

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association



FIELD REPORT 2016

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During July there were no particular changes in the field apart from the increased number of refugees leaving and arriving in TC Tabanovce and TC Vinograd. MYLA's data gathered in the field show that the push backs registered in the previous months continued during the month of July, with an increase of push backs from Serbia to Macedonia and less intensity regarding those from Macedonia to Serbia. The issues regarding access to procedure continued this month as well and refugees encountered obstacles when trying to apply for asylum, particularly in TC Tabanovce.

Compared to previous months, the situation on field has not changed drastically. The number of refugees in the transit center in Tabanovce varied between 70 and 85 persons on a daily basis, depending on the number of arrivals and departures. Most of the persons staying in TC Tabanovce attempted to leave the camp and enter Serbia, however the majority of those detected by the authorities were returned to the center. In total **27** refugees from TC Tabanovce succeeded in their attempt to leave the camp and continue towards Serbia while the rest of those who tried were caught and prevented in their attempt. Some of the refugees used the cargo train that stops in Tabanovce to cross the border before continuing to Serbia. Others tried to cross on foot, usually in the evening hours or early in the morning.

There were approximately **16** persons that arrived in TC Tabanovce during the month of July. These refugees coming from Congo, Iran, Afghanistan, Morocco, Algeria, etc. used this center to rest for several hours and continue their journey to Serbia. They informed MYLA's lawyers that they traveled in bigger groups but got separated on the way to Serbia. There is no statistical data on the number of refugees and migrants transiting through Macedonia, however their number is relatively high according to the statements of those arriving.

Refugees that are travelling across Macedonia are trying to avoid TC Tabanovce due to fear of being caught by the police authorities and being pushed back to Greece.

According to MYLA's data, during July a total of **64** persons were intercepted in Serbia and returned back to Macedonia. From this group only **12** persons were accommodated in TC Tabanovce, while the rest were sent back to TC Vinograd in Gevgelija and from there pushed back to Greece. On 11 June 2016, it was reported that 10 refugees were pushed back from Serbia to Macedonia. The group consisting of 4 men, 3

children and 3 women all from Syria, stated that they were pushed back from Hungary to Serbia and later on from Serbia to Macedonia because they were profiled as economic migrants. Additionally, **2** persons (1 male and 1 female) were pushed back from Serbia to Macedonia, and the women claimed she was separated with her daughter while attempting to avoid contact with the Serbian police. The authorities, as well as the relevant organizations were informed about this case and worked together towards finding the girl.

MYLA FIELD STAFF

- **18 Field Lawyers**
- **22 Data Entry Clerks**
- **8 Interpreters**
- **7 On-call Attorneys**
- **24/7 Free Legal Aid Number**

During the reporting period **59** persons accommodated in the transit center in TC Tabanovce were provided with information and other legal counselling. They were mostly interested in knowing about the asylum procedure in Macedonia, family reunification with family members in Germany and other EU countries, the conditions in the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo, their current status in Macedonia, freedom of movement in Macedonia and information about reopening of the borders along the Balkan route.

In terms of legal counsel, majority of the people that were offered legal aid and counseling in TC Vinograd were persons that were caught by the Macedonian Police in an attempt to enter Macedonia irregularly and were taken back to the camp site to be questioned/profiled and later on pushed back to Greece.

In total **395** persons have been pushed back to Greece during July. This number is lower in comparison to previous months, however the reason behind this practice remains unclear, whether the authorities are not taking for questioning all of the persons they catch or because the refugees have managed to find alternative crossing points and routes and they manage to transit through Macedonia without being detected by the police authorities. Whatever the reason this month, on 24.07.2016, for the first time on the official site of the Ministry of Interior there was a [report](#) that a group of irregular migrants that were caught by the Police being smuggled through Macedonia were returned back to Greece.

Access to asylum procedure is still a problem and is allowed by the authorities on selective basis. The biggest obstacles when trying to apply for asylum were noted in TC Tabanovce.

During the month of July, approximately 132 refugees were staying in TC Vinojug in Gevgelija. With the assistance of MYLA's lawyers in TC Vinojug, on 20 July 2016, one woman from Afghanistan with her 2 children managed to apply for asylum and later on she was transferred and accommodated in the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo.

Due to increased activities of organized groups of smugglers that are operating in Macedonia and according to information between 100 - 200 refugees are transiting through Macedonia on a daily basis, MYLA's mobile teams went on several monitoring visits both in villages in Macedonia as well as Northern Greece.

On 19 July 2016 there was one visit to the village of Lojane and Vaksince. MYLA's lawyers spoke with the local population who told them that refugees are no longer using the local mosque as a place where they sleep and rest like they did in the past. They also claimed that the refugees had raised an improvised shelter where they rest, in a remote place in the mountains but even though it was dismantled by the police approximately one month ago, they have managed to rebuild it. The refugees go to the village only to buy food. In terms of information relating to smuggling activities, based on the statements of the locals, the smugglers are mainly originating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. They told MYLA's lawyers that as one group of refugees manages to enter in Serbia, another arrives and currently there are between 100 - 300 persons in improvised shelters in the mountains. Our mobile team encountered 5 migrants in the center of the village, but they refused to speak to them.

On 22 July 2016, another visit to the police station in Kumanovo was conducted by MYLA staff and UNHCR representative. This visit was done because it was reported that a group of 31 migrants were intercepted in the villages of Lojane and Vaksince and detained in the Police Station. Upon arrival in Kumanovo the mobile team was informed that no group was brought in the police station and that the group was immedi-

ately sent back to Gevgelija.

In July, MYLA continued its monitoring activities on the southern border. MYLA monitoring team conducted 6 monitoring visits to 4 different regions in the Southern border with Greece covering 21 villages. The following regions were covered: South Central region (Gevgelija area towards Kozuf); South Central region (Gevgelija and Bogdanci area towards East); South East region (Dojran area); South East region (Novo Selo area towards East). The objective of the field monitoring was to gather data on: transit routes (entry and exit points) frequency of movements, important locations, modus operandi (for people on the move, smugglers and police); Police/Army presence and practices both in contacts with refugees and migrants and with local population, frequency of patrols etc.; to establish network of contacts with local population for further cooperation, including early warning mechanisms.

During July MYLA's monitoring teams continued with field visits both on the northern and southern border of Macedonia, as well as in parts of Northern Greece.

In addition to the monitoring and protection activities in Macedonia, MYLA conducts a fact finding monitoring mission in Northern Greece in order to collect testimonials of both push backs and push forwards by both Macedonian and Greek authorities. MYLA presence in these regions in Greece is contributing to the wider MYLA advocacy objective of stopping push-backs along the Balkan route, facilitating access to territory and access to asylum procedure to people in need of international protection, and full implementation of readmission agreements in cases of irregular migrants.



Women in TC Tabanovce attending one of the workshops
Photo: MYLA

As of 01 July 2016, **7** creative workshops with women and girls have taken place in TC Tabanovce and TC Vinojug. At the workshops, the women refugees had the possibility to practice and develop new skills. The workshops were attended by a total **129** women and girls.

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental professional organization which provides legal aid and strategically litigates to protect human rights. By using the knowledge and innovative capacities of young lawyers, MYLA promotes the rule of law and influences policy through research and advocacy. MYLA strives for a society in which the rule of law is established and people proactively strive for the respect of their human rights.

MYLA is the only organization in the Republic of Macedonia that provides free legal aid and represents asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons and other persons of concern in procedures related to asylum, legal residence and other social rights.

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