

UNHCR COVID19 SPECIAL REPORT



[BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA] PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

15 – 31 MARCH 2020

Background

As of 29 March 2020, BiH authorities registered irregular arrival of **4,423 persons to the country in 2020** that represents a **20% increase** compared to the same period in 2019. The number of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants currently in the country is estimated around **9,500** of which **6,652** are accommodated in reception centers and other formal accommodation, while around **2,800** are estimated outside formal accommodation or on route.

Situation snapshot

568

COVID-19 confirmed cases in BiH¹

0

COVID-19 cases in reception centers²

10

persons in centres exhibiting COVID-19 like symptoms²

605

persons in centres directed to isolation for preventive monitoring²

1,242

persons screened in reception centres²

For the time being, **no cases have been** identified affecting asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. The situation is evolving daily, the actions taken by the authorities to date have already affected access to asylum and basic services.

Protection risks, challenges and response measures

After passing the decision on **introduction of curfew on the entire territory of BiH on 21 March** and the suspension of public transport in Canton Sarajevo, and bus and railway transport throughout BiH, the movement of refugees/migrants has been significantly reduced.

Restrictions of movement are in place in all reception centres – although measures taken differ slightly among them.

On 24 March, Federal Headquarter of Civil Protection issued an order **prohibiting** visits to Refugee reception centers, Temporary reception centers and Asylum center Delijas, but also any

exits of migrants and asylum seekers accommodated in centers in the territory of FBiH.

On 26 March, a **new location in Una-Sana Canton** has been agreed upon to be used as an emergency reception tent-camp for additional capacity at the existing operating centers in USC with up to 1,000 single men only who currently squat in abandoned buildings in Bihac and those who cannot be accommodated in TRC Bira due to scarce space.

On 26th March the SFA and Cantonal Police Sarajevo started **relocation of refugee and migrants from the streets of Sarajevo**, hostels/private apartments

where the owners stopped offering accommodation. In total of 360 people was transferred from the Sarajevo area to TRC Blazuj during the first two days.

The restriction on freedom of movement is negatively impacting access to adequate accommodation and access to essential services.

Limitations on access to registration, documentation, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response, and other essential protection services also pose risks for persons of concern.

¹ Source: BiH authorities/ the figure as of 03 April 2020

² Source: Danish Refugee Council (DRC) – Emergency Response to COVID-19 – Situation Report #02 (30 March 2020)/ screenings were conducted by DRC.

UNHCR activities

247

legal assistance provided to asylum-seekers

156

psychosocial interventions in reception centres

80

health-related assistance SGBV relevant activities

35

62

instances of informal education activities for children

UNHCR in BiH works closely with UN Country Team, Resident Coordinator and the World Health Organization on crisis management, personnel and business continuity arrangements, programme criticality, preparedness, and response planning.

Protection response coordination structures continue to function through virtual communication where relevant.

UNHCR continues to advocate directly and through partners to ensure asylum process remains accessible.

The close contact with relevant government and international stakeholders has been maintained since the onset of the COVID-19 response.

Through daily contact with reception centre managers, partners and CSW legal guardians, UNHCR and its partner Vasa Prava ensure access to asylum counselling to those interested in

seeking international protection in BiH, particularly to unaccompanied and separated children. Vasa Prava lawyers on duty, continued legally assisting those asylum-seekers meet asylum procedures deadlines and extension of asylum documentation.

Vasa Prava has **expanded work through SMS, WhatsApp or regular calls**. To increase possibilities of communication with asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, they also developed an **online forum**, where anyone can receive all relevant information about asylum procedure. During the reporting fortnight, VP BiH provided **legal counselling to 230 asylum seekers** and taken **power of attorney from 17 throughout BiH**.

UNHCR protection partner BHWI conducts a variety of protection, child protection, PSS and education activities in formal accommodation locations in

Sarajevo and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.

In RC Salakovac BHWI adjusted their working arrangements under the current situation. Group psychosocial activities have been replaced with individual counselling and activities with maximum 2 participants.

BHWI remains in constant telephone communication with school educators and class teachers, children follow online classes, and the BHWI social worker monitors the needs and alternative teaching possibilities. During the reporting period, BHWI provided 132 food assistances, 80 health related assistances, provided 62 instances of informal education activities for children, 82 occupational and recreational activities, 156 PSS interventions, 35 SGBV relevant activities as well as provided protection assistances incl. legal guardianship to 43 UASCs.

Funding needs

UNHCR has launched globally an emergency appeal for US\$255 million to respond to COVID-19 outbreak, to safeguard those uprooted from their homes as well as the communities that support them. Funding is part of wider UN appeal for US\$2 billion.

While seeking funds to carry out COVID-19 preventative measures and response activities, UNHCR stresses the need for support to be additional to the existing critical funding requirements laid out in UNHCR's regular Global Appeal for 2020. It is vital that funding for ongoing and planned programmes is also provided as soon as possible to sustain support for refugees and internally displaced people already living a precarious existence, for whom already limited self-reliance opportunities are likely to shrink further as a result of the economic impact of the crisis.

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