

# Belgium

February 2021

Belgium has a **solid asylum** system and UNHCR enjoys **good collaboration** with the asylum instances. In 2020, Belgium increased its unearmarked funding to UNHCR over the next three years.

In 2020, due to the COVID-related restrictions, only **16,910** persons applied for asylum, a decrease of 39% compared to 2019). The protection rate **decreased** to 34%, compared to 39% in 2019.

In October 2020, a **new government** was established after more than a year of negotiations. In this context, a **Memorandum** with recommendations was established by UNHCR.

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

|                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| Refugees         | <b>61,182</b> |
| Asylum-seekers   | <b>26,110</b> |
| Stateless people | <b>10,933</b> |

## TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

| Refugees         |               | Asylum-seekers   |              |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| Syrian Arab Rep. | <b>16,555</b> | Palestinian      | <b>3,410</b> |
| Unknown          | <b>5,944</b>  | Afghanistan      | <b>2,850</b> |
| Iraq             | <b>5,398</b>  | Syrian Arab Rep. | <b>2,190</b> |

Data source: UNHCR 2020 Mid-Year Statistical report and UNHCR [data finder platform](#)

## COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

**Advocacy:** UNHCR advocated for registration, access to asylum and reception conditions to remain effective even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Inclusion of persons of concern:** People benefitting from a legal stay (incl. asylum-seekers and refugees) in Belgium are included in the general COVID-19 vaccination plan. Belgium intends to extend the vaccination campaign to stateless and undocumented people.

**Communication with Communities:** UNHCR developed a Help Page with a link to COVID-19 information and a Covid guide for asylum seekers and refugees and remained reachable by phone and email.

**More information:** for COVID-19 specific information and latest updates, please visit: <https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/>

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Buddying campaign

In December 2020, UNHCR launched a public information campaign on buddying initiatives for the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

### Webinar on PSSMH for UASC

In November, UNHCR and Platform Mineurs en Exil organised a webinar on psycho-social support and mental health needs of UASC for 250 professionals.

### Resettlement/community sponsorship

In the fall of 2020, resettlement activities resumed after a suspension in 2019 and a pilot project on community sponsorship was rolled out.

### Help Page Belgium

was launched in November 2020 to provide information to refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people



### Integration is better together

Binta, a young refugee from Guinea wanted to change her career orientation. Through an integration programme she met her buddy Georgine, an encounter which resulted in a trust-based and friendly mentoring relationship. [Read story](#)

## Key Priorities

- **Protection (monitoring) / Asylum:** COVID-19 measures introduced in March 2020 (suspension of interviews, cancellation of hearings, etc.) were gradually lifted but impacted access to and length of the procedure. Lately CGRS consulted UNHCR on the use of videoconferencing to undertake interviews. Nearly systematic detention at the border, access to quality legal aid incl. in detention and status determination vis-a-vis some caseloads are potential sources of concern and are constantly monitored by UNHCR and its partners.
- **Resettlement and Complementary Pathways:** Following a suspension in 2019, Belgium resumed resettlement in fall 2020. Since then, Belgium resettled 176 refugees, of which 14 via a community sponsorship pilot project conducted by Fedasil and Caritas. Belgium has committed to continue resettlement with an objective of 1,400 places for 2021.
- **Integration:** In 2019, UNHCR started developing a two-tier project on buddying as a tool for social inclusion and social cohesion, with a “Buddies with Refugees” multimedia campaign launched in 2020 to highlight the contribution of buddying to a welcoming society and to the integration of refugees, and a study day that will take place on 1 April 2021 to assess the role of buddying, to be conceived as a complementary integration tool, in light of challenges faced by refugees and those who support them in their inclusion and integration into Belgian society.
- **Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance:** UNHCR set up a community-based protection project aimed at setting up sustainable refugee Committees in Brussels. Several committees have been established so far and are currently trained in order to prepare them to organise their own advocacy message to deliver to the Brussels local authorities.
- **Advocacy:** UNHCR Belgium enjoys a constructive cooperation with the new government and the new Cabinet of the Secretary of State for asylum and migration.

- **Family reunification:** In 2020, FR has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 measures, and several restrictive draft laws have been introduced in Parliament. UNHCR monitors the situation, provides comments, is in continuous communication with the authorities and supports individual cases.

## Working with Partners

- UNHCR Belgium enjoys a good cooperation with its two implementing partners: NANSSEN (which provides legal support to lawyers and asylum-seekers on the territory and in detention) and Myria, the Federal Migration Centre (which formulates policy advice and provides legal support to beneficiaries of IP, lawyers, and case workers to facilitate family reunification).
- UNHCR also has good working relations with the main refugee NGOs.
- **External Engagement:** The Public Information unit raises awareness about the situation of refugees in Belgium and worldwide to the general public. On World Refugee Day 2020, the unit produced a 2-minute video about asylum-seekers and refugees in Belgium and Luxembourg assisting society in the fight against COVID-19.

## Statelessness

- Belgium is party to the 1954 and 1961 statelessness Conventions. Nationality law contains solid safeguards. Statelessness determination is the competency of tribunals and has been recently centralized.
- In spite of the repeated commitments by precedent governments, no residence permit is automatically granted to recognized stateless persons, leaving them often *de facto* without rights.

## UNHCR Presence in Belgium

### Staff\*:

25 National Staff  
 17 International Staff

### Office:

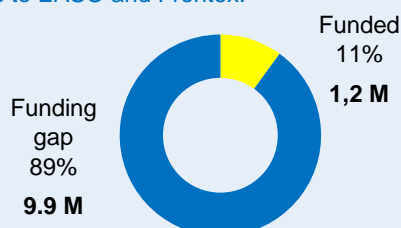
1 Office in Brussels

\* Covering the Representation for EU Affairs, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland and the Netherlands.

## Financial information\* (28 February 2021)

\*information relates to the Representation for EU Affairs, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the Liaison Offices to EASO and Frontex.

Financial requirements:  
**USD 11.1 M**



UNHCR is grateful to the major donors of unearmarked contributions\* to the 2021 global programmes (USD, as of 28 February):

Norway 80 M | Sweden 66.9 M | Netherlands 36.1 M | Denmark 34.6 M | Germany 22.1 M | Switzerland 16.4 M | Ireland 12.5 M | Belgium 11.9 M

\*Unearmarked contributions allow UNHCR for critical flexibility in how best to reach populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Above are donors of USD 10 million or more.