

COUNTRY FACTSHEET* – Smuggling of migrants



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LEGAL AND JUDICIAL INFORMATION ON MIGRANT SMUGGLING

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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GENERAL INFORMATION ON MIGRATION



MAIN FIGURES AND TRENDS

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains primarily a **transit country** on the Western Balkans route, with migrants aiming to reach EU countries (mainly via Croatia → Slovenia → other EU states).

Key figures (2024–2025, based on official reports from the Ministry of Security of BiH, Service for Foreigners' Affairs – SFA, and cross-verified with Frontex data):

- 2024: Registered irregular migrants/arrivals: approximately 25,200–25,284 (decline of ~26–27% from 2023). Detected illegal border crossings: 11,298 (17.2% decrease from 2023). Asylum intentions: 21,489. Formal asylum applications: 234. Readmissions from Croatia: 3,049 (decline ~28%). Border Police of BiH recorded 89 criminal offenses under Article 189 KC BiH (smuggling of persons) and 5 under Article 189a (organizing a group for smuggling), with 138 suspects (mostly BiH citizens). These cases involved attempts to smuggle 892 persons.¹
- 2025: Significant further decline on the Western Balkans route (Frontex: -42% detections vs 2024). Registrations in BiH: ~13,987 (decline ~44–52% vs 2024). Overall EU external border detections: ~178,000 (-26% vs 2024).²

Trends (2024–2026): Sharp reduction in irregular flows due to enhanced regional controls (Serbia–Hungary, Serbia–North Macedonia), anti-smuggling operations, and Frontex joint operation launched in BiH (November 2025). Main nationalities: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Iran, Morocco, Türkiye, Russia (Chechnya), China. Modus operandi: boats on Drina/Sava rivers (spring/summer), hidden vehicle compartments, guides, encrypted apps (Telegram, WhatsApp, Signal). Increased migrant self-organization after learning routes/languages.



MIGRATORY ROUTES

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) functions almost exclusively as a **transit territory** for irregular migrants and asylum seekers aiming to reach EU Member States, primarily through Croatia and onward to Slovenia or other Western European countries. BiH is not a primary

¹ <https://msb.gov.ba/PDF/020720254.pdf>

² <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-irregular-border-crossings-down-26-in-2025-europe-must-stay-prepared-lyKpVb>

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destination but a key segment of the Western Balkans route, where migrants spend limited time before attempting onward movement.

According to official assessments and operational intelligence from 2024–2025 (including data from the Service for Foreigners' Affairs – SFA, Border Police of BiH, and the Joint Risk Analysis Centre), the main migratory flows follow three primary entry patterns, with corresponding exit directions toward the EU external border:

1. **From Serbia (eastern entry):** The most frequently used route involves crossing the Drina River into eastern BiH (mainly areas under the jurisdiction of Border Police units in Zvornik, Bratunac, and Višegrad). Migrants then move through central BiH (Sarajevo area, often via short-term stays in urban zones or informal accommodations) toward the northwest (Bihać, Velika Kladuša, Gradiška regions in Una-Sana Canton). This path has seen shifts in pressure points, with increased activity around Višegrad and Bijeljina from early 2024 onward.
2. **From Montenegro (southeastern entry):** Migrants cross rugged, forested, and mountainous terrain into southeastern BiH (primarily Čajniče area and surrounding border zones). This route is less voluminous but remains active for groups originating from South Asia and the Middle East, often involving foot movement and local guides.

Exit routes primarily lead toward the EU external border with Croatia:

- Northern and northwestern sectors (Gradiška, Velika Kladuša, Brod, Kostajnica, Izačić-Bihać), where attempts often involve crossings of the Sava River (using inflatable boats in spring/summer) or land passages.
- Southwestern directions (Posušje region)

Transportation and communication methods Migrants rely on a combination of low-cost and clandestine means: on foot (often guided across remote terrain), taxis or private vehicles (frequently arranged by smugglers), modified trucks with hidden compartments, and small boats (especially on the Drina and Sava rivers). Communication is coordinated via encrypted and widely available applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Viber, and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) for route sharing, payments, and coordination with facilitators.

Areas of highest migratory pressure The most intense activity remains concentrated in:

- **Northwestern BiH** (Una-Sana Canton: Bihać, Velika Kladuša, Izačić), due to proximity to the Croatian border and historical transit hubs.
- **Northeastern/eastern BiH** (Zvornik, Bratunac, Bijeljina areas along the Drina), where river crossings from Serbia are frequent.

Volumes in these zones have significantly decreased in 2025, reflecting broader regional trends (Frontex-reported -42% detections on the Western Balkans route) and enhanced border management measures, including the new Frontex joint operation launched in BiH in November 2025. Despite the decline, smuggling networks continue to adapt, with increased reliance on local facilitators and digital tools.

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INSTITUTIONAL ORGANISATION

Key actors in prevention, detection, and repression of migrant smuggling:

- **Prosecutor's Office of BiH (POBiH)** – Special Department for Organized Crime; Section for Combating Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (leads investigations/prosecutions).
- **Border Police of BiH** – Primary state border protection; detects most smuggling cases; conducts operational actions.
- **State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA)** – Handles complex organized crime cases linked to smuggling.
- **Service for Affairs with Foreigners (SFA)** – Administrative control of foreigners, registration, readmission, Immigration Centre; refers criminal cases to police/prosecutor (no direct investigative role).
- Entity/cantonal police – Inland support.
- Coordination via Working Group for Combating Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons;



LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina

189.

Smuggling of Persons Article

(1) Whoever, out of personal or someone else's gain, illegally transports or enables transportation across the state border of one or more migrants or other persons, or whoever with the same purpose, makes, obtains or possesses false travel or personal documents, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term between one and ten years.

(2) Whoever recruits, transports, harbours, protects or otherwise enables smuggled persons to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shall be punished by a prison sentence between six months and five years.

(3) If the offences under paragraphs (1) and (2) have been perpetrated by members of a structured group, or an organised crime group, by abuse of official duty, or in a manner that poses a threat to life, health or safety of the smuggled persons, or if those persons were exploited or treated in another inhuman or degrading manner, the perpetrator shall be punished by imprisonment for a term between three and fifteen years.

(4) The punishment under paragraph (3) of this Article shall be imposed also on the perpetrator of the criminal offences referred to in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this Article whose victims were under 18 years of age.

(5) In the event that the offences under paragraphs (1) and (2) resulted in a death of one or more smuggled persons, the perpetrator shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of not less than five years.

(6) The objects or means of transportation used for the purpose of perpetration of the offence shall be confiscated.



Article 189a

Organising a group or an association for the purpose of perpetration of the criminal offences of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants

(1) Whoever organises a group or an association for the purpose of perpetration of the criminal offences in violation of Articles 186 (Trafficking in Persons) and 189 (Smuggling of Persons) of this Law, shall be punished by a prison sentence of not less than three years.

(2) Whoever becomes a member of the group or the association referred to in paragraph (1) of this Article, or otherwise assists the group or association, shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than one year.

(3) The provisions set forth in Article 250 (Organised Crime) of this Law shall apply to the organiser or ringleader of the structured group or the association who perpetrated the offences under paragraph (1) of this Article and the members thereof

Conducting above mentioned articles, police officer are obliged as well to apply certain procedures from Criminal Procedure Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Jobs in the domain of controlling the movement and residence of foreigners are carried out in accordance with the competences prescribed by the Law on the Service for Affairs with Foreigners ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 54/05 and 36/08), the Law on Foreigners ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 88/15, 34/21 and 63/23), the Law on Asylum ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 11/16), the Rulebook on the Entry and Residence of Foreigners ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 81/08) and other legal and bylaw regulations.



JUDICIAL FRAMEWORK

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Prosecutors are in charge of conducting investigations, submitting indictments to the Court and representing the indictments during the main hearing before the Court, according to CPC there are two phases of the main hearing i.e. presentation of the prosecution case and presentation of the defense. Once both the prosecution and defense present their evidence Judges will deliver a verdict. During the investigation phase Judges are in charge of issuing orders for search and seizure special investigative activities and they also deliver decisions on motions for custody.

Whenever there is a doubt that a criminal offence is committed, Border police immediately informs Prosecutor, when the Prosecutor is informed about circumstances of the case, and the Prosecutor is the one who will decide if there is criminal offence or may be misdemeanor. When Border police is leading an operation action which will be realized by processing the suspects, the Prosecutor is included from the very beginning, and all other special investigation measures which are necessary to document organized crime related to the smuggling of migrants are authorized by Prosecutor and Court.

Police officers (investigation inspectors) of Border police have a frequent meetings with Prosecutors, regarding all actions which need to be taken, about sharing informations, checking information, collecting the evidence, analysing of forensic evidence, from the early beginning till the realization of some operational action.

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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Bosnia and Herzegovina maintains active and structured international cooperation in the field of combating migrant smuggling, aligned with EU priorities and regional mechanisms. This includes operational, judicial, and intelligence-sharing frameworks with key partners such as Eurojust, Europol, Frontex, Interpol, SELEC, and neighbouring countries.

- **Eurojust:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has a designated contact point at the Prosecutor's Office of BiH. Cooperation facilitates the exchange of operational information and evidence in cross-border cases. Successful use of Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) has been recorded in complex migrant smuggling investigations, particularly those involving organized criminal groups with links to neighbouring EU Member States. In October 2024, BiH concluded a cooperation agreement with Eurojust, enabling systematic exchanges and the posting of a liaison prosecutor.
- **Europol:** A permanent joint contact team has been established within the Ministry of Security of BiH, enabling daily operational information exchanges. Europol provides analytical and operational support in dismantling transnational smuggling networks, including through Operational Task Forces (OTFs) and EMPACT priorities. Examples include coordinated actions in 2024–2025 targeting routes across BiH, Croatia, and other Western Balkan countries, with focus on encrypted communications and financial flows.
- **Frontex:** Cooperation was significantly strengthened with the signing of a new Status Agreement on 11 June 2025 between the EU and BiH authorities. This agreement enables Frontex to conduct joint operations on BiH territory, including at borders with non-EU neighbours and at border crossing points (including airports). A fully-fledged joint operation was rolled out in BiH starting late 2025 (initial deployments and planning from October–November 2025), with over 100 Frontex Standing Corps officers deployed alongside BiH border guards. The operation focuses on border management, tackling migrant smuggling, risk analysis, and information exchange while fully respecting fundamental rights. This has contributed to the continued decline in migratory pressure on the Western Balkans route.
- **Interpol and SELEC:** Regular operational information sharing occurs through established channels. SELEC serves as a key platform for regional coordination with neighbouring countries (Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro), facilitating joint actions and intelligence on smuggling networks.
- **Regional cooperation:** Strong bilateral and multilateral ties exist with Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro, including joint operational actions, information exchange via SELEC, and readmission/readmission procedures. Cross-border operations have targeted smuggling groups operating along shared borders (e.g., Drina and Sava rivers).
- **Specialized mechanisms:** Monitoring of international financial flows (related to smuggling payments) and interception of cross-border communications are supported through Europol and Interpol channels. BiH actively participates in Joint Action Days (JADs), such as Global Chain (focus on human trafficking and document fraud), Danube (smuggling of migrants), and others under EMPACT priorities.

This cooperation framework has yielded tangible results, including reduced irregular crossings, disruption of smuggling networks, and enhanced capacity-building for BiH authorities.

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RELEVANT CASES

1. International Operational Action “Gora” (November–December 2025) Joint action by Border Police of BiH and Ministry of Interior of Serbia, under supervision of Prosecutor’s Office of BiH and orders of Court of BiH. Focused on organized smuggling of migrants from Serbia to BiH (under taxi business cover). 13 persons deprived of liberty (10 BiH citizens, 3 foreign nationals). Group smuggled at least 500 migrants in ~3 months (estimated illicit gain ≥50,000 KM). Charges: Article 189a (organizing group for smuggling) and Article 189 (smuggling of persons), in conjunction with Article 29 KC BiH. Action continued on 22 December 2025 with additional arrests (Iraqi and Afghan nationals). **Official source:** Border Police of BiH official announcement (19 November 2025):

<https://www.granpol.gov.ba/Publication/Read/939051?pageId=0&title=medunarodna-operativna-akcija-%E2%80%9EGora%E2%80%9C-%E2%80%93-zajednicko-djelovanje-sigurnosnih-agencija-bih-i-republike-srbije>

2. Indictment against 15 persons for organized smuggling of over 600 illegal migrants (December 2025) Prosecutor’s Office of BiH filed indictment against 15 persons (BiH citizens and others) for membership in organized criminal group (Articles 189a and 189 KC BiH). From 2023 to April 2024, group smuggled at least 600 illegal migrants (including minors) from BiH to Croatia/EU outside border crossings for agreed financial gain. **Official source:** Prosecutor’s Office of BiH – Weekly activities overview (1–5 December 2025):

<https://www.tuzilastvobih.gov.ba/index.php?id=6181&jezik=b>

3. Indictment for smuggling via boat on Drina river (November 2025) Prosecutor’s Office of BiH filed indictment against Adnan Šrndić (BiH citizen) for smuggling Indian migrant women across Drina river by boat (4 August 2024 incident). Accused accepted and transported persons not meeting entry conditions for illicit gain. Charge: Article 189(1) KC BiH. **Official source:** Prosecutor’s Office of BiH – Weekly activities overview (17–21 November 2025): <https://tuzilastvobih.gov.ba/?id=6176&jezik=b>

4. Indictment for attempted smuggling of 30 Chinese nationals (January 2026, incident September 2025) Prosecutor’s Office of BiH filed indictment against Mersudin Kurbegović (Montenegrin citizen, in custody) for attempting to smuggle 30 Chinese nationals hidden in a truck among chopped wood (24 September 2025). Prevented by Croatian police at Gradina/Jasenovac border crossing. Charge: Article 189(1) in conjunction with Article 26 KC BiH. **Official source:** Prosecutor’s Office of BiH – Weekly activities overview (26–30 January 2026): <https://www.tuzilastvobih.gov.ba/?id=6213&jezik=b>