FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

Irregular migration and smuggling of migrants along the Balkan route

2011–2017

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June 2019

- The research report identifies, documents and analyses patterns and characteristics of irregular migration in thirteen states along the so-called Balkan route in the period from 2011 to 2017. These states are Albania, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia.

- Each country report focuses on the movement of irregular migrants, including refugee flows, smuggling activities, methods of migration, and the status of migrants in their host countries.

- The research demonstrates that irregular migration and smuggling of migrants occurs on a significant scale throughout the region. While migration along the Balkan route is anything but a new phenomenon, the issue remains pressing for years to come.

- While irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants affects all countries in the region, the levels and characteristics of these phenomena vary strongly. By numbers, Greece, FYR Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Serbia, and Hungary have been most affected by irregular migrants flows for much of the 2011–2017 period. The main route from Turkey to Western Europe used by irregular migrants and migrant smugglers leads through these countries; irregular movements via neighbouring states and along other routes across the Balkans have been small by comparison.

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I INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

I.1 Topic

This research report identifies, documents, and analyses the patterns and characteristics, levels and developments of irregular migration, including refugee flows and the smuggling of migrants, in thirteen states along the so-called Balkan Route in Southeastern Europe. The project documents the ways in which Albania, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia experienced irregular migration, and the challenges these countries faced in the period from 2011 to 2017.

The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed, country-by-country account, in order to shed light on the events and experiences of that period, and to investigate and displace some of the myths and misrepresentations associated with irregular migration in this region. The research seeks to provide the fullest possible picture of these phenomena, to collate and analyse relevant data and documentation, to identify information and knowledge gaps, to develop an evidence base against which existing measures to prevent and combat irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants in this region can be assessed, and on which policy recommendations can be developed.

I.2 Background and context

I.2.1 Irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants

Irregular migration, refugee movements, and the smuggling of migrants have emerged as significant and complex issues in the domains of international relations, human rights, national politics, and criminal justice. Globally, these topics are the subject of fierce and controversial debate; they polarise opinions, and feature prominently in political contests and public debate. Few topics have gained as much publicity and media attention in recent years.

The countries of Southeastern Europe (collectively referred to as 'the Balkans') have been one of the main focal points of irregular migration and of national and international efforts to control, contain and stop the flow of irregular migrants, many of them refugees, into the European Union (EU). It is estimated that in 2015 alone over one million people migrated irregularly to the EU along routes leading through the countries of Southeast Europe. Many countries have responded to this surge by tightening border controls, building fences and other border fortifications, denying entry to asylum seekers through the use of force, and restricting the assistance afforded to refugees.

Such measures are, however, incapable of stopping international migration and the flow of refugees. At best they may redirect migration routes and deter some migrants, or at worst push them into the hands of smugglers. Recent years have witnessed a surge in migrant-smuggling activities in Southeastern Europe as irregular migrants, many of them refugees fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East and South Asia, have come to rely on smugglers to flee persecution and reach those destinations where they seek protection. Migrant smugglers exploit differences in national laws to their advantage. They create illegal avenues of migration by transporting people in a clandestine manner and/or by supplying fraudulent documents to those willing or forced to migrate. Smuggled migrants are vulnerable to life-threatening risks and exploitation, while the huge profits generated by those involved in migrant smuggling fuel corruption and empower organised crime.

The countries most affected by irregular migration flows through the Balkans have responded in many different ways to the challenges associated with managing the effects of large-scale displacement, transit migration, and of the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers. Differences in opinion about how best to respond to the influx of irregular migrants, to stop the smuggling of migrants, and to protect the rights of refugees and other migrants, currently stymie concerted action by the EU and the development of common asylum and migration policies.

I.2.2 Migrant smuggling routes in Southeastern Europe

The term 'Western Balkan route' is widely used by law enforcement and immigration authorities and in the literature to describe irregular migration from Turkey to Greece, through FYR Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Serbia, Hungary or via Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, to Austria, Germany and other parts of Western Europe. The term 'Eastern Balkan route' is often used to describe irregular migration that leads from Turkey to Bulgaria (sometimes via Greece) and then via Romania or Serbia to Hungary and on to Austria. This route is less established and less predictable than the Western Balkan routes. In this report, the Western and Eastern Balkan routes, including all of their variations, are collectively referred to as the Balkan route.

Smuggling along the Balkan route usually involves land-based means of transport such as private vehicles or trucks, though some borders may also be crossed on foot or by train. The route is usually travelled in multiple stages, and most migrants use several smugglers and several smuggling methods as they make their way along this route. Generally, covert smuggling methods such as hiding in cars or trucks are only employed when smuggled migrants want to cross borders undetected, or want to reach particular destinations further afield and not run the risk of being returned to their country of origin, to the country in which they first entered the EU, or to another transit country. Smuggling by air involves commercial flights to airports in Balkan countries from third countries, flights within the region, and flights originating in the Balkans destined for airports in Western Europe. Smuggling by sea predominantly involves the use of private vessels departing from Turkey's west coast to the Greek islands, a route that is referred to by some sources as the Eastern Mediterranean route. In some cases, smuggling by sea involves departures from Turkey to Bulgaria and departures from Albania to Italy.

The Balkan route gained particular prominence in 2015, when several hundred thousand migrants, most of them asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, moved along this route to Western Europe. One of the reasons for the great popularity of the Western Balkan route in particular during this period was the fact that migrants could travel with relative ease, and without needing to employ smugglers. The large number of migrants who were able to move along this route to Western Europe to apply for asylum also encouraged several other nationalities to travel to Greece and then continue along the Western Balkan route where, up until late 2015, borders remained relatively open. Starting in September 2015, countries in the region gradually adopted measures to close borders, in some cases fortifying them with walls and fences, and denying entry to irregular migrants. This, in turn, fuelled demand for the services offered by smugglers, and displaced irregular migration to other, more dangerous routes.

I.3 Purpose and goals

The purpose of this report is to document and critically reflect on the flow of irregular migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, along the Balkan route to Europe, then to examine the methods of their migration, the levels and characteristics of migrant-smuggling, and the profiles of migrants and smugglers.

The research seeks to provide the fullest possible picture of how irregular migration in this region manifests itself, to collate and analyse relevant open-source data and documentation, and to identify information and knowledge gaps. One of the main objectives of this research is to develop an evidence base that informs public debate and policy making on this contentious topic, against which existing measures to prevent and combat irregular migration in the affected countries can be assessed.

I.4 Scope

This report systematically examines the levels and characteristics of irregular migration in thirteen Southeast-European states situated along the Balkan route which is commonly used by irregular migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and in turn migrant smugglers, and which connects

Western Asia to Central Europe. These countries — comprising Albania, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia —have been at the centre of irregular migration flows to Europe and have been the focus of national and international measures to close borders, deny entry to irregular migrants, and stop the smuggling of migrants. Several of these states have also attracted attention through the adoption of restrictive border measures and the harsh treatment of irregular migrants and refugees in their territories.

The focus of this report is on the movement of irregular migrants into and through these countries, the methods of their migration, and their status in the host countries. This includes persons seeking asylum and applying for refugee status or complementary protection through official channels, as well as persons who migrate covertly and do not engage national or interna-

Figure 1: Southeast-Europe

tional protection systems. The role of local communities and social networks, as well as criminal elements assisting irregular migrants by facilitating their illegal entry and, in some cases, exploiting irregular migrants are also be examined..

I.5 Structure

This report is divided into fifteen chapters, comprising this introduction (Chapter I), thirteen chapters examining each of the countries along the Balkan route (Chapter II–XIV), and a concluding chapter (Chapter XV) summarising the main findings and making observations for further policy development, cooperation, and research in this field.

Each country covered by this report is examined using a standard template and set criteria. The information in each country chapter is presented using the following categories and headings:

1. Situational overview
2. Levels and characteristics of irregular migration
3. Profile of irregular migrants
4. Smuggling of migrants

I.6 Terminology

Wherever possible, this report adopts terminology that is consistent with international law and academic standards, as well as being gender-neutral and non-discriminatory.

The term 'smuggling of migrants' adopts the definition in Article 3(a) of the United Nations (UN) *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air*[1] supplementing the *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.[2] It refers to 'the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident'. In some instances, the term 'migrant smuggling' is used for better readability.

Article 3(b) of the UN *Smuggling of Migrants Protocol* defines 'illegal entry' to mean 'crossing borders without complying with the necessary requirements for legal entry into the receiving State'. Accordingly, the term 'illegal border crossing' is used throughout the report to refer specifically to situations in which persons cross an international border without complying with the necessary legal requirements.

The term 'refugee' is used in accordance with the definition in the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* as amended by the *Protocol relating the Status of Refugees*.[3] Refugee refers to a person who:

> owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country.[4]

The term 'asylum seeker' is not defined in international law. It broadly refers to persons seeking protection but who have yet to reach the place where they can seek protection, or whose request for asylum has yet to be decided. This report adopts the working definition used by the International Organization for Migration (IOM):

> Asylum seeker — A person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In case of a negative decision, the person must leave the country and may be expelled, as may any non-national in an irregular or unlawful situation, unless permission to stay is provided on humanitarian or other related grounds.[5]

This report uses the term 'migrant' in accordance with the terminology of IOM, the International Organisation for Migration. IOM defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2)

whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.[6]

The terms 'irregular migration' and 'irregular migrant' are not defined in international law. They are broadly used in the literature to describe any type of relocation, usually across international borders, that is not in conformity with existing migration laws and regulations in the countries of origin, transit or destination. IOM defines the term as 'movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries' and further notes:

> There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. From the perspective of destination countries, it is entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations. From the perspective of the sending country, the irregularity is seen for example in cases where a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document, or does not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country.[7]

I.7 Methodology and source material

The research for this project was conducted through the collection and analysis of open-source material, including primary sources, such as reported cases and official data collections and reports, as well as secondary sources prepared by international organisations, academic scholars and other experts, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and selected media reports from major international news outlets.

The process of sourcing the literature for this study consisted of two phases: First, a comprehensive literature search was undertaken using online library database aggregators. This enables the searching of over 1,000 research databases containing journal articles, books, online resources and reports authored by government agencies, international and non-governmental organisations. The targets of this search were resources dating from 1 January 2011 to 31 January 2017, and Boolean operators were used to filter the results. The second phase involved a systematic review of the search results in order to trim this body of literature to a smaller number of higher-quality sources. To accomplish this, each individual result was checked for relevance. The information retrieved from these sources was sorted into a predetermined structure developed to systematically document data relating to illegal entry, the smuggling of migrants, refugee and asylum seekers, the profile and status of smuggled migrants, the methods of irregular migration, the dangers to and exploitation of irregular migrants, the treatment of irregular migrants, and the protection of their rights, including rights to government assistance.

The scope, objectives, and methodology of this research are deliberately ambitious, although there are many limitations to researching, documenting, and analysing irregular migration in Southeastern Europe. The research also revealed many facets and dimensions to this phenomenon which are not adequately researched or documented, and demonstrated where the available information is out of date, incomplete, questionable, or unreliable. Obstacles, concerns and limitations encountered during research are clearly marked throughout the report and reiterated in the concluding sections so that future research can address these specific issues.

Research for this project was conducted between 1 September 2017 and 11 July 2018 at locations in Brisbane, Australia; Budapest, Hungary; and Vienna, Austria.

Notes

1 Opened for signature 15 December 2000, 2241 UNTS 507 [hereinafter *Smuggling of Migrants Protocol*].

2 Opened for signature 15 December 2000, 2225 UNTS 209.

3 *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, opened for signature 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 150 (entered into force 22 April 1954) [hereinafter *Refugee Convention*]; *Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, opened for signature 31 January 1967, 606 UNTS 267 (entered into force 4 October 1967) [hereinafter *Refugee Protocol*].

4 *Refugee Convention*, Art 1A(2) as amended by the *Refugee Protocol*.

5 IOM, 'Key Migration Terms' (2011).

6 IOM, 'Key Migration Terms' (2011).

7 IOM, 'Key Migration Terms' (2011).

II GREECE

II.1 Overview

Greece marks the first entry point into Europe for irregular migrants travelling across the Balkans to Western Europe. Several routes used by irregular migrants and migrant smugglers start in Greece, including the Western Balkan route that leads across the border to FYR Macedonia and on to Serbia, Hungary, Croatia or Slovenia; the Eastern Balkan route that leads from Greece to Bulgaria and on through Romania or Serbia to Hungary; and various sub-routes that take migrants via Albania to Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Croatia.

Greece has experienced exceptionally high levels of irregular migration in recent years. Most of this flow has involved refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as migrants from Pakistan and other countries of origin in South Asia, the Middle East, or North Africa who travel via Turkey to Greece. Illegal border crossings from Turkey to Greece occur across the land border and across the Aegean Sea that separates the two countries. Developments over the last decade clearly show that the popularity of either route depends on the obstacles and controls that are instituted to stop irregular arrivals: When sea patrols were stepped up, irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants along the land route through the north of Greece became more popular. Many migrants crossed the Evros River, which runs along most of the land border between Greece and Turkey. When special operations were instigated, fences built, and border controls stepped up to reduce crossings by land, migrants and smugglers shifted to seaborne methods instead, departing from Turkey's east coast to make the relatively short journey to one of the Greek Islands. In 2015, several hundred thousand irregular migrants crossed from Turkey to Greece by sea, many facilitated by smugglers who set up operations in response to the growing demand for their services. Despite the relatively short distance between the two countries, hundreds of migrants have drowned in bad weather or on unseaworthy vessels.

The measures adopted in 2016 by other countries in Western Europe and along the Western Balkan route, along with an agreement reached between the European Union (EU) and the Government of Turkey to allow the return of irregular migrants from Greece to Turkey in certain circumstances, led to a reduction of irregular arrivals in 2016 and 2017. It also meant that more migrants became stranded in Greece or were returned to Greece from countries such as FYR Macedonia and Serbia, and that more migrants who originally sought to reach Western Europe applied for asylum in Greece in order to remain in the EU. The large number of irregular migrants entering Greece, transiting through the country or remaining there has placed great strain on a country that has also had to struggle with a serious financial downturn and economic crisis in recent years.

The available information about irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants in Greece is far greater than for the other countries examined in this report. The following sections provide a level of insight and reveal details that are not documented—and in some cases are not known—for most other Balkan countries.

II.2 Levels and characteristics

II.2.1 Numbers

II.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Overview

For the past ten years or more, Greece has witnessed among the highest numbers of irregular migrant arrivals of any European country, and perhaps one of the highest in the world. Numbers relating to illegal entry, especially from neighbouring Turkey, have been very high for some time, but peaked between July 2015 and February 2016 when large numbers of people travelled by sea from Turkey's west coast to the Greek islands in the eastern Aegean.

Developments

After peaking at 146,337 in 2008, the number of detected irregular arrivals dropped significantly

until 2013.[1] Data from the Greek Ministry of Public Order & Citizen Protection, shown in Figure 2 below, summarise this trend.

Figure 2: Apprehensions of irregular persons (border and island), 2011–30 September 2013[2]

year	total apprehensions
2008	146,337
2009	126,145
2010	132,524
2011	99,368
2012	70,227
2013 (to 30 September)	35,719

Data relating to irregular arrivals published by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, is somewhat higher than the numbers shown in Figure 2 above. According to Frontex, the number of irregular migrant arrivals rose from 76,697 persons in the first nine months of 2010 to 113,844 over the same period one year later.[3] In response to the rise of irregular migration across the land-border to Turkey, Greek authorities launched 'Operation Aspida' (Operation Shield) in mid-August 2012, which led to a reduction in the overall number of arrivals but also displaced irregular migration to the sea route from Turkey to Greece.[4]

The highest numbers of irregular migrant arrivals in Greece, most of them by boat, were recorded in October and November 2015 with 212,168 and 151,716 persons respectively.[5] Data collected by IOM, shown in Figure 3 below, reveals a 100-fold increase from January to September 2015. Nearly 860,000 migrants are believed to have arrived irregularly in Greece in 2015, most of them by boat from Turkey.[6]

Figure 3: Migrant arrivals Greece, 2015–2017 (IOM)[7]

	total	land arrivals	sea arrivals
Jan 2015	1,505	33	1,472
Feb 2015	2,563	83	2,480
Mar 2015	6,785	202	6,583
Apr 2015	12,029	156	11,873
May 2015	18,057	168	17,889
June 2015	31,503	185	31,318
July 2015	55,103	204	54,899
Aug 2015	108,635	792	107,843
Sep 2015	147,913	274	147,639
Oct 2015	212,168	505	211,663
Nov 2015	151,716	467	151,249
Dec 2015	109,386	644	108,742
2015 total	**857,363**	**3,713**	**853,650**
Jan 2016	67,954	539	67,415
Feb 2016	57,540	547	57,066
Mar 2016	27,123	152	26,971
Apr 2016	3,934	284	3,650
May 2016	1,910	189	1,721
June 2016	1,654	100	1,554
July 2016	2,047	127	1,920
Aug 2016	3,789	249	3,540
Sep 2016	3,256	204	3,052
Oct 2016	3,570	492	3,078
Nov 2016	2,215	283	1,932
Dec 2016	1,914	199	1,715
2016 total	**176,906**	**3,292**	**173,614**
Jan 2017	1,520	130	1,390
Feb 2017	1,185	161	1,024
Mar 2017	1,702	148	1,554
Apr 2017	1,364	194	1,170
May 2017	2,246	171	2,075
June 2017	2,662	753	1,909
July 2017	2,615	332	2,283
Aug 2017	4,240	575	3,665
Sep 2017	5,799	1,195	4,604
Oct 2017	5,007	789	4,218
Nov 2017	3,867	738	3,129
Dec 2017	2,845	365	2,480
2017 total	**35,052**	**5,551**	**29,501**

Starting in December 2015, and continuing to an even greater extent in the first six months of 2016, the number of irregular arrivals decreased significantly, to less than 2,000 per month. The decline since March 2016 is widely attributed to the 'EU–Turkey Statement' of 20 March 2016, in which Turkey agreed to house refugees in return for large financial incentives.[8] Irregular arrivals started to increase again in the second half of 2017, climbing to 5,799 arrivals in the month of September alone.

Despite the high number of irregular migrant arrivals recorded in Greece in recent years, it appears that few people are denied entry at the border. Figure 4 below shows that the number of refusals of entry to non-EU citizens dropped significant from 2011 to 2013 and then remained steady until 2015. With the increased measures introduced in 2016 to control Greece's external border, refusals tripled to 18,145. The vast majority of these refusals, about 95%, were made at the Greece's land border. By comparison, refusals at the sea border were very rare in 2016.

Figure 4: Non-EU citizens refused entry, Greece 2011–2016 (Eurostat)[9]

	Total	land border		air border		sea border	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
2011	11,160	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a	n.a.
2012	9,415	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a	n.a.
2013	6,995	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a	n.a.
2014	6,445	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a	n.a.
2015	6,890	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a	n.a.
2016	18,145	17,230	95.0%	640	3.5%	275	1.5%

II.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

The higher number of irregular migrants entering Greece corresponds to the high number of foreigners found to be staying in Greece illegally. As shown in Figure 5 below, their number peaked at 911,470 in 2015. The annual number of foreigners found to be staying in Greece illegally does not seem to follow a particular trend, varying greatly between different years, though the figures broadly correspond with the number of people entering Greece illegally.

Figure 5: Third country nationals found to be illegally present, Greece 2011–2016 (Eurostat)[10]

	Total
2011	88,140
2012	72,240
2013	42,615
2014	73,760
2015	911,470
2016	204,820

Some sources estimate the number of unregistered (or undocumented) foreigners residing in Greece to be much higher. A 2013 article, for instance, suggests that in 2011 up to 440,000 people, or 4% of the total population of Greece, might have been irregular migrants.[11] Another publication by the same author from the same year states that in 2011, 'the absolute number of undocumented migrants in Greece (including irregular entrants, rejected asylum seekers, visa overstayers and individuals whose temporary permits were not renewed) was approximately 390,000'.[12] Other sources similarly estimate that 390,000 undocumented migrants resided in Greece in 2011, rising to 470,000 in 2013.[13]

II.2.2 Entry points

Irregular entry into Greece occurs mostly from Turkey and, to a lesser extent, from Albania. The latter is largely associated with the regional, circular migration of Albanian nationals. In 2017, some irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to Greece was also observed following enhanced

border control activities in the Western Balkans, which prevented onward migration from FYR Macedonia to Western Europe. In recent years, the non-regional flow of migrants through Turkey has vastly outweighed the number of migrants entering Greece irregularly across all other borders. Irregular arrivals from Turkey are associated with non-regional migrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Arrivals from Turkey may be further divided into entry across the land border and arrivals from Turkey by sea. Figure 6 below shows the number of illegal border crossings for the 2011–2017 period as reported by Frontex. Irregular arrivals from Turkey and Albania are discussed separately in the following sections.

Figure 6: Illegal border crossings into Greece, 2011–2015 (Frontex) [14]

	Illegal border crossings from Turkey to Greece		**Illegal border crossings from Albania to Greece**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – 1st quarter	6,504	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – 2nd quarter	11,137	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – total	**55,630**	**3%**	**5,269** **6,472***	**–85%**
2012 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,475	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,050	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**8,983**	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,142	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**9,829**	**9%**
2015 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,540	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	3,202	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**8,932**	**1%**

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

II.2.2.1 From Turkey

The predominant country of departure for irregular entry into Greece is Turkey. There are two main routes from Turkey into Greece. One route leads across the 200 kilometre-long land border between the two countries. The other involves travel by sea from Turkey's west coast to the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, predominantly Lesbos, Chios, and Kos. Over the past fifteen years the favoured route has switched between these two alternatives several times, depending on the ease of crossing the border. From 2001 to 2009, most irregular movements occurred across the Aegean Sea until Frontex increased surveillance in this area to stop such activities.[15] From early 2010 arrivals across the land border began to increase, overtaking arrivals at the sea border in the first quarter of that year.[16] Detections along the land route increased by 372% from 2009 to 2010.[17]

Throughout 2010, the vast majority of detections of irregular migrants entering Greece occurred at the land border with Turkey. This occurred in spite of the several EU border enforcement operations to reduce illegal arrivals from Turkey which commenced in November 2010 ('Operation RABIT') and March 2011 ('Operation Poseidon Land').[18] Most migrants entered Greece by crossing the River Evros that marks much of the land border between the two countries.[19] Between the first and second quarters of 2011, the number of illegal border-crossings detected increased from 6,057 to 10,582.[20] This number further increased to 18,509 detections in the third quarter of 2011.[21] In October 2011 the single highest number of detections of any month from 2009 to 2014 was recorded.[22] There has been some debate about whether the higher number of detections in this period show that the border operations had the desired effect of apprehending more irregular migrants, or whether it demonstrates the resilience of irregular migrants and the networks that assist irregular migrants trying to reach Greece.[23] According to several sources, some 54,000 to 57,000 people were detected attempting to enter Greece in 2011 across the land border to Turkey.[24] In the same year, only about 1,000 people were detected crossing illegally from Turkey to Greece by sea.[25]

Until 2012, the land route remained the preferred route for entry into Greece from Turkey, though the combined effect of further border control operations (such as 'Aspida' and 'Xenios Zeus') meant that the number of persons seeking to cross the land border illegally started to decline.[26] Operation Aspida sought to increase the surveillance and response capacity at the border, and to reduce the number of migrants attempting entry. It involved the deployment of 1,881 additional Greek police officers, as well as additional technical equipment at the border with Turkey.[27] Operation Xenios Zeus targeted irregular migrants in Athens and other urban areas of Greece.[28] Whereas more than 2,000 people had been detected attempting entry into Greece via the land border in the first week of August 2012, fewer than ten people per week were detected attempting entry in October 2012.[29] Detections at the land border remained negligible for the remainder of the year.[30] According to Greek authorities, 30,433 irregular migrants were detected attempting to enter from Turkey by land in 2012;[31] while other sources show a smaller decrease to 47,088.[32] Further contributing to the drop in irregular land arrivals from the Turkey was the construction of a fence along the portion of the shared border between Kastanies and Nea Vyssa not bounded by the Evros River. This was completed in December 2012.[33]

The sharp reduction in the number of irregular migrants using the land route was followed by an increase in the number of irregular migrants arriving by sea.[34] Irregular arrivals from Turkey by sea more than doubled in the third quarter of 2012, and rose further in the fourth quarter of 2012.[35] Over 3,600 illegal border crossing by sea were detected in 2012.[36]

Since late 2012, the route across the Aegean Sea has remained the most common route for entry into Greece. The extent of Greece's coastline, its many islands, and the proximity of these islands to Turkey, make policing very difficult. As a consequence, reported apprehensions do not

necessarily reflect the actual number of migrants crossing along this route. Increases or decreases in detections along this route are influenced not only by changes in the number of migrants using the route, but also changes to the enforcement activities of authorities along the border.[37] Figure 7 below shows how the majority of detected illegal border crossings from Turkey to Greece shifted from the land to the sea route during the 2011–2017 period.

Figure 7: Illegal border crossings into Greece from Turkey, separated by land and sea borders, 2011–2016 (Frontex) [38]

	Illegal border crossings from Turkey to Greece by land		**Illegal border crossings from Turkey to Greece by sea**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – 1st quarter	6,057	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – 2nd quarter	10,582 10,464*	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – 3rd quarter	18,509	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	7,650	29%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	13,145	26%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**1,910**	**73%**	**44,051**	**272%**
2015 – 1st quarter	318	n.a.	12,645	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	509	n.a.	65,996	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	1,388	n.a.	314,289	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	1,624	n.a.	480,008	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	**102%**	n.a.	**1,915%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a.	**–19%**	n.a.	**–80%**

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

Detections at Greece's land border with Turkey remained low throughout 2013;[39] only about 1,100 illegal border crossing by land were recorded during this year.[40] Irregular arrivals by sea, on the other hand, increased substantially in 2013, to a total of 11,447 arrivals by year's end, three times the number of arrivals in 2012.[41]

In 2014, the number of illegal border crossing from Turkey to Greece increased fourfold. Depending on the source, between 42,651 and 44,051 irregular migrants arrived by sea during that year.[42] Almost 20,000 migrants were detected attempting illegal entry in the eastern Aegean Sea in the third quarter of 2014 alone.[43] Most of these arrivals were Syrian nationals fleeing the civil war, who had travel across Turkey or had stayed there for some time after leaving Syria. Also contributing to the much higher numbers of sea arrivals was the increased surveillance of the land borders between Turkey and Greece, as well as Turkey and Bulgaria.[44] Due to the growing number of migrants seeking to reach Greece, illegal border crossings by land from Turkey to Greece nevertheless rose by 73% to 1,910 in 2014.[45]

The year 2015, as has been widely reported, saw the highest number of irregular arrivals from Turkey to Greece by sea. According to UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 856,723 persons were detected in 2015.[46] Nearly half of these arrivals occurred on the island of Lesbos, which lies about 15 kilometres west of the Turkish coast.[47] Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos also witnessed large numbers of boat arrivals. Border control agencies were quickly overwhelmed by the unprecedented number of arrivals, and it is likely that a considerable number of irregular sea arrivals from Turkey remained undetected. 2015 also saw an increase of 80% in illegal crossings from Turkey to Greece by land, though, as Figure 7 above shows, land crossing remained very low compared to those by sea.[48]

The surge in maritime arrivals across the Aegean began in March 2015, after two months of relatively low detections due to poor weather.[49] By the end of first quarter, the number of those detected—most of them Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi nationals—reached more than 13,000.[50] In the second quarter, 29,016 irregular migrants were detected at Lesbos alone, around 20% of all migrants that entered the EU illegally during this period.[51] Figure 7 above shows that more than 314,000 irregular arrivals were recorded in the third quarter, and as many as 480,000 in the fourth quarter. Although in previous years the beginning of autumn usually heralded a reduction in the number of migrants attempting to reach Greece by sea, detections in October 2015 increased by 45% compared to the previous month.[52] More than 125,000 people arrived on Lesbos alone.[53]

From November 2015 onwards, the numbers slowly started to decrease but remained at high levels for several months.[54] The lower number of arrivals during the winter months were mostly the result of the weather conditions during this period.[55] In March 2016 a controversial agreement was struck between the European Union and Turkey, which—along with other measured adopted to close borders and stop irregular migration along the Balkan route—resulted in a significant drop of irregular arrivals from April 2016 onwards.[56] Under this agreement, all irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands from March 20th 2016 who do not apply for asylum, or whose asylum claims are found to be unfounded or inadmissible, will be returned to Turkey.[57] In exchange for every Syrian national returned to Turkey under the agreement, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU. Additionally, Turkey agreed to take measures to prevent irregular migration to the EU by land and by sea in cooperation with the EU. Between April and June 2016, the 'Eastern Mediterranean route' from Turkey to Greece ceased to be the most common point of entry for irregular migration into the EU.[58] The lower number of arrivals also meant that most persons who arrived irregularly at the Greek islands could be contained locally for processing, and fewer migrants were able to reach the Greek mainland.[59] As a result, irregular migration through all Balkan countries declined considerably.

Although the third quarter of 2016 saw a 24% increase in irregular arrivals,[60] the total number of

illegal border crossing from Turkey to Greece by sea remained small compared to previous years. Arrivals in October 2016 were almost 99% less than a year earlier. For the whole of 2016, 173,450 irregular arrivals were recorded entering Greece by sea from Turkey, most of them in the first two months of the year. 3,282 migrants were detected entering Greece illegally by land from Turkey in 2016.[61]

In the first quarter of 2017, fewer than 5,000 people were detected seeking to enter Greece by sea from Turkey.[62] Apprehensions at the land border increased by almost 36% in the second quarter of 2017,[63] though it is not possible to detect a new trend or shift in these figures.

II.2.2.2 From Albania

Irregular migration from Albania to Greece mostly involves Albanian nationals who cross the border to take up work in Greece's agricultural sector.[64] Much of that work, and the migrants' stay in Greece, is seasonal, and the migrants return to Albania after a period of time abroad. For this reason, these movements are commonly referred to as circular migration. Many irregular workers take this trip to Greece regularly, some annually, if and when work becomes or is believed to become available.[65]

Figure 8 below shows that the number of migrants entering Greece illegally from Albania exceeds 1,000 in most quarters in the reporting period, and is generally higher than the number of irregular migrants arriving from Greece across this border (see Figure 6 above). The highest total number in the 2011–2017 period was recorded in 2015, though the level of illegal border crossings has been quite high throughout the entire period.

Prior to the period shown in Figure 8 above, the level of irregular migration from Albania was considerably higher, as Albanians did not have visa-free entry for short visits to the EU at that time. In 2010 alone, some 12,000 illegal border crossings were recorded by Frontex. With the visa liberalisation that came into effect in December 2010, the number of illegal crossing dropped markedly in the next quarter.[67] According to Data collected by Greek authorities and published by the European Commission in 2015, 'apprehensions

Figure 8: Illegal border crossings from Albania to Greece, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[66]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**6,472**	**–88%**
2012 – 1st quarter	1,475	–11%
2012 – 2nd quarter	2,050	+39%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**5,913**	**–4%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	3,013	+72%
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	1,373	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	2,142	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	2,242	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	3,084	n.a.
2014 – total	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	2,540 1,907*	+83%
2015 – 2nd quarter	2,727 3,202*	+34%
2015 – 3rd quarter	2,182	2242
2015 – 4th quarter	2,116	3084
2015 – total	**8,932**	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	1,350	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	1,142	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	1,116	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	1,258	n.a.
2016 – total	**5,121**	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	1,539	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	1,657	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

for illegal entry and stay' at the Albanian-Greek border dropped from 38,164 in 2009 to 33,979 in 2010, and to just 11,743 in 2011.[68]

Although the overall number of illegal crossings dropped significantly, despite the changes to visa requirements, considerable numbers of Albanian nationals continued to cross into Greece illegally. In the following years, Frontex reported that many Albanians were travelling with counterfeit documents, especially forged stamps used to fabricate travel histories and thus extend their stay in Greece.[69] In 2014, the number of illegal border crossings nearly doubled from 1,373 in the first quarter to more than 3,000 in the fourth quarter.[70] Greek authorities recorded 10,927 'apprehensions for illegal entry and stay' at the Albanian-Greek border in 2012, 10,413 in 2013, and 9,290 in 2014.[71]

In early 2015 Frontex noted a drop in the number of Albanian migrants seeking to enter Greece, and in the number of those refused entry at the shared border. At that time it was believed that fewer migrants were seeking work in Greece, and that they were instead turning to other EU Member States where an increase of Albanian migrants travelling with fraudulent documents had been recorded.[72] The drop of illegal border crossings from Albania to Greece was only small, as more than 2,000 irregular migrants crossed into Greece each quarter in 2015.[73] In 2016 and into 2017, fewer migrants were detected crossing from Albania into Greece, averaging about 1,300 each quarter.[74] The sources presently available do not provide any explanation for this development, which may only be a temporary drop since higher numbers were reported again in the first half of 2017.[75]

II.2.2.3 From FYR Macedonia

Irregular migration between FYR Macedonia and Greece has generally occurred only at low levels. Data from the Macedonian Ministry of Internal Affairs shows in Figure 9 below that between 2011 and 2013, fewer than 100 migrants were apprehended crossing irregularly between FYR Macedonia and Greece. This was a significant decrease on apprehensions in the immediately preceding years. In 2009, 791 people had been apprehended at the border, and in 2010 this figure dropped to 412.[76] In the first two months of 2015, 36 migrants were apprehended attempting to enter Greece at the Macedonian border.[77]

Figure 9: Illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia to Greece, 2011–2014 (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)[78]

	absolute number
2011 – total	45
2012 – total	31
2013 – total	60
2014 – total	113

In 2017, as a result of more intensive border control efforts along the Western Balkan route, the number of migrants crossing from FYR Macedonia to Greece began to increase. In May 2017, the number of non-regional migrants irregularly exiting FYR Macedonia for Greece surpassed the number of non-regional migrants entering FYR Macedonia from Greece irregularly. While Frontex hailed this development as evidence of the success of more intensive border-control activities and cooperation in reducing the attractiveness of the Western Balkan route for irregular migration, the fact that irregular migrants return from FYR Macedonia to Greece may also demonstrate that migrants have become stranded and desperate, and attempt to enter Greece in order to gain access to an EU Member State.[79]

II.2.3 Stay

For most migrants arriving in Greece, including most Afghans and Syrians, the country is not a destination but a transit point for onward migration. The majority of migrants entering Greece do not apply for asylum in Greece, and instead seek to move on to destinations in Western Europe.[80]

II.2.3.1 Temporary stay

Notwithstanding the desire of most irregular migrants to eventually leave Greece, many end up staying in the country for longer than they anticipated.[81] In some cases they may not have sufficient funds to pay for the onward journey, and wait in Greece for money to be wired by family members. Others work in the informal labour sector until they have earned enough money to get to the next destination, or to pay smugglers to take them there. It is not uncommon for irregular migrants in Greece to find themselves stranded in the country, some temporarily, others permanently.[82]

The fact that many migrants have become stuck in Greece in recent years is also explained by efforts to prevent their departure through tougher border control activities, such as the construction of a fence along the border between Greece and FYR Macedonia.[83]

II.2.3.2 Greece as a destination country

Greece has been a destination country for irregular migrants, particularly for Pakistanis. Some Pakistani migrants arriving in Greece will live and work in the country for extended periods of time. Greece is home to a well-established Pakistani diaspora which provides migrants—regular and irregular—with support when they first arrive in the country. Newly arrived migrants commonly stay with friends or family in Greece.[84]

Bangladeshi migrants also typically enter Greece with the intention to stay, largely out of necessity as many do not have the money to pay for further journeys. Like Pakistanis, they also rely on kin and communal networks in Greece, though migration networks from Bangladesh to Greece are less-established than those from Pakistan. For other migrants, inaccurate beliefs about economic opportunities available in Greece often lead them to regard Greece as a destination country prior to arrival; views which often change after they reach Greece.[85]

Prior to the Greece's most recent economic crisis, many migrants, both regular and irregular, worked in Greece's large informal economy, especially in agriculture, construction, processing, the service sector, and as street vendors.[86] Bangladeshis in Athens sometimes work in small hardware stores, textile, factories, and restaurants. Some irregular migrants become involved in criminal activities on the streets, such as selling drugs or as brokers for migrant smugglers.[87] The right of asylum seekers to work in Greece is contingent upon obtaining refugee status. The processing of asylum applications has traditionally been very slow, with some asylum seekers having to wait years for the outcome. This pushes them into working in the informal sector. But even those refugees who have been successful in obtaining work permits may face difficulties finding regular employment.[88] The employment of migrants within informal sectors of the economy has also been driven by demand for informal workers in Greece.[89]

These factors have been compounded by Greece's struggling economy.[90] The country's financial crisis has hit migrants particularly hard, with many losing their jobs and the possibility of finding work becoming increasingly difficult.[91] Work in the informal sector has shrunk significantly in recent years.[92] Those who have found work have had to put up with greatly reduced wages.[93] The difficult economic conditions in Greece have forced many migrants, including many Pakistani nationals for whom the country was initially a destination country, to leave and seek work elsewhere.[94] Irregular Bangladeshi migrants have sometimes resorted to cleaning car windows at traffic lights or selling goods on the street as strategies for survival in Athens.[95] Greece is now seen as a transit country by migrants who originally saw it as a destination.[96]

While in Greece, migrants are sometimes exposed to xenophobic violence and maltreatment. Greece's economic difficulties have triggered resentment and hostility towards migrants, and the number of racially motivated attacks on migrants in Greece has grown sharply.[97] Numerous publications report instances of physical abuse

and harassment of migrants and asylum seekers by the Greek police.[98] Findings of abuse against migrants by Greek police officers have also been made in several cases before the European Court of Human Rights.[99] Migrants in Greece are routinely stopped, patted-down and searched in the streets without any reasonable suspicion of having committed an offence. Immigration stops and arrests of migrants were heightened during Operation Xenios Zeus, which commenced in August 2012: migrants were grabbed off the street, taken off buses, and had their homes searched. Between August 2012 and February 2013, nearly 85,000 people were brought to police stations in Athens for verification of their immigration status.[100] Human Rights Watch questioned the proportionality of this operation, given that more than 94% of those taken to police stations were found to be lawfully living in Greece.[101] The large number of people stopped and taken to police stations compared with the small number of irregular migrants actually identified suggested that Greek police were basing these stops on the physical appearance of persons on the street and their racial and/or ethnic features.[102] Frontex has also been criticised for its treatment of migrants in Greece.[103]

II.2.3.3 Push factors

Migration from Greece to Western Europe is influenced by a number of push and pull factors. Many migrants, including those for whom Greece was formerly a destination country, decide to leave because of their poor economic situation, lack of job opportunities, reduced wages, labour exploitation and squalid living conditions.[104] Exposure to crime, racially-motivated attacks and harassment by the police serve as further push factors.[105] The de facto reality of being unable to obtain protection as a refugee is a further push factor. Difficulties in obtaining refugee status and the limited protection of migrants' rights in day-to-day life also contribute to the decisions of migrants to leave Greece.[106]

Positive stories from friends and family who have migrated to other European countries are an added pull factor for many migrants.[107] Most Afghan and Syrian migrants hope to reach Sweden or Germany after transiting through Greece.[108] Migrants receive information on staying in and departing from Greece in various ways, principally through family and friends living in or transiting through Greece, but also through smugglers, other migrants and social media.[109] It was reported that in 2015 the time necessary for migrants to organise onward smuggling had shortened, with some migrants heading towards the border with FYR Macedonia roughly forty-eight hours after reaching the Aegean Islands.[110] Some migrants transiting in Greece are willing to pay migrant smugglers extra for a swift departure.[111]

II.2.4 Departures

Irregular migrants transiting Greece usually depart from the country in one of three principal ways.[112] Most migrants leave Greece by land through the Western Balkans or Bulgaria. Of these migrants, most cross the border between Greece and FYR Macedonia. The second option is to depart Greece for Italy by sea. The third involves air travel to other destinations in Europe. Until the early 2010s, the air and sea routes were the most popular.[113] More recently, the land route through FYR Macedonia has become the most common, followed by the route via Bulgaria. The levels and characteristics of departures on each route are outlined in the following sections.

II.2.4.1 To FYR Macedonia

The border between FYR Macedonia and Greece, measuring 246 kilometres in length, is the main exit point for irregular migrants from Greece. Figure 10 below shows that the number of illegal border crossings from Greece to FYR Macedonia was very low in 2011 and 2012, and doubled in 2013 and again in 2014. In 2015, some 800,000 irregular migrants entered FYR Macedonia from Greece, creating some dramatic scenes at the border and posing serious challenges for a country with a population of just 2.1 million. In 2016, the number of illegal border crossings again

dropped significantly, though absolute numbers are not provided in the sources consulted for this research project.

Figure 10: Illegal border crossings from Greece into FYR Macedonia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[114]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**539**	**–71%**
2012 – 1st quarter	78	+47%
2012 – 2nd quarter	175	–13%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**536**	**–1%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	**997**	**+86%**
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**1,825**	**+83%**
2015 – 1st quarter	591	+148%
2015 – 2nd quarter	6,547 6,288*	+1,485% +9,881%*
2015 – 3rd quarter	259,986	+38,416%
2015 – 4th quarter	437,741	+87,624%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+38,523%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+17,545
2016 – 2nd quarter	14,587	+123%
2016 – 3rd quarter	6,078	–98%
2016 – 4th quarter	1,891	–100%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–82%**
2017 – 1st quarter	1,056	–44%
2017 – 2nd quarter	809	–23%
2017 – 3rd quarter	656	–89%
2017 – 4th quarter	1,256	–33%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

Reports observing an emergent route for irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants from Greece to FYR Macedonia started to surface in the early 2010s. A variety of means have been used to enter and cross FYR Macedonia, ranging from border crossings on foot and by train to smuggling in concealed compartments of coach buses.[115] The number of (recorded) illegal border crossings from Greece to FYR Macedonia started to rise in the first quarter of 2013, and continued to grow throughout the year. To some extent this was influenced by heightened efforts to detect migrants.[116] Further data published by Frontex from October 2013 onwards, shown in Figure 11 below, demonstrates the sharp increase in quarterly detections. The rise in illegal border crossings was observed both at the main official border control points in Bogorodica, Star Dojran, and Medjitlija, and across the 'green border' in rural and remote parts of the border.[117] As well as being heavily influenced by the large number of migrants fleeing the Middle East, the increase in migrants crossing between Greece and FYR Macedonia in 2014 was also influenced by poor conditions at sea during the winter months for crossing from Greece or Turkey to Italy, and the comparative ease of the land route through Macedonia.[118]

In 2015, the number of illegal border crossings between border control points grew from just 591 in the first quarter to 437,741 in the fourth quarter of the year. While Macedonian authorities stepped up efforts to detect illegal border crossings, irregular migrants made no efforts to avoid detection and transited through the country with relative ease.[119] By August 2015, some 1,500 to 2,000 irregular migrants were crossing the border from Greece to FYR Macedonia each day.[120] On 20 August 2015, FYR Macedonia declared a state of emergency and sent additional military personnel and police to the border to prevent migrants from entering the country.[121] This was met with clashes between these authorities and migrants who tried to break through the barriers into FYR Macedonia. On 22 August 2015, FYR Macedonia relented and allowed migrants to enter the country once again. By the end of the year, the number of irregular migrants crossing the border each day rose to 3,000—4,000.[122]

Figure 11: Illegal border crossings, Greece to FYR Macedonia, 2013–2017 (Frontex)[123]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	176	7
2014 – 1st quarter	238	5
2014 – 2nd quarter	413	5
2014 – 3rd quarter	675	55
2014 – 4th quarter	499	19
2015 – 1st quarter	591	30 0*
2015 – 2nd quarter	6,547	36 0*
2015 – 3rd quarter	259,986	0
2015 – 4th quarter	437,741	0
2016 – 1st quarter	104,279	0
2016 – 2nd quarter	14,587	1
2016 – 3rd quarter	6,078	4
2016 – 4th quarter	1,891	0
2017 – 1st quarter	1,056	18
2017 – 2nd quarter	809	0
2017 – 3rd quarter	656	2
2017 – 4th quarter	1,256	31

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

The high number of border crossings continued into early 2016. In February 2016, after a series of regional meetings, and following the example of other countries, FYR Macedonia began to adopt measures to control and close the border to Greece, which, as shown in Figures 10 and 11 above, led to a reduction in the number of arrivals.[124] These measures ranged from requiring migrants to show travel or identity documentation upon entry into the country, limiting entry to persons from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, requiring prior registration in Greece, imposing daily quotas on border crossings, refusing migrants who have previously resided in countries considered to be safe, and refusing entry to migrants not cooperating with the authorities.[125]

The gradual closure of the border to Greece resulted in large numbers of migrants no longer being able to enter FYR Macedonia, meaning that thousands of migrants were stranded at the border, especially near the city of Idomeni, where they stayed in squalid conditions due to a lack of infrastructure and services.[126] Migrants continued to arrive at the border in the hope that authorities would bow to migrant pressure and reopen it, as had happened in July 2015.[127] Desperate migrants stranded in Idomeni protested against the closure of the border and violently clashed with police as they attempted to break through the fence.[128] On 25 May 2016, Greece dismantled the camp that had been established at Idomeni and relocated many of its 12,000 to 13,000 residents.[129] Others voluntarily moved to nearby border areas and into other refugee camps, and continued to linger around the border in the hope of entering FYR Macedonia.[130]

By the middle of 2016, illegal border crossings had dropped to the levels last seen in the spring of 2015.[131] Nine months later, only a few hundred people were crossing the border from Greece illegally each month.[132] Illegal border crossings continued to decrease in the first half of 2017.[133]

II.2.4.2 To Bulgaria

In some cases, irregular migrants first travel from Turkey to Greece before they enter Bulgaria. As an internal EU border, travelling from Greece to Bulgaria involves fewer obstacles than the direct route from Turkey.[134] In 2010, some 25% of all illegal border crossings in Bulgaria were detected at the border with Greece.[135]

Based on the available information, illegal entry from Greece into Bulgaria appears to spike during periods when other routes are not available. An increase was recorded, for instance, in the first quarter of 2012,[136] and again in 2016 after it became nearly impossible for migrants to move from Greece to FYR Macedonia.[137] In the first quarter of 2016, fewer than 100 migrants were detected entering Bulgaria from Greece.[138]

II.2.4.3 To Albania

Much of the irregular migration across the Greek-Albanian border is said to involve circular movements by Albanian nationals.[139] The number of border crossings from Albania to Greece is not available for all years, though figures published by Frontex, displayed in Figure 12 below, show that these numbers have increased each year from 2012 to 2015.

Figure 12: Detections of illegal border crossings, Albania–Greece, 2012–2017 (Frontex)[140]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2012 – total	**810**	**146%**
2013 – total	**807**	**0%**
2014 – total	**1,569**	**91%**
2015 – 1st quarter	350	+132%
2015 – 2nd quarter	757	+323%
2015 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	**8%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	9,067%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	92%
2016 – total	n.a	**–39%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–3%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–79%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+583%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a	+83%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

Most irregular migrants enter Albania from Greece overland, usually on or near the main road from Greece which crosses the border near Kakavia (Kakavijë) in southern Albania. The relatively low numbers of illegal border crossings from Greece to Albania have also been explained by the fact that the terrain between the two countries is very mountainous and that the border is difficult to cross in many places. Nevertheless, some migrants, usually in groups and with the aid of guides, cross the 'green border' to reach Albania or, in the reverse direction, in order to reach Greece.[141]

In 2011, smuggling through Albania became more attractive for non-regional migrants exiting Greece who found it increasingly difficult to leave by ferry to Italy or by air.[142] The sharp increase in 2012 has been attributed mostly to Albanian nationals returning from Greece, though larger numbers of Pakistanis, Syrians, and Eritreans were also detected in that year.[143] There is some information suggesting that Albania was, at the time, used as a transit point for irregular migrants from North Africa seeking to reach the European Union.[144] In 2013, higher numbers of Pakistani, Syrian, and Eritrean migrants were also detected attempting to reach Albania from Greece.[145]

The higher number of irregular migrants arriving in Greece in 2014, many of them Syrians, also had the effect that more of them were trying to travel from Greece to Albania, causing an increase in detection of illegal border crossings in that year.[146] While the land border between Greece and FYR Macedonia was targeted by both Syrians and Afghans at this time, the land border with Greece was used by relatively greater numbers of Syrians than Afghans.[147]

In 2015, irregular migration of third country nationals from Greece to Albania decreased when migrants faced few obstacles travelling on the more direct route via FYR Macedonia.[148] With the volume of arrivals in and departures from Greece, some migrants, albeit in comparatively small numbers, also departed from Greece and entered Albania, which explains the rise in illegal border detections in the first half of 2015.[149] Significantly fewer migrants attempted to cross from Greece to Albania in the second half of 2015. The overall increase in 2015 was, however, very small in comparison to most other borders along the Balkan route, and in fact reflected the route becoming relatively less attractive as more non-regional migrants opted to travel through FYR Macedonia.[150]

Figures for 2016 and 2017 were not available at the time of writing. In the first quarter of 2016, Frontex reported that more migrants were crossing from Greece to Albania, as authorities effectively closed the route to FYR Macedonia.[151]

The number of migrants attempting to enter Albania through Greece continued to increase slightly for the remainder of the year.[152] While these figures were seen as increases compared to the second half of 2015, when compared to 2015 as a whole, illegal border crossings from Greece to Albania by third country nationals dropped by a further 39% in 2016.[153] The number of detections in 2016 was very low and did not reflect any significant displacement from the route through FYR Macedonia.

II.2.4.4 To Italy

Arrivals by boat in the Italian regions of Apulia and Calabria from Greece peaked in September 2013. Numbers afterwards decreased, several months after the launch of Frontex's Joint Operation EPN Aeneas 2013 on 3 June 2013. In 2013 and 2014, Frontex reported that this indicated that the sea route from Greece to Italy was becoming less relevant compared to the Western Balkan Route.[154] In 2013, 1,943 persons were detected arriving in Italy from Greece, which dropped to 1,508 in 2014.[155] Migrants arriving in Italy in 2014 included Pakistanis and Syrians arriving from Greece, but also Syrians arriving from Egypt and Afghans arriving from Turkey.[156] At the same time, growing numbers of migrants were choosing to take the land route through the Western Balkans rather than crossing to Italy by sea.[157] The implementation of measures to close the Western Balkan route in early 2016 did not lead to an immediate increase in irregular migration from Greece to Italy by boat.

II.2.4.5 To other European destinations by plane

Greece was, along with Italy, one of the places where migrants were detected with fraudulent documents travelling on intra-Schengen flights in 2012.[158] Frontex further noted that the number of migrants departing Greece by air with fraudulent documents was underestimated due to a lack of systematic checks and border controls on these flights.[159] Most migrants detected at this time were refugees from Syria.[160]

Following the commencement of Greece's Operation Aspida in August 2012, detections of irregular migrants exiting Athens or arriving in other Schengen countries on flights from Athens decreased by 50%, owing both to the fact that fewer migrants were entering Greece in the first place, and that more migrants were departing from Istanbul by plane.[161]

Detections of migrants with fraudulent documents attempting to exit Greece by air again increased in the third quarter of 2013.[162] More Syrian migrants using the air route from Greece to Germany led to a 20% rise in the number of detections in 2015 compared to 2014.[163] In 2016, detections of migrants travelling by air with fraudulent documents again increased as migrants became stranded in Greece following the closure of the Western Balkan route.[164] Frontex reported that the total number of people travelling with fraudulent documents on intra-EU/intra-Schengen flights to Germany nearly doubled to 1,200 detections. The vast majority of passengers were travelling on flights from Thessaloniki, Athens, and Heraklion.[165] Almost all of those detected were Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, or Iranian nationals.[166] In the first quarter of 2017, a record number of Syrians were detected departing from Athens International Airport to reach other EU Member States.[167] Detections were again high in the second quarter of 2017, with the top nationalities detected including Syrians, Afghans, Iranians, Turks, Albanians and Eritreans. In the same quarter, a trend was observed of Syrian migrants opting for flights to Switzerland, Italy and Belgium instead of Germany, though Germany was still the most popular destination.[168]

II.3 Profile of irregular migrants

II.3.1 Nationality

Between 2011 and 2017, Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi nationals were the most commonly detected irregular migrants in Greece. Figures published by IOM show that Pakistani, Iranian, and Palestinian migrants constituted further large groups of non-regional migrants entering Greece irregularly during this period, followed by Algerians and

Congolese (Republic of Congo). During this period, there was also a constant circular flow of irregular migrants from neighbouring Albania which is not included in the numbers shown in Figure 13 below.

Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi nationals also constituted the largest groups of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. Statistics published by UNHCR, shown in Figure 14 below, further show that in 2013, Pakistanis were by far the largest group of asylum seekers, but their number decreased very significantly in 2014 and 2015. Figure 14 further shows that in 2016 greater numbers of refugees and asylum seekers were recorded in Greece, which is due in part to the fact that migrants had fewer options to continue their journey to other destinations in Western Europe.

Figure 13: Migrant arrivals Greece, 2015–2017, main nationalities (IOM)

	Syria	Afghan.	Iraq	Pakistan	Iran	Palestine	Algeria	Congo Rep.
2015 total	475,902	205,858	86,989	23,260	22,276	6,115	1,353	1,217
2016 total	79,467	41,369	25,975	8,353	5278	1,675	1,629	861
2017 to Jun	2,587	442	921	404	184	249	439	522

Figure 14: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Greece 2011–2016, top nationalities[169]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011—total	**208**	**168**	**746**	**20**	**10**
- refugees	208	168	656	20	10
- asylum-seekers	0	0	0	0	0
2012—total	**343**	**254**	**928**	**19**	**20**
- refugees	343	254	838	19	20
- asylum-seekers	0	0	0	0	0
2013 – total	**4,025**	**894**	**3,835**	**16,139**	**9,860**
- refugees	632	321	1,019	84	195
- asylum-seekers	3,393	573	2,816	16,055	1,665
2014 – total	**2,225**	**656**	**1,789**	**1,485**	**4,095**
- refugees	1,451	479	1,242	441	3,913
- asylum-seekers	774	177	100	994	182
2015 – total	**5,810**	**664**	**5,193**	**1,582**	**9,549**
- refugees	5,223	543	4,348	522	9,101
- asylum-seekers	587	121	397	1,060	448
2016 – total	**15,657**	**1,472**	**11,296**	**4,657**	**28,417**
- refugees	11,440	693	8,161	590	14,420
- asylum-seekers	4,217	779	3,135	4,067	13.997

II.3.1.1 Middle East

Syria

The number of Syrian nationals detected entering or staying in Greece illegally increased from 1,522 detections in 2011 to 7,927 in 2012.[170] By 2014, Syrian migrants were already the top nationality arriving in Greece by sea.[171] In 2015 and 2016, Syrians were again the largest group of migrants that arrived in Greece,[172] with the vast majority arriving by sea.[173]

A number of migrants detected entering Greece claiming to be Syrian are nationals of other countries.[174] About 14–15% of migrants detected at Greece's border with Turkey have been found to be falsely claiming that to be Syrian nationals.[175] Most of these were Iraqi nationals. To a lesser extent, Egyptians, Moroccans, Libyans and Tunisians have also been detected making false claims of this kind.[176] The trend of migrants falsely claiming to be Syrian is largely due to a perception that Syrian nationals can move through Europe more freely and are more likely to receive protection in the EU.[177] From 2014, Greece stopped keeping Syrians who were detected in the Eastern Aegean in detention centres on the islands.[178] Greece allowed Syrians to board ferries to the mainland to register their asylum claims in Athens. Migrants of other nationalities were, however, kept on the islands. For this reason many claimed to be Syrian, and sometimes presented fraudulent Syrian documents.[179] Circumstances like these encourage migrants to lie about their country of origin in order to gain the same benefits that are granted to other nationalities.

Iraq

After relatively large numbers of Iraqis fled to Greece in 2007–2008, the number of Iraqi migrants detected for illegal entry or residence in Greece dropped to only 700 in 2013 and 1,023 in 2014.[180] In 2015, the number of Iraqi migrants detected illegally entering Greece increased again, particularly towards the end of the year.[181] In 2015 and 2016, Iraqis were the third-most largest group of irregular migrants in Greece.[182] In 2015, 86,989 Iraqi migrants arrived in Greece irregularly, constituting 11% of all arrivals; in 2016 this further increased to 15%.[183] The actual number of Iraqi nationals arriving in Greece is likely to be higher because, as mentioned, some Iraqi nationals claim to be Syrian when detected by authorities.[184] The geographical proximity of Iraq to Syria, as well as ethnic, cultural and linguistic similarities between the two countries, mean that Iraqis can often falsely but convincingly claim to be Syrian.[185] In 2015–2016, Frontex estimated that as much as 27 per cent of all Iraqi nationals arriving in Greece falsely claimed to be Syrian.[186]

Iran

Along with most other nationalities, the number of irregular Iranian migrants arriving in Greece increased over the course of 2015.[187] In 2016, Iranian nationals represented around 3% of all migrants arriving in Greece by sea.[188]

Palestine

In the years prior to 2011, increasing numbers of Palestinians were detected at Greece's border with Turkey.[189] In 2011, 2,065 Palestinians were apprehended for illegally entering or staying in Greece. Over the following years this fell to 1,718 migrants in 2012 and to just 469 in 2013.[190] It has been suggested that some of these migrants were actually people from countries such as Algeria and Tunisia claiming to be Palestinians in order to increase their chances of being granted asylum.[191]

Kuwait

In the first half of 2017, greater numbers of ethnic Bedoons, stateless Kuwaiti nationals, began to arrive in Greece. From about March 2017 onwards, more than 100 Bedoons were arriving each month. More than 60% of these arrivals were minors. Many applied for family reunification visas after arriving in Greece, some with fraudulent documents, with a large number of Bedoons having relatives living legally in the United Kingdom and other EU countries.[192]

II.3.1.2 South Asia

Afghanistan

Over the past decade, Afghans have been among the most commonly detected nationalities of irregular migrants entering Greece.[193] 28,528 Afghans were detected entering Greece irregularly in 2011,[194] the largest number for any nationality.[195] In 2012, a total of 16,584 Afghan nationals were detected illegally entering or staying in Greece.[196] After dropping in 2013, the number of Afghans arriving irregularly in Greece began to increase in the second half of 2014.[197] In 2015, Afghans were the second most frequently detected nationality among persons entering Greece illegally, with 205,858 detections.[198] In 2015, 25% of all refugees detected entering Greece were Afghans,[199] a proportion that remained steady in 2016.[200]

Pakistan

Pakistani nationals have been among the most commonly detected migrants entering Greece irregularly.[201] In 2011, Frontex reported that the number of Pakistani migrants arriving in Greece had increased greatly, and that at Greece's border with Turkey the number of Pakistanis detected was second only to the number of Afghans.[202] 19,975 Pakistani nationals were apprehended for illegal entry or residence in Greece in 2011.[203] In 2012, Pakistani migrants were again the second-most commonly detected at Greece's border with Turkey, representing one quarter of all detections.[204] As with migrants from other countries, the number of Pakistani nationals detected in 2015 increased significantly,[205] though not to the same extent as migrants from countries such as Syria. In 2016, Pakistani nationals represented 5% of all migrants detected entering Greece by sea.[206]

Bangladesh

In the first quarter of 2012, the number of Bangladeshi migrants arriving at Greece's land border with Turkey surged, with Bangladeshis being the most commonly detected nationality during this period.[207] In total, 7,863 Bangladeshi nationals were apprehended for illegal entry or residence in Greece in 2012. This fell to 1,524 in 2013 and 1,164 in 2014.[208]

II.3.1.4 North Africa

Algeria

Algerians have been detected at both Greece's land and sea borders with Turkey.[209] Following the 'Arab Spring' of 2010, Frontex reported that between 2010–2012 Greece had experienced increased arrivals of Algerians.[210] In 2011 and 2012, Algerians were among the most commonly detected nationalities entering Greece.[211] In 2011, 5,398 Algerians were apprehended for illegal entry or residence in Greece. 4,606 Algerians were apprehended in 2012, but this figure dropped to only 443 in 2013.[212] In the second quarter of 2017, Frontex reported that around 12% of Algerians arriving on Greece's Eastern Aegean islands were minors.[213]

Morocco

In 2011 and 2012, 3,405 and 2,207 Moroccans respectively were apprehended for illegal entry or residence in Greece.[214] Moroccans arriving in Greece are generally removed from the country and, as a consequence, often resort to falsely claiming to be nationals of other countries. Frontex estimated that in 2015–2016, almost 40% of Moroccans arriving in Greece had claimed to be Syrian nationals.[215]

Egypt

Egyptian nationals have been detected attempting entry into Greece in relatively small numbers. In the second quarter of 2014, nearly 300 Egyptians were apprehended entering Greece by sea.[216]

II.3.1.5 Other nationalities

Albania

Circular, irregular labour migration from Albania to Greece has been a longstanding issue, although this flow has decreased significantly since the

introduction of legal avenues for migration in December 2010.[217] After peaking at 72,454 detections for illegal entry and residence in 2008, around 10,000–17,000 Albanian migrants were detected in the years immediately following visa liberalisation.[218] Circular migration from Albania to Greece has also been slowed by Greece's economic troubles and fewer employment opportunities in recent years.[219]

Somalia

Somalians have been detected at Greece's land border with Turkey.[220] 2,238 Somalians were apprehended for illegal entry or residence in Greece in 2011. This number fell to 1,765 in 2012 and 1,004 in 2013 but rose again to 1,876 in 2014.[221]

Further nationalities regularly detected entering Greece irregularly include Eritreans, Sudanese, and Georgians.[222]

II.3.2 Other background

The profile and background, as well as gender distributions and age range of irregular migrants vary across the different nationalities and change somewhat between years. For example, in 2012, almost three quarters of all Syrians detected entering Greece illegally were male, and most were between 20 and 28 years of age.[223] In 2015, many Syrian and Afghan family units, rather than men travelling without their family, entered Greece by sea.[224] In 2016 UNHCR estimated that approximately 21% of all migrants entering Greece were female.[225]

Syrians

As mentioned, Frontex reported that in 2012, three-quarters of all Syrian migrants detected illegally entering Greece were male, the majority of whom were aged between 20 and 28. Groups comprising men and women were also detected, though they tended to cover a wider age spectrum of between 25 and 60 years. Some groups included three generations of family members travelling together. About half of the Syrians arriving in Greece in 2012 already had relatives living in the EU, mostly in Germany and Sweden.[226]

Based on the available information, it appears that in subsequent years more Syrians travelled in family groups than had previously been the case.[227] The number of minors fleeing from conflict areas in Syria simultaneously continued to grow. In the first half of 2017, about one third of irregular migrants entering Greece were minors.[228]

Afghans

Irregular migrants from Afghanistan entering Greece comprise family units, young men and unaccompanied minors.[229] In 2012, Frontex noted that the low numbers of Afghans found to be staying in Greece illegally relative to the high number of Afghans entering the country illegally suggests that many Afghans quickly depart from Greece.[230]

Pakistanis

Pakistani migrants arriving in Greece irregularly are typically young, non-skilled, single men between the 21 and 29 years of age. Most are believed to travel to Europe in search of better employment opportunities and higher wages.[231] Many were previously unemployed in Pakistan.[232] It is less common for irregular migrants from Pakistan to travel in family units, and the proportion of unaccompanied minors is low compared to other nationalities.[233]

Bangladeshis

Irregular migrants from Bangladesh are typically young men. In 2012, Frontex reported that most Bangladeshi migrants arriving in Greece through Turkey had been working in construction in the Gulf region, but had left in search of work.[234] It is less common for women or family units from Bangladesh to travel to Greece.[235]

(Unaccompanied) minors

It is estimated that between 2010 and 2013, around 30% of all migrants apprehended in Greece for illegal entry or stay were minors.[236] UNHCR

reports that around 37–38% of all migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Greece in 2016 were children.[237] According to Frontex, in the first half of 2017, around 29% of all migrants entering Greece by sea were minors, many of them Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and stateless Kuwaitis.[238]

Many of these minors are unaccompanied by their parents or other family members when they arrive in Greece.[239] Greece is believed to be the main transit point for unaccompanied Afghan minors who are smuggled to Europe.[240] In the first seven months of 2016, Greek authorities registered more than 3,300 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum;[241] in the first five months of 2017, 1,800 unaccompanied minors were recorded.[242] The majority of unaccompanied minors are male, and many are from Afghanistan.[243] Unaccompanied minors from Syria, Iraq and Pakistan are also detected entering Greece.[244]

II.4 Smuggling of migrants

II.4.1 Routes

II.4.1.1 Into the country

The main routes for smuggling migrants lead from Turkey to Greece over land or by sea.[245] Smugglers choose between these two methods depending on border controls and law enforcement activities. Between 2009 and 2010, for instance, many smuggling operations changed from sea crossings to land crossings as it became easier to use the land route. As interdiction efforts increased along the land border, smugglers again turned to the sea route from about 2011 onwards.[246]

Overland from Turkey

From early 2010, the majority of smuggling activities into Greece shifted from the Aegean Sea to the land border with Turkey.[247] This shift occurred following the de-mining of the Greek side of the land border and enhanced border control activities in the Aegean Sea.[248] Smuggled migrants have also been detected attempting to enter Greece at official border crossings, albeit in smaller numbers.[249]

Crossing the land border from Turkey into Greece generally entails crossing the Evros River, which runs alongthe greater part of the border between the two countries.[250] This crossing can be very dangerous and many migrants have died attempting to cross the Evros.[251] Land crossings near the Greek towns of Kastanies and Nea Vyssa are a safer option,[252] but in late 2012 a fence was erected along the portion of the border not marked by the Evros River to prevent illegal crossings.[253]

Following the completion of this fence and heightened border controls along the land border, beginning with the Greek Operation Aspida in August 2012, smugglers operating on the land route shifted their operations to the sea route.[254] Since then, Greek and Turkish authorities have been cooperating more closely, with the result that most apprehensions of irregular migrants take place on the Turkish side of the border.[255]

From Turkey across the Aegean Sea

From 2007 to 2009, and again since late 2012, the route from Turkey across the Aegean Sea to the Greek islands has been the most popular route for smuggling migrants to Greece.[256] Controls and fortifications along the land border, as mentioned, displaced the main smuggling route from land to sea in 2012, and since then the majority of smuggling ventures from Turkey to Greece have been conducted by boat.[257]

Despite many efforts and large investments made to stop irregular departures from Turkey and prevent the smuggling of migrants across the Aegean Sea, the task of mounting effective patrols has proven challenging. Measuring 13,676 kilometres, the Greek coastline is the longest of any European country, and Greek territory includes some 6,000 islands.[258]

Smuggling by sea from Turkey to Greece encompasses routes from several departure points along the west coast of Turkey, leading either to one of the Greek islands in the eastern

Aegean or to the Greek mainland.[259] The cities of Izmir and Bodrum have been popular points of departure for smuggled migrants bound for Greece,[260] though departures have been recorded from almost every settlement along Turkey's west coast.[261] Of the two cities, Bodrum is closer to the coast and the eastern Aegean islands, but Izmir is significantly larger. In Izmir, migrants have access to greater amenities and can transit less conspicuously. From Izmir, groups of migrants are generally transported by smugglers in vans to more remote locations where they board boats departing for Greece.[262] The city of Mersin, located on Turkey's southern coast, has reportedly emerged as a further departure point for Syrian migrants. Some travel by boat to Izmir or Bodrum, while other are smuggled directly from Mersin to Greece.[263]

Arrivals have been recorded throughout the Greek islands, from Samothrace in the north to Megisti in the south.[264] Several Greek islands in the eastern Aegean are in close proximity to the Turkish coast.[265] Lesbos, for example, is only ten kilometres from the Turkish mainland.[266] In some places, the distance between the two countries is as little as one kilometre.[267] The journey across the Aegean Sea to the eastern Aegean islands is thus quite short but nevertheless often quite dangerous.[268]

The precise routes taken and the specific islands targeted by smugglers have changed constantly.[269] Frontex reported that in 2012, Lesbos, Samos, Agothonisi, Farmakonis and Symi were the most targeted islands.[270] In 2014 and 2015, most detections were recorded on Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos.[271] In 2015, Lesbos alone accounted for almost half of the more than 800,000 irregular migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey.[272] Some smuggling ventures involve more southerly routes, leading from Turkey to Crete or Cyprus before continuing to Athens or other parts of the Greek mainland.[273]

From other countries

Greece witnesses some inbound smuggling activities from Albania. While these activities have subsided since visa liberalisations for Albanian nationals took effect,[274] many Albanian nationals are detected using fraudulent documents to cross the border or to prolong their stay in Greece.[275]

A further route to smuggle migrants by sea to Greece starts in Egypt and runs across the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2014, this route was used by many smuggled migrants from Syria, but since 2015 migrants from Sudan and sub-Saharan African countries have used this route.[276]

II.4.1.2 Through/within the country

After arriving in Greece, asylum seekers are registered and then generally travel from the Aegean to Athens. Athens is the main hub for organising onward smuggling for migrants of all nationalities.[277] Undocumented migrants may be detained on the islands for some period of time before they are allowed to continue to the Greek mainland.[278] Since 2014, Syrian nationals have not been kept in reception centres on the Aegean Islands, and have been allowed to board ferries for the Greek mainland to register their asylum claims in Athens.[279]

For movement within Greece, the use of migrant smugglers is generally not necessary. Government-provided, public or private transportation can be used to reach Athens. Up until March 2016, Greek authorities sometimes facilitated onward travel for migrants seeking to reach the border to FYR Macedonia, though these measures were halted when the EU-Turkey Statement was signed.[280] This statement bars undocumented migrants arriving on the Greek island from travelling to the mainland unless they file asylum applications which are deemed admissible by Greek authorities.[281] Without admissible asylum claims, irregular migrants are detained on the islands before being returned to Turkey.[282]

There are some reports of migrants being smuggled in vehicles or hiding in trucks, for example after crossing the land border from Turkey clandestinely, or in order to reach the border to FYR Macedonia.[283] Based on the available

information, however, such covert smuggling methods are not commonly used to transport migrants within Greece.

Thessaloniki, in the north of Greece, has been described as a hub for smuggling activities that take migrants across the Balkans to Western Europe.[284] From Thessaloniki, two main routes lead to FYR Macedonia: The most common route takes migrants to Evzonoi or Idomeni on the Greek side of the border near the Macedonian town of Gevgelija.[285] Some migrants have reportedly made this journey on foot.[286] The other route involves migrants taking public buses to Kilkis, from where they use local taxi services to reach the border.[287]

Migrants seeking to cross illegally into Albania mostly use public transport to reach Ioannina in Greece's northwest. Here they encounter smugglers who can organise transportation across the border.[288]

The dangers for smuggled migrants in Greece stem less from the means and methods of smuggling, but rather from smugglers who take advantage of newly-arrived migrants. Smugglers sometimes offer transportation or accommodation at excessive cost and in very poor and crowded conditions. In some cases, migrants have no choice but to sleep outdoors during the summer months, moving into railway yards or abandoned carriages, or setting up makeshift camps where they live in squalid conditions.[289] Some smugglers lure new arrivals into situations where they are kidnapped, detained, or even tortured in order to extort money or enforce the payment of smuggling fees.[290] If smuggled migrants are unable to raise sufficient money to pay their smugglers, they may be obliged—or even forced—to engage in criminal activities.[291]

II.4.1.3 Out of the country

The smuggling of migrants from Greece may occur across the land borders to Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Albania, or by sea to Italy. Alternatively, migrants may be smuggled by plane from Greece to destinations in Western Europe or to other transit points.[292] Up until the early 2010s, most smuggling ventures involved sea or airborne methods.[293] More recently, border crossings into FYR Macedonia have become the prevalent route for irregular migration and for the smuggling of migrants.

In the context of smuggling migrants from Greece to other countries, it is not possible to single out specific routes that invariably follow the same line between departure, transit, and destination points. Each 'route' entails multiple variations and combinations, depending on a range of circumstances. The methods used to smuggle migrants and the speed at which they travel further depend on the intended destination, border controls and law enforcement activities along the route, the know-how of the smuggler, and the financial resources of the smuggled migrants.[294]

Routes and contact points are identified and shared among migrants and smugglers alike in various ways. Migrants arriving in Greece often make contact with their diaspora, which can provide them with information. Information on smugglers, routes, and methods is also shared on social media websites or exchanged in detention centres.[295]

To FYR Macedonia

The land route through FYR Macedonia has been a preferred route for irregular migration and for the smuggling of migrants because it is a direct, well-established, and less expensive route, and safer than seaborne smuggling routes.[296]

One of the main locations for smuggling into FYR Macedonia has been the area between Bogorodica (near Gevgelija and Idomeni) and Star Dojran.[297] Macedonian authorities have also reported smuggling activities near the town of Medžitlija.[298] During the period when border controls were more relaxed, many migrants were able to cross into FYR Macedonia on foot, some independently and others after receiving instructions or guidance from smugglers. Many migrants only turned to smugglers after their initial attempt to cross the

border failed.[299] Migrants seeking to cross the border faster, travel deeper into or across FYR Macedonia, and to avoid detection by border guards may resort to covert smuggling methods such as hiding in cars, buses, trucks or trains.[300]

To Albania

Smuggling from Greece into Albania is mostly done by land, often using roads and pathways that run through rural and remote areas, away from official border control points. A report published by Frontex in 2015 implies that the scale of migrant smuggling through Albania is mostly determined by the level of border controls along the border to Greece.[301] Most of the migrants smuggled from Greece to Albania in 2015 were Syrian nationals; Afghans are believed to use this route less frequently.[302]

Illegal migration and the smuggling of migrants from Greece to Albania (and subsequently Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and/or Serbia) is a more cumbersome route than the one via FYR Macedonia, and the means of transportation and infrastructure along this route are not as well-developed.[303] Smuggling from Greece through Albania tends to increase when other routes are not available. For example, in 2011, when it became more difficult for smugglers to take migrants from Greece to Italy by boat, some smuggling activities shifted to the Greek-Albanian border which is in close proximity to Igoumenitsa, a port city and the intended departure point for smuggling ventures to Italy.[304]

To Bulgaria

Smuggling activities across the border from Greece to Bulgaria are not well documented and may not occur on a large scale. Because this border is an internal EU border, many crossings involve overt methods, though there are reports of cases in which covert methods are used to smuggle migrants from Greece to Bulgaria and in which smugglers have actively recruited migrants who were unable to cross from Greece into FYR Macedonia and then took them to Bulgaria.[305]

To Italy

Patras and Igoumenitsa appear to be the main departure points for the smuggling of migrants from Greece by sea, though the scale of smuggling activities is difficult to gauge. Both cities have been described as major hubs for smuggling to Italy,[306] though the opening of new port facilities in Patras in 2011, equipped with fences and surveillance, reportedly made it much harder, if not impossible, for smuggled migrants to travel on boats bound for Italy.[307] Corfu has been an alternative departure point in some cases.[308]

Smuggling by boat may involve regular commercial ferry services between ports in Greece and major Italian port cities such as Ancona or Venice. It may also involve smuggling on smaller, privately-owned vessels departing from points anywhere along Greece's west coast, crossing the Ionian Sea to destinations in Apulia or Calabria. In some instances the smuggled migrants first board lorries and hide in their cargo compartments before the lorries board the ferries. This may be done with or without the knowledge of the driver and with or without the aid of smugglers.[309]

Since 2012, border controls at both ports have intensified significantly, making successful smuggling to Italy both more difficult and more expensive. In 2014, Frontex reported that the sea route from Greece to Italy was beginning to fall out of favour, and that due to increased costs and difficulty of smuggling to Italy as a result of intensified border controls at Greek ports and in the Ionian Sea, migrants now preferred to travel on the Western Balkan route.[310] Following the closure of the border to FYR Macedonia in March 2016, migrants were again detected attempting to cross from Greece to Italy by boat.[311]

II.4.2 Methods

II.4.2.1 Smuggling by land

A variety of methods are used to smuggle migrants in and out of Greece, including smuggling on foot and in cars, trucks, vans, buses, trains or by boat.[312]

Methods of smuggling by land are especially variable, and the means and conditions often depend on how much migrants are able and willing to pay.[313]

Cars, vans, trucks and buses

Entry into, transit through, and exit from Greece may involve clandestine methods where migrants are hidden in cars, vans, trucks, or buses.[314] Such methods are particularly dangerous for smuggled migrants if the vehicles are involved in accidents, if migrants are crowded into spaces that are insufficiently ventilated, or if they are left with no food or water.[315]

In some cases, migrants entering Greece from Turkey are taken in trucks to the Greek border, but are unloaded before the truck crosses the border. The migrants then cross the border between border control points and reboard the same truck to reach other parts of Greece or the border with FYR Macedonia.[316] While most crossings into FYR Macedonia take place on foot, some migrants are hidden in vehicles or freight trains.[317] Smuggling out of Greece hidden in trucks often takes place without the knowledge of the driver. Migrants wait for truck drivers to fall asleep at known rest stops near the Macedonian border before entering the truck and hiding in the cargo area.[318] From mid-2011, Frontex reported that the number of irregular migrants being hidden in vehicles departing from Greece and traveling through the Western Balkans had increased.[319]

A similar modus operandi is employed by migrants travelling as stowaways on trucks and buses that board ferries bound for Italy. In other cases, migrants pay smugglers for a place on board a truck or bus and transportation takes place with the knowledge of the driver.[320]

Trains

Migrants may be smuggled on freight trains departing Greece travelling via FYR Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary or other EU Member States.[321] In 2013, Frontex reported that a growing number of migrants were being hidden on trains departing from Thessaloniki for Linz, Austria.[322] In some cases, migrant smugglers have misused customs stamps and seals in an attempt to ensure that the smuggled migrants reach their destination undetected.[323] In other cases, migrants have been hidden amid dangerous cargo such as metal waste.[324]

On foot

Migrants may travel on foot, with or without the aid of smugglers, when entering, transiting, or exiting Greece.[325] Since the construction of a border fence along the land border between Greece and Turkey in late 2012, it has become more difficult to enter Greece on foot.[326] In the summer months, the water levels of the Evros River that separates the two countries are low enough that it is possible for migrants to wade across the river into Greece at some points; at other times they may use makeshift floatation devices or attempt to swim from one side to the other.[327] Both methods are very dangerous, and many migrants have died attempting to make the crossing.[328]

Border crossing into FYR Macedonia from Greece are generally undertaken on foot, usually without the use of a migrant smuggler. Many migrants use mobile phones with GPS and map applications to cross the border. In some cases, smugglers provide migrants with instructions about where and how to cross the border but do not accompany them.[329] Travelling on foot is particularly dangerous for migrants during winter months. Some journeys can take several days and lead through forests and rural areas where migrants are forced to sleep outside in cold temperatures. Migrants risk hypothermia and frostbite, particularly where they do not have adequate clothing, food or medical assistance.[330]

II.4.2.2 Smuggling by sea

From Turkey

Since around 2012, smuggling by sea from Turkey to Greece's eastern Aegean islands has been the predominant method of entry into Greece.[331] The

most common type of vessel used to smuggle migrants is the inflatable rubber dinghy.[332] These vessels are typically packed with a large number migrants to maximise the profits of migrant smugglers.[333] Smugglers sometimes instruct the migrants to slash the boats before arriving in Greece or being intercepted by authorities to prevent a forced return to Turkey.[334] It has also been reported that some smugglers collect the engines of smuggling vessels arriving in Greece and return then to Turkey for use in future smuggling ventures.[335] In other cases, migrants have pooled their money together to purchase their own rubber dinghies to travel to Greece without the use of smugglers.[336] To avoid detection by the authorities, many vessels depart during the night.[337]

A wide variety of other vessels have also been used to smuggle migrants from Turkey to Greece, including yachts, speedboats, plastic boats, jet skis and cargo ships.[338] The use of more powerful vessels tends to be less common as this entails a greater investment.[339] Smugglers generally try to reduce their outlay in smuggling vessels because of the high chance of confiscation by authorities. Likewise, to reduce costs smugglers generally hire either an inexperienced crew or no crew at all.[340] If more powerful, faster, and safer vessels are used, smuggled migrants can expect to pay higher fees for the journey.[341]

The sea crossing may take anywhere from a few hours to several days.[342] Notwithstanding the often short distances between Turkey's west coast and the Greek islands, smuggling in these waters can be very dangerous. In 2015, around 5,000 cases of shipwreck occurred, and more than 89,000 migrants had to be rescued by authorities, including more than 16,500 minors.[343] Many irregular migrants, especially those from landlocked countries, do not know how to swim and are not equipped with lifejackets.[344] Many migrants have drowned attempting to cross the Aegean Sea into Greece. In 2015, 779 people drowned crossing from Turkey to Greece. In 2016, that figure stood at 441.[345]

Smuggling is particularly dangerous during winter months, where migrants are exposed to hypothermia and often require hospital treatment following rescue.[346] Even in good weather conditions, the vessels often carry insufficient food, water, and clothing. In some cases, migrants have been forced onto boats bound for Greece at gunpoint when they expressed hesitation about boarding the vessels during bad weather conditions. Furthermore, there are numerous reports of ill-treatment of migrants by smugglers on boats bound for Greece, including threats and physical violence. Some migrants have allegedly also been thrown overboard or abandoned at sea by smugglers.[347]

From Egypt

Migrants who are smuggled from Egypt to Greece are initially taken on small fishing boats three or four kilometres out to sea where they are then transferred to a larger 'mother ship' or 'rendezvous vessel'. This vessel then travels towards the territorial sea of Greece (or in other cases Italy) where the migrants are again transferred to small boats. Smugglers or migrants may then launch a flare or send out a distress signal for the local coastguards to come to their rescue and bring them to shore.[348]

To Italy

Smuggling to Italy was formerly a significant route of departure for migrants smuggled into Greece. Two distinct modi operandi have principally been employed for entry into Italy. One method involved the use of private boats to cross from Greece to Apulia or Calabria. The other method involved hiding on ferries or using fraudulent documentation to board ferries departing from Patras or Igoumenitsa in Greece to Ancona or Venice in Italy.[349]

As noted earlier, smuggling on board ferries bound for Italy typically involves stowing away on trucks travelling by ferry, usually without the knowledge of the truck driver. In other cases, migrants pay smugglers for a place on board a truck or bus and smuggling takes place with the knowledge of the driver.[350] Crossings on private vessels are typically undertaken using speed boats or, in some cases, high-quality pleasure boats.[351]

II.4.2.3 Smuggling by air

The fastest, safest, but also the most expensive method to be smuggled in or out of Greece is by air, which usually involves the use of fraudulent travel or identity documents to board international commercial passenger planes and pass through border control points upon departure and arrival.[352] Smuggling by air from Greece to many destinations in other parts of the European Union is very common.[353] What is less documented is the level of smuggling by air to Greece. There are few reported cases of smuggled migrants seeking to board or disembarking from international flights bound for Greece; though this is not to say that smuggling by air to Greece does not occur.

The volume of smuggling of migrants by air from Greece is determined, inter alia, by the demand for irregular migration from Greece to other EU destinations, the availability of other routes and their associated risks, and seasonal variations between the availability of flights and the price of airfares.[354]

In the past, smuggling by air from Greece was typically associated with departures from Athens on flights bound for Germany.[355] During the tourist season, smuggling by air reportedly moves from Athens to smaller airports in other parts of Greece.[356] In the second quarter of 2017, Frontex noted that more Syrian migrants were opting for flights to Switzerland, Italy and Belgium instead of Germany, though Germany was still the most popular destination at that time.[357]

II.4.2.4 Fraudulent travel or identity documents

Fraudulent travel or identity documents are used on various routes in and out of Greece. Athens has been referred to as a hub for the production and supply of fraudulent documents used to smuggle migrants.[358]

For migrants entering the country, fraudulent documents are used or carried by regional migrants entering Greece from Albania, as well as non-regional migrants entering Greece from Turkey by land or by sea. Notwithstanding the introduction of visa-free travel for Albanians in late 2010, the Greek-Albanian border has remained particularly affected by instances of document fraud. This mostly involves genuine Albanian passports with counterfeit Greek border stamps, though fraudulent Albanian passports and fraudulent Italian identification documents have also been detected.[359]

Migrants arriving in Greece by sea sometimes carry fraudulent documents. In 2016, Frontex found that approximately 5% of the 1,500 examined documents carried by migrants arriving in Greece by boat were fraudulent. Approximately two-thirds of these were Syrian documents, mostly poor-quality counterfeit Syrian identity cards, but some high-quality forgeries were also detected.[360]

Many irregular migrants have been detected using fraudulent Greek registration papers to enter FYR Macedonia. Between December 2015 and January 2016 over 8,000 such cases were recorded. Some of these cases involved Iranian migrants changing the nationality on their registration papers from 'Iran' to 'Iraq' in order to gain entry into FYR Macedonia after the country limited entry to migrants from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.[361] For this reason, some Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian migrants applied for multiple registration certificates to sell the additional certificates to nationals of countries unable to enter FYR Macedonia.[362]

In other cases, migrants have 'rented' the passports of people living regularly in the EU to board ferries from Greek ports bound for Italy or planes bound for other European destinations.[363]

II.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

Irregular migration from Greece to neighbouring countries and destinations in Western Europe is often wholly or partly facilitated by migrant smugglers. Where migrants can cross a border without the assistance of a smuggler, they will

often prefer to do so because migrants generally dislike, distrust or even fear migrant smugglers.[364] Crossing without a smuggler is cheaper, but it increases the risk of detection by authorities. One strategy employed by migrants attempting entry into FYR Macedonia, for instance, has been to first attempt the journey alone and engage a smuggler only if the initial attempt proves unsuccessful.[365]

II.4.3.1 Profile of smugglers

Nationalities

Migrant smuggling to, through, and out of Greece is carried out by nationals of origin, transit and/or destination countries.[366] In 2016, the majority of persons arrested in Greece as suspected migrant smugglers were nationals of Albania, Greece, Syria, Bulgaria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey.[367] In 2017, Frontex noted that Albanian and Greek nationals were the most commonly detected nationalities among migrant smugglers in Greece.[368] Albanians in particular have been involved in smuggling activities across the Greek-Albanian land border.[369]

Smugglers of the same nationality or ethnic origin as the smuggled migrants are often responsible for recruiting migrants for their services, or for acting as local contact points that connect migrants to smugglers, or to further contacts in other transit points or destinations.[370] In some cases, they are friends or family of the smuggled migrants or their relatives.[371] For this reason, Syrians, Afghans and Pakistanis are among the main nationalities represented among persons smuggling migrants from Turkey to Greece, facilitating their stay in transit through the country and on to FYR Macedonia.[372]

Little information is available regarding the nationalities of smugglers involved in bringing migrants from Greece to Italy, though a recent report noted that Ukrainian and Russian nationals were the most commonly detected nationalities captaining boats detected entering Italy from Turkey or Greece.[373]

II.4.3.2 Organisations and networks

Several publications have developed typologies for the roles occupied by participants in migrant smuggling networks operating in Turkey and Greece.[374] While each typology differs in the degree to which these roles are particularised or generalised, they all can be reduced to the same basic model.

Organisers enable and coordinate smuggling ventures. In larger operations, there may be multiple levels of smuggling organisers. High-level smugglers oversee the smuggling operations, establish and exploit links with law enforcement and other officials, and receive the main share of the profits. Mid-level organisers plan the logistics of the smuggling ventures, liaise with recruiters and organise the transit of migrants, the purchase of boats used for smuggling, and the recruitment of low-level smugglers to bring the migrants to Greece. Low-level smugglers manage the loading of migrants onto the vessels used to bring the migrants to Greece. They are reportedly paid per smuggled migrant and thus have a financial incentive to put as many migrants as possible on each vessel. They may be armed and use threats of violence to force migrants to board overcrowded or unsafe vessels against their will. In smaller smuggling operations, a single organiser may occupy all of these roles.[375]

Recruiters find or are contacted by potential clients. They may receive payments from migrants on behalf of the smuggling organisers. The recruiters are often migrants themselves and can speak the same language as the smuggled migrants. In smaller smuggling operations, this role may be performed by organisers themselves. In Turkey, recruiters are generally based in smuggling hubs such as Bodrum, Izmir, and Istanbul.[376]

Drivers, or captain and crew, are the people who transport smuggled migrants, either to their destination or to the next transit point. They may work on multiple smuggling routes or for multiple organisers. In complex smuggling networks, collectors and guarantors receive smuggling fees from migrants when such fees are not paid to organisers directly. This function may be performed by insurance offices or *hawaladars*

operating the *hawala* system, a money transfer system commonly used by Afghan migrants.[377]

A range of opportunistic actors operate on the peripheries of smuggling activities. These include persons providing food or accommodation to smuggled migrants, selling them lifejackets or mobile phones, finding modes of transport for smugglers or recommending drivers, or in some cases transporting migrants or guiding migrants to border crossings or embarkation points.[378]

Once in Greece, smuggled migrants can move about and travel without the aid of smugglers. If they wish to travel onwards they usually move to Athens, Thessaloniki, or another 'smuggling hub' to establish contact with other smugglers and, perhaps, to compare the prices, routes, and services on offer. Finding a smuggler in a smuggling hub such as Athens is reportedly quite easy. Cafés frequented by persons of the same background as the migrant, or who speak the same language, are commonly visited by newly arrived migrants to receive information on smuggling services and to make contact with smugglers. In other cases, migrants find recommendations for particular smugglers or smuggling routes on social media.[379]

Based on the available information, it appears that individual smugglers and local groups are often only loosely connected with each other or not at all; they generally do not use the hierarchical, mafia-esque structures often associated with organised crime. The various members of a smuggling network are better conceived of as 'freelance contractors' forming links in a chain. These structures also explain why smuggling journeys across multiple borders are rarely pre-arranged from beginning to end. Rather, the smuggling journey usually consists of multiple legs, and smugglers are engaged if migrants cannot reach their next destination independently. In some instances, however, smugglers offer a 'full package' of smuggling from Greece through FYR Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary. In such cases, guides—often Afghan or Pakistani nationals—sometimes accompany the migrants across several borders.[380]

Notes

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III FYR MACEDONIA

III.1 Overview

The former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia (now North Macedonia) is a major transit country for irregular migration across the Balkans. The vast majority of non-regional migrants arrive in the country from Greece and take a short period, sometimes several days, to cross the country, before continuing to Serbia, then on to Hungary or Croatia and onward to destinations in Western Europe.[1] Smugglers frequently facilitate entry into, transit through and exit from FYR Macedonia, though on certain occasions during the period from 2011 to 2017 government authorities actively assisted irregular migrants on their journeys, which all but destroyed the demand for smugglers at those times.

In recent years, FYR Macedonia, a country with a territory of less than 26,000 square kilometres and a population of just two million, with a relatively weak economy and high unemployment, has experienced some of the highest levels of irregular migration of any country in the Balkans. In 2015 alone, several hundred thousand irregular migrants, most refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, transited through the country. When other countries further along the Balkan route later closed their borders to irregular migrants, many found themselves stranded in FYR Macedonia with little protection and no legal status.[2] In February 2016, FYR Macedonia moved to close its border with Greece, leading to tumultuous scenes in border areas on the Greek side of the border. Border control and the management of such large numbers of people pose serious challenges to FYR Macedonia, and international cooperation remains hampered by protracted political disputes with neighbouring Greece. FYR Macedonia is neither a Member of the European Union (EU) nor of the Schengen Zone, which further adds to the challenges faced by the country in recent years.[3]

Non-regional migrants may also enter FYR Macedonia from Bulgaria, a route usually used when the border to Greece is either tightly controlled or closed to irregular migrants. FYR Macedonia also experiences irregular migration from neighbouring Albania, which involves both non-regional migrants as well as Albanian nationals who travel to Greece or destinations in Western Europe, usually in order to find employment. While the majority of irregular migrants continue from FYR Macedonia to Serbia, an alternative, less common route leads via Kosovo and Montenegro to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia.

III.2 Levels and characteristics

III.2.1 Numbers

III.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

The number of irregular migrants entering FYR Macedonia increased significantly between 2010 and 2016. Between 2011 and 2013, several sources noted early signs of a growing influx of irregular migrants. Officials figures from the 'Sector for Border Affairs and Migration' in the Macedonian Ministry of Internal Affairs, published by the European Commission, show that the number of irregular migrants detected at the border rose from 110 in 2011 to 140 in 2012, and to 442 in 2013, before falling to 275 in 2014. According to the same source, in January and February 2015, 47 irregular migrants were detected at the border.[4] A 2015 article places these figures a little higher, suggesting that in 2011, 209 irregular migrants were detected at FYR Macedonia's external borders, rising to 251 in 2012 and 586 in 2013.[5]

It is difficult to identify when precisely in 2015 the flow of irregular migrants started to rise again. Prior to June 2015, Macedonian authorities did not register irregular migrants who were merely transiting in the country and, once registration began, only about 30% – 50% of migrants were registered.[6] A newspaper article reported that in early August 2015 as many as 1,000–1,500 migrants were crossing through FYR Macedonia each day.[7]I

Arrivals of irregular migrants peaked in the autumn of 2015. Data published by IOM, the International Organization for Migration, shows that in the four

months from September to December 2015 a total of 388,233 migrants arrived in Macedonia (see Figure 15 below).[8] It has been reported that in October 2015 alone, as many as 10,000 irregular migrants arrived in the country on some individual days.[9] In November 2015, over 100,000 migrants entered the country. Some sources estimate that in 2015 'more than 750,000 migrants passed through the country', though these figures appear to be slightly inflated and are not supported by data from international organisations.[10]

Monthly arrival figures published by IOM, shown in Figure 15 below, reveal that between December 2015 and March 2016, the number of arrivals dropped from 95,500 to just 1,783. Since then, monthly arrivals have ranged between 0 and 107 per month.

Figure 15: Migrant arrivals FYR Macedonia, 2015–2017 (IOM)[11]

	2015	2016	2017
January	n.a.	53,436	2
February	n.a.	34,404	56
March	n.a.	1,783	14
April	n.a.	0	5
May	n.a.	47	0
June	n.a.	0	45
July	n.a.	12	107
August	n.a.	9	90
September	49,996	7	64
October	87,204	66	29
November	102,776	7	50
December	95,500	0	85
year total	**388,233**	**89,771**	**547**

The decrease in arrivals since late 2015 has been attributed to the measures adopted by FYR Macedonia, along with Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria—the subsequent transit countries for irregular migrants travelling through FYR Macedonia—to curb the flow of irregular migrants along the Western Balkan route. The decision taken by some countries in November 2015 to restrict entry and transit to Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals is seen as the main reason why the number of irregular arrivals dropped in late 2015 and early 2016.[12] When Slovenia and Croatia announced in March 2016 that they would return to enforcing the Schengen borders and limit entry to those seeking to apply for asylum and remain in the country, this had a cascade effect on countries such as FYR Macedonia and led to many people becoming stranded in Greece, especially at the border to FYR Macedonia.[13]

Starting in February 2016, FYR Macedonia likewise took measures to limit entry to refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and in March 2016 moved to close the border to Greece for irregular migrants.[14] Since that time, the number of irregular migrants transiting through the country has decreased significantly, though a report from mid-2016 suggests that some 100 to 200 irregular migrants were still transiting the country each day. The same report also suggests that many more migrants have been returned or pushed back to Greece by Macedonian authorities.[15]

III.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Information about the number of persons residing in FYR Macedonia illegally is, for the most part, not available. A 2015 publication merely cites data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the years up to 2013. These figures show that in 2011, 260 'illegal immigrants' were discovered within the territory of FYR Macedonia (rather than at the border). This number rose to 431 in 2012 and 546 in 2013.[16] More recent figures were not available.

One effect of the measures adopted by countries further along the Western Balkan route in late 2015 and in early 2016 was that some migrants became stranded in FYR Macedonia. Data on stranded migrants has not been collected systematically, though IOM intermittently publishes figures on 'stranded migrants and asylum seekers' who do have regular status in the host country. The data for FYR Macedonia is shown in Figure 16 below. The decrease in the number from 2016 and 2017 reflects the fact that many migrants eventually regulated their status, generally by applying for asylum.[17]

Figure 16: Stranded migrants and asylum seekers, FYR Macedonia, March 2016–June 2017 (IOM)[18]

Date of reporting	Stranded migrants and asylum seekers
10 March 2016	1,199
19 April 2016	878
3 May 2016	575
17 May 2016	402
31 May 2017	333
15 June 2016	255
28 June 2016	212
26 July 2016	209
10 August 2016	212
24 August 2016	200
6 September 2016	188
21 September 2016	194
29 December 2016	137
March 2017	44
June 2017	63

III.2.2 Entry points

III.2.2.1 From Greece

Overview

The border between FYR Macedonia and Greece, measuring 246 kilometres in length, is the main entry point for irregular migrants, and has been one of the 'busiest' borders for irregular migration flows anywhere in the region in recent years. Figure 17 below shows that the number of illegal border crossings from Greece to FYR Macedonia was very low in 2011 and 2012, then doubled in 2013 and again in 2014. In the year 2015, according to Frontex data, some 800,000 irregular migrants entered FYR Macedonia from Greece, creating some dramatic scenes at the border and posing serious challenges for a country with a population of merely 2.1 million. In 2016, the number of illegal border crossings again dropped significantly, though absolute numbers are not provided in the available sources.

Figure 17: Illegal border crossings from Greece into FYR Macedonia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[19]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**539**	**–71%**
2012 – 1st quarter	78	+47%
2012 – 2nd quarter	175	–13%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**536**	**–1%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	**997**	**+86%**
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**1,825**	**+83%**
2015 – 1st quarter	591	+148%
2015 – 2nd quarter	6,547 6,288	+1,485% +9,881
2015 – 3rd quarter	259,986	+38,416%
2015 – 4th quarter	437,741	+87,624%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+38,523%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+17,545
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+123%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–98%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–100%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–82%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–44%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–23%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–19%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

Developments

FYR Macedonia started to become an important transit country for irregular migrants travelling from Greece to Serbia in about 2013. Previously, the number of irregular migrants apprehended

at the border was very low. Data provided by Macedonian authorities for the period of January 2009 to February 2015 shows that small numbers of 'irregular migrants aiming to enter the FYR Macedonia' were apprehended at the border with Greece (see Figure 18 below).

Figure 18: 'Number of apprehended irregular migrants aiming to enter FYR Macedonia, 2009–February 2015 (FYR Macedonia, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Border Affairs and Migration Section)[20]

	absolute number
2009	62
2010	71
2011	31
2012	44
2013	327
2014	122
2015 (January + February)	40

Reports observing an emerging route of irregular migration and smuggling of migrants from Greece to FYR Macedonia started to surface in the early 2010s. Ineffective border controls and a lack of cooperation between FYR Macedonia and Serbia were identified in 2013 as two of the reasons why irregular migrants chose to enter FYR Macedonia from Greece, and why so few illegal border crossings were detected. It was further noted that the number of illegal border detections in Serbia (4,765 in 2013) were several times higher than in FYR Macedonia (995 detections), which suggests that many had crossed through FYR Macedonia undetected.[21]

The number of (recorded) illegal border crossings from Greece to FYR Macedonia started to rise in the second half of 2013. Further data published by Frontex from October 2013 onwards, shown in Figure 19 below, shows a sharp increase in quarterly detections. In 2014, Macedonia's National Rapporteur for Trafficking in Humans and Illegal Migration reported that a 'major part of illegal crossings of the state border' was now occurring across the border from Greece. The rise in illegal border crossings was observed both at the main official border control points at Bogorodica, Star Dojran, and Medjitlija, and across the 'green border' in rural and remote parts of the border.[22]

Figure 19: Illegal border crossings, Greece to FYR Macedonia, 2013–2017 (Frontex)[23]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	176	7
2014 – 1st quarter	238	5
2014 – 2nd quarter	413	5
2014 – 3rd quarter	675	55
2014 – 4th quarter	499	19
2015 – 1st quarter	591	30
2015 – 2nd quarter	6,547	36
2015 – 3rd quarter	259,986	
2015 – 4th quarter	437,741	0
2016 – 1st quarter	104,279	0
2016 – 2nd quarter	14,587	1
2016 – 3rd quarter	6,078	4
2016 – 4th quarter	1,891	0
2017 – 1st quarter	1,056	18
2017 – 2nd quarter	809	0
2017 – 3rd quarter	656	2
2017 – 4th quarter	1,265	31

In 2015, the number of illegal border crossings between border control points grew from just 591 in the first quarter to 437,741 in the fourth quarter of the year. While Macedonian authorities stepped up their efforts to detect such crossings, irregular migrants made no efforts to avoid detection and transited through the country with relative ease.[24] In June 2015, FYR Macedonia announced that it would permit irregular migrants to enter and stay legally if they left the country again within three days. It further allowed migrants to apply for asylum at any police station, and buses and trains were offered to bring migrants from the Greek border to immigration reception centres or all the way to the border to Serbia.[25] By August 2015, some 1,500 to 2,000 irregular migrants were crossing the border from Greece to FYR Macedonia each day,[26] and by the end of the year

that number had risen to about 3,000–4,000 migrants per day.[27]

The high number of border crossings continued into early 2016. In February 2016, after a series of regional meetings and following the lead of other countries, FYR Macedonia began to adopt measures to control and close the border to Greece which, as shown in Figures 17 and 19 above, led to a reduction in the number of arrivals.[28] These measures ranged from requiring migrants to show travel or identity documentation upon entry into the country, limiting entry to persons from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, requiring prior registration in Greece, imposing daily quotas at border crossings and refusing migrants who have previously resided in countries considered to be safe, to refusing entry to migrants not cooperating with the authorities.[29]

One consequence of the gradual closure of the border to Greece was that large numbers of migrants were no longer able to enter FYR Macedonia and thousands were stranded at the border, especially near the town of Idomeni, where they stayed in squalid conditions due to a lack of infrastructure, supplies, and services.[30]

By the middle of the year, illegal border crossings had dropped to levels last seen in the spring of 2015.[31] Nine months later, only a few hundred people were crossing the border from Greece illegally each month.[32] UNHCR reports that over 2,400 refugees and irregular migrants crossed from Greece into FYR Macedonia between April and June 2017.[33] Macedonian authorities, on the other hand, have been cited stating that only 216 irregular migrants were apprehended entering the country from Greece in the first eight months of 2017.[34] Figures provided by Frontex, shown in Figure 19 above, give higher numbers.

III.2.2.2 From other countries

Albania

Irregular migration from Albania to FYR Macedonia appears to involve several hundred people each year. Data relating to illegal border crossings, shown in Figure 20 below, suggests that there is less variation across different reporting periods. The available sources report that illegal border crossings to FYR Macedonia involve a significant number of Albanian nationals who use this route when they cannot cross the border to Greece, or can only do so with some difficulty. The increase in illegal border crossings to FYR Macedonia in the first half of 2012, for instance, has been attributed to seasonal workers from Albania going to Greece via FYR Macedonia instead of travelling to Greece directly.[35] Similarly, decreases in border crossings from Albania to FYR Macedonia recorded in 2014 (which do not appear in Figure 20) have been explained by easier direct access to Greece.[36]

From the limited information available, it appears that irregular migration from Bulgaria to FYR Macedonia occurs only in very small numbers. The data provided by Frontex for 2014 and 2015, shown in Figure 20 above, involves single-digit figures in most quarters.[37]

III.2.3 Stay

FYR Macedonia is almost exclusively a transit point for irregular migrants. Nearly all non-regional migrants enter from Greece and only take a couple of days before they leave the country by crossing into Serbia.

As a relatively new and small country, the capacity of FYR Macedonia to accommodate, support, and process irregular migrants is extremely limited. Prior to 2011, FYR Macedonia did not grant asylum to those seeking protection in its territory. Since about 2012, procedures to process asylum claims and grant asylum have improved but remain slow and cumbersome. The main reception centre for asylum seekers in Vizbegoyo on the northern outskirts of the capital Skopje also had a reputation for poor conditions that may have deterred migrants from seeking asylum.[38] A *Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection*, introduced in June 2015, did little to improve the situation, as waiting periods for lodging and granting asylum claims continued to be long. As a result, many

Figure 20: Illegal border crossings into FYR Macedonia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[39]

	Illegal border crossings from Albania to FYR Macedonia		**Illegal border crossings from Bulgaria to FYR Macedonia**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	28	–48%	n.a	n.a
2012 – 2nd quarter	77	+88%	n.a	n.a
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2012 – total	**253**	**+32%**	n.a	n.a
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2013 – total	**226**	**–11%**	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.
2014 – total	**246**	**+9%**	**39**	**+77%**
2015 – 1st quarter	39	+18%	2	–83%
2015 – 2nd quarter	46	–34%	3	–86%
2015 – 3rd quarter	31	–48%	19	–533%
2015 – 4th quarter	43	–48%	2	0%
2015 – total	n.a	**–35%**	n.a	**–33%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a	+38%	n.a	n.a
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a	–24%	n.a	n.a
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a	+/– 0%	n.a	n.a
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a	+121%	n.a	n.a
2016 – total	n.a	**+35%**	n.a	n.a
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a	–76%	n.a	n.a
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a	+48%	n.a	+/– 0%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a	–47%	n.a	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a	+67%	n.a	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a.

migrants, after filing applications for asylum, simply left the country, some after waiting for their interviews or the decision of their application for six months or more. Few migrants are said to stay until the end of the process because most lose hope that they will be afforded protection.[40] Reports by human rights organisations show that some migrants were abused by Macedonian authorities or experienced attacks, theft, and exploitation by criminal groups.[41]

Although the majority of migrants merely transit quickly through FYR Macedonia, some stay, or even return to the country, mostly for lack of other

choices. As the opportunities to move elsewhere have narrowed, more migrants remain in FYR Macedonia, and the number of persons applying for asylum is rising.[42]

The measures adopted to close borders and stop the flow of migrants along the Western Balkan route meant that some migrants became stranded in FYR Macedonia or returned from Serbia to FYR Macedonia. Since 2015, following the closure of the Hungarian-Serbian border, reports have emerged of migrants becoming 'increasingly trapped' in FYR Macedonia and Serbia, two countries that serve 'as an overflow pipe for refugees and migrants that neither Greece nor Hungary, nor, indeed, the EU as a whole, are willing to receive.'[43]

III.2.4 Departures

III.2.4.1 To Serbia

Overview

The vast majority of irregular migrants transiting through FYR Macedonia leave the country by crossing the border into Serbia. Throughout the 2011–2017 period, irregular migration across the border from FYR Macedonia to Serbia occurred at high levels. Figure 21 below shows that high increases were recorded in 2011 and 2012. The numbers dropped in 2013 and 2014, before rising to unprecedented levels in 2015. In the three months from July to September 2015 as many as 98,209 persons crossed the border illegally; in the following three months, that number grew more than fourfold to 408,021.

In addition to the data shown in Figure 21 above, Frontex publishes quarterly reports containing the number of illegal border crossings detected between and at border control points. This data, displayed in Figure 22 below, equally shows the very steep rise in numbers from the third quarter of 2013 to the fourth quarter of 2015. Also visible is the complete drop in numbers since the start of 2016. By looking at the numbers relating to detections between border control points on the one hand and those relating to detection at the border on the other, it becomes evident that for a period of time in the second half of 2015, the border between the two countries was virtually open and no one was stopped from entering.

Figure 21: Illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia into Serbia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[44]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**7,045**	**+421%**
2012 – 1st quarter	1,731	+149%
2012 – 2nd quarter	2,216	+86%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**8,471**	**+20%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a.
2014 – total	**3,524**	**–27%**
2015 – 1st quarter	2,190	+353%
2015 – 2nd quarter	3,759 3,845*	495% 473%*
2015 – 3rd quarter	98,209	+8,977%
2015 – 4th quarter	408,021	+31 579%
2015 – total	n.a	**+15 039%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a	–99%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a	–99%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a	–100%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a	**–100%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

Figure 22: Illegal border crossings, FYR Macedonia into Serbia, 2013–2017 (Frontex)[45]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	319	164
2014 – 1st quarter	483	28
2014 – 2nd quarter	671	23
2014 – 3rd quarter	1,082	35
2014 – 4th quarter	1,288	116
2015 – 1st quarter	5,381	195
2015 – 2nd quarter	21,881	49
2015 – 3rd quarter	98,209	0
2015 – 4th quarter	408,021	0
2016 – 1st quarter	60	92
2016 – 2nd quarter	183	66
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.

Developments

The route from Greece via FYR Macedonia into Serbia has been an established avenue for irregular migrants since at least the late 2000s. Reports and data from 2011 and 2012 show that several thousand irregular migrants were entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia each year and that authorities were well aware of developments and fluctuations on this route at that time.[46] The Macedonian authorities have been criticised, since despite their awareness of the situation they did little to stop irregular migration through the country and onward movements to Serbia, and at least until 2014 there was no effective cooperation between the two countries concerning irregular migration.[47]

Initially, many of the migrants were Afghan nationals, some of whom had lived in Greece for some time. From 2014 onwards, a growing number of Syrian nationals were among those entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia. The increase in detections in Serbia corresponded more or less directly with the growing number of irregular migrants entering Greece from Turkey.[48]

Until about early or mid 2015, it was believed that most irregular migrants entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia did so with the aid of smugglers, many crossing the border clandestinely on foot in remote areas.[49] Reports which surfaced in 2015 stating that both Hungary and Serbia were returning refugees and other migrants to FYR Macedonia, sometimes forcibly, did not deter other migrants from moving along this route.[50]

From July 2015 onwards, the number of persons entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia increased quite dramatically. This increase reflected the much higher number of arrivals recorded in Greece a few months earlier, but can also be attributed to measures adopted by Macedonian authorities, which permitted migrants to enter the country lawfully if they transited within 72-hours, and gave them access to public transportation so that they could cross the country swiftly.[51]

The level of irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to Serbia started to drop in late 2015, when countries further along the route moved to close their borders or limit entry to refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

III.2.4.2 To Greece

Irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to Greece largely occurred at negligible levels between 2011 and 2017. Data from the Macedonian Ministry of Internal Affairs, shown in Figure 23 below, reveals that between 2011 and 2013 fewer than a hundred migrants were apprehended crossing irregularly from FYR Macedonia to Greece. This was a significant decrease compared to apprehensions in preceding years. In 2009, 791 people had been apprehended at the border, and 412 people in 2010.[52] In the first two months of 2015, thirty-six migrants were apprehended attempting to enter Greece at the Macedonian border.[53]

Figure 23: Illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia to Greece, 2011–2014 (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)[54]

	absolute number
2011 – total	45
2012 – total	31
2013 – total	60
2014 – total	113

In 2017, as a result of more intensive border control efforts along the Western Balkan route, the number of migrants crossing from FYR Macedonia to Greece began to increase.[55] In May 2017, the number of non-regional migrants irregularly crossing from FYR Macedonia to Greece surpassed the number of non-regional migrants irregularly entering FYR Macedonia from Greece.[56] While Frontex hailed this development as evidence of the success of more intensive border-control activities and cooperation in reducing the attractiveness of the Western Balkan route for irregular migration,[57] the fact that irregular migrants are returning from FYR Macedonia to Greece may also demonstrate that migrants have become stranded, desperate, and attempt to enter Greece because it is an EU member state.

III.2.4.3 To other countries

Information about irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to other countries is extremely limited.

According to information published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo, 285 persons were refused entry at border control points to FYR Macedonia in 2014.[58] These figures appear to include both inbound and outbound travellers, however, and thus offer little insight into the true levels of irregular migration from FYR Macedonia. Frontex reports that 149 illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia to Kosovo were detected in 2014, and 156 in the following year.[59]

Irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to Bulgaria appears to occur on a very small scale only and mostly involves migrants from the region rather than from third countries.[60]

III.3 Profile of irregular migrants

III.3.1 Nationalities

In the 2011 to 2017 period, FYR Macedonia not only experienced remarkable developments in the scale of irregular migration through the country, but also significant shifts in the profile of irregular migrants.

Up until 2015, most irregular migrants apprehended in the country were nationals of neighbouring countries, chiefly Albania. Figure 24 below shows that between 2012 and 2014, Albanians constituted the single largest national group among those detected crossing into FYR Macedonia illegally.

Figure 24: Illegal border crossings into FYR Macedonia by nationality, 2012–February 2015 (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)[61]

	2012	2013	2014	1 Jan–28 Feb 2015
Afghanistan	65	134	291	118
Albania	328	400	624	34
Algeria	5	27	7	0
Bangladesh	4	26	5	1
Cote d'Ivoire	0	36	9	0
Eritrea	4	11	15	0
Mali	0	36	9	0
Pakistan	88	73	21	15
Senegal	1	31	0	0
Serbia	12	12	7	0
Somalia	34	34	42	28
Syria	0	116	570	176

Starting in 2014, Macedonian authorities noted a substantial shift in the profile of irregular migrants. Since then, most irregular migrants have been refugees from the conflict zones in the Middle East.[62] 2014 saw a considerable rise in Syrian and

Afghan nationals entering the country illegally, a shift that followed the increasing numbers of Syrians and Afghans arriving in Greece several months earlier.[63]

Frontex noted in 2015 that 60% of irregular migrants were recorded as of 'unknown nationality' by Macedonian authorities because they had no capacity to record, let alone validate, the details of the large number of persons transiting through the country at that time.[64] It is also noteworthy that in the 2012–2015 period, nationals from several South Asian and African countries entered FYR Macedonia in numbers totalling two hundred or more. These nationalities no longer cross into FYR Macedonia in significant numbers, since the country instituted measures on 19 November 2015 to only allow Afghan, Syrian, and Iraqi nationals to enter from Greece.[65] According to data published by IOM, in the period from 19 November 2015 to 31 December 2016 44% of all irregular arrivals were Syrians, 30% Afghans, and 26% Iraqis.[66]

III.3.1.1 The Middle East

The largest number of irregular migrants arriving in FYR Macedonia in 2014, 2015, and 2016 came from Syria. Their number started to rise significantly in 2013.[67] In 2014, several thousand Syrians crossed through FYR Macedonia, most of them continuing across the border to Serbia. Some 700 to 800 Syrian nationals applied for asylum in FYR Macedonia, constituting more than 50% of all asylum applications lodged in that year.[68] The number of Syrians crossing FYR Macedonia rose further in 2015 and remained high in 2016. During the summer of 2015, before FYR Macedonia stopped recording the number of irregular arrivals, 39,164 Syrian were registered in the ten weeks between 19 June and 27 August 2015 alone.[69] 62% of all irregular arrivals recorded in the five months from 19 June to 19 November 2015 were Syrian nationals.[70] According to IOM, 44,808 Syrian arrived in FYR Macedonia in 2016.[71]

Iraqi nationals were the third largest group crossing through FYR Macedonia in the summer of 2015. Between 19 June and 27 August 2015, Macedonian authorities recorded the arrival of 2,152 Iraqis.[72] 14.5% of all irregular arrivals recorded in the period from 19 June 2015 to 13 January 2016 were Iraqi nationals.[73]

Iranians and Palestinians are two other significant groups of irregular migrants who have transited through FYR Macedonia in recent years, though in much lower numbers.[74] In the period from 19 June 2015 to 13 January 2016, 1.5% of all irregular arrivals recorded in FYR Macedonia were Iranian nationals and 0.5% Palestinian, making them the fourth and sixth largest groups respectively.[75]

III.3.1.2 South Asia

Afghan nationals have been the second largest group of irregular migrants transiting through FYR Macedonia since 2011. Their number started to rise in 2012, dropped in 2014, but rose again in 2015.[76] Between 19 June and 27 August 2015, Macedonian authorities recorded the arrival of 2,258 Afghan nationals.[77] 25.3% of all irregular arrivals recorded in the period from 19 June 2015 to 13 January 2016 were Afghan nationals.[78]

Pakistanis are another large group of irregular migrants who have transited through FYR Macedonia in recent years, and constitute the fourth largest group of persons applying for asylum in the country.[79] Between 19 June and 27 August 2015, Macedonian authorities recorded the arrival 1,452 Pakistani nationals.[80] 1.3% of all irregular arrivals recorded in the period from 19 June 2015 to 13 January 2016 were Pakistanis.[81]

III.3.2.2 Africa

The number of irregular migrants from Africa who have transited through FYR Macedonia is small in comparison to migrants from the Middle East and South Asia. Based on the limited information available, Moroccan and Somali nationals constitute the two largest groups of African migrants, followed by various other nationalities from East and West Africa.[82]

III.3.2.3 Other nationalities

A further significant group of irregular migrants entering FYR Macedonia are Albanian nationals, who constituted the largest group of irregular arrivals up until 2014.[83] Frontex reports that in the first half of 2014, detections of Albanian nationals crossing into FYR Macedonia illegally increased by 150% in both quarters.[84] Albanians also make up one of the largest groups of irregular migrants staying in FYR Macedonia.[85] While the number of non-regional migrants transiting through FYR Macedonia decreased considerably in 2016 and 2017, the number of Albanian nationals staying in the country illegally remained high.[86]

There have also been reports of Turkish nationals staying in FYR Macedonia illegally, though their numbers appear to be small in comparison to the other nationalities outlined here.[87]

III.3.2 Gender, age, family relationship

There is some additional information on the profile of irregular migrants entering FYR Macedonia which shows that the majority of migrants are men, most between the ages of 18 and 35, and travelling without any family.[88]

It has also been noted that the number of unaccompanied minors travelling through FYR Macedonia has increased between 2013 and 2015, albeit starting from very small levels.[89]

III.4 Smuggling of migrants

While FYR Macedonia has experienced very high levels of irregular migration in the 2011–2017 period, the number of detected incidents of migrant smuggling, criminalised in Article 418b of the Macedonian *Criminal Code*, is rather small.[90] This may demonstrate that most migrants have been able to enter, cross, and exit the country without the aid of smugglers;[91] it may also indicate that many migrant smuggling ventures remain undetected. There is some evidence to show that the smuggling of migrants through FYR Macedonia increases when it becomes harder for migrants to transit through the country legally and/or independently. For example, smuggling activities began to rise when countries along the Balkan route started to close their borders and restrict entry from November 2015 onward. Between November 2015 and April 2016, as many as 1,032 migrants were smuggled from Greece into FYR Macedonia and on to Serbia.[92]

In comparison, during the late 2000s, approximately 30 cases relating to the smuggling of migrants and 50 perpetrators were recorded by Macedonian authorities each year. In 2010 and 2011, this figure stood at 27 in both years.[93] The growing level of irregular migration from 2012 onwards led to a rise in smuggling activities in FYR Macedonia, though disproportionately lower than the overall level of irregular migration. In 2012, Macedonian authorities recorded 40 cases of migrant smuggling and 70 perpetrators under Article 418b of the *Criminal Code*. In 2013, these figures rose slightly to 52 cases and 98 perpetrators, followed by 92 cases and 166 perpetrators in 2014.[94] This shows that more people became engaged in the smuggling of migrants when they saw the demand for irregular migration rising, but it also demonstrates greater efforts by Macedonian authorities to detect and prosecute migrant smugglers. When irregular migration through FYR Macedonia peaked in 2015, as many as 160 criminal proceedings relating to the smuggling of migrants were instituted in the five months to May 31st of that year.[95]

Figures published by Frontex for the years 2015 to 2017 show that FYR Macedonia detects a small number of smugglers and 'facilitators' compared to other countries in the region. In the first and second quarter of 2015, Macedonian authorities detected approximately 40 and 60 smugglers per quarter respectively.[96] In the first quarter of 2016, only 25 smugglers were detected.[97] By the third and fourth quarter, only 5–10 smugglers were detected per quarter.[98]

III.4.1 Routes

Most smuggling activities take place along the border with Greece, with migrants using smug-

glers to assist them in entering FYR Macedonia, transiting in the city of Veles and the capital Skopje, then crossing into Serbia. The distance across FYR Macedonia from the Greek to the Serbian border is only about 150 kilometres, thus many migrants spend less than a day in the country, especially if they are smuggled on board trains and trucks originating in Greece and bound for Serbia. Smuggling activities have also been detected across FYR Macedonia's borders to Kosovo, Albania, and Bulgaria, albeit at much lower levels.

III.4.1.1 Into the country

Many smuggling ventures leading into and across FYR Macedonia start in Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, situated some 60 kilometres south of the border. Once in Greece, many irregular migrants independently make their way to Thessaloniki where they spend some time working out how to continue their journey. If freight trains or trucks are used to cross into FYR Macedonia undetected, the migrants usually board these vehicles in or near Thessaloniki and then travel on the main roads and railways north, crossing the border near the Greek towns of Idomeni or Tsoliades and the Macedonian towns of Gevgelija and Bogoroditsa. If migrants cross the border on foot, with or without the aid of smugglers, they generally do so in rural and remote areas away from main roads and border control points. Sometimes, migrants will initially try to cross using more direct routes running through urban areas, and if they are barred from crossing or pushed back by Macedonian authorities they will move along the border into more remote areas, where they make further attempts to enter FYR Macedonia.[99] A 2015 report published by the European Commission found that:

> Overall, two main routes were identified from Greece into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The first and most common route begins from Thessaloniki to Euzonoi (a village on the border). From there, migrants, either with the assistance of smugglers or alone, cross the border on foot. The second route departs from Thessaloniki, where through the use of public buses migrants can reach Kilkis. From there they use taxi services operated locally to get close to the border. The persons offering these services are often not part of a smuggling operation but regular taxi drivers who profit from transporting irregular migrants close to the border. From there, migrants attempt to walk and cross on foot into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia alone.[100]

Crossing from Greece into FYR Macedonia does not necessarily require the use of smugglers, and many migrants attempt to cross the border independently. Only if their attempts fail or if they are returned to Greece from FYR Macedonia will they engage the costly and sometimes dangerous services offered by smugglers.[101]

Several reports show that smuggling activities across the border from Greece to FYR Macedonia prospered at the time when Macedonian authorities prevented irregular migrants from entering the country, sometimes using force to stop people from crossing the border. When FYR Macedonia effectively closed the border to Greece in early 2016, large numbers of irregular migrants became stranded in and around Idomeni and smugglers quickly saw an opportunity to prey on the migrants, offering them passage across the border. International organisations and human rights organisation observed that smugglers were operating very overtly, and noted that the risk of abuse, exploitation and trafficking rose concomittantly with the desperation of the migrants.[102] The European Commission further noted in this context that 'the absence of legal avenues of entry pushes both economic migrants, forced migrants and asylum seekers to use smugglers'.[103]

Migrant smuggling also occurs across the border from Bulgaria, though the level and patterns of smuggling across this route are not well documented. Some sources suggest that smuggling from Bulgaria involves trucks in which migrants are hidden before being driven across the border to FYR Macedonia.[104]

III.4.1.2 Through/within the country

The smuggling of migrants through FYR Macedonia, usually travelling from the Greek to the Serbian border in a northbound direction, involves a variety of methods, though for a time irregular migrants did not have to rely on smugglers at all and their movement was facilitated by government agencies.

Migrants who use clandestine smuggling methods such as hiding in the cargo compartments of trucks or freight trains merely transit through FYR Macedonia and do not need to change smugglers or smuggling methods if they hide on vehicles or carriages travelling all the way from Greece to Serbia and, perhaps, onwards. Those using less direct, multi-stop methods generally resort to public transportation such as buses or trains, or use taxis to get from the area near the Greek border to the main cities, especially the capital Skopje, and then on to the Serbian border. A 2015 report notes that using a combination of walking and cars, smuggled migrants on average need approximately two days to cross the country.[105]

For example, migrants crossing into FYR Macedonia at or near Idomeni, with or without the aid of smugglers, often walk the twelve kilometres to Gevgelija from where they can catch trains or other means of transports to reach Skopje and subsequently the Serbian border.[106] The village of Lojane near the Serbian border appears to have been a popular transit point for irregular migrants and for smuggling ventures aimed at crossing the border.[107]

It has also been reported that some migrants contact smugglers in FYR Macedonia ahead of time and meet them once they cross the border from Greece. The smugglers, some of them taxi drivers or local people using their private vehicles, then take them to the Serbian border or, in some cases, all the way into Serbia.[108] At times when the risk of detection and arrest for irregular migrants was relatively low, most migrants used public transportation instead of smugglers, or else simply walked, following the main roads and railway lines.[109] When numbers of irregular migrants grew in 2014–2015, so did the number of accidents and injuries, as migrants walking along roads and railways were hit by cars, trucks, or trains.[110]

The rapidly-increasing number of irregular migrants transiting through FYR Macedonia, along with increasing numbers of accidents along the country's roads and railways, and growing frustration among drivers about roads being blocked by large groups of migrants, led the Government of FYR Macedonia to take the step of legalising and facilitating their passage through the country.[111] On 18 June 2015 an amendment to Macedonia's *Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection* came into effect, allowing irregular migrants to enter the country lawfully and file asylum applications with the Macedonian authorities within three days. Migrants were permitted to use public transportation to reach relevant offices and immigration reception centres, which made both the use of smugglers and the long, dangerous walks across the country redundant.[112] After filing their application, migrants would then be transferred to open accommodation centres where, in theory, they would await the authorities' decision. In practice, however, 95% of migrants, often following instructions received by smugglers, would abscond from the accommodation and make their own way to the border and across into Serbia.[113]

As a result, the steps taken by the Macedonian Government greatly increased the pressure on the Serbian border, and are seen by some as one of the reasons why irregular migration along the Western Balkan route grew so significantly between June and August 2015.[114] The use of special buses and trains which met the migrants at the Greek border to transport them to the northern parts of the country further accelerated the flow of migrants, and subsequently shifted migration pressure to countries further down the route, especially Hungary.[115] For a short period, transportation across FYR Macedonia was coordinated with similar initiatives in Serbia, resulting in relatively smooth and fast migration processes which greatly reduced the need of migrants to employ smugglers.[116] This situation

changed once Macedonia moved to restrict entry to the country for irregular migrants, and ultimately closed its border with Greece.

III.4.1.3 Out of the country

For the great majority of irregular migrants, including smuggled migrants, Serbia is the next destination after FYR Macedonia. From Skopje, most migrants travel north to Kumanovo and then to smaller towns along the border, a journey that takes approximately three to four hours. Vakintse and Lojane in the Lipkovo municipality, south of the border to Serbia and east of the main highway and railway line connecting the two countries, is an important transit point for migrants seeking to cross the border. Here they encounter a range of smugglers who offer to take them across the border by car or guide them to and across the border on foot through remote areas, usually in groups of 30 to 40 migrants. Many crossings on foot are done at night to avoid detection by border guards. Some migrants reportedly became stranded in Lojane and paid locals for accommodation or camped in nearby forests until they had the funds or the opportunity to cross into Serbia.[117] It has also been reported that migrants may receive maps from their smuggler or that smugglers use plastic bags hanging on trees to mark the route across the border or to places where migrants meet the smugglers.[118]

The towns of Miratovac and Presevo are usually the first points of entry on the Serbian side of the border. When the number of irregular migrants and smuggling activities increased in 2015, the Serbian authorities stationed more border police along the border near Miratovac. This led to push backs and deportations of irregular migrants, and caused other migrants to resort to smugglers instead of crossing the border independently.[119]

The patterns and levels of migrant-smuggling from FYR Macedonia into Kosovo are not well documented. This route, as mentioned, serves as an alternative means of reaching Serbia, or continuing to Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia.[120]

III.4.2 Methods

III.4.2.1 Smuggling by land

The smuggling of migrants into, across, and out of FYR Macedonia is done exclusively by land, using private cars, vans, or trucks, or on board trains travelling from Greece to FYR Macedonia and/or from FYR Macedonia to Serbia. Illegal entry may also be facilitated by guiding migrants across the border on foot.[121] The smuggling methods, and thus the time needed to cross FYR Macedonia, frequently depend on the funds available to the migrants: if they can afford it, they may use taxis arranged independently or by smugglers; if they are less well resourced, they are more likely to have to walk across the border and through the country.[122]

Smuggling involving private cars sometimes entails little or no concealment of the migrants. Some smugglers merely serve as drivers to take the migrants from one point to another, across the border or within FYR Macedonia. It is not uncommon for migrants to use taxis or for taxi drivers to offer their services and, wittingly or unwittingly, act as smugglers. Similarly, some migrants, especially within FYR Macedonia, may use public transportation such as buses or trains, or even bike rentals, to travel within the country.[123] Regional bus services may also be used by migrants to travel from Greece's main cities to the border region and, as previously mentioned, the Macedonian authorities did for a time provide buses and trains to transport migrants from the border with Greece to immigration reception centres.[124]

The smuggling of migrants in private vehicles such as vans and trucks more commonly involves clandestine methods in which migrants are hidden behind seats, in separate compartments, or among cargo. Frontex reports that instances in which migrants are hidden in vehicles when attempting to cross the border are particularly common between FYR Macedonia and Serbia.[125] In 2013, for instance, some 310 such cases were detected at this border, down from approximately 460 in 2012.[126] Covert smuggling on board trucks

and freight trains has also been observed across the border from Greece into FYR Macedonia. Migrants may be concealed on freight trains where they are hidden among cargo, in freight compartments, or below the undercarriage, which is a particularly dangerous method.[127]

Border crossings on foot, with or without the aid of smugglers, are a common occurrence at the border between Greece and FYR Macedonia and between FYR Macedonia and Serbia.[128] Many migrants also walk for long distances across the country, some to evade detection by the authorities, some because they have no funds to pay for transportation or smugglers. Maps and mobile phones are often used by migrants to navigate; in some cases smugglers furnish migrants with such equipment, or they may guide the migrants to or across the border.[129] Migrants may also be given instructions to destroy their documents after crossing the border in order to avoid identification and return.[130]

It is not uncommon for migrants to follow main roads and railway lines to make their way across FYR Macedonia, which has resulted in a large number of accidents and deaths when migrants were hit by trains or road traffic.[131] The long walks through remote areas and mountainous terrain also entail dangers, and some migrants have drowned while trying to cross rivers. Others have been robbed or attacked by local gangs.[132]

III.4.2.2 Smuggling by air

Information about the smuggling of migrants by air through FYR Macedonia is, for the most part, non-existent. The available information is presently limited to several reports by Europol detailing circuitous smuggling ventures involving Chinese nationals seeking to reach Western Europe. In one instance, Chinese migrants flew to Belgrade, Serbia, then travelled in the opposite direction via FYR Macedonia, with Greece as the intended destination or transit point en route to other EU destinations.[133] Other variations of this route involve, for example, a smuggling network that brought Chinese nationals to Kosovo and FYR Macedonia, then flew them from Skopje to destinations in France and Switzerland.[134]

III.4.2.3 Fraudulent travel or identity documents

Instances in which fraudulent travel or identity documents are used to smuggle migrants in and out of FYR Macedonia appear to occur regularly, though few details have been published about the patterns and characteristics. Frontex reports note that by regional comparison, FYR Macedonia detects a relatively large number of document fraud cases, second only to Serbia.[135] Forged Greek registration papers appear to be used frequently to misrepresent migrants as Greek nationals. In the two months of December 2015 and January 2016 alone, over 8,000 such cases were detected by the Macedonian authorities.[136] When FYR Macedonia restricted entry to Afghan, Syrian, and Iraqi nationals, some migrants from other countries used forged papers pretending they were refugees from one of these three countries.[137] It has also been reported that smugglers operating in FYR Macedonia sometimes use false nationalities and forged papers.[138]

III.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

III.4.3.1 Profile of smugglers

Information about the nationality and background of smugglers operating in FYR Macedonia and across Macedonia's borders is limited. A 2016 publication noted that according to Macedonian media outlets, most persons engaged in the smuggling of migrants (along with other cross-border crime) are male foreign nationals.[139]

As in other places along the Balkan route, it appears that both local people as well as smugglers from the same countries of origin as the migrants are involved in smuggling activities. A publication from 2015 found that:

> There are different types of smugglers operating in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, namely:

– Smugglers of foreign origin (Pakistani of Afghan), involved with organised criminal groups from other countries (usually from Turkey or Greece). They act as leaders of smuggling operations within the country, staying illegally in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. They are involved in the smuggling operations either because they have been 'forced by the criminal groups due to monetary debts' or because they aim to make profit through smuggling operations.

– Local smugglers (mainly nationals of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) who operate from inside the country and are exclusively involved in the facilitation of the smuggling processes, providing transportation and accommodation to irregular migrants.

– Smugglers of unknown nationality or using false EU documents, who enter the country once or several times in order to conduct the smuggling operation and then leave the country.140

Afghan, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani nationals, for instance, occasionally work as organisers who assist irregular migrants from South Asia (and Syrians assist fellow Syrian nationals) to enter and cross FYR Macedonia. Sometimes they also act as guides, and lead groups of migrants from FYR Macedonia into Serbia. Smugglers of this type were usually themselves once smuggled migrants who became stranded in transit countries and/or saw an opportunity to use their knowledge to facilitate illegal border crossings by others. In some instances, these organisers do not reside in FYR Macedonia but operate in a supervisory capacity from Greece or Turkey.[141]

There have also been reports of smugglers from other EU countries such as Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Sweden operating in FYR Macedonia. Nationals of these countries have visa-free entry to the country, though some of them were found entering FYR Macedonia with false documents.[142]

Macedonian and Serbian nationals sometimes adopt the role of smugglers if they assist migrants with local transportation, use their private vehicles to bring migrants to or across the border, or offer accommodation to irregular migrants. It has been reported that many Macedonians assist irregular migrants out of compassion and for humanitarian reasons, providing them with food, accommodation, and other necessities, often without asking for compensation. Some locals also provide their banking details so migrants can receive money transfers from their remaining relatives and friends in their countries of origin. There are, however, others who prey on the vulnerability and desperation of migrants, charge excessive prices and exploit migrants. Some local smugglers operate independently if and when they see a demand or opportunity, while others maintain contact with a smuggling network and become involved in smuggling-related activities on an ongoing basis.[143]

III.4.3.2 Organisations and networks

There is some disagreement between sources about the extent to which smugglers operating in FYR Macedonia are networked and organised, with some sources referring to hierarchical, mafia-esque criminal organisations, while others suggest that these structures are much more loosely-defined and ad-hoc. By and large, it appears that the networks are quite opportunistic and not bound by hierarchies or oaths, meaning that participants may join or leave at any time.[144]

Based on the available information, it appears that some established criminal networks in FYR Macedonia became involved in the smuggling of migrants when the opportunity arose and when demand for smuggling services peaked.[145] As the demand declined and migrants were prevented from entering FYR Macedonia or diverted to other routes, some networks withdrew from smuggling activities or dissolved altogether.[146]

Several reports suggest that some of the groups offering their services to smuggled migrants are less concerned with assisting migrants cross bor-

ders than with robbing, exploiting, and sometimes kidnapping them in order to obtain or extort money. Smuggled migrants in FYR Macedonia are vulnerable to gangs pretending to be smugglers but instead seeking to take the migrants' sparse savings and belongings or extort money from their families and friends.[147]

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IV ALBANIA

IV.1 Overview

Irregular migration across Albania's borders is a complex issue as it involves non-regional migrants who transit through the country, often with the aid of smugglers, as well as Albanian nationals who migrate irregularly to other countries, especially Greece. Based on the available information and data, Albania appears to experience some irregular transit migration of non-regional migrants, albeit at moderate levels. Irregular migration of non-regional migrants through Albania is a relatively new phenomenon. Previously, illegal border crossings mostly involved small numbers of persons from neighbouring countries.[1]

Most non-regional irregular migrants enter Albania from Greece and continue to Montenegro, though in some instances they leave Albania by boat and cross the Adriatic to Italy. Geographically, Albania is positioned in a strategic location, offering an exit point for irregular migrants seeking to leave Greece, especially at times when border crossings from Greece to FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria are seemingly impossible. Moreover, the north of Albania is in close proximity to Croatia and thus to the European Union (EU) and Albania has a long coastline in relative proximity to Italy, another EU member state.

Limiting Albania's attractiveness for irregular migration and smuggling of migrants is the fact that Albania continues to lag behind most its neighbours in economic development, and Albania's infrastructure is fragmented and frequently in poor condition. Access to Albania, especially from Greece, is limited to a small number of main roads. The border goes through mountainous terrain in many areas, making it difficult to cross, especially during winter. Furthermore, the irregular migration route from Greece into Albania and on to Montenegro, Croatia or other transit countries (often referred to as a 'sub route' in the Western Balkans)[2] involves more border crossings of non-EU states, adding to the time and expenses associated with this route. Greater border surveillance, as well as policy announcements by the Albanian Government that the country does not welcome the entry and transit of irregular migrants, constitute further deterrents for irregular migrants.[3]

IV.2 Levels and characteristics

IV.2.1 Numbers

IV.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Information about the number of irregular migrants who enter Albania is very limited. Based on the available sources, it appears that the level of illegal immigration into Albania is low to moderate when compared to other Balkan states.[4]

IOM, the International Organization for Migration, has published data, shown in Figure 25 below, for the number of 'illegal entries' recorded in Albania between 2009 and 2013. The data shows a steady increase in the number of illegal arrivals, albeit starting from very low levels. Nevertheless, the rise in numbers is very significant, increasing from just 81 in 2009 to 426 in 2011, and to 1,978 in 2013. The rise of illegal entries into Albania is considerably higher than in other parts of the Western Balkans, which has also been attributed to the improvement of measures to detect illegal border crossings over this period.[5]

Figure 25: Illegal entries (apprehended upon entry, in country, or upon exit), Albania, 2009–2013 (IOM)[6]

year	number of persons
2009	81
2010	81
2011	426
2012	1,126
2013	1,978

The large number of irregular migrants who travelled from Greece to FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria (and onwards) in 2015 caused some fear that Albania would experience a large influx of irregular migrants, especially once

FYR Macedonia adopted measures to reduces the flow of migrants from Greece. In October 2015, the Albanian Government presented a 'Contingency Plan for Possible Mass Influx of Migrants and Asylum Seekers at the Albanian Border' which set up a system to channel, manage, and accommodate migrants in large numbers, should a 'crisis situation' arise. The expected shift of irregular flows to Albania, however, never materialised, and a scaled-down version of the plan replaced the original in March 2016.[7]

IOM publishes monthly data for irregular entries to Albania.[8] These figures, shown in Figure 26 below, do not demonstrate any particular trend and are not sufficient to draw conclusions about the levels of irregular migration into Albania. They also seem to differ from figures relating to illegal border crossings into Albania, especially from Greece, reported by Frontex for the same period.[9]

Figure 26: number of irregular migrants entering Albania, 2015–2017[10]

month	2016	2017
January	55	108
February	19	15
March	37	3
April	69	1
May	127	8
June	47	11
July	16	32
August	108	94
September	136	110
October	84	116
November	94	96
December	39	158
Total year	**831**	**752**

IV.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

The number of persons staying in Albania illegally has risen along with the number of persons found to be entering the country illegally. Information on this point is limited to one 2014 report by IOM which 'maps major migration flows' through Western Balkan countries. According to this data, displayed in Figure 27 below, the number of 'foreigners found to be present illegally in Albania' increased from just 96 in 2009 to 444 in 2011, and 923 in 2013. The numbers for 2013 are high compared to other neighbouring countries.[11]

Figure 27: Foreigners found to be illegally present, Albania, 2009–2013 (IOM)[12]

year	number of persons
2009	96
2010	417
2011	444
2012	n.a.
2013	923

More recent information on the number of persons staying in Albania illegally could not be obtained.

IV.2.2 Entry points

Irregular immigration into Albania occurs mostly across the border from neighbouring Greece. Nearly all the available sources exclusively contain information concerning illegal immigration across this border. This border, as later parts of this Chapter show, also experiences considerable levels of irregular emigration from Albania to Greece. Much of the irregular migration across this border is said to involve circular movements by Albanian nationals.[13]

The number of irregular arrivals in Albania from Greece is not available for all years, though figures published by Frontex, displayed in Figure 28 below, show that these numbers have increased each year from 2012 to 2015. Absolute numbers relating to crossing from Greece into Albania were not available for 2016 and 2017.

Most irregular migrants enter Albania overland from Greece. Many enter Albania on or near the main road from Greece which crosses the border near Kakavia (Kakavijë) in southern Albania. The relatively low numbers of illegal border crossings from Greece to Albania have also been explained

Figure 28: Illegal border crossings, Albania–Greece, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[14]

	Illegal border crossings from Greece to Albania		**Illegal border crossings between Albania and Greece total**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**6,472**	**–88%**
2012 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,475	–11%
2012 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,050	+39%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**810**	**146%**	**5,502**	**+4%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	3,013	+72%
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,933	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**8,728**	**+59%**
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,540	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,572	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,620	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	4,666	n.a.
2014 – total	**1,596**	**91%**	**11,398** **8,841***	**+1%**
2015 – 1st quarter	350	+132%	2,890	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	757	+323%	3,959	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,506	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,960	–37%
2015 – total	n.a.	**8%**	**12,315** **8,932***	**+8%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,914	41%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	2,209	51%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,407	–55%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,603	–49%
2016 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**7,166** **5,121***	**–42%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,939	+23%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	1,867	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+583%	1,924	+37%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+83%	2,424	+51%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

by the fact that the terrain between the two countries is very mountainous and that the border is difficult to cross in many places. Nevertheless, some migrants, usually in groups and with the aid of guides, cross the 'green border' to reach Albania or, in the reverse direction, to reach Greece.[15]

The sharp increase in 2012 has been attributed mostly to Albanian nationals returning to Greece, though larger numbers of Pakistanis, Syrians, and Eritreans were also detected during that year.[16] There is some information suggesting that Albania was, at that time, used as a transit point for irregular migrants from North Africa seeking to reach the European Union.[17] The higher number of irregular migrants arriving in Greece in 2014, many of them Syrians, also had the effect that more irregular migrants were trying to travel from Greece to Albania, causing an increase in detection of illegal border crossings in that year.[18]

In 2015, irregular migration of third country nationals from Greece to Albania initially decreased when migrants faced few obstacles travelling on the more direct route via FYR Macedonia.[19] While the vast majority of migrants opted to take the route through FYR Macedonia, the large increase in the volume of migrants departing Greece in the first half of 2015 led to a modest increase in illegal border detections at the border with Albania in the first half of 2015.[20] Measuring just 8%, the overall increase in 2015 was, however, very small in comparison to most other borders along the Balkan route.

Figures of detections for 2016 and 2017 were not available at the time of writing. In the first quarter of 2016, Frontex reported that more migrants were crossing from Greece to Albania, trying to bypass the route via FYR Macedonia.[21] According to Frontex, illegal border crossings from Greece to Albania by third country nationals dropped by a further 39% in 2016.[22] In the second half of 2017, a relative increase of illegal border crossings from Greece to Albania was recorded.[23]

IV.2.3 Stay

In the context of irregular migration through the region, Albania is primarily a transit point for non-regional migrants, and the majority of irregular migrants who enter Albania do not intend to stay there.[24]

The relative increase in irregular migrants entering Albania in the 2011–2017 period resulted in a higher volume of asylum applications submitted in the country. Whereas in 2009 only three people applied for asylum in Albania, that number rose to 16 in 2012, and increased further in 2013.[25] After the closing of the Macedonian-Greek border, asylum applications jumped to over 1,000.[26] In many instances, migrants who apply for asylum in Albania leave before their application has been or can be properly processed.[27] The poorly-developed state of asylum procedures, and the low number of such requests which are ultimately approved, both contribute to this phenomenon.[28]

IV.2.4 Departures

IV.2.4.1 To Greece

Irregular migration from Albania involves the departure of Albanian nationals to other countries, especially to EU member states, chief among them neighbouring Greece. The border between the two countries thus experiences irregular migration flows in both directions, which is commonly referred to in the literature as 'circular migration.' Albanian nationals crossing to Greece generally do so in the context of labour migration, as many Albanians take up work in Greece's agricultural industry.[29] Much of that work—and consequently the Albanian workers' stay in Greece—is seasonal, and the migrants return to Albania after a period of time abroad. Many of these irregular workers take this trip to Greece regularly, some annually, if and when work becomes or is believed to become available.[30]

Figure 29 below shows that the number of migrants entering Greece illegally from Albania exceeds 1,000 in most quarters in the reporting period. This number is generally higher than the number of irregular migrants arriving from Greece across this border (see Figure 28 above). The highest total number in the 2011–2017 period was recorded in 2015, though the level of illegal border crossings remained quite high throughout the entire period.

Figure 29: Illegal border crossings from Albania to Greece, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[31]

	absolute number	change to previous period (same quarter in the previous year)
2011 – total	**6,472**	**–88%**
2012 – 1st quarter	1,475	–11%
2012 – 2nd quarter	2,050	+39%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**5,913**	**–4%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	3,013	+72%
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	1,373	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	2,142	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	2,242	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	3,084	n.a.
2014 – total		n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	2,540 1,907*	+83%
2015 – 2nd quarter	2,727 3,202*	+34%
2015 – 3rd quarter	2,182	2242
2015 – 4th quarter	2,116	3084
2015 – total	**8,932**	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	1,350	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	1,142	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	1,116	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	1,258	n.a.
2016 – total	**5,121**	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	1,539	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	1,657	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

Prior to the period shown in Figure 29 above, the level of irregular migration from Albania was considerably higher, as Albanians did not have visa-free entry for short visits to the EU at that time. In 2010 alone, some 12,000 illegal border crossings were recorded by Frontex. With the visa liberalisation which came into effect in December 2010, the number of illegal crossing dropped markedly in the next quarter.[32] According to data collected by Greek authorities and published by the European Commission in 2015, 'apprehensions for illegal entry and stay' at the Albanian-Greek border dropped from 38,164 in 2009 to 33,979 in 2010 and to just 11,743 in 2011.[33]

Although the overall number of illegal crossings dropped significantly, and despite the changes to visa requirements, considerable numbers of Albanian nationals continued to cross into Greece illegally. In the following years, Frontex reported that many Albanians were travelling with counterfeit documents, especially forged stamps used to fabricate travel histories and thus extend their stay in Greece.[34] In 2014, the number of illegal border crossings nearly doubled from 1,373 in the first quarter to more than 3,000 in the fourth.[35] Greek authorities recorded 10,927 'apprehensions for illegal entry and stay' at the Albanian-Greek border in 2012, 10,413 in 2013, and 9,290 in 2014.[36]

In early 2015, Frontex noted a drop in the number of Albanian migrants seeking to enter Greece and in the number of those refused entry at the shared border. At that time it was believed that fewer migrants were seeking employment in Greece and that they were instead turning to other EU member states where an increase of Albanian migrants travelling with fraudulent documents had been recorded.[37] The drop of illegal border crossings from Albania to Greece was, however, only small, as more than 2,000 irregular migrants crossed into Greece each quarter in 2015. At that time, Albanian nationals were the largest group of regional migrants crossing EU borders illegally. Reports that many of them were travelling on fraudulent documents continued at that time.[38] In 2016 and into 2017, fewer migrants were detected crossing from

Albania into Greece, averaging about 1,300 each quarter.[39] The sources presently available do not contain any explanation for this development, which may only reflect a temporary drop since higher numbers were reported again in the first half of 2017.[40]

IV.2.4.2 Departures to other countries

As previously mentioned, for most non-regional migrants Albania is largely a transit country en route to Western Europe. Irregular migration by non-Albanian nationals is mostly northbound, with migrants departing Albania for Montenegro, FYR Macedonia, and, in lesser numbers, to Kosovo. There are also reports of departures from Albania by sea to Italy, though no data about the levels of irregular migration on this route was available at the time of writing.

To Montenegro

For non-regional migrants, Montenegro seems to be the logical next transit point en route to EU member states. Once in Montenegro, they can cross into Croatia and follow the Croatian coast to reach Slovenia and Austria, travel via Serbia to Hungary, or use alternative routes.[41] The data regarding illegal border crossings from Albania into Montenegro, shown in Figure 30 above, is not available for many reporting periods. It appears that several hundred migrants cross this border illegally each year, though it is not possible to identify any trends or periodic developments. High increases were recently reported for the second half of 2016 and the third quarter of 2017, though there was no information to show whether this might be a result of other routes becoming unavailable.

To FYR Macedonia

The level of irregular migration from Albania to FYR Macedonia appears to be broadly at the same level as the flows to Montenegro, though the data shown in Figure 30 above suggests that there is less variation between different reporting periods. The available sources report that illegal border crossings to FYR Macedonia involve a significant number of Albanian nationals who use this route when they are unable to cross the border to Greece directly, or when they can do so only with some difficulty. The increase of illegal border crossings to FYR Macedonia in the first half of 2012, for instance, has been attributed to seasonal workers from Albania travelling to Greece via FYR Macedonia instead of going to Greece directly.[42] Similarly, decreases of border crossings from Albania to FYR Macedonia recorded in 2014 (not shown in Figure 30 above) have been explained by easier direct access to Greece.[43]

To Kosovo

Information and data about irregular migration from Albania to Kosovo is very limited. Most illegal border crossings appear to involve Albanian nationals rather than non-regional migrants. The data shown in Figure 30 above suggests that the level of irregular migration across this border is very low, though very high increases were recorded in the second half of 2016. Absolute numbers, along with additional information about the causes of this increase, could not be obtained at the time of writing.

To Italy

Occasional reports of irregular migration by boat from Albania to Italy have been surfacing for a long time. The distance between the coasts of the two countries is less than 100 kilometres in some places. Based on the limited number of reports it appears that both regular ferry services and, in particular, private vessels have been used by irregular migrants to leave from Albania for Italy.[44] In 2016, following the closure of many borders along the main Balkan route, it was anticipated that smuggling from Greece via Albania to Italy would emerge as a likely alternative.[45] Data and further information about developments along this route were, however, not available at the time of writing, and there are no specific indicators suggesting that irregular migration from Albania to Italy has increased significantly.

Figure 30: Illegal border crossings from Albania, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[46]

	Illegal border crossings from Albania to Montenegro		**Illegal border crossings from Albania to FYROM**		**Illegal border crossings from Albania to Kosovo**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to previous same period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**180**	**+260%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	104	+478%	28	–48%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	165	+313%	77	+88%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**387**	**+115%**	**253**	**+32%**	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**235**	**+37%**	**246**	**+9%**	**104**	**n.a.**
2015 – 1st quarter	34	–39%	39	+18%	9	–59%
2015 – 2nd quarter	122 127*	+15% +1%*	46	–34%	15	–38%
2015 – 3rd quarter	7	–22%	31	–48%	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	43	–48%	21	–5%
2015 – total	n.a.	**–22%**	n.a.	**–35%**	n.a.	**–37%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–76%	n.a.	+38%	n.a.	+133%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–83%	n.a.	–24%	n.a.	–47%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+471%	n.a.	0%	n.a.	+1,886%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+47%	n.a.	+12%	n.a.	+462%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–49%**	n.a.	**+35%**	n.a.	**+454%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+710%	n.a.	–47%	n.a.	–83%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–35%	n.a.	+67%	n.a.	+113%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

IV.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Information about the nationalities and profiles of irregular migrants moving across Albania's international borders is very limited. As mentioned earlier, many illegal border crossings involve Albanian nationals, especially those moving to Greece, sometimes via FYR Macedonia, in search of work.

Throughout the 2000s and the early 2010s, most irregular migrants entering or seeking to enter Albania were nationals of neighbouring countries, or of countries in some proximity or with specific ties to Albania. IOM, for instance, reports that in 2013 the 'three main groups of citizens refused entry' to Albania came from Turkey, Kosovo, and Russia.[47]

Since the early 2010s, non-regional migrants from countries of origin in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa have moved through Albania, usually by entering the country from Greece.[48] Since about 2010, international organisations have been reporting on Syrian, Afghan and Pakistani nationals crossing through Albania to reach Western Europe. The route from Greece into Albania and on to Montenegro and Croatia emerged as an alternative—albeit more gruelling—route to the more common route from Greece via FYR Macedonia and Serbia or via Bulgaria.[49] Because the route via Albania is less frequently used, and often runs through mountainous and remote areas, migrants may also hope that these circumstances may make it easier to evade detection, arrest, and return. Since 2012 there have also been reports of Algerians crossing illegally from Greece into Albania. At that time Frontex feared that this signalled a trend towards increasing national diversification on this route.[50] A 2016 publication citing Albanian government sources reports that in 2015, 1,534 Syrians were detecting crossing Albanian borders illegally. The second largest group that year were Eritreans (171) followed by Somalis (118).[51] IOM has published data on the nationalities of irregular migrants apprehended on entry into Albania for the years 2016 and 2017. This data, shown in Figure 31 below, confirms that Syrians constitute the largest group of irregular migrants. Afghans and Iraqis were the second and third largest groups in 2016, but their numbers dropped significantly in the following year. Instead, the number of Algerian migrants grew considerably from 2016 to 2017.

Figure 31: Top nationalities of irregular migrants apprehended on entry to Albania, 2016–2017[52]

Nationality	2016	2017
Syrian	288	269
Algerian	7	213
Moroccan	69	41
Iraqi	101	34
Afghan	249	31
Palestinian	13	22
Pakistani	27	17
Iranian	13	7

The number of refugees and migrants applying for asylum in Albania is quite low, but as Figure 32 below demonstrates, it grew considerably between 2013 and 2016. This is due in particular to the increasing number of Iranian nationals applying for asylum. Syrian nationals, on the other hand, appear to use Albania more as a transit country and do not apply for asylum.

Figure 32: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Albania 2011–2016, top nationalities[53]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**5**	n.a.	n.a.
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	5	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	0	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**5**	n.a.	**3**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	5	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3
2013 – total	n.a.	**196**	**5**	n.a.	**15**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	5	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	196	n.a.	n.a.	15
2014 – total	n.a.	**456**	**3**	n.a.	**11**
- refugees	n.a.	0	3	n.a.	3
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	456	0	n.a.	8
2015 – total	n.a.	**822**	**3**	n.a.	**3**
- refugees	n.a.	9	0	n.a.	3
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	813	0	n.a.	0
2016 – total	n.a.	**2,762**	**23**	n.a.	n.a.
- refugees	n.a.	17	23	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	2,745	0	n.a.	0

IV.4 The smuggling of migrants

IV.4.1 Routes

Albania serves as a transit country for the smuggling of migrants through the Western Balkans or by boat to Italy. The sea route is believed to be more expensive and riskier, and as a result is used less frequently.

Smuggling from Greece into Albania is mostly done by land, often using roads and pathways that run through rural and remote areas, away from official border control points. A report published by Frontex in 2015 implies that the scale of smuggling of migrants through Albania is mostly determined by the level of border controls along the border to Greece.[54] The city of Ioannina in north-western Greece, some 50 kilometres south of the Albanian border, has been referred to as a 'hub' for migrants seeking to find smugglers to take them along the land route to Albania.[55] Most of the migrants smuggled from Greece to Albania in 2015 were Syrian nationals; Afghans are believed to use this route less frequently.[56]

From Albania, the main route to smuggle migrants by land leads to Montenegro, and from there to Croatia or Serbia. This route is frequently described as a 'sub-route' in the Western Balkans; a route that is less popular than others as it leads through mountainous terrain and countries with less developed infrastructure and roads that involve significant detours. A 2016 report, for instance, notes that migrants crossing into Albania from Greece through or near the border control point east of Korçë (in Albania's east) or Kakavia (in the southeast) have to walk or pay a taxi fare for at least 31 kilometres to reach the closest point with meaningful public transport. Furthermore, Albania has no international railway connections and national transport networks are very fragmented, making it difficult to cross the country.[57] This can add to the time that is needed to reach the desired destination. Furthermore, the smuggling routes through Albania involve crossing several more international borders, which

can add to delays and costs. The fact that none of Albania's northern neighbours are EU member states also makes this route less attractive for irregular migrants.[58] Despite these difficulties, the sub-route via Albania tends to experience higher levels of smuggling when the routes from Greece to Bulgaria and/or FYR Macedonia become more difficult to travel.[59]

Information about the smuggling of migrants from Albania by sea to Italy is quite scarce, and it is difficult to gauge the level of smuggling activities from Albania across the Adriatic. Given that at the narrowest point the two countries are only separated by some 80 kilometres, one might expect—or at least speculate—that small vessels are used to smuggle migrants from Albania to Italy, a phenomenon which was quite common in the 1990s. There are only scattered reports to substantiate such claims, and some of the available sources reporting on migrant smuggling activities from Albania to Italy are out of date.[60] Among the few more recent and reliable sources is a 2015 publication by the European Commission, stating that 'the route from Albania to Italy, suppressed years ago, has recently been reactivated by involving Italian smugglers smuggling migrants on fast rubber dinghies for high prices.'[61]

IV.4.2 Methods

IV.4.2.1 Albanian nationals

Albanian nationals who cross the border to Greece illegally (and later return to Albania) are said either to use their own cars or public transportation such as buses to make this journey. They frequently carry fraudulent documents, especially counterfeit border stamps, to falsify their travel history and the date they last crossed the border.[62]

Several reports point to the smuggling of Albanian nationals by air. Detections at airports in EU member states, especially in Italy, the UK and Ireland, involved instances in which Albanian nationals used fraudulent Greek and Italian travel and identity documents.[63] The fact that many Albanians speak Greek and/or Italian makes it easier for them to pose as nationals of these countries and thus gain visa-free access to Schengen countries.[64] Throughout the 2011–2017 period, Albanian nationals consistently ranked very highly among persons detected travelling on fraudulent documents in EU member states.[65] In 2013 alone, 3,200 cases of document fraud involving Albanian nationals were detected by EU member states and Schengen associated countries, constituting 16% of all detections in that year.[66] Albanian nationals also feature very prominently among refusals at airports for failing to hold valid visas or other required documentation.[67]

Figure 33 below, although not directly related to the smuggling of migrants, shows the number illegal border crossings by Albanian nationals detected in all Schengen associated states (total) in the 2011–2017 period.

IV.4.2.2 Other nationalities

Other nationalities have also been found entering Albania from Greece using bus lines, though the use of covert methods appears be more common. In some instances, unknown to the driver, smuggled migrants hide in the cargo compartments of trucks crossing the border.[68] In most cases, smugglers guide or direct the migrants to and across the border on foot and provide the migrants with information on where to meet other smugglers and find onward transportation on the Albanian side.[69] Migrants are usually smuggled through Albania individually or in small groups. Some sources suggest that they usually travel in groups composed of persons of the same nationality;[70] other sources suggest that groups usually comprise mixed nationalities.[71]

The limited information concerning smuggling by boat from Albania suggests that smaller, privately owned vessels are generally used to transport people from Albania across the Adriatic to Italy. In the 1990s and early 2000s, smugglers frequently used their own speed boats to smuggle people and contraband to Italy. The scale of this

Figure 33: Illegal border crossings, Albania–all Schengen associated countries, 2011–September 2017 (Frontex)[72]

	All borders		Land borders		Air borders		Sea borders	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**15,947**	**+586%**	**8,978**	**+611%**	**3,302**	**+429%**	**3,667**	**+739%**
2012 – 1st quarter	2,261	–54%	1,192	–59%	617	–25%	452	–64%
2012 – 2nd quarter	3,737	–17%	2,587	–15%	638	–13%	512	–29%
2012 – 3rd quarter	2,872	–19%	1,718	–8,8%	582	–27%	572	–34%
2012 – 4th quarter	3,207	+8,8%	1,915	+65%	853	–9,6%	439	–48%
2012 – total	**12,932 12,036***	**+11%**	**8,250 7,378***	**+11%**	**2,689**	**+6,1%**	**1,969**	**+30%**
2013 – 1st quarter	2,789	+23%	1,576	+32%	724	+17%	489	+6,4%
2013 – 2nd quarter	2,695	–28%	1,474	–43%	747	+17%	474	–8,8%
2013 – 3rd quarter	3,225	+14%	1,919	+14%	735	+27%	571	–0,3%
2013 – 4th quarter	2,855	–11%	1,535	–20%	953	+12%	367	–16%
2013 – total	**11,564**	**–4,1%**	**6,504**	**–12%**	**3,159**	**+17%**	**1,901**	**–4,6%**
2014 – 1st quarter	2,977	+4,9%	1,443	–12%	1,011	+40%	523	+7%
2014 – 2nd quarter	3,342	+24%	1,883	+28%	923	+23%	537	+13%
2014 – 3rd quarter	3,028	–6.1%	1,782	–7,1%	710	–3,4%	536	–6,1%
2014 – 4th quarter	3,650	+28%	1,897	+24%	1,115	+17%	638	+74%
2014 – total	**13,001 12,099***	**+12%**	**7,005**	**+7,7%**	**3,760**	**+19%**	**2,234**	**+18%**
2015 – 1st quarter	3,326	+12%	1,539	+6,7%	1,075	+9,8%	616	+29%
2015 – 2nd quarter	3,705	+9,1%	1,903	+1,1%	1,172	+21%	630	+17%
2015 – 3rd quarter	3,915	+29%	2,069	+16%	1,247	+75%	603	*12%
2015 – 4th quarter	4,171	+14%	2,382	+26%	1,107	–0,7%	682	+6,9%
2015 – total	**15,025**	**+16%**	**7,893**	**+13%**	**4,602**	**+22%**	**2,531**	**+13%**
2016 – 1st quarter	3,585	+12%	1,701	+11%	1,152	+8,2%	732	+22%
2016 – 2nd quarter	4,715	+28%	2,871	+51%	1,050	–10%	794	+28%
2016 – 3rd quarter	4,841	+23%	3,078	+49%	937	–27%	826	+37%
2016 – 4th quarter	6,410	+54%	2,879	+21%	2,126	+92%	1,405	+106%
2016 – total								
2017 – 1st quarter	7,899	+119%	3,999	+135%	2,195	+88%	1,705	+133%
2017 – 2nd quarter	9,007	+91%	5,400	+88%	2,087	+99%	1,520	+91%
2017 – 3rd quarter	7,442	+53%	5,100	+66%	1,378	+46%	964	+17%

smuggling method led the Albanian Government to impose a moratorium which forbade Albanians to possess speedboats of a certain size. This moratorium remained in effect between 2006 and March 2013,[73] though it appears that this method has not experienced a resurgence in recent years.

IV.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

Individuals and networks involved in the smuggling of migrants in Albania fall into two broad categories: those who smuggle Albanian nationals and furnish them with fraudulent documents in order to reach EU member states, and those who operate locally and engage in smuggling non-regional migrants across one of Albania's land borders or across the Adriatic to Italy.

The provision and use of fraudulent documents by Albanian nationals is frequently associated with smuggling by air, which makes it a more costly service—and more profitable to smuggling networks. Such methods involve a greater level of coordination and sophistication, and usually require multiple individuals working in networks or organisations.[74] In June 2014, for instance, British authorities dismantled a network that had furnished hundreds of Albanian nationals with fraudulent documents and smuggled them on flights via Istanbul and Rome to the UK. The migrants had to pay between €6,000 and €10,000 and generally used identity cards with substituted photos.[75]

Smuggling foreign nationals across Albania's borders frequently requires very little sophistication. It is often done by local individuals or small groups with local knowledge who either guide irregular migrants across the border or meet them after crossing the border, or who use their vehicles to bring them into or move them around Albania.

The smuggling of migrants by sea from Albania to Italy tends to involve a slightly higher degree of coordination and planning. It has been reported that when the flow of irregular migrants was at its peak in 2015, organised networks set up to recruit migrants in camps in Idomeni, Greece, would take them to Albania and, avoiding the Albanian and Italian coastguards, smuggle them by sea to Apulia, Italy. Facebook and other internet sites have been used to promote the smuggling of migrants via Albania to Italy. The same report, however, further noted that the logistics of such smuggling ventures are so complex and costly that they are unattractive for smugglers and smuggled migrants alike.[76]

Notes

1 Cooperation and Development Institute, *Albania in the Western Balkans Route: August 2015 – June 2016*, Berlin Process Series, Working Paper No 1 (2016) 6.

2 See generally, European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 9.

3 Cooperation and Development Institute, *Albania in the Western Balkans Route: August 2015 – June 2016*, Berlin Process Series, Working Paper No 1 (2016) 8–10.

4 Cf. IOM, *Mapping major Migration Flows over the Territory of Western Balkan Countries, 2009–2013* (2014) 30.

5 Ibid, 30.

6 Ibid, 58.

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V BULGARIA

V.1 Overview

Bulgaria is a transit country for irregular migrants travelling from Turkey across the Balkans to Western Europe. While the country only shares a relatively short land border with Turkey, it is situated along a direct line—and along main roads and train services—between Istanbul, Belgrade, and Western Europe. Accordingly, most irregular migration flows cross Bulgaria in an east-west direction, entering the country across the land border from Turkey and leaving over the border to Serbia. During periods when irregular migration from Greece to FYR Macedonia is not feasible or involves great obstacles, irregular migrants in Greece often divert via Bulgaria to Serbia. In some instances irregular migrants cross from Bulgaria into Romania and then continue to Hungary.

At the start of the 2011–2017 period, the level of irregular migration from Turkey to Bulgaria was relatively low, as migrants could cross from Turkey to Greece with relative ease. The building of a border fence along the Greek—Turkish border, along with other measures designed to stop the flow of migrants across the Aegean Sea, has meant that more irregular migrants—and more migrant smugglers—try to enter the EU by crossing into Bulgaria. As a result of the greater number of people entering Bulgaria, and due to the measures adopted by other countries along the Balkan route, the number of refugees and individuals seeking asylum in Bulgaria, especially Afghans, Syrians, and Iraqis, has increased greatly in recent years.

Bulgaria is one of the poorest nations in the European Union (EU) and has, at times, struggled to control or stop the influx of irregular migrants from Turkey. Bulgaria's capacity to control its borders effectively, manage immigration and process asylum applications efficiently is limited in comparison to many other EU member states. Bulgarian politics, nationalist rhetoric and corruption also frequently stand in the way of measures that could reduce irregular migration, promote safe migration, and foster cooperation with other countries.[1]

V.2 Levels and characteristics

V.2.1 Numbers

V.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

The levels of irregular migration through Bulgaria appear to be mostly determined by the ability or inability of migrants to move from Turkey to Greece and from Greece to the Former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia. The route via Bulgaria, sometimes referred to as the Eastern Balkan Route, seems to be a less attractive option to many migrants, who generally prefer to use the more direct Western Balkan Route, which tends to be a slightly less direct but nevertheless faster way to reach Western Europe.

Most irregular migrants reach Bulgaria over land, attempting to cross the border from Turkey or, in smaller numbers, from Greece. Figure 34 below shows the number of non-EU citizens refused entry at Bulgaria's border. In 2016 more than three-quarters of refusals occurred at the land border, and more than one-fifth at Bulgaria's airports. The limited data available for the years 2011 to 2017 does not show significant trends, though the total number of entry refusals has dropped somewhat over this period.

The number of persons refused entry at Bulgaria's border does not, however, reflect the levels of irregular migration to and through the country, which are considerably higher. It has been estimated that in the eleven months from 1 January to 30 November 2013, some 10,000 migrants arrived in Bulgaria irregularly.[2] These higher figures are understood to be a displacement of irregular migration flows brought about by activities along the land border between Greece and Turkey, starting in mid-2012.[3]

In 2015, the number of irregular migrants recorded in Bulgaria rose to over 30,000. Monthly data of migrant arrivals published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) show a signifi-

Figure 34: Non-EU citizens refused entry, Bulgaria 2011–2017 (Eurostat)[4]

	Total	land border		air border		sea border	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
2011	2,810	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012	3,070	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013	2,550	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014	2,315	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015	2,405	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016	2,170	1,655	76.3%	470	21.7%	45	2.1%

cant fluctuation between individual months for the years 2015 and 2016 (Figure 35 below). The number of irregular arrivals was particularly high in the second half of 2015. It dropped over the winter months but rose again between May and October 2016. Significantly lower numbers have been reported for 2017.

Figure 35: Migrant arrivals Bulgaria, 2015–2017 (IOM)[5]

	2015	2016	2017
January	504	596	48
February	502	450	50
March	568	524	158
April	1,090	1,201	347
May	782	782	209
June	1,508	1,436	158
July	n.a.	1,236	330
Aug	n.a.	4,022	311
Sep	7,706	2,645	354
Oct	n.a.	2,133	190
Nov	21,602	1,129	161
Dec	1,866	487	n.a.
year total	**31,174**	**15,962**	**2,562**

V.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Bulgaria has witnessed a significant increase in the number of foreigners found to be staying in the country illegally. As shown in Figure 36 below, from 2011 to 2015 the number of 'third country nationals found to be illegally present in Bulgaria' rose from just 1,355 to 20,810. The highest increase was recorded in the years 2014 and 2015, which has been attributed to the sharp rise in the number of Syrian nationals entering Bulgaria from Turkey.[6]

Figure 36: Third country nationals found to be illegally present, Bulgaria 2011-2016 (Eurostat)[7]

	Total
2011	1,355
2012	2,050
2013	5,260
2014	12,870
2015	20,810
2016	14,125

V.2.2 Entry points

Most irregular migrants enter Bulgaria from Turkey, and in lower numbers from Greece. The patterns and levels of irregular entry into Bulgaria very much depend on the measures adopted to stop irregular flows from Turkey to Greece: If border crossings from Turkey to Greece become more difficult, migrants will attempt to travel from Turkey to Bulgaria in larger numbers. If measures to stop illegal entry from Turkey to Bulgaria are stepped up, more migrants will resort to the routes which lead via Greece. A closer look at developments over the past decade reveals that from Turkey, migrants may choose between one of three routes, depending on accessibility: from Turkey to Greece across the land border, from Turkey to Greece across the Aegean Sea, and from Turkey to Bulgaria overland.[8]

V.2.2.1 From Turkey

Prior to 2012, illegal border crossings from Turkey to Bulgaria occurred on a relatively small scale. In 2010, for instance, 1,036 illegal crossings were recorded along that border, some 61% of all detections recorded in Bulgaria that year.[9] In 2012, a significant increase in the number of illegal crossings from Turkey was noted, which has been attributed to the strengthening of border controls at the Greco-Turkish land border.[10] The displacement of irregular migration to the route from Turkey to Bulgaria occurred almost immediately after Greek authorities, supported by other EU countries, introduced 'Operation Aspida' to stop the flow of migrants from Turkey across the land border (and the Evros River) to Greece on 6 August 2012. At the same time, Bulgarian authorities stepped up measures to monitor the Turkish border and apprehend those crossing it illegally, which further contributed to a greater number of persons being detected.[11]

During 2013, illegal border crossings from Turkey to Bulgaria continued to rise. While the displacement to the Turkey-Bulgaria land border was rather modest in the first 12 months following the adoption of Operation Aspida, the number of illegal border detections rose more significantly between August and November of 2013.[12] In 2013, detections at this border accounted for 45% of all detections on the Eastern Mediterranean Route.[13]

While irregular migration appears to occur all along the 240 kilometre long border separating the two countries, most migrants seem to travel to Edirne in the far northwest corner of Turkey, then cross into Bulgaria in the mountainous area south of the Bulgarian town of Elhovo, often with the help of locals.[14] It appears that the immediate effect of Operation Aspida was a displacement to other routes, and that it did not cause any reduction in the number of migrants in the region seeking to enter the EU.[15]

In late 2013, with assistance from the EU External Borders Fund, Bulgaria introduced additional measures to stop and apprehend persons seeking to cross the border clandestinely. New technology and coordination measures were introduced to detect movements at the border and alert Turkish authorities who would detain the migrants before they crossed into Bulgaria.[16] These measures led to a drop in the number of illegal border crossings recorded in 2014, shown in Figure 37 below.[17] The illegal crossings which were recorded in 2014 are said to have occurred at the eastern part of the Turkey-Bulgaria border, which was not covered by the new Integrated Border Surveillance System (IBSS) at that time.[18]

While the total number of illegal border crossings from Turkey to Bulgaria increased in 2015, the route lost relative significance compared to irregular migration from Turkey to Greece. Nevertheless, in absolute numbers a high number of irregular migrants still made their way to Bulgaria, especially between August and November 2015. The relative decline throughout 2015 was initially attributed to additional border control measures and flooding, which made it harder for people to cross the border independently. Instead, migrants had to hide in vehicles taking them across clandestinely.[19] Later that year, the percentage of irregular migrants travelling from Turkey to Bulgaria decreased further, as more attractive options opened up in Greece. In particular, the ability to travel with relative ease from Greece through FYR Macedonia meant that relatively fewer people sought to cross from Turkey into Bulgaria and on to Serbia.[20]

In 2016, the number of illegal crossings from Turkey into Bulgaria further declined as a result of the measures adopted to stop the flow of migrants from Turkey to Greece and Bulgaria. Those who managed to enter Bulgaria illegally are believed to have done so in the eastern part of the border near the towns of Malko Tarnovo and Bolyarovo.[21]

The decrease in the number of illegal crossings over the land route continued in 2017, though a new, albeit small trend emerged with irregular movements from Turkey to Bulgaria (and also Romania) by boat across the Black Sea. This method was used in 2014[22] but since seems to have disappeared. Whether the 'Black Sea route' will evolve into a more common avenue of irregular migration is not presently predictable.[23]

Figure 37: Illegal border crossings into Bulgaria, 2010–2017[24]

	Illegal border crossings from Turkey into Bulgaria		**Illegal border crossings from Greece into Bulgaria**		**Illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia into Bulgaria**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2010 – total	**1,036**	n.a.	**419**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**1,700**	**+206%**	n.a.	n.a.	**10**	**–41%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**4,028**	**–64%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	956	+148%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	1,454	+64%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	3,028	+88%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	1,754	+54%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–6%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	100%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–35%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–74%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–69%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–50%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–78%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0%
2016 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–46%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–50%	n.a.	–91%	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+1%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–65%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

V.2.2.2 From Greece

In some cases, irregular migrants first travel from Turkey to Greece before they enter Bulgaria. As an internal EU border, travelling from Greece to Bulgaria involves fewer obstacles than the direct route from Turkey.[25] In 2010, some 25% of all illegal border crossings in Bulgaria were detected at the border to Greece.[26]

Based on the available information, illegal entry from Greece to Bulgaria appears to spike at times when other routes are not available. A large increase was recorded, for instance, in the first quarter of 2012,[27] and again in 2016 after it became nearly impossible for migrants to move from Greece to FYR Macedonia.[28]

V.2.2.3 From Serbia and FYR Macedonia

The border to Serbia appears to be rarely used for irregular crossings into Bulgaria (but it is frequently crossed irregulary in the opposite direction; see section V.2.4.1 below). There have been occasional reports of irregular migrants entering Bulgaria from Serbia, though the limited available information suggests that these flows have been very limited in size and have declined in recent years.[29]

Similarly, irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to Bulgaria appears to occur only on a very small scale, and mostly involves migrants from the region rather than from third countries.[30]

V.2.3 Stay

Bulgaria is both a destination and a transit country for irregular migrants. For some migrants, Bulgaria is merely the first entry point into the European Union and they quickly move on to other countries where they may have relatives and friends. Some asylum seekers also prefer to leave Bulgaria, which only has limited resources to support refugees, does not offer the same protections as Western European countries, and where allegations of forced push-backs of asylum seekers may deter migrants from staying in the country any longer than necessary.[31]

Others, however, seek to remain in Bulgaria and apply for asylum. Many refugees come to Bulgaria to escape inadequate conditions and uncertain status in Turkey, because they have been unable to reach Greece, or because the cost of living is lower in Bulgaria than in Greece.[32] Figure 39 below shows that the number of refugees and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan in Bulgaria has grown very significantly in recent years. According to other sources, the total number of asylum applications lodged in Bulgaria rose from just 890 in 2011 to 7,144 in 2013, 11,081 in 2014, and to over 20,000 in 2015.[33]

V.2.4 Departures

For most irregular migrants, Bulgaria is a transit country. From Bulgaria most travel to Serbia, with a smaller number travelling to Romania, and fewer still to FYR Macedonia.[34]

V.2.4.1 To Serbia

The route from Bulgaria to Serbia (and on to Hungary or other countries) has been among the most frequently used in recent years.[35] The rising flow of irregular migrants via Bulgaria to Serbia was first noted in 2013, and corresponds with higher levels of irregular arrivals into Bulgaria from Turkey earlier that year. At that time, Frontex already predicted that any increase in irregular migration from Turkey to Bulgaria would result in growing secondary movements from Bulgaria, especially to Serbia.[36] Detections at the border rose from just 40 in 2012 to more than 500 in 2013. At that time it was found that the profile and nationalities of these migrants was largely the same as those of migrants entering Bulgaria illegally from Turkey.[37] In 2014, after a brief drop early in the year,[38] detections on the route from Bulgaria to Serbia and Hungary increased by a further 65%, which has also been attributed to conditions in Bulgaria that caused irregular migrants to shorten their stay and depart sooner than they otherwise would have.[39]

Irregular departures from Bulgaria to Serbia increased greatly in 2015, especially in the second half of that year. This reflects an increase in irregular movement in the Eastern Mediterranean, though in 2015 these figures no longer correlated directly with detections of irregular arrivals from Turkey.[40] It appears that in 2015 more migrants entered Bulgaria from Greece, and perhaps that more migrants were able to cross from Turkey to Greece undetected.[41] By the end of 2015, more than 48,000 illegal border crossings had been detected at the Bulgaria-Serbia border, a sixty-fold increase over 2014.[42]

The number of illegal border crossings from Bulgaria to Serbia was lower in 2016 than in 2015, but remained at high levels throughout the year. Most of these migrants had previously arrived from Turkey, though some had entered Bulgaria from Greece after they were no longer able to travel from Greece to FYR Macedonia.[43] Figures for the year 2017 were not available at the time of writing. In July 2017, Frontex reported that the number of detections of illegal border crossings by Bulgarian authorities at the border to Serbia had dropped significantly compared to the third and fourth quarters of 2016, indicating that fewer irregular migrants were travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes.[44] In the first quarter of 2017 detections of irregular migrants from Bulgaria to Serbia dropped by 46%.[45]

Figure 38 below shows data provided by Frontex relating to illegal border crossings from Bulgaria for the period from 2012 to 2016.

Figure 38: Illegal border crossings from Bulgaria, 2012–2016 (Frontex)[46]

	To Serbia			**To FYR Macedonia**
	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points	Detections of illegal border crossings	Detections of illegal border crossing
2012 – year total	n.a.	n.a.	36	
2013 – 4th quarter	335	10	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – year total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	89	0	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	27	6	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	147	9	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	557	34	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – year total	n.a.	n.a.	**820**	**39**
2015 – 1st quarter	1,886	19	912	2
2015 – 2nd quarter	7,828	114	4,130	3
2015 – 3rd quarter	18,673	147	n.a.	19
2015 – 4th quarter	20,108	30	n.a.	2
2015 – year total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	2,182	0	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	495	0	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	4,162	2	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	4,928	37	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – year total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

V.2.4.2 To Romania

Romania is an alternative next stage for irregular migrants transiting through Bulgaria.[47] The scale of irregular border crossings from Bulgaria to Romania appears to be affected by the ease or difficulty of crossing from Bulgaria to Serbia. UNHCR, for instance, noted in September 2016 that increased restrictions at the border to Serbia had redirected some irregular migrants to the Romanian border and forced them to use dangerous, clandestine methods to cross from Bulgaria to Romania to avoid detection.[48]

V.2.4.3 To FYR Macedonia

From the limited available information, it appears that irregular migration from Bulgaria to FYR Macedonia occurs only in very small numbers. The data provided for 2014 and 2015 by Frontex, shown in Figure 38 above, involves single-digit figures for most quarters.[49]

V.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Irregular migrants who enter Bulgaria mostly come from the conflict zones in the Middle East, particularly Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. Iranian and Turkish nationals, along with persons from Algeria and several West African nations are also found among irregular migrants, albeit in much smaller numbers.[50]

Figure 39 below shows that Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals also constitute the largest groups of refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria. Their number grew significantly between 2013 and 2016, as did the number of Pakistani nationals seeking asylum in Bulgaria.

Figure 39: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Bulgaria 2011–2016, top nationalities[51]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**2,414**	**304**	**2,475**	**36**	**168**
- refugees	2,067	250	2,109	1	98
- asylum-seekers	347	54	366	35	70
2012 – total	**368**	**89**	**1,359**	**4**	**97**
- refugees	368	89	1,359	4	97
- asylum-seekers	0	0	0	0	0
2013 – total	**852**	**140**	**1,439**	**38**	**4,604**
- refugees	268	70	1,200	4	2,104
- asylum-seekers	584	70	239	34	2,500
2014 – total	**2,845**	**199**	**1,805**	**167**	**11,011**
- refugees	121	73	1,207	6	8,501
- asylum-seekers	2,633	126	567	161	2,510
2015 – total	**3,438**	**204**	**4,861**	**356**	**15,502**
- refugees	197	72	1,339	7	13,819
- asylum-seekers	3,241	132	3,511	349	1,683
2016 – total	**7,806**	**485**	**5,477**	**1,466**	**16,988**
- refugees	170	68	1,385	1,458	1,961
- asylum-seekers	7,636	417	4,092	8	15,027

V.3.1 The Middle East

Syrians

The number of Syrian nationals entering Bulgaria illegally from Turkey started to rise towards the end of 2012 due to the deteriorating situation in their country of origin and the growing number of Syrians fleeing to Turkey. While in 2012 most Syrians left Turkey for Greece, enhanced border protection and interception efforts along the Turkish-Greek border led to a displacement of irregular migration from Turkey to Bulgaria in 2013. Detections of Syrian nationals fleeing to Bulgaria across the land border from Turkey started to increase almost immediately after the beginning of Operation Aspida, which sought to prevent and deter irregular migration from Turkey to Greece.[52] It has been estimated that in 2013, more than 6,000 Syrian nationals 'walked across the border from Turkey into Bulgaria'.[53]

Simultaneously, the number of persons applying for asylum in Bulgaria rose very sharply, and since then Bulgaria has increasingly become a destination country for Syrian migrants.[54] By early 2014, Bulgaria reportedly recorded the highest numbers of detections of Syrian nationals staying in any EU member state.[55] The shift to the route via Bulgaria also meant that detections of Syrian nationals leaving Bulgaria for Serbia started to go up in the second half of 2013.[56] Throughout 2014 and 2015, Syrian nationals continued to be among the main nationalities entering and staying in Bulgaria illegally.[57]

Iraqis

Iraqi nationals are ranked by most sources as the third largest group of irregular migrants entering Bulgaria. Most Iraqis enter Bulgaria across the land border from Turkey and leave by crossing into Serbia. Absolute numbers for Iraqis transiting through Bulgaria in the 2011 to 2017 period are not available, though Iraqis are among the main nationalities apprehended each year in the reporting period, albeit in smaller numbers than Syrians and Afghans.[58]

Palestinians

Among the irregular migrants entering Bulgaria are a considerable number of Palestinians. In 2012 and 2013 Palestinians were among the top nationalities detected at the land border to Turkey.[59] The number appears to have decreased considerably in 2014, when only a small number of Palestinians were found to be entering Bulgaria illegally, most of them across the land border to Greece.[60]

V.3.2 South Asia

Afghans

In 2011 and 2012, the number of Afghan nationals crossing through Bulgaria was quite low, having declined significantly from previous years.[61] In 2013, the number of Afghans entering Bulgaria from Greece rose sharply as a result of measures adopted in Greece to stop and intercept illegal border crossings from Turkey. The measures adopted in Greece under Operation Aspida shifted irregular migration to the route from Turkey to Bulgaria. Many Afghan nationals who arrived in Bulgaria subsequently applied for asylum in the country; others moved on and sought to cross from Bulgaria into Serbia, resulting in a marked increase in the number of illegal border crossing detections.[62]

Since 2014, Afghan nationals have constituted one of the top three nationalities of irregular migrants apprehended in Bulgaria,[63] and, as shown in Figure 39 above, make up the second largest group of refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

Pakistanis

Pakistanis are among the many nationalities that cross illegally from Turkey to Bulgaria. Border crossings are usually made overland. Pakistanis often use covert methods to enter and transit through the country, including concealment in cars and trucks, or the use of fraudulent travel or identity documents.[64] In early 2016, Pakistani nationals were the fourth largest group of persons apprehended on exit from Bulgaria to Serbia.[65]

Figure 39 above further shows that number of refugees from Pakistan grew very significantly from 2015 to 2016.

V.3.3 Africa

Information about irregular migrants from Africa entering or transiting through Bulgaria is rather scattered. Nationals of Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Mali have been found crossing from Bulgaria into Serbia illegally. Algerians and Malians were reportedly among the main nationalities apprehended in Bulgaria in 2012, though absolute numbers are not available.[66] It is noteworthy that reports concerning irregular migrants from Africa entering or transiting through Bulgaria mostly involve persons from Algeria and West African nations; the source material consulted for this report contained no reports suggesting that considerable numbers of irregular migrants from East Africa enter or transit through Bulgaria.

V.4 Smuggling of migrants

V.4.1 Routes

V.4.1.1 Into the country

Most efforts to smuggle migrants into Bulgaria take place across the border with Turkey, and most detections of smugglers are also made in connection with these activities.[67] The smuggling of migrants from Turkey to Greece, along with other forms of irregular migration, is said to have increased since the completion of the border fence between Turkey and Greece, which forced irregular migrants to look for alternative avenues to enter the European Union.[68]

Smuggled migrants usually travel from Istanbul to Edirne, then employ one of several methods to enter Bulgaria. Crossings on foot between Turkey and Bulgaria usually take place in the rural areas between the main border control posts at Kapıkule/Kapitan Andreevo and Lesovo. The border runs through many remote areas, with thick forests and hilly areas, as well as rivers which also separate the two countries in some places. While it may be physically challenging to cross the border, especially in winter, migrants can enter Bulgaria clandestinely with relative ease. This is why fences and electronic equipment to detect border crossings have been installed in some places.[69] When entering Bulgaria from Turkey, smuggled migrants are usually brought by smugglers to an area near the border, then told how to get to Bulgaria. Sometimes local residents who work independently or are connected to smuggling networks based in Istanbul assist migrants in finding their way to the border. Bulgarian authorities report that smugglers have ceased accompanying migrants across the border to avoid being apprehended by border authorities.[70] After crossing the border, the smuggled migrants are frequently met by another member of the smuggling organisation who is responsible for arranging their accommodation and onward travel. Most migrants are initially taken to Sofia, where they either apply for asylum or plan the next leg of their journey (or both).[71]

In addition to smuggling on foot, a number of other methods are used to bring migrants into Bulgaria. These include entry with valid or fraudulent visas, smuggling in private vehicles, and concealment in cars, trucks, and vans.[72] Sometimes the smugglers instruct the migrants to misrepresent their nationality should they be apprehended by Bulgarian authorities.[73] Covert smuggling methods, especially concealment in various means of transport, are said to have increased considerably, as it has become more difficult to cross the border without the aid of smugglers. Migrants have become more dependent on smugglers, who facilitate the border crossing by hiding migrants in freight trains and trucks.[74]

A further, albeit less frequently used method to smuggle migrants from Turkey to Bulgaria involves the use of boats to take migrants across the Black Sea in an attempt to reach Bulgaria clandestinely.[75]

In some instances, smuggled migrants first cross from Turkey to Greece before they enter Bulgaria. Because the border between Greece and Bulgaria is an internal EU border many crossings in-

volve overt methods, though there are instances in which covert methods are used to smuggle migrants from Greece to Bulgaria and in which smugglers actively recruited migrants who were unable to cross from Greece into FYR Macedonia and then took them to Bulgaria.[76]

V.4.1.2 Out of the country

Most smuggling activities out of Bulgaria take place across the border with Serbia. This may at first sight seem surprising, given that this border crossing takes migrants out of the European Union, but the route from Bulgaria via Serbia is a more direct way to reach Western Europe, and the route from Bulgaria via Romania to Hungary is said to be 'much worse' because it runs through mountainous areas and places with very poor infrastructure.[77]

The smuggling of migrants from Bulgaria to Serbia directly correlates to irregular migration from Turkey to Bulgaria: It involves the same nationalities, and smuggling activities along this route increase at times when crossing from Turkey to Greece and FYR Macedonia entails greater obstacles.[78] The methods used to smuggle migrants into Serbia are very similar to those used to smuggle migrants from Turkey into Bulgaria. Local people frequently assist migrants with their vehicles by taking them from Sofia or other parts of the country to the 'green border' and giving them instructions about how, where, and when it is best to cross. In some instances smuggled migrants are hidden in vehicles and taken across the border from Bulgaria to Serbia, especially to Belgrade.[79]

Information about the smuggling of migrants from Bulgaria to Romania is quite limited, and this route, as mentioned, tends to be used less frequently. Both overt methods, such as walking across the border, and covert methods, such as hiding in private vehicles, trucks, or vans, are used to take migrants across this border. There are also reports of smuggled migrants acquiring valid visas in Bulgaria and then continuing their journey to other parts of Europe using overt, legal avenues.[80]

V.4.2 Methods

V.4.2.1 Smuggling by land

Most migrant smuggling ventures into, across, and out of Bulgaria are made overland, using a variety of covert and overt methods, and usually involve small groups of migrants who are smuggled together.[81]

Use of vehicles

Covert methods tend to predominantly involve the concealment of migrants in commercial vehicles such as trucks and vans and, to a lesser extent, in private vehicles or trains. If trucks and vans are used to smuggle migrants from Turkey to Bulgaria, this is usually done with the knowledge of the driver, and special compartments are installed to hide the migrants. Similarly, if private vehicles are used, migrants are often hidden behind the seats.[82] Such methods frequently entail great dangers for the migrants, especially if they are crammed into compartments that are too small to carry that number of people.[83]

If migrants are smuggled on board cargo trains they may be hidden anywhere among the cargo, or in spaces near the undercarriage. This method is said to be used mostly by Afghan, Syrian, and Pakistani nationals who are hidden on the trains in Turkey, usually in Edirne, then cross the border by train near the border control point at Kapitan Andreevo and disembark at the first stop in Svilengrad, having travelled only about 30 kilometres by train.[84]

In some apparently less common instances, migrants are furnished with fraudulent travel or identity documents to cross the border into Bulgaria, are instructed to make false claims about their country of origin, or are hidden among larger groups of people trying to cross at the same time, in the hope that they can cross without being checked themselves.[85]

Once in Bulgaria, private vehicles and taxis are generally used to carry migrants, either to Sofia or another transit city, or to the next border,

especially the border to Serbia. Private vehicles, as mentioned earlier, are often used to smuggle migrants covertly from Bulgaria to Serbia, or migrants may be driven to a place near the border, cross into Serbia without the assistance of smugglers, and meet a taxi on the other side.[86]

On foot

Crossing Bulgaria's borders on foot, independently or with the aid of smugglers, is a common method used by irregular migrants to enter or leave the country. Most smuggling ventures into and out of Bulgaria involve a combination of methods. Smuggled migrants are often driven to the border or use public transport to reach towns near the border, and are then guided across the border or are given instructions by smugglers about how, where, and when to cross. Sometimes borders are crossed at night to avoid detection by border guards. To reduce the risk of arrest, smugglers usually do not cross the border with the migrants.[87] On the other side of the border the migrants are then met by other drivers, or simply by parked cars, refuelled and with the keys inside so the migrants can drive themselves to Sofia or other meeting points.[88]

V.4.2.2 Smuggling by air

Information about the smuggling of migrants by air through Bulgaria is extremely limited. There are only occasional reports about smuggling aboard commercial flights originating in non-EU States bound for Sofia.[89]

V.4.2.3 Smuggling by sea

Reports about the smuggling of migrants by sea to Bulgaria are very isolated and somewhat anecdotal. They mostly refer to instances in which vessels were used to smuggle migrants from Turkey across the Black Sea to the Bulgarian coast.[90] Rumours that smugglers overload these vessels to the extent that they sink refer to isolated incidents and are not supported by other evidence.[91] In some cases, boats have also been used to smuggle migrants along and across the Danube River from Bulgaria to Romania.[92]

V.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

The persons involved in smuggling migrants into, through, and out of Bulgaria are mostly nationals of the countries in question: Turkish nationals tend to be involved in facilitating illegal border crossings from Turkey into Bulgaria, Bulgarian nationals transport migrants through the country and sometimes into Serbia, and Serbian smugglers assist in bringing migrants from Bulgaria to Serbia, or meet the migrants on the Serbian side after they have crossed the border.[93]

Based on the available information, it appears that most smugglers of this kind are opportunistic in the sense that they become involved if and when demand for illegal border crossings arises; such smugglers have little influence on the level of irregular migration and only play a minor, if any, role in creating or funnelling the demand. This is also supported by the fact that local residents often play an important role in assisting smuggled migrants, especially by driving or otherwise guiding them to the border.[94]

These local residents often operate individually or in small local groups. Sometimes they are connected to smugglers in larger cities such as Istanbul, Sofia, or Belgrade, who may pass on phone numbers or other details of local smugglers to migrants. Organisers of this sort are not necessarily nationals of the countries in which they operate; they frequently share the same nationality as the migrants whom they smuggle.[95]

In some instances, corrupt Bulgarian police officers have been involved in—and charged with—smuggling migrants through the country.[96]

The costs of being smuggled from Turkey across the border to Bulgaria and onwards to Sofia or to Serbia are estimated at between €2,000 and €3,000. A 2015 publication by the European Commission found that:

for a group of four to five migrants for guided border crossing and arranged transportation to Sofia, the profit for the organiser would be about EUR 10,000–EUR 13,000. He would receive EUR 2,500–EUR 3,000 from each migrant while his expenses would be EUR 1,000 EUR for the car, EUR 500 for the guide and EUR 200 for the person who bought the car.[97]

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VI SERBIA

VI.1 Overview

Serbia is a major transit country for irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants in the Balkans. During the 2011–2017 period Serbia experienced some of the highest numbers of irregular arrivals, and the country was most profoundly affected by the large flow of irregular migrants travelling across the Balkans in the second half of 2015. Although exact figures vary across sources, over half a million irregular migrants passed through Serbia in 2015 alone.[1] 'At the beginning of the migratory surge' in mid-2015, a Frontex report notes the following:

> Serbian authorities implemented a series of prevention measures (such as increasing the number of personnel, enhanced control activities and opening a new migrant reception centre in Presevo). Later, however, the focus was shifted from prevention measures to organised orderly transit, registration and onwards transfer by public transport (i.e. towards Hungary and after September towards Croatia).[2]

Serbia also felt the effects of the policies and measures adopted by the other countries in region more than most. In particular, Hungary's unilateral decision to close its border to irregular migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, followed by measured adopted in Slovenia and Croatia to limit the flow of migrants to Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals, meant that thousands of migrants became stranded in Serbia and that the 'irregular migration problem' of other countries was passed to Serbia and subsequently to other countries further along the Balkan route.

Irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants generally leads from Serbia's south-eastern to its north-western borders. In recent years, the vast majority of irregular migrants have entered from FYR Macedonia and continued across Serbia to Hungary and Croatia. Irregular migration also occurs across the borders to Bulgaria, Romania, and Montenegro, albeit at much lower levels and usually only at times when the more direct and popular routes are not open.[3] Adding to the scale of irregular migration through Serbia are movements by Albanian nationals, Kosovars, and persons from other parts of the former Yugoslavia who pass through Serbia en route to Western Europe. Disputes about some of Serbia's borders, and uncertainties about the international status of Kosovo, further fuel the complexities of migration-related issues. A 2016 publications notes:

> Faced with extremely complex migration situation, Serbia does not have the appropriate institutional and regulatory framework, nor a political response to a series of complex issues in the area of migration and migration-related issues, such as asylum system, irregular migration, sustainable return of our citizens asylum seekers in EU Member States, implementation of the agreement on readmission, the departure of highly educated — brain drain, migration and development, the fight against human trafficking (protection of victims, prevention, criminal prosecution of traffickers), and smuggling of migrants, issues of border management, demarcation and boundary determination (as well as the agreement that should be concluded).[4]

VI.2 Levels and characteristics

VI.2.1 Numbers

VI.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Serbia's central location and the large size of its territory relative to most of its neighbours are some of the reasons why the country is experiencing levels of irregular migration higher than most other Western Balkan countries. Serbia plays a crucial role on the Western Balkan route, and has witnessed some of the highest numbers of irregular migrant arrivals in recent years. In 2012, Frontex reported that 'Serbia was by far the top reporting country' of illegal border crossing detections in the region.[5]

Reports by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) show that in 2014, 8,238 foreigners were denied entry at Serbia's borders, up from 8,069 in 2013. Most of these detections were not connected to refugees seeking to enter the country, but rather involved nationals of Bosnia-Herzgovina and Germany, as well as persons considered stateless by Serbian authorities. For the most part, detections of irregular migrants at the border in these years related to persons arriving without valid travel or identity documents (5,377 in 2014 and 5,813 in 2013). In other cases, persons were denied entry because of uncertainties concerning their purpose for entering Serbia (813 in 2014 and 413 in 2013) or concerns that the persons would not have sufficient funds to cover their stay in Serbia (260 in 2014 and 234 in 2013).[6]

From January 2015, monthly irregular migrant arrivals in Serbia started to rise, from 2,427 in January to 15,689 by mid-year. Data published by IOM show that monthly arrivals further increased twelvefold to 180,303 in the four months to October 2015, and remained high for the rest of the year (Figure 40 below). According to IOM, 579,518 irregular migrants arrived in Serbia in 2015. Other sources place that number higher still, suggesting that 'over 650,000 people'[7] or 'more than 815,000 refugees and migrants'[8] passed through Serbia in 2015.

Figure 40: Migrant arrivals, Serbia, 2015–2016 (IOM)[9]

	2015	2016
January	2,427	58,464
February	2,544	36,141
March	3,821	1,512
April	4,439	18
May	9,894	367
June	15,689	904
July	29,146	525
August	37,459	603
September	51,048	236
October	180,303	22
November	149,922	3
December	92,826	0
Year total	**579,518**	**98,975**

From November 2015 the number of migrant arrivals began to drop considerably. In December less that 100,000 arrivals were recorded, by March 2016 only 1,512 and, according to IOM figures, in April 2016 just 18 irregular migrants arrived in Serbia. For the remainder of 2016 anywhere between 0 and 904 irregular migrant arrivals per month were recorded in Serbia. Figures for 2017 were not available from the same source. UNHCR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, reported that some 2,500 refugees and other irregular migrants arrived in Serbia in the six months from January to June 2017.[10]

VI.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Reliable information concerning the number of migrants residing in Serbia irregularly was not available in the sources consulted for the purpose of this research. The fact that many migrants became stranded in Serbia after Hungary closed its borders, and after Slovenia and Croatia adopted measures to limit entry to asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, is well documented, though few sources contain data about the total number of migrants staying in Serbia illegally at any one time. Media reports from 2015 to 2017 generally put the figure of migrants stranded in Serbia as a result of the border restrictions imposed by neighbouring countries at from 7,000 to 10,000.[11] IOM lists 3,979 migrants as 'stranded' in Serbia on December 31st 2017.[12]

VI.2.2 Entry points

Serbia shares borders with seven countries (including Kosovo). In the 2011–2017 period, the vast majority of irregular migrants arrived in Serbia from FYR Macedonia, which is the shortest of Serbia's borders. Some irregular flow also occurs across the borders with Montenegro and Bulgaria, but, as shown in Figure 41 below, these are small when compared to the influx of migrants which has crossed from FYR Macedonia. The number of irregular migrants entering from Romania, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina is smaller still, and no complete records for the number of illegal border crossings reported each year are publicly available.

Figure 41: Illegal border crossings into Serbia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[13]

	Illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia to Serbia		**Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Serbia**		**Illegal border crossings from Bulgaria to Serbia**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**7,045**	**+421%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	1,731	+149%	40	+100%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	2,216	+86%	78	+420	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**8,471**	**+20%**	**146**	**+92%**	**36**	**+3,500%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**3,524**	**–27%**	**94**	**–62%**	**820**	**+63%**
2015 – 1st quarter	2,190	+353%	6	–63%	910	+922%
2015 – 2nd quarter	3759 3845*	495% 473%*	4 10	–78% –66%*	4,129 4,130*	15,781% 15,196%*
2015 – 3rd quarter	98,209	+8977%	534	–60%	18,673	+12,603%
2015 – 4th quarter	408,021	+31 579%	44	+2%	20,108	+3,510%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+15 039%**	n.a.	**+3,337%**	n.a.	**+5,814%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–99%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	+16%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–99%	n.a.	–99%	n.a.	–94%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–100%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–98%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–75%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–100%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**–76%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–46%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–93%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

VI.2.2.1 From FYR Macedonia

Overview

Throughout the 2011–2017 period, irregular migration across the border from FYR Macedonia to Serbia has occurred at very high levels. Figure 41 above shows that high increases were recorded in 2011 and 2012. Numbers dropped in 2013 and 2014, before rising to unprecedented levels in 2015. In the three months from July to September 2015, as many as 98,209 persons crossed the border illegally; in the following three months, that number grew more than fourfold to 408,021.

In addition to the data shown in Figure 41 above, Frontex publishes quarterly reports containing the number of illegal border crossings detected between and at border control points. This data, displayed in Figure 42 below, again shows the very steep rise in numbers from the third quarter of 2013 to the fourth quarter of 2015. Also visible is the drastic drop in numbers since the start of 2016. By comparing the numbers relating to detections between border control points to those relating to detections at the border on the other, it becomes evident that for a period of time in the second half of 2015 the border between the two countries was virtually open and nobody was stopped for illegal entry at the border.

Developments

The route from Greece via FYR Macedonia into Serbia has been an established avenue for irregular migrants since at least the late 2000s. Reports and data from 2011 and 2012 show that several thousand irregular migrants entered Serbia from FYR Macedonia each year, and that the authorities were well aware of developments and fluctuations on this route.[14] Initially, many of the migrants were Afghan nationals, some of whom had been living in Greece for some time. From 2014 onwards, a growing number of Syrian nationals were among those entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia. It was further noted that the increasing number of detections in Serbia corresponded more or less directly with the growing number of irregular

Figure 42: Illegal border crossings, FYR Macedonia – Serbia, 2013–20167 (Frontex)[15]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	319	164
2014 – 1st quarter	483	28
2014 – 2nd quarter	671	23
2014 – 3rd quarter	1,082	35
2014 – 4th quarter	1,288	116
2015 – 1st quarter	5,381	195
2015 – 2nd quarter	21,881	49
2015 – 3rd quarter	98,209	0
2015 – 4th quarter	408,021	0
2016 – 1st quarter	60	92
2016 – 2nd quarter	183	66
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	6
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.

migrants entering Greece from Turkey.[16] Until about early or mid 2015, it was believed that most irregular migrants entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia did so with the aid of smugglers, many crossing the border clandestinely on foot in remote areas.[17] Reports that surfaced in 2015 stating that both Hungary and Serbia were returning refugees and other migrants to FYR Macedonia, some forcibly, did not deter other migrants from travelling along this route.[18]

From July 2015 onwards the number of persons entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia increased quite dramatically. This increase reflects the much higher number of arrivals recorded in Greece a few months earlier. The increase is also attributable to measures adopted by Macedonian authorities, permitting migrants to enter the country lawfully if they transited within 72-hours, and giving them access to public transportation so that they could cross the country swiftly.[19]

The level of irregular migration from FYR Macedonia to Serbia began to drop in late 2015, when countries further along the route took steps

to close their borders or to permit entry only to refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

VI.2.2.2 From Bulgaria

The route from Bulgaria to Serbia (and on to Hungary or other countries) has been another important route for irregular migrants in recent years.[20] The rising irregular flow of migrants via Bulgaria to Serbia was first noted in 2013, and corresponds with higher levels of irregular arrivals in Bulgaria from Turkey earlier that year. At that time, Frontex was already predicting that any increase in irregular migration from Turkey to Bulgaria would result in growing secondary movements from Bulgaria, especially to Serbia.[21] Detections at the border rose from only 40 in 2012 to more than 500 in 2013. It was found that the profile and nationalities of these migrants was largely the same as those of migrants entering Bulgaria illegally from Turkey.[22] After a brief drop early in the year (attributed to the lower number of arrivals into Bulgaria),[23] detections on the route from Bulgaria to Serbia and Hungary increased by a further 65% in 2014, which has also been attributed to conditions in Bulgaria that caused irregular migrants to shorten their stay and depart sooner than they otherwise would have.[24]

Irregular departures from Bulgaria to Serbia increased greatly in 2015, especially in the second half of that year. This increase reflects the rising number of irregular flows in the Eastern Mediterranean, though in 2015 these figures no longer corresponded with detections of irregular arrivals from Turkey.[25] It appears that in 2015 more migrants entered Bulgaria from Greece, and that more migrants may have been able to cross from Turkey to Greece undetected.[26] By the end of 2015, more than 48,000 illegal border crossings had been detected at the Bulgaria-Serbia border, a sixty-fold increase on 2014.[27]

The number of illegal border crossings from Bulgaria to Serbia decreased in 2016 compared to the previous year, but remained at high levels throughout the year. Most of the migrants had previously arrived from Turkey, though some had entered Bulgaria from Greece after they were no longer able to travel from Greece to FYR Macedonia. In late 2016, more than 1,000 irregular migrants sought to cross into Serbia from Bulgaria. Those who were stopped at the border often made further attempts later on, which may inflate the figures shown in Figure 42 below somewhat.[28]

Figures for the year 2017 were not available at the time of writing. Early in the year it was reported that, according to Bulgarian authorities, fewer migrants were seeking to enter Serbia. In the first quarter of 2017, detections of irregular migrants from Bulgaria to Serbia dropped by 46%, and in the fourth quarter by as much as 93% compared to the previous year.[29] In July 2017 Frontex reported that the number of detections of illegal border crossings by Bulgarian authorities at the border to Serbia had dropped further compared to the third and fourth quarters of 2016, indicating that far fewer irregular migrants were travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route.[30]

Figure 43 below shows data provided by Frontex relating to illegal border crossings from Bulgaria into Serbia.

Figure 43: Illegal border crossings, Bulgaria – Serbia, 2013–2016 (Frontex)[31]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	**Illegal border crossings at border control points**
2013 – 4th quarter	335	10
2014 – 1st quarter	89	0
2014 – 2nd quarter	27	6
2014 – 3rd quarter	147	9
2014 – 4th quarter	557	34
2015 – 1st quarter	1,886	19
2015 – 2nd quarter	7,828	114
2015 – 3rd quarter	18,673	147
2015 – 4th quarter	20,108	30
2016 – 1st quarter	2,182	0
2016 – 2nd quarter	495	0
2016 – 3rd quarter	4,162	2
2016 – 4th quarter	4,928	37

VI.2.2.3 From other countries

Montenegro

Figure 41 above shows—insofar as those numbers are available—that the number of illegal border crossings from Montenegro into Serbia is quite small. Illegal border crossings from Montenegro into Serbia appear to be a further variation of a route leading from Greece via Albania to Montenegro and ultimately to Western Europe.[32] This would also explain the increase of detections recorded in 2015.

Kosovo

Data and other information concerning the number of irregular migrants entering Serbia from Kosovo is very limited. In this context it must be noted that Serbia does not recognise Kosovo as an independent country, and that the precise line of the border is disputed in some locations. Reports by Frontex merely include the number of illegal border crossings from Kosovo into Serbia, as shown in Figure 44 below, for 2014 and the first half of 2015.

Figure 44: Illegal border crossings from Kosovo to Serbia, 2014–2015 (Frontex)[33]

	Illegal border crossings from Kosovo to Serbia	
	absolute numbers	**change to same previous period**
2014 – total	**211**	**n.a.**
2015 – 1st quarter	72	+50%
2015 – 2nd quarter	53	+8%

Romania

Reports of illegal arrivals from Romania into Serbia are quite scarce. In the first half of 2012, for instance, Frontex reported that Algerian and Moroccan nationals were detected at the border in growing numbers.[34] In 2017, reports emerged about an increase in the number of irregular migrants departing from Romania to Serbia.[35] At the time of writing there was no further information to show whether this signals a new trend or was simply an isolated observation.

VI.2.3 Stay

For the majority of irregular migrants entering the country, Serbia is a transit point en route to Hungary, Croatia, and eventually other EU Member States.[36] Given the long distances that migrants have to travel from entering Serbia in the south to exiting in the north, most migrants will spend several days or weeks in the country. Some will stay temporarily, others permanently. Since the closure of the border to Hungary in September 2015 and the difficulties associated with crossing the border to Croatia, many migrants have no choice but to stay in Serbia for much longer than they had hoped, and some become stranded there.

In 2015, when several hundred thousand migrants travelled through Serbia, nearly 580,000 expressed an intention to claim asylum in Serbia, though only 11,000 registered in reception centres in the country. 583 people lodged applications for asylum, but only 16 were afforded refugee status. A further nine persons were granted subsidiary protection. 551 applications were rejected, though most of the applicants had absconded or left Serbia before their application was finalised.[37] These circumstances demonstrate that few migrants intend to stay in Serbia, and instead take the first available opportunity to leave the country and head towards Western Europe.[38]

For this reason, it has been remarked that the large flow of migrants through Serbia was a 'relatively marginal' question for the country, as it was evident that most migrants were merely transiting through the country and did not place any real strain on domestic resources. In this context, it has also been noted that the experience of the Balkan wars in the 1990s, and the exodus of refugees at that time, meant that many Serbians felt indifferent or even sympathetic to irregular migrants crossing the country.[39]

To expedite the transit of migrants through Serbia, in late 2015, the country allowed Afghan, Syrian, and Iraqi migrants to enter the country and remain lawfully for 72 hours, even if they had no intention to apply for asylum in Serbia. They

were issued with registration cards for this period, though it has been reported that these cards were also used by migrants from other countries who altered the information on the cards to enter and travel through Serbia.[40]

VI.2.4 Departures

VI.2.4.1 To Hungary

Overview

The border between Serbia and Hungary has been at the centre of discussions and concerns about irregular migration through the Balkans towards Western Europe.[41] Up until September 2015, this 175-kilometre-long border saw some of the highest numbers of illegal crossings in the region. The decision by the Hungarian government to seal this border to irregular migrants and build a fence along its full length led to dramatic scenes of refugees and migrants rushing to cross the border before it closed on 15 September 2015. Once completed, this border fence triggered a massive displacement of migration flows, with hundreds of thousands of people having to move from Serbia to Croatia, then continue on towards Western Europe.

The scale of irregular departures from Serbia to Hungary is well documented, though exact figures vary somewhat between sources. Figure 45 below shows that the number of illegal crossings from Serbia into Hungary as reported in annual and quarterly reports published by Frontex. Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary have historically been quite high, as people sought to enter the European Union (EU) along this route. In the early 2010s, well over 4,000 illegal border crossings were detected annually. In 2014 this figure increased tenfold, and in 2015 more than 200,000 people crossed this border illegally. With the measures adopted by Hungary in September 2015, these figures dropped to very low levels.

For the period from October 2013 to December 2017, Frontex has published separate data concerning 'illegal border crossings between border control points' and 'illegal border crossings at control points', shown in Figure 46 below. In the 15 months from the second quarter of 2014 to the third quarter of 2015, detections of illegal border crossings between border control points rose

Figure 45: Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[42]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**4,204**	**+59%**
2012 – 1st quarter	1,066	+55%
2012 – 2nd quarter	956	–5%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**4,576**	**+9%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**45,827**	**+129%**
2015 – 1st quarter	36,988	+949%
2015 – 2nd quarter	36,956 37,766*	+1 674% +1176*
2015 – 3rd quarter	142,918	+1,364%
2015 – 4th quarter	1,267	–96%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+791%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–81%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–72%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–100%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+216%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–88%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–28%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–63%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+177%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–37%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

from 2,959 to 142,918. Since that time this number has dropped considerably, though a further increase to 11,194 was recorded in the first half of 2016. Although the border is technically closed to irregular migrants, over 1,000 persons still cross from Serbia into Hungary illegally each quarter. By comparison, detections of illegal crossings at the border involve much smaller numbers. Detections were particularly low in 2015, when most irregular migrants could cross into Hungary without facing many obstacles.

Figure 46: Illegal border crossings, Hungary-Serbia, 2013–2017 (Frontex)[43]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	3,093	43
2014 – 1st quarter	3,527	33
2014 – 2nd quarter	2,959	91
2014 – 3rd quarter	9,762	203
2014 – 4th quarter	29,579	130
2015 – 1st quarter	32,274	78
2015 – 2nd quarter	39,459	63
2015 – 3rd quarter	142,918	72
2015 – 4th quarter	1,267	0
2016 – 1st quarter	6,629	209
2016 – 2nd quarter	11,194	22
2016 – 3rd quarter	5,006	20
2016 – 4th quarter	4,002	78
2017 – 1st quarter	2,900	21
2017 – 2nd quarter	1,074	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	2,971	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	1,883	n.a.

Developments

By the start of the 2011–2017 period the route from Greece via FYR Macedonia to Serbia was well-established, and several thousand migrants crossed from Serbia into Hungary each year. By 2011 the highest number of illegal crossings at any border in the Balkans was detected at the Serbian-Hungarian border. At that time, and throughout 2012, the largest group of irregular migrants crossing from Serbia into Hungary were Afghans, followed by Kosovars and Pakistanis.[44]

In the first half of 2013 the volume of irregular migration across this border increased further.[45] The first quarter of 2013 recorded a threefold increase compared to the first quarter of 2012, mostly because of changes to Hungary's asylum laws that were seen as making it easier for asylum seekers to apply for asylum in Hungary and then move on to other destinations. At the same time, and as a result of these changes, other nationalities such as Algerians began to move across this border in growing numbers.[46] Over the following three years most migrants crossed from Serbia into Hungary near the town of Subotica in Serbia, and Röszke, south of Szeged, in Hungary. The principal routes followed the main A1 motorway which connects Belgrade and Budapest, though many migrants crossed the border on foot in rural areas away from border checkpoints.[47]

Amendments to Hungary's asylum procedures which came into effect on 1 July 2013, introducing the detention of asylum seekers who arrive in Hungary, resulted in a drop of 50% in illegal border crossings by the third quarter of 2013. It has been reported that Kosovars in particular were deterred by this amendment, and sought to leave Serbia by other routes. The effect on other nationalities leaving Serbia for Hungary was less pronounced.[48] From around mid-2013 through to mid-2014, the number of illegal border crossing from Serbia into Hungary stabilised, albeit at relatively high levels. Afghans and Syrians were among the largest groups of irregular migrants detected at this border.[49]

Beginning in September 2014, the number of border crossings again increased significantly, resulting in an increase of 193% in the third quarter of 2014 over the second quarter. In the fourth quarter, nearly 30,000 migrants crossed the border illegally, many of them—some 60%—Kosovar nationals.[50] By December 2014, 55% of all illegal border crossings detected anywhere in

the entire EU and Schengen area were recorded at the Serbian-Hungarian border.[51]

In the first quarter of 2015, over 32,000 irregular migrants crossed from Serbia into Hungary, and nearly 40,000 in the following quarter. Until February 2015, Kosovars were among the largest groups crossing this border, though their number dwindled rapidly from March 2015 when measures were adopted by several countries, including Germany, Austria, Hungary and Serbia, to specifically prevent Kosovars from leaving Kosovo, deter them from moving to Western Europe and deport them back to Kosovo in large numbers.[52] However, the growing number of Afghan and, in particular, Syrian nationals moving along the Western Balkan route meant that irregular migration from Serbia to Hungary continued to rise in the following months.[53] As the number of illegal border crossings grew even further, the Hungarian Government announced in August 2015 that it would build a fence along its border with Serbia. This fence was completed on 15 September 2015, thus effectively closing the border to irregular migrants. The immediate effect of the border fence was that far fewer migrants were able to cross into Hungary and, as the following section shows, many more were diverted to a route leading from Serbia to Croatia.[54]

The border fence to Serbia, as seen in Figures 45 and 46 above, did not completely stop the flow of irregular migrants from Serbia to Hungary. Especially after the route via Croatia to Hungary was closed on 16 October 2015, many migrants in Serbia once again sought to cross directly into Hungary, trying to break through the border fence in several places. By March 2016, some 100 illegal border crossings from Serbia into Hungary were being recorded each day.[55] When Croatia took measures to stop—or at least limit—the number of migrants crossing from Serbia, more and more people tried to enter Hungary. Because Croatia continued to allow asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria to enter its territory, the main nationalities now seeking entry to Hungary were Moroccans and Algerians.[56] In April and May 2016, the number of illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary reached its highest level since the completion of the border fence. On average, some 120 persons crossed into Hungary from Serbia illegally each day.[57] From about June 2016, the number of illegal border crossings from Hungary to Serbia dropped again as far fewer migrants were able to reach Serbia in the first place.[58] Nevertheless, due to the relatively large number of migrants stranded in Serbia, several thousand were detected crossing into Hungary each quarter through the rest of 2016 and well into 2017.[59] During the calendar year of 2016, Hungary reported more than 25,000 illegal border crossings from Serbia, far fewer than in the previous year but still one of the highest numbers in the region.[60] As a result, the Hungarian Government adopted further measures at its border to Serbia to drastically limit the number of people who could apply for asylum if they entered from Serbia. These measures explain the decrease in detections in the first six months of 2017 but are said to have placed greater pressure on Romania and Croatia, where detections of illegal border crossings were rising.[61]

VI.2.4.2 To Croatia

Overview

In total numbers, over the 2011–2017 period more irregular migrants crossed from Serbia into Croatia than into Hungary. While the route from Serbia to Western Europe via Croatia is less direct, the measures adopted by Hungary to prevent the entry of asylum seekers and other irregular migrants from Serbia had the effect that the flow of irregular migrants was diverted to Croatia.[62] Figure 47 below shows how the number of illegal border crossings increased from just 42 in the second quarter of 2015 to over 91,000 in the third quarter of 2015, following the closing of the border to Hungary on 15 September 2015. In the fourth quarter of that year over 465,000 migrants left Serbia for Croatia.

In addition to the data shown in Figure 47 above, Frontex has published quarterly data regarding illegal crossings between and at border control points along the Serbian-Croatian frontier. This

Figure 47: Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Croatia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[63]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**2,699**	**+432%**
2012 – 1st quarter	315	–2%
2012 – 2nd quarter	1,075	+31%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**5,887**	**+118%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**978**	**–58%**
2015 – 1st quarter	64	–76%
2015 – 2nd quarter	42	–87%
2015 – 3rd quarter	91,698	+32,649%
2015 – 4th quarter	465,506	+403,924%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+56,909%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+58,863
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–53%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–99%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–100%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–81%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–31%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+18%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–14%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+15%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

data, shown in Figure 48 below, further demonstrates that after a period of relative decline in 2014, illegal border crossings between Serbia and Croatia rose to unprecedented levels in the second half of 2015, and remained high in the first quarter of 2016. Just as rapidly as these numbers rose in the autumn of 2015, they fell by more than 102,500 in the first half of 2016 and, after a small increase in the third quarter of 2016, have remained at low levels. Figure 48 below also shows that while levels of irregular migration between the two countries in 2015 and early 2016 were extremely high, very few illegal border crossings were detected at the border. Detections at border control points along the Serbian-Croatian frontier were relatively high until late 2014, and have risen again since mid-2016.

Figure 48: Illegal border crossings, Croatia – Serbia, 2014–2017 (Frontex)[64]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	318	152
2014 – 3rd quarter	280	225
2014 – 4th quarter	108	113
2015 – 1st quarter	174	11
2015 – 2nd quarter	173	19
2015 – 3rd quarter	91,698	6
2015 – 4th quarter	465,506	14
2016 – 1st quarter	102,596	78
2016 – 2nd quarter	81	17
2016 – 3rd quarter	731	337
2016 – 4th quarter	308	211
2017 – 1st quarter	214	746
2017 – 2nd quarter	253	653
2017 – 3rd quarter	631	71
2017 – 4th quarter	354	104

Developments

A first increase in the number of irregular migrants leaving Serbia for Croatia was recorded in 2010 and 2011.[65] In 2010, Frontex recorded a 222% increase in detections of illegal border crossings from Serbia into Croatia, followed by a 432% increase in 2011. Many migrants, most of them Afghans, crossed into Croatia by simply walking across the land border; some followed

the railway all the way from Belgrade to Tovarnik in Croatia.[66] The high number of Afghan nationals transiting through Croatia is seen as the main reason for this rise, which was recorded in similar numbers at the FYR Macedonia-Serbia border in the same period.[67] The numbers continued to rise through 2012, when a westward shift of irregular migration routes through the Balkans became noticeable; due to changes of asylum procedures in Hungary, migrants crossed from Serbia to Croatia instead.[68]

In 2013, several political events affected the level of irregular migration from Serbia to Croatia. When, following international pressure, Hungary stopped the practice of detaining asylum seekers in early 2013, instead accommodating them in open centres, a 'massive shift' of migration flows occurred away from Croatia and towards the route from Serbia and Hungary. By June 2013, only 39 detections of illegal border crossings were made at the Serbia-Croatia border. Once the Hungarian Government reintroduced the detention of asylum seekers from 1 July 2013, detections of illegal border crossings from Serbia to Croatia started to rise again.[69] Also on 1 July 2013, Croatia became a Member of the European Union (but not yet of the Schengen Zone). There were some fears that this would result in a further increase of attempts to cross from Serbia into Croatia – which now became an external border of the EU – but the impact was somewhat smaller than expected. A further increase in irregular migration from Serbia into Croatia was, however, recorded at that time due to the greater numbers of Syrian nationals moving through the region.[70]

Throughout 2014 and into 2015, irregular migration across the border from Serbia to Hungary continued at high levels and, as was widely reported, increased quite dramatically in the late (northern) summer of 2015. During this period, the route from Serbia to Croatia remained in operation but accounted for a relative small percentage of illegal border crossings in the region. In 2014, only about 3% of all non-regional migrants were detected at the Serbia-Croatia border, compared to 73% at the Serbia-Hungary border.[71] With the growing flow of irregular migrants from Greece via FYR Macedonia to Serbia, detections at the Croatian broder started to rise in the spring of 2015.[72] It reached an all-time high, becoming the most significant route for irregular migration, when the Hungarian Government closed the border to Serbia.[73] By early September 2015, when it became known that the route via Hungary would soon be closed, as many as 9,200 people crossed from Serbia to Croatia in a day. Serbian authorities and private operators offered to transport migrants who had crossed into Serbia from FYR Macedonia directly to cities like Šid, close to the Croatian border.[74] Within three days, 14,000 people had crossed into Croatia, many on foot after making their way unsuccessfully to the Hungarian border.[75] By late September, as many as 10,000 migrants were crossing into Croatia from Serbia every day, and up to 65,000 per week.[76] A Frontex report notes that while an average of 66 persons per month were detected crossing from Serbia to Croatia between January and August 2015, between mid-September and December 2015 nearly 557,000 crossed that border.[77]

In October 2015, Croatia started to undertake sporadic attempts to stop or control the arrival of people from Serbia, which caused long delays for regular cross-border traffic, as well as tensions between the two countries.[78] For most of the month, however, the border between the two countries remained open, and the influx of migrants, along with the difficulties in catering for them, continued unabated.[79] Later that month, Croatia restricted entry to asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, considering other nationalities to be 'economic migrants' and rejecting them at the border, allegedly without considering the causes of their displacement.[80] Coordination between the Serbian and Croatian authorities improved in November 2015, when most migrants were transported by train and a central registration and accommodation centre was opened in Šid, Serbia. Further restrictions on entry from Serbia followed when the Croatian authorities began to allow migrants to enter and transit only if they stated that either Austria or Germany was the intended destination where

they would seek asylum.[81] Nevertheless, until February 2016, with over 100,000 crossings by non-regional migrants, Croatia's border to Serbia recorded the highest number of attempted illegal entries along the Western Balkan route.[82]

By March 2016 Croatia, along with most other Western Balkan countries, had all but closed its borders to irregular migrants. Despite a small increase in the third quarter of 2016, detections of illegal border crossings along the Serbia-Croatia border remained low throughout the year and into 2017.[83] Concerns remained, however, that refugees and other migrants who became stranded in Serbia would increasingly resort to smugglers to leave Serbia, including to Croatia.[84] The measures adopted by Hungary in 2017 to further limit the number of asylum seekers it would accept from Serbia have placed further pressure on the Serbia-Croatia border, and is said to explain the slight increase in detection at the border recorded in the first half of 2017.[85]

VI.2.4.3 To Romania

Figure 49 below shows that in the early 2010s, considerable numbers of irregular migrants illegally crossed the border from Serbia to Romania. According to Frontex, from 2010 to 2011 the number of illegal border detections increased from just 49 to over 2,000.[86] The increase recorded in the first half of 2011 was initially attributed to errors, though it later became clear that the detections mostly involved North African migrants who had previously travelled through Greece and FYR Macedonia.[87] This increase continued throughout 2012.[88] When it was further noted that most detections occured close to the Serbian and Romanian borders to Hungary, suggestions were made that the movements from Serbia to Romania were a (temporary) displacement of migrants who encountered difficulties trying to cross directly from Serbia into Hungary, as authorities made it harder to cross that border illegally.[89] By mid-2012 it had been observed that growing numbers of Afghan nationals were crossing into Romania from Serbia.[90]

Figure 49: Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Romania, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[91]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**2037**	**+4057%**
2012 – 1st quarter	1021	+953%
2012 – 2nd quarter	1157	+405%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**3288**	**+61%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**37**	**–49%**
2015 – 1st quarter	13	+30%
2015 – 2nd quarter	46	+2200%
2015 – 3rd quarter	27	+358%
2015 – 4th quarter	15	–21%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+2489%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–90%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–3%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+815%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+1,780%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–31%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+55%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+95%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.

Towards the end of 2012 irregular arrivals began to decline again;[92] a trend that continued through 2013 and 2014. The reintroduction on 1 July 2013 of Hungary's policy to detain asylum seekers had only a minor impact, if any, on irregular migration via Romania.[93] The flow of very large numbers of irregular migrants through the region in 2015, especially from August to December, including the closure of

Hungary's border to Serbia and then to Croatia, did not affect the border between Serbia and Romania in any significant way. Figure 50 below shows that illegal border crossings at the Serbian-Romanian border remained low until mid–2016.

Figure 50: Illegal border crossings, Romania–Serbia, 2015–2017 (Frontex)[94]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points
2015 – 4th quarter	15
2016 – 1st quarter	91
2016 – 2nd quarter	37
2016 – 3rd quarter	247
2016 – 4th quarter	273
2017 – 1st quarter	423
2017 – 2nd quarter	823
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.

Since mid-2016 the irregular migration of non-regional migrants from Serbia into Romania has increased considerably. This has been attributed to the fact that migrants in Serbia gradually ran out of other options for leaving Serbia, a country they did not wish to remain in. In late October 2016 the Romanian authorities responded to this development by instituting stricter controls at the Serbian border, though illegal arrivals continued in considerable numbers from December 2016 onwards. A further tightening of Hungary's asylum procedures and immigration policies in early 2017 placed further pressure on alternative routes from Serbia, including the border to Romania.[95]

VI.2.4.4 To other countries

Based on the limited available information, illegal border crossings from Serbia to Bosnia-Herzegovina do not occur on a very significant scale. Figure 51 below shows the available data published by Frontex for the 2011-2017 period. For the years 2014 to 2017 the numbers fluctuate somewhat, though at low levels, and it is not possible to detect any particular trends or developments for the reporting period.

Data and other information relating to irregular migration from Serbia to Montenegro is scarcer still. Between 2016 and 2017 significant fluctuations, shown in Figure 51 below, have been reported, but the absolute numbers of persons crossing from Serbia to Montenegro have not.

The border to Bulgaria appears to be of little importance for irregular border crossings from Serbia. There have been occasional reports of irregular migrants entering Bulgaria from Serbia, though based on the limited available information these flows have been very limited in size and have declined in recent years.[96]

Figure 51: Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Bulgaria, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[97]

	Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Bosnia-Herzegovina		**Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Montenegro**		**Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Bulgaria**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	6	–57%	n.a.	n.a.	3	+200%
2012 – 2nd quarter	24	+100%	n.a.	n.a.	10	+400%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**77**	**+4%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**85**	**+10%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	8	–68%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	35	+67%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	40	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	14	–33%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	**n.a.**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+67%	n.a.	–99%	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–98%	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+121%	n.a.	+32%	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a.	**+6%**	n.a.	**–97%**	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–16%	n.a.	–60%	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–12%	n.a.	–13%	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

VI.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Irregular migrants who enter, stay, or transit through Serbia come from a diverse range of countries in the Middle East, South Asia, and from various parts of Africa. Over the 2011–2017 period the single largest group of irregular migrants detected in Serbia were Syrian nationals, who also constitute the largest group of persons seeking asylum in the country. Afghan nationals constitute the second largest group, followed by irregular migrants from East Africa.[98]

For most irregular migrants Serbia serves as a transit country to other destinations, and only a small percentage of migrants express an intention to apply for asylum in Serbia. Fewer still actually lodge applications.[99] Figures produced by UNHCR (which combine Serbia and Kosovo) show that relative to the vast number of irregular migrants passing through Serbia, very few are registered as refugees or asylum seekers. These numbers, shown in Figure 52 below, jumped significantly from 2015 to 2016 as migrants found themselves stuck in Serbia with few, if any, options for continuing to Hungary or Croatia. The largest group of refugees and asylum seekers in Serbia and Kosovo are Afghans, followed by Iraqis and Syrians.

Figure 52: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Serbia and Kosovo 2011–2016, top nationalities[100]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**174**	**4**	**34**	**4**	n.a.
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	32	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	174	4	2	4	n.a.
2012 – total	**81**	**8**	**25**	**21**	**49**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	18	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	81	8	7	21	49
2013 – total	**21**	**3**	**23**	**37**	**36**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	16	n.a.	3
- asylum-seekers	21	3	7	37	60
2014 – total	**58**	n.a.	**9**	**3**	**2**
- refugees	0	n.a.	45	0	1
- asylum-seekers	58	n.a.	5	3	1
2015 – total	**35**	n.a.	**12**	**7**	**11**
- refugees	0	n.a.	7	0	11
- asylum-seekers	35	n.a.	5	7	0
2016 – total	**3,519**	**338**	**1,357**	n.a.	**747**
- refugees	3,449	335	1,353	n.a.	747
- asylum-seekers	70	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0

VI.3.1 The Middle East

Syrians, as mentioned, constitute one of the largest groups of migrants entering Serbia illegally. According to IOM, Syrians made up about 50% of asylum applicants in the country in 2014, though this figure differs from those provided by UNHCR.[101] Syrians are also among the largest groups of migrants entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria, and departing Serbia for Hungary and Croatia.[102] The number of Syrians passing through Serbia rose particularly rapidly towards the end of 2014 and through 2015.[103] In the three months from April to June 2015, 10,134

Syrian nationals were detected passing through Serbia illegally.[104]

Significant numbers of Iraqi, Palestinian and—in smaller numbers—Iranian irregular migrants have also been detected entering Serbia from FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria, and continuing to Hungary and Croatia.[105]

VI.3.2 South Asia

Afghans

Afghan nationals feature very prominently among irregular migrants in Serbia. Reports from 2012 point to high levels of Afghan migrants entering Serbia from Bulgaria and Romania, and continuing to Hungary and Croatia.[106] The number of Afghan migrants transiting through Serbia rose significantly from 2012 to 2014, and the main focus shifted specifically to the Serbian-Hungarian border which became 'the busiest in terms of detection of illegal border crossings in region' and where Afghan nationals constituted the largest group of irregular migrants.[107] Since about 2014, most Afghan nationals have arrived in Serbia from Greece via FYR Macedonia, though the route via Bulgaria into Serbia remained a viable and frequently-used alternative.[108]

The year 2015, as discussed earlier, witnessed the highest number of irregular migrants transiting through Serbia, and Afghan nationals, along with Syrians, constituted one of the largest groups. Most continued to Hungary; a route which subsequently shifted to Croatia once Hungary closed its border to Serbia in September of that year.[109]

In early 2016 the flow of irregular migrants shifted to Bulgaria, and Frontex noted growing number of Afghan migrants seeking to leave Bulgaria for Serbia. Despite increased efforts to close the border, some Afghans continued to use the more direct route from Greece via FYR Macedonia to Serbia.[110]

Pakistanis

Irregular Pakistani migrants frequently travel alongside Afghan nationals and use many of the same routes and methods to transit through Serbia.[111] Since Pakistani nationals have lower chances of being granted asylum, some Pakistanis resort to clandestine means of crossing into Serbia, or misrepresent their nationality by stating that they are Afghans. The restrictions introduced along the Western Balkan route, permitting entry only to Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals, further fostered clandestine movements and the use by Pakistanis of migrant smugglers to help them enter and depart from Serbia.[112]

VI.3.3 Africa

Information concerning irregular migrants from Africa passing through Serbia mostly concerns Algerian and Moroccan nationals. Reports from 2012 show large increases in the number of Algerians and Moroccans entering Serbia from Romania.[113] In 2012 and 2013, increasing numbers of Algerian and Moroccan nationals were also detected at the Serbian-Hungarian border.[114] In 2016, after the closure of the border between Serbia and Hungary, reports emerged of large numbers of Algerians and Moroccans crossing the border clandestinely. Higher numbers of Algerians and Moroccans were also detected at the Croatian-Serbian border in 2016[115]

VI.3.4 Other nationalities

Kosovars

Kosovars constitute a large migrant group in Serbia due to historical circumstances and the fact that many Kosovars have roots in Serbia (and vice versa). Kosovars can enter and remain in Serbia freely; they are not irregular migrants. The migration of Kosovars becomes irregular if they enter other countries, especially EU Member States, without the necessary documents, especially visas, which Kosovars are required to obtain to enter the Schengen Zone.

For these reasons, much of the information concerning the irregular migration of Kosovars through Serbia relates to their departure from Serbia (rather than their entry from Kosovo.) The border between Serbia and Hungary has recorded some of the highest numbers of illegal border crossing by Kosovars. The number increased particularly sharply in late 2012 and early 2013, when Frontex recorded a three-fold increase in detections, making it the single largest group of persons entering Hungary illegally.[116] The number of Kosovars continued to rise through 2014.[117] Of the 25,000 persons detected crossing the border from Serbia into Hungary illegally between October and December 2014, over 60% came from Kosovo.[118] In 2014, the total number of Kosovars crossing into Hungary illegally from Serbia stood at 22,069.[119]

The number of Kosovars leaving Serbia in irregular ways dropped significantly after February 2015, when several countries adopted measures to prevent and deter the arrival of Kosovars, and to return them to their country of origin.[120] Since then the number of Kosovars detected at Serbia's borders trying to cross into Hungary and other EU Member States has remained very low.[121]

VI.3.5 Other background

Several studies have been conducted which give further insight into the profile of irregular migrants transiting through Serbia. Most sources agree that that majority of irregular migrants are young adult men travelling by themselves, whereas women make up a smaller portion of irregular migrants and more likely to travel with others, including their partners. A 2016 publication notes:

> That the typical refugee in Serbia is a 27-year-old man. He is likely to be unmarried, to be travelling alone, to have 12 years of schooling and to have left his family in his country of origin. He has probably spent over a year in transit in his attempt to reach a better life. Men comprise almost 90% of refugees in Serbia and fewer than a third of them are married.[122]

VI.4 Smuggling of migrants

The smuggling of migrants through Serbia is said to occur at high levels, as the country is one of the most affected by non-regional flows and is one where, according to Frontex, migrants are 'more likely to need facilitation' to enter and exit the country.[123] Most smuggling activities are carried out by local people who operate within Serbia and across its borders, which explains why Serbian nationals constitute a large portion of the number of smugglers detected in the region. In the second quarter of 2015, for instance, 59% of all 'facilitators' detected in the region were Serbian nationals; 47% of all facilitators detected in the region during this period were detected by Serbian authorities, mostly at the borders to FYR Macedonia and Hungary.[124]

A 2017 publication provides some further insight into the use of smugglers by irregular Syrian migrants who transited through Serbia and Hungary. The paper draws some interesting conclusions about migrants' decisions on whether and when to employ smugglers, noting that migrants usually turn to smugglers when they lack the confidence and knowledge to find their way and cross borders independently, and when they form the view, rightly or wrongly, that trusting smugglers may be the better option. These views are often based on information they receive from previous migrants, or on reports they read in internet forums. 'The greater the anxiety', note the authors, 'the greater the panicked reliance on smugglers, who in turn suggest urgent movement for a price "before it's too late".'[125]

VI.4.1 Routes

VI.4.1.1 Into the country

As with other irregular migration in Serbia, the smuggling of migrants generally occurs in a southeast to northwest direction, with most smuggled migrants entering from FYR Macedonia, some from Bulgaria, and continuing to Hungary or Croatia.[126]

In 2011 and 2012 the border between FYR Macedonia and Serbia was one of the 'top border sections' for the smuggling of migrants in the region, with most people hiding in vehicles to cross into Serbia and some, mostly Afghan migrants, crossing the border on foot (with or without the aid of smugglers).[127] Serbia is the main transit country for Afghan migrants who are smuggled into the European Union via Hungary. Serbian authorities estimate that during the first six months of 2013, approximately 77% of Afghan nationals detected attempting irregular entry into the country engaged the services of migrant smugglers. Most enter Serbia from FYR Macedonia or, in some cases, from Kosovo or Bulgaria.[128]

Miratovac and Presevo are usually the first points of entry on the Serbian side of the border to FYR Macedonia. When the number of irregular migrants and smuggling activities increased in 2015, Serbian authorities stationed more border police along the border near Miratovac. This led to push backs and deportations of irregular migrants, and caused other migrants to resort to smugglers instead of crossing the border independently.[129]

In late 2015, when Macedonian authorities took steps to reduce the flow of irregular migrants through the country, eventually closing the border to most of them, more migrants began trying to reach Serbia via Bulgaria, and Frontex noted an increase in smuggling activities across the Bulgaria-Serbia border at that time.[130] This trend appears to have continued in 2016, when it also affected the border to Romania. With more migrants travelling from Bulgaria to Romania and then using smugglers to cross into Serbia rather than Hungary, where additional measures had been implemented to deter irregular arrivals.[131]

VI.4.1.2 Through/within the country

Irregular migrants often rely on the services of smugglers to cross the country and travel the approximately 600 kilometres from the Macedonian to the Hungarian border. After entering Serbia, most smuggled migrants travel from Vranje in the south of the country to Belgrade, and then on to Subotica, just south of the Hungarian border. A 2015 report found that:

> There are different modes of transport which are typical for certain parts of the route, and different 'teams' which organise the transport. The way through Serbia is usually organised by smugglers either directly or indirectly. Migrants are transported by cars from the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or from asylum reception centres in Serbia to Belgrade, Subotica or the border area or may also use public transportation.[132]

In the literature, the capital Belgrade is frequently referred to as a hub for migrant smuggling. Irregular migrants usually spend some time in Belgrade, making decisions about their onward journey and choosing between the services offered by different smugglers.

VI.4.1.3 Out of the country

Most smuggling activities out of Serbia involve border crossings into Hungary. The level of these activities and the need of irregular migrants to employ smugglers is often linked to the stringency of border controls and fortifications along this border: When migrants can cross into Hungary with relative ease they may do so independently, without the aid of smugglers. At times when the border is tightly controlled, however, migrants are more likely to resort to smugglers in order to enter Hungary clandestinely, or they may be diverted to other routes. By and large, the smuggling of migrants from Serbia to Hungary appears to increase with the overall rise in irregular migrant flows. In the third quarter of 2014, for instance, Frontex noted a 150% increase in clandestine entries from Serbia into Hungary compared to the previous quarter.[133]

The areas around Subotica in Serbia and Szeged in Hungary have been described as 'hubs for international smuggling networks' that transport migrants across the border. Prior to the building of the border fence, many smugglers guided the migrants to or across the border, or gave them

instructions on where to cross. They were then met by cars or vans on the Hungarian side and taken to Budapest, the Austrian border, or even straight into Austria.[134] With fierce competition among smugglers, it is not uncommon for some smugglers to offer guarantees to migrants, meaning that they will make repeated attempts to cross the border until the migrants successfully make it to Hungary. Despite these guarantees, some smugglers nevertheless double-charge the smuggled migrants, who often have no choice but to comply with the smugglers demands.[135] It has been estimated that the price to be smuggled from Belgrade or Subotica to Hungary ranges between EUR 50 and 200. Actual pricing will depend on several factors, including:

> The season, how much the smuggler charges for services, the mode of transport, the size of the group (e.g. taxi drivers may charge for a ride, regardless of the number of people in the car), etc. The intensity of border controls also determines the prices of smuggling services and it is evident that migrants tend to seek more for assisted border crossing when the border controls intensify, rather than make the attempt on their own. In cases where a driver is used, migrants usually pay for the ride in advance to the driver. [136]

In the 2011–2017 period, the border to Croatia was usually easier for irregular migrants to cross, which explains why there are fewer reports of smuggling from Serbia into Croatia. Despite this, many migrants are drawn to Hungary and the established smuggling industry across the Serbian-Hungarian border.[137] The closure of this border in September 2015, however, diverted migration flows to Croatia and also led to a rise in smuggling activities from Serbia to Croatia.[138]

VI.4.2 Methods

VI.4.2.1 Smuggling by land

Most smuggling activities in Serbia involve land-based methods, such as smuggling in trains, trucks, buses or cars, or walking across the border. Both overt and covert methods of smuggling are used, and in some cases migrants are furnished with fraudulent travel or identity documents.[139]

By vehicle

The smuggling of migrants in private vehicles such as vans and trucks more commonly involves clandestine methods in which migrants are hidden behind seats, in separate compartments, or among cargo. Frontex reports that instances in which migrants are hidden in vehicles when attempting to cross the border are particularly common between FYR Macedonia and Serbia.[140] In 2013, for instance, some 310 such cases were detected at this border, down from approximately 460 in 2012.[141]

Generally, most migrants are not smuggled through Serbia in one leg but encounter several smugglers along the way, or they may undertake some part of the journey without the aid of smugglers. Locals often use their own vehicles to transport migrants within the country, meeting them near the border to FYR Macedonia and, for a fee of approximately EUR 100, taking them close to the border with Hungary.[142]

Smuggling migrants by hiding them in private vehicles is another common method of transporting them from Bulgaria to Serbia, and from Serbia to Hungary or Croatia.[143] Covert smuggling from Serbia to Croatia also frequently involves hiding migrants in trucks, with or without the knowledge of the driver.[144] The migrants often embark on the trucks at rest stops along main roads, either by cutting the covers to the cargo compartment or by breaking and later resealing customs seals and ropes.[145]

Since it has become nearly impossible for irregular migrants to cross from Serbia into Hungary, and since Croatia has stepped up measures to reduce irregular arrivals from Serbia, the border from Serbia to Croatia has become one of the main areas for the clandestine smuggling of non-regional migrants in vehicles.[146]

Smuggling in and out of Serbia, especially from FYR Macedonia, may also involve passenger and

cargo trains on which migrants may travel overtly, with valid tickets, or covertly, hiding in separate compartments or cargo areas.[147]

On foot

Smugglers in FYR Macedonia frequently guide migrants to and across the border on foot through remote areas, usually in groups of 30 to 40. Many crossings on foot are done at night to avoid detection by border guards.[148] The fee for smuggling on foot with a guide from FYR Macedonia to Serbia, including transportation by car to and from the border is said to be about EUR 200.[149] It has also been reported that migrants may receive maps from their smugglers, or that smugglers use plastic bags hanging on trees to mark the route across the border from FYR Macedonia to Serbia, or to places where migrants meet the next smugglers.[150]

Similar methods are used to bring migrants from Bulgaria to Serbia: The migrants are driven to the vicinity of the border, provided with maps and instructions of where to cross the border and, after crossing the border, are met on the Serbian side by other drivers who will take the migrants to the border with Hungary. By not making the crossing with the migrants, the smugglers minimise their risk of being detected and arrested. Sometimes pilot cars are sent out ahead of the migrants to check for border guards before the migrants are brought to the border and released from the vehicles. Some crossings are made across the Timok river, which marks the border for a length of about 15 kilometres.[151]

Fraudulent documents

There are ample reports concerning the use of fraudulent travel or identity documents to enter or leave Serbia, though it is difficult to gauge to what extent these reports relate to irregular migration and specifically the smuggling of migrants. Serbia records some of the highest numbers of fraudulent document detections in the region, especially at the border to Hungary and, to a lesser extent, at the border with Croatia.[152]

Based on the available information, it appears that border crossings involving fraudulent documents mostly involve Serbian nationals and, to a lesser extent, Albanians and Kosovars.[153] In 2015, Frontex further noted an increase in the number Afghan and Syrian nationals using fraudulent documents to enter Hungary from Serbia.[154]

VI.4.2.2 Smuggling by air

Several reports published by Europol note cases of Chinese nationals flying to Belgrade and then travelling to FYR Macedonia and Greece in order to enter the EU. Belgrade has been referred to as a 'hotspot' for the smuggling of Chinese migrants to Europe. Serbian authorities have implemented concerted law enforcement efforts in response to such reports, though it is not clear whether these led to a significant reduction or displacement of the smuggling activities.[155]

There have also been reports of Turkish nationals travelling via Belgrade airport, usually by using fraudulent documents.[156]

VI.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

Between 2015 and 2017, Serbia consistently detected the highest number of migrant smugglers of any country in the region, reflecting the very great prevalence of migrant smuggling throughout the country and the involvement of many local people in this form of crime. In the third quarter of 2015, when irregular migration along the Balkan route peaked, 62% of all detections of migrant smugglers in the region were made in Serbia alone.[157] In 2015, anywhere between 260 and 340 migrant smugglers were arrested each quarter, bringing the annual monthly average to about 100.[158] For 2016, absolute figures are only available for the first quarter when approximately 260 smugglers were detected during this three months period.[159] For the remainder of the year and the first six months of 2017, only percentages relative to

detections in other countries in the region have been published. These figures show that Serbia continued to detect the highest number of smugglers in the region, ranging from 35% (first quarter of 2017) to 62% (third quarter of 2016) of all detections in the region.[160]

VI.4.3.1 Profile of smugglers

As mentioned earlier, the single largest group of smugglers detected in Serbia are Serbian nationals. Indeed, Serbian nationals constitute by far the largest group of smugglers operating in the region. Between 2015 and 2017, anywhere from 250 to 300 Serbian nationals were detected each quarter.[161]

As in most other places along the Balkan route, the majority of persons involved in the smuggling of migrants are local people who engage in smuggling or related activities if and when demand and opportunity arise. Most of the smugglers operating along and across the border between Bulgaria and Serbia, for instance, are Bulgarians and Serbians who usually operate within their home country by taking or guiding migrants to the border or meeting them on the other side. Many are taxi drivers or people who use their own vehicles to make some additional money by transporting migrants to or from the border.[162] Similarly, many illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary are facilitated by Serbian and Hungarian nationals on their respective sides of the border.[163]

Organisers, on the other hand, who connect migrants to local smugglers or who oversee the smuggling ventures in more than one country are often not from the region, and sometimes have the same background as the people they smuggle.[164] Social networks also play an important role in this context. Irregular migrants may use existing contacts, online platforms or internet forums to connect to overseas diasporas, and to migrants who have made the same journey earlier. These contacts then connect the 'next generation' of migrants to smugglers and other known contacts along the main routes.[165]

VI.4.3.2 Organisations and networks

Information about specific organisations and networks involved in the smuggling of migrants through Serbia, as well as their structure and operations, was very limited in the sources consulted for this report. The fact that large numbers of local people are involved in smuggling activities lends credence to the suggestion that many smugglers are opportunists and amateurs who turn to smuggling activities such as transporting, guiding, or accommodating irregular migrants if and when demand for such services increases.

A 2015 report further noted, for instance, that many drivers work independently and are not part of a larger organisation that plans the smuggling journey. In some cases these drivers recruit and pick up the migrants themselves; in others, they are connected to other drivers and form loose 'teams' that hand the smuggled migrants from one driver to the next. As such, any money earned usually stays with the smugglers themselves, and is not passed on to other organisers or masterminds.[166]

Notes

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VII KOSOVO

VII.1 Overview

Kosovo is a transit country for non-regional irregular migrants, as well as a source country for Kosovar migrants who travel to Western Europe irregularly, often with the aid of smugglers. Kosovo, which is not recognised as an independent country by some Balkan States, serves as a transit country for irregular migrants travelling from Greece via FYR Macedonia to Serbia or, albeit in smaller numbers, to Montenegro. This is a secondary route for irregular migrants who generally prefer the more direct, faster routes from Greece via FYR Macedonia or Bulgaria in order to reach Serbia and then continue to Hungary or Croatia. Irregular migration into Kosovo has also been recorded across the border from Albania, which involves Albanian nationals as well as non-regional migrants.

Up until 2015, the principal irregular migration 'problem' associated with Kosovo was the large-scale emigration of Kosovar nationals, especially young people seeking to escape unemployment and dire economic circumstances in Europe's poorest nation. The ongoing uncertainty regarding Kosovo's international status, as well as widespread corruption and ongoing border disputes with Serbia, contribute to the country's economic difficulties, and to the desire of Kosovars to find employment, seek asylum or join the existing diaspora abroad.[1] Kosovars can travel to Serbia freely and easily, and then continue to Hungary, Croatia and other EU Member States using the same routes and methods as irregular non-regional migrants travelling through the Balkans.[2]

Due to the large number of Kosovars entering Western European countries, often facilitated by smugglers, in the spring of 2015 several destination and transit countries including Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Serbia adopted measures to deter the arrival of further irregular migrants from Kosovo, and to swiftly return irregularly-migrating Kosovars to their country of origin. These measures effectively stopped mass emigration from Kosovo,[3] though they also led some Kosovars to resort to more clandestine, expensive, and dangerous smuggling methods in order to reach their desired destination.[4]

VII.2 Levels and characteristics

VII.2.1 Numbers

VII.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Information about the number of irregular migrants detected at Kosovo's external border is limited. Between 2013 and 2014 it was noted that Kosovo was increasingly being used as a transit country for migrants seeking to reach EU Member States, and that many of these migrants were assisted by smugglers. The number of detections is, however, very low by comparison to other Balkan states, and the increase in detections appears to be a result of better cross-border law enforcement cooperation rather than a trend towards more irregular migration via Kosovo.[5]

Kosovo's Ministry of Internal Affairs reports that in 2014, 2,827 persons were refused entry at the country's border control points, nearly twice as many as in 2013 (1,449 persons). In 2014, 383 irregular migrants (or 14%) were detected at Pristina Airport, Kosovo's only international airport.[6] These numbers differ from those published by Frontex, which reports that in 2013, 215 illegal border crossings were detected by the Kosovo Border Police, and that only 15% of these were 'associated with illegal migration purposes'.[7] IOM has published figures relating to irregular entries into Kosovo for the years 2016 and 2017. These figures, shown in Figure 53 below, confirm the low levels of irregular arrivals identified by Frontex. While the second half of 2016 saw an increase in irregular arrivals, this number dropped again in 2017.

VII.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Information about the number of persons staying in Kosovo illegally is extremely scarce. Official figures published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Figure 53: Irregular entries, Kosovo, 2016–2017 (IOM)[8]

	2016	2017
January	14	18
February	1	27
March	–	0
April	3	15
May	16	21
June	20	0
July	44	4
August	42	21
September	35	17
October	23	5
November	26	16
December	53	3
Year total	**279**	**147**

in 2014 point to an increase in detections of foreigners residing in Kosovo illegally, rising from just 100 cases in 2009 to 817 in 2012, falling to 720 in 2013 and then rising to 1,030 in 2014.[9] Kosovar authorities see a 'growing trend' which they attribute to a greater number of inspections and identifications and better cooperation among different branches of government.[10]

VII.2.2 Entry points

Since levels of irregular migration into and through Kosovo appear quite low in comparison to other countries in the region, there is little information about the main borders and entry points used to cross from neighbouring countries into Kosovo. Based on the limited data published by Frontex on illegal border crossings into Kosovo, shown in Figure 54 below, it appears that small and somewhat similar numbers of illegal crossings are recorded from Albania, FYR Macedonia, and Serbia. In addition, Kosovar authorities also detect some illegal arrivals at Pristina airport.[11]

Figure 54: Illegal border crossings into Kosovo, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[12]

	Illegal border crossings from Serbia into Kosovo		**Illegal border crossings from FYR Macedonia into Kosovo**		**Illegal border crossings from Albania into Kosovo**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**149**	n.a.	**104**	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	56	+70%	9	–59%
2015 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	35	–18%	15	–38%
2015 – 3rd quarter	58	–2%	31	0%	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	32	–42%	34	–24%	21	–5%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+2%**	n.a.	**+5%**	n.a.	**–37%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–17%	n.a.	–61%	n.a.	+133%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+30%	n.a.	–47%	n.a.	–47%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+3%	n.a.	–10%	n.a.	+1886%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+50%	n.a.	35%	n.a.	+462%
2016 – total	n.a.	**+10%**	n.a.	**–26%**	n.a.	**+454%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–6%	n.a.	–39%	n.a.	–59%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+20%	n.a.	+29%	n.a.	–4%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–39%	n.a.	400%	n.a.	–83%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–47%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	113%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Most instances of illegal border crossings are recorded at the 'Administrative Boundary Line', the official term used to refer to the border between Kosovo and Serbia. In 2014, for instance, 1,253 persons or 44% of all cases in that year were rejected at border crossing points to Serbia, though this figure includes inbound as well as outbound travellers.[13] The border crossings near Dheu I Bardhë in Kosovo and near Merdare in Serbia, located to the east

and southeast of Pristina, were identified in 2014 by Kosovar authorities as 'hot points' for illegal border crossings, mostly involving crossings by car and other vehicles.[14]

In 2014, about 731 persons, or 26% of all cases, were rejected at the border to Albania, 285 persons or 10% at border control points to FYR Macedonia, and 175 persons or 6% at the border with Montenegro.[15] These figures appear to include both inbound and outbound travellers, and thus offer little insight into the true levels of irregular entry into Kosovo from these countries. A report by Frontex suggests that illegal border crossings from Albania to Kosovo became more common in 2012 as irregular migrants found it harder to hide or be smuggled in trucks that were loaded onto ferries to Italy, and thus had to find alternative routes to travel to Western Europe.[16]

VII.2.3 Stay

Information about the stay of irregular migrants in Kosovo is almost non-existent. According to Kosovar authorities, it appears that those found to be staying illegally are mostly foreign nationals who overstay or otherwise violate their visas, or who are not in possession of work permits, rather than persons who entered the country clandestinely or otherwise illegally.[17] For irregular migrants from Asia and Africa, Kosovo is mostly a transit point en route to final destinations in Western Europe.[18]

VII.2.4 Departures

VII.2.4.1 Emigration of Kosovars

While irregular migration into and through Kosovo tends to occur on very low levels, very many Kosovar nationals migrate irregularly to Western Europe in the hopes of working, settling, joining the existing diaspora or, in some cases, applying for asylum.[19] Emigration from Kosovo, both regular and irregular, occurs on a very significant scale. It has been estimated that between 1970 and 2014 about 610,000 people left the territory that now forms the Republic of Kosovo.[20] The vast majority of Kosovars leave their country across the Administrative Boundary Line to Serbia, a border they can cross easily. In Serbia, Kosovars can move freely.[21]

The causes for emigration from Kosovo are complex and multi-faceted, and a detailed analysis of the circumstances that 'push' Kosovars to leave and 'pull' them to destinations abroad falls outside the purposes and scope of this paper. The uncertain international status of Kosovo, high youth unemployment, the poor socio-economic situation of many people, corruption, weaknesses in the rule of law, and the inability of Kosovar nationals to enter many countries legally in fast and efficient ways are among the key reasons for the irregular migration of Kosovars.[22]

The high levels of irregular migration of Kosovar nationals to other parts of Europe has been attributed to the fact that Kosovo is the only country in the region whose citizens continue to require visas to enter the Schengen Zone and other countries in the European Union (EU).[23] The inability to travel freely and the complications and long waiting periods associated with obtaining visas explain why many Kosovars migrate irregularly—and why migrant smugglers take advantage of this situation by offering transportation and entry into EU Member States in exchange for payment.[24] There have long been calls for visa liberalisation, and a consensus exists among experts that visa-free entry to EU countries would reduce irregular migration. While there have been many announcements by official entities that visa requirements for Kosovar nationals are about to be lifted, a concrete date has yet to be set. It appears that the reluctance to introduce this change is driven by the fear that any travel liberalisation would be followed by greater numbers of Kosovar nationals seeking to work or settle abroad.[25]

A large increase in irregular migration from Kosovo by Kosovar nationals was recorded in 2013. Between 1 January and 30 June 2013 the number of recorded illegal border crossings by Kosovars into EU Member States increased six-fold (or by

542%) compared to 2012.[26] This rise has been explained by both internal and external factors, which affect the ability of Kosovars to leave their country and travel to and within the EU.[27] The number of asylum applications lodged by Kosovar nationals in all 28 EU Member States jumped from 10,210 in 2012 to 20,225 a year later.[28]

The number of Kosovars leaving the country and irregularly moving to other parts of Europe further increased during 2014 and into 2015. In 2014, about 50,000 people left the country; some 35,000 in the winter of 2014–15.[29] Frontex reports that in 2014 there were almost four times as many illegal border-crossings by Kosovo nationals (an increase of 268%) and over twice as many asylum seekers (33,400, or 134% more) from Kosovo compared to 2013.[30] While the exodus of Kosovars in this period affected many parts of Europe, most detections of irregular migrants were made at the Serbian-Hungarian border, especially after Hungary began accommodating families who requested asylum in open centres rather than detaining them.[31] The outflow of Kosovars was apparently also fuelled by rumours among Kosovars, and promises spread by smugglers, that Kosovar migrants could easily find work and obtain social welfare benefits in EU Member States, and that they would be granted asylum. Of the Kosovar families who moved to Hungary and applied for asylum, many did not remain in Hungary for long but instead moved on to Austria and Germany.[32] Austria recorded a 50% increase in the number of Kosovars smuggled into the country in 2014.[33] The number of asylum applications lodged by Kosovar nationals in all 28 EU Member States also nearly doubled from 20,225 in 2013 to 37,890 a year later. 21,455 applications (or 57%) were lodged in Hungary alone.

Irregular migration from Kosovo peaked in February 2015, though the focus shifted from Hungary, where fewer Kosovars were detected at the border with Serbia, to Germany, which became their primary destination.[34] A total of 72,480 asylum applications were submitted by Kosovar nationals in the EU in 2015; 37,095 or approximately 50% of those in Germany and 24,455 in Hungary.[35]

Starting in March 2015, Austria, along with Germany, Hungary, and Serbia, took active measures to prevent and deter Kosovar migrants from reaching their territories, and collaborated with the government of Kosovo to facilitate returns. Advertising campaigns were run to counter the information spread by smugglers. As a result, the number of migrants dropped considerably in the spring of 2016 and has remained very low since.[36] While in 2015 Frontex recorded 16,000 Kosovar migrants staying in EU Member States illegally, that number dropped to just 6,500 the following year.[37] Eurostat recorded only 11,680 asylum applications by Kosovars in the EU in 2016.[38]

VII.2.4.2 Departures of non-nationals from Kosovo

Given the low number of irregular non-regional migrants entering and staying in Kosovo, it is not surprising that information about departures from Kosovo is very limited, and that the available sources suggest that the number of irregular departures is very low. Data relating to illegal border crossings by non-Kosovars from Kosovo to other countries, shown in Figure 553 below, is, for the most part, non-existent.

Figure 55: Illegal border crossings from Kosovo, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[39]

	Illegal border crossings from Kosovo to Serbia		**Illegal border crossings from Kosovo to Albania**		**Illegal border crossings from Kosovo to Montenegro**	
	absolute number	change to previous period	absolute number	change to previous period	absolute number	change to previous period
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**211**	**n.a.**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	72	+50%	n.a.	n.a.	2	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	53	+8%	n.a.	n.a.	2	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	7	–56%	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Irregular migrants passing through Kosovo either continue to Serbia and on to Hungary or, especially after the closing of the Serbian-Hungarian border, travel from Kosovo to Montenegro and Croatia.[40] It appears that the Administrative Boundary Line to Serbia records the highest number of illegal border crossings from Kosovo. About 15% of those detected crossing this border illegally are nationals from outside the region.[41]

VII.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Information about the profile and background of irregular migrants passing through Kosovo is limited. Based on the available sources it appears that small numbers of irregular migrants from diverse countries of origin in the Middle East, South Asia, North and West Africa have used Kosovo as a transit point en route to other countries.

Syrian nationals appear to constitute the largest group of irregular migrants that transited through Kosovo up until 2015. In 2014, the Kosovo Ministry of Internal Affairs further reported that Syrians were the largest group of applicants seeking asylum in Kosovo, though their total number is relatively small.[42] Kosovar authorities also report that Pakistanis, Palestinians, Nigerians, Albanians, Algerians, Moroccans, Malians, and Tunisians were among the other nationalities detected crossing into Kosovo illegally in 2014.[43] In 2016 Frontex noted a 'slight increase' in the number of Afghan nationals transiting through Kosovo.[44]

A 2018 publication by IOM includes a 'nationality breakdown of irregular migrants apprehended on entry to Kosovo'. This data, shown in Figure 56 below, confirms that Afghans and Syrians are the two largest groups of irregular arrivals, and also demonstrates the low levels of irregular migration to Kosovo.

Figure 56: Top nationalities of irregular migrants apprehended on entry, Kosovo, 2016–2017 (IOM)[45]

	2016	2017
Afghanistan	189	43
Syria	68	26
Libya	0	22
Algeria	0	15
Pakistan	0	11

VII.4 Smuggling of migrants

The smuggling of non-regional migrants into and through Kosovo appears to be rather uncommon. In 2014, Frontex reported that 85% of persons crossing irregularly from Kosovo into Serbia were local or regional migrants. Frontex noted that '[t]his would indicate that Kosovo is much less affected by the secondary movements from Turkey and that Pristina airport is obviously not used for entry of non-European migrants to Europe with intention to move illegally towards the EU.'[46] Official figures published by Kosovar authorities similarly point to a very low level of smuggling activities involving non-regional migrants. In 2014 the Kosovar authorities recorded 48 'initiated migrant smuggling cases,' up from 29 a year earlier.[47]

VII.4.1 Routes

Most smuggling activities into Kosovo appear to occur across the border from FYR Macedonia, usually involving migrants from the Middle East, South Asia, or North Africa who previously travelled via Turkey and Greece. The route via Kosovo is a less frequently used alternative to irregular migration and smuggling via Serbia.[48] In 2017, Frontex reported on smuggling activities across the border from Albania involving mainly Afghan migrants.[49]

Smuggling from Kosovo, along with other forms of irregular migration involving non-regional nationals, is usually done across the border to Montenegro, from where the migrants continue to Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.[50] A report by the Swiss Federal Police published in 2015 found that up until late June 2013 most Kosovars were smuggled from Kosovo to Austria via Serbia and Hungary, and from there to other destinations in Western Europe. Since then the alternative route via Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Slovenia and on to Austria or Italy has become more important. A third route of smuggling Kosovar nationals is said to lead via FYR Macedonia to Greece and from there by ferry to Italy.[51]

VII.4.2 Methods

Information about smuggling methods across Kosovo's border is likewise quite limited. The Kosovar authorities report that most migrants are

smuggled across the 'green border', presumably on foot, though in some cases migrants have been found hidden in trucks.[52] There are also known cases in which Pakistani migrants were smuggled by air on flights from Turkey to Pristina, taking advantage of the visa-free entry which Kosovo affords Turkish nationals. This also means that the documents of passengers on incoming flights from Turkey are not or not always inspected, or that some Pakistanis may travel on fraudulent Turkish documents.[53] Swiss authorities have further reported that migrants are frequently smuggled to Zurich and Geneva on flights originating in Pristina.[54]

Kosovar nationals usually leave the country on public transport, especially on long-distance buses bound for Serbia.[55] The use of fraudulent travel or identity documents appears to have been very common among Kosovars during the period when they migrated irregularly in large numbers.[56] In many instances they used forged passports from other countries such as Albania or EU Member States, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece or Slovenia.[57]

VII.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

Based on the available sources, most of those involved in smuggling Kosovar nationals tend also to be from Kosovo. German and Swiss authorities detected a particularly high number of Kosovar smugglers at the time when many Kosovars were arriving in the European Union and Schengen Zone States with the assistance of smugglers.[58] Swiss authorities further report that the networks involved in smuggling Kosovar nationals have associates positioned along the main smuggling routes, are usually organised along ethnic lines, and comprise groups and individuals who have been involved in other criminal activities such as property offences or the selling of illicit drugs.[59]

Notes

1 Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, *Kosovo to EU: The Challenge of Irregular Migration*, Policy Paper No. 1/15 (2015) 1, 7; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 4 2014* (2015) 5; Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 71; Visar Malaj & Stefano de Rubertis, 'Determinants of migration and the gravity model of migration: Application on Western Balkan emigration flows' (2016) 14 *Migration Letters* 204, 209.

2 European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 3–4.

3 See, for example, ibid; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2014* (2015) 7; Frontex, *Risk Analysis* (2016) 38.

4 Cf. Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 6.

5 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 64.

6 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 51–52.

7 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2014) 22.

8 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2017' (2018).

9 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014)) 56.

10 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 56.

11 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 24; Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 56.

12 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 20; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 17; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 22; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2017* (2018) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2017* (2018) 7.

13 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 51.

14 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 52.

15 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 51.

16 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 24.

17 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 56, 65.

18 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 64.

19 See generally, Ronald Majláth, 'What Drives Kosovo Refugees to Hungary?' (2015) 4 *Hungarian Review* 22, 24.

20 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 70.

21 Ronald Majláth, 'What Drives Kosovo Refugees to Hungary?' (2015) 4 *Hungarian Review* 22, 22; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 40.

22 Judith Möllers et al, *Massenflucht aus dem Kosovo: Ein schlingernder Staat verliert seine Bürger*, IAMO Policy Brief, Issue 24 (2015) 2, 4.; Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 64.

23 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 69.

24 Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, *Kosovo to EU: The Challenge of Irregular Migration*, Policy Paper No. 1/15 (2015) 16.

25 Ibid, 16.

26 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 6, 15.

27 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 61.

28 Eurostat, *Asylum applications of Kosovar nationals within the Schengen Area* (7 February 2018).

29 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 64; Keno Verseck, 'Exodus aus dem Kosovo: Flucht aus dem gelähmten Land', *Spiegel* (online), 13 February 2015.

30 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 5, 19, 34.

31 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 5; Judith Möllers et al, *Massenflucht aus dem Kosovo*, IAMO Policy Brief, Issue 24 (2015) 3; see also, Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2013* (2013) 13, 17.

32 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2014* (2015) 5; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 5, 35; see generally, Judith Möllers et al, *Massenflucht aus dem Kosovo*, IAMO Policy Brief, Issue 24 (2015) 1, 3.

33 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 11.

34 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 19; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 27.

35 Eurostat, *Asylum applications of Kosovar nationals within the Schengen Area* (7 February 2018).

36 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 10; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 8; Frontex, *Risk Analysis for 2016* (2016) 51; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 17.

37 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 26; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 30, 31.

38 Eurostat, *Asylum applications of Kosovar nationals within the Schengen Area* (7 February 2018).

39 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 20; *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 7.

40 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 64.

41 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 22; see also, Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 51.

42 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Kosovo Migration Profile 2014* (2014) 68.

43 Ibid, 64.

44 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 25.

45 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2017' (2018).

46 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2014) 22.

47 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Migration Profile* (2014) 64.

48 Ibid, 65; Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23; European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 36.

49 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2017) 25.

50 European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 36; IOM, *Needs Assessment: Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans* (2014) 39.

51 Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Migrantenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 64.

52 Kosovo, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Migration Profile* (2014) 65.

53 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 128.

54 Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Migrantenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 65.

55 Jeta Xharra, 'Kosovans risk perils of roads, forests and criminals in chase for better life in EU', *The Guardian* (online), 17 February 2015.

56 See, for example, Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 12, 19; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 12; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 8; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2015) 22; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 8; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2016* (2017) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2016) 27; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2017* (2017) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2017) 31; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2017) 29; Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Migrantenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 64.

57 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis* (2014) 43.

58 Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Migrantenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 68; Danai Angeli & Anna Triandafyllidou, 'Europe' in Marie McAuliffe & Frank Laczko (eds), *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A global review of the emerging evidence base* (2016) 105, 116, 117.

59 Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Migrantenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 69.

VIII MONTENEGRO

VIII.1 Overview

Montenegro is a transit country for some irregular migrants travelling southwest of the main route that leads via Serbia. Irregular migration in Montenegro mostly occurs in a southeast to northwest direction, with most irregular entries occurring across the border with Albania, and most departures leaving for Serbia, Croatia, or, in lesser numbers, to Bosnia-Herzegovina.[1] The route taken by irregular migrants crossing through Montenegro is frequently referred to as a sub-route of the main route.

By regional comparison, Montenegro plays a very limited role for irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants across the Balkans. This small country with a population of approximately 625,000 has not been affected by the flow of non-regional migrants in recent years in the same way as most of its neighbours.[2] For this very reason, information concerning irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants to or through Montenegro is very limited. The following sections summarise the available sources.

VIII.2 Levels and characteristics

VIII.2.1 Numbers

VIII.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Overall, Montenegro has been less affected by irregular migration than most other Western Balkan countries. Although absolute numbers are not available for most years, Frontex has noted an increase in border detections on several occasions. In its quarterly report for July to September 2013, for instance, Frontex noted a 625% increase in detections.[3] Modest increases were recorded in early 2015,[4] low numbers throughout 2016,[5] and slight increases towards the end of that year.[6]

IOM has published figures relating to irregular entries into Montenegro for the years 2016 and 2017. These numbers, shown in Figure 57 below, confirm that the level of irregular migration has been low in the past two years. It is notable, however, that 2017 saw many more irregular arrivals than previous years, and that the numbers grew particularly quickly in the second half of 2017.

Figure 57: Irregular entries, Montenegro, 2016–2017 (IOM)[7]

	2016	2017
January	81	41
February	15	36
March	3	39
April	9	14
May	2	23
June	6	34
July	9	39
August	31	179
September	9	97
October	28	66
November	45	101
December	70	138
Year total	**308**	**807**

VIII.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Information on the number of persons staying or residing in Montenegro illegally was not available.

VIII.2.2 Entry points

Most irregular migrants enter Montenegro from Albania. This includes both Albanian nationals as well as migrants from countries outside the region. Irregular migration of migrants from outside the region started to increase in 2010–2011, when Frontex noted that some migrants use the route from Greece via Albania to Montenegro and then continue to Croatia and Slovenia.[8] Some migrants, albeit in small numbers, continued to use this sub-route in subsequent years.[9] In the third quarter of 2013, Frontex reported a 'sharp rise' of 625% in

detections of irregular migrants in Montenegro compared to the previous quarter, signalling that this route was becoming more established.[10]

The available numbers relating to illegal border crossings from Albania into Montenegro, shown in Figure 58 below, have fluctuated somewhat over time, with considerable increases recorded in 2011, 2012 and late 2016, and decreases recorded at some other times in the 2011–2017 period.[11] Overall the numbers do not show any specific trends and, by regional standards, are not very high, involving no more than several hundred persons a year detected entering illegally from Albania. Despite the significant increases recorded in some months, there appears to have been no displacement to the route via Montenegro; the very mountainous terrain and the fact that neither Montenegro nor Albania are EU Member States are seen as further reasons for the 'low attractiveness' of this route.[12]

Illegal border crossings into Montenegro from other countries appear to be even less common, and may involve occasional movements by irregular migrants who were unable to use other, more direct routes.[13]

Figure 58: Illegal border crossings into Montenegro, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[14]

	Illegal border crossings from Albania to Montenegro		**Illegal border crossings from Kosovo to Montenegro**		**Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Montenegro**	
	absolute number	change to same period in previous	absolute number	change to same period in previous	absolute number	change to same period in previous
2011 – total	**180**	**+260%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	104	+478%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	165	+313%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**387**	**+115%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**235**	**+37%**	**3**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	34	–39%	2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	122	+15%	2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	7	–11%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – total	n.a.	**–22%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–76%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–99%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–83%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+471%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–98%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+47%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	+32%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–49%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**–97%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–76%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–60%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–74%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–13%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	265%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11%
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

VIII.2.3 Stay

Based on the available information, it appears that in recent years the arrival of irregular migrants in Montenegro has often been followed by applications for asylum lodged in the country. In 2012 and 2013 Montenegro recorded a particularly high increase in asylum applications, especially by Algerian nationals, though it appears that many applicants did not stay in Montenegro to await their asylum decisions.[15] Montenegro is, by and large, a transit country, with most irregular migrants staying in the country temporarily before continuing to other countries.[16]

VIII.2.4 Departures

A look at irregular departures from Montenegro in the 2011–2017 period provides a very mixed picture. Figures published by Frontex on the number and changes of illegal border crossings from Montenegro to neighbouring countries, shown in Figure 59 below, demonstrate that the borders with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia are more or less equally affected by irregular migration from Montenegro, with great variations between different periods. Numbers relating to illegal border crossings to Albania and Kosovo are only sparsely reported, but generally appear to involve very low levels.

Figure 59: Illegal border crossings from Montenegro, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[17]

	Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Bosnia-Herzgovina		**Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Serbia**		**Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Croatia**		**Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Albania**		**Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Kosovo**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**263**	**–33%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	4	–84%	40	+100%	20	–89%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	29	+190%	78	+420%	44	+57%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**194**	**+273%**	**146**	**+92%**	**226**	**–14%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**47**	**–32%**	**94**	**–62%**	**151**	**14%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	7	–59%	6	–63%	67	+91%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 2nd quarter	10	+100%	10	–66%	50	+117%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 3rd quarter	9	–38%	534	–60%	87	+50%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 4th quarter	9	–18%	44	+2%	50	+43%	15	–6.6%	2	+100%
2015 – total	n.a.	**–26%**	n.a.	**+3337%**[18]	n.a.	**+68%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**+100%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–14%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–79%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–50%	n.a.	–99%	n.a.	–66%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–50%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+200%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–71%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	0%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	+154%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a.	**+34%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**–28%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**–83%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+489%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–35%	n.a.	+73%	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–89%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–16%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	91%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	+400%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	122%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	–25%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

The patterns and levels of irregular departures from Montenegro are said to be closely connected to the use of the route from Greece via Albania to Montenegro described earlier in this chapter. The literature and the limited available data seem to suggest that most irregular migrants transiting through Montenegro continue to Croatia and then to Slovenia and Western Europe. This route, as mentioned, appears to have first emerged in 2010–2011, and is used by some migrants as an alternative to the more direct route from Greece via FYR Macedonia and Serbia.[19] It is worth noting that the border between Montenegro and Croatia measures less that 20 kilometres in length, and only one main road connects the two countries. In the first half of 2017, Frontex reported an increase in the number of clandestine movements from Montenegro to Croatia, which has been attributed to the unavailability of other routes and the inability of irregular migrants to cross borders on foot and without the aid of smugglers.[20]

In some instances, irregular migrants enter Montenegro from Serbia before they continue to Croatia.[21] Illegal border crossings from Montenegro into Serbia or Bosnia-Herzgovina appear to be a further variation of the route leading from Greece via Albania to Montenegro and ultimately to Western Europe.[22]

Prior to visa liberalisations which came into effect at end of 2009, irregular migration from Montenegro also involved Montenegrin nationals, though this problem has since subsided.[23] In 2015, however, some reports emerged stating that some 3,500 persons from northern Montenegro were leaving the country to seek asylum abroad. Most of them appear to have originated in a cluster of towns that are home to a Muslim minority. Many of them sold their belongings to move to Germany, some with the assistance of facilitators.[24] Further up-to-date information about this phenomenon was not available at the time of writing.

VIII.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Based on the very small number of sources, it appears that Syrian nationals constituted the largest group of non-regional migrants in Montenegro in the 2011–2017 period. A 2018 publication by IOM includes a 'nationality breakdown of irregular migrants apprehended on entry to Montenegro' for the years 2016 and 2017. According to this data, shown in Figure 60 below, the largest groups of irregular migrants came from Algeria, Morocco, and Syria, followed by Pakistan and Afghanistan. These figures further show the large increase in irregular arrivals from 2016 to 2017, caused in particular by the large rise in the number of Algerian nationals, though the numbers of Moroccan, Syrian, and Pakistan migrants also grew substantially between these years.

Figure 60: Top nationalities of irregular migrants apprehended on entry, Montenegro, 2016–2017 (IOM)[25]

	2016	2017
Algeria	12	379
Morocco	41	102
Syria	34	68
Pakistan	28	58
Afghanistan	54	43
Iraq	39	42

Unlike some neighbouring countries, Montenegro has seen very few asylum applications made by migrants from the conflict zones in the Middle East and South Asia. The number of Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Pakistani and Syrian refugees, and other persons of concern to UNHCR, shown in Figure 61 below, is quite negligible. The years 2013 and 2014 saw higher numbers of Syrian nationals, albeit in low numbers in comparison to other countries in the region.[26] In 2012 Montenegro further recorded a large increase in asylum applications lodged by Algerian nationals, most of whom had arrived from Greece via Albania.[27]

Figure 61: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Montenegro 2011–2016, top nationalities[28]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	n.a.	**1**	**1**	n.a.	n.a.
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	1	1	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**1**	**10**	**7**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	1	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	0	10	7
2013 – total	**2**	n.a.	**2**	**7**	**60**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	1	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	2	n.a.	1	7	60
2014 – total	n.a.	**2**	**4**	n.a.	**36**
- refugees	n.a.	1	1	n.a.	0
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	1	3	n.a.	36
2015 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	**1**	**2**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0	2
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1	0
2016 – total	**21**	**10**	**15**	**12**	**11**
- refugees	0	0	0	0	10
- asylum-seekers	21	10	15	12	n.a.

Montenegro is also a home to and destination for irregular migrants from other countries in the region. Serbian nationals and, in smaller numbers, nationals of Bosnia-Herzegovina are the top nationalities among persons found to be staying in Montenegro illegally.[29]

VIII.4 Smuggling of migrants

Information about the smuggling of migrants into, through, and out of Montenegro is very limited, and it is difficult to gauge the magnitude of this phenomenon. Based on quarterly data regarding the detection of migrant smugglers published by Frontex, only a very small number of perpetrators are detected by Montenegrin authorities.[30]

VIII.4.1 Routes

Irregular migration through Montenegro, including the smuggling of migrants, as mentioned, occurs along a secondary route. The levels, locations, and methods of smuggling along this route are not well documented. Generally, the smuggling of migrants occurs in a southeast to northwest direction, with migrants entering Montenegro from Albania and exiting the country by crossing into Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Croatia.[31] Although the smuggling of migrants has been referred to as 'the second most important criminal activity',[32] little to no evidence has been provided to support this remark or to explain how 'importance' is measured in this context.

VIII.4.2 Methods

Based on the limited information available, it appears that the smuggling of migrants in Montenegro mostly occurs by land, and either involves smuggling in vehicles, guiding migrants across the border, or giving them instructions about how and where best to cross undetected.

Covert smuggling in cars, vans, and trucks is a common method of smuggling migrants from Montenegro into Serbia or Croatia.[33] It mostly involves Afghan, Pakistani and Syrian nationals hiding in the back of trucks, usually without the knowledge of the driver. A 2014 report stressed that this method

> is cheap, requires little planning and therefore allows for multiple attempts if detected. […] Once the driver is asleep, migrants cut all security features and hide in the cargo area. They either do this without external help or solicit services from fellow migrants or local facilitators.[34]

Illegal border crossings on foot can occur at almost any location along the border. Usually, rural or remote areas are chosen, where migrants and their smugglers are less likely to encounter border patrols. It is for this reason that cameras have been installed along the border between Montenegro and Albania, for instance, which can detect irregular movements across the border.[35]

There are no reports to suggest that the smuggling of migrants by air through Montenegro is a common occurrence. In 2013, Frontex reported cases in which Albanian nationals crossed into Montenegro and then, using fraudulent documents, travelled from Podgorica airport via Istanbul to Sweden.[36]

VIII.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

There are presently no publicly available reports containing information about the profiles and backgrounds of persons engaged in smuggling of migrants through Montenegro, or about the networks in or with which they operate. The available information largely consists of isolated reports of individual arrests and other cases in which perpetrators were caught smuggling migrants through Montenegro.[37] These are not sufficient to make generalisations about the type of offenders and organisations smuggling migrants through the country.

Notes

1 European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 9.

2 Europol, *Regional Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment* (2016) 25.

3 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2013* (2014) 16.

4 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 12.

5 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 24.

6 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 25.

7 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2017' (2018).

8 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 16; see also, Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 24.

9 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 23; Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 27; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 24.

10 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2013* (2013) 16.

11 See also, Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 25.

12 Cooperation and Development Institute, *Albania in the Western Balkans Route: August 2015 – June 2016*, Berlin Process Series, Working Paper No 1 (2016) 10; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 17; European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 55.

13 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 24

14 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 18; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 27; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 32; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 19; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016)

17; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 22; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2017* (2018) 7.

15 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2012* (2013) 27–28, 33; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 16.

16 Europol, *Regional Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment 2016* (2016) 25.

17 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 18; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 27; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 32; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 19; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 20; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 17; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 22; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2017* (2018) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2017* (2018) 7.

18 This figure, reported in Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 17 appears to contradict other reports.

19 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 16; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 23; Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23.

20 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2017* (2017) 9.

21 UNHCR, 'Desperate Journeys: Refugees and migrants entering and crossing Europe via the Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes' (February 2017) 4.

22 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 17; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 27; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 19; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 17.

23 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 10; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 16.

24 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 21; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 15; Visar Malaj & Stefano de Rubertis, 'Determinants of migration and the gravity model of migration: Application on Western Balkan emigration flows' (2016) 14 *Migration Letters* 204, 215.

25 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2017' (2018).

26 See alos, Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 24.

27 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2012* (2013) 27–28.

28 UNHCR, 'Population Statistics: Persons of Concern' (8 March 2018).

29 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 9.

30 See, for example, Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January – March 2015* (2015) 11.

31 Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 23; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 27.

32 Europol, *Regional Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment 2016* (2016) 25.

33 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2016* (2017) 9.

34 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 30.

35 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 27.

36 Frontex, *Western Balkan Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 29.

37 See, for example, Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 29.

IX BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

IX.1 Overview

Irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants into, through, and out of Bosnia-Herzegovina is very poorly documented in official reports, while academic literature and media reports are likewise extremely limited. For much of its recent history, the primary focus of attention has been on the exodus during the war and post-war periods, though emigration from Bosnia-Herzegovina has declined significantly since that time, and today generally involves legal avenues of migration.

From the limited sources which could be located during this research, it appears that Bosnia-Herzegovina was not affected by irregular migration flows on a significant scale in the 2011–2017 period. Compared to most of its immediate neighbours, the country witnessed relatively low levels of irregular arrivals and departures, and avoided much of the frenzy associated with the large flow of irregular migrants through the Western Balkans in the second half of 2015.

This is not to say, however, that Bosnia-Herzegovina has not been affected by the events and developments associated with irregular migration in recent years. The country is situated at the heart of the Western Balkans and borders Serbia and Croatia, two countries that have experienced particularly high levels of irregular migration in recent years. Since Croatia—a country with which Bosnia-Herzegovina shares a long border—became a Member State of the European Union (EU) on 1 July 2012, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been perceived as a potential gateway into the EU, and some migrants have transited through the country for this reason.[1]

IX.2 Levels and characteristics

IX.2.1 Numbers

Information about the number of migrants entering or staying in Bosnia-Herzegovina is extremely limited. Most of the available data and other information concerns the border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, and the flow of migrants from the country into the territory of its northern neighbour. The influx, if any, of irregular migrants into Bosnia-Herzegovina is scarcely documented in publicly accessible sources. Since Bosnia-Herzegovina and its eastern neighbours Montenegro and Serbia are not EU Member States, Frontex, Eurostat, and other EU agencies do not document irregular movements across these borders in the same manner as they report illegal border crossings into and the illegal stay of foreigners in EU Member States.

In 2014, the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), published a report on migration flows through the Western Balkans which contains some data on illegal border crossings for the years 2009–2013. These figures, shown in Figure 62 below, suggest that the level of illegal immigration into Bosnia-Herzegovina, including 'apprehensions at border control points, at the green border, apprehended in the country, and upon exit from the country', is very low, and the figures reveal no major trend or development in this period, though numbers dropped significantly from 2012 to 2013.

Figure 62: Illegal entries (apprehended upon entry, in country, or upon exit, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2009–2013 (IOM)[2]

year	number of persons
2009	381
2010	310
2011	324
2012	389
2013	228

IX.2.2 Entry points

The limited number of irregular arrivals into Bosnia-Herzegovina appear to enter the country mostly from Serbia and Montenegro. Complete data for illegal border crossings into Bosnia-Herzegovina is not available. Frontex has published data from some quarters for the

period of 2011 to 2017, but this data, shown in Figure 63 below, is too incomplete to make any observations about the main entry points and about developments in recent years. The figures fluctuated considerably in the years 2014 to 2017, with significant increases and decreases recorded in different quarters, especially in relation to illegal border crossings from Montenegro. The absolute number of irregular arrivals is nevertheless quite low. Data relating to illegal border crossings from Croatia into Bosnia-Herzegovina could not be located during the course of this research.

Figure 63: Illegal border crossings into Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), 2011–2017 (Frontex)[3]

	Illegal border crossings from Montenegro into BiH		**Illegal border crossings from Serbia into BiH**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2012 – 1st quarter	4	–84%	6	–57%
2012 – 2nd quarter	29	+190%	24	+100%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2012 – total	**194**	**+273%**	**77**	**+4%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2013 – total	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2014 – total	**47**	**–32%**	**85**	**+10%**
2015 – 1st quarter	7	–59%	8	–68%
2015 – 2nd quarter	10	+100%	35	+67%
2015 – 3rd quarter	9	–36%	n.a	n.a
2015 – 4th quarter	9	––18%	14	–33%
2015 – total	n.a	**–26%**	n.a	n.a
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a	–14%	n.a	+67%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a	–50%	n.a	n.a
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a	+200%	n.a	n.a
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a	0%	n.a	+121%
2016 – total	n.a	**+34%**	n.a	**+6%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a	+489%	n.a	–16%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a	–89%	n.a	–12%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a	n.a	n.a	+291%
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a	+122%	n.a	–4%
2017 – total	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a

Illegal entry of third country nationals into Bosnia-Herzegovina is mostly seen as a diversion from other routes. A 2014 publication, for instance, notes that in response to growing border controls at the Serbia-Hungary and Serbia-Croatia borders, some migrants used boats to cross the river Drina to reach Bosnia from Serbia, and then continued north to Croatia.[4]

IX.2.3 Stay

Irregular migrants entering Bosnia-Herzegovina, including refugees and asylum seekers, generally do not intend to remain in the country, or at least not for long. For the majority of irregular migrants, Bosnia-Herzegovina is merely a transit country used when other, more direct routes from Serbia to Hungary and Croatia become unavailable.

Most irregular migrants do not apply for asylum in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and questions have been raised as to whether the country would have sufficient capacity to process and protect them if they did.[5] The lack of proper protection systems for asylum seekers and refugees may be a further reason why irregular migrants opt not to remain in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

IX.2.4 Departures

From Bosnia-Herzegovina, most irregular migrants continue north (or west) to Croatia. The border between the two countries, measuring over 1,000 kilometres in length, is the second longest external land border section of the EU. Because of its length, the large number of small roads crossing the border, and the presence of established criminal organisations on both sides, there have been some concerns that this border may be used for a range of illegal activities, including the smuggling of migrants.[6] As mentioned previously, it appears that irregular migration via Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia serves as an alternative route for some non-regional migrants seeking to reach Hungary or Slovenia. In 2011–2012, for instance, it was reported that some Turkish nationals fly directly from Istanbul to Sarajevo and then move through Bosnia-Herzegovina to enter Croatia, with the intention of continuing to Slovenia or possibly Hungary.[7]

Based on the limited information available, illegal border crossings to Serbia and Montenegro do not occur on a very large scale. Figure 64 below shows the available data published by Frontex for the 2011 to 2017 period. For the years 2014 to 2017 the numbers fluctuate somewhat, albeit starting from low levels, and it is not possible to detect any particular trends or developments for the reporting period.

Figure 64: Illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[8]

	Illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia		**Illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia**		**Illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Montenegro**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**610**	**–23%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	82	–52%	6	–57%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	163	+14%	24	+100%	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**645**	**+6%**	**77**	**+4%**	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	**430**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**287**	**–41%**	**85**	**+10%**	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	61	–8%	8	–68%	n.a.	7
2015 – 2nd quarter	45	–22%	35	+67%	n.a.	10
2015 – 3rd quarter	77	+10%	40	n.a.	n.a.	9
2015 – 4th quarter	119	+28%	14	–33%	n.a.	9
2015 – total	n.a.	**+5%**	n.a.	**n.a.**	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–23%	n.a.	67%	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	45	+0%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	59	–23%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	212	+79%	n.a.	+121%	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a.	**+23%**	n.a.	**+6%**	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	67	–68%	n.a.	–16%	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	127	+90%	n.a.	–12%	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	259	+104%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	394	+86%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

IX.3 Profile of irregular migrants

In the available open source information there is very little detail about the nationality and background of irregular migrants passing through Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A *Migration Profile* published by the Ministry of Security of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2014 notes that of the over 400 foreign nationals held in immigration detention in 2013 and 2014, most were from Afghanistan and Serbia, with smaller numbers from Kosovo, Turkey, Syria, and Albania.[9] Frontex reports for the years 2015, 2016, and 2017 confirm that the largest group of persons entering and staying in Bosnia-Herzegovina irregularly are Serbian nationals.[10] In 2016, Frontex further noted the comparatively high number of Turkish nationals who were found to be staying in Bosnia-Herzegovina illegally.[11]

As noted earlier, very few irregular migrants apply for asylum in Bosnia-Herzegovina; most merely transit through the country.[12] Figure 65 below shows that Syrian nationals have been the largest group of refugees and asylum seekers in Bosnia-Herzegovina in recent years, though their number is very small and has dropped from a small peak in 2013. Other nationalities typically involved in irregular migration through the Western Balkans have only been registered as refugees or asylum-seekers in Bosnia-Herzegovina in very small numbers.

Figure 65: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Bosnia-Herzegovina 2011–2017, top nationalities[13]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**2**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**3**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1
- asylum-seekers	2	1	2	1	2
2012 – total	n.a.	**1**	**1**	n.a.	**31**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	1	n.a.	5
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	1	0	n.a.	26
2013 – total	**6**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**66**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a	1	n.a.	48
- asylum-seekers	6	2	1	2	18
2014 – total	**7**	n.a.	**5**	n.a.	**27**
- refugees	0	n.a.	3	n.a.	25
- asylum-seekers	7	n.a.	2	n.a.	2
2015 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**13**	n.a.	**17**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	2	n.a.	14
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	3	n.a.	3
2016 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**10**	n.a.	**27**
- refugees	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	15
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	6	n.a.	12

IX.4 Smuggling of migrants

As with other aspects of irregular migration, the smuggling of migrants into, through, or out of Bosnia-Herzegovina is extremely limited. Based on the available sources, and given the lack of further reports, it does appear that the smuggling of migrants does not occur in the country on a significant scale, and that instances of smuggling are quite isolated.

There is no specific information concerning the routes used to smuggle migrants across the

borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is also not possible to make generalisations about the methods and means used to smuggle migrants. In some cases, migrants were smuggled by boat across the river Drina, which separates Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in some places.[14] In other instances, fraudulent travel or identity documents were used to enter or leave the country.[15]

In some instances the airport in Sarajevo was used as a transit point to smuggle people into Bosnia-Herzegovina, from where they continued overland to Croatia and then to other countries such as Slovenia and Hungary. According to the Bosnian authorities, flights from Istanbul to Sarajevo have been used to smuggle migrants into the country, then move them closer to Croatia with the intention of smuggling them onward.[16] Other sources also point to the smuggling of migrants from Turkey to Bosnia-Herzegovina by air on board commercial flights, often involving Turkish nationals travelling on fraudulent documents.[17]

No information could be found on the individuals and groups involved in the smuggling of migrants in Bosnia-Herzgovina. Given that instances of smuggling appear to be rather isolated, it is not possible to make observations and generalisations about those engaged in smuggling. Several reports suggest that the presence of established criminal organisations on both sides of the border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia give rise to concerns that these organisations may engage in the smuggling of migrants.[18] In the absence of further data or other information, it is not possible to establish whether or not these concerns have proved well-founded.

Notes

1 Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ministry of Security, *Strategy in the Area of Migrations and Asylum and Action Plan for the Period 2016–2020* (2016) 14–15; Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23–24.

2 IOM, *Mapping major Migration Flows over the Territory of Western Balkan Countries, 2009–2013* (2014) 58.

3 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 27; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 32; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 19; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (2015) 20; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July– September 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 17; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July– September 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2016* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2017* (2017) 22; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2017* (2017) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July– September 2017* (2018) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2017* (2018) 7.

4 Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23–24.

5 Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, 'Asylum Systems in the Western Balkan Countries: Current Issues' (2016) 54(6) *International Migration* 151, 158–159.

6 Frontex, *Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 61; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 40; IOM Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Irregular Migration' (2017).

7 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 36.

8 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly, Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 27; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 32; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 7; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2017* (2018) 7, 20; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2017* (2018) 7, 13.

9 Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ministry of Security, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Migration Profile for the year 2014* (2015) 37.

10 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 9, 13; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2015* (2016) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2016* (2016) 9; Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 9.

11 Frontex, *Western Balkans Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2016* (2016) 9.

12 Bosnia-Herzegovina Ministry of Security, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Migration Profile for the year 2014* (2015) 52, 53.

13 UNHCR, 'Population Statistics: Persons of Concern' (8 March 2018); see also, Bosnia-Herzegovina Ministry of Security, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Migration Profile for the year 2014* (2015) 54–55.

14 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 24; Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23–24.

15 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 24.

16 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 36.

17 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 24.

18 Frontex, *Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 61; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 40; IOM Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Irregular Migration' (2017).

X ROMANIA

X.1 Overview

Romania is a country which sits at the crossroads of several irregular migration routes, yet the country experiences only relatively moderate levels of irregular migration and migrant smuggling compared to many other countries in the region. Romania is mostly a transit country for irregular migrants continuing to Hungary and Western Europe.[1] Since January 1st 2007 Romania has been a Member State of the European Union (EU) and migration flows are said to have increased since that time. Romania is not, however, part of the Schengen Zone, and migrants thus face additional hurdles when they seek to cross from Romania into Hungary or other Schengen Zone countries.[2]

Most irregular migrants enter Romania from Bulgaria after travelling via Turkey, sometimes also via Greece. Furthermore, Romania experiences irregular migration and migrant smuggling across its northern borders from Moldova and Ukraine. Migrants entering Romania across the country's northern border have travelled along the so-called Northern Route that leads from Russia to Eastern Europe. There are also reports of migrants being smuggled by boat from Turkey across the Black Sea to Romania. Another route used by irregular migrants runs from Serbia to Hungary via Romania; a small detour that is sometimes taken when border crossings from Serbia to Hungary are not possible.

For some irregular migrants, Romania is a destination country where they can seek asylum and are afforded protection. A growing number of Syrian nationals, along with smaller numbers of Afghan and Iraqi nationals, have sought asylum in Romania in recent years, albeit at lower levels than in some neighbouring countries.

X.2 Levels and characteristics

X.2.1 Numbers

X.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry (detections at the border)

Information about the total number of irregular migrants detected in Romania annually is only available for some years in the 2011–2017 period. A 2012 publication notes that in 2011, Romanian authorities detected more than 1,000 persons entering Romania illegally, up from just 6 in 2010.[3] For the year 2013, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), reported that 2,318 irregular migrants had been identified.[4] In 2014, IOM recorded an increase of 8% to 2,496 irregular migrants;[5] in 2015, the number dropped by 7% to 2,324.[6] In 2017, a total of 1,600 irregular arrivals were recorded by IOM, with the largest numbers of migrants detected in April and September (see Figure 66 below).

A further indicator of the level of irregular migration to Romania is the data collected by Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, relating to refusals of entry to non-EU nationals at the border. According to this data, shown in Figure 67 below, several thousand people are refused entry each year, most of them at Romania's extensive land borders. It should be noted, however, that these figures do not directly correlate with the flow and smuggling of irregular migrants through Romania, as the refusal to enter Romania may also include circumstances such as arrival with invalid visas or without other valid documents.

Figure 66: Irregular entries, Romania 2017 (IOM)[7]

	2017
January–March	320
April	398
May	96
June	17
July	35
August	192
September	376
October	64
November	83
December	19
Year total	**1600**

Figure 67: Non-EU citizens refused entry, Romania 2011–2017 (Eurostat)[8]

	Total	land border		air border		sea border	
		number	% of all refusals	number	% of all refusals	number	% of all refusals
2011	3,620	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012	3,340	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013	3,410	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014	4,045	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015	4,810	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016	5,390	4,480	83.1%	815	15.1%	95	1.8%

X.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Additional figures published by Eurostat show that the number of foreigners found to be staying in Romania illegally has been very steady in recent years. Figure 68 below shows that numbers ranged between 2,010 and 2,430 for the years 2012 and 2016, with slightly higher numbers recorded in 2011. Based on this information it appears that, unlike many other countries in the region, the flow of irregular migration in recent years has not led to a rise in the number of people found to be staying in Romania illegally.

X.2.2 Entry points

Romania experiences the arrival of irregular migrants from a range of directions, as several routes converge on this country. This includes the entry of irregular migrants from Turkey and Greece who arrive via Bulgaria, the arrival from Serbia of migrants who travelled from Greece via FYR Macedonia, arrivals by sea directly from Turkey, and the irregular migration from Moldova and Ukraine of people who have travelled along the so-called Northern Route via Russia. Frontex collects data on illegal border crossings into Romania from non-EU Member States, which is shown in Figure 69 below and examined in the following sections.

Figure 68: Third country nationals found to be illegally present, Romania 2011–2017 (Eurostat)[9]

	Total
2011	3,365
2012	2,145
2013	2,400
2014	2,335
2015	2,010
2016	2,430

Figure 69: Illegal border crossings into Romania, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[10]

	Illegal border crossings from Serbia into Romania		**Illegal border crossings from Moldova**		**Illegal border crossings from Ukraine**	
	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**2,037**	**+4,057%**	**346**	**+77%**	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 1st quarter	1,021	+953%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 2nd quarter	1,157	+405%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**3,288**	**+61%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	**73**	**–98%**	n.a.	**+228%**	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**37**	**–49%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015 – 1st quarter	13	+30%	9	–47%	10	–66%
2015 – 2nd quarter	46	+2,200%	40	+67%	16	–27%
2015 – 3rd quarter	27	+358%	34	+209%	47	+52%
2015 – 4th quarter	15	–21%	2	–90%	72	+279%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+2,489%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–90%	16	78%	23	130%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–3%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	+815%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	+1,780%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016 – total	n.a.	**–31%**	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+55%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+95%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–84%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	21%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

X.2.2.1 From Serbia

Figure 69 above shows that in the early 2010s, considerable numbers of irregular migrants arrived in Romania from Serbia. According to Frontex, from 2010 to 2011 the number of illegal border detections increased from just 49 to over 2,000.[11] The increase recorded in the first half of 2011 was initially attributed to statistical errors, though it later became clear that these detections mostly involved migrants of North African background who had previously travelled through Greece and FYR Macedonia.[12] The increase in irregular arrivals continued throughout 2012. It was further noted that most detections were made close to the Serbian and Romanian borders to Hungary, suggesting that the movements from Serbia to Romania were a (temporary) displacement of migrants who encountered difficulties trying to cross directly from Serbia into Hungary, as authorities made it harder to cross that border illegally.[13] By mid-2012 it was found that growing numbers of Afghan nationals were crossing into Romania from Serbia, too.[14]

Towards the end of 2012 irregular arrivals started to decline again;[15] a trend that continued through 2013 and 2014, as shown in Figure 69 above. The reintroduction on 1 July 2013 of Hungary's policy to detain asylum seekers had, if any, only a minor impact on irregular migration via Romania;[16] unlike, for instance, Croatia and Slovenia. The flow of very large numbers of irregular migrants through the region between August and December 2015, and the closure of Hungary's border with Serbia and then with Croatia, did not affect the border between Serbia and Romania in any major way. Figure 70 below shows that illegal crossings between control points at the Serbian-Romanian border remained low until mid–2016.

Figure 70: Illegal border crossings, Romania–Serbia, October 2015–2017 (Frontex)[17]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points
2015 – 4th quarter	15
2016 – 1st quarter	91
2016 – 2nd quarter	37
2016 – 3rd quarter	247
2016 – 4th quarter	273
2017 – 1st quarter	423
2017 – 2nd quarter	823
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.

Since mid-2016, irregular migration by non-regional migrants from Serbia into Romania has increased considerably. This has been attributed to the fact that migrants in Serbia gradually ran out of other options to leave Serbia, a country they did not wish to remain in. In late October 2016 the Romanian authorities responded to this development by instituting stricter controls at the Serbian border, though illegal arrivals continued in considerable numbers from December 2016 onwards. A further tightening of Hungary's asylum procedures and immigration policies followed in early 2017.[18]

X.2.2.2 From Bulgaria

Data relating to the number of irregular migrants entering Romania across the border from Bulgaria—an internal EU border—is not available, though there are reports that border crossings occur both overtly and covertly, with and without the use of smugglers.[19] The scale of irregular border crossings from Bulgaria to Romania appears to be affected by the ability or inability to cross from Bulgaria to Serbia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for instance, noted in September 2016 that increased restrictions at the border with Serbia redirected some irregular migrants to the Romanian border and forced them to use dangerous, clandestine methods to cross from Bulgaria to Romania to avoid detection.[20]

X 2.2.3 From Turkey

Romania also occasionally experiences irregular arrivals by boat directly from Turkey, albeit in small numbers. The first reports of irregular migrants travelling across the Black Sea to Romania, as well as Bulgaria,[21] emerged in mid 2013, when two groups of Syrian nationals arrived by boat from a small port near Istanbul. Both cases were reportedly facilitated by smugglers.[22] Further arrivals, also including Afghan nationals, followed in 2013 and 2014, leading to suggestions that this would become a more established route in response to greater surveillance in the Aegean Sea.[23] In 2014, 433 persons were detected crossing the Black Sea to reach Romania and Bulgaria illegally.[24] Throughout 2015 and 2016, however, there were no further reports of this kind.

In 2017, new reports of irregular migration by sea from Turkey to Romania emerged, which again resulted in speculation that smugglers were testing new routes to bring migrants to the EU. In August 2013, for instance, the Romanian Coast Guard detected 101 adults and 56 children from Iran and Iraq on a small, overcrowded fishing vessel that had travelled from Turkey and came into distress during strong winds.[25]

X.2.2.4 From Moldova

Information about the arrival of irregular migrants from Moldova into Romania is quite limited and, as shown in Figure 69 above, data is only available for some years. The available information nevertheless demonstrates that irregular migrants are regularly detected at this border, albeit not in large numbers. It appears that most of these border crossings involve covert methods, such as hiding in vans or even swimming across one of the rivers that separate the two countries. Irregular arrivals from Moldova generally involve non-regional migrants such as Afghan, Bangladeshi and Turkish nationals, but also Moldovans who cross the border illegally.[26]

X.2.2.5 From Ukraine

Data and other information about the patterns and scale of irregular arrivals from Ukraine into Romania is similarly scarce. Based on the limited data published by Frontex, shown in Figure 69 above, it appears that irregular migration from Ukraine occurs at a similar level as from Moldova, though further details giving a fuller picture and indicating specific trends were not available at the time of writing.

X.2.3 Stay

For most irregular migrants, Romania is a transit country en route to Hungary and Western Europe. The fact that Romania only has very small communities of people from the same background as newly arriving migrants appears to be a further reason why many migrants prefer to settle elsewhere. For some irregular migrants, however, Romania is a destination country, though there are no figures or other information giving any indication as to which factors induce irregular migrants to remain in or leave Romania.[27]

X.2.4 Departures

Most irregular migrants transiting through Romania continue east to Hungary. This border, measuring 448 kilometres in length, can be crossed easily in many places and is an internal EU border. The European Commission has been publishing data on illegal crossing detections at the border between Romania and Hungary for selected years, and this shows that detections rose from 686 in 2013 to 995 in 2014. Between 1 January and 31 July 2015, a further 533 persons were detected. While these figures are relatively low, up until the autumn of 2015 the border to Romania recorded the second highest number of irregular arrivals into Hungary, second only to Serbia.[28]

In 2017, reports emerged about an increase in the number of irregular migrants departing from Romania (and also from Bulgaria) for Serbia.[29]

At the time of writing there was no further information to show whether this signaled a new trend or was an isolated observation.

X.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Irregular migrants who are detected in Romania come from a diverse range of source countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The available information mostly relates to refugees and asylum seekers recorded by Romanian authorities. Broader information about the profile of irregular migrants is very limited.

Generally, most migrants who apply for asylum in Romania are of Middle Eastern and South Asian background, while other nationalities either use Romania merely as a transit point to other destinations or remain in Romania illegally and clandestinely. Figure 71 below shows that the number of refugees from Syria increased nearly tenfold between 2012 and 2013, and continued to grow at more moderate levels in subsequent years. Iraqis and Afghans constitute the second and third largest groups of refugees in Romania respectively.

Figure 71: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Romania 2011–2016, top nationalities[30]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**148**	**60**	**612**	**99**	**47**
- refugees	91	38	474	6	20
- asylum-seekers	57	22	13	93	27
2012 – total	**127**	**52**	**562**	**11**	**162**
- refugees	125	50	487	9	152
- asylum-seekers	2	2	0	2	10
2013 – total	**125**	**75**	**304**	**20**	**1,023**
- refugees	108	74	293	18	932
- asylum-seekers	19	1	110	2	91
2014 – total	**159**	**75**	**382**	**56**	**1,392**
- refugees	120	65	323	25	1,278
- asylum-seekers	39	10	26	31	114
2015 – total	**182**	**82**	**438**	**34**	**1,687**
- refugees	141	69	345	34	1,591
- asylum-seekers	41	13	68	30	96
2016 – total	**130**	**67**	**438**	**47**	**1,796**
- refugees	129	64	426	33	1,775
- asylum-seekers	n.a.	n.a.	12	14	21

Syrian and Iraqi nationals are among the largest groups of irregular migrants detected in Romania. Iranians are also frequently apprehended, albeit in smaller numbers. These three nationalities are also among the main source countries of persons applying for asylum in Romania.[31] While most irregular migrants enter Romania from Bulgaria,[32] there have also been reports of Syrian nationals travelling directly from Turkey across the Black Sea to Romania, usually with the aid of migrant smugglers.[33]

Afghanistan and Pakistan are two further significant source countries of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Romania.[34] A 2013 report further suggests that Afghan and Bangladeshi nationals frequently travel along the Northern Route and enter Romania from Moldova.[35] A 2012

report notes that China is a further source country of irregular migrants seeking to stay in (rather than transit through) Romania.[36]

Based on the available source material, Romania is not commonly used by irregular migrants from Africa.[37] Several reports published in 2012 noted growing numbers of Algerian and Moroccan nationals who were detected at the Romanian-Serbian border.[38] The sources consulted for the purpose of this report contained no more recent information.

Additional source countries of irregular migrants detected in Romania include neighbouring Moldova and Serbia, as well as Turkey and Georgia.[39]

X.4 Smuggling of migrants

X.4.1 Routes

The smuggling of migrants through Romania generally occurs in an east-west direction.

Migrants are smuggled from Bulgaria to Romania using covert methods, such as hiding in trucks and vans, or walking across the border.[40] The route from Bulgaria to Romania is said to involve many obstacles, such as poor infrastructure and mountainous areas.[41] These circumstances may deter some migrants from travelling to Romania, instead opting to continue from Bulgaria to Serbia or FYR Macedonia.

Illegal entry from Moldova into Romania is said to generally be facilitated by smugglers, and involves clandestine methods of entry. Some migrants initially travel to Moldova, including legally by air, and then engage smugglers to cross the external EU border to Romania.[42] The smuggling of migrants from Ukraine to Romania appears to follow similar patterns.[43]

While most irregular migrants, including smuggled migrants, reach Romania via Bulgaria, there have been several instances of migrants bypassing Bulgaria and the tight controls along the borders between Bulgaria and Turkey and Greece and Turkey. The migrants instead engaged smugglers who brought them by boat directly from Turkey across the Black Sea to the coast of Romania.[44]

For most irregular migrants, Romania is merely a transit country. The vast majority continue west into Hungary. Some, albeit in smaller numbers, continue to Serbia, and fewer still travel to Slovakia using a variety of overt and covert methods that do not always necessitate the use of smugglers.[45]

X.4.2 Methods

X.4.2.1 Smuggling by land

Smuggling ventures into and out of Romania involves both overt and covert methods. The 'better' and faster the smuggling method—i.e. the lower the likelihood of migrants being detected, and the greater the rapidity with which they reach their next destination—the higher the price they have to pay smugglers.

It has been reported that those migrants who can afford it transit through Romania using fraudulent travel or identity documents supplied for high prices by their smugglers. Those who cannot afford to pay for forged documents travel in trucks, vans or cars, or are hidden in compartments built specially to conceal smuggled migrants when they enter, transit through, or exit Romania.[46]

Covert smuggling methods involving cars, vans, and trucks are said to be particularly common in Romania. These methods are used to smuggle migrants from Bulgaria or Moldova into Romania, but also to bring them from Romania into Hungary.[47] Crossing Romania's borders on foot is cheaper still, and migrants may attempt this with or without the aid of smugglers. Reports about this method are quite limited, though there have been reports of Pakistani nationals entering Romania from Bulgaria on foot.[48]

X.4.2.2 Smuggling by air

Reports about the smuggling of migrants by air into, via or from Romania are quite isolated, and do not lend themselves to generalisations. In some instances, smuggled migrants from Vietnam initially flew to the Russian Federation before continuing by plane to Romania, where they were accommodated in safe houses before being taken overland to Hungary.[49] Other reports refer to the arrival of Pakistani nationals at Bucharest airport, though it is not clear whether this information relates to the smuggling of migrants or to legitimate travel.[50] Indeed, some sources seem to conflate and confuse legal and irregular migration and, in so doing, directly or indirectly accuse migrants of using smugglers even if the circumstances of their journey are lawful and compliant with the applicable immigration laws.

X.4.2.3 Smuggling by sea

In 2013, and again in 2017, reports emerged of migrant smuggling from Turkey to Romania across the Black Sea. In July 2013, Romanian authorities detected two instances of Turkish smugglers bringing a total of 59 Syrian nationals from Turkey to Romania aboard Turkish fishing vessels.[51] At that time, Frontex suggested that this may be becoming a more established route. These incidents still constitute isolated cases, but they reveal possible increasing pressure of seasonal irregular migration from Turkey across the Black Sea. They are possibly linked to the increased surveillance on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the increasing number of migrants waiting in Turkey to reach the EU illegally.[52]

Among the sources consulted for this research, there were no further reports of this kind until September 2017 when Romanian authorities detected one or more wooden fishing vessels carrying a total of 101 adults and 56 children from Iran and Iraq. They had boarded a vessel designed to carry about a dozen people in Turkey, and were then taken across the Black Sea to Romania. At that time, it was again speculated 'that smugglers may be looking to revive this route'.[53]

X.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

The information about the background of persons involved in the smuggling of migrants through Romania covers a broad range of nationalities. Some of this information stems from media reports and is somewhat anecdotal, hence it is not possible to point to specific nationalities commonly involved in smuggling ventures, or to specific roles assigned to particular people.

The available sources involve reports about migrant smugglers from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Syria, and Turkey who have been involved in smuggling migrants into or out of Romania.[54] Most were drivers detected on entering or exiting the country. Information about networks, organisations or organisers involved in smuggling activities within Romania was not available in the source material consulted for this report.

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XI HUNGARY

XI.1 Overview

Hungary plays a very complex role in irregular migration along the Balkan route. In recent years Hungary has experienced a large number of irregular arrivals, not least because the Western and Eastern Balkan routes converge on Hungary. Up until 2015, Hungary was the main gateway for irregular migrants seeking to travel from Serbia, Croatia, and Romania via Hungary to Austria, Germany and other parts of Western Europe.

The patterns and levels of irregular migration through Hungary are uniquely influenced by political developments and legal and practical measures adopted by the Hungarian Government. On 24 December 2010, laws relating to refugees and asylum seekers in Hungary were amended to introduce the detention of asylum seekers while their cases were pending, and to extend the maximum period of detention from six to 12 months. Even families with children could be detained for up to 30 days under the new laws.[1] In the following years the conditions in detention centres became the subject of frequent criticism, and as a result of international pressure, the practice of detaining asylum seekers ceased on 1 January 2013. This policy change almost immediately triggered an influx of irregular migrants using Hungary as a gateway to the European Union (EU) rather than taking longer, slower routes via neighbouring countries. To deter refugees, asylum seekers and other irregular migrants from entering Hungary, the detention policy was reintroduced as of 1 July 2013. Frontex, the EU's Border and Coast Guard Agency, reported that Hungary's decision to open or close asylum centres had a direct impact on respective increases and decreases in migration flow within the region, though less so on the number of transiting migrants.[2] Some political decisions concerning border measures and asylum were taken unilaterally by the Hungarian Government, with little consultation and little concern for the effect these measures might have on neighbouring countries or migrants. Some of these measures have caused considerable harm and suffering to migrants, including refugees.

Perhaps the most significant initiative in this context was Hungary's decision to close the border to Serbia by building a barbed-wire fence, which was completed in mid-September 2015. Amendments to Hungary's criminal law were enacted at the same time, introducing new offences for unauthorised entry into Hungary in fenced areas, causing damage to the border fortifications, and obstructing the construction of the border fence.[3] Penalties for offences relating to the smuggling of migrants were also stiffened in the same amendment.[4]

Following the completion of the border fence, the Hungarian Government issued a decree declaring a 'crisis situation caused by mass immigration' which initially applied to the border areas but was extended in March 2016 to cover the whole country.

Hungary's asylum law was amended to establish so-called 'transit zones' which are special centres for asylum-seekers along the southern borders, and to introduce special asylum procedures for persons arriving in these transit zones. Using somewhat vague criteria, the rights of asylum seekers in transit zones were significantly curtailed. Asylum-seekers are detained in the transit zones for the duration of asylum proceedings and are prohibited from leaving the zones during that time.[5]

Within 24 hours of completion of the fence along the Hungarian-Serbian border, the flow of irregular migrants was displaced to the Serbian-Croatian border, though many irregular migrants merely detoured via Croatia to reach Hungary, until Hungarian authorities also closed the border to Croatia. This, as later Chapters of this report show, shifted the migration route first to Slovenia and then to Austria.

XI.2 Levels and characteristics

XI.2.1 Numbers

XI.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

In the years leading up to 2015, Hungary experienced high levels of irregular arrivals, especially across the border from Serbia and, in lesser numbers, from Croatia and Romania.[6] Frontex

noted an increase in the number of illegal border crossings into Hungary between 2009 and 2011.[7] Figures rose moderately through 2012, but increased fourfold in the first six months of 2013. IOM, the International Organisation for Migration, reports that 26,061 migrants crossed or attempted to cross into Hungary irregularly in 2013, up from 9,933 in 2012 and 6,904 a year earlier.[8] This increase has been attributed to the end of the practice of detaining asylum seekers in Hungary, which came into effect on 1 January 2013.[9]

From that time, every month several thousand irregular migrants arrived in Hungary, increasing to over 17,000 in February 2015. By June 2015, over 60,000 irregular migrants had arrived in Hungary, almost all of them from Serbia,[10] triggering plans by the Hungarian government to build a 'wall to keep out desperate migrants'.[11]

Figure 72: Migrant arrivals Hungary, 2015–2017 (IOM)[12]

	2015	2016	2017
January	14,647	543	133
February	17,384	2,398	166
March	5,975	3,412	37
April	8,224	3,946	46
May	11,606	3,463	112
June	19,546	3,768	50
July	38,059	573	165
August	57,938	346	303
September	138,396	152	312
October	99,155	164	191
November	315	189	64
December	270	267	47
year total	**411,515**	**19,221**	**1,626**

Data published by IOM, reproduced in Figure 72 above, shows that after a decrease in March 2015, irregular arrivals increased from 5,972 per month to 138,396 arrivals in September 2015. From June 2015, more than 1,000 irregular migrants were arriving in Hungary every day, rising to more than 1,500 by early August and to 2,000–3,000 migrants per day in September.[13]

Beginning with the construction of the border fence to Serbia, Hungary adopted a range of measures designed to prevent and obstruct the arrival of irregular migrants, which led to a rapid decrease in the number of arrivals, dropping from 99,155 in October 2015 to just 315 a month later. A small rise to nearly 4,000 irregular arrivals was recorded in early 2016, but numbers have remained very low since then. After counting 411,515 irregular arrivals in 2015, that number fell to 19,221 in 2016 and just 1,626 in 2017.

XI.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Up until 2012, most people found staying in Hungary illegally were overstayers who originally entered the country legally but failed to leave when their visa or other permit expired.[14] Since 2012, statistics relating to the number of persons staying in the country illegally reflect the great increase in the number of irregular migrants entering Hungary. Data published by Eurostat, the Statistical Information Directorate of the EU, shows that the number of third-country nationals found to be staying illegally in Hungary grew from just 3,810 in 2011 to 424,055 in 2015. In the following year that figure dropped by more than 90% to just 41,560 (see Figure 73 below).

XI.2.2 Entry points

Up until September 2015, the majority of irregular migrants entered Hungary from Serbia. The completion of the border fence along this border temporarily shifted irregular migration to

Figure 73: Third country nationals found to be illegally present, Hungary 2011-2016 (Eurostat)[15]

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of persons	3,810	6,420	28,755	56,170	424,055	41,560

Hungary's border with Croatia, until this border was likewise closed by erecting a fence. Irregular entries from Romania are an alternative route through the Balkans to Hungary. Hungary also shares borders with Ukraine and Slovakia, and witnesses some irregular migration along the so-called Northern Route through these countries to Hungary. In 2015, the European Commission published a breakdown of illegal border crossings to Hungary by border section for the period of January 2013 to July 2015, which is shown in Figure 74 below.

Figure 74: Illegal border crossings into Hungary by border section, 2013–July 2015 (European Commission)[16]

Border section	2013	2014	2015 (to July)
Airports	2	0	0
Austria	0	0	0
Croatia	135	2016	359
Romania	686	995	533
Serbia	19,675	43,711	103,404
Slovakia	0	0	0
Slovenia	0	0	0
Ukraine	68	170	266
Inland	3,042	4,973	10,591
Total	**23,608**	**50,065**	**106,938**

The following sections examine each of these border sections separately.

XI.2.2.1 From Serbia

Overview

The border between Serbia and Hungary has been at the centre of discussions and concerns about irregular migration through the Balkans to Western Europe.[17] This border stretches for 159.6 kilometres over land and for 17.5 kilometres along the river Tisza. In 2015, eight official border crossing points were situated along the Serbian-Hungarian border, including Hercegszántó, Bácsalmás, Tompa. Kelebia (railway), Ásotthalom, Röszke (road and railway), Szeged (port), and Tiszasziget.[18]

Up until September 2015 this border saw some of the highest numbers of illegal crossings in the region. The decision by the Hungarian Government to seal this border to irregular migrants and build a fence along its full length led to dramatic scenes of refugees and migrants rushing to cross the border before it was closed on 15 September 2015. UNHCR reports that:

> The Hungarian authorities did not provide shelter, food, water or medical care to some 2,000 individuals waiting in front of the fence. Tensions escalated on both sides, but the Hungarian authorities did not take up an offer from UNHCR to mediate, and, on 16 September 2015, riot police responded to scenes of disorder with tear gas and water cannon. [19]

Once completed, this border fence triggered a massive displacement of migration flows, with hundreds of thousands of people moving from Serbia to Croatia instead of Hungary.

The scale of irregular arrivals from Serbia into Hungary is well documented, though figures vary somewhat between sources. Figure 75 below shows the number of illegal crossings from Serbia, as reported in annual and quarterly reports published by Frontex. Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary have historically been quite high as people sought to enter the European Union along this route. In the early 2010s, well over 4,000 illegal border crossings were detected annually. In 2014 this figure increased tenfold, and in 2015 more than 200,000 people crossed this border illegally. With the measures adopted by Hungary in September 2015, the number dropped to very low levels.

For the period from October 2013 to December 2017, Frontex publishes additional data concerning 'illegal border crossings between border control points' and 'illegal border crossings at control points' which are shown in Figure 76 below. In the 15 months from the second quarter of 2014 to the third quarter of 2015, detections of illegal border crossings between border control points rose from 2,959 to 142,918. Since that time the num-

Figure 75: Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[20]

	absolute number
2011 – total	**4,204**
2012 – 1st quarter	1,066
2012 – 2nd quarter	956
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.
2012 – total	**4,576**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.
2013 – total	**20,038**
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.
2014 – total	**45,827**
2015 – 1st quarter	36,988
2015 – 2nd quarter	36,956 37,766*
2015 – 3rd quarter	142,918
2015 – 4th quarter	1,267
2015 – total	n.a.
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.
2016 – 2nd quarter	11,194
2016 – 3rd quarter	5,006
2016 – 4th quarter	4,002
2016 – total	n.a.
2017 – 1st quarter	2,900
2017 – 2nd quarter	1,074
2017 – 3rd quarter	2,971
2017 – 4th quarter	1,883
2017 – total	n.a.

* For the marked periods, separate publications report slightly different numbers.

ber has dropped considerably, though a further increase to 11,194 was recorded in the first half of 2016. Although the border is technically closed to irregular migrants, over 1,000 persons still cross from Serbia into Hungary illegally each quarter. By comparison, detections of illegal crossings at the border involve much smaller numbers. Detections

Figure 76: Illegal border crossings, Hungary-Serbia, 2013–2017 (Frontex)[21]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	3,093	43
2014 – 1st quarter	3,527	33
2014 – 2nd quarter	2,959	91
2014 – 3rd quarter	9,762	203
2014 – 4th quarter	29,579	130
2015 – 1st quarter	35,274	78
2015 – 2nd quarter	39,459	63
2015 – 3rd quarter	142,918	72
2015 – 4th quarter	1,267	0
2016 – 1st quarter	6,629	209
2016 – 2nd quarter	11,194	22
2016 – 3rd quarter	5,006	20
2016 – 4th quarter	4,002	78
2017 – 1st quarter	2,900	21
2017 – 2nd quarter	1,074	n.a.
2017 – 3rd quarter	2,971	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	1,883	n.a.

were particularly low in early and mid 2015, when most irregular migrants could cross into Hungary without facing many obstacles.

Developments 2011–2017

By the start of the 2011–2017 period, the route from Greece via FYR Macedonia to Serbia was well established and, as already mentioned, several thousand migrants crossed from Serbia into Hungary every year. By 2011, the highest number of illegal crossings at any border in the Balkans was detected at the Serbian-Hungarian border. At that time, and throughout 2012, most irregular migrants crossing from Serbia into Hungary were Afghan nationals, followed by Kosovars and Pakistanis.[22]

In the first half of 2013 the volume of irregular migration across this border further increased.[23]

The first quarter of 2013 recorded a threefold rise compared to the first quarter of 2012, mostly because of changes to Hungary's asylum laws, which were seen as making it easier for asylum seekers to apply for asylum in Hungary and then move on to other destinations.[24] These changes are said to explain the sharp increase in the illegal arrival of Kosovars in early 2013. At the same time, and also as a result of these changes, other nationalities such as Algerians started to move across this border in growing numbers.[25] Over the following three years, most migrants crossed from Serbia into Hungary near the town of Subotica in Serbia and Röszke, south of Szeged, in Hungary. The routes taken essentially followed the main A1 motorway connecting Belgrade and Budapest, though many migrants crossed the border on foot in rural areas away from the main border checkpoints.[26]

Amendments to Hungary's asylum procedures introducing the detention of asylum seekers arriving in Hungary, which came into effect on 1 July 2013, resulted in a drop of 50% in illegal border crossings in the third quarter of 2013.[27] It has been reported that Kosovars in particular were deterred by this amendment, and sought to leave Serbia along other routes. The effect on other nationalities leaving Serbia for Hungary was less pronounced.[28] From about mid-2013 through to mid-2014 the number of illegal border crossings from Serbia into Hungary stabilised, albeit at relatively high levels. Afghans and Syrians were among the largest groups of irregular migrants detected at this border.[29]

In the third quarter of 2014, especially from September onwards, the number of border crossings increased by as much as 193% over the previous quarter. In the fourth quarter nearly 30,000 migrants crossed the border illegally, some 60% of them Kosovar nationals.[30] By December 2014, 55% of all illegal border crossings detected anywhere in the entire EU and Schengen area were recorded along the Serbian-Hungarian border.[31]

In the first quarter of 2015 over 32,000 irregular migrants crossed from Serbia into Hungary, and nearly 40,000 in the following quarter.[32] Up until February 2015, Kosovars were among the largest group of persons crossing this border, though their number dwindled rapidly from March 2015 when measures were taken by several countries including Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Serbia to specifically prevent Kosovars from leaving Kosovo, deter them from moving to Western Europe, and deport them back to Kosovo in large numbers.[33] The growing number of Afghan and, in particular, Syrian nationals moving along the Western Balkan route, however, meant that irregular migration from Serbia to Hungary continued to increase in the following months.[34] As the number of illegal border crossings continued to rise still higher in August 2015, the Hungarian Government announced that it would build a fence along its border with Serbia. This fence was completed on 15 September 2015. The immediate effect of the border fence was that far fewer migrants were able to cross into Hungary, and that many more were diverted to a route leading from Serbia to Croatia.[35] In the fourth quarter of 2015 just 1,267 illegal border crossing were recorded at the Serbian border.[36]

The border fence to Serbia, as seen in Figures 75 and 76 above, did not completely stop the flow of irregular migrants from Serbia to Hungary. For example, after the route via Croatia to Hungary was closed on 16 October 2015, many migrants in Serbia once again sought to cross directly into Hungary, trying to break through the border fence in several places. By March 2016, some 100 illegal border crossings from Serbia into Hungary were recorded each day.[37] When Croatia took measures to stop, or at least limit, the number of migrants entering from Serbia, more and more people tried to enter Hungary. Because Croatia continued to allow asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria to enter its territory, the main nationalities who now sought to enter Hungary were Moroccans and Algerians.[38] In April and May 2016, the number of illegal border crossings from Serbia to Hungary reached its highest level since the completion of the border fence; on average, some 120 persons illegally crossed into Hungary from Serbia each day.[39] From about June 2016, the number of illegal border crossings from Hungary to Serbia dropped

again as far fewer migrants were able to reach Serbia in the first place.[40] Nevertheless, due to the relatively large number of migrants stranded in Serbia, several thousands were found crossing into Hungary each quarter throughout the rest of 2016 and well into 2017.[41] In the 2016 calendar year, Hungary reported more than 25,000 illegal border crossings from Serbia, far fewer than in the previous year but still one of the highest numbers in the region.[42] As a result, the Hungarian Government adopted further measures at the border to Serbia to drastically limit the number of people who could apply for asylum if they entered from Serbia. These measures, outlined in Section XI.1 above, explain the decrease in detections in 2017, but are said to have placed greater pressure on Romania and Croatia, where illegal border crossing detections rose as a result.[43]

XI.2.2.2 From Croatia

Information about illegal border crossings from Croatia into Hungary is surprisingly limited. This is partly explained by the fact that this border became an internal border of the European Union when Croatia became a Member is 2013, though Croatia is not part of the Schengen Area.

Based on the available information, it appears that irregular migration across the Croatian border had occurred at relatively low levels prior to the closure of the border between Hungary and Serbia.[44] The completion of the border fence to Serbia, as mentioned, had the immediate effect of shifting the flow of irregular migrants to Croatia from where most of them continued to Hungary in large numbers in the second half of September 2015 and the first half of October 2015.[45] As a result, Hungary started to build another fence, this time at its border to Croatia, which was completed by 16 October 2015, sealing this border to irregular migrants and diverting them to Slovenia.[46]

XI.2.2.3 From Romania

Hungary is the next destination for most irregular migrants moving through Romania. The border between the two countries, measuring 448 kilometres in length, can be crossed easily in many places and is an internal EU border, though, Romania is not part of the Schengen Area.In 2012, Frontex noted that a growing number of irregular migrants from Algeria were detected entering Hungary from Romania.[47]

The European Commission has published data on illegal crossings of the border from Romania to Hungary for selected years, showing that detections of illegal border crossings rose from 686 in 2013 to 995 in 2014. Between 1 January and 31 July 2015, a further 533 persons were detected. While these figures are comparatively low, up until the autumn of 2015 the border with Romania had recorded some of the highest numbers of irregular arrivals into Hungary, second only to Serbia.[48]

XI.2.2.4 From Ukraine

Information about the levels and patterns of irregular migration from Ukraine to Hungary is limited. Irregular arrivals from Ukraine are mostly part of irregular movements along the so-called 'Eastern Borders' or 'Northern' route, which leads from Russia via Belarus and/or Ukraine, or at times via the Baltic States, to Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and/or Romania. Data published by the European Commission, shown in Figure 74 above, shows an increase in illegal border crossings from Ukraine to Hungary from 2013 and 2014. Further quarterly data released by Frontex, shown in Figure 77 below, demonstrates that this trend continued throughout 2015, when more than 600 illegal border crossings were recorded in one year.

XI.2.2.5 From Slovakia and Slovenia

Data published by the European Commission suggests that no illegal border crossings were recorded from Slovakia and Slovenia into Hungary (see Figure 74 above). Since these are internal EU borders, Frontex reports do not contain further information about borders crossings.

Figure 77: Illegal border crossings, Ukraine to Hungary, 2015–2017 (Frontex)[49]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Change to same previous period
2015 – 1st quarter	75	+582%
2015 – 2nd quarter	151	+1,050%
2015 – 3rd quarter	245	+433%
2015 – 4th quarter	166	+207%
2016 – 1st quarter		
2016 – 2nd quarter		
2016 – 3rd quarter		
2016 – 4th quarter		
2017 – 1st quarter		
2017 – 2nd quarter		
2017 – 3rd quarter		
2017 – 4th quarter		

Hungary is nevertheless concerned that these countries could be used as departure points for irregular migrants trying to enter the country. In October 2015, for instance, Hungary temporarily introduced controls at the border to Slovenia, expecting that some irregular migrants might seek to reach Hungary after the border to Croatia was closed and following steps taken by the Austrian Government to manage, control, and limit the flow of migrants entering from Slovenia.[50]

XI.2.3 Stay

Hungary is both a destination and transit country for irregular migrants. As a Member State of the European Union and the Schengen Zone, Hungary offers many of the perceived benefits that draw migrants to Europe. From Hungary, irregular migrants can, for the most part, continue their journey freely, and up until 2013 Hungary maintained relatively liberal asylum policies which explained why many refugees from warn-torn countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq sought to reach Hungary and apply for asylum. Hungary's relative prosperity compared to its eastern and southern neighbours is another reason why some irregular migrants sought to enter and settle in Hungary, temporarily or permanently.[51]

Hungary's increasingly tough and controversial stand on all matters relating to international migration, and its overtly hostile and xenophobic campaigns against refugees, asylum seekers, and other irregular migrants, has reduced its attractiveness as a destination country.[52] Not least because of these policy developments and the publicity around them, for most irregular migrants Hungary is primarily a transit point en route to Austria and other Western European countries. This became particularly evident in August and September 2015, when large numbers of irregular migrants travelled from Serbia through Hungary to Austria and spent just a few days in the country. There have also been reports of asylum seekers submitting applications for asylum in Hungary and, unless they were detained, leaving the country before a decision about their application was made.

XI.2.4 Departures

For the majority of irregular migrants departing from Hungary, Austria is the next destination. The main roads and railway lines are usually used to take migrants to and across the border.[53] In some instances, especially in the summer and fall of 2015 when large numbers of irregular migrants were transiting through Hungary, migrants follow the main roads on foot and walk across the border into Austria.

In early 2016 there were some reports of an increase in irregular migration from Hungary to Slovenia and thence to Italy. This has been attributed to the reintroduction of border controls along the Austrian border, which diverted some migrants to Slovenia and Italy, where many applied for asylum.[54]

XI.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Irregular migrants entering Hungary or transiting through the country come from a diverse range of

backgrounds. The majority are Afghans, Syrians and Iraqis who have fled from the violent conflicts and desperate circumstances in their countries of origin. Other irregular migrants come from countries in South Asia or Africa. In the period of 2011 to 2012, Hungary also experienced significant levels of irregular arrivals of persons from countries within the region, especially Kosovo and Serbia.

For the vast majority of irregular migrants, Hungary is a transit country en route to Western Europe. Figure 78 below, which displays the number of refugees and asylum seekers recorded by UNHCR in Hungary for the years 2011 to 2016, shows that although several hundred thousand people passed through Hungary during this period, very few reported to authorities and organisations in the country in order to seek asylum. Up until 2014, Afghan nationals constituted the largest group of refugees and asylum seekers; in 2015, nearly twice as many Syrian refugees and asylum seekers were recorded.[55]

Figure 78: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Hungary 2011–2016, top nationalities

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria	Somalia
2011 – total	**1,697**	**167**	**998**	**68**	**42**	**406**
- refugees	1,697	167	998	68	42	406
- asylum-seekers	0	0	0	0	0	0
2012 – total	**1,131**	**145**	**563**	**77**	**86**	**431**
- refugees	1,131	145	563	77	86	431
- asylum-seekers	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013 – total	**1,446**	**79**	**235**	**201**	**325**	**488**
- refugees	749	69	223	34	141	446
- asylum-seekers	697	10	12	167	184	42
2014 – total	**3,442**	**151**	**392**	**144**	**1,157**	**529**
- refugees	819	68	220	35	334	496
- asylum-seekers	2,623	83	172	109	523	33
2015 – total	**9,411**	**458**	**2,661**	**3,677**	**19,083**	**684**
- refugees	942	104	396	47	476	611
- asylum-seekers	8,469	354	2,265	3,630	18,607	73
2016 – total	**2,400**	**241**	**862**	**246**	**1,448**	**662**
- refugees	1,008	112	466	55	584	644
- asylum-seekers	1,392	129	396	191	864	18

XI.3.1 The Middle East

Based on the available information, Syrian nationals constitute the second largest group of irregular migrants moving to or through Hungary.[56] The number of Syrian nationals has been very high since 2012, and increased further in 2013 and 2014, rising fourfold in the fourth quarter of 2014.[57] Most entered Hungary from Serbia.[58] Syrians constitute the majority of refugees who came to Hungary in 2015.

Iraqis and Palestinians have also entered Hungary illegally from Serbia, though precise numbers for individual years are not, or not always, available.[59]

XI.3.2 South Asia

Afghan nationals are said to constitute the largest group of irregular migrants who arrived in or transited through Hungary in the 2011–2017 period. Most travelled along the Western Balkan

route via FYR Macedonia and Serbia, though some moved through Bulgaria and/or Romania before reaching Serbia and/or Hungary.[60] The number of Afghan nationals entering Hungary rose significantly in 2012 and 2013, and many Afghans applied for asylum in Hungary during this period.[61] Throughout 2014, Afghan nationals remained the largest group of migrants entering Hungary illegally.[62]

Irregular migrants from Pakistan constitute another significant group in Hungary, though their numbers appear to have been higher in 2012 and 2013 than in more recent years. Pakistani nationals use Hungary as a transit country, though many have also applied for asylum in the country.[63]

There have been reports of Bangladeshi nationals entering Hungary illegally from Ukraine,[64] and of other 'Asian migrants' using Hungary as a transit point for irregular migration to Western Europe.[65]

XI.3.3 Africa

There is some limited information about migrants from various parts of Africa who enter Hungary illegally. These reports mostly relate to Algerian nationals who enter Hungary from Romania or Serbia.[66] Instances of Somali, Eritrean, and Malian nationals moving to or through Hungary appear to be less common.[67]

XI.3.4 Other

After Afghans and Syrians, Kosovars constitute the third main group of irregular migrants who entered Hungary in the 2011–2017 period. Their number rose considerably in 2012 and 2013.[68] In 2013, over 6,000 Kosovars entered Hungary illegally, most of them to apply for asylum.[69] In the first quarter of 2013, Hungary recorded a threefold increase in the number of irregular Kosovar migrants detected in the country, and an eightfold increase in their asylum applications.[70] In the second quarter of the year, about half of all persons crossing the border from Serbia illegally were Kosovars.[71] The changes to Hungary's asylum procedures which came into effect on 1 July 2013 resulted in a significant drop in irregular arrivals from Kosovo,[72] only to rise again when some of these policies were reimposed in 2014.[73] In the third quarter of 2014, more than 3,000 asylum applications were lodged in Hungary by Kosovars, a 736% increase over the previous quarter.[74] It has been reported that many Kosovars moved to Hungary as family units and then applied for asylum merely to avoid immigration detention. Family units were permitted to stay in open asylum centres, and it appears that most Kosovars absconded shortly after lodging their application and then moved on to other parts of the EU, especially to Austria, Germany, and Sweden.[75] The number of Kosovars entering Hungary continued to rise throughout the rest of 2014 and into 2015, until a number of countries, including Germany, Austria, and Hungary, adopted measures to stop the arrival of Kosovars and return them to their home country.[76]

Serbian and Albanian nationals have also been found crossing into Hungary illegally in substantial numbers.[77]

XI.4 Smuggling of migrants

XI.4.1 Routes

Hungary is a main transit point for the smuggling of migrants to Western Europe, not least because the Western Eastern Balkan routes converge here. Hungary is also situated at the end of a smuggling route that leads via the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and sometimes also Poland and Slovakia, to Austria and other parts of Western Europe; this is sometimes referred to as the 'Northern Route'. While the following sections show that the smuggling of migrants generally occurs in a west-bound direction, and that some means and methods are commonly used to smuggle migrants in and out of Hungary, it must be noted that not all smuggling activities follow predetermined routes, that illegal crossings may occur at almost any location along the border, and that such crossings are not always organised.

XI.4.1.1 Into the country

During the 2011–2017 period, most smuggled migrants entered Hungary across the border from Serbia. The migrants are often driven to locations near the border and then cross on foot or with the aid of a guide into Hungary. In other cases, migrants are smuggled across the border hidden in trucks or vans.[78] Not all illegal border crossings from Serbia into Hungary are clandestine and require the support of smugglers. Migrants frequently use public transport, walk, or make their own way from Belgrade or other parts of Serbia to the Hungarian border. Before the completion of the border fence along the shared border, many migrants could also cross into Hungary independently, without the aid of smugglers.

Another smuggling route leads from Bulgaria or Serbia via Romania into Hungary. For migrants located in the north of Serbia, travelling via Romania to Hungary involves only a minor detour, but means avoiding the border fortifications along Hungary's borders with Serbia and Croatia. The border between Romania and Hungary is an internal EU border and can thus be crossed with relative ease. A 2016 news article described this route as 'the fastest, safest, and most developed in terms of smuggler networks and logistics along the way'.[79]

Some smuggling activities also occur across the border from Ukraine and Slovakia into Hungary.[80] This usually involves migrants who have travelled along the Northern Route via Russia. The levels and characteristics of smuggling activities across Hungary's northern borders are, however, not well documented or researched.

XI.4.1.2 Through and out of the country

Once in Hungary, most irregular migrants pass through the capital Budapest, which is also at the centre of the country's railway and highway networks. From Hungary, the main smuggling routes continue west to Austria. Main roads and railway lines are generally used to take migrants to and across the border. The Hungarian M1 motorway, which turns into the A4 on the Austrian side of the border, is the main and most direct road connecting Budapest and Vienna, and is mentioned in many reports about smuggling activities between the two countries.[81]

In some instances, especially in the summer and fall of 2015 when large numbers of irregular migrants were transiting through Hungary, many migrants followed the main roads on foot, reaching the border and crossing into Austria without having to resort to smugglers.

Some migrants are smuggled from Hungary via Slovakia instead of Austria, which only involves a minor detour and avoids the border controls that Austrian authorities instituted in several locations along the border to Hungary.[82] The levels and characteristics of migrant smuggling from Hungary to Slovakia are, however, not well documented.

XI.4.2 Methods

Three principal methods are used to smuggle migrants into Hungary: crossing borders in groups unaccompanied by smugglers (usually on foot), crossing borders while hidden in vehicles and driven by smugglers, or with fraudulent documents. The method chosen to enter into or exit from Hungary, as well as the price demanded by smugglers, is often determined by the intensity of border controls and the ability of migrants to cross the border independently.[83]

XI.4.2.1 Border crossings on foot

Crossing the border on foot was the most common method to smuggle migrants from Serbia into Hungary before the border was sealed by a fence.[84] Traditionally, the smugglers, mostly people from the area, would guide the migrants, usually in pairs, across the border. A 2015 publication notes that:

> Because of the relatively danger-free landscape (fields, orchards, woods) and lower risk to physical well-being, the price of being

> smuggled through the Serbian-Hungarian border section of the route is reportedly the lowest along the Western Balkan route, however, as one stakeholder noted: 'The price depends on demand and supply'.[85]

Many smugglers later ceased the practice of accompanying the migrants into Hungary and rather gave them instructions about where and how to cross the border and provided them with a contact number to call once they reach Hungary. The smuggled migrants are then picked up and taken to Budapest where arrangements are made for the next legs of their journey.[86] When the practice of guiding migrants subsided, it became more common for migrants to cross the border in larger groups, often involving family units with children, rather than alone.[87]

XI.4.2.2 Smuggling by motor vehicle

The smuggling of migrants into Hungary inside vehicles, mostly trucks and vans, usually involves covert methods where the migrant is hidden in the cargo area or special compartments. If large trucks or freight trains are used, this is often done without the driver's' knowledge.[88] Data collected by Frontex shows that smuggling migrants by hiding them in vehicles is a method used to cross many borders in the region, but particularly to cross the border between Hungary and Serbia. In 2011, for instance, approximately 1,750 such cases were discovered at this border, followed by about 300 cases in 2012, and 250 cases in 2013.[89]

Smuggling from Hungary to Austria is often done by car, van or train. Private vehicles are frequently used to drive migrants to the Austrian border; the migrants are often concealed in the trunks of cars, or the cargo compartments of vans or small trucks when the border is crossed. A 2015 study found:

> For the short and comparatively low-risk journey from Budapest to Austria, for example, a driver will ask for EUR 150 per person. If they use a standard car, they will usually transport four persons, nine in a mini-van or, if a small van, 25 persons hidden in the luggage area. The drivers receive the lowest amount and are paid by the organisers only after the successful transfer when they arrive back to Hungary.[90]

Covert smuggling in cars, vans, and trucks entails particular dangers for the migrants if these vehicles are involved in accidents[91] or if too many migrants are crowded into small compartments with insufficient air, water, and food.[92] The death of 71 migrants who suffocated in a small truck driven from Hungary into Austria in August 2015, and which was then abandoned by the smugglers along the side of the highway, best illustrates this danger.[93] At that time it was particularly common to smuggle groups of migrants in vans from Hungary to Austria and Germany, and in several instances migrants were simply abandoned or forced to exit the vehicles along main roads and highways in Austria.[94]

There have also been reports about smugglers organising or using carsharing or carpooling as a method to transport migrants from Hungary into Austria and Germany. This involves smugglers contacting private drivers who offer to transport passengers in their vehicles, sometimes for payment. The smuggler then connects the driver to the migrants, often without the driver knowing that they are irregular migrants. This creates a risk for the drivers of unwittingly becoming involved in the smuggling of migrants.[95]

In 2015, many private Austrian citizens took their own cars to collect irregular migrants in Hungary or near the border, and drive them to destinations in Austria and Germany. The term 'refugee convoy' was used when some 140 private cars brought refugees from Budapest to Vienna.[96] Transportation of this kind, done for humanitarian or altruistic purposes, was usually offered free of charge and does not amount to smuggling of migrants, though some drivers nevertheless ran into problems with the law or were stopped by the authorities.

XI.4.2.3 Smuggling by air

Information about the smuggling of migrants into or via Hungary by air is quite limited. Occasional

reports suggest that some migrants, once they reach Hungary, continue their journey by air, especially if they intend to reach more distant destinations such as the United Kingdom. In such instances, forged documents are used to enable check-in for flights and passing through border controls at the points of departure and arrival.[97]

XI.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

In 2015 and 2016, of all countries in the region, Hungary reported the second highest number of detections of smugglers at its borders and within its territory. In each quarter of 2014, approximately 40 to 60 smugglers were detected by the Hungarian authorities. This number grew to approximately 90 in the first quarter of 2015, and to about 120 in each of the following two quarters.[98] Since late 2015, the number has dropped significantly to about 20 detections between October and December 2015, and to about 30 in the following quarter.[99] Since that time, Hungary's significance for the smuggling of migrants appears to have dropped significantly, though absolute figures have not been published since April 2016.[100]

XI.4.3.1 Profile of smugglers

The profile of persons engaged in the smuggling of migrants into, through, and out of Hungary is largely the same as in other Balkan States: Most smugglers, especially those organising local transportation and accommodation, drivers and guides, are Hungarian nationals and nationals of neighbouring countries. The much smaller number of organisers who have some oversight of the journey that migrants take, link up migrants between transit points and connect them to local operators, are often nationals of the same countries as the migrants they smuggle, or were themselves once smuggled migrants. A 2015 study found:

> In cases where a driver is used, migrants usually pay for the ride in advance to the driver. In some cases, these are local taxi drivers and there is no larger organisation behind it organising the journey; in other instances, the drivers are part of 'teams' who are either sent to pick up and transport the migrants to the Hungarian border or to recruit the travelling migrants themselves — in both cases, only part of the profit is theirs. In such cases, the main smuggler organiser of the trip keeps the majority of the money.[101]

These two categories are well reflected in official and media reports about the smuggling of migrants in Hungary. It is noticeable that if and when smugglers are arrested in Hungary, the majority of suspects are usually Hungarian nationals who are found to be working alongside Romanians, Serbians, Austrians, Croats, Ukrainians and other nationals from the region.[102] These smugglers, as mentioned, are usually involved in transporting or accommodating irregular migrants; many of them engage in smuggling activities ad hoc and opportunistically, if and when demand arises. A 2015 study published by the European Commission found that:

> The largest group of smugglers (with whom the Hungarian National Bureau of Investigation has experience) are Serbian nationals who enjoy residence rights in Hungary, mostly based on family ties. They are often the main organisers of the irregular journey from Hungary to onward destination countries. However, the number of perpetrators who are Hungarian nationals is reportedly increasing as many Hungarians have grown as mid-level organisers. They collaborate with the main organisers in Serbia and destination countries. Their task is recruiting the drivers and organising accommodation for smuggled migrants in the territory of Hungary. They also have personal meetings in Serbia with the main organisers to agree on the changes in modus operandi after the capture of migrants in illegal transportation.[103]

If Afghans, Pakistanis, and nationals of other countries from outside the region are arrested for

their involvement in smuggling of migrants, then this usually relates to their roles as organisers of smuggling ventures.[104] Many smugglers in this category share the background, experience and language of the migrants whom they smuggle, and connect them to local people who can organise transportation and accommodation. Frequently, these organisers were once themselves smuggled migrants who became stranded in transit countries, and who use their own experience and know-how to facilitate the irregular migration of others.

XI.4.3.2 Organisations and networks

Based on the available sources it appears that criminal networks engaged in the smuggling of migrants through Hungary are slightly more organised and networked than in some of the other countries examined in this report. This may, however, also reflect the fact that smuggling through Hungary is better documented than in most other countries. The structure of these networks is mostly loose and fluid rather than hierarchical, with participants changing frequently.

A study published in 2013 found that these networks comprise persons from source and transit countries, and that most 'leaders' are EU nationals. The study further points to a division of labour between the various participants, including recruiters, transportation or accommodation providers, guides and corrupt officials. Communication between the various participants may occur by phone or online, or by meeting in public places.[105] The smuggling networks often connect the country of transit (Serbia) with the first point of entry into the EU (Hungary) and the destination (Austria). The term 'team' has been used in this context to refer to clusters of people on one side of the border working with a 'team' on the other side.[106]

More recent reports tend to suggest that, as in other countries, smuggling networks are usually overseen by nationals from the irregular migrants' source countries. The network involved in smuggling 71 migrants on board a truck from Keskemet to Austria in August 2015, which then abandoned the truck containing the 71 dead migrants along a major highway was, for example, a network led by an Afghan national who was once himself a refugee and smuggled migrant. He was assisted by two chief accomplices from Bulgaria, and various drivers and other actors from Bulgaria. This network is alleged to have smuggled more than 1,200 mostly Afghan migrants through Hungary.[107] A further example is the network led by Pakistani nationals based in Milan who, with the assistance of people from those countries, organised the smuggling of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Afghan migrants from Hungary via Slovenia to Italy and other EU Member States.[108]

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XII CROATIA

XII.1 Overview

Croatia is primarily a transit country for irregular migrants. Croatia shares borders with Serbia, one of the countries most affected by irregular migration in the Balkans, and with the Schengen Zone Member States Slovenia and Hungary. This geo-political position of Croatia makes it an important gateway for irregular migrants and, in some instances, the smuggling of migrants. On 1 July 2013, Croatia became the 28th Member State of the European Union (EU). It was anticipated that this would greatly impact on levels of irregular migration, and that Croatia's borders would become much more attractive for the smuggling of migrants. The available information, however, does not reveal any significant changes in the levels and patterns of irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants at that particular time. This may partly be explained by the fact that Croatia is not part of the Schengen Area, though this may change in 2019.[1]

In recent years, most irregular migrants have entered from Serbia and travelled through Croatia to reach Hungary or Slovenia. Small numbers of irregular migrants also enter Croatia from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro.

The levels and patterns of irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants through Croatia are greatly influenced by the ability or inability of migrants to enter and transit through Hungary: At those times when the border between Hungary and Serbia is open, when migrants can apply for asylum in Hungary and are not placed in closed immigration detention centres, most migrants choose to travel from Serbia to Hungary, and only a small number opt for the route from Serbia to Croatia. Few migrants seek asylum in Croatia, and the country has a reputation among asylum seekers for slow asylum procedures and low approval rates. As a result, migrants prefer to continue to Hungary if and when this is feasible.

Various initiatives by the Hungarian Government in the 2011–2017 period to tighten border controls and reduce the rights of asylum seekers had an immediate impact on the flow of irregular migrants through neighbouring Croatia. Croatia was particularly affected by the Hungary's decision to close its border to Serbia in September 2015, which almost completely diverted the flow of irregular migrants to Croatia. For a brief period, migrants continued to move to Hungary via Croatia until Hungary also closed this border. As a result, irregular migrants travelled from Croatia to Slovenia and on to Austria.

XII.2 Levels and characteristics

XII.2.1 Numbers

XII.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Croatian authorities publish annual statistics relating to the number of illegal border crossings, and to the number of persons entering Croatia illegally. These numbers, summarised in Figure 79 below, show a considerable increase from 2010 to 2012, followed by a slower decrease in 2013 and 2014. Regrettably, the crime statistics for the number of 'aliens entering the Republic of Croatia illegally' for the years since 2014 no longer include this number.

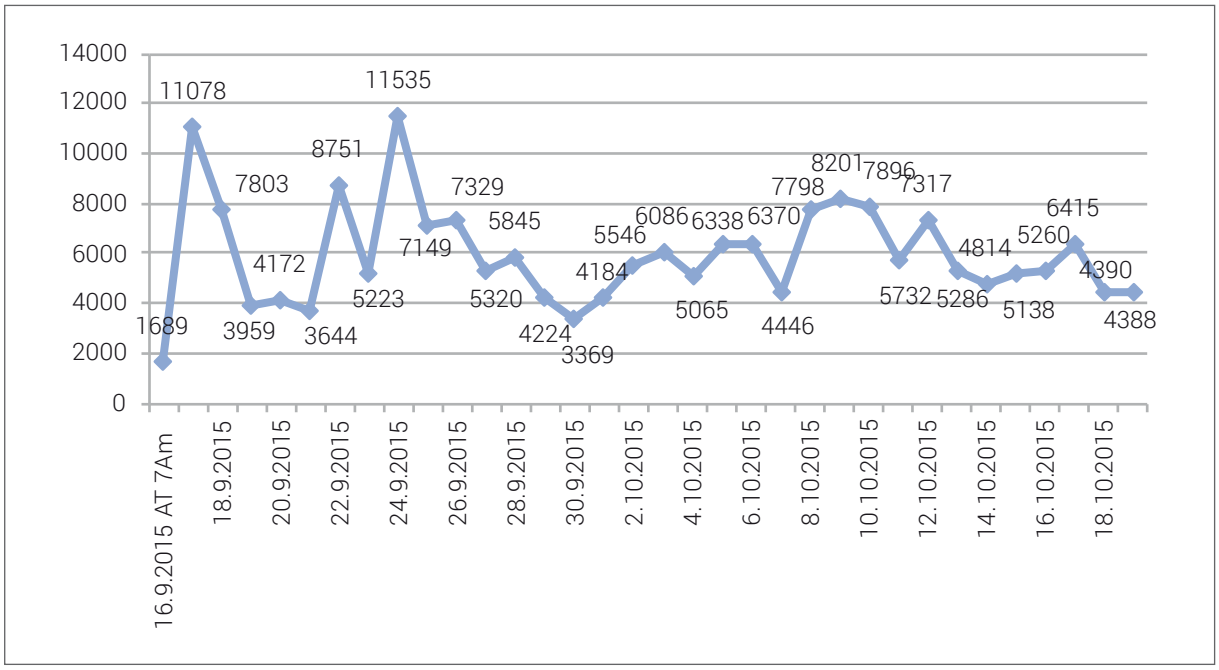
Figure 79: 'Illegal state border crossings' and 'aliens illegally entering into the Republic of Croatia', 2010–2014 (Croatia, Ministry of Interior)[2]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Illegal state border crossings Article 36 *Aliens Act* (Croatia)	2,435	3,824	6,839	4,734	3,914
No. of foreigner illegally entering	1,757	2,720	4,926	3,333	n.a.
Increase to previous year	+23%	+54.8%	+81.1%	-32.3%	n.a.

In a 2013 report, Frontex stressed that in the fourth quarter 2012, Croatia recorded the second-highest number of illegal border crossings in Europe after Serbia, higher than, for instance, Greece, Italy, and Spain.[3] The European Commission has also been cited as noting that detections of irregular migrants in Croatia increased from 3,461 in 2011 to 6,541 in 2012. Simultaneously, the number of unaccompanied minors among these migrants nearly doubled to 726 in 2012.[4] This increase, as later parts of this chapter show, was caused by the growing number of Afghan nationals migrating along the Balkan route from Serbia to Croatia at that time.[5] The growing number of detections of illegal border crossings from Serbia into Croatia and onwards in to Slovenia starting in 2011 also signalled a 'westward shift in the routing' to Croatia rather than to Hungary.[6]

Irregular migration through Croatia spiked in late 2015 and early 2016, peaking in the weeks and months after Hungary fenced off its border to Serbia, which diverted irregular migration along the Western Balkan route to Croatia. Statistics produced by the Croatian Interior Ministry, shown in Figure 80 below, demonstrate the immediate consequence of the border closure: Within 24 hours of closing the border between Hungary and Serbia on 15 September 2015, Croatia experienced a tenfold increase in the number of arrivals. For the following month, between 3,369 and 11,535 migrants arrived in Croatia each day.

Figure 80: Migrant arrivals Croatia, 16 September–19 October 2015 (Croatia, Ministry of Interior)[7]



Data collected by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), shown in Figure 81 below, reveals that 556,830 irregular migrant arrivals were recorded in Croatia in 2015. Over 330,000 arrived in the months of October and November 2015 alone; 555,761 migrants arrived in Croatia from the day Hungary closed its border until the end of 2015.[8] The number of irregular migrants subsequently decreased to just 1,637 in March 2016. In 2016, a total of 102,275 irregular migrant arrivals were recorded in Croatia. Data for the months and years not displayed in Figure 81 below was not available.[9] According to a different 2016 publication, between September 2015 and March 2016, 658,968 irregular migrants transited in Croatia.[10] According to IOM data, between 1 January 2015 and 26 November 2017, 659,105 irregular migrant arrivals were recorded in Croatia.[11]

Figure 81: Migrant arrivals Croatia, October 2015–2016 (IOM)[12]

month, year	total
Oct 2015	174,287
Nov 2015	163,621
Dec 2015	98,032
2015 total	**556,830**
Jan 2016	65,546
Feb 2016	35,092
Mar 2016	1,637
2016 total	**102,275**

Eurostat, the statistical information directorate of the EU, publishes information on the number of non-EU nationals who are apprehended at Croatia's borders and who are refused entry into the country. The total number of refusals in the years 2013 to 2016 does not show any significant trends (Figure 82 below). Figures for the year 2016 show that the vast majority of refusals, 95.7%, were made at Croatia's land borders. These figures demonstrate that irregular migration to Croatia predominantly involves movements over land (especially, as the following sections show, from Serbia) that detections of attempts to enter Croatia irregularly by air are limited and that, despite a coastline totalling 5,835 kilometres (1,777 kilometres of mainland coastline and 4,058 kilometres along the islands), irregular migration by sea is quite insignificant.

XII.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Data relating to the number of foreigners residing in Croatia illegally is limited. Eurostat publishes some data on the number of 'third country nationals found to be illegally present' in Croatia for the years 2013 to 2016. This data, shown in Figure 83 below, provides limited insight and does not reveal significant trends over this period, though it has been noted by Frontex that detections of persons staying in Croatia illegally (not surprisingly) correlate directly with the level of persons entering the country illegally.[13]

XII.2.2 Entry points

The vast majority of irregular migrants enter Croatia from Serbia. This is despite the fact that border is marked by the Danube in some parts and difficult to cross in places away from official border control points. There are also unconfirmed reports that the border used to be mined in some places.[14] The number of illegal border crossings from Serbia into Croatia, as reported by Frontex and shown in Figure 84 below, has been at high levels throughout the 2011–2017 period but increased exceptionally in the second half of 2015.

Illegal entries from Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzgovina to Croatia are, by regional standards, quite considerable, but pale in comparison to the

Figure 82: Non-EU citizens refused entry, Croatia 2011–2016 (Eurostat)[15]

	Total	land border		air border		sea border	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
2016	9,135	8,745	95,7%	350	3,8%	40	0.4%
2015	9,355	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014	8,645	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013	10,015	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Figure 83: Third country nationals found to be illegally present, Croatia, 2011–2016 (Eurostat)[16]

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of persons	n.a.	n.a.	4,150	2,500	3,295	3,320

very high number of illegal border crossings from Serbia. The following sections examine the three borders and the levels of irregular migration across them individually.

Figure 84: Illegal border crossings into Croatia, 2011–2017 (Frontex)[17]

	Illegal border crossings from Serbia to Croatia		**Illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Croatia**		**Illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzgovina to Croatia**	
	absolute number	change to same period in previous year	absolute number	change to same period in previous year	absolute number	change to same period in previous year
2011 – total	**2,699**	**+432%**	**263**	**–33%**	**610**	**–23%**
2012 – 1st quarter	315	–2%	20	–89%	82	–52%
2012 – 2nd quarter	1,075	+31%	44	+57%	163	+14%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**5,887**	**+118%**	**226**	**–14%**	**645**	**+6%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	n.a.	n.a.	**133**	n.a.	**430**	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – total	**978**	**–58%**	**151**	**+14%**	**287**	**–41%**
2015 – 1st quarter	64	–76%	67	+91%	61	–8%
2015 – 2nd quarter	42	–87%	50	117%	45	–22%
2015 – 3rd quarter	91,698	+35,649%	87	+50%	77	+10%
2015 – 4th quarter	465,506	+430,924%	50	+43%	119	+28%
2015 – total	n.a.	**+56,909**	n.a.	**+68**	n.a.	**+5%**
2016 – 1st quarter	n.a.	+58,863	n.a.	–79%	n.a.	–23%
2016 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	–53%	n.a.	–66%	n.a.	+0%
2016 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	–99%	n.a.	–71%	n.a.	–23%
2016 – 4th quarter	n.a.	–100%	n.a.	+154%	n.a.	+79%
2016 – total	n.a.	**–81%**	n.a.	**–28%**	n.a.	**+23%**
2017 – 1st quarter	n.a.	–31%	n.a.	–35%	n.a.	–68%
2017 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	+18%	n.a.	–16%	n.a.	+90%
2017 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2017 – total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

XII.2.2.1 From Serbia

Overview

Most illegal border crossings into Croatia have been recorded at the border to Serbia. In addition to the data shown in Figure 84 above, Frontex publishes quarterly data of illegal border crossings 'between' and 'at' border control points along the Serbian-Croatian border. This data, shown in Figure 85 below, shows that after a period of relative decline in 2014, illegal border crossings between Serbia and Croatia rose to unprecedented levels in the second half of 2015, and remained high in the first quarter of 2016. Between April–June and July–September 2015, illegal border crossings rose by more than 91,500, and in the following quarter by a further 350,000. Just as rapidly as these numbers rose in the fall of 2015, from January–March 2016 to April–June 2016, illegal border crossings between Serbia and Croatia fell by more than 102,500 and, after a small decrease, remained at low levels.

Figure 85: Illegal border crossings, Croatia – Serbia, 2013–2017 (Frontex)[18]

	Illegal border crossings between border control points	Illegal border crossings at border control points
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2014 – 2nd quarter	318	152
2014 – 3rd quarter	280	225
2014 – 4th quarter	108	113
2015 – 1st quarter	174	11
2015 – 2nd quarter	173	19
2015 – 3rd quarter	91,698	6
2015 – 4th quarter	465,506	14
2016 – 1st quarter	102,596	78
2016 – 2nd quarter	81	17
2016 – 3rd quarter	731	337
2016 – 4th quarter	308	211
2017 – 1st quarter	214	746
2017 – 2nd quarter	253	653
2017 – 3rd quarter	631	71
2017 – 4th quarter	354	104

Figure 85 above further shows that while the levels of irregular migration between the two countries in 2015 and early 2016 were extremely high, very few illegal border crossings were detected—and stopped—at the border. Detections at the Serbian-Croatian border were relatively high until late 2014, and rose again in mid-2016.

Developments

A first increase in the number of irregular migrants entering Croatia was recorded in 2010 and 2011. At that time, migrants were arriving in growing numbers from Serbia, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, and continued to Slovenia without spending much time in Croatia.[19] In 2010, Frontex recorded a 222% increase in illegal border crossing detections from Serbia into Croatia, followed by a 432% increase in 2011. Many migrants, most of them Afghans, crossed into Croatia by walking across the land border; some simply followed the railway line all the way from Belgrade to Tovarnik in Croatia.[20]

The high number of Afghan nationals transiting through Croatia is seen as the main reason for this rise, which was recorded in similar numbers at the FYR Macedonia-Serbia border in this period.[21] Numbers continued to increase throughout 2012, when a westward shift in irregular migration routes through the Balkans became noticeable. Due to changes to Hungary's asylum procedures, migrants sought to avoid that country, travelling instead from Serbia to Croatia and on to Slovenia.[22]

In 2013, several political events affected the level of irregular migration from Serbia to Croatia. When in early 2013, following international pressure, Hungary stopped the practice of detaining asylum seekers instead accommodating them in open centres, a 'massive shift' of migration flows occurred away from the Serbia-Croatia route and towards the route from Serbia and Hungary.[23] By June 2013, only 39 detections of illegal border

crossings were made at the Serbia-Croatia border, compared to 4,100 at the Serbia-Hungary border. Once the Hungarian Government reintroduced the detention of asylum seekers from 1 July 2013, detections of illegal border crossings from Serbia to Croatia began to rise again.[24]

On 1 July 2013, Croatia became a Member of the European Union (EU) (though not yet of the Schengen Zone). There were some fears that this would result in a further increase of attempts to cross from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzgovina into Croatia, which now became external borders of the EU. The impact was, however, somewhat smaller than expected. A further increase of irregular migration from Serbia into Croatia was recorded at that time due to the fact that greater numbers of Syrian nationals were moving through the region.[25]

Throughout 2014 and into 2015, irregular migration across the border from Serbia to Hungary continued at high levels and, as was widely reported, increased quite dramatically in the late northern summer of 2015. During this period, the route from Serbia to Croatia remained in operation but accounted for a relatively small percentage of illegal border crossings in the region. In 2014, only about 3% of all non-regional migrants were detected at the Serbia-Croatia border, compared to 73% at the Serbia-Hungary border.[26] With the growing flow of irregular migrants from Greece via FYR Macedonia to Serbia, detections at the Croatian border started to rise in the spring of 2015.[27] It reached an all-time high and became the most significant route for irregular migration when the Hungarian Government closed the border to Serbia and built a fence along the border, making it all but impossible for migrants to enter Hungary from Serbia.[28]

By early September 2015, when it became known that the route via Hungary would soon be closed, as many as 9,200 people crossed from Serbia to Croatia in a single day. Serbian authorities and private operators offered to transport migrants who had crossed into Serbia from FYR Macedonia directly to towns like Šid close to the Croatian border.[29] The sudden arrival of large numbers of migrants at the Croatian border in towns like Tovarnik near one of the main border crossings posed particular challenges, as Croatian authorities struggled to manage such large numbers of people. They organised buses and trains to take them to Zagreb and other cities in Croatia, where registration centres were set up.[30] Within three days, 14,000 people had crossed into Croatia, many of them on foot, after making their way unsuccessfully to the Hungarian border.[31] By late September, as many as 10,000 migrants a day were crossing into Croatia from Serbia, and up to 65,000 a week.[32] A Frontex report notes that while an average of 66 persons were detected per month crossing from Serbia to Croatia between January and August 2015, between mid-September and December 2015 nearly 557,000 crossed that border.[33]

Initially, Croatia was merely a further transit point for migrants seeking to reach Hungary. Due to the continuing arrival of large numbers of irregular migrants, within a month of effectively closing the border to Serbia, Hungary started to build a further fence along the border to Croatia, which was completed by 16 October 2016,[34] diverting the flow of migrants from Croatia to Slovenia and on to Austria.[35] At the same time, Croatia undertook sporadic attempts to stop or control the arrival of people from Serbia, which caused long delays for regular cross-border traffic, as well as tensions between the two countries.[36] Throughout most of October 2015 the border between the two countries remained open, and the influx of migrants, along with the difficulties in catering for them, continued unabated.[37] Later that month, Croatia restricted entry to asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Other nationalities were considered to be 'economic migrants' and rejected at the border, allegedly without considering the causes of their displacement.[38] The coordination between Serbian and Croatian authorities improved somewhat in November 2015, when most migrants were transported by train and a central registration and accommodation centre was opened in Šid. Further restrictions on entry from Serbia followed when Croatian authorities only allowed migrants to enter and transit if

they stated that Austria or Germany were their intended destinations.[39] Nevertheless, until February 2016, with over 100,000 crossings by non-regional migrants, Croatia's border to Serbia recorded the highest number of attempted illegal entries along the Western Balkan route.[40]

From March 2016 onwards, Croatia, along with most other Western Balkan countries, all but closed its borders to irregular migrants. For a brief period, some migrants, unable to enter Croatia, were diverted to the Hungarian border, where they either sought to break through the border fence or paid smugglers to be taken into Hungary clandestinely. Despite a small increase in the third quarter of 2016, detections of illegal border crossings at the Serbia-Croatia border remained low throughout the year and into 2017.[41] Concerns remained, however, that refugees and other migrants who became stranded in Serbia would increasingly resort to smugglers to leave Serbia, including to Croatia.[42]

XII.2.2.2 From Bosnia-Herzegovina

Illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia occur at a much lower levels than from Serbia. This is despite the fact that this border, measuring over 1,000 kilometres, is much longer than the 319-kilometre-long border to Serbia. The border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia is the second longest external land border section of the EU. Because of its length, the large number of small roads crossing the border, and the presence of established criminal organisations on both sides, there have been some concerns that this border may be used for a range of illegal activities, including the smuggling of migrants.[43]

Figure 84 above shows that the number of illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia varies across years, ranging from 645 in 2012 to just 237 in 2014. Although absolute numbers are not available for recent years, it is noticeable that illegal border crossings from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia increased in the second half of 2015, albeit much more modestly that at Croatia's other borders. An even greater increase was recorded at the end of 2016, and again in the second quarter of 2017.

From the limited available information, it appears that irregular migration via Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia serves as an alternative route for some non-regional migrants seeking to reach Hungary or Slovenia. In 2011–12, for instance, it was reported that some Turkish nationals were flying directly from Istanbul to Sarajevo and then moving through Bosnia-Herzegovina to enter Croatia with the intention of continuing to Slovenia and possibly Hungary.[44]

XII.2.2.3 From Montenegro

The number of illegal border crossings from Montenegro to Croatia is smaller still than the numbers from Bosnia-Herzegovina, but considerable given that the border measures less than 20 kilometres in length. Figure 84 above shows that fluctuations between different quarters are quite significant, though seen in absolute numbers, detections appear to range between no more than 130 and 260 in most years.

As with entries from Bosnia-Herzegovina, irregular migration from Montenegro to Croatia appears to be part of a small, alternative route to the flows that go from Greece via FYR Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary and Croatia.[45] In some instances, irregular migrants enter Montenegro from Serbia before continuing to Croatia.[46] In 2015, Frontex noted an increase in the number of non-regional migrants moving from Greece via Albania to Montenegro and Croatia (or Serbia), but also highlighted that transport links and other infrastructure are not well developed along this route, and that it is harder by comparison to reach the EU.[47] In the first half of 2017, Frontex again reported an increase in clandestine movements from Croatia to Montenegro, which has been attributed to the unavailability of other routes and the inability of irregular migrants to cross borders on foot and without the aid of smugglers.[48]

XII.2.3 Stay

Croatia is not merely a transit country for irregular migrants, but also a destination where some migrants—deliberately or because of circumstance, temporarily or permanently—choose to stay. The literature tends to divide migrants who remain in Croatia into two groups: The first involves migrants for whom Croatia is the intended destination, the second involves migrants who remain in Croatia reluctantly.[49]

Those migrants who arrive with the intention to stay tend to choose Croatia as a destination either because they have relatives or friends who have previously migrated to the country, and who facilitate their arrival and integration. The experiences of some migrants who chose to stay in Croatia also appears to be quite positive, even among those who were initially reluctant to stay. This might encourage others to migrate to or remain in the country. Some also opt for Croatia as a destination because migration to the country, including irregular migration and the use of smugglers, is cheaper and more convenient and involves fewer legal obstacles. This was the especially the case before Croatia became a Member of the EU.[50]

Some migrants stay in Croatia because of a lack of other options, some because they lack the funds to move onwards, some because of the difficulties and obstacles associated with migration to countries like Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, and Austria. These migrants stay in Croatia reluctantly; some, as mentioned, later change their minds and adapt to the situation; others may stay until they find an opportunity to move on.[51]

For most other migrants, Croatia is merely a transit country. Some migrants decide to leave after making efforts to stay and obtain asylum in Croatia. Croatia's asylum system is seen as rather restrictive, and many asylum seekers are of the view that the chance of being recognised as a refugee in Croatia is very low, and that waiting periods are long. For this reason, some migrants decide to leave Croatia without applying for asylum in the first place, or before a decision about their asylum application has been made.[52]

XII.2.4 Departures

For many, if not most irregular migrants, Croatia is a transit point rather than a destination.[53] Until October 2015 most migrants continued from Croatia to Hungary, but since this border has been all but closed, the flow of irregular migrants has been diverted to Slovenia and on to Austria. Annual statistics and other data about the number of irregular migrants departing from Croatia for Hungary, Slovenia or other countries are, for the most part, not available (because these are internal EU borders).

Prior to the closure of Hungary's borders, first to Serbia and then to Croatia, Croatia was merely the second choice of irregular migrants seeking to reach Western Europe, compared to the preferred route via Serbia to Hungary. The route to Hungary is more direct and generally faster. Moreover, up until July 2013 Croatia was not an EU Member State. To this day, Croatia is not a Member of the Schengen Area, which means migrants cannot freely depart Croatia for Hungary or Slovenia.[54]

XII.2.4.1 To Hungary

Hungary used to be the next main destination for irregular migrants departing from Croatia. Based on the available information, it appears that irregular migration across this border used to occur at relatively low levels prior to the closure of the border between Hungary and Serbia in September 2015, which instantly diverted migration flows to Croatia from where they continued to Hungary in large numbers.[55] As a result, Hungary started to build another fence, this time at its border to Croatia, which was completed by 16 October 2015, sealing this border to irregular migrants and diverting them to Slovenia.[56]

XII.2.4.2 To Slovenia

Irregular migration from Serbia via Croatia to Slovenia (and on to other countries) emerged as an alternative to the route from Serbia to

Hungary in 2010. At that time, before Croatia became an EU Member State, reports emerged of regional and non-regional migrants travelling to Croatia—most of them legally, some by plane—and then continuing to Slovenia, crossing the border clandestinely.[57] In 2011 Frontex first reported that the route via Croatia and Slovenia was growing in importance for non-regional migrants, signalling a westward shift away from Hungary.[58] Most of the persons detected were Afghan nationals who had travelled via Turkey and Greece along the Western Balkan route to Croatia.[59]

The increase in detections continued throughout the rest of the year and into 2013. An increase of 138% compared to the previous quarter was recorded in the third quarter of 2012, an increase of 98% in the fourth quarter, and a further increase of 192% in the first quarter of 2013, indicating a shift of irregular migration flows to the route via Croatia and Slovenia instead of Hungary or Romania.[60] As mentioned earlier, legislative changes in Hungary concerning the detention of asylum seekers are seen as the main reason for the diversion to Croatia and Slovenia.[61]

Departures from Croatia to Slovenia—along with irregular arrivals from Serbia to Croatia—decreased rapidly in early 2013 when Hungary suspended its detention policy. Irregular migrants then moved directly from Serbia to Hungary until the Hungarian Government reintroduced the policy on 1 July 2013, diverting the flow once more to Croatia and Slovenia.[62]

Departures of irregular migrants from Croatia to Slovenia increased enormously when Hungary closed its border to Croatia on 16 October 2015. Croatian authorities subsequently started to actively divert the flow of irregular migrants to Slovenia.[63] In the following weeks up to 10,000 migrants arrived in Slovenia each day, many on buses organised by the Croatian authorities. The highest number of arrivals in a single day was recorded on 21 October 2015, when 12,616 persons arrived. Most of them entered Slovenia at the Slovenian border crossing of Zavrč and Rigonce. Reception centres were set up to temporarily accommodate the migrants, though most only stayed for a short time before continuing to Austria.[64]

To stop the flow of irregular migrants from Croatia, Slovenia started to build a razor-wire fence along the border on 11 November 2015. A week later, Slovenia decided to limit entry into the country to Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals, and to stop irregular migrants of other nationalities at the border; a measure that was subsequently also adopted by Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia.[65] As a result, the number of irregular migrants arriving in Slovenia started to drop in December 2015, and decreased even further from February 2016 when FYR Macedonia closed the border to Greece and fewer migrants were able to travel through Serbia and Croatia. In the same month Slovenia, along with other countries along the Western Balkan route, limited entry on humanitarian grounds to Iraqi and Syrian nationals, thus further reducing the number of irregular arrivals.[66] By June 2016 the route had become 'practically impassable'.[67] A further small increase in irregular arrivals was recorded by Slovenian authorities in around October 2016, though by that time a bilateral agreement with Croatia had been signed, enabling Slovenia to return irregular migrants who had arrived from Croatia within 72 hours.[68]

XII.3 Profile of irregular migrants

XII.3.1 Nationality

Information about the nationality of irregular migrants transiting through Croatia is surprisingly limited. While Afghans, Iraqis, and Syrians constitute the three largest groups,[69] the sources consulted for this research did not contain absolute numbers for the reporting period. The lack of better data is partly explained by the fact that few migrants apply for asylum in Croatia, which means that nationalities, along with other data concerning the profile of irregular migrants transiting through Croatia, often go unrecorded.

XII.3.1.1 Non-regional migrants

Figure 86 below shows that the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Croatia, as recorded by UNHCR, is very low by any standard. While the number of Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals have increased between 2014 and 2016, total numbers are much lower than in most other Balkan countries.

The number of Syrian nationals entering Croatia illegally started to rise in 2012 and 2013, when approximately 700 Syrians were detected crossing the border from Serbia illegally (per year).[70] Since 2013 Syrians have constituted the largest group of asylum seekers in Croatia.[71]

The number of Iraqi nationals seeking asylum in Croatia shows the same development as for Syrian nationals, albeit in slightly smaller numbers. Iraqis are also one of the main groups found to be staying in Croatia illegally.[72]

Afghan nationals make up the second largest group of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in Croatia. In 2011 and 2012, the number of Afghans either transiting through Croatia en route to Slovenia or applying for asylum in Croatia was higher than in subsequent years, as more Afghans sought to avoid entering and applying for asylum in Hungary due to the more restrictive policies implemented there.[73] The number of irregular Afghan migrants dropped between 2013 and 2015 when, after a policy shift, most Afghan migrants preferred to move from Serbia to Hungary instead of Croatia. Following the closure of Hungary's borders to Serbia and Croatia in 2015, their number rose again, albeit from low levels, in 2016.

Data and other information about irregular migrants from African nations who enter Croatia is even more limited. Somali and Algerian nationals constitute some of the larger groups of asylum applicants in the 2011–2017 period but,[74] as Figure 86 demonstrates, these numbers are nevertheless very low.

Figure 86: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Croatia 2011–2017, top nationalities[75]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**151**	**8**	**2**	**2**	**4**
- refugees	16	n.a.	1	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	135	8	1	2	4
2012 – total	**147**	**11**	**5**	**7**	**52**
- refugees	19	n.a.	3	0	12
- asylum-seekers	128	11	2	7	40
2013 – total	**31**	**n.a.**	**6**	**14**	**59**
- refugees	20	n.a.	5	n.a.	22
- asylum-seekers	11	n.a.	1	14	37
2014 – total	**28**	**1**	**6**	**7**	**28**
- refugees	21	0	6	2	22
- asylum-seekers	7	1	0	5	6
2015 – total	**23**	**3**	**20**	**5**	**27**
- refugees	22	1	9	3	23
- asylum-seekers	1	2	2	2	4
2016 – total	**179**	**77**	**150**	**18**	**192**
- refugees	39	8	30	n.a.	60
- asylum-seekers	140	69	120	15	132

XII.3.1.2 Other nationalities

Until 2016 Croatia also witnessed irregular migration by Kosovars, who left their country in large numbers in the early 2010s. For most Kosovars, Croatia was merely a transit country en route from Serbia to Western Europe, and was used as a transit point mostly during periods when Hungary adopted measures to deter asylum seekers or close its borders to irregular migrants.[76] When in 2015 Austria, Hungary, and Serbia, along with other Balkan states, adopted measures to prevent the irregular arrival of Kosovar nationals and speedily return them to their country of origin, the number of irregular migrants from Kosovo entering Croatia also dropped significantly.

Albanian nationals constitute a further group of migrants who are found to be entering and staying in Croatia illegally.[77] Absolute numbers for the 2011–2017 period were, however, not available at the time of writing.

There have also been some reports about Turkish nationals trying to enter the EU illegally via Croatia.[78]

XII.3.2 Gender, age, and other background

Several reports point to a significant number of unaccompanied minors who enter or stay in Croatia in an irregular situation. In 2011, for instance, 552 children in that category were identified, almost twice as many as in the previous year.[79] In 2012, 726 unaccompanied minors were identified by Croatian authorities among irregular migrants.[80] A 2014 publication further noted that within the region Croatia identified 'the highest number of unaccompanied and separated children':

> The main countries of origin are Afghanistan and Somalia, but increasingly also other countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Mali and Eritrea. While most of the children originating from Afghanistan are adolescent boys of undetermined age, the unaccompanied children from African countries include a large proportion of girls, including under the age of 15.[81]

XII.4 Smuggling of migrants

XII.4.1 Numbers

The smuggling of migrants affects Croatia on a considerable scale, and each year the Croatian authorities detect and prosecute a significant number of smugglers who are charged with the offence of 'illegal transfer of persons across the state border'[82] which was renamed 'illegal entry, movement and residence in the Republic of Croatia' in official statistics in 2013. Figure 87 below shows the number of reported offences of this kind, along with the number of offences concerning 'aliens illegally entering into the Republic of Croatia'.[83]

Figure 87: Reported offences relating to smuggling of migrants and illegal entry, 2010–2015, Croatia[84]

	illegal transfer of persons across the state border	Illegal entry, movement and residence in the Republic of Croatia	aliens illegally entering into the Republic of Croatia
2010	89	n.a.	1,757
2011	88	n.a.	2,720
2012	184	n.a.	4,926
2013	n.a.	176	3,333
2014	n.a.	140	n.a.
2015	n.a.	68	n.a.
2016	n.a.	156	n.a.
2017 (to Nov)	n.a.	287	n.a.
2018 (to Jan)	n.a.	22	n.a.

XII.4.2 Routes

Information concerning the smuggling of migrants into Croatia almost exclusively concerns smuggling activities across the border from Serbia. The route from Serbia via Croatia is, as already mentioned, usually used at times when migration to Hungary is not attractive or not possible. Smugglers are said to use the route from Serbia to Croatia to bring migrants to Slovenia, Austria, and Italy.[85] Considerable truck and train traffic crosses the border from Serbia to Croatia, and irregular migrants, especially Syrians, often hide in the cargo or in other compartments.[86] A 2017 publication notes that with the harsh measures adopted by Hungary to deny access and fair treatment to irregular migrants and asylum seekers, smugglers and smuggled migrants have taken the view that

> the Croatian alternative is more porous and unlikely to end in beatings, teargas and attack dogs; or that certain periods of the month—when trucking volume is high, or when bribed customs officers are on shift—are more hospitable to safe smuggling than others.[87]

Once in Croatia, many smuggled migrants travel to the capital Zagreb, where they may stay for a period of time while they consider their options and contact smugglers who can assist in organising their onward journey.[88] Several reports suggest that many smuggled migrants have next to no prior knowledge of Croatia's location and borders, and are sometimes misled by smugglers as to where they are and where they are travelling to.[89]

From Croatia, smuggled migrants either continue to Hungary or, in recent years, generally to Slovenia. The smugglers are said to be mostly local people who witness the demand for onward migration and see an opportunity to make money using their vehicles and local knowledge to take migrants to the border or smuggle them into a neighbouring country.[90]

XII.4.3 Methods

XII.4.2.1 Smuggling by land

The smuggling of migrants into Croatia for the most part takes place overland. Based on the available information, most smuggling activities seem to involve covert methods whereby smuggled migrants are hidden or otherwise concealed in order to prevent their detection. For this purpose, cars, trucks, and other vehicles are used to cross the border; sometimes they are modified to create spaces or compartments in which migrants can be hidden.[91] This modus operandi has been observed at a range of border sections across the region, though since the beginning of the reporting period, information published by Frontex specifically notes that smuggling by hiding migrants in vehicles is frequently detected on the route from Serbia via Croatia to Slovenia.[92]

In the fourth quarter of 2012, the border between Croatia and Serbia was 'the top reporting section,' detecting 26% of all cases across the region involving migrants hiding in vehicles.[93] Throughout 2012, detection of this smuggling method at the Serbian-Croatian border rose from approximately 90 cases in 2011 to over 300 in 2012. Over the same period, detection of such cases at the Croatian-Slovenian border rose from about 150 to nearly 440.[94] In 2013, the number of detections of migrants hiding in vehicles at the Serbia-Croatia border dropped to about 200 cases,[95] but rose again in 2014, when 42% of all cases across the region involving migrants hiding in vehicles were detected at this border.[96]

If larger vehicles such as trucks and vans are used, the migrants usually hide in the vehicle without the knowledge of the driver. A 2014 report notes: 'Once the driver is asleep, migrants cut all security features and hide in the cargo area. They either do this without external help or solicit services from fellow migrants or local facilitators.'[97]

Irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants from Serbia to Croatia on foot tends to be less common than covert smuggling in vehicles. In 2015, when a large number of irregular migrants

were moving through the region, and once Hungary had closed its border to Serbia, many migrants used public transport or simply walked from Belgrade or other parts of Serbia to the Croatian border and then walked across. Similarly, a report from 2011 observed that most Afghan migrants followed the railway line from Belgrade to Tovarnik in Croatia and cross the border on foot, with or without the aid of smugglers.[98]

Between 2011 and 2014 there were some reports of third-country nationals, many of them Turkish, using fraudulent travel or identity documents to exit Croatia, especially to Slovenia.

XII.4.2.2 Smuggling by sea

Despite its very long coastline along the Adriatic Sea, reports about the smuggling of migrants to or from Croatia by sea are, for the most part, non-existent. A 2011 publication notes that 'criminal groups in Croatia' use boats and fast ships to smuggle migrants. These ships are then used to collect migrants in Albania or Montenegro and take them across to Italy.[99] It appears that this report does not relate to the smuggling of migrants through Croatia. The publication contains no further details and could not be validated using other sources.

XII.4.4 Information about smugglers and networks

The smuggling of migrants into, through, and out of Croatia is mostly carried out by local people or nationals of neighbouring countries who transport, guide, or accommodate migrants or offer other menial services.[100] It may also involve smugglers with greater oversight over the migrants' journey, who are frequently not based in Croatia and often do not come from the countries in which they operate. They often share the nationality of the migrants they smuggle and connect the migrants to local groups and individuals who can assist with smuggling services.[101] In 2011, for instance, Frontex noted that Slovenian nationals played a particularly prominent role in assisting irregular migrants in crossing the border from Croatia.[102]

A 2011 publication suggests that some criminal groups in Croatia are well established, experienced in smuggling migrants through the country, and collaborate with groups in other countries. These groups are said to be well organised and usually consist of five to ten people, including repeat offenders. Suggestions that these groups smuggle migrants as well as a range of contraband such as drugs, weapons, and explosives are not supported by other sources.[103] It is also not clear whether these observations are still valid.

Frontex reports from 2011 and 2012 note that smugglers and other 'facilitators' of irregular migration played a limited role in Croatia. At the time it was noted that transportation and other smuggling services were mostly offered by local people and that very few migrants were 'using costly organised smuggling services'.[104] This has been explained by the fact that migrants didn't require sophisticated assistance; they were able by to use public transport extensively and find their way with handwritten instructions.[105] Mobile phones and online social networks are other tools used for smuggled migrants to obtain information about possible routes and to communicate with other migrants or connect with smugglers.[106]

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XIII SLOVENIA

XIII.1 Overview

Slovenia is almost exclusively a transit country in irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants. It sits along a sub-route of the main Western Balkan route, and experiences higher levels of irregular migration and smuggling when migrants cannot cross from Serbia into Hungary. Most migrants enter from Croatia and make the short crossing through Slovenia to reach Austria. Irregular migration also occurs from Slovenia to Italy.

The scale and pattern of irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants through Slovenia are generally not well documented, and there are several information gaps. Generally, the flow of irregular migrants through the country has been quite slow, though irregular migration through Slovenia moved into the spotlight in the autumn of 2015: When Hungary closed its borders to its southern neighbours, hundreds of thousands of migrants moved from Serbia via Croatia to Slovenia. In November 2015 Slovenia erected its own fence along the border to Croatia, and a little later restricted entry to Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals.[1]

Very few migrants remain in the country for any length of time and fewer still apply for asylum in the country. The vast majority of migrants continue to Austria, crossing the border near Spielfeld, south of Graz. Others, in somewhat smaller numbers, continue west from Slovenia to Italy.

XIII.2 Levels and characteristics

XIII.2.1 Numbers

XIII.2.1.1 Numbers relating to illegal entry

Irregular migration into and through Slovenia has traditionally involved quite small numbers of people. These numbers are closely tied to those in neighbouring Croatia and have been, for the most part, influenced by the ability of irregular migrants to travel from Serbia into Hungary, and to the treatment of asylum seekers in Hungary. At times when access to Hungary was easy and when asylum seekers did not have to fear detention there, the number of arrivals in Slovenia remained low. At those times when Hungary detained asylum seekers or closed the border to Serbia, migrants rerouted via Croatia and Slovenia.

A study by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) shows that in 2010, Slovenian authorities apprehended 785 'border violators', down from 824 a year earlier.[2] The decrease at that time was attributed to an eastward shift of irregular migration across the Balkans, with more people moving from FYR Macedonia via Serbia to Hungary rather than to Slovenia. The decrease also reflects visa liberalisations for Albanian and Bosnian nationals entering Slovenia.[3]

Illegal border crossings into Slovenia started to rise again in late 2011.[4] The westward shift continued in 2012, affecting both Croatia and Slovenia. This trend was seen as the result of changes in Hungary's asylum system, and the approaching entry of Croatia into the European Union (EU).[5] This trend was, however, reversed at the beginning of 2013 when Hungary discontinued the practice of detaining asylum seekers upon arrival.[6] In the following year, and throughout the early months of 2015, the number or irregular arrivals in Slovenia remained at low levels.[7]

This situation changed drastically in the second half of 2015, especially in the months of October and November, following Hungary's closure of its borders with Serbia and Croatia, which diverted the migration route back to Slovenia.[8] Data published by IOM and compiled in Figure 88 below shows that in October 2015 alone, 116,627 irregular migrants arrived in Slovenia, rising to 164,313 a month later. Between 5,000 and 13,000 migrants were arriving in Slovenia on individual days in October and November 2015.[9] Data for the months not shown here was not available at the time of writing.

Figure 88: Migrant arrivals Slovenia, October 2015–2017 (IOM)[10]

	total
Oct 2015	116,627
Nov 2015	164,313
Dec 2015	97,664
2015 total	**378,604**
Jan 2016	62,785
Feb 2016	34,795
Mar 2016	1,607
2016 total	**99,187**

Between 16 October and 31 December 2015 a total of 378,604 irregular migrants arrived in Slovenia.[11] Figure 88 above also shows that after December 2015 the number of irregular migrant arrivals decreased very rapidly to just 1,607 in March 2016. In December 2015 an average of 3,116 migrants crossed into Slovenia each day. This figure dropped to 1,986 in January 2016, and to about 800 per day in late February 2016.[12] In the three months of 2016 before the 'closure' of the Balkan route in March 2016, 99,187 irregular migrants entered Slovenia,[13] while between October 2015 and March 2016, a total of 477,791 migrants arrived in Slovenia.[14] Since March 2016, irregular migration to Slovenia has 'effectively stopped'.[15]

Eurostat publishes additional data relating to the number of non-EU nationals refused entry at Slovenia's borders. These figures, shown in Figure 89 below, do not directly relate to the levels of irregular migration experienced by Slovenia, as they only capture persons stopped at the border, and include a broader spectrum of migrants, such as persons arriving with an expired visa and persons denied entry for individual reasons. It is noticeable that the number of persons refused entry in Slovenia dropped significantly from 2012 to 2013 when Croatia joined the EU and Slovenia thus became surrounded by other EU Member States. In 2016 most persons were refused entry at a land border; given the lack of major airports and seaports, few persons are refused entry at air and sea borders.

XIII.2.1.2 Numbers relating to persons staying in the country illegally

Data relating to the number of irregular migrants staying in Slovenia illegally was not available in any of the sources consulted for this research. Frontex reported that in the months of April, May, and June 2015, 301 'illegal stayers' were apprehended in Slovenia.[16] Similar information for other periods was not available.

XIII.2.2 Entry points

Irregular migration into Slovenia mostly takes place along the border to Croatia, Slovenia's longest border, which measures 670 kilometres in length. Slovenia no longer has any external EU borders, thus data on the flow of irregular migrants from neighbouring countries is not well documented. For the 2011 to 2017 period, Frontex reports only contain data on illegal border crossings for the years 2011, 2012, and 2013 (shown in Figure 90 below).

Figure 89: Non-EU citizens refused entry, Slovenia 2011–2016 (Eurostat)[17]

	Total	land border		air border		sea border	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
2011	7,970	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2012	7,665	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2013	4,780	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2014	4,410	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2015	4,410	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2016	4,455	4,080	91.6%	365	8.2%	10	0.2%

Figure 90: Illegal border crossings from Croatia into Slovenia, 2011–2013 (Frontex)[18]

	absolute number	change to same previous period
2011 – total	**1712**	**+17%**
2012 – 1st quarter	418	+24%
2012 – 2nd quarter	361	–12%
2012 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2012 – total	**3 340**	**+95%**
2013 – 1st quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 2nd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 3rd quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – 4th quarter	n.a.	n.a.
2013 – total	**490**	**–24%**

Irregular migration from Serbia via Croatia to Slovenia (and on to other countries) emerged as an alternative to the route from Serbia to Hungary in 2010. At that time, when Croatia was not an EU Member, non-regional migrants were travelling to Croatia—most of them legally, some by plane—and then continuing to Slovenia, crossing the border clandestinely.[19] In 2011, Frontex first reported that the route via Croatia and Slovenia was growing in importance for non-regional migrants, signalling a westward shift away from Hungary.[20] Most of those detected were Afghan and Pakistani nationals who had travelled via Turkey and Greece along the Western Balkan route and Croatia.[21]

Although Croatia subsequently stepped up border control measures,[22] the increase in detections continued throughout 2012 and into 2013: an increase of 138% compared to the previous quarter was recorded in the third quarter of 2012, an increase of 98% in the fourth quarter, and a further increase of 192% in the first quarter of 2013, indicating a further shift of irregular migration flows to Croatia and Slovenia.[23] Legislative changes in Hungary concerning the detention of asylum seekers are seen as the main reason for the diversion to Croatia and Slovenia.[24]

Departures from Croatia to Slovenia—along with irregular arrivals from Serbia to Croatia—decreased rapidly in early 2013 when Hungary suspended its policy of detention. Irregular migrants then moved directly from Serbia to Hungary until the Hungarian Government reintroduced the policy on 1 July 2013, diverting the flow once more to Croatia and Slovenia.[25]

In the following two years, the flow of irregular migrants from Serbia across Croatia to Slovenia continued. The closure of the border between Hungary and Serbia initially had a limited effect on departures from Croatia to Slovenia, though as early as 15 September 2015 reports emerged that the border from Hungary to Croatia, too, would soon be closed.[26] When some larger groups of migrants first arrived at the Slovenian border in mid-September 2015, there were tumultuous scenes at one of the main border crossings near Harmica as migrants sought to enter Slovenia and broke through border fortifications.[27]

Departures of irregular migrants from Croatia to Slovenia increased enormously when Hungary closed its border to Croatia on 16 October 2015 and Croatian authorities subsequently started to actively divert the flow of irregular migrants to Slovenia.[28] Slovenian authorities pre-emptively introduced controls at the border to Hungary, expecting that some irregular migrants would enter along this route.[29] In the following weeks, up to 10,000 migrants a day arrived in Slovenia from Croatia, many on buses organised by the Croatian authorities. The highest number of arrivals was recorded on 21 October 2015, when 12,616 persons arrived in one day. Most of them entered Slovenia at the border crossing of Zavrč and Rigonce in Slovenia. Reception centres were set up to temporarily accommodate the migrants, though most stayed only for a short time before continuing to Austria.[30]

To stop the flow of irregular migrants from Croatia, Slovenia started to build a razor-wire fence along the border on 11 November 2015. A week later, Slovenia decided to limit entry into the country to Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian nationals and to stop irregular migrants of other nationalities at the border, a measure that was subsequently also adopted by Croatia, Serbia

and Macedonia.[31] As a result, the number of irregular migrants arriving in Slovenia started to drop in December 2015, and decreased further from February 2016 when FYR Macedonia closed its border to Greece, and fewer migrants were able to travel through Serbia and Croatia. In the same month Slovenia, along with other countries along the Western Balkan route, limited entry on humanitarian grounds to Iraqi and Syrian nationals, thus further reducing the number of irregular arrivals.[32] By June 2016, the route had become 'practically impassable'.[33]

A further small increase in irregular arrivals was recorded by Slovenian authorities in about October 2016, though by that time a bilateral agreement with Croatia had been signed, enabling Slovenia to return irregular migrants who had arrived from Croatia within 72 hours.[34]

XIII.2.3 Stay

Slovenia is mostly a transit country for irregular migrants; only a small number choose Slovenia as a destination, or remain in the country for lack of alternatives.

Those staying in the country, temporarily or permanently, comprise regional and non-regional migrants.[35] A report published by Frontex in 2014, for instance, shows that a total of over 2,000 persons from Serbia, FYR Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina were found to be staying in Slovenia illegally in 2012–2013.[36]

Figures showing the number of persons found to be staying in Slovenia illegally, and the number of migrants entering illegally and deciding to stay in the country were, however, not available at the time of writing.

IX.2.4 Departures

Most irregular migrants transiting through Slovenia depart for Austria. The border crossing near Spielfeld, south of Graz in the Austrian state of Styria has been the main entry point for irregular migrants leaving Slovenia. The flow to Austria from Slovenia increased considerably after Hungary closed its borders to Serbia in September 2015, and migrants diverted to the route via Croatia and Slovenia.[37]

Information about the departures of irregular migrants from Slovenia to Italy is very limited. In 2014, Swiss authorities reported that some irregular migrants were travelling from Slovenia to Italy, some with the aid of smugglers, and then continued to Milan and Switzerland.[38]

XIII.3 Profile of irregular migrants

Information about the nationalities and other background of irregular migrants entering and transiting through Slovenia is quite limited. Until about 2010, most of those caught entering Slovenia illegally were nationals of other countries in the region, especially from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia and, in smaller numbers, from Kosovo, Serbia, and Albania.[39] A significant number of Turkish nationals were also found to be crossing Slovenia's borders illegally in the early 2010s.[40]

From about 2011, reports emerged about a greater number of non-regional migrants, especially Afghans and Pakistanis, crossing through Slovenia. Most entered from Serbia via Croatia and used clandestine methods to cross borders.[41] In 2012, 864 Afghan nationals were detected crossing from Croatia into Slovenia, while 143 Pakistanis and 313 Algerians were detected in the same year.[42]

In 2015, as outlined earlier, Slovenia became a major transit point for irregular migrants after Hungary closed its Serbian and Croatian borders to irregular migrants. By that time, the single largest group of migrants (about 40%) were Syrian nationals, followed by Iraqis, Iranians and Afghans.[43] In 2016, when far fewer migrants were moving along the Western Balkan route and entering Slovenia, Afghans were the largest group of asylum seekers in that country, followed by Syrians, Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Iranians.[44]

The number of refugees and persons seeking asylum in Slovenia is very low. According to IOM, in 2012 for instance, the largest group of persons being granted asylum were Afghans with ten persons, followed by eight Somalis and five Iranians. Numbers were similarly low in 2013, 2014 and 2015, though more Syrian refugees were recorded at that time.[45] Figure 91 below shows the number of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR for the 2011–2017 period. This data confirms the low level of refugees and asylum seekers in Slovenia. Their numbers have risen from 2014 to 2016, especially for Afghan and Syrian nationals, though total numbers are very low by comparison to other countries in the region.

Figure 91: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Slovenia 2011–2016, top nationalities[46]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**36**	**19**	**7**	**3**	**6**
- refugees	8	9	3	n.a.	n.a.
- asylum-seekers	28	7	4	3	6
2012 – total	**36**	**17**	**6**	**3**	**10**
- refugees	18	15	4	n.a.	2
- asylum-seekers	18	2	2	3	8
2013 – total	**25**	**20**	**5**	**3**	**11**
- refugees	22	18	4	1	9
- asylum-seekers	3	2	1	2	2
2014 – total	**34**	**28**	**10**	**2**	**28**
- refugees	23	25	4	1	20
- asylum-seekers	11	3	6	1	8
2015 – total	**38**	**57**	**22**	**19**	**39**
- refugees	22	45	5	1	30
- asylum-seekers	16	12	17	18	9
2016 – total	**129**	**91**	**47**	**29**	**159**
- refugees	39	57	34	n.a.	118
- asylum-seekers	93	34	13	28	41

XIII.4 Smuggling of migrants

The levels and patterns migrant smuggling through Slovenia are not well documented. At the beginning of the decade a decline in smuggling activities was observed, with detections of migrant smugglers dropping from 214 in 2009 to 140 a year later. It appears that at that time illegal border crossings and migrant smuggling mostly involved migrants from countries in the region, such as Serbia and Kosovo, who were aided by locals from Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[47]

From 2011/2012 onwards this trend was reversed, as the 'level of reliance on smuggling services increased' together with the number non-regional migrants moving along the Western Balkan route.[48] This increase continued and became more significant in the following years, when many 'domestic facilitators' from Slovenia and Croatia became involved in the smuggling of migrants—especially Afghan nationals—across the border between the two countries.[49] The number of smugglers apprehended in Slovenia rose to 670 in 2011, and then decreased to 478 in 2012 and 257 in 2013.[50] At the same it became less common for smuggled migrants to cross into Slovenia individually (with or without the aid of smugglers) and more common for migrants to be smuggled in groups using covert methods.[51]

XIII.4.1 Routes

The smuggling of migrants through Slovenia mostly follows the same routes as the general flow of irregular migrants: Most smuggled migrants cross into Slovenia from Croatia and continue north into Austria, a journey of some 50 kilometres which can be completed in a short period of time. Smuggling also occurs across the border from Slovenia into Italy and, albeit in very low numbers, from Hungary to Slovenia.

As with other forms of irregular migration in the region, the smuggling of migrants via Slovenia serves as a sub-route of the main Western Balkan route which leads from Greece via FYR Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary. Smuggling through Slovenia is said to rise when migrants encounter difficulties in crossing the border from Serbia to Hungary, and instead divert to the route via Croatia and Slovenia.[52]

XIII.4.2 Methods

Based on the available information, the smuggling of migrants into, through, and out of Slovenia is almost exclusively done by land; in fact, the many sources consulted for this research contained no information about smuggling by air (through Ljubljana airport) or by sea (though the country's coastline is only about 20 kilometres long). A study published in 2011 shows that more than 90% of all 'migration related apprehensions' in Slovenia occurred at the land border (away from border control points) and about 5% of detections were made at road border crossings.[53] More recent data of this kind was not available.

If cars or other vehicles are used to smuggle migrants, migrants are usually hidden behind seats, among the cargo, or in special compartments of the vehicle. In 2011/2012, when the level of smuggling activities began to rise, Frontex noted that concealment in vehicles was becoming a frequent method to smuggle migrants along the Western Balkan route. Slovenia, especially at the border to Croatia, was singled out as a location where this method was particularly common.[54] In 2011, some 150 'migrants hiding in vehicles attempting to cross' the border were apprehended; in 2012, this figure rose to about 440.[55] In some instances, smuggled migrants hide in the cargo compartment of trucks and travel in this space all the way from Greece to Slovenia.[56]

Information about the smuggling of migrants on foot—that is, by guiding them to or across the border—mostly dates from 2010 and 2011 and, as mentioned, appears to have become less common in later years. Many of the smuggled migrants at that time came from countries in the region, and it has been noted that the visa liberalisation for nationals from Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina that came into effect in 2010 had the immediate effect that fewer migrants had to rely on smugglers to cross through Slovenia.[57]

Several reports broadly refer to the use of fraudulent travel or identity documents to enter or leave Slovenia, but these reports contain no specific details about the types of documents, the specific purpose of their use, and the circumstances of such cases.[58] In 2011, Frontex reported that 20% of all detections of forged documents in the region were made at the Croatia-Slovenia border, the highest share of all regional detections in that year.[59]

XIII.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

The available information on the nationalities of migrant smugglers apprehended in Slovenia—which, however, is from the year 2011—shows that the great majority of smugglers come from Slovenia and neighbouring countries. In 2009 and 2010, about 50% of all 'human smugglers apprehended' by Slovenian authorities were Slovenian nationals. Smugglers from Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina constituted the next largest groups.[60] Smugglers from countries outside the region do not appear in these statistics at all.

Recent information about the way in which smugglers operating in Slovenia are organised and networked is, for the most part, non-existent, save for isolated reports of smuggling networks that operate across borders and involve organisers who have the same migration background as the migrants they smuggle.[61]

The fact that most smugglers are Slovenian or come from neighbouring countries may indicate that many smugglers are opportunistic amateurs who operate independently or in loose networks, and are not organised in mafia-style syndicates. Recent sources confirming these observations are, however, not available. A report on 'illegal migration, human smuggling and trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe' published in 2011 drew similar conclusions:

> Criminal groups involved in human smuggling in Slovenia are usually small, composed of 3-10 people, with links to criminal groups in the countries of origin. Their responsibilities are divided, but in most cases they are not hierarchically organised. In a few cases, groups are smaller groups or networks of smugglers; while in most cases criminal groups are part of larger networks of various organisations. Some hierarchical relationships can be observed within the structure of networks. There is usually a leader with connections to organisers from the country of origin, who is responsible for contacts with other groups and for the organisation of transportation. At the lower level, there are drivers and other members involved in smuggling.[62]

Notes

1 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016)16; Jovana Arsenijevic et al, 'A crisis of protection and safe passage: violence experienced by migrants/refugees travelling along the Western Balkan corridor to Northern Europe' (2017) 11(6) *Conflict and Health* 1, 2.

2 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 7, 259.

3 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 255.

4 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 18, 25.

5 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 20; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 18.

6 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 18.

7 Cf. Slovenia, 'Slovenia is not building a fence or a wall on its borders' (press release, 22 September 2015).

8 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 16.

9 Slovenia, 'Influx of migrants to Slovenia has been slowing slightly' (press release, 30 October 2015); Slovenia, 'Slovenia has received 200,000 refugees to date' (press release, 13 November 2015).

10 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 16; IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2016' (2017) 10.

11 IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 4, 16.

12 Slovenia, 'Migration in Numbers' (2016); Slovenia, 'Šefic: Austria denies entry to a few migrants arriving from Slovenia' (press release, 2 March 2016).

13 Amnesty International, *Report 2016/17: The State of the World's Human Rights* (2017) 324, 325; IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2016' (2017) 10.

14 IOM, 'Slovenia' (2018).

15 IOM, *Migration Flows to Europe: 2017 Quarterly Overview March* (2017) 3.

16 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2015* (2015) 11.

17 Eurostat, 'Enforcement of Immigration Legislation Statistics' (May 2017).

18 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 18; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012), 27; *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 32; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013), 19; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 16.

19 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 256.

20 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 4; Kristina Zitnanova, *Refugee Protection and International migration in the Western Balkans* (2014) 23.

21 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 22, 31; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 15; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 3, July–September 2012* (2013) 6.

22 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 16.

23 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 31, Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2013* (2013) 24; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 19.

24 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2013* (2013) 24; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2013* (2013) 17.

25 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2013* (2013) 17; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 18, 19.

26 See, for example, Agence France Presse et al, 'Zwei Schwerverletzte nach Gewalt an ungarischer Grenze', *Die Zeit* (online), 16 September 2015.

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28 Marco Funk et al, 'Introduction' in Kristine Anderson et al (eds), *Migration Panorama: The Western Balkans migratory route: perspectives and persisting challenges* (2016) 7, 7; IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 15; Frontex *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016* (2016) 4, 19; Jovana Arsenijevic et al, 'A crisis of protection and safe passage: violence experienced by migrants/refugees travelling along the Western Balkan corridor to Northern Europe' (2017) 11(6) *Conflict and Health* 1, 2; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2013* (2013) 24; [s.n.], 'Ungarn sperrt Grenze zu Kroatien', *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (online), 17 October 2015.

29 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 16.

30 Slovenia, 'By today, over 64,000 refugees and migrants had entered Slovenia' (press release, 25 October 2015); IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 16.

31 Jovana Arsenijevic et al, 'A crisis of protection and safe passage: violence experienced by migrants/refugees travelling along the Western Balkan corridor to Northern Europe' (2017) 11(6) *Conflict and Health* 1, 2; IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 16.

32 Neza Kogovisek Šalamon, 'Asylum Systems in the Western Balkan Countries: Current Issues' (2016) 54(6) *International Migration* 151, 152; Jovana Arsenijevic et al, 'A crisis of protection and safe passage: violence experienced by migrants/refugees travelling along the Western Balkan corridor to Northern Europe' (2017) 11(6) *Conflict and Health* 1, 2; IOM, 'Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information, Reporting Period 2015' (2016) 16.

33 Meret Baumann, 'Warum Ungarns Zaun immer weniger nutzt', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (online), 10 June 2016.

34 Slovenia, 'The state needs to implement all measures necessary in the event of an increased migration flow' (press release, 12 October 2016).

35 See generally, Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 31; IOM, 'Slovenia' (2018).

36 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2014* (2014) 40.

37 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–August 2015* (2016) 16; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 12

38 Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Menschenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 44.

39 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 255–256, 259.

40 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 6, 37.

41 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 3, July–September 2011* (2012) 21.

42 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 22.

43 Slovenia, 'Migration in Numbers' (2016); Slovenia, 'Slovenia expects prompt and effective joint European response' (press release, 21 September 2015); Slovenia, 'Slovenia is not building a fence or a wall on its borders' (press release, 22 September 2015).

44 IOM, 'Slovenia' (2018).

45 IOM Slovenia, *Labour integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Slovenia* (2017) 10.

46 UNHCR, 'Population Statistics: Persons of Concern' (8 March 2018).

47 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 256.

48 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 24.

49 Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 2, April–June 2012* (2012) 29, 34.

50 European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 51; see also, Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 10.

51 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 257.

52 Switzerland, Koordinationsstelle gegen Menschenhandel und Menschenschmuggel (KSMM), *Gewerbsmässiger Menschenschmuggel und die Schweiz* (2014) 63, 64; European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants, Case Study 5: Greece – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Serbia/Hungary* (2015) 18, 19; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 3, July–September 2015* (2016) 16.

53 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 260.

54 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2012* (2012) 24, 25; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 4, October–December 2012* (2013) 26, 27; Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 20, 21; ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 257.

55 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 21.

56 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 257.

57 Ibid, 255.

58 See, for example, Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2013* (2013) 35; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 2, April–June 2014* (2015) 28; Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Quarter 1, January–March 2014* (2014) 29, 30.

59 Frontex, *Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2011* (2011) 12.

60 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 261–262.

61 See, for example, Frontex, *FRAN Quarterly: Issue 1, January–March 2012* (2012) 27, 28.

62 ICMPD, *Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe* (2011) 259.

XIV AUSTRIA

XIV.1 Overview

Austria is both a destination and and a transit country for irregular and smuggled migrants. The country is an important hub for irregular migration and smuggling because of its geographical location, history, and economic strength. For a long time, apart from Greece, Austria was the most easterly point of the European Union (EU), bordering countries to the north, east and south which were once part of the Soviet Bloc. For this reason, Austria emerged as a gateway for migration and travel to other parts of Western Europe. The eastern enlargement of the EU moved the external borders of the European Union and Schengen Zone away from Austria, though the country continues to play a significant and unique role, not least because several irregular migration routes converge on Austria.

In the 2011–2017 period Austria experienced high levels of irregular migration across the border from Hungary and Slovenia by people moving along the Balkan route, as well as border crossings from Italy made by people travelling on the Central Mediterranean route. Especially between August and November 2015, large numbers of irregular migrants crossed into Austria, initially from Hungary and later from Slovenia. Many arrived on foot and in large groups, leading to chaotic scenes at some points along the border. While many of the migrants arriving in Austria stay and apply for asylum, many more use Austria as a transit point, especially to neighbouring Germany, as well as to Sweden and other EU Member States. The exact number of persons who transited through Austria in 2015 is not known, though many reports suggest that over one million people migrated irregularly, often with the aid of smugglers, to Germany via Austria.

The levels and characteristics of irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants to Austria are much better documented than in most other countries featured in this report. This is due in part to annual reports published by Austria's federal criminal investigation authority (Bundeskriminalamt) on the specific topic of migrant smuggling. Academic research and other official data collections and analyses are generally also more comprehensive than in many other countries examined in this report.

XIV.2 Levels and characteristics

XIV.2.1 Numbers

The number of persons found to be entering Austria irregularly, with and without the aid of smugglers, is very high by regional standards. Austrian authorities publish detailed annual reports on the number and profile of smuggled migrants and persons who have entered Austria illegally, or who are found to be staying in the country illegally. The reports separate these two categories based on whether there is evidence that the migrants entered the country with the assistance of smugglers, thus placing them in the former category; if there is not then they remain in the latter. In addition, the Austrian statistics shown in Figure 92, below, include figures on the annual numbers of detections of migrant smugglers.

After experiencing very high levels of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the early 2000s, numbers dropped between 2007 and 2010. The drop in the number of smuggled migrants from a high in the years 2005 and 2006 to a low in 2010 has been explained by the eastern enlargement of the European Union, and the end of border controls which made the use of smugglers unnecessary.[1] Numbers started to rise again from 2011 to an all time high in 2015, when the number of smuggled migrants reached 72,179, in addition to 20,975 persons who were found to be entering or staying in Austria illegally. Early signs that the number of irregular migrants entering Austria would rise were noted as early as May 2012 by the designated departments in Austria's federal criminal investigation authority (Bundeskriminalamt) tasked with confronting migrant smuggling, when it stressed that the continuing crises in Syria and Afghanistan, along with instability in Libya, would lead to larger migration flows.[2] In 2016 the number of smuggled

Figure 92: Detections of irregular migrants and migrant smugglers, Austria, 2001–2016[3]

year	Smuggled migrants	Illegally entered or staying	Migrant smugglers	total
2001	15,508	30,857	2,313	48,751
2002	19,626	27,560	1.221	48,435
2003	18,533	25,568	1.025	45,126
2004	15.630	22.047	964	38,642
2005	20,894	18,133	713	39,740
2006	12.571	26,379	864	39,814
2007	9,987	4,416	682	15,085
2008	8,734	5,914	371	15,367
2009	10,248	7,885	438	18,571
2010	6,779	9,621	327	16,727
2011	9,812	11,132	288	21,232
2012	12,426	1,714	235	24,375
2013	12,323	14,811	352	27,468
2014	20,768	12,791	511	34,070
2015	72,179	20,975	1,108	94,262
2016	27,850	22,749	249	50,848

migrants dropped again to 27,850. Figures for 2017 were not available at the time of writing but are likely to be considerably lower than in previous years.

XIV.2.2 Entry points

Austria's eastern borders, especially its border to Hungary, have been particularly affected by irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants during the the 2011 to 2017 period. It is for this reason that the largest numbers of smuggled migrants are apprehended in Burgenland and Lower Austria, the two States nearest to that border. Figure 93 below shows that very few smuggled migrants are apprehended in Vorarlberg, which borders Germany, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. Austrian authorities stress, however, that the data shown in Figure 93 relates to the location where the person was detected or first contacted authorities, and note that this does not automatically mean that the person also entered Austria through that State.[4]

According to Austria's federal criminal investigation authority, 62.3% of all migrant smuggling activities occurred across the border from Hun-

Figure 93: Detections of smuggled migrant by state, Austria, 2011–2016[5]

year	Burgenland	Carinthia	Lower Austria	Upper Austria	Salzburg	Styria	Tyrol	Vorarlberg	Vienna
2011	460	159	6,251	830	221	336	378	168	1,009
2012	2,481	153	6,806	949	155	348	293	140	1,101
2013	1,016	154	7,358	949	294	210	862	165	1,315
2014	4,104	508	9,671	1,436	448	534	975	162	2,984
2015	10,894	1,272	27,611	6,310	4,672	3,931	2,314	1,230	13,945
2016	5,802	787	7,699	3,245	1,986	2,062	1,290	456	4,523

gary in 2012.[6] This marks a considerable increase compared to previous years: in 2011, 34.6% of smuggled migrants arrived from Hungary, and in 2010 only 27.8%.[7] Only 11.8% of smuggled migrants entered Austria from Italy in 2012, down from 31.1% in 2011 and 32.5% in 2010. These changes document a shift in the main smuggling routes away from the Central Mediterranean Route via Italy towards the Balkan route via Hungary. This trend continued in 2013–2015, though Austrian authorities did not report percentages for individual borders for these years.[8] In 2016, 42.9% of irregular border crossings, including smuggled migrants and persons not facilitated by smugglers, occurred at the boder to Hungary, 36.2% at the border to Italy, and 17.2% at the border to Slovenia.[9]

In 2012, the last year these figures were reported, 3.6% of smuggled migrants entered across the border from the Czech Republic (2011: 3%), 3.1% from Slovakia (2011: 3%), 2.1% from Germany (2011: 4.7%), 1.5% from Slovenia (2011: 3%), and 1.3% from Switzerland (2011: 3%). 14.3% (2011: 17.6%) of smuggling activities were done by air or from 'other countries'.[10]

Austrian authorities publish additional data relating to the location where migrant smugglers are apprehended. This data, shown in Figure 94 below, does not present a uniform picture, and the distribution between states varies from year to year. Burgenland, Lower Austria, and Tyrol tend to be the States with the highest number of detections in most years.

Figure 94: Detection of migrant smugglers by location (State), Austria, 2011–2016[11]

year	Burgenland	Carinthia	Lower Austria	Upper Austria	Salzburg	Styria	Tyrol	Vorarlberg	Vienna
2011	32	15	28	20	13	8	79	19	74
2012	45	25	37	26	7	19	52	6	18
2013	86	27	52	25	13	23	90	5	31
2014	151	33	59	53	18	15	136	7	38
2015	239	32	254	174	55	24	46	14	270
2016	94	15	19	33	22	24	22	6	14

XIV.3 Profile of irregular migrants

XIV.3.1 Nationalities

Data and other information about the nationality of irregular and smuggled migrants detected in Austria demonstrates the close links between refugee flows, asylum seeking and irregular migration. Nor surprisingly, countries marked by war, persecution, discrimination, political instability and upheaval are overrepresented among that 'top nationalities' of smuggled migrants apprehended by Austrian authorities. Figure 95 below shows that the main countries of origin of smuggled migrants apprehended in Austria in the 2011–2016 period are countries that have experienced violence, armed conflict, destruction, and displacement for many years.

In recent years, most smuggled migrants detected in Austria were Afghan and Syrian nationals. In 2015, Iraqis constituted another large group of smuggled migrants. Somalia and, to some extent, Iran and Pakistan are three further countries from which many people flee persecution and violence, and which feature prominently among the top nationalities of smuggled migrants in Austria. Stateless persons broadly fall into the same category.

Russian nationals constitute another large group of smuggled migrants detected in Austria, especially in the years 2012 and 2013. Many come from Chechnya or other conflict zones in Russia, and move to Austria with the aid of

Figure 95: Top nationalities of detected smuggled migrants, Austria, 2011–2016[12]

County of nationality	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Afghanistan	9,445	20,391	4,069	1,632	3,035	2,809
Algeria	850	807	412	796	464	376
China	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	166	n.a.
Georgia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	198	n.a.
India	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	330	340	410
Iran	1,850	2,656	532	369	622	326
Iraq	2,134	12,732	925	n.a.	344	303
Kosovo	n.a.	1.772	1.429	690	213	n.a.
Morocco	909	n.a.	n.a.	435	290	n.a.
Nigeria	1,424	1,084	431	516	258	n.a.
Pakistan	2,298	2,633	n.a.	793	1,705	804
Russian Federation	852	n.a.	897	1,661	1,813	1,100
Serbia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	89	n.a.
Somalia	1,058	1,538	770	n.a.	337	432
Syria	2,880	21,473	6,510	1,951	729	364
Turkey	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	189	302
stateless	n.a.	1.165	843	n.a.	98	n.a.

smugglers to apply for asylum.[13] Also noteworthy is the relatively high number of Kosovars who were smuggled into Austria until 2015, when the Austrian Government, along with neighbouring states, took measures to stop irregular migration and migrant smuggling from Kosovo to Western Europe.[14]

XIV.3.2 Other background

Figure 96 below shows that about 75–80% of all smuggled migrants apprehended in Austria each year are men. Despite greatly varying levels of smuggling, this proportion has changed very little over the years.

The very high percentage of men has been explained by the socio-economic and cultural background of migrants, though the specific circumstances may vary greatly between individuals. The literature generally notes that in many families and societies, men are seen as (or like to be seen as) more capable of coping with the strains and challenges associated with irregular migration, and that it is believed they will find it easier to settle and find work in the destination countries. Many men, especially young men, are chosen by their families to migrate, and the costs of their journey are paid for by relatives, in the hope that they will support their families at home with remittances, or enable them to follow once they reached their destination.[15]

Figure 96: gender of detected smuggled migrants in Austria, 2011–2016[16]

year	Smuggled migrants	male	female
2011	9,812	80%	20%
2012	12,426	79%	21%
2013	12,323	76%	24%
2014	20,768	80%	20%
2015	72,179	77%	23%
2016	27,850	76%	24%

Most migrants who are smuggled to Austria are young adults. Figure 97 below shows that persons aged between 19 and 30 years constitute the largest group, followed by persons between 15 and 18 years of age. It is noteworthy that the total percentage of minors (i.e. persons under the age of 18) has risen from 25% in 2013 to 38% in 2016. While these figures do not contain any information about minors travelling with their families or independently, other sources suggest that the number of unaccompanied minors who are smuggled to Austria has risen greatly in recent years.[17]

Figure 97: Age of detected smuggled migramts, Austria, 2011–2016[18]

year	Under 7 y.o.	8–14 y.o.	15–18 y.o.	19–30 y.o.	31–40 y.o.	41–50 y.o.	51–60 y.o.	Over 60 y.o.
2011	7%	6%	15%	46%	17%	6%	2%	1%
2012	n.a.							
2013	9%	6%	10%	43%	20%	7%	3%	2%
2014	6%	6%	15%	41%	19%	8%	3%	2%
2015	9%	8%	16%	41%	16%	6%	2%	1%
2016	9%	9%	20%	40%	14%	5%	2%	1%

XIV.3.3 Refugees and asylum seekers

The available sources show a close correlation between the levels of irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants to Austria on the one hand, and the quest to seek asylum in that country on the other. A comparison between these numbers, shown in Figure 98 below, demonstrates that both categories rose equally in the period from 2011 to 2016. Furthermore, each year the number of persons seeking asylum is approximately 20 to 30% higher than the number of smuggled migrants.

It should be noted, however, that figures for smuggled migrants and asylum applications are collected differently by different agencies, which makes it difficult to draw direct comparisons between them. Moreover, many persons may be smuggled to Austria in one year but not lodge an asylum application until the year after. This makes it difficult to compare numbers for the same year. What is evident, however, is that the intention to seek asylum and find protection is one of the principal reasons why migrants resort to the services offered by smugglers. This is further confirmed by a look at the main nationalities of smuggled migrants (above) and the main nationalities of refugees and asylum seekers (Figure 99 below).

Figure 98: Smuggled migrants detected and asylum applications received, Austria 2001–2016[19]

Year	Smuggled migrants	Asylum application received
2011	9,812	14,416
2012	12,426	17,413
2013	12,323	17,503
2014	20,768	28,064
2015	72,179	89,098
2016	27,850	42,073

The data shown in Figure 99 below shows a sharp increase in the number of persons who come to Austria as refugees and asylum seekers. The number of Afghan asylum seekers, for instance, grew fivefold from 2013 to 2016, while the number of refugees and asylum seekers from Syria grew nearly tenfold over the same period. Austria further hosts significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers from countries not listed in Figure 99, including Armenia, Georgia, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Kosovo, Somalia, as well as some 3,329 stateless persons (2017 figures).[20]

Figure 99: Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, Austria, 2011–2017, top nationalities[21]

	Afghanistan	Iran	Iraq	Pakistan	Syria
2011 – total	**13,212**	**3,133**	**3,515**	**1,133**	**1,399**
- refugees	8,636	2,509	2,622	74	903
- asylum-seekers	4,576	624	893	1,059	456
2012 – total	**16,361**	**3,620**	**3,670**	**1,350**	**2,369**
- refugees	10,158	2,816	2,863	94	1,675
- asylum-seekers	6,203	804	807	1,256	694
2013 – total	**18,154**	**3,875**	**3,665**	**785**	**4,309**
- refugees	11,906	3,188	2,966	131	2,748
- asylum-seekers	6,248	687	699	654	1,561
2014 – total	**21,757**	**4,147**	**4,543**	**917**	**11,525**
- refugees	14,793	3,203	3,015	179	6,653
- asylum-seekers	6,964	944	1,172	738	4,872
2015 – total	**41,725**	**6,899**	**15,617**	**2,102**	**33,563**
- refugees	17,458	3,379	3,732	203	14,894
- asylum-seekers	24,767	3,520	11,742	1,899	18,669
2016 – total	**50,003**	**8,088**	**15,766**	**2,260**	**40,770**
- refugees	20,220	3,598	5,555	230	30,958
- asylum-seekers	29,783	4,490	10,211	2,030	9,812
2017 – total	**51,172**	**7,998**	**15,219**	**1,615**	**47,825**
- refugees	26,939	4,565	7,414	270	43,888
- asylum-seekers	24,333	3,433	7,805	1,345	3,937

XIV.4 Smuggling of migrants

XIV.4.1 Routes

Several routes used for irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants converge on Austria, and the popularity of routes used by migrants to reach Austria varies across years. The Balkan route that takes migrants from Hungary or Slovenia to Austria saw the largest number of migrants in the 2011–2017 period, followed by border crossing from Italy by migrants using the Central Mediterranean route. Furthermore, some irregular migrants reach Austria from Hungary or Slovakia along the Northern route (or Eastern Borders route). Irregular migration on the Western Mediterranean route to Spain and France does not significantly affect Austria.[22] Section XIV.2.2 on entry points gives further insight into the locations where irregular migrants, including smuggled migrants, commonly enter Austria.

XIV.4.2 Methods

The smuggling of migrants to Austria is done by land and air. Between 2003 and 2010 the Austrian authorities published data on how migrants were smuggled into the country, whether individually or in groups of various sizes. This data, which has not been published for more recent years, shows that most migrants were smuggled individually or in groups of less than five people. Smuggling in larger groups only occurred in more isolated cases.[23]

Reports for the years 2003 to 2012 contain further information about the method used to smuggle migrants into Austria. According to information for the years 2011 and 2012, shown In Figure 100 below, most cases in which the smuggling method could be determined involved smuggling by car or truck, followed by smuggling by train. Smuggling by air accounted for 7% of all cases in both years.

Figure 100: Means of transportation used by smuggled migrants at border crossing, Austria, 2011–2012[24]

year	on foot	car	van	bus	truck	train	plane	boat	unknown
2011	n.a.	21%	n.a.	3%	19%	18%	7%	n.a.	32%
2012	3%	19%	n.a.	4%	22%	15%	7%	n.a.	30%

A 2014 publication provides some insight into the fees charged by smugglers for bringing migrants to Austria. The following figures are based on information obtained by Austrian authorities from smuggled migrants:

> From Syria to Austria and beyond: between 8,000 and 12,000 Euro per person or between 30,000 and 40,000 Euro per family.
>
> From Turkey to Austria and beyond: between 6,000 and 10,000 Euro per person.
>
> From Greece to Austria and beyond: between 3,000 and 5,000 Euro per person. […]
>
> From Serbia to Austria: between 700 und 1,200 Euro per person.[25]

A 2016 publication further notes that smugglers demand approximately 1,000 Euro to take migrants from Austria to Germany, and about 2,500 Euro to take them to Scandinavia.[26]

XIV.4.3 Information about smugglers and networks

XIV.4.3.1 Profile of migrant smugglers

Austrian authorities maintain detailed records on the number and profiles of smuggled migrants detected in the country, as well as the number of smugglers convicted for migrant smuggling by Austrian courts each year.

Figure 101: Detections of migrant smugglers and convictions for the smuggling of migrants under § 114 *Policing of Foreigners Act [Fremdenpolizeigesetz (FPG)]/§ 104 Fremdengesetz 1997 [Foreigners Act 1997* (FrG)] (total offences), 2010–2015[27]

year	Migrant smugglers detected	male	female	Criminal offence	Convictions total	male	female
2010	327	91%	9%	§ 114 FPG § 104 FrG	130 2	104 2	26 0
2011	288	88%	12%	§ 114 FPG § 14 FrG	124 4	96 3	28 1
2012	235	93%	7%	§ 114 FPG	143	127	16
2013	352	92%	8%	§ 114 FPG	144	134	10
2014	511	96%	4%	§ 114 FPG	234	222	12
2015	1,108	93%	7%	§ 114 FPG	748	729	19
2016	249	93%	7%	§ 114 FPG	342	324	18

Figure 101 above shows that the number of migrant smugglers detected by the Austrian authorities rose from 235 in 2012 to 1,108 in 2015. Over the same period, convictions for migrant smuggling rose from 128 to 748. The vast majority of persons detected and convicted for migrant smuggling are men. In 2016 the number of detections and convictions once more dropped to levels similar to the years prior to 2015.

Further data shows that most detected smugglers are young adults between 21 and 30 or 31 and 40 years of age.[28] The number of smugglers under the age of 20 is very small. Figure 102 below further shows that there was little variation in the age groups over the 2011 to 2016 period. From 2013 and 2015 there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of smugglers over the age of 50, which may indicate that more older people were drawn into migrant smuggling by the rising demand for smuggling services in these years. This trend appears to have reversed in 2016.

Figure 102: Age of detected migrant smugglers, Austria, 2011–2016[29]

year	Below 20 y.o.	21–30 y.o.	31–40 y.o.	41–50 y.o.	Over 51 y.o.
2011	5%	28%	33%	24%	10%
2012	2%	26%	35%	26%	11%
2013	3%	35%	28%	25%	9%
2014	2%	29%	30%	26%	13%
2015	2%	29%	31%	20%	18%
2016	9%	29%	36%	20%	6%

The top nationalities of persons detected smuggling migrants into Austria in the 2011 to 2016 period, shown in Figure 103 below, broadly fall into three categories.

The first and largest group involves smugglers originating from the main transit countries, including Hungary, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Italian, Greek, Turkish, and Slovak smugglers also fall into this first category, though their numbers are smaller by comparison and have decreased in recent years. Migrant smugglers from transit countries are usually drawn to become involved in smuggling activities if and when demand rises, and they see the opportunity to earn money by assisting irregular migrants. This usually means that the smugglers use their own cars, trucks and local knowledge to facilitate migrants' journeys.[30]

The second category of smugglers involves persons who come from the main source countries of smuggled migrants, who thus speak the same language as their 'clients' and who may have had prior contact with them or their families. In some instances the smugglers may even be relatives or friends of the smuggled migrants. Smugglers from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Kosovo fall into this category. A 2016 report published by Europol and Interpol further noted that smugglers who share the same nationality as the migrants frequently act in an organising capacity, and are networked across international borders.[31] In some cases these smugglers themselves once arrived in Austria as smuggled migrants, and later used their contacts, experience and knowledge to smuggle other migrants along similar routes. The rise in Syrian smugglers detected between 2012 and 2015 is indicative of this phenomenon. Similar observations can be made about the high number of Kosovar smugglers in the years 2014 and 2015, when many Kosovar migrants were smuggled to Austria.[32]

The third group is made up of smugglers from destination countries, which includes the Austrian and German nationals contained in Figure 103 below. In the absence of further information it is more difficult to make generalisations about this category. It is plausible that their involvement, too, is influenced by the level of demand, and it has been suggested that some of these smugglers may have a migration background.[33] In the absence of further information , however, it is not possible to confirm or expand upon these hypotheses.

Figure 103: top nationalities of detected migrant smugglers, Austria, 2011–2016[34]

Nationality	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Afghan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	15	14
Austrian	14	57	19	29	10	23
Bulgarian	n.a.	35	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11
Egyptian	9	n.a.	17	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
German	n.a.	n.a.	32	n.a.	15	16
Greek	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	26
Hungarian	29	139	64	71	27	17
Iraqi	10	42	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	8
Italian	n.a.	n.a.	24	16	n.a.	8
Kosovar	n.a.	74	34	n.a.	n.a.	12
Pakistani	17	26	n.a.	17	13	17
Polish	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	9	n.a.
Rumania	30	141	32	14	n.a.	n.a.
Russian	n.a.	30	n.a.	13	16	10
Serbian	14	190	56	17	23	20
Slovak	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6
Syrian	14	62	34	16	7	n.a.
Turkish	13	n.a.	18	31	21	24
Ukrainian	10	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

XIV.4.3.2 Organisations and networks

Information about criminal networks involved in the smuggling of migrants into and through Austria and about their organisation is somewhat limited. Most of the available literature tends to doubt myths about mafia-style smuggling groups, arguing that such structures are neither warranted nor economical for most smuggling ventures.[35] This does not mean, however, either that smugglers are not networked or have no communication with each other. While cooperation between smugglers is practical and relevant to facilitating cross-border movements,[36] it appears to be less common for smugglers to establish structured groups. In this context it has also been emphasised that many smugglers are opportunists who become involved in smuggling activities when there is demand, and that they use their vehicles and know-how to transport or guide smuggled migrants.[37] It is further believed that these ad hoc offenders are unlikely to become involved in and take up formal roles in more highly structured organisations.[38]

Networking among smugglers and between smugglers and associates may occur horizontally or vertically.[39] Horizontal networking refers to communication and cooperation between smugglers located in different transit hubs, who act as contact points for smuggled migrants and pass them on from one smuggler to the next along the main smuggling routes. This does not necessarily mean that they meet the smuggled migrants in person; it often suffices to communicate by phone or electronically to pass on information, contact details, or to identify specific meeting points. As mentioned, smugglers of this kind often share the background of the migrants they smuggle, in that they come from the same country and speak the same language.[40]

Vertical networking refers to the cooperation between these organiser-type smugglers and local groups and individuals who actually transport, guide, accommodate or otherwise assist the smuggled migrants. The literature tends to separate higher-level organisers from those who

carry out practical smuggling activities, and who are thus at higher risk of detection by authorities.[41] This is also reflected in the statistics relating to the nationality of smugglers apprehended in Austria, discussed earlier in this chapter.[42]

The loose connection between smugglers also reflects the fact that most migrants do not 'purchase' the smuggling services as a single package that covers the entire journey from source to destination country. In the majority of cases, migrants use different smugglers at different stages of their journey, and often resort to smugglers once they have failed to cross borders independently or through legal avenues.[43] Moreover, most migrants do not have the financial resources to pay for the entire journey upfront, and thus have to spend prolonged periods in transit countries to earn money or wait for transfers in order to pay for the next leg of their journey. For these reasons, many smugglers only operate along one leg of much longer journeys. By networking with others, they can pass the migrants on to other smugglers further down the route which in turn may allow them to ask for higher fees.[44]

The ever-changing demand for smuggling services, along with smugglers' intentions to maximise their profits, explains the fierce competition between smugglers in some locations. This, in turn, can lead to conflict and, in some cases, to violent clashes between smugglers. Conversely, as has recently been observed by Europol and Interpol, it can have the effect that larger networks will attempt to consume or destroy smaller groups.[45] The extent to which this can also be observed in Austria is, however, not clear. What is noticeable is that any concentration of smuggling activities in the hands of fewer but larger networks significantly increases the dangers and costs for smuggled migrants. Less competition means, on the one hand, that smugglers can demand higher fees. On the other hand, larger networks are usually more sophisticated, and thus better equipped to stay ahead of border controls and law enforcement intervention and, in some cases, have the resources to bribe border, immigration, or police officers.[46]

The rising demand for smuggling services along the Balkan route and into Austria in recent years has led to another phenomenon that Austrian authorities have called the 'de-professionalisation of the smuggling of migrants'. This refers to the fact that many new perpetrators have become involved in smuggling activities which they conduct in amateurish ways. In some cases, this has led to dangers and accidents involving smuggled migrants.[47]

Notes

1 Daniela Peterka-Benton, 'Human Smuggling in Austria: A Comparative Analysis of Data on Smuggled Migrants from Former Yugoslavia and the Russian Federation' (2011) 45(2) *International Migration Review* 215, 221–222; cf. Michael Jandl, 'Irregular Migration, Human Smuggling, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union' (2007) 41(2) *International Migration Review* 291, 315.

2 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 20.

3 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei, Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 8; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht* (2015) 19–20; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2009* (2010) 8; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2008* (2009) 9; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2003* (2004) 14.

4 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2010* (2011) 23; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2009* (2010) 23

5 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 24; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 24; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 29; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2014) 20; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 19; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 21.

6 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 15.

7 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 17; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2010* (2011) 17.

8 Caroline Lessky, 'Routen und Methoden der Schlepperei in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 53, 58.

9 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 10.

10 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 15; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 17.

11 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 24; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 24; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 29; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2014) 20; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 19; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 21.

12 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 13; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 22; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 26; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2014) 18; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 13, 20–22; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 15.

13 Daniela Peterka-Benton, 'Human Smuggling in Austria' (2011) 45(2) *International Migration Review* 215,225; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 12; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 16; UNHCR, 'Flüchtlingsland Österreich' (2016).

14 See Section VII.2.4.2 above; see also, Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 43.

15 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 44-45; cf. Veronika Bilger et al, 'Human Smuggling as a Transnational Service Industry: Evidence from Austria' (2006) 44(4) *International Migration* 59, 63.

16 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 13; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 22; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2016) 26; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2013) 18; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 13; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 15.

17 See generally, Saskia Koppenberg, *Unbegleitete Minderjährige in Österreich: Rechtsrahmen, Praxis und Statistiken* (2013) 98–102.

18 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 13; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 22; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 26; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2014) 18; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 15.

19 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 9; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 19–20 Austria, Bundesministerium für Inneres, 'Vorläufige Asylstatistik Dezember 2016' (December 2016) 3; Austria, Bundesministerium für Inneres, *Asylstatistik 2015* (2016) 3; Austria, Bundesministerium für Inneres, 'Entwicklung der Zahl der Asylwerber in der Republik Österreich in der Zeit von 1999 bis 2013' (undated).

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21 Ibid.

22 Caroline Lessky, 'Routen und Methoden der Schlepperei in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 53, 60–66.

23 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2010* (2011) 19; see further Caroline Lessky, 'Routen und Methoden der Schlepperei in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 53, 66–67.

24 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 15; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 17.

25 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 19.

26 Danai Angeli & Anna Triandafyllidou, 'Europe' in Marie McAuliffe & Frank Laczko (eds), *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research* (2016) 105, 113.

27 Statistk Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2016*, Tabellenband (2017) 78; Statistk Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2015*, Tabellenband (2016) 24; Statistk Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2014*, Tabellenband (2015) 24; Statistik Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2013* (2014) 81; Statistik Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2012* (2013) 65; Statistik Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2011* (2012) 129; Statistik Austria, *Gerichtliche Kriminalstatistik 2010* (2011) 117; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 19–20; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 9, 12.

28 Cf. Daniela Peterka-Benton, 'Human Smuggling in Austria' (2011) 45(2) *International Migration Review* 215, 223.

29 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei, Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 12; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 21; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 26; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2014) 17; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 10; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 12.

30 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 37.

31 Europol/INTERPOL, *Migrant Smuggling Networks, Executive Summary* (2016) 7; UNODC, *Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges* (2015) 32.

32 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 37–38.

33 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 38.

34 Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei, Jahresbericht 2016* (2017) 12; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei Österreich, Jahresbericht 2015* (2016) 21; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Schlepperei 2014* (2015) 26; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2013* (2014) 17; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität, Jahresbericht 2012* (2013) 10; Austria, Bundeskriminalamt, *Jahresbericht Organisierte Schlepperkriminalität 2011* (2012) 12.

35 Cf. Veronika Bilger et al, 'Human Smuggling as a Transnational Service Industry: Evidence from Austria' (2006) 44(4) *International Migration* 59, 64.

36 Europol/INTERPOL, *Migrant Smuggling Networks, Executive Summary* (2016) 7–8; UNODC, *Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges* (2015 33–34.

37 Cf. Matthias Neske & Jeroen Doomernik, 'Comparing Notes: Perspectives on Human Smuggling in Austria, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands' (2006) 44(4) *International Migration* 39, 48.

38 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 39.

39 Veronika Bilger et al, 'Human Smuggling as a Transnational Service Industry: Evidence from Austria' (2006) 44(4) *International Migration* 59, 64

40 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 39.

41 Veronika Bilger et al, 'Human Smuggling as a Transnational Service Industry: Evidence from Austria' (2006) 44(4) *International Migration* 59, 64, 78–79

42 See Section XIV.4.3.1 above.

43 Matthias Neske & Jeroen Doomernik, 'Comparing Notes: Perspectives on Human Smuggling in Austria, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands' (2006) 44(4) *International Migration* 39, 54.

44 Tuesday Reitano & Peter Tinti, *Survive and Advance: The Economics of Smuggling Refugees and Migrants into Europe*, ISS Paper No 289 (2015) 5.

45 Europol/INTERPOL, *Migrant Smuggling Networks, Executive Summary* (2016) 8.

46 Julia Kienast, 'Umfang und Ausprägungen der Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich' in Andreas Schloenhardt (ed), *Schlepperkriminalität in Österreich* (2017) 23, 40.

47 Cf. Florian Klenk & Lukas Matzinger, '"Ich habe das vorausgesagt"', *Falter* (online), 13 June 2017.

XV OBSERVATIONS

This research demonstrates that irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants occurs on a significant scale throughout the region, that irregular migration and smuggling of migrants are not new phenomena, and that they are highly likely to remain pressing and prevalent issues for years to come. All countries in region are affected by irregular migration flows and the smuggling of migrants, most as transit points, some also as destination countries, while some countries are both source and transit countries for irregular migrants.

Irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants are complex and long-standing issues for the thirteen countries featured in this report. They involve both non-regional migrants who enter and transit through the region, as well as regional migrants who are nationals from the region moving to other countries in the region or other destinations in Westen Europe. It is also evident that developments and events in one country, as well as measures adopted unilaterally by individual states, have an immediate impact on others.

While irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants affects all countries in the region, the levels and characteris of these phenomena vary between them. By numbers, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary have been most affected by irregular migrants flows for much of the 2011–2017 period. The main route from Turkey to Western Europe used by irregular migrants and migrant smugglers leads through these countries; irregular movements via neighbouring states and along other routes across the Balkans have been small by comparison. The immediate effect of measures taken by countries along this route to prevent irregular border crossings has been a displacement to other countries and other routes. This is most evident in the events that followed the closure of Hungary's border to Serbia, which almost immediately shifted the flow of irregular migrants to neighbouring Croatia and Slovenia.

The following observations and conclusions drawn from this research focus on four key issues:

1. A lack of information,
2. A lack of foresight,
3. A lack of management, and
4. A lack of cooperation.

These four points should be considered in the development of future policies, laws, and other measures.

XV.1 A lack of information

One of the main challenges in developing meaningful and sustainable solutions for preventing irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants, and in researching these issues, is the lack of consistent and complete open-source information and reliable data. Despite the fact that the flow of irregular migrants through the region—especially in the autumn of 2015—dominated and continues to dominate news reporting, as well as political and public debates, and despite the plethora of opinions on how to stop irregular migration, the actual evidence base is mixed at best. Despite the magnitude of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the region, and despite the heightened emotion surrounding these topics, there is very little in-depth documentation and analysis of the causes, circumstances, characteristics and consequences of these phenomena.

Academic books and articles, thorough and independent research, along with reliable reports from experts and organisations have grown in numbers and to some extent improved in quality, Nevertheless, the bulk of available open-source information consists of short-term periodic reporting, information presented through the lense and within the mandate of specific international organisations and NGOs, and, in the absence of other sources, a considerable number of media reports which vary greatly in quality and journalistic rigour. Put simply, the topics of irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants along the Balkan route remain quite poorly documented, researched and understood.

It is noteworthy that much of the available reporting and literature form clusters or 'bubbles'

of information that are produced around particular events, at certain times, and in specific locations. This in turn explains the uneven depth of information presented in the separate country chapters contained in this report. Some developments, such as the closure of Hungary's border to Serbia in September 2015, irregular migration by sea from Turkey to Greece, and the flow of irregular migrants through FYR Macedonia and Serbia are documented in almost microspic detail. Yet the magnitude and patterns of irregular migration and migrant smuggling cannot be clearly ascertained for some other parts of the region. In light of the global attention and political rhetoric devoted to this topic, it is surprising that the topic is not more comprehensively documented and researched.

This situation is alarming, since it is not always clear on what, if any, information and evidence policy initiatives, legislation, and practical measures to combat irregular migration and migrant smuggling are founded. Unable to gauge the true dimensions and manifestations of the problem, it is equally difficult to assess the quality and effectiveness of responses adopted by states, both individually and collectively. It appears that many of the policies, laws and other measures proposed and implemented to stop irregular migration and migrant smuggling were developed without a proper knowledge base.

There are some obvious obstacles to better reporting and analysis of irregular migration and migrants smuggling in the Balkans. First among these is the difficulty of data collection and research on issues that frequently occur out of sight of the authorities. Many borders are crossed and many migrants smuggled without anyone noticing, and without any entity recording such movements. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that some data and other information may be collected but not made public, especially if that data relates to ongoing investigations. Estimates of the dark figures relating to irregular migration and smuggling of migrants, which capture the number of persons crossing international borders undetected, are not available.

Further obstacles stem from the fact that even if data is recorded and published, this is often done inconsistently and in an ad hoc manner. Regular reporting of data for comparable periods using consistent criteria and parameters is the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, the methodology used to collect and analyse data is not clear or has not been reported for some sources, which may cast doubt on the accuracy of some information. Even national and international organisations with mandates to uncover irregular movements frequently shift the criteria and mechanisms used to record and report relevant data, making it difficult to compare and analyse the available statistics.

This is particularly evident in the vast amount of data collected and published by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. In the absence of other information, this research frequently had to rely solely on Frontex reports. Like no other agency, Frontex publishes a plethora of quarterly and annual reports that give great insight into many facets of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the region. In this context it must be emphasised, however, that Frontex reporting is not always consistent and complete; some data is available for some quarters and years but not for others. The fact that the outer borders of the EU have shifted during the 2011–2017 period further explains the changing scope of Frontex reporting. In this context, it is also worth nothing that over this period, the mandate and budget of Frontex has grown significantly, along with Frontex operations at the exterior borders of the European Union. While this has led to more reporting on illegal border crossings, it has not necessarily improved the consistency and quality of such reporting. It further needs to be stressed that, given its mandate, Frontex primarily views migration and smuggling through a border control and law enforcement lense, leaving out many other facets of these phenomena.

Some of these concerns similarly relate to reports published by IOM, the International Organization for Migration, which gradually assumed a role of documenting irregular migration, including deaths of migrants, in the 2011–2017 period and,

only recently produced more complete reports that are published regularly. It is worth noting that IOM takes a more positive attitude towards international migration, and its reports—unlike those produced by Frontex—show much greater concern for the safety of migrants and the causes of their displacement. The same can be said about data published by UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, concerning asylum seekers and refugees. Unlike many other organisations, UNHCR has a much longer history of data collection and analysis, though figures published by UNHCR may not always conform with those reported by national agencies.

Fuelling this problem is the fact that different sources use different vocabulary, terminology, and standards. This often makes difficult, if not impossible, to make observations about trends and developments in different places at different times. With the exception of the term 'refugee', most other expressions used to refer to irregular migrants are not based on clear criteria or established legal definitions. Terms such as 'smuggled migrant' and 'asylum seekers' are sufficiently established and distinguishable in much of the literature, but expressions such as 'illegal asylum seekers', 'economic migrants' and the like are often politically tainted, based on uncertain criteria or, in some instances, simply incorrect. This report, along with many other scholarly sources, adopts the term 'irregular migrant' to refer to persons who cross international border without full compliance with the relevant laws relating to entry and exit.

It is evident that different countries place different emphasis on irregular migration and migrant smuggling. Some view these issues as top priorities, as a menace threatening national security and local populations. Others, directly or indirectly, view them as secondary, neglibible matters; in some states the 'problem' of irregular migration is overshadowed by other more pressing issues. It is further acknowledged that the countries examined in this report have different capacities and resources to investigate irregular migration and migrant smuggling, and to collect and analyse that data comprehensively.

Nevertheless, to better document the level of irregular migration and provide some common ground to enable comparisons between states, and to inform policy development, it would be desirable if, at a minimum, all states would report the number of persons detected entering their territory illegally each year, the locations and means of their entry, as well as the number of persons detected staying in the country unlawfully and numbers relating to investigations, prosecutions, and convictions for offences relating to the smuggling of migrants.

The lack of better information on irregular migration and migrant smuggling has led to many myths about the levels and characteristics of these isues. This also explains many misrepresentations made in media reporting and other sources. The absence of better sources has also been exploited by some reporters, public officials and politicians, wittingly or unwittingly, to make misrepresentations about irregular and smuggled migrants, and the causes and conditions of their journeys.

It is a core responsibility of states to fully and accurately document to the best of their abilities the scale and patterns of irregular migration into, through, and out of their territories and, as far as possible, to make this information publicly available. More transparency on all matters relating to irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants along the Balkan route is urgently needed, not only to better inform the public and inject more truth into current debates, but also, and importantly, to enable evidence-based policy development and assessment of policy initiatives, legislation, and other measures already adopted. Further and ongoing documentation, research, and analysis are crucial in preventing irregular migration and migrant smuggling.

XV.2 A lack of foresight

Many governments in the region, politicians and the media, along with large swathes of the general population, were surprised by the rapid increase in irregular migration through the region,

especially in the second half of 2015. The number of people moving along the Western Balkan route did indeed reach unprecedented levels during that year. While estimates about the true scale of these movements vary greatly, most reliable sources agree that about one million irregular migrants travelled from Greece through the Balkans to Austria, Germany, Sweden and other destinations in Western Europe in 2015.

Many if not most countries were unprepared for the arrival of large numbers of irregular migrants, most of them asylum seekers. Few had the capacity to adequately manage the many people who arrived at once, and to cater for their specific needs. With more than 1,000 people crossing some borders in a single day, some countries quickly ran out of space, staff and resources to accommodate and support these migrants and process their asylum applications. In some places, community organisations and individuals quickly stepped in and provided meals, accommodation and clothing. This is best demonstrated at the makeshift facilities set up at Vienna's main railway stations to assist migrants who were arriving by train or on foot from Hungary. Some people used their cars to collect and transport migrants who had travelled hundreds of kilometres and often walked long distances, leaving them exhausted and in poor condition. Residents of Austria and Germany drove into Hungary or Slovenia, or to the border, to pick up migrants and take them to Vienna, Salzburg or Germany free of charge.

In other instances, authorities capitulated to the influx of new migrants and simply turned a blind eye to their irregular movements; elsewhere, for example in FYR Macedonia, authorities used buses and trains to transport migrants through and out of the country as quickly as possible. In other places, the response to irregular migration was more hostile and resulted in measures to close borders and erect fences. In some instances, compassion fatigue set in, and gestures of support and welcome turned into hostility and xenophobia.

The analysis in this report has shown that irregular migration through the Balkans is not a new phenomenon. The countries in the region are interconnected, and have histories of migration both inbound and outbound. All countries in the region have diasporas of their own nationals abroad, and many are home to communities of other nationalities, which explain and shape migration flows into, through, and out of the region. This is exemplified in the many nationalities from the former Yugoslavia who were displaced during the armed conflict in the 1990s, the exodus of Kosovars in recent years, and the large number of Albanians who seek employment in neighbouring Greece.

What is frequently overlooked in debates about migration in the Balkans is the fact that irregular migration in the region involves both regional and non-regional migrants. For some countries, the main 'migration problem' stems from the influx of nationals of neighbouring countries, or from the outflow of their own nationals seeking prosperity abroad. Many reports about irregular migration in the region, and many responses developed to counteract these movements, fail to recognise the diversity and complexity of these migration patterns.

The causes driving irregular migration towards Western Europe and across the Balkans are longstanding; many predate the 2011–2017 period. Within that period, there were early signs in 2011 to 2014 signalling that a rise in irregular migration was imminent. At that time, the situation for many displaced persons in transit countries was rapidly deteriorating, along with the security situation in the main source countries in the Middle East, South Asia, and parts of Africa. With the situation in countries such as Syria and Afghanistan worsening, Western countries slashing their support to host countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and with many displaced persons running out of hope that they would ever return to their home country, it was obvious that some migrants would 'pack up' and try to make their way to places where they hoped to find greater security and a better life for themselves and their families. In the absence of resettlement locations and legal avenues of migration, it was not at all surprising that many

migrants would resort to irregular means and the offers of migrant smugglers.

Most countries lacked the foresight to adequately prepare for growing numbers of irregular migrants and rising volumes of asylum applications. Most had no mechanisms in place to adequately, fairly, and efficiently manage the flow of migrants. Yet no country could really have been surprised by the developments that took place in the second half of 2015. The reactions and responses by states to the events of that year are characterised by a lack of planning and preparedness, and by a failure to cooperate and communicate.

In particular, there was a near complete lack of engagement with the main source, host, and transit countries. Furthermore, many responses were left too late and, if they came at all, were quite shortsighted and failed to address the root causes of displacement and irregular migration. The measures adopted by states in recent years, collectively and individually, to 'close the Balkans route' are, for the most part short-term and tactical, not strategic, and certainly not aimed at solving the ongoing crises that displace millions of people in the Middle East, South Asia, and parts of Africa.

The responses adopted by many states proritise the protection of borders over the protection of people; national security has become more important than human security. Many measures implemented to stop the flow of irregular migrants merely serve short-term political gains rather than tackling the harder issue of developing long term strategies to manage international migration and the plight of refugees.

This is particularly evident in measures to close borders and erect fences or build other fortifications to stop irregular border crossings. Without exception, the immediate effect of these measures has been that migration was displaced, not stopped. Such measures show disregard for, and create, human suffering, and merely divert irregular migration to other routes and pass on the management of migration and the processing of asylum claims to other countries.

Furthermore, the research shows that the harder it is for migrants to cross borders legally and overtly, the more likely it is that they resort to covert methods of migration and take up the offers made by migrant smugglers. The smuggling of migrants responds to a demand by persons unable to use legal avenues of migration. It is symptomatic of a lack of proper management of migration, and of coherent and effective immigration policies. Criminalising the smuggling of migrants and punishing smugglers does little to reduce irregular migration unless it goes hand in hand with proper planning of migration intakes and cooperation with source, host, and transit countries as well.

It should be noted that the myriad measures to control and close borders in the region, enhance border control and law enforcement cooperation, increase the budget, powers, and mandate of agencies such a Frontex, and to strike questionable agreements with some transit countries, have greatly reduced the flow of irregular migrants through the Balkans. To call the Balkan route 'closed' is, however, an exaggeration, given that many thousands of irregular migrants continue to travel through the region. Numbers have clearly dropped since the peak in late 2015, but many migrants have been diverted to other routes. Irregular migration along the Central and Western Mediterranean routes from Northern Africa to Italy and Spain has risen dramatically since the Western Balkan route was declared closed by some politicians. What is more alarming is that these other routes are far more dangerous, and that migrants are more dependent on smugglers since these routes involve long seaborne journeys and pass through countries such as Libya which are in serious political turmoil. According to IOM, recorded deaths at sea by irregular migrants in the Mediterranean rose from 1,809 in 2015 to 2,911 in 2016 and remained high, with 2,121 deaths in 2017.[1]

XV.3 A lack of management

The lack of foresight and preparedness of many states goes hand in hand with the lack of management of regular and irregular migration.

Many states in the region (and elsewhere) were—and some continue to be—altogether oblivious to international migration and refugee flows. Many adopt the view that 'this is not our problem'. All too frequently, this attitude results in utter unpreparedness if and when irregular migrants and refugees arrive. Many governments dismiss calls for better preparation and planning with simplistic statements that they are not immigration nations, or with claims that national security considerations prevent them from adopting more proactive and humane migration and refugee policies.

Migration is not, and never has been, new to the region. The histories of all countries in the Balkans have been shaped by migratory movements, including voluntary and forced migration by national, regional, and non-regional migrants. Despite this, many countries in the region lack transparent, rules-based systems to properly and fairly manage international migration. Laws criminalising the smuggling of migrants, protecting the rights of smuggled migrants, and enabling international cooperation are developed very unevenly across the region, and many states fail to adhere to basic principles of international law.

Moreover, many countries do not have comprehensive immigration laws, do not have fully developed asylum systems, and do not maintain immigration policies that tie immigration intakes to labour market needs, demographic developments, and humanitarian considerations. With the rise of globalisation and increasing human movement worldwide, these are, however, core responsibilities. Nevertheless, many governments, wittingly or unwittingly, choose to neglect this duty.

It must be noted in this context, however, that some states, especially new, smaller, and less developed countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and FYR Macedonia, have limited capacity to properly manage and support irregular migrants in large numbers, and may lack the expertise and experience to set up sophisticated immigration and asylum procedures. In these circumstances, regional and international cooperation and support from Western European nations and the European Union are all the more important to enhance the capacity and preparedness of Member and Non-Member States to manage migration in all its forms.

Just as many states failed to prepare for irregular migration and refugee flows, many failed to anticipate and manage community reactions to the large flow of migrants through the region. Similarly, many states failed to accurately inform the public about the true levels and patterns of these flows, the causes of displacement, and the conditions of the migrants' journeys. In this environment, it was to be expected that community concerns about irregular migration would grow, and that xenophobic sentiments would rise. Nevertheless, many politicians failed to address these concerns; others chose to fuel them in order to gain political capital. Myths and misinformation about irregular migration, refugees, and other groups of non-citizens are widespread, and few countries actively provide accurate information and transparency to counteract false claims and animosities.

On a broader level, it appears that many states have yet to see the benefits of international migration, and to adopt policies that enhance human mobility rather than obstruct it. To this day, some governments prioritise the control of borders over the protection of people. Many fail to realise that migration is inevitable and cannot be stopped, but that migration is manageable, and for this states themselves, rather than smugglers, must ultimately take responsibility.

XV.4 A lack of cooperation

The reactions and responses of states to irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants have often been characterised by ad hoc measures accompanied by populist rhetoric. Most of the initiatives taken by states have been short-term rather than strategic, and not in a spirit of cooperation and burden-sharing. Across the Balkans, narrow and nationalistic views prevail

in nearly all matters pertaining to migration and asylum systems.

When borders were closed, fences erected and controls instituted, states gave little consideration to the impact such measures would have on neighbouring states and on other transit points and destinations countries along the Balkan route. In many cases, these measures simply displaced migration routes, passed problems and people from one country to another, or pushed irregular migrants into clandestine avenues of migration and into the hands of smugglers.

In the context of irregular migration, cooperation within the European Union and across the EU's borders has been, at best, selective, and has mostly been limited to law enforcement and border protection measures. Cooperation to protect the rights of refugees and other migrants, and to set up legal avenues of migration, has for the most part been non-existent, and continues to be a thorny issue. This goes hand in hand with a failure to fully engage with and trust the experience of international refugee and migration organisations that have the know-how and expertise to manage migration flows, and to do so humanely.

In many places, NGOs had to fill the gaps and take up duties when states were unwilling or unable to render basic assistance to those in need. But even if NGOs took on responsibilities when states failed to do, they were often blamed for the arrival of irregular migrants or were obstructed in their work.

Calls for greater cooperation and coordination between EU Member States are not new, but many states, chief among them the Visegrad States of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as Austria, remain fiercly opposed to the concept of burden sharing and solidarity, and refuse to accept a quota system whereby asylum seekers would be distributed fairly across EU Member States.

What is urgently needed is a coordinated EU asylum and migration policy that articulates basic priniciples to which either all Member States or a group of willing partners agree, and on which practical measures can be built. The implementation of these principles should be supported through additional funding awarded to cooperating states. These initiatives need to go hand in hand with close partnerships that bring together government agencies, international organisations, NGOs, and civil society. Moreover, the EU and its Member States need to engage actively with and support non-EU Member States in developing strategies and practical solutions. The answer to irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants along the Balkans route must not give rise to a 'Fortress Europe' but to the emergence of collegial, strategic and cooperative measures that promote safe migration, prevent the smuggling of migrants, and protect the rights of all migrants.

Notes

1 IOM, 'Misisng Migrants: Tracking Deaths along Migratory Routes' (12 June 2018) <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean> (accessed 11 July 2018).

XVI THE WAY FORWARD

Although this report did not document and analyse specific policy actions and other countermeasures to prevent and stop irregular migration and migrant smuggling, and while it is beyond its scope to develop concrete policy recommendations, several key observations nevertheless emerge from this research.

The following points must not be understood as a comprehensive plan of action to solve the myriad challenges faced by Balkan countries in the context of irregular migration and migrant smuggling. They merely serve as issues for further consideration, as components and parameters for future planning and policy making, and as an inspiration for further public debate and scholarly work.

(1) Further and ongoing research, data collection, documentation, and analysis are an essential prerequisite for a better understanding, meaningful discussion, and sustainable, evidence-based policymaking on irregular migration and migrant smuggling. This includes

- comprehensive collection and dissemination of relevant data by government agencies,
- documentation and independent analysis of the levels and charateristics of irregular migration and migrant smuggling,
- critical examination of measures adopted to stop these phenomena through properly funded scholarly research,
- collaboration between government entities, international organisations, NGOs, academic scholars, and other experts,
- disclosure and dissemination of data and research findings, and
- informed public debate and community engagement about these issues.

(2) One of the main lessons learned from the experience of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the 2011–2017 period is the need for better planning and projection. To anticipate and prepare for irregular migration flows, it is necessary to:

- monitor and analyse political, economic, demographic and environmental developments which can lead to conflict, poverty, unemployment, the loss of livelihoods, and thus to forced displacement and voluntary or involuntary emigration,
- engage directly with source countries in order to address the causes of displacement and, as far as possible, develop pathways for safe departures,
- support countries of first refuge in their efforts to protect, accommodate, and assist irregular migrants,
- greatly increase the number, quality and speed of avenues that offer resettlement from source countries and countries of first refuge to safe third countries,
- collaborate closely with, and adequately support the work of, international organisations, NGOs, local communities and other areas of civil society,
- develop contingency plans for situations involving sudden displacement and mass exodus, and
- facilitate the voluntary return of migrants where it is safe to do so.

(3) The smuggling of migrants prospers in situations where fences, fortifications, border controls, visa regimes, or other legal or practical measures obstruct a demand for international migration. To prevent the smuggling of migrants, reduce the loss of lives and other dangers associated with smuggling, and to deter would-be smugglers, states must:

- create and promote legal avenues of migration to reduce the demand for smuggling,

- facilitate access to official travel and identity documents,
- criminalise profit-seeking migrant smuggling, especially in situations in which smugglers place the health and lives of smuggled migrants at risk, or if they exploit smuggled migrants or treat them inhumanely,
- ensure that smuggling for humanitarian and altruistiuc purposes is not criminally sanctioned, and
- not criminalise smuggled migrants merely for being the object of this crime.

(4) International migration and human mobility are realities, and are certain to grow in the future. If properly managed, they create benefits, opportunity, experience, safety, exchange, prosperity and understanding for communities in sending and receiving countries. Migration cannot be stopped by states, but states should:

- monitor demographic developments and engage in comprehensive population and migration planning,
- approach migration law and policy as a social, economic, family, and international relations matter, and shift it away from the mandate of law enforcement and national security statutes and agencies,
- identify existing and future labour demand in skilled and low-skilled sectors, and set up avenues for labour migration,
- enable family reunification between close relatives and foster the flow of remittances,
- set up contingencies for the resettlement of refugees from source countries and countries of first refuge, as well as for persons seeking asylum at the border or in country,
- develop and properly fund comprehensive integration measures for new arrivals, especially in relation to language and skills training, work, and education,
- consult closely with local communities, industry and other stakeholders about the capacity for immigration and integration,
- disseminate accurate and comprehensive information on all aspects of migration to the media and the public, and
- actively counteract xenophobia and racism and protect vulnerable migrants.

(5) Greater cooperation at local, national, bilateral, regional and international levels is essential to reduce irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants, and is integral to any of the points articulated above. In particular,

- regional dialogue and forums on international migration and cross-border cooperation should be strengthened,
- the development of EU migration and asylum policies and the creation of an EU migration and asylum agency should be fostered, and
- existing international refugee law and human rights treaties along with the *Global Compact for Migration* and the United Nations *Protocol to against the Smuggling of Migrants* should serve as a framework for any measure adopted to stop irregular migration and protect the rights of smuggled migrants.

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Abbreviations

cf.	confer (compare)
EU	European Union
FYR	former Yugoslav Republic (of Macedonia)
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
n.a.	not available
NGO	non-governmental organisation
s.n.	sine nomine (without a name)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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The lead researcher was supported by Messrs Colin Craig LLB, BA (Leiden Univesity), Liam O'Shaughnessy (The University of Queensland), Paul Scheichel (University of Vienna), and Andreas Wintersperger (University of Vienna).

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Issued by: Regional Project:
"Flight, Migration, Integration in Europe"

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http://www.fes-budapest.org/en/topics/flight-migration-integration-in-europe/

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- Monitoring national discourses on flight, migration and integration and contributing to mutual understanding among the European countries.
- Exchanging experiences concerning integration and sharing best practices in the field of integration policies.
- Developing ideas and recommendations for a Common European Migration and Asylum Policy, as well as contributing to a rapprochement of the divergent approaches towards migration policy within Europe.

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