



## Overview: Gender-based violence programme

# Serbia – Refugee and migrant response

September 2021

**Focus on the programme: Action Against Gender-Based Violence Affecting Refugee and Migrant Women and Children Greece, Italy, Serbia and Bulgaria, supported by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, October 2019 – June 2021<sup>2</sup>**

### Situation of refugees and migrants

The transit of the people in Serbia intensified as the weather improved between April and June 2021, with 11,457 new arrivals, three times as many as during same period in 2020 (3,030).<sup>3</sup> On average, 3,800 people arrived each month in spring 2021 – a 40% increase compared to the monthly average for winter 2020.<sup>4</sup> Serbia remains primarily a transit country for refugees and migrants on their way to Western Europe, who live mainly in 14 government reception and asylum centres during their time in the country. At the end of June 2021, 5,603 refugees and migrants were living in Serbia, with 3,818 was accommodated in reception and asylum centres, including 154 women and 94 girls.<sup>5</sup> In 2020 and 2021, the increase in the number of migrants arriving, coupled with fears related to the COVID-19 pandemic, has fuelled a rise in anti-migrant sentiments, while legal pathways for migrants to continue their journey have narrowed, adding to the protection risks linked to travel.

When entering the country, women and children on the move are physically exhausted, psychologically traumatized and often in need of medical and protection support. Research carried out in 2019 by UNICEF partner the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) found that refugee and migrant women and girls in Serbia are at high risk of gender-based violence (GBV), including physical and sexual violence, often from their intimate partners.<sup>6</sup> These risks were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as movements across Serbia became more restricted, with smugglers often seen as the only alternative. Despite notable progress to strengthen protection systems, shrinking funds and overstretched service capacities mean that referrals to services, including for sexual violence, remain limited, as girls and boys still face linguistic and social barriers to seeking support, in particular unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

### UNICEF priorities and strategy on gender-based violence

The response to GBV in Serbia has been mainstreamed into UNICEF's overall programme to promote the physical and psychosocial healing and recovery of refugee and migrant survivors, protect them from further violence, and support system-level reforms for longer term solutions. UNICEF prioritized the establishment of [safe spaces](#), where women and girls can safely and confidentially access information and services and other important sources of support.

To ensure sustainable impact, UNICEF

works with key public institutions, Belgrade University and civil society, and provides financial and technical support. This work includes support for state agencies to improve their safeguarding policies and procedures, including in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse and integrating GBV and child protection (CP) into broader EU migration management initiatives. As co-chair of the National Child Protection Working Sub-Group, UNICEF supports the coordination of child protection activities that integrate GBV response.

### Programme achievements

Between October 2019 and June 2021, UNICEF and partners worked to ensure GBV survivors and those at risk were able to safely access care and support in Serbia. In all, 3,262

people were provided with GBV prevention and response services, including psychosocial support, counselling, case management and referral for specialized support.

### KEY POPULATION FIGURES

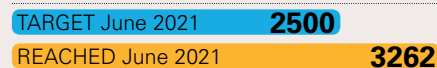
**11,637** arrivals between April and June 2021,<sup>1</sup> almost four times as many as during same period in 2020 (2,961)

**3,818** refugees and migrants housed in reception and asylum centres in June 2021

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE

(Oct 2019 – June 2021)

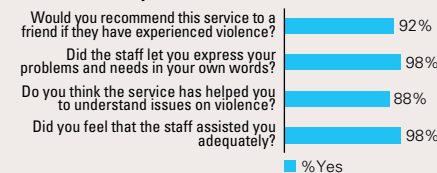
**3,262** people in need accessed GBV prevention and response services



**95%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others



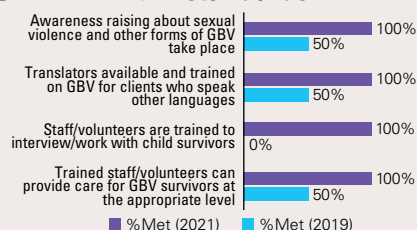
### Beneficiary Feedback



### 5 GBV service delivery points supported by UNICEF



### Percentage of services that meet GBV minimum standards



**7,922** women, girls, men and boys accessing information on GBV

*“For my confidence these three hours on your workshops are crucial. I feel far more comfortable in my own skin because I can use the time for my personal development with your help. I do realize that when I feel good, I can do good for my child as well.” A refugee woman from Iraq, 35, currently in Serbia*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF and partners adapted their approach to respond to the declaration of a national state of emergency. This included the introduction of remote psychosocial and case management services via phone, Viber and WhatsApp groups to disseminate information about how to access this GBV support, and gender-specific information on COVID-19. In-person outreach was still offered in the central Belgrade area, including short-stay shelter services.

UNICEF partners also stepped in to provide hygiene support, distributing dignity kits to women and girls to help them move safely, promoting their health and protection. In addition, UNICEF has shared technical guidance and undertaken service mapping to support the adaptation and coordination of the protection sector at national level. It has also supported its partner Info Park to organize coordination meetings for all field actors involved in the emergency response in Belgrade to strengthen cooperation between state institutions and civil society organizations, responding to the needs of at-risk groups during the pandemic.



### Technical support

UNICEF Serbia has worked with its partners Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and Info Park to strengthen the technical quality of their GBV and CP services. UNICEF supported ADRA to develop internal procedural guidelines for GBV response and prevention for its GBV programme, standardize its informed consent template and improve its GBV follow up form. Working with Info Park, UNICEF supported the improvement of its GBV Procedure, Referral and Supervision Guide, GBV service map, outreach/rapid assessment guidelines, and COVID-19 Pandemic Infection Prevention Protocol.

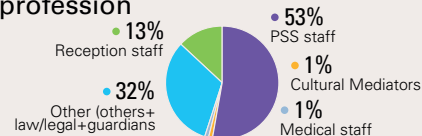
In collaboration with the University of Belgrade - Faculty of Political Science, UNICEF supported the development of a [dedicated GBV and CP in Emergencies course](#), accessible to both students and practitioners. UNICEF also supported the development of a training module for the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) on Safeguarding and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). This accompanied technical support for SCRM, including a comprehensive revision of internal policies and the development of new policies that introduce safeguarding measures with a specific focus on PSEA. UNICEF also supported partners to strengthen their PSEA

**267** frontline workers trained

TARGET June 2021 **70**

REACHED June 2021 **267**

### Frontline workers trained, by profession



### UNICEF Partners

Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, University of Belgrade - Faculty of Political Science



Adra, Info Park



mechanisms, including the development of PSEA policy, the design of information materials and strengthening the promotion of available reporting mechanisms. UNICEF also collaborated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the inclusion of people with disabilities, identified as a gap in the response, and designed a tool to improve identification, consultations with and response to the needs of girls, boys and young people with disabilities and their families.

*“Today, girls can achieve a lot if they are self-confident and focused”, Aya, 17 from Congo, currently in Serbia<sup>7</sup>*

## In Focus: Multi-country coordination and technical assistance in programming on gender-based violence in emergencies

The UNICEF Serbia Country Office has been working within the multi-country approach, collaborating closely with the UNICEF GBV coordination team and other country offices in Bulgaria, Greece and Italy. This approach has included technical support, joint technical work and coordinated programming across the different countries.

One key benefit of this approach is the way in which country offices have worked together to jointly produce the [Unaccompanied and Separated Girls Analysis Note: Making the Invisible Visible](#).

The process of developing the note reflected several core values of the multi-country approach, in that it was participatory and informed by the needs identified by local experts. It began with Serbian partner Info Park recognizing the invisibility of unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant girls in its programmes. Info Park raised this with the Serbia country team who then shared the concern with the GBV coordination team. The team then consulted the other three countries in the programme to confirm that this was also concern they were seeing in their contexts and that it was,

therefore, an issue common to the region. The GBV coordination team conducted desk-based analysis on unaccompanied and separated girls and found a gap in both the data and in the response in UNICEF programming, as well as across the wider sector. They then led the development and dissemination of the analysis note, accompanied by a practical tool to help frontline workers identify and support unaccompanied and separated girls. This has been influential in making these invisible girls visible at both the Serbia country level and the wider regional level.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Revised on the basis of UNHCR Stat Snapshot 2020 and 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> The Programme officially started in October 2017. This factsheet, however, focuses on the final phase of the Programme, which ran from October 2019 to June 2021.
- <sup>3</sup> *UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report #40* ([www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021](http://www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021)).
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> This analysis was provided by UNICEF Serbia and is taken from consecutive UNHCR Serbia monthly updates for the period August 2019 to March 2020.
- <sup>6</sup> ADRA, *Room for Women and Girls: Female Voices from Refugees and Migrants in Serbia*, 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> The name of the unaccompanied refugee girl has been changed for her protection.



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