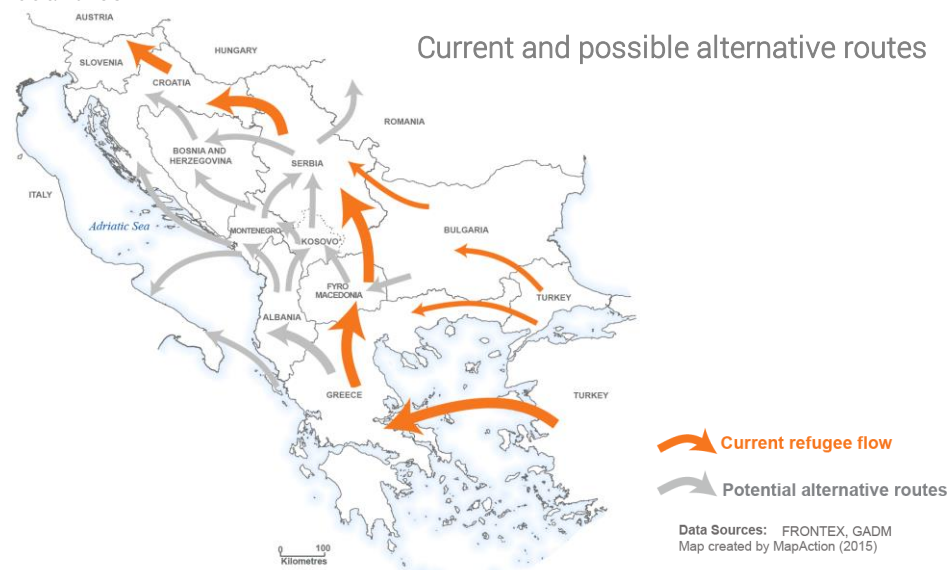


SITUATION ANALYSIS - TRANSIT COUNTRY MIGRANT CRISIS December 2015

KEY CONCERNS

Selective entry: One of the most important developments during the last month has been the introduction of selective entry procedures at all major borders from Greece to Slovenia, which permit only those formerly resident in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria to cross. In the month of November, 16% of arrivals to Greece (or about 800 on average a day) originated from other countries, primarily Iran, Morocco and Pakistan. The nature of the crisis and response has changed as a result. In general, the basic needs of those in transit are largely met. However, the needs of those unable to move require a change of the modus operandi. At present there is no coherent policy for addressing the needs of the groups and it is possible that many continue to try and reach their preferred destination country via unofficial routes. The potential rise in clandestine movements will result in significant protection concerns, particularly if movement through Bulgaria increases. Reports indicate that Greece has, as of last week, started detaining Algerians, Tunisians and Moroccans upon arrival to return them to their home countries.



Capacity to respond: None of the Balkan countries currently have the capacity and/or financial resources to address the full spectrum of humanitarian needs, making Governments reliant on the efforts of volunteers, EU support and (international) organisations for some of the service provision and response. Without sufficient investment into Government capacity, this need for external support is not likely to recede in 2016, particularly in the case of cash-strapped Greece. Coordination of activities by Governments and aid organisations remains weak throughout the region. Whilst a weekly coordination call occurs between the EU and governments along the Western Balkan transit route, no formal information sharing mechanisms exist between those processing asylum-seekers in each country. At country level, bureaucratic procedures, the lack of longer term planning and a lack of communication between the national and local authorities and relief organisations hamper the provision of relief.

The main current humanitarian concerns are the impact of the selective entry procedures, the increased shelter/NFI needs over the winter months, the situation of unaccompanied minors, and the unpredictability of flow and political developments that hamper response planning.

Unaccompanied minors: Child protection continues to be a concern. Most authorities are taking a pragmatic approach by monitoring unaccompanied minors (UAM), defined as persons under the age of 18 and not cared for by an adult, through their country without stopping them. The exception being Greece where they are held in transit centres on the different islands, before being transported to open centres in Athens where most leave to re-join the route unmonitored. To avoid this procedure, children often try to evade identification as a UAM. There are concerns over the inappropriateness of the transit centre facilities and the lack of support to and coordinated monitoring of UAMs along the route.

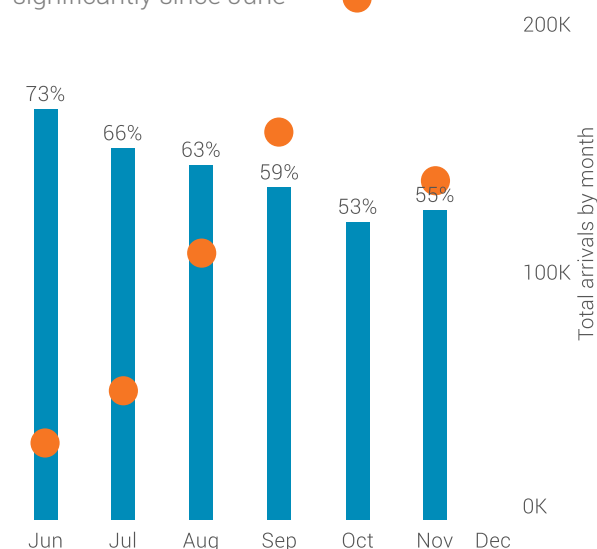
EU response to influx: The number of shipwrecks is increasing – more than 180 people drowned in the last six weeks, which amounts to 25% of the total number of recorded deaths or missing in the Aegean Sea since the start of the year. EU efforts to reduce the number of people undertaking the risky trip have had limited impact to date. The 29 November EU-Turkey agreement, under which Turkey is to increase border patrols and crack down on human-trafficking, has not resulted in a significant decrease in flow. Several media articles highlight how smugglers are still able to openly operate in Turkish coastal towns. (IRIN 4/12/2015, The Guardian 29/11/2015) Plans to resettle refugees directly from Turkey, and possibly Jordan and Lebanon, are currently under negotiation. One of the main EU instruments to better manage the flow is the hotspot approach. Until now, only one (on Lesbos) of the planned five hotspots is operating and as at 15 Dec only 64 asylum seekers had been relocated from Greece with a further 370 relocation candidates registered. (EC 15/12/2015)

TRENDS

Arrivals into Greece fluctuate daily but the average has remained between 2,800 and 3,600 over the past four weeks, down by around 40% on the previous four weeks. Most of the current reduction in arrival numbers is attributed to the winter weather, particularly the high waves. However, the winter effect has been off-set by a reduction in the cost of passage for those making use of smuggling rings from an estimated USD 1,200 in the summer to USD 750-900 per person currently.

The demographics of those arriving is changing. The percentage adult men dropped from 73% in June to around 55% in the past two months, which may indicate that there is an increase in families attempting to join men who have already made the journey. (UNHCR 30/11/2015, UNHCR 18/12/2015)

Adult men as a % of total arrivals has decreased significantly since June



INFORMATION NEEDS

- + Identification of UAM is difficult and there is insufficient data on the number of UAMs along the route. Registration data in countries of arrival shows that the number of UAM could be significant – in 2015, Sweden received applications for asylum of over 32,000 UAM. Harmonised identification and registration of UAM across the countries is required.
- + There remains limited information on the profile of those arriving and how this changes over time. Information on the place of origin, reason for leaving, the route and socio-economic background is required to be able to better forecast changes in flow and to inform relief provision in places of origin. UNHCR is in the process of setting up a profiling exercise in Greece, which is planned to start in 2016.
- + Other information needs include: information on the roll-out of EU instruments for regulation of the flow, detailed information on the legal framework for those in transit, the situation of people unable to transit and the flow from Turkey.

POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS

At the start of November 2015, ACAPS/Map Action developed four scenarios, covering the possible developments in transit countries over the next 6-9 months. Despite several significant developments since, including the EU-Turkey agreement, the baseline scenario continues to be the most likely in the short term. However, if the selective entry procedures and accompanying measures do not deter nationals from countries other than Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq to undertake the journey, the fourth scenario (stranded), is highly likely to occur in the next 3 months:

Scenario	Likelihood in the next	
	3 weeks	3 months
1. Baseline: continued manageable flow A significant flow of asylum-seekers continues through the transit countries. The daily average decreases over winter and increases again from April 2016.	Very High	High
2. Significant reduction in arrivals The number of people entering Greece reduces significantly, due to a tightening of border controls by Turkey	Low	Low
3. Significant increase in arrivals The overall number of people in transit countries at any one time increases, leading to the creation of bottlenecks and longer journey times.	Very Low	Medium
4. Stranded Large concentrations of people and longer average length of stay result in severe humanitarian needs	Medium	High

On 14 December, German chancellor Angela Merkel, vowed to 'noticeably reduce the number of refugees'. Some see this as an indication of an upcoming closure of German borders, which would completely change the nature of the crisis. However, permanent border closures in a country for which the 'Willkommenskultur' has become a source of national pride is politically undesirable and therefore seems unlikely.

Aggravating factors: In the next 3 weeks, reduced decision-making capacity due to national holiday periods will compound existing coordination problems. There is limited capacity and resources to respond should new routes open. In the next 3 months, increased weather-related local crises (snow, floods etc.) are likely to require significant national attention and resources. The start of the tourist season in April is expected to increase tensions with host communities in the Greek islands especially Kos and Chios.

LOGISTICS OF MOVEMENT

Transport arrangements have improved significantly since the summer, especially with the introduction of free train services from Serbia to Croatia on 3 December. As a result, journey time to transit the Balkan countries has reduced dramatically.

The cost of the transit differs, depending on whether people are able to pay the standard rate or face inflated unofficial prices. The cost of the train through FYRo Macedonia has for instance risen from €2.50 to €25 and a taxi for the 20km journey from the Romanian border to Dimitrovgrad can cost €50. Transport to Slovenia and Austria is free.

The border between FYRo Macedonia and Serbia remains of concern, as people have to walk several kilometres by foot through muddy terrain. Journey times are expected to increase slightly as people rest for longer periods, especially overnight when it is too cold/dangerous to undertake the border crossings on foot (Greece – FYRo Macedonia and FYRo Macedonia – Serbia).

About this report: This report is the first situation analysis published by the Transit Countries Migrant Analysis Project, an initiative of ACAPS and MapAction and funded by the Start Network. Provision of regular comparative analysis of the situation in these countries will inform both strategic and immediate operational decision-making. The analysis is based on a review of secondary data and discussions with key informants from (I)NGOs, UN agencies and Governments. The next situation analysis will become available mid-January.

ACAPS and MapAction would like to thank all organisations that support the project. For additional information, requests for support, or questions, please e-mail analysis@acaps.org

Travel Times and Transit routes

