



Position and needs of migrant children and mothers from Russia in Serbia

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GROUP 484



Save the Children

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FROM RUSSIA IN SERBIA**

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Abbreviations

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
APR	Business Registers Agency
ENIC/NARIC	European Network of Information Centres - National Academic Recognition Information Centres
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GSI	Group for Minority Education, Social Inclusion and Protection from Violence and Discrimination
HEART	Healing and Education Through the Arts
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IEP	Individual educational plan
LGU	Local Government Unit
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
ICSO	International Civil Society Organization
MESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
NSHC	Novi Sad Humanitarian Center
NES	National Employment Service
CSO	Civil society organization
PIN	Psychosocial Innovation Network
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPS	Pedagogical and Psychological Service
RFZO	Republic Fund for Health Insurance
RS	Republic of Serbia
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZUOV	Institute for the Advancement of Education

Summary

Serbia has traditionally been a transit country for refugee and migrant children and adults seeking safety and a better life in Europe, traveling along the so-called Balkan route, which is reflected in the small number of asylum seekers in Serbia. However, Serbia is increasingly becoming a destination country for foreign nationals. **In 2023, more than 52,000 work permits were issued to foreigners, representing a nearly 70% increase compared to the previous year.**¹ The largest immigrant group in Serbia in 2022 and 2023 were citizens of the Russian Federation—22,351 and 41,644 respectively, of which 45.6% were women in both these years.² In 2023, 24,068 Russian citizens were granted temporary residence for the first time, making up 53% of all issued permits.³ Out of the total number of permits issued for the first time to Russian citizens, 10,768 were based on family reunification, which accounts for 78.5% of certificates issued on that basis.⁴ Precisely because they are the most numerous immigrant group in Serbia and the largest percentage of all immigrants obtain temporary residence based on family reunification, our intention was to determine to what extent they exercise their basic rights and what is the quality of their integration in Serbia, with a focus on women and children.

The research's goal is to, based on the collected data, **provide guidelines and recommendations for decision-makers and relevant stakeholders to improve access to and the quality of rights related to education, cultural rights, healthcare, and labor market inclusion** for children and mothers from Russia.

The research was conducted from early December 2023 to the end of May 2024. It involved interviews with **children and mothers from Russia**, key stakeholders for the realization of the above-mentioned rights from **institutions, international and domestic civil society organizations, as well as Russian volunteers in a local civil society organization**. The methodology was qualitative and included desk analysis and field research through focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. **A total of 61 people participated in the research.** The limitations of the methodology stem primarily from the **small and convenient sample of migrant mothers and children from Russia**. Additionally, it is important to note that representatives from a certain number of ministries (4) and schools (13) did not respond (positively) to letters or/and phone calls.

The research findings indicate that while the Russian community has integrated well in Serbia and is establishing basic life infrastructure, there are challenges in exercising all the analyzed rights—the process of education, access to cultural rights, healthcare, and inclusion in the labor market. All three groups of research participants agree that the inclusion of Russian children in the education system is proceeding well. However, **there are no objective indicators of their academic success**, nor is there an analysis of students **applying for recognition of school certificates** by the Qualifications Agency, leaving their educational potential unknown. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and the Agency need to identify and monitor objective indicators of the academic success and potential of children and youth from Russia. Furthermore, **challenges in meeting educational needs** were observed, which may hinder and reduce educational outcomes: the Serbian language learning program as a foreign language is not yet systematically implemented in schools, there is no structured preparatory program for the inclusion of migrant children in schools; there are differences in the order of lessons in some subjects (e.g. math for grades 5 and 6) between Serbia and Russia; parallel attendance at Serbian and Russian schools; enrollment in the first grade of elementary school is based on Serbian tests; the obstacles to enrolling in high school are multiple – lack of information, passing elementary school final exam in the Serbian language and high costs of recognition of school documents. Regarding **social needs**, research participants agree that local children and teachers have accepted Russian children well and provide support at school. However, discussions about free time revealed that children rarely socialize with Serbian peers outside of school. **School staff reported struggling to address the emotional/psychological needs** of students from Russia — stress and trauma, developmental difficulties, and behavioral problems, feeling unprepared for these challenges. **Schools vary in their readiness to include students from Russia**, and it is necessary to assess both the migration potential from Russia and the capacity of schools to respond. Strengthening schools to include migrants and refugees is important also due to the growing number of foreign children in schools. All these challenges point to the **need for the Ministry of Education to enhance the integration mechanism for refugee and migrant children in schools** and continue empowering schools to apply it. **Despite agreement among**

1 [U Srbiji tokom 2023. godine zaposleno više od 52.000 stranaca \(insajder.net\)](#)

2 [Migracioni profil.pdf \(kirs.gov.rs\)](#)

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

participants on the existence of cultural institutions and events promoting Russian culture, difficulties arise because Russian and Serbian **youth participate in parallel cultural trends, without intercultural dialogue between them**. It is also challenging to **support mothers in attending cultural events** due to work and family obligations. Key recommendations include **identifying the cultural needs of these target groups by the Ministry of Culture and Information and developing a mechanism for exercising their cultural rights and cultural activities in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports**. In **healthcare**, the Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance Fund (RFZO) should **create a special communication channel** in Russian in cooperation with the Russian community and civil society organizations to **clearly present all healthcare options in Serbia to newly arrived migrants and identify national healthcare providers**. The most effective way to address the right to healthcare of migrants from Russia **is to include them in the labor market**, which would grant health insurance to both employed persons and their family members.

To improve **access to the labor market, the Ministry in charge of labor affairs and the NES** should, in cooperation with the Russian community and civil society organizations, create a **special channel of communication in the Russian language**, which would enable the Russian community to be informed in a simple way about the possibilities and methods of status regulation, conditions for employment and self-employment, access to links on which the demand on the Serbian labor market is presented, and where they could post their offers and present their qualifications. In parallel, the **NES and the Ministry in charge of labor affairs and civil society organizations** should provide continuous and systematic **information to employers** about the new legal framework for foreigners and the labor potential and qualifications of interested Russian migrants. **The National Employment Service, in cooperation with the Ministry, international stakeholders and civil society organizations, should develop active employment measures intended exclusively for foreigners** and their specific characteristics. This means, above all, introducing the measure of learning **the Serbian language** for the purpose of employment and **modeling** existing non-financial and financial measures of employment (support for self-employment). Right from the moment of arrival in Serbia and through the request for recognition of qualifications, the competent agency can **establish a database** on the qualifications of Russians living and working in Serbia. At the same time, through additional research, it is possible to identify additional professions, for which the recognition of qualifications has not yet been requested, and which are in short supply in the Serbian labor market.

1. Introduction

The report was developed within the project “**Integration of Immigrant Communities in Serbia – New Challenges and Opportunities**”, implemented by Group 484 in collaboration with the international organization *Save the Children*. **The project aims, as the title suggests, to identify the needs, challenges, and potentials of refugees and migrants who have arrived in Serbia due to the war in Ukraine – Ukrainians and Russians, with a focus on mothers and children.** On the one hand, we aim to adequately respond to their needs and promote the development and utilization of their potential **through direct work with them and local communities.** On the other hand, we seek to **influence the improvement of national integration policies** and facilitate access to rights for new immigrant communities. Therefore, **two reports were written.** One on the status and needs of mothers and children displaced by war in Ukraine, who have received temporary protection in Serbia, questioning the effectiveness of this type of protection for those who have been in Serbia for three years now. The other report is this one, on the **status and needs of mothers and children from Russia**, who represent the largest immigrant population in Serbia. **In this way, we question the adequacy of the system of integration of foreigners in Serbia and the use of their potential for the development of the country.**

Serbia is traditionally a transit country for migrants on the so-called Balkan route, as evidenced by the small number of migrants entering the asylum procedure in Serbia. However, Serbia is increasingly becoming a destination country as well. **In 2023, more than 52,000 work permits were issued to foreigners, a nearly 70% increase compared to the previous year.** ⁵ In 2023, 24,068 citizens of the Russian Federation received a temporary residence permit for the first time, which accounts for 53% of the total number of issued permits.⁶ Of the total number of Russian citizens who were granted temporary residence for the first time, 10,321 were granted on the basis of work (39% in relation to the total number of certificates issued on that basis) and 10,768 were granted on the basis of family reunification, which accounts for 78.5% of the total number of certificates issued on that basis⁷.

Migrants from Russia regulate their status, like other foreigners, according to the provisions of the **Law on Foreigners**. According to the Law on Foreigners, temporary residence is a residence permit of a foreign citizen in the Republic of Serbia and can be granted to a foreigner who intends to stay in the Republic of Serbia for longer than 90 days in a period of 180 days, longer than the period of stay determined by an international agreement, i.e. longer than the period to which a long-stay visa was issued. The law, for the first time, introduces the concept of a single permit, which gives a foreigner the right to temporary residence and work in the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the law. Newly arrived Russian citizens in Serbia **regulate their status in two ways: through registration of residence**, characterised by short, tourist-business visits, or through **temporary residence**, mostly based on the reason of employment or self-employment.

The first method of regulating legal status was massively used during the first year of the stay of Russian citizens in Serbia and is still very present today. It involves applying for a stay of up to 30 days, in accordance with the bilateral *Agreement on Mutual Visa-Free Travel for Citizens of Serbia and the Russian Federation* (white card). After 30 days, Russian citizens must leave the territory of Serbia, but they can return at the same time and within 24 hours, they can re-register their stay. However, a Russian tourist, with many years of tourist experience in Serbia, does not have regulated health insurance, access to the labor market, and is invisible to other services, which provide access to various rights to foreigners who temporarily or permanently stay in Serbia. It seems that this is slowly being understood by Russian migrants, who are increasingly looking for ways to regulate their **temporary residence in Serbia**, as a legal way of regulating their status, which, however, best suits their current position and needs.

Therefore, the project began by researching one of the largest groups of foreigners, with **the aim of defining data-based guidelines and recommendations for relevant decision-makers and other stakeholders to improve access and the quality of the realization of the right to education, cultural rights, the right to healthcare, and labor market integration** for children and mothers from Russia. Moreover, **we want to familiarize mothers and children from Russia with their rights and the possibilities of their realization**, key stakeholders, good practices and start a discussion with them about important activities and the necessary

⁵ [U Srbiji tokom 2023. godine zaposleno više od 52.000 stranaca \(insajder.net\)](#)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

legal and institutional solutions. **Youth (from Russia and Serbia) involved in volunteer programs** can use research findings in designing activities for the integration of their peers.

The research was conducted from early December 2023 to the end of May 2024. Children and mothers from Russia are included in the research, as well as stakeholders key to the implementation of the mentioned rights from **institutions, international and domestic civil society organizations, and Russian volunteers from a local CSO.**

The report is structured into six chapters: summary, introduction, research context, methodological framework, research findings, and concluding remarks. **Research findings are divided into four chapters based on the realization of four rights** – education, culture, healthcare, and labor. For each right, there is an overview of the **legal, strategic, and institutional framework for its realization; perception of its realization by three groups of stakeholders** – institutions, civil society, and migrants/refugees; and **a summary of challenges and solutions. Quotes from evaluation participants** were used to **accurately convey their voices** while preserving their anonymity.

In this report, the masculine gender is used for simplicity of reading, but it would be more appropriate if it were written in the feminine gender, given that more than half of the report is intended for women, mothers, girls, and young women, who were the majority of the research participants. In any case, we want to emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive language and to keep it in mind even though we have used one gender in the text.

We owe special thanks to the women, children, and youth from Russia who openly discussed the advantages and disadvantages of life in Serbia and shared their insights on enhancing services tailored to them, with the desire to assist their compatriots, peers, and other migrants.

We thank all the research participants who daily invest efforts to improve the realization of rights for migrants and who generously and sincerely shared their experiences - challenges and good practices. Together, we have assessed our progress and identified areas for further improvement in developing a society where everyone “feels at home”.

We extend our gratitude to everyone who enabled us to get in touch with the newly arrived neighbors from Russia, who cared about having their voices heard while also protecting them from abuse.

Thanks to our partner organization Save the Children, whose support has been invaluable throughout the development and implementation of the research (and the project as a whole), including the writing of this report. Without their financial support, none of this could have been achieved

2. Research context

By 31 October 2023, temporary residence permits were granted to 37,514 Russian citizens, making up almost half of all residence permits issued to foreigners in Serbia at that time (75,444). According to data from the National Employment Service⁸, a total of 1,364 work permits were issued to Russian citizens in 2021, of which 444 were issued to women. In 2023, the year following the beginning of the war, 18,349 work permits were issued, with 5,022 going to women. Data from the Business Registers Agency (APR)⁹ shows a sharp increase in economic activity by Russian migrants in Serbia. By 30 November 2023, a total of 2,193 business entities and 7,774 entrepreneurs were registered in Serbia. Notably, the number of entrepreneurs (self-employment) increased significantly from 2,929 in 2022 to 4,588 in the first eleven months of 2023.

It is evident that with the onset of the war in Ukraine, the number of Russian citizens seeking to regulate their stay in Serbia has continuously increased, making Serbia an increasingly popular destination for Russian migrants who no longer see their future in Russia.

Without seeking international protection, Russian migrants are integrating into Serbian society, facing various challenges. Unfortunately, this period is also marked by the absence of a clear state policy towards integrating this group of foreigners. This aligns with the general assessment of Serbia's immigration policy, which fails to find a proper place in relevant strategies and action plans.

Therefore, currently, there is no record or review of the qualifications of Russian migrants who have sought recognition of their educational achievements in Serbia, the socioeconomic profile of children enrolling in our schools and the monitoring of their success, records of foreigners, or measures created for their inclusion in the labor market, nor the recognition of human potential to address ongoing shortages in certain professions, such as medical or healthcare fields.

Nevertheless, Russian migrants are finding their way, using all available opportunities, although little is known about this due to the lack of publicly available relevant research. This discrepancy contrasts with the importance of this phenomenon for Serbian society and its future development.

⁸ 18/12/2024, letter NES.

⁹ 18/12/2024, letter APR.

3. Methodological framework

3.1. Research objectives and methodology

The research tasks were:

- Investigate the conditions, challenges, and obstacles to the successful inclusion of migrant children and youth from Russia in the education system and identify good practice examples.
- Investigate the access to and quality of the realization of cultural rights and healthcare for migrant children and mothers from Russia.
- Investigate the regulation of the legal status of migrant mothers from Russia in Serbia and access to the labor market.

The methodology was qualitative – desk analysis and field research through focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews.

Desk analysis involved the analysis of legal and strategic documents relevant to the four mentioned rights, research on migrant integration, academic and media articles, and data collected through written requests sent to relevant stakeholders. Ten responses to written requests were received.

Focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews were conducted based on prepared protocols in the form of semi-structured interviews. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized – with mothers, children, and volunteers from the Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC); and two interviews with youth. Interviews were conducted with representatives of institutions, and international (ICSOs) and domestic civil society organizations (CSOs). FGDs and interviews were conducted in person, online, or via phone.

3.2. Research participants

A total of 61 people participated in the research (Appendix 1):

- 15 representatives from 12 state institutions, 14 women and 1 man;
- 5 representatives from 4 academic institutions, all 5 women;
- 23 representatives from 12 CSOs and ICSOs, 19 women and 4 men;
- 6 representatives from 3 schools in Belgrade (two elementary and one high school) and 1 high school in Novi Sad, all 6 women. Care was taken to include schools with different numbers of Russian migrants and to include one school in the support program for migrant and refugee inclusion realized by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, supported by the EU Delegation in Serbia. One elementary school has 6 Russian students (3 from the asylum center), and another has about 30. One high school has 2 Russian students, and another has 17.
- 3 mothers who are Russian citizens (2 living in Belgrade, one in Novi Sad). They are all unemployed and came to Serbia with their primary family. Two women have four children, one has two. By profession, they are a doctor, a philologist (but she has never worked) and a philologist university professor.
- 5 children from Russia, 3 girls (in 3rd and 5th grades of elementary school and 1st grade of high school) and 2 boys (1st grade of elementary school and 1st grade of high school). Two high school students are from Novi Sad, and the elementary school students are from Belgrade.
- 4 Russian citizens who are volunteers with NSHC, 1 woman and 3 men. Their ages range from 22 to 25 and one volunteer is 42. By profession, they are a documentary film director, conceptual artist, computer scientist, and product manager in an IT company. They are all employed except for one person. They arrived in Serbia in October (one in September) 2022.

3.3. Limitation of methodology

The limitation primarily stems from the **small and convenient sample of migrant mothers and children from Russia**. It should also be noted that representatives of a certain number of ministries¹⁰ (4) and schools¹¹ (13) did not (positively) respond to letters and/or phone calls. We tried to **gain full insight by analyzing three perspectives** – children and mothers from Russia, institutions and civil society. It should also be borne in mind that the Russians who participated in the research live in Belgrade and Novi Sad, so it is possible that a group with greater accessibility to services was selected. In any case, it should be kept in mind that this is small qualitative research of an exploratory type and we hope that it will instigate more extensive research on a representative sample.

10 The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoI) has refused to provide data on the number of Russians and Ukrainians who have entered Serbia since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. There has been no response to the correspondence from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights.

11 School representatives most often refused to participate in the research due to being busy or simply did not answer the repeated call when an appointment was to be arranged.

4. Research findings

4.1. Education

4.1.1. Legal, strategic, and institutional framework for education of migrant students from Russia

In the Republic of Serbia, under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and national regulations, all children have equal rights to free access to education, regardless of their status. They are enrolled in school through a simplified procedure, aimed at the best interest of the child.

According to Article 71 of the **Constitution of the Republic of Serbia**, every individual has the right to education, which is free and compulsory in elementary school, while high school education is only free. Additionally, all citizens are guaranteed access to higher education under equal conditions. The **Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System** (Article 110) prohibits activities that lead to endangering, belittling, discriminating against, or segregating individuals or groups based on various characteristics such as race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, physical or mental abilities, developmental disorders, health status, age, social or cultural origin, economic status, political orientation, or any other characteristics defined by law as grounds for prohibiting discrimination.¹²

At the core of the **Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia by 2030**¹³ and its **corresponding action plans for 2021-2023**¹⁴ and **2023-2026**¹⁵ lies inclusive education. “The vision for further improving inclusion and justice is for all children to learn and develop their competencies through quality inclusive education by 2030, contributing to their well-being and encouraging their active participation in the community. Education in the Republic of Serbia must be provided for all children, students, and adults alike, based on principles of social justice and equal opportunities without discrimination.” The vision will be realized through further development and implementation of legal and strategic frameworks and their alignment with international standards; further development of management and financing of inclusive education; maintenance and improvement of additional support systems for children from vulnerable social groups, including “children on the move”.

The two general goals of the Strategy are 1) Increased quality of teaching and learning, fairness and availability of pre-university education and strengthened educational function of educational institutions, 2) Improved availability, quality, relevance and fairness of higher education. Under both general goals, there are specific goals that are significant for the inclusion of both refugees and migrants: 1.4: Improved accessibility, equity and openness of pre-university education, 2.3: Improved coverage and equity of higher education. However, when monitoring activities and indicators, migrants and refugees are rarely mentioned, and in the **annual reports on the implementation of the Action Plan 2021-2023**, for the period June 2021 – June 2022 and June 2022 – December 2022¹⁶, there is no clearly identified progress in terms of the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the education system¹⁷. It was stated that Serbian as a foreign language program, manual¹⁸ and teacher training were developed (400 teachers in 2021, and 31 teachers in 2022). The number and socio-demographic characteristics of migrant and refugee students, as well as their coverage¹⁹ and school success, are not known.

12 prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/obrazovanje-ucenika-migranata-izbeqlica-nov-2022.pdf

13 [SROVRS-2030-1.pdf \(prosveta.gov.rs\)](https://prosveta.gov.rs/SROVRS-2030-1.pdf)

14 [SROVRS-2030-1.pdf \(prosveta.gov.rs\)](https://prosveta.gov.rs/SROVRS-2030-1.pdf)

15 [Akcioni-plan-za-period-od-2023--do-2026--godine.pdf \(prosveta.gov.rs\)](https://prosveta.gov.rs/Akcioni-plan-za-period-od-2023--do-2026--godine.pdf)

16 [ПРВИ ГОДИШЊИ ИЗВЕШТАЈ О ИМПЛЕМЕНТАЦИЈИ АКЦИОНОГ ПЛАНА ЗА ОСТВАРИВАЊЕ СРОВРС 2030 \(prosveta.gov.rs\)](https://prosveta.gov.rs/PРВИ%20ГОДИШЊИ%20ИЗВЕШТАЈ%20О%20ИМПЛЕМЕНТАЦИЈИ%20АКЦИОНОГ%20ПЛАНА%20ЗА%20ОСТВАРИВАЊЕ%20СРОВРС%203030)
[Drugi godišnji izveštaj SROVRS_FINAL \(prosveta.gov.rs\)](https://prosveta.gov.rs/Drugi%20godišnji%20izveštaj%20SROVRS_FINAL)

17 There are no clear indicators of the progress of the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the education system, not even in the National Report on Inclusive Education in the RS, period 2019-2021. [https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/22251/file/Nacionalni%20izve%C5%Altaj%20o%20IO%202019-2021%20Sa%C5%BEetak%20\(SRB\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/22251/file/Nacionalni%20izve%C5%Altaj%20o%20IO%202019-2021%20Sa%C5%BEetak%20(SRB).pdf)

18 [Српски-као-страни-језик-у-наставној-пракси.pdf](https://prosveta.gov.rs/Srpski-ka-o-strani-jezik-u-nastavnoj-praksi.pdf)

19 The Action Plan 2021-2023 says that one of the indicators for general objective 1, the rate of participation of refugee and migrant students in education, was 80% in 2019, and the expected value for 2023 was 81.5%. AP 2023-2026 says that in 2022 it is 82%, and that in 2026 it is expected to be 84%. It is not mentioned in the annual reports of the Ministry of Education.

There are no indicators for their social inclusion, emotional status, or degree of discrimination to which they are (not) exposed. When considering the inclusion of students from vulnerable social groups, the focus is on the inclusion of students with disabilities and Roma.

A **Department for Human and Minority Rights in Education** was established within the **Ministry of Education** with that scope of work. In 2015, the Social Inclusion Group was established, later renamed to the **Group for Minority Education, Social Inclusion, and Protection from Violence and Discrimination (GSI)**. The task of this group is the further development and coordination of inclusive education implementation.²⁰ The **Institute for the Improvement of Education (ZUOV)** plays an important role in improving the quality of education at all levels, particularly in relation to the inclusion of migrant and refugee children, through the development of educational materials, teacher training, provision of guidelines and support to schools, and monitoring and evaluation.

The first migrant and refugee children were included in elementary education in the Republic of Serbia in the 2013/2014 school year. According to UNICEF,²¹ in February 2024, 2,212 children, Russian citizens, were enrolled in schools in Serbia, comprising 1,235 boys and 977 girls. Specifically, 2,025 were enrolled in elementary schools and 187 in high schools.

The inclusion of migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking children in elementary and high school education is carried out by the Ministry of Education with the support of the EU²², now in its third phase under the project **“EU Support to Migration Management in Serbia – Improving Reception Capacity, Protection Services, and Access to Education III”**, in collaboration with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** as the **EU’s implementing partner. The project aims to enhance the capacities of education professionals to provide adequate support to migrant and refugee students and create a stimulating and tolerant educational environment while developing quality education for migrants.**

A series of activities have been undertaken to include refugee and migrant children²³, primarily based on developed capacities and resources for the inclusion of migrants from the Middle East. On 11 April 2022, the Ministry distributed **“Professional Guidelines for the Inclusion of Refugee/Asylum-Seeker Students in the Education System of the Republic of Serbia”**²⁴ and the **Handbook for the Implementation of the Professional Guidelines**²⁵. These guidelines regulate the enrollment process for students, the provision of support measures (at the school and student level), as well as the assessment, monitoring, and issuance of documentation.

The enrollment of migrant/refugee children is conducted according to age and previously acquired level of education, following the recognition of foreign school documents by the ENIC/NARIC center within the Qualifications Agency²⁶. If there is no evidence of previous education, students are enrolled based on a prior knowledge assessment. Enrollment requests are processed within five working days upon request from parents, legal guardians, or relevant authorities²⁷. If a school cannot enroll a child, it provides an explanation and informs educational counselors for inclusive education in the respective school administration within the same timeframe.

The first activity upon the inclusion of migrant/refugee children in a specific school is the convening of an **Inclusive Education Expert Team**, required to develop a **School Support Plan for the Inclusion of Migrant/Refugee Students**. This aims to prepare all school students and their parents, as well as teachers, promote interculturality and linguistic diversity, strengthen ties with families and the local community, and mobilize peer support. The Expert Team coordinates sub-teams that handle specific inclusion tasks, such as the **Pre-assessment Team** (which must complete assessments within 7 days of the student’s arrival at school) and the **Additional Support Team**. Based on the knowledge assessment, a **Student Support Plan** is developed, determining the grade level for student enrollment. An adaptation period of two weeks to two months for students is possible. The **Student Support Plan** includes an adaptation and stress coping program, an intensive

20 Ibid.

21 Meeting of the Working Group for Child Protection organized by UNICEF, 02/02/2024.

22 The European Union has been supporting the Ministry of Education in the field of education for migrants in Serbia since 2018, through the MADAD 2 project, as well as support through Special Measure 6 and Special Measure 7 programs.

23 prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/obrazovanje-ucenika-migranata-izbeglica-nov-2022.pdf

24 <https://mpn.gov.rs/vesti/strucno-uputstvo-za-ukljucivanje-ucenika-izbeglicatrazilaca-azila-u-sistem-obrazovanja-i-vaspitanja/> the Ministry of Education developed the professional guidance in May 2017.

25 [Realizacija Programa dobrodošlice učenicima migrantima.indd\(cep.edu.rs\)](https://realizacija-programa-dobrodoslice-ucenicima-migrantima.indd(cep.edu.rs)), The handbook was developed within the project “Support to Refugee/Migrant Students in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia”, implemented by the Center for Educational Policy in partnership with UNICEF in Serbia and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

26 [ENIC/NARIC centar – AGENCIJA ZA KVALIFIKACIJE – AZK](https://www.enic-naric.rs/)

27 MESTD, Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities – National Communities of Vojvodina, KIRS, CSR, CSOs.

learning program for the local language, individualized teaching activities through schedule adjustments, didactic materials, methods, and teaching styles, as well as extracurricular activities with peer support.

Student progress monitoring is conducted daily and reviewed every two weeks to a month, in accordance with the student adaptation process and the achievement of planned goals. Schools maintain **legally required records and pedagogical documentation on students**. The student portfolio includes student achievements, reports on the implementation of the Student Support Plan, special interests of students, language proficiency, correspondence with parents or guardians, and other institutions/agencies. If a student leaves school during the school year, parents receive a school report based on international experience in monitoring and evaluating student achievements and acquiring interdisciplinary competencies.

Significant support is provided by **school authorities**²⁸ in the inclusion of migrants into the education system. In 2022, 12 mentors were engaged as a link between the Ministry of Education and the schools attended by migrant and refugee children. These mentors offer continuous support to schools, thereby making the education system of the Republic of Serbia more accessible to migrant and refugee students. A methodology for accelerated learning of **Serbian as a Foreign Language** has been developed, and teachers of Serbian and foreign languages have been trained for its implementation (including online education). An elective program “Serbian as a Foreign Language” has been introduced in elementary schools²⁹. Materials, as well as the Teacher’s Handbook³⁰, are available. In 2021, **three bilingual brochures were printed and distributed**³¹, showcasing examples of best practices in migrant education: teaching and extracurricular activities, successful examples of school documentation, and schoolwork by migrant students. **Branko Pešić Elementary School has been declared a resource center** for the inclusion of migrants/refugees and other vulnerable groups into the education system.

The report “**Education of Migrant, Asylum-Seeker, and Refugee Students**” by the Department for Human and Minority Rights in Education of the Ministry of Education lists numerous implemented activities aimed at the inclusion of these students: education of preschool teachers, teachers, principals, and professional associates; granting small grants to schools; development of student support plans at the school level; additional classes; library visits, peer support, computer work; extracurricular activities – excursions, nature schools, theater, technology fairs; sports and cultural activities; involvement in various sections; marking significant dates; providing snacks, clothing, and footwear; workshops on interculturality, anti-discrimination, etc.; providing books, textbooks, school supplies; visits to collective centers, etc. Expert training of teachers and professional associates has been conducted to reduce stress in the migration process.³²

Besides institutional stakeholders, significant support for the inclusion of migrant and refugee students in schools is provided by **international organizations and civil society organizations, which** empower schools to include all migrants and provide support to asylum-seeking children from Russia.

4.1.2. Education of migrant students from Russia in practice – perception of relevant stakeholders

■ Institutional perspective

The schools included in the research have adapted well to integrating children from Russia into the education system. Russian students were immediately enrolled in schools in the same grades they would attend in Russia, while their diplomas were simultaneously validated. The children were entered into the electronic diary system and assigned a unique student identification number. Teachers were prepared for the arrival of new students, as well as entire classes, to ensure their peers were ready to support them. Additionally, where possible, at least two Russian students were placed in each class to ensure they had support from fellow compatriots. Teachers work on **individualization of teaching, although formal individual education plans (IEPs) have not been created for every child.** A good practice example can be seen in a high school where 17 children from Russia were enrolled. For each student, class teachers created a pedagogical profile, and professors created individualization measures for each subject. They also developed criteria for evaluating Russian children,

28 [U Srbiji postoji 16 školskih uprava, a za područje opština Novi Pazar, Sienica i Tutin organizovana je Grupa za stručno-pedagoški nadzor u Novom Pazaru.](#)

29 [Нови изборни предмет у основним школама: Српски као страни језик – Друштво за српски језик и књижевност Србије \(bg.ac.rs\)](#)

30 [Српски као страни језик | Завод за унапређивање образовања и васпитања \(zuov.gov.rs\)](#)

31 <https://mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/IOM-2-brosura-160x230mm5mm-SRP-PREVIEW.pdf>, <https://mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/IOM-1-brosura-160x230mm5mm-SRP-PREVIEW.pdf>, <https://mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/IOM-3-brosura-160x230mm5mm-SRP-PREVIEW.pdf>.

32 [0547-33302102239V.pdf \(ceon.rs\)](#)

taking care not to harm local children. Intercultural events are organized where children of Russian and Serbian origin can get to know each other's culture. Furthermore, during lessons, teachers encourage intercultural exchange by asking how something is said in Russian or how something is done in Russia.

According to the **Qualifications Agency**,³³ in the period 24 February 2022 – 12 February 2024, there were **2,404 requests for the recognition of foreign elementary school documents** from Russia and **814 requests for the recognition of foreign high school documents**, mostly for the purpose of continuing education, i.e. enrolling in studies. The **representatives of the Qualifications Agency** stated that there were no difficulties in the recognition of diplomas, they only indicated that they had many cases of recognition of school documents of Russians and for that reason, they did not process data on their socio-demographic characteristics. The lack of data (age, level of education, school success, educational profile, gender) makes it difficult to identify the potential and needs of school students and students from Russia.

As far as **educational outcomes** are concerned, representatives of elementary schools believe that younger children learn both language and school subjects faster, while older children learn language more slowly, have more difficult and complex school subjects, and teachers do not know how to work with some children in order to achieve the expected results. Russian school students especially excel in mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

Teachers and professors describe how satisfied they are with the relationship they have with children and young people from Russia, as well as that they receive the same feedback from the children. They believe that the Russian school students have adapted well in Serbia, that the local children have accepted them well, and that they are also well organized within their Russian community.

Cooperation with parents is going well. School staff describe parents as very interested in the process of children's education and their educational outcomes. They come regularly to parent meetings.

” Fellow teachers are amazed at how cultured the children are, the high level of communication culture, they are full of respect for the teachers, they ask meaningful questions. Children are patient, trained. They fulfill their obligations appropriately, they attend classes regularly.

[...] We have a proper cooperation with the parents. I think that parents respect the figure of the teacher and the authority.

Pedagogue in a high school with 17 Russian students³⁴

However, there is a different **preparedness of schools for the inclusion of refugees and migrants**, including Russians, depending on previous experience with that target group, involvement in the project of the Ministry of Education and UNICEF to support schools for the inclusion of migrants and refugees (and other vulnerable groups), the size of the town in which the school is located (and the vicinity of the border) and on the number of Russian children enrolled in school. Of the four schools (two elementary schools and two high schools) included in the research, one elementary school is included in the project of the Ministry and UNICEF.

Representatives of the elementary school, which is part of the program to support schools for the inclusion of refugees and migrants, state that they have **extensive experience in working with migrants and refugees since they are located near the asylum center**. In their school, there are children from Russia, as well as migrants in private accommodation and asylum seekers accommodated in the asylum center. They pointed out the well-established practice, which they implement in cooperation with representatives of the Commissariat from the asylum center and with the school administration, according to the Ministry's professional instructions for children from the camp, but very similar for children in private accommodation.

” Children start school after the assessment, an interview with the teacher or class teacher is held. The class is prepared for a new student, that he/she is not from here, does not know the language, that we have to help them. The children are very interested, immediately, they want to help. So, they spent time together on school breaks. They get to know where the school is, how things function. So, the children who come to our school as migrants are very well received.

Elementary school principal, 6 Russians³⁵

33 Qualifications Agency, email, 14 February 2024.

34 16./05/2024, interview with high school pedagogue.

35 28/03/2024, interview in Vasa Pelagić Elementary School.

Based on their experience, the representatives of this school cited a number of **good practice examples** for the inclusion of migrants and refugees, including Russians:

- Learning clubs as an innovative form of support for learning, i.e. additional classes.³⁶
- Summer and winter school.³⁷
- Training for teachers “Serbian as a foreign language”, which they were going through at the time of the research.
- UNICEF projects aimed at young people – “Upshift”, whose aim is to empower youth to initiate the solution of social challenges in their environment by combining social entrepreneurship, innovation, and team spirit and “Uplift”, whose aim is to provide the most vulnerable youth and adolescents who arrived from Ukraine, but also other migrants and refugees, with skills and an entrepreneurial mindset that contributes to building advanced communities.
- Volunteering service (UNICEF)
- Education organized by Save the Children – *Healing and Education Through the Arts* – HEART, whose goal is to help children exposed to traumatic experiences or everyday stress³⁸.

Schools without experience in working with refugees and migrants are familiar with the *Professional Guidance on Integration of Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children in the Education System of the Republic of Serbia*, but they believe that specific children from Russia and their families brought challenges that required greater preparedness of schools, such as for example, language barrier.

” Children come to school, we enroll them, they start school immediately. With Google Translator, without Google Translator, we communicate with parents as best we know, in English, we try to translate, we try to understand each other, but it’s always a struggle, because you basically don’t know if they understood correctly, whether you understood correctly, is everything ok.

NSHC volunteer, Novi Sad ³⁹

There is a consensus among institutional stakeholders that the **language barrier** is the biggest challenge to the inclusion of children from Russia in the education system. In addition to not knowing the Serbian language, children from Russia speak English poorly and did not learn Latin at school (which is important for following the gymnasium curriculum). There is still no systemic support for learning the Serbian language, although the elements for it have been developed – a program for learning Serbian as a foreign language, a manual, training of teachers, and the optional subject “Serbian as a foreign language”⁴⁰ has been introduced. However, schools found different solutions. From additional classes of Serbian (and Latin), through the use of Google Translator and an application that records speech in Serbian and then translates it into Russian. Children who know Russian or English help with translation, but Serbian children also help by additionally explaining some content to the Russian children.

” When we talk about first graders, we inquire whether any of them speak Serbian to some extent, but that is usually not the case. We call upon a fifth-grade boy who actually does not have Russian ancestry (he lived in Russia) but speaks both Russian and Serbian well enough. He then translates the conversation with the parents and the child who needs to enroll in our school. He translates the interview with the parents and the test we give to first graders when enrolling in school.

Pedagogue in an elementary school with about 30 Russian students.⁴¹

36 Klub za učenje: škola u školi | UNICEF Srbija

37 [Znanje, druženje, igra, povezanost – za svako dete! | UNICEF Srbija](#)

38 [Smjernice za integraciju HEART metodologije.indd \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

39 18/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers.

40 [Нови изборни предмет у основним школама: Српски као страни језик – Друштво за српски језик и књижевност Србије \(bg.ac.rs\)](#)

41 05/04/2024, interview with the pedagogue from the elementary school.

The language barrier is **a significant obstacle to integrating migrant children into school for several reasons.** First, learning is hindered, especially in subjects that require language proficiency, such as history and Serbian. Second, socialization is difficult due to the gap between Russian and Serbian children, partly because of the language barrier. Third, it is hard to identify developmental difficulties or trauma-related issues versus those caused by the language barrier.

Schools face **numerous other challenges as well:**

- **A large influx of Russian children and insufficient school capacity for their enrollment.** A pedagogue in a high school in Novi Sad pointed to this problem: *We had a large influx of children from Russia, but due to the school's capacity, we could not enroll them all, so we sent them to other schools.*⁴²
- **Enrolling in the first grade of elementary school.** It is necessary to assess the knowledge and maturity of Russian children who are supposed to start first grade and do not know the Serbian language. In practice, a maturity assessment test designed for Serbian children is used. This test is not scored but serves to provide a general understanding of the child's development. It helps to get to know the child, see how they cope, how they reason, how mature they are, how easily they separate from their mother, etc.
- **Taking the final graduation exam.** It is necessary to organize special support for Russian children who have not yet fully mastered the language. In one school, they plan for Russian students to take the final exam in a separate classroom with a translator.
- **Children with developmental difficulties.** Some children have been identified with weaker fine motor skills and slower acquisition of numbers and letters. Teaching is adapted for them, and their progress is monitored relative to the initial situation. Sometimes parents hide the diagnosis, and only when teachers notice difficulties, they disclose it. Russian children are also enrolled in schools for children with developmental disabilities.
- **Children with behavioral problems.** Schools have problems dealing with foreign children with behavioral problems.
- **Stress in children.** Changing environments cause stress in children, and it is possible that they have also experienced trauma. Teachers notice such children and, in collaboration with the school psychologist, try to determine whether it is a language barrier, cultural difference, trauma, or something else. School representatives say that teachers generally do not know how to approach and support such children and that it would be beneficial for them to undergo training on supporting stressed/traumatized students.
- **Some children attend online classes in Russia at the same time.** Sometimes teachers and school professional services are not even aware of this, and it would be good to determine the workload of these children and the compatibility of the programs.

The representative of the school administration warned about the poor economic status of parents from Russia in small towns and villages, where it is very difficult for them to find jobs, they spend their savings quickly, and such families need economic support.

Regardless of the experience and preparedness of schools for the inclusion of children from Russia, all representatives of elementary and high schools propose the organization of a **preparatory period for schools, for migrant children** – to learn the Serbian language and get to know the culture and education system in Serbia.

” We had situations where children arrived in Serbia from Russia and joined school the very next day after their arrival... I know that abroad there are zero classes for preparation and integration.

Pedagogue in high school with 17 Russian students⁴³

” A preparatory program for language learning is needed, possibly support in socialization, it can last a month, a preparatory program that they will go through before entering our school. Like our children when they go to Germany or somewhere else. They first learn the language, get ready, and then enter the system. The language barrier is the biggest problem. Also, to introduce them to the system, the way it works in our school.

Deputy Principal of an elementary school with 6 Russian students⁴⁴

42 16/05/2024, interview with high school pedagogue.

43 16/05/2024, interview with high school pedagogue.

44 28/03/2024, interview in elementary school.

Representatives of schools without experience in working with refugees and migrants say that they manage with migrants, that the work with them is based on the enthusiasm of teachers, and that a **systemic and systematic approach should be developed**. They proposed establishing a coordinating body or agency, where students would receive information about schools, how they can apply, what the procedures are, where their knowledge and psychological condition will be assessed and the necessary assistance provided. Furthermore, they proposed that there should be an **advisor for specific situations or a resource center at the city level**.

” We have guidelines from the Ministry for the inclusion of children, but none of the guidelines can write what you are facing. We don't only receive children, we also receive their families, these are people with broken destinies. We managed somehow but were self-taught... We would need a systemic approach – a coordinating body or agency, where students will go to register, to tell them where and how to register, where the schools are, what the procedures are. We had situations where parents and students went from school to school with documentation. So, we need a body, an agency to apply, so that educated people can provide help in direct work with children, to assess the knowledge and condition of that child before sending them to school, to provide help to children, to talk with them.

Pedagogue in a high school with 17 Russian students⁴⁵

” It's a big problem because we have children (Russians, but also other foreigners – Cubans, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.), and we don't have elaborate mechanisms for working with them and the right strategy on how best to approach them. We manage. It is at the teacher level. It is implemented very sporadically [...] and a systemic solution for its implementation would be needed.

Pedagogue in an elementary school with about 30 Russian students⁴⁶

In the direction of developing support for schools and achieving sustainability, **the Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF, will empower ZOUV, i.e. their Department for Minorities and Diaspora**, to maintain and develop a network of support for schools. Schools (14) that have gone through their program for working with migrant/refugee children will be joined by other schools and will support the education of Serbian as a foreign language. The plan is also to strengthen the resource center – Branko Pešić Elementary School, which should provide support on the ground.

■ Perspective of international organizations and civil society organizations

Representatives of international organizations and CSOs have not specifically examined the needs of migrant children and mothers from Russia in the field of education. A smaller number of Russian asylum seekers are housed in the asylum center in Krnjača, where targeted support from organizations is directed to them. CSOs have organized psychosocial activities for children and parents and provided support for school enrollment (diploma recognition), as well as for other asylum seekers. IOM, UNICEF, and the UNHCR have focused on strengthening the capacity of institutions for the inclusion of refugees and migrants to ensure the sustainability of achieved results – including the Ministry of Education, schools, and the Commissariat. Their projects and activities were previously mentioned by institutional representatives as examples of good practices. All organizations coordinate and cooperate with each other and regularly exchange information and experiences through **the Working Subgroup for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children** organized by UNICEF.

Representatives of the organizations noticed that there are many children from Russia in schools in Serbia, that they easily integrate into schools and that their parents cooperate well with the school staff. Moreover, Ukrainian and Russian children get along well and have often participated together in the activities of the organizations.

” The fact is that both Russians and Ukrainians integrate much faster than anyone before them. It happens that Russians who attend schools request to participate in and actually take part in Serbian language competitions and have won awards at regional competitions.

UNICEF representative⁴⁷

45 16/05/2024, interview with high school pedagogue.

46 05/04/2024, interview with high school pedagogue.

47 01/02/2024, interview, ICSO.

”” And the group, we had this experience, we asked refugee children from Ukraine and Russia whether they had any problem being together in a group or if we should create separate groups, and there was no problem. I mean, the children really don't see any differences. They love to socialize together. We haven't had any unpleasant incidents. I mean, it was really great; they socialized regularly. After the group sessions, some children from private addresses attended psychoeducational workshops, and children from Krnjača also came. They immediately connected through TikTok.

CSO representative⁴⁸

Representatives of international and domestic organizations emphasized the need for the education system to be even better prepared for the growing number of migrants, i.e. foreigners who come to Serbia as part of work migration and bring their families, especially since the legislation of Serbia is changing in the direction of easier integration of foreigners into the labor market and integration into society.

The representatives of the organizations also highlighted the different preparedness of schools to work with refugee and migrant students.

”” There were various training courses that were going on when this big refugee crisis started. Some schools are very well prepared, they implement that program very well, they have that program. We still have schools that do not have that program, without additional classes, there are no criteria adapted to a child who does not know the language. It is still not harmonized across the country. And I think it depends on school principals and teachers. So, we have really wonderful examples, where they are maximally adapted, they want to help the children additionally, they prepare include additional classes for them. And we have an example where all this doesn't exist at all. So, I would say, it depends on individual cases.

CSO representative⁴⁹

All stakeholders pointed to the importance of developing **Serbian as a foreign language program**, which was first developed in response to the wave of refugees in the period 2015-2017, while there was previously a Serbian as a non-native language program intended for minorities in Serbia. This program is also useful for Russian children.

”” However, with the Faculty of Philology, we developed for the first time the Serbian as a foreign language methodology, essentially we are not only a country of emigration, we are also a country of immigration. Now there is a whole set of training courses, now they are developing additional training, and we are now working on the 'advance' training, how to teach Serbian as a foreign language to the children who are coming. Somehow, you have the concept of individualization, differentiation and Serbian as a foreign language, where you assess the progress of each child in relation to it.

ISCO representative⁵⁰

Examples of good practices used with asylum seekers and refugees are also needed and applicable to Russian migrants. Besides those implemented in institutions, these include:

- **PIN's Program for Providing Initial Psychological Assistance:** This program consisted of training sessions where young people (from the local population and refugees from Ukraine and Russia) were trained to be peer mediators in recognizing mental health issues among youth and connecting them with available resources, particularly the education system and school psychologists. After the training, the youth organized various community actions to promote mental health and educate their peers, parents, and adults about what mental health is, the most common symptoms among youth, and the challenges they face. These actions were diverse, such as giving lectures and distributing leaflets with contact information for relevant institutions before the start of a volleyball tournament, creating plays, and holding creative drawing workshops for younger children in the camp to express their feelings and experiences. The group of young people continued to participate in PIN's initiatives even after the project ended.

48 19/01/2024, online interview, CSO.

49 19/01/2024, online interview, CSO.

50 01/02/2024, interview with ISCO representative.

- **JRC Change Program:**⁵¹ A representative of JRC pointed to this program as an example of good practice for empowering teachers in working with migrant and refugee children and achieving sustainability. This program was initially implemented only in European countries but has now expanded to Serbia. It is aimed at children aged 13 to 18 but can be adapted for different age groups. The goal of the program is to support students in becoming aware of their own attitudes and viewpoints, to gain knowledge about the topic of refugees/migration in a critical and active way, to experience encounters with refugees, and to discover starting points for personal and collective actions. Teachers are very interested in participating in this education, since the program gives good inclusion results.
- **An example of good practice of working with parents was presented by representatives of the Indigo organization from Niš,** as partners of UNICEF. They informed parents, more precisely, mothers from Ukraine accommodated in the Vranje asylum center about the education system in Serbia, connected them with the school, and supported their cooperation.

■ Perspective of children, mothers and volunteers from Russia

Mothers from Russia staying in private accommodations in Belgrade and Novi Sad found the school enrollment process, especially for elementary schools, to be very straightforward. They felt that both principals and teachers were very supportive. Although they were supposed to have their elementary school documents recognized, the children were immediately enrolled in schools with only confirmation that the documents were submitted for recognition. One girl was even enrolled in the third grade of elementary school without the documents being recognized, based on a certificate from a Russian school teacher confirming completion of the second grade. They also needed to provide a health center certificate confirming that the children had received all vaccinations.

🗨️ When we came here to school, we said that the child had completed the second grade. They asked for confirmation, and the teacher from the Russian school provided a certificate that the child had completed the second grade, along with sending the grades. We translated that certificate using Google Translate. My husband brought the certificate to the school. A conversation was held with the psychologist in Serbian and English. The child had already attended a bit of online school here and had been learning the language. That was it, the conversation with the psychologist, they looked at the grades, said she's a good girl, and she was enrolled without any recognition, without anything.

*Mother, Belgrade.*⁵²

🗨️ My husband's brother speaks Serbian; he spoke with the apartment owner who explained to us that in K... there is a school from first to eighth grade, and we have a residence permit, so we went to the school to inquire. We went to the principal and asked, and they sent us to the psychologist to talk with him to see if the child was ready (for 1st grade of elementary school). After the conversation with the psychologist, the principal said OK, come to the school. They gave him books, a backpack, and some sweets, school supplies.

*Mother, Belgrade.*⁵³

Enrollment in **high schools posed challenges regarding the recognition of diplomas, taking entrance exams, and finding information** about the enrollment process. The recognition of documents also requires money, which some parents do not have, especially if there are several children in the family.

🗨️ Translation of documents by a certified translator costs around three and a half thousand dinars for two certificates. The agency fee was about four and a half thousand dinars... In total, we needed eighteen to twenty thousand for everything.

*Mother, Belgrade.*⁵⁴

51 08/04/2024, online interview with ICSSO representatives. [CHANGE – JRS Europe](#), [Course change – Change \(jrschange.org\)](#)

52 13/04/2024, focus group with mothers from Russia, private accommodation in Belgrade.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

Regarding the two younger children in the Technical School, we were lucky because they entered elementary school and completed it here. Then, along with their peers, they enrolled in high school. They have no problems because they received a unique identification number and complete documentation. With the two older children, we have a problem; they still do not have a unique identification number and are not fully integrated into the education system. They had to validate all their diplomas from Russia... With the two children who were eager for school, it was a bit specific; they spent a lot of time researching how to enroll in high school, what was needed, which entrance exams. Once they understood what was needed, they simply bought guides to take the entrance exams, and the kids studied from these guides.

Mother, Novi Sad⁵⁵.

I had a student here who wanted to enroll in a high school in Novi Sad. She also had a problem passing the preparation exams. Yes, there is Google Translate, but it has errors; for example, the word “obim” in Serbian is translated as “obiom” in Russian, but “obiom” is not “obim” but “volume”. So, when a child does a math task, they get incorrect information, and a completely wrong solution. Also, with this school, there was a problem with certain tasks on the test that were not in the guidebook, which she had not practiced.

Volunteer NSHC, Novi Sad.⁵⁶

Mothers and Russian volunteers believe that schools **were not prepared for the arrival of such a large number of children from Russia**, but everyone was well-intentioned and supportive, making efforts to find solutions to the challenges. Children were immediately integrated into schools without knowing the language. Teachers managed by using English or students who know English or Russian, as they are of Russian origin.

It seems to me that the school system has certain rules and instructions on how to work, how to treat children who come from another country. However, it seems to me that this is like fire instruction, some other instructions that are unverified in practice. Even if there are instructions somewhere on how to behave, what to do, not everyone is trained on those instructions, and in practice, we still encounter situations where we don't know how to proceed.

Mother, Novi Sad.⁵⁷

I believe that thanks to all these people who want to help, who are very open and positive and strive to assist, they are building a system that will eventually exist in practice. I am very grateful for all these open-minded people who are trying to help.

Volunteer at NSHC, Novi Sad.⁵⁸

Mothers are **satisfied with the cooperation with schools** and the approach of teachers towards both them and their children, as well as towards education in general. At parents' meetings, they manage the Serbian language as their children do, some have learned a little Serbian, some use English, some bring a friend who knows Serbian with them, or ask other mothers if something is unclear to them, etc.

One of the Russian volunteers of the NSHC, who gives English and math lessons to Russian students in Serbia, pointed out that the **school curriculum** for mathematics in Serbia and Russia **differs**, in terms of when what is taught, especially in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school, as well as that the terminology used can be confusing since some similar terms have different meanings in Serbian.

As for the mathematics program, it can be very complicated for children, because the school curriculum in Serbia and in Russia is very different in terms of what topics of the curriculum are taught and when. This problem is especially prevalent in the fifth and sixth grades. In the seventh and eighth grade, that difference levels out. The other problem is related to the language, so they don't understand the math

55 18/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR.

56 Ibid.

57 18/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR.

58 Ibid.

because the terminology is different. With that goal in mind, I created curricula for the fifth and sixth grades, intended for Russian children who are in Serbian schools, in order to help them...

NSHC volunteer, Novi Sad⁵⁹

One mother made a proposal to **compare school curricula for mathematics, chemistry and physics** in Serbia and Russia precisely because of the different arrangement of topics. Then to **familiarize parents with these differences**, so that they can recognize whether their children do not understand something because they did not learn it or whether there is some other reason, since parents ask for private classes and teachers.

” I believe it would be good and desirable to make a comparison of the school curricula for mathematics, chemistry, and physics between Russia and here, because the program, or rather the sequence of topics taught, is indeed very different. Whether parents want it or not, they should definitely sit down and see the curriculum, which topics are covered, and which are not. Perhaps it would be good for parents to already have this information and truly understand what their child has not yet learned and will only start learning, and because of that, why they don't understand something, where they missed something, slept through, and simply didn't learn. After all, parents are the ones who seek extra classes and additional teachers for their child to learn something, so she thinks that would be extremely useful.

Mother, Novi Sad⁶⁰

The specificity of the Russian education system is also that there are no unified textbooks accepted in education, so children's knowledge depends on which school they attended and who taught them. Furthermore, there is a possibility of homeschooling, so some children continued online schooling in Russia, alongside attending school in Serbia. Parents believe that attending both schools simultaneously is not a burden for their children.

” This is the state of education in Russia now. You can practically choose how your child will learn. It can be entirely online, they can attend school, or it can be partially online. You sign a contract with the school and specify that your child will attend certain subjects like math, and others you will teach them at home.

Mother, Belgrade⁶¹

” As for my brother specifically, he continues to attend school in Moscow, officially registered as homeschooled. He is required to submit homework, and as far as I know, he takes some tests once every six months. He also has additional private lessons in Russian and English, maybe more, to stay connected with Russian culture.

Volunteer at NSHC, Novi Sad⁶²

Mothers and volunteers who are in contact with the children **believe that they have adapted well in schools, have both Serbian and Russian friends, and participate in extracurricular activities**. They see Novi Sad as a **safe city** where children can freely play outside.

” The adaptation process passed very quickly. When she came to school, the teacher placed her with another girl who also had the name L. That girl spoke English. The teacher also speaks English well. Initially, she spoke half English and half Serbian with that girl, and now the child has already learned Serbian.

Mother, Belgrade.⁶³

59 18/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR.

60 18/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR.

61 13/04/2024, focus group with mothers from Russia in private accommodation in Belgrade.

62 18/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR.

63 13/04/2024, focus group with mothers from Russia in private accommodation in Belgrade.

”” Regarding the younger child, they placed him to sit with a boy whose mom is Russian and dad is Serbian. So, that boy helped him and translated. Now he is already learning. As for the older girl, twelve years old, she also fits in very well regardless of her age, which is transitional. She hangs out with one girl – some Google Translate, some basic English. In any case, she has integrated very well in these two months. She has already been to three birthday parties with her friends.

Mother, Belgrade.⁶⁴

It should be noted that these **children have also been affected by the war in Ukraine, with many fleeing from Russia because their fathers evaded mobilization**. Some **have changed several countries and schools** before coming to Serbia, which can be a **source of trauma and/or stress for these children**, as pointed out by both mothers and children. Additionally, their legal status, such as the need to renew a visa (the so-called visa run), can bring stress and difficulties in their daily functioning. **It is important for children to know whom they can turn to for help if they encounter any problems**—whether it is a teacher, deputy principal, class teacher, or psychologist. Schools should systematically inform children and teachers about the procedure for reporting violence and discrimination in schools, as well as empower Teams for protection against discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect in schools, to recognize and react to violence and discrimination directed against migrants and refugees.

”” We had fears, we were afraid for the youngest child who is now in the first grade, and who has changed three schools and three countries in the last year... Yes. In Russia, she completed five grades, then spent several months in Turkey, and two more months in Astana. Now she is finishing the sixth grade here.

Mother, Belgrade.⁶⁵

”” I came here from Turkey. Initially, I was in Russia, then I spent six months in Turkey, and in 2023 I came here, but for some time I was still attending online school in Russia. It was only in September that I started the third grade here.

Girl, 3rd grade elementary school student and online Russian school, Belgrade.⁶⁶

”” So far, I haven't had any problems, but the class teacher, a woman, always approaches me, asks if everything is okay, and if I have any problems, I can come to her.

Girl, 6th grade elementary school student, Belgrade.⁶⁷

Children of all ages, as well as their mothers, have mentioned that they **easily adapted to schools in Serbia**, even though they did not know Serbian when they arrived. Teachers helped them by allowing the use of Google Translate and adjusting their requirements based on their knowledge of the Serbian language. Peers communicated with them in English or Russian children who arrived earlier and learned Serbian. Everyone at school welcomed them warmly.

”” In the beginning, the teacher gave me Google Translate so I could translate what was written on the board. Gradually, I started learning Serbian, and now I even borrow books from the library. I'm the best student in the class. But in Russian school, we're already learning to multiply billions, while in Serbia, we're still working on three-digit numbers. I continue to attend school online in Russia, so I know what they are doing there and what they are doing here. It's three times easier here.

Girl, 3rd grade elementary school in Serbia and online Russian school, Belgrade⁶⁸

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

67 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

68 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

When I came here, everyone accepted me nicely. Everyone tried to get to know me quickly, who I am, what I am, and they started talking to me right away, in Serbian and English. Now everyone communicates nicely with me. Teachers allow me to use Google Translate in class to understand what's going on...

Girl, 6th grade elementary school, Belgrade⁶⁹

People here are very nice, they accepted me, I feel much better than in Russia. Teachers help with translation, provide additional materials, some teachers ask me less, lower the criteria, give me easier topics. This is the best school I have attended so far, and I have changed two schools in Moscow and two in Serbia.

Boy, 4th grade high school, Novi Sad⁷⁰

Children have also pointed out the **differences in the school curriculum**, for example, physics in Russia starts from the 7th grade, while in Serbia it starts from the 6th grade, so when a girl reached the end of the 6th grade, she found it difficult to engage and understand physics classes. High school students and their mothers highlighted **the lack of relevant information for enrollment in high school**.

They spend their **free time** constructively engaged in sports or artistic activities, although they have not yet developed a deeper relationship with their peers to socialize outside of school. A high school student living in Novi Sad believes that people in Serbia are open and approachable. He believes that there is not much mixing between Russians and Serbs as far as social life is concerned.

As for future plans, children dream of going abroad – Switzerland, America, England, France. Their mothers believe that for now, they will stay in Serbia, mostly because their children have integrated well into school, but also because of the straightforward business functioning (conducting business internationally is impossible in Russia).

Children's recommendations on how their peers who come from other countries to Serbia can be supported to integrate more easily into school and community mostly revolve around overcoming the language barrier, but also on the availability of information about the necessary documents and the procedure for enrolling in high schools.

- *Depending on the circumstances. If a child already knows English, it's best to sit next to someone who knows English, so that person can help and translate. If someone knows Russian, then it is best to sit at the desk with someone who knows Russian, because they will help that way too.* Girl, 3rd grade elementary school and online Russian school, Belgrade.⁷¹
- *It depends on the subject. If it's math, you look at what's required in the task and solve it. I do the same tests as other kids. As for other subjects, for example, history, sometimes I don't understand what's written in the text, but then I ask the teacher, the teacher tells me what to do, and I write it down. As for the Serbian language, I get easier tests and tasks than other kids because I don't understand everything.* Girl, 6th grade elementary school, Belgrade.⁷²
- *I mastered Serbian mostly with friends at school, I mastered grammar in a private Serbian language course, but mostly with friends.* Boy, 4th grade high school, Novi Sad.⁷³
- *They don't need to worry or be afraid because everyone here will accept them. No one will have anything against you. Of course, the advice would always be to start learning the Serbian language. But even if you don't have time to learn Serbian, don't worry, you will fit in and learn it very quickly.* Girl, 6th grade elementary school, Belgrade.⁷⁴
- *I think when students come to Serbia, they need help with documents. We didn't know what to do about the white card, diplomas. Someone should help with that information, what needs to be done, to make a plan.* Boy, 4th grade high school, Novi Sad.⁷⁵

69 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

70 16/05/2024, interview.

71 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

72 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

73 16/05/2024, interview.

74 13/04/2024, focus group with three Russian children.

75 16/05/2024, interview.

4.1.3. Education of migrant students from Russia – summary of challenges and solutions

We will interpret the obtained findings through a holistic model of integration of refugee and migrant children into the education system⁷⁶, since the *Professional Guidance on Integration of Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children in the Education System of the Republic of Serbia* covers all elements of that model. The Professional Guidance foresees the **activities of inclusion of migrant and refugee children at the level of the entire school**, which include the preparation of teachers and all school students and their parents for the reception of new students, promotion of interculturality and linguistic diversity; strengthening ties with family and local community; and mobilizing peer support. The **support plan for the migrant/refugee student includes** a program of adaptation and overcoming stress; a program of intensive learning of the language of the environment; individualization of teaching activities through the adjustment of plans, didactic material, methods and ways of working; involvement in extracurricular activities with peer support. This means that the **educational, social, and emotional needs of refugee and migrant students are expected to be met; the individual, interpersonal and institutional level is targeted; and the partnership of all relevant stakeholders is insisted upon, as presented in the holistic model.**

It is the holistic model that points to the importance of meeting all of the mentioned needs of migrant and refugee children. **Educational needs** mean the need to learn the language of the host country and develop their mother tongue, overcome interruptions in schooling or limited education, and adapt to the new education system. **Social needs** include the need to communicate with others, develop a sense of belonging and connect with a community, and develop a strong personal identity. Feeling safe, and being able to cope with loss, grief, as well as separation and/or trauma are **emotional needs**. These needs are shaped by various **individual, interpersonal and institutional (school-level) factors**. **Individual factors** include knowledge of the language of the host country, mother language development, as well as physical and mental health. **Interpersonal factors** include relationships with peers, as well as family and community support for refugee children. **School-level factors** include the learning environment, teacher-student interactions, school engagement, school grading, extracurricular activities, and parent involvement in the school community. These factors shape various **targeted policies and practices**. The holistic approach also **suggests partnering with other relevant actors** to address various needs – the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, asylum centers, health institutions, centers for social work, CSOs, etc.

- ▶ All three groups that participated in the research (mothers and children from Russia, institutions and organizations of civil society) agree that **the educational needs of children are met**. All stakeholders believe that the education of Russian children is going well, from enrollment, through the organization of classes, student success, to grading. Even if there are difficulties, they do not see them as something that reflects to a greater degree on educational outcomes.
- However, **there are no objective indicators of their educational success**. The success of Russian children was not monitored and compared with the success of local children at the level of all schools in Serbia attended by Russian children. The presence of Russian children in the education system in Serbia is also unknown, since they are in private accommodation, and it is possible that some children only go to a Russian online school. In general, there is no research on the inclusion of children from Russia in the education system in Serbia. Closely related to this challenge is the **lack of monitoring of the characteristics and potential of Russian pupils and students through the analysis of applicants for the recognition of school documents** to the Qualifications Agency, according to age, gender, place, educational profile, and school success.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » The Ministry of Education should, in addition to monitoring the indicators of the achievement of the *Strategy for the Development of Education and Education in the RS until 2030*, “Participation rate of refugee and migrant students in education”, include the indicator and monitor it “Success of refugee and migrant students in education compared to domestic students” (in the PISA test as well) and at the same time differentiates the indicator in relation to the country of origin, age and sex of the student. Annual reports on the implementation of action plans should also contain this data.

76 More in u: Lucie Cerna (2019), REFUGEE EDUCATION: INTEGRATION MODELS AND PRACTICES IN OECD COUNTRIES, OECD Education Working Paper No. 203.

- » It should also encourage the cooperation of schools with the academic community in conducting research (especially longitudinal, on a representative sample) and organizing expert meetings for the exchange of practice and research findings, as a basis for updating and creating educational policies.
- » The Qualifications Agency should conduct a regular analysis of applicants for the recognition of school documents according to age, sex, place, educational profile and school performance and publish it in public reports.

Furthermore, **challenges were observed in meeting educational needs**, which can make it difficult to achieve and reduce educational outcomes:

- **Learning Serbian.** The program of learning Serbian as a foreign language is still not systematically implemented in schools. Children from Russia manage with the help of online applications, peers who know English or Russian, private lessons and Serbian and Russian language teachers, enthusiasts who provide them with additional support.

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Education should support the proposal of the Society for the Serbian Language and Literature of Serbia, which is included in the *Initiative for the introduction of the elective program Serbian as a Foreign Language*, to make Serbian as a Foreign Language a compulsory subject for students whose mother tongue is not Serbian.⁷⁷ Learning clubs (that already exist in 30 schools) can be used as places for a preparatory period for refugee and migrant students, by applying the Serbian as a foreign language program and by presenting information about culture and education in Serbia (through workshop work).

Additionally, the Ministry should research how the program/handbook/elective subject Serbian as a foreign language is implemented with Russian children and how it reflects on educational outcomes.

- **Differentiation between the educational programs of Serbia and Russia.** The research participants indicated the difference in the school program (for example, for mathematics related to the sequence in which individual lessons are taught, especially in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school), as well as the need to pay special attention to some contents.

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Education and ZUOV should analyze the Serbian and Russian curricula, especially for mathematics, chemistry and physics, and develop an additional program for learning subjects in which there is a difference. Furthermore, in that process, potential language concerns should be identified, and attention should be paid to overcoming differences in the school curriculum.

- **Parallel attendance of two schools.** Some children attend a Serbian school and a Russian school online at the same time, which could be a burden or confuse students due to the different order of learning certain material.

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Education should determine the characteristics of that educational process both to determine the workload of students and to determine the compatibility of the program, although mothers and children from Russia believe that parallel school attendance does not represent a burden for children. ZUOV should organize research into the spread of this way of schooling and its characteristics, i.e. the needs of children. After conducting an assessment and better understanding of how attending two schools affects the well-being of children and their educational outcomes, the Ministry of Education should, in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders, including children and parents, come up with an action plan to harmonize these two education systems to achieve the best interests of the children. Class teachers and teaching staff should be supported to familiarize themselves with the Russian school curriculum to better create individual support plans for children.

- **Enrollment in the first grade of elementary school is based on Serbian tests.** Serbian tests are used to determine the readiness of Russian children for school. Schools cannot translate, and in some situations, they hire children to help translate conversations with parents and enrollment tests.

77 [ДРУШТВО ЗА СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК \(bg.ac.rs\)](http://drustvo.za.srpски.jezik.bg.ac.rs)

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Education should determine the number of children from Russia who are preparing to enroll in elementary school and, based on the assessment of the number of children, develop a strategy that will enable an adequate assessment of readiness for school in a way that is adapted to the child and the family. Engaging children in translating and helping peers can strengthen children's skills and help strengthen solidarity and integration, but it is important that children's engagement is consistent with their consent, capacities, and school responsibilities.

- **Enrollment in high school is accompanied by three obstacles** – the final exam for elementary schools, (in)availability of information, and recognition of diplomas. There is no systemic solution for organizing the final exam for elementary schools for students from Russia if they have not sufficiently mastered the Serbian language. There is a need for the availability of information about the process and required documents for enrollment in high schools. Recognition of school documents (and their translation) requires financial resources, and not everyone is able to pay. These obstacles may be also present for enrollment in higher education institutions, but we did not identify them since the research did not include youth of that age.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » The Ministry of Education should organize a special room and a translator for students from Russia or prepare tests in the Russian language when organizing the final exam for elementary schools (and the entrance exam to the faculty).
 - » The Ministry of Education should make information for enrollment in high schools (faculty) easily available in Russian, and enable students from Russia to ask and resolve any ambiguities related to enrollment.
- Concerning **social needs**, there is also agreement among research participants that local children and teachers have accepted children from Russia well and that they support them at school. However, the conversation about free time and activities showed that children usually do not socialize with their Serbian peers outside of school. Some respondents also pointed out that there is a separation between Russian and Serbian children/youth, especially if there are more of them in the class. No one mentioned that children/youth from Russia experienced discrimination or peer violence based on their origin. The children also said that they know who to turn to if a problem arises at school or in life in general.

RECOMMENDATION: Schools, where students from Russia attend classes, should be strengthened for the implementation of “inclusion activities at the level of the whole school”: “teacher preparation for the reception of new migrant and refugee students; preparation of all school students and their parents for the reception of new migrant and refugee students; promotion of interculturality and linguistic diversity; strengthening ties with family and local community; and mobilizing peer support”. (Handbook for Schools in the Implementation of Professional Instruction, p. 40-48)

- **Professional school staff have the hardest time dealing with the emotional needs** of students from Russia, considering that they are not experts in that area. They encountered stress and trauma in children, developmental difficulties and behavioral problems. They state that it is difficult for them to recognize these challenges and to distinguish them from difficulties due to insufficient knowledge of the language. Due to communication difficulties and language barriers, sometimes they do not even know how to react.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » The Ministry of Education, ZUOV, and resource centers for the inclusion of children from vulnerable social groups should empower teachers to recognize stress and trauma, as well as to respond and refer students with trauma to relevant institutions. They can also support preventive activities and recommend/educate for the implementation of existing examples of good practice, such as, for example, *Teacher education for stress management of migrant children in schools* (MESTD, ZUOV), *Healing and Education Through the Arts-HEART* (Save the Children), peer education on providing psychological first aid (PIN).
- » Helping children from Russia with behavioral problems requires close cooperation between schools and centers for social work, and for children with developmental difficulties, cooperation with a special education teacher.

► There are also **challenges that reflect on all three groups of needs:**

- **A large number of Russian children want to enroll in schools in Serbia**, and some schools do not have enough capacity to enroll so many children. According to the Qualifications Agency, 2,404 students requested the recognition of school documents for enrollment in elementary school and 814 for enrollment in high school, in the period of two years since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Since migration takes place through the incentives and support of the social network, more migrants from Russia can be expected.

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Education, with the support of the Ministry of Interior, should assess the migration potential from Russia, as well as the capacities of schools to respond to it. For this purpose, it is important to determine the exact number and socio-demographic characteristics of Russian children who are in Serbian schools.

- **Different preparedness of schools for inclusion of students from Russia**, due to different levels of experience in working with migrants and lack of information and education of school staff.

RECOMMENDATION:

- » The Ministry of Education should implement its plan to, in cooperation with UNICEF, empower ZUOV to take over support in the inclusion of refugees and migrants for a network of 14 schools and to expand the network by including new schools, as well as to further strengthen the resource center for inclusion, Branko Pešić Elementary School. It should also include this target group in the 5 planned resource centers for inclusion by 2026. (Action Plan 2023-2026).
- » The Ministry of Education should use the most successful schools that have experience working with refugees and migrants as resource centers for the inclusion of this target group. Each school can get its own “mentor school”. It should also valorize the efforts of the most active teachers so that they become educators for colleagues and organize exchanges of good practice through gatherings and publications.

► **The economic difficulties of parents, especially in small towns and villages**, are reflected in children’s participation in educational activities, but also in extracurricular activities and socialization.

RECOMMENDATION: LGUs in cooperation with Migration Councils should include in local action plans activities and a budget for the inclusion of foreigners facing economic difficulties in the education system and support them both in the recognition of diplomas and in schooling.

► Finally, it was identified that there are more and **more foreign children in schools**⁷⁸ and **that a systemic (and holistic) approach to their inclusion** in the education system should be improved.

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Education should encourage research by the academic community and the exchange of experience with practitioners on the inclusion of foreign children in the education system. The findings of the research will lead to the improvement of the inclusion process and the updating of policies and strategic documents in relation to the change of social context and needs on the ground.

⁷⁸ At the end of 2023, 46,073 foreigners were granted temporary residence based on work. This number is by 29% higher compared to 2022, and even by 121% higher compared to 2021. Most of them were from the Russian Federation (41%), Republic of China (24%), Turkey (12%), India (7%) and Cuba (1.5%). In the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023, the National Employment Service issued a total of 52,178 (9,875 women) work permits to foreign nationals. Migration profile of RS for 2023, [Migracioni profil.pdf \(kirs.gov.rs\)](#)

4.2. Cultural rights

4.2.1. Legal, strategic and institutional framework for the realization of cultural rights of migrants from Russia

The Law on Culture states that cultural activities can be carried out by domestic and foreign individuals and legal entities. **The Law on Foreigners does not mention** the right of foreigners to participate in cultural life and cultural activities.

The Ministry of Culture and Information, in the *Strategy for the Development of Culture of the Republic of Serbia from 2020 to 2029*⁷⁹, expressed Serbia's strategic commitment "towards culture as one of the key factors in the development of society, and culture as a national priority contributing to the harmonious development of society in the Republic of Serbia, the quality of life of its citizens, and the improvement of international relations." It is committed to preserving cultural diversity as a special asset of our country, which includes the creativity of national minorities and all social groups, as well as the possibility of different identity choices. Two important principles underlying the strategy include "enhancing mutual understanding and equal inclusion of vulnerable groups in cultural life" and "broad access to culture and equal and active participation in cultural life".

Under measure 3.3. Encouraging and developing cultural needs and habits and equal participation in cultural life,⁸⁰ the Strategy emphasizes the responsibility of the state in cultural policy aimed at children and youth, since they represent the most important segment in the development of cultural needs, because they are not only visitors to events, but also future audiences and creators in culture. As many as 81% of youth believe that they are insufficiently involved in cultural activities, and 70% that there is not enough content for young people. Therefore, one of the nine areas in the *National Youth Strategy for the period 2015-2025*⁸¹ is dedicated to the culture and creativity of youth. It is very important to establish a systemic connection between cultural institutions and education, in all models of cooperation between educational and cultural institutions – visits to cultural institutions, but also the involvement of youth in the production and presentation of cultural content, both in the field of cultural heritage and in the field of contemporary creativity. The strategy deals with the policy of social cohesion and the inclusion of all social groups in cultural life, since this is important for the development of culture and quality interpersonal relations. It also points to the importance of gender equality, to which culture can make a significant contribution, not only in the domain of creativity, but also in the domain of deconstruction of gender stereotypes and roles in society. However, migrants, foreigners and refugees are not mentioned as sensitive social groups that should be the target groups of the strategy.

The National Council for Culture, as an advisory body in accordance with the **Law on Culture**, analyzes and provides opinions on the state of culture, offering suggestions for cultural policy creation and the development of cultural activities. Support is also provided by the **Institute for the Study of Cultural Development** through research and the preparation of studies and analyses. At the provincial level, according to the **Law on the Determination of Competencies of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina**, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, through the work of the **Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information, and Relations with Religious Communities**, oversees the implementation of cultural policy in the province and provides conditions for the operation of provincial cultural institutions.

In Serbia, Russians are recognized as an autonomous and full-fledged national minority, represented through the **National Council of the Russian National Minority**⁸². The Council has four committees – for culture, education, information, and for the official use of language and script. **After the October Revolution of 1917, tens of thousands of Russians emigrated to Serbia.** Hundreds of Russian scientists, painters, architects, doctors, and engineers arrived in Serbia.⁸³ The cultural activities of the emigration significantly contributed to the cultural development of Serbia and the strengthening of Serbian-Russian cultural ties.

79 [strategija-razvoja-kulture-od-2020--do-2029-godine.pdf \(kultura.gov.rs\)](#)

80 Ibid.

81 [nacionalna_strategija_za_mlade0101_cyr.pdf \(mos.gov.rs\)](#)

82 [Национални Савет Руске Националне Мањине – Национални савет руске националне мањине \(nsrnm.org\)](#)

83 [Rusija, Srbija i istorija: Kako su ruski emigranti gradili Beograd između dva svetska rata – BBC News na srpskom](#)

Consequently, today there is a developed official structure on which the newly arrived Russians can rely to exercise their cultural rights and available cultural content. Upon the initiative of Russian emigrants, the **Russian House in Belgrade** (Russian Center for Science and Culture)⁸⁴, was established, which opened as a cultural center on 9 April 1933. It promotes the Russian language and culture, houses exhibition materials, a film collection, books, and participates in organizing various festivals, conferences, and other cultural events in Belgrade and beyond. The Russian House's website lists **contacts for 15 Russian associations**⁸⁵. In many cities in Serbia, a **"Russian Corner"** has been organized – in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac, Kruševac, Kovin, Rumenka, Kikinda, Vrbas – in schools, libraries, or other institutions, as places for the exchange and collaboration in the field of culture. Since 2012, the **Society "Russia" has been organizing the event "Days of Russian Culture"** in Novi Sad⁸⁶.

Following the Russian aggression against Ukraine, particularly in September 2022 when the President of Russia announced partial mobilization, **together with audiences, bands, and event organizers, many other artists, authors, and performers arrived in Serbia** who have established *fan groups*. Migrants from Russia can enjoy various cultural events – musical (concerts of rock, metal and punk groups, but also experimental and classical music concerts), actors and stand-up comedians from Russia, poetry and cultural evenings⁸⁷, Russian Film Festival⁸⁸, etc. There are also radio and TV programs to promote Russian culture and provide information in the Russian language, for example, the TV show **"My Russia in Serbia"**⁸⁹ and the informative-musical-educational radio program in the Russian language **"Window to Russia"**⁹⁰. Two social networks are important for informing about cultural events in Serbia – the Facebook group **"Russians in Belgrade"** (30,600 members) and **Telegram** (700 million active users per month)⁹¹.

However, the social and cultural life of the newly arrived Russian community **takes place in parallel with the local population**⁹². Thus, there are Russian cafes, Russian hairdressers, Russian medical doctors, Russian beauty salons, Russian kindergartens where mostly Russians are employed and do not know the Serbian language. It also points to the difference in mentality, unlike Serbs, Russians are portrayed as introverts in the Serbian media.⁹³

4.2.2. Realization of cultural rights of migrants from Russia – perception of relevant stakeholders

■ Institutional perspective

Cultural institutions in Serbia, both Serbian ones and those established to promote Russian culture such as the National Council of the Russian National Minority, Russian House, and Russian corners throughout Serbia, are very active in promoting Russian culture. Besides longstanding cultural cooperation, in Serbia, especially after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the announcement of partial mobilization in Russia, a large and well-paying Russian audience has been formed. Russian agencies organizing cultural events track their audience and arrange numerous events for them in Serbia. Doing business in Serbia is facilitated for them because they do not need a visa, and the pro-Russian orientation of citizens is present.

It was also noted that there are two parallel cultural flows, Serbian and Russian, and that for now there is not much mixing, although there is potential through connecting at concerts of foreign groups and connecting Russian concert agencies and local operatives, and vice versa, our organizations employ Russian advisers.⁹⁴

🗨️ The integration of two, for now, parallel cultural streams is not progressing quickly. The audience at these concerts has not mixed much so far – Russians attend concerts of Russian groups, very rarely Serbian concerts, seemingly out of curiosity. Serbians attend concerts of Serbian groups, and Russian concerts

84 [Руски дом – Руски центар за науку и културу у Београду \(ruskidom.rs\)](http://ruskidom.rs)

85 [Друштва – Руски дом \(ruskidom.rs\)](http://ruskidom.rs)

86 [Ове године «Дани руске културе у Србији» биће посвећени 225. годишњици рођења А. С. Пушкина – Национални Савет Руске Националне Мањине \(nsrgm.org\)](http://nsrgm.org)

87 [Србија, Русија и музика: Како је долазак Русија утицао на концертну сцену у Београду – BBC News на српском](http://bbc.com/news/russia-61888888)

88 [Festival Ruskog Filma u Beogradu – Nedeljnik](http://www.nedeljnik.rs)

89 [Šta se skriva iza zidina Ruskog doma usred Beograda | Moja Rusija u Srbiji – 05.02.2023, Sputnik Srbija \(sputnikportal.rs\)](http://sputnikportal.rs)

90 [Novo izdanje o informativno-muzičko-obrazovnog radio programa na ruskom jeziku Prozor u Rusiju 06.11.2022. – Humanitarni radio Kragujevac](http://radio.kragujevac.rs)

91 [Kako je Telegram postao jedna od najvažnijih društvenih mreža za Ruse? – Russia Beyond Croatia \(rbth.com\)](http://rbth.com)

92 [Paralelni svet Rusa u Srbiji – DW – 4. 4. 2024.](http://www.dw.com)

93 [Kako žive Rusi u Srbiji: "Srbi su mnogo druželjubiviji, to učimo od njih" – B92](http://www.b92.rs)

94 [Tajni život Rusa u Beogradu iz prve ruke: Mit je da su bogati, za vlasti u Moskvi su izdajnici, za Zapad smetnja \(nova.rs\)](http://www.nova.rs)

seem to be attended only incidentally (except for a few who have already established careers here). Points of contact are concerts of foreign performers coming from America, Great Britain, or other European countries – a few Russian promoters, in fact, represent a very avant-garde taste and bring daring names from the global alternative music scene to our market.⁹⁵

Schools also organize cultural events and encourage intercultural exchange with students from Russia.

■ Perspective of international organizations and civil society organizations

Representatives of international organizations and CSOs believe that Russians are well-accepted by the Serbian population and that there are many Russian cultural events. They explain that Russians have chosen Serbia as their new homeland and have organized many things to feel at home.

One of the few CSOs (if not the only one) providing direct support for the integration of Russians into the Serbian community, considering their relocation to Serbia as forced, regardless of their legal status, is the Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC). Through the project “Support for the Integration of Vulnerable Foreigners into the Local Community,”⁹⁶ NSHC encourages volunteering among Russian migrants and identifies their needs, designing and supporting their integration efforts.

Furthermore, **NSHC explores the specific current needs of the target group** regarding integration into the local environment, as well as the current offerings of services and support in the local community. The organization recently conducted a survey among 150 Russians in Novi Sad about their needs in the local community, revealing not only the need for legal regulation of longer stays in Serbia but also the immediate need to engage and integrate into the local community. They feel isolated, lonely, separated from their families, and unable to return home, experiencing a sense of insecurity. They like Serbia and plan to stay for at least the next 5-10 years. NSHC’s director estimates that less than 10% of Russians have integrated well into Serbia.⁹⁷ Language barriers and the closed nature of both the Russian and local populations are seen as obstacles to integration. Therefore, NSHC plans to open a conversation club and involve more foreigners, as they have noticed progress in Serbian language skills and the community integration of their volunteers.

Other international and domestic organizations support schools, teachers, and students in implementing intercultural programs with all categories of migrants, and good practices are described by the institutions themselves – learning clubs, summer and winter schools include activities promoting intercultural dialogue, as well as volunteer activities.

■ Perspective of migrant children, mothers and volunteers from Russia

Russian volunteers and high school students living in Novi Sad believe there are plenty of cultural events, related to Serbian and Russian culture. According to one volunteer, there are three cultural centers around which Russians organize in Novi Sad (Yellow Lamp, Nadia, the third was part of the Anton Chekhov School but has since separated). Each center gathers specific age groups and types of people. The social network Telegram is the primary source of information for cultural events.

” Regarding cultural life in Serbia, it’s similar to the climate in Serbia, it’s great in Serbia and there are no problems with that. As for any Serbian cultural events, I still haven’t fully managed to get involved in that, there are many Russian events I attend, but I follow, a lot of Serbian things are organized, I’ve been to some events, at some performances I didn’t really understand what was going on, but I try to attend them.

Russian volunteer at NSHC, Novi Sad⁹⁸

” There are many Telegram channels where different information is published about where cultural events will be organized, which lecturers will be there. Likewise, people know each other, so you can know a specific person who is organizing a gathering with this and that, with a lecturer who came from Moscow

95 [Ibid.](#)

96 [Podrška integraciji ugroženih stranaca u lokalnu zajednicu – NSHC](#)

97 [Новосадски хуманитарни центар у акцији подршке интеграцији уgroženих странаца и избеглица у локалну заједницу – Podcast.rs](#)

98 24/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR, II part.

or a painter or poet. There are a lot of such events, they usually take place in a café, and if you want to see something interesting, you go to that. We also go to various Serbian events a lot.

Russian volunteer at NSHC, Novi Sad⁹⁹

Volunteers and a high school student from Novi Sad, like other participants in the research, have pointed out the separation of the Russian and Serbian communities in cultural life and their attempts to connect them, unfortunately not very successful. Furthermore, they emphasized that **it is not easy to voluntarily organize cultural events at the same time with a regular job**, so it is important for Russian volunteers to have the support of a local organization like NSHC.

They point out cultural differences in terms of openness to communication, assessing Russians as more closed and focused on their community.

☞☞ Mostly my circle consists of Russians, mostly the circle is Russian, we have a Serbian friend in the circle. I agree that there isn't much mixing of Russians and Serbs in terms of social life... We go to clubs, we also go to Serbian clubs. We went to a Russian café, there was a Russian stand-up comedy night in a Serbian club. On Telegram, there are different channels where various information about cultural events is shared, different things... People in Serbia are open and approachable, it's not like that in Russia, Russians are closed off.

Boy, Serbian high school, Novi Sad¹⁰⁰

Mothers living in private accommodations in Belgrade are not motivated to attend cultural events due to business and family obligations, but at the same time, they emphasize the importance of cultural participation for their children.

Russian volunteers, who are also artists themselves, would like to encourage collaboration among artists, as well as introduce the Serbian community to Russian culture.

☞☞ It would be interesting if there was some association, that is, unification, organization, Russian-Serbian friendship that would deal with art, because I see that in Serbia, as well as in Russia, there is contemporary Serbian art that develops, new places open up, new spaces where people can work in that area. To hold some lessons, workshops. I would like to get involved and help in the development, I think I would have a great influence on the development of Serbian contemporary art, influx of new artists. Of course, that would attract a large number of Russians who are here, and it would attract Serbs, all together it would help to develop Serbian culture.

Russian volunteer NSHC, Novi Sad¹⁰¹

☞☞ I agree, especially in my own field, I'm a philologist. Serbs accept Russians very well, especially educated Serbs, they accept Russians who have come as their own, in terms of education, as highly educated people. I highly value the personal contacts I have built, they are truly wonderful people I collaborate with. As a philologist, I plan to continue working mainly in the Russian language area. Now I have created a course "Taste of Literature" and two Serbs came to that course and I am very proud of that. I easily find Russians, I know where to find them, it's not easy with Serbs and I'm very proud that they joined my course. They didn't come to listen to the course, but these are two Serbian lecturers, they will teach Russian students.

Russian volunteer NSHC, Novi Sad¹⁰²

99 Ibid.

100 16/05/2024, interview with a high school student from a school with 17 Russian students.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

4.2.3. Realization of cultural rights of migrants from Russia – summary of challenges and solutions

All stakeholders agree that Russian migrants fully enjoy their cultural rights and that there are numerous cultural events promoting Russian culture. Serbian institutions and cultural establishments include Russian programs in their schedules, but there are also Russian actors who are active in promoting Russian culture – Russian House, Russian corners, Russian agencies organizing cultural events, Russian associations, etc.

However, there are still challenges in the realization of cultural rights by newly arrived Russian migrants:

- ▶ **Youth from Russia participate in a parallel cultural and social life compared to youth from Serbia. Serbian and Russian cultural scenes and audiences rarely meet and conduct intercultural dialogue.**

RECOMMENDATION: The Ministry of Culture should define in the Action Plan migrants as one of the target groups, as well as foreigners and refugees, and activities aimed at nurturing and promoting their cultural creativity and intercultural dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. A significant role in these activities should be played by CSOs and international organizations, which have experience in this area and with the specified target groups.

- ▶ **Mothers from Russia are not motivated to participate in cultural events due to business and family matters.**

RECOMMENDATION: The education system in cooperation with cultural institutions should motivate mothers to participate in cultural events, at the same time as their children. Civil society organizations should also support mothers in exercising their cultural rights. It is important that cultural institutions conduct an analysis of the audience and determine how many mothers there are among them (both local and foreign) and what their cultural needs are, and that the gender perspective be included in the Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy.

4.3. Healthcare

4.3.1. Legal, strategic and institutional framework for access to healthcare of migrants from Russia

The issue of healthcare for migrants from Russia in the Republic of Serbia is **regulated by general and special regulations** governing the field of healthcare.

The **Law on Healthcare**, in Article 3, stipulates that citizens, as well as foreign nationals and stateless persons who are permanently or temporarily residing in the Republic of Serbia, have the right to healthcare in accordance with the law, and a duty to protect and improve their own health and the health of other citizens, as well as the conditions of their living and working environment. It also stipulates that a person passing through the territory of the Republic of Serbia has the right to emergency medical assistance under the law.

Article 236 of the law specifies that a foreign national, a stateless person, a person recognized as a refugee, an asylum seeker, a registered foreigner who has expressed an intention to submit an asylum application, a person included in a voluntary return program, and a person granted asylum under international and domestic legislation in the Republic of Serbia (in further text: a foreigner), who is permanently or temporarily residing in the Republic of Serbia, or passing through the territory of the Republic of Serbia, **has the right to healthcare under this law unless otherwise specified by an international agreement. Funds for the realization of the right to healthcare from paragraph 2 of this article are provided from the budget of the Republic of Serbia.** A foreigner who meets the conditions to acquire the status of an insured person in accordance with the law governing health insurance, realizes healthcare in accordance with those regulations.

Article 237 of the law indicates that **foreigners receive healthcare to the same extent as Serbian citizens.**

Article 238 stipulates that **healthcare institutions, private practices, and healthcare professionals are obligated to provide emergency medical assistance to foreigners.** The foreigner **personally bears the costs** for the emergency medical assistance provided, as well as for other types of healthcare services provided at

their request, unless otherwise specified by this law or international agreements. For the use of healthcare services as per paragraph 2 of this article, the foreigner pays a fee according to the price list of the healthcare institution or private practice.

Article 240 provides that reimbursement for emergency medical assistance provided to a foreigner by healthcare institutions and private practices is covered by the budget of the Republic of Serbia if the healthcare institution or private practice cannot collect this fee from the foreigner due to their lack of necessary financial means. The reimbursement is made based on the request of the healthcare institution or private practice and evidence that the healthcare service was provided, while the Ministry has the right to inspect the documentation and seek the opinion of the relevant healthcare institution. After the reimbursement is made to the healthcare institution or private practice, the Ministry takes measures through competent authorities to **recover these costs from the foreigner for the benefit of the budget of the Republic of Serbia.**

The Law on Health Insurance, in Article 60, provides that emergency medical assistance, within the meaning of this law, is immediate medical assistance provided to avoid bringing the insured person into life-threatening danger or irreparable health damage or death. It includes medical assistance provided within 12 hours from the moment the insured person is admitted to a healthcare institution or private practice to avoid bringing the insured person into life-threatening danger or irreparable health damage or death.

The issue of healthcare for migrants from Russia, in the healthcare system in the Republic of Serbia, is **set in accordance with the provisions of the positive legal regulations of the Republic of Serbia and is related to the regulation of the legal status of migrants from Russia.**

Bearing in **mind their different statuses, the right to healthcare is realized in different ways, in different scopes, but also in the quality** of the provided health service.

In this sense, we can recognize **several different regimes of access to the right to healthcare** in which migrants from Russia are or can be found.

Having in mind that the citizens of Russia to a significant extent still opt for the regime of short (tourist) travel, a possible way of health insurance is **travel insurance**. Depending on the package of health services, the amount of the premium of this insurance also depends, but it provides primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare. The problem with this insurance is the fact that it must be concluded **before the start of the journey**, that is, in Russia, and it can be purchased again from Russia. Such an option is only possible for migrants who regularly travel between Serbia and Russia.

The second type of health insurance for migrants from Russia derives from **Article 17 of the Law on Health Insurance and the corresponding Rulebook on the manner and procedure of inclusion in compulsory health insurance of persons** who are not compulsorily insured, which stipulates that a person included in compulsory health insurance acquires the status of insured on the day of submission of the application for inclusion in compulsory health insurance to the branch of the Republic Health Insurance Fund (RFZO), in whose territory the person has a residence, i.e. temporary residence if he/she is a foreigner, which determines the nature of the insured by a relevant decision.

The third type of health insurance is **voluntary health insurance**, which according to the Law on Health Insurance can be implemented as: insurance that covers the costs of healthcare that arise when the insured person supplements the rights from mandatory health insurance in terms of content, scope and standards; insurance that covers the costs of healthcare, i.e. health services, medicines, medical devices, rehabilitation and financial benefits, which is not covered by mandatory health insurance; **insurance of citizens who are not compulsorily insured under this law, i.e. who have not included into the compulsory health insurance.** Voluntary health insurance is concluded for a period of at least 12 months, and in the case of foreigners on temporary residence, it is possible to conclude it for a shorter period as well.

🗨️ When it comes to Russian citizens, to conclude a contract for voluntary health insurance, only a 'white card' and a valid travel document are required. It is not necessary for them to have regulated temporary residence. Of course, the premium amount depends on the chosen service package, which can include basic and emergency medical care but may also cover secondary and tertiary treatment in all health institutions that have agreements with us.

A representative of the private insurance company.¹⁰³

103 18/03/2024, telephone interview.

The fourth type of health insurance is related to rights based on work or self-employment. The Law on Insurance provides health insurance and access to health services to employed foreign nationals and their family members on this basis as well.

4.3.2. Realization of healthcare of migrant children and mothers from Russia – perception of relevant stakeholders

■ Institutional perspective

Having in mind the specific position of Russian citizens in Serbia, the perspective of national institutions is linked exclusively to the existing legal framework, which more closely defines the rights and obligations of the insured within the framework of the normative framework, which regulates the healthcare of foreigners.

A foreigner can be health insured in the RFZO when **he/she has a registered stay and assigned an identification number for foreigners by the Ministry of Interior of Serbia**. In the response submitted by the RFZO to the ADRA organization¹⁰⁴, the grounds on which a foreigner can be compulsorily insured are explained, which was already explained in the previous section.

From the submitted response, it can undoubtedly be concluded that **prior regulation of status or residence is a prerequisite for accessing mandatory health insurance**, which otherwise represents a comparative standard for foreign nationals.

In this sense, citizens of Russia, who do not have a regulated stay in the Republic of Serbia, i.e. an identification number for foreigners, must pay for health services or rely on some of the types of voluntary health insurance.

■ Perspective of international organizations and civil society organizations

Unlike the displaced persons from Ukraine, whose access to rights in Serbia attracted significant attention and activity from international and civil society organizations, migrants from Russia did not receive this type of support. This is somewhat understandable, considering that they do not enjoy international protection in Serbia, and most international organizations and their civil society partners tie their mandate specifically to vulnerable groups of foreigners or foreigners who enjoy some form of international protection.

Thus, the **UNHCR** pays attention to asylum seekers from Russia, but there have been no requests for support in the context of healthcare.

Through the project “Support for the Integration of Vulnerable Foreigners in the Local Community”, **NSHC** recognizes the problem and points out the challenges when it comes to the healthcare of the Russian community in Serbia.

🗨️ Mostly, they pay for all services themselves, if they do not work... or through private health insurance.

NSCH representative¹⁰⁵

■ Perspective of migrant children, mothers and volunteers from Russia

Only migrants from Russia who **have regulated residence in Serbia based on employment, and their family members, can rely on the RFZO to cover the costs of their healthcare services**. All other costs of healthcare services are managed by relying on the principle of inclusion in compulsory health insurance or through private insurance.

🗨️ As for healthcare, my family, who opened an entrepreneurial firm, actively uses medical services. We called Emergency Services twice, and they came. My mother is very rigorous about health, regularly checks everything, and pushes the whole family to do the same. She visited the general practitioner several times, did all the check-ups, and all the analyses....

NSHC volunteer¹⁰⁶

104 Republic Health Insurance Fund, Response to ADRA Foundation's request for information of public importance, 02/03/ 2023.

105 18/03/2024, telephone interview.

106 24/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NHCR, II part.

Private health insurance, which can be regulated very easily, is a relatively good option, because it provides effective access to health services, primary healthcare. **Migrants from Russia opt for private health insurance, because they evaluate it as cheaper and more efficient for presenting proof of health status when regulating their stay.**

”” I’m still not at an age where I expect to be constantly visiting doctors. If something happens, I have insurance that I can rely on, but I don’t think I need it since I don’t plan to visit the doctor every month.

NSHC volunteer¹⁰⁷

What is clearly worrisome is the fact that there are Russian citizens who are not health insured and that, if necessary, they pay for health services.

”” We had two medical visits. My husband went to the dentist, and my daughter to check her vision at the ophthalmologist. We found a woman through chats, at the Vizim clinic. In the chat, we found out that a woman from Russia, who has been here for twenty or thirty years, works there. I got all the recommendations, so we went there. We don’t have any health insurance, and we’re aware that if something happens, we’ll be forced to pay for everything.

NSHC volunteer¹⁰⁸

Urgent medical assistance is provided, without the uniform practice of the competent institutions. The experiences of Russian migrants indicate that it is sometimes charged, and sometimes not, although from their statements, it can be concluded that the request for payment does not come to those who have state health insurance.

”” In a chat with Russians, I read that some of them even had to pay for an appendectomy.

I have an acquaintance, a Russian woman. She had a miscarriage here and didn’t pay anything, but it only lasted a day. She came in the morning and was sent home. The same thing happened when her child broke an arm.

NSHC volunteer¹⁰⁹

Migrants particularly point to the refusal of emergency services to provide adequate service to them, as well as to other citizens. They also point to the **high prices of dental services.** **The reactions of the emergency services, as well as the high prices of dental services, represent challenges faced by citizens of Serbia as well,** and it cannot be claimed that this is a question of discriminatory behavior by the competent institutions.

”” We had a situation when we called the emergency service, and they refused to come. The girl was feeling very unwell, vomiting for about 45 minutes, unable to move, and it was around two in the morning. We called the emergency service, but they didn’t come. They told us to take her to the nearest health center or hospital. I don’t know whether the emergency service has the right to refuse a patient or not.

NSHC volunteer¹¹⁰

”” He had problems with his teeth; two of them broke, and the insurance didn’t cover it. He needed a dentist. First, we started looking at Russian clinics and found a Russian clinic with Russian dentists who had opened a practice here, so we went to them. However, when they calculated how much it would cost, it was a huge amount of money, and we couldn’t afford it. Thanks to my colleagues at work, they recommended a Serbian dentist, and it turned out that not only were the services twice as cheap at the Serbian dentist’s, but even more than that. Sometimes this is a problem because, due to their lack of Serbian language skills,

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

Russians mostly turn to their own, to Russians. On the other hand, should we blame or not blame the others for setting prices that are not affordable?

NSHC volunteer¹¹¹

It is absolutely natural for an immigrant community to seek any, even medical support from their compatriots who are now medical doctors in Serbia. But it may not be the best possible choice, given the prices of a private medical practice. The language barrier was not cited as a problem in communication with health institutions, **but it is a problem regarding providing information about the availability of services and ways to achieve them.**

4.3.3. Realization of healthcare of migrant children and mothers from Russia – summary of challenges and solutions

Migrants from Russia are entitled to healthcare services like all foreigners in Serbia. Those in employment have the most favorable position, while others who regulate their status through alternative means pay for services or private health insurance privately.

- ▶ The existence of migrants in Serbia who do not have health insurance represents a risk, first of all, to their health.

RECOMMENDATION: It is necessary for the Ministry of Health and the RFZO, in cooperation with the Russian community and civil society organizations, to create a special channel of communication in the Russian language, which would clearly present newly arrived migrants with all the options for providing healthcare in Serbia and the national stakeholders who provide healthcare services.

- ▶ Migrants from Russia who are not employed or are self-employed are in the most unfavorable position.

RECOMMENDATION: It is necessary for the Ministry in charge of labor affairs and the NES to create special measures that encourage the employment of Russian citizens, thus solving the issue of access to the right to healthcare for migrants from Russia and their family members in the most efficient way. In this way, the previous recommendation also gains importance, bearing in mind the need to acquaint the Russian population with the possibilities of accessing different types of health insurance in Serbia.

4.4. Regulation of status and access to the labor market

4.4.1. Legal, strategic and institutional framework for regulation of status and access to the labor market of migrants from Russia

As with other foreigners, migrants from Russia regulate their status according to the provisions of the **Law on Foreigners**, and additionally, when it comes to access to the labor market, according to the provisions of the **Law on the Employment of Foreigners**.

According to **the Law on Foreigners**, temporary residence is a permit for a foreign citizen to stay in the Republic of Serbia and can be granted to a foreigner who intends to stay in the Republic of Serbia for more than 90 days within a period of 180 days, longer than the period of stay determined by an international agreement, or longer than the period for which a long-stay visa is issued, on the basis of: employment; education or learning the Serbian language; studying; participation in international student or student exchange programs; professional specialization, training, and practice; scientific research work or other scientific educational activities; family reunification; performing religious services; medical treatment or care; property ownership; humanitarian stay; status of a presumed victim of human trafficking; status of a victim of human trafficking; other justified reasons in accordance with the law or international agreement. The law, for the first time, introduces the concept of a **single permit**, which gives a foreigner the right to temporary residence and work in the Republic of Serbia, in

111 Ibid.

accordance with the law. A foreigner who has been granted temporary residence or permanent residence has the right to work in the Republic of Serbia under the regulations governing the employment of foreigners in the Republic of Serbia, without a single permit.

The **Law on the Employment of Foreigners** prescribes the procedure faced by employers and foreigners in order to legally access the labor market, from submitting a request, through a labor market test, to issuing a work permit or a single permit.

With the adoption of amendments to the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment of Foreigners at the end of July 2023, which entered into force on 1 February 2024, the **conditions were created for foreign nationals to exercise the right to temporary residence and to work in Serbia at the same time**, through a unified verification procedure related to both the approval of temporary residence and work permits. Through the digitalization of the entire process, the legislator intended to make the procedure more efficient and accessible to all key stakeholders, primarily foreign workers, but also employers. Nevertheless, **the inconsistency of certain provisions with the Law on General Administrative Procedure, as well as the novelties not well known, above all to employers, insufficient information of key stakeholders about the new procedures, have made it difficult to effectively implement the law**, and even the employers' refusal to hire foreign labor.

4.4.2. Regulation of status and access to the labor market of migrant mothers from Russia – perceptions of relevant stakeholders

With the arrival of migrants from Russia, which was de facto caused by the war in Ukraine, similar questions arose in both professional and general public discussions: who these people are, where they live, how they regulate their status in Serbia, and what their future plans are.

Over time, and through their presence in Serbia, it is evident that newly arrived Russian citizens in Serbia **regulate their status essentially in two ways: through residence registration**, typical for short, tourist-business visits, or **through temporary residence**, mostly based on employment or self-employment.

I Institutional perspective

According to the data from the National Employment Service (NES),¹¹² in 2021, a total of 1,364 work permits were issued to Russian citizens, of which 444 were to women, and in 2023, following the start of the war, 18,349 work permits were issued, of which 5,022 were to women.

Data from the **Serbian Business Registers Agency (APR)**¹¹³ vividly shows the sharp increase in economic activity of Russian migrants in Serbia. As of 30 November 2023, a total of 2,193 business entities and 7,774 entrepreneurs were registered in Serbia. The significant growth in the number of entrepreneurs (self-employment) is particularly interesting—2,929 in 2022 compared to the first eleven months of 2023, which saw 4,588.

Businesses founded by Russian individuals and legal entities predominantly engage in the following activities: unspecialized wholesale trade, computer programming, business and other management consultancy activities, IT consultancy activities, and activities of restaurants and mobile food service activities.

Self-employed entrepreneurs predominantly engage in the following activities: computer programming, business and other management consultancy activities, other IT services, IT consultancy activities, and specialized design activities.

It is evident that the ICT industry is the sector where Russian individuals and legal entities conduct most of their activities, but one should not overlook activities in the hospitality and consultancy services sectors.

The **NES**¹¹⁴ pointed out that the Employment Action Plan **does not specifically define active employment policy measures intended for foreign citizens**, i.e. foreigners-refugees or asylum seekers. According to the **Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance**, foreigners can register with the NES and exercise the right to support according to their needs and status.

112 18/12/2023, letter NES.

113 18/12/2023, letter APR.

114 18/12/2023, letter NES.

The **NES** highlights that there are 519 foreigners (398 women) registered as unemployed with the NES. Of that number, **67 are from the Russian Federation (50 women)**. Of the total number of Russian Federation citizens, **17 individuals are qualified, while 50 are registered as unqualified**. Two individuals, from the **Russian Federation** and Tunisia, are registered as job seekers with the NES.

Regarding Russian citizens seeking international protection, the **NES signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR**, which further defines cooperation, primarily through organizing informational sessions, identifying needs for easier access to the labor market, regular cooperation in creating individual integration plans, and more. The NES participated in informational sessions for asylum seekers and employment counselors to familiarize them with the services provided to this category of users, informing them about their rights and procedures regarding their employment, and the NES's role in this process. Further work on the integration of asylum seekers and foreign refugees includes organizing information days and conducting job-seeking training.

The NES identifies the **lack of valid documentation** (e.g. recognized diplomas) or proof of qualifications and the **language barrier** as major challenges in providing adequate support for access to the labor market.

■ Perspective of international organizations and civil society organizations

As already highlighted in the section on access to healthcare, there is a significantly smaller number of international stakeholders and civil society organizations involved. In this context, the **Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC)** seems to be an exception. NSHC has had a developed volunteer program for many years, which now increasingly includes Russian citizens in Serbia.

☞ We offer a volunteer contract, which provides Russian citizens with a legal basis to regulate their stay in Serbia and create conditions for access to all other rights. Besides this primary reason, there are at least two more reasons motivating Russian citizens to join our activities. First, through work engagement, they improve their language skills. They all learn the language through private lessons, and here they practice it. Second, they need contact with people, with the local community. Here, they are either isolated or connected only to the Russian community. It is very nice to see their engagement in our Club for Intergenerational Solidarity. They are very creative in planning daily sessions, singing, cooking together... We conducted a survey among 147 Russians, and a significant majority of them now want to stay in Serbia. It is very important for us to understand this and to react as a society...

NSHC representative¹¹⁵

As seen from the quote, **volunteering is another way for Russian migrants to legally regulate their stay in Serbia and ensure access to all other rights**. A significant gain from volunteering is language learning and socialization.

■ Perspective of migrant mothers and volunteers from Russia

The issue of status regulation and access to the labor market highlights significant challenges faced by migrants from Russia. **In Serbia, migrants regulate their status through visa runs¹¹⁶, employment, self-employment, and volunteer contracts**. There is also a combination, **where residency is regulated on one basis, but the work engagement is outside Serbia**.

☞ My boyfriend and I have regulated our status in Serbia. We came to NSHC, where they informed us that we could obtain temporary residency in Serbia through a volunteer contract. We achieved our first stay in Serbia thanks to the NSHC volunteer contract. I found a job and extended my stay based on a work contract.

I also volunteer there, but I am on a visa run.

I have regulated my stay through an NSHC volunteer contract. At the school where I teach, I have a work contract with a company in Russia.

115 18/03/2024, telephone interview.

116 *Visa run* is the process of leaving the host country with the aim of legally crossing the state border and legally returning to the host country again, which legalizes the foreigner's presence for a certain period.

I am in a typical situation for most Russians; I work in IT, and like most IT professionals, I don't depend on the Serbian market. Even job offers my friends send me are from foreign companies.

Volunteers, NSHC¹¹⁷

Our respondents believe that Serbia is a country **where they can easily adapt**. Furthermore, the easiest way to legalize their stay in Serbia is to establish a business entity. And with the legalization of residence, they **can apply for a visa to a European country**. Therefore, it is not known where **they will live in the future**. Deciding on future plans depends on various factors, including **family circumstances**.

It's important to understand one more thing. The new people coming to Serbia aren't just migrants from Russia. It's the entire Russian diaspora. Serbia is one of the countries that Russians decide to go to. Usually, they start in Turkey, Israel, or Kazakhstan, and after spending some time there, the next country they choose is Serbia. Serbia and Armenia are countries where it is very easy to adapt, where it's easy to continue education, obtain residency, and gain certain rights. That's why Serbia has become the choice. Serbia is a very suitable ground for the adaptation of foreign citizens.

This primarily depends on the age group. Young people who have experienced stress and the changes of moving from one country can't say where they'll be in five or ten years. But people who are older, like me, with four children — when I emigrated here, I knew I would stay. Where could I go around the world with four children? I came here to adapt and stay here.

Volunteers, NSHC¹¹⁸

However, more and more people are regulating their stay in **Serbia and showing a tendency to stay longer**.

From my experience working at a translation agency, where people come to translate documents, I can say the general opinion in the agency was that there would be two major waves of Russians coming. When the war started and during the major mobilization. However, that's not the case. The number of people hasn't decreased. New clients keep coming, saying they arrived a week, two weeks, or three weeks ago. From the information I have from work, most people who come here want to regulate their status and stay in Serbia. I know this from the documents we translate, like their diplomas and their children's diplomas, to find jobs and enroll their children in schools. Only a small number of Russians come here to obtain a visa for another country. I know this because we translate documents not into Serbian but for the country they plan to apply for a visa. Most people genuinely want to stay in Serbia.

Russian volunteer, NSHC¹¹⁹

One of the **biggest challenges in accessing the labor market**, for migrants from Russia is **insufficient information about the procedure for hiring foreigners and Serbian employers and their needs and demands of the labor market in Serbia**. The employment procedure is still not sufficiently known to **employers, as well as the qualifications and potential of Russian migrants**.

As for official employment... the moment Serbian employers realize how complicated the process is, how much time and money it requires, they simply give up. They don't understand why they should go through all of that when they can find an employee who doesn't need any of it. And even when you direct them to lawyers who can explain how the process works, that it takes time but is not complicated, even with legal advice, they simply give up. Also, when they hear about the penalties...

I think it would be useful to familiarize them with Serbian companies. The thing is, a lot of people with higher education are coming from Russia, people who are specialists in certain fields. It would be really good if there were a website or portal where these people could see what jobs they can apply for, or which jobs in Serbia are available to foreigners, and especially a site or portal where shortage occupations would be listed, so that specialists could see what skills are in demand here and which are not...

Volunteers, NSHC¹²⁰

117 24/04/2024, online focus group with Russian volunteers from the NSHC, II part.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

Other **challenges in the inclusion of Russian migrants in the labor market were also observed:**

- ▶ **Insufficient knowledge of the Serbian language**, but they emphasize their **comparative advantage of the knowledge of the Russian language**.

☞ Usually, people who come don't have enough finances to live for a year while they learn the language and look for a job. In the first year, or even before, you have to find a job to support your family.

I work in a Serbian company. Of course, the biggest problem is the language. On one hand, the language is a barrier, but on the other hand, knowing Russian, my native language, helped me find a job. I found a job in a translation company because I know Russian and speak a little Serbian. At work, I can communicate with Russians and help with communication when people arrive.

Volunteers, NSHC¹²¹

- ▶ **There are also Russian migrants who are still unemployed or do jobs that require lower qualifications than they possess.**

☞ As I am looking for a job in the field of arts, I still haven't found one. I simply don't know where to turn, where to look, or which websites post job ads. In Russia, there are Telegram channels where people post when they need something. But here, I don't know who to approach, which fields are looking for artists, what kind of education they require, which documents, what skills are needed, and whether any organizations are even interested in working with someone who just arrived.

In his profession as a sailor, my husband only worked when he was young. After that, he switched to working with cars. Here, he works as a food delivery driver. He decided to do that to learn the city, learn the language, and meet people. He is 42 years old, so it's much harder for him to adapt to a new environment.

Volunteers, NSHC¹²²

- ▶ Challenges also arise when **opening entrepreneurial businesses**. Consequently, there is a problem with **opening an account**. Therefore, some Russian migrants decide to **work online in Russia, without opening a company in Serbia**.

☞ If you have money, you can open an entrepreneurial business. It is not a lot for starting up, but as foreigners, after opening, we apply for a work permit for self-employment, which costs around 17,000 dinars, plus the cost of translating all the documents. But okay, even if you have a certain amount of money to finance the entrepreneurial business, the point is that you need clients who will bring in profit right away, as soon as you open it. If you don't have them, you're at a loss because taxes still need to be paid...

Banks won't open an account for you unless the company is in the IT sector. A Russian passport, that's it. They pay my salary into an account in Russia, and I send the salary here to the system [...], and then I go to the exchange office connected to that system to withdraw the money.

Volunteers, NSHC¹²³

☞ I am an endocrinologist with 24 years of work experience. I was a good doctor. I have some patients who don't want to part with me. I continue to work with them. I can't physically examine them, but they send me all their test results. Based on those results, I provide consultations. There is a group on Facebook called 'Treatment in Serbia' where different Russians post, and I added my contact information there. Now, I provide consultations to Russians who are here. This information is spreading. I recently offered a consultation to a Russian woman in Serbia and recommended her to someone still in Russia. This is how I earn a living.

Mother from Russia, Belgrade¹²⁴

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 13/04/2024, focus group with mothers from Russia.

All the mentioned challenges when joining the labor market are **common to all Russian migrants regardless of gender dimension**.

4.4.3. Regulation of status and access to the labor market of migrant mothers from Russia – summary of challenges and solutions

The general conclusion is that when it comes to regulating the status of Russian citizens, competent institutions approach this issue liberally and in accordance with the law. **Key aspects of support, primarily, can be related to the fundamentals through which regulated residence can be acquired (employment and self-employment), as well as in the segment of timely and accurate flow of information about the rights and obligations of foreigners**, in a language they understand.

- ▶ There is no adequate way of communicating with Russian migrants that would provide timely and accurate information about rights and obligations in the Serbian labor market.

RECOMMENDATION: It is necessary that the Ministry in charge of labor affairs and the NES, in cooperation with the Russian community and civil society organizations, develop different types of communication, primarily online, in the Russian language. This would enable the Russian community to be informed in a simple way about the possibilities and ways of regulating the status, conditions for employment and self-employment, and access to the links on which the demand on the Serbian labor market is presented, but on which they could place their offers and present their qualifications.

- ▶ Employers do not sufficiently know about the new legal framework for foreigners and the potential of the Russian community.

RECOMMENDATION: In cooperation with the NES and the Ministry in charge of labor affairs, civil society organizations should provide continuous and systematic information to employers about the new legal framework for foreigners. On that occasion, the fact of the existence of a possible portal should be shared with employers, where the labour potential and qualifications of interested Russian migrants would be presented.

- ▶ There are no active employment measures that would activate the labour potential of Russian migrants.

RECOMMENDATION: The NES, in cooperation with the Ministry, international stakeholders, and civil society organizations, should develop active employment measures intended exclusively for foreigners and their specific characteristics, with a special emphasis on women. This means, above all, the introduction of the measure of learning the Serbian language for employment and modeling the existing non-financial and financial employment measures (support for self-employment). The measures would aim to activate those who are unemployed, or who do jobs for Russian companies, receive their salary from Russian companies, and work in Serbia online.

- ▶ There is no identified and systematized human potential in the Russian community in Serbia, which makes it difficult to activate significant human capital.

RECOMMENDATION: It is necessary for the competent Qualifications Agency to establish a database for monitoring the socio-demographic data and qualifications of Russians who requested the recognition of their school documents for employment. In cooperation with the academic community and civil society organizations, through additional research, it is possible to identify additional professions, for which the recognition of qualifications has not yet been requested, and which are in short supply in the Serbian labor market.

5. Concluding remarks

The arrival of migrants from Russia, which began after February 2022, is **a very noticeable phenomenon in terms of mass and intensity**. Children and adults face challenges in Serbia, as this research shows, analyzing the areas of education, access to cultural rights, healthcare and the labor market.

All stakeholders who participated in the research **believe that, despite numerous challenges, the education of Russian children is going well**, and that the educational needs of the children are met. They do not see difficulties as something that reflects greatly on educational outcomes. However, **there are no objective indicators of their education success, nor an analysis of the structure and potential of students who submit a request for recognition of school documents** by the Qualifications Agency. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and the Agency must identify and monitor objective indicators of educational success and potential of children and youth from Russia. Furthermore, **challenges were identified in meeting educational needs**, which can make it difficult and reduce the achievement of educational outcomes: the program of learning Serbian as a foreign language is still not systematically implemented in schools, generally, there is no preparatory period for the inclusion of children in schools; there is a different order of lessons in some teaching curricula (e.g. mathematics for 5th and 6th grade) in Serbia and Russia; parallel attendance at Serbian and Russian schools; enrollment in the first grade of elementary school based on Serbian tests; obstacles to enrolling in high school – lack of information, passing the elementary school final exam in the Serbian language and the cost of recognition of school documents. Concerning **social needs**, there is also agreement among research participants that both local children and teachers have accepted children from Russia well and provided them with support at school. However, the discussion about free time and activities showed that children usually do not socialize with their Serbian peers outside of school. **School staff have the hardest time dealing with the emotional/psychological needs** of students from Russia – stress and trauma, developmental difficulties and behavioral problems, as they believe they are not experts in these challenges. There is a **different preparedness of schools for the inclusion of students from Russia**, and it is necessary to assess the migration potential from Russia, as well as the capacities of schools to respond to it. It is important to empower schools for the inclusion of migrants and refugees, because of the increasing presence of foreign children in schools. All these challenges point to the **need for the Ministry of Education to strengthen the mechanism of integration of refugee and migrant children in schools**, and to continue empowering schools for its implementation.

Regarding cultural rights, although all stakeholders agree **that there are cultural institutions and numerous cultural events that nurture and promote Russian culture**, the challenge lies in the lack of intercultural dialogue between youth from **Russia and Serbia**. Additionally, **mothers are not able to participate in cultural events** due to work and family obligations. Therefore, the key recommendations refer to the **identification of the cultural needs of these target groups by the Ministry of Culture and Information, and the development of a mechanism for exercising the cultural rights of these target groups and cultural activities in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, as well as civil society organizations**.

In the field of **healthcare**, the Ministry of Health and the RFZO should, in cooperation with the Russian community and civil society organizations, **create a special channel of communication** in the Russian language, which would **clearly present** newly arrived migrants **with all the options for providing healthcare in Serbia and the national stakeholders who provide healthcare services**. The most effective way of realizing the right to healthcare of migrants from Russia is their **inclusion in the labor market**, which enables the right to healthcare, both for the insured person who is employed, and for members of his or her family.

To improve **access to the labor market**, the **Ministry in charge of labor affairs and the NES** should, in cooperation with the Russian community and civil society organizations, create a **special channel of communication in the Russian language**, which would enable the Russian community to be informed in a simple way about the possibilities and ways of regulating the status, conditions for employment and self-employment, to have access to links where the demand on the Serbian labor market is presented, but where they could also post their offers and present their qualifications. At the same time, the **NES and the Ministry in charge of labor affairs and civil society organizations** should provide continuous and systematic **information to employers** about the new legal framework for foreigners and about the labour potential and qualifications of interested Russian migrants. **The NES, in cooperation with the Ministry, international stakeholders and civil society organizations, should develop active employment measures intended exclusively for foreigners** and their specific characteristics. This primarily refers to the introduction of measures for learning **the Serbian language** for the purpose of employment and **modeling** the existing nonfinancial and financial employment measures

(support for self-employment). From the moment of arrival in Serbia and through requests for recognition of qualifications, the competent agency can **establish a database** with socio-demographic characteristics and qualifications of Russians living and working in Serbia. At the same time, through additional research, it is possible to identify additional professions, for which the recognition of qualifications has not yet been requested, and which are in short supply in the Serbian labor market.



Save the Children