

The European Migrant Crisis

Situation Overview: Horgos, Serbia

16th September 2015

INTRODUCTION

The past week saw a rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers travelling through the Balkans to the rest of Europe. As of 14th September, UNHCR estimated that Europe has seen 411,567 Mediterranean sea arrivals in 2015, far exceeding figures for 2014. Among these, Greece alone has seen 288,020 arrivals, with the number increasing daily. Once in Greece asylum seekers travel upwards through the Balkans, many with the hope of reaching destinations such as Germany and Sweden. However with the daily change in country border controls and the increasing number of refugees, displacement routes are changing at an unprecedented rate.

On September 15th REACH sent two teams to Greece and the Balkans to collect preliminary data to assess the current displacement routes and trends for Syrian asylum seekers, as well as the motivating factors both for leaving their country of origin and choosing their target destination. The information will complement an overall social media

review as well as findings from similar ongoing assessments by REACH teams in the Balkans and in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

This report outlines the findings from an assessment conducted at the Hungarian-Serbian border. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews with asylum seekers. Due to the transient nature of the groups, the limited time spent together, and the complex and disparate nature of motivations and intentions, there are limitations on generalizing these issues. The sample is not statistically representative, but interviews were consistent enough for trends to be perceived.

DISPLACEMENT

AREAS OF ORIGIN

Most of the asylum seekers in Horgos at the time of the assessment were from Syria. The second largest group was from Afghanistan followed by smaller pockets from other countries in the Middle East and the continent of Africa.

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SITUATION OVERVIEW

From Syria, the largest group was from Kurdish areas, most prominently from Qamishli. This was followed by those groups from Aleppo City and Damascus and thirdly from Idlib, all of which were interviewed.



Picture 1: Asylum seekers sleeping in tents and in the open air



Picture 2: People at the Hungarian border

Most asylum seekers had experienced multiple displacement for some years now. The vast majority had also spent some time in Turkey.

REASONS FOR DEPARTING TO THE EU

For those who had been displaced directly from Syria, conflict was consistently stated as the reason for displacement in all responses, followed by conscription to armed forces, even for minors. A lack of access to basic services – water in particular, was the third most mentioned cause for displacement.

For the majority of Syrian respondents, who had

spent more than three months in Turkey, employment rights, low salaries (sometimes due to illegal working status), and high cost of living were the most reported factors for leaving.

Asylum seekers reportedly chose to move to Europe primarily for job opportunities then for reasons of safety and security and thirdly for provision of services.

MIGRATION ROUTES

FINAL DESTINATION INTENTIONS

Nearly all asylum seekers represented in the study intended to go to Germany as their final destination. Belgium was the second preferred destination. The greatest factor to decide between countries within Europe was the presence of family in final destination countries. Germany's statement of welcome to asylum seekers was also mentioned as a reason for choosing Germany as a destination.

Legal frameworks for refugee status (including time periods to obtain this status) were never mentioned as pull factors to any of the final destination countries. This may be because of the poor levels of information available to asylum seekers.

Refugee Profile in Horgos as of 16th September

According to UNHCR there were approximately 3,000 at the Horgos border crossing. Many of were sleeping in open air, with a considerable number also sleeping in donated tents. Most had been there between one and three days.

Within the groups, young families made up the predominant group. The proportion of males was great in comparison to the number of women or children. This was due to the fact that many men have travelled first in order to assure that the journey is safe and secondly to generate the funds necessary for their families to then cross. There were very small numbers of disabled and unaccompanied minors and no observed unaccompanied elders.

Due to the high cost of travel, the groups observed in the study were generally well educated and had usually mid level employment in Syria prior to the conflict.

JOURNEY INTENTIONS

As the Serbian-Hungarian border had been closed since the 15th of September, asylum seekers in Horgos had been waiting there hoping that it would reopen, and partially to see how others fair on the alternative routes. The most preferred alternative route was mentioned to be through Croatia and Slovenia.

None of those interviewed knew if there would be safe passage throughout these two countries, whether they would get their finger prints taken as part the Dublin agreement, or what modes of transport were available. As a result, many remained in Horgos to receive more news.

AVAILABLE INFORMATION

Prior to their journeys there were plenty of information sources available to asylum seekers. Smugglers informed them of legal status opportunities in final destination countries (although this information is often incorrect), and social media updates were common for changes to the route. Asylum seekers also relied heavily on information obtained from their families already in the final destination country (usually Germany), which was in some cases outdated.

When on the journey, telephones and internet access



Map 1: Current migration routes through Europe

was vastly reduced, and thus limited the availability of up to date information. Word of mouth from asylum seekers in the travel group and gathering location was the main source of information, as well as advice from local aid groups present. This lent itself to misinformation and confusion.

As an example a rumour started in Horgos on the 16th of September that they would reopen the border crossing which led to a surge of asylum seekers going to the closed gate to Hungary. This added to the already high tensions with Hungarian police.

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT, its sister-organisation ACTED, and the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT).

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions. For more information, you can write to geneva@reach-initiative.org. Visit www.reach-initiative.org and follow us @REACH_info