



The aim of this Report is to present the current situation regarding the protection of human rights and freedoms of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers passing through, or staying in Serbia and Macedonia. The data in this Report were obtained from 24 civil society organisations from Serbia and Macedonia, within the "Help on the Route" network.

Situation in Serbia

The structure of migrants arriving in Belgrade during the last months has been constantly changing. The number of migrants coming from Iraq (Curds), Iran, Morocco and Algeria increased in January. Migrants keep coming mainly from Bulgaria and Macedonia, while the Iranians mainly come from Turkey by airplane.

Around 150 single migrants pass daily through "Miksalište", and around 80 of them stay in the nearby park throughout the day. The number is smaller since many of them do not leave the centres due to winter and cold weather. It is estimated that around ten unaccompanied minors arrive daily to Belgrade. All of them are still referred to either the asylum centre Krnjača or the reception centre Obrenovac.

The improvised accommodation where refugees and migrants stayed, the so-called "Staklenac" in Belgrade, was displaced on January 22nd. Around 110 migrants, of whom around 20 unaccompanied minors, stayed in these premises. Most of them come from Pakistan, but there are also Curds and Arabs in smaller numbers. All migrants who were dislodged from these premises were offered transport and accommodation in the reception centre Preševo.



A part of a 17-member family from Iraq that arrived to Belgrade in January. After days of walking the mother and smallest children were assisted in the Mother and baby corner. (Photo: NSHC)

There were **4,087** of refugees and migrants in Serbia in January (UNCHR data, January 21st, 2018). Most of them (93%) are accommodated in 18 transit-reception and asylum centers, while others stay in Belgrade or in the areas close to borders with Croatia and Hungary. During the third week of January, UNHCR registered 79 new arrivals (compared to 59 during the previous week) from Afghanistan (30%), Iran (22%), Pakistan (18%), Iraq (16%) and Syria (9%). The majority of them were grown up men (53%) and children (42%). Most of them (61%) came from Macedonia while others came by airplane or from Bulgaria.

Migrants often gather at a certain time in the park in the centre of Belgrade, and then they leave the park in a group and go in the same direction, while others replace their places. They say they are going to Šid, from where they travel further with the involvement of smugglers. The police and gendarmerie are constantly present in the park.

Migrants who are currently residing in the territory of the Republic of Serbia continue to opt for the continuation of the journey to the countries of the European Union. Some of those who access the asylum procedure, after a while, give up the procedure and leave Serbia. Migrants

in the reception centres still face problems of accessing the asylum procedure, bearing in mind that the Directorate for Foreign Citizens of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, does not identify the persons with a true intention of staying in Serbia and seeking for the asylum when issuing the certificates.

Starting from January 22nd, 2018, Hungary reduced the number of people allowed to enter the country and access the asylum procedure from ten to two a day. In both transit zones, the passage is permitted for one person a day, and for now it is the matter only of unaccompanied minors and men travelling alone. It is not known whether this reduction will be temporary or not. Information about this change spread rapidly and cause discontent and fear among refugees waiting for months in the reception centres; many have said they wanted to leave the accommodation immediately and head towards the Hungarian border.

Accommodation of refugees and migrants

The most frequent complaints of refugees and migrants regarding the accommodation conditions refer to hygiene and safety conditions. Many minors in Belgrade complain about the conditions in the centres in Krnjača and Obrenovac, where in January, according to them, incidents, thefts between migrants and fights in which knives, bars, etc. were used were occurring on a daily basis. Several boys complained about the attempts of sexual abuse by older migrants. It is evident that families are increasingly nervous because their stay in Serbia has got longer, so quarrels within families, between families and between groups occur on a daily basis.

“The locals do not want to talk to us; they avoid us or laugh at us because we are dark-skinned. Sometimes it happens that they literally run away from us in the street and that makes me feel a bit disappointed. When we were in Niš, people were open to talk to us and help us and we felt great then, but it is different here.”

- the refugee from Nigeria

The situation in the centres did not change significantly compared to the previous period. Upon arriving in the centre, the refugees and migrants are informed about the House Rules, and about other rights and obligations they have. The principle of family unity is generally observed, however, in some centres the families are accommodated together in large collective dormitories, which creates a problem regarding the protection and respecting of privacy. Another problem is when unaccompanied minors stay with adults in the same rooms. Also, people of different nationalities are not rarely accommodated in the same rooms in centres with a large number of people, which also leads to conflicts between migrants.

Migrant children start going to school

"The friends accepted me and I grew to like them. I am particularly fond of mathematics. I would like to stay here forever with my friends, but my uncle and sisters and brothers are waiting for us in Germany."

- M.S. (9)

Around 470 children attended elementary and secondary schools in Serbia in January. In addition, some 50 children in Sombor and Kikinda attend regular classes in the reception centres three times a week.

UNICEF, COP, NGO Indigo, and the Faculty of Philology, organised several trainings were held for about 300 class teachers and teachers on the topic of accelerated Serbian language teaching, with a focus on functional language learning. Significant progress has been noted in the attitude of schools towards integration, in the self-confidence of teachers and adapting to the current situation. It is planned to establish the teams for supervisory support for the implementation of Serbian language classes. UNICEF has developed a framework for monitoring and evaluation of education of refugee and migrant children.

Motivation for attending classes continues to be a problem, especially in families that do not get involved enough, and NGOs and the Commissariat often take on their duties (child waking, etc.).

From the perspective of educational institutions, there is a need to further regulate the rules on documentation and to allow for passage from one level of education to another. The support of civil society organizations in this process is very important for the schools, and this co-operation should be encouraged. Secondary education remains a major challenge.

The situation in Macedonia

The situation with the refugee crisis in Macedonia during January did not escalate but remained rather calm. Apart from the small number of refugees and migrants who reside in transit camps, the movement of illegal groups outside of the camps was also reduced. For example, during January, 2018 seventy people (last month were 103) were brought to the camp in Gevgelija within a short period of time after which they were transferred to Greece in separate groups and individual cases.

Around 20 refugees were present in the transit camp in Vinojug, Gevgelija at one point, but this number slowly decreased as people were transferred to Greece, on their own will. According to the country of origin, they mostly come from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Morocco and Algeria. In the transit camps in Tabanovce, Kumanovo, the number of refugees and migrants who are accommodated there did not exceed 30.



Refugees walking around the transit camp in Tabanovce, Kumanovo

After significant movement (people coming and going on a daily basis), 24 people remained in the camp by the end of the month. Unlike in the previous period, all refugees who are admitted at the camp are now being registered. Refugees and migrant who pass through this camp come predominantly from Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya and Algeria.

The refugees and migrants who stay within the transit camps are provided with medical care, food and warm clothes. They have the opportunity to leave the camp for a walk in the city in case they need to do shopping or are in need of medical examination. The biggest concern within the transit camp in Tabanovce is the lack of internet connection. All refugees are provided with information on the asylum procedure and those who have submitted an asylum claim are immediately transferred to the Reception centre for asylum seekers in Skopje.

Mixed patrol teams of foreign police officials are still present, with police officers from the Czech Republic being deployed immediately after the holidays.

Incidents and irregular migration

During January, 2018 the Ministry of Interior in its daily bulletins registered only two cases related to the refugees and smuggling, which significantly differs from the numbers of groups and individuals who were brought to the transit camps. In the first case, the police in the village of Sopot (near Kumanovo) encountered a group of 11 migrants (one person from Somalia, 4 people from Iran and 6 people coming from Syria), who have crossed the border on foot, after residing in Serbia for a while. The group was composed of men, women and children. They were all transferred to the transit camp in Tabanovce, Kumanovo. In the second case, only a few days later, the police encountered a vehicle near the village of Aracinovo, and found nine migrants originating from Pakistan. They did not hold any personal documentation and were transferred to the police station in Skopje, for further processing.

One day a man coming from Syria arrived at the camp in Gevgelija, in a group with 3 Iranians. According to him, the smuggler took 2,000 euros from him, promising him that he will be taken to Serbia. Instead, the smuggler left him near the bus station in Gevgelija. After being questioned by the police, he was transported back to Greece.

Most groups who arrived in the country are coming back from Serbia, either voluntarily or being sent back by the Serbian police officials. Smaller groups of people are those who are coming from Greece and have the intention to cross the Macedonian-Serbian border. Some of them are stuck in Macedonia after the smugglers have tricked them, took their money and left them at an unknown location.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Serbia:

- It is necessary to continue efforts aimed at ensuring the observing of the right to asylum and access to the procedure, as well as efficient asylum procedure and protection of persons who need international protection.
- Adequate protection should be provided to those refugees and migrants who are outside the system, who are not registered or accommodated in the way that will enable them to exercise their basic rights.
- Preventing of smuggling and human trafficking remains high on the list of priorities, with advocating prevention of harassment of refugees and migrants by the authorities or civilians along the refugees' route.
- An efficient providing of comprehensive assistance requires co-ordination of activities between the civil society organisations and service providers from the public sector. The feasibility and impact of activities reach the maximum if they are co-ordinated between all the key stakeholders.
- The activities of information dissemination, linking, learning about and intercultural exchange are of great significance in order to bridge the distance between local and refugee communities. In the context of the beginning of the school year it is important to inform and co-operate with parents of local children and refugee children for the purpose of better preparation and preventing of misunderstanding, prejudice and fear.
- Basic human rights and freedoms of refugees and migrants should be promoted, observed and protected at all times by all the institutions and citizens.
- It is necessary to invest efforts to prevent discrimination towards migrants and to respond adequately to cases of proven discrimination so that they do not repeat.
- There is large need in the reception and asylum centres to organise free time and provide for occupational, recreational and other activities for migrants.

For Macedonia:

- The illegal deportation of refugees and migrants from Macedonia to Greece must be terminated and refugees and migrants must be sent back in an official procedure with cross-border cooperation of police officials.
- The transit camps must be provided with internet connection, given that this is their only source of information and communication with their families.

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