

FYR MACEDONIA

INTER-AGENCY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

19 August – 25 August 2015

KEY FIGURES

19,300

Food packages distributed

12,558

Medical interventions provided

275

People provided with direct legal assistance

691

Unaccompanied minors identified

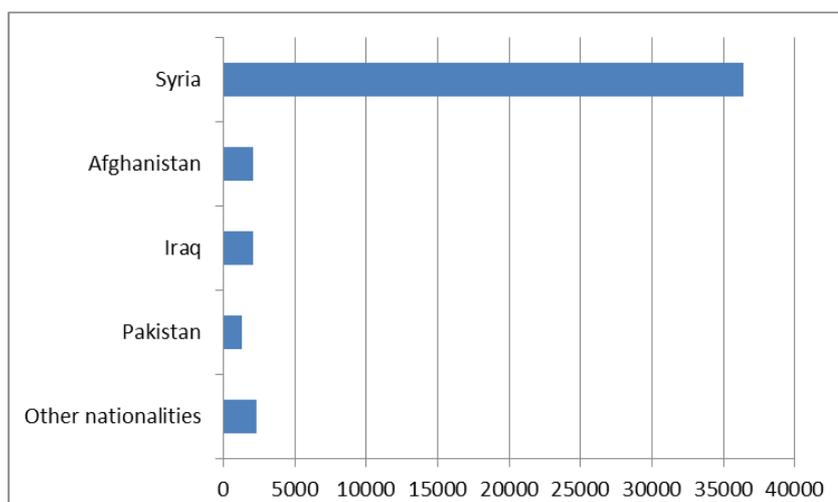
PRIORITIES

- 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

HIGHLIGHTS

- On Wednesday (19.08.2015) the Government of FYR Macedonia reached a decision to declare a state of Emergency for the South and the North border due to the increased number of refugees entering from Greece. As a result of the declaration the army, in addition to the border police and other police units, was deployed to the border line and prevented the refugees crossing into the country. Tear gas and stun grenades were used for crowd control on Thursday and Friday. UNHCR and partners were daily present at the border together with two medical teams from the Red Cross to monitor and assist those in need with food, water, blankets and medical assistance.
- The border was opened again on Friday 22 and the Foreign Minister, Nikola Poposki, assured that the border will not be closed in the future. An estimated 6,000 to 7,000 persons arrived in Gevgelija after the border was opened again on Friday afternoon.

Intention to apply for asylum: **44,762** applications have been filed from 19 June to 24 August 2015 (source: Ministry of Interior).



Refugees gather in shade, Red Cross distributing water, Gevgelija. Photo: UNHCR/M.Bijali

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational Context

The number of refugees and migrants crossing the border from Greece, entering the city of Gevgelija continues to be high with 44,762 persons registered their intention to apply for asylum, including 7,020 children, of whom 691 are unaccompanied since 19 June until 24 August 2015. This is an increase of 7,301 persons compared to the previous reporting period. Of these 36,400 (81%) of the arrivals are Syrians, 2,107 (5%) Afghans, 2,069 (5%) Iraqis, 1,309 (3%) Pakistanis and the remainder represent other nationalities such as Somalis, Palestinians, Congolese and Cameroonians. 49 applications for asylum were registered out of which 36 were submitted by Syrians.

There is a discrepancy between the number of registered persons by the MoI and the number of refugees who have passed through the country. The closing of the border and the subsequent reopening meant that some 6,000 to 7,000 people were not registered.

UNHCR is working with the Government to improve the registration to facilitate safe access to asylum and to ensure implementing border management measures with humanity and in accordance with international obligations including family unity and protection of persons with specific needs.

Achievements

Protection

Achievements and Impact

- A new site for registration has been identified by the authorities some 600 meters from the border and is already being used. The army has erected three tents and leveled the ground to link the new site to the railways in order for the train to pick up passengers. This decision will shift the majority of the refugees to the new site rather than to Gevgelija town. Registration by the police supported by UNHCR is now taking place at the new site although challenges still exist.
- A rest area for the most vulnerable families is fully operational in Gevgelija offering social services to women and children, provided by UNHCR and UNICEF supported mobile teams from NGO La Strada. Art and play material for children are distributed on site by UNICEF and La Strada.
- 12 new data entry clerks have been hired and trained through the NGO Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) and new data software and IOM-donated IT equipment is in place.
- In Tabanovce the day waiting facilities are not geared for the large influx throughout the weekend, but as the backlog in Gevgelija was cleared, the facilities were adequate to cater for the refugees. However, nights are growing colder and while most continue directly to Serbia rather than stopping in Tabanovce, many are not equipped for cold weather. Particularly children were observed to wear summer clothes. Distribution of blankets is taking place at evening time. Nun and Legis distributed 1,500 blankets. The refugee housing units are in use. Open pavilions have been erected to provide shade at the hot hours of the day. Maintenance of the area is in place and functioning.
- UNHCR Protection team and partners have maintained presence at Tabanovce site, monitoring the flow of refugees given the increased numbers of those arriving from the southern border in the country.



Child friendly space, Gevgelija. Photo: UNHCR/E.Percuklievska

- During the reporting period approximately 275 persons were offered free legal advice at the railway station. Also MYLA assisted 12 asylum seekers at the Vizbegovo Reception Center with their asylum procedure. These activities are funded by UNHCR.
- 200 flyers with information in English and Arabic have been distributed by Help the Migrants in Macedonia.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- A UNHCR site planner is on location and is working on the new site to improve overall reception conditions and basic humanitarian assistance.
- There is a need to improve the registration and set up border management structures with humanity and in line with international standards allowing in particular for the most vulnerable cases to be identified. UNHCR is supporting the Government to achieve this.



Health

Achievements and Impact

- During the reporting period the Red Cross provided 12,558 medical interventions out of which 413 were pregnant women and 2,847 were children. Four mobile teams of the Red Cross are working in two shifts to provide medical assistance and first aid in Gevgelija and Tabanovce. Red Cross distributed 624 first personal aid sets. The activity is funded by UNHCR.
- Most common health issues reported by Red Cross were foot injuries, diarrhea, vomitus, skin injuries, droops and warts.
- The MoH issued an instruction to health care institutions for provision of free medical services to the migrants.
- The Ministry of Health provides voluntary vaccination at Gevgelija train station throughout the day.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Cough syrup for children and sick in Tabanovce in the wake of a drop in temperature and colder nights approaching.



Food Security and Nutrition

Achievements and Impact

- The NGOs Nun, Legis and Help the Migrants with the support of individuals are providing daily food packages and other products to the refugees. During the reporting period 19,300 food packages and 50 kg fruit were distributed.
- Supported by SOS Children's Village, Red Cross is distributing age specific food for babies in Gevgelija.
- The Red Cross provided 3,681 food kits last week.



Food distribution, Gevgelija. Phot: UNHCR\E.Percuklievska



Water and Sanitation

Achievements and Impact

- Both rest areas in Tabanovce and Gevgelija train station are fully operational. The Red Cross provided 1,469 hygienic parcels (for men, women and babies).

- Legis, Nun and Help the Migrants in Macedonia distributed daily hygienic goods to babies consisting of: diapers (1,200), baby wipes (200 pkg.) shoes and clothing (300 pcs each), and to women; pads (600 pcs), wipes (400 packages), shoes (100 pair).

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Challenges related to the sewage system at the new site were discovered; this might delay the installment of more durable WASH facilities. UNHCR and UNICEF are working to provide a temporary solution while access to water and sewage is secured.

Communication and Information

Achievements and Impact

- On August 21st, the regular field coordination meeting was organized in Gevgelija by the MLSP and UNHCR with participation of Mayor of Gevgelija, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, IOM, MRC, MYLA, MK Railway staff, Open gate-La Strada, HERA, NGO Legis, NGO Nun, Civil Movement - Help the migrants.
- The UNHCR Skopje Facebook page (UNHCR-Skopje) regularly posts updates on the situation and cooperation in the humanitarian community.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- An awareness raising campaign about refugees is envisaged to be broadcast on local TV and radio stations and shared on the social networks in September.

Working in partnership

- As a result of the declaration of a state of emergency the Government has formed a Crisis Management Team to address the refugee crises. The new Director visited Gevgelija and UNHCR assured her of its support, while emphasizing the importance of proper planning for the site and basic contributions from the Government's side.
- The refugee response activities are headed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Partners working with the Ministries and municipalities to provide protection and assistance to refugees are: Help the Migrants in Macedonia, HERA, IOM, La Strada Open Gate, Legis, MYLA, Nun, Drika, Vlaznija, Red Cross, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WHO.



Field cooperation: UNHCR, MYLA, La Strada, Legis, UNICEF, Volunteers from the village of Labunishta.
Photo: UNICEF\A.Lazovski

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