



Save the Children

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE

REGIONAL OVERVIEW 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

This report was written by Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub, working within Save the Children North West Balkans Country Office. The report would not have been possible without valuable inputs from Save the Children Romania (<http://salvaticopiii.ro>), Save the Children Albania (<https://albania.savethechildren.net>), Save the Children Kosovo (<https://kosovo.savethechildren.net/>) and our partners in Serbia Centre for Youth Integration (<http://cim.org.rs>).

This project was made possible through generous support and funding by Save the Children Spain and the Human Rights department of the Basque Government.

Published by:

Save the Children in North West Balkans
Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub
Simina 18, 11000 Belgrade
Serbia
<https://nwb.savethechildren.net>
bmdh.sci@savethechildren.org

© Save the Children 2021

This publication may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full.

Author:

Katarina Jovanovic, Data Analyst and MEAL Officer,
katarina.jovanovic@savethechildren.org

Project support:

Tatjana Ristic, Advocacy and Communications Coordinator,
tatjana.ristic@savethechildren.org

Bogdan Krasic, BMDH Programme Director,
bogdan.krasic@savethechildren.org

Design:

Nikola Lazarevic

Cover photo:

Amira*, a girl refugee from Iraq, attends a workshop on COVID-19 prevention in a child-friendly space run by Save the Children and partner Centre for Youth Integration in an asylum centre in Belgrade, Serbia.

Photo by Nemanja Stojanovic, Save the Children



CONTENTS

Key Regional Trends	2
Greece	5
<i>Decrease in arrivals and COVID-19 movement restrictions</i>	
Serbia	7
<i>Refugees and migrants on the move</i>	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9
<i>Busy route through Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	
Bulgaria	11
<i>Migration flow</i>	
North Macedonia	13
<i>The busiest route in the region</i>	
Albania	15
<i>Important migration corridor</i>	
Kosovo*	17
<i>Refugees and migrants in transit</i>	
Romania	18
<i>Increased transit through Romania</i>	
About The Project	20
Endnotes	21

KEY REGIONAL TRENDS

While the beginning of 2020 was marked by an increase in the number of new refugee and migrant arrivals to the Balkans¹, the figures significantly decreased once the COVID-19 pandemic started. Until the end of the year, around 16,000 new refugee and migrant entries were officially registered, amounting to one-fifth of the arrivals registered in 2019².

Although fewer children and adults entered Greece, the key entry point on the Western Balkans Route, the migration movement within the region remained high. Those stranded in the Balkans countries moved regardless of the pandemic, trying to reach one of their destination countries in Western Europe.

Despite the decreased number of new arrivals and continued movement through the region and towards Western and Central Europe, around 140,000 refugees and migrants were present in the countries along the route at the end of 2020, which is an increase compared to the beginning of the year when around 128,000 people on the move were reported staying in the reception centres³.

Children made up about one-third of all refugees and migrants transiting through the Balkans, with the majority of them being unaccompanied and separated children.

Among other events, COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the dynamic of the migration to Europe. Although the number of new arrivals through the Balkans increased in the second half of the year, after the initial decrease due to the pandemic, the figures have not reached the pre-COVID-19 level. Other Mediterranean routes were more prominent and, for the first time in the past few years, the Balkans Route was not the main route taking people in search for safety and dignified life to Europe. In 2020, the number of refugees and migrants entering Europe through Spain increased by 54%, while Italy was the key point for entry with over 34,000 new arrivals, a 198% increase in comparison to 2019. In total, 123,663 refugees and migrants entered Europe during 2019, while in 2020 the number of the registered new arrivals dropped to 95,031.⁴

Even though the number of officially registered entries to Greece dropped, the migrant flow continued between the Balkans countries. UNHCR reported **15,688** new beneficiaries in Greece and **25,506** in Serbia; Bulgarian authorities registered **3,486** people who entered the country irregularly, while **16,211** new refugee and migrant arrivals were recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina, **41,257** in North Macedonia, **1,910** in Kosovo*, **11,973** in Albania and 6,156 in Romania.⁵

Due to slower migration movement throughout the year, the reception capacities accommodating children and adults on the move in most Balkans countries were full. The movement was particularly slow during the first wave of the pandemic (in spring and early summer), when many countries introduced lock-down measures, which included restriction of movement of those staying in the refugee reception centres. This resulted in increased stress among children and adults, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, as they reported feeling even more stuck and desperate in the face of isolation.

Many international and local stakeholders running programmes to support refugees and migrants closed operations or reduced their services during this period, which further aggravated health and protection risks affecting the refugee and migrant population accommodated in the official centres.

Although cases of COVID-19 were reported in the reception centres along the route, both among the staff and the beneficiaries, there were no reported major disease breakouts in any of the accommodation facilities in the Balkans during 2020.

The transit routes changed somewhat since the beginning of the pandemic, with the route through Romania emerging.

Although the Balkan countries remained only a transit corridor for refugees and migrants on their way to Central and Western Europe, the way that people moved through the region somewhat changed. At the end of 2019 and the very beginning of 2020, **Kosovo*** was one of the most prominent refugee and migrant transit countries in the region. As soon as the pandemic started, there were very few officially registered new entries.

Although most refugees and migrants still headed to Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming to reach the EU through Croatia, **Romania** became a more prominent exit route, with a significant increase in the number of arrivals and emerging protection and accommodation issues.

The number of people accommodated in reception centres, at external addresses and unofficial shelters in the Balkan countries was estimated at **139,372** by available official data. At the end of the year most of them were in Greece (**119,700**), Bosnia and Herzegovina (**9,517**) and Serbia (**7,903**).

Bosnia and Herzegovina remained a key country on the route for refugees and migrants travelling through the Balkans. The country has been struggling to provide accommodation and support to the high number of people already present, with more continually arriving. The situation worsened after the authorities closed one of the major accommodation facilities in September, leaving thousands of refugees and migrants to sleep in the open.

Existing transit corridors 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 remained 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.

The majority of unaccompanied and separated children in the Balkan countries were boys from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Children from African countries and Syria were also registered as unaccompanied travellers.

The percentage of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in the overall number of children varies significantly from country to country, and is probably higher than reported since most of the countries on the route struggle with identification procedures and services for children travelling alone. For the same reason, establishing the exact share of children travelling alone among the population of migrant children is challenging, and the values provided should be understood as an estimate.

A review of the available data for the Balkans, for 2020, once again highlights the need for improved collection and comprehensive presentation of the data on migration.

The number of children and adults is probably higher than registered in all countries along the route, as many of them are travelling with smugglers, trying to steer clear of the police when crossing the borders irregularly, and therefore remaining invisible. In most countries, the data is collected only through the registration of asylum seekers, while some refugees and migrants stay out of the registration system as they are trying to continue their journey swiftly.

Gaps in data collection and lack of availability of data in all countries along the route have been present throughout the five years of the protracted migration crisis. In Romania, the authorities share the data on new arrivals and those already present only on request, rather than regularly and publicly. In Greece, the key entry point, segregated, comprehensive data on the new arrivals is less and less available. In North Macedonia, various stakeholders provide surprisingly discrepant data, differing by 35,000 people. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, fully disaggregated official data for new refugee and migrant arrivals are not available. Recording mechanisms for pushbacks are established in only some of the countries along the Balkans route. Different data collection methodologies are used by the same agencies working in various Balkans countries, and it often happens that the data on the particular country differ in different sources or publications issued by the same agency.

While the very nature of the mixed migrations in the Balkans presents a significant challenge for the data collection, some of the gaps could be addressed and data collection could and should be significantly improved. Lack of timely and accessible data affects the visibility of children and adults and their needs and, consequently, the timely provision of aid. Transparent, accessible data are of the utmost importance for providing adequate support to refugees and migrants.

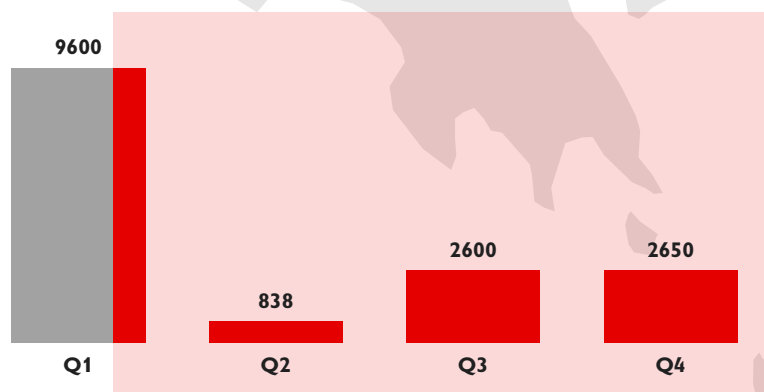
All countries along the Balkans Route should step up their efforts to improve data collection and secure timely distribution of the relevant data to ensure visibility of vulnerable children and adults in need. This should include, among other actions, promoting basic data collection standards, ensuring consistent methodological approach and transparency of the methodology used for data collection, encouraging dialogue and knowledge exchange between relevant stakeholders - including cross-border cooperation - and improving access to data.

DECREASE IN ARRIVALS AND COVID-19 MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a major change in the number of refugee and migrant arrivals, indicating that the pandemic had a direct impact on the decrease in arrivals. Although Greece had been the main entry point to Europe since the beginning of the 2015/2016 refugee crisis, in 2020, it was less used than the other Mediterranean routes.

While during 2019 as many as 60% of refugees and migrants entered Europe through Greece, in 2020 the share of arrivals to Greece fell to 16%, while 84% came through Italy and Spain. During 2020, only 15,688 new refugees and migrants entered Greece, a decrease from 74,603 new arrivals during 2019.⁶

15,688
new refugees and
migrants entered
Greece during 2020



Graph 1. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 as per UNHCR. Highlighted is the period since COVID-19 pandemic was declared.

After the noticeable COVID-19 pandemic-related decrease in new arrivals in the spring and early summer months, the figures started to increase but never reached the “pre-COVID-19” scale. Since the start of the migrant crisis in the Balkans, migrants and refugees usually entered Greece using sea routes, but this trend changed in the third quarter of 2020 and continued until the end of the year. At that point, for the first time in years, land routes became primary entry routes to Greece. For comparison, in 2019, 80% of all new refugees and migrants came by sea, while in 2020, it was 62%.⁷

According to the UNHCR data⁸, during 2020, Greece was behind Spain and Italy when it comes to the new arrivals.

Data sources on refugees and migrants in Greece were less available than before the pandemic. This could be a result of challenges related to the pandemic, but could also indicate a shift in the way that authorities in Greece manage the migrant situation.

The number of refugees and migrants residing in this country at the end of the reporting period was similar to 2019 (112,300)⁹. Majority were on the mainland (100,600), while the number of those in the islands was reduced to 19,100.

Unrest on the islands, particularly in the camps on Lesbos, resulted in fewer people in the shelters and on the islands. According to the National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum¹⁰, at the end of December there were 17,005 migrants and refugees present on the islands, which is a major decrease compared to 41,899 registered at the end of the same period last year.¹¹ These numbers, although decreasing, still exceeded the accommodation capacities.

In mid-January 2021¹², there were 4,028 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Greece, slightly less than at the end of the previous year¹³. Most of them (38%) came from Afghanistan, followed by those from Pakistan (22%) and Syria (13%), which is almost the same as in the previous quarter. Out of that number, 930 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.

930

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

DEMOGRAPHICS

The data on the demographic structure of the refugee and migrant population arriving in Greece is available only for the arrivals by sea, from January until March, and August until December 2020¹⁴. According to the available segregated data, roughly one-third of migrants who came to Greece were children. Most of the migrants arriving in the first half of the year came from Afghanistan (35%), followed by Syria (23%) and Congo (10%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin

Afghanistan	35%
Syria	23%
Congo	10%

Among the children, 6 out of 10 were younger than 12, while around 14% were unaccompanied.

MIGRATION ROUTES

Although migrants and refugees mostly used sea routes to enter Greece, namely islands close to the Turkish coast (Lesvos, Samos, Chios and the Dodecanese islands), in 2020 the ratio changed in favour of land routes. The mainland route at the north-eastern border with Turkey, crossing the river Evros, became the dominant entry point in the second half of the year.

According to the UNHCR data,¹⁵ 102 people were declared dead or missing at sea on the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2020.

Even though Greece is an EU member state, many refugees and migrants continue their journey towards Western and Northern Europe. The well-established exit route, extensively travelled since the beginning of the migration crisis, heads north towards North Macedonia and Serbia, with the occasional prominence of the route leading towards Albania and Kosovo*.

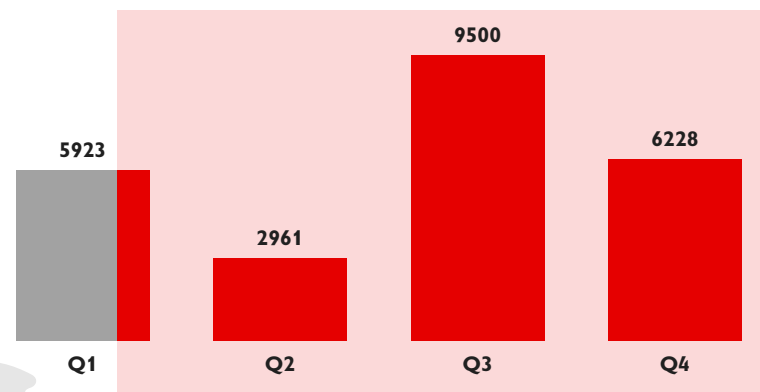
REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ON THE MOVE

According to the UNHCR data¹⁶, during 2020, as many as 25,506 new refugee and migrant arrivals were recorded in Serbia regardless of COVID-19 pandemic outspread.¹⁷

According to the same source, 26,989 (or 29,959 by the same source but different publication¹⁸) refugees and migrants entered Serbia in 2019. Therefore, 2020 saw only a slight decrease compared to the pre-pandemic period.

The year started with a high number of new refugee and migrant entries in the country, followed by a pause due to the pandemic and closure of the borders. Subsequently, from late summer, the numbers slowly increased, returning to the pre-pandemic figures at the end of the year. Similar to previous years, the highest number of refugees and migrants transiting through Serbia was observed in the third quarter of the year.

25,506
new refugee and
migrant arrivals
were recorded in
Serbia during 2020



Graph 2. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 as per UNHCR with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

Although humanitarian activities in Serbia were downscaled due to the pandemic, Save the Children and its partners managed to provide services to 3,722 newly arrived refugees and migrants (in total more than 6,000 of both new and old beneficiaries) throughout the year¹⁹. More than one third of beneficiaries in 2020 were children (38%).

DEMOGRAPHICS

Information on the number of refugees and migrants in Serbia, their structure and other characteristics is often imprecise or unavailable, while 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. More than a third of beneficiaries were children (38%) who were supported through child protection services, information sharing, psycho-social support and educational activities. Two-thirds of the children were UASCs, with almost all of them being boys.

Gender and age-segregated data of the official new arrivals²⁰ show that the structure of migrants has not changed significantly compared to the previous year. Most of the official refugee and migrant arrivals throughout 2020 were adults (83%), out of which the most were male (97% of adults). As in the previous year, children made up 17% of new arrivals, with most of them being boys (86% of children in 2020). Almost two-thirds of children coming to Serbia during 2020 were unaccompanied and separated children (62%), which is similar to the 2019 data (69%). Only 4% of the new arrivals were women and girls.²¹

62% of registered children were unaccompanied and separated

In 2020 almost half of refugees and migrants arriving in Serbia came from Afghanistan (48%), followed by those from Pakistan (19%), Syria (12%), Bangladesh (8%), Morocco (2%) and Iraq (2%). The countries of origin were similar to 2019 except for a somewhat lower percentage of those coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan (Afghani migrants made 38% of new arrivals, those from Pakistan 28% and Syrians 8% in 2019).²²

Refugees and migrants by country of origin

Afghanistan	48%
Pakistan	19%
Syria	12%
Bangladesh	8%
Moroc.	2%
Iraq	2%

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 attempt to leave Serbia irregularly.

While in the last months of 2019 and first quarter of 2020, most migrants and refugees came to Serbia through Kosovo*, entry points dramatically changed after the COVID-19 pandemic when, due to low number of arrivals registered, Kosovo* almost disappeared from the route map.



Most of the arrivals to Serbia after mid-March happened through the border with North Macedonia (79%).²³

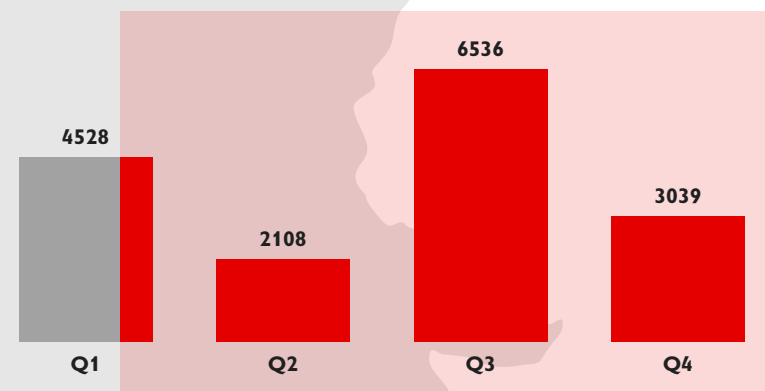
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

BUSY ROUTE THROUGH BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Just as with the other countries in the Balkans, during the first wave of the pandemic, there were fewer arrivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the numbers picked up pace toward the end of the year. The situation for refugees and migrants in the country additionally deteriorated with the authorities' decision to close key accommodation facilities in the Una-Sana Canton. This left a large number of migrants, including children, without shelter. The migration route through Bosnia and Herzegovina remained one of the main transit corridors in the region in 2020. There were 16,211 new refugee and migrant arrivals registered during 2020^{24,25}, which is around 45% less than in 2019.²⁶

16,211
new refugee and
migrant arrivals
registered during
2020

The real figures are possibly much higher, since refugees and migrants (including children) can only be registered if there is available accommodation – otherwise, they remain invisible.



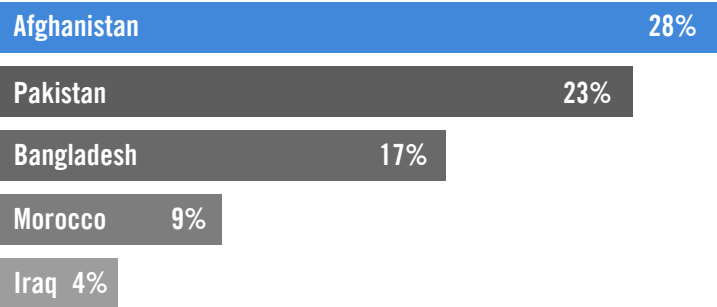
Graph 3. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 as per UNHCR with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

According to the data shared by the UNHCR, at the end of December 2020,²⁷ there were 9,517 refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is slightly less than in the same period in 2019 (8,973). More than half of the people (5,983) were accommodated in refugee centres across the country, mainly in the Una-Sana Canton, according to organizations managing the centres²⁸. The same source indicates that there were 1,062 children in various reception centres at the end of 2020, which means that 18% of all accommodated refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina were children. Almost a half of them (49%) were UASCs. For comparison, at the end of 2019 children made up 23% of refugees and migrants accommodated in the centres, with 62% being UASC.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Fully disaggregated official data for new refugee and migrant arrivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not available. The only available data shared by UNHCR shows that 28% of new arrivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina came from Afghanistan, 23% from Pakistan, 17% from Bangladesh, 9% from Morocco and 4% from Iraq.²⁹ Interestingly, refugees and migrants from Pakistan were not as prominent as they were during 2019, when they made up the most numerous group of new arrivals (32%) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although they are numerous among new arrivals in most Balkan countries, refugees and migrants from Syria were not frequently registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020 (3%).

Refugees and migrants by country of origin



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 data³⁰, most migrants coming to Bosnia and Herzegovina from a single country came from Serbia (76%) followed by Montenegro (15%). 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. Most attempts to cross the Croatian border have been recorded at the northwest border in the area of Bihac and Velika Kladusa.

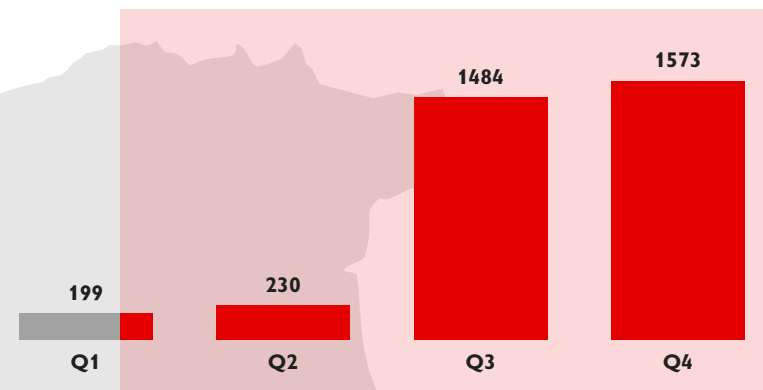
BULGARIA

MIGRATION FLOW

In 2020, Bulgarian police apprehended 3,486 refugees and migrants entering the country, which is 37% more than in 2019.³¹ Although the number of new arrivals declined considerably during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring and early summer, migration flow increased substantially in the second half of the year when 88% of all apprehensions happened.

The number of refugees and migrants reported to be in the official centres or at “external addresses”³² gradually grew as the year progressed. At the end of December 2020, there were 1,228 people officially in the country (compared to 601 at the end of the first quarter and at the end of), with most of them accommodated in the refugee and migrant centres.

3,486
people were
apprehended
while entering
the country



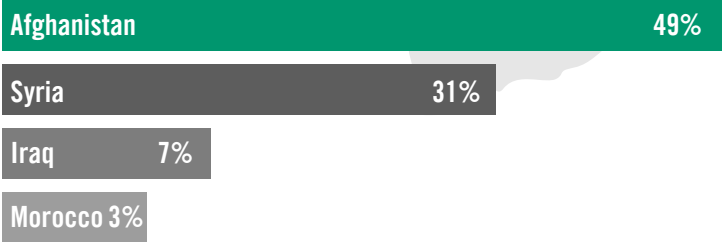
Graph 4. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 as per Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

DEMOGRAPHICS

Data provided by the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees³³ shows that 3,525 new refugees and migrants applied for international protection in Bulgaria during 2020. This is an increase of 39% compared to 2019, confirming that the trend of applications for international protection follow the same pattern as the trend of border-crossing attempts. The applicants were mostly adults (2,400 or 68%). Similarly to the previous reporting periods, men made up 91% and women 9% of all adults. The majority of new child applicants were boys (965 or 86%). Women and girls made up 10% of all new migrant and refugee cases recorded in Bulgaria during the relevant period, a common finding for this country throughout different periods.³⁴

Most of these new arrivals came from Afghanistan (49%) and Syria (31%), followed by Iraq (7%) and Morocco (3%). The structure of new arrivals (per country of origin, gender and age) is largely unchanged compared to 2019. During 2019, 34% of new arrivals were children, while woman and girls made up 14% of the new arrivals; refugees and migrants mostly came from Afghanistan (46%) and Syria (23%), followed by those from Iraq (14%). As in the previous years, the applicants from Afghanistan were predominantly men and teenage boys, while migrants from Syria and Iraq had a more balanced gender and age ratio.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin



MIGRATION ROUTES

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

Most of the refugees and migrants entered the country from the south-east, by crossing the borders with Turkey and Greece. Some of the refugees and migrants were pushed back from Serbia. Migrants and refugees left the country through Serbia and, to a lesser extent, through Romania³⁵.

NORTH MACEDONIA

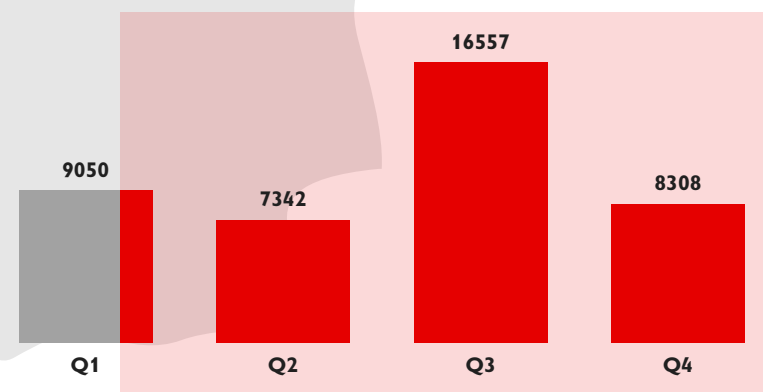
THE BUSIEST ROUTE IN THE REGION

According to the UNHCR data, the number of arrivals to North Macedonia during 2020 was larger than in 2019, with 41,257³⁶ newly registered refugees and migrants. According to the same source, there were 40,626 new entries during the previous year³⁷. In parallel, IOM suggests that only 5,375 new refugees and migrants officially entered North Macedonia in 2020.³⁸

41,257
newly registered
refugees and
migrants

Possible reason for such a large data discrepancy could lie in different methodologies used to measure new arrivals (official police numbers vs those coming from field workers).

Although there is no publicly available data on the number of migrants residing in North Macedonian refugee and migrant centres at the end of this period, there is little evidence to suggest that the situation has changed compared to previous years, as North Macedonia was and remains a country of transit for most migrants.



Graph 5. Number of the new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 as per UNHCR with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

DEMOGRAPHICS

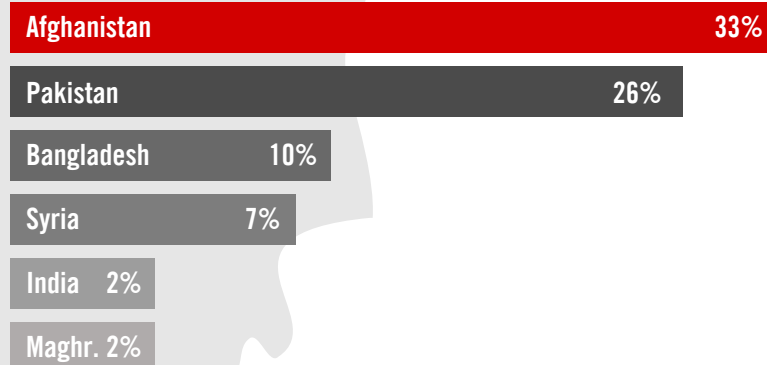
During 2020, children made up 3% of all new arrivals in North Macedonia, while in 2019, they made up more than a third of the new refugee and migrant population (38%).³⁹

Unaccompanied and separated children made the majority of the officially registered child arrivals (70%), which is higher than in 2019 (53%). Women and girls made up only 1% of all new arrivals in 2020, which is also less than usual (for comparison, in 2019, women and girls made up 6% in the refugee and migrant population).⁴⁰

70% of all children entering North Macedonia were UASC

Countries of origin resemble those in 2019. During 2020, 33% of all new arrivals came from Afghanistan, 26% from Pakistan, 10% from Bangladesh, 7% from Syria, 2% from India and 3% from the Maghreb region.⁴¹

Refugees and migrants by country of origin



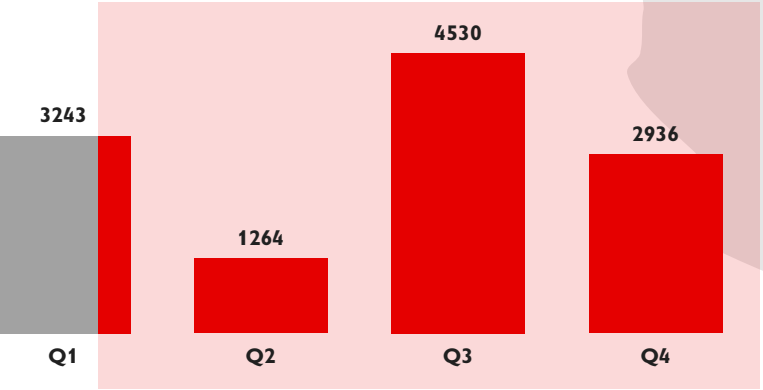
MIGRATION ROUTES

Although in 2019 migrants came to North Macedonia in almost the same numbers from Greece and Serbia⁴², the situation changed in 2020, when 90% of all registered new arrivals came to North Macedonia from Greece and only 5% from Serbia (presumably pushbacks, but that is not confirmed), restoring this country's position as a transit corridor from Greece to Serbia.⁴³

IMPORTANT MIGRATION CORRIDOR

Regardless of the fact that the pandemic significantly slowed down migrant movement throughout the Balkans, Albania saw more new arrivals than in 2019. During 2020, 11,973 migrants and refugees were recorded by the authorities, which is a 14% increase compared to the previous year. These were mostly adults (85%) and, as in the other Balkan countries, primarily men (74% of all arrivals).⁴⁴

11,973
migrants and
refugees were
recorded by the
authorities during
2020



Graph 6. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 according to UNHCR with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

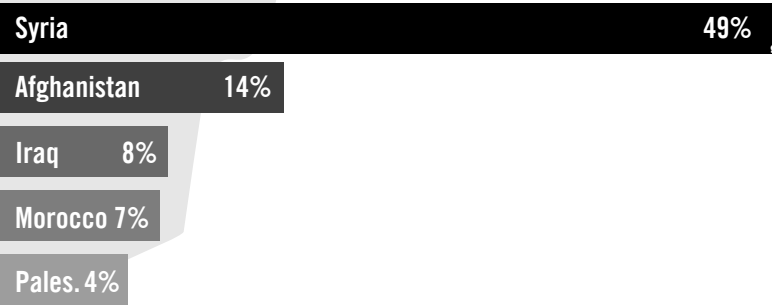
DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic structure of migrants is almost the same as in 2019, with children making up 15% of the new arrivals in Albania, out of which two-thirds were boys (67%). As in the previous year, no official data on the number of UASCs are available.

15% of the new arrivals in Albania
were children

While in 2019 most refugees and migrants registered were from Iraq and Syria, in 2020 Syria was the most frequently stated country of origin (49%). The rest of the people came from Afghanistan (14%), Iraq (8%), Morocco (7%) and Palestine (4%).⁴⁵

Refugees and migrants by country of origin



MIGRATION ROUTES

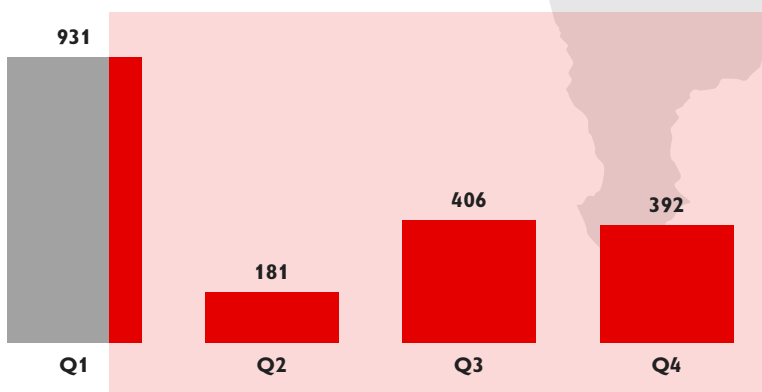
Refugees and migrants started using the migration route through Albania more frequently from the beginning of 2018. According to the UNHCR data⁴⁶, during 2020, almost all refugees and migrants entered the country from the south, by crossing the border with Greece. They mostly moved north towards Montenegro, usually crossing the border in the vicinity of Lake Skadar. The IOM data shows that during this period, at least 2,542 persons left Albania through this exit point⁴⁷.

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

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT

Even though Kosovo* was never a major part of the Balkans migration corridor in previous years, it has become one of the most prominent parts of the route in late 2019 and early 2020. The number of new arrivals decreased in the second quarter of the year and remained low until the end of the year. Although the pandemic slowed down the movement through Kosovo*, the figures surprisingly resemble those from 2019, with official 1,910 new arrivals which is only 3% less than in 2019⁴⁸. IOM reports that the authorities registered 2,100 new refugees and migrants during 2020 on Kosovo* territory⁴⁹.

2,100
officially registered
new arrivals
during 2020



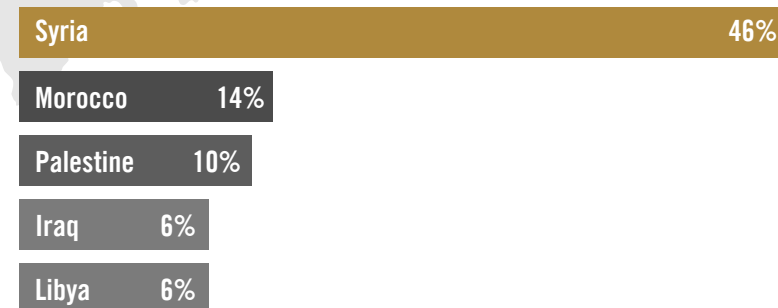
Graph 7. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 according to UNHCR with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

DEMOGRAPHICS AND MIGRATION ROUTES

Most of the reported migrant and refugee new arrivals in Kosovo* (UNHCR has data on only 874 out of the registered 1,910) were adult men (87%). According to the same data, only 8% of all registered new migrant and refugee arrivals were children, with only one officially registered UASC. This is a significant decrease in children arrivals compared to the previous year, when the children made up 21% of all new refugees and migrants. 79% of children were boys. Only 4% of refugees and migrants coming to Kosovo in 2020 were women and girls.⁵⁰

Almost half of all new arrivals came from Syria (46%) followed by Morocco (14%), Palestine (10%), Iraq (6%) and Libya (6%). While Syria remained the dominant country of origin in 2019 (30%), Iraqi refugees and migrants were not as widely present as they were a year before (27%). Maghreb countries accounted for 24% of all new entries to Kosovo*, with the number of people from these countries increasing progressively toward the end of the year.⁵¹

Refugees and migrants by country of origin



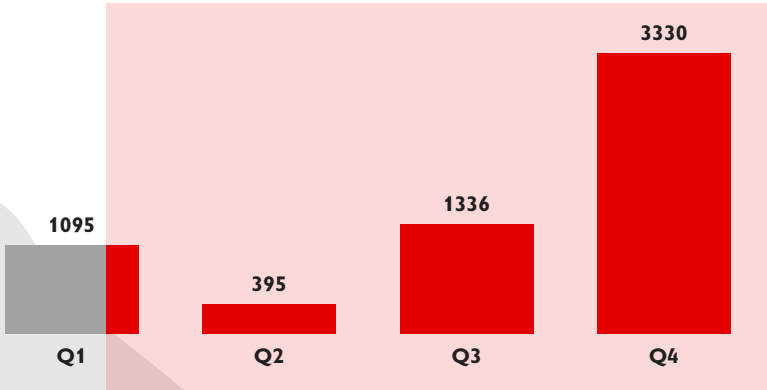
As in the other Balkan countries, refugees and migrants mostly transit through Kosovo* on their journey towards western and northern Europe. During the reporting period, the prevailing majority of new arrivals (81%) came from Albania.⁵²

ROMANIA

INCREASED TRANSIT THROUGH ROMANIA

Since 2015, official figures on arrivals in Romania have been continually increasing, with a noticeable peak in 2017 and, recently, 2020. Regardless of COVID-19, Romania has seen more officially registered newly arrived refugees and migrants than in any previous year. Out of the 6,156 new arrivals, more than half (54%) entered Romania in the last quarter of the year, which is an unusual occurrence compared to previous years when the distribution of new arrivals was even throughout the year. Keeping in mind that these numbers represent only those migrants who applied for asylum in the relevant period, it can be reasonably assumed that the actual number of the new entries was even higher.

6,156
new refugee and
migrant asylum
applications in
Romania during 2020

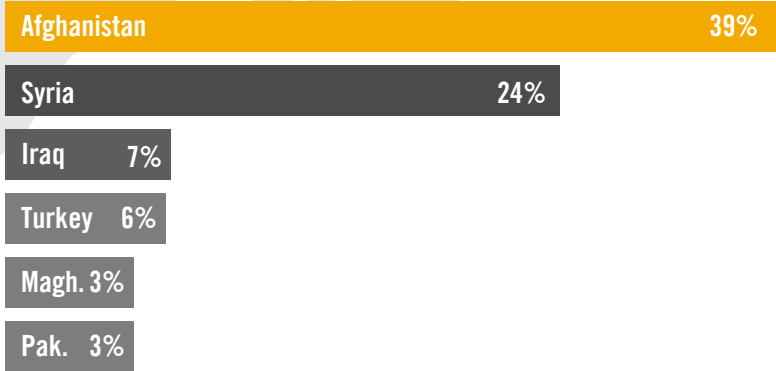


Graph 8. Number of new refugee and migrant arrivals in 2020 as per UNHCR with the highlighted official COVID-19 pandemic period

DEMOGRAPHICS

During 2020, more than a third (39%) of the newly arrived refugees and migrants registered by the Romanian General Inspectorate for Migration (GII)⁵³ came from Afghanistan, followed by arrivals from Syria (24%), Iraq (7%), Turkey (6%), Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, 7% respectively) and Pakistan (3%). Refugees and migrants from Afghanistan were most numerous in 2020, while in the previous year the largest number of people came from Iraq and Syria.

Refugees and migrants by country of origin



Out of all newly registered arrivals in 2020, 16% were children, and 68% of those children travelled unaccompanied. In previous years, children made up between 10% and 20% of all new arrivals. Although there is no available segregated data for all children arriving in Romania during 2020, based on the available data for the first nine months, most of the refugees and migrants came from Syria (38%), Afghanistan (35%), Iraq (10%) and Palestine (3%). Almost a half of those children (49%) were unaccompanied, and 22% were girls.

Regardless of their scarce recourses and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Salvati Copiii (Save the Children) teams in Romania managed to assist at least 450 children (mostly boys – 87%), out of which almost two-thirds (64%) were UASC.

At the end of December 2020, reception centres extended their capacities by an additional 260 places, reaching the capacity of 1,210 places. The centres hosted 1,024 refugees and migrants, mostly in Timisoara (close to the Serbian border), but also in Galati, Radauti, Bucharest and Somcuta Mare. While most of the refugees and migrants were usually located in Bucharest, at the end of 2020 people were more evenly distributed throughout the country.

In the same period, there were 3,597 migrants with valid residence permits in Romania.

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.

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

International attention remains 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 synthesize valuable information on migration, especially on refugee and migrant children, and contribute to evidence-based programming and policy-making within the region.

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

Data Sources

Besides primary data collected by Save the Children and its partners, other data used for this purpose include publicly available data from reports, dashboards, publications, policies and articles, and information from other relevant stakeholders which are collected and analyzed. The initiative is and will remain 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 2015-2017, 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 the 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 implements 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 Compared to the same period in 2019

² At least 15,947 arrivals registered in 2020 and 75,625 arrivals registered in 2019. The numbers represent the sum of official number of entries to Greece and entries to Bulgaria through Turkey.

³ Refugees and Migrants at the Western Balkans Route Regional Overview Q4 2019, issued by BMDH and available at the resourcecentre.savethechildren.org

⁴ Source: [UNHCR operational portal Mediterranean situation](#). In Spain, 26,168 arrivals were registered in 2020 and 40,326 in 2019. In Italy, 34,154 arrivals were registered in 2020, and 11,471 in 2019. The same source reports 15,688 entries to Greece in 2020 and 74,613 entries in 2019. The reported numbers for Greece differ slightly from other UNHCR document also quoted in this report - Fact Sheet Greece [December 2020](#),

⁵ 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.

⁶ Source: UNHCR, Fact Sheet Greece [December 2020](#)

⁷ Source: UNHCR, Fact Sheet Greece [December 2020](#)

⁸ Source: UNHCR, Operational portal, Mediterranean situation, [December 2020](#)

⁹ Source: UNHCR, Fact Sheet Greece [December 2019](#)

¹⁰ 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 ([31/12/2020](#))

¹¹ 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 ([31/12/2019](#))

¹² Due to the fact that there is no available data for the very end of 2020 we used mid-January data as a guide.

¹³ Source: E.K.K.A., Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece ([15th January 2021](#))

¹⁴ Source: UNHCR Sea Arrivals Dashboard ([July 2020](#))

¹⁵ Source: UNHCR, EUROPE SITUATIONS: DATA AND TRENDS - ARRIVALS AND DISPLACED POPULATIONS ([December 2020](#))

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

¹⁷ Although we have used two different publications by UNHCR during 2020 as a reference in our quarterly reports, for this specific report we have opted for a unified source (UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country) which was not available before our Q2 reporting period in 2020.

¹⁸ Source: UNHCR Snapshot Serbia, [December 2019](#)

¹⁹ In 2019, partnering organizations supported 15,666 refugees and migrants.

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

²¹ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

²² Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

²³ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

²⁴ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

²⁵ Due to the changes in primary data source the figures for Q3 do not correspond fully to those published in our Quarterly analysis for the relevant period

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Source: UNHCR, Weekly Site Population Matrix, December 27th, 2020 (shared by authorities running the centres with stakeholders via email)

^{28, 29, 30} Ibid

³¹ Source: Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria, Monthly Information on Migration Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria for [December 2020](#).

³² “Asylum seekers are allowed to reside outside the reception centres at so called “external addresses”. Source: [Country Report: Bulgaria](#), p 48, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

³³ Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, [December 2020](#)

³⁴ Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, [December 2020](#)

³⁵ Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, [December 2020](#)

³⁶ All discrepancies between our previous quarterly and annual analyses are due to changes in the data made by the data source after the quarterly analysis had been published.

³⁷ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

³⁸ Source: IOM Mixed migration report ([October – December 2020](#))

^{39, 40, 41} Ibid

⁴² Presumably pushbacks, but since UNHCR categorizes them as entries we have opted to categorize them as new entries as well

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

^{45, 46} Ibid

⁴⁷ Source: Europe — [Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(July - September 2020\)](#)

⁴⁸ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

⁴⁹ Source: Europe — [Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Quarterly Overview \(October - December 2020\)](#)

⁵⁰ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

⁵¹ Source: [UNHCR South Eastern Europe – Mixed migrations by reporting country](#)

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Data obtained by GII is not published but unofficially shared with UNHCR and other International agencies working in humanitarian sector.



**Save the Children in North West Balkans
Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub**

Simina 18, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia



nwb.savethechildren.net



savethechildrennwb



scnwb