

KEY FIGURES

1 January 2015-21 January 2016

425,037

Registered intentions to apply for asylum

30%

of registered intentions were expressed by minors

2,030

Applications for asylum

85%

of asylum applications were from the top 10 refugee-producing countries

2

Persons granted refugee status

15-21 January 2016

9,607

Registered intentions to seek asylum

47

Applications for asylum

10,251

Medical interventions provided

452

Medical assistance to children

9,540

Food packages distributed

7,665

Winter and rain jackets distributed

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

FYR MACEDONIA

INTER-AGENCY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

15-21 January 2016

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9,607 refugees and migrants crossed the border into the **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** during the reporting period 15-21 January 2016, with a daily average of 1,373. Since UNHCR began monitoring departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some **724,011** refugees and migrants have departed.
- In the period from 15-21 January 2016, 47 applications for asylum were filed, while from 1 January 2015 to 21 January 2016, 2,030 asylum applications were submitted out of which 1,002 (49%) were submitted by Syrians, 409 (20%) by Afghans, and 174 (9%) by Iraqis. So far only two persons have been recognised as refugees in 2015-2016, both unaccompanied children, one from Iraq and one from Syria.
- During the reporting period, 79 people were returned from Vinojug transit centre, on the southern border of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the Greek border for possessing forged documents, no documents, or for being nationals of countries other than Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria.

- The UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Turk, was on mission in the FYR Macedonia on 20-21 January. During his visit he met with government officials responsible for the most important aspects of the country's response to the refugee and migrant crisis, including the Head of the Steering Committee for



UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Turk, speaking with a refugee family in Vinojug reception centre. ©UNHCR/S.Vasilevska, Vinojug reception centre (FYR Macedonia), 21 January 2016

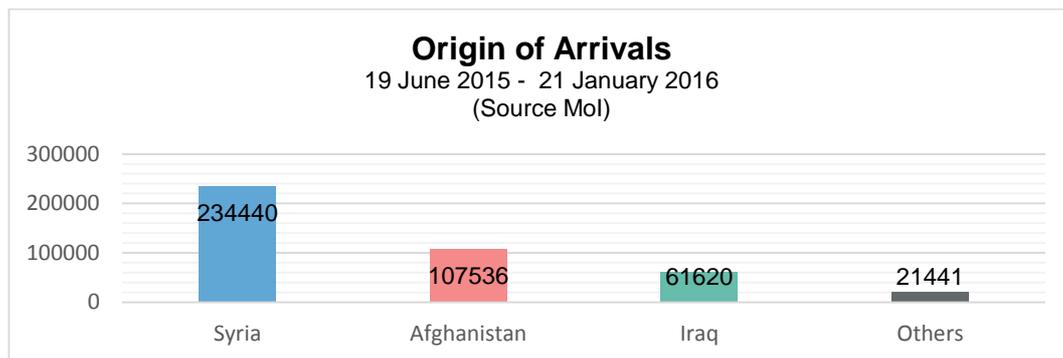
coordination and management of the crisis system and Minister of Health; the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy; and the Minister of Interior as well as UN officials and representatives of major UNHCR donors in the country. AHC Turk also visited the border with Greece, and the Vinojug reception centre where he had the time to speak with refugees, the authorities managing the site, the border police, and the UNHCR field team as well as humanitarian partners providing assistance at the site.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational Context

9,607 refugees and migrants crossed the border into FYR Macedonia during the reporting period 15-21 January 2016, with a daily average of 1,373. Since UNHCR began monitoring the departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some 724,011 refugees and migrants have departed.

The Ministry of Interior's statistics of refugees and migrants declaring their intention to apply for asylum reached 425,037 including 126,803 (30%) children, of whom 18,224 (4% of children) were registered as unaccompanied since 19 June 2015 until 21 January 2016. Of these 234,440 (55%) of the arrivals are Syrians, 107,536 (25%) Afghans, 61,620 (15%) Iraqis, and the remaining (5%) represent other nationalities such as Iranians, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Congolese and Bangladeshi.



Protection

Achievements and Impact

- The Information/Advice Desk, as a part of the Children and Family Protection Support Hub is installed in Vinojug reception centre. All related services provided by humanitarian partners are marked with the new CFSH agency neutral logo.
- MLSP, MYLA, UNHCR, and La Strada held a meeting in the Gevgelija Centre for Social Work to discuss MLSP's 15 January decision to fully take over the Best Interests Assessment process and make it operational. All unaccompanied and separated children identified by the police or other competent humanitarian actors will be referred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for Best Interest Assessment interviews with the continued support of UNHCR, a social worker, MYLA staff and a translator.
- The Danish Refugee Council recruited protection monitoring staff and established a daily presence in two shifts at both borders (Gevgelija and Tabanovce).
- The Crisis Management Centre decided that refugees who need to withdraw money can exit the Vinojug site to go to Western Union. Once the refugee receives permission from the CMC representative, a taxi is called to take them to the nearest Western Union in town and then immediately back to the site.
- UNICEF has initiated discussions with IOM about including a topic on the importance of considering children in crowd management tactics in their upcoming trainings of border police, scheduled in February, and future trainings. UNICEF believes a more child-friendly approach to crowd management will minimise risks of increased psychosocial distress of children.
- On 20 January, UNICEF and the MLSP met in Gevgelija to discuss issues around crowd management and the importance of ensuring unaccompanied minors are transferred to authorities by their Greek counterparts at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- On 21 January, a cross-border visit, both in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece, was organised between La Strada and ARSIS, with the support of UNICEF and Save the Children, to improve harmonisation and coordination for handling children with special needs, including unaccompanied minors, when crossing the border.
- As part of the renewed project agreement with La Strada, to be implemented from 1 February, UNICEF has included an increased number of translators both during day and night shifts to improve communication and prevent and minimise stress factors for parents and children.



AHC Turk visiting the UNICEF child-friendly space within the Child and Family Protection Support Hub. ©UNHCR/S.Vasilevska, Vinojug reception centre (FYR Macedonia), 21 January 2016

- From 15-21 January, approximately 1,735 children and 1,271 women were provided with support, including emotional and psychosocial assistance, in the UNICEF Child Friendly Space operated by the NGO La Strada in Vinjug. La Strada identified and assisted 82 vulnerable individuals. In Tabanovce La Strada assisted and supported approximately 1,191 children and 1,110 women. The activities are funded by UNICEF, UNHCR, GIZ, Save the Children and Terre des Hommes.
- From 15-21 January approximately 957 children and 463 women were provided with support, including emotional and psychosocial assistance in the Child Friendly Space operated by the SOS Children's Village in Tabanovce. Additionally, 32 vulnerable individuals were identified and assisted. The activities are funded by the SOS Kinderdorf International and UNICEF.
- During the reporting period 209 refugee group leaders, representing around 10,350 refugees, were given information about their rights and obligations in FYR Macedonia at the Vinjug site by MYLA, who also assisted 47 asylum seekers at the Vizbegovo Reception Center with their asylum procedure. MYLA also ensured prioritisation in 63 cases, around 82 vulnerable individuals, for their registration in Vinjug.
- During the reporting period and in close coordination with UNHCR, Red Cross, and La Strada staff in Tabanovce, 42 Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) and 118 members of their families/groups were transported by Mercy Corps from Tabanovce transit centre to the border with Serbia, and referred to MSF for pick-up at the border and to the Mercy Corps team at the Miratovac RAP. The Mercy Corps Tabanovce team has been assisted by two volunteers from Operation Mercy, experienced in emergency work and work with EVIs, and four volunteers from the Macedonian Scouts Association – Scouts Emergency Team.
- **Visits:** On January 19, the Dutch Ambassador to Skopje visited the Vinjug centre and border area with Greece. On 17 January, representatives from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) visited Vinjug. They commented that the conditions and services offered had improved since their last visit. On 16 January, the Ministers of interior of FYR Macedonia and Serbia visited Vinjug reception center, as did the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Frosina Remenski. During each of their visits they toured the site and met with the UNHCR team, who briefed them about UNHCR's work in the field. On 18 January, the Ambassador of Hungary in FYR Macedonia, the General Major, and Commander of the Hungarian Special Forces visited the Vinjug site at noon, and were briefed by the Commander of the Border Police.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The border between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece was closed from 17:30 on 19 January until approximately 10:00 am on 21 January. FYR Macedonia authorities informed that they had received information from the Serbian Border Police that from 20 January onwards only refugees with Germany or Austria marked as their final destination country on their registration documents would be allowed to transit through the route. This practice was also implemented in FYR Macedonia with the border re-opening.
- There is a need to address the potential implications of the abovementioned decision compelling refugees to inform authorities about their country of destination before crossing the border with Greece, as well as allowing the selection only between Germany and Austria, on increasing on-route family separation and restricting family reunification with family members already in countries other than Germany and Austria.
- There is a need to address the potential implications that selective entry procedures at borders have on the increase in number of refugees using smuggling routes to cross borders, resulting in the risks of violence for children and lack of access to basic services provided in government-managed transit centres.
- Incidents of smugglers robbing and abusing refugees and migrants also continue to be shared on a regular basis, especially by individuals arriving to the Tabanovce transit centre on foot.
- Refugees complained that railway staff in Vinjug did not always return change to refugees after purchasing train tickets.
- While conversations are being held bilaterally between UNICEF and partners, there is a need for a centralised common database and case management system, which will allow information sharing using confidentiality protocols, keep track of cases and set up referral pathways to ensure continued support across borders until they reach their country of destination.



Health

Achievements and Impact

- During the reporting period the Red Cross provided 10,251 medical interventions out of which 124 were pregnant women and 452 were children. The Red Cross is working in shifts to provide medical assistance and first aid in Gevgelija and Tabanovce 24/7. This activity is funded by UNHCR and the Red Cross.
- The Red Cross medical team in Tabanovce moved to a container closer to the Rubb halls. This has improved services for refugees as they now have easier access.

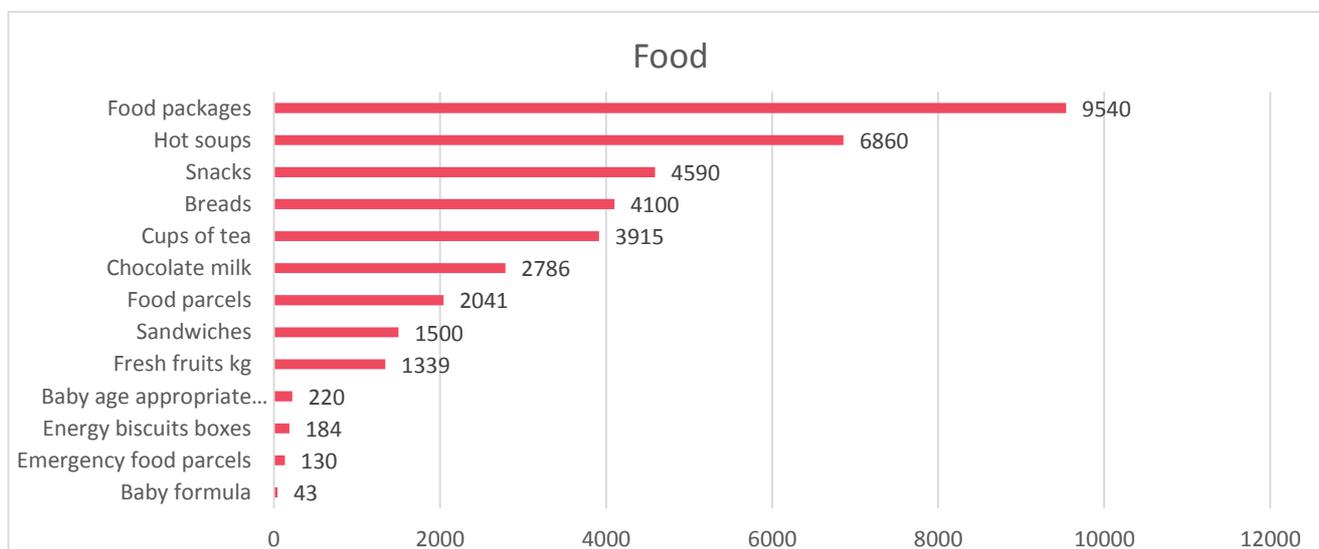
- In the period between 20 and 21 January 2016, the Red Cross distributed 395 hand disinfectants in the Tabanovce transit centre, procured by UNFPA. La Strada distributed a total 7,200 leaflets, produced by UNFPA, in three languages, Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. UNFPA, in collaboration with the city hospitals of Gevgelija and Kumanovo, continues to support the development of a plan for utilisation, management and monitoring of the recently procured Reproductive Health Kits. Further planning for utilisation of the two UNFPA procured mobile gynecological clinics is underway between the Ministry of Health and UNFPA.



Food Security and Nutrition

Achievements and Impact

- Legis, Nun, Kalliri, Agape, Dorcas, La Strada, Help the Refugee in Macedonia, Caritas, UNHCR and Red Cross distributed:



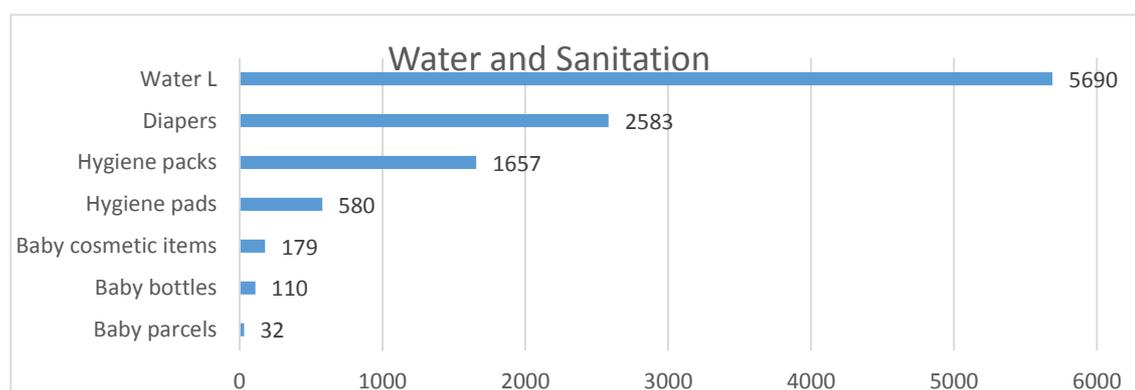
- The baby food that is distributed in the child-friendly spaces in Gevgelija and Tabanovce is funded by UNICEF.
- In Tabanovce, the kitchen was completed, insulated and equipped, and is ready to function.



Water and Sanitation

Achievements and Impact

- Red Cross, Help the Refugees in Macedonia, La Strada and other NGOs distributed:



- Repairs on the water taps started in Vinojug. Also, general cleaning of the of the area going towards “stone 59” began during the reporting period and is scheduled to continue over the coming days.
- On 21 January, work began on construction of the new sanitation block and septic tank at Gevgelija transit centre, funded by UNICEF and supervised by MLSP, with technical input from DRC in its role as site planners at the centre. This block will provide toilet facilities to people waiting for trains, as access to the centres other toilets currently can be restricted once people join the train-boarding queue. Work is expected to be completed during February.

- After advocacy from various actors to address acute water, sanitation and hygiene needs in Tabanovce transit centre, due to blocked and frozen pipes and damage due to the poor siting of septic tanks, CMC/DRC appointed dedicated maintenance staff to improve the situation.
- The hygiene items that are distributed in the child-friendly space in Tabanovce are funded by UNICEF.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Throughout the reporting period the weather was extremely cold in Tabanovce, water both inside the toilet block and outside froze, so no water was available. Hand sanitizers were provided in the interim.
- On 15 January, a DRC mission followed the UNHCR WASH Officer's visit to Tabanovce and confirmed that the toilets and septic tank were improperly installed, and only partially functional. They will redesign the installation. The UNHCR WASH Officer went back to the site on 21 January to meet with the Crisis Management Centre site manager to discuss the timeframe for installing the new toilet facilities, as well as the lack of water/frozen pipe issue and potential solutions. The WASH Officer got in touch with DRC to follow-up on the various issues.



Communication and Information

Achievements and Impact

- The Emergency Lab from UNHCR Innovation / Emergency Services is on its second mission to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The team has been working with field staff in Gevgelija on enhancing the loudspeaker messages for refugees, through partnership with Translators without Borders, and bringing wireless control capabilities. UNHCR installed a TV screen in the UNICEF child-friendly space in the Children and Family Protection Support Hub. Content specific to the protection needs of children and families is being piloted. The screens are due to be placed in other areas of the site with appropriate content for each space. Also, the piloting of a palm of the hand translation app is planned in the coming days.
- The Mercy Corps Cross border Info Group continues to share information about the current situation from Eidomeni to Sid lead to increase connection and coordination between humanitarian actors in Idomeni-Gevgelija-Tabanovce-Miratovac-MiratovacBusPoint-Presevo, as well as improve results.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

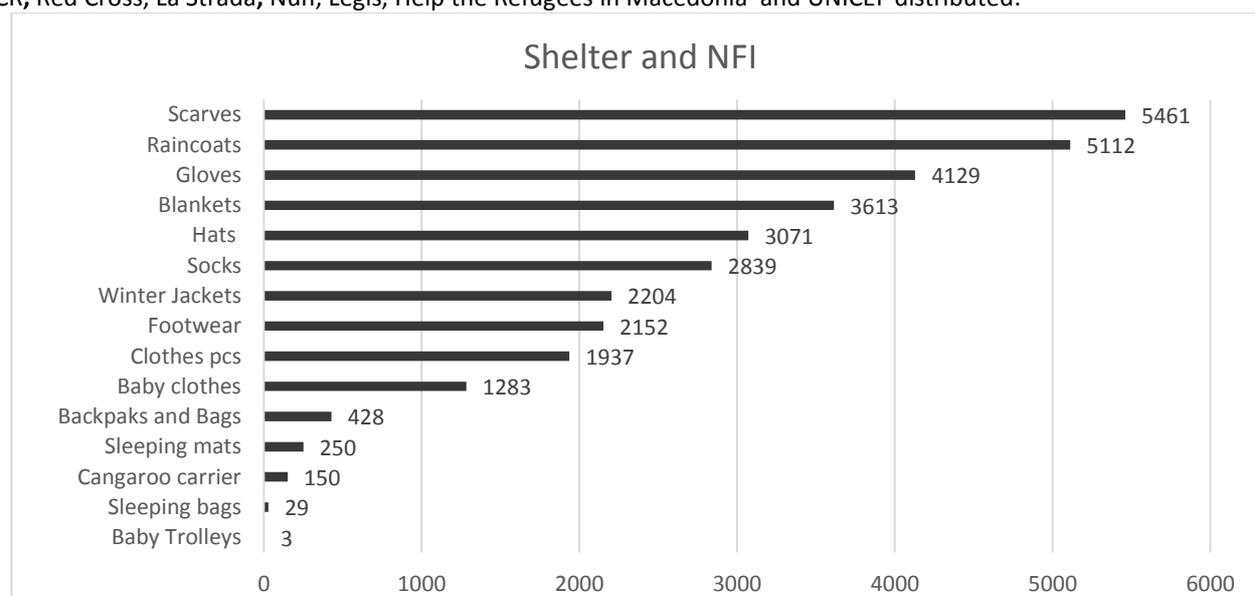
- The WiFi connection in Tabanovce is still weak.



Shelter and NFIs

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR, Red Cross, La Strada, Nun, Legis, Help the Refugees in Macedonia and UNICEF distributed:



- To date the Danish Refugee Council has contributed the following to the reception and transit centres: built two toilet blocks in the Tabanovce transit centre; rented generators for the Vinojug reception centre; provided four fuel tanks in each site and fuel for the generators; purchased 24 electric heaters in each transit centre, and procures gas for the heaters in Tabanovce on a daily basis; facilitated the expansion of the Vinojug reception centre and Tabanovce by expanding and fencing the area; enclosed the camp distribution warehouses with pre-fabricated walls in Tabanovce and provided heating; and procured blankets and diapers to supplement NFI packages benefiting 1,000 asylum-seekers and migrants. Procurement of additional “winterized” NFIs is underway.
- Three additional containers were delivered and installed on the site to be used as La Strada’s operational and administrative offices.
- UNHCR procured 50 benches that were delivered to the second Rubb hall in Vinojug.
- Mercy Corps containers for vulnerable individuals have been equipped with beds, mattresses, and pillows provided by UNHCR.



A Syrian single mother of two taking some time to rest in a Tabanovce Rubb hall before continuing on her journey. ©UNHCR, Tabanovce (FYR Macedonia), 17 January 2016

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The ground was frozen at the Tabanovce transit site and on the way to the Serbian border. A La Strada team brought salt to put on the pathways, but more will be needed as the freezing weather continues.
- Refugee Housing Units still lack lightbulbs, so refugees were redirected to use the Rubb halls in Tabanovce instead.
- There were still frequent power outages, but of shorter duration, in the Tabanovce transit centre.
- On 15 January, work was done to install a cover over the entrance to the Vinojug to protect refugees from the rain and snow when outdoors. The Red Cross erected two Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) to be used to distribute NFIs, and another RHU was being erected in a Rubb hall to distribute dry food. The Rubb hall at the entrance of the site was in very unsanitary condition and ripe for spreading disease. The disinfection company said that more permanent flooring needs to be installed to solve the situation. UNHCR is following up.

Working in partnership



AHC Turk meeting and talking with partners in the Vinojug reception centre. ©UNHCR/S.Vasilevska, Vinojug reception centre (FYR Macedonia), 21 January 2016

The weekly coordination meeting took place on 21 January in Tabanovce. No meeting took place in Gevgelija during this period.

Partners working with the Ministries and municipalities to provide protection and assistance to refugees are: Agape, ASB, Caritas, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Macedonia, Danish Caritas, DRC, Dorcas, Euro Human, GIZ, Grain of Goodness, Habitat for Humanity, Help the Refugees in Macedonia, HERA, IOM, JRS, Kalliri, La Strada Open Gate, Legis, MCMS (Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation), Mercy Corps, Merhamet, MYLA, Nun, Operation Mercy, People in need, Red Cross, Samaritan’s Purse, Secours Islamique Balkans, SOS Children’s Village, Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF), Terre des hommes, Vlaznia Kumanovo, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO.

Contacts: Lauren Panetta Chammas, Reporting Officer, panetta@unhcr.org, Cell + 389 (0) 70 298 101
Ljubinka Brashnarska, PI/External Relations, brashnar@unhcr.org, Tel: +389 2 311 8641, Cell + 389 (0) 72 269 346