

Migrant/Asylum Seekers Crisis in Serbia

Factsheet & Situation Report 2

Current situation

- The migrants are currently traveling the route of least resistance **Turkey → Greece → Macedonia → Serbia → Hungary** (Bulgaria and Romania, although both part of EU, are less favorable options for personal security reasons plus Bulgaria's borders are increasingly being militarized and fenced, with motion sensors and cameras).
- However, the current **Western Balkans route is increasingly becoming harder to travel/cross**. Hungary is building a 4-meter (13-foot), 110 mile long razor-wire fence along its border with Serbia, while on 20 August Macedonia declared a state of emergency over the surge of migrants and refugees, deploring army at the border with both Greece and Serbia (Djevdjelija crossing). For the last three days, Macedonians were letting just the most vulnerable and ill to cross the border into Serbia, but late Sunday, 23 August, Macedonia lifted the restrictions letting around **7,000 refugees and migrants to cross into Serbia**, where in the village Miratovac (close to the border crossing and several kilometers away from Presevo) eight huge United Nations refugee tents were set up to provide food and shelter.
- The Serbian Defense Minister said Monday morning (24 August) that the state will build **additional one-stop center in Miratovac** where migrants and refugees cross the border (currently, the state's medical and health, police and gendarmerie personnel, along with the Red Cross, UNHCR and Medicines sans frontiers are assisting with food and medical aid). He **appealed for donations of food and water** since both one-stop centers have supplies for additional two or three days.
- **One-stop center in Presevo** run by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration **currently serves 2,000 people daily** with rest and shower areas, food and medical assistance. The center was opened in July 2015 and serves as a hub for issuing appropriate documents to migrants and refugees under a fast-track procedure.
- **By end of July 2015** the number of asylum applications in Serbia reached **79,782** (figures for August to be released soon, although the estimate is that the number of people that crossed in the first 10 days of August will be higher than the numbers for all of July). **At least another 50,000** crossed Serbia without registering. For now, asylum seekers have no attention to stay in Serbia. When they ask for asylum in Serbia and start a process, officials are obliged to issues them a 72 hours permit to move freely throughout Serbia. They use it to go from south, where most enter, towards north - Serbia/Hungary border, the entrance into the EU.
- The construction of the new walls and fences will force migrants to adjust their travel (once the crossing to Hungary is disabled, **the probable routes are through Bulgaria or Croatia**)
- The EU 28 member states are **required to accept asylum seekers** in proportion to the size of their economy, unemployment rate, and population. Very few countries however provided quotas so far.
- According to UNHCR's report given at the meeting mid-August, there is a **clear increase in vulnerable people crossing the border** (mothers pregnant and/or with small children, stranded, fainting, dehydrated, ill people); UNHCR is currently offering transport to the most vulnerable from Mirtovac to the one-stop center in Presevo



Temporary center in Presevo

- **Belgrade's urban area** has also seen an increase in the number of people transiting from the south (Presevo) to the north (Hungarian border); parks around the bus and rail stations in the Belgrade's center are full if migrants and refugees who wait there for a couple of days to catch a transport towards the Serbian-Hungarian border; There is a **constant presence of around 1,000 people daily**; the info center is opened in one of the parks by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights offering information on available services and assistance
- State protection is provided as well on the exit of Serbia near the town of Kanjiza, where the Red Cross is providing food and temporary shelter but the **capacities are overstretched** since this is currently the main point of entry (Hungary)
- The Government is expected to issue its activity plan on **how they plan to respond to the crisis in the next 7 months, along with the list of the most pressing needs**; the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is expected to share the list this or next week (CWS will report as soon it is released)
- As the winter approaches, and with the expectation that some of the current routes will not be easily accessible, special attention needs to be put on monitoring the town of Zajecar in Serbia (close to the Bulgarian border) that already sees **around 600 migrants and refugees daily** and was on the verge of declaring a state of emergency in July due to reports that around 40,000 migrants wait at the border with Bulgaria



Everyday sight in Belgrade's downtown area near the bust station

CWS's early response

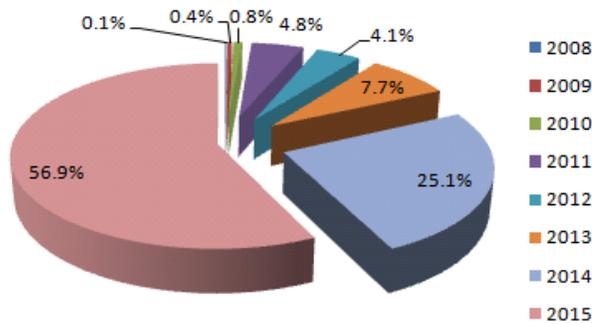
- CWS visited the south (areas of Bujanovac and Presevo) as well as the east (town of Zajecar) during its monitoring visit in August; further visits to the north (border with Hungary) are planned for the week of August 24 or 31)
- CWS's double container that was purchased for the educational program purposes will be redirected to one of the following points: either Kanjiza or Zajecar (depending on the final recommendation from the Red Cross). The container will be used by the Red Cross either for shelter or for the storage of medical and food supplies (to be confirmed)
- CWS also recommends assisting the Red Cross Bujanovac with the immediate fund of \$5,000. The Red Cross Bujanovac is currently providing 1,600 breads to migrants and refugees in the one-stop center in Presevo (the Red Cross Presevo doesn't have a soup kitchen nor necessary personnel) and 700 meals. Apart from the emergency response, the Red Cross Bujanovac is the second largest provider of food in Serbia: they have 1,200 soup kitchen beneficiaries daily (including the Roma settlement Salvatore with 600 and refugee and IDP settlement Veliki Trnovac with 104 beneficiaries) and also provide around 900 snacks to school and pre-children. Bujanovac is also one of the poorest communities in Serbia (along with Presevo), with rural areas consisting of around 90% elderly-headed households. The donation would be used for purchasing a car for distributing food to migrants and refugees in Presevo (80:20, the Red Cross would participate with \$2,000). The investment would secure not only the emergency capacity of the Red Cross to continue providing much needed assistance but would go beyond that in securing the sustainable delivery of food to the rest of the beneficiaries. The Red Cross Bujanovac currently rents the car to cover all the distributions.

Background

- In last few years, Serbia emerged as an important recipient country of migrants/asylum seekers (m/as). This major influx was caused dominantly by Syrian civil war - an estimated 9 million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of civil war in March 2011.

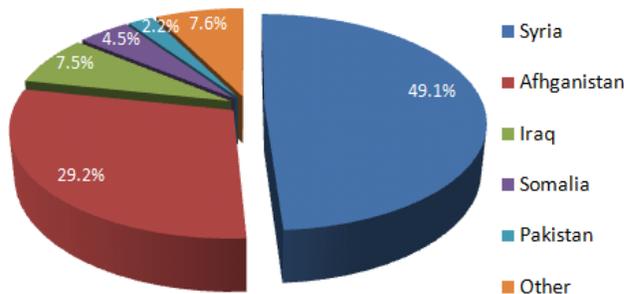
- From 2008 to 2011, Serbia received a couple of hundreds asylum applications per year, on average.
- In 2011 and 2012, the number grew to a couple of thousands
- The first sharp increase was evidenced in 2013 - 5,068.
- By the end of 2014, the number rose to 16,490.

% of Registered Asylum Seekers



- In Serbia 2015, half of registered migrants/refugees are from Syria (50%). Others come from Afghanistan (25%), Iraq (10%), Somalia (5%), Pakistan (2%) and other countries.

Country of Origin in 2015

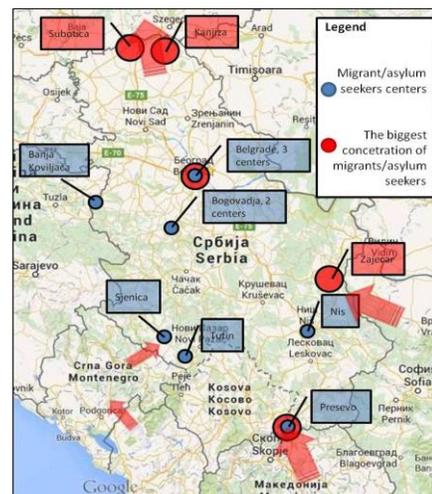


Routes

- In 2014/15, Serbia had become major passage on the South-East Europe route for m/as on their way to EU.
- The most usual route is **Turkey → Greece → Macedonia → Serbia → Hungary** and further towards the major destination countries: Germany, Norway, Sweden and other.

Shelters

- Currently, there are 5 regular and 2 temporary shelters in Serbia.
- The 5 regular centers are situated in Banja Koviljaca, Bogovadja, Sjenica, Tutin and Krnjaca (meant to provide accommodation for those in the process of asylum approval, although currently those center house many vulnerable women and men who just pass through Serbia).
- The 2 temporary centers are in Presevo and Kanjiza, although the Kanjiza center was recently established, lacking some services and organized support). The additional centers being established is the one in Miratovac (next to the border with



Major centers, concentration and routes

Macedonia) and the possible center that will be established near Belgrade (more info in the next SitRep).

Major Stakeholders (the list of activities will be updated as we gather more info):

Government:

- Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy
- Commissariat for Refugees and Migration

Local institutions

- Red Cross

International organizations

- UNHCR (mainly in Presevo/Miratovac)
- CRS (Kanjiza)
- Danish Refugee council
- Medicines sans frontiers (mainly Miratovac and Belgrade urban areas)
- IOCC (Bujanovac and Zajecar)
- ADRA

Local NGOs

- Philanthropy (intervention planned in Zajecar)
- Group 484 (migrant issues)
- Belgrade Center for Human Rights (providing translators)
- NSHC – Humanitarian center from Novi Sad (providing translators)
- Center for protection of and help to the asylum seekers
- Balkan center for migration and humanitarian activities
- ASTRA (anti trafficking)
- Atina (anti trafficking)

Rights Issues

- Currently, m/as are not interested in staying in Serbia. Their goal are western EU countries, and they are seeking asylum in Serbia only to have a legal permission to be in Serbia, and reach Serbia's northern border and entry point into EU (Hungary). In that sense, Serbian authorities are responsive as they see their role in helping migrants/asylum seekers reach EU.
- However, general feeling and expectations are that Serbia (for various reasons) is not ready to offer asylum and long-term support, that is to act in accordance to different international conventions (Serbia is a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol); and domestic laws (The Serbian Constitution provides for the right to asylum, and Serbia adopted its Law on Asylum in 2007).
- There are a number of informal reports on Serbian police officers asking m/as for cash. There are also official reports of trafficking in human beings, across Serbian-Hungarian border in particular.

Needs

Short-term: Fuel, Heating Devices, Winter Clothes

- With a surge of new arrivals, the needs are becoming greater in food/water, clothes, hygiene and medical support (waiting for the official list from the Commissariat)
- The main challenge will come with colder weather, as migrants and refugees are not dressed for winter. Winter will also slow down their travel, meaning that more pressure will be put on shelters/camps, which are also not prepared and well equipped, especially for winter - they lack proper heating (fuel, heating devices, blankets), as well as appliances, furniture...

Mid-term (Integration Programs)

- Serbia lacks proper integration programs. When (as expected) m/as start asking for asylum with intention to stay in Serbia, Serbia will probably fail in offering proper integration programs.

CWS Europe Next Steps

- Travel to north to access the situation

- Stay in close contact with stakeholders, especially ACT members to stay aware of their plans and programs and act in accordance to them
- Continue to attend UNHCR's meetings