



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 increase in number of families originating from Iraq (Curds and Asides) who come to Serbia via Turkey and Bulgaria and intend to continue their journey was registered in October. The increase in number of unaccompanied minors was also noted and in Belgrade there were migrants from the centres in the south – Preševo and Bujanovac. From 100 to 200 migrants stay in the centre of Belgrade, in Miksalište and the park in front of the Faculty of Economics.

Since the inflow of somewhat larger number of migrants started the problems occurred with queuing for registration in the Department for Foreigners. Unaccompanied minors and families with children are given the advantage so that adult men mainly are admitted last. Since they cannot use the services of Miksalište at night they are forced to sleep in the open all until the registration procedure is finalised and they get the referral note to a designated centre. After obtaining of the referral note the problem remains of transport from Belgrade to the centre they were assigned to. Since they mainly do not have money for the ticket they turn to organisations that could provide them with transport.



Belgrade: Waiting for registration the migrants spend nights in front of Miksalište (Photo: CRPC)

There were **4,258** of refugees and migrants in Serbia in October (UNHCR data from October 22nd, 2017), which makes a small increase compared to the previous month. Most of them (88%) are accommodated in 18 transit-reception and asylum centres while others are in Belgrade or in the areas near the borders with Croatia and Hungary.

As in the previous period, most migrants do not intend to stay longer in Serbia, or to access the asylum procedure. The largest number of them opts for legal crossing of the Hungarian border based on the list they can register at within the centre where they reside. Irrespective of the fact that they could wait to cross the border for a year or two they do not give up and do not lose hope that they will get to their desired destination that way.

A new Law on the Asylum has entered the National Parliament but it has still not been put on the agenda for the debate. The objective of passing of a new Law is the improvement of the national asylum system and harmonisation of national legislation regulating the field of asylum with the EU Directives, reducing of space for abuse of the

right to asylum and creating of conditions for the increase of efficiency of the asylum system in the Republic of Serbia.

When it comes to the accommodation conditions, although many facilities have been renovated and capacities extended, there are still case in some centres that a large number of persons resides in small rooms, that privacy is

not fully observed and different nationalities are begin put together in the same rooms. This quite often results with conflicts between the migrants.

Several hundreds of migrants are still remain "outside the system", staying most frequently in informal shelters in the vicinity of Šid and places in the area near the border with Hungary. The conditions they live in are unhygienic and unsafe and their presence causes fear, anxiety and dissatisfaction of the local population.

Refugee children start going to school

The situation in schools the migrant children attend is good; children are accepted by both local children and the teaching staff. Organising of professional meetings and horizontal linking of schools has already started. The web site about education of migrant children www.remis.rs was created and it will enable easier information sharing.

"I do not dare say anything to my husband. I tried to say it was not so bad here. We are not under bombs. Children can go to school. We have food and roof, clothes, water, money. There are no bombs. He got very angry..."
A.M., Afghanistan

"I was surprised when they told me I would be able to play football during physical education classes together with other children. I thought I only needed to sit, keep quiet so that others shouldn't get frightened of me and I made no problems to them. I would not like anyone to punish me because others are afraid of me. I thought that teachers and other pupils would be frightened of me because I came from Afghanistan. Now that I know it is not like that I am really looking forward to start attending the secondary school."
K.M. (aged 17)

"I am glad they came and I guess they also feel nice. We do not speak their language and they speak Serbian only a little. But playing together does not require us talking to each other!"
S.L, a pupil from Vranje

The children in lower grades master better the curriculum while older children have a significant language barrier. There is also an evident varying in the number of children at schools at a weekly level and mentors are trying to understand the reasons – whether it is the question of leaving the camps or it is the matter of reaction to the teaching process. Schools continue to emphasise the fact that there is no unique method of accelerated learning of the language of instructions as the largest problem. It is not possible to provide additionally funded lessons so that teaching is carried out either during regular classes or at workshops. On the other hand, schools are exceptionally interested in all types of trainings and professional meetings; they also meet informally and exchange ideas and solutions.

Children like daily routine, an established schedule of activities and obligations they have in connection with school. They are in a better mood, more responsible and more directed towards each other. They have problems with the fact they attend classes in Serbian and they cannot do their homeworks without the assistance of persons working at the accommodation centre because they are required to write in Cyrillic alphabet.

Access to asylum and forced push backs

As in the previous period, the "closed borders" and lack of safe passages expose migrants to numerous risks. Forced push backs from one country into another continue and testimonies about such practice are numerous. A minor from Afghanistan spent a year and a half in Bulgaria and tried to cross the border and come to Serbia more than 20 times. According to him, every time he managed to come to Pirot or vicinity of it when the police would catch him, take him to the border with Bulgaria and tell him to go back. After the

repeated crossing attempts the Bulgarian police already knew who he was; they would wait for him on the other side with police sticks and beat him up and then return him to the camp in Bulgaria where he was accommodated. He says that once he tried to cross together with a group of 25 people when the Bulgarian police caught them in the border zone and took them to the police station; they ordered them in the lobby to face the wall and put hands on it and after that they started beating them.

Two boys from Afghanistan aged 14 and 16 say they tried to cross the border with Croatia but the police caught them as soon as they crossed and returned them. After that they jumped into a train and managed to cross the border again. They managed to get unnoticed up to the vicinity of Zagreb where they left the train and moved along the deserted road. However, the police car soon found them and they started running. The policemen went after them, took guns and threatened to shoot them if they did not stop. They got scared and stopped and two policemen approached them and beat them up. After that the police car came which took them back to the border. Although

they kept saying to the policemen they wanted the asylum in Croatia they replied “Go back to Serbia, there is no room here in the camps and we do not want people from Afghanistan.”

Situation in Macedonia

During October, 2017 the situation with the refugees in Macedonia remained calm and without significant changes. The number of refugees in both transit camps is small and they serve mostly as transit centres for short-term stay. At Vinojug camp, for example, during the whole month the number of residing refugees remained 3, with more frequent arrivals. Most of them were immediately transferred to Greece. At Tabanovce, the number of refugees varied through the month, with the maximum number of refugees at one point being 25. However, the refugees settled in Tabanovce transit camp, do not spend longer periods of time staying at the camp, but most of them continue their journey in only a couple of days.



Reception-transit camp Vinojug, Gevgelija (Photo: MHC)

The refugees who have been registered to transit through the country during this month are predominantly coming from Pakistan. In smaller numbers were encountered refugees coming from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Algeria.

The general conditions within the camps are satisfactory and within human rights standards. The refugees are provided with medical assistance and interventions when necessary. They are allowed to leave the camp for a walk in the city, with the obtained permission and accompanied by either the Red Cross representatives or institutional staff.

The number of children is rather small, with only 6 unaccompanied minors residing at Tabanovce camp for a short period of time. It is concerning, however, that there were two cases (one in Vinojug and one in Tabanovce) where unaccompanied minors whose assigned guardian is the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, escaped the camps and left in an unknown direction. Given the absence of children from Vinojug (and the small number of refugees there), there are no recreation activities. In Tabanovce though, there are educational-recreational activities organized for the refugees who reside there.

A man originating from Iran, who was caught travelling in a smaller group, told his story. He converted from Muslim to Christian in his own country, for which he faced serious prosecution from the government and institutions. He was forced to leave the country to avoid further prosecution and to leave his family behind.

Although security services have registered all refugees (individuals and groups) at Vinojug camp which were transported back to Greece, it is concerning to note that systematic check-ups of everyone's personal belongings were performed and their mobile phones have been searched. There is no logical, justifiable reason for systematic search of every single person, but this has to be based on legal grounds for reforming a detailed search.

Four people expressed their interest in submitting an asylum claim, however after being informed of the procedure, only one of them actually started the procedure. He was quickly transferred to Centre for Asylum seekers in Vizbegovo, Skopje.

Push-backs and illegal deportation

It is interesting to note that there is an evident increase of larger groups of refugees which are encountered by the police on illegal routes through the country, either travelling by themselves or with smugglers, mostly in the southern part of the country. For example, during October there are 8 registered cases of larger groups being brought by the police to the transit camp in Gevgelija, with 5 refugees travelling in the smallest group and 23 refugees in the largest group. Almost every single person from all these was immediately sent back to Greece, after short questioning and registration by the security officials. They were provided with medical and humanitarian aid within the camp in Gevgelija, before being sent back to Greece.

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:

- There is a high necessity for increased supervision of unaccompanied minors within both transit camps. They are in serious risk and a vulnerable position and cannot be left without any supervision.
- The continuing practice of illegal deportation must be terminated and refugees must be transferred from one country to another in lawful procedure in cooperation with officials from the neighbouring country.
- The police and security services must not perform systematic search of personal belongings and mobile phones, but searches must be based on a lawful grounds and a reasonable grounds of suspicion for criminal activities.

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