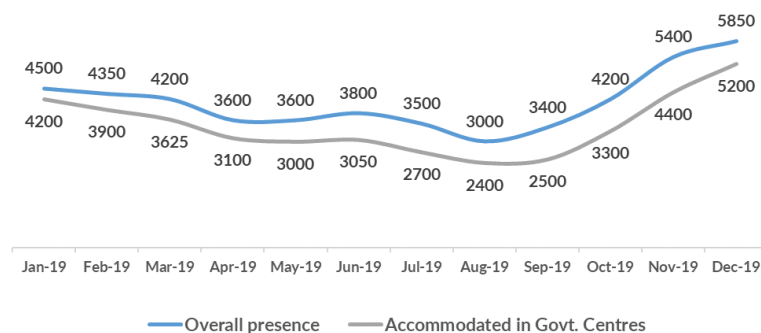


SERBIA UPDATE

- On 15 December, a young man from Palestine, previously accommodated in Šid Transit Centre (TC) with his family, tragically perished when electrocuted by high voltage power lines while attempting to climb onto a train carriage. On 23 December, two families: a Syrian and an Iraqi, comprising **four adults and two children went missing** when their boat capsized in an attempt to cross the Danube from the Serbian side and reach Croatia. They were part of a 15-persons group. To date, **more than 20 refugees and migrants died** trying to cross the Serbian border.
- UNHCR and partners profiled **1,713** newly arriving asylum seekers and migrants in December, of which 46% came from Afghanistan and almost a third from Syria and Iraq, including families (decrease by 55% compared to November). This brings the total figure of new arrivals encountered in 2019 to **30,216** (almost double the number of 16,165 arrivals in 2018). While **63%** of new arrivals irregularly entered Serbia from North Macedonia in December, the portion of those coming from Albania remained steady at **19%** and **5%** arrived from Bulgaria. Irregular departures to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) all but stopped and to Croatia decreased substantively, allegedly because of poor reception conditions in BiH and increased border controls and use of force by Croatian authorities, with continued returns and new arrivals from BiH to Serbia.
- As a result, the number of asylum seekers and migrants counted at any one day again grew to **5,833** at the end of December – nearing the figure of 6,000 and the total hard shelter capacity nation-wide for the first time since the summer of 2017. These included almost **650** asylum-seekers and migrants squatting in Belgrade City or near the border with Hungary or Croatia. The authorities transferred over 900 into official centres, including to the Reception Centre (RC) in **Preševo** that was reopened in November.



- Occupancy of 17 governmental centres thus again increased by 18% to **5,199** at the end of December, leading to the **overcrowding** of three transit centres that house unregistered migrant men (Adaševci, Principovac and Kikinda), of the reception centres in Bujanovac, Sombor and Šid and of Sjenica asylum centre (AC).
- UNHCR and partners counselled over **3,100** foreigners at over thirty sites throughout the country on asylum. **Nine hundred and seventy-two** registered their intention to seek asylum with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), while **31** lodged new substantive **asylum claims** with the Asylum Office (AO), three of which were represented by UNHCR project lawyers. In December, the AO adjudicated **two recognitions** (both cases had been represented by UNHCR project lawyers) and **14 rejections**. In 2019, a total of **252** substantive claims were lodged by asylum seekers, and **35** applications were adjudicated positively by the AO and the Asylum Commission (25 in 2018).
- On 18 December, the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and Migration presented five pledges at the **Global Refugee Forum (GRF)**, four of which refer to continued efforts in the domain of local integration and education and the 5th to early warning and emergency preparedness mechanisms.
- UNHCR and partners counselled **over 170** recognised refugees and active asylum seekers on **sustainable local integration** and obtained ID cards for two. In close coordination with the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM), we assisted 94 with [Serbian language classes](#), 49 with cash-based interventions and **14** with vocational training.

- On 6 December, in the Miksalište Hub of Belgrade, twenty asylum seekers from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen, Zimbabwe, Burundi and BiH obtained detailed information about the asylum system and legal aid in Serbia, the rights and responsibilities of persons granted protection, as well as available integration support at a **pilot Integration Workshop** hosted by the SCRM, UNHCR and its partners Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC).
- UNHCR Serbia compiled and issued monthly updates of its [Statistical Snapshot](#) and [Joint Site Assessments](#). With over 43,000 views, the latter remained a most popular and trusted information product.
- UNHCR and partners identified and referred to Child Welfare Services **484** newly arrived **unaccompanied or separated children** (UASC). **506** UASC benefitted from guardianship under the UNHCR project. Government centres accommodated **465** UASC at end-December (312 in Sjenica and 153 in Krnjača AC).
- On 3-4 December in Zlatibor, six UASC Peer Educators, trained back in November by UNHCR, Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and CRPC, trained 12 UASC from Sjenica AC on SGBV, human trafficking and LGBTI.



UASC peer educators in Sirogojno, Zlatibor, ©DRC, 4 December 2019

- **Nine hundred and sixty-four** asylum seekers reported **collective expulsion** from neighbouring countries (495 from Romania, 328 from Hungary, 130 from Croatia and 11 from BiH). 46% of them alleged to have been denied access to asylum and 7% **maltreatment** by authorities of these countries. Amongst them were asylum seekers, who were expelled to Serbia outside lawful procedures from Hungary (seven), though they had never been in Serbia before.
- Partners of UNHCR Serbia published interesting studies: the Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN) on [Towards an integrative multisectoral approach in provision of mental health and psychosocial support services](#) and Indigo published [A Safe Place in an Unsafe Journey](#) on lessons learnt from psychosocial support to refugee and migrant children.

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¹ Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Where a donor has contribution \$10 million or more, the total amount of the contribution is shown.

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