

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country?

The primary source of data for international migration in BiH, including irregular migration, is the Information System on Migration (ISM), the central database owned by the BiH Ministry of Security (MoS). Quality of administrative records integrated in the ISM are good, as the coverage is full. The administrative records are used to report both stock and flow data. The data within the ISM comprise information that allows disaggregation of data required by Eurostat. All topics covered by the EU Regulation 862/2007 are included (immigration, asylum implementation of migration regulation, etc.), with exception of emigration. They contain data about sex, age, citizenship, country of birth and previous residence, etc. In 2019, a set of 28 tables prepared for reporting to Eurostat are created in the ISM system. However, these tables are not yet reported either to BHAS or Eurostat. The data are used by the MoS for the purpose of monitoring migration flows and for the preparation of the Migration Profile of BiH. The Statistical agencies of BiH has legal access to these data but in the current situation due to the lack of appropriate system for exchange of data between administrative bodies and statistical institutions (BHAS and entity statistics agencies), no report on international migration statistics is being produced and published by statistics agencies.

The BiH Ministry of Security (MoS) and its organisational units improved border management and upgraded the largest and most comprehensive source of data on migration – the Migration Information System (MIS). Article 129 of the Law on Aliens stipulates that MoS establishes and keeps Central Database on Aliens for recording and monitoring the entry, stay and exit of aliens from BiH. Central Database contains data from 31 official record on aliens and at least 4 official records on asylum seekers as the article 80 of Law on Asylum proscribes it. Implementation of the above legal provisions required exquisite technical, logistical and other capacities. In addition, introduction of biometric data for aliens in the entire system is required in order to improve accuracy and efficiency of the system. Any alien who is requesting visa, residence or is being subject of identity check is obliged to provide biometric data to the competent authorities (BP, SFA). MIS currently combines four registries previously located in: (i) Sector for Asylum – registry of

asylum seekers; (ii) SFA – resident permits registries; (iii) MFA – visas registry; and (iv) BP – border crossing registry. The MIS upgrade and integration of all four registries in the central data base improved connections, exchange and interoperability between these institutions and with other information systems of police agencies outside of BiH (regional countries, EUROPOL, Interpol, Frontex etc.). Data processing was standardised and secured. This tool for collecting and using registered data for statistical, analytical and enforcement purposes enabled other law enforcement agencies, including EURODAC, to check data on foreigners by means of biometric identification methods.

This integration has improved the exchange of information and the interoperability of the information systems among the above-mentioned institutions, as well as among the information systems of other police agencies outside of BiH. The online system for the registration of foreigners (E-foreigner) has been developed and integrated in the MIS. It simplifies registration procedures and enhances national security. The capacities of the BP have also been enhanced so that units can report faster on all border events. This includes an early warning and response system, in the case of border security threats. There is now efficient exchange of data among 21 local units, six regional field offices and the central BP office. Conditions are now suitable for the establishment of an integrated video surveillance system at 59 international border crossing points.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

Generally, use of data in policy making in BiH is almost non-existent, as many policy reviews have shown. Strategies are often developed without relevant data or by designing measures that do not address the policy needs at all. Many strategies developed are then not passed in the parliaments at all or only in the final year of its implementation. Lack of coordination between different institutions is also evident, at the same level of government and even more between different levels. Migration statistics according to the EU Regulation 862/2007, despite being produced by MoS since 2020, has not been submitted to the Eurostat yet, because MoS rejects sharing the tables with BiH Agency of Statistics. According to the interviewees from government institutions, the main source of information for policy making is the abovementioned Migration Profile, published by MoS every year since 2011. Interviewees from NGOs and international organisations also confirmed that they use this report as their main source. However, the lack of any forecasting the policies introduced using historical data are at the best implemented too late, if at all.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

A desk review was based on my previous experience, including a technical assistance project on improving migration statistics in BiH, which I was involved as a key expert in two occasions (2012 and 2020). Only two source of irregular migration data were identified: Migration Profile from MoS, and quarterly reports on transit migration from UNHCR.

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

The only difficulty was limited access to information about the data collection process and methodology for data from UNHCR, and failed attempts to arrange a meeting with them.

5. What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?

KIIs from non-governmental and international organisations stated that they observe a discrepancy between the MoS data and the information gathered at the registration centres regarding the number of individuals seeking food and those who have registered (BA_02 and BA_03). It seems that MoS understates the actual number. Moreover, government KI stated that there are differences in the official registers between the Border Police (BP) and the Service for Foreigners (SPS), as earlier they were registering more irregular migrants at the border and fewer of them were escorted to the SPS. However, now the SPS has more individuals registered due to the issuance of "yellow cards"¹ and they are not obligated to register at the Bosnian Border Police (BP), and in some cases, there is an incentive to avoid the BP.

6. Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful.

A meeting request to UNHCR office in BiH was sent, but they did not reply. As they publish quarterly reports on transit migration in the Western Balkans, including BiH, it would be good to learn about the process of making such estimates from them.

7. Please point to an example of good practice estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across. Why did you select this example?

UNHCR could be a good example, as they were identified as the only source of irregular migration statistics besides MoS. However, more information is needed before assessing whether it could be considered a good practice.

¹ The "yellow card" is documents issued to migrants after their expression of interest to apply for asylum.