

UNHCR Representation to Serbia



#WithRefugees team took part in the 36th annual Belgrade Marathon, @UNHCR, 23 April 2023

Highlights:

UNHCR and other UN agencies in Serbia, a number of embassies and the refugees in Serbia, made starts of the 36th Belgrade Marathon on 23 April: UNHCR Serbia mobilized a #WithRefugees Team of 35 participants, including refugees from Burundi, UNHCR and UN staff, the UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia Ms. Francoise Jacob, the Ambassador of Belgium to Serbia H.E. Ms Cathy Buggenhout, etc. A member of the Refugee Olympic Team since 2019, Tachlowini Gabriyesos, a refugee from Eritrea and a resident of Israel, arrived in Belgrade to showcase the strength and resilience of the refugees, and came up fifth in the half-marathon. Refugees from Burundi, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Niger, Ghana and Russia joined the events surrounding the Marathon by performing on a UNHCR stage and by volunteering to distribute water to the runners.

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Highlights



In April 2023, authorities reported 4,114 new arrivals to governmental centres (compared to 6,477 in March 2023). According to data collected by UNHCR and partners, over 64% of all arrivals originate from Syria and Afghanistan, followed by arrivals from Morocco, Pakistan, DRC, etc. 93% of all arrivals were men, 2% women and 5% children. 59% of all arriving children were unaccompanied or separated.

Key Figures (as at end-April 2022)



3,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted in Serbia, of whom
2,400 accommodated in governmental centres, and
600 staying outside of governmental centres.
75 refugees from Ukraine accommodated in Vranje Asylum Centre (AC).



31 applications for asylum in April 2023
0 positive decisions in April 2023
244 positive decisions since 2008
1,254 persons fleeing Ukraine received Temporary Protection (TP) in Serbia since 24 February 2022, of whom **25** in April 2023

Access to territory, registration, personal documents and services

Activities of UNHCR and its partners aim at ensuring that refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and persons at risk of statelessness benefit from an improved and systematically implemented legal framework and can thus access rights in line with the international standards, and that persons in need of international protection have access to territory and asylum procedure and receive protection and assistance in safe reception conditions.

The Asylum Centre (AC) in Tutin was placed on hold by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) on 1 April, and its 24 residents were transferred to Sjenica AC.

On 19 April, UNHCR provided the established briefing to the new contingent of Frontex border guards in Serbia on its mandate, the refugee situation in Serbia and the importance of access to territory and asylum. UNHCR did the same for the participants in the meeting of the International Police Association (IPA) of Serbia in Belgrade on 21 April.

In terms of **cash-based interventions**, UNHCR supported 18 refugee households with 43 members in April.

Partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) met with the newly established project team of the Ministry of Health on 18 April and agreed on future cooperation. DRC has continued to advocate for access to health care services and medications for refugees and asylum-seekers with specific needs.

DRC supported 11 sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) survivors with information, counselling, legal aid and/or referral to responsible institutions and services and organised **five women's empowerment workshops** in Krnjača AC and elsewhere in Belgrade, focusing on personal health and development.

Partners International Aid Network (IAN) and Indigo continued identifying vulnerable individuals and groups amongst new arrivals and supported 168 persons (including unaccompanied and separated children - UASC) with **psychological/psychiatric and psychosocial support** in April.

#IBelong

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 less than 2,000 today.



UNHCR Representative Soufiane Adjali and Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government Aleksandar Martinović, @MPALSG, 26 April 2023

On 26 April, the UNHCR Representative in Serbia Mr. Soufiane Adjali met with the Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (MPALSG) Mr. Aleksandar Martinović, to discuss the results of long-term successful cooperation on resolving the status of "legally invisible persons" and doing away with the risk of statelessness, within the framework of the ongoing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation signed in February 2022. Minister Martinovic noted that, not only has the applicable legal framework been improved and overly complicated administrative procedures removed, but also information campaigns have been organized for members of the Roma community as well as a series of trainings in which more than 500 registrars/civil servants from 145 cities and municipalities in Serbia were instructed on managing cases registering births of children from parents without personal documents. The Minister also expressed the commitment of Serbia to resolve the remaining cases of unregistered births before the end of the #IBelong campaign in 2024. He further pointed out the importance of the problems in the return of IDPs and forcibly displaced citizens of Serbia from Kosovo and Metohija, endangerment and disrespect of their basic human rights. UNHCR Representative expressed his content with the cooperation with the MPALSG and concluded that Serbia could be among the first countries to completely eradicate statelessness by November 2024.

UNHCR partners A11 Initiative and Praxis visited 19 informal Roma settlements in the country and counselled/supported 220 persons in registering births and nationality, obtaining personal documents, accessing socio-economic rights, etc. **Twenty-two persons thus had their Serbian nationality granted/confirmed in April (40 in total in 2023).**

On 10 April, A11 organized a **training** for Roma volunteers and activists. Twenty-one participants took part, focusing on Roma tradition, early marriages,

access to personal documents, health protection, social protection and adequate housing. Selected **paralegal** started her work with A11 in April.

A11 also prevented forced evictions of Roma IDPs from an informal settlement in New Belgrade by addressing the European Court of Human Rights and competent domestic bodies and independent institutions. Municipality of New Belgrade suspended their earlier decision on demolishing and removal of residential objects from the settlement within a deadline of 24 hours, and without having offered alternative accommodation. This case represents one of the very rare examples of **direct implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in Serbia.**

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 policy and legal matters.



Refugee athlete **Tachlowini Gabriyesos** (first row, second from left) in Belgrade Marathon, ©UNHCR, 23 April 2023

UNHCR and its legal partners IDEAS and Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) **counselled 1,061 persons in April, including 610 persons specifically counselled on asylum in Serbia (of which nine UASC and one SGBV survivor);** 81 refugees/asylum-seekers benefitted from cultural mediation/orientation provided by partner Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC). In 351 cases, UNHCR and partners Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT) and Sigma Plus **supplied interpreters for refugees and asylum-seekers, including in the asylum procedure.** IDEAS and BCHR **provided free legal aid/representation in asylum and akin procedures to 102 persons in April.**

BCHR also continued the UNHCR-supported Refugees for Refugees (R4R) initiative, whereby integrated refugees supported the “new” refugees in opening

bank accounts, obtaining work permits, replacing foreign driving licenses, etc.

Child Protection

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

UNHCR and its local partners identified 106 UASC in April, aged 11-17, from Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey, Somalia, Egypt, Morocco and DRC, 63% of whom arrived through Bulgaria. Thirteen percent of all UASC identified were found to be illiterate, even in their mother tongue. All the identified children were assisted, provided with psychological first aid and referred to the authorities/partners for specialized assistance.

On 11 April, partner DRC organized a gathering of six refugee Peer Educators in Belgrade, focusing on group cohesion, in which a peer educator from Iran explained to the new members from Russia the asylum procedure in Serbia.

On 13 April in Bujanovac Reception Centre (RC), partner Indigo organized a psychosocial support workshop for five UASC accommodated therein, with the topic *The Story of My Journey*, intended to help them cope with their emotions, identify personal strengths, avail of social support and develop a plan for the future.

With regard to **child, early and forced marriages** (CEFM) activities, a workshop for school children was organized by partner Praxis in „Dušan Radović“ primary school in Novi Sad, with 17 pupils attending.

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

Twenty-five refugee children and youths and 144 Roma children were supported through supplementary lessons in school subjects procured by UNHCR and its partners, support to effective parenting, support to school attendance, etc. Eight UASC were in receipt of cash vouchers which serve to buy transport tickets, clothes/shoes and school supplies.

Partner Indigo organised 31 non-formal educational activities in the centres in the south and east of the country in the month of April.



Children from vulnerable groups who are part of the Music Art Project (MAP) performed at UNHCR music stage in the Belgrade Marathon, @UNHCR, 23 April 2023

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.

To contribute to standardisation of cultural mediation in Serbia, strengthen opportunities for integration and access to tertiary education of asylum-seekers and refugees, UNHCR, its partner Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) and the Faculty of Philology of Belgrade University kickstarted the 2nd **Course in Cultural Mediation** for senior students, which gathered 51 participants. On this occasion, CRPC presented the [Student's Handbook on Cultural Mediation](#), endorsed by the UNHCR and funded by SlovakAid. The course was inaugurated the UNHCR Representative and Faculty representatives on 10 April and will last through April and May. The most successful course participants will have a chance of a one-month internship with the CRPC and of direct work with the refugees.

In addition, one-off courses on cultural diversity were given by the UNHCR and CRPC to students of the Technical School Obrenovac and the Hospitality and Tourism School in Belgrade in April, with an average of 40 students attending each session.

In April, BCHR's integration team was engaged in applying for ID cards, work permits and various certificates for recognised refugees, particularly from Ukraine, and since the Asylum Office started to issue (re)new(ed) decisions granting temporary protection (TP). During their visit to Vranje AC, BCHR informed refugees from Ukraine of the extension of temporary protection, as well as the procedure for replacing their documents. BCHR also completed the **procedure for of recognition of a university diploma** of a refugee from Ukraine under TP.

In April, UNHCR and BCHR performed 14 socio-economic profile interviews with recognised refugees

and began developing a **Higher Education Map** of the refugees and the next steps regarding affirmative measures. A total of **141 asylum-seekers/refugees were supported by UNHCR and its partners in their local inclusion/integration** in April, through livelihood assistance, employment support, language lessons, provision of occupational equipment, etc.

A total of **95** beneficiaries (including 22 adults and 10 children from Ukraine) **were attending Serbian language lessons** supported by UNHCR in April.

In the meeting of UNHCR with Umka Cardboard Factory, which produces and recycles cartons, and employs some 500 workers in a facility in the vicinity of Obrenovac, the company representatives expressed openness to employing refugees and asylum-seekers, especially those residing in the nearby AC Obrenovac. Hotel Hilton in Belgrade has employed an IDP and asylum-seekers from Congo, Cuba and Iran, following established collaboration with UNHCR in late 2022.

In April, DRC organised one return-related meeting in



Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, CRPC and UNHCR kickstarted the 2023 Course in Cultural Mediation in the Faculty, @CRPC, 8 April 2023

Novi Pazar, with the total of 13 IDPs participating. Three IDP families with six family members were registered to return to Kosovo and Metohija on this occasion.

On 13 April, UNHCR Representative attended a [ceremony of handover of keys to 25 apartments in Klek, Zrenjanin, constructed under the Regional Housing Programme \(RHP\) Sub-Project 9 for the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia](#). On 27 April, the keys to another 25 apartments in Čačak were [handed to refugee families from former Yugoslav republics](#). On this occasion, the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and Migration Ms. Nataša Stanisavljević stated that, so far, 6,951 housing units have been delivered to refugee families in Serbia under the RHP, out of the planned 7,000.

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.

On 1 April, CRPC and BCHR (through Rainbow Migration Network) held a session with asylum-seekers and refugees on LGBTI+ safety, social and art life in Belgrade. Cultural mediation was provided during this activity as well.

On 5-6 April, the UNHCR Representative and the UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia engaged in a two-day mission to southern Serbia, to get acquainted with the ongoing situation and trends concerning new arrivals through North Macedonia, the situation in the local reception centres, to assess the concerns of the local authorities and to identify areas of possible cooperation amongst the UN Agencies and with external stakeholders.

On 11 April, Ukrainian refugee children from Vranje AC attended an activity for painting Easter Eggs which was organized by Indigo and Youth Office in Vranje.



Easter eggs painting in Vranje, ©Indigo, 11 April 2023

On 20 April, UNHCR, SCRM and the NGO "Beyond" from Bujanovac donated clothes to ten UASC and to two girls in Bujanovac RC, ahead of Eid Al Fitr celebration. In addition, the local Islamic Community from Bujanovac delivered traditional sweets to residents of Bujanovac RC for Eid Al Fitr.

On 23 April, UNHCR Serbia mobilized a [#WithRefugees team](#) of 35 participants including refugees from Burundi, UNHCR and UN staff, including the UN Resident Coordinator, the Ambassador of Belgium in Serbia, etc. who participated in the [36th Belgrade Marathon](#). To gain visibility of refugee's strength and

resilience, a member of the Refugee Olympic Team [Tachlowini Gabriyesos](#), Eritrean refugee residing in Israel, was invited to participate. He has been part of the Refugee Olympic Team since 2019. [Gabriyesos came up fifth in the half-marathon run](#). Refugees from Burundi, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Niger, Ghana and Russia joined the events surrounding the Marathon by performing on a UNHCR stage and by volunteering to distribute water to the runners, resulting in almost unprecedented positive coverage of the UNHCR and the refugee stories in relation to the Marathon, with which the UNHCR Serbia enjoys a long-standing cooperation.

UNHCR partner IDEAS launched the **Journalists' Network Against Xenophobia** in Serbia. It currently numbers 10 members, and it is intended to double in membership by end-2023. The Network works on improving the reporting on refugees and migrants in Serbia in accordance with applicable ethical standards.

Partners CRPC, Indigo and Sigma Plus organised 57 recreational, creative, sports and psychosocial support workshops throughout the country in April, involving refugees and asylum-seekers and 12 community-based events which also involved the local population. In one of such events, on 1 April, Ukrainian refugees took part in a charity bazaar in Vranje under the motto *Laughter for Medicine* by selling their handicrafts created during UNHCR/Sigma Plus-supported workshops in AC Vranje. The money that they raised was donated in aid of special medical treatment needed by three local women from Vranje.

On 28 April, 11 boys from Afghanistan, residents of AC Obrenovac joined 21 pupils of Technical School Obrenovac in a joint cleaning/greening of the school. This activity was organized in the framework of a tripartite MoU among CRPC, UNHCR, and the Technical School.




Creative workshops with refugee and local children at the Technical School in Obrenovac (Art Unites), ©CRPC, April 2023

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