



BULGARIA

2024-2026 IFRC network country plan

19 June 2024

Multi-Year Funding Requirement **CHF 62.3M**

In support of the Bulgarian Red Cross



BULGARIAN
RED CROSS



28

National Society branches



501

National Society staff



16,367

National Society volunteers

People to be reached



180,000

Ongoing
emergency
operations



2,000

Climate and
environment



15,000

Disasters
and crises



5,000

Health and
wellbeing



20,000

Migration and
displacement



10,000

Values, power
and inclusion

IFRC network multi-year focus

Emergency response

- Population movement crisis

Longer term needs

- Disaster preparedness
- Climate change adaptation

Capacity development

- Humanitarian diplomacy
- National Society development

Key country data

Population

6.5M

INFORM Climate Change Risk Index

Low

Human Development Index rank

68

Population below poverty level

22.9%

IFRC Country Cluster Delegation for Central &
South-eastern Europe, Sarajevo

Funding requirements

2024

2025**

2026**

Total 37.9M CHF

Total 12.8M CHF

Total 11.62M CHF

Through the IFRC

27.2M CHF

Through Host National Society

→ **10.7M CHF**

Through the IFRC

→ **2.1M CHF**

Through Host National Society

10.7M CHF

Through the IFRC

→ **925,000 CHF**

Through Host National Society

10.7M CHF

***Projected funding requirements*

IFRC Breakdown

Ongoing emergency operations

25.1M CHF (2022-2025)

Longer-term needs

250,000 CHF

Climate and environment

500,000 CHF

Disasters and crises

500,000 CHF

Health and wellbeing

500,000 CHF

Migration and displacement

150,000 CHF

Values, power and inclusion

200,000 CHF

Enabling local actors

Participating National Societies

American Red Cross*

British Red Cross*

Canadian Red Cross Society*

Hong Kong Red Cross, Branch of the Red Cross Society of China*

French Red Cross*

Irish Red Cross Society*

Japanese Red Cross Society*

Swiss Red Cross

Turkish Red Crescent

**National Societies which have contributed only multilaterally through the IFRC in the first half of 2023.*

IFRC Appeal codes

Ongoing Emergency Appeal:

MGR65002

Longer-term needs:

MAABG001

Hazards



Fires



Floods

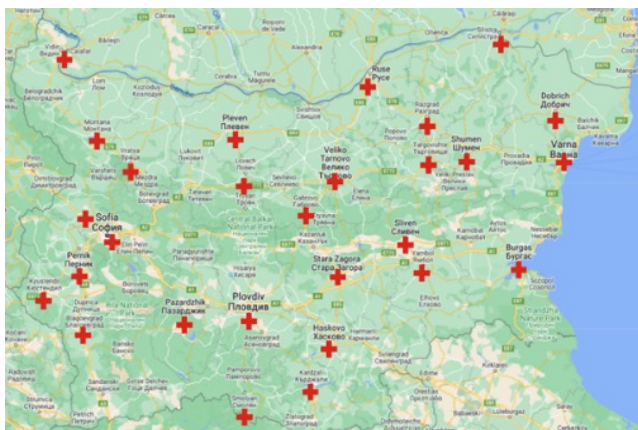


Earthquakes



Extreme weather conditions

NATIONAL SOCIETY PROFILE



Map of the Bulgarian Red Cross branches

The **Bulgarian Red Cross** was founded in 1878 and was admitted to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1921. It operates across the country through 28 regional branches and over 2,691 local units, adhering to the Bulgarian Red Cross Act and the principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. The National Society is the largest volunteer organization in Bulgaria, providing first aid training, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, rescue operations, and various social and health services. The Bulgarian Red Cross follows a four-tier organizational structure, culminating in the General Assembly, its highest governing body.

The Bulgarian Red Cross' strategic plan, in line with Strategy 2030, focuses on three main strategic goals developed through several national general assemblies:

- Support empathetic and active individuals to overcome vulnerabilities and build integrated, prosperous, and sustainable communities
- Implement essential activities for successful intervention in disaster and crisis situations and preserve the health and lives of affected members of the communities
- Make a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion and ensure acceptance of humanitarian values in society to limit negative social attitudes (such as xenophobia, discrimination, intolerance, and aggression)

As outlined in the National Society Strategic Plan 2020-2030, its programmes target various areas including first aid, disaster response, long-term development, shelter, health, youth engagement, and migration. By 2022, the National Society reached 477,000 people through its long-term services and development programmes and 216,000 people through disaster response and early recovery programmes.

IFRC NETWORK ACTION

JOINT SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Bulgaria, located in the eastern Balkan Peninsula, has diverse terrain including mountains, rivers, lakes, and a coastline. With a population of about 6.5 million, 75 per cent reside in urban areas, while 25 per cent of the population live in rural regions. However, the country faces challenges from a persistent trend of population ageing and uneven distribution.

Economically, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp GDP decline, impacting businesses and the lives of ordinary citizens in the country. Coupled with healthcare facilities being overwhelmed, foreign direct investment to the country decreased, and unemployment rates soared to over 10 per cent. Economic recovery was hindered in 2022 due to the Ukraine conflict and resulting inflation, exacerbating poverty, which affects 22.9 per cent of the population.

Politically, Bulgaria grapples migration-related challenges due to its position on migration routes from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The country aims to support other countries through its international development cooperation policy, transitioning towards Eurozone inclusion for economic stability.

In terms of environmental challenges in the country, Bulgaria faces multiple environmental threats in the form of air and water pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Industrial activities, outdated infrastructure, and inefficient waste management contribute to environmental policies with EU standards and commitments, including efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air and water quality, and protect natural habitats. Socially, Bulgaria faces issues of aging populations, poverty, and loneliness, particularly in rural areas. Emigration, driven by low incomes, contributes to population decline and poses risks of trafficking. Social cohesion is a concern in Bulgaria, with persistent issues related to discrimination, social exclusion, and poverty, particularly among minority communities.

ONGOING EMERGENCY RESPONSE

For more real-time information on emergencies, see IFRC GO page [Bulgaria](#).

Emergency Operation	Ukraine and Impacted Countries Crisis
Appeal number	MGR65002
Duration	September 2022-December 2025
People to be assisted	22.7 M (total); 180,000 (in Bulgaria)
Funding requirement	Total: CHF 800 M (IFRC); CHF 2.7 billion (Federation-wide) Bulgaria: CHF 25.1M (IFRC); CHF 30.3 M (Federation-wide)
Link to Emergency Appeal	Revised Emergency Appeal
Link to Operational Strategy	Revised Operational Strategy Bulgaria Response Plan
Last operation update	Operation Update No.9

The international armed conflict in Ukraine continues, inflicting a devastating toll on the lives of people. The protracted crisis has resulted in massive civilian casualties, severe harm to critical infrastructure and livelihoods, and widespread displacement from front-line communities, leading to an alarming escalation in humanitarian needs, inside and outside of Ukraine. Millions of people have crossed borders from Ukraine into neighbouring countries and beyond. Most of these individuals have been displaced for nearly two years, and the gaps in meeting their needs are still increasing. Displaced people from Ukraine still require safety, assistance, and critical protection to lead dignified lives and restore their wellbeing and livelihoods.

First launched in February 2022, the IFRC Emergency Appeal was revised in May 2023, in support of the work of 18 National Societies including the Bulgarian Red Cross who are responding to the crisis. The revised Emergency Appeal presents a substantial increase in people targeted, funding requirement and geographical coverage, to support the National Societies in assisting people in Ukraine and other impacted countries affected by the crisis. It also represents a shift in response from an emergency phase to a protracted crisis scenario, while recognizing the need to remain agile and proactive in what continues to be a highly dynamic environment.

Short description of the emergency operational strategy

The Bulgarian Red Cross has been actively involved in the IFRC Ukraine and affected countries response, raising nearly CHF 3 million from the public, with expenditures totalling CHF 2.08M.

The National Society's interventions under this emergency appeal will consist of:

Health and care

Provide health information and referrals through a hotline based in Sofia. Support payment of health insurance for displaced women from Ukraine and displaced men older than 65. Provide financial reimbursement using cash or voucher modality. Provide mental health and psychosocial support ([MHPSS](#)) at the branch level through face-to-face professional consultations as well as through the psychosocial helpline. Provide access to first aid. Procure and distribute hygiene kits and baby kits.

Shelter, housing and settlements

Replenishment of sleeping kit stock used during the initial emergency and prepositioning of additional kits for use in future emergencies linked to the conflict in Ukraine.

Cash and voucher assistance ([CVA](#))

Provide cash grants to displaced people including targeted winterization grants, multi-purpose cash support based on selection criteria, and improved access to health through reimbursement grants for health-related expenses.

Livelihoods

Purchase large parcels of emergency food assistance to support households. Purchase migrant food kits and set up soup kitchens for daily food supply at larger branches.

Protection, Gender, and Inclusion ([PGI](#))

Manage and create child friendly spaces in all humanitarian service points. Provide art therapy classes in selected location. Develop Bulgarian Red Cross specific minimum standards for child friendly spaces. Provide prevention and protection of

sexual exploitation and abuse and child safeguarding training for staff and volunteers.

Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

Manage effective feedback mechanisms for the Ukraine response, including a helpline with Ukrainian-speaking operators, social media, and face-to-face channels. Train staff and volunteers on CEA fundamentals, including responding to feedback. Institutionalize CEA approaches in all long-term programs and operations.

Migration and displacement

Establish humanitarian service points ([HSPs](#)) across Bulgaria run by different regional branches. Ensure all HSPs have a minimum understanding on protection, including restoring family links ([RFL](#)) tools and how to use them.

Provide access to activities such as language classes, curriculum vitae (CV) development and job placement opportunities that help migrants and refugees to better adapt and integrate with the communities that they are living with.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Climate and environment

Bulgaria's current climate features hot, dry summers and cold winters, but climate change is anticipated to alter these patterns significantly. Rising temperatures are expected, leading to reduced snowmelt flow and more frequent and intense heatwaves. [Climate models](#) predict hotter, drier summers and milder winters with less snowfall, impacting agriculture, water resources, and ecosystems, requiring adaptation measures.

Air pollution is a significant environmental challenge in Bulgaria, particularly in urban areas and industrial zones. The main sources of air pollution include vehicle emissions, industrial activities, and residential heating. According to the European Environment Agency (EEA), Bulgaria has struggled to meet [European Union air quality standards](#), with high levels of particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) exceeding permissible limits. Poor air quality poses risks to public health, contributing to respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and premature mortality.

Globally, increasing disasters exacerbate vulnerability, expanding societal risks. Climate change not only intensifies disaster damage but also prompts ecological shifts, affecting livelihoods and disease distribution. Higher temperatures pose health risks, particularly for vulnerable groups, and changing precipitation patterns challenge water and food access.

[Agriculture](#) faces reduced yields and pest risks, while strained water resources impact drinking and irrigation. Infrastructure risks rise from extreme weather, and the health sector contends with heat-related illnesses and disease spread.

Bulgaria has enacted environmental laws and regulations to address pollution, waste management, and biodiversity conservation. The government enforces these regulations through monitoring, inspections, and penalties for

non-compliance. As an EU member state, the country has aligned its [environmental policies with EU standards](#) and directives. The country implements EU regulations related to air and water quality, waste management, and nature conservation, essential for EU funding and environmental sustainability.

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross aims to ensure that it is an effective partner of the state in adequately responding to protect the life and health of the population, build resilience of vulnerable individuals and communities, reduce damage and recovery, and prevent, recognize, and mitigate the risks and impacts of climate change. For achieving this, the National Society will:

- Ensure that all its own strategies, policies and programmes work towards increasing its resilience to the impacts of climate change
- Support local communities as well as national, regional, and local authorities to adapt to climate change and mitigate risks
- Contribute to the international climate resilience and preparedness by encouraging stronger [global engagement](#) and exchanges on adaptation
- Strengthen its role at the mountain rescue service as a leading structure in the prevention, assistance, and rescue of victims in the mountains and a partner of the state

Planned activities in 2024

- Install a 115-kW grid-connected solar panel system at the main warehouse and training centre in Sofia to produce carbon-free electricity and expand it to the Lozen training centre

- Continue solar panel installations across its branches and Headquarters in Sofia, aiming to reduce the organization's [carbon footprint](#) and lower electricity costs
- Implement climate awareness projects involving youth engagement in activities like tree planting, clean-up drives, and recycling campaigns
- Conduct outreach to schools and youth groups to raise awareness about the heightened risk of climate disasters such as flooding, hurricanes, and extreme weather events
- Involve community groups and stakeholders like municipalities, fire services, and national park rangers in the design of activities to address long-term climate change challenges
- Install [green](#) infrastructure like gabion baskets, tree planting, grassland renewal, and river clean-ups to mitigate flooding
- Support projects to provide shading in urban areas with structures and vegetation, and implement measures to mitigate forest fires by creating fire trails and reducing fuel loads
- Establish shelters for the vulnerable population to provide refuge and support during extreme weather events

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC provides comprehensive support to the Bulgarian Red Cross in the conception and execution of initiatives focused on climate change adaptation and improved resilience enhancement. This includes capacity building, knowledge dissemination, technical support, and financing. These combined efforts are intended to improve the capacity of the Bulgarian Red Cross to address climate related issues faced by communities, with the aim of safeguarding the most vulnerable segments of the population.

The IFRC's [Guide to Climate-Smart Programmes and Operations \(2023\)](#) provides a structured approach for conducting climate analyses. Emphasizing collaboration with national partners such as HydroMet agencies, the guide integrates climate and environmental data to enhance analysis precision and inform decision-making for vulnerable communities. This data-driven approach was highlighted at the consultative meeting of National Societies in the Central and South-Eastern Europe (CSEE) Country Cluster in Sarajevo. During the meeting, Secretaries General and key staff from the eight National Societies discussed a joint action plan for longer-term development goals, including environmental sustainability objectives.



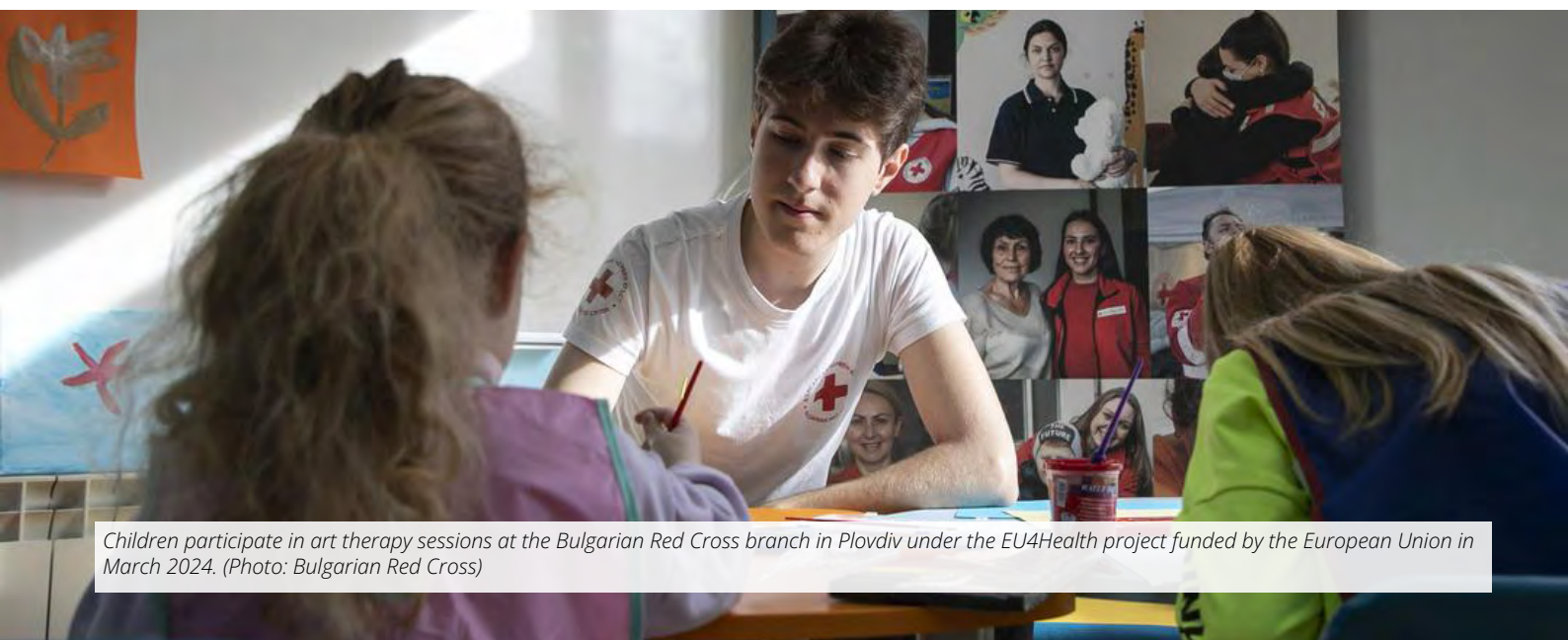
Disasters and crises

For more real-time information on emergencies, see IFRC GO page [Bulgaria](#).

Bulgaria faces various hazards such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, and extreme temperatures, with vulnerability influenced by factors like poverty rates and healthcare access. The country's coping capacity for these hazards is limited, highlighting the need for comprehensive disaster risk

reduction strategies, better infrastructure, and enhanced institutional capacities. Chronic disasters including floods, droughts, and extreme temperatures are common, affecting agriculture, water resources, and public health, especially for vulnerable groups.

Recent severe [floods in 2022](#) and increasing wildfires pose significant challenges, along with risks from technological



Children participate in art therapy sessions at the Bulgarian Red Cross branch in Plovdiv under the EU4Health project funded by the European Union in March 2024. (Photo: Bulgarian Red Cross)

accidents due to industrial areas. Vulnerable populations, including the elderly and low-income communities, are disproportionately affected, requiring emergency shelter, clean water, healthcare, and livelihood support.

Forest fires are a recurring threat in Bulgaria, especially during hot and dry weather conditions. Forest fires can devastate ecosystems, destroy habitats and threaten human settlements. The risk of forest fires is higher in regions with dense forest cover, such as the [Balkan Mountains](#) and [Rhodope Mountains](#).

Coordination among state services, NGOs, and international organizations is crucial for disaster response and management, including access to remote areas and logistical hurdles in aid distribution. The Bulgarian government has established policies and plans for disaster risk reduction and management, involving various ministries and local authorities to ensure a comprehensive approach to response and recovery. The Bulgarian government has also implemented early warning systems to alert communities and authorities about impending disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, and forest fires. These systems use technology, including sirens, weather forecasts and mobile phone alerts to disseminate timely information and warnings.

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross aims to effectively execute and enhance its auxiliary role to the public authorities for adequate response to disaster and crisis situations at national and local levels to protect the life and health of the population, build resilience of vulnerable individuals and communities, reduce damage and recovery, and prevent, recognize, and mitigate the risks and impacts of climate change.

Planned activities in 2024

- Conduct an [emergency needs assessment](#) training at the Lozen training centre, followed by a national disaster simulation exercise involving regional branches and Bulgarian government stakeholders
- Conduct an [preparedness for effective response \(PER\)](#) assessment, to enhance response capacity, followed by a plan of action for implementation
- Invest in communication systems and digital infrastructure and establish a crisis operation centre at the headquarters in Sofia, with the Lozen centre serving as a backup
- Ensure swift nationwide response and minimization of crises' impact by prepositioning emergency relief items for 12,000 people in regional and main warehouses

- Upgrade the very high frequency (VHF) radio network to a modern digital system to enhance communication, critical information dissemination, and assistance provision during emergencies
- Modernize infrastructure and optimize storage facilities in three regional warehouses to strengthen rapid deployment of life-saving supplies
- Invest in specialized equipment and training for the Mountain Rescue Service comprising 32 teams and 560 volunteers to maintain 24/7 communication and conduct rescue operations in all mountain regions
- Focus on vital skills and teamwork for the Water Life Saving Service (WLSS) by providing cutting-edge equipment for water rescue scenarios and comprehensive training to new volunteers
- Carry out activities and training linked to becoming a cash ready National Society

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC supports the Bulgarian Red Cross in disaster response and recovery operations by mobilizing resources, providing humanitarian aid, and assisting in the coordination of relief efforts. The IFRC helps build local capacities by training volunteers and promoting [community-based initiatives](#) to enhance resilience and preparedness for future disasters.

The IFRC is supporting the Bulgarian Red Cross in expanding its [MHPSS](#) services for disaster-affected populations, as well as safeguarding the well-being of staff and volunteers. Beyond immediate response, IFRC's support focuses on strengthening local institutions, advocating for disaster preparedness policies, and addressing root causes of crises like conflict and poverty. Collaboration with partners promotes sustainable development and resilience-building in communities. In 2022, the IFRC supported the National Society through the Disaster Response Emergency Fund ([DREF](#)) for consecutive floods which caused heavy damages in several settlements in three municipalities on the territory of Plovdiv region, Central Bulgaria along the Stryama river.

During the joint consultation of CSEE National Societies, technology emerged as a critical driver for improving efficiency, with applications like the Red Rose system and KoBo survey tool enhancing data management and reducing costs. However, challenges such as digital literacy gaps and data protection concerns were acknowledged. The IFRC will support the Bulgarian Red Cross in implementing these tools to enhance its disaster response.



Bulgaria exhibits a mixed health profile, with an average life expectancy of 75 years for males and 81 years for females. Major diseases prevalent in the population include cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory issues, diabetes, and mental health disorders like depression and anxiety.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bulgaria experienced one of Europe's highest mortality rates. Economic constraints and growing vulnerabilities influenced preventive measures and treatment. Vulnerable groups displayed heightened risky behaviours and lifestyle choices, exacerbating chronic distress, particularly during emergencies.

The incidence of various diseases, including cardiovascular, pulmonary, musculoskeletal, endocrine, and infectious diseases, has surged in Bulgaria. Accidents and traumas disproportionately affect children, low-income individuals, and specific ethnic communities, contributing to premature death and disability. Road traffic trauma emerged as a leading cause of mortality and permanent disabilities, especially among young individuals, warranting urgent intervention and preventive measures.

Bulgaria's health priorities include improving healthcare access and quality, strengthening primary healthcare services, addressing health inequalities, and promoting preventive measures. The implementation of the National Health Strategy focuses on enhancing healthcare infrastructure, workforce development, and chronic disease management.

Access to healthcare faces challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas. Disasters and crises further disrupt healthcare services, making it difficult for affected populations to access medical care. Epidemics like influenza outbreaks periodically challenge public health in Bulgaria. While vaccination coverage is generally high, specific populations or regions may face reduced access, leading to under-immunized children.

Malnutrition is generally not a major concern in Bulgaria, but it can affect vulnerable groups such as the elderly and socially disadvantaged populations.

Non-communicable Diseases, including cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, are a growing health burden in Bulgaria, requiring focused attention in the country's health agenda.

Climate change poses various health risks in Bulgaria, including increased heat-related illnesses, changes in water availability leading to water-borne diseases, and the prevalence of vector-borne diseases like tick-borne encephalitis and West Nile virus.

The Bulgarian government has implemented policies and action plans to address health issues, including the National Health Strategy, National Plan for Health Promotion, and National Environmental Health Action Plan. Coordination mechanisms involving various ministries, agencies, and local

authorities aim to ensure effective emergency response and health crisis management.

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross emphasizes healthy lifestyle and mitigating health risk factors across environmental, economic, social, and behavioural domains. In line with its mission, the Bulgarian Red Cross advocates for a comprehensive approach to enhance community health and wellbeing, confronting the challenges head-on and striving for lasting impact. For this, the National Society aims to:

- Increase health awareness among aged and vulnerable groups with activities, education and campaigns promoting disease prevention and healthy ageing
- Strengthen the resilience of communities and their training in first aid, to deal with different types of traumas and build habits for safer living
- Support vulnerable migrants and displaced persons to access health services, including MHPSS, medicines, and equipment
- Further develop its MHPSS capacities and increase the ability to respond to emerging mental health and psychosocial needs, through provision of basic psychosocial support

Planned activities in 2024

- Promote voluntary participation of retirees in community activities and civil society development
- Conduct information campaigns targeting vulnerable groups to minimize health risk factors and promote healthy lifestyles
- Utilize digital communications for disseminating health-related information and prevention of communicable diseases
- Publish and distribute advertising materials to promote voluntary blood donation and raise awareness about organ, tissue, and cell donation
- Introduce digital platforms for first aid training and equip regional branches with new first aid equipment
- Provide first aid training tailored for refugees and migrants, ensuring accessibility and availability
- Support over 4,000 refugees and migrants in accessing health services and medical equipment, and reimburse costs associated with healthcare, medicine, and specialist visits

- Publish guidebooks in multiple languages to raise awareness about accessing health services
- Establish mobile health teams equipped to respond to emergencies such as influx of refugees and flood disasters
- Train volunteers and staff to provide basic psychological support and medical assistance
- Train master trainers in Advanced Life Support for enhancing emergency health response capacities
- Pilot mini mobile units for road safety and mass casualty response in partnership with the Ministry of Interior
- Facilitate technical support for health emergency preparedness through knowledge sharing, conferences, and capacity building
- Develop MHPSS micro-projects based on identified needs, including art therapy classes, first aid training, and cultural events
- Implement projects across Bulgaria, with each branch participating in at least one project managers to address staff and volunteer care and fund activities to mitigate issues associated with staff care and mental health
- Support staff and volunteers' mental health and psychosocial wellbeing to enable effective response

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC supports the Bulgarian Red Cross regarding community health programmes, promoting health education, and enhancing access to healthcare services, particularly in underserved areas. This includes training volunteers, establishing health clinics, and supporting outreach initiatives to address specific health needs.

The IFRC also supports the Bulgarian Red Cross in strengthening health emergency preparedness and response. This involves enhancing the capacity of local health teams, promoting early warning systems for disease outbreaks, and coordinating with relevant authorities to ensure an effective health response during crises. In addition, the IFRC supports the Bulgarian Red Cross in strengthening its MHPSS capacity including the staff and volunteer care.

In collaboration with the IFRC, the Bulgarian Red Cross also works on promoting disease prevention and control, focusing on vaccinations, hygiene practices, and disease surveillance. This includes initiatives targeting zero-dose and under-immunized children, aiming to increase vaccination coverage and protect vulnerable populations.

The **Canadian Red Cross** is supporting the Bulgarian Red Cross bilaterally to implement the health in emergencies project and localization efforts with the Russe Red Cross branch located at the border with Romania.



Migration and displacement

Migration and displacement in Bulgaria encompass diverse groups, including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. Bulgaria serves as both a transit and destination country, with occasional instances of originating migration flows.

Historically, refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria have primarily hailed from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, but the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led to a shift in this trend. Fluctuations in asylum applications are influenced by regional and global geopolitical dynamics. While many asylum seekers previously aimed to transit through Bulgaria to reach other EU countries, a notable change has occurred, with numerous refugees from Ukraine now opting to stay in Bulgaria until the conflict subsides.

The causes of migration and displacement in Bulgaria are multifaceted. Economic factors including the pursuit of better job opportunities and higher wages drive labour migration,

while conflict, political instability, and persecution remain significant drivers of refugee flows.

Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers encounter humanitarian needs and gaps in support along their journey. Access to safe shelter, healthcare, education, and legal assistance are essential requirements, yet language barriers, discrimination, and limited social and labour integration opportunities present additional challenges.

Bulgaria aligns with international and regional frameworks such as the Global Compact on Refugees, implementing national legislation and establishing coordination mechanisms to manage migration and displacement. However, the dynamic political landscape, characterized by frequent elections and xenophobic displays, poses challenges to the establishment of a comprehensive and consistent governmental strategy for refugee protection and integration.

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross aims to strengthen its auxiliary role as an important partner of state institutions, local authorities, international and non-governmental organizations in the reception and socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants, in the formation of a tolerant social environment, and in the empowerment of refugee and migrant communities. With this aim, the National Society will:

- Provide timely and effective assistance to protect vulnerable persons and restore and maintain family ties between members of separated families
- Ensure meaningful participation of refugee and migrant communities and facilitate sustainable integration into host community

Planned activities in 2024

- Encourage staff and volunteers to participate in national and international thematic trainings, seminars, and conferences on working with refugees and migrants to enhance knowledge and skills
- Empower and assist refugees and migrants to access social services, humanitarian assistance, education, health, housing, labour market, as well as through thematic trainings/vocational training/community-led initiatives
- Organize information meetings with refugees and migrants to educate them on their rights and obligations
- Assist and protect migrants and refugees along the Balkan migration route through [humanitarian service points \(HSPs\)](#)
- Raise awareness among Bulgarian host community and overcome xenophobic displays; advocacy before national

and local authorities, public and private stakeholders to ensure meaningful participation and health, educational and labour integration

- Provide improved access to health and hygiene in government managed refugee reception centres for migrants on the move

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC works closely with the Bulgarian Red Cross to enhance their capacity in responding to the needs of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, by supporting with technical expertise, resource mobilization, and capacity building. This enables the Bulgarian Red Cross to provide vital services such as emergency relief, access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and assistance in the process of integration and social [inclusion](#). The IFRC also assists in promoting awareness, community engagement, and advocacy efforts to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of migrants and displaced populations.

The IFRC fosters coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners, to ensure a comprehensive and collaborative response to migration and displacement issues in Bulgaria. The long-term support aims to strengthen the resilience of affected communities and facilitate their successful integration into the host society.

The **Swiss Red Cross** provides support to the National Society under migration and displacement.

The **Hong Kong Red Cross Branch of the Red Cross Society of China** is supporting the National Society to provide hot meals for displaced people during winter months.

The **Swiss Red Cross** supports the National Society in the project for improved and quality [restoring family links](#) (RFL) and protection services.



Values, power and inclusion

In Bulgaria, marginalized groups such as single mothers, disabled individuals, and ethnic minorities often experience significant inequalities, with limited access to resources and opportunities. Their exclusion from decision-making processes further exacerbates this situation.

Human trafficking is a pressing concern in Bulgaria, necessitating measures to identify and protect at-risk individuals, provide comprehensive support to survivors, and enhance law enforcement against traffickers. Refugees, migrants, and

others separated from their families require specialized assistance to facilitate family reunification and address the psychological impacts of separation. Disabled individuals often face risks of violence and exclusion, hampering their accessibility, opportunities, and support services.

Gender inequality is high, especially considering its intersection with other forms of inequality. Efforts should concentrate on promoting gender equality, challenging harmful gender stereotypes, and empowering women and girls.

Single mothers constitute one of the most vulnerable population groups in Bulgaria, with poverty rates nearly three times higher than the national average. Child poverty is particularly prevalent among families with multiple children, contributing to social marginalization. Children are especially susceptible to violence and exclusion, underscoring the importance of comprehensive child protection systems to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Discrimination and marginalization are also faced by the LGBTQI+ community, racialized individuals, and ethnic and religious minorities. In Bulgaria, individuals are at risk of identity-based violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross aims to make a significant contribution to reducing poverty and social exclusion and creating the conditions for protection, gender, and inclusion (PGI), sustainable growth, and opportunities to improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups by harnessing new reserves, resources and means to unlock their potential for meaningful participation in society.

Planned activities in 2024

- Create conditions for improving the adaptation of vulnerable persons to their environment and enhance their skills and capacities to cope with challenges they face in their daily lives
- Carry out an assessment of existing PGI practices and develop and implement a set of policies, guidelines and standards to complement the current operational frameworks
- Revise/update the child protection policy and other relevant internal documents
- Develop PGI/ Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) guidelines and referral pathways, follow-up on procedures, and map service providers
- Disseminate updated procedures among the relevant internal stakeholders (both nationally and locally) by implementing a series of training and information sessions
- Ensure the national focal point is prepared to train local staff and volunteers on PGI topics
- Support inclusion of PGI in existing networks of professionals and volunteers (disaster response teams, MHPSS volunteers' network, mountain and water rescue teams)

- Develop a basic PGI e-learning course in Bulgarian within the e-learning platform
- Conduct awareness sessions in planned events and trainings in regional branches under its 16-days of activism campaign
- Organize community engagement and accountability (CEA) events for children and adults, including host communities, as part of its PGI mainstreaming
- Ensure regional branches are inclusive and accessible for people with special needs, and assist highly vulnerable people with referrals to existing health support programmes
- Establish child and community friendly spaces with art-therapy classes, recreational, sports and cultural activities in safe zones for unaccompanied children at reception centres and at the state agency for refugees
- Provide restoring family links (RFL) services, as well as integration support, including Bulgarian language courses for refugees, and translation of documents and certificates
- Provide 1500 sets of winter clothes to migrants in detention centres
- Pilot "Cash for Protection" activity to support highly vulnerable and at-risk persons in migrant and refugee households

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC provides technical expertise, guidance, and resources to help the Bulgarian Red Cross in implementing programmes and initiatives that promote inclusivity, respect for diversity, and the empowerment of vulnerable populations. This includes support in developing and implementing policies that uphold human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion.

The IFRC collaborates with the Bulgarian Red Cross to advance community dialogue, raise awareness, and advocate for marginalized individuals and groups' rights and well-being. This partnership fosters inclusivity by addressing power imbalances, challenging discrimination, and promoting equal opportunities. Through knowledge exchange and learning platforms, the IFRC enhances the Bulgarian Red Cross' capacity to respond to the needs of vulnerable populations effectively. Overall, this long-term support enables the Bulgarian Red Cross to uphold humanitarian values and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society in Bulgaria.

The **Swiss Red Cross** supports the National Society's efforts under values, power, and inclusion.

ENABLING LOCAL ACTORS

The Bulgarian Red Cross is committed to the Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) process and is currently planning on implementing a PER assessment. This workshop will be supported by the IFRC disasters and preparedness delegate



Strategic and operational coordination

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross aims to strengthen its strategic partnerships, enhance its representation in global and regional groups and networks, develop bilateral and multilateral relationships and establish itself as a valued and sought-after international partner. To achieve this, the National Society will:

- Increase its collaboration with the IFRC and ICRC on issues related to the Movement's global policies
- Introduce new methods of fundraising, including collection of donations through mobile applications and bank cards, donation boxes, payroll, direct mailing and online platforms, using the participation of influencers and opinion leaders
- Participate more actively in preparing and conducting forums of the National Societies in the Balkan region and take a leading role in the dialogue to establish lasting partnerships (continued support of the X stock

and will be followed up by a plan of action for the National Society to be able to carry out the identified activities to improve the response capacity of the Bulgarian Red Cross. The PER Approach is a continuous and flexible process that enables National Societies to assess, measure and analyse the strengths and gaps of its preparedness and response mechanism, and take necessary action to improve it. The IFRC network is committed to support the National Society in its development according to its priorities.

programme, [Global Route Based Migration Programme](#), and the [Neighbours Help First initiative](#))

- Increase visits to and from other National Societies and organizations for transferring good practices and know-how at different levels, as well as to initiate joint activities and projects

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC offers technical assistance, guidance, and resources to aid the Bulgarian Red Cross in developing and executing strategic plans and operational frameworks. This support includes identifying priorities, setting objectives, and designing programmes aligned with community needs. This assistance enables the Bulgarian Red Cross to strengthen its capacity to mobilize resources and coordinate emergency responses effectively. Moreover, the IFRC fosters collaboration among various stakeholders, promoting partnerships with government entities, local organizations, and other National Societies.



National Society development

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

- Invest resources and introduce new technologies in the training process, expanding the volume of interactive training, including in a virtual environment
- Mobilize resources from the local community
- Strengthen the youth departmental structure at branch level through youth academies, bringing young leaders

together with the specific goal to improve volunteer engagement

- Launch an internship programme for volunteers to work on specific activities and projects to support the implementation of ongoing programmes as well as strengthening new programmatic endeavours
- Modernize and standardize the training equipment and apparel for use by the youth disaster response teams including improved first aid kits for early responders, and winter uniforms

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC supports the National Society's youth programmes via the [Capacity Building Fund \(CBF\)](#). It will provide technical capacity building support in areas such as of volunteer

management, branch development and logistics development. Through knowledge-sharing platforms, training programmes, and collaborative partnerships, the IFRC facilitates continuous learning and growth within the Bulgarian Red Cross.



Humanitarian diplomacy

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The National Society focuses on advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy through systematic and proactive consultation and collaboration with government institutions, international and non-governmental organizations, the corporate sector, diplomatic services, and key partners to influence policies, participate in decision-making processes and leverage resources to help the Bulgarian population. As part of efforts to strengthen its humanitarian diplomacy, the Bulgarian Red Cross will undertake the following:

- Share information with government institutions, NGOs, and other partners about the components of the Movement and [strategic documents](#) related to the auxiliary role of National Societies
- Disseminate knowledge about emblem protection, the role of the Red Cross in conflict and disaster situations, its [fundamental principles](#), and internal regulations
- Share effective policies and practices with government institutions, particularly from EU countries, to address priority issues impacting vulnerable groups and enhance responses

- Promote the ratification, promulgation, and effective implementation at national level of all major international humanitarian law instruments, in liaison with relevant state institutions
- Organize joint information campaigns to promote the identity of the Movement and promote respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) norms

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC supports the National Society through guidance, training and resources to build the capacity of the Bulgarian Red Cross in humanitarian diplomacy, including effective communication, negotiation and coordination with relevant stakeholders. The IFRC collaborates with the Bulgarian Red Cross to effectively represent the needs and concerns of vulnerable populations, foster partnerships with government entities and international organizations, and contribute to shaping humanitarian policies and practices at the national and international levels



Accountability and agility (cross-cutting)

Multi-year high level objectives of the National Society

The Bulgarian Red Cross aims to continuously invest in strengthening transparency and accountability, reinforcing support systems and building a culture of ethical practice by:

- Ensuring the quality and effectiveness of programmes by improving financial management, reporting, and control systems by adopting [new technology and tools](#)
- Updating electronic databases to regulate activities, programmes and budgets

- Standardizing frameworks and guidelines on PMER across all levels of the National Society
- Training relevant staff and volunteers to strengthen PMER structures and systems within the National Society and in the broader Movement context
- Developing a methodological guide for the management, monitoring and evaluation of projects and activities
- Exploring and introducing new online platforms for access to specialized information to increase the health awareness of the public

- Training staff and volunteers on [safety and security](#)
- Exploring and introducing new online platforms for access to specialized information to increase the health awareness of the public

Longer-term support from the IFRC network

The IFRC supports the National Society's efforts to enhance transparency, [integrity](#), and responsible governance within the

organization. This includes guidance, training, and resources to enhance the capacity of the Bulgarian Red Cross in financial management, as well as monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Additionally, the IFRC assists in building the organization's adaptive capacity, enabling it to respond effectively to evolving humanitarian challenges.

THE IFRC NETWORK

The IFRC

The Central and South-Eastern Europe (CSEE) regional office of the IFRC oversees operations in Bulgaria. Aligned with its core functions, the IFRC supports the Bulgarian Red Cross through various means, encompassing technical assistance, capacity building, and coordination of international aid during crises. Recent assistance includes guidance on disaster risk

reduction, health initiatives, volunteer management, and community resilience.

The IFRC aids the Bulgarian Red Cross through emergency appeals and the [Disaster Relief Emergency Fund \(DREF\)](#), addressing disasters and crises and assisting individuals displaced by the conflict in Ukraine.



Staff and volunteers participate in photo collection for Capacity Building Fund in February 2024. (Photo: Bulgarian Red Cross)

IFRC membership coordination

IFRC membership coordination involves working with member National Societies to assess the humanitarian context, humanitarian situations and needs; agreeing on common priorities; jointly developing common strategies to address issues such as obtaining greater humanitarian access, acceptance and space; mobilizing funding and other resources; clarifying consistent public messaging; and monitoring progress. This also means ensuring that strategies and programmes in support of people in need, incorporate clarity of humanitarian action, links with development assistance, and efforts to reinforce National Societies in their respective countries, including through their auxiliary role.

The Bulgarian Red Cross closely partners with the IFRC, benefiting from technical support, capacity building, and resource mobilization for emergency response and community programmes. Operating within the IFRC’s CSEE Regional Office, the Bulgarian Red Cross engages in knowledge exchange, collaboration, and advocacy with neighbouring National Societies.

The **Swiss Red Cross** supports the National Society in its response to migration and displacement issues. It also provides support for interventions related to the strategic priority on values, power and inclusion.

Participating National Society Support

National Society name	Funding Requirement	Climate	Disasters and crises	Health and wellbeing	Migration	Values, power and inclusion	Enabling local actors
Swiss Red Cross							

Movement coordination

The Bulgarian Red Cross ensures regular exchanges with the IFRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and participating National Societies, for the alignment of support and action between Movement partners. In times of emergencies, closer coordination is organized. This is carried out in line with the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation ([SMCC](#)) principles, and the newly-adopted [Seville Agreement 2.0](#).

The **ICRC** under its mandate supports the Bulgarian Red Cross by providing technical expertise, capacity building, and advisory assistance. This support spans disaster management, health services, civilian protection, and humanitarian law. The ICRC specifically supports the National Society in RFL services, protection in immigration detention and disseminating International Humanitarian Law with a focus on RFL in migration and disasters and addressing health needs.

Coordination with other actors

The Bulgarian Red Cross collaborates with public authorities at national and sub-national levels through coordination mechanisms led by relevant ministries and agencies. It actively participates in assessments, first response activities, and registration processes during disasters, showcasing its auxiliary role. The National Society also forms partnerships with ministries and departments for longer-term work, addressing issues in the areas of health, social welfare, education and civil protection.

The Bulgarian Red Cross, along with the IFRC and other network partners, engages in inter-agency coordination mechanisms

such as the humanitarian country teams, sectoral clusters, and working groups. In cases relevant to shelter assistance, it may contribute to shelter cluster coordination.

The National Society builds partnerships with international actors like UN agencies, INGOs, and embassies, facilitating knowledge exchange and resource mobilization. It collaborates with national and local actors including the private sector, academic institutions, and NGOs, leveraging diverse expertise and resources for resilience-building and community development.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 15 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [IFRC Global Plan and Country Plans](#)
- [Subscribe for updates](#)
- [Donor response](#) on IFRC website
- [Live Disaster Response Emergency Fund \(DREF\) data](#)
- Operational information: [IFRC GO platform](#)
- National Society data: [IFRC Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System](#)
- [Evaluations database](#)

This plan reflects the priorities of the Bulgarian Red Cross, the IFRC and National Societies providing international support, for 2024 and subsequent years. It is aligned with [IFRC Strategy 2030](#), representing the collective ambitions of IFRC membership, and is the result of a joint planning process and will serve for joint monitoring and reporting. It will be revised on an annual basis to adjust priorities and funding requirements to the needs in-country.

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