

European Migration Rapid Assessment: Belgrade and North Serbia

28 April 2016



REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Despite the implementation of the EU-Turkey Plan on 20 March, migrants* have continued to arrive in Serbia, mainly through illegal means. As of 14 April, UNHCR recorded around 650 migrants at transit sites in Serbia, although irregular arrivals are estimated to bring this figure up to around 950 individuals.¹ This represents a significant decrease from the 2,000 reported on 20 March, indicating migrants are continuing their journey despite border closures.² Of those currently on the move, the majority are travelling via Belgrade before attempting to cross into Hungary.

In both the transit zones of the Hungarian borders and in Belgrade the humanitarian situation has been changing on a daily basis. **An increased number of migrants arriving in the transit zone of Kelebija has been observed along with a change in attitude by authorities towards migrants in Belgrade.**

This report summarizes data collected by REACH through interviews with migrants, NGOs and border authorities in Belgrade and in Kelebija, from 23-27 April 2016. Interview findings are triangulated with information from available secondary data and media reports.

Belgrade

Beginning on 20 April, officials from the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration began to clear Luke Celovica Park in central

Belgrade, a makeshift camp for migrants.³ On the 26 April, the Miksalitse refugee aid centre was dismantled, as was the "No border" hostel, a group of empty buildings used as shelter for migrants.

With less than 48 hours' notice, the volunteers at Miksalitse refugee aid centre were forced to end activities to make way for a waterfront development project,⁵ although the refugee aid centre was not scheduled to end its activities until June. Police were present during the eviction to guarantee compliance. Following the destruction of the centre, the migrants found outside were driven to the nearest police station. According to migrants interviewed after this, they were required to register their intention to seek asylum in Serbia. Prior to this incident none of the migrants had intentions to apply for asylum in Serbia. As a result, there is no longer a designated aid point in Belgrade, apart from the nearby Asylum Info Centre, as shown in Map 1 (right). Some of the few remaining aid actors, Médecins du Monde and MSF, are attempting to provide mobile assistance, but migrants remain scattered across the city.

Prior to closure, Miksalitse hosted an estimated 250-300 migrants per day, providing them with food and non-food items. Médecins du Monde and Save the Children also conducted activities including a clinic and child friendly



Map 1: Time line and location of Migrant aid points and aid distribution in Belgrade

space, the latter reported to welcome around 128 children per week.

The destruction of Miksalitse represents a significant reduction to available assistance in Belgrade. In addition, the Serbian Red Cross is no longer operating in Belgrade due to a lack of authorisation. Local NGO Asylum Info Centre submitted a request for permission to install portable toilets in the park, although this request was denied.

*This report uses the word migrant to refer to all those travelling to Europe, including people who intend to seek asylum and may later gain refugee status.

1 UNHCR Official declaration during Protection Working Group meeting, 28 April 2016, Belgrade

2 UNHCR Serbia Daily Updates 18-20 March 2016

3 REACH Situation Update 22 April 2016

4 According to the Commissariat of Refugees, currently 14 migrants in that situation were staying in Krnjaca as of 28 April.

5 Balkans Insight, 27 April 2016.

Figure 1: Migrants assisted by Asylum Info Centre in Belgrade, in numbers

125	assisted during the day (1 in 6 are children)
120	assisted during the night (1 in 4 are children)
80	of those assisted during the night sleep at the centre
Origin of migrants:	Primarily Afghanistan & Pakistan

While the facilities and capacity to respond to migrants needs are decreasing as a result of a recent policy shift by Serbian authorities, the number of migrants arriving to Belgrade in need is rising.

Since authorities removed blankets and tents used by migrants to sleep in Luke Celovica Park and began patrolling the parks, NGOs have reported an increased number of migrants looking for shelter in central Belgrade.

While authorities provide daily buses at 3pm and 7pm between Central Belgrade and Krnjaca asylum centre, migrants are reluctant to go, despite the fact they may spend the night in the asylum centre without valid documentation or intent to seek asylum.⁴ Of the small numbers that do travel to Krnjaca, the majority reportedly leave for the Hungarian border the following morning.

Instead, a small number of migrants continue to sleep in the park despite fear of being

caught by the police. However a larger number are concerned about being apprehended by authorities and have taken to “hiding” in the city, renting rooms in nearby hostels and/or sleeping on the streets in undisclosed areas, where they are more vulnerable.

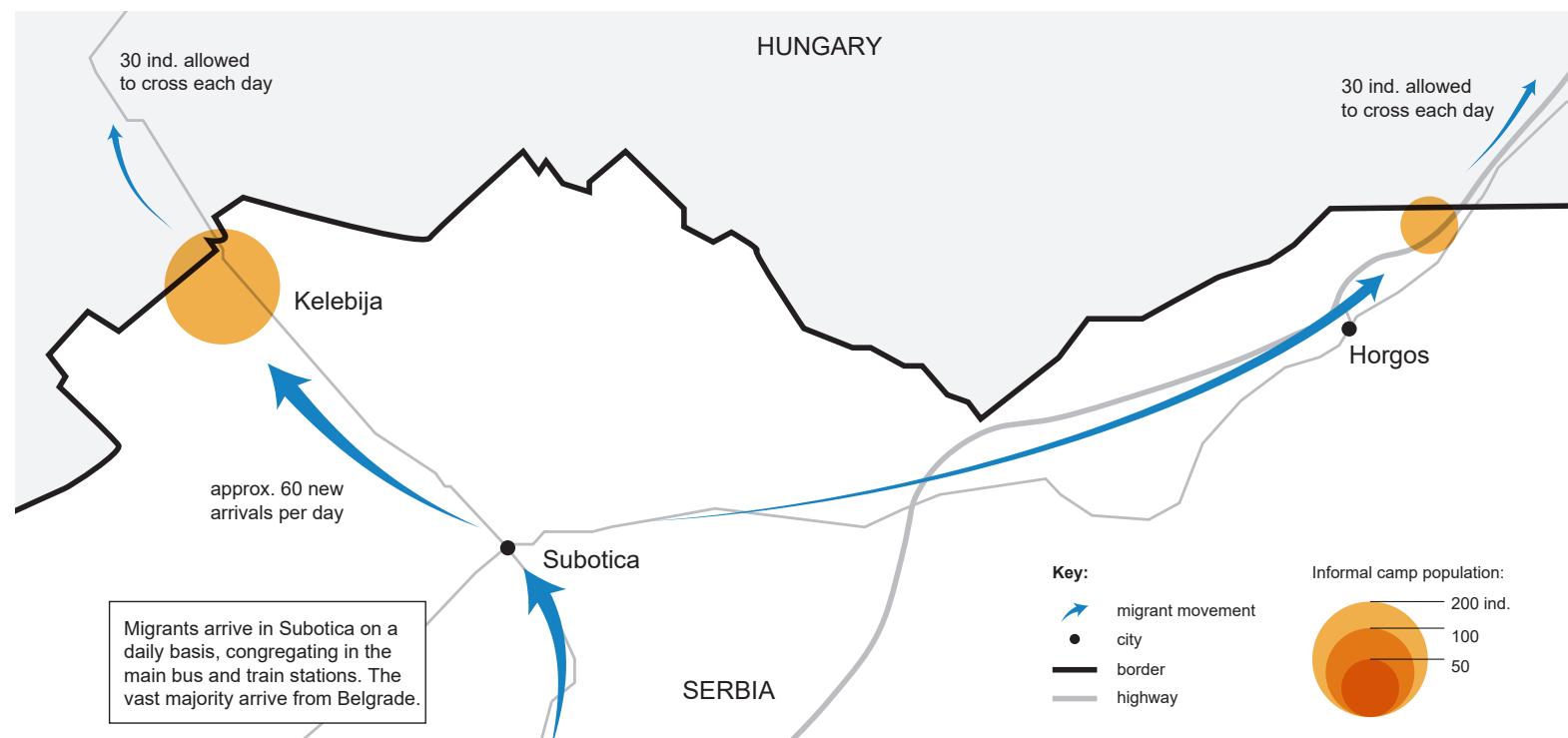
Kelebija Transit Zone

Hungary has again become a transit point for migrants trying to reach Europe from Serbia. While the majority of migrants are seeking illegal routes, some are trying to

legally enter Hungary, waiting at the Serbian border crossing of Horgos and Kelebija. With Hungarian authorities only allowing a daily quota of 30 migrants per border crossing, the number of migrants reported in the area has been increasing since early April.⁶

The numbers of migrants present at Horgos and Kelebija fluctuates, although larger numbers appear to be waiting at the Kelebija border crossing. This can be explained by Kelebija's greater proximity to Subotica bus and train stations, where most migrants arrive

before moving to the transit zone. Numbers at Horgos border crossing have decreased to approximately 50 migrants per day while the numbers in Kelebija have increased to 150 migrants per day. Around 30 migrants were reported on 27 April to be waiting in the bus station at any given point.⁷ The overall increase in number of migrants is potentially due to the spread of word of mouth that the Hungarian authorities are allowing few migrants to enter legally everyday.



Map 2: Routes taken by migrants to reach the Serbian border with Hungary

6 REACH Situation Update Horgos and Kelebija 18 April 2016

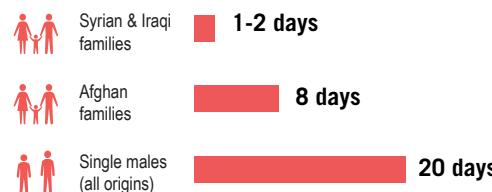
7 Similar figure reported by UNHCR during Protection Working Group Meeting, 28 April 2016, Belgrade

Increased police presence has been observed since 23 April and while the number of migrants has increased in Kelebija transit zone, REACH teams have collected reports of extortion for migrants to exit the area. This has created issues for migrants who wish to access the shop located 800m from the transit zone to charge their phone. It has also caused difficulties for migrants wishing to leave the transit zone at night to sleep in a facility organised by Commissariat of Refugees in Subotica.

Migrants who choose to sleep in the transit zone are without any type of shelter structures⁹, some migrants have managed to purchase tents while others have created makeshift shelters made of a combination of tents, blankets and wood. UNHCR Hungary confirmed that the authorities are tolerating these temporary shelters. With poor weather conditions over the past few days and forecast for the coming week, shelter remains a key issue for migrants stranded in this zone.

As of 22 April, the Ministry of International Cooperation has denied Humanitarni Centar za Integraciju i toleranciju (HCIT), UNHCR's partner, to distribute food and NFIs, to both Horgos and Kelebija transit zones. UNICEF is now providing food, NFIs, hygiene products and baby formula. The Serbian Red Cross has also applied to the border police to access this zone and is planning to receive it early May. Until now, no wash facilities have been authorized in these two sites. Lack of proper shelter, toilets and bathing facilities

Figure 2: Average length of stay in Kelebija, by nationality



is putting migrants at risk for the spread of communicable diseases. The lack of garbage disposal is also a critical health issue in both of these zones.

In the meantime, with numerous families stranded at the border, including single women with children travelling as part of larger groups, particularly from Syria and Afghanistan, the lack of information regarding the procedure to cross the border from Horgos or Kelebija has been clearly observed. Very few migrants intend to stay in Hungary even though they will have to seek asylum once they cross the border from these two transit zones. This level of uncertainty is also pushing numerous migrants to seek out services of smugglers who drive them around at night and leave them to wander around the fence in the forest putting the migrants at risk for apprehension by border authorities as well as other protection concerns.

The number of migrants reported in these locations is likely to increase in the coming days. However, if the number of migrants

allowed to seek asylum in Hungary remains stable, the humanitarian situation could worsen in these transit zones with the number of migrants arriving outnumbering the number of migrants allowed to cross the Hungarian border on a given day. REACH will closely monitor the situation in the coming days in order to better inform the humanitarian community.

8 UNHCR confirmed this information during Protection Working Group Meeting, 28 April 2016, Belgrade

9 UNHCR is still waiting on an authorisation to provide these structures from the border authorities.