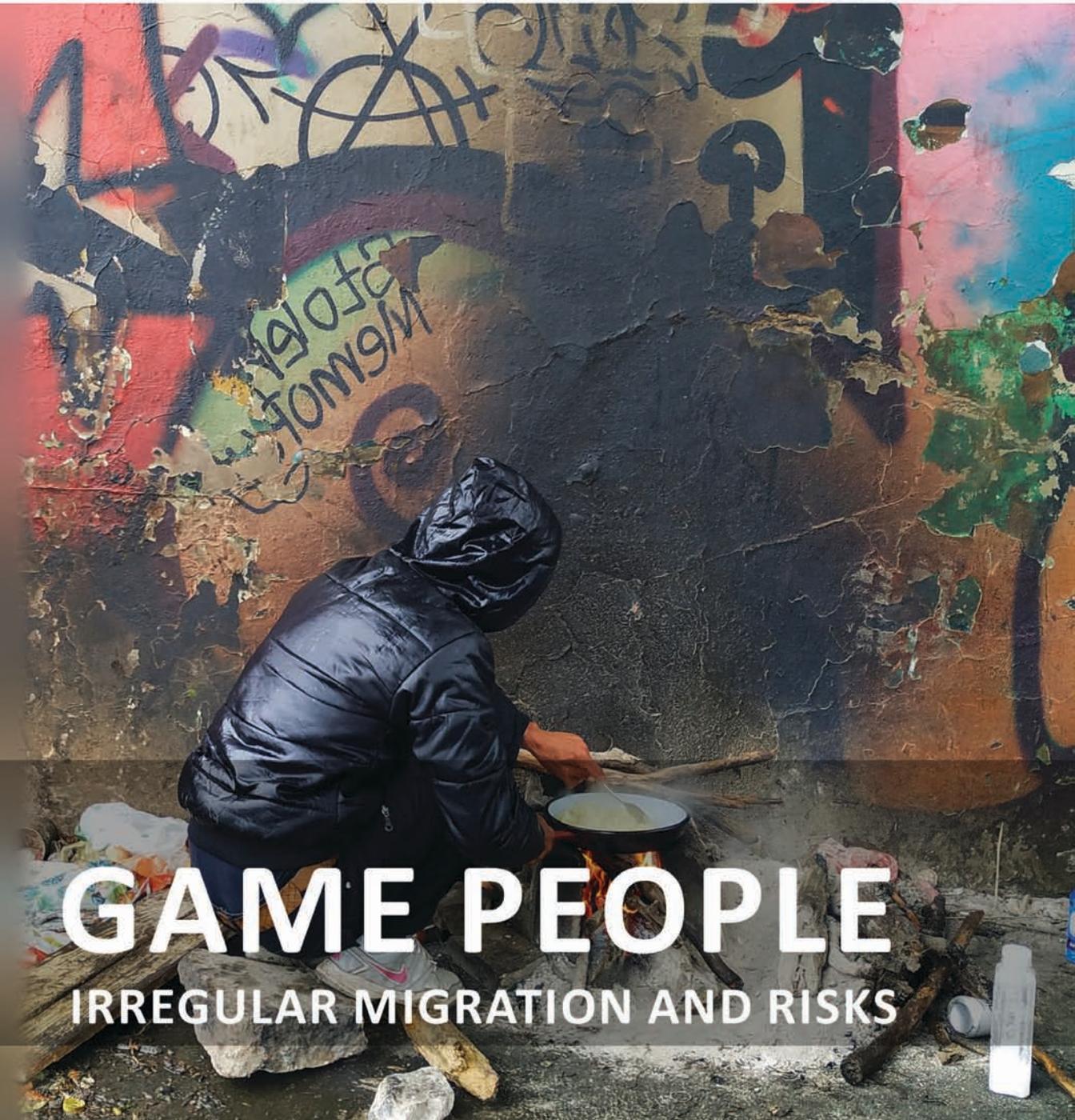




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CRISIS  
RESPONSE  
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CENTRE



# GAME PEOPLE

## IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND RISKS



# **GAME PEOPLE**

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Belgrade 2019

GAME PEOPLE  
IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND RISKS

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## · INTRODUCTION ·

A significant number of newly arrived migrants in Serbia are unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and young adults.<sup>1</sup> Newcomers from Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as Arab countries form the majority of this population. Many of these migrants have not entered any legal procedure and risk staying outside the legal system. They lack knowledge and information and are exposed to various risks while travelling irregularly, in an attempt to reach Western Europe. Such risks became drastically increased due to the closure of borders along the Western Balkan route and prolonged stay in an irregular situation.

The first part of this study provides an overview of the irregular journey for different population groups - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran and others. Findings and observations are presented through practical experience of field work in differed locations where Crisis Response and Policy Centre (CRPC) conducts activities.

The second part of this study presents findings of two researches, focus group discussions and a questionnaire that was implemented during risk awareness workshops among UASC and young people within accommodation centres, social protection institutions and sleeping rough in order to present young migrant's perspective on risks of irregular movement.

Finally, a dictionary of common slang phrases used by irregular migrants casts more light on the life of many living and moving irregularly.

Findings, analysis and observations presented in this study were compiled within Migrant Vulnerability in Irregular Movement Project funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration.

### GAME PEOPLE: THE BALKANS

Perhaps no other word signifies the Western Balkan route irregular mixed migration more than 'game'. *The game is a colloquial term established by migrants and refugees for an attempt at crossing the border, where a person goes back and forth between borders, evading border guards, fences etc. as in playing a game.*<sup>2</sup> The word has become incorporated in the vocabulary of those that work directly or even indirectly with populations arriving via the route.

At the peak of the European refugee crisis in 2015, 'the game' consisted of providing information, guidance and navigation that was often unnecessary as the route was 'open',

<sup>1</sup> In summer of 2019, 13% of observed newly arrivals were UASC. Krnjaca Asylum Centre (AC) and Sjenica AC provided shelter to many of them. On the other hand, adult migrant population was predominantly young men, accommodated at Obrenovac Reception and Transit Centre (RTC). For further details see: UNHCR data portal, <https://data2.unhcr.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Vukasevic et. al. (2018). Between closed borders, Belgrade: Crisis Response and Policy Centre, p.16; Dragojevic et. al. (2019) Between closed borders 2018, Novi Sad: Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance, p. 13. <http://crpc.rs/dokument/Between%20Closed%20Borders%20-%20WEB%2017%2007%202018.pdf>

however smugglers offered their services to those seeking to reach an EU destination, misusing their lack of information, insecurity and vulnerability.

At that time the movement was quick and ‘the game’ was paid in advance through the Hawala system. The *Hawala* is an informal funds transfer system used since ancient times in the Middle East and South Asia. Hawala is an Arabic word that means ‘transfer’. *It can be defined as money transfer without money movement.*<sup>3</sup> Transfers of money take place based on communications between members of a network of “hawaladars”, or Hawala dealers. If ‘X’ living in the UK is the son of a family in Afghanistan and wishes to send them money he can do so through the Hawala system by paying cash to a *Hawaladar* in the UK and sending an agreed code to his family member in Afghanistan. The Hawaladar in UK will instruct another Hawaladar in Afghanistan to provide money to the family member upon producing the code and pay out an equivalent sum in local currency. *Hawala makes minimal (often no) use of any sort of negotiable instrument... Hawaladars keep informal records of individual transactions, as well as a running tally of how much is owed by and to different brokers. Settlement of debts between hawaladars can take many forms, including cash, the exchange of goods, properties, services, or even the transfer of employees.*<sup>4</sup>

Smuggling networks on the Western Balkan route make extensive use of this system enabling quick and untraceable transfer of funds. Initially the entire journey or ‘game’ from country of origin to country of destination was paid to a Hawaladar that cleared payments to smugglers in each country on the route as each border was crossed successfully. When borders became harder to cross, the journey became longer and more expensive. Payments were made per border. For example, instead of paying 7.000 euros at once for a journey from Afghanistan to France, an initial payment of 2.000 euros would be made to reach Istanbul. Although these sums are particularly exorbitant for countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, creditors seem to be readily available, many times smugglers offer loans, and also many are ready to sell everything to invest in the journey. Most traveling irregularly are in debt and under pressure to return this debt with interest. Smugglers actively encourage irregular movement by presenting solutions to those in difficult circumstances. In recent years legal travel and regular migration are options only for a limited percentage of populations in many countries that became isolated as a result of security concerns and the irregular movement of such populations is perceived by some countries as a security risk. The isolation of such large groups of population in poverty stricken and dangerous countries is one of the major causes of irregular mixed migration via the Western Balkan route.

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<sup>3</sup> Jost, M. Patrick, Sandhu, Harjit Singh, The Hawala Alternative Remittances System and its Role in Money Laundering, Prepared by the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network in cooperation with INTERPOL/FOPAC, available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/terrorist-illicit-finance/Documents/FinCEN-Hawala-rpt.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> What is Hawala? Definition and Meaning, Market Business News, available at: <https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/hawala-definition-meaning/>

As the route closed and borders became very hard to cross, the journey slowed down and ‘the game’ became a prolonged process often involving years of living, working and moving invisibly. This slowing down of movement but without any significant improvement in the status of irregular migrants staying in or passing through the countries on the route, coupled with violent push-backs<sup>5</sup> on almost all borders has increased risks for those travelling.

## • OVERVIEW OF JOURNEY – DIFFERENT POPULATION GROUPS

The following section will present a short overview of the journey of each population group. The groups that are included are the ones mainly present on the Western Balkan route towards the EU, transiting through Serbia– Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Somalia. Short notes on other groups are also included. These descriptions of the journey are based entirely on accounts provided to CRPC by migrants/asylum seekers during field work.

### AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Recently, most of those arriving from Afghanistan are Pashto speaking people. Presently they consist mainly of male unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and young adults. There is also a smaller percentage of Farsi speaking people that are ethnic Hazara or Tajiks. An overwhelming majority of them say that they are from areas that are extremely unsafe due to continued conflict; they have no opportunities for education and even if they might not be in imminent danger the only future that awaits them is either recruitment by the Taliban, or the army or police. Population arriving from Pakistan is also mainly of Pashtun ethnicity and many cite security as well as financial concerns for leaving. Those arriving from Punjab are mainly from rural areas. Most are looking for better life prospects, others cite blood feuds over land disputes etc. There is also a considerable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who moved from their homes due to military operations and border skirmishes but left without support.

Reportedly, one of the deadliest ‘game’ occurs at the land border between Iran and Pakistan, in the province of Baluchistan, in rough, rocky, mountainous and desert terrain. It is considered to be the most dangerous border to cross by the migrant population, because of Iranian border police that take measures such as shooting in the air with live ammunition. Occasionally, a bullet can hit a person, resulting in death or injury. Most mention ‘Koh-e-Mushkil’ or the ‘Mountain of Hardship’. It is a dangerous mountain to cross, often involving walking on ledges over an abyss. Many fall to their death. Others suffer from exhaustion and are left behind. Many die of hunger or thirst, as the journey can last for

<sup>5</sup> In this study, “a push-back” refers to collective expulsion of irregular entry of foreign nationals from neighbouring countries to Serbia. See: Dragojevic et. al. (2019) *Between closed borders 2018*, Novi Sad: Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance, p. 34, <http://crpc.rs/dokument/Between%20Closed%20Borders%202018%20WEB.pdf>

days and it is not possible to carry enough supplies. In winter the area is covered with snow and ice, resulting in severe frostbite cases with other complications.

According to several accounts, local people often use every opportunity to exploit irregular migrants, selling them water and food for exorbitant prices. Bands of robbers are also very dangerous in this area. They are armed with knives and guns and rob irregular migrants of their valuables and any cash or mobile phones they might have on them. Kidnappings for ransom also occur in these areas, where kidnappers can hold a person as long as their family do not pay a sum for them to be released.

Irregular migrants also face physical violence by their guides that often beat them to make them walk or run faster. They report being in trunks of cars that are packed full of people, under the seats as well as on them, with one ordinary car carrying up to 20 people sometimes, journeying for many hours without rest, food or water, often leading to terrible accidents.

Many report that once the region of Van in Turkey is reached, clients<sup>6</sup> are shut in houses in deserted areas. This is the time to extract payments. Some UASC report that although the agent promised he would help them “reach an EU country free of cost” in Van they found this was a false promise and their families were blackmailed to pay for the journey. Clients are verbally, physically and often sexually abused until payments are made. Often video recordings of violence are sent to family members via phone. Video calls are made via apps on smart phones to show family members the suffering being endured by their loved ones in order to make them pay. Some of them report that they were forcefully made to take the gender role of a girl, to dance for adult men and were sexually exploited by the same men. This traditional harmful practice (HTP) is known as *Bacha Bazi*.

These payment methods are used in all countries on the route, in all houses where clients are kept until the clearing of payments. There are rare reports that agents were fair in their treatment of clients. The majority say that agents are dangerous and violent people.

Once Istanbul is reached, a smaller percentage stay in accommodation provided by their smugglers with limited freedom of movement while the majority need to fend for themselves. Turkey primarily employs the irregular migrant and asylum seeking workforce in the textile industry and shoe factories. Migrants work for up to 12 hours a day and receive salaries ranging from 150 to 200 euros per month on average. Accommodation and food expenses are usually subtracted from the salary.

The journey is made in phases because following the closure of borders and increased security measures, it is too costly and difficult to complete it in one phase. Payments for

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<sup>6</sup> Person that has paid for services provided by a smuggler.

'game' are made until Turkey and from Turkey onwards each border is paid separately. For some the stay in Turkey is a few months, for others a few years. Many migrant workers report that they do not tend to leave jobs and areas that are hospitable to some basic needs. Even though work is tough in Turkey and pays are small, most manage to save and send money back home, or pay back the debt incurred during the first phase of the journey, and to save for expenses for their future journey. Most live in uncertainty and do not have entirely fixed plans.

Many will not move on until they have to, because of factors such as a fall in salaries, police raids, and detention and deportations. The attitude of local population is also an important factor and countries where there is general hostility and/or vigilante groups with xenophobic ideologies are less attractive to irregular migrant workers. For this reason, Turkey was more popular than Greece, until police raids began in Istanbul. The kind of work available also makes a difference. Turkey generally offers more work in factories than Greece. The Greek job market for irregular migrant workers is more concentrated in the countryside. Fruit picking and other jobs on farms bring less income and are also controlled by middlemen belonging to the same groups as the irregular migrant workers that exploit them and hold back wages.

Another factor is relations between communities of irregular migrant workers. According to communities of Kurds, Arabs, Afghans and Pakistanis, they are divided and violent fights are often in Istanbul. Injured parties claim they have no recourse to justice and redress. In recent developments, Afghans and Pakistanis staying irregularly were pushed by Turkish authorities to dangerous areas in Syria, and many were consequently kidnapped for ransom. Many had to pay sums to smugglers to return to Turkey.

The land route from Turkey to Bulgaria is quicker and less dangerous than the sea route from Turkey to Greece. However, the Bulgarian border is heavily policed and violence during push-backs is far more intense than exercised by the Greeks. The Bulgarian route is avoided also due to fear of the Dublin Return, conditions in accommodation centres and hostile local population.

Many UASC complained about being kept in bad conditions in Greek accommodation centres and say that this discourages them from staying visible to authorities. On the other hand, in Turkey medical care in emergency situations is reportedly very difficult and costly to access for irregular migrants, while in Greece conditions are better.

North Macedonia is crossed within a period of ten days at the most. The journey from both Bulgaria and North Macedonia is hard. For most it means walking for days on foot, having very little food and water.

Although, reports of violence by North Macedonian and Serbian authorities are reported by the irregular migrants and asylum seekers, these are rare, the violence is not system-

atic and cannot be compared in degree or type to that inflicted by other states on the route. Since the closure of borders, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>7</sup> have become points from where several thousands of people make attempts at crossing the border into EU, facing violent and degrading push-backs on all EU borders. This violence includes beating with batons, shocks from tazers, removal of clothes, forcing to squat for hours, setting of dogs, verbal abuses and pouring of alcohol on those of Islamic faith. Experiencing such violence repeatedly eventually can lead to serious mental conditions and push-backs that occur during the dark also result in accidents including being hit by trains, injuries from falling etc.

## SYRIA, IRAQ (KURDISTAN)

The Turkish border with Iraqi Kurdistan and Syria has become increasingly more difficult and expensive to cross since 2015. Leaving Syria also includes moving through dangerous areas within Syria, with the help of smugglers. Initially, the majority of Syrian refugees settled in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, while some fled to Iraq. These refugees included Syrian Palestinians who had settled there earlier. The number of Syrian refugees that travelled to EU countries while the route was open was relatively smaller compared to those that stayed in neighbouring countries. After the EU-Turkey agreement in 2016, this irregular movement became reduced as many Syrians stayed in Turkey and Greece, awaiting the conclusion of various procedures. A small percentage kept moving and mainly used North Macedonia/Albania/Montenegro/Bosnia route to European Union, as well as North Macedonia/Serbia/Bosnia, but also from Serbia to EU borders. Many also chose to travel by air from Greece on travel documents that were sold by EU citizens or recognized refugees with valid travel documents, provided by smugglers.

Some testify that conditions in accommodation centres and cities for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece expose them to discrimination in the labour market. In Lebanon, they earn less wages than local population for the same work, regardless of their legal status. Lebanese agencies also recruit workers from Syria to work legally in Lebanon, however work conditions and worker rights are of a nature that their status is usually of a lesser value. They are perceived by local population as competition in small businesses, giving rise to hostilities and difficult relations between communities. In Turkey, usually entire families, including small children work for long hours in difficult conditions for low wages in order to survive. They have to suffer a great deal of exploitation and mistreatment by employers and are unable to report this because of their irregular situation. Many conveyed that they could not stay in zones assigned to them by Turkish authorities as they could not find means to support themselves and had to move to other areas, thereby becoming irregular. Health care in Turkey was largely unavailable to migrants unless they could afford to pay for it. Due to recent developments, Syrian refugees found to be staying in undesigned areas were pushed-back to dangerous areas in Syria.

<sup>7</sup> In the further text referred as Bosnia.

Family separation frequently occurs on the route during irregular movement, due to lack of funds for the entire family to travel together or accidental separation while crossing borders or because smugglers arrange transport in different vehicles. Some families opt to send their children ahead on the route towards EU, hoping for family reunification but are often misguided by inaccurate information regarding these procedures. During the crisis in 2015, many were cheated by their smugglers that took large sums of money for a journey in a closed truck that did not take them to the agreed destination but to a country on the route, for example to Serbia instead of Germany. Syrians have also reported suffering violence at the hands of smugglers at a ‘safe house’ (a house used by smugglers to keep clients before they can move on) including physical and sexual abuse, located in North Macedonia near the Serbian border. During this phase of the journey, many populations will use Pakistani or Afghan smugglers as they hold the route. Populations usually prefer to use their own smugglers due to issues of trust and language, however the journey cannot always be completed without relying on smugglers from another ethnic background.

Families from Syria that had family members, frequently young children, with serious medical conditions travelling irregularly towards EU because therapy was not available in countries on the route, faced the risk of death or worsening of illness on the way. Pregnant women crossing the border illegally very often had to face physical hardships that could result in loss of life for babies and mothers.

Single mothers, or single women and girls, travelling alone faced the risk of SGBV.<sup>8</sup> Some have reported that they were exposed to sexual exploitation by their smugglers as they were told that they could cover the price of the journey through sexual services.

As the structure of groups from Syria moving irregularly mostly consisted of families, collective expulsions were much riskier than for single men. Frequently, border areas are also inhabited by gangs that are known to rob and kidnap those pushed-back for ransom.

Those arriving from Iraq are mostly Kurds from Iraqi Kurdistan. They tend to leave due to worsening economic conditions and general security concerns. They can apply for a visa to Turkey, but the process takes very long and many do not wish to wait that long. In case of those trying to escape persecution, it could be unfeasible to acquire visas because of the waiting period, necessitating irregular entry into Turkey. Kurds usually sell all their property in order to acquire funds to travel. A large sum of money is usually required to travel as Kurds can have many members in the family. The solution is to sell real estate

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<sup>8</sup> SGBV or sexual and gender-based violence is defined as “any act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships”, including physical, emotional or psychological and sexual violence, and denial of resources or access to services. UNHCR Emergency Handbook, available at: <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/60283/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-sgbv-prevention-and-response>.

and pay for a ‘*guarantee game*’ (a sure to succeed attempt at crossing the border) ahead, all the way to the destination country, instead of travelling in phases. This is why Kurds rarely stay long in countries on the route or work during their journey. They avoid contact with authorities and have accommodation arrangements with their smugglers, choosing to remain largely invisible. They almost always use exclusively Kurdish smugglers and their top destination country has remained Germany throughout the period from 2015.

Kurds mostly expect to work in their destination country and rely on their community living in that country. This can help many to even stay irregularly in the country and work for extended periods of time.

Like other population groups mainly consisting of families, their irregular movement presents the risk of exposure to harmful traditional practices and other violations of human rights by smugglers, their own family members or others in their community (such as forced marriage, child marriage, child labour etc).

## SOMALIA

The journey from Somalia to other countries for irregular migrants can take different forms. Mainly the population arriving consists of singles - men and women. Both might be UASC. It has been noticed that they are mostly young women and girls. They usually leave home to work in order to support their families or to escape from forced marriages to members of extremist groups that are warring with the government. Many claim that they have worked in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia in the services sectors. Women recruited to work in Saudi Arabia mostly travel there with visas permitting them to work for up to one year. If they stay over the permitted time period, they claim to have a restricted freedom of movement, do hard work and might survive SGBV and other forms of violence. They are afraid of leaving the house as authorities react immediately, with punishments such as long periods in prison and deportation. Many return to Somalia after their work permits expire. The journey to Saudi Arabia usually takes place by air when they have visas.

Many that have previously worked in this manner, start their journey towards EU countries to find employment. They do not mention the precise employment that awaits them and rarely talk about any abuse they might have survived. The route they take to Europe can be either by sea or by land. Some have enough funds and contacts to arrange for a visa to Turkey. Those with not enough funds travel over land through Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. This journey is very hard and lasts very long. It involves a lot of walking and can last up to one year or more. The sea route is from Somalia to Yemen and then to Egypt.

Once they reach Turkey their further journey towards EU takes them through Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia. They do not always use their own smugglers, however they

are very secretive about the details of their journey and do not have a lot of interaction with other communities of irregular migrants and asylum seekers.

Somali women and girls are often assessed to be at high risk of exploitation and trafficking, however due to their secrecy and unwillingness to seek assistance it is very difficult to identify such cases. They rarely ever try to seek international protection in countries on the route and remain concentrated on their final destinations. Germany and Sweden seem to be their main destination countries.

## MOROCCO AND ALGERIA

The population arriving from Morocco and Algeria through the Western Balkan route consists mainly of single young men, including a small number of UASC. As some are troubled young men, there tends to be a lot of generalisation and stigma surrounding this population which can grow into serious discrimination against Moroccans and Algerians. This can put at risk all persons in need of international protection coming from these countries. The young men perceived as troubled usually have a history of abandonment, living on the street as children, and juvenile misconduct aggravated by harsh prison sentences. The majority of them travel by sea to France and Italy, like other African population groups. Frequently they travel legally to Turkey and then send their travel documents back home before continuing towards EU, through North Macedonia but also from Albania to Serbia or Bosnia. Some of them travel by air from Greece to EU with travel documents arranged for them by the smugglers.

## EGYPT

Until recently migrant workers from Egypt used to travel to Arab countries such as United Arab Emirates through agencies that recruit workers for a sum of approximately 1.000 EUR, and arrange work permits and visas. However, upon arrival these migrants realize that they work in very hard conditions and despite the fact that they work legally they have practically no rights as workers and describe their status as that of “slaves”. Recently, economic conditions in Egypt became worse than ever and the trend is changing. Migrants intending to work abroad are heading for EU countries, particularly Italy and France. They cannot hope to travel legally as this requires fulfilling strict visa requirements. This increased restriction on movement particularly at a time when growing poverty is causing people to migrate, is leading to increased irregular movement. Those arriving are usually young, single men, including a smaller percentage of UASC. Egyptians previously used the sea route to Italy or Turkey, however now because of heightened border security at Alexandria it is difficult to use boats. Egyptians can enter Turkey legally, but this is not possible for everyone. From Turkey onward they head for Greece either by sea or land, often working in Turkey before moving on.

## ERITREA

The population arriving from Eritrea testifies to harsh and difficult living conditions in the country. They state that men and women are recruited in the Eritrea defence force (National Service) from age 18 up to almost 50 for various kinds of work, despite human rights organizations protesting against such policies. They do not have access to social media. Travelling legally outside the country is very difficult for most people due to visa requirements. Economic conditions are very hard. Most of those arriving are single young men but also a small percentage of single women. They travel to Sudan as it is a culturally close country and many Eritreans are already present in Sudan. The trend is that they carry their original documents with them as this makes proving their identity easier when seeking international protection that many of them are granted. From Sudan they travel to Turkey and from Turkey onwards, Eritreans travel like others on the Western Balkan route, choosing to move through Greece/North Macedonia.

## BANGLADESH

The population arriving from Bangladesh consists mainly of young single men, many of them previously students and also many that have previously been regular or irregular migrant workers in places such as Dubai. The majority report that they live in poverty and wish for a better income. Some also report an additional factor of mistreatment and imprisonment due to repressive measures against those affiliated with opposition political parties. They tend to be from smaller urban areas or rural places. The percentage of UASC is very small. Those from Bangladesh often first travel to Karachi by sea or reach the Baluchistan/Iran coast and continue their journey as Afghans and Pakistanis do, crossing the border from Iran into Turkey and trying to reach Italy and France.

## IRAN

The population of Iran presents a very specific case of irregular movement. Iran is generally far more developed than other countries from where people are arriving irregularly. Iranians were not very visible on the Western Balkan route until Serbia and Iran removed visa restrictions for a short period of time. Prior to this, those arriving from Iran were mostly Iranian Kurds or Iranians that had previously been granted protection in Turkey but did not find conditions adequate there. Upon removal of visa restrictions in 2017, Serbia saw an influx of Iranians, including families, single women, single mothers, single men and UASC. They claim that most of them had left the country because of repressive social conditions. Many were affluent upper middle class people with a sound educational and professional background. These included a considerable number of LGBTI+ persons, converts to Christianity, women with children unable to divorce from their husbands, women that had survived SGBV and artists that were persecuted for their freedom of expression. Others simply wished to join members of extended families

already living in EU countries. A small number of individuals addicted to different substances and abandoned by their families was encountered.

Iranians arrived to Serbia by air and mostly stayed at privately arranged accommodation. They became irregular migrants once their legally granted period of stay in Serbia expired, while they made attempts at crossing the border illegally into the EU. Iranians had less experience with irregular movement and smugglers, therefore often paid for the journey in advance to smugglers that later did not keep their promise to take them to the EU. There were several cases of robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and swindling by smugglers, similar to those happening to other populations along the route.

Many Iranians did not wish to seek international protection in Serbia and those unable to travel on to EU returned to Iran. Among those that stayed some applied for asylum in Serbia while others stayed for longer periods of time in reception centres without being in the asylum procedure and worked irregularly, hoping to move on to Germany, France, UK... Iranians that were mostly able to travel legally and stay in Serbia legally for a certain period of time, faced the least of the risks, but the moment they lost their legal status, documents and financial resources they became vulnerable and many reported being cheated or abused by smugglers etc.

\*

No matter from where a population group originates, during 'game' they will mostly all face the same risks. The nature and degree of risks might vary due to some factors such as previous experience, knowledge and information, personal resources and personal circumstances. Additionally, the impression that irregular migrants have access to large funds while travelling is vastly incorrect. The entire journey is frequently made with borrowed money that creates a mounting debt to be paid back with interest. It was noticed that many asylum seekers and migrants accommodated at various centres in Serbia and also staying at private addresses, regardless of their legal status, found work in this country in order to earn cash for their needs or to save enough for expenses to continue their journey towards EU.

Whether irregular migrants have a justifiable reason to seek international protection or the motive behind their movement is better life prospects, most of them eventually become workers. This reflects a global reality. *"90% of total international migrant population is economically active; 40% of the 21 million forced labourers are migrant workers."*<sup>9</sup> Individual perspective on the journey, risks of irregular migration, experiences and identified issues is presented in the following chapters.

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<sup>9</sup> The ILO and the protection of migrant workers in situations of irregular work, Lund University, available at: [https://www.jur.lu.se/WEB.nsf/\(MenuItemByDocId\)/ID5180274E559537E2C1257D630025EFC7/\\$FILE/JUFN20%20The%20ILO%20and%20protection%20of%20migrant%20workers.pdf](https://www.jur.lu.se/WEB.nsf/(MenuItemByDocId)/ID5180274E559537E2C1257D630025EFC7/$FILE/JUFN20%20The%20ILO%20and%20protection%20of%20migrant%20workers.pdf)

## · FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ·

### METHODOLOGY

Focus groups discussions (FGD) were organised in order to identify the baseline knowledge of children and young adults about irregular movement. These discussions were organised in state-run asylum centres (AC) and reception transit centres (RTC), then in shelters and facilities for unaccompanied and separated children in Serbia. A total of six locations were visited during August and September 2019 – Sjenica AC (FG1.1-FG1.2), Loznica - House of Rescue<sup>10</sup> (FG2.1-FG2.2) and four locations in Belgrade –Institute for Education of Children and Adolescents in Vodovodska Street (FG3.1-FG3.3), Pedro Arupe House<sup>11</sup> (FG4.1-FG4.3), Krnjaca AC (FG5.1-FG5.5) and Obrenovac RTC (FG6.1-FG6.4).

Six focus group discussions were adapted to different languages therefore each discussion was divided into smaller groups (median 5 participants, total of 19 mini groups). A total of 90 persons participated.

The participants were selected based on their age and life experience. This research targeted unaccompanied and separated migrant children (UASC) and young migrants up to 25 years of age. Almost all of them were boys and young men. The youngest was 10 Y.O. while the average is 18 Y.O. Only one girl participated in the discussions. Topics for discussion were related to a range of risks of irregular migration.

### KEY RESULTS

#### Misinformation and improperly informed decisions

Participants are leaving their home countries fleeing “war”, “conflicts”, “indiscriminated violence” and various forms of harm, but also seeking a better future, “with more opportunities” and to support the family. In preparation of the journey, most participants claim that their family (usually “father”, “older brother” or “uncle”) contacted “the agent”. On the other hand, part of the participants state they organised the journey themselves.

The decision of the journey isn’t well informed. Participants rely on (mis)information given by smugglers or personal contacts. Smugglers often provide false information such as to the expected length of the journey and the means of travel. Many of the participants started the journey with little or no information, “hoping for the best” and “having no choice but to leave” and decided to continue even if they realized it was harder than they had imagined. Some knew it was dangerous but did not realize the extent of the hardships and risks involved.

<sup>10</sup> Run by BorderFree Serbia.

<sup>11</sup> Run by Jesuit Refugee Service.

Only a few participants state they knew of the risks but “had no choice but to face them”.

*When it comes to specifics, I have had very little in detail. I had put my trust in smuggler or people embarked on the journey before described their ordeals on the road to their family and friends. So, it could be said that there was a lot of general knowledge around about what is going on (during the journey), but we chose not to believe the stories, because we had no other option but to leave our homes (Sjenica, FG1.1).*

*I didn't know anything about the journey, destination country, how long and how difficult the journey will be (Sjenica, FG1.1).*

*Didn't have a lot of information, when I started the journey, I was told it is easy to reach Europe. But the information that I got when I was in Iran was not so good (Belgrade, FG3.2).*

*I knew the journey would be hard and dangerous. Although the smuggler told this would be a smooth journey, that I would have food and water everywhere, and that I would walk only an hour-two, It turned out to be completely different as I was walking a lot and I was hungry and thirsty very often (Belgrade, FG6.3).*

### Financial loss (debt)

**F**inancial burden and debt is another topic of interest to FGD participants. The journey involves financial loss as money is borrowed to cover the costs and/or property is sold to invest everything in the journey. Such investment/debt puts pressure on UASC and young adults to continue their journey and reach their destination while exposing them to various forms of exploitation and/or trafficking and other risks.

Results show that family members (usually – “parents”, “brother” “uncles”) took it upon themselves to pay the cost of the journey. On the other hand, some participants gathered the amount on their own. In most cases both family and/or participants have “sold some land”, “personal belongings, including jewellery” and/or borrowed money in order to start the journey or to continue from one point to the next. According to those that know the precise amount of their current debt, it can range from 1.000 to 10.000 EUR.

*I cannot say precisely because money lent to my family was with interest. Debt is growing by the day, it's certainly close to 10.000€ by now (Sjenica, FG1.2).*

*My family sold some land in Afghanistan (Sjenica, FG1.2).*

*My brother sold his car and took a loan (Belgrade, FG5.4).*

*I borrowed some money to finance the journey, but my family paid it back. Now I will have to borrow more money to continue... (Belgrade, FG5.1).*

### Loss of family ties

**P**eople travelling along the Western Balkan route either embarked upon the journey alone or with relatives and/or friends. Some found friends on the way. Some teenagers travelling for such lengthy periods of time have been separated from their families since they were young children. Participants state that they have been away from home for periods ranging from several weeks to four or five years, in some cases for even longer. Becoming separated from the group is always a threat.

*I started the journey with an adult cousin, but he died in a bus accident on a road between Pakistan and Iran. Almost 50 people died then. I was among ten people who survived. After that, I continued my journey alone (Belgrade, FG3.2).*

*I started journey with my older brother, but we got separated trying to cross from Turkey to Greece (Belgrade, FG5.5).*

Furthermore, as smugglers organise the groups, in most cases, participants can't fully rely on group support and are often exposed to risky situations.

*I didn't know anyone in the group. When people are ethnically different, they fight with each other. There were more Farsi people<sup>12</sup> in the group, and they harassed me and didn't want to share food and water. The first time a cousin was in the group, but we got deported and the second time I didn't know anyone in the group. My parents didn't know this (Loznica, FG2.1).*

Another reason why groups support is not reliable is that groups change often. For many, this happens at almost every border and with almost every border crossing attempt. Usually, smugglers are in charge of group formation.

*In every country, at every game a new group was made (Loznica, FG2.1).*

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<sup>12</sup> Participant is referring to different Farsi speaking ethnicities from Afghanistan. He speaks Pashto and belongs to the Pashto ethnical group from the same country.

Smuggler changed the group at every border, and I arrived in Serbia with only one person I started the journey with (Sjenica, FG1.1).

Many participants have spent years in different countries, mostly in Turkey and Greece before continuing north.

First attempt took me around six and a half months, then I got deported back to Afghanistan. I took some rest for around seven months and on the second attempt it's been close to four months now (Loznica, FG2.2).

If you count everything in, it's been almost six years... My first journey lasted four months. We arrived in Austria, where my two brothers and I applied for asylum. I spent four years in Austria, went to school there but unfortunately my case was discarded, and I was not found eligible for asylum. I was deported by plane to Afghanistan and not much after, I embarked on second journey that up until now lasted seven months (Belgrade, FG5.5).

### Loss of personal documents and legal invisibility

While some have never had a personal document, many participants state that they had had some form of personal documents at home but travel without them, out of “fear of deportation” “fear of losing them” or because they “don’t consider them important”.

Also, most did not receive a document in countries they transited through. Some received documents in Turkey or Greece but became irregular again either because they wanted to continue their journey or did not wish to stay in the country for other reasons. Many received their first document in Serbia such as a police document registering them as potential asylum seekers.

I could have applied for a document in Greece, but they kept me in a container for 45 days. There were many kids in a small space. I didn't want to stay in Greece (Loznica, FG2.1).

The state of legal invisibility and/or fear of deportation prevented many from successfully reporting crimes and violations against them to police and impeded proper access to services. When asked if they had reported such cases, answers did not show confidence in law enforcing authorities.

The police are thieves also (Loznica, FG2.1).

No, because it's useless. Nobody reacts (Loznica, FG2.1).  
I reported but there was no reaction (Sjenica, FG1.1).

In Turkey a friend of mine got robbed. Thieves came and took everything. He asked the police for help. The police told him he had no proof and no documents. This is because we are game people (Belgrade, FG3.1)

I reported all of the acts. Police responded with questions why did I come to their country anyway (Sjenica, FG1.1).

### Labour exploitation

**M**any participants also have to work during their journey and pay back the debt with interest, to support families back home, to meet their own expenses and/or to save enough for the next part of the journey. Often this involves exploitation as they work long hours and get paid little. Those who worked during their journey speak of hard working conditions. They mention long hours, usually in textile and food industry, construction and building, recycling industry, seasonal jobs (picking fruit) and similar.

I worked in Turkey in a bread factory. I worked from 12 noon to 10 in the night (Loznica, FG2.1).

I was a welder in Turkey. I worked from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Others worked until 6 p.m. but we (migrant workers) worked until 10 in the evening. It's steel work. We fixed steel pillars in the floor. Nobody got paid for overtime work (Loznica, FG2.1).

I worked for 5 months at a textile factory in Turkey for 12 hours every day. The owner was very bad. He beat workers to make them work faster (Belgrade, FG5.1).

When it comes to pay, many of the respondents are not satisfied, but say they had no choice but to work.

Pay was not enough, but at least I was able to save something to get me to Greece (Sjenica, FG1.1).

Textile worker: At first the pay was good but then I was not paid, and I left the job. After a while, I found other jobs, but the pay was very little (Sjenica, FG1.2).

Another textile worker: No, the money was not enough... also, they didn't pay me all salaries (Belgrade, FG6.3).

## Robbery and being held against will

Many report being robbed on the way either by gangs of robbers, or the local population. According to FGD participants, robberies are common and “to be expected” on the road, especially while sleeping rough. Their belongings are also frequently confiscated by border police and they see this as robbery.

*I was robbed by robbers in Iran and also Croatian border police took everything (Loznica, FG2.1).*

*Yes, in Turkey and in Bulgaria... by the police (they took my money). And also, my phone was stolen in Bulgaria by local people (Belgrade, FG3.2).*

Some were also held against their will and kept locked by smugglers until payments were cleared and some report being kidnapped by criminals for ransom. Many know of this happening to others.

*I was locked in Iran for 10 nights. Smugglers only gave us a piece of bread a day (Belgrade, FG5.4).*

*I was held in Turkey for 5-6 nights, without food, until the money arrived (Belgrade, FG5.4).*

*I was kidnapped at the Turkish-Iranian border by Kurdish criminals who were operating in the area. I paid 4.000 dollars to be released (Sjenica, FG1.1).*

## Detention in inadequate conditions

Many participants do not differentiate between loss of freedom from being held against will by smugglers or being detained by police for trying to cross the border irregularly and many reported inadequate conditions in detention in procedures they did not understand properly.

*Each time I was pushed-back by Bulgarian police, Turkish police held me for three days and on one occasion I was held for month and a half. During that time, I was constantly ordered to sign AVR papers (Assisted Voluntary Return). They did not take my fingerprints nor issued any document. I didn't report this... I've heard of deportation cases from Turkey to Syria with Afghan people being deported in armoured vehicles (Sjenica, FG1.1).*

*Turkish police arrested me on a Bulgaria border game. Food was*

given in Turkish prison only once during the day. There were also other children my age. I was kept there for 35 days. There was no doctor (Belgrade, FG5.1).

I was in Iran 15 days in jail for illegal border-crossing. They beat us every day. They woke us up by pouring water on our faces (Loznica, FG2.1).

### Verbal, physical and sexual violence

Participants were called names and insulted. Perpetrators are mostly smugglers (“when you argue with them” or “when they tell you what to do”), but also border police during push-backs and local population.

Now when I come to think of it (verbal violence), it became normal to me. I don't notice it anymore... (Belgrade, FG5.5).

In Turkey, at the factory where I worked, the driver insulted me... he said - you stink, you are a dog! I didn't have an ID card, so I had to bear this (Belgrade, FG3.1).

Many experienced physical violence inflicted by smugglers and/or border police.

Violence was almost everywhere I went. Bulgaria, Turkey... previously I was a refugee in Pakistan, so some violence happened there as well (Sjenca, FG1.1).

Bulgarian, Hungarian and Croatian police beat us (Belgrade, FG5.2).

I have experienced violence many times on the whole journey. The police on all borders was beating me. Few days ago, I was beaten by the Croatian police as well (Belgrade, FG3.2).

Smugglers beat me and also Bulgarian, Croatian and Hungarian police. (Belgrade, FG5.2).

Most that provided information about gender and sexual violence said that it was perpetrated mainly by smugglers, but there were also indications of it being committed by migrant population and sometimes by border police. Due to possible re-traumatization, stigma, shame and similar, fewer participants were ready to talk much about this risk.

Yes, young and pretty boys, by the smugglers and older migrants (Belgrade, FG3.2).

*In Greece, men in my group were forced to take off their clothes which was very degrading, especially with females being present in the group. One girl was hiding a cell phone in her bra and when it rang a policeman also forced her to undress. Later in the evening two policemen who were visibly drunk took two girls with them. (Sjenica, FG1.1).*

*This happened many times during the journey, when the group stops somewhere for rest. (Sjenica, FG1.2).*

*I saw the Afghan Uzbek girl who was travelling alone... how she was forcefully taken in the hills by the smugglers (Belgrade, FG3.2).*

*Smugglers do this sexual assault when they want to force a family to pay the money for somebody. They can record this and send it to the parents (Loznica, FG2.1).*

### Substance abuse

**M**ajority of the participants have witnessed substance abuse and perceive it as one of the risks of travelling irregularly, “in all countries on the route” and often connected with other criminal activities.

*A lot of refugees use drugs, because they couldn't stand hardships on the journey. Also, many smugglers tell people to use tablets to give them the strength, not to get tired and continue the journey (Belgrade, FG5.2).*

*Smugglers offered me drugs to bring with me to some place, from where another person who doesn't have the money for the game would come to take the drugs to the next location (Belgrade, FG5.3).*

### Physical and mental health risks

**A**ttempts to cross the border illegally involve many days of waiting and/or walking with small amounts of food and water and no medical help readily available in case of injury or sickness. Harsh and changeable weather conditions, crossing mountains and deep water, sleeping rough, exhaustion, hunger, thirst, physical injuries, fever, malaria, skin diseases such as scabies, repeated exposure to various forms of violence take their toll. Although most speak of physical ill-health many also talk about their mental health. Participants confide they often feel depressed, stressed, worried, tired, in a bad mood and keep “forgetting things”.

*My mental health worsened, I am depressed and in the bad mood often (Belgrade, FG4.2).*

*My nerves couldn't stand anything anymore. My soul is ruined (Belgrade, FG5.2).*

*I was athlete in Afghanistan, in a good shape, but now I can't recognise myself (Belgrade, FG5.5).*

### Trauma and life-threatening experiences

Quite a few participants have gone through potentially traumatic events. Many participants have witnessed death of others or seen dead bodies on the route. Death was caused by drowning, gun and knife injuries, illegal substances, hunger, accidents etc.

*I witnessed a boat accident and I saw people drowning (Sjenica, FG1.1).*

*In Iran I saw a man die with my own eyes. He was shot (Loznica, FG 2.1).*

*13 people were shot by the Iranian police on the border with Turkey, but I wasn't shot (Belgrade, FG4.2).*

*My uncle drowned in Greece (Belgrade, FG6.4).*

Some have had life-threatening experiences. Many narrowly escaped drowning in boat accidents, or barely survived exhaustion and hunger and thirst.

*Once I walked for days without water and eventually collapsed. One person in the group gave me a sip of water to regain my composure. Afterwards, I couldn't sustain thirst any longer, so I consumed some water I found in the forest which led to my poisoning and further deterioration of my condition. God knows how I survived (Sjenica, FG1.2).*

*During border crossing to Iran, my group was spotted by their police. They went after us with their rifles, there were some shots fired as well. I couldn't distinguish whether they were aiming at us or just shooting in the air. It was really scary (Loznica, FG2.2).*

Despite the frequently traumatizing situations they face, most still think that given their lives and prospects back home it is better for them to continue their journey. They generally have high hopes of destination countries and plan to work and study, help their

families financially, pay back debt if they have to and build good lives. Most of them want to “go on a game” and “only go forward”, until they reach Western Europe. They say they have an obligation to their families – “to work and send money home”. They do not associate the risk of trafficking, exploitation and possible legal invisibility to destination countries.



## · QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS ·

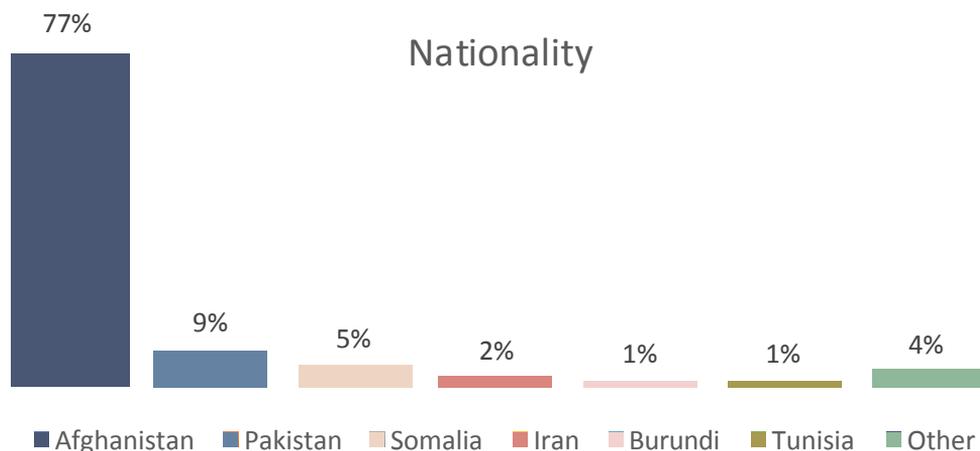
In order to reach out to more population groups and identify risks of irregular migration, and to raise awareness on risks and legal invisibility among migrant children and youth, 12 workshops were organized in Krnjaca AC, Sjenica AC, Bogovadja AC, Obrenovac RTC, then at the Institute for Education of Children and Adolescents in Belgrade (in Vodovodska Street) and in Nis, House of Rescue in Loznica, Pedro Arrupe House in Belgrade and with young migrants sleeping rough in Belgrade. During the workshops, participants completed an anonymous questionnaire.

### METHODOLOGY

Data is collected in September and October 2019, through a questionnaire and analysed quantitatively. A total of 137 male and female respondents answered the questionnaire, children and young migrants up to 25 Y.O. mostly accommodated at state run centres and UASC facilities and that participated in the workshops.

### KEY RESULTS

Majority of the respondents are boys and young men (91%), almost two thirds are male UASC (65%) followed by young male adults (26%). Only 11% of the respondents participated in previously held focus group discussions. On average, respondents mainly come from Afghanistan (77%) which correlates with the fact that most migrants and asylum seekers accommodating the centres in Serbia are in fact Afghan in origin.<sup>13</sup> Average age of respondents is 18 years, while almost half are between 16 and 17 years of age. There are only 12 female respondents (9%), with only two girls (one UASC). Average age of female respondents is 21 Y.O. Half of the girls and women originate from Somalia, then Afghanistan (25%) and Ghana, Tunisia and Iran (8% respectively).



<sup>13</sup> UNHCR, Quantitative Snapshot Serbia, September 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71601>



### Misinformation and improperly informed decisions

Respondents start the journey without full information - only 6% of children and youth stated they were well informed about the journey. Majority of them have had no previous information (53%) or obtained some information (41%) about the journey and risks they take.

### Financial loss (debt)

Parents (48%) and close relatives (32%) provided the money for the journey beginning and they also contacted the smuggler to arrange it (70%). Some respondents provided the money themselves (7%) and contacted the “agents” (18%). Others travel without their services (8%). At the moment of research, 18% of the respondents are in debt with an average sum of 3.360 EUR. Respondents that don’t have precise information about their debt (34%) are mainly UASC (81%).

### Loss of family ties

Every third child respondent travels alone, away from the family and their direct support. Similarly, most of the respondents started the journey alone (53%) or with friends (24%). Only 15% of them started the journey with cousins, or close family members (8%). Respondents cannot rely on group support either. Gathered data show that most respondents have travelled from their countries of origin to Serbia between one and two years. During this time most of them changed groups they were traveling with up to 7 times (48%), while only 15% stayed with the same group on the route. A third of the respondents changed groups from 8 to more than 15 times, and 7% cannot respond.

## Loss of personal documents, legal invisibility and labour exploitation

During their migration to Serbia, 54% respondents stayed in Turkey the longest, then in Serbia (30%), Greece (9%), Bulgaria (1%) and Iran (6%). Although 58% of respondents obtained some documents at some point during their migration – including expulsion document/cancellation of stay in transit (9%) and in Serbia (5%), then registration documents in a transit country (32%) and in Serbia (70%); the majority of them travelled mostly invisible - only one third was registered on the route. On average only 2.5% respondents obtained asylum and/or refugee ID at some point of their travel.

More than a third respondents worked during the journey (39%), mostly in Turkey and 74% of them stated they were not paid enough. UASC make up a total of 42% of those who worked on the route and more than three quarters of this sample (80%) was underpaid.

Upon arrival in Serbia, respondents speak of better access to asylum information. Out of 51% that received asylum information on the route, a total of 91% are informed in Serbia (in comparison to Greece 10%, Bulgaria 9% and Turkey 1%), which could be indicative bearing in mind their prolonged stay in this country.

## Verbal, physical and sexual violence

A high 81% of the respondents have experienced some form of verbal violence (insults, threats, yelling...) from police officials (84%) or smugglers (55%), then local people (24%), other migrants (16%) and other (multiple choice answers). Many respondents experienced physical violence (62%), finally, respondents are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence – 1% personally, 2% witnessed persons from the group they travel with or 23% heard of it.

## Robbery, being held against will and detention in inadequate conditions

Half of the respondents were robbed during the journey (53%). More than half of the respondents report being detained for border crossing (55%). A total of 26% were kidnapped/held against their will during the journey, while 32% of respondents know of such cases. Almost none of them (93%) reported such or any other cases of violence and crime to authorities.

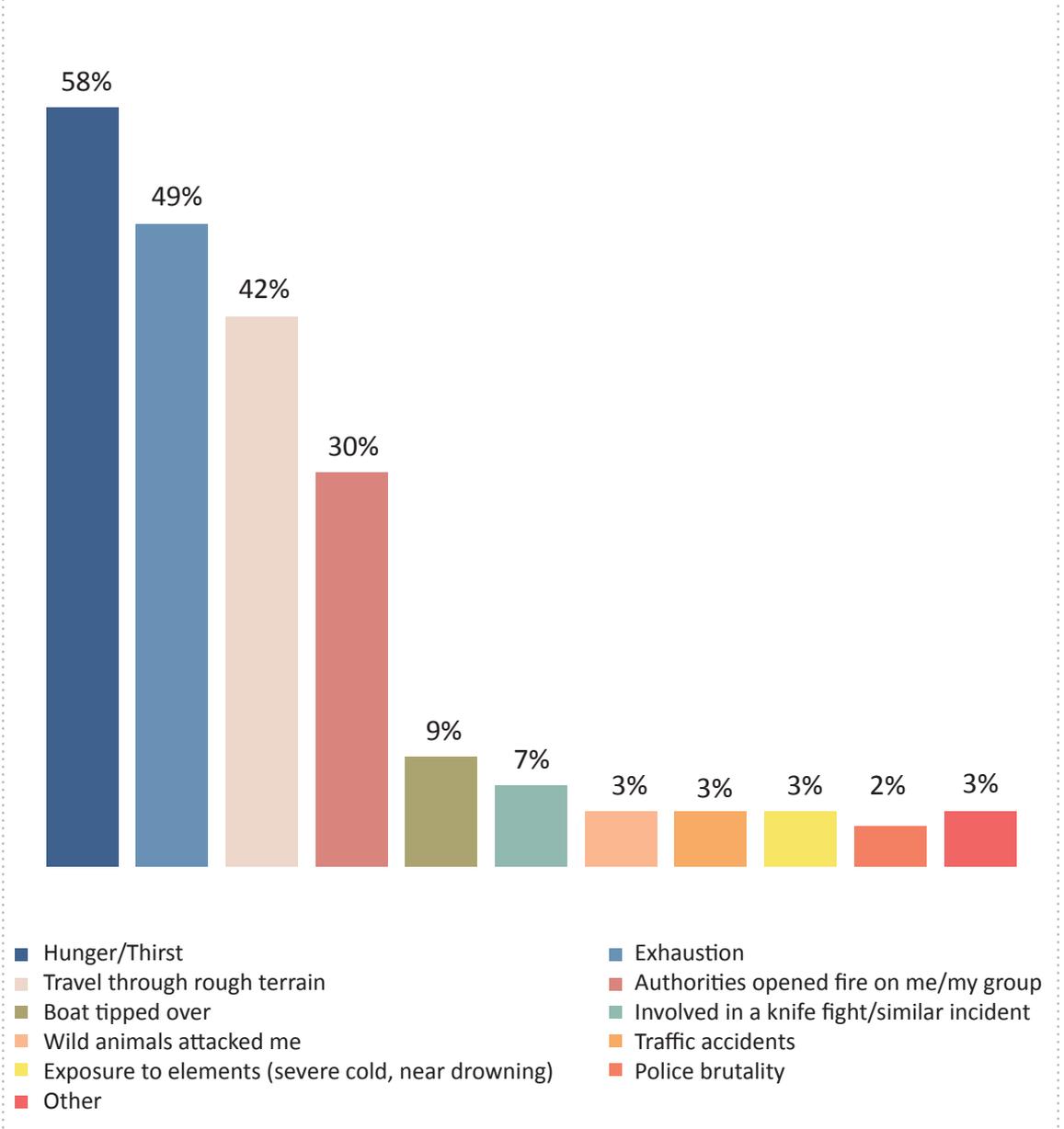
## Substance abuse

A high percentage of respondents report some kind of contact with illegal substances. A total 72% of them have seen persons abusing alcohol or illegal substances. On the other hand, only 9% claims to have knowledge of people being offered to carry drugs for a free 'game'.

## Trauma and life-threatening experiences

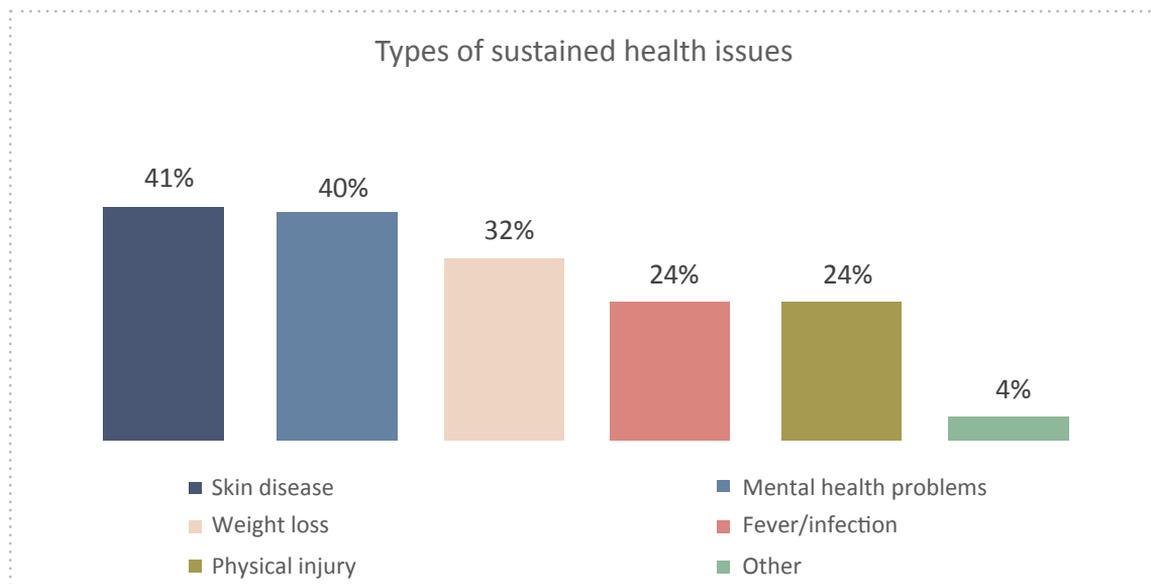
Again, a high number of respondents (67%) found themselves in a life-threatening situation during travel. Every eighth person witnessed the death of someone from their own group, or a group member went missing and 32% respondents know of death and/or disappearance of persons from other group.

Types of life-threatening situations

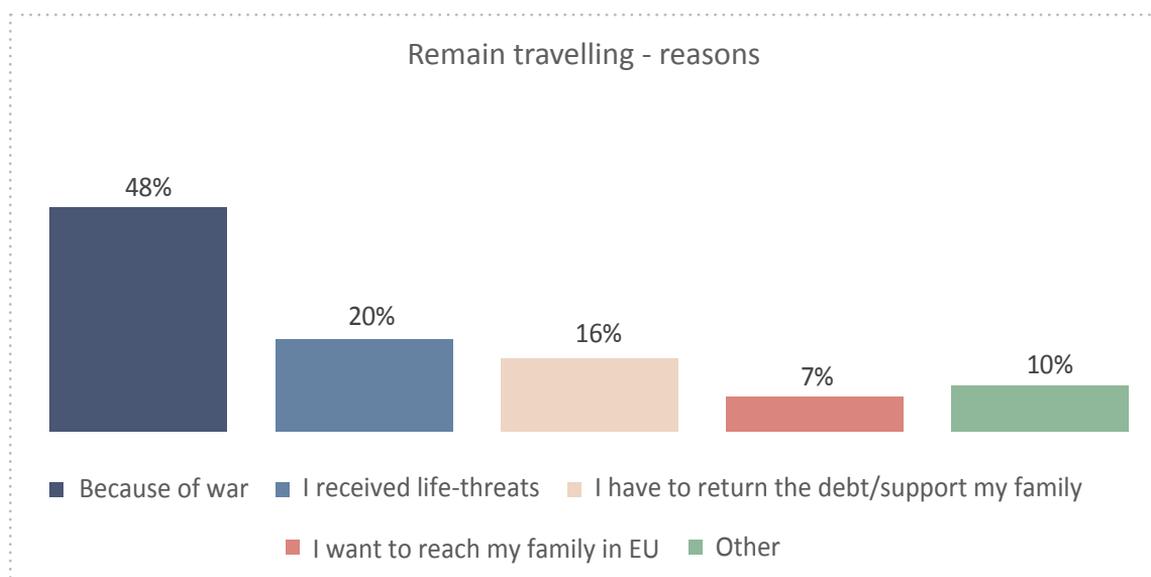


## Physical and mental health risks

Three quarters of the respondents (74%) stated that the journey had affected their health in some way, usually in several ways.



On the other hand, respondents remain resolute – 89% of them don't want to return to their home country and wish to continue further, associating risks of irregular migration only to the journey.



## FEMALE RESPONDENTS

Migrant women traveling alone, including female UASC, are an extremely vulnerable group. The small percentage of women and girls in the sample correlates with the migrant population in Serbia with its predominantly male structure. Out of the total female respondents, **42%** are travelling alone, while the rest with friends or relatives. Group consistency is more stable in the case of female than male respondents, as women and girls mostly haven't changed the group while travelling (**50%**). The rest of female respondents changed their group, one to three times, in comparison to male respondents who changed the group more frequently, five times on average.

Lack of information on the journey is more prominent within female respondents. Three quarters of female respondents (**75%**) had no previous information about the journey when they started. The rest of them had very scarce information about it. In most cases, their families (**50%**) or they (**25%**) contacted the smuggler, while **17%** travelled without their services.

Half of the respondents obtained personal documents in their home country (**58%**) and brought them with on the journey (**60%**) in comparison to only **19%** of male respondents. Two thirds of the girls and women have received registration documents in Serbia. Almost two thirds of female respondents stated the journey affected their health (in multiple answers – they experienced mental health issues **42%**, fever/infection **33%**, skin disease **33%** and weight loss **17%**).

A total of **83%** girls and women stated they had found themselves in a life-threatening situation during travel (which is higher in comparison to male respondents – **66%**). In multiple answers, more than half of the girls and women experienced exhaustion and travelled through rough terrain (**58%**), **25%** faced hunger and thirst and at **17%** authorities opened fire.

No female respondents worked on the route. Half of them witnessed substance abuse while travelling and almost fifth of respondents were robbed. None of them reported such cases to the authorities.

Finally, **67%** women and girls stated they didn't want to return home, mostly because of serious threats to life (**25%**) or conflict and "bad situation" in the country of origin (**49%**).

— *When you travel illegally it is always 50-50 chance to lose — your life, so every time I went to game I felt like my life is threatened (Belgrade FG5.5).*

## • CONCLUDING REMARKS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS •

Mainly the population arriving to the Balkans, is from Afghanistan, of Pashtun ethnicity. Most of them are very young. The proportion of UASC is quite high, so it would not be unreasonable to say that we are looking at the migration of children and young adults. Afghans will often say, ‘Afghanistan is becoming emptied’, or ‘they want us back so that we can fight and die’.

When it comes to Pashtuns, we could say that we are looking at a very special case of migration. Due to decades of war, the Pashtuns have become very deprived, their way of life has seen a return and proliferation of harmful traditional practices and Afghan society has suffered serious damage in this respect. Boys and young men have particularly been affected by child labour, child recruitment and *Bacha Bazi*.

Based on various accounts CRPC gathered, rejection of an extremist ideology, the realization that a faith based (*madrassa*) education is ‘worthless’ and a secular education is a requirement for leading a successful and meaningful life, is the main motivation behind this irregular movement of Pashtun children and young adults. Generally speaking, there is an aspiration to live in places that offer social justice and personal freedom. In this respect, the formation of clear zones of prosperity such as Western EU countries is very relevant. Not only are such zones very attractive because of their prosperity but also for the values they represent. Many of those arriving from Afghanistan, particularly UASC/young adults are in debt and they perceive a Western EU country as the most suitable where they can hope to work and return the debt, but also to acquire a good education in order to build a good life. Pashtuns are generally reluctant to return even if their options are limited. They travel misinformed and therefore can potentially make improperly informed decisions, they lose touch with families, they travel without documents or lose them on the move, becoming legally invisible, prone to various risks. Debt means that many are unable to go back even if they wanted to, as the failure to pay back debt could many times lead to death punishment by creditors, which may cause blood feuds. Giving up on the journey also may entail other consequences for this ethnic group and this is the shaming they must go through by their own family and community because they have failed in their quest. They are alienated and left out of the ranks of those that can claim self-respect. Often this shaming can be so unbearable that it leads to desperate acts such as incurring more debt and making the journey to EU twice or even three times. Sometimes it leads to depression and suicide. This is why giving up and returning is very hard for this particular population group.

Other population groups facing the same risks are also headed for destinations in Western EU. Many believe that Western EU countries can provide them with personal documents that will entitle them to the same rights to live, work and travel as EU citizens. An aspect of this belief is the perception that there are ‘privileged personal documents’

that ensure greater rights and liberties. We live in an age when our personal information determines our human rights, and not our existence as human beings. There are ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ passports in this context. Those who provided such testimonies see passports issued by EU or other western countries as ‘superior’ because they add to the worth of a person as a human being, as such a personal document confers more rights upon the holder, in contrast to the ‘less worthy’ national passport.

Many of those arriving to Serbia do not recognize that they are in Europe. For them, the image of a Western EU country is so deeply embedded in their minds as “the only Europe” that they fail to recognise transit countries as a part of Europe.

Most hope to acquire legal status allowing them to live, study or work freely. The general perception regarding this irregular migration in transit countries is that “these people want to move on”. While this could be correct, such a perception has become the basic premise behind policies in ‘transit countries’ leading to a situation where no concerted and coordinated effort is invested in creating an environment which encourages people to stay but many factors are there that stimulate them to move on. Transit under these circumstances can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One of the most violated rights during this irregular movement pertains to collective expulsion (push-back) as it denies access to other rights and frequently puts people at imminent risks. Extreme violence and exposure to harm related to these collective expulsions has been extensively documented. In the minds of those that have suffered violent push-backs occurring at the EU-Balkan borders, such events are not associated with the EU, as they only view Western EU countries as “the proper Europe of their dreams”.

*“Today, there are more than 232 million international migrants in the world. If they came together to form a country, it would be the fifth most populous country on the planet. Yet, this remains a largely invisible population. Many migrants, particularly those who are in an irregular situation, tend to live and work in the shadows, afraid to complain, denied rights and freedoms that we take for granted, and disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization. Rendered vulnerable by their irregular status, these men, women and children are often afraid or unable to seek protection and relief from the authorities in countries of origin, transit or destination. Clearly, the irregular situation in which international migrants may find themselves should not deprive them either of their humanity or of their human rights.”<sup>14</sup>*

Generally speaking, inadequate implementation of conventions and documents pertaining to the rights of irregular migrants and a primarily control-based approach rather than a rights-based one has made the problem a self-perpetuating one. States should ensure

<sup>14</sup>The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Migrants in an Irregular Situation, by United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, New York and Geneva, 2014, available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HR-PUB-14-1\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HR-PUB-14-1_en.pdf)

that the control-based approach does not infringe upon the rights-based approach. In line with aforementioned and presented results, several recommendations should be made:

- States on the route perceived by irregular migrants as transit, should ensure that human rights of migrants are respected and ensure clear access to rights stipulated by laws and ratified declarations.
- States should implement an individual approach when assessing the irregular migrants making them legally visible. This is the only way states can ensure irregular migrants have access to rights.
- Countries perceived as transit by irregular migrants ought to develop services which can help irregular migrants stay and start legalising their irregular status. Such services should be created in a culturally sensitive way, in a language they understand and focused on the information migrants need in order to make an informed decision. Serbia has developed a model of such services through cultural orientation which is currently implemented by the State and NGOs.
- All countries need to continue challenging and breaking up smuggling and trafficking networks on the route, in origin, transit and destination countries. While travelling irregularly, migrants use such networks and therefore are exposed to different risks, labour exploitation, survival sex, violence and gender-based violence, extortion and similar.

These are all circumstances none of the irregular migrants ever dreamt of being in, desired or hoped for. They have marked their lives, hurt them and influenced the language they speak. The dictionary CRPC collected on the slang used by irregular migrants illustrates how words were given additional meaning based on the peculiar social situations these people were exposed to during this harsh and dangerous journey.

Without giving careful consideration to the plight of those isolated in countries of origin, the human dilemmas of those making this journey, and an effort to find solutions together with them, we run the risk of creating an even more dangerously divided world, where an even wider population might become irregular, joining the ranks of ‘the game people’, as many on this route call themselves.

— *Every game is a risk to life (Belgrade, FG3.1).* —

## · SHORT DICTIONARY OF SMUGGLER SLANG ·

In Dari (Farsi dialect spoken in Afghanistan), Farsi, Punjabi, Urdu, Arabic and English

- **Agent** (English) – The agent fixes the deal for crossing a border. Almost all populations use this word to describe their smuggler.
- **Badmash** (Farsi, Arabic: living off illegal activities, Urdu: violent criminal) – member of organized crime network; a person that resembles a member of organized crime network, a person with a threatening appearance.
- **Commando** (English) – army or police officer; leader of criminal organization; a person that appears to be strong and likes to dress in military or camouflage clothes. Both Commando and Badmash denote people that usually belong to a gang that rents services to smugglers such as kidnapping, beating up a person to teach them a lesson or murdering them; they are usually involved in theft, dealing drugs, robbery and sexual exploitation.
- **D shin tutibachiyan** (Pashto: children of the green parrot) – another slang word for police.
- **Dankilagana** (Urdu) – attempt to cross the border illegally.

### Helpers - Guides:

- **Chantakesh** (Farsi) – the one that handles logistics on the ground, designated to collect cash from those paying on site and organizing the group for the ‘game’.
- **Dankar** (Punjabi) – guide
- **Jello-ro** (Pashto) – guide
- **Rah Balad** (Farsi, Dari) – the one that shows the way (to the border).
- **Rah Rawan** (Farsi, Dari) – “the one that runs upon the path” (another name for the guide). These essentially poetic conceptions of the guide hark back to the times of caravans and emphasize the migrant as ‘traveller’. Guides are often individuals that start off from home as other refugee/migrants and then due to lack of funds they join a smuggling network. They often do not stay to work for extended periods of time. Some choose to work as long as they do not save enough cash for their own needs, for a year or more. Some stay to join the network permanently and do other jobs in the network later on.

- **Game** (English) – act of crossing the border illegally. It would be difficult to trace the origins of the word however it can be speculated that game with its association with sport or play could have been used by smugglers to explain to children the activity they were undertaking. It is also possible that children were the ones that described the attempt to cross the border illegally in this manner. Each ‘game’ lasts up to a week or more. It involves moving to a place in the border area and waiting for the smuggler to arrange the means of crossing the border and then actually crossing the border.
- **Geymzadan** (Farsi) / **geymwahel** (Pashto) – to play (used to denote the game)
- **Ghat kachakbar** (Pashto) – one of the persons in charge of a smuggling operation. It is the ghat kachakbar that determines which individuals will be in which group, according to payments that have been cleared.
- **Graukhana** (Farsi) – to catch; house; house or room where people are kept shut while payments are cleared.
- **Guarantee - geym-e garanti** (English root) – pre-arranged and paid ahead journey to the destination country; main smuggler in country of origin organizes entire journey and guarantees that the client will reach the destination country.
- **Guzara** (Pashto) – killing time, waiting for the ‘game’. While waiting at the gathering point for the ‘game’, many days might pass. Originally the word denotes ‘managing’ in hard times.
- **Kachakbar** (Farsi, Dari) – Afghans and Iranians will refer thus to their smuggler.
- **Malang** (Pashto, Punjabi) – a poor helpless person; **charsimalang**– a person that has fallen on hard times because of using narcotics (**chars** – marijuana).
- **Mama** (Pashto: uncle) – a way to address older people, mother’s brother (for example Ahmed mama); slang for police (particularly for police officers at borders that take bribes). Many UASC will refer to their smuggler as ‘uncle’, they will also say that their ‘uncle’ financed their journey, their ‘uncle’ is waiting to take them to the next country, and an ‘uncle’ is going to help them once they reach their destination country.
- **Mohajer** (Arabic: refugee) – this Arabic word is associated with the history of Islam and Muslims. It refers to the journey that the Prophet Mohammad made from Mecca to Yathrib, as a result of persecution. The act of leaving from home in order to maintain freedom of religion was recorded in Islamic history as a commendable one and associated with spiritual rewards. This is also one of the rea-

sons why those travelling and away from home are shown special hospitality in many Muslim countries.

- **Musafer** (Arabic: traveller) – refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from Afghanistan call themselves travellers. Even though many times a person travelling irregularly has a justified reason for seeking international protection, this is not necessarily how they might view themselves. Lack of accurate information about the legal framework relevant to irregular movement and cultural influences, lead to persons defining themselves as travellers, rather than potential asylum seekers or irregular/undocumented migrants. Cultural codes that apply to travellers in countries of origin see freedom of movement as a basic human right, regardless of borders, the traveller being a person deserving of shelter, refuge from danger, food and other help. The traveller is not seen as a ‘trespasser’ but as a guest. Cultural codes mean that this help will be offered and expected. This is a very direct and human approach that sometimes finds it difficult to accommodate institutional and legal demands.
- **Musafirkhana** (Farsi, Urdu) – originally refers to an inn, houses kept by smugglers where their clients can stay for payment, if they do not wish to go to a government provided accommodation centre.
- **Nokta** (Arabic: point, place) – place from where the vehicle starts off during the ‘game’ or at which the vehicle is to arrive after crossing the border. The English word point is also used for this purpose.
- **Reis** (Arabic: leader) – leader of the criminal group; originally used to address a person holding a high position.
- **Safe lagana** (Urdu) – keeping clients shut until payments are cleared.
- **Saraf** (Arabic: exchange) – exchange in which money is until clients reach the agreed destination, according to Hawala system (third person guards money as a guarantee that the agreement will be respected).
- **Shabaka** (Arabic: network) – network of smugglers.
- **Toligi, toligawel** (Pashto) – to gather, gathering of the group before the ‘game’. Groups come together to start off for the ‘game’ at specific points determined by the smuggler.

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