



Context

Since 2019, an estimated 103,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) via the Western Balkans migration route. The Una-Sana canton is transited by nearly all refugees and migrants moving through BiH on their way to the European Union, of which an estimated 8% to 10% are unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

The path through BiH has become increasingly difficult for refugees and migrants due to border closures and restricted access to rights and services. The closures incentivize the use of smugglers and reduced access to service providers and protection actors, as people increasingly take more difficult and remote routes that avoid large population centers. The closing of several reception facilities in Una-Sana canton resulted in an increased number of people residing outside the official reception centers facing threats to their protection and safety and requiring specialized services outside formal centers.



CWS staff hands out supplies to refugees and migrants outside of reception centers (faces blurred for safety of migrants and refugees).

This is especially threatening for unaccompanied and separated children. Most UASC traveling through Una-Sana canton are between the ages of 14-17, and are predominantly from Afghanistan, Burundi, Pakistan, Guinea, Somalia, and India. They arrive physically exhausted, distressed, and in need of medical assistance. Forced to cross the border illegally and hide their age so they can continue their journey, many remain hard-to-reach, isolated and highly vulnerable to violence, abuse, sexual exploitation neglect and trafficking. For some, the journey resulted in separation from their family long before they reached BiH. Many children are under enormous pressure from their families to continue their journey no matter what.

CWS Response

CWS has been responding to the refugee and migrant crisis in BiH since 2019 and has provided services to approximately 6,500 people in Una-Sana canton. Under the mandate of Social Welfare Centers, CWS provides guardianship of UASC as a key element of the broader child protection system for refugees and migrants. Working under a wider refugee and migrant protection system of BiH and Una-Sana canton, CWS' goal is to ensure all UASC are identified, registered and given access to their rights to care and protection throughout their stay. **CWS operates a unique mobile team that identifies and assists UASC residing outside reception facilities, quickly assesses risks and vulnerabilities, facilitates their transportation and accommodation and links them to needed services.**



CWS | Migrant Protection In BiH (cont.)

CWS legal guardians support UASC through needs assessments, referrals to essential services (shelter, medical, food), immediate escort and transport of UASC who express intent to be accommodated in reception facilities and assistance during registration. They are also responsible for sharing protection information on availability and accessibility of critical services and facilities, legal pathways, local safety points and contacts and information on how to cross border points legally and safely. UASC are also informed on the risks of human trafficking and transportation through smuggling.

As part of the program, CWS provides targeted assistance to other vulnerable refugees and migrants, including families and single adult young men identified outside of official reception facilities, and makes referrals to specialized organizations as needed. The program works in partnership with the eight Social Welfare Centers of Una-Sana canton, and coordinates closely with the Ministry of Security, IOM, Red Cross, Save the Children, and Service for Foreigners' Affairs.

In 2023, the program seeks to improve detection, identification and assistance to UASC and other vulnerable refugees and migrants residing outside official reception facilities. Our goal is to reach approximately 1,600 refugees and migrants. CWS' team will map locations where people reside outside of centers and share information and needed services with relevant actors. To improve the quality of information shared with UASC and better serve their protection needs, the project will also conduct mapping of child protection actors and service providers in destination countries, especially refugee-led organizations to identify and map services relevant to protection.

To date, CWS has:



Provided services to approximately 6,500 people in Una-Sana canton



Served as guardians of UASC, providing protection and support to over 2,000 children



Provided services in eight municipalities, covering 4,125 square kilometers of territory



Ensured immediate escort and transportation of UASC who express intent to be accommodated in reception facilities and served as legal guardians



Conducted needs assessment to identify protection risks and provide immediate referrals to service providers



Provided information on legal pathways and alternatives, including anti-trafficking materials, accommodation options, registration procedures and services available



Provided essential non-food items, such as blankets, hygiene kits and clothing