

RAS

REFUGEE AID SERBIA

FIELD

Migration-related Context in Bosnia and Herzegovina

April 2018.

Field team of Refugee Aid Serbia (RAS), a partner of Oxfam, has been on exploratory mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) during the period of March 27th - March 30th in order to verify obtained information about the emerging migration routes through BiH.

Since the team's planned visit coincided with carrying out of the Multi-cluster/sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) coordinated in Sarajevo by UNHCR, RAS has, together with other organizations, participated in the assessment with the approval of the UNHCR in BiH.

This report is not supposed to replace MIRA and no information obtained during the collection of data in MIRA was used in compiling of this report.

The aim of this report is to help the improvement of the migration-related situation in BiH by informing all interested parties and stakeholders about the current developments, issues and gaps in provision of services along the newly-emerged migration route through BiH, and thereby call for the increase of support directed towards all actors in the field.

1. General migration context

Due to the fact that refugees and migrants arrive in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) via two different routes - one going through Turkey, Greece, Albania and Montenegro, the other through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia/Bulgaria and Serbia - their presence is recorded in urban areas along the eastern border, from Bijeljina, Višegrad, Goražde, Foča to Trebinje. Since the route from BiH towards EU countries leads through Croatia, presence of migrants attempting to leave BiH is documented mainly in the western areas, around Bihac and Velika Kladuša.

Urban areas where presence of migrants is noted serve as transit areas in which migrants rarely spend more than 24 hours, except in Velika Kladuša, which serves both as transit area and a place of prolonged stay¹.

However, most of refugees and migrants take residence in the capital of Sarajevo, which serves as a congregation point for significant majority of newly arrived persons who are entering BiH from neighboring countries, Serbia and Montenegro.

1.1 Sarajevo

Besides Velika Kladuša, where migrants manage to find shelter with the support of the local community, all locations in which migrants spend more than 24 hours are in Sarajevo or in its close proximity.

In Sarajevo accommodation is provided through several different sources - by the government, international organizations (which are active in Bosnia in cooperation with their local partners), volunteer groups, and local citizens.

Government runs two facilities in which migrants reside - Asylum center in Delijaš², and Immigration center in Sarajevo suburb of Lukavica, which represents a detention center.

UNHCR provides accommodation in 10 hostels across Sarajevo for those refugees and migrants who got registered but were not able to obtain access to government-run Asylum center - mainly due to the lack of capacities.

Volunteer groups provide accommodation in one house in Ilidža, while a local citizen provides accommodation for migrants in two houses in the

1 In Bosnian migration context, prolonged stay refers to the period of few weeks, less than 2 months

2 Near the city of Trnovo, some 40 km southeast of Sarajevo

2 village of Semizovac.

UNHCR field office, located in Sarajevo city center, is a gathering spot for newly arrived persons and those trying to obtain either the registration documents or accommodation.

2. Estimation of the size of migrant population in BiH

On March 30th, the estimated number of refugees and migrants residing on the territory of BiH was slightly below 1.000.

In all mentioned locations number of accommodated migrants varies daily, as the number of refugees and migrants entering BiH is exponentially increasing over the last four months - at the present reaching over 100 on the weekly basis.

According to the information provided by the Ministry of Security of BiH, 115 persons were residing in Asylum center in Delijaš (capacity 154) on March 30³. However, the exact number of persons residing in Immigration center in Lukavica is not publically disclosed (capacity of the centre is for over 100 migrants).

With the support of UNHCR, hostels in Sarajevo are accommodating close to 200 refugees and migrants, while around 120 are residing in objects run by volunteer groups and local citizens in Sarajevo.

Over the last couple of weeks the representatives of various international organizations have visited Velika Kladuša on several occasions and came out with estimated number of migrants ranging from 80 to 250.

3. Migration routes

Migrants are arriving in BiH traveling along two separate routes (one going through Turkey, Greece, Albania and Montenegro, the other through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia/Bulgaria and Serbia) leading towards the towns in the eastern BiH - from Bijeljina to Trebinje. However, there is a general distinction between those arriving from Serbia - who usually have some experience with asylum systems in the

region and are familiar with the migration context in the Western Balkans - and those arriving from Montenegro, who have no knowledge about the legal framework nor the current migration related developments. Additionally, among those individuals arriving via Montenegro, a high level of fatigue and exhaustion is reported, as they cover long distances through extremely rough terrain.

The entry routes connect in Sarajevo (except for the small number of people heading directly towards Velika Kladuša from Bijeljina) and lead towards Croatian border in three general directions - the main one towards Velika Kladuša and the other two towards Banja Luka in the north, and Croatian southern region of Dalmatia.

4. Legal framework

According to the law, a person can ask for asylum immediately, at the first contact with the Border Police or the Service for Foreigners' Affairs. Most migrants arriving in BiH get registered in the police station in Goražde, where they are being issued an attestation of the expressed intention to seek asylum, which provides 14-days timeframe to reach asylum center and get registered as an asylum seeker, thereby getting a "white card" (asylum seeker card).

However, obtaining residence in the only Asylum center, located in Delijaš, is currently practically impossible because of the center's nearly full capacity, which forces migrants to take residence outside the facilities of the asylum system and thereby being unable to maintain legal residence in BiH after the expiration of the 14-day timeframe.

Position of the government of BiH, conveyed by the representative of the Ministry of Security⁴, is that persons who have lost the right to legal residence in BiH are not anymore under the international protection which makes it unclear if the growing number of those residing outside the asylum system would have any access to basic services.

3 Information provided at the coordination meeting at UNHCR headquarters in Sarajevo, on March 30th

4 Ibid.

5. Available services and service providers

5.1 Shelter and accommodation

Asylum center in Delijaš

Asylum center in Delijaš is the only facility in BiH dedicated for accommodation of people in need of international protection. It currently provides shelter for 115 people. Despite the efforts of camp management to separately accommodate families, they often share rooms with “single men”, which causes security concerns, and often results in families leaving the center⁵.

Hostels in Sarajevo

In order to fill the gap created by a greater influx of people and inability of the government to provide adequate accommodation, UNHCR is currently renting several hostels in Sarajevo, thus meeting the needs for shelter for 150 to 200 refugees/migrants. This has to be seen as a temporary response to the emerging migration related situation, but not a long term sustainable solution. On March 27 and 28, UNHCR in collaboration with partner organisations conducted Multi-cluster/sector initial rapid assessment (MIRA) with an aim to make the national migration response strategy and support the government.

Accommodation provided in hostels which are hosting migrants is not any different than in other commercial residences in Sarajevo, and persons residing there are generally satisfied with the conditions, despite the fact that some migrants are forced to sleep on the floor due to the lack of capacities. In general, refugees and migrants reported that staff in the hostels is supportive and polite.

Alternative accommodation

Apart from the accommodation being provided by the government and UNHCR, volunteer groups are offering accommodation in a hotel-like facility in Ilidža, which is available exclusively for families, mainly those with expired registration documents.

Houses in Semizovac

3

An Egyptian landlord gave access to refugees in two houses located in the village of Semizovac, around 20 km Sarajevo. Within the residences, water and electricity are available. One house is hosting 35 people coming from different countries of origin (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), while in the other 25 Arabic-speakers, mainly originating from North African countries, took residence. Current separation between the ethnicities residing in the two houses is a consequence of previous disputes and conflicts between Arabs and non-Arabs.

RAS Field Team have been confirmed from several sources that dozens of migrants live on the streets or occupy public places, i.e. sleep inside university campuses, with some support of local community and volunteer groups. Migrants mentioned receiving a lot of support from local population in Sarajevo, offering them food and money.

Velika Kladuša

In Velika Kladuša, there is no official system for the support to the refugees and migrants, including the provision of shelter. Therefore, migrant population present in this area is completely dependent on the support from the local community.

5.1.1. Identified gaps

Current capacities in state-run facilities and in accommodation provided by UNHCR and volunteer groups are not sufficient for the number of new arrivals. Due to such circumstances, dozens of people, “single men”⁶ in particular, are forced to sleep rough, without reliable access to most basic services such as food, water, hygiene and sanitation.

The problem is compounded by the fact that those migrants who obtained registration document, but were not able to be accommodated in Asylum center are in serious risk of losing the legal status in BiH⁷, which further hinders their access to basic services.

Those who have lost the right to legal residence in BiH are oriented towards volunteer groups which are able to offer accommodation in very limited capacities and rely on unstable systems of fund-

5 Information provided at the coordination meeting at UNHCR headquarters in Sarajevo, on March 30th

6 Male migrants traveling without members of immediate family

7 According to the current legal framework in BiH, those individuals whose intent to seek asylum has been registered by the police, have legal timeframe of 14 days to obtain residence in the asylum center, or take residence which offers all the services available within the asylum center. Since hostels and local citizens are not able/willing to meet these requirements, those accommodated in commercial and private residences lose the legal status in BiH after the 14-day timeframe has expired.

ORGANIZATIONS	SERVICES								AREAS OF ACTIVITY
	Shelter	Food	NFI ¹	Protection	Legal aid	Medical care	MHPSS ²	Transport	
Government of BiH	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓ ³			Sarajevo, Delijaš
UNHCR	✓	✓		✓					Sarajevo
IOM				✓		✓	✓	✓	BiH ⁶
MSF ⁴			✓			✓	✓		BiH ⁷
Vaša prava BiH					✓				Sarajevo
BiH Women's Initiative		✓					✓		Sarajevo
Volunteer groups	✓	✓	✓					✓ ⁵	Sarajevo
Local community	✓	✓	✓					✓ ⁵	Sarajevo, Velika Kladuša ⁸

1 Non-food items

2 Mental health and psychosocial support

3 Medical services in asylum and immigration center in BiH are being provided in the primary health care centers

4 MSF is currently based in Serbia, however MSF is sporadically providing medical services in BiH

5 Primarily related to medical referrals within the single urban area

6 Two mobile teams

7 Mobile teams

8 Also, in smaller measure, throughout BiH

ing and support.

Lack of available accommodation provided by all actors is often the cause for increased risk towards the members of vulnerable groups, as they are sometimes forced to share rooms with groups of “single men”.

5.2 Food provision

At the moment, the amount and quality of food that one person is able to get is directly correlated to the place of her/his residence. Those living in state facilities and accommodation provided/supported by volunteers having meals three times per day. On the other hand, refugees/migrants residing in hostels are receiving only one dry meal per day. This assistance is sponsored by UNHCR, while distribution is carried out by their partner organisation BH Women’s Initiative. Groups of “single males” who are forced to spend several days on the streets of Sarajevo due to the lack of available accommodation, are usually getting one meal a day from volunteers which they, as those residing in hostels, consider not enough. As previously mentioned for the situation in Velika Kladusa, the only food providers are local citizens.

5.2.1. Identified gaps

All people residing outside official centers (Deliaš and immigration center in Lukavica) must rely on temporary and unsustainable food assistance. As it was the case with accommodation, UNHCR has taken provisional measures for food provision that in the future have to be replaced with systems providing stable and long-term support. Some migrants residing in hostels have complained that the only daily meal is being distributed at different times at different days, compounding to overall sense of insecurity.

Current supplies of food do not seem to be sufficient since many people in hostels and those staying outdoors are not able to afford to purchase meals. It is especially worrying that currently hundreds of people depend on the assistance received by volunteers and citizens, which is not carried out through any reliable and sustainable framework.

5.3 Non-food items distribution 5

Non-food items (NFI) are being primarily distributed by informal volunteer groups and local community. So far, no reliable system of detection of needs and distribution was established.

5.4 Protection

Protection-related services are being offered by UNHCR, on the territory of Sarajevo, and IOM across BiH through the presence of its two mobile teams.

5.4.1 Identified gaps

Although there is a clearly stated openness towards the establishment of cooperation and coordination between the different actors in the field, no coherent and reliable systems of referrals and protection monitoring are in place. Reasons behind this are primarily the fact that actors’ current capacities are not sufficient to meet the emerging increasing needs, passive response of the state institutions, but also the fact that, in absence of reliable system of shelter provision, majority of migrants in BiH reside in small groups, scattered throughout the urban areas.

One of the major gaps is the complete lack of involvement of Centers for Social Work in migration-related issues, including those involving unaccompanied minors and potential victims of gender-based violence⁸. Highest need for the involvement of Centers for Social work is detected in Velika Kladuša.

Based on the situation in the field, most migrants residing in small groups in commercial or private accommodation, or those sleeping rough in Sarajevo, have no contact with the teams providing protection-related services. Dynamics of the current situation, together with the lack of cooperation, primarily between the official organizations and volunteer groups, makes it essentially impossible to even map the areas in which persons of concern reside and frequent, which would be the first logical step in establishing the effective protection monitoring and introducing related services.

6 5.5 Legal aid

Free legal aid is being provided by Vaša Prava, an UNHCR partner NGO - which has provided legal counseling to 417 persons just in March 2018⁹ - and Free Legal Aid Office of the BiH Ministry of Justice, although their involvement in migration-related issues is not clear, as their presence was not detected in the field.

5.5.1 Identified gaps

It is clear that, despite the committed approach, capacities of the only NGO providing free legal aid would not be enough, because of the growing number of registrations, but also the current circumstances in which vast majority of registered migrants lose the legal residence in 14 days upon their arrival, without any deliberate breach of procedures.

Despite frequent and numerous request coming from those with expired registration documents to find a way regulate their residence in BiH, the government is currently unresponsive and sticking firmly to the narrow framework of the official asylum procedures.

5.6 Access to medical care

5.6.1 Primary health care

Current legislative framework in BiH guarantees access to primary health care for all asylum seekers. In practice, this is applicable only to persons accommodated in asylum center while vast majority of refugees/migrants who live outside of this facility have not been properly informed about of either the possibility or available options of accessing the primary health care services.

Vast majority of persons arriving in Sarajevo is in poor condition - mainly those seriously exhausted after a long travel through extremely rough terrain - have no opportunity to go through proper medical examination. Additionally, both NGOs and volunteers periodically identify persons suffering from chronic conditions and pregnant women in need of frequent and intensive medical attention. Occasional visits of MSF mobile teams have recorded increasing need of various specialised medical services, including psychological counselling.

Especially concerning is the position of the

government, conveyed by the representative of the Ministry of Security, that it does not regard those with expired registration documents as persons under the international protection, thereby preventing them from having access to primary health care services.

5.6.2 Mental health and psychosocial support

According to the current circumstances, and noted absence of reliable and sustainable systems of provision of basic services, provision of specialised services such as mental health and psychosocial support remains one of the main challenges for the actors in the field.

5.6.3. Identified gaps

Adequate and timely access to primary health care is currently available only to those individuals residing in Asylum center in Delijaš, which is about 12% of total migrant population in BiH at the moment. This issue is compounded by the fact that members of the most vulnerable groups often leave center because of inadequate living conditions and potential safety risks, and choose to reside outside the BiH asylum system.

Access to primary health care for all others residing in commercial or private accommodation or sleeping rough in Sarajevo and other areas is completely dependent on those actors providing basic services and support in these locations, level of their familiarity with the migration-related context and legal framework, and logistical capabilities.

There is no proper provision of access to secondary and tertiary health care and specialized services¹⁰, even in the asylum center, as the system of referrals and scope of jurisdiction of different medical centers is still being established and currently fully dependent on negotiation between the actors in the field and institutions of the health care system in BiH on a case-by-case basis.

5.7. Transportation

Transportation services are being provided by IOM mobile teams throughout BiH, and volunteers and members of the local community mainly within the scope of single urban area.

9 Information provided at the coordination meeting at UNHCR headquarters in Sarajevo, on March 30th
10 Ibid.

5.7.1. Identified gaps

Considering the fact that the only way to secure legal residence for more than 14 days is obtaining accommodation in the Asylum Center in Delijaš, and the fact that certain number of individuals entering BiH travel directly towards areas of Bihać and Velika Kladuša, bypassing Sarajevo, it is clear that limited capacities of teams able to provide transportation, particularly in western parts of BiH will contribute to worsening of the migration-related situation in these areas, when it comes to legal aspects, but also when it comes to the access to specialized health care services, available only in larger cities.

6. Projections

Based on the position taken by all organizations involved with the migration-related issues in BiH, but also statements provided by migrants present in BiH, it is certain that number of persons of concern in BiH would not decline, but will continue to gradually increase. This can be further confirmed by interviews conducted with migrants in Serbia, according to which the route leading to BiH is becoming one of the main options of consideration for those willing to leave Serbia.

The government of BiH has made it clear that they perceive BiH as a “transit country”, basing this on the fact that overwhelming majority of beneficiaries of asylum system declare no intention of remaining in BiH¹¹. In accordance to that, it is expected that the state institutions would remain passive when it comes to the issues emerging from the current legal framework and the needs of those persons who have lost legal residence and reliable access to basic services. Government representatives have, however, declared strong focus on the increase of the capacities within the asylum system, namely through renovation of abandoned army facilities or establishment of provisional reception facilities (declaring a price of 31 EUR per beneficiary per day)¹². These measures need to be seen primarily as the means to lower security risks and increase control of the migration flows through BiH.

None of the actors present in the field expect further increase of daily new arrivals, above the current one of approximately 100 a week. It is expected for the situation in Velika Kladuša and Bihać to grad-

ually deteriorate, if no adequate and reliable systems of support are being introduced. 7

Additionally, it has to be taken into consideration that majority of migrants arriving from Serbia already have experience of prolonged stay in countries in the region and have spent several months and up to a year within the asylum systems of neighboring states. Considering the known psychological impact of being exposed to specific living conditions inside camps and informal settlements for long periods of time, it is important to note the need for enhanced and informed approach towards these individuals in order to prevent further negative effects and avoid security risks, especially considering the previously mentioned issues with the access to basic services and accommodation.

7. Recommendations

Detailed recommendations for the improvement of the current migration-related situation in BiH are expected to be provided by UNHCR based on the findings of MIRA. Recommendations given below are aimed at state institutions, international organizations, local NGOs and donors in accordance to their respective spheres of influence and/or activities, and are based on information obtained during RAS Field team's 4-day fact-finding mission to BiH.

It is obvious that the crucial precondition for the improvement of both the detection of the needs and establishment of reliable and sustainable systems of provision of services and support is increased transparency, cooperation and coordination between all actors. Current state of separate “spheres of activities” between the official organizations and state institutions on one side and volunteer groups and local community on the other contributes to further deterioration of the situation.

The most urgent concerns are focused around provision of shelter and related legal issues. Without the possibility of rapid increase of capacities within the BiH asylum system that is in proportion to the current migration flows, it is clear that in order to avoid increasing numbers of persons residing outside the asylum system and without the right of legal residence, it is detrimental to either introduce the possibility of privately-run reception facilities, change the legal framework, or introduce informal

11 Information provided at the coordination meeting at UNHCR headquarters in Sarajevo, on March 30th
12 Ibid.

8 policies that would tolerate certain deficiencies of currently available systems of accommodation provision in commercial and private residences throughout BiH.

Distribution of food poses another critical challenge as it is impossible to imagine any effective system of food distribution in current conditions¹³ without the establishment of fixed distribution point in the accessible, public spots within the areas of prolonged stay. Current system of door-to-door distribution is not sustainable and would deteriorate in quality as the number of migrants and locations of their residence increases. From the nutritional standpoint, preparation and distribution of cooked meals is essential, but possible only within a system that involves fixed place of food preparation and fixed spot of its distribution.

Provision of information, protection-related services and legal aid is another gap that is mostly related to insufficient capacities at the disposal of international organizations and their local partners in BiH. This challenge can be overcome through closer cooperation, transparency and gradual increase of capacities. However, it has to be noted that working with persons with previous experience of prolonged stay in the neighboring countries requires additionally enhanced and informed type of approach, especially considering the specific migration-related legal circumstances in BiH. Input from organizations from the region dealing on a regular basis with persons affected by the circumstances of prolonged residence in reception facilities and informal settlements would be useful in creating the most effective approach and avoiding potential security risks.

13 With several hundred persons residing in groups of 15-60, residing in places of accommodation scattered throughout the wider Sarajevo area



MIGRATION ROUTES THROUGH BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- Transit areas
- Areas of prolonged stay
- Asylum center
- ▲ Immigration center

