

## KEY FIGURES

1 January 2015 - 25 February 2016

**475,439**

Registered intentions to apply for asylum

**31%**

of registered intentions were expressed by children

**2,156**

Applications for asylum

**81%**

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

**2**

Persons granted refugee status

19 – 25 February 2016

**4,018**

Registered intentions to seek asylum

**35**

Applications for asylum

**1,907**

Persons provided first aid

**92**

Number of pregnant women assisted

**15,570**

Food packages distributed

**3,535**

Pieces of clothing 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

19 – 25 February 2016

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- During the reporting period, elements of the Zagreb Joint Statement of the Heads of Police began to be implemented. A number of new practices were put in place, including a new unified registration form that will be used by all countries along the route and increased scrutiny of documents as well as requiring refugees to prove their nationality by providing original documents such as IDs, passports, marriage certificates, birth certificates or other personal identification documents in order to be allowed to cross the border (into FYR Macedonia and into Serbia).
- People of Afghan nationality were denied entry into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in response to Serbia refusing entry to persons of this nationality, resulting in over 600 Afghans being stranded in the Tabanovce transit centre (northern border). According to the Border Police from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, negotiations took place with the Serbian authorities to let them enter. However, a decision at a higher diplomatic level is still pending. Currently only Syrian and Iraqi nationals, with Greek registration and official identity documents, receive new registration forms and are allowed to continue their journeys.
- 4,018 refugees and migrants crossed the border into FYR Macedonia from 19 – 25 February 2016, with a daily average of 574 (source: MOI). Since UNHCR began monitoring departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some 775,823 refugees and migrants have departed.
- In the period from 19 – 25 February 2016, 35 applications for asylum were filed, while from 1 January 2015 to 25 February 2016, 2,156 asylum applications were submitted out of which 1,022 (48%) were submitted by Syrians, 415 (20%) by Afghans, and 177 (8%) by Iraqis. So far only 2 persons have been recognised as refugees in 2015-2016, both unaccompanied children, one from Iraq and one from Syria (Source: MLSP).
- For the period 1 January – 25 February total of 259 applications, out of which 25 were submitted by Syrians, 37 by Afghans and 5 by Iraqis.



Refugees waiting in the Rubb hall following UNHCR distribution of blankets and sleeping bags ©UNHCR/Lj.Brashnarska, Tabanovce transit centre (FYR Macedonia) 22 February 2016

## UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

### Operational Context

4,018 refugees and migrants crossed the border into fYR Macedonia during the reporting period 19 – 25 February 2016, with a daily average of 574, compared with 5,958 and an average of 851 the previous week (12 – 18 February 2016). Since UNHCR began monitoring the departures from Gevgelija on 1 July 2015 some **775,823** refugees and migrants have departed.

The Ministry of Interior's statistics of refugees and migrants declaring their intention to apply for asylum reached 475,439 including 147,183 (31%) children, of whom 18,335 (4% of children) were registered as unaccompanied since 19 June 2015 until 25 February 2016. Of these 258,939 (54%) of the arrivals are Syrians, 122,289 (26%) Afghans, 72,770 (15%) Iraqis, and the remaining (5%) represent other nationalities such as Iranians, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Congolese and Bangladeshi. The number of women and children registered on 20 February 2016 made up 72% of the refugee flow.

### Achievements



#### Protection

#### Achievements and Impact

- On 25 and 26 February, the UNHCR protection team in cooperation with Ministry of Labor and Social policy (Centre for Social Work), Ministry of Interior (Sector for Asylum), La Strada and UNICEF organised one-day trainings on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) for social workers and other protection partners working in the transit centre in Vinograd, including MYLA, UNHCR, La Strada, UNICEF, DRC, and Red-Cross RFL (35 participants in total). The purpose of the training was to empower first line workers to be able to ensure adequate protection of refugee children and to use standard referral systems. The training included the national and international legal framework and procedures for UASC, Best Interest Assessment (BIA) and access to child-friendly procedures, and referral to support services for children in the field. The training will be replicated for the front line workers in Tabanovce transit centre, and also with the social workers that will be hired by the MLSP with the support of UNICEF and out-posted to both transit centres.
- On 23 February, an informal donor coordination meeting was initiated by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. All embassies and international organisations from the country were invited. The focus was on gender equality, women's empowerment, and gender responsive budgeting.
- On 22 February, a meeting was organised to initiate activities related to the SGBV response. For this purpose, an International Woman's Protection consultant was hired through UNHCR's implementing partner La Strada. The consultant will be supporting the process, led by Ministry of Health, to finalise the draft SOPs for processing SGBV survivors in the emergency context, make an assessment of the current situation in the field, propose recommendations, and provide training for service providers in the field. The consultant will add to the existing national instruments and mechanisms for providing support to victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking, and UACs. The activities will be implemented with the support provided of UNHCR and UNFPA, and under the guidance of the Ministry of Health.
- Officers from the Sector for Asylum paid a visit to the Tabanovce transit centre and instructed all government staff (including the police), as well as legal aid providers and other humanitarian workers to advise refugees/migrants about the possibility to seek asylum in the country. They also talked to a number of Afghans stranded in the site and advised them accordingly. So far no one has opted to seek asylum in the country.
- The countries along the Western Balkans route, from Austria to fYR Macedonia, agreed to introduce a unified registration form. The form is issued by the authorities in fYR Macedonia as the first point of entry for refugees. Entry and exit stamps will be recorded on the form in every country along the route to Austria. The agreement was

announced on 18 February through a joint statement of Heads of Police Services in Zagreb. The form was introduced the next day (19 February). New registration software was installed in the Vinojug reception centre in order to comply with the new registration practices being put in place. In addition, the MoI introduced an additional new document called “Personal Data of Migrant” that each refugee is required to fill in before departing the reception centre. The main purpose of this document is to track the refugees’ final destination country for asylum.

- A training on child-friendly spaces is scheduled to take place in the week of 7 March for UNICEF’s and Save the Children’s implementing partners, as part of the inter-agency capacity building initiative.
- To address the need for a presence of the Centre for Social Work (CSW) in both transit centres, UNICEF is working with the MLSP on engaging additional social workers and translators.
- From 19 – 25 February 2016, 1,782 children and 1,022 women were provided with support, including emotional and psychosocial assistance, in the UNICEF Child Friendly Space operated by the NGO La Strada in Vinojug. La Strada identified and assisted 110 vulnerable individuals. In Tabanovce La Strada assisted and supported approximately 1,503 children and 1,790 women. The activities are funded by UNICEF, UNHCR, GIZ, The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Save the Children and Terre des Hommes.
- 1,454 children and 808 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, 30 pregnant women identified and assisted. The activities are funded by the SOS Kinderdorf International and UNICEF.
- During the reporting period 70 refugee group leaders, around 3,118 refugees were given information about their rights and obligations in fYR Macedonia at the Vinojug site by MYLA, who also assisted 50 asylum seekers at the Vizbegovo Reception Centre with their asylum procedure. MYLA also ensured prioritisation in 38 cases, around 79 vulnerable individuals for their registration in Vinojug. MYLA’s data entry clerks assisted the Border Police in issuing 3,287 intentions for asylum during the reporting period.
- MYLA maintained a 24/7 presence in TC Tabanovce where during the reporting period staff informed 755 refugees about services in Tabanovce, 469 refugees were informed and advised on the asylum procedure in Serbia; 83 refugees informed about the asylum procedure in fYR Macedonia, six unaccompanied or separated children were identified, referred or assisted; 168 refugees were referred to other organisations/ institutions for assistance (UNHCR, Red Cross, MLSP, etc); and 41 extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) identified and assisted.
- During the reporting period, in close coordination with UNHCR, the Red Cross, DRC and La Strada staff in Tabanovce, 13 EVIs and ten members of their families/groups were transported by Mercy Corps from Tabanovce transit centre to border with Serbia, and referred to the MSF and DRC teams to be picked up at the border, and to the Mercy Corps team at Miratovac RAP. The Mercy Corps Tabanovce team has been supported by two volunteers of Operation Mercy, experienced in emergency work and work with EVIs.
- Visits:
  - On 23 February, the Swiss Ambassador visited the Vinojug site and border area. UNHCR briefed the delegation on services available in the reception centre, and the situation at the border. The Delegation was also briefed by La Strada and SOS Children’s Village.
  - Also on 23 February, a delegation from the Austrian Ministry of Defense, accompanied by the fYR Macedonian Ministry of Defense visited the Vinojug reception centre and border area.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- On 24 February, 743 refugees had to spend six hours in the train without access to food, water, and sanitary facilities. The train departed at 10:43 from Vinojug towards Tabanovce, but was stopped at the Gevgelija train station about 10 minutes after departing. Special Police Forces at the station did not allow the refugees to disembark from the train. The UNHCR field team intervened to calm down the refugees, until the local police and MLSP made the decision to return the train to Vinojug. Later that night, the police started filling in the new document (“Personal Data of the Migrant”) for each refugee boarding the train.

- During this reporting period, refugees were denied entry into Serbia if they were not holding the new unified registration form and/or did not have a valid exit stamp. Also, as a domino effect since Serbia stopped admitting Afghans, FYR Macedonia started imposing border restrictions on Afghans.
- From 21 February, during regular border monitoring visits, UNHCR staff observed that the police were only letting Syrian and Iraqi nationals enter who had Greek registration documents and were in possession of other individual personal documents (passports, IDs, etc.). Not all documents were accepted. For instance, a Syrian woman who had a family certificate was refused entry.
- Processing time at the borders was very slow because the police checked documentation very carefully, also asking each refugee for passport or ID.
- MYLA noted that 408 refugees were returned from Serbia to FYR Macedonia and/or refused entrance to Serbia; 185 refugees were returned from TC Tabanovce to Vinograd.
- The registration software in Vinograd reception centre was offline for much of the reporting period. The registration figures were being entered manually until the system was upgraded on 24 February. The new registration system included some changes in terms of registering separated children; they will be issued a separate document even if they travel with their family members (brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and spouses).
- On 22 February, at around 13:30, a group of persons that were denied entry into FYR Macedonia from Greece went towards to the border and started protesting loudly against the border restrictions being imposed on Afghan nationals. More people started gathering at the border, seven people managed to climb over the fence or to crawl underneath it. They were taken by the FYR Macedonian police and held at the border. As a result, Special Forces were dispatched to reinforce the border. The protesters attempted to push the border gate. Following the removal of Afghan protestors on the Greek side of the border, refugee movements into FYR Macedonia started again around 13:00 the next day.
- MYLA staff observed several fights in Tabanovce among the Afghani refugees. The fights occurred as a result of tensions between the Afghani refugees staying in Tabanovce because of the restrictions imposed by the countries along the migration route, particularly Serbia, which on several occasions closed the border to refugees and introduced selection procedures without notifying the FYR Macedonian authorities in advance.
- On 22 February, the border police started using a metal detector at the border crossing to try to speed up the process instead of checking each man individually.
- On 22 February, around 320 Syrian and Iraqi refugees were returned from the Serbia – Croatian border and Slovenia after being interviewed and asked (allegedly) what city they were from in their country of origin and the reason why they left their country. Individuals claimed that they were separated before getting on the train to Croatia and required to sign a document. When they reached the Serbian – FYR Macedonian border the Serbian police took their Serbian registration documents, some even had all of their documents confiscated by the Serbian police. These groups were left near Lojane village close to the border and walked for 2-2.5 hours to Tabanovce transit centre. The FYR Macedonia police took their names and copies of documents for those that had them. During the night FYR Macedonian police had a meeting with the Serbian police, and came to an agreement that Syrian and Iraqi nationals would be issued new registration documents. MYLA registration clerks were already working on the issue alongside the police.
- Around 138 refugees from the group mentioned above were pushed back by Serbian authorities again despite having received the new registration document in FYR Macedonia. As per refugee statements, the Serbian police denied them entry as they were allegedly not in possession of their initial Greek registration forms. UNHCR intervened with the FYR Macedonia Border Police Chief on duty to ensure that all refugees could regain entry to the transit centre (which was not initially granted). Upon entry to the site, the border police gathered all of the new registration documents and stated they would keep them until a solution is found.



*Refugees were visibly stressed while disembarking from the Train in Tabanovce, wondering if they would be able to continue their journey. ©UNHCR/A.Lecaj, Tabanovce transit centre (FYR Macedonia) 22 February 2016*

- The new restrictions at borders and new documents required put children at greater risk of family separation. Children are being exposed to situations that create additional distress. Unaccompanied children are at particular risk of exploitation and violence by smugglers and traffickers.



## Health

### Achievements and Impact

- During the reporting period the Red Cross assisted 5,021 individuals, out of which 92 were pregnant women and 620 were children. 1,907 persons received first aid. 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.
- Three women were assisted in the gynecological clinic managed by the NGO HERA (with UNFPA support) in Vinojug reception centre, including two pregnant women.
- UNFPA has supported the Ministry of Health to prepare the mobile gynecological clinics to be operational in accordance with international standards in the two transit centres. The support includes inventory management, data collection and provision of medical staff, as well as medications and disposable materials. In Tabanovce transit centre the mobile clinic became operational on February 24. In the period between 24 and 25 February, six gynecological examinations were performed, out of which three for pregnant women.
- From 22 to 25 February, dental hygienists and dentists from Dentists Without Borders provided training for La Strada in Gevgelija on dental health promotion, including how to teach children to correctly brush their teeth. The training was arranged by UNICEF. Children's toothbrushes donated from TRISA are currently undergoing customs clearance.



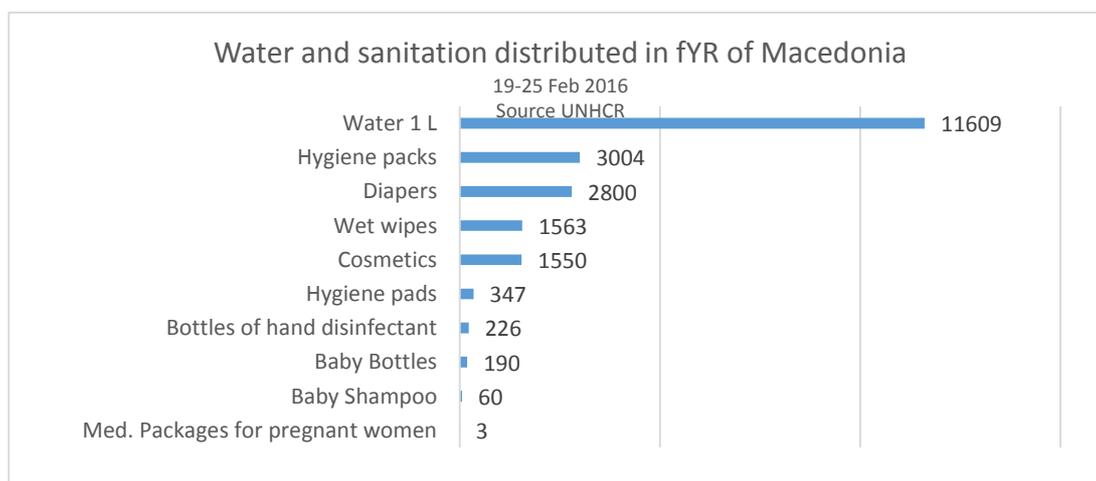
Women accessing the services provided by the mobile gynaecological clinic supported by UNFPA. ©UNFPA Tabanovce transit centre (fYR Macedonia) February 2016



## Water and Sanitation

### Achievements and Impact

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



- The two UNICEF- and MCIC-funded toilet blocks are due to be handed over to the CMC in Gevgelija on 2 March.
- Toilet reconstruction was ongoing in Tabanovce.
- DRC starting from 19 February rented 16 mobile toilets for the TC Tabanovce. Taking in consideration the increased number of refugees in transit centre the toilets will be there until 10 March 2016

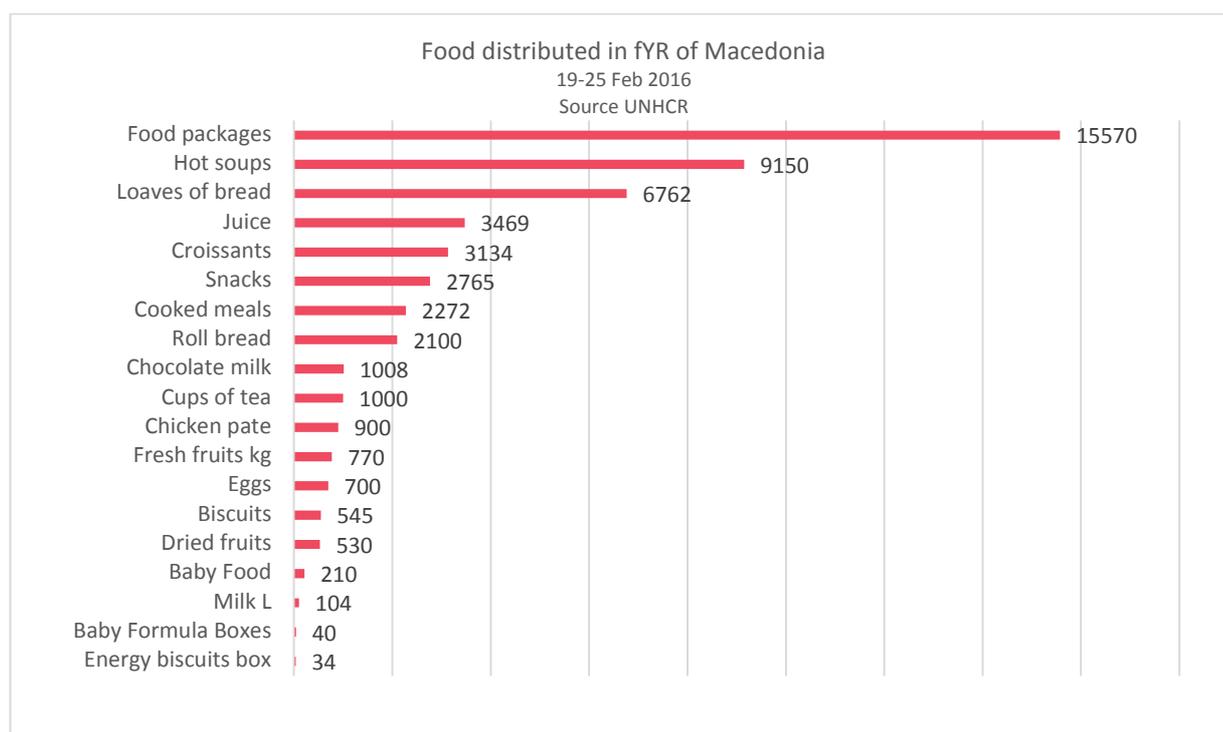
- DRC is responsible for maintenance of the both camps and hired maintenance staff (electricians and plumbers) who are organised in shifts and quickly react to all calls to repair or upgrade as needed. They started working in the centres in January 2016.
- DRC is closely collaborating with UNHCR in addressing acute WASH needs in the reception/transit facilities in Tabanovce and Gevgelija. In the reporting period regular supplies of cleaning materials as well other hygienic items have been provided for both camps.



## 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:



- The baby food that is distributed in the child-friendly spaces in Gevgelija and Tabanovce is funded by UNICEF and SOS Children's Village.
- Construction work on the kitchen was completed. The benches will be delivered from abroad shortly in order to make it fully functional.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Waste started building up in Tabanovce transit centre due to the number of refugees that were stranded there throughout the reporting period.
- As at 28 February a group of refugees including children is being held in no-man's land between the Vinojug transit centre and the border with Greece. They do not have access to toilets or sanitation facilities. UNICEF is advocating for mobile toilets to be set up to meet this need.



## Communication and Information

### Achievements and Impact

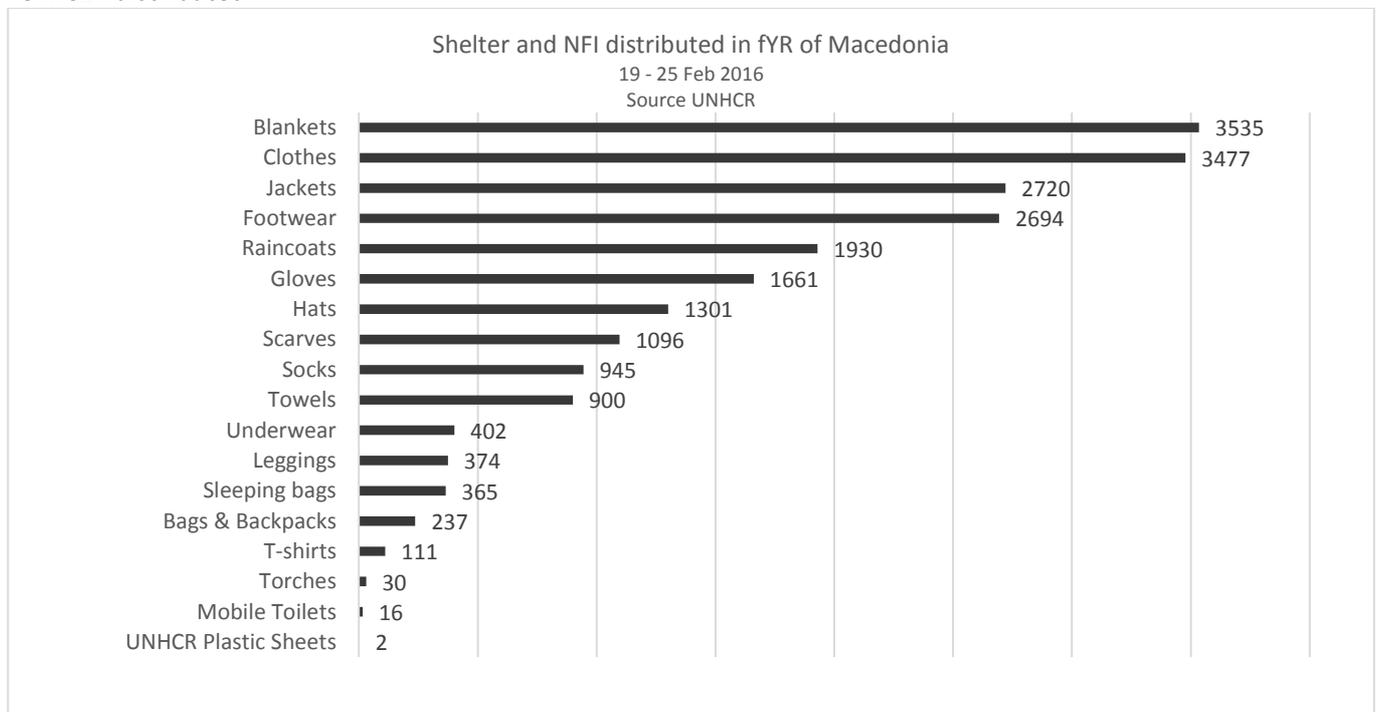
- As part of the Communicating with Communities initiative, seven additional TV screens were placed in the six Rubb halls and in the child-friendly space in the Child and Family Protection Support Hub in the Vinojug reception centre. Four screens were placed in Tabanovce. The TV screens are to disseminate targeted information, such as registration procedures, services at the site, and entertainment for children. The UNHCR Innovation team is working with partners and persons of concern (PoCs) to develop the content that will be broadcasted.
- La Strada, with the support of UNICEF and UNHCR, is in the process of recruiting eight Advice Desk Assistants (half of the positions will be funded by UNICEF while the others will be funded by UNHCR) to provide information to refugees on available services at Vinojug transit centre in Gevgelija.
- MSF has provided a Farsi language assistant in Tabanovce on a daily basis to assist the Red Cross and other partners.



## Shelter and NFIs

### Achievements and Impact

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



- In Vinojug reception centre:
  - The Red Cross installed two Refugee Housing Units to be used as a temporary warehouse to stockpile items for the kitchen until they receive two containers from MLSP as per the agreed plan.
  - The new flooring and construction in the Habitat for Humanity Rubb hall was completed.
  - Four IOM containers replaced the RHU for vulnerable individuals, bringing the total of IOM containers to eight.
  - Construction work on NFI distribution point is ongoing.



- In Tabanovce transit centre:
  - Additional gravel was put on the ground to level the pathways in the Tabanovce transit center.

## Working in partnership

### Achievements and Impact

Coordination meetings took place on the 19, 24, and 25 February in Gevgelija. No coordination meeting took place in Tabanovce during the reporting period.

- On 19 February, a coordination meeting was held at UNHCR in the Vinojug reception centre to discuss the proposed changes in the set-up of the site. Representatives from MLSP, CMC, DRC and UNHCR attended the meeting to ensure all actors agreed to the proposals.
- On 24 February, UNHCR organised an ad-hoc coordination meeting with partners in Vinojug to take necessary steps to ensure the availability of sufficient food, NFIs, medication, accommodation and other protection services in case refugees would need to be hosted in Vinojug for the upcoming few days. Other operational partners were also informed to increase their response capacity in terms of food and NFIs.
- On 25 February, the Crisis Management Centre organised a coordination meeting to discuss the ongoing construction of the NFI distribution point, kitchen preparations, and availability of facilities in the centre.

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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