



# REGIONAL OVERVIEW

JANUARY - AUGUST 2017



# CONTENTS

<b>Key Trends</b> .....	2
<b>Bulgaria</b> .....	4
<i>Continuing migration flow</i>	
<b>FYROM</b> .....	6
<i>Irregular flow</i>	
<b>Serbia</b> .....	7
<i>Refugees and migrants on the move</i>	
<b>Romania</b> .....	9
<i>New route through Romania</i>	
<b>About The Project</b> .....	11
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	12

# KEY TRENDS

## The Balkans route is still active

The number of refugees and migrants transiting through the Balkans has decreased since the conclusion of the EU-Turkey Deal, but the movement of people continues. Figures from Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and FYROM clearly indicate that the Balkans remains one of the most travelled migration routes.

## New route through Romania

In 2015 and 2016, during the highest flow of refugees and migrants, Romania was not part of the main corridor at the Balkans migration route. However, the data now shows an increased transit through Romania during the last eight months.

## The Balkans countries are used as transit points towards Western Europe

Behavioural patterns suggest that refugees and migrants perceive Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and FYROM as transit countries only. Most of them want to avoid asylum processes, and when they initiate the asylum procedure, it is often to gain access to services and temporarily legalize their stay in the country concerned.

## More than 5,000 refugees and migrants are estimated to have arrived to the Balkans countries (other than Greece) since the beginning of the 2017

In Serbia, Save the Children identified 3,781 new arrivals. During the same period, 2,140 new refugees and migrants were identified in Bulgaria and 3,048 were recorded as transiting through FYROM. Diversity of routes and data on demography indicates that these figures do not overlap completely. In addition, available data does not capture all irregular migrants at the Balkans route. Based on these indicators, we estimate that at least 5,000 refugees and migrants arrived to the region since the beginning of the year.

## More than 10,000 refugees and migrants are currently present in the Balkans countries (other than Greece)

The number of people accommodated in reception centres, at external addresses and unofficial shelters in Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and FYROM is estimated to be around 10,000.

### Refugees and migrants from Iraq and Syria more often travel in family groups than those coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan

The data from all four countries covered in this analysis shows a balanced proportion of males and females among refugee and migrant groups from Iraq and Syria, suggesting that they travel more often in family groups than those coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### Refugees and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan primarily use the Balkans route

More than 90% of all refugees and migrants transiting through the Balkans come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Figures from other routes, such as Italy and Spain, show different demographics.

### Children make about 35% of all refugees and migrants

Available data on the number of refugee and migrant children transiting through the Balkans vary from country to country. Figures fluctuate from 31% in Bulgaria to 42% in Serbia.

### About 40% of children travel alone

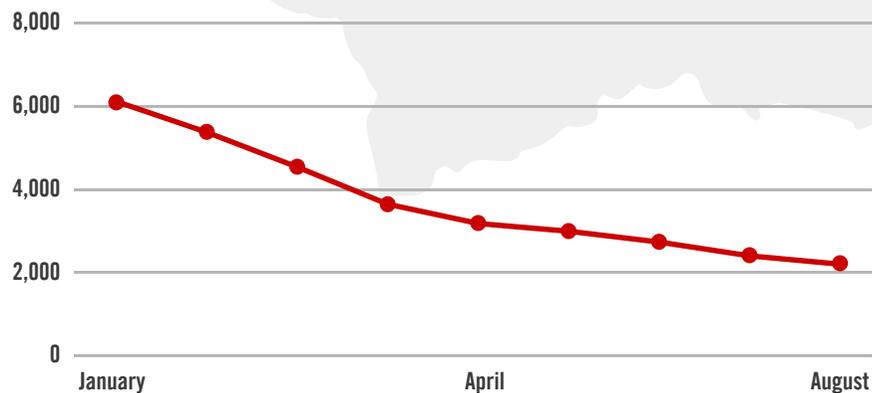
According to the available data, unaccompanied and separated children account for about 40% of all identified refugees and migrant children. The vast majority of UASC are from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and almost 98-99% are boys.



## CONTINUING MIGRATION FLOW

According to the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, during the first eight months of 2017, police apprehended 2,140 people that illegally transited through the country<sup>1</sup>. Most of them entered Bulgaria from Turkey or Greece. However, this continuous influx of refugees and migrants did not increase the number of those accommodated in Bulgaria. During the same period, the number of refugees and migrants in official centres or at “external addresses”<sup>2</sup> declined by 3,804 people (from 6,030<sup>3</sup> at the beginning of January, to 2,226 reported at the end of August). Where did 5,944 people go? The latest monthly overview of the Ministry of Interior reports that 1,519 migrants were deported or they left Bulgaria legally. For the “missing” 4,425, we can only assume that they have continued their journey towards Western Europe.

Statistics on refugees and migrants accommodated in official centres or at external addresses



2,140

Refugees and migrants arrived to Bulgaria since the beginning of the year

5,944

Refugees and migrants left Bulgaria since the beginning of the year

## DEMOGRAPHY<sup>4</sup>

From January to August 2017, the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees reported that 2,633 people have applied for international protection. This number includes 1,806 (69%) adults (1,430 men; 376 women) and 827 (31%) children (580 boys; 247 girls). According to official statistics, 315 (38%) of children were traveling alone.

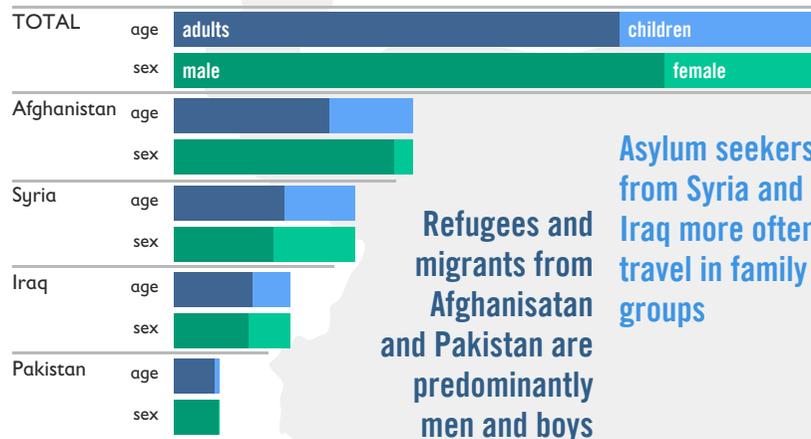
Most of the asylum seekers were from Afghanistan (37%); Syria (28%); Iraq (18%) and Pakistan (7%). Applicants from Afghanistan and Pakistan are mostly men and teenage boys (around 90%). At the same time, 3 out of 4 children coming from these two countries are unaccompanied and almost all of them are boys.

# Balkans Migration and Displacement Centre

## Data and Trends Analysis

Data on asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq shows more balanced demographics suggesting that many of them travel in family groups.

Refugees and migrants demography disaggregated by age (adults vs children), sex (male vs female) and country of origin (N=2,633)



Asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq more often travel in family groups

Refugees and migrants from Afghanistan and Pakistan are predominantly men and boys

If we compare this with applications for international protection in 2016, it is evident that migrants' demography has changed over time. In 2016, almost half of the applicants were children (48%) while this year children make up 31% of migrants and refugees. Data also shows different proportion of unaccompanied children in the overall refugee and migrant children population. Last year, 30% of all children travelled alone while over the first eight months of this year the ratio of unaccompanied children increased to 38%. The demographics relating to the country of origin also shifted. Last year, applicants were from Afghanistan (45%), Iraq (28%), and only 14% were from Syria.

It is worth mentioning that asylum recognition rates for Afghanistan are extremely low in Bulgaria. Out of 1,463 asylum seekers who were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2017, only 15 (1%) were from of Afghanistan. The vast majority of non-Syrian applications were considered manifestly unfounded.

### CHILDREN KEY FIGURES

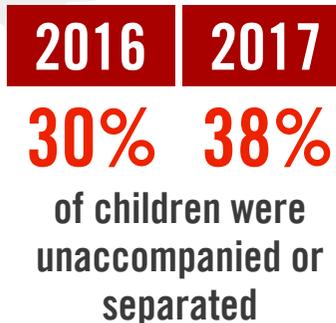


Applications for international protection were submitted by children



Girls make only 30% of all refugee and migrant children

Vast majority of refugee and migrant children in Bulgaria are from:



77% of unaccompanied and separated children are boys from Afghanistan

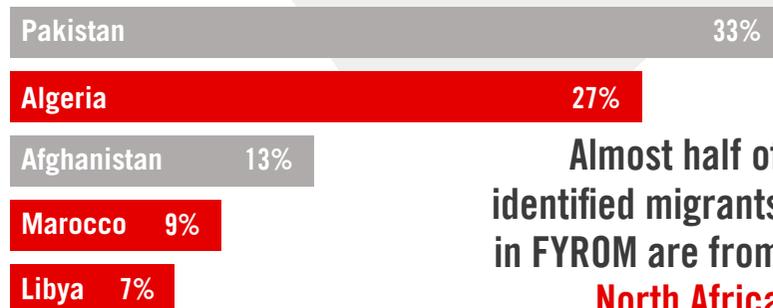
## IRREGULAR FLOW

During the first eight months of 2017, FYROM police apprehended 216 refugees and migrants entering the country from Greece and brought them to a Transit Centre. After a short stay in the Transit Centre, 176 (82%) of them were returned to Greece<sup>5</sup>. During the same period, Macedonian Red Cross reported supporting 2,832 irregular refugees and migrants near the border with Serbia.

**3,048**  
refugees and migrants  
were identified transiting  
through FYROM since the  
beginning of the year

In total, more than 3,048 refugees and migrants were identified transiting through FYROM since the beginning of the year. Besides new arrivals coming from the south, some of the refugees and migrants identified in FYROM are returning from Serbia. Those are refugees and migrants who have decided to move back to Greece and explore their options from there.

### Refugees and migrants by country of origin

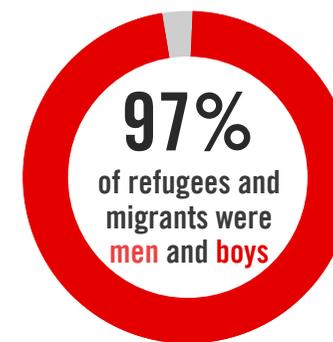
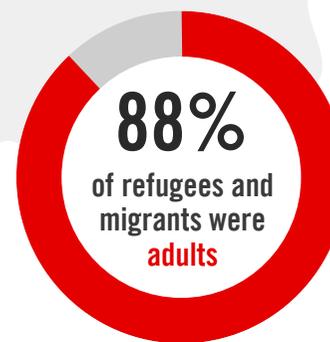


Almost half of  
identified migrants  
in FYROM are from  
**North Africa**

## DEMOGRAPHY

The Macedonian Red Cross identified 2,832 refugees and migrants during the period January – August 2017. This number includes 2,487 (88%) adults (2,434 men; 53 women) and 345 (12%) children (314 boys; 31 girls). The majority of refugees and migrants come from Pakistan (33%), Algeria (27%), Afghanistan (13%), Morocco (9%) and Libya (7%).

If we compare data on most represented nationalities of new arrivals in FYROM and Bulgaria, we will notice different demography. While the Bulgarian route is mostly used by refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, almost half of identified migrants in FYROM are from North Africa.

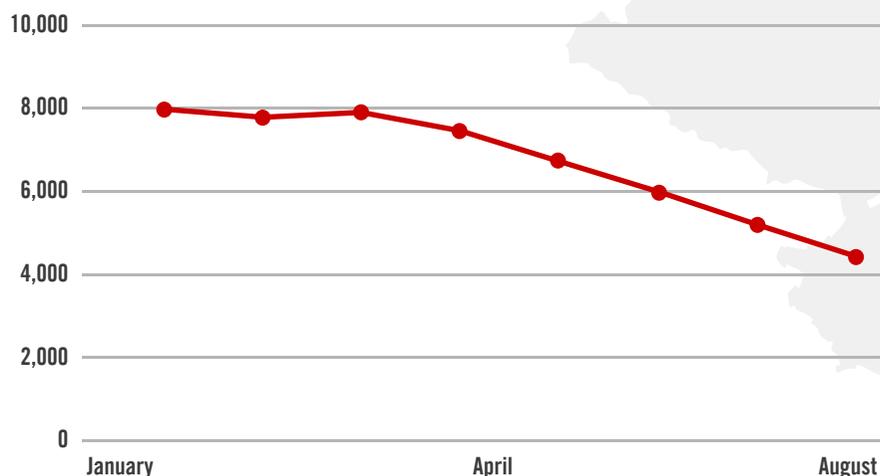


**345** (314 boys and 31 girls)  
refugee and migrant children were identified  
transiting through FYROM since the beginning  
of the year

## REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ON THE MOVE

According to UNHCR data, the number of refugees and migrants present in Serbia in January 2017 was around 7,900<sup>6</sup>. From January to August, Save the Children identified and supported 3,781 newly arrived refugees and migrants, who entered Serbia from Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). These new arrivals never increased the overall number of refugees and migrants in the country. The UNHCR data for August shows that there were around 4,200 persons of concern in Serbia<sup>7</sup>, implying that more than 7,000 people left the country during this eight-month period. Around 2,000 have legally crossed the Hungarian border to seek asylum<sup>8</sup>, while more than 5,000 refugees and migrants continued their journey using irregular channels.

Statistics on refugees and migrants present in Serbia



3,781

newly arrived  
refugees and  
migrants  
identified in  
Serbia

more than  
7,000

refugees and  
migrants left the  
country since the  
beginning of the  
year

## DEMOGRAPHY

Save the Children and its partners routinely collect data on new refugee and migrant arrivals in Serbia. Even though it is not a record of all people transiting through Serbia, the data set is illustrative, giving us an insight into the demography of new arrivals. New arrivals included 3,781 people, identified during the period January – August 2017<sup>9</sup>, of which 2,197 (58%) were adults (1,841 men; 356 women) while 1,584 (42%) were children (1,287 boys; 297 girls).

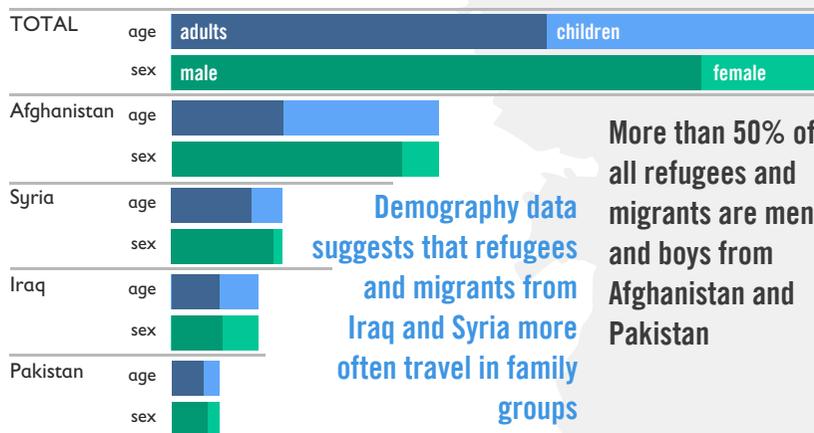
The total of 941 children were registered as travelling alone, or 59% of all identified children, meaning that unaccompanied and separated children make nearly 25% of all new arrivals.

# Balkans Migration and Displacement Centre

## Data and Trends Analysis

SERBIA

Refugees and migrants demography disaggregated by age (adults vs children), sex (male vs female) and country of origin (N=3,781)



Demography data suggests that refugees and migrants from Iraq and Syria more often travel in family groups

More than 50% of all refugees and migrants are men and boys from Afghanistan and Pakistan

Almost all (99%) identified unaccompanied minors were boys, with the majority of them coming from Afghanistan 717 (76%) and Pakistan 146 (16%).

Most refugees and migrants identified were from Afghanistan (44%), Pakistan (18%), Iraq (15%) and Syria (8%). Data shows that the ratio between males and females is balanced only within refugee and migrant groups from Iraq, while refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria are predominantly men and boys. As in Bulgaria, the data shows changes in migrants' demography compared to 2016. From the EU-Turkey Deal until the end of 2016, unaccompanied minors made up 20% of all children, while this ratio increased to 59% in 2017.

The percentage of migrants from Afghanistan and Syria decreased by approximately 10%, while the percentage of those from Pakistan increased from 5% to 18%.

Since the beginning of the year, 3,830 migrants expressed their intention to seek asylum in Serbia. However, only 164 (4%) of them initiated the procedure and applied for asylum.

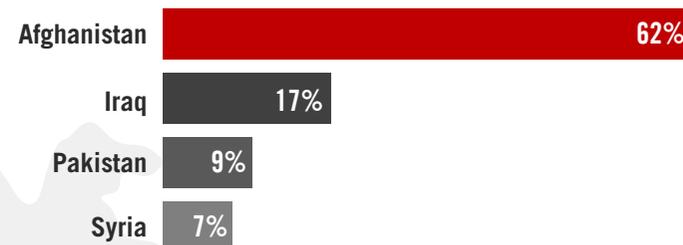
According to the available data, about 40% of those who have started the asylum process already left the country. These behavioural patterns undoubtedly show that the most refugees and migrants perceive Serbia as a transit country.

## CHILDREN KEY FIGURES

1,584

refugee and migrant children were identified since the beginning of the year

Refugee and migrant children by country of origin

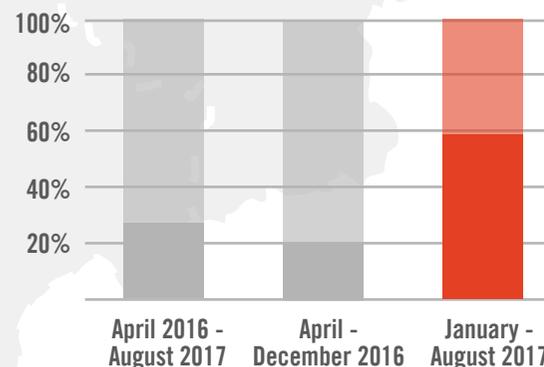


941

unaccompanied and separated children identified since the beginning of the year. Vast majority of them were boys from Afghanistan and Pakistan



Ratio of UASC in total number of refugee and migrant children



Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children in total number of refugee and migrant children increased significantly in 2017

## NEW ROUTE THROUGH ROMANIA

In 2015 and 2016, during the highest flow of refugees and migrants, Romania was not part of the main corridor at the Balkans migration route. According to the General Inspectorate for Immigration, 1,889 migrants applied for asylum in Romania throughout 2016, the majority of them from Syria. However, 2017 brought about some changes. Only in the first six months of 2017, Romanian police apprehended 2,941 migrants trying to enter or leave the country irregularly. Most of them were caught entering from Serbia (80%) and Bulgaria. The main exit point is Hungary. In August 2017 only, two groups (172 persons, out of which 89 children) were reported to have arrived in Romania, arriving from Turkey via the Black Sea. All of them were from reportedly from Iran and Iraq.

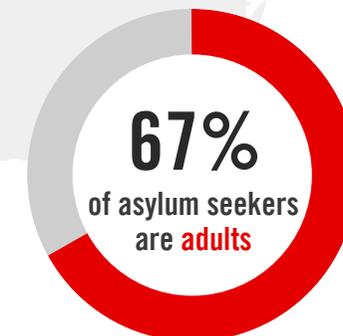
year	Asylum seekers in Romania number of asylum seekers	Number of asylum seekers in Romania significantly increased in 2017
2016	1,889	
2017	3,059	

Information from the field suggests that not all the migrants caught in Romania want to apply for asylum in Romania. They fear they would be returned to Romania, as per Dublin Regulations, to their first point of entry in the EU.

In practice, some of them get “tolerated stay”, granting them access to the Romanian territory for 90 days. Regardless of their status, most migrants leave the country after a few months. As in other Balkans countries, they see Romania as a transit point on their way towards Western Europe. At the end of August, there were 3,661 migrants in Romania benefiting from some form of international protection. They are accommodated in six reception centres managed by the General Inspectorate for Immigration, or are staying at external addresses.

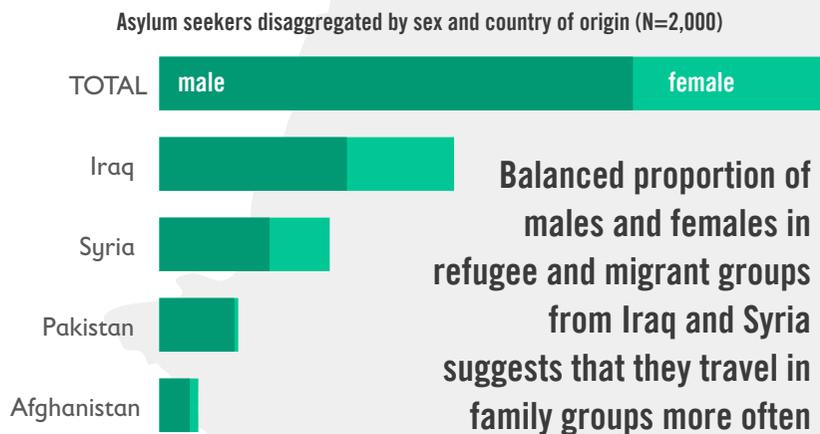
## DEMOGRAPHY

According to official data on refugees and migrants in Romania, 3,059 new arrivals were registered during the period from January until August 2017. This number includes 2,042 (67%) adults, and 1,017 (33%) children.



# Balkans Migration and Displacement Centre Data and Trends Analysis

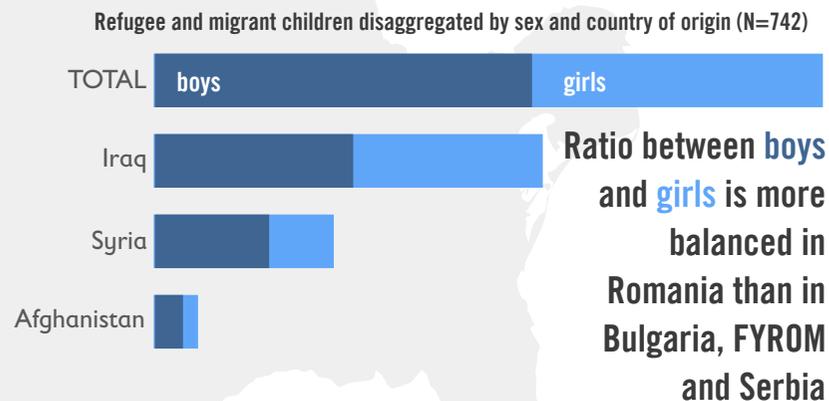
The majority came from Iraq (44%), Syria (26%), Pakistan (11%) and Afghanistan (6%)<sup>10</sup>. As in other countries, the data shows a balanced proportion of males and females in refugee and migrant groups from Iraq and Syria. This suggests that they travel in family groups more often than those coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan.



During the same period, Save the Children in Romania identified and supported 742 newly arrived children or around 73% of all newly registered refugee and migrant children. According to Save the Children's records, 56% of children were boys, and 44% were girls. Most of the children are from Iraq (58%), Syria (27%) and Afghanistan (7%). Data also shows that 9% (70) of children travelled alone. Out of 70 unaccompanied children, 58 (83%) were boys and 12 (17%) were girls.

Demographic data in Romania indicates some differences compared to the other Balkans countries, namely Bulgaria, FYROM and Serbia.

The majority of refugees and migrants identified in Romania are from Iraq and Syria while in other countries most of them originate from Afghanistan. Consequently, there is a balanced number of boys and girls. Finally, there is a lower proportion of unaccompanied children, that includes a relatively large proportion of girls, also not typical in other Balkans countries.



**70** Unaccompanied and separated children were identified in Romania

The official closure of borders, and the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016, reduced the number of migrants, but did not stop the migrations through the Balkans. Refugees and migrants have been pushed into the hands of smugglers and traffickers facing heightened protection risks. The national protection systems in countries like Bulgaria, FYROM, and Serbia are struggling to provide adequate support to the new arrivals. There is a lack of reliable data on migration trends and rights violations against migrants and refugees transiting through, or stranded in the Balkans.

Organizations and volunteer groups operating in the Balkans track irregular arrivals, departures, cases of pushbacks, detention, and violence in their own countries, often without clearly defined standards, objectives or consistency. At the current time, there is no unified collection of information or a regional initiative to collate and organize the available information into a clear and concise overview.

International attention remains focused on Greece, while the migration flows through other Balkans countries stay below the radar. The lack of comprehensive data analytics at individual country and regional level increases the vulnerability of refugees and migrants on the move, children in particular, and hinders the development of relevant, evidence-based and responsive policies and programs.

Data and Trend Analysis (DATA) is a project launched by Save the Children's Balkan Migration and Displacement Centre (BMDC). The goal of this initiative is to synthesize valuable information on migration, especially on refugee and migrant children, and contribute to evidence-based programming and policy-making within the region.

The DATA Project will focus on the following three topics: (1) Main migratory trends: ebbs and flows in migration, changes in demographics, changes in routes, and seasonal changes; (2) Main protection violations: detention rates and conditions, pushbacks, returns, police violence, local acceptance and tensions; (3) Changes in national migration and social protection policies.

## Data Sources

Besides primary data collected by Save the Children and its partners, publicly available data from reports, dashboards, publications, policies and articles, and information from other relevant stakeholders will be collected and analyzed. The initiative will remain open and will encourage the exchange of information, cooperation and partnership with all relevant actors. Data processing will be done in line with national and international regulations and standards on protection of personal data.

## Geographical Scope

We will cover the Balkans route, without Greece, which includes the territories of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Hungary.

## CONTACTS

Focal Point:

**Ivan Tasic**, MEAL Manager

[ivan.tasic@savethechildren.org](mailto:ivan.tasic@savethechildren.org)

**Save the Children International**

Balkans Migration and Displacement Centre

Francuska 27, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

[bmdc.sci@savethechildren.org](mailto:bmdc.sci@savethechildren.org)

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, [Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for August 2017](#),

<sup>2</sup> “Asylum seekers are allowed to reside outside the reception centres at so called “external addresses”. This could be done if asylum seekers submit a formal waiver from their right to accommodation and social assistance, as warranted by law, and declare to cover rent and other related costs at their own expenses. Except those few whose financial condition allows residence outside the reception centres, the other group of people who live at external addresses are usually Dublin returnees, to whom the SAR applies the exclusion from social benefits, including accommodation as a measure of sanction within the jurisdiction for such decision as provided by the law (Law and Asylum and Refugees – article 29)”. Source: [Country Report: Bulgaria](#), Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

<sup>3</sup> Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, [Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for December 2016](#),

<sup>4</sup> The only way to track demographic data of refugees and migrants in Bulgaria is through asylum applications.

<sup>5</sup> According to the [Macedonian Helsinki Committee](#), apprehended refugees and migrants are returned back to Greece on their own request.

<sup>6</sup> Source: UNHCR, [Serbia Update 30. January-01 February 2017](#).

<sup>7</sup> Source: UNHCR, [Serbia Update 28. August – 03. September 2017](#).

<sup>8</sup> Source: [Praxis](#), data issued by Hungarian authorities on official request

<sup>9</sup> For the same period of time, UNHCR observed 2.995 new arrivals, while authorities registered 3.830 intentions to seek asylum. Source: UNHCR, [Serbia Monthly Snapshot – August 2017](#).

<sup>10</sup> Source: UNHCR, Asylum requests January – Jun 2017