

SERBIA MONTHLY UPDATE

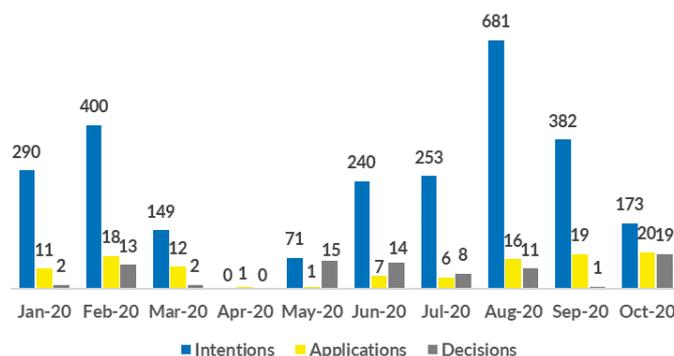
One hundred and seventy-three intentions to seek asylum were registered in October (compared to 382 in September) and **20 persons applied for asylum** (comp. to 19 in September). The **Asylum Office (AO) adjudicated on 13 asylum applications** by granting refugee status to six persons and subsidiary protection to eight (the highest monthly recognition rate for this year), and by rejecting applications of another five persons. Eleven asylum-seekers gave power of attorney to UNHCR project lawyers in October for representation in asylum procedure, 950 displaced persons received legal counselling and two asylum-seekers underwent psychological assessment for the purpose of asylum procedure. By end-October, AO has granted international protection in Serbia to 30 persons (15 have been granted asylum and 15 subsidiary protection) in 2020.

UNHCR partner BCHR issued a short [analysis of sections of EC 2020 Progress Report on Serbia relating to progress in asylum and migration areas](#).

Two new cases of Covid-19 amongst the refugees/migrants were reported in October, including a seven-year-old child, **both with milder symptoms**, bringing the **total** number of cases thus far recorded since to **nine**. With additional amounts of PPE and disinfectants procured for and delivered to Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs SCRМ, the value of UNHCR's **Covid-related procurements reached 220,000 USD**.

On 19 October, the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and Migration (SCRМ) circulated a decision by which all non-state actors will be allowed in governmental centres accommodating refugees and migrants only with a negative PCR test or under a full PPE equipment.

Asylum intentions/applications/decisions



Seven known incidents involving either attacks against or attacks by refugee/migrant men, which happened in Kikinda, Apatin and Belgrade, marked the month of October, along with ensuing gathering of right-wing movements in downtown Belgrade on 25 October who announced intention to “clean the parks of Belgrade”. These events were followed by fairly negative anti-migrant rhetoric online and reactivation of “people’s patrols” in Belgrade. UNHCR is working with the authorities and international partners on addressing these xenophobic discourses and actions.

The number of **observed arrivals remained steady counting 2,703** (comp. to 2,730 in September): 80% arrived from North Macedonia, 8% from Albania (through Kosovo¹), 5% from Bulgaria and smaller numbers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Hungary, etc. 68% originated from Afghanistan, 13% from Syria, 8% from Pakistan, etc.; 83% were adult males, 3% women and 14% children, including **279 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)** (comp. to 250 in September). **The number of persons pushed back from neighbouring countries in October – counting 3,637 – again, like in September, exceeds the number of monthly arrivals and sets the new monthly record in the number of pushbacks recorded since UNHCR Serbia began monitoring pushbacks in 2016.** Twenty-three percent of all pushbacks from neighbouring countries reported denial of access to asylum and 26% reported physical abuse, mistreatment, extortion, et al.

The number of residents in Asylum (AC) or Reception/Transit Centres (RTC), again increased by 25% to **6,314** at the end of the month. They comprised 2,683 citizens of Afghanistan, 1,635 of Syria, 328 of Bangladesh, 277 of Pakistan, 221 of Morocco, 204 of Iran, 177 of Iraq and 789 from 46 other countries. 5,437 are adult men, 278 adult women and 599 children, including 187 UASC. With increased movement towards the EU borders, especially Hungary and Romania, avoidance of Covid-prevention isolation measures in centres and fear of another lockdown, the number of foreigners observed **staying rough** outside centres increased by 90% to **1,490** at the end of the month. **A total of 7,950 new refugees and migrants were counted to be present in the country at end-October.** In order to relieve the chronically overcrowded RTCs in the north and decrease the number of refugees and migrants staying outside of governmental centres, authorities transferred 900 persons from Sombor and Subotica to Pirot RTC and Bujanovac RTCs, both reopened on 13 October after major refurbishment, and to Preševo RTC in the south.

¹ All references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

UNHCR engaged in age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) exercise with residents of Krnjača AC on 26 October and Banja Koviljača AC on 28 October, also online participatory assessment interviews took place in the last week of October.

UNHCR currently supports **67 refugees and asylum-seekers with cash-based assistance**, during pandemic circumstances when jobs for refugees are scarce and are also being lost due to Covid-19, in the total amount of 13,900 USD. Partner BCHR obtained 17 ID cards and 10 work permits for asylum-seekers and refugees. Four asylum-seekers received employment in October thanks to support from UNHCR/BCHR and one was interviewed for a job in hospitality sector.

With the goal of rolling out their **global partnership at the local level**, UNHCR and IKEA organized a kick-off event on 28 October in IKEA Belgrade store, where IKEA staff were introduced to the refugee cause, the activities of UNHCR, INGKA/IKEA's three-year action plan to enhance refugees' self-reliance through development of their skills, etc.

Partner BCHR received a letter of opinion from the University in Belgrade confirming that **Persons who have been granted refugee protection or subsidiary protection have equal access to university enrolment and can be supported from the state budget, with equal rights as Serbian citizens**. UNHCR/BCHR integration team will proceed with mapping asylum-seekers and refugees interested in tertiary education in order to support them in enrolling in 2021/2022 academic year.

UNHCR partners Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) and Sigma Plus supported Serbian and English language skills and provided support in other school subjects to 74 UASC and 57 adult asylum-seekers and partner IDEAS distributed cash cards to 16 refugee schoolchildren and covered monthly transportation costs for those using public transport.



Profiling of new arrivals in Preševo, ©UNHCR, Oct 2020

On 15 October, on the occasion of the **World Mental Health Day**, partner Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN) organized a [round table](#) which discussed what has been done over the last five years on improvement of refugee mental health and presented the results of [2020 Study on Refugee Mental Health](#). In October, PIN supported 126 asylum-seekers and UASC through individual or group counselling and psychoeducational workshops. Partner International Aid Network organised six **community support trainings** with 96 asylum-seekers and UASC in Banja Koviljača, Bogovada and Tutin ACs, also in Belgrade, covering topics of self- and peer-support, psychological and psychiatric problems, STDs and other epidemiological topics including Covid-19.

UNHCR initiated its field activities to implement the **2020 Statelessness Survey**, which is aiming to survey 2,000 Roma households in informal settlements throughout Serbia; results of the Survey will be presented in mid-December.

Partner A11 Initiative supported 28 Roma IDPs in accessing housing and social protection solutions and obtaining free legal aid. Partner Praxis visited five Roma settlements and counselled 43 persons, identified 21 persons in need of substantive legal assistance and **helped two persons who confirmed/obtained their Serbian nationality**. Praxis obtained nine personal documents for vulnerable Roma and reimbursed another 95 persons who obtained their ID cards. Praxis likewise organised four workshops with 58 school children, Roma and non-Roma, on **child, early and forced marriages**.

UNHCR Serbia compiled and produced the [September Statistical Snapshot](#), the [Serbia Update September 2020](#) and a [Video on Roma UNV joint project of UNHCR & UNDP](#).

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