

Invisible Routes: An Exploratory Study of Changing Patterns and Trends in Routes of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkan Region

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Introduction

In July 2004 two consultants, Tal Raviv and Alberto Andreani, carried out an assessment for IOM titled: *Changing Patterns and Trends of Trafficking in the Balkan Region: Assessment carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova* (hereinafter Raviv and Andreani 2004 report). The report examined the visible marked decline in the number of referrals of victims and concluded that trafficking is in fact on the increase, but that the methods of operation have become less visible. Traffickers have adapted their strategies and routing systems according to measures taken by governments and organisations.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine whether the IOM Counter Trafficking Module (CTM) database,⁵⁷ corresponds to the findings of the Raviv and Andreani 2004 report and whether any additional findings or suggestions can be given to the question regarding why there has been a decrease in the number of referrals of Victims of Trafficking (VoT). The central questions examined are: What have been the changes and trends in routes of trafficking in persons in the Balkan region based on the data from the IOM CTM database? How do these

⁵⁷ The CTM database stores information collected from assisted victims of trafficking. The information is derived from two interviews with the victim of trafficking: the Screening Interview that assesses the individual's eligibility to be assisted by one of IOM's counter trafficking projects and the Assistance Interview that captures a more in-depth set of information regarding the trafficking process. In December 2000, IOM adopted the UN Palermo Protocol, and is the international legal instrument guiding IOM counter-trafficking activities.

patterns and trends correspond to the July 2004 IOM assessment? What recommendations for future research and anti-trafficking measures may be made in light of these findings? Thus, the main aim and objective of this article is to assess the value of the sampling of the IOM CTM database through examining whether the database corresponds to the findings made in the Raviv and Andreani 2004 report concerning the changes and trends in routes of trafficking in persons in the Balkan region.

Background Literature

It has been argued that there is an overall lack of documentation regarding specific trafficking routes (Van Reisen and Stefanovic, 2004: 13). It has also been acknowledged that trafficking routes change regularly within a short span of time to adapt to new policies and enforcement mechanisms by governments and international institutions. A recent report on Albania found that transportation routes had changed significantly within a 12 month-period (Hunzinger and Sumner Coffey, 2003: 30). This change has mainly been as a result of law enforcement measures to close the speedboat routes between Albania and Italy.

The Raviv and Andreani 2004 report makes several observations regarding the changes in trafficking routes. Their findings show that there has been an increase in the trafficking of victims across a single border. Internal trafficking has increased within the Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) whilst further research needs to be conducted regarding internal trafficking in FYR of Macedonia and BiH. Overall, Raviv and Andreani argue that trafficking has not declined but rather increased but has become less visible. The lack of visibility in trafficking has been due to changed methods of operation, changes in sexual exploitation taken into private contexts such as private apartments, internet and phone communication, victims being given small payments and the recruitment of women as traffickers and pimps.

It has been argued that victims of trafficking are increasingly traveling with valid documentation directly to the countries of destination. It is argued in the recent report titled *Trafficking in Human Beings in South*

Eastern Europe that these changes have led to altered trafficking routes and have not represented a decrease in trafficking as has been suggested by some commentators (2004: 8, 13). The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings issued an assessment and also argued that the continuous shifts in trafficking routes are strongly related to changes in Schengen visa regulations for future EU countries rather than a response to counter-trafficking measures (2003: 2).

It is argued in this paper that the declining numbers in IOM referrals is related to a decrease in visibility of trafficking rather than a decrease in numbers. Traffickers are using alternative routes to avoid obstacles and interruptions, making trafficking less visible. These alternative routes can be clearly noted in the visual presentation of the maps that are featured in this article. Thus, the findings of the Raviv and Andreani 2004 report may be confirmed from the IOM CTM database in relation to two points: the decreased visibility of VoT and changes in trafficking routes.

The main gap in the literature on trafficking routes is the lack of assessment of primary documentation such as stories of victims of trafficking. The IOM Counter-Trafficking Database is one of the most unique resources globally that provides this necessary primary documentation. IOM's database is perhaps the largest collection of stories from victims of trafficking and will offer greater possibilities for researchers who can utilize such reliable primary documentation. This exploratory study contributes in beginning to fill this gap in the literature and contributes to confirming findings conducted by other researchers, particularly the research carried out by Raviv and Andreani.

Methodology

The areas of focus in this study are the same as the Raviv and Andreani 2004 report: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova. The data source is the IOM CTM Database. The number of records in the database (as of April 2005) for

these four countries and the Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) is 2 412 of which 2 334 contain interview information.

Due to time restrictions of the study, the large body of data is limited. The method used to assess the data consists of a random selection of 20 stories from the period 2000-2001 and 20 stories from 2003-2004 from each of the four countries and the Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro). Thus, a total of 200 stories are examined and analysed in this study. Where there is insufficient data from the specified periods to reach 20 stories, the 2002 data will be used instead. This applies in the case of the Republic of Moldova where there are only 15 stories in 2000-2001. This data set is sufficient to conduct an exploratory examination of the questions. Clearly a larger data set is required to conduct an in-depth examination.

The data is analysed through mapping the routes that are reported in each story for each geographical area in two distinctive periods: 2000/2001 and 2003/2004. The data covers Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The data comes from referrals of victims to IOM, thus they are not strictly destination, origin or transit points but places where victims have been referred to IOM. For the case of the Republic of Moldova, there is only a focus on the country of origin as Moldova and the routes of trafficking for Moldovans.

In addition, the analysis considers factors such as the type of documentation that is used by victims of trafficking (whether legal or illegal), the modes of transport that are used and other relevant factors that can be identified in the routes. The findings in the report refer to both specific city names and country or province names without a city reference. It would be preferable to specify city names to identify an exact route however as there no such consistency in the stories in the database, both city, country and province names are used in reporting the findings.

A note should be made on the confidentiality of the records in the database. No references are made to victims that could identify an

individual in any way. The study conforms to the ethical and confidential requirements of the IOM database.⁵⁸

Albania: old routes

The Raviv and Andreani 2004 report suggests several changes in the routes related to Albania. In the summer of 2002 heightened maritime control measures were taken to intercept speedboats between Albania and Italy. Thereafter, there was a dramatic decline in speedboats as a mode of trafficking between Albania and Italy. In addition, the report suggests that new routes are discernible. New routes include travelling through the mountains, such as from Korce, Kapshtice, Gjirokaster or Kakavije to Greece, from Podgarec and Oher to FYR of Macedonia and from Shkodra to Montenegro. Routes through FYR of Macedonia mean that Albanian citizens do not need visas and can use genuine Albanian documents. Victims are being rerouted to Greece and transferred by ferry or plane to Italy. Since 2002, Romanian and Bulgarian citizens do not need a visa to enter the Schengen area, thus they no longer need to pass through Albania illegally to enter the EU. There has also been a trend noticed in the use of fake documents and real visas, allowing modes of transport such as airplanes and ferries making it more difficult to detect trafficking cases. The open border between Province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) and Albania enables easy illegal movement and trafficking of victims in both directions.

Albania: changes

The data from the CTM database indicates that traffickers are continuing to use illegal means to move people across borders, such as by foot through green borders and by boat through blue borders. There has also been a use of fake documents to enter borders, however from the data collected the number of VoT travelling with fake documents was not in the majority and in many cases the stories in the database did not clearly indicate whether fake documents had been obtained or not.

⁵⁸ The counter-trafficking services unit at IOM specifies that no personal data can be disclosed of trafficking victims that might reveal the identity of the victim and that all data must be used with utmost care and confidentiality.

Albania: new routes

There are several patterns that emerge from an examination of the CTM data of routes in trafficking related to Albania. In 2000/2001, there is a certain pattern that emerges from the data of the common route. The country of origin is either Moldova or Romania and the transit places are Belgrade and Podgorica travelling through to Shkodra and Vlora, Albania with Italy as the final country of destination planned for most cases. In the 2003/2004 period certain patterns emerge that indicate changes in routes. In addition to Moldova and Romania, there is an increase in different countries of origin. There are also several new transit points: Bucharest, Sofia and FYR of Macedonia. There is a decrease in the number of transits to Podgorica but an increase in Durrës and Tirana as transit points. New routes that appear are: Chisinau to Bulgaria; Bulgaria to FYR of Macedonia; FYR of Macedonia to Albania; Albania to Greece. The following two maps show these changes in routes.

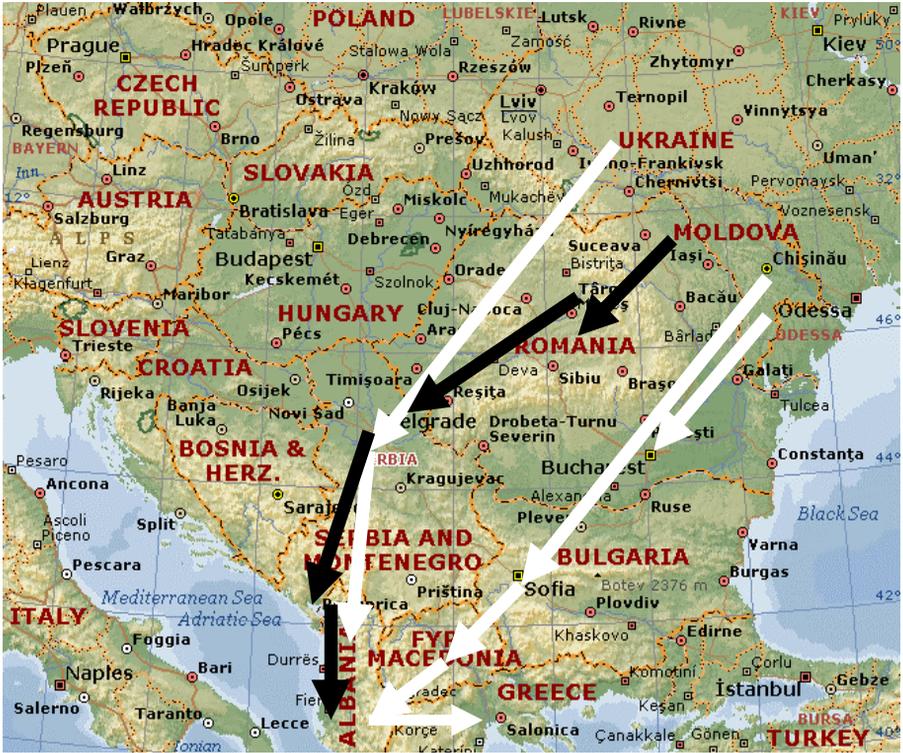
Figure 1: Albania - 2000/2001 trafficking routes



Figure 2: Albania - 2003/2004 trafficking routes



Figure 3: Albania – patterns and trends in trafficking routes
Legend: → 2000/2001 black → 2003/2004 white



Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): old routes

In relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), there are four main reasons given by Raviv and Andreani to explain the decline in referral of trafficking victims. To begin with the International Police Task Force (IPTF) had created STOP teams that were combating trafficking, these teams and the IPTF withdrew their operations and responsibility was shifted to the national police. Another factor is that trafficking has been moved to private contexts rather than open public establishments making it more difficult to detect trafficking. Victims of trafficking are now also reported to have improved living conditions and to be receiving modest payments. However, there continues to be intimidation and threats and victims of trafficking fear approaching authorities as there is a lack of future witness protection. Another factor that may be linked with the decline in referrals is the increase in internal trafficking rather than international trafficking for purposes of local prostitution.

BiH: changes and new routes

The CTM data analysis of BiH indicated that there has been a decrease in Romania as a transit from Moldova and that Belgrade has increased as a transit point, Budapest has also become a new transit point. There has been an increase in Ukraine as a country of origin and an increase in Sarajevo as a destination, rather than a concentration to the North-North West of BiH. There does not appear to be a marked increase in the use of legal documents, but rather a continuation of illegal border crossings. There does not appear to be an increase in internal trafficking of local individuals within BiH with only one VoT originating from BiH in the data collection. However, overall statistics from the database suggest otherwise indicating an increase in internal trafficking from none in early 2000 to eleven victims in 2004.

Figure 4: BiH – 2000/2001 trafficking routes



Figure 5: BiH – 2003/2004 trafficking routes



Figure 6: BiH – patterns and trends in trafficking routes

Legend: → 2000/2001 black → 2003/2004 white



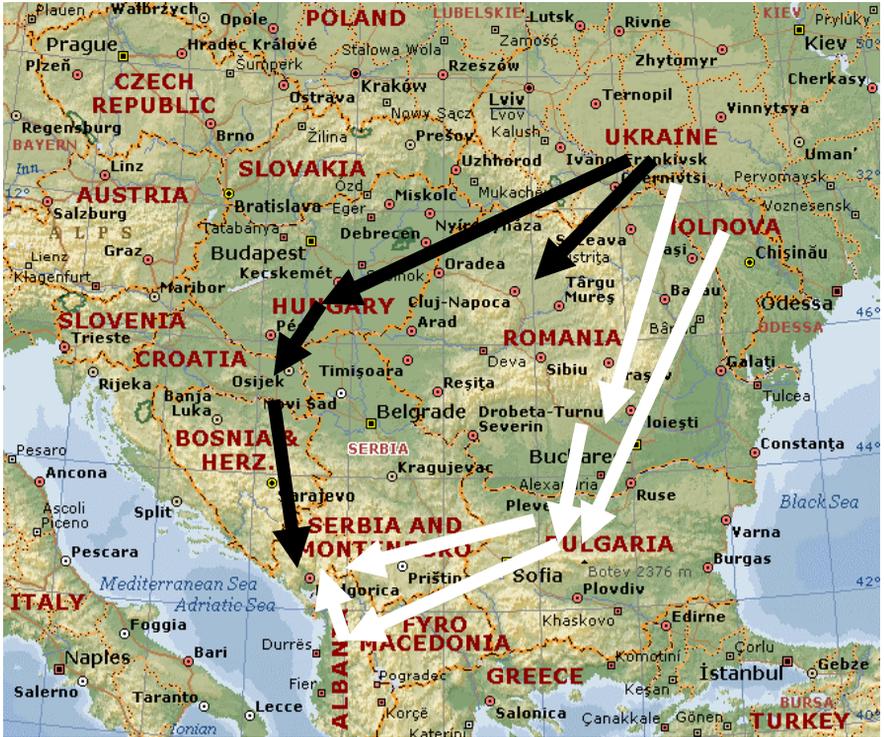
The Province of Kosovo (Serbia): old routes

The Raviv and Andreani report made several observations regarding trafficking routes related to the Province of Kosovo (Serbia). Victims from Moldova travel with false documents and cross the border with scheduled bus services to Romania. They enter Serbia illegally through green borders and then the Province of Kosovo (Serbia) illegally. The same is done by Romanians. Victims from the Ukraine travel overland or by plane with legal documents and valid visas to Hungary, then to the Province Kosovo (Serbia) via Belgrade crossing the border legally with authentic documents. Victims from Bulgaria transiting to or from FYR of Macedonia are trafficked across green border. Victims from Albania travel without documents as there are no checks along the Province Kosovo (Serbia)-Albanian border. Some of the possible reasons that are given for the decline in the numbers of referrals of VoT are that there has been an increase in hidden or more sophisticated methods of operation such as bringing victims legally by air or land. Another reason given is that victims are being held privately. A further reason suggested is that there has been an improved change in the victims' living and working conditions.

The Province of Kosovo (Serbia): changes and new routes

The data for the Province of Kosovo (Serbia) suggests that Hungary and Belgrade have decreased as a transit points and that instead Bulgaria and the FYR of Macedonia have increased as transits. A new route that it is apparent in the data is: Bucharest to Bulgaria to FYR of Macedonia. There have also been more direct routes taken such as flights.

Figure 9: The Province of Kosovo (Serbia) – patterns and trends in trafficking routes
Legend: → 2000/2001 black → 2003/2004 white



Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR of Macedonia): old routes

The Raviv and Andreani 2004 report suggests several possible reasons for the decline in the number of referrals in FYR of Macedonia. There has been a reduction of police referral of non-victims,⁵⁹ a reduction of police raids in bars and a possible reduction of international victims who have been replaced by local victims of trafficking. It is suggested that more secretive methods are being used and that forced prostitution is going underground. There has also been a decrease in the number of escapes.

FYR of Macedonia: changes and new routes

The data shows that there is a decrease of Moldovans who are referred to the IOM in FYR of Macedonia as Moldova as a country of origin decreases significantly, by half, in the records. There data also suggests an increasing route through Bulgaria and Bucharest as transit points. An increase in internal trafficking is also clear from the data. In the data set examined, there are no cases that indicate any underground covert operations, most of the VoT are taken to bars where they have restricted freedom of movement. There are a few cases where fake documents are obtained compared to the period of 2000/2001 where none of the cases examined had fake documents. In the earlier period, there is also a higher number of border crossings by foot across green borders. In 2003/2004 these incidences of border crossings by foot decreases.

⁵⁹ In the FYR of Macedonia, the police is responsible in referring individuals as victims of trafficking to IOM. The police were referring individuals to IOM who did not fit the definition of victims of trafficking. The police reviewed their referral methods which translated in a decline in the number of referrals. There is a concern that changed methods of referral has not only meant a decline in non-victims but has also led to some VoT being deported indiscriminately.

Figure 10: FYR of Macedonia – 2000/2001 trafficking routes

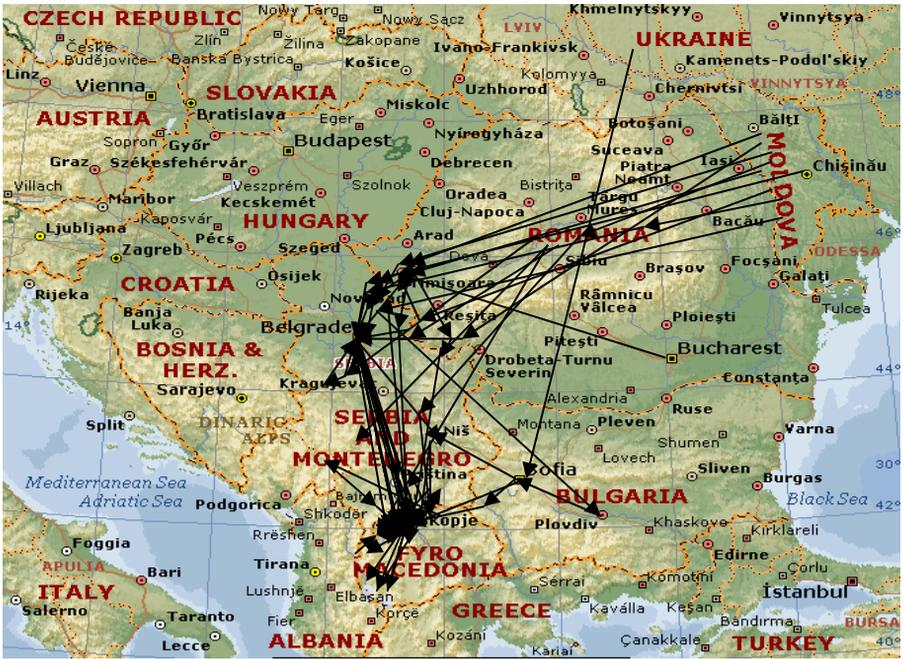


Figure 11: FYR of Macedonia – 2003/2004 trafficking routes

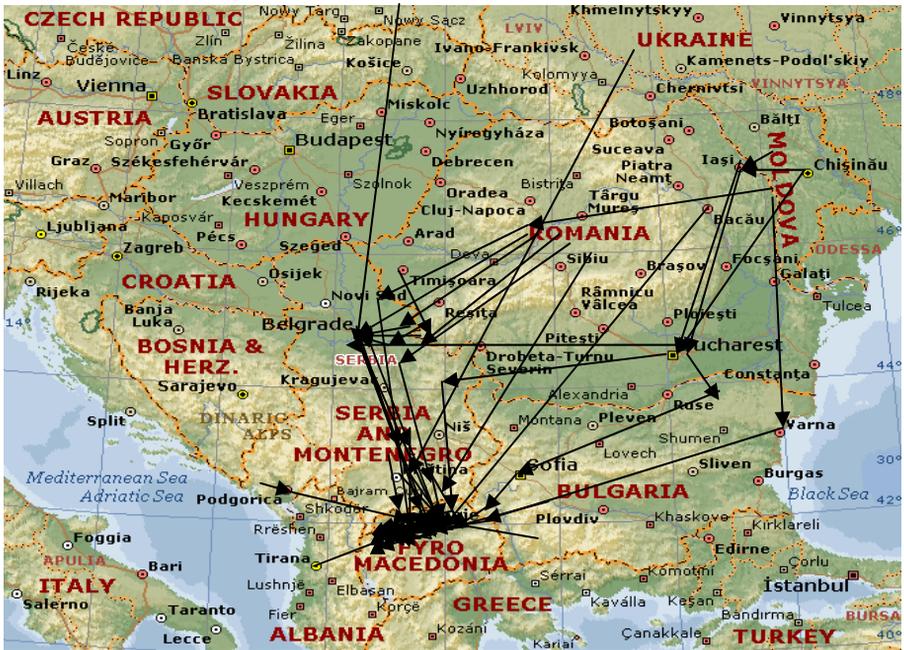
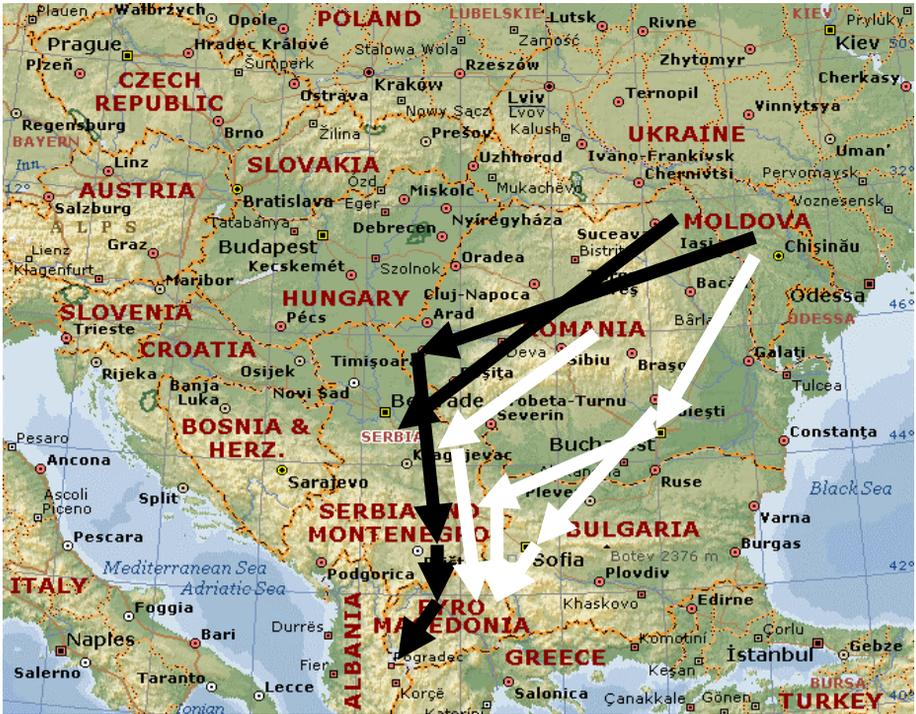


Figure 12: FYR of Macedonia – patterns and trends in trafficking routes
Legend: → 2000/2001 black → 2003/2004 white



Moldova: old routes

Moldova has been known as one of the highest rates as a country of origin for VoT. The Raviv and Andreani 2004 report stated that there had been a 20% decline each year since 2001. The report cites an increase to Moscow, Russia as a new destination country. Many victims are still taken across national borders illegally. The preferred route from Moldova is through Russia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) and Albania. The mapping of routes for Moldova is shown in terms of the country of origin. Five cases are taken from the countries and the province examined in this article: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Province of Kosovo (Serbia) to examine whether routes from Moldova have changed.

Moldova: changes and new routes

In comparing the maps from 2000/2001 to 2003/2004, it is clear that there have been some changes. Bucharest and Sofia increase as transit destinations. There is also an increase in the FYR of Macedonia as a destination country where there has also been an increase in movement to different cities and villages within the country. A recent IOM report concerning return and reintegration of victims of trafficking in the Western Balkans and main countries of origin highlights an increase of Moldovan victims of trafficking who are returned from Turkey.

Figure 13: Moldova – 2000/2001 trafficking routes from country of origin



Figure 14: Moldova – 2003/2004 trafficking routes from country of origin

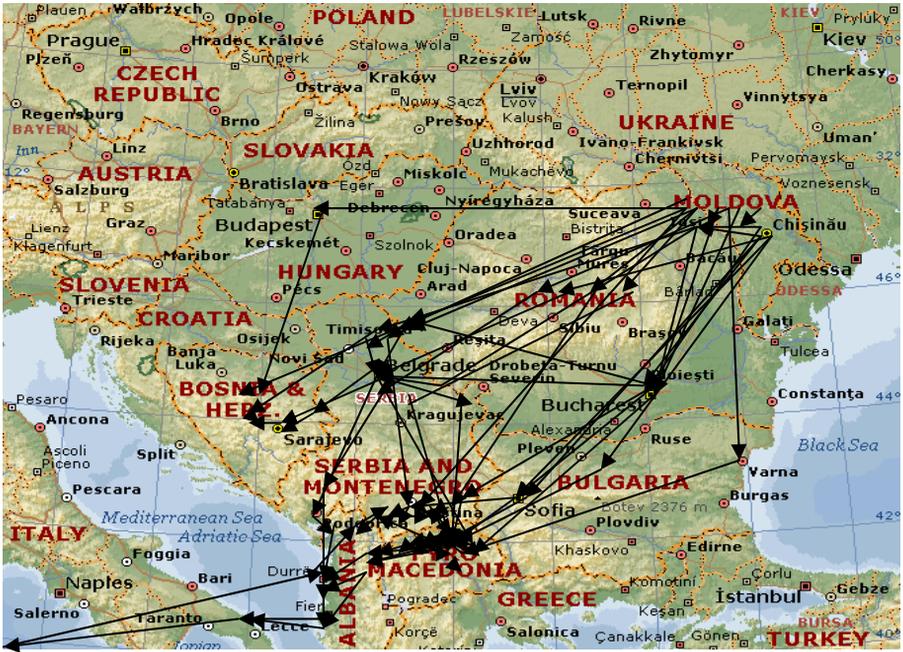
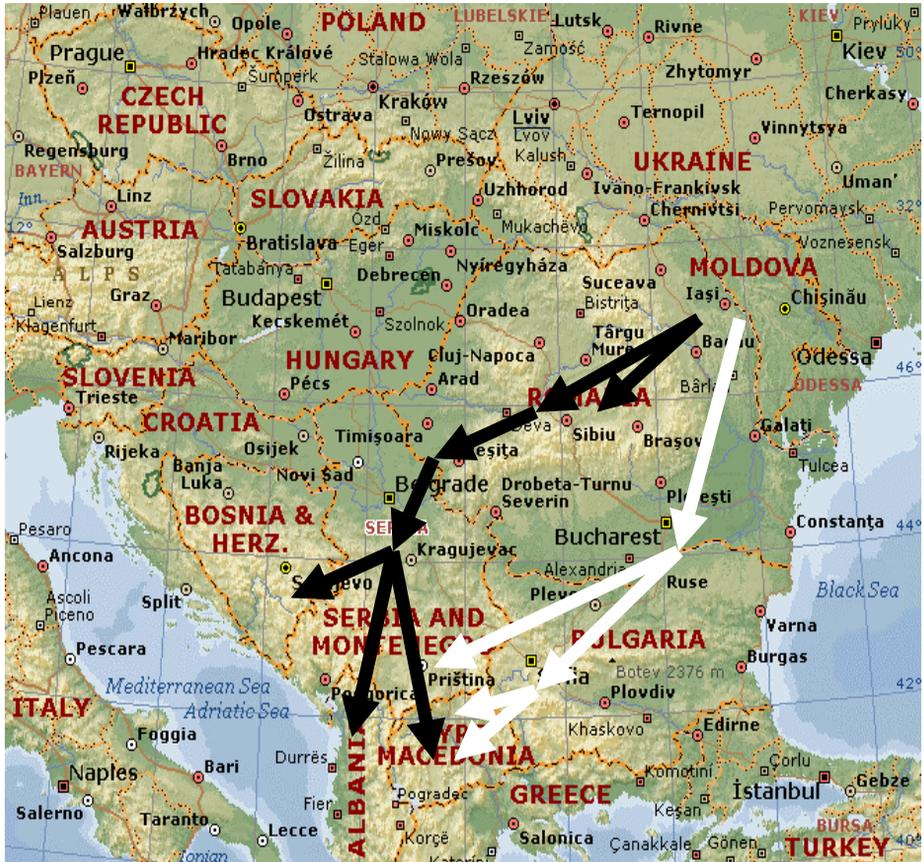


Figure 15: Moldova (country of origin) patterns and trends in trafficking routes
Legend: → 2000/2001 black → 2003/2004 white



Conclusions

Several new patterns and trends have emerged in this exploratory study. In the case of *Albania* new transit points that appear are Bucharest, Sofia and FYR of Macedonia. There has been a decrease in transits to Podgorica and an increase in transits to Durrës and Tirana. There are also new routes that appear: Chisinau to Bulgaria; Bulgaria to FYR of Macedonia; FYR of Macedonia to Albania; Albania to Greece.

In the case of *BiH*, Budapest emerges as a new transit point and there is an increase of Belgrade as a transit point with a decrease in Romania as a transit. Ukraine increases as a country of origin and Sarajevo increases as a destination point within BiH.

For the *Province of Kosovo (Serbia)* Hungary and Belgrade have decreased as transit points and instead Bulgaria and FYR of Macedonia have increased as transit points. A new route that appears is: Bucharest to Bulgaria to FYR of Macedonia.

For *FYR of Macedonia*, there is a significant decrease of Moldovan victims. There is an increase in Bulgaria and Bucharest as transit points.

In terms of *Moldova* as a country of origin, it is clear from the data that Bucharest and Sofia increase as transit points for Moldovan VoT. FYR of Macedonia increases as a destination country.

There is a need to further examine the findings of the Raviv and Andreani 2004 report and the findings in this article by considering a wider selection of data. Preferably, it would be useful to go through the entire body of data for the countries and the province featured in the report, in case of limited resources or time, the data may be restricted to comparing only 2000 and 2004. Given that trafficking routes can change rapidly, it may also be useful to focus on monthly changes within 2004.

It is clear that alternative paths are being taken by traffickers to move VoT, there is a need to heighten levels of security at these new routing points. A trend in the use of false documents calls for enhanced methods

of detection. Such findings challenge other arguments cited earlier that there has been an increase in legal documents.

A trend in the use of false documents calls for enhanced methods of detection. In the FYR of Macedonia and the Province of Kosovo (Serbia) there has been more internal movement. Thus, there is a need for heightened attention in identifying trafficking networks that are operating.

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