

UNHCR Representation to Serbia



Refugee women participated in the Women's Run in Belgrade's Ada Ciganlija, in the spirit of the race's motto #JaToMogu [Yes I Can], @UNHCR, 21 October 2022

Serbia was represented at the 73rd session of UNHCR ExCom by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Nikola Selaković and the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and Migration Ms. Nataša Stanisavljević. In his ExCom address, Mr. Selaković expressed gratitude to UNHCR for cooperation on overcoming the consequences of the conflicts in the Balkans in the 90s, as well as on caring for persons who found themselves on the territory of Serbia due to ongoing conflicts worldwide. He further pointed out that "Since 2015, around 1.5 million refugees and migrants have passed through Serbia and 6,000 are currently in reception centres. Serbia is also contributing in terms of caring for persons who were forced to leave their homes in Ukraine." Serbia has thus far dispensed 3 million euros of aid to Ukraine, of which 1.5 million was provided to refugees through UNHCR.

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Highlights



In Jan-Oct 2022, authorities reported 99,031 new arrivals to governmental centres (compared to 49,402 in the same period in 2021). According to profiling performed by UNHCR field staff, Syrians make up 37% of the arrivals, followed by arrivals originating from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Morocco, and Burundi. 14,519 persons arrived in governmental centres in October (compared to 19,345 in September and 17,997 in August).

Key Figures (as at end-October 2022)



7,951

Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted in Serbia, of which

5,319

accommodated in governmental centres,

over 2,600

staying outside of governmental centres, and

73

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



284

Applications for asylum in 2022

23

Positive decisions in 2022

3

Positive decisions in October 2022

228

Positive decisions since 2008

991

Persons fleeing Ukraine received Temporary Protection (TP) in Serbia since 24 February 2022, of which **52** in October.

Access to territory, registration, personal documents and services

Embassy of Norway to Serbia, the Nansen Dialogue Centre Serbia, Nansenskolen Norway and UNHCR Serbia jointly organized **two events to mark the 100th Anniversary of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Fridtjof Nansen**, which included openings by the Norwegian Ambassador H.E. Mr. Jørn Eugen Gjelstad and lectures by distinguished guests from Norway. UNHCR contributed by shedding light on the refugee protection work of F. Nansen. The current challenges in this area were particularly addressed by lawyer Nikola Kovačević, the 2021 awardee of the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award.

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 approximately 2,000 today.

A round table for 60 registrars, police officers, social workers and free legal aid providers from Vojvodina was organised in Novi Sad by UNHCR, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (MPALSG) and the Ombudsman's Office. It focused on better coordination of local stakeholders in **registering births, support to acquisition of citizenship and registering residence**. The round table took place within the framework of a tripartite Statelessness Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among the aforementioned partners, and the global [#Ibelong](#) campaign.



UNHCR partners A11 Initiative and Praxis visited seven Roma informal settlements throughout the country and counselled 217 persons on access to personal documents/birth registration and social protection/housing. **Ten persons had thus their nationality confirmed/acquired in October.**

UNHCR partner International Aid Network (IAN) provided 39 refugees and asylum-seekers with individual psychotherapy

and psychiatric interventions/individual and group psychological and psychosocial support in Krnjača, Vranje and Bogovađa Asylum Centres, and in Vodovodska Institution for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

IAN's team, consisting of a psychologist and a psychiatrist, visited Ukrainian refugees accommodated privately in Kula and surrounding villages, and provided them with individual mental health and psychosocial support and emergency hygiene and food packages.

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 suggestions on relevant policy and legal matters.

On 17-18 October, UNHCR gathered round the representatives of the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs (MoLEVSA) and Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) in a workshop on **Vulnerable Groups in the Asylum Procedure**. The participants discussed better coordination in the registration and protection of UASC asylum-seekers and gaps in capacities for processing asylum claims, for interpretation and transportation to/from governmental centres. Participants agreed to initiate adoption of common Standard Operating Procedures and formation of multifunctional teams that would regularly visit governmental centres.

UNHCR and partners counselled 964 persons on asylum in October. Sixteen persons signed power of attorney for UNHCR project lawyers to represent them in asylum procedures.

Three refugees from Iran, represented by UNHCR project lawyers, were granted asylum in Serbia in October.

Partner IDEAS provided legal aid to five UASC and 14 victims of gender-based violence and their families (23 persons in total).

333 refugees/asylum-seekers benefitted from cultural mediation/orientation provided by partner Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) in October.

UNHCR facilitated an exchange between Serbian and Italian asylum authorities in October. A four-member **delegation from Italy**, consisting of three representatives of the Italian MoI – the National Commission for the Right to Asylum and the Territorial Commissions of Rome and Ancona - and a representative of UNHCR Italy, arrived in Serbia for [a study visit](#), which included meetings with the Serbian MoI (Asylum Office and Asylum Commission), MoLEVSA, the SCRM and the civil society service providers, as well as visits to Krnjača AC and the Detention Centre for Foreigners in Belgrade.

Child Protection

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

UNHCR and its partners continued to identify and profile UASC arriving in the country. 776 UASC were newly identified in October, of which 74% were from Afghanistan, 17% from Syria, 6% from Pakistan, and others from Morocco, Egypt and Iraq.

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

Forty-seven refugee children received support and tutorials (in Serbian and English languages and Maths) from partners Indigo and CRPC, who also organised 226 non-formal educational activities in six towns and cities in Serbia. Roma schoolchildren benefitted from special support to their inclusion, with the backing of UNHCR's partner Indigo, in eight primary and secondary schools in Serbia.

Praxis organised two workshops for schoolchildren on [prevention of child, early and forced marriages](#) in primary schools "Šećenji Ištvan" in Subotica and "Žarko Zrenjanin" in Apatin, attended by 54 pupils in total.

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. UNHCR conceived and executed a series of undertakings in October, aimed at supporting inclusion and integration.

UNHCR organized a workshop entitled **Financial Inclusion of Refugees in Serbia**, with participation from refugees and asylum-seekers, the SCRM and UNHCR partners Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and IDEAS, and with representatives of a number of banks in Serbia, kickstarting the resolution of challenges that refugees face in accessing banking services. The Refugee Commissioner Nataša Stanisavljević pointed out that "Financial integration is one of the most important aspects of integration, enabling the refugees to contribute to the Serbian society in the best possible manner".

As part of their *Refugees for Refugees* programme, BCHR organized a panel discussion in Belgrade on **Higher**

Education of Refugees, where four third-level education students from Burundi, Afghanistan and Iraq presented their experiences, challenges and support received. The young refugees confirmed that the legal aid, counselling and comprehensive support provided by BCHR, UNHCR and Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) during the first year of their university studies were key in their progress and enrollment in the second year.

Thirty-eight recognised refugees were supported in October in accessing accommodation, vocational training and employment.

The BCHR integration team received a confirmation of recognition from the Agency for qualification - **ENIC NARIC** Centre - in the case of a high school diploma for a refugee from Chechnya.

In Vranje, 16 refugee children from Ukraine are enrolled in two primary schools, while 4 children are enrolled in two secondary schools.

Under a joint MoU, UNHCR, SCRM and the National Employment Service (NES) organised an information session in Novi Sad, on **employment of Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection**, for fifteen branch offices of the NES in Vojvodina.

Eleven refugees from Ukraine have thus far received working permits with support from UNHCR project lawyers.



Refugee from Syria, artist Bilal Faro, at the opening of his exhibition "Flight" in Obrenovac Sports and Culture Centre, ©UNHCR, 24 October 2022

Vranje-based furniture factory *Mobel-S* donated to UNHCR partner Sigma Plus textile for sewing and wood for carpentry workshops, organised with refugees from Ukraine in AC Vranje.

Partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) organised two return-related meetings for 25 internally displaced persons (IDPs), who were informed about the available support to returns. **Seven IDP families were registered for return to Kosovo¹**. Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian IDPs pointed out the lack of any previous ownership of land/property as a major impediment to return.

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.

Ten refugee women from Ukraine and Burundi participated in the *Women's Run*, which took place in Belgrade's Ada Ciganlija. UNHCR enabled the refugees' participation and procured the needed equipment.

UNHCR marked the UN Day with two events: Firstly, **a concert entitled *Together*, celebrating the opening of the stage donated by UNHCR to the Technical School Obrenovac, took place in the school's front yard.** Students from the school (their choir and their band) performed together with the Music of Hope choir and percussionists. An asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, who lives in a childcare institution and is enrolled in a high school in Belgrade, was a guest performer. Secondly, the Sports and

Culture Centre Obrenovac hosted the **opening of the exhibition by an asylum-seeker from Syria Bilal Faro, a multitalented sculptor and painter, entitled *Flight***, with media and promotional support from UNHCR.

A group of refugee children and Belgrade School of Hospitality and Tourism pupils engaged in an excursion which included visits to the Ram Fortress, Viminacium and Vinča archeological site, accompanied by four UNHCR/CRPC cultural mediators, who supported the children in familiarizing themselves with one another and with the cultural/historical sites of Serbia.

In order to debunk the xenophobic public discord, BCHR organised a **street debate on refugees and migrants with citizens of Belgrade** in the central Knez Mihailova Street and spoke with more than 100 people. Most of them were supportive of the idea of helping those in need and did not mind working/being neighbors with refugees or migrants, but many expressed dissatisfaction with migrant groups sleeping outdoors in Belgrade.

Partner Indigo organized a training on ***Involving local actors in integration and inclusion of young refugees and asylum seekers*** on Vlasinsko lake, on 14-16 October, attended by 21 refugee and local youngsters from Bujanovac, Preševo, Vranje, Bosilegrad and Niš. The participants learnt about the local and refugee communities and exchanged ideas for future joint actions and cooperation.

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