



Save the Children

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

JANUARY – JUNE 2018

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub
Data and Trends Analysis

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IMPRESSUM

Every child has the right to a future. Save the Children works in North West Balkans and around the world to give children a healthy start in life, and the chance to learn and be safe. We do whatever it takes to get children the things they need – every day and in times of crisis.

Acknowledgements

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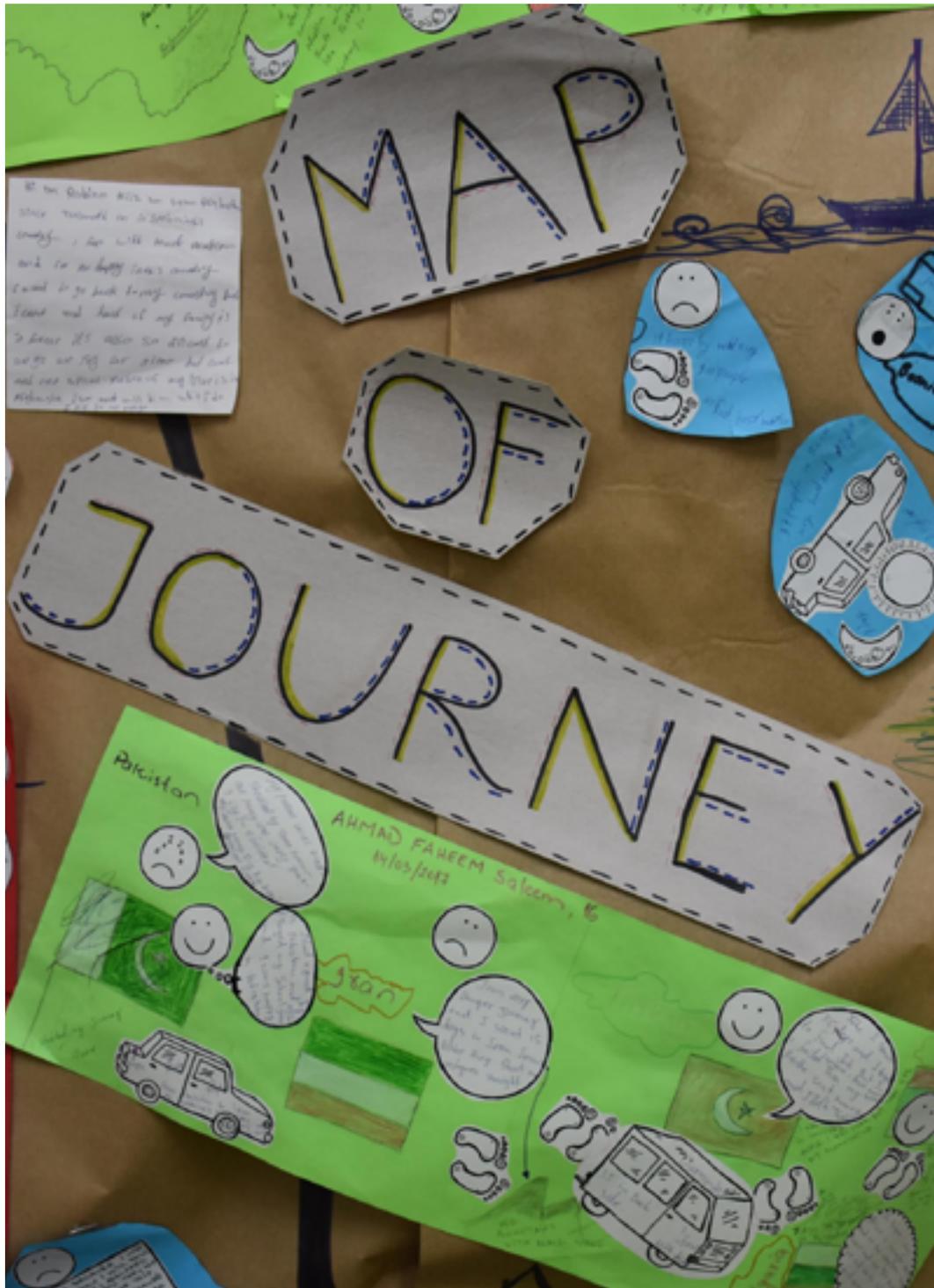
Photo: Save the Children

Ameer from Iraq arrived with his family in Save the Children's drop in centre in Refugee Aid Miksaliste in Belgrade. While his parents were receiving information about registration and referrals to reception centres in Serbia, Ameer and his sister took part in activities in the child friendly space. They were learning about the Solar System and creating adventurous stories about travelling through space as astronauts.*

Tell us what you think about our work or ask for more information:

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Mixed migrations flows continue on the Balkans route. More than 24,000 refugees and migrants are estimated to have arrived to the Balkans countries which makes it the most travelled migration route in the first six months of 2018¹

Figures from Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, FYROM, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina indicate that the Western Balkans is one of the most travelled migration routes in Europe. During the first six months of the year, 21,963 new refugees and migrants were registered in Greece, while Save the Children identified 4,398 new arrivals in Serbia, out of which 1,087 were by plane. During the same period, 718 new refugees and migrants were identified in Bulgaria, 1,098 were recorded as transiting through FYROM, while 900 people applied for international protection in Romania. In addition, 2,275 new arrivals were identified in Albania and 7,652 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fact that many different routes are used and the comparison of demographic data indicate that these figures do not overlap completely. In addition, the available data does not capture all irregular migrants, particularly those who are avoiding police registration. Based on these indicators, we estimate that at least 24,000 refugees and migrants arrived to the region in the period from January to June of 2018.

The Balkans route is the main migration route for refugees and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan

The demographic data on refugees and migrants in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, FYROM, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that the Balkans route is dominantly travelled by refugees and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. On the other side, the Central and Western Mediterranean route is mostly used by refugees and migrants from African countries, and in a small percent by those from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

More than 68,000 refugees and migrants are currently present in the Balkans countries

The number of people accommodated in reception centres, at external addresses and unofficial shelters in the Balkans countries is estimated to be around 68,000. Most of them are present in Greece (about 60,000), Bosnia and Herzegovina (about 4,000), Serbia (3,000) and Bulgaria (996), while several hundreds of are accommodated in Romania (370), FYROM (95) and Albania. The data shows that the number of refugees and migrants present in the region, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, increased in the second quarter of the year.

The route through Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of the most travelled in the Western Balkans

Transit corridors from Bulgaria/FYROM and Serbia as well as through Albania and Montenegro merge in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The data shows that refugees and migrants transiting through the Western Balkans region are moving towards Bosnia and Herzegovina where they try to cross the border with Croatia and continue towards Western European countries.

Children make about one-third of all refugees and migrants transiting through the Balkans with many of them travelling alone

The available data on the number of refugee and migrants transiting through the Balkans shows that the proportion of children in the total migrant population fluctuated between 19% and 37%. The percentage of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in the overall number of children varies from country to country, oscillating from 8% in FYROM to 55% in Serbia, indicating that some children remain invisible and that there are significant differences in identification procedures. The vast majority of UASC are boys from Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is important to note that reliable data on refugees and migrants disaggregated by age and sex were not available for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Data and Trends Analysis

MIGRATION ROUTES



Greece

Both, sea and land routes are used by refugees and migrants to enter Greece, while on the exit side, they are heading towards Albania and Macedonia.

Bulgaria

The vast majority of refugees and migrants enter Bulgaria from south-east, namely by crossing the border with Turkey and Greece. On the other side of the country, the strongest pressure is on the borders with Serbia and Romania.

FYROM

FYROM is mainly used as a corridor between Greece and Serbia. Refugees and migrants enter FYROM from Greece and most of them head north trying to cross the border with Serbia.

Albania

Albania is a transit country. It is part of the migration corridor which goes from Greece, through Albania and Montenegro towards Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Serbia

The vast majority of refugees and migrants enter Serbia from Bulgaria and FYROM. In addition, as a result of visa liberalisation policy, increased number of people from Iran arriving to Serbia by plane. Exit routes from Serbia are going through Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary and Romania.

Romania

Most of refugees and migrants arrived to Romania from Serbia, while a small number of them entered from Bulgaria. The main exit point from the country is the north-west border with Hungary.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The most of refugees and migrants enter Bosnia and Herzegovina from Serbia or from Montenegro. Within the country, they move north, north-west or south where they are trying to cross the border with Croatia.

CONTINUOUS INFLUX AND ONWARD MOVEMENT

According to the UNHCR data, 21,963 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece during the first six months of 2018 which made the Balkans route the most travelled migration route in Europe for the first half of the year.² The majority of arrivals, about 13,700 or 62%, were made by sea, while more than 8,300 refugees and migrants entered Greece by crossing the land border from north-east. Compared to 2017, the number of sea arrivals slightly decreased, while entries via the land route increased significantly. The data shows that monthly average of sea arrivals in 2017 was 2,477, while during the period from January to June 2018 it decreased to 2,283. On the other hand, about 5,700 refugees and migrants entered Greece by land in 2017, while about 8,300 land crossings were recorded during first six months of this year.

21,963
refugees and
migrants arrived in
Greece during the
first six months of
2018

The number of people of concern in Greece increased from 49,900 recorded in December 2017³ to 59,700 recorded at the end of June 2018.⁴

According to the National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum, at the end of June over 17,500 of refugees and migrants were present on the islands, while the total accommodation capacities included about 9,000 places. The situation was especially difficult in reception and identification

centres on Lesbos with the total capacity of 3,000 places but accommodating more than 7,000 people; and on Samos with the total capacity of about 650 places but accommodating almost 3,600 refugees and migrants.⁵



Over 17,500 of refugees and migrants were present on the islands at the end of June, while the total accommodation capacities included about 9,000 places

The data shows that there were 3,448 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Greece at the end of June, with about one-third accommodated in shelters for UASC or Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments. This left more than 2,300 of UASC in need of adequate shelter. Some of UASC were in protective custody or were placed in safe zones, hotels (emergency accommodation), reception and identification centres or open accommodation facilities, and more than 1,000 UASC were reported as living in informal housing arrangements, on the streets (reported as homeless), or with their location unknown.⁶

DEMOGRAPHY

The reports on sea arrivals for the period from January to June 2018, provide an insight on the demography of refugees and migrants arriving in Greece.⁷ Out of 13,717 refugees and

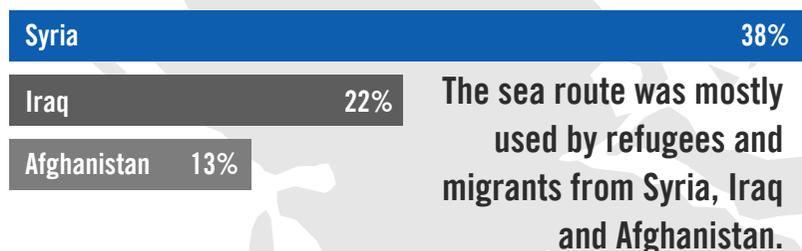
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Data and Trends Analysis

migrants arriving in Greece.⁷ Out of 13,717 refugees and migrants arriving by sea, 63% were adults (men 5,418; women 3,278), while 37% were children (boys 2,826; girls 2,195). About 12% of newly arrived refugee and migrant children travelled alone, mostly from Syria and Afghanistan.

Regarding the country of origin, during the first six months of 2018, the sea route was mostly used by refugees and migrants from Syria (38%), Iraq (22%) and Afghanistan (13%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=13,717)



Statistics show that these three nationalities mostly travel in family groups. A similar trend for travelling in family groups was recorded for Syrians and Iraqis in other Balkans countries, but not for Afghans. According to the data from other countries at the Balkans route, refugees and migrants from Afghanistan are dominantly men and teenage boys. Possible explanations of this variance could include the different background of refugees and migrants using the land and sea routes (for example, different provinces of origin, ethnicity, religion, status, wealth); divergent smuggling schemes used; a decision to separate the family, with women and children staying Greece, while men continue the journey alone through the Balkans towards Western and Northern Europe. At this moment, these are only assumptions that would need to be verified or refuted through a thorough research. Meanwhile, Save the Children will systematically monitor this trend and report on it.

MIGRATION ROUTES

During the first six months of 2018, refugees and migrants used both the sea and land routes to enter Greece. The main entry points for the sea route were islands close to the Turkish coast, namely Lesvos, Samos and the Dodecanese islands. These entry points were used in almost 90% of sea arrivals.

During the same period, 48 persons are presumed to have died or remain missing from crossing the sea. This is a significant increase when compared to 30 refugees and migrants who were registered as dead or missing in 2017 while trying to enter Greece by the sea.

The main land route used by refugees and migrants is at the north-eastern border with Turkey, crossing the river Evros. Even though this is not a new route, during the first half of 2018 it was increasingly used by refugees and migrants, and the number of new arrivals through the land route greatly outnumbered previous years. According to the available data, 8,300 new crossings were registered during the first six months of 2018, compared to 5,700 for the whole of 2017.

Even though Greece is an EU country, many refugees and migrants continue their journey towards the West and Northern Europe. The well established exit route, extensively travelled since the beginning of the migration crisis, heads north towards FYROM and Serbia. The use of other routes intensified since the beginning of the year. According to data from Bulgaria, there was an increase in entries from Greece compared to previous year. In addition, a new route from Greece, through Albania and Montenegro, towards Bosnia and Herzegovina also emerged in last six months. Finally, some refugees and migrants use the sea route towards Italy to leave the country.

8,300
refugees and migrants entered Greece by crossing the land border from north-east

DECREASED MIGRATION FLOW

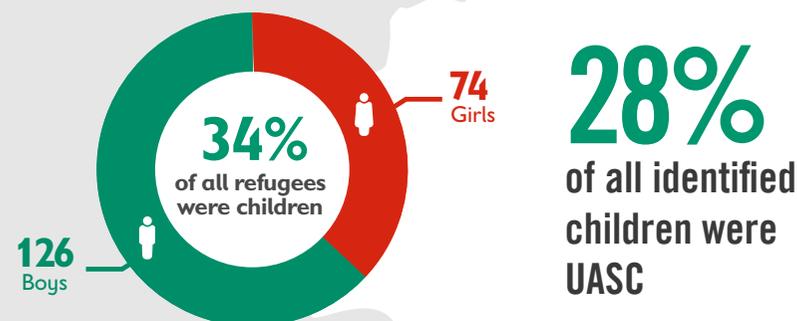
According to the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, from January to June 2018, police apprehended 718 people that were accused of illegally entering the country.⁸ Compared to the data for the last four months of 2017, the monthly average of apprehended refugees and migrants decreased by around 45%.⁹ As in the previous period, the continued influx of refugees and migrants did not increase the number of those accommodated in Bulgaria. During the reporting period, the number of refugees and migrants reported to be in official centres or at “external addresses”¹⁰ dropped by 588 people (from 1584¹¹ in December 2017, to 996 reported in June). The Ministry of Interior further reports that 420 migrants were either deported or they left Bulgaria legally during the first six months of 2018. For the “missing” 168, we can only assume that they have irregularly continued their journey towards Western Europe.

The data collected by Save the Children and its partners in Serbia also shows a significant decrease in the number of refugees and migrants transiting through Bulgaria. According to this data, the average arrivals from Bulgaria in late 2017 were 436 people per month, while in the first six months of 2018 there were only about 130 person a month recorded as arriving through Bulgaria. Influx was especially low during the first quarter of the year, while some increase was identified in last three months.¹²

718
people were
apprehended for
illegally entering
the country

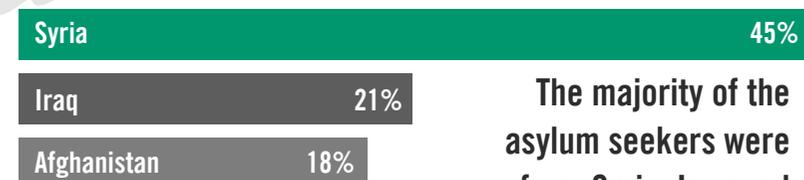
DEMOGRAPHY¹³

From January to June 2018, the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees reported that 591 persons have applied for international protection. This number includes 391 (66%) adults (278 men; 113 women) and 200 (34%) children (126 boys; 74 girls). According to the official statistics, 55 (28%) of children were traveling alone, most of them from Syria and Afghanistan.



The majority of the asylum seekers were from Syria (45%), Iraq (21%) and Afghanistan (18%). The applicants from Iraq and Syria included a more balanced number of men, women and children indicating that many of them travel in family groups. The applicants from Afghanistan were predominantly men and teenage boys (more than 90%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=591)



The majority of the
asylum seekers were
from Syria, Iraq and
Afghanistan.

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Data and Trends Analysis

If we compare this data with the asylum statistics from 2017, it is evident that there was a change in the demographics. The most significant change is related to the country of origin. During the first eight months of the year, the majority of the asylum seekers were from Afghanistan (37%), whereas in the latter part of the year, about half of the applicants came from Iraq. However, data from the first quarter of 2018 shows that almost half of asylum seekers were from Syria. As a result, the proportion of women and girls increased by 6%, while the percentage of unaccompanied children in the total number of children decreased by 8%.

The Regional Overviews for 2017 highlighted that asylum recognition rates for Afghanistan was extremely low in Bulgaria. Namely, out of 1,704¹⁴ asylum seekers who were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2017, only 22 (1.5%) were from Afghanistan, meaning that only about 2% of Afghans who applied were granted protection. The data from the State Agency for Migration from January – June 2018, shows some improvement. In this period, out of 419 asylum seekers who were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection 22 (5%) were from Afghanistan.

MIGRATION ROUTES

The Bulgarian Ministry of Interior also provides data on where irregular migrants were apprehended. The locations are divided into three categories: (1) borders of entry, namely the borders with Turkey and Greece; (2) in-country, meaning that people were arrested somewhere within the country; (3) borders of exit, namely North and West borders with Serbia and Romania.

Even though this data does not capture the overall migration flow it gives us clues about cross-border migratory routes.

According to the available data, the vast majority of refugees and migrants entered the country from south-east, namely by crossing the border with Turkey (51%) and Greece (44%). It is important to highlight that migrants entered the country from both Turkey and Greece in similar numbers, while in 2017 the vast majority of refugees and migrants were apprehended at the border with Turkey. This is the trend that should be monitored in the future.



Refugees and migrants are entering Bulgaria from south-east, by crossing the border with Turkey and Greece

The data also shows a significant pressure on the west and north borders, suggesting that most of the refugees and migrants continue their journey through Serbia (38%) and Romania (43%). To enter Serbia from Bulgaria, the majority of refugees and migrants use smuggling routes through the mountains, and to enter Romania, most of the refugee and migrants attempt to cross at the official border crossings.

INCREASED IRREGULAR FLOW

From January to June 2018, authorities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) registered 1,098 newly arrived refugees and migrants. This is a significant increase compared to the first six months of 2017 when only 122 new refugees and migrants were officially recorded.¹⁵

1,098
newly arrived
refugees and
migrants were
registered

The irregular flow through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) can also be observed from the data from civil society actors. According to the Macedonian Red Cross, from January to June their mobile teams assisted about 3,100 refugees and migrants near the border with Serbia,¹⁶ compared to 882 supported in last four months of 2017.¹⁷

According to the available data, there were 95 refugees and migrants accommodated in reception/transit centres and safe house in FYROM at the end of June.

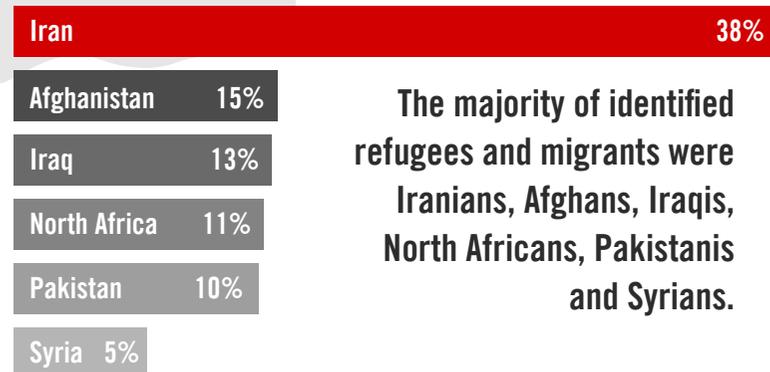
DEMOGRAPHY

During the first six months of 2018, the authorities registered 1,098 newly arrived refugees and migrants in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), of whom 81% were adults (three-quarters were men) and 19% were children. The data shows that 8% of registered children travelled alone.

19% of registered refugees and migrants were children

Most of the recorded new arrivals were from Iran (38%). Besides them, authorities registered refugees and migrants from Afghanistan (15%), Iraq (13%), North Africa (11%), Pakistan (10%) and Syria (5%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=1,098)



The majority of identified refugees and migrants were Iranians, Afghans, Iraqis, North Africans, Pakistanis and Syrians.

MIGRATION ROUTES

The data suggests that the migration route through FYROM is mainly used as a corridor between Greece and Serbia. Refugees and migrants enter FYROM from Greece and most of them head north trying to cross the border with Serbia.

In addition to the route towards Serbia, some of the refugees and migrants move west using the route through Albania or Kosovo*.¹⁸

However, the data also indicate some reverse movement. Beside new arrivals coming from the south, some of the refugees and migrants identified in FYROM are returning from Serbia. According to the Help on the Route reports, during the April and May field teams identified a number of refugees and migrants heading from Serbia towards Greece.

On May 10th, three families coming from Afghanistan arrived at the camp in Tabanovce. The group consisted of 11 people, among which one pregnant woman, a single mother and 6 minors, with the youngest being 7 months old and the oldest being 7 years old. They arrived from Serbia after staying in the Presevo camp for a while. They returned voluntarily with the intention to go back to Greece.¹⁹



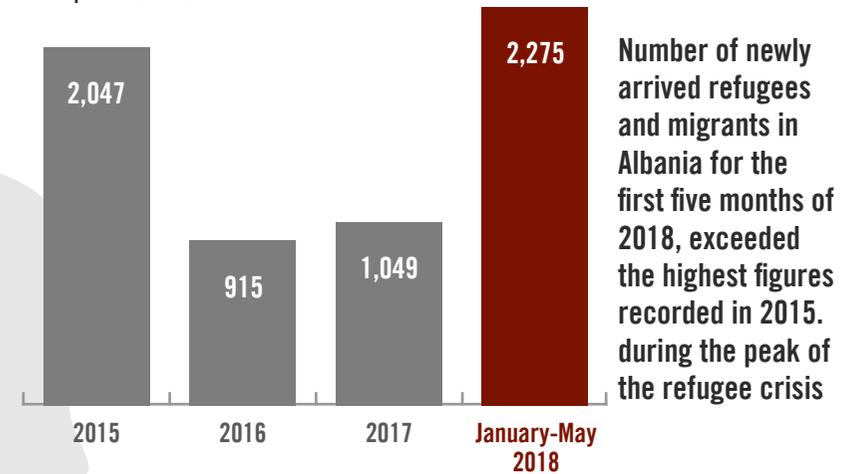
NEW MIGRATION CORRIDOR

In late 2017 and the beginning of 2018, the migration route through Albania became increasingly used. According to UNHCR, 2,275 newly arrived refugees and migrants were identified in Albania during the first five months of 2018. This is a significant increase compared to the previous year when the total of 1,049 new refugees and migrants were identified for the twelve months. The number of new arrivals for the first five months of 2018 also exceeded figures from 2017, when 2,047 persons of concern were identified.

2,275 newly arrived refugees and migrants were identified in Albania during the first five months of 2018

Along with the increased number of new arrivals in the first five months of 2018, the data shows an increase in the applications for international protection in Albania. Namely, from January to May, 1,406 persons applied for international protection, compared to 309 applications in 2017. Most applications were made by Syrians (59%), Pakistanis (13%) and refugees and migrants from North Africa (14%).

Number of newly arrived refugees and migrants in Albania for period 2015-2018



DEMOGRAPHY

According to UNHCR, out of 2,275 newly arrived refugees and migrants identified in Albania, 81% were adult men, while children and women make only 19% of the population.

Nevertheless, the data shows that the proportion of women and children increased compared to the first quarter of the year, suggesting that in April and May more families travelled through Albania. The similar trend was observed lately in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. This trend of families using the newly established routes with some delay after they are established was observed in the past with other routes. A possible explanation is that families with children are more cautious about new migration routes, often using only the routes that are well established and perceived as safe enough.

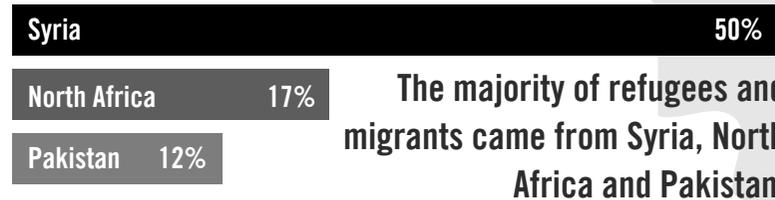
81% of identified refugees and migrants were adult men

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Data and Trends Analysis

The majority of refugees and migrants came from Syria (50%), North Africa (17%) and Pakistan (12%).

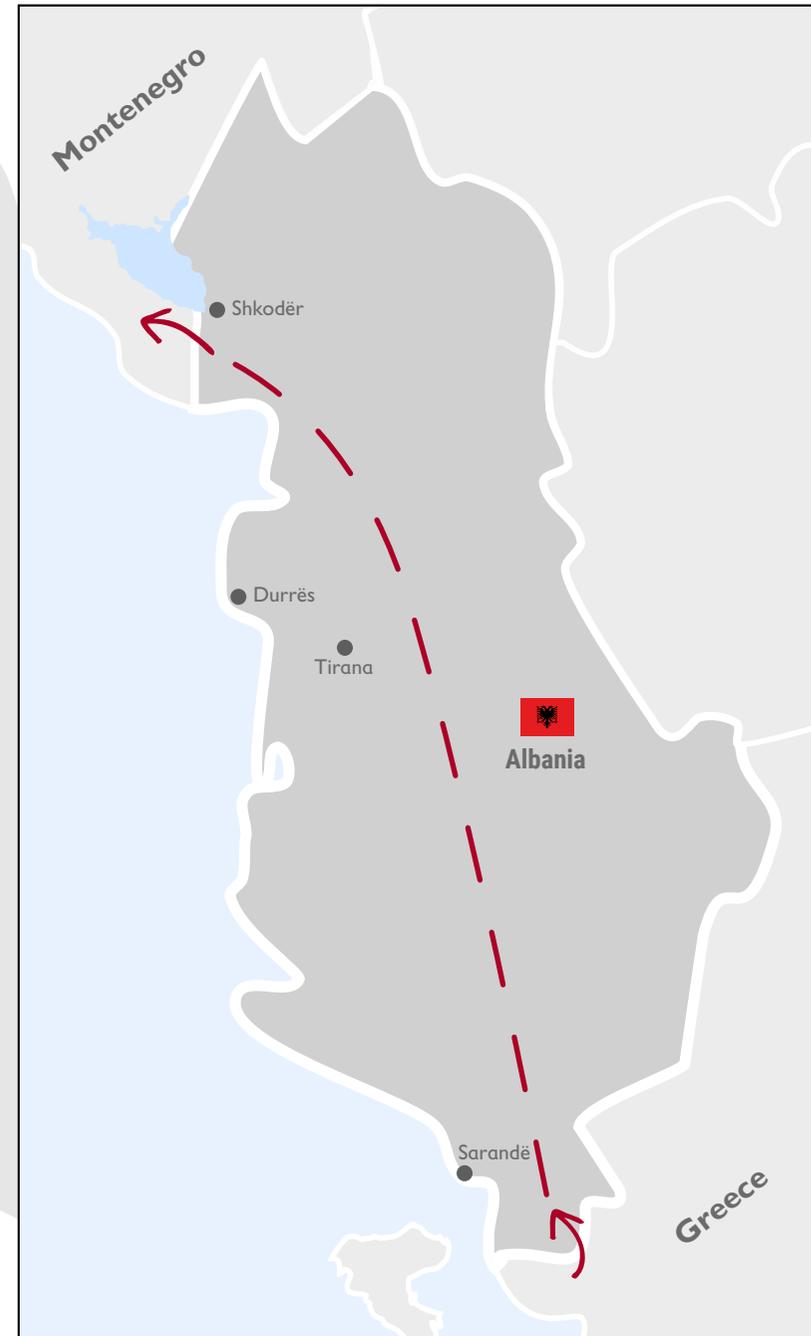
Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=2,275)



MIGRATION ROUTES

The migration route through Albania is not a new route, but it is the first time it is used by so many refugees and migrants. According to the field data, most refugees and migrants enter the country from the south by crossing the border with Greece. Even though more than 60% of the identified new arrivals applied for international protection in Albania, they abscond after several days and try to continue the journey.²⁰ They move north towards Montenegro, most frequently crossing the border in the vicinity of Lake Skadar.

Similar to other Western Balkans countries, Albania is perceived as a transit country. It is part of the migration corridor which goes from Greece, through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina from where refugees and migrants try to cross the border with Croatia and continue their journey towards Western European countries.



ALBANIA

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ON THE MOVE

During the first half of 2018, Save the Children has identified and supported 4,398 newly arrived refugees and migrants in Serbia. The rate in which these new refugees and migrants have been coming to Serbia and being identified by SC has steadily increased since January. This increase could be attributed not only to better weather conditions facilitating migrant movement in spring and summer months but also to the newly established routes through Bosnia and Herzegovina. UNHCR has observed 4,114 new migrant and refugee arrivals during the same period of time but has reported a general decrease²¹ in overall number of migrants present in Serbia since January.²² This discrepancy is in line with information on new Bosnian routes opening and somewhat increased opportunities for mobility emerging through these routes. As for formal intentions to seek asylum since the beginning of the year, there have been 3,694 requests recorded by officials in Serbia, but only 98 migrants and refugees actually initiated the procedure and applied for asylum in Serbia.²³

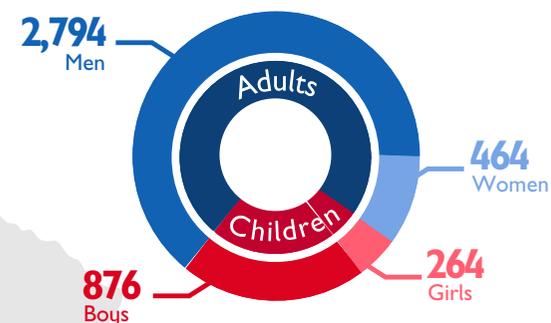
It should be noted that, relying on combined Save the Children and other relevant data sources, most refugees and migrants who left Serbia since the beginning of the year used irregular channels to do so. While roughly 500 of them gained access to some type of legal entry (Hungarian asylum system, AVR or resettlement programme), some 5,000 continued their journey without it.²⁴

4,398
newly arrived
refugees and
migrants in Serbia
during the first six
months of 2018

DEMOGRAPHY

During the first six months of 2018, Save the Children and its partners in Serbia registered 4,398 newly arrived refugees and migrants. The vast majority (3,258 or 74%) of these new arrivals were adults – 2,794 men and 464 women. The prevalence of male migrants was consistent in the structure of identified refugee and migrant children as well. Save the children identified 1,140 children during this period (26% of new migrants and refugees) out of which 876 boys and 264 girls. Although these figures can't reliably refer to the whole migrant population in the country (due to specific nature of migration and the lack of possibility to collect exact and comprehensive data) they have been collected regularly and systematically giving a very good insight into the structure of this population.

83%
of newly identified
refugees and
migrants in
Serbia were boys
and men



When compared to the whole last year, first half of 2018 showed highly noticeable increase in Iranian refugees and migrants. Namely, 28% of all new arrivals in 2018 were from Iran, compared to 9% during 2017. The number of Pakistani migrants somewhat increased as well making up 26% of new migrants and refugees in Serbia (compared to 20% in 2017), while Iraqis were identified in somewhat smaller number than last year (17% of all migrants in the first 6 months of 2018 compared to 25% in 2017).

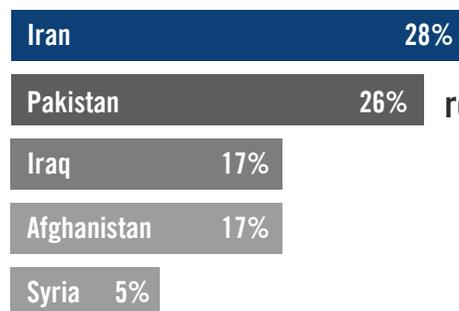
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SERBIA

Migrants from Afghanistan showed the most noticeable decrease in presence so far (17% compared to 30% during 2017.). The share of children in that total number of Afghani migrants also dropped from 58% in 2017 to 47% in the first 6 months of 2018. Syrians made 5% of all newly identified refugees and migrants in the first half of 2018.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=4,398)



The majority of refugees and migrants identified were from Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

During the first half of the year, the unaccompanied minors made 55% of all newly arrived children – that is 14% of all newly arrived migrants and refugees. The absolute majority of UASC (98% or 612) were boys while only 2% (14) were girls, continuing the last year's trends. More than a half of all newly registered UASC came from Afghanistan (51%), while 31% originate from Pakistan, 5% came from Iraq and 3% from Iran.

During the first half of the year, the unaccompanied minors made 55% of all newly arrived children – that is 14% of all newly arrived migrants and refugees.

55% of all children were registered as traveling alone

The absolute majority of UASC (98% or 612) were boys while only 2% (14) were girls, continuing the last year's trends. More than a half of all newly registered UASC came from Afghanistan (51%), while 31% originate from Pakistan, 5% came from Iraq and 3% from Iran.

MIGRATION ROUTES

The migration trends noted in 2017 somewhat changed during first half of 2018. Exit routes from Serbia no longer only went through Croatia, Hungary and Romania but now also through Bosnia and Herzegovina which has been established as more and more prominent route. Borders towards EU countries remained very well protected either by physical barriers at the Hungarian border or by the strong border police presence. On the other side, the Bosnian border was in this period the most porous drawing more and more refugees and migrants from Serbia. Migrant testimonies showed that crossing the border to Bosnia and Herzegovina takes several attempts and that those caught during the process are being forced back to Serbia.



From Serbia, most of the refugees and migrants are heading west towards Bosnia and Herzegovina

Figures from the field also showed changes in entry routes compared to the trends identified in 2017. Namely, during the last four months of 2017 about 51% of newly identified refugees and migrants entered Serbia from Bulgaria, while 36% of them used the route through FYROM. This year, and using the data collected from 4,300 refugees and migrants (98% of all identified persons), only about 18% of arrivals were from Bulgaria, while 51% of refugees and migrants entered Serbia from FYROM.

In addition to land arrivals, refugees and migrants from Iran arrive mainly by plane. During the first six months of 2018, plane arrivals made 25% of all new arrivals.

PUSH-BACK TESTIMONIES OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN SERBIA

Two years after the EU-Turkey deal took place, the migration journey of the refugees and migrants travelling through Western Balkans is marked by the serious risks, including violence, repeated pushbacks and collective expulsions, as frequently heard from their testimonies. People travelling are regularly reporting ill treatment by border officials, including physical violence at all borders, particularly Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary. Asylum-seekers are often turned away at the border and effectively denied the right to claim the asylum. Increasingly organized smugglers, who earn high profits and often cooperate with or become human traffickers, are expanding their operations in the Western Balkans.

In Belgrade, Serbia, in the period January – June 2016, a total of 3,370 refugees/migrants reported 3,427 cases of pushbacks occurring at the different borders along the Balkan route. Some of the refugees/migrants were pushed back at more than one border. A total number of 652 children were involved in 699 cases of pushbacks, including 354 unaccompanied or separated children (344 boys and 10 girls) and 298 children who were traveling with families (149 boys and 149 girls).

Many collected testimonies tell about the violent treatment of refugees and migrants at the borders, including children and children travelling alone.

TESTIMONIES

“We crossed the border on our own. Not long after that, the Croatian police intercepted us and sent us back. We returned to Belgrade. My father was exhausted from the journey, so he fell on the street, hitting his head. He had to be taken to the ambulance where they sutured his wound. Five days after that, we tried crossing again. The father fainted in the forest. We left to find the police. They called an ambulance. We were immediately sent back to Serbia, so we returned to Belgrade on our own. The father was kept in an ambulance until he recovered, and then sent back to Serbia the day after.”

AZIZA (15, AFGHANISTAN)

(her father and sister (17) who tried to continue the journey by crossing the border with Croatia after spending 5 months in a refugee centre in Serbia)

“In Bulgaria, we connected with a smuggler to cross to Serbia. It was winter, and the snow was very high. He took us through remote areas and forests, and then he left us in a middle of nowhere. Three days we wandered around, alone, and then we came across a Serbian police patrol. They took us to a police station, gave us water and some food, and then they accompanied us back to the border. We begged them not to send us back to the forest and snow, but they said we have to go. My youngest child was 2 years old. We walked in snow back to Bulgaria... After 4 months in a refugee centre in Bulgaria, we found another smuggler and crossed to Serbia again, this time successfully.”

EREZ

(father of 10, travelled with his family from Iraq to Serbia with smugglers. The Kurdish family crossed Bulgaria mostly on foot)

“We were caught by a Romanian police patrol. They were rough and rude, pushing us around, taking away money and phones. From us they took around 2,000 EUR, from one man from Iran they took 800 EUR. One woman from the group fell when they pushed her and hurt her eye. After they took our possessions, they pushed us back to Serbia.”

YEZIDI FAMILY FROM IRAQ

(travelling with three children (12, 13, 14) tried to cross the Serbian-Romanian border in a group of 30 people)

“In Bulgaria, our group was intercepted by police patrol near the border with Turkey. We started running, but they opened fire at us. I believe they would not have minded killing us. Then the reinforcement arrived and released dogs. Some people got bitten. Policemen, 6 of them, approached each person from the group, one by one, and beat us with their hands and batons, without asking were there any minors, and there were 10 of us. Then they pushed us back to Turkey. In Croatia, two policemen caught our group of 12 people, amongst whom 4 were minors. They didn't ask us if we were children. They beat us using their hands, foot, batons.”

TWO BOYS FROM AFGHANISTAN

(have been roaming through Western Balkans for over a year, trying to reach Western Europe)

TRANSITING THROUGH ROMANIA

From early 2017, Romania became an important transit point in the Balkans migration route. This trend continued in 2018. According to the Romania's General Inspectorate for Immigration, 900 persons applied for international protection during the first six months of 2018, suggesting that the intensity of migration decreased compared to the period from September to December of 2017. The data shows that the number of asylum seekers decreased during the first three months of the year, which is a common trend during the cold season in Romania.

900
persons applied for international protection during the first six months of 2018

The data from the General Inspectorate for Immigration also shows that at the end of June 4,072 beneficiaries of international protection were registered in Romania, all possessing valid residence permits. In addition, 373 asylum seekers were registered as being in the asylum procedure. However, it is thought that not all of them are still in the country. By the end of June 2018, there were 370 refugees and migrants accommodated in in state-run reception centres in Romania.²⁵

DEMOGRAPHY

For the first six months of 2018, Romanian officials registered 900 asylum applications. Out of that number, 211 (23%) were children, while 689 (78%) of registered asylum seekers were adults.

The majority of applicants came from Iraq (47%) and Syria (20%), followed by a small number of arrivals from Iran (8%).

Applicants for international protection by country of origin (N=900)



The majority came from Iraq and Syria, followed by small number of arrivals from Iran.

Out of 211 children who applied for international protection in Romania in the first six months of the year, 35 (17%) were submitted by unaccompanied children. Of unaccompanied children 30 (86%) were boys, while 5 (14%) were girls. Most of them came from Iraq 19 (54%), Syria 5 (14%) and Afghanistan 5 (14%).

MIGRATION ROUTES

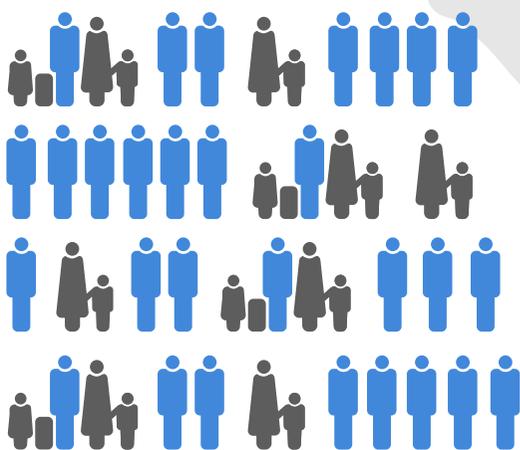
According to the data from the field, most of refugees and migrants arrived to Romania from Serbia, while a small number entered from Bulgaria.

As in other Balkans countries, refugees and migrants see Romania as a transit point on their way towards Western Europe. According to the recent field data, the length of their stay in Romania varies. Single adults usually have shorter stays and leave the country in several weeks while families stay longer.

The main exit point from the county is its north-west border with Hungary.

BUSY ROUTE THROUGH BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Migration route through Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged in late 2017 and quickly became one of the main transit corridors in the region. According to the UNCT, 7,652 newly arrived refugees and migrants have been identified during the period January - June 2018.²⁶ Compared to previous years (around 100 refugees and migrants registered in 2016 and 754 in 2017), this is a significant increase and it is not expected that the numbers of refugees and migrants using this route would decrease in the near future.



7,752
newly arrived
refugees and
migrants were
identified in Bosnia
and Herzegovina
during the first six
months of 2018

For the first six months of the year, the Service for Foreigners' Affairs issued 6,494 attestations of intention to seek asylum, while 684 refugee and migrants have submitted their asylum claim.

According to the data from the field, it is estimated that about 60% of refugees and migrants that have arrived to Bosnia and Herzegovina since the beginning of the year have already left the country. Those who are still in the country, about 4,000 persons, are mostly accommodated in informal settlements. Unlike other countries in the region where reception and asylum centres are just partly populated, Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks capacities to accommodate a large number of refugees and migrants. At this moment, there only two facilities with about 450 places and two more that are going to be operational soon. If the number of refugees and migrants in the country remains high in the following months it is going to be a great challenge to find adequate accommodation for all the persons in need during the winter.

60%
of refugees and
migrants that have
arrived to Bosnia
and Herzegovina
since the beginning
of the year have
already left the
country

DEMOGRAPHY

At the moment, the disaggregated data on refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not available. However, the data gained from different reports can be indicative of refugee and migrants' demography.

According to the available reports, refugee and migrants' demography has changed since the beginning of the year. Namely, early in the year the vast majority of arrivals were single men, while during the second quarter of 2018 about half of all new arrivals were women and children.²⁷

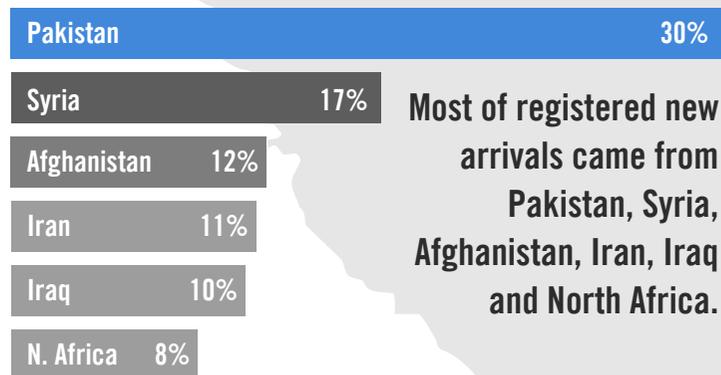
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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Regarding the country of origin, data for the first six months of the year shows that most of refugees and migrants came from Pakistan (30%), Syria (17%), Afghanistan (12%), Iran (11%), Iraq (10%) and North Africa (8%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=7,752)

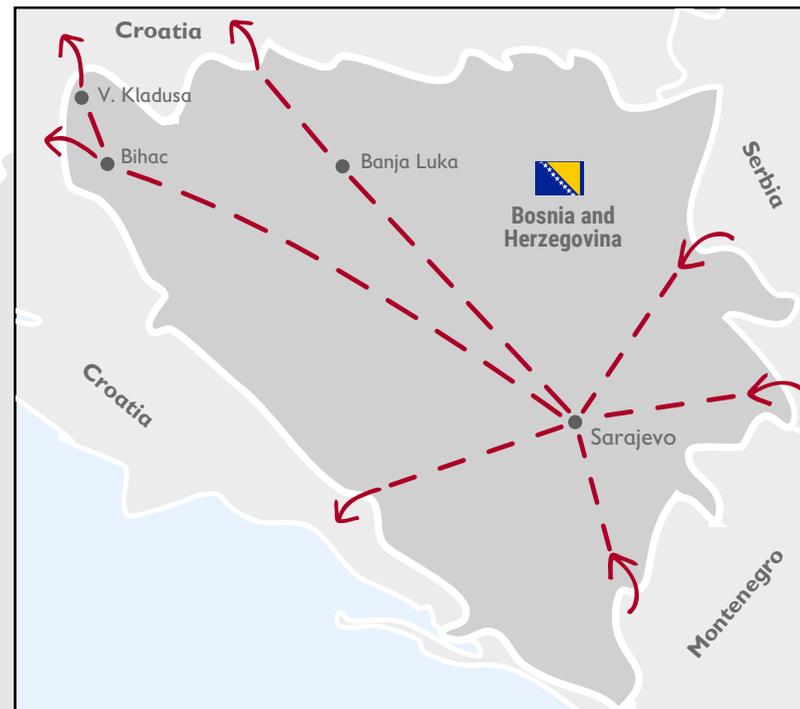


Most of registered new arrivals came from Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and North Africa.

In addition, the available data shows that 147 unaccompanied and separated children were identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first two quarters of 2018, out of which 145 were boys and 2 were girls.

MIGRATION ROUTES

Most of refugees and migrants identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina entered into the country from south or south-east by irregularly crossing the border with Serbia or Montenegro. Entry routes merge in Sarajevo, the country's capital located in the central part of the country. From there, refugees and migrants head towards Croatia.



The border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia is more than 900 kilometres long. According to the data from the field, the hardest pressure is on the north-west part of the border in the area of Bihac and Velika Kladusa. It is estimated that there are over 3,500 refugees and migrants in that area, most of them in informal settlements waiting to cross the border and continue their journey. Besides these two towns, refugees and migrants were identified in the north (Banja Luka area), and in the south.

High numbers of refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their movement across the country became an important political issue as general election are approaching. Some of proposed measures to deal with migrations include stricter border control and rigorous regulation on refugees and migrants' movement and stay within the country. We have seen in the past that such policies have a strong effect on migration routes and often lead to an increased vulnerability among refugees and migrants.



TESTIMONIES

STRANDED IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Zahra*, her husband, and her 15-month-old daughter Sima, left their home country Iran in 2017. Their journey led them first to Serbia, where they stayed for eight months. In Serbia they were waiting to cross to Hungary and seek asylum there. After months of waiting for their number to come up on a lengthy waiting list for the asylum in Hungary, the family decided to travel with smugglers to Bosnia and Herzegovina. They arrived to the northwest region of BiH – the border area with Croatia, with a growing number of refugees and migrants. With ongoing arrivals to the region since early 2018, there were around 3,000 children and adults in the region, staying in dire conditions with no official shelters. The family stays in an informal camp in the town of Bihac, without easily accessible clean water, an adequate space for the preparation of baby food, which are the conditions that could cause serious health issues for their baby. The mother, experiencing difficulties with breastfeeding, relies on the support provided in the Mother and Baby Corner run by Save the Children and its partners.

“The problem with my baby is that she doesn’t grow. She is so small for a 15-month-old child. In the past three months, she gained only half a kilogram,” says Zahra in a strained voice.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

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 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 often 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 Hub (BMDH). 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, which includes the territories of Greece, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Hungary.

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

ENDNOTES

¹ Total of 24,000 includes all new arrivals to the Balkans, namely refugees and migrants that arrived to Greece by sea and land; arrivals from Turkey to Bulgaria, and refugees and migrants from Iran that arrived to Serbia by plane.

² Source: UNHCR, [Europe Monthly Report June 2018](#)

³ Source: UNHCR, [Fact Sheet Greece December 2017](#)

⁴ Source: UNHCR, [Fact Sheet Greece June 2018](#)

⁵ Source: Hellenic Republic Ministry of Interior National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum, [National situational picture regarding the islands at eastern Aegean sea \(30/06/2018\)](#)

⁶ Source: UNICEF, [Refugee and Migrant Children in Greece as of 30 June 2018](#)

⁷ Source: UNHCR, [Greece Sea Arrivals Dashboard June 2018](#)

⁸ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [June 2018](#)

⁹ In average, 120 refugees and migrants were apprehended each month in period January – June 2018, while the average for the last four months of 2017 was 212.

¹⁰ “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](#), p 48, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

¹¹ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, [Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for December 2017](#)

¹² Source: Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub Data and Trends Analysis: [Regional overview \(April-June 2018\)](#)

¹³ The only way to track demographic data of refugees and migrants in Bulgaria is through asylum applications.

¹⁴ Source: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee [Country Report: Bulgaria](#)

¹⁵ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [June 2018](#).

¹⁶ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [January 2018](#), [February 2018](#), [March 2018](#), [April 2018](#), [May 2018](#) and [June 2018](#).

¹⁷ Source: Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub Data and Trends Analysis: [\(September – December 2017\)](#)

¹⁸ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

¹⁹ Source: Help on the Route, Monthly report on human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Serbia and Macedonia – [May 2018](#)

²⁰ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [March 2018](#)

²¹ UNHCR reported 3,000 refugees and migrants present in Serbia in [Jun 2018](#), compared to 4,100 present in [January 2018](#)

²² Source: UNHCR Inter-agency operational update, [January - March 2018](#) and [April - June 2018](#)

²³ Source: UNHCR, Serbia Monthly Snapshot for [January](#), [February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#) and [June 2018](#)

²⁴ Source: UNHCR Inter-agency operational update, [January - March 2018](#) and [April - June 2018](#)

²⁵ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [June 2018](#)

²⁶ Source: UNCT Operational Update for [June 2018](#)

²⁷ Source: UNCT Operational Update for [May 2018](#)



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Data and Trends Analysis**