



Co-funded by the European Union

ADDRESSING COVID-19 CHALLENGES WITHIN THE MIGRANT AND REFUGEE RESPONSE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

PROJECT FACTSHEET



IOM staff refilling hand sanitizer dispenser in one of the centres in Bihac, BiH, March 2020

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken by governments to prevent and control the spread of the virus are having an unprecedented impact on mobility, and on border and migration management systems. In the Western Balkans, cross-border movements have been restricted and quarantine or isolation measures were put in place for travelers. With the progressive re-opening of borders, updated procedures for screening and handling ill passengers will become necessary, as well as increased supplies of protective equipment for border police officials, to ensure their safety while not disrupting passengers' movements. The pandemic also affected around 21,000 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers currently present in the region, putting reception and protection systems under additional pressure.

Overall objective

The overall objective of this action is to protect migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and other vulnerable persons by ensuring that systems and services in place are supported, reinforced and can be quickly adapted to the measures that must be implemented in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

This will be achieved through three sets of interventions:

- Enhancing authorities' preparedness to respond to the pandemic
- Preventing transmission of COVID-19 among migrants, asylum seekers and refugees
- Protecting the most vulnerable

DURATION:

15 months (3 April 2020 – 2 July 2021)

DONOR:

European Union (EU) Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI)
Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)

BUDGET:

EUR 8.2M (8M IcSP)

IMPLEMENTED BY:

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo¹

BENEFICIARIES:

Border authorities, migration management and asylum authorities, institutions and actors providing accommodation and protection services to refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, health care institutions, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.



¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Proposed interventions

Given the rapid development of the situation, the action will remain flexible and activities will be adapted to the local needs. Priorities for each location will be identified and periodically reviewed in coordination with the EU, IOM, UNHCR and host governments. Interventions will be selected among the following activities:

ENHANCING AUTHORITIES' PREPAREDNESS TO RESPOND TO THE PANDEMIC

In targeted locations, the action will build border police, migration management and asylum authorities' capacities to address the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic through:

- Enhancing coordination among government authorities, donor, international and non-governmental organizations
- Developing and implementing standard operating procedures for the prevention and management of COVID-19 at the borders
- Building capacity of migrant reception and asylum centres' staff to implement established protocols and procedures for the prevention and management of COVID-19
- Procuring and distributing personal protective supplies, disinfection products, medical equipment and other disease prevention materials
- Supporting asylum authorities for resuming asylum interviews in a safe environment

PREVENTING TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 AMONG MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

The action will strengthen prevention and mitigation measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 contagion among migrants and asylum seekers within and outside migrant reception and asylum centres. This will be achieved by:

- Adjusting reception facilities to reduce health and security risks related to COVID-19
- Increasing availability and access to water, sanitation and hygiene services
- Ensuring migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have access to information, education and communication on COVID-19 risks and public health prevention measures

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Lastly, the action will aim to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 public health measures, including isolation and social distancing on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in vulnerable situations, through:

- Regularly monitoring protection needs and coordinating adequate response actions
- Strengthening the provision of mental health and psychosocial support
- Providing tailored assistance to respond to identified protection needs
- Building the capacities of health care respondents and other service providers for increased resilience and preparedness, ensuring equitable access to health care for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers



All children of asylum-seekers and refugees should have access to online education, photo credit: UNHCR/BHWI