

# EUROPEAN ASYLUM-SEEKER CRISIS: **SCENARIOS**

Possible developments in transit countries over the next 6–9 months

4 November 2015



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## SUMMARY

### Scenario 1: Baseline – Continued manageable flow

Rate of arrival to transit countries	→	PROBABILITY	
Ability to exit transit countries	→		
Operational space	↗	IMPACT	

**Estimated Caseload** 5,000–10,000 per day in any one country (a total of 1.25–2.75m in 9 months)

**Duration of need for external support** 3 months, November–February

**Overview:** A significant flow of asylum-seekers continues through the transit countries. The daily average decreases over winter and increases again from April 2016. Increased need for shelter and access to basic services during the winter months. The humanitarian needs during winter can be met by the local and national authorities and humanitarian organisations currently active in each country.

### Scenario 2: Significant Reduction

Rate of arrival to transit countries	↓	PROBABILITY	
		IMPACT	

**Estimated Caseload** Fewer than 1,000 per day of ‘visible’ asylum-seekers; up to 5,000 ‘invisible’

**Duration of need for external support** No requirement

**Overview:** The number of people entering Greece reduces significantly, due to a tightening of border controls by Turkey. Overall numbers of people in need in transit countries reduces. However, the crackdown on movement increases protection concerns and the ‘invisible’ humanitarian caseload grows significantly. This scenario has a high positive impact as there is a large reduction in numbers in need, but also negative impact as those in need become more difficult to assist.

### Scenario 3: Significant Increase

Rate of arrival to transit countries	↗	PROBABILITY	
Operational space	↗	IMPACT	

**Estimated Caseload**

**Duration of need for external support**

An average of 20,000 per day in any one country

Up to 2 months, as this scenario would precipitate significant political activity to reduce the flow.

**Overview:** The overall number of people in transit countries at any one time increases, leading to the creation of bottlenecks and longer journey times. The profile of people in transit changes, with a greater proportion being from poorer backgrounds and having fewer resources.

### Scenario 4: Stranded

Ability to exit transit countries	↓	PROBABILITY	
		IMPACT	

**Estimated Caseload**

**Duration of need for external support**

Concentrations of 20,000 – 50,000 people at key locations

2–6 weeks, as this scenario would prompt swift political activity to find a solution.

**Overview:** Large numbers of asylum-seekers are stuck in the transit countries, unable to access their preferred destination countries. Larger concentrations of people and longer average length of stay significantly increases humanitarian needs (especially if this scenario occurs during winter). Many asylum-seekers become less accessible, as they are moving further and faster. Others become more static requiring shelter, WASH and health assistance for longer periods. Protection concerns increase with the rise in clandestine movement.

## INTRODUCTION

### SCENARIOS FOR NOVEMBER 2015 – JULY 2016

This scenario document provides a description of situations that could occur in the coming six to nine months, with their associated humanitarian consequences. The aim is to support strategic planning, create awareness and promote preparedness activities for those responding to this crisis.

In October 2015, ACAPS undertook a scoping study to better understand gaps in information and analysis in the context of the asylum-seeker<sup>1</sup> crisis in Europe. One of the key priorities that emerged from the consultation with humanitarian stakeholders was the need for scenario building, outlining possible developments and anticipated impact on the transit countries over the next six to nine months. At the end of October, three workshops in Athens, Belgrade and Geneva were held to develop and validate these scenarios. See the [methodology](#) section for more information on the scenario building process.

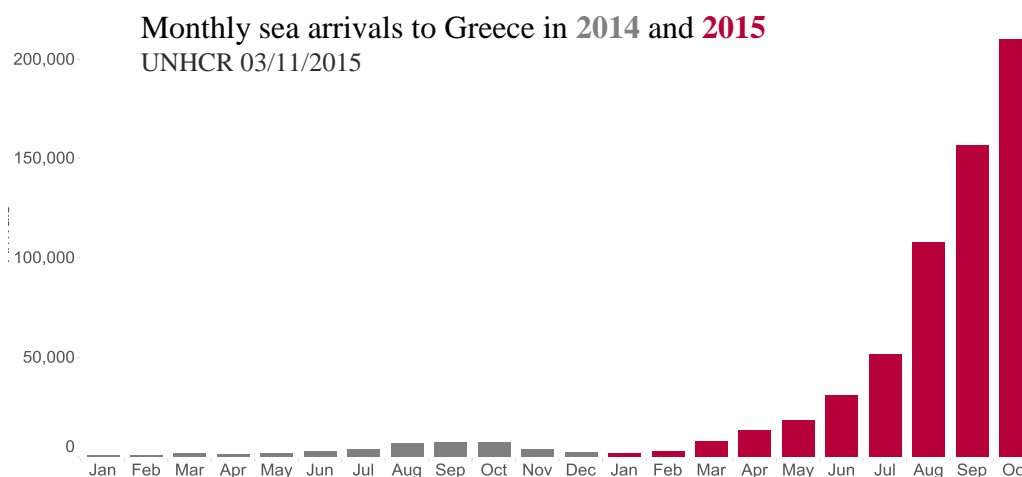
### CURRENT SITUATION

The number of people making their way to northern EU countries, via Greece and the Balkans, has risen sharply in 2015. A high of around 10,000 per day arrived in Greece during early October. Transit countries (currently Croatia, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia but potentially also Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Romania) are under tremendous strain coping with the large numbers of people passing through their borders. The EU is undecided on how many asylum-seekers it can welcome.

All those travelling through transit countries are treated in the same manner by most of the host governments and international humanitarian agencies. In some instances Syrians, Iraqis and Eritreans are being fast-tracked. Transit country governments seek to register all people entering their country, although the thoroughness of the registration procedure varies by country and is sometimes waived when the number of arrivals exceeds local capacity. The implementation of the EU's 'hotspots' relocation scheme in

Greece in October has resulted in a slower, more thorough processing of asylum-seekers.

In October 2015, over 180,000 asylum-seekers entered Greece from Turkey, representing one third of the total arrivals to Greece in 2015 despite deteriorating weather. The majority crossed by sea arriving at the islands of Agathanisi, Chios, Crete, Kalymnos, Karpathos, Kos, Lesvos, Leros, Patmos, Psara, Rhodes, Samos, Samothrace, Symi and Tilos. The current route for the majority of asylum-seekers is through Greece, FYR Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia where they cross into Austria (see map page 4). Changes to the route are precipitated by the border closures. Although a small proportion of asylum-seekers indicate their intention to apply for asylum in one or more of the transit countries during the registration process, almost none follow up their applications. There have been few incidents of violence between host communities and those in transit, considering the large scale of movement, and much of the assistance provided to the asylum-seekers has come from local people. The financial toll on the transit countries is significant especially in Greece, FYR Macedonia and Serbia.



<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this report the term 'asylum-seeker' is used to refer to all those transiting to Europe, although the majority have not (yet) stated their intention to apply for asylum.

# SITUATION MAP



## SCENARIOS

### Scenario 1

#### Baseline – Continued manageable flow

**PROBABILITY** 

**IMPACT** 

**Description** - There remains a significant flow of asylum-seekers through the transit countries (5,000–10,000 per day). The daily average decreases over winter and increases again from April 2016.

**Estimated caseload** – 5,000–10,000 per day in any one country (a total of 1.25–2.75 million in 9 months)

**Duration of need for external support** – 3 months: November–February (during winter)

**Possible triggers** – There are no significant changes in the push and pull factors. The instability and lack of physical security in Syria continues at a similar level, there is no end to the conflict in sight and there are no changes to livelihood opportunities, humanitarian assistance and security in countries of first asylum (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey). Except for the challenges posed by the winter, the conditions for passage remain similar with the Turkish-Greek and European borders remaining open to a limited extent. Popular opinion towards asylum-seekers remains generally positive in destination countries.

**Geographic areas of most concern** – Greek islands, Athens (during winter).

**Humanitarian consequences** – The journey time for asylum-seekers increases over winter, with many people resting longer and more frequently. They opt to spend longer in more traditional receptions centres, rather than making brief use of one-stop transit centres and moving on. Some increase in humanitarian space and available funding as governments increase reliance on humanitarian organisations to cope with this increased

demand for services. National humanitarian organisations suffer from volunteer fatigue. Increased need for shelter and access to basic services during the winter months. The humanitarian assistance required during winter is within capacity of the local and national authorities and humanitarian organisations currently active in each country, although some countries (such as Greece, Serbia and FYR Macedonia) have difficulties in providing sufficient adequate shelter during winter. National health systems struggle to cope with the increased caseload during winter and need additional support.

Organisations take advantage of the relative lull in new arrivals during winter to prepare for the significant increase in spring. The increased preparedness results in a more effective and efficient processing of new arrivals in 2016.

## Scenario 2

### Significant reduction

**PROBABILITY** 

**IMPACT** 

**Description** – The number of people entering Greece reduces significantly due to a tightening of border controls by Turkey. Those who do enter the transit countries are able to exit to one of the destination countries. This scenario assumes a continuing desire by asylum-seekers to transit to northern EU countries and that legal means are an option for relatively few, resulting in clandestine movement.

**Estimated caseload** – Less than 1,000 per day of visible asylum-seekers; up to 5,000 invisible.

**Duration of need for external support** – No requirement, although a change in support by provided by national actors will be required to address the increased protection concerns.

**Possible triggers** – An EU-Turkey agreement results in Turkish authorities successfully tightening border controls with Greece, and possibly Syria. EU countries encourage transit countries to stop facilitating the flow of asylum-seekers.

**Impact** – This scenario has a high positive impact as the number of asylum-seekers seeking humanitarian assistance falls dramatically. There is also a negative impact as significant numbers begin to attempt to transit covertly to avoid tightened controls. Options for unofficial passage to the transit countries become more dangerous and expensive as the smuggling trade becomes more sophisticated. The number of people arrested and detained increases. The involvement of, and funding to, international humanitarian organisations reduces.

**Geographic areas of most concern** – Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania.

**Humanitarian consequences** – Overall number of people in need in transit countries reduces. The humanitarian assistance required during winter, and beyond, is within capacity of the current organisations in each country. However, the unseen humanitarian caseload grows significantly. Large numbers of asylum-seekers attempt the journey to Europe undetected, making them more vulnerable en route and more at risk of abuse and human trafficking. Protection concerns grow and are likely go underreported as attention shifts to other crises. Restrictions on movement from countries of origin/first asylum, such as Syria and Turkey, result in significant additional humanitarian needs in these areas.

**Alternative scenario** – Should the flow of asylum-seekers reduce for voluntary reasons (such as imminent hopes of a peace deal in Syria, significantly improved conditions in countries of first asylum and reports of dissatisfaction among those who arrived in their preferred country of destination - see Annex A for additional possible triggers) most of the above concerns would reduce significantly. This is considered unlikely in the next six to nine months.



## Scenario 3

### Significant increase

**PROBABILITY** 

**IMPACT** 

**Description** – The number of asylum-seekers in the transit countries increases dramatically (doubling to 10,000–20,000 per day). People are able to move as the destination countries keep borders largely open. The greater the difference between the inflow to Greece and outflow to destination countries, the greater the increase in asylum-seekers residing in the transit countries at any point in time and more severe the humanitarian consequences.

In addition to increased numbers, it is assumed that the profile of the population in transit changes. The proportion of less wealthy and the proportion of economic migrants increases.

**Estimated caseload** – An average of 20,000 per day in any one country

**Duration of need for external support** – Up to 2 months, as this scenario would precipitate significant political activity to reduce the flow

**Possible triggers** – A sudden or significant deterioration of the situation in one or more places of origin precipitates a sudden exodus. Strict patrolling of Libyan sea borders by EU military forces smugglers to redirect people to the Balkan route. Rumours or announcements of increased immigration control by one or more preferred destination countries, or of a new destination country opening up, encourage asylum-seekers to take advantage before the situation changes. A significant reduction in the cost of travel to Greece and a mild winter could also lead to this scenario.

**Geographic areas of most concern** – Croatia, Greek islands, FYR Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania.

**Humanitarian consequences** – The overall number of people in need in transit countries at any one time increases, leading to bottlenecks at registration and transit centres and longer journey times for asylum-seekers. As numbers and frustration grows amongst asylum-seekers the flows become more aggressive. Hygiene conditions deteriorate, due to extended travel and waiting times, leading to outbreaks or an increase in diseases. The profile of people in transit changes, with a greater proportion being from poorer backgrounds and having fewer resources. Black economies emerge, which fuels the growth of criminality and leads to further exploitation of asylum-seekers. Increased competition for essential services heightens tensions with host communities. Growing frustration among the asylum-seekers gives rise to occasional outbursts of violence both towards the "holding authorities" and among different ethnic groups of migrants. These fuel negative public opinion and increase support to radical groups resulting in more localised conflict, further straining national police. Significant need for shelter, WASH, health, food and clothes at locations where large numbers of people are forced to wait a week or more before continuing their journey. The sheer number of arrivals overwhelms the capacity to cope of the national authority and existing humanitarian community. As a result, there is an increase in morbidity among the most vulnerable due to a lack of access to assistance. Increased friction between asylum-seekers and host communities, in areas where asylum-seekers congregate, result in increased protection concerns. Humanitarian agencies and local authorities do not prepare sufficiently for increased arrival rates in spring, as they are preoccupied with responding to the high caseload during winter. In spring, national service providers (health, sanitation, police etc.) are overwhelmed resulting in reduced services to nationals, exacerbating tensions between those in transit and host populations. Both the number of vulnerable people and the level of their vulnerability increase. Humanitarian space and funding increases as transit country governments request humanitarian actors to rapidly scale up their activities.

## Scenario 4

### Stranded

**PROBABILITY** 

**IMPACT** 

**Description** – Significant numbers of asylum-seekers are stuck in the transit countries, unable to access their preferred destination countries. This scenario is an extension of either scenario 1 or 3 above, in which the numbers of asylum-seekers in transit countries continues to fluctuate around the present level OR increases significantly. At the same time, crossing into preferred destination countries is severely restricted.

**Estimated caseload** – Concentrations of 20,000 – 50,000 people at key locations (primarily around border crossings) at any one time. Average numbers in each transit country increase to 20,000–50,000 at any given time.

**Duration of need for external support** – 2–6 weeks, as this scenario would prompt swift political activity to find a solution

**Possible triggers** – Increased immigration control by preferred destination countries or destination countries encourages transit countries to enact tighter border controls. Costs of onward travel rises significantly. Transit countries reduce the assistance provided to asylum-seekers, or fail to increase it in proportion to arrivals.

**Impact** – Combination of small build-ups of people (likely to be the most vulnerable) along the route – at controlled borders, major transport hubs or places where they run out of money to move further – and increasing numbers of people on the move, constantly re-routing. As the number and frustration of asylum-seekers grows the flows become more aggressive. The strain on public services and negative public opinion increase, as asylum-seekers are perceived to be staying rather than transiting. This in turn fuels increased support to radical groups and localised conflict, further straining national police. Those stuck in transit countries will have an uncertain legal status as they exceed their permitted transit times. Increased numbers of people apply for asylum in transit countries. Smuggling/human trafficking activities increase as people opt for more clandestine routes to destination countries.

**Geographic areas of most concern** – FYR Macedonia, Serbia, Greece, Croatia and Slovenia.

**Humanitarian consequences** – Increased mobile humanitarian caseload in some transit countries as they seek alternative routes. Increased static humanitarian caseload in some transit countries as they wait for borders to open. Sudden surges in caseload in some

transit countries as the sheer number of asylum-seekers at certain crossings force entry into the next country. Significant humanitarian needs, which without sufficient support, result in an increase in morbidity. Larger concentrations of people and longer average length of stay increases humanitarian needs (especially during winter). Many asylum-seekers become less accessible, as they are moving further and faster. Others become more static requiring shelter, WASH and health assistance for longer periods. Protection concerns increase with the rise in clandestine movement.



## COMPOUNDING FACTORS

The following developments can occur in parallel to any of the above scenarios and have the potential to significantly change the humanitarian situation.

- **INCREASED OPERATIONAL SPACE FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

*This development could occur in conjunction with any of the above, although it is only likely in scenarios 3 or 4 when the national capacity is overwhelmed and there is insufficient support from EU institutions.*

Possible triggers include a request for assistance and facilitation of response by transit country government, and/or a combination of actors launching a joint appeal. Consequently, the quality of response improves significantly – more information, better shelter/food while waiting for registration or movement – and the vulnerability of population decreases. The need for humanitarian coordination increases, both within humanitarian community and with governments.

- **REDUCED OPERATIONAL SPACE**

Reduced operational space would mean increased control operations by local authorities/police and reduced access for humanitarian staff. This could be caused by right wing governments closing humanitarian space and undertaking all or most humanitarian activities themselves. Less funding available to humanitarian organisations. As a result, safety, security and health issues are not addressed and there is a requirement for the humanitarian system to adapt and find ways to work through national institutions / non-traditional partners.

- **RETURN OF PERSONS UNDER THE READMISSION PROCESS**

Destination countries start sending larger numbers of people back to the non-EU countries from which they entered EU, as it is established that they are not in need of international protection. Such a development would have significant impact on Serbia which is unlikely to be prepared, or have the resources, to facilitate their onward journey to their countries of origin.

- **PROFILE OF POPULATION IN TRANSIT CHANGES**

The profile can change in two main ways:

- An increased number of arrivals do not qualify for Temporary Protection under EU law, which enables fast tracking of their asylum application. At present only Syrians qualify. A significant increase in those originating from sub-Saharan Africa or countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Bangladesh would not immediately affect the flow of asylum-seekers through the transit countries as most process everyone in the same manner. However, different treatment in the destination countries could result in increased returns to the transit countries and people who are in need of international protection will find it harder to claim their rights. It would become more difficult to advocate for their rights. So far most of the Syrian and Afghan asylum-seekers have been family groups with children, whereas those from other countries are predominantly males. A change in this profile would necessitate a change in assistance modality.

This profile change has already begun and it is likely that the percentage of asylum-seekers not qualifying for Temporary Protection will grow significantly in the next nine months.

- The social-economic background of Syrians in transit changes. Greater numbers have fewer resources, are more vulnerable to longer journey times and have reduced coping mechanisms. A change of assistance support modalities is required. This is considered less likely as most of those currently making the journey to Europe have family members already living and working in their preferred destination country. It is suggested that fewer Syrians from a lower socio-economic background would have such links with Europe to encourage migration.

An expected profile change is that the proportion of women and children transiting during the winter reduces, and then increases again during spring.

## METHODOLOGY

The scenarios were developed by first identifying a list of events (or triggers) that might significantly change the humanitarian landscape. There are five main factors that affect future developments in the transit countries:

- The rate at which asylum-seekers enter the countries (primarily from Turkey to Greece).
- The rate at which they exit to the destination countries.

- The operational humanitarian space within each transit country.
- The profile of the population in transit.
- The severity of the winter.

By selecting differing combinations of these triggers four plausible scenarios were developed. These scenarios were then validated at workshops with humanitarian actors, in Athens, Belgrade and Geneva, during which the major impacts of each scenario and resultant humanitarian consequences were identified.

Staff from the following organisations participated in one or more of the workshops: Action Aid, Amnesty International, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Divac Foundation, ICRC, IFRC, IMC, IOM, IRC, MapAction, Mercy Corps, MSF, National Red Cross societies, NRC, OSCE, Praksis, Praxis, REACH, Save the Children, UNHCR, UNICEF.

That conditions will be more difficult during winter is a given; the relative severity is not addressed in these scenarios as it applies equally to each. Changes to the operational space and profile of the population in transit are seen as compounding factors and addressed separately at the end. Scenario 1 envisages an increase in operational space proportional only to the increased winter needs, while scenarios 3 and 4 envisage a greater increase in operational space. Only scenario 3 assumes a change in the profile of the population in transit.

A list of individual triggers for each scenario is given in Annex A. It should be noted that a combination, but not necessarily all, of the triggers are required to realise a scenario.

## LIMITATIONS

Scenarios can seem to oversimplify an issue, as the analysis balances details with broader assumptions. The aim of scenario building is not to try and accurately predict the future but rather to understand the range of possible futures. It is not an end in itself, but a process for generating new ideas that should in turn lead to actual changes in project design or decision-making.

Due to time constraints it was not possible to visit or consult individuals in all of the transit countries. These scenarios are for the transit countries as a whole. It should be

noted that the relative impact of each scenario on individual countries would differ significantly.

For more information on how to build scenarios, please see the ACAPS Technical Brief on Scenario Development.

## THANK YOU

**ACAPS would like to thank all organisations that provided input to these scenarios, especially those who attended the workshops in Athens, Belgrade and Geneva. For additional information, comments or questions, please email [analysis@acaps.org](mailto:analysis@acaps.org)**

## ANNEX A – TRIGGERS PER SCENARIO

### Scenario or Compounding Factors application

Scenario 1 = Baseline / Scenario 2 = Significant reduction / Scenario 3 = Significant increase / Scenario 4 = Stranded / Compounding Factors = CF

	1	2	3	4	CF	Current situation (Start Nov 2015)
<p>The rate of <b>arrival</b> in transit countries is likely to <b>remain the same</b> if...</p> <p>No significant change in push or pull factors.</p>	•					
<p>The rate of <b>arrival</b> in transit countries is likely to <b>increase</b> if...</p> <p>Rumour of or actual increased immigration control by destination countries.</p> <p>Rumour of or actual destination country opening up.</p> <p>Strict patrolling of Libyan sea borders forces smugglers to use Balkan route.</p> <p>Significant sudden deterioration in situation in Syria or host countries.</p> <p>The humanitarian situation significantly deteriorates in a country other than Afghanistan, Eritrea or Syria, triggering displacement from 'new' countries.</p>			•	•		
<p>The rate of <b>arrival</b> in transit countries is likely to <b>decrease</b> if...</p> <p>Turkish border controls effectively stem the flow to Greece.</p> <p>Effective crackdown significantly increases the price of passage.</p> <p>Destination countries become less attractive to asylum-seekers when significant number of people die or are detained during passage or stay.</p> <p>A significant decrease in popular support results in violent confrontations between host communities and asylum-seekers, deterring arrivals.</p> <p>Transit countries reduce the assistance provided to asylum-seekers, or fail to increase it in proportion to arrivals.</p> <p>Increased prospects for peace in Syria.</p> <p>Creation of effective legal ways to relocate/reach Europe direct from countries of origin/first asylum.</p> <p>Significant increase in humanitarian assistance or access to livelihood opportunities in Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey.</p>		•				EU / Turkey agreement under discussion 1,500 € pp Turkey to Greece (median all reported) ~300 killed in October
<p>The ability to <b>exit</b> transit countries is likely to <b>remain the same</b> if...</p> <p>Current EU border policies remain unchanged</p>	•		•			See Map page 4
<p>The ability to <b>exit</b> transit countries is likely to <b>decrease</b> if...</p> <p>Closure of borders Croatia and/or Slovenia.</p> <p>Destination countries encourage transit countries to enact tighter border controls.</p>				•		See Map page 4
<p>Operational humanitarian space is likely to <b>remain the same</b> if...</p>						

Humanitarian and popular support does not increase or decrease significantly.



25% received of USD 11.4 million requested for the situation in Greece\*

### Operational humanitarian space is likely to **increase** if...

International funding to crisis increases significantly, e.g. a combination of actors launch a joint appeal.

Easing of registration and operation regulations for INGOs.

A transit country government requests external assistance and takes measures to facilitate response.

Actors are able and willing to sufficiently prepare for increased spring influx.



No joint appeal



No formal request as of yet



### Operational humanitarian space is likely to **decrease** if...

A significant decrease in popular support results in violent confrontations between host communities and asylum-seekers.

International funding to crisis decreases significantly.

Registration and operation regulations for INGOs are tightened.

The number of people that do not qualify for prima facie refugee status increases, making it more difficult to advocate for their rights.



64% of recorded arrivals to Greece in October were Syrian. An increase of Afghan arrivals and families with young children has been observed in October.

Sources: UNHCR 19/10/2015, UNHCR 29/10/2015, IOM 03/11/2015 , The Migrants' Files 14/08/2015, UNHCR 20/10/2015