

## UNHCR SERBIA UPDATE

Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) noted 3,180 newly registered persons in Jan 2021<sup>1</sup> (comp. to 1,695 in Feb 2019) and 2,273 in Feb 2021 (comp. to 2,633 in Feb 2020). Most new arrivals transit through North Macedonia. Notable is increase in the number of arrivals originating from Somalia in the first two months of 2021, with the top three nationalities of arrivals being Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia.

First two months of 2021 saw as many as **5,956 pushbacks** from neighbouring countries to Serbia (53% from Hungary, 44% from Romania, 3% from Croatia and a handful from Bosnia and Herzegovina). Nationals of Syria make up 62% of all the pushbacks, including families with children.

One new case of Covid-19 amongst the refugees/migrants was reported in the first two months of 2021 – bringing the total number of cases recorded since March 2020 to 31, and the number of casualties to one.



Left: Syrian refugee boy reunites with mother in Austria following 11-month long procedure, @UNHCR, Jan 2021



Right: Unaccompanied refugee boys who have become peer educators mark the completion of second year of the project with the staff of CRPC, DRC and UNHCR, @DRC, Jan 2021

The number of residents in Asylum (AC) or Reception/Transit Centres (RTC), decreased by 28% compared to end-Dec 2020 to **4,655** at the end of Feb 2021. They comprised 2,069 citizens of Afghanistan, 879 of Syria, 294 of Pakistan, 208 of Somalia, 176 of Iraq and 1,029 from 47 other countries. 3,978 are adult men, 263 adult women and 414 children, including 76 UASC. **A total of 5,675 new refugees and migrants were counted to be present in the country at end-February**, including those staying outside of governmental centres. The authorities continued systematically gathering refugees and migrants staying outside the centres, in downtown Belgrade and in border areas, and transferring them to official centres with vacant places.

UNHCR strongly values the decision of the **authorities in Serbia to include refugees and migrants accommodated in 19 governmental centres in the Phase 3 of the National Vaccination Plan for 2021**. UNHCR Serbia and its partners Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) continued contacting by phone the privately accommodated asylum seekers and persons granted status to inform them on the ongoing vaccination against Covid-19, on where and how to express interest in vaccination and register, offering assistance if needed. So far, the information has been conveyed to 56 households out of which 14HHs/20 persons expressed their interest in vaccination. All 20 (adults) were assisted to fill out the questionnaire/register themselves on the eGovernment portal. In cooperation with SCRM, UNHCR facilitated the identification of asylum-seekers and vulnerable individuals in governmental centres to be prioritized for vaccination.

On 13 Jan, a 17 y.o. Syrian boy with refugee status in Austria, departed Belgrade for Vienna to reunite with his family. This reunification resulted from concerted efforts of the Austrian Embassy in Belgrade, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Cross of Serbia, the Austrian Red Cross, the boy's guardian from Subotica Social Welfare Center and legal representative, Astra NGO, SCRM, partner CRPC and UNHCR.

**The Constitutional Court found that the Border Police violated Article 39 of the Constitution (prohibiting *refoulement*), based on a complaint submitted by a group of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan collectively expelled to Bulgaria in February 2017.** The Court confirmed the plaintiffs' right to compensation of EUR 1,000 each. This Decision has strategic importance for prevention of future *refoulement*, as it is the first of this kind to be passed by a court in Serbia.

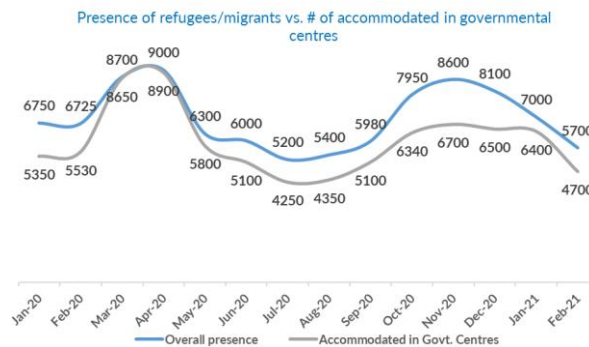
BCHR published its annual report [Right to Asylum in the Republic of Serbia 2020](#). Partner IDEAS published [Protection of physical and psychological integrity of unaccompanied and separated children in the Republic of Serbia](#) Handbook.

In Jan-Feb 2021, the Asylum Office (AO) of the Ministry of Interior granted refugee status to none, whilst rejecting nine applications. One hundred and twelve foreigners expressed intention to seek asylum in Serbia, 28 submitted actual asylum

<sup>1</sup> Source: Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration

applications. In February, two unaccompanied children represented by BCHR were approved temporary residence on humanitarian grounds in Serbia.

UNHCR and partners BCHR, Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT) and Sigma Plus counselled over 1,200 persons on asylum. Partners BCHR and Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) aided the integration of 37 refugees by supporting them in finding employment and accommodation, accessing school and providing them with legal representation. UNHCR is preparing two refugees for enrolment in tertiary education in Serbia in October 2021 and has identified seven other potential students amongst the refugee population. Partners Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Sigma Plus taught Serbian to 130 adults in six centres in Serbia and through an [online learning platform](#). Four primary and two secondary school refugee schoolchildren were aided by CRPC cultural mediators. BCHR obtained 10 ID cards and 15 work permits for recognized refugees.



Supporting children in online schooling in Krnjača Asylum Centre, @SCRM

In Jan-Feb 2021, 53 refugee families received keys to apartments in Zrenjanin and Sombor within the Regional Housing Programme (RHP). OSCE and UNHCR supported the local authorities in Bujanovac in preparing a project proposal for EU-funded UNOPS CfP, which would aim at sustainable closure of the last remaining collective centre in Bujanovac ("Salvatore") and solutions for its residents (mainly Roma IDPs). The decision on approval of funding is pending.

Partner Praxis visited 14 Roma settlements and provided 112 persons with counselling and legal assistance regarding birth registration and acquisition of citizenship, and **nine persons had thus confirmed/acquired their Serbian citizenship**. On 18 Feb, partners A11 Initiative and Praxis jointly presented their [findings](#) on the implementation of Law on Free Legal Aid, from the perspective of IDPs and persons at risk of statelessness. Both reports revealed that, during the first year of its implementation, the a/m Law hindered access to free legal aid for the most vulnerable groups. **Twenty-six** persons were counselled and provided with free legal aid by A11.

Partners CRPC, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Indigo and Sigma Plus organized over 600 educational and recreational activities with parents and children (incl. UASC) in centres throughout Serbia. Partners DRC, International Aid Network (IAN), Indigo and Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN) also aimed at keeping the spirits of the refugees up by holding over 200 individual and group sessions of psychological, psychiatric and psychosocial support throughout the country. PIN's paper [Refugee Status Determination Procedure and Mental Health of the Applicant: Dynamics and Reciprocal Effects](#) was published in a reputable journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*.

Six UNHCR partners gathered in the Coalition against Abuse and Neglect of Refugee and Migrant Children issued a [press release](#) debunking the anti-migrant posters spotted in Belgrade. TV Prva featured [an interview with Katja, a refugee from Burundi and Tomislav, national coordinator of the Association of Young Volunteers \(UNV\)](#), including a review of the [UNDP/UNHCR joint short film on young asylum-seekers and young Roma](#), the common problems they face and future common initiatives.

On the occasion of death of UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador for former Yugoslavia Đorđe Balašević on 19 Feb, UNHCR Serbia issued a [press release](#), pointing to his human rights activism and reconciliatory work in the region of former Yugoslavia, including his two "Concerts of Reconciliation" in Sarajevo in February 1998, organized by UNHCR, the proceeds of which were given to fund activities for the benefit of children of Sarajevo.

On 14 Jan, UNHCR and partners CRPC, DRC and IDEAS organized an event that marked successful completion of the second year of the **Peer Educators Project**. Eight peer educators who have participated in the Project received tablets and backpacks. The youth highlighted that the Project had been very useful in supporting them and their peers in facing their challenges, also in socializing and exchanging experiences. Partner DRC organized five workshops in Krnjača AC Safe Space for Women, co-facilitated by refugee women gender focal points, to raise awareness amongst 25 female participants of gender equality and reproductive health.

**UNHCR Serbia is grateful for the support of:**  
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