Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci

Přírodovědecká fakulta

Katedra rozvojových a environmentálních studií

Bc. Vojtěch Jochim

ZKUŠENOSTI MIGRANTŮ NA BALKÁNSKÉ TRASE
THE EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANTS ON THE BALKAN ROUTE

Diplomová práce

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Lenka Dušková, Ph.D.

Olomouc 2023

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma Zkušenosti migrantů na Balkánské trase vypracoval samostatně pod vedením Mgr. Lenky Duškové, Ph.D. a s použitím uvedené literatury a pramenů.

Hereby I certify that the thesis entitled The Experiences of Migrants on the Balkan Route is the result of my own work under the guidance of Mgr. Lenka Dušková, Ph.D., using the literature listed at the end of this document.

V Olomouci dne / In Olomouc on …… ……

Vojtěch Jochim

Tímto děkuji vedoucí práce Mgr. Lence Duškové, Ph.D. za podněty, připomínky i věnovaný čas a ochotu při vypracovávání tohoto textu i během souvisejícího terénního výzkumu.

I hereby thank the supervisor Mgr. Lenka Dušková, Ph.D. for the suggestions and comments as well as time and willingness devoted to the development of this text and the conduction of the related field research.

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI
Přírodovědecká fakulta
Akademický rok: 2020/2021

Studijní program: Mezinárodní rozvojová a environmentální studia
Forma studia: Prezenční

Podklad pro zadání DIPLOMOVÉ práce studenta

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Téma práce:	Zkušenosti migrantů na Balkánské trase
Téma práce anglicky:	The experiences of migrants on the Balkan route
Jazyk práce:	Angličtina
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Lenka Dušková, PhD. Katedra rozvojových a environmentálních studií

Zásady pro vypracování:

Tato práce se zaměří na masovou migraci do Evropské Unie po tzv. Balkánské trase, která se v posledních dekádách stala jedním z nejvýznamnějších migračních kanálů světa. Teoretická část shromáždí relevantní zdroje o stavu trasy a migrantech na ní. Praktický výzkum se pak zaměří na zkušenosti a prožitky migrantů, kteří trasou prošli v nedávné době. Práce bude psaná v anglickém jazyce pro maximální zachování svědectví získaných v rámci výzkumu.
This thesis will examine mass migration to the European Union through the Balkan route, which has become one of the most distinctive migration channels in the contemporary world. The theoretical part will introduce relevant information about the route's state and migration. The research will map the experiences of migrants who have travelled through the route in recent years. The thesis will be written in English to preserve the authenticity of testimonies obtained within the research.

Seznam doporučené literatury:

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Podpis vedoucího práce: Datum:

Podpis vedoucího pracoviště: Datum:

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce si klade za cíl zmapovat výzvy, kterým čelí migranti cestující tzv. Balkánskou migrační trasou, a způsoby, jimiž tyto výzvy překonávají. Teoretická část definuje základní terminologii a zkoumanou trasu, definuje a popisuje push a pull faktory a některé z hlavních zdrojových zemí. Poté práce představuje jednotlivé úseky trasy, přičemž věnuje pozornost pohybu migrantů dovnitř, skrz, a ven z každé země na trase, výzvám, kterým zde migranti musí čelit, a faktorům, které je způsobují. Výzkum čerpá z dat shromážděných dotazováním migrantů, kteří trasu dokončili nebo absolvovali, lidí, kteří jsou s migranty v kontaktu, i z pozorování provedených na vybraných místech trasy a v rámci skupin na Facebooku a Whatsappu. Výsledky práce mapují výzvy a strategie spojené s cestováním, překračováním hranic, ilegalitou a dalšími aspekty migrace, přičemž doplňují existující literaturu o další podrobnosti i zkoumají některé zcela nové motivy.

Klíčová slova: migranti, migrace, výzvy, strategie, ilegalita, pašování lidí, lidská práva, Balkánská migrační trasa

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to map the challenges faced by the migrants travelling through the Balkan route as well as strategies to overcome them. The theoretical part defines relevant terminology and the route, defines and describes push and pull factors and some of the major contributing countries. Then it introduces individual sections of the route, paying attention to migrants' movements in, through, and out of each country, the challenges they have to face as well as factors and forces behind them. The research draws on the data gathered by interviewing migrants completing or having completed the route and people in contact with them, observations conducted in selected locations of the route and observations of migration-related Facebook and Whatsapp groups. Its findings map the challenges and strategies linked to travelling, border crossing, illegality, and other motives, complementing the existing literature with further details as well as exploring some completely new motives.

Keywords: migrants, migration, challenges, strategies, illegality, human smuggling, human rights, Eastern Mediterranean route, Western Balkan route.

List of Abbreviations:

BVMN	Border Violence Monitoring Network
DW	Deutsche Welle
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
ICMPD	International centre for Migration Policy Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SNA	Syrian National Army
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
USD	United States dollar

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INTRODUCTION

Despite losing attention to other urgent issues such as the war in Ukraine, migration from Africa and Asia to the European Union countries has been on the rise; and similarly to the last decade, when the issue captured the headlines of the world's most renowned media, the eminent role in this process belongs to the so-called Balkan route. In 2022, Frontex - the border-guarding agency of the EU - recorded 145 000 irregular crossings through the Western Balkans, which accounts for 45 % of total irregular border crossings on the EU's external border and makes the corridor the single most significant migration channel to Europe (Frontex, 2023).

In recent years, I travelled through the Balkan route as a journalist, mapping the effects migrants brought to the communities in transit localities, and later also collecting migrants' stories to capture their everyday living in between the crossing attempts. During this work, I came across motives I had not found in the media or the existing academic literature. Some materials – such as the UNHCR's updates on countries on the route used in the theoretical framework of this work – are rich in quantitative information such as the data on migrants' demographics as well as explanations of smuggling mechanisms or route's current directions. However, they fail to capture many potentially significant explanatory and complementary details, such as how do the people on the move look for reliable smugglers, how do they navigate in terrain, or how do they share information.

Other sources, such as various NGO reports (e.g. Border Violence Monitoring Network or No Name Kitchen) or qualitative research papers (e.g. De Clerck 2013; Chen, 2021; Raheem, Badshah, and Arshed, 2021), do explore migrants' stories in more detail, but oftentimes rather selectively; very little is known on challenges migrants have to face while dwelling in Iranian cities, walking through the Albanian mountains, or simply throughout the everyday life on the journey in between the dramatic border-crossing attempts. Additionally, works focused on one issue or stage of the route unavoidably omit possible interconnectedness and/or development of these factors throughout the route – such as how experiencing life-threatening situations or frustration from the unfulfilled expectations influences later decision-making.

In this thesis, I will try to fill this gap by attempting to holistically map the challenges the migrants on the route have to face, the ways they react to them, and their development throughout their journeys. To achieve this, I shall rely on qualitative fieldwork, which will

include travelling through the route, conducting observations as well as interviewing migrants and other people working with them.

Rather than further explore what has already been described, I hope to uncover academically unexplored phenomena. The outcome shall therefore present an exploratory study, which would describe lesser-described issues, or complement the existing literature with some new details. This may be potentially useful for other researchers as well as for policymakers, researchers, and NGOs concerned with tackling migration-related problems.

1 BASIC TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

In this section, I will define the background concepts and terminology used throughout the rest of this work. This will include migration and its subtypes, migrants and their subtypes, human smuggling, and the researched route.

1.1 Migration

Most of the conventional definitions agree that migration presents a movement of people across some distance for some amount of time - despite the fact that we can find conceptualisations dismissing both of these factors (Kok, 1999). In her review of various materials, Tataru (2020, p.13) defines migration as "the crossing of an administrative unit`s border for a certain minimum period of time". According to her, most authors agree that it shall involve an intentional change in one's domicile and space to perform his or her profession as well as a change in social relations, thus excluding activities where the bonds of social belonging remain, such as tourism, and relocation of passve objects such as transport of refugees to safe shelter. E.g. Dingle and Drake (2007) remind us that migration does not have to be concerned only with humans, yet, for the purposes of this paper, migration of other species is irrelevant.

Human migration can be divided according to various criteria. First, researchers often distinguish between voluntary migration (based on relatively free will and initiative of a migrating person) and forced migration (caused by harmful factors such as violence, poverty, or natural disasters, which push people to move to avoid immense suffering and hardship) (Tataru, 2020). Second, migration might either be internal (movement within a given country) or international (e.g. King and Skeldon, 2010). This work is concerned only with the latter. Third, we can distinguish between permanent and temporary migration (Chen, Kosec, and Mueller, 2016). It is possible to find a number of other distinctions as well, such as skilled vs. unskilled migration or international retirement migration (Bell et al, 2010); however, these are the most relevant for this work.

As described below, migration on the researched route is largely possible due to **human smuggling**, which can be defined as "the clandestine movement of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers across international borders through the circumvention of state regulatory norms for financial gains" (Campochiaro, 2018). Smuggling is also oftentimes associated with **human trafficking:** defined by the UN Palermo Protocol as a "recruitment, transportation,

transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (OSCE, 2003).

Table 1: Basic types of migrants

Migrants	A person carrying out the migration regardless of his or her legal status, the voluntariness of the movement, or factors that forced him or her to start the journey (Tataru, 2020).
Refugees	According to the 1951 Refugee protocol, refugees are those who flee from persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Currently, about 25 million people are falling within that definition (UNHCR, 2023a).
Economic migrants	Migrants who decided to travel voluntarily, motivated by economic opportunities. The term is used to distinguish them from refugees but is not anchored in international law (Perruchoud, R. and Redpath-Cross, 2011; IOM, 2019).
Asylum-seeker	People seeking legal protection in the host country, whose request has not been yet processed (Perruchoud, R. and Redpath-Cross, 2011; IOM, 2019).
Internally displaced person	Refugees who have not crossed an international border and dwell within their country of origin (Perruchoud, R. and Redpath-Cross, 2011; IOM, 2019).
Irregular migrants	Generally defined as persons travelling abroad in search of opportunities, having, however, no right to remain there. Crossing a border without a right to entry constitutes an irregular entry (Aksoy and Poutvaara, 2021).
Unaccompanied children	Children separated from both parents or a primary caretaker (OSCE, 2017).

1.2 The researched route

Even though migration to the European continent has been going on for decades, the beginning of what has been called "The Balkan route" can be traced back to 2015 when Europe recorded 1 046 599 irregular arrivals mostly from the Near East, Middle East, and Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa (Abikova and Piotrowicz, 2021). During that time, they were almost

exclusively entering the content from Turkey through Greece and then Balkan countries – prominently North Macedonia and Serbia – and entered the EU via Croatia or Hungary, heading mostly towards destinations in Northwestern Europe such as Germany or Scandinavian countries. Initially, the transit countries turned a blind eye or even actively assisted the refugees in their transfer to push them outside their territory as fast as possible (Abikova and Piotrowicz, 2021, Minca and Collins, 2021).

The resultant semi-formal chain soon became known as "the Balkan corridor" or "the Balkan route" (Abikova and Piotrowicz, 2021, Minca and Collins, 2021). Nevertheless, most of the sources used in this work further divide this route into the “Western Balkan route”, which includes North Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the “Eastern Balkan route” leading through Bulgaria and Romania. The preceding maritime passage between Turkey and continental Europe has been also distinguished as “the Eastern Mediterranean route (which distinguishes it from the Central Mediterranean route connecting Tunisia and Libya with Italy and Malta, and Western Mediterranean route connecting Morocco with Spain). This work is concerned with the Eastern Mediterranean route and Western Balkan Route, which present the largest channels of illegal border crossings to the European Union (Frontex, 2023), and at the same time, for transit migrants, the latter naturally geographically follows the former.

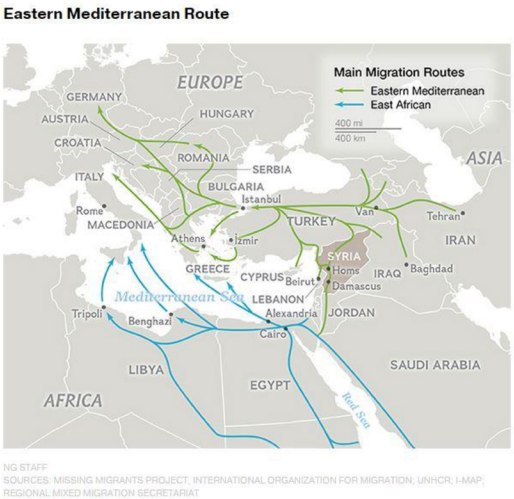
Throughout its existence, the route underwent some significant changes. By the end of 2016, it had largely closed due to two factors. First, the policies of the transit countries became far more restrictive; by autumn 2015, Hungary closed its border with Serbia, covering it with a barbed fence and allowing only 20 selected migrants per day to cross it; this was eventually lowered to one per day. Similarly, Slovenia closed its borders with Croatia and Austria began to push migrants back to Serbia. In consequence, migrants found themselves stranded in bottlenecks (Minca and Collins, 2021). The second major factor presented a deal between the European Union and Turkey as the former promised support to the latter in exchange for retaining migrants on its territory, which is described in more detail below. The combination of these two factors caused a rapid decline in the number of migrants entering Europe, though the route never fully ceased to exist (Brunovskis and Surtees, 2019; Minca and Collins, 2021). Instead, this period was marked by a quick increase in migrant arrivals to Italy through the central Mediterranean route (Campochiaro, 2018).

In 2017-2018, the route was "reopened". We can trace a gradual increase in the numbers of people in transit in many of its sections: between 2018-2019, the number of refugees increased by 238 % in Montenegro, 271 % in Serbia, nearly 200 % in North Macedonia, or 313 % in Kosovo (UNHCR, 2019). However, we can also observe some differences. First, we can record a relative increase in the importance of the initially less frequented sub-route leading through Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Second, the passage has never again been as smooth as during the route's initial phases. A number of migrants found themselves stuck homeless in transit countries for years, though not giving up on reaching their intended final destination (Koinova, 2022).

The pandemics of Covid-19 influenced the route in certain ways as well. First, it caused an economic decline in a number of the countries of origin, which may, by now, have increased the number of departures - though the exact impact is yet to be seen and quantified. On the other hand, the mobility restrictions caused a temporary decline in the number of arrivals in Turkey (ICMPD, 2021) as well as caused many migrants stranded in the Western Balkan countries (Hodzic, 2020).

In the last two years, we can observe another massive increase. In 2022, the EU's border agency Frontex recorded more than 330 000 irregular entries, which presents the highest amount since 2016 - and this does not include Ukrainian refugees. Western Balkans accounts for this by 45 %; the number annually grew by 136 %. Despite the tightened border controls, the movement is fuelled by various new and continuing crises in many parts of Asia and Africa (Tistdall, 2016; Frontex, 2023).

Figure 1: Map of the route during 2015-2016. Chwastyk and Williams, 2018



2 PUSH AND PULL FACTORS IN CONTEXT OF THE ROUTE

This section is using the "push and pull" framework based on Everet Lee's theory from 1966. Lee claims that the decision to migrate is influenced by push factors, which force individuals to leave their countries of origin, and pull factors, which attract people to a certain destination. In practice, both include economic, social, and environmental factors (Lee, 1966, Urbański, 2022).

2.1 Push factors

The evidence of asylum seekers in Turkey, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other countries on the route show applications of citizens from across the Middle East (except high-income states of the Persian Gulf), (mostly North) Africa, and certain farther countries such as India and Bangladesh (Worlddata.info, 2021). The literature review compiled by Langley et al (2016) concludes that factors pushing people from these countries to start the journey include political factors (such as violence and conflicts), security threats, human rights-related issues, and socio-economic factors such as substandard living standard, poverty, and economic hardships. According to the review, certain authors also point to other factors such as:

- Demographic pressures such as the share of the young population, population size, or fertility rate. However, some consider them important only in combination with other factors.
- Historical, cultural, and geographical factors, such as shared colonial past, linguistic similarity, and geographical proximity.
- Environmental factors such as climate change, natural disasters, drought, or soil degradation.

These factors, of course, vary by country; for instance, Aksoy and Poutvaara (2021) find that more than 90 % of those from Eritrea, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia fled because of conflict and persecution. In contrast, most of the people from Morocco left the country due to economic reasons. Although it is impossible to examine each country separately, to observe the push factors in action as well as to understand the background of the researched population, we will now look in detail at the three most contributive destinations of origin.

2.1.1 Syria

The large-scale exodus from Syria has been eminently linked to the ongoing civil war and its consequences. The conflict initially began as a public protest against the incumbent president Assad, who had held power since 2001 and was blamed by many for the country's poor economic results, high unemployment, or the lack of personal and political freedoms of Syrian citizens. Soon, these protests transformed into a full-fledged multi-party conflict between governmental forces, opposition, Islamist militias (including the infamous Islamic State), and foreign actors (including Russia and Turkey). The war-torn country suffers from alarmingly high rates of terrorism (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022), crime (Al-Zoubi, 2011) as well as steep economic decline and inflation (Baltes, 2016). Poverty levels reached 90 % (World Bank, 2022), and Syrians experience shortages of basic necessities and hunger (Norwegian refugee council, 2021). Additionally, both the regime and rebel-controlled areas still suffer from a lack of personal and political freedoms (Freedom House, 2021). In consequence, 6.8 million Syrians fled overseas, which presents roughly a quarter of the country's total population (UNHCR, 2023b). Turkey alone records over 3.5 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2022a) with a questionable number of unregistered ones. This flow may expectedly be now further strengthened by the recent earthquake in the northern part of the country, which might have left as many as five million of Syria s homeless (UNHCR, 2023c).

2.1.2 Afghanistan

A no less grim situation remains in Afghanistan. Despite the fall of the Taliban and the impressive economic growth in the 2000s, Afghanistan had long grappled with an unsatisfying human rights-related situation (Freedom House, 2022), violence, drought, and natural disasters (OCHA, 2021). After the Taliban's takeover, the situation further worsened. The economy had depended on foreign assistance by 75 %. Loss of this instream and associated supporting activities such as cash-for-work and livelihood support programmes together with international isolation resulted in economic collapse and an alarming fall in households' purchasing power (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In total, there are approximately 4.5 million Afghans in Iran and 3.7 million in Pakistan and the exodus is further expected to continue (UNHCR, 2023d)

2.1.3 Pakistan

The third major departure destination presents Pakistan, which, unlike its counterparts, experiences no major conflict, but rather suffers from a combination of adverse factors. A high long-term annual population growth rate created a labour surplus and the country suffers from the scarcity of employment and education opportunities. This has resulted in a great exodus (in fact, labour export has also become a part of the country's development strategy). Less skilled migrants generally tend to head to the Middle East and particularly the Gulf States, while more skilled to OECD countries (Aqeel, 2015; IOM, 2010). Additional causes of migration include continuous political instability, poor security situation, and natural disasters (Schloenhardt and Saleem, 2020) such as the recent floods which might have displaced as many as 33 million people (OCHA, 2022).

Additionally, Pakistan has been the first destination for Afghan refugees ever since the communist revolution in 1978, especially as the movement between the two countries has been eased by the contested borderline artificially drawn in 1893. Waves of departures and returns have been recorded depending on the actual state of Afghanistan. Before the Soviet withdrawal, the country welcomed these refugees and took care of them in cooperation with Afghan mujahideen and the international community. Since the 1990s, Pakistan's position has hardened. Currently, the country hosts more than 1.4 million refugees including those of second, third, or even fourth generation, facing a variety of legal, social, and economic challenges (EUAA, 2022).

2.2 Pull factors

As described above, pull factors motivate migrants to depart to certain destinations. The intended destination for most migrants on the researched route present European EU member countries. This seems to be caused by several factors. According to Komljenović (2022), Yoo and Koo (2014), or Reisig (2016), migrants tend to join already established migrant communities in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, or Sweden, where they have friends, family members and can expect assistance. The second factor presents socio-economic indicators such as the state of the labour market or the extent of the welfare state as well as the perceived degree of economic differences between the countries of origin and intended destinations; in other words, the migrants head to destinations, which they see as richer and more suitable for a comfortable life (Hager, 2021; Komljenović, 2022; Yoo and

Koo, 2014; Reisig, 2016). Third, according to e.g. Langley et al (2016), some authors found the migration policies of host countries significant, so that the migrants get a chance to settle legally instead of being forced to move out. Fourth, Hager (2021) found the cultural openness of the host destination important as well.

It must be noted that push and pull factors do not fully explain migrants' decision to depart. For instance, Aksoy and Poutvaaras's (2021) large-scale quantitative research assessing the demographics of the migrant population on the Balkan route in 2015-2016 stresses the importance of the migrants' characteristics such as education, gender, or age.

3 THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN UNION

Despite the fact that most of the route as defined in this work lies outside the EU's territory, the EU has played a crucial role in shaping its directions as well as actions of various involved actors, and, in turn, the experiences and decision-making of the migrants themselves. Before the detailed analysis of the route's individual sections, I will therefore attach a brief overview of its role.

Although the earliest phase of the crisis in 2015 was characterised by differing (though de facto informally cooperative) approaches of individual countries, mounting reports of tragedies and increasing pressure from the most affected countries (namely Greece) led the incumbent president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker to call a first meeting on October 25th of 2015 to coordinate the response to the crisis on the European level, in which eleven EU members and three other countries participated. Since then, some key decisions have been agreed on at the European level (Zoppi and Puleri, 2021).

Before analysing the concrete steps taken, it must be noted that the European debate has been complicated and shaped by a number of different actors including governments, political parties, or civil society organisations with a variety of oftentimes opposing views. In fact, the European Union soon found itself polarised. On the one hand, some - such as a number of civil society organisations - kept defending a solidarity-first approach, stressing the need to respond to the humanitarian crisis. On the other end of the spectrum, part of the public and political scene perceived migration flows as a security threat, and a number of far-right parties attempted to capitalise on the view using racist and divisive rhetoric (Zoppi and Puleri, 2021). This ambiguity was visible e.g. in the debate on a proposed solidarity-based redistribution of migrants, which was effectively blocked by the countries of Visegrad four, or more recently on the EU's inability to express a clear position towards the illegal pushbacks committed by member countries such as Greece and Croatia (Fallon, 2023).

Nevertheless, the debate did result in several major informal agreements, which have clearly characterised the EU's approach ever since. First, particularly the perceived risks (such as the inability to control own borders, the burden for the welfare state, or crime and terrorism-related issues) largely led to securitisation of the whole issue. This, in turn, led to the criminalisation of migration, attempts to contain the flows and fight the smuggler networks. Second, it led to a Europeanisation of the issue, thus being seen as a problem of all countries instead of only the

affected ones. The Greek border was, by many, no longer perceived as only a Greek border, but also as a European border. Third, the debate led to an externalisation of the European borders, i.e. securing the border by operating on the territory outside it. Fourth, it led to "multi-level" management, characterised by cooperation between various actors such as governments, EU-related agencies, and other entities, or international organisations (particularly UNHCR and IOM) as well as by blurring borders between their operations and responsibilities (Deidda, 2020; Zoppi and Puleri, 2021).

All these features are clearly visible in the major steps the EU has taken. First, the EU supported the establishment of designated facilities in locations in proximity to its borders to prevent irregular entries deeper into the continent. This has included creating camps on Greek islands run jointly by the government, IOM, and UNHCR (Parsanoglou, 2022; Zoppi and Puleri, 2021), which played a pivotal role in these efforts and adversely also shaped much of the EU's migration policies (Bousiou, 2021), and which are further described below.

This went hand in hand with an effort to fight smuggling and illegal border crossing. A pivotal role in this was played by a 2004-founded agency Frontex, whose rights and responsibilities related to controlling the EU's outer border used to be limited to coordination issues and support of the member countries. Its agenda and responsibilities were widened in 2007 and 2011 when it established border guard teams to assist overwhelmed member states, and then in 2013, when it created the European border surveillance system, which allowed it to monitor "pre-frontier" regions outside the EU's territory (Hartwig, 2020).

However, a crucial change came with the outbreak of the 2015's crisis. Frontex was de facto permitted to actively intervene in the border regimes of member states with a set of new powers. With the 2019 regulation, it started to build its uniformed forces to recruit 10 000 personnel by 2027 (Sandven and Scherz, 2022), which presents a rapid increase from the previous number of 700 employees. Its budget grew from 320 million euros in 2018 to 1.3 billion euros in 2019-2020, and then again to a staggering 11.3 billion euros for the period of 2021-2027, which finally turned Frontex into an eminent authority on control of the EU's border. This was simultaneously complemented by other extensions of its agenda and powers such as combating border-crossing-related crime. On the other hand, a repeatedly proposed right to intervene against the affected states' has never been adopted (Hartwig, 2020).

Apart from these tools, the EU used its informal power to influence countries outside its border to take steps in accordance with its preferences. The most evident manifestation of this arguably presents the above-described deal with Turkey. However, no less cunning exercise of its political weight presents the use of an ascension conditionality for potential new members in Western Balkans. Prior to 2015, the major aim of the EU's conditionality was to strengthen the weak emergent post-conflict states and promote democratic governance. However, the refugee crisis suddenly turned the attention toward the management of illegal migration. Through conditionality, the European Union promoted its model of migration management, ensuring that it will be passed without much resistance (Koinova, 2022).

In 2015, the EU and Balkan countries announced a plan to respond to the crisis, which involved information sharing, migrants' registration, or deployment of Frontex, which had so far only operated on the EU's territory. At that time, the Balkan route was being formalised under the EU's leadership. Migrants expressing intent to apply for asylum were registered and received a document de facto presenting a 72-hour visa (though most proceeded illegally without this step) (Koinova, 2020). The need for coordination was further underlined at 2016's Managing Migration Together conference in Vienna and the 2017 Trieste Western Balkan Summit. This time, however, with the primary intention of containing the inflows. As a result, the EU started funding many migration-related projects ranging from border monitoring to running asylum centres. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have become key partners in the region (Zoppi and Puleri, 2021).

4 THE ROUTE AND ITS SECTIONS

In this section, I will introduce the major sections of the Balkan route sorted by country, focusing on how migrants move in, through, and out, what are the major hubs, what challenges do they encounter, and what is each country's approach towards them. This will provide us with a background for the locations contained in this work's research. I will draw on qualitative and quantitative research articles, relevant reports of renowned international institutions and NGOs including UNHCR, Border Violence Monitoring Network, or European Union Agency for Asylum, and, in some cases of "too recent" events, media reports. I will start with Iran, which is generally not regarded as an integral part of the route, but, as described below, presents a first transit country for migrants from two major source countries - Afghanistan and Pakistan - and as such presents an important part of the research. Then, I will continue along the route's directions towards Croatia and Hungary, which present entry points to the European Union, and where the extent of the research ends.

In each case, I will describe the country's role on the route, migration policies, movements of migrants in, through, and out of the territory, challenges they have to face, and how these factors have evolved. However, it must be noted that in a number of cases, the rigorous information on these topics is severely limited.

4.1 Iran

Despite not being included in the route by most materials used in this work as Iran presented an important migration channel for decades before and its development followed a separated line, Iran does play an important role since the largest source countries include Afghanistan and Pakistan, and proceeding to Turkey and the Balkans by land de facto geographically requires passing through the country. In fact, Iran has been a primary destination for Afghan refugees ever since the outbreak of the chains of crises and violence in the late 1970s (Naseh et al, 2018).

Currently, there are three official open border crossings between Afghanistan and Iran, the most frequented of which is located at Islam Qala; however, most migrants cross the border irregularly (EUAA, 2022). Similarly to other regions, human smuggling inside the country is linked to the pre-existing local smuggler networks operating with other commodities. Iran has been a major transit destination for smuggling drugs and particularly opium production from

Afghanistan to Europe, accounting for 74 % of the opium seizures in the world outside Afghanistan itself (UNODC, 2022), but there is also a movement of commodities such as oil and gas. Both Pakistani and Afghans without legal permission to enter Iran are smuggled by well-connected and established local smugglers, who may as well offer them jobs and accommodation (Raheem, Badshah, and Arshed, 2021). However, there is insufficient information available on how precisely the smuggling is carried out.

According to the Iranian government, in 2022, Iran officially hosted 800 000 refugees, 780 000 of whom were of Afghani and 20 000 of Iraqi origins. However, the UNHCR (2022e) indicates that there are more than 2.1. additional undocumented Afghans with 500 000 - 1 000 000 new arriving migrants after the Taliban's takeover in 2021. According to the agency, 96 % of all these dwell in Iranian cities, while only 4 % stay in the 20 settlements managed by the Ministry of Interior. Returns have become scarce; in 2022, only 124 Afghani and one Iraqi refugee voluntarily returned.

The Iranian policies towards migrants have been increasingly hostile. At first, they were welcomed as the assistance to them was considered to be a firm part of intra-Muslim solidarity, not to mention the common cultural and language ties between Farsi and Dari speakers. However, since the early 1990s, the country has gradually increased barriers to new arrivals and settlements. This was due to the unwillingness to bear the related costs as the country battled with the aftermath of a costly war with Iraq, the Iranian baby boom, and international economic sanctions. In practice, this has led to tighter border controls, reduced freedom of movement, or reduced access to public services. The most visible manifestation was arguably the introduction of Amayesh cards, which give refugees some limited rights and must be regularly renewed. In 2002, Iran also signed an agreement with the UNHCR with the aim to repatriate refugees back to Iran. Despite many returns, most remained, and additionally, many second-generation Afghans were born (Naseh et al, 2018; EUAA, 2022; Siavoshi, 2022).

According to the report of the EUAA (2022), Afghans in Iran face various challenges and deprivations. First, they have to deal with unfair legal treatment and restrictions from the Iranian authorities. A number of Afghans could not afford to renew their Amayesh card after the recent increases in the renewal fees, turning to undocumented and thus illegal persons. In 2020, most of the provinces officially became no-go areas for refugees, though the real extent of enforcement of this law is unclear. Additionally, we can observe cases of forcible returns without a proper case assessment as well as delays in processing. Second, migrants face

growing enmity from the locals, which also resulted in violent incidents; the 'intra-Muslim solidarity' era seems to be definitively gone. Third, Afghans face economic deprivation. Amayesh card holders are legally able to work only in predetermined fields, while illegal migrants often end up in simple and often low-paid jobs in construction and agriculture. Additionally, migrants face problems with access to financial services. This all, in turn, slows down the integration into Iranian society - even amongst the second, Iran-born generation. Despite this, it must be admitted that some improvements have been made as well, such as universal healthcare access or the announced formalised access to banking services.

Additionally, Iran - similarly to Pakistan and Turkey - presents a transit/intended as well as destination of origin at the same time. Iranian migrants have been steadily recorded as asylum applicants in all the countries described below (Worlddata.info, 2021). In fact, large-scale outflows have been recorded ever since the fall of the last shah and the rise of the current internationally-sanctioned Islamist regime in the period of 1979-1980 with the last major wave occurring after 2009's doubtful presidential election followed by the nationwide unrest. In 2019, the total number of Iranian emigrants reached 3.9 million (though this includes all people leaving through all routes) with one million seeking asylum. Apart from fleeing the regime, major drivers of this include the state's poor functioning and response to critical situations, factors related to poor economic performance, environmental challenges, the rise of workers' mobility, or an increase in the number of friends and family members abroad (Azadi, Mesgaran, and Mirramezani, 2020).

Nevertheless, it must be noted that very few rigorous sources mapping the changes in all the above-mentioned trends since the outbreak of the current demonstrations in September 2021 are available, so the above-mentioned information may have already become obsolete. Azadi Mesgaran, and Mirramezani (2020) show that every government's crackdown on anti-government protests has so far led to increased emigration, which may already have proven itself again.

4.2 Turkey

Since the Gulf War, Turkey has become a major spot for refugees from countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries for both settlement and transit migration, though a line between these in Turkey oftentimes blurs (Bilen et al, 2020; Kilic and Biffl, 2021). The major

migration wave started by the end of 2011 and was linked to the outbreak of the Arab Spring (Bilen et al, 2020).

Currently, migrants enter Turkey through several major channels. The first presents a border with Iran in the east of the country, covered by the Zagros mountain range. Although there has been a gap in the literature on how this route works, Augustova and Suber (2023) bring a rare peer-reviewed insight. A crucial role seems to be played by the pre-existing local Kurdish smuggler networks. Within the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish community was split into the local emirates with a vivid mutual trade and free inter-emirate movement. After finding themselves divided into four different countries, these interactions, nevertheless, continued, being now labelled as illegal smuggling. Lately, these activities included human smuggling.

Sometimes, these smugglers, known as the kaçakçi, rely on bribery and cooperation with the Turkish border patrols. However, this is not always possible e.g. due to bribe rejection or the duty or the presence of non-local guards without links to the locals. In these cases, smugglers attempt to pass the border unnoticed, which sometimes resulted in pursuits and deaths. IOM recognises "at least 157 deaths" between 2014-2022, but growing cemeteries in the city of Van, where the ceased migrants are being normally buried, suggest that the real number is likely to be higher. This may partly present a result of the EU's increased pressures to contempt the migration flows, which led to the alleged intensification of border controls. Turkish authorities claim to have caught an increased number of migrants; however, the reality is unclear (Augustova and Suber, 2023). According to Takva (2023), migrants leaving the country through this route are sometimes forced to carry small amounts of drugs.

The second major stream flows from Syria. As in the previous case, smuggling has had a long tradition. However, since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, it has experienced a rapid development connected particularly to the emergence of new actors (such as armed groups, criminal gangs, and new state structures) which have often been dependent on it. Humans are being smuggled through the same channels as other goods such as drugs and cigarettes, flowing either through the Idlib governorate controlled by the militia Hayat Tahrir al-Sham or Syria National Army-held governorates of Aleppo and Raqqa. The former area has recorded significantly higher activity due to the disruption of illegal trade by the Olive Branch Operation at the end of 2018, the Turkish military presence, which increases the costs and risks of these operations, and SNA's fear to harm its relationship with Turkey. In contrast, for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, smuggling is one of the most profitable activities. HTS collects revenues from

smugglers varying between 10-20 %, relying on trusted and well-connected individuals (Hatahet and Aldassouky, 2022).

The crossing itself may be currently carried out in three ways. The cheapest presents a foot crossing, with a cost between 500-3500 USD depending on the degree of cooperation with the Turkish authorities. The second way is to cross through the underground tunnels near Basaqba, al-Joz, al-Rai, or the Turkmen mountains, which costs about 2700 USD per passage. The third and the most expensive way (costing 5000 USD per crossing) is to corrupt Turkish officers and cross the official border point (Hatahet and Aldassouky, 2022).

Other migrants - such as the ones from Sub-Saharan Africa - may arrive by plane on tourist visas, and then remain illegally (e.g. De Clerck, 2023). Fourth, Cengiz (2018) and other older sources mention travelling from Syria to Turkey by sea, but little recent information is available on whether this route continues to operate.

Nowadays, Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population since 2014 with 4 million refugees and asylum-seekers. 3.7 million of them are Syrians (Erdogan, 2021, p.3). However, both settled and transit migrants in Turkey are in reality far more diverse; for instance, migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa have been flowing into the country ever since the 1980s (De Clerck, 2023). Although refugees are present all across the country, the distribution has been uneven. Syrian refugees have been concentrated in areas surrounding the Syrian border, particularly Hatay and Gaziantep, around Ankara, and in the urban hubs in the western part of the country, especially Izmir and Istanbul (Bilen et al, 2020; UNHCR, 2022b).

The largest single migrant hub in Istanbul. Within its streets, one can wander into Syrian quarters of Küçükçekmece, Bağcılar, Fatih, Sultangazi, Esenyurt, and Başakşehir, or a largely African neighbourhood of Yenikapı (Bilen et al, 2020; Esmer and Kudumovic, 2021). Reportedly, Istanbul has been the centre of Turkish migrant smuggling networks (Demir, Sever, and Kahya, 2017; Somer, 2019; Opryszek, 2021) and the coast near the city also served as a departing point towards Romania (Carmikli, 2016). Additionally, Istanbul de facto presents a transit point for nearly many of those wishing to cross the land border with Greece and Bulgaria. To reach Greece, migrants depart towards the nearby city of Edirne located only a few kilometres from the Greek border, where they reportedly attempt to cross the border by crossing the river Evros, climbing the border fence, or hiding in or under the trucks and cars on the way to Europe (e.g. Somer, 2019; IOM, 2020; Turkish Coast Guard Command 2021).

Other major locations include cities along the western coast, which serve not only as destinations for an (oftentimes temporary) settlement but also as departing points for transit to the near Greek islands through the Eastern Mediterranean route. Amongst these, the eminent hub presents Izmir and particularly its Basmane neighbourhood, located strategically in proximity to Basmane railway station and the coast as well as providing relatively affordable living spaces and job opportunities. Historical and other buildings were transformed into hotels, which was followed by the exodus of Turkish residents (Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, and Grant, 2021). Throughout the second half of the last decade, some media brought reports of bargaining between the migrants and smugglers, selling sailing equipment such as life jackets and waterproof bags, and discussing sails to the nearby islands of Lesbos, Samos, and Kos, all open in the streets (e.g. Kingsley, 2015 and McNeill, 2016). Nowadays, this continues in a less gaudy way (e.g. Xinhua, 2022).

Turkish policies on tackling migration have always been somewhat ambiguous. After the crisis's outbreak, Turkish authorities closed the borders with Syria except for seriously injured refugees and introduced visa requirements for Syrian citizens (Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, and Grant, 2021). Nevertheless, otherwise, it de facto pursued an open-door policy (being manifested by e.g. zero activity against smugglers in the streets of Basmane) and saw a rapid increase in the number of arrivals (UNHCR, 2015; UNHCR, 2016)

The important legal change came with the deal with the EU in March of 2016. The country was promised 6 billion euros (and in fact, the support continues to flow) in exchange for allowing migrants to stay in Turkey and preventing them from illegally travelling to the Greek islands. In consequence, Turkish authorities strengthened border patrolling both on the Mediterranean Sea and the land border with Greece. Additionally, anyone who would try to travel would be returned swiftly, and for each of these returned, the EU members would accept one Syrian refugee (Üstübici, 2019). However, the real situation might be somewhat different; the Border Violence Monitoring Network reported cases of Turkish forces trying to forcibly push migrants toward Greece.

Additionally, the Turkish approach has been characterised by distinguishing the Syrian migrants from the rest, calling them “guests“ rather than refugees. Special temporary protection theoretically enables Syrians to find jobs more easily than other migrants and an eminent portion of the EU support went into the mitigation of the situation of the Syrian families (Üstübici, 2019) with the European Commission (2023) claiming to have helped millions of

refugees with shelter and basic needs, education, or healthcare access. On the other hand, this also prevents Syrians from applying for asylum in third countries (Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, and Grant, 2020) and the work permit system prioritises those with high financial and cultural capital, which causes most of the refugees to end up in abusive informal sectors (Kilic and Biffl, 2021; Üstübici, 2019).

Apart from the dangers linked with border crossing and illegality, migrants in Turkey nowadays seem to face a great number of various economic, social, and other problems. Field research from Basmane by Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, and Grant (2021) reports migrants facing job precarity and problems properly participating in the job market, which manifests itself in illegal child work, de-qualification of skilled refugees or discrimination by employers due to stereotypification as competitors on the job market and a potential security threat. Özvaris et al (2020) found the language barrier and out-of-pocket expenditures to be the major barriers to healthcare access during the Covid-19 pandemic. Kaargac, Bilecen, and Veenstra (2022) found the schooling of Syrian children being negatively affected by the language barrier and uncertainty about the future legal status of their parents. Morgul, Savaskan, and Mutlu (2021) found migrants in Istanbul marginalised and perceived as a threat by the local residents and as being provided insufficient support from the official authorities. In their study on elderly migrants, Özmete, Pak, and Duru (2021) found women are deprived more than men in terms of education, language, income, and employment. However, it must be noted that these studies scarcely focus on *transit* migrants (though, as mentioned above, the distinction often blurs). Perhaps the only found reports of challenges faced by the transit conditions of transit migrants present warnings about migrants' harsh conditions in Edirne; recently, eleven were found frozen to death (BIA News Desk, 2022).

4.3 Greece

Greece has always been at the very heart of the route. Throughout 2015 and 2016, a total of 1.2 million migrants transited through the country, only about 120 000 of which applied for international protection. As of February 2023, UNHCR recorded 147 420 refugees (including 16 882 from Ukraine) with most originating in Syria and Afghanistan.

There are two major channels of irregular entry into the country. As described above, the first way presents the pathway from the Turkish city of Edirne to the neighbouring Greek prefecture of Evros. Part of the border is protected by a fence, whose length is to now be more than doubled (DW, 2023), and the surrounding area also seems to be heavily guarded. The Border Violence Monitoring Network, a network of NGOs that documents pushback and violence committed by the EU member states, reports regular commitments of human rights abuses: some migrant testimonies indicate systematic destruction of the legal documentation as well as beating, unlawful seizure of personal belongings and imprisonment in unsatisfactory conditions (BVMN, 2020). However, it must be noted that these testimonies cannot be verified elsewhere.

The second channel presents the maritime route from the coast to the islands near the Turkish coast, particularly Lesvos, Kos, Leros, Samos, Chios, and Rhodes, which the migrants reach by sailing on small boats (UNHCR, 2023f). This route is regarded to be highly dangerous; since 2015, twenty thousand people have died attempting to reach the islands, mostly by drowning (Sandven and Scherz, 2022). Designated Greek forces assisted by Frontex (operation Poseidon) should be monitoring the waters and assisting stranded boats. However, both have been repeatedly accused of performing and covering up illegal pushbacks (Ssan, 2022).

Arriving migrants are transported from the coast to camps designated for registration and accommodation. Until the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, the camps' major purpose was to collect information. Most migrants were acknowledged to be refugees and provided with a 30-day-long valid document allowing them to transit through Greece; the exceptions were nationals of Pakistan and Maghreb countries, whose rights to asylum were denied, and Syrians, whose documents were valid for six months. At that time, Greek authorities actively moved migrants towards the port of Piraeus and the Greek mainland. Afterward, the government instead attempted to contain the flows. The camps were declared closed facilities, and restrictions on migrants' freedom of movement - i.e. 25-days-long detention - were imposed (in practice, they were free to leave the camp but not the island), aiming to facilitate smooth returns to Turkey (Parsanoglou, 2022).

Figure 2: Migrants-frequented Greek islands. Karakoulaki and Tosidis, 2019.

Due to the large number of arrivals and the unpreparedness of the island to face such a crisis, the situation on many of the islands has become grievous. This has been particularly true for Lesbos, which, at the end of 2015, accommodated over 379 000 refugees. Overcrowding (Moria, the largest camp on the island and a point of initial reception for all the arriving migrants, used to be the most overcrowded place in the world in terms of the number of people living on the square metre), conflicts between the migrants of various ethnic origins, a huge amount of waste or the inability to proceed with the asylum application are just some of the problems faced by its dwellers (Pail, 2021). Similar problems have been reported on other Greek islands as well. Though the migrant population of the islands decreased rapidly to only

a few thousand in 2022, (infomigrants.net, 2022), new arrivals continue to be recorded (UNHCR, 2023f).

A notable role in mitigating this situation was initially played by the local communities, which organised provisional humanitarian assistance supplying oftentimes slow and unwilling participation of the municipal and central Greek authorities (Bousinou, 2021; Fotaki, 2022), which brought them a nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize. However, with the long-term progression of the crisis and the EU-Turkey deal, the local attitudes became less friendly with occasionally reported anti-migrant demonstrations and other signs of enmity. The local help was de facto replaced with EU-backed initiatives; just In 2016-2018, Greece was provided with 700 million euros to provide refugees with basic humanitarian assistance (Bousinou, 2021).

Migrants arriving through both channels then continue further towards the continent's inland. Generally, migrants from the islands first travel over the sea to Athens, while migrants arriving by land continue towards Thessaloniki, which has presented a key transit hub (Kasra et al, 2020). Afterwards, they can choose to leave for either Albania, North Macedonia, or Bulgaria.

4.4 North Macedonia

During the 2015's crisis, North Macedonia served as a transit location between mainland Greece and Serbia for the majority of migrants on the route, making it, for the country of 2 million inhabitants, exceptionally difficult to manage. After the route's closure, a number of migrants found themselves stranded on its territory. In 2017, Northern Macedonia itself closed its border with Greece, which led to a relative increase in crossings from Bulgaria. Migrants have generally left the country to continue to Serbia, or, less frequently, to Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Schloenhardt, 2019).

Any reliable records of the current numbers are difficult to find; however, the IOM's survey conducted in February and March 2022 indicated the top nationalities being Afghanistan, India, Morocco, Pakistan, and Syria, though this may not necessarily represent the whole population.

4.5 Serbia

Until the Balkan route's official closure in 2016, Serbia served as a major transit destination between North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria on one side, and Hungary and Croatia on the other. During the great wave of 2015-2016, migrants were tolerated. In April 2016,

Serbia followed some neighbouring countries which began closing the route. Migrants were evicted from informal settlements, the army was sent to the borders. Nevertheless, thousands of migrants found themselves struck and in many cases remained in the country for years, while more - though in largely reduced numbers - continued to arrive. Later, the country experienced a rapid temporary surge in Iranian arrivals due to the simultaneous introduction of visa-free travel for Iranian citizens and the establishment of regular flight connections between Tehran and Belgrade. This visa-free access was nevertheless abandoned in October 2018 (Galijaš, 2019; Deidda, 2020; Oruc, Raza, and Santic, 2022).

Recently, the country's importance for illegal migrants has increased again. In July 2022 there were over 7000 arrivals, and in the first half of 2022, more than 34 000 arrivals in total, the largest portion of whom originate in Afghanistan. Large portions of migrants stay in hotels and private accommodation facilities, though near the border with Hungary, Croatia, or Romania, a number of them occupy deserted houses in a similar manner in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNHCR, 2022).

The current Serbian policies to tackle the issue seem somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, Serbia has continued with providing visa-free entry to citizens of route's other source countries such as India, Tunisia, or Burundi, but at the same time enjoys a visa-free travel regime with the EU, which seems to ease the illegal entries (Lynch and Barigazzi, 2022). On the other hand, organisations such as the Border Violence Monitoring Network and No Name Kitchen have collected testimonies on evictions from official camps, which have left thousands homeless in the cold local forests, which shall likely serve as both a deterrence and a way to show the public that the government exerts control over the issue (ECRE, 2023). Nevertheless, the real situation remains unclear as these reports oftentimes rely on rumours and unverified testimonies. As previously mentioned, Serbia has also been a key EU partner in the region, being provided €130 million, which allowed i.a. establishment of refugee camps or tighter border patrolling (Zoppi and Puleri, 2021).

4.6 Albania

Albania has a strategic location for transit and has been particularly important at times when Greek borders with Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria were effectively blocked. Migrants have generally entered the country from Greece and continued to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In some cases, they nevertheless left the country via the Adriatic Sea, attempting to sail to Italy. The

major problem presents the lack of and the poor condition of existing infrastructure. Access from Greece is limited to a small number of main roads. Albania's interior is largely made up of mountains, which are difficult to cross, especially during the winter. Additionally, transiting to the EU by land through Albania requires one more border crossing than the transit through Northern Macedonia does (Schloenhardt, 2019).

Since the route's reopening in 2017, Albania's significance has relatively increased. Between January and October of 2021, UNHCR registered 9000 arrivals. As of September 2021, it recorded 115 refugees and 1582 people at risk of statelessness (UNHCR, 2021), which shows that the vast majority of arriving migrants managed to pass through.

4.7 Montenegro

Montenegro presents another transit country. However, even during the Balkan route's 'golden era', it was not affected as much as other countries in the region. Most migrants entered Montenegro from Albania and continued toward Serbia, Croatia, or Bosnia and Herzegovina (Schloenhardt, 2019). Very little information on the current figures and information can be found. In 2021, the UNHCR claimed to assist more than 4000 asylum seekers with most originating in Afghanistan, Morocco, and Iran (UNHCR, 2023g).

4.8 Bosnia and Herzegovina

Before 2017, migration streams had not affected Bosnia and Herzegovina as much as other countries in the region as the major corridor led through neighbouring Serbia (Schloenhardt, 2019). However, since 2018, the number of incomers has steadily increased with about 85 000 new arrivals in 2021. Most asylum-seekers of that year came from Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey, though - as in other countries - we can observe a variety of nationalities from all over Asia and Africa (UNHCR, 2023h).

Bosnia’s role as a transit corridor between Montenegro and Serbia on one side and mainly Croatia and the EU on the other (Hodzic, 2020) largely determines the distribution of migrants in the country. The major hubs include towns and cities next to the border entry points in the south and east of the country, the capital Sarajevo, and the Una-Sana canton located next to the Croatian border, especially the cities of Bihac and Velika Kladusa. Nowadays, there are six official temporary reception centres run jointly by the UNHCR, IOM, and the government with

one in Mostar, two in the capital of Sarajevo, and two in the Una-Sana canton. However, a large number reportedly stay in unofficial dwellings such as deserted houses, having no access to basic needs, hygiene, healthcare, clothing, and asylum procedures (e.g. Al Jazeera, 2021).

Similarly to other Balkan countries, Bosnia found itself unprepared to face such a crisis, particularly after the route's closure, which resulted in a large number of stuck migrants. Initially, its accommodation facilities included only several hundred beds, which left most migrants homeless, and, in turn, made asylum applications impossible as it required having an address (Deidda, 2020).

This has arguably somewhat improved with the intervention of the European Union, which assisted the country in creating its first strategy for tackling migration in 2015-2016, and has played a large role in tackling the issue ever since (Hodzic, 2020). In 2018, the EU has started funding activities aimed at solving the problem. The total migration-related assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina exceeded €144 million, which is aimed at providing shelter, food, and basic necessities as well as protecting vulnerable individuals and strengthening the state's capacities to manage the crisis. €18 million of these were channelled through humanitarian organisations such as IOM and UNHCR, which allowed e.g. the establishment of proper accommodation facilities (Deidda, 2020; European Commission, 2023).

Additionally, the European Commission has articulated that having a functional strategy for managing migration is a key requirement for giving the country status of an EU candidate. In consequence, the Council of Ministers has adopted an ambitious migration-related strategy for 2021-2027. Though it is, the government officials, "fully in line with the EU recommendations… aims also to improve the integration of foreigners legally residing in the country… strengthen coordination mechanisms in the management of migration and asylum… fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking", its true effect is yet to be revealed. Its estimated costs exceed €45 million, which should be obtained by international donations (Kurtic, 2020).

Furthermore, Savić-Bojanić and Jevtić (2022) find that though migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina experience enmity and hate speech from the locals (as they also do in other parts of the route), they also experience a specific kind of solidarity of locals who lived as refugees

during the infamous civil war of 1992-1995, which reportedly led to the provision of some assistance.

On the other hand, Bosnia's efforts to deal with the crisis have been constantly hindered by its complicated and dysfunctional administrative system. The federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its ten cantons, Republika Srpska, and district Brčko all have their own largely independent governments, and the country has three presidents, each representing one of the country's three major nations (Hodzic, 2020). The research conducted by OSCE (2018) revealed that the Bosnian border police had no clear instructions on how to deal with the issue, chaos in cooperation between various stakeholders, and even no nationwide system for recording migrants. Perhaps the most eloquent example of an uncoordinated one-sided move can present a 2020's step taken unilaterally by the government of Una-Sana canton, which attempted to reduce migrants' arrivals from the rest of the country by banning all transport of migrants in and within the canton (Amnesty International, 2020).

Figure 3: Map of the Western Balkan route after 2018. Caritas, 2019.

4.9 Croatia

Croatia found itself being a major transit hub between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia on one side and Slovenia on the other, particularly after Hungary effectively closed its borders. According to Rijavec, Štambuk, and Pevcin (2021), the country had very little tradition and experience with tackling migration, and so the crisis caught it unprepared. Initially, it similarly

to other countries assisted refugees with transit, providing them also with humanitarian and other assistance, but after Hungary closed its borders and the flow was therefore almost completely redirected towards Croatia, the country closed seven out of eight border crossing points with Serbia - and its doors to migrants, in general. Ever since then, Croatia's border protection has been marked by numerous reports of human rights abuses. UNHCR had been collecting testimonies of unlawful practices such as illegal pushbacks and violence, asking European countries to run an investigation (Vladisavljević, 2021), and these claims can be supported by the evidence of other civil society organisations (ECRE, 2023).

Though the exact current numbers of incomers are unclear, in 2021, Croatia recorded over 2500 asylum applications (Worlddata.info, 2022) and migrants reported about 3400 pushbacks (ECRE, 2023). Although these numbers show significant growth in comparison with previous years, comparison with the above-mentioned numbers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia indicate that most of the migrants from the latter two did not manage to cross the border with Croatia (nor, as described below, to Hungary).

4.10 Hungary

Unlike in the above-mentioned Balkan countries, the issue has been heavily politicised from the very beginning. This is largely linked to the fact that the incumbent Fidesz party had been losing popularity and was looking for a new topic to reverse this trend. As mentioned above, Hungary was amongst the first to restrain the free movement, erecting a barbed fence or introducing quotas to contempt the inflows. In the following years, the anti-immigrant sentiment was further fed by the referendum on the proposal of redistribution of migrants between the EU member countries, the campaign "Let's stop Brussels" against the perceived open-door policies of the European institutions, or the anti-campaign against the "Soros plan", whose aim was allegedly to resettle millions of migrants in Hungary (Bíro-Nagy, 2021). This was accompanied by several further practical restrictive steps such as erecting additional fences, enormously strict assessment of asylum applications, or discriminatory practices towards NGOs (Pardavi et al, 2022).

Hungary's strict policies seem to have led to a relative minimization of the inflows; in 2021, the country recorded only 38 applications for protection (Pardavi et al, 2021). More recent

numbers are nevertheless difficult to retrieve as flows are currently intermingled with the massive amount of arrivals and asylum applications from Ukraine.

5 RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research's aims, research questions, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and the major research limits.

5.1 Research aims

Previous chapters introduced the route and its various sections, and outlined some problems experienced by migrating persons as well as factors driving them. However, apart from largely missing evidence from certain sections of the route, a number of complementary questions might arise for the reader. How do the migrants *find* the smugglers or travelling companions, how do they navigate the terrain, where do they charge their phones, do they have to overcome a fear of the sea? And how do all these factors change as the migrants progress ahead? And many other such details, concerned with the problems the migrants have to face.

This research attempts to fill this gap, having three particular aims. First, it intends to holistically map challenges migrants encounter between the decision to depart and reaching the border of the European Union (with Greece being counted among transit destinations). Consequently, it aims to map the strategies, tools, people, or activities which help the migrants to overcome these challenges. These may be connected to a wide range of issues such as preparation for departure, information sharing, smuggling, and but also e.g. activities to overcome boredom. Third, it intends to map how these factors vary and evolve throughout the route.

The research's practical use is threefold. First, it will bring in unexplored motives for further migration-related research and academic debate, which the author himself intends to take part in. Second, the paper mapping the problems experienced by migrants could be useful for NGOs, agencies, policy-makers, and other people and entities practically concerned with helping migrants. Third, the same can be true for the map of the strategies used by migrants as it may help to provide an explanation for their behaviour and facilitate understanding of their needs.

5.2 Research questions

Q1: Which challenges do the migrants travelling through the Balkan route experience between the point of decision to depart and the point of reaching the EU border?
Q2: What are the drivers behind these challenges?
Q3: Which strategies do they use to overcome them?
Q4: Which external factors and forces help them to overcome them?
Q5: How do both of these groups of factors develop throughout the route?

5.3 Data collection methods

Reaching the data saturation to answer the research questions required using a combination of different methods, none of which would suffice alone. First, I interviewed a sample of migrants who successfully completed the Eastern Mediterranean route and either started or completed the Western Balkan route. However, the execution of these interviews revealed that: a) a number of potentially important details could not be recounted by the respondents; b) certain details, typically those linked to traumatic experiences, were not shared willingly; c) many details, such as these linked to cultural factors, seemed taken for granted and not spoken of; d) overall feeling that to obtain a fuller picture of the situation on the route, I need to go into the field.

Therefore, the interviews were complemented with the field research in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes. I conducted direct observations of migrants undertaking the journey in the route's selected sections and hotspots. Furthermore, I interviewed the non-migrant population in close contact with the migrants, which provided me i.a. with valuable insight into the role played by local people and governments, and finally, I observed the communication in and the role of social media platforms. As we will see, each of these methods had serious shortcomings; however, their combination eventually enabled me to reach data saturation.

5.3.1 In-depth interviews with migrants

Throughout 2022, I took nine semi-structured interviews with migrants of various nationalities who travelled the route between 2015-2022, and who shared their experiences, problems, and strategies to complete the route.

5.3.1.1 The sample

The sample consisted of nine migrants who completed the Eastern Mediterranean route and started or completed the Western Balkan route, regardless of their nationality, gender, age, opinions, personal goals, or socio-economic background. At the moment of taking the interview, six respondents were dwelling in Sarajevo after a number of unsuccessful attempts to cross the Croatian border, two were in Salzburg, and two were in the Greek refugee camps. Their nationalities included Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, and Somalia, thus representing the Near East, Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Apart from a 12-year-old Iraqi boy interviewed together with his mother, all of them were males between 18-40 years of age. All of them had at least basic conversational knowledge of English. The sample was obtained using the snowball method with the initial contacts provided by a former volunteer who worked with the migrants in Greece, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the former Red Cross representative in Ključ.

Table 2: Migrant respondents for in-depth interviews

No.	Nationality	Age[1]	Reason for leaving[2]	Education level[3]	Travelled localities
1	Afghan	Middle	Political and economic	High	Iran, Turkey, Greece
2	Afghan	Higher	Unclear	High	Iran, Turkey, Greece
3	Afghan	Young	Safety concerns	Low	Iran, Turkey, Greece
4	Moroccan	Young	Economic	Low	Turkey, Greece, Western Balkans

[1] Young = 18-24, Middle = 26-34, Higher = 35=<. These categories were chosen considering the sample age distribution and the relatively low age of migrants in comparison with the general population.
[2] Economic = poverty and seeking higher lying standard, Political = political persecution, Safety concerns = safety concerns due to war and/or terrorism
[3] Low = completed primary school or less, Medium = completed secondary school, High = completed college or university education

5	Moroccan	Middle	Economic	Low	Turkey, Greece, Western Balkans
6	Syrian	Higher	Political	High	Iran, Turkey, Greece, Western Balkans
7	Iraqi	Higher	Safety concerns	High	Iran, Turkey, Greece, Western Balkans
8	Somali	Middle	Economic	Low	Turkey, Greece, Western Balkans
23	Moroccan	Middle	Economic	Medium	Turkey, Greece, Western Balkans

5.3.1.2 Interview design

After being familiarised with the research and its aims and giving their consent to being recorded, respondents were asked to introduce their background, and motivation for leaving, and to describe their experience from the point of decision to depart to reach their current location. Once they started narrating, they were not interrupted by any prepared questions. First, this allowed them to express whatever problems, processes, and locations they (rather than the researcher) considered important, which is in accordance with the research's highly explorative nature. Second, I soon found that the experiences of the individual respondents were different to the extent that asking the same questions would have lacked any sense. Therefore, the respondents were interrupted only to further clarify the details of their testimonies. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes depending on the respondent's story, ability to remember the details and the will to share them. The interviews were recorded and the records were transcribed.

5.3.2 Field observations

The primary method of the field research presented direct observation conducted in the route's selected hotspots in the spring of 2023, with the additional use of some relevant field notes and recordings obtained in 2021-2022 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece.

5.3.2.1 The sample

Qualifying criteria for the sample selection were identical to those applied to the above-described interviews, only with the condition of completing at least the Eastern Mediterranean route being softened to either undertaking an active preparation for departure or having completed at least some part of the route. Again, nationality, gender, age, religion, personal goals, or socio-economic background did not play any role. The sample was obtained by the snowball method with the first contacts being usually met in accommodation facilities at one of the locations listed below.

It must be noted that it is not possible to truly quantify the sample size as the important part of the research presented observations of mass sceneries such as the ordinary life in temporary informal settlements with hundreds of dwellers. Nevertheless, the sample of persons who engaged in contact beyond the mutual introduction and spent at least several hours with the researcher included males between 15-40 years of age of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, Moroccan, and Syrian origins. All of them had at least basic knowledge of English. Importantly, the observations were done in natural settings, i.e. the sample members were currently completing their journey in the real locations of the route. However, not all activities were possible to observe in the natural settings; border crossings, dealing with smugglers or police chases couldn't be observed, and thus concerning these matters, the research relies on indirect data only.

Table 3: Migrant respondents met during the field research

No.	Nationality	Age	Reasons for leaving	Educational level	Place of contact
9	Indian	Young	Economic	High	India
10	Indian	Middle	Economic	Medium	India
11	Indian	Middle	Political	High.	Bosnia and Herzegovina
12	Iranian	Middle	Political	High	Bosnia and Herzegovina
13	Pakistani	Higher	Economic	Low	Turkey
14	Pakistani	Young	Economic	High	Turkey
15	Moroccan	Middle	Economic	Medium	Greece
16	Moroccan	Middle	Economic	Medium	Greece
17	Iranian	Young	Political	High	Greece
18	Pakistani	Young	Economic	High	Albania
19	Syrian	Young	Safety concerns	High	Turkey
20	Afghan	Young	Safety concerns	Low	Bosnia and Herzegovina
21	Afghan	Young	Economic	Low	Bosnia and Herzegovina
22	Afghan	Young	Unclear	Unclear	Bosnia and Herzegovina

5.3.2.2 Observation design

The observation was **direct** (the only issues where the research relies on merely indirect data were border-crossings and activities conducted online) and took place in **natural settings**, i.e. involved contact with the persons attempting to migrate through the researched route on the route.

Similarly to the above-described interviews, the observation was **non-structured**, intending to observe whatever the migrants on the route do, say, or are exposed to in the hope to find new motives rather than being limited to further observations of already known. In the end, I was able to record challenges and strategies related to the preparation for departure, looking for and dwelling in formal and informal settlements, finding travelling companions and smugglers, and activities related to travelling and movement. In contrast, it was impossible to directly observe the border-crossing and partly also the interaction between the migrants and locals as I was repeatedly told that the locals often behave differently in my presence.

Both **participatory and non-participatory techniques** were used. By travelling through the route, I did participate in completing it and in some of the observed activities (walking, navigating, experiencing cultural and time zone changes, etc.) - though obviously legally, safely, and having generally a different experience (see research limits). While spending time with migrants, I also participated in a variety of daily, leisure, and social activities. Some other activities were completed alone (though in the same way as migrants, who also often complete these alone), such as trying to find the smugglers or hiking the route's mountain trails. In all these cases, I and my experiences and feelings became part of the research, acknowledging that my experience is nevertheless fundamentally different in terms of safety, experienced feelings, and other factors. In contrast, I did not participate in the border-crossing and most activities related to departure preparation (due to the involvement of illegal activities or activities impossible to participate in such as attempting to obtain the legal documents or long-term learning of the intended destination's language).

Different stages of research were conducted **both covered and open**. Being uncovered was always preferred due to ethical concerns, but oftentimes I had to take a cover due to: a) personal dangers resulting from uncovering oneself, which varied with location, b) the social settings of

the given situation, c) the consequences of uncovering oneself for the research. For example, my true purpose was systematically hidden from the police in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it was known for preventing outsiders from researching migration-related issues. Similarly, it was initially hidden from a group of randomly encountered migrants in Thessaloniki drinking and smoking weed to prevent the Hawthorne effect. While covered, I assumed the identity of a traveller, except for one case of contact with smugglers, when I assumed the identity of a refugee from Russia. The data were recorded in the form of field notes, photographs and videos, and recordings.

5.3.2.3 Locations

First and foremost, the route was perceived as an undividable entity rather than a sum of individual locations intended for separate research; this was to capture the issues concerned with more than one location and/or corridors in between them (i.e. smuggling and travelling from one location to another). It was seen as a corridor for the continuous movement, in which the researched population, as well as the researcher, take part, aiming to map factors hindering and easing it. Therefore, the research location de facto presents the route itself, whilst the list of selected locations below serves rather as a tool for defining it and setting its bounds.

The existing literature identified all the selected locations as being the most important hubs for either smuggling or temporary settlement on the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkan route and so did most of the interviewed migrants. To obtain evidence of a *complete* experience and account for cultural factors (see below), one further location representing a destination of origin was added. In the end, the list included:

a) Kashmir region and New Delhi, India, represent a departure destination *and* a first destination for some Afghan migrants. This location was chosen in exchange for Pakistan due to security reasons.
b) Iran's cities of Zahedan and Tehran, which were eventually dropped due to the country's highly volatile security situation.
c) Izmir's coastal quarter of Basmane, Turkey.
d) Istanbul's quarters of Fatih and Yeninkapi, Turkey.
e) Edirne and the neighbouring area surrounding the border, Turkey and Greece.
f) The island of Lesbos, Greece.

g) Thessaloniki, Greece.
h) Tirana and its neighbourhood, Albania.
i) Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina.
j) Una-Sana canton, particularly the towns of Bihac and Velika Kladusa, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, this list is not exhaustive. Considering the previous point of perceiving the route as a corridor, the research also needed to include all the corridors and hubs of transit between these locations such as bus stations, ports, airports, trails, as well as roads, air, and maritime routes; all these present integral parts of migrants' and the researcher's experience.

5.3.3 Observation of the social media platforms

As a consequence of the fact that interviewed migrants repeatedly described social media platforms as an important channel for information sharing, finding smuggler services, and looking for travelling companions, it was decided to complement the data with a small-scale observation of the selected social media groups.

5.3.3.1 The sample

The sample presented members of two freely-accessible Facebook and one Whatsapp group dedicated to communication between the migrants and migrants and smugglers. The selected Facebook groups presented the largest groups in terms of members and activity which were possible to find and join freely; in one of these, a link to join the observed WhatsApp group was provided by the smugglers. By actively contributing to these topics and searching for services or companions, its members (except for the smugglers) presumably expressed interest or already were at the point of completing the route. All of the members were speaking either English or Arabic. Otherwise, they presumably varied in nationality, socio-economic background, age, or intended destinations, none of which - similarly to other methods in this research - nevertheless played any role.

5.3.3.2 The design

The observation was indirect, relying on the data in the form of migration-related posts, comments, and communication between the members between October 2022 and April 2023, which were recorded through print screens. As with all the data collection methods in this research, the observation was non-structured, assessing whatever motives appear instead of looking for the data related only to predetermined issues. It was also non-participant, merely observing the flow and communication of other members. For the translation of Arabic, I relied either on translation software or an Arabic speaker. Eventually, the gathered data proved useful to answer Q2, particularly for the strategies related to illegal border crossing.

5.3.4 Interviews with non-migrant respondents

Finally, I interviewed various non-migrant persons who were in long-term contact with the migrants in the selected locations. This was due to their possible ability to provide either context or further data on motives that migrants are either unable or unwilling to give details of, such as traumatising events or long-term trends in the investigated issue in the given locality, acknowledging the fact that they perceived migrants and the route through very different lenses than migrants themselves.

5.3.4.1 The sample

The only qualification for being interviewed was to have at least six months of continuous and regular contact with migrants at any period of time since 2015. This period was chosen to eliminate those with one-time or short-term experience only, such as a number of locals who e.g. brought food a few times or months at the beginning of the crisis but generally didn't see the migrants more than occasionally and thus did not presumably have an opportunity to obtain enough insight to provide an in-depth interview about migrants and their problems. Otherwise, it paid no attention to any demographic, professional, religious, socio-economic, or other characteristics. The sample was obtained through an introduction by another existing contact or by random meetings.

Table 4: Non-migrant respondents

Code name	Place of contact with migrants	Background
A	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Volunteer
B	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Serbia	Volunteer
C	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Volunteer
D	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Local resident
E	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Local resident
F	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Government official
G	Greece	Volunteer

5.3.4.2 The design

After being familiarised with the research's aim, the respondents were asked to describe their experience with the migrants, particularly in relation to the problems migrants had to face in the given locality, and, in the case of the respondents who were helping migrants, also how their efforts helped to mitigate them. However, the interviews were otherwise unstructured due to the wildly differing natures of respondents' experiences and activities, the aim to find new motives, and the attempt to obtain facts rather than e.g. personal motivations and feelings, which would possibly allow at least some degree of standardisation. The respondents were thus interrupted to further clarify their answers. The interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes, depending on the respondent's experience and willingness to share it. The interviews were recorded and these recordings were transcribed.

5.4 Data analysis

The data analysis involved the triangulation of all the data sources described above, i.e. recording transcriptions, field notes, and social media posts and messages. The data were processed using the method of inductive coding. The codes were grouped into subcategories, which make chapter sections, and categories, which make chapters. This way, I identified the major challenges migrants have to face and the strategies used to cope with these challenges.

Special attention was paid to: a) how these motives differ with varying locations and respondents' backgrounds, b) how these evolve for the individual migrants *and* locations, and c) which actors and factors shape and influence them. The results are described in the following chapter.

Table 5: Coding scheme

Travelling the route	Journey preparation	Preparation steps	Obtaining funds
			Getting the documents ready
			Packing
			Looking for companions
			Preparation for settling in the final destination
			Hiding the departure
		Motivations and plans	Changes in the final destination
			Blurring barriers between migrant types
	Smuggling	Finding smugglers	Obtaining contacts from relatives and friends
			Using social media platforms
			Direct contact
		Dealing with smugglers	Process
			Price trends
			Insurance mechanisms
	Border crossings	Afghanistan to Iran	The method
		Iran to Turkey	The method
			Route's dangers

		Turkey to Greece	Sea route
			Land route
		Greece to Bosnia and Herzegovina	The method
		Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia	The method
			Causes of danger
	Intra-country travelling	Challenges to movement	Transport arrangements
			Long walk consequences
			Police encounter
		Movement strategies	Blending-in
			Using transport as a stowaway
		Accommodation and shelter	Legal residence at accommodation facilities
			Unregistered residence at accommodation facilities
			Staying with friends and relatives
			Squats and rough sleeping
			Staying in refugee camps
		Navigation strategies	Navigation methods
			Improvisation
		Getting basic everyday necessities	Getting food and drinks
			Phone batteries
			Internet access

			Money withdrawals
		The influence of Covid-19	Covid-19 as a factor slowing down migrants' movement
	Migrants as an influential factor	The positive mutual influence between migrants	Sharing basic necessities
			Travelling cooperation
			Information sharing
			Mutual assistance with other things
		Travel groups formation and separation	Meeting via social media platforms
			Meetings at accommodation facilities
			Random meetings on the route
			Establishing the contact
			Group separations
		The negative mutual influence between migrants	Conflicts between migrants
		The positive influence of locals on migrants' movement	Basic necessities provision for free
			Basic necessities provision for money
		The negative influence of locals on migrants' movement	Misusing migrants
			Reporting migrants to authorities
		Psychological factors influencing migrants	Fear
			Frustration
			Trauma

			Positive emotions
		Religious factors influencing migrants	Ramadan
			Muslim solidarity
		Cultural factors influencing migrants	Language barrier
			Cultural shock
	Access to public services	Problems with asylum processes	Migrants' inability to deal with the process
			Bureaucratic problems
			Inappropriate dealing with rejected applicants
		Education	Migrants out of education
			State and NGO-provided education
			Community-based education
			Private tutors
			Self-learning
		Healthcare	Obstacles to healthcare access
		Justice access	Lack of access to justice
			Consequences of lack of access to justice

5.5 Research limits

First, as a non-migrant person with a different cultural and socioeconomic background than my respondents, I perceived the same motives through different lenses. For instance, while I perceived Istanbul's weather as pleasant, Pakistani respondents never being outside the tropical belt reported freezing. While they found the local people being cold due to the lack of mutual interaction, I found this indifference to be nothing else than a general European standard. Hadn't these issues been articulated, I would fail to spot them, as I might have done with other details. Additionally, I travelled legally, and safely (without the need for dangerous border crossings), with enough budget, and knowing that if something happens, home is just a flight away, thus my feelings and experience were therefore presumably highly different from the real migrants.

Furthermore, I had to acknowledge that in the same way, people of each background perceived the route differently from each other - for example, newcomers from Sub-Saharan Africa seemed to find Turkey more alien than those coming from the neighbouring countries. Two steps were taken to address this issue: the first was to familiarise me with the cultural background of the respondents (which was eased by the fact that I had, in the past, visited some of the destinations of origin) and attempt to take this into account while analysing the data. The second step was to start the research in a destination of origin, which allowed me to directly observe and personally experience the sudden cultural, environmental, political, and other changes.

The second major problem presented a language barrier linked to the high variability in the nationalities of the interviewed migrants. I am not able to speak migrants' mother tongues such as Pashto, Urdu, or Arabic. This made dealing with the migrants very difficult and might have prevented me from penetrating deeper into their communities (as well as may have made the research possibly fail to capture some of the challenges faced particularly by the migrants unable to speak English). Eventually, I chose the migrants able to speak English or relied on interpreters from the migrants' ranks as a number of migrant groups had at least one member or friend able to speak English.

Third, the research possibly fails to fully capture the experiences and problems of migrating women and families, which is due to the underrepresentation of these groups in the research

sample. In interviews, this was caused by the combinations of snowball sampling and the fact that the initial contacts included only young male respondents. In observation, this was caused by the fact that I was mostly accommodated in shared facilities frequented by single male migrants but not by women or families. Furthermore, as a young male, I found socialising and spending time with other young males natural; in contrast, some of the researched cultures find contact between unmarried strangers males and females undesirable or at least not usual. I attempted to fix this by seeking more female and elder-aged respondents, but this met with very limited success. Therefore, the findings can be claimed as valid for young and middle-aged single male migrants.

Fourth, the full exploration of each researched place and reported issue would take months or even years of focused effort. However, the study is aware of this and shall merely serve as an explorative launchpad for further research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This part of the work summarises the findings of the research sorted into six chapters linked to different geographical phases of the route and various drivers influencing the whole process.

6 DEPARTING

This chapter is concerned with motives linked to the pre-departure period which directly influence the travelling process, i.e. preparation, motivations and plans of the researched migrants.

6.1 Preparation steps

This category includes preparation steps commonly taken by the respondents in their home countries before starting their journey, regardless of whether they later proved useful or not. Put simply, it maps how the migrants prepare for their departure.

The first step, reported by all respondents, was to collect sufficient funds to pay for smuggling, transport tickets, food, and other expected expenses, which usually went into thousands of USD. *"The journey costs thousands of dollars, even if you're modest… I still owe about ten thousand dollars."* described respondent 1. Two sub-strategies for that were found: first, had they had any, respondents used personal savings from their previous jobs or inherited funds. Second, nearly all respondents were supported by families and/or friends, who were in all cases reportedly supporting them willingly without arranging any clear repayment schedule, possibly not expecting the repayment at all. This was, by some, explicitly ascribed to the collective and supportive nature of their cultures. *"You just call your friends and relatives, people help each other. When you have money, you will help them back… This is a good thing about [my country], people help each other,"* explained respondent 1.

Second, the migrants arranged necessary documents and services, depending on one's exact possibilities and intentions. Most respondents got (or at least tried to get) a passport, either by a legal application at the proper office or by bribery. *"You should always carry your passport,"* emphasised respondent 4, which had, according to him and other respondents, threefold use: it

enabled some migrants to travel to certain destinations (particularly Turkey) legally, it helped them to pass the police checks, and it also helped in dealing with governmental entities (such as in attempts to obtain legal protection).

Having valid ID documents, most continued by trying to arrange a visa to travel legally to as close to their final destination as possible. This was nevertheless generally reported to be exceptionally difficult due to the number of required documents, and so only three respondents succeeded. *"I tried to get a French visa,"* described respondent 4. *"They said you need money in the bank. You need a lot of things. So it was impossible for me to get it."* Consequently, if legal travelling wasn't possible *and* the respondents were able to afford it, the preparation involved arranging the smuggler service for illegal border crossing, which is described in detail in the following chapter.

Third, the preparation in all cases involved packing. Respondents and observed migrants generally travelled with only one light backpack containing clothes, legal documents, and electronics. Given the great distance to be travelled and frequent loss of personal belongings on the way, which appears through most of the stories, carrying heavier baggage or valuables would be generally considered rather a burden. *"I just had a small backpack with two, three pairs of jeans and jackets and sweaters. That clothes. Nothing else,"* described, similarly to others, respondent 2.

Fourth, some respondents who preferred travelling in groups (either for practical reasons such as safety and the possibility to cooperate or due to their relatively extroverted nature), found travelling companions to begin the journey with. This involved either relatives or friends with the intention to migrate in the same direction, or, interestingly, random people contacted through social media. Respondent 4 described: *"There is a Facebook group about meeting people crossing the borders and these things. You can write there… I met two people and we agreed we will meet in Turkey."* Observation of the sample Facebook groups indeed clearly reaffirmed that this may present a wider trend as dozens of posts of potential migrants looking for companions were found.

Fifth, the respondents who had clear ideas of their intended final destinations and future life took steps to prepare for settling there. This included self-learning the language of the given country and/or checking the possibilities of staying legally, such as protection or working

permits for foreigners. *"I am watching movies in German, I downloaded some materials online, and I also checked some ways how [citizens of my country] can get a job,"* described respondent 9.

Sixth, some respondents who were not funded by their families hid that they were departing not to bring them fear and not be forbidden to do that. *"It was just between friends because mothers don't want it,"* described respondent 4. *"They don't let you go… my mom was crying and she said no because she heard that it's dangerous and that a lot of guys died there."*

6.2 Plans and motivations

Two more findings of interest were detected. First, the motivations for departure demonstrated blurring barriers between refugees and economic migrants as the reasons for leaving often presented either a combination of these or reasons not strictly fitting into any of these categories. The case can be illustrated by the story of respondent 1.

"I started to work with a military mission... There were many people who didn't like that and forced me to leave this job. They beat me a lot. [Later] I lost the job. With my friend… we started to work in the media, publishing modern things. The people got against me again. 'You're not a good Muslim, you're publishing harmful things'... There was a [wealthy military person]. I went to him and asked him to support me… He said… I'll give you 60 000 dollars… I'll now give you 20 000, but after you'll put my name on the official record I will give you the rest…. We did that… He took our [project] and kicked us out. He said 'I am the owner now, leave me.'… he had like twenty guards… They kicked me out. I found out I would be a loser if I stayed in [my country]. I don't want to be a loser."

The respondent did suffer the unlawful violence and he was later granted refugee protection, yet he was not in a life-threatening situation and sought a better country to go on with his business. Similarly, respondent 3 left his country of origin to flee from an abusive father, *"start a new life"* and later to Turkey to help his sister, which fits neither the category of refugee nor an economic migrant as defined in the first chapter. Such mixed and/or uncategorizable reasons could be found in nearly all respondents except for those of Moroccan and Indian (except for Kashmiri) nationality, whose motivations could be considered merely economic.

Second, the intended 'final' destination often changed later throughout the journey. The original 'final' destinations of sample migrants at the point of departure included Saudi Arabia, India, Iran, or Turkey, yet they all ended up travelling to the European Union. This had three reasons. The first was unfulfilled expectations on the quality of life in the 'original final' destination in terms of opportunities, safety, or the level of economic development. Respondent 1 said: "*I thought India is better than [my country]. But it's not a very good place to live, and it's dangerous.*" The second factor was the inability to obtain documents or permits for legal stay and subsequent fear of deportation, which drove respondents to move forward. *"Turkey is a good country, but I couldn't get any paper. Some of my friends from [my country] were deported. So I could be kicked out as well at any moment. It was too risky to stay,"* described respondent 3. The third reason was the perceived appeal of European countries, often delivered through stories and testimonies of successful migrants from the ranks of one's friends and relatives.

7 ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSING

Central motives and oftentimes the most dangerous parts of the journey present illegal border crossings, which migrants call *"the Game"*. This chapter is concerned with the motives linked to the preparation, process, and challenges of all the border crossings on the route.

7.1 Preparation

This section examines preparation strategies for illegal border crossings. The preparation process was found to be similar at each border.

7.1.1 Smugglers

Unsurprisingly, using the smuggler services proved a major factor enabling respondents to illegally cross most of the borders on the route. Nearly all of the respondents had at least one such experience; the only exception presented those who did not have enough money). The following section will introduce strategies for arranging smuggling services.

7.1.1.1 Establishing contact

Considering the fact that the whole business operates illegally, finding smugglers was reported and later proved to be perhaps surprisingly easy with migrants as well as me being able to find the contact numbers within minutes. Three major ways of getting into contact with smugglers were discovered.

The first way presents obtaining contacts from friends and family members who started their journey earlier or had contacts with such people, simply by asking them. Respondents reported it to be simple and quick as one can always find someone who would willingly share the contact. Furthermore, the advantage is that the given smuggler has already been 'verified' by another trusted person. This way was reported to be particularly used before the departure from the destination of origin. *"When people are going to move for the first time, they're asking neighbours or friends,"* described respondent 3. *"'Do you know any smuggler to take me to [a certain country]?' And then say 'can you give me the number?' ... my best friend was already there, so I asked him and took the number from him."*

The second way is presented through social media platforms. In observed Facebook groups, smugglers were openly advertising priced smuggling services, enclosing numbers for

Whatsapp groups or private Facebook groups to make further arrangements with anyone interested. *"We have an available driver, we can pick you up wherever you want [in the Balkans] except for Serbia. Contact [a number]."* stated one of such posts.

Inversely, many posted their requirements and waited for offers in the comments below. "*Hello brothers, I want to go to Germany via Greece. Do you have any drivers?"* states one of them. Each of such posts was answered with dozens of replies with offers and contacts within hours, which indicates possible high effectiveness in this way.

Third, migrants were often finding smuggling "enterprises" personally in the hotspot cities on the route. The particular places dedicated to that present certain coffee shops, which the migrants can find through other migrants in a given location. A special case presented open migrant quarters in Turkey, where it was possible to find them visually without any previous information. "*You can see who is a smuggler, who is suspicious, who is not like normal people,"* described respondent 6. There, they were disguised as either coffee shops or travelling bureaus offering trips to various European destinations, having no clear opening hours and being not findable on the internet. Just stopping at the door, I was approached and offered accommodation, smuggling, and sex services (being mistaken for a Russian refugee, which, at the time, fled to the country in large numbers). This way was, therefore, found as simple and quick as the other two.

7.1.1.2 Arranging the service

All the testimonies across the border agree on the way of arranging the service. Whether the initial contact went through phones, social media, or personally, the respondents were offered several types of smuggling services depending on their budget and preferences, except for the crossings from Afghanistan to Iran and from Iran to Turkey, where only crossing by foot was possible. Otherwise, the migrants were able to choose between crossing by foot with a guide (which involved either passing through difficult-to-patrol mountainous terrain, climbing the fence, or fording the bordering rivers), travelling hidden inside trucks, arranging a car transport called "taxi" (likely involving a bribe to border guards, though no direct evidence for that was found), or travelling with forged documents. Smuggling from Turkey to Greece additionally involved the infamous waterway to Greek islands. Each of these ways had a different price. When the migrants chose, they were told to wait to be contacted again, the day before or on the day of crossing. "*It is easy… I called the smuggler. He just told me 'Which way would you like*

to go – by walking, by taxi, by going in a container of a truck?... Every way has a different price… Do you have the money?'" described the process respondent 1.

A comparison of the testimonies of migrants crossing the borders at different times and observations of social media groups indicated that the prices seem to follow several trends. First, the cheapest way is always crossing by foot, or, in the case of the Turkey-Greece border, by boat, both of which are also considered the riskiest. Second, the prices of smuggling across continental Europe seem to be significantly higher than smuggling in Asia and Greece, which was explicitly mentioned by respondents talking on this topic. Third, all prices seem to be steadily rising over time. For instance, the price of sailing by boat from the Turkish coast to Lesbos was known to be about 1000 USD back in 2015, yet, respondents completing this route between 2019-2021 paid over 2500 USD. Similarly, the price of smuggling between Una-Sana canton and Croatia went up about four times between 2019-2021 to 1500 USD for crossing by foot and 4000 USD for vehicle transport. In consequence, a number of refugees cannot afford to use the service and attempt to cross on their own.

Interestingly, two mechanisms of insurance ensuring that the payment will go smoothly from both sides were developed. The first, used on sections between Turkey and the EU, presented so-called *"guarantee shops"*. Migrants pre-arrange visits to these "shops", which seem to be usually disguised as coffees or restaurants and give the amount agreed with a smuggler plus a fixed provision to a shop-owner, who is connected to the smuggler. The provider safely stores the money and gives the migrant a secret code. When the migrant successfully reaches his destination, he calls the shop and shares the secret code and the location of his phone. These two additional features ensure that the smuggler cannot obtain the money by pretending to be the migrant. If the migrant does not reach his destination, he can withdraw the money at any time, but only personally, which ensures that the migrant will not withdraw and flee after being provided with the service.

On the route's earlier sections between Afghanistan and Turkey, a less sophisticated system was used as reported by all respondents who travelled through these destinations. After crossing the border, migrants were de facto imprisoned and set free and/or transported farther only after paying the smuggler, either personally or through a relative. Respondent 1 described: *"He [the smuggler] came with the car and took me to the place where other refugees were staying. It was a very old house… We were there from the morning till the evening… He told*

me, 'Go and sit in the car, we will move you to Istanbul.' I said 'but what about the other guys?' He said 'they need to pay me first.' I already paid."

Before examining each crossing in detail, one more reappearing motive throughout all the border crossings was found - mistreatment of migrants from the hands of smugglers, which took various forms, but was generally aimed at obtaining more profit by either direct trickery, or saving costs, time, and energy by taking improper care of their clients. Respondent 6 reported a smuggler running away with the money, respondent 1 being left abandoned in the mountains when unable to keep with the rest of the group, respondent 3 being locked and forced to pay more money, and respondent 7 being provided with an old boat in dangerously poor condition, etc. Respondent 1 described: *"We came to a very dark room. It was still night, around 4:00 AM. And they just put us like animals inside that room. We were so hungry and thirsty and there wasn't anything to eat. So we waited for a couple of hours... and the smuggler came around 10:00 AM. He just brought one piece of dry bread...The children and women were so hungry. They were yelling and saying 'bring us as food. We are humans, not animals that you are behaving like that to us'... But the door was locked... Going to the toilet or these things was not possible. They behave like we are not even humans."*

7.1.2 Packing

Apart from the possible arrangement of smuggler services, the preparation - similarly to the preparation for the initial departure - usually consisted of packing a light backpack with clothes, durable food and water reserves, charging the phone, and possibly determining the route. In Turkish coastal areas, waterproof bags and cases were also bought. Nevertheless, as the migrants could not afford adequate equipment, the observed result was sometimes clearly inadequate; migrant groups were seen walking in beach sandals and spring jackets to snow-covered areas and heights exceeding 2000 metres above sea level.

7.2 Border crossing methods and challenges

This section examines the motives of strategies and challenges linked to each illegal border crossing on the route.

7.2.1 Afghanistan to Iran

All the recorded testimonies used smuggling services and all agreed on a method to complete

the crossing. The process was as follows: first, the clients were instructed to relocate to Nimruz province, where they spent a night or two waiting in one of the hotels close to the borders with Pakistan's Balochistan to be contacted by the smuggler. After being contacted, they were picked up and, together with other migrants, transported closer to the border. The whole group departed on foot with an Afghan smuggler, who guided them through pathways in the mountains to the border with Pakistan, where he handed them over to a Pakistani colleague. A Pakistani smuggler took the group in the same manner to the border with Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan, where they were handed over to an Iranian smuggler. Such a method was to avoid police controls located on the roads, and a direct Afghan-Iranian border, which was considered to be more tightly controlled and dangerous. An Iranian smuggler brought groups to vehicles waiting on the road at a safe distance from the border checkpoints, which transported them to safe bases in Iranian villages. There they were held locked before they paid and then transported to Zahedan, and arranged transport to their destination in Iran (in the case of all respondents, to Tehran).

Respondent 3 described: *"We went to the border. Smuggler was walking with me to the border and then he handed me over to someone from Pakistan. We walked for… an hour and a half, and then we turned to Iran… there was a new person from Iran. When we came to Iran… we walked for … three, four hours. Then we saw a road and many cars waiting for us. All the people were running… because they were afraid that the police could come anytime. They took us to [a village] and then they told us, 'now you should pay for we brought you here, then we will let you go. And we will buy bus tickets for you. We will send you to Tehran or anywhere you want.'"*

Nevertheless, it must be noted that it is unclear how this may have changed with the outbreak of the current anti-government protests as no fresh information from the area is available.

7.2.2 Iran to Turkey

Again, all the recorded testimonies agreed on the method and route. The base for the departure was the bordering area around the city of Tabriz, where the migrants gathered. Interestingly, respondent 6 mentioned that his group contained not only Afghan, Pakistani, or Iranian members, but also people from Syria, Iraq, and other countries; so far, there was little evidence mentioning Iran as a major channel for these refugees. Groups were then transported close to the border. Then they got off the vehicles and crossed the border through the unguarded areas

of the Zagros mountain range on foot, guided by smugglers to avoid border guards. The final mechanism was the same; crossings ended up in one of the villages next to the border, where the smuggler had a hidden refuge in one of the villages near the border. Again, the migrants were locked up till they paid and then transported to destinations across Turkey.

All respondents called the walk particularly difficult (even in comparison with the crossing from Afghanistan to Iran), mentioning terrain difficulty and snow, which made the walk physically exhausting, length (crossing took all night), temperatures below zero, and the presence of wolves and dogs. Respondent 1 described: *"The border crossing was so* difficult. *I was walking on the snow, there was a metre of it… One woman was so close to losing a baby there because of the cold, but we saved him... I took my jacket off and covered him. All the people went with the smuggler, but me and another guy who was overweight lost them in the mountains… at two o'clock… he couldn't walk anymore. I said that I will go to the smuggler and ask him for help. There were so many dogs and wolves. I saw a wolf with green eyes just ten metres away. Luckily, it didn't attack me."*

7.2.3 Turkey to Greece

As already described, the route herein divides into two sub-routes, so migrants can choose. The crucial factor described by most was the price of smuggling. All those respondents who could not afford the smuggler went by land as it was possible to manage it without the service. However, it took far longer (days vs several hours), was physically more challenging as it required extensive walking, climbing, and/or river fording, and unlike on the sea, arrested respondents were experiencing pushbacks. It was possible to arrange a smuggler service through there as well, but this was significantly more expensive than the boat. Most migrants, therefore, opted for boats. *"The cheapest way was the boat… so I took it,"* described respondent 1 his decision.

7.2.3.1 Sea route

As described above, this was the method used by most respondents. The process was as follows: after reaching an agreement with the smuggler and depositing money in a guarantee shop, respondents waited in accommodation facilities in one of the coastal cities to wait to be contacted by the smuggler. After being contacted, they were transported in vans to deserted coastal points, gathered together with other migrants, and boarded prepared boats. Then they

departed towards the closest Greek island. After reaching the beach, all the migrants went or were transported by police or volunteers to refugee camps. This included respondents caught by border patrols; their boats were simply directed and accompanied to one of the islands, where the police brought them to camps.

Most respondents expressed strong doubts concerning the safety of used boats. Respondent 3 reported the engine ceasing to work in the middle of the sea, respondent 7 refused to board the boat due to being *"small and finished",* and respondent 1 reported shipwrecking near the coast of Lesbos: *"There was a big storm. We crashed on the rocks and our boat got a hole. I jumped in the water and swam over a hundred metres to reach the beach..."*

Importantly, this route also involved travelling from islands to mainland Greece, which was nevertheless never part of the smuggling agreement. It was completed by attempting to buy tickets without arousing suspicion of salespersons and/or sneaking in the ferries heading towards the mainland. Respondents agree that it was necessary to look like a tourist or attempt several times to encounter 'lenient' employees. Respondent 7 also mentions that it was possible to purchase fake documents to board a ferry, which significantly eased the process. *"They have migrants who work with these things in the camp. They wrote that we are from America. We paid 800 euros for three ID cards. We went inside [the ferry] and showed them our cards. They were looking at our faces. I spoke English and I told them, "okay, can we go inside?" They said, okay, you can go.' We went to Athens."*

7.2.3.2. Land route

This way involved crossing from the Turkish Thrace (with Edirne being a 'central' departure base) to the neighbouring Greek province of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

The departure base was in all cases Edirne, a point where it is quickly possible to get by public transport from Istanbul and other major cities. Nevertheless, migrants were found to cross at different points all across the 212 km-long border, trying to find unguarded points to cross. It is not necessary to avoid Turkish forces, whose members were reported assisting or even forcing migrants to cross to Greece. *"Turkish police just take your information and they even tell you, for example, go to Germany and don't go to Italy. And then they say, you must go to the border tonight,"* described respondent 4. However, it was necessary to avoid Greek patrols on the other side of the border. Crossing the line itself was done either by sailing or fording the bordering Meric river or climbing the border fence. When I visited the area in March, its basin

was at some sections parched to the degree where it was possible to cross by foot without getting wet, which was indeed also done by some migrants. Respondent 4 described: *"We stayed all night hiding in front of the border because we heard that at night, it's easy for them to catch you. But in the morning there is a time when the military changes, so… this is the best moment to cross. There is a river, but there is also a fence. We walked till the fence ended and the water was down at that moment. So we crossed."*

After crossing the border, it was necessary to continue by walking through the bordering and heavily patrolled hills and forests of Greek Thrace without getting arrested in the surrounding reportedly heavily patrolled areas. This regularly took days to complete, and arrests seemed to be frequent. Respondent 4 described: *"We walked for seven days… We slept just during the day because it was a little bit warmer… and nobody sees you. It took seven days before we finished."* It was also described to be physically very difficult due to the distance, the impossibility to stop and replenish, and having to sleep rough in the mountains with a relatively cold climate. *We couldn't walk anymore. We were so upset because we did not think that it would be so long and hard. We were thirsty, hungry… it was so cold… we were struggling so much,"* described respondent 4.

Interestingly, respondent 7 caught by the Greek patrols confirms rumours of secret detention centres and illegal practices in the area. *"We walked for about three hours and the police caught us. They were very bad to us. In prison, they gave us only some water and biscuits and they beat us. Many people ran because the jail was big, it was like a camp in Greece. There was a fence. And people go downstairs to the fence and jump or dig. But we didn't run… They sent us back by bus."*

7.2.4 Greece to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Methods of crossing the three borders between Greece, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina virtually do not differ. All these borders were located in the mountainous terrain of the Gramos range and Dinaric Alps and the crossing involved walking through border forests, hills, or rivers. The exact passage seems to differ by the respondent, as, unlike in other borders, many different passageways are possible to take, and migrants can therefore choose according to their preferences (i.e. avoid fording rivers, steep terrain, etc.). For instance, respondent 5 described: *"We agreed to avoid rivers and other dangerous things, even if it meant walking for longer."* All these borders were also reported to be sparsely patrolled. None

of the respondents used a smuggler to cross any of them and none was arrested at the border. *"Some people are using smugglers, but you can do it alone,"* explained respondent 6: *"Most people are using just their phone and go. They cannot control the whole border. You just need to check safe routes. Then just cross the border by walking and go to the first bus station. When you arrive, you are safe. It's easy."*

7.2.5 Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia

The major channel presented a passage from the Una-Sana canton to Karlovac and Sisak-Moslavina counties of Croatia. In the summer months with plausible weather conditions, migrants were observed to gather in towns and villages close to the border such as Bihac and Velika Kladusa. There they form groups and attempt to pass through the pathways of the surrounding Dinaric Alps.

Of all the borders on the route, this was repeatedly explicitly described as the most difficult one to cross in terms of chance to succeed. This was due to two factors. First, the crossing to Croatia is difficult due to the border guards' presence and modern equipment including thermal imaging cameras, drones, and helicopters. *"We tried everything. Pay someone, walk, GPS, everything. Nothing is working. We tried so many times,"* reported respondent 7. This seemed common; dozens of migrants encountered in local informal settlements regularly reported up to fifty unsuccessful attempts, calling the crossing *"nearly impossible"*. Second, the journey does not end behind the Croatian border, but as I was told by respondents, one must continue towards Slovenia and get to Austria or Italy without stopping with the constant threat of being arrested as both Croatia and Slovenia are reportedly promptly deporting all the caught migrants back to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some migrants also reported being (repeatedly) returned even from north-eastern Italy. *"It's just so hard in Croatia. So much. I arrived a few times. I also arrived in Italy three times, seven kilometres from the border. They just catch us. Even if you are in Zagreb, they just catch you,"* described respondent 6.

All respondents who made at least one unsuccessful attempt reported suffering a wide range of illegal practices at the hands of Croatian forces. They were beaten, stolen their personal belongings such as phones, money, and even shoes, and deported back to Bosnia, where they were left dispersed in various deserted places. Deported migrants were observed to hide in informal settlements, resting and recovering from injuries before pursuing another attempt.

"Croatians were bad to us, they steal everything from you, beat you, and bring you back," described respondent 7.

8 INTRA-COUNTRY TRAVELLING

Although the literature is arguably most concerned with border crossings, travelling *within* the countries on the route, as found by the research, is sometimes no less dangerous and difficult. Since the migrants in Iran and Turkey are usually either transported through these countries by smugglers as a "part of the package" or staying legally and thus able to move in a similar way to e.g. tourists, this chapter is particularly - though not exclusively - linked to travelling through continental Europe.

8.1 Moving forward

This section examines challenges and strategies related to illegal physical movement within the countries on the route.

8.1.1 Challenges

The first challenge was a large inability to take any form of transport. First, most migrants reported problems with buying tickets for public transport within the travelled countries; sometimes, they were even reported to the police by clerks. Second, none of the respondents could afford to use a smuggler for travelling *within* countries, despite its availability as the precious money was saved for border crossings. This forced them to travel hundreds or even thousands of kilometres on foot (or forced them to develop strategies to sneak in the transport).

This brought a second set of challenges. Respondents frequently mention exhaustion from long walks, weather (particularly in winter months and mountains), hunger, and injuries (generally related to body overload, i.e. pulled muscles). *"We were walking so much that our feet were dying,"* said respondent 4, who was walking for over 1000 kilometres between Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina. "*We couldn't walk anymore… It's so hard you should walk in the mountains and you are thirsty, hungry… cold… we were struggling so much."*

The third related problem was avoiding police encounters, which could end up in deportations to previous countries which 'extended' the journey by hundreds of kilometres. Many respondents described repeated chases and runaways from the police all across the route. It is crucial to note that this phenomenon was not linked only to areas in proximity to the border. In Iran, Turkey, Albania, and Montenegro, migrants were deported from capital cities or other

locations deep inside the countries' territories. The only relatively safe areas were those close enough to the next border, where, as both repeatedly described and observed, the police generally helped or even forced migrants to go away from their territory rather than attempting to push them back. *"When you enter any country, they push you back. Only if you are leaving, they will push you to leave [for the next country]."* described respondent 4. Therefore, avoiding police encounters at most of the route presented an important challenge on its own.

8.1.2 Strategies

The following sections introduce motives concerned with the strategies migrants use to deal with the above-mentioned challenges.

8.1.2.1 Blending in

In all the researched countries, strategies to blend in with the local population and environment, or at least not to stand out too much, were pursued to avoid getting arrested and deported.

When staying at one place, some respondents reported not leaving the accommodation facility unless necessary (i.e. when attending their workplace or buying groceries) to avoid being spotted and arrested by the police, which, as respondents agreed, is generally experienced with distinguishing migrants from locals. One of the respondents described: *"When I arrived [in Tehran], my [relative] took me to his apartment like a smuggler. He told me to stay aware, and just look behind to make sure we are not being followed by police or by someone. Because of the police, he was leaving his apartment very secretly. In Turkey, it was the same…. After I woke up from sleep, I just washed my face and went directly to the place where I worked, and when I was going back, I came directly back to my house… because several of my Afghan friends have been deported from Turkey. Turkish people caught them… they kicked them back to Afghanistan."*

When on the move, respondents generally avoided the major routes and settlements, taking advantage of parallel pathways and forest covers. Places inhabited and frequented by locals are only visited in case of need, and only one member of the group does the visit so it does not draw much attention. Some migrants also report avoiding travelling in daylight. "*If you go during the day, someone sees you,"* explained respondent 4.

Furthermore, before visits to cities, towns and villages and attempting to take public transport, nearly all respondents reported intentionally changing clothes, bathing and shaving. *"You should always have clean clothes in your bag to use just when you go to the city to not be noticed,"* explained respondent 5. This was confirmed by observations; meeting with migrants camping in a forest and informal settlements in Una-Sana canton while visiting local cities and villages, their clean-shaved, neatly-dressed inhabitants bore little outer signs of homelessness-related hardships, which was in striking contrast with their camping places covered in filth and litter. In tourist-frequented cities of Turkey and Greece, it was nearly impossible to distinguish some of my respondents from tourists or locals. It also brought some success to respondents trying to get into public transport. For instance, respondent 6 succeeded in buying tickets and boarding two ferries in the Aegean Sea by *"looking as a tourist,"* which he described as *"shaving [his] beard, wearing sandals and a light bag"*, and talking to a random real tourist.

8.1.2.2 Using public and private transport

To avoid walking thousands of kilometres on foot, illegal migrants had several alternatives. First, smugglers were reportedly able to arrange transport within each of the countries on the route, which was nevertheless also relatively costly (respondent 4 reported paying 350 Euro for an approximately 400 km drive) and most either considered it a waste of money or could not afford it.

Second, as already indicated above, respondents used public transport regardless of its illegality. This included using the above-mentioned strategies or taking advantage of the fact that authorities in certain areas or at certain times did not pay attention to their presence. A number of respondents managed to board buses at various points throughout Greece, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was done particularly using the strategies described in the previous section, particularly attempting to not stand out/look locally and travelling during the night. Respondent 5 described: *"We wanted to take a taxi from there to the border, but they didn't accept us. When we went back to take a bus, the man who was working there called the police… They told us: "you have to go back to Bulgaria... And we went back to Podgorica again. And the next day again, we went and took this bus at night because we didn't want to make the mistake of going at like four in the afternoon… We waited for the last one… Until dark. It was a small one. They gave us tickets, no problem."*

Third, it was travelling with the locals for a fee. *"[At the bus station,] they asked us for papers and they didn't want to give us the ticket. But we met some guy, we talked to him and went to coffee. He could speak English. He told me, 'I can take you there, no problem.' I asked how much and he told me 70 euros for everyone. He took us to Tirana normally, by car highway. We passed the police and everything was normal."* reported respondent 6.

Fourth, it was hiding inside the transport vehicles, which was used particularly when it was impossible to get a ticket and respondents were tired of, unable, or unwilling to travel by foot. This included hiding inside or under trucks or inside ferries. Respondent 4 described hiding under the truck chassis: *"It was some small rest stop. It was dark. The first two ran to a truck and hooked… All of us couldn't go together because someone could see us. So the first two they went and we were watching them from the forest and they went under the truck and after five minutes the driver moved it… We saw our friends going…The other two went and then me… You have the truck and there's wheels behind it… and this iron. You lay on this iron and you catch other things. And then the truck moved."*

This strategy, however, came with considerable drawbacks. Oftentimes, it necessarily involved group separations as more people would be more easily spotted and/or did not have enough room in one vehicle, having to leave personal belongings behind, inability to determine where one ends up resulting in getting off at unintended locations, and problems with getting off safe and unspotted, which resulted in repeated arrests. Respondent 4 reported: "*We arrived but the driver was driving fast and he didn't stop in [the intended destination]…. The third guy… jumped from the truck and broke his arm. And after a kilometre, my friend and I did the same."*

8.2 Navigation

Navigation in terrain was by all respondents done using GPS apps. To determine the route, migrants also used information from their knowledgeable fellows. This was observed to be done in migrant-frequented accommodation facilities, reported by some respondents and also observed in discussions in Facebook groups.

Nevertheless, many stories show a high degree of improvisation due to dead batteries, inaccurate maps, unexpected police checks, group separations, and getting off the transport or being deported to unknown locations. The common steps taken by respondents finding themselves in such situations involved asking locals for directions, checking signposts, or simply keeping to walk in a set direction. After separation from his group, respondent 4

described: *"I had no money, no food, no phone… I was walking from 10 o'clock to five o'clock without stopping. I read at the end of this coast where I needed to go. I also asked one girl, 'please, can you tell me which way to go to [a certain location]?' She said, 'what you ask for is so far from here.' It was around 200 kilometres. I was walking all of it."*

8.3 Basic necessities

When travelling long distances illegally by foot, a particular challenge was to solve practical details including obtaining food, drinks, clothes, charging phone batteries, withdrawing money, or accessing the internet, without being arrested. *"You have to think about many small things at the same time,"* described respondent 20. Let us now explore found strategies to deal with this problem in detail.

First, it was necessary to purchase food and drinks. This, however, wasn't as simple as walking to the nearest shop as not all the shops in migrant-frequented locations let the migrants in. A visited grocery shop in Bihac bore a sign *"migrants prohibited"* and some vendors even checked the passports of people with darker skin tones. Some other stores were observed to let in only one person per group. Similar practices were reported from Lesbos where the illegal migrants tend to gather in large numbers. As a result, migrants were either informing themselves from other migrants or, in cases of locations without the presence of other migrants such as small villages, doing it blindly. *"After coming here, I was told that the shops run by Chinese are the only ones which would let us in freely,"* said a respondent in Bihac next to one such shop, where several migrant groups were doing their shopping.

The second necessity is charging phones. A full charge is always done before the departure. When on the move, three strategies for preserving batteries were found. First, migrant groups were using only one phone at a time. After the given phone died, the next one was switched on, etc. Second, carrying a power bank was reported and observed sometimes, though this was seen as *"a rather risky investment as the power bank could cost as much as a new phone",* as respondent B put it. Third, it was visiting settlements and looking for open-access sockets or some hospitable locals. However, it must be noted that the data indicated that even using these strategies was not enough to keep phones alive as the motive of *"dead battery"* appears repeatedly in the collected stories.

The third challenge presents internet access to use maps and communicate with others. In cases of prolonged stay and locations with possibilities to buy it (such as in Turkey and Bosnia and

Herzegovina), migrants were generally observed using local SIM cards. However, this was not the case when attempting to pass through the given country as quickly and stealthily as possible, such as when travelling through Greece, Albania, Montenegro, or Croatia. To get online, respondents reported seeking open Wi-Fi, which was observed to be particularly frequent in Albania. *"Four days later we found wifi and contacted [others] and found that they were lucky. They all arrived alright and we all met in [another location],"* described respondent 5, and similar motives appear through other stories.

The fourth point was withdrawing money. The way observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and reported by some respondents was a transfer via Western Union or its alternatives, which have branches all across the route. This was mentioned to have several reasons: no need for a bank account or internet access is needed, and the recipient can visit any branch in a given country to withdraw the money. Only an ID document is necessary and when migrants lack it, they report asking willing local people to do the withdrawal for them (in this case, the money is sent to his or her account) for a fee.

In practice, these steps were usually done together while visiting local settlements in the manner described in the previous section, i.e. being done infrequently, in locations with a presumably lower chance of encounters with police, and by only one or two persons who wore clean clothes and bore a good appearance.

8.4 Shelter and accommodation

One of the greatest challenges on the move presents finding an accommodation, particularly given the high amount of movement and illegality, which disqualifies migrants from most possibilities. Nevertheless, the respondents had reportedly several possibilities:

Those residing legally (i.e. with visa, working and other permits, or also those given legal protection) could naturally stay either in hotel rooms or private apartments. This was particularly observed in Turkey with the quarters of Basmane, Fatih and Yenikapi, which were filled with migrant-frequented budget accommodation facilities and communities ready to accommodate newcomers, but also in all the observed destinations.

When staying illegally, the situation got naturally more complicated. In many places, it is possible to find a hotel, hostel, or apartment which would accept one anyway. Respondent 6 reported that *"in cheap Turkish hostels, they will accept you even without ID"*, and indeed, such

facilities were found in the visited immigrant quarters, sometimes marked to be hostels by a small label in Arabic only and impossible to find on the web. In some cases, authorities de facto did not pay any attention to accommodating illegal migrants as was observed in e.g. some areas of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Second, nearly all migrants who had friends or relatives settled in countries on the route went to apartments and houses owned or rented by them. The fact they have been accepted and hosted was repeatedly explained as culturally conditioned. *"When you see your cousin or uncles, it'll be like, you wanna stay for two days and you'll be there for two years… This is a tradition of [our culture],"* laughed respondent 6.

Third, where none of these was possible, migrants were forced to sleep outside or find deserted buildings, ideally in places that were unguarded so they would not face eviction or arrest. This generally presented "a last resort" possibility due to problems such as overcrowding, insufficient hygienic conditions and exposure to weather changes and extremes. Therefore, it was typical in locations where no other facilities were available (i.e. near the border or when moving through mountains) and/or in places where attempting to rent accommodation was prohibited and this prohibition enforced, such as Una-Sana canton after the above-mentioned 2020 ban. *"We walked to another village,"* reported respondent 4 on his stay in Albania. "*And met [others] in the old house there. It was a normal one without windows and without anything. That day it was raining and snowing all the time. It was February. We needed just something to cover so that we don't get wet or something, but because of the cold, we were dying from the cold, so we made this fire. So you should stay all day in front of the fire.*

The fourth possibility was going to refugee camps. While on transit migration, camps were reportedly mentioned to be perceived as places to *"rest a bit"*, as respondent 4 put it, and find travel companions. For those who wanted to get protection, they also presented points for registration and waiting for the decision.

Virtually all mentions of camps had strongly negative connotations, and migrants attempted to avoid them if possible. The only exception presented camps reserved for families, women, and children, which were both observed and described by respondents who experienced them as "*nice"* and *"clean"*; the only reported problem presented adult male residents posing as minors. *"They're all 20, 25 years old,"* described respondent 7. *"But they say they are eighteen because they have small faces. There were Arabic and Kurdish fighting with knives. When we*

need to play football, they take our ball and they go to play football. They did it a lot. We told security, but nothing happened."

The data on challenges in camps generally reaffirm the findings of existing literature. First, the camps were generally overcrowded. In some cases, the migrants reported having to sleep outside on the ground and finding various improvised shelters, being de facto homeless. *"We slept in the street in the cold,"* reported respondent 7 when describing Lesbos's Moria camp. *"And after we saw that there was an unfinished small mosque. We slept in there. We woke up at six when people went to pray there, and after they left, we went back inside to sleep again."* Similarly, respondent 4 reported sleeping *"in a small space between the container and the ground"* in Thessaloniki's camp. Overcrowding also resulted in a complete lack of privacy (with dozens of people sharing a single tent) and constant noises during the night. Moreover, the camps also suffered a high rate of criminality and violence, which is further described in Chapter 10. *"You can't even go to the toilet without a knife,"* described respondent 7. As a result, some migrants left them even if it meant sleeping outside. *"I used to live in the official Lipa camp,"* reported respondent 20, who was living in an abandoned house in Bihac. *"It is located in the mountains, where it was freezing and there was snow everywhere. We huddled there in unheated military tents. I'd rather be here."*

8.5 Obtaining funds

As already mentioned, completing the journey requires obtaining sufficient finance. However, throughout nearly every interview the motive of funding shortage appeared. Furthermore, the illegality of the migrant's presence together with a language barrier naturally prevents migrants from looking for jobs. Nevertheless, other motives of strategies aimed at obtaining additional funds were found.

First, migrants on the route borrow from their family and friends in their country of origin or already in Europe. This is both the most frequently used method and explicitly described as the most usual way when additional funds are needed. It is reportedly normal to pay back when one has money, and it is expected that if one establishes himself in the final destination, he will help others in the same way, which creates networks of mutual assistance. *"My uncles, my friends, all are supporting me,"* described respondent 1. *"Right now, I have to pay back like ten thousand euros. Most people are doing it like this. The good thing about [my country] is that people support each other. When they see that someone needs help, they help… I called*

my father and my father, God bless him, said 'no problem, I will borrow the money from your uncles.'"

Second, some transit migrant respondents who needed additional money and were unable to obtain enough through the above-mentioned way accepted temporary jobs - in all cases unqualified and illegal. In some cases, these jobs were arranged by their friends and relatives. *"I don't have a family to support me… I was controlling the swimming pool, gardening, and things like that. Some painting, or if you have a lamp and it's broken and you need to change it. Sometimes cooking or preparing breakfast for the guests,"* described respondent 6 his work in a certain Greek hotel. *"I was working there because I needed the money. I cannot pass to Europe if I don't have money. So I was working there."*

Interestingly, despite the fact that the literature often links illegal migrant work to exploitation, none of the respondents expressed such a view, and quite in contrast, some expressed gratitude towards their employers for how they were treated. *"He was Kurdish,"* described respondent 2 his employer. *"He knew I was [of a different culture], but he was very friendly to me. I liked him.'"*

A special case presented working for smuggling businesses. Although none of the respondents personally took part in it, it was reported by some respondents as done by other migrants they know as well as relatively profitable in comparison with the above-mentioned jobs. Nevertheless, the reason it was not more common and described rather as a *'last resort'* option was that migrants taking part in it were despised by their own communities, which respondent B described as being caused by perceivably taking part in their exploitation. Furthermore, smuggling was by some considered *haram* (i.e. forbidden by Quran) - as respondent 6 put it, *"because you didn't work on it at all to get this money."*

Other common finance sources included begging on the street and/or selling cheap items such as matches and handkerchiefs, occasional one-time jobs for the locals such as wood cutting reported by respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or the official cash assistance allocated monthly to refugees registered in official Greek camps, which may reach up to 500 Euro per month.

8.6 Covid-19

Some of the migrants travelling the route between 2020-2022 mentioned the pandemic of Covid-19 as a factor slowing down their pace. Several respondents mentioned the suspension of public transport, therefore having to walk long distances: *"There were no buses because it was corona. So we needed to walk from Tirana to Montenegro's border. It was around 175 or 180 kilometres,"* said respondent 4. Furthermore, other respondents report not being admitted or having to wait in quarantine when trying to enter refugee camps in Greece, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with respondent 4 being even deported. *"We had to sleep outside in the cold for one night and then they put us in quarantine… we stayed for 14 days,"* described respondent 7.

9 INFLUENTIAL GROUPS

This chapter separately introduces two groups which can both positively and negatively influence the whole experience. The first one is (other) migrants, the second is local people.

9.1 Migrants

The data have shown that one of the most significant factors in easing travel presents mutual assistance between migrants. Despite the presence of some *"lone wolves"*, as respondent 6 put it, most observed and interviewed migrants preferred travelling in small groups of up to ten persons.

9.1.1 Fellow migrants as a positive factor

Migrants help each other in several ways. First, those on the move share food, water, sleeping bags and other necessities, which can potentially be life-saving. *"It was around like 200 kilometres or something. I was walking all of it,"* described respondent 4. *"And at the end of this coast, I saw two guys sitting on the beach and eating. I also thought that maybe they are migrants. I had a very long, long time to walk and I had no food, no sleeping bag. And it was cold. I ate with them. They gave me the sleeping bag and we continued together. They had the maps and everything."*

Second, migrants cooperated to improve their travelling abilities as a group. It was both observed and mentioned by respondent 5 that the most language-skilled migrants from each group perform interpreting for their fellows. Respondent 5 and observational data also indicate that migrants skilled with maps do navigation. Many respondents were also reportedly helping their less physically able fellows to complete difficult walking and hiking. *"I was pushing [women and children] in the mountains and trying to help them,"* described, for instance, respondent 4.

Third, migrants shared useful information on border crossing, finding smugglers, avoiding police controls, and other issues related to travelling. This was done either through personal contact or online. The "personal way" was done at accommodation facilities or in certain restaurant-like facilities, which many respondents mentioned as a channel for information sharing and finding travelling companions, and which was also observed at some locations. The observed Facebook groups also revealed massive information exchanges in areas of legal

advice, smuggler services, and the current situation on the route's various sections. *"I have a visa from [a certain country], I want to go from there to [another location]. How? Please explain it,"* states a post in one of the observed groups. *[My relative] used a smuggler for about 5,000 euros from [a certain location]. I can give you contact."* states one of the answers. Such exchanges were going on almost every day. Respondent 4 sarcastically described the extent of this information exchange by saying that *"now everyone in [my country] knows how to get to Germany."*

Fourth, as already indicated in several sections, fellow migrants often help each other to arrange accommodation and secure jobs and finance. It seemed not uncommon to accommodate and feed incoming relatives or friends for an indefinite amount of time, lend thousands of USD with no clear repayment terms, or employ them. *"When I need money or a home to stay anywhere, I just call [other migrants]."* described respondent 1.

9.1.2 Formation and separation of travel groups

How do migrant groups form in the first place? Several ways of this were indicated.

The first way was through social media, which was the way used regularly, particularly by young respondents. As observed and described, the communication was very vivid and finding a companion was a matter of hours at maximum. *"When you write you will go there will be like 150, 200 people saying yeah, we will go… You choose just three or four,"* described respondent 4.

The second way presents random meetings in budget accommodation facilities, the above-described migrant-frequented restaurant facilities, or else in refugee camps. This presented a regular way of meeting companions to virtually all respondents. *"Istanbul is full of people of many nationalities. They share rooms to cut prices. They are outside and you can just meet them,"* described respondent 5. *"I also rented a hostel, but [eventually] I met others at coffee."*

Third, migrants meet randomly on the corridors all along the route, which happened to virtually all respondents. This is due to the fact that migrants share information and largely use the same paths and corridors, thus bumping into other migrants regularly. *"It was around two o'clock [in the morning] I heard some sounds,"* described respondent 4 his attempt to cross one of the borders *" I didn't know where I was. Then I saw people making fire just near the border. They*

saw me… 'What are you doing here alone?' And I just explained it to them… and I crossed [the border] with them."

Establishing the contact seemed simple. In accommodation facilities frequented by migrants, it was observed that they approach and introduce themselves to each other freely and randomly regardless of their nationality. First, this might have been linked with the feeling of shared migrant identity mentioned by respondents, even on the social media groups, where members call each other *"brother"* and specially greet each new *"brother"* in the group. Second, it seemed linked to psychological and cultural factors; some respondents explicitly expressed openness to meet new people and a "collective mentality". *"In [my culture], we do everything together and always introduce ourselves to new people. It's different from people here in Europe,"* described respondent 13.

Nevertheless, it must be said that while all respondents travelled with a group at some point, none of them spent the whole journey with one group; in contrast, they reported spending it with up to ten different groups. Separations generally occurred very quickly as a result of either inability to continue of some members (e.g. due to injury) or disagreement over the directions, travelling pace, or used means of transport. However, it was normal to remain in contact and possibly meet and/or help each other later. Respondent 3 described: *"The [local] woman told others to help us. To take us to the bus station and buy a ticket. One of the guys didn't want to go because they already tried that many times… and they were arrested… he said he would not risk it. But that one was excited to go. One guy went with him and we separated. The next day, one of the guys said that... he also wants to continue by bus. One wanted to go as well… They left and we four continued walking. Four days later we found wifi and contacted them. They all arrived alright."*

9.1.3 Fellow migrants as a negative factor

In contrast, the only way in which migrants hinder each other's efforts to move forward is through hostility between some particular migrant communities. This was observed to be either based on underlying conflicts and prejudices brought from home, racism, or religion. *"Just yesterday I talked to Hazara Afghan, he called Pashtuns 'a bunch of Talibs,'"* described respondent B. This enmity manifests itself with violence, which was described by a number of both migrant and volunteer respondents as a frequent phenomenon, particularly in camps.

"Every single day there [in the camp] was someone stabbed with a knife by someone from another community," described respondent B.

9.2 Local people

The second influential group presents the local people.

9.2.1 Local people as a positive factor

The most frequently appearing motive involved the free provision of basic necessities such as food, drink, and shelter during accidental encounters between migrants and locals and was reported in all countries on the route. "*In the first house, one woman was going out and I just asked her, if she speaks English,"* described respondent 4 during his visit to a random village. *"She didn't understand, but she knew that I was a migrant and she said that the police are in the city… And she called someone… And she gave her the money and she told her to buy salami and cheese and everything. I went with her inside the house. She made me coffee and beans. And she, this daughter, also bought some. And when I wanted to go, she even said, 'You can stay and rest here for two, three days.'"*

In cases of locations frequented by migrants, it was sometimes done repeatedly or even systematically; for instance, a retired couple living in the mountain cottage near one of the borders opened their home and fridge free for anyone who would come, and so did one of the respondents, who accommodated migrants in free rooms of his hotel. In some cases, this led to the establishment of NGOs due to the possibility to get funding for these activities, professionalise, and avoid possible legal problems for assisting illegal migrants. Respondent A described: *"One day three years ago I decided to bring some spare food into an informal camp. Ever since then, I have been doing that. Other people started to bring clothes and food to me to give to migrants. But the police were forcing me to stop, so I registered a non-governmental organisation to get rid of them… I started alone, now I have eight volunteers."*

Some people also provided certain services for money. First, this involved accommodation services by enterprising locals who turned their flats and houses into budget accommodation facilities, which were observed in a number of the locations along the route. Second, it was assistance with cash transfers through Western Union for migrants without documents, which

was reported by both migrant and volunteer respondents. Third, it involved transport in personal cars for money. *"Here you can often see some locals with migrants visiting the Western Union branch here,"* described volunteer B.

9.2.2 Local people as a negative factor

However, in all the researched countries, local people also intentionally hindered the migrants' efforts to move forward. First, respondents described being misused for personal profit by locals taking advantage of their problematic situation (typically urgent need for shelter, food, and transport) and inability to turn to law enforcement. Respondents or other migrants they knew experienced various forms of unfair practices including theft, trickery, or even being forced to provide sexual services. Respondent 4 described: *"A BMW came. Four people were inside… They said 'money, money. The chef needs to take money.' It was a mafia. So we gave them the money and were told they will drive us [to the border]. Two hundred for everybody, so it was like five or six thousand euros. They took it, and then they just said, 'Go outside, police, police, police.' We didn't understand anything. They say 'Go, go, go fast, fast.' They pushed us outside and they ran."*

Second, migrants were victims of steps aimed at evicting them from particular locations - either being reported to police to be arrested and possibly deported, which appeared in nearly all stories, or subjects to direct violence such as attacks. It particularly occurred in Greek islands and Una-Sana canton, which present 'bottleneck' locations where migrants gather and stay for prolonged periods of time and where they were, according to local and volunteer respondents, oftentimes perceived as a security threat. *"The police showed themselves. Someone reported us. We made a mistake by going to such a small village where we stood out too much. So we ran,"* described one of the numerous similar stories the respondent 5.

10 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Apart from factors linked to the presence and activities of other involved actors, the migrants were also influenced by a palette of factors related to their own backgrounds, beliefs, and emotions. These are examined in this chapter.

10.1 Psychological factors

Naturally, the perception of the route was highly individual. Nevertheless, certain motives were strongly emphasised and/or appeared repeatedly in obtained data, and at the same time influenced not only migrants' experience but also their physical movements.

The first such motive was a feeling of fear of certain perceived dangers and subsequent alternation of directions. This particularly common motive was a fear of water, which was not only reported by many migrant respondents, but also by respondent B, who described that *"half of migrants on Lesbos are avoiding beaches altogether to stay away from sea"*. This was caused by the fact that many respondents did not see the sea before (e.g. respondent 3 described: *"In movies, when you see the people swimming, it's very different from this one. There were big waves. It's not the sea from the movie. I was scared."*), or else by traumatic experiences from past crossings. This led some respondents either to avoid the sea route or avoid crossing rivers. *"They [fellow travellers] said… we should cross the river by swimming or walking..."* described respondent 4. *"And because I fell once into the river in Greece… and I almost died there, I was scared, I didn't want to go like that... Then they crossed. And I didn't."*

The second particularly emphasised motive presented frustration from one's current personal situation or environment as a factor driving migrants' movements. First, it caused many respondents to move forward from their 'original final destinations' when they were unsatisfied with their living standard or overall situation. Inversely, frustration together with the impossibility to continue led some respondents and their fellows to stop the attempts to continue or even return to their countries of origin. Respondent 4 described: *"I didn't see [my friend] for two or three days. He says 'I am in Marrakech, I arrived just two days ago.' But we said, 'No way, are you joking?'... He sent us pictures. He said that they caught him [again]. When he arrived at night, they caught them with some other guys. And they deported him again to Turkey."*

Third, it was the presence of traumatic experiences carried from the lands of the origin or obtained throughout the journey - situations of near-death experiences during border crossings, violence, abuse, or rapes. Respondents experiencing these as well as volunteers working with them describe that when untreated, this results in clear manifestations of mental health problems: depression and hopelessness, suicide attempts, aggressivity towards others, self-harm, and drug addiction. *"I've met hundreds of them, and no one is entirely alright, no matter what they say. It leaves a mark on everyone. Half of them would need proper medical assistance,"* summed up respondent B his experience with migrants in camps.

Fourth, positive emotions played a role as well. Seeing the successes of others reportedly worked as a motivating factor, which encouraged some respondents to overcome their fears, take more risks, and energised them to move forward. For instance, the success of a fellow migrant in sailing to Italy also motivated respondent 4 to pursue unsuccessful attempts to hide in ships, and the group of respondent 3 opted for a perceived riskier route despite the fear of police after seeing another migrant successfully passing through. Respondent 4 was more eager to hook on the truck chassis after seeing his fellows successfully departing: *"...so he [the truck] moved and we saw our friends going. This track will take you away from the danger. And then we had a real energy to do it also."*

10.2 Religious factors

Throughout the research, religious motives were omnipresent, ranging from frequent religious expressions such as *"Allāhu Akbar"* (God is Great), *"Inshallah"* (if God wills), *"Alhamdulillah"* (Praise be to God) throughout communication of nearly all respondents as well as online posts to the articulated belief that God presents a driving force behind certain experienced events. Nevertheless, two of these motives were found directly influence migrants' movements. However, it must be noted that both are related to Islam only as insufficient data were gathered to examine these factors in relation to other religions.

The first such motive was the celebration of Ramadan. It is difficult to combine fasting with physically exhausting, difficult, and stressful activities such as hundreds of kilometres-long walks, climbing fences, or sailing. Due to this in combination with the desire for being clean and able to celebrate properly, some relatively religious respondents decided to stop for its duration, which was reported and observed during the observations done during Ramadan. Respondent 4 described: *"We were really exhausted... Ramadan was near... and we needed to*

find a place to sit and shower and everything. And fast. When you are moving, you can't fast. So we decided to find a place to spend Ramadan and then after Ramadan, we will try again."

Interestingly, the second reappearing motive was the discouragement of the possibly expected idea of Muslim solidarity between migrants and locals when describing locals and their attitude towards them. When describing Turkey, respondent 13 described the locals as *"cold and indifferent"*, adding that *"true Muslims should treat guests as a gift of God,"* while respondents 1 and 2 called Turkish *" racist"* and *"unfriendly"*. Remarkably, when speaking about Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. Muslim countries where migrants were experiencing a relatively high degree of help), they were ascribing the experienced solidarity to non-religious factors. Respondent 4 stated that *"In Albania, there is no difference between Muslims and Christians"*. The other two respondents called Bosnians *"Muslims by the name"* only, instead emphasising a shared refugee experience as a driver of their solidarity.

10.3 Cultural factors

These factors are related to one's cultural background. As the research sample included people of nationalities from across two continents, these factors varied highly, though again, some were common. Again, some influenced migrants' movements.

The first and perhaps the most obvious of these presented a language barrier, which made it more difficult to deal with the locals, government officials, and other migrants, and also complicated the general orientation in the new environment, which was mentioned multiple times by virtually all respondents. *"I couldn't speak Turkish and they didn't know English. And even if they know, they don't speak it,"* described respondent 1. *"They say 'Turkish is the most beautiful language and you have to improve in it.' It's not easy for an Afghan refugee to live in Turkey."*

The second factor presents a cultural shock and a need for adjustment. This manifested in the overall feeling of being 'lost', inability to navigate in cities on the route or naively expecting help from locals, all of which I directly observed while in contact with migrants on the route. Interestingly, in a few cases, it also brought a 'positive shock' or even an unexpected desire to settle in localities on the route which were to be merely waypoints, using adjectives such as *"modern"*, *"friendly"*, or *"beautiful"*.

11 LEGAL FACTORS

Apart from the illegality to travel, whose consequences stretch over all chapters of this work, migrants face a number of other particular legal obstacles. These are summarised in this chapter.

11.1 Asylum protection

Although the exact asylum process varies by country, applicants should naturally receive fair treatment according to their laws in any location. However, the data gathered in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece, which present bottlenecks with a long-term migrant presence and thus are receiving asylum applications continuously, contained a number of motives concerned with problems linked to all major stages of the asylum process - access to applications, receiving a hearing, being able to appeal and being dealt with accordingly after the decision.

The first found motive was the migrants' inability to deal with the process, which had two reasons. First, many migrants were observed to have very little idea of what to do or where to go, and the relevant information was not available - or in Bosnian only, thus not understandable for most. *"Everyone would need proper assistance and guidance, which is often not available,"* summed up respondent 11. Second, the migrants experiencing physical hardships were often not in a condition of being able to deal with other issues than mere everyday survival. *"I used to sleep in ruins and cold. It's hard to even survive that, let alone being able to deal with bureaucratic problems,"* described respondent 11, and this was in accordance with findings of observations conducted in the informal settlements.

The second factor was discrimination practices and bureaucratic problems. Some reported being not even allowed to approach the appropriate office or and all reported having to use Bosnian, thus largely not understanding what they were doing. Additionally, the post-application process was repeatedly reported to be slow. *"It took them seven months to acknowledge that I had submitted a request for temporary protection. Up to that point, I was there illegally,"* described respondent 11. *"Getting a permanent residence permit here takes years."*

Similar problems were found in Greece, where the migrants are first interviewed by the European Asylum Support Office, which passes a recommendation to the Greek government on whether the protection should be granted. Although the migrants were found to be able to

apply for asylum freely, some of the information was available in Greek only, and great delays to a maximum time of six months and losing evidence were reported. *"I had an appointment for 13th September 2019,"* described respondent 3. *"But because I didn't have the paper from the doctor to prove I don't have any problem, I couldn't do the interview… they gave me a new appointment for 2020… when I came, they said 'we only do people who arrived in 2020.' They gave me a new appointment for next year. When I came to the office, I was waiting with other people for my name to be called… but they said 'your name is not on the list."*

Some respondents also described inappropriate dealing with rejected applicants, who should either appeal officially or be deported. On the one hand, an appeal requires attending the appropriate office in Athens, but migrants were legally prohibited to leave their island. *"The only option was then to hire an advocate, which was nevertheless not affordable for most people,"* described respondent B. On the other hand, deportations were oftentimes not performed and migrants are left stuck in camps without any legal status and benefits of asylum-seekers such as the right to food rations. *"We had so many people left in the camps who should have been deported, but wandered without any legal status… so their friends had to feed them,"* described respondent B.

11.2 Education access

Some migrants remained out of education for years. Respondent 3 and a child of respondent 7 started the journey as children and never returned to education again, while the volunteer respondents or observations of migrant child street beggars in some locations indicated that such a problem is widespread. Description of possible negative consequences, such as the impact on one's psychological development and possible long-term socioeconomic consequences would be out of the scope of this work. Nevertheless, the presence of children out of school can be also arguably considered *inherently* wrong.

Four solutions were generally used. First, children in official refugee camps were either taught local languages and then transported to local schools, or, in some Greek camps, provided with some education by volunteers and NGOs. However, volunteer respondents repeatedly described capacities for this as generally insufficient, so many were left out. *"You'll always see loads of children just wandering around aimlessly because there is nothing to do for them,"* said volunteer B.

Second, some migrants are educated by their family and community members. Volunteer respondents reported that communities in refugee camps organise classes in camps with some relatively educated migrants as teachers. This had the disadvantage of the teachers often having to take care of subjects they had no expertise in, but also the advantage of providing education in children's native languages so they did not have to wait to learn English or local languages.

The third solution is paying a private tutor, which is possible when the families are at least temporarily settled in one place (thus one tutor may come repeatedly) and the family could afford to pay for the service. This was used by e.g. respondent 3: *"It was a lady, [my relative] paid for her to come sometimes at least."*

Fourth, migrants motivated by its possible benefits were observed learning by themselves. This way was commonly used for learning English or local languages. Learning the languages was considered particularly useful for dealing with locals, and other smugglers, getting a job, and communicating with governmental entities concerning legal matters, particularly protection, and indeed, it helped respondents to reach significant successes in these areas including obtaining asylum or getting a job. Nevertheless, as the research is concerned only with the migrants who learnt relatively advanced English and thus demonstrated relatively high and long-term interest in this issue, this may not necessarily indicate a "wider" trend.

11.3 Healthcare access

The third problem in this category presents inaccessible healthcare. Illegal migrants on the move could seek no medical assistance for cases of coldness and freezing, bone and muscle injuries, sicknesses, and other frequent health consequences of travel. As described in Chapter 12, some are also in need of psychological help due to the consequences of traumatic events either from the journey or the destination of origin and untreated psychical problems.

The degree of healthcare access naturally varied by country, but problems were reported from all of them. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, illegal migrants are oftentimes directly refused medical help. Respondent A described: *We had a severely injured Algerian. I took him to the local hospital… They denied him medical assistance while the doctor called the police…. The patrol wanted to take him to the station, where they usually beat the arrested. Luckily I was able to talk them into at least taking him back to where we found him."* All volunteer respondents also agreed that the police were preventing even volunteers from providing aid themselves. *"They were searching us for medical needles, which cannot be officially used by anyone except*

certified doctors. They knew well there was no alternative option for migrants, though," reported respondent B.

In Greece, some medical assistance including psychological help, supplied mostly by various international NGOs such as Red Cross, was available in official refugee camps. Nevertheless, respondents who went through there reported dissatisfaction with the provided healthcare, reporting cases of long queues and waiting times for appointments as well as inadequate or insufficient medication. *"Whatever the problem was, they [the doctors] gave them aspirin. It was sometimes totally absurd,"* described respondent B.

11.4 Justice access

The last found the great problem was a lack of access to justice. As described throughout this work, migrants experience various forms of misuse at the hands of security forces, officials, locals, or smugglers, which includes beating, theft, fraud, but also inappropriate asylum procedures. None of the dozens of such cases has ever been reported to the police or had any consequences for the culprits. While the lack of access to justice might be arguably considered intrinsically immoral, the low traceability and punishability of the culprits were also considered to be contributing factor in committing these crimes, which was explicitly expressed by both migrant and non-migrant respondents. *"They can often turn to nobody, because they fear they would get deported or something, and they [people who want to abuse them] know it. How can you go to the police station and tell them you have stolen money for getting illegally smuggled?"* described respondent B.

12 DISCUSSION

Put together, the results bring some new pieces to complete the general picture of migrants' problems and behaviour. In the following section, I will discuss the importance of my findings in detail.

Though the theoretical literature showed that the situation in source countries, as well as the motivations of the migrants, vary highly - and this was also indicated in section 6.2 - the preparation process was very similar for migrants with different motivations, goals, nationalities, and socio-economic backgrounds, involving packing, getting sufficient funds, travelling companions, documents, and sometimes preparation for settling in intended final destinations. Though the results were perhaps somewhat intuitive, such an overview was, to the author's best knowledge, the first of its kind. Some new details also emerged in sections on smugglers. Although their crucial role in migration and the smuggling market operation mechanisms are well-known, this research complemented them with a practical demonstration of how exactly the smugglers are found and dealt with or the described insurance mechanisms.

The following two chapters helped to shed new light on the route's lesser-mapped sections. First, this included its 'earlier' phases up to the Turkish coast, i.e. illegal border crossing between Afghanistan and Iran, transit through Iran and border crossing to Turkey. As stated in section 4.1, there has been an insufficient amount of peer-reviewed information on how the crossing between Afghanistan and Iran is carried out with a few used academic sources de facto only touching related topics such as the operation of border crossings (EUAA's 2022 report), related drug smuggling (UNODC's 2022 report), or the role of locals in the process (Raheem, Badshah, and Arshed, 2021); in this sense, my results bring some valuable new insights. The same can be said for human smuggling *through* Iran as well as the illegal border crossing to Turkey as the only explanation of its mechanisms was found in the paper of Augustova and Suber (2023). This research does not significantly extend or update their findings; however, it complements it by showing the process from the migrants' point of view, explaining how exactly it is carried out in practice. However, it must be said that neither Augustova and Suber (2023) nor my research have brought sufficient information on whether this route continues to operate after the outbreak of nationwide protests in Iran (though all the migrants encountered

during my recent field research used different routes, which might indicate that it might not be in operation anymore and thus all the information might be outdated).

The data on travelling between Turkey and Greece generally reaffirmed the existing literature (i.e. major migrant hubs, used routes and methods); yet, it was enriched by some new details, such as how the migrants find smugglers in Turkey and how they continue from Greek islands to the mainland. Particularly Chapter 8 then again brought some important new insights on land travelling between mainland Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina (particularly Albania and Montenegro), concerning which only limited sources describing rather macro-level trends have been available, as seen in sections 4.6 and 4.7. This work showed how exactly is the travelling and border crossing on this part of the route carried out with a number of details including where the migrants dwell, how they travel, or how they avoid getting caught.

Chapter 9 introduced some drivers which influence migrants' movements all across the route. Although it is well-known that migrants travel in groups, few academic sources mention the practical effects of cooperation between migrants as drivers for moving forward, and before carrying out the research, I had not thought greatly of its role either. These findings certainly present relevant contributions as well as a possibly interesting subject for future research.

In contrast, the role of locals had been well-mapped in materials concerned with migrants' situations in individual countries on the route as shown throughout Chapter 4. Migrants' testimonies generally reaffirm these findings (e.g. solidarity of Bosnians based on the shared refugee experiences), adding only one possibly new motive - the remarkable friendliness of local communities in Albania. Nevertheless, it must be noted the research was mainly mapping ways in which locals help and hinder migrants' movement across the route rather than examining public mood towards migrants in the route's individual locations, showing that friendly locals can help migrants in travelling, while the hostile ones can trick them or report them to authorities. These mechanisms thus present the research's original contribution to this topic.

Chapter 10 touches on problems which are known and mapped (such as migrants' psychological traumas or cultural shock) but had nevertheless not been expected to directly influence the transit migration movements (except perhaps for the possible Muslim solidarity and a language barrier) and thus given much space in the theoretical framework. The new information, therefore, presents the existence of the *connection* between these aspects and its

mechanisms (i.e. how exactly these emotions, traumas, religion and cultural factors affect migrants' movements).

Chapter 11 dealt with already-known systematic problems which were mentioned throughout the individual sections of Chapter 4. Additionally, as I found out, these problems are well-known and dealt with by various NGOs, international organisations and volunteers. Therefore, the chapter does not bring as much new information as the previous ones - yet, they were by both migrant and non-migrant respondents considered both relevant and important to complete the general picture of migration on the route.

Additionally, some other interesting individual motives popped up throughout the work. One such motive was the extent and significance of social media and smartphone use. Although their role was already mentioned in various materials, it is obvious they have become vital tools for everyday survival as information exchange tools, smuggling or forged documents markets, or navigation tools. Another such motive was the impact of Covid-19 on migrants' movements, which has not yet been much reflected in migration-related academic literature (with the rare exception of e.g. Hodzic, 2020); this research brings some hints on this, yet it would clearly need further, more detailed research.

Interestingly, the directions and strategies varied very little amongst the migrant respondents, which was likely caused by the large-scale information exchange between the migrants resulting in using similar strategies, affected countries' policies and border guarding that restrict possibilities to use different strategies, smuggling market which sets the used travelling methods for its clients, but possibly also due to little heterogeneity of the sample (see below). In any case, this fact, supported by the reaffirming testimonies of volunteers in long-term contact with hundreds of other migrants, increases the chance that the results captured indications of some wider trends.

13 CONCLUSION

The research's aim was to find challenges and strategies used by the migrants travelling through the so-called Balkan route and their development throughout the journey. In the theoretical framework, I first defined some basic concepts including migration and its types, human smuggling and trafficking as well as generally acknowledged types of migrants. Second I defined the researched route by combining the two major connected sub-routes - the Eastern Mediterranean route and Western Balkans route - and extending them by Iran and migrants' home countries to capture the whole experience of my sample.

Then I introduced the push-and-pull framework in the context of the route. The major push factors include socio-economic, political, security, and human rights-related issues, though they vary by country. The illustration of this on three major migrant contributors - Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan - showed its complexity in practice; in the former two, the prolonged conflict and poor security situation increase poverty as well as cause further deterioration of the human rights situation, while the latter suffers from the combination of adverse socio-economic factors and destabilisation by Afghan refugees. Inversely, the pull factors include established migrant communities, socioeconomic factors, migration policies, or cultural openness of the host countries.

Using the existing academic literature, reports of concerned international organisations, and some recent media reports, I then introduced the recent and current transit migration through Iran, Turkey, Greece, and the countries of the Western Balkans. The whole corridor was formed in 2015, largely closed a year later, and reopened and partly altered its directions in 2018. Turkey and Iran have by far the largest migrant populations and both serve as both final and transit destinations. In Europe, Greek border islands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to some extent Serbia present bottlenecks where the migrants often get stuck, while the transit migration through Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia seems relatively smooth, but also not thoroughly mapped. A great role in all this has been played by the European Union, which uses diplomatic leverage as well as Frontex involvement to influence the policies and openness of the route's countries.

The research part drew on the data gathered through unstructured interviews with migrants and both direct and indirect observations of the route and selected migration-related social media groups. Using data triangulation and inductive coding, the findings were sorted into

subcategories and grouped into categories containing challenges and strategies related to individual factors encountered on the way.

Three following chapters shed more light on the whole migration process from the preparation to crossing the border to the European Union. All the illegal passages between Iran and Croatia (except for the water passage to Turkey) lead through the less-patrolled mountainous terrain. Migrants cross them during the night, attempting to find the safest points while avoiding border guards. The foot crossing between Iran and Turkey is considered the most physically difficult and dangerous due to the terrain difficulty and climatic conditions, while the most difficult in terms of chance to succeed is the 'final' crossing to Croatia due to heavy patrolling. In contrast, crossings between mainland Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina are relatively simple due to the sparsity of border patrolling. Each, though, includes a chance of pushbacks, freezing, and other risks.

To ensure a safe pass, migrants often use the services of specialised smugglers, who use local guides, hideouts in vehicles, or arrange fake documents to get their clients past borders on the route. With the time, proximity to the European Union, and safety of the used way, their prices go up; thus, many cannot afford it, particularly in the journey's later phases. Two mechanisms are used to make sure the payment from migrant to smuggler goes well - guarantee shops, where the money is temporarily held by a middleman and released after the safe pass, and migrant imprisonment after the pass.

Apart from the border crossings, the research also mapped the movement *within* the countries on the route. Particularly in the Western Balkans, migrants are forced to travel long distances by foot due to the inability to use public transport and hire a smuggler, which often comes at the price of exhaustion and injuries, rough sleeping, need for navigation, and especially the necessity to avoid police encounters. This last goal is achieved by dressing as locals, travelling during the night, or avoiding major roads and local settlements. Getting the basic necessities such as food, phone charging, money transfers, and internet access is then done during brief visits to local settlements using the above-mentioned methods to blend in. Alternatively, migrants often try to take public transport or hide in vehicles and ferries, which is nevertheless risky due to the possibility of police encounters as well as a physical danger and often also the inability to influence where one ends up.

On the way, the migrants help each other by sharing basic necessities, information, and money, and travelling and cooperating in groups. However, they also experience conflicts and violence often based on ethnic, racial and religious differences, which occurs particularly in refugee camps. Local people can play both positive and negative roles as well. Some either randomly or systematically provide migrants with food, shelter, or transport tickets for free, while some provide such assistance for money. Others, however, either report their presence to the police or enrich themselves using trickery or taking advantage of migrants' precarious situations. Apart from them, migrants are also influenced by various psychological (fear, frustration, trauma and motivation), cultural (cultural shock and a language barrier), and religious factors (e.g. Ramadan and possible Muslim solidarity).

Chapter 11 mapped some long-term systematic problems related to illegality. It showed that asylum processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece suffer delays and bureaucratic problems. Migrants lack understandable information, sufficient guidance, and capacities to deal with the process even if they have formal access to the application. Furthermore, migrants generally lack sufficient access to education and healthcare, which is then supplemented by migrant communities, NGOs, self-help, or in other ways. The final section shows that the lack of access to justice may contribute to abusive practices towards migrants.

I see the threefold practical use of the results. First, it could be useful for researchers as a holistic introduction to migration through the Balkan route, which the author himself would have once been grateful for. Second, their 'practical' nature makes the results potentially useful for NGOs and policymakers with the intention to aid migrants and tackle illegal migration. It was often these people who pointed me towards many of the described problems; yet, the research went further in investigating them, their context and drivers, and brought them all together, thus may be useful for them as well. Third, it can serve as a basis for further research.

I believe there are four general directions for further research, each of which opens a number of possibilities. First, the research could be extended to other herein underrepresented groups of migrants and analysis of differences in their experiences. As this research focuses on young single males, it would be interesting to examine how all the examined factors differ for elder migrants, women, families, or perhaps children, which would e.g. expectedly not risk certain discovered strategies such as travelling hooked under the truck chassis, or for people of non-Islamic religion, for which e.g. the religious factors would be expectedly different.

Second, further research could involve a deeper examination of some discovered but only briefly examined factors and indications of possibly important factors which appeared in the data without reaching saturation. There is a number of such factors throughout this work. The first presents the possible role of Iran as an escape channel for refugees from Syria and other countries of the Near East, of which little has been known but which has been indicated and used by one respondent. Second, it is the role of social media in migration, whose importance for the whole process seems so high that it would deserve separate research. Third, it would be a further mapping of the impact of Covid-19 on migration, which has clearly been indicated by some respondents but hasn't been thoroughly investigated here nor by other authors. Fourth, it would be the examination of the impact of religious factors on migrants' experiences and movements, which has, again, clearly been indicated but not thoroughly investigated. Fifth, the role of locals as facilitators or saboteurs of migrants' progress could be examined separately for each country or section on the route. This is to name a few examples - I believe a reader can find a number of other such motives and unanswered questions.

Third, quantitative research could be conducted to check indicated trends. Can we confirm the indicative price trends on smuggling markets? Is the level of rule of law enforcement correlated with migrant abuse? Is the degree of locals' help to migrants higher in Muslim countries? These and others would be interesting to verify.

Fourth, it could involve future updates as the migration patterns and the route change over time. Two expectedly game-changing events have occurred recently – the Covid-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the Iranian protests. Will it cause permanent changes in the migration patterns or will things go back to their previous state? And how will migration be affected by possible changes in the migration policies of countries on the route or the increasing prices on the smuggling market? These questions await future researchers.

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