

## SERBIA MONTHLY UPDATE

The number of **observed arrivals decreased, counting 878** (from 1,638 in November): 70% arrived from North Macedonia, 14% from Albania (through Kosovo<sup>1</sup>), 8% from Montenegro and smaller numbers from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Turkey, etc.; 60% originated from Afghanistan, 18% from Syria, 6% from Morocco, 5% from Pakistan, etc.; 75% were adult males, 4% women and 21% children, including 147 UASC (comp. to 162 in November). **In 2020, 24,250 new refugees and migrants have been observed to have arrived in Serbia.**

A young man from Syria was found dead in the western town of Šid, cause of death unknown, and another man from Syria who had suffered from diabetes passed away in hospital after contracting Covid-19. These unfortunate events, including the first Covid-19 casualty, bring **the number of casualties amongst refugee/migrant population in Serbia in 2020 to 24.**

In December, the Asylum Office (AO) of the Ministry of Interior granted refugee status to one person, national of Iraq, **which brings the number of persons awarded international protection in Serbia in 2020 to 29** (comp. to 35 in 2019) – 12 were awarded subsidiary protection and 17 were granted refugee status. UNHCR and partners counselled over 500 persons in December, two persons gave Power of Attorney to be represented in asylum procedures to UNHCR project lawyers and partner Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN) performed two psychological assessments of two UASCs in asylum procedure at the request of the AO.

On 17 December, a riot took place in Bogovađa Asylum Centre, which accommodates unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Luckily, no one was seriously injured, however, as reported by Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM), the facility was substantially damaged. The police calmed the situation and 79 UASC were transferred to Preševo Reception/Transit Centre. UNHCR, Indigo and SCRM identified 13 most vulnerable minors and are following up on their needs. On 24 December, the Ombudsman launched an investigation to establish the circumstances of the incident; the following day, the police arrested five Afghan minors for suspected coercion, abuse and damage to reputation on the grounds of religious, ethnic and other affiliation, and for destruction of property. The minors remain in detention pending investigation.



*Children accommodated in Loznica Home for UASC were happy to receive New Year's presents, ©UNHCR, December 2020*

**The number of persons pushed back from neighbouring countries in December is 3,818. Like in October and November, by far it exceeds the number of monthly arrivals.**

The number of residents in Asylum (AC) or Reception/Transit Centres (RTC), decreased by 6% to **6,509** at the end of the month. They comprised 2,929 citizens of Afghanistan, 1,609 of Syria, 353 of Pakistan, 253 of Bangladesh, 247 of Morocco and 1,118 from 48 other countries. 5,647 are adult men, 242 adult women and 620 children, including 209 UASC. With continued police actions of gathering up those sleeping rough and placing them in the centres and with the colder weather, the number of foreigners observed **staying rough decreased by 36% to 1,400. A total of 8,023 new refugees and migrants were counted to be present in the country at end-December**, with the country having only 5,665 hard shelter places available.

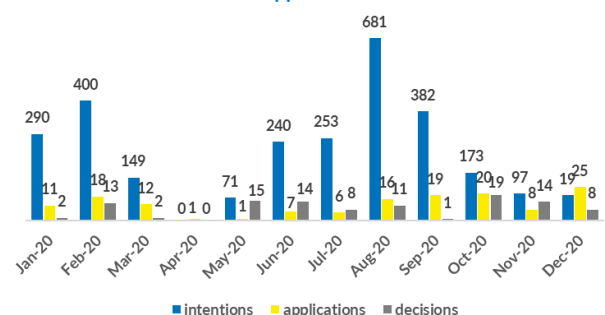
With the support of UNHCR, on 9 December partner Praxis distributed food and hygiene parcels to 85 Roma families in the villages around Bojnik, who were identified during previous field visits as particularly vulnerable due to COVID-19 epidemic and related restrictive measures. With the latest procurements

and delivery of 24,000 masks and disinfectants to SCRM and national Social Protection Services, **the value of Covid-19 procurements of UNHCR Serbia in March-December 2020 reached 251,000 USD.**

UNHCR partners Praxis and A11 Initiative visited five Roma settlements and provided counselling to 82 persons. Thanks to their assistance, two persons had their nationality granted or confirmed in December, and a total of 10 personal documents were obtained for nine persons, while 23 persons obtained ID cards, others accessed social housing solutions, financial assistance and/or legal assistance.

UNHCR and partners Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Sigma Plus and PIN supported 220 asylum-seekers in local integration through language classes

**Intentions/applications/decisions**



<sup>1</sup> All reference to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

(Serbian, French and English), finding employment opportunities, finding private accommodation, through self-reliance workshops, etc. Cultural mediation support was provided to four schoolchildren by CRPC. Two refugees were supported in starting a bookkeeping/accounting course, and one successfully passed the driving course-exam. Fifteen refugees obtained ID cards and nine received work permits in December thanks to efforts of legal partner Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). Seventy-two refugees and asylum-seekers benefitted from cash-based assistance (CBI) and winterization CBI in December. Through joint action of UNHCR, BCHR, SCRUM and ICRC, one Syrian minor was reunited with his family in Austria on 13 December and another person granted humanitarian visa in the USA has been prepared for departure.



*Youth event on occasion of UNHCR 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a young refugee's piece of art as present to UNHCR*

UNHCR and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) staff began preparations for enrolling two young adults, proteges of JRS UASC House, into university. Thanks to donation of LED Ekran company, six boys and girls accommodated in UASC House of Rescue in Loznica were all equipped with proper footwear and received New Year's presents. Partner Indigo distributed **200 New Year's parcels** to children accommodated in six reception centres and UASC Homes. Partner PIN provided psychological and psychosocial support to 121 adults and UASC in Banja Koviljača AC and Šid RTC, Vodovodska and Zmaj UASC homes as well as remotely. Partner IAN implemented two days of community support trainings for asylum-seekers accommodated in Krnjača AC and in private accommodation. CRPC and Indigo organised over **150 educational, creative and recreational workshops for children and adults** in nine reception centres and UASC Homes throughout the country.

In the scope of **16 days of activism against SGBV**, partners DRC, Indigo and CRPC organized a series of gender equality workshops in Krnjača and Bogovada ACs, as well as JRS and Vodovodska UASC Homes and Bosilegrad RTC, with participation of women, men and UASC. **A number of workshops were realized by female refugees' gender focal points and UASC peer educators.** UNHCR and BCHR launched an online **campaign Seventeenth Day** as a result of educational programme for youth from refugee and local population on the topic SGBV, gender equality and related issues which was conceived as continuation of 16 days of activism against violence towards women and with the idea of young people asking: what will we do on Day 17 when the campaign is over and media lose interest?

On the occasion of **UNHCR's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary**, Serbia CO and its partners BCHR and CRPC organised an **online event** on 14 December with over 50 participants, students of law and political science, high school students and young refugees and asylum seekers who exchanged their personal stories and views on refugee inclusion and integration, public attitudes and misconceptions and also positive examples of students' engagement to understand and promote the refugee cause and efforts for acceptance and belonging in Serbia.

On 10 Dec, the UN Resident Coordinator, the IOM and the UNHCR co-chaired a **Partners' Briefing**, attended (online) by more than 80 embassies, bilateral and multilateral donors, authorities and (I)NGOs, where SCRUM, IOM and UNHCR presented their Covid-19 response, the current situation with refugees and migrants, and the plans and challenges for 2021. On 15 December, a webinar on **Refugee integration challenges and review of best practices from Austria** was organized by UNHCR and BCHR.

UNHCR partners CRPC and HCIT published **Between Closed Borders 2019 Report** and CRPC also issued a **Handbook on Cultural Mediation**.

**UNHCR Serbia is grateful for the support of:**

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