

Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2010

European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union



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1. Introduction

This first annual risk analysis (WB-ARA) has been developed jointly in accordance with the Frontex May 2009 proposal to establish a permanent Western Balkan Risk Analysis Network (WB-RAN) between the Risk Analysis Units of the competent border-control authorities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Frontex Risk Analysis Unit (RAU).

Given the current scope of regular information exchange in the context of WB-RAN and Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN), the WB-ARA focuses mainly on the threat of irregular migration. The public version of the first annual risk analysis is structured around the following main elements: (1) a description of the situation through a set of indicators on irregular migration, (2) a short analysis of the three distinctive irregular migration flows, impacting both the area of Western Balkans and Member States, and (3) forecasts. The restricted version of the analysis describes also factors likely to influence irregular migration in the area of Western Balkans and the EU. It concludes with recommendations aimed at addressing identified vulnerabilities and strengthening border management and border security.

Frontex Risk Analysis Unit would like to thank all FRAN and WB-RAN members, in particular Albania, who was tasked first (according to alphabetical order) to compile the statistical data set.

2. Methodology

2.1. Background

*This refers to the lead country during the reporting year. The first lead country (reporting year 2009), was Albania, according to the alphabetical order of WB-RAN countries' names.

In November 2008, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the following Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia establishing “a system of statistical information exchange on irregular migration and the participation in a regional early warning system”. The MoU was developed within the context of the EU funded AENEAS project and with the support of Frontex. In article 3, the MoU specified that “once per year an overall analysis should be made, carried out by the national body of the country responsible for the collation of all national reports.”* Article 3 is the basis for this report.

Frontex contributed on several occasions to the development of the information exchange system, in particular with respect to templates for the type of data to be exchanged and tools for implementing the exchange. In addition, Frontex contributed to the training of WB-RAN countries' risk analysis experts. The WB-RAN countries agreed to use the slightly adapted FRAN data collection templates (2008 version).

Similarly to the information exchange within the FRAN, the Commission and Frontex set up a secure Internet platform on the European Commission's Circa server to facilitate the exchange of information between the WB-RAN countries and Frontex.

The members of the network have agreed to initiate statistical data exchange from January 2009 and have been meeting at least once a year in a joint meeting with FRAN members. Additional technical meetings were organised when deemed necessary.

2.2. Data collection and additional information

The backbone of this analysis is composed of the WB-RAN countries' monthly statistical data, covering the twelve months of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010 (when indicated). This regular data collection exercise focuses on six key indicators, specific to the threat of irregular migration: (1) detections of irregular border-crossing, (2) detections of facilitators, (3) detections of irregular stay, (4) refusals of entry, (5) asylum applications and (6) detections of false documents. The data collected is categorised by border type (land, air and sea) and by land border sections, i.e. borders with different neighbouring EU Member States. Frontex was also able to analyse reference period data from Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovenia as well as data from other Member States where relevant.

Related reports such as Frontex ARA 2010, FRAN bi-monthly analytical reports and several Frontex Tailored Risk Analyses conducted in 2008 and 2009 were valuable sources of information. A substantial amount of information was also provided through the analysis of the materials collected during different Frontex coordinated joint operations.

The WB-RAN countries were not addressed with specific requests for information for this analysis, but instead, regularly and promptly responded to all Frontex queries related to specific issues.

A preparatory meeting with risk analysis experts from the WB-RAN countries and Frontex was organised on the Agency's premises in order to discuss the overall structure of this analysis and to gather additional information related to the threat of irregular migration affecting both the Western Balkan region and Member States. The WB-RAN countries also provided the analysis of the situation of irregular migration within their countries and common borders with other WB-RAN countries.

Quality of the available data

The quality of the statistical data on irregular migration depends on several factors. For example, the number of detections of irregular border-crossing is not only a function of the number of persons attempting to cross the border irregularly, but also, the effort of border-control authorities to detect them. Increasing detections might be due to a rise in persons attempting irregular crossing or might be a result of enhanced resources to detect such crossings.

The statistical data used for this analysis should not be considered as official statistics but as a means of management of information to support the planning of joint operational activities. The data might therefore occasionally vary from data published officially by national authorities.

The use of slightly adapted FRAN monthly statistical templates from 2008 by the WB-RAN countries created certain compatibility issues between the FRAN and WB-RAN data sets. In particular, detections for irregular border-crossing at border crossing-points (BCPs), as reported by the WB-RAN countries, should be analysed with caution since they also include figures for persons using forged documents and are thus reported twice.

3. Situation at the borders

As described in the Frontex Annual Risk Analysis 2010, reduced job opportunities in the EU (the global economic crisis) and the intensified operational cooperation with some key transit countries in Africa have greatly contributed to decreasing the trend for most indicators used to monitor the migration pressure at the EU external borders.

In the Western Balkan region this trend was also observed in 2009. However, two developments stand out: (1) a counter-cyclical increasing trend of irregular border-crossing was reported by Serbia and Hungary and, (2) irregular border-crossing at the Albanian-Greek border continued to be reported in very high numbers.

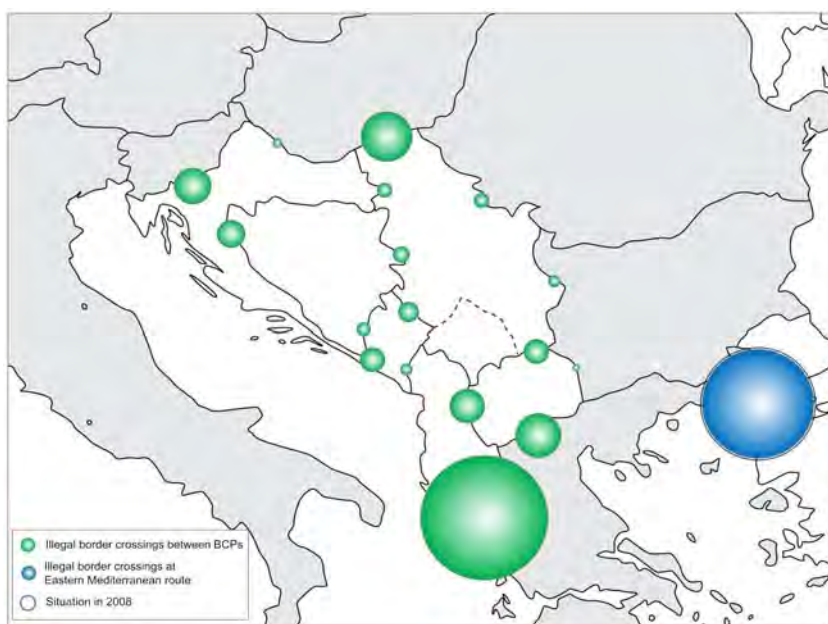
3.1. Irregular border-crossing

Between BCPs*

In 2009, there was a total of 67,419 detections of irregular border-crossing reported by WB-RAN countries and neighbouring EU Member States at their common borders. The map below shows the border sections with the highest pressure. Almost 90% of irregular border-crossing cases were reported at the Greek-Albanian land border, where a vast majority of detected persons were Albanian, crossing the border from Albania to Greece.

*Number of people detected by State authorities when entering or attempting to enter the territory between border crossing-points (BCPs) at external borders.

Detections of irregular border-crossing between BCPs in 2009

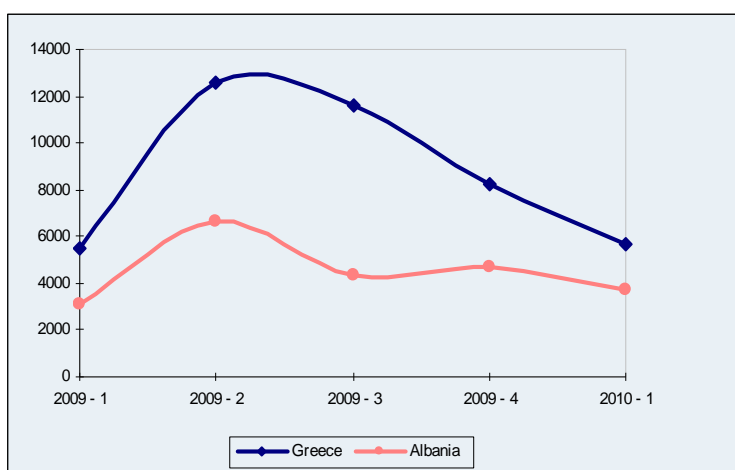


Source: FRAN and WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

Albania-Greece

Two thirds of irregular migrants were detected on the Greek side, while the rest had been stopped already in Albania. Combined, the detections on both sides followed a clear seasonal pattern. There were, however, some important differences between the two sides. For example, detections in the third quarter dropped by 35% on the Albanian side, and only 8% on the Greek side. Moreover, in the fourth quarter, detections on the Albanian side rose by 9%, while the Greek authorities detected almost 30% less irregular migrants compared to the previous quarter.

Quarterly detections of irregular border-crossing at Greek-Albanian border



Source: WB-RAN and FRAN as of 15 May

Comparing 2008 and 2009, detections on both sides followed a rather stable trend, while the figures from the first quarter of 2010 suggest even a 10% increase.

Hungary-Serbia

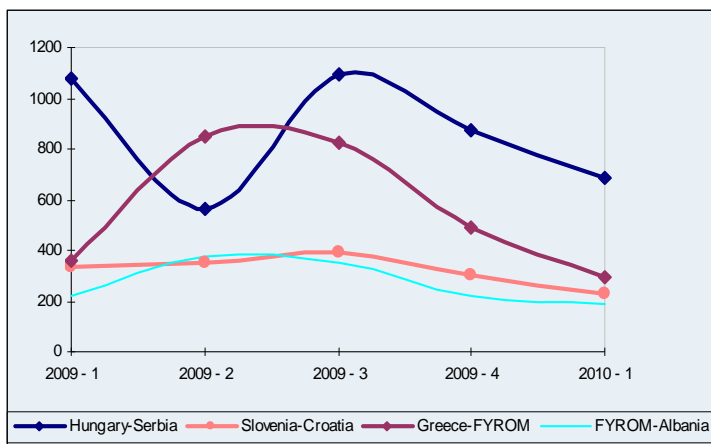
With a total of 3,609 cases of irregular border-crossing, the Hungarian-Serbian border section is ranked second in terms of overall detections (5% of the total). Almost 70% of detections occurred on the Hungarian side of the border, thus indicating a similar overall ratio between detections as in the case of the Greek-Albanian border.

The flow was directed almost exclusively from Serbia to Hungary. The peak was reached in the third quarter (mainly September and October) of 2009. Surprisingly and contrary to the usual seasonal pattern, there was a significant decrease of detections in the second quarter (compared with the first). The decrease was particularly strong on the Serbian side and was mainly linked with significantly lower detections in May 2009.

In terms of yearly trends, available FRAN data suggest a 17% increase of detections on the Hungarian side in 2009, while in Serbia, authorities have reported a staggering 237% increase on their side of the common border. Both developments were somewhat associated with increasing numbers of detected Afghan nationals.

Importantly, however, overall detections in the first quarter of 2010 decreased by 36%, a development linked with visa liberalisation for Serbian nationals. Still, the subsequent changes in the composition of this flow suggest a direct link with secondary movements of irregular migrants from Greece. This phenomenon, including the mentioned increased detections of transiting Afghan nationals, is analysed in detail in another chapter.

Quarterly detections of irregular border-crossing on both sides of different border sections



Source: WB-RAN and FRAN as of 15 May 2010

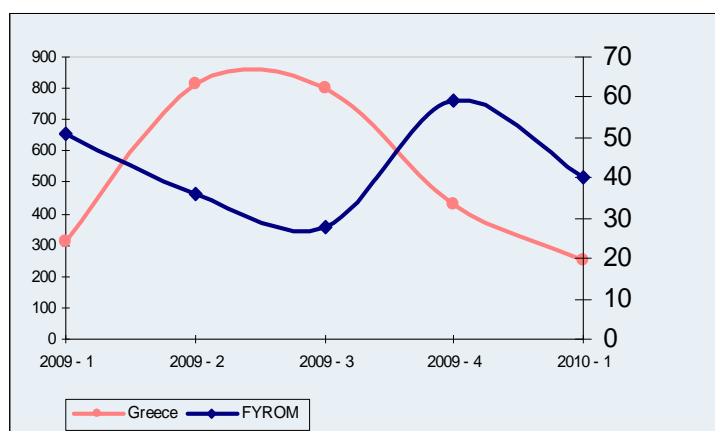
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-Greece

Authorities on both sides of the border between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece reported 2,526 cases of irregular border-crossing out of which only 7% were detected by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. While most migrants attempted to cross irregularly into Greece during the second and third quarter of 2009 (clear seasonality), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia reported an opposite trend, with most migrants detected during the first and the fourth quarter.

In the same way the ratio between detections of a particular nationality differed extensively. Namely, in 2009, the Greek authorities detected altogether 2,167 Albanians (92% of the total), trying to cross from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia into Greece. Authorities in Skopje, on the other hand, reported only two Albanians, suggesting a clear 1:0 ratio. However, with 107 detentions on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia side and 84 on the Greek side, the 2009 ratio for detections of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia nationals trying to cross into Greece seems to be closer to 1:1.

During the first quarter of 2010, detections on both sides of the border decreased by 18% when compared to the reference period in 2009.

Quarterly detections of irregular border crossing at the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-Greece border



Source: FRAN and WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

Croatia-Slovenia

There were 1,376 cases of irregular border-crossing reported by Croatia and Slovenia at their common border in 2009. The figure represents a decrease compared to 2008 (14% in Croatia and 34% in Slovenia). Detections were relatively stable throughout the year, suggesting a less-pronounced seasonality. The vast majority of irregular migrants were detected while trying to exit Croatia and enter Slovenia.

Importantly, more than half (57%) of the detections were reported by Croatia. Combined, 76% of all detected irregular migrants were from the region of Western Balkans.

The decreasing trend in irregular border-crossing continued into the first quarter of 2010, with a combined drop of 32% reported by Slovenia and Croatia.

Albania– the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

There were 1,166 cases of detected irregular border-crossing at the border between Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2009. The vast majority of persons irregularly crossing the border were Albanian nationals (99,9%). Almost 92% of the detections were made on one side of the border, in this case in by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .

Considering the general direction of the flow towards Greece, available figures seem to suggest that one person could be detected several times at different border sections between Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece.



Irregular migrants discovered in a truck in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

At BCPs

The WB-RAN countries and their neighbours reported 1,473 cases of irregular border-crossing at BCPs in 2009. Given the current WB-RAN monthly statistical template's definitions*, the WB-RAN countries also include the use of forged documents in this category. Therefore, relatively high numbers, reported for some nationalities, should not be regarded as a measure for clandestine method of entry (hiding in vehicles).

More than three quarters of detections were reported at land borders. The highest numbers were detected in the third (441) and fourth quarter (384); lower numbers were reported for the first (348) and second quarter (300).

*The category covers incidents of illegal entry or exit whether it was committed by avoiding border checks, by employing some sort of deception (the use of a fraudulent document, hiding in the transportation means etc.) in order to gain entry or exit or by failing to comply with a decision to refuse or prohibit the subject's entry.

Serbian nationals were reported most frequently. Similarly, significant numbers of Turkish nationals were reported by Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia (mainly linked to the use of false documents). Only 80 Afghans were detected by Greece and the WB-RAN authorities at their common BCPs, suggesting a clear preference of Afghan migrants for irregular border-crossing between BCPs.

3.2. Facilitators*

There were 1,015 cases of reported facilitators in the WB-RAN countries and neighbouring FRAN Members in 2009. Unsurprisingly, the highest number of facilitators was reported at the land border between Albania and Greece. However, with one detected facilitator for every 134 cases of irregular border-crossing, the border section between Albania and Greece trails far behind the border section between Croatia and Slovenia, where one facilitator per every seven cases of irregular border-crossing was detected.

Detections of facilitators per number of irregular border-crossing cases, broken down by the main land border sections, 2009

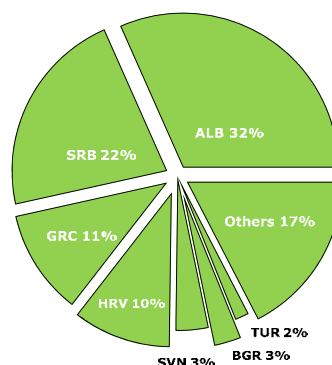
Bordr section	Detected facilitators	Irregular border-crossing	IBC/Facilitators ratio
SLO-HRV	197	1,376	7
BiH-HRV	31	598	19
HUN-SRB	148	3,609	24
MKD-GRC	48	2,526	53
ALB-GRC	421	56,589	134
ALB-MKD	2	1,166	583

Source: FRAN and WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

The table shows the limited need for facilitation of irregular border-crossing from Albania to Greece. Additionally, it also reflects differences in the amount of administrative efforts put into detection of facilitators.

*Person intercepted who have intentionally assisted migrants to illegally enter to or exit from the territory. The data set does not include persons detected for assisting with illegal stay of a foreign national.

Nationality of detected facilitators in 2009



Source: FRAN and WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

3.3. Irregular stay*

*Number of persons who have been detected by proper authorities while not fulfilling, or no longer fulfilling, the conditions for stay or residence during the reference month, be it that they were detected inland or while trying to exit the territory.

A large majority of detected irregular stayers were from WB-RAN countries. Their irregular stay does not represent a major problem, since they are regularly readmitted to their country of origin. Notwithstanding a general decrease in the region, Serbia and Slovenia reported a yearly increase of 283% and 18% respectively.

The main reason for the increase of detections of persons staying irregularly in Serbia is linked with secondary movements of Afghan nationals coming from Greece. The reason for the increase in irregular stay in Slovenia is mainly due to detected overstayers exiting the country.

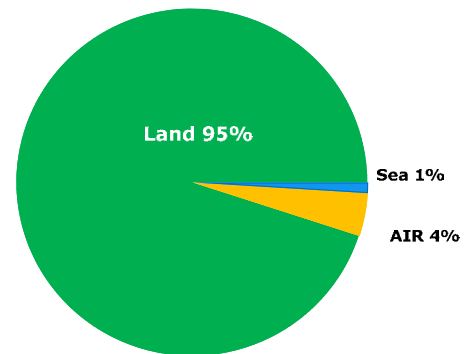
3.4. Refusals of entry*

WB-RAN and neighbouring countries refused entry to 68,450 persons on their joint borders in 2009. The refusals follow a clear seasonal pattern, in line with regular passenger flow variations (summer peaks and winter lows). Similarly to the detection of irregular border-crossing and irregular stay, only Serbia reported a 36% increase of refused persons at its borders.

Nationals of the WB-RAN countries were the most refused group (56% of the total). With more than 12,000 refusals, nationals from Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked the first. They were refused mainly on the border with Croatia. Serbian nationals were reported as the second largest group refused entry. As in the case of nationals from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 40% of Serbian nationals were refused by Croatian authorities at the border with Serbia.

*Number of persons refused entry at the external borders. This category only those persons who were refused entry by proper authorities according to respective national legislation.

Refusals of entry



Source: WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

Importantly, Turkish nationals were by far the main refused nationality at the air borders of WB-RAN countries, with 1,269 detections or 45% of the total in 2009. Most of them were refused by Croatia, followed by Serbia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Estimated refusals of entry per 100,000 passengers on the WB-RAN countries borders, 2009

	Passengers	Refusals of entry	Number of refusals/100,000 passengers
Serbia	46,953,261	21,735	46
FYR of Macedonia	11,658,417	3,283	28
Montenegro	10,785,499	2,020	19
Croatia	141,383,447	23,563	17
Bosnia and H.	51,432,186	4,874	9
Albania	10,125,469	471	5
Total	272,338,279	55,946	21

Source: WB-RAN (as of 15 May) and April 2010 preparatory meeting

3.5. Detections of false documents*

In 2009, WB-RAN countries detected 864 false documents and 852 persons using them. Figures show that Serbian nationals represent 40% of the total, followed by nationals of Albania (16%) and Turkey (15%).

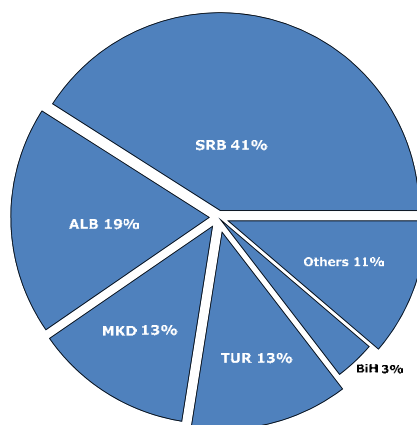
Serbia reported the highest numbers of false documents, although the detections on their borders decreased by more than 50% compared to 2008. A decrease of false documents detection was also reported by other WB-RAN countries. It is likely that the trend is linked to a decrease in regular passenger flow.

Serbian nationals were mostly detected at the border section between Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia using Serbian documents. Serbian travel documents are abused most frequently (19% of the total).

*Number of persons who were detected by authorities during border checks at BCPs who attempted to use false travel documents, false visas or false permissions to stay etc. for the purpose of entering or exiting the territory.

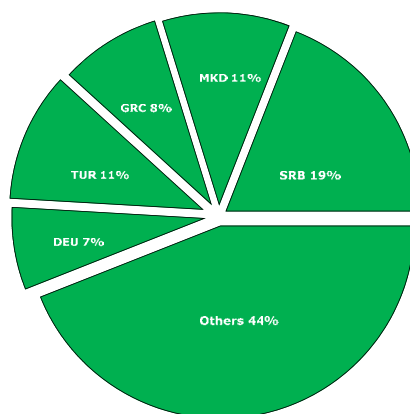
The detection of forged documents is relatively small in comparison with the passenger flow of estimated 272 million passengers crossing the WB-RAN borders in 2009. This low level of detections signals limited need for document abuse given that a vast majority of regular passengers originate from the region itself (visa free travel)

Nationality of false document users



Source: WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

Origin of false documents



Source: WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

4. Analysis

Analysis of the available statistical data, additional information provided by the WB-RAN countries and relevant Frontex-coordinated joint operations clearly points to the existence of three distinctive irregular migration flows, impacting both the area of the Western Balkans and EU Member States. The distinction between the three is based on the size, composition, direction, number of affected countries and main modus operandi.

*Kosovo under UNSCR 1244

In terms of the overall size, the irregular migration flow, composed mainly of Albanians from Albania (and Kosovo*), is by far the most important. It is driven by economic necessities and seasonal work. In terms of border management, this flow affects mainly Albania and Greece and to a much lesser extent the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and Italy.

A transiting flow by land from Greece to Hungary (and further towards other European countries), composed of migrants from southern Asia, Middle-East and Africa, represents an increasingly growing threat to the integrity of the borders in the Western Balkan region and internal security/migration policies in the EU. It clearly highlights several vulnerabilities related to the management of common borders, asylum procedures and return operations, both in Greece and in the Western Balkans. Therefore, it is discussed in more detail as an “issue in focus”.

The third distinctive flow is much smaller in size but quite diverse in terms of modus operandi and the number of affected border types. Its main characteristic is linked to the fact that the Western Balkan region is itself considered as the entry point into Europe. The flow consists largely of Turkish nationals, arriving in the Western Balkans by air as legal travellers (visa free regime) and later continuing to the EU, either clandestinely, with false documents, or through the green borders.

Overview table, summarising the three distinctive irregular flows, impacting both the area of the Western Balkans and Member States

	Estimated relative share	Composition	Modus operandi	Main affected countries	Border type	Trend
Transiting by land from Greece	10%	South Asia, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa	green border crossing, limited or no facilitation, hidden in vehicles	Greece- FYROM-Serbia- Hungary- destination Member States	land	increasing
Albanian irregular migration	88%	Albania, Serbia (Kosovo)	green border crossing, limited or no facilitation	Albania- Greece, Italy	land, sea	stable
Entry point WB	2%	Turkish	legal travel, subsequent irregular border-crossing, use of false documents	WB-RAN countries, Slovenia,	air, land	stable

4.1. Albanian irregular migration

Albanian migration (legal and irregular) to the Member States is economically driven, circular in character and focuses mainly on the low-skilled, low-wage and informal sectors of the economy. It has a strong seasonal character, closely connected to the availability of work in the Greek informal labour sector. Albanian male migrants are mainly engaged in construction or agriculture, whereas women are employed in domestic work.

The main destination countries for Albanian migrants are two of the country's neighbours: Greece and Italy. Greece is preferred by Albanians from the south and south-east areas populated mainly by Albanian Orthodox Christians and ethnic Greeks. Meanwhile, Italy is a more preferred destination for Albanians from the central and western areas.* The 2009 FRAN data for irregular stay (and exit) clearly confirms the preference for Greece and Italy, since 93% of detected Albanian irregular stayers are reported by the two Member States.

*IOM, Migration in Albania: A Country Profile 2008

As indicated by the detection figures, Albanian irregular migrants mainly use a direct land route to Greece, although some also transit through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Conversely, migrants frequently reach Italy on a regular ferry from Greece. A small proportion of irregular migrants also transits Montenegro, Serbia (Kosovo), Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia before trying to enter Italy.

From Albania to Greece

The irregular migration pressure at the Greek-Albanian border is by far the highest compared to other border sections in the Western Balkans. Combined, the detections for irregular border-crossing on both sides of the border reached almost 90% of the regional total in 2009. In the first quarter of 2010 this share rose almost to 95%.

Furthermore, detections of Albanian nationals at the Greek side of the border constituted a massive 66% of total detections at the external land borders of the EU in 2009. However, multiple crossings by one person are common, therefore, the number represents cases, not persons.

Often facilitators lack the capacity to plan and execute a complete trip from Albania to the intended destination in Greece. Instead, each step is done on an ad hoc basis. Moreover, only 26 facilitators were detected by Albanian authorities in 2009, clearly indicating either non-existent or unconsolidated and non-hierarchical nature of the facilitation.

From Albania to Italy

In comparison with Greece, irregular flow to Italy is relatively small. The use of speedboats for clandestine entry, a typical modus operandi in the 1990s, has been practically reduced to zero due to a moratorium on the use of navigable means in Albanian territorial waters and Albanian-Italian joint patrolling of the sea.

Therefore, to reach Italy, Albanian irregular migrants mostly use regular ferry connections, either from Albania or from Greece (indirect route). It is likely that the direct route is not the preferred option, given the existence of border checks on the Albanian and Italian side of the sea border. This notion is further corroborated by relatively low numbers of refusals for Albanian nationals in Italian ports.

Choosing the indirect option usually entails irregular crossing of the Albanian-Greek border in the southern Albanian district of Seranda, from where migrants continue to the nearby Greek port of Igoumenitisa, or travel further south to the port of Patras.

A portion of irregular migrants from Albania specifically choose to go to Italy through Greece due to perceived easiness of travel in the Schengen area and the availability of fraudulent travel documents in Greece.

From Albania to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and further towards Greece

Albanian nationals are able to travel to the neighbouring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia without visa obligation since April 2008. After entering, either legally or irregularly, local groups transport Albanian migrants closer to the border with Greece (Gevgelija region*), where accommodation in small hotels is provided.

They later cross the border with Greece in a similar fashion, either on foot or in a vehicle. As an indication of its size, this flow represented less than 3% of the total Albanian irregular flow to Greece during the first three months of 2010. In terms of trend, the first quarter 2010 detections suggest a moderate decrease compared to the reference period in 2009.

*Gevgelija has a population of 15,685 and is located in the very southeast part of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, at the country's main BCP with Greece (Bogrodica-Evzoni). This BCP lies on the main motorway, linking Skopje, Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana with Thessaloniki in Greece.

Facilitation services in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Criminal investigations of Albanian irregular migration have demonstrated the following elements:

- the use of taxi companies for transportation close to the border with Greece;
- unlicensed taxi drivers often cross the border;
- small motels or hotels close to the border with Greece are used as "safe houses";

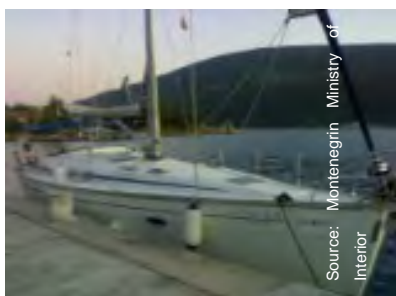
Irregular migrants using unlicensed taxis to cross irregularly to Greece



Transiting Montenegro or Serbia (Kosovo) and further towards the EU

Albanians from the territory of Kosovo and Albania are able to travel to Montenegro without visa obligation since November 2009. Migrants therefore often enter Montenegro legally with cars or buses. Once there, most opt for the land route and transit Montenegro using public transport. They irregularly cross the border with Croatia (or Bosnia and Herzegovina) in smaller groups.

Some Albanian migrants are also believed to use regular ferry links between the port of Bar (Montenegro) and the port of Bari (Italy), either hiding in trucks and buses or using falsified documents. According to Montenegrin authorities, Albanians have also been detected attempting to cross the Adriatic on vessels carrying 10-20 persons.



Sailing boat "Lutalica", detected in Montenegrin territorial waters, carrying 19 Albanian irregular migrants towards Italy

Other reported option involves routing through or starting from the territory of Kosovo. The route goes either through Croatia and Slovenia or, in the case of Albanians from Kosovo, through Hungary. In some cases, migrants are escorted until their destination for prices that amount to 2,800 EUR.

In 2009, 67,415 Albanian citizens were readmitted based on a readmission agreement with the EU. The figure, represented a substantial 11% decrease, compared to 2008. The vast majority of readmitted persons came from Greece.

4.2. Western Balkans as an entry point for migration transiting Turkey

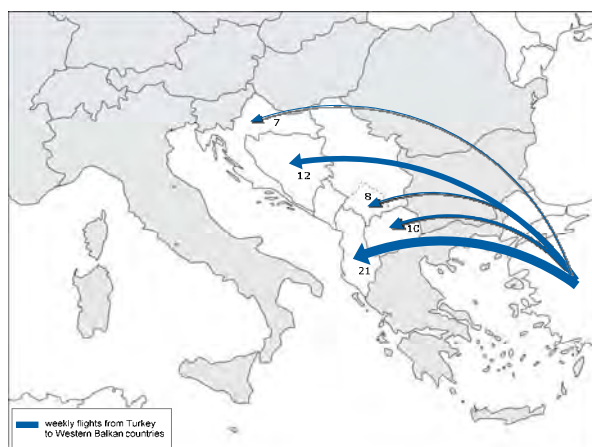
WB-RAN countries, with the exception of Serbia (but including the territory of Kosovo), share a visa-free travel regime with Turkey. In terms of direct regular passenger flow, there are currently around 48 weekly flights from Turkey to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia (Kosovo).

Unsurprisingly, Turkish nationals are by far the most refused nationality at the external air borders of WB-RAN countries, on the average accounting for more than 50% of the quarterly share. Compared to refusals at land borders, refusals of Turkish nationals at air borders follow a less seasonal pattern, indicating a fairly constant passenger flow. Refusals at land borders are mainly limited to the Serbian-Bulgarian border, reflecting the annual holiday travel of Turkish nationals working in the EU.

As indicated on the map, Tirana airport stands out with three daily flights. Considering the relationship between the number of regular passenger flow and the number of refusals, Albania should record the highest refusal rate for Turkish nationals. However, Croatia ranked first with 38% share of the total refusals in 2009 at air borders of the WB-RAN countries.

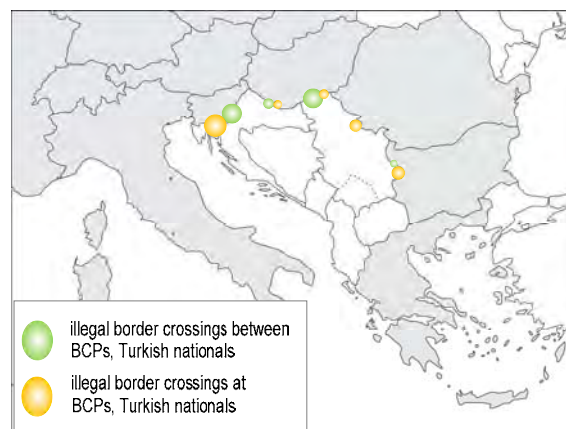
In summary, Turkish migrants extensively use legal travel options to enter the area of the Western Balkans by air. Once there, they use public transport to travel by land. Irregular border-crossing into the EU is facilitated by small, flexible and adaptable criminal groups. Usually, migrants are split into groups of up to four persons.

Weekly regular flights from Turkey to the Western Balkans



Source: Open sources

Irregular border-crossing of Turkish nationals in 2009



Source: WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

4.3. Transiting flow by land from Greece

As described in the Frontex Annual Risk Analysis 2010, the current global economic crisis and the linked reduced job opportunities in the EU have significantly contributed to lower the numbers of irregular border-crossing at the external borders of the EU in 2009 (compared to 2008). At the Serbian-Hungarian border, however, detections increased. Secondary movements from Greece to other European countries largely explain this counter-cyclical increase.

Consequently, the size of the transiting flow is a function of the number of newly arriving irregular migrants in Greece (from Turkey). Most of the migrants detected there claim Afghan origins.

Afghans—before reaching Greece

Available information suggests that a large majority of migrants from Afghanistan usually transits Iran, either directly or through Pakistan, before splitting into two main flows. One follows the land route via Iran and Turkey to Greece, while the other leads across the sea to the Gulf, via Oman or the United Arab Emirates. Those trying to reach Greece have a long-term stay in mind, while the second group is likely to engage in a yearly circular migration pattern.

In Turkey, facilitation networks compete in providing different transportation means to cross into Greece, depending on the amount of money paid. Operational information indicates that Turkish cities of Izmir and Didim were (in 2009) important staging areas for the sea crossing to Greece. In the beginning of 2010, a shift towards land borders has been observed.

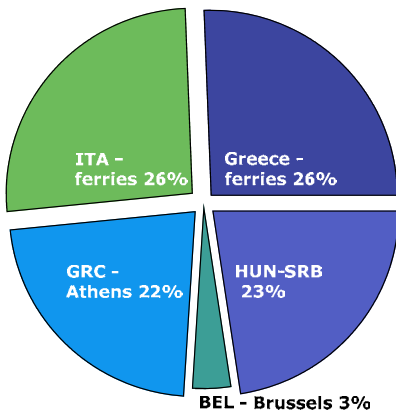
Afghans—the profile

Most of Afghan irregular migrants detected in Greece or in the WB-RAN countries tend to come from middle-income background, with earning potential in Afghanistan but are nevertheless driven by aspiration of higher wages in Europe. They are likely to have diaspora ties in Europe, both when it comes to obtaining information prior to migration and finding work upon arrival. When in Greece, they often try to generate income to finance their migration to the UK or other final destination country.

Exiting Greece

Chart on the left shows that in 2009 most Afghan irregular migrant exited Greece through intra-Schengen flights, using false documents or on board Italy-bound ferries. Roughly one third has opted for the Balkan land route option, transiting the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia before reaching Hungary.

Detections of Afghan irregular migrants broken down by exit options, 2009



Detections of Afghan nationals at the Serbian-Hungarian border (on both sides) became significant in March 2009, five months after irregular border-crossing of Afghans at the Greek-Turkish borders had peaked in October 2008. This in turn points to the amount of time spend in Greece before making an attempt (or multiple attempts) to reach other EU Member States.

In addition, after the closure of the Patras camp in Greece (July 2009), detection figures in Serbia and Hungary were rapidly increasing until October 2009, clearly indicating a so-called “squeezing balloon”^{*} or displacement effect.

Source: FRAN and WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010, Greek and Italian Ministry of Interior

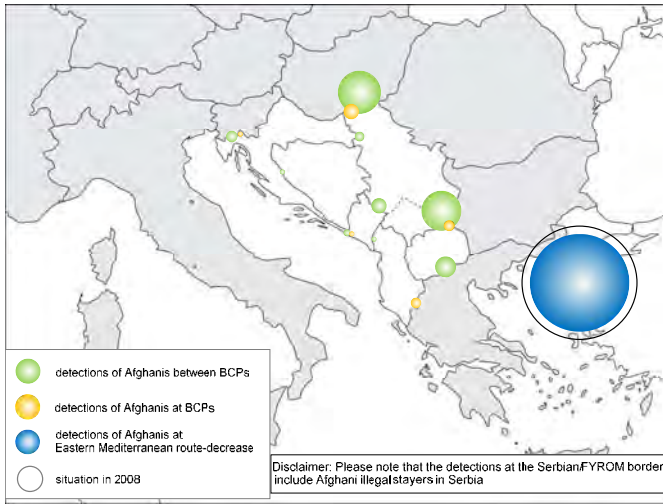
^{*}This effect describes what happens when a latex balloon is squeezed: it will bulge elsewhere. In the context of the Greek the “squeezing balloon” means the following: if more migrants arrive, more will have to leave Greece through the three main exits. So, if one exit (port of Patras) is significantly affected, the other one (Western Balkans route) will have to balance out the difference.



Make-shift camp for migrants in Patras

Source: unher.org

Detections of irregular border-crossing of Afghans in 2009



Source: FRAN and WB-RAN as of 15 May 2010

The Balkan route—modus operandi

Operational information suggest that detected Afghans usually carry handwritten maps showing the detailed route from Greece to Hungary and further to Austria or other Member States.

Irregular migrants use public transport and often carry important amounts of money sewn into their clothing. They also rely on small-time operators, linked together in flat and unconsolidated networks. By definition, small operators face low threat to their businesses from competitors and from law enforcement. Moreover, return procedures are usually not initiated, reducing further return risk for detected irregular migrants.

The city of Bitola in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is believed to be the first main gathering point after irregularly crossing the border between from Greece. Migrants usual stay close to the main transport route (Pan-European corridor 10*) and continue through Bujanovac (Presevo valley in Serbia) and Belgrade to finally reach Subotica, a city close to the border with Hungary. There, irregular migrants gather into groups of up to 20 persons and cross the green border into Hungary.

Handwritten instructions found in Serbia

*The Corridor 10 is one of several pan-European corridors. It runs between Salzburg in Austria and Thessaloniki in Greece. The corridor passes through Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece.



Source: Serbian Ministry of Interior

Main characteristics of the Western Balkan route, from the migrants' perspective:

1. Accessibility
2. Limited need for higher-priced smuggling services
3. Negligible financial investment
4. Negligible law enforcement and return risk
5. Multiple attempts

False declaration of nationality (nationality swapping)* is, like in the case of Greece-Turkey borders, becoming an important issue affecting the transit route from Greece and Serbia further on to Hungary. Detecting and effectively countering the practice of nationality swapping requires specialised language/cultural analysis and debriefing techniques.

*Nationality swapping is a practice by which migrants deliberately lie about their real nationality and/or prior residence in order to frustrate return procedures after illegal border crossing. It also allows migrants to further their possible asylum claim. Often, migrants are advised to conceal their real identity and country of origin either by facilitators or friends and family that had travelled the route before them.



Frontex guest officers debriefing irregular migrants.

5. Environmental scan

Visa liberalisation for Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro

New biometric passport holders from the three mentioned countries have been able to travel to the EU without visa obligation since 21 December 2009. Following the decision, a significant increase of unsubstantiated asylum claims was recorded in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden.

The increase was largely attributed to ethnic Albanian or Roma community members from Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, travelling legally to the mentioned EU Member States and citing socio-economical reasons for their asylum claims.



Failed asylum seekers from Serbia waiting in front of Belgian asylum office

Available information suggests that most failed asylum seekers are willing to return home, either voluntarily or in accordance with the existing readmission agreements. Reports from Belgium and Serbia indicate that at least 500 Serbian failed asylum seekers have already returned from Belgium to Serbia.

Similarly, Norway has introduced a fast-track procedure (48 hours) and has forcefully returned 78 failed asylum seekers in March 2010 alone. Following the return, a 90% weekly decrease of asylum applications from Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was recorded in Norway.

The Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia publicly addressed the issue by highlighting negative consequences of unsubstantiated asylum claims. In addition, its border police strengthened exit controls, while the Ministry of Interior initiated investigations into possible criminal involvement of travel agencies.

Possible visa liberalisation for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have made progress in improving passport security, strengthening border controls, reinforcing the institutional framework to fight organised crime and corruption, as well as in external relations and fundamental rights.

*For Albania, the remaining open benchmarks relate to: the development of a strategy and policy to support the reintegration of Albanian returnees; the strengthening of capacities of law enforcement authorities and the effective implementation of the legal framework for the fight against organised crime and corruption, including through the allocation of adequate human and financial resources; the effective implementation of the legal framework in the area of the confiscation of organised crime assets.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, the remaining open benchmarks relate to: the strengthening of capacities of law enforcement and the effective implementation of the legal framework for the fight against organised crime and corruption, including through the allocation of adequate human and financial resources; the progressive implementation of the action plan from March 2010 on the establishment of electronic data exchange between police and prosecution bodies; the harmonisation of entity level and Brcko district criminal codes with the state-level criminal code.

In April 2010 the European Commission carried out a thorough assessment of the progress achieved by Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conclusions allowed the Commission to propose visa free travel for the two countries. The proposal entered into regular procedure at the end of May 2010.

Both countries still have to make progresses in some areas where shortcomings have been identified*. The European Commission will continue to monitor the efforts over the summer months of 2010 in order to allow the Council and the Parliament to make a final decision in autumn. The earliest possible date is most likely 7 October 2010 (EU Justice and Home Affairs Council). Regionally, only the territory of Kosovo remains excluded from the visa free package.

Schengen enlargement

Bulgaria and Romania are likely to become parties to the Schengen agreement in March 2011. Thus, the area of free travel with no internal controls will expand to the shores of the Black Sea, making the two Member States more attractive for irregular migration flows transiting through Turkey. This eventuality should lead to a reduction of the transiting flow from Greece towards Hungary.

6. Outlook

6.1. Albanian irregular migration

The Albanian strategy concerning irregular migration is characterised mainly by a limited need for planning and/or facilitation of irregular entry, short distances, low relative costs and shorter duration of migration (circularity).

This means that dismantling facilitator networks is not a particularly valid strategy given the limited need for facilitation or the fact that facilitators are usually local residents. Therefore, the economic situation in Greece and possible visa liberalisation for Albanian and Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens will likely impact the flow in the widest way.

To be precise, should irregular employment opportunities in Greece be substantially reduced in the context of the current political, fiscal and economic situation in the country, the irregular flow from Albania will temporarily be reduced. It is however difficult to estimate the size of this reduction.

Possible lifting of visa requirements to travel in the EU could bring about significant changes affecting the patterns of Albanian circular migration. Specifically, a gradual but significant reduction of irregular border-crossing pressure at the Albanian-Greek border section is to be expected.

Visa liberalisation could also affect refusals of entry at external land borders of the EU for Albanian (and Bosnia and Herzegovina) nationals. They are likely to increase in Greece, Slovenia, Italy and Hungary, mainly as the consequence of the increased regular passengers flow.

The Albanian Government has already started an information campaign, aimed at addressing the possible abuse of legal travel channels. By publicly raising the issue, it wants to avoid similar problems related to the abuse of asylum procedures as witnessed in the case of Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia nationals. In addition, the Albanian Government is also raising awareness regarding the conditions and length of stay provisions.

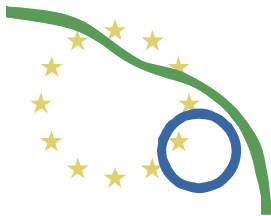
6.2. Transiting flow by land from Greece

The transiting flow through the Balkan route should be mainly viewed in the context of developments at the Greek-Turkish borders (Eastern Mediterranean route). Additionally, movements of migrants leaving Greece by air or ferry should also be taken into consideration when trying to estimate the future behaviour of the mentioned flow.

A combination of reduced job opportunities in the EU and effective return policy or police cooperation with transit countries in Africa (Libya, Senegal, and Mauritania) has significantly increased the relative importance of the Eastern Mediterranean route. Elsewhere in the EU arrivals have dropped considerably; In Italy (Central Mediterranean route) from 4,500 in the first quarter of 2009 to 147 in the same period of 2010 and in Canary Islands (Western African Route) from 1,400 in the first three months of 2009 to no arrivals in 2010.

In the absence of effective return policy and operational cooperation with Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean route is now the single largest entry point into the EU for non-European irregular migrants. This has and will continue to have a direct effect on the Balkan transiting route, both in terms of the size and the composition of future transiting flow.

Therefore, the composition of irregular migration flow along the Balkan route will largely correspond to the changes of the flow at Greek-Turkish border. Likewise, it will increasingly be affected by the issue of false declarations of nationality. Related difficulties with identifying countries of origins are likely to expose additional vulnerabilities related to return procedures. Partial displacement towards Croatia and Slovenia is likely.



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