

## European Parliamentary Research Service Blog

# The Western Balkans: Frontline of the migrant crisis

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Written by Velina Lilyanova

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2015 was a landmark year in the history of migration to Europe, with an unprecedented and constantly increasing flow of migrants making their way to the European Union. Fleeing poverty and war mainly in the Middle East and Africa, more and more people embarked on perilous journeys to reach the safety of Europe. In 2015, there was a significant surge in migrant transits across the eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans. The EU Member States bordering the Mediterranean Sea shared the challenge of the influx with other Member States and the Western Balkan countries, in particular the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.

The 1990s wars in the Western Balkans triggered a mass exodus to other parts of Europe, which has had long-lasting consequences for the region. While today the Western Balkans remain a substantial source of migration, in the current context they are mainly a transit route. Countries in this particularly sensitive region have less-advanced welfare systems, limited institutional capacity and struggling economies that are further strained by having to provide for large numbers of transiting migrants. Having activated dormant political conflicts in the region, these developments risk turning into a major destabilising factor. In all likelihood, the crisis will last and the Western Balkans will remain a busy migrant route. This puts relations between the EU and the Western Balkan enlargement countries in the spotlight and makes the case for increased cooperation in a situation of mutual dependence. While the EU is already providing technical, humanitarian and financial assistance to the Western Balkans, it needs to come up with a coordinated approach focused not only on short-term measures, but also on the long-term consequences for the region, including their impact on the enlargement process as a whole.

For the complete briefing in PDF on '**The Western Balkans: Frontline of the migrant crisis**' please [click here](#).

## Timeline

## Discussion

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