REFUGEE/MIGRANT CRISIS IN EUROPE:

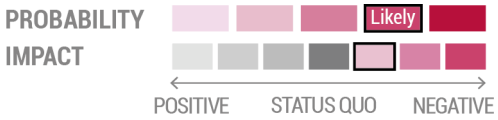
SCENARIOS

POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS IN TRANSIT COUNTRIES OVER THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

24 March 2016

SUMMARY

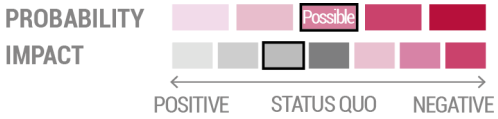
Scenario 1: Increasing numbers stranded in Greece



Estimated Caseload: 100,000-200,000 stranded

Overview: Significant numbers of migrants continue to enter Greece from Turkey, with new arrivals exceeding the number of people being returned to Turkey by Greek authorities. Smuggling from Greece through the Balkans increases. The growing population of migrants stranded in Greece strains the military-led national response capacity, which suffers from weak coordination and aid organisations' refusal to operate in detention camps. Multiple camps fail to meet basic humanitarian standards, and the potential for violence between migrants and between migrants and authorities rises.

Scenario 2: Minimal arrivals in Greece



Estimated Caseload: 50,000 in Greece

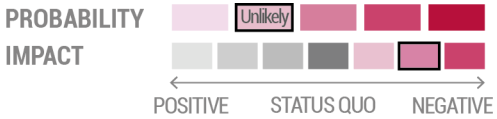
Overview: Turkey, NATO, and Frontex successfully prevent migrants from crossing the Aegean Sea. While very small numbers still arrive in Greece via both sea and land routes, they remain hidden from view as smuggling routes become less obvious. The number of migrants in Greece gradually reduces as they are either returned, relocated, or attempt more covert smuggling routes. Camp conditions improve, but those remaining require integration assistance, education, and longer-term health interventions. Migrants residing outside of camps are less accessible to aid organisations and more likely to attempt dangerous routes into Western Europe.

Scenario 3: Facilitated transit through Balkans

Estimated Caseload: 50,000-100,000

Overview: Sudden, time-limited movement of large numbers of migrants is facilitated on a sporadic basis as authorities at the FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) border are unable to prevent the mass entry of people and opt to facilitate their onward movement out of the country. Subsequent Balkan countries adopt similar responses. Existing infrastructure along the route is able to adequately address the needs of migrants after an initial period of harsh measures by police and military forces resisting the route's reopening.

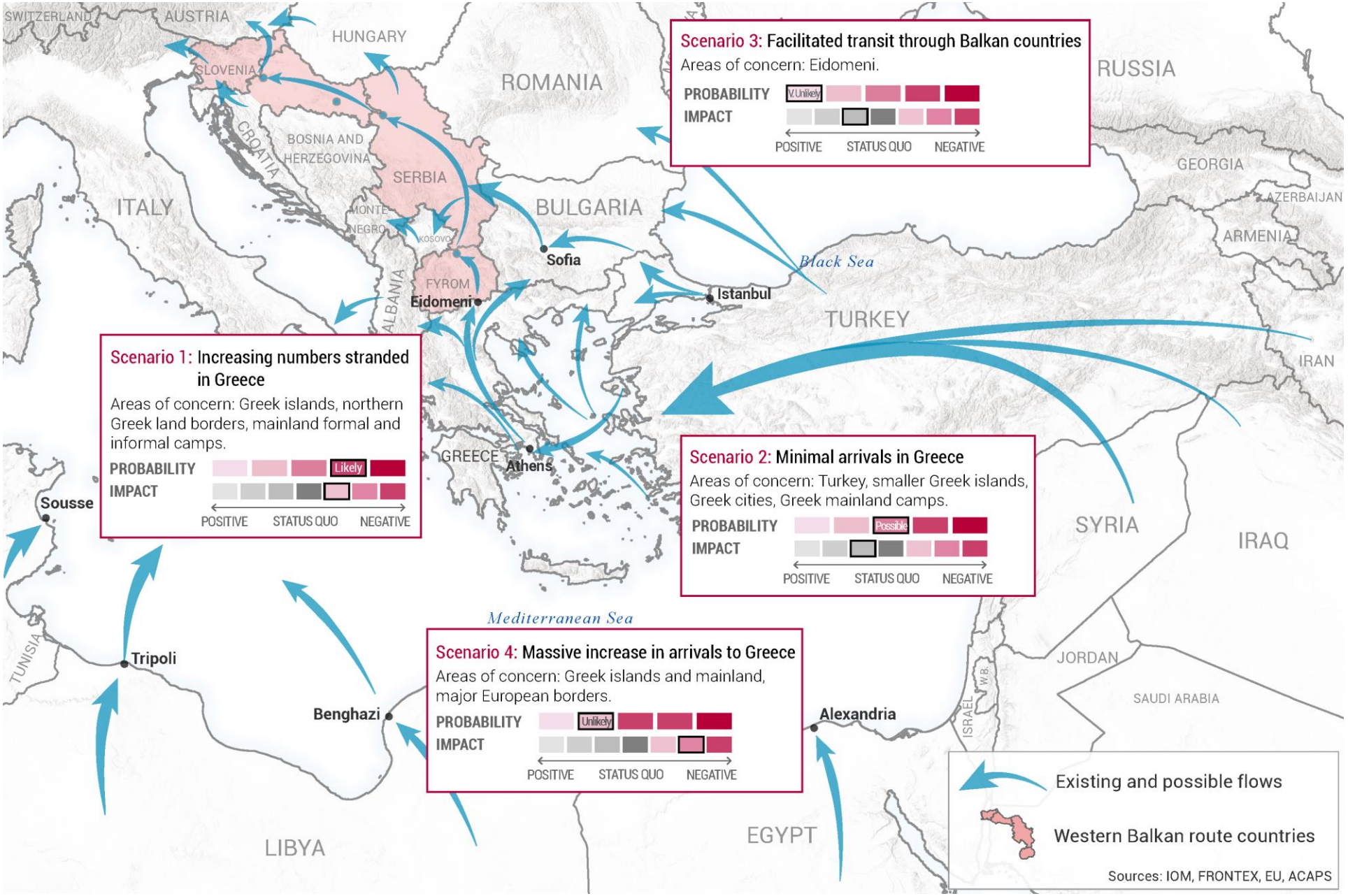
Scenario 4: Massive increase in arrivals to Greece



Estimated Caseload: 10,000-20,000/day, up to 500,000 total

Overview: A dramatic increase in arrivals results in around 300,000 migrants being hosted in planned and unplanned refugee camps in Greece. National militaries, assisted by Frontex and NATO, become the main actors responding to the crisis in all transit countries, with few humanitarian actors besides UN agencies present in most sites. The Greek military is unable to keep up with demand for shelter, food, WASH and medical services. Violence between migrants and between migrants and authorities occurs frequently, communicable diseases spread as health services are overwhelmed, and protection concerns such as identification of vulnerable people are sidelined.

SITUATION MAP



INTRODUCTION

SCENARIOS FOR APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2016

These scenarios are a description of situations that could occur in the coming six 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.

See the Methodology section for more information on how these scenarios were developed.

CURRENT SITUATION

In 2015, close to 900,000 migrants arrived on the Greek islands and proceeded to destination countries in Western Europe through the Western Balkan corridor. From November onward, transit through the Balkan countries was facilitated through the establishment of organised bus and train links into Austria and Germany. Given the undiminished number of arrivals in Greece and the desire to limit the influx into destination countries, unilateral measures by some transit and destination countries led to reduced access to facilitated transit through Balkan countries.

In mid-November 2015, transit was limited to asylum-seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (SIAs). On 22 February 2016, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) stopped allowing entry to Afghans, hindering their onward travel. On 8 March, the entire Balkan route was suddenly closed to all migrants. Several thousand were stranded along the Balkan route and, as migrants have continued to arrive in Greece, around 50,000 are currently stranded in camps at the Greece-FYROM border and throughout Greece. Stranded migrants are looking for alternative ways to reach destination countries and an increase in smuggling is expected for those who can pay for the journey. The humanitarian response has changed as a result of these border closures, from one that supported people in transit, to serving the needs of a stationary population

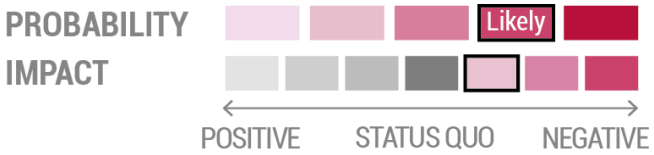
The number of people eligible for relocation and asylum in Greece rose sharply in March, although adequate systems are not currently in place in Greece to process these claims.

The situation has been further shaped by EU discussions with Turkey to stem the migrant flow, and the EU-Turkey Agreement officially came into effect on 20 March. It calls for all new arrivals from Turkey to Greece to be returned to Turkey, and that for every returned Syrian, another Syrian will be resettled directly from Turkey to the EU. While the effective implementation of the Agreement is still in doubt, migrants continue to arrive on the Greek islands, with several hundred each day since 20 March. Another major migration route across the Mediterranean Sea, from Libya to Italy, has seen a spike in arrival numbers in March. This is unsurprising, as migration numbers across the Mediterranean were expected to increase with the onset of spring and better crossing conditions.

SCENARIOS

Scenario 1

Increasing numbers stranded in Greece



Estimated caseload: 100,000- 200,000 stranded in Greece

Description – Restricted access to FYROM, Albania, and Bulgaria prevents most migrants from legally exiting Greece. Meanwhile, as the weather improves, significant numbers continue to enter Greece from Turkey, assisted by smugglers and undeterred by authorities. New arrivals exceed the number of people being returned to Turkey by Greek authorities. The resultant additional migrant population in Greece severely strains the national response capacity, which relies increasingly on the national military. Smuggling from Greece and through the Balkans increases.

Possible triggers – Some or all of the following occur:

- Neither the EU-Turkey Agreement nor the NATO and Frontex forces in the Aegean Sea succeed in significantly reducing the number of people using smugglers to enter Greece.
- There is no national or EU-level political agreement on how to handle the status of migrants stranded in Greece.
- The proposed policy of mass returns to Turkey is not fully implemented due to practical constraints, respect for international refugee law, the risk of unrest by migrants, and international attention.
- The EU continues to pressure Balkan countries to reduce the number of asylum-seekers transiting to Germany, leading Balkan authorities to respond to mass crossing attempts with force while further reinforcing borders.
- A major terrorist attack in the EU changes perceptions towards migrants and results in a sudden political reaction to further restrict entry of asylum-seekers to destination countries.

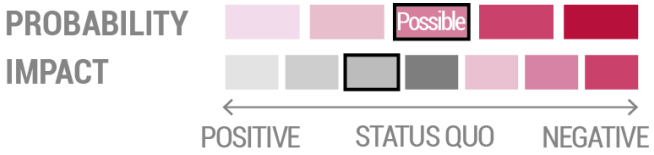
Geographic areas of most concern – Greek islands, northern Greek land borders, mainland formal and informal camps.

Impact – A significant rise in the number of people staying in Greece overwhelms state capacities. Accommodation needs grow, with some migrants staying for up to two years. This raises tensions with increasingly overburdened host communities, particularly in areas reliant on tourism. A large proportion of migrants continue their journey on clandestine routes: primarily through Bulgaria, and alternatively to Italy via Albania, and potentially via the Black Sea to Romania and/or Ukraine. Asylum applications increase significantly in Serbia. Border controls are strengthened between Serbia and Bulgaria, and Bulgaria and Turkey. Assisted voluntary returns increase, as does the potential for limited forcible returns to countries of origin and to Turkey. Efforts to relocate migrants to other European countries focus on vulnerable groups and families. The number of new arrivals in Greece decreases by June as knowledge of the restrictions on legal routes to Western Europe spreads to countries of origin. The profile of those continuing to cross into Greece shifts towards: a) single young men, a reflection of the increased level of difficulty in making the crossing; b) Afghans, who would take longer to be deterred by the reduced chance of reaching Europe; and c) unaccompanied minors, whose families believe they are more likely to gain asylum.

Humanitarian consequences – Coordination in Greece continues to suffer from poor government leadership, including bureaucratic and regional infighting, efficient but often substandard military-led camp management, and weak communication with both aid organisations and migrants. Combined with some organisations' refusal to work in closed facilities including hotspots, camp conditions do not fulfil basic humanitarian standards for health, hygiene, protection, and shelter. Women and children in camps suffer disproportionately from persistent overcrowding (including mixing of antagonistic ethnicities and unaccompanied minors with adults) and limited basic services including transport, interpreters, and food distributions. There is a risk of poor nutrition, especially among children, as well as disease outbreaks, though these are likely to be managed effectively by the military. The Greek government is also unlikely to shift effectively from emergency response to long-term integration. A high volume of asylum applications overwhelms Greek authorities, who are unable to offer specialised public services to successful applicants due to the existing economic crisis.

The potential for violence between migrants or between migrants and authorities is very high. Causes including forcible returns, inter-ethnic fighting, tension over prioritisation of Syrians in relocation assistance, mass detentions, loss of hope of onward movement, frustration over service provision, host population fatigue and anger, and dwindling money supplies and increased petty crimes. A growing proportion of rejected asylum applicants remain in Greece, without access to public services. The risk of trafficking increases significantly as people seek alternative paths into Western Europe, putting them beyond the reach of aid organisations, while family separations spike as stranded migrants are unable to join relatives already in destination countries. Drownings increase as the Mediterranean crossing to Italy becomes more popular.

Scenario 2
Minimal arrivals in Greece



Estimated caseload: 50,000 in Greece

Description – In line with the EU-Turkey Agreement, Turkey takes steps to prevent the activities of smugglers. Supported by NATO/Frontex patrols on the Aegean Sea, this effectively prevents asylum-seekers reaching Greece. While very small numbers still arrive in Greece via both sea and land routes, they remain hidden from view as smuggling routes become far less obvious. The number of migrants in Greece gradually reduces as some are permitted to continue their journey legally, some continue undetected, and others are returned to Turkey, possibly by force.

Possible triggers – Some or all of the following occur:

- Effective implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement.
- A NATO/Frontex enforced blockade on Aegean crossings.
- Emergence of a new route allowing for mass crossings (e.g. Turkey to Italy).
- Durable peace agreement in Syria and/or improved conditions for migrants in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

An increase in destination country asylum acceptance rates, family reunifications, and/or EU relocation scheme totals would also contribute to this scenario.

Geographic areas of most concern – Turkey, smaller Greek islands, Greek cities, Greek mainland camps.

Impact – The number of asylum-seekers in Turkey increases significantly, and Turkey closes its border with Syria. Syrians in Turkey are relocated to Europe in relatively insignificant numbers as Europe continues to struggle in developing a practicable relocation scheme; a peace agreement could also spur large-scale voluntary returns. The pressure on Greece, especially its islands, steadily diminishes as most migrants leave legally or illegally, especially those with expired 30-day permits and little chance of gaining asylum anywhere. Some remain stranded longer term in mainland camps. Others choose to integrate into Greek society outside of formal camps, fuelling further right wing sentiments. Funds for Greece may be reduced after six months as aid activities scale down to focus on the remaining stranded migrants through local NGOs.

Balkan migrant flows return to 2014 levels and routes, drawing more single men, refugees already registered in Greece, and Afghans, whose exclusion from the EU-Turkey agreement renders them more vulnerable. The reduced number of people transiting the Balkans leads to a reduction in humanitarian activity, with a greater reliance on local NGOs. Authorities in Balkan countries adopt a mixed response, with some collaborating with smuggling activities and some adopting a harsh approach to "illegal migrants", arresting and fining them more frequently.

With Turkey's borders mostly sealed, the Libya-Italy crossing becomes the preferred route for migrants entering Europe. Donors consider shifting funds from Greece to Italy and possibly Spain. To relieve its burden and/or to pressure Europe, Turkey may at some point reverse its crackdown on smuggling, freeing up its migrant population, thereby repeating the 2015 crisis.

Humanitarian consequences – Migrant needs change as they transition from a mobile to a stationary population, requiring integration assistance, education, and longer-term health interventions. Greek camp conditions and coordination may improve with smaller camp populations. Migrants who lack residency documents and choose urban areas over camps are particularly vulnerable as they are less accessible to aid organisations and more likely to attempt dangerous routes into Western Europe. Smugglers adapt their operations, making migrants less visible and needing more protection monitoring, especially for unaccompanied minors. Attempts to forcibly return stranded migrants from Greece to Turkey lead to increased human rights violations.

Scenario 3
Facilitated transit through Balkans

Estimated caseload: 50,000-100,000

Description – Sudden, time-limited movement of large numbers of asylum-seekers is once again facilitated by national authorities in the Balkans on a sporadic basis. Authorities at the FYROM border are unable to prevent the mass entry of people, and after failing to stop the flow through brutal use of force, opt to facilitate their onward movement. Subsequent Balkan countries adopt similar responses.

Possible triggers – Some or all of the following occur:

- Asylum seekers continue to enter Greece as the EU fails to find a way to reduce arrivals.
- Frontex approves onward travel for certain migrant profiles.
- Increasing numbers of people on the FYROM border, coupled with growing frustration at the continued closure, results in a mass breach of the border by 10-20,000 people.

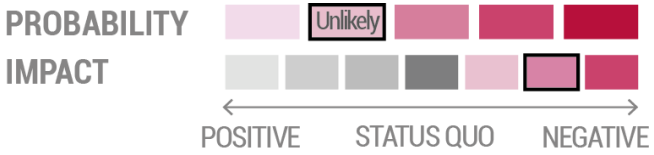
Geographic areas of most concern – Eidomeni

Impact – The number of migrants stranded in Greece falls. Those ineligible for international protection continue to be refused entry to the Balkans. They either turn to illegal routes as countries further strengthen border security, or join the over 500,000 undocumented migrants already in Greece before 2015, who face multiple protection challenges. Numbers on the FYROM border continue to rise. Successful transit along the Balkan route by migrants encourages others to attempt the crossing to Greece.

Humanitarian consequences – A reactivation of the officially facilitated route within the next three months takes advantage of existing infrastructure and presents only minor logistical challenges. Initially, medical needs spike as authorities use harsh measures in failed attempts to stop the flow. A reopening of the route more than three months after it closed results in 1-2 weeks of inadequate food, shelter, and other basic service provision, before returning to the pre-February status quo. Continuation of selective entry sparks tension and possibly clashes between eligible and ineligible groups of migrants.

Scenario 4

Massive increase in arrivals to Greece



Estimated caseload: 10,000-20,000 per day, up to 500,000 total

Description – A dramatic increase in arrivals (10,000–20,000 per day) results in around 500,000 migrants being hosted in planned and unplanned refugee camps in Greece, as migrants are unable to legally access their preferred destination countries due to the closure of the Balkan route. A noticeable rise in smuggling activity throughout the Balkans and the fear that large numbers of migrants on the FYROM border may overwhelm local authorities causes Europe to adopt more restrictive migration policies and militarise its response. National militaries, assisted by Frontex and NATO, become the main actors responding to the crisis in all transit countries, with few humanitarian actors besides UN agencies present in most sites.

Possible triggers – One or more of the following occur:

- Push factors are exacerbated in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and/or Pakistan, with neighbouring countries unable to host large numbers of additional refugees.
- The EU-Turkey Agreement fails, and Turkey permits the mass movement of refugees to Greece to alleviate pressure on its economy.
- A complex humanitarian emergency occurs in a fragile north-African country, resulting in a sudden increase in the number of migrants trying to reach Europe through various routes.

Geographic areas of most concern – Greek islands and mainland, major European borders.

Impact – Greece declares a state of emergency as migrants are hosted in EU-sponsored, military-run, large-scale overcrowded mainland and island refugee camps, on ships, or out in the open. Registration of new arrivals is suspended, ordinary legal processes are blocked, and a political crisis erupts within the EU and particularly between the EU and Greece, which nevertheless receives emergency funding. With the Balkan route officially closed and the relocation scheme effectively a failure, a growing number of people apply for asylum in Greece, where tensions with host communities reach a boiling point, adding to national political instability. Poor national coordination causes limited resources to be used inefficiently and results in a breakdown of effective communication with migrants.

Access to asylum in destination countries is severely reduced and the response to the crisis becomes increasingly militarised, with NATO and Frontex forcibly returning migrants intercepted at sea. The numbers of smuggling routes multiply and grow in complexity, with migrants adopting different routes depending on nationality and socio-economic profile as smugglers are unable to keep up with demand, creating a bottleneck on the Turkish coast. A Mediterranean-wide response is considered as Italy and Spain begin to face unprecedented migrant flows. Human rights violations are reported throughout Europe, especially in transit countries that are particularly hostile to migrants.

Humanitarian consequences – The Greek military focuses on basic service provision, though it is unable to keep up with demand for shelter, food, WASH and medical services. Basic needs are not met in most locations, with oversupply of some goods and services and shortages of others, including water in summer months. Camps are separated by nationality, though violence between migrants and between migrants and authorities occurs more frequently, and the current vulnerability of camps to safety risks such as fire becomes more acute. Communicable diseases spread amid overwhelmed health services; a cholera outbreak could lead to hundreds of preventable deaths. Family separations rise steeply amid logistical chaos, while protection issues such as identification of vulnerable people are ignored by the military's focus on basic service provision. With civil society seeking to avoid cooperation with military forces, NGOs focus on informal camps and providing specialized support to official camps, such as shelter for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups.

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.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

An increased number of human rights violations occur because of changes in asylum laws that diminish the rights of those with international protection needs. Humanitarian organisations turn increasingly to advocacy on human rights violations and access to beneficiaries. They face difficulty in accessing funding, especially for advocacy.

INCREASED USE OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MILITARY

Humanitarian access to migrants is increasingly limited by national and/or international military forces, and by the changed legal status of migrants in Greece. Civil-military engagement and coordination become increasingly important. Some organisations refuse to participate in the humanitarian response and withdraw in protest over forced returns, improper asylum request processing, and/or mass detentions.

DIFFICULTY IN ACCESSING "INVISIBLE" MIGRANTS

Migrants are more reliant on smugglers following successful implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement. This reduces humanitarian access to migrants, who face increased protection risks.

HOW SCENARIOS CAN BE USED

Scenarios are a set of different ways in which a situation may develop. The aim of scenario building is not to try and accurately predict the future but rather to understand the range of possible futures and then select a few that result in distinct situations with, usually, differing humanitarian outcomes that can:

- Support strategic planning for agencies and NGOs.
- Identify assumptions underlying anticipated needs and related interventions.
- Enhance the adaptability and design of detailed assessments.
- Influence monitoring and surveillance systems.
- Create awareness, provide early warning, and promote preparedness activities among stakeholders.

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

METHODOLOGY

A first round of scenario building workshops was held in October 2015 in Athens, Belgrade, and Geneva. Since then, the situation has been changing very dynamically as a result of political measures in destination and Balkan transit countries. Humanitarian actors felt a need for another scenario building exercise to inform their planning and decision-making. A new set of scenarios was developed during three one-day workshops in Athens, Belgrade, and Brussels in March 2016, involving 20 organisations. Initially a list of events (or triggers) that might significantly change the humanitarian landscape was identified. The main factors that affect future developments in Greece and the Balkans are:

- The rate at which migrants enter these countries, primarily from Turkey to Greece.
- The rate at which migrants exit the region to the destination countries.
- The operational space, primarily within Greece.
- The rate at which migrants are returned, primarily from Greece to Turkey.

By selecting different combinations of these triggers, four plausible scenarios were developed and the major impacts of each scenario and resultant humanitarian consequences identified. These scenarios are not considered mutually exclusive; their elements can unfold simultaneously, or one scenario can be part of or lead to another scenario.

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

Staff from the following organisations participated in one or more of the workshops: ATINA, DFID, DRC, ECHO, Hellenic Red Cross, ICRC, IFRC, MapAction, Mercy Corps, NRC, Praksis, Praxis, REACH, Samaritan's Purse, Save the Children, Serbian Red Cross, Solidarity Now, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WVI.

LIMITATIONS

Scenarios can seem to oversimplify an issue, as the analysis balances details with broader assumptions. Scenario-building is not an end in itself. It is 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 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.

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 Brussels. For additional information, comments or questions, please email analysis@acaps.org.

ANNEX A – TRIGGERS PER SCENARIO

Scenario or Compounding Factors application

Scenario 1 = Increasing numbers stranded in Greece / Scenario 2 = Minimal arrivals in Greece / Scenario 3 = Facilitated transit through Balkans / Scenario 4 = Massive increase in arrivals to Greece / Compounding Factors = CF

	1	2	3	4	CF	Current situation (March 2016)
The number of stranded migrants in Greece is likely to increase if…						
Migrants keep arriving in Greece but cannot exit onto the Balkan route.	●			●	●	Several hundred per day arrive on Greek islands after 20 March.
The proposed policy of mass returns to Turkey is not fully implemented due to risk of unrest by migrants, legal concerns surrounding international refugee law, international attention, and practical constraints.	●		●	●	●	
The EU continues to pressure Balkan countries to reduce the number of asylum-seekers transiting to Germany, leading authorities in Balkan countries to respond to mass crossing attempts with force.	●		●		●	
A major terrorist attack in the EU changes perceptions towards migrants and results in a sudden political reaction to further restrict entry of asylum-seekers to destination countries.	●				●	
The number of arrivals in Greece is likely to decrease if…						
The EU-Turkey Agreement is effectively implemented.	●	●			●	Frontex and NATO have reached a common understanding on the form of their cooperation in the Aegean Sea, and will exchange information in real time.
There is a NATO/Frontex enforced blockade on Aegean crossings.	●	●	●		●	
There is a durable peace agreement in Syria, and/or improved conditions for migrants in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.	●	●	●			UNHCR is urging the swift implementation of the pledges made by the Government of Jordan at the Syria Donor Conference on 4 February to support pressing protection and livelihood needs in Jordan.
The number of arrivals in Greece is likely to increase if…						
Asylum-seekers continue to enter Greece as the EU fails to find a way to reduce arrivals.	●		●		●	
Neither EU-Turkey negotiations nor the NATO and Frontex forces in the Aegean Sea succeed in significantly reducing the number of people using smugglers to enter Greece.	●		●	●	●	
Push factors are exacerbated in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, while neighbouring countries in the Middle East do not have the capacity to host refugees.	●		●	●	●	
A complex humanitarian emergency occurs in a fragile north-African country resulting in a	●			●	●	

	1	2	3	4	CF	Current situation (March 2016)
sudden increase in the number of migrants trying to reach Europe through various routes. The EU-Turkey Agreement fails, and Turkey permits the mass movement of refugees to Greece to alleviate pressure on its economy.	●		●	●		
The number of migrants exiting Greece is likely to increase if…						
Frontex approves onward travel for certain migrant profiles.		●	●		●	
Increasing numbers of people on the border between Greece and FYROM, coupled with growing frustration at the continued border closure, results in a mass breach of the border of 10-20,000 people.		●	●		●	
There is no national or EU-level political agreement on how to handle the status of migrants stranded in Greece.	●				●	
Funding for the response in Greece is inadequate as coordination suffers from ineffective government leadership combined with aid organisations' unwillingness to operate in closed camps.	●		●		●	
Balkan border crossings reopen to migrants.			●		●	

Sources: UNHCR 16/03/2016, Frontex 06/03/2016, UNHCR 22/03/2016, Internews 23/03/2016