



2019

Report on Illegal Migration in Southeast Europe



MIRAGE TASK FORCE
Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration

PUBLIC VERSION



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The 2019 Report on Illegal Migration in Southeast Europe provides a wide-range overview on the situation of illegal migration in Southeast Europe for 2018. The main purpose of this Report is to support the competent law enforcement authorities completing their understanding and tackling illegal migration at regional level. The Report covers relevant characteristics of illegal migration for the year 2018 and was prepared based on information provided by all SELEC Member States through a standard questionnaire containing quantitative data related to the detected (at the green/blue borders, BCP and inland), expelled and returned migrants, asylum seekers, migrant smugglers and also descriptive information regarding the process of illegal migration in each SELEC Member State and at regional level.

The restricted version of the herein report is available for law enforcement and judicial use only and is disseminated to SELEC Member States, Operational and Strategic Partners.



Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC)

Parliament Palace, 10th floor, 13 Septembrie Avenue, no 1-5, 050711
Bucharest, Romania

Phone: +40 21 303 60 09

Fax: +40 21 303 60 77

E-mail: secretariat@selec.org



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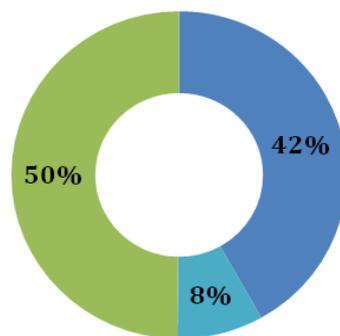
Key findings

Subsequent to the downward trend of the past two years, a threefold increase was reported for 2018 compared with the previous year, a total of **438,099 migrants** were detected by the law enforcement authorities in SELEC Member States inland or attempting to illegally cross the borders.

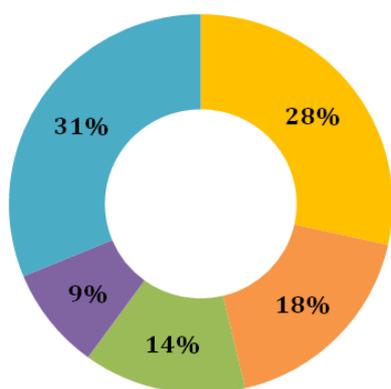
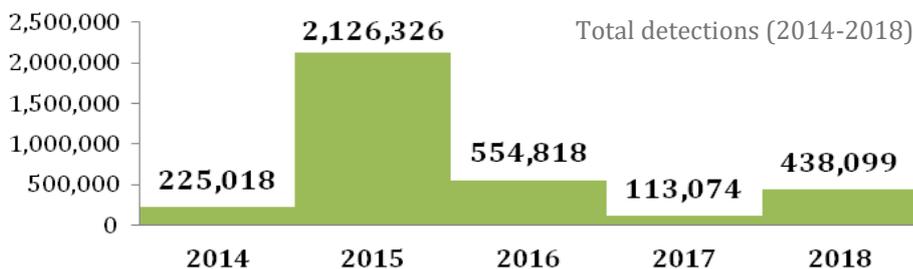
Different from the previous years when the number of migrants detected at the borders was considerable higher than inland, in 2018 the number of **inland detections (83,465 detections)** was *almost equal* with the number of **detections made at the borders** of SELEC Member States (**86,631 detections**).

However, the share of migrants apprehended on entry (42%) remains higher than the share of migrants on exit (8%)

■ detection at the border - on entry
 ■ detection at the border - on exit
 ■ detections inland



Place of detection



■ Afghanistan
 ■ Pakistan
 ■ Syria
 ■ Iraq
 ■ Other

Main identified citizenships

438,099 migrants detected

23,681 migrants returned, readmitted or expelled

218,339 applications for international protection

13,354 granted refugee status

7,024 smugglers charged/prosecuted

Criminal Networks and Smugglers

< commonly characterized by strict hierarchic organization structure and clear defined roles for each member;

< linked on grounds of common ethnic background, kinship and on regional basis;

< members holding multiple citizenships, foreigners (Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian), as well as nationals of SELEC MS. Leaders are usually foreigners, sharing the same origin with the migrants;

< a significant the involvement of foreigners with temporary residence or asylum seekers in the countries were the OCGs organize the smuggling process.

< constantly adapting to the countermeasures implemented by the LEA in the MS, using shifting routes and diversified modus operandi;



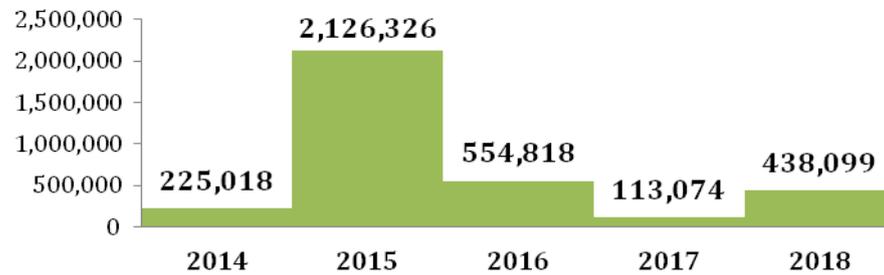
A total of **438,099** migrants were detected by the law enforcement authorities in SELEC MS in 2018.

The number of detections has constantly increased starting with 2013, reaching unprecedented figures in 2015, when more than 2 million detections were reported by SELEC MS.

Following a descending trend highlighted by the statistics for 2016 and 2017, the available data for 2018 is underlining a threefold increase of detected migrants compared with the previous year.

Significant higher detections was reported by most Member States (more than 100% increase), except for Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia which reported smaller figures.

Detections - overview



Total number of detections of illegal migrants (2014 – 2018)

Similar with previous year, Turkey (268,003 detections) and Greece (93,367 detections), the countries facing the biggest migratory pressure, reported the highest figures at regional level.

The most relevant increase in the number of migrants detected in 2018 compared with the previous year was reported by Bosnia and Herzegovina (from 812 to 28,391), currently the main country of exit of the migration flow towards EU with a significant number of detections inland, and Turkey (from 15,268 to 268,003) the main entry point the region. Figures reported by both countries are highlighting a sharp increase compared with the previous years, even more than the number of detections made in 2015.

Moldova has also reported a significant increase compared with 2017, from 65 up to 2,728 detections in 2018. Nevertheless, the number of migrants detected in 2017 appears to be a rather isolated exception considering that the reported figures from the previous years are comparable

with those corresponding to 2018.

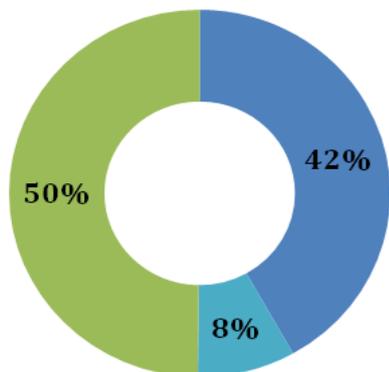
Five other Member States made a higher number of detections in 2018: Albania (from 2,992 to 6,894), Greece (from 68,112 to 93,367), Hungary (from 1,755 to 4,885), Montenegro (from 1,288 to 4,753) and Republic of North Macedonia (4,129 to 16,895), the last two even significant higher than in 2015.

Nevertheless, the number of detections has dropped roughly with 30% in three Member States: Bulgaria (from 4,957 to 3,132), Romania (from 6,191 to 3,880) and Serbia (from 7,505 to 5,171). For Bulgaria and Serbia this decrease is continuing the downward trend which began in 2016, suggesting that the migration follow has shifted to a different route in the past two years, while Romania has faced a rather constant migration pressure starting with 2014, the increased number of detections made in 2017 do not appear to be the result of a change in the routes at regional level.



Place of detection

- detection at the border - on entry
- detection at the border - on exit
- detections inland



Unlike previous years when the number of migrants detected at the borders was considerable higher than inland, in terms of place of

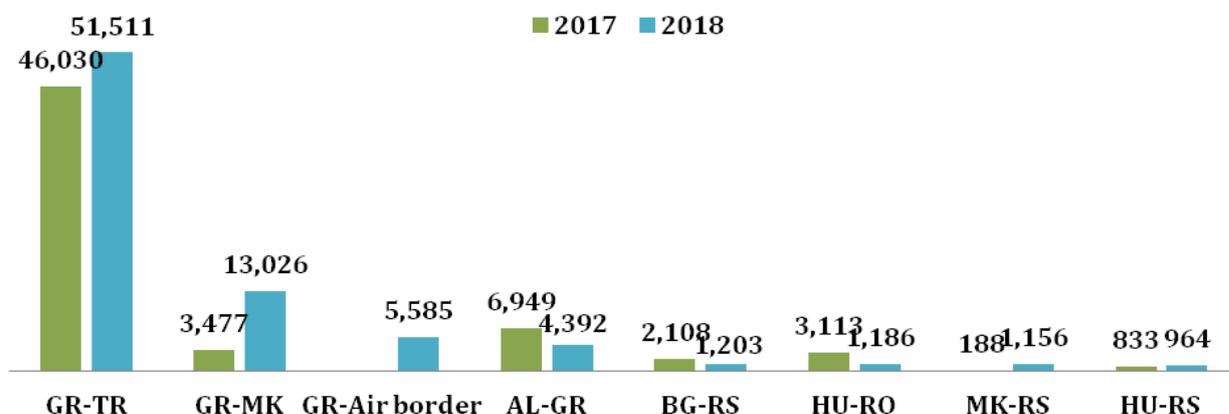
detection, in 2018 the share of inland detections (83,465 detections) was almost equal with the number of detections made at the borders of SELEC Member States (86,631 detections).

The analysis in terms of direction of detections at the border continues the trend of the past years; the share of migrants apprehended on entry (42%) remains higher than the share of migrants on exit (8%)

The overall increase at regional level in the number of detections made inland

compared with those made at the borders is the result of higher figures for inland detections reported by seven out of ten reporting Member States. Nonetheless, the share between the two is balanced (almost equal) by the significant higher number of migrants apprehended at the borders of Greece and Republic of North Macedonia.

With over 51,000 detections of migrants, the border between Greece and Turkey remains the border with the highest pressure on the map of Southeast Europe (51,511 on entry from Turkey to Greece).



Border with most extensive illegal crossings

Compared with the previous year, a 12% increase was observed at the border between Turkey and Greece, a fourfold increase at the border between Greece and Republic of North Macedonia, a fivefold increase at the border between Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia and a 16% increase

at the border between Hungary and Serbia. On the other hand, decreased figures for detections were reported for the following borders: Albania - Greece (37%), Hungary-Romania (62%) and Bulgaria - Serbia (43%). The statistics for illegal border crossings detected at the

borders in 2018 are highlighting relevant changes in the routes followed by the migration flow with an extensive increased pressure over the Western Balkan route compared with 2017. Thus, in 2018 at the borders between Bulgaria and Greece, Romania and Serbia and between Serbia



and Croatia the number of illegal border crossings no longer exceeded 900 detections, while a higher figure was reported for the border between Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia, placing it on the list of borders with over 900 detections.

The border of Greece with Turkey has been illegally crossed mainly by migrants

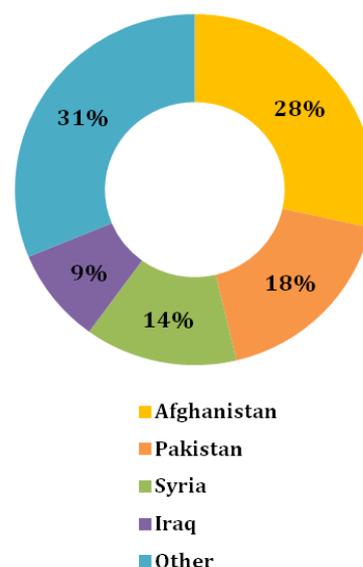
from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, while at the border with Republic of North Macedonia the migrants were Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan were mostly identified. At air borders in Greece the identifications are highlighting high figures for migrants from Syria, Turkey and Iraq. The border between Albania and Greece has been mainly illegally crossed by Albanians.

At the border of Bulgaria with Serbia the highest number of identifications is referring to migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Furthermore, the border between Romania and Hungary was mostly crossed by migrants from Iraq, Iran and Vietnam.

Main detected citizenships (non-regional)

2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number
Syria	48,440	Syria	788,449	Syria	185,961	Syria	26,389	Afghanistan	124,755
Afghanistan	30,172	Afghanistan	367,517	Afghanistan	132,375	Iraq	13,073	Pakistan	77,925
Kosovo*	25,995	Iraq	134,901	Iraq	95,205	Afghanistan	12,699	Syria	60,280
Iraq	2,565	Pakistan	55,017	Pakistan	60,865	Pakistan	12,567	Iraq	38,376

Citizenship	2017	2018	Variation 2017/2018 (%)
Afghanistan	12,567	124,755	893
Pakistan	26,389	77,925	195
Syria	12,699	60,280	375
Iraq	13,073	38,376	194
Iran	2,247	17,161	664
Palestine	1,156	14,616	1,164
Bangladesh	1,166	11,003	844
Algeria	2,189	6,917	216
Uzbekistan	9	5,273	58,489
Central African Republic	5	3,273	65,360
Libya	425	2,904	583
India	430	1,749	307
Morocco	1,001	1,631	63
Somalia	349	1,423	308
Democratic Republic of Congo	90	1,363	1,414
Cameroon	609	1,265	108



* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



Citizens of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Iraq represent, for the fourth year consecutively, the most important share of non-regional migrants (adding up 69% together) detected inland or at the borders of SELEC Member States.

Different from the previous years, the number of detected migrants from Afghanistan and Pakistan exceeded the numbers corresponding to migrants from Syria.

Compared with the previous year, the figures are

emphasizing an overall increase in terms of detections of migrants regarding the main four identified citizenships, particularly Pakistani. Moreover, according to the data presented in the following table, for all other identified citizenships with over 1,000 detections, available data reveals a rise of the number of identifications, at least an eightfold increase being observed for migrants with the citizenship of Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Returns/readmissions/expulsions

A total number of **23,681 migrants returned, readmitted or expelled** from SELEC Member States was reported, emphasizing a slight decrease compared with the previous year when the total figure added up 26,529.

Apart from a few particular citizenships, including Syrian, data available reveals a similar ranking to the detections of migrants.

International protection

Following 218,339 applications for international protection lodged in SELEC Member States, in 2018 a total of 13,354 asylum applicants were granted refugee status, 21 humanitarian status and 345 subsidiary protection.

The same pattern as the number of detections of migrants was observed, a twofold increase is observed compared with the previous year when 70,091 such applications were registered.

More than half of the total number of requests for international protection were

lodged in Turkey (114,537), followed by Greece (67,970) and by Bosnia and Herzegovina (22,499). Additionally, in 2018 Turkey hosted over 3.6 million Syrian refugees under temporary protection.

The major countries of origin of the applicants for international protection are similar to the origin of migrants detected. Thus, citizens of Syria (16,740), Pakistan (15,495), Afghanistan (14,918) and Iraq (13,157) were on top of the applicants for international protection in SELEC Member States in 2018.

Although the number of Syrian applicants continued to decrease, remained relatively stable compared with the number of applicants in the previous year (17,359), different from the number of applications of asylum seekers from Pakistan and Afghanistan which has seen a sharp increase, almost double, compared with 2017. The number of applications from Iraq has also increased, but in a smaller percent.



Particularities of smuggling of migrants in SEE

Subsequent to a downward trend followed by the number of detections of migrants inland or attempting to illegally cross the borders of the Member States, a threefold increase was reported for 2018 compared with the previous year. The most relevant increase was reported by Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently the main country of exit for the migration flow towards EU, and Turkey, the main entry point the region, the figures for both countries are highlighting a sharp increase compared with the previous years, even more than the number of detections made in 2015.

The closure of the Balkan transit corridor in 2016 had a decisive impact on the migration flow in the region. On one hand it may have discouraged migrants to further use the route through Southeast Europe towards Western European countries, while an important number of migrants remained stranded along the route, seeking to reach the EU and thus increasing the pressure in countries close to EU borders, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, another consequence is the orientation of migrants towards criminal networks providing smuggling services and to an increased use of fraudulent travel documents.

Moreover, starting with 2016

the agreement between Turkey and the European Union on the readmission of persons residing without authorization has led to a significant improvement in the situation in Greece and at the regional level in general. However, migrants continued to turn to the support of smugglers in order to facilitate their travel through Southeast Europe towards Western EU countries.

Furthermore, the countermeasures implemented at border of the Member States, such as the installation of border protection fences at the borders between Hungary and Serbia, Hungary and Croatia, Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as the amendments of the legislation in Hungary, have diverted the routes followed by the migration flow, an increased pressure was seen in 2018 on the following route: Turkey - Greece - Albania/Republic of North Macedonia - Montenegro/Serbia - Bosnia and Herzegovina and further to Croatia and Slovenia.

As a general rule, the border crossing and the transit along the routes is facilitated by criminal networks which have connections in the countries of origin, destination as well as neighboring countries, thus ensuring continuity and facilitating the migrants through the entire route. Migrant smuggling networks are offering their services including accommodation, the

provision of fraudulent documents and information on contact points in other countries, while widely relying on social media and use online platforms in order to arrange the facilitation of services.

The smugglers are generally Hawala for the transfer of money requested in exchange of smuggling services, posing serious challenges to law enforcement authorities in seizing the proceeds of crime during investigations. After each successful transfer through the state border, whether at the entrance or exit from the country, the organizers receive money from the country from where the groups of migrants left. However, money transfer system such as Western Union and Money Gram are also used.

In order to ensure a more efficient and safer communication so as to avoid being detected, members of OCGs facilitating migration are using social media messenger applications, Whatsapp, Viber or Telegram. Additionally, in order to keep track of the location where the migrants are transferred, the smugglers are using GPS devices. It is also noteworthy that the different communication tools are often changed and combined (it is not unusual to start the communication via mobile phones or internet and continue later on work phones or radios).



The abuse of legal asylum system continues to represent a tool in the hands of the migrants and smugglers who apply for asylum in order to avoid detention and administrative and penal measures. At the same time they ensure their stay on the route until they find an appropriate way to travel to the destination country.

The illegal migration phenomenon is affecting **Greece** both at the sea and the land borders, the majority of the migrants entering the country through the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route. The transportation is arranged by OCGs located in Greece using various vessel types, depending on the proximity to the shore and the amount of

money been paid. In some cases the migrants are transported directly to Italy.

At the land border between Greece and Turkey, the migrants cross the Evros River from unguarded areas and reach Greece. From there, they arrange their transfer, with the help of facilitators, in order to reach Athens, Thessaloniki or another city. Their transfer is usually made by bus or by vehicles that have hidden compartments in order to escape from the police checks. The use of forged travel documents is also very common and has seen rise mainly due to the measures implemented by the Greek authorities to avoid migrants exiting the country, but also as

a result of the closure of the Balkan route. Thus, the activity of OCGs engaged in forging document has increased. Based mainly in Athens, the OCGs are producing big quantities of forged documents using high quality printing equipment. Moreover, stolen or forged travel documents are being shipped to Greece from other European countries via courier services or they are brought from Albania. Nationalities involved in forging of documents are: Albanians, Bangladeshi, and Iranian, the price of the documents depending on their country of origin.

Criminal Networks

At regional level, human smuggling criminal networks are commonly characterized by strict hierarchic organization structure and clear defined roles for each member (leader, facilitator, transporter, guide, recruiter, forger, locator), generally linked on grounds of common ethnic background, kinship and on regional basis.

The basic objective of the OCGs being the financial benefit, the facilitators are played according their role and risks undertaken.

As a general rule, the border crossing and the transit along the routes is facilitated by criminal networks which have connections in the countries of origin, destination as well as neighboring countries, thus ensuring continuity and facilitating the migrants through the entire route.

Migrant smuggling networks are offering their services including accommodation, the provision of fraudulent documents and information on contact points in other countries, while widely relying on social media and use online

platforms in order to arrange the facilitation of services.

The OCGs investigated by the Member States generally consist in members with various citizenships, foreigners (Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian), as well as nationals of SELEC Member States.

The leaders are usually foreigners, sharing the same origin with the migrants and most cases are not located in other countries where the smuggling activities are organized. Furthermore, it was observed a significant the



involvement of foreigners with temporary residence or asylum seekers in the countries were the OCGs organize the smuggling process.

The most common method of payment used is the HAWALA system, the agreed price for each stage of the movement is deposited, the hawaldar and the migrants get certain codes. After reaching the respective destination the code is given to the smuggler and via the code he receives his payment.

The perpetrators are relying on internet based

communication applications in order detection. They use applications such as Viber, Whatsapp, Telegram, IMO etc.

Thus, wiretapping as a method of gathering intelligence did not prove to be useful in the last period of time in ongoing investigations. The development of human intelligence sources may be one of the solutions in the future to effectively fight against illegal migration. Additionally, in their daily communication and in negotiating the details of organizing and carrying out

the illegal transfer they use specific slang to exchange information.

The smugglers are using a well organized and efficient system for the development of the routes. Apart from modern means for communication, they are using GPS devices, tracers, radio stations, mobile phones and night vision cameras.

New Modus Operandi

The criminal networks have proved to be constantly adapting to the countermeasures implemented by the law enforcement authorities in the Member State, not only by coordination their criminal activities using shifting routes, but also through a diversification of the modus operandi.

During the second half of 2018, Bulgarian law enforcement authorities have identified a tendency for unmarried foreigners accommodated in centers presenting themselves as families in order to obtain faster international protection in Bulgaria, allowing them to leave the country in the direction of Central and Western Europe (mainly

Germany).

Smugglers at the Turkish coast line are often using bigger vessels attempting to smuggle migrants directly to Italy because in order to avoid remaining stranded in the Greek islands. In some cases, the vessels have picked up migrants on the way to Italy from the Greek islands or at coast of the mainland.

Given the measures taken by the Greek authorities and the closure of the Balkan Route, migrants attempt to travel to Central and Northern Europe by plane, with the use of fraudulent travel documents. In some cases they attempt exiting the country from smaller peripheral airports.

As a result of the high demand for forged travel documents, the number of illegal print shops has risen, especially in Athens. Apart from that, forged or stolen travel documents are been sent to Athens from Albania or other European countries in order to facilitate migrant smuggling.

Regarding transportation, a reemerging modus operandi is the use of freight trains, tendency observed in Republic of North Macedonia and Hungary. Illegal migrants were concealed into the cargo wagons in Serbia; in some cases the smugglers wearing black masks boarded the migrants at the railway station in Subotica. Migrants entered the wagons by cutting and



resealing the custom seal, or cutting holes beneath the container, facilitated by smugglers.

Smugglers in Republic of North Macedonia are also using luxury vehicles with stolen/forged/lost license plates purchased at cheap prices.

For the illegal border crossings in Serbia an increased use of look-alike documents was observed, as well as the use of rubber boats to cross the border over rivers.

In Moldova an increased number of detections of Bangladeshi migrants were detected at the green borders.

Moreover, the citizens of Bangladesh were detected as well at the Ukrainian and at the Estonian border with the Russian Federation, which would suggest they have used Russian Federation as a start/transit country towards EU.

This has been facilitated by the use of Fan Id cards issued by the Russian Federation during the 2018 FIFA World Cup™

which allowed travelers visa-free entry in to the country for those in possession of match tickets (extended until the end of 2018).

It was observed an increased use of internet based means of communication, either through social media accounts or through applications such as Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram or IMO in order to avoid being intercepted.

Identified Routes

Southeast Europe has been a longstanding transit region for the migration flow travelling from Asia and Northern Africa towards Western European countries.

Within the region the routes remained fluid, highly depending on the connections of the criminal networks facilitating migration with those in the neighbouring countries, national strategies and policy changes, countermeasure of law enforcement in particular Member States, whether conditions, etc. Thus, over the past years, along with the diversification of the modus operandi used by the smugglers, various displacements between the

routes were seen in Southeast Europe.

For example, the built-up engineering facility on the land border between Bulgaria and Turkey finalized in 2016, as well as the deployment of groups of military formations to the implementation of tasks related to the protection of the state border has diverted the route of migrants coming from Turkey to the Greek Islands.

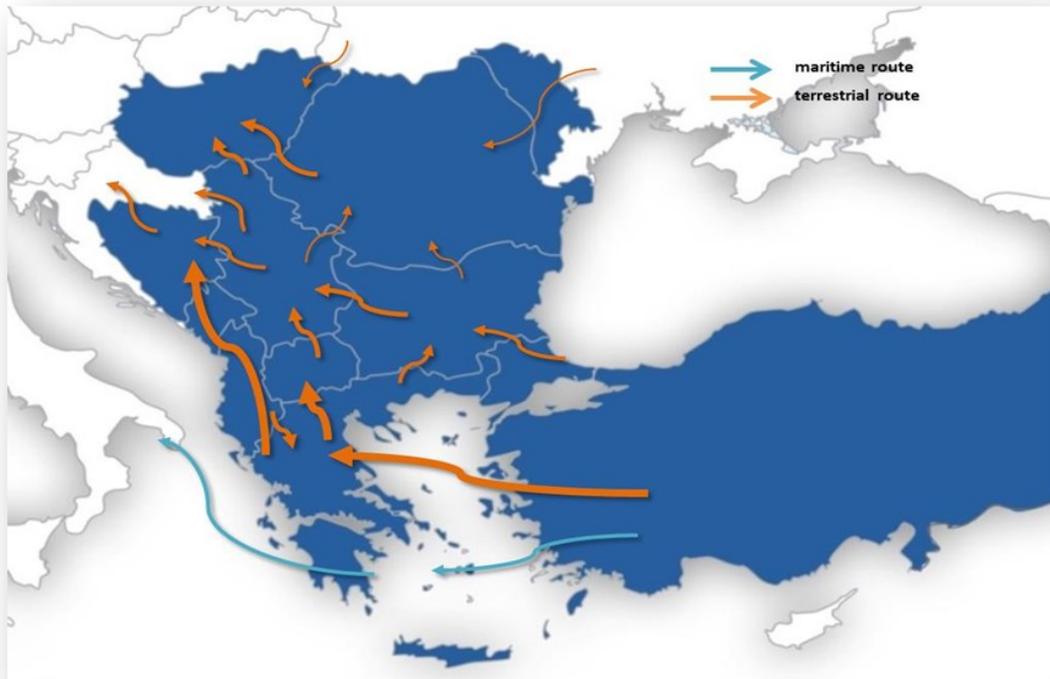
In 2017, the completion of the fence reinforcement at the border with Serbia and the entry into force of the new legislation on immigration in Hungary coincided with the rise in illegal border crossing figures at the border between Serbia and Croatia and at the

border between Serbia and Romania, shifting the migration flow from the border between Serbia and Hungary. Nonetheless, the increase of the detections at the Serbian-Romanian border did not continue in 2018, the number of identifications at this border has dropped to slightly over 350 detections from roughly 1,500 in 2017.

In 2018 the migrants continued to enter the region through Turkey and to further cross the borders with Greece. The available data is highlighting an intensification of the route through Turkey – Greece – Albania/Republic of North Macedonia – Montenegro/Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina and further to



Identified Routes for 2018



Croatia and Slovenia, resulting in an increased unprecedented pressure of the migration flow in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reported both inland and at the borders, while the route through Turkey – Greece/ Bulgaria – Serbia/Romania – Hungary appears to have been less used by the migrants in 2018.

In some cases, in order not to get stranded in the Greek Islands, the facilitators in Turkey are attempting to smuggle the migrants directly to Italy using bigger vessels. In some cases, the vessels are picking up the migrants, on their way to Italy, from the Greek Islands or from the coast the mainland.

The main direction of

migratory flows in Bulgaria is from Turkey and further to Serbia, with fewer cases of entry from Greece or exit to Romania. Due to the increased control of the Serbian-Bulgarian border, the majority of migrants remain at home or within Bulgaria.

Moreover, in 2018 a significant number of migrants, around 5,500 detections, were apprehended at air border in Greece. In case of smuggling by air, migrants are provided with the travel documents and the tickets and they may be accompanied until the airport or, sometimes, throughout the entire travel in order to assist them and not drive the attention of the authorities.

Furthermore, independent of

the current migration pressure arriving in the region, a significant number of detections were made at the border between Albania and Greece, from Albania towards Greece, corresponding to the so called *circular route* between the above mentioned countries.

In 2018, for the 2018 FIFA World Cup™, Russian Federation allowed travelers visa-free entry in to the country for those in possession of match tickets (extended until the end of 2018). This has facilitated migrants, mainly citizens of Bangladesh, to use the Russian Federation as an intermediate point on their way to the Western Europe, following the route through Ukraine and further through



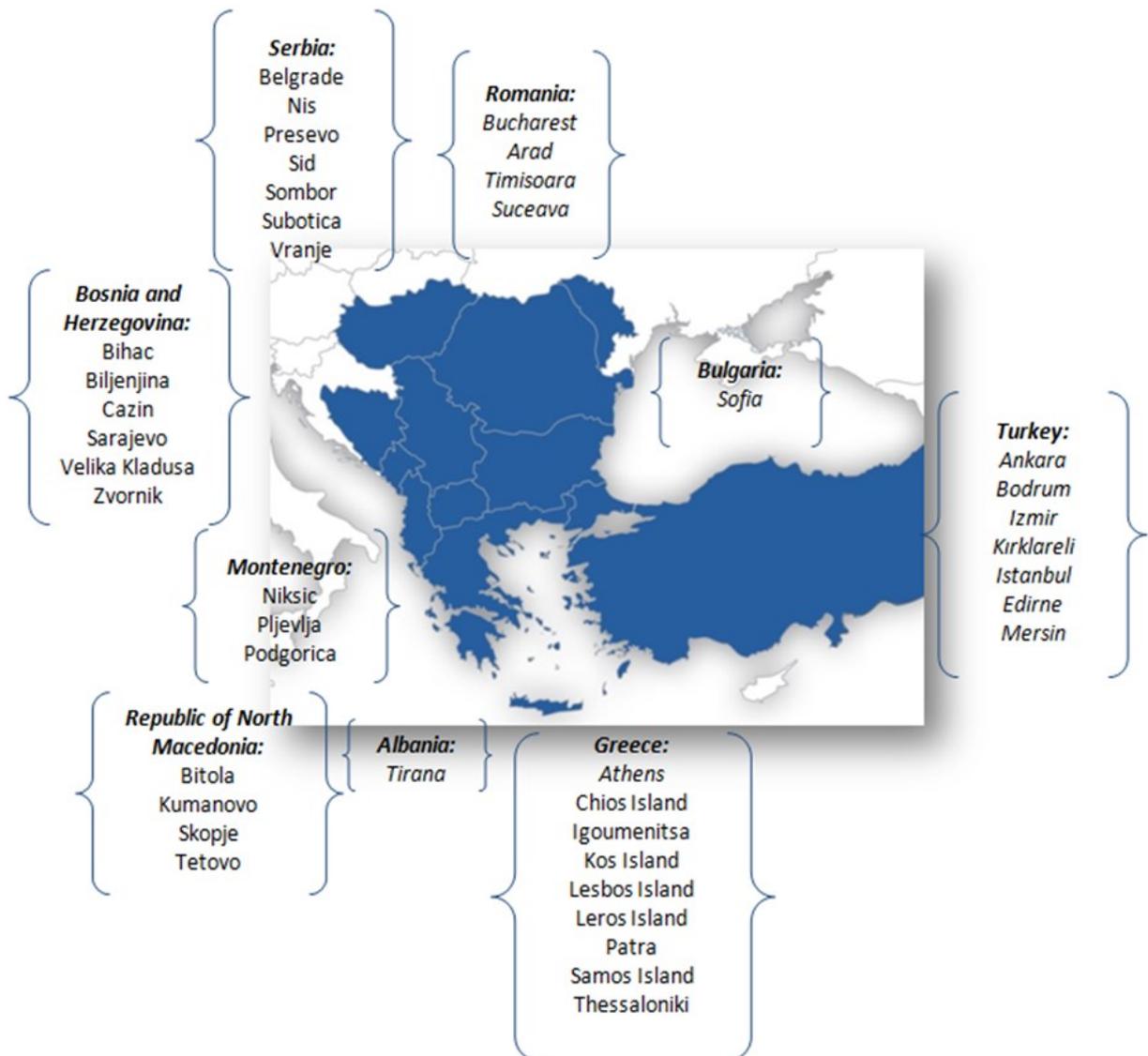
Moldova and Romania. The latter reporting the presence of a significant number of Bangladeshi migrants at the border section with Ukraine and Moldova in the second half of 2018, almost all declaring that they entered Russia using

the Russia Fan Id 2018, especially issued for the championship.

Additionally, along the Hungarian border with Ukraine human smugglers became more active in 2018.

Although this cannot be described as a new tendency, it must be considered as a potential further shift in the route, having in mind the counter measures taken at the Hungary's Southern border.

Identified Hubs for 2018





Conclusions and future scenarios

Southeast Europe has been a longstanding transit region for the migration flow travelling from Asia and Northern Africa towards Western European countries.

The number of detections of migrants has constantly increased starting with 2013, reaching unprecedented figures in 2015, when more than 2 million detections were reported by SELEC Member States.

Following a downward trend in terms of detections of migrants inland or attempting to illegally cross the borders of the Member States which started in 2016, a threefold increase was reported for 2018 compared with the previous year.

The most relevant increase was reported by Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently the main country of exit for the migration flow towards EU, and Turkey, the main entry point the region. The figures for both countries are highlighting a sharp increase compared with the previous years.

Out of 438,000 detections reported at regional level, close to 270,000 were reported by Turkey, close to double than the figures reported for 2015, when the region has faced an overall unprecedented number of detections. Although data regarding the place of detections is not available (inland or at the borders on

entry or exit), as a result of the high number of detections made in Turkey, the region may further face an increased migration pressure.

Furthermore, given the geographical position, independent on the evolution of migrants arriving in Turkey, Southeast Europe will continue to represent one of the most important transit area for the migrants traveling from Asia and Northern Africa towards Western Europe.

Given the high degree of flexibility shown by the criminal networks supporting the illegal border crossings, as a result of the countermeasures implemented at border of the Member States, such as the installation of border protection fences at the borders between Hungary and Serbia, Hungary and Croatia, Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as the amendments of the legislation in Hungary, the routes used by the migration flow have constantly evolved over the past years. In 2018 an increased use of the Western Balkan route (Turkey - Greece - Albania/Republic of North Macedonia - Montenegro/Serbia - Bosnia and Herzegovina and further to Croatia and Slovenia) was observed. Moreover, given the significant increased number of illegal crossings over the border between Greece and Republic of North Macedonia, the route through Republic of North Macedonia may further

strengthen.

The criminal networks will constantly search for new routes in order to facilitate the travel towards Western European countries. For example, in 2018 along the Hungarian - Ukrainian border section, human smugglers became more active. While this is not necessarily a tendency, a diversion of the route should be considered given the counter measure at the southern borders.

Given that many migrants are abusing the asylum system in order to avoid detention and administrative and penal measures, they will continue to attempt to illegally cross the borders during asylum procedure in order to reach Western Europe.

For 2018 law enforcement authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have identified a new trend regarding the arrivals of Turkish citizens often involved in organization, accommodation and transportation of migrants involved in coordination of border crossings along the route from Turkey to Croatia. They are using social networks in support of the coordination of their activities and speak Turkish and Arabic.

Due to the closure of the Western Balkan route, migrants from the Middle East have been denied access to EU countries. The visa-free regime was abused by many migrants



in order to enter through Serbia to the destination countries. The migrants are following the route through Serbia - Republic of North Macedonia - Greece, from where, using forged documents, are travelling to mostly to Germany and Italy.

In October 2018, Serbia has canceled the visa-free entry regime for Iranian passport holders, due to the number of Iranian nationals using Serbia as a route to reach the EU illegally. Thus, is expected the Iranian migrants will be seeking for new alternatives in order to reach Western Europe.

An increased number of Romanian citizens was detected other countries, involved in activities of facilitation of illegal migration, especially in migrant transportation, in countries like France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, UK, and other Northern countries.

The use of forged travel documents is very common and has seen rise mainly due to the measures implemented by the Greek authorities to avoid migrants exiting the country, but also as a result of the closure of the Balkan route. Thus, the activity of OCGs engaged in forging document has increased. Based mainly in Athens, the OCGs are

producing big quantities of forged documents using high quality printing equipment. Moreover, stolen or forged travel documents are being shipped to Greece from other European countries via courier services or they are brought from Albania. Nationalities involved in forging of documents are: Albanians, Bangladeshi and Iranian, the price of the documents depending on their country of origin. Furthermore, the use of false Romanian IDs in facilitating illegal migration has been frequently detected. The documents are forged by other citizens outside Romania, as no Romanian component was yet identified.

The migration flows transiting the region on the way to Western Europe have been highly influenced over the past years by the ongoing armed conflicts in the proximity of Southeast Europe. Additionally, while the war conflicts appear to be the main driver for the rise of extremism, this also triggers a general potential risk in relation with the channels and routes used by the migrants, which may as well open the doors for the members or supporters of terrorist organizations.

The threat of terrorism-related movements within the region

is particularly dangerous given the undetected arrivals from countries supplying terrorist entities that were reported to confirm the legality of their stay in the destination countries using fraudulent documents. Thus, their real identity and their actual stay in that particular country remains unnoted, thus their potential role in a variety of serious, violent criminal acts should be carefully taken into account.

Apart from the risks to which migrants are exposed during the smuggling process, including the risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, risk regarding physical integrity and even their lives, smuggling of migrants produces a serious impact on the transit countries stimulating corruptive practices, while affecting the general security of the national frontiers of the countries in the region.

Given the international dimension of smuggling of migrants, in order to efficiently tackle this phenomenon, there is a constant need of cooperation and partnership at international level.

