3,931 newly registered persons were noted in March (comp. to 2,273 in February). Most new arrivals transit through North Macedonia, but also through Albania, Bulgaria and Montenegro. The main countries of origin of arrivals to Serbia remain Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria, with nationals of Somalia and Eritrea also in the top five main nationalities of arrivals.

Month of March saw 2,121 (5,956 in February) pushbacks from neighbouring countries to Serbia (47% from Romania, 44% from Hungary, 5% from Croatia and 4% from Bosnia and Herzegovina). Nationals of Syria make up 50% of all the pushbacks, followed by nationals of Afghanistan, Morocco, Libya, Palestine, etc. Pushed-back persons are mainly younger men, a few women and a dozen children (mainly unaccompanied boys from Afghanistan).

One more case of Covid was identified among refugees/migrants, hospitalized but stable, bringing the total number of cases since the start of the Covid epidemic to 32 (including two casualties, both with co-morbidities).

On 26 March, Serbian authorities began a campaign of vaccination of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants accommodated in 19 governmental centres across the country. Serbia became amongst the first countries in Europe to start vaccinating both refugees and asylum seekers in the centres and those accommodated privately. Five hundred and fifty refugees and migrants in government centres expressed interest in vaccination and 309 have been vaccinated by end-March. Additional 32 privately accommodated refugees have also been vaccinated against Covid. To promote vaccination, Batut Institute for Public Health, UNHCR, Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) and WHO sensitized the refugees and migrants in terms of health promotion and protection from Covid.

The number of residents in Asylum (AC) or Reception/Transit Centres (RTC), again slightly decreased compared to end-February to 4,460 at the end of March 2021. They comprised 1,754 citizens of Afghanistan, 888 of Syria, 317 of Pakistan, 206 of Somalia, 188 of Bangladesh and 1,107 from 50 other countries. 3,797 are adult men, 256 adult women and 407 children, including 74 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). A total of 5,463 new refugees and migrants were counted to be present in the country at end-March, including those staying outside of governmental centres. The authorities continued systematically gathering refugees and migrants staying outside the centres, in downtown Belgrade and in border areas, and transferring them to official centres with vacant places.

In March 2021, the Asylum Office (AO) of the Ministry of Interior granted refugee status to none, whilst rejecting two applications. One hundred and twenty-four foreigners expressed intention to seek asylum in Serbia. Eight submitted actual asylum applications. No persons have been awarded international protection in Serbia thus far in 2021, except two unaccompanied children who were awarded temporary residence on humanitarian grounds.

UNHCR Representative met with the Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development Mr. Branko Ružić, agreed that access to tertiary education for refugee students should be envisaged and promoted by the national system of education, and agreed on organising jointly a competition for secondary students in Serbia on the topic of refugee inclusion.

UNHCR’s partner IDEAS completed the Guidelines for identification and status determination procedures of UASC and published “Them and us - (de)construction of fear” report, dealing with xenophobia in the Serbian society.

Over 750 persons were counselled on asylum in Serbia in March by UNHCR and partners, and 12 opted for signing a power of attorney to UNHCR project lawyers. Partner Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN) performed two psychological assessments in March, one for the purpose of asylum procedure and one for the purpose of criminal proceedings.
UNHCR corporate partner IKEA SEE issued a call for applications for re-skilling programme for refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia, in order to enhance their employment prospects.

On the 10th anniversary of the Syrian crisis, Serbia’s public service broadcaster RTS featured a 20 min interview with UNHCR Serbia Representative, who highlighted the fact that the Syrian conflict has produced 6.6 million refugees from Syria worldwide and 6.7 million internally displaced persons within Syria.

On International Women’s Day (IWD), to celebrate women from all walks of life, their achievements and contribution, the UN in Serbia (UNHCR, UNFPA, OHCHR, UNV, RCO) organized “Women’s Day Coffee Jamming”. The event gathered four Serbian women, proven community leaders within UN agencies’ projects and an Iranian refugee painter who is teaching the children and adults in the Knjača AC to paint. Partners IAN, Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT), Indigo and DRC organized celebrations of IWD and Nowruz in centres across the country and ensured small gifts packages (containing hygiene items, PPE and makeup) for female participants in different workshops organized to promote women’s rights and gender equality.

With regards to child, early and forced marriages, on 11 March, a workshop was organized by partner Praxis at elementary school “Dušan Radović” in Novi Sad. The workshop was attended by 16 Roma and non-Roma children, who were given promotional material (bags, postcards and brochures) after the workshop.

Partners A11 and Praxis engaged in visits to 14 Roma informal settlements and provided 190 persons with counselling and assistance in accessing the right to housing, personal documents, social and financial assistance. Praxis obtained 26 personal documents for Roma (IDPs) and six persons had their nationality confirmed or granted in March thanks to Praxis’ efforts.

Sixteen refugee families from BiH and Croatia received keys to apartments in Kikinda under Regional Housing Programme (RHP) SRBS component and 12 families received purchased houses in Grocka near Belgrade under SRB9 component of RHP.