COUNTRY FACTSHEET* – Smuggling of migrants

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

LEGAL AND JUDICIAL INFORMATION ON MIGRANT SMUGGLING

SERBIA

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GENERAL INFORMATION ON MIGRATION

MAIN FIGURES AND TRENDS

As a transit country on the Western Balkan migration route, the Republic of Serbia continues to face migratory movements frequently facilitated by organised migrant smuggling networks.

Between 1 January and 31 December 2025, the number of prevented illegal border crossings decreased by 19.2%, from 17,181 in 2024 to 13,878 in 2025.

At entry points into Serbia, the number of prevented illegal crossings decreased by 23.6% (from 14,170 to 10,823). At exit points, a slight increase of 1.5% was recorded (from 3,011 to 3,055) compared to the same period in the previous year.

Prevented illegal border crossings at state borders (1 January – 31 December 2024/2025)

Border section	Input			Output			TOTAL		
	2024.	**2025.**	trend	**2024**	**2025**	trend	**2024**	**2025**	trend
North Macedonia	10.487	8.758	- 16,5%	70	119	70%	10.557	8.877	-15,9%
Bulgaria	3.437	1.912	-44,4%	20	6	-70%	3.457	1.918	-44,5%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49	21	- 57,1%	1.137	404	-64,5%	1.186	425	- 64,2%
Hungary	8	7	- 12,5	946	1.643	73,7%	954	1.650	73%
Croatia	45	13	- 71,1	528	685	29,7%	573	698	21,8%
Romania	28	4	-85,7%	195	143	- 26,7%	223	147	- 34%
Air BCPs	96	63	- 34,4%	113	43	- 61,9%	209	106	- 49,3%
Montenegro	20	45	2,2 x more	2	12	6 x more	22	57	2,5 x more
Total	**14.170**	**10.823**	**- 23,6%**	**3.011**	**3.055**	**1,6%**	**17.181**	**13.878**	- 19,2%

<u>**Entry into the Republic of Serbia**</u>

As in the previous reporting period, migratory pressure continued primarily from the directions of North Macedonia and Bulgaria, which remain the two main entry corridors.

Border with North Macedonia

Since the beginning of 2025, a 16.5% decrease in illegal crossings has been recorded compared to the same period in 2024 (from 10,487 to 8,758).

The predominant method of illegal entry remains crossings between official border checkpoints, most frequently involving nationals of Afghanistan (279), Egypt (131) and Morocco (109).

Interviews conducted with migrants indicate that some are bypassing the jurisdiction of the Rujan Border Police Station by crossing from North Macedonia into the territory of AP Kosovo and Metohija, and subsequently entering the municipality of Preševo via the administrative boundary.

There are also indications that migrants cross from North Macedonia into AP Kosovo and Metohija and then proceed via the administrative line into Novi Pazar, continuing onward through Sjenica, Prijepolje and Priboj toward Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Intelligence further suggests that the cost of transporting irregular migrants within Serbia is significantly higher than in AP Kosovo and Metohija and Albania, which may act as a deterrent factor.

Border with Bulgaria

At the Bulgarian border, a 44.4% decrease in illegal entries was recorded compared to the same period in 2024 (from 3,437 to 1,912).

The dominant method remains illegal crossing between border checkpoints, most commonly involving nationals of Morocco (339), Afghanistan (331) and Syria (50).

<u>**Exit from the Republic of Serbia**</u>

Border with Hungary

At the Hungarian border, a 73.7% increase in illegal exit attempts was recorded compared to the same period in 2024 (from 946 to 1,643).

The most frequent method remains illegal crossings between checkpoints, typically on foot, most commonly involving nationals of Afghanistan (229), Turkey (188) and Morocco (92).

A notable month-to-month increase was observed toward the end of the year: November recorded a 29.6% increase compared to October, while December witnessed a further 75% increase compared to November (from 12 to 21 cases).

Regarding the "escorting" of migrants through secondary gates in the temporary protective fence, 4,152 persons were escorted by Hungarian authorities in 2025, representing a 26% decrease compared to 5,609 in 2024. The majority were nationals of Afghanistan, Turkey, Syria, Morocco and Egypt.

According to statements provided, migrants most frequently cross through pre-cut sections of the protective fence.

Interviews also revealed that a smaller number of escorted individuals had not used Serbian territory for their attempted crossing into Hungary, but had arrived from Romania or Croatia, or had flown directly to Budapest.

Furthermore, "guides" facilitating irregular crossings are typically members of the migrant population themselves, with Afghan nationals frequently identified in this role. They are frequently masked and armed with firearms (such as automatic rifles and pistols) or bladed weapons. "Guides" operate in groups of at least three persons.

Recent migratory movements have also been recorded in the eastern section of the Hungarian border, near the so-called Dead Tisa canal and along the Tisa River, including the area of responsibility of the Bački Breg Border Police Station near border markers E57 and E65.

Border with Croatia

At the Croatian border, a 29.7% increase in illegal crossings was recorded (from 528 in 2024 to 685 in 2025).

The dominant modus operandi is the smuggling of migrants concealed in freight vehicles (560 attempts recorded in 2025), most frequently involving nationals of Turkey (215), Afghanistan (147) and China (89).

During the January–December 2025 period, Croatian authorities returned 226 persons to Serbia through readmission procedures and contacts outside the regular procedure.

Border with Bosnia and Herzegovina

A 64.5% decrease in illegal crossings was recorded compared to 2024 (from 1,137 to 404).

The most frequently detected nationals were Palestine (55), Egypt (38) and Morocco (34).

The predominant method of illegal crossing in this sector remains movement between official checkpoints, particularly crossings over the Drina River using small boats.

Borders with Montenegro and Romania

The borders with Montenegro and Romania have not been significantly affected by irregular migration along the Western Balkan route.

However, since the second half of September 2025, renewed activity by Turkish nationals attempting illegal entry into Romania has been observed. This shift is assessed to be linked to increased migratory pressure and enhanced police presence along the Hungarian and Croatian borders.

Countries of Origin

The five most represented countries of origin among migrants prevented from illegally crossing the border in 2025 were:

1. Afghanistan (1,040 attempts)
2. Turkey (542)
3. Morocco (537)
4. Egypt (275)
5. Syria (240)

Irregular migrants are generally not interested in prolonged stay on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Accordingly, the number of persons expressing the intention to seek asylum in the Republic of Serbia remains relatively low.

During 2025, a total of 626 Registration Certificates were issued to foreign nationals who expressed their intention to apply for asylum in the Republic of Serbia, representing a decrease of approximately 26% compared to the same period in 2024.

Reception Centres

A total of 9,757 persons were registered in reception centres operated by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, representing a 3% decrease compared to 2024 (10,086).

The five most represented nationalities were:

- Afghanistan (2,905)
- Egypt (1,701)
- Turkey (1,125)
- Morocco (972)
- Syria (760)

Most arrivals into Serbia during the reporting period entered from:

- North Macedonia (5,186)
- Bulgaria (2,650)
- Belgrade Airport (1,001)
- Albania (515)

Security Situation and Criminal Activity

Criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling that had operated in Serbia during 2022–2023, and left the country in 2024, reactivated their activities during 2025. This resulted in renewed inter-group clashes, some with fatal outcomes.

Armed confrontations between migrant groups, primarily of Afghan origin, were recorded along the borders with Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria, as well as near reception centres in Belgrade.

During 2025, these incidents resulted in:

- 7 fatalities
- 4 persons injured by firearms
- 9 persons injured by bladed weapons
- Several cases of abduction involving migrant groups

These developments indicate a high level of violence linked to competition over smuggling routes.

The continued presence of firearms among migrant groups in border areas significantly increases the risk of further violence. During 2025, authorities found 40 firearms and 1,162 rounds of ammunition left behind by irregular migrants. In comparison, during 2024 a total of 84 firearms and 6,253 rounds of ammunition were seized.

Despite the overall decrease in migratory pressure, the persistence of organised smuggling networks and the presence of weapons among migrant groups indicate the continued need for coordinated action by competent authorities.

Criminal proceedings initiated and completed in the period 2024–2025

The statistical data refer to activities carried out during the reporting period. Convictions may relate to indictments filed in previous years, while some proceedings may still be pending before the competent courts.

During 2024, Public Prosecution Offices issued orders to conduct investigations against 322 persons for the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons under Article 350 of the Criminal Code. Indictments were filed against 398 defendants and convictions were issued against 324 defendants. Of these, 317 defendants were sentenced to imprisonment, 6 defendants received suspended prison sentences, and 1 defendant was found guilty but relieved of punishment. Five defendants were acquitted of the charges, while in respect of three defendants the charges were dismissed.

During 2025, Public Prosecution Offices issued orders to conduct investigations against 158 persons for the criminal offence under Article 350 of the Criminal Code. Indictments were filed against 270 defendants and convictions were issued against 214 defendants. Of these, 205 defendants were sentenced to imprisonment, one defendant received a monetary fine, 7 defendants received suspended prison sentences, and in one case a security measure was imposed as the principal sanction. Thirteen defendants were acquitted of the charges, while in respect of one defendant the charges were dismissed.

Year	Persons subject to investigation	Indictments filed	Convictions	Acquittals
2024	322	398	324	5
2025	158	270	214	13

Criminal proceedings initiated and completed in the period 2024–2025 – Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime (PPOOC)

During 2024, the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime issued orders to conduct investigations against six organised criminal groups due to reasonable suspicion that they committed the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons, involving a total of 47 suspects. By the end of 2024, indictments were filed against 57 defendants (including 10 defendants whose investigations had begun in 2023). Convictions were issued against 39 defendants: 36 defendants were sentenced to a total of 73 years and 6 months of imprisonment, while three defendants received suspended prison sentences. Proceedings against six defendants remain in the main trial phase.

Eight passenger vehicles, one van and proceeds of crime amounting to 240,221.60 RSD and 24,030 EUR were seized from the suspects.

During 2025, the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime issued orders to conduct investigations against three organised criminal groups due to reasonable suspicion that they committed the criminal offence under Article 350 of the Criminal Code, involving a total of 26 suspects. By the end of 2025, indictments had been filed against 28 defendants. Convictions were issued against 24 defendants: 23 defendants were sentenced to a total of 43 years and 4 months of imprisonment, while one defendant received a suspended prison sentence. Four defendants were acquitted of the charges.

Eight passenger vehicles and proceeds of crime amounting to 12,000 RSD, 7,760 EUR, 199 USD, 141,000 Iraqi dinars and 60 Egyptian pounds were seized from the defendants.

Year	Organised criminal groups investigated	Suspects	Indicted persons	Convictions
2024	6	47	57	39
2025	3	26	28	24

MIGRATORY ROUTES

Smuggling methods include facilitating illegal border crossings on foot or by overcoming physical obstacles, such as cutting border fences along the Hungarian border. In addition to the already established Hawala system, cryptocurrency transactions are also used to pay for smuggling services.

On the territory of the Republic of Serbia, migration routes originating from Greece and Bulgaria converge, and Serbia is used as a transit corridor toward Western European countries via the borders with Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. There is no significant migratory pressure on the borders between Serbia and Montenegro or Serbia and Romania (only sporadic, individual attempts of illegal crossings are recorded).

The main entry routes for irregular migrants into the territory of the Republic of Serbia remain Bulgaria and North Macedonia, although migratory pressure at all border sections has significantly decreased compared to 2023.

INSTITUTIONAL ORGANISATION

The migration situation in the Republic of Serbia is jointly monitored by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In order to respond to increased migratory pressure, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other competent authorities, adopts annual response plans approved by the Government.

Within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Border Police Directorate is responsible for issues related to irregular migration and border control. Repressive measures related to migrant smuggling, including the identification of cases, collection of evidence, arrests and the filing of criminal charges against persons suspected of committing the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons (Article 350 of the Criminal Code), fall within the competence of police administrations and the Service for the Fight against Organized Crime. Within this Service, the Department for the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Persons has been established, whose police officers deal with the suppression of organised human smuggling.

Migration management is based on the protection of migrants' rights while respecting their specific needs and the capacities of the Republic of Serbia. In accordance with the Law on Migration Management, migration is managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, which operates six asylum centres and twelve reception centres.

The Border Police Directorate performs tasks related to border control, the suppression of irregular migration and cross-border crime, as well as other activities related to asylum, risk analysis and integrated border management.

Within the Public Prosecution system of the Republic of Serbia, 58 Basic Public Prosecution Offices are competent to prosecute the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons. Where this criminal offence is committed by an organised criminal group, competence lies with the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime.

In cases of Human Trafficking (Articles 388 and 389 of the Criminal Code), 25 Higher Public Prosecution Offices are competent. Each of these offices has designated contact points for human trafficking who have undergone specialised training. Where these offences are committed by an organised criminal group, competence likewise lies with the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime.

On 15 December 2024 the Chief Public Prosecutor for Organized Crime issued an order reconstituting the Task Force for the Suppression of Smuggling of Persons and Trafficking in Human Beings. The Task Force includes representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Criminal Police Directorate and Border Police Directorate), the Ministry of Finance (Customs Administration and the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering) and the Security Information Agency.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Article 350 of the Criminal Code criminalises illegal crossing of the state border and smuggling of persons. The offence includes facilitating illegal entry, residence or transit for the purpose of obtaining financial gain. The basic form of the offence is punishable by imprisonment of one to eight years, while aggravated forms (including offences committed by a group or an organised criminal group) carry penalties of up to fifteen years. Means used for committing the offence are subject to confiscation. In Article 57 of the Criminal Code, this criminal offence (paragraphs 3 and 4) is listed among the offences for which mitigation of the sentence is not permitted.

Article 162 of the Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that special evidentiary measures may be applied to this criminal offence under the conditions set out in Article 161.

The Criminal Code also defines, in Articles 388, 389 and 390, the following criminal offences: Trafficking in Human Beings, Trafficking in Minors for the Purpose of Adoption, and Establishing a Slave Relationship and Transporting Persons in a Slave Relationship.

The strategic framework in this field is represented by the Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, and the Protection of Victims (2017–2022). Although the strategy has expired, it still contains definitions of key concepts relevant to this field. The normative framework is outlined in the introductory part of that strategy.

At the same time, the Decision on the Establishment of the Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings ("Official Gazette of the RS", Nos. 92/17 and 60/23) was adopted. The Council functions as an expert advisory body of the Government responsible for coordinating national and international activities to combat trafficking in human beings, reviewing reports of relevant international bodies, adopting positions and proposing measures for the implementation of international recommendations, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of national strategic documents in this field, coordinating the activities of competent state institutions and proposing measures to address identified challenges and ensure the necessary resources.

JUDICIAL FRAMEWORK

The provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Serbia are applicable to the prosecution of perpetrators of the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons, as stipulated in Article 350 of the Criminal Code.

Criminal prosecution is initiated by the first action undertaken by the public prosecutor, or by authorised police officers acting upon the prosecutor’s request in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure. The purpose of this action is to establish whether there are grounds for suspicion that a criminal offence has been committed or that a specific person has committed it. In accordance with the principle of prosecutorial investigation, the public prosecutor directs the pre-investigation and investigation phases and may request the police and other competent authorities to undertake investigative actions.

Pursuant to Article 162 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, special evidentiary measures may be applied to this criminal offence under the conditions prescribed in Article 161 (in relation to the criminal offence under Article 350 paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Criminal Code). Within the framework of special evidentiary actions, the following measures may be used in combating the smuggling of migrants, particularly when it is committed as a form of organised crime: covert surveillance of communications (Article 166); covert surveillance and recording (Article 171); simulated deals (Article 174); computer data search (Article 178); controlled delivery (Article 181); and the use of an undercover investigator (Article 183).

In addition, the Law on Organisation and Competence of State Authorities in the Suppression of Organised Crime, Terrorism and Corruption regulates the establishment, organisation, competence and powers of specialised state authorities and organisational units responsible for the detection, criminal prosecution and adjudication of criminal offences falling within its scope.

The competent authorities involved in combating organised crime include the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime, the Ministry of Internal Affairs – the specialised organisational unit responsible for the suppression of organised crime, the Special Department of the High Court in Belgrade for Organised Crime, the Special Department of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade for Organised Crime, and the Special Detention Unit of the District Prison in Belgrade.

Where the criminal offence is committed by an organised criminal group, or otherwise falls within the scope of organised crime as defined by law, jurisdiction lies with the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and the specialised police and court units competent for organised crime cases.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ministry of Internal Affairs

As migrant smuggling constitutes a form of transnational organised crime, bilateral cooperation with police authorities in the region, as well as with those of Hungary, Germany, Austria, France, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom, has been further strengthened in recent years. This cooperation resulted in the establishment of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) between the police of Germany, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands and Serbia, which led to the successful prosecution of dozens of migrant smugglers (https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/25-arrests-in-eu-wide-operation-against-syrian-migrant-smuggling-network).

In recent years, meetings with representatives of the Italian police have taken place at the bilateral level through liaison officers at the Italian Embassy in Belgrade, as well as at multilateral meetings organised within the EU4FAST project.

Cooperation has been particularly intensified with EUROPOL in the past few years, not only through participation in and contributions to the Migrant Smuggling Analytical Project, but also through more frequent participation in multilateral meetings organised by the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) and through participation in an increasing number of operational activities within the EMPACT priority "Migrant Smuggling".

This cooperation has resulted in participation in two Operational Task Forces at EUROPOL (OTF ZEBRA and OTF 505). The aim of establishing the ZEBRA Operational Task Force was to identify and prosecute violent migrant smugglers operating along the Western Balkans route, mainly Afghan nationals involved in migrant smuggling and transporting migrants through the territory of the Republic of Serbia, while the 505 Operational Task Force was established to identify certain individuals, primarily from Syria, involved in migrant smuggling through Serbia and further towards Western Europe.

International cooperation in combating migrant smuggling is also carried out through established mechanisms of police and judicial cooperation, including cooperation with Europol and participation in relevant EU and international operational frameworks.

The Supreme Public Prosecution

The Supreme Public Prosecution of the Republic of Serbia provides guidance, coordinates and facilitates international legal assistance and international cooperation involving public prosecution offices. It has developed a Manual on International Legal Assistance and model forms for use by public prosecution offices. Specialisation has also been ensured, as each of the 25 Higher Public Prosecution Offices has a designated contact point for international legal assistance who has undergone specialised training.

The Supreme Public Prosecution also strengthens the capacity of public prosecutors to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking through cooperation with international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and UNODC, as well as through the implementation of international projects, including EU4FAST. These initiatives provide professional capacity-building activities for prosecutors and other competent state authorities in the form of workshops, conferences and study visits, enhancing professional knowledge as well as inter-agency and international cooperation.

In the field of international legal assistance, the Supreme Public Prosecution acts in accordance with ratified international conventions, the Law on International Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and other relevant legislation. In order to facilitate the implementation of ratified international conventions, the Supreme Public Prosecution has signed Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation with its international counterparts. These memoranda do not create international obligations but facilitate international cooperation by establishing contact points and communication channels in order to make cooperation under international conventions and national legislation more efficient and effective.

Currently, 38 Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation have been signed, many of which include human trafficking and migrant smuggling among the areas of cooperation. Some of them specifically address migrant smuggling and related crimes, such as the Additional Protocol to the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Supreme Public Prosecution of the Republic of Serbia and the General Prosecution of the Republic of Hungary of 5 February 2008, signed on 26 June 2023.

The Supreme Public Prosecution further enhances international cooperation through participation in international judicial networks such as Eurojust and the European Judicial Network (EJN). It also engages in bilateral cooperation, including cooperation with foreign judicial and law enforcement liaison officers in Serbia. This cooperation has contributed to successful operational cases, such as operation "Nephogram", in which in 2024 Serbia provided assistance to the United Kingdom following a letter rogatory from the Crown Prosecution Service concerning an organised criminal group that procured small boats for the smuggling of migrants. In that case, Serbian authorities searched a truck transporting boats and related equipment and seized the items.

The Agreement on Cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and Eurojust was signed in 2019, following longstanding cooperation through contact points designated within the Ministry of Justice and the Republic Public Prosecution Office (which, in accordance with the Law on Public Prosecution of 2023, continues to operate as the Supreme Public Prosecution). The agreement defines the scope and purpose of cooperation between Serbia and Eurojust with the aim of strengthening cooperation in the fight against serious forms of crime, particularly organised crime.

Since the opening of the Office of the Liaison Prosecutor for Serbia at Eurojust in March 2020, cooperation between Serbia and Eurojust has further intensified. The Liaison Prosecutor facilitates the exchange of information and documents with competent national authorities in areas including migrant smuggling. Serbia also participates through a nominated representative in the work of the Focus Group of Prosecutors and Investigative Judges dealing with migrant smuggling. In addition, Serbia contributes to discussions on legal issues related to migrant smuggling within the Eurojust framework.

The presence of the Liaison Prosecutor at Eurojust headquarters significantly enhances international cooperation by enabling more direct coordination in cases of serious cross-border and organised crime. This includes participation in operational and strategic meetings, coordination meetings, coordination centres and joint investigation teams, which have proven to be an effective tool for coordinating investigations and improving the efficiency of international cooperation.

With regard to the casework handled by the Office of the Liaison Prosecutor, the most common form of cooperation relates to the forwarding, monitoring and verification of the execution of mutual legal assistance requests. Between 2023 and 2025, the Office handled a total of 275 operational cases, including 7 cases related to migrant smuggling (3 in 2023 and 4 in 2024). Since the establishment of the Office, Serbia has consistently ranked among the top third countries in terms of the number of cases handled.

Coordination meetings are considered an important tool for cooperation. Between 2023 and 2025, Serbian authorities participated in 60 coordination meetings organised within the Eurojust framework.

Serbia has also participated in several Joint Investigation Teams (JITs). In the period 2023–2025, six JITs were established. For example, Serbia participated in a JIT supported by Eurojust that contributed to coordinated investigations and enforcement actions across multiple countries, leading to the dismantling of an organised criminal group smuggling Syrian migrants via the Balkan route to Germany and the United Kingdom. Serbian authorities arrested and charged nine suspects in 2024 in connection with this criminal network. In total, 29 suspects were arrested for smuggling at least 750 migrants.

The Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime

Given that the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons is transnational in nature, various mechanisms of international cooperation are required, particularly with countries in the region. Such cooperation primarily takes place at the police level through the exchange of information and later during criminal proceedings through the exchange of evidence within the framework of international legal assistance.

International cooperation in the detection and prosecution of offences under Article 350 of the Criminal Code is particularly intensive with neighbouring countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia, as well as with European Union Member States. In addition to longstanding cooperation with Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic, there has been an increase in cooperation with other countries, particularly France, which in 2024 submitted four requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal proceedings related to this type of criminal offence, as well as with the United Kingdom, Italy and Poland.

Cooperation takes place through direct contacts between public prosecutors, as well as through operational cooperation between police authorities. Operational and coordination meetings are frequently organised in relation to specific cases, as well as for the processing of requests for international legal assistance.

Particular importance is attached to the work of the Permanent Task Force of Serbia, Hungary and North Macedonia, which has been holding regular annual meetings for ten years. These meetings address developments related to migrant smuggling, including the identification of new smuggling routes, and provide opportunities to strengthen cooperation and establish direct contacts between representatives of the police, prosecution services and liaison officers.

One of the most common forms of cooperation in pre-investigation and criminal proceedings is the so-called parallel investigation, conducted together with police and prosecution authorities from Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. This form of cooperation has produced very positive results and has strengthened mutual trust between the competent authorities of the participating states.

Joint investigation teams represent another important mechanism of international cooperation. Based on an agreement between the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Germany, an agreement establishing a Joint Investigation Team between the two countries entered into force on 8 March 2024. On 21 November 2024, the JIT was expanded to include Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In addition, in January 2026 a coordination meeting organised by Eurojust was held at the initiative of Italy with the participation of representatives of Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Portugal. The meeting addressed the possibility of establishing a new Joint Investigation Team and provided a basis for further cooperation aimed at preventing the activities of an organised criminal group involved in migrant smuggling.

Cooperation with Europol at the police level is also essential, particularly in operational cases involving migrant smuggling. In such cases, international cooperation is often necessary in order to obtain financial and operational intelligence, including information related to informal money transfer systems such as hawala.

The Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime also manages the Task Force for the Suppression of Smuggling of Persons and Trafficking in Human Beings. Members of this Task Force cooperate closely with the EU4FAST project and participated in the EU4FAST meeting on migrant smuggling and human trafficking held on 3 December 2025, which brought together numerous representatives of law enforcement authorities to discuss challenges and future forms of cooperation in this area.

RELEVANT CASES

Case 1 – Organised criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling

Following a multi-month investigation, police officers of the Criminal Police Directorate – Service for Combating Organised Crime, in coordination with the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime and with the assistance of the Police Directorate for the City of Belgrade, carried out an operational action on 3 October 2024 in Belgrade, Mladenovac and Aranđelovac. On that occasion, 14 members of two organised criminal groups were arrested.

The investigation established that between May and August 2024 the members of the two organised criminal groups enabled at least 178 irregular migrants to transit through the territory of the Republic of Serbia and illegally cross the state border between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the aim of further movement towards European Union countries.

Members of the first organised criminal group organised the transport of migrants from the vicinity of Zaječar to Belgrade and further to the area of the Drina River, where migrants illegally crossed the border by boat into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Members of the second organised criminal group organised the transport of migrants from the vicinity of Dimitrovgrad to Belgrade, after which migrants were further smuggled towards EU countries.

The members of both groups are suspected of committing the criminal offence of Illegal Crossing of the State Border and Smuggling of Persons.

Case 2 – Organised criminal group involved in migrant smuggling (KTI No. 23/24)

Case KTI No. 23/24 was initiated by the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime on 20 November 2024 by issuing an order to initiate an investigation against the organiser of an organised criminal group and five members suspected of being part of that group.

According to the investigation, between mid-June 2024 and 22 August 2024 the organised criminal group enabled irregular migrants to illegally cross the border between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Serbia and organised their further transit through Serbia. Migrants were transported from Dimitrovgrad, Pirot and Bosilegrad to Belgrade, where their unlawful stay was organised before further movement towards the European Union through Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At least 159 irregular migrants were smuggled, including ten Syrian nationals, five Palestinian nationals, three Armenian nationals, one Moroccan national and 140 migrants of unknown nationality.

The investigation was conducted within the framework of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) established between the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Germany (Public Prosecutor's Offices of Traunstein and Weiden). On 21 November 2024, the JIT was extended to include Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Special evidentiary measures were applied during the investigation, including covert surveillance of communications and the engagement of an undercover investigator. These measures enabled the identification and arrest of the organiser of the criminal group.

Plea agreements were concluded with all defendants and accepted by the competent court. Proceeds of crime and instrumentalities used for the commission of the offences, including mobile phones and motor vehicles used for transporting migrants, were confiscated.

Case 3 – International organised criminal network involved in migrant smuggling

Following a multi-month international investigation conducted by the Criminal Police Directorate – Service for Combating Organised Crime in coordination with the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime, and in cooperation with police authorities of Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina, six members of an organised criminal group were arrested on 20 November 2024 in Belgrade and Novi Sad. The investigation was supported by Europol and Eurojust.

The organised criminal group enabled irregular migrants to illegally cross the border between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Serbia and organised their further transit through Serbia with the aim of smuggling them to European Union countries.

Between June and the second half of August 2024, the group organised the transport of migrants from Dimitrovgrad, Pirot and Bosilegrad to Belgrade, where migrants were accommodated before continuing their journey towards Western European countries.

The criminal activities were coordinated by a Syrian national who was a high-ranking member of an international migrant smuggling network operating along the Western Balkans route towards Germany, the United Kingdom and other EU countries. At least 159 irregular migrants were smuggled through this network.

Members of the organised criminal group organised the illegal crossing of the border between Bulgaria and Serbia, the transport of migrants to Belgrade and their accommodation before further movement towards Western Europe, sharing the financial gain obtained from these activities.

Case 4 – Organised criminal group involved in migrant smuggling (KTI No. 10/25)

Case KTI No. 10/25 concerns an investigation conducted by the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime in cooperation with the Criminal Police Directorate – Service for Combating Organised Crime.

Following a multi-month investigation aimed at dismantling a migrant smuggling network, on 8 July 2025 police carried out a coordinated operational action in Belgrade, Pirot, Subotica, Niš and Šimanovci, during which 11 members of an organised criminal group were arrested.

The investigation established that between December 2024 and the end of April 2025 the organised criminal group enabled at least 180 irregular migrants to illegally cross the border between Bulgaria and Serbia and organised their further transit through Serbia.

Migrants were transported from the border area to Belgrade, where they were accommodated at several locations. They were then transported towards Subotica to illegally cross the state border or hidden in trucks in Šimanovci and smuggled to Germany.

Following the investigation, the Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime filed an indictment against 13 defendants. One suspect concluded a plea agreement and was sentenced to three years and six months of imprisonment. The suspect's mobile phone and proceeds of crime amounting to 1,650 EUR were confiscated.

The case is currently pending before the competent court in the main trial phase.

These cases illustrate the complexity and transnational nature of migrant smuggling activities affecting the Republic of Serbia, as well as the importance of international cooperation between law enforcement and judicial authorities.