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## **BOSNIA AUTHORITIES ARGUE OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR MIGRANTS**

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Balkan Insight (14 February 2019)

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said it would welcome an announcement by the Bosnian state authorities that they will take over responsibility for reception centres for migrants and refugees in the countrys northwest Una Sana Canton, UNHCR told BIRN.

It is the primary responsibility of the central government to be the lead stakeholder in managing the refugee/migrant situation that has affected Bosnia, and particularly the Una Sana Canton, since the beginning of 2018, Neven Crvenkovic, UNHCR Spokesperson in South Eastern Europe, told BIRN.

On February 5, the Una Sana Canton warned that it may send some 2,500 migrants and refugees to Sarajevo ff Bosnias state government, the Council of Ministers, fails to accept the request from the to take over responsibilities for reception centres by February 15,

The canton, one of 10 local units in Bosnias Federation entity, is temporary home to most refugees and migrants in the country, and has long claimed that they should fall under the jurisdiction of state-level institutions.

The cantons Migration Task Force on Tuesday repeated its requests that the Bosnian Security Ministry should take over all ad-hoc migrant centres, set an upper limit on the number of migrants and refugees allowed in the canton at 3,200, and task the countrys border agency with preventing migrants from entering the country.

Many migrants and refugees on their way to EU have got stuck in the canton, which lies on the border between Bosnia and EU-member Croatia – which does its best to keep them out.

Crvenkovic noted that UNHCR has been working with the canton and Bosnias Ministry of Security from the start on finding solutions in line with humanitarian principles and Bosnias international obligations.

The Mayor of Bihac, the main town in the canton, describes the situation as frustrating.

We sit down for a meeting with state ministers and then they complain to each other about how the state is not functional. That is very frustrating, Suhret Fazlic told N1 TV on Wednesday.

If the cantons request fails, it has arranged to transport many migrants and refugees to the capital, as Fazlic says the whole of Bosnia should share responsibility for the burden.

But Dragan Mektic, Bosnias Security Minister, has said he doubts handing responsibility for refugee

centres to the state will solve the problem.

I have put this request into procedure, but [even] when it happens, I do not think that anything will be that different, Mektic told N1 on Monday.

By the time of publication, the ministry had not responded to BIRNs inquiries for details about further procedures.

Just over 20,000 migrants and refugees are registered as having entered Bosnia during 2018, according to the countrys Service for Foreign Affairs.

The exact number of those still in Bosnia is hard to confirm, as many have clearly moved on.

Latest information from the Council of Ministers says only 3,900 remain, which means that most of those who declared an intention to claim asylum in Bosnia have left the country.

Those who stayed and are registered in Bosnia have been placed in seven locations: in Sarajevo, Mostar, Bihac, Cazin and Velika Kladusa. Most are in Bihac.

Most of them are taking the new so-called Balkan route to Western Europe, which passes through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia.

The former route was closed off after Hungary built a fence to stop migrants and refugees from entering the country from Serbia, and then moving on to Austria.

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