

RAS

REFUGEE AID SERBIA

FIELD

Field Report

05.02. - 20.02.2018.

Overview

From February 5th to February 20th, **RAS Field Team has been in contact with 116 new arrivals**. The most represented groups among new arrivals were citizens of Iraq (28%), Pakistan (28%) and Iran (21%).

During this period, **154 interviews were conducted** and information was provided to 183 persons.

During the reporting period, in coordination with Praxis and MSF, **22 targeted non-food items (NFI) distributions were carried out** as a result of which 27 persons were provided with 35 items of clothing and blankets.

The need for NFIs is the most urgent in cases of new arrivals, who are sometimes forced to wait several days before they get registered by the police. These persons arrive in Belgrade not adequately prepared to spend nights outdoors, without blankets or sleeping bags, and with no legal options or financial means to seek shelter in private accommodation.

Although the number of persons in need of targeted NFI distribution is relatively small (approximately 2-3 persons a day), it is clear that the items in demand are essential for the prolonged exposure to winter conditions in Serbia.

In the first two weeks of February, **67 persons were referred to services provided by other NGOs**

and state institutions - in most cases Praxis, for assistance related to registration process, and MSF for medical assistance and mental health support.

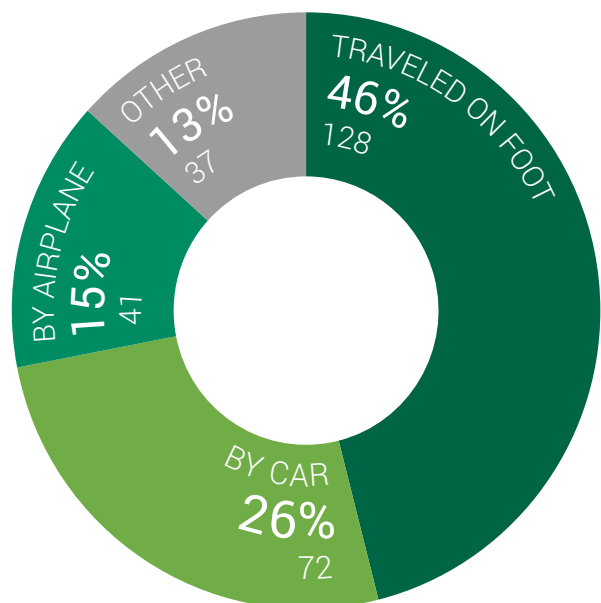
RAS field team has provided protection related services to 71 individuals in 18 cases in cooperation with Praxis, MSF, Info Park, and CRPC.

Smuggling with vehicles on the rise

During the past weeks, **increasing number of migrants stated that they have been attempting to cross into Hungary, Romania and/or Croatia by being hidden inside vehicles**. Reemergence of this mode of travel was noticed by RAS field team during the interviews focused on border crossing attempts. Since 2016, this method was used regularly only in Romania, where 19% (522) of prevented attempts to enter Hungarian territory involved the use of vehicles in 2017.

Modes of travel

Among those interviewed, **most persons have traveled on foot** for at least one, significant proportion of their route to Serbia.



Modes of travel used to reach Serbia, February 2018

However, in last three months, **travel by airplane has become increasingly represented among new arrivals** as a consequence of growing presence of Iranian nationals seeking asylum.

Influx of Iranian citizens

Since the visa liberalization arrangement with the Islamic Republic of Iran - which enables the

citizens of Iran to legally reside in Serbia up to 30 days¹ - **increasing number of Iranian nationals started arriving in Belgrade and gathering in community centers in the Savamala area.** Proportion of Iranian citizens among those expressing intent to seek asylum in the Republic of Serbia has been increasing gradually since October 2017, when they comprised 9.9% of recorded new arrivals, through November and December 2017, when they represented 22.7% and 34%, respectively². Besides those expressing intent to seek asylum in Serbia, a notable number of Iranian citizens present in the Savamala area reside in hotels and hostels.

Influx of Iranian asylum seekers, who usually arrive by plane, is creating a sharp division among migrants in Serbia, as their experience differs dramatically from those who are going through traumatic experiences of a several-week-long journey from their countries of origin such as Afghanistan or Pakistan.

This situation represents a new challenge to NGOs in the field due to the ambiguity of the formal status of Iranian nationals. There is no reliable way for service providers to determine if and when the legal status of Iranian citizens changed³.

This phenomenon might be the reason for the discrepancy between the numbers of migrants traveling along the Balkan route reported by international actors, such as Frontex⁴ and UNCHR⁵, and those being reported by local NGOs⁶.

Bypassing Belgrade

Since the demolition of the abandoned structures behind the Belgrade bus station, **Belgrade is not anymore an exclusive congregation point for all newly arrived migrants.** During past several months, alternative routes have been established between the southern and northern/western borders that bypass Belgrade completely.

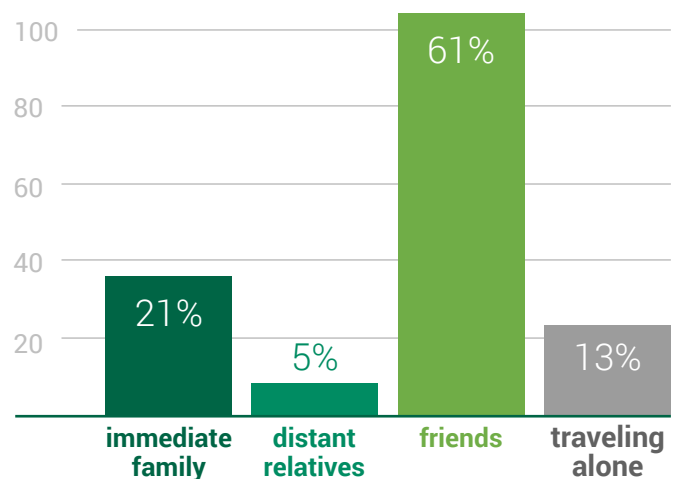
After crossing into Serbia, **a considerable proportion of migrants go directly towards Hungarian, Croatian and Romanian border where they temporarily reside either in make-shift shelters or transit centers - often without registration - frequently at-**

tempting to cross into EU member states. Only after reaching the tipping point of exhaustion - due to harsh weather conditions, hardships from continuous unsuccessful border crossing attempts, lack of food, adequate shelter or clothes - they go to reception facilities and Belgrade community centers where **their arrival is recorded, with significant delay.** Likewise, same person can also be recorded twice, first by NGOs or institutions in the north or west, and then again, few weeks or days later, in Belgrade.

It is clear that **inter-organizational efforts are required to establish a timely and accurate system of new arrivals recording and provision of appropriate assistance, without delay.**

Group composition

Among those interviewed, **more than a half traveled with friends,** accompanied with 5-6 persons on average.



Company structure of interviewed persons, February 2018.

Push-backs

Although the decreasing numbers of prevented attempts of irregular border crossings would suggest that the number of attempts has sharply gone down, it seems that the low number of prevented entries and push-backs has to do much more with the fact that most recent border-crossing attempts

1 Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in the Islamic Republic of Iran - <http://tehran.mfa.gov.rs/consularservices/text.php?subaction=show-full&id=1348565352&ucat=17&template=MeniENG&>

2 According to Praxis' Protection Monitoring Report on Migration for October, November, and December of 2017 - <https://www.praxis.org.rs/index.php/en/praxis-in-action/migration>

3 Significant number of Iranian citizens present during the day in community centers give unclear answers about the purpose of their visits.

4 300 persons in January 2018, along the whole Western Balkan route - <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/migratory-flows-in-january-arrivals-in-spain-and-greece-down-rise-in-italy-0TIMSL>

5 282 total observed arrivals in January 2018 in Serbia - <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/61798.pdf>

6 Info Park NGO has recorded 340 newly arrived beneficiaries in Belgrade in January 2018 (as reported in their newsletter - Info Park Bilten #12).

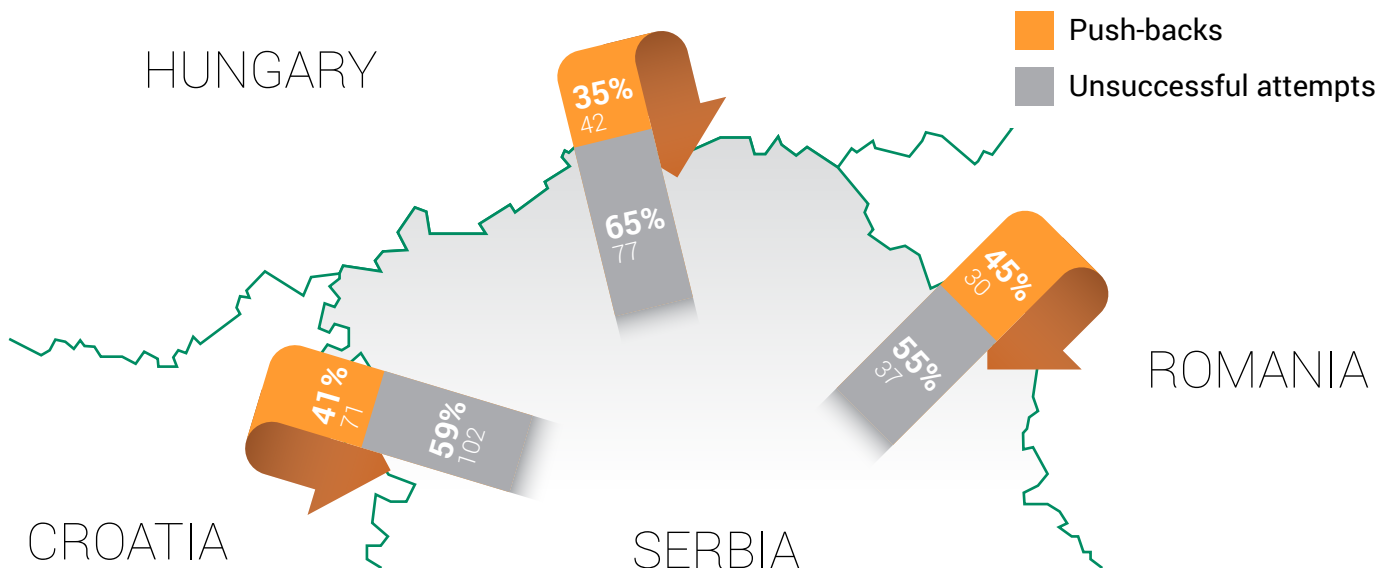
end with giving up before reaching either the border fence or Hungarian territory.

According to the statements given by the people who have attempted to cross into the territories of EU member states in recent weeks, it is clearly implied that the brutal treatment of migrants by the police in previous months is the cause for the growing reluctance among migrants to risk getting in contact with the border security forces, especially when the weather conditions are harsh.

transferred from the islands to mainland during the same time period. On February 15th, camps on **Greek islands hosted 12.563 persons.**

BULGARIA

During January, **154 persons have applied for asylum in Bulgaria⁹**, while 11 persons were granted refugee status and 14 subsidiary protection in 233 completed asylum procedures^{10,11}



Regional developments

TURKEY

From 01.02. to 16.02, **Turkish coast guard prevented 595 persons from illegally reaching Greek islands⁷**, while **407 persons were stopped while attempting to reach Greece over the land border⁸**, along Maritsa river, during the same time period.

GREECE

From 01.02. - 15.02, **440 new arrivals were recorded on Greek islands**, while 691 persons were

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Slobodan Ujić, Director of Service for Foreigners' Affairs, has stated that **Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced a sharp increase in the number of newly arrived migrants in 2018**, but that the situation related to migration crisis is under control.

In the first month and a half of 2018, some 500 new arrivals have been recorded by Bosnian state institutions, with 140 persons being pushed back from the border and 162 being returned to other countries¹² by Service for Foreigners' Affairs.

It was stated that the main route leading towards Bosnia is the "alternative" Balkan route going through Albania, Montenegro and into Herzegovina.

Claims of some NGOs and volunteer groups

7 In 15 separate incidents, during which one suspected smuggler was arrested.

8 In 11 separate incidents, during which 2 suspected smugglers were arrested.

9 112 applicants were from Syria, 22 from Iraq, 12 from Afghanistan, 5 from Pakistan, 1 from Yemen, Tunisia and Turkey.

10 12 refusals, 67 ceased procedures and 129 terminated procedures.

11 Source: Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers - <http://www.aref.government.bg/index.php/en/status-tics-and-reports>

12 50 persons were returned to Serbia (18 persons from Afghanistan, 16 from Pakistan, 11 from Iran, 3 from Serbia and 2 from India).

4 that 100-200 migrants are sleeping rough in Sarajevo and neighboring areas have been disrupted by Bosnian officials, who state that they were unable to confirm the presence of large migrant groups anywhere in Bosnia.¹³

HUNGARY

In a statement from February 16th, **UNHCR has expressed its dismay over recent additional restrictions at border crossing points with Serbia**, resulting in only two asylum-seekers being allowed to enter Hungary per day through its two “transit zones”.

According to UNHCR, by automatic expulsion of persons attempting to cross the razor-wire border fences, Hungary has practically closed its borders to people seeking international protection, in clear breach of its obligations under international and EU law.

Furthermore, **UNHCR has expressed serious concerns at three new legislative proposals submitted by the Hungarian government to the Parliament**

on February 13th, which clearly target organizations that support the arrival or stay of asylum-seekers and refugees.¹⁴

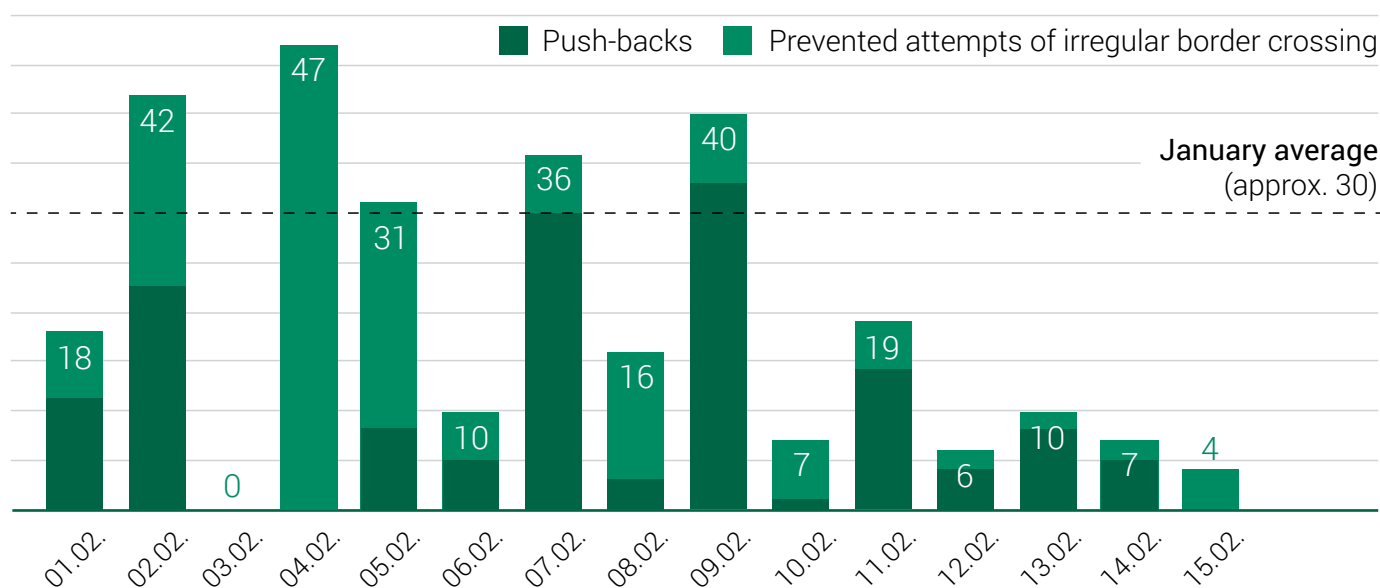
According to the proposed measures, any organization that aids illegal migration would have to register and provide their data to the courts.

Those organizations that receive more funding from outside of Hungary than from within Hungary would have to pay a tax of up to 25 percent of the funds received from abroad.

A further measure would make it possible to issue restraining orders against Hungarians who take part in organizing illegal immigration, which would apply in any area within eight kilometers of the Schengen border.¹⁵

Attached to this report is a **Map of asylum facilities in Serbia** which you are free to use, redistribute and share.

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Prevented attempts of irregular crossing of Serbian-Hungarian border and push-backs to Serbia from Hungarian territory (aggregated numbers)

13 Source: Dnevni Avaz - <http://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/351605/potvrdeno-za-avaz-ba-veliki-priliv-migranata-u-bih-nadlezni-tvrde-da-je-situacija-pod-kontrolom> & <http://alfa.avaz.ba/tv-vijesti/351816/povecan-broj-migranata-u-bih-kapaciteti-nisu-popunjeni>

14 Source: UNHCR - <http://www.unhcr.org/5a86dcff4.html>

15 Source: EU Observer - <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/140590>

ASYLUM FACILITIES IN SERBIA

1	TRANSIT CENTER SUBOTICA	CAPACITY 130	DISTANCE 189km
2	TRANSIT CENTER SOMBOR	CAPACITY 120	DISTANCE 186km
3	TRANSIT CENTER KIKINDA	CAPACITY 240	DISTANCE 132km
4	TRANSIT CENTER PRINCIPOVAC	CAPACITY 250	DISTANCE 126km
5	TRANSIT CENTER ADAŠEVCI	CAPACITY 450	DISTANCE 100km
6	ASYLUM CENTER KRNJAČA	CAPACITY 1.000	DISTANCE 10km
7	TRANSIT CENTER OBRENOVAC	CAPACITY 900	DISTANCE 34km
8	ASYLUM CENTER BANJA KOVILJAČA	CAPACITY 120	DISTANCE 151km
9	ASYLUM CENTER BOGOVAĐA	CAPACITY 200	DISTANCE 70km
10	ASYLUM CENTER TUTIN	CAPACITY 80	DISTANCE 295km
11	ASYLUM CENTER SJENICA (BERLIN) ASYLUM CENTER SJENICA (VESNA)	CAPACITY 150	DISTANCE 250km
12	RECEPTION CENTER PIROT	CAPACITY 250	DISTANCE 310km
13	RECEPTION CENTER DIVLJANA	CAPACITY 280	DISTANCE 285km
14	RECEPTION CENTER DIMITROVGRAD	CAPACITY 90	DISTANCE 331km
15	RECEPTION CENTER BUJANOVAC	CAPACITY 220	DISTANCE 360km
16	RECEPTION CENTER VRANJE	CAPACITY 220	DISTANCE 346km
17	RECEPTION CENTER BOSILEGRAD	CAPACITY 60	DISTANCE 386km
18	RECEPTION CENTER PREŠEVO	CAPACITY 1.000	DISTANCE 381km

