

## KEY FIGURES

1 January 2015 - 3 March 2016

**476,877**

Registered intentions to apply for asylum

**31%**

of registered intentions were expressed by children

**2,181**

Applications for asylum

**79%**

of asylum applications were from the top ten refugee-producing countries

**2**

Persons granted refugee status

26 February – 3 March 2016

**1,438**

Registered intentions to seek asylum

**25**

Applications for asylum

**6800**

Cooked meals

**3,996**

Blankets distributed

## PRIORITIES

- Assist the Government and civil society in responding to the most urgent humanitarian and protection needs of the refugees
- Strengthen the asylum systems in the country in line with applicable international standards

## FYR MACEDONIA

### INTER-AGENCY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

26 February – 3 March 2016

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- The President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, President Gjorge Ivanov, told [Der Spiegel Online](#) that, when Austria reaches the set limit of 37,500 asylum applications this year, the Balkan refugee route will have to close. Regarding the border restrictions along the Western Balkan route, he further mentioned that "in times of crisis, every country must find its own solutions".
- On 29 February, during the [Top Tema TV talk show](#) Brigadier General Mirche Gjorgoski, Aide-de-Camp to President Ivanov, said that a battalion of over 600 troops were deployed on the FYR Macedonia border and the show's host added that an additional company of police officers were also recently deployed.
- 1,438 refugees and migrants crossed the border into FYR Macedonia from 26 February – 3 March, with a daily average of 205 (source: MOI). Since UNHCR began monitoring departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some [777,487](#) refugees and migrants have departed.
- In the period from 26 February – 3 March 2016, 25 applications for asylum were filed, while from 1 January 2015 to 3 March 2016, 2,181 asylum applications were submitted out of which 1,032 (47%) were submitted by Syrians, 395 (18%) by Afghans, and 177 (8%) by Iraqis (Source: MLSP). So far only two persons have been recognised as refugees in 2015-2016, both unaccompanied children, one from Iraq and one from Syria.
- For the period 1 January – 3 March total of 284 applications, out of which 35 were submitted by Syrians, 37 by Afghans and 5 by Iraqis (Source: MLSP).



Refugees who were not admitted to Serbia returning to the Tabanovce transit centre.  
©UNHCR S.Gicev, Tabanovce transit centre (FYR Macedonia) 29 February 2016

## UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

### Operational Context

1,438 refugees and migrants crossed the border into fYR Macedonia during the reporting period 26 February – 3 March 2016, with a daily average of 205, compared with 4,018 (daily average of 574) the previous week (19 – 25 February 2016). Since UNHCR began monitoring the departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some 777,487 refugees and migrants have departed.

The Ministry of Interior's statistics of refugees and migrants declaring their intention to apply for asylum reached 476,877 including 148,321 (31%) children, of whom 18,343 (4% of children) were registered as unaccompanied since 19 June 2015 until 3 March 2016. Of these 260,046 (55%) of the arrivals are Syrians, 122,289 (26%) Afghans, 73,101 (15%) Iraqis, and the remaining 21,441 (4%) represent other nationalities such as Iranians, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Congolese and Bangladeshi. Women and children registered made up 49% of the refugee flow.

During the reporting period, the border with Greece was intermittently closed for long periods, with the explanation that it would only be reopened once the situation of stranded refugees in Tabanovce was resolved, or when trains departed Vinojug in order to avoid overcrowding the site. When the flow continued, refugee arrivals were granted access in small numbers (groups of 25-40 individuals).

In addition to the fYR Macedonian police checking documents at the border, new admissions are also being checked by Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Austrian police officers. The police in Vinojug confirmed to UNHCR that this would be the new standard practice.

The trend of returning people from Vinojug to the border (and into Greek territory) due to discrepancies between the Greek registration document and the other identification documents despite previous validation at the border continued.

Hundreds of Syrians and Iraqis who were previously profiled jointly by the abovementioned police officers present in Gevgelija and admitted to fYR Macedonia, were subsequently not admitted to Serbia. Serbian police explained that individuals were denied entry for the following reasons: security; errors in fYR Macedonian registration documents; old Greek documents; or refugees had spent more than 30 days in Turkey, Greece or fYR Macedonia (as seen in their passports). Following UNHCR interviews with the refugees who were pushed back the team also discovered that some individuals were rejected because their children's names were not on the registration paper; they had no Greek documentation; they attempted to cross the border twice; a stamp was missing for a child; they were on the road too long; not from a war affected city; one had a husband residing in Germany; or no reason given.

On 29 February, on the fYR Macedonian – Greek border about 300 protestors from the Greek side attempted to enter fYR Macedonian territory by force by attempting to break down the gate. They were stopped by fYR Macedonian Special Forces using tear-gas. After some time the group of protestors retreated and only a small group of 50 people remained on the railroad.

The Army set up a fence on the walking path between the border and the Vinojug reception centre so that people could not avoid going through the site.

## Achievements



### Protection

#### Achievements and Impact

- Eight Unaccompanied children (6 girls and 2 boys) were identified and registered (MOI figures). Best interest assessments were conducted by MLSP, assisted by MYLA and UNHCR. Out of the eight, 5 were separated children and 3 unaccompanied (UNHCR). However, they were all registered as unaccompanied children due to a technical constraint (impossibility to register children other than with their parents in the database).
- Between 22 February and 3 March, UNICEF supported its implementing partners La Strada and SOS Children's Village to train 46 staff, who work with children and families in the child-friendly spaces and through outreach, in child protection in emergencies.
- From 26 February – 3 March 2016, children and women continued to be provided with support, including emotional and psychosocial assistance, in the UNICEF Child Friendly Space operated by the NGO La Strada in Vinjug. La Strada identified and assisted 39 vulnerable individuals. In Tabanovce La Strada also assisted and supported children and women. The activities are funded by UNICEF, UNHCR, GIZ, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Save the Children and Terre des Hommes.
- The Child Friendly Space operated by the SOS Children's Village in Tabanovce also assisted women and children with emotional and psychosocial assistance, and identified and assisted a number of pregnant women. The activities are funded by the SOS Kinderdorf International and UNICEF.
- During the reporting period 29 refugee group leaders, around 1,346 refugees were given information about their rights and obligations in Macedonia at the Vinjug site by MYLA, who also assisted 25 asylum seekers at the Vizbegovo Reception Center with their asylum procedure. MYLA also ensured prioritization in 20 cases, around 40 vulnerable individuals for their registration in Vinjug. MYLA's data entry clerks assisted the Border Police in issuing 1,386 intentions for asylum during the reporting period. MYLA is also present 24/7 in the Tabanovce TC, offering legal aid and working in partnership with La Strada.
- During the reporting period, in close coordination with UNHCR, the Red Cross, DRC and La Strada staff in Tabanovce, 45 EVIs and 33 members of their families/groups were transported by Mercy Corps from Tabanovce transit centre to border with Serbia, and referred to the MSF and DRC teams to be picked up at the border, and to the Mercy Corps team at Miratovac RAP. The Mercy Corps Tabanovce team has been supported by two volunteers of Operation Mercy, experienced in emergency work and work with EVIs.
- Visits:
  - A British Embassy delegation, including the Ambassador, visited Vinjug on 3 March. UNHCR staff briefed them about the current situation in Vinjug inside, the 117 individuals stranded at the entrance of the site, and about developments at the border.
  - The British Embassy delegation also visited Tabanovce on 2 March, where UNHCR briefed them about the current situation in Tabanovce and the operation.
  - Many visits were conducted to Vinjug through the day on 2 March: the Prime Minister of Slovakia - Mr. Robert Fico; Slovakian Minister of Interior - Mr. Robert Kalinak; the Slovakian Ambassador in FYR Macedonia - Mr. Martin Bezak; the Technical Minister of Interior - Mr. Oliver Spasovski as well as the Deputy Head of Mission Ms. Azadeh Alain from Embassy of Sweden; and the Consul of German Embassy in FYR Macedonia - Tomas Here.

- On 1 March, Mr. Jens Bertil Georg Nilsson, Swedish politician and the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) visited the Greek-fYR Macedonian Border. He met with MLSP and other officials from the Vinojug TC, including police officials. Afterwards he visited the border “stone 59” and communicated with people stranded there. He also spoke through the fence with refugees awaiting passage at the border. UNHCR briefed him on the current situation and the new procedures being applied along the route.
- On 28 February, the Dutch Ambassador, six members of the Dutch Parliament and members of the Embassy in Skopje visited the Vinojug reception centre. The police, UNHCR and other humanitarian partners briefed them on the current situation and developments.
- The fYR Macedonia Minister of Interior conducted a short visit to the Vinojug reception centre and the border “stone 59” on 26 February.



*The Dutch delegation meeting with UNHCR in Vinojug reception centre. ©UNHCR Vinojug reception centre (fYR Macedonia) 28 February 2016.*

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- During the period a number of people were caught trying to enter the country irregularly. The police were holding them at the border, hoping to arrange with Greece to return them. UNHCR monitored the situation closely, and with its legal partner MYLA advised them on their rights. UNHCR staff met with representatives of the police and MLSP at the border and advocated for better treatment of the people there, including providing them with improved shelter and more assistance in terms of food and NFIs. Allegedly some of them jumped the fence back into Greek territory.
- UNHCR informed the police that people from the neighboring villages in Tabanovce were approaching the fence and selling items to the refugees. The police stated that they were aware of the situation, but no steps were taken.
- NGO staff informed UNHCR and the police that they noticed refugees walking around in Tabanovce village and frequenting the local store to buy personal items. They were exiting the site through the railway.
- On 26 February, a train from Tabanovce went to Vinojug carrying 128 refugees mainly Iraq and some Syrians, who were returned to fYR Macedonia despite arriving to Serbia through Bulgaria. The refugees planned to go to Greece to obtain Greek registration documents in order to attempt to try to continue on their journey. They were sheltered in the Habitat for Humanity Rubb hall at the entrance to the site, and provided with NFIs, food, water and sleeping bags. At the end of the reporting 117 people remained, the others disappeared. The group was not admitted to Greece, and have been stranded in Vinojug with no solution at the end of the reporting period.
- The Ministry of Interior officials urgently need a professional Arabic translator to interpret conversations, read and verify IDs at the border, and decipher other documents. Translating IDs is one of the biggest challenges pointed out by the border police during informal conversations.
- As approximately 1,000 refugees and migrants are now stranded in Tabanovce, with numbers building since 19 and 20 February, plans that have been drafted to respond to increased needs of non-formal education and recreational activities tailored to specific age groups will require additional financial, human and infrastructure resources.
- According to the findings from REACH’s January 2016 assessment of the European Migration Crisis<sup>1</sup>, 22 per cent of the refugees and migrants interviewed stated family reunification was a reason for choosing to come to Europe. Decisions by authorities, as outlined in the joint statement signed by the heads of police services of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 18 February<sup>2</sup>, to disallow people to travel to Europe on the basis of reuniting with family will potentially increase the length of separation between refugee and migrant children with close members of their family, putting them more at risk of exploitation and violence.
- The tightening of identity checks at borders could enable the provision of more appropriate services to unaccompanied and separated children. On the other hand, imposing stricter entry procedures has increased families

<sup>1</sup> REACH, Situation Overview: European Migration Crisis January 2016, p. 4: [http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/srb\\_situation\\_overview\\_european\\_migration\\_monitoring\\_monthly\\_overview\\_january\\_2016\\_0.pdf](http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/srb_situation_overview_european_migration_monitoring_monthly_overview_january_2016_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mup.hr/UserDocsImages/topvijesti/2016/veljaca/migranti\\_sastanak/joint\\_statement.pdf](http://www.mup.hr/UserDocsImages/topvijesti/2016/veljaca/migranti_sastanak/joint_statement.pdf)

resorting to smugglers, with the risk of violence by smugglers and being exploited by traffickers. Families also face arbitrary detention and abuse by police in some countries on the route.<sup>3</sup>



## Health

### Achievements and Impact

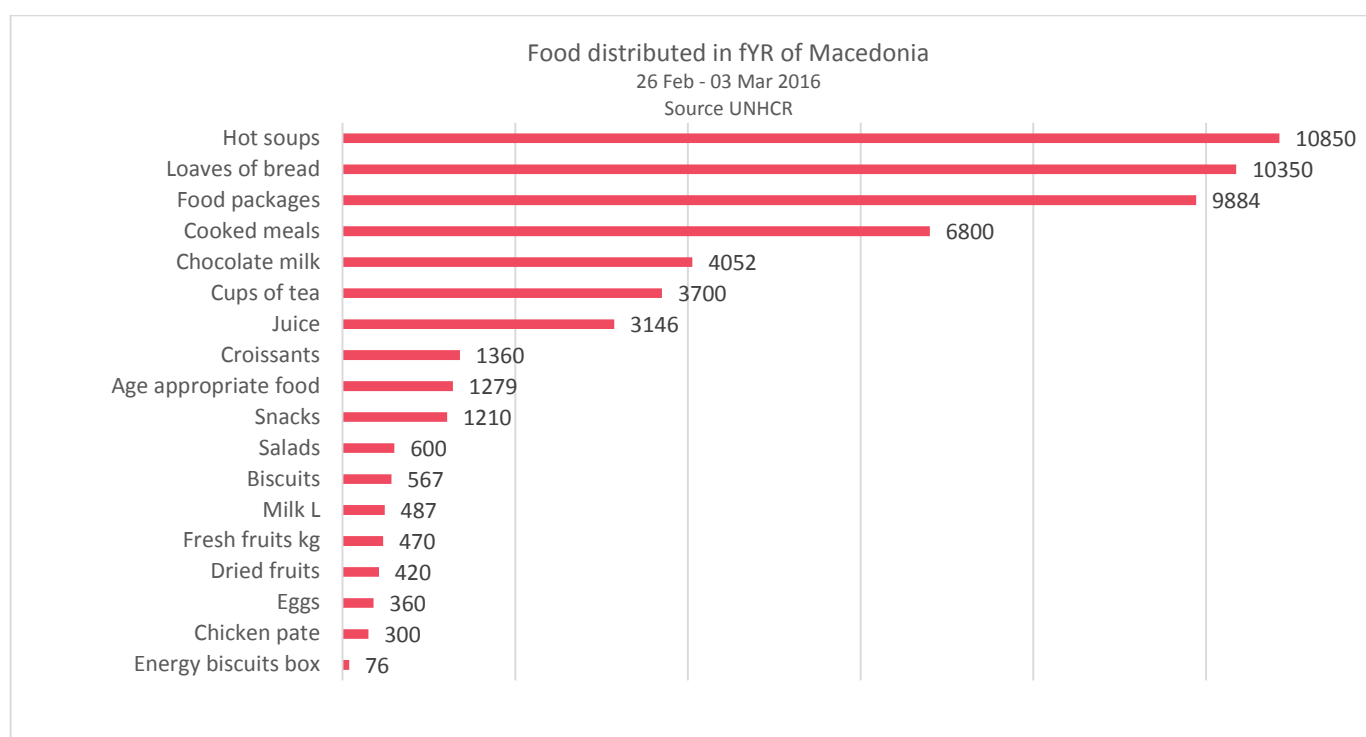
- During the reporting period the Red Cross mainly treated the refugees for respiratory illness, influenza, fever and cough, and other chronic illnesses. There were a total of 3262 visits to the clinic, out of which 166 visits of pregnant women and 660 of children<sup>4</sup>. The Red Cross is working in shifts to provide medical assistance and first aid in Gevgelija and Tabanovce 24/7. This activity is funded by UNHCR and the Red Cross.
- No women were assisted in the gynecological clinic managed by the NGO HERA (with UNFPA support) in Vinograd reception centre.
- 26 women were provided with SRH services in the mobile gynecological clinic managed by the Ministry of Health (with UNFPA support) in Tabanovce reception centre, of which seven were pregnant.



## Food Security and Nutrition

### Achievements and Impact

- Legis, Nun, Kalliri, Agape, Dorcas, La Strada, Help the Refugee in Macedonia, Caritas, SIF, UNHCR, UNFPA and Red Cross distributed:



<sup>3</sup> ACAPS, Refugee/Migrant Crisis in Europe Situation Analysis – March 2016, <http://acaps.org/img/documents/s-refugee-migrant-crisis-in-europe-situation-analysis-march-2016.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Please note that some people visit the clinic and receive treatment repeatedly throughout their stay and thus are counted multiple times in the figures listed.

- The baby food that is distributed in the child-friendly spaces in Gevgelija and Tabanovce is funded by UNICEF and SOS Children’s Village.

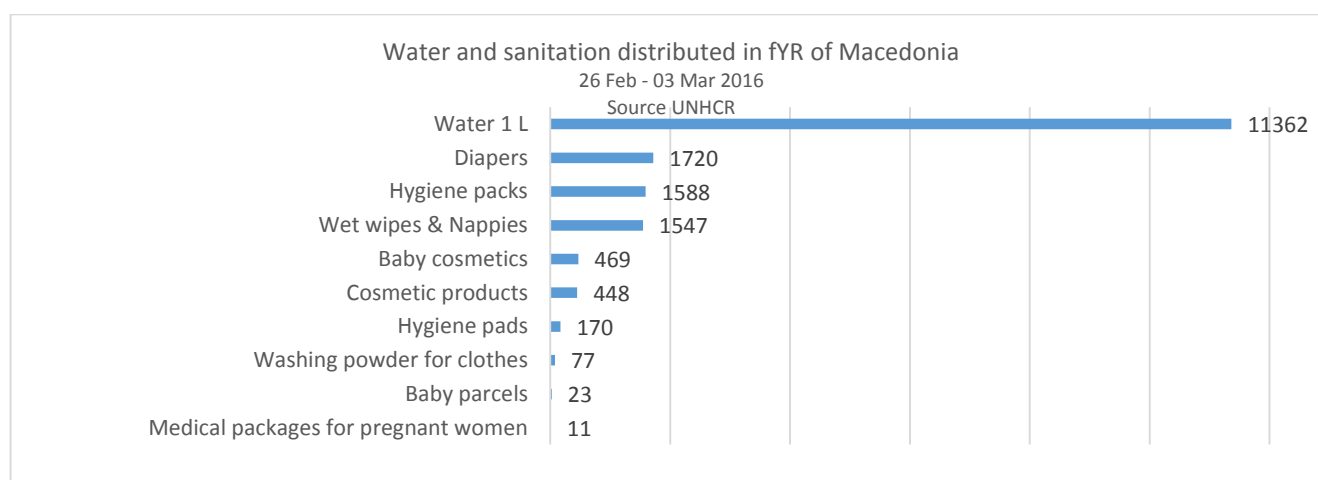
### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- UNICEF and child protection partners (SOS Children’s Village, La Strada and Save the Children) have agreed to coordinate to streamline Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) activities and messages in all child-friendly spaces in transit centres. In this context, UNICEF, the Ministry of Health and the National Breastfeeding Committee will jointly develop standard operating procedures for IYCF and training programmes to improve the counselling skills of staff.

## Water and Sanitation

### Achievements and Impact

- Red Cross, Help the Refugees in Macedonia, La Strada, SIF, UNFPA and other NGOs distributed:



- Construction of shower cabins and toilets was ongoing in Tabanovce. Additionally, ten mobile toilets were installed along the pathway between the site limits and the border in Tabanovce, and DRC started installing toilets near the administrative area in Tabanovce.
- UNICEF and the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) have increased the number of toilets at the Vinojug transit centre near the Greek border by 60 per cent and increased the number of toilets for people with a disability fivefold. Two sanitation blocks – one inside and one outside the transit centre – opened on 3 March.
- UNICEF supported the hygiene needs of the expanding population at the Tabanovce transit centre through the provision of washing materials (20 bowls, clotheslines and clothes pegs and two baby baths) and installation of electric water heaters, which enabled people now staying for multiple days to wash with warm water. Approximately 1,000 people, including 650 women and children, benefited from the temporary showers.

## Communication and Information

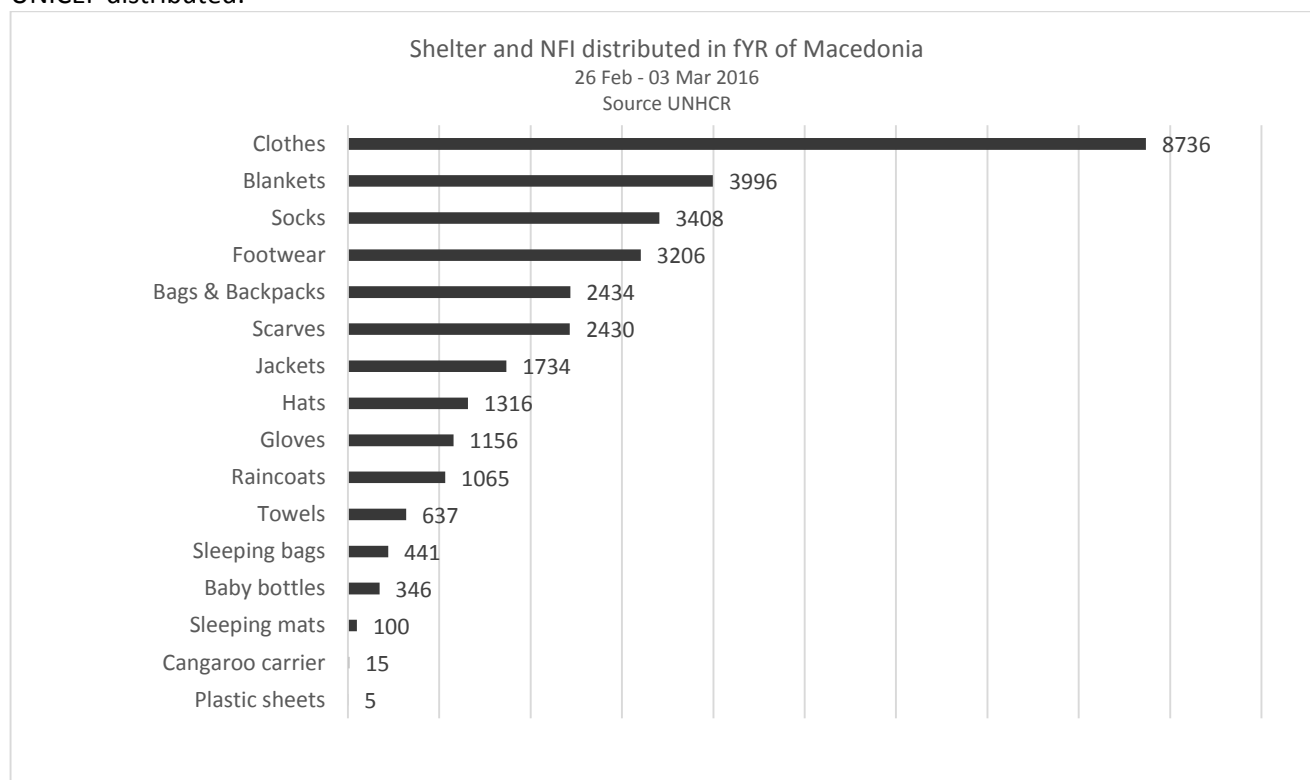
### Achievements and Impact

- Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) installed optical fibre to power its centre-wide Free Wi-Fi Internet access in the Vinojug Reception Centre, complementing its existing satellite connection.

- La Strada, supported by UNICEF and UNHCR, finalised the recruitment of five Advice Desk Assistants (funded by UNICEF and UNHCR) to provide information to refugees on services at Vinojug transit centre in Gevgelija. The desk is expected to be operational on 14 March.

## Shelter and NFIs

- UNHCR, Red Cross, La Strada, Nun, Legis, Help the Refugees in Macedonia, MSF, SOS Children's Village, SIF, and UNICEF distributed:



- Fencing was added in several areas around the Tabanovce transit centre and additional gravel was provided and levelled.
- Four new containers were delivered to Tabanovce, and according to MLSP will all be used by the police.
- Construction work on the NFI distribution point was ongoing in Vinojug.

## Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- On 27 February, there was a brief heating shortage in three of the Rubb halls in Vinojug. There were no gas cylinders available for the gas heaters and a power outage occurred. The power was restored, and the Rubb halls were heated with electric heaters in the meantime.

## Working in partnership

### Achievements and Impact

The weekly coordination meeting took place 03 March in Gevgelija, while no meeting took place in Tabanovce during the reporting period.

On 26 February, the weekly Protection Coordination meeting took place at UNHCR in Skopje.

UNHCR organised a coordination meeting with partners working in the site (Red Cross, MYLA, and La Strada) to discuss new developments and improve response activities in general.

Partners working with the Ministries and municipalities to provide protection and assistance to refugees are: Agape, ASB, Caritas, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Macedonia, Danish Caritas, DRC, Dorcas, Euro Human, GIZ, Grain of Goodness, Habitat for Humanity, Help the Refugees in Macedonia, HERA, IOM, JRS, Kalliri, La Strada Open Gate, Legis, MCMS (Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation), Mercy Corps, Merhamet, MYLA, Nun, Operation Mercy, People in need, Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse, Secours Islamique France, SOS Children's Village, Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF), Terre des hommes, Vlaznia Kumanovo, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO.

Contacts: Lauren Panetta Chammas, Reporting Officer, panetta@unhcr.org, Cell + 389 (0) 70 298 101  
Ljubinka Brashnarska, PI/External Relations, brashnar@unhcr.org, Tel: +389 2 311 8641, Cell + 389 (0) 72 269 346

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