

## On the front foot in crisis preparedness

### EPW core priorities and flagships

Moving towards universal health coverage  
Protecting against health emergencies

### WHO collaboration

Training and capacity building  
Partnership between the Regional Office and Country Office

Since the escalation of the war in Ukraine, Bulgaria has granted Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection status the same access to health-care services as citizens. This influx, along with the arrival of asylum seekers from regions such as North Africa and South Asia, has stretched the capacity of the country's health system to cope effectively. To identify the most serious pressure points, the Regional Office and Bulgaria partnered to conduct a joint review team mission in late 2022. The goal was to identify areas for improvement, especially in addressing the urgent needs of refugees and host communities.

One of the mission's recommendations was to organize a training on early warning, alert and response in emergencies. In May 2024 the four-day workshop brought together frontline health workers, epidemiologists and policy-makers to bolster the country's ability to detect and respond to public health crises.

### The impact

The training involved a mix of practical exercises and lectures. Twenty-one attendees reported improvements in their technical knowledge in areas such as surveillance, risk assessment and outbreak management. The hands-on approach and real-world scenarios used by the Regional Office's instructors proved highly effective, with most participants stating that the content was comprehensive and relevant to their work.

### Lessons learned

- The inclusion of case studies tailored to Bulgaria's specific context was particularly valuable for participants.
- Facilitation through translators can be a barrier to the smooth running of training courses.
- Working on scenarios beyond refugee-based exercises would be beneficial to the broad professional background of participants.

### Donors and partners

Ministry of Health; United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control



WHO has been working with a variety of Bulgarian partners in the Ukraine refugee response.  
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“The training was very useful and will be for all countries, no matter what stage their supervisory system is at.”

**Dr Radosveta Filipova**, State Expert at the Public Health Protection and Health Control Directorate, Bulgaria

### What's next?

With continued support from the Regional Office, the Government will focus on improving health data systems, enhancing communication strategies, and further strengthening coordination between health authorities and refugee services. These efforts will ensure that both refugee populations and Bulgarian citizens are better protected against future health threats.