

Center Inventiva

# Project report

The project “Life-saving assistance for refugees and migrants transiting Serbia”, Reception Centers in Presevo, Bujanovac and Vranje, January 1st – December 30th, 2018

## Introduction

The Centre Inventiva is implementing the project **“Life-saving assistance for refugees and migrants transiting Serbia”** since May 15<sup>th</sup> 2016, with the support of the Kinderberg International e.V. The project is set out to provide supporting psychosocial first aid measures according to refugee and migrant-specific needs. The main goal is to respond effectively to the most urgent humanitarian and protection needs of refugee and migrant families, especially children and youth-at-risk (unaccompanied minors who are not accompanied by family members), to help them cope with their current situation in dignity and reduce suffering considerably. Activities carried out aim to contribute to a basic stabilization of their physical, emotional, and psychosocial well-being. In order to increase the overall effectiveness and impact of interventions and to avoid duplication, any services provided, occur in close consultation and cooperation with the responsible Serbian Ministry of Labor Social Policy and Veterans (MoL), the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, UN-organizations as well as other relevant stakeholders and humanitarian partners.

The report was created through the direct psychosocial first aid provision to the children and families, with special attention to the unaccompanied children and youth refugees and migrants, and through a variety of implemented activities with more than 909 beneficiaries who are currently living in Refugee centres in Presevo, Bujanovac and Vranje. The document was written by Marija Sreckovic Radovanovic, project manager, and Branislav Djordjevic, program coordinator.

## **General situation<sup>1</sup>**

### **January 2018**

According to UNHCR the overall situation and numbers of new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted in Serbia in January remained stable with 4,196 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted. 3,921 (or 94%) of them are housed in 18 governmental centres, while some 170, mostly men, continued sleeping in informal locations in Belgrade city centre and smaller groups near borders with Croatia or Hungary.

Authorities assisted 312 new arrivals. About half arrived from Bulgaria, 24% by air and 18% from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. For the first time in years, most new arrivals were from Iran (30%), followed by Iraq and Pakistan (22% each), and 15% from Afghanistan. 61% were adult men, 13% adult women and 26% children. 142 Unaccompanied or Separated Children were accommodated in government centers, plus over 50, identified amongst new arrivals and those sleeping rough in border areas.

UNHCR reports on a total of 520 collective expulsions from Croatia, Hungary and Romania.

As of 23 January Hungarian authorities drastically reduced admission of asylum-seekers from Serbia into its so-called “transit zones” from 50 to 10 per week. As a result, only 39 asylum seekers were allowed into territory and asylum procedures of Hungary during the reporting period, compared to 103 in the preceding two weeks.

In January, 233 foreigners expressed an intention to seek asylum in Serbia, while the Asylum Office granted refugee status to two individuals.

In January, 427 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. 60% were registered by adult men, 10% by adult women and 30% for children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (24%), Iran (22%), Pakistan (22%), Syria (11%), or Iraq (8%). Two persons were granted refugee status, and one subsidiary protection.

### **February 2018**

The overall number of new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants remained stable with 4,081 counted in Serbia. 95% (or 3,856) were accommodated in 18 governmental centers. Of them, 46% originate from Afghanistan, 21% from Pakistan, 12% from Iran, 10% from Iraq, 2% from Syria and 9%

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Serbia update - summarizing the data from UNHCR weekly reports

from other nationalities, while 55% are men, 15% women and 30% children, including 21 unaccompanied or separated boys.

At the beginning of the month authorities transferred 137 men and boys (and one woman) who had slept rough in abandoned buildings in Belgrade to the Presevo Reception Centre. Most were from Syria or Pakistan and had arrived in Serbia only over the past few weeks. While these transfers reduced the number of refugees/migrant men in Belgrade City center, another 150 were observed sleeping rough near the border to Croatia and Hungary. Despite the harsh winter weather only some 20 migrant/refugee men sleeping rough near the borders with Croatia and Hungary agreed to be transferred to Tutin Asylum Centre, while most others, opted to remain sleeping rough in border areas.

Authorities assisted 405 new arrivals. Almost half reportedly entered Serbia from fYR of Macedonia, 35% from Bulgaria and 16% by air. 64% were adult men, 8% adult women and 27% children (including 16 Unaccompanied or Separated Children). An increase in arrivals from Syria was noted, comprising almost 40% of new arrivals, followed by those from Afghanistan (18%), Pakistan (13%), and Iran (15%). Most Syrian refugees reached Serbia through fYR of Macedonia, with around 30% reporting to have fled Syria within the last six months. While Iranians continue arriving by air, most Syrians and Pakistani arrived via fYRo Macedonia.

Over 90% of 7-14 year-old children housed in governmental centers continued attending local primary schools, while also secondary school enrolment increased.

Authorities received reports of 284 asylum-seekers having been collectively expelled from Croatia, Hungary and Romania.

Hungarian authorities admitted 62 asylum-seekers from Serbia into asylum procedures at its so called "transit zones".

In February 2018, 594 foreigners registered intention to seek asylum in Serbia. 70% were adult men, 7% adult women and 23% children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (25%) or Pakistan (25%), followed by Iran (16%), Iraq (13%), or Syria (6%). One asylum-seeker was granted refugee status, and one subsidiary protection, bringing the total number of positive decisions by the Asylum Office thus far in 2018 to five.

## **March 2018**

3,858 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia. 91% (or 3,522) were accommodated in 18 governmental centers.

As weather conditions improved, over 300 migrants and refugees, mostly men, were observed sleeping rough. These included some 180 in Belgrade city and smaller groups near the borders with Croatia and Hungary.

Authorities assisted 468 new arrivals. Most were from Iran (30%), Pakistan (28%) or Afghanistan (22%). Most arrived from FYR Macedonia (62%) or by air (23%), with fewer from Bulgaria (14%). 61% were adult men, 8% adult women and 30% children, including 25 unaccompanied or separated children (UASC).

Reports were received on the collective expulsions of 296 asylum-seekers from Croatia, Hungary and Romania, and additionally, on 50 asylum-seekers having been returned from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Hungary continued reduced admission into its so-called “transit-zones”. According to UNHCR, 62 asylum-seekers were admitted.

In March, 710 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. 72% were registered by adult men, 9% by adult women and 19% for children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Pakistan (36%), Afghanistan (22%), Iran (16%), Iraq (9%), or Syria (9%). With no application granted during March, the number of positive decisions by the Asylum office thus far in 2018 remains at five.

According to UNHCR, 95% of refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children of compulsory school age continued attending local primary schools. The enrolment of children of 15 years and older, however, remained limited.

On 22 March, the Serbian Parliament adopted a new Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, as well as new laws on Foreigners and on the Protection of State Borders. All three new laws will be relevant for managing the refugee and migration situation. The new Asylum Law, for example, aligns Serbian legislation to international and EU standards by including an improved refugee definition and enhanced provisions for unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking children.

3,866 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia on 01 April. 3,481 (i.e. 90%) were accommodated in 18 governmental centers, while – with milder weather - close to 400 were

observed sleeping rough: around 180 in Belgrade City, and some 200 close to the borders to Croatia or Hungary.

#### **April 2018**

3,722 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia on April 15<sup>th</sup>. 3,280 (i.e. 88%) were accommodated in 18 governmental centers, while over 450 were observed sleeping rough: around 180 in Belgrade City, and some 250 close to the borders to Croatia or Hungary, using the milder weather to prepare leaving Serbia irregularly, mainly to Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

51% of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants arrived via FYRo Macedonia, 34% crossed in through Bulgaria and 19% arrived by air. 33% were Pakistani nationals, 25% were from Afghanistan, 16% from Iraq, 14% from Iran, only 5% from Syria and 8% were of other nationalities. 59% were men, 9% women and 32% children, including 19 unaccompanied and separated children.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> 3,498 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia, according to UNHCR. 3,194 (i.e. 91%) were accommodated in 18 governmental centres. After April 23<sup>rd</sup>, when authorities transferred 110 men and boys that had been sleeping rough in the North-West to Presevo Reception Centre, around 300 were still observed outside of centres: around 200 in Belgrade City and some 100 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary.

According to UNHCR, that organization received increased reports of collective expulsions in April, including of 487 asylum-seekers from Croatia, 280 from Hungary and 35 from Romania, while 35 persons reported to have been pushed-back from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Hungary admitted 35 asylum-seekers into procedures in its so-called “transit-zones”.

In April 2018, 642 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. 62% were registered by adult men, 10% by adult women and 28% for children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Pakistan (28%) and Afghanistan (28%), followed by Iran (26%), Iraq (6%), Libya (4%), Syria (2%) and Somalia (2%), etc. Five asylum applications received positive decision in April (4 refugee status and 1 subsidiary protection), thus bringing the number of positive decisions by the Asylum Office so far in 2018 to 10 in total.

## **May 2018**

3,199 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia on May 13<sup>th</sup>. 2,795 (i.e. 87%) were accommodated in 18 governmental centres. Around 400 were still observed outside of centres: around 200 in Belgrade City and some 200 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary.

The number of new arrivals continued growing to 253 (compared to 208 the preceding two weeks). 55% arrived from FYR Macedonia, 15% from Bulgaria and 30% by air and/or other destinations. 59% of all arrivals were men, 11% women and 30% were children. 25% were nationals of Afghanistan, 23% of Pakistan, 16% of Iran, followed by 10% Iraqi, 9% Syrian and 17% nationals of other countries.

New arrivals appeared to almost offset irregular departures, reportedly mainly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, stabilising the number of new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted in Serbia on May 27<sup>th</sup> at 3,041. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, authorities gathered 76 single migrant men, who were sleeping rough in the vicinity of Sombor and transported them to Divljana, Pirot and Bosilegrad Reception Centres.

UNHCR identified at least 48 new unaccompanied or separated refugee children (UASC), all boys from Afghanistan or Pakistan and referred them to Child Welfare Services. According to government statistics, 74 UASC are accommodated in refugee/migrant centres (mainly Krnjaca Asylum Centre), 16 in specialised care institutions and two in the JRS shelter.

UNHCR continued to receive high numbers of reports of collective expulsions: 493 asylum-seekers from Croatia, 149 from Hungary, 50 from Romania and 79 persons returned from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Hungary admitted 22 asylum-seekers into its so-called “transit-zones.

In May, 582 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia, bringing the total in 2018 to 2,922. In May, 59% were registered by adult men, 9% by adult women and 32% for children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (28%) and Iran (23%), followed by Pakistan (21%), Syria (7%), Iraq (6%) etc. Three asylum applications received positive decision (refugee status), thus bringing the total number of positive decisions by the Asylum office in 2018 to 13. 101 asylum applications remain in the procedure.

### **June 2018**

UNHCR noted an increase in the number newly arriving refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to Serbia. 73% arrived irregularly from FYR Macedonia, 11% from Bulgaria, and only 6% by air. 69% were adult men, 9% adult women and 22% children. Most originated from Pakistan (39%), Iraq (22%), or Afghanistan (20%), few from Iran (9%) or Syria (3%).

With high number of arrivals as well as irregular departures, reportedly mainly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the number of new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants counted in Serbia on June 10<sup>th</sup> slightly reduced to 2,803. While 2,541 (i.e. 91%) of them were accommodated in 18 governmental centres, over 250 were observed outside: some 150 in Belgrade City and another 100 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary.

According to UNHCR 180 asylum-seekers alleging to have been collectively expelled from Croatia, 31 from Hungary, 38 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 30 from Romania.

Hungary admitted 52 asylum-seekers into procedures in its so-called “transit-zones”.

In June, 739 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia bringing the total in 2018 to 3,694. 60% were registered by adult men, 12% by adult women and 28% for children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Pakistan (29%), followed by Iran (21%), Afghanistan (20%) and Iraq (19%). Six asylum applications received positive decision (subsidiary protection) in June, thus bringing the number of positive decisions by the Asylum office so far in 2018 to 16 in total.

### **July 2018**

According to UNHCR data 3,529 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. While 3,124 (i.e. 87%) of them were accommodated in 18 governmental centres, 400 were observed outside: some 150 in Belgrade City, another 150 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary and up to 100 waiting near the bus station of Loznica town close to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

A big number of men from Pakistan arrived irregularly from Greece through FYR Macedonia. 75% of new arrivals irregularly entered Serbia from FYR Macedonia and 9% from Bulgaria (down from 15%), while 10% came by air (down from 12%), and 16% other/or unknown. 80% were adult men, 44% adult women and 10% children (8% boys and 2% girls). Most new arrivals were from Pakistan (57%), followed by Afghanistan (17%), Iran (9%), Iraq (7%), India (3%), Libya (2%), and other countries (5%).

Hungarian authorities stopped admission of asylum-seekers from Serbia into their so-called “transit zones”, after a last three asylum-seekers were admitted on 28 June. News of this cessation of admissions spread fast amongst refugees/migrants, many of whom are still on so called “waiting list”, leading to increased frustration and tensions. On late July Hungarian authorities resumed admitting asylum seekers from Serbia into their so-called “transit zones” and they admitted 20 asylum-seekers.

UNHCR received 697 collective expulsions reports. 384 were reported from BiH, followed by 237 from Croatia, 37 from Hungary and 39 Romania. More than 50% of reports alleged denial of access to asylum procedures by authorities of these neighbouring countries. 60% of reports alleged violence, harassment or robbery (confiscating of moneys or telephones) by these countries’ authorities.

In July 2018, 1,021 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia, bringing the total for the year to 4,715 (compared to 3,548 in same period last year). Of those registered in July, 68% were adult men, 6% adult women and 26% children. Most applications were filed by citizens of Pakistan (32%) and Afghanistan (28%), followed by Iran (19%), Iraq (6%), Syria (3%), etc. Seven asylum applications received positive decision in July (two refugee status and five subsidiary protection), increasing the number of positive decisions by the Asylum Office so far in 2018 to 23.

### **August 2018**

According to UNHCR data 3,875 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were counted in Serbia on 19 August, of which 3,382 (i.e. 87%) were accommodated in 18 governmental centres. Over 590 were observed outside the centres: 250 in Belgrade City, another 240 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary and up to 100 in Loznica, close to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

65% irregularly entered Serbia from FYR Macedonia, 15% from Bulgaria (up from 11%), while 15% arrived by air (up from 10%). Adult men constituted 69% (down from 80%), only 6% were adult women and 25% children (20% boys and 5 % girls) up from 15% two weeks ago and including 117 identified unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Most new arrivals were from Afghanistan (32%), Pakistan (23%) followed by Bangladesh -16%, and Iran (14%). Iraqi arrivals increased slightly to 7%.

UNHCR gathered 1123 collective expulsions reports, 704 were reported from Croatia, followed by 118 from Hungary, 94 from Romania and 201 from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most of those expelled were Afghan (35%) and Pakistani (32%) nationals, followed by Iraqi (14%). More than 58% of these reports alleged denial of access to asylum procedures, 18% physical abuse and 17% other maltreatment by authorities of these neighbouring countries.

Hungarian authorities resumed admitting asylum seekers from Serbia into their so-called “transit zones”. 32 were admitted during August.

In August 2018, 856 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. 62% were adult men, 5% adult women and 33% children. Most intentions were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (36%) and Pakistan (19%), followed by Iran (16%), Bangladesh (7%), Iraq (6%), or India (5%). No asylum-seeker was granted refugee or subsidiary protection status in August, leaving the number of positive decisions by the Asylum Office so far in 2018 at 23.

The Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration transferred 37 residents from Presevo RC to Pirot, Vranje, Bujanovac centres, in accordance with their plan to consolidate and rationalize the accommodation capacities. The accommodation facilities in Presevo, Divljana and Dimitrovgrad RC are being put in standby mode with the possibility to reactivate them at short notice should the situation require. Profiling and screening facility in Presevo remained operational in order to deal with new arrivals.

### **September 2018**

As a result of continuing high new arrivals, also the presence of new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Serbia continued increasing with 3,905 counted on 30<sup>th</sup> September. 3,343 (i.e. 87%) were accommodated in 15 governmental Reception/Transit (RTC) and asylum centers. Despite cooler weather over 500 mainly male refugees/migrants were observed outside the centers: 200 in Belgrade City, another 180 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary and up to 150 in Loznica, close to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to UNHCR 73% entered Serbia irregularly from fYR Macedonia and 16% from Bulgaria, while 8% arrived regularly by air. 66% were adult men, 4% adult women and 30% children (incl. 237 unaccompanied and separated children). Most new arrivals originated from Afghanistan (37%) or Pakistan (37%), followed by Iran (16%), Iraq (4%), and others.

UNHCR gathered increasing reports of collective expulsions: 1071 from Croatia, followed by 435 from BiH, 46 from Hungary and 96 from Romania. More than 58% of these reports alleged denial of access to asylum procedures by authorities of these neighboring countries.

Hungarian authorities admitted 28 asylum seekers from Serbia into their so-called “transit zones”. All cases that entered Hungary after 1 July 2018 - regardless of their vulnerability or the reasons for not

seeking asylum in Serbia - received inadmissibility decisions to asylum procedures and protection in Hungary, leading to increased returns to Serbia.

In September, 628 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. Among them, 67% were adult men, 9% adult women and 24% children, while citizens of Iran represented 35%, Afghanistan 22%, Pakistan 11%, followed by India (8%), Iraq (7%), Syria (5%), etc. No application received positive decision in September and four applications were rejected, leaving the number of positive decisions by the Asylum Office so far in 2018 at 23 in total.

Since the start of the new academic year on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, local and central authorities enrolled refugee/migrant children into a second year of public schooling. According to UNHCR “consolidated efforts to secure comprehensive enrolment of all refugee/migrant children also resulted in greatly increased enrolment in public pre-schools and institutions of secondary education”. According to the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 348 (96%) of children between 7-14 were enrolled in elementary schools, 40 (or 79%) of six year olds in state preschool institutions, 107 in kindergartens and 71 (14%) above 14 years of age in secondary schools. A total of 33 elementary schools and 13 secondary schools enrolled refugee, migrant and asylum seeking children country-wide.

### **October 2018**

The number of new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Serbia on 28<sup>th</sup> October was 3,919. Of those, 3,485 (i.e. 87%) were accommodated in 15 governmental Reception or Asylum Centers. Also, close to 500 mainly male refugees/migrants were observed outside the centers: 200 in Belgrade City, another 200 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary and up to 80 in Loznica, close to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to UNHCR 34% of refugees were nationals of Afghanistan, 33% of Iran, 19% of Pakistan, 6% of Iraq, etc. Majority, 71%, were men, 8% women and 21% were children, including 107 unaccompanied and separated children. Some 37% arrived from FYRo Macedonia, 30% by air, 29% from Bulgaria and 4% from other destinations.

UNHCR received an increased number of reports of collective expulsions: 1133 from Croatia, followed by 485 from BiH, 38 from Hungary and 41 from Romania. More than 64% of these reports alleged denial of access to asylum procedures by authorities of these neighboring countries.

Hungarian authorities admitted only 18 asylum seekers from Serbia into territory and procedures in their so-called “transit zones” at Horgos and Kelebija border crossings.

On 17<sup>th</sup> October, the decision of the Government of Serbia to reintroducing visa for Iranian nationals entered into effect.

In October 2018, 700 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. Among them, 58% were adult men, 7% adult women and 35% children. Most intentions were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (33%), Iran (31%) or Pakistan (22%), followed by Syria (3%), Bangladesh (2%), and other countries. No application received positive decision in October and four applications were rejected, leaving the number of positive decisions by the Asylum Office so far in 2018 at 23 in total. A total of 6,899 intentions to seek asylum in Serbia and 234 asylum applications have been registered/submitted in 2018 as at end-October.

### **November 2018**

According to UNHCR 4,030 new refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were assisted in Serbia on 25<sup>th</sup> November. Of them, 3,677 (i.e. 91%) were accommodated in 15 governmental Reception or Asylum Centers, while around 350 mainly male refugees/migrants were observed outside centers: 100 in Belgrade City, some 200 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary and up to 50 in Loznica, close to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The number of newly arriving refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants remained high with 1,510 observed or assisted. 47% were from Afghanistan, 14% from Pakistan, and 6% of Iran. Men constituted 73%, women only 2% while 24% were children, including 82 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC). 61% arrived from FYRo Macedonia (down from 75%), 23% from Bulgaria (down from 20%), 5% by air (up from 4%). Men constituted 91%, women only 2% while 7% were children, including 49 unaccompanied and separated children. 75% arrived from FYRo Macedonia, 20% from Bulgaria, 4% by air, and 5% from other destinations.

UNHCR reported to receive 821 reports of collective expulsions: 525 from Croatia, 159 from BiH, 81 from Hungary and 53 from Romania. 86% of these reports alleged denial of access to asylum procedures and 28% mistreatment by authorities of these neighboring countries.

Hungarian authorities admitted 29 asylum seekers from Serbia into territory and procedures in their so-called “transit zones” at Horgos and Kelebija border crossings.

In November 2018, 752 foreigners registered intentions to seek asylum in Serbia. Among them, 57% were adult men, 4% adult women and 39% children. Most intentions were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (54%), Iraq (13%), Iran (9%), Pakistan (7%) and Syria (7%). One application received

positive decision (refugee status) and one application was rejected, making the total of 24 positive decisions by the Asylum Office so far in 2018.

### **December 2018**

4,468 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were present in Serbia on 30<sup>th</sup> December. Of them, 4,205 (i.e. 94%) were accommodated in 16 governmental Reception or Asylum Centers. Additionally, some 300, also male refugees/migrants, were observed outside the centers: 100 in Belgrade City and some 180 camping close to borders with Croatia or Hungary while with onset of cold weather very few were in Loznica at the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

44% of newly-arriving refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were from Afghanistan, 21% from Iraq, 9% from Pakistan, 7% from Syria and 3% of Iran. Of them, 52% arrived from FYRo Macedonia, 37% from Bulgaria, while only 5% again arrived by air. Men constituted 72%, women 4% while 24% were children, including 148 unaccompanied and separated children.

The number of observed arrivals in 2018 as at 30 December, was in total 16,060.

UNHCR received reports of 726 collective expulsions: 478 from Croatia, 123 from Romania, 67 from Hungary and 58 from BiH. 76% of these reports alleged denial of access to asylum procedures and 17% mistreatment by authorities of these neighboring countries.

Hungarian authorities admitted only 20 asylum-seekers from Serbia into territory and procedures in their so-called “transit zones” at Horgos and Kelebija border crossings.

## The program and implemented activities

Since May 2016 until today, through a variety of implemented activities, psycho-social support was provided to **more than 3.700 refugee children and youth** in Refugee centres in Presevo, Bujanovac and Vranje, South Serbia. Reduced capacity and fewer days spent in the camp, led us to some small adjustments in the way we operate. The two days of activities are focused on process of empowerment of refugee and migrant children and young people and strengthening healthy and psychosocial development in challenging circumstances, which are carried out through creative, educational and sports workshops. The workshops are designed to suit the needs of children, taking in regard suggestions of parents about their children needs, but in accordance with our assessment and standards. Workshops are mainly aimed at cognitive development and satisfying the emotional needs of the children, but also developing their sense for tolerance, acceptance of other's differences, learning how to work in group, importance of respect of others opinions, and also patience and respect for the rules. Another goal of our workshops is that children began to acquire capacities for further learning and integration in the school system (in Serbia or somewhere else), to become accustomed to more "schooling atmosphere", focusing on basic skills and knowledge that are universally needed – universal age appropriate competences such as: effective communication and engagement in group activities, "learn how to learn", healthy coping with the psycho-social transition, etc.

This is realized through the activities which affect children's intellectual, emotional and social development:

- **Creative and educational workshops** (mostly related to practicing English, French, Serbian, mathematics and acquiring new competences). For example, with young children, through creative or didactic workshops like drawing, coloring or puzzles solving, we work on development of fine motor skills. Children love to color, so the team uses their passion to teach them how to hold the pencil and write the first signs. Creative workshops are also used as an opportunity to express themselves, while drawing a story about things that torture them. Some *educational activities* serve as a "painless" way through play (quizzes, drawings, role play) and singing, to learning as many English words as possible and to use them in the proper context. Also, each activity / workshop has a segment of practicing some words and sentences in Serbian that could be useful. This is important because Serbian language is

necessary for them to follow school classes, which is a great challenge for most migrant children.

- **Musical workshops**, help the community to gather, and share some cultural content. This is very important because people usually just sit and wait for their days to pass, and they have no initiative to organize their time and interact.
- **Sports activities** necessary for physical development of children and as well as development of a team spirit. Sport activities (football, volleyball, chess etc.) were also organized with older boys in mixed teams.
- **Psycho-social support** - Emotional and social level that our activities influence, we would like to highlight as the most important, because emotional support is what the kids in camps need the most. Activities that enable building of the self-image, release of blocked emotions and tensions in a protected and safe space, these are activities that teach children to recognize their feelings, to find ways to deal with them, either alone or with the help of other people. We often perform a kind of "container function" for children, we process their raw and strong emotions and "interpret" them adequately. We teach them how to control their feelings and how to express them in an acceptable way.

We try to influence the social level through activities that develop a sense of community, encourage team spirit, reduce prejudice, teach children how to communicate assertively and how to solve conflicts in a constructive manner, how to behave in a group, and how to be part of the group. Also, we were organizing activities that can induce what older people can teach young ones. The goal of our activities is to teach children to be self-sufficient and how to rely on their loved ones and their friends.

- **Helping with learning and also helping children and youth with their homework** (with children attending primary and youth in secondary schools). Children in the school in Preševo, Vranje and Bujanovac do not understand the classes that have been hold in Serbian language, and with almost no adjustments of school program for young migrants, helping with homework is always required.

To the unaccompanied minors, through an individual interviews, support was provided for their adaptation to the educational system. Their characteristic is that they act like they don't need any help, so it is challenging sometimes to approach them and earn their trust, but when it is done, they like to talk about everything they experience in schools and outside of the

camp. Main and most important subject is cultural differences, so team conducted workshops to help them understand and accept the cultural differences in high schools. Focus was to empower them and help them understand new situations for them and new expectations from them.

- The activity team is also focused on **identifying, educating, documenting and reporting on human rights** violations, and providing basic administrative and logistic support to migrants whose human rights have been violated and assisting in protection of their rights. Refugees and migrants (especially focusing on children and youth at risk) included in activities are protected, educated and aware of their rights and how they can protect themselves. These activities are realized in parallel with psycho-social support in all refugee centers on south of Serbia.

Since the beginning of April, the team focused on helping children and youth with their homework on a weekly bases. The impression of our facilitators is that integration into the school system in Serbia is an almost futile effort and too much of stress for young migrants. But after this period, from mid-Jun, children were on summer holiday break, so the team was focused on creative workshops and sport activities so that they could meet each other better (since a lot of new children have come in and a lot left the camps) learning through play (“finding hidden treasure”, “feed the Anxiety monster”, roleplay activities, etc.). Majority of activities are carried out outside, in nature. They practice counting in nature - to collect natural elements such as leaves, twigs, yellow flowers in specific amounts, in order to encourage staying in nature, learn numbers and counting with children as well as colors, and determine who is lagging behind in which developmental domain. Children are delighted by the activities themselves. They especially liked to draw objects themselves, and other children to guess what was drawn and how to say it. Peer support was also achieved with workshops that encouraged interaction between younger and older children, older migrants and parents.

Other organizations are withdrawing from camps and having less content for users, our presence is still essential. At least a few times a week migrants have a chance to learn something new, have fun, relax, or at least talk to someone about the things that are bothering them.

## **Prevention of secondary traumatization**

Work situations in refugee camps may be classified as mildly traumatic at least, taking into account that in our case:

- deal daily with people who have experienced traumatic incidents
- the victims are often children and youth
- the number of victims is large
- the task is prolonged (cumulative stress)
- traumatic incidents in the camps (domestic violence, fights amongst mothers, etc.)
- situations are continually repeated
- interpersonal relations in the workplace

### **Interventions**

#### ***Selection***

Accumulated experience naturally affects our perceptions of various situations. When experience is gained in a great variety of situations, it brings a calm approach and ability to cope with difficult situations. In the small team that is currently active, ones that have remained are ones who possess high levels of stress tolerance and who cope with difficult situations better than most. They are able to process the traumatic experiences 'out' so that they do not become encapsulated.

#### ***Professional role***

We put emphasis on the role of the professional that protects a person from his own personal emotions. While concentrating on the task at hand, there is no time to see and perceive everything around the refugee camp. Thematic approach focusing on the content of the work - planning the theme, activities, focus on technical side of work (workshop structure, selection of interventions, timing, structure of a whole week and contextualization of content), allowed team members a partial emotional distance - but retained an empathy attitude towards migrants – yet they had to understand children's needs and state of mind to invent something specific and useful for them).

#### ***Psychological defusing***

The aim of defusing meetings is the alleviation of traumatic reactions, normalization of experiences, reinforcement of the group support and prevention of isolation and withdrawal.

- Whenever they ask, there is the opportunity to talk among themselves and crisis counsellors about experiences that are on their minds (traumatic stress and traumatic experiences);
- The defusing meeting would have been held as quickly as possible after a traumatic event or situation;
- Psychological defusing meeting takes about 20–45 minutes;
- Session would be attended by all those who were involved. In these days, it is usually small, homogeneous group;
- It starts with an introductory stage, when the participants are told why the meeting has been organized and what has happened;
- During the discussion stage, the traumatic event itself is reviewed. The central questions are what actually happened, what each participant did, saw, heard and experienced. The aim is to discharge from the mind the uppermost feelings about what happened;
- In the information stage, the discussion focuses on how the situation developed, how the victims were doing, etc. The facilitators are made aware of common psychological reactions in situations that are similar to the one they have witnessed and instructed on how to approach these reactions.

Based on the defusing session, decisions are made on the necessity of a psychological debriefing session, or whether the defusing is sufficient to ensure recovery. If the incident is extremely shocking and has given rise to strong reactions and emotions, a psychological debriefing session is organized.

### ***Psychological debriefing***

The aim of psychological debriefing is imparting information on how we usually react in traumatic events and afterwards, and how we should relate to such reactions.

- The starting point of the coping process of a traumatic experience is facing up to the event and accepting it as reality. This means, among other things, understanding that what happened is irreversible. There is no way of undoing the event .
- Reviewing the course of events in as concrete, detailed and thorough a manner as possible and then one can talk about things that were left unsaid.
- Possible psychological reactions include thoughts, feelings and intrusive mental images or flashbacks associated with the traumatic event. Verbalizing feelings and thoughts make them concrete and enable their sharing.

- Reactions produced by traumatic experiences are addressed together with others who have experienced the same event (inside our team, of course). Other group members in coping with their feelings also helps one to find ways of coping with one's own. In the course of observing this process, some of one own feelings and thoughts are processed, even if one does not participate in the discussion.

If the incident is, for example, a private experience of a single facilitator, or is connected with the other co-workers, we discuss the experience privately in one-on-one counselling meeting.

### ***Outcomes***

- Staff members are better able to face and accept their stress symptoms.
- The participants of group sessions were supported and strengthened by other participants.
- Solutions to some problems were found in participatory fashion.
- Staff members acknowledged the importance of airing and expressing feelings.
- They understood that they had done their best.
- They were prepared for separation situations with refugee children and families or domestic violence situations by normalization of reactions and preparation for future reactions.

## Main results

**Psycho-social first aid:** Psycho-social first aid support (through various group and individual activities) was proved to 909 beneficiaries (610 refugee and migrant children, age 3 to 14 and to 195 young people, mostly unaccompanied minors, age 15 to 30, and 104 parents) from January 1<sup>st</sup> until December 28<sup>st</sup> 2018.

**Prevention for secondary traumatization** (“Helping the Helpers”): More than 25 psycho-social/psychological sessions (twice per month minimum) were offered to activity team involved in the work with migrants and refugees. Regular supervision and support was conducted weekly.

The Reception Center Bujanovac				
Month/year	Average № of beneficiaries in the Center	№ of children who participated in activities	№ of youth who participated in activities	№ of adults who participated in activities
January 2018	130	40	19	18
February 2018	145	37	18	14
March 2018	140	32	21	17
April 2018	170	38	19	19
May 2018	126	29	12	18
June 2018	72	24	5	14
July 2018	96	27	16	8
August 2018	110	12	10	11
September 2018	190	10	14	19
October 2018	180	8	12	16
November 2018	190	/	15	12
December 2018	220	/	/	/
The Reception Center Vranje				
Month/year	Average № of beneficiaries in the Center	№ of children who participated in activities	№ of youth who participated in activities	№ of adults who participated in activities
January 2018	210	28	16	12
February 2018	200	26	18	18
March 2018	160	29	15	21
April 2018	200	33	16	30
May 2018	120	26	18	17
June 2018	122	29	3	12
July 2018	155	24	14	8
August 2018	150	30	9	6
September 2018	160	28	17	28
October 2018	160	34	21	23
November 2018	180	25	19	11
December 2018	190	22	16	13

The Reception Center Presevo				
Month/year	Average № of beneficiaries in the Center	№ of children who participated in activities	№ of youth who participated in activities	№ of adults who participated in activities
January 2018	340	22	28	4
February 2018	380	24	22	12
March 2018	220	21	18	6
April 2018	130	18	12	5
May 2018	100	14	6	6
June 2018	90	14	9	3
July 2018 <sup>2</sup>	40	/	3	2

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<sup>2</sup> In August 2018 the reception centre in Presevo was officially closed by Commissariat for refugees.