

# Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2018





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Throughout this report, all references to Kosovo are marked with an asterisk (\*) to indicate that 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.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ARA</b>	Annual Risk Analysis
<b>BCP</b>	border-crossing point
<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>CIRAM</b>	Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model
<b>CIRCABC</b>	Communication and Information Resource Centre for Administrations, Businesses and Citizens
<b>Daesh/ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>EaP-RAN</b>	Eastern Partnership Risk Analysis Network
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EDF</b>	European Union Document-Fraud
<b>EPN</b>	European Patrols Network
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>Europol</b>	European Union's law-enforcement agency
<b>FOA</b>	Flexible Operational Activities
<b>FRAN</b>	Frontex Risk Analysis Network
<b>FTF</b>	foreign terrorist fighter
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IBC</b>	illegal border-crossing
<b>ICJ</b>	International Court of Justice
<b>ID</b>	identification document
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>Interpol</b>	International Criminal Police Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>ISAF</b>	NATO's International Security Assistance Force
<b>JO</b>	joint operation
<b>JORA</b>	Frontex Joint Operations Reporting Application
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>OCG</b>	organised crime group
<b>RAU</b>	Risk Analysis Unit
<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>SE</b>	South East
<b>SIS</b>	Schengen Information System
<b>TU-RAN</b>	Turkey Risk Analysis Network
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council resolution
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>WB-ARA</b>	Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis
<b>WB-RAN</b>	Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network

# Executive summary

## The migration flow continued to decrease remaining largely under control; coordination and cooperation remain crucial

An array of response measures, ranging from coordinated enhancement of border-controls by the most affected countries to policy actions supported by the EU, introduced at the end of 2015 and maintained throughout 2016 and 2017, contributed to a marked reduction in the volume of the **non-regional**<sup>1</sup> migration flow observed in the Western Balkans.

Overall, on the Western Balkan route, the number of illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants at and between border-crossing points (BCPs) decreased in 2017 to roughly 19 000 (down from over 260 000 in 2016). The decreasing trend observed during the last nine months of 2016 was mirrored in 2017. Each quarter of 2017 saw lower figures as the migratory pressure remained relatively stable and returned to manageable levels.

The closure of the Western Balkans transit corridor in Q1 2016 was a crucial step towards tackling the migration crisis and bringing the pressure down to manageable levels.

As regards enhanced border-controls, specific measures were implemented at key transit points in the Eastern Mediterranean, at main entry points at southern common borders of regional countries with EU Member States, as well as at

main exit points in the north of the region, especially at EU Member States common borders with Serbia.

At the southern common borders between the region and EU Member States the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia maintained their efforts both on their own (internal re-deployments) and with international support in the framework of either EC-funded interventions<sup>2</sup> (in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia) or Frontex-coordinated JOs<sup>3</sup> (in Bulgaria and Greece).

In the north of the region Hungary strengthened border-controls by re-enforcing police presence, erecting technical obstacles while also redefining working procedures. Romania also implemented an array of measures aimed at deterring migration from Serbia, among which it increased its detection capabilities through redeployments of staff and equipment from other border police units or other national law enforcement structures. Croatia also continued to devote resources to maintaining

enhanced controls at its common border with Serbia.

In terms of policy responses, the EU-Turkey Statement on Stemming irregular migration together with the implementation of the Hotspot approach<sup>4</sup> on the Greek Aegean islands reduced and kept the migration flow from Turkey from re-escalating while preventing further movements towards the Western Balkans.

## The migration situation stabilised but coordination remains necessary

As coordinated restriction measures were maintained in the Aegean Sea, in the south and north of the Western Balkan region, as well as in destination countries, the non-regional flow of irregular migrants considerably declined and stabilised throughout 2017.

The enhanced restrictions, however, led to a number of migrants becoming stranded in different locations along the route (i.e. on the Aegean Islands, the Greek mainland, in Bulgaria and in Serbia). These persons maintained a certain pressure at specific border sections as they repeatedly attempted to cross them, in spite of the decrease in the volume of irregular migrants transiting the region.

Considering that the underlying conditions for a rapid increase in migration pressure are still in place (i.e. large pool of would-be migrants in neighbouring regions or within the Western Balkans, signs of continued search for

1 Migrants of nationalities other than those of Albania, Kosovo\*, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2 Project 'Special measure supporting the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to manage its southern border in the context of the European migration crisis'; a similar measure was later implemented at the Bulgarian-Serbian border.

3 JO Flexible Operational Activities South East, Western Balkans, EPN Poseidon

4 Providing migrants with accommodation, as well as screening, registering and processing them on the islands rather than in the mainland Greece.

travel alternatives along other sub-routes such as the Albania-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia corridor), continued cooperation and coordinated response measures remain of crucial importance, especially considering the precipitous growth of the migration flow in previous years.

### **Generally stable regional migration flow mainly observed at the region's southern common borders with Greece**

Most detected illegal border-crossings of **regional migrants**<sup>5</sup> (around 76%) occurred in the south of the region (at the common land borders between Greece,

Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and were, by and large, associated with Albanian circular migration<sup>6</sup> to Greece.

In the northern part of the region (Hungary, Croatia and Romania's borders with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) only approximately 16% of the total illegal border-crossings by regional migrants were registered; for the most part they involved Kosovo\* citizens attempting to reach Western European destinations and to a lesser extent Albanian and Serbian.

A slight increase in the number of detected illegal border-crossings by nationals of Kosovo\* was observed between August and October. This likely resulted

from media rumours (i.e. articles alleging massive outflows from this area, which may have encouraged some nationals of Kosovo\* to attempt migration). The authorities implemented prevention measures similar to those successfully used to tackle the 2014/15 Kosovo\* migration crisis (e.g. through checks on exit, profiling, refusals of exit limited number of licenses for transport companies etc.) which kept the situation from escalating.

5 Migrants who are citizens of the Western Balkans countries.

6 Seasonal movements of workers (Albania-Greece-Albania).



## Cross-border criminality – firearms and drug smuggling

### Small-scale firearm detections at the borders; continued presence of small and light weapons (SALW) in the region

Overall, the number of detections reported within the general area of responsibility of the regional border police forces continued to reveal generally small quantities of firearms and ammunition, mostly obtained for personal use. Detections involved both legally owned firearms used in illegal circumstances (e.g. hunting without a licence or out of season, ammunition forgotten in luggage while travelling across borders etc.) as well as illegally owned weapons.

A number of cases involving the transportation of relatively large quantities of

weapons (especially gas-powered ones) were detected during 2017, indicating the possibility of a cross-border dimension of the phenomenon. Most of these detections however occurred on entry to the region showing that a demand for gas-powered weapons exists.

The estimated high number of firearms in the region following past conflicts and the gun culture remain some of the main drivers behind the illicit possession of such goods. Moreover, the potential profits are likely to be an incentive for criminal groups to engage in selling firearms and distributing them in neighbouring regions and the EU.

Given the possible security impact of illegal firearms possession, closely monitoring the situation in the region is necessary.

### Locally produced cannabis – the main smuggled narcotic substance

Local groups in Albania appear to have regained and further developed cannabis production capacity that was lost following police operations in 2014. Specifically, in the second half of 2014 and the whole of 2015 saw fewer detections of cannabis at the borders coupled with higher prices for the product, in 2016 and 2017 a re-saturation of the regional market with this type of narcotic substance could be observed (record quantities seized at the borders, lower prices on the black market).

The fact that the climate of some of the countries in the region is conducive to cultivating cannabis plants outside (on vast swaths of land) without the need for special incubators makes producing and trafficking this type of drug an inherent vulnerability in the Western Balkans.

# 1. Introduction

As was the case with the previous (eight) issues, the current edition of the Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis (WB-ARA) 2018 has been produced by the Frontex Risk Analysis Unit (RAU) in cooperation with the Risk Analysis Units of the competent border-control authorities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo\*.

The joint analytical activities are an integral part of the Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network (WB-RAN) in which all

the mentioned Western Balkan countries actively participate.

The WB-RAN was established following a proposal put forward by Frontex in May 2009.

The WB-ARA 2018 builds on knowledge from previous editions of the annual report, reporting provided by WB-RAN throughout 2017 and other relevant documents available to Frontex.

The WB-ARA 2018 is structured around the following elements: (1) a description of the general context in which border

controls at common and regional borders occur; (2) annual risk assessment that includes identification and detailed description of the main risks affecting both the area of the Western Balkans and EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries.

The statistical annex of the WB-ARA 2018 includes detailed tables, describing the key indicators of irregular migration in detail.

The Frontex Risk Analysis Unit would like to thank all WB-RAN and FRAN members for their active participation throughout 2017 and their valuable input.

## 2. Methodology

In order to facilitate the exchange of information between WB-RAN countries and Frontex, the European Commission and Frontex set up a secure Internet platform on the European Commission's Circa server similar to what is available for the FRAN. This platform (transformed into CIRCABC in 2012) is used exclusively by WB-RAN countries and the Frontex Risk Analysis Unit. WB-RAN statistical data have been available since January 2009.

The core of monthly statistical data from WB-RAN and neighbouring FRAN countries (only common borders) is focused on six key indicators of illegal immigration: (1) detections of illegal border-crossing; (2) detections of facilitators; (3) detections of illegal stay; (4) refusals of entry; (5) asylum applications; and (6) detections of false documents. Monthly reporting by the six regional countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) related to the detections of firearms in the general area of responsibility of their respective border police forces was efficiently exploited for the creation of this report.

In addition to the core data set, other sources available to Frontex were also used. Those include data from the European Document Fraud Risk Analysis Network (EDF), and reporting from different Joint Operations coordinated by Frontex. Importantly, in line with an agreement undertaken by all WB-RAN members, the Kosovo\* Border Police was invited to participate in the work of the network (starting from 2014).

Many other qualitative and quantitative sources were also used, in particular, bimonthly and quarterly analytical reports of EU Member States and WB-RAN countries, regular and ad hoc reporting from the Frontex Liaison Officer and from the European Migration Liaison Officer to the Western Balkans and analysis from Frontex Risk Analysis for 2018 (ARA 2018).

Furthermore, all WB-RAN countries have contributed additional information, graphical material and analytical inputs following the 2017 Annual Analytical Review meeting and the 2018 Guest Analysts Workshop that were held in Warsaw.

Open-source information was also effectively used. Amongst others, this source included reports issued by government agencies, EU institutions and international or non-governmental organisations. Both EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries and WB-RAN countries provided additional input during the Western Balkans Expert meeting on 21 March 2018.

### 2.1. Quality of available data

Data quality is consistent with law enforcement indicators. The number of detections of illegal border-crossing and refusals of entry are both functions of the amount of effort spent detecting migrants and the flow of irregular migrants. For example, increased detections of illegal border-crossing might be due to an actual increase in the flow of irregular migrants, or they may in fact be an outcome of more resources made

available to detect migrants. In exceptional cases, an influx of resources may produce an increase in reported detections while effectively masking the actual decrease in the flow of migrants, resulting from a strong deterrent effect.

### 2.2. Changes in the data scope after Croatia joined the EU

Important changes in the collection and use of data for Western Balkan analytical reports were introduced when Croatia joined the EU in July 2013. Firstly, data for Slovenia, which now has no external border with non-EU Western Balkan countries, have not been included in the report since the third quarter of 2013. Slovenian historical data were also excluded from the tables in order to make the comparison with previous quarters analytically meaningful.

Secondly, as Croatian-Hungarian and Croatian-Slovenian border sections have now become internal EU-borders they are no longer covered by this report.

Thirdly, after Croatia joined the EU, its data on illegal stay have been limited to detections at the border. More precisely, Croatia's data on illegal stay include cases detected only on exit, while inland detections are not included.

### 2.3. Changes in the data scope after Kosovo's\* entry to the WB-RAN

Starting from the first quarter of 2014, data from Kosovo\* on key indicators of irregular migration are included in the reporting, making it possible to get a more comprehensive picture on the movement of irregular migrants in the region. However, as there are no historical data available for Kosovo\*, the new data do in some measure impact the comparisons of the examined period with the previous quarters. When necessary for analytical purposes, some comparisons are made excluding data from Kosovo\* and this is noted in the text.

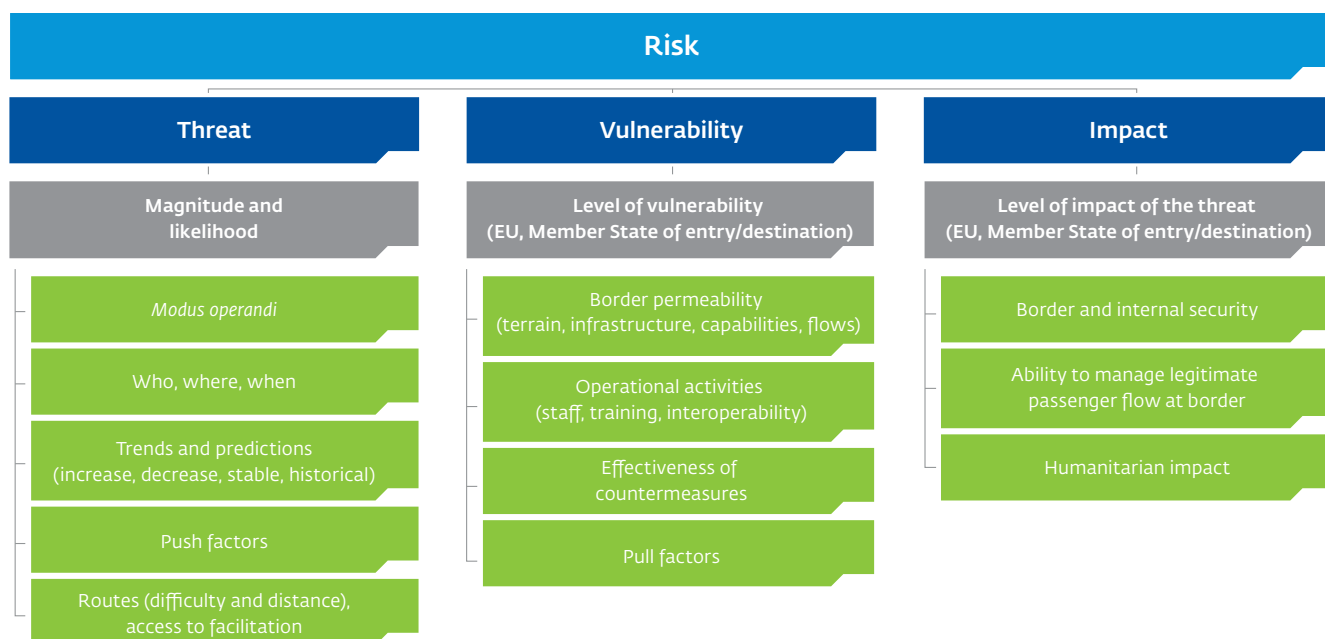
### 2.4. Application of the Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM)

In line with the previous issues of this annual report, the 2018 WB-ARA considers 'risk' as defined by the updated CIRAM: a function of 'threat', 'vulnerability' and 'impact' (see Figure 1). Such an approach endeavours to emphasise risk analysis as a key tool in ensuring the optimal allocation of resources within constraints of budget, staff and efficiency of equipment.

According to the model, a 'threat' is a force or pressure acting upon the external borders that is characterised by both its magnitude and likelihood;

'vulnerability' is defined as the capacity of a system to mitigate the threat and 'impact' is determined as the potential consequences of the threat. In this way, the structured and systematic breakdown of risk is presented in the annual risk assessment chapter.

Figure 1. Risk as defined by the Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM)



Source: RAU – Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM)

## 2.5. Annual Risk Assessment

As in previous years, this edition of the annual risk assessment is guided by the CIRAM working definition of 'risk' as a function of three main components: 'threat', 'vulnerability' and 'impact'. It largely builds on the main findings from the same exercise for the drafting of the WB-ARA 2017.

Each identified risk is broken down by its main components with focus on the description of the threat and related vulnerabilities. A summary table containing the key observations and findings related to the risk in question is added at the beginning of each detailed description allowing for a rapid understanding of the issues at stake.

The following four main risks and main specific components are considered in this assessment:

### **Risk of irregular migration by non-regional migrants through the Western Balkans**

- Overall decrease in the number of illegal border-crossings between BCPs; fluctuations and shifts in migration flows were nonetheless observed at various border sections as migrants searched for travel alternatives;
- Increased pressure observed at BCPs;
- Changes in visa policies which could increase migration pressure at the borders.

### **Risk of irregular migration by nationals of the Western Balkan countries**

- Illegal border-crossings at the regional<sup>7</sup> and common<sup>8</sup> borders with the EU;

7 Regional borders: all borders between regional countries

8 Common borders: all borders between EU MSs and regional countries

- Illegal stay in the EU;
- Document fraud cases within the territories of EU MSs/SACs.

### **Risk of non-regional migrants using the international protection system in the Western Balkans as a way to avoid detention, and continue their transit**

- Overview of the situation.

### **Risk of firearms and drug smuggling at regional and common borders**

- Detections of firearms;
- Drug trafficking.

# 3. Situation at the common<sup>9</sup> and regional<sup>10</sup> borders – the overall context

9 Common borders: all borders between EU MSs and regional countries

10 Regional borders: all borders between regional countries

Figure 2. General map of the Western Balkans region



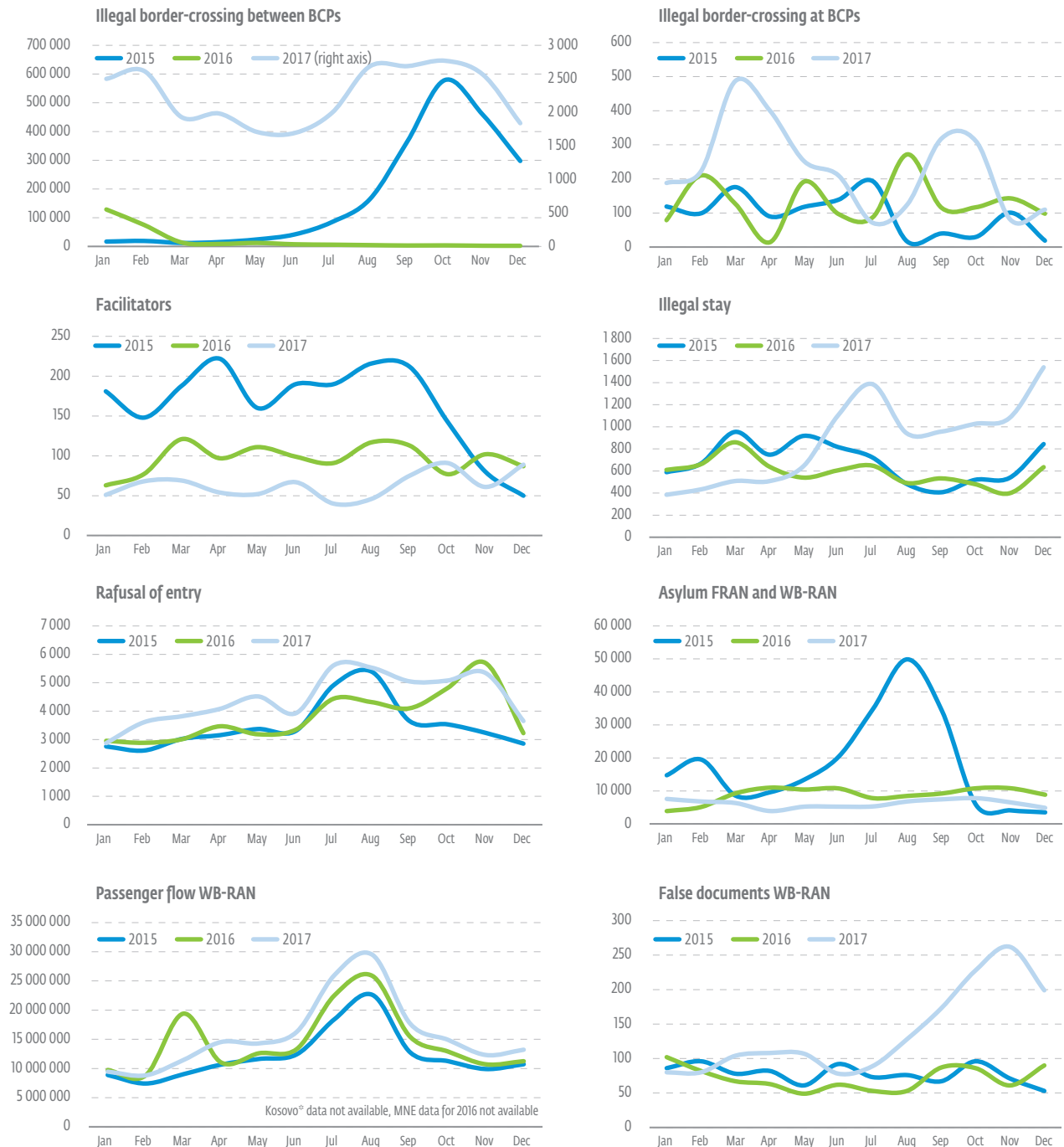
Annex Table 1. Overview of indicators

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year
<b>WB-RAN Indicator</b>				
Illegal border-crossing between BCPs	2 081 366	270 595	26 979	-90
Illegal border-crossing at BCPs	1 140	1 552	2 775	79
Facilitators	1 980	1 155	763	-34
Illegal stay	8 208	7 105	10 513	48
Refusals of entry	41 800	45 437	53 088	17
Asylum applications <sup>°</sup>	218 559	106 472	73 877	-31
False travel-document users <sup>°°</sup>	931	855	1 636	91

<sup>°</sup> Applications for asylum for EU Member States include all applications received in the territory of the countries and are not limited to those made at Western Balkan borders.

<sup>°°</sup> Reported by the six regional partners

Figure 3. Evolution of WB-RAN and FRAN indicators — for common and regional borders



Source: WB-RAN data as of 22 January 2018

### 3.1. Passenger flow analysis

Serbia's borders remained the busiest in terms of regular passenger traffic. More precisely, there were almost 69 million entries and exits recorded by the Serbian authorities, a figure which represented 36% of the total passenger traffic reported by the regional countries. Unlike 2015 and 2016, the number of passengers who crossed Serbia's border with Hungary was lower than the traffic volumes reported at the borders with Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This development was actually due to a 13% drop in passenger traffic at the border with Hungary, while the numbers at the other two border sections remained largely similar to 2016.

This passenger traffic volume combined with the migratory pressure still exerted on Serbia's two northern border sections with Croatia and Hungary,

likely translated into an important workload for the border authorities in 2017. Specifically, the authorities needed to create a balance between maintaining a high level of border surveillance and providing sufficient resources at BCPs in order to ensure an adequate level of checks.

The borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina were still the second busiest in terms of passenger flows at regional level, accounting for a 26% share of all traffic in the Western Balkans, registering a traffic volume comparable to that of 2016 (-2%). The Croatian border section constituted 67% of the almost 49 million entries and exits reported by Bosnia and Herzegovina. The irregular migration pressure at this section remained relatively low in 2017, although signs of an increase started to appear in the second half of the year.

Around 62% of the entries and exits at regional level were related to passengers

who were not nationals of the reporting country (so-called foreign travellers) in 2017. The number of these persons was largely on a par with that registered one year earlier (+2%) if data of Kosovo\* (unavailable in 2016 and reported in 2017) are excluded.

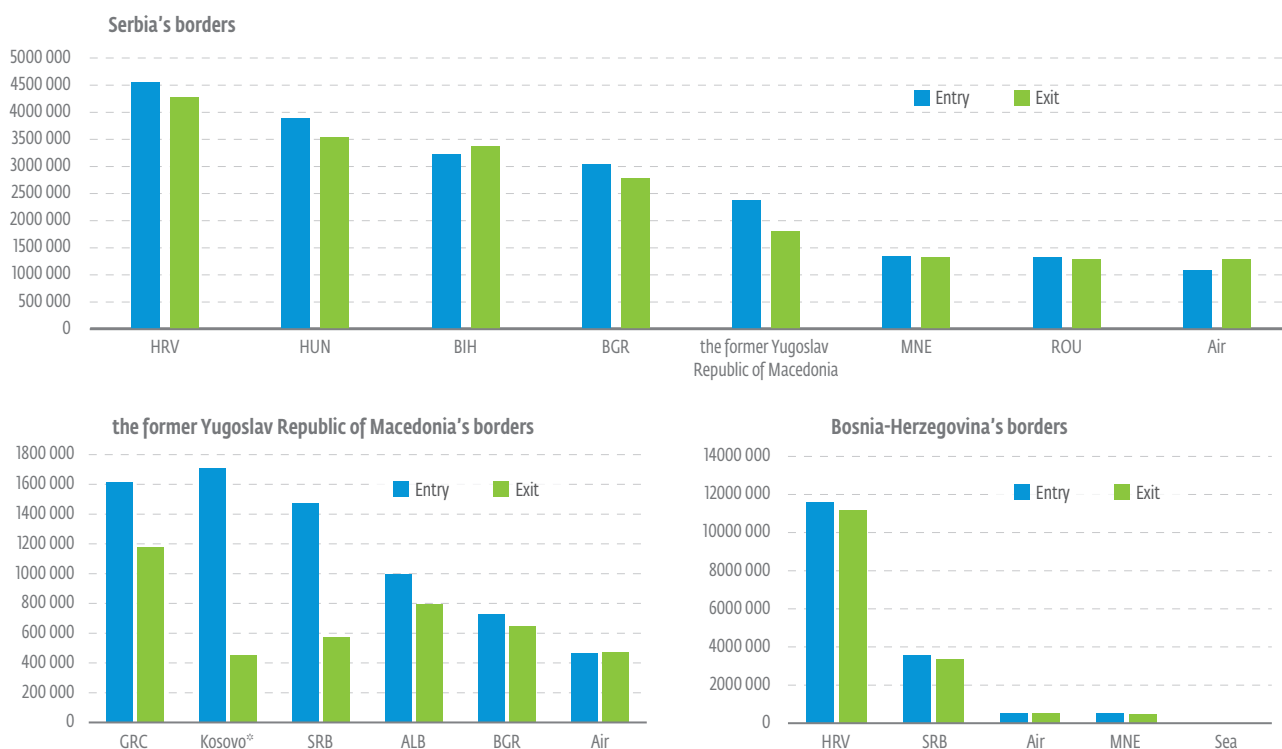
At regional level, there were around 4.9 million more entries than exits by foreign travellers (8%) in 2017. The largest differences were reported at the borders of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia similar to 2016, followed by Kosovo\* and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, the largest discrepancies were observed during the summer months (generally during the holiday season) and, to a lesser extent, in spring and winter.

Around 38% of the entries and exits at regional level were related to passengers who were nationals of the reporting country (so-called domestic travellers).

Figure 4. Largest differences between entries and exits of foreign passengers reported by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

Foreign passenger flow from the perspective of Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina towards their neighbouring countries in 2017

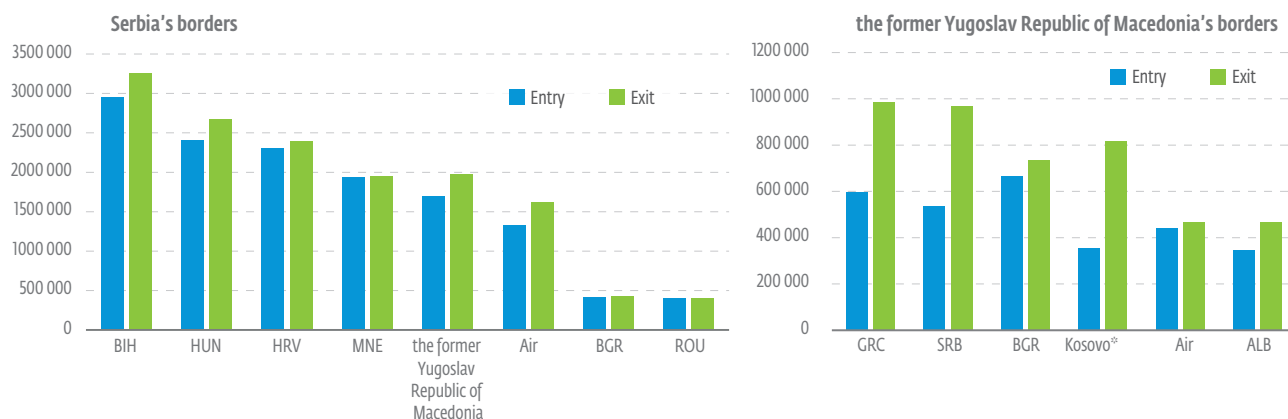


Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018



Figure 5. **Biggest differences between exits and entries of domestic passengers reported by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia**

Domestic passenger flow from the perspective of Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia towards their neighbouring countries in 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

The number of these persons was 3% lower in 2017 compared with 2016 (if data of Kosovo\* is excluded).

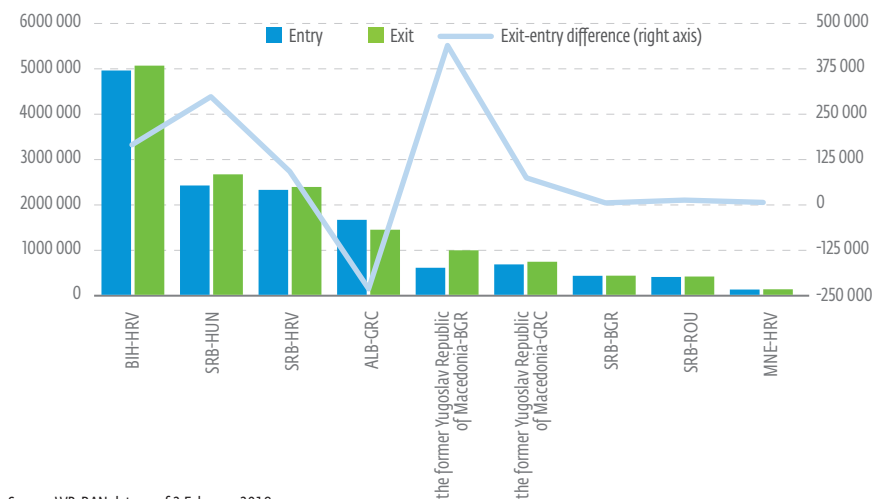
Roughly 2 850 000 more exits than entries by domestic passengers were observed at regional level in 2017. The biggest differences were mainly reported at the borders of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and those of Serbia.

The ratio between entries and exits can serve as a relative proxy measurement of bona fide travel patterns, since it provides an indication of how many persons exited a country and later returned in a given fixed period, and hence did not overstay the legal period of stay.

Overall, at regional level there were roughly 770 000 more exits by citizens of regional countries who share common borders with EU Member States towards the respective Member States than entries by the same nationalities from the respective Member States (Figure 6). The biggest discrepancy between exits and entries appears to be related to nationals of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia at this country's border with Bulgaria and Greece, where 390 000 and 66 000 more people exited than returned respectively. However, only 4 700 citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were reported for illegally staying in the EU in 2017.

Figure 6. **Largest discrepancies between exits and entries of domestic passengers were reported by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia towards Greece and by Serbia towards Hungary**

Nationals of each regional country moving across the respective common borders with the neighbouring EU Member States in 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

The second largest difference was observed at Serbia's border with Hungary where 265 000 more Serbs exited their country than returned. By comparison, less than 11 400 Serbs were reported for overstaying in the EU.

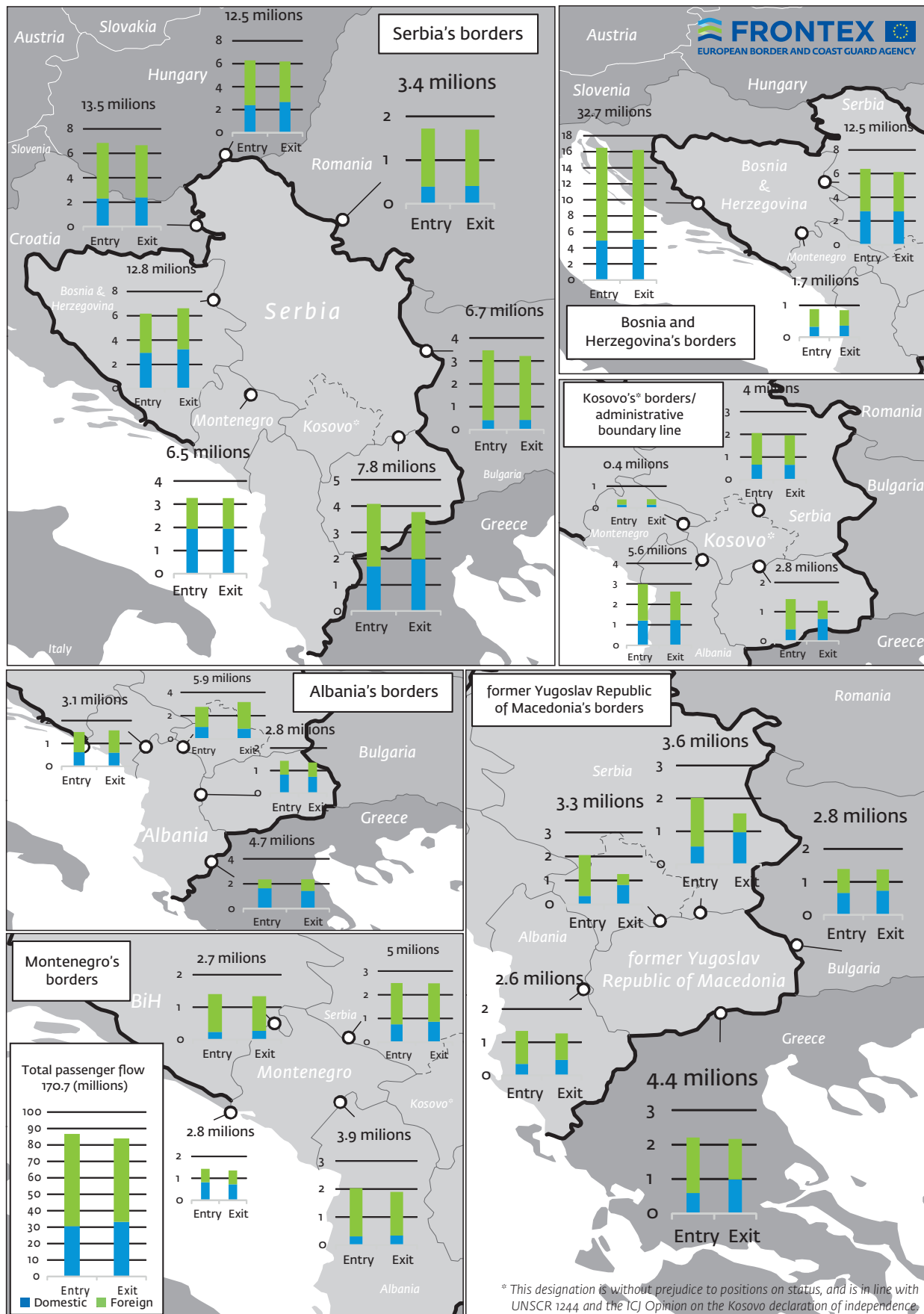
Interestingly, as in 2016 Albania's border with Greece registered a higher number of Albanians (over 200 000) returning from Greece than leaving towards the neighbouring EU Member State. Despite this, Albanians were still the most

detected illegal stayers in the EU Member States, with a total of 24 801 in 2017.

All of the entry/exit differences can only be regarded as indicative, and the share of bona-fide travellers to the EU among the mentioned nationalities may in fact be greater, considering that the entries (re-entries) to the region/home countries can also be done via other sections than those through which the exits were done.

Figure 7. **Borders of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina remained the busiest ones in terms of regular passenger flow**

Passenger flow across common and regional land borders in the Western Balkans in 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 25 January 2018

### 3.2. Refusals of entry

A total of 53 139 decisions to refuse entry were issued by the six regional partners and five neighbouring EU Member States at the common and regional borders in 2017. This represented a 17% increase in comparison with 2016 and was largely linked to more refusal of entry decisions issued by Greece, to Albanian nationals at its common border with Albania. Croatia and Hungary also issued slightly higher numbers of refusals of entry, largely to nationals of the countries in the region and, to a lesser extent, to Afghans, Turkish citizens or other nationalities associated with the non-regional migration flow affecting the EU's external borders with Turkey.

As in previous years, the vast majority of refusals of entry was issued at the land borders (92%), while the remaining 8% were mostly reported at the air borders.

Despite registering a 14% decrease compared with 2016, the number of refusals of entry issued to Turkish nationals remained significant (roughly 2 650), maintaining their status as the fourth most refused nationality for the fourth year in a row. The mentioned 14% decrease was primarily linked to decisions taken at the common and regional land borders, while regional airports issued the same number of refusals as in 2016. Roughly, 57% of the refusals issued to Turkish citizens in 2017 were thus issued at the airports where they continued to be the most refused nationality for the ninth consecutive year (or since data collection began).

At the same time, at land borders, Turkish citizens received 2% of the refusals issued and ranked sixth among known nationalities, after registering a 27% decrease over 2016. This decrease was largely linked to fewer refusals of entry issued to them at the Bosnian and Herzegovinian-Serbian and Montenegrin-Serbian borders in 2017.

As in previous years, most of the refusals reported by neighbouring EU Member States in 2017 were issued to nationals of Western Balkan countries.

These nationals even accounted for a higher share of the total decisions issued by neighbouring EU Member States (93% compared with 78% in 2016) due to roughly 10 000 more Albanians being refused entry to Greece. In turn, as regards refusals of entry to the six countries in the region, 33% were issued to local residents, followed by nationals of EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries (25%) and Turkish nationals (11%).

The number of refusals of entry issued to Iranians, Chinese and Indians (nationalities that were granted the right to travel to Serbia without a visa during the second half of 2017) rose significantly compared with 2016. In the case of Iranians and Indians, the large majority of decisions were taken by Serbia and only a limited impact has been observed at Hungary's and Croatia's common borders. Chinese nationals were refused mainly by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro.

For the most part, non-regional transiting migrants continued to prefer crossing the region via the green borders. Refusals issued to non-regional migrants associated with the irregular migration flow transiting from Turkey/Greece continued to account for a low share of the total. Specifically, only 2% of all refusals were issued to Pakistanis, Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis and Algerians (top five non-regional nationalities reported for illegal border-crossing in 2017 in this order).

Nonetheless, in absolute terms Pakistanis, Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis and Algerians were issued with 57% more refusals of entry in 2017 than in 2016, an increase which may indicate that enhanced border surveillance activities in the region push migrants to attempt various travel alternatives, including transit via BCPs without fulfilling conditions of entry and stay.

### 3.3. Irregular migration

Overall, the number of detected illegal border-crossings by **non-regional migrants**<sup>11</sup> at the green borders (16 575) and at BCPs (2 291) in the Western Balkans decreased to a total of roughly 19 000 in 2017 (down from over 2 million in 2015 and roughly 262 000 in 2016).

An array of coherent regional measures aimed at tackling irregular migration which were introduced in 2015–16 gradually brought the flow down to manageable levels towards the end of 2016. Decreases were reported almost each month throughout 2016 (i.e. from 128 000 illegal border-crossings in January to roughly 3 000 in December) and the situation stabilised at lower levels during 2017.

The introduction of enhanced border control measures led to a number of migrants accumulating at certain locations along the route as they became unable to easily continue their journey. Therefore, although the overall size of the transiting flow of migrants was significantly reduced, the pressure on some border sections persisted, sustained by the accumulated migrants.

Thus, the pressure observed at some sections may have been higher than the actual number of individual migrants, due to repeated attempts to cross the border made by the same person. Moreover, the same migrant may have been detected at several border sections while transiting the region.

As in previous years, the detections reported along the Western Balkan route do not necessarily relate to an equal number of individual migrants or to the actual size of the transiting flow.

Enhanced control measures in the north of the region also resulted in continued attempts by migrants to find an alternative routing in order to continue their journey. Specifically, in 2017, an

11 Migrants of nationalities other than those of Albania, Kosovo\*, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

increasing number of non-regional migrants began being reported travelling south through the region in the direction of Greece. Increases in numbers were also observed along other previously unaffected corridors, like the one via Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia. Moreover, more non-regional migrants were detected while trying to cross illegally via BCPs or were refused entry as they tried to transit BCPs without fulfilling travel conditions.

Afghan and Pakistani were the two main reported nationalities, accounting for roughly 32% and 30%, respectively of the overall number of detections involving non-regional migrants. Syrians ranked third in 2017 accounting for an 8% share of the total, followed by Iraqis and Algerians who accounted for 7% and 5%, respectively, of the total number of detections involving non-regional migrants. However, in terms of absolute numbers, with the exception of Algerians whose reported number of detections remained on a par with that of 2016, all other mentioned nationalities registered steep declines in relation to the previous year (ranging from -43% for Pakistanis to -97% for Syrians).

Overall, slightly over 100 migrants were reported as 'unknown'<sup>12</sup> nationality in 2017 (less than 1% of detections involving non-regional migrants). This represents an important reduction compared with the crisis period of mid-2015 – beginning of 2016, when at times 40% to 50% of the non-regional flow was reported as 'unknown nationality'. The shrinking proportion of this category indicates that migration through the region largely returned to manageable levels towards the end of 2016 and remained so in 2017.

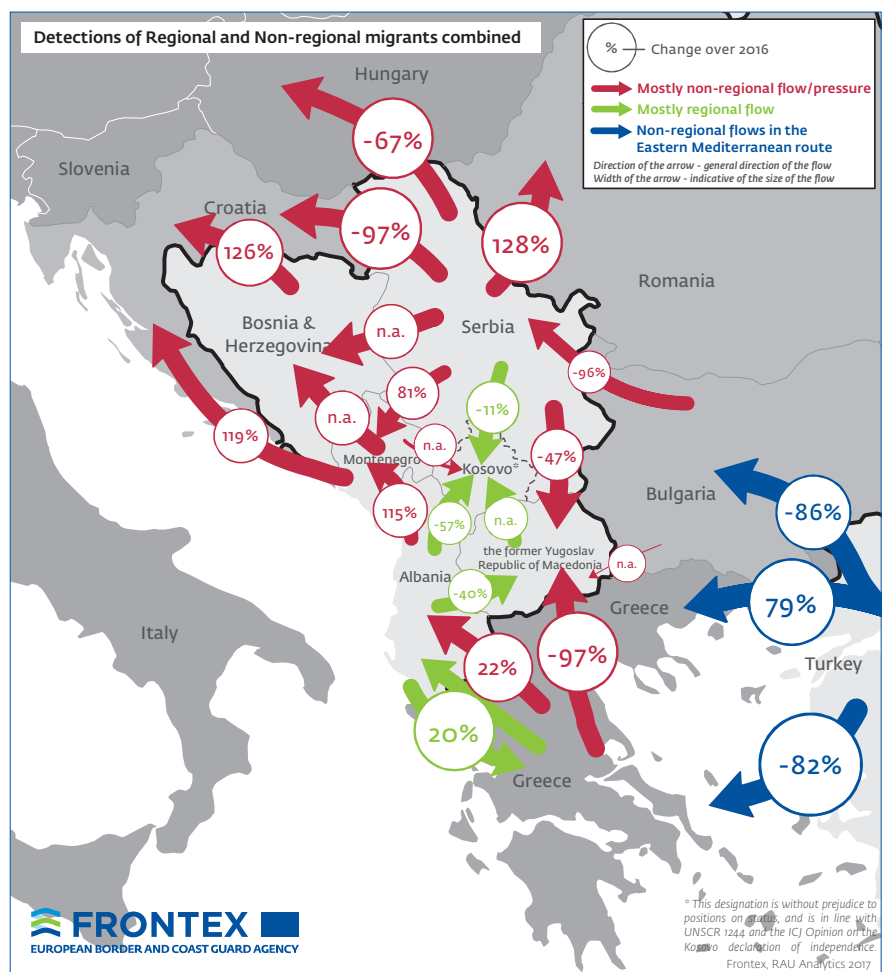
At the same time, 10 890 illegal border-crossings by regional migrants<sup>13</sup> were

12 The number reported as 'unknown' is analysed as part of the non-regional migration flow as the authorities are considered capable of identifying regional residents.

13 Seasonal movements of workers (Albania-Greece-Albania).

Figure 8. An overall decrease in non-regional migration through the Western Balkans, especially along the main Serbia-centred route. Circular movements by non-regional migrants stranded in certain territories contributed to sustained pressure on some borders, especially in the north of the region. A continued search for travel alternatives led to an increase in pressure along the Albania–Montenegro–Bosnia and Herzegovina–Croatia sub-route. The regional migration flow mostly affected Greece's borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, to a lesser extent, other sections in the north of the region

Illegal border crossings at and between BCPs by regional and non-regional migrants.



reported, a figure 13% above that of 2016. The great majority of detections were detected between BCPs (10 405) and only 485 were reported at BCPs. The 13% increase compared with 2016 was mostly linked to more detections involving Albanian nationals, especially in the south of the region. The numbers of illegal border-crossings by regional migrants followed a relatively stable trend in 2017 and, due to the drop and stabilisation

in the non-regional flow of migrants, accounted for roughly 37% of the overall migratory pressure in the region.

Most of the detections of illegal border-crossing by regional migrants (around 76%) continued to occur in the south of the region (at Greece's borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and were, by and large, associated with Albanian circular migration to Greece.

The number of Kosovo\* citizens detected for illegal border-crossing in 2017 remained largely on a par with that of the previous year. They were only the second most detected regional migrants accounting for approximately 12% of the regional flow, after Albanians, who ranked first with an 82% share. There were some variations in the number of Kosovo\* citizens trying to illegally cross

the border throughout the year. Specifically, there was an increase in detections between August and October, largely exacerbated by media rumours alleging large outflows from this area. The authorities implemented prevention measures similar to those used to effectively tackle the 2014–2015 Kosovo\* migration crisis and the situation did not escalate.

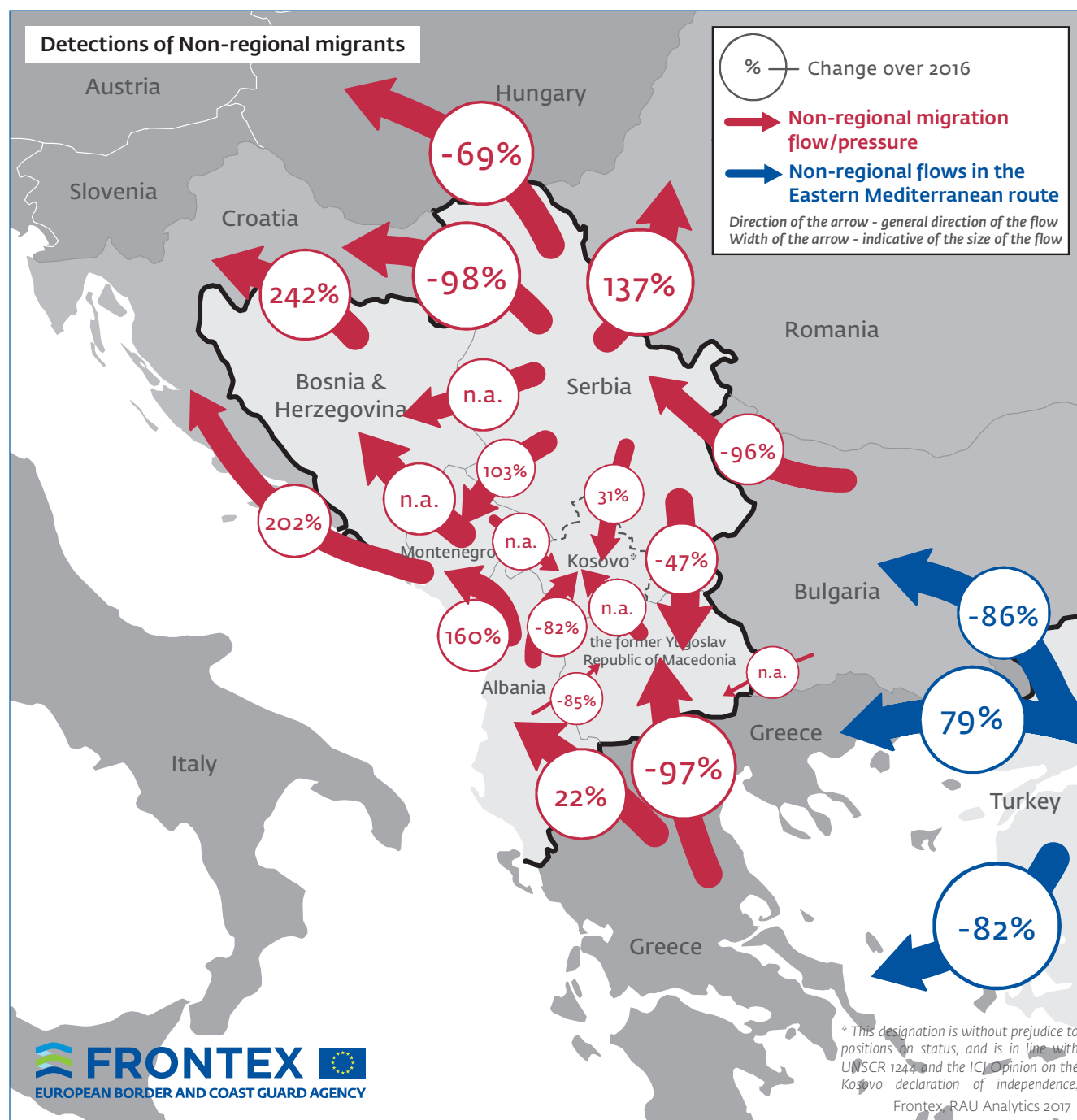
The detected Kosovo\* nationals mostly targeted the common borders from the north of the region, mainly those of Serbia with Hungary and Croatia and to lesser extent Croatia's borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina or Montenegro. The other regional nationalities were detected in low numbers in 2017, similar to 2016.

# 4. Risk of irregular migration by non-regional<sup>14</sup> migrants through the Western Balkans

<sup>14</sup> Migrants of nationalities other than those of Serbia, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro or Kosovo.\*

Figure 9. An overall decrease in non-regional migration through the Western Balkans, especially along the main Serbia-centred route. Circular movements by non-regional migrants stranded in certain territories contributed to sustained pressure on some borders, especially in the north of the region. A continued search for travel alternatives led to an increase in pressure along the Albania-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia sub-route.

Illegal border crossings at and between BCPS by non-regional migrants.



#### 4.1. Overall decrease in the number of illegal border-crossings between BCPs; fluctuations and shifts in migration flows were observed at various border sections

As in previous years, non-regional migrants continued to attempt to enter the Western Balkans across the southern common borders with Greece and Bulgaria before heading north and trying to exit the region largely at the northern common borders of Hungary, Croatia or Romania with Serbia.

However, in 2017 the enhanced control measures and changes in policy along the route made irregular transit increasingly difficult. Unsuccessful illegal border-crossing attempts became a widespread reality, resulting in a continued decrease in migration, but also in an accumulation of migrants on certain territories, circular movements, and even reverse flows and partial shifts/deflections in migration flows through the region.

In this respect, the observed pressure could not be regarded as equivalent in size to an actual transiting flow of migrants as was the case in previous years. Specifically, stranded migrants were likely detected several times while attempting to leave the region or at several different border sections, maintaining pressure on certain borders despite the decrease in the actual size of the transiting flow.

This does not mean that new arrivals or undetected crossings did not occur and did not play a role in the observed pressure at various border sections. However, given the control measures in place along the Western Balkan route, the number of such cases can be assessed as generally lower in comparison to the detected and prevented illegal border-crossings.

A total of roughly 16 600 illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants en route from Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria were reported at the common and regional borders of Western Balkan countries in 2017. This is a significant drop compared with the number of detections reported in 2016 (roughly 260 000) and even more so compared to the numbers reported during the crisis period of 2015 (over 2 million detections).

Throughout 2017, the level of pressure remained stable, at levels generally below those observed during the last quarter of 2016, when the situation already began to stabilise following the closure of the transit corridor, the implementation of policy responses in the Eastern Mediterranean and the strengthening of border controls along the route.

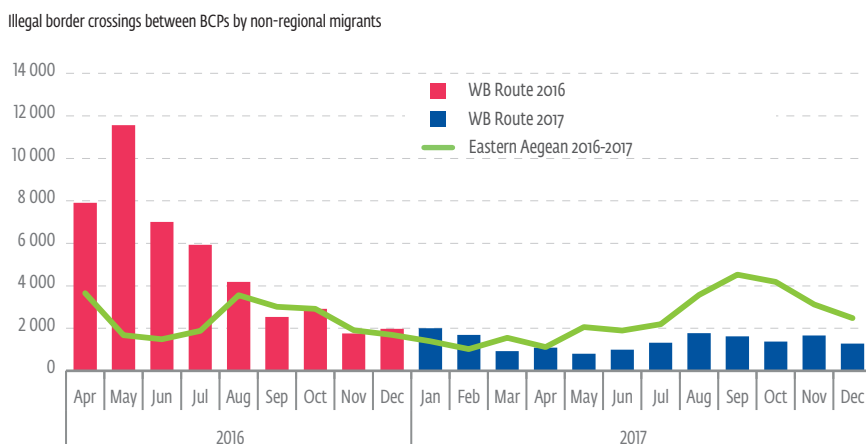
Moreover, the flow appears to have remained at generally manageable levels, matching the authorities' registration capacities. Specifically, based on reported data, between Q3 2015 and Q1 2016, a significant share (40%-50%) of illegal border-crossings was associated with persons whose nationality was reported as 'unknown'. The share continuously

shrank as the volume of the flow declined, reaching less than 3% during the last quarter of 2016 and below 1% in 2017.

That is not to say that the need for close cooperation has disappeared, especially keeping in mind the precipitous growth of the migration flow in 2015 and the fact that the preconditions for escalation remain in place (e.g. migrants accumulated in Turkey, Greece, Serbia plus their continued search to find possibilities of reaching their destination also reflected in the social media).

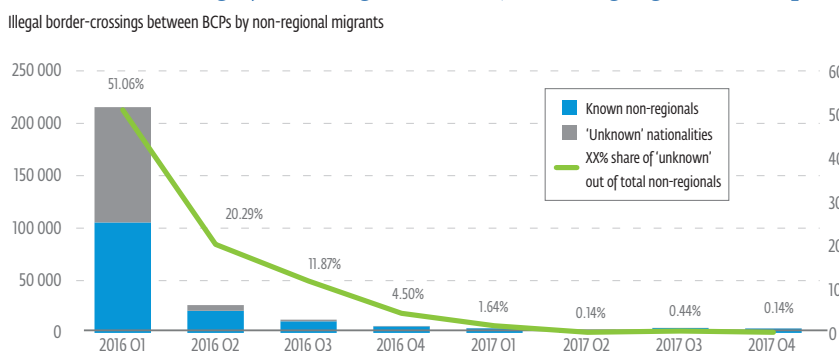
Some variations in the level of detections and main affected border sections were observed throughout 2017, most likely connected to the pressure accumulated in the region, circular movements and attempts to find alternative routings by the stranded migrants, and, to a lesser extent, to new arrivals across the region's southern common borders with Greece or Bulgaria.

Figure 10. Generally stable trend of migratory pressure observed along the Western Balkans common and regional borders in 2017



Source: WB-RAN and FRAN data as of 2 February 2018

Figure 11. The share of 'unknown' nationalities shrank with the flow; the situation remained largely at manageable levels, matching registration capacities



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

#### 4.1.1. The southern common borders of the region with Greece and Bulgaria continued to experience migratory pressure by non-regional migrants; significant decreases, shifts/deflections of migration flows and even reverse flows were observed

The **Bulgarian-Serbian** border, a key section in the south of the region, continued to be covered by enhanced operational activities in 2017. These measures were largely a continuation of those initially implemented in response to the increase in migratory pressure over 2016, especially after the effective closure of the Western Balkans transit corridor.

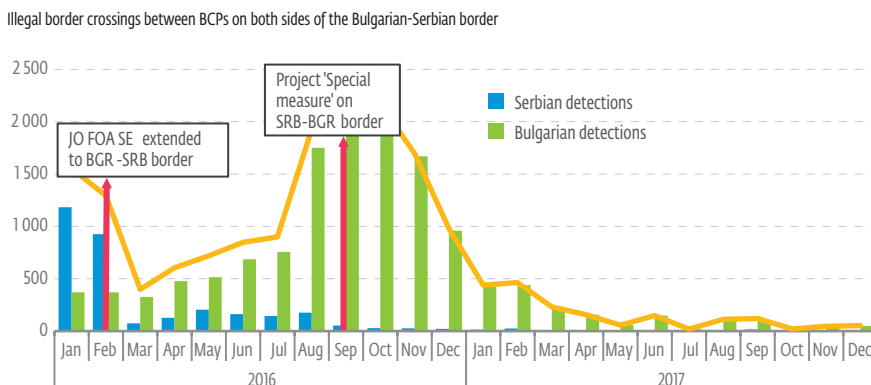
Repeated unsuccessful crossing attempts by the same migrants appeared to have largely contributed to the high pressure observed over 2016 (migrants detected on exit by Bulgaria and sent back to the reception centres). Repeated attempts also remained a reality in 2017.

Nonetheless, combined operational information from Bulgaria and regular reporting from Serbia on both sides of the common border indicate that the enhanced operational activities implemented in this area managed to produce a consistent decrease in migratory pressure compared with 2016.

Detections on the Serbian side throughout 2016 indicate that due to Bulgaria's increased capacities (also enhanced through a Frontex-coordinated Joint Operation) fewer migrants were able to successfully cross into Serbia (a decreasing trend of detections reported by Serbia as Bulgaria's numbers increased – Figure 12).

In 2017, the pressure also decreased on the Bulgarian side of this border (Figure 12) while Serbia did not appear to experience any increase in arrivals. As Serbia also continued carrying out enhanced border controls (even through the deployments of additional guest officers from EU Member States under the implementation of a EU-funded Project similar to the one implemented at the border between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece), its detection capacities likely remained high.

Figure 12. Apparent success registered by operational activities implemented on both sides of the Bulgarian-Serbian border in reducing the number of illegal border-crossings



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February for Serbia, WB Daily data as of 8 February for Bulgaria

The fact that the implemented measures likely made illegal border-crossings increasingly difficult (in terms of time, effort and finances on the part of migrants) appears to have reduced the overall attractiveness of crossing the Bulgarian-Serbian border, leading to a decrease in migratory pressure on this area.

Operational information indicated that the controls implemented on the Serbian side of the border also resulted in a number of instances whereby migrants gave up on their intention to cross the border upon observing police patrols.

Judging by regular reporting and available operational data, no clear correlation could be observed between Bulgaria's border with Serbia and the one with Turkey.

Specifically, the numbers reported at the Bulgarian-Turkish border section were constantly lower than the detections on attempted exit towards Serbia, an occurrence possibly explained by repeat offenders. Efforts undertaken in 2016 to reinforce capacities also at the border with Turkey were extended into 2017, but the reported figures remained relatively low.

In 2017 the Bulgarian authorities finalised the construction of a technical obstacle on the border with Turkey. This obstacle is complemented by an integrated border surveillance system comprising stationary and mobile surveillance posts as well as sensors for perimeter detections. The system is interconnected with the national coordination centre in Sofia as well as five local and one regional coordination centre.

Figure 13. Technical obstacle and surveillance cameras on the Bulgarian-Turkish land border



Source: Bulgarian border police



Over the previous years, the **border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** was essential in the successful implementation of all measures aimed at stemming migration taken throughout the region. Specifically, the effective controls implemented at this section were the key to achieving a gradual reduction of the migration flow, closing the transit corridor in March 2016 and making the continued stability throughout 2017 possible.

In the context, Project 'Special measure supporting the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Manage its Southern Border in the Context of the European Migration Crisis' initiated in April 2016 with the support of the European Commission and IOM was extended and continued throughout 2017 and into 2018. Within the framework of this project, additional police officers and equipment from several countries within or outside the region support border controls performed by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The measure together with the commitment of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia played a key role in halting the momentum of the migration flow, and sent an important message to would-be migrants still preparing to make the journey from Turkey or their home countries. These factors then resulted in a gradual decrease and stabilisation of migration pressure (Figure 14).

In particular, the number of detections at this border went from roughly

60 000 in January 2016 to an average of roughly 210 per month between January and December 2017. Arguably, as the closure of the corridor largely equated to preventing illegal border-crossings and only allowing entry on humanitarian grounds, many of the detections reported in 2017 were actually failed illegal border-crossing attempts.

Undoubtedly, Greece's efforts to dismantle and prevent the creation of new irregular migrant settlements close to the common border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2016 and 2017 also helped to keep the migration pressure at stable levels and prevent security incidents similar to those seen in 2015 when large groups of migrants used force in order to cross the border.

Available information indicates a constant presence of around 4 000 non-regional migrants in northern Greece during 2017. In the context of continued border controls and prevention measures, it is likely that people smuggling networks were active in this area.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continued to detect migrant-smuggling cases, albeit in lower numbers than in 2016 (see textbox overleaf).

The main *modus operandi* remained similar to that observed in previous years. Detections occurred also at BCPs in either rental cars and even in specially-designed compartments on trucks.

In 2017, a new phenomenon began to be observed, at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic

of Macedonia, consisting in a reverse flow of migrants travelling towards Greece. This was most likely the result of enhanced control measures in the north of the region.

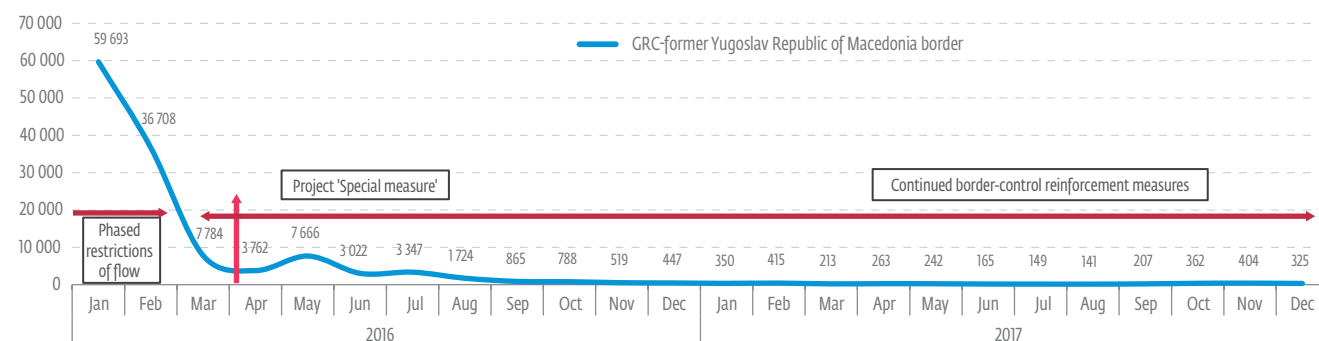
In May, November and December 2017, the number of illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants travelling via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Greece surpassed that of non-regional migrants travelling in the opposite direction (Figure 16 overleaf). Moreover, Iranian nationals were part of this southbound flow, especially after Belgrade's decision to waive visa requirements for them in September 2017.

Overall, the observed rise in the size of flows moving from the Western Balkans towards Greece is indicative of the fact that the main Serbia-centred land route through the region is becoming increasingly difficult to transit. Specifically, the operational activities at Serbia's northern common borders with Croatia, Hungary and Romania are successful in deterring illegal immigration.

The occurrence of reverse flows via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-Greece border was accompanied by an increase in migratory pressure reported at another of the region's southern common borders. Specifically, the **Greek-Albanian** border section experienced an increase in the pressure being exerted by non-regional migrants between June and September 2017. This

Figure 14. **Decrease in migratory pressure at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following the closure of the corridor and continued reinforcements**

Illegal border-crossings between BCPs by non-regional migrants



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

## Two organised migrant-smuggling groups dismantled in 2017 by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The first OCG involved in migrant-smuggling activities was dismantled in the framework of joint international investigations with neighbouring countries (Serbia, Hungary and Greece) supported by the SELEC centre in Bucharest. The operational activities revealed that the OCG consisted of persons from Middle Eastern countries living in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albanian nationals and persons of unknown origin operating in Greece. These persons operated between February 2016 and September 2017 arranging the transportation of migrants from Greece towards Serbia and onwards.

The OCG conducted counter-surveillance activities and used Whatsapp and Viber applications to communicate the time, date, location (GPS coordinates) and number of migrants to be guided across the border from Greece in order to avoid police patrols. The migrants were then taken over by the organisers and transported to rented safe houses in the north of the country (areas of Vlaksince and Lojane). Rented cars or vans (often with false registration plates) were generally used. From the safe houses, the migrants were guided across the border with Serbia. Each migrant had to pay EUR 1 500 to 2 500 to the OCG through Western Union or Money Gram.

The second OCG consisting of four nationals of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and two unknown persons was also dismantled in September 2017. The people smugglers were transporting migrants from the area of Gevgelija towards the border with Serbia. The division of tasks was done so that some of the members made

contact and transported the migrants while others drove ahead to spot police presence and clear the way.

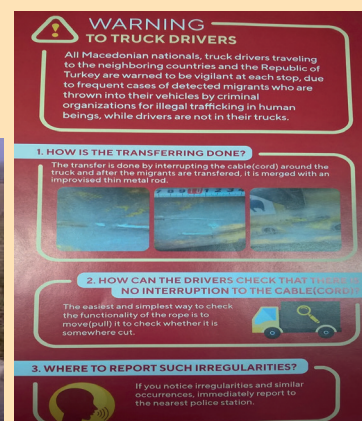
The authorities have identified the following routes for transportation of smuggled migrants across the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia over the past years and continue to focus police controls along those routes:

- Gevgelija–Valandovo–Demir Kapija–Negotino–Veles–Skopje–Kumanovo;
- Gevgelija–Valandovo via Strumica, Radovis, Stip, Sveti Nikole–Kumanovo.
- from Bitola region through Prilep/Kavadarci, to Skopje and Kumanovo;

Four migrant-smuggling cases were uncovered along the Gevgelija–Skopje highway in 2017 by police checkpoints organised in cooperation with guest officers from the Czech Republic and Croatia deployed to the country under the ‘Project Special measure’.

Source: Border Police of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

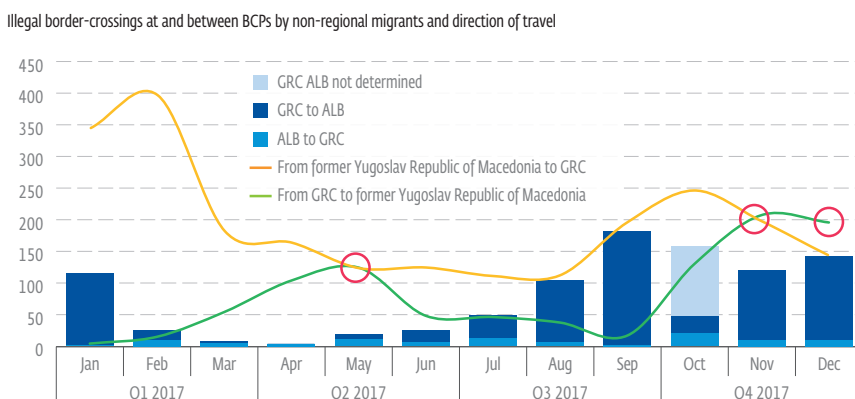
Figure 15. Migrants detected in a truck at BCP Bogorodica in connection with an OCG / warning issued to truck drivers



pressure then levelled off throughout the fourth quarter of the year and was mainly associated with migrants moving from Greece towards Albania.

Reportedly, some of the migrants intercepted by Albania in 2017 had previously stayed in different parts of the region (e.g. Serbia) before opting for the alternative routing via Albania. This hints at a connection between the observed flows towards Greece and the increase in pressure at Albania’s southern border. Specifically, both phenomena stem from an increased search for travel alternatives by migrants trying to bypass enhanced border controls along the main Serbia-centred route. Still, it

Figure 16. Higher number of migrants reportedly travelling from the Western Balkans towards Greece; an increase in detections at the Albanian-Greek section observed



Source: WB-RAN data as of 22 January 2018

cannot be said that the pressure reported by Albania is solely associated with the observed reverse flows.

Previously, the fact that non-regional migrants detected by Albania did not apply for asylum and chose an immediate return to Greece acted as a mitigating factor, for onward irregular movements.

However, towards the end of 2017 and into 2018 Albania observed that more migrants began to express the intention to apply for international protection, upon detection for illegal border-crossing and then abscond from reception facilities in order to continue their journey.

It is worth noticing that Serbia has been confronted with migrants applying for international protection and then absconding from reception facilities for a number of years.

#### 4.1.2. An increase in migration pressure was observed at intra-regional border sections hinting at the possible emergence of a new migration sub-route through the Western Balkans

The rise in migratory pressure at the Albanian-Greek border, a likely result of a continuous search for travel alternatives by migrants, was projected further north along the **Albanian-Montenegrin-Bosnian** and **Herzegovinian-Croatian** sub-route. The overall number of detected migrants remained largely manageable by the end of the year, nonetheless, the situation needs careful monitoring as the situation was expected to deteriorate.

The readmission agreements between the countries located along the mentioned sub-route are a crucial factor in mitigating illegal immigration. While generally these agreements function well,<sup>15</sup> some disruptions also occurred.

Such disruptions raise concerns as non-functioning readmission

15 Greece accepts readmissions from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina accepts readmissions from Croatia while Montenegro accepts readmissions from both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

agreements will hinder the efforts taken against illegal immigration.

Between January and December 2017, 203 illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants (122 at the green border and 81 at BCPs) were reported at the **Albanian-Montenegrin** border section, most of which were recorded in the second half of the year.

The timing of the increase coupled with the fact that most of the detected migrants were observed moving from Albania towards Montenegro, hint that the increased pressure observed at Albania's southern border with Greece is then projected northwards, possibly developing into a new migration sub-route (Figure 17).

The Albanian authorities reported the majority of these detections on exit thus preventing the onward movements towards Montenegro. Nonetheless, some migrants still managed to cross into Montenegro and move on.

After reaching Montenegro, a significant share of the migrants reportedly applied for international protection with the aim of avoiding misdemeanour liability for illegally crossing the border and obtain certificates issued by the Directorate for Asylum which allow them to move freely within the territory.

A new *Law on International and Temporary Protection of Aliens* entered into force

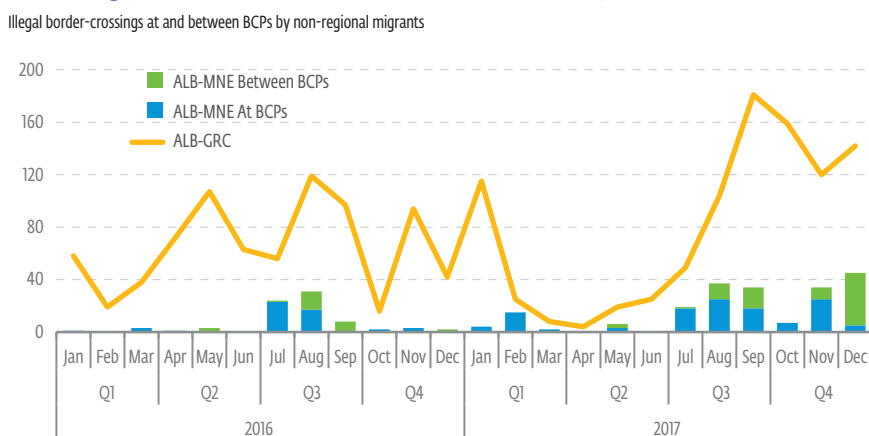
in January 2018 in Montenegro and foresees that applicants for protection can be accommodated in closed reception facilities or in special facilities at BCPs. This apparently led to fewer migrants applying for protection in January 2018.

The **Montenegrin-Bosnian and Herzegovinian** border section also experienced an increase in the number of detected illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants in 2017. The pressure remained low during the summer period, before considerably rising in the second half of the year.

Overall, 389 illegal border-crossings (mostly between BCPs) by non-regional migrants were reported at the Montenegrin-Bosnian and Herzegovinian section in 2017. Roughly 88% of the detections were made between August and December. Most migrants were reported travelling north from Montenegro towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. While detections occurred on both sides of the border, most of the cases were reported by Bosnia and Herzegovina after migrants managed to enter the country.

The timing of the observed increase in pressure (after mid-2017) and the direction of migrants' travels (from Montenegro towards Bosnia and Herzegovina) appear largely consistent with the developments observed at the Greek-Albanian border section. Specifically, the increase

Figure 17. Increase in migratory pressure observed at the Albanian-Montenegrin border section in the second half of 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

in pressure at the border between Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina appears to be associated with migrants travelling from Greece to Albania and further north.

Nonetheless, the higher pressure at the analysed section also coincided with the observed tendency of migrants in the region to search for alternative travel options (e.g. the observed reverse flows towards Greece).

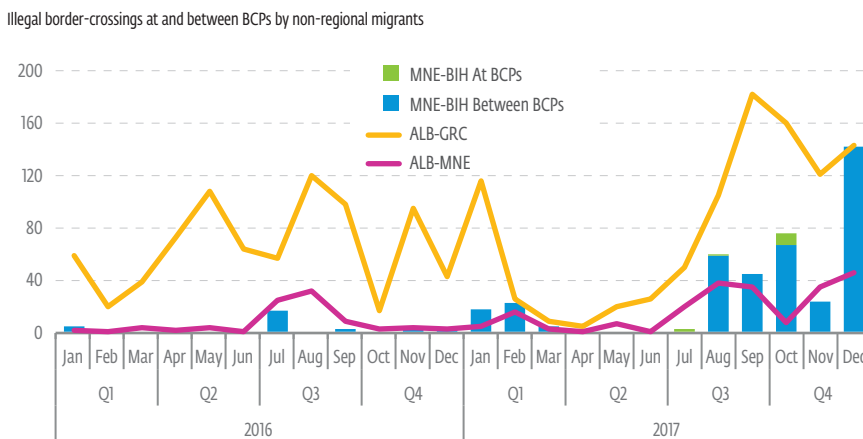
This draws attention to the possibility that migrants stranded in Serbia may also have opted for moving towards Montenegro or towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, besides only travelling south towards Greece via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Although geographical factors mitigate the risk of large-scale migration, they do not totally rule out movements.

The fact that the number of detections reported at the Montenegrin-Bosnian and Herzegovinian border was higher than the figure reported at the preceding section (Albania – Montenegro) (Figure 18) hints at the possibility of migrants travelling towards Montenegro through other routes, possibly from Serbia or that undetected crossings could occur between Montenegro and Albania.

An increase in migration pressure was also experienced at the **Croatian-Bosnian and Herzegovinian** border section in 2017, especially in the second half of the year. A total of 565 detections of illegal border-crossing by non-regional migrants were reported in 2017.

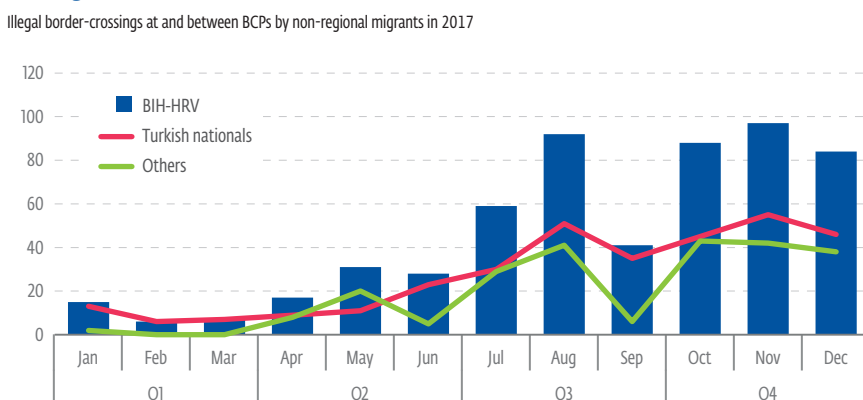
The increase in the pressure is linked to two specific factors. The largest share of detections (59%) is linked to Turkish nationals. These persons are generally not part of the migration flow transiting the Western Balkans south to north across the land borders. They generally arrive in Sarajevo legally (they enjoy visa-free travel), after which they try to move illegally towards the EU. Their numbers increased in the second half of 2017, and could be linked to the situation in Turkey.

Figure 18. Increase in migratory pressure observed at the Montenegrin-Bosnian and Herzegovinian border section in the second half of 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

Figure 19. Increase in migration pressure observed at the Croatian-Bosnian and Herzegovinian border section linked to Turkish but also to other nationalities



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

Two coordinated operations were organised in the region in order to address the issue of Turkish nationals, who enjoy visa-free travel in the region, crossing the EU's external border illegally.

**Operation Bosphorus** took place between October 2016 and March 2017, bringing together the authorities from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Border Police), Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia.

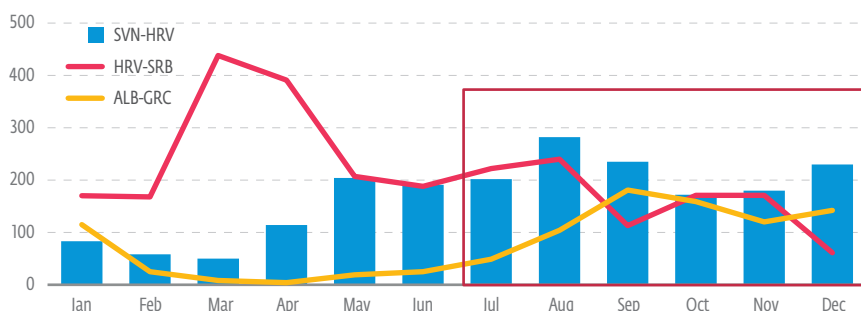
**Operation Dardanelles** was organised between May and September 2017 and brought together the authorities of Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In both operations, participating countries exchanged information through the SELEC centre in Bucharest and conducted investigations that led to the arrest of roughly 85 members of organised criminal groups smuggling Turkish nationals, across the Western Balkans to the EU.

Source: Border police forces of Bosnia – Herzegovina and Montenegro / WB-RAN Guest Analysts Workshop 2018

Figure 20. **Pressure on Slovenia originated from two sources. Initially, most arrivals were likely linked to illegal crossings to Croatia from Serbia; in the second half of 2017, the sub-route via Albania also contributed to this pressure**

Illegal border-crossings at and between BCPs by non-regional migrants on both sides of the border in 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February (HRV-SRB; ALB-GRC) and FRAN data as of 23 January for SVN-HRV

Other nationalities also contributed to this observed increase, a situation possibly linked to the previously described developments along the Albanian–Montenegrin–Bosnian and Herzegovinian sub-route and adjacent border sections (i.e. Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro).

The migration pressure was also observed in intra-EU/secondary movements at the **Croatian-Slovenian** border section. Operational information indicates that more non-regional migrants started to be detected at this section, especially in the second half of 2017.

The pressure reported at the Slovenian-Croatian border resulted from the convergence of two migration flows. Specifically, the flow of non-regional migrants that crossed the Serbian–Croatian border converged with the one moving along the Albanian–Montenegrin–Bosnian and Herzegovinian–Croatian sub-route (and adjacent intra-regional border sections – Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia – Montenegro) exerting pressure on the Slovenian-Croatian section.

It is difficult to make exact estimates related to the extent to which each of these two flows contributed to the pressure observed by Slovenia.

It can be assumed that in the first half of 2017 most of this pressure on Slovenia originated from the Croatian-Serbian border section.

In the second half of 2017, the sub-route likely contributed to the migratory pressure on Slovenia (the pressure at the Croatian-Serbian border began decreasing while the pressure on the sub-route started to increase). For more

clarity, these developments are graphically represented in Figure 20.

#### 4.1.3. Movements across Serbia's regional borders with Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina were observed despite geographical limitations

The migratory pressure observed at the **Montenegrin-Serbian** border section also showed signs of increasing in the second half of 2017. The timing of this increase largely coincided with the observed tendency of migrants to search for alternative routes that would bypass enhanced controls in the north of the region (i.e. avoiding Serbia's common borders with Hungary, Romania or Croatia).

The overall pressure remained relatively low, with 152 detections reported in 2017, over 80% of which between July and December. Most of the migrants were reported travelling from Serbia towards Montenegro, although two-way

flows were also apparent, especially at the end of the year. Available information indicates a lower level of pressure in January 2018 when less than 10 non-regional migrants were detected crossing the border illegally.

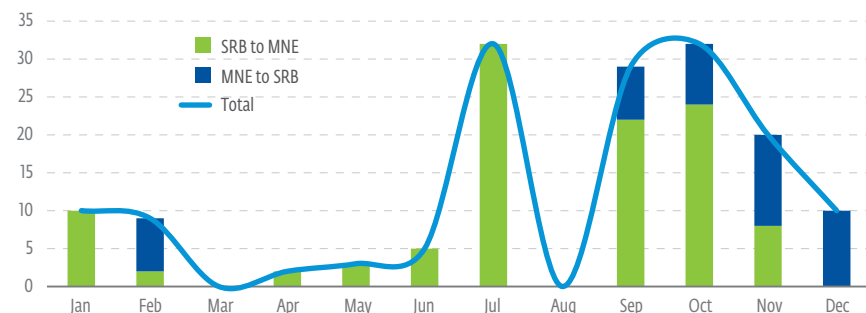
Although this border section is characterised by rough mountainous terrain and forested areas, which mitigate the risk of large-scale movements of migrants, more physically fit persons (young single men) could still consider it as an option for leaving Serbia. This, especially if migrants perceive that travelling via the Albanian–Montenegrin–Bosnian and Herzegovinian sub-route is a viable option, preferable to trying to bypass the enhanced controls at Serbia's northern borders.

Thinking along similar lines, migrants stranded in Serbia could very well decide to travel towards the **Serbian-Bosnian and Herzegovinian** border section and join the new route, if they perceive it as a viable option for leaving the region. This section is likely more attractive than the Serbian-Montenegrin one as it is closer to Croatia.

This border section registered 251 illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants in 2017. Although the number of detections was higher in the second half of the year, the overall trend appeared to have stabilised at higher levels between September and December. The vast majority of migrants were reported travelling in the direction of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

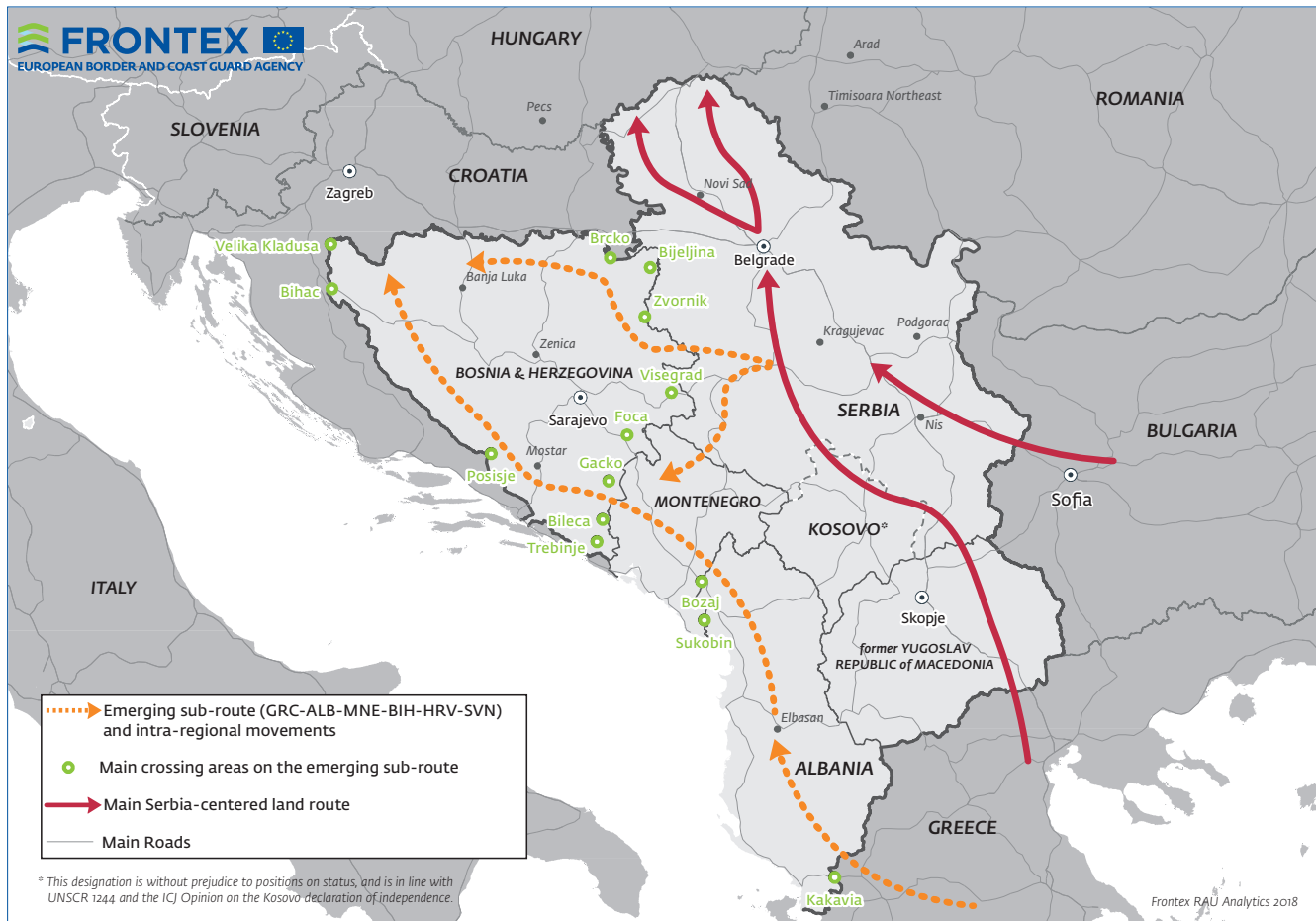
Figure 21. **Increase in migratory pressure observed at the Montenegrin-Serbian border section in the second half of 2017**

Illegal border-crossings at and between BCPs by non-regional migrants in 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

Figure 22. Map showing the main Serbia-centred land-route, the emerging sub-route through the Western Balkans and main crossing areas for non-regional migrants



Source: Frontex data and operational information shared in the framework of the WB-Guest Analysts Workshop

The increase in pressure does indicate that the sub-route via Albania-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia is becoming more attractive.

Nonetheless, it has to be considered that the pressure on the Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina border section was most likely sustained by migrants already stranded in Serbia (estimates indicate roughly 4 000 migrants) who are looking for ways to reach their final destinations by avoiding enhanced border-controls at Serbia’s northern common borders with Hungary, Croatia or Romania.

Bearing this in mind, the continuation of enhanced controls in the south of the region (Bulgaria-Serbia and Greece-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia borders) can prevent new migrants from entering Serbia and then moving towards Bosnia and Herzegovina.

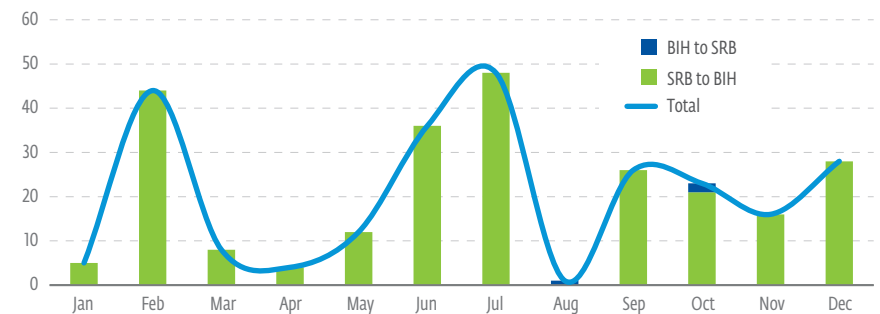
The border between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina largely follows the course of the Drina river and/or

runs through forested and mountainous terrain. These geographical factors could mitigate the risk of large migratory movements, as they make the area less accessible to persons who are neither physically fit nor willing to take risks.

Nonetheless, young male migrants may still chose to cross this border between BCPs (roughly 53% of all detections in 2017 occurred between BCPs), while other persons could opt to travel by hiding in transportation means at BCPs.

Figure 23. The migratory pressure at the Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina border section rose in mid-2017, stabilising at higher levels at the end of the year

Illegal border-crossings at and between BCPs by non-regional migrants in 2017



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

#### 4.1.4. In the north of the region, variations in pressure between different borders were observed in reaction to environmental or institutional developments occurring during the year; overall, the pressure decreased

Traditionally, most of the non-regional migrants who entered the Western Balkans through the southern common borders with Greece and Bulgaria transited Serbia on their way north, principally towards Hungary or Croatia and, to a lesser extent, towards Romania.

The pressure on these northern common sections continued to be observed in 2017, although at lower levels, largely similar to those before the 2015–2016 migration crisis.

These three sections reported roughly 12 100 illegal border-crossings (roughly 10 500 between BCPs and 1 600 at BCPs) by non-regional migrants in 2017, a rate 91% lower than that of 2016. The pressure reported in 2017 was also lower than that registered in 2012, 2013 and 2014, the three years before the onset of the migration crisis.

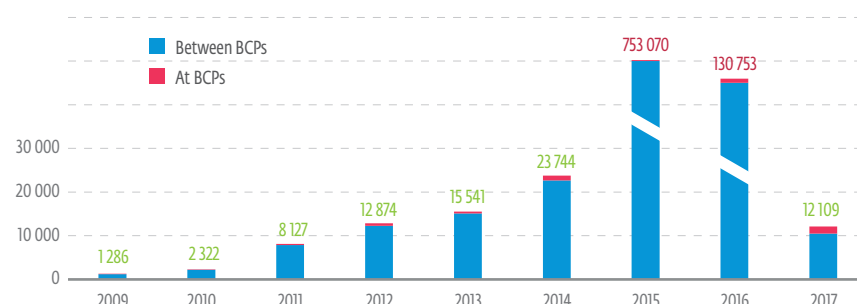
Moreover, in 2017 the illegal border-crossing attempts were arguably more linked to migrants already in Serbia, multiple failed attempts by the same persons and, to a lesser extent, to new arrivals from the south. Thus, the number of detections were likely lower than the actual size of the transiting flow of migrants.

Overall, the Hungarian-Serbian border section registered the highest pressure with roughly 8 200 detections, largely reported between BCPs. The Croatian-Serbian border reported roughly 2 500 detections (mostly at BCPs in the first half of the year and then mostly between BCPs). Meanwhile, the Romanian-Serbian section reported roughly 1 300 detections, largely in the first half of the year and between BCPs.

Variations in terms of pressure exerted on these sections were reported in 2017, largely stemming from seasonality

Figure 24. The migratory pressure observed at Serbia's northern common borders with Hungary, Croatia and Romania in 2017 dropped to levels similar to those before the migration crisis of 2015–2016

Illegal border-crossings at and between BCPs by non-regional migrants at the Serbian-Croatian, Serbian-Hungarian and Serbian-Romanian border sections



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

and the implemented border controls and policies.

The pressure observed at the Romanian-Serbian and Croatian-Serbian border sections increased between February and April 2017, which was likely linked to both environmental (improved weather conditions resulting in increased migrant mobility) and institutional developments in the region (i.e. a change in Hungary's migration policy<sup>16</sup>, which was publicised in February and adopted at the end of March). By contrast, the pressure exerted on the Hungarian-Serbian border in the same period decreased.

In other words, as weather improved, migrants stranded in Serbia began looking for alternative travel solutions to bypass the Hungarian-Serbian border section, which led to the described developments.

In the second quarter of 2017, however, the pressure on the Romanian and Croatian borders with Serbia began decreasing while migrants slowly started to target, once more, Hungary.

This situation continued into the third quarter, with the pressure on the Hungarian-Serbian border section rising to levels similar to those reported at the beginning of the year.

<sup>16</sup> Return of migrants from all territory to be processed in the transit areas at the borders; no inland access.

Enhanced control activities carried out at all of the mentioned northern sections likely discouraged migrants from taking the alternative routes to leave the region/Serbia. Migrants realised that none of the alternative routes through Romania or Croatia provides them easy access to their destinations and most likely require increased effort and/or the use of expensive people smuggling services.

As a result, migrants appear to have reconsidered their options and many of them made another attempt to cross directly into Hungary. Even though the success rate of onward travel is low,<sup>17</sup> this direct crossing to the Schengen area may be more affordable if made without the use of people smuggling services.

Moving into Q4, the pressure observed by Hungary decreased, while the situation at other sections remained relatively unchanged.

Overall, the pressure observed by Hungary, as well as Romania and Croatia remains most probably linked to migrants who had been staying in Serbia for some time and, to a lesser extent, to newly arrived ones. Given the

<sup>17</sup> Migrants detected by Hungary are processed in reception centres at the border with no access to the territory/possibilities of moving onwards before the procedures are finalised

In 2017 Hungary amended its national legislation in order to enhance border control activities and procedures in reaction to the migration pressure affecting the Western Balkans.

Under the legislative amendments (introduced through Act XX/2017), all foreigners detected while illegally staying in Hungary can be escorted at the nearest gate of the temporary security border barrier established at the border with Serbia. Special transit zones have been established at the border where applicants for international protection are accommodated and processed without being allowed to freely transit Hungary.

A two layer temporary security barrier covering the entire length of the common border with Serbia was erected, complemented by a system of stationary and mobile surveillance sensors. Special police units and the army support the control activities at the border with Serbia. Meanwhile a continuous recruitment and training of Riot police personnel destined for border surveillance activities is being carried out.



Figure 25. Two-layer security barrier, patrol roads and surveillance systems at the border between Hungary and Serbia  
Source: Hungarian border police

prevention measures implemented at these sections, it is likely that one migrant is detected attempting to cross the border multiple times. Thus, the pressure exerted at the borders can be assessed as higher than the size of the transiting flow.

In this context, even low number of newly arrived migrants entering Serbia from the south of the region are likely to exert considerable pressure on the country's northern borders with EU Member States (Hungary, Croatia and Romania).

Nonetheless, towards the end of the year, the pressure on the mentioned northern common borders of between Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and Romania decreased, a fact roughly coinciding with the observed reverse flows through the region. Taken together, these developments are strong indications that the enhanced control measures and policy actions implemented at the mentioned northern sections were efficient in deterring irregular migration via the main Serbia-centred route through the Western Balkans.



#### 4.1.5. Top non-regional nationalities detected for illegal border-crossing between BCPs

Pakistani and Afghan were the top detected nationalities for illegal border-crossing between BCPs each accounting for roughly 33% and 28%, respectively of the non-regional migrants reported throughout the Western Balkans. In 2017, Syrians ranked third in detection with a 9% share of the total followed by Iraqis with an 8% share.

In terms of absolute numbers however, all of the top four nationalities registered steep declines in relation to 2016 (-44% for Pakistanis, -90% for Afghans, -95% for Iraqis and -97% for Syrians).

The top ten non-regional nationalities also included Algerians, Turkish, Iranians, Libyans, Moroccans and Bangladeshis, with numbers ranging from just above 200 detections in the case of Bangladeshis to roughly 900 with regard to Algerians. The number of detected Algerians and Libyans ran relatively stable compared with 2016, while those of Turkish nationals, Iranians, Moroccans and Bangladeshis all registered decreases (-33%, -78%, -86% and -64%, respectively).

These top ten nationalities amounted to 15 570 illegal border-crossings between BCPs, or roughly 94% of detections reported in 2017.

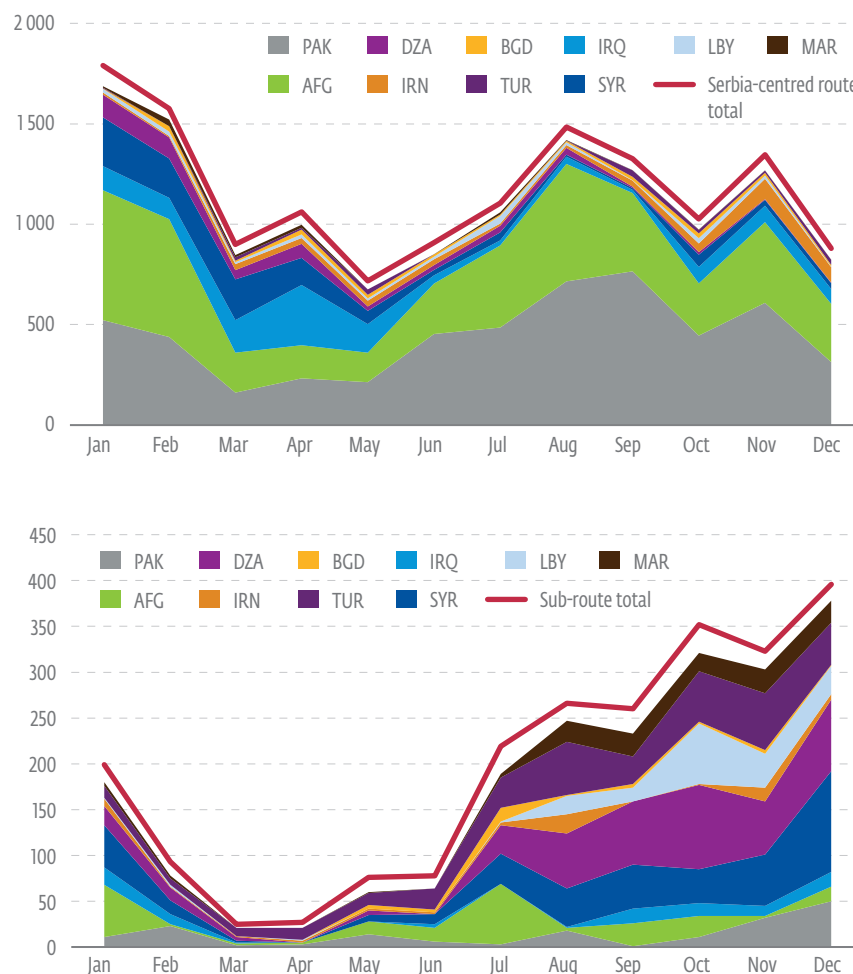
Overall, they were mostly reported (13 387) along the Serbia-centred land route. But also, along the emerging sub-route via Greece-Albania-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia (2 095).

Pakistanis, Afghans, Iraqis, Bangladeshis and Syrians were largely reported along the Serbia-centred route, trying to enter the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from Greece, or trying to exit the region at Serbia's common borders with Hungary, Croatia and Romania.

Turkish nationals generally travel legally to the region (especially by air to Sarajevo airport) before trying to reach the EU illegally. As in previous years, they were largely detected by Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina at their common border, and, to lesser extent, at Serbia's

Figure 26. Algerians, Moroccans, Libyans and Syrians accounted for the largest share of the migration pressure (50%) along the emerging sub-route via Greece-Albania-Montenegro-HRV/BIH-HRV; meanwhile they accounted for 13% of detections along the Serbia-centred land route

Illegal border-crossings between BCPs by the top ten non-regional nationalities along the main sections of the Serbia-centred land-route (top) and along the main sections of the emerging sub-route (bottom)



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

common borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and Croatia.

Iranians were mostly detected by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on exit towards Greece, but also at Serbia's common borders with Hungary, Croatia and Romania. Most of the detections (58%) occurred between September and December, largely coinciding with Belgrade's decision to waive visas for Iranians.

It could be observed that Moroccans, Algerians and Libyans accounted for a

larger share of the detections along the emerging sub-route (via Albania-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia) than they did along the traditional Serbia-centred land route. This may be related to the general profile of these migrants (mostly young males, unaccompanied by family or children) which allows them greater freedom in exploring new routes and opportunities. In the second half of 2017 more Syrians were also reported along the sub-route as it became more attractive.

Together, Moroccans, Algerians, Libyans and Syrians accounted for almost 50% of all detections reported along the emerging sub-route and at intra-regional borders adjacent to it in 2017. The same nationalities only accounted for 13% of the total detections along the main Serbia-centred route, which indicates an increased preference for this new travel alternative.

A low number of Tunisians (18) and Egyptians (7) were also detected along the emerging sub-route. Together with the already mentioned Moroccans, Algerians and Libyans they brought the number of North Africans detected for illegal border-crossing between BCPs along this sub-route to 761 in 2017 (almost half of all North Africans detected at regional level).

From a different perspective, North Africans accounted for roughly 33% of all detections reported along the sub-route and for just 6% of the total detections along the main Serbia-centred land route.

As already mentioned, the preference of North Africans for the new sub-route could be explained through their profiles, which allow them more freedom in searching for options and exploiting emerging opportunities.

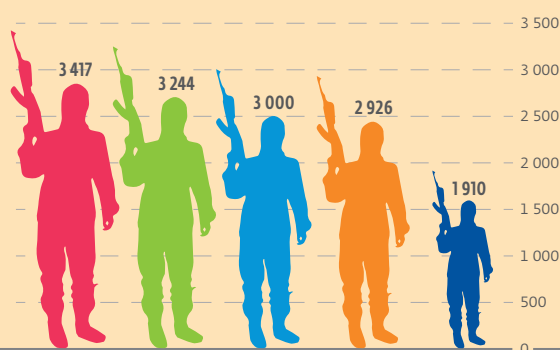
In order to raise awareness of Western Balkan border police forces and increase their capabilities of detecting possible travelling terrorists, Frontex RAU worked together with experts from the region to elaborate a booklet containing a set of common risk indicators. To facilitate its use, the booklet was translated into three regional and local languages.

In October 2017, the Soufan Center assessed that out of the over 40 000 foreigners that joined Daesh from more than 110 countries, around 5 600 from 33 different countries have returned home. The number of FTFs from the Western Balkans is estimated to be around 845.

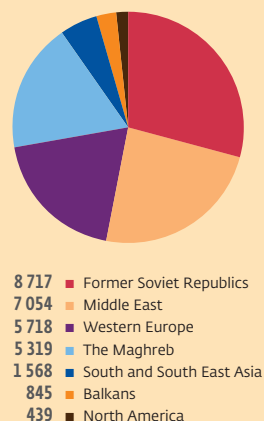
In July 2017, the Radicalisation Awareness Network estimated that about 30% of over 5 000 Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) who resided in Europe, and left to Syria, Iraq or Libya, returned back to the continent. INTCCEN assesses that about 1 400 have returned to Europe, while over 900 are presumed dead. This implies that circa 2 500 European FTFs are still close to combat zones or unaccounted for.

Data on FTFs is neither exhaustive nor standardised. This said, the following infographic offers a contextual understanding of the magnitude of the omnipresent threat from Daesh's global ranks.

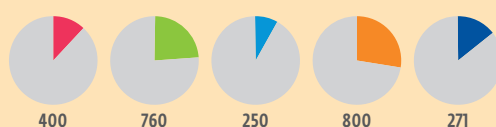
Highest numbers of FTFs who joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq



FTFs by region



Share of returned FTFs



\* Tunisian Government revised FTFs' figures are about half of what was originally reported

Source: TSC, October 2017

## 4.2. Increase in migration pressure observed at BCPs

### 4.2.1. Illegal border-crossings at BCPs

In 2017, approximately 2 300 **non-regional migrants** were detected while trying to cross at BCPs illegally, most of them hiding in vehicles. This figure was 71% higher than in 2016.

This 71% rise is hardly surprising, since the authorities continued to reinforce border-control measures and implement procedures, which made illegal border-crossing significantly more difficult. This apparently forced migrants to revert to the less convenient (and likely more expensive) alternative of crossing the borders through BCPs.

By and large, the detected illegal border-crossings at BCPs were reported on both sides of the Croatian-Serbian border section, chiefly during the first half of 2017. Specifically, this section reported roughly 1 570 non-regional migrants trying to travel illegally through BCPs by hiding in means of transport. Most of these detections occurred between January and June (roughly 1 400), after which migrants began shifting towards the green border, likely as a result of enhanced controls at BCPs.

The Greek-Albanian, Serbian-Bosnian and Herzegovinian and Albanian-Montenegrin borders were the second, third and

fourth busiest sections, respectively, as regards detections of non-regional migrants at BCPs. Together these sections detected roughly 390 non-regional migrants illegally crossing at BCPs in 2017. This is not a substantial number, but it is significantly above what was reported by the same sections in 2016 (42). Considering the locations of the mentioned sections, this reported increase points to the fact that migrants began perceiving the emerging Greek-Albanian-Montenegrin-Bosnian and Herzegovinian sub-route as an attractive travel option through the Western Balkans.

The Hungarian-Serbian border section ranked fifth in detections during 2017 with only 53 non-regional migrants reported at BCPs, a significant decrease compared with 2016 when 322 detections were recorded. Most likely, this decrease was the result of the enhanced border-control measures in Hungary as well as the new working procedures whereby detected migrants are processed in special transit zones at the borders with no possibility to abscond inland.

Afghan, Pakistani, Syrian, Algerian and Iraqi were the top five reported nationalities, respectively, together accounting for 88% of all non-regional migrants detected at BCPs.

### 4.2.2. Document fraud cases in the region

The six partners in the Western Balkans reported some 631 cases of document fraud involving **non-regional migrants** in 2017. This represents a significant increase compared with 2016 (over a three-fold rise) and the largest number reported since data collection began in 2009. This increase was largely linked to detected Iranian (223 cases) and Turkish (150 cases) nationals.

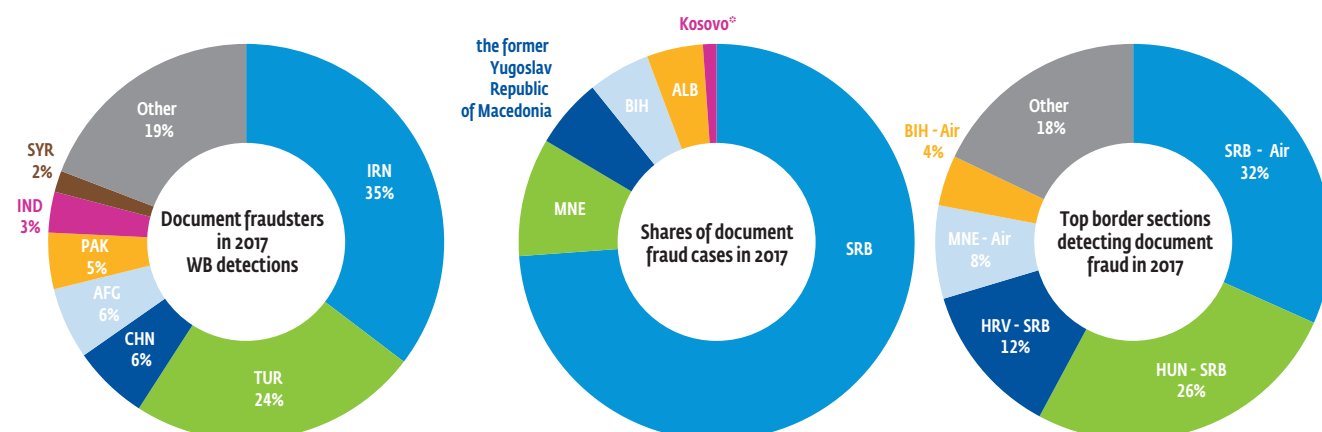
As regards the top seven reported document fraudster, Iranian and Turkish nationals were followed by Chinese (39 cases), Afghans (37 cases), Pakistanis (29 cases), Indians (21 cases) and Syrians (11 cases). Together these seven nationalities accounted for over 81% of all reported cases in 2017.

Most of these top seven nationalities were reported by Serbia.

Most **Iranians** were reported at Serbia's airports and, to a lesser extent, while trying to transit the country's land borders with Hungary or Croatia, especially after Belgrade's decision to grant them visa-free travel. **Turkish nationals** were reported largely on exit from Serbia towards Hungary or Croatia at the land borders

Figure 27. **Top detected non-regional document fraudsters by the six Western Balkan countries in 2017; Serbia reported the largest share of detections; Serbia's air and land border sections were the most affected**

Document fraud cases by non-regional migrants in the six regional WB-RAN countries



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

and also while trying to travel through Serbia's airports. Montenegro also reported Turkish nationals largely at its air borders. **Chinese**, the third most detected document fraudsters, at its land border with Hungary and, to a lesser extent, at its airports.

Turkish nationals, Iranians and Chinese, in this order were the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> most detected nationalities illegally crossing the borders at and between BCPs, as reported by regional partners and neighbouring EU Member States in 2017.

None of these three nationalities was a significant part of the migration flow travelling by land from Greece/Bulgaria via the Western Balkans region. All of them tend to prefer a more sophisticated travel

method and avoid illegal border-crossings at the green borders whenever possible. This suggests that they can afford more comfortable illegal travel options.

**Afghan** (37) and **Pakistani** (29) were the fourth and fifth non-regional nationalities, respectively reported for document fraud by Western Balkans partners in 2017. As mentioned, most detections were reported by Serbia, especially at its air borders, largely on entry to the country but also at its common borders with Hungary and Croatia, largely on exit. Afghans and Pakistanis were a significant part of the non-regional migration flow detected also for illegal border-crossing at the green borders in 2017, where they were the top detected nationalities.

**Indians** were the sixth most detected document fraudsters in the Western Balkans region, with 21 cases in 2017. Most of these cases occurred at Montenegro's and Serbia's air borders, largely on entry and, to a lesser extent, on exit at Serbia's land borders with Hungary and Croatia. These nationals are not part of the traditional migration flow transiting the region from Turkey over land.

In 2017, the six Western Balkans regional partners reported only 11 Syrians for document fraud, making them the seventh most reported nationality. Most of them were detected on exit from Serbia towards Hungary across the common land border and, to a lesser extent, trying to leave Serbia by air.

### 4.3. Changes in visa policies which could increase migration pressure at the borders

The year 2017 and the first two months of 2018 brought new developments in the Serbian visa regime – the Serbian government unilaterally removed visa requirements<sup>18</sup> for citizens of **Iran, India, Indonesia, Guinea-Bissau, Suriname, the Bahamas, Barbados**, Colombia, **Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, Paraguay and **the United Arab Emirates**. The Serbian authorities are also planning to introduce a visa waiver for citizens of **Azerbaijan, Armenia** and Georgia. (The nationals of the countries highlighted in blue do require Schengen visa).

Open source information indicates that nationals of other countries which include Vietnam or Saudi Arabia, could also become visa-exempt when travelling to Serbia in the future.

The changes in Serbia's visa policy could provide an option for would-be migrants to legally approach the common borders with EU Member States before trying to continue their journeys illegally. It is worth noting that Turkey's

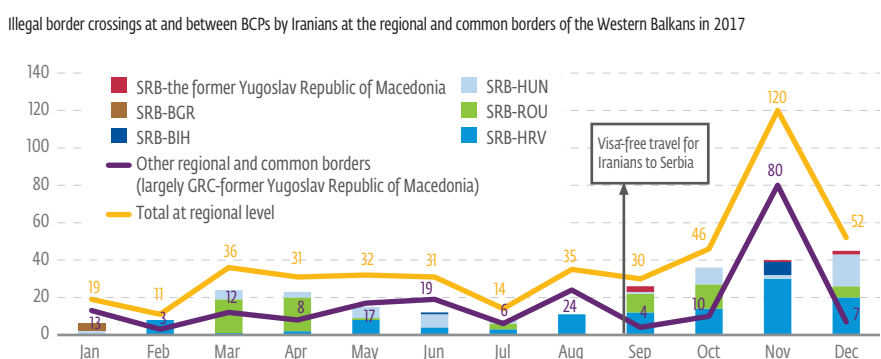
liberal visa policy is likely exploited by would-be migrants (e.g. North Africans) in a similar manner.

In relation to the recent decisions of Serbia, the most relevant development was observed in the case of Iranians. Specifically, since September 2017, the Serbian authorities have reported an increase in the number of Iranians trying to exit the country illegally. At the same time, Croatia, Hungary

and Romania started to report larger numbers of Iranians on entry. These increases suggest that these nationals are taking advantage of easier access to Serbia in order to cross illegally into the EU over land.

An increase was also reported at the land border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, largely attributed to migrants who did not manage to leave Serbia through its northern borders, and thus headed south in search of alternative options from Greece.

Figure 28. Increase in migration pressure exerted by Iranians at Serbia's northern common borders with the EU after visa-waiver decision; more Iranians travelling towards Greece via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in November



Source: WB-RAN data as of 18 January 2018

18 Respectively Annex II & I of Regulation (EC) No 539/2001.

In parallel, an increase in Iranians presenting fraudulent documents at land and air border control points has also been noted (Figure 29). Serbia detected the majority of the cases on exit, largely preventing their illegal movement to EU Member States. Nonetheless, some migrants did manage to cross the borders using fraudulent documents.

Iranian nationals generally arrive in Serbia by air from Turkey (Istanbul and Ankara airports). Moreover, in March 2018, Iran's national air company - 'Iran Air' started operating two direct flights between Belgrade and Tehran per week with a seating capacity of about 600 persons. Another Iranian carrier - 'Qeshm Air' began ad hoc charter flights from Tehran in mid-February. These new direct connections will create conditions for additional arrivals of Iranian nationals and for other nationalities travelling from Iran to Serbia.

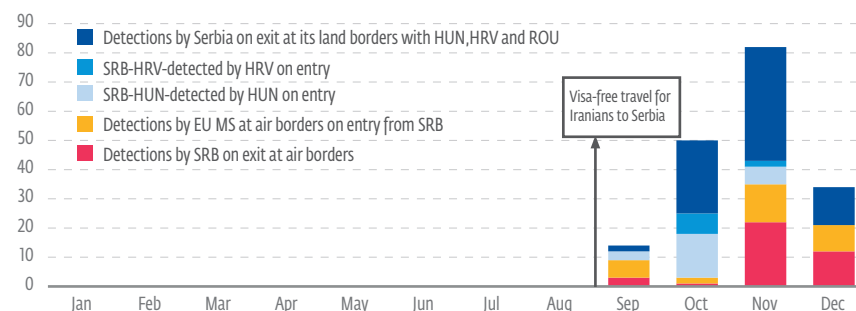
A total of 509 refusals of entry were issued to Iranians by Western Balkan countries and neighbouring EU Member States at the common and regional borders in 2017.

The vast majority of these decisions were issued by Serbia at its air border especially after September 2017 and, to a lesser extent, by Serbia's neighbouring EU Member States and regional countries. The timing of the increase also coincides with the decision to waive visa requirements for Iranians.

The fact that most decisions to refuse entry were issued by Serbia tends to validate available operational information according to which Serbia has enhanced its efforts to counter any escalation of migration by Iranians and is conducting profiling of these nationals at its BCPs.

Figure 29. Increase in document fraud cases involving Iranian nationals, at the land and air borders with Serbia after the visa waiver decision was taken in September 2017

Document Fraud cases involving Iranian nationals at the common borders/air connections with Serbia in 2017

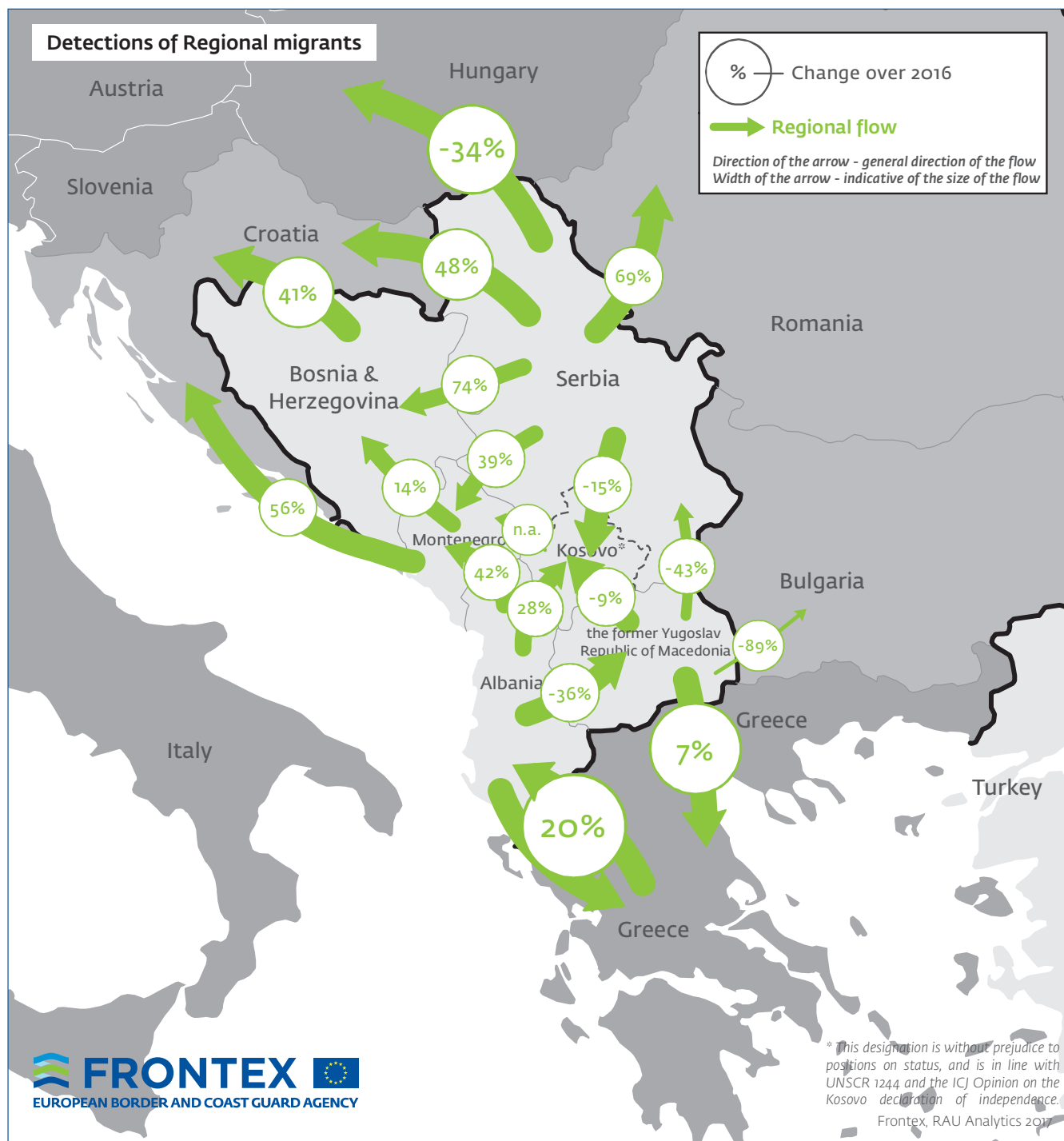


Source: EDF and WB-RAN data as of 18 January 2018

# 5. Risk of irregular migration by nationals of Western Balkan countries

Figure 30. The regional migration flow mostly affected Greece's borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, to a lesser extent, other sections in the north of the region

Illegal border-crossings at and between BCPS by regional migrants



## 5.1. Illegal border-crossings at the regional and common borders with the EU

All six Western Balkan countries, with the exception of Kosovo\*, are exempt from visa requirements when traveling to the EU. Thus, the regional migration flow mostly consists of persons who previously overstayed in EU Member States and attempt to travel illegally to circumvent entry bans that have been imposed on them.

In 2017, there were roughly 10 900 nationals from Western Balkan countries detected while illegally crossing the regional and common borders, most of which between BCPs (over 10 400). At the same time, the 10 900 illegal border-crossings by regional migrants represent a 13% increase compared with 2016.

This increase was mostly linked to developments in the south of the region, especially at the border between Greece and Albania, where there was a 20% increase in detections compared with 2016.

The common borders between EU Member States and regional countries in the north of the region also registered an overall 2% increase in pressure compared with 2016. With the exception of the Hungarian-Serbian border section, where the number of detected regional migrants dropped by 34% compared with 2016, the rest of the northern common borders reported increases in such detections ranging from 41% for the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia to 69% for the Serbian-Romanian section.

Overall, most of the detections of illegal border-crossing between BCPs by regional migrants (around 76%) continued to be reported in the south of the region (at Greece's borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and were, by and large, associated with Albanian circular migration\* to Greece.

Some seasonal variations were observed as regards the number of reported illegal border-crossings by regional migrants in 2017. Overall, there was a slight increase recorded between February and April followed by a stabilisation and

slight easing of the pressure during the summer months, before the numbers rose again between August and October. The detections made at the common borders between Greece, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accounted for over three quarters of all detected illegal border-crossings by regional migrants in 2017. Thus, the monthly increase or decrease in detections of illegal border-crossing largely reflected seasonal employment opportunities in agriculture or the tourism industry, especially in Greece.

The number of Kosovo\* citizens detected for illegal border-crossing remained relatively similar to that of 2016. They were the second most detected

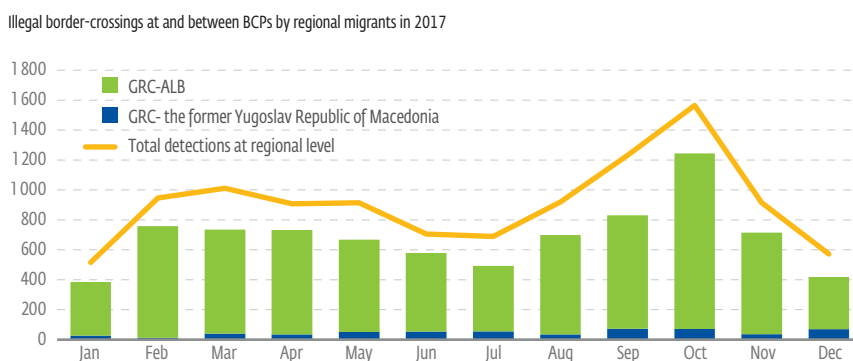
regional citizens accounting for roughly 12% of the regional flow, after Albanians, who ranked first with an 82% share.

While Albanian migrants were largely detected in the south of the region and, to a lesser extent, at other border sections, Kosovo\* citizens mostly targeted the northern common borders with Hungary and Croatia.

Overall, the number of Kosovo\* citizens detected while illegally crossing the borders remained largely similar to that reported in 2016; the detections also followed the same seasonal patterns.

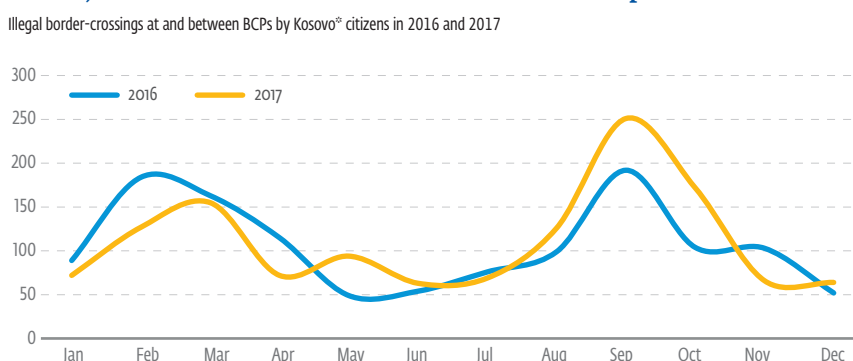
The increase patterns appear largely consistent with seasonal employment opportunities. Specifically the number of detections increased in spring (associated with migrants taking on seasonal jobs) and at the end of summer (migrants returning to work in EU Member States

Figure 31. Seasonal variations in the pressure exerted by regional migrants largely influenced by the situation at the southern common borders with Greece.



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

Figure 32. The number of detected Kosovo\* citizens was largely similar to that of 2016; the detections also followed the same seasonal patterns



Source: WB-RAN data as of 2 February 2018

after summer holidays). This indicates that the motivations for migration among citizens of Kosovo\* are largely connected to seeking employment in the EU. Moreover, it indicates that many of the persons illegally residing/working in EU Member States choose to spend their summer holidays at home after which they try to return to their place of employment illegally.

Nonetheless, while the number of Kosovo\* citizens reported for illegal border-crossings followed seasonal patterns similar to 2016, their numbers were higher between August and October 2017 compared with the same period of the previous year.

The higher pressure registered in 2017 could have very well been the result of the local media hype alleging a new Kosovo\* crisis<sup>19</sup> in the period September-October. This could indicate the important role perception plays in triggering irregular migration.

This situation created concerns at regional and EU level at the moment it occurred, but the Kosovo\* authorities were quick to react, setting in place measures already tested during the unprecedented migration outflows from Kosovo\* observed between Q2 2014 and Q1 2015. Considering the decrease in pressure observed throughout November and December 2017, the implemented measures can be regarded as efficient. Moreover, in the absence of extraordinary developments, the fact that these measures are kept as a permanent part of the contingency plans of the authorities, is likely to mitigate large outflows at the levels of those observed in 2014/15 (see textbox).

Illegal border-crossings by other regional nationalities were detected in low numbers in 2017 largely similar to those registered in 2016.

At regional level, the majority of the illegal border-crossings was registered between BCPs, while only 485 regional migrants were discovered hiding in vehicles. The 485 detections at BCPs in 2017

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.koha.net/video/42223/vale-e-re-ikjesh-nga-kosova/>

#### **Certain 'push/pull factors' and travel options for would-be Kosovo\* migrants remain in place:**

- Economic migration to the EU remains attractive;
- Free travel to Serbia based on ID cards for two weeks;
- Regular bus connections to Serbia;

#### **A repeat of the mass movement of Kosovo\* citizens, seen in late 2014 and early 2015, remains nonetheless unlikely, given that:**

- Kosovo\* limited the number of transport licences for public transport companies operating routes to Serbia (so although the demand for tickets may suddenly increase in case of a crisis, increasing the number of buses may not be possible as it was a few years ago);
- Hungary has installed a two-layer obstacle at their border with Serbia making it more difficult to cross undetected;
- Migrants detected on Hungarian territory are processed in transit zones/centres at the border with Serbia, thus not allowing onward movements (this could deter further departures and possibly even transit via Romania to Hungary);
- Joint controls were carried out on trains travelling between Hungary and Austria successfully preventing the onward movements of Kosovo\* citizens at the time of the crisis; such measures could be reactivated if needed;
- Serbia allows returns to Kosovo\* over land thus making the process much quicker than before.

#### **Measures implemented during the crisis of 2014/15 proved efficient and some were reactivated in 2017:**

- Cooperation between Kosovo\* police and Ministry of Infrastructure remains in place for issues related to transport licences and checks of transport companies which would facilitate mass-movements to Serbia;
- Detailed checks performed on buses and taxis linking Kosovo\* and Serbia;
- Interviews and profiling were conducted by Kosovo\* police at the administrative boundary line to prevent exits of persons aiming to migrate illegally to the EU.

#### **Lessons learned:**

- The Kosovo\* authorities remain aware of the migration potential;
- The measures previously implemented were triggered pre-emptively in 2017 when the rumours of mass migration emerged (increase control on exit, control on buses and taxis, profiling etc.);
- The authorities closely follow media reports related to a possible new migration crisis.

Source: Kosovo\* Police/WB-RAN Guest analysts Workshop

represent more than a twofold rise over 2016 and were, by and large, related to more Albanians being reported using this *modus operandi* for migration at the common border with Greece, especially after Albania enhanced its border checks on exit in August trying to prevent possible abuse of visa-free travel to the EU by its own citizens.

Following the decrease in the non-regional flow, the regional migrants

accounted for roughly 37% of the overall migratory pressure in the Western Balkans (up from roughly 3% in 2016, which still saw mass movements of non-regional migrants under the application of the Western Balkans transit corridor until March).

Nonetheless, the regional flow remained largely under control and continued to exert the highest pressure at the southern common borders with Greece.



## 5.2. Illegal stay in the EU

In 2017, almost 49 000 illegal stayers from the Western Balkans region were reported at EU Member State/Schengen Associated Country level, a figure 9% higher than in 2016 but 18% lower than in 2015. Nevertheless, of the total number of detections in 2017, 44 600 were of citizens of the five visa-exempt countries and 4 100 of Kosovo\* citizens.

Amongst the five visa-exempt nationalities, the overall number of detected illegal stayers in the EU/Schengen Associated Countries rose by 17% compared with 2016. With the exception of Albanian nationals whose numbers remained largely on a par with those recorded in 2016 (a minor 3% rise), the rest of the visa-free Western Balkan migrants registered significant increases (i.e. ranging from 29% for nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina to 61% for nationals of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

Despite having the lowest increase (3%) over 2016, Albanians continued to rank top amongst the Western Balkan visa-free nationalities reported for illegal stay in 2017, accounting for roughly 56% of the total detections of these nationalities in EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries.

In August 2017, the Albanian Ministry of Interior developed specific working procedures to prevent Albanian nationals from misusing the visa-free travel

scheme to the EU. These procedures require specific checks to establish whether each Albanian citizen trying to leave the country actually fulfils all the travel and stay conditions in the EU. In cases of doubt, more thorough checks and interviews are performed. Any previous abuse of the visa-free regime is taken into consideration during the screening.

Roughly 35% more Serbs were reported for illegal stay in EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries in 2017 than in 2016. They continued to rank second among the Western Balkan visa-free nationalities, accounting for a 26% share of their total at EU+ level. The increase in the number of Serbian illegal stayers in 2017 was largely due to more detections reported by Hungary and, to a lesser extent, by Germany and Austria.

Nationals of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ranked third among the visa-free nationalities from the Western Balkans that were reported as illegal stayers in the EU+ in 2017, accounting for an 11% share of the total. They registered a 61% rise compared with 2016. Nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked fourth, accounting for a 7% share of the total in 2017, after registering a 29% increase compared with 2016. Montenegrins ranked last with a 1% share of the total.

Most detections of illegal stayers from the visa-free Western Balkan countries continued to be reported by Germany,

Hungary, France, Greece and Slovenia, whose total numbers accounted for 75% of all illegal stayers reported at EU Member State/Schengen Associated Country level.

Hungary registered the highest increase compared with 2016 (+128% mostly related to detected Serbs), followed by Slovenia (a 68% increase largely linked to Albanians and nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina), while the rest of the top six reporting countries showed relatively stable detections compared with 2016 (-5% for Germany, +9% for France and no real change for Greece).

As in previous years, Albanians were the most reported nationality in each of the top six countries, with the exception of Hungary, where Serbs returning from the EU were most numerous.

Overall, the number of illegal stayers from Kosovo\* registered a 36% decrease compared with 2016 and a 74% drop compared with 2015. These developments are largely in line with the subsiding migratory outflows from Kosovo\* after Q1 2015.

Germany continued to report the highest number of illegal stayers from Kosovo\* followed by Switzerland, Croatia and Austria.

After the outflow from Kosovo\* subsided in March 2015, the total number of these nationals detected for illegal stay in Hungary and Austria decreased significantly from almost 5 200 in 2015 to roughly 500 in 2016 and also in 2017.

### 5.3. Document fraud in EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries

In 2017, there were 3 282 nationals of the five visa-exempt Western Balkan countries and 54 Kosovo\* citizens reported using false documents on intra-EU/Schengen travel. Most cases were reported by the UK, Italy, Ireland and France.

As regards nationalities, similar to the situation of illegal border-crossings between BCPs at the external borders, the vast majority of false document users from the Western Balkans reported on intra-EU/Schengen travel were Albanians, accounting for 94% of all cases reported in 2017.

Albanian fraudulent document users on intra-EU/Schengen travel were largely reported by the UK, Italy, France and Ireland (roughly 62% of all 3 147 detections of Albanian document fraudsters on intra-EU/Schengen travel). While most cases

detected by the UK and Ireland were on entry to their territories, Italy and France reported most document fraud cases by Albanians on exit from their territories, as the mentioned nationals were trying to largely reach the UK.

In fact, the UK and Ireland were the top targeted destinations for roughly 85% of Albanian document fraudsters detected on intra-EU/Schengen travel while trying to exit the territories of other EU Member States.

In terms of used fraudulent documents, Albanians seemed to continue preferring Italian, Greek and Romanian travel documents, largely ID cards and, to a lesser extent, passports and border stamps.

Contrasting with the situation of Albanians, Serbs were the second most detected document fraudsters from

the Western Balkan region reported on intra-EU/Schengen travel, with a total of 67 detections in 2017, a number roughly on a par with that registered in 2016. They were mostly reported by Slovenia either on entry or on exit at its land border section with Croatia.

Overall, in 2017 there were 3 636 false documents used by the visa-exempt nationals of the Western Balkan countries (3 570) and Kosovo\* (66) throughout 2017 on intra-EU/Schengen travel, numbers largely similar to those recorded in 2016. Most of these documents were issued by EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries.

At EU level, 75% of the document fraud cases involving citizens of the Western Balkans countries were reported on intra-EU/Schengen movements and only 14% on entry at the external borders.

# 6. Risk of non-regional migrants using the international protection system in the Western Balkans as a way to avoid detention and continue their transit

## 6.1. Description of the threat

There were no major changes in terms of migrants using the international protection systems in the Western Balkans as a way to avoid detention and continue their trips compared with the situation in the previous years, aside from an overall decrease in the number of detections following the closure of the transit corridor in 2016. The situation continued to stabilise throughout 2017.

Specifically, in Serbia in 2016 there were roughly 6 200 registered expressions of intention to claim asylum, while only 232 migrants actually filled in an official application. After expressing their intention to claim asylum, migrants were free to reach reception centres and lodge an official request. Nonetheless, as the statistics show, most of them chose not to follow-up on their expressed intention, although

benefiting from accommodation and support in the centres.

Over the past two years, irregular travel across the region has become more difficult, resulting in a number of migrants becoming stranded at certain locations along the route.

In 2016, many of the migrants completely refused to be accommodated in Serbian reception centres even organising protests, demanding that the borders be reopened and making it clear that they did not wish to remain in Serbia. Similar protests were reported in Bulgaria, following the reinforcement of the border with Serbia at the end of July 2016.

Nonetheless, as migrants realised that the borders would not be reopened, a large number of these persons accepted accommodation in the reception centres in Serbia. As a result, the largest share of the migrants estimated to be in

Serbia in 2017 were reportedly accommodated in reception facilities, although some still opted for other locations (abandoned buildings, parks, or areas close to the northern common borders with Croatia and Hungary) in the hope that they would succeed in continuing their journeys.

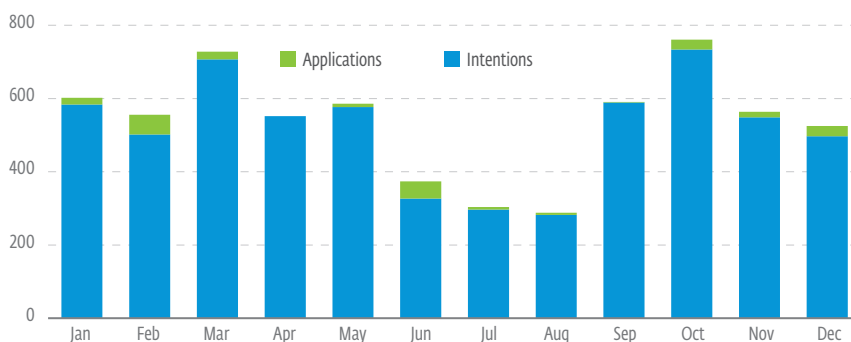
Given the enhanced security measures introduced at Serbia's common borders with Hungary, Croatia and Romania it is likely that migrants stranded in Serbia contributed to the observed migration pressure on the respective sections, often through unsuccessful attempts to cross the border illegally.

It is also likely that after failing to move on, the migrants would go (return) to reception centres in order to rethink their travel options and/or benefit from the support the state authorities offer. It remains possible that such registrations are made under different claimed identities and/or in different centres, a practice which could lead to higher estimates of so-called new arrivals to Serbia.

The estimated number of stranded migrants in Serbia fluctuated between 7 800 in January to 4 300 in December 2017. This decrease could be explained through different factors, such as successful crossings to EU Member States, legal admission into Hungary's transit zones (at a rate of roughly 50–100 per week in 2017) or reorientation towards other travel alternatives (e.g. reverse flows, transit to other regional countries).

Figure 33. Ratios between expressed intention and official applications for asylum in Serbia indicate misuse of international protection system

Number of migrants entering the stages of asylum procedure in Serbia in 2017



Source: Serbian data reported in the WB-RAN, as of 2 February 2018

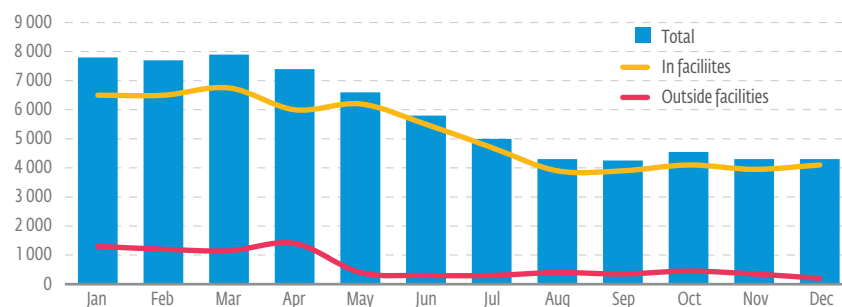
Whichever the case, the decreasing presence of migrants even in the cold season (when persons would be more prone to make use of reception facilities) indicates a decrease in the attractiveness of the Serbia-centred migration route through the Western Balkans.

A situation similar to the one reported by Serbia began being observed by the authorities in Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the end of 2017 and into January 2018. In essence, more of the migrants began expressing their intention to claim asylum upon being detected for illegal border-crossing and then absconded from the reception facilities in order to continue their transit.

Reacting to this situation, Montenegro passed a new *Law on International and Temporary Protection of Aliens*, which entered

Figure 34. **Decreasing estimated migrant presence in Serbia**

Migrant presence on Serbian territory by type of accommodation



Source: UNHCR Serbia Snapshot – January 2018

into force in January 2018. This act foresees that applicants for protection can be accommodated in closed reception facilities or in special facilities at BCPs for the duration of the procedures. Interestingly, the adoption of the new act

apparently led to fewer migrants applying for protection in Montenegro at the beginning of 2018 and opting to be processed as irregular migrants even if they run the risk of being subjected to removal orders/readmission procedures.

# 7. Risk of firearms and drugs smuggling at the regional and common borders

## 7.1. Firearms

### 7.1.1. The border dimension – description of the threat

In an attempt to create a better understanding of the international dimensions of firearms smuggling in the region and work towards more efficient solutions through coherent and concerted regional approaches, the Frontex Risk Analysis Unit together with representatives of Western Balkan countries, taking part in the WB-RAN, agreed to set in place a regular data exchange related to cases of firearms possession/smuggling detected by the border police forces of the respective countries.

Provisional definitions/indications and a standardised reporting template were created for the collection of the most relevant information related to cases of firearm detection. Following these definitions/indications, the information covering 2015 was collected as a result of an organised workshop. The process then continued with monthly reporting by participating countries throughout 2016 and 2017.

As it is still a new initiative, these definitions/indications, template and the aggregated data are still subject to improvement, based on practical experience, further discussions/proposals from participants but also depending on available resources.

### Overall detections at the borders

In 2017, the border police forces of the six regional Western Balkan countries continued to detect weapons (firearms,<sup>20</sup> gas-powered<sup>21</sup> and converted<sup>22</sup> weapons), and ammunition during their activities. At the regional level the reporting lists 360 weapons and parts, 15 grenades, 25 339 rounds of ammunition, 3 kilograms of explosive material, 12 kilograms of explosive precursors and two detonators, all detected in 209 cases.

Compared with 2016, the number of rounds of ammunition rose by 51%, the number of gas weapons/parts registered a six fold increase while the number of firearms/parts and the quantity of explosive substances or precursors decreased (by 9% and by 35 kilograms, respectively). Meanwhile 2016 only registered one converted weapon, no detonators and no grenades (2, 2 and 15, respectively, in 2017).

In order to put the assessment into perspective, it should be kept in mind that the volume of detections in both 2016 and 2017 remained relatively low considering the total length of the borders in the region.

Serbia continued to rank first in terms of detections of weapons/parts, and ammunition, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

<sup>20</sup> Firearm – factory-made as a firearm

<sup>21</sup> Gas weapon – a firearm using compressed gas or low quantity of gunpowder; generally not meant to be lethal

<sup>22</sup> Converted weapon: initially designed as Gas / Signal / Alarm / Pneumatic and modified into normal firearm (shooting projectiles). Also includes reactivated weapons (from previously disabled firearms) or weapons modified in any other way (ex. semi to fully automatic etc).

At the regional level, among the detected firearms/parts 46 were handguns (pistols and revolvers), 53 long rifles or shotguns and nine automatic weapons. Additionally, for eight of the parts detected it remained unclear to what type of firearms they belonged. Of the 242 gas weapons/parts, 69 were handguns, while 173 were long rifles. Both of the converted weapons detected were handguns.

### Most detections occurred at BCPs

In 2017, most detections occurred at BCPs. Specifically, BCP detections contained 21 101 rounds of ammunition, 240 gas weapons/parts, 54 firearms, one converted weapon, three grenades and two explosive detonators, 71 rifle scopes and two parts of handguns, whose nature remained undetermined at the moment of reporting.

Overall, Serbia's BCPs at the borders with Bulgaria, with Croatia and Hungary reported most weapons in 2017, largely on entry to Serbia.

Four firearms and 1 197 rounds of ammunition were reported at the green borders throughout the region. Such detections are likely linked to hunters without licences or hunting out of season as the detected firearms were all long rifles/shotguns. The authorities also detected 44 firearms, two gas-powered weapons, one converted handgun, 12 grenades, 12 kilograms of substances considered explosive precursors and 2 946 rounds of ammunition in their area of responsibility (generally within 30 km of the borders) but not in the immediate vicinity of the borders. Additionally, 14 firearms, 95 rounds of ammunition and 3 kilograms of explosive substances were detected outside the usual area of responsibility (more than 30 km inland).

### Mostly citizens of Western Balkans countries detected with prohibited goods by the border police forces

In 2017, 227 persons were detected carrying the reported prohibited goods, while in eight cases the perpetrators remained unknown (as the goods were hidden in common compartments of trains or abandoned in the border areas). The largest part (170) were citizens of the countries in the region, followed by EU nationals (38), Turkish nationals (14) and other third-country nationals from outside the region (4). Additionally, one detected person's nationality remained undetermined at the time of reporting.

Interestingly, most Turkish nationals detected carrying prohibited goods (largely gas-powered or firearm handguns) were reported by Serbia on entry from Croatia and Bulgaria or on exit to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Some Turkish nationals were also reported while trying to leave the region through the airports. They generally had stranded rounds of ammunition in their luggage, and only one handgun was reported in such a case.

#### Gas-powered weapons imported into the region

Gas-powered weapons are not specific to the Western Balkans region but they are imported legally or illegally especially from Turkey or Bulgaria where the legislation on such goods is not as restrictive. Such weapons are attractive because they can be used for hunting small game and possibly because they come at a lower price than regular hunting rifles.

#### 7.1.2. Firearms within the region – description of the threat (focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro)

Analytical documents developed by representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro participating in WBRAN and kindly shared with Frontex

Figure 35. Large quantity of gas-powered weapons detected at BCP Gradina/Kalotina in April 2017 ('Grizli 83-2' – 5.5 mm, 'Grizli striker' – 4.5 mm rifles (left) and 'Zoraki' – 9 mm handguns (right))



Source: Serbian Border Police

RAU, updated last year's assessment related to the presence/trafficking of firearms in the two respective countries going beyond detections at the border.

As regards firearms, **Bosnia and Herzegovina** mainly remains a country of origin and, to a lesser extent, a transit country. Moreover, it is estimated that a significant number of people continue to illegally possess different types of firearms and explosives left behind after the war ended despite various collection and destruction campaigns which occurred over the past years.

Available information indicates that the state authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are focusing their efforts on countering the security issue of firearms in the country even in cooperation with regional neighbours. In this regard, state authorities reported the collection and destruction of 10 801 weapons in 2017, the highest quantity in years.<sup>23</sup>

During two years (2015 and 2016) no cases of stealing weapons from military warehouses were registered, and only one such occurrence was reported in 2017.

Investigations conducted by the authorities over 2014–2015 have indicated that in some cases weapons end up being trafficked towards other Western

Balkan countries or Western Europe, however, not in large-scale shipments. Detections at BCPs continued to show mostly citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina transporting small quantities of firearms hidden in their own vehicles.

The **Montenegrin** authorities have continued to observe that persons have relatively easy access to firearms, especially criminal groups who are more prone to disobeying laws. Most of the weapons detected were catalogued as small and light weapons, although even rocket-propelled grenades could be found on rare occasions over the past few years. Most of the firearms come from past conflicts in the region.

The Montenegrin authorities estimate that between 2006 and 2013 several tonnes of explosive substances and thousands of electric detonators were stolen from the Polix factory in Berane (Montenegro). No recent reports of similar cases have emerged but there is a possibility that the explosives, which were stolen in the past, are still being traded on the black market. Nonetheless, no such cases have been detected in the past two years.

In 2016, Montenegro supported by the United Nations Development Programme ran a campaign ('Respect life, surrender weapons'), which, following temporary impunity granted to persons who gave up illegally owned weapons,

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.sarajevotimes.com/10801-pieces-weapons-collected-destroyed-bih-2017/>

Figure 36. Action in Montenegro to destroy excess ammunition in 2017



Source: www.me.undp.org

gathered impressive quantities of such goods (roughly 2 000 weapons and parts, 191 mines and explosive devices together with over 17 000 rounds of ammunition). The results of this campaign indicated the general good faith of the population, while still highlighting the prevalence of firearms in Montenegro.

Montenegro continued its efforts to tackle the prevalence of ammunition and weapons on their territory<sup>24</sup> also in 2017. Open-source information indicates that between January and September 2017, state authorities destroyed roughly 1 050 small weapons and parts as well as over 36 000 rounds of ammunition.

Over 21 000 rounds of ammunition were destroyed in an event which was seen as a joint effort by the Police, Ministry of Interior and citizens. In the framework of this event, the Ministry of Interior destroyed rounds of ammunition confiscated during its activities, as well as surrendered by the citizens during the 'Respect life, surrender weapons' campaign of 2016.

24 <http://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/presscenter/articles/2017/10/20/from-its-citizens-to-law-enforcement-montenegro-united-in-destroying-its-ammunition.html>

## 7.2. Drugs

### 7.2.1. Description of the threat at the borders

In terms of illicit drug trafficking at the regional level, cannabis remained the most commonly detected substance, most of it grown in the region and trafficked internally or to the EU. Available information indicates that over 23 tonnes of this drug were detected by Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\* in 2017, with most of these reporting countries registering increases over the previous year.

The same countries also reported detections of heroin, but generally the seized quantities were small (roughly 35 kg). Other drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines were also reported, but the quantities detected at the borders were small.

Albania's mild climate, isolated rural areas together with experienced groups involved in drug smuggling have all contributed to the country's status as a long-time top regional producer of cannabis.<sup>25</sup>

In the first quarter of 2014, the Albanian authorities performed complex

25 <http://globalganjareport.com/node/767>

operations aimed at disrupting the cultivation and processing of cannabis and other drugs in the areas of Lazarat and Dukagjin.

As a result, the production capacity of local groups was reduced and, along with it, the detection of smuggled drugs shrank as well. Namely, most of the cannabis detected by Albania at its borders in 2014 was reported before the mentioned interventions and the quantities reported in the following months of 2014 and in 2015 were smaller.

In 2016 and 2017, however, criminal groups appeared to have steadily regained their cultivation capabilities.

This fluctuation in production capabilities affected the price of cannabis on the black market. Specifically, as production was significantly impaired by the police actions of 2014 in Albania, Montenegro (an important transit country for regionally produced cannabis) observed that the price for one kilogram of cannabis went from roughly EUR 500 in 2013 to EUR 1 000 in 2015 signalling scarcity in the market.

In 2016 and 2017 the observed price for one kilogram of cannabis dropped to EUR 350–400 signalling that criminal groups regained production capabilities and the cannabis availability on the market increased despite larger quantities being confiscated (over 23 tonnes at regional level in 2017).

Similar to the situation in the past, the Albanian authorities detected most of the smuggled cannabis at the country's sea border both at and between BCPs.

Continuing their efforts against cannabis production, the Albanian authorities adopted a national plan against cultivation and trafficking of cannabis in 2017. Under this plan, all national law enforcement agencies, international partners and local authorities work together to stem criminal groups' abilities to grow and traffic this narcotic. Also under the plan, Albanian border police conduct checks in the area of competence near the borders detecting and destroying a number of cannabis plants being cultivated in open areas.

## 8. Statistical annexes

### LEGEND

**Symbols and abbreviations:** n.a. not applicable  
: data not available

**Source:** WB-RAN and FRAN data as of 22 January 2018, unless otherwise indicated.

**Note:** 'Member States' in the tables refer to FRAN Member States, including both 28 EU Member States and three Schengen Associated Countries

Annex Table 1. **Overview of indicators**

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year
<b>WB-RAN Indicator</b>				
Illegal border-crossing between BCPs	2 081 366	270 595	26 979	-90
Illegal border-crossing at BCPs	1 140	1 552	2 775	79
Facilitators	1 980	1 155	763	-34
Illegal stay	8 208	7 105	10 513	48
Refusals of entry	41 800	45 437	53 088	17
Asylum applications <sup>°</sup>	218 559	106 472	73 877	-31
False travel-document users <sup>°°</sup>	931	855	1 636	91

<sup>°</sup> Applications for asylum for EU Member States include all applications received in the territory of the countries and are not limited to those made at Western Balkan borders.

<sup>°°</sup> Reported by the six regional partners



## Annex Table 2. Illegal border-crossings between BCPs

Detections reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring countries by top ten border sections and top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Top Five Border Sections</b>						
						<b>Nationality</b>
Hungary-Land-Serbia	218 918	26 831	8 828	-67	33	Pakistan (46%)
Albania-Land-Greece	12 315	7 133	8 154	14	30	Albania (91%)
Greece-Land-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	704 865	126 835	3 786	-97	14	Pakistan (24%)
Romania-Land-Serbia	958	648	1 481	129	5.5	Iraq (45%)
Croatia-Land-Serbia	557 551	103 716	1 452	-99	5.4	Afghanistan (29%)
Others	586 759	5 432	3 278	-40	12	Albania (13%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						
						<b>Border section</b>
Albania	12 782	7 594	8 552	13	32	Albania-Land-Greece (86%)
Pakistan	32 549	9 939	5 528	-44	20	Hungary-Land-Serbia (73%)
Afghanistan	314 406	47 991	4 594	-90	17	Hungary-Land-Serbia (62%)
Syria	709 920	53 110	1 470	-97	5.4	Greece-Land-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (27%)
Iraq	141 536	23 731	1 281	-95	4.7	Romania-Land-Serbia (52%)
Kosovo*	23 958	1 249	1 274	2.0	4.7	Hungary-Land-Serbia (39%)
Algeria	1 524	956	921	-3.7	3.4	Greece-Land-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (28%)
Turkey	592	758	508	-33	1.9	Bosnia and Herzegovina-Land-Croatia (63%)
Iran	20 196	2 135	473	-78	1.8	Greece-Land-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (37%)
Libya	340	347	379	9.2	1.4	Greece-Land-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (33%)
Others	823 563	122 785	1 999	-98	7.4	Hungary-Land-Serbia (22%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2081 366</b>	<b>270 595</b>	<b>26 979</b>	<b>-90</b>	<b>100</b>	

\* 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.

## Annex Table 3. Illegal border-crossings at BCPs

Detections reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring countries, top five border sections and top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Top Five Border Sections</b>						
						<b>Nationality</b>
Croatia-Land-Serbia	50	643	1 574	145	57	Afghanistan (86%)
Albania-Land-Greece	83	72	498	592	18	Albania (60%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina-Land-Serbia	3	3	118	n.a.	4.3	Afghanistan (56%)
Albania-Land-Montenegro	3	33	89	170	3.2	Syria (40%)
Hungary-Land-Serbia	213	329	65	-80	2.3	Afghanistan (71%)
Others	788	472	431	-8.7	16	Albania (22%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						
						<b>Reporting Country</b>
Afghanistan	425	580	1 535	165	55	Serbia (62%)
Albania	147	138	401	191	14	Albania (82%)
Pakistan	10	108	175	62	6.3	Serbia (48%)
Syria	331	185	125	-32	4.5	Albania (74%)
Algeria	11	101	112	11	4.0	Albania (79%)
Iraq	73	44	68	55	2.5	Albania (35%)
Kosovo*	49	31	57	84	2.1	Kosovo* (25%)
Libya	0	19	42	121	1.5	Albania (55%)
Germany	0	7	29	314	1.0	Montenegro (100%)
Turkey	2	19	25	32	0.9	Croatia (32%)
Others	92	320	206	-36	7.4	Montenegro (35%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 140</b>	<b>1 552</b>	<b>2 775</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>	

\* 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.

#### Annex Table 4. Facilitators

Detections reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring countries, place of detection and top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Place of Detection</b>						
						<b>Nationality</b>
Land	1 781	1 001	584	-42	77	Serbia (27%)
Inland	188	153	163	6.5	21	Serbia (74%)
Sea	5	0	12	n.a.	1.6	Albania (50%)
Air	6	1	4	n.a.	0.5	Turkey (100%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						
						<b>Reporting Country</b>
Serbia	1 090	547	278	-49	36	Serbia (85%)
Albania	179	119	138	16	18	Greece (66%)
Greece	98	74	76	2.7	10	Greece (99%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	31	21	42	100	5.5	Bosnia and Herzegovina (86%)
Bulgaria	174	131	36	-73	4.7	Bulgaria (75%)
Turkey	14	12	21	75	2.8	Albania (24%)
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	95	69	19	-72	2.5	Greece (42%)
Not specified	56	49	19	-61	2.5	Serbia (53%)
Croatia	16	5	13	160	1.7	Bosnia and Herzegovina (38%)
Romania	22	9	13	44	1.7	Romania (85%)
Others	205	119	108	-9.2	14	Serbia (25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 980</b>	<b>1 155</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>-34</b>	<b>100</b>	

#### Annex Table 5. Illegal stay

Detections reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring countries, place of detection and top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Place of Detection</b>						
						<b>Nationality</b>
Land	4 601	3 850	7 057	83	67	Serbia (61%)
Inland	3 170	2 492	3 426	37	33	Serbia (15%)
Not specified	437	763	30	-96	0.3	Russia (13%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						
						<b>Reporting Country</b>
Serbia	2 932	2 814	4 862	73	46	Hungary (87%)
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	428	397	1 511	281	14	Hungary (91%)
Albania	631	789	1 024	30	9.7	Hungary (60%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	271	253	403	59	3.8	Hungary (43%)
Kosovo*	163	142	279	96	2.7	Hungary (34%)
Montenegro	140	117	244	109	2.3	Hungary (70%)
Turkey	271	263	204	-22	1.9	Bosnia and Herzegovina (32%)
Italy	66	104	174	67	1.7	Albania (88%)
Russia	100	134	153	14	1.5	Montenegro (52%)
Afghanistan	228	234	130	-44	1.2	Serbia (45%)
Others	2 978	1 858	1 529	-18	15	Serbia (44%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 208</b>	<b>7 105</b>	<b>10 513</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>	

\* 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.

## Annex Table 6. Refusals of entry

Refusals reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring countries, border type and top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>						<b>Nationality</b>
Land	37 146	42 167	48 965	16	92	Albania (48%)
Air	4 571	3 193	4 036	26	7.6	Turkey (37%)
Sea	83	77	87	13	0.2	Italy (1.8%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						<b>Reporting Country</b>
Albania	10 685	12 928	23 423	81	44	Greece (7.2%)
Serbia	7 113	6 757	7 479	11	14	Hungary (66%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5 069	4 972	4 346	-13	8.2	Croatia (7.6%)
Turkey	3 898	3 073	2 640	-14	5.0	Serbia (26%)
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	1 805	1 699	2 069	22	3.9	Hungary (4.1%)
Kosovo*	1 522	1 389	1 766	27	3.3	Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.9%)
Not specified	982	5 016	911	-82	1.7	Serbia (9.8%)
Germany	962	715	678	-5.2	1.3	Serbia (6.5%)
Afghanistan	64	290	613	111	1.2	Croatia (9.1%)
Bulgaria	1 091	815	592	-27	1.1	Serbia (6.2%)
Others	8 609	7 783	8 571	10	16	Serbia (4.2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>41 800</b>	<b>45 437</b>	<b>53 088</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	

\* 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.

## Annex Table 7. Applications for Asylum (FRAN)

Applications for international protection reported by Western Balkan and top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						<b>Reporting Country</b>
Syria	77 182	35 890	19 368	-46	26	Greece (85%)
Iraq	17 358	14 697	12 545	-15	17	Greece (6.3%)
Afghanistan	54 726	25 703	11 089	-57	15	Greece (6.8%)
Pakistan	17 753	10 882	9 958	-8.5	13	Greece (9.0%)
Albania	1 321	1 469	2 461	68	3.3	Greece (100%)
Turkey	429	780	2 132	173	2.9	Greece (8.6%)
Iran	2 290	3 183	1 849	-42	2.5	Greece (7.1%)
Algeria	783	1 825	1 496	-18	2	Greece (5.3%)
Bangladesh	4 922	1 565	1 495	-4.5	2	Greece (9.3%)
Palestine	1 204	1 140	1 405	23	1.9	Greece (9.4%)
Others	40 591	9 338	10 079	7.9	14	Greece (8.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>218 559</b>	<b>106 472</b>	<b>73 877</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>100</b>	

## Annex Table 8. Persons using false documents

Detections reported by Western Balkan countries, border type, document type, fraud type, top ten nationalities

	2015	2016	2017	% change on prev. year	Share of total	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>						<b>Documents</b>
Land	556	637	982	54	60	Albania (20%)
Air	307	187	535	186	33	Italy (24%)
Sea	63	31	104	235	6.4	Albania (25%)
Not specified	5	0	15	n.a.	0.9	Albania (20%)
<b>Document Type</b>						<b>Documents</b>
Passports	545	509	948	86	58	Albania (25%)
ID cards	183	189	374	98	23	Italy (40%)
Residence permit	51	58	124	114	7.6	Germany (19%)
Visas	36	37	121	227	7.4	France (24%)
Unknown	9	33	40	21	2.4	Italy (35%)
Stamps	107	29	29	0	1.8	Greece (66%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>						<b>Documents</b>
Albania	370	359	490	36	30	Albania (48%)
Kosovo <sup>o</sup>	159	200	351	76	21	Serbia (23%)
Iran	11	12	223	n.a.	14	France (17%)
Turkey	60	40	150	275	9.2	Turkey (31%)
Serbia	103	62	122	97	7.5	Serbia (44%)
China	0	0	39	n.a.	2.4	China (41%)
Afghanistan	10	1	37	n.a.	2.3	Pakistan (51%)
Pakistan	17	20	29	45	1.8	Pakistan (41%)
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	11	20	22	10	1.3	the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (55%)
India	3	1	21	n.a.	1.3	Greece (29%)
Others	187	140	152	8.6	9.3	France (13%)
<b>Top Ten Countries of Issuance of Documents</b>						<b>Persons</b>
Albania	266	266	253	-4.9	15	Albania (93%)
Italy	74	81	237	193	14	Albania (59%)
Serbia	110	68	142	109	8.7	Kosovo <sup>o</sup> (56%)
Greece	88	44	113	157	6.9	Albania (66%)
France	21	17	103	506	6.3	Iran (36%)
Germany	18	25	73	192	4.5	Kosovo <sup>o</sup> (33%)
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	25	47	73	55	4.5	Kosovo <sup>o</sup> (68%)
Bulgaria	40	57	70	23	4.3	Turkey (39%)
Turkey	38	12	51	325	3.1	Turkey (90%)
Kosovo <sup>o</sup>	42	32	43	34	2.6	Kosovo <sup>o</sup> (95%)
Others	209	206	478	132	29	Iran (25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>1 636</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100</b>	

<sup>o</sup> 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.

## Annex Table 9. Detections of firearms

Detections of firearms at the borders reported by Western Balkan countries

	Weapons									Explosives						Ammunition pieces			Persons detected			Number of cases		
	Firearms			Gas			Converted			Explosives (kg)			Grenades			2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017									
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12 995</b>	<b>16 793</b>	<b>25 339</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>209</b>

Top nationalities involved	2015	2016	2017
SRB	20	33	55
BIH	15	20	43
Kosovo*	27	24	27
ALB	8	8	18
TUR	7	13	14
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	8	8	14
MNE	6	11	13
BGR	4	6	11
DEU	2	4	5
FRA		1	4
HRV		2	3
Others	20	24	20
Unknown author	11	7	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>235</b>

\* 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.

## EXPLANATORY NOTE

Detections reported for EU Member States for indicators Illegal border-crossing between BCPs, Illegal border-crossing at BCPs, Refusals of entry and Persons using false documents are detections at the common land borders on entry only. For Facilitators/people smugglers, detections at the common land borders on entry and exit are included. For Illegal stay, detections at the common land borders on exit only are included. For Asylum, all applications (land, sea, air and inland) are included.

For Western Balkan countries, all indicators – save for Refusals of entry – include detections (applications) on exit and entry at the land, sea and air borders.

Each section in the table (Reporting country, Border type, Place of detection, Top five border section and Top ten nationalities) refers to total detections reported by WB-RAN countries and to neighbouring land border detections reported by EU Member States.



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