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REFUGEE CHILDREN IN SERBIA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Maja NIKOLOVA, M. Sc.

Museum Adviser, UNIHUB Belgrade, Serbia
ngomusketar@hotmail.com

Abstract:

Taking care of the refugees who came to Serbia during the Second World War required great efforts from both the state apparatus and the entire nation. Children who arrived in Serbia with parents who were unable to take care of them, as well as those without parental care, were a special problem. Serbian refugee homes were organized for these children, and some of them were cared for by Serbian urban and rural families. Young people of school age attended classes in Serbian schools, or in special classes formed at refugee homes. The state took care of their survival, food, clothing and health.

Key words:

Second World War, refugee issue, children's homes, family accommodation

Izvleček:

Begunski otroci v Srbiji med drugo svetovno vojno

Skrb za begunce, ki so med drugo svetovno vojno prišli v Srbijo, je zahtevala velike napore tako od državnega aparata kot tudi celotnega naroda. Otroci, ki so prišli v Srbijo s starši, vendar le-ti niso mogli skrbeti zanje, in otroci brez starševske oskrbe so predstavljali še poseben problem. Za te otroke so bili organizirani begunski domovi, za nekatere pa so skrbele srbske družine tako v mestih kot na podeželju. Mladi v šolski starosti so obiskovali pouk v srbskih šolah ali v posebnih razredih, ustanovljenih v begunskih domovih. Država je skrbela za njihovo preživetje, hrano, obleko in zdravje.

Ključne besede:

druga svetovna vojna, begunska problematika, otroški domovi, nastanitev družin

1 Introduction

One of the characteristics of the Second World War in Serbia was the refugee issue, i.e., the status and life of many refugees who happened to be in occupied Serbia at the beginning of the war. One gets the impression that this topic is partially and insufficiently researched in Yugoslav and Serbian historiography, although Slobodan D. Milosevic, as early as 1981, published an extensive work entitled *Refugees and settlers on the territory of occupied Yugoslavia 1941-1945*. And some other works, printed in the

last decades, improved the knowledge related to this topic. Among them is the graduation thesis titled *Refugee Question in New Times 1941*, by Mirko Reljic, a history student at the University of Belgrade, defended in 2019, as well as Bora Majdanac's article, *Refugee children in Belgrade families in 1942*, published in the *Archive Review* in 1999. A lot was written about refugees in the daily newspaper *Novo vreme*, which was published during the Second World War, as well as in other newspapers from that period.

Archival materials related to this topic are mainly located in the Historical Archives of Serbia in the fonds of the Ministry of Education and Religion and the fonds of the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants. At the end of the 20th century, in 1998, the Archives of Serbia opened the exhibition *Refugees in Serbia 1941-1945*, whose authors were Radomirka Djokic, Dobrinka Gavric, Djina Trisovic and Boro Majdanc. The exhibition was accompanied by a short catalog.

In addition, in the Archives of Yugoslavia in the fonds of the Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there are documents related to institutions such as children's refugee homes. The fonds contains lists of students, requests from parents, letters from the Ministry and other documents.

It is an indisputable fact that archival material is the primary source for studying this topic, but it should be borne in mind that not all facts could be officially recorded. That is why it is necessary to consider the memories of the wards and students at that time, which indicate the real situation in which the children were. In addition, the preserved photographs make it easier to get to know and understand the past, which is constantly being transformed. As a source of some historical reconstruction, it allows us to fill in the gaps of previous research and to reconstruct a section of time comprehensively and accurately. Because it records what really happened, and the skill of the historian is to read it.

2 Establishment and work of the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants

During 1941, a large wave of refugees arrived in Serbia from many parts of the then already fragmented Yugoslavia. Refugees came in two segments - in organized and pre-prepared transports and in significantly larger numbers unorganized and spontaneous. Mostly those who came in an organized manner were Slovenes from Lower Styria, Carniola and Carinthia, while Serbs who were fleeing genocide and terror arrived individually.¹ By the end of October 1941, 55,000 refugees were registered, and at the beginning of March 1942, over 160,000 (Majdanc, 1999, p. 177). In the group of 160,000 refugees, there were 63,000 children under the age of 18, of which 12,000 were in Belgrade (Majdanc, 1999, p. 177). Most of the children were placed in refugee homes, recreation centers and boarding schools, while around 300 children were accepted by Belgrade families, mostly middle-class and poor families. The children's accommodation action was organized by the Commissariat for Refugees, which for the occasion made a list in which the following information was entered: name and surname of the family, occupation of the father of the family, number of children in the family, whether he accepts the child as his own, until the end of the war and only over the winter, then data related to children - child's name, age, parent's name, occupation, place of origin and current residence.

¹ *At the beginning of May 1941, refugees arrived from Slovenia, and a little later from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, as well as from those territories that were under the control of the Hungarians, Italians and Bulgarians.*

In May 1941, the *Committee for Emigration was established*, and in mid-June of the same year, the *Central Committee for the Care of Refugees and Reconstruction of Smederevo* (Lj. S, 1941, p. 1). The president of the board was Milan Acimovic, and the vice-presidents were Dimitrije Ljotic and Dragomir Dragi Jovanović. On the proposal of the Council of Commissioners, the *Commissariat for Refugees and Displaced Persons* was established on July 6, 1941, and the extraordinary commissioner for refugees was Andra Popovic, and from November 1941, Toma Maksimović.² The Commissariat was subordinate to the Ministerial Council, and it worked based on the *Office of the Commissariat for refugees and immigrants*, which was adopted on September 23, 1941. (N. N. 1941, p. 1). At the end of the year, on December 10, 1941, the *Rulebook on the Organization of the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants was adopted*, and at the beginning of 1942, the *Rulebook on the Work and Organization of District, City, County and Municipal Committees for Refugees and Immigrants* was printed.³ Help for the refugees was also provided by the Red Cross Society, which, among other things, organized collective meals.

Due to the poor living conditions, some refugees were infected with typhus, so special quarantines were opened for them in several places in Belgrade and Serbia. The central infirmary, i.e., the central hospital for the treatment of children, was in the building of the Belgrade seminary. In addition, sick and emaciated children were also treated in the City Hospital in Belgrade, where 34 children were placed at the beginning of 1942 after several months of starvation (N.N, 1942, p. 3).

In addition to illness, the problem was accommodation as well as food for the refugees.⁴ Due to high inflation, in the spring of 1941, new money was printed that could be replaced from June 25, 1941. Citizens, numerous businesses, and the church provided material assistance to refugees in Serbia, and at the end of 1941, an action called *Winter Aid was organized for refugees*.

Thinking of his people and innocent people, at the end of 1941, in his speech, Commissioner Toma Maksimovic pointed out: *Serbs and Serbian women, refugees from various parts of our former country, came to today's Serbia naked and barefoot, without anything, without belongings, without clothes and with sorrow, pain and sickness. We quickly accepted them and received them under the roof of our present state, but that is not enough. They need work, employment, bread, clothes, shoes, care, medicine, education, and comfort for the pain they have suffered and the trouble they have fallen into. Many are cared for and accepted as they should be, but there are still unwilling ones, especially children* (Djokic, 1998, p. 9).

The life of refugees in Serbia was permeated with grief and sadness for the places they came from, as well as concern for the fulfillment of basic life needs. Their life was full of uncertainty and difficulties. Unsettled circumstances, due to the war, were also present in Serbia, so the fate of the entire nation was unpredictable. Nevertheless,

² *The office of the Commissioner for Refugees was in Kralja Milan Street in the building of the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. (N. N. Mr. Andra Popovic was appointed Commissioner for Settlers and Refugees. New time, 1941, 27 June, p. 1).*

The news about the appointment of Toma Maksimovic, which was made based on the decision of the President of the Council of Ministers, was printed in the newspaper Monday on October 20, 1941.

Toma Maksimović (Brčko, 1895 - Belgrade, 1958) was the director of the company Bata in Borovo and the president of the humanitarian organization of the Serbian business association Marchant (Privrednik).

³ *Rulebook on the Organization of the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants, Official Gazette, no. 21718, 1941, December 11; Rulebook on the work and organization of district, city, county and municipal committees for refugees and immigrants, Official Gazette, no. 194, 1942, January 3, p. 1.*

⁴ *Due to the lack of accommodation capacity, some refugees were forced to return to their place of residence.*

refugees found their home and peace in Serbia, as evidenced by some of their memories - they received us kindlier than if we were their own brothers.

3 Caring for refugee children

In addition to the educational workers, many children of preschool and school age came with the refugees. As already mentioned, out of 160,000 registered refugees, 63,000 were children who were waiting to find their new home (Majdanc, 1999, p. 177). In order to regulate the newly created situation, in May 1941, the commissioner of the Ministry of Education, Risto Jojić, issued a decree that the decision on the end of the school year 1940/41 also applies to school children of refugees (Majdanc, 1999, p. 177). Since most refugee high school students did not have documents about their completed classes, students were enrolled based on their parents' statement as well as based on the teacher's assessment of their knowledge. Students from Zagreb who were not obliged to pay enrollment and examination fees could continue their studies at the University of Belgrade immediately after their arrival.

During the war years, in places where educational work was possible, there were 40 students in each class, among whom were refugees from Maribor to Bitola. Children brought with them personal and family suffering, they were closed, uninterested and unfriendly. In addition, failures in previous education, as well as language, especially among Slovenian children, made it difficult. Such many students in the classroom and their apathetic behavior made it difficult for teachers to work.

When it comes to Slovenian children, they had the opportunity to continue their education in Serbian schools where the teaching of Slovenian language and literature was organized. At the beginning of 1945, a Slovenian school was founded in Belgrade, which had about 120 children in four classes.⁵

In addition to general education, work was also done on professional development, so during 1942, practical courses for housewives were established. Namely, the Department of Public Enlightenment passed the *Decree on the opening of a special practical course for housewives for refugee children at the Belgrade Women's Society*, where refugee girls learned the basics of housekeeping, cooking, sewing, and basic concepts related to hygiene habits (N. N, 1942, p. 3). In addition, at the beginning of 1943, 30 refugee girls were sent to a ten-month course at the Homemaking School in Bavaniste.⁶

Among the escaped youth, there were also those who needed to be trained for self-employment, so the Agricultural School in Bukovik received, during 1942, 32 young men for training (Mar. 1942, p. 3).

In Belgrade, the *Kraljević Andreja Home* housed 250 apprentices who practiced various trades with the masters, while they had general education classes within the Home. To make it easier for them to decide on a particular trade, the children attended a preparatory course where they were introduced to the basic elements of many trades. After that, they went to workshops with masters, as well as to classes in extended schools. In addition to the Commissariat, the members of *Privrednik 's Youth* took care of this youth (B. P. M, 1942, p. 3).

⁵ Ivan Cankar Slovenian four-grade primary school was established in Belgrade in 1945. (Nikolova, 2012, p. 702).

⁶ N. N, *Homemaking school in Bavaniste accepts runaway girls*, *Renewal*, no. 515, 1942, March 11, p. 5.

Special attention was paid to children who were left without parents as well as those from poor families.⁷ The goal of taking care of refugee children was of general social and national importance. That was the survival of the Serbian people and their future generations (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 170). The Commissariat for Refugees had a serious and responsible task before it - it was necessary to systematically distribute the children according to age and school readiness and to provide them with collective housing or family housing. To realize this, the Commissariat was forced to cooperate with social and state enterprises, with private individuals, as well as with the Orthodox Church, which needed to find families to accommodate the children. In this sense, in the fall of 1941, Commissioner Andra Popovic sent a notice to the Ban and county committees in which he stated that the committees were obliged to take care of all refugee children up to the age of six by the beginning of winter (Djokic, Gavric, 1998, p. 32).

School buildings and kindergartens, public buildings and boarding schools were used to house refugee children, and a little later several homes for neglected children were opened. During the summer, the children were accommodated in children's summer resorts, while they spent the winters in foster families or other children's homes.

Upon arrival in Serbia, most of the refugee children were first placed in the Guberevac refugee camp in Belgrade, where they were provided with basic assistance in the form of shoes and clothing. In the second half of 1941, the children were placed in several locations. Thus, in the Home of *Andrej Kraljević* and in the Home of the Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health, children of primary school age from the town and semi-town were placed, in the Home of the retired *Nikola Spasic* the girls who attended the Trade School were taken care of, and in the Home of the *Serbian Society*, city children of school age were taken care of (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 174). The children were also placed in other guards in Serbia, so one group was transferred to Smederevo in July 1942 (N. N, 1942, p. 3).

One of the resorts for neglected children was opened on August 4, 1941, in the *Matija Ban elementary school* in Belgrade, where 210 children were housed, at the expense of the Red Cross, of which 175 were refugee children from various parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Mar. 1941, p. 5). The children who arrived were in a difficult condition - they were barefoot, physically exhausted and sick. Elementary school classes were held in several classrooms, and in one large illiterate course with 40 participants.

In addition to the above, the space of the existing boarding schools was also used, so there were 80 students in the boarding school of the *Male Teacher's School* in Sabac, and 35 students in the boarding school of the *Female Teacher's School* in Kragujevac.⁸ There were future teachers in the boarding school of the *Male Teacher's School* in Jagodina (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 175).

In the barracks of the infantry regiment in Negotin, after the renovation, in December 1941, 350 children were accommodated, most of whom attended the elementary school that was opened on that occasion (N. N, 1942, March 6, p. 4). School inventory and classrooms were brought from other schools in Negotin.

During the war, there were about 12,000 children in Belgrade, among whom there were those who were placed with Belgrade families (Majdanc, 1999, p. 177). Their placement was organized by the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants, and they were cared for by others such as the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare and

⁷ In the beginning, during 1941, poor families received money to support their own children, which, in addition to the children, fed the whole family.

⁸ AS, G-3, f. 1016, no. IV, 15476.

charitable societies. Taking care of children, however, was quite difficult due to wartime poverty. Mostly poor and middle-class families responded to the call, so 38 families from the outskirts of the city, with the obligation to care for them until the end of the war, took one child each (Milosevic, 1981, p. 294). Later, another nine families adopted one child each, and 69 families accepted the obligation to pay for the maintenance of refugee children who were placed in homes (Milosevic, 1981, p. 294). When it comes to placing children in foster families, it is necessary to cite the example of merchant Slavko Kragujevic from Brankova No. 21, who took in ten of the weakest (Majdanc, 1999, p. 177). The recommendation was that the children be placed in families similar to theirs, that is, rural children in rural families, and city children in cities. Children who were distributed among families received clothes and shoes from the Commissariat for Refugees.

In addition to Belgrade families, refugee children were also cared for by families across the country. At the beginning of February 1942, 50 children were sent to Pozarevac, from where they were distributed to families in the surrounding villages (Milosevic, 1981, p. 294).

A Serbian monastery was a safe place to accommodate refugee children. One of them, the *Children's Home of the Commissariat for Refugees*, was in the Ravanica monastery, 12 kilometers from Cuprija, where the children were housed at the beginning of September 1941 (B. N, 1942, October 1, p. 4). Immediately after their arrival, they were assigned to rooms within the Monastir accommodation, and they were provided with three complete meals, clothes and shoes. The children were visited twice a week by doctors from Cuprija, and the monastery staff measured their body weight twice a month. The head of the home was the manager Aleksandar Saric, and next to him, the children were taken care of by the deputy manager, and three teachers (A. I, 1943, May 30, p. 3). The children spent their days in the established order, playing, respecting the monastery's discipline. All religious holidays were celebrated by the children according to Serbian traditional customs. The monastery received donations from the Red Cross, the Sugar Factory from Cuprije and miners from the Senj and Sisavac mines. During their stay, 80 of them received, in addition to the necessary accommodation, sweets and warm sweaters. One of the journalists of *Novo vreme*, while visiting the residents in the presence of representatives of the Red Cross, noted: *This home is one of the smallest, but it takes care of them as if it was the greatest. See all the children are dressed, well fed and happy, so their day is short for play. Permanent control of the Commissariat in sanitary, administrative and from a financial and economic point of view, it maintains a vigilant and continuous action work for the benefit of children. The principle of our work is that every duty is great* (B. N, 1943, May 30, p. 3).

In addition to this home at the Ravanica monastery and in the Josanica monastery near Jagodina, in December 1941, a home for neglected refugee children was opened (B. N, 1943, October 15, p. 5).

In the Studenica monastery, 50 kilometers from Kraljevo, in the period from August 19, 1943, to December 28, 1944, about a hundred children from 4 to 12 years of age were housed. They were accommodated in the premises of the monastery inn and were provided with food and firewood (Panic, 1994, p. 284).

During 1942, there were more than 25 homes for refugee children in Serbia, most of which were in Belgrade: Central Infirmary, Women's Apprentice Home, *Holy Introduction Home*, *Nikola Spasic Home*, Home of the Circle of *Serbian Sisters*, Mother's Association, Workers' Kindergarten institution, the *Serbian Mother*, the Home of Students, the Home of the *Belgrade Women's Society* and the Home of *King Andrija* (M. Mar, 1942, p. 3). In addition, refugee homes were established in many places in Serbia,

such as the Dom in Banja Koviljaca, Vrnjačka Banja, Mataruska Banja, Soko Banja, Avala, Uzice, Arandjelovac, Brus, Bukovik, Nis, Negotin, Smederevo, Sabac, Cacak, Kragujevac, Pozarevac and some other places. Serbian monasteries were also places where children stayed - the monasteries of Bogovadja, Josanica, Sveta Petka and Ravanica near Paracin.

4 Home accommodation for refugee children

From the available archival data at the beginning of 1942, more attention began to be paid to the care of abandoned children, so the *Section for the care of families, children and youth* was established at the Serbian Red Cross, which took care of poor and exhausted refugee children.⁹ As already mentioned, on January 3, 1942, the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants adopted the *Rulebook on the Organization and Work of District, City, County and Municipal Committees for Refugees*, which was published in the *Official Gazette* for 1942. In it, it was stated that the work of the mentioned committees refers to the care of the accommodation and care of refugees, the organization of common meals, their employment and the care of their children.

At the beginning of March, more precisely on March 1 of the same year, the *Rulebook on the care of Serbian refugee children in Serbian refugee homes* was adopted, which specified the procedure for acceptance, accommodation, care and further work with the youngest. In Article 1 of this Rulebook, it was stated that the Commissariat is obliged to provide refugees with accommodation, clothing, shoes, food, as well as upbringing and education in the Serbian national spirit (Panic, 1994, p. 30). In the continuation of this legal act, the tasks in the care and education for the youngest were specified: "*Only children without parents, children of parents who are burdened with a large family and children of poor parents, who do not have the opportunity to provide for their children themselves, could be admitted*" (Panic, 1994, p. 43). Only healthy children were admitted to the home, who received their card with basic data upon admission. The rulebook resolved the responsibilities of the home manager, administrative staff and educators who were required to take care of hygiene and discipline, as well as attendance during the school year. The Commissariat for Refugees appointed an education supervisor who took care of the proper functioning of the home, and through whom they were in round-the-clock contact with the administration and educators. These homes operated, from mid-1942, under the name *Serbian Refugee Child – SID* (Djokic, 1998, p. 32).

Towards the end of the war, in mid-1944, the Commissariat for Refugees took care of 3,000 high school students and 6,000 elementary school students.¹⁰ In May 1944, due to the war, children from Belgrade were evacuated to Rakovica Monastery, Mataruska Banja, Soko Banja and Koviljaca Banja (N. N, 1944, p. 5).

One of the homes for the accommodation of refugee children in Belgrade was the *Andreja Kraljević Home*, which had six comfortable bedrooms, two rooms for the ambulance and its doctor, a kitchen, a bathroom and rooms for professional subjects and extracurricular activities (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 180). The home was housed in former cannon sheds and had a spacious yard where the children played. When the conditions allowed, the students received enough bread, vegetable stew and meat for food, and before each meal they said the *Our Father prayer*. The students were in uniform, with a suit, shoes and a cap, and in the administration of the Home, each cadet had his own

⁹ On the initiative of the Section, several children were placed in families in Vrsac, Zrenjanin, Kovacica and Velika Kikinda (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 175).

¹⁰ AS, G-3, f. 169, 4-204-44.

card with a photo. At the end of 1943, there were 360 cadets in the Home, among whom were 108 high school students who attended the secondary school, trade academy, secondary technical school and school for applied arts (M. A. T, 1944, p. 15). In addition, the wards of the Home were also members of the literary group *Serbian home*, whose goal was to develop children's will to work and prepare them for life, that is, to be useful members of the new social community.

The largest number of refugee children was accommodated in the home in Mataruska Banja, which included several buildings - Villa *Karajovic*, Villa *Ibar*, Gendarmerie Home, Villa *Bunjak* and Villa *Kraljevo*. The home, which was founded on June 3, 1942, worked under the patronage of the Commissariat for Refugees and Immigrants and was part of the Serbian Refugee Homes in Serbia, through which more than 20,000 children passed (Panic, 1994, p. 34). It was a social, educational and health institution, which within its scope of work had the lower classes of primary school, a clinic and a small hospital. At the beginning, there were 76 boys and 42 girls, but soon the number of children was increased to 228.¹¹

According to recorded memories, the children who were the first to be admitted were in a desperate state: "*Suffered horror, sudden and brutal separation from their parents, from their own, prolonged suffering, infectious diseases, which somehow always appear in such situations*" (Panic, 1994, p. 34). Since only healthy children were admitted to the homes in Mataruska Banja, quarantine measures were introduced.¹² Some children, after recovery, were sent to rural families, but there were cases where the hosts used them inadequately as labor.

There were children in the Home from all over the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and most of them had parents who were unable to take care of them and feed them. The Commissariat for Refugees and the administration of the Home made great efforts to feed the children properly, although this was not always possible due to wartime conditions. The children received five meals, but often these meals were meager, and the children remained hungry (N. N, 1942, August 27, p. 3).

There were cases when parents withdrew their children from the Home due to the famine that prevailed throughout Serbia, including the Home. One of them was father Dusan Draskovic, who in October 1942 sent a letter to the administration of the Home: "*As a refugee, on the order of the Commissariat, 25 days ago, I handed over three children to the Refugee Home in Mataruška Banja... I visited the children and when I saw that they were completely wasted and sickly... with various scabs all over their bodies... that they were naked and barefoot in the cold weather and unable to live - due to the carelessness of the Management in Mataruška Banja. I am asking the Commissariat to take my children under protection and, if possible, to place them in Belgrade for support and education, since I am also moving there with my service, and if it is not possible - for the Commissariat to return my children to me, so that I can take care of them and I educate as a parent, because I stand for them my whole life.*" (<http://www.snd-us.com>, Freedom - Serbian national defense in America).

In addition to financial difficulties regarding food, medicine and clothing for the children, the Home also had problems with the teaching staff, which was never in sufficient numbers.

¹¹ In August 1942, out of 1026 children were sick with scabies, smallpox and whooping cough 348. (Panic, 1994, p. 34).

¹² Children were the most affected by scabies, measles and mumps. Often the number of infected children was quite large, and unfortunately there were also those who died from pneumonia or dysentery.

By the end of the war, more than 5,000 children had passed through the Home. Due to the war, in November 1944, many children left the Home, and in June 1947, the children were transferred to the Home in Gornji Milanovac. When the last resident came of age, in 1960, the Home was closed. In the seventies of the last century, according to the designs of the architect Spasoje Kronic, a monument in the form of a pyramid was erected at the cemetery in Konarevo near Kraljevo, as a sign of memory (<http://www.krug.rs>, *The secret of the pyramid in Konarevo*, 2020).

In Vrnjačka Banja, during the war, there was a home for refugee children. In the newspaper *Novo vreme*, from April 15, 1942, it was stated that it was one of the largest social institutions in Serbia, which received more than 600 children at that time (N. N, 1942, April 15, p. 4). It accommodated boys and girls. High school students and students from Belgrade could also be admitted as many places as were available. All children were divided into age groups - kindergarten, primary school, gymnasium, home economics and agricultural course. As in other cases, the Commissariat for Refugees provided the necessary working conditions. A primary school was opened within the home, where the assessment criteria were milder. Commissioner Maksimović visited this Home in August 1942 (N. N, 1942, December 3, p. 3).

On July 5, 1942, a children's refugee home was opened in Požarevac. The opening of the home was attended by a lot of famous people who donated funds for the work of the home. It accommodated 50 boys and girls from 5 to 12 years of age, who were with or without parental care (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 176). In addition to elementary school students, among the wards were also students of the Trade Academy and Civic School. Since the building was not adequate for housing children, after some time, at the request of the Commissariat for Refugees, the residents were moved to homes located in Valjevo and Soko Banja, while some children of primary school age were distributed in the surrounding villages - in Mali Crmnić, 97 of them and Veliki Popovac, 72 of them (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 176). During 1943, the boarding school of the Lower Agricultural School housed students who attended that school.

One of the refugee homes was established in Uzice and its surroundings (Milosevic, 1981, p. 294). In fact, the children were placed in three locations: in the Red Cross Home, in a location called *Koštica*, and in the building of the Agricultural School in Sevojno (Iskrin, 2013, p. 59). In the Red Cross Home, in addition to the manager, Milorad Davidovic, and then Antoni Dergenac, there were five educators, two wardens, one cook and one nurse. At the beginning of October 1942, there were 111 children in the Home, 71 elementary school students and 40 high school students (Iskrin, 2013, p. 59). At the end of 1942, the Red Cross Home was evicted, and the building was handed over to the German occupier, only to be returned to the home's children after some time. In July 1943, children from the Refugee Home from Vrnjacka Banja were transferred to the Red Cross Home in Uzice, and during the summer of 1944, children from this locality were transferred to the Serbian Refugee Home *in Koštica*. During the war, some children were handed over to Serbian families, and some of them went to the National Liberation War (Iskrin, 2013, p. 62). When conditions allowed, the cadets attended school and sports events, organized celebrations and choir performances (Iskrin, 2013, p. 59).

In *Koštica Home*, in addition to the manager Blaz Radomana, there were nine teachers, two seamstresses, two shoemakers, two orderlies, and a nurse, a cook and a night watchman (Iskrin, 2013, p. 62). The Agricultural School in Sevojno handed over its building to the Commissariat for Refugees on June 26, 1942 (Iskrin, 2013, p. 63). In addition to the manager Uros Avdalovic, three other educators worked in the Home. At the end of 1942, on December 23, 1942, 70 cadets were transferred from Sevojno to the Home in Mataruska Banja (Panic, 1994, p. 107).

In 1942, the refugee home in Smederevo housed 143 boys, 34 of whom were under the age of 7, and 34 girls, 31 of whom were under the age of 7.¹³ The citizens of Smederevo provided help during the renovation of the building, decorated bathrooms, procurement of beds, as well as clothes and shoes (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 177). During the war, there were also monetary contributions for this home.

The fact that the Children's Rehabilitation Center for children up to 10 years of age was established in Avala shows that the Commissariat for Refugees took serious care of refugee children (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 177). In addition, several children were sent to Switzerland for recovery through the joint action of the Commissariat for Refugees, the International Red Cross and the Serbian Red Cross, and through the German Red Cross organization and with the approval of their parents. Recovery for 452 children lasted three months (Zivkovic, 2015, p. 176). In addition to the Health Care Commissariat, the Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health was also in charge and regularly inspected children in all homes.

In Arandjelovac, in the pavilions of the *Society for the Protection and Education of Children*, during 1942, 91 children stayed for recovery (N. N, 1942, August 13, p. 3). Their stay was financed only by the Society and the Commissariat for Refugees. During the visit, the Minister of Social Policy Dr. Jovan Mijuskovic indicated the possibility of additional financial assistance that would make life easier for the children in the Home.

The physical and spiritual upbringing of children in the national spirit was the job of educators, male and female teachers. Systematic work was done on the formation of future generations ready to accept a new era. In primary regular schools and those that were formed within the homes, all subjects provided by the Law on Public Schools were studied, with the fact that the criteria for refugee children, due to irregular schooling, was somewhat lenient. Despite the difficult situation, all major religious holidays - Christmas, Easter, Mathers day (Materice) and Lazar's Saturday - were celebrated in the homes. For health reasons, due to the spread of the infection, the holidays were celebrated exclusively within the home, and for Mathers day in addition to the festive lunch, the children also received gifts.

The Commissariat for Refugees tried to provide adequate housing for all refugee children, so many homes had classrooms and special rooms for gymnastics or some other type of training in addition to dormitories and dining rooms.

5 Family accommodation of Serbian and Slovenian children from the camp in Sarvar

During the Second World War, several children from Vojvodina and Slovenia were deported to the Hungarian Sarvar camp.¹⁴ The camp was in a former silk factory, in nine factory halls where hunger, cold and disease prevailed. Children and mothers with babies were the most affected by the conditions in the camp. The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Diocese of Backa with Bishop Irinej Ciric came to their aid, that is, members of the Committee for Assistance that was formed in Novi Sad in June 1941 (Petkovic, 2017, p. 75). With the consent of the Hungarian occupation government, children and mothers with babies were taken out of the camp and distributed among

¹³ AS, G-3, f. 546, 65-250-42.

¹⁴ Among the others, about 600 Slovenians were detained in Sharvar, who after the First World War emigrated from the Primorje region, which was annexed to Italy, to Prekomurje, on the border between Hungary and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the Second World War, the Hungarian authorities deported them to the Sharvar labor camp. (Petkovic, 2017, p. 73).

families in Backa. Already at the beginning of spring 1941, the first convoy of children from Šarvar left for Novi Sad. There were 186 children under the age of 15 in the group - boys under 14 and girls under 15 (Petkovic, 2017, p. 77). The recorded memories of the little Slovenians testify that the reception was cordial, that they felt at home in their new environment and that the members of the Serbian Orthodox Church took care of their spiritual life, insisting on respecting the Catholic faith.

In July 1942, the hospital of the Serbian Orthodox church municipalities of the Eparchy of Backa was opened in Novi Sad, where children from the camps were also admitted (Petkovic, 2017, p. 79). With the findings of the doctor of the Serbian Orthodox church municipality and with the approval of the hospital administration, the patients had free care and treatment, and the children had certain occupations during their stay. School-aged children practiced reading, writing, arithmetic and religious studies, while the younger ones spent time in organized play (Petkovic, 2017, p. 82). After healing, the children were placed to families from Vojvodina.

The memories of children of Slovenian nationality point to the great hospitality of Vojvodina families. Together with the other members of the household, the children did light physical work, looked after livestock, carried water, and helped in the house. There was no shortage of food, and they inherited clothes and shoes from their older peers. Most of them did not attend primary school: they acquired basic knowledge in their new family, they learned to play music, to do handcrafts, and some of them learned Hungarian, German or Serbian from their friends. This forced migration was largely completed in the summer of 1945 when Slovenian families returned to their homeland. A few schoolchildren stayed to finish school, and the post-war socializing was proof of the unbreakable friendship gained during the Second World War.

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SUMMARY

BEGUNSKI OTROCI V SRBIJI MED DRUGO SVETOVNO VOJNO

Mag. Maja NIKOLOVA

muzejska svetovalka, UNIHUB Beograd, Srbija
ngomusketar@hotmail.com

Skrb za begunske otroke, ki so bili med vojno nameščeni v begunskih domovih ali pri srbskih družinah, je bila osnovna naloga Komisariata za begunce in priseljence. Na podlagi razpoložljive dokumentacije te vladne institucije je mogoče sklepati, da je Komisariat izvajal načrtovano in sistematično razporeditev beguncev po celotnem ozemlju Srbije. Nedvomno lahko skrb za begunce označimo kot pozitivno potezo srbske kolaboracionistične vlade, vendar je treba upoštevati tudi njeno vztrajanje na socialnem in nacionalnem pomenu tega vprašanja. Z dejavnostjo v zvezi z begunci so namreč oblastniki želeli utrditi svojo avtoriteto med srbskim prebivalstvom in dokazati, da so varna opora pred nemškimi okupatorji. Zato je bilo moč begunsko vprašanje pogosto zaslediti tudi v kolaboracionističnem tisku. Kljub temu pa ni možno zanikati, da so srbska vlada in srbski ljudje pri reševanju življenjskega vprašanja mnogih beguncev, še posebej begunskih otrok, dosegli vidne rezultate. Veliko otrok je zato v štirih letih vojne izkusilo poleg slabih in grenkih stvari tudi nekaj plemenitega. To so bili otroci, ki so zaradi vojnih razmer odrasli pred svojim časom, a so mnogi od njih kljub temu ohranili okolje, v katerem so bivali kot begunci, v lepem spominu.