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Executive Summary

This briefing is submitted by Refugee Rights Europe (RRE) to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereafter the Committee). It presents evidence acquired through desk research and interviews with field based organisations. It is a response to the state report by Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) to the Committee which inadequately outlined practical and meaningful measures taken by the government in ensuring adequate reception conditions for people on the move living in temporary reception centres (TRCs) and those living in squats and other unsuitable habitation. Our research shows major gaps, most acutely in Una Sana Canton (USC) and Tuzla. The number of people with no or insufficient accommodation remains high. The government has been reluctant to admit people in certain TRCs, manage overcrowding, the lack of basic service provision outside TRCs is endemic and we see intensified and routine violence and forced transfers. There are no existing or planned government shelter solutions for Tuzla. Vulnerable populations remain particularly affected and Covid-19 continues to present a threat and an additional shelter challenge for displaced people.

About Refugee Rights Europe (RRE)

Refugee Rights Europe (RRE) is a human rights advocacy organisation and registered charity. Founded in 2016, the organisation researches and documents the situation for refugees and displaced people seeking protection in Europe, with a particular focus on human rights violations and inadequate humanitarian conditions experienced. The organisation uses its research findings to advocate for human rights-centred policy development, to ensure the rights of refugees and displaced people are upheld on European soil, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. RRE is independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion.

1. Access to adequate accommodation and shelter for asylum seekers

1.1 Previous Committee Issues & State response

In November 2019, The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights published a list of issues and requested for Bosnia to report measures taken on the following issues:

- “The steps taken to provide the large number of asylum seekers living in squats or on the street, particularly in Una Sana Canton, with adequate accommodation”
- “The measures taken to improve the living conditions in reception centres, particularly for those with special needs”.¹

Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted a reply to issues² and responded that: “In accordance with Article 78, paragraph (4) of the Law on Asylum, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) is obliged to provide refugees and foreigners under subsidiary protection in BiH with access to accommodation among other rights”. In relation to accommodation for asylum seekers it was noted that “Article 76 of the Law on Asylum also provides for the right to accommodation in a centre for asylum seekers, primary health care, access to primary and secondary education”. In the subsequent state report, it was stated that “30. Refugees, displaced persons and returnees, regardless of their ethnicity, have in the RS access to economic, social and cultural rights on an equal footing as domicile individuals” and furthermore that “36. Refugees and internally displaced persons, and especially those belonging to ethnic minorities, do not face discrimination that results in difficulties in access to social protection rights.”³

In practice, some positive measures have been taken by authorities to ensure adequate accommodation, including the closing of the Vucjak camp in Una Sana Canton (USC) in December 2019, which was widely condemned by various human rights actors.⁴ The authorities also increased accommodation capacity in USC by opening camp Lipa in April 2020. However, RRE and several partner organisations working on the ground remain deeply concerned about numerous issues which remain unaddressed or have become exponentially worse in the reporting period.

1.2 Remaining concerns following State response and intervention

Despite guaranteed accommodation provisions under Bosnian law for refugees and asylum seekers, evidence shows government actions and implementation of the legal provisions are insufficient and that there is a dire need for better shelter solutions. RRE’ key concerns are outlined as per below:

a. Insufficient accommodation capacity

The biggest issue facing people on the move remains accommodation.⁵ NGOs working with shelter provision particularly and repeatedly stress the urgent need for authorities to identify more sites and

¹ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fBIH%2fQ%2f3&Lang=en

² https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fBIH%2fRQ%2f3&Lang=en

³ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fBIH%2f3&Lang=en

⁴ <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/20066/hunger-filthy-toilets-no-electricity-what-it-s-like-for-migrants-in-bosnia-s-vucjak-camp>;

⁵ https://refugee-rights.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RRE_LimitedAccessToAsylumAlongTheBalkanRoute.pdf

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expand accommodation capacity.⁶ The number of prospective asylum-seekers, asylum-seekers and refugees currently in the country are 8,251 (as of June 2020).⁷ Inter-agency teams and local authorities reported up to 3,000 people in informal accommodation in June, primarily sleeping outside.⁸ UNHCR estimates from mid-August on people in squats was 2,745 in USC however it was noted that most people are not residing in squats on a long terms basis but tend to sleep there for the odd night.⁹ The latest published numbers for May¹⁰ and June¹¹ show the current capacity and occupation figures across the centres:

Camps	Population type	Capacity (May)	Occupancy (May)	Capacity (June)	Occupancy (June)
Sedra	Families, UASC, vulnerable individuals	430	368*	400	410*
Miral	Single men, UASCs	700	999	700	882
Lipa	Single men	1,000	1,076	1,000	1,003
Bira	Single men, UASCs	1500	539	1500	521
Borići	Families, UASC, vulnerable individuals	420	322*	420	355*
Blažuj	Single men	1,400	1,680	1,400	1,709
Ušivak	Mixed, planned for accommodation of vulnerable categories	800	338	800	495

* UNHCR noted in correspondence with RRE that in family TRCs, they tend to be full at lower occupancy numbers. For instance, a 4 person bedroom housing a family of 3 cannot house an additional single person from another family unit, hence that room would be at capacity despite the additional space. Borici is therefore considered full at the current rate.¹²

In addition to TRCs listed above there are two government run centres; the Salakovac Refugee Reception Centre outside of Mostar and Delijas Asylum Center (AC) outside of Sarajevo.¹³ Both however have low capacity and currently only house 19 and 2 individuals, respectively.¹⁴ TRCs Mira and Bira have been under threat of closure since October 2019 by the USC government. It is not clear until when they will be extended or what the long-term plan for the facilities are. This ad hoc, non-structured and politically motivated approach to managing shelter for displaced people who reside in the centres is detrimental to finding long-term effective solutions which will meet existing needs and allow for better reception conditions.¹⁵ The failure to find new facilities despite promises by officials to fulfil this obligation, threats by local authorities to close down TRCs, forcible relocation of vulnerable persons, along with the obstruction of humanitarian partners prompted sharp criticism by the EU Home Affairs Commissioner, bringing into question EU's financial support to Bosnia.¹⁶

⁶ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/74293>

⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20-%20South%20Eastern%20Europe%20-%20Refugees%2C%20asylum-seekers%20and%20other%20migratory%20movements%20%28as%20of%20end%20June%202020%29.pdf>

⁸ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

⁹ Information acquired by BH UNHCR Information Officer via email, 26 August 2020

¹⁰ <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/IA%20Monthly%20Sit-Rep%20May%202020%20Final.pdf>

¹¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

¹² Information acquired by BH UNHCR Information Officer via email, 26 August 2020

¹³ <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Final%20Inter-agency%20Sit-Rep%20April%202020.pdf>

¹⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

¹⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDRBA011ou4.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/eu-slams-bosnia-treatment-migrants-71302595>

b. The dire shelter situation in Una Sana Canton (USC)

The lack of appropriate accommodation in USC “continues to be a key protection issue”.¹⁷ In this region the accommodation capacity for single males has continuously been stretched, in TRC Miral especially. Informal tent camps, homelessness and squatting remain commonplace. Grassroots organisation No Name Kitchen (NNK) which provides services for those living outside TRCs in the town Velika Kladusa reported in July that an informal settlement outside of the official TRC Miral was cleared and destroyed by security forces. Around 600-700 people had been living outside of the centre in dire conditions, without hygiene facilities, proper shelter or NFIs, singlehandedly relying on help from volunteer-led organisations. They have identified about 50-60 squats around the city, though people sleeping in parks and other public places have largely been moved to TRCs.¹⁸

TRC Lipa was built in April to accommodate 1,000 people and was primarily aimed to house single men sleeping rough in USC.¹⁹ It however has failed to address the problem sufficiently as it has been at capacity since it opened and the rate of people sleeping outside of TRCs remains high. Concerns have been raised regarding the location of the camp – an open field in a desolate village 22 km outside of Bihac. Many actors questioned how the facility would meet the reception standards in the Law on Asylum of “humane and dignified” accommodation, due to the isolation from towns, services, lack of hygienic management, hot shower water, and sewage. The facilities in the camp are not even made of the commonly used containers but large plastic tents.²⁰

Furthermore, NGOs have criticised the enforcement of involuntary relocations of asylum-seekers with regulated private accommodation in Bihac to Lipa by the local authorities.²¹ Enforced transfers of people in private accommodation has no legal or public health protection justification, but is especially concerning when TRCs are overcrowded during a pandemic. This practice seems to have precedent and was raised last year by the UN Country Team regarding forced transfers to the since closed camp Vucjak.²² Moreover, the Bosnian police reportedly has been entering TRCs for single men and forcefully re-accommodating them to TRC Lipa despite less overcrowding in TRC Bira.²³ The removals were publicly condemned by the IOM Chief of Mission in BiH.²⁴ Most single men don’t want to stay in Lipa due to its remoteness. During Covid-19, residents were barred from using public transport to travel to nearby cities. Those that defied the ban to buy food or access services were caught by police and frequently beaten before being taken back. Local volunteers also often receive complaints about the lack of and subpar quality of the food and generally poor conditions.²⁵

Recently on 19 August, the Coordination Committee on Migration in Una-Sana Canton adopted measures that are a grave restriction of the freedom of movement of people on the move outside TRCs. This encompasses “the complete prohibition of new arrivals into the Canton, ban on transporting migrants and asylum-seekers including in public transport and taxis, ban on gathering of

¹⁷ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

¹⁸ <https://medium.com/are-you-syrious/ays-daily-digest-17-7-20-devastation-in-bosnia-security-forces-destroy-camp-18885c21070e>

¹⁹ <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Final%20Inter-agency%20Sit-Rep%20April%202020.pdf>

²⁰ <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/16153-20200504.pdf>

²¹ <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Final%20Inter-agency%20Sit-Rep%20April%202020.pdf>

²² <https://bih.iom.int/pbn/un-country-team-bih-joint-statement-relocation-migrants-and-refugees-location-near-biha%C4%87>

²³ <https://www.unhcr.org/see/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2020/01/BiH-Country-Fact-Sheet-December31-2019-1.pdf>

²⁴ <https://twitter.com/PeterAuweraert/status/1270340535207833601>

²⁵ https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HRC44_BiH_WS-on-SR-on-migrants-report_18.06.2020.pdf

migrants and asylum-seekers in public places and prohibition of providing them with private accommodation”.²⁶ A grassroots organisation*²⁷ working with local groups to distribute NFIs, food and other basic supplies, reported a situation for people outside of TRCs in Velika Kladusa which has been gravely deteriorating during Covid-19 but reached critical level in the last month. They report on the special police driving around the town beating up homeless people on the move, and in the last two weeks putting them in buses and dropping them at the railway in Otoka, a village in USC where they are told to not come back. Apart from one local organisation which was able to make it out to the location to distribute food, the respondent reported that those stuck were unable to acquire any food for 5 days. Simultaneously, key services that sustain many displaced people, e.g. shops and money transfer services like Wester Union, have barred them from using the services.²⁸

Local volunteers are afraid to continue operations due to threats by local vigilantes which is making the situation graver for the homeless population which heavily dependent on grassroots initiatives.²⁹ The provision of services in this community has been so poor that an overwhelming amount of people are reported to be drinking water from the river, leading to severe health problems like diarrhoea, infections etc. Though Red Cross and DRC teams distribute food and hygiene parcels in USC³⁰, the needs constantly outstrip available support. The respondent frequently comes across people that have not eaten for days. There is barely any health service outreach in these communities, and those that go to TRCs Miral and Bira to seek medical help have reportedly been severely beaten by the security guards. They have been known to be rejected at hospitals and the respondent noted “people are only admitted if they have been shot and are dying”.³¹ Despite existing capacity in Bira, people are not admitted as local authorities want to discourage people from coming to the city and is also “a bid to initiate closure of that facility”.³²

Demolition of squats and other provisional dwellings in Velika Kladusa and the forced relocations to Otoka have driven many to hide in fields and forests outside of the town in fear of reprisals. The difficulties local volunteers already face in reaching out to this community hence becomes even more challenging and people find themselves in a state of grave destitution. The closest TRC is for single men, hence any families which come to Velika Kladusa have no other option but to sleep on the street, before seeking accommodation nearby family TRCs in USC or trying to cross the border.³³

c. Deteriorating humanitarian situation in Tuzla

Tuzla has increasingly become a new humanitarian hotspot in Bosnia. In Tuzla 345 people were sleeping in squats and at the bus station earlier this year, with some staying in facilities operated by

²⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/bosnia-and-herzegovina-reckless-restrictions-of-movement-leave-refugees-and-migrants-stranded-without-protection/>

²⁷ The organisation wished to remain anonymous

²⁸ Data collected using a semi-open questionnaire, on 26 August 2020

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

³¹ Data collected using a semi-open questionnaire, on 26 August 2020

³² Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

³³ Data collected using a semi-open questionnaire, on 26 August 2020

local NGOs. There are no TRCs currently in this region.³⁴ Red Cross operational overview in May raised serious concerns about the lack of government initiative and provision of accommodation here. The homeless population was primarily made up of single men but also families. Until recently an accommodation initiative was run by the local Bosnian NGO Pomozi.ba which made 60 hotel rooms (circa 100 beds) available as a winterization solution. The small NGO Puz runs two small houses where shelter is provided along with food, NFIs, WASH access etc., for up to 40 people.³⁵

A recent study by CARE international showed that, in Tuzla, “over three-quarters of refugees and migrants do not have sufficient access to clean drinking water. There is also no adequate access to sanitation and basic hygiene”. The recent push by the government against civil society organisations service provision has made this infinitely situation worse and there is nearly no support in the city.³⁶ A grassroots partner in Tuzla we interviewed*³⁷ describe an extremely poor situation with a mostly homeless displaced population, living in streets, abandoned houses and in tents in parks with no access to toilets and other basic provisions. What is particularly noteworthy is that they estimate unofficially that about a quarter of the people that they service are families, vulnerable or minors.³⁸

The organisation services about 30-50 people daily in a small day centre where they provide basic services like food, clothes and showers and distribute food for up to 400 people weekly. They also run a small accommodation where people can stay for a few weeks, with priority being given to families and vulnerable cases. Many of their activities have however ceased since the outbreak of the pandemic. Many people come to Tuzla after leaving TRCs in places like Sarajevo due to poor conditions and overcrowding, where they report people were sleeping on floors, crime, and a lack of food and hot shower water. Last winter many people were also turned away from these TRCs.³⁹ A major barrier in people accessing the shelter provided by the organisation is a missing ‘intention to seek asylum’, the first document people receive when they enter the country or register at the asylum office. The respondent mentioned that as a deterrence tactic, the police in many cases did not issue this document last winter. During the Covid-19 outbreak, police has been transferring people sleeping outside in Tuzla to TRCs in Sarajevo and many also reported that they had been picked up by the police, driven 10-15 km and dropped off in desolate areas outside of the city.⁴⁰

d. Ongoing homelessness in Sarajevo

An organisation RRE interviewed*⁴¹ working with homeless single men in Sarajevo, distributing NFIs and making referrals to other services outside of TRCs, noted the ongoing homelessness issue. Many single men sleep in abandoned buildings or squats, which lack water, electricity, or even fully enclosed spaces, while a small group of people reside in hostels that do not require papers or with locals that rent out rooms. A major service provision gap they recognise is food distribution to meet

³⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20inter-agency%20response%20to%20the%20mixed%20movement%20-%20Monthly%20situation%20report%2C%20February%202020.pdf>

³⁵ <http://adore.ifrc.org/Download.aspx?FileId=308594> May 2020 update

³⁶ <https://www.care-international.org/news/press-releases/stranded-and-forgotten-bosnias-migrants-and-refugees-left-to-themselves>

³⁷ The partner has requested to remain anonymous

³⁸ Data collated using a semi-open questionnaire, on 17 August 2020

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The organisation requested to stay anonymous

the need in the city. More resources are available for non-single men populations (families and women) in relation to accommodation in the city. Though camps remained overcrowded throughout the Covid-19 lockdown they have observed this issue particularly in the last two weeks according to our respondent and people have been routinely turned away. A lot of people left Sarajevo TRCs in June to cross the border but due to failed attempts many returned to the camps which have been reaching full capacity. At the height of the crisis police routinely rounded up people and forced them into the closed camps, or people “remained in hiding in their informal accommodation (squats) and were not able to access stores or any types of services”.⁴²

Another grassroots organisation from Sarajevo interviewed for the submission^{*43} similarly works with single men outside TRCs, and occasional minors and families. Apart from fluctuations due to Covid-19, the respondent estimates around 600-800 people live outside of TRC facilities at any given time. Most stay in squats, with some residing in private accommodation which “occasionally get raided and evicted, with occupants being transferred to camps”. Some people have been staying in a former restaurant in the city where residents pay a fee to stay each night, which has been described as worse than a squat. At the height of the pandemic in March, they serviced a population of 400-600 people weekly despite relatively limited geographical reach, the real numbers can only be assumed to be much higher. During Covid-19 they served approximately 2,000-2,400 food packs per month. Pre-Covid-19, they distributed winter NFIs and reached approximately 950 unique ‘homeless’ beneficiaries per month. Though larger NGOs have increased their coverage and service provision to this population since last winter, including distribution of food packs, hygiene kits, first aid, basic psychological support and NFIs, the respondent deems existing government and the NGOs efforts insufficient, including the existing accommodation options but especially safehouse shelter accommodation for particularly vulnerable people (LGBTQ+, SGBV victims, etc). People with mental health issues or vulnerabilities sometimes choose to leave TRCs without alternate suitable shelter.⁴⁴

e. Lack of suitable shelter for UASC and other vulnerable groups

The national average of vulnerable individuals in TRCs is 30 percent (families, UASCs etc.).⁴⁵ It is estimated there are 370 UASCs in total as of July.⁴⁶ TRCs such as Borići, Sedra, Bira, and Salakovac accommodate families and vulnerable cases, however the need for expanded protection and shelter appropriate for vulnerable groups remains pressing. Services during Covid-19 have notably been insufficient in meeting the needs of UASCs and establishing appropriate safeguarding.⁴⁷ The lack of accommodation solutions “particularly affects UASC and families, as facilities accommodating vulnerable categories at the centres are full and inadequate to meet their protection needs”.⁴⁸ Though designated zones for UASCs have been built out in TRCs Bira and Miral, with 24/7 child protection support, they are still very often housed with single men.⁴⁹ In the Bira UASC zone there

⁴² Data collated using a semi-open questionnaire, on 20 August 2020

⁴³ The organisation requested to stay anonymous

⁴⁴ Data collated using a semi-open questionnaire, on 21 August 2020

⁴⁵ Information acquired by BH UNHCR Information Officer via email, 26 August 2020.

⁴⁶ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77754>

⁴⁷ <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Final%20Inter-agency%20Sit-Rep%20April%202020.pdf>

⁴⁸ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

⁴⁹ <https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Final%20Inter-agency%20Sit-Rep%20April%202020.pdf>

are currently 130 children. There are currently no plans to expand facilities for families and UASCs,⁵⁰ despite UNICEF outreach team and protection officers identifying 223 UASC in June, out of which only 54 were referred to accommodation due to lacking capacity. The number of UASC is high in Sarajevo Canton, with 200 registered in TRC Usivak where they receive psychosocial and other support. There has been an intensification of transfers from TRC Usivak to Blazuj, a single men TRC.⁵¹

In Covid-19 lockdowns, children in these facilities are particularly vulnerable to potential abuse, smuggling and other safety concerns.⁵² In April UNHCR and UNICEF met with government authorities and recommended transfers of UASC to the Emmaus centre in Duje which would provide sufficient protection and free up additional space for single men.⁵³ This was practiced two years ago but is unlikely to be resumed.⁵⁴ Systematic gaps were also echoed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, from his visit in 2019. Apart from the few placed in low-capacity safe houses, he concluded “there is a lack of appropriate alternative housing provided by the State for unaccompanied or separated children and victims of abuse and exploitation”. The lack of ‘family-based care’ alternatives for children, e.g. community-based and foster care, was also observed. Currently there is one shelter available for children victims of violence or abuse in Bihac, managed by a small organisation. There are many recorded cases of SGBV in camps where the victim cannot be separated due to a lack of safe houses.⁵⁵ Some transfers have taken place to a safe house run by Zene sa Une, the only existing shelter in BiH for SGBV survivors.⁵⁶

In Sarajevo one of the interviewed organisations estimate around one of ten people they serviced are UASCs and have been attempting to refer them to Save the Children that recently started operations in Sarajevo. They come across about 25 LGBTQ+ individuals in total, which nationally lack any specialised facilities or safe accommodation. DRC and Red Cross Outreach teams have increased their outreach to vulnerable populations. This has improved services for vulnerable population however long term and suitable accommodation for UASCs and other vulnerable categories need to improve substantially. In Sarajevo and Tuzla there are no safe houses for GVB victims, or separate provisions for other vulnerable groups such as the UASC or LGBTQ+.⁵⁷

f. Health risks under Covid19 within the existing accommodation framework

At the end of August, the first positive cases of Covid-19 were registered in a TRC since the outbreak, in Bihac.⁵⁸ The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly concerning in view of the living conditions of both TRC and non-TRC residents. 6,000 people were locked down in centres at the outset of the pandemic, which even in normal circumstances struggle to provide basic levels of food quality, personal hygiene provisions and access to water. They lacked proper space and/or

⁵⁰ Information acquired by BH UNHCR Information Officer via email, 26 August 2020

⁵¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

⁵² <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/16153-20200504.pdf>

⁵³ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/75809.pdf>

⁵⁴ Information acquired by BH UNHCR Information Officer via email, 26 August 2020

⁵⁵ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_44_42_Add.2_E.pdf

⁵⁶ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interagency Response to Mixed Movement, Monthly Situation Report – June 2020, not published yet, acquired from BiH UNHCR Information Officer via email 25 August 2020

⁵⁷ Data collated using a semi-open questionnaire, on 21 August 2020

⁵⁸ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tensions-grow-bosnian-authorities-crack-migrants-72651177>

separate spaces for self-isolation. Government responses to Covid-19 were detrimentally opposed to health safety and shelter considerations, including the ban on private accommodation for displaced people.⁵⁹ The disproportionality of the lockdown measures imposed in relation to people on the move has been criticised by NGOs.⁶⁰ UNHCR criticized that two thirds of the facilities operated well above their capacity – making isolation and distancing measures obsolete.⁶¹

Caritas furthermore reported how the police routinely and forcibly transfer any people on the move they spot in Sarajevo to the TRC Blazuj.⁶² The interviewed organisation in Sarajevo noted the swelling rates of people in TRC Blazuj during the initial stages of Covid-19, approximately 3,000 people (above the officially estimated 2,100-2,200). They emphasized that “as we have been seeing a rise in the number of new cases in Bosnia in the last month, it is paramount that there is a preparedness for a second wave which will avoid the same level of oversaturation in the camps we have seen before. Frequency and intensity of police raids and forced transfers to TRCs has heavily influenced the overall situation for homeless people, during the beginning of Covid-19 restrictions, resulting in a ping-pong effect of migrants being rounded up and forced to TRCs, and returning back on foot to the city”. This is especially vital now with the first cases of Covid-19 in the TRCs.⁶³

g. Obstructions to grassroots service provision

All the organisations we interviewed reported various levels of resistance by the government of volunteer activities. The interviewed organisation working in USC, as noted earlier, suspended most operations during Covid-19, due to what was presented as public health concerns, but since the recent obstruction measures of their work⁶⁴ local volunteers have in many cases been taken to police stations and asked to pay fines because of their work. The volunteers see this potentially leading to heavier punishments like jail time and feel like they cannot carry out their work in the region. This is detrimental for the population not accommodated in TRCs and depending on their services.⁶⁵ The organisations from Sarajevo reported that barriers for volunteers operating have historically been police and SFA pressures against independent volunteers, resulting in expulsion and one year bans of several volunteers in 2019. They also note an increasing climate of authorities discouraging large visible public gatherings of migrants and evictions of sites in the city and the central train/bus station area. As they noted, “resulting dispersal and lowered visibility of populations outside of TRCs have created a soft barrier for grassroots to provide services to non-camp populations, due to not being able to identify and locate them”. Though the respondent organisation has not had direct issues with police so far, they report this has in many cases been an issue for grassroots working with homeless populations.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/16153-20200504.pdf>

⁶⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/bosnia-decision-to-confine-thousands-of-migrants-into-camp-inhumane-and-puts-lives-at-risk/>

⁶¹ <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/submission-to-the-committee-against-torture-bosnia-and-herzegovina>

⁶² <https://www.caritas.eu/migrants-struggling-in-the-face-of-covid-19/>

⁶³ Data collated using a semi-open questionnaire, on 21 August 2020

⁶⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/bosnia-and-herzegovina-reckless-restrictions-of-movement-leave-refugees-and-migrants-stranded-without-protection/>

⁶⁵ Data collected using a semi-open questionnaire, on 26 August 2020

⁶⁶ Data collated using a semi-open questionnaire, on 17 August 2020

2. Our recommendations

a.) To ensure access to shelter and accommodation, the Committee ought to call on the government to ensure accommodation across the key regions of concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to provide sufficient reception conditions in accordance with the Law of Asylum and international standards for both TRC residents and those residing outside of TRCs.

b.) The grave shelter and humanitarian situation in USC needs to be addressed urgently by the government and canton level authorities. Barring of access to TRC Bira needs to be lifted and accommodation capacity increased. All forced transfers, from private accommodation and into destitute locations with no services, need to be terminated, along with all government sponsored violence against people on the move. Officials need to lift the existing severe movement restrictions, and remove bans to access shops, money transfer and other key services.

c.) The lack of any organised accommodation facilities in Tuzla needs to be urgently addressed, especially for the large proportion of families and other vulnerable populations sleeping in public spaces, squats, and other unsuitable places of habitation. It is particularly urgent to address the lack of clean drinking water and basic hygiene facilities experienced by displaced people in Tuzla. Forceful transfers by local police to desolate locations outside of the city need to come to an immediate halt.

d.) Accommodation capacity in Sarajevo Canton needs to expand to provide shelter to individuals sleeping rough and address the issue of overcrowding in TRC Blazuj. We urge for ongoing transfer efforts of UASC from TRC Blazuj to Usivak to continue and for all UASC to be housed in appropriate accommodation facilities.

e.) Across all regions, the government and relevant partners, need to expand accommodation and shelter provisions for vulnerable groups that are currently not serviced or underserved, e.g. UASCs, SGBV survivors/those at risk, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Transfers and separation of UASC into child friendly spaces need to continue and intensify across all TRCs. To service those vulnerable individuals sleeping rough effectively more efficient outreach procedures are required to identify people at an early stage along with reinforced referral and case management mechanisms for vulnerable individuals residing outside of TRCs. Smaller organisations and grassroots groups which are already providing the very few specialised facilities should be supported to address existing gaps more efficiently.

f.) With the continued threat of Covid-19 and the first time positive cases in TRCs, the government needs to make sure that the conditions in the accommodation facilities allow for sufficient social distancing, necessary hygiene regimes and provisions and isolation facilities.

g.) The government needs to ensure an end to intimidation, disruptions and/or barring of grassroots services and assistance. This is especially vital in the current situation in USC and Tuzla where people on the move are particularly dependent on the already limited services due to Covid-19.