

## **Dealing with the challenges of increased influx of illegal migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina.**

### **Association VASA PRAVA Bosnia and Herzegovina**

For almost 30 years, the Western Balkan region has been continually faced with challenges relating to population movements and mass displacement caused by past conflict and other circumstances. The region is still in the process of finding solutions for issues pertaining to refugees and IDPs, primarily through international support and aid programmes such as the Regional Housing Programme<sup>1</sup>.

Today the region is faced with additional challenges as a result of the mass influx of migrants and refugees along the Balkan route.

The fencing-off of borders along the Balkan route has not prevented the influx of migrants but rather forced them to seek alternative routes. As of late 2017, the Bosnian route is one of these alternative routes. In 2017, the detected number of new arrivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was 218 persons. In the first eight months of 2018, this number has drastically increased to 10.866 arrivals, with an estimated daily influx of 50-70 persons.

Although officials say that 60 percent of those who have arrived already left the country, volunteers and aid workers claim that more than 4,000 refugees and migrants are now stranded in Bosnia, sleeping in the open without access to food, water, or adequate hygiene and sanitation.<sup>2 3 4</sup> They also run the risk to sustain serious physical harm, even deadly injuries, as land mines still cover a significant portion of the territory of BiH, including those areas where people try to cross the border.<sup>5</sup> Additional challenges along the route include alleged ill-treatment of migrants and refugees attempting to cross the border by the border police of the neighbouring countries.

BiH has demonstrated its full commitment to the implementation of international law and the provision of safe refuge to all those in need of international protection. However, in order to manage their asylum and migration system more efficiently, authorities in BiH should maximize available resources through cooperation with the international community. An efficient asylum and migration system must include not only provision of dignified accommodation for all, but also access to the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure (RSD), prompt registration, accelerated decision-making processes and the issuance of individual documents certifying individual status and ensuring access to rights<sup>6</sup>.

Whether the humanitarian crises in BiH are long-standing, such as the dire conditions still faced by 100,000 IDPs, or newly arrived as is the case of the migrant and refugee influx, the lesson we have learned over the past thirty years is the same. These challenges are not national, they are regional. The solutions must be regional as well. Therefore, we call for strengthening and upholding the solidarity and burden-sharing principles between countries. Neither Bosnia and Herzegovina, nor any other country, should be forced to endure the harsh winter of a humanitarian crisis alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Partner Countries in this Programme that provides housing to the displaced population in the region are BiH, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia

<sup>2</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/montenegro/red-cross-warns-rising-needs-number-people-migrating-through-balkans-increases>

<sup>3</sup><https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/details/64659>

<sup>4</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/montenegro/red-cross-warns-rising-needs-number-people-migrating-through-balkans-increases>

<sup>5</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/montenegro/red-cross-warns-rising-needs-number-people-migrating-through-balkans-increases>

<sup>6</sup> accommodation, food, medical and health care, use of language in procedure, access to legal aid, adequate protection of unaccompanied and separated children, etc