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Information bulletin

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Population Movement

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Host National Society: Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina

This bulletin is being issued for information, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the support of the [Emergency Appeal](#) launched by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), is seeking funding and other assistance from donors.

The situation

Countries throughout the Balkans experienced a significant influx of migrants in 2015 and 2017. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), however, not being situated on the main migratory route, was only marginally affected at that time. Since the beginning of 2018, the country has seen a significant increase in the numbers of arrivals, with migrants arriving via two different routes: one through Albania and Montenegro; and the other through the Republic of North Macedonia or Bulgaria, and Serbia.

Only in 2018, there have been over 26,000 arrivals to BiH. In the first half of 2019, the number of migrants in BiH is estimated around 11,000 (up to 9,000 migrants and refugees registered and at least 2,000 people - approx. 25 per cent of total arrivals - being unregistered). Entry points to BiH are in the areas of Trebinje, Foča and Višegrad in the Republic of Srpska (RS) and Goražde in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). The majority of people arriving are heading towards Una-Sana Canton and seeking to enter the European Union through Croatia. After an initial increase in the number of migrants since the beginning of 2018, the number of new entries stabilized over the winter period and late spring in 2019 with an average of 25-50 people arriving each day. With increasingly strict border controls, it became more difficult for migrants to leave the country, so the number of migrants within country at any certain given time is much higher than the figures from 2018.

The top declared country of origin of arrivals remained Pakistan, followed by Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Algeria and Iraq, among others¹.

As experience from first quarter of 2019 shows, migrants - including families – have started leaving Temporary Reception Centres (TRCs) more frequently with the purpose of trying to enter Croatia.

A total of 16,662 migrants were registered in five centres across the country from July 2018 to May 2019 with the majority in four centres in Una-Sana Canton (*Source IOM, May 2019 report*). In addition to registered arrivals, a



Image 1: Makeshift shelters in Bihac. Photo: The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina

¹ Source: Service for Foreigners' Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is worth noting that in the absence of official documents the country-of-origin is self-declared.

quite significant number of unregistered arrivals has been observed within the same period, many seeking shelter in private accommodation or abandoned buildings or simply in open air space.

Since spring 2019, with increasing strictness of border controls, most return within few days. According to the information received at the IOM-UNHCR Coordinated Interagency Meeting on 7 June 2019, in total there were 4,600 migrants in IOM managed centres: four centres in Una-Sana Canton (USC) and in one centre in Ušivak. However, due to the continuous movement of people, the estimated number of people staying inside the centres is about 4,000.

Category/TRC	BIRA	BORICI	SEDRA	MIRAL	USIVAK
Total Number	1,848	380	345	658	727
Children	2%	42%	42%	-	11%
Unaccompanied Minors	17%	-	3%	3%	4%
Single Man	78%	4%	2%	97%	71%
Adults with Families	3%	51%	52%	-	13%
Single Women	-	3%	1%	-	1%

Source: IOM BiH

Since the beginning of June 2019, the pressure of migrant arrivals was hard felt in Una-Sana Canton (USC). According to USC Government, the number of migrants reached over 8,000 mainly staying in Bihac city, out of whom only 3,200 were accommodated inside of centres and the rest were sleeping outside of Bihac Bira centre in a plain field, reaching 550 in a single day, exposed to bad weather, with no access to shelter (as Bira centre was running at full capacity), food, water/sanitation, health assistance. Many of the migrants opted for private accommodation or abandoned buildings, whereby during recent police operations in Bihac, in just two private houses around 300 migrants were found. Such sudden influx proved to be very difficult to manage for local authorities, resulting in increased tensions among local population and visible deterioration in public spaces (squatting, littering, public defecation etc.).

In early June 2019, in response to new developments, and to prevent further escalation and deterioration of the security situation, the City Council of Bihac and the Mayor of Bihac - supported by the decision of Una Sana Cantonal Government - adopted a quick decision to relocate all migrants staying outside of IOM-run centres as well as those staying in illegal private accommodation to a new location outside of Bihac town – Vucjak. Vucjak location is 8 kilometres outside of the city of Bihac and within 3 kilometres to the border of Croatia, officially approved by the state government. The location was rejected by the EU and IOM in the country as hazardous. The location did not have the necessary infrastructure in place to secure minimum living conditions, including poor access road, no electricity supply, no water/sanitation or any other infrastructure in place. However, the city of Bihac, under the pressure of the chaotic situation and pressure



Image 2: People queuing for food in Vucjak. Photo: The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina

from the local population was determined to ensure basic conditions are met for the relocation of migrants. The communal service company was tasked to prepare the ground (approx. 2,000 m²) and clear the entry while migrants are being collected across the city and transported by police forces. In two days of operations, around 850 migrants were found in several private houses in Bihac city. According to local authorities, operations will continue and spread to Velika Kladusa as well – until illegal accommodation of migrants has been resolved and all migrants are accommodated in the temporary reception centres.

As the groups of migrants started to be transported in police buses to Vucjak, authorities immediately sent an official request to the local Red Cross Branch of City of Bihać to engage and provide basic humanitarian assistance to migrants in Vucjak. As an auxiliary to public authorities in the humanitarian field and acting on

humanitarian grounds, the local Red Cross used their available but limited resources to provide basic emergency assistance in shelter, food, hygiene and First Aid to prevent further deterioration of the already difficult situation. Within just a few days, the number of migrants brought to Vucjak reached 600-700. This number continues to change as police operations are still ongoing and some migrants continue with their efforts to leave the new location and return to Bihac city or voluntarily return to Sarajevo or other parts of BiH. Meanwhile, the local authorities have continued to work on improving the living conditions at Vucjak, ensuring sufficient quantities of drinking water by the local water supply company as well as two cisterns of water for washing provided on a daily basis by the fire brigade. A generator has been set up to provide electricity for lighting the site. Police has been deployed at the site to provide security with further reinforcement during food distribution. Thus far no incidents have been recorded in the new site.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RCSBiH) has been involved in the migration response activities since the beginning of the crisis in coordination with Government authorities and other stakeholders in all locations where the migrants are either on the move or are accommodated in centres. There are six main branches of the National Society involved in the response: Red Cross Branch of City of Bihać, Red Cross Branch of Una-Sana Canton, Red Cross Branch of Ključ, Red Cross Branch of Tuzla, Red Cross Branch of City of Mostar and Red Cross Branch of Bijeljina with most of the burden of the high migrant influx being dealt with by three branches in Una Sana canton. The RCSBiH is also working in five migrant centres across the country – Borici (Bihac), Bira (Bihac), Miral (Velika Kladusa), Hotel Sedra (Una-Sana Canton), and Salakovac near Mostar. The centres are run by IOM and the Government. Red Cross is providing hot meals, blankets, clothing, hygiene items, first aid and psychosocial support.

The RCSBiH has six mobile teams operating to support migrants on the move. Many newly arrived migrants are sleeping in the open with inadequate protection from the elements. The mobile teams are made up of three trained Red Cross volunteers and are equipped with food parcels, water, hygiene items, blankets, clothes, information and first aid equipment. The six mobile teams are based at Bihac, (2), (near Croatia border), Bijeljina and Tuzla (near Serbia border), Mostar (near Montenegro border), Ključ (at the internal border of Una-Sana Canton and Republic of Srbska and where migrants are made to disembark public transport). The closest centre is more than 90 kilometres away in Bihac and the only option to get there is to walk. Since they started activities on 10 March 2019, the mobile teams have assisted almost 4,116 people and distributed 4,309 food parcels, mostly in Bihac and Ključ, where there is no transit centre. Red Cross teams are also administering first aid to people who have been walking for weeks.



Image 3: RCSBiH mobile team providing first aid. *Photo: The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

In order to support the RCSBiH efforts and activities mentioned above, IFRC has launched an [Emergency Appeal](#) for BiH for 3.3 million Swiss francs on 8 December 2018. The appeal aims to assist approximately 7,600 migrants, and 1,500 households from the host community. The current coverage for the appeal is 1.1 million Swiss francs, or about 34 per cent.

To ensure continuous support to the National Society, the IFRC Regional Office filled the gap with visits by the operational staff as well as with the deployment of a Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) member and an interim operations manager.

The IFRC is scaling up its response as the magnitude of the crisis continues to grow. The IFRC operations manager present in the country, has been working closely with all RC structure in the field to ensure necessary technical, coordination and other support while dealing with the complex and challenging situation.

IFRC has sent experts in health; disaster preparedness; protection, gender and inclusion (PGI); community engagement and accountability (CEA); planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting (PMER) and information management (IM) for various assessments, trainings for the mobile teams and volunteers and other means of support. A communications expert is currently in the country, soon to be followed by specialists on health, shelter, water and sanitation and logistics. The needs are huge, the situation is changing daily, therefore IFRC is working closely with the RCSBiH to tailor its support accordingly.

IFRC has been actively raising the profile of this emergency within the international community by issuing three [press releases](#) and regular [timely updates](#) on IFRC Europe Twitter account. As a result of IFRC efforts, the situation has been covered by dozens of media outlets including [Reuters](#), [Yahoo](#) and [Euronews](#). During his visit in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the 13th Mediterranean Conference in April, IFRC President Francesco Rocca also gave a [live TV interview](#) for Al Jazeera Balkans, pointing out humanitarian needs and profiling the work of the National Society.

Movement partners are also supporting the RCSBiH in their migration response activities including; Croatian Red Cross (PSS, household items, human resources – communications delegate as staff on loan, first aid kits), German Red Cross (mobile kitchen and kitchen equipment, household items, clothing, tents, containers), Italian Red Cross (household items, winter clothing, hygiene packs, mobile kitchen and technical support for health assessment), Swiss Red Cross (food through a project in Salakovac /Mostar, household items, cash assistance for local communities, support to mobile teams), Turkish Red Crescent (tents, mobile kitchens, household items, clothing, warehousing/logistics), Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates (food parcels) and ICRC (RFL services and mine awareness activities). IFRC maintains close coordination and collaboration with all Movement partners on very regular basis discussing relevant issues linked to migration crisis in the country. In addition to this bilateral coordination and collaboration, five Movement coordination meetings have been held in Sarajevo since the onset of the operation and a partnership meeting is planned to be held in Bihac in early September.

Due to the Cantonal Government's decision to re-locate the migrants to Vucjak since 16 June, staff and volunteers of the City of Bihac Red Cross and Una Sana Cantonal Red Cross have been continuously working to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to migrants located in Vucjak in order to prevent additional vulnerabilities. Within a very short period of time, over 30 tents have been set up to provide basic shelter, including the distribution of blankets and sleeping bags. Over 800 hygiene kits have already been distributed and the preparation and distribution of two daily meals is ongoing. In addition to shelter and food, RC First Aid teams have been treating dozens of migrants for minor injuries on a daily basis, while referring more difficult cases to local health centres.

As needs are growing, additional tents will continue to be set up in coming days in the newly identified temporary location. Also understanding the needs of migrants to maintain communication with their families, RC Bihac set up a mobile charging station.

Local Red Cross of Bihac city is also working with local authorities on finding an urgent solution to the need for sanitation/latrines, bearing in mind high temperatures and the health hazard which could create further complications to an already difficult and complex situation.

The concern remains with regards to the location of Vucjak, which is known to be surrounded by mine fields and rests on a former landfill presenting high danger. The RCSBiH has been in contact with ICRC and UN Mine Action Centre (MAC) with request for site inspection ensuring all mine fields are clearly marked. The Red Cross will start the distribution of updated mine maps prepared by UNMAC to all migrants in Vucjak location as well as to all those on the move assisted by RC Mobile teams in coordination with ICRC.

The Red Cross is the only humanitarian agency assisting hundreds of migrants brought to Vucjak which is putting an enormous pressure on the local RC Branches/ RC Branches of Bihac and of USC, therefore other branches in the country provided some limited support from their available stocks such as additional shelter, food and household items.

Due to the strict border controls between Croatia and BiH and the steady number of arrivals in the country, the number of migrants is estimated to increase significantly which may also result in the increased average length of stay in the country and have a significant impact on migrants' needs. Therefore, it is foreseen that the RCSBiH



Image 4: Red Cross staff and volunteers distributing food in Vucjak. *Photo: The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

will not only be in need of sustaining its services but will also need to expand in order to provide assistance to migrants in centres as well as to migrants on the move.

IFRC is seeking funding to ensure continuous support to the RCSBiH migration response activities and to urgently address the need for latrines and sanitation in the new temporary location. Any other forms of technical support such as staff with expertise in health, water, sanitation and hygiene, logistics and shelter to support the RCSBiH will also be highly welcomed by IFRC.

RCSBiH Headquarters building damaged

Due to the heavy rains in the country since the end of May 2019, in addition to the local flash floods which affected multiple towns and were responded by the RCSBiH branches, the newly renovated headquarters building of the National Society was also affected: the roof, premises and equipment on the second floor of the building were damaged. The RCSBiH is urgently seeking bilateral support for some **EUR 13,000** for the repairment of the damages in order to have functional space and conditions necessary for the work of the services. The RCSBiH focal point for support is: Azra Bricic, Financial Manager; office phone: +387 33 263 925; email: azra@rcsbh.org.

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All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives,
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.



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