



### Monthly report on human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Serbia and Macedonia

*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

During March, due to very low temperatures, there were fewer refugees in the park in Belgrade - on average around twenty of them a day. A larger number of people, mostly Pakistani people who came to warm up and recharge their phones, were passing through Miksalište. As far as the structure is concerned, mainly Afghans, Pakistanis, Algerians and Moroccans, and only a few Kurdish families stayed in the centre of Belgrade.

The number of Iranians who arrive in Serbia directly by plane continues growing. Migrants who arrive from Iran mostly stay in Serbia for a short time and declare that they do not have any major difficulties and problems. They come with a certain amount of money and sleep in hostels, so they feel considerably safer, compared to people with no money and financial help from families. The main issue is still the continuation of the journey and search for opportunities to leave Serbia. However, unlike refugees from Afghanistan, migrants from Iran are also considering the possibility of voluntary return to Iran.

Many refugees from the centres in Bujanovac, Preševo and Vranje tried to cross the border illegally and failed, and some still intend to try the so-called "game" (as they call, amongst themselves, the attempts to cross the border with smugglers). They are not interested in seeking the asylum because, as they state, there is no work here and that is the main reason. As a result, the number of migrants accommodated in the centres varies daily, because many go to the border, and if they fail, they return to the centre again.

More intensive inflow of unaccompanied minors to Belgrade has continued. In March, the protection of children was still aggravated due to the lack of social workers at site, long waiting for registration and going to camps. Unaccompanied minors praised the behaviour of the Serbian police after forced returns from Romania. They said that the Serbian police "treated them as people", often warned them of taxi drivers who wanted to charge three times more than the actual price, and that they often offered them water and food when they met them after their exhausting stays in the woods and return to Serbia.

The Asylum Centre in Krnjača became the only centre for accommodation of unaccompanied minors. However, certain number of minors returns to Obrenovac and some of those who used to be accommodated in Krnjača are now in Preševo as adult persons.

Since the beginning of March, the relocation programme into safe third countries is no longer available and the work is in progress on strengthening of the asylum system in Serbia and encouraging the refugees to seek for the asylum in Serbia. In March, the Serbian Parliament passed a new Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection and Law on Foreigners.

There were **3,858** of refugees and migrants in Serbia in mid-March (UNHCR data, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018). Most of them (91%) are accommodated in 18 transit-reception and asylum centres, while others stay in Belgrade or in the areas close to borders with Croatia and Hungary. During the first half of March, UNHCR registered 138 new arrivals, 62% coming from the direction of Macedonia, 23% by airplane and 14% from the direction of Bulgaria. The majority were the Iranians (30%), Pakistanis (28%), and Afghans (22%).

When it comes to mental health of migrants, parents' concerns about raising children in refugee have been highlighted, since they have been on the road for a long time. Parents worry how their further migration to other countries will affect children. They admit that they do not direct all their strength and capacities to organisation and adaptation to life in Serbia, partly because of chronic fatigue and psychic and physical exhaustion, and partly because of the fact that Serbia is not the final and desired destination for them, so they do not want to waste their already significantly weakened strength.

Most adults and older minors try to bring their daily life to normal by fulfilling their days with different activities. For users accommodated in the centre of Krnjača, it is noticeable that those who participate in different activities are less likely to complain about depression symptoms. They demonstrate far greater openness in sharing their feelings in front of the group, as well as self-awareness of the anxiety-depression symptoms they register in their thinking and behaviour. Centers in the east of the country host workshops for women and girls whose handicrafts are later exhibited at bazaars. Their participation in the bazaars contributes to better integration and reduction of tensions among the local population. Such activities also contribute to the reduction of depression and tensions among refugees.

An organisation was contacted by a 21-year-old migrant who was accommodated in the reception centre. He said he had worked for four months at a local restaurant and was paid a total of 200 Euros during that time. The restaurant owner promised him a salary of 700 Euros and told him to tell everyone he was earning that much. Also, the owner has also obtained a kind of document for him (he told him that was an identity card). He showed this document to him only once, and kept it with him all the time. He is not the only one who worked in that restaurant; as he claims, there are still refugees who work there occasionally for a fee of 400 dinars for all-day work. The said migrant refused to report the case to the competent authorities, explaining that he was trying to leave Serbia.

### **Migrant children at schools**

In March, some 400 migrant children attended primary and secondary schools in Serbia. In addition, about 40 children in the reception centres in Sombor, Subotica and Kikinda had classes three times a week in the centre.

In schools attended by children from Principovac and Adaševci, a lot of drop-outs and irregularities in attending classes are reported. Families of school children try to cross the border almost every night, so children suffer from lack of sleep. Schools have so far registered them regularly and justified these absences, but such a situation prevents progress in education. In centres in Sombor and Subotica, there is a problem with dropouts, teachers often come and find no groups, although schools have tried to adjust the schedule so that it would be easier for children to attend.

The best results are achieved in schools that have more stable groups. Children learn language very quickly and more and more of them require additional classes or materials. Through grants, schools were able to purchase teaching means and materials, making it easier to produce additional learning materials. In the case of older pupils, mostly unaccompanied minors, there is frequent lack of interest in schooling, so it is necessary to work more with them on motivation.

Manuals for the application of professional guidance and language support are being printed and will soon be available to schools. Questions of passability, recognition of previous education, certificates and other documents of importance for the status of pupils are still not resolved, so enrolment in secondary and higher education is resolved on a case-by-case basis.

The celebration of *Nau ruz*, the Afghan and Iranian New Year was organised in March. In Bujanovac, the Afghans and Iranians celebrated together, and in Vranje, the Iranians made a small celebration in the common room, while the Afghans celebrated in their rooms, with their families.

*S.D. (38): "It means a lot to us when we feel we can be what we are, that we are accepted as we are. The arrival of spring and the new cycle in everyone's life have been welcomed in such a way for centuries. Yes, we are sad because we are far from home and family, but we are also grateful that we could nevertheless celebrate the arrival of the New Year."*

## The situation in Macedonia

During March, the situation in Macedonia remained relatively calm, with frequent movement of refugees' groups and individuals, both coming from Greece and returning from Serbia. Apart from regular maintenance of living conditions, there are no significant changes in the infrastructure of the camps. One of the problems that was common for both camps was the lack of Internet connection. The problem was due to technical issues (i.e. it was not clear who would cover the costs for the Internet), but was resolved half-way through the month. In both transit camps, co-ordination meetings organized by the Center for Crises Management or the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy among all the present organizations and institutions are being held on a weekly basis.



*Children's playground in an almost empty transit camp in Gevgelija*

In Gevgelija, mixed police patrol teams are still present. During March, police officers coming from the Czech Republic and Austria were present and in the middle of the month a new team of police officers coming from Hungary arrived in Gevgelija. A one-time visit was conducted by the police officials coming from Belarus at the transit camp in Vinojug, Gevgelija.

During the previous month, 43 refugees (mostly families coming from Iraq) who stayed in the transit camp in Vinojug, Gevgelija submitted the application for asylum. During March, as expected, all of them were transferred in several groups to the Reception Center for asylum seekers in Vizbegovo, Skopje. After all of them were transferred, the camp was left with only 6 refugees coming from Afghanistan. 4 Four of them, the family that has been staying in the camp for almost a year, were transferred in Greece on their own demand. The refugees who stay in the camp, have the opportunity to go to the city for a walk or shopping, accompanied by an official representative from the camp.

After the transfer of the asylum seekers to the Reception Center, it was concerning to note that there were no other groups or individuals who were brought to the camp by the police. Namely, the first group of refugees was brought to the camp at the end of the month, on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The group consisted of 10 persons coming from Iran, two families, man and wife with their two children as well as a mother with 5 children who stayed for about 10 days in the transit camp in Tabanovce, Kumanovo and arrived in Gevgelija by bus.

According to statistical data from IOM, from March 1<sup>st</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018 there were 263 migrants who crossed through Macedonia in both directions, from and to Greece and Serbia. CSOs were unable to keep track of the numbers, given that refugees/migrants were not brought to the transit camp in Gevgelija.

In Tabanovce, the highest number of refugees accommodated reached 62 and varied from one day to another. The countries of origin are Iran, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Algeria, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq and India. The groups consisted predominantly of men, although during March, a higher number of families (women and children) were registered. At the end of the month, 4 families coming from Iraq (20 persons in total out of which 5 men, 6 women and 9 children) arrived at the camp in Tabanovce and were temporarily accommodated.

Given the bigger number of refugees in both transit camps, "Legis" organized several workshops and recreational activities with women and children in the camps.

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, three migrants came to the camp in Tabanovce, two from Algeria and one from Pakistan. The man from Pakistan told his story: he met the smugglers in Greece and agreed to pay 4,000 euro in order to be transferred to Germany. When he reached Serbia, he was robbed by the smugglers, physically abused and held hostage by the smugglers who asked more money from his family in order to let him go. He said he reported that to the police and managed to escape.

## 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 a 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 towards Greece is still a practice of the Macedonian police that needs to be terminated
- There is a necessity to increase the number of police officials within the transit camps due to the increased number of refugees in order to guarantee for the safety and security of everyone
- The establishing of an Internet connection is much needed given that it is the only source of information and communication of the refugees who stay within the transit camps

The project is funded by the European Union



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union, under the project "HELP ON THE ROUTE - Fostering protection of human rights of migrants passing through Macedonia and Serbia. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Project implemented by:

