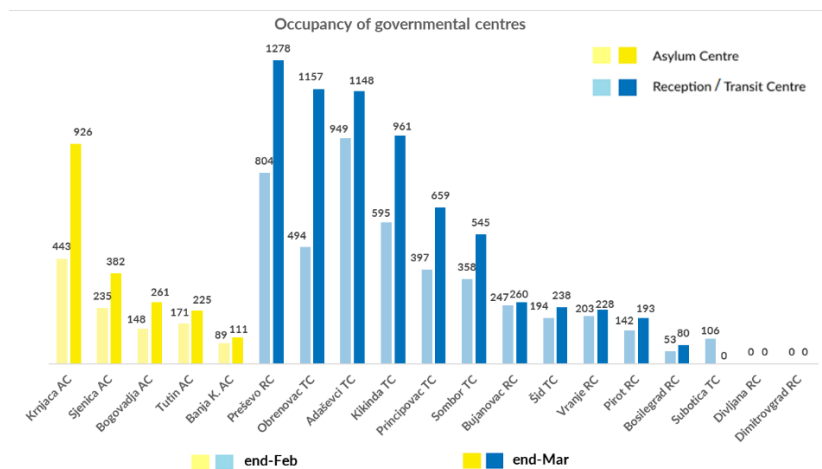


SERBIA UPDATE

- No COVID-19 infection was reported among refugees, asylum seekers or migrants.
- UNHCR and partners counselled over **1,500** foreigners at over thirty sites throughout the country on asylum. **149** registered their intention to seek asylum with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), while **12** lodged new **asylum claims** with the Asylum Office (AO). In March, the AO adjudicated **two** rejections.
- Following the introduction of the State of Emergency, on 17 March, the Government of Serbia (GoS) adopted a *Decision on the temporary limitation of movement of asylum seekers and irregular migrants accommodated in asylum and reception centres*, which allows for exit from centres only with special permits.
- On 24 March, the GoS adopted a *Decision on the Status of Foreigners in the Republic of Serbia during the State of Emergency*, which places on hold the taking of biometric data from foreigners but automatically extends the validity of all personal documents of foreign nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees until the end of state of emergency, implying that receipt of new applications for asylum in Serbia is also placed on temporary hold.



- UNHCR and partners profiled **1,609 newly arriving** asylum seekers and migrants. While initially most arrived from North Macedonia, after increased controls of green borders and boundaries in the South under the State of Emergency, most new arrivals during the second half of March came from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) or Hungary.
- 17-20 March, authorities systematically gathered over 2,000 migrants in public places and transferred them to the nearest centres, regardless of this being an Asylum Centre (AC) or a Reception/Transit Centre (RTC). The number of asylum seekers and migrants counted at any one day thus increased by 30% to **8,692** at the end of March (up from 6,724 at end February). **8,652** were accommodated in five AC and twelve RTC and only 40 observed outside. They comprise 3,701 citizens of Afghanistan, 1,618 of Syria, 925 of Pakistan, 634 of Bangladesh, 368 of Iraq, 330 of Iran, 266 of Morocco, and 810 from 42 other countries - a majority likely in need of international protection as coming from so-called "refugee-producing countries". 7,149 are adult men, 393 adult women and 1,110 children, including 540 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).
- With most centres seriously **overcrowded**, the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM), enhanced medical and hygiene measures, expanded soft shelter capacities and started transferring migrants and UASC between centres. On 25-26 March it greatly alleviated risks to registered asylum-seekers in Banja Koviljača Asylum AC by moving to RTC 225 migrants that had been cramped into this small AC by law-enforcement authorities, who has collected them near the border to BiH. On 21 Mar, the SCRM moved all 100 residents of Subotica RTC to other RTC, whereupon it was handed to the army to be used for COVID-19 quarantine. On 30 March, the SCRM moved 284 single men from overcrowded Kikinda RTC to Divljana RTC, which the SCRM reopened after it had been closed 18 months ago.
- UNHCR and its ten partner organisations remained open and fully operational, with many services swiftly transferred online or -phone to reduce risk of infecting clients or colleagues. In close coordination with UN sister agencies and partners, we received requests for additional support from authorities, reallocated funds in our programme, shared a funding proposal with interested donors, and started assisting authorities' COVID-19 prevention measures. With emergency procurements, by the end of the months we already **donated** to the SCRM one vehicle, one water tank (for Banja Koviljača AC), 1,000 blankets, 1,500 litres of liquid soap, 500 spray bottles, 18 no-contact thermometers, and 10 mobile phones. UNHCR partner Indigo quickly hired eight cleaners to improve hygiene in Preševo RTC, where most newly arriving asylum seekers and migrants are currently being accommodated.
- UNHCR and partners contacted all asylum seekers and refugees in private accommodation, quickly reassessed their needs and transferred **financial assistance** for April for those with and for April and May to those without bank accounts. New requests for financial assistance by asylum seekers and refugees, who lost their work or employment due to movement restrictions under the State of Emergency, were received, assessed and addressed almost daily.

- Guardians remained in 24/7 contact with UASC, while UNHCR donated 12 computers and software to the five specialized UASC homes to allow UASC to continue their education online.
- In addition to WHO COVID-19 prevention information already distributed widely in seven languages over the last months, UNHCR partners produced leaflets with information on the state of emergency and how it affects persons we care for in seven languages and distributed them in all governmental centers, as well as to the Border Police and other police departments. The SCRМ launched a [Coronavirus Pandemic Daily Bulletin](#) and distributed its summary daily in refugee languages in centres.
- Partner Indigo continued to support the SCRМ with cultural mediation, identifying UASC, providing UASC with psychological aid and support, organizing outdoor activities and workshops in the RTCs of Bujanovac, Preševo, Pirot and Vranje and the UASC home in Niš. Partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) finished its COVID-19 prevention and awareness activities in the five ACs. Partner Sigma Plus quickly upgraded its [online platform for learning the Serbian Language](#) to also allow asylum-seeking and migrant children currently unable to access formal education to use it. Partner Psychological Innovation Network (PIN) prepared guidelines on priorities in protection of refugees' mental health during the COVID-19 situation and formed a mobile field team of psychologists and interpreters.



UASC in JRS Pedro Arrupe Shelter, Belgrade, ©JRS, March 2020

- Partner A11 Initiative mapped the emergency-related needs of **internally displaced persons**, accommodated in informal settlements and unofficial collective centres and [called on the Government of Serbia to take immediate action to protect the most vulnerable citizens during the emergency caused by the corona virus pandemic](#), refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, internally displaced persons and Roma.
- Partner BCHR [called on state authorities](#) to ensure that emergency law abstain from derogation of human and minority rights guaranteed by the constitution and international treaties. BCHR also issued a [public statement](#) condemning protests against the accommodation of migrants in Čardak of Deliblato and calling on authorities to safeguard solidarity with asylum-seekers and migrants in these challenging times.
- Hungarian authorities did not admit new asylum-seekers but expelled to Serbia twelve whose asylum claims had been rejected while in detention in its “transit zones” as well as around one hundred other foreign nationals, many of whom had never been to Serbia before.
- **849** asylum seekers reported **collective expulsion** from neighbouring countries (643 from Romania, 81 from BiH, 75 from Croatia and 50 from Hungary). 25% of them alleged to have been denied access to asylum and 19% maltreatment by authorities of these countries.
- UNHCR Serbia compiled and issued March 2020 update of its [Statistical Snapshot](#) and a COVID-19 [Communication](#).

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Sweden 76.4 million | Norway 41.4 million | Netherlands 36.1 million | Denmark 34.6 million | United Kingdom 31.7 million | Germany 25.9 million | Switzerland 16.4 million | Private donors Spain 13.2 million

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¹ Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Where a donor has contribution \$10 million or more, the total amount of the contribution is shown.

² Due to their earmarking at the region or sub-region, or to a related situation or theme, the other softly earmarked contributions listed are those which can potentially be used for Serbia. Where a donor has contributed \$2 million or more, the total amount of the contributions is shown.