

Introduction

Since the last situation update by REACH on 16 March, migrants* have continued to arrive in Serbia, despite closure of the borders with FYROM and Bulgaria. Onward travel towards Western Europe is also continuing, with people increasingly seeking alternative routes since no legal opportunities exist. Our findings show that young Afghans, predominately single men and unaccompanied minors are more likely to seek alternative routes to Europe than Syrian and Iraqi families travelling with young children, disabled or elderly group members.

With migrants continuing to arrive and depart from transit sites along the Western Balkans corridor, it is a clear indication that new smuggling routes have been activated, while existing ones remain in use. UNHCR has reported that the smuggling route from Serbia to Hungary remains operational, while Syrian and Arabic-language social media show new routes being advertised to people waiting in Turkey, as well as in countries of origin. These include a route from Syria via Sudan (where no visa is required for Syrians), travelling onward to Libya before crossing to Italy. Other advertised routes include ships from Turkey directly to Italy, as well as numerous land and river routes.

This situation overview provides an update on the current situation in Serbia and FYROM, where a total of over 2,100 migrants are

currently waiting in transit sites. In addition to discussing the numbers of new arrivals and departures, this report examines humanitarian needs, conditions and intentions at major transit sites across this section of the Western Balkans.

Serbia

New Arrivals

As of 3 April, an estimated 1,100 migrants are hosted in transit sites in Serbia.¹ This includes 200 irregular arrivals recorded by UNHCR between 23 - 30 March,² although the total number is likely to be higher. In the same period, departures have been recorded from several transit sites. These include around 100 migrants reported to have left Sid between 20 - 24 March, despite the absence of legal options for onward travel following the implementation of the EU-Turkey plan.³ Many migrants have also reportedly left Belgrade, although exact numbers are not documented as people using this route are often travelling with the help of smugglers and are therefore not registered with national authorities or UNHCR.

If caught, new arrivals to Serbia through irregular means are usually transferred to registration centre in Presevo and are then hosted at the registration centre or at other Refugee Aid Points (RAPs) throughout the country. However, on 23 March, a group



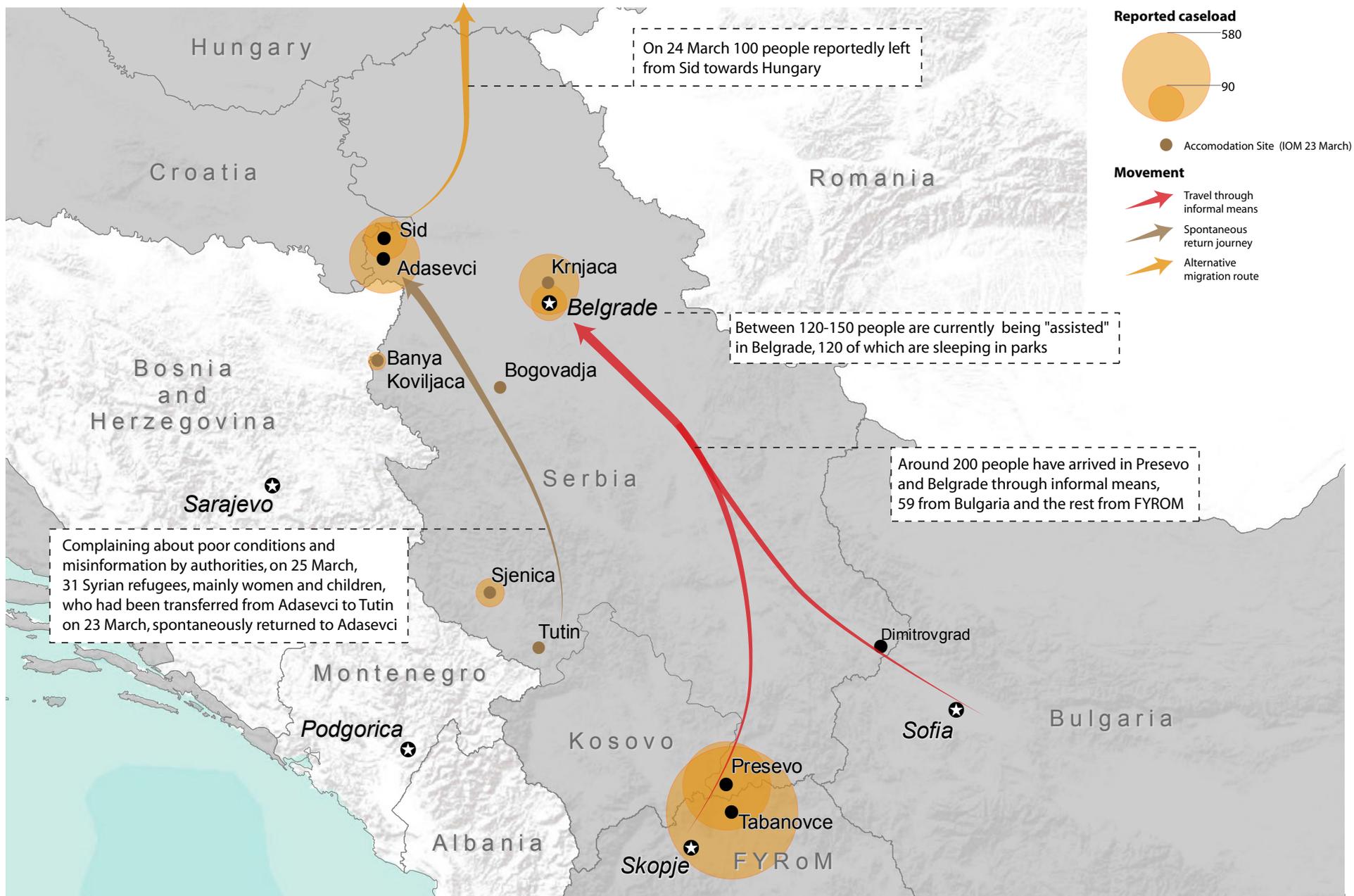
Migrants wait in a park in Belgrade, Serbia

of eight Syrians (two women and six men) entered in Serbia irregularly from FYROM and were subsequently detained and issued with an order from authorities to leave the country within 48 hours.⁴ This marks a shift in policy by Serbia authorities who previously sent migrants to registration centres for processing, despite having crossed borders illegally. As reported by REACH in the previous Rapid Assessment, illegal entry into Serbia is considered a “misdemeanour” and carries a fine from 500 - 50,000 RSD (50 - 400 EUR) and possible expulsion from the country, as in the case cited above.⁵

*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 Calculated from figures reported by UNHCR on 3 April, located in transit and registration camps, does not include those hosted in the asylum centres within Serbia
2 UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 23 March 2016; UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 24-28 March 2016; UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update, 29 March 2016; UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 30 March 2016
3 UNHCR Intelligence Analysis Unit, 24 March 2016
4 UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 23 March 2016
5 REACH, Rapid Assessment of Stranded Migrants Across the Western Balkans, 16 March 2016

Map 1: Overview of hotspots and alternative routes in use by migrants across the Western Balkans



Site snapshot: Adasevci, Serbia

Shelter	People sleep in a mixture of tents and hotel rooms in the nearby motel. Conditions in tents are not ideal, but migrants do not consider shelter to be a primary need.	
Non-Food Items	Clothing and other essentials are being provided by NGOs and UNHCR. Despite distributions migrants report that some NFIs are lacking, specifically underwear and clothing.	
Food	Food and cooking equipment has been distributed, but migrants continue to complain about quantity and quality of food provided.	
WASH	Toilets are provided, but insufficient washing facilities are available for the number of people. The lack of facilities for clothes washing has also contributed to unhygienic conditions.	

Site snapshot: Sid, Serbia

Shelter	Sufficient shelter is available for all migrants however, but poor hygiene has resulted in outbreaks of lice.	
Non-Food Items	Clothing, cooking equipment and other essentials are being provided by NGOs and UNHCR, although NFIs remain among migrants' primary reported needs.	
Food	Food is regularly distributed, but migrants continue to complain about quantity and quality of food provided.	
WASH	Toilets are provided, but insufficient washing facilities are available for the number of people. The lack of facilities for clothes washing has also contributed to unhygienic conditions.	

Site snapshot: Principovac, Serbia

Shelter	Adequate shelter is being provided and the site is currently below capacity, making conditions less crowded than at other locations.	
Non-Food Items	NFIs are provided within the site.	
Food	Food is provided within the camp, including some hot meals, although migrants complain that the meals lack protein (meat). Migrants must travel bus to the nearest town to purchase additional food	
WASH	Toilets and showers are provided on site and conditions are relatively good compared to other locations.	

Stranded Migrants

As shown in Map 1, the highest concentrations of migrants are located close to entry and exit points, with 577 reported in Presevo, 60 in Sid, 129 in Adasevci, 176 in Principovac and around 120-150 in Belgrade, although this number continues to fluctuate due to new arrivals and departures. Others are located in asylum centers in Banja Koviljaca, Bogovada, Obrenovac, Sjenica, Tutin and Krnjaca.

Adasevci

Migrants and asylum seekers interviewed in Adasevci had all arrived in Serbia more than three weeks ago. All reported to have arrived in Adasevci at the same time, suggesting a less mobile population than Belgrade. The majority of those interviewed (83%) were of Syrian nationality travelling with family and small children. The remainder (17%) were Iraqi nationals travelling with family. All groups interviewed in Adasevci reported they would wait in their current location to travel across the borders legally, anticipating that the borders would reopen.

When asked about their immediate needs, migrants ranked food as their primary immediate need followed by non-food items and WASH facilities. When asked about longer term needs, food maintained a priority with shelter and information prioritized over non-food items and WASH.

Sid

Conditions in Sid RAP are less crowded than in previous weeks, as many groups have left to seek out alternative routes to Europe.

Approximately 60 individuals are hosted in Sid compared to some 120 reported earlier in the month. Those left in the RAP lack sufficient funds to leave the sites and continue their journey. Some groups do not see smuggling as an option, usually those travelling with children, and continue to hope that borders reopen.

Principovac

Conditions in Principovac are comparatively better than in Adasevci and Sid, however migrants report dissatisfaction about the site's location, around 10km from the nearest town. In order to buy food to supplement aid received, it is necessary to take the bus, costing 200 RSD (1.70 EURO) one way, which is difficult for those on a shrinking budget.

During the past week, around 80 migrants have reportedly left the site to travel on to Western Europe by alternative means. During interviews conducted on 1 April, a group of Syrians with children indicated that they would try to cross into Croatia the following day. This is in contrast to interviews conducted in February and January when the majority of those seeking out smugglers were young men without families, usually Afghans or those of other nationalities such as Algerians, Moroccans and Egyptians.

Site snapshot: Dimitriovgrad, Serbia

Shelter	Containers with bunkbeds are provided at the site. With limited numbers arriving in Dimitriovgrad, there have not been complaints about overcrowding thus far.	
Non-Food Items	There continues to be non-food item distribution in Dimitriovgrad for the limited number of arrivals.	
Food	Food is provided at the site by NGOs.	
WASH	Toilets and showers are provided on site.	

Site snapshot: Presevo, Serbia

Shelter	Migrants located in Presevo are hosted within a refurbished tobacco factory. The facilities are at capacity, but have not reached crowded conditions.	
Non-Food Items	Non-food items are being provided on site.	
Food	Both hot and cold meals are provided at the facilities.	
WASH	WASH facilities are provided, though there is a report of an outbreak of scabies due to lack of hygiene within the facilities.	

Site snapshot: Belgrade, Serbia

Shelter	There is limited access to shelter within Belgrade for those travelling with limited financial means and/or unwilling to apply for asylum. Many groups sleep in parks and under bridges near transportation hubs.	
Non-Food Items	Food and non-food items are distributed at the Asylum Info Centre (AIC) and at Miksalište. AIC provides internet and access to computers for migrants to contact family and friends and also provides blankets for those sleeping on the streets.	
Food	Food is distributed at the AIC until 10pm and at Miksalište from 10am-4pm. Food remains a commonly reported priority need among migrants.	
WASH	Portable toilets are located in the park near the train and bus stations where migrants congregate, and some bathing facilities are also available closeby.	

Dimitriovgrad

While the Dimitriovgrad RAP is no longer allowing new arrivals to register, small numbers of people continue to arrive, mostly picked up by Serbian authorities having been smuggled across the border.

During the week of 21 March, around 20 Afghans and 14 Iraqis who had been smuggled across the border from Bulgaria were reported to have stayed in Dimitriovgrad RAP, where they were provided food and shelter and informed about applying for asylum in Serbia.

Approximately one bus a week is organised by authorities, bringing 20-35 migrants to Belgrade and/or Sid, although some migrants travel by themselves to Pirot and take taxis and buses from there.⁷ These findings are supported by UNHCR reports that migrants have arrived in Belgrade and Sid via Bulgaria, despite the border closure.

Presevo

According to UNHCR, the number of migrants hosted in Presevo has decreased from 683 earlier in the month to 577 as of 3 April. This is a result of both applications for asylum, with people moving to asylum centres, and those leaving sites through smugglers. Overall, conditions in Presevo are reportedly much better than other locations in Serbia, with less overcrowding and regular distributions of food and NFIs. Unlike in other sites, additional programs and activities, such as talent shows, are provided for children and adults by international non-government organisations.

Belgrade

Belgrade is not a formal site, but a key meeting point for migrants seeking alternative routes to gain entry into Europe. On average, groups interviewed in Belgrade had been in the country for more than 5 weeks, having spent around 3 weeks in Belgrade. These groups reported having been pushed back from borders further back along the Western Balkans corridor, with 33% of groups in Belgrade reporting having experienced pushbacks in FYROM. The vast majority (86%) reported push backs at the Croatian border, and a while the remainder (14%) had been pushed back from the border with Slovenia. Most did not know the reason for the push backs, while a few indicated it was due to their nationality, that documents had not been accepted on suspicion of being falsified, or that their area of origin had been deemed a 'safe area' in recent weeks.

When asked about intentions to continue their journey, most groups responded that if they had to wait in their current location for up to five days they would stay until they were able to move forward. When the time period was extended to 1-2 weeks, a larger proportion of group members reported that they would turn to alternative means to reach their final destination.

Asylum Requests in Serbia

According to the Serbian Ministry of Interior, 699 migrants applied for asylum in March.

Individuals who initiate an application for asylum are transferred from a registration centre or RAP to an asylum centre. However conditions in asylum centres are reportedly poor, causing some people to return to transit sites. On 25 March, 31 Syrians, mainly women and children, who had been transferred from Adasevci RAP to a temporary Asylum Centre in Tutin on the border with Montenegro, spontaneously returned to Adasevci citing poor conditions and misinformation by authorities, as shown in Map 1.⁹

A recent report by the European Council of Refugees and Exiles supports these findings and reports that the inability of reception systems to adapt to higher numbers of asylum seekers is a structural challenge throughout Europe, not just in Serbia and FYROM. Findings from the report suggest that the lack of sufficient accommodation places has driven many persons in need of protection into inadequate living conditions and destitution.¹⁰

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

New Arrivals

Unlike Serbia, FYROM has not reported any new arrivals, although multiple attempts have been made to break through the Greece-FYROM border from the Idomeni refugee camp, where over 11,290 individuals have

been waiting as of 2 April.¹¹ However attempted crossings have been stopped by authorities, with those who had managed to cross the border apprehended and returned to Idomeni.¹²

Despite the lack of recorded new arrivals in FYROM, a small decrease has been recorded in the population of Idomeni, Greece, since 2 April, suggesting that some individuals may still be continuing leave and cross the border to enter FYROM via alternative means, and.

Stranded Migrants

Approximately 1,000 people are currently waiting in Tabanovtse, on the border with Serbia. Gevgelija, formerly the other key transit site across the border from Idomeni, is now empty.

Of those in Tabanovtse, around 500 are reportedly from Afghanistan, while the remainder come from Syria and Iraq. All of

those interviewed in FYROM were Afghans, the majority (47%) of groups travelling with family, and smaller proportions travelling with people from their area of origin (27%) or with other individuals they met along the way (20%).

Tabanovtse

Conditions in Tabanovtse are particularly challenging, with containers overcrowded, some people living in tents, and limited access to showers. More than half of those interviewed (53%) indicated that shelter was their primary immediate need, while secondary needs included health care related to illness and insufficient access to proper WASH facilities. When asked about longer term needs, people prioritized shelter and healthcare over non-food items and information.

Site snapshot: Tabanovtse, FYROM

Shelter	Migrants are sheltered in containers and pop up tents suitable for short-term accommodation. Facilities are over capacity and not sustainable in the longer term.	
Non-Food Items	Non-food items are being provided to the population in Tabanovtse.	
Food	Food packages passed their expiration date were recalled from Tabanovtse. The current amount of food that is being provided is reportedly insufficient. REACH has received reports of fainting and health issues related to lack of nutrition.	
WASH	WASH facilities are provided, though there is a report of an outbreak of diarrhea possibly linked to lack of hygiene within the facilities.	

Conclusion

The Western Balkans corridor has been officially closed since the EU-Turkey Plan was first announced on 8 March. This has resulted in the emergence of new smuggling routes, through the Western Balkans as reported by REACH on 16 March. Migrants continue to arrive through irregular means from FYROM and Bulgaria into Serbia, but there are no reported departures or arrivals for the refugee camp in Tabanovtse indicating that these migrants are not from the already stranded population in FYROM. In addition to irregular arrivals, there has been a reactivation of the irregular migration route through Hungary with many people reported to be leaving sites in Serbia to travel onwards via Hungary.

For those currently stranded in Serbia and FYROM, needs have begun to shift from access to short-term lodging, food and non-food items such as shoes and jackets, to longer-term shelter, adequate hygiene facilities (toilets and bathing facilities) and healthcare. When asked how their needs might change if they were to remain in the same location for longer than two weeks, migrants reported medical care and proper sanitation and bathing facilities among their top priorities.

The failure to provide adequate conditions in transit sites has led to outbreaks of disease associated with poor hygiene conditions. By mid-March, the lack of appropriate bathing and laundry facilities resulted in an outbreak of lice and rashes among migrants stranded at the Refugee Aid Point in Sid, Serbia.¹² In

8 UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 31 March 2016

9 UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 22 March 2016

10 AIDA, "Wrong counts and closing doors: The reception of refugees and asylum seekers

in Europe"

11 UNHCR Europe Refugee Emergency Site Locations in Greece, 2 April 2016.

12 Al Jazeera, "Refugees attempt perilous Greece-Macedonia crossing" 15 March 2016

addition, there continue to be complaints by those in the transit camp in Sid that healthcare services provided in the camp are insufficient.

In FYROM, the capacity of the transit camp in Tabanovtse has been surpassed with more than 1,000 living in cramped conditions. The cramped conditions and lack of access to proper washing facilities have led to an outbreak of diarrhea at the end of March, affecting 20% of the transit camp.

Despite the increasing focus on longer-term needs, **the sector overview of key transit sites shows that needs and conditions vary considerably by site.** Overall, groups interviewed in Serbia indicated food as their primary immediate need, followed by non-food items and sanitation and washing facilities, suggesting that in many cases short term needs have not been adequately met and continued assistance is vital.

Conditions will need to be improved in order to avoid further outbreaks of disease and to maintain adequate and dignified conditions for the thousands who remain stranded in the sites across the Western Balkans.

In addition, inadequate conditions have already been seen to act as catalysts for further movement, causing numbers to fluctuate and making it more difficult for overstretched responders to accurately predict and plan adequate assistance accordingly.

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 REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our in-country office: iraq@reach-initiative.org or to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

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