

OBSERVATORY OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

ISSUE **12** MAY 2022

Summary highlights

1. Could war in Ukraine affect organized crime in the Western Balkans?

The war in Ukraine has been raging for two months, with a devastating impact on the country and its people. It is also having spillover effects outside the country. We look at how the war in Ukraine might expand the opportunity space for organized crime in the Western Balkans, including as a result of arms trafficking, money laundering, sanctions busting, the movement of fighters or a possible shift in trafficking routes.

2. Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a key transit country for weapons smuggling in Europe.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is both a source and a transit country for the smuggling of small arms and light weapons. Since the end of the Bosnian war in 1995, the country has been awash with weapons. We look at where the guns come from, where they go and who is involved in this business that contributes to terrorism, war and organized crime.

3. Brcko: A market for organized crime.

In this issue, we focus on the hotspot of Brcko in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina. This district, close to Bosnia's borders with Croatia and Serbia, which has had a reputation since the early 1990s as a marketplace for everything, has recently witnessed a number of incidents concerning smuggling of migrants, weapons and drugs. We look at the factors of vulnerability and the current situation.

4. Extortion is underestimated and under-reported in Serbia.

There have been reports of extortion, usury and racketing in Serbia, but how big is the problem? A new study carried out thanks to a scholarship from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)'s Resilience Fund shows that the problem is underestimated and under-reported.

5. Allegations of missing babies still haunt Serbia.

It is alleged that, over several decades, thousands of babies have disappeared from maternity hospitals in Serbia and been sold to parents who wanted to



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

adopt a child. This shocking trade came to light as the result of a case against Serbia brought to the European Court of Human Rights. How is such a

practice possible, how organized is it and what is being done to address it?

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Welcome to the 12th issue of the Risk Bulletin produced by the GI-TOC's Observatory of Illicit Economies in South-Eastern Europe.

Like many, we are transfixed by the horrible events in Ukraine. We are also concerned about the impact of the war, both in Ukraine and on its people, as well as possible knock-on effects elsewhere. In line with our mission, we put a special focus on the potential impact of the war on organized crime in the Western Balkans. As we did with COVID-19, we will closely monitor the effects of the war in Ukraine on illicit economies in south-eastern Europe.

There is often talk about how weapons from the Western Balkans are smuggled, for example to be used by criminal groups or terrorists in western Europe. In this issue, we take a closer look at the problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While we knew about how weapons that are a legacy of the Bosnian war are smuggled on the black market, we were surprised to learn that Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a transit country. Furthermore, recent arrests and seizures demonstrate transnational cooperation, both by criminals and by law enforcement – as revealed by several recent investigations.

As in every issue, we focus on a hotspot of organized crime. This time, it is Brcko in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on interviews and first-hand observations, we explain the factors of vulnerability and the types of trafficking that are prevalent in this small region, as well as problems of corruption in the police.

Thanks to a scholarship from the GI-TOC's Resilience Fund, Milos Katić from Vojvodina, Serbia, carried out research on extortion and usury in the country. We profile some of the main findings of his research, published in December 2021.

In recent years, the Serbian media has published reports about missing babies. While most of the cases under scrutiny are from decades past, it appears that stealing and smuggling babies and even embryos may still be a problem in a number of countries, with characteristics of organized crime.

We recently published a report on illicit financial flows (IFFs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, which follows the publication of a similar assessment in 2020 analyzing key drivers and current trends of IFFs in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia.¹ The report highlights the need to increase information on the impact and harm of IFFs, as well as civil society's capacity to investigate and raise awareness on these types of crimes. We hope to focus on these topics in the future.

We are always looking for new ways of presenting our work. We have therefore developed an online interactive platform to feature some of the data and main findings of our reports. The first visualization is an overview of the smuggling of migrants through the Western Balkans. The information is based on data from our 2021 report 'Spot prices: Analyzing flows of people, drugs and money in the Western Balkans'.² The tool provides data on irregular border crossings along the Balkan route, the numbers and nationalities of migrants and asylum seekers, estimated profits of the migrant-smuggling market and an interactive map displaying smuggling routes and the prices paid for each route. Watch this space for further visualizations of our work, including on the link between organized crime and football hooliganism, as well as trafficking through ports in south-eastern Europe.

If you have a proposal for a story or would like to provide feedback, please contact:
almedina.dodic@globalinitiative.net

Notes

1. Robin Cartwright and Kristina Amerhauser, Illicit financial flows in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia: Key drivers and current trends, GI-TOC, January 2022; For the 2020 report, see Tuesday Reitano and Kristina Amerhauser, Illicit financial flows in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia: Key drivers and current trends, GI-TOC, August 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/iffs-western-balkans/>.
2. Walter Kemp, Kristina Amerhauser and Ruggero Scaturro, pot

prices: Analyzing flows of people, drugs and money in the Western Balkans, GI-TOC, May 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/western-balkans-crime-hotspots-3/>.

1. Could war in Ukraine affect organized crime in the Western Balkans?

Organized crime is not foremost in our minds as we watch with horror the devastation in Ukraine. But all wars have spillover effects and long-term consequences, as witnessed in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The war in Ukraine might expand the opportunity space for organized crime in the Western Balkans, including as a result of arms trafficking, money laundering, sanctions busting, the movement of fighters or a possible shift in trafficking routes.

One of the most astounding responses of the West to Russia's aggression against Ukraine has been its economic restrictions, including sanctions and travel bans. One of the few remaining routes for Russians to travel is via Belgrade. No doubt their money may also move into or through the region. Indeed, in recent years, several thousand foreigners have taken advantage of so-called 'golden' passport schemes in some European countries, including in south-eastern Europe.¹ And some Western Balkan countries, like Montenegro and North

Macedonia, continue to offer 'citizenship for investment' schemes.² In a recent case, Montenegro granted asylum to a Russian tycoon wanted for murder.³

While not among the biggest investors in the Western Balkans, in the past Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs have parked their wealth in Serbia, for example, or along the Montenegrin coast. The Adriatic coast is a playground for the ultra-wealthy; one of Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich's superyachts recently docked at a marina in Montenegro.⁴

Wealthy Russians on the move could seek investment opportunities in the region and might well draw on the connections of well-established criminal groups with contacts in political and business circles. There is a danger that Russian money could be laundered into real estate, tourism, gambling and other sectors vulnerable to IFFs, impacting local economies and politics.



Ukrainian refugees cross into Poland, March 2022.

Photo: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Russia is facing almost unprecedented sanctions, and if the conflict continues, further penalties may be imposed. Some countries of the Western Balkans have not joined the ban on Russian flights, so airports such as Belgrade's (and via Istanbul to all capitals in the region) have become key hubs for Russian travellers. It is possible that Russian assets, which are frozen in many countries, could find a safe haven in countries of the Western Balkans where Russians already feel comfortable doing business. The Western Balkans could also be a conduit for the trafficking of luxury goods, alcohol and cigarettes. But the region is not contiguous to either Ukraine or Russia and the amount of sanctions busting will probably be limited – but worth keeping an eye on.

A frightening sign of the times is that a black market could develop for medications that are designed to reduce the impact of nuclear radiation: at the moment, there are almost no potassium iodide pills available in pharmacies in North Macedonia.⁵ As in other parts of Europe, there are also concerns about shortages of certain commodities and rising prices; two of the most obvious in the Western Balkans thus far are gasoline and sunflower oil.⁶ Scarcity markets could create incentives for smuggling.

Shifts in trafficking routes

As Turkey clamped down on smuggling (particularly of migrants) after 2015, it is thought that some trafficking routes for drugs shifted towards maritime routes across the Black Sea or even into the Adriatic.⁷ The former trend is confirmed by notable seizures of 400 kilograms of heroin from Iran in the port of Varna, Bulgaria, and 1 400 kilograms in Constanta, Romania, by authorities in February and May 2021, respectively.⁸ These ports may become more attractive to illicit flows if trafficking is disrupted in Odessa and other Black Sea ports because of the war in Ukraine. An increase in trafficking through a maritime Balkan route can also be noted by major seizures in the north-eastern Adriatic ports of Koper, Slovenia (where more than one tonne of heroin was seized between 2019 and 2021); Ploce, Croatia; and Trieste, Italy, in recent years.⁹ This shift in heroin trafficking comes at a time when there is increased evidence of cocaine trafficking into Adriatic ports. The Danube river could also become a conduit for smuggling.

A massive amount of weaponry is pouring into Ukraine, including from the Western Balkans. There are indications that automatic rifles and mortars made in Serbia are being used on the battlefield.¹⁰ According to

a source familiar with the criminal milieu in Bosnia and Herzegovina, prices of firearms on that country's black market have risen by more than 100 per cent since late February – a trend that is also apparently evident in some countries of western Europe. It is possible that the war has created an increase in demand, not least from those heading to the region as volunteer fighters. There is a danger that some of the weapons flooding into Ukraine will trickle back into the Western Balkans, either to be used by criminal groups or paramilitaries, or sold on the black market.

Young men from south-eastern Europe have gone to fight in Ukraine – on both sides – since the outbreak of the crisis in 2014,¹¹ although it is illegal to do so in most countries of the region. It is anticipated that the numbers will grow if the war drags on, not least since Ukraine has created a so-called 'foreign legion'.¹² As in other situations, such as fighters going from Europe to Syria or Iraq, many will not return home.

But the flow of weapons and fighters between the Western Balkans and Ukraine could increase the risk of (particularly right-wing) violent extremism, homicides and paramilitary violence. The latter threat is particularly worrisome in relation to the destabilizing impact of armed groups in regions where ethnic tensions can be quickly stoked. The Night Wolves motorcycle club, for example, has branches in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. There have been reports in the past of Russian-trained mercenaries in Serbia and the Republic of Srpska with links to organized crime.¹³ The flow of weapons and fighters back and forth from the war zone in Ukraine could swell the ranks of criminal and paramilitary groups in the Western Balkans, strengthen their arsenals and increase radicalization.

The high number of people – particularly women and children – fleeing Ukraine could increase vulnerability to human trafficking. The longer the crisis goes on and the more desperate people become, the greater the danger that some could be vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual exploitation, including in the Western Balkans – for example in big cities, resorts on the Adriatic coast or online. Indeed, Europol has issued an early warning notification highlighting how women, children and vulnerable persons are potential victims of criminal networks engaging in trafficking in human beings.¹⁴ They have warned that unaccompanied minors are most at risk for sexual and labour exploitation, as well as forced criminality and begging, or other criminal activities.

The war in Ukraine has created the biggest upheaval in European security since the end of the Cold War and the most profound shake-up of the world order since 1945. Criminals are always first movers in times of change and conflict. The war will no doubt affect geopolitics in the Western Balkans and possibly even national politics and inter-ethnic relations. It could also revive discussions about the EU accession process, particularly given Ukraine's application for EU membership.¹⁵

But it will probably also have an impact on criminal markets and IFFs, and it has triggered the departure of young men to Europe's new battlefield. This is something national law enforcement agencies as well as regional organizations and all stakeholders with an interest in stability in the Western Balkans should anticipate and watch closely, not least when these fighters and their weapons return home. For its part, the GI-TOC will continue monitoring the impact of the war on criminal markets.

Notes

1. Clara Hernanz Lizarraga, Russia's war puts Europe's 'golden passports' under microscope, Bloomberg, 15 March 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-15/russia-s-war-puts-europe-s-golden-passports-under-microscope>.
2. Samir Kajosevic, Montenegro extends 'golden passport' program despite EU criticism, BalkanInsight, 31 December 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/12/31/montenegro-extends-golden-passport-program-despite-eu-criticism/>.
3. Montenegro grants asylum to tycoon wanted in Russia for murder, The Moscow Times, 23 October 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/10/23/montenegro-grants-asylum-to-tycoon-wanted-in-russia-for-murder-a75381>.
4. Abramovich's superyacht cruises in to Montenegro marina, France24, 12 March 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220312-abramovich-s-superyacht-cruises-in-to-montenegro-marina>.
5. Срѓан Стојанчов, За пандемијата се бараше тоалетна, за нуклеарната закана јод, Радио Слободна Европа, 3 March 2022, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/za-pandemijata-se-barashe-toaletna-za-nuklearnata-zakana-jod-/31734027.html>.
6. N1, Zašto je poskupilo domaće suncokretovo ulje – 4,85 KM po litru?, 15 March 2022, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/zasto-je-poskupilo-domace-suncokretovo-ulje-485-km-po-litru>.
7. Ben Crabtree, Black Sea: A rising tide of illicit business?, GI-TOC, 1 April 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/black-sea-illicit-flows/>.
8. Bulgarian prosecutors say heroin found in cargo from Iran, ABC News, 16 February 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/bulgarian-prosecutors-heroin-found-cargo-iran-75923810>; 'Historical seizure' of heroin at Romanian Black Sea port, AP News, 20 May 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/black-sea-europe-romania-business-government-and-politics-a048a5d3cb5ad48f20067c3d11edc58e>.
9. I. Hina, Slovenska policija u Kopru otkrila 730 kilograma iranskog heroína, T Portal, 13 November 2019, <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/slovenska-policija-u-kopru-otkrila-730-kilograma-iranskog-heroína-20191113>; R K, V Luki Koper zasegli već kot 200 kilogramov heroína; Siol, 16 June 2021, <https://siol.net/novice/slovenija/v-luki-koper-zasegli-vec-kot-200-kilogramov-heroína-554783>; Maxi sequestro di eroina al porto, i cani futano un carico da 50 chili, Trieste Prima, 20 July 2018, <https://www.triestepima.it/cronaca/maxi-sequestro-eroina-porto-trieste.html>; Hina, Croatian police seize 220 kg of heroin and 62 kg of cocaine in the port of Ploče, N1, 11 January 2022, <https://hr.n1info.com/english/news/croatian-police-seize-220-kg-of-heroin-and-62-kg-of-cocaine-in-the-port-of-ploce/>.
10. Aleksandar Radić, Oružje iz ex YU na ukrajinskom ratištu, Balkanska bezbednosna mreža, 15 March 2022, <https://www.balkansec.net/post/oru%C5%BEje-iz-ex-yu-na-ukrajinskom-rati%C5%A1tu>; Vuk Cvijić, Srpske mine na ukrajinskom frontu, NIN, 31 March 2022, <https://www.nin.co.rs/pages/article.php?id=102361781>; Battle of Kyiv. Moshchun. Hostomel, Direction Ukrainian military TV, 13 March 2022, <https://youtu.be/NdZVNU93Bvs>.
11. Mila Đurđević, Dobrovoljci iz Srbije u Ukrajini: Politička i vojna smetnja, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 24 February 2022, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-ukrajina-borci/31718923.html>.
12. Rusko ministarstvo: 'U Ukrajini je 200 hrvatskih plaćenika'. Tvrdje da ih je organizirao Hrvat koji je šest godina ratovao u pukovniji Azov, Slobodna Dalmacija, 3 March 2022, <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/svijet/rusko-ministarstvo-u-ukrajini-je-200-hrvatskih-placenika-tvrde-da-ih-je-organizirao-hrvat-koji-je-sest-godina-ratovao-u-pukovnji-azov-1172456>.
13. Julian Borger, Russian-trained mercenaries back Bosnia's Serb separatists, The Guardian, 12 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/12/russian-trained-mercenaries-back-bosnias-serb-separatists>.
14. European Migrant Smuggling Centre, War in Ukraine – refugees arriving to the EU from Ukraine at risk of exploitation as part of THB, Europol, March 2022, https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Early_Warning_Notification_War_in_Ukraine_-_refugees_arriving_to_the_EU_from_Ukraine_at_risk_of_exploitation_as_part_of_THB.pdf.
15. Erwan Fouéré, Can the war in Ukraine revive the EU's enlargement agenda for the Western Balkans?, CEPS Policy Insights, No 2022-11, 24 March 2022, https://www.ceps.eu/download/publication/?id=35980&pdf=PI2022-11_Can-the-war-in-Ukraine-revive-the-EUs-enlargement.pdf.

2. Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a key transit country for weapons smuggling in Europe.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has long been a source country for weapons smuggling. Since the end of the Bosnian war in 1995, the country has been awash with small arms and light weapons. While some of these weapons have been trafficked into conflict areas in the region, others were used in terrorist attacks in western Europe. Prices on the black market have soared since the start of the war in Ukraine. Recent police operations reveal that the trade is well organized and transnational, and that Bosnia and Herzegovina is now also a transit country for weapons smuggling.

Arsenals past and present

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a population of around 3.2 million people. In 2010, the United Nations Development Programme estimated that there were about 750 000 weapons in illegal possession in the country.¹ Based on data of locations of police actions where weapons were found or criminals arrested, it is evident that there are illicit firearms in almost all parts of Bosnia, but mostly in the east of the country, as well as the Tuzla and Sarajevo regions, western Herzegovina, Bosanska Gradiska area, Banja Luka, Tesanj, Doboj, Bijeljina and Zenica.

Furthermore, it is estimated that since 2006 there have been nine thefts of weapons from warehouses of the Bosnian armed forces. In March 2017, eight pistols and six automatic pistols went missing from the barracks in Bileca,² while arms and ammunition were stolen by a soldier in the barracks in Pale in 2018.³ In February 2021, the Ministry of Defence informed that 'a certain amount of weapons disappeared' from the basic training centre in Pazaric, and that the security seal at the entrance to the weapons and military equipment warehouse had been damaged.⁴ The deputy chair of the joint parliamentary commission for defence and security, Dušanka Majkić, asked how it was possible for 25 high-quality pistols to disappear from the ministry's premises and how someone could enter the warehouse and know exactly where to go and what to take.⁵ It is worth noting that many of these cases were never solved. According to Majkić, 'weapons usually end up in foreign markets... it is a matter of good, fast and easy trade.'⁶

According to information by Bosnia and Herzegovina's Border Police, a number of recent seizures indicate that smuggling of firearms from Bosnia and Herzegovina is very active. In 2021, police in Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded 18 crimes related to arms smuggling; 27 weapons, a bomb and 1 135 pieces of ammunition were seized. In the same period, seven misdemeanour charges were filed against suspected smugglers, while two weapons and 231 pieces of ammunition were temporarily seized.⁷

Drugs and guns follow similar routes

Organized criminal groups that smuggle weapons are usually involved in smuggling drugs. The most travelled routes are through well-known hotspots of organized crime, for example through main highways and border crossings using sealed trucks. However, sometimes less passable terrain is used, for example forest roads along the border between Montenegro⁸ and the Trebinje⁹ and Bileca regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, using rafts and boats in the Bijeljina region of Serbia or the Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹⁰ or forest trails around Capljina, Ljubuski or Grude in Croatia.¹¹ According to a convicted member of an organized criminal group from Trebinje, when weapons smugglers use these routes they hire local guides and porters.

There are also indications of weapons being smuggled through Bosnia and Herzegovina from elsewhere in the Western Balkans. A lawyer who has been defending arms trafficking suspects in Bosnian courts for the past 15 years said: 'There is a smuggling channel going from Albania and Montenegro via eastern and western Herzegovina to Croatia and Europe, and Croats and Serbs are doing it. I think it's the strongest channel that goes roughly from Montenegro through those "wild" crossings in Bileca and the surrounding area. It goes through western Herzegovina, where the other team takes over for Croatia.'¹²

In other cases, the weapons are destined for western Europe. In March 2022, an international investigation conducted jointly by French and Croatian police revealed that a criminal group including members from Croatia,



Figure 1 Smuggling of weapons through Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, and France were trying to smuggle weapons to France.¹³

In December 2018, the Croatian Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime launched an investigation against two Croatian members of a criminal organization who were allegedly smuggling Ecstasy from the Netherlands to Croatia, as well as optical equipment for weapons and 37 kilograms of plastic explosives from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia. The criminal group's plan was to procure, smuggle and resell large quantities of Ecstasy and cocaine to pre-agreed buyers from the Netherlands to Croatia, and to smuggle and sell large quantities of weapons from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia and then to western European countries. Police seized weapons and explosives in the area of Slavonski Brod and Okučani.¹⁴

The links between weapons and drug trafficking can also be seen in a December 2021 police operation called Storage 2,¹⁵ carried out in the town of Bosanska Gradiska in the Republic of Srpska, close to the border to Croatia. The operation was launched to disrupt a drug trafficking ring, but after searching several locations, the police discovered large quantities of weapons,

ammunition and mines. Twenty suspected members of an organized criminal group were arrested.

According to media reports, the police had been monitoring the group from Bosanska Gradiska via the 'Sky' application.¹⁶ They had observed that drugs and firearms were temporarily stored in hidden locations in Bosanska Gradiska and that the group had vans and passenger vehicles with special compartments for hiding narcotics and weapons. Prosecution documents disclose that the group had links to accomplices in Zagreb and Osijek in Croatia, as well as clients in Serbia and western Europe.¹⁷ For example, in November 2020, members of the group allegedly trafficked 23 pistols from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Germany, earning them €53 000.

It is worth noting that members of the criminal group from Bosanska Gradiska have been linked to a number of executions in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, when looking for the murderer of Strahinja Stojanović, who was killed on 13 September 2020 when a bomb exploded under his car, the Serbian police discovered a 'house of horrors' in Ritopek that is thought to be the home of the assassin. It was full of weapons, some of which were allegedly procured from criminals in Bosanska Gradiska.¹⁸



Weapons seized from a criminal and alleged assassin's house in Ritopek, Serbia.

Photo: Serbian Ministry of Interior

Direct sales

While criminal groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina appear to be part of multinational criminal networks, in other cases they seem to be trying to sell weapons 'first hand', which returns a higher profit. In January 2020, German and Bosnian police thwarted an attempt by a Bosnian citizen to smuggle weapons to Germany and the Netherlands. According to an indictment from the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 95 hand grenades, four semi-automatic rifles, eight pistols and a significant amount of ammunition of various calibres, all of which was intended for the illegal market, was discovered in Dresden in a car with Bosnian licence plates.¹⁹

Similarly, in May 2021, police in Bosnia and Herzegovina arrested four men trying to smuggle large quantities of illicit firearms (including a hand-held rocket launcher) into western Europe.²⁰ Three of them were previously convicted of similar crimes. More recently, in August 2021, members of the Bosnian border police seized an

arsenal of weapons and ammunition and arrested a Bosnian citizen from Zvornik who was suspected of smuggling weapons to France for the illegal market.²¹

According to a former member of a criminal group from Trebinje, the demand for and cost of weapons in the region rises during periods of political instability, such as when barricades were set up in northern Kosovo or before the 2020 elections in Montenegro.²² There are indications that prices for firearms on the black market in Bosnia and Herzegovina have doubled since the start of the war in Ukraine.

Trafficking in small arms and light weapons is a threat in itself and often a side-effect of conflict. As demonstrated in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, criminal groups involved in drug trafficking are often involved in the trafficking of weapons, for which the Western Balkans remains a major region of supply and transit.

Notes

1. A Đugum and M Žuvela, Ukrađenom oružju iz kasarni BiH se redovno ne ulazi u trag, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 15 February 2021, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ukrađenom-oružju-iz-kasarni-u-bih-se-redovno-ne-ulazi-u-trag/31104191.html>.
2. N N, Novi skandal u Oružanim snagama BiH: Iz kasarne u Bileći nestalo oružje, Nezavisne novine, 7 March 2017, <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Novi-skandal-u-Oruznim-snagama-BiH-Iz-kasarne-u-Bileci-nestalo-oruzje/416228>.
3. B Brezo, Misteriozna krađa u kasarnama u BiH: Gdje završava ukradeno oružje?, N1 BiH, 17 February 2021, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/kradja-oruzja-u-kasarnama-u-bih-ko-kako-i-gdje-je-zavrсило/>.
4. Potvrđeno: Nestalo oružje u Pazariću, istraga u toku, N1 BiH, 12 February 2021, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/potvrđeno-nestalo-oružje-u-pazaricu-istraga-u-toku/>.
5. Majkić: Nestanak oružja iz kasarne novi sigurnosni izazov za BiH, Klix, 16 February 2021, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/majkic-nestanak-oruzja-iz-kasarne-novi-sigurnosni-izazov-za-bih/210216076>.
6. A Đugum and M Žuvela, Ukrađenom oružju iz kasarni BiH se redovno ne ulazi u trag, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 15 February 2021, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ukrađenom-oružju-iz-kasarni-u-bih-se-redovno-ne-ulazi-u-trag/31104191.html>.
7. Interview with head of investigations at Border Police Bosnia and Herzegovina, 15 January 2022, Sarajevo.
8. J Jovanović, Procurili dokazi: šta će sada izmisliti Čovićev direktor Granične policije: Na ovom mjestu je granica BiH šuplja kao sir..., Slobodna Bosna, 6 November 2019, <https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/132351/procurili-dokazi-sta-ce-sada-izmisliti-čovicev-direktor-granichne-policije-na-ovom-mjestu-je-granica-bih-suplja-kao-sir.html>.
9. A Terzić, Otvorena južna ruta: Sve više migranata preko Trebinja do Zapada, Anadolu Agency, 22 December 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/otvorena-južna-ruta-sve-više-migranata-preko-trebinja-do-zapada/1012210>.
10. Akcija policije BiH i Hrvatske na Savi, hapšenja zbog krijumčarenja migranata, N1 BiH, 22 September 2021, <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/akcija-policije-bih-i-hrvatske-na-savi-hapsenja-zbog-krijumčarenja-migranata/>.
11. N N, Osuđen bračni par iz Trebinja zbog šverca heroina iz BiH u Hrvatsku, Nezavisne novine, 10 July 2019, <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/hronika/Osudjen-bracni-par-iz-Trebinja-zbog-sverca-heroina-iz-BiH-u-Hrvatsku/547591>.
12. M Sadiković and Dž Halimović, Ilegalna trgovina oružjem iz BiH ka Evropi, Radio Slobodne Evrope, 30 April 2021, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ilegalna-trgovina-oruzjem-u-bosni-i-hercegovini/31229561.html>.
13. Ahmet Kalajdžić, Zbog krijumčarenja oružja Francuzima po pet, a švicarskom gastarbajteru tri mjeseca zatvora, Dubrovački Vjesnik, 5 March 2022, <https://dubrovacki.slobodnadalmacija.hr/dubrovnik/vijesti/crna-kronika/zbog-krijumčarenja-oruzja-francuzima-po-pet-a-svicarskom-gastarbajteru-tri-mjeseca-zatvor-1173033> and Zajedničkom akcijom hrvatske i francuske policije razotkriveno krijumčarenje oružja namijenjenog Francuskoj, Republika Hrvatska Policijska uprava dubrovačko-neretvanska, 30 March 2022, <https://dubrovacko-neretvanska-policija.gov.hr/novosti/zajednickom-akcijom-hrvatske-i-francuske-policije-razotkriveno-krijumčarenje-oruzja-namijenjenog-francuskoj/14320>.
14. USKOK – Hrvatski državljani uhapšeni zbog krijumčarenja oružja i eksploziva iz BiH, Radio Sarajevo, 19 December 2018, <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/hrvatski-drzavljanu-uhapseni-zbog-krijumčarenja-oruzja-i-eksploziva-iz-bih/321802>.
15. G Obradović, Ekskluzivni detalji akcije „Storidž 2“ Kriminalci iz Gradiške prodavali oružje Velji Nevolji, do njih odveli dokazi iz kuće strave, Srpskainfo, 10 December 2021, <https://srpskainfo.com/ekskluzivni-detallji-akcije-storidz-2-kriminalci-iz-gradiške-prodavali-oruzje-velji-nevolji-do-njih-odveli-dokazi-iz-kuće-strave/>.
16. M Aščić, Kako je aplikacija „Sky“ raskrinkala opasnu narkobandu iz Bosanske Gradiške: Na prodaji pištolja zaradili 100.000 KM!, Avaz, 6 January 2022, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/708294/kako-je->

- aplikacija-sky-raskrinkala-opasnu-narkobandu-iz-bosanske-gradiske-na-prodaji-pistolja-zaradili-100-000-km.
17. Ibid.
18. G Obradović, Ekskluzivni detalji policijske akcije „Storidž 2“ Kriminalci iz Gradiške prodavali oružje Velji Nevolji, do njih odveli dokazi iz kuće strave u Ritopeku, Blic, 10 December 2021, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/ekskluzivni-detalj-policijske-akcije-storidz-2-kriminalci-iz-gradiske-prodavali/Ohgvleb>.
19. Podignuta optužnica protiv dvije osobe optužene za međunarodno krijumčarenje oružja i vojne opreme, Tužilaštvo Bosne i Hercegovine, 17 January 2020, <http://www.tuzilastvobih.gov.ba/index.php?id=4397&jezik=b>.
20. Podignuta optužnica protiv četiri osobe optužene za međunarodno krijumčarenje oružja i vojne opreme, Tužilaštvo Bosne i Hercegovine, 7 May 2021, <http://www.tuzilastvobih.gov.ba/index.php?id=4885&jezik=b>.
21. Otkriven lanac švercera oružja iz BiH u Francusku, uhićen čovjek iz Zvornika, Index, 7 August 2021, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/otkriven-lanac-svercera-oruzja-iz-bih-u-francusku-uhicen-covjek-iz-zvornika/2295755.aspx>.
22. Interview with a convicted criminal from Trebinje who has been involved in the resale of weapons, and is familiar with smugglers as well as smuggling routes and prices. Trebinje, 7 January 2022.

3. Brcko: A market for organized crime.

In recent years, the Brcko District in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been the scene of a number of incidents concerning smuggling of migrants, weapons and drugs. This is due in part to Brcko's location along trafficking routes as well as weak governance and corruption.

Before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina broke out in 1992, Brcko was a multi-ethnic city and a well-known regional transport hub where the main rail, road and river routes connecting Yugoslavia intersected. With the break-up of Yugoslavia, Brcko is now situated in a triangle where the borders of Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina meet. The port of Brcko used to be one of the most important river ports in the former Yugoslavia. This strategic position was the reason why Brcko suffered enormous destruction during the war. As a result of heavy fighting, the city was destroyed and the Croat and Bosniak populations were expelled. Brcko's status was so contested that it was decided during the Dayton peace talks that the city would not only be part of both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it would also be granted the status of a separate mixed entity formally recognized as a district.

During the war, Brcko was the hub of black-market activity. After the war, peacekeepers cleared an area and soon traders began to set up makeshift buildings to sell their wares. The so-called Arizona market became a notorious tax-free marketplace where it was possible to buy almost anything. As a result, it was a magnet for smuggling and other types of crime, including prostitution.¹ It is estimated that in 1996 the black market accounted for 98 per cent of the district's economy.

In order to bring trade under control, the local government and its international partners built a new market, which has become a place where people from all over the region buy and sell goods. Today, the market hosts more than 2 000 business units, and it is estimated that between 5 000 and 6 000 people visit it every day.² Around €10 million in taxes flow annually into the state budget from the revenues of the Arizona market, which has become the largest market in the former Yugoslavia.³ Nevertheless, Brcko remains one of the poorest regions in the country; in December 2021, the average monthly salary was €502, the lowest in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴

But transforming a black market for licit goods into a legal market did not eliminate illegal activity in the district. Criminals sought other opportunities, primarily trafficking in drugs and human beings, and smuggling of firearms and high-tariff goods.

Cooperation among criminals, corruption within the police

Brcko's geography makes it a key node for smuggling between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. Its location just across the Sava river from the EU makes it an attractive place for smuggling outside the region, including of migrants. Criminal groups in Brcko engage in transnational criminal activities with their counterparts in the two neighbouring countries. Over the past two years, several police operations have disrupted the smuggling of drugs, firearms and migrants involving multinational criminal groups.⁵ Criminals from Croatia and Serbia have been known to sometimes cross the border to lie low in Brcko.⁶ That is not say that Brcko is always peaceful. Because of the criminal milieu, there have been a number of violent incidents, both in terms of criminals settling scores as well as armed robberies and attacks.⁷

Although criminals move through the region relatively easily, Bosnia's complex system of government – which is also reflected in the police and judicial system – sometimes hampers cooperation among law enforcement officials. Poor collaboration between cantonal and federal, as well as with state agencies in joint actions on countering crime, not to mention a lack of data sharing, gives space for criminals to operate.

Corruption also hampers the fight against organized crime. Criminal groups have managed to recruit police officers from Brcko to personally participate in drug trafficking and smuggling, as well as to protect and mediate drug handovers. In 2018, the assistant chief of the Brcko District criminal police was arrested with 1.1 kilograms of pure cocaine, worth €130 000, in his car.⁸ As irregularities continued, in April 2019 the chief of police temporarily suspended seven police officers on suspicion that they had committed serious breaches of official duty.⁹ Shortly thereafter, police officers were arrested again in the Brcko District area, as were border police officers, on criminal offences of bribery and smuggling of migrants and drugs. It is striking that there



Figure 2 Brcko, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a key smuggling node in the region.

are so many cases of corruption in such a small area, despite the fact that police are paid better than in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have good equipment, receive training and support from the international community and work in a new building that cost more than €5 million.¹⁰

Despite the problems of organized crime in the region and corruption within the police service, Brcko police have carried out several successful operations against the smuggling of migrants, weapons and drugs, particularly when cooperating with counterparts in Croatia, Germany and Austria.

In a police operation codenamed Cer in 2019, 17 people were arrested, including two former and one current police officer. A large quantity of narcotics, intended for street sale, was found, and about three kilograms of drugs were seized. These include marijuana, speed and Ecstasy worth about €20 000, as well as packing accessories, weapons and mobile phones. Over €8 000 in local currency was confiscated.¹¹

During a police action codenamed Bjegunac, carried out in November 2021, two members of Brcko's police were part of the organized criminal group that was buying and selling drugs in the Brcko District as well as in the area of Bijeljina, Pelagićevo and Orašje. During the operation, about a kilogram of marijuana was found, along with a little more than a hundred grams of cocaine.¹²

Brcko has many of the characteristics evident in other hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans: a location attractive for trafficking, weak governance (in this case exacerbated by corruption) and economic vulnerability. It suffers the additional handicap of misusing funds that are desperately needed to strengthen resilience among civil society. In such a small place, everybody knows each other. This makes change hard. On the other hand, the committed approach of honest officials, strengthened by the support of the international community, can make a big difference very quickly. More efforts are needed to bolster civil society and to build bridges between civil

society and government institutions with integrity to reduce the space for criminal groups to exploit.

According to a senior police officer: 'We are aware that we have issues. But we are also devoted to fighting crime. For a long time, corruption here in the police was a standard, but now the tides are changing.'¹³

Notes

1. Balkanski shopping u Arizoni, Nacional, 30 August 2019, <https://www.nacional.hr/balkanski-shopping-u-arizoni/>.
2. The market even has its own website: <https://tobd.ba/objekti/313/trznica-arizona>.
3. M Nikolić, Arizona dream: Od šverca do proizvodnje, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2 March 2016, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/arizona-dream-od-sverca-do-proizvodnje/27585352.html>.
4. BILTEN Statistički podaci Brčko distrikta BiH, Agencija za statistiku BiH, 14 March 2022, https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Bilteni/2022/BRC_00_2022_B1_1_BS.pdf.
5. Odličan učinak policijske akcije „KALIBAR“, Radio Brčko, 30 November 2016, <https://radiobrcko.ba/arhiva/odlican-ucinak-policijske-akcije-kalibar/>; D B, Velika policijska akcija u Njemačkoj: Trojka iz BiH upletena u krađu vozila vrijednih 1,5 milion eura, Klix, 23 February 2022, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/svijet/velika-policijska-akcija-u-njemackoj-trojka-iz-bih-upletena-u-kradju-vozila-vrijednih-1-5-miliona-eura/220223139>; A K and A B, Ko je bio meta akcije „Wolf“ u kojoj je učestvovalo 250 policajaca, Avaz, 16 December 2020, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/616880/ko-je-bio-meta-akcije-wolf-u-kojoj-je-ucestvovalo-250-policajaca>; Hapšenja u BiH i Austriji: Pali dileri droge i oružja, ATV BL, 29 May 2016, <https://www.atvbl.rs/hapsenja-u-bih-austriji-pali-dileri-droge-o-oruzja>; Velika akcija razbijanja lanca krijumčara droge i ljudi u Republici Srpskoj, dio robe redovno je završavao i u Hrvatskoj, Slobodna Dalmacija, 8 December 2021, <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/regija/velika-akcija-razbijanja-lanca-krijumcara-droge-i-ljudi-u-republici-srpskoj-dio-robe-redovno-je-završavao-i-u-hrvatskoj-1149492>.
6. Interview with a senior police officer in Brcko District, 14 January 2022.
7. N N, Brčak optužen za 20 teških pljački i ranjavanje nožem, Nezavisne novine, 23 October 2017, <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/hronika/Brckak-optuzen-za-20-teskih-pljacki-i-ranjavanje-nozem/448468>.
8. S Bandić, Uhićeni muškarac pomoćnik šefa Krim-policije Brčko distrikta Zlatko Androšević, Zadarski list, 27 October 2018, <https://www.zadarskilist.hr/clanci/27102018/uhiceni-muskarac-pomocnik-sefa-krim-policije-brcko-distrikta-zlatko-androšević>.
9. E Redžić, Sedmorica policajaca suspendirana zbog napada na imovinu uglednog privrednika, Avaz, 18 April 2019, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/477094/sedmorica-policajaca-suspendirana-zbog-napada-na-imovinu-uglednog-privrednika>.
10. Svečano otvorena nova zgrada Policije Brčko distrikta BiH, Vlada Brčko distrikta BiH, 17 February 2016, <http://vlada.bdcentral.net/Publication/Read/svecano-otvorena-nova-zgrada-policije-brcko-distrikta-bih?lang=en.M>.
11. M N, Akcija Cer u Brčkom: Od 17 uhapšenih u pritvoru ostao samo jedan osumnjičeni, Klix, 24 October 2019, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/akcija-cer-u-brckom-od-17-uhapsenih-u-pritvoru-ostao-samo-jedan-osumnjiceni/191024121>.
12. M M, "Bjeginac": Akcijom SIPA-e obuhvaćeno 15 osoba, među njima i policajci, Faktor, 22 November 2021, <https://faktor.ba/vijest/bjeginac-akcijom-sipa-e-obuhvaceno-15-osoba-medu-njima-i-policajci/145052>.
13. Interview with a senior inspector in Brcko District, 8 January 2022.

4. Extortion is underestimated and under-reported in Serbia.

How big a problem are extortion and usury in Serbia? That is a question that Milos Katić, executive board president of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, set out to investigate in 2021 thanks to a scholarship from the GI-TOC's Resilience Fund. Motivated by his personal experience in a small community, Katić analyzed institutional responses and citizens' perceptions of extortion, racketeering and usury in Serbia. His findings were published in December 2021.¹

The main difference between extortion and usury (also referred to as loan sharking) is that the perpetrator in extortion coerces the victim to illegally obtain property, while in usury, the victim seeks financial services from the perpetrator in the form of a loan and is then exploited. In Serbia's criminal code, extortion is a criminal offence of a property nature. It implies the intention to illegally obtain property or other benefits by force or threat. The force can be direct or indirect, while the threat must be of such intensity as to create a feeling of fear. The perpetrator does not need to intend to personally receive this benefit; extortion could also be committed for someone else's benefit.

According to Katić's report, individuals generally extort relatively small sums of money from people who are in a difficult financial situation. For example, hooligan criminal groups that operate private security companies in Belgrade and Novi Sad often extort restaurants or clubs, asking for thousands of euros to 'protect them'. 'This is classic racketeering', said Katić. 'Owners pay for the protection even though they did not ask for it because it is the only way to work or not to damage their reputation.'

Based on his research, Katić concluded that extortion is widespread but underestimated in Serbia. 'People in Serbia do not take extortion seriously until it knocks on their door. When that happens, they are not sure how to react', said Katić. It is also a relatively unknown phenomenon. 'People know more about racketeering and usury, perhaps because of television series and movies, but also because they know more victims or perpetrators,' he explained.

In his study, he noticed a big difference between the number of cases reported and how citizens view these crimes. According to Katić, people believe that the Serbian legal system will not protect them, which is why 'it is not surprising that most people are afraid to report extortion, racketeering and usury'.

He added: 'For example, a person borrowed €500 000 and agreed on an interest rate. After some time, he could not return the amount, and the loan shark took away his hotel. The court procedure started, and the court expert reduced the value of the hotel to €1 million, which was not enough to repay the debt to the loan shark, who is always asking for more and more money. In the end, it turned out that the loan shark was working in an organized manner and that this was not the only hotel he took. He has a team of lawyers making contracts and has connections in the judiciary.'

Katić's findings reveal that people in cities more often dare to report cases of extortion, especially when extorted by individuals rather than organized groups. On the other hand, fear is present in smaller communities because victims face the risk of running into the perpetrators. Figures 3 and 4 show that more than a third of all criminal complaints of extortion and usury in Serbia are made in the capital, Belgrade.

In the Western Balkans, the highest sentences for extortion are in Serbia and Montenegro, which provide for imprisonment of up to eight years. The lowest penalties are in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, where perpetrators face three-month prison sentences.

According to Katić, most racketeers are men, although women are also involved. Minors often carry out racketeering and extortion schemes. Betting shops are hubs for gatherings of victims and perpetrators, as well as the recruitment of minors, especially in cities.

The study concludes that closer cooperation between the media and civil society is needed because of the press's sensationalist approach to the topic. 'The press mainly reports on these cases when a tragic outcome occurs. A more professional approach is necessary. Professionals in cooperation with civil society and media

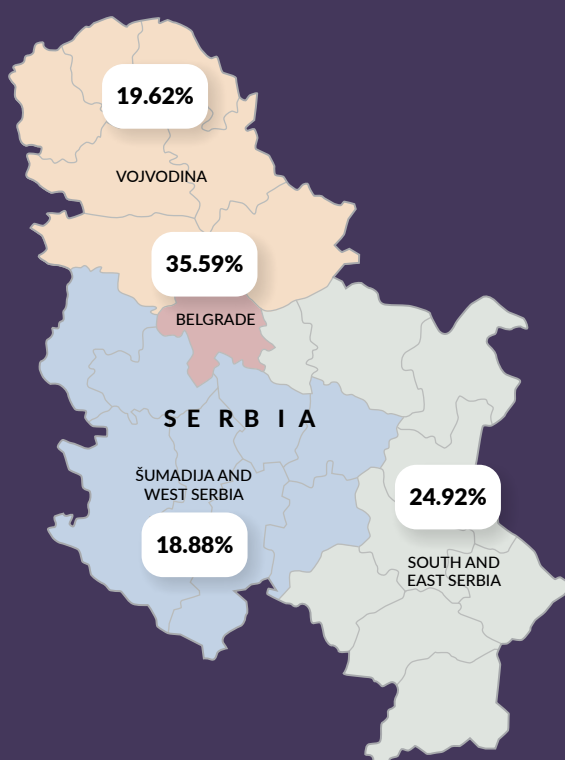
need to prevent these crimes, and it is important to target young perpetrators. Education is key. Trust

between civil society, the media and state institutions is the only solution to bring real results,' noted Katić.

Notes

1. Miloš Katić and Sanja Kosović, Extortion and Usury in Serbia between 2016 and 2020, GI-TOC, December 2021,

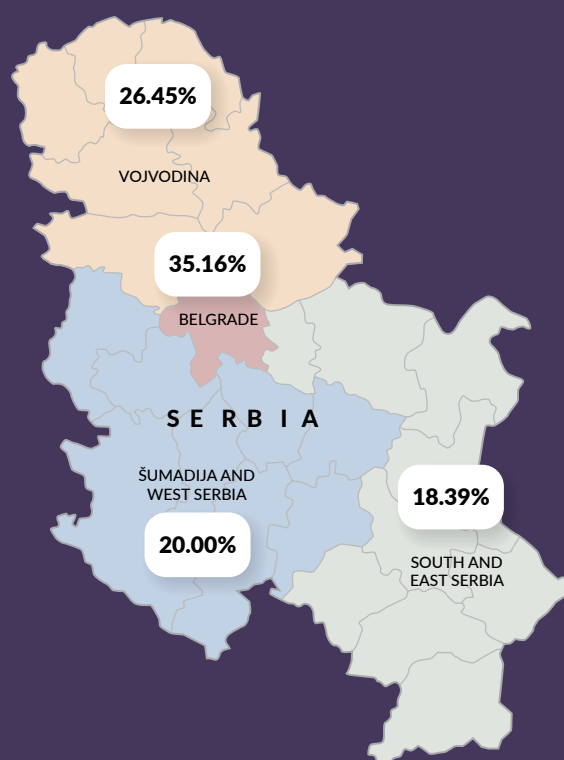
<https://voice.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Case-study-2021-1.pdf>.



Number of criminal complaints	
Belgrade	345
South and East Serbia	235
Šumadija and West Serbia	178
Vojvodina	185
Total	943

Figure 3 Criminal complaints of extortion in Serbia, by region, 2016–2020.

Miloš Katić and Sanja Kosović, Extortion and usury in Serbia between 2016 and 2020, GI-TOC and Vojvodina Research and Analytical Center, December 2021, <https://voice.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Case-study-2021-1.pdf>



Number of criminal complaints	
Belgrade	109
South and East Serbia	57
Šumadija and West Serbia	62
Vojvodina	82
Total	310

Figure 4 Criminal complaints of usury in Serbia, by region, 2016–2020.

Miloš Katić and Sanja Kosović, Extortion and usury in Serbia between 2016 and 2020, GI-TOC and Vojvodina Research and Analytical Center, December 2021, <https://voice.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Case-study-2021-1.pdf>

5. Allegations of missing babies still haunt Serbia.

Criminal markets often treat human beings as commodities. Victims of human trafficking are bought and sold mainly for forced labour or sex, while migrants are smuggled for a price, sometimes under conditions that cost them their lives. There is even a black market for babies.

Over the past 70 years, as many as 10 000 babies have allegedly disappeared from maternity hospitals across Serbia under questionable circumstances.¹ The story is always the same: parents are told that their child died after birth, but they were neither allowed to see the child's body nor told where it was buried. As one mother testified in 2018 about her 1988 case, 'a doctor came to me and told me ... that my baby was dead. They said it was better not to see the dead child because I would remember that image for the rest of my life.'²

Babies started to disappear during the communist period in the former Yugoslavia. At the time, many parents could not fathom the lack of information concerning the death of their child. But under communism, people did not question official narratives.³ As one mother observed, 'at that time, in that system, any woman who tried to condemn a doctor and dispute such a sudden death of her child would be declared insane'.⁴

For many years, the disappearance of babies from maternity wards in Serbia was an open secret.⁵ But this situation changed in 2013 when the mother of a missing baby, Zorica Jovanović, won a case against Serbia before the European Court of Human Rights.⁶ The case had been filed with the Court after Serbian authorities had continuously denied Jovanović access to information about the fate of her son, who had allegedly died in 1983 while in the care of a state-run hospital. The case focused on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides a right to respect one's private and family life. Jovanović was awarded €10 000 in non-pecuniary damages due to the court's finding that Serbia had failed to provide her with credible information as to the fate of her son. She has never been given his body or informed about where he is allegedly buried. In addition, his death was never properly investigated or even officially recorded. The court also ordered Serbia to take all appropriate

measures to establish a mechanism aimed at providing individual redress to all parents in a similar situation.

It took Serbia until 2020 to pass legislation on the missing babies.⁷ The government established a commission to gather facts on the status of all newborn babies suspected of having gone missing from maternity hospitals in Serbia and to provide up to €10 000 in compensation to the parents. At that time, many people testified publicly about their cases. One mother recalled how she was haunted by the thought that someone could bury a child without the parents' knowledge, and decided to report her case once Serbia adopted the law.

Thus far, a total of 694 applicants (mostly from Belgrade) have filed motions to begin proceedings to determine the fate of newborn babies believed to have disappeared from one of the country's maternity wards.⁸ Ana Stamenić, a judge in the Special Unit of the Higher Court for the Suppression of Corruption in Novi Sad, noted in July 2021 that although one case had been resolved, another 99 cases were still pending.⁹

However, there is increasing hope for resolution of at least some cases. In September 2021, Mlađan Radivojević, after multiple DNA analyses, managed to find his biological family and prove that he was abducted from a hospital in Serbia 40 years ago.¹⁰

How is the market organized?

While stealing babies is irrefutably a heinous act, can it be considered a type of organized crime? The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime describes criminal groups as a structured group of three or more people, existing for a period of time for the purpose of achieving illegal monetary gain.¹¹

In Serbia, illegal adoption seems to have been the main modality for stealing babies from their biological parents. In these cases, a non-existent woman is registered on the documents as the mother, after which falsified documents declare that she gives the child up for adoption.¹²

The illegal adoption procedure takes about one week. The process is usually arranged by legal mediation agencies or lawyers that provide buyers with the

necessary contacts. For a fee of around US\$10 000, which was the price in 1998,¹³ they fill out the necessary paperwork and arrange the handover, logistics and accommodation.

Testimonies sometimes point to the involvement of state officials in falsifying the child's documents: state officials are reported to have listed non-existent women as mothers in official documents or created documents in which a mother renounces the baby and gives it up for adoption.¹⁴ Sometimes mistakes revealed their complicity, such as in cases where children without names and surnames or without their parents' names were registered in official documents in violation of the law.¹⁵ There were also cases in which funeral companies stated that the supposedly deceased children never reached the cemeteries and had not been buried or cremated.¹⁶ In another incident, it was discovered that the files for 29 babies adopted from 1976 to 1981 disappeared from a Serbian centre for social work.¹⁷

Doctors have reportedly also been complicit in these schemes. An American woman who adopted a baby from Serbia in 1998 stated that she paid a doctor US\$2 800 together with a donation of US\$1 000 to a maternity hospital to facilitate the adoption.¹⁸ There are also cases in which doctors allegedly mediated the illegal sale of children or signed the child's birth and death certificate.¹⁹ In another example, a letter from a maternity hospital in

Novi Sad stated in 2019 that they had 72 stillborn babies that were all sent to a certain cemetery. However, the cemetery declared in 2019 that it had received the bodies of only 15 stillborn babies from that particular hospital.²⁰ Given the pattern of apparent cooperation between lawyers, doctors and state officials, this could be seen as a type of organized crime.

A wider problem

This crime is not unique to Serbia. For instance, from the 1950s to the 1990s in Spain, more than 50 000 babies were reportedly stolen from their mothers.²¹ The modus operandi was similar to the one in Serbia: the biological mother was informed that the infant had died shortly after birth, while the newborn baby was actually given up for adoption, often making it appear as if the adoptive parents were the biological parents.²²

Further steps are necessary to stop illegal adoption worldwide. After an official inquiry, in February 2021 the Netherlands suspended all adoptions from abroad.²³ In addition, in August 2021, the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances urged Switzerland to investigate illegal adoptions from Sri Lanka that took place over a period of three decades, beginning in the 1970s.²⁴ One would hope that with Serbia's new law and greater attention to this crime at home and abroad, the risk of missing babies would be reduced in the future.



A 2019 protest in Serbia to denounce pending cases of missing babies.

Photo: N1

However, a new danger appears to be emerging: a black market for embryos in Serbia and the Balkans.²⁵ In 2019, police in Greece traced 24 embryo sales.²⁶ The president of the Association of Missing Babies of

Vojvodina has warned parents that Serbia is not immune to this crime.²⁷ As hard as it is to believe, a market for stolen babies could be supplemented by an emerging market for stolen embryos.²⁸

Notes

1. After months of investigation, which covered several ministries, local self-government authorities and health care and other institutions, the Serbian Ombudsman identified a number of omissions in the work of competent public authorities and institutions vested with public powers, which are listed in the relevant sections of the Report of the Protector of Citizens on the So-called "Missing Babies" Cases with Recommendations, Protector of Citizens, Belgrade, 29 July 2010, <https://www.ombudsman.org.rs/attachments/article/117/Missing%20babies%20cases%20report%20-%20Serbian%20ombudsman.doc>.
2. Adriana Jankovic, 'Idi kući, rađaćeš još Potresne ispovesti roditelja koji sumnjaju da su im deca ukradena u porodilištu, Blic, 12 February 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/idi-kuci-radjaces-jos-potresne-ispovesti-roditelja-koji-sumnjaju-da-su-im-deca/ls1hl1f>.
3. Missing Babies, Off The Grid, TRT World, 18 February 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXDPx7YFWnk>.
4. Adriana Jankovic, 'Idi kući, rađaćeš još Potresne ispovesti roditelja koji sumnjaju da su im deca ukradena u porodilištu, Blic, 12 February 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/idi-kuci-radjaces-jos-potresne-ispovesti-roditelja-koji-sumnjaju-da-su-im-deca/ls1hl1f>.
5. Alternative Report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Serbia and Montenegro, ASTRA, 2005, <https://www.astra.rs/en/alternative-report-committee-economic-social-cultural-rights-2005/>.
6. Zorica Jovanović v. Serbia, Application no. 21794/08, ECHR, 9 September 2013, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22appno%22:%5B%2221794%22%5D%22documentcollectionid%22:%5B%22JUDGMENTS%22%22DECISIONS%22%5D%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-118276%22%5D%7D>.
7. Officially, it is called the Law on Determining the Facts on the Status of Newborn Children Suspected of being Missing from Maternity Hospitals in the Republic of Serbia.
8. Zorica Jovanović v. Serbia, Application no. 21794/08, ECHR, 9 September 2013, Status of execution, <https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/ENG?i=004-7011>.
9. U novosadskom sudu navala je sudskih sporova o nestalim bebama, Dnevnik, 8 July 2021, <https://www.dnevnik.rs/hronika/u-novosadskom-sudu-najezda-sudskih-predmeta-o-nestalim-bebama-08-07-2021>.
10. Ljiljana Raičević, "Sad imam sestru, majku, brata i znam čiji sam" – jedan slučaj otehtih beba danas dobio epilog, Radio Television Serbia, 30 September 2021, <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/4533049/bebi-afere-otet-bebe-epilog-sud-kruisevac.html>.
11. The full definition appears in Article 2(a) of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: 'Organized criminal group shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.'
- <https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>.
12. Slavica Tuvic, Mladan iz Adrana kaže da je pronašao biološke roditelje i da je to prvi razrešen slučaj afere „nestalih beba“, Euronews Serbia, 1 October 2021, <https://www.euronews.rs/srbija/drustvo/19055/mladan-iz-adrana-kaze-da-je-pronasao-bioloske-roditelje-i-da-je-to-prvi-razresen-slucuj-afere-nestalih-beba/vest>.
13. Amerikanka priznala da je kupila bebu iz Srbije, platili 10.000 dolara, Večernji list, 22 October 2020, <https://www.vecernji.ba/vijesti/amerikanka-priznala-da-je-kupila-bebu-iz-srbije-platili-10-000-dolara-1440487>.
14. V. Crnjanski Spasojevic, Ukradeno 29 dosijea o "nestalim bebama", Novosti, 21 May 2019, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:795819-Ukradeno-29-dosijea-o-nestalim-bebama>.
15. Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia, Report for the period 2000-2010, ASTRA, 2011, <https://www.astra.rs/en/human-trafficking-serbia-report-period-2000-2010/>; Scans of some of the documents containing the mentioned omissions can be found in the book: Ristović M., Trgovina bebama u Srbiji- rođeni da nestanu. Nis: Ristović M.2006, pg 20, 53, 89, 92, http://www.kradjabeba.org/files/knjiga_rodjeni%20da%20nestanu.pdf; Report of the Board of Inquiry Charged with Ascertaining the Truth about New-born Babies Abducted from Maternity Wards in Several Serbian Cities (2005) - A report of a Board of Inquiry formed by the republican parliament with the aim of helping parents who believe that their newborn children have disappeared. In its report, the Board describes the observations it made based on investigations and interviews with a number of parents in private sessions.
16. The 'missing babies' scandal, European Implementation Network, 5 December 2019, <https://www.einnetwork.org/blog-general/2019/12/5/the-missing-babies-scandal>.
17. V. Crnjanski Spasojevic, Ukradeno 29 dosijea o "nestalim bebama", Novosti, 21 May 2019, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:795819-Ukradeno-29-dosijea-o-nestalim-bebama>.
18. Amerikanka priznala da je kupila bebu iz Srbije, platili 10.000 dolara, Večernji list, 22 October 2020, <https://www.vecernji.ba/vijesti/amerikanka-priznala-da-je-kupila-bebu-iz-srbije-platili-10-000-dolara-1440487>.
19. Ana Jankovic Jovanovic, The 'missing babies' scandal, European Implementation Network, 5 December 2019, <https://www.einnetwork.org/blog-general/2019/12/5/the-missing-babies-scandal>.
20. Bez Ustrucavanja: Ana Pejić i Dragoslava Šaponja - dokazi o krađi beba u Srbiji postoje!, 11 November 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oReNLEmzo8A&t=1085s>.
21. Graham Keeley, More than 50,000 babies stolen from Spanish mothers under Franco era laws, Independent, 16 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/spain-babies-mothers-stolen-law-franco-b1817860.html>.
22. Cristina Fernández-Pacheco Estrada, On the prosecution of "stolen babies" cases in Spain, Criminal Law Forum, 31, 415–460.

23. Dutch suspend foreign adoptions after abuses found, BBC, 8 February 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55982542>.
24. Dorian Burkhalter, UN body puts illegal adoptions in new, criminal light, Swissinfo.ch, 30 August 2021, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/un-body-puts-illegal-adoptions-in-new-criminal-light/46905860>.
25. Proverava se anonimna prijava: Da li su pojedini tužioci i funkcioneri u BiH umešani u nezakonitu trgovinu jajnim ćelijama?, Blic, 5 May 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/proverava-se-anonimna-prijava-da-li-su-pojedini-tuzioci-i-funkcioneri-u-bih-umesani-u/5tt984v>; Crno tržište embriona u Srbiji Žene kupuju plod za 5.000 evra, a to sa sobom nosi seriju opasnosti, Blic, 20 May 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/crno-trziste-embriona-u-srbiji-zene-kupuju-plod-za-5000-evra-a-to-sa-sobom-nosi/17fqs3k>; Embrije iz BiH švercali i u Izrael, pokrenuta istraga, VL, 30 January 2014, <https://www.vecernji.ba/crna-kronika/embrije-iz-bih-svercali-i-u-izrael-pokrenuta-istraga-918089>; Sumnje u šverc jajnih ćelija!, Novosti, 2 April 2013, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/hronika/aktuelno.291.html:427487-Sumnje-u-sverc-jajnih-celij>.
26. Afera "nestale bebe" u Grčkoj Uhapšeno 12 osoba, osumnjičeni odbacuju optužbe, Blic, 28 September 2019, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/afera-nestale-bebe-u-grckoj-uhapseno-12-osoba-osumnjiceni-odbacuju-optuzbe/30e2elg>.
27. Ko nam i dan danas krade bebe u Srbiji?, Posle rucka, Tv Happy, 28 April 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tcmjvK2LOE&t=4900s>.
28. Elvira Krithari, Making babies, pushing boundaries: The great Greek fertility market, Balkan Insight, 9 July 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/09/making-babies-pushing-boundaries-the-greek-fertility-market/>; Top Italian fertility doctor Severino Antinori arrested, BBC, 14 May 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36293549>; Proverava se anonimna prijava: Da li su pojedini tužioci i funkcioneri u BiH umešani u nezakonitu trgovinu jajnim ćelijama?, Blic, 5 May 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/proverava-se-anonimna-prijava-da-li-su-pojedini-tuzioci-i-funkcioneri-u-bih-umesani-u/5tt984v>; Tužiteljstvo: Sud je teško pogriješio oslobodivši Asima Kurjaka, Jutarnji, 2 August 2009, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/tuziteljstvo-sud-je-tesko-pogrijesio-oslobodivsi-asima-kurjaka-2829317>; UC Irvine fertility scandal isn't over, LA Times, 20 January 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-jan-20-me-uci20-story.html>.

Latest from the Observatory of Illicit Economies in South-Eastern Europe

CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN UNCOVERING ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS

A new GI-TOC report on IFFs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia highlights the need to increase information on the impact and harm of IFFs, as well as bolster civil society's capacity to investigate and raise awareness of these types of crimes. The report uncovers how IFFs are being siphoned out of the three economies due to corruption, tax evasion and organized crime.

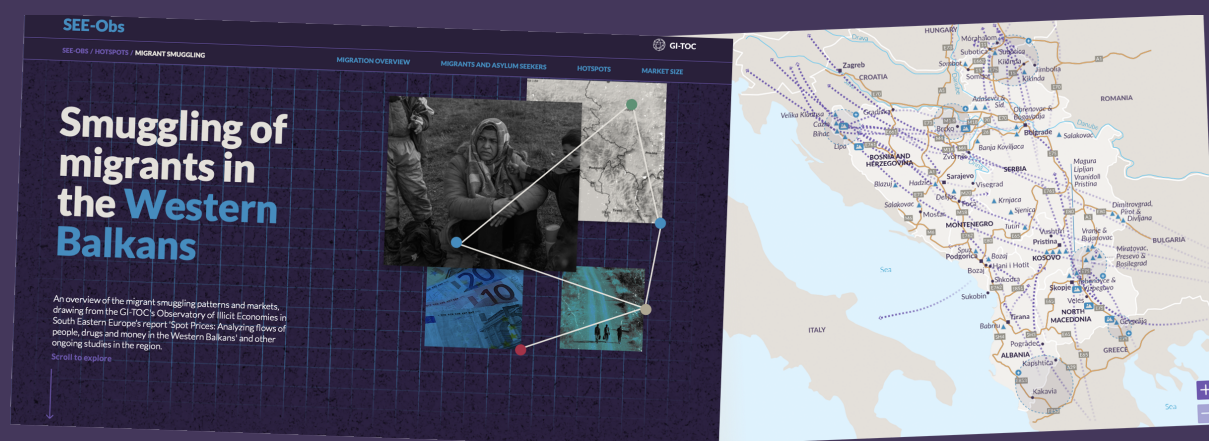
The financial system is the key channel through which illicit proceeds are moved. All three countries have significant domestic and international banking sectors, and all have problems with money laundering. From 2 to 5% of GDP is estimated to have been laundered in 2020 alone. Much of this money goes into real estate, tourism and cash-based businesses.

All three countries have given important attention to IFFs through enhanced anti-corruption efforts, financial governance and public sector transparency. And yet, it appears that their damaging impact is poorly understood by civil society and government actors alike. There is a need for civil society to increase the quantity and quality of data available on all components and channels of IFFs, as well as to enter into dialogue with state officials, the private sector and the general public on the topic.

Civil society in the Western Balkans may not – yet – have core expertise on IFFs, but it is an important



stakeholder group that should be engaged by providing evidence for new policies, and oversight and monitoring of government progress, as well as raising public awareness.



This report follows the publication of a similar assessment in 2020 analyzing key drivers and current trends of IFFs in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia.¹

NEW ONLINE TOOL TRACKS MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

In 2015, an estimated 1.5 million asylum seekers and migrants – triggered in part by the wars in Syria and Iraq – made their way through Turkey and Greece to the Western Balkans, and from there to western Europe. To this day, the Western Balkans remains a hub for migrants trying to reach western Europe.

In 2021, the GI-TOC analyzed the market for migrant smuggling in a report entitled 'Spot prices: Analyzing flows of people, drugs and money in the Western Balkans'.² As a follow-up, taking into account the dynamic nature of criminal markets, the GI-TOC has developed an interactive online tool that provides an overview of the migrant-smuggling landscape in the region.

This tool provides data on irregular border crossings on the Balkan route; the numbers and nationalities of migrants and asylum seekers; estimated profits of the migrant-smuggling market; and an interactive map displaying smuggling routes and the prices paid for each route.

With a user-friendly layout and periodic updates, the tool is accessible to the wider public, including civil society organizations, media outlets, analysts, students and law enforcement authorities. Users can share the whole tool and/or specific sections and graphs with their networks through social media.

This is the first in a series of interactive analytical tools created by the Observatory, which are designed to not only provide an alternative way to publish research findings but also to trigger analysis-supported dialogue, policies and awareness among stakeholders.

To explore the tool, visit <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/migrant-smuggling-western-balkans>.

NOTES

1. Tuesday Reitano and Kristina Amerhauser, Illicit financial flows in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia: Key drivers and current trends, GI-TOC, August 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/iffs-western-balkans/>.
2. Walter Kemp, Kristina Amerhauser and Ruggero Scaturro, Spot prices: Analyzing flows of people, drugs and money in the

Western Balkans, GI-TOC, May 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/western-balkans-crime-hotspots-3/>.

Acknowledgements

This Risk Bulletin is an output of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's Observatory of Illicit Economies in South Eastern Europe (SEE-Obs).

The SEE-Obs is a platform that connects and empowers civil society actors in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. It aims to enable civil society to identify, analyze and map criminal trends, and their impact on illicit flows, governance, development, inter-ethnic

relations, security and the rule of law. The SEE-Obs supports civil society in their monitoring of national dynamics and wider regional and international organized-crime trends. The SEE-Obs was launched as an outcome of the 2018 Western Balkans Summit in London, a part of the Berlin Process.

We would like to thank Safet Musić, Rusmin Hrnjić, Miloš Katić and Ana Profozić for their valuable contributions.

Risk Bulletins are regular outputs of our regional observatories, which draw on civil society networks to provide new data and contextualize trends related to organized-crime networks, illicit trade and state responses to them. If you would like to subscribe to future editions of the Risk Bulletin, please sign up [here](#) or email almedina.dodic@globalinitiative.net.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net

This publication was produced with the financial support of the United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the GI-TOC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Kingdom.



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME