

URGENT ACTION

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS FREEZING IN SERBIA

Over a thousand refugees and migrants are being exposed to disease and inhuman living conditions by the Serbian authorities who are fail to provide accommodation, food and healthcare to them. They are being forced to endure the extreme cold winter temperatures by lighting fires and squatting in derelict warehouses in the capital.

An estimated **1,200 refugees and migrants** are sleeping rough in abandoned warehouses in central Belgrade. The conditions seen by Amnesty International are inhuman and, with winter temperatures reaching -20 C (-4 F), they are at serious risk of illness and even death from frostbite and hypothermia. Most have no funds to sustain themselves and are surviving on one small meal a day provided by an NGO. The Serbian authorities are failing to provide them with adequate food, water and sanitation, healthcare, appropriate clothing and basic accommodation. People are forced to light fires to keep warm, burning foraged wood and scrap materials, including plastics, creating toxic fumes and the risk of flames spreading. Many people lack basic clothing, including socks and shoes appropriate for winter weather.

Serbian authorities have not organized emergency shelters to accommodate these refugees and migrants, the majority of whom come from Afghanistan. Serbian police are visiting the warehouses daily to count the number of people in the warehouses. No attempt has been made by the Serbian authorities to identify particularly vulnerable people, including children and people requiring immediate medical treatment.

Unaccompanied children, as young as 11 represent a quarter of the population in the warehouses, according to UNHCR. They are at risk of further abuses and are particularly vulnerable to the harsh living conditions and exploitation. Many of them have spent months in the warehouses. In November 2016, the government informed NGOs providing assistance that their support outside formal centres was "no longer acceptable", while signalling that their capacity would not be increased.

Please write immediately in Serbian or your own language:

- Calling on the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs to ensure all refugees and migrants are provided with basic services such as adequate housing, food, sanitation and healthcare and NGOs are not stopped from distributing aid;
- Urging the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Interior to urgently deploy competent staff to identify and provide treatment to all unaccompanied children and other vulnerable individuals;
- Urging the Minister of Interior to ensure all persons wishing to seek asylum in the country are received by police and are referred to a reception centre for the duration of the asylum process.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 FEBRUARY 2017 TO:

Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran
and Social Affairs

Aleksandar Vulin
Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran
and Social Affairs
Nemanjina 22-26
11000 Belgrade, Serbia
Email: brziodgovori@minrzs.gov.rs
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Interior

Nebojša Stefanović
Minister of Interior
Bulevar Mihajla Pupina 2a
11000 Belgrade, Serbia
Email: info@mup.gov.rs
Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Commissioner
Vladimir Cucić
Commissariat for Refugees and
Migration
Narodnih heroja 4
11070 Belgrade, Serbia
Email: kirs@kirs.gov.rs

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY DR OGNJEN PRIBIŠEVIŠ, Embassy of the Republic of Serbia, 28 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QB tel: 020 7235 9049 Fax 020 7235 7092, Email: london@serbianembassy.org.uk, www.london.mfa.gov.rs, Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Serbian authorities have argued that the refugees and migrants squatting the warehouses in the extremely dire winter conditions are there of their own choice and only temporarily. Several refugees and migrants Amnesty International staff interviewed have however attempted to express their intent to seek asylum at a nearby police station, in line with Serbian asylum procedures, but were denied. They were either told that there was no place for them in the “camps” (formal asylum reception centres), that they should go away, or that they should come back at another time. Police registration is essential to be referred to an asylum reception centre and benefit from basic accommodation, food and medical care.

On 13 January 2017, UNHCR estimated that 1,200 males were sleeping rough in Belgrade city centre, including up to 300 unaccompanied or separated boys.

In 2016 the Serbian government has adopted a policy of not providing accommodation for all asylum seekers but only up to 6,000 persons at any one time. Current reception capacities are almost fully exhausted with some centres operating beyond capacity. No emergency measures have been taken to ensure all refugees and migrants are taken care of.

The warehouses where these refugees and migrants are squatting are well known and easily reachable by the authorities. In fact, police visit the camp every day to count the number of squatters. To keep warm, people light fires inside and outside the warehouses and burn scrap materials, causing toxic fumes. The majority of people interviewed by Amnesty International on the site complained of a lack of clothing, including shoes, proper blankets and sleeping mats, and of the amount of food distributed each day (usually 2 slices of bread, and a stew of vegetables). At the time of Amnesty International’s visit in January 2017, there were no women in the warehouses but a significant proportion were children or young adults. Children were especially disorientated and did not have any information or support to be able to access basic protection in Serbia. Single women and families who were not referred by the police to asylum centres were staying overnight in a nearby information point run by NGOs.

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