

## UNHCR SERBIA UPDATE

**Key statistics:** **4,978 newcomers** to governmental centres were registered in December (comp. to 6,027 in November). Arrivals came mainly from North Macedonia (68%, decrease by 14%), Bulgaria (15%, increase by 6%), Montenegro (7%, increase by 3%), Albania via Kosovo<sup>1</sup> (4%, increase by 2%), and smaller percentages from Turkey (air), Russia (air), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). **60,407 refugees and migrants newly arrived in governmental centres in 2021 (compared to 58,103 in 2020)<sup>2</sup>.**

**As at end-December 2021, 5,369** (decrease by 4%) **refugees and migrants were in the territory of Serbia**, of which 4,429 accommodated in 13 operational governmental centres across the country, 30 in specialised institutions for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), 135 in private accommodation and 775 staying rough outside the centres.

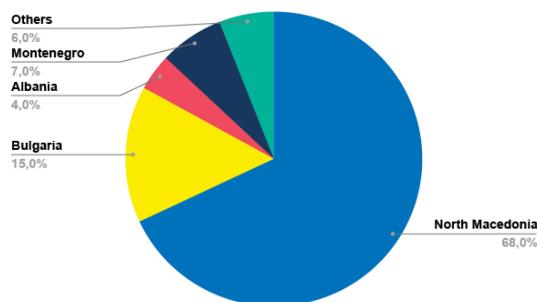


Figure 1: Countries of arrival



Figure 2: Number of refugees and migrants in Serbia's territory

December 2021 saw **2,713** (decrease by 35% comp. to November) **pushbacks** from neighbouring countries to Serbia (89% from Hungary, 9% from Romania and 2% from Croatia). **Nationals of Syria make up 46% of all the pushbacks and persons originating from Afghanistan make up 29%.**

**Asylum/protection:** In December 2021, the Asylum Office (AO) of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) of Serbia granted subsidiary protection to one national of Syria and rejected asylum applications from three nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Iran and Mali. Two hundred and seventy-six persons expressed intention to seek asylum in Serbia in December, and 18 submitted actual applications. Nine hundred and ten asylum-seekers newly arrived in governmental centres in December, and 1,019 absconded from them.

**In total in 2021, the Asylum Office granted subsidiary protection to seven and refugee status to another seven asylum-seekers.**



Conference marking 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Refugee Convention and 45 years of UNHCR in Serbia, Belgrade, @UNHCR, December 2021

UNHCR and partners counselled 350 persons on asylum in December; two persons gave powers of attorney to UNHCR project lawyers for representation in asylum procedures; 21 refugees received ID cards and eight work permits with support from UNHCR.

On 16 December, [UNHCR and the Government of Serbia jointly organised the final event in the National Assembly to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNHCR presence](#) in the country. The panel discussion, opened by Mr. Ivica Dačić, Parliament Speaker, followed by keynote addresses by Ms. Mateja Norčić Štamcar,

<sup>1</sup> All reference to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration

Deputy Head of the European Union (EU) Delegation, Mr. Tobias Flessenkemper, Council of Europe Head of Office, Mr. Vladimir Cucić, Serbian Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Francesca Bonelli, UNHCR Representative in Serbia and livestreamed speech by Ms. Gillian Triggs, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner, enlisted participation of government ministries, competent institutions, international organisations, bilateral donors and the civil sector. On the same occasion, UNHCR's legal partner Belgrade Center for Human Rights (BCHR) presented a publication [“Seven Decades of Refugee Protection – Collection of Papers on the Occasion of 70 Years of Adoption of the Refugee Convention”](#).

On 9-10 December, UNHCR organized a **Seminar on the Standards of the European Court for Human Rights in Asylum Cases**, within the framework of the EU Regional IPA II project. Mr. Flip Schuller, attorney at law from *Prakken d'Oliveira* Human Rights Lawyers Amsterdam who specializes in asylum and migration, lectured and discussed the issues of credibility and evidence assessment, national security, effective legal remedies, etc. with some 30 participants from the AO, the Asylum Commission, the Administrative Court and concerned CSOs.

UNHCR participated in an annual panel discussion [“Challenges in the Process of Integration – higher education of refugees”](#), organised by BCHR on 23 December in Belgrade and via Zoom platform. The results of the “Survey on Perceptions of Citizens of Refugees and Migrants” were presented at the event.



Finalised works on administration building of Vranje AC, @UNHCR, December 2021

**Publications:** On 28 December, BCHR organised an online event to promote the new guide on interculturality for youth [“ENCOUNTERS: A short guide on interculturality, acceptance, and togetherness”](#), which provides important terms and shares examples and practical guidelines on interculturality, cultural identities and allyship.

Partners Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) and Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT) published their annual publication [BETWEEN CLOSED BORDERS – Joint Agency Paper on Refugees and Migrants in Serbia 2020 and 2021](#). The study provides an overview of the main trends of mixed migration flows in 2020 and 2021, including the situation of unaccompanied children and other vulnerable individuals

Thanks to support from the European Union, the UNHCR and its partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) completed the works on the administrative building in Vranje Asylum Centre (AC) .

**Social cohesion: Friendship Benches** were assembled on 2 December at an event that brought together refugee and local youth, with UNHCR providing the materials for the benches that symbolize unity of friendship in creation, at the Technical Vocational School in Obrenovac, Belgrade. The main wall of the school was also painted with images of solidarity created by refugee and local community youth.

On 6 December, UNHCR and CRPC partnered with the School for Hospitality and Tourism in Belgrade and GRAD Cultural Centre and organised the second [Deli Monday international cuisine festival where refugees from Iran and Iraq and Serbian students jointly prepared Kurdish, Iranian and Serbian dishes](#), offered to members of the diplomatic corps, civil society,



Friendship benches were assembled in Obrenovac AC, Belgrade, @UNHCR, December 2021



Winners in the category of "best essay" of "Welcome to My Country" Competition, Belgrade, @UNHCR, December 2021

international organisations, frontline workers and media representatives who provided positive media coverage of this cohesion event.

**Statelessness:** Partners A11 Initiative and Praxis conducted nine field visits to 13 informal Roma (IDP) settlements in six Serbian municipalities and provided counselling and support to 227 individuals in accessing housing and social protection, as well as personal documentation. **Twelve persons had their Serbian nationality granted or confirmed in December** owing to efforts of Praxis - legal partner of UNHCR. Thirteen ID cards were issued and 10 personal documents obtained from various registries.

**Changing the narrative on refugees:** In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, the European Union Delegation to Serbia, and the Sixth Belgrade Gymnasium, UNHCR organised, on 7 December, **the ceremony of announcing the laureates of the National Secondary School Competition "Welcome to My Country"** in which the students from across the country competed for awards for the best paintings, essays, and short videos on the topic of refugee integration.

With regard to **child, early and forced marriages (CEFM) activities**, UNHCR partner Praxis participated in the **Conference of the National Coalition for the Prevention of Child Marriages "Together for the End of Child Marriages: for the Rights to Choose, Education and a Better Future"**, which presented the activities of the National Coalition and discussed a multisectoral approach to ending child marriages.

**Legacy caseload:** On 28 December, 15 refugee families from BiH and Croatia received the keys to their new apartments in the municipality of Smederevska Palanka, under the Sub-project 9 of the Regional Housing Programme (RHP) in Serbia. The event was attended by the SCRM, the EU Delegation and the UNHCR representatives.

**Private sector partnerships:** On 14 December, UNHCR Representative gave a keynote speech at the annual conference of **The Economist magazine "World in 2022"**, co-organized by the Serbian Diplomacy & Commerce magazine and held at the **National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia**. The Representative's speech focused on growing forced displacement around the world and the need for solidarity with the displaced persons, but also for their strategic economic inclusion.

UNHCR Serbia met with the German Chamber of Commerce (CoC) in Belgrade, which boasts of membership of some 450 companies, to inform about the importance of employment and integration of refugees/asylum-seekers and to discuss opportunities for cooperation beyond employment such as joint fundraising, cultural events, dual education, etc.

**Important missions:** On 10 December, [UNHCR Serbia and its Representative was part of a mission consisting of Ambassadors of Austria, Belgium, European Union, Hungary, Portugal and Slovakia to the south of Serbia](#), where they visited the Vranje AC and Preševo RTC.

In cooperation with UNHCR Italy, the mission of Edoardo Albinati, Francesca D'aloja and Marcello Pastonesi - Italian journalists, (screen-) writers – arrived in Serbia in early December, resulting in a 13-page [feature on refugees and migrants in Serbia in the New Year's edition of Corriere della Sera weekly](#).

**Age, gender & diversity initiatives/activities in the centres:** 72% of persons of concern to UNHCR currently in Serbia were reached through Focus Group Discussions and individual interviews within the framework of UNHCR/SCRM-conducted 2021 Participatory Assessment in December 2021. Many participants spoke of challenges to smooth inclusion and effective integration in the country, difficulties in obtaining personal documents and gaining access to the labour market, scattered response to their specific needs, interruption of services, etc. A detailed report with recommendations will be available in January 2022.



Partner Indigo distributed New Year's presents to UASC in Preševo RTC,  
@UNHCR, December 2021



Asylum counselling in Obrenovac AC, Belgrade,  
@UNHCR, December 2021

UNHCR partner DRC organised interactive health awareness workshops on breast cancer early detection by breast self-examination, in the Women's Safe Space in Krnjača AC, for 18 refugee women of different age groups. Partner International Aid Network (IAN) held group sessions and educational workshops on sexual and gender-based violence, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and influence of the holiday season on mental health for 31 participants in two asylum centres.

UNHCR, the SCRM and partners organised a number of New Year events for children accommodated in the asylum and reception centres and the homes for unaccompanied children, when each child received a gift. UNHCR and UASC peer educators organized a gathering for unaccompanied refugee and local children accommodated in "Zmaj" specialized institution for child protection in Belgrade on Friday 17 December, where more than 30 children celebrated the coming of the New Year and exchanged small presents prepared by the peer educators .

**UNHCR Serbia is grateful for the support of all the donors who contribute to UNHCR activities, with special thanks to:**

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**With the support of the following organisations and private sector partners:**

**IKEA SEE**