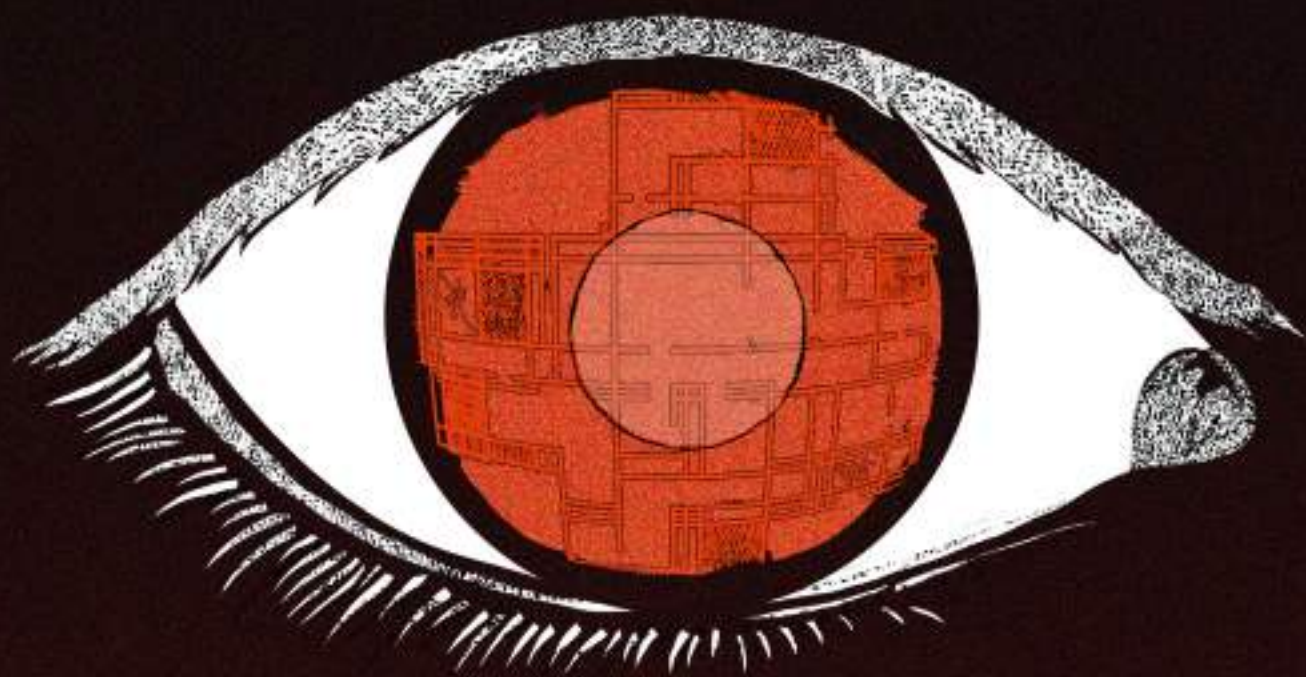


Watch the camp:



counter-mapping architectures of
violence in Serbia

Watch The Camp: counter-mapping architectures of violence in Serbia is a report on the conditions and events of six reception/transit and asylum centers in Serbia between September and December 2023: Subotica RTC, Krnjaca AC, Sombor RTC, Šid Stanica and Adasevci RTC. It is the result of three months of fieldwork conducted in these facilities by four activists and researchers, Benedetta Bressan, Ginevra Canessa, Sofia Fanfani and Zelda McCormick, in collaboration with the No Name Kitchen team. With this report, the authors aim to shed light on the unacceptable conditions of life within Serbian camps, exposing the severe human rights violations witnessed in these months. The events narrated in the report expose the violent use of camps within the context of the Joint Action Against People Smuggling undertaken by the Hungarian and Serbian governments from the end of October 2023. Finally, this report aims to analyze the events and conditions of the camps in connection to European-level decisions and policies towards the management of mobility.



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Introduction

We went to a jungle area in the municipality of Horgoš to provide basic necessities to people on the move. Some of us are on police lookout, Lea is staying by the van chatting with people, and the others are drinking chai and playing with kids. I am observing the scene as I fill up the water tanks for showers. At some point, a man approaches Lea and asks her for a bin bag. A few minutes later, the man is using that bin bag as a praying rug. What does it mean to carry out one's daily life in the face of detention, pushback, and deportation?

NNK activist, Serbia 2023

This scene captures one of the many instances of life conducted amidst the pervasive violence of the border. As **four activists who joined the No Name Kitchen¹ team in Serbia**, we collected many such memories during three months of fieldwork, from September to December 2023. Throughout this period, No Name Kitchen team regularly visited official reception/transit centers (RTCs) and asylum centers (ACs) for people on the move² near Subotica and Šid, two cities located respectively in the North and North-West of Serbia, as well as in Belgrade.

In Serbia, camps were established in the context of the Balkan corridor, a formalized migratory passage created in the first months of 2015 and then shut down by March 2016 with the beginning of the so-called "European migration crisis". Currently, there are 21 camps in the country, divided into reception/transit centers (RTCs) and asylum centers (ACs).

In the months from September to December 2023, the use of camps in Serbia underwent dramatic shifts as a result of the Joint Serbian-Hungarian Action Against People Smuggling³. Following the deaths of three people amidst armed clashes in the area of Horgoš on October 27th, Serbian and Hungarian police joined forces to "fight against organized crime and irregular migration", as stated by the Serbian Interior Minister Bratislav Gašić and Hungarian Minister of the Interior Sandor Pinter⁴. This partnership led to the militarisation of the Serbo-Hungarian border, with the deployment of several hundred members of the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, gendarmerie, Units of the Serbian and Hungarian Police, Border Police Administration, the Serbian Uprava Kriminalističke Policije (UKP), as well as Regional Police Administrations.

In this period, **the No Name Kitchen team witnessed a series of systematic and violent evictions in the camps regularly visited.** People in camps in the North were progressively moved towards the South or the East of Serbia to camps situated further away from border zones.

1 No Name Kitchen manages distributions of items and clothes outside of some of the Official Reception Centre of Serbia, and, apart from camps, mainly reaches informal settlements in the forests at the borders. KIRS, the Kommissariat for Refugee and Migrants of the Republic of Serbia had never allowed NNK to enter the buildings of the official Reception Centres.

2 People on the Move is an umbrella concept designating all people who decide to leave their homes. It is a term which, contrary to terms such as 'refugee' or 'migrant', does not seek to define the terms of an individual's right to move. From now on designated as 'Joint Police Operation'

3 From now on designated as 'Joint Police Operation'

4 <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/31/serbian-hungarian-police-agree-joint-action-against-people-smugglers/>

These events re-configured the purpose and use of camps in Serbia, from sites of total neglect to hyper-policed and surveilled realities. Furthermore, these events were marked by severe **human rights violations** and a worsening of the conditions of life afforded to people on the move in Serbia.

This report is the result of these months spent documenting life in Serbian camps and the events of the Joint Police Operation. By shedding light on the conditions inside Serbian official reception centers and the institutional violence witnessed in these months, **this report offers a counter-map to dominant views regarding humanitarian assistance in Serbia.** The practice of counter-mapping is guided by relationships and friendships with people living inside the camps. In this sense, this project is an attempt to challenge the disappearances and silencing of forced evictions and empty camps during the Joint Police Operation in Serbia.

Finally, this report offers a wider perspective on **'camps', as political spaces which encapsulate the objectives of current migration policies at the national, European and global levels:** to externalise and contain people portrayed as a 'threat' to national integrity. This report critically **examines why camps have emerged as a predominant approach to migration.** Camps act as barriers, isolating and segregating people from broader society, rendering their lives invisible and facilitating the perpetration of violence.

Questioning camps and their existence is to challenge the foundational premises upon which the 'free' European Union is built and to expose its actual principles: exclusion, racism, imperialism, and capitalism. To examine them more closely, and push for their abolition, is to push against these principles, but it is also to radically envision the interconnectedness of everything that must change: abolish borders, free us all.

Methodology and structure

Methodologically, this report hinges on a qualitative account of camp spaces and their features. This choice comes from an effort to give body and validity to months of interactions with people hosted in camps, to their stories, their issues and demands, and their testimonies. This report includes the memories that were created while in the field, sharing conversations, food, cups of chai, thoughts, and reflections.

The experiential foundation of this report led us to adopt a writing style that is primarily personal. Throughout the report, we use the pronoun 'we' as a means to explicitly convey the relational nature of the knowledge produced, our positionality as activists working in the field, and the continuous exchange of ideas and information which made this project possible. Furthermore, the use of this pronoun is informed by the fact we often witnessed the events firsthand; and, at other times, that they were reported to us directly by people on the move that we met.

The data we gathered provides compelling evidence of the human right violations and abuses occurring in Serbian camps. By consistently comparing our data with UNHCR reports on camps in Serbia, we seek to give validity to our findings for advocacy purposes and expose the UN agency

for what, at best, can be presumed to be negligence towards the real conditions of Serbian camps and people residing in them.

The report is divided into two main sections. The first section provides a narrative account of the camps we examine and is divided into five chapters: 1. Subotica RTC, 2. Krnjaca AC, 3. Sombor RTC, 4. Šid RTC, and 5. Adasevci RTC. These chapters provide information on the structural conditions of the facilities as well as the services provided. They recount the events of these months - forced evictions, police controls, and institutional violence. The chapters include reflections that emerged following the relational nature of our encounters with these places: on the psycho-physical experience of camps, violence, emotions, and perceptions of time which emerge from intimate conversations as well as from casual banter. Through a critical examination of the conditions and events witnessed in the Serbian camps, this section addresses severe human right violations and abuses committed against people on the move. These testimonies expose the actors and systems that establish camps as spaces of containment and violence - Serbia, the EU, and a shared logic of containment of oppressed communities under racial capitalism⁵.

In the second section, titled 'Analysis', the narrative and reflective account of camps gives way to a deeper examination of these spaces as political architectures of violence embedded within national, regional, and global systems of border enforcement. The experiential accounts from the first section are here re-elaborated through readings, reports, and conversations with researchers across various fields. In particular, this chapter delves into the intricate relationship between Serbian domestic politics and European externalisation policies, as an effort to understand the condition, use, and meaning of camps during the Joint Police Operation. Drawing connections between the national, regional, and global levels around the management of mobility is a way to understand which actors and agencies are to be held responsible for the real life-worlds created in camps. Through critical analysis, this chapter unravels propaganda narratives to offer a structural explanation for the global proliferation of encampment practices- contextualising their role as integral components of the border-industrial complex⁶.

⁵ Racial capitalism is a concept coined by Cedric J. Robinson in his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. The theory links the foundation of industrial capitalism to the production of social separateness between human beings (and humans and nature) for the functioning of capitalist expropriation.

⁶ <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/financing-border-wars>

First section

The order of the camps examined in this section follows the journey of people violently displaced during the Joint Police Operation through evictions and forced displacement. The first camp to be addressed is Subotica RTC, which was the first to be evicted on November 1st 2023. This episode marked the beginning of the series of evictions which moved thousands of people from camps in Northern Serbia to camps further South and away from border regions. Chapter 1 delves into the 'spectacularization' of border management which marked the experience of people residing in Subotica RTC. It shows how, prior to the eviction, the conditions of the camp were characterized by police violence, racial discrimination, and an inadequate provision of basic life necessities. Chapter 2 moves to Krnjaca AC in Belgrade, following Delia, a friend from Subotica RTC who, resisting the eviction, had to independently move to an asylum camp in the capital. The tone of this chapter is primarily personal and informed by the feelings and emotions evoked in conversation with our friend. Through these, we convey the 'temporal uncertainty' produced by the Joint Police Operation and the insidious violence of forced displacement within already displaced lives. The third chapter recounts the events leading to the complete evacuation of people on the move from Northern Serbia, an event completely sealing off the route into Hungary. Sombor camp was used for two weeks to temporarily station people taken away from Subotica and Kikinda RTCs. This chapter exposes the human rights violation and abuses which took place in this camp, through episodes of police violence and arbitrary detention. The eviction of Sombor camp took place on November 18th and was exceptionally violent. After this, hundreds of people were brought to Šid, to which the last two chapters turn. Chapter 4 examines the conditions of Šid Stanica RTC, a camp hosting migrant children on the move. Based on direct testimonies from these children, this section exposes alarming patterns regarding the treatment of minors in a EU-funded institution. These range from the lack of services to direct forms of abuse at the hands of social workers. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on Adasevci RTC, the camp which experienced one of the most impressive surge in population following evictions from northern Serbia. The chapter 6 is a visual representation of Principovac camp. Through these six chapters, the different phases of the Joint Police Operation are examined in detail.



1. Subotica RTC Camps as Border Spectacles

1.1 What stories does the camp tell?

Subotica camp is the perfect example of the changing meaning of camps throughout different political contexts. No Name Kitchen teams started organizing distributions at Subotica camp in September 2023, after witnessing institutional negligence and violence towards people on the move. NNK's work consisted of distributing food, water, items and providing emotional support to people.

Subotica camp represented a relational space where No Name Kitchen activists used to meet hundreds of people everyday⁷.

⁷ UNHCR data of September 2023 (Site Profiles Serbia) reported the presence of 192 persons in Subotica camp. During NNK's visit to the place we noticed weeks where there were more than 200 people. Then, UNHCR data of the December 2023 report does not mention how many people there were in November and December (as it was used in their report) but the only number reported is 0 people and the capacity of the camp 220. .

It is the place where unexpected conversations could take place; like the one in which a Syrian woman sitting under a tree shared knowledge about Arabic literature and introduced listeners to the poetry of Nazar Quabbani. It is the place where people played endless football matches, drank several cups of chai (regularly not sweet enough), and where children expressed themselves through drawings and colors. At the same time, Subotica camp is a site where hundreds of people would be regularly denied basic human rights. It functioned as a transit point where people used to gather every night, preparing to go ‘on game’⁸ through Hungary. As the first reception center subject to eviction during the Joint Operation, Subotica camp offers us the initial glimpse into the violence of the EU border regime.

1.2 Funding and management

Subotica is a border town in northern Serbia and a main departure point for people on the move to the European Union where No Name Kitchen has been active since 2022.

The camp in Subotica opened in November 2015 as a result of the “emergency response” by Serbian officials to the large number of refugees who were transiting through Shengen countries during the so-called “long summer of migration”. **Subotica camp opened with the funds provided by the German Federal Foreign Ministry and by Arbeiter Samariter Bund** (ABS), a German charity organization, in cooperation with the Serbian Minister of labour, employment, veteran and social policy at the time, Aleksandar Vulin, the local government of Subotica, and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration⁹.

ABS allocated significant fundings and resources to Subotica camp through the financial support of the EU Commission and the German Federal Foreign Office. ABS started the programme Aid in transit to support Syrian and other refugees in camps and in transit in Serbia, North Macedonia and Greece. The project, lasting from 2015 until 2018, was financed by the German Federal Foreign Office which allocated € 3,000,541.46¹⁰.

In 2015, ASB allocated around 150.000 Euros for the opening of Subotica camp. The reconstruction works started in September 2015 and after less than two months the management was handed over to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. Under the project funded by the German Federal Foreign Ministry, ASB reconstructed an old dormitory building, management and medical buildings, a kitchen, a dining room, two sanitary blocks and installed a sewage and water supply network as well as a heating system¹¹.

As of today, lack of transparency makes it difficult to track down specific amounts allocated by individual states, the EU, and international organizations. Germany plays an important role in Serbia for migration management and continues to represent Serbia’s main economic partner for bilateral relations¹².

8 Expression used by people on the move to refer to the act of crossing borders.

9 <https://asb-see.org/refugee-camp-in-subotica-successfully-opened/>

10 <https://www.asb.de/en/foreign-aid/countries/serbia#transit>

11 <https://asb-see.org/refugee-camp-in-subotica-successfully-opened/>

12 <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/serbia/228080>



Drawings showing police at Subotica camp
from early October 2023

The European Union remains the largest donor in the Republic of Serbia for migration management. Since 2015, the EU has allocated more than 130 million euros for the provision of humanitarian aid and the protection of migrants, including for the conditions of reception and care in reception and asylum centers¹³. These funds have mostly been coming from the Instrument for pre-accession Assistance (IPA), an EU development fund for prospective member countries.

Subotica camp is managed by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, a central state body in charge of reception and migration management. Even if staffing should be provided by the Serbian state, the EU Commission reports that “the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is operating without a full complement of staff while staffing in the reception centers remains fully dependent on external (EU) funding”¹⁴.

1.3 Voices from the camp

Living conditions, including accommodation, hygiene conditions, access to adequate food and water, and medical healthcare, have a significant impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of

¹³ <http://euinfo.rs/podrska-eu-upravljanju-migracijama/en/>

¹⁴ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_695_Serbia.pdf

people. Depriving people of adequate living conditions creates harm and as such constitutes a form of institutional violence.

In Subotica camp, people who are granted a camp ID are accommodated in **group container rooms** which do not guarantee privacy and adequate hygienic conditions. Official data from the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration indicated that Subotica camp has a capacity for up to 220 people. However, as reported by Nikola Kovačević¹⁵, RTC Subotica experienced overcrowding throughout 2021 and 2022, accommodating 162 persons in June 2021 and 431 persons in September 2022.

As a transit center, people were allowed to move in and out the camp without particular restrictions. Nevertheless, the presence of gates and frequent visit by Serbian police and Gendarmerie contributed to a general climate of fear, surveillance, and harassment.

During a drawing session with a group of children, **one child drew only police cars**. His mother later explained that his son had been terrified by the police and for a while that was the only thing that the child was drawing. This family, sleeping outside of Subotica RTC for about a week, constantly fled everytime police visited the camp to prevent their money being stolen.

Despite being officially under the authority of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, only two guards appeared to be on duty, amid rumors of corruption. **Subotica RTC is a facility known to be controlled by organized criminal groups** involved in smuggling, regulating access based on ethnicity and reportedly extorting payments.

Although a **UNHCR report from September 2023 asserts that Subotica RTC meets the requirements for family unity**¹⁶, the reality observed by NNK upon visiting was starkly different. Families, women, and minors were often denied access to the camp, relegated to living outside in the fields. The majority of those inside were Syrian men, constituting 86% of residents according to UNHCR data. Residents of Subotica RTC reported insufficient space to accommodate everyone, leading to restrictions on access in order for camp security to mitigate potential conflicts between different groups.

On more instances, Afghan and Moroccan nationals reported having been denied access to the camp as facilities would be reserved to Syrian men only.

A group of Moroccans contacted No Name Kitchen team on the field on October 24th in a desperate attempt to receive medical assistance following a violent pushback at the hands of Hungarian authorities¹⁷. Serbian police had driven them back from the area of Martonoš and simply dropped them in front of Subotica RTC. As camp authorities did not issue them any ID, they were forced to sleep outside in the cold. However, the physical conditions of M., one of the men, were too serious. When the NNK team went to meet the group in the vicinity of Subotica RTC, M. could not stand on his own and reported not being able to see properly. Hungarian police had hit him with a baton causing him an open wound on his forehead and a severe concussion on the back of his head.

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

16 <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/serbia-site-profiles-september-2023>

17 <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy77131tM04/?igsh=djE5ZGw3Z3lkdHp4>



Picture taken by No Name Kitchen showing RTV journalists reporting on Subotica RC

With the support of volunteers from Medical Volunteers International (MVI), NNK team accompanied M. to Subotica hospital where he finally received appropriate medical treatment.

This event raises the issue of discriminatory practices against **particular nationalities who are systematically denied access to camp's facilities**. It also **proves UNHCR data wrong on the provision of medical healthcare at Subotica RTC**. The UNHCR report alleges that Subotica RTC offers adequate medical treatment with, for example, mentions of a health spot with an isolation room, and the covering or refund of health costs¹⁸. The reality we witnessed, as the No Name Kitchen team on the field, was very distant from UNHCR accounts.

The area surrounding Subotica RTC is also telling of the conditions inside the camp. **Local businesses selling food and beverages have been proliferating around the camp**, profiting from the poor access to services inside of the camp. A food shack owned by a Serbian man is placed right in front of the camp to sell fries and sandwiches. Many of the people would report buying water bottles for 1400 dinars (almost 1,50 euros) from this business due to tap water not being drinkable inside the camp. At the back of the camp, Serbian construction workers had been building a fast-food restaurant, but with the closure of Subotica TRC their plan was also interrupted.

¹⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/serbia-site-profiles-september-2023>

1.4 Subotica RTC as Border Spectacle

The events that No Name Kitchen activists witnessed at Subotica RTC over three months of activity are evidence of the deadly logics of exclusion, deterrence and erasure of borders. Subotica RTC emerges as a stage for the “Border Spectacle”, setting a scene that “appears to be all about “exclusion”, where allegedly “unwanted” or “undesirable” migrants must be stopped, kept out and turned around”¹⁹.

On October 31st, NNK team visited Subotica RTC for a regular distribution of food and non-food items (NFIs). Upon arrival, the team witnessed a scene never seen before: all the people were queued inside for food, with no one lingering outside in the fields. **Journalists from RTV**, the Serbian national broadcaster, were standing outside filming and reporting the scene. On the same day, the Hungarian and Serbian governments launched the Joint Action against People Smugglers, marking the beginning of mass evictions from northern Serbia and heightened border militarisation.

The subsequent eviction of Subotica RTC on November 1st served as a glaring display of state manipulation regarding migration management. The spectacle orchestrated by the Serbian government the day prior to the eviction epitomizes the manipulation of narratives: one day, the “Border Spectacle” portrays the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration as a benevolent provider of care and services for residents; the next day, the same site becomes the stage of a violent eviction.

This shift exemplifies the intertwined nature of humanitarian discourse and the logic of securitisation, whereby migrants are rendered disposable in the purported pursuit of “fighting organized crime and illegal migration”²⁰.

The discourse around “illegal” migration creates the conditions for the forced expulsion of migrants within and outside the nation-state. In Subotica, the “spectacle” of border enforcement, wherein migrant ‘illegality’ is rendered spectacularly visible, paved the way for the eviction of almost five hundred people to Sombor camp, as well as camps in Šid, Belgrade and southern Serbia.

1.5 Eviction

No Name Kitchen team collected testimonies of the eviction on November 1st. The NNK team arrived at the camp to find the space completely empty apart from five people who slowly approached them to recount what had happened. Reportedly, **Serbian police arrived at Subotica RTC on the night of November 1st with five buses to move people to other locations.** Witnesses described instances of physical violence, with batons employed against those attempting to run away. One person reported that there was blood on the floor of the camp facilities. According to the

19 https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.13169/decohor.4.0023.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A95f8ed679da33ce-2541e83b634150105&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

20 <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/31/serbian-hungarian-police-agree-joint-action-against-people-smugglers/>

testimony, some people tried to run away through the fields. Police chased them and tried to shoot them. People were forcefully removed without even the possibility of collecting their belongings.

The situation turned out to be extremely challenging for those who managed to hide during the eviction. Increased police and military presence in the areas of Subotica, Horgoš, and Sombor severely impeded movement for people in the north. Finding shelters in hotels or informal accommodations was not a possibility as police started conducting regular raids in all these sites. The Joint Police Operation effectively devolved into a racial and ethnic profiling- driven manhunt, with inhumane and degrading consequences for all people on the move.



Tank moved and then parked
outside the squat where
the shooting took place,
November 2024

2. Krnjaca AC

Dalia and counter-mapping geographies of violence



People who were not put on buses during the eviction of Subotica RTC were instructed by camp workers to find their own way to other camps in the south. In a climate of disorientation, people attempted to reach other locations using taxis or buses. Among them was Dalia, a Palestinian girl with whom we became friends in Subotica. She had to leave Subotica RTC in the night without even having the time to collect her personal belongings. One morning, she had reached out to one of us, telling us that she was going to Krnjaca camp in Belgrade.

We met her at Subotica bus station where she had been hiding in a nearby parking lot out of fear of the police. We quickly left her some winter clothes and gave each other a hug. Inshallah, we would see each other again soon.

This chapter is motivated by our friendship with Dalia, who, after two months spent at Krnjaca AC, successfully crossed into Bosnia-Herzegovina and eventually reached Germany. The stories Dalia shared with us and the context in which our friendship developed provide insights into the geographies of violence perpetuated by the Joint Police Operation. Through this relationship, this chapter engages in a form of counter-mapping, challenging dominant narratives and revealing the hidden realities of violence within these spaces. The events from Krnjaca AC are yet another example of the underlying logics of camps: containment and exclusion.

2.1 General overview of the camp

Krnjaca is Serbia's oldest asylum center and is located on the outskirts of Belgrade in the Municipality of Palilula. It is a complex of former workers' barracks, which since the early 1990s began housing Serbian refugees and internally displaced people fleeing from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo. In 2014, the Serbian government designated Krnjaca as an asylum center to accommodate the large influx of people passing through the Balkan route.

The camp is divided into spaces that provide distinct services: a kindergarten, rooms dedicated to children activities, a Serbian language center for adults, and a 'women's corner'²¹. The provision of these activities is intended for residents who remain for lengthy periods of time. It is the case of L, a guy from Burundi who has been living in the camp for seven years whilst working in construction in Belgrade. According to UNHCR data, Krnjaca AC can host up to 830 residents, even if its realistic capacity is up to 600 places when taking into consideration other standards that refer to privacy, overcrowding, and hygiene²².

As an Asylum Center, Krnjaca stands at the intersection of care and control. The provision of humanitarian care and assistance to people arriving via the Balkan Route goes hand-in-hand with managing the mobility of refugees across the European Union. The conditions and architecture of Krnjaca AC reveal the political imperatives of the camp: *regulation, leniency, and containment*.

Through *regulation*, camp residents are *contained*, as following rules becomes a prerequisite for receiving aid. At the same time, a *lenient* attitude grants residents the autonomy necessary to remain mobile along the Balkan route²³.

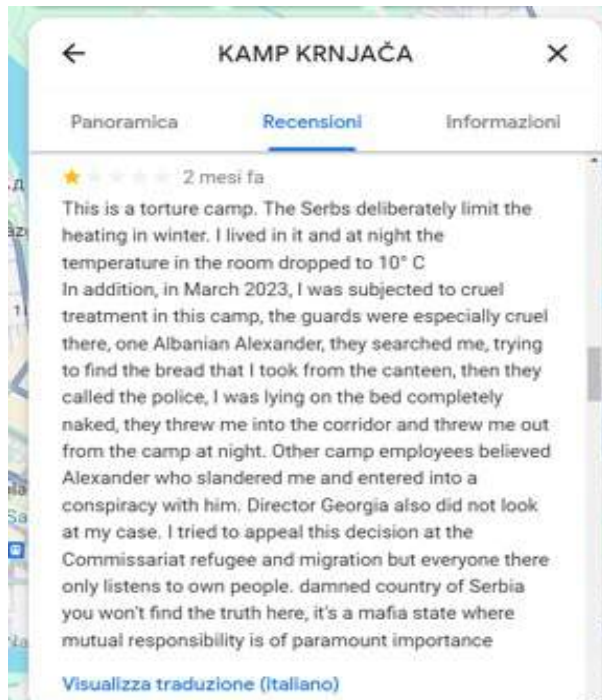
21 <https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/the-camp-as-a-custodian-institution-the-case-of-krnja%C4%8Da-asylum-ce>

22 <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/>

23 <https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/the-camp-as-a-custodian-institution-the-case-of-krnja%C4%8Da-asylum-ce>

2.2 Conditions inside the camp

The degrading living conditions of Krnjaca contributed to the psychological harm inflicted on people on the move. Google reviews left by residents, like the one below, are a testimony of how camps can be sites where people's dignity is stripped off.



During one of the meetings with Delia, she reported how guards would abuse their power towards residents. **Verbal and racist abuse** would be regularly used against residents, amounting to degrading treatment and a violation of Article 3 of the ECHR.

The provision of food did not count as 'adequate meals', as instead reported by the UNHCR. According to several testimonies, for a few weeks, Commissariat only served hot dogs as a meal, with no other *halal* options. This forced Muslim residents to buy food from outside, even if no cooking was allowed inside the camp.

UNHCR report from December 2023²⁴ indicates that **Krnjaca AC offers 'Special services for SGBV survivors', yet a friend reported incidents of sexual harassment at the hands of a Commissariat personnel towards several women.**

2.3 Temporality at Krnjaca camp: waiting and uncertainty during the Joint Police Operation

The feelings of uncertainty about the future combined with the sense of atemporality and immobility of the space characterized the atmosphere of Krnjaca camp. These sensations emerged from the stories Delia and her friends shared with us during our meetings.

People at Krnjaca camp are allowed to enter and exit the camp as they want. However, there are restrictions to their freedom of movement. Camp residents have to present their camp ID every time they enter or exit the camp. Furthermore, access to the camp is regulated by a curfew at 10 pm. These regulations are a perpetual reminder of people's lack of autonomy within the camp and a powerful tool for camp management to maintain order and control. There is nevertheless a

²⁴ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89400>

form of *leniency* in the enforcement of such regulations - as management indirectly but effectively supports the mobility of those residents who intend to move further along their journeys.

The Joint Police Operation drastically reduced the mobility of people in Serbia. Serbian authorities would, at least for the first month, stop people on the move from roaming around areas that are not in the proximity of camps and bring them back to the camp. This is what Delia's cousin had to endure twice before managing, at the beginning of December, to cross into Bosnia-Herzegovina and continue her journey. The Joint Police Operation effectively put the lives of Delia and many others on hold for two months. During this time, people living at Krnjaca camp had to make a place for themselves whilst planning to 'go on game'. Spaces of temporary transit became endowed with the possibility of permanent stay, with hard psychological consequences for people on the move. With the Joint Police Operation, many of the people who were about to cross into Hungary got stuck in Krnjaca for months. As a consequence, the occupancy of the camp went from 152 in September 2023 to 346 in December 2023²⁵.

The last time we went to Krnjaca to meet with Delia and her friend was on the 10th of December. As always, we caught the bus from the center of Belgrade, we changed at Blok Braca Maric, and waited for about an hour for the 108 line. Once we arrived in front of the camp, we called Delia who checked out with the Commissariat guard and walked with us along the highway to the gas station Knez Petrol.

As we sat at the table and tried to relax, we realised something was off this time. Delia's cousin was going 'on game' through Bosnia that night and she was feeling really scared. Delia was also considering trying the following day in order not to remain alone in camp. She kept asking for our advice and really could not decide. The following day, we would also have left Serbia. As women of similar age, we often felt really close to Delia in many respects. Yet, the fact that she would have had to cross rivers and forests in the middle of the night, pay thousands of euros, and live in fear just to get to Germany and see her family made our lives very distant.

Ultimately, the temporal uncertainty created by the Joint Police Operation reproduced a carceral logic resulting in the active harassment and disruption of people's lives. Krnjaca camp functioned as a space where people's lives would be delayed in a **state of "protected" uncertainty**, harming people through the production of forms of mobility impairment.

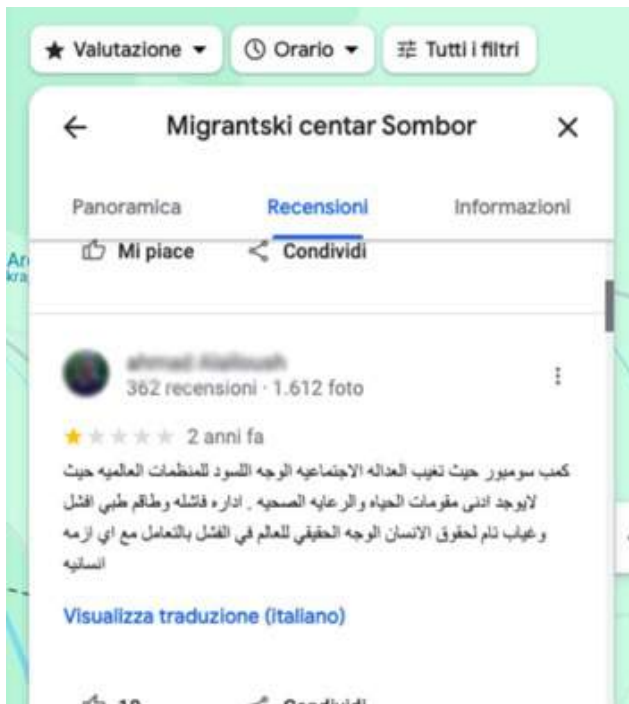
The reflection and analysis on camps presented in this report aims to show how borders configure racial geographies of time and space that define global mobilities. From the reflection on space and temporality presented in this chapter, it is clear how borders are not mere lines demarcating territories but can be identified in multiple forms: a camp, surveillance technologies, policing techniques aiming at suspending people's lives.

Our relationship with Dalia and the context in which it developed are evidence of the violence of border politics. For the unequal dynamics of power and the violence that they (re)produce, borders should be abolished.

25 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89400>

3. Sombor RTC The necropolitics of camps

After Subotica RTC was evicted, rounds of evictions of squats in the area seemed to empty Northern Serbia from people on the move. However, NNK team soon started receiving reports that hundreds of people had been brought to Sombor camp. This camp is located in North-west Serbia near the Croatian and Hungarian borders and was opened on November 6th 2016. It is renowned for the heavy presence of organized criminal groups and its numerous security incidents. Reports document its poor living conditions, lack of privacy and adequate requirements for the respect of human dignity and rights²⁶. For lack of capacity, NNK team on the field was not regularly going to this camp when the Joint Police Operation started. Thus, after Subotica camp was evicted, the team was approaching the site for the first time. This camp, seemingly forgotten by everyone, can be found in the review world of google maps, where a 2.7 stars rating is accompanied by comments. reporting its degrading conditions.



Camp Sombor, where social justice is absent, is the black side of international organizations, where there are no minimum necessities for life or health care. Failed administration, failed medical staff, and a complete absence of human rights. The true face of the world is the failure to deal with any humanitarian crisis.

Says A. two years ago.

Set up in the warehouse of a military complex, the overcrowded conditions of this facility have been documented across the years. In December 2021, the facility reached a peak rate of 580%. Next to the camp there is the Šikara picnic area, a public park where hundreds of people had been sleeping in tents since before the Operation. In 2018, the EU funded the renovation of this park, with the intention of creating an “opportunity of exchange between migrants and Serbian people”²⁷. However, due to persistent overcrowding within the camp, the park soon turned into an informal sleeping accommodation for people, as well as a ‘game’ starting point, with scores of taxis stationed there.

²⁶ <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>

²⁷ <http://euinfo.rs/podrska-eu-upravljanju-migracijama/en/sombors-picnic-area-sikara-got-a-makeover/>



Picture taken by No Name Kitchen team on the field, Sikara park near to Sombor camp, November 2023.

3.1 NNK visits Sombor Camp

On 6th of November, when NNK team managed to enter the adjacent park, it was estimated that the place was hosting between 500 to 700 people, against the official capacity of 380 places. There were young men, women, children, and unaccompanied minors. The presence of unaccompanied minors raised concerns for their exposure to violence and the possibility of exploitation. People reported access to food was limited to a small minority. **Most people were sleeping outside and had no access to showers. All of these aspects are inaccurately described in the UNHCR report covering these months.** For the UNHCR, a 'separate accommodation was provided for UASCs'²⁸ and the camp provided 'adequate meals'. Moreover, the center was said to be 'Accessible for all'²⁹.

After the methodical and systematic evictions of the Joint Operation, Sombor camp became the only place hosting people in the whole of Northern Serbia. This was the case for approximately two weeks, from the 1st to the 18th of November.

28 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

29 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89400>

The conditions in Sombor camp, historically inadequate for the support and dignity of the lives of people on the move, were gravely exacerbated by the severe overpopulation of the place in this period. **What was then the rationale behind such a large displacement and resettlement of people to this camp?**



Picture taken by No Name Kitchen team on the field, Sikara park near to Sombor camp, 6th of November 2023.

There's no bed or anything here, just human traffickers. They live like kings. We are exposed to the harshest types of violence and beatings, and we suffer from a lack of food. They do not allow us to get food outside.

Declarations from A., person on the move during NNK visit at the camp, 6th November 2023.

3.2 The Closing of Sombor Camp

With the launch of the Joint Police Operation, Sombor camp became significantly **militarised** and surveilled. Police patrolled the surrounding area and set a checkpoint at the entrance of the park to regulate entry and exit. After the first assessment on November 6th, the NNK team repeatedly attempted to enter the park and reach people inside with food and NFIs. Yet, **the police prevented NNK team access every time, checking vehicles and stopping activists for hours.** This

obstruction persisted for two weeks, during which NNK and other prominent NGOs like MSF³⁰ were prevented access to the camp or the park, despite the urgent need for essentials such as food, clothes and medical assistance. Responsibility for this denial of access was continuously deflected between the police and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, with conflicting claims around the jurisdiction of the park. The impossibility of reaching people in what should be a public park points to the hidden violence embedded in the use of Sombor camp to relocate people on the move during the Joint police Operation.

In addition, police did not allow people on the move to freely move in and out of the camp, depriving people possibly in need of international protection of their liberty, raising issues with article 5 (right to liberty and security) of the ECHR.

People in the camp who were in contact with the NNK team reported daily forms of police brutality, including physical violence and the destruction of personal belongings. Furthermore, in the days preceding the eviction, reports emerged of **police setting fire to the tents in the park**³¹. The pervasive atmosphere of intimidation and violence at Sombor camp took a toll on the mental health of its residents, with many experiencing severe psychological distress, including suicidal thoughts.

In a report published in 2022, Nikola Kovačević highlights the dangers inherent in camps situated in proximity of borders in Serbia³². With RTCs not equipped to facilitate long term accommodation for people on the move, they become sites of heightened tensions in view of the high presence of smugglers. Moreover, these centers are not equipped to provide care for people who are subjected to the harsh (and illegal) practice of push-backs along the borders. People in reception centers are already exposed to extreme possibilities of violence, including by Serbian police and special forces. These factors, as well as the lack of adequate services and provisions for the welfare of people in these camps, was denounced by the European Commission in 2017 as raising issues with articles 2 (right to life) and 3 (prohibition of torture) of the ECHR. It is with these facts in mind that we must consider the period at hand as critical, when for two weeks in November 500 to 700 people were detained inside the premises of the park and the camp, with no contact with the outside world. In this context, we can imagine the abuses we are reporting on as constituting just a fragment of what people on the move experienced inside the camp. **The closure of the camp for this period can be seen as an act of dehumanization and detention strictly linked with the possibility of violence and human rights violations towards people on the move.**

The emergency nature of the Joint Police Operation enabled arbitrary detention in a purportedly 'open' camp. Ultimately, this exacerbated the **necropolitical function of the camp**, enforcing its architecture of violence and segregation, the checkpoint at the entrance of the park acting as a militarized line, marking the division between 'wanted' and 'unwanted' populations.

30 Médecins Sans Frontières

31 <https://www.nonamekitchen.org/eviction-from-sombor-transition-centre/>

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

3.3 The eviction

On the 18th of November, Sombor camp was evicted, with people brought to camps in Šid, to the South of Serbia or in prisons. From the accounts we received, the eviction was very violent.

Many police cars surrounded the camp and the park around it. Around 50 policemen, fully armed, got out of the cars, waking people up by screaming, beating them up and using pepper spray against them. Seemingly, the operation was carried out by regular police units, Intelligence, and the Serbian Army. According to the testimonies, they were carrying with them Kalashnikovs, guns, batons, electric batons, and they were supported by dogs and drones to reach the people that tried to escape. They gathered all the people in the square, forcing them to sit on their knees and with their hands behind their head. After gathering everyone up, police officers started to beat them up with punches and kicks, and with electric batons. Police stole everybody's phones, and some were also asked to pay a fine of 30.000 dinars to avoid being sent to jail. Whilst the people who could pay were taken to other camps, we have no information about what happened to the others. Fourteen police buses were then filled up with people who were taken to other camps in Serbia, most of them in camps close to Šid area, where NNK is present as well, in already overcrowded centers.³³

The incredible violence of the eviction shows the extent to which force is allowed and perhaps encouraged in these exceptional spaces. Allowing camps to become places where the segregation and dehumanization of people is narratively and spatially established, means institutions and police can act with impunity.

After Sombor camp was evicted, the forced resettlement of people on the move from camp to camp points to the exceptionality of Transit/Reception centers (RTCs) and their use. It highlights the fact that RTCs in Serbia are not places established and regulated to provide a certain kind of service and rights to people on the move, but rather exceptional sites that can act outside the purview of society and the law, serving a population kept in illegality. RTCs are not made for the people hosted in them, but for managing and regulating them vis-à-vis the rest of society. As exceptional sites, camps inherently contain the possibility of violence, control and confinement. In this period, Sombor camp was used to temporarily relocate people on the move away from the rest of Northern Serbia, whilst subjecting them to extremely degrading conditions and police violence. The joint operation between the Serbian and Hungarian government had been framed as a strategy to combat people-smuggling organizations in the country. Instead, the use of camps in this way speaks of an act of population management resting on a logic of segregation and violence. It displays the 'absolute power' to lock people on the move into a spatial system of accessible and inaccessible zones, minutely regulating movement and heavily restricting the scope for autonomous action³⁴.

³³ <https://www.nonamekitchen.org/eviction-from-sombor-transition-centre/>

³⁴ The_camp_as_a_custodian_institution_the_case_of_Krnja_a_Asylum_Centre.pdf

3.4 After the eviction and the relational nature of space

On the 2nd of December, we returned to the camp for the first time after the eviction. This time, the police officers at the checkpoint did not even look at us as we walked into the park, reminding us that we are implicated, with our shifting meaning(s) and privileges, in a spatial configuration of power. NNK's right to enter a public park had been rendered illegal just a few weeks before, for the sole reason of wanting to come into contact with the people on the move 'hosted' there. The purported illegality of human contact stands as a statement in itself, unveiling the potential dress to be worn by camps, of dividing people, of invisibilizing some, and giving impunity to commit violence and power abuses to others. But now that there was no one to see, no one who could tell us their story, no one who could speak their truth to power, we were not dangerous. Sombor RTC was deserted, but the forest was full of traces of life, flattened tents and carpets beneath the leaves, leopard garments and lingerie pointing to the presence of women, a little kid's overalls pointing to the presence of families. **If spaces can have shifting meanings, the case of Sombor camp shows that camps should not exist, as they inherently contain the premises for segregation, violence, and abuse.**



Picture taken by No Name Kitchen team on the field out from Sombor camp after the eviction.

4. Šid Stanica RTC Childhood at the border

Šid is a crucial transit point on the Balkan route since 2015. Located 150 km away from Subotica, on the Croatian border, this town counts 15 thousand inhabitants. It also hosts three refugee camps: Principovac, Adaševci, and Šid Stanica.

Šid Stanica camp is a Reception and Transit Center that accommodates migrant families on the Serbian-Croatian border. Opened in November 2015, it is located in front of the train station and next to a bus station, a strategic location which had been used in 2015 to allow people to continue the route by train.

Between September and December 2023³⁵, the camp would only host unaccompanied minors, with whom NNK activists had the chance to get together and spend time. Due to restricted access to the camp, we would meet the kids in a nearby park, located next to train tracks and surrounded by houses. The majority of the boys we encountered were aged between 14 and 17, with some exceptions like a 6-year-old kid. Most of them came from Afghanistan, Syria and Egypt.

4.1 Spatial confinement

Like most teenagers, the kids from Šid camp were driven by the need to socialize and explore the world around them. As a period in which one starts to define a personality, being a teenager can be an extremely challenging, yet exciting moment in life. However, the strict impositions enforced by the police and camp authorities curtailed these kids' ability to enjoy the most basic activities. Mohammed, Abdul, Ali recounted how their attempts to venture beyond the camp's confines and explore the city of Šid, were routinely thwarted by police intervention. Despite regulations purportedly allowing for movement outside of camp, a police car would regularly stop them and send them back to camp.

According to the UNHCR report on Serbian official camps in September 2023, Šid RTC can give permits to move outside, even if there are no registered numbers of granted permits. The boys reported that the camp would be regulated by a 9 pm curfew. However, NNK activists witnessed harsh limitations imposed on the boys' mobility. Police effectively **deprived children of their right to meet with others - going against Article 15th of the UN Convention** on the Rights of the Child. This represented just one form of violence concerning the spatial confinement imposed on the boys housed in Šid camp.

Police also hindered their participation in recreational activities organized by the NNK team. In early December, police showed up at the park to conduct ID checks on NNK activists and required that the kids return to the camp, citing complaints from local residents. Before walking back to the camp, the kids would apologize for the perceived trouble they had caused. Yet, it was not their fault that the police failed to acknowledge their right to be happy and seek respite from the challenges

35 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89400>

they faced.



NNK team on the field playing cards
with some of the kids outside from Šid camp

In a context of policing and surveillance, the kids ended up spending the majority of their time on their mobile phones, which represented their last accessible window on the outside world.

4.2 Inside the Camp

According to the UNHCR report on Serbian official camps from December 2023³⁶, Šid camp has a maximum capacity of 120 places. With the start of the Joint Police Operation at the end of October 2023 Šid camp faced an increase in its population due to the evictions and relocation of people from the north of Serbia. By the end of November, testimonies revealed that approximately 40 boys were being housed in the camp, predominantly originating from Syria and Afghanistan, with two minority groups from Morocco and Egypt. “Social workers” reported that to accommodate the newcomers, they had to organize new sleeping arrangements- despite an allegedly capacity of 120 places. Compared to other Serbian camps, this facility looked welcoming. The house had a garden and a balcony on the first floor, where the boys would often gather

36 Ibid.

in the evenings. However, despite the inviting aesthetics of the building, the architecture of Šid camp remains entrenched within hostile politics of migration management, containing people and excluding them from the rest of society. This was reflected in the extremely poor quality of services offered in the camp.

According to the UNHCR report from December 2023, the camp would provide access to schools. In reality, the kids reported that only a **few educational activities would take place inside the camp and that no one would attend school.** The structure of the camp, intended to provide only temporary accommodation for kids in transit through Serbia, made it impossible to even attend a local school. In this sense, the experience of these kids inside of camps demonstrates that a border regime based on encampments fundamentally denies the right to education and life of children. Their “illegal” status forces them to endure long and dangerous travels and face several forms of violence. The resulting temporal uncertainty is intimately connected to their lack of access to education.

Furthermore, the UNHCR report states that access to medical healthcare and related costs for treatment would be ensured to children. The reality we witnessed was very different. For instance, NNK teams provided first aid medical care to a kid who got violently pushbacked by Croatian police. NNK teams treated wounds caused by dog bites and paid for the medicines he needed.



Pictures taken by some minors in Sid camp,
Meals distributed in the camp

In regard to access to food and NFIs, UNHCR reports that adequate services are provided. Yet, kids would regularly complain about the food, which was generally low quality and served in plastic recipients. Breakfast would consist of plain bread and milk.

As a result, kids who had more financial capacity preferred to buy food elsewhere. This would lead them to consume junk food, such as french fries, chocolate, snacks and soda.



Pictures taken by some minors. Meals some minors were buying in alternative to camp meals.

Within the camp, the kids were not offered a balanced diet that would ensure them the “standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”, as required by the article 21.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Children.

4.3 “Social Workers”

A team of “social workers” resided in the facility, each with their own approach and behavior towards the kids. One of the kids told us about a very kind translator; a doctor who was “very good and loves to make jokes with us”; and another “social worker” who seemed to care deeply about them. One staff member fostered a warm rapport with many of the kids and fostered open dialogue with NNK volunteers.

UNHCR reports state that Šid camp employs staff trained with child protection skills. However, troubling testimonies emerged regarding the **abuse of children by one “social worker”**. Reportedly, he would exploit moments when other workers were absent to sell energy drinks and packaged snacks to the boys in the evening. Then, in the middle of the night, around 3-4 am, he would barge into the minors bedrooms, reeking of alcohol and possibly other substances. Once in the bedroom, he obliged them into participating in a disturbing ‘game’. The ‘game’ would consist in turning around quickly enough to avoid a violent slap on the neck from the social worker. All the kids were afraid of him and deeply enraged. Even after a long time, once they arrived in another country, the kids would text us remembering the terrible moments they had to endure at his hands.

These episodes, occurring fortnightly, amount to physical and psychological violence inflicted on minors. This **“social workers”’s behaviour violates the UN Convention of the Rights of the Children** stating that: “states parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child” (art.19.1).

4.4 The Tunnel to Adaševci Camp

During a conversation, NNK team on the field learned that two of the kids housed in Šid camp were working for smugglers operating in Adaševci camp, located approximately 2 ½ hours away on foot. Despite the considerable distance, the kids were willing to undertake the journey to earn money. Their tasks, as they reported, included transporting passengers in vehicles, guiding them through the forests and leading the way.

According to their accounts, this work would earn them 500 euros per person. The two boys would report spending the night in Adaševci camp and coming back in the early morning to Šid camp. However, “social workers” in Adaševci would sometimes discover that the two boys lacked the identity cards for that camp. Sometimes, a “social worker” would give them a ride back to Šid camp, while other times they have to make their journey back on foot.

Furthermore, we discovered that the two minors were consuming **Captagon**³⁷ – a drug that allowed them to stay awake for extended periods during their smuggling job. They commented: “Many people sell the pills in the Adaševci camp”³⁸. As a stimulant, these pills raise the level of dopamine, allowing people to be alert for longer periods. Other side effects are: “elevated heart rate, elevated body temperature, elevated blood pressure, sleep deprivation, heart toxicity, malnutrition, sleep disturbances, and depression”³⁹. The two kids admitted to grappling with addiction issues stemming from their use of the substance.

The fact that the kids were forcibly prevented from loitering in the city centre of Šid, yet managed to walk two and a half hours to Adaševci camp is telling of the dynamics of migration management in Serbia. Migration is perceived as a phenomenon to be contained and hidden from plain sight, cast away from the eyes of Serbian civil society. In this context, the safety of migrant children is often disregarded. It comes as no surprise that instances of drug use and abusive behaviors from “social workers” occur with alarming frequency. **The systemic racism under which camps operate is fundamentally incompatible with the wellbeing of migrant children.** Under such conditions, their lives will never be able to flourish.

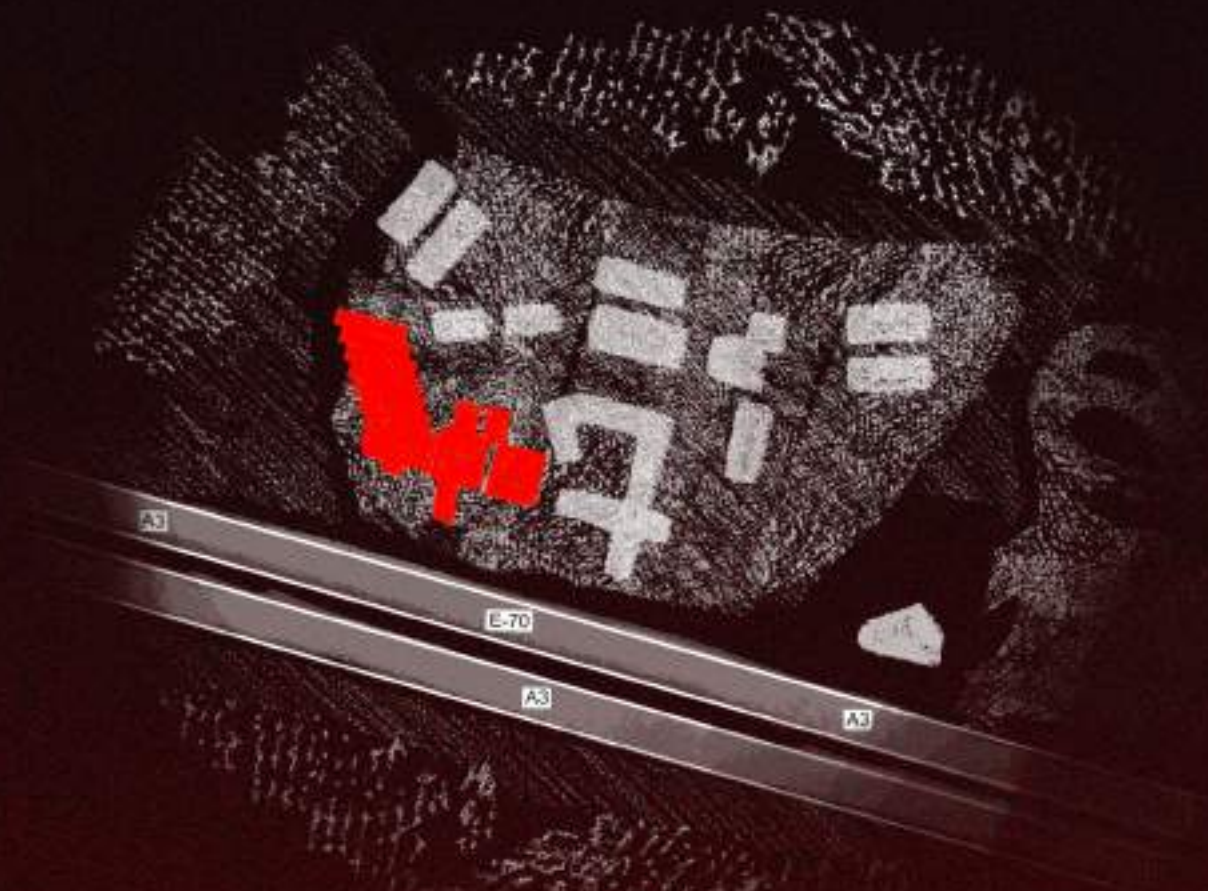
37 Captagon is a psychoactive medicine made by fenethylline. In the Sixties, when it was first synthesised, it was used to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as well as narcolepsy and depression. Nowadays, even if it was banned by the United Nations in 1986, Captagon is still massively produced, mainly in Syria, and smuggled to the Gulf states (Al Jazeera, 2023).

38 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/9/what-is-captagon-the-addictive-drug-mass-produced-in-syria>

39 <https://www.addictionresource.net/blog/what-is-captagon/>

5. Adasevci RTC The psychophysical experience of camps

Adaševci Camp is a reception center situated at the Serbo-Croatian border, marking one of the final transit points before entering the European Union. The structure, an old motel, was established in 2015, following the closure of the Balkan route. It is located along the highway linking Belgrade to Zagreb, flanked by speeding cars and amidst stretches of cultivated fields and forests, it is an isolated and desolate place. The only facilities around the camp are a gas station and a small kiosk offering a limited food selection.



The nearest urban center, the town of Šid, lies 2 hours and 47 minutes away on foot. For those unable to undertake the journey on foot, the alternative is to pay 40 euros for a taxi - an amount of money that not everyone can afford. The isolation negatively affects the lives of the residents of the camp, contributing to their lack of access to basic services. For instance, people report access to medicines being highly limited, if not impossible. Its position at the fringes of society can give us a glimpse into migration governance technologies employed by the Serbian government and the European Union. The transit of people is managed as a phenomenon to be contained and marginalized. Locally, by making integration impossible, locating the camps on the outskirts and employing hostile architecture, such as fences and security gates. Regionally, by externalizing the borders using bridging countries such as Serbia to prevent people from entering the European Union.

5.1 Overcrowding

With the militarization of the Serbo-Hungarian border and the systematic evictions of all RTCs in Northern Serbia - Kikinda, Subotica, and finally, Sombor - buses from the north began arriving every week, bringing hundreds of new people to Adaševci camp. **Within a month, from the 1st to the 31st of November, we estimated that the camp's population increased from around 150 to over 1100 inhabitants.**

Exceeding the official UNHCR data that estimates a maximum capacity of 1000 places⁴⁰, the already questionable living conditions inside the camp worsened due to overcrowding. However, such situations are not rare. According to lawyer Nikola Kovačević, the Adasveci camp has exceeded its hospitality capacity several times over the years⁴¹. Furthermore, in his report, Kovačević states that the camp's maximum capacity to guarantee adequate living conditions should not exceed 250 inhabitants⁴².

5.2 Living Conditions Inside the Camp

During the months from September to December 2023, people reported that the quality, quantity, and cultural sensitivity concerning the provision of food did not meet adequate standards. Numerous individuals complained about the meager and unappetizing meals, pointing out the lack of basic seasonings, like salt. Endless queues outside, often in freezing conditions, added to the grievances. Additionally, the **inclusion of pork in the meals** was particularly problematic for Muslims.

One conversation during an afternoon spent in front of the camp made us aware of these issues. A young man, M., approached us and shared his grievances:

40 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89400>

41 [Conditions in reception facilities - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#)

42 Ibid.

We eat it only because we are really hungry but we don't even know what is it.

M. person on the move, 10th November 2023

People with financial possibility opted to purchase food from the kiosk outside the camp, despite the exorbitant prices. Taking advantage of the limited shopping options available, the shop owner raised the prices of items. Similarly, gas station workers raised cigarette prices for those who couldn't communicate in English. Overall, based on the hundreds of collected testimonies, a stark contrast emerged: the situation inside the camp significantly differed from UNHCR's quarterly reports on Serbian camps, revealing that food was both inadequate and insufficient.



Pictures taken by people on the move inside to Adasevci camp. December 2023

Turning to the hygienic conditions, the standards were shockingly poor. People would share images of the camp's bathrooms to convey the dire situation: clogged sinks, filthy toilets with broken facilities, and unclean showers. The visual evidence spoke for itself about the degrading conditions of the camp's facilities. People reported that they spent days on end being unable to change their clothes and take a shower due to the poor services inside the camp. Furthermore, residents would be asked to clean the bathrooms as a prerequisite for receiving clothes from the camp's staff.

Concerning sleeping conditions, the influx of hundreds of people brought from the North of the country prompted the deployment of large military tents. Each tent accommodated approximately one hundred individuals, sleeping in bunk beds arranged closely next to each other. Due to overcrowding conditions, some people resorted to sleeping on the floor and in corridors. Recurrent complaints included the bitter cold in the tents during Serbian winter nights, exacerbated by a shortage of blankets. With temperatures dropping below 0° and occasional snowfall, the inadequate heating systems provided little relief, along with broken and dirty beds often infested with scabies. A young man described sleepless nights due to the cold and incessant itching caused by scabies, a widespread disease exacerbated by poor hygienic conditions. Privacy was virtually non-existent. Overall, residents consistently lamented the overwhelming population density, highlighting the extreme difficulty of living in such conditions.

The behavior of the police and Commissariat workers heightened stress levels among camp's residents, resulting in instances of physical, verbal, and psychological violence. People revealed a disturbing pattern by which police would systematically wake people up at 4 a.m. in an intimidating and rude way, and then leave again. For instance, on the 10th of November, a man reported:

Police arrived around 4 am, opened the door of the room by kicking it really violently, they shouted to wake up! They checked inside and left. Police speak only Serbian, and mostly nobody can understand them. If someone tries to say something they hit him, they hold batons in their hands.



Pictures taken by people on the move inside to Adasevci camp. December 2023

We witnessed numerous cases of **scabies contracted from the camp's beddings**, alongside individuals grappling with common winter ailments, like colds and headaches. However, what aggravated the situation was that **camp doctors issued prescriptions without providing the necessary medications**. This left many residents without access to essential treatment. For those with chronic diseases, obtaining medications proved even more challenging, as the nearest pharmacy was a 3-hour and 30-minute walk from the camp.

Disabilities were largely disregarded. A man with 95% blindness sought assistance from the NNK team due to neglect within the camp. Furthermore, at the clinic in Šid, people on the move reported racist treatment from the staff.

The institutional negligence regarding access to medical healthcare for people residing in state and EU-funded facilities is directly connected to the biopolitics of disposability, by which camps function. Due to the extensive need encountered, No Name Kitchen team on the field tried to alleviate people's sufferings by providing basic medical necessities and facilitating people's access to the Serbian healthcare system -- despite the state's responsibility in delivering these services.

5.3 Desiring Beyond Survival

Life at the border is a corporal and mental struggle that people have to resist and navigate daily. Police violence, restricted access to food, poor hygiene conditions, and sleep deprivation are just a few examples of how border regime violence affects people's bodies, minds, and lives. It involves experiencing frustration due to the impossibility of changing clothes or taking a shower. It means feeling tired from staying awake all night due to the cold and the itching from scabies. It means feeling bored because you can't move freely and you can't do anything other than wait. It means feeling stressed because of the uncertainty of the future.

Yet, amid these psycho-physical pressures at the border, life persists, and people adapt, motivated by desires and expectations. On one of the days spent outside the camp, a 25-year-old man was showing selfies from his life in Syria. These images depicted a proud and attractive figure, once well-built from days spent at the gym. Pointing at his muscular image, he would smile and say "Look, when I was trained. I'm an attractive guy!". Then, he touched his biceps - now out of practice - with a sad expression. The impossibility of being able to care for himself and his body, of not being able to train, manifested both physically and mentally. Physically, he was visibly weaker compared to his representation in the picture. Mentally, his physical condition made him insecure and uncomfortable with his body. Despite his unsatisfying psycho-physical condition, his primary concern remained clear – to communicate that, at that very moment, he was just a regular individual. He wished to project an image of attractiveness underlining a shared human desire for connection and recognition. In such interaction, we caught ourselves perplexed that within the harsh reality of the camp, the man showed aspirations beyond mere existence. In contemplating this, we realized that even our understanding of what you can or cannot aspire to within the context of the camp had been involuntarily downsized, aligning with the prevailing notion that survival was the paramount and perhaps the sole objective of its residents.

5.4 Voices from the Camp

In November, as the camp became increasingly overcrowded and conditions deteriorated, people began voicing their desire to report the situation and complained about the total absence of journalists and media. NNK team recorded some testimonies of people sharing their stories and **denouncing the situation inside the camp**. During one of these recordings, a person stated:

The situation is really bad. Everything is difficult here. The cold is so aggressive. We come from Turkey with summer clothes. So we cannot stand the cold now. We don't have money to pay for winter clothes such as jackets, shoes, socks and gloves. The food is horrible inside. Plus, we cannot eat it because we are Muslims. All we want is to let us continue our road to Europe to be in peace.

Another person on the move said:

We want to go to Europe. Here there are no services for us. They treat us like hostages, not refugees. We are forced to wear the same clothes for many days. We couldn't take any showers for a lot of days. They make us work in the camp. This is the only way to obtain clothes.

Another topic that would come out of the interviews was **the uncertainty about the future**. People didn't know how long they would have to stay there, why they were brought to Šid, and when the Joint Police Operation would have ended. Many times people were asking: "When will you open the border?", "For how long do we have to stay here?". The impossibility of predicting the future was disorienting. A 50-year-old man from Syria used these words to describe how this situation of precariousness was making him suffer the most:

The people don't need food, we need options. Do we go or we stay here? Here a lot of people are mad because they don't know where they're going to. All these people, where are we standing? Can we go through or we stay here? We need to understand because we have problems in our country. We left it because it is really not safe there. We need options to survive. We also have a family to look after. Now, here, we are not understanding anything.

This deliberate lack of transparency created feelings of uncertainty and fear, where individuals felt they were living in a limbo, unable to make decisions and plan for their future. This lack of clarity undermines individuals' fundamental rights and dignity.

5.5 Economies of the Camp

The site of Adaševci camp is also linked to the proliferation of businesses that profit directly from the presence of people on the move. **Adaševci RTC is property of Nis Petrol**, a Serbian multinational oil and gas company that used to import oil from Russia until the EU's latest sanctions⁴⁴. The gas station, a transit point for those traveling by car between Zagreb and Belgrade, represents an important place to understand how the camp creates spaces that facilitate the diffusion of racist behaviors, highlighting the gap between those who are welcomed in society and those who are not.

For example, the gas station workers, through a screening based on skin color, language spoken, and clothing condition, would decide who could or could not use the facility's restroom. As a resident of the camp, even if you were a customer, access to such services was denied. When allowed in the gas station shop, residents of the camp would be shouted at to come in 'one at a time'. Furthermore, cigarette prices were exclusively increased for camp residents. The gas station workers, aware of the linguistic and mobility difficulties of camp residents, took advantage of their condition to profit from their social precariousness. H., who was speaking perfect English, while at the gas station buying cigarettes, pointed out that he knew the real price of the pack of cigarettes, and managed to pay the regular price. The kiosk owner did the same. He would **illegally raise the prices** of his products to excessive amounts, acceptable only to those who have no other options. The camp residents were aware of the crazy prices but, as they were saying, there were no other choices.

5.6 Eviction

Starting in mid-December, the police began to evacuate the camp. Authorities arrived early in the morning to forcefully put individuals onto buses, transporting them to camps situated in the southern regions of the country, near the borders with Kosovo and Montenegro. Disturbing reports emerged, recounting episodes of police violence during these evictions; some witnesses described a police officer placing his feet on a resident's head while pointing a gun at his face, amidst widespread beatings with batons.

Within 15 days, Adaševci camp was totally emptied and closed. Once again, we witnessed the *modus operandi* of Serbian authorities towards migration management as hinging on exceptional and short-termed measures. **Thousands of people were moved from one place to another without any given explanation.** Within two months, authorities had moved people first from Subotica to Sombor, then to Adaševci and Belgrade, and finally to camps in the South of the country. The Commissariat's behavior towards migrants showed a disturbing pattern. **The rights and dignity of people on the move were systematically and violently overridden in an effort to contain and manage their presence in the country.**

⁴⁴ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-sanctions-fallout-serbia-to-stop-receiving-russian-oil-via-adriatic-pipeline/>

2. Principovac RTC Example of architecture of violence

Opened in September 2015, Principovac camp is the 3rd camp present in the village of Šid. The camp can host 250 persons and has a particularity, the fence of the garden of the camp coincides with the actual border between Serbia and Croatia. The absurdity of the architecture of this place lies in the fact that the people hosted can see from their rooms the border that they would like to cross, and the land towards which they would like to continue their journey. The architecture of violence is expressed in many ways.



Second section

1. Analysis

To survive the Borderlands

You must live sin fronteras

Be a crossroads

- Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*



In the previous chapters, we narrated the events of the Joint Action Against People Smuggling and its effects on camps situated in the North of Serbia and on Krnjaca AC, in Belgrade. Launched on October 27th, 2023, this action developed as a substantial police and military operation, a joint effort of the Hungarian and Serbian governments to officially target smuggling networks and “illegal” migration in Serbia. It involved a massive deployment of forces in the northern part of the country and rounds of systematic evictions of people on the move away from official camps and informal squats. **As a result, this military action emptied Northern Serbia of people on the move and closed off the possibility of people crossing into Hungary to continue their journey.**

In the months of the Joint Police Operation, the main narrative circulating amongst people on the move in Serbia was the following: “The border with Hungary will re-open again after the elections”. According to this logic, the main reason behind forced evictions, militarisation, and increased police presence in the country was motivated by propaganda purposes. The government relied on massive evictions to build the narrative that control over migration had been reinstated in the north of Serbia. In a matter of three weeks, thousands of people on the move were violently relocated away from Subotica, Horgoš, and Sombor towards camps in Šid and in the South. The massive deployment of forces to reinstate ‘order’ and ‘security’ in the region was evident and entered the ordinary: police and military could be seen daily around the city of Subotica and in the area. **A tank**, menacing and visible from the main highway, was **permanently stationed at the entrance of Horgoš**. **Yet, the Joint Police Operation did not achieve its stated purpose as, whilst camps and squats were emptied out in the north, the ‘problems’ of smuggling and illegal migration simply moved elsewhere.**

The spectacularisation of camp management and the Joint Police Operation appeared as strategies aimed at gaining consensus amongst local communities affected by the mismanagement of migration in Serbia, in view of the Parliamentary elections on December 17th, 2023. Notable in this regard are the videos released by Serbian media outlets depicting police and military forces evicting people in forests, raiding hostels, and searching people on the ground⁴⁵.

However, the operation did not stop with the elections, as the border with Hungary remained militarised, and evictions from camps in Šid continued to push people to camps further in the south. In mid-January 2024, a new round of evictions emptied camps in the area of Šid. As people were moved away from border zones, the ACs of Sjenica and Tutin and the RTC of Preševo became the main camps where the government stationed people⁴⁶.

Effectively, the Joint Police Operation has turned Serbia into a containment site for people on the move through various technologies of violence. **These shifts in population management - put in motion during the Joint Police Operation - might indicate new biopolitical intentions for people on the move in Serbia.**

In this section, we will try to understand these intentions in their interplay with broader systems of power and interest towards a global management of mobility.

1.1 Serbian Migration Management

As people continue to travel the Balkan route into Europe, Serbia has remained a main transit point, with thousands of people passing through the country every year. Serbian migration management experienced a securitarian shift between 2015 and 2016, with the official closure of the Balkan corridor and the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal. In this context, Transit and Reception Centers (RTCs) were set up as an emergency measure to provide accommodation and basic services. At the moment, there are 12 RTCs located across Serbia. These facilities were intended as a temporary humanitarian solution, not ensuring the right to seek international protection, or the provision of long-term accommodation and services.

Most centers are located in the proximity of the Croatian and Hungarian borders, an element which allowed thousands of people to continue crossing the border to reach their destinations away from Serbia. Throughout the years, Serbian authorities demonstrated a tacit leniency towards border crossing practices, a political strategy mostly motivated by the lack of capacities, will, and interest in stopping migration and providing legal status to people on the move (Mitrović, 2020). Yet, this lenient attitude has been intermittent in nature - evictions taking people away from the North to camps further away from the border have been a recurring practice. The Joint Police Operation is the latest display of this practice. So far, it has been the most systematic and consistent, effectively 'trapping' people on the move in centers not adequate for long-term stay.

Notably, in 2017, the Council of Europe Special Representative of the Secretary General on

45 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bELaQFBJcf0&t=8s>

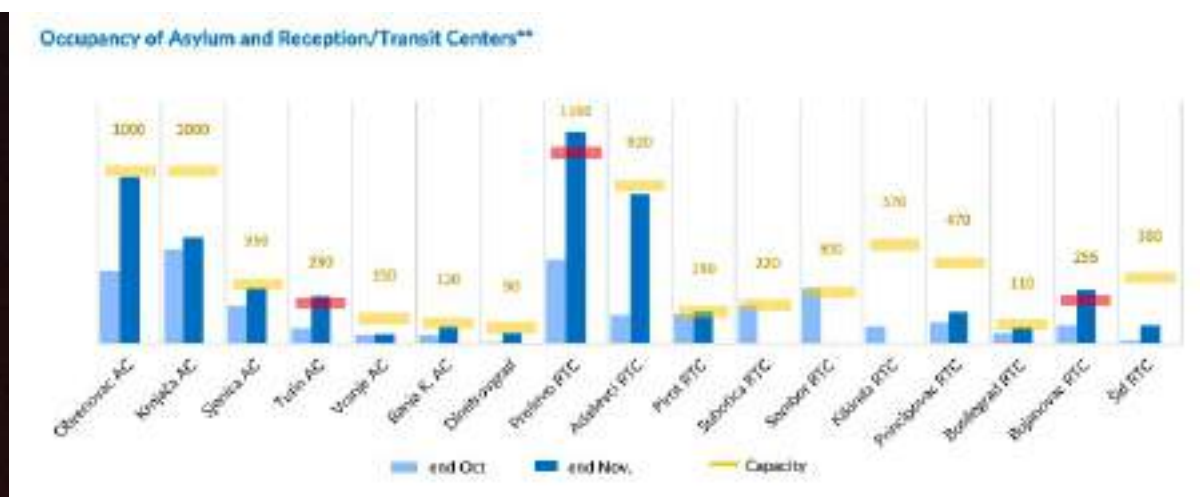
46 <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2024/02/DEC-Stat-Snapshot.pdf>

migration and refugees recommended that Serbia move beyond “the emergency phase and go further than the provision of humanitarian assistance”, in order to comply with the human rights standard set out in the ECHR⁴⁷. **Six years ago, it was established that the standards of accommodation and services provided in Serbian camps – amongst other problems – raised potential issues with articles 2 (right to life) and 3 (prohibition of torture) of the EHRC⁴⁸.** However, not much seems to have changed since the recommendations included in the 2017 European report. Through conversations with the camp’s residents in Serbia, we were able to establish that the provision of services continues to systematically neglect the standards for dignified treatment. In the months of the Joint Police operation, Sombor RTC, Adavešci RTC and Krnjaca AC were purposefully rendered inhabitable through severe overcrowding.

These types of systematic human rights violations are allowed by the continuing lack of a legal framework for people’s stay in Asylum and reception centers, a stay which is ‘tolerated rather than regulated’, as denounced in a 2023 country report⁴⁹. As a consequence, Nikola Kovacevic writes, “The vast majority of persons in need of international protection (...)who have been transiting through (...)Serbia since 2008 have been in a legal limbo, deprived of any status, but provided with the existential minimum while in Serbia.”⁵⁰

In this context, UNHCR publishes monthly statistical snapshots on the conditions and provision of services inside of Serbian camps⁵¹. As the previous section of this report has shown, **UNHCR data often misrepresents the services provided in Serbian camps.**

Additionally, UNHCR presents data without any mention of changing migration policies across different political contexts. For instance, Fig. 1 shows how in the months from October to December 2023, the occupancy of asylum centers (ACs) and RTCs underwent dramatic shifts in population. However, no explanations of the events which brought to these shifts nor of the means with which they were achieved is given, effectively concealing the human rights violations occurring in this period through evictions, institutional abuse and violence, and the purposeful overcrowding of centers.



Screenshot from UNHCR statistical snapshot on Serbia from November 2023

47 https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=090000168075e9b2#globalcontainer

48 Ibid.

49 <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/reception-conditions/short-overview-of-the-reception-system/>

50 Ibid.

51 <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2024/02/DEC-Stat-Snapshot.pdf>

Significantly, the statistical snapshots covering the months of October and November 2023 only provide data collected at the end of the months. This choice, glossing over events and data for the period in-between these dates, effectively conceals, for instance, the severe overcrowding of Sombor camp which the No Name Kitchen team witnessed and documented. The fact that the data on occupancy on ACs and RTCs in Serbia is provided to the UNHCR by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration points to the question of the partiality of the information relayed in these reports.

The lack of official and consistent monitoring of the conditions within camps is deeply troubling and poses significant risks, raising concerns about the respect for the principles enshrined in the ECHR. Monitoring and demanding accountability for the conditions of camps is an urgent issue especially in light of the unchanging conditions of camps in Serbia in the past six years and of the events of the Joint Police Operation.

Camps seem in fact to be shifting from a temporary response to address a perceived ‘crisis’, to the very end goal of migration management in Serbia – disrupting, containing, and preventing the movement of people towards the EU.

1.2 European Externalization: Outsourcing Migration Management to External Countries



Since the ‘long summer of migration’ in 2015, Balkan states have become integral to the European border regime, particularly in its effort to regulate and decrease the influx of people into its member states. In 2003, Balkan states were given “European perspective”⁵². Since then, the EU has provided financial and technical assistance to aid Western Balkan countries in meeting the accession criteria. Over the period from 2007 to 2019, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) mechanism alone allocated €216 million to the Balkan countries for migration-related purposes. This encompassed support for constructing new border posts, training and supplying modern equipment to border protection authorities and establishing detention and deportation centers⁵³.

Picture taken on December 28th 2023 inside of Adavesci RTC showing an IOM’s poster advertising ‘voluntary-returns’.

In its bid to fortify external borders, the **EU has funded the construction of dozens of camps along the ‘Balkan route’** to contain the people it refuses to receive and host. The political and economic relationship between the EU and Serbia exhibits significant power imbalances,

⁵² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_03_163

⁵³ <https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2021/blackmail-in-the-balkans-how-the-eu-is-externalising-its-asylum-policies/>

suggesting the emergence of a neo-imperial regime in the Balkans. Under this paradigm, **Balkan countries are increasingly assimilated into the EU border regime, enabling imperial states to erect not just walls but entire fortifications extending well beyond the border** (Walia, 2021). In this intricate power dynamic, the EU exercises influence over Serbia's governance of its sovereign territory and border controls⁵⁴. At the same time, Serbia uses its ability to control movement as a way to leverage leniency from the EU on other sets of political matters and democratic (un)freedoms. Through its partnership with the IOM, the EU has succeeded in its outsourcing of migration management in the Balkans, trapping people away from the borders of the EU and violating their fundamental rights.

Despite being labeled as the UN's Migration Agency, the IOM, unlike the UNHCR, is not bound by any convention or accountable to the UN system. Instead, the IOM is accountable only to its donors, of which the EU is the most influential. Operationally, the IOM adopts the institutional logic of a private corporation, further entrenching the profit-logic driving much of what makes the border regime so deadly⁵⁵. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, this approach led to the hiring of private security agencies for the control of camps in 2018, resulting in various forms of harassment and violence against residents. While the IOM no longer contracts private security agencies due to severe incidents, it remains deeply involved in the militarisation of border practices, police force training, and the management and surveillance of camps.

In the Balkans, **the IOM** is also responsible for the so-called 'voluntary-returns'⁵⁶, raising concerns that the Balkans might become a deportation hub, where those expelled from the EU are gathered before being deported. Notably, the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and the CRM in Serbia points to a stronger collaboration in migration management⁵⁷, further endangering the rights of people on the move.

Through its relationship with the EU and involvement with agencies, such as the IOM and FRONTEX, migration management in Serbia is increasingly aligned with the interests of the European Union. Considering this, the events of the Joint Police Operation can be seen as part of a broader set of strategies aimed at upholding and fortifying European structures of racialisation and structural oppression. This system extends from the local to the European and global levels, with each level influencing the others.

In the next and concluding section of this analysis, we point to some relevant concepts and developments for a more in depth-understanding of interconnected processes governing mobility worldwide. Because these systems are intricate and complex, they are beyond the purpose of this analysis and would require further research into how exactly they play into national dynamics in Serbia.

54 For instance, in 2022 Serbia implemented stricter visa rules to align with EU visa policy. It ended visa exemptions with Tunisia and Burundi, following threats that its own visa-free travel to the EU would be scrapped.

55 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/repackaging-imperialism>

56 The IOM organises the Assisted Voluntary Return Programme which "aims to support migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wish to return to their countries of origin". Yet, much research has put into question the actual voluntariness of such returns due to the extremely hostile conditions that the EU border regime impose on migrants.

57 <https://serbia.un.org/en/255566-iom-serbia-and-serbian-commissariat-refugees-and-migration-signed-memorandum-understanding#:~:text=of%20migration%20management.,Natasa%20Stanisavljevic%2C%20The%20Commissioner%20for%20Refugees%20and%20Migration%20of%20the,challenges%2C%20while%20committing%20to%20upholding>

1.3 EU Migration Pact and Border-Industrial Complex

On April 10th, 2023, the European Parliament approved the new Migration and Asylum Pact - a set of regulations and policies intended “to create a fairer, efficient, and more sustainable migration and asylum process for the European Union”⁵⁸.

In practice, the New Pact introduces screening regulations at EU external countries, through the use of surveillance and biometric systems of identification, for all those seeking asylum. This system will subject people, including children, to arbitrary detention in border facilities for the sole purpose of applying for asylum in the EU. This procedure will normalise the illegal practice of pushbacks to external countries. In addition to this, inside the EU, anyone who looks “foreign” is subjectable to immigration detention for identification checks. Not only these measures have devastating implications for the right to international protection and greenlight abuses across Europe, including racial profiling, arbitrary detention, and pushbacks. The plan to channel increasing fundings into camps, walls, biometric technologies, and other surveillance mechanisms, as envisioned by the New Pact, also increasingly incorporates private contractors in the future of EU migration-management.

The narrative behind these new policies – heavily pushed by the industries profiting from the business of migration – portrays migration as a security problem. In this sense, migrants are depicted as a threat that needs to be dealt with using draconian measures.

The ‘border industrial complex’ is both the outcome and cause of this securitarian development.⁵⁹ As a concept, the Border Industrial Complex encapsulates the collaboration between governmental bodies, private corporations, and various stakeholders invested in the enforcement and regulation of borders. Understanding the interplay between the Border Industrial Complex and the New European Migration Pact is crucial for analyzing how these global and regional dynamics manifest in the local context of Serbian migration management.

Throughout analysis and conversations, this report identified in **the encampment of people** in Serbia trends of migration-management that are in line with the profit-driven **system of global apartheid**, creating (im)mobilities for the purpose of capitalist reproduction and dispossession. **This system is increasingly reliant on the militarisation of “peripheral” countries, under the guise of countering smuggling practices, deportations, and arbitrary detention.**

The modalities with which camps were used in Serbia under the Joint Police Operation seem to indicate an alignment with the future directions envisioned in the New Migration Pact. As most RTCs close to borders were completely evicted, people on the move are now only allowed in the Asylum and Reception Centers of the South of Serbia: Sjenica, Tutin, Presevo, Bujanovac, Bosilegrad, Pirot, Dimitrovgrad. In Belgrade, the camp of Obrenovac was recently converted into an Asylum Center, hosting around ten asylum seekers⁶⁰ The ACs of Krnjaca and Šid

58 https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

59 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/financing-border-wars>

60 These latest updates come from No Name Kitchen teams in Serbia at the end of March 2024.

Stanica are the only camps which were not evicted.

With the New Migration Pact, whose formal adoption is expected in June 2024, the EU plans to externalise the asylum application process to Serbia, which might explain why people on the move have been increasingly contained in ACs.

In the meantime, **the whole Balkan region has also been taking steps towards the implementation of the New Migration Pact:** Croatia has been seeking support from the EU for the construction of a new immigration detention center⁶¹; Slovenia is planning to set up temporary facilities for the processing of migrant arrivals at the border with Croatia⁶²; Albania established an agreement with Italy to build migrant centers to house people rescued at sea by Italian boats⁶³.

As we write this report, we are also compelled to acknowledge **Israel's genocidal military campaign in Gaza**, unfolding before our eyes with the support of European countries. Israel is a key actor in the border-industrial complex for its development of technologies aimed at containing, surveilling, and policing Palestinians -- technologies that the EU has been adopting for its migration-management policies. For instance, **Elbit Systems, Israel's largest arms producer, has supplied drones and military technologies to the EU for the purpose of border security**⁶⁴. In 2015, Hungary and Bulgaria turned to Israel for advice on building a fence to stop the transit of migrants, modeled on the apartheid wall set up to divide Palestinian communities. Increased militarisation of border control, as we saw in northern Serbia under the Joint Police Operation, will become common practice if the New Migration Pact is approved in June 2024. The global interconnectedness of politics of containment and the profit-driven motives behind it has alarming consequences for society at large, from ecological threats to the total disregard for life.

61 <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/06/croatia-seeks-eu-support-for-new-migrant-centre-near-karlovac/>

62 <https://sarajevotimes.com/slovenia-is-building-temporary-facilities-for-migrants-on-the-border-with-croatia/>

63 <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-and-albania-strike-rwanda-style-migrant-deal/>

64 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/financing-border-wars#:~:text=This%20financing%20means%20that%20the%20industry%20become%20ever%20more%20clear.>

Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to launch a project that links the events that we witnessed in Serbia during the Joint Police Operation to global structures of racialisation and structural oppression.

In Serbia, the temporal and spatial uncertainty produced by the militarisation of the north of the country, the blocking of the route through Hungary, and regular evictions from camps and squats played into troubling and disrupting people's lives. Camps favored a state of protected uncertainty⁶⁵ for people on the move during which their lives were delayed in a context of heightened police and military presence.

In this sense, **camps in Serbia are an important example pointing to the biopolitical modes aimed at “choking migrant’s lives”** (Tazzioli, 2023). At the European level, camps are progressively turning into the main way migration is approached. As the most visible sites where racial differences and a hierarchical disposition of bodies are actively constructed, the use of camps for population management poses great concern for the respect of human dignity and the right to life. Detaching from the institutional narrative that describes the camp as a humanitarian response to migration, we built a counter-argument based on our engagement with abolitionist theory and field work in Serbia. **This report showed how the European Union uses camps as architectures of control and containment of a selective human flow within a neo-imperial perspective on migration and nation-state formation.**

We hope that this report and its analytical basis can inspire further research into such topics. In the face of increasing state violence, research can provide insights into the workings of racial capitalism and border violence. It can thus provide direction for political actions that take into consideration global structures and technologies of violence targeting migrants.

Finally, with this report, it is also our intention to reflect on migration in ways that do not remain stuck in the binarism of “victimisation” and/ or “heroism”- usually attached to people on the move. In bringing to the surface the political dynamics creating death and (im)mobilities, we aim to show how **the fight against border regimes and capitalism should be in everyone’s interest**. As global markets for AI technologies of surveillance, policing and military occupation are on the rise, European governments have been undermining human rights also for their ‘citizens’: the right to protest is increasingly under threat and solidarity actions are often met with harsh criminal convictions in so-called “Western democracies”.

Ultimately, to transform conditions of carcerality and logics of control is to change everything⁶⁶. As our fight against the border-industrial complex continues, we will keep chanting in our streets:

*Free the people, free us all.
Free Free Palestine.*

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66 Gilmore, R. W. (2024). *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition*.

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