

1. Overall Situation

The Republic of Serbia is facing a humanitarian crisis, rapidly and dramatically increasing every day. 115,000 migrants from war affected areas in Asia and Africa passed Serbian territory since the beginning of the year. Most of them are from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Eritrea and Ghana. During July and August, 1100 - 2000 migrants pass through north borders in Serbia daily, with an aim to reach south border with Hungary as soon as possible. There are 3 points of entrance: Presevo (Tabanovci) on Macedonian border (90%), Zajecar and Pirot near Bulgarian border (9%) and Sjenica and Tutin near Montenegro border (1%).

The Western Balkans countries witness mighty inflow of refugees. Serbia being recognized as under exceptional pressure, now and in the next months, is due several reasons.

The Western Balkans countries are bound by international agreements they signed (all EU countries are signatories the Dublin III regulation, non-EU countries are signatories of multilateral Agreements on Readmission). However, presently, most key western Balkans countries on the route are not acting according to these internationally assumed obligations toward providing asylum seeking. Turkey has declared a moratorium on their Agreement on Readmission, Greece renounces its obligation due to dramatic internal economic and political crisis, Bulgaria does not register them and simply pass them on to Serbia, Macedonia is refusing to accept asylum seekers, and Hungary has officially announced suspension of the Dublin III regulation. In addition, a wall has started being built at the border with Serbia to physically disable asylum seekers to illegally cross the border and enter Hungary.

So far, Serbia has been the only country following its obligations, offering asylum seeking and accepting persons who get returned to Serbia on the basis of the agreement on readmission.

Applications of intent to seek asylum have risen above 1,100 per day. 29,037 applications were submitted in July, compared to 15,209 in June and 9,034 in May. As at end-July, 66,428 applications have been filed since the beginning of the year, of whom 95% originated from refugee-producing countries, including 57% from Syria, 23% from Afghanistan, and 7% from Iraq.

As at 3 August, 3,017 applications have been registered this month. It is estimated that an equal number of refugees transit through the country without registering with the authorities.

As at end-July, the number of registered refugee women and children is 11,048, an increase of 115% since end-June. The highest surge is found among minor girls reaching a total of 2,355 registered in July, 153% more than June's total of 929 which, in turn, is 118% more than May's total of 427.

As at end-July, more than 2,600 individuals have been readmitted to Serbia from Hungary (2,599) and Croatia (72). Approximately 90% are Syrian.

There are five asylum centers in Serbia with a combined accommodation capacity of approximately 1,000 individuals. There are currently 218 individuals residing in asylum centers. From January to end-July 2015, 484 asylum applications have been submitted, however, only 6 individuals have been granted asylum. In 2014, a total of 388 asylum applications were submitted out of whom only 1 individual was granted asylum.

From January to end-July 2015, a total of 15,280 minors have been registered, 4,122 of whom are unaccompanied, including 3,498 boys and 614 girls. The total number of registered minors has increased by more than 350% from May (1,973) to July (7,080).

Radoš Đurović, executive director of the Asylum Protection Center, a nongovernmental group that provides free legal aid to child and adult asylum seekers, said that unaccompanied migrant children often disappear from the asylum system and possibly leave the country without any record of where they go. "Children are usually left on their own without assistance or their basic needs ensured," Đurović said.

In August, the Macedonian Government proclaimed state of emergency at the borders in order to control the entries. This kept many people in no man's land between Greece and Macedonia where no available services available.

Migrants take train or bus from Preševo to Belgrade where they are staying for 2-3 days to collect money from ATMs and then they continue their journey to the Hungarian border. The most of them are forced to stay in open spaces, mostly in city parks, because they can't stay in hotels without proper documents and registration. After few days of rain, without spare clothes most of migrants, especially children, are in risk of getting ill.

According to APC, 70% of the migrants are trying to cross Hungarian border from Kanjiža, and 30% are trying same thing from Subotica. Hungary closed its borders and raised the wall of barbed wire to prevent the entry of migrants. In Subotica, migrants are placed in old brick factory. In Kanjiža, all migrants were moved from town center to place Vašarište with present of strong police forces.

It is expected that, because of stronger border control by Macedonia and Hungarian border police, all migrants will be staying for some time in Presevo, Belgrade, Kanjiža and Subotica until they will succeed to cross border.

Serbian state is trying to organize adequate care and assistance to migrants, but the majority of avoid any registration or formal procedures because they want as quickly as possible to continue their journey to the final destination in the EU. They often lack the information as they cannot communicate with the local population and services because of language and different cultural patterns (especially women). This makes them particularly vulnerable and in high risk of all kinds of exploitation, trafficking and abuses by local crooks and criminals.

Activists and NGOs started offering help in this area as well but present state and other capacities for support (asylum centers, supplies, information points and transportation) are insufficient, especially for urgent replay.

2. Humanitarian Needs

Migrants are coming to border line with Serbia exhausted, hungry, with wounds on their feet, and a lot of them, especially children are suffering from fever, diarrhea, respiratory infections and sunstroke.

There are a significant and increasing number of pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children, as well as unaccompanied children. It is noticed that in first wave of migration most of migrants were man who travelled alone and had significant funds for traveling.

Beginning of second wave means that more families and unaccompanied children arriving at Serbian state border and they will be slower in passing Serbian territory. Almost 25% of migrants in incoming wave are children with tendency of rapid progression.

A lot of children, especially unaccompanied, young girls and women are in risk of trafficking and all kinds of exploitation and abuse. They don't have financial resources, place to stay, food, basic hygienic items and psychological support and adequate information.

Many of the refugees lost contact with their family members during their traveling and are in need of communication channels, both to reach their family members and relatives living in their destination states.

The government institutions and other organizations that provide assistance to refugees lack resources and expertise, especially in case of unaccompanied children (lack of shelters, vehicles, translators, professional staff, etc.).

On June 15th, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) presented the Study on Psychological Characteristics of Asylum-Seekers in Serbia.

It was found that 89% of asylum-seekers in Serbia suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, 67% from anxiety and 77% from depression as a consequence of their experience in the countries of origin and in transit.

Joint needs assessments performed by ADRA, BCHR (both as UNHCR implementing partners), MSV, and NGO KlikAktiv on a weekly basis since July 1st in the Belgrade region, combined with relevant information from other stakeholders (SRC, INGOs and the CRM), reveal the multifaceted needs of refugees in Serbia and specifically in Belgrade. Belgrade is frequent point of transit or stay for 98% of them. The unofficial estimates from the Serbian Red Cross representatives is that at each given moment, there are 5,000-6,000 refugees in Belgrade. The profile of refugees at the points of entrance in Serbia (south and eastern Serbia) is replicated among the refugees who reach Belgrade: 55% are Syrians, 20% Afghani, and the rest 25% are Eritreans, Pakistani, Iraqi, Somalis, Nigerian, with an increase of Pakistani since July 10th.

They spend on average 3-7 days in Belgrade usually accommodated in hostels, legal and illegal, i.e. recently opened. Others, with no resources even for a shared room in a cheap hostel, sleep outdoors in the Belgrade parks.

Importantly, there is an official Refugee reception center 7 km from Belgrade, in Krnjaca. It has been founded by the government 15 years ago to accommodate refugees who have expressed intention to seek asylum in Serbia, usually at the police station at the border. This center presently has only 55 beneficiaries (out of the capacity for 250).

This means that the migrants are determined to continue the journey as soon as possible. Their stop in Belgrade is out of necessity - they run out of money (spent it due to extremely expensive smuggling "services", poor material condition, or a combination of these), or simply to rejuvenate. Often they stay there waiting for a signal from a smuggler that they organized an illegal crossing at the Hungarian border.

While staying in Belgrade, many needs are there to be addressed but presently no systemic approach exists. Government institutions - health, social care and others, are open to provide service even for legally invisible individuals, but no connection is made between the refugees and those, so that they can be easily accessed. This and other needs are waiting to be met.

Information collected reveal that 30% of the refugees are already coming from socially vulnerable situations and present multifaceted vulnerabilities as it relates to their:

I. Health condition. Poor health (especially related to chronic pathologies), malnourishment, dehydration intensified due to extremely high temperatures from mid-June on, and long and exhausting travel, sometimes taking several months from their country of departure. (Afghani and Pakistani are in worse condition.) Suppressed traumatic experiences are an issue not easily seen. The motivation to reach countries which are their intended final destination mask the post-traumatic stress syndrome. Once they come to a halt (in Belgrade or other point), waiting for opportune moment to continue, the symptoms appear: depressive behavior, self-isolation, outbursts of different emotions, etc. Also, incidents of tensions and conflicts among the members of refugee groups are more frequent since July 18th (taking place in public transport or in the reception centers in the south and the north). Although they spend relatively short time in Belgrade, offering this assistance can be crucial for preventing worsening of overall condition but also alleviating the trauma and even preventing strife and conflict among the refugee community, or between refugee and domicile population.

II. Legal invisibility. Large numbers of refugees use illegal crossings along all main routes - on the south where they enter from Macedonia, and on the eastern, where they enter from Bulgaria. Even those using official border crossing report as no-document asylum seekers. This way, they believe the risk of them being returned is minimized. At the same time, their visibility makes them additionally vulnerable toward the abuse of smugglers/traffickers who organize their travel. Extortion or money for their "services", even robbery is not infrequent. Being legally invisible to the government means no-one will protect you.

III. Misinformation or lack of information. The traffickers usually misinform the refugees so to ensure their loyalty (and secure profit). Refugees are told not to communicate to anyone (government officials, humanitarian organizations) because there is a danger that once they get identified via official personal documents, they will be extradited to their country of origin, or will be pushed back to the previous country of transit. Also, smugglers make deals with others transporters over-charging

for transportation services. This abuse is sometimes performed by locals even when there is no smuggler.

Also, lack of information makes them vulnerable to deception of locals with the exchange rate, the charge for taxi or private transport, etc. Also, the fear-producing approach of smugglers results in refugees not registering themselves in official registration centers. This would enable them to be visible and all services available to them which the government, and all humanitarian actors provide at all border crossings and the official registration centers, in the south of Serbia mostly - food, NFI, WASH, shelter, information on the asylum procedure, etc. Misinformation makes these vulnerable individuals/refugees additionally vulnerable.

IV. Difficult access to support. This refers to two specific things. Existing health and social care institutions are available to support (although with scarce HR) but refugees cannot easily access them. They do not know their locations, do not speak Serbian, and even if they speak English, officers usually do not. Second, support has to entail comprehensive attention to all their needs - physical, mental, safety, etc. which will take into account all the aspects of their vulnerability in the present situation.

V. Incidents of abuse by representatives of local authorities. There have been reports of police officers extorting refugees in the streets of Belgrade who did not have documents so to allow them to freely move. Again, the reason they register as asylum seekers is to acquire referral letter with which they can, in 72 hours, reach one of the three asylum reception centers in Serbia where they wait for their case be resolved by the government. In this refugee crisis, those who register almost never go to these asylum centers but in 99% continue their road to Belgrade, and then to the northern border with Hungary where they join the unofficial refugee centers and wait for opportune moment to illegally cross the border. Others, who have not registered, move north wise, get caught by the police, and have no IDs or referral letter. In such case police officers can and should take them into custody. However, there have been incidents of extortion so that are allowed to continue to move freely.

VI. Minors with no parental/adult supervision. Due to harsh weather conditions, refugees try to speed up their pace. Children sometimes slow them down. Some families decide to leave the kids in Serbia (to friends, other groups, in reception centers, often without any adult supervision) hoping they will reunite once they get asylum status approved in the country of their final destination. These children have been found temporarily accommodated with foster families or reception centers, under severe psychological traumas.

VII. Scarce financial resources. This usually has to do with the country of origin: Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Somalia. Financial challenges mean these refugees arrive at Belgrade with little (or scarce) resource to support them in seeking for proper nourishment, shelter and transport. The reports are they traveled by foot. Organized traffickers provide them with "services" which are costly. Refugees from Syria are mostly financially self-supporting.

The urgent needs on the ground in Belgrade, Kanjiza, Subotica and Presevo are:

- o Baby formula;

- o Diapers;
- o Hygienic packages for babies, children and women;
- o Waterproof/Mylar blankets;
- o Raincoats, footwear for children and women;
- o Food suitable for traveling;
- o Safe space and assistance to mothers with babies and small children;
- o Medical and psycho-social support to children and families;
- o Mobile toilets and tents, washing machines & driers;

3. PROPOSED RESPONSE

SOS CV Serbia proposes the following measures to be implemented:

- o Providing food and sanitation packages, raincoats, blankets and basic hygiene items based on needs of our target group;
- o Providing Safe space and assistance to mothers with babies and small children;
- o Providing medical and psycho-social support to children and families;
- o Providing access to information and communication tools (for establishing contacts between separated family members)
- o Providing support to state institutions in assisting the target group (providing expertise, translators, additional equipment, etc.)
- o Information exchange with other stakeholders and providing additional education to them in order to strengthen support or ensure high quality services for the migrants in spite of them staying (as asylum seekers) or transiting through the territory of the Republic of Serbia;

3.1 Target population and intended beneficiaries

- o Children, with special focus on unaccompanied children
- o Young persons (especially female),
- o Mothers with children (especially malnourished children <5)
- o Pregnant women

3.2 Main activities / Focus areas (sectors)

- ☑ Protection: safe spaces for children, assistance to children and mothers with small children;
- ☑ Health: medical and psycho-social support to children, parents and families in general;

☒ Food Security & Nutrition: baby formula milk, nutritive food packages for malnourished children <5, food suitable for travelling (edible without cooking);

☒ Shelter, Settlements & Non-Food Items (NFIs): shelter for unaccompanied children, diapers, seasonal clothes, blankets, hygiene packages, mobile toilettes, tents, washing machines & driers, access to Internet and communication tools

3.3 Major risks

Transit through Serbia will be slower because of Hungarian border close-up. With current flow of incoming people refugee centers will be full and a lot of people will be forced to spend winter in Serbia.

Prolonged stay in inadequate living condition can increase frustration among refugees, just like the lack of humanitarian support. This can result in reduced acceptance of our project and consequently increases the risk of security incidents.

Ongoing monitoring of the commitment of the target group, meetings and focus groups with the community and refugees and contacts with other humanitarian actors can mitigate the risks.

Problem will be expanding from Hungarian border (north - first in Subotica and Kanjiza) to south (Belgrade, Niš and possibly Novi Sad). That situation will ask for long term support project.

Different languages, cultures, and customs significantly hamper communication and psychological support, especially to women.

This risk can be mitigated by engagement of associates who speak the languages of migrants, cooperation with partner organizations that specialize in certain types of support (information, communication) and focusing activities on non-verbal communication techniques for working with children in Safe places for children, involving members of migrant communities who enjoy the confidence of speaking English, in work teams.

4. COORDINATION AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The ERP Coordinator will prepare technical and financial proposals in close coordination with the NMT. The ERP Coordinator will also be in charge of initiating and coordinating cooperation and support with local NGOs and CBOs as well as humanitarian actors. This person reports directly to the National Director. All assessments, reports and monitoring are channeled through the ERP Coordinator to the National Director and the Emergency Response Advisor in IO.

Other staff and external associates will be defined after detailed assessment and project designed.

4.2 Collaboration and Coordination with the government and other stakeholders

SOS CV Serbia is in regular communication and coordination with all involved government institutions (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants, local municipalities) and NGOs (UNHCR, UNICEF, Red Cross, IOM etc.).

5. PROJECT TIMELINE

The project will be implemented in 24-month period, starting from September 1st 2015.

6. ESTIMATED FINANCIAL SCOPE

SOS CV Serbia estimates a total budget of 950,000 EUR for the implementation of the 24-month ERP. Detailed action plan and budget will be designed shortly in accordance with the more detailed needs assessment.

7. FUNDING APPEAL

Given the dramatic ongoing and looming humanitarian crisis, in particular for children, we hereby kindly request the International Office to support the above outlined humanitarian action and start mobilizing funds to secure the necessary financial resources.

A more detailed crisis response program document will follow in due course, after the rapid on-site assessment has been conducted.