

UNHCR Representation to Serbia



Refugee and local children, pupils of Technical School in Obrenovac, together planted trees in the School's backyard, ©CRPC, 30 March 2023

Highlights:

On 17 March, the Government of Serbia extended the Decision on providing Temporary Protection in Serbia to all persons fleeing Ukraine until 18 March 2024.

In early March 2023, Divljana Reception/Transit Centre (RTC) in Bela Palanka in the east of the country was closed down. Its 27 inhabitants were transferred to Pirot RTC, which was hosting 220 inhabitants at the end of the month.

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Highlights



In March 2023, authorities reported 6,477 new arrivals to governmental centres (compared to 3,782 in February 2023). According to data collected by UNHCR and partners, over 50% of all arrivals originate from Syria and Afghanistan, followed by arrivals from Morocco, Pakistan, DRC, Somalia, etc. 90% of all arrivals were men, 4% women and 6% children. 46% of all arriving children were unaccompanied or separated.

Key Figures (as at end-March 2022)



3,200 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted in Serbia, of whom

2,500 accommodated in governmental centres, and **700** staying outside of governmental centres.

77 refugees from Ukraine accommodated in Vranje Asylum Centre (AC).



19 applications for asylum in March 2023

4 positive decisions in March 2023

244 positive decisions since 2008

1,459 persons fleeing Ukraine received Temporary Protection (TP) in Serbia since 24 February 2022, of whom **246** in March 2023

Access to territory, registration, personal documents and services

Activities of UNHCR and its partners aim at ensuring that refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and persons at risk of statelessness benefit from an improved and systematically implemented legal framework and can thus access rights in line with the international standards, and that persons in need of international protection have access to territory and asylum procedure and receive protection and assistance in safe reception conditions.

On 17 March, the Government of Serbia extended the Decision on providing Temporary Protection to all persons fleeing Ukraine until 18 March 2024.



Crochet club of Ukrainian women at Vranje AC, @Sigma plus, March 2023

As a part of the process of changing the **Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment of Foreigners**, UNHCR and partner Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), a member of National Convention on EU in Serbia (NCEU), attended a meeting with the Serbian Minister of European Integration and Government representatives, and provided expert opinion during the debate entitled ***What will be the position of foreign workers in Serbia?***. Proposed changes should provide easier access to employment to the persons that UNHCR serves.

In March, BCHR legal team assisted eight asylum-seekers in **getting access to the asylum procedure in Belgrade's Nikola Tesla Airport**. BCHR also continued the UNHCR-supported Refugees for Refugees (R4R) initiative, whereby integrated refugees supported the "new" refugees in opening bank accounts, obtaining work permits, replacing foreign driving licenses, etc.

In terms of **cash-based interventions**, UNHCR supported 18 refugee households with 43 members in March.

Partners International Aid Network (IAN) and Indigo continued identifying vulnerable individuals and groups amongst new arrivals and supported 164 persons (including unaccompanied and separated children - UASC) with **psychological/psychiatric and psychosocial support** in March.

UNHCR's partner **IKEA Serbia** delivered a new **donation to Obrenovac AC**, including some 6,000 towels, 1,000 pillows and 55 bed linen sets, amongst other products.

Partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) **supported 12 gender-based violence (GBV) survivors** with information, counselling, legal aid and/or referral to responsible institutions and services and organised **11 women's empowerment workshops** in Krnjača AC and elsewhere in Belgrade, focusing on family planning, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), personal health and development.



UNHCR partner Praxis visiting the Roma (IDP) settlement Zaga Malivuk in Belgrade, @Praxis. March 2023

#IBelong

Over the past decade, Serbia has progressed significantly in statelessness reduction and prevention. Having changed the legislation, the authorities next focused on the harmonization of practice of relevant actors at the local level, resulting in reduction of the number of persons at risk of statelessness from tens of thousands in 2010 to less than 2,000 today.

UNHCR partners A11 Initiative and Praxis visited 14 informal Roma settlements and counselled/supported 188 persons in registering births and nationality, obtaining personal documents, accessing socio-economic rights, etc. **Two persons thus had their Serbian nationality granted/confirmed in March (18 in total in 2023)**, five obtained their personal

IDs [lična karta] and six obtained other mandatory personal documents.

By addressing the European Court of Human Rights, which granted an interim measure, and the competent national bodies, partner A11 Initiative prevented forced evictions in the informal Roma settlement Antena in Novi Beograd, scheduled for 30 March. The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, acting upon the appeal submitted by the A11 Initiative, came up with a set of recommended measures for the Municipality of Novi Beograd in terms of alternative solutions, which also resulted in a meeting amongst the representatives of the Municipality, inhabitants of "Antena", A11 Initiative and the UN, and ensuing decision which terminated the execution of the previous decision on the demolition of houses in the informal settlement Antena.

Fair and Fast Asylum Procedures

UNHCR aims to foster development of the national asylum system by working with responsible decision-making authorities to increase capacities through training, exchanges with other countries, support for stopgap measures and policy and legal matters.



Profiling and identification of vulnerable individuals amongst new arrivals in Preševo Reception Centre, ©UNHCR, March 2023

UNHCR and its legal partners **counselled 1,281 persons in March, including 776 persons specifically counselled on asylum in Serbia (of which 60 UASC)**; 182 refugees/asylum-seekers benefitted from cultural mediation/orientation provided by UNHCR partner Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC). In 323 cases, UNHCR and partners Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT), CRPC and Sigma Plus **supplied interpreters for refugees and asylum-seekers, including in the asylum procedure.**

Partners IDEAS and BCHR **provided free legal aid/representation in asylum and akin procedures to 46 persons in March.**

Child Protection

UNHCR supports the authorities to place UASC under guardianship, receive medical and other care and to be accommodated separately/adequately.

UNHCR and its local partners identified 79 UASC in March, from Afghanistan, Syria, DRC, Cameroon, Egypt and Morocco, 74% of whom arrived through Bulgaria. Twenty percent of all UASC identified were found to be illiterate in their mother tongue. All the identified children were assisted, provided with psychological first aid and referred to the authorities/partners for specialized assistance.

On 24 March, partner CRPC held a lecture on ***Cultural Mediation in Working with Children in the Humanitarian Context***, to students of the Faculty of Political Sciences of University in Belgrade.

Peer education group of UNHCR-supported UASC was very active in March, having organised a presentation of their activities in Kvaka Social Centre in Belgrade on 13 March with teenagers from Guinea, Russia and Syria (incl. two girls) who expressed interest in joining in their group, giving a lecture a week later, on young asylum seekers, at Jovan Dučić Elementary School in Belgrade to fifth and eighth-grade students, and, finally, enjoying a visit to the aquarium and tropicarium in Belgrade in the last week of March.

In Vranje AC, partner Indigo organised a psychosocial support workshop on the topic of "Gratitude", in view of developing positive qualities and social skills of the participants.

UNHCR and partners also support the inclusion of refugee children into the educational system in Serbia and help their parents navigate the system.

Thirty-seven children and youths were supported through supplementary lessons in school subjects procured by UNHCR and its partners. Six UASC were in receipt of cash vouchers which serve to buy transport tickets, clothes/shoes and school supplies.

Durable solutions and opportunities for education and employment

Access to education and financial services, as well as inclusion in activities of everyday life, remain key for refugees trying to find their footing in Serbia.

The **UNHCR Representative Soufiane Adjali** and the **Director of the Serbian Agency for Qualifications Prof. dr Časlav B. Mitrović** on **13 March signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Belgrade**, thus formalizing cooperation which is to address the challenges and provide solutions that will facilitate refugees' access to and inclusion in the educational and employment systems of the Republic of Serbia.



*Director of Agency for Qualifications Prof. dr Časlav B. Mitrović and UNHCR Representative in Serbia Soufiane Adjali sign an MoU on supporting the recognition of refugees' qualifications,
 ©Agencija za kvalifikacije, 13 March 2023*

On 15 March, UNHCR provided a **presentation on the legal status, rights and documents of refugees and asylum-seekers** and the possibilities of cooperation with Serbian banks, at the **annual counselling of legal departments of banks in Serbia**, organized by the national **Association of Banks** in Zlatibor. UNHCR advocated for greater financial inclusion of the forcibly displaced, and the heads of legal departments agreed that **IDs issued** to refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia are a **valid document for opening bank accounts**.

Twenty-eight refugees and asylum-seekers applied for the third cycle of IKEA's *Skills for Employment* paid internship programme through a call jointly issued with the UNHCR. They will commence their internships beginning of May.

A total of 120 beneficiaries, including 25 from Ukraine, were attending Serbian language lessons supported by UNHCR in March. **Sixty-two persons received tailored support in integration and accessing rights and services** from UNHCR and partners. BCHR succeeded in completing the procedure which resulted in recognition of a Master's degree for a refugee from Ukraine and registration with the Serbian Medical Chamber and receipt of a license for a doctor from Ukraine.

In March, DRC organised one return-related meeting in Čačak in the Office of the Local Refugee Trustee, with the total of 12 IDPs participating. Six IDP families with 19 family members were registered to return to Kosovo¹ on this occasion.

BCHR, CRPC, UNHCR and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) implemented two integration workshops in Krnjača AC, attended by 18 asylum-seekers.

Community Engagement

Inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and persons at risk of statelessness in community activities promotes inclusion and peaceful coexistence. UNHCR focuses on promoting their human capital, and on linking them with the local authorities, schools, youth, cultural centres and municipalities, and on supporting joint projects.



Carpentry workshop in Bosilegrad, ©Sigma plus, March 2023

On 17 March, at the initiative and with support from UNHCR partner Sigma Plus, [a performance \(concert\) "What do women want"](#), by the Ukrainian refugees, was staged in Vranje AC. Apart from other refugees from the centre in Vranje, the audience included members of the local Society of Oncological Patients and a Russian language teacher from the local high school. In Preševo, Bujanovac, Vranje, Bosilegrad,

¹ All references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

Pirot, Obrenovac, etc. UNHCR's NGO partners organised language, creative, carpentry, manicure and recreational workshops throughout the month, to support the psychosocial well-being of residents of centres located therein.

Celebrations of the International Women's Day took place in Obrenovac Technical School, where artwork from the *Art Unites* workshops was presented at a humanitarian selling exhibition by local and refugee youths; in Šid where partner HCIT distributed giftbags to women and girls accommodated in the local reception centre; in Belgrade where partner IAN organised a sales exhibition of refugee artwork, the



Refugees from Bujanovac RC meet women members of "Radanska ruža" social enterprise from Lebane, @UNHCR, March 2023

proceeds of which benefitted the survivors of recent earthquake in Syria; in Preševo where the UNHCR and the local Youth Office organised a workshop on women's rights; in Vranje where local members of the *Society of Oncological Patients* and refugee women from Ukraine conducted a workshop called *Happy and Beautiful* which aimed at reducing stress and boosting self-confidence through the mutual support of women; in Bujanovac where the UNHCR and the local Roma Women's Association shared their experiences with refugee women from Bujanovac Reception Centre (RC) and two refugee women joined the women from social enterprise *Radanska Ruža* in Lebane which served as an opportunity for exchanging information about culture, food, and women's rights, and served to send out a joint message that **"Every woman is strong enough on her own to fight for whatever she needs, and when she teams up with other women who have the same goal, the sky is the limit."**; in Bosilegrad where the refugees from the local reception centre distributed paper flowers made in UNHCR-supported workshops to women of Bosilegrad town.



Launch of the "In their sneakers" 2023 programme cycle, @UNHCR, March 2023

On 25 March, the UNHCR and the Ministry of Education commenced, for a second year in a row, the initiative ***In their Sneakers***, in order to raise awareness amongst secondary school pupils and their teachers of the needs and potentials brought by refugees. The start of the project was marked by a day-long workshop organized in Belgrade, which gathered representatives from 13 schools from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Vranje, Bečej, Paraćin, Bujanovac, Žagubica, Šid, Užice and Trstenik. Through a series of interactive activities, including conversations with young refugees, the participants got a chance to get acquainted first-hand with the everyday challenges refugees face. For the majority of pupils, this was the first ever in-person encounter with forcibly displaced people, and a chance to witness the knowledge, the skills, and the talents brought by refugees into their host communities.

On 24 March, the UNHCR Representative met with the Mayor of Novi Sad, Mr. Milan Đurić, and jointly explored ideas, resources, and capacities of refugees, to be tapped into and nurtured by the host community.



Mayor of Novi Sad in conversation with the UNHCR Representative and staff, @UNHCR, 24 March 2023

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