

Red Cross of Serbia

Case Study: Local Red Cross Branch Palilula



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Location

Palilula, Belgrade, Serbia

Date established

June 2024

Target communities

- Migrants and displaced persons

Services provided

- Information
- Food (including baby food)
- Non-food items
- First Aid
- Medical items and equipment
- Restoring family links
- Anti-trafficking activities
- Safe referrals

Context

Serbia serves as a transit hub for those moving from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia toward Western Europe. The Western Balkan route, which passes through Serbia, has seen significant traffic. The country's geographical location places it at the crossroads of migration flows. In 2023 there was more than 90,000 registered entries to the country, which is a similar number to 2022 and is the biggest number in this part of Europe.

There are currently 19 transit, reception and asylum centers in Serbia, 18 of which are operational at the moment. Throughout the year the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (KIRS) KIRS closes and opens the centers according to their assessment of needs. In addition, KIRS changes the purpose of the centers (transit centers become asylum centers) but also changes the locations (towns and municipalities) of the Centres.

Most of the registered migrants in 2023 at some point of their travel passed through Belgrade. Although the Red Cross carries out activities with migrants within the framework of PEP (Prevention, Empowerment, Protection) points in transit centers, the Red Cross is dependent on the permission of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia for the implementation of these activities. Occasionally, in crisis situations, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (KIRS) has temporarily suspended the possibility of entering the Centers. In those moments, the Red Cross has been prevented from providing support to migrants in need. Establishing the humanitarian services for migrants in Palilula enables the Red Cross to strengthen the level of support they are able to provide to people on the move.

The Local Red Cross Branch of Palilula provides a friendly and welcoming physical space, accessible to migrants and displaced people irrespective of their status, category, nationality or any other characteristic; actively providing information and other humanitarian services and safe referrals to other services. The Red Cross uses the space to provide learning support to migrant children who attend schools in Belgrade. Additionally, in order to better connect migrants children with their peers from Serbia RC Palilula organize events as visiting ZOO or Cinemas.

Overview of the service

The Red Cross of Serbia has engaged the Palilula local branch of Red Cross to better address the needs of vulnerable people on the move.

Located in Cvijićeva street in Belgrade, the Palilula Red Cross branch opened its premises to migrants in April 2024. It is conveniently situated near the bus station in Belgrade, making it accessible to those in transit, and is positioned approx. 10 kilometers from the Krnjača reception center, which accommodates asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups. The strategic location of the Palilula Red Cross Branch has been additional encouragement for the branch to adapt and rearrange its premises and regular services to meet the needs for people on the move.

The Local Red Cross Branch is positioned in one of the busiest streets in Belgrade. The Palilula Red Cross Branch has adjusted its premises to better meet the migrants' needs. The facility includes two dedicated offices for service provision, divided into two parts, along with a small separate storage space. This setup allows for efficient organization and delivery of services.

The primary target group for this Local Red Cross Branch engaged in providing humanitarian support to migrants, consists of individuals accommodated at the Krnjača reception center, predominantly women with children. However, the branch also extends its support to a smaller number of people outside the migration center.

The Local Red Cross Branch operates in close cooperation with the Commissariat for Refugees (KIRS) of the Republic of Serbia, the agency responsible for managing the reception center. KIRS directs individuals from the center to Palilula Red Cross Branch when their needs cannot be met within the center. Additionally, the branch collaborates with Caritas and the Center for Youth Integration, both of which have a regular presence in the migration center and disseminate information about the Palilula – Local Red Cross Branch to the communities.

The services provided at the Local Red Cross Branch Palilula include non-food items (NFI) and food (including baby food), medical items (excluding medicines), Restoring Family Links (RFL), information sharing, and anti-trafficking activities. Food and drinks are also offered on-site to those in need. The engagement of the Local Red Cross Branch in providing humanitarian services to migrants was inspired by similar initiatives undertaken by Red Cross National Societies implementing the Global Route Based Migration Programme.

The humanitarian services for migrants within the Local Red Cross Branch Palilula are managed by one staff member, supported by two other employees (social welfare officer and person engaged in IM) and team of volunteers to deliver activities. All volunteers undergo training in Red Cross/Red Crescent values, cultural sensitization, and receive an introductory orientation before starting their work with the communities.

Information is shared with the communities through posters with QR codes, which are displayed in the migration center and schools attended by children on the move.

The premises of the Palilula branch operate on a structured schedule: on Mondays and Tuesdays, donations are collected from the local community; on Saturdays, distributions are organized for people on the move; and on Thursdays, Red Cross volunteers visit migration centers to identify the needs of the people, ensuring that the collection of donations is more effective.

This Local Red Cross Branch stands as a testament to the commitment of the Red Cross of Serbia to support vulnerable populations, providing essential services and fostering a sense of community and hope among those in need.



Local Red Cross Branch providing humanitarian services to migrants



Volunteers at the Local Red Cross Branch preparing the distribution of materials

Voices from the field:

“The first thing we came for was some information, also I really needed baby milk powder, which the Red Cross gave us very quickly”

Female migrant from Kyrgyzstan, arriving in Serbia with her husband and three children

“I enjoy supporting people on the move because I would like to have people to support me if I come into that position”

Volunteer at the Local Red Cross Branch Palilula

“It is the most beautiful thing when you see the children that were unhappy get a smile on their face during our activities”

Volunteer at the Local Red Cross Branch Palilula



