

# Global Monthly Surveillance Report

## Making a Difference for Refugee Children in Europe

ISSUE #7 – FEBRUARY 2017

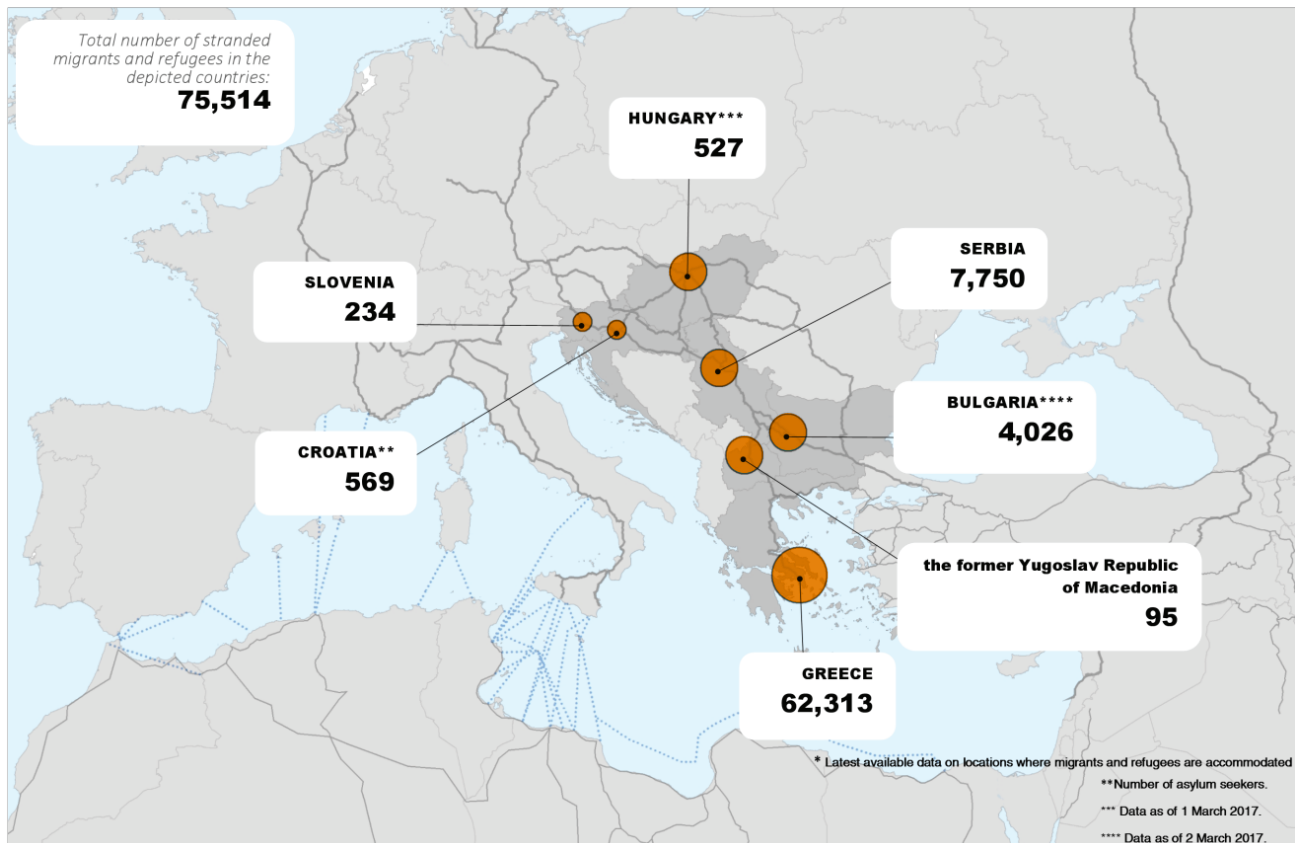
### 1. Migration trends, facts and figures

At the end of February 2017, the IOM reported 75,514<sup>1</sup> people stranded in Central and South Eastern Europe, showing an increase compared to the previous month (74,909<sup>2</sup>). The real number is likely to be higher since the IOM only captures people registered within national databases<sup>3</sup>. The period was marked by cold weather (similar to January) that exacerbated the hardship endured by the most vulnerable people, particularly those without suitable accommodation.

#### OVERVIEW: STRANDED MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Stranded migrants and refugees in Greece, FYR of Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria\* (28 February 2017\*)

Disclaimer: Base Map Source: ESRI. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.



#### In Tdh countries of intervention

In Albania, 10 people irregularly crossing the Albanian border with Greece were apprehended in February and were consequently returned to Greece<sup>4</sup>. There is still limited information available about the situation in Albania and inadequate transparency regarding the way irregular migration is handled.

1 <http://migration.iom.int> Mixed Migration flows in the Mediterranean 1 February 2017 – 28 February 2017

2 <http://migration.iom.int> Mediterranean Flows Compilation Report No2 9 February 2017

3 see more details about Bulgaria, Macedonia and Hungary below

4 <http://migration.iom.int> Mixed Migration flows in the Mediterranean 1 February 2017 – 28 February 2017



In **Bulgaria**, in February, 385 asylum applications were lodged, 87 persons were granted refugee status, 84 subsidiary protection, 243 received a negative decision, 2,108 were ceased and 1,437 procedures were terminated<sup>5</sup>. The Bulgarian Ministry of Interior (Moi) apprehended 772 persons, the vast majority of whom (550) for attempting to exit the country irregularly<sup>6</sup>. There was no relocation from either Greece or Italy to Bulgaria during this month.

In **Hungary**, there was no information published this month by authorities or civil society organisations in relation to asylum and immigration trends in February.

In **Macedonia**, in February, 56 new arrivals were registered by the authorities<sup>7</sup>. However, data provided does not reflect the situation in the field. According to Tdh/La Strada, people are still transiting through the country every day, movements which remain unaccounted for in official statistics.

## 2. Legal and political developments on asylum

### 2.1. At regional level

February was a month of intense policy and legislative activity at the European Union level. Several developments are likely to impact negatively upon the situation of refugee and migrant children, particularly concerning return procedures and effective access to international protection procedures.

In line with previous alarming developments (e.g. the recommendation to resume transfers of children and families from EU Member States to Greece despite the opposition of the vast majority of international humanitarian agencies operating in Greece<sup>8</sup>), the **European Commission continued to adopt a restrictive interpretation of the EU Return directive and its associated policy**, in the development of a Recommendation<sup>9</sup> and a Communication outlining an action plan<sup>10</sup> to make the return of refugee and migrant children and families to their countries of origin more effective. If adopted, both initiatives will encourage Member States to curtail asylum seekers' procedural rights and to increase the use of detention on the basis of immigration status<sup>11</sup>.

On the relocations front, as of February 28th 2017, 13,546 people were relocated (9,610 from Greece and 3,936 from Italy), which represents an increase of 3,418 persons since we last reported the figure (dated 18 January 2017). Despite the increasing pace of relocation, the EC expressed concern that the total number of relocated persons represented only 14% of those formally foreseen in the EU Council Decisions (respectively 63,302 and 34,953) and set to be attained in September 2017. Countries from Central Europe continue to be low as Hungary, Poland and Austria refuse to participate in the relocation scheme, while the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovakia have accepted less than 2% of the total number of persons they are legally

5 <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=21>, applications and decisions taken 01.01.93 28.02.2017, March 14th 2017. The difference in between the ceased and terminated procedure is not explained on the State Agency for Refugees. Tdh contacted them for clarifications. As of March 27th we did not yet receive an answer.

6 <http://migration.iom.int/> Mixed Migration flows in the Mediterranean 1 February 2017 – 28 February 2017

7 Ibid

8 See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20161208/recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_resumption\\_of\\_transfers\\_to\\_greece\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20161208/recommendation_on_the_resumption_of_transfers_to_greece_en.pdf)

9 See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302\\_commission\\_recommendation\\_on\\_making\\_returns\\_more\\_effective\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302_commission_recommendation_on_making_returns_more_effective_en.pdf)

10 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302\\_a\\_more\\_effective\\_return\\_policy\\_in\\_the\\_european\\_union\\_-\\_a\\_renewed\\_action\\_plan\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302_a_more_effective_return_policy_in_the_european_union_-_a_renewed_action_plan_en.pdf)

11 Both documents were adopted and published on the Official Journal of the EU during the first days of March



bound to welcome<sup>12</sup>.

On the other hand, the **resettlement** scheme appears to be functional with 14'422 persons resettled from mainly Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to 21 EU MS and associated countries. Again, CEE States have been criticized by the EC for their reluctance to participate in the scheme, as opposed to associate countries (Liechtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland, which have already met their commitments)<sup>13</sup>.

## 2.2. In selected countries

While no noteworthy legislative or policy developments occurred in **Bulgaria and Macedonia during the reporting period, the month of February was marked by intense legislative activity in both Hungary and Albania.**

In **Albania**, on 18 February, the Albanian Parliament voted a new law on Child Protection and Children rights.

In **Hungary**, a draft bill was submitted by the Hungarian government to the Parliament on 14 February, which will allow the authorities to automatically detain asylum seekers in transit zones and to summarily return asylum seekers to the Serbian border from anywhere in Hungary. The law allows authorities to detain all adult asylum seekers on its territory, including families with children and unaccompanied children aged 14 to 18, in transit zones, without any way for them to challenge the detention. It would also permit the authorities to summarily return all asylum seekers and other migrants in the country without permission to the Serbian border from any part of Hungary. This extends countrywide the July 2016 law that authorizes police to return to the border irregular migrants apprehended within eight kilometres of the border<sup>14</sup>. The Law was unfortunately approved on 7 March<sup>15</sup>.

## 3. Child Protection issues: vulnerability situations encountered during the period

In **Macedonia**, the situation around the gray zone<sup>16</sup> and the villages of Lojane and Vaksince in the northern part of the country is still of concern. Migrants and refugees continue to report abuse, and limited access to services and protection further puts children at risk<sup>17</sup>.

On 9 February, a group of 49 people were returned from Tabanovce to Greece under a bilateral agreement<sup>18</sup>. However, according to local staff, the transfer was not done in a respectful and humane way. The authorities informed the group that they had to pack their belongings at 11.00 pm and gave them two hours to do so, after which they had to wait in the common area until 3.30 am. The local social workers reported that families who had been staying for almost one year in the center were very anxious, and that children were crying. Prior warning would have mitigated the stress experienced by the group.

12 See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302\\_tenth\\_report\\_on\\_relocation\\_and\\_resettlement\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302_tenth_report_on_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf)

13 Idem

14 See <http://www.helsinki.hu/en/draft-law-tramples-asylum-seekers-rights-eu-should-look-to-halt-plan-to-hold-asylum-seekers-in-transit-zones/>

15 <http://www.helsinki.hu/en/hungary-governments-new-asylum-bill-on-collective-push-backs-and-automatic-detention/>

16 Tdh/ Open Gate La Strada team weekly report, 3 February – 9 February 2017, 10 February – 16 February 2017, 17 February – 24 February 2017

17 Ibid

18 Tdh/ Open Gate La Strada team weekly report, 10 February – 16 February 2017



Additionally one mother and her two children who were in the process of **family reunification** and were reported in the previous report’s issue could not complete the process. The family was returned to Greece as part of the aforementioned bilateral agreement before receiving their visa (the embassy received the travel documents the day after the family was brought to Larissa camp).

**Push-backs** from Serbia to Macedonia intensified in February and continued from Macedonia to Greece. This practice raises great concerns, especially in relation to the protection of vulnerable groups including UASC.

Month	Number of reported push-backs from Macedonia to Greece <sup>19</sup> .	Number of reported push-backs from Serbia to Macedonia <sup>20</sup> .
October	122 (including 37 children)	3
November	210	268
December	148	95
January	111 (including 10 children)	58
February	61 (including 6 women and 7 children)	158 (all men)

### 3.1 Information on reception conditions for families with children

In **Albania**, at the end of February, 6 persons were present in the Karrec detention centre<sup>21</sup> while 45 persons were hosted in the **Babrru** asylum reception centre<sup>22</sup> including 17 children<sup>23</sup>. The National Reception Center of Asylum Seeker of Babrru is being re-built. The new construction was planned to be finished by February 2017, though work is still in progress. The center lacks appropriate and dedicated spaces for children: there are no recreational or psycho-social-support activities for the children hosted in the facility. Finally, the core leading staff continuously demands for food and non-food items to be provided to the center to meet the needs of children and families.

Accommodation was provided to 4,299 people in **Bulgarian** facilities at the end of February<sup>24</sup>. There is no systematic and detailed information provided about detention nor on the situation in all of the centres.

19 These numbers only represent what the project team in Gevgelija was able to observe; real numbers are likely to be higher.  
 20 These figures only capture the number of people who came back to Tabanovce. Real numbers are likely to be higher and many people go back to Vakince and Lojane instead of coming to Tabanovce transit center. Some attempt to cross the border again.  
 21 Tdh/ Tdh Albania team weekly report, 17 February – 24 February 2017  
 22 Of which 20 are from Iraq, 1 from Ukraine, 1 from Bulgaria, 27 from Afghanistan, 1 from Turkey, 1 from Pakistan, and 15 from Kosovo.  
 23 Tdh/ Tdh Albania team weekly report, 17 February – 24 February 2017  
 24 <http://migration.iom.int> Mixed Migration flows in the Mediterranean 1 February 2017 – 28 February 2017



Center	Total occupancy	Men	Women	Families	Children	UASC
Voenna Rampa	610	321	41	46	248	164
Ovcha Kupel	608	218	137	64	253	49
Vrazhdebna	373	191	90	n/a	92	21
Harmanli	2207	1049	497	n/a	661	177
Banya	107	25	34	22	48	4
Pastrogor	54	50	0	n/a	4	4
Busmantsi – closed camp	Not available					
Lyubinets – closed camp	340	325	15	n/a	Not available	14
AC Elhovo – closed camp	Closed					
Total	4299	2179	814	132	1306	433

Occupancy of Bulgarian facilities at the end of February<sup>25</sup>

**Voenna Rampa** provides precarious accommodation in poor hygienic conditions. There are holes in the walls, in the ceiling, rooms lack or have broken doors. In the center there is a lot of litter especially in the outdoor part around the building. Bathrooms and corridors often experience water leakage. Finally, the mattresses are not in good condition and people are reporting bed bugs<sup>26</sup>. In Harmanli center in February two fire incidents took place during which 500 people had to be evacuated (on 21 February)<sup>27</sup> and 270 people (on 21 February)<sup>28</sup>. No information was available in the other centers.

In **Hungary**, no information was made available in relation to the number of asylum seekers in Hungarian facilities this month.

In **Macedonia**, according to IOM, there were 95<sup>29</sup> people accommodated in state run facilities (49 in Gevgelija and 46 in Tabanovce). However, according to La Strada the number of people in the 4 facilities fluctuated from 213 to 129 in during the month<sup>30</sup> (at the end of February, there were 47 people in Tabanovce, 49 in Gevgelija, 18 in Vizbegovo and 14 in Skopje's safe house).

The two Transit centers (Tabanovce and Gevgelija/ Vinojug) are still hosting people, including children, in detention-like conditions. In **Tabanovce**, due to the cold weather, authorities continued to accept to

25 Tdh/ BRC team weekly report, February 2017

26 Tdh monitoring visit to Bulgaria, Voenna Rampa 22 February 2017

27 <http://sofiaglobe.com/2017/02/21/270-evacuated-from-bulgarias-harmanli-refugee-centre-because-of-fire/>

28 Border monitoring Bulgaria: <http://www.novinite.com/articles/178640/Fire+Breaks+Out+at+Harmanli+Migrant+Center>

29 <http://migration.iom.int> Mixed Migration flows in the Mediterranean 1 February 2017 – 28 February 2017

30 (2 Transit centers, Vizbegovo asylum center and Skopje's safe house).

accommodate some of the newcomers that arrived at the center<sup>31</sup>. However, at least 54 men who were pushed back from Serbia did not access the Transit center and slept outside of the facility. The people reaching the center were allegedly hungry, exhausted and suffering from the cold as reported by La Strada's social workers. In the centre, refugees complain about the poor **medical assistance** provided and the lack of appropriate drugs while in the **Gevgelija center**, poor hygiene conditions were reported. Warm food started to be provided again at the beginning of February.

### 3.2 Focus on UASC in Bulgaria and Macedonia

One 16-year old UASC was reported to be detained in the **Albanian** Karrec center<sup>32</sup>, since 20 February 2017 after his arrest by the Shkodra Migration and Border police for illegal border crossing towards Montenegro, together with a group of 5 other people.

In **Bulgaria**, at the end of February, 433 UASCs were hosted in open centers. As stated in previous reports there is very limited information available regarding UASCs during this period and many gaps in the protection remain. There **is no special arrangement for UASCs** in Bulgaria. In some centers, some rooms or floor space are reserved for UASCs and families at best. The **guardianship system is still not functioning**<sup>33</sup>. The municipalities appointed one representative for the center they are covering. In Sofia there is one representative for the 3 centers (234 UASC at the end of February). This number is insufficient to ensure the protection of all UASCs present. Children continue to be held in different kind of **detention** facilities – the detention of UASCs is against national legislation but is nonetheless happening in practice. Finally there is no institution that appears to be mandated to cater for the needs of migrant children who did not apply for asylum, a situation which concurs with reports from local organisations that children are being **pushed to apply for asylum**.

In **Macedonia**, there were 17 UASCs identified by Open Gate La Strada in February, 10 were referred to the Center for Social Work and 8 were appointed guardians. However, only 8 UASCs were still present in Macedonia at the end of the month. Upon arrival in the camps, UASCs are provided with psychological support, information and referrals appear to be made.

31 In practice almost no new comes were accepted in the center before January.

32 Tdh/ Tdh Albania team weekly report, 17 February – 24 February 2017

33 According to AIDA country report « Since an amendment to the LAR 2015 the municipality is in charge of appointing a legal representative from the municipality. However the municipality is not well equipped for this and the staff does not have special qualifications in child protection (CP) nor in asylum procedure." <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/06-02-2017/aida-2016-up-date-bulgaria> AIDA country report: Bulgaria, 2016,



Macedonia	New UASC identified at the end of the month	UASC present in the centres at the end of month	UASC who left during the month	Number of UASC referred to the CSW	Number of Guardians appointed
October	9	1	8	No data	0
November	20	8	12	No data	2
December	13	7	10	1	11
January	23	8	8	19	13
February	17	8	7	10	8

Local organisations report cooperation and communication issues with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and lack of information sharing on actions taken by the CSW. There are regular cases of children absconding while under the responsibility of the authorities.