

# RAS

REFUGEE AID SERBIA

FIELD

## Preliminary Findings on Border-Crossing Attempts and Push-Backs

#4 / April 2018.

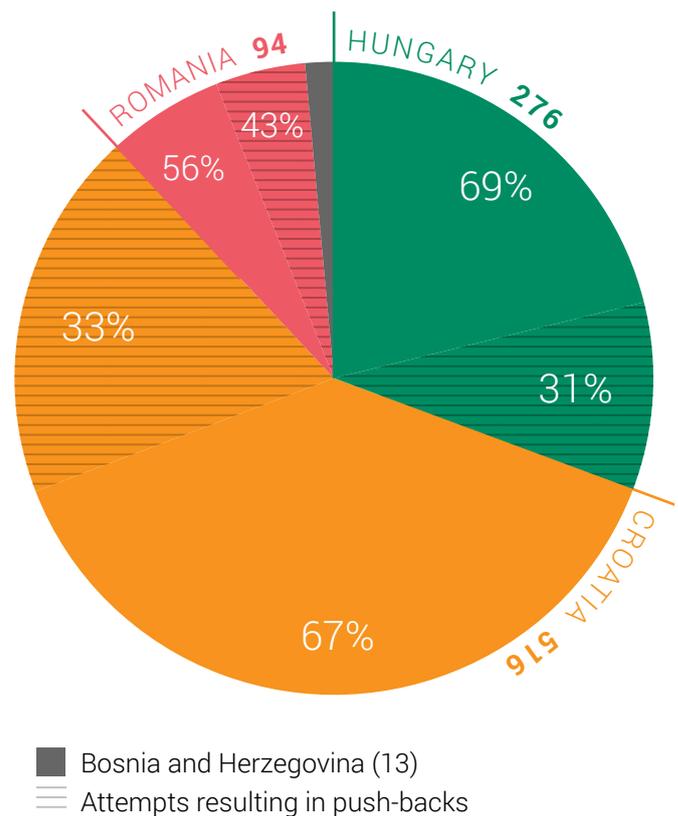
### Attempts and Push-backs

102 migrants/refugees interviewed between February 6 and April 9, 2018 reported that they tried to exit Serbia in irregular manner during their stay in the country, which varied between 2 weeks and 2 years, with 4-6 months being the average length of stay in Serbia.

**Majority of interviewed migrants attempted to reach Croatia - 62 (61%) of them made 516 attempts (which constitutes 57% of total 899 attempts) towards Serbian-Croatian border - while 42 (41%) tried to enter Hungary in 276 (31%) attempts, 37 (36%) migrants made 94 (10%) attempts to Romania, and 11 (10%) to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 13 (1%) attempts.**

Only 4 (4%) respondents tried to enter three different neighboring countries - namely, Croatia, Hungary, and Romania, while 16 (16%) of them have previously tried to exit Serbia both towards Hungary and Croatia. Seven (7%) respondents sought the entry point to the European Union both through Romania and Croatia, but avoided Hungary. Nine (9%) of them avoided Croatia, but tried to enter both Romania and Hungary. Among the respondents who tried to enter Bosnia and Herzegovina, 5 (5%) of them had also attempted to exit Serbia by reaching Hungary.

Among those interviewed, 31 (30%) respondents claimed that they were pushed back from Hungarian border with Serbia in 86 instances (31% of all attempts towards Hungary). Fifty two (51%) respondents were pushed back from Croatia into Serbia in 170 instances (33% of all attempts to enter Croatia).



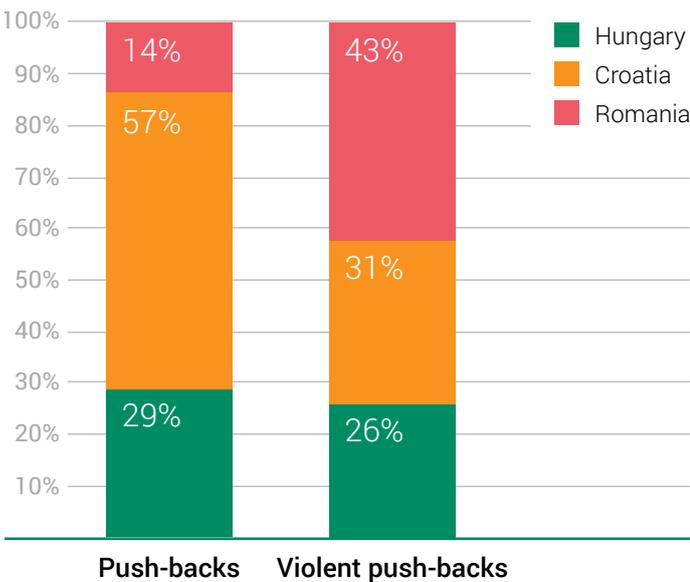
When it comes to Romania, 31 (30%) migrants were pushed back to Serbia 41 times (44%) they tried to enter Romania.

On average, respondents make 7 attempts to enter Hungary and are pushed back during 2 out of those attempts, while other 5 ended before reaching the Hungarian territory - reasons for giving up usually being high concentration of border security forces, fatigue, impassable terrain, weather condi-

2 tions, lack of food or adequate clothes. When it comes to Croatia, the analyzed answers show that migrants try to cross to Croatia 8 times on average and that they will be pushed back 3 out of those 8 times. The insignificant proportion of those interviewed who had previously gone to Romanian border with Serbia points out that the average number of such attempts is 3 per respondent and that in nearly half of the cases such an attempt will result in a push-back.

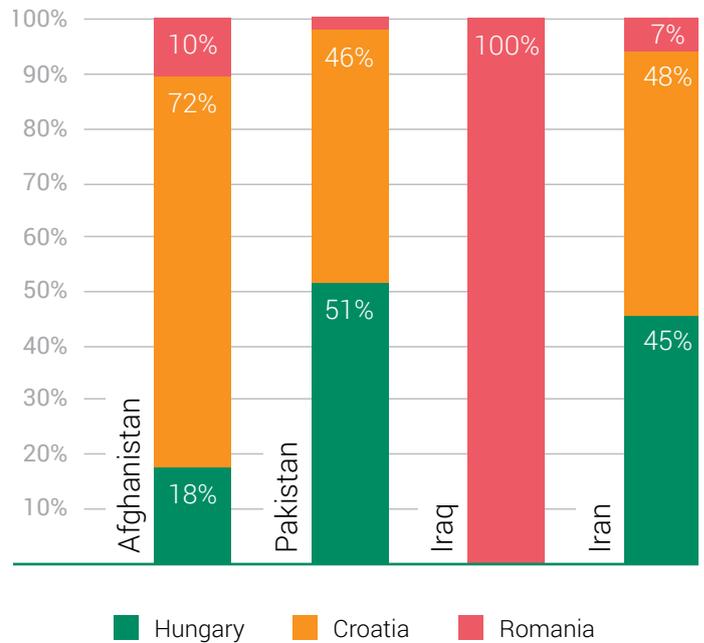
## Violent Push-Backs

In addition, migrants were asked about violent push-backs, out of which 44 (43%) of interviewed migrants/refugees who tried to exit Serbia reported violent push-backs, either as witnesses, victims, or both. 58 (57%) reported no instances of violent push-backs. 24 (55%) of those who reported violent push-backs made claims as witnesses, while 25 (57%) claimed to be victims of 32 violent attacks.



*Representation of the locations of all reported push-backs and violent push-backs*

Most self-reported victims of violent push-backs found themselves on Croatian territory and/or border area (12 or 27% of all reported violent push-backs), while 10 (23%) reported violent push-backs took place in Hungary. Two migrants/refugees (4%) say they were victims of violent push-backs from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia. Eight (8%) migrants reported being victims to violent push-backs in Romania, which amounts to 20% of all reported push-backs from this country. In that sense, Romania is categorized as a neighboring country with the highest rate of self-reported violent push-backs.



*Irregular border-crossing attempts based on the country of origin*

Among those who claimed to be witnesses of violent push-backs, 15 (15%) witnessed a violent push-back in Romania, all of them reporting one same event - one respondent was treated roughly by the Romanian border security forces, injuring her hand after she was pushed, while other 14 members of the group witnessed the incident. Additional 5 (5%) respondents witness violent push-backs in the border area with Croatia, and 4 (4%) in Hungary.

Descriptions of violent push-backs include beatings and causing minor injuries, as well as demanding bribes (1) and taking personal belongings (6) such as mobile phones and backpacks from migrants/refugees.

## Demographics

Looking more specifically into the demographics of the respondents who reported attempts to exit Serbia illegally and instances of push-backs, most respondents come from Pakistan (35 or 34%), followed by those from Afghanistan (27 or 26%), and Iraq (18 or 18%) and Iran (16 or 16%).

All Iraqi respondents who attempted to exit Serbia illegally did so through Romania. Respondents from Afghanistan seem divided in their attempts to go to Croatia and Romania, while Pakistani respondents seem to prefer Hungary and Croatia over Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. No Iranian respondents have tried to cross to Romania.

When it comes to violent push-backs, most alleged victims come from Pakistan (11), comprising

nearly 44% of all victims. These are followed by respondents from Iraq (6 or 25%) and Afghanistan (4 or 16%), both of which are disproportionate to the percentages these populations constitute among the total number of respondents.

## Informal Settlements

During the field visit to informal settlements in Sombor and Subotica areas, RAS Field Team noted the following trends related to push-backs.

In the Subotica area Desert House settlement, which burned down on March 15, none of the interviewed migrants reported that they tried to enter Hungary in the days preceding the visit, mostly due to the cold weather and fear that their traces in the snow would be easy to track. When they do try to cross, they do it in large groups - at least 10 of them. They are never joined by families and do not know anyone from the settlement who successfully crossed the border in the past weeks. These migrants prefer to cross borders on foot and with smugglers' assistance.

Due to unfavorable weather conditions and surprisingly low temperatures during the week of the visit, the number of migrants residing in the Sombor area informal settlement drastically decreased. Interviewees reported that about 30 people found shelter in the settlement before these weather changes, after which many of them decided to go back to Belgrade. On April 20, a Pakistani migrant who had just returned from an unsuccessful attempt to cross to Croatia reported that at least 200 migrants/refugees visit the informal settlement in Sombor in order to enter Croatia.

While four of the interviewees in this settlement tried to illegally exit Serbia in the days preceding RAS' visit, a couple of them reported that they have not tried in weeks, even months.

At the same time, five respondents interviewed in informal settlements in Sid and Sombor (2) and Subotica (3) claimed that they tried to cross legal borders of Serbia 'too many times to count' during their prolonged stays in Belgrade, expressing aggravated frustrations over this fact.

## Recent developments

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With the improvement in weather conditions from April 8 onwards, RAS Field Team has noticed a significant increase in the number of migrants/refugees spending time in the Afghan Park. A vast majority of those found in the park during this period come to the location in preparation to move towards the legal borders of Serbia with one of the neighboring countries and try to exit the country in irregular manner. At the same time, the park has been frequented by migrants/refugees who return from so-called "games", or attempts to enter one of the neighboring countries. On April 9, Team's estimated that up to 300 migrants/refugees spend time in the Afghan park for these purposes during one day, many of them otherwise residing in asylum facilities across Serbia.

Importantly, RAS Field Team has recorded an increased number of migrants/refugees who attempt to enter Bosnia and Herzegovina, are pushed back from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia, or show interest in continuing their route through this neighboring country. As of the third week of April, RAS estimates that up to 50% of all respondents the team interviews daily either are met upon their return from an unsuccessful border crossing to Bosnia and Herzegovina or express clear plans to move forward to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Daily numbers of those who are pushed back from Bosnia and Herzegovina and reach Belgrade on their way again amount to up to 20 migrants/refugees. In conversation with migrants/refugees, RAS learns that Bosnia and Herzegovina has emerged as a desirable location for the continuation of the journey due to the beliefs that border crossing is less demanding and that the migrant population is well received by the locals, as well as the complete exhaustion of other plausible border crossing options.

*In the next months, RAS will continue to collect data on border-crossing attempts and push-backs and come out with a comprehensive report covering these and related topics.*

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