

# UNHCR COVID19 SPECIAL REPORT



## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

22 APRIL – 11 MAY 2020

### Background

So far in 2020, BiH authorities recorded **4,586** new arrivals to BiH. Compared to the same period in 2019 (6,201), this represents a **26 percent** decrease. In April alone, BiH authorities recorded **102** arrivals which, compared to April 2019 (2,631), represents a **96 percent** decrease. The number of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants accommodated in reception centers and other formal accommodation currently in the country is **5,600**, while some additional **2,000<sup>[\*]</sup>** persons are estimated to be outside formal accommodation or on route.

### Situation snapshot



For the time being, **no cases have been** identified affecting asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. The situation is evolving daily, the actions taken by the authorities to date have already affected access to asylum and basic services.

### Protection risks, challenges and response measures

The 16 April BiH Council of Ministers decision continues to **restrict freedom of movement** and stay for several categories of foreigners in BiH, including undocumented foreigners and asylum seekers who either do not hold valid documents or do not have fully registered residence. Adopted as a COVID-19 prevention measure, it is foreseen to remain in force as long as the conditions for its introduction require.

Further, implementation of **restriction of movement for asylum-seekers and migrants in reception centres** remains generally strict. Residents of Temporary reception Centres in USC can leave for onward movement but are not allowed to

return. In Sarajevo the situation in centres is much more restrictive in terms of in-and-out movement.

Increased **onward movement** and departures from centres have been observed in Una-Sana Canton. Subsequently, the number of recorded alleged pushbacks is also rising.

UNHCR noted several cases of documented asylum-seekers transferred from their regular private accommodation to the emergency tent centre Lipa, without a **clear legal basis**.

Although UNHCR reacted by advocating with the local authorities for the practice

to cease, similar cases were reported to as having occurred on 8 May.

The restrictions of movement continue **affecting the mental health** of the beneficiaries and increasing the symptoms of anxiety, insomnia and depression. Psychosocial support activities were provided to a limited degree, but resources and capacities are largely insufficient to serve those in need.

**Registration of asylum-seekers and migrants** continues to be impacted by COVID – 19 measures.

[\*] Source: Inter-agency outreach teams and USC authorities

<sup>1</sup> Source: BiH authorities/ figures as of 11 May 2020

<sup>2</sup> Source: Danish Refugee Council (DRC) – Emergency Response to COVID-19 – Situation Report #08 (11 May 2020)

## UNHCR activities

**513**

asylum-seekers provided with legal assistance

**280**

psychosocial interventions in reception centres

**261**

UASC assisted with protection activities incl. legal guardianships

**29**

health-related assistance

**101**

children provided with informal education activities

During the reporting period, UNHCR's legal aid partner Vasa Prava BiH filed a request with the Constitutional Court of BiH on behalf of two asylum-seekers, to take an interim measure to repeal the Decision on Restriction of Movement and Stay of Foreigners in BiH, adopted by the Council of Ministers at its 13th extraordinary session. The appeal explains that this decision comes in conflict with the standards prescribed by the European Convention on Human Rights and Freedoms and the

UNHCR's legal aid partner Vasa Prava continued providing free legal aid through phone calls, WhatsApp/Viber calls/chat and newly created VP BiH online communications platform. Constitution of BiH.

They have also continued providing assistance with extension and delivery

of asylum-seekers' cards. Extending documentation has become a challenge due to restrained access to the relevant authorities.

The Sector for Asylum re-assumed delivering extended asylum seeker cards to asylum-seekers in private accommodation, but delivery of asylum seeker cards to persons accommodated in temporary reception centers Ušivak and Blažuj is stopped.

During the reporting fortnight, Vasa Prava BiH provided legal counselling to 505 asylum-seekers and taken power of attorney from 8 asylum-seekers throughout BiH.

UNHCR's protection partner BHWI continued providing a variety of protection, child protection, psychosocial interventions and

education activities in formal and private accommodation locations in Sarajevo and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.

During the reporting period, BHWI provided 211 NFI/food assistances, 29 health related assistances, provided 101 instances of informal education activities for children, 124 occupational and recreational activities, 280 psychosocial interventions, 19 SGBV relevant activities as well as provided 261 instances of protection assistance to UASC incl. legal guardianships.

In Una Sana Canton, UNHCR's partner DRC continued its activities in relation to the COVID -19 response through community protection-based activities, including health awareness and hygiene maintenance; peer-support, online language classes and sewing workshop.

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## Funding needs

The revised COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) was released on 7 May, covering the period April-December 2020. UNHCR seeks USD 745 million to globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.

The UNHCR in BiH is currently applying for funding under the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace as part of a regional joint project with IOM for both immediate and long-term response to COVID-19.

## CONTACTS

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