

MANAGING THE REFUGEE CRISIS

WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE: STATE OF PLAY REPORT

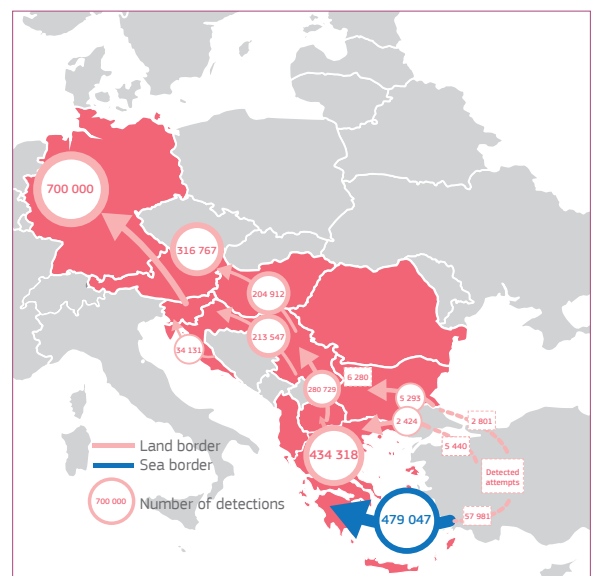
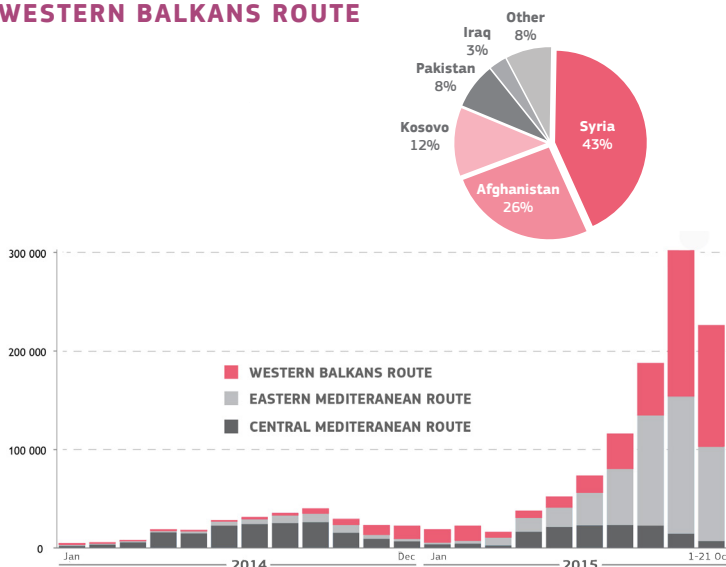


On 25 October, President Juncker convened a Leaders Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans route to address the unfolding emergency situation. The objective was to improve co-operation, step up consultation between the countries along the route and take pragmatic operational measures to tackle the refugee crisis. Leaders representing Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia agreed on a **17-point Action Plan**.

By the end of October, nearly 700,000 people had travelled along the Western Balkans route from Greece to Central Europe. With worsening weather conditions and a lack of coordination and communication between neighbouring countries, the European Commission intervened to prevent a humanitarian disaster. Under the direct authority of President Juncker, 7 weekly videoconferences have taken place since the meeting to ensure a better management of migration flows.



THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE



INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND COORDINATION



What has been done

- All participating countries, institutions and agencies nominated contact points
- Weekly high-level videoconferences held among these to share information and report on progress
- Daily reports on migration flows shared by Frontex with data provided by all countries on the route
- Needs assessments submitted by most countries

What remains to be done

- Notify partners in advance about policies or measures which impact them and avoid unilateral de facto nationality based entry conditions and fence constructions
- Complete needs assessments so support can be provided
- Improve and expand longer-term reception capacities to slow down the flows

RECEPTION CAPACITY

What has been done

- Commitment by Leaders to provide 50,000 reception places in Greece and 50,000 along the route
- Launch of the UNHCR rental scheme for 20,000 reception places in Greece through Commission financing of €80 million and a further 7,000 places in the hotspots through a rent subsidy scheme
- Around 20,000 extra reception places provided by several countries along the route
- Extensive EU financial support provided to help increase capacity
- 14 European Investment Bank projects have been adapted to respond to migration related demands, as well as a Council of Europe Bank grant agreement worth €13.2 million.

What remains to be done

- Create the extra 23,000 places committed by Greece to reach the 50,000 target
- Commit the remaining places along the route to reach the 50,000 target
- Conclude agreements with international financial institutions to support capacity building



BORDER MANAGEMENT

What has been done

- New joint operations agreed by Greece and Frontex for the Aegean Sea and Northern borders
- Over 200 guest police officers sent to Slovenia to help with border management
- EU-Turkey Action Plan activated
- Frontex operations working at Bulgaria-Turkey border

What remains to be done

- Reduce bottlenecks of stranded people in border areas
- Improve dialogue with third countries on readmission and return of economic migrants
- Send more guest police officers to Slovenia (400 requested)
- Improve cooperation at the Greece-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia border
- Enable the deployment of Frontex support at Croatian and Serbian border



HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT AND THE FIGHT AGAINST SMUGGLING

What has been done

- Civil Protection Mechanism (CPM) triggered by Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece
- Task force on communication launched to provide information to migrants
- European Migrant Smuggling Centre to be set up by Europol by March 2016 to fight smugglers and traffickers; with operational agreements in place with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia
- Major operation in Greece on 10 December to transfer people from the Northern border to major cities to assess their asylum claims

What remains to be done

- Member States to pledge the resources requested under the CPM – eg bedding, accommodation, clothing, heating and medical equipment
- Improve communication to migrants on EU asylum rules
- Increase information sharing with Europol on migrant smuggling

