

# Refugee and Asylum-Seekers Update



*Hasibullah is from Afghanistan and has been in Ukraine since 2011. In 2018, he received a UNHCR self-reliance grant to cover his tuition fees and procure equipment to start working as a barber in Odesa. After receiving the grant Hasibullah started his barber course, graduated and is currently employed in a barber shop. For the future, he plans to start his own barber business, as he sees high demand for his service and truly enjoys his new profession.*

## Overview

Since 2011, Ukraine has offered two forms of protection to those who have fled persecution and war in their own countries and have sought asylum in Ukraine: **refugee status** and **complementary protection**. The refugees and asylum-seekers in Ukraine comes from over 60 different countries. While some have managed to learn Ukrainian, find a job, start a business and integrate, others have encountered challenges in integrating and becoming self-sufficient due to their specific needs. These include single mother of large families, unaccompanied minors, persons with disabilities and those who have experienced traumatic experiences. Refugees also face challenges when integrating such as discrimination, legislative discrepancies, corruption and the general economic situation in Ukraine that challenges locals in the same way to access employment opportunities. Although Ukraine has asylum legislation and institutions in place, there are still some remaining gaps in the asylum procedures. For this reason, some asylum-seekers and refugees choose to move to a third country in search of better integration opportunities. The majority of refugees in Ukraine come from countries which are not yet safe for a dignified voluntary repatriation. The low recognition rate in Ukraine makes it particularly difficult for asylum-seekers to achieve progress toward integration, and the state does not provide them with social assistance, language courses or tailored assistance to help them access employment. Nevertheless, during UNHCR's participatory assessment in spring 2019, refugees and asylum-seekers have expressed their interest in learning Ukrainian, finding a job or opening a business in order to stay in Ukraine and call it their home.

# Statistics

Refugee in Ukraine (as of 1 January 2019)

## 2,620

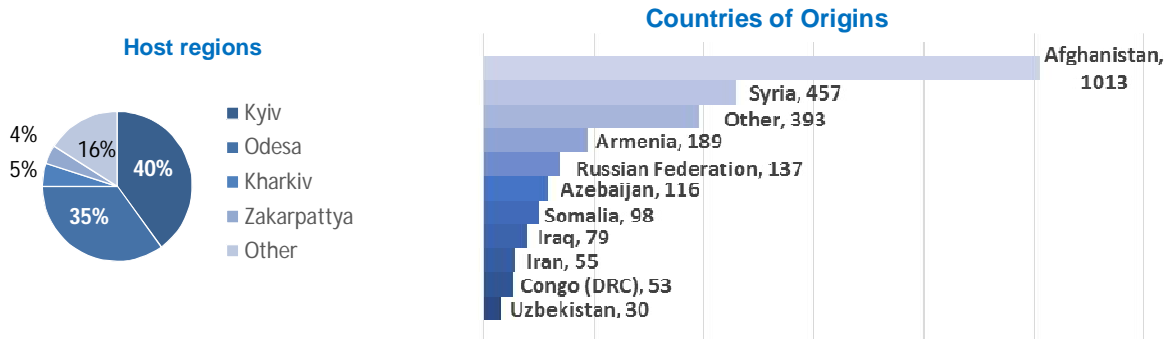
Refugees and persons granted complementary protection in Ukraine

## 24%

Of refugees and persons granted complementary protection are women and girls

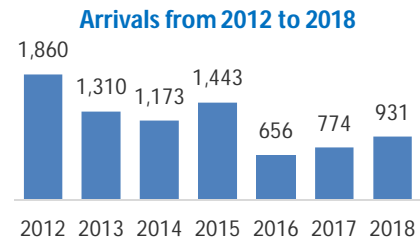
## 17%

Of refugees and persons granted complementary protection are children



# Trends

Despite the large influx of refugees and migrants through the Mediterranean and Balkans routes, there has been no evidence during 2016 - 2018 of a significant increase in the number of new arrivals in Ukraine. Moreover, after four years of stable numbers of new arrivals, 2016 and 2017 saw the number of new asylum-seekers fall by more than half, from 1,433 new applicants in 2015 to 656 new applicants in 2016, and 774 in 2017. In 2018, the number of new asylum applicants increased by 20%, but remained low at 931 persons.



## Low Recognition Rates

At the moment, UNHCR estimates that there are around 6,500 asylum-seekers who are waiting for the results of their asylum application review by the State Migration Service (SMS) or courts. At the same time, only around 100 asylum-seekers per year are granted one of the two protection statuses in Ukraine. A majority of asylum-seekers, including some Syrians, are rejected. For this reason, UNHCR advocates that asylum application be thoroughly considered in order to increase the recognition rates for asylum-seekers from refugee-producing countries.

*“Our children are growing up, studying, and going to school. They ask what they should do with their lives, but we have no answers for them as we do not know which decision the Migration Service will take, or when it will do so.”*

**Asylum-seeker from Tajikistan in Kyiv**

*“I was supposed to undergo a complicated surgery on my eyes. I was told by doctors that delay could lead to blindness. Everything was prepared thanks to UNHCR’s NGO partner. UNHCR agreed to cover the expenses for the surgery and I was already in the hospital. Then the doctors noticed that I did not have proper documents. So they simply withdrew me from the surgery.”*

**Asylum-seeker from Chad**

## UNHCR in Ukraine

UNHCR has been working in Ukraine since 1994 and established a country office the following year. Since its establishment in the country, UNHCR worked with the Government entities, national and local authorities, for an improved national asylum system aligned with international standards, as well as strengthening the capacity of national NGOs to advocate for, protect and assist refugees. Improving asylum procedures in Ukraine has always been a core function of UNHCR. However, cooperation intensified in 2013 with the creation of the Quality Initiative Program. More recently, UNHCR has trained 224 State Migration Services (SMS) staff in charge of status determination from 12 regions in 2018.

### Today UNHCR focussed on livelihoods and empowerment, including:

- **Livelihoods support and self-reliance grants:** In November 2017, UNHCR Ukraine launched a Self-Reliance Grant program, which provides financial assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers



who want to start their own business or attend a vocational training so that they can achieve greater self-reliance. In 2018, 73 persons benefitted from the program. A majority of successful applicants have initiated small farming business, food production and crafts. Other small-scale business examples include tailoring, furniture production, graphic designing, beauty parlour and barber shops. *Photo: Thanks to UNHCR's self-reliance grant, a refugee from Tajikistan opening his own eastern cuisine café. Thanks to the success of the café, he will soon opened additional shops.*

- **Community based protection (CBP)** is a process where UNHCR supports communities to use their own knowledge and capacity to identify their concerns and design response to these concerns themselves. In Ukraine, UNHCR supports refugee communities with trainings on a variety of topics, such as community mobilization and empowerment, NGO management, SGBV response, paralegals, access to migration procedure etc. In 2018, UNHCR organized 16 community support initiatives and 18 peaceful coexistence projects for refugee and their host communities. *Photo: In the beginning of 2019, UNHCR equipped two evening schools used by refugee youth in Bila Tserkva and Vyshneve, Kyiv region. Studying together with Ukrainians will help refugee youth smoothly integrate in society.*



- **Language training:** UNHCR continues providing basic language training for refugees and asylum seekers and advocating with the Government for the identification of certified state language courses. In 2018, the Ministry of Education cooperated with partners on improvement of the manual used for language studies for the refugees. In 2018, over 282 refugees and asylum seekers received life-skills trainings, which included also language training. During the 2019 Participatory Assessment with refugees and asylum-seekers, language studies opportunities were identified as their main priority.
- **Access to employment:** UNHCR and its partners provide counselling to refugees and asylum-seekers on employment and labour market opportunities. Through partnerships, UNHCR provides support with access to apprenticeship or work-placement schemes; advises on diploma recognition procedures to enable employment that matches refugees and asylum-seekers' qualifications. UNHCR also provides assistance with obtaining work permit and advocates with the State Employment Center on regional and local levels for inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers into their retraining programmes.



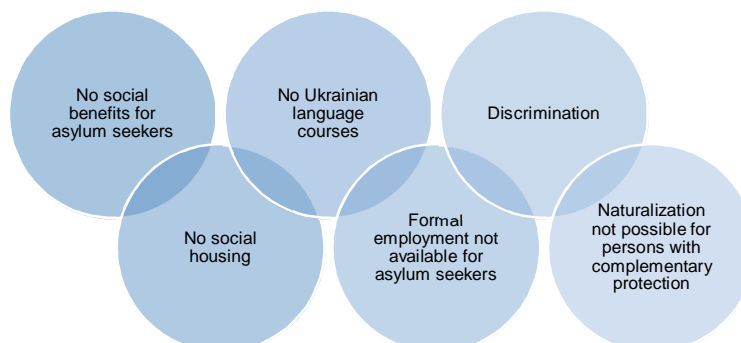
On 6 August 2018, 30 refugee youth benefitted from a motivational training courses provided by MBA Kids in partnership with UNHCR and Charitable Foundation Rokada. The training involved courses by successful Ukrainian business leaders and included the development of entrepreneurial skills.

- **Legal Assistance:** UNHCR provides free legal assistance through its NGO partners to asylum-seekers during their asylum procedures so that they can access their rights, obtain documentation, employment and medical services. In 2018, UNHCR and its partners provided legal assistance to 2,539 refugees and asylum-seekers. Some 500 were assisted with job applications, while 30 refugees were employed.
- **Cash support for the most vulnerable:** UNCHR also provides for the basic needs of the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, with a particular focus on women at risk, unaccompanied and separated children, persons with disabilities and persons with specific protection needs (including LGBTI persons), using cash-based interventions where possible.

**DID YOU KNOW**

UNHCR has a **multi-year, multi-partner protection and solutions strategy** setting out UNHCR's engagement plans for Ukraine for a period of five years, during 2018-2022. The strategy aims to achieve protection and durable solutions for IDPs, refugees, and stateless persons throughout the country.

**Key obstacles to local integration in Ukraine include:**



## Key concerns and advocacy messages

Based on an assessment developed jointly with the State Migration Service in 2018, as well as a participatory assessment with refugees and asylum-seekers in 2019, UNHCR highlights the following priorities for improvements to the asylum system in 2019-2020 (for more information – [please see our attached Key Messages on Asylum](#)):

- Adopt a procedure for considering asylum applications at international airports.
- Provide interpreters free of charge for asylum seekers when accessing state services.
- Ensure that all persons enjoy the right to apply for asylum without undue barriers, regardless of how and when they arrived in the country.
- Asylum-seekers should enjoy freedom of movement; detention is an exceptional measure and can only be justified for a legitimate purpose.
- Persons must have a fair opportunity to appeal against negative asylum decisions.
- Asylum-seekers must have access to free urgent medical care.
- Asylum-seekers' access to employment must be simple and practical.
- Provide language instruction to asylum-seekers and refugees.
- Engage with asylum-seeker and refugee communities.
- All persons with international protection needs must have the possibility to naturalize after a reasonable period of residence.

## Working in partnership

**Free Legal Aid Centres (FLAC):** As of 1 July 2015, government-run FLAC have become operational and available to asylum seekers in the asylum process. However, free legal aid still lack specialized skills required to assist asylum seekers and refugees. Supporting FLAC with the aim of progressively developing their capacity in the area of asylum is one of UNHCR Ukraine strategic priorities. UNHCR provides support to the free legal aid system in regions where most asylum applications are received.

**The State Migration Services of Ukraine:** The Department on Foreigners and Stateless Persons of the State Migration Service is the main counterpart of UNHCR in Ukraine. The SMS was established in 2010 as a government institution coordinated by the Minister of Interior. Through the SMS, the Minister implements the state migration policy on combating illegal migration, citizenship, registration of refugees and other categories of migrants. The SMS is responsible for implementation of the Refugee Law. The SMS's Headquarters in Kyiv coordinates the work of 12 regional branches that conduct first instance RSD. Decisions to grant protection are made at the central level.

UNHCR also works in coordination with the [State Border Guard Service](#); [Supreme Court](#); [Ombudsperson of the Ukrainian Parliament \(Verkhovna Rada\)](#); and the [Ministry of Social Policy](#).

UNHCR provides financial support to five NGO partners assisting refugees and asylum-seekers, including protection and legal aid, and conduct advocacy and capacity building activities. These partners are: **Kyiv:** [Right to Protection \(R2P\)](#), [Rokada](#), **Lviv, Lutsk, Chernihiv and Kharkiv:** [Right to Protection](#) **Odesa:** [Desyate Kvitnya](#), **Zakarpattia:** [International Fund for Health Well Being and Environment Conservation \(NEEKA\)](#).



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