

EUROPE'S REFUGEE SITUATION RESPONSE UPDATE #34

January 2017

HIGHLIGHTS

KEY FIGURES

6,860

Refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Europe in January 2017.

257

Refugees and migrants estimated to have died / gone missing at sea in 2017 compared to 361 in 2016.

1,393

Estimated sea arrivals in Greece in 2017 compared to 67,415 in 2016.

4,467

Estimated sea arrivals in Italy in 2017 compared to 5,273 in 2016.

798

Estimated unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) arrived by sea to Italy in 2017 compared to 25,846 total UASC in 2016.

USD 690.9M

Total 2017 requirements for UNHCR's activities in the context of the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe.

USD 70.5M

Funding received for UNHCR's activities thus far in Europe in 2017.

- Severe cold and heavy snow storms swept across **Greece** for much of January, dramatically intensifying challenges faced by refugees and migrants, significantly worsening living conditions and causing infrastructural damage in a number of sites. The Aegean islands, particularly Lesbos and Samos, suffered extreme weather. Conditions greatly deteriorated due to existing overcrowding and sub-standard shelter in the two Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) of Moria and Vathy. On 10 January, a State of Emergency was announced for the Evros region in the North East. UNHCR expressed its concern about protection and security gaps, particularly for Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs) and Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC). The slow full registration of asylum claims and pace of asylum procedures significantly exacerbated overcrowding on the islands, leading to increased tensions.
- In January 2017 in **Italy**, 4,467 persons arrived by sea (compared to 5,273 who arrived in January 2016) and mainly originate from sub-Saharan African countries but also from Morocco and Bangladesh. Some 95 per cent departed from Libya. Numerous tragedies at sea occurred in the Mediterranean in the first month of 2017, mainly due to unfavourable weather conditions and rough seas.



*In Greece, as heavy snow falls on Lesbos vulnerable refugees are moved to warm accommodation.
January 2017 © UNHCR/Pavlos Avagianos*

PRIORITIES

- Boost reception capacity, winterize shelter facilities and provide emergency assistance in receiving countries through support for States, civil society and local communities.
- Strengthen protection systems and support access to asylum for those in need of international protection.
- Ensure access to durable solutions for persons found to be in need of international protection.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Trends on arrivals

In January 2017, 4,467 persons arrived to Italy by sea. The numbers of monthly sea arrivals are comparable to the same period last year (5,273 persons arrived in January 2016). Among them, there were some 800 UASC, corresponding to 18 per cent of total sea arrivals in January. The majority of the new arrivals mainly originated from sub-Saharan African countries - 19 per cent from Côte d'Ivoire; 17 per cent from Guinea; 11 per cent from Nigeria; 10 per cent from Senegal; 8 per cent from The Gambia; 6 per cent from Mali - but also from Morocco (6 per cent) and Bangladesh (5 per cent). Harsh weather conditions and rough seas led to several tragedies in the Mediterranean and 257 persons overall (222 in Central Mediterranean) have been reported dead or missing in January.

In Greece, it is estimated that there were 1,393 sea arrivals on the Aegean islands in January. This constituted a sharp decrease compared to the 67,415 people who arrived in January 2016, but remained roughly at the levels of December 2016 when 1,665 arrived.

In the South Dodecanese islands, on Kastelorizo, 264 people mostly from refugee-producing countries arrived in January. This followed a trend of increased arrivals to the island that had begun in December 2016.

Relocation

In January 2017, 551 persons were transferred from Italy to Germany, Latvia, The Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Spain, bringing the total of relocations from Italy to 3,205 since the beginning of the relocation scheme as of 31 January (8 per cent of the 39,600 target). In the first month of 2017, Italy received 851 pledges from states participating in the scheme. No UASC has been relocated from Italy as a procedure is yet to be developed.

In the context of sea arrivals in Italy, UNHCR supported the intra-European relocation programme by providing advice and counselling support to potential beneficiaries prior to their transfer to reception facilities. Regional hubs set up to accommodate relocation candidates were, however, at full capacity. As a consequence, candidates are dispersed throughout the national territory. Gaps in relation to registration capacity and training at decentralized locations persisted. In the reporting period, UNHCR carried out missions to reception facilities in the Rome area, where relocation candidates are accommodated. UNHCR continued to liaise with the competent authorities to ensure prompt registration of candidates and adequate follow-up of individual cases, including those of persons who have long waited to be transferred and candidates with specific needs. In terms of UASC relocation, UNHCR liaised with the Italian authorities to discuss a possible way forward to overcome current procedural hurdles while ensuring respect for the best interests of the child principle.

Member States welcomed 1,132 asylum-seekers from Greece under the relocation mechanism and pledged 1,550 new places in January 2017. At the end of January, over 8,400 relocation candidates had departed or were scheduled to depart from Greece to another EU Member State.

Situation overview in Greece

As temperatures plummeted across Greece, hundreds of refugees and migrants accommodated in unheated shelter and tents tried by all means to stay warm. This created fire hazards in overcrowded sites like RIC Vathy on Samos. UNHCR supported winterization at the RICs and other centres on the islands and on mainland Greece, with Core Relief Items (CRIs), improvements in accommodation such as pre-fabricated houses and transfers out of tents, winter kits, the installation of heaters and insulations. It has also supported the Greek Government in transferring people without a geographical restriction from the islands to the mainland, alleviating the pressure on the islands.

Between 20 March 2016 and 31 January 2017, Greek authorities recorded 23,829 expressions of will to apply for asylum on the Aegean islands and the Asylum Service (AS) registered 11,044 border procedure applications. Long waiting periods led an increasing number of people attempting to depart from the islands to the mainland and abandon their asylum claims. The AS noted some 1,000 withdrawals by the end of January 2017. Full registration progressed for Syrians and

nationalities with a recognition rate under 25 per cent, but authorities began systematically registering nationalities over 25 per cent, such as Afghans and Iraqis, only in January. Some have waited nine months for registration since 20 March 2016. The pace of full registration picked up in January with the increase in AS personnel. On the mainland, full registration of pre-registered asylum-seekers was expected to be completed by 15 March (one month ahead of initial projections), since interpretation for Kurmanji was increased through EASO support in January and the lodging of claims is being accelerated. UNHCR is supporting the speeding up of lodging, through transportation and a functioning system of scheduling interviews.

In January, seven new Appeals Committees became operational, reaching a total of 12, with the participation of one out of the three members designated by UNHCR. By 22 January, 2,615 appeals against first instance decisions on inadmissibility and in the regular asylum procedure had been submitted. Adjudication of appeals by Syrians against an inadmissibility decision at the first instance delayed, as the outcome of the litigation at the Council of State level is still pending. UNHCR closely monitors procedures at the appeals stage in order to assess the quality, given that, so far, they present a recognition rate below 1 per cent.

In January, under the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March, 64 people (including 27 Syrians) were re-admitted back to Turkey. Out of the 27 Syrians, 14 had withdrawn their asylum claim and 13 revoked their intention to apply for asylum.

Situation overview in Italy

On 31 January, 174,573 persons were accommodated in the reception centres in Italy: 136,729 (78 per cent) in temporary reception facilities; 14,026 (8 per cent) in first line reception centres; 23,107 (13 per cent) in second line facilities, i.e. the so-called SPRAR (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers) centres; and 711 persons (0.4 per cent) in the four operational hotspots (Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Taranto, and Trapani).

In early January 2017, a regulation setting out mechanisms and criteria for the multi-disciplinary age assessment of children who have been victims of trafficking entered into force, implementing the provisions of EC Directive 2011/36/EU. Over the years, UNHCR had advocated and lobbied for the adoption of a multi-disciplinary age assessment. UNHCR will further advocate for the regulation's principles to apply to all UASC.

UNHCR's activities in terms of sea arrivals and hotspots continued under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)-funded ACCESS project and in close cooperation with the Government and other partners. In northern Italy, UNHCR has deployed a team to conduct missions to areas near the borders near Austria, France, Slovenia and Switzerland to assist the authorities in providing persons in transit with information on the asylum and relocation procedures, to conduct capacity building activities on asylum and relocation for local authorities and NGOs, and to monitor access to such procedures. In southern Italy, UNHCR deployed 10 teams to monitor disembarkation procedures and provide information and counselling support on asylum.

UNHCR activities in January included:

- 1) advising competent authorities on strengthening the reception system;
- 2) cooperating with the Government for the purposes of adopting monitoring and evaluation methodologies to be applied in the reception context;
- 3) working with the authorities to promote good practices on best interest assessment and determination of UASC;
- 4) coordinating with UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Save the Children through information-sharing on activities undertaken;
- 5) participating directly in refugee status determination in the decentralised Territorial Commissions and advising the Government on the reform of the asylum system (48 Territorial Commissions are currently operational);
- 6) delivering EASO training to members of Territorial Commissions, focusing on the interpretation and application of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its relation to the recast EU Qualification Directive;
- 7) supporting the Government in coordinating the response to the arrival of persons seeking international protection, e.g., participating in the National Coordination Group of the Ministry of Interior (MoI), advising key governmental counterparts in policy formulations and legislative developments.

Most of these activities were either funded by the Government of Italy or by EU AMIF.

Situation overview in Serbia

The number of new asylum-seekers and migrants in Serbia rose from 7,000 to above 7,800: 47 per cent were children, 37 per cent men, and 16 per cent women. 81 per cent had fled from: Afghanistan (52 per cent), Iraq (20 per cent), Syria (9 per cent), 19 per cent other countries. 85 per cent of them were accommodated in 17 heated governmental centres, while the others were counted sleeping rough in Belgrade City.

Winter weather conditions with prolonged sub-zero temperatures threatened refugees and migrants not accommodated in heated governmental shelters. Authorities publicly invited them to move to shelters. While in the North, most asylum-seekers camping outside the Hungarian transit zones moved to the transit centre in Subotica, in Belgrade over 1,200 men continued sleeping in derelict buildings/warehouses in the city centre. On 14 January, the Government instructed authorities to urgently prepare new temporary emergency shelter and UNHCR immediately supported the refurbishment of an empty army compound in Obrenovac near Belgrade. Intensified communication with the refugee/migrant community with consolidated information led to a first voluntary transfer of 170 unaccompanied or separated boys from Belgrade city centre to Obrenovac on 17 January.

Asylum-seekers in Serbia expressed concern over the reduction of the number of people admitted to Hungary through the two transit zones since 23 January (now to 50 per week as compared to 210 per week until 02 November 2016), with many indicating that they will now try to cross the border irregularly instead of waiting for regular admission. In this context, in January UNHCR and partners received reports of almost daily testimonies on collective expulsions from Hungary (700) and Croatia (60) into Serbia after entering these countries irregularly and reportedly without having been granted access to asylum procedures there.

In January, 584 intentions to seek asylum in Serbia were registered: 48 per cent by men, 12 per cent by women, and 40 per cent by children. Applications were filed by citizens of Afghanistan (50 per cent), Iraq (17 per cent), Syria (13 per cent), Pakistan (10 per cent), or other countries (10 per cent). No first-instance decisions were issued.

Situation overview in Hungary

Some 503 people entered Hungary in January out of which 133 were apprehended by the police inside the country after crossing the border irregularly, while 370 people entered through the transit zones on the border with Serbia. The police reported that 3,561 people have been prevented from accessing the Hungarian territory. A total of 2,017 people were blocked as they were attempting to cross the border irregularly and 1,544 were intercepted inside Hungary and escorted back to the other side of the border fence.

On 23 January, the Immigration and Asylum Office (IAO) - formerly called the Office of Immigration and Nationality (OIN) - further decreased the rate of daily admissions to some five persons per day in each transit zone. IAO staff members were reportedly instructed to conduct more thorough interviews with the Constitution Protection Office also taking more active part, therefore they reduced the daily intake of asylum applications in order to cope with the increased workload. Meanwhile, the number of IAO staff members working at each transit zone has been reduced to three (down from five at Rösztke and seven at Tompa).

The Government announced major changes to be introduced to the national legal framework on asylum and amendments are currently being drafted. According to Government statements, detention will be extended to everyone arriving irregularly for the length of the assessment of the asylum application and until a final court decision is issued. The Ministry of Justice is tasked by the Government to prepare the necessary measures giving effect to the announcement, however it remains unclear what the plans will exactly entail, both in terms of legal amendments and implementation arrangements. Meanwhile, measures are also underway to further strengthen the existing border fence.

On 30 January, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visited the fence along the Serbian border and Rösztke transit zone. He stated that strengthening control at the southern border is inevitable and affirmed that the border 'defense' must be modern and efficient.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS AND IDENTIFIED NEEDS

Protection, Humanitarian Assistance and Technical Support

Greece

Achievements and Impact

- Improving living conditions continued to be the number one priority for humanitarian actors in Greece. UNHCR actively supported the Greek Government, under the coordination of the Ministry for Migration Policy (MoMP), in moving people to improved accommodation, and intensified efforts to install prefabricated houses, heaters, and distribute winter items such as blankets, sleeping bags, winter clothes, and footwear.
- UNHCR, directly and through partners, distributed over 28,000 CRIs to nearly 13,000 people on five islands and three sites on the mainland. Since early October, UNHCR has delivered over 240,000 essential items, including for winter on seven islands and 47 sites across Greece. On the islands, UNHCR continued to provide improved accommodation, winter kits, and installed heaters and insulations. Across Greece, over 4,000 people have been accommodated in 783 pre-fabricated houses out of 1,400 planned countrywide. Under its humanitarian response to winter, UNHCR assisted authorities in the transfer of 1,400 people from the Greek islands to improved shelter on the mainland and UNHCR's Relocation and Accommodation Scheme. Countrywide, 25,112 people had benefitted from UNHCR accommodation by the end of January and 19,129 places were available.
- On 09 January, in the midst of severe weather conditions on Lesbos, UNHCR, in coordination with authorities and in collaboration with local partner Iliaktida, evacuated 130 people from official sites to hotels on the island. In coordination with the Greek Government, vulnerable asylum-seekers registered with the AS were accommodated in hotels until they received appropriate documentation to travel and continue their asylum process on the mainland. All pregnant women and babies, elderly and people with disabilities or serious medical conditions, and families with children living in tents were transferred to hotels. UNHCR Lesbos prioritized and transferred 683 from RIC Moria to improved accommodation at the Kara Tepe site, private accommodation, and 170 people to a navy vessel provided by the Greek Government as an emergency measure for protection from the cold.
- In northern Greece, authorities with support from UNHCR and partners, transferred 612 people from the warehouse sites of Sindos-Frankapor, SK Market-Kalochori, Sindos-Karamanlis, and Oreokastro to hotels. The transferred people were relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers, particularly families.
- In January 2017, UNHCR and its implementing partners (IPs) provided cash assistance to over 24,000 persons of concern (PoCs) in UNHCR-supported accommodation and in 13 sites across Greece.
- In January 2017, UNHCR has provided through its IPs – the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), the Ecumenical Refugee Programme - legal assistance to 90 PoCs in detention, 486 asylum-seekers in open accommodation facilities, 53 beneficiaries of IPs, and 803 asylum-seekers for family reunification under Dublin procedures. Moreover, UNHCR (through partners Metadrasi and GCR) continued the provision of legal assistance at the appeal stage of the asylum procedures having assisted 2,615 asylum applicants and 431 UASC from 15 July 2016 until 31 January 2017.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- UNHCR remains concerned about the delay in appointment of permanent directors for the RICs, which affected the pace of procedures, coordination, and decision making in the RICs. The lack of permanent directors, indirectly delayed transfers to improved accommodation which increased protection risks, particularly for PSNs. By 12 January, Greek authorities recorded 24,782 intentions to apply for asylum on the Aegean islands, since the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March.
- Delays persisted in transfers of the new arrivals to the RIC Fylakio (Evros) in North East mainland Greece, often leading to prolonged detention in police facilities with substandard conditions. Additionally, the limited capacity of the RIC and slow transfers to open accommodation sites exacerbated the situation. On 21 January, UNHCR undertook a mission to identify and prioritize PSNs. At reporting, 46 children out of some 140 people at RIC Fylakio were particularly affected by difficult conditions and a prolonged stay.

- Significant concerns arose from the lack of reception facilities there and the overwhelmed capacity on Rhodes, where many Kastelorizo arrivals were transferred. On Rhodes, new arrivals were accommodated in a dilapidated building, former slaughterhouse, at Sfageia, where very basic amenities were available and support was provided by local volunteers. Conditions there deteriorated daily, particularly with inclement weather and lack of heating. UNHCR stepped up support at Sfageia, particularly in the distribution of winter items.
- In the RICs, half of women consulted by UNHCR reported encountering or observing some kind of sexual violence or harassment inside the RIC. UNHCR, authorities, and partners are continually working on awareness raising, prevention and response to SGBV.

The Western Balkans and Hungary

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Achievements and Impact

- At the beginning of January, there were 160 PoCs in Tabanovce and Vinojug transit centres: 68 (15 women, 19 men, 16 girls, 18 boys) in Tabanovce and 90 (20 women, 23 men, 19 girls, 30 boys) in Vinojug. In the reporting period, onward movement from TC Tabanovce continued. At the end of the month, there were 154 PoCs in the two transit centres: 85 (17 women, 31 men, 16 girls, 21 boys) in Tabanovce and 69 (17 women, 16 men, 14 girls, 22 boys) in Vinojug.
- UNHCR continued daily monitoring visits to the reception centre for asylum-seekers in Vizbegovo.
- On 12 January at the National Cinemathique in Skopje, the UNHCR Skopje Representation and the Crisis Management Centre jointly opened an exhibition of drawings titled "Escape to a better tomorrow" created by the Syrian refugees Shergo Musa and Nazli Abdou during their stay at Vinojug. The two Syrian artists were present at the opening with their families and gave statements to the media. The exhibition was on display until 25 January 2017 and was a positive occasion to bring the refugees' experience of the crisis closer to the public through artistic expression.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Push-back operations still posed important risks for refugees and migrants as they take place outside of any legal procedure. This often led to the continued resort to smugglers, a trend which has been increasing. Smuggling, posed additional specific risks to refugees and migrants, exposing them to risks such as trafficking, kidnap, detention, extortion, and physical assaults.
- Due to extreme weather conditions in the beginning of January, the authorities in TC Tabanovce opened the TC and started admitting new arrivals. The admission was informal, without registration taking place and documents being issued to newcomers, but it did lead to a short-lived decrease in push-backs. However, by the middle of the month, as conditions improved, the authorities abandoned the practice and reverted to not admitting new arrivals and occasionally pushing back those who would show up at the TC. This left those moving irregularly through the country with no other option but to seek shelter in the villages around the TC or to revert to using smugglers' channels or attempt to cross into Serbia and further north on their own accord.
- A single instance of persons being denied access to the asylum procedure has once again been noted in the first week of January, as two men from Syria and Palestine were denied and were pushed back to Greece. It was another worrying manifestation of the arbitrary denial of access to the procedure, which happens sporadically and for no particular reason, blocking any legal channel through which persons crossing through the country can regularize their stay and find more permanent solutions to their situations.

Serbia

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR and partners strongly supported authorities by swiftly refurbishing an old army compound in Obrenovac near Belgrade, to accommodate refugee and migrant men and boys in the city centre. On 17 January, the first transfers to the new facility started and, by the end of January, 570 men and boys were accommodated there. On 29 January, the Obrenovac centre was officially opened by the Ministries of Interior, Defence and Labour, and the UNHCR Representative.

- With UNHCR's support, authorities achieved an increase in shelter capacities and occupancy (from 5,830 to 6,460). The number of governmental centres accommodating asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants in the country increased to 17 (from 16 in December).
- UNHCR continued its winterization support and through its partners distributed over 1,800 blankets, 800 winter jackets, 550 pairs of footwear, 1,800 track suits, and thousands of other clothing items for adults and children.
- UNHCR and partners continued to support registration and provided transport for 355 newly registered asylum-seekers from Belgrade to governmental asylum centres.
- UNHCR and nine partners continued protection and border monitoring and interventions, some 24/7, including: the identification and referral of several hundred PSNs to child-welfare; medical, registration; facilitating reunification of split families at 20 refugee sites all around the country.
- On 17 January at the "14th Partners Briefing", UNHCR, together with the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy informed over 60 members of the diplomatic and donor community, civil society, international organizations and other stakeholder about the UN response to the refugees and migrants situation. The briefing focused on the current winter situation in Serbia and appealed to potential donors to fund the Serbia chapter of 2017 Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for Europe.
- On 23 January at a press event in Belgrade, UNHCR, IOM, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Serbia, the State Secretary, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy launched the Serbia chapter of the RMRP. Well-attended by media and potential donors, this event was followed by a press release.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Despite the efforts of authorities, UNHCR and humanitarian partners to resolve the situation of refugees and migrants in poor conditions in Belgrade city centre by offering transportation to government shelters, a number migrant men and boys opted to remain in the city, thereby exposing themselves to potential protection risks.
- UNHCR is awaiting agreement from the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and Migration to extend Best Interest Assessments (BIAs) conducted by authorities, UNHCR and partners for UASCs in Presevo and Bujanovac reception centres to all other 15 governmental centres. In addition to BIAs, profiling and identification for potential resettlement and/or family reunification should also be considered.
- As interest in IOM Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) is rising, AVR to Afghanistan still requires enhanced cooperation by Afghan authorities. UNHCR assistance to registration, asylum and other protection-sensitive procedures also aims at supporting authorities putting in place procedures to determine migrants not in need of international protection, who should be lawfully re-admitted to Bulgaria or Greece or returned to their countries of origin.
- Some 2,000 school-aged refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children now residing in Serbia for many months can no longer miss out on proper schooling. UNHCR and UNICEF are appealing for funding to enable authorities to enrol them in schools.
- The main health issues among refugees and migrants were respiratory infections, psychosocial conditions, as well as family planning. Body lice and scabies have been eradicated from almost all centres, however, they remain inflicting residents of centres with sanitary issues that are easily accessed by inflicted persons, such as Sid transit centre, as well as the men squatting in Belgrade city centre.

Croatia

Achievements and Impact

- All asylum-seekers' children of school age accommodated in the reception centre Zagreb (Porin) are now attending primary school. In addition to eight previously enrolled children, with the beginning of the new semester, 28 children joined the local elementary school near the centre. The MoI and the Jesuit Refugee Service (UNHCR's IPs) have been organizing their transport to/from school.
- In January, UNHCR joined the inter-agency working group on drafting the new Protocol on Protection of UASC, led by the MoI. The working group shall meet on a weekly basis.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- On 02 January, a group of asylum-seekers staged a protest outside Porin reception centre in Zagreb as the police allegedly had not taken actions following several incidents. One of the incidents occurred on New Year's Eve when unidentified assailants wielding baseball bats attacked several asylum-seekers outside the centre. On 10 January, Zagreb police reported on arrests of two Croatian citizens charged with assault on the asylum-seekers. Several NGOs have described the attacks to be racially-motivated hate crimes. UNHCR continues to monitor the developments.
- On 20 January, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that the Croatian police is forcing asylum-seekers back to Serbia, in some cases using violence, without giving them an opportunity to lodge claims for protection. HRW interviewed 10 people from Afghanistan, including two unaccompanied children who claimed being forced back to Serbia since November 2016 after being apprehended on Croatian territory. They said they were denied the right to lodge asylum claims even though they wanted to seek asylum. Nine said the officers kicked and punched them, and all said that the officers took personal items, including money or mobile phones (full statement in English: <http://bit.ly/2k9cLej>). Consequent reports have been issued by the local NGOs confirming HRW findings. The claims have been dismissed by the Croatian MoI. UNHCR is continuously communicating its concerns over the information and reports received from UNHCR Serbia and IPs on access to territory and system of asylum with the Ministry for its interventions.

Slovenia

Achievements and Impact

- The proposed restrictive amendments to the Aliens Act (first introduced in November 2016) were passed in January 2017. [UNHCR issued comments on the amendments in December](#) as well as started monitoring the developments as soon as the drafts of the proposals were available. Contrary to the first version of the proposed amendments, the adopted ones did not include a restrictive interpretation of a minor, stemming from the Slovenian Criminal Code. In its comments, UNHCR specifically addressed the need for the definition of a minor to be understood as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was taken into account in the later drafts. The Aliens Act after the amendments would allow Slovenia to limit access to territory to asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants in the event of extraordinary circumstances. Access to territory would be allowed for unaccompanied children and most vulnerable. All irregular arrivals would be able to register an intention to seek international protection; however if they do not fall into one of the vulnerable categories, they would be sent back to the country from which they entered the country irregularly. The restrictive provisions in the Act could be activated with a simple majority in the National Assembly.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- UNHCR is concerned that the MoI, who proposed the amendments, has so far not shared a contingency plan nor a clear overview of capacities needed for the implementation of the restrictive measures. At the moment, it is unknown how complementary services will be provided (appropriate reception facilities, care, and legal aid) in case the provisions are activated. The MoI has not consulted with relevant stakeholders in the planning of the amendments or the contingency plan. Currently no information on a budget for the implementation of the amendments is available. UNHCR will be discussing different scenarios with the relevant stakeholders at the upcoming Refugee Protection Working Group.

Hungary

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR staff members are present in Röszke and Tompa transit zones to monitor the admission procedure, coordinate referral of vulnerable cases to advocate for their prioritized entry to Hungary as well as to coordinate referrals of asylum-seekers who miss their turn to enter due to reasons beyond their control. UNHCR provided information to people waiting outside and to those admitted into the transit zones, including on the national asylum procedure and related rights and obligations. UNHCR also collected information on travel routes and push-back incidents.
- UNHCR and its partner the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) issued a new information leaflet in seven languages aimed at providing asylum-seekers entering Hungary via the transit zones with information about the

border procedures, the asylum process, their rights and obligations and available services. UNHCR has started distributing leaflets to the asylum-seekers inside the transit zones.

- On 09 January, UNHCR met with the Institute of Minority Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Centre for Social Services) to discuss the findings of the integration research carried out in 2016. The research was initiated with the aim to explore the integration process of refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and stateless people in Hungary, based on qualitative interviews and in-depth analysis of the situation of 50 PoCs.
- UNHCR Hungary is coordinating with NGOs and local aid groups to complement the assistance currently provided to the people awaiting admission to the transit zones by UNHCR Serbia and its partners. IAO continued to provide daily cold food packages both inside the transit zones and in the waiting areas, while several Hungarian NGOs contributed by distributing food and Non-Food Items (NFIs). SOS Children's Village doctors continued to provide health care for the children awaiting admission and the children already admitted into the transit zones. Sirius Help continued to distribute food and NFIs (cooking oil, tuna cans, fresh fruits and vegetables, clothes, and shoes) in the waiting areas of both transit zones. Moreover, the Community of Sant'Egidio distributed food items, (including fresh vegetables, canned food, sugar, rice, pasta, cooking oil, and tea) in the waiting areas in both transit zones.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gap

- The Regional Director of the IAO in Szeged barred aid organizations from distributing fuel, including sawdust briquettes to people in the waiting area outside the transit zones despite the severe cold weather. He stated that any distribution of fuel across the border would breach tax and customs regulations and is therefore not authorized.
- The HHC is currently denied access to the closed accommodation (detention) section in the transit zones and only authorized to meet asylum-seekers with whom a power of attorney was already signed. As a result, asylum-seekers who had not already signed a power of attorney with the HHC lawyer in the transit zones remain without access to independent legal services provided by HHC. The Deputy Director of IAO stated that access to legal assistance is adequately ensured through the representatives of the Office of Justice present on a daily basis in the transit zones. UNHCR is monitoring the availability and quality of the state legal aid service while anxiety and uncertainty prevails among single men held in the transit zones due to the increased number of direct returns in January.
- UNHCR monitored detention and reception facilities in Hungary and visited Békéscsaba and Kiskunhalas asylum detention centres, Vámoszabadi reception centre, and Körmend tented camp. Many of the detained asylum-seekers were awaiting transfers under Dublin, most of them to Bulgaria and some to Germany or Austria. Kiskunhalas provides adequate conditions while the hygiene and sanitation situation in Békéscsaba has deteriorated with detained asylum-seekers complaining about skin rashes and bed bugs as well as receiving damaged and worn pillows, blankets and sheets. IAO continues to operate the tented camp in Körmend which remains unsuitable to host asylum-seekers even for a short period of time, especially during the freezing weather conditions. IAO is not preventing any interventions by civil organizations promoting the transfer of applicants to other facilities. Oltalom Charity provided accommodation for some 10 asylum-seekers in the Budapest based homeless shelter while the vicar of Körmend supported asylum-seekers by providing temporary accommodation and basic food items in the community shelter of the church. Vámoszabadi renovation works includes painting of the building, upgrading the heating system and insulation of the walls. Nevertheless asylum-seekers complained that they were accommodated in poor sanitary conditions with dirty rooms. Turn-over remains high, residents usually leave the country irregularly towards Western Europe after two-four days of their arrival.
- On 18 January, the Minister of State for Government Communication announced that the Children's Village in Fót will be closed by 30 June 2018. The closure is announced as a result of the restructuring of the Hungarian child protection regime which will no longer provide accommodation in large institutions. No decision has been made about the placement of unaccompanied children.

Working in partnership

In line with the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), UNHCR supports the government's coordination efforts at central and local level in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Turkey. In Hungary, UNHCR chairs a coordination forum including UN agencies, IGOs, NGO partners and non-state institutions. This includes support to crisis management teams and facilitation of general and sectoral coordination meetings. Besides cooperation with governments, UNHCR also operates closely with the European Commission and relevant EU Agencies, including Frontex and EASO. A full list of partners is available [here](#).

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2016 (RMRP), co-led by UNHCR and IOM, brings together more than 60 UN agencies and NGOs in response to the refugee and migrant crisis affecting Southern Europe and the Western Balkans.

As of 10 February 2017, the RMRP is 10 per cent funded; USD 70.5 million in earmarked contributions have been received against USD 690.9 million in total requirements.

UNHCR is appealing for USD 332.8 million under the framework of the RMRP, against which USD 29.1 million in earmarked contributions has been received (10 per cent funded).

Detailed funding information on the RMRP (inter-agency and UNHCR-specific) is available [here](#).

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to its operations in response to the emergency response in Europe, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unrestricted and broadly earmarked funds.

Major donors of unrestricted and regional funds to UNHCR in 2016: [Sweden \(76 M\)](#) | [Netherlands \(52 M\)](#) | [Norway \(41 M\)](#) | [Denmark \(23 M\)](#) | [Australia \(19 M\)](#) | [Switzerland \(15 M\)](#)

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Links:

UNHCR, [Rescue boat scours sea for flimsy craft](#), 31 January.

UNHCR, [Desperate refugees and migrants in Serbia face freezing temperatures](#), 25 January.

UNHCR, [UNHCR, IOM and partners launch new plan to respond to Europe's refugee and migrant situation](#), 19 January.

UNHCR, [UNHCR lauds Europe's rescue efforts in Mediterranean Sea](#), 15 January.

UNHCR, [UNHCR calls for help for refugees facing European winter freeze](#), 13 January.

UNHCR, [Faster movement of people from Greek islands to mainland essential](#), 06 January.

UNHCR, <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php> (webportal accessible via Google Chrome or Firefox only).