

ASSESSMENT REPORT

FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE IN SOUTHERN SERBIA

NOVEMBER '23 - APRIL '24

NO NAME KITCHEN



“The areas of Horgoš, Kikinda and Subotica have been cleaned up”

Bratislav Gašić, minister of internal affairs of Serbia

Serbia represents a crucial waypoint along the Balkan route. While migration paths mark the lives of thousands of people crossing borders in search of safety and dignity, Serbia has witnessed violence, cruelty, and illegalities in recent years. The events detailed in this report are no exception.

On October 31st, 2023, in the Subotica area near the Hungarian border, a Special Police operation was launched. Bratislav Gašić declared that they "will not move from here until every person responsible for any criminal act is removed," referring to shootings on the night of October 27th involving people on the move (PoM), resulting in three fatalities. This event was used as a pretext by authorities to execute an operation seemingly prepared in advance. Hungarian authorities also participated, deploying policemen and Special Forces.

While authorities' rhetoric has been used to justify illegal practices and human rights violations, public opinion has remained largely silent. On November 17th, the entire northern border area with Hungary and Romania was forcibly evacuated. 7,000 people were relocated to different official camps in southern areas without being informed of their destination. They were not allowed to take their personal belongings, which were confiscated by the police, and suffered physical violence, as reported by respondents. The brutality of the operation, the suffering inflicted on the people, and the mistreatment of PoM, including minors, illustrate how displacement has been planned and used as a tool to implement a violent system to 'manage' migration.

In an effort to monitor operations, stand with the people, and denounce systematic violence, the No Name Kitchen (NNK) team has been following the displacement of people to the South, where PoM have been detained and silenced by racist, Islamophobic, and security-based rhetoric. This report serves as an in-depth overview of the current situation in Serbia over the past several months. It is crucial to understand that Serbia's situation is intricately linked to the European Union's (EU) border strategy. In recent years, the EU's approach has shifted from strict control to externalization, evident in substantial agreements between Brussels or EU member states and countries like Turkey, Tunisia, or Morocco. This externalization of borders now extends to the Balkans, where aspiring EU members, such as Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, must adhere to European Commission guidelines.

NNK has been present on the ground since 2017, witnessing significant violence against migrants and asylum seekers on a permanent basis. Nowadays, the impact of border externalization in Serbia is profound, resulting in forcibly keeping people away from northern border areas, leading to instances of humiliation, violence, and arbitrary detention at the hands of authorities. Since the Belgrade government's eviction of camps in the north and subsequent relocation of people southward, substantial changes have reshaped the landscape. NNK's project in Subotica has ceased due to the absence of migrant populations, but new operations have emerged in the southern regions of Serbia.

Our aim is to shed light on how recent agreements between Serbia and the European Commission, as well as with EU member states like Hungary or Austria, affect the lives of thousands, even if sometimes, somebody, could think that some lives, some migrants, some humans, don't matter.

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People on the move looks for shelter in Obrenovac Asylum Centre, near Belgrade.



ANALYZING BRUTALITY: ILLEGAL OR INHUMAN?

Thousands of people cross the Balkan countries every year, including Serbia, usually with no intentions to stay in this region. These borders are de facto considered a transit zone. People on the Move (PoM) are coming from eastern countries, the majority are obliged to cross Serbia but in most of the cases, people never consider Serbia as a country of arrival. People's goal is to continue their journey towards Central Europe. For this reason, PoM try not to leave any proof of their stay in Serbia, avoiding starting any type of asylum procedure in the country as well as avoiding leaving their fingerprints in Serbia. The lack of access to legal counseling, misleads indeed the people to perceive the registration upon the Serbian administration as a risk that could jeopardize their asylum request in other countries based on the Dublin Regulation that prevents people to apply for asylum if they have done it already in other country following the same Regulation; regardless the fact that Serbia is not included in the EURODAC database¹.

While crossing Serbia, people are in an administrative limbo that easily drifts them into an illegal status: PoM have no resident permit, no visa, no asylum procedure in place and are therefore considered illegally present in the territory by the local authorities. From January to November 2023 around 101.000 people have transited in Serbia; just 181 people have applied for asylum in the country (UNHCR, 2023)²; all the rest has been in this limbo.

When someone is illegally present in the territory of Serbia, the person has two obligations: (1) leave the country, (2) regulate the status. If one of the two conditions are not met, authorities are allowed to: detain, arrest, and deport the person (APC, 2013)³. This is the legal ground that is justifying PoM's relocations currently ongoing in Serbia since December, 2023.

More specifically, authorities have the right to detain a person who is illegally present in the country up to 180 days, as it is currently happening in Padinska Skela and Dimitrovgrad prison, according to data collected by NNK during the here presented study. The authorities also have the right to both relocate the people in different Transit Centers and to charge a fee to the individuals due to their illegal status. In some specific cases, deportation is also a legal option authority might go through.

These practices, when justified by law, should assure human treatments to those involved. Serbian law claims indeed: regardless of the status of an individual, human rights are met; every person must receive emergency medical care and preserve the right to ask for asylum. NNK research reveals serious gaps in this regard and has identified the violation of those rights that must be respected.

People met by NNK reported degrading and violent treatments by the authorities during the latest evictions and relocations as videos demonstrate⁴. **Unjustified isolation, food poisoning, physical, verbal and psychological violence, are the most commonly mentioned.**

¹Eurodac is the EU's asylum fingerprint database. It contains the fingerprints of all asylum applicants from each Member State and prints from persons apprehended in an irregular border crossing.

²[Western Balkans, UNHCR, 2023.](#)

³[enhancing Asylum System in Serbia, APC, 2013.](#)

⁴[MUP, Republike Srbije](#)



TIMELINE OF ABUSES

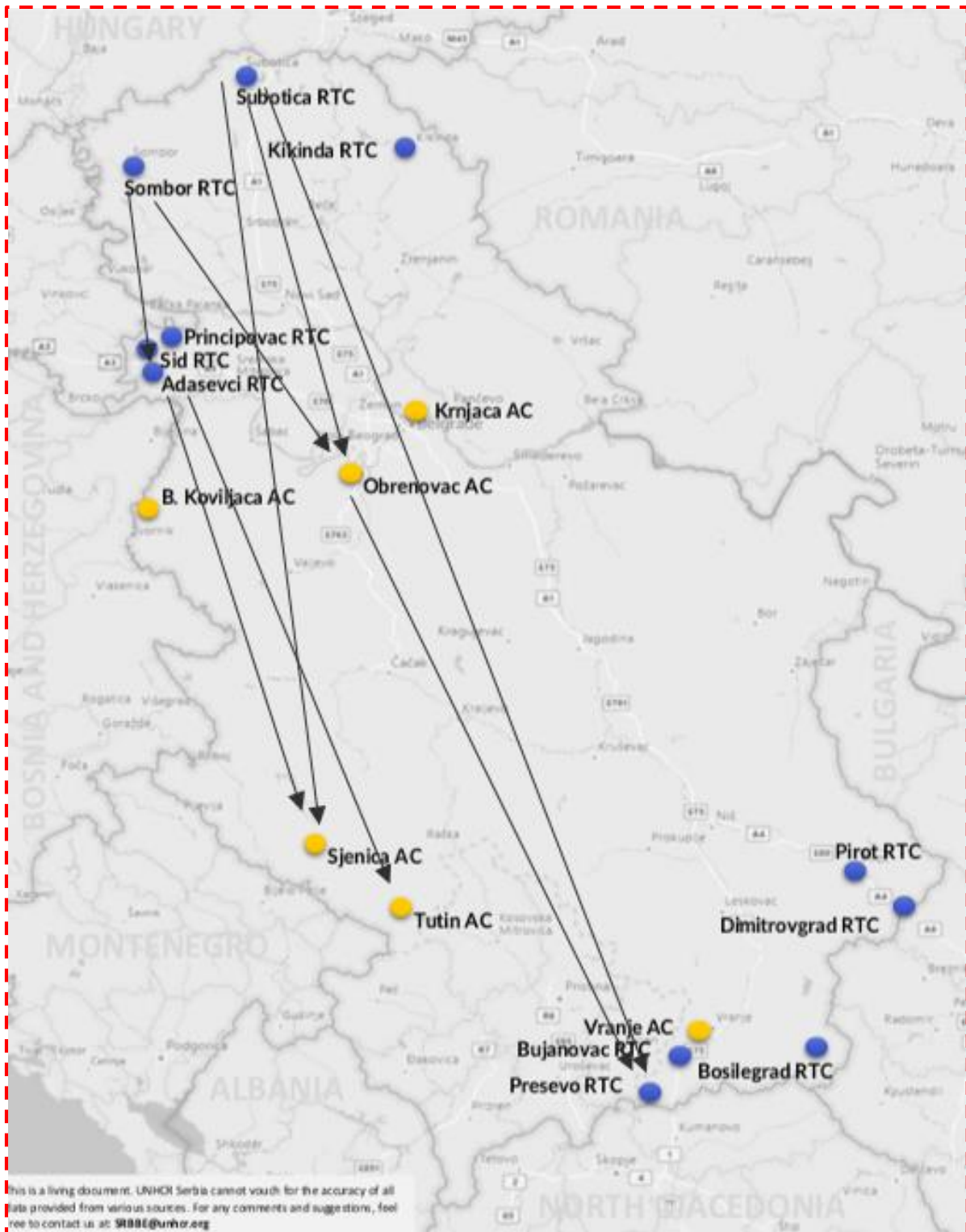
October, 27 th	Two shootings involved PoM is used as a pretext to launch a massive operation against PoM, including arbitrary detentions and evictions.
October, 31 st	A Special Police operation is launched: Hungary forces participate on it to stop trafficking and to identify smugglers ⁵ .
November, 7 th	The Reception and Transit Center (RTC) in Subotica is evicted and closed. People is forcibly moved to southern facilities. In the following days, more operations and evictions followed.
November, 15 th	The Northern area at border with Hungary and Romania is completely evicted. 7.000 people are forcibly relocated in different RTCs and Asylum Centres (AC) in the south -Sjenica and Tutin- and in the north -Adaševci RTC and Principovac RTC-.
November, 21 st	The RTC of Sombor is evicted and shot down.
December, 28 th	Due to the ongoing reallocations, the Camps in Šid are overcrowded with a total of 1.700 POM being hosted. Seven buses are fled by the police from Šid to Sjenica and Tutin, at the border with Montenegro. After this event, the camps in Šid were closed.
January, 8 th - 12 th	Eviction of Principovac RTC in Sid and Banja Koviljica RTC.
January, 13 th	The last evictions of jungles and squats are carried out in Šid. People is taken to the South.
January, 30 th	Police operation in Mali Zvornik, Loznica ⁶ . PoM taken to the south.
February, 18 th	50 people relocated from Obrenovac AC to Pirot at the Bulgarian border.
February, 26 th	Obrenovac AC empty. 6 asylum seekers remaining after the eviction of the hosts inside the camp and the jungle in the outskirts. People is taken to Tutin.
March, 22 nd	A total of 500 people are detained inside the Sjenica and Tutin camps.
March, 26 th	Violent eviction in Sid. Police burns tents and take 10 people to Sjenica.

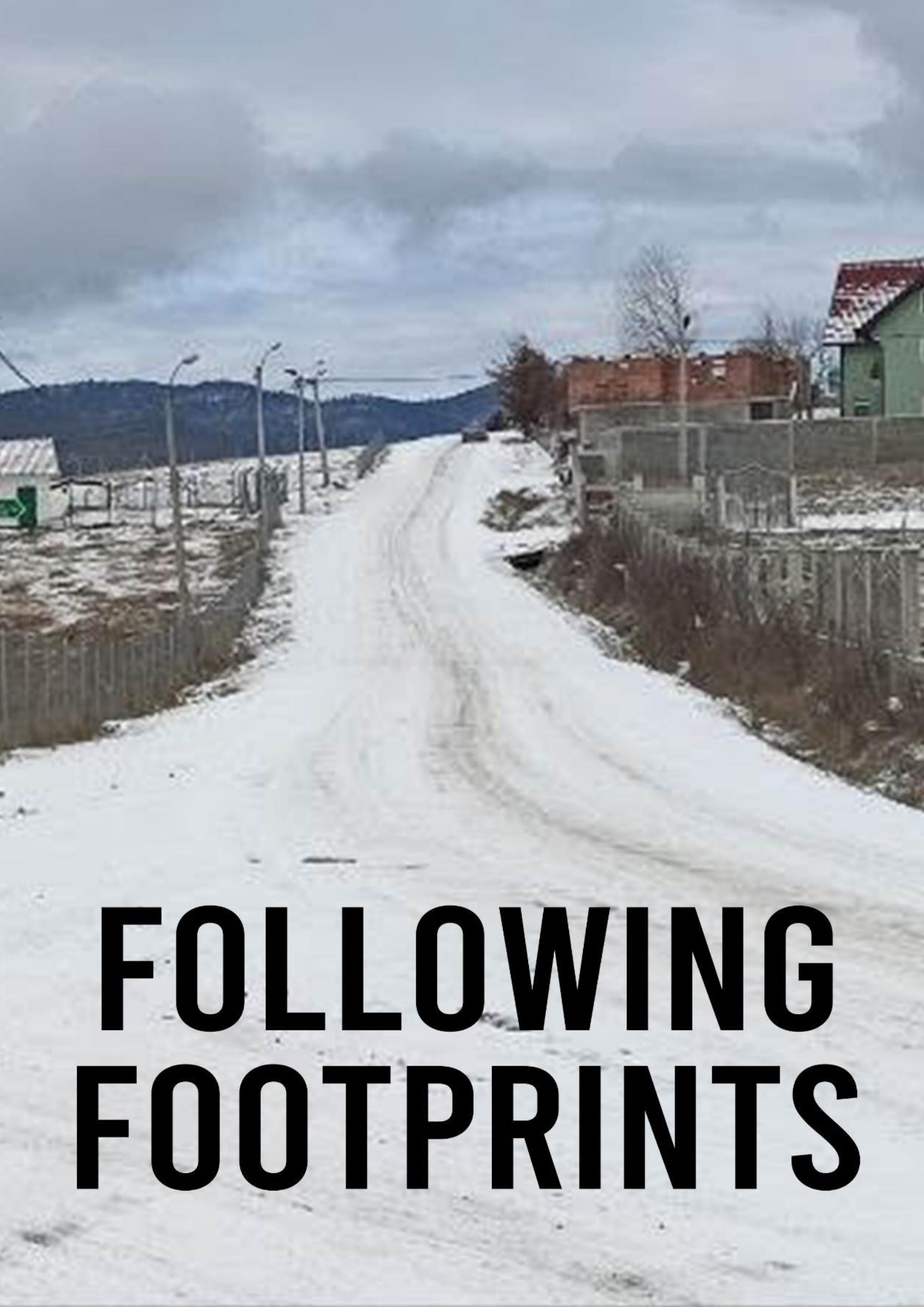
⁵ BalkanInsight, [click here to know more](#)

⁶ N1, [click here to know more](#)

MAPPING FORCED DISPLACEMENTS

Before the Operations launched at the end of 2023, a total of 7.000 people were present in the North of Serbia at the borders with Hungary, Romania and Croatia. This population was considered in transit with the main intent of reaching Central Europe throughout the Balkan Route. The Serbian and Hungarian authorities involved in the operation carried out between October and December '23 transferred the people either directly to the south of Serbia, or to the camps nearby Šid, before the final reallocation in the south, as shown in the map below.





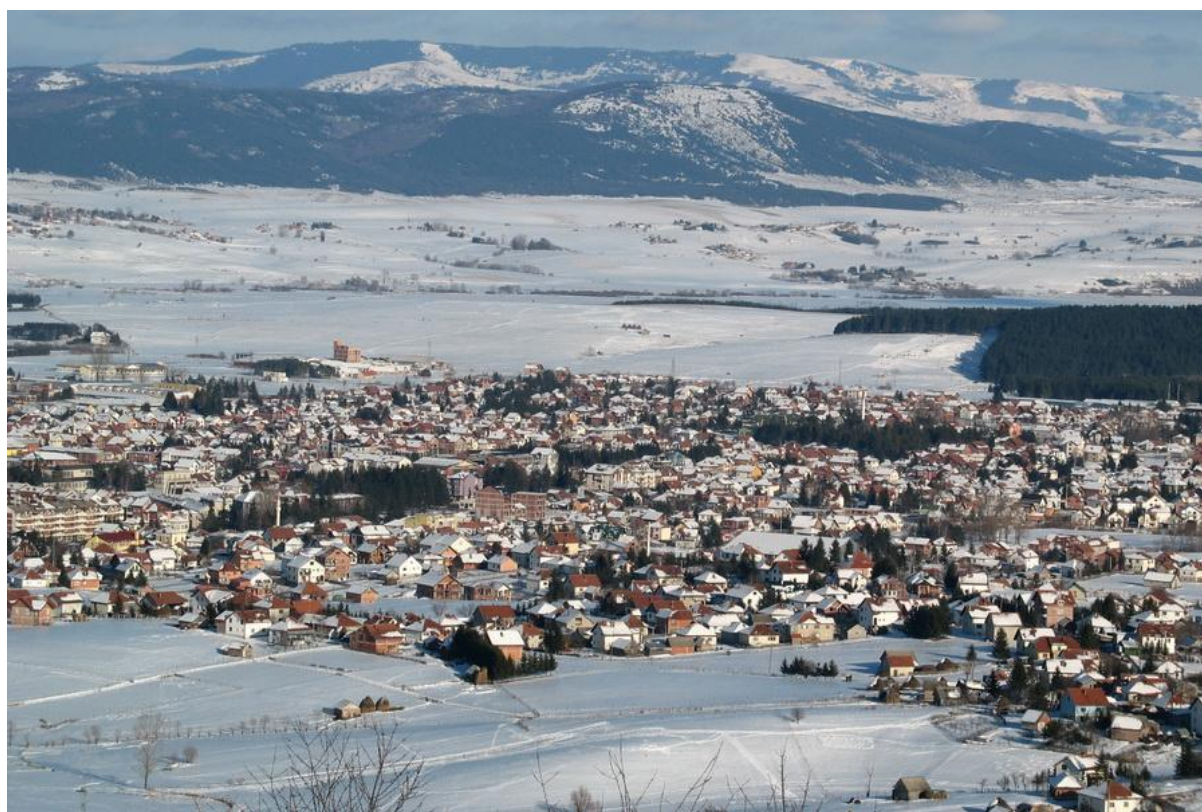
FOLLOWING FOOTPRINTS

SERBIA-MONTENEGRO BORDER

During the first 3 days of assessment, the team went to the Serbia-Montenegro border and visited Sjenica and Tutin, two cities that host a camp where the people that were taken from the North were transferred. The first day the team drove from Šid to Sjenica, 311 km.

SJENICA

Sjenica is a town and municipality located in the southwestern part of Serbia, on the vast Sjenica-Pešter plateau, and geographically located in the central part of Sandžak. The population of the municipality, according to the 2022 census, is 24,083, while the town has a population of 12,989. Sjenica is also called the Siberia of Serbia. It is located at an altitude of 1,026 meters above sea level, one of the highest towns in Serbia and the Balkans. Temperatures fall below freezing on average 134 days per year, with the first freeze in late September and the last in early May. The local people of Sjenica are Bosniaks, Serbs, Albanians, Montenegrins, Turks, Romani and others. Most of the population in Sjenica are Bosniaks or Muslims by ethnicity (77.79%), followed by Serbs (16.03%) and Romani (0.35%).



The mayor of the city is Munib Mujagić who is part of the SPP (Justice and Reconciliation Party, formerly known as Bosniak Democratic Union of Sandžak, political party that represents the Bosniak minority in Serbia). The city center of Sjenica is quite small, the Palestinian flag hangs on the main square, and there are different cafes and bars; most of them are halal and people on the move are joining these places and they go to the public mosque to pray. Sjenica is known to be a welcoming place⁷, in 2013 local people and the municipality had mobilized to welcome and support PoM.

The camp in Sjenica is an Asylum Seekers Centre, it is located 10 minutes walking from the city center. The first camp of the city was opened in the “Hotel Berlin” in 2013.

⁷ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sjenica-rasirenih-ruku-docekuje-azilante/25191050.html>

Due to the increased influx of migrants in March 2017 and due to relocations⁸, the capacity of 200 beds was extended to an additional 250, in a renovated building of the former textile factory "Vesna." (KIRS 2019). The old Hotel Berlin, with inadequate conditions and collective dormitories in the hall, was closed in July 2018. According to the report "Conditions in reception facilities" (ECRE-AIDA) written by Nikola Kovačević⁹, in 2020 most of the people (93%) accommodated in the center were unaccompanied minors. In 2021 the camp was almost empty —it hosts around 10 people; in 2022 there were around 80 people. In 2019 the camp was renovated, and it is still based in one of the buildings of the "Vesna" factory.



This camp was never really populated or reached by the people. Since the camp opened, the people there have mostly been taken there by the police. The location is, in fact, 1 hour from the border with Montenegro, but is neither located on the entrance route to Serbia, nor on the exit route from the country. **The camp is strategically located in a place where, on the one hand, people do not arrive by their own; and, on the other, from where people struggle to leave.**

NNK's team approached the camp first in the evening of the 14th of January at around 10.30 pm. The gates of the camps were still open until 11 pm, before this time there were some people coming back from the city center and there were no police outside from the camp.

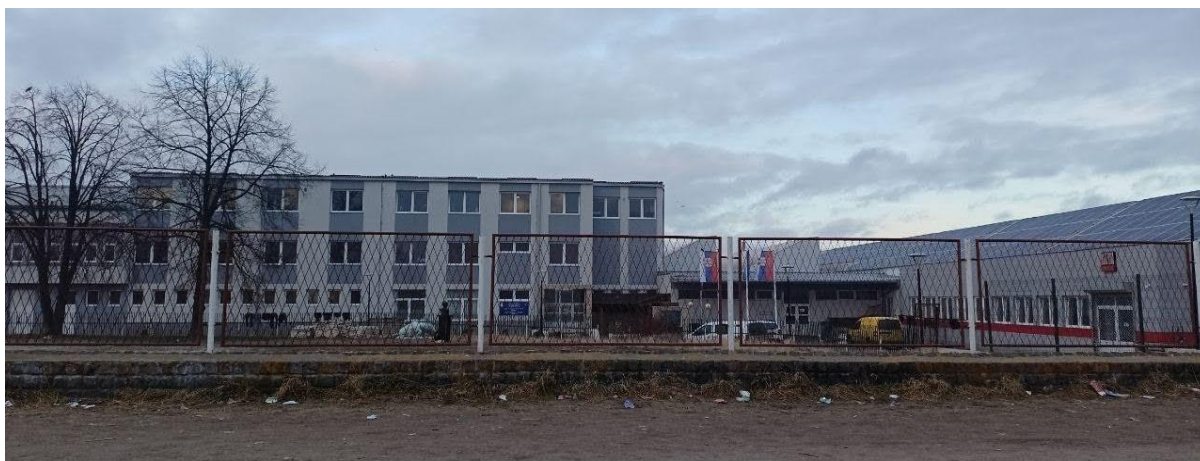
On the 15th of January, NNK's team went to the camp again at around 11 am. While reaching the place a police van that stopped a group of people and screamed at them to show the ID card of the camp and then go back there. Outside the camp there were a lot of people. When the area outside started to become crowded the police arrived and asked to show our documents, papers of the organizations and they prevented the team from continuing to talk with the people for at least one hour. While the police were checking, a member of the KRIS arrived and stated that volunteers of Kuhinja Bez Imena (No Name Kitchen in Serbian) are not allowed in the camp because of "issues in the past"; NNK's team repeated that it was not their intention to enter. Another actor arrived, a person from SIGMA PLUS¹⁰, a Serbian organization funded by UNHCR that provides in the camp Serbian lessons to asylum seekers (in the camp there were just 5 asylum seekers) and legal advice, he was really careful on giving information but he expressed that NNK is welcome in Sjenica.

⁸ <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/17/serbian-town-takes-in-refugees-evicted-from-belgrade-05-17-2017/>

⁹ Conditions in Reception facilities - Nikola Kovačević

<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>

¹⁰ <http://www.nvosigmaplus-learning.org.rs/>



NNK had the chance to talk with the people and spent quality time together. While chatting, NNK's team got to know that the **majority of people gathered there because of the relocations from the North of Serbia, both from Šid and from Subotica and Sombor.**

Different people said that after the eviction in Subotica they were taken to the prison in Sremska Mitrovica, they spent 2 months there and then they were directly taken from the prison to Sjenica camp. NNK's team met some people who was already in contact with the teams in Subotica or in Sid. The guys expressed that **three days earlier, buses had arrived**¹¹.

The following day, 16th of January, NNK's team came back to the camp at around 12 am and managed to spend more time with the people in the field in front of the camp. The police didn't stop the team and the workers of the camp didn't complain about our presence there.

This time, the people that had already seen the team the day before were chattier, and NNK's team was also invited to share some rice with chicken that the people were cooking outside the camp.

This time, there were several fires outside, at least 6, and people were divided in groups. They expressed that in the camp they provide food 3 times per day, but sometimes they prefer to cook for themselves. The only problem is that the police allow just medium small pots. Going more deeply on the discussion about the camp, people **complained about the doctor**, that was not always there, and mostly they were saying that the doctor does not provide medicines or painkillers. People also said that they have rooms for 8 people, and some of them expressed that the heating system was not working. People mostly complained about some **tensions between groups in the camp.**

NNK's team noticed several people under the **influence of drugs**, in particular one of the minors. **This guy explained that he, with his friend that was a minor too, had already tried two times to enter Bosnia but that they were pushed back.** Two people expressed that the **police had beaten them the night before** inside the camp and **stolen the medicine for epilepsy** from one of them. NNK's team met one old guy that was shaking and really hungry, but didn't understand which type of problem he had.

In general, **people have given the team back worries and a sense of loss.** They were sharing with the team different concerns: about being stuck, being pushed back to Bulgaria and not finding a way to continue the trip because the costs, with the police operation, are rising. They asked "when will the Hungarian border open again?" Some of them expressed that they wanted to wait until the end of

¹¹ From Šid, because the 12th of January there was an eviction in the squats and jungles in Šid.



winter and then go back to Subotica; the majority were making plans to cross into Bosnia and then continue from there.

Even if NNK's team joked, laughed together with the people, there is a deep atmosphere of hopelessness. **The psychological violence enacted by this operation was visible, palpable.** Leaving the place at around 4.30 pm (unfortunately it was too cold to stay longer outside) NNK's people saw movement of taxis, cars and some people getting ready continue their trip to find a safe place.

TUTIN

On the 16th in the morning NNK's team went to Tutin. The road that connects Sjenica and Tutin crosses the Pešter plateau and is around a one hour drive. The road was built only some years ago, and now it is a far better connection to Tutin than going via Novi Pazar. It consists mostly of fields and mountains with some small villages with a few houses and cute mosques.

Tutin is a town and municipality located in the Raška District of southwestern Serbia. According to the 2022 census, the municipality has a population of 33,053 people, while the town has a population of 11,169. During World War II, Tutin belonged to the Italian protectorate of Albania from 1941 to 1943 and to the Albanian Kingdom from 1943 to 1944, which was a client state of Nazi Germany. Most of Tutin's population are Bosniaks (92.01%), followed by Muslims and Serbs.



The current camp is located in the village called Vele Polje, **4 km far from the city.** Within the vicinity, there are only two houses and one small shop. The architecture of the camp makes it look a prison, and it is really isolated. In the garden of the camp there are games used in playgrounds for kids.

NNK's people arrived at around 10 am, parked near the little shop, and walked to reach the camp. There were no people outside. At the gate of the camp, a guy from Iraq that expressed that he had recognized NNK's team because he had been in Sid before. NNK's people chatted a little, then one person from the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRM) arrived, and from a distance, said "You are No Name Kitchen, you are not allowed in the camp". The team explained that they were not inside and that they didn't want to enter. **He expressed that it was forbidden to stay at the gate,** and that the only place to stay and conduct distributions would be outside of the shop, where a police car was parked. **The CRM expressed that there had been more people a few days ago, but that everyone had gone to Bosnia.**

After the interaction with the Commissariat NNK's people decided to drive to the city center, and 2 km from the camp there are some shops. After walking around the city, and heading back to the camp, four people from Morocco **explained that they were taken by the police in the Subotica area. They spent 2 months in Sremska Mitrovica prison, and then the police took them to Tutin.** They explained that they wanted to continue their journey to Europe from there.

SERBIA-BULGARIA BORDER

MOKRA, BELA PALANKA

Following the report of Nikola Kovačević¹², we found out about the existence of a camp in Mokra, a really small village (300 inhabitants) in the municipality of Bela Palanka, half an hour away from Pirot. In the village there were some houses, people were working in fields around, no shops.

In all the areas NNK's people found different signs of the **INTERREG IPA-CBG Bulgaria-Serbia¹³, the European program to sustain the development of the Serbia-Bulgaria border started in 2015**. In this program EU invested 8.696.074 euro in nature protection and **joint risk management**.

The camp was located on the **top of a mountain**, probably Mokra Mountain. The architecture was impressive, the buildings of the camp were before apartments for tourists placed in the middle of the forest. The road to the camp was a narrow mountain road with many hairpin bends.



NNK's people reached the camp with the car. It was empty, after a couple of minutes a worker came out, she expressed the camp was **evicted 8 months ago (in May 2023) and there were 200 people inside** that had been brought to Preševo and Pirot. It was a reception center supposed to be a family camp (APZ/CZA) but as the worker expressed it was not, it was hosting only adult men.

NNK's team was wondering if it was not present in the UNHCR report because it was empty, but the last report showed that it is not the criteria used, in fact the camps that were already empty in December in the Subotica area appeared in it.

PIROT

Pirot is a town 40 km far from the Bulgaria border, the population is mostly Serbs. The city is known for the mountains that surround the area and it is a tourist destination for natural explorations. From 2016 the city started to see the entrance of different people that were crossing from Bulgaria and continuing their journey then through Belgrade.

¹² <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>

¹³ <http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/overview-0>



Different news reports the presence of people on the move around in the city and, differently from what is happening in Sjenica, locals people complain about the presence of the people¹⁴. In September 2023 there was a police operation in Pirot¹⁵ against an Afghan group accused of smuggling; after the operation the 15th of September the Commissariat Nataša Stanisavljević visited the camp and pointed out the necessity to expand it. **In the same days when in the North the police operation was starting the Gendarmerie were around in the city of Pirot¹⁶.**

In the days that NNK's people stayed in the city, no refugee/asylum seeker was met; no one in the autobus station, no one walking in the city, no one at the supermarket. In previous visits in this area, most recently August 2023, NNK activists were reporting the presence of people in the city, near to the river that runs through the city.

The camp was opened in 2016 and it is located at the beginning of a natural park, in the surrounding of the camp there are trekking ways and to reach the city there is a walking road and a normal one. No public transport connects the camp to the city that is far half an hour walking.

A police car with two police officers was parked outside near to the white van of MSF. The only people that were outside from the gate of the camp were 3 patients of MSF; we decided to go at the gate of



the camp and see what would happen. There were more than 8 workers of the camp watching us, and at some point the boss of the camp from the CRM came to talk with the team. NNK's people asked him why there were no people going outside to the camp and why there were no people at all in the city. He was really careful about giving information, and pointed out at first that NNK is not allowed to enter the camp. **He explained that from the end of October the police are controlling (day and night) the exit of the camp and if the police find people in the street take them to the camp.** NNK's people asked if the camp became a close camp and if it was possible to talk about **detention**. He answered that the camp is officially an open camp and the KIRS is not involved in these decisions, police put in place these measures and people are allowed to go out from the gate of the camp just for a few meters to reach the van of MSF. He answered that it is need an official permission. NNK's people decided to organize some recreational activities outside of the camp, in the same spot that MSF was using and asked the Commissariat if it was okay to let the people go outside for joining the activities. The answer was negative.

¹⁴ <https://www.plusonline.rs/da-li-je-stanje-donekle-pod-kontrolom-migranti-u-gradu-vi-e-nije-vest-kao-ranije->

¹⁵ <https://www.plusonline.rs/pu-pirot-pripadnici-mup-a-uhapsili-etiri-iregularna-migranta->
<https://www.plusonline.rs/manojlovi-broj-iregularnih-migranata-ne-jenjava-otvoreno-novo-prihvatili-te-u-dimitrovgradu->

¹⁶ <https://www.plusonline.rs/ekskluzivno-sa-lica-mesta-pripadnici-andarmerije-danas-na-keju-priveli-grupu-iregularnih-migranata->

DIMITROVGRAD

The city is at the border with Bulgaria and is crossed by the highway that arrives to Bulgaria then; NNK's team moved from Pirot to Dimitrovgrad using the normal road, the highway was patrolled. Different police cars were moving up and down. On the normal road too we have been stopped by the police, we paid a fee because of the speed and to do all the procedures we spent one hour with the police. The city of Dimitrovgrad is small, the number of people living there is around 6000.

The Minister of Internal Affairs Gašić visited the city the 30th November 2023¹⁷ and made a speech in the Serbian Regional Center of the Border Police towards Bulgaria: *"The police will additionally strengthen their presence on the borders with Bulgaria and North Macedonia in order to suppress irregular migration, and in the coming days a headquarters will be formed in Preševo (sic) We will stay in this area, but also in the north of the country, until we completely solve this problem"*.

The Reception and Transit camp is located near to the city center of Dimitrovgrad. It is a family camp. There was a family walking outside. Nobody at the gate. NNK's team waited at the door, rang too, but, even if there were cameras, no workers showed up. In report of Nikola Kovačević about the Conditions in Reception facilities, referring to Pirot camp, Bosilegrad camp, Dimitrovgrad and Bela Palanka one, is stated that all of these centers offer very basic, aging facilities and are inadequate for anything other than very short-term stay: for example, the center in Dimitrovgrad only offers collective dormitories, and there are no separate male and female toilets.¹⁸ Dimitrovgrad camp was made by **containers** and, as Kavačević said, this facility for sure is inadequate.



SERBIA-KOSOVO/NORTH MACEDONIA BORDER

VRANJE

Vranje is the biggest city in the area, with 80.000 inhabitants. The news of August 2023¹⁹ reported the intensification of controls of cars and autobuses in Vranje to "control" the movement of people from Vranje to Belgrade.

¹⁷ <https://www.juznevesti.com/Drushtvo/Gasic-Dodatno-angazovanje-policije-na-granicama-sa-Bugarskom-i-Severnomo-Makedonijom.sr.html>

¹⁸ <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>

¹⁹ <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/policija-vranje-migranti-pojacana-kontrola/>

The Asylum Seekers Camp in Vranje is located near to the highway. The official website of the Commissariat says that the camp was opened in May 2017 in the renovated Motel “Vranje” and that it has the capacity of 250 persons. When NNK’s team visited the camp the Commissariat said that there were no people around, just **Ukraine’s cars parked outside**, in a dedicated parking place.

In the camp are hosted just people from Ukraine, even if it is not mentioned anyway that the camp is dedicated to people that come from a specific place of the word. The installation seems much newer than the average (new children's playground, cleaner buildings, higher technology), the difference with the other camps was really visible. The CRM didn’t allow the team inside, even if it was snowing, and didn’t give the team the chance to have more information.



PREŠEVO

Preševo is a town and municipality located in the Pčinja District of southern Serbia. As of the 2022 census, the municipality has a population of 33,449 inhabitants. Preševo is the cultural center of Albanians in Serbia. Albanians form the ethnic majority of the municipality, followed by Serbs, Roma and other ethnic groups.

On 7th March 2017, the President of Albania Bujar Nishani made a visit to the municipalities of Bujanovac and Preševo, in which Albanians form the ethnic majority. Shqiprim Arifi is the mayor of the city from April 2022, he is the head of the Alternative for Changes and the. Arifi is a representative of the country's Albanian community. Around the city it is possible to notice some Albanian flags hanging everywhere. Here, the team found a sign that put in evidence **the support of the European Union to the city**. The economic support for the municipality of Preševo is part of an European project that include the support to the city of Vranje an Bujanovac too²⁰

In September the Minister of the Interior of Hungary, Bence Retvari, came to Presevo for a visit to the area with Serbian Assistant Police Director Vasiljević. **The Hungarian minister “emphasized the importance of the joint work of Serbia, Hungary and Austria to preserve the security of the external borders”**.²¹

The camp of Preševo is located outside of the city, in the suburbs, but around there are different shops, cafes and supermarkets. NNK’s team talked a little with the guy from Security, he expressed that the people arrived there from Macedonia and someone from Bulgaria, without understanding if

²⁰ <https://europa.rs/eu-supports-development-of-vranje-presevo-and-bujanovac/?lang=en>

²¹ <https://n1info.rs/vesti/zajednicki-odgovor-na-iregularne-migracije-vasiljevic-i-retvari-obisli-prelaz-presevo/>

it was the police taking them there from the Bulgarian border. He expressed that there were less people than in the previous month, he expressed that no one was taken there from the north, NNK is not at all sure of that. The energy outside from the camp was quite tense and there was a policeman and some Albanian guys quite chatting but in an unpleasant way. Not a lot of people were coming inside and outside from the camp, NNK's team went on the back of the camp and saw a lot of people sitting outside. When the assessment team tried to reach them but a policeman stopped them.



BUJANOVAC

Bujanovac is a town and municipality located in the Pčinja District of southern Serbia at the border with Kosovo e Macedonia. As of the 2022 census, the municipality has a population of 41,068. The majority of the population is Albanian.

The camp is quite isolated, 1 km and half far from the closed shop and around 20 minutes walking to the center of Bujanovac²². NNK's team had the chance to talk with 3 people. **A couple from Iran** explained to us their route: Turkey, Greece and Macedonia and then they entered Serbia two months ago. Now they're waiting because they don't have enough money to go. Also, the team met a **young man (21 years old) from Afghanistan who arrived with his mother (around 65 years old - she is sick)** and his brother. They arrived two days before our arrival, they walked for three days crossing the border from Bulgaria with no food and water. They were coming back from the shop. It was snowing and super cold. They expressed that the conditions of the camp are not the best, the food is not good and rooms are dirty. They expressed that the doctor is not giving medicine for allergies. In the camp they are giving clothes to the people. They were saying that the people are moving from there to Belgrade and then to Bosnia. They declared that they tried to buy tickets for the autobus to go to Belgrade but they didn't sell them the tickets saying that *"the police will make problems for us if we do that"*.

²² Do not follow Google maps to go there from the highway.



INFLUX OVERVIEW

The figures in the table show how the number of PoM hosted in the camps have been directly affected by the reallocations conducted at the end of 2023. According to data gathered by NNK, any of these camps was actually ready to host such a number of people while the living conditions are barely acceptable, as shown in the hereinafter analysis.

LOCATION	CAMP	DECLARED CAPACITY	HOSTS SEPT 23 (SOURCE: UNHCR)	HOSTS DEC 23 (SOURCE: UNHCR)	HOSTS JAN 24 (SOURCE: NNK)
Serbia / Montenegro border	AC Sjenica GPS location	350	65	378	250/300
	AC Tutin GPS location	230	28	290	150
Serbia / Bulgaria border	AC Bela Palanka GPS location	280	N/A	None	None
	Pirot RTC GPS Location	190	259	67	50
	Dimitrovgrad RTC GPS location	84	N/A	28	20
Serbia / Kosovo / North Macedonia border	Vranje AC GPS location	150	53	47	50
	Preševo RTC GPS location	1100	236	738	250/300
	Bujanovac RC GPS location	255	73	169	40/60

The reallocation affected the migration flows. NNK gathered testimonies of people intending to continue their journey towards Bosnia while they were not considering this option before the reallocation. At the same time, NNK recorded an increase of arrivals in its project in Bihac (Bosnia); an aspect that indicates how the trend was already in place. NNK also got testimonies of groups pushed back from Serbia to Macedonia. In this scenario, the most impressive is probably a pushback reported by [The Guardian on 22nd of February](#) when 50 people were forced to walk, naked from the Serbian side of the border with North Macedonia across the snow.

LIVELIHOOD IN THE CAMPS





MAIN FINDINGS

POLICE MISTREATMENT

- More than 50% of the people met by NNK, declared to have suffered some type of violence during the reallocation; including psychological mistreatments (threatening, mockery, offense) and physical violence (kick, thrust, cuff).
- At AC Sjenica (Montenegro border), two people claimed the police in the camp beat them the night before, stealing drugs for epilepsy to one of them.
- Both in AC Sjenica and Tutin, a total of 15 people declared to have been incarcerated in Sremska Mitrovica prison before the reallocation to the southern camps. It is believed the same treatment has been suffered by other POM during the operation.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES

- In all the camps the lack of medical services as well as the poor quality of those few services provided has been highlighted by the people NNK met.
- In all the camps, people on the move have declared that in most cases, even if the doctor might visit them, there will be no prescription of any drugs afterwards which increases the loss of trust in the service.
- NNK team had noticed a severe sense of loss by those met. Due to the reallocations, POM nourished a feeling of not being able to control their own life. For those brought to the prison before, this feeling is even more emphasized.
- POM shared their main worries: to be stuck, to be pushed back to Bulgaria and to not find a way to continue their journey. Even if these meetings were full of laughs, the hopelessness' atmosphere was crystal clear. The psychological violence enacted by this operation was visible, palpable.
- NNK noticed several people under the influence of drugs, including minors. A man explained to the activists that he, with his friend who was a minor too, already tried twice to enter Bosnia and they were pushed back. A fact that increases anxiety and psychological distress.

HARSH CONDITIONS

- Hygiene conditions have been highlighted as a great concern by the majority of the people. Rooms are overcrowded and considered dirty; access to water is not assured on a regular basis; in some cases, the heating system was not functioning while the degrees easily go under zero; food portions are not deemed enough by those interviewed and in any case the food is judged poor in terms of quality by the totality of those met.
- Tensions between groups in the camp have also been highlighted as a challenge by some of those interacting with NNK.
- A part for Sjenica AC and Dimitrovgrad AC, the camps are usually located far away from the city center, in remote and isolated areas where there is a poor presence of shops, hospitals and other service in the proximity.

NO NAME KITCHEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

At the beginning of 2024, NNK decides to temporarily freeze its project in Subotica (north of Serbia) and move to the south to assess the situation where reallocations were happening in order to monitor the abuses and to identify the needs of the people suffering those abuses.

While NNK continues to be present in Šid (north of Serbia). The reallocations brought challenges, violations and needs, this is why NNK intent is to launch its new project in the area, here below the actions foreseen for the first three months of operations (March – May 2024).

CARE ON THE MOVE: PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

People have expressed their suffering of psychological distress due to three main reasons: 1) fear police and violence; (2) feeling alone and abandoned, and 3) lack of ownership of their own life. NNK proposes to set a psychological support hotline managed by a therapist, to provide individual sessions, mediated by a translator when needed, and face-to-face support and leisure activities carried out by field activists trained on peer support and emotional accompaniment.

PROTECTION: INFO POINT & LEGAL ADVICE

It has been identified how people feel isolated, with a poor long-term perspective and a lack of knowledge of the new context they got forced to be. NNK will provide basic information on how the asylum system works, as well as informing about services available and the referral system in place. This activity is forerun by proper legal training sessions and workshops for field activists.



MONITORING & REPORTING BORDER VIOLENCE

As described in the report, the perpetration of abuses of power, illegalities, and inhuman treatments continue to happen in daily basis. NNK will bring its know-how to the south of Serbia to collect testimonies of pushbacks and internal violence episodes for future publications and advocacy efforts.

In parallel, NNK will keep its assessment process in other locations following the influx of PoM during the next months. Sjenica and Tutin are close to 3 different borders: Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro. NNK intends to monitor the areas of Priboj (Bosnia-Serbia border), the closest city of Dobrakovo in Montenegro, and the entrance of people from Kosovo. At the time of writing, the border with Bosnia and Serbia is quite active and pushbacks are a matter of fact.

The Joint Police Operation is the expression of the new "migrations management" plan designed by the UE; a well-organized action to externalize its borders, enabling the violation of human and civil rights, the instrumentalization of people's lives and the perpetuation of systemic violence.



**Many thanks to all the people who have collaborated
to make this assessment report possible.**



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