

**Mapping of the Population at Risk of Statelessness**

In the period June-October 2023, the non-governmental organisation Praxis, supported by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), **conducted** **the mapping of the population at risk of statelessness in 24 municipalities and towns** in the Republic of Serbia[[1]](#footnote-1). The selection of municipalities and towns was based on the previous experience of Praxis in the field of providing legal assistance to persons at risk of statelessness, and on the [latest UNHCR](https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/615efd094.pdf) survey[[2]](#footnote-2), according to which the highest number of persons at risk of statelessness in 2020 lived in the regions of Southern and Eastern Serbia and Belgrade.

**The goal of mapping** was to identify persons at risk of statelessness, through intensified field activities, in the selected municipalities and towns and collect quantitative and qualitative data related to their number, settlements in which they lived, legal problems regarding their personal status, in order to gain insight into the outstanding problems and develop a legal strategy accordingly, i.e. provide them with adequate legal assistance, information or counselling.

Twenty-four **(24) collaborators, members of the Roma national minority** from local communities, were engaged for mapping. In 24 municipalities and towns, collaborators **mapped 184 settlements**.

**The survey examined the following statelessness indicators: lack of birth registration, lack of citizenship, lack of registered permanent residence and lack of ID card.** Unlikesome previous UNHCR surveys, conducted on a representative sample of households, **the mapping aimed at identifying individuals at risk of statelessness in Serbia** or individuals who faced the problem related to personal documents, as well as providing them with legal assistance.

In addition to the information collected by collaborators, we hereby present the information from additional 21 municipalities and towns – 27 settlements, collected by Praxis lawyers while performing their regular field activities.

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| **According to the data obtained, on 1 November 2023, a total of 785 persons at risk of statelessness were identified in the municipalities and towns covered by the mapping. The latest UNHCR survey “**[**Persons at Risk of Statelessness in Serbia – overview of current situation and the way forward**](https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/615efd094.pdf)**”, prepared in 2020, estimated that there were 2,139 persons at risk of statelessness.****Within that number, 383 persons are not registered in birth registry books in Serbia (out of which 164 persons are not registered in birth registry book in any place), 431 do not have the proof of citizenship of the Republic of Serbia (88% of them are not registered in the birth registry books in Serbia, and a successful procedure of birth registration should result in acquisition of citizenship at the same time), 746 do not have a registered permanent residence in the places where they live, while 325 do not have a valid ID card. To solve these issues, it is necessary to collect the required evidence and initiate relevant procedures before the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia.** |

As regards **migration-related experience**, the collected data indicate that **50% of identified persons are domicile, while 46% have some migratory experience**: 26% of the total number are internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija (IDPs), 14% are returnees from Western Europe, 5% are foreigners, while 1% are refugees from the former Yugoslav republics. A total of 4% of identified persons did not express themselves on this issue.

**This mapping confirmed the UNHCR survey findings on the geographical distributions of persons at risk of statelessness. Most persons at risk of statelessness in the municipalities and towns covered by the mapping (35% of all identified persons) were identified in the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia and the region of Belgrade (32% of all identified persons).** They are followed by the region of Western Serbia and Šumadija and the region of Vojvodina (16%).

**A total of 383 persons who are not registered in birth registry books** include the following categories:

* **164 persons who are not registered in birth registry books in any place;**
* **50 persons who are registered in the birth registry books in Kosovo, but not in the civil registry books administered by the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia;**
* **169 persons who are registered in birth registry books abroad, but not in Serbia[[3]](#footnote-3)**.

As for the reasons for not being registered in Serbia, **48% of respondents stated that they did not have the proof required for registration, while 18% were not acquainted with the procedure or it was overly complicated or expensive**. A small percentage of respondents (3%) stated that they used to be registered in birth registry books, but these books were later destroyed or went missing. A total of 6% stated that their parents, whose participation in the procedure was required, were not alive, known or available. **One fourth, or 25% of persons not registered in the birth registry books in Serbia are those whose parents (mothers) are unregistered or undocumented**.

**A total of 84 children aged 0-6 years are not registered in birth registry books in any place, which is 22% of all unregistered persons.**

**The number of respondents who do not possess a proof of citizenship of the Republic of Serbia is 431**. **A total of 88% of these persons are not registered in the birth registry books in Serbia** and in most of these cases a successfully conducted procedure for registration in birth registry books should result in the acquisition of citizenship at the same time, while a small number of cases will require the initiation of separate procedures for acquiring citizenship. Out of the total number of persons without Serbian citizenship, **50 (12%) are registered in the birth registry books in Serbia**, **but do not have citizenship** because their parents do not have Serbian citizenship, or they failed to obtain all the evidence, or they do not know the procedure, or it is too complicated. These are the persons who, in most number of cases, have a connection with the Republic of Serbia (place of birth, origin of parents and have been living in Serbia for a long time), which suggests that their citizenship status can be resolved, but, at the moment of conducting the mapping exercise, they had not initiated or did not have the evidence for initiating adequate procedures.

**Permanent residence** continues to be a problem for a large number of persons:

* **573 identified persons do not have registered permanent residence in any place;**
* **173 identified persons have registered permanent residence but not in the place of their actual residence, which prevents their access to the rights exercised in the place of permanent residence (43 of these persons have registered permanent residence in Kosovo and Metohija).**

Most (72%) of 573 persons who stated that they did not have registered permanent residence in any place stated that the reason for that was a lack of birth/citizenship certificate, 20% gave other reasons, while 8% stated that they were refused by the competent authorities. The aforementioned figure includes 373 persons who are not registered in the birth registry books in Serbia, 46 persons who do not possess the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, which means that they will first have to successfully conduct the procedures for registration in birth registry books and citizenship acquisition.

**Seventy-two percent** **(72%)** of all respondents who do not have registered permanent residence in the place of their actual residence **stated that they had not even tried to register their permanent residence in the place in which they lived, while 4% pointed out that they had submitted a request, but it was rejected.** It is particularly worrying that **23% tried to register their permanent residence but were verbally refused**.

**Three hundred and twenty-five (325) persons do not possess a valid ID card**. The most frequent reasons for not having an ID card are related to the fact that these persons are not registered in birth registry books or do not have citizenship, but also that they do not have registered permanent residence in any place or in the place of their actual residence. A total of 28 persons or 9% of all respondents who do not have a valid ID card stated that they did not have the money to pay fees.

1. Bujanovac, Bor, Bojnik, Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Kragujevac, Niš, Subotica, Novi Sad, Zemun, Novi Beograd, Surčin, Čukarica, Palilula, Zvezdara, Obrenovac, Smederevo, Kostolac, Požarevac, Vranje, Aleksinac, Prokuplje, Žitoradja, Zrenjanin [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Persons at Risk of Statelessness in Serbia, Overview of the Current Situation and the Way Forward, CeSid, November 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Persons registered in birth registry books abroad are mainly those registered in Germany (56), followed by Montenegro (32), North Macedonia (27), Italy (12), Sweeden (10), France (8), Belgium (7), Croatia (7), Bosnia and Herzegovina (5); there are also a few cases of those born in Bulgaria, Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)