

## KEY FIGURES

1 January 2015 – 31 March 2016

**477,856**

Registered intentions to apply for asylum

**31%**

of registered intentions were expressed by children

**2,215**

Applications for asylum

**79%**

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

**2**

Persons granted refugee status

4 – 31 March 2016

**979**

Registered intentions to seek asylum

**36**

Applications for asylum

**1,223**

Number of refugees/migrants in the transit centres

## 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

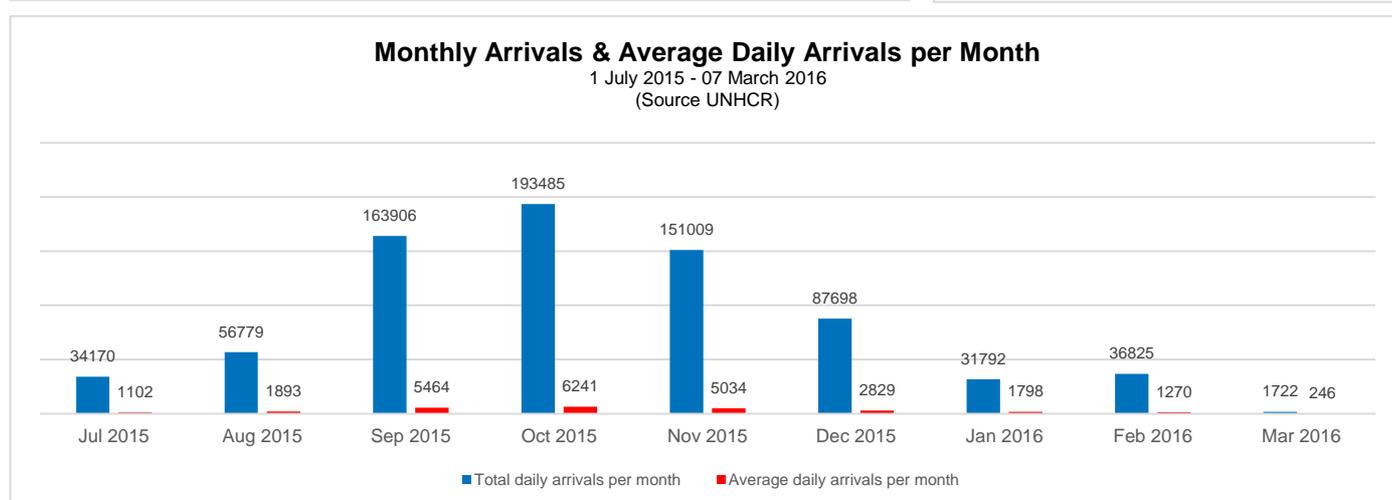
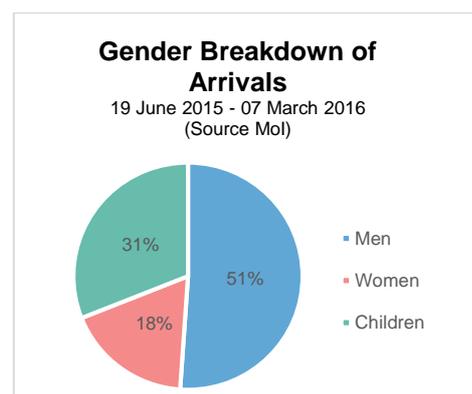
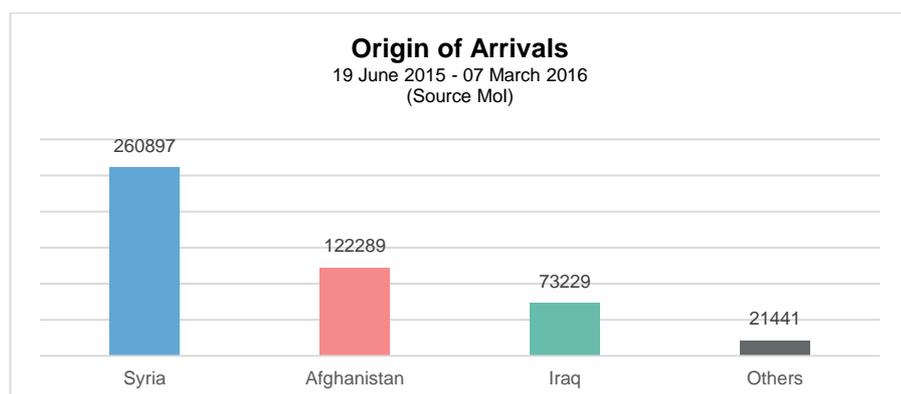
4 – 31 March 2016

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- The Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia extended the state of crisis until the end of the year to secure the continuity of the Crisis Management Committee and of “the execution of tasks by the army and security forces of the Interior Ministry in an attempt to guard and protect the state border”.
- Dnevnik reported that a three-metre high wire fence is also being constructed on the border with Serbia, along with the one which was constructed around the Tabanovce refugee aid point. Media sources from the Ministry of Interior have stated for Dnevnik, “It has not been defined so far how many kilometres the fence will be long. It is being built by the army and the army has the instructions to do so because there has been an increased number of illegal crossing of migrants from Serbia into Macedonian territory, but also from Macedonia towards Serbia in a smaller number. There is pressure from illegal crossing from the southern side of the country as well”.
- During a telephone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 23 March, the President Ivanov renewed his request for the German Federal Border Police to be part of the EU police contingent present at the southern and northern border of the country. He further reiterated the need for political and increased logistical support by the European Commission.
- President Ivanov wrote in an Op Ed in the Telegraph newspaper on 6 March “My country, Macedonia, is on Greece’s northern border and feeling the full force of the migrant crisis. We are facing innumerable illegal entries, the destruction of state and private property, the use of counterfeit passports and violence against security forces on the border – all of this by migrants intending to avoid registration and the verification of who actually has a right to asylum. Yet we are not in the European Union. The crisis is coming from the territory of Greece – a Schengen area state. So Macedonia has to defend Europe from the EU itself”.

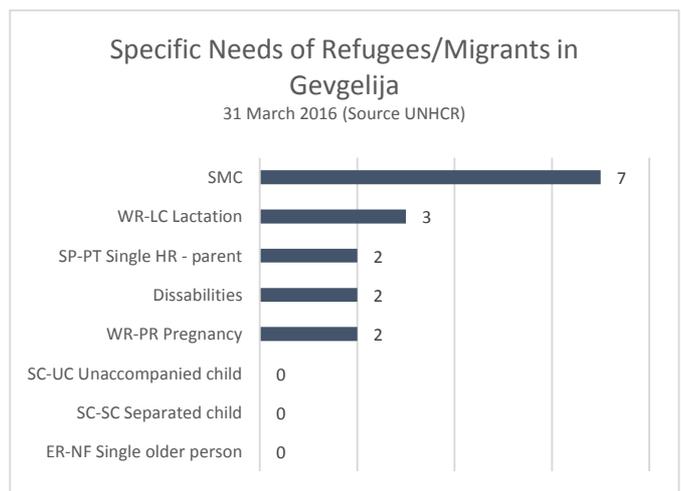
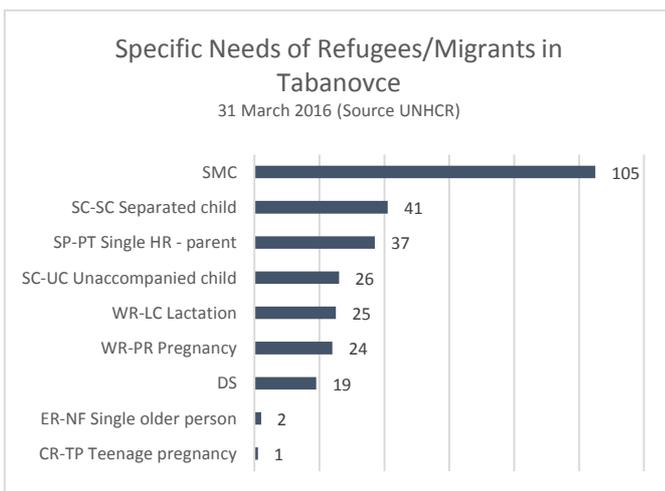
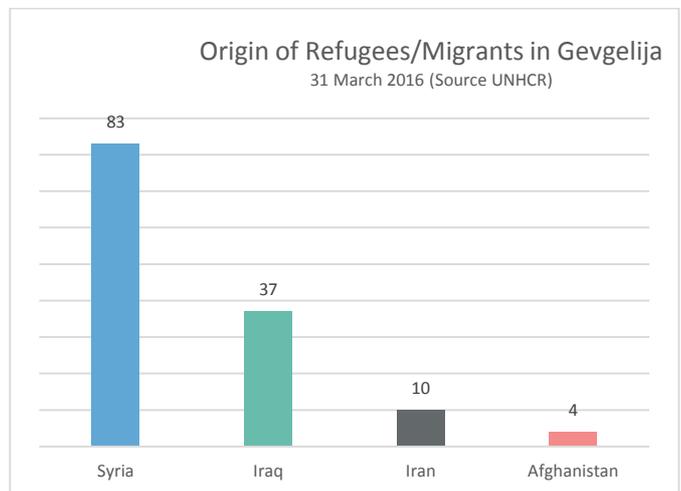
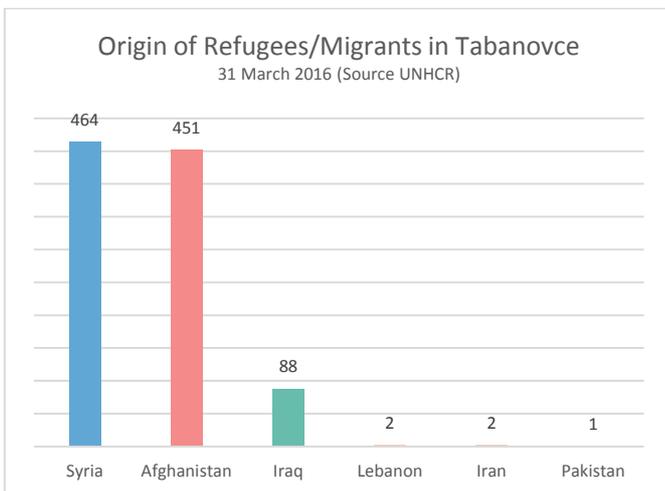
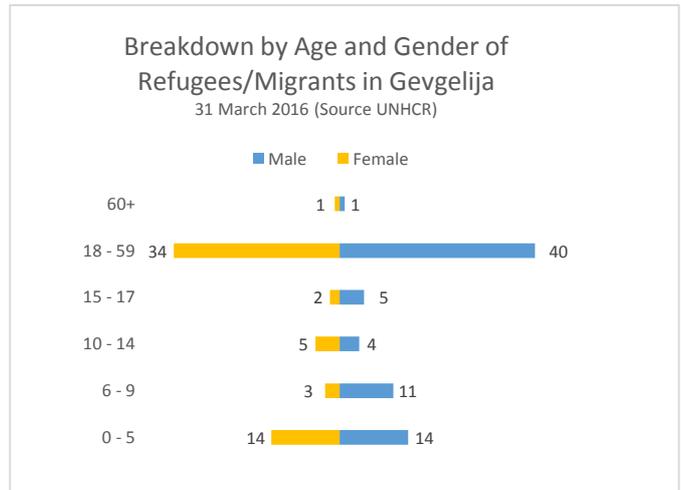
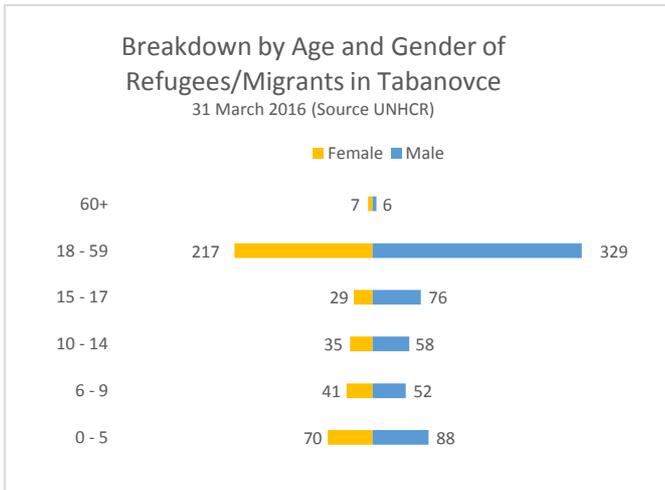
## Statistics

- According to the Ministry of Interior, **979** refugees and migrants crossed the border into FYR Macedonia during the reporting period 4 – 31 March 2016, with the final arrivals on 7 March early in the morning. Since UNHCR began monitoring the departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some **778,768** refugees and migrants have departed. The Ministry of Interior's statistics of refugees and migrants declaring their intention to apply for asylum reached **477,856** including 148,245 (31%) children, of whom 18,349 (4% of children) were registered as unaccompanied since 19 June 2015 until 7 March 2016. Of these 260,897 (55%) of the arrivals are Syrians, 122,289 (26%) Afghans, 73,329 (15%) Iraqis, and the remaining 21,441 (4%) represent other nationalities such as Iranians, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Congolese and Bangladeshi. Women and children registered made up 49% of the refugee flow. No new official arrivals or departures have been recorded since 8 March.



- In the period from 4 March – 31 March 2016, 36 applications for asylum were filed, while from 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2016, 2,215 asylum applications were submitted out of which 1,035 (47%) were submitted by Syrians, 405 (18%) by Afghans, and 181 (8%) by Iraqis (Source: MLSP). Until 31 March only 2 persons have been recognised as refugees in 2015-2016, both unaccompanied children, one from Iraq and one from Syria.
- For the period 1 January – 31 March total of 319 applications, out of which 38 were submitted by Syrians, 47 by Afghans and 9 by Iraqis (Source: MLSP).

- A total of **1,223** refugees and migrants were estimated to be in the country at the end of the reporting period, with 1,033 in Tabanovce centre, 135 in VINOJUG reception centre, 43 in the Vizbegovo reception centre for asylum seekers, and 12 in the JRS-run Safe House.



## Operational Context

A new 'screening procedure' at the border crossing between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia significantly reduced the flow of people into the country at the beginning of the reporting period. People were requested to state their town of origin, following which the border police assessed whether the town is in a war-torn area in order to determine eligibility to enter the territory. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the Serbian Police was jointly screening people at the entry point (Gevgelija) with the fYR Macedonian Border Police, many of those admitted to fYR Macedonia were screened out at the entrance to Serbia. The police also asked if individuals had family in Germany in order to screen out those with potential family reunification cases. Following interviews with refugees who were denied access to Serbia they shared that the Serbian police wrote on the bottom of some of their unified registration documents that they were denied entry on the basis of Article 8 from the Zagreb Agreement. People who were not admitted to Serbia complained to UNHCR that the selection was random and that no reasons were given for not admitting them to Serbia, whereas people at the entry point to fYR Macedonia received explanations as to why they were not allowed to enter (e.g. forged documents, non-fulfilment of some of the other criteria, etc.).

The European Council Meeting with Turkey took place on 7 March in Brussels and subsequent to the meeting a number of developments related to the refugee/migrant crisis were announced:

- to return all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands with the costs covered by the EU;
- to resettle, for every Syrian readmitted by Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian from Turkey to the EU Member States;
- to speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey; and
- to work with Turkey in any joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria, which would allow for the local population and refugees to live in areas which will be more safe.

Leaders met again in a Summit on 17-18 March to finalise the proposals from the European Council Meeting with Turkey and reached an agreement to "end irregular migration from Turkey to the EU", announcing the details of the agreement.

The Government of Slovenia informed UNHCR and all humanitarian partners that, as of 8 March at midnight, authorities would fully implement the provisions of the Schengen Borders Code, no longer allowing irregular transit. As a result Serbia stopped the flow into its territory, and no official arrivals or departures have taken place in fYR Macedonia either since 8 March. Irregular transit through the Western Balkans essentially came to an end on the same day.

Refugees and migrants grew increasingly desperate throughout the period as the borders remained closed, especially as the region experienced heavy rains and the people were exposed to the elements. On 14 March early in the morning three Afghan nationals drowned in the river of Suva Reka in the south of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, near its border with Greece. It is believed that the victims were trying to find alternative routes following the closure of the border for irregular onward movement of refugees and migrants. 23 other individuals were rescued from the icy river that had swelled with rain. They were brought to the Vinojug registration and reception centre, where local UNHCR and NGO staff provided them with advice on access to asylum, and humanitarian support. Later in the day around 2,000 people set off on foot from Eidomeni camp in Greece towards the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, after leaflets were distributed suggesting the border was closed. Carrying all of their belongings they also crossed a river and into fYR Macedonian territory at an unofficial irregular point. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the authorities returned all of the people to Greece.

Following the abovementioned events President Ivanov convened a Security Council on 15 March during which he stated, "We are not going to allow illegal entry of migrants in Macedonia". He also added that he would inform the European Union about this position. In his statement, as reported by media, he mentioned that he had informed the Security Council about other security risks aside from the incident that happened on Monday, 14 March. President further declared "With the closing of the Balkan corridor, it was expected that the attempts of forceful and illegal entry into Macedonia would increase."

On 30 March UNHCR held a high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian Refugees, which concluded with new offers of resettlement and other forms of humanitarian admission places by Member States. The meeting also highlighted the challenges over the next three years in narrowing the gap between the number of places countries are willing to offer Syrian refugees and the number that UNHCR believes are urgently needed.

### ***General conditions for refugees/migrants in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***

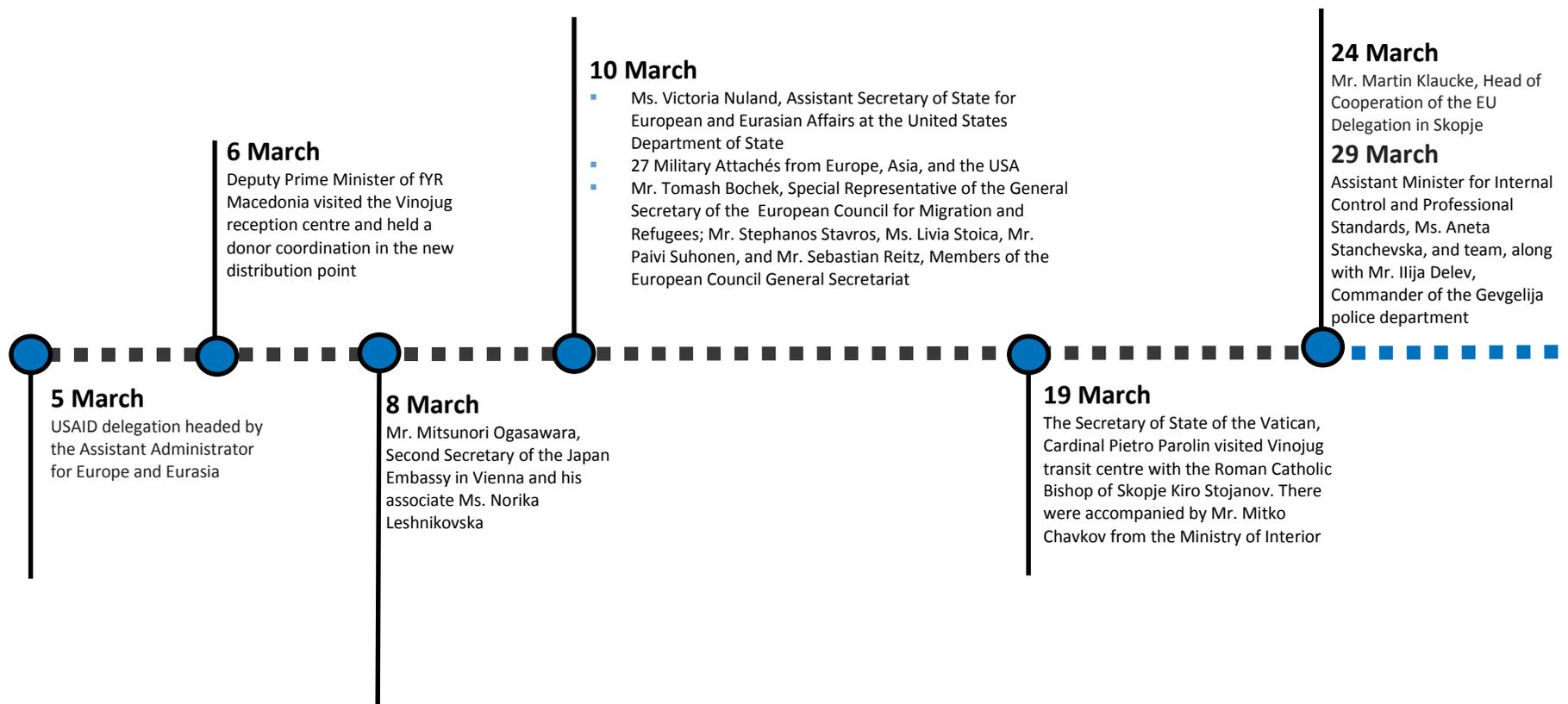
With the end of the “wave through” approach around 1,200 refugees and migrants found themselves in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, most of whom are located in Tabanovce – with more than 400 individuals, mostly women and children, stranded at the border with Serbia. At the end of the reporting period most of the people have been in country for more than a month. The site was overcrowded and the condition of the refugees/migrants at the border crossing was appalling – they were accommodated in small camping tents in muddy and flooded areas. Sanitation facilities were inadequate and overcrowded, and waste and trash was building up as cleaning crews were insufficient. Many of the refugees and migrants were ill with colds and the flu, and some have were affected by Scabies and lice.



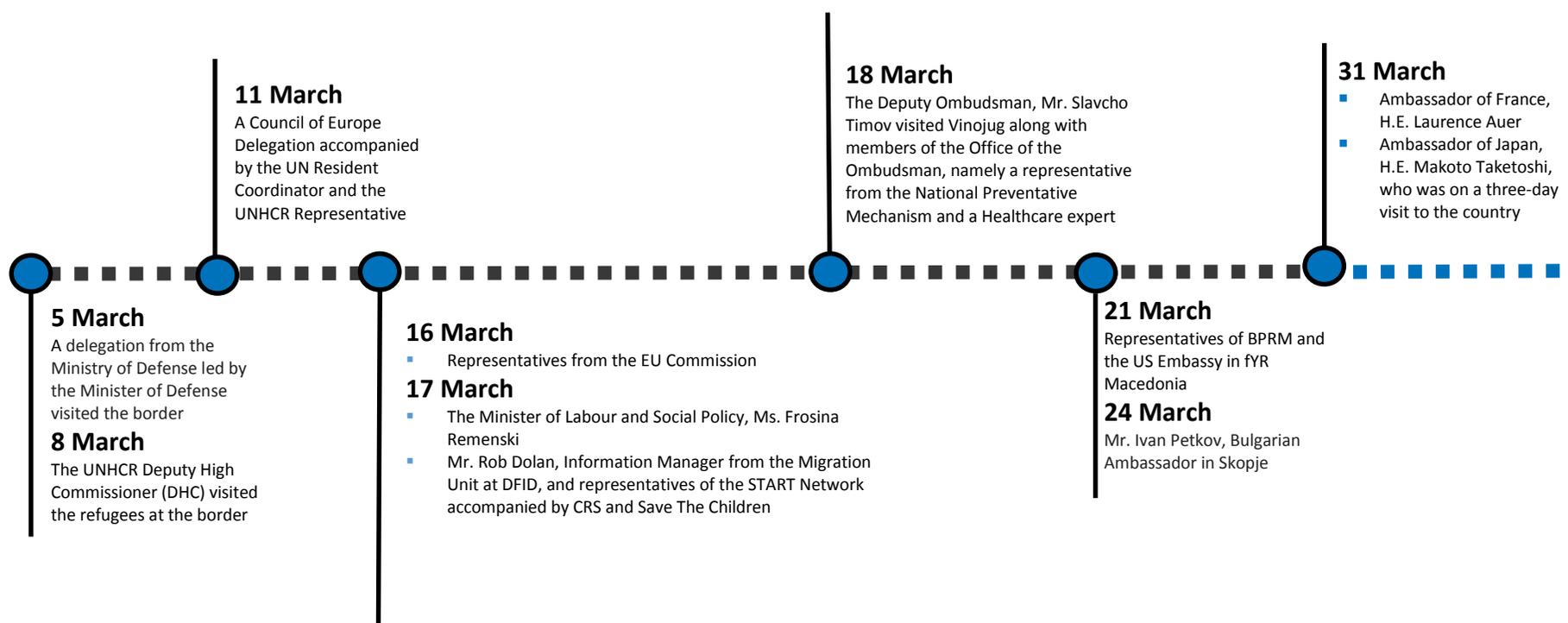
*Two-year old Nizar from Syria and his family spent many days at the border with Serbia in dire conditions, Tabanovce, FYR Macedonia, 8 March 2016, Photo: UNHCR/L.Brashnarska*

On 20 March the Crisis Management Centre announced that they would be moving people voluntarily from the Tabanovce site to the Vinojug reception centre. The CMC assured that the sole purpose of the relocation would be for people to access better accommodation and other facilities as they are not sufficient in Tabanovce. Initially refugees in the site and at the border area were very reticent to make the move, as they were worried it would be done in order to return them to Greece. By the end of the reporting period around 100 people moved from Tabanovce to Vinojug, and the border area was cleared out with all of the refugees having relocated to either Vinojug or into the Tabanovce centre.

## Visits to Vinojug Reception Centre



## Visits to Tabanovce Centre



## UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

### Achievements



### Protection

#### Achievements and Impact

- Following the profiling exercise, UNHCR held participatory assessments with an age, gender and diversity (AGD) perspective in Tabanovce on 30 and 31 March, starting with four selected groups to identify the protection concerns and assess the needs (safety and material needs) in more detail, as well as other issues of concern for the groups. The four groups were as follows: 21 Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan women heads of household (in two groups), nine Afghan boys (UAC 14-17 years old) and nine Afghan girls (not UAC 14-20 years old). The main focus of the discussions were safety/protection and health issues. The participatory assessments were conducted in collaboration with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health (doctor responsible for the mobile gynaecological clinic in Tabanovce), and the groups were informed about the available health services in the site, namely the gynaecological clinic and the available service for women, girls, men, and boys, and sensitized on SGBV. Additional participatory assessments with other groups and on other topics will be held in the coming weeks and information will be shared the humanitarian community. Findings and recommendations will be shared in a separate report.
- In coordination with UNHCR, La Strada organised a training for two groups of interpreters from various organisations operating in the Vinjug and Tabanovce transit centre on 25 and 28 March. The training aimed at improving skills for interpreters working with communities, as well as explain the guiding principles and Code of Conduct for interpreters.
- The Ministry of Health convened the Working Group developing the national GBV prevention and response standard operating procedures (SOPs) to discuss progress on activities. The outline of the draft SOPs was presented. The SOPs are expected to be shared by MOH with the GBV Working Group members for final comments. The process is supervised by UNHCR and UNFPA.
- During the reporting period, 15 refugee group leaders, around 741 refugees were given information about their rights and obligations in fYR Macedonia at the Vinjug site by MYLA, who also assisted 39 asylum seekers at the Vizbegovo Reception Centre with their asylum procedure. MYLA also ensured prioritization in 30 cases, around 94 vulnerable individuals for their registration in Vinjug. MYLA's data entry clerks assisted the Border Police in issuing 973 intentions for asylum during the reporting period. Also MYLA assisted in the issuance of the birth certificate for the newborn baby, as well as the death certificates for the persons that tragically lost their lives in river of Suva Reka on 14 March.
- During the reporting period MYLA informed 650 refugees about services in Tabanovce, 832 refugees were informed about the asylum procedure in fYR Macedonia, 249 refugees were referred to other organizations/ institutions for assistance (UNHCR, Red Cross, MLSP, etc). In addition, 57 extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) were identified and assisted.



*Discussion with Afghan girls on safety/protection and health issues, Tabanovce, fYR Macedonia, 31 March 2016, Photo: UNHCR/L.Brashnarska*

- Before the border closure Mercy Corps' teams in the Balkans continued their activities related to provision of protection services to refugees in transit. These services primarily included transportation of Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) on both sides of the FYR Macedonian - Serbian border. When the flow stopped, and refugees/migrants stayed in the centres, Mercy Corps continued providing transportation services to the people to the nearest town, where they could access some basic services, such as withdraw money from an ATM or the Western Union office, or repair their cell phones.
- A few refugees and migrants expressed their intention to return to their Country of Origin. UNHCR and MYLA first advised them about the asylum procedure and international protection to ensure they were aware of their rights in country. Subsequently they were referred to IOM for information on Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR). IOM informed them about the conditions and assistance that will be provided to them if they opt for return (i.e., obtaining travel document, transportation to final destination, and assistance during travel, etc.). 34 persons were in different stages of the AVR process during the reporting period. Five have returned – one to Iran and four to Iraq; eight from Iraq were about to return; and 21 others were in the preparatory stage of AVR (eight to Afghanistan, ten to Iraq, one to Iran, one to Egypt and one to Morocco).
- From 4 – 31 March 2016 in the UNICEF Child Friendly Space operated by the NGO La Strada-Open Gate in Vinogug and the Tabanovce "Safe Space", the teams provided psycho-social support and individual counseling to children and women. La Strada held educational - occupational group workshops with the children and with the women. La Strada made 41 referrals to other organizations in Vinogug and 861 in Tabanovce. Assistance was also provided to unaccompanied children, persons with disabilities, and support and counselling was provided to persons who showed indications of trafficking. The activities are funded by UNICEF, UNHCR, GIZ, WE EFFECT, Swiss Embassy, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Save the Children and Terre des Hommes.
- Women and children were provided with support, including emotional and psychosocial assistance in the Child Friendly Space operated by the SOS Children's Village in Tabanovce. The activities are funded by the SOS Kinderdorf International and UNICEF. On 17 March, outside decking was installed at the child-friendly space in Tabanovce to enable children to safely play outdoors during warmer days.
- On 14 and 15 March, and again on 29 and 30 March, UNICEF and Save the Children, as part of the wider inter-agency Child Protection in Emergencies Capacity Building Initiative, conducted two trainings, out of four planned, on child-friendly spaces. The training was for La Strada and SOS Children's Village staff working in child-friendly spaces in Tabanovce and Gevgelija. It focuses on the practical, day-to-day operation of child-friendly spaces, including use of space, tailoring activities to different needs of children (e.g. age, gender and cultural appropriateness, different learning and developmental stages of children), and provides participants with an understanding of child protection and the multi-sectoral nature of child-friendly spaces, including infant and young child feeding in emergencies. Thirty-two social workers and psychologists participated during trainings in March.
- In March, UNICEF worked with La Strada, SOS Children's Village and Save the Children to coordinate the delivery of non-formal education activities for children in Tabanovce. Planning is underway to schedule age-appropriate unstructured, semi-structured and structured recreational and non-formal education activities for both boys and girls, and utilize the skills and abilities of refugees staying at the transit centre to co-facilitate activities. UNICEF is sourcing educational materials in Arabic and Farsi.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- At the beginning of the reporting period, while official arrivals were still permitted, the FYR Macedonia police used a metal detector for searches, and also conducted body checks and phone searches (checking photos and documents).
- Family separation cases were on the rise due to the decreased flow of refugees from Greece as a result of the stringent entry criteria at the start of the reporting period.
- There are children in transit centres whose births may not have been registered in their country of origin because of situations including conflict, and also a number of pregnant women. There is a need for awareness raising for mothers on birth registration processes and services.

- There is a need to strengthen youth programming to cater for the needs of adolescent girls and boys in the transit centres.
- There is a need to increase the psychosocial assistance to children in the transit centre in Tabanovce, in order to reduce children's trauma caused by war and conflict in their countries of origin, which can be aggravated by their risky journeys. UNICEF is liaising with HERA in relation to provision of specialized psycho-therapy for children and their families.
- The Centre for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo and the Safe House managed by Jesuit Refugee Service currently host unaccompanied and separated children. In addition, they also host single mothers and families with children. UNICEF is liaising with the MLSP and will conduct an assessment to define UNICEF's contribution to strengthen and expand the services.
- MLSP informed UNHCR that they were facing challenges to assign caretakers for unaccompanied children, as people were no longer volunteering to accompany children because they were concerned about how it would affect the screening process at the Serbian border and further along the route.
- During the period a number of people were apprehended trying to enter the country irregularly. The police held some of them at the border, while others were kept in police stations in order to arrange their return to Greece. UNHCR monitored the situations closely, and with its legal partner MYLA advised the individuals on their rights and the asylum procedure in the country when access was permitted. UNHCR staff met with representatives of the police and MLSP at the border and advocated for better treatment of the people there, including providing them with improved shelter and more assistance in terms of food and NFIs.
- Regular fights between Afghan nationals have been observed throughout the reporting period. Alcohol and drug abuse by specific individuals has become evident, causing some to exhibit aggressive behavior putting other refugees, namely single women and families, at risk. UNHCR notified the police on several occasions that refugees are able to obtain alcohol and drugs from neighboring villages and through the fence, but until now no specific measures have been taken to curb these activities. Police usually intervene on a case by case basis when a fight happens to de-escalate the situation. However, a number of the people sharing the spaces where fights occur have complained that they are afraid of the police during interventions (some have pushed and hit when the police entered the Rubb hall). Individual refugees have offered to help in any way they can to find a permanent solution to the problem (namely to somehow isolate the people who are originally creating the problems). The issue will be taken up with the police again in an attempt to find a more lasting solution.
- A number of refugees and migrants were discovered in cargo trains trying to transit irregularly through FYR Macedonia to Europe throughout the period. A number of them are accommodated in the Tabanovce centre. In addition, a number of refugees and migrants staying in Tabanovce site tried to go to Serbia irregularly; some returned to the centre after unsuccessful attempts, while others seem to have passed.
- Refugees of different nationalities (Syria, Iraq and Afghan) have started complaining against one another on various topics including on the use of sanitation facilities and food distribution. UNHCR has started counselling some of the refugees to stay calm and to encourage respect, but much more follow up is needed in this area.
- During the reporting period the army started putting up additional razor wire on the southern border and a razor wire fence on part of the northern border.
- Fliers with religious content were distributed to refugees in Tabanovce centre. Moreover, they were given to refugee children to distribute them to other people inside the site. The organization responsible has yet to be identified.
- At the end of the reporting period, refugees complained that they were no longer allowed to go to the Western Union office in Kumanovo to withdraw money. Previously, MLSP and CMC in coordination with the police were allowing



*Afghan sister taking care of her baby brother, Tabanovce, FYR Macedonia, 24 February 2016, Photo: UNHCR/L.Brashnarska*

them to do so. While in Vinojug, UNHCR coordinated with the CMC and the police to facilitate access to Western Union in Gevgelija for refugees to receive money.

- Refugees and migrants that were transferred to Vinojug reported to UNHCR and other refugees in Tabanovce that the fYR Macedonian police were collecting their fYR Macedonia registration papers upon arrival. Rumors started circulating among the refugees that this was in order to return them to Greece.



## Health

### Achievements and Impact

- During the reporting period the Red Cross continued working in shifts to provide medical assistance and first aid in Gevgelija and Tabanovce 24/7, including for pregnant women and children. The main illnesses that were treated were respiratory, influenza, and other chronic diseases. This activity is funded by UNHCR and the Red Cross.
- With information from the UNHCR profiling exercise conducted on 17-19 March, 23 women in need of a gynecological examination (out of which 21 pregnant) were informed of the schedule and location of the mobile gynecological clinic in Tabanovce TC. One pregnant woman was referred to the hospital in Kumanovo for an additional check-up, and 2 other women were referred to Kumanovo hospital for lab tests.
- Ten women were assisted in the gynecological clinic managed by the NGO HERA (with UNFPA support) in Vinojug reception centre, of which two were pregnant. Additionally, as of 26 March, the mobile gynecological clinic was available in Tabanovce every Saturday and Sunday (15:00 -19:00 pm). In this period 8 women (4 of them pregnant) received services in Tabanovce.
- 71 women, 30 of whom were pregnant, were provided with Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services in the mobile gynecological clinic managed by the Ministry of Health (with UNFPA support) in Tabanovce.
- A WHO Field Officer conducted weekly visits to the Tabanovce centre and also visited the Vinojug reception centre to gather information about the health needs of the refugees/migrants and other related problems in order to follow up on the needs.
- Together with the medical teams assigned by the Ministry of Health and the Red Cross first aid teams, the WHO Country Office participated in weekly coordination meetings in Gevgelija.

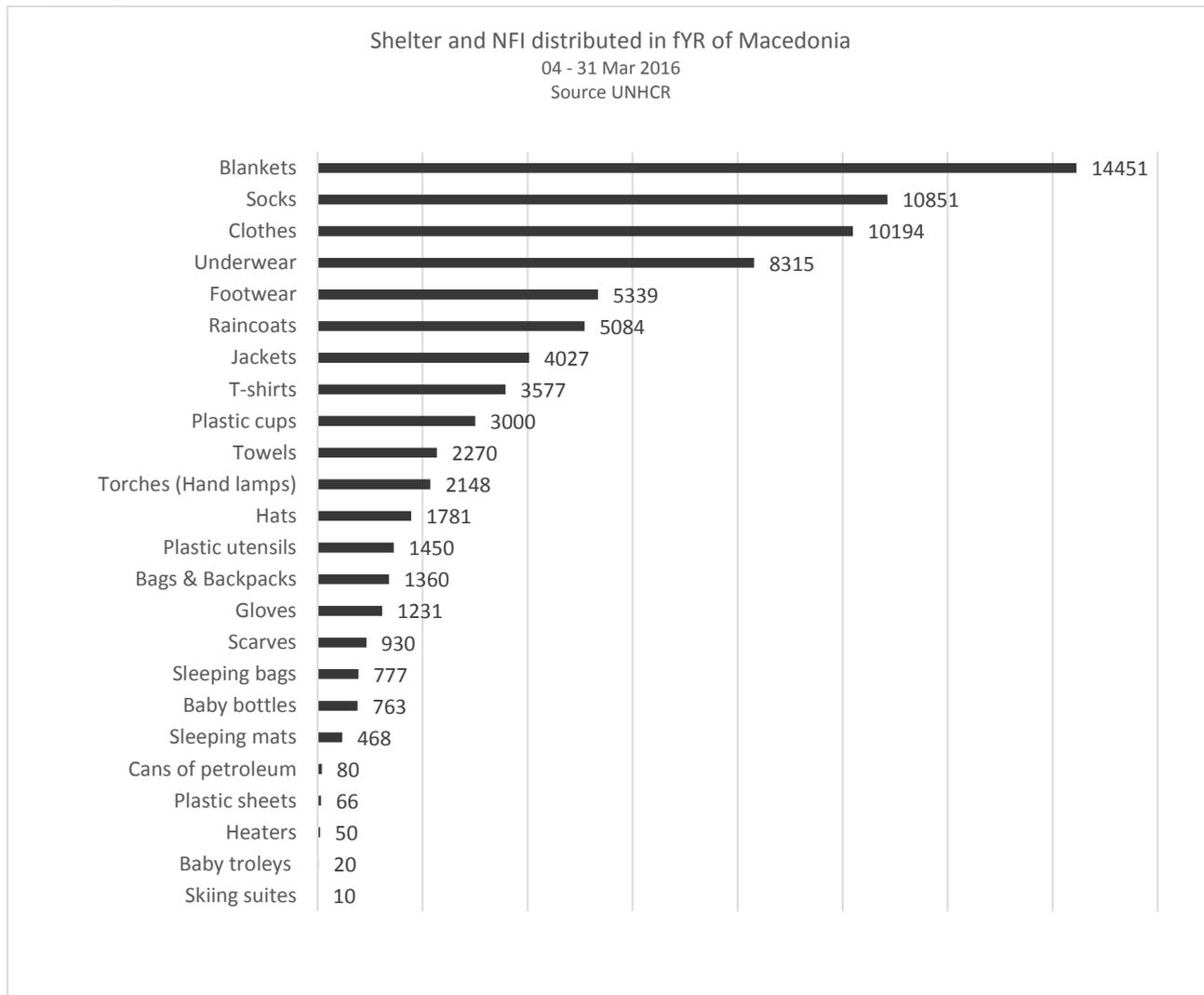
### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The health situation in Tabanovce has been worrying, in particular for the refugees who were staying at the border crossing throughout most of the reporting period. The Red Cross reported a sharp increase in the number of people infected with scabies as a result of the poor hygienic conditions. There were also two cases of Varicella and a number of people with lice. Some 50 refugees were treated with medicine, followed by disinfection of their living space. A shortage of medicines, in particular antibiotics has been reported. UNHCR coordinated with the Ministry of Health (MOH) medical clinic (the only authority that can issue antibiotics on site) and the Red Cross, to ensure that the gap is addressed. The MLSP Site Coordinator informed that the Centre for Public Health will provide special shampoos to address the lice situation. The UNHCR profiling exercise also addressed health issues and risks in order to mitigate and address them in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Towards the end of the reporting period, the Red Cross informed UNHCR that three children were diagnosed with scabies in the Vinojug reception centre. Following UNHCR's request anti-scabies lotion was distributed. MOH and MLSP were informed in order to take steps to prevent the spread of the disease.
- On 27 March, UNHCR received a number of complaints about stomach aches, diarrhea, and vomiting. Upon a few referrals to the hospital, the Ministry of Health (MOH) confirmed food poisoning in 154 persons with the same symptoms. UNHCR coordinated with the Red Cross, to ensure availability of appropriate medicines. UNHCR discussed the situation with the authorities and the Red Cross. Mitigation measures included development of food menus, special permits for NGOs distributing food, inspection of food quality, and improved hygiene at the food distribution area. Initially dry food was only available until the situation could be rectified.

## Shelter and NFIs

### Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR, Red Cross, La Strada, Nun, Legis, SIF, Help the Refugees in Macedonia, MSF, SOS Children’s Village, and UNICEF distributed:



- NFI distribution points and storage areas in the sites will be managed by MLSP with the support of the Red Cross. MLSP is creating lists of current NFI needs and will share them with NGOs if there is a lack of items.

#### **Tabanovce centre:**

- All accommodation facilities were marked so that UNHCR and partners can keep track of where refugees are staying, namely to ensure that persons with specific needs are assisted and followed up on.
- A wooden fence was built around the SOS Children’s Village building in Tabanovce to provide increased security and privacy if those receiving services and accommodated there.
- Flooring was completed in all three Rubb halls in Tabanovce in order to improve the hygiene and facilitate maintenance.
- Gravel was spread inside the Tabanovce site and on the way to the Serbian border to try to reduce the amount of mud and flooding in and around the site during heavy rains.

- Throughout the reporting period, UNHCR provided additional Refugee Housing Units from the ‘technical area’ and IOM containers from the ‘administrative area’ were opened to accommodate refugees in Tabanovce. MSF delivered four tents (4 x 50m<sup>2</sup>) to the site to accommodate refugees in Tabanovce
- Mercy Corps delivered additional gas and electric heaters for the containers and RHUs in Tabanovce. MSF (Serbia) team delivered 2 “Wilms” mobile heaters that are now providing sufficient heat to the four tents located within the administrative area. Petroleum heaters are no longer being given to refugees as they are unsafe and pose a fire hazard. MLSP reported that there was no gas left on site, and procurement of new gas tanks will not take place, as the contract with the supplier expired. MLSP only provided oil for the “Wilms” heaters connected the MSF tents. On 28 March MLSP procured additional electric heaters to cover part of the gap.
- Mercy Corps procured and delivered emergency equipment on 10 March for the refugees/migrants who were stranded at the border, including 200 SIM cards, 75 flashlights, 30 family tents, 10 heaters, a diesel generator, fuel, extension cords with lights, charging booth for mobile devices, as well as tools for making drainage system (shovels, pick axes and heavy duty bags).
- SIF also handed out 30 packs of playing cards to refugees/migrants in Tabanovce.

#### **Vinojug reception centre:**

- The construction on the clothing distribution point was completed on 6 March in Vinojug and is ready to use.
- On March 26, the Red Cross started dismantling five Refugee Housing Units near the MYLA office in order to replace them with four IOM containers to accommodate refugees in Vinojug. Other containers will also be transferred into the site once space is found. MLSP delivered 15 bunkbeds and 38 mattresses to be placed in the IOM containers.
- ADRA provided three containers for the Army, MOI and intelligence services in Vinojug.

#### **Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps**

- A number of refugees complained about the lack of heat in some of the Refugee Housing Units in Vinojug. UNHCR followed up with MLSP, which promised to deliver ten heaters to the site. In the meantime, UNHCR distributed extra blankets to the families until they receive the heaters.
- The Tabanovce site is over-crowded, people were accommodated in every possible facility (including kitchen Rubb hall, food storage warehouse, distribution point, etc.). Tensions were rising due to lack of space and refugees were concerned for the safety of their families. Moreover, accommodation for the group of refugees who have moved from the border to the site remains problematic. For the time being, people are staying in the small camping style tents which they brought with them from the “stone”, with no connection to electricity for heating and they are located near the septic tanks. MLSP and CMC tried to ask the Afghans in the first two Rubb halls to move into one, as there is space for all of them, but they refused. The CMC will try to encourage the group to cooperate.
- Frequent power outages occurred in Tabanovce during the reporting period as the electricity grid is overburdened and not all housing units were connected to electricity. The electricity network is insufficient to sustain the consumption so the CMC will discuss the issue with MCMS to find a solution.
- The majority of refugees reported a lack of items, such as spring clothes and shoes. Also, women noted the lack of culturally appropriate choices, and pregnant women also noted the lack of adapted clothing for them. A list of the most needed items was consolidated in order to be purchased through UNHCR or partner organisations.



*Refugee baby who just turned one playing peek-a-boo at the Rubb hall in Tabanovce refugee aid point, Tabanovce, FYR Macedonia, 24 February 2016, Photo: UNHCR/L.Brashnarska*

- After an NGO started distributing clothing from a car chaos among the refugees ensued. The Crisis Management Centre stopped the distribution until order could be re-established. MLSP explained to the NGO that distributions must take place at the distribution point in Tabanovce in order to avoid these kinds of situations and any possible security incidents.
- The army continued construction work on the 3 meter razor wire fence around the Tabanovce centre and along the pathway to the border.



## Food Security and Nutrition

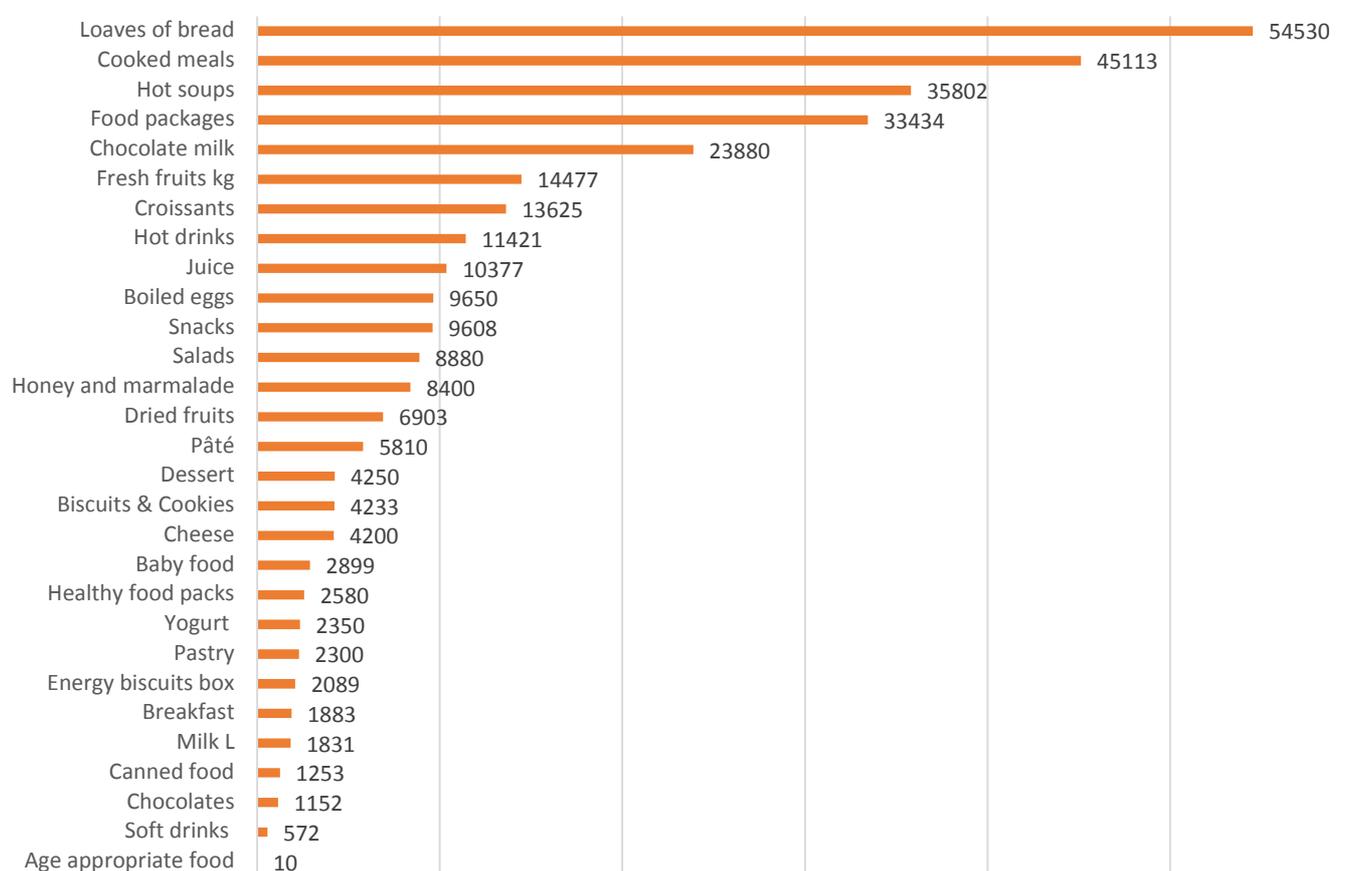
### Achievements and Impact

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

Food distributed in FYR of Macedonia

04 - 31 Mar 2016

Source UNHCR



- With the change in circumstances, a static population rather than on the move, insufficient quantity and quality of food distributed became an issue that required an immediate response, especially with regard to warm meals. Local NGO Nun approached Mercy Corps with proposal to jointly work on it. Mercy Corps responded quickly and signed a

contract and a MoU with a local catering company respectively for production of culturally and nutritionally appropriate food and distribution of up to 1,500 dinners daily. With funding provided by Start Network, in total 13,500 meals were served in the camp. Afterwards Red Cross took over and continued distribution of all food in the camp.

- Due to issues with food distribution, and the food poisoning case, it was decided that only the Red Cross would be responsible for handing out food as well as NFIs in both Tabanovce and VINOJUG. NGOs were requested to hand over all items in order to centralise the system. The Red Cross informed UNHCR that a new daily food distribution schedule started on 28 March in VINOJUG with breakfast being served from 08:00 to 10:00 am, lunch from 13:00 to 14:00, and dinner from 19:00 to 20:00 in VINOJUG. Hot meals have also been served in Tabanovce since 15 March following the relocation of refugees who were accommodated in the kitchen/dining facility to other shelters, but experienced a pause following the food poisoning incident. Sanitation certificates were requested for the Tabanovce kitchen.
- With the Red Cross, UNICEF continues to provide age-appropriate food for babies and children aged under five years. Now that transit centres are hosting a static rather than transiting population, the composition of food rations for children has been revised to better meet children's nutrition needs. Children now receive semi-solid complementary food, cereals, porridge, fruits and vegetables. Mothers are encouraged to breastfeed in mother and baby corners in the child-friendly spaces.
- The baby food that is distributed in the child-friendly spaces in Gevgelija and Tabanovce is funded by UNICEF and SOS Children's Village.
- Based on the data obtained through the UNHCR profiling exercise, MLSP introduced a ration card system in Tabanovce for food distributions wherein each individual/family received a card that entitles them to receive meals, in order to ensure equal access to assistance for all and to provide appropriate food for persons with specific needs. Almost everyone in Tabanovce received their card, while a few persons who were absent from the site or who initially were weary to include themselves in the list will also receive their ration cards. The system was functional by the end of the reporting period. UNHCR through DRC ordered bar coded cards, which will be received shortly.
- During March, UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Health and humanitarian partners to better coordinate the provision of health and nutrition services for refugee and migrant children. This included collaborating with the National Breastfeeding Council, the Institute of Public Health, the Crisis Management Centre and the Association of Patronage Nurses. A Technical Working Group has been established to develop a standard operating procedure on infant and young child feeding and child survival in emergencies, considering the current situation and possible scenarios.
- On 20 March the dining facility was fully operational and ready to be used in VINOJUG. A refrigerator container was connected to the electricity grid in order to serve as a food storage unit.
- New linoleum flooring was installed in the kitchen in Tabanovce to improve hygiene and sanitation of the facility.

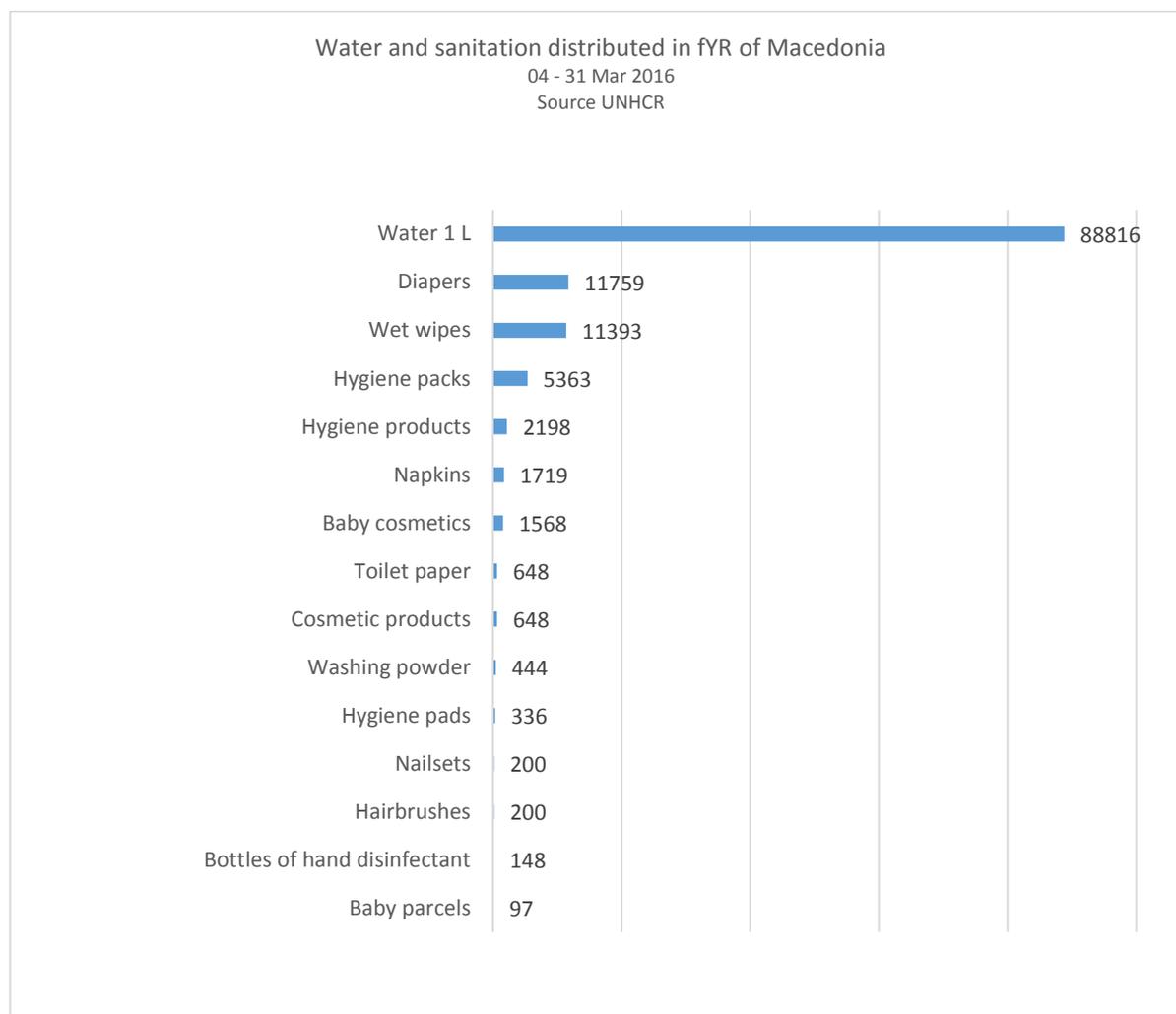
### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- At the beginning of the reporting period, many refugees reported to UNHCR that they did not have proper or equal access to food. MLSP worked on implementing a ration card system to resolve this problem (see above). UNHCR is monitoring and advising on the situation following the implementation of the new system mentioned above.
- UNHCR observed that the Red Cross food distribution team continued to face some challenges as they were unable to organise the refugees to wait in line, and prevent fights initially; however, MLSP with the help of the police ensured crowd control.

## Water and Sanitation

### Achievements and Impact

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



- 40 new trash cans were placed in Tabanovce centre, and some of them were put up along the road to the border, and at the border stone on 22 March.
- Construction/maintenance on the drainage pipes for the latrines in Tabanovce was ongoing.
- New UNHCR-funded latrines were available for use for people in Tabanovce from 19 March. In Tabanovce, 32 squat toilets are functional, four urinals and 31 basins/taps; of which in three blocks, there are five facilities for male, five for female, and two for disabled. And 11 showers are functional (5 female, 5 male, 1 disabled).
- 37 toilets in solid containers are functioning on site in Vinojug for the refugees and migrants as well as five for personnel and two toilets for disabled. 41 showers are functional (20 male; 20 female) and 1 for disabled people.
- Four solar water boilers were installed by SIF (each with a capacity of 240L/m<sup>2</sup>), two became operational on 24 March and the other two on 30 March.
- After the submersible water pump supplying Tabanovce transit centre with safe water broke at the end of March, UNICEF's pre-positioned replacement pump was immediately installed to ensure ongoing water provision for more than 1,000 people.

- UNICEF is partnering with NGO ORT to improve solid waste collection in and outside the transit centre at Tabanovce over a one-month period, until a more sustainable solution is identified by local authorities.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Showers were not operational in Tabanovce because of a problem with the septic tank. Efforts were made to fix the issue by isolating the water supply from the septic tanks with concrete, and are now functional
- The septic tank behind the staff toilets in Tabanovce overflowed causing a small flood in the area accommodating the persons recently moved from the border area. The truck that empties the tank was not able to reach the septic tank. It was recommended to move the people immediately to adequate accommodation and that the sanitation block should not be used until the problem is fixed.
- MLSP informed UNHCR that the solar water heater valves near the kitchen and in some of the shower stalls in Tabanovce were stolen. SIF contracted the supplier to install metal boxes to protect the valves from potential misuse from 1 April.
- Refugees reported that mice were spotted in both Tabanovce and Vinojug in some of the shelters, most likely due to food being kept in the vicinity. UNHCR informed MLSP who instructed the sanitation team to take the necessary measures to prevent the multiplication of the problem. Also refugees were advised to avoid keeping food in their accommodation.
- UNHCR has emphasized the importance of following minimum standards for usage of toilets of 20 persons per toilet and asked DRC to take stock of the number of toilets and if needed, in coordination with MSLP, to increase the number of toilets in both sites.

## Communication and Information

### Achievements and Impact

- The Information/Advice Desk (“Blue Dot”) container was delivered to Vinojug and fully furnished by UNHCR. La Strada recruited four Information and Advice Desk Assistants, including two Arabic speakers (the assistants are co-funded by UNHCR and UNICEF). They all underwent extensive training with UNHCR and UNICEF in good Communicating with Communities approaches, including specificities around the context, utilising various innovative tools to support the work, following on from the UNHCR Innovation intervention in FYR Macedonia. These tools include mobile/tablet applications, TV screens, and feedback mechanisms. They will also be supporting more general feedback and complaints mechanisms, alongside referrals of particular cases based on the agreed SOPs. Two of them began assisting refugees and migrants present and newly re-located in Vinojug with information about services available in the site. Given the current context, UNHCR, UNICEF and La Strada decided to redeploy two of the four Assistants from Vinojug to Tabanovce, to support the child and family protection support hub. They will be operational as soon as the Information/Advice Desk (Blue Dot) container is made available.
- A technology assistant was also hired through DRC to support UNHCR, partners and in particular the information and advice desk assistants with the relevant technology/innovation projects they have been working on. This staff member is also exploring connectivity solutions, enhancing what infrastructure is already in place. This staff member was fully trained in all solutions and on-the-job training carried out in Tabanovce.



UNHCR Innovation Lab setting up CwC content for children in Tabanovce.  
Photo: UNHCR/D.Kladarin Tabanovce transit centre (FYR Macedonia) 5 March 2016

- These new staff, alongside other partner and UNHCR staff have been investing significant amounts of face-to-face time with refugees in both sites. The changing in circumstances brought about an acute distrust of humanitarian responders and only through investing in this face-to-face time and support were staff able to change the tide and build the trust to quickly and cooperatively undertake the profiling exercise to assess any specific needs of PoCs (as described in the Protection section).
- An information and communication needs assessment is currently underway, with 75 out of 100 interviews with women, men, girls and boys in different age groups completed. The results will be analysed in an upcoming protection meeting to determine the appropriate messaging and content to meet the information and communication needs of the refugees/migrants. The UNHCR Innovation Emergency Lab has already established relationships with partners such as Translators without Borders and BBC Media Action who may be able to help support taking this forward, and then the Lab will support staff in FYR Macedonia in adapting the technology solutions based on these outcomes.
- UNICEF continued to support communication between people on the move and their families through the Information and Communications Technology Corner in Tabanovce. In March, 65 adolescents used facilities in the space, 48 in the first week of the month.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The content (including Farsi) needs be created for the screens in Tabanovce based on ongoing assessments of the situation on site.
- The Information/Advice Desk (“Blue Dot”) in Tabanovce was not operational yet as the container had not arrived.
- A group of refugees/migrants approached UNHCR in Tabanovce and inquired about the possibility of being provided with FYR Macedonian SIM cards, in order to communicate with each other and their families abroad.

### Working in partnership

In line with the Refugee Coordination Model UNHCR continued to closely support the Government in its primary protection responsibility. During the reporting period MLSP and UNHCR co-chaired bi-weekly coordination meetings for food and non-food (NFIs) assistance. UNHCR also chaired a bi-weekly Protection Working Group at the national level with some 20 partners participating, including the representatives of the Government institutions – CMC, MLSP and the MOI/Sector for Asylum. Field-level and ad-hoc coordination meetings in Gevgelija and Tabanovce took place to address the fast changing operational environment also took place. These meetings are chaired by the Crisis Management Centre in cooperation with UNHCR. The objective of all coordination meetings is to identify needs and remaining gaps and ensure complementarity of response from all partners involved in the crisis.

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 France, SOS Children’s Village, Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF), Terre des hommes, Vlaznia Kumanovo, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO

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