

# EMPLOYMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND PERSONS GRANTED ASYLUM OR TEMPORARY PROTECTION

Employer handbook





GOVERNMENT  
OF SERBIA



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
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Implemented by



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



**IOM**  
UN MIGRATION



COMMISSARIAT  
FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRATION  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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## Why do people seek protection in the Republic of Serbia?

People who have been forced to flee their countries due to **war, conflict, or persecution** may apply for and receive protection in the Republic of Serbia. They are unable to return to their countries because doing so would put their lives at risk. According to the international definition, persons in such circumstances are referred to as refugees<sup>1</sup>. In Serbia, they may be granted protection in the form of asylum or temporary protection, which also entitles them to legal residence and access to employment.

**Asylum seekers** are foreign nationals whose asylum applications are still pending and on which the competent authorities have not yet made a decision. It is important to distinguish between persons granted asylum or temporary protection and asylum seekers, and other categories of foreigners residing in the Republic of Serbia—their reasons for arrival, their needs, legal status, and documents differ.



## How are their status, rights, and obligations regulated in Serbia?

The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection of the Republic of Serbia regulates the residence, status, rights, and obligations of:

- **persons granted asylum** (refugee status or subsidiary protection),
- persons granted **temporary protection**,
- asylum seekers.

This Law defines asylum as **the right to residence and protection**, in the form of:

- **Right to asylum (refugee status):** residence and protection

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<sup>1</sup> Article 1 of The Refugee Convention, ratified by Republic of Serbia: "Refugee is a foreigner who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it".

granted to a refugee for whom the competent authority determines a **well-founded fear of persecution** in their country of origin or habitual residence;

- **Subsidiary protection:** granted to a foreign national who would face a **risk of serious harm** if returned to their country of origin or habitual residence and who cannot or, due to such risk, does not wish to avail themselves of the protection of that country.

A third form of protection is **temporary protection**, granted by a Government decision in cases of a mass influx of displaced persons who cannot return to their country of origin or habitual residence. In Serbia, this form of protection is currently granted to displaced persons from Ukraine through an expedited procedure compared to the asylum process.

### 3 What does the asylum procedure in Serbia look like?

Foreign nationals seeking protection in Serbia submit their asylum application to the **Asylum Office of the Ministry of Interior**, which then issues them an **identity card**. Asylum seekers present their claims during interviews with Asylum Office officials, explaining the reasons they cannot return to their country of origin. They retain asylum seeker status until a final decision is made in the asylum procedure.

If the application is approved, the individual is granted asylum in the Republic of Serbia—either **right to asylum** (refugee status) or **subsidiary protection**<sup>2</sup>.

### 4 What personal documents are issued to them by the Republic of Serbia?

Depending on their status, the Ministry of Interior issues the following **personal documents**<sup>3</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 24/2018), Article 25.

<sup>3</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 24/2018), Articles 89 and 90.

- Identity card for persons granted asylum (refugee status), valid for five years
- Identity card for persons granted subsidiary protection, valid for one year
- Identity card for persons granted temporary protection (displaced persons from Ukraine), valid for one year
- Identity card for asylum seekers, valid for six months.

All documents may be extended upon expiry. All asylum seekers and persons granted asylum or temporary protection are registered with the Ministry of Interior, which also assigns them a **Foreigner Registration Number (EBS)**<sup>4</sup>, equivalent in importance to the national identification number (JMBG).

Their identity cards differ from those of Serbian citizens - they are laminated and completed manually. Improvements to the design of identity documents for persons granted asylum (refugee status or subsidiary protection) are planned for 2026.



## How do they access the labor market in Serbia?

According to the Law on Employment of Foreigners in Republic of Serbia, they do not require a single work permit<sup>5</sup> to access the labor market:

- Persons granted asylum (refugee status or subsidiary protection) or temporary protection may work using only their **identity card**;
- Asylum seekers must submit both their **identity card** and a **certificate of status** issued by the Asylum Office. They are eligible to begin working **six months after submitting their asylum application**, provided no decision has yet been made.

<sup>4</sup> Law on the Central Population Register of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 17/2019), Article 10, paragraph 10.

<sup>5</sup> Law on the Employment of Foreigners in the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", Nos. 124/2014, 113/2017, 50/2018, 31/2019 and 62/2023), Article 3.

As the institution responsible for reception and integration, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (SCRM) provides assistance to persons granted asylum in accessing the labor market, including:

- 1) Assistance in obtaining documents required for registration with the National Employment Service and employment agencies;
- 2) Support in initiating recognition of foreign educational qualifications;
- 3) Access to additional education and training aligned with labor market needs;
- 4) Assistance for inclusion in active employment policy measures.

Employers may also contact SCRM integration advisors and share job vacancy information.

## 6 Why is their employment beneficial for your business?

People fleeing war and persecution represent one of the most vulnerable groups in any society, yet they bring diverse **talents**, **knowledge**, and **experiences**. Access to decent work enables them to support themselves and their families, connect with local communities, and integrate more quickly. By employing them, employers:

- bring **new perspectives and experience from international markets**,
- enhance **diversity and inclusion**,
- identify and **utilize valuable skills and talents**,
- strengthen **corporate social responsibility** and community engagement.



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## How can UNHCR support their employment?

UNHCR in Serbia provides daily counseling to people fleeing war and persecution regarding employment and **connects them with suitable employers**, sharing **relevant candidate information**.

UNHCR is also **available to employers for guidance on legal status, documentation, candidate profiles**, and offers **training sessions, informational resources**, and other support to facilitate efficient workplace integration of persons granted asylum or temporary protection, as well as asylum seekers.

Together with IKEA Serbia, UNHCR launched the **private sector network “For Refugees”**, bringing together companies willing to offer internships, employment opportunities, training, product donations, and other types of support. The network currently includes 14 companies and business associations.

As a relevant state institution, SCRM also supports employment by helping prepare CVs, providing technical assistance, matching candidates with job opportunities aligned with their qualifications and experience, and facilitating contact with employers.



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## What practices have proven effective in their employment?

**Trainings or informational sessions** for employees, focused on the **position** and **workplace integration** of people fleeing war and persecution, as well as intercultural skills, have proven to be effective practices.

New employees benefit from direct support at the beginning, particularly through **mentorship** during onboarding. **Cultural**

**differences** should also be considered - for example, attitudes toward punctuality, gender equality, and boundaries between professional and private life may vary.

Since 2021, IKEA Southeast Europe and UNHCR have been implementing the **“Skills for Employment”** program in Serbia, Croatia, and Romania. The program provides paid three-month internships for persons granted asylum or temporary protection and asylum seekers. It enables participants to demonstrate their talents while developing new skills. Various trainings, including psychological support, are available. More than 50 percent of participants continue working with the company after completing the program.

Find out more details on this good practice example in the video [Skills for Employment](#), on UNHCR Srbija YouTube channel, as well as in the guide for employers that IKEA developed based on multi-year experience on various markets, available [at this link](#), on UNHCR Serbia website.

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## What else should employers know?

Employers should be familiar with the rights of people fleeing war and persecution, as defined by the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection and other relevant regulations.

### RIGHTS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS:

- residence and freedom of movement in RS
- material reception conditions
- information and free legal aid
- freedom of religion
- social assistance
- health care
- primary and secondary education
- access to the labor market (after six months)
- personal documents

**RIGHTS OF PERSONS  
GRANTED ASYLUM  
(REFUGEE STATUS OR  
SUBSIDIARY PROTECTION):**

- residence and freedom of movement
- accommodation
- health care
- education
- access to the labor market
- free legal aid
- social assistance
- property rights
- freedom of religion
- family reunification
- personal documents (ID card and travel document for refugees)
- assistance with integration

**RIGHTS OF PERSONS  
UNDER TEMPORARY  
PROTECTION:**

- residence and freedom of movement
- collective accommodation
- information and free legal aid
- freedom of religion
- health care
- primary and secondary education
- access to the labor market during the period of temporary protection
- personal documents

They are required to comply with the Constitution and laws, cooperate with the Asylum Office, and report changes of address or loss of documents. All legal and material changes must also be reported to SCRM.

Asylum seekers are entitled to accommodation in asylum centers managed by SCRM. If they have sufficient financial means, they may reside outside these facilities at their own expense, but only with prior approval from the Asylum Office, which is issued after an application has been submitted. Exceptionally, approval may be granted earlier if required for the safety of a foreign national who has been registered as having expressed the intention to seek asylum.

During workshops organized by UNHCR in cooperation with SCRM, persons granted asylum or temporary protection, as well as asylum seekers, formulated **recommendations** for the private sector based on their own workplace experiences. You can read them [at this link](#) on the UNHCR Serbia website.





**Be there #ForRefugees!**

UNHCR invites all socially responsible companies interested in cooperation to contact us at [srbbesaradnja@unhcr.org](mailto:srbbesaradnja@unhcr.org) or by phone at +381 63 434 173.

We closely cooperate with the private sector and are deeply grateful to all companies providing dignified employment opportunities and other meaningful support to people fleeing war and persecution.





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