



Save the Children

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2020

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub
Data and Trends Analysis

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

IMPRESSUM

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

Acknowledgements

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KEY REGIONAL TRENDS

While the Western Balkans migration route had been the main point of entry into Europe for refugees and migrants for several years, during the second and third quarter of 2020, Western and Central Mediterranean routes¹ took over, seeing a major increase in the number of arrivals. In parallel, for the first time in a while, land routes through Greece were more used than the sea route, taking refugees and migrants from Turkey to the Greek islands. Nevertheless, migration movement through the Balkans remained high in the third quarter of 2020, with 2,689 new refugee and migrant entries officially registered².

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of new entries to Greece (2,600) compared to the second quarter of 2020, but the figures have not reached pre-COVID-19 levels. During this period, UNHCR reported 9,500 new beneficiaries in Serbia, Bulgarian authorities registered 1,484 people who entered the country irregularly, while 7,235 new refugee and migrant arrivals were recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 15,056 in North Macedonia. In Kosovo*, 220 new asylum seekers were registered, Albania saw an increase with 4,218 new refugees and migrants identified, and a surge in numbers was reported in Romania as well, with 1,336 new arrivals³.

Movement between Balkan countries continued regardless of COVID-19

Although there were not many new arrivals to the peninsula, the migrations between the countries in the Balkans were high. N. Macedonia received more than 15,000 new refugees and migrants mostly from Greece, regardless of stricter border controls and restricted movement for all, not only refugees. Movement through Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Romania was also high, taking into consideration all restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemics.

COVID-19 pandemic influenced migration flows

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on migration routes is still visible in the third quarter of 2020. The routes and movement dynamics have changed. Many international and local stakeholders providing help to refugees and migrants have closed operations during this period, which further aggravated health and protection risks affecting the refugee and migrant population accommodated in official centres.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains a key country on the route for refugees and migrants travelling through the Balkans by land. The authorities are struggling to provide accommodation and support to the high number of people already present in the country, with more continually arriving. The situation deteriorated after one of the major accommodation facilities was closed in September, leaving thousands of refugees and migrants to sleep in the open.

Existing transit corridors Bulgaria/North Macedonia/Serbia, Kosovo*/Serbia, as well as Albania/Montenegro, usually converge in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the number of refugees and migrants trying to cross the Hungarian or Romanian border remained relatively high, with less movement from Bulgaria to Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina is still the most used exit route. A rising number of pushbacks from Romania to Serbia was registered. The data show that most refugees and migrants enter the Balkans through Greece.

Families did not travel as much during the pandemic; as in previous periods, they mostly came from Syria and Iraq. The route through Kosovo*, which was dominant at the beginning of 2020, was not used at all during the third quarter of 2020.

Around 140,000 refugees and migrants are currently present in the Balkans.

The number of people accommodated in the reception centres, at external addresses and unofficial shelters in the Balkan countries is estimated at 141,445. Most of them are currently in Greece (about 121,000), Bosnia and Herzegovina (about 9,220) and Serbia (5,975).

Children, on average, make less than the usual one-third of all refugees and migrants transiting through the Balkans. Many of these children are travelling unaccompanied.

The percentage of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in the overall number of children varies from country to country, making it difficult to determine the share of UASC in the population of refugee and migrant children travelling through the Balkans. Looking at the available data, we can conclude that the majority of UASC in all the Balkan countries are boys from Afghanistan and Pakistan, with children from African countries and Syrian minors emerging as unaccompanied travellers as well.

A DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ARRIVALS AND COVID-19 MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

During the third quarter of 2020, 2,600 new refugee and migrant arrivals were registered in Greece.⁴

After a noticeable decrease of arrivals in the second quarter, which was related to COVID-19, the figures started to increase again in the third quarter, but have not even come close to the pre-pandemic levels⁵. For the first time in several years, refugees and migrants entered Greece mostly via land routes (61%) rather than sea routes (39%).

2,600
new refugee and migrant were registered in Greece

According to UNHCR data⁶, in Q3, same as in Q2, the number of arrivals to Greece was lower than the number of arrivals to Spain and Italy. It is important to mention that data sources on refugees and migrants in Greece are not as readily available as they were before the pandemic. If this continues as a trend, it could severely affect the visibility of the needs of refugee and migrant children and adults in Greece and the way the migration situation is perceived and managed. BMDH will continue to monitor data sources and their availability.

Although new arrivals dramatically decreased since the pandemic started and fires and riots, mostly in the camps on Lesbos,

resulted in fewer people in the shelters, the number of refugees and migrants residing in Greece at the end of the reporting period was almost the same as in the previous quarter (121,100)⁷. Most of them were on the mainland (98,200) while the number of those in the islands decreased (22,900). This is one of the highest overall numbers of migrants temporarily residing in Greece in the last several years.

According to the National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum⁸, at the end of September there were 21,564 migrants and refugees staying on the islands. These numbers, although decreasing, still exceeded the accommodation capacities. For the first time in several years, the capacities exceeded the number of people accommodated in the island of Lesbos (occupancy rate at the end of the reporting period was 8,554 refugees and migrants, with 10,000 accommodation places available in total). Other islands such as Chios, Samos, Leros and Cos still have more migrants in official shelters than their capacities would allow, with the situation in Samos being the most dramatic (capacity of 648 places filled with 4,404 migrants).



21,564 migrants and refugees were present on the Greek islands still exceeding the accommodation capacities.

At the end of September, there were 4,222 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Greece⁹. Most of them (39%) came from Afghanistan, followed by those from Pakistan (23%) and Syria (11%). Out of that number, 1,019 children were left without adequate shelter. They were reported as living in informal housing arrangements, on the streets (reported as homeless), or with their location unknown.

1,019
UASC children in Greece are left without adequate shelter and are living in informal/insecure housing conditions

DEMOGRAPHICS

Since the beginning of 2020, segregated data on the structure of migrants coming to Greece have not been published monthly (not even on the sea arrivals). In Q3, the data showcasing the demographic structure of migrants coming by sea from January to July 2020 became available.¹⁰ This data shows that most of the migrants arriving in the first half of the year came from Afghanistan (38%), followed by Syria (24%) and Congo (11%).

Demographic structure of migrants coming by sea from January to July 2020



More than half of them were women (24%) and children (36%). Not only were more than a third of all new arrivals children, but we also know that 6 out of 10 of them were younger than 12 years of age.

MIGRATION ROUTES

During the third quarter of 2020, the sea route was used less frequently than the land crossing across the river Evros on the border between Greece and Turkey.

Many refugees and migrants continue their journey from Greece towards western and northern Europe. The well-established exit route, extensively travelled since the beginning of the migration crisis, heads north towards North Macedonia and Serbia. According to the data from Albania and Kosovo*, the route through Albania and Montenegro towards Bosnia and Herzegovina has been active since 2019.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ON THE MOVE

According to UNHCR data¹¹, the number of new refugee and migrant arrivals to Serbia has substantially increased compared to the previous reporting period. During July, August and September 2020, 9,500 new arrivals were registered, compared to less than 3,000 in the second quarter of the year or 5,021 in the same period in 2019. Data from IOM¹², however, suggests that there were almost twice as many arrivals to Serbia (15,165) as the UNHCR data shows for the third quarter of 2020.

9,500
new arrivals were registered during July - August period

At the end of September, 5,975 refugees and migrants were estimated to be present in the country with almost all of them (5,086) accommodated in the official accommodation centres.¹³ Although the number of new arrivals has gone up compared to the second quarter of the year, the number of those staying in the country has slightly decreased, confirming once again Serbia's status as a country of transit.

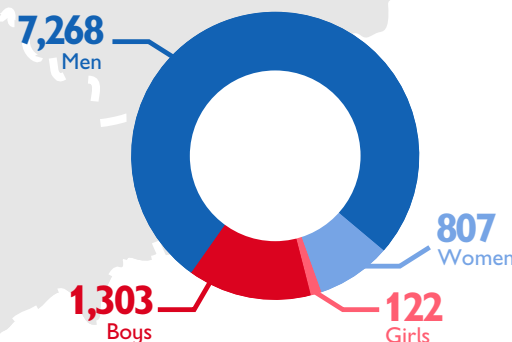
During the third quarter of 2020, 41 applications for asylum were submitted, with only three positive decisions.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the presence of most nongovernmental organisations supporting refugees and migrants, Save the Children, together with partners, continued operating and provided services to 203 refugees and migrants, more than half (56%) of whom were children.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Information on the number of refugees and migrants in Serbia is often imprecise or not available, and the nature of migration makes data collection challenging. However, for several years already, Save the Children has been systematically and regularly collecting data on its beneficiaries, providing important insight into the structure and habits of this population. Although Save the Children has decreased its fieldwork capacities during this period, its partners have managed to support 772 new refugees and migrants. Most of them were children (63%) who were provided with psychosocial support and educational activities. Girls made up 16% of all children supported by our teams. In parallel to supporting newly arrived migrants, our field teams worked with the beneficiaries already present in the country, serving up to 1,343 people in total in Q3.

Of the 9,500 new arrivals to Serbia in Q3, the majority were adults (85%) and primarily males (90%)¹⁴. Children made up 15% of all newly arrived refugees and migrants in Serbia, with girls representing only 15% of these children (122 girls).



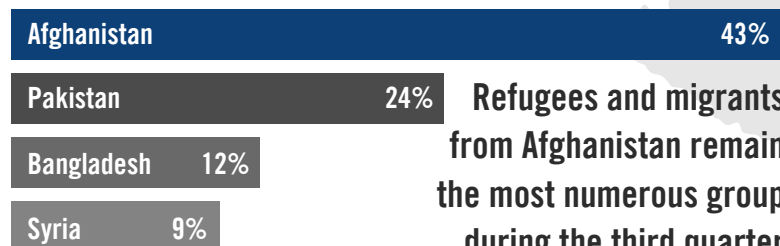
15%
of the new arrivals were children

Unaccompanied minors made up 60% of all children coming to the country during the period from July to September.

60% of registered children were travelling alone

Refugees and migrants from Afghanistan remain the most numerous group during the third quarter of 2020, with 4,115 new arrivals (43%), followed by those from Pakistan (2,301 or 24%), Bangladesh (1,168 or 12%) and Syria (825 or 9%).¹⁵ Roughly 4% of new arrivals came from North African countries and 2% from Sub-Saharan countries.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=9,500)



Refugees and migrants from Afghanistan remain the most numerous group during the third quarter of 2020

MIGRATION ROUTES

As in the previous years, exit routes from Serbia led to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary and Romania. Almost all borders with Serbia were well protected, with physical barriers and strong police presence, except the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it the most likely site for migrants and refugees to try to leave Serbia irregularly.

More than half of all newly arrived refugees and migrants came through North Macedonia (52%), followed by Bulgaria. Although Albania and Kosovo* were the main entry points to Serbia before the COVID-19 outbreak, the routes through these countries were almost absent in the third quarter of the year¹⁶.



More than half of all newly arrived refugees and migrants came through North Macedonia (52%), followed by Bulgaria

A BUSY ROUTE THROUGH BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The migration route through Bosnia and Herzegovina is still one of the main transit corridors in the region, with 7,235 new refugee and migrant arrivals during the third quarter of 2020.¹⁷ This is an increase of 26% compared to the Q2, but the number of arrivals is smaller than the number of new arrivals registered in the third quarter of 2019 (12,000). This continuous increase shows that the movement of refugees and migrants in the Balkans is slowly reaching the figures from the pre-COVID-19 period. At the end of the reporting period, some of the main refugee and migrant camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina were closed or restricted for the accommodation of new arrivals. This resulted in a large number of refugees and migrants, including children, staying outside, without adequate shelter.

7,235
new refugee and migrant arrivals during the third quarter of 2020

According to IOM¹⁸, at the end of September, there were 9,220 refugees and migrants in the country (in official and informal shelters), out of which 2,747 were UASC.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Fully disaggregated official data for the total population of refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not available, only the information on refugees and migrants who are accommodated in the official reception centres.

The available data from IOM-led centres shows that, at the end of September, there were 6,114 refugees and migrants in reception centres of which 1,028 were children. UASC made up 41% or 423 of all children in the refugee and migrant centres. As in the previous period, adult men made up the majority of the centre's temporary residents (76%). Women and girls made up 10% of all residents.¹⁹

According to UNHCR²⁰, 31% of new arrivals were people coming from Bangladesh, followed by Afghanistan (29%), Pakistan (19%) and Iran (4%). Syria and Iraq were reported among other countries of origin.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=7,672)



MIGRATION ROUTES

Most of the refugees and migrants identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina entered the country from south-east or east by irregularly crossing the border with Serbia or Montenegro. According to the UNHCR data, most migrants coming to Bosnia and Herzegovina come from Serbia (52%). Entry routes merge in Sarajevo, the country's capital located in the central part of the country or in Tuzla, in the north. From there, refugees and migrants head towards the western border with Croatia. The majority of attempts to cross the Croatian border have been recorded in the north-west of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the area of Velika Kladusa.



TESTIMONIES

“OUR LIFE IS GOING TO CHANGE SOON, TOO”

Selma* (15) and Malia* (9) live with their family in the asylum centre near Serbian capital Belgrade. The family left Afghanistan over twelve years ago. After spending six years in Iran, where it was difficult for parents to find jobs and children were not able to go to school, the family left the country and arrived in Greece. For nine months, they lived in an overcrowded refugee camp.

“It was apparent that our life was not going to get any better”, said Selma’s* and Malia’s* mother, Madiha*, “that’s why we left for Serbia.” The family has been living in Serbia for the past five years.

The girls have two brothers, Salim* (13) and Milan (1,5). The youngest child in the family, Milan*, was born in a camp in the south of Serbia. The family moved to an asylum centre in Belgrade because Milan* was born with a heart problem, and he needs regular medical care and support.

The past year has been one of the most challenging years in the life of Selma’s* and Malia’s* family. The stress of living a refugee life has been piling up. In 2020, the Hungarian authorities finally stopped admitting asylum seekers through two transit zones at the border with Serbia, which was one of the rare legal opportunities for refugees and migrants to leave to the European Union countries. Without access to legal pathways, many of the refugee families stay suspended in a limbo in Serbia if they don’t have enough money to continue their journey with smugglers. They are not motivated to seek asylum in Serbia, as they find the country is not economically strong enough to provide opportunities for their successful integration.

The coronavirus outbreak has worsened already strenuous conditions for refugees and migrants travelling the Balkans route. Closing of centres and restriction of movement, introduced as prevention measures against COVID-19, isolated these vulnerable children and adults even more.

“With coronavirus, everything changed. During the lockdown, we were close to exploding. Even now, we don’t go out of the camp much. What can we do outside without cash?” said Madiha*.

Together with the partnering organization, Centre for Youth Integration, Save the Children operates a child-friendly space in the asylum centre. The area is equipped with computers, and the team runs workshops for children supporting them to develop digital skills and advance their digital literacy. In parallel, the team gives English and Serbian language classes to children through child-friendly games and activities. The area is also a safe space for all children in the camp, where they can come to spend some time, ask for support or take part in an activity which they enjoy the most.

“We are very grateful for this child-friendly space and the programmes that you run”, said Madiha*. Malia* comes to the child-friendly space to learn more about computers and study English and Serbian – she is one of the most regular and hard-working participants of the workshops. “I like coming here, especially because currently I can’t go to school due to the coronavirus. Here I have friends, and we can learn new things together, but also play and have fun”, said Malia*.

Selma* also comes to the child-friendly space. She likes to draw and is very talented. In the child-friendly space, she can find drawing materials, which the family can’t afford to buy. “I liked going to school, although I felt frustrated because I couldn’t understand Serbian. I should be going to high-school, but it was not organized for us – I don’t feel good about it, because school is important. I would like to have my own business when I grow up. I’m intensely interested in design” said Selma*.

The child-friendly space operates with all COVID-19 precaution measures. The children come in small groups, wearing masks. Each half an hour, the team opens the windows for ventilation.

“It makes a big difference when children have a place where they can go; they have something to do, some structure during the day,” explained Madiha*.

Madiha* is very proud of her daughters, but also very worried about their future. She said that her days were filled with sorrow, as she didn’t see any long-term solution for the family.

“The families who sought asylum in Serbia live the same life as we do – they are living in an asylum centre, they don’t have jobs, they can’t travel. I don’t see why we should apply for asylum. People ask me, ‘why don’t you send your children to the game* with other families, or a smuggler, since you don’t have the money for all of you to travel’. I can’t do that,” said the mother. “They are only children, and the game is dangerous. My son asks me to let him go on his own because this is what smugglers do - they create a place under the car and take children across the border. But I tell him to wait. I come up with excuses hoping that our situation is going to get better.”

“All people have fear in their heart when they go to the game, but they go anyway because they have no choice,” said Selma*. “The game is more difficult for children. Children need food, and sometimes there’s no food during the journey. Sometimes you have to run, and children can’t run like adults. When our family was travelling with a smuggler, he was lying to us all the time. We were afraid that we were going to die,” said the girl.

“Children say to me: ‘When is our life going to change? We are only changing places, and our life stays the same’,” said Madiha*, and added: “I tell them: ‘Wait a little bit more, our life is going to change soon, too.’”

*The game is how refugees and migrants refer to irregular attempts of crossing the borders.

**Names in the story are changed in order to protect children’s identity.

BULGARIA

MIGRATION FLOW

During July, April and March 2020, the Bulgarian police apprehended 1,484 people who were accused of illegally entering the country.²¹ This is a significant and unusual increase, not only compared to the previous quarter of 2020 when only 230 people were identified, but also compared to the same period last year (922 in the third quarter of 2019).

As for the number of refugees and migrants reported to be in official centres or at “external addresses”²², this too has more than doubled compared to the end of the previous reporting period (from 481 reported at the end of June to 929 in September 2020). The Ministry of Interior further reports that 138 migrants were either deported or left Bulgaria legally during the third quarter of 2020.

1,484
people were
apprehended of
illegally entering
the country

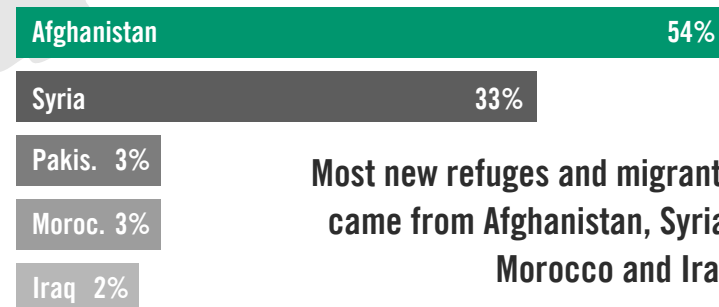
DEMOGRAPHICS

The perceived increase in new refugee and migrant arrivals is additionally supported by the fact that the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees reported 1,252 people applying for international protection in the third quarter (far more than in the previous reporting period).²³ These were mostly adults (834 or 67%) – men making up 91%, and women 9% of all adults.

When it comes to children, most of the new child applicants were boys (368 or 88%). Women and girls made up 10% of new migrant and refugee cases recorded in Bulgaria during this period, which is in line with data trends monitored by the BMDH so far.

When it comes to the origin of newly arrived refugees and migrants, most of them came from Afghanistan (54%) and Syria (33%), followed by Pakistan (3%), Morocco (3%) and Iraq (2%). Children most frequently came from Afghanistan and Syria as well. As in previous periods, the applicants from Afghanistan were predominantly men and teenage boys, while migrants from Syria and Iraq were more diverse in gender and age.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=1,484)



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

When it comes to the UASC's applications for protection, there has also been a significant increase during the third quarter of 2020 compared to the previous period. In the first six months of the year, there had been 48 such cases while July, August and September brought additional 324 cases.

324 cases of UASC applications were recorded during July - September period

MIGRATION ROUTES

The Bulgarian Ministry of Interior regularly provides data on the locations where irregular migrants were apprehended. These are classified in three categories: (1) borders of entry, e.g. the borders with Turkey and Greece; (2) in-country, meaning that people were arrested somewhere within the country; (3) borders of exit, namely north and west borders with Serbia and Romania. Even though this data does not capture the overall migration flow, it gives us clues about cross-border migratory routes.



The vast majority of refugees and migrants entered the country from south-east, namely by crossing the border with Turkey (46%) and Greece (43%). During the third quarter of the year, most of the migrants recorded by this institution left the country through Serbia (92%) with only 7% using Romania as an exit point.²⁴

THE BUSIEST ROUTE IN THE REGION

Although Greece reports a decrease of migrant flow during the third quarter of 2020, North Macedonian numbers of new refugee and migrant arrivals are twice as high compared to the previous quarter of the year (7,345).

During July, August and September 2020, 15,056 new arrivals were registered according to the UNHCR²⁵.

The numbers of new arrivals are amongst the highest since the migrant crisis peaked in 2016.

There is no publicly available data on the number of migrants residing in North Macedonian refugee and migrant centres in this period. So far, North Macedonia has been a country of transit for most of the refugees and migrants.

15,065
new arrivals
were registered
during third
quarter

DEMOGRAPHICS

It is interesting that only 2% (321) of the recorded new arrivals were children, 77% of whom were boys. As in the other countries in the region, children travelling alone made up a significant percentage of new child arrivals (60%). Almost all new arrivals were adults and predominantly men (95% of all new arrivals or 99% of all adults).²⁶

60% of all children entering North Macedonia in last three months were UASC

When it comes to countries of origin, most refugees and migrants came from Asia: Pakistan (28%), Afghanistan (27%), Bangladesh (15%) and Syria (8%).²⁷

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=15,065)



Most refugees and migrants came from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Syria

MIGRATION ROUTES

Data suggests that the migration route through North Macedonia was, as in previous periods, mainly used as a corridor between Greece and Serbia. Two-thirds of refugees and migrants entered North Macedonia from Greece (66%), with other entry points being unknown (except for several cases of reported pushbacks from Serbia).²⁸

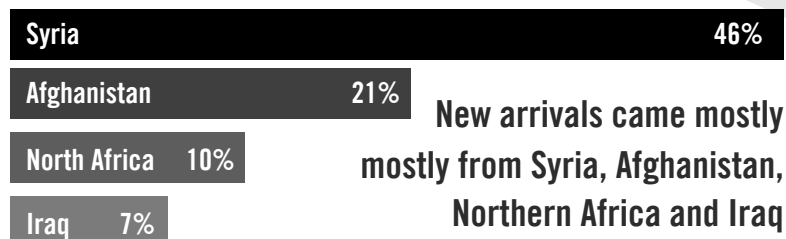
IMPORTANT MIGRATION CORRIDOR

According to the UNHCR, there were 4,218 new refugee and migrant arrivals in Albania during the reporting period.²⁹ This number indicates a substantial rise of new entries since COVID-19 pandemic caused the numbers to decrease earlier this year. These new entries were mostly adults (83%).

4,218
new refugee and migrant arrivals in Albania during the reporting period

Children made up 16% of all new arrivals, majority of them being boys (66%) and one third being girls (34%). There are no official data on the number of UASC. As in other countries of the region, males made up not only the majority of children but also the majority of all refugees and migrants entering Albania (85%).

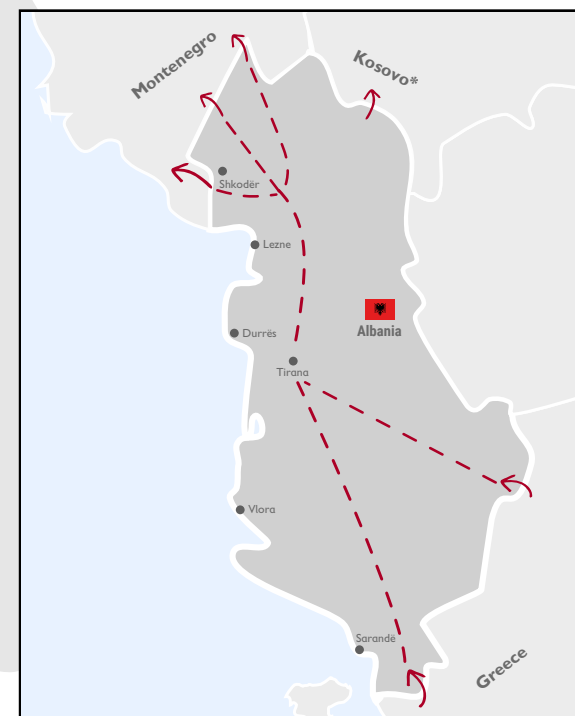
By far, the most numerous were refugees and migrants coming from Syria (1,951 or 46%), followed by Afghanistan (21%) and Iraq (7%). Roughly 10% of all new arrivals came from the Northern Africa region.



MIGRATION ROUTES

The migration route through Albania is not new, but it became more popular among refugees and migrants at the beginning of 2018. According to the UNHCR data³⁰, the vast majority of refugees and migrants enter the country from the south by crossing the border with Greece. They mostly move north towards Montenegro, most frequently crossing the border in the vicinity of Lake Skadar. IOM data shows that, during this period, at least 944 persons left Albania through this exit point.³¹

It seems that, similar to the other Western Balkan countries, Albania is perceived as a transit country. It is part of the migration corridor going from Greece, through Albania, Montenegro and reaching Bosnia and Herzegovina. From there, refugees and migrants try to cross the border with Croatia and continue their journey towards Western European countries.



REDUCED NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT

Even though Kosovo* had never played a prominent role in the Balkans migration corridor in previous years, it did in 2019. However, this changed radically in the second quarter of this year, due to the pandemic. The numbers remained low in Q3, with only 220 new arrivals registered by the UNHCR.³² These numbers are only slightly higher than in the second quarter of the year (181).³³

220
officially registered new arrivals

In parallel, IOM reports that authorities registered 554 refugees and migrants on the territory of Kosovo*, in the same period (Q3)³⁴.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND MIGRATION ROUTES

Although there are no completely age- or gender-desegregated figures for the new arrivals, of those adults that UNHCR does have gender data on (75 out of 220), 70% were men. Also, only 6% of all new arrivals reported were children (29% of them were girls).

6% of all new arrivals in last three months were children

Most of the refugees and migrants, as in Q2, came from Syria (55%), followed by Iraq (12%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin (N=220)



Most refugee and migrants registered in Kosovo* in last three months came from Syria and Iraq.

Like in other Balkan countries, many refugees and migrants only transit through Kosovo* on their journey towards Western and Northern Europe. During the reporting period, the prevailing majority of new arrivals (87%) came to Kosovo* from Albania, with only a small number coming from North Macedonia or being pushed back from Serbia.



The prevailing majority of new arrivals (87%) came to Kosovo* from Albania, with only a small number coming from North Macedonia

TRANSITING THROUGH ROMANIA

Romania has been an important transit point of the Balkans migration route in the last couple of years, with its importance rising at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. Although the COVID-19 situation decreased the number of new arrivals in mid-year, during the third quarter of 2020, these numbers began rising again.

According to the official data,³⁵ there have been 1,336 new refugee and migrant asylum applications in Romania during July, August and September 2020, which resembles the figures from the end of 2019 when there had been a peak in recent arrivals. This is a significantly larger number than in the last reporting period (395 in Q2 2020) or in the same period last year (443 in the third quarter of 2019).

At the end of September, 410 refugees and migrants were accommodated in state-run centres, (mostly Bucharest, Radauti and Somcuta Mare, but also Galati and Timisoara)³⁶, which is more than a one-third increase compared to the Q2 of the same year. Data provided by Save the Children in Romania (Salvati Copii), operating in the centres to provide support to refugee and migrant children, suggest that the centres are overcrowded and that conditions in them are poor.

According to the field data and insights from Salvati Copii field teams, the length of stay in Romania varies but is shorter when it comes to single men. Families choose to stay longer than single adults who usually leave the country after several days or weeks.

1,336
new refugee and migrant asylum applications in Romania during July, August and September 2020

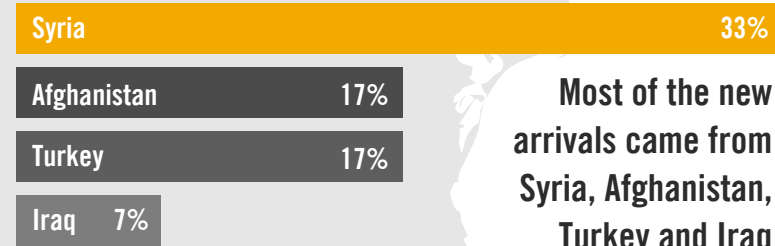
DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the official data, about 19% of asylum applicants were children, while the majority (81%) of registered asylum seekers were adults. Half of all newly registered children were UASC (50%).

50% of all newly registered children were UASC

Most of the new arrivals came from Syria (33%), Afghanistan (17%), and, surprisingly, Turkey (17%)³⁷. A smaller number of migrants came from Iraq (7%) and other countries, mostly in Northern Africa.

Applicants for international protection by country of origin (N=1,336)



Most of the new arrivals came from Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey and Iraq

Since desegregated official data on newly arrived refugee and migrant children are not available, figures available to Save the Children Romania are used to illustrate trends³⁸. Save the Children worked with 119 newly arrived refugee and migrant children during the third quarter of 2020, out of which 96 (81%) were boys and 23 (19%) girls. Most of them came from Afghanistan (46%), Syria (29%) and Iraq (11%). More than half (55%) of these children were unaccompanied.

MIGRATION ROUTES

According to the data from the field, refugees and migrants mostly arrived to Romania from Serbia, while a small number entered from Bulgaria. Serbian UNHCR data shows a large number of pushbacks from the Romanian border³⁹, suggesting intensified cross border activities.

As is the case with other Balkan countries, refugees and migrants see Romania as a transit point on their journey towards Western Europe. According to the recent field data, their length of stay in Romania varies. Single adults usually stay shorter and leave the country within several weeks, while families stay for longer.

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



Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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

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

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

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

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

Data Sources

Besides primary data collected by Save the Children and its partners, other data used for this purpose include publicly available data from reports, dashboards, publications, policies and articles, and information from other relevant stakeholders which are collected and analysed. The initiative is and will remain open, encouraging the exchange of information, cooperation and partnership with all relevant actors.

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

Geographical Scope

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

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

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

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net>

keyword: **BMDH**

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

ENDNOTES

¹ Western Mediterranean route stretches across the Mediterranean Sea between Spain and Morocco, while the Central Mediterranean route connects North Africa and Italy. Source: <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes>

² The sum of official number of entries to Greece and entries to Bulgaria through Turkey.

³ The number of new arrivals in this report represents a very conservative estimate, mostly relying on recorded arrivals, through Turkey, in Greece and Bulgaria, to avoid any data overlap.

⁴ Source: UNHCR, Fact Sheet Greece [September 2019](#)

⁵ 27,700 arrivals were registered in the same quarter of 2019.

⁶ Source: UNHCR, Operational portal, Mediterranean situation, [September 2020](#)

⁷ Source: UNHCR, Fact Sheet Greece [September 2019](#)

⁸ Source: Hellenic Republic Ministry of Interior National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum, National situational picture regarding the islands at eastern Aegean Sea ([30/09/2020](#))

⁹ Source: Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece ([September 2020](#))

¹⁰ Source: UNHCR Sea Arrivals Dashboard ([July 2020](#))

¹¹ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

¹² Source: Europe — [Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(July - September 2020\)](#)

¹³ Source: UNHCR Snapshot Serbia, [September 2020](#)

¹⁴ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

¹⁵ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

¹⁶ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

¹⁷ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

¹⁸ Source: IOM Weekly site population matrix, October 1st 2020 (unpublished)

¹⁹ Source: IOM Weekly site population matrix, October 1st 2020 (unpublished)

²⁰ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

²¹ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [September 2019](#).

²² “Asylum seekers are allowed to reside outside the reception centres at so called “external addresses”. This could be done if asylum seekers submit a formal waiver from their right to accommodation and social assistance, as warranted by law, and declare to cover rent and other related costs at their own expenses. Except those few whose financial condition allows residence outside the reception centres, the other group of people who live at external addresses are usually Dublin returnees, to whom the SAR applies the exclusion from social benefits, including accommodation as a measure of sanction within the jurisdiction for such decision as provided by the law (Law and Asylum and Refugees – article 29)”. Source: [Country Report: Bulgaria](#), p 48, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

²³ Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, [September 2020](#)

²⁴ Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, [September 2020](#)

²⁵ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Source: Europe — [Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(July - September 2020\)](#)

³² Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Source: Europe — [Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(July - September 2020\)](#)

³⁵ Source: Unpublished official data collected by Romanian General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII) in cooperation with UNHCR

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ It should be noted that sometimes migrants refer to country of origin as Turkey/ Iraq or Syria/Turkey suggesting that they could be Kurdish. This will be monitored by our team in future.

³⁸ Source: Unofficial data on beneficiaries collected regularly in field by Save the Children Romania (Salvati Copii)

³⁹ Source: UNHCR Serbia Snapshot, [September 2020](#)



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