

# Situation Overview: European Migration Crisis

March 2016



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humanitarian action

## Introduction

Following the successive implementation of new border restrictions by Croatia, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in the latter half of February, the migration\* flow to the EU through the Western Balkans corridor has been officially closed since 20 March, when the EU-Turkey Plan came into force.

As a direct result of these changes, migration through the Western Balkans corridor has decreased significantly, although smaller numbers of people have continued to travel by irregular means. **At the time of writing, a total of over 57,812 stranded migrants had been recorded along the migration route in Greece, FYROM, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Hungary**, unable to continue their journey towards Western Europe and unsure of the legal pathways available to them.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, migrants' vulnerabilities and intentions have changed due to the increasing length of their stay, requiring a shift in the response by both governments and aid actors.

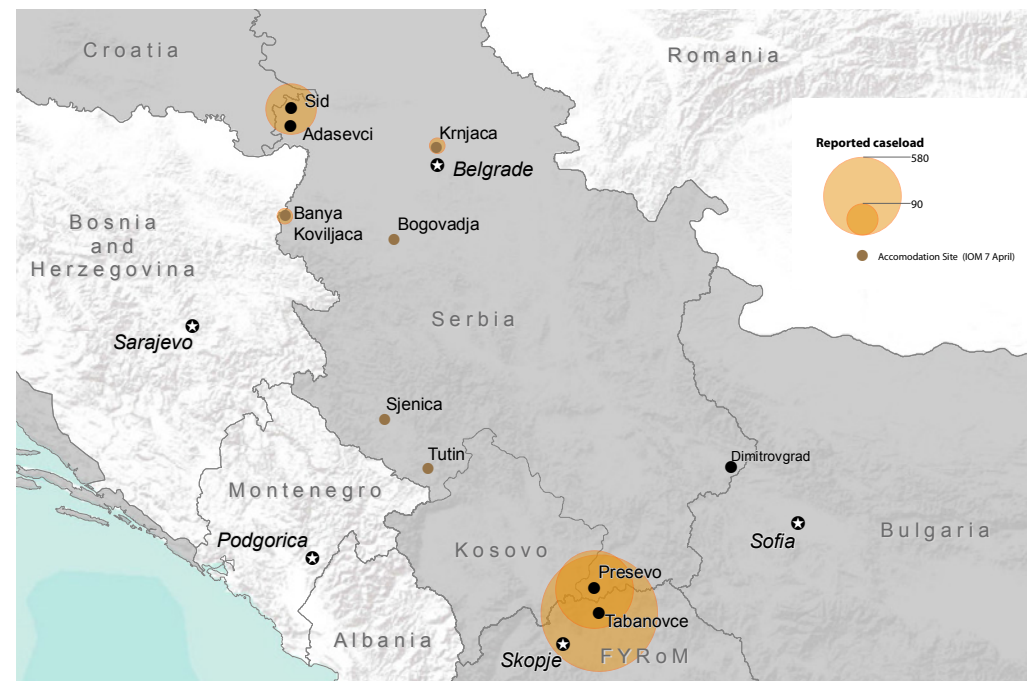
This situation overview focuses on those stranded in the Western Balkans as of the end of March, examining their current vulnerabilities and intentions as well as the changing profile of new arrivals in the past months. Based on data collected in Serbia, FYROM and the primary countries of origin (Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan) in March 2016, this report compares the different migration

experiences of people of each nationality, including discussion of the factors that affect their decision to leave their place of origin, the role of humanitarian assistance, and their intentions in reaction to the evolving border restrictions within Europe.

## Context

A total of 26,222 new arrivals were recorded in Greece in March 2016, including 5,842 individuals who arrived after the 20 March cut-off point, when in line with the EU-Turkey Plan, authorities began detaining new arrivals to Europe.<sup>2</sup> Under the agreement, those who do not apply for asylum or whose claims are rejected will be returned to Turkey.<sup>3</sup> The first migrants were returned from Greece to Turkey on April 4th, although returns were later suspended due to a surge in applications for asylum and the limited capacity of Greek authorities to process the volume of requests.<sup>4</sup>

While overall arrivals to the EU have decreased, **irregular arrivals have continued to Serbia via FYROM—indicating that small numbers of new arrivals to Greece are avoiding detention—and from Bulgaria**, which still appears to be an option for some migrants. Migrants are also increasingly seeking alternative routes to reach North and West Europe, including travelling through Albania or directly bypassing the Western



**Map 1: Location of transit sites and stranded populations in FYROM and Serbia**

Balkans for Italy.

Meanwhile, large numbers of migrants remain stranded in the Western Balkans, with the highest concentrations in Greece, Serbia and FYROM.

**In Serbia, around 1,700 migrants were estimated to be present across transit sites and asylum centres as of March 31st**, with the highest numbers reported in Presevo, and smaller numbers in Sid and Adasevci on the border with Croatia.<sup>5</sup>

\*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. IOM, Migration Flows - Europe data portal, figures as of April 7th 2016.
2. UNHCR, Daily Estimated Arrivals per country, 1 October 2015 - 30 March 2016
3. European Council, "EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016",
4. The Telegraph, Greece Suspends Expulsion of EU Migrants to Turkey" 5 April 2016
5. UNHCR, Serbia Daily Situation Update 31 March 2016

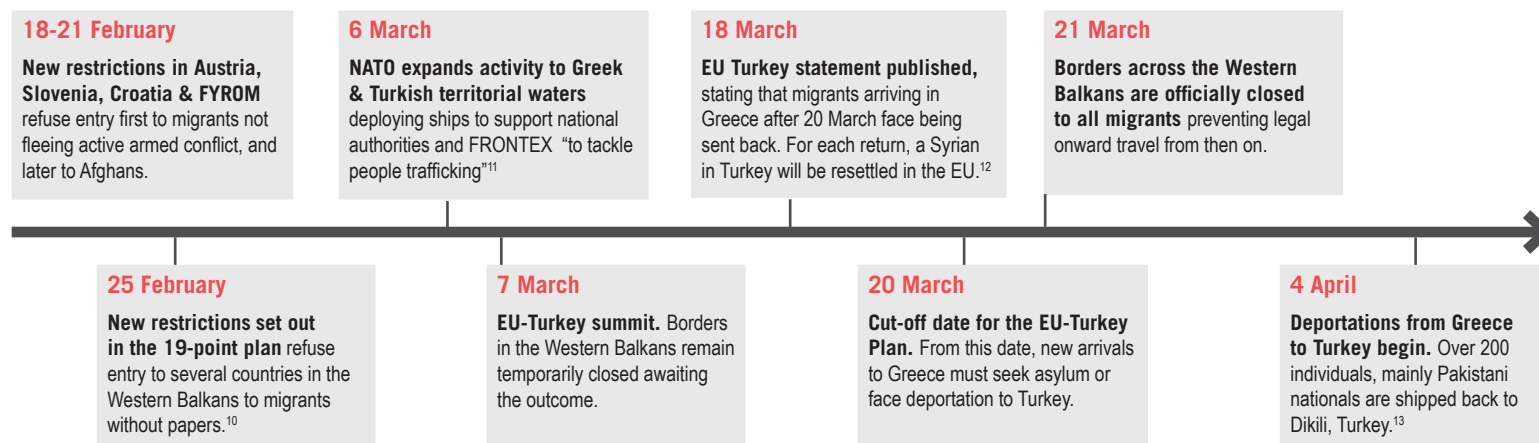
**FYROM continues to host over 1,100 people in Tabanovtse**, close to the Serbian border, with no reported change in numbers since borders were officially closed following the EU-Turkey Summit.<sup>6</sup> Gevgelija, formerly a transit site close to the Greek border, has been empty since the end of March.

**By the end of March, more than 46,000 people were stranded at sites in Greece.** Conditions in Idomeni continued to deteriorate, where 2,536 tents and informal shelters<sup>7</sup> hosted an estimated 12,000 people as of 31 March.<sup>8</sup> Attempts to relocate people from Idomeni to other formal sites were met with hostility by migrants, who were keen to stay close to the Serbian border in case it would reopen.<sup>9</sup> Since the closure of the border migrants have made several unsuccessful attempts to cross from Greece into FYROM but were pushed back by Greece and FYROM authorities. Elsewhere in Greece, new camps were established in the second half of March, including Doliana and Konitsa on the borders with Albania.

## Characteristics of the migrant population in the Western Balkans Corridor

The 57,812 migrants reportedly stranded along the Western Balkans Corridor as of 20 March can be considered as two broad groups with differing vulnerabilities, needs and intentions. This section outlines the nationalities and demographic composition of these groups and reviews how this has changed over time.

**Figure 1: Timeline of key developments in February and March, 2016**



### 1 Stranded migrants in transit sites

This is the largest group, accounting for the vast majority of people who reached the Western Balkans before 20 March. Accordingly, **the nationalities and demographics represented in this group are broadly representative of all recorded arrivals** and with overall data collected by REACH in previous months. According to entry figures from UNHCR, Syrians make up the largest group (accounting for 43% of all recorded Mediterranean sea arrivals), followed by Afghans (23%) and Iraqis (14%), with a minority of individuals from other countries, particularly Pakistan (3%), Iran (3%) and a range of African countries.<sup>14</sup>

In January 2016, Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans could travel with relative ease across the Western Balkans, leaving only those of other nationalities stranded in transit sites for

more than two or three days. Members of this group were predominantly young males traveling alone or with groups of their peers. These individuals were generally travelling by irregular means and lacked the transit papers issued to Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans by authorities. The vast majority had formal schooling and reported leaving home due to a lack of jobs and opportunities in their area of origin.

**Throughout February, successive restrictions to entry criteria limited travel to a much smaller group, increasing the diversity of those stranded.** Beginning on February 21st, when Serbia and FYROM issued a joint decision to permit entry to only Syrians and Iraqis, the number of Afghans stranded in transit sites began to grow. This group had lower levels of education, fewer resources

and limited access to information. Young men travelling alone tended to disappear in search of alternative routes, leaving families stranded at transit sites for longer periods. In late February and early March, Afghan families were joined by a growing number of Syrians and Iraqis. New restrictions meant that those from designated "safe areas", those with incomplete or inconsistent papers, and those travelling from areas considered a security threat (eg. Raqqa, Syria) were also forbidden from continuing their journey.

Following the EU-Turkey Summit on Migration, the Western Balkans corridor was officially closed as of 20 March, leaving all remaining migrants in FYROM and Serbia stranded, irrespective of their nationality. By the end of March, members of this group include individuals of all ages, levels of education

6. REACH interviews with camp staff at Tabanovtse.

7. UNOSAT, Idomeni Informal Site, Image Analysis, 21 March 2016.

8. UNHCR, Sites in Greece (interactive map), accessed 31 March 2016

9. Financial Times, "Frustration turns to desperation at Idomeni migrant camp in Greece", 25 March 2016

10. Countries at the meeting, included EU members Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia and their western Balkan neighbours Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and FYROM.

11. Nato, "NATO Secretary General welcomes expansion of NATO deployment in the Aegean Sea" 6 March 2016.

12. European Council, "EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016"

13. Al Jazeera, "Deportation of refugees from Greece to Turkey begins", 4 April

14. UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response data portal, as of 7 April 2016.

and socioeconomic background. All face a high degree of uncertainty and lack sufficient information about legal channels for onward movement or resettlement.

### Migrants in transit sites face similar short term needs, regardless of nationality.

While conditions in individual transit sites were found to vary significantly,<sup>15</sup> all of those stranded require access to accommodation and services appropriate for a longer-term stay. This includes access to adequate shelter, food, showers, washing facilities and toilets. Inadequate shelter conditions remain a serious problem in some sites, while food was consistently reported among migrants' priority needs in March. In several cases, inadequate hygiene facilities have led to outbreaks of lice, rashes and diarrhoea,<sup>16, 17</sup> and healthcare has also been increasingly reported as a priority need. While transit sites in Serbia remain open, leaving people free to come and go and supplement aid with items purchased in town, Tabanovtse in FYROM remains closed, leaving the population entirely reliant on assistance to meet their needs.

## 2. Migrants continuing or undertaking their journey via alternative means

**Despite official closures, people have continued to travel towards Western Europe via alternative means.** Since the cut-off, new arrivals have been recorded in Austria (1,396), Hungary (1,474), Serbia (224), Bulgaria (28), and Slovenia (16), although actual numbers are likely to be much higher.<sup>20</sup>

In January and February, those willing

to risk travel within Europe by irregular means were primarily single men travelling alone, the majority from countries other than Iraq and Syria, including those from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and African countries. While families were not common, this group contained a higher proportion of unaccompanied minors than identified elsewhere. Once in Serbia, migrants travelling by irregular means commonly passed through Belgrade, a meeting point increasingly used in late February and March by those who had already been turned away at borders and faced limited legal options for onward movement. As border crossings became stricter and eventually closed to all migrants, a wider range of alternative routes opened up, including travel via Hungary—where authorities reported an increased number of illegal border crossings in recent weeks<sup>21</sup>—as well as from Serbia to Croatia along the River Danube, and from Greece via Albania into Italy.<sup>22</sup>

Arabic-language social media contains increasing offers of alternative routes to families stranded in Greece, while smugglers in Syria are advertising new routes via Sudan, and from the Turkish coast directly to Italy<sup>23</sup> (see map 3) based on social media monitoring. Map 2, right, illustrates examples of new travel routes within Europe, reported by key informant interviews in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

**In light of blanket closures, the profile of groups travelling by irregular means**



**Map 2: Alternative migration routes within Europe reportedly used by migrants from the KRI**

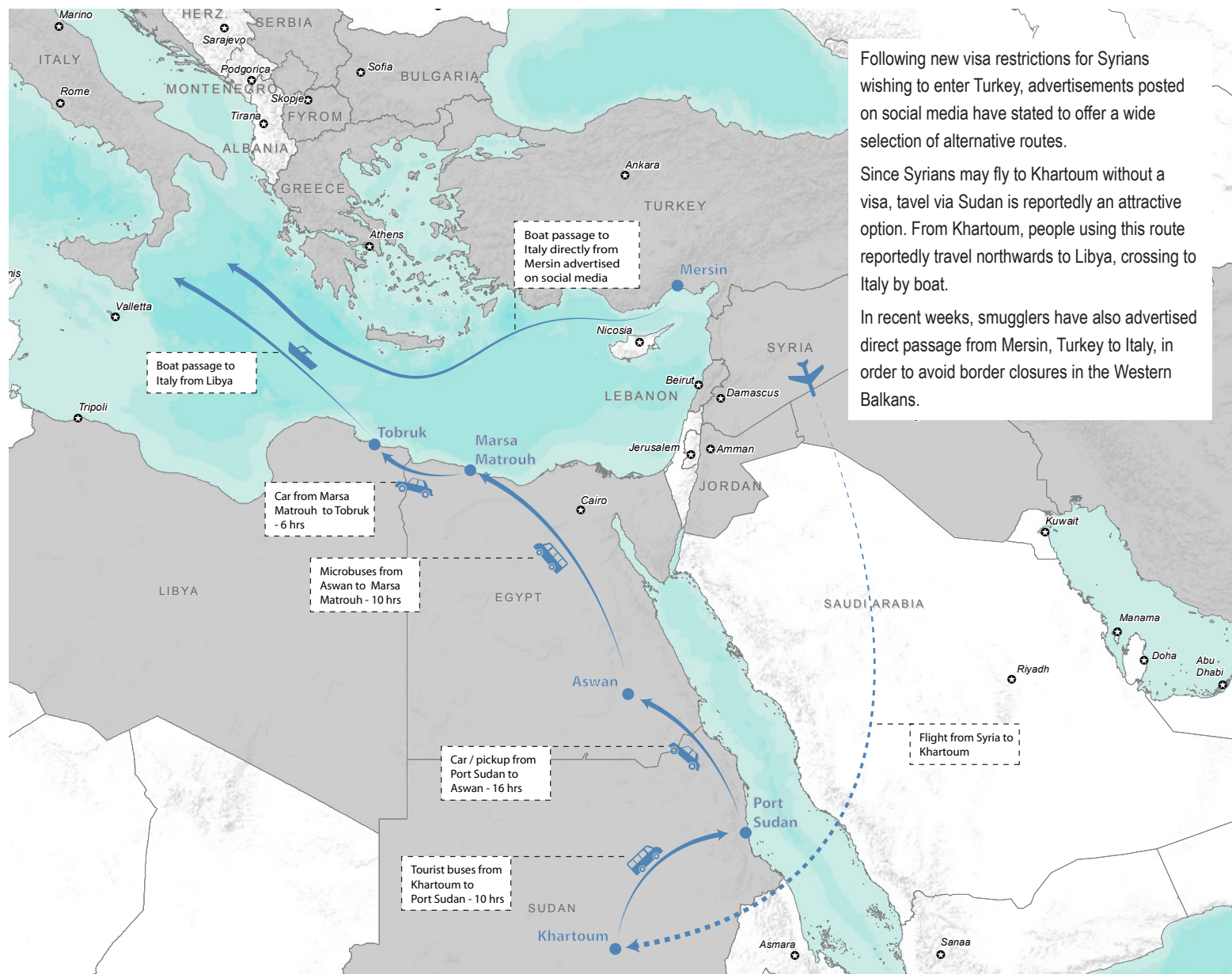
15. REACH, Western Balkans Rapid Update, 5 April 2016  
 16. UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 18-20 March 2016  
 17. REACH interviews, Tabanovtse, FYROM, 28 March 2016  
 18. UNHCR, Daily Estimated Arrivals per country, 1 October 2015 - 30

March 2016  
 19. Guardian, Greece may have deported asylum seekers by mistake, says UN, 5 April 2016  
 20. Data for Austria, Hungary, Serbia & Slovenia from: UNHCR, Daily

Estimated Arrivals per country, 1 October 2015 - 30 March 2016; data for Bulgaria from: IOM, Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond Compilation of available data and information, 24-30 March 2016.

has shifted to align more closely with the nationalities and demographic profile of those stranded. While groups containing vulnerable individuals remain more reluctant to resort to alternative means one in Europe, reports of families with young children turning to smugglers have become increasingly common, both to enter Serbia, and to travel onward.<sup>24</sup> When asked about their intentions if stranded in their current location, an increased proportion of people of all nationalities reported intending to seek alternative means if waiting there for longer than two weeks.

**Migrants seeking alternative routes face higher risks than those in transit sites, but remain largely invisible and difficult to assist.** Illegal border crossings place migrants at increased risk of accident and injury and leave people exposed to violence and abuse from criminal gangs, smugglers and border guards. Migrants using alternative means have reported detention and beatings, while medical NGOs operating in Belgrade have treated physical injuries that are consistent with these reports.<sup>25</sup> In their haste to continue their journey, migrants seeking alternative means are less likely to access available assistance, and also more likely to be excluded from such assistance in the first place. According to assessments conducted by REACH in March, 63% of interviewed Afghans reported to have received assistance, compared to 100% Syrians and 93% Iraqis.



**Map 3: Examples of new migration routes advertised to Syrians via social media**

21. Hungarian Government, "State spent HUF 80 billion on management of migrant crisis last year", 16 March 2016  
 22. REACH, Rapid Assessment of Stranded Migrants Across the Western Balkans, 16 March 2016.

23. REACH Social media monitoring; Guardian "Smugglers offer Turkey-to-Italy boat crossings" 31 March 2106.  
 24. UNHCR, Serbia Daily Update 31 March 2016

## Origin of migrants in the Western Balkans

According to figures from UNHCR, Syrians continue to constitute the largest proportion of Mediterranean sea arrivals (43%) followed by Afghans (23%) and Iraqis (14%). This section focuses on the trends and journeys of migrants arriving from these three countries.

### Syrians

**March saw a particular spike in arrivals from Aleppo Governorate, which accounted for 74% of all Syrian arrivals.** This is probably related to the intensification of conflict in early February that caused the displacement of an estimated 70,000 people from Eastern Aleppo City and Northern Aleppo Governorate.<sup>26</sup>

Consolidated data collected by REACH since December 2015 shows that Syrians arriving in the Western Balkans have travelled from locations across the country, including government and non-government controlled areas. The largest proportion of people arriving from Syria originates from Aleppo (31% of reported locations), followed by Damascus (17%), Idlib (15%) and Deir-ez-Zor (14%).

The wide distribution of recorded areas of origin is confirmed by interviews conducted by REACH in Syria. According to data collected from 360 communities in Syria in March 2016, key informants in 41% of assessed communities reported that people had left for Europe in the preceding month. Of these, 30% reported that between 1-25% of their community's population had left for Europe

in February, with a further 30% reporting that between one quarter and one half of their population had done so.

### Iraqis

March saw Iraqi groups arriving primarily from the governorates of Ninewa (43%), Kirkuk (11%), Baghdad (11%). An additional 7% originated from Anbar Governorate, representing a significant increase compared to previous months.

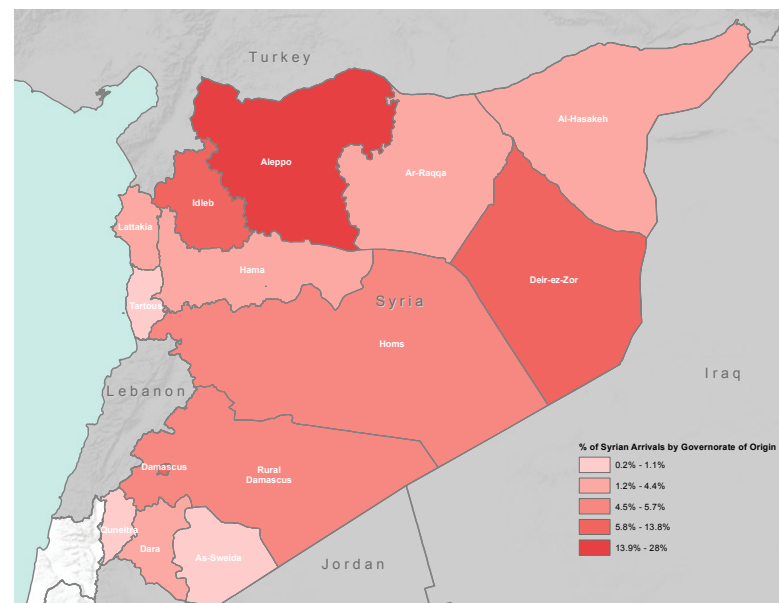
According to overall data collected since January 2016, the primary governorates of origin reported by Iraqis arriving in the Western Balkans are Dahuk (20% of all reported locations), Baghdad (21%), and Ninewa (11%). As shown in map 4, these governorates represent a mix of areas witnessing active conflict (such as Anbar) as well as those such as Dahuk and Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which are relatively stable.

### Afghans

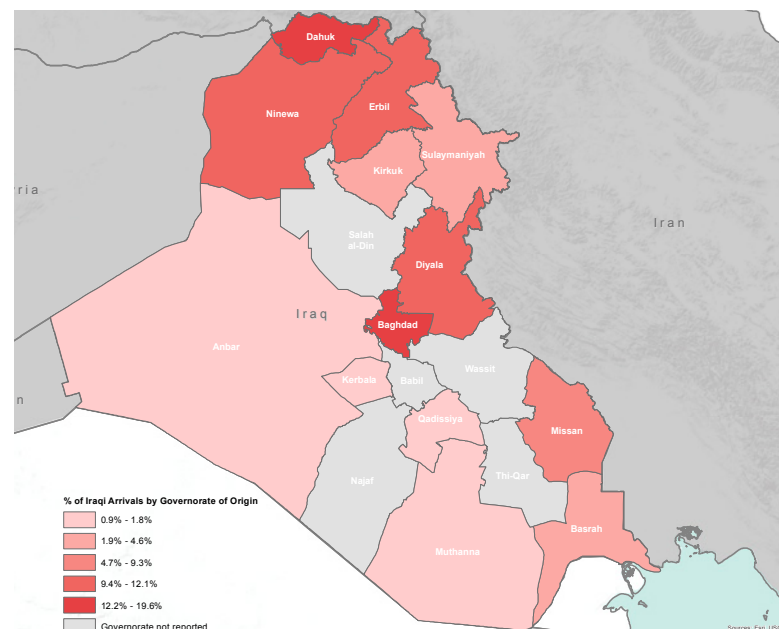
Afghans interviewed in the Western Balkans in March originated primarily from Parwan (19%), Kabul (11%), Badakhshan (7%), and Wardak (7%).

As with other nationalities, proportions differ slightly from overall figures since January, with the largest proportions overall coming from Kabul, Nangarhar and Kunduz, as well as other provinces, as shown in the map overleaf.

**Most people reported using smuggling routes originating in Afghanistan.** According to qualitative data collected by REACH in



**Map 4: Reported governorate of origin by Syrians arriving in the EU, December-March 2016**

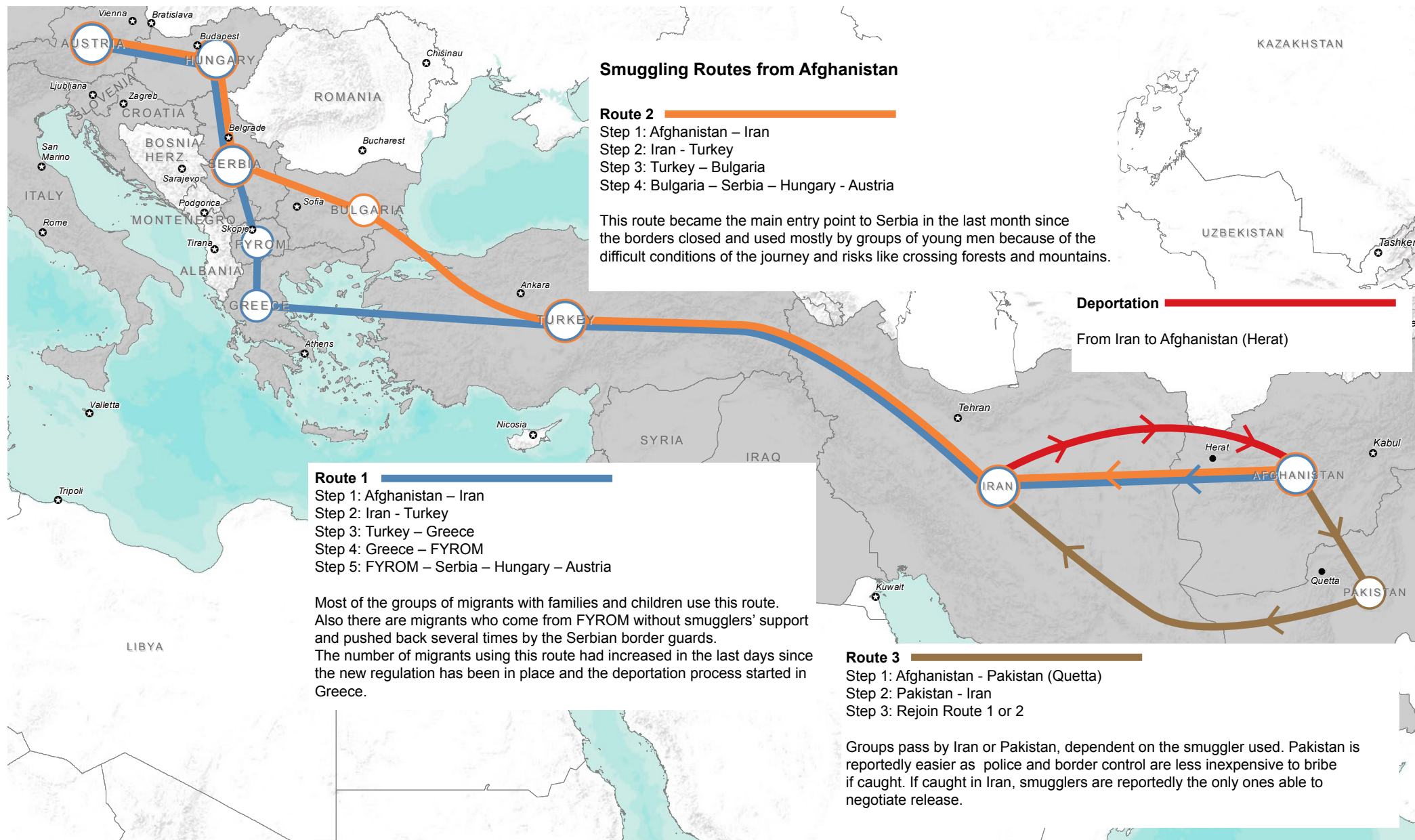


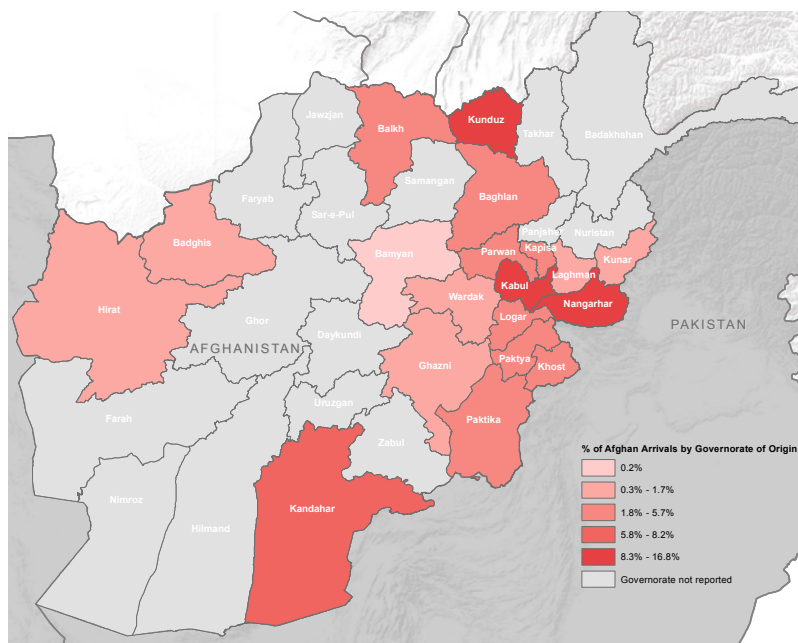
**Map 5: Reported governorate of origin by Iraqis arriving in the EU, December-March 2016**

25. MSF, EU Migration Crisis Update - March 2016, March 2106.

26. REACH, Situation Overview: Displacement from Aleppo Governorate, Syria, February 2016

Map 6: Reported smuggling routes from Afghanistan to Central Europe





**Map 7: Reported governorate of origin by Afghans arriving in the EU, December-March 2016**

Afghanistan, it was possible for Afghans to secure visas for Iran and Turkey from Kabul, however, the cost, timeframe and uncertainty related to the visa application process were the main reasons for choosing to use smugglers, also known as “travel agents”.

Key informants identified two main routes, as shown in Map 6, opposite. The first route leads from Afghanistan through Iran (from Nimroz province to Turkey, then either by sea to Greece or via land to Bulgaria, before converging again in Serbia. The second reported route leads from Afghanistan to Pakistan (Quetta) and then on to Iran and Turkey, where migrants join other nationalities before reaching Europe through either Greece or Bulgaria.

According to key informants in Kabul and Jalalabad, smugglers guarantee multiple tries to migrants. If they get caught along the way, especially in Pakistan and Iran, and deported back to Afghanistan, smugglers will commonly allow them to try two more times with no or limited additional expenses. In fact, if migrants decide that they no longer wish to try to reach Europe, smugglers may reimburse part of the sum.

### Changing migrant profiles

This section examines how motivations, profile and intentions have changed in the past four months and the differences observed among the different nationalities travelling.

### Push and pull factors affecting migration

As for previous months, push and pull factors continue to be closely correlated to the nationality of the migrants. **Syrians and Iraqis are more likely to report fleeing active armed conflict than people of other nationalities.** Together, individuals from Syria and Iraq account for 57% of Mediterranean Sea arrivals, motivated to travel to by the promise of safety and security in Europe. Reported areas of origin have remained largely consistent during the past three months, including both areas of active conflict, as well as more stable areas.

**While primary reported push and factors have remained consistent, reported reasons for leaving began to diversify in February and March with lower proportions of both Syrian and Iraqi groups reporting active**

armed conflict. Instead, respondents cited generalised violence and insecurity, followed by a lack of income or high cost of living, a lack of access to basic services, and fear of the spread of conflict, as shown in Figure 2. Data collected from communities in Iraq and Syria in March 2016 supports this shift, with a lack of income or high cost of living reported as most common reason for people leaving, reported by 39% of assessed communities in Syria, and 61% in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

**Afghans are more likely to report generalised violence as their motivation for leaving, closely followed by a lack of opportunities for work, and limited access to services in their area of origin.** As of March 2016, generalised violence and insecurity remained the primary push factor (reported by 37%), although the

**Figure 2: Primary reported push factors by Iraqis and Syrians, December - March**

	Syrians				Iraqis			
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Active armed conflict	65%	81%	44%	32%	77%	69%	20%	25%
Violence and insecurity	0%	6%	9%	21%	0%	14%	25%	32%
Fear of spread of conflict	7%	3%	0%	10%	3%	11%	13%	14%
Lack of basic services	20%	0%	19%	14%	9%	3%	20%	10%
Military recruitment	5%	9%	0%	11%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Lack of income / high cost of living	3%	0%	27%	7%	0%	0%	28%	1%
Others	0%	0%	8%	6%	9%	0%	0%	16%

proportion of groups reporting active armed conflict had increased to 22%, much higher compared to the previous month. This increase corresponds with the 2016 “fighting season” in Afghanistan, which recommences with the onset of warmer weather.<sup>27</sup> A further 16% reported a lack of access to basic services as their main reason for leaving.

It should be noted that findings from data collected in Afghanistan differ somewhat from data collected in Europe. Instead, key informant interviews pointed to lack of employment opportunities as the main push factor, with insecurity seen as the underlining cause for economic and social instability rather than as a direct threat for most individuals. Similarly, the most frequent reason cited to travel to the EU was the search for economic opportunities in order to send back remittances to family.

Figure 3: Primary reported push factors by Afghans, December - March

	Afghans			
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Active armed conflict	9%	6%	9%	22%
Violence and insecurity	51%	76%	42%	37%
Fear of spread of conflict	0%	6%	7%	5%
Lack of basic services	26%	6%	18%	16%
Military recruitment	0%	0%	0%	0%
Lack of Income / high cost of living	11%	6%	31%	9%
Others	3%	0%	0%	11%

However, it is important to note that **security remains a key push factor for specific vulnerable groups such as young men living rural areas (families send them away to avoid forced recruitment by AOGs) or women without family safety nets living in urban areas.**

Group composition and demographic profile

**Syrians and Iraqis have tended to flee as families, the vast majority travelling directly from their areas of origin.** In March 2016, 76% of Syrian groups and 73% of Iraqi groups interviewed in Serbia and FYROM consisted of nuclear or extended families, with similar proportions recorded during the previous months.

**While the composition of Syrian and Iraqi groups has remained fairly consistent since December, the proportion of Afghans travelling as families has increased.** In March 2016, 59% Afghans were travelling with immediate or extended family members, leading to a corresponding decrease in the number of individuals travelling alone. The increased number of Afghan families interviewed is likely to be due in part to the current situation, whereby the most vulnerable individuals (including families with small children) remain stranded in transit sites along the Western Balkans, while single males are more likely to resort to alternative means to continue their journey.

**Syrians, Iraqis and other nationalities have continued to report higher levels of education**

**than Afghans.** Migrants from North African countries (eg. Morocco, Egypt and Algeria) consistently recorded the highest levels of education, followed by Syrians and Iraqis. For the vast majority of these groups, adults had received a formal education, with smaller proportions reporting a university education as well. Almost all Syrian and Iraqi children above the age of five reportedly attended school in their area of origin, while much lower proportions of Afghan children had accessed any education at all.

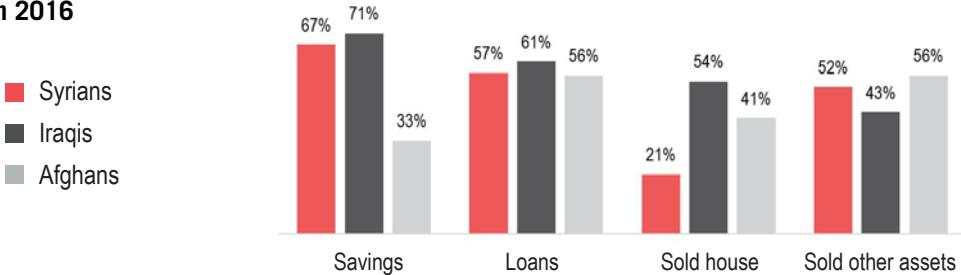
**Syrians and Iraqis were more likely than Afghans to report reliance on stable sources of income prior to departure, indicating relatively better access to financial resources.** Both groups were also more likely to report reliance on savings to fund their journey, reported by 67% of Syrians and 71% of Iraqis. However the majority of both Syrians and Iraqis also reported having borrowed money (57% and 61%, respectively) and smaller proportions had sold their homes (21% and 51%) or other assets to fund the journey (52% and 43%). Afghans reported a lower percentage of reliance on savings (33%) compared to Syrians and Iraqis.

In comparison, Afghans had the highest percentage of reliance on the sale of other assets to fund their journey than Syrians and Iraqis while also reporting funds from the sale of their home (41%). This means that **once Afghans start their journey, it is very unlikely they can count on additional resources provided by families or other extended networks. Moreover, if deported back to Afghanistan, this group would be extremely vulnerable and totally dependent on aid or other external support.**

Future trends and intentions

**For those currently stranded in the Western Balkans, the possibility of continuing their journey via legal means has become increasingly unlikely.** When asked about their intentions if stranded in their current location up to one week, the vast majority of migrants interviewed reported that they would wait. However, if stranded for longer, people’s intentions began to change. **If faced with delays of over two weeks (now the case for almost all migrants still stranded), increasing proportions of migrants reported that they would use alternative routes, seek asylum, or in some cases return home.**

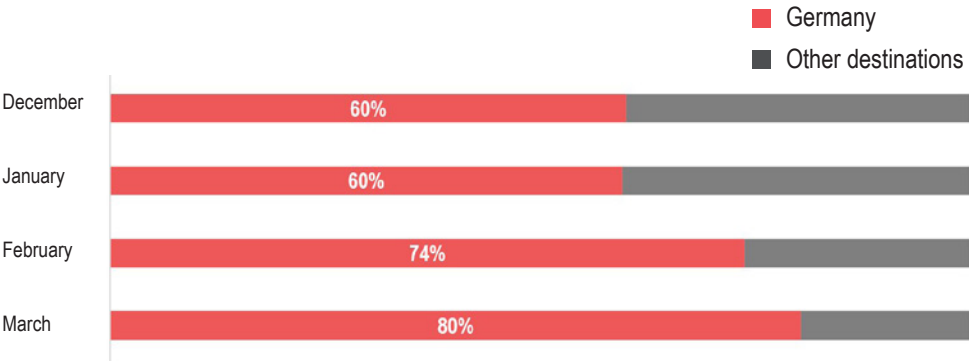
Figure 4: Reported funds used by Syrians, Iraqis & Afghans to fund their journey to Europe, March 2016



Despite the closing of borders, **information collected from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan indicates that migration is likely to continue from all three countries in both the immediate and longer term.** When asked whether individuals in their community were planning to leave for Europe in the next three months, 95% of key informants in the KRI responded that this was the case, as did key informants in 56% of assessed communities in Syria. In both cases, the reported numbers of people planning to migrate were high, indicating that significant numbers of Syrians and Iraqis are likely to continue to travel to Europe.

For those travelling from Afghanistan, average journey times to Europe are significantly longer, meaning the people are continuing to arrive in Europe unaware of recent changes to entry criteria. In addition, focus groups conducted in Afghanistan in late March revealed that even those aware of recent changes are still willing to travel, believing that opportunities in Europe are significantly better than those available at home.

**Figure 5: Proportion of interviewed migrants intending to travel to Germany, December - March**



### Destination country

When asked about their intended destination, **increasing proportions of migrants have reported heading to Germany, the intended destination for 80% of migrants interviewed in March.** Starting from December, decreasing proportions reported intending to reach Sweden and Austria, the second and third preferred destination countries in December.

For those not reporting the intention to travel to Germany, a wide range destinations were reported, including Belgium, France, the UK, Italy, Holland, Norway among others.

The observed change in preferred destination is likely due in part to changing legislation, whereby restrictions introduced in January obliged migrants to state their destination country on their entry papers. Onward travel was only permitted to those stating the intention to reach Austria or Germany, which may have made migrants more likely to provide

these answers when talking to REACH teams, regardless of their actual intended destination.

However, despite the possibility that some answers may have been influenced by these new restrictions, findings are consistent with data collected in areas of origin, where the vast majority of key informants in Iraq and Mali reported Germany as their preferred destination. When compared by nationality,

### Returns from Europe to the KRI

Data collected in areas of origin has highlighted the presence of returns from several areas of origin.

This was most marked in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), where increasing proportions have reportedly returned since February 2016. Key informants in 56% of assessed communities in the KRI reported knowing of people who had returned from Europe, the vast majority of these (47%) in the past month, and a further 21% in the last two months.

**Figure 6: Proportion of communities in the KRI reporting returnees in the past 3 months**



the only groups to overwhelmingly favour other destination countries than appear to be those from Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt, who more commonly reported intending to travel to France or Italy, in most cases reporting that this was because of the presence of family members already there.

**Figure 7: Reported reason for return from Europe to the KRI, March 2016**



When asked about the reasons for returning from Europe, the majority (64%) were reported to have returned because life was not as expected, while others reportedly wished to reunite with their family in the KRI.

In early March, only 7% of KIs reported that people had turned back before reaching the EU because the journey was too difficult, however **by the end of March, this figure had increased to 20%, coinciding with the introduction of increasing restrictions and closures** affecting Iraqis on the Western Balkans route.

## Conclusion

Despite the fall in the number of new arrivals in the past month, migrants have continued to transit through the Western Balkans via both Greece and Bulgaria, and onwards to Western Europe by irregular means. In recent weeks, new routes have also been reported both within Europe and directly from areas of origin, in response to the closure of the Western Balkans route.

While continued border closures have considerably reduced the number of people reaching Germany, Austria and other destination countries, **many migrants remain relatively mobile, moving between transit sites and across borders.** This has resulted in lack of clarity on the numbers continuing to travel by irregular means and a fluctuating caseloads of people in need of assistance while in transit.

Against a backdrop of questions about the legality and practicality of the EU-Turkey Plan, authorities in Greece and Turkey are processing the current backlog of some 10,000 individual cases. While this happens, **over 50,000 migrants continue to stay in often precarious conditions throughout Greece and the Western Balkans and require humanitarian assistance to meet short term needs.** The future of those already in Serbia, FYROM, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia remains unclear and people require further information about options they may take.

**The absence of safe, legal pathways for onward movement has led increasing numbers of people to resort to irregular means to continue their journey, increasingly families as well as young children.** These people become “invisible” and face high personal risk, while authorities remain largely unprepared for continued movement, particularly along new routes.

As also shown in previous reports, people migrating to Europe are not a homogenous group, and instead include a wide variety of profiles with differing vulnerabilities in transit, upon arrival in their intended destination or upon return to their country of origin.

Information collected in areas of origin confirms that despite awareness of new restrictions, confidence in information about new legislation is low, and that **large numbers of people are still prepared to leave for Europe for a variety of reasons, including active armed conflict, violence and insecurity and a lack of access to income and basic services, caused by years of instability.**

### About REACH Initiative

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