

REFUGEE/MIGRANT CRISIS IN EUROPE

SITUATION ANALYSIS - January 2016

KEY CONCERNS

Registration and entry limits

Several issues are delaying the flow of people along the Balkan migration route, with conditions varying significantly day-to-day. Registration processes in the Greek islands are still inadequate, although backlogs were recently reduced because of lower overall arrival numbers. Bottlenecks have emerged further along the route, due to more stringent checking of documents, and an increase in denials of entry as well as deportations. Austria has limited entries from Slovenia to 3,760 per day, prompting Slovenia to limit train arrivals proportionally from Croatia. (InterNews 5/1/2016) All countries on the route have stepped up denials of entry as well as deportations to the previous country on the route. These delays and large daily variations in numbers pose a challenge to responders' preparedness.

The main current humanitarian concerns are the selective entry procedures, registration and entry limits and the effect the weather conditions have on the humanitarian response.

Limitations of service provision

Service provision in general continues to be hampered by the rapid transit of migrants and refugees. In recent weeks, people in transit have received medical assistance, but there are concerns that people are refusing or not seeking treatment as they do not want to delay their onward journeys. A continued increase in respiratory infections, such as bronchitis and flu brought on by the winter weather, is possible. People continue to be offered food and warm clothes throughout the transit route; however, shortages of warm clothes, especially adequate warm clothing for young children at reception or transit centres, has been observed. Heating in means of transportation and at reception and resting camps is another concern. On a positive note, collaboration between humanitarian actors within countries has improved in recent weeks.

Recent changes in border checks in destination countries

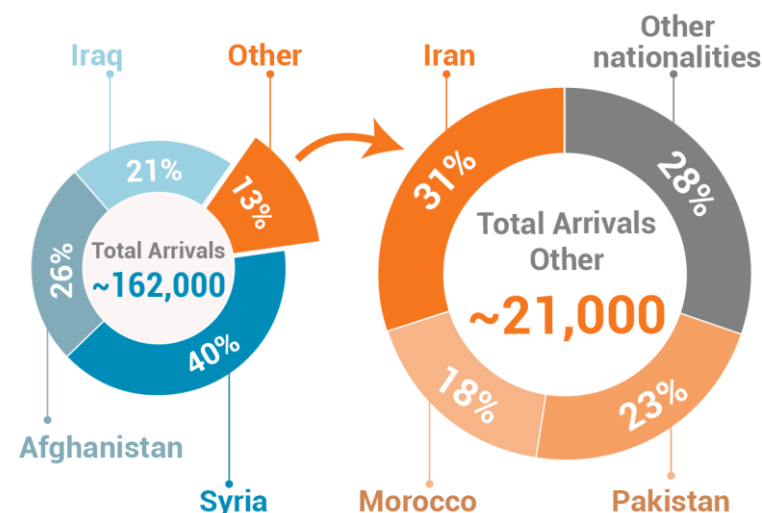
Several EU member states have temporarily introduced border checks in a bid to stem the migration flow. Most recently Sweden began implementing temporary controls on 4 January, triggering a knock-on effect prompting Denmark to do the same on its border

with Germany the same day. These measures could have a further knock-on effect on transit countries in the Balkans.

Selective entry

Selective entry procedures allowing only Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans to pass began in late November 2015 and continue at all major borders from Greece through to Slovenia. This increases the humanitarian community's concern regarding the fate of migrants and refugees of other nationalities, who are rendered unable to legally continue their journeys beyond Greece. Arrivals from other countries make up around 13% of the registered total and are primarily Moroccan, Iranian, and Pakistani. The most basic needs of those migrants and refugees who are allowed to continue their journey are being met along the route, but the numbers of non-Syrians, non-Afghans and non-Iraqis, their actual needs and even physical locations are not known, given these refugee and migrants' avoidance of government-provided accommodation. Refugees and migrants from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia are no longer being issued with documents required for onward travel by Greek authorities.

13% of arrivals to Greece between 18 Nov. and 12 Jan. are not allowed to cross



Data Source: UNHCR

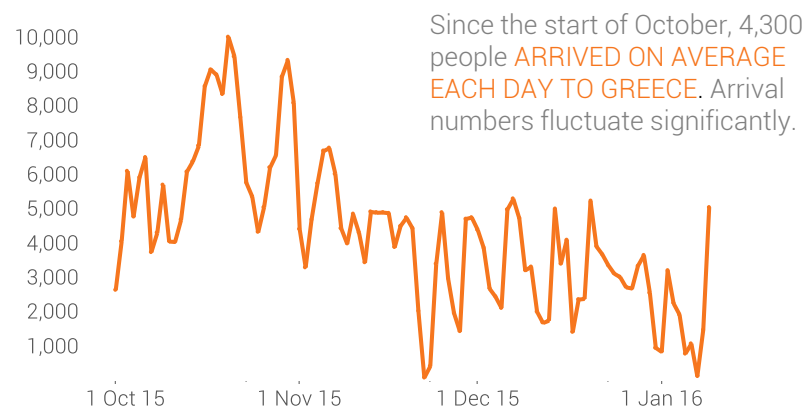


Weather conditions and related events

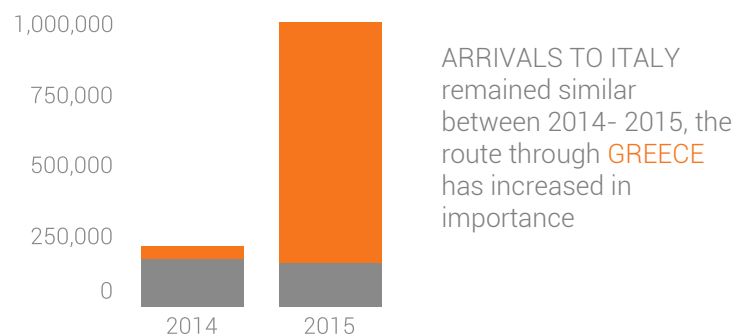
The combination of strong winds, high waves and lower water temperatures in recent weeks has made the journey across the sea to Greece more difficult, resulting in lower arrival numbers. With conditions improving, arrival numbers are expected to increase. Poor weather (rain, extreme cold) is affecting service provision in transit countries and there are concerns that transit centres are not prepared for spikes in refugee/migrant numbers, should people become stuck. Examples of weather-related events in the last few weeks are shown on the map.

TRENDS

- + Some 22,304 refugees and migrants reached Greece by sea in the first two weeks of this year, more than 10 times the total number for all of January 2015. The number of arrivals to Greece is lower than what was reported in December but higher than what many had predicted, considering wintry waters grow more dangerous by the day. Recurrent changes in weather are causing temporary delays, followed by cyclical surges in arrivals once weather conditions improve.



- + Crossings to Europe shifted from the central Mediterranean to the Aegean Sea over the latter part of 2015. This can be seen in changes in trends of daily arrivals in Greece and Italy.



- + The proportion of women and children among overall arrivals has increased steadily into 2016, as the number of men arriving dropped from over 70% of totals in June 2015, to 55% at the end of the year, and finally 45% from 1 January to 13 January.

POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS

At the start of November 2015, ACAPS/Map Action developed four scenarios, covering possible developments in transit countries over the next 6-9 months. The baseline scenario continues to be the most likely in the short term. This entails the continued manageable flow of refugees and migrants, with a significant increase in the spring. However, there are three main developments that could significantly change the current trajectory:

Push and pull factors In Turkey

Although Turkey has started to implement activities to meet their obligations under the 29 November EU-Turkey agreement, a resulting significant reduction in Syrian arrivals in the coming months is highly unlikely. Under this agreement, Turkey is, among other measures, to prevent travel from Turkey to the EU and improve the socio-economic situation of Syrians within the country. (EC 29/11/2015, IRIN 19/10/2015) Arrivals to Greece remain high, indicating that Turkey is not yet able or willing to step up border controls. Turkey has, however, taken initial steps aimed at further improving the situation of Syrian refugees in the country.

According to public statements, a decree granting access to formal employment to registered Syrians, has recently been passed. If materialised, this is a welcome development, as there are over one million Syrians of working age (between 18 and 59) registered in Turkey. (UNHCR/Government of Turkey 31/12/2015) Only 6,000 work permits have been issued to Syrians since 2011 and most of those working had to resort to employment in the informal market. (ILO 30/12/2015)

However, it is highly unlikely that this development will result in a reduction in arrival figures in the next three months. The decree has been planned since October 2014 and has been delayed multiple times. (Amnesty International 08/01/2016) With national unemployment rates at almost 10% (EU Stat 01/2015), this is regarded as an unpopular policy change. Even if the law is implemented, obstacles to employment remain, primarily due to language differences. Hence, access to formal employment for Syrians will not significantly in the short term.

As of 8 January, Syrians travelling by sea or air require a visa to enter Turkey, a deviation from the prior policy which allowed visa-free entry. As a result, Syrians using Turkey as a transit country, including the often used Damascus-Beirut-Istanbul route, are no longer able to travel to Greece from Turkey. This has had more impact than the planned improved access to formal labour on reducing movement from Turkey to Greece, at least in the short term, but comprehensive information on the route taken by Syrians arriving to Greece is lacking, so the size of the reduction is unclear.

EU policies and grand strategy

European Union policies regarding refugee and migrant issues so far have only been slowly implemented and anticipated effects on migration issues still have to be seen. After eight months of summits, debates and joint declarations, the EU has yet to implement policies it has agreed to, for example regarding the relocation process. Member states are not providing the necessary experts to manage the response. In Greece for example, besides political will, only one of five hotspots, in Lesbos, is operational.

Financial support provided to Greece is expected to be used to find accommodation for large numbers of refugees and migrants, with an aim to process them all in Greece. There are indications that transit countries will consequently close their borders, expecting that the population of concern will be dealt with in Greece.

As of 28 December 2015, Frontex is active in the north of Greece and in the Aegean Sea with the Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) and the new operation Poseidon Rapid Intervention to provide technical assistance with border surveillance, identification, registration and fingerprinting. These activities are expected to support Greek authorities in their border monitoring.

Political developments in transit countries

Political developments in some of the transit countries might influence policies and measures regarding refugee and migrant transit that could affect response. In general, despite the political tensions and uncertainty in the region, most of the countries will probably follow EU recommendations, especially Serbia and Macedonia, as both are EU candidates. For example, Macedonia is taking positive steps to solve their long lasting name dispute with Greece. (The Guardian 16/12/2015) Macedonia on the other hand will hold early elections in 2016 after a politically difficult year in 2015. In Serbia, the announcement of early elections in 2016 is still unsure and will depend on the political climate. (Intellinews 06/01/2016) In Croatia, the elections resulted in a hung Parliament and coalition discussions are ongoing. In all countries with upcoming elections or unformed Governments, the stance any new Governments might take towards the migrant issue is obviously unknown, but could have an impact on humanitarian access; resources, and funding allocation, as well as the shaping of public opinion towards the migrant issue.

INFORMATION NEEDS

- + Humanitarian actors need greater clarity on whether statistics on arrivals of non-Syrians, non-Afghans and non-Iraqis include unregistered migrants and refugees, as well as on the specific needs of this vulnerable group.
- + The identification of unaccompanied minors (UAMs), defined as persons under the age of 18 not cared for by an adult, is a significant concern. Transit times are short and there is no systematic appraisal policy to detect them
- + Additional data is required on the number of people with health conditions that require immediate treatment along the route, including those with chronic diseases and people with disabilities.
- + Information remains limited regarding the profile of arrivals and how this changes over time. Information on place of origin, reason for leaving, the route and socio-economic background is required to better forecast changes in flow and to inform relief provision in places of origin. A UNHCR profiling exercise is underway in Greece, with the first results expected in February 2016.
- + Other information needs include information on the roll-out of EU measures to regulate the flow, including the hotspots in Greece. Further data is also needed to understand the situation of Syrians who fled to Turkey and are staying there, and Turkey as a destination country of migrants.
- + Real time operational information sharing on numbers, demography and timing of arrivals needs to be improved.

About this report: This report is the second situation analysis on the refugee/migrant crisis in Europe published by 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 in the beginning of February.

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

