



IRC Serbia

ANTI-TRAFFICKING

program

FACT SHEET
October 2024

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) Serbia works to expand community engagement and anti-trafficking programs enhancing the prevention of trafficking, protection of victims, and prosecution of perpetrators, focusing on both refugee and local populations across the Western Balkan countries.

Background

IRC Serbia's anti-trafficking programs prioritize Serbia and the Western Balkan countries - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. These countries are consistently placed on Tier 2 of the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Reports, as countries that do not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, highlighting the urgent need for improved prevention and response measures. All countries are identified as origin, transit, and destination countries for trafficking, involving men, women, and children subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labor. An unstable political context compounded by systemic rule of law issues as well as challenging socio-economic conditions and the prolonged EU accession processes of these countries, create an enabling environment for trafficking activities. On the demand side, some of the most significant "pull" factors are attractive job opportunities and better living conditions elsewhere that make individuals more susceptible to exploitation and trafficking.

An additional reason for focusing on this region is the increase in migrants and asylum seekers since 2015 which heightened the risk of trafficking and smuggling. Being at the center of the Western Balkan route, since 2015 Serbia has witnessed over one million asylum seekers and migrants passing through its territory which are facing immense challenges due to decades of violence and adversity, making them highly vulnerable to trafficking in human beings (THB). During 2022 and 2023, Serbia saw a significant increase in the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers, some

145,600 having been recorded in 2022 and 108,808 in 2023. However, there has been a notable decrease in the number of arrivals in 2024, with only 15,266 arrivals by the end of October. On the other hand, there has been a slight increase in the number of arrivals in the past month as compared to the rest of the year, which is also evidenced by the Hungarian border police that prevented more entries in September and October than during the rest of the year.

The introduction of border controls within the EU and increasing control at borders of countries neighboring the EU such as Serbia has led refugees to resort to unsafe travel methods, often relying on smugglers to facilitate their journeys. This trend significantly heightens the risks associated with trafficking, particularly considering the unchanged proportion of unaccompanied children within the overall refugee population. Recent incidents, such as the drowning of 11 refugees in Bosnia this summer, emphasize the dangers inherent in these precarious routes.¹ Additionally, the forthcoming implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum by EU member states is expected to introduce further challenges to securing the right to international protection, potentially exacerbating obstacles faced by asylum seekers across Europe.

Even though such a large number of people transited through the region, the number of victims of trafficking (VoTs) identified overall has been constantly decreasing. It is estimated that, internationally, only about 1% of victims of human

¹ For more information, see:
<https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-serbia-migrant-drowning-boat-capsized-drina-river/33090280.html>.

trafficking cases are identified, meaning that the vast majority of cases go undetected.

Programming approach and activities

Since 2018 IRC Serbia established close collaboration with **local NGOs in four Western Balkan countries** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia). The selected partnering organizations are well-recognized and established experts in the field of THB in the region.

In partnership with these local organizations, IRC Serbia initiated both national and regional projects to combat modern slavery in a context where trafficking networks target not only traditional victims of trafficking but also especially vulnerable individuals (women, and children including

IRC Partner – Vasa Prava conducting trafficking awareness-raising session in Bihac, B&H | June 2022



unaccompanied and separated children) within the asylum seekers and migrant population.

IRC projects to date were focused on the prevention of trafficking, protection of victims, capacity strengthening of service providers and system strengthening, as well as enhancing cross-border collaboration.

Provision of direct assistance services to VoTs included:

- Early intervention support through mobile teams
- Proactive identification and referral of presumed victims
- Protection and emergency assistance to identified or presumed VoTs (including safe temporary housing, meals, clothing, client-centered and trauma-informed

psychological counseling, legal counseling, health care etc.)

- Support to survivors through reintegration and recovery programs, including empowerment and educational workshops, as well as income-generating activities.



IRC Partner – NGO Vatra conducting trafficking awareness-raising sessions in Albania | April 2023

In addition to the provision of direct services to VoTs, in Serbia, the IRC worked on:

Capacity strengthening of service providers for early identification and provision of specialized services to VoTs including police, judges, social workers, and other relevant state and non-state actors from the National Referral

Mechanism, who received a series of trainings and educational sessions to bring new skills, knowledge, practical and innovative solutions. **Two educational events/trainings developed by IRC were accredited by the Serbian Social Protection Chamber** and are included in the regular curriculum for the license renewal of social work professionals. **The developed Leaflet on victims' rights became an official part of the**



Capacity-building for professionals, Serbia | July 2021

Instructions for the Ministry of Interior representatives to deal with the THB cases.

Provision of technical assistance to institutions in strengthening the strategic framework and counter-trafficking mechanism through the development of two key documents that define the Anti-Trafficking framework in Serbia – Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the Action Plan for implementation of the National Strategy for the period 2019-2020. In this process, a number of meetings and round tables were organized with the representatives of the government institutions, local civil society, international organizations, and VoT representatives. To ensure that the survivor's perspective is heard and taken into account, an advocacy group of THB survivors was formed and further supported.

Additionally, IRC Serbia supported authorities in strengthening service mapping and referral pathways between stakeholders and service providers with the aim of improving referrals, especially for child VoTs.

To ensure quality coordination and **partnership** among key regional stakeholders to contribute to a better antitrafficking response, IRC Serbia organized three regional roundtables to discuss important topics such as the identification of VoTs among refugee and migrant populations, coordination between asylum and anti-trafficking systems and improvement of the regional anti-trafficking cooperation. In addition, these efforts resulted in the establishment of processes and tools for regular communication utilized by state and non-state actors beyond the completion of project activities.

Achievements to date

- ☑ **2,184** clients underwent initial THB screening and received information on THB risks.
- ☑ **876** presumed trafficked persons provided with direct support/services (temporary accommodation, meals, clothing, legal and psychological support, etc.)
- ☑ **201** clients referred to legal, medical, and accommodation services.
- ☑ **168** potential VoTs identified and supported through reintegration and recovery activities.
- ☑ **90** clients participated in income-generating activities.
- ☑ **668** professionals trained in the prevention of the secondary victimization of VoTs, identification, and referrals.
- ☑ **9** roundtables with **118** participants from national and regional key asylum and anti-trafficking organizations and institutions were held.
- ☑ **1** Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey conducted with **90** participants.
- ☑ **4,000** leaflets with information on victims' rights and available support mechanisms delivered to VoTs and key stakeholders.
- ☑ **10,000** info cards to key institutions disseminated.



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