

Red Cross Society of Bosnia & Herzegovina

Case Study: Mobile team at Blažuj Temporary Reception Centre



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Location

Blažuj Temporary Reception Centre (TRC), Sarajevo Canton, Bosnia & Herzegovina (capacity of 1,700 bedspaces)

Date established

2019

Target communities

- Migrants and displaced persons

Services provided

- Information
- Food and Water
- Non-food items (hygiene items)
- First Aid
- Psychosocial First Aid
- Restoring family links
- Safe referrals

Context

Bosnia and Herzegovina acts as a transit country along the Western Balkan route with migrants typically entering from Serbia or Montenegro, before continuing their journey towards Croatia where they seek to enter the Schengen zone and their intended country of destination in the European Union.

According to data published by the IOM, there were 34,409 recorded arrivals of migrants entering Bosnia & Herzegovina in 2023, a 25% increase on the 27,429 arrivals in 2022. In 2024, the Ministry of Security of BiH recorded 25,236 migrants. The total number of arrivals recorded by the BiH Ministry of Security for the period from January to December 2024 being the decreased by 26% of migrants compared to 2023 year.

The main nationalities of recorded arrivals in 2023 were Afghanistan, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic. In 2024, the largest number of migrants comes from Syria (39%), followed by Afghanistan (17%) and Morocco (9%). Arrivals from Egypt are on the rise, accounting for four percent of all arrivals in the first half of 2024.

The vast majority of arrivals register an intent to claim asylum in Bosnia & Herzegovina (which gives them permission to remain in the country for 14 days to submit a claim), but then choose to continue their journey, most commonly leaving the country after 3-4 weeks. According to data from the UNHCR, only 147 asylum claims were submitted in 2023, a fraction of total number of recorded arrivals. The main countries of origin of asylum applicants in 2023 were the Russian Federation, Türkiye and Afghanistan. In 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina registered 234 asylum seekers, mostly nationals of Syria, Turkey, and Palestine, which is a 59% increase compared to the previous year (147). Two individuals were granted refugee status, while 97 individuals, mostly from the Russian Federation and Palestine, were granted subsidiary protection status.

In 2024, a total of 464 foreign nationals were returned to their countries of origin. Of these, 394 were returned voluntarily, 18 forcibly, and 52 under a readmission agreement. Top 5 countries for migrant returns in 2024: Turkey, Russian Federation, Nepal, Azerbaijan, and Bangladesh. In 2024, temporary residence permits were issued to 3,590 foreign workers, with the largest numbers coming from Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, and India.

Once migrants have been registered by the authorities, they are able to access official reception facilities. There are 4 reception centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Blažuj, Ušivak, Lipa and Borići), with a combined capacity to accommodate 4,950 people. The largest reception centre, Blažuj is located just outside Sarajevo and has a capacity to accommodate 1,700.

Migrants responding to surveys conducted by the IOM across the Western Balkans in 2023 show that most respondents travelled through Türkiye before crossing into Greece (either by land or sea) or Bulgaria, and then continued their journey across the Balkans towards the European Union. The same surveys indicate that the main intended countries of destination for migrants using the Western Balkan route are Germany and Italy.

Migrants and displaced persons who reach Bosnia and Herzegovina after transiting difficult terrain along the border with Serbia or Montenegro will have faced many dangers along the route and are often in need of urgent humanitarian assistance upon their arrival.

Overview of the service

The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina have had a presence in reception centres since 2018 when the number of migrants entering the country first peaked. The level of activities provided by the national society has varied over the years, depending on the level of need and the capacities of other organisations supporting migrants in the centre. Humanitarian assistance provided to migrants transiting through Bosnia and Herzegovina falls under the [Global Route Based Migration Programme \(GRBMP\)](#).

Blažuj Temporary Reception Centre in Sarajevo Canton, is one of four reception centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The centre started providing accommodation for migrants during the winter of 2019. Prior to this, the site was formerly used as a military barracks. With limited capacities for medical services, the Red Cross of Bosnia and Herzegovina plays a key role in providing medical assistance having the first aid team present in the camp. The team are also able to make referrals to other medical providers or services. In addition to providing direct humanitarian assistance to migrants in the reception centre, the team also deliver first aid workshops for migrants as well as thematic workshops related to public health, substance abuse and awareness of the risks associated with trafficking in human beings.

In early September 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina began the transition process in the Lipa and Blazuj camps, and activities gradually started shifting from IOM to state agencies and organizations. Specifically, the transfer of responsibilities occurred to the Service for Foreigners' Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while services began to be taken over by the Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RCSBH) in coordination with Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. There are currently 25 employees in the Blažuj camp working as Red Cross staff, providing WASH, FOOD and NFI services

Along with the assistance provided in the reception centre, a mobile team also provide migrants in Sarajevo with information and humanitarian assistance at key locations around the city (the bus station for example).

Voices from the field:

"After several months of traveling, we arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at first, we didn't know what to expect, as we had already gone through many difficult situations. We were exhausted and had lost all hope, as our journey was tough and draining. However, when we arrived at the camp, our first encounter was with the Red Cross team"

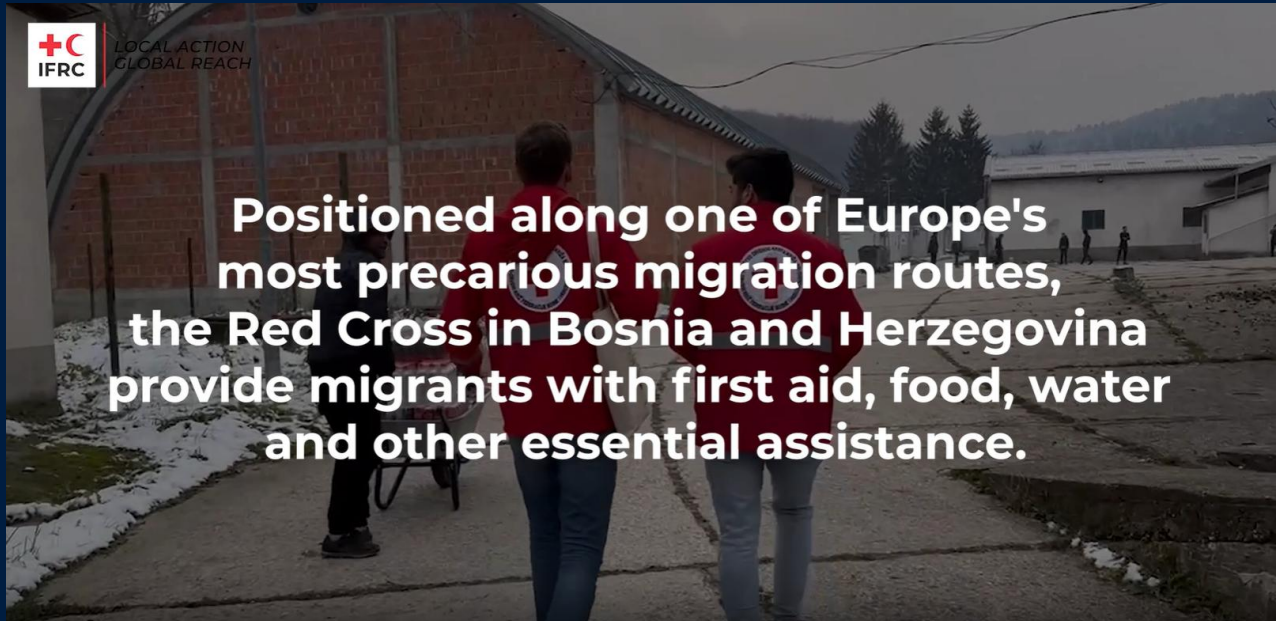
Migrant in Reception Centre

"Their kindness, attention, and willingness to help, at a time when we felt completely lost, gave us a sense of security. Their help wasn't only physical, but emotional as well, as they reassured us that we were not alone. They provided first aid, gave us food, water, and clothing, and most importantly, they spoke with us and asked how we were doing. You can't imagine how much just one simple question can help, making us feel safe and welcome, knowing that we are not alone and that someone cares about us."

Migrant in Reception Centre

"For me, the Red Cross wasn't just an organization that helped us – they were our friends in the difficult moments of life and showed us that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country of good, humane, and kind people. After some time, I decided to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I received asylum. Now, I am employed and working."

Statements of a migrant at the Social Cohesion workshop organized by the Red Cross of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Find out more about the work of mobile team at Blazuj TRC by clicking on the image above



