



Save the Children

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

JANUARY – MARCH 2020

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub
Data and Trends Analysis

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

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: Nemanja Radovanović, Save the Children

CONTENTS

Key Regional Trends	2
Greece	4
<i>Continuous arrivals and crowded camps</i>	
Serbia	6
<i>Refugees and migrants on the move - Covid-19 situation</i>	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	8
<i>Busy route through Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	
Testimonies	9
<i>Refugee children continued their education despite COVID-19 outbreak</i>	
Bulgaria	10
<i>Migration flow</i>	
North Macedonia	12
<i>Highly invisible irregular flow</i>	
Albania	13
<i>Increasingly important migration corridor</i>	
Kosovo*	15
<i>In transit</i>	
Romania	16
<i>Transiting through Romania</i>	
About The Project	18
Endnotes	19

KEY REGIONAL TRENDS

Even with the emergence of Covid-19 crisis, the migration route through the Balkan countries continues to be the most travelled route to Europe with at least 9,834¹ newly arrived migrants and refugees registered during the first quarter of the year.

Although the winter months are not as favourable for the migration journeys and despite the emergence of the Covid-19 crisis, the number of new arrivals exceeded the number of arrivals (8,500) in the same period last year. Greece was the country with the highest number of new arrivals in Europe with more than 9,600 new refugees and migrants registered during the first quarter. 5,923 new arrivals were registered in Serbia, 4,528 in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), 9,050 in North Macedonia, 3,245 in Albania, 1,160 in Kosovo*, 1,095 in Romania and 199 in Bulgaria. The total estimated number of new arrivals in Western Balkans represent a very conservative estimate, mostly relying on the recorded arrivals in Greece, arrivals in Bulgaria through Turkey, and plane arrivals in Serbia, in order to avoid possibly overlapping data.

Greater proportion of families, most often from Syria and Iraq, are on the move, when compared to the first half of 2019.

The number of refugees and migrants from African countries is increasing on the Western Balkans route.

More than 138,500 refugees and migrants are currently present in the Balkans.

The number of people accommodated in reception centres, at external addresses, or in unofficial shelters in the Balkans countries is estimated to be around 138,500. Most of them were present in Greece (about 120,000), Bosnia and Herzegovina (about 9,000), Serbia (8,652), Bulgaria (486), and Romania (385).

COVID-19 crisis affected migration flows.

Covid-19 prevention measures started to be introduced in February and became more widespread and stricter by late March 2020. Closed borders were one of the factors resulting in the decrease of new arrivals in the second half of March. Covid-19 prevention measures included restricting movement from most refugee and migrant camps. The closed access to camps increased health and protection risks for refugees and migrants, fuelled the fears among refugees and migrants and led to many incidents, fights, and fires in the camps, increasing the risks for children and for staff still in the centres. Hostility against refugees and migrants increased among the host communities. This was further exacerbated by support organizations pulling out of camps or reducing their activities, also affecting the availability of data on migrations.

Routes through Romania and Albania/ Kosovo* are increasingly used.

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains an important junction used by refugees and migrants traveling towards Europe.

Transit corridors traversing Bulgaria/North Macedonia/Serbia, Kosovo*/Serbia as well as Albania/Montenegro most often merge in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) even though the number of refugees and migrants trying to cross through Hungary or Romania seems to be increasing.

Children make roughly one-third of all refugees and migrants transiting through the Balkans and many of them travel alone.

The available data shows that the proportion of children in the total migrant population fluctuated between 8% and 30%, similar to the previous period. The percentage of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in the overall number of children varies from country to country, with most of them recorded in North Macedonia (81%), indicating that some children remain invisible and that there are probably significant differences in identification procedures. Most UASC in the Balkans countries are boys from Afghanistan and Pakistan, followed by children from Syria and some African countries. It is important to note that reliable data on refugees and migrants disaggregated by age and sex were not available for some countries during the reporting period.



Photo: Velja Hasanbegović, Save the Children

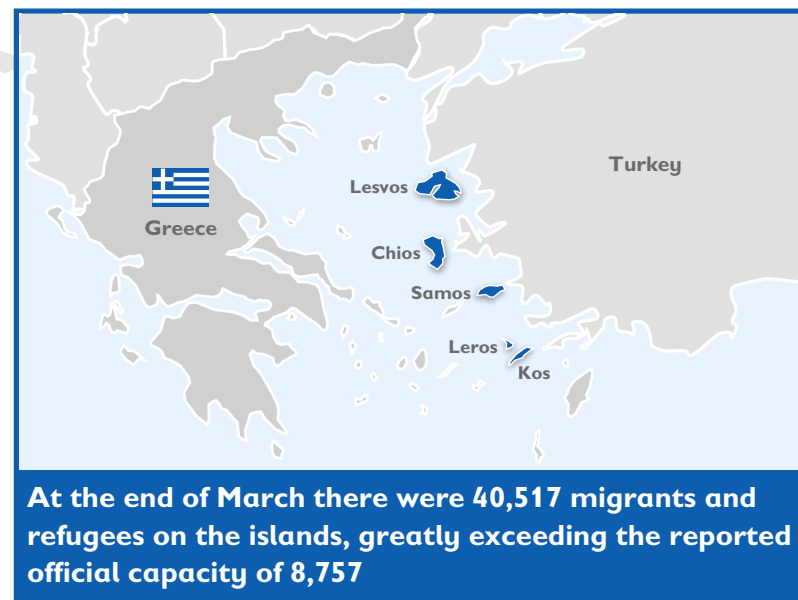
CONTINUOUS ARRIVALS AND CROWDED CAMPS

During the first quarter of 2020, 9,600 new refugees and migrants were registered to have arrived in Greece, which is less than in the last quarter of 2019, but more than in the same period last year (8,750 new arrivals in 2019). There has been an increase in new arrivals in the first quarter of each year since 2016. Most of refugees and migrants who entered Greece in this period arrived by the sea (7,550 or 79%).

9,600
new refugees and
migrants were
registered to have
arrived in Greece

UNHCR data shows that at the end of the reporting period there have been around 120,000 refugees and migrants in Greece. Most of them were on the mainland (more than 80,000) while around 40,000 were on the islands.² The total number of those accommodated in Greece exceeded the number recorded since 2016.

According to the National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum³, at the end of March there were 40,517 migrants and refugees on the islands, greatly exceeding the reported official capacity of 8,757. The island of Lesbos had the largest gap with 19,224 refugees and migrants on the island were although the overall capacity included only 2,757 places. The island of Samos has the official capacity to accommodate 648 migrants but had 7,178 refugees and migrants or almost 12 times more than the capacity allows.



At the end of March, there were 5,252 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Greece⁴. Out of that number, 1,061 children were reported to be without adequate shelter, and living in informal housing arrangements, on the streets (reported as homeless), or at unknown locations.

1,061 UASC children in Greece living in informal housing arrangements, on the streets, or at unknown locations

DEMOGRAPHY

The reports on sea arrivals for the period from January to March 2020, provide an insight into the demography of refugees and migrants arriving in Greece.⁵ Out of 5,591⁶ refugees and migrants arriving by sea, 63% were adults (men 2,236; women 1,286), while 37% were children (boys 1,174; girls 895). About 14% of newly arrived refugee and migrant children travelled alone.

Similar to the previous period, most of the new arrivals were from Afghanistan. During the first quarter of 2020, the sea route was mostly used by refugees and migrants from Afghanistan (40%), Syria (25%), DR Congo (9%), Somalia (6%) and Iraq (4%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=9,600)



The statistics show that Afghans, Syrians, and Iraqis most often arrived in Greece in family groups

The statistics show that Afghans, Syrians, and Iraqis most often arrived in Greece in family groups. A similar trend of travelling in family groups was recorded for Syrians and Iraqis in other Balkans countries, but not for Afghans who were more often recorded as single young men or boys in the other Balkan countries.

Possible explanations of this variance could include different backgrounds of refugees and migrants staying in Greece and continuing to travel on the Western Balkans route, including for example, different provinces of origin, ethnicity, religion, status, wealth, smuggling arrangements, or potentially deciding 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 detailed research. Meanwhile, Save the Children will systematically monitor this trend and report on it.

MIGRATION ROUTES

During the first three months of the year refugees and migrants mostly used sea routes to enter Greece, namely islands close to the Turkish coast, including Lesvos, Samos, Chios and the Dodecanese islands. The main land route used by refugees and migrants is at the north-eastern border with Turkey, crossing the river Evros.

During this period⁷, 66 persons died or went missing on the Eastern Mediterranean route. This is a noticeable increase compared to the previous period.⁸

Even though Greece is an EU country, many refugees and migrants continue their journey towards western and northern Europe. The well-established exit route, extensively travelled since the beginning of the migration crisis, heads north towards North Macedonia and Serbia, or travel through Albania and Montenegro, towards Bosnia and Herzegovina.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ON THE MOVE - COVID-19 SITUATION

During the first three months of 2020, UNHCR observed the higher numbers of new arrivals compared to the same period last year – 5,923 compared to 3,546 in the first quarter of 2019 but only 839 persons showed intention to seek asylum which is, a decrease of 46%⁹ compared to the same period last year.

Save the Children and its partners in Serbia identified and supported 2,924 newly arrived refugees and migrants. Although the numbers were affected by the measures introduced in the second half of March, there were still more new beneficiaries than during the same period last year (2,113). With the introduction of the Covid-19 measures, our teams had to stop direct field work in mid-March. The camps for refugees and migrants became closed camps, guarded by the army. Newly arrived refugees and migrants were relocated to the camps by the police.

The number of refugees and migrants present in the country at the end of the first quarter of 2020 was much higher because of the Covid-19 measures and included 8,652¹⁰ persons. This was a major increase when compared to the last several years' average of 4,000-5,000 people in official reception centres. No case of Covid-19 among refugees and migrants was reported in this period.

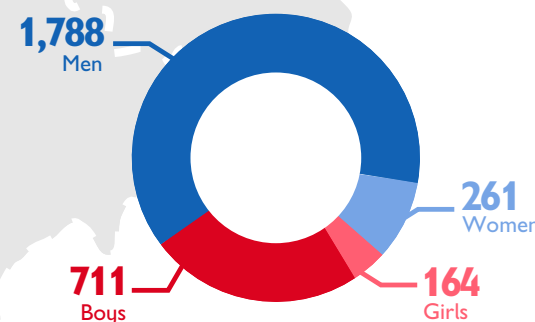
2,924
new migrants and
refugees recorded
by Save the Children
during the first three
months of 2020

The official data shows that 41 formal asylum applications were submitted during this period, which is almost double the number of applications in the previous quarter (23). In addition, more refugees and migrants have been granted protection (7) than at the end of 2019 (3).¹¹

DEMOGRAPHY

Although the precise information on the number of refugees and migrants in Serbia is not available and the nature of migrations makes it difficult to collect exact data on this population, for several years now Save the Children has been systematically and regularly collecting data on its beneficiaries providing important insight into the structure and habits of this population. The data is desegregated by sex, age, country of origin as well as status child refugees and migrants have (traveling accompanied or not).

The data covers the period until mid-March when the direct field activities stopped due to government restrictions related to Covid-19. Of 2,924 new beneficiaries, 2,049 (70%) were adults – 1,788 men and 261 women. Children made 30% of newly arrived refugees and migrants (875) with 711 boys and 164 girls. Girls and women made a noticeably higher percentage of refugee and migrant population (14%) than in the same period last year (3%) and most of them came from Iraq, Iran and Syria.



85%
of new arrivals
were men and
boys

During this reporting period the children who are traveling alone made more than half of all children helped by our teams (58%) and came from Afghanistan (81%) and Syria (12%). While most of unaccompanied children were teenage boys, children under 13 years of age had almost the same proportion of girls and boys. The younger children most often travelled with their family members.

58% of registered children were travelling alone, coming mostly from Afghanistan and Syria

The highest number of refugees and migrants were again from Afghanistan (40%), followed by Syria (33%) and Iraq (9%). The others, in much smaller numbers, came from Pakistan, Iran, North African countries, Palestine and Egypt. Compared to the end of 2019, the numbers of those coming from Afghanistan and Syria increased while the numbers of Pakistani and Iraqi refugees and migrants decreased.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=2,924)

Afghanistan	40%
Syria	33%
Iraq	9%

Numbers of refugees and migrants coming from Afghanistan and Syria increased

MIGRATION ROUTES

Exit routes from Serbia were going through Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary and Romania (which is being increasingly used in the last 6 months). Almost all borders surrounding Serbia were well protected with physical barriers and strong police presence, except the one between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it the most likely site for migrants and refugees to try to leave Serbia irregularly.

According to our beneficiary data, the most widely used route for entering Serbia in the first quarter of 2020 was Kosovo*/ Albania route (51%) overtaking the entries from North Macedonia (44%). Plane arrivals made only 2% of all refugee and migrant arrivals in Serbia during the first quarter of 2020.



The most widely used route for entering Serbia in the first quarter of 2020 was Kosovo*/ Albania route (51%) overtaking the entries from North Macedonia (44%).



Photo: Velić Hasanbegović. Save the Children

BUSY ROUTE THROUGH BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The migration route through Bosnia and Herzegovina remains one of the main transit corridors in the region. According to UNHCR¹², there have been 5,730 new arrivals in BiH during January, February and March 2020. Even with the introduction of Covid-19 movement restrictions, and the reduced identification and registration capacities in the field, it is estimated that in March alone 2,742 new refugees and migrants came to BiH.¹³ Refugees and migrants were confined to reception centres with restricted movement, and no Covid-19 cases were recorded. Save the Children teams continued supporting refugees and migrants in the centres located in Bihac during the state of emergency. According to UNHCR there were more than 9,325 refugees and migrants, including 508 UASC, in the country at the end of March (in official and informal shelters).¹⁴

During the first three months of 2020 there have been 78 new asylum claims in BiH.

DEMOGRAPHY

At the moment, the fully disaggregated official data for the overall population of refugees and migrants in BiH is not available but the information on refugees and migrants who are accommodated in the official reception centres is available.

5,730
newly arrived
refugees and
migrants have
been identified
during the first
quarter of 2020

According to the IOM data on 6,260 persons accommodated in IOM-run reception centres at the end of March, 76% of all accommodated people were single adult men (from the overall proportion of 82% men), women made 3% of refugees and migrants in centres, children made 15%, with 472 UASC or 52% of all children.¹⁵

According to the UNHCR data on new arrivals the majority of new arrivals came from Pakistan (21%), Afghanistan (19%), Morocco (14%), Iraq (5%), followed by Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Bangladesh and Syria.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=5,730)

Pakistan	21%
Afghanistan	19%
Morocco	14%
Iraq	5%

Most new refugees and migrants came from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Morocco and Iraq

DEMOGRAPHY

Most of refugees and migrants identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina entered the country from south-east or 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 or in Tuzla in the north. From there, refugees and migrants head towards the western border with Croatia. The most attempts to cross the Croatian border have been recorded at the north-west part of the border in the area of Bihac and Velika Kladusa.

TESTIMONIES

REFUGEE CHILDREN CONTINUED THEIR EDUCATION DESPITE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

“I’m glad that we have this school in the camp,” said 10-years-old Sawa from Iraq, “I have learned many new things in the past few days. I wish I could go to the ‘big’ school again, but I know that because of the epidemic we shouldn’t go out.”*

Sawa* is one of the children who travelled the Western Balkans Route and arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, fleeing from conflicts and insecurities in their home countries. Out of over 9,000 refugees and migrants present in the country, the majority is situated in the north-west of the country in Una-Sana Canton. In 2018, Save the Children and UNICEF launched education programme for Sawa* and other refugee and migrant children to be able to continue their education. We supported schools to provide preparatory classes for children, engaged cultural mediators and school escorts to facilitate successful integration while also providing school meals, working materials and support with homework and other school tasks. In past two years, over 540 refugee and migrant children benefited from the programme.

However, due to the risk of COVID-19 spread in Bosnia and Herzegovina the schools needed to close. This measure specifically affected the lives of refugee and migrant children, since going to school, meeting new friends and spending time outside the refugee camp brought them joy and a sense of normalcy, which they so often missed.

“I miss my school, the schoolteacher and my friends from class”, said 11-years-old Zain from Iraq, “but I understand that this disease spreads from person to person and that we need to stay away from other people for a while.”*

Over 50,000 refugees and migrants arrived in BiH since it became a key transit country in the Balkans in 2018. In the past two years, Save the Children, in cooperation with UNICEF, supported over 15,000 children and adults, providing often life-saving protection services for the most vulnerable children,

education support and NFI’s, while advocating for the visibility and the rights of children on the move. The spread of COVID-19 put an additional pressure to already stretched governmental and humanitarian actors, challenging them to adapt to the new circumstances. Having in mind the importance of education, including for mental health and general wellbeing of refugee and migrant children in the difficult circumstances, supporting access to learning was seen as one of the priorities.

With schools closing down, the school activities in BiH transferred to television and online platforms. Instead of escorting children to school, the education team started supporting children in the centres to keep up with the classes online. Cultural mediators welcomed small groups of children in the child friendly space, supporting them to access video lessons and download their homework. Children did their homework in their rooms. The education team made sure that the homework was regularly sent and that children received feedback. To support the children who were, at the time of the lockdown, attending preparatory programme, the education team worked with the teachers who were providing tailor-made materials daily.

While keeping the distance is one of the key measures introduced to prevent the spread of the virus, this practice is particularly difficult to sustain in the refugee centres. Baran* (11) and Neda* (13), also from Afghanistan, laughed while stressing that they tried their best to do it, nevertheless: “When we meet, we don’t hug and kiss as we used to do before.”

“We are happy to have our place to continue learning,” they added. “But we miss the days when we were expecting the bus to take us to school, the time we spent in the classes, and we wish that everything would be as it used to be.”

**Names are changed in order to protect the identity of the beneficiaries*



MIGRATION FLOW

During the first three months of 2020, the Bulgarian police has registered 199 people as illegally entering the country.¹⁷ Although the decrease of new arrivals was in part affected by the Covid-19 measures, this number is lower than during the same period last year (360).

The number of refugees and migrants in official centres or at “external addresses”¹⁸ also dropped from 601 at the end of 2019 to 486 in March 2020. During the first quarter of 2020, 125 migrants were either deported or they left Bulgaria legally¹⁹. The discrepancy between the number of those who officially left the country, the number of new arrivals, and the number of those who stayed in the country, could indicate that the number of refugees and migrants that possibly left the country irregularly is 560.

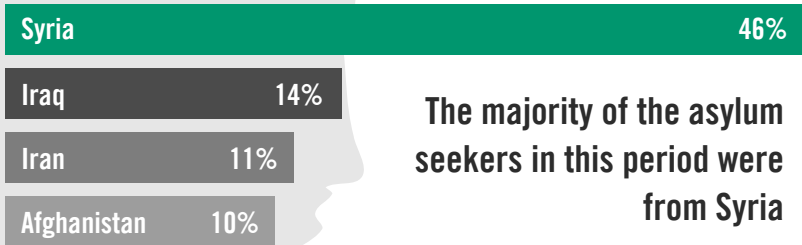
DEMOGRAPHY

The Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees reported that 199 persons applied for international protection during the first three months of 2020.²⁰ Those were mostly adults (75%, 118 men and 32 women) while 49 were children (25%, 31 boy and 18 girls).

199
people were
registered
illegally entering
the country

Most asylum seekers in this period came from Syria (46%), followed by Iraq (14%), Iran (11%) and Afghanistan (10%). Applicants from Syria had a more balanced number of men, women and children, while those from other countries had more adult men.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=360)



The majority of the asylum seekers in this period were from Syria

During this period 147 persons were granted international protection.

MIGRATION ROUTES – LEAVING THROUGH ROMANIA

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.

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub Data and Trends Analysis

Although there has usually been more balanced number of refugees and migrants coming in Bulgaria from Greece and Turkish borders, in the first 3 months of 2020 most refugees and migrants entered the country from Turkey (76%), followed by Greece (10%) and Serbia (7%).²¹



In the first 3 months of 2020 most refugees and migrants entered the country from Turkey (76%), followed by Greece (10%) and Serbia (7%)

Although in the last few years, refugees and migrants mostly left Bulgaria to enter Serbia, in the first 3 months of 2020, most of the officially registered departures happened at the Romanian border (67%) and only 8% towards Serbia. There are no additional data that could help us understand this sudden change, but BMDH is closely monitoring these trends.²²



Photo: Boško Dorđević, Save the Children

HIGHLY INVISIBLE IRREGULAR FLOW

Although the official government institutions and IOM recorded 5,372²³ new arrivals in North Macedonia during this period²⁴, UNHCR published that during this period there have been 9,050 new refugees and migrant cases recorded.²⁵ These numbers are slightly lower than 10,235 registered by the same organization in the previous period. The limited data collected by Save the Children and its partners only in Belgrade, Serbia show that at least 1,210 new beneficiaries during the last quarter of the year came from North Macedonia.

According to UNHCR, at the end of March there were only 233 refugees and migrants estimated to be present in North Macedonia²⁶.

5,372
officially
registered new
migrant and
refugee arrivals

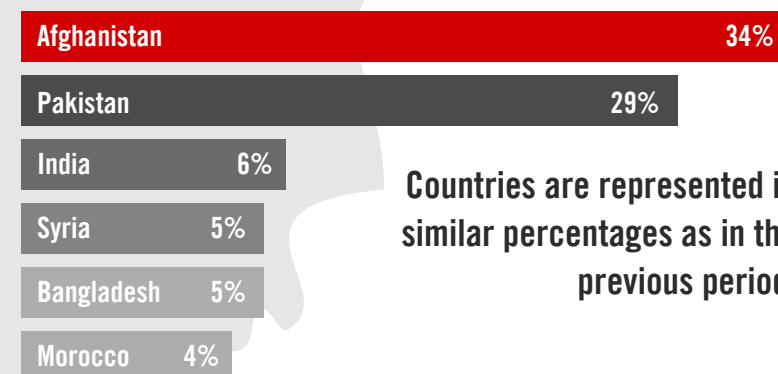
DEMOGRAPHY

According to UNHCR, 92% of newly arrived refugees and migrants were adults, and only 8% were children, with 663 boys and 30 girls. The majority of children were UASC (81% of all children) which is a significantly greater percentage than in the last reporting period (58% in the last quarter of 2019).²⁷

81% of all children entering North Macedonia in first three months were UASC

According to the same source, most of refugees and migrants came from Afghanistan (34%) Pakistan (29%), India (6%), Syria (5%), Bangladesh (5%) and Morocco (4%). Countries are represented in similar percentages as in the previous period.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=5,372)



Countries are represented in similar percentages as in the previous period.

MIGRATION ROUTES

The data sources²⁸ indicate that the majority of migrants and refugees entered North Macedonia from Greece (about 85%) and most of them continued their journey towards Serbia although a growing number is using the route through Kosovo* and Albania. The data by Save the Children in Serbia shows that North Macedonia is one of the two most used points of entry to Serbia.

INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT MIGRATION CORRIDOR

During the first three months of 2020 the migration route through Albania continued to be one of the most travelled routes in the western Balkans. According to UNHCR, 3,245 newly arrived refugees and migrants were identified in Albania during this period, which is slightly less than during the last three months of 2019 (a decrease of 18%).²⁹ This decrease is relatively small having in mind that Albania introduced a strict Covid-19 lockdown from early March and much earlier than the neighbouring countries.

The official institutions registered only 166 new migrants and refugees during this period³⁰.

DEMOGRAPHY

According to UNHCR data, out of 3,245 newly arrived refugees and migrants identified in Albania during the first three months of the year, 83% were adults, the majority of whom were men (88%). Most of the 563 children were boys (364 or 65%).

3,245
newly arrived migrants
and refugees were
detected during the
first quarter of 2020

Most of the new arrivals in the first quarter of the year were from Syria (39%), followed by Morocco (13%), Afghanistan (13%), Iraq (12%), Palestine (5%), Iran (4%) and Pakistan (4%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=3,245)

Syria	39%
Morocco	13%
Afghanistan	13%
Iraq	12%
Palestine	5%
Iran	4%
Pakistan	4%

Officially
registered new
arrivals came
mostly from Syria,
Morocco, Afghanistan
and Iraq



MIGRATION ROUTES

The migration route through Albania is becoming more important in the last years. According to the UNHCR data, the vast majority of refugees and migrants enter the country from the south by crossing the border with Greece. Even though a large number of identified new arrivals have applied for international protection in Albania, but according to field our data, most of them continued their journey relatively fast. They moved either north towards Montenegro, crossing the border in the vicinity of Lake Skadar, or towards Kosovo*. UNHCR data on arrivals to Kosovo* suggests that the majority of refugees and migrants came directly from Albania.



IN TRANSIT

Even though Kosovo* was not a major part of the Balkans migration corridor in the previous years, this has changed over the last year. In the first three months of 2020 most refugees and migrants who entered Serbia came from Kosovo*. According to the official data³¹, 1,160 persons applied for asylum in Kosovo* during this period which is similar to the numbers from the last quarter of 2019. UNHCR reported 672 newly arrived refugees and migrants during this quarter and 310 refugees and migrants in Kosovo* at the end of March.

672
officially
registered new
arrivals

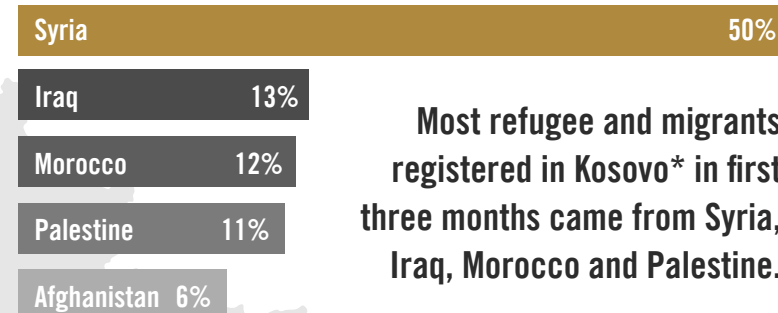
DEMOGRAPHY

This data reported by UNHCR about 672 newly arrived refugees and migrants can provide an insight into demographic structure of refugees and migrants transiting Kosovo*. Adults made 79% of all migrants and most of adults (93%) were male. UNHCR registered 108 children (16%), including 85 boys and 23 girls, with only 2 children registered as unaccompanied.

78% of children entering Kosovo* in first three months were boys

50% of all refugees and migrants were Syrians, followed by Iraq (13%), Morocco (12%) and Palestine (11%). Interestingly, Afghan refugees and migrants made only (6%) of all new arrivals.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=672)



Most refugee and migrants registered in Kosovo* in first three months came from Syria, Iraq, Morocco and Palestine.

MIGRATION ROUTES

As in the other Balkans countries, many refugees and migrants only transit through Kosovo* on their journey towards western and northern Europe. Interestingly, the UNHCR data³² suggests that 93% of migrants came to Kosovo* through Albania.

93%
of migrants came to
Kosovo* through
Albania

There is no official data on migration routes through Kosovo* or entry and exit points. However, according to Save the Children's field data from Serbia, refugees and migrants often enter Kosovo* from the east, namely from North Macedonia and move towards Serbia or Montenegro.

TRANSITING THROUGH ROMANIA

Although Romania has been an important transit point of the Balkans migration route in the last couple of years, the recent data show that its importance has risen even more. Although there have been slightly less new arrivals compared to the last quarter of 2020, the numbers are unprecedentedly high for this part of the year – UNHCR recorded 1,095 new applications for international protection. As a comparison, 349 applications were recorded in the first quarter of 2019, or three times less than in 2020.

1,095
migrants and
refugees applied for
international
protection

At the end of March, 395 refugees, migrants and asylum seekers were accommodated in state-run reception centres in Romania (mostly Bucharest, Radauti and Somcuta Mare, but also Galati, Timisoara and Giurgiu, with the highest pressure on Timisoara centre because of its proximity to the Serbian border and the capacity to accommodate only 50 migrants).³³ This is a small decrease from 460 persons reported in Romania at the end of 2019.³⁴

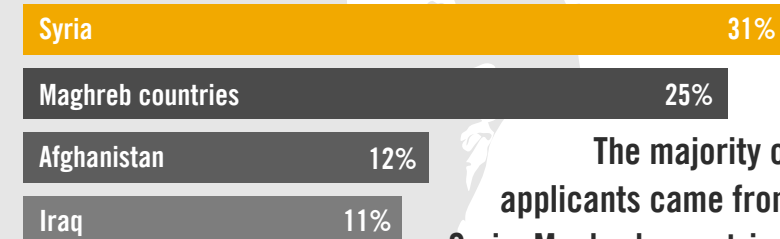
Since the start of COVID-19 measures and the introduction of the state of emergency in Romania, the number of asylum requests have dropped, even though the authorities declared that the borders would stay opened for those who seek international protection. The reception centres became closed centres with limited freedom of movement for the beneficiaries.

According to the field data and insights from Save the Children's field teams, the length of stay for refugees and migrants in Romania varies, but it is the shortest for single men. Families choose to stay longer than single adults who often leave the country after days or several weeks.

DEMOGRAPHY

During the first quarter of 2020, Romanian officials registered 1,095 asylum applications. According to the Immigration Office unofficial data³⁵, 162 applications concerned children (15%) which is a similar to the share of children in the previous periods. The majority of applicants came from Syria (31%) followed by Afghanistan (12%) and Iraq (11%). 25% of new protection applicants came from Maghreb countries.

Applicants for international protection by country of origin (N=1,095)



The majority of
applicants came from
Syria, Maghreb countries,
Afghanistan and Iraq

The official Immigration Office data shows that 46% of the newly arrived children were unaccompanied or separated, and they were most often from Afghanistan (57%) and Syria (30%).

46% of the newly arrived children
were unaccompanied or
separated

MIGRATION ROUTES

According to the data from the field, the main point of entry for refugees and migrants in Romania was the border with Serbia (Moldova Veche, Oravita and Moravita points) and about 88% of registered cases came from this direction. As in the other Balkans countries, refugees and migrants see Romania as a transit country on their journey towards Western Europe and the most frequent exit point from the country is the border with Hungary - Nadlac, Turnu, Salonta, Curtici, Bors, Girisu de Cris (Arad and Bihor county).



Photo: Tatjana Ristić, Save the Children

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The official closure of borders, and the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016, reduced the number of refugees and 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 Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia are struggling to provide adequate support to new arrivals. There is a lack of reliable data on migration trends and there are many 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.

While the situation in Greece receives relatively good media coverage, the migration flows through the 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 focuses 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, other data used for this purpose includes publicly available data from reports, dashboards, publications, policies and articles, and information from other relevant stakeholders which are collected and analyzed. The initiative is and will remain to be open and encouraging for the exchange of information, cooperation and partnership with all relevant actors.

Data processing is done in line with national and international regulations and standards on protection of personal data.

Geographical Scope

We intend to cover the Balkans route which includes the territories of Greece, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Hungary.

The Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub (BMDH) has been established in 2018 in Belgrade, Serbia, in order to ensure visibility and continual support for children on the move in the Balkans. Drawing from the experience gained in responding to the refugee and migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016, BMDH documents good practices, improves learning and knowledge sharing and promotes emergency preparedness. The Hub monitors trends in migrations across the Balkans and conducts research in particular issues related to mixed migrations, issuing regular reports. By developing partnerships in countries along the Balkans route and liaising with other stakeholders working with children on the move, BMDH runs and promotes a robust advocacy for children ensuring that their needs are put at the forefront. Together with Save the Children's advocacy offices, BMDH is implementing regional advocacy initiatives targeting EU. The Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub works within Save the Children North West Balkans CO.

Find our Data and Trend Analysis and other reports and publications at:

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net>

keyword: **BMDH**

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ENDNOTES

¹ This estimate was based on the official data on new entries in Greece, in Bulgaria via Turkish border and in Serbia by plane.

² Source: UNHCR, Fact Sheet Greece [March 2019](#)

³ 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 \(29/03/2020\)](#)

⁴ Source: Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece ([March 2020](#))

⁵ Since no UNHCR data on Sea arrivals for the month of March are available in dashboard format, some of the data on sea arrivals are represented as approximations based on January-April 2020 data which are available (there have been only 39 new arrivals on Greek islands in April making these approximations plausible).

⁶ End of April

⁷ Since there are no available similar information for period from January to March 2020, we are using Jan-Apr data having in mind that officials recorded only 39 new arrivals to Greece during the month of April.

⁸ Source: UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe: Europe situation data and trends ([April 2020](#))

⁹ Source: UNHCR Serbia Update [March 2020](#)

¹⁰ Source: UNHCR Serbia Snapshot – [March 2020](#)

¹¹ Source: UNHCR Serbia Update [March 2020](#)

¹² Source: UNHCR, [Western Balkans mixed movements report](#)

¹³ Source: UNHCR Western Balkans - Refugees, asylum-seekers and other mixed movements, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/75991>

¹⁴ Source: UNHCR Western Balkans - Refugees, asylum-seekers and other mixed movements, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/75991>

¹⁵ Source: Interagency response to mixed movement [March 2020](#)

¹⁶ Source: UNHCR Western Balkans New Arrivals Tracking, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/103?sv=41&geo=0>

¹⁷ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [March 2020](#).

¹⁸ “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

¹⁹ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [March 2020](#).

²⁰ Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, Актуална информация, [March 2020](#)

²¹ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [March 2020](#).

²² Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [March 2020](#).

²³ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [January-March 2020](#)

²⁴ This same source cited 615 migrants in the last quarter of 2019 (publication from the end of 2019) and now cites 5,072 for the same period. Since IOM data we used for the previous report changed and are not referable, we refrained of making data comparisons.

²⁵ Source: UNHCR, [Western Balkans mixed movements report](#)

²⁶ Source: UNHCR Western Balkans - Refugees, asylum-seekers and other mixed movements, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/75991>

²⁷ Source: UNHCR, [Western Balkans mixed movements report](#)

²⁸ Source: UNHCR, [Western Balkans mixed movements report](#)

²⁹ Source: UNHCR - [Mixed movements report](#)

³⁰ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [January-March 2020](#)

³¹ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [January-March 2020](#)

³² Source: UNHCR, [Western Balkans mixed movements report](#)

³³ Unofficial data collected in field by Save the Children Romania (Salvati Copiii) and UNHCR

³⁴ Source: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of Available Data and Information for [December 2018](#)

³⁵ Obtained through Save the Children Romania (Salvati Copiii)



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