



HELP ON THE ROUTE

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Fostering protection of human rights of migrants
passing through Macedonia and Serbia

Monthly report on human rights of migrants,
refugees and asylum seekers in Serbia and Macedonia

SEPTEMBER 2017

The aim of this Report is to present the current situation regarding the protection of human rights and freedoms of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers passing through, or staying in Serbia and Macedonia. The data in this Report were obtained from 24 civil society organisations from Serbia and Macedonia, within the "Help on the Route" network.

Situation in Serbia

Migrants who are staying in Serbia are either in the asylum seeking procedure or they are still staying in the reception and asylum centres with only the police certificates on the expressed intention to seek the asylum. Among them there are those who are still thinking about staying in Serbia and submitting the application for the asylum while others are waiting for their turn to cross the border with Hungary. Some, however, still manage to get to the desired destinations with the assistance of smuggling networks, which is a clear sign that this criminal act has still not been eradicated. The fact that a large number of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable categories are exposed to threats and abuse from smugglers makes a special problem in that context.



Children from the Reception Center Adaševci on their way to school accompanied by the NGO associate (Photo: NSHC)

The number of refugees and migrants in Serbia at the end of September was **4,146** (UNHCR data).

Most of them (92%) are accommodated in 18 transit-reception and asylum centres while others are in Belgrade or in the border areas with Croatia and Hungary. Compared to August, the number of refugees and migrants has not changed significantly. During the month of September there is an evident increase in the number of new arrivals, mainly Asides from Iraq who come to Belgrade from the direction of Bulgaria. The largest number are the families with children, which makes them particularly vulnerable group. Many are trying to cross illegally the border with Croatia or Hungary, and within the most recent months the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Republic of Serbia continues to provide the support to migrants in accordance with the possibilities and available means. In September there were no claims regarding the enabling of access to the asylum procedure by the police officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Migrants have the possibility to be informed by the organisations working actively in the field. During the visits to the reception and asylum centres they also provide information to migrants with the assistance of brochures in their mother tongues while posters with numbers where they can ask for legal assistance whenever they need it are displayed at the centres.

In the reception and asylum centres there is currently a smaller number of migrants, significantly below the full accommodation capacity. The accommodation conditions are satisfactory and some migrants declared "they had much better conditions for living there than they had had at their homes".

Several hundreds of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are still "outside the system", most frequently in inform shelters in

the vicinity of Šid and places in the area around the border with Hungary. They are trying to find the way to cross the border and conditions for living are unhygienic and unsafe. Their visible presence in the vicinity of inhabited places causes fear, anxiety and dissatisfaction of the local population.

Providing of health care to migrants who are registered and accommodated in the reception and asylum centres in Serbia is carried out in coordinated and efficient way. Health protection institutes carry out regular inspections of hygienic conditions, water quality, and quality of food and accommodation conditions. According to the results of these inspections the conditions are at and appropriate level.

Refugee children start going to school

The phase inclusion of children from the reception and asylum centres in elementary and secondary schools started on September 1st, 2017. Around 350 employees from schools in the territory of nine school administrations (Novi Sad, Leskovac, Novi Pazar, Kraljevo, Niš, Valjevo, Sombor, Zrenjanin, and Belgrade) got detailed instructions for implementation of Expert Guidelines and Pedagogical Instructions. The Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations and school administrations distributed children in schools taking into account the language, age, the fact whether they have already

attended schools in Serbia and keeping families together, in co-operation with non-government organisations working with children in the reception and asylum centres.

"My son started going to school. When the meeting with parents was held only men were invited and no nobody asked us, the mothers, about the opinion. I like the fact that my child goes to school. There are rumours that will prevent us from going further, but I want him to learn something."

M.M. from Afghanistan

During the first week the children were thrilled with the reception they encountered among the teachers and other children:

"I have a lot of friends, everyone wants to play with me!"

H.S. (11)

"Two friends invited me to **go with them** to the school break."

Z.A. (8)

"Everybody wants to sit with me."

N.S. (10)

Currently, the children attend 40 schools although secondary schools are still joining (the Ministry order the enrolment only for profiles with vacancies because secondary school is not obligatory). The mentors, external associates of school administrations monitor the process in every school and they report regularly about that. New trainings and financial support to schools are being prepared. The resistance to inclusion of children has been felt only in the municipality of Šid (Adaševci) but School Administration Novi Sad conducted a series of discussions with parents and representatives of the municipality and children started going to schools. According to class teachers and those teaching at higher grades everything passes in the best possible order and

other children accept nicely their peers. The children attend classes in Serbian. They are familiar with the basic terms and words in Serbian and older children also speak English so that they do not have any problems in communication with teachers. Teaching is adapted to their needs; during the month of September they had three lessons a day and all the children were provided transport, school accessories and luncheons.

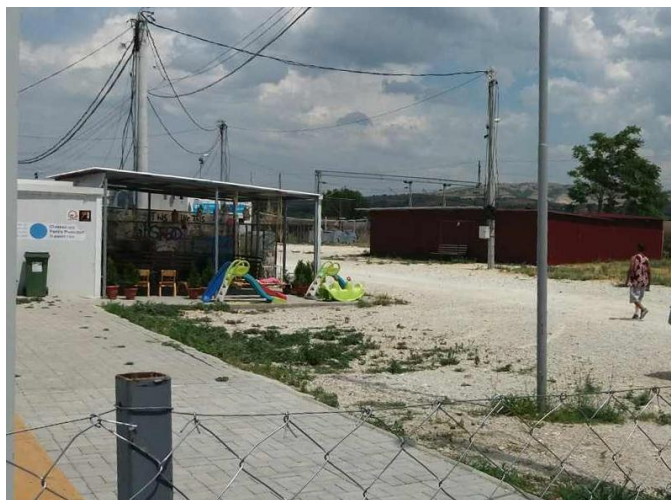
Unequal quality of teaching is the largest problem: in some schools children have a well designed schedule and in others they attend lessons based on the "what happens at that moment" principle. School administrations are trying, via mentors, to urge schools to adapt the teaching process to children's needs. Teaching of Serbian is still not standardised and every school uses the approach they opted for. Language is the barrier in schools where teachers do not speak English.

Discrimination

Cases of discriminatory behaviour towards migrants occurred most frequently in providing services in catering facilities and public transport. Potential discrimination was performed in the way that persons from the refugee, migrant and asylum seekers population were disabled from access to a catering facility or vehicle, or they were asked not to visit certain catering facilities. The reason for such behaviour, as stated by the catering facilities owners, is the alleged fear from destruction of equipment or causing of incidents (fights, quarrels). With regards of that the claims were submitted to the Commissioner for protection of equality and proceedings are in progress.

The situation in Macedonia

In Macedonia, the number of refugees who are transiting has decreased, but the frequency remains the same. Families or smaller groups arrive at the camp in Tabanovce on a daily level. The number of refugees within the Tabanovce transit camp during September, 2017 reached up to 27, eight out of whom were unaccompanied minors. The most common concern among them is to be returned to Greece. It is noted that the selective reception of refugees in the camp in Tabanovce seems to have terminated, i.e. all refugees who arrive are admitted in the camp, regardless of their origin, desire to remain in the camp or desire to be returned to Greece.



Tabanovce transit camp, Kumanovo (Foto: MHC)

Two unaccompanied minors were brought at the Tabanovce camp by the Red Cross mobile team from Lojane village. They say that they were staying in Serbia (in Sid and Belgrade mostly) for about ten months. After many unsuccessful attempts to cross the Serbian-Croatian borders, they decided to go back without any hope of continuing forward.

The refugees who are coming in are predominantly from Algeria, Morocco or Pakistan. In many cases, groups which have arrived at the camp, leave the camp temporarily in an effort to cross the Macedonian- Serbian border. Sometimes they come back after a short period of time (the same or next day), which means their attempt was unsuccessful, or they do not return to the camp, which implies that they have crossed through.

In the transit camp in Gevgelija, the number of refugees reached 18 at most at one point, but due to the arrivals and departures of different groups or individuals, by the end of the month, only 4 refugees remained in the camp. The predominant countries of origin of the refugees at the camp are Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq or Bangladesh.

Refugees are regularly and timely provided with medical assistance or examination if necessary, either by mobile teams of the Red Cross or they are directly transported to the hospital. There are regular gynaecologist checkups for pregnant women and available paediatrician for the children.

Given the decrease of number of children (and refugees in general) present at the transit camps, there are less and less educational and recreational activities by the civil society organizations.

Push-backs and illegal deportation

During September, there were in total 66 refugees who were brought to the camp in Gevgelija (9 at the Gevgelija police station) who were sent back to Greece after being interrogated by the police officials. Most of them were caught on the illegal routes by the police, as victims of smugglers and a small number were returned from Serbia and expressed their will to return to Greece.

It is interesting to note that in the past month, there have been 3 cases of larger groups, counting up to 35 refugees who have been caught on illegal routes by the police. In this regard, on the 6th of September, the police encountered a group of 30 refugees, exclusively male persons whose origin is not confirmed. They were caught on the border itself, in an effort to enter the country. Twenty one of them have been brought to the camp, while the rest were taken to the police station in Gevgelija. Humanitarian aid was provided by the Red Cross and in a short time, the group was transferred back to Greece. Later in the month, on 9th of September, a group of 23 refugees originating from Pakistan and Syria were caught by the police on illegal routes in the surrounding villages. They were all brought to the camp, registered by the police and personal belongings of each person individually were checked up by the police.

The trend of movement of larger groups of refugees is concerning and should be carefully followed by government institutions. Refugees in groups are usually victims of smugglers who deceive them, rob them and often physically attack them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Serbia:

- It is necessary to continue the efforts in order to ensure the observing of the right to asylum or access to the procedure, as well as to an efficient asylum procedure and protection of persons who need international protection.
- Adequate protection should be provided to those refugees and migrants who are outside the system, who are not registered and accommodated in the way that will enable them to exercise their basic rights.
- Preventing of smuggling and human trafficking remains high on the list of priorities, with advocating prevention of harassment of refugees and migrants by the authorities or civilians along the refugees' route.
- An efficient providing of comprehensive assistance requires co-ordination of activities between the civil society organisations and service providers from the public sector. The feasibility and impact of activities reach the maximum if they are co-ordinated between all the key stakeholders.
- The activities of information dissemination, linking, learning about and intercultural exchange are of great significance in order to bridge the distance between local and refugee communities. In the context of the beginning of the school year it is important to inform and co-operate with parents of local children and refugee children for the purpose of better preparation and preventing of misunderstanding, prejudice and fear.
- Basic human rights and freedoms of refugees and migrants should be promoted, observed and protected at all times by all the institutions and citizens.
- It is necessary to invest efforts to prevent discrimination towards migrants and to respond adequately to cases of proven discrimination so that they do not repeat.
- There is large need in the reception and asylum centres to organise free time and provide for occupational, recreational and other activities for migrants.

For Macedonia:

- Recreational and educational activities within the camps should continue regardless the number of migrants and their age.
- The practice of illegal, group push backs of migrants must be terminated. It represents the violation of basic human rights and freedoms of migrants, an inhumane treatment. All the return procedures must be in compliance with human rights standards and carried out in co-operation between the countries.

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