

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 22 May, UNHCR reported that their records show around 1,400 migrants in Serbia at any one time.¹ This represents a significant increase on the 900 reported on 13 May, indicating that migrants are continuing their journey despite border closures. Once in Serbia, many migrants travel onwards to Hungary, passing through Belgrade before heading north towards Subotica and the Hungarian border

In both Belgrade and the transit zones at Kelebija and Horgos, the situation has been changing on a daily basis, with increased numbers of new arrivals observed in both locations.²

This report summarizes data collected by REACH through interviews with migrants, NGOs and border authorities from 16-26th May 2016. A total of 94 interviews were conducted with groups of migrants in Belgrade, Subotica and Kelebija, accounting for 467 individuals. Interview findings are triangulated with a review of secondary data and media.

*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.

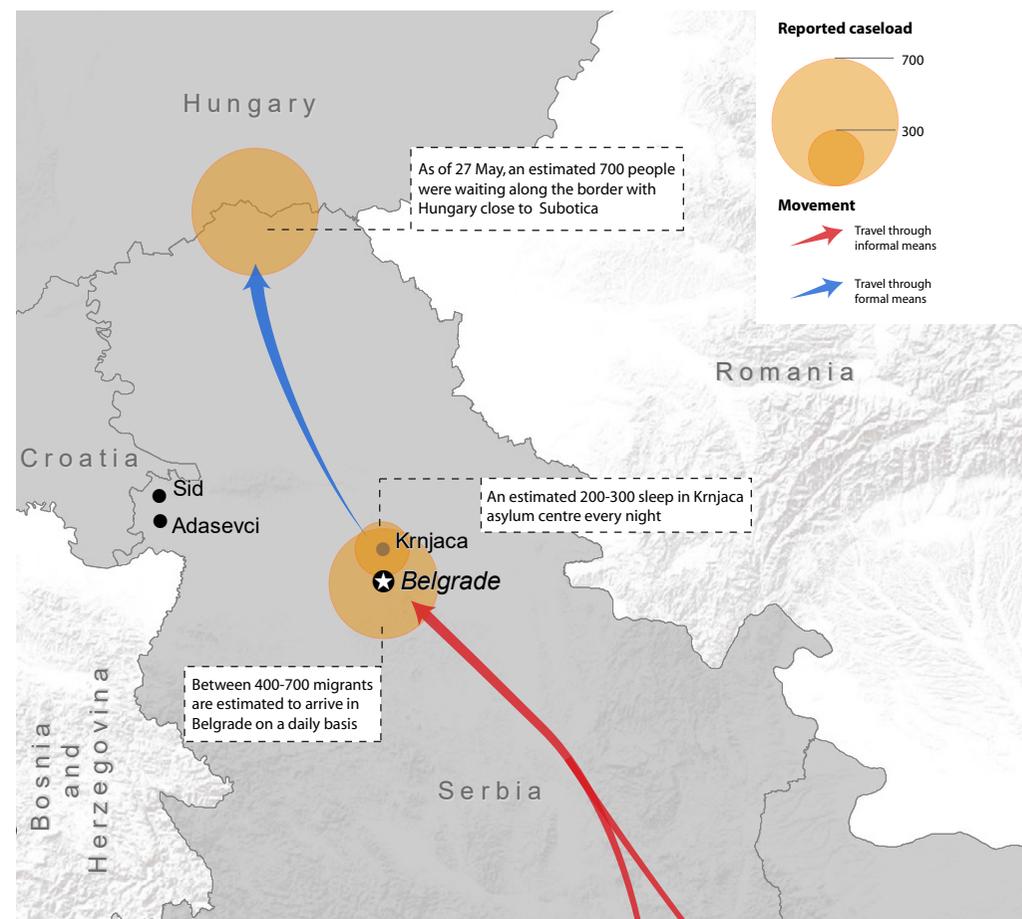
Belgrade

Population profile

Since REACH's previous situation overview of Belgrade on 15 May, the number of migrants travelling through the city has steadily increased. From 200 migrants early May to between 400 and 700 migrants have been arriving on a daily basis in central Belgrade³, and staying during the day in Luke Celovica Park. Of the 90 groups interviewed in Belgrade, 78% were from Afghanistan, 6% from Iraq, 4% from Syria and 9% from Iran. The largest proportion of those travelling from Afghanistan came from Kabul, with smaller proportions from other provinces across the country.

The majority of migrants (72%) travelled with at least one other family member, while smaller proportions of migrants travelling with friends they met on their journey or since they left their country of origin. Minors travelling without family made up 9% of all groups. All of these unaccompanied or separated minors were of Afghan origin, and had arrived in Serbia via Bulgaria. Half of this group reported that they had already experienced pushbacks in Serbia.

Overall, 54% of interviewed groups had travelled to Serbia via Bulgaria and 46% from FYROM. As observed in previous weeks, different nationalities appeared favour different routes, with almost all interviewed Syrian reporting having travelled via FYROM.

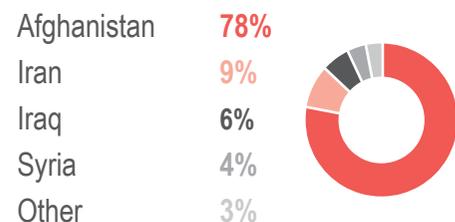


Map 1: Estimated caseload of migrants at assessed locations in Northern Serbia

The majority of this group had spent time in Idomeni, Greece before entering FYROM. Out of all the interviewed migrants, 83% had left their country of origin over a month ago, and had transited through Turkey and Greece.

1 UNHCR Serbia Daily Updates 19-22 May 2016
 2 REACH Situation Overview 15 May 2016
 3 UNHCR Serbia Daily Updates 23-25 May 2016

Figure 1: Country of origin of interviewed groups



The majority of the migrants interviewed reported leaving their country of origin due to active armed conflict (81%), while the recent deterioration of the situation in their place of origin led to their departure to Europe. None of the migrants interviewed reported being willing to seek asylum before reaching their final chosen destination. Germany remains the most reported country of destination (60%), before France (16%) and Austria (7%).

Humanitarian Situation in Belgrade

Since 20 April when authorities removed blankets and tents used by migrants sleeping in Luke Celovica Park and began patrols⁴, NGOs have reported an increased number of migrants looking for shelter in central Belgrade and staying in Krnjaca asylum centre, an alternative location proposed by authorities. Approximately 40 migrants are estimated to continue to sleep in the park, despite fear of being caught by the police.⁵ However many more are concerned about being apprehended by authorities and have taken to hiding in the city, making it harder for the NGOs to provide assistance.

Having hosted an average of only 60 migrants

per night in early May, Krnjaca asylum centre is now reported to be at full capacity, hosting between 200 and 300 migrants every night. Most of these migrants do not wish to seek asylum in Serbia and therefore leave the premises in the early morning to reach Belgrade city centre, by bus, yet do not pay for it. Serbian authorities continue to facilitate transportation to the asylum centre, providing daily buses from Belgrade city centre at 3pm and 7pm.

Most of the migrants spend only one night in Krnjaca and carry on with their journey towards the Hungarian border, in some cases the camp hosts them up to one week in the event they expect to receive money from their relatives in order to keep travelling towards their country of destination.

As the result of a recent policy shift by Serbian authorities, the availability of facilities and capacity to respond to migrants' needs in Belgrade has decreased. Following the closure of Miskaliste refugee aid centre in Belgrade⁷ and the removal of the Red Cross containers in Luke Celovica Park, the only remaining distributions are organised from the Info Park hut, a structure originally designed to support migrants with information about humanitarian assistance and the asylum process.

While limited services remain available, the number of migrants arriving to Belgrade in need of assistance is rising putting migrants in very poor humanitarian conditions. A lack of information regarding protection mechanisms and legal procedures such as

family reunification is leading migrants to take increasingly dangerous routes, and to blindly trust smugglers to carry on with their journey.

Kelebija Transit Zone

Following implementation of the EU-Turkey Plan in March 2016, Hungary has again become a transit point for migrants trying to reach Europe from Serbia. While the majority of migrants seek illegal routes, some attempt to enter Hungary legally, waiting at the formal crossing points of Horgos and Kelebija.

At the time of writing, Hungarian authorities allow a daily quota of 15 migrants to pass through each crossing point – half the number allowed to cross in early April.⁸ With the number of arrivals continuing to outpace this small number of departures, the total number of migrants at numbers at Horgos and Kelebija has continued to rise, with a total of around 500 migrants reported to stay here as of 25 May.⁹

The news that Hungarian authorities are continuing allowing migrants to enter has spread quickly by word of mouth, motivating increasing numbers to travel to the border zone. Data collection teams have observed an increased presence of security forces, while migrant movement in and out of the transit zone remains limited, also preventing them to sleep in the premises organised by the Commissariat. Some organisations such as Divac and Catholic Relief Services have distributed food packages, water, and hygiene kits a few hundred meters from the fence,

next to a booth that has been set up for the migrants to charge their phones.

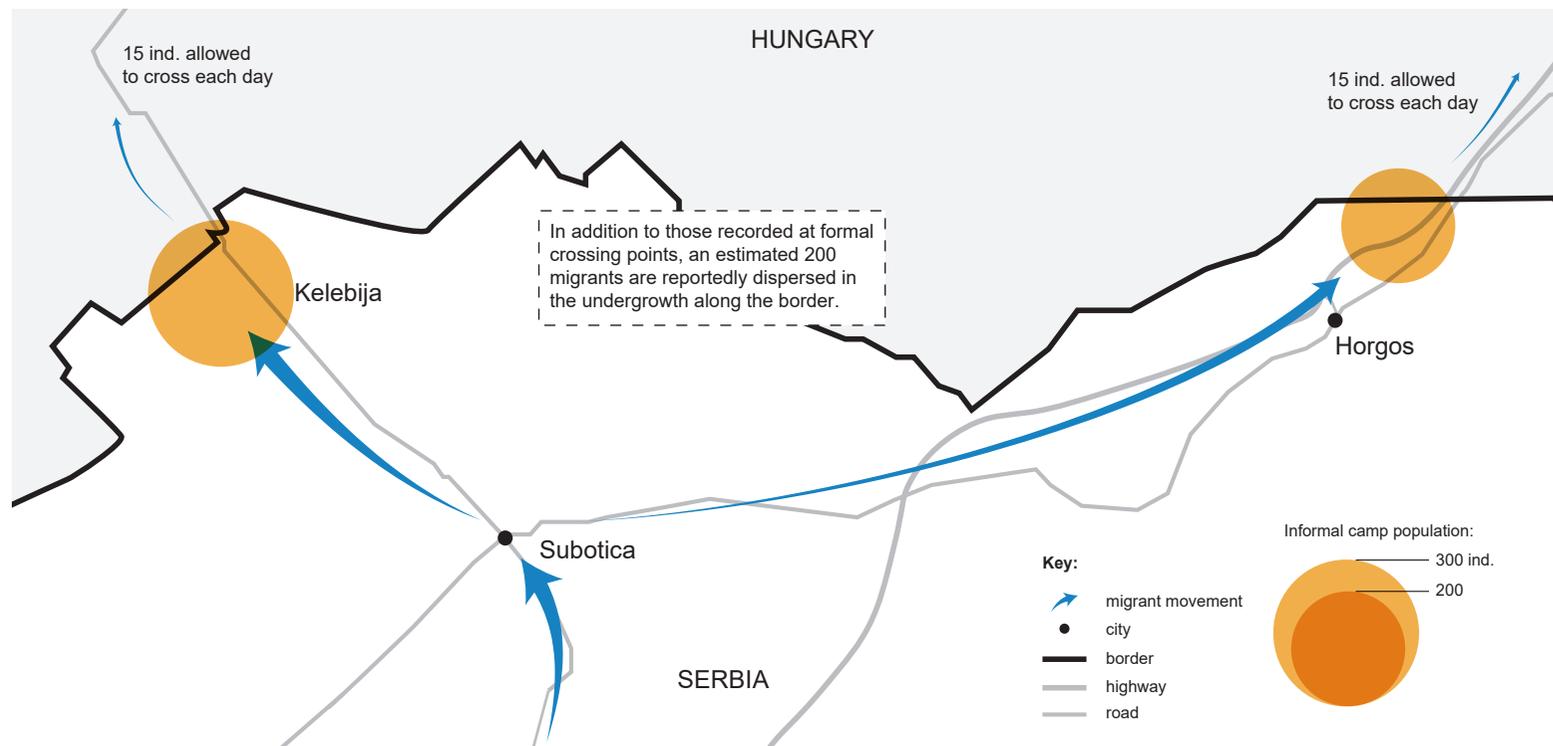
Humanitarian conditions in the Transit Zone

No accommodation is provided in the transit zone itself,¹⁰ although migrants are allowed to sleep in a facility organised by Commissariat of Refugees in Subotica.¹¹ However, afraid of losing their chance to cross, the vast majority of migrants stay in the transit zone at night, sleeping in the open air, in makeshift structures of canvas, blankets and wood, or for very few in tents they have purchased themselves. With poor weather conditions over the past few days, including thunderstorms and heavy showers, shelter remains a key issue for migrants stranded in this zone.

Food, NFIs, hygiene products and baby formula are provided by UNHCR and UNICEF, while MSF still conducts daily visits to conduct health checks and hygiene kits distributions. HCIT and the Red Cross have also been granted access to distribute food and NFIs in the transit zone. Until now, no WASH facilities have been authorized in either Horgos or Kelebija. The lack of proper shelter, toilets and bathing facilities is putting migrants at risk of the spread of communicable disease, with several cases of diarrhoea and vomiting among children reported on 26 May. The lack of garbage disposable is also a critical health issue in both of these zones.

The lack of information regarding the mandatory procedure of asylum seeking in

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



Hungary when crossing through these zones remains a critical issue, with numerous families stranded at the border, including single women with children. 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 pushing numerous migrants to seek out the services of smugglers who drive them around at night and leave them to wander around the fence in the forest to cross illegally putting the migrants at risk for apprehension by border authorities as well as

other protection concerns. UNHCR reported close to 200 migrants sighted nearby both Kelebija and Horgos border crossings trying to find a way to cross, from 22-25 May.¹²

A critical humanitarian situation is already developing in transit zones along the border with the number of migrants arriving outnumbering the number of migrants allowed to cross the Hungarian border on a given day. Shelter and sanitation facilities remain a key priority for the over 400 migrants stranded in front of the fence. The number of migrants reported in

these locations attempting to cross both legally and illegally is likely to keep increasing in the coming days, especially with the decrease in number of migrants allowed to seek asylum in Hungary.

Conclusion

The number of new arrivals in Belgrade and on the Hungarian border has continued to increase in recent weeks. While migrants in transit are able to access some assistance, conditions of those in transit camps close to the border with

Hungary are particularly challenging. Even at formal border crossings, the lack of shelter and sanitation is increasing the vulnerability of people waiting to cross, while the increasing numbers of people hiding in the undergrowth lack access to any assistance at all and are particularly vulnerable to protection risks.

In addition to the existing flow of migrants along the Western Balkans Corridor, the closure of Idomeni camp in Greece, which hosted some 8,500 migrants until 25 May, is expected to further increase the number of new arrivals to Serbia. Late last week, some 700 migrants are reported to have successfully crossed from Greece into FYROM.¹³

REACH will continue to closely monitor the situation in the coming days in order to better inform the humanitarian community.

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All information products are available via www.reachresourcecentre.info.

For more information, visit our website, www.reach-intiative.org, or follow us on Twitter @REACH_info

9 UNHCR Serbia Daily Updates 23-25 May 2016

10 UNHCR is awaiting authorisation to provide these structures from border authorities.

11 This facility was reported to have hosted 15 migrants between in the 19-22 May according to UNHCR Serbia Daily Updates 19-22 May 2016

12 UNHCR Serbia Daily Updates 22-25 May 2016

13 Keep Talking Greece « Idomeni evacuation in slow pace as many reluctant to move to new camps », 25 May 2016.