanisms to manage unmet needs, reflecting persistent economic stressors.

Call:

```
randomForest(formula = kpi_used_negative_coping ~ ., data = rf_data %>%  
drop_na(kpi_used_negative_coping) %>% filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = 0.2) %>%  
na.omit() %>% select(-stop_child_school, -sell_livelihood, -ask_for_money, -  
move_to_poorer_shelter, -send_under_16_to_work, -send_for_work_far, -risky_activities,  
-skip_paying_rent, -take_out_loans, -reduce_expenditure, -spend_essential_savings),  
importance = TRUE)
```

Type of random forest: classification

Number of trees: 500

No. of variables tried at each split: 11

OOB estimate of error rate: 12.93%

Confusion matrix:

Yes No class.error

Yes 527 10 0.01862197

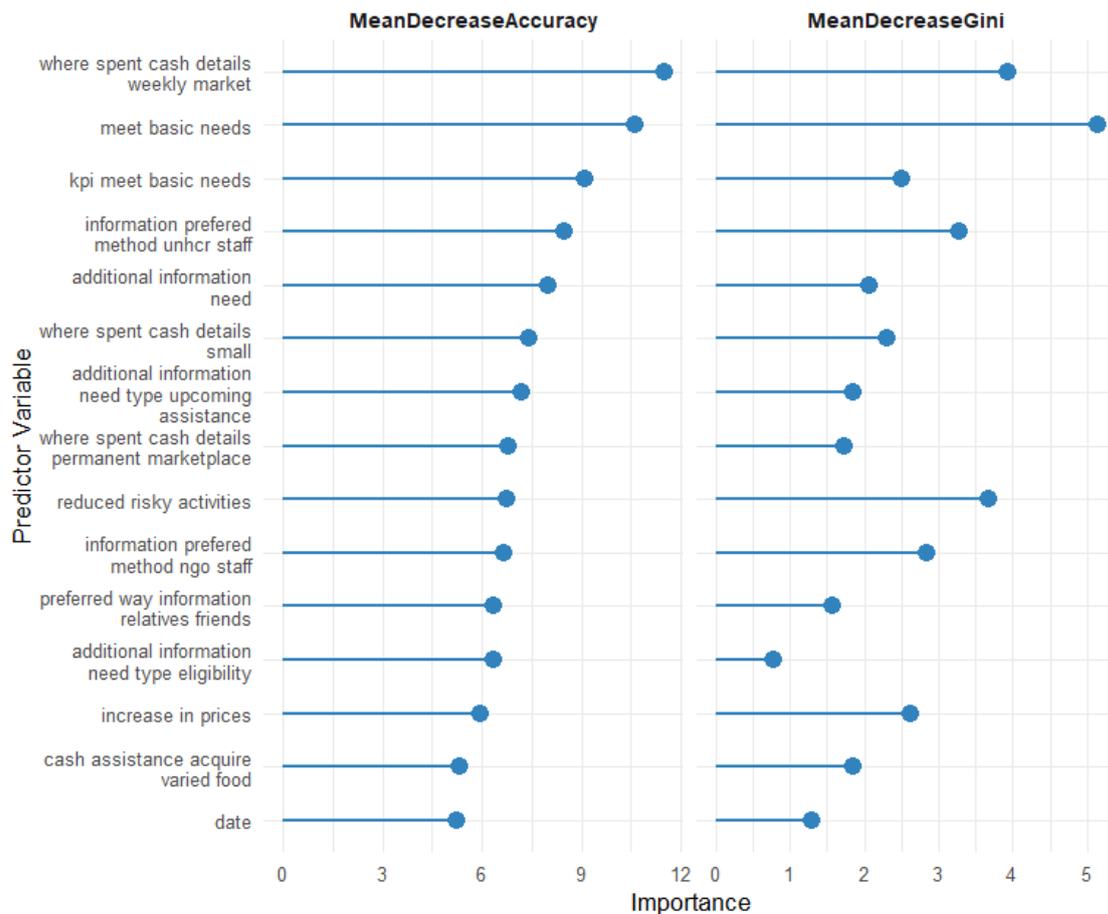
No 69 5 0.93243243

A random forest model was trained to classify the variable `kpi_used_negative_coping`, which identifies whether households adopted negative coping strategies. The model was constructed using **500 trees**, with **11 variables** considered at each decision split.

The **out-of-bag (OOB) error rate** was **12.9%**, indicating moderate predictive strength. The **confusion matrix** shows that the model correctly identified **527 out of 537 households** that used negative coping strategies, yielding a **low class error rate of 1.9%** for the “Yes” group. However, performance was substantially lower for the “No” group, with only **5 of 74 responses** correctly predicted, resulting in a **very high class error rate of 93.2%**.

This imbalance in predictive accuracy indicates that the model has difficulty distinguishing non-users of negative coping strategies, likely due to the dominance of “Yes” cases in the dataset. Adjustments such as class rebalancing or tailored sampling techniques may be necessary to strengthen model sensitivity to minority responses.

## Top 15 predictors of use of negative coping strategies



The most influential predictors of the use of negative coping strategies centre on a combination of **economic vulnerability, unmet basic needs, and communication dynamics**. Variables such as **where households spend cash** (e.g. weekly markets, small shops), **difficulty meeting basic needs**, and both the self-reported and KPI versions of this indicator consistently appear as strong predictors. These suggest that constrained access to essential goods or formal markets is associated with greater reliance on coping behaviours.

Several predictors also reflect the importance of **information access and communication preferences**, such as preferred information channels through **UNHCR or NGO staff**, and expressed **additional information needs**—especially related to upcoming assistance or eligibility. This highlights the potential protective role of clear, proactive communication in mitigating stress responses among affected households.

Economic signals like **cash amount received, price inflation**, and whether the household had **already spent their cash**, also feature prominently, suggesting that the adequacy and timing of assistance are closely linked to the need for negative coping. Contextual factors such as **province of residence** and **perceived safety when reporting** round out the top predictors, indicating that local conditions and trust in reporting mechanisms influence household resilience strategies. These findings reinforce the importance of coupling cash with inclusive communication and protection-sensitive programming.

### 4.6.4.1 Regression analysis: Use of Negative Coping Strategies

The logistic regression model predicting the use of negative coping mechanisms (kpi\_used\_negative\_coping) demonstrates a **good fit**, with a **McFadden pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.39** and

**Cragg-Uhler pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.55**, suggesting that the model explains a substantial portion of variation in the outcome. The model was highly statistically significant ( $\chi^2(21) = 161.12, p < 0.001$ ), based on 301 observations.

A range of **material deprivation and spending behaviour indicators** were associated with a lower likelihood of using negative coping strategies. Households that were **better able to meet their basic needs** were significantly less likely to resort to harmful coping strategies. Specifically, respondents who met **half, less than half, or more than half** of their needs had **lower odds** of negative coping compared to the reference group ( $p < 0.01$  across all three categories). These results reinforce the protective role of basic needs coverage in reducing vulnerability.

**Spending location** was also associated with coping behaviour. Not using **small shops** ( $p < 0.001$ ) or **weekly markets** ( $p = 0.08$ ) was linked to a lower likelihood of negative coping, possibly reflecting more stable purchasing patterns or better access to formal markets. Additionally, not relying on **UNHCR staff as a preferred information source** ( $p = 0.007$ ) and not relying on **relatives or friends** for preferred communication ( $p = 0.03$ ) were also linked with decreased likelihood of negative coping. This may suggest that households with clearer or more direct communication channels are better supported and less exposed to stress-induced strategies.

Conversely, respondents reporting **mild to moderate engagement in risky behaviours** (e.g. reduced\_risky\_activitiesSlightly,  $p = 0.01$ ; Not\_at\_all,  $p = 0.03$ ) were more likely to be classified as engaging in negative coping, perhaps indicating **persistence of such strategies** despite reported reductions. These results reflect that behavioural change is not always linear and that different levels of reported change may still coincide with structural vulnerability.

The ability to acquire **varied food** through cash assistance was negatively associated with negative coping ( $p = 0.02$ ), further highlighting the importance of **nutritional adequacy** as a resilience factor. Finally, **survey timing** (i.e. date02-2024 and date03-2024) was strongly associated with coping behaviour ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that seasonal or operational changes over time could influence vulnerability profiles.

The model indicates that reducing harmful coping strategies among cash recipients requires **comprehensive support**: ensuring basic needs are met, improving food access, reinforcing reliable information channels, and monitoring economic shocks across time. These findings can support improved targeting and design of cash-based interventions to mitigate behavioural risks.

**MODEL INFO:**

Observations: 313  
 Dependent Variable: kpi\_used\_negative\_coping  
 Type: Generalized linear model  
 Family: binomial  
 Link function: logit

**MODEL FIT:**

$\chi^2(21) = 169.90, p = 0.00$   
 Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (Cragg-Uhler) = 0.56  
 Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (McFadden) = 0.39  
 AIC = 307.99, BIC = 390.40

**Standard errors:MLE**

	Est.	
(Intercept)	4.06	
where_spent_cash_details_weekly_marketNo		-1.18

meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	-17.51	
meet_basic_needsHalf	-3.13	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	-3.15	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	-1.15	
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo	-1.08	
where_spent_cash_details_smallNo	-1.33	
where_spent_cash_details_permanent_marketplaceNo		0.17
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		1.48
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	1.36	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	2.11	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	1.41	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	2.52	
information_prefered_method_ngo_staffNo		0.88
preferred_way_information_relatives_friendsNo	-3.21	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo		0.09
increase_in_pricesNo	-0.04	
increase_in_pricesYes	-1.17	
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo		-1.16
date02-2024	2.10	
date03-2024	3.02	

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S.E.  
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(Intercept)	1.81	
where_spent_cash_details_weekly_marketNo		0.60
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	1028.70	
meet_basic_needsHalf	0.61	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	0.73	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	0.55	
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo		0.42
where_spent_cash_details_smallNo	0.38	
where_spent_cash_details_permanent_marketplaceNo		0.49
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		0.85
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	4.14	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	1.04	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	0.83	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	1.15	
information_prefered_method_ngo_staffNo		0.55
preferred_way_information_relatives_friendsNo		1.44
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo		0.56
increase_in_pricesNo	0.56	
increase_in_pricesYes	0.61	
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo		0.40
date02-2024	0.57	
date03-2024	0.72	

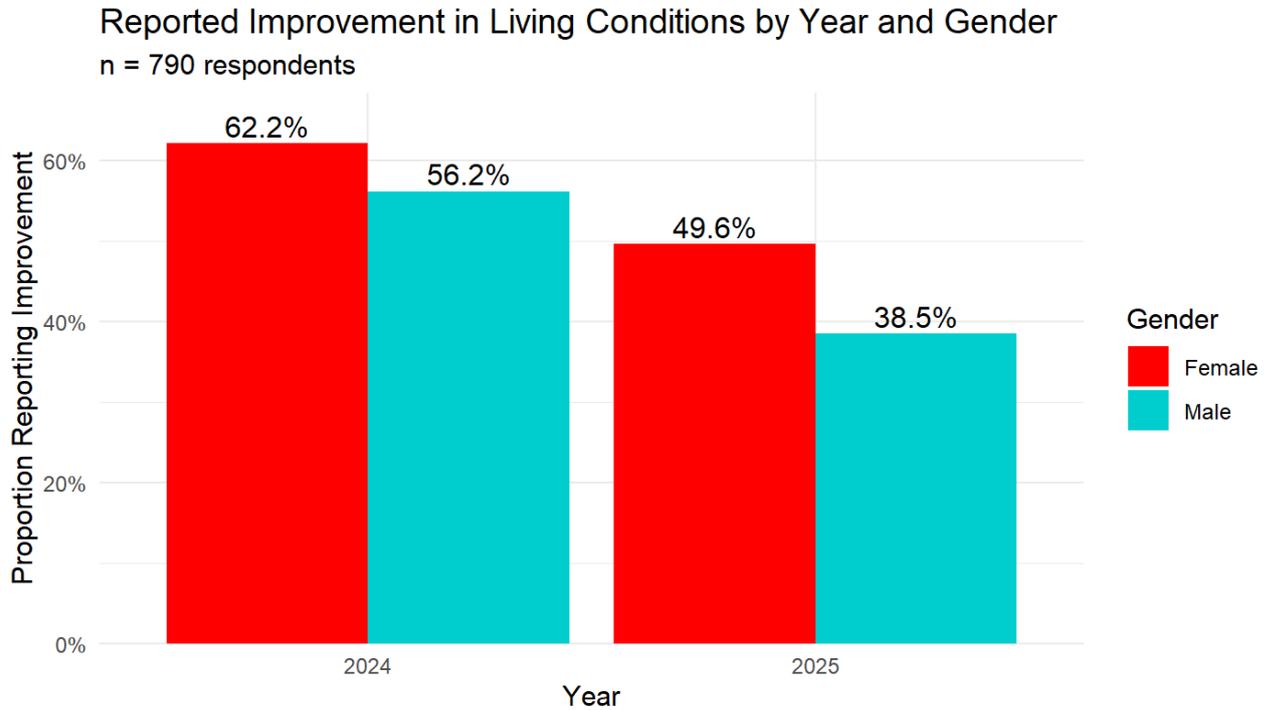
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z val.  
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(Intercept)	2.24	
where_spent_cash_details_weekly_marketNo		-1.98
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know		-0.02
meet_basic_needsHalf	-5.13	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half		-4.35
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half		-2.12
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo		-2.56
where_spent_cash_details_smallNo		-3.47
where_spent_cash_details_permanent_marketplaceNo		0.34
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		1.74
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	0.33	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	2.03	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	1.70	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	2.19	
information_prefered_method_ngo_staffNo		1.59
preferred_way_information_relatives_friendsNo		-2.23
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo		0.16
increase_in_pricesNo	-0.07	
increase_in_pricesYes	-1.93	
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo		-2.92
date02-2024	3.70	
date03-2024	4.23	

	p	
(Intercept)	0.03	
where_spent_cash_details_weekly_marketNo		0.05
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know		0.99
meet_basic_needsHalf	0.00	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half		0.00
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half		0.03
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
information_prefered_method_unhcr_staffNo		0.01
where_spent_cash_details_smallNo		0.00
where_spent_cash_details_permanent_marketplaceNo		0.73
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		0.08
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	0.74	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	0.04	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	0.09	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	0.03	
information_prefered_method_ngo_staffNo		0.11
preferred_way_information_relatives_friendsNo		0.03
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo		0.87
increase_in_pricesNo	0.94	
increase_in_pricesYes	0.05	
cash_assistance_acquire_varied_foodNo		0.00
date02-2024	0.00	
date03-2024	0.00	

### 4.6.5 Improved Living Conditions

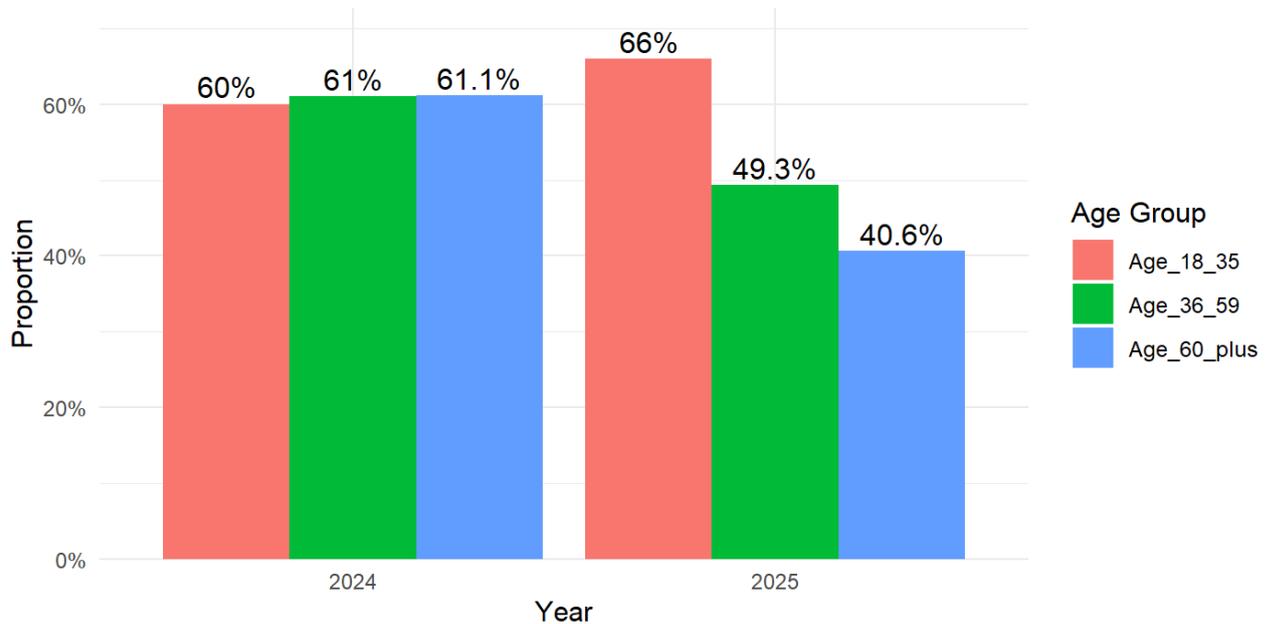
This section evaluates whether respondents reported improved living conditions because of cash assistance, based on the variable `kpi_improved_living_conditions`. The graph compares trends by sex and year.



The graph above displays the proportion of respondents reporting an improvement in their living conditions, disaggregated by gender and year. In 2024, over 60% of female respondents and just over 56% of male respondents indicated improvements, suggesting that many perceived tangible benefits from the support received during that period. However, in 2025, these proportions dropped noticeably for both groups, falling to 49.6% for women and 38.5% for men. This decline could reflect a deterioration in housing quality, stability, or affordability, or increased difficulty meeting basic needs due to inflation or reduced assistance. The gap between male and female responses also widened in 2025, suggesting women may have experienced relatively more stability or perceived benefits from the assistance than men. Overall, the trend points to a deterioration in perceived living conditions over time, raising concerns about the sustainability and coverage of support mechanisms.

## Proportion Reporting Improved Living Conditions by Year and Age Group

n = 790 respondents



The graph above shows the proportion of respondents who reported improved living conditions, disaggregated by age group and year. In 2024, perceptions of improvement were relatively consistent across age groups, with around 60% or more in each group indicating better living conditions. However, in 2025, this pattern diverged. While the 18–35 age group saw a modest increase to 66%, both the 36–59 and 60+ groups experienced sharp declines—to 49.3% and 40.6%, respectively. This shift suggests that younger recipients may have been more resilient or able to benefit from available resources, while older age groups faced growing barriers to experiencing tangible improvements in their living environments.

Call:

```
randomForest(formula = kpi_improved_living_conditions ~ ., data = rf_data %>%
drop_na(kpi_improved_living_conditions) %>% filter_sparse_columns(., threshold = 0.2)
%>% na.omit() %>% select(-improved_living_conditions), importance = TRUE)
```

Type of random forest: classification

Number of trees: 500

No. of variables tried at each split: 11

OOB estimate of error rate: 13.26%

Confusion matrix:

Yes No class.error

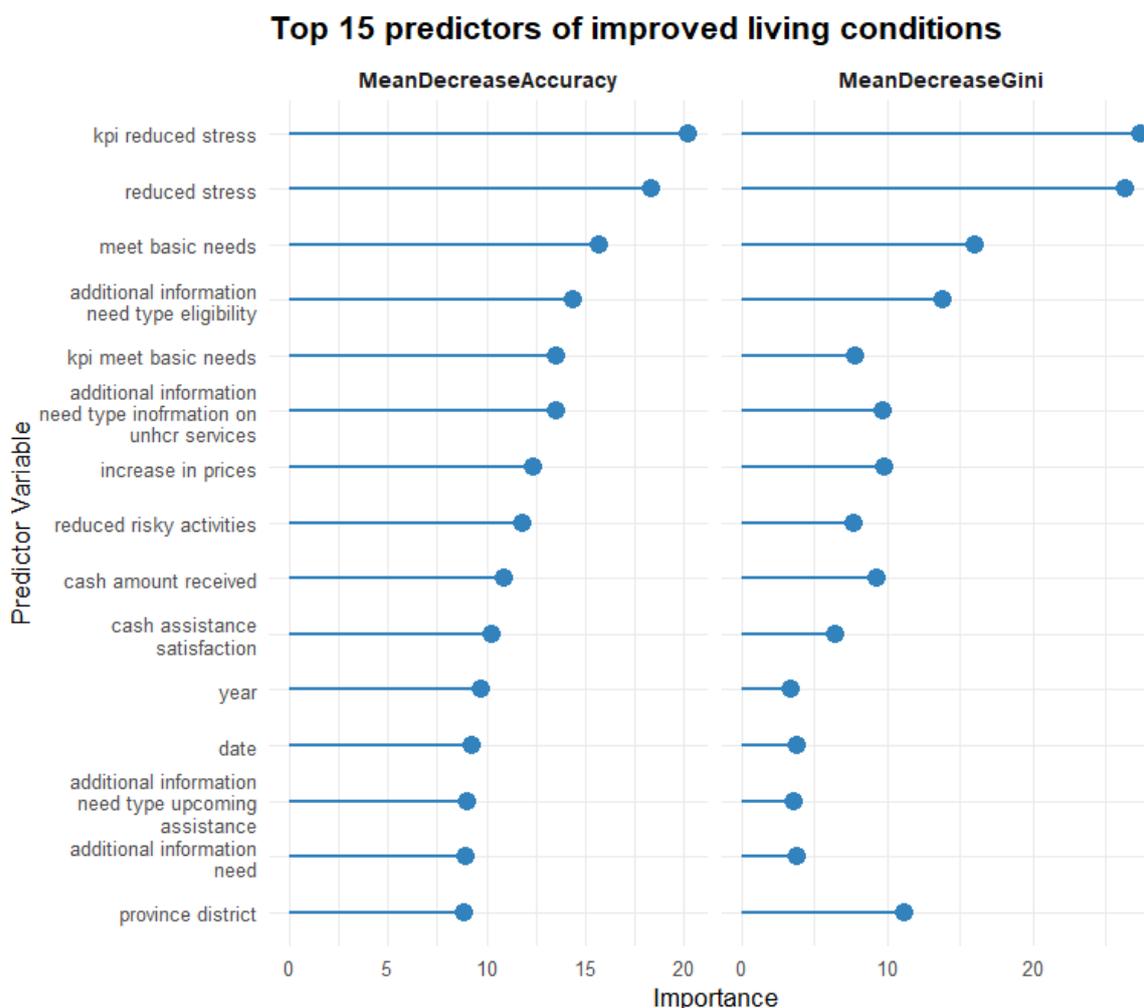
Yes 325 46 0.1239892

No 35 205 0.1458333

A random forest model was used to classify the binary variable `kpi_improved_living_conditions`, representing whether respondents perceived an improvement in their living conditions. The model was trained using **500 trees**, with **11 variables** considered at each split.

The model's **out-of-bag (OOB) error rate** was **13.3%**, reflecting reasonable overall predictive performance. The **confusion matrix** indicates that the model correctly predicted **325 of 371 "Yes" responses**, with a **class error rate of 12.4%**. For the "No" responses, **205 out of 240** were correctly classified, leading to a **class error rate of 14.6%**.

Although the model performs moderately well across both categories, the similar error rates suggest some overlap or noise in the predictors used to distinguish changes in living conditions. Further refinement or segmentation of input variables could help increase classification precision, particularly for mixed-response groups.



The most influential variables associated with reported improvements in living conditions continue to reflect a strong relationship between **psychosocial stability, satisfaction of basic needs, and financial adequacy**. The key performance indicator and self-reported measure for **reduced stress** are the top predictors, pointing to the importance of emotional well-being in shaping how households assess changes in their living environment.

**Meeting basic needs** and variables linked to **information needs**—particularly regarding **eligibility** and **UNHCR services**—also rank highly, reinforcing the role of clear communication and perceived accessibility of support. Other important predictors include **cash amount received, price increases, and cash assistance satisfaction**, suggesting that both the volume of support and how it aligns with household needs influence perceived outcomes.

Contextual and structural variables such as **province of residence, survey date, and spending priorities (spent\_1st)** add further nuance, indicating that perceptions of living condition changes are shaped not just by tangible inputs, but also by timing, location, and broader economic conditions. This underscores the multi-dimensional nature of self-assessed well-being and the need for integrated approaches in programming.

#### 4.6.5.1 Regression analysis: Improved Living Conditions

The regression model for predicting whether respondents reported **improved living conditions** (kpi\_improved\_living\_conditions) exhibits a **very strong fit**, with a **McFadden pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.62** and a **Cragg-Uhler pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> of 0.77**. The model was highly statistically significant ( **$\chi^2(25) = 153.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$** ) and based on 180 observations, indicating that the included variables explained a substantial portion of the variance in outcomes.

A key finding is the strong association between reduced stress and perceived improvements in living conditions. Respondents who did not report reduced stress (kpi\_reduced\_stressNo) were significantly more likely to report worse living conditions ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a close link between mental well-being and housing or living quality assessments.

Likewise, the ability to **meet basic needs** was important. Compared to those fully meeting their needs, individuals in the **“half” category** showed significantly higher odds of perceiving improved living conditions ( **$p = 0.01$** ). Other levels (less\_than\_half, more\_than\_half) had elevated coefficients but did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. These results reinforce the connection between **basic needs satisfaction and subjective perceptions of improvement**.

On the other hand, **information-related constraints** appear negatively associated with improved conditions. Specifically, **not needing information about UNHCR services** (additional\_information\_need\_type\_inofrmation\_on\_unhcr\_servicesNo) was **negatively associated** with improvements ( **$p = 0.01$** ). This may reflect that households who feel more informed are more likely to assess their living situation positively, or conversely, that unmet informational needs contribute to dissatisfaction.

The role of **price inflation** is mixed: while coefficients for both increase\_in\_pricesNo and Yes were negative, neither reached statistical significance. Similarly, the **amount of cash received** had a small, positive, but non-significant coefficient. This suggests that while economic support matters, its direct influence on perceived living conditions may be mediated by other factors, such as spending priorities or broader psychosocial stability.

Results also varied across **provinces**, although few location-based coefficients were statistically significant. Respondents in **Varna**, however, were more likely to report improved living conditions ( **$p = 0.03$** ), potentially reflecting regional differences in services or housing affordability. Other districts showed unstable or non-significant estimates.

A few variables, including cash\_assistance\_satisfactionSomewhat\_satisfied and meet\_basic\_needsDo\_not\_know, had extremely high or undefined coefficients and standard errors, indicating potential **multicollinearity or data sparsity in certain categories**. These outliers suggest the need for collapsing rare response categories or applying regularisation in future modelling.

In sum, this model underscores the importance of **stress reduction, basic needs satisfaction, and access to timely information** in shaping households' perceptions of improvements in their living conditions. While cash assistance plays a foundational role, its perceived value depends on broader support structures and individual psychosocial conditions.

#### MODEL INFO:

Observations: 180

Dependent Variable: kpi\_improved\_living\_conditions

Type: Generalized linear model

Family: binomial

Link function: logit

MODEL FIT:

$\chi^2(25) = 153.52, p = 0.00$   
 Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (Cragg-Uhler) = 0.77  
 Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> (McFadden) = 0.62  
 AIC = 144.80, BIC = 227.82

Standard errors:MLE

	Est.	
(Intercept)	0.69	
kpi_reduced_stressNo	3.79	
reduced_stressNot_at_all	0.02	
reduced_stressSignificantly		
reduced_stressSlightly	-0.33	
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	32.29	
meet_basic_needsHalf	2.69	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	2.01	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	1.14	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.03	
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo		-2.38
increase_in_pricesNo	-1.20	
increase_in_pricesYes	-0.57	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		-2.07
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	-2.19	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	-1.92	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	-2.85	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	-1.24	
cash_amount_received	0.00	
cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied		16.12
cash_assistance_satisfactionVery_satisfied		-1.43
province_districtDobrich	0.97	
province_districtNot available	0.32	
province_districtPlovdiv	-14.66	
province_districtSofia	-2.14	
province_districtSofia-City	0.55	
province_districtVarna	2.55	

	S.E.
(Intercept)	2.46
kpi_reduced_stressNo	0.81
reduced_stressNot_at_all	1.22
reduced_stressSignificantly	
reduced_stressSlightly	0.95
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know	2683.21
meet_basic_needsHalf	1.08
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	1.21
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	1.15

additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo	0.93	
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo		0.86
increase_in_pricesNo	0.92	
increase_in_pricesYes	0.89	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		1.89
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	7385.27	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	2.48	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	2.02	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	2.23	
cash_amount_received	0.00	
cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied		3463.73
cash_assistance_satisfactionVery_satisfied		0.98
province_districtDobrich	0.93	
province_districtNot available	0.84	
province_districtPlovdiv	1696.02	
province_districtSofia	1.55	
province_districtSofia-City	1.07	
province_districtVarna	1.16	
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	z val.	
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(Intercept)	0.28	
kpi_reduced_stressNo	4.66	
reduced_stressNot_at_all	0.02	
reduced_stressSignificantly		
reduced_stressSlightly	-0.35	
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know		0.01
meet_basic_needsHalf	2.49	
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half	1.66	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half	0.99	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo		0.03
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo		
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo		-2.78
increase_in_pricesNo	-1.30	
increase_in_pricesYes	-0.64	
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti		-1.10
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	-0.00	
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	-0.78	
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	-1.41	
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	-0.56	
cash_amount_received	1.09	
cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied		0.00
cash_assistance_satisfactionVery_satisfied		-1.46
province_districtDobrich	1.03	
province_districtNot available	0.38	
province_districtPlovdiv	-0.01	
province_districtSofia	-1.38	
province_districtSofia-City	0.52	

province_districtVarna	2.20		
-----			
-----			
	p		
-----			
(Intercept)	0.78		
kpi_reduced_stressNo	0.00		
reduced_stressNot_at_all	0.99		
reduced_stressSignificantly			
reduced_stressSlightly	0.73		
meet_basic_needsDo_not_know		0.99	
meet_basic_needsHalf	0.01		
meet_basic_needsLess_than_half		0.10	
meet_basic_needsMore_than_half		0.32	
additional_information_need_type_eligibilityNo		0.98	
kpi_meet_basic_needsNo			
additional_information_need_type_inofrmation_on_unhcr_servicesNo			0.01
increase_in_pricesNo	0.19		
increase_in_pricesYes	0.52		
reduced_risky_activitiesi_do_not_usually_resort_to_such_activiti			0.27
reduced_risky_activitiesModerately	1.00		
reduced_risky_activitiesNot_at_all	0.44		
reduced_risky_activitiesSignificantly	0.16		
reduced_risky_activitiesSlightly	0.58		
cash_amount_received	0.27		
cash_assistance_satisfactionSomewhat_satisfied		1.00	
cash_assistance_satisfactionVery_satisfied		0.15	
province_districtDobrich	0.30		
province_districtNot available	0.70		
province_districtPlovdiv	0.99		
province_districtSofia	0.17		
province_districtSofia-City	0.61		
province_districtVarna	0.03		

## 5 Conclusion and Key Recommendations

This evaluation examined the role of UNHCR Bulgaria's Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) in advancing protection outcomes, fostering economic resilience, and enhancing housing stability among forcibly displaced populations. Drawing on a rich dataset from post-distribution monitoring (PDM), the analysis applied a robust statistical approach—including Random Forest variable selection, Propensity Score Matching (PSM), and logistic regression—to unpack the complex associations between cash assistance and key outcome indicators.

At a methodological level, the evaluation highlights the limitations of manual sampling procedures. The absence of reproducible sample generation constrained the generalizability of the findings and limited opportunities for robust trend analysis. A transition toward coded, reproducible sampling and stronger survey design standards would significantly enhance future evaluation and monitoring efforts.

### Statistical tests

**Significant year-on-year changes** were observed in several core indicators. Between 2024 and 2025, access to financial services deteriorated markedly: the proportion of respondents with a bank account, productive assets, or access to loans declined significantly ( $p < 0.005$ ). This suggests a weakening of financial inclusion and potentially shrinking economic opportunities for CBI recipients. Similarly, fewer respondents in 2025 reported that they could fully meet their basic needs, pointing to increasing material hardship ( $p < 0.001$ ). Perceptions of improved living conditions also declined ( $p < 0.001$ ), underscoring growing concerns around household stability. In contrast, some positive changes were also evident. Reported reductions in stress increased significantly between the two years ( $p < 0.001$ ), and perceived safety while accessing or spending assistance also improved, although this change came from an already high baseline of perceived security ( $p = 0.029$ ). Other indicators—such as satisfaction with the cash assistance process, savings behavior, use of negative coping strategies, and food insecurity—remained statistically unchanged over time.

**Gender-disaggregated analysis** revealed very limited differences. The only statistically significant variation was found in stress reduction, with women reporting slightly greater psychological relief than men ( $p < 0.05$ ). Across all other indicators—including financial access, coping behaviors, and ability to meet basic needs—no meaningful disparities were identified between female and male respondents.

**Accommodation type**, however, emerged as a more influential differentiator. Those living in governmental accommodation were significantly more likely to report saving a portion of their cash assistance ( $p < 0.005$ ), potentially reflecting reduced expenditures or access to basic services. Conversely, respondents in private accommodation were significantly more likely to own a bank account ( $p < 0.001$ ), pointing to stronger financial inclusion. For other indicators—including asset ownership, access to loans, and perceived well-being—no statistically significant differences were observed by housing type.

Together, these statistical findings reinforce a key conclusion: while CBI contributed to improved perceptions of stress and safety, economic resilience appears to be under strain, particularly in 2025. Accommodation context influences financial behavior, whereas gender-based outcome disparities were largely absent. These insights underscore the importance of adjusting CBI strategies to address structural barriers to financial inclusion and basic needs fulfillment.

### Summary of regression analysis on financial inclusion

The regression analysis on financial inclusion explored factors associated with whether cash assistance recipients reported having a bank account—a key proxy for economic inclusion and

resilience. The model achieved good fit (McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.30$ ), underscoring that financial inclusion among forcibly displaced households is influenced not only by access to services, but also by how people receive and act upon information, their expenditure priorities, and their housing status.

The analysis confirmed a decline in financial inclusion between 2024 and 2025, particularly among older respondents. A random forest model identified a mix of economic behaviors and information-related variables as the most influential predictors. These included access to loans, preferred sources of information, spending priorities, and accommodation type.

Logistic regression analysis reinforced these associations. **Lack of access to loans** was strongly linked to financial exclusion ( $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting interdependencies between banking and credit access. **Spending behaviors**, such as prioritizing food ( $p < 0.05$ ) or rent ( $p < 0.05$ ), were positively associated with having a bank account—perhaps reflecting greater financial planning or stability. **Information preferences** also mattered: respondents who did not prefer to interact with NGO staff were significantly less likely to be financially included ( $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting the role of communication channels in shaping economic outcomes. Meanwhile, living in **private accommodation** was marginally associated with lower odds of financial inclusion ( $p = 0.06$ ), possibly reflecting informality or lack of documentation.

These findings point to the need for integrated approaches that combine financial literacy, improved access to banking and credit, and tailored communication strategies.

#### Summary of regression analysis on stress reduction

The regression analysis on stress reduction assessed the factors associated with respondents reporting lower stress after receiving cash assistance—a proxy for psychological well-being in displacement contexts.

Findings confirmed that **reported stress reduction improved** across all demographics between 2024 and 2025, particularly among women and younger respondents. A random forest model identified that the most influential predictors of reduced stress included material conditions (such as improved living conditions, ability to meet basic needs, and satisfaction with assistance), behavioral factors (like reduced use of risky coping strategies), and access to reliable information.

Logistic regression further validated these associations. Improvement in **living conditions** showed one of the strongest positive effects ( $p < 0.001$ ), while higher **cash amounts** received were also significantly linked to reduced stress ( $p = 0.03$ ). Avoidance or moderate reduction of risky coping behaviors also correlated with improved well-being. On the **information** side, lack of direct communication with UNHCR staff ( $p = 0.01$ ) and inability to access varied food ( $p = 0.05$ ) were negatively associated with **stress** reduction, underscoring the psychosocial importance of **food security** and institutional communication. The model demonstrated high explanatory power (McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.55$ ), highlighting that stress reduction is shaped by the interplay between financial sufficiency, protection factors, and information access. These results reinforce the need for holistic cash-based interventions that integrate both economic and psychosocial support.

#### Summary of regression analysis on ability to meet basic needs

The regression analysis on respondents' ability to meet their basic needs aimed to identify the key household-level factors influencing economic sufficiency. The model showed strong explanatory power (McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.54$ ; Cragg-Uhler  $R^2 = 0.71$ ), indicating that the selected covariates account for a substantial share of outcome variation.

The analysis confirmed that higher **cash amounts received** were significantly associated with an increased likelihood of meeting basic needs ( $p < 0.001$ ). Respondents who reported greater

reductions in **risky coping behaviors**—particularly those indicating “significant” or “slight” reductions—were also more likely to meet their needs, highlighting the link between economic stability and behavioral adaptation.

**Stress** outcomes emerged as another relevant factor. Not feeling less stressed ( $p = 0.05$ ), or explicitly reporting no stress reduction ( $p < 0.001$ ), were both associated with lower odds of meeting basic needs, underscoring how psychological well-being and material hardship often co-occur.

**Information-related variables** were also significant. Not receiving information through help desks ( $p < 0.001$ ), not preferring to receive updates via social media ( $p < 0.001$ ), and needing more information about UNHCR services ( $p = 0.007$ ) were all linked to a lower probability of meeting basic needs. This suggests that timely, clear communication plays a role not only in protection outcomes but also in supporting financial planning and household decision-making.

The results consistently indicate that basic needs fulfilment depends on an interplay between adequate financial support, reduced reliance on negative coping strategies, and strong information access. Programmatic efforts aiming to boost economic resilience should prioritize all three dimensions to ensure more consistent and equitable outcomes.

#### Summary of regression analysis on negative coping strategies

The regression analysis investigating the use of negative coping strategies among respondents revealed significant insights into the drivers of behavioral vulnerability. The model showed solid explanatory power (McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.39$ ; Cragg-Uhler  $R^2 = 0.56$ ) and was highly statistically significant ( $\chi^2(21) = 169.90$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that the selected covariates meaningfully predict coping behaviors.

Respondents who reported being able to meet all or most of their **basic needs** were substantially less likely to resort to negative coping strategies ( $p < 0.01$  across multiple categories), underscoring the protective role of material adequacy. Additionally, **access to a varied diet** through cash assistance ( $p < 0.001$ ) and reduced reliance on **informal shopping** venues like small shops and weekly markets ( $p < 0.001$  and  $p = 0.05$ , respectively) were associated with lower odds of adopting harmful behaviors. This suggests that food security and purchasing environments can influence coping outcomes.

**Information dynamics** also mattered. Respondents who did not rely on UNHCR staff ( $p = 0.007$ ) or friends and family ( $p = 0.03$ ) as their preferred communication channels were less likely to engage in negative coping, suggesting that reliance on informal or institution-led communication may signal gaps in support clarity. Furthermore, **survey timing** (i.e. data collected in February and March 2024) was significantly associated with coping behaviors ( $p < 0.001$ ), implying that seasonal or operational factors may influence household vulnerability.

Interestingly, some respondents who reported only “slight” or “no” reductions in risky activities were more likely to be classified as using negative coping strategies ( $p = 0.03$  and  $p = 0.04$ , respectively), indicating that perceived behavior change may not always align with structural economic conditions.

Taken together, these findings highlight that reducing reliance on negative coping mechanisms requires a comprehensive approach: ensuring consistent basic needs coverage, supporting access to diverse food and stable markets, and reinforcing effective, accessible communication pathways.

## Summary of regression analysis on living conditions

The regression model assessing predictors of perceived improvements in living conditions yielded a strong statistical fit (McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.62$ ; Cragg-Uhler  $R^2 = 0.77$ ) and was highly significant ( $\chi^2(25) = 153.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This underscores the strength of associations between the included covariates and reported improvements in living standards among cash assistance recipients.

**Psychosocial wellbeing** emerged as a critical factor. Respondents who reported no reduction in stress were significantly less likely to perceive improvements in their living conditions ( $p < 0.001$ ), affirming the close link between mental health and broader perceptions of stability and quality of life. Similarly, those who reported meeting half of their **basic needs** had significantly higher odds of perceiving improved living conditions ( $p = 0.01$ ), supporting the view that even partial satisfaction of material needs contributes positively to perceived outcomes.

**Information-related variables** also showed associations with perceived improvements. Specifically, not needing information about UNHCR services was negatively associated with reported improvements in living conditions ( $p = 0.01$ ), suggesting that households who feel better informed may also feel more supported overall. However, the model did not detect statistically significant effects for **economic variables** such as the amount of cash received. This absence of effect may be due to the relatively small sample size or the inherently subjective nature of the "improved living conditions" variable, which may be influenced by a broad range of contextual and psychosocial factors beyond the cash assistance alone.

Among **geographic predictors**, only residents in Varna were significantly more likely to report improved living conditions ( $p = 0.03$ ), pointing to possible regional disparities in services, costs, or housing stability.

The analysis indicates that reductions in stress, satisfaction of basic needs, and timely access to information are key drivers of perceived improvements in living conditions. These findings suggest that cash assistance is most effective when complemented by psychosocial support and effective communication, and when embedded in broader strategies aimed at improving household stability and self-reliance.

## 5.1 Summary of Key Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the analytical findings and are presented to guide forward-looking programming and strategy development.

### 1. Strengthen Integration Between Cash and Protection Services

- Establish or reinvigorate referral pathways that link cash recipients to legal, housing, and psychosocial support services.
- Ensure that follow-up mechanisms described in SOPs—such as post-assistance case reviews and vulnerability tracking—are consistently implemented.
- Explore targeted “cash-plus” approaches that provide layered support for individuals facing compounded risks (e.g. persons with disabilities, survivors of GBV).

### 2. Improve Targeting and Inclusion Mechanisms

- Move beyond broad categorical targeting by incorporating vulnerability assessments that include economic, legal, and protection indicators.
- Conduct targeted outreach to underrepresented groups such as ethnic minorities and stateless persons to ensure they are equitably included in assistance distributions.

### 3. Enhance Financial Inclusion

- Partner with financial institutions to reduce documentation barriers and expand access to mobile banking or low-fee accounts for displaced populations.
- Incorporate financial literacy training into program delivery where feasible, especially for women-headed households and youth.

#### 4. Strengthen Communication and Information Access

- Improve transparency around eligibility, distribution schedules, and complaint mechanisms through trusted, multilingual communication channels.
- Regularly review which communication modalities (e.g. SMS, UNHCR Help Pages, community focal points) are most effective and adjust strategies accordingly.
- Monitor information adequacy as a core indicator and respond quickly to gaps in awareness or understanding.

#### 5. Address Psychosocial Vulnerability

- Recognise reductions in stress and the ability to avoid risky coping as central indicators of program success—not just material outcomes.
- Expand collaboration with mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) providers to better support CBI recipients experiencing high levels of stress or insecurity.

#### 6. Reinforce Economic Stability and Basic Needs Coverage

- Adjust cash transfer values in line with inflation and shifting household expenditure patterns, with regular market price monitoring.
- Improve alignment between assistance and seasonality (e.g. rent cycles, heating costs) to prevent sudden vulnerability spikes.

#### 7. Adopt Reproducible Sampling and Improve Data Quality

- Require the use of pseudorandom sampling with reproducible code (e.g. `set.seed()` in R) for all future survey rounds.
- Standardise variable naming conventions and ensure full documentation of derived indicators and calculation logic.
- Introduce regular data quality audits and apply automated validation rules to detect inconsistencies during data collection.

These recommendations are intended to ensure that CBI programming in Bulgaria is not only efficient and needs-responsive, but also strategically linked to the broader goals of protection, resilience, and inclusion. They reinforce the need to view cash assistance as a **tool for protection**, not just a mechanism for meeting basic needs. The continued adaptation of program design and data practices will be critical as UNHCR, and its partners navigate the phasing out of CBI and the evolution of the refugee response in Bulgaria.

## APPENDIX 13 – BIBLIOGRAPHY

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