

People on the Move in  
Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018:

# STUCK IN THE CORRIDORS TO THE EU





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# List of abbreviations

**BiH** - Bosnia and Herzegovina  
**DRC** - Danish Refugee Council  
**EC** - European Commission  
**ECHO** - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations  
**EU** - European Union  
**INGO** - International non-governmental organization  
**IOM** - International Organization for Migrations  
**IPA** - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance  
**MSF** - Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)  
**NGO** - Non-governmental organization  
**NFI** - Non-food items  
**RSD** - Refugee status determination  
**RC** - Red Cross  
**SIPA** - State Protection and Investigation Agency  
**SFA** - Service for Foreigners Affaires  
**TRC** - Temporary Reception Center  
**UN** - United Nations  
**UN Agencies** - United Nations Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies  
**UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
**UNICEF** - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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# Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has been part of the “Balkan route” for smuggling people, arms and drugs for decades, but also a migrant route for people who have been trying to reach Western Europe and the countries of the EU in order to save their lives and secure a future for themselves. While in 2015, when millions of people arrived in Europe over a short period of time BiH was bypassed by mass movements, the situation started changing after the closure of the EU borders in 2016, and later on, in 2017, with the increase of violence and push backs in Croatia, and other countries at the EU borders. It was just a matter of time until the route was redirected.

In March 2016, the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted the Migration and Asylum Strategy and Action Plan for 2016-2020, stating that they were aware of the increased migrations flows through the Balkans. Nevertheless, exactly two years later, in March 2018, while thousands of people were living in the streets, fields, forests, or makeshift camps, all over the country, it became clear that the relevant organizations and bodies did not prepare for the increase in arrivals of people to BiH.

Most of the people who arrived in BiH had been on the move for several years. A significant number of them were stuck in the EU – specifically Greece and Bulgaria - for several years (mostly since the EU-Turkey deal and the closure of the borders in 2016). Not having other options, while they were indefinitely waiting to have asylum interviews in Greece, reunifications with families elsewhere, or relocations within other countries in the EU, they decided to start walking. Some people came from Bulgaria, where they were deprived of their basic rights for months, and locked in detention. Some started their journeys several months before reaching Bosnia, and among them were people from Syria, Iraq, Iran, as well as other countries. On numerous occasions we were told by the people who arrived in Bosnia: “We need to begin life, waiting around does not mean having a life.”

According to IOM data over 23.000 people came to BiH during 2018. Out of this number only about 7 percent found a way to submit the request for asylum through the nightmare of the existing bureaucracy. However, since 2004 until the end of 2017, 381 person submitted their asylum request: 9 were granted refugee status and 85 subsidiary protection (mostly people from Syria, Iraq, Serbia, and Turkey).

The data provided by the Ministry of Security, specifically from the Department for Asylum, states that in 2018, 961 requests concerning 1.567 persons were submitted. Out of this number, 449 requests concerning 611 persons are considered as resolved: 426 requests are stopped before the procedure (people left the country in most of the cases),

21 requests were dismissed and 2 persons got a positive response and subsidiary protection. Asylum requests were filed by people coming from 27 countries<sup>1</sup>.

From *Monthly Operational Updates on Refugee/Migrant Situation*, it can be observed that information about increase in number of arrivals was available, and that all the actors were aware of it. Even though the UN agencies and related organizations, together with the government of BiH, did initiate some kind of activities, not enough efforts were made to coordinate an adequate response and to ensure that laws are respected, existing regulations and procedures improved, accommodation provided, health protection secured, or at least substantial funding made available to cover all of this.

Until May 2018, the Asylum Center Delijaš, run by the Ministry of Security, was the only place where people who applied for asylum were accommodated. Since the beginning of 2018 its capacity of 160 was far from being enough. The Refugee Center Salakovac, run by the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, with a 250-person capacity, which was designated for people who already obtained refugee status, and citizens of BiH who were repatriated from other countries, was mostly empty. Only in May 2018 the first families who arrived to BiH, and were about to start the asylum process, were placed there (around 200 of them).

The first round of funding from the European Commission (EC) started *arriving in June 2018*. Until then, the majority of the activities made regarding the securing accommodation for all people on the move stuck in BiH were reduced to *negotiations* between local, cantonal, state, UN agencies and EU bodies about the establishment of the reception centres.

The first center run by the IOM was improvised in the abandoned Sedra hotel in the Cazin municipality, near Bihać, in August (for around 400 families). Both of the interventions, the opening of Salakovac and Sedra, were made under huge public and media pressure.

Delijaš (official asylum seeker center)	The maximum capacity is 160, but the numbers are changing all the time
Ušivak (camp adapted from former army barracks)	520 – 550 (last available data were published in December by the local media)
Salakovac (official refugee center/camp)	229 asylum seekers and 33 recognised refugees (people from Kosovo mostly who came in 1999)
Bira (abandoned factory hall)	2,200 (data obtained from media reports)
Miral (abandoned factory hall)	730 (data obtained from the media reports)
Borići/Đački dom (abandoned/unfinished building for student housing)	500 (data obtained from the media)
House of All (private house)	75 (Data obtained from residents)
Sedra (old hotel)	411 (data obtained from the media reports)

While most of the people were heading towards the northern parts of BiH, close to the borders, the authorities in these areas were not so open to plan accommodation centers under their jurisdiction. Additionally, the EU requested that no center is placed within a 30 km radius of to the border, which proved almost impossible having in mind that

<sup>1</sup> According to the same source, in 2017, 341 requests concerning 382 persons were filed. The decision was issued in 342 cases concerning 360 persons, while 17 cases were transferred to be resolved in 2018. Out of 342 cases, 291 were dismissed after persons left the country, 26 got negative answers and only 7 positive, subsidiary protection.



some of the places with the biggest concentration of people (around Bihać and Kladuša, mainly) were less than 100m away from the EU border.

The accommodation solutions provided at the end of the year, in the majority of cases and for the majority of people, has been below any standards needed for humane and dignified life: people have been placed in factory halls without any privacy, there are no adequate provisions of NFI including linen and hygiene products, food is often not substantial or made in a way to fulfil requirements of vulnerable categories, be it people with chronic diseases or children and pregnant women. The majority of the privately provided accommodation, usually by the citizens of BiH themselves, is of far better quality and standards. However, this is costly for the individuals supporting the people and consequently (since these individuals are not provided support by either government or UN agencies) of uncertain sustainability. While at the moment any solution is better than nothing, given the risk of having people freezing to death in the outdoors, it needs to be pointed out that there was sufficient time and funding to find more humane, dignified and sustainable accommodation for them.

This research was conducted with the aim of evaluating the conditions that people on the move face upon their arrival to BiH: what are the problems the potential asylum seekers faced within BiH; where and how they live; who is taking care of them; are their human rights respected and to what level; are there any integration programs in place, and if yes, what type. Those are just some of the questions the authors sought to find the answers to, while speaking to people who arrived in BiH, representatives of the government, NGOs, UN agencies and UN related organizations and their partners, and/or local activists.

While this report was written in the period between September and December 2018, it is based on in-depth insight in the situation at the country level, throughout 2018. The methodology for this research was based on the principles of [participatory action research](#), which allows for involvement, activism and social critique, for the purpose of knowledge production aiming towards the improvement of the conditions for the social group that the researched focused on.

Both of the researchers have been present as activists (as someone providing immediate humanitarian assistance, but also reporting on human rights violations and engaged in advocacy) in the field since January 2018, when the increase in people on the move entering BiH became visible on the streets of many cities, including Sarajevo, Bihać, Velika Kladuša, but also Trebinje, Zvornik, Bijeljina, etc. While information gathering for this report intensified since September 2018, because of their active ongoing engagement, the authors were able to draw from examples and descriptions of the situation in the field throughout the year.

In addition, since September 2018, we also visited the places where people on the move who entered BiH have been residing, whether official camps or unofficial settlements, or places where local people are hosting them, to conduct the interviews with various actors in the field, including volunteers, NGOs, people on the move, representatives of state institutions and UN agencies and related organizations, as well as local solidarity networks and other citizens. The information available in various documents, media, and other publications was also used for the report.

This report is based on numerous encounters, both in formal and informal settings, and discussions with all actors present in the field throughout the year. Nevertheless, the stories of the people on the move we present in the report are stories given to us directly by people wanting their stories to be made known to the public. Given that the people in question are considered to belong to vulnerable groups, we are making their stories anonymous. While the stories are in some way relating to the individual cases we

would like to underline that those are not unique stories, but many of the experiences are shared by many people stuck in BiH.

At the start of the research for this report, our main aim was to evaluate the conditions for the integration of people who expressed the wish to remain in BiH, and who were waiting for a resolution of their asylum application. However, since we noticed that not much attention was paid to the overall situation, and that the issues of potential access to asylum and integration have been connected to a complete disinterest to find solutions for the manageable humanitarian crisis that was unfolding, we decided to extend the scope of the report. Thus, in this report, we address the overall situation regarding people on the move and potential asylum seekers in BiH.

Due to its post-war dysfunctionality, BiH is in a specific situation concerning the response to any humanitarian (no matter how small) crisis. Given that this state has been under the formal **semi-protectorate** of the international community, there are still **too many actors involved in “running” the state**, and as such, all of them contribute to the maladjusted responses to any “crisis” in the country. This, along with the fact that BiH is **among the most corrupted countries** in Europe and not politically stable, could be seen as one of the reasons for the EU’s decision to direct all its donations toward IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, instead of the local government. Additionally, **2018 was election year** in BiH and the state government should have been changed by the end of the year, which did not happen even in January.

Nonetheless, stripping the state authorities of any responsibility, and taking over their role, could be dangerous. Unlike international organization, state institutions could be held accountable and have more obligation to work transparently. Engaging the state institutions could be used to make them more functional, but the EU decided to act differently. This now created the situation where blame is always possible to be shifted among actors, and this has always been an excuse for everyone (be it state or local actors, UN agencies and related organizations present in BiH or EU delegation in BiH) for inaction when it comes to any critical situation. In this case, organizations that became responsible for distribution of money are stating that the government has been responsible for the provision of the accommodation, while the government has stated that it is the UN agencies and their related organizations that received funding for that purpose.

However, it needs to be emphasized that the majority of people on the move we interacted with are actually crossing BiH on their way to EU countries. Whether they entered Europe by sea or land, they arrived to BiH via EU member countries – so for many of them this is just a confusing corridor that somehow exists in the middle of Europe. While most of the people we encountered told us they are planning to leave BiH and continue towards the EU, we did meet a significant number of people who told us that they would be willing to stay if they had the option. However, not enough efforts were made to create the conditions needed for them to stay.

Our observation based on the way decisions around support of the people who arrived to BiH have been made, from issues of registration, through to the provision of accommodation, health support or children’s education, is that everyone, state institutions but also the UN agencies and other who are involved, treat this situation as a temporary issue, as if there is a specific group of people who is passing through BiH and once they go through, the issue will be resolved. One example for this is that even where it was possible to renovate more permanent buildings, such as the Ušivak camp, containers were brought in. So the permanency is avoided at any cost, no matter the fact that the buildings could be used later for some other purpose if there is no need for accommodation any longer.

However, the fact is that many people who arrived under the impression that they will only pass through BiH, are getting stuck here. After encountering violence by the border police in Croatia; or after seeing the pictures from the streets of Paris where people are sleeping rough for more than a year; or after being tired of travelling for years; or simply after not finding better solutions and a future in the EU, many people are considering, or have already decided to claim asylum in BiH. But one year after the number of people on the move started increasing significantly, no integration centers have been opened, and the state institutions did not establish any permanent or even semi-permanent institution to offer support. There are no talks about increasing the capacity of the Sector for Asylum, or any kind of free legal aid. Additionally, all the plans to enroll children in schools are on temporary basis providing just some classes rather than really involving them in the classrooms.

What we observed in the field during the research, but also during a year of active engagement is really concerning. We have seen a strongly established non-functional system responsible for protection, security, and human rights. At the same time, this non-functionality actually benefits all the actors who bear responsibility for securing protection and fulfillment of human rights, be it local institutions or the international organizations present in BiH for the issues related to migrants and refugees and asylum seekers. However, the “ordinary” people - whether they are on the move, living in BiH or wanting to seek asylum in BiH - are those whose rights are being violated on a daily basis.

Below we discuss the general situation in 2018 regarding people on the move and potential asylum seekers, and further discuss the conditions for their stay in BiH.

# Overview 2018



*Sedra Camp, Cazvin.*

Starting with the beginning of 2018, an increase in arrivals of people on the move and potential asylum seekers in BiH exposed the incapacity of the state government and the UN agencies in the country to deal with the higher numbers of people in need of assistance. Due to the 1995 [Dayton Peace Agreement](#), political arrangements provided for BiH are complex, and they always facilitate excuses for the non-functionality and non-implementation of the laws.

However, regarding this specific issue, it needs to be emphasized that as early as 2004, the UNHCR handed over refugee status determination (RSD) to the state of BiH. After supporting the adoption of the relevant laws and frameworks, the UNHCR determined that the state has a functioning national asylum system. Prior to that, it was the UNHCR who determined refugee status within the country.

The asylum and refugee issues are state level responsibilities. The Ministry of Security is in charge of the entire asylum process, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is in charge of providing support after the refugee status determination. However, the office of the UNHCR has remained open in the country, along many other international organizations and representatives who perform a role of observers and advisers in a semi-protectorate created with the peace accord, and they took upon themselves to work on strengthening the asylum process. The monitoring role of the UNHCR is provided for in the [Law on](#)

**Asylum of BiH.** It is important to note, that the IOM office is also significantly present without always having a **clear mandate** (dealing, for example, not only with issues of migration but also with reparations for wartime sexual violence or prevention of violent extremism). During 2018, the IOM took control almost entirely over the operations related to people on the move in the country<sup>2</sup>, being even responsible (together with the UNHCR and UNICEF) for the managing and distribution of donations coming from the **European Commission**.

Since 2013, BiH has also had the **Migration Coordination Body**, led by the Ministry of Security, which included some members from the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. Even though not officially members of the Migration Coordination Body, it can be read from the Coordination Body's Reports that it has consultations with the EU Delegation, UNHCR and **IOM in relation to the drafting of relevant laws**, as well as drafting the **Strategy and Action Plan**. Some of the activities have been part of the visa liberalization processes for Bosnian citizens within Schengen countries, as well as part of the EU pre-accession process.

As mentioned previously, although the state institutions and the international organizations were aware of the increased migrations flows throughout the Balkans, they were unprepared to prevent the humanitarian crisis that unfolded in 2018. The humanitarian crisis could have been greater had the local population and volunteer groups not responded by providing places to stay, to shower, and in many cases taking care about different medical issues, including providing care to people with cancer or disabilities.

During the period of November 2018 through to January 2019 in the camps opened in Una Sana Canton an epidemic of scabies emerged. The issue was tackled by the personnel in charge of health in the camps to some extent, but very often volunteers were the ones to deal with it in the end. The scabies spread because the screening that took place during admission into the camp was not done thoroughly and because there was no sufficient number of showers with hot water provided in the camps. Also, linen provided on the arrival was not changed. In order to adequately respond to the scabies outbreak all linen and mattresses were supposed to be destroyed in the camps and replaced by the new ones. However, this did not occur as only the personal clothes of people in the camp were destroyed.

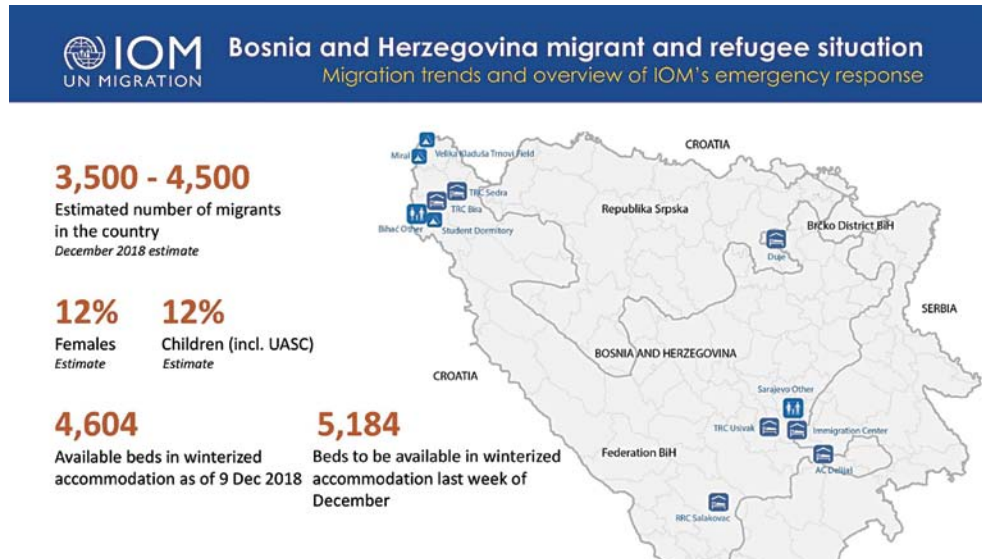
## (Un)reliability of the data

The steady intensification of irregular migration through Bosnia and Herzegovina has been noted since the end of 2017. By the end of April 2018, the number of people reported to enter BiH was 2.762, while already by the end of May 5.290 people were registered. In November, the number of officially registered entries was 23,132. The **numbers presented** by the Council of Ministers of BiH for the period of January 1st to November 29th 2018, indicate that out of the 23.058 persons that entered BiH, 21.759 persons expressed intent to seek asylum and 1.356 persons submitted requests for asylum. People who were registered in BiH come from **67 different nationality** groups.

Below in the report, we discuss the problem regarding the government's active prevention of applications requesting asylum. However, there have been active guessing and bidding games around the number of people who at any given time have been in BiH. What is obvious is that no one with any certainty can say how many people are in the country at the moment<sup>3</sup>. According to the estimates presented by the IOM and UNHCR during the Interagency **Coordination Meeting** on December 7th, 2018, there were around 5,300 refugees and migrants in BiH, of which around 4,000 were in the Una-Sana Canton (the canton on the North-West of Bosnia and Herzegovina bordering with Croatia). Almost at the same time, the head of IOM, published a map on his **twitter account**, showing slightly different numbers.

<sup>2</sup> The IOM officials often describe it as "support to the local authorities".

<sup>3</sup> This situation is more or less similar in all of the countries along the route, having in mind that a number of people will always stay unregistered. In BiH it is even more complicated since people are moving between neighboring countries, entering more than once, and registering also more than once.



In general, the data collection in BiH is not particularly reliable since the 1990s war, and this is also visible when it comes to the issue of migration. The numbers presented by officials at the end of November point to three categories they present in their reporting – the number of irregular entries, the number of people that expressed intent to seek asylum, and the number of people who were able to submit a request for asylum. Both the government and the UN agencies and related organisations explain the big difference in numbers between those who expressed the intent to ask for asylum and those who succeeded in applying as being proof of people being exclusively in ‘transit’ through BiH.

However, a significant number of people we encountered, living outside of the system or in the centers, showed us that they only have expired Papers of Intent to Ask for Asylum, which they got at the first registration after entering the country. In some of the cases, even people we met in the official camps and people who were registered in private accommodation, had their asylum seeker cards expired (which they received upon registering their request for the asylum) since the officials either refused or did not care to renew. Without valid registration, none of the people who came to BiH exist, nor are they able to seek and enter the process for seeking asylum. It also creates the possibility for the authorities, but also all other actors, to manipulate the numbers of people for different purposes, and puts these people in a very dangerous position, prone to become victims of any type of crime, or human traffickers.

# Issues of Registration and Access to Asylum

As it appears from the statements of the officials, as well as what is seen in the field, the majority of people who irregularly entered BiH registered their intent to seek asylum with the border police or the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA)<sup>4</sup>. After the intent to seek asylum is expressed, the official paper (Intent Paper) containing the photograph and basic data the person gave to the authorities about themselves is issued. Since it is written in the local language only, many people do not know what the paper contains, some only understood the expiration date of the document, others did not even understand that<sup>5</sup>. At this first registration stage their fingerprints and photographs are taken at the SFA offices. This paper is usually the only ID document that people have in BiH. It is valid for 14 days since the registration and it allows a person free movement and some form of 'legal' presence in the country.

After the registration, given that they were not provided with either transport to the Asylum Center in Delijaš or anywhere else (as it is provided by Law on Asylum in Article 34), many people started turning to the UNHCR office in Sarajevo where they would also be additionally registered. This practice lasted until the summer of 2018. After that, people had to find



*Dački dom Camp, Bihać.*

<sup>4</sup> Either in their field offices or in main office in Sarajevo

<sup>5</sup> Given the different areas they are coming from many cannot even read the Latin script, for some of them we are not sure whether they could even understand the expiration date of the document. At the same time, we noticed many mistakes in these papers, from age, nationality, to family relations.

their way to camps on their own. It is important to note, that both the registration in the SFA office and the registration in the UNHCR office were only possible during weekdays and working hours. After hours, during weekends and holidays, it was impossible to register or get any support, if available at all.

## Free Legal Aid

According to the Law on Asylum, those who express the intent to ask for asylum in BiH are supposed to be offered free legal aid for their asylum application. Given that there is still no free legal aid institution that is **supposed to be provided** for by the Ministry of Justice, those who decided to apply for the asylum, are - by large - represented by the local NGO Vaša prava, one of the partners of UNHCR.

Vaša prava has been involved in this issue for many years. The **NGO has been established by UNHCR** in 1996, and since 2005, they officially work with asylum seekers. They have information since at least 2015, when an increase in the number of arrivals could be identified. So, they also know the practice and how complicated it is to go through the procedure with the existing bureaucracy and inside of a very complicated state structure. Nevertheless, even in December 2018, Vaša prava did not publish any type of report about problems related to the status of asylum seekers, or legal issues they are faced with daily, which could be expected from the civil society organization dealing with human rights if aware of the violations. All the data and information they had was transferred to the UNHCR, their main donor, who publishes parts they find relevant. From the regular monthly reports it can be seen that UNHCR did warn about this issue, but we cannot know whether anything has been done to improve the process.

Vaša prava are also the only legal aid organization that has access to the **Immigration Center in Lukavica**, which is of a closed type. People who are there have the right to ask for free legal aid and, if requested, are allowed to be visited by Vaša prava. However, some people we spoke to were not aware of free legal aid at all, especially in Velika Kladuša or Bihać, while in Sarajevo the situation was to some extent better as people were generally better informed. Nevertheless, with the amount of cases Vaša prava have at the moment, it is almost impossible to rely only on them to offer free legal aid.

## Problems with Access to the Asylum Process

A significant number of people we encountered expressed their interest in exploring the potential to seek asylum in BiH. The same was acknowledged by the UNHCR at the December coordination meeting, when they concluded that “the greater number of people are interested in pursuing an asylum claim,” and that “the limited access to the asylum procedure is becoming an increasingly significant issue”<sup>6</sup>.

Among those who did not find a way to submit their request are many minors who are traveling alone. One of them is K. from Iraq. He came to Sarajevo in April 2018, and did not have regular papers even in December. He registered when he entered the country, but since then he stayed in squats or with local people, and even though he tried to register, he was rejected when he went to SFA. K. was hoping to get registered, but we met a number of minors who were afraid to register with their real age as they were told that there is a possibility to be sent to the closed facility (Duje), which did happen a number of times.

<sup>6</sup> Reports from these meeting are distributed by email to those who participated, and one of the researchers attended the meeting in December.



Even though the Ministry of Security is, according to its own Rule book (art. 8 and 9), as well as the Law on Asylum (art. 15), obliged to provide all necessary information regarding the asylum process and procedures in a language that the person understands, the vast majority of persons contacted for this research have been interviewed for registration of the Intent in English (even when the police field notes would say that the person speaks very poor English), and issued papers in the local language. Furthermore, there are no proper official information points across BiH that could provide potential asylum seekers with the adequate information about the process. The only information booklet available is the one produced by Vaša prava which contains basic information in several languages. The booklets are available at their offices, UNHCR offices, official border crossings, SFA offices, and in some camps and centers.

According to the UNHCR's data, **only 7% of people who arrived** during this year have managed to file their asylum claim. The UNHCR finds that the main obstacles to achieve this are the need to register an address (including for those staying in reception centres), and the limited capacity of the Sector for Asylum for staffing reasons,<sup>7</sup> which is an issue the Ombudsperson office also outlined **in their report**. The procedure for claiming asylum is complicated. The request can only be submitted within 14 days of the expression of intent to ask for asylum. However, the condition to submit a request for asylum is the registration of the place of residence within BiH. Given that large numbers of people do not have access to accommodation in this short period of time, they are not able to register the place of the residence (given that the state, even though obliged by the Law, has not provided them any). Consequently, many missed the deadline for the submission of the request to seek asylum.

This leads to the situation in which people who registered their intent to ask for asylum have lost their right to apply because they could not obtain the required documents (residency registration) within the required deadline. People who are prevented from applying for asylum are consequently left without any status in the country (after the expiration of the document of expression of intent to ask for asylum). By being prevented to register as asylum seekers people are also prevented from accessing any rights that they are entitled to, by law.

## Registration Issues

Also of concern is that there are people who, even though have official accommodation, were not availed the required registration for asylum seekers. During our field visit to the Salakovac<sup>8</sup> camp in late September 2018, we discovered that the majority of people there did not have valid registration documents, even though they were under the responsibility of the government (more exactly the Ministry of the Security). The people residing in the camp had different papers, either intent to seek asylum paper or asylum seeker cards. However, the documents they had were expired. In December, the situation had not changed much<sup>9</sup>. Faced with the fact that people are losing 5-6 months of asylum process, we decided to look more in detail regarding the registration procedures across the country and in the newly opened camps.

In the Asylum Center in Delijaš,<sup>10</sup> the procedure had been established previously and as such it seems to function in accordance with the Law on Asylum, more or less. However, with the new camps, even getting information on procedures is a complicated

7 Until spring this year, only one person was working on asylum claims. During the year, two more were employed.

8 Salakovac is officially a refugee camp under the authority of the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. In May 2018, an emergency decision was adopted to open the camp for the newly arrived asylum seekers who were sleeping in the public parks. The authority over the camp was transferred to the Ministry of the Security.

9 At the start of the New Year, we have received information that some people in Salakovac were finally issued asylum seeker cards (yellow cards), in some cases after more than 6 months.

10 The asylum Center in Delijaš is the only official center for accommodation of people who seek international protection/asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is under authority of the Ministry of Security of BiH.

endeavor, even when representatives of the SFA are present inside. The situation varies from camp to camp.

In the Bira<sup>11</sup> and Sedra<sup>12</sup> camps, the procedure is unnecessarily complicated. Upon arrival, people have to register as residing in the camp. This registration, the camp card, contains basic data, and is issued by the IOM and each resident has to have it with them at all times. Once in the camp, people must go to the SFA office in Bihać to register their status in the country. At the beginning, people were just going there and waiting for hours in lines, but in winter, the rules changed and up to 50 people could come, while the lists were made in the camp. In Ušivak<sup>13</sup>, SFA is present inside the camp. After the camp was opened, the rule was established that even those in Sarajevo, who are not residing inside the camp, are obliged to come to the camp to register their status, which is not convenient for many of them having in mind that the camp is far away from the city, and that they need to use public transportation to get there<sup>14</sup>.

Among the people in Velika Kladuša we met some who arrived in BiH in November 2017. However, due to constantly being on the move, they lost their asylum cards (yellow cards). After one year, they still did not know how to obtain new cards. They remain people without any status, outside of the system and without any kind of help. What is also worrying is the registration and issuance of birth certificates for children born in BiH. In March, one baby was born in Sarajevo. The family was living in Delijaš, but given that the asylum center is far away from the hospital, and that living conditions the future mother described to us were bare minimum, they had to leave it for the birth of the child. Before and after the baby was born, a group of citizens took care of the small family. Because they left Delijaš and lived in private housing, they were stripped of their registration in the center and were asked to cover their hospital expenses, which was impossible for them. In the end, after interventions from volunteers, this was done by the IOM.

However, more complications ensued around the birth certificate of the baby. Nevertheless, none of the organizations responsible for providing assistance knew how to approach this issue. Finally, the host family took upon themselves to do this as the legal deadline for the registration of the baby was fast approaching. On the very last day, and thanks to the assistance of local volunteers and the clerks in the municipality, the baby was registered and received the birth certificate. Some other families have done the same, registered their babies with the help of the locals. However, three babies born in the hospital in Mostar during the summer, whose parents were residents in the Salakovac camp, were not registered even at the beginning of December.

11 So called temporary reception center opened by IOM in an abandoned factory hall in Bihać in November 2018.

12 So called temporary reception center opened by IOM in an abandoned hotel in Cazin at the end of July 2018.

13 So called center for accommodation of migrants opened by IOM at the end of October 2018 in an abandoned army barracks near Hadžići.

14 People with asylum seekers status, or any other, do not have free or discounted public transportation, even though most of the inspectors do not mind that.

## From Nepal to Mostar

When a person from Sarajevo met A. (23) from Nepal, who was sleeping on the street with her husband, A was 7 months pregnant. It was summer, but there were many rainy days. The night before, a Friday, they arrived in Sarajevo hoping to get into some camp where she would be able to give birth to their first child.

They registered with the border police after entering Bosnia and expressed their intention to seek asylum. The police issued them a piece of paper, in Bosnian, showing the date of registration, their most basic data including name, surname, date of birth, and country of origin.

They were told that they have to go to Delijaš. However, they were not told how to get there or what Delijaš was. From the border they went towards Sarajevo.

When they arrived in Sarajevo, they headed to the UNHCR office as they were told by some people they could assist them. However, they arrived around 6 pm and the UNHCR office closed its doors around 4pm. Given that it was Friday and the UNHCR was not working during the weekend, the next opening day was to be on Monday. They realized they had no other option but to stay outside.

Not knowing how to get to Delijaš by themselves, with no other information, they went to the train station in Sarajevo to get food from the volunteers. They were told by the other people they met in front of the UNHCR's closed doors about the food and NFI distribution by the volunteers that took place twice a day.

At that moment, almost 100 people were sleeping rough in and around the train station and the two of them found a corner for themselves in front of the building. It was mostly single men there. Luckily, local people found them and took them in until Monday when they went to the UNHCR again, and soon after they were taken to the Salakovac camp, near Mostar.

In September, we met the family in the Salakovac camp. Twenty-five days before our visit, A. had given birth to a healthy girl. They were living in one big room in a barrack together with other families. They had a shared bathroom,



living room and a kitchen. The space was nice and clean, and calm. However, they expressed concern that they were still unable to register the baby's name and to receive the birth certificate. It was still the case in December.

The baby was the second child born to parents placed in the Salakovac camp in 2018. Neither A.'s baby nor the other baby was registered on the day we visited Salakovac. Moreover, the parents only had expired papers of the intent to seek asylum even though, they were supposed to already be able to submit a request for asylum.

Baby A. was born in the local hospital. In order to have a birth certificate issued, the local laws require that the baby's birth and name be registered at the relevant municipality within 30 days. The municipality is determined based on the parent's residence at the time of the baby's birth.

At the time we visited the camp, almost all residents of the camp had expired papers. All of them had been living in the official camp, which belongs to the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, and is under the supervision of the Ministry of Security, with the presence of the IOM and UNHCR, as well as their partners in Bosnia.

The problem with registration is just one, among other, for many thousands of people who arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina since February 2018.

# The Situation in the Field

Even though it was already visible in January 2018 that the Balkan route was to be redirected through BiH, many humanitarian aid actors within the country, who had access to the official reports showing growth in numbers of people arriving, were hardly noticeable in the field. Additionally, when civil society reacted appealing for help through the media or in reports done by local volunteers and activists, adequate response was still missing.

This part of report tries to summarize situation in the field throughout 2018 as it unfolded throughout different parts of the country. While people on the move have been crossing the entire BiH and have been present in many towns and cities, due to the highest numbers being only in three cities/towns (Sarajevo, Bihać, and Velika Kladuša) they have also been in the public focus. Thus, most of the information in this report is from these cities/towns. Nevertheless, the report refers to the situation throughout the country when relevant.

Before focusing on specific areas, it is important to note that, whether in Foča, Tuzla, Banja Luka, Mostar or Stolac, local citizens have been providing humanitarian assistance to people on the move. However, it is also noticeable that in the areas with a greater number of people, when finally, NGOs, INGOs and UN Agencies and their related organizations got involved, it created wariness among the local people, and the support decreased. As activists, we understand this reaction to be a response to long experience of witnessing the functioning of the internationally donor driven civil society. The civil society in BiH has been expressing its concerns for years about 20 years of this approach and the hindrances it created to the citizens of BiH. Looking from this angle, it was expected that citizens will react with dissatisfaction and little confidence in



Trnovo Makeshift camp, Velika Kladuša.

big intergovernmental organisations, or some of the international groups of volunteers who are functioning in the similar manners as big international NGOs, and who showed little to no understanding of the local situation and circumstances.

## Sarajevo

Since the beginning of 2018, citizens of Sarajevo have been supporting people on the move by bringing the food, providing warm clothes and shoes, or finding them places to live – even opening their own homes. The only available state run accommodation at the start of the year was the Delijaš Asylum Center, with a capacity of maximum 150 people. However, it is located high up in the mountain and hardly suitable for the refugee and migrant population to live in. It is isolated, and people living in the center do not have possibility to keep contact with their families or friends since there is not WiFi or phone signal, which is, according to the UNHCR standards, of a crucial importance. UNHCR claims that the refugee population has an even bigger need to stay connected having in mind that often they are separated from their families and friends. “Knowing where friends and family are and knowing that they are safe, is of paramount importance to refugees,” UNHCR recommends.

Additionally, around the center in Delijaš there are no shops, or available regular transport to the nearby town of Trnovo. The closest place is a gas station, about 12 km away, which people have to walk to.

Faced with the lack of accommodation, local citizens jumped in doing their best. During the winter, citizens of Sarajevo could see people in the streets and parks, frozen, hurt, lost. Among them, often were children or pregnant women, people with injuries after difficult traveling conditions. The residents of Sarajevo started taking care of them. In the winter 2017/18, one family in Semizovac, with help from volunteers, hosted about 80 people, mostly single men. Since March, one local foundation has helped create shelter for families in Ilidža. Up to 100 people can live in this shelter, which is run by volunteers. The same foundation was paying accommodation in several hostels and hotels during the winter. By the end of spring, a small, local, self-organized group opened a small camp in the suburbs of Sarajevo (Stup). They were offering basic accommodation only for Syrian families. After all of their guests left, the camp closed in the fall. Some local NGOs, upon initiative from citizens and activists, and people from the Bosnian diaspora, additionally helped with finding and paying accommodation for people staying in hostels and hotels, but also helping host families to cover utility bills<sup>15</sup>.

In April, a makeshift camp was created in one park in Sarajevo where over 300 people lived. They were, again, assisted mostly by the citizens who were bringing them food and NFI, as well as giving to some of them access to showers, toilets and even accommodation in their homes which were in the neighborhood<sup>16</sup>.

*Makeshift camp in the Old Town in Sarajevo, April and May 2018.*



<sup>15</sup> Even people from diaspora got involved in helping with providing accommodation during the winter.

<sup>16</sup> During our research in the fall and early winter, we encountered several host families and their guests still living together, in uncertainty in most of the cases due to negligence from the state or anybody but neighborhood and friends.

In that period of time, UNHCR and IOM were providing rooms in hostels for people they determined vulnerable. The UNHCR has been working mainly through its partner local NGOs, while IOM has been more present in the field with their mobile teams, helping with transportation to hospitals, covering bills occasionally, and providing accommodation. Nevertheless, in more than one occasion, UNHCR and IOM asked for help from local volunteers, asking them to accommodate people or take care of the sick.

The non-systematic approach led to many people being left in a vulnerable situation, including the LGBTQ population, victims of torture and war, people with chronic diseases, pregnant women, unaccompanied minors, etc. One example is that of a woman who was placed by a UNHCR partner organization, BH Women Initiative, in a hostel room with two men, complete strangers, while her husband was left to sleep in the street. A second example is that many people got scabies and lice in the places where they were offered accommodation by the UNHCR partners, but were not offered any type of relief for it after they complained. Local and international volunteers, later on, were the ones to help even with this, finding ways to provide showers, and often buying what was needed to treat scabies and lice.

In May, a big group of over 250 people were relocated to Salakovac, near Mostar. However, this only meant the relocation of people living in the makeshift camp in the park at that moment, as the authorities decided to evict the park. People continued to arrive, as summer was nearing, even in greater numbers. Since the end of January 2018 until the end of the year, a minimum of 100 people were sleeping rough on the streets of Sarajevo or in squats at any given moment, struggling to find decent accommodation. For those on the streets the help came mostly from international volunteers and the residents of Sarajevo.

Among people who came to BiH during 2018 there was a certain number of LGBTQ people. This category was not offered any type of special protection, while none of the institutions or organizations involved alarmed or asked for assistance from the local LGBTQ community. When the camps were open, many of them ended in a space that was very risky, ending as victims of violence and even rape. Finally, local LGBTQ groups were involved after local volunteers invited them. Even now it is only when the citizens and volunteers identify the protection needs of the LGBTQ people that they are put in contact with BiH LGBTQ groups.



Ušivak Camp in Hadžići

## Ušivak

The situation became more bearable at the end of October when the Ušivak camp in Hadžići opened with the initial capacity of about 500 people, and the plan was to increase it to about 800. The camp is run by the IOM, while UNHCR is in charge of health care and the vulnerable categories. Most of the people in the camp are single men and they sleep in big tents on bunk beds, with minimum (if any) privacy.

Families and unaccompanied minors are staying in containers, as well as a number of single men. The biggest issues are heat-

ing in tents, and access to bathrooms. Additionally, hot water was not provided in the outdoor showers, even in December. Furthermore, even though designated, in reality there are no clearly separated toilets and bathrooms for women and girls. The security is provided by the IOM who employed a local private security company for this type of job. Unaccompanied minors were not separated in a way that would keep them safe from the others. In Ušivak (as in other new camps) the area for the minors is in between other areas, and easily accessible for anyone. The food is provided by the local charity *Pomozi* through their crowdfunding activities, and prepared by international volunteers. The cantonal Red Cross is not involved, and the IOM was the one to decide on who they will partner with in the camp. The health care is provided during working days by the local private clinic SaNaSa with which the UNHCR made a contract. The access for the media and visitors is provided by the IOM and is selective, and often not even a reply is given to those who request to enter.

One million euros was used to install containers, big tents, a heating system, a kitchen, and to create livable conditions to some extent in this camp. Nevertheless, from what we saw during the visit, minimal efforts were made to ensure the space looks warm or is livable. The camp looked as a place improvised for a short stay.

## The Train station and Alternative Accommodation

Throughout the year, many people stayed in the train station, sleeping in between train platforms, under bridges, in parks, old buildings, in corridors... everywhere. The police was sometimes good, sometimes bad. People spoke about cases of violence, or racism from the police, but also violence initiated by some of the people they encountered at the station. For a while, the police was not allowing people at the train station to sit or spend time in the green areas. Even more, when volunteers approached one of the Cantonal police commanders asking him why the police officers are preventing people from sitting on the grass in the green area around the train station when there is no law forbidding that, and if the same rule would apply for the local population and refugees and migrants, he openly stated that "it is different for them and for the others".

It was also noticeable that, especially at the train station, police used to come with riot equipment and just walk around people who were quietly sitting or eating. This created an atmosphere of fear among some.

Sarajevo,  
train station,  
June.





*Food distribution at the train station, Sarajevo, August 2018.*

Until October, the train station was the place where volunteers distributed food and NFI twice a day. However, due to the constant issues with the police, they changed the place of distribution, going to a less frequented area. At the same time, citizens were helping out every day. Just to mention as examples the local restaurant Zmaj, located at the train station, which used to give out over 100 meals a day to people there, or the local sport facilities that let people have showers.

## Mostar

About 250 people, mostly families, are living in the camp Salakovac near Mostar. The place is run by the Ministry of Security and the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, while the local Red Cross provides food, UNICEF partner organizations World Vision and BHWomen Initiative activities for children, and psychological support. The security is under the state's responsibility, and two unarmed civilians are present at all time at the site, employees of the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. They are the only ones to stay after 4 pm, when all the employees of the NGOs and UN agencies leave since it is the end of the working time for them.

The place seems very calm and people did not complain about anything, other than the fact that they have nothing to do. The place was a camp even before, and small houses with spacious rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens are provided.





In the late September 2018 (4 months after the people moved in), there were still no plans for the enrolment of children in schools, or any other activities in relation to any form of integration. Additionally, one of the families had a child with special needs, but no attention was given to the girl.

Nevertheless, in December, a UNICEF [assessment](#) was made public as well as the plan to enroll children in school, and in February a number of children from this camps (as well as others) started school in special classes organized in local schools.

The access to the camp for the media and visitors is provided by the Ministry of Refugees and Human Rights and is done with no obstacles.

### No support

In the camp Salakovac, we met with a family from Afghanistan with 8 children, the oldest one was a teenage girl with special needs, and the youngest child was 20 months old. Before coming to Salakovac, the family was living in the park in Sarajevo, after they arrived from Serbia where they stayed for 9 months. Before Serbia, they were living in Greece and Turkey.

In Salakovac, they got two big rooms, opposite each other. We found them in a room with clean, but very damaged sheets, and they explained to us that they have only one set of bedding for each person, the same one they got the very first day when they arrived at the camp. They did not complain about the food or living conditions, but about the fact that none of the children was enrolled in school even though they spoke Bosnian/Serbian having in mind that in Serbia they attended a regular school for one year. They also stated that the teenage girl with the special needs did not get any kind of support. Additionally, they told us that there are not enough activities for children in the camp, and that the food is the same for everyone, kids, the sick, the elderly...

The family reached BiH after 3 years of being on the road and traveling through 9 countries in which they stayed for shorter or longer periods. "We are looking for the future," they told us while we were speaking in one of their rooms. "We are on the road to reach some better place for our family, but here, there is nothing. We did not leave our country to live like we live here. We left to have a future. Here, we do not have it," the father of the family told us.

## Bihać

For the first half of the year, the focus of the media and small interventions made by the UN agencies were mostly concentrated on Sarajevo. Not much attention was paid to the border towns of Bihać and Velika Kladuša, where numbers of people had started accumulating since the beginning of the year. Due to the proximity to the border with Croatia, throughout the spring and summer of 2018, this area witnessed a significant increase in arrivals of people wanting to reach the EU. It was again citizens (this time those living in Bihać and Velika Kladuša) who showed solidarity with the humanitarian needs of the newly arrived people in the area. Small local organizations like Solidarnost and Žene sa Une, as well as many individuals (mostly women), were the first to respond, and they stayed active throughout the year. They were those who alerted the public, as well as the city mayor, who later on dedicated an amount from the local budget for the first response.

Solidarnost and Žene sa Une were, at the start, providing basic help, food and NFI. Žene sa Une, a group with over two decades of experience in working with vulnerable categories, engaged their capacities to provide help for children and women, and opening the doors of their safe house accommodating up to 30 people at one time. The local Red Cross responded after the Mayor got involved, and they have remained engaged until today. Together with the IOM and some INGOs, they are providing assistance to people living in Đački dom and Borići, as well as Bira and Sedra.



Borići, September 2018.

### From Moria to Borići

We met Hasan (18) from Pakistan in the Borići camp in September. He came to Bosnia in April, stayed in the Delijaš center for some time. Soon, determined to continue his journey, he moved to Bihać where he had to pay a gang in Borići to even be able to put up his small tent.

Hasan came to Bosnia from Greece where he was trapped in the Moria camp, Lesvos, for two years. After two years, he found a way out of Moria, jumping on a truck and going to Athens where he stayed only for couple of months, eager to leave Greece after everything he went through in Lesvos. While at Moria, he never got a date for his asylum interview or any other paper that would allow him to leave the island.

His journey from Lesvos, took him through Macedonia and Serbia, to Bosnia. He tried the “game”, as every attempt to cross into the EU is called among people on the move, six times. Once he even reached Slovenia, but was pushed back by the police and not allowed to express his intention to seek asylum in the country. The same happened to him in Croatia, several times. One time he was even beaten by the Croatian border police.

“I never tell my family about the real situation,” Hasan told us while we were standing on the hill in Borići above the Đački dom. “I cannot show them this or Moria. But, it is very difficult for me. I am alone, have no money, the police in Croatia broke my phone...” he recalls just some of the issues he has to live with for already almost three years.

He told us, that if he could find a job, Bosnia could be his final country. But, he has no information about the procedures or what to do to find a job. He would also like to enroll to study IT, but he did not know if that option existed for him in Bosnia at all. “I am lost here. I do not know what to do or how to plan my next step. Maybe it was better I stayed in Moria!” he told us while looking over Borići and remembering the place many call hell on earth.

His wish is to reach Spain where, he believes, he will have a chance to work and study. That is the reason he left his country in the first place. In December, he was still waiting for his chance to cross from Bihać.

## Đački dom and Borići

Đački dom and Borići, an abandoned student dormitory and surrounding park, were designated by the city council as temporary accommodation for the people. From several hundreds, the number rose to over 1.200 people by the end of the summer. They were sleeping in extremely dire conditions. Everything was an issue - from security, to hygiene, and food. Nevertheless, during our several visits to this place in spring, summer and fall, we could see many people who belonged to vulnerable categories, from unaccompanied minors traveling alone, to women and children, sick people, living in Borići, some of them even for several months.

For some time, special police forces, with riot gear, were present inside, and the regular police was guarding the entrance. Uniformed officials from the SFA were also present. After a while, the IOM took over security and a private company was engaged, and the police was called only if needed. According to the media reports, while engaging private companies, the IOM responded the cantonal **government's request** to “form a security agency within the migrant centres they run, and to form house rules for migrants, in cooperation with the Foreigners Affairs Office”. On several occasions, residents complained to us about **extensive use of force by SFA officers**, and the special police forces in Borići. They told us that they complained also to the Red Cross and IOM, but see no reaction from them. IOM did not react publicly even after this video was published.

Bathroom and toilet facilities were placed outside, but were not safe for everyone. Women were forced to move around all the time accompanied by men or more than one woman. At some point, the permission was given to Žene sa Une to work mostly with children, but also to provide psychosocial support and activities for women in several places in the Una-Sana canton. Additionally, their safe house became a shelter for families and vulnerable people.



In late spring and during part of the summer, over 100 people were living in the abandoned Pensioner home, near the river, in Bihać. Nevertheless, this place was evicted and the people were moved to Borići and Đački dom where people lived in a building that was not safe to be used at all, and in the surrounding park. The presence of smugglers was easy to notice, as well as other criminal activities. However, the security never focused on these issues. Rather they were looking into ways to frighten away the people who were trying to help. While speaking to some of the citizens of Bihać who self-organized to provide help from the first day, we were told about security officers who stopped them from coming near the park and distributing help. They also told us they were told openly not to come to the area, and it forced them to find another solution in order to continue helping. On several occasions, we accompanied some of the citizens during the distribution that was always done away from Borići or Đački dom, usually in the street or parking lots, which often made distribution chaotic and hard to handle.

The smugglers' prices are enormous, and according to some [journalists' reports](#) the price to cross the Balkan Route costs up to 10.000 euros. In December, as some of the people on the move told us, smugglers were asking 4,500 euro from Sarajevo to Trieste. Many of the people undertaking this endeavor have become victims of trafficking on their journeys, or are potential victims of slavery because it is unimaginable that all of them can afford the smugglers' prices. In many cases, unaccompanied minors are recruited as "agents" for smugglers with the task to find "customers," and in return they get free rides to the EU after certain number of customers, and up to 200 euros per person they bring to their bosses. Yet, many still try to cross by themselves, in bigger or small groups, using GPS. Active prevention mechanisms to protect people falling victims to smugglers and traffickers were hardly visible in any of the places we visited.

According to the available information, during 2018 only one person was [sentenced for smuggling](#) (3 years) by the Court of BiH. One trial was still ongoing in November. During 2018, the Prosecution charged 16 people with smuggling, including citizens of Kosovo, Germany and Croatia. Additionally, the State Protection and Investigation Agency (SIPA) arrested 34 people on suspicion of smuggling.

The access for the media was provided by the Red Cross and was simple.

By the end of the summer, the IOM started the reconstruction of the building. In November, all the people were moved to Bira. A plan was made that only families and vulnerable categories are to come back to the renovated building. The park was evicted in its entirety. In the meantime, two more camps were opened. The first one was Sedra, which was opened at the end of July. Families were sent back to Đački dom in January 2019.



*Entrance to Sedra in September 2018.*

## Hotel Sedra

Hotel Sedra, near Cazin, which opened at the end of July, became temporary accommodation for families and a limited number of vulnerable people, some of whom were moved from Đački dom. The center is run by the IOM, while the UNHCR and its partners take care of health and protection, and UNICEF and their partners of the wellbeing of children and education.



*In front of the Sedra camp*

During the visit at the end of September, there was a small tent in front of the entrance to the Sedra camp. It was occupied by a young Iraqi boy, who had just turned 18. The family he was traveling with for the last two years was placed in the camp. However, since he was not directly blood related to the family, he was not allowed to be with them, even though the family asked for it. His parents died a long time ago, and the family he travelled with was actually the only relatives he had. Even in this situation, they took care of him bringing him food and spending time with him.

Since he was not allowed to enter the camp, he somehow succeeded in obtaining a tent and setting it up in front of the entrance. As not registered in the camp he was not able to enter the camp to eat, take a shower or use the toilet. Back in September, the nights were getting colder and he was only wearing shorts and a t-shirt. Volunteers were the only ones to bring him some food, warm clothes, and blankets. The family tried several times to get approval for him to stay in the camp with them, but with no success.

However, many vulnerable people were not able to access Sedra partially due to lack of capacities, but also due to the ambiguous procedure of determining who is vulnerable. We met many people with different types of disabilities, or unaccompanied minors traveling alone, or single women, who were left to live in overcrowded makeshift camps, or other places that were not safe for them.

IOM is in charge for the security of this camp too. Again, they contracted a private security company to do this job<sup>17</sup>.

Sedra is an isolated place, by the regional road. The only place where people can go outside of the camp is the nearby gas station with a small cafe. The access for the media and visitors is provided by the IOM and is selective, and often not even a reply is given to those who request to enter, like in our case.

In December, children still did not go to school. At the same time, a monthly coordination meeting was held in Sarajevo, and UNICEF stated that they completed the **assessment** (which was conducted in August) and that soon children should start attending **special classes** in one of the local schools. Based on the research they conducted in some of the camps and collective accommodation, the conclusion was that every second child shows signs of depression and deep sorrow, while every third child has nightmares and trouble sleeping. Every fourth child deals with anger, fear, anxiety and irritability. Yet, this conclusion did not change living conditions for the children in camps.

Women in the front of Sedra told us that the conditions in this center are relatively good, stressing the fact that there is no drinking water in the rooms. They also told us that they, but also children, have nothing to do inside. Some organizations do provide activities, but, according to what residents told us, it is not enough<sup>18</sup>. In October, in the front of Sedra, at the gas station cafe, we spoke with two women who were in Bosnia since June. Both arrived with their families after spending over a year in Serbia. Their children spoke the local language since they finished one year in school while in Serbia, and were ready and willing to start school even in BiH. However, it did not happen until February.

Women told us that the living conditions are satisfactory, but uncertain and the lack of information about what awaits them, made them feel insecure. They told us they would be willing to think about staying, but did not have enough information about the procedure and possibilities for them if they stayed. Faced with the lack of information about their possible stay in BiH, they, as well as many others, spend most of the time discussing and planning how to move on, even when they do not know where they will go. “We just want to be safe,” people we spoke to kept repeating to us.



*Children do not have much to do in Sedra, and they often play by the roadside.*

17 During our visit in December, we witnessed extremely rude behaviour from the security guards towards residents, as well as towards us while we were talking to the people outside, and neighbors living nearby. They also tried to prevent us from taking photos of the center from the outside, and coming even close to the fence claiming that the entire area around Sedra is private property, which is not true. Finally, we had to call IOM staff to intervene, which they did.

18 It is worth noting that the hotel was meant to go on a public bid due to debts of the private owner only several weeks before it was rented to the IOM. According to sources, including the lawyer of the owner, IOM pays 15.000 euro per month to the owner.

*BIRA, inside  
one of tents.*



In November, the former BIRA factory became another place of temporary accommodation. It was planned to accommodate up to 500 people, but at the start of December, over 2000 people were living under huge tents, and in containers<sup>19</sup>. The place is enormous, and it looks like a factory (as it is) that will never be even close to a decent place to live in. Nevertheless, IOM decided to place inside single men, families, women and unaccompanied minors, and all under the watch of the private security company. In order to create even a small sense of privacy and safety people are using the sheets and whatever else available to put up curtains around their bunk beds.

One of the volunteers described the procedure to enter Bira as a resident. This is similar in all other centers ran by IOM.

*In Bira, when they arrive, they give their data to IOM and then there is a medical exam. If someone has scabies or lice, or something else, they go in quarantine. Then, they get a card with their name and photo, country of origin, and an ID number by IOM. They have to show the card every time they go in and out, go for food, go to do laundry...etc.*

For the purpose of this research, we spoke with a number of residents but also volunteers and employees of the organizations present inside. They all point to several issues, including general safety<sup>20</sup>, long waiting lines for food, and no substantial health care, as the most important. Nevertheless, in our daily contact with residents of the camp, we kept hearing about the extremely unprofessional treatment of the private security guards, who in some instances even used force against minors as well as other residents.

Generally, the safety and wellbeing of the residents of the camp is neglected. The most striking example is the story of a 17-year-old boy from Pakistan who died in pain in mid-December in Bira. The local media reported how the doctors in the hospital he was taken to established that he died of heart failure. Residents told us that he complained about pain in the stomach area for several days. IOM claims that the responsibility is on the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) staff, who were responsible for vulnerable people. One month after the incident, the police in Bihać informed us, after we filed a request for freedom of access to information, that the boy died of pneumonia, followed by an infection. This was a problem that could have been cured if only the child had been given antibiotics.

<sup>19</sup> It is a former privately owned factory, closed due to financial problems. It is interesting to notice that the BIRA owner and the owner of the big chain of shops Robot are the same. However, after he rented BIRA to IOM, he forbade any refugee or migrant to enter his shops in the Una Sana Canton as we were told by refugees and migrants, as well as workers in Robot.

<sup>20</sup> More than one woman told us that it is completely impossible for them to go to bathroom or toilet alone due to security concerns.



## Velika Kladuša

In Velika Kladuša, in the months of February and March 2018, people were living in the city park which served as a makeshift camp for a while. When the park became too small for all the people, even though unwilling, the local municipality assigned a swampy area, Trnovi, near the city stadium, as a place where people could stay and put up shelters, mostly tents. At the beginning, the municipality provided electricity, security guards, (employees of the local Komunalac company who were not armed), and they were obliged to clean the area. IOM placed several hygienic toilets in the area, too. The food was provided sometimes by the IOM partners MfS EMMAUS or the Red Cross. But, there were many days when no one came to bring food to the camp but volunteers or citizens from Kladuša.

## Trnovi Camp

In the camp, the shelters were made by the people themselves with some support from volunteers and citizens. None of the organizations present in the field put efforts into providing information for the people in Trnovi, so groups of volunteers took over this responsibility. Additionally, residents and volunteers who were present every day did not notice anyone coming to check on the registration status of the people or to explain to them the procedure for obtaining asylum or refugee status. Children, unaccompanied minors, the elderly, those who were sick, they were all living there, too.

In the Trnovi camp, the only consistent care was provided by the citizens and international volunteers who started arriving into the town at the end of March. MSF was also present from the beginning, and officially since June, operating “a small mobile clinic to address the most basic, urgent healthcare needs at each location, as well as to refer more complex yet urgent cases to secondary healthcare in the surrounding Una-Sana canton”. Additionally, MSF were helping international volunteers to secure showers, and coming several times a week with doctors who were providing first aid. MSF has remained present in Miral, even though it is an official camp run by an organization which is financed by the EU<sup>21</sup>.

In autumn, the area became a health hazard. The rubbish was not disposed of, and the toilets were not cleaned for over several months. The changing weather conditions, rain, snow, wind and cold also added to the disastrous conditions - with shelters being blown

21 In 2016, MSF denounced publicly the EU policies on migration issues calling them “dangerous”

away or the area being flooded overnight. Under the public pressure, the Trnovi camp was evicted in November and the people were taken to a temporary accommodation site in the Miral factory<sup>22</sup>. Over 600 people were accommodated in Miral, including at least 5 women<sup>23</sup>. The place had no activities, the accommodation was only basic, and **the atmosphere was of terror and fear** due to several criminal groups present inside, but also the treatment they got from the IOM and private security employed.

While there were minors present in Miral, there was no designated area at all for them. Many people, including men and women, left the place due to safety concerns. It is run by IOM, and they decide on anyone's requests to enter, be it media, potential residents, or even donors<sup>24</sup>.

At the beginning of December, several hundreds of people were still living in Kladuša, with citizens or in self-run shelters (squats). The food and care for them was **provided by** citizens and small groups of international volunteers, all under growing pressure from the police and SFA.

## Dobož

The organization MFS - EMMAUS, which has many activities across BiH (**including mass weddings**) runs a center near Dobož, in which 30 people lived at the end of November. In May 2018 they **signed the protocol** with the UNHCR and the Ministry of the Security on providing accommodation to vulnerable people in the Duje Centre in Dobož. During the year, it was estimated that the center could receive up to **2000 people**, but since it is far away from the route, and has very strict rules, hardly anyone is willing to stay there.

This organization is the one with which both the IOM and UNHCR have had **long-term cooperation**, having mainly used its shelter in the hills near Dobož to place women victims of trafficking during the 2000s. The shelter is of half-closed type and it is actually used for **many unrelated purposes** from drug and alcohol addiction rehabilitation, to a sanatorium for mental illnesses to a shelter for victims of different types of violence. Some of the people who lived in Duje told us they felt almost imprisoned there: their documents were taken away, their freedom of movement limited, as well as the use of mobile phones and WiFi (restricted to 2 hours); there were strict wake up calls at 7 am and shutting of the lights at 8 pm. In addition, the shelter is really far from any nearest town. Access to the center for visitors or the media is strict and decided by the EMMAUS personnel.

Besides the center, Emmaus runs several smaller houses in Bosnia, including the one in Kladuša.

<sup>22</sup> The owner of Miral, a local businessmen, agreed with the cantonal authorities to give this factory to be used as accommodation. For several weeks, the owner of the factory was trying to find an institution or organization who would take responsibility for the people in Miral. At the end of November, IOM stepped in with their partners.

<sup>23</sup> The head of the IOM, on the day when people were evicted from Trnovi to Miral, **told the media** that it will not be a refugee center but "humane accommodation".

<sup>24</sup> In mid-January, after the research was concluded, independent volunteers in Kladuša recorded a number of cases of **violence in Miral**, caused mainly by inhuman living. What is more worrying is that in several cases the private security guards engaged by the IOM used violence against people living in the camp. While most of the claims from the volunteers were dismissed or ignored by the IOM, they **reacted** differently after a video showing violence was published. However, their reaction was not in the media, it is hard to find it on IOM official website, and the link does not work properly.



## Bihać/Ključ

The atmosphere radically changed in the Una-Sana canton at some point during the summer. From very welcoming, it became almost threatening. It was provoked, by large, by the negative attitudes from the local authorities and police, and pushed through the media. Several protests were organized and protesters demanded that no camp is formed in the city or its close proximity, and if there were camps they should be closed, while people's movement should be controlled. These protests, led by the local politician Sej Ramić, were excuses for the local government to issue a decision which limited the freedom of movement of the (potential) asylum seekers and for all the people on the move. In October, at the meeting that was held in Bihać, both the state Minister of Security and the head of IOM were present, concluding that people are to be prevented from coming to the Una-Sana Canton, unless the IOM gives approval on the grounds that there is space for accommodating them in one of the existing official camps. The freedom of movement was limited also inside of the Canton, so people from Kladusa could not come to Bihać even to meet with lawyers<sup>25</sup>. This decision, and its implementation, completely changed the atmosphere, especially since it came with additional pressure from the police towards solidarity networks. These measures led to a series of serious human rights violations, where the police started taking people off the busses and trains arriving from Sarajevo and forcing some to return to Sarajevo on their own expense. Some people, including those who were stopped in the streets and who stayed in the camps, were even forcefully pushed back from Bihać to the border area of the Una-Sana Canton, near Ključ (Velečevo).

On December 13th, early in the morning, the police came into one house in Bihać where 25 men from Pakistan were living (paying for their stay themselves). Some of them even had valid yellow cards, which is the status of asylum seekers. Others had different registration papers. The police forced them out of the house, and half of them were taken to Velečevo and left by the road. They were later forced to go to Sarajevo.

This type of practice became a daily occurrence in Bihać, while Velečevo became a checkpoint where police not only brought refugees and migrants from Bihać, but also took them off the busses going towards Bihać, and even stopped cars arriving from Sarajevo for checks "in order to control the influx of migrants," as government representatives explained. The place where people were taken off the buses or brought to by the police from Bihać is a meadow without any shelter from wind, rain, snow, cold or even sun. Volunteers from the Red Cross in Ključ and citizens from this area, and occasionally some international groups, were the only ones who came and assist people with limited resources. The police was not allowing them to, at least, put up some temporary shelter for the people who were forced to stay there, sometimes even for several days since they didn't have sufficient financial means to pay for bus tickets to return to Sarajevo.

In addition, placing the checkpoint between two administrative units in BiH violates the freedom of movement of the local people. The normalization of the checkpoints between administrative units in BiH is a politically controversial venture, as it opens space for many political manipulations aiming towards enforcing divisions in the country.

25 According to the notes from the meeting between the Ministry of Security, IOM, and other actors who are active, which was held in January, UNHCR stated that more than 800 people who have expressed intention to seek asylum have not had the opportunity to formally lodge their claim in part due to the restriction on freedom of movement.



*Self-organized groups of locals provide help in Tuzla bus station.*

## Tuzla

During the summer, Tuzla became very busy with a number of people passing through, arriving from Serbia and going to Sarajevo, or Bihać. Three times in August big groups of over 100 people arrived. In November, Tuzla also became frequented by groups returning to Serbia. Daily, sometimes even more than 30 people were heading back, on the same route they came to BiH. Some of them returned to camps in Serbia, and some went all the way back to Greece<sup>26</sup>.

They all passed through the village of Sapna where citizens provided help: they rested in the local mosque, while the municipality gave money to the local bakeries to give people free food.

In Tuzla, a small group of individuals was organized through a Facebook group. They managed to provide immediate humanitarian assistance for those who were coming through. They even found a way to alert the public and more citizens joined, as well as local companies and small businesses. Nevertheless, citizens in Tuzla never encountered anyone from the state institutions (excluding local police), or the big international organizations (whether the UNHCR or IOM) to offer assistance or to even ask about the situation regarding the people on the move.

<sup>26</sup> The anguish of people stuck in the corridors of the EU needs to be stressed here. They are now even forced to roam back and forth between countries just to survive.

## Other places across BiH

Throughout the year, people have been passing through, or even stopping for a while, in a number of other cities, including Trebinje, Zvornik, Bijeljina, Brčko, Prijedor, Banja Luka, Stolac, Čapljina, Ljubuški, Banja Luka, etc. In all of these cities, citizens were there to offer much needed help. In Zvornik and Bratunac, several death cases were registered. They were people who lost their lives trying to cross the river Drina from Serbia. Some bodies were identified, in some cases even returned to the country of origin, and in other cases they were just buried under “no name” signs. Again, citizens were the ones to help, like in the case of 17-year-old boy from Algeria who lost his life while trying to swim from Serbia to Bosnia. He was buried in August under NN in the local Orthodox cemetery. However, local people felt it was not fair and, guessing he could be Muslim, first they found an imam who came to say a prayer at the grave, and later on they found the way - through contacts with other people - and identified the body, got in touch with the family in Algeria, and got engaged in a long and complicated process of exhumation, identification, and transfer of the body back to Algeria.

The Mountain Rescue Service in Foča was providing help throughout the year to people on the move. The same was done by the Service in the Bihać area, who in December engaged in saving **over 25 people** from the snow. During the summer, both services, as well as others in the country, made extensive preparations to help people who get stuck in the mountains. In the Bihać area, some mountain climbers made their huts available, supplying them with food and other basic items, leaving them open for anybody.

# Integration

The initial focus of this research was to see if substantial efforts have been made towards the integration of the people who want to stay in BiH. Here it needs to be stressed that integration is understood as a complex process and is **defined as** “a two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and host societies in which migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community”. It encompasses both social inclusion and social cohesion, where social inclusion refers to full economic (labor market and access to financial services) and social (e.g. health and education) inclusion and civic and political participation of migrants in host communities, while social cohesion refers to concepts such as anti-discrimination, countering xenophobia and promoting mutual understanding. Given all the obstacles faced through 2018 just when it comes to registration and accommodation of the people who arrived in BiH, this report only addresses integration services and social cohesion support that refer to the facilitation of access to health care, education and employment, and ensuring the social and economic inclusion of people who arrived in BiH.

After months of being present in the field as activists and researchers, we concluded that very limited efforts have been made by all the actors involved, being local or big international organizations. However, citizens, individually, were doing quite a lot to provide support for those who stayed in the country, given their capacity, such as helping them go through the nightmare of administration, finding accommodation, even jobs, enrolling children in schools, helping with language, etc. An important focus has been to find a way to socialize and make people feel welcome. Anything but just offering food and NFI, which many felt was not enough or what was needed.



*Inside a tent in Boríći, where a family of 9 used to live. Bihać.*

Throughout 2018, the officials, but also representatives of the relevant international organizations (including the UN Agencies and their associates), have been pointing out that people who are entering BiH are almost exclusively in transit. At the same time, the local officials have constantly referred to people on the move as “illegal migrants.” These were just additional excuses for either the government or the international organizations not to pay enough attention to any aspect of support for integration.

In all of the cities we visited, there were some local people willing to work and live

with newcomers who wanted to stay. Nevertheless, faced with uncertainty, a lack of willingness from the state institutions, the non-transparent work of the international organizations, locals and their guests became afraid of the future. Being afraid of this uncertainty, is what made three brothers from Afghanistan, one minor and the other two in their early 20s, to leave Sarajevo where they had lived since March until October 2018. They tried to find a way to stay, but until the very last day they could not even get basic information on how long it would take for them to get asylum, if they could get it, or whether they could bring their families with them, or whether they were entitled to receive any help from the state at any point. Even though they were willing to stay, the youngest one - with the help of a group of citizens – even attending school and learning the language, they decided to go for the game and left BiH.

The most difficult situation is in Velika Kladuša where up to 1000 people live. Most of them do not have papers, some because they are not interested to obtain them, others because they were never told what to do in order to fully legalise their status, and some due to the fact that they did not have an official address and citizens became too afraid of the local government to support them in this way. Despite a significant number of people present in Kladuša, neither the UNHCR, IOM, SFA or Vaša prava are very visible.

Local hosts have come under pressure since October and some of them were threatened or issued fines for providing assistance. Yet, many decided to resist and continue doing what they did. Among them are small business owners, professors, doctors, police officers, etc. Some tried to give temporary or seasonal jobs to people on the move, not only to help them but because of the huge migration from Kladuša and the fact that there are not enough workers. However, they were threatened by the authorities that it can have negative consequences for them, or that they will have to pay different fines, which was too much of a risk for many.

In Sarajevo one host family was told by an SFA official that if they accept people in their house, they will have to take all the responsibility for them, to cover their costs, including health care, costs of education for the children and anything else that asylum seekers are entitled to by law. Nevertheless, the host family accepted this. However, this presents a constant struggle for both the host family and the asylum seeking family.

“We were told that if someone stayed to live with us, and if their asylum claim got rejected, we will have to pay for every day of that person’s stay, and all the costs for the administration. When we asked what if their claim is not rejected, they told us: it will be,” a Kladusa resident who was hosting one family from Syria for a while told us. Additionally, in Kladuša we spoke with teachers and professors at the primary and secondary schools who told us that their schools were willing to enroll children even in the spring of 2018, but were not allowed to by the cantonal ministry of education. One professor told us that it is more important for the local community to have more children in the classrooms having in mind the schools are being closed due to a lack of pupils, than for refugees and migrants themselves.

In Sarajevo, only few children were enrolled in school in September. For them, the Ministry of Education has requested the original documents to be submitted, even though in some of the cases the children were from war torn areas of Syria. This type of request turned to be a mission impossible, and caused more frustrations.

# Discussion

Due to its administrative arrangements which resulted from the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995, BiH has specific dynamics within the country regarding governance. The state has three levels of governance - the state, the canton and the municipality. In this case, the responsibility for the implementation of its international obligations and its asylum laws is at the state level, which is too dysfunctional to provide an adequate response to any humanitarian crisis (case in point being the [floods in 2014](#)).

Due to its direct relationship to the organization of the state, the Red Cross has been divided in accordance to the administrative divisions of the state and consequently also made dysfunctional. Local branches function independently from each other, which can be seen in the field as their presence is different throughout different areas, and they have had different levels of impact. Unlike the complete invisibility of the Red Cross in Sarajevo, the Red Cross of the Una Sana Canton has been continuously present in Bihać and Velika Kladuša. In Bihać the local government assigned the responsibility to the cantonal Red Cross to take care of food provision and the provision of the NFIs. In Velika Kladuša they were also partially providing some food. In Velečevo, where people were taken off the busses and left in the outdoors, the Red Cross Ključ was the only organization providing humanitarian assistance. In Salakovac, the cantonal Red Cross provides food and NFI.

When the significant increase in arrivals started being recorded at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018, due to the lack of the quick and adequate response by the Ministry of Security people were forced to look for themselves for any form of accommoda-



Borići Camp, Bihać.

tion to hide from freezing temperatures. From the media reports, and through contact with people on the move, starting from March 2018, we could notice that the state has been avoiding respecting their obligations concerning the Law on Asylum. Based on the monthly operational reports issued by the UNHCR, it can be seen that the trend could be noticed even in 2017. This was particularly noticeable in relation to the process of asylum applications and the responsibility to provide accommodation to the asylum seekers<sup>27</sup>.

The period until May 2018 was marked by the Ministry of Security's claims that they were "controlling the process". However, throughout the winter there was no sufficient accommodation capacity – having only the Asylum Centre in Delijaš of a maximum capacity of 150 people. Back in winter, instead of looking for solutions to provide adequate accommodation, given that temperatures were below zero, the UNHCR focused on additionally registering people who entered BiH. The registration conducted by the UNHCR had no visible purpose, as the same people were also instructed that they had to register with the SFA.



*Line in the front of the UNHCR, March 2018.*

The direct responsibility for accommodation for all the persons in need, and those who expressed intent to ask for asylum, is assigned to the Ministry of Security in accordance with Article 34 of the Law on Asylum. However, this Law also gives quite significant authority to the UNHCR. Thus, once it was visible that the state did not respect its obligations, it was expected that the UNHCR takes a more proactive role in resolving the issue of accommodation, at least during the cold winter months that lasted long into April 2018. From our observations in the field, we could see that they restricted activities on what their partners, first and foremost Vaša prava, and BH Women Initiative, were doing, meaning providing legal advice and representation, and some accommodation in hostels or hotels. It was temporary accommodation, and in many cases limited to several days. People had to come in the morning in front of the UNHCR and wait sometimes the entire day to see if they would be accommodated, and where. Those who did used to receive a coupon for one meal a day, usually a small pizza in a local fast food. In some cases, people were left in hotels for a longer period of time, but again, food was provided by citizens and volunteers. Both IOM and UNHCR too often relied on a private health clinic to provide even basic medical care, while citizens used to take them to

<sup>27</sup> Dunja Mijatović, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe in May sent an open letter to the Minister of Security reminding him about the need for the stronger role of the government in treating the new arrivals. Moreover, I would like to recall that the European Committee of Social Rights has emphasised that the minimum guarantees under the European Social Charter, for the right to housing and emergency shelter apply to irregular migrants too. Shelter must be provided even when migrants have been requested to leave the country and even though they may not require long-term accommodation. The Committee has pointed out that the right to shelter is closely connected to the human dignity of every person, regardless of their residence status. It has also been stressed that foreign nationals, whether residing lawfully or not in the country, are entitled to urgent medical assistance and such basic social assistance as is necessary to cope with an immediate state of need (accommodation, food, emergency care and clothing).

public health institutions. Citizens were often engaged in negotiating with the health institutions to provide care for those in need, while IOM used to come with the money and deal with the situation, which caused many problems for citizens who could not afford to offer the same kind of help. Occasionally, IOM agreed to help citizens in their efforts to help people on the move in providing health care.

Nevertheless, back in March one volunteer came across a man in the hospital who was dying of cancer. Doctors in the hospital found a way to keep him inside and provide basic help, even though they were not sure how to cover the expenses. In May, expenses exceeded 15.000 KM and it became problematic for the hospital personnel to keep taking care of him. They asked several times for help from UNHCR and IOM, but did not get positive answer. Finally, volunteers took care of the man until he died and was buried in Sarajevo. He had a brain tumor and was in his late 20s.

In her letter directed to the Minister of Security, Dunja Mijatović, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, observed that the current situation occurred “due to the lack of a systematic response by authorities to the humanitarian needs of these persons”.

Almost one year later, based on what we observed in the field, and heard from the interviews we conducted, it can be concluded that the role the citizens of BiH played in providing assistance to people on the move in 2018, was the most important. They were supported by the few local NGOs, like the charity Pomozi from<sup>28</sup> Sarajevo, Solidarnost and Žene sa Une for Bihać, and couple of more small organizations who provided help occasionally. In our contacts with a number of the local NGOs we were told that the work with people on the move was not what they had planned in their activities for 2018. Others told us that their donors do not support these types of activities. In some cases, UNHCR and IOM did not accept the assistance from the local NGOs whom they were not partnered with.

Since February 2018, the assistance through informal activism has been consistent and it consisted of provision of food, clothing, hygiene articles, toys, housing, and accommodation, organizing showers, and delivering non-food items to people sleeping rough all over the country. Starting from March, international volunteers became active in BiH, firstly providing support to locals, but later taking over (especially in Sarajevo). Unlike local activists who mostly relied on other citizens, diaspora and occasional donations from outside, international volunteers had more resources.

## UN Agencies and their related organizations

Unlike the neighbouring countries and the EU states, BiH still has a significant number of UN agencies and different international organizations offices, among them the UNHCR and IOM, which in 2016 became “a related organization of the UN”. The Law on Asylum (which was drafted and adopted with the help of the UNHCR office in BiH), provides several roles for this agency. One is certainly of the monitoring nature. The second role is consultative role regarding decisions on temporary protection and protection activities in cases of mass arrivals, as provided by Article 57 of the Law on Asylum. In addition to the UNHCR, this article states the consultative role for other relevant international organizations in BiH (in this case IOM seems relevant).

During the first months of the 2018, the UNHCR or IOM were providing support for the government run center Delijaš, and other official activities, which were very limited. Like the government, they were stating to the media that the situation was under

<sup>28</sup> When supplies allow them, Pomozi sends help to Velika Kladuša, Bihać, Foča, Tuzla, Mostar and other cities, upon informal requests from local groups active in the field.



control, while meeting regularly and discussing the situation. The **first coordination meeting** was held in February, and it gathered national agencies and international institutions. In March, the **UNHCR launched** a “Multi-cluster/sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)” in the wider Sarajevo area. As they introduced it, “the MIRA was initiated by the UNCT Resident Coordinator and participation was open to interested parties.” The organization of the meetings was sometimes taken over by the UNHCR and sometimes by the IOM. Meetings first occurred on a fortnightly basis but have been recently reduced to a monthly basis.

At the beginning, only selected non-governmental organizations were invited to these meetings. Many of the invited NGOs were not even participating in any way in providing assistance to potential asylum seekers. Nevertheless, the meetings became more open with the time, and useful for the exchanges of information between individual actors in the field, since many have not interacted and have not been aware of each other. However, it needs to be noted that issues that were raised in the **first report** from the coordination meeting between international institutions and national agencies - regarding, for example, the identification and referral of unaccompanied and separated children or provision of food for people who are staying outside of official accommodation - were not resolved even at the end of the year.

In general, the UNHCR retained the *modus operandi* used throughout the previous years, when there were significantly less applications, concerning supporting potential asylum seekers in BiH. The majority of their interventions in the field have been done through cooperation and working mainly with two Bosnian NGOs: **for legal aid**, *Vaša prava*, and for **psychosocial support** BH Women Initiative - BHWI. By doing this, throughout the years, the UNHCR has actually been supporting the state's avoidance to meet its obligations<sup>29</sup> as those organizations were taking care of the tasks that the state was obliged to do by the law<sup>30</sup>. Given that this *modus operandi* was not reduced only to the area of asylum seekers<sup>31</sup> but it appears in other sectors as well<sup>31</sup>, these activities subsequently contribute to non-functionality of the state.

In addition to the supporting of non-institutional legal aid and psychological support, rather than legally defined institutional support, the UNHCR also put the NGOs in peculiar positions in relation to the government. Given that they are supported by the UNHCR those were the only two non-governmental organizations in BiH which were allowed to have actual Protocols agreed and signed with the Ministry of Security and to have access to the Immigration Centre in Lukavica and the Asylum Centre in Delijaš. Because of this situation, apart from representing the individual cases, they are not able to monitor the government and pressure it to respect its overall obligations.

In addition to registering whoever came to their office in Sarajevo during the first half of the year, the UNHCR directed (if not already directed by SFA) all the people who expressed the intent to ask for an asylum to *Vaša prava* to give them the power of attorney for legal representation. Moreover, the UNHCR also directed people who were classified as vulnerable to the BH Women Initiative, for placement in the designated accommodation in hostels around Sarajevo, Bihać and Kladaša areas. However, in many cases, even the vulnerable population would end up sleeping rough in the

29 Quoting Roy again here, and her claims that “NGOs give the impression that they are filling the vacuum created by a retreating state. And they are, but in a materially inconsequential way. Their *real* contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right. They alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance.”

30 In particular this relates to the legal obligations of free legal aid that arise out of Article 76 of the Law on Asylum in BiH and Article 13. of the Law on free legal aid in BiH. It is the Ministry of Justice of BiH that has the obligation to provide free legal aid for any person on the BiH territory under international protection according to international standards, particularly asylum seekers, refugees, persons under the subsidiary protection, stateless persons, victims of human trafficking etc, and all according to the international conventions that BiH has ratified.

31 Just as an example to mention provision of psychosocial support and legal aid to victims of war which was entirely oriented towards the NGO sector that is, among others, actively supported by the UN agencies - even though again the laws provide for such obligations to be met by the state.

streets, and on many occasions individuals would jump in to find accommodation for them for few nights.

In addition to those two NGOs, we already mentioned, there is the third organization that both IOM and UNHCR have been cooperating with and which also has an MoU signed with the government starting with 2018. MSF- EMMAUS has been working with IOM and UNHCR for a long time, mainly providing shelter for women who were victims of trafficking. In April 2018 the organisation was engaged by the UN Agencies and related organisations to deliver food to people in makeshift camps in the Sarajevo Park, and later in the year in the Trnovi makeshift camp in Velika Kladuša. In Trnovi they were filmed throwing clothes at the people from the truck, instead of organizing a more dignified distribution. Similar scenes were witnessed in Sarajevo on several occasions. Even after this video was made public, their cooperation continued.

Unlike the UNHCR which is rarely seen, the IOM has been more visible in the field. Nevertheless, the services provided by IOM were relatively minor until the EU funding was assigned, and directed to BiH through them. From then on, the IOM became in charge for almost all questions related to managing the situation with people on the move in BiH. In many public and media appearances they were talking about what is happening in camps and about the general situation instead of the state officials. IOM also took the liberty to impose rules and ways of working in the country, which led to a number of disputes with local and the state level officials. One journalist from Velika Kladuša told us how the representative of IOM “screamed at” representatives of the Municipality at the meeting where the media were present. All the rules in the centers were established by the IOM, too, and they were the ones negotiating and making deals on the factories and hotels that were turned into centers<sup>32</sup>.

## EU funding

During the summer of 2018, the EU decided to start financially supporting the response to the humanitarian crisis that was developing in BiH. Camps/reception centers became a topic often discussed in public as the only option for the accommodation of the people. Nevertheless, even in July, no agreement was reached regarding where and how to establish the centers. The EU’s request that no camp be placed within 30 km distance from their border, made it even more difficult. Croatia, the EU member state, became “the last EU defense line”, and their representatives have been in constant contact with the authorities in Bihać and Velika Kladuša.

In July, when the number of people present in BiH was over 10.000, the UN agencies and related organizations were advocating to BiH authorities, to urgently identify sites and open additional protection and sensitive accommodation facilities. The state government was proposing the ideas, but the local authorities, in different municipalities, were rejecting them for various reasons, one after another. In June, the European Commission, via European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), secured first 1.5 million Euros dedicated to help BiH deal with the ongoing situation. This was topped up in July by the Council of Europe Development Bank in the amount of 1 million of Euros in humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants. On the 30th of October 2018 the EU Delegation to BiH announced that the EU allocated more than 7.2 million euros in grants from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) special measure. The IOM in partnership with the UNHCR and UNICEF were named as organisations for the distribution of these funds. On the 29th of November 2018 it was announced that the European Commission ECHO had allocated an additional 500.000 Euros for the assistance.

<sup>32</sup> According to the notes from the meeting held in January 2019 between representatives of different level of government and international organizations, representatives of Ministry of Security complained that IOM is creating “parallel system” in the Una-Sana Canton, which they rejected.



*Sedra Camp, Cazin.*

We need to point out that this is just the available information regarding the EU funding provided for handling the “humanitarian” crisis in BiH. Just these amounts seem sufficient for adequate and human provision of the assistance of the people who are either crossing through BiH, or are staying in the country. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say, based on what we observed in the field, that the response was humane: people are placed in centers that are far from being decent accommodation, due to inadequate medical assistance people are dying in camps, and due to the living conditions and overcrowding tensions are so high making people often tense and prone to conflicts. We could not find any initiative from the IOM and UNHCR to make living conditions especially in Bira and Mira, decent.

While the EU funding seems to be relatively high compared to the numbers of people in need of assistance, it needs to be emphasized that the people would not be in need were it not for the EU anti-immigration populist politics. Since 2015, member states have constructed almost 1000 km of walls, to prevent migrations into Europe. Additionally, more barriers have been placed in the sea, including [naval operations patrolling the Mediterranean](#), and agreements with countries in the north of Africa aimed to stop people from crossing to Europe. As it could have been predicted, it did not stop migrations, but only made roads more dangerous, and costly.

At the same time, the violence at the borders increased to the point that [children were dying](#) on mainland Europe while trying to enter the EU. The final closing of the borders began after the so called [EU-Turkey deal](#) was reached in March 2016. The deal sealed the borders, forcing many to look for new routes, often more dangerous and more expensive. It is BiH that is directly affected by the closure of the EU borders and militarization and [violence on the borders](#), becoming the very last crossing point for thousands of people.

It is significant to mention that the only money directly awarded to the Ministry of Security relates to border protection, rather than the improvement of asylum policies and a humane response to the people on the move and potential asylum seekers. Outside of the EU grants, we could trace a grant provided in August 2018 by the Czech Republic to the Ministry of the Security in the amount of some [1 million euros](#), directly intended for the “purchase of pre-specified technical equipment of BiH border police, such as unmanned aircrafts, thermal imaging cameras, observation devices, scoutguard cameras, etc.”

As with the financial support for recovery from the 2014 floods, the EU decided that the funds should be distributed through the UN agencies and related organizations (IOM), rather than to give the donations directly to the government of BiH. The prob-

lem that was created in this way is that, once the funds were directed and given to the international organizations, the possibility for the public to control the spending disappeared, even though the money is assigned as supporting BiH. Not to mention that it has already, on many occasions, been pointed out that UN Agencies and their related organizations globally have become the unfair competitors for the funding against local civil society organisations. This also creates the absurd situation regarding the fulfillment of responsibilities that are shifted from the government to the international organizations.

At the same time, the UN Agencies and their related organizations always have the excuse of the legal nature where the government is still formally responsible, even though in this case it is the IOM and the UNHCR that have the means for implementation. Unfortunately, when it comes to the monitoring of their work, the local public is not given enough information. The EU claims that they do not trust the government due to corruption<sup>33</sup>, and it is true that politicians in BiH are not trustworthy. However, the EU has constantly been acknowledging and cooperating with that government when it comes to the imposition of austerity measures or providing the loans pushing the state further into the unnecessary debt. And in this regard, when the civil society complains, the EU ignores these concerns.

At play is the individualisation and privatisation of the role of the public, and a reduction in decisions regarding public interests to the individual actors. In this example the funding is provided for the support in fulfilling the state's obligations stemming from both international and domestic laws to provide for the asylum seekers' social inclusion. However, since the funding is not given directly to the state, the state is removed from meeting its obligations both towards fulfilling the specific tasks but also for being accountable to its public/citizens. Instead, the funding is given to the UN agencies and related organizations and made them accountable to one person with executive power to monitor the spending of the EU funding. The government and the citizens of BiH are completely removed from this process. Consequently, this undermines the decision-making processes in the country and importance of insisting on establishing transparent and corruption free public institutions.

Since the majority of the EU funding is coming from IPA funds, we wish to recall that IPA funding is directed towards the improvement of the state's "capacity to undertake the necessary reforms to align its political, institutional, legal, administrative and economic systems with the rules, standards, policies and practices in the Union". So one has to question why the decision regarding the spending of the funding awarded to the UN agencies and its related organisations is ignoring this obligation. Instead, it seems that we see the further weakening of the already dysfunctional state through IPA funding that at the end of the day should be used to make the state more functional.

Even if the control of the money was given to the UN agencies and related organizations, the state should have been involved and supported to meet its obligations. At the end of the day, the UN agencies and related organizations, which relinquished its powers for RSD to the state more ten years ago, should either find a way to take back these powers and take full responsibility for the situation – and finally spell it out that the country is still a semi-protectorate - or should find a way to cooperate with the government and make it responsible. Instead the situation is that all actors have excuses to shift the blame for responsibility from themselves. The funding provided in this way keeps enabling the blame and responsibility shifting between the state government and the UN agencies and related organizations.

The final result of this is that in the field the IOM is making the final decisions for the majority of the accommodation, to rent the spaces from private individuals and engag-

<sup>33</sup> According to the Transparency International corruption index, BiH ranks 89 out of 180 countries.

ing private security firms to organize “order” in the camps. The UNHCR and DRC ended up negotiating with private health institutions to provide for the health checkups in the camp. Instead, if IPA reasoning was followed, even if the funding was given to the UN agencies and related organisations, those should only be guarantors of adequate spending, and not understood as the main beneficiaries of the funding. In this sense the state would still be held responsible for fulfillment of its obligations and UN agencies and related organizations would in that scenario really be just support mechanisms.

For example, as it was case with Salakovac (before all the funding arrived) the state should have been the one to designate and prepare the objects for housing. Instead, even in Ušivak, which state designated, it was IOM who decided how to solve the issue of the accommodation. The state would then be obliged to employ people who would be responsible for the organization of “safety and order” in the camp and to assign a public health institution to respond to the health issues. In this sense the UN agencies and related institutions would not have led, but could financially support those activities, while also playing a monitoring and advisory role to the government to provide for the best and most humane response possible. Instead, the UN agencies and related institutions are engaged both in organizing camps with inhumane conditions, and directly impacting the further weakening of the state.

As stated above, the state institutions did not find a way to adequately respond to the ongoing situation, partially due to lack of capacity which is a result of a period of over 20 years in which the ruling political parties in the country found a way to capture the state, and make the entire system work exclusively for political parties instead of the public interest. Giving all the responsibility to NGOs and the international organizations, provides excuses to the government officials for inaction and, on the other hand, undermines the government’s role as it places the UN Agencies and their related organizations in a position to negotiate with the local governments (instead of having the exclusive communication with the state government as the only actor responsible for the issues of migration and asylum in BiH by law).

By the end of the year, the IOM was almost exclusively working with cantonal institutions in the Bihać area, often completely ignoring the state. As one of the activists in Bihać told us, “IOM is here to turn off and turn on the lights and nobody else”. Furthermore, the explanation that BiH is a highly dysfunctional state also cannot be good enough to explain this derogation of the state institutions. Serbia, a neighboring state, is also very corrupted and a highly dysfunctional state, but the EU directed funds to the government, which created centers among which some are at the level of accommodation in member countries<sup>34</sup>. It took them some time to get there, but they could do it since the centers were exclusively under the state jurisdiction. It was the same case with Macedonia.

Moreover, even the claim that the funds are awarded to the UN agencies and related organisations in order to prevent corruption fails short in a situation in which the funds are used for renting private spaces for the camps instead of using state or publicly owned buildings. The claim is further devalued as anyone with any knowledge of the situation in BiH would immediately know that corruption in the country is often tied to the owners of private properties who only own those properties due to war profiteering.

In this sense it is obvious that the IOM, when renting the spaces did not do due diligence as regards to prevention of corruption. Just one of the examples is hotel Sedra that was about to be sold on at an auction just a few days before it was turned into a camp for vulnerable categories. The IOM, apparently, was informed about it by the lawyers, and the decision about the public bid was to be found in the local media. Nevertheless, IOM

<sup>34</sup> In 2018, the centers in Serbia were far from good, but were at least decent in comparison to those in BiH, which made a number of people go back the same dangerous route to spend winter in the neighboring country.

took the decision to pay a 15.000 euro monthly rent for this old hotel, preventing the implementation of the court decision in this way. A similar non-transparent contract was made with the owner of Bira. Even the **BIRA factory was on sale** for several years, with no success. It is significant that in 2017 the Mayor of Bihać, who cooperates with the IOM, offered the owner help with finding investors. The cooperation between local authorities and the IOM, and their partners, over the year extended to supplying municipalities with logistics, partial covering the **public street lights** in Bihać, and **announcing** a number of new infrastructure projects in the city.

Another issue that was not clarified to the public is the fact that private security and health institutions are engaged to work within the camps. This practice is present in several EU countries, as well as other countries, mostly closed detention facilities and immigration removal centres. IOM chose to do that even in several temporary accommodation centers in BiH, without public debate on this question, or government advice, like it was done in other countries. **Critics of this approach argue** that involving private security companies raises questions about accountability should things go wrong. Their argument is that privatization has made it more difficult to investigate and prosecute cases of abuse, even when they occur in front of dozens of witnesses. How problematic this is we can see from the example of the Miral center where security guards, according to at least 5 residents we spoke to, act in a violent way.

Contrary to these arguments, the decision to award IPA funding to the IOM and to the UN Agencies instead of the state could also be for different political reasons. There are several possible options. One is that BiH is the very last crossing point for people heading toward the EU. Due to this reason, it was decided to engage organizations which could be influenced and subsequently through which decision making processes could be controlled, as well as the money flow, rather than relying on the government. The second option is that the EU considers BiH as a state that is in deep crisis, and as such cannot be relied on to take care of the aims of Brussels when it comes to migration. It is the fact that, while people on the move were crossing through the country, tens of thousands of BiH citizens “joined” them trying to reach the EU. According to the **available statistics**, in 2013, about 3.050.000 people lived in BiH, while in 2018 the number was about 2,7 million.

In mid-2018, the EU openly started discussing the so called “**regional disembarked platforms**” that could be created outside the EU, which would be created in “close cooperation with IOM and UNHCR, and in partnership with third countries”. **Non-paper on regional platforms** expands further on the role of the IOM and UNHCR stating that, in the case of third countries, which could be BiH in this case, “UNHCR and IOM could, after disembarkation, provide support to quickly distinguish between irregular migrants and those in need of international protection, taking into account individual situations, and operating in full respect of international law”. Part of the plan is that the EU will support the activities of IOM and UNHCR in third countries “to expand protection space for refugees and asylum seekers and in providing protection and assistance to vulnerable migrants, including return and reintegration activities”. If this is taken into consideration, even though BiH was not openly discussed as one of the possible locations, the reasons behind the decision to push for the more active role of especially IOM, an organization that is doing repatriation, is logical and has little to do with the local situation, but more with the EU’s plans to curb further massive migrations.

Finally, partially the reason could be that, according to Brussels, BiH is not perceived as an independent state, which is reflected in the high presence of different international organizations and bodies, including foreign governments, in the political life in BiH and in the process of making decisions.

Whatever the final answer may be, it completely disregards human lives, being those of the local population or the people on the move.

Based on observations in the field, we can conclude that the funding that is intended for improving the lives of the people on the move or potential asylum seekers in BiH, instead of being used to provide a dignified and humane response to the needs of people on the move was used for other aims, like trying to prevent people from crossing the border while creating unbearable living conditions in temporary centers. That is why we conclude that the transparency in spending the funds, as well as the transparency in decision making regarding the wellbeing of the people, is necessary.

Short media press releases, like the [one from December](#), with claims that cannot be seen in the field, are not sufficient, for example, the claim that “shelter and basic healthcare service have been secured for all migrants on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At all TRCs in Una-Sana Canton, three meals a day are provided to all camp residents,” is just partially true. While the vast majority of people was accommodated by the end of the year, and three meals were provided in all centers, from what we have seen and showed in this report, it has been far from decent and humane. When it comes to the healthcare service, the death of a boy in Bira, whom we mentioned above, can be used to counterargument the claims from the statement<sup>35</sup>.

Additionally, almost all the people who are living in the camps we visited during this research, kept complaining about a lack of hot water, clean bandages, food quality and quantity, medical care, privacy or safety, but also activities and access to information.

More questions remain to be answered in the future, including regarding the renting of private properties and their transformation into official centers, or the engagement of private security agencies or healthcare providers and the privatisation of public services and state functions.

Having experience from other countries, the IOM and the UNHCR could predict that establishing camps, which are meant as temporary solutions, is expensive and camps are no places for living, especially for children or vulnerable categories. In Greece at some point the UNHCR and their partners introduced so called cash cards, and started renting apartments for people, which showed as effective way to help people start new lives and integrate into society. In BiH, this was not an option, even though it could have been a solution having in mind that there are many empty houses and apartments, and that the state is not able to offer any financial support for people on the move. If this method is employed, even the local population will benefit, which will further support solidarity. Instead of that, camps and the alienation of the migrant and refugee population, was accompanied by the criminalization of solidarity. In the end, those who are most impacted by this are the people on the move.

Furthermore, there is confusion regarding spending money on importing containers, not suitable for harsh winters in Bosnia, instead of renting hotels, houses or apartments that are ready to be used. Or why the options of renovating the available buildings is not considered as a solution which could provide more permanent accommodation or could eventually later be used for other purposes.

Additionally, the establishment and the placement of people in camps raise many human rights concerns. While unacceptable as long term accommodation for any human being, it is possible to understand the reasons for placing people in the camps so at least they are not exposed to rain, snow and freezing temperatures. But winters in

35 Doctor from Slovenia who volunteers in BiH was very critical in several of his posts on social networks about the health care. For more see <https://www.facebook.com/notes/dimitar-anakiev/which-human-rights-have-been-violated-to-refugees-and-migrants-in-bosnia/10212967032309100/> or <https://www.facebook.com/notes/dimitar-anakiev/first-impressions-after-short-visit-of-admission-camp-for-refugees-and-migrants-/10212823898170836/>

BiH are long and just the length of the winter is already an unacceptable time to keep people in such dire conditions.

There is little proof that anyone is seriously considering how to help people who are “stuck” in BiH to resolve their “status” and work on their integration, long term. While speaking about refugees and migrants in BiH, representatives of local institutions and of the international organizations keep stressing that hardly anyone is planning to stay in the country. Sometimes *these statements* sound like the borders are open, and everyone is welcome in the EU. The fact that some of them are, or will remain stuck in BiH, not able to continue their journey and reach a country where they can apply for asylum, while not having possibility to go back to the countries they came from, is hardly ever mentioned publicly.

Or maybe everyone is actually thinking that suddenly those people are just going to mysteriously disappear? In some sense the opening of camps (or temporary centers as often referred to in public), and the insistence to place all the people inside, looks like some form of attempt to make the people disappear from the public visibility. However, no one is considering the fact that people in BiH still have a living memory of concentration camps from the previous war and it is really hard to predict a reaction to the “normalisation” of any form of camps for people.







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