



The Balkans

Asylum Seekers, Migrants and Refugees in Transit

Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
			x		
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major
			x		

Crisis Overview

Over 800,000 asylum seekers and refugees have made their way towards Europe by land and sea in 2015. As the sea route to Italy via North Africa is longer and more risky, and as the number of Syrians have increased, more people are traveling through Greece and then through the Balkans to reach northern and western Europe. The main pattern of movement is from Greece to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in a northwestern route through Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia towards Austria and Germany.

As of 5 November 2015, Greece had received the highest number of refugees and asylum seekers in decades, with over 656,108 people arriving by sea in 2015. The arrival of 210,265 in October alone marks a 2,729% increase compared to October 2014. Over 93% come from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries; over 60% are from Syria. However, this is a significant under-estimation as only about one-third of refugees and asylum seekers are reportedly registering on arrival to transit countries, according to UNHCR (UNHCR 10/2015). Very few recent arrivals are pursuing asylum cases in the Balkan countries.

The humanitarian needs are driven by obstacles at the borders, overcrowded and expensive transportation, tensions between host communities and refugees, long waits for registration, the risk of exploitation by smugglers, as well as inadequate assistance and shelter. Local and international capacities are under strain, and the arrival of winter is expected to exacerbate needs.

Key Findings

Anticipated scope and scale

- It is expected that the flow of people will continue, possibly aggravated by more border closures, leaving people stranded with limited accommodations and assistance. The approaching winter poses particular challenges in terms of supply of adequate shelter and NFIs. Despite increased dangers, reports of traffickers have reportedly reduced transit costs.
- Seasonal conditions will make the boat crossing from Turkey to Greece more treacherous, leading to an increase in drowning and hypothermia.
- A ferry strike is expected to resume 12 November and while there are efforts to make exceptions to transport refugees and asylum seekers to the mainland, this may further exacerbate bottlenecks on the transit route on the Greek islands.
- The number of people transiting through the Balkans is vastly underestimated, largely due to a significant number of people transiting bypassing registration.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- Shelter: winterisation assistance and heating in reception centres
- NFIs: blankets and winter clothes
- Protection: specialized services for unaccompanied and separated children, older people, pregnant and lactating women, infants and young children, and people with disabilities have specific needs in transit and accommodations.
- WASH: improved and expanded WASH facilities at reception and accommodation centres and access to drinking water
- Health: access to healthcare and psycho-social support

Limitations

The constant and dynamic movements of people and the fluidity of the situation in each country limit the accuracy of figures and information on needs in each location.

Most data covers those who are registered; little is known about the high number of non-registered people moving across the region.

Movement of Asylum Seekers and Refugees through the Balkans

European Migrant Crisis: Transit Centres



(as of 5 Nov 2015)



Country	Transit Centre	Average # of daily arrivals
Greece	Moria	Not fully functional
Macedonia	Gevgelija	6,000
	Tabanovce	n/a
Serbia	Preševo	6,000-10,000
Croatia	Opatovac	4,000
Slovenia	Brežice	4,000
	Dobova	
	Rigonce	
	Gruškovje	
	Šentilj	



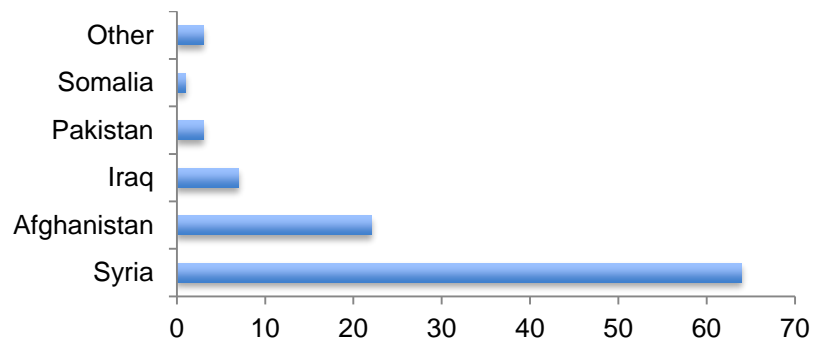
Source: ACAPS, 04/10/2015

Displacement

Greece: As of 5 November, there have been 656,108 arrivals by sea in Greece in 2015. There were 7,000 people arriving daily in October, compared to 1,000 people in June, and 200 in May (UNHCR, 01/07/2015; IOM, 10/2015). 210,265 people arrived in October 2015, compared to 7,432 in October 2014; this is a 2,729% increase (UNHCR, 31/10/2015).

94% of arrivals come from among the most common countries of origin for refugees: these include Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia. 62% are men, 23% are children, and 14% are women (UNHCR, 31/10/2015). There are 44 known sea landing points and one land entry point (Evros region), making reception activities a major challenge. As well as landing on big islands (e.g. Lesbos, Kos), people are arriving at islets (e.g. Pserimnos, Agathonisi), rocks, and military bases (Farmakonisi, Kalimnos), where access is limited. In Kos and Chios, local authorities have restricted access of humanitarian organisations, reportedly in a bid to encourage people not to stay (Human Rights Watch, 28/05/2015; GCR, 2015; DW, 10/2015).

Country of origin as % of total registered in Greece



Source: UNHCR, 31/10/2015

Asylum seekers' financial situation is crucial to determining how long they stay in Greece, as they have to pay for all their transport (IOM, 10/09/2015). The majority of arrivals move to the mainland and then to Athens (IRIN, 19/05/2015) with the aim of crossing the Balkans to western and northern Europe (UNHCR, 01/07/2015). A strike by ferry workers between 2-5 November further exacerbated transit from the islands to the mainland (AP 05/11/2015).

Greece lacks proper reception facilities to register asylum seekers, which has been exacerbated by its financial crisis and economic austerity measures (UNHCR, 2015). In most islands, registration is conducted by the police and the coast guard. The newly

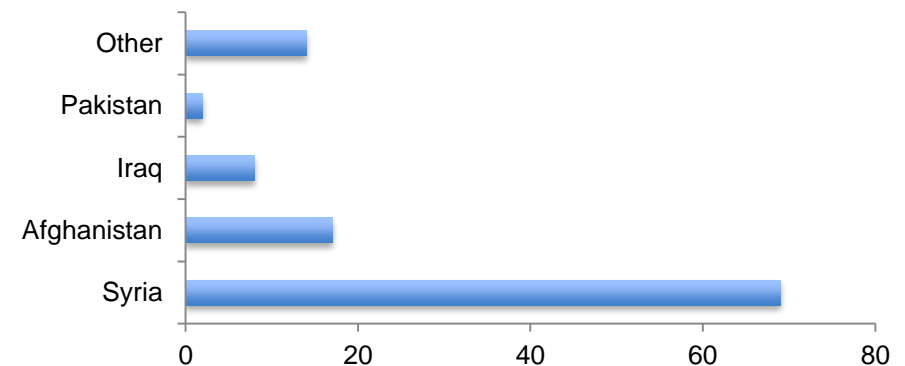
established First Reception Service in Lesbos is not yet fully functional. A backlog in processing is causing tensions, as people are waiting on islands for days, and some leave without registering (UNHCR, 16/10/2015). The frequent changes in procedures hinder the provision of accurate information (UNHCR, 10/2015). Once registered, Syrians with valid documents have permission to remain in the country for six months. Non-Syrian asylum seekers are given expulsion notices to leave the country within one month.

FYROM: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is the main corridor for people travelling from Greece to Serbia. By June and 27 October, 214,343 people had arrived in the country. There are indications that this is an underestimation, because as many as two-thirds of people may transit through the country without being registered.

In October, the numbers crossing the border from Greece and entering the southern border town of Gevgelija continued to be high, with estimated daily arrivals reaching 6,000 (IOM, 22/10/2015). An all-time high was recorded on 18 October at 10,005 (UNHCR, 20/10/2015).

According to Government sources, in mid-October, 69% of the registered arrivals in the country were Syrians, 17% Afghan, 8% Iraqi, and 2% Pakistani (UNHCR, 20/10/2015).

Country of Origin as % of total registered in FYROM



Source: UNHCR, 31/10/2015

FYROM changed its asylum law on 16 June 2015, after a series of fatal accidents involving people travelling through the country via dangerous routes to avoid arrest (AP, 18/06/2015). According to the new law, people can apply for temporary asylum at the border or the nearest police station, which will allow them to travel legally through the country for three days. Beforehand, the asylum seekers' entry into the

country was considered illegal and could result in imprisonment. After receipt of the document at the Gevgelija reception centre people can travel directly to Tabanovce reception centre, next to the train station at the FYROM–Serbia border (UNHCR, 10/2015; w2eu.info, 10/2015). On 25 September government policy changed to allow transit through the country only by train (UNHCR, 01/10/2015). In the beginning of October, the increased numbers of arrivals meant buses and taxis started to be used again as well (UNHCR, 08/10/2015).

The vast majority of registered people are transiting through the country. 1,710 asylum applications were submitted to the Government from January to the end of September (UNHCR, 20/10/2015). Upon registration these asylum-seekers are accommodated in the reception centre in Skopje, which has capacity for 150 people (w2eu.info, 10/2015).

Serbia: Most refugees/asylum seekers enter Serbia from FYROM. The main point of registration is the Preševo One Stop Centre, just north of the border with FYROM. Most refugees leave Preševo the day that they arrive, and continue their journey by bus directly to Šid or Berkasovo, on the border with Croatia (UNICEF 12/10/2015). Preševo can register 6,000 people per day. For the rest of the country, authorities can process 500 people per day (ECHO 20/10/2015; UNHCR 12/10/2015).

The number of registered arrivals in Serbia in 2015 was 308,184 as of 5 November (IOM 22/10/2015). Since late September, an average of 4,300 people a day have been entering Serbia from FYROM (ECHO 20/10/2015) and between 250-550 from Bulgaria every day (UNHCR 12/10/2015). On 18 October, there arrivals peaked at over 10,000 from FYROM, of which more than half were children (ECHO 20/10/2015, Caritas 26/10/2015). 4,500 were recorded exiting to Croatia on the same day (ECHO 20/10/2015).

The number of people seeking asylum increased by 37% between August and September, as well as the proportion of Afghan applicants, however, it is reported that very few follow-up on their asylum applications (UNHCR 12/10/2015, ACAPS, 04/11/2015).

UNHCR estimates that at any given time there are over 7,000 asylum seekers and refugees in Serbia (UNHCR 12/10/2015). The actual number of asylum seekers are thought to be higher because not all are registered (EurActiv 10/09/2015).

Most are thought not to plan to spend more than a few days on Serbian territory (IRIN 14/10/2015). Those who pursue their initial registered ‘intent to seek asylum’ must go to one of the five asylum centres located in Bogovadja, Banja Koviljača, Krnjača, Sjenica and Tutin (central, western and southwestern Serbia). Only 14 people have been officially granted refugee status since the beginning of the year, although few applicants actually follow through on the process (UNICEF 12/10/2015).

An estimated 3,800 people exit Serbia on a daily basis, primarily from the Berkasovo/Bapska border crossing, but also Šid/Tovarnik crossing (UNHCR 12/10/2015).

The number of refugees in Belgrade has fallen to around 100 as reception and transit facilities have improved. As of 11 October, only around 20 refugees and asylum seekers remained on the Serbia–Hungary border due to Hungary’s closure of its border crossings (UNHCR 12/10/2015; UNICEF 12/10/2015).

Croatia: Overall, 266,265 people have arrived in Croatia since September 2015. Since 16 September 2015, when Hungary closed its border with Serbia and announced it would start arresting people crossing the border illegally, the number of asylum seekers transiting through Croatia drastically increased. According to the Ministry of the Interior, some 44,000 people entered Croatia between 16 and 22 September (IFRC, 02/10/2015) and nearly 200,000 people had transited through Croatia within a month of Hungary’s border closure, crossing mostly to Hungary, and a smaller number to Slovenia (AP, 18/10/2015). On 16 October, Hungary also closed its borders with Croatia to migrants and asylum seekers, leaving only two official border crossings open with Croatia, forcing people to move on to Slovenia or stay in Croatia (Independent, 16/10/2015).

Croatia closed most of its eight border points with Serbia two days after people began arriving (AFP, 19/10/2015). The main known entry points from Serbia are at Bapska (more than 95% of arrivals) and Tovarnik (less than 5% enter through this crossing point) (IOM, 22/10/2015). In late November, the governments of Serbia and Croatia have agreed that people would be transported by train from Šid in Serbia directly to the reception centre (welcome, 29/10/2015). The main border point has shifted from Tovarnik to Bapska, which is closer to the only reception and registration transit centre that the Croatian government set up in September, in the village of Opatovac (UNHCR, 01/10/2015; IOM, 05/10/2015). As of 2 November, the Government closed Opatovac and opened a renovated warehouse in Slavonski Brod to register and accommodate 5,000 people, particularly in the winter months (Government, 06/11/2015). People crossing the border at Bapska in Croatia are taken to the transit centre (UNHCR, 08/10/2015). After registration, they are taken by buses and train to the Slovenian border (previously, to the Hungarian border). The vast majority do not express an intention to stay in Croatia; only four asylum applications have been submitted (UNICEF, 12/10/2015).

The influx into Croatia continues and appears to be increasing, with 6,500 daily arrivals and more than 52,000 in the last week of October, a 47% increase compared to the previous week (IOM, 27/10/2015).

Slovenia: As of 2 November, 139,322 people have arrived in Slovenia since mid-October, the equivalent of about 5% of the Slovenian population (Government, 02/11/2015). 48,832 people arrived between 20 and 27 October (IOM, 29/10/2015). Since 30 October, the influx has slowed, according to the Government (Government, 30/10/2015). Most refugees come from Syria (nearly 50%), followed by Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan (Government, 26/10/2015; 02/11/2015). 59 people have requested asylum (Government, 02/11/2015). By 31 October, over 87,000 people had left.

Rigonce crossing point sees the highest traffic. Across the country the main reception and accommodation centres are Brežice, Dobova, Rigonce, Gruškovje and Šentilj (Government, 24/10/2015; 23/10/2015). They at times accommodate over 4,000 people, but are built for several hundred (Government, 02/11/2015).

People housed in the accommodation centres are allowed to move freely inside and outside these centres (Government, 02/11/2015).

By the end of October, a special train service, which provides a more dignified transit and reduces waiting times, started taking people from Tovarnik, Croatia directly to Dobova, Slovenia. From Dobova, people are transferred to centres near the Austrian border (UNHCR, 02/11/2015).

Shelter and NFIs

Safe temporary shelter facilities are required along transit routes, particularly as delays at border crossings, boat crossings, and registration sites increase. (Caritas 03/09/2015; MSF 15/10/2015).

Winter

Clothing and shoes for rainy conditions have been observed to be in high demand but often not available (UNHCR 20/10/2015). Warm clothing, blankets, and heated temporary shelters will also be required to weather near freezing temperatures, which have already set in along the southern portion of the routes, along the Serbian borders areas with Croatia and Bulgaria (ECHO 20/10/2016).

Shelter

Greece: Temporary shelter demands rose in October as the number of new arrivals increased as asylum seekers are trying to make the crossing from Turkey before winter sets in and sea conditions worsen. Expensive fares from islands to the mainland and worsening weather are leading delays in transit and overcrowded housing. A strike by ferry workers between 2-5 November further exacerbated transit from the islands to the mainland (AP 05/11/2015). This has resulted in more people sleeping in the open or in inadequate shelters (UNHCR, 26/10/2015). More than half of

asylum seekers had no access to blankets and 30% had no mattress to sleep on. (UNHCR, 01/07/2015).

The greatest needs are in Lesvos, as the island is receiving the largest proportion of arrivals. In Kos and Chios, there are no reception and registration facilities and asylum seekers are living in abandoned buildings, with limited running water and no electricity. Others sleep in tents or on the streets (Human Rights Watch, 28/05/2015; GCR, 2015; DW, 10/2015) such as in Athens, where asylum seekers have set up temporary camps in Victoria Square and Areos Park (DW, 02/10/2015). Greek authorities have established only one accommodations, made up of pre-fabricated structures in Eleonas, an Athens suburb, and can accommodate 700 people (UNHCR, 20/08/2015, Al Jazeera 30/09/2015).

FYROM: The onset of cold temperatures has increased the need for heating and blankets in Gevgelija centre (independent.mk, 30/20/2015).

Serbia: Delays at border crossings are causing more people to be stranded with no access to shelter. Preševo centre near the FYROM border provides space for short rests but as winter approaches, improved shelter facilities are required (UNICEF 12/10/2015). An estimated 800 places in shelters are available in Serbia but many are not along the main transit routes (IRIN 14/10/2015). There is an urgent need particularly along the Croatia/Serbia border (MSF 15/10/2015).

Croatia: The new Slavonski Broad transit centre is better suited for winter conditions and can accommodate 5,000 people compared to the Opatovac transit centre which had the capacity to accommodate 4,000 people in tents (welcome, 29/10/2015). In addition to the Slavonski Brod centre, Croatia can reportedly host 1,500 to 2,000 asylum seekers and refugees in Zagreb, which is located along the current transit routes, and smaller numbers at other temporary shelters around the country (AFP 02/10/2015).

Slovenia: Camps set up to handle a few hundred people were overwhelmed with thousands of arrivals (The Guardian 31/10/2015) due to slowed movements through border crossings (UNHCR 02/11/2015), forcing some people to sleep outside (Caritas, 26/10/2015). Shelter needs appeared to be most severe in Brežice transit centre. Thousands of people, including young children, older people and disabled, are sleeping in the open around the centre and in the fields in Rigonce and Dobov, with no access to shelter, food or sanitation facilities (MSF, 26/10/2015). Reception and registration facilities at the border with Croatia need to be winterized. (UNHCR, 27/10/2015).

WASH

The lack of adequate sanitation facilities, drinking water, rubbish collection, and cleaning services is a major concern across all reception centres in the Balkans. This is assumed to be a major issue along the transit routes as well.

Greece: Almost 20% of asylum seekers lack regular access to sanitation and 70% not to regularly receive hygiene items. More than half had no access to a shower (UNHCR, 01/07/2015).

FYROM: Rubbish accumulation is a problem in and around the Gevgelija reception centre and according to local authorities, the procurement of a waste truck and drinking water are required (Independent MK, 30/20/2015). UNHCR has also reported inadequate cleaning in and around the centre. (UNHCR, 20/10/2015).

Serbia: Clean water and safe sanitation facilities are needed at crossing points and registration centres (MSF 19/10/2015; Amnesty International 24/10/2015). It has been reported that there are only 12 toilets at Preševo registration centre: available for the 6,000 - 10,000 people passing through the centre daily, amounting to approximately 66 people to one toilet (Deutsche Welle 26/10/2015; UNHCR 12/10/2015; Caritas 26/10/2015; ECHO 20/10/2015)

Croatia: There have been reports of the Opatovac transit centre on occasions being overstretched, and people being without proper hygiene and sanitation facilities (Care, 21/10/2015).

Slovenia: WASH facilities at reception centres require improvement. Limited WASH access for people taking the 15-hour train journey from the Croatian town of Tovarnik to Slovenia is a major concern (UNHCR, 02/11/2015).

Food security and livelihoods

The provision of food has largely focused on reception centres and transit sites. Due to a lack of resources, many people have been subsisting on dried and canned foods and are inadequate particularly for infants, young children and pregnant and lactating women. As the weather becomes more severe, food needs are expected to increase.

Greece: Food distributions are undertaken only on a sporadic basis by local NGOs and volunteers on most of the islands (UNHCR, 26/10/2015). On Lesbos, food rations are reportedly not sufficient for all the new arrivals (MSF, 20/07/2015), while on Kos, no food was being provided to arrivals who were being sent by local authorities to a re-opened hotel building (IRIN, 19/05/2015).

FYROM: In mid-October, food security and access to safe drinking water had generally improved, although food needs may not be suitable for young children and infants (UNHCR, 20/10/2015).

Serbia: Adequate food supplies are needed at registration centres, transportation points, and border crossings at the Croatian border and to a lesser extent along the border with Bulgaria. As temperatures drop, warm food is preferred (MSF 15/10/2015).

Croatia: There is a concern about food security, especially for infants, as most children in transit have been eating dry food for weeks or sometimes months (UNICEF, 12/10/2015). The nutrition situation is likely to worsen as winter conditions demand a higher calorie intake.

Slovenia: The lack of food for people travelling by train from the Croatian town of Tovarnik to Slovenia is a concern (UNHCR, 02/11/2015).

Protection

Vulnerable Groups

People with specific needs, such as unaccompanied children, older people, pregnant and lactating women, people with disabilities, and victims of torture, are likely receiving appropriate support (UNHCR, 16/06/2015; 15/10/2015; IOM, 10/2015).

Family separation is a major concern, especially when boarding buses and trains (UNHCR, 01/10/2015). Unaccompanied children and women are particularly vulnerable to being exploited by traffickers and other perpetrators of abuse (UNHCR 9/10/2015; UNICEF 12/10/2015). There are also reports of attempted abductions of children, as families with children receive priority access to services such as transport and food (UNICEF, 12/10/2015).

Greece: Disabled and older people have reportedly been abandoned on islands by smugglers, without any food or water (local media, 26/06/2015). The overcrowding of trains is of serious concern. Refugees are being charged high prices for train tickets compared to locals: the rail company has reportedly increased fares from five to 25 Euros (UNHCR, 20/10/2015; Balkaninsight, 29/10/2015).

FYROM: A third of registered people transiting the country are women and children. Some 12% of women are pregnant (UNICEF, 01/09/2015). Refugees are also reportedly being charged higher costs for train tickets than locals and there is reported abuse by train operators (UNHCR, 20/10/2015).

Croatia: Information on asylum seekers in Croatia is not disaggregated, but it is estimated that women and children constitute 30–40% of arrivals (UNICEF, 12/10/2015).

Slovenia: The number of separated families is reportedly significantly rising. They are separated during border crossings from Croatia and when women and children are given priority for transportation (UNHCR, 02/11/2015).

Child Protection

Greece: There is a lack of appropriate shelters on almost all islands, resulting in cases of children remaining in police custody in substandard conditions, before being transferred to open reception facilities in the mainland. (UNHCR, 22/10/2015).

FYROM: Between 19 June and 20 October, almost 35,000 children had been registered at the border. Among these were 6,389 unaccompanied minors, highlighting the need for enhanced protection and monitoring for these children (UNHCR, 20/10/2015).

Serbia: Between January and July 2015, the number of unaccompanied and separated children registered by the Government exceeded 4,000. While adolescent males make up the majority of this group, as of 9 October, 1,047 girls had been identified amongst the unaccompanied and separated children crossing into Serbia this year (UNHCR 9/10/2015). Between 23% and 38% of those who have applied for asylum are minors (UNHCR 12/10/2015; UNICEF 12/10/2015). Referrals for welfare assistance are often not being made, leaving these groups with a lack of specialized support (UNHCR 9/10/2015).

Croatia: Many children arriving at the reception centre are reportedly exhausted, confused, and traumatised, with some experiencing illnesses and dehydration as a result of the long journey (UNICEF, 22/09/2015).

Host community and asylum seeker tensions

Tensions between asylum seekers and host communities are frequent, as well as among asylum seekers, particularly in transit centres. Incidents of discrimination and violence against asylum seekers have been reported (UNHCR, 2015).

Greece: Tensions are increasing between refugees and the local population on the islands, as well as among refugees themselves (UNHCR, 16/10/2015).

FYROM: In August, residents of Gevgelija, which hosts the main reception centre on the border, protested the physical and environmental toll of asylum seekers and refugees have had on the local area (NYT, 21/10/2015). These tensions erupted into clashes between police and asylum seekers/refugees.

Croatia: At the end of September, tensions between groups of asylum seekers and refugees were reported at the Opatovac transit centre due to the delays in registration and departures from the centre (UNHCR, 01/10/2015).

Health

The main health conditions observed have been respiratory problems, joint pain, exhaustion, and dehydration, with pregnant women, older people, and young children particularly affected (IOM, 05/10/2015).

Psychosocial services are also needed to reduce health and mental health risks associated with the mass movement of people (IOM, 10/2015).

FYROM: The Government is providing medical assistance at reception centres (IOM, 11/09/2015). The increasingly cold and wet weather has led to an observed increase in respiratory infections (UNHCR, 20/10/2015) and is expected to increase with the onset of winter conditions

Serbia: Medical assistance is severely lacking both at border crossings and while in transit. MSF medical teams are reportedly treating more than 400 patients every day, and the number is increasing. People are experiencing flu and gastrointestinal and respiratory problems, as well as injuries and chronic conditions. Patients with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, asthma and heart problems have been unable to obtain medication whilst on their journey (MSF 15/10/2015).

Croatia: The Government provided health services at Opatovac transit centre (until the facilities were shifted to Slavonski Brod in early November) and had conducted over 7,600 health interventions in the latter half of September, resulting in 28 hospitalizations. Most health problems were related to exhaustion and dehydration (IOM, 05/10/2015).

Slovenia: Medical support is provided at reception and accommodation facilities through community health centres and the army is also providing mobile health services. The health situation is reportedly the most difficult in Brežice due to overcrowding of the reception site (Government, 26/10/2015). A few isolated cases of scabies and hepatitis have been reported (Government, 24/10/2015).

Response capacity

International actors

A number of UN agencies and international NGOs, with local partners are providing WASH, shelter, NFI, food, health and protection support. Projects to facilitate family reunification exist along borders and in registration centres. A number of projects are aimed at vulnerable groups, and provide transportation assistance: IOM and UNHCR have been providing daily transport for up to 4,000 asylum seekers deemed vulnerable from Miratovac in FYROM across the border with Serbia to Preševac Centre (UNHCR 12/10/2015; UNICEF, 12/10/2015).

A number of EU countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, UK, Slovakia, Austria and the Netherlands, are providing assistance, particularly shelter and NFIs (ECHO, 30/10/2015).

The EU recently allocated 7 million euros to Serbia in order to cover the provision of humanitarian aid and the enhancement of reception centres (UNHCR 12/10/2015).

Greece: Officially, undocumented refugees and asylum seekers are not entitled to access public health services, except for emergencies. In practice, however, refugees and asylum seekers are referred to local health centres for testing and hospitalisations on some islands (Médecins du Monde, 04/2015).

Macedonia: In the wake of clashes with asylum seekers and refugees, a temporary state of emergency was declared in August and the military was deployed to restore along its borders with Greece and Serbia (NYT 20/08/2015). In September, the Macedonian parliament extended the state of emergency on the country's borders until June 2016 (AP, 04/10/2015).

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with public health institutions provide medical care at the reception centre site in Gevgelija. Nine mobile teams of the Red Cross are working in shifts to provide medical assistance and first aid in Gevgelija and Tabanovce. (UNHCR, 20/10/2015; WHO, 05/10/2015).

Serbia: The Serbian Government continues to request additional humanitarian support, however a number of local and international organisations have been providing medical, WASH, shelter, NFI, food and protection services (The Guardian 15/09/2015). In October, the EU allocated 7 million euros for Serbia in humanitarian assistance, including the improvement of reception centres.

Croatia: The Croatian Government runs the Opatovac transit centre, with extensive support from the Croatian Red Cross, which has been mandated by the Government to coordinate the assistance provided for refugees. Civil society and volunteers are playing an important role in supporting and assisting refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 01/10/2015).

Slovenia: A military field hospital will be deployed to support the teams in the field. Social Work Centres are also providing support with their emergency services through the provision of psychosocial support, family reunification, and identification of unaccompanied children, etc. (Government, 02/11/2015).

On 20 October, Slovenia called in its army to help manage the influx of people (BBC, 20/10/2015). Among other things, the army has been tasked with logistics, health support, and preparation and delivery of cooked meals to reception and accommodation centres (Government, 02/11/2015).

Local NGOs

Local NGOs, national Red Cross societies, and volunteer networks are active in providing emergency assistance, primarily medical, food and NFI assistance both at reception centres and along transit routes. They have also helped disseminate information on asylum rights and guidance on services available, and established temporary safe spaces for children and families (UNHCR 12/10/2015; UNICEF 12/10/2015).

However, it is reported that groups are struggling to keep pace with arrivals, especially with winter drawing close (AP, 04/10/2015). In Slovenia, a NGO platform is coordinating local organizations' activities and one organization is dedicated to collecting and coordinating individual donations.

Aggravating factors

Winter conditions increase the need for warm clothes and shoes, high-calorie food, blankets, improved shelter, heating in reception centres and shelters, and medicine and supplies for respiratory infections. Without adequate assistance to facilitate movement at border crossings, blockages and delays in wet and cold conditions will exacerbate the situation (MSF 15/10/2015).

Harsh winter conditions with extreme weather events may occur. Heavy snowfall can limit movement, and cut communications and electricity, especially in mountainous areas (IFRC, 15/01/2015). People might change their route to avoid the harshest weather, which could create humanitarian needs in new locations (AFP, 02/10/2015).

Communication and access to information: Télécoms Sans Frontières notes that people experience bottlenecks in communication and accessing information in some areas. These include the lack of network connectivity, high roaming costs, saturated and inoperative networks, the lack of power to charge phones, which contributes to the lack of information and separation of families (TSF, 28/10/2015).

Border controls: Neighbouring states on the transit route have concentrated on curbing irregular cross-border movement, including through tighter border controls and detention, or penalisation for illegal entry.

Border controls imposed elsewhere in Europe, most significantly in Hungary, are causing a bottleneck along the Serbia–Croatia border, increasing the need for humanitarian support in the area (ECHO 20/10/2015).

The EU Summit on the European Refugee Crisis on 18 October noted the need for border-related confidence measures and the strengthening of border cooperation between Greece and FYROM (independent.mk, 26/10/2015).

On 28 October, Austria announced it would build a fence along its border with Slovenia to control the influx of people. Ljubljana has warned it will shut its border if the EU does not stick to the 17-point action plan announced on 25 October to improve cooperation regarding the asylum seeker influx (AFP, 28/10/2015).

Landmines along the Serbia–Croatia border: Around 300,000m² of Croatian territory along the border with Serbia is contaminated with landmines. Although contaminated areas are marked and additional markers have been installed, the mines pose a risk. De-mining is expected to be complete by November (Balkan Transitional Justice, 15/10/2015; Independent, 22/10/2015).

Previous displacement: In Greece, 200,000 undocumented asylum seekers and refugees were estimated to be living in the country and it is possible that some of this group will also join the flow towards western and northern Europe. Since 2013, migration routes have been shifting to Italy and Greece resulting in a significant increase in arrivals (Eliamep, 10/2014).

Information gaps

- There is a lack of comprehensive data on the number of people transiting through each country due to many people avoiding registration. The number of those registered is not disaggregated by sex, age or disability. The large, dynamic, and continuous movement of people across the Balkans severely restricts attempts to assess needs, both as a whole and in specific country contexts.
- There is an overall lack of information on specific sectoral needs.
- Data on unaccompanied or separated children is incomplete. This is in part due to the fact that some may not register or are not properly identified and referred or pretend to be adults.
- Most data available concerns asylum seekers who have registered and little is known about the situation of unregistered asylum seekers. Due to this lack of data, it is difficult to target the most vulnerable and establish the number of people arriving and exiting from each country.