



Save the Children

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AT THE BALKANS ROUTE

OVERVIEW OF THE DATA

ON ARRIVALS IN 2025

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

Every child has the right to a future. Save the Children works in North West Balkans and worldwide to give children a healthy start in life and the chance to learn and be safe. We do whatever it takes to get children the things they need – every day and in times of crisis.

Acknowledgments

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IMPRESSUM

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KEY TRENDS

- **Lower registered arrivals in 2025:** In 2025, newly registered refugee and migrant arrivals declined across first-entry, transit, and destination countries.
- **Transit through the Balkans not fully captured by official statistics:** For the second year in a row, significantly more people appear to have passed through Western Balkan countries than indicated by official statistics
- **Interpretation of declining numbers and drivers of movement:** While the reduction in officially registered arrivals has been associated with strengthened border controls and anti-smuggling measures, there are indications that these measures mainly reduced visibility and access to protection for people on the move. Evidence further indicates that the availability of protection services does not drive onward movement, which is shaped by broader and more complex structural factors.
- **Future risks and regional pressures:** The continued reduction of services supporting protection and inclusion in the Western Balkans warrants closer attention in the context of the forthcoming implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. At the same time, persistent conflicts and severe economic disruption in the Middle East and the Gulf region continue to shape displacement dynamics, with the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan routes historically playing a central role as pathways for displaced populations
- **Shrinking capacities and data gaps:** The year saw significant reductions in funding and operational capacity of organisations assisting refugees and migrants in the Balkans, leading to growing service gaps and declining availability and quality of data for effective monitoring.

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KEY FINDINGS

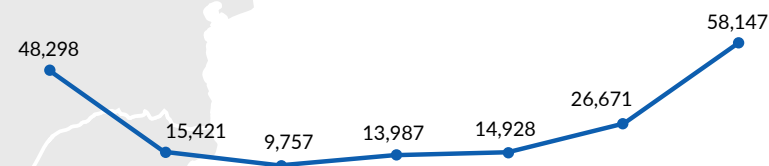
In 2025, a decline was observed in the number of newly registered arrivals of refugees and migrants in countries of first entry to the EU, such as Greece and Bulgaria, in the transit countries of the Western Balkans, as well as in destination countries such as Germany. This decline is largely rooted in the reduced number of Syrian refugees travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route¹, as well as in policies based on the suspension of the submission of asylum applications, as in Greece.

At the same time, while registrations are lowering, for the second consecutive year, it appears that more people have passed through key Balkan transit countries such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina than is reflected in official data and statistics. This is indicated by the number of irregular border crossings recorded in Slovenia and, in particular, by the number of first-time asylum seekers in destination countries across Europe. The numbers registered in Germany far exceed those recorded by the authorities. Even if some Afghans, Syrians, and Turks who arrived in Germany took alternative routes, and even when including roughly 15% children born in Germany to asylum-seeking parents, the scale of the discrepancy indicates that many more people transited through the Western Balkan countries than were officially recorded.

Particularly concerning is the narrative that links the decline in the number of registered refugees and migrants transiting the Balkans with the result of successful anti-smuggling efforts and the connected policy choices to reduce reception and services for migrant, given that,

with official numbers decreasing, the need to maintain structures that provide support to children and adults should be diminishing.

Data on new arrivals in 2025



Neglecting protection to support such narratives worryingly reduces the visibility of children and adults on the move through the Balkans, strengthen smuggling operations, making journeys even more dangerous, particularly for children, and make smuggling more profitable.

On the contrary, the reasons of movement of refugees and migrants towards EU countries are complex and multifaceted and the availability of adequate services for children and adults, protection of mental health and well-being of displaced children, educational activities and safe spaces are not to be interpreted as vehicles that facilitate onward movement towards destination countries.

¹ Reduced movement of Syrian refugees should not be interpreted as evidence that conditions in Syria now meet the threshold for safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return.

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The year was also marked by a significant reduction in the capacities and resources of local and international organisations working on supporting refugees and migrants across the Balkans. The growing number of gaps in services has been reported, while the availability of data and reporting, which are essential for effective monitoring of the situation in the region, has deteriorated.

Diminishing services supporting protection and inclusion, could also affect the upcoming implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum and its implications for Western Balkan countries located at the EU's external borders. Moreover, the ongoing conflicts and severe economic disruption in the Middle East and the Gulf region must not be overlooked, particularly given that the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Balkans have historically been key pathways for displaced populations from these regions.

KEY FINDINGS



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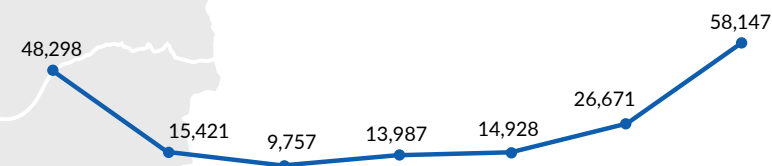
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

Following the same methodology for data reporting used in 2024, Frontex published data on the “number of detections of irregular border crossings” in 2025, treating the Eastern Mediterranean Route and the Western Balkan Route as two separate and independent routes. This methodology used by Frontex stems from the Agency’s primary focus on protecting the EU’s external borders rather than on the actual journeys taken by refugees and migrants. Consequently, the *Eastern Mediterranean* route is understood as movements towards Cyprus, the Greek sea borders, and the land borders of Greece and Bulgaria with Türkiye, while the *Western Balkan route* is defined as crossings of the land borders that Western Balkan countries share with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Croatia. Although certain nationalities appear in the Western Balkans due to more favourable visa policies in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (primarily nationals of Türkiye and the Russian Federation) and subsequently continue onwards to more economically developed European countries, the majority of refugees and migrants present in Western Balkan countries have previously travelled through Greece or Bulgaria, i.e. along the *Eastern Mediterranean route*.

Frontex reported that 51,399 attempts at irregular border crossings were detected along the *Eastern Mediterranean route*, representing a 27% decrease compared to 2024.² The majority were children and adults arriving from Afghanistan, Sudan and Egypt.

This reported decline is also reflected in official Greek government statistics, according to which 48,298 new arrivals were registered in 2025 – a 21% decrease compared to 2024.³ This represents the first decline in the number of registered new arrivals in Greece since 2021, following the end of restrictive measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data on new arrivals in 2025



New arrivals in Greece	"Migration pressure" in Bulgaria	New entries into government centers in Serbia	New arrivals in BiH	First-time asylum seekers in Croatia	Cases of "illegal border crossings" in Slovenia	First-time asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan in Germany
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In 2025, a total of 61,629 applications for international protection were submitted in Greece, most frequently by nationals of Afghanistan, Egypt, and Sudan.⁴ Around 20% of these applications concerned children, including 3,502 unaccompanied minors, who primarily originated from Egypt, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Approximately 38,140 displaced people from Ukraine were beneficiaries of temporary protection in Greece at the end of December 2025, including 6,555 children.⁵

¹ Reduced movement of Syrian refugees should not be interpreted as evidence that conditions in Syria now meet the threshold for safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return.

² Frontex, Frontex: Irregular border crossings down 26% in 2025, Europe must stay prepared, available at <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-irregular-border-crossings-down-26-in-2025-europe-must-stay-prepared-lyKpVb>

³ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, available at [Στατιστικά | Υπουργείο Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου](https://www.migra.gov.gr/Στατιστικά-Υπουργείο-Μετανάστευσης-και-Ασύλου)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Eurostat, Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data, available at

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EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The beginning of 2025 was marked by an increase in boat arrivals from Libya to the Greek islands of Crete and Gavdos. This shift was accompanied by a high proportion of unaccompanied children among those arriving. In July 2025, Greek authorities introduced a three-month suspension on the submission of asylum applications for individuals arriving by sea from North Africa to Crete.⁶ Many of those undertaking the dangerous journey from Libya to Crete and Gavdos were fleeing conflict and violence. Only in the last ten days of September, refugees from Sudan and Eritrea who have arrived in Crete, started to be taken into reception and identification centres to register their asylum applications.⁷ Exemptions were applied inconsistently and without transparency, leaving many without access to information, legal assistance, or appropriate reception conditions. Although the suspension was not extended beyond its initial period, its implementation created confusion and unequal treatment. At the same time, Crete remained without adequate reception infrastructure throughout 2025. Despite becoming the main entry point, no formal reception facilities were established, and arrivals continued to be accommodated in ad hoc and unsuitable conditions. These developments took place within a broader context of legislative changes. In September 2025, the Greek authorities adopted new legislation introducing a more punitive approach to migration management. Rejected asylum seekers who leave within 14 days face prison sentences of two to five years, along with financial

penalties. The law also extends detention for those entering without valid documents to up to 24 months and removes the possibility for long-term irregular migrants to regularise their status.⁸ Reforms to age assessment procedures introduced in 2025 weakened key guarantees, including the presumption of minority and the use of non-invasive methods.⁹

Official statistics from Bulgarian authorities also indicate a decline in new arrivals in 2025. The “total migration pressure” on Bulgaria’s borders was estimated at 15,421 children and adults, representing a 72% decrease compared to 2024, while 13,568 of refugees and migrants “returned on their own” to the neighboring countries, mostly to Türkiye.¹⁰ It is therefore difficult to establish a reliable estimate of how many people actually entered Bulgarian territory in 2025. In Bulgaria, there is no independent monitoring mechanism that could verify that the practice of third-country nationals voluntarily going back to neighbouring countries complies with human rights standards.¹¹ Local NGOs warn that this voluntary return might be a euphemism for pushbacks and the denial of the right to seek asylum since only 3,895 people formally applied for international protection in Bulgaria in 2025. The majority of the 1,774 individuals detained by Bulgarian authorities were refugees and migrants attempting to enter the country from Türkiye, mainly from Afghanistan, Morocco, and Iraq. Official data

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytspm_custom_20687953/default/table

⁶ UNHCR, UNHCR deeply concerned by Greece’s suspension of asylum applications, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/gr/en/news/press-releases/unhcr-deeply-concerned-greece-s-suspension-asylum-applications>

⁷ Greek Council for Refugees, Before the Greek courts and the European Court of Human Rights, the Greek authorities for the suspension of asylum, available at <https://gcr.gr/en/news/item/nea-apo-to-pedio-8/>

⁸ The Guardian, Greece passes draconian legislation with prison terms for rejected asylum seekers, available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/03/greece-passes-draconian-legislation-with-prison-terms-for-rejected-asylum-seekers?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁹ Ekathimerini, Greece to verify asylum seekers’ age with medical tests, available at https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/1278766/greece-to-verify-asylum-seekers-age-with-medical-tests/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁰ Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of the Interior, available at <https://shorturl.at/vYaVY>

¹¹ 11.11.11 (Belgium), Hungarian Helsinki Committee, We Are Monitoring Association (Poland), Centre for Peace Studies (Croatia), Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH), Sienos Grupė (Lithuania), I Want to Help Refugees/Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem (Latvia), BEATEN BACK AT EUROPE’S BORDERS - 2025 Annual Report on Pushbacks, available at <https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Pushback-Report-2026.pdf>

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EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

further show that 6,914 children and adults voluntarily left reception centres during the year, while only 3,504 were newly admitted.¹² Approximately 78,105 displaced people from Ukraine were beneficiaries of temporary protection in Bulgaria at the end of December 2025, including 13,135 children.¹³

Amid concerns that a violence and pushback-based approach to managing the Bulgarian–Türkiye border continued into 2025, a tragic case from late 2024 finally prompted a response from an EU agency. In November 2025, Frontex’s Fundamental Rights Office concluded that Bulgarian authorities have been under the obligation to assist and rescue three Egyptian teenagers who froze to death near the Turkish border in late December 2024.¹⁴

The NGO rescue teams received several alerts from the children, including their respective positions at different times. The alerts on the immediate risk of death were effectively shared with the Bulgarian emergency services, but the Bulgarian authorities not only did not react to the alerts, but also actively obstructed the NGOs’ rescue attempts, which resulted in a more than 24-hour delay in reaching the reported positions.

The Fundamental Rights Office concluded that Bulgarian authorities had sufficient information to reasonably infer there was a life-threatening situation, and although they had the capacity to act, they failed to implement adequate measures on time which resulted in the loss of

lives.¹⁵ Another tragic incident that attracted public attention in Bulgaria was a traffic accident in November 2025, in which six Afghan nationals lost their lives. The incident occurred near the port city of Burgas on the Black Sea, when police repeatedly attempted to stop a van with Romanian licence plates. Officers used spike strips to intercept the vehicle, at which point it crashed, skidding off the road and into a lake.¹⁶

In their efforts to combat smuggling, local law enforcement authorities sometimes expose refugees and migrants to immediate and heightened risks.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Eurostat, Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data, available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpsm_custom_20687953/default/table

¹⁴ Frontex, Serious Incident Reports Cat 1, available at <https://prd.frontex.europa.eu/document/serious-incident-reports-cat-1/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Euronews, Van carrying migrants crashes after police chase in Bulgaria, killing at least six people, available at <https://www.euronews.com/2025/11/07/van-carrying-migrants-crashes-after-police-chase-in-bulgaria-killing-at-least-six-people>

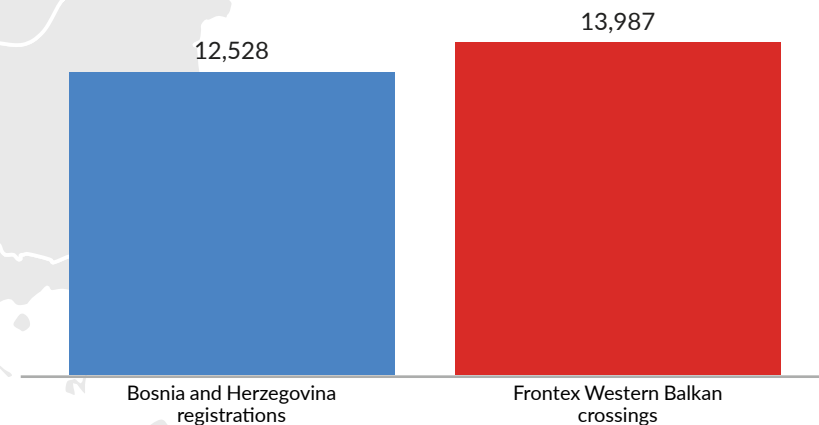
WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE, CROATIA AND SLOVENIA

Frontex data for what they designate as the Western Balkans route indicate that 12,528 attempts at irregular border crossings were detected, 42% fewer than in 2024.¹⁷ Most were children and adults from Türkiye, Afghanistan, and Syria. According to Frontex, detections fell sharply, aided by heightened security measures and close cooperation with the Agency, which maintains a presence in the Western Balkans. This included the launch of a new Frontex joint operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in November 2025, enhancing operational support on the ground.¹⁸

It is important to note that the officially registered number of new arrivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2025 amounted to 13,987, which exceeds Frontex data for the entire route, as it did in the Frontex reports for 2024.¹⁹ This is particularly striking because citizens of Türkiye, who are reported as most frequently detected by Frontex, can enter BiH without a visa and stay for tourism or private purposes for up to 90 days. As a result, they are usually in private accommodation and remain invisible to the system as migrants or asylum seekers, often only becoming visible when they experience a pushback at the Croatian border. Therefore, Frontex numbers would be expected to exceed the officially recorded figures in BiH, as they capture a larger share of citizens of Türkiye and other visa-exempt countries who join migrants and refugees heading toward economically developed European countries. Frontex estimates also include the number of crossings of other borders that do not involve Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as

the Serbia–Croatia or Serbia–Hungary borders, which again would be expected to increase the Frontex estimates. This discrepancy is particularly concerning from a child protection perspective, as invisible children and young people along the route face heightened exposure to exploitation and abuse, including an increased risk of trafficking, due to their reliance on informal and increasingly aggravated facilitation mechanisms.

Frontex compared to BiH in 2025



The majority of children and adults registered in BiH came from Egypt, Afghanistan, Morocco, Türkiye, Syria, and to a lesser extent from Bangladesh, China and Pakistan. There was a rise in the number of Palestinians (they did not necessarily reside in the territory of OPT immediately before the journey)²⁰ and in the number of young people from Sudan. The official BiH statistics link the Balkans with the

¹⁷ Frontex, Frontex: Irregular border crossings down 26% in 2025, Europe must stay prepared, available at <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-irregular-border-crossings-down-26-in-2025-europe-must-stay-prepared-lyKpVb>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ IOM, Bosnia & Herzegovina — Migrant Mobility Situation Report (December 2025), available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/bosnia-herzegovina-migrant-mobility-situation-report-december-2025?close=true>

²⁰ BiH Ministarstvo bezbjednosti, Informacija o stanju u oblasti migracija u Bosni i Hercegovini za prvih devet mjeseci 2025. godine, available at <https://www.parlament.ba/act/ActDetails?actId=3940>

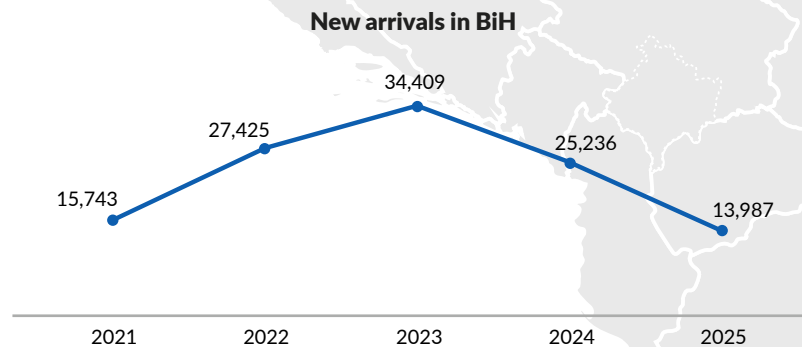
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Eastern Mediterranean, indicating that migrants and refugees often continue their journey from Greece and Bulgaria through the Western Balkans. The route division presented by Frontex is artificial: the route passing through Western Balkan countries is in fact a branch of the Eastern Mediterranean route, regardless of specific nationalities that occasionally join this flow due to favourable visa and labour migration regimes with countries in the region.

When the number of new arrivals in BiH in 2025 is compared with previous years, it becomes evident that, for the second consecutive year, the number of individuals registered by competent authorities has declined



At the end of 2025, there were 198 asylum seekers with claims pending processing and final decision before the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most commonly originating from Russia, Syria, and Türkiye. This figure includes 38 children, of whom 10 were unaccompanied and separated children.²¹ It is estimated that 327 Ukrainians were residing

in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of 2025, most often granted temporary residence on humanitarian grounds.²²

Approximately 9,757 entries into government centers were recorded in Serbia in 2025.²³ Most were refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Morocco, Syria, Egypt and Türkiye. It is important to note that accommodation capacities in Serbia were radically reduced over the past two years, as were other forms of support and services previously available to children and adults transiting through the country. Therefore, some local CSOs emphasise that official figures reflect more the number of people using the remaining reception centres than the actual number of individuals who have transited through Serbia, warning that camps are often bypassed and that smugglers arrange private accommodation when necessary.

According to local CSO estimates, at least 35,000 migrants and refugees entered and transited through Serbia in 2025.²⁴ Save the Children's partners that have field presence reported that in the capital, Belgrade, unregistered children are increasingly encountered, and that well-organised smuggling networks facilitate very rapid transit through Serbia. Similar to BiH, holders of Turkish passports can enter and stay in Serbia without visas and often are not visible until they are apprehended while attempting to cross the border.

The fact that more people were registered in BiH than in Serbia also indicates that the number of those registered in reception centres does not reflect the total number of people passing through Serbia. Data collected in Bosnia and Herzegovina show that only a small number

²¹ UNHCR, UNHCR Bosnia and Herzegovina monthly Report - December 2025, available at https://reliefweb.int/report/bosnia-and-herzegovina/unhcr-bosnia-and-herzegovina-monthly-report-december-2025?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²² Ibid.

²³ UNHCR, Serbia Statistical Snapshots for 2025, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/en/country-reports>

²⁴ N1, Najmanje 35.000 migranata ušlo i prošlo kroz Srbiju ove godine, available at <https://n1info.rs/vesti/35000-migranata-uslo-i-proslo-kroz-srbiju-2025/>

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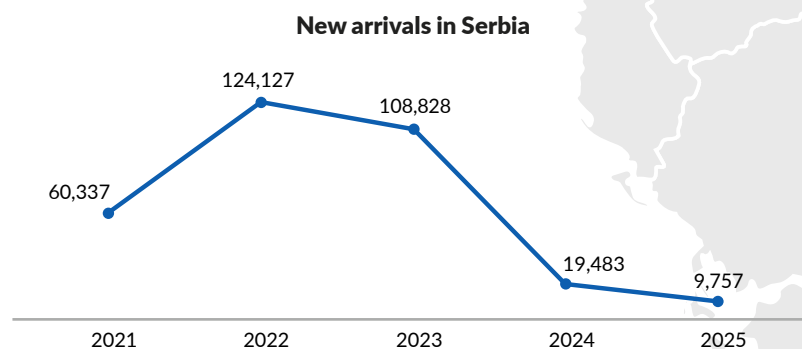
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of displaced children and adults enter BiH via Montenegro, while the majority pass through Serbia, and a number of persons continue their journey from Serbia directly to Croatia or Hungary²⁵, without ever entering BiH.

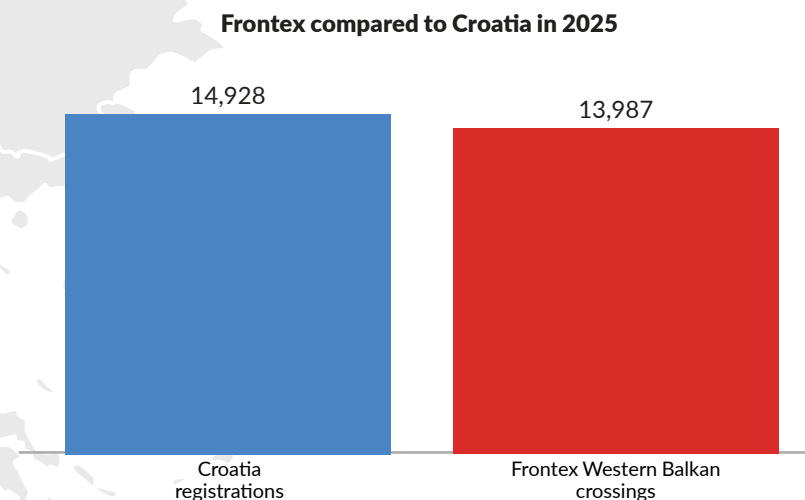
The route through Serbia in 2025 for many refugees and migrants, involved violence, pushbacks at the borders, repeated returns to centres in southern Serbia, collection of personal data without explanation, violence and exploitation by smugglers on whom they increasingly depend, informal labour, potential sexual exploitation in order to obtain financial means necessary to continue their journey.

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but with even more pronounced differences, the number of new arrivals in 2025 compared with previous years, shows the decline in the number of individuals registered in reception centres for the second consecutive year.



During 2025, a total of 132 asylum applications were submitted in Serbia, most commonly by persons from Russia, Palestinians, and people from Pakistan, and seven persons were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection.²⁶ Temporary protection was granted to 1,253 Ukrainians.²⁷

Official data on asylum applications in Croatia in 2025 also indicate that the number of people passing through the Western Balkans was higher than what Frontex reports. A total of 14,928 people applied for international protection in this EU member state, most frequently coming from Russia, Türkiye, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Syria.²⁸



What is notable is that the number of unaccompanied and separated

²⁵ There are no longer reception or transit centres in the northern part of the country, near the Hungarian border, so the statistics only cover those refugees and migrants who were apprehended by the police while attempting to cross that border and were referred to accommodation.

²⁶ UNHCR, Serbia Statistical Snapshots for 2025, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/en/country-reports>

²⁷ Ibid.

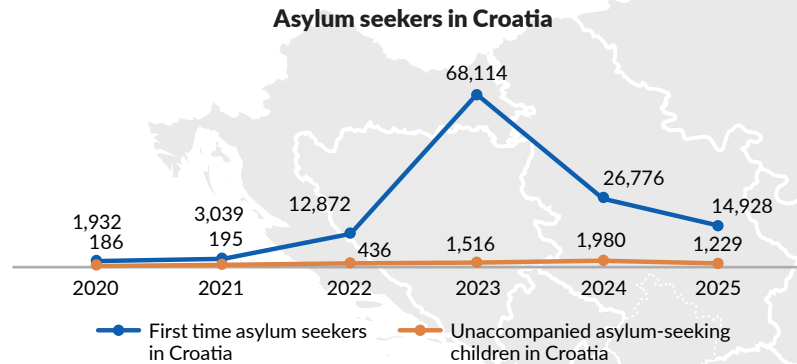
²⁸ Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske, Statistika: Tražitelji međunarodne zaštite, available at [Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske - Statistika: Tražitelji međunarodne zaštite](https://www.mup.hr/statistika/trazitelji-medunarodne-zastite)

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children requesting protection in Croatia remained relatively stable, not following the fluctuations in the total number of asylum seekers. This may point to shortcomings in the registration process in Croatia. Throughout 2025, reports of violent pushbacks of both children and adults back into Bosnia and Herzegovina continued.



Approximately 28,353 displaced people from Ukraine were beneficiaries of temporary protection in Croatia at the end of December 2025, including 6,665 children.²⁹

Illustratively, even in Slovenia, the next country on the route, 24,137 cases of “illegal border crossings” from Croatia were recorded.³⁰ These most often involved children and adults from Afghanistan (3,399), Bangladesh (3,034), Egypt (3,004), Türkiye (1,903), Morocco (1,723), Pakistan (1,658), Syria (1,414), Nepal (1,136), China (864), and persons of Palestinian origin (782). To better understand the scale of movement of displaced children and adults from the Balkans through Slovenia, this figure must be supplemented with 2,534 detected cases of illegal

entries into Slovenia from Hungary. Again, these most often involved refugees and migrants from Morocco (1,019), Afghanistan (647), Egypt (160), Pakistan (158), Syria (73), Bangladesh (67), and others.³¹ Although Slovenia recorded a significant 39% decrease in the total number of observed cases of illegal border crossings compared to 2024 (from 46,217 to 28,200, mainly due to a decline in the number of Syrians entering the country from Croatia). The number of cases of illegal border crossings from the direction of Hungary in 2025 was almost five times higher. The route might be shifting (for example, due to stricter controls at the border between Hungary and Austria), and this significant increase may also point to more intensive use of routes from Serbia or from Romania towards Hungary.

²⁹ Eurostat, Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data, available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpsm_custom_20687953/default/table

³⁰ Republika Slovenija, NEDOVOLJENE MIGRACIJE NA OBMOČJU REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE, available at <https://www.policija.si/images/stories/Statistika/MejnaProblematika/IllegalneMigracije/2025/December2025.pdf>

³¹ Ibid.

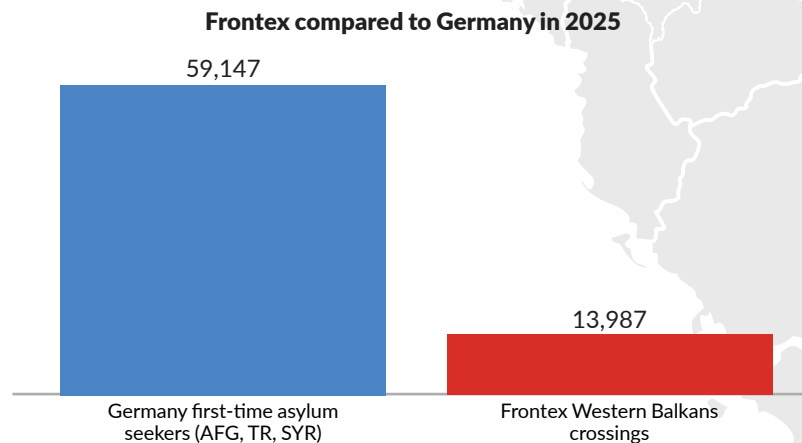
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DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The majority of refugees and migrants leave the Western Balkan countries relatively quickly and continue their journey towards their countries of destination. Only by looking at the numbers of first-time asylum seekers in those countries does it become clear that the number of registered children and adults who passed through the Western Balkans is too low.

For example, in Germany, the registered number of first-time asylum seekers in 2025 was 113,236, representing a 51% decrease compared to 2024 (229,751).³² As many as 45% of these applications concern children, with around 15% concern children born in Germany during the year among the applicants. The majority of applicants came from Afghanistan (23,972), Syria (23,256), and Türkiye (11,919) – the most prominent nationalities observed in the Western Balkans.



Findings are similar when we analyse the data from Austria. In 2025, 6,901 first-time asylum applications were registered – significantly less than in the previous year. However, most of the asylum seekers who newly arrived in the country came from Afghanistan (1,707), Syria (1,149 – a significant decrease compared to the previous year), and Türkiye (511).³³ In the Netherlands, 24,073 first-time asylum applications were registered in 2025 – mostly by Syrians (3,280 – again, a significant decrease compared to the previous year), and Türkiye (1,468), Sudan (796), Afghanistan (758) and Pakistan (689) are also among the ten most commonly registered nationalities.³⁴ In Sweden, 6,734 first-time asylum seekers were registered in 2025 – mostly Afghans (707), Syrians (544), Iranians (372) and Iraqis (329).³⁵

But these statistics do not capture the journey of a significant number of young people and children from Egypt and Morocco, whose movements through the region are highly organised and increasingly resemble human trafficking networks rather than previously known smuggling routes. Internal data suggest that UASC from Egypt reached by our teams in BiH most commonly move onward to Italy, whereas children from Morocco also travel towards Spain and France. The first entry point in Italy is usually the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. Statistics from the competent ministry show that 724 unaccompanied children were registered in this region as of December 2025. Most were boys from Bangladesh, Egypt and Afghanistan.³⁶ When looking at the statistics for the whole of Italy as of December 2025, boys from Egypt were the most frequently registered group of unaccompanied minors, totalling 5,159.

³² Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, Aktuelle Zahlen (12/2025), available at <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/AsylinZahlen/aktuelle-zahlen-dezember-2025.html?nn=284722>

³³ Bundesministerium für Inneres, Asyl-Statistiken 2025, available at <https://www.bmi.gv.at/301/Statistiken/>

³⁴ Ministry of Asylum and Migration, Asylum Trends, available at <https://ind.nl/en/about-us/statistics-and-publications/asylum-trends>

³⁵ Migrationsverket, Asyl, available at <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Asyl.html>

³⁶ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Monthly report on unaccompanied minors in Italy, available at https://analytics.lavoro.gov.it/t/PublicSIM/views/UnaccompaniedMinorsinItaly_16944462287100/UnaccompaniedMinorsinItaly?%3Aembed=y&%3Aiid=21&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y

Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

FIELD MONITORING

The year 2025 brought numerous changes for Save the Children's partners in Serbia and teams in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Our partners in Serbia, the Centre for Youth Integration (CYI), continued to operate in the Krnjača asylum centre until its closure in June. They subsequently continued their activities, focused on supporting school-aged children and parents, in the Obrenovac centre, which had previously been intended exclusively for single males, and to which families and children were transferred. Our partners also worked in the Institution for Children and Youth in Belgrade, where unaccompanied children were accommodated, and Save the Children supports one of their drop-in shelters for children who live or work on the streets of Belgrade, testing different approaches to supporting refugee and migrant children as part of addressing urban poverty.

In 2025, CYI supported 608 migrants and refugees, including 183 adults (mostly parents), 124 girls and 205 boys travelling with their families, as well as 96 UASC. Unaccompanied children most commonly came from Afghanistan, Syria, and Morocco.

In BiH, Save the Children teams have maintained a presence and supported children at two key locations used by refugees and migrants throughout the country. Our team operated at the Blažuj reception centre in Sarajevo, intended for the reception of single adult men, focusing on the early identification and referral of UASC to the Ušivak centre, designated for the accommodation of children and families. The teams also carried out outreach work in the city and distributed Cash Voucher Assistance to refugee and migrant children and their families in reception centres, safe houses, and to asylum-seeking families

with children, living in private accommodation. The teams identified potentially unaccompanied and separated children, assessed their needs, provided essential child protection information, and accompanied them to registration, medical services, safe accommodation, and psychosocial first aid.

Save the Children was also present at the main exit point from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Una-Sana Canton (USC). The outreach team covered various locations and provided support to refugees and migrants, including those who had been pushed back from Croatia. Our team referred children to the assistance they needed and focused on ensuring legal guardianship for unaccompanied children. Armed groups operated along the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia throughout 2025, controlling certain sections of the border, as repeatedly witnessed by refugees and migrants who shared their experiences of exploitation and threats.

The outreach team supported 1,160 refugees and migrants who experienced pushbacks during the year, including 381 children. Our education team continued to support a preparatory school programme for children accommodated in the local reception centre in USC, even after the centre, located in the urban area of Bihać, was closed and the children and families were relocated to a significantly more distant centre, far from the local school where educational activities are organised.

A major challenge, which continues to this day, has been ensuring transport for school age children participating in this activity, which, in addition to its educational value, also has a significant MHPSS component, as it provides children with a sense of normalcy and daily routine, as well as the opportunity to leave the camp and the stressful

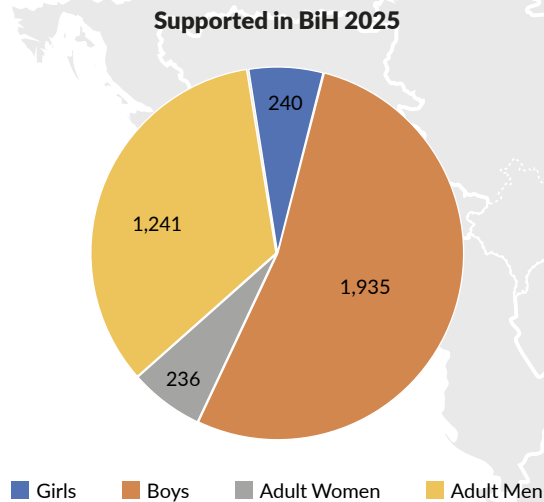
Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

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FIELD MONITORING

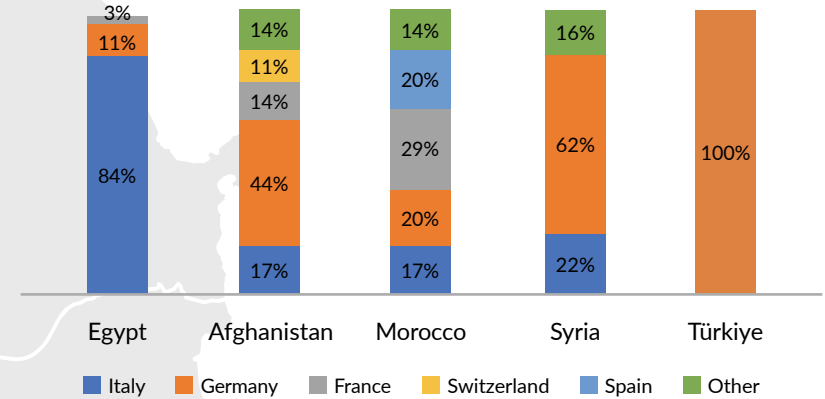
environment in which children are exposed to stories of violence faced by refugees and migrants in their attempts to enter Croatia.

In 2025, across all these activities at both locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Save the Children supported 3,652 unique migrants and refugees, including 1,477 adults, 240 girls and 1,935 boys, among them 16 unaccompanied and separated girls and 1,627 unaccompanied and separated boys.



When we asked unaccompanied children about their intended destinations, those who chose to respond gave consistent answers that reflect previously identified trends. A significant proportion of UASC from Egypt reported Italy as their destination, while, alongside the expected countries in Central and Western Europe, some children from Morocco expressed a preference for reaching Spain. This suggests that, for certain groups of children, the Eastern Mediterranean route is becoming a more viable option than the routes that would typically be expected to lead through the Central or Western Mediterranean routes.

Countries of origin and destination of USAC



Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub

Data and Trends Analysis

ABOUT THE PROJECT

About the Project

The official closure of borders and the EU-Türkiye deal in March 2016 reduced the number of migrants, but did not stop the migrations through the Balkans. Refugees and migrants have instead been pushed into the hands of smugglers and traffickers, facing increased protection risks. The national protection systems in countries like Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia are struggling to provide adequate support to new arrivals. There is a lack of reliable data on migration trends and many rights violations against migrants and refugees transiting through, or stranded in the Balkans.

Organizations and volunteer groups operating in the Balkans track irregular arrivals, departures, cases of pushbacks, detention, and violence in their own countries, often without clearly defined standards, objectives or consistency. At this time, there is no unified collection of information or a regional initiative to collate and organize the available information into a clear and concise overview.

International attention remains mostly focused on Greece, while the migration flows through other Balkan countries stay below the radar. The lack of comprehensive data analysis at individual country and regional levels increases the vulnerability of refugees and migrants on the move, children in particular, and hinders the development of relevant, evidence-based and responsive policies and programs.

Data and Trend Analysis (DATA) is a project launched by Save the Children's Balkan Migration and Displacement Hub (BMDH). The goal of this initiative is to synthesize valuable information on migration, especially on refugee and migrant children, and contribute to evidence-based programming and policy-making within the region.

The DATA Project focuses on the following three topics: (1) Main migratory trends: ebbs and flows in migration, changes in demographics, changes in routes, and seasonal changes; (2) Main protection violations: detention rates and conditions, pushbacks, returns, police violence, local acceptance and tensions; (3) Changes in national migration and social protection policies.

Data Sources

Besides primary data collected by Save the Children and its partners, other data used for this purpose include publicly available data from reports, dashboards, publications, policies and articles, and information from other relevant stakeholders which are collected and analyzed. The initiative is and will remain open, encouraging the exchange of information, cooperation and partnership with all relevant actors.

Data is processed in line with national and international regulations and standards on protection of personal data.

Geographical Scope

We intend to cover the Balkans route which includes the territories of Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo*, Serbia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia.

The Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub (BMDH) was established in 2018 in Belgrade, Serbia, in order to ensure visibility and continual support for children on the move in the Balkans. Drawing from the experience gained in responding to the refugee and migrant crisis in 2015-2017, BMDH documents good practices, improves learning and knowledge-sharing and promotes emergency preparedness. The Hub monitors trends in migrations across the Balkans and conducts research in particular issues related to mixed migrations, issuing regular reports. By developing partnerships in the countries along the Balkans route and liaising with other stakeholders working with children on the move, BMDH runs and promotes robust advocacy for children ensuring that their needs are brought to the forefront. Together with Save the Children's advocacy offices, BMDH implements regional advocacy initiatives targeting EU. The Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub works within Save the Children North West Balkans CO.

Find our Data and Trend Analysis and other reports and publications at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net>
keyword: BMDH



Save the Children

**Save the Children in North West Balkans
Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub**

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