

# UNHCR COVID19 SPECIAL REPORT



## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

1 – 21 APRIL 2020

### Background

So far, in April 2020, BiH authorities reported **36 new irregular arrivals** of asylum-seekers and migrants to the country, adding to the total for **2020 at 4,459**. This represents a **16% decrease** compared to the same period in 2019 when BiH authorities reported 5,288 arrivals. The number of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants accommodated in reception centers and other formal accommodation currently in the country is **6,266**, while up to **3,000<sup>1</sup>** persons are estimated outside formal accommodation or on route. For the time being, **no cases of COVID-19 have been** identified affecting asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

### Situation snapshot



### Protection risks, challenges and response measures

COVID-19 related **restriction of movement** for asylum-seekers and migrants in reception centres continued to be in force. Residents are unable to leave the centres unless exceptionally and with a special permit.

**Overcrowding** in the largest reception centres makes isolation measures incl. **physical distancing** difficult to implement. Limited freedom of movement freedom creates situations of tension among residents incl. increased risk of **gender-based violence**.

Availability of psychosocial assistance (PSS) becomes increasingly crucial to mitigation of this challenges and all PSS providers in the field are adjusting to

COVID-19 conscious work environments. Currently, the needs are surpassing the available resources.

On 17 April, UNHCR and UNICEF Representatives called a meeting with all relevant authorities for **urgent relocation** of the prioritized unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children living in very difficult conditions in two most overcrowded centres, TRC Bira and TRC Miral in Una Sana Canton.

Moving them to Emmaus centre in Duje would be a great achievement for their protection and would create much needed isolation capacity in these two centres in particular.

**Registration of asylum-seekers and migrants** continues to be impacted by COVID – 19 measures. During the reporting period the Service for Foreigners' Affairs registered **36 attestations of intention to seek asylum**, while the Sector for Asylum (MoS) has put all asylum claim applications and the Refugee Status Determination interviews on hold until further notice.

Extending existing asylum-seeker IDs, especially for people dwelling in centres is also a challenge for the authorities and significantly delayed. UNHCR legal aid partner is assisting to ensure asylum-seeker IDs are extended and delivered to asylum seekers.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Inter-agency outreach teams and USC authorities

<sup>2</sup> Source: BiH authorities/ figures as of 21 April 2020

<sup>3</sup> source: Danish Refugee Council (DRC) – Emergency Response to COVID-19 – Situation Report #05 (21 April 2020)

## UNHCR activities

**446**

asylum-seekers provided with legal assistance

UNHCR calls for current orders to prevent COVID-19 spread should be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner and in the best interest of the most vulnerable groups of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

On 1 April, a joint letter by UN agencies (IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA), DRC and Save the Children has been addressed to the Federal HQ of Civil Protection and relevant ministerial lines reminding them that allowing access to accommodation, transportation and provision of services to asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants, in line with procedures that were previously defined by relevant ministries, is key to properly addressing the public health risk of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

UNHCR in close coordination with UNICEF, State and local level authorities, and other child protection actors, is working to support vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) transfer and accommodation out of Una Sana Canton.

**369**

psychosocial interventions in reception centres

UNHCR's partner Vasa Prava BiH ("VP") continued providing free legal aid through phone calls, WhatsApp/Viber calls/chat and newly created VP BiH online communications platform.

Leaflets announcing available free legal aid in asylum procedure and other general information produced in English, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu were distributed in centres. During the reporting fortnight, VP BiH provided legal counselling to 441 asylum-seekers and taken power of attorney from 5 asylum-seekers throughout BiH.

UNHCR's protection partner BHWI continued providing a variety of protection, child protection, psychosocial interventions and education activities in formal and private accommodation locations in Sarajevo and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.

During the reporting period, BHWI provided 343 NFI/food assistances, 89 health related assistances, provided 37 instances of informal education activities for children, 82 occupational and recreational activities, 369 psychosocial

**343**

protection activities for UASC incl. legal guardianships

**89**

health-related assistance

interventions, 19 SGBV relevant activities as well as provided 343 instances of protection assistance to UASC incl. legal guardianships.

In RC Salakovac, BHWI is currently drafting and updating a plan for continuing the activities of 'My School through adjustment to crisis' programme aimed at continuation of educational activities during the COVID-19 situation. The BHWI psychosocial team continues to be engaged for individual counselling sessions with parents.

In Una-Sana Canton, UNHCR's community-based protection activities in partnership with DRC have been adjusted and continue in accordance with COVID-19 prevention measures.

Together with BHWI, VP, DRC and all other protection actors, UNHCR is currently looking into ways to improve communication with communities during the pandemic – including initiatives related to health awareness and hygiene maintenance; peer-support, online language classes and sewing workshops.

**37**

children provided with informal education activities

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## Funding needs

UNHCR has launched globally an emergency appeal for US\$255 million to respond to COVID-19 outbreak, to safeguard those uprooted from their homes as well as the communities that support them. Funding is part of wider UN appeal for US\$2 billion.

While seeking funds to carry out COVID-19 preventative measures and response activities, UNHCR stresses the need for support to be additional to the existing critical funding requirements laid out in UNHCR's regular Global Appeal for 2020. It is vital that funding for ongoing and planned programmes is also provided as soon as possible to sustain support for refugees and internally displaced people already living a precarious existence, for whom already limited self-reliance opportunities are likely to shrink further as a result of the economic impact of the crisis.

UNHCR in BiH is currently applying for funding (750,000 euros) under the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace as part of a regional joint project with IOM for both immediate and long-term response to COVID-19.

## CONTACTS

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