



# **Under the Line of Marginalization: The Shadowing Games and the Erosion of Rights for People on the Move**

The Annual Report for the Year 2024

klikAktiv



# PREFACE

*You are about to read Klikaktiv's Annual Report for 2024. As per tradition, our yearly report provides the latest and most relevant insights into the situation of people on the move in Serbia. From institutional responses and legal frameworks to migration trends and the challenges faced by displaced individuals, this report sheds light on key issues while placing Serbia's migration landscape within a broader global context.*

*However, this year's report brings some notable innovations compared to previous editions. We have adopted a new methodological approach to research and reporting, making the report more accessible to a wider audience—from policymakers and humanitarian workers to anyone interested in migration and refugee issues.*

*The findings in this report are based on meticulously gathered sources, including reports and articles from relevant media outlets and organizations, as well as official data from national and international institutions. However, what sets Klikaktiv's reports apart—and gives them a distinctive quality—is the inclusion of first-hand accounts collected through our fieldwork. Through dedicated on-the-ground efforts, our*

*team has gathered authentic testimonies from people on the move, enriching the overall narrative and adding a deeply human dimension to the report.*

*We hope that this year's report will serve as a valuable resource for those working on migration issues and raise awareness among the wider public about these critical and pressing topics.*

**– Klikaktiv Team**

# ABOUT KLIKAKTIV

*Klikaktiv - Center for Development of Social Policies is a grassroots non-profit civil society organization which provides free legal counseling and psychosocial services to people on the move, asylum seekers and refugees in Serbia. The team is present on the external EU borders, namely covering border areas between Serbia and Croatia/Hungary/Romania, but also Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

*For more information and regular updates on our work, you can visit [Klikaktiv's webpage](#), [Facebook page](#) and [Instagram page](#).*

*For any additional information, comments or suggestions, feel free to contact us: [info@klikaktiv.org](mailto:info@klikaktiv.org)*



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# EDITORIAL NOTE: IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY, ACRONYMS AND RELEVANT ACTORS

**People on the move** - an umbrella term for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers

**Refugees** - people fleeing persecution, war, discrimination or any other factor that threatens their safety and well being.

**Migrants** - people who migrate, or move from one location to another.

**Asylum seekers** - people who have applied for asylum and international protection in a country.

**Squat** - an informal settlement in a field, forest or abandoned building.

**Push back** - illegal practice of a collective expulsion of people on the move by the border police authorities, regardless of the persons' asylum claims. Push backs commonly involve acts of violence, humiliation and/or other inhumane and degrading treatment.

**Game** - a slang term used by people on the move to refer to an attempt to cross a border.

**Smuggler** - an individual who facilitates the unauthorized movement of people across international borders, typically in exchange for financial or material gain.

**Commissariat** - Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, a governmental body primarily in charge of managing accommodation for people on the move in Serbia in official reception, asylum and transit centers.

**MiO** - the Ministry of Interior, a cabinet-level ministry in the Government of Serbia, responsible for local and national Police services with municipal and district branches throughout the country.

**UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is a UN agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.

**Frontex** - the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, is an agency of the European Union. In coordination with the border and coast guards of member states, it exercises border control of the European Schengen Area, a task within the area of freedom, security and justice domain.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Legal Framework

The legal status of people on the move in the Republic of Serbia is regulated by the Constitution, numerous international treaties, domestic laws, and bylaws. Given the broad definition of the term “people on the move,” the legal framework spans various legal sources.

First and foremost, the legal status of people on the move in the Republic of Serbia is defined by the Serbian Constitution, particularly Articles 17, 39, and 57. Article 17 states:

*“Pursuant to international treaties, foreign nationals in the Republic of Serbia shall have all rights guaranteed by the Constitution and law, except for those rights explicitly reserved for citizens of the Republic of Serbia under the Constitution and law.”<sup>1</sup>*

Furthermore, Articles 39 and 57 guarantee protection to foreigners fleeing persecution in their countries of origin. Article 57 provides that:

*“Any foreign national with a reasonable fear of persecution based on race, gender, language, religion, national origin, association with a particular group, or political opinions shall have the right to asylum in the Republic of Serbia.”<sup>2</sup>*

Article 39 prohibits the deportation of foreigners to countries where there is a threat of persecution or violence:



***A foreign national may be expelled only under a decision of the competent body, through a procedure stipulated by law, and if an opportunity to appeal has been provided. Expulsion is prohibited if there is a threat of persecution based on race, sex, religion, national origin, citizenship, association with a social group, political opinions, or if there is a threat of serious violations of rights guaranteed by this Constitution.*<sup>3</sup>**



As a member of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, the Republic of Serbia incorporates many conventions and declarations from these bodies into its legal system. Key international agreements relevant to people on the move include:

- The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,<sup>4</sup>
- The European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment<sup>5</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Official Herald of the Republic of Serbia, Nos 98/2006 and 115/2021).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights, as amended) (ECHR).

<sup>5</sup> European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted 26 November 1987, entered into force 1 February 1989) ETS No 126.

- The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>6</sup>,
- The Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>7</sup>,
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>8</sup>, and
- The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment<sup>9</sup>.

As a candidate for European Union membership, Serbia is required to meet economic and political conditions, including establishing a stable democratic government that upholds the rule of law and associated freedoms. Politically, Serbia must harmonize its policies with those of the EU. The implementation of EU regulations in the areas of justice, freedom, and security is closely linked to the legal status of people on the move in Serbia.

In aligning its domestic legislation with EU standards, Serbia has adopted several agreements, laws, and bylaws that significantly impact the status of people on the move. Notable legislation includes:

- Two Frontex Status Agreements—one signed in 2019 and another in June 2024. The latter was ratified by the Serbian parliament in December 2024 as the Law on the Ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the European Union on Operational Activities Conducted by the

European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia<sup>10</sup>.

- The Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Serbia on the Readmission of Persons Residing without Authorization<sup>11</sup>, adopted in 2007.

Other significant initiatives include the 2024–2027 Program for the Fight Against Human Trafficking and the introduction of a visa regime for several countries, such as Cuba<sup>12 13</sup>.

The primary domestic laws regulating the status of people on the move in Serbia are:

- The Law on Foreigners<sup>14</sup>,
- The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection<sup>15</sup>,
- The Law on Border Control<sup>16</sup>,
- The Law on Migration Management<sup>17</sup>, and
- The Law on Employment of Foreign Citizens<sup>18</sup>.

These laws cover all categories of foreigners, including refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers residing in or transiting through Serbia. Complementing these laws are numerous bylaws, some of the most significant being:

- The Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on Establishing the List of Safe Countries of Origin and Safe Third Countries,
- The Regulation on Amendments and Supplements to the Regulation on the Inclusion

<sup>6</sup> Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137.

<sup>7</sup> Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967) 606 UNTS 267.

<sup>8</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3.

<sup>9</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 1465 UNTS 85.

<sup>10</sup> Law on the Ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the European Union on Operational Activities Conducted by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia - International Agreements, No 9/2024).

<sup>11</sup> Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Serbia on the Readmission of Persons Residing without Authorisation [2007] OJ L334/46.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 'Visa Regime for Entering Serbia: Cuba' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia) <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/gradjani/ulazak-u-srbiju/vizni-rezim/kuba> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>13</sup> N1 Beograd, 'Srbija uvela vize za Kubance zbog usklađivanja sa EU' (N1, 18 April 2023) <https://n1info.rs/vesti/srbija-uvela-vize-za-kubance-zbog-uskladjivanja-sa-eu/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Law on Foreigners, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 24/2018, 31/2019 i 62/2023).

<sup>15</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 24/2018).

<sup>16</sup> Law on Border Control, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 24/2018).

<sup>17</sup> Law on Migration Management, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 107/2012).

<sup>18</sup> Law on Employment of Foreign Citizens, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 128/2014, 113/2017, 50/2018, 31/2019 i 62/2023).

- of Persons Granted Asylum into the Social, Cultural, and Economic Life,
- The Regulation on Criteria for Determining Priorities for Housing Persons Granted Asylum or Subsidiary Protection and Conditions for Using Temporary Housing Facilities,
- The Regulation on the Method of Inclusion of Persons Granted Asylum into the Social, Cultural, and Economic Life,
- The Regulation on Temporary Protection for Ukrainians, and
- The Regulation Amending the Regulation on Establishing the Program of Incentives for Implementing Measures and Activities Necessary for Strengthening Tolerance Towards Migrants and the Capacity of Local Self-Government Units in the Republic of Serbia Hosting Migrants.

## 2. General Overview

As previously mentioned, the term “people on the move” refers to various categories of foreigners who reside in or transit through Serbia for different reasons. Depending on their legal status, intentions, preferences, and circumstances, they may interact with one or more institutions in Serbia. In the Republic of Serbia, numerous institutions engage with people on the move, including domestic and international entities, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations. The most significant institutions in Serbia are:

- Ministry of the Interior (MoI)
- Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (Commissariat)
- UNHCR in Serbia
- European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)
- Asylum Commission
- Serbian courts
- Ombudsman’s Office
- Schools, hospitals, and social work centers

- Civil sector (NGOs working with people on the move)

### Ministry of the Interior

The Ministry of the Interior is probably the most important institution in Serbia dealing with people on the move. There are several different departments within the MoI that directly work with various categories of foreigners in Serbia.

The Border Police Directorate is in charge of:

- Border checks in road, river, rail, and air traffic;
- State border surveillance;
- Suppression of cross-border crime and irregular migration;
- Integrated border management;
- Risk analysis;
- Cross-border cooperation;
- Control of movement and residence of foreigners;
- Asylum processes;
- Training, oversight of legal compliance, and logistics<sup>19</sup>.

Specialized organizational units within the Border Police Directorate, whose work is of great significance for people on the move, include the Asylum Office and the Department for Detention and Accommodation of Foreigners<sup>20</sup>.

- The Asylum Office is responsible for conducting the asylum procedure in accordance with the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection and delivering decisions on asylum applications in the first instance<sup>21</sup>. The Office is comprised of:
  - The Department for Determining the Right to Asylum; and
  - The Department for Collecting and Documenting Data on Countries of Origin<sup>22</sup>.
- The Department for Detention and Accommodation of Foreigners is in charge of

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 'Organizacione jedinice Direkcije policije i policijske uprave' ['Organisational Units of the Police Directorate and Police Departments'] (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia) [http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/direkcija-policije/ojdp/!ut/p/z1/04\\_Sj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfI-jo8zi\\_S19zQzdD](http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/direkcija-policije/ojdp/!ut/p/z1/04_Sj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfI-jo8zi_S19zQzdD) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, art. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 'Uprava granične policije' ['The Border Police Directorate']

running detention centers in Serbia. These facilities accommodate individuals against whom expulsion, removal, or return orders have been issued but cannot be enforced immediately, and who have, in accordance with the law, been placed under detention with close police oversight. Currently, there are three operational detention centers in Serbia: Padinska Skela (in the outskirts of Belgrade), Plandište (near the border with Romania), and Dimitrovgrad (near the border with Bulgaria). Similar facilities exist at the transit zone of the Belgrade Airport<sup>23</sup>.

The Police Directorate operates under the MoI, and its powers and responsibilities are regulated by the Law on the Police<sup>24</sup>. Within each of Serbia's 27 Regional Police Directorates, there is a specialized department dealing with foreigners' affairs. Their scope of work includes:

- Registration of a foreigner's residence;
- Issuance of personal documents for foreigners; and
- Issuance of temporary residence and work permits for foreigners<sup>25</sup>.

## Commissariat for Refugees and Migration

In accordance with the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, the Commissariat provides material conditions for the reception of asylum seekers. It also offers temporary accommodation to persons granted the right to asylum. The Commissariat implements programs for the voluntary return of foreigners whose requests for asylum were rejected, whose asy-

lum procedures were suspended, or who were granted temporary protection but whose right to asylum has ended.

The Commissariat is responsible for conducting integration programs for individuals granted the right to asylum, in accordance with regulations governing migration management. Additionally, under the Law on Migration Management, the Commissariat performs tasks such as:

- Proposing goals and priorities for migration policy to the Government;
- Recommending measures to promote the positive effects of legal migration and combat illegal migration;
- Monitoring the implementation of migration policy; and
- Providing data to state, regional, and local authorities for developing strategic documents in the field of migration<sup>26</sup>.

The Commissariat manages Serbia's asylum centers and other designated accommodation facilities<sup>27</sup>. A total of 17 asylum and reception centers have been established, including six asylum centers located in Belgrade (Krnjača), Obrenovac, Banja Koviljača, Vranje, Sjenica, and Tutin, and eleven reception/transit centers primarily situated near state borders at strategic entry and exit points, including Preševo, Bujanovac, Bosilegrad, Pirot, Dimitrovgrad, Divljana, Šid, Adaševci, Principovac, Sombor, and Subotica.

As of late 2024, four asylum centers (Vranje AC, Sjenica AC, Obrenovac AC, and Krnjača AC) and three reception centers (Preševo RC, Bujanovac RC, and Principovac RC) were fully operational.

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(Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije) [http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/direkcija-policije/ojdp/Uprava%20granice%20policije/%21ut/p/z1/04\\_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8zi\\_S19zQzdDYy83X3MjAwcZbx-N3X3dTYwNTA30vfSj8CsAmmBU5Ovsm64fVZBYkqGbmZeWrx8RWICUWJaokF6UmJeZnJeqUJCfk5mcmZWqX5Ad-FQkAC2HDtA%21%21/](http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/direkcija-policije/ojdp/Uprava%20granice%20policije/%21ut/p/z1/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8zi_S19zQzdDYy83X3MjAwcZbx-N3X3dTYwNTA30vfSj8CsAmmBU5Ovsm64fVZBYkqGbmZeWrx8RWICUWJaokF6UmJeZnJeqUJCfk5mcmZWqX5Ad-FQkAC2HDtA%21%21/) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Law on Police, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 6/2016, 24/2018 i 87/2018).

<sup>25</sup> Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije, 'Informacije za strance' (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije) [http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/gradjani/Informacije%20za%20strance!/ut/p/z1/04\\_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8ziDY0sjTyM3Q18\\_F2N3AwcDfIdQkJdf1CTAz0g4uL4oOC45V9Ekvy9AuyHRUBK8fPMg!!/](http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/gradjani/Informacije%20za%20strance!/ut/p/z1/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8ziDY0sjTyM3Q18_F2N3AwcDfIdQkJdf1CTAz0g4uL4oOC45V9Ekvy9AuyHRUBK8fPMg!!/) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, 'About the Commissariat' (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia) <https://kirs.gov.rs/eng/about-us/about-the-commissariat> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, art. 51.

All centers in Serbia are open-type facilities, permitting entry and exit between 6:00 AM and 10:00 PM during the winter period and between 6:00 AM and 11:00 PM during the summer period<sup>28</sup>.

## UNHCR in Serbia

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as a United Nations agency is mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.

Faced with a growing number of asylum-seekers from the neighboring countries, Eastern Europe and Africa in the early 1970s, the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia invited UNHCR to establish an operation in the country. UNHCR established an office in Belgrade in 1976.

The UNHCR's mission in Serbia focuses on supporting refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers through humanitarian assistance, capacity building, and legislative support. Since the 1990s, the agency has addressed the needs of over 750,000 refugees and displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo. UNHCR contributed to Serbia's first asylum law in 2008. During the 2015 refugee crisis UNHCR provided critical humanitarian support, helping to ensure access to protection, services, and infrastructure for people in need<sup>29</sup>.

## European Border and Coast Guard Agency

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) primarily supports EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries in managing external borders and combating cross-border crime<sup>30</sup>. In 2019, Serbia signed the Status Agreement on Actions Carried Out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia, which allowed Frontex to operate along Serbia's borders with EU Member States (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria).

Under this agreement, Frontex deployed teams, patrol cars, helicopters, and other equipment to assist Serbian authorities in detecting criminal activities such as human trafficking, smuggling, and document fraud<sup>31</sup>.

In 2024, the cooperation expanded with the signing of a new agreement. The updated agreement allows Frontex to conduct operations across Serbia's entire territory, including borders with non-EU neighboring countries (North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro). The agreement also grants Frontex teams greater operational autonomy to perform tasks such as border checks and irregular migration management while respecting Serbia's sovereignty<sup>32</sup>.

## Asylum Commission

The Asylum Commission is a second-instance authority in Serbia's asylum procedure, responsible for deciding on appeals against first-instance decisions made by the Asylum Office. The Commission should operate as an independent governmental body, and decisions are made through voting<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Komesarijat za izbeglice i migracije Republike Srbije, 'Centri za azil i prihvatni centri' (Komesarijat za izbeglice i migracije Republike Srbije) <https://kirs.gov.rs/lat/azil/centri-za-azil-i-prihvatni-centri> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'UNHCR in the Republic of Serbia' (UNHCR) <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/en/unhcr-in-the-republic-of-serbia> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Frontex, 'Beyond the EU Borders: Frontex Liaison Officers' (Frontex, 2021) [https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/Beyond\\_EU\\_borders\\_2021.pdf](https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/Beyond_EU_borders_2021.pdf) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Status Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia [2020] OJ L202/3.

<sup>32</sup> Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia on operational activities carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia [2024] OJ L202/3.

<sup>33</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, art. 21

## Serbian Courts

Various types of courts in Serbia are involved in handling issues related to people on the move, including basic courts (courts of general jurisdiction), misdemeanor courts, and administrative courts.

- Basic Courts handle civil lawsuits and criminal offenses. Regarding people on the move, these courts primarily address violations under Article 350 of the Criminal Code, which covers Illegal Crossing of State Borders and Human Smuggling<sup>34</sup>.
- Misdemeanor Courts act as courts of special jurisdiction for minor offenses. In the context of people on the move, these courts handle violations such as Illegal Entry and Illegal Stay under the Law on Foreigners<sup>35</sup> and Illegal Crossing of State Borders under the Law on Border Control<sup>36</sup>.
- Administrative Courts have jurisdiction over administrative disputes, including appeals against actions made by government bodies. For asylum seekers, administrative courts are of particular importance, as final decisions of the Asylum Commission may be challenged in an administrative dispute<sup>37</sup>.

## Ombudsman's Office

The Ombudsman of Serbia, officially known as the Protector of Citizens, is an independent and autonomous government institution tasked with safeguarding and promoting human rights and freedoms. The Ombudsman ensures that state administration bodies, the Republic Public Attorney, and other organizations exercising public authority operate in compliance with the law and principles of good governance.

<sup>34</sup> Criminal Code, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016, 35/2019, 94/2024).

<sup>35</sup> Law on Foreigners

<sup>36</sup> Law on Border Control.

<sup>37</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, art. 22

<sup>38</sup> Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia, 'About the Protector of Citizens' (Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia) [https://www.ombudsman.org.rs/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=24](https://www.ombudsman.org.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=24) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Law on Fundamentals of Education System (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 88/2017, 27/2018, 10/2019, 27/2018, 6/2020, 129/2021 i 92/2023).

Most complaints related to people on the move involve allegations of forced pushbacks, denial of access to asylum procedures, and inhumane treatment or torture in detention facilities. By investigating complaints or acting on its own initiative, the Ombudsman should play an important role in protecting the rights of individuals in vulnerable situations<sup>38</sup>.

## Schools, Hospitals and Social Work Centers

Although not directly responsible for enforcing legal rights, schools, hospitals, and social work centers play a vital role in ensuring access to fundamental human rights for people on the move, such as the right to education, health-care, and social protection. These institutions are also crucial for the integration of foreigners into Serbian society.

According to Serbian legislation:



**Foreign citizens and stateless persons shall be entitled to education under the same conditions and in the same manner as citizens of the Republic of Serbia.**<sup>39</sup>



This guarantees free access to elementary and secondary education for foreign nationals in Serbia, providing equal opportunities for children and young people on the move.

While Serbian legislation guarantees the right to healthcare for foreign nationals and stateless persons, access to these rights varies depending on the individual's status. According to the Law on Healthcare, the following categories of foreign nationals are entitled to healthcare at the expense of the budget of the Republic of Serbia:

- Foreign nationals whose healthcare is covered by international social security agreements;
- Asylum seekers and registered foreign nationals who have expressed an intention to apply for asylum;
- Persons included in voluntary return programs;
- Foreign nationals staying in Serbia by invitation of state authorities;
- Foreign nationals granted asylum in Serbia, if they are materially disadvantaged;
- Foreign nationals suffering from infectious diseases requiring medical supervision under public health regulations;
- Foreign nationals who are victims of human trafficking<sup>40</sup>.

Center for Social Work is a key public institution in Serbia's social welfare system. They have a broad range of responsibilities, including:

- Social Protection Services
- Child Protection
- Family Support
- Crisis Intervention
- Legal Support
- Support for Vulnerable Populations<sup>41</sup>

According to the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, foreign national or stateless person in need of social protection may also be a beneficiary

of the Center for Social Work<sup>42</sup>. Particularly, asylum seekers and refugees may address the Center for Social Work for social assistance - financial aid and material support to those in vulnerable situations, ensuring access to basic necessities during the asylum process<sup>43</sup>. The Center for Social Work also plays a vital role in child protection of people on the move, ensuring the welfare of unaccompanied minors by appointing guardians<sup>44</sup>.

## Civil Sector

Finally, in Serbia, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both domestic and international, are actively involved in supporting asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. These organizations provide a range of services, including legal assistance, humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, and advocacy for the rights of displaced individuals. They complement the government's work by providing services that may not be fully covered by state institutions, thereby enhancing the overall support system for foreign nationals<sup>45</sup>.

## Illegal Migration

All the aforementioned institutions are primarily designed to assist foreigners who reside in Serbia legally. However, not all people on the move have a legal status. The majority view Serbia as a transit country and do not intend to stay longer than necessary.

People on the move who reside in Serbia illegally can be divided into two categories. The first includes those who entered the country illegally and remain without a regulated legal status

<sup>40</sup> Law on Medical Protection, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 25/2019 i 92/2023).

<sup>41</sup> Law on Social Protection, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 24/2011).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection designates NGOs as providers of free legal aid to foreigners who have expressed their intention to seek asylum. "A foreigner who has expressed his/her intention to seek asylum in the Republic of Serbia, and the Applicant, may use free legal aid and representation before the competent authorities provided by the organisations whose objectives and activities are aimed at providing legal aid to the Applicants and persons who have been granted asylum."

throughout their stay. The second category consists of individuals who initially had their status regulated (e.g. entering Serbia on visa-free regime, holding a work permit or seeking asylum) but later lost their legal grounds, thus acquiring an illegal status.

Those who have never regulated their status typically enter Serbia illegally, often with the assistance of smugglers who facilitate illegal border crossings. The most common entry points are through the Balkan mountain range along the Bulgarian-Serbian border, followed by routes through North Macedonia.

Regardless of the category, people on the move residing illegally in Serbia generally stay outside official accommodation facilities for foreigners, such as asylum or reception centers. Those with

sufficient financial means rent private apartments, while those without resources live in squats.

Another commonality among people on the move residing illegally is their intent to leave Serbia, often through illegal means, with the help of smugglers. These smugglers assist in organizing unauthorized border crossings, referred to as “games.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, it can be concluded that, in addition to the legal institutions addressing the needs of people on the move in Serbia, there exists a well-organized parallel network of smugglers. This network facilitates illegal stays and arranges border crossings for those who can afford the services and are willing to take the associated risks.<sup>47</sup>

### 3. 2024 Statistics<sup>48</sup>

According to official data from the Commissariat and MoI a total of 19,603 people on the move stayed in Serbia during 2024. This figure represents individuals who resided in accommodation facilities designated for asylum seekers and refugees.

The majority of people on the move in Serbia came from Syria and Afghanistan. Demographically, the largest group consisted of adult men (76.45%), followed by minor boys (14.70%), adult women (6.01%), and minor girls (2.84%).

The average duration of stay in asylum and reception centers was 14 days.<sup>49 50</sup>

#### People on the move in 2024 who were residing in government’s accommodation facilities

Nationality	Number of people
Syria	7486
Afghanistan	3907
Turkey	2343
Morocco	1284
Iraq	674

<sup>46</sup> People on the move with legal status are trying to leave the country this way as well.

<sup>47</sup> Klikaktiv, Annual Report 2021 - Still on the Move: Situation of Refugees in Serbia, Belgrade, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> The complete statistics for 2024 can be found at the end of this edition.

<sup>49</sup> Komesarijat za izbeglice i migracije Republike Srbije, 'Smanjen broj migranata u Srbiji za 82 odsto u 2024. godini' (Komesarijat za izbeglice i migracije Republike Srbije, 13 January 2025) <https://kirs.gov.rs/lat/aktuelno/broj-migranata-u-srbiji-opao-za-82-odsto-u-2024-godini/5565> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>50</sup> UNHCR, 'Statistical Snapshot for Serbia, December 2024' (UNHCR, December 2024) <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2025/01/DEC-Stat-Snapshot.pdf> accessed 18 February 2025.

The occupancy rate across all centers stood at approximately 13%. By the end of December 2024, a total of 566 people were residing in asylum and reception centers.

The largest number of residents were accommodated in the Preševo reception center (just over 200 people), followed by the Krnjača asylum center (around 100 people) and the Sjenica asylum center (around 70 people).

The majority of those housed in accommodation centers were Afghan nationals, followed by Syrians and Ukrainians.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Presence in Asylum and Transit Centers by nationality 2024**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Afghanistan	107
Syria	82
Ukraine	64
Burundi	30
Morocco	30

In 2024, a total of 850 people expressed their intention to seek asylum, while 219 individuals formally submitted an asylum application. This means that only 1.12% of people who were accommodated in the official accommodation centers actually initiated the asylum procedure.

During the year, 203 asylum procedures were completed, with the following outcomes: 113 procedures were discontinued, 83 applications were rejected, and 7 applications were approved, granting refugee or subsidiary protection in Serbia.<sup>52</sup>

#### **Intentions to seek asylum 2024**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Syria	325
Afghanistan	86
Turkey	41
Morocco	38
Congo DRC	35

#### **Applications for asylum submitted 2024**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Syria	35
Turkey	30
Cuba	27
Russian Federation	22
Burundi	13

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

In 2024, MoI issued 12,551<sup>53</sup> return decisions to foreigners who were illegally residing on the territory of Serbia, mostly to nationals of Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey. According to the Law of Foreigners<sup>54</sup> the return decision is a first step in the return procedure and subsequently enables a foreigner to apply for asylum in Serbia.

Under the same Law, MoI issued 436 decisions on placement in the Detention Centers for Foreigners, also mostly for nationals of Afghanistan, Syria and Turkey. Out of 436 people who were detained, only 11 foreigners had access to legal remedy and submitted a lawsuit to the Administrative Court against this decision and only one lawsuit was adopted while the other 10 were rejected<sup>55</sup>.

In both cases, the majority of decisions were issued to nationals of Syria, Afghanistan, and Turkey.<sup>56</sup>

<b>Decisions on return 2024</b>	
<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Syria	4026
Afghanistan	2005
Türkiye	1425
Morocco	742
China	590

<b>Order of stay in the detention centre 2024</b>	
<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Afghanistan	132
Syria	108
Türkiye	40
Morocco	29
India	20

<sup>53</sup> It should be stated that 12,551 foreigners who received a return decision are not necessarily counted among 19,603 people who were accommodated in official camps during the previous year. Klikaktiv's team met dozens of people on the move who were issued with the return decision and who were never accommodated in any of the asylum/reception centers and therefore are not counted among the total number of migrants communicated by the state.

<sup>54</sup> Law on Foreigners, art. 77.

<sup>55</sup> Klikaktiv, 'Annual Migration Statistics 2024' (Data compiled from Ministry of Interior Reports, UNHCR Statistics, and Commissariat for Refugees and Migration Records).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Under readmission agreements with neighboring EU and non-EU countries, a total of 145 foreign nationals were returned in 2024 to the countries from which they had illegally entered Serbia. The majority were sent back to Bulgaria, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, and North Macedonia. At the same time, Serbia accepted 393 foreign nationals at the requests of neighboring countries under readmission agreements. Most of these individuals were returned from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>57</sup>

#### **Decisions on forced removal of people on the move to the neighbouring countries based on the readmission agreement 2024**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Syria	63
Afghanistan	34
Morocco	11
Pakistan	5

#### **Decisions on accepting people on the move from the neighbouring countries based on the readmission agreement 2024**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Türkiye	220
Syria	48
China	35
Afghanistan	29

Under the Regulation on Temporary Protection for Ukrainians, a total of 1,084 Ukrainian citizens have been granted temporary protection in Serbia. The number of Ukrainians receiving temporary protection has remained relatively stable since the regulation came into effect, averaging around 1,000 people per year.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

# KEY TRENDS AND EVENTS IN 2024

The year 2024 brought significant domestic and international developments that could greatly impact the situation regarding people on the move in Serbia. The EU introduced substantial changes to its migration and asylum policies, including a new legal framework and strengthened cooperation with neighboring third countries.

By the end of 2024, 13 years after the Syrian civil war began, Bashar al-Assad was overthrown by the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army. Throughout the year, Serbia continued to serve as a transit country along the Balkan route. People on the move entered the country both legally and illegally, primarily with the intention of continuing their journey toward Western European countries. In light of this, some new practices emerged in 2024, marking notable deviations from previous years.

Additionally, Serbia faced a serious labor shortage in 2024 due to its poor demographic situation and significant emigration of the local population. As a result, Serbia, traditionally recognized as a country that exports workers, also became a destination for importing labor.

Taking all of the above into account, the following events and trends stand out as the most significant in 2024:

1. The EU's new Pact on Migration and Asylum,
2. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria,
3. The new Status Agreement between Frontex and Serbia,
4. A decrease in the number of people on the move applying for asylum in Serbia or staying in asylum camps,
5. An increase in illegal migration through Serbia, and
6. A rise in the number of foreign workers in Serbia.

## 1. New Pact on Migration and Asylum

After a long political stalemate, in September 2020, the European Commission presented the plan for a fresh start putting forward the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which should reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). In December 2023, after intense negotiations, the European Parliament and the Council reached a breakthrough with a political agreement on key files of the Pact, allowing its final adoption and its entry into force in June 2024. The pact is composed of eight legislative files whose implementation should begin in June 2026, giving the Member States enough time to adopt and harmonize the new rules with their legislation.<sup>59</sup>

Eight legislative files the New Pact consists of are the following:

- Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (AMMR) - AMMR replaces the current "Dublin III Regulation and it clarifies the responsibility criteria and the rules for determining the Member State responsible for assessing an asylum application. The new Regulation also introduces a permanent, mandatory, and needs-based solidarity mechanism, replacing current ad-hoc voluntary solutions.
- Asylum Procedure Regulation (including the Return Border Procedure Regulation) - This Regulation establishes a common proce-

<sup>59</sup> European Commission, 'Managing migration responsibly' (European Commission, November 2024) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/879950/7%20Migration.pdf> accessed 18 February 2025.

cedure for deciding on an asylum application. Together with the Return Border Procedure Regulation it also establishes a mandatory border procedure for both the asylum and return process at the external border.

- Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation - It addresses situations of crisis, including instrumentalization, and force majeure, and provides derogations and solidarity measures for Member States.
- Eurodac Regulation - The recast of the Eurodac Regulation will turn the existing Eurodac database from an asylum database into a fully-fledged asylum and migration database. Eurodac will make it possible to count not only applications but also applicants. The type of data registered will expand (not only fingerprints but also facial image, identity data, copies of identity/travel documents). The storage period for certain types of data will be extended to 5 years while the storage period for data of applicants will remain for 10 years. It will contain data of persons disembarked after search and rescue operations, apprehended following an irregular crossing of the external border, found to be staying illegally on a Member State's territory, resettled persons and beneficiaries of temporary protection. The system will now also include data from children as of 6 years old.
- Screening Regulation - The new Screening Regulation sets up uniform rules ensuring checks on the EU external borders and proper registration of irregular migrants and asylum seekers entering the EU which should ensure either return or asylum procedures.
- Qualification Regulation - The Qualification Regulation replaces the Qualification Directive. It incorporates the Geneva Convention into EU law, aiming to ensure that Member States apply common criteria to qualify persons as beneficiaries of international protection.
- Reception Conditions Directive - The revised Reception Conditions Directive should provide criteria for minimum standards of

assistance for asylum applicants by Member States, ensuring adequate standards of living for those arriving to the EU and seeking international protection. The upgraded Directive harmonizes the standards of assistance across the EU and sets obligations for Member States to guarantee these standards.

- Union Resettlement Framework - It creates a collective and harmonized approach for resettlement and humanitarian admission, with common procedures.<sup>60</sup>

In essence, the asylum procedure in the EU, starting from June 2026, should be uniform and structured as follows: Asylum seekers and refugees should clearly be identified and registered in the expanded biometric database "Eurodac" within seven days of their arrival by land, sea, or air. Migrants from countries with an asylum recognition rate below 20 percent should be detained at the border for up to twelve weeks. In camps – which must be established in Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain, Croatia, and Cyprus – decisions should be made about who will be returned to their country of origin without further processing.

Migrants from countries with a higher asylum recognition rate should undergo a regular asylum procedure. These procedures, which have so far taken years, should be expedited. Rejected asylum seekers should be deported to countries of origin or safe third countries directly from the external borders.

Many asylum seekers have so far traveled directly from Greece or Italy to Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, or Belgium. This also applies to rejected asylum seekers. The country of first entry (e.g., Italy) is technically required to take these migrants back. However, this does not happen in practice. Countries of first entry into the EU should be able to transfer some asylum seekers or migrants with good chances of receiving asylum to other EU member states. There should be "mandatory solidarity" among member states.

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<sup>61</sup> European Commission, 'Legislative files in a nutshell' (European Commission, 4 June 2024) [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum/legislative-files-nutshell\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum/legislative-files-nutshell_en) accessed 18 February 2025.

Countries like Hungary, which refuse to accept migrants, should at least pay compensation or send equipment and personnel to the so-called first-entry countries. The compensation amount is set at €20,000 per migrant not accepted. However, this compensation system is not legally binding and must be negotiated between member states on a case-by-case basis.

If a country feels overburdened, it can relax many rules and demand more solidarity. All 27 member states jointly decide whether such a "crisis situation" has occurred. This leaves significant room for political disputes.

The Pact envisions faster deportation of individuals in the future to their countries of origin or transit countries designated as safe. The European Union aims to establish more agreements with third countries to ensure they accept rejected migrants. The Western Balkan countries, Serbia included, could potentially be declared as safe third countries and designated to accept rejected migrants.

EU border guards should, in the future, record all incoming individuals and store their biometric data in an expanded database accessible to all authorities in Europe. This would determine whether migrants rejected in Greece, for example, are reapplying for asylum in Austria or passing through multiple other countries. Asylum seekers could then be more easily deported back to the country of first entry in the EU and ultimately to their country of origin.<sup>61</sup>

Adoption of the New Pact caused significant criticism regarding its potential impact on human rights, equitable responsibility-sharing, and the protection of asylum seekers. Organizations such as Amnesty International have raised concerns that the Pact's reforms could heighten the risk of human rights violations. The emphasis on border security and expedited procedures may compromise the rights of asylum seekers, potentially leading to inadequate protection and unjustified returns.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, Caritas Europa has expressed apprehension that the new rules may limit access to protection for those in need. The complexity of the proposed solidarity mechanism and the concept of "return sponsorship" might not lead to predictable solidarity and responsibility sharing among Member States, potentially coming at the expense of people's rights and human dignity.<sup>63</sup>

As aforementioned, the Pact introduces a solidarity mechanism intended to distribute responsibilities among member states. However, critics argue that this system may be ineffective due to its complexity and the potential reluctance of some countries to participate fully. This could result in certain nations bearing a disproportionate burden, undermining the principle of equitable responsibility-sharing.<sup>64</sup>

There are also concerns that the Pact's provisions for mandatory border procedures could lead to increased detention of asylum seekers, including vulnerable individuals. Critics argue that such measures may not adequately safeguard human rights and could result in prolonged detention periods without proper judicial oversight.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Deutsche Welle, 'Pakt o migraciji: Šta donosi nova politika azila EU' (Deutsche Welle, 15 December 2024) <https://www.dw.com/sr/pakt-o-migraciji-%C5%A1ta-donosi-nova-politika-azila-eu/a-68792186> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>62</sup> Amnesty International, 'EU: Migration and Asylum Pact reforms will put people at heightened risk of human rights violations' (Amnesty International, 4 April 2024) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/eu-migration-asylum-pact-put-people-at-risk-human-rights-violations/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>63</sup> Caritas Internationalis, 'What's wrong with the EU's Pact on Migration?' (Caritas Internationalis, 12 April 2024) <https://www.caritas.org/2024/04/whats-wrong-with-the-eus-pact-on-migration/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Filippo Scuto, 'Solidarity in the Common Asylum System and the Control of Illegal Immigration: A Critique of the New EU Migration Pact' (BRIDGE Network, 14 January 2021) <https://bridgenetwork.eu/2021/01/14/solidarity-in-the-common-asylum-system-and-the-control-of-illegal-immigration-a-critique-of-the-new-eu-migration-pact/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>65</sup> Catherine Warin and Valeria Ilareva, 'Vulnerability in the New Pact: an empty promise to protect, or an operational concept?' (EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy, 11 October 2024) <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/vulnerability-in-the-new-pact-an-empty-promise-to-protect-or-an-operational-concept/> accessed 18 February 2025.

Ultimately, the Pact's focus on partnerships with third countries to manage migration flows has raised alarms about the potential externalization of asylum processing. This approach may lead to situations where asylum seekers are kept in countries with weaker protection standards, increasing the risk of rights violations and undermining the EU's commitment to international protection norms.<sup>66</sup>

**While the Pact primarily targets EU Member States, its implications extend to neighboring countries, including Serbia. As a candidate for EU membership and a key transit route for migrants, Serbia's alignment with EU migration policies is of significant interest to the EU. A major concern for Serbia is that it may become a buffer zone or "parking lot" for the EU's migration policies, particularly regarding pushbacks and the containment of migrants outside EU borders. Additionally, Serbia's role as the last non-EU country on migrants' route raises concerns about potential increases in deportations to its territory. As already stressed, the EU's new Pact on Migration and Asylum**

**emphasizes cooperation with neighboring countries to manage migration flows, which could lead to increased pressure on Serbia to align with EU policies and handle a higher number of people on the move.<sup>67</sup>**

## 2. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria

On 15 March 2011, one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history broke out. Popular discontent with the Ba'athist regime led by Bashar al-Assad triggered large-scale protests and pro-democracy rallies across Syria, as part of the broader Arab Spring in the region. After months of violent crackdowns by the government's security forces, various armed rebel groups, such as the Free Syrian Army, began forming across the country, marking the start of the Syrian insurgency. By mid-2012, the insurgency had escalated into a full-scale civil war. From the outset, the conflict has been described as the "worst man-made disaster since the Second World War," with more than 600,000 fatalities, almost half of whom were civilians. As a result of the war, more than 6 million Syrians fled the country, and an additional 6 million are internally displaced.<sup>68 69 70 71 72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> EuroMed Rights, 'Analysis of the New EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: A "fresh start" for human rights violations' (EuroMed Rights, October 2020) [https://euromedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Analysis-of-Asylum-and-Migration-Pact\\_Final\\_Clickable.pdf](https://euromedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Analysis-of-Asylum-and-Migration-Pact_Final_Clickable.pdf) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Simon Ilse, 'Insights from Serbia - a buffer zone for the EU's illegal pushback policy?' (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 12 October 2020) <https://eu.boell.org/en/2020/09/30/insights-serbia-buffer-zone-eus-illegal-pushback-policy> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>68</sup> Terre des hommes, '10 years of war in Syria - Between pain and hope' (Terre des hommes, 15 March 2021) <https://www.tdh.org/en/stories/10-years-of-war-in-Syria-Between-pain-and-hope> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>69</sup> UNHCR, 'Syria Regional Refugee Response' (UNHCR) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>70</sup> UN Human Rights Office, 'UN Human Rights Office estimates more than 306,000 civilians were killed over 10 years in Syria conflict' (UN Human Rights Office, 28 June 2022) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/un-human-rights-office-estimates-more-306000-civilians-were-killed-over-10> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>71</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 'Syrian Revolution 13 years on | Nearly 618,000 persons killed since the onset of the revolution in March 2011' (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 15 March 2024) <https://www.syriahr.com/en/328044/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>72</sup> UNHCR, 'Refugee Data Finder' (UNHCR) <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download> accessed 18 February 2025.

The majority of Syrians who fled the country—more than 4.5 million—sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Others settled in countries across the Middle East and Europe, with Germany receiving the largest number of Syrians, nearly one million.<sup>73 74</sup>

On 8 December 2024, the Assad regime collapsed during a major offensive by opposition forces. The offensive was spearheaded by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and primarily supported by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army. The capture of Damascus marked the end of the Assad family's rule, which had governed Syria as a totalitarian regime since Hafez al-Assad seized power in 1971 following a coup d'état.

One day after Assad fled the country, Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali announced that he had agreed to transfer power to the rebel-led Salvation Government. On 10 December, al-Jalali officially handed over power to Mohammed al-Bashir, the Prime Minister of the Syrian Salvation Government. The transitional administration declared it would remain in place until 1 March 2025, with all ministers from the Salvation Government retaining their posts in the new transitional government. However, Ahmed al-Sharaa, leader of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, is widely regarded as the de facto

leader of Syria.<sup>75 76</sup>

Despite Assad's departure, by the end of 2024, the situation in Syria remained deeply unstable, and the war appeared far from over. In December 2024 forces of the Syrian transitional government conducted several attacks on Assad's loyalists primarily in strongholds within the Alawite-majority Tartus and Latakia governorates in western Syria.<sup>77</sup> Simultaneously, Kurdish-led fighters, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched a counter-offensive against the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army to take back areas near Syria's northern border with Turkey. The SDF a key U.S. ally in Syria, also targeted sleeper cells of the extremist Islamic State scattered across the country's east.<sup>78</sup>

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, currently the strongest military and political force in Syria, follows a conservative Salafist<sup>79</sup> doctrine, raising concerns among other religious groups. To mitigate tensions in the deeply divided society, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham has assured that Christians and other minorities will be allowed to freely practice their religion. On 31 December 2024, Ahmed al-Sharaa met with senior Syrian Christian leaders at the People's Palace to address these concerns.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Riham Alkousaa, 'European countries put Syrian asylum bids on hold after Assad's fall' (Reuters, 9 December 2024) <https://www.reuters.com/world/european-countries-put-syrian-asylum-bids-hold-after-assads-fall-2024-12-09/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>74</sup> UNHCR, 'Syria Regional Refugee Response' (UNHCR) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>75</sup> Maya Gebeily and Timour Azhari, 'With Syria's Assad gone, his PM agrees to hand power to rebel administration' (Reuters, 9 December 2024) <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/with-assad-ousted-new-era-starts-syria-world-watches-2024-12-09/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>76</sup> Financial Times, 'Syrian elections may not be held for 4 years, says de facto leader' (Financial Times, 9 December 2024) <https://www.ft.com/content/bf11898a-8e0a-416b-bd37-b7835bc8fd1c> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>77</sup> VOA News, 'New Syrian authorities launch operation against pro-Assad militias, state media report' (VOA News, 26 December 2024) <https://www.voanews.com/a/new-syrian-authorities-launch-operation-against-pro-assad-militias-state-media-reports/7914502.html> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>78</sup> Kareem Chehayeb and Hogir Al Abdo, 'Kurdish-led forces push back Turkish-backed Syrian rebels in a tense offensive' (Associated Press, 24 December 2024) <https://apnews.com/article/syria-kurds-turkey-sdf-manbij-kobani-84928d1755cc09c239fe00074291ff0f> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>79</sup> The Salafi movement or Salafism is a revival movement within Sunni Islam, founded in the late 19th century and influential in the Islamic world to this day. The name "Salafiyya" is a self-designation, to call for a return to the traditions of the "pious predecessors" (salaf), the first three generations of Muslims who are believed to exemplify the pure form of Islam. Due to its conservative interpretation of Islam Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham is considered as a terrorist organization by the UN, US, UK to name the few.

<sup>80</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Syria de facto leader al-Sharaa meets Christian clerics' (Al Jazeera, 31 December 2024) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/31/syria-de-facto-leader-al-sharaa-meets-christian-clerics> accessed 18 February 2025.

Finally, on the same day that Assad fled the country, Israel invaded the buffer zone between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, launching an aerial campaign targeting the Syrian Army's military infrastructure.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the fact that the war in Syria is still ongoing, certain countries that have accepted large numbers of Syrian refugees have used the fall of Assad's regime as a turning point to revise their policies toward them. Various factors influence this kind of reaction. First and foremost, countries like Turkey and Lebanon are grappling with domestic crises of their own. Turkey is facing a severe economic crisis, marked by high inflation, and the domestic public perceives the large number of Syrian refugees as an additional burden on the state in this fragile situation. The situation in Lebanon is even more dire, as the country is under constant attacks from Israel, and the overall security situation is currently highly unstable.

On the other hand, the political landscape in Europe has shifted significantly over the past decade, particularly in Germany. From the "welcome refugees" approach in 2015, Europe has moved toward a more xenophobic, right-wing stance. Many European countries are witnessing a surge in the popularity of extreme right-wing political parties that are strongly anti-immigration. As a result of this growing sentiment across European societies, several countries have decided to revise their policies toward Syrian refugees.

Since the fall of Assad's regime in December 2024, many European countries have put Syrian asylum applications on hold until further notice. In 2024, Syria was the top country of origin for asylum seekers in Germany, with 72,420 applications submitted by the end of November,

of which 47,270 remain undecided. The suspension of applications does not currently affect those who have already been granted asylum.<sup>82</sup>

Other countries, including Norway, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Greece, and the Netherlands, have also announced suspensions of Syrian asylum requests. France stated that it plans to announce a similar decision soon. Norwegian immigration authorities have declared that Syrian asylum applications will neither be denied nor approved for the time being. Denmark has also paused the processing of applications, explaining that Syrians whose requests had already been rejected and who had been given a deadline to leave would be allowed to remain longer due to the current uncertainty. Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer instructed his interior minister to suspend all ongoing Syrian asylum applications and family reunifications, while Greece has paused the asylum applications of approximately 9,000 Syrians.<sup>83</sup>

However, some countries are planning to go even further by revising their overall policies toward Syrians already residing within their borders. In Austria, Chancellor Karl Nehammer has directed his interior minister to review all asylum cases involving Syrians. In response, Interior Minister Gerhard Karner announced that he had instructed the ministry to prepare an "orderly return and deportation program" for Syrians. Since the beginning of the war, approximately 100,000 Syrians have been granted asylum in Austria.<sup>84</sup>

In October, some EU countries, led by Italy, pushed for the normalization of ties with Syria to facilitate the deportation of migrants. In line with this effort, the Italian government announced it would maintain a diplomatic presence in Damascus, attempting to portray the situation in Syria

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<sup>81</sup> The New Arab, 'Israel's Netanyahu declares end of Syria border agreement, orders military to seize buffer zone' (The New Arab, 8 December 2024) <https://www.newarab.com/news/israels-netanyahu-declares-end-syria-border-agreement> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>82</sup> Riham Alkousaa, 'European countries put Syrian asylum bids on hold after Assad's fall' (Reuters, 9 December 2024) <https://www.reuters.com/world/european-countries-put-syrian-asylum-bids-hold-after-assads-fall-2024-12-09/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Seb Starcevic et al., 'Austria prepares to deport Syrian migrants after Assad regime falls' (Politico, 9 December 2024) <https://www.politico.eu/article/austria-deport-syria-migrant-bashar-assad-regime-fall/> accessed 18 February 2025.

as more stable than it actually is.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, the greatest concern currently revolves around Germany, home to approximately one million Syrians. Migration policy has become one of the most contentious topics ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2025. Soon after Assad's fall, prominent right-wing figures, ranging from the conservative opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), quickly proposed initiatives encouraging Syrians to return home.<sup>86</sup>

The situation for Syrian refugees outside Europe is not much better. Just days after Assad's fall, some politicians in Turkey launched campaigns ostensibly aimed at helping Syrian refugees return to their country. However, the language and tone used in these campaigns—offering to buy transport tickets and cover relocation costs—have drawn widespread criticism for being discriminatory. Liberal media in Turkey described these initiatives as “racist.”<sup>87</sup>

Both the IOM and the UNHCR have issued statements urging national governments to refrain from making hasty decisions, emphasizing that the security situation in Syria remains highly volatile and that the conflict is far from over. UNHCR has specifically called for a moratorium on forced returns, as well as a suspension of negative decisions on Syrian applications for international protection.<sup>88 89</sup>

Regarding Serbia's position in this crisis situation, no official statements have been made by state officials. Since the beginning of the war, a total of 46 Syrians have been granted asylum in Serbia—seven have obtained refugee status, while others have received subsidiary protec-

tion. It remains to be seen what stance Serbian authorities will take, especially considering that Serbia has recently been aligning its migration policies with those of the EU. On the other hand, Serbia is one of the few countries where the Syrian embassy remained fully operational throughout the war, while the Serbian government maintained diplomatic relations with Bashar's regime.

### 3. New Status Agreement between Frontex and Serbia

As mentioned in the Introduction, Serbia is a candidate for EU membership and is obliged to harmonize its policies with those of the EU. Given that external border security is currently among the most important issues in the EU, cooperation in this regard plays a vital part in Serbia's commitments toward membership. Geopolitically, Serbia serves as a buffer zone between entry points into the EU and member countries such as Croatia and Hungary, which lead further toward Western European countries. Therefore, the EU considers Serbia an important partner in its security policy.

In 2019, Serbia and the EU signed the first Status Agreement, regulating the role of Frontex in the country. This agreement enabled Frontex to assist Serbian authorities in border management, conduct joint operations, and deploy teams along Serbia's borders with the EU (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Croatia). The main objective of this agreement was to combat illegal immigration and cross-border crime.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Deutsche Welle, 'Germany starts Syrian migration debate after Assad's fall' (Deutsche Welle, 10 December 2024) <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-starts-syrian-migration-debate-after-assads-fall/a-71011692> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>87</sup> Ragip Soyly, 'Turkey's mayors offer refugees one-way tickets to Syria' (Middle East Eye, 9 December 2024) <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkeys-mayors-offer-one-way-syria-tickets-refugees> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>88</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic' (UNHCR, December 2024) <https://www.refworld.org/policy/countrypos/unhcr/2024/en/149254> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>89</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'Responding to Syria at a Time of Need; Statement by IOM Chief' (IOM, 17 December 2024) <https://www.iom.int/news/responding-syria-time-need-statement-iom-chief> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>90</sup> European Union and Republic of Serbia, 'Status Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia

The EU continuously works on strengthening and externalizing its migration and border management policies, with Serbia and other Western Balkan countries playing an integral role in these efforts. In December 2022, the European Commission presented the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans, structured around five pillars: (1) Strengthening border management along migration routes; (2) Accelerating asylum procedures and enhancing reception capacity; (3) Combating migrant smuggling; (4) Enhancing readmission cooperation and returns; (5) Achieving visa policy alignment. The Action Plan aims to further enhance cooperation with Western Balkan partners on migration and border management.<sup>91</sup>

In June 2024, following the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, Serbia and the EU signed a new Status Agreement. The European Parliament, EU Council, and Serbian Parliament all approved the agreement. This was the fifth such agreement signed between the EU and a third-country. The first was concluded with Moldova in March 2022, followed by North Macedonia in October 2022, Montenegro in May 2023, and Albania in September 2023.<sup>92</sup> The new Status Agreement significantly expanded Frontex's authority in Serbia. Under this agreement, Frontex is now authorized to conduct joint operations and deploy permanent units of the European Border and Coast Guard anywhere in Serbia, including along borders with non-EU neighboring countries. The agreement also includes mechanisms for reporting

incidents, the appointment of a Frontex coordinator, and the designation of a Frontex office in Serbia, among other provisions. Under specific circumstances, Frontex officers may exercise executive powers, such as conducting border checks and surveillance, in alignment with Serbian law and under the supervision of Serbian authorities.<sup>93</sup>

According to the agreement, Frontex officers are granted specific privileges and immunities, including: Immunity from jurisdiction (criminal, civil, and administrative) for actions performed in their official functions, inviolability of personal property and tax exemptions. This means that Frontex personnel cannot be subjected to legal proceedings in Serbia for actions taken as part of their official duties.<sup>94</sup>

Frontex currently deploys over 480 officers in the Western Balkans through joint operations on the EU's external borders with Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro. This includes 111 Frontex officers already stationed in Serbia under the previous status agreement, operating along the borders with Hungary and Bulgaria.<sup>95</sup>

The immunity provisions granted to Frontex personnel in Serbia have sparked concerns about Serbia's sovereignty and its ability to enforce its own laws within its territory. Critics argue that such immunities could lead to a lack of accountability, particularly in cases of misconduct or human rights violations.<sup>96</sup>

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on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia' (European Union, 21 January 2019) <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15579-2018-REV-1/en/pdf> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>91</sup> European Commission, 'EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans' (European Commission, December 2022) [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/e63e3b92-4f0c-4d95-a7f9-b0aff2dd0efc\\_en?filename=Western%20Balkans\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/e63e3b92-4f0c-4d95-a7f9-b0aff2dd0efc_en?filename=Western%20Balkans_en.pdf) accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>92</sup> BOŠ, 'Sporazum EU-Srbija o aktivnostima Fronteksa' Beogradska otvorena škola, 29. januar 2025) <https://eupregovori.bos.rs/progovori-o-pregovorima/najnovije/1761/4597/sporazum-eu-srbija-o-aktivnostima-fronteksa.html> accessed 18. February 2025.

<sup>93</sup> Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia on operational activities carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia [2024] OJ L 202/3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> BOŠ, 'Sporazum EU-Srbija o aktivnostima Fronteksa' Beogradska otvorena škola, 29. januar 2025) <https://eupregovori.bos.rs/progovori-o-pregovorima/najnovije/1761/4597/sporazum-eu-srbija-o-aktivnostima-fronteksa.html> accessed 18. February 2025.

<sup>96</sup> Mariana Gkliati and Jane Kilpatrick, 'Frontex cooperation with third countries: examining the human rights implications' (*Forced Migration Review*, 16 November 2021) <https://www.fmreview.org/externalisation/gkliati-kilpatrick/>

Another major concern revolves around human rights protections, given that some EU countries have exhibited problematic treatment of migrants. During the migration crisis and afterward, Hungary imposed extremely harsh policies on migrants, leading to the European Court of Justice fining it 200 million euros for violating EU asylum policy. Hungarian authorities failed to respect the right to international protection for individuals at risk of war or persecution.

Similarly, Bulgaria has engaged in illegal pushbacks of migrants to Turkey, while Croatia has also faced accusations of mistreatment. To address such concerns, Frontex established the Fundamental Rights Office, responsible for overseeing Frontex officers and ensuring compliance with international human rights standards.

Nevertheless, the fact that Frontex has previously been implicated in pushbacks and the use of excessive force against migrants raises concerns that similar practices could occur in Serbia.<sup>97</sup>

## 4. Decrease in the Number of People on the Move in Serbia

The situation in Serbia regarding the status of people on the move changed significantly in 2024. A comparison of official data from the Commissariat and the MoI clearly indicates that the number of people on the move has decreased substantially. In 2023, 108,828 individuals were recorded, whereas in 2024, only 19,603 people on the move were residing in the official centers in Serbia. This represents a decrease of 82%.

However, it is important to keep in mind that these figures only reflect official statistics pro-

vided by Serbian institutions and it includes only people on the move who have been residing in official, state-run camps. The individuals included in these numbers are those who have declared their intention to seek asylum or who have been recorded to stay in asylum centers. As a direct consequence of this decline in arrivals, all other related statistics have dropped as well. Consequently, only 850 people declared their intention to seek asylum in 2024.<sup>98</sup>

When analyzing these numbers, one inconsistency becomes apparent. Given that only individuals who have entered the asylum procedure are legally allowed to reside in asylum centers, it is evident that the officially recorded number of people on the move is significantly higher than the number of those actually in the asylum procedure. The reason for this discrepancy lies in the fact that the Commissariat, in cooperation with the MoI, has established an illegal practice of accommodating people on the move who do not have a legally regulated status in the Republic of Serbia. Although this malpractice could be interpreted positively, as it allows accommodation for people on the move, it nonetheless raises several concerns.

Firstly, the practice of “open-for-all” asylum centers is not implemented in all facilities, but only in the southern regions of Serbia, specifically in Bujanovac, Preševo and Sjenica. This means that if people on the move attempt to enter other centers without having previously expressed their intention to seek asylum in Serbia in the designated police station, they will not be granted access.

Another issue is that persons accommodated in asylum centers who are not engaged in the asylum procedure cannot exercise other rights guaranteed by law to asylum applicants, such as access to healthcare, primary and secondary education, information and legal aid, and labour market access. The denial of the right to information and legal aid is particularly problematic. According to testimonies from people on the

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accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>97</sup> Hope Barker, ‘Frontex in Serbia — a catalogue of 12 months of denials’ (*EUobserver*, 15 December 2024) <https://euobserver.com/migration/are14cd993> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>98</sup> See Introduction, subchapter Statistics

move, many who stayed in asylum centers stated that they could not obtain any relevant information from Commissariat staff. They were not informed about their legal status in Serbia, the possibility of seeking asylum in Serbia, nor was it explained how this could affect their rights. The withholding of this crucial information was also noted in situations where medical care was necessary. Even then, they were not informed that, as asylum applicants, they might have the right to healthcare.<sup>99</sup>

Additional confusion arises from the fact that upon receiving people on the move who are not in the asylum procedure, Commissariat officials conduct certain actions resembling registration, where individuals are photographed, and a camp ID card is issued to them. Due to a lack of information, many people on the move believe that this process initiates the asylum procedure and that they have thereby obtained a legal basis for residing in Serbia.<sup>100</sup>

This illegal practice by the Commissariat has been further reinforced by other institutions in Serbia, primarily the MoI. While MoI frequently emphasizes in public statements that combating irregular migration and human trafficking is one of its priorities, practical deviations from this official narrative have been observed.

MoI's efforts to prevent human trafficking and irregular migration have been primarily focused on border areas, both at entry and exit points, as well as along highways. Throughout 2024, police forces conducted a large number of arrests in these areas, as indicated by official MoI statements. However, it remains unclear whether all arrested individuals were subsequently charged with offenses or crimes in accordance with the law.

This issue is particularly relevant in northern Serbia, where people on the move, after an unsuccessful attempt at crossing the border—commonly referred to as a “game”—were subjected to pushbacks into Serbia. Numerous witnesses have stated that after being detained in border areas in the north, they were taken to a police station, most likely in Subotica<sup>101</sup>, where they remained for several days in detention-like facilities. After that, they were forcibly transported by bus to Preševo, where they were accommodated in a reception center.<sup>102</sup>

Although many of the individuals subjected to this practice were Syrians and Afghans, police officers, similar to Commissariat staff, did not provide them with information about their right to seek asylum in Serbia. The organized transport of people on the move from northern Serbia to Preševo became a routine practice in the second half of 2024.<sup>103</sup>

In addition, numerous testimonies reveal another malpractice by the Serbian police. Specifically, in 2024, many cases of forcible pushbacks to Bulgaria were recorded.<sup>104</sup>

Misdemeanor courts in Serbia have also developed illegal practices concerning people on the move. Individuals apprehended by the police in operations aimed at preventing irregular migration and human trafficking are typically charged with offenses such as illegal border crossing or illegal stay in Serbia. According to the Law on Foreigners, the minimum fine for these misdemeanors is 50,000 RSD. If the convicted individual cannot afford to pay, the fine can be converted into a prison sentence, which, according to the Misdemeanor Law, cannot exceed two months.<sup>105 106</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Conclusion of the Klikaktiv team based on testimonies of people on the move.

<sup>102</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).

<sup>105</sup> Law on Foreigners

<sup>106</sup> Code of Misdemeanor, (Official Herald of the Republic of Serbia, Nos. 65/2013, 13/2016, 98/2016 - Constitutional Court decision, 91/2019, 91/2019 - another law, and 112/2022 - Constitutional Court decision).

## Case Report: Deportation Order and Misdemeanor Penalty for Illegal Border Crossing

*In May 2024, a refugee from Iraq contacted us via WhatsApp while staying in Sjenica, expressing his intention to apply for asylum in Serbia. However, he was informed by the police that he was not eligible, and he subsequently provided official documents from the Subotica police concerning his case. On May 4, 2024, he was apprehended for allegedly violating Article 71, Paragraph 1, Item 1 of the Border Control Law for attempting to cross the border at an unofficial point. The Subotica Police Department issued a detention order pending his appearance before a misdemeanor judge. At the time of his detention, he was given a document outlining his rights under the Police Law and the Misdemeanor Law (both in English), as well as a receipt for the temporary confiscation of his belongings—including his phone, charger, earphones, and shoelaces. A request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings was also filed that same day, with the sole charge being illegal border crossing from Serbia into Hungary.*

*On May 5, 2024, the Subotica Police issued a deportation order, requiring his immediate departure from the country. Records indicate that on the previous day at 17:45, he had been “released at the auxiliary gate near border marker E-304 by Hungarian police officers” and was then apprehended and processed by Serbian authorities at the same location. During questioning, he reportedly admitted to illegally entering Serbia and later crossing into Hungary on May 1, though it remains unclear where he was located during the four days between May 1 and May 4—whether in detention, in a transit zone, or elsewhere. Later that day, the Misdemeanor Court in Subotica rendered its verdict, sentencing him for illegally crossing the Serbian-Hungarian border on May 1 by allegedly hiding in a truck—a detail not reflected in the police records. He was fined 10,000 RSD, later reduced to 9,000 RSD due to being detained for more than 12 hours. Although there is no document confirming that the fine was converted into a prison sentence, it is assumed that he paid the fine. Notably, the appeal period was set at only 48 hours—a remarkably short timeframe—and there is no record of an interpreter being provided during the proceedings.*

*Additionally, he was issued an “Urgent Protocol” from a medical facility, the exact institution of which was unclear. This report stated that he denied having any injuries or health issues and that no injuries were observed. The unusual nature of this document, which has not been commonly encountered in similar cases, raises questions about its intended purpose. Overall, this case—resulting in a decision for return and a misdemeanor penalty for illegal border crossing—highlights significant procedural concerns, including the rapid deportation order, the extremely brief appeal window, and the absence of interpreter support during the court proceedings.*

However, in practice, misdemeanor judges frequently issue only warnings to people on the move instead of fines or jail sentences. Although this practice may seem beneficial to people on the move, as it spares them financial penalties and imprisonment, it actually illustrates the lack of genuine commitment and capacity within Serbian institutions to systematically address

migration issues.

The inability and lack of interest of Serbian institutions is also evident in the actions of the MoI. According to the Law on Foreigners, all individuals illegally residing in Serbia must receive a decision on return with a deadline for departure.<sup>107</sup> As noted in the Introduction, a

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<sup>107</sup> Law on Foreigners

total of 12,551 decisions were issued in 2024, with most ordering voluntary return.<sup>108</sup>

However, under the Law on Foreigners, any foreigner suspected of failing to leave voluntarily should be placed in a detention center for foreigners. Grounds for such reasonable suspicion include: Lack of identity documents, failure to voluntarily leave Serbia, Attempts to re-enter or already entering Serbia irregularly, etc.<sup>109</sup>

If applied precisely, this would mean that most foreigners issued return decisions should also receive an order for placement in a detention center. In practice, however, this was not the case. In 2024, only 426 individuals were placed in detention centers, while forced removal was conducted for just 145 people.<sup>110</sup>

The lack of engagement from Serbian institutions, particularly the MoI, is also evident in the police's unauthorized interpretation of the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection. This interpretation effectively prevents people on the move who have received a return decision from applying for asylum, despite the fact that no such restriction exists in the law itself. The MoI justifies this practice by labeling asylum claims in these cases as an abuse of the system, sending a clear message to people on the move that they are not welcome in Serbia and should continue their journey toward the EU.

All individuals who were forcibly removed from Serbia were returned to the countries through which they had entered irregularly, in accordance with readmission agreements. This practice could be legally justified, as most individuals who were issued return and detention orders were from Afghanistan and Syria—countries where forced returns could pose a serious threat to their safety. Serbian law, in line with international conventions, strictly prohibits returning individuals to a country where they may face persecution or threats to their life.<sup>111</sup>

An additional challenge in the forced removal process is that the countries from which migrants entered Serbia irregularly are not always willing to accept them back.

Another illegal practice that has emerged is the use of detention centers for foreigners as de facto prisons. In some cases, instead of conducting procedures before the misdemeanor courts and sentencing individuals to fines/prison, or even instead of conducting criminal procedures for criminal acts, authorities ordered their placement in detention centers. According to Serbian law, individuals can remain in detention centers for up to six months, while the maximum prison sentence for misdemeanor offenses is only two months.<sup>112</sup>

An analysis of the data and practices of Serbian institutions indicates that Serbia lacks both the capacity and the political will to systematically address migration issues. Numerous illegal practices, ad hoc measures, and, most importantly, the silence of responsible institutions, have resulted in widespread distrust among people on the move toward Serbian authorities. Consequently, many people on the move arriving in Serbia actively avoid contact with Serbian institutions. This trend is reflected in official statistics, which underreport the actual number of individuals who stayed in or transited through Serbia in 2024. The real number of people on the move who passed through Serbia remains unknown and can only be speculated upon.

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<sup>108</sup> See Introduction, subchapter Statistics

<sup>109</sup> Law on Foreigners

<sup>110</sup> See Introduction, subchapter Statistics

<sup>111</sup> Law on Foreigners

<sup>112</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).

## 5. Increase in Illegal Migration through Serbia

In the previous subchapter, while discussing the decline in the number of people on the move who stayed in or passed through Serbia, the approach of Serbian institutions toward them was also analyzed. The findings indicate that the migration and asylum management system does not function efficiently and has numerous shortcomings. This lack of institutional effectiveness has led to a widespread distrust among people on the move toward Serbian authorities. A direct consequence of this policy failure has been the growth and consolidation of smuggling networks across Serbia.

It is widely recognized that Serbia is not the desired final destination for the majority of people on the move. While the country has, in recent years, attracted a growing number of foreign nationals who have chosen to settle, for most individuals fleeing persecution, Western European countries remain the primary goal.

Since 2016, following the abolition of Germany's open-door refugee policy, free movement across Europe has become significantly more restricted. Many EU Member States have adopted increasingly restrictive migration policies, leading to stricter border controls, violent pushbacks, and deportations.

This shift in EU migration policy has contributed to the rise of highly organized smuggling networks throughout Europe, including Serbia. Smugglers have established well-structured routes for the illegal transport of migrants, including cross-border movements.

In Serbia, key entry points for smuggling routes are primarily located in the Balkan Mountains region along the Bulgarian-Serbian border, as well as the border with North Macedonia. In

2024, the majority of people on the move entered from Bulgaria (46.84%) and North Macedonia (38.18%). To a lesser extent, some also entered through Kosovo.<sup>113</sup> Although exit points were primarily concentrated in northern Serbia along the borders with EU member states—Croatia, Hungary, and Romania—the tightening of Serbian-Hungarian border controls since October 2023 has significantly restricted movement toward Hungary. As a result, smugglers have increasingly turned to alternative routes, including detours toward the Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia border. In particular, the Drina River has emerged as both a critical hotspot and one of the most dangerous crossing points into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, other exit points along the Serbia-Croatia border have become key corridors for irregular migration.

Over the years, the preferred EU entry route has varied, largely depending on the current situation (border control measures, enforcement policies in those countries, etc.) In 2024, despite being one of the most heavily guarded borders, Hungary remained the primary entry point for irregular migration. This trend intensified in the second half of the year, as increasing numbers of people redirected their routes toward Hungary. While the cost of crossing remains higher compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a defining feature of the current situation is the relative invisibility of migrants. Unlike before, old squats now serve only as brief stopovers, often for just a few hours, while police controls remain in place but are less visibly enforced.<sup>114</sup>

Smugglers operate well coordinated, maintaining strong cross-border cooperation with well-established smuggling networks. Beyond facilitating irregular border crossings, smugglers provide a range of additional services, including transportation, accommodation, and basic information to assist migrants during transit.

<sup>113</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, 'Pad broja migranata u Srbiji za 70 odsto u odnosu na prošlu godinu, kaže Dačić' (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 6 August 2024) <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/manje-migranata-u-srbiji-2024-ivica-dacic/33067873.html> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>114</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).



Smugglers operate actively and offer their services in all locations where people on the move may be present—both official and unofficial—including asylum centers, reception centers, and squats.

In 2024, Serbia witnessed a growth in smuggling activities, accompanied by greater efficiency and speed in the movement of people on the move across the country (average time that people spent in Serbia towards the end of 2024 was only 4 days<sup>115</sup>). As previously mentioned, widespread distrust in Serbian institutions deterred people on the move from attempting to regularize their legal status or seek protection. Moreover, the increased use of administrative detention and jail sentences for misdemeanor offenses related to illegal residency deepened distrust, compelling people on the move to rely on smuggling networks.

## Case of Institutional Non-Response: Unaccompanied Minors in Obrenovac

*During fieldwork near the official camp in Obrenovac, we encountered two unaccompanied minors who had been sleeping in the forest across from the camp for three days. Despite attempting to access the camp, they were turned away without explanation, as they planned to continue their journey toward France or Germany.*

*Among a group of approximately 120 adults in similar conditions, these minors were the only children. One of them—a 10-year-old—was in particularly poor condition, exhibiting severe scabies with inflammatory symptoms and noticeable skin sores.*

*Recognizing the urgent need for child-specific shelter, medical care, and protection, we attempted to contact the Center for Social Work (CSR) in Obrenovac by phone during official hours, but received no response. The following day, we sent an email requesting the appointment of a guardian and appropriate support for the minors. No follow-up or action was taken by the state institutions.*

*This case highlights a critical failure of institutional response in addressing the specific needs of unaccompanied minors, leaving them vulnerable to further risks and neglect.*

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

Beyond the previously mentioned reasons, this lack of trust was further exacerbated by the visible presence of EU institutions on Serbian territory, primarily Frontex. Their deployment created, at the very least, confusion among both smugglers and people on the move, leading to a tendency to remain as unexposed as possible. Many people on the move feared that applying for asylum in Serbia would compromise them, making their personal data accessible to EU authorities and potentially hindering their chances of securing asylum in Western Europe.<sup>116</sup>

The distrust toward Serbian state institutions extended to civil society organizations as well. This shift was particularly noticeable during field visits and conversations with people on the move, who appeared far more reserved than in previous years.

This was not the case in previous years, especially before 2020, when the first agreement between Serbia and Frontex came into force. In the past, people on the move did not hesitate to apply for asylum in Serbia and to stay in asylum centers for extended periods while waiting for an opportunity to leave the country under better circumstances.

As a result, by 2024, Serbia was increasingly regarded by smugglers and people on the move as a *de facto* EU state on route—a barrier that needed to be navigated quickly and discreetly to reach Western Europe.

In 2024, people on the move transited through Serbia at a faster yet more dangerous pace than ever before. Interviews with people on the move revealed that many were unaware of their exact location while transiting through Serbia or which country they would enter next. Their route and next steps were entirely determined by the smugglers. They showed no interest in

attempting to regularize their status in Serbia, with their sole focus being to continue their journey as quickly as possible.

As a result, the visibility of people on the move in Serbia was significantly lower than in previous years. Since asylum and reception centers remained largely empty in 2024, the same applied to squats. Previously well-established informal gathering points near asylum centers or national borders were visibly emptier. In many squats, the only people frequently present were smugglers' assistants, waiting for newly arrived people to offer them their services.

The decline in the number of people in squats was also influenced by the fact that smugglers had developed private accommodation networks, allowing people on the move to stay hidden and minimize exposure.<sup>117</sup>

However, the desire for rapid transit through Serbia was not always easily achievable in practice. As previously mentioned, the largest number of irregular border crossing attempts was recorded at the Hungarian border. Given that the Serbia-Hungary border is one of the most heavily guarded in Europe, many people on the move were unsuccessful in their attempts to cross.

People on the move have testified about the involvement of Serbian police in push-backs from Hungarian territory. Officially, only five third-country nationals (three Chinese citizens and two Turkish citizens) were deported from Hungary to Serbia under the Readmission Agreement. However, numerous reports indicate that the Hungarian police engaged in push-backs via the "Röszke transit zone,"<sup>118</sup> handing people on the move over to Serbian police officers.

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<sup>116</sup> The Republic of Serbia currently does not directly apply any of the EU regulations concerning migration and asylum; consequently, the Eurodac database is not operational in Serbia. Therefore, data on asylum seekers should not be shared with or made accessible to other countries.

<sup>117</sup> During field visits to squats, the Klikaktiv team identified several locations suspected to be places where a larger number of people on the move reside. These locations are primarily in Belgrade but also in villages and towns along the exit borders.

<sup>118</sup> The Röszke transit center was officially closed in 2020 following a ruling by the European Court of Justice. For more information see <https://ecre.org/cjeu-advocate-general-detention-in-roszke-transit-zone-at-the-hungarian-serbian-border-unlawful/>

Once returned to Serbia, these individuals faced different outcomes—some were transported to official reception centers, others were detained in one of Serbia’s detention facilities, while some were brought before the misdemeanor court. According to data from the Misdemeanor Court in Subotica, a total of 883 people were fined in 2024 for misdemeanor offenses related to illegal residency and illegal entry into Serbia. The majority of those fined were Afghan (219) and Syrian (215) nationals.<sup>119</sup>

Those who failed to leave Serbia were often subjected to violence, beatings, and forced push-backs, ultimately ending up detained by Serbian police. These individuals—who were unable to leave Serbia—make up the 18,500 people recorded in Serbia’s official statistics who resided in Serbia without applying for asylum. However, the exact number of people on the move forcefully returned to Serbia is impossible to determine, as not all of them stayed in government-operated facilities and were thus included in official statistics.

## Police Brutality Case

*In February and March 2024, the Klikaktiv established contact and later engaged directly with a young refugee who was a victim of police brutality at the Serbian south borders. As a result of the incident, he sustained severe injuries that ultimately led to a double leg amputation. According to his testimony, in January 2024 he and a group of refugees were apprehended by members of the local police force. They were subjected to physical assault and then abandoned in an uninhabited area—in derelict buildings in a remote location. The officers reportedly stripped them of their clothing and left them barefoot, without food or water. Due to the extreme conditions and lack of sustenance, the group was unable to seek help. Several days later, a different patrol accidentally discovered them in critical condition. The individual had developed severe frostbite, and despite medical intervention, his legs had to be amputated to prevent gangrene and sepsis.*

*Determined to seek justice, he expressed his intention to pursue legal action against the officers responsible for the abuse. Klikaktiv’s team later met with him at a secure, undisclosed location where he was receiving treatment, providing legal information regarding his rights and options. He has since secured legal representation to initiate criminal proceedings aimed at identifying and holding accountable those involved in his mistreatment.*

*As of the time of this report, the individual remains in a secure, undisclosed location, focusing on rehabilitation and pursuing legal action against police officers. His case represents one of the most severe instances of police brutality against refugees documented by the organization to date. This case underscores the urgent need for increased oversight of law enforcement practices concerning refugees and for ensuring access to justice for victims of human rights violations. Klikaktiv continues to monitor developments and provide support as needed.*

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<sup>119</sup> See Introduction, subchapter Statistics

People on the move, however, do not suffer violence only at the hands of the police. Entirely dependent on smugglers, they are completely at their mercy. Smugglers exert full control over people on the move from the moment they seek their services. The consequences of this complete dependency often manifest in beatings, forced confinement, and extortion.

## Smugglers Brutality Cases

*Klikaktiv reported several cases of potential human trafficking and smugglers brutality to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoI).*

*In the first case, Klikaktiv received a video showing smugglers whipping four individuals who were lying half-naked on a bed. The video, which was circulated among refugee networks, was sent to the victims' families as part of an extortion attempt demanding money for their release. Due to the circulation of the video and the transient nature of the refugee community, Klikaktiv's team have been unable to establish direct contact with the victims. However, Klikaktiv received the location of the property where the video was recorded and reported this information to the police.*

*In Sjenica, Klikaktiv's team encountered a man from Pakistan who reported that he had been kidnapped and brutally tortured by smugglers. He stated that he was held captive in a house in Belgrade, where he endured severe abuse, was recorded during his torture, and witnessed his family being extorted for money. Fortunately, he eventually managed to escape. He has expressed his willingness to formally report the incident to the police. His testimony underscores the severity of the abuse and the grave risks faced by those subjected to such criminal practices.*

*During this period, Klikaktiv was also contacted by another organization regarding a group residing at the Dimitrovgrad camp. This group, consisting of two adult men and two unaccompanied minors traveling as a family, had been held hostage by smugglers in a house on Stara Planina before being rescued by the police. Their ordeal began when Bulgarian authorities registered and detained them in a camp for two months. Later, smugglers abducted the group on the Bulgarian side of the border and detained them, subjecting them to physical abuse, torture, and extortion as ransom was demanded from their families. A few days later, after being moved to Serbian territory, the mistreatment continued until they managed to call for help. Serbian police then rescued them and transferred them to the Dimitrovgrad camp. Other unaccompanied minors in the group—traveling together since Turkey but not previously acquainted—faced similar hardships. While the adult men had sufficient funds and planned to depart soon, the unaccompanied minors, lacking financial resources and direct contact with the smugglers, remain in a vulnerable situation awaiting further steps from their families.*

*These cases underscore the urgent need for increased oversight of smuggling networks and enhanced protection measures for vulnerable individuals subjected to such brutality.*

Numerous testimonies from people on the move reveal that smugglers exploit their position of power to extort money, charging them multiple times the agreed-upon price. Those who refuse or are unable to pay are subjected to compulsion, including beatings and detention at unknown locations.<sup>120</sup>

In some cases, the urgent need to transit through Serbia as quickly as possible had tragic consequences. In their efforts to remain undetected by authorities, smugglers often used highly dangerous routes. Particularly hazardous paths include the mountainous passes of Balkan Mountains along the Bulgarian-Serbian border, especially during the winter months, as well as the Drina River, which forms the natural border between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since 2020, a noticeable number of unidentified bodies have been found in border areas between Serbia and Bulgaria and between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on conducted research, it has been confirmed that at least 11 people lost their lives at the Serbia-Bosnia border in 2024. On the other hand, determining the number of people on the move who died while crossing the Serbia-Bulgaria border is significantly more challenging. At least four confirmed deaths occurred in the Balkan Mountains region in 2024. However, there is reasonable suspicion that the actual number is much higher, given the area's rugged terrain, sparse population, and presence of wild animals.<sup>121</sup>

## 6. Rise in the Number of Foreign Workers in Serbia

Over the past decades, Serbia has consistently ranked among the countries with the highest population outflows. In the last 10 years, nearly half a million people have left the country.<sup>122</sup> Most of them were young, educated individuals, leading to an aging population and a declining birth rate. Directly linked to this trend is a growing labor shortage. Estimates suggest that in the past 3–4 years, Serbia has faced an annual shortfall of around 50,000 workers, with the greatest demand for drivers, construction workers, factory employees, warehouse staff, supermarket workers, and hospitality personnel.<sup>123</sup>

In response to this growing need for labor, Serbia has significantly increased its recruitment of foreign workers. The turning point came in 2023, when over 52,000 work permits were issued to foreigners, marking a nearly 70% increase compared to the previous year.<sup>124</sup> This trend continued into 2024, as the Serbian Parliament passed amendments to the Law on the Employment of Foreigners, simplifying the work permit application process. Under the new system, residence and work permits have been merged into a single biometric document, similar to an identity card. Another key development was the introduction of an online portal, allowing foreign nationals and employers to apply for a unified permit electronically. In 2024, over 41,000 permits were issued, primarily to workers from China, Russia, Turkey, India,

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<sup>120</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, '2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia' (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022).

<sup>123</sup> Nova, '35 hiljada stranaca dobilo radne dozvole u 2024. godini: Ostajemo bez 50 hiljada radnika godišnje' (*Nova.rs*, 5 December 2024) <https://nova.rs/emisije/35-hiljada-stranaca-dobilo-radne-dozvole-u-2024-godini-ostajemo-bez-50-hiljada-radnika-godisnje/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>124</sup> Nova, 'U Srbiji prošle godine zaposleno više od 52.000 stranaca' (*Nova.rs*, 11 March 2024) <https://nova.rs/vesti/biznis/u-srbiji-prosle-godine-zaposleno-vise-od-52-000-stranaca/> accessed 18 February 2025.

Cuba, Nepal, and Bangladesh.<sup>125 126</sup>

Since the large-scale influx of foreign workers is a relatively new phenomenon in Serbian society, many uncertainties remain. Notably, the majority of foreign workers do not apply for jobs in Serbia directly but arrive through recruitment agencies. A large number of specialized agencies operate in this sector, providing foreign nationals with job placements, assistance in obtaining visas, residence and work permits, as well as transportation and accommodation. Experiences with these agencies vary. While some workers express satisfaction with the services, housing, and job opportunities, others report having paid substantial sums of money just to come to Serbia. Overall, there is still insufficient data on the living and working conditions of most foreign workers, as well as on their treatment by employers. Although foreign workers are legally entitled to the same rights as domestic workers, there is no significant evidence of large-scale union membership among them.<sup>127 128</sup>

Apart from uncertainties surrounding employment agencies, serious cases of human rights violations have been documented in the past. The most notable example is the case of Vietnamese workers at the Chinese Linglong tire factory in Zrenjanin, where approximately 500 workers were subjected to forced labor, restricted movement, and severe violations of their fundamental human rights.<sup>129</sup>

The rapid increase in foreign labor in Serbia also raises concerns about the potential misuse of work and residence permits. The key question is whether some foreign nationals view Serbia's simplified entry process as a gateway to reaching Europe and getting closer to the EU. While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from statistical data, one noticeable trend stands out: Turkey and China—the two countries with the highest number of foreign workers in Serbia—also recorded the highest number of deportation orders in 2024.<sup>130</sup>

Some testimonies regarding the misuse of work and residence permits have already been recorded. In interviews conducted in 2024 with people on the move who were forcibly pushed back by Hungarian and Croatian police, there were individuals from Egypt, Morocco, India, and Turkey who had initially entered Serbia on a work visa. They had legally worked for a certain period before quitting their jobs and attempting to reach the EU with the help of smugglers.<sup>131</sup>

Given Serbia's demographic trends, it is expected that the number of foreign workers will continue to rise. Consequently, this issue warrants greater attention in the coming period.

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<sup>125</sup> Danas, 'Kancelarija za IT i eUpravu: Za godinu dana izdato 41.319 boravišnih dozvola strancima' (*Danas*, 4 February 2025) <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/ekonomija/kancelarija-za-it-i-eupravu-za-godinu-dana-izdato-41-319-boravisnih-dozvola-strancima/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>126</sup> Nova, 'U Srbiji prošle godine zaposleno više od 52.000 stranaca' (*Nova.rs*, 11 March 2024) <https://nova.rs/vesti/biznis/u-srbiji-prosle-godine-zaposleno-vise-od-52-000-stranaca/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>127</sup> Nova, '35 hiljada stranaca dobilo radne dozvole u 2024. godini: Ostajemo bez 50 hiljada radnika godišnje' (*Nova.rs*, 5 December 2024) <https://nova.rs/emisije/35-hiljada-stranaca-dobilo-radne-dozvole-u-2024-godini-ostajemo-bez-50-hiljada-radnika-godisnje/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>128</sup> Vanja Popović, 'Iza kulisa zapošljavanja stranaca u Srbiji i Adria regionu' (*Bloomberg Adria*, 22 November 2023) <https://rs.bloombergadria.com/businessweek-adria/glavna-tema/45328/iza-kulisa-zaposljavanja-stranaca-u-srbiji/news/> accessed 18 February 2025.

<sup>129</sup> For more detailed information, you can refer to the following sources: A11 Initiative Report (<https://www.a11initiative.org/dosije-linglong-teska-eksploatacija-stranih-radnika-uz-podrsku-drzavnih-subvencija/>), BWI Report ([https://www.bwint.org/hr\\_HR/cms/bwi-report-exposes-exploitation-of-vietnamese-and-indian-workers-in-serbian-construction-3143](https://www.bwint.org/hr_HR/cms/bwi-report-exposes-exploitation-of-vietnamese-and-indian-workers-in-serbian-construction-3143))

<sup>130</sup> Turkey ranks third with 1,425, and China fifth with 590 decisions.

<sup>131</sup> Klikaktiv, Fieldwork Reports (internal reports, January–December 2024).



*Image 1: Torn Passports Found in One of the Squats Along the Hungarian Border*

# KLIKAKTIV'S WORK IN 2024

In 2024, Klikaktiv continued to monitor and respond to the evolving situation at Serbia's external borders with the EU, including those with Hungary, Croatia, and Romania, as well as the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Throughout the reporting period, our team conducted **47 field visits**, providing direct support to people on the move across **194 informal settlements** in these border regions. Additionally, we carried out **46 visits to refugee hotspots in Belgrade** (including Obrenovac), where people on the move and refugees gathered before continuing their journeys. Over the course of the year, we identified and worked with **47 unique squats**.

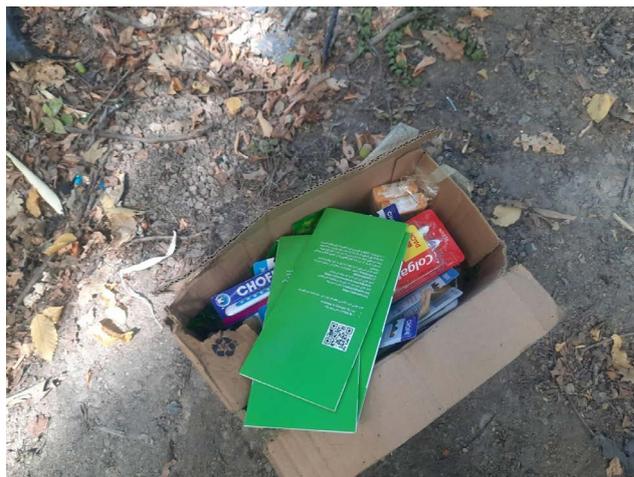
Our activities took place in informal settlements, including squats near the border, where people on the move gathered before attempting to leave Serbia. Additionally, we maintained a presence in Belgrade at informal gathering points where migrants prepared for their departure to one of the country's exit routes. We also provided support in informal locations near official asylum centers, such as those in Obrenovac, Sjenica, and Tutin, where many individuals sought temporary shelter while navigating their next steps.

The migration landscape remained highly unstable, with frequent police operations leading to the eviction and destruction of squats, particularly in the north and west of Serbia. These actions made squats increasingly transient, forcing Klikaktiv to adapt its approach. In response, we expanded our presence in the southwest of the country, where many displaced individuals were relocated by state authorities. This included visits to asylum centers in Sjenica and Tutin, where a significant number of refugees from the northern borders were transferred.

Despite not having access to official camps operated by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, Klikaktiv remained committed to assisting refugees in informal gathering places near these camps.

Through regular field visits, Klikaktiv's team continued to document human rights violations, advocate for the rights of refugees, and provide essential legal and humanitarian support to people on the move.

A significant number of those we assisted sought information about asylum and legal procedures in Serbia and the EU, including steps in asylum procedure, resettlement, relocation, and family reunification. Many also inquired about their rights, responsibilities, and access to essential services such as healthcare, accommodation, employment, and education. Also, the fall of Assad's regime in Syria raised concerns among Syrian refugees who feared that their asylum claims would not be processed in Europe and that they would face direct deportation back to their country of origin.



*Image 2: Hygiene Kit and Informational Brochure on Common Legal Questions for Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees, Available in Five Languages*



*Image 3: Recovery from Injuries Sustained Following Multiple Days of Walking Through Hazardous and Inaccessible Areas*

Beyond legal assistance, the immediate needs of people on the move remained critical. Many lacked access to food, adequate clothing, clean underwear, and hygiene products. While their primary goal was to continue their journey, numerous factors—such as financial constraints, exploitation by smugglers, pushbacks by border authorities, and physical injuries—prevented them from doing so.

Klikaktiv's presence in these areas proved essential, as its team provided direct support at key moments of their journey. In 2024, we frequently encountered individuals suffering from serious health conditions or injuries resulting from harsh living conditions and violence—whether inflicted by smugglers or law enforcement. The combination of physical exhaustion, lack of medical care, and exposure to brutality further deepened their vulnerability, underscoring the urgent need for humanitarian intervention.

As part of our response, Klikaktiv prioritized ensuring that people's primary needs were met first, providing food, water, and essential non-food items (NFIs) such as tents, blankets, underwear, and hygiene products. We also operated a mobile phone charging station and offered psychosocial support, particularly for vulnerable groups like women and unaccompanied minors. In addition to addressing these urgent humanitarian needs, we provided legal counseling and disseminated accurate, timely information to help refugees make informed decisions about their safety and future.

The challenges faced by refugees and people on the move in 2024 remained severe, and restrictive policies further complicated their access to protection. Despite these barriers, Klikaktiv remained committed to delivering essential services, advocating for human rights, and ensuring that those on the move received the support they needed during one of the most precarious times in their lives.

# 1. Snapshot of Klikaktiv's Work in 2024

Borders covered:

**Hungary, Romania and Croatia** (EU external borders), **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bulgaria**



- Total number of services (legal and psychosocial services, including also NFI provision) which Klikaktiv provided in the reporting period – **5637**
- Percentage of women and children (including unaccompanied boys and girls) among Klikaktiv’s beneficiaries in the border area - **7.1%** (a significant drop in comparison to 2023)
- Countries of Origin: The majority of people on the move came from **Afghanistan (60%)** and **Syria (22%)**.

Together, these two countries account for 82% of refugees, highlighting the ongoing conflicts and dire humanitarian conditions that have persisted for over a decade. Following them are individuals from **Morocco, Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey (Turkish), Pakistan, Palestine, India, Iraq (Arab),** and **Burundi**, which collectively make up approximately 18% of the total.

- Number of field visits in 2024: **93**
- Number of visits to the squats: **194**
- Number of unique squats visited: **47**

*Additionally:*

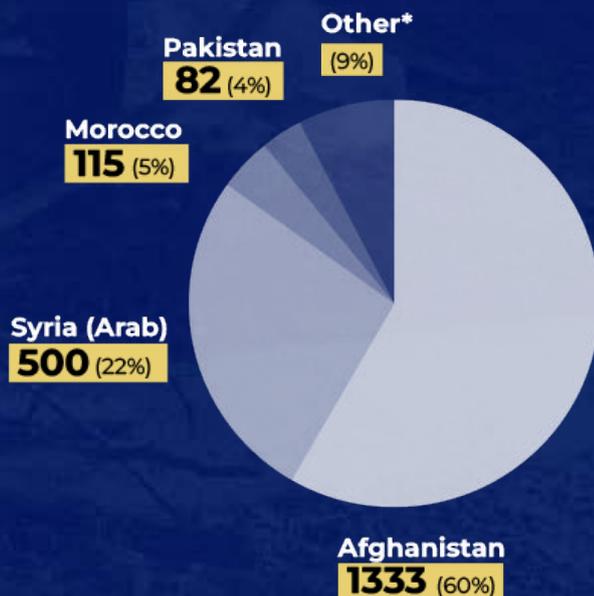
**52** humanitarian workers, volunteers and activists provided legal information and training

**45** media interviews, guest lectures, interviews with researchers and participation at conferences and other migration-related events

TOTAL NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES IN 2024: **2226**  
 NUMBER OF MEN: **2069 (92.9%)**  
 NUMBER OF WOMEN: **4 (0.2%)**  
 NUMBER OF CHILDREN (including UASB): **153 (6.9%)**  
 NUMBER OF UASB: **153 (<14 – 9, 15-17 – 144) (6.9%)**

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH FAMILY MEMBERS: **0 (boys – 0, girls – 0) (0%)**  
 NUMBER OF SERVICES (legal advising and psychosocial counseling) – **4309**  
 NUMBER OF NFI AND FOOD ITEMS DISTRIBUTED: **1328**  
 NUMBER OF FIELD VISITS IN 2024: **93**  
 NUMBER OF VISITS TO THE SQUATS: **194**  
 NUMBER OF UNIQUE SQUATS VISITED: **47**

**Number of people by country of origin:**



\*Other – Algeria, Egypt, Turkey (Turkish), Pakistan, Palestine, India, Iraq (Arab), Burundi, etc.

In 2024, Klikaktiv provided services to people on the move, the majority of whom came from Afghanistan (60%) and Syria (22%), making up a combined 82% of our beneficiaries. The remaining 18% came from Morocco, Pakistan, India, Turkey (both Kurdish and Turkish populations), Iraq, Algeria, Palestine, Egypt, Burundi, and other countries.

People from Syria and Afghanistan consistently represented the majority of those we assisted, as both countries face severe humanitarian crises, ongoing armed conflicts, and significant political instability. In Syria, shifting political dynamics and unresolved conflict continue to force people to flee, while Afghanistan remains plagued by deepening repression, economic collapse, and widespread human rights violations following the Taliban takeover. Also, Klikaktiv's team continues to record a high number of Syrian refugees who have fled Turkey and Lebanon after spending years in those countries. Despite these dire circumstances, people from these regions are frequently labeled as "illegal migrants" at the EU's borders. As a result, they are denied access to asylum procedures, safe territory, social protection, and other fundamental rights they would otherwise be entitled to under international law.

In terms of demographics, approximately 7.1% of those on the move were women and unaccompanied minors, marking a decline compared to previous figures. Notably, no families were detected among them, suggesting a significant shift in migration patterns. This decline is likely due to increased border restrictions, heightened risks along migration routes, and the worsening humanitarian conditions in both transit and origin countries.

The absence of families may indicate that migration has become even more perilous for vulnerable groups, pushing them further out of sight. With legal pathways increasingly inaccessible, many are forced to depend on smuggler networks, making their journeys even more dangerous. As a result, movement is now more dominated by single individuals, particularly young men, who are often the only ones able to navigate these treacherous conditions. Restrictive asylum policies and externalized border controls have further compelled families to reconsider their options, either delaying their movement, seeking alternative routes, or remaining in precarious situations in transit countries.

## 2. Field Work

### Overview of the Border Areas and Cities where Klikaktiv works

In 2024, migration dynamics along Serbia's borders underwent significant shifts, shaped by intensified law enforcement, evolving smuggling tactics, and changing refugee movement patterns. Klikaktiv's team visited 47 squats, many of which remained largely empty due to frequent police raids and the relocation of refugees to official centers. Smuggling networks adapted by moving refugees into private accommodations, using squats only for short-term stays in small groups before border crossings. These developments reflect the increasing precarity of migration routes and the ongoing challenges faced by people on the move in Serbia.

### Serbian-Hungarian Border

Throughout 2024, most squats near the Hungarian border, particularly around Subotica and Sombor, remained largely empty. After the escalation of conflicts between smuggling groups in late 2023, increased violence, police raids, arrests, transfers, and pushbacks forced refugees into deeper hiding. The heightened presence of law enforcement and Frontex representatives made them nearly invisible to humanitarian organizations, with Klikaktiv only able to track movement through traces left at short-term rest points before border crossings.

Despite these challenges, border crossings intensified in the second half of the year, particularly in Horgos. Smugglers continued moving people in small groups with short-term stays in squats. By year's end, Klikaktiv sporadically encountered refugees in squats again, but many were inaccessible, and those present were hesitant to cooperate, fearing the organization's potential collaboration with the police.

Additionally, evidence suggested that many migrants who had entered Serbia legally continued using this route to reach Western Europe.



*Image 4: Squat Near the Hungarian Border*

Klikaktiv found destroyed travel documents, visas, and personal belongings from individuals originating from Turkey, India, Azerbaijan, and other countries.

## **Serbian-Croatian Border**

The Serbian-Croatian border was more active in the first half of the year, especially during the summer. Some refugees successfully crossed into Croatia near Šid and Batrovci, with the highest number of pushbacks recorded in the first three months. Most crossings were attempted on foot or by hiding in trucks, while train crossings, once common, were no longer used. Also, the fact that Serbia accepted 345 third-country nationals (mostly nationals of Turkey, Syria and Afghanistan) from Croatia based on the official readmission agreement shows that this border was quite active throughout the year.

During the summer months, refugee presence increased noticeably in Jamena, a village at the tripoint of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. This is because many refugees tried to enter Croatia by the Sava river but were subsequently pushed back by the Croatian police authorities. This shift coincided with the closure of the Reception Center in Šid in July 2024 and the relocation of unaccompanied minors to the Principovac Reception Center, located directly at the Croatian border crossing. However, Principovac lacks essential infrastructure, making conditions increasingly difficult for those accommodated there.



*Image 5: Railway Tracks Used by People on the Move in an Attempt to Cross the Border with Croatia in the Area of Sid*

## **Serbian-Romanian Border**

Migration activity at the Serbian-Romanian border has sharply declined, making it even less frequented than in previous years. The largest squat in the area, an abandoned milk factory in Majdan, along with a few deserted houses in Rabe, showed no recent signs of refugee presence. Local residents also confirmed they had not seen any refugees recently.

Located at the tri-border of Serbia, Romania, and Hungary, Majdan and Rabe were once key transit points. People on the move used this route to enter Romania, bypass the razor-wire fence, and more easily reach Hungary before continuing toward Western Europe.



*Image 6: Razor-Wire Fence in the Tri-Border Area of Serbia, Hungary, and Romania*

## Serbian–North Macedonian Border

This border remained a key entry point for refugees heading toward Western Europe, where strict border controls coexist with well-organized smuggling routes. Migration dynamics continued to be shaped by Austrian and Hungarian police forces patrolling in unmarked vehicles, reinforcing EU border policies and increasing the securitization of migration routes.

Despite heavy surveillance, refugees continued crossing through Miratovačko Polje and the hills above Miratovac before moving toward Preševo and further north. Local smuggling networks played a crucial role, organizing transport from Miratovac to key highway points near Belgrade. The smuggling system remained highly structured, with refugees receiving precise instructions on when and where to appear for transport.



*Image 7: View from North Macedonia and the Village of Lojane Towards Miratovac, Along the Route Frequently Used by People on the Move Attempting to Enter Serbian Territory*

A border fence near Miratovac was extended some time ago, further restricting movement. However, construction seems to have stalled in 2024. In some areas, local residents resisted further expansion, as many have land and family across the border in North Macedonia.

## Serbian–Bulgarian Border

Like the North Macedonian border, this remained one of the key entry points for refugees heading toward Western Europe. Despite strict border controls and EU-backed patrols, smuggling routes remained well-established. Increased enforcement forced refugees into riskier nighttime journeys to avoid detection.

The main crossing points were rural areas near Dimitrovgrad and Pirot, where refugees used small villages and forested mountain paths before moving further into Serbia. Local residents reported that small groups of 5 to 10 refugees crossed nightly, using remote paths like Kozarice Hill between Bačevo and Mazgoš. In more isolated areas closer to the border, sightings became rare as movements occurred almost exclusively at night.

Evidence of past crossings was found near Poganovo Monastery, where abandoned backpacks, tents, and sleeping bags suggested frequent use in previous months. Foreign police forces, including Austrian, Slovak, Czech, and German patrols, remained consistently present in border villages as part of EU border enforcement efforts. While these officers monitored movement, they rarely intervened directly.



*Image 8: Discarded Backpacks Carried by People on the Move Who Entered Serbian Territory from the Direction of Bulgaria Near the Poganovo Monastery*

Smuggling networks were also well-organized, with refugees being picked up at pre-arranged locations and transported toward central Serbia and the Hungarian border. Although enforcement intensified, local authorities reportedly tolerated these operations, with selective law enforcement allowing smuggling networks to operate largely undisturbed.

## Serbian-Bosnian Border

In 2024, the Serbian-Bosnian border remained the most frequently used migration route, particularly during the summer when the Drina River's water level was low. Its accessibility was largely influenced by cost, as crossing here was significantly cheaper than through Hungary or Croatia, primarily because it does not lead directly into the European Union. However, with the increase in crossings, the risks also grew, leading to a rise in missing persons cases. Many refugees were last seen in this area before disappearing or tragically losing their lives while attempting to cross the Drina. The most devastating incident occurred during the night of August 21-22, 2024, when an overcrowded boat capsized, resulting in the drowning of 12 people, including a nine-month-old baby.

While the main crossing points remained around Loznica and Ljubovija, where refugees had to cross the Drina, towards the end of the reporting period, people on the move also began using routes further south, near the border triangle with Montenegro. In this region, the Drina is no longer a natural border, making crossings easier. Smugglers charged 500 EUR to take refugees into Bosnia and Herzegovina, with an additional 2,500 EUR required to reach Western Europe.

“Some of my friends are already in Bosnia, they crossed the border under the bridge. We will try to cross in the same way. Police are on top of the bridge and we will try to climb the bridge's construction and go underneath it. If each of us pays an additional 100 EUR we can get a boat to cross the river. Everything is possible if you have enough money. But we already paid several thousands of EURs to reach Serbia and

we are broke. So we will risk it.” Group of men from Morocco, July 2024, Belgrade

A common challenge observed at other borders was also present here—reduced visibility of people on the move. Crossings were most frequent near Loznica, where refugees often used a bridge or a narrow ledge within its structure, just wide enough for a single person to cross in a chain formation. This precarious method led to falls, with most of the injured hospitalized in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



*Image 9: Bridge Connecting Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Used by People on the Move in Their Irregular Attempts to Cross the Border*

From Loznica toward Ljubovija, crossing points were typically chosen based on the Drina's water level. At the beginning of the year, during our regular visits to the border region, villages north of Loznica showed no traces of refugee presence. Locals also reported an absence of national or foreign police forces. However, in Sremska Rača, residents confirmed that Serbian and Bosnian police continued joint patrols, a long-standing practice rather than a new development. They noted that refugees were not visibly present in the region and, to their knowledge, most attempted crossings occurred near Loznica.

Klikaktiv's team also visited Loznica and found that previously used squats had been evicted, with some even locked and gated to prevent further access. This was likely part of a police operation following the establishment of the Serbian Police Headquarters for the Suppression of Illegal Migration in Mali Zvornik. By mid to late 2024, police presence in the area had significantly diminished, while smuggling networks appeared increasingly well-organized. Squats in Loznica and Banja Koviljača, once frequently occupied, were largely abandoned, with only sporadic traces of use.



**Someone goes from Bosnia to Croatia through forests and someone goes across the river. But you don't know how you will go until you are actually there. Smuggler decides it for you. But after everything I've been through, I am not afraid of forests nor of rivers.**

— Refugee from Syria



## Belgrade

Throughout 2024, refugees were occasionally seen at their usual gathering spots in Belgrade, including the park near the former main bus station and the so-called "Afghan Park" in front of the Faculty of Economics. Many also stayed in private accommodations, often arranged by smugglers, making their exact number difficult to track. Their gathering locations frequently shifted in response to daily police patrols, with many moving toward Belgrade Waterfront and New Belgrade to avoid fines, arrest, or relocation to Preševo. Despite these movements, Belgrade remained a temporary stop for most, where they waited for connections to continue their journey.

Although refugees tried to remain inconspicuous, their presence in parks and surrounding areas grew during the summer months. In the first half of the year, most were traveling toward the Croatian and Bosnian borders. As the year went on, migration routes increasingly shifted toward Bosnia, and by the end of the year, Hungary had once again become a key destination. The relocation of the main bus station to New Belgrade at the end of September, combined with frequent police patrols, further shaped the movement and gathering patterns of refugees in the city.



*Image 10: Demolition of the Old Bus Station in Central Belgrade, Once a Gathering Point for People on the Move*

During this period, Klikaktiv’s team also began visiting Obrenovac, on the outskirts of Belgrade, where one of the official state-run camps was located. Initially, this camp accommodated only single men. However, state authorities started evicting and relocating people to other camps in the south, allowing only registered asylum seekers to remain in Obrenovac. This meant that people on the move had to go to the designated police station in New Belgrade for registration, since asylum registrations were not conducted in the camp despite having all necessary equipment for it. As a result, many individuals resorted to sleeping rough in the nearby woods or other locations, fearing police transport to the south.

The situation in Obrenovac escalated in the second half of the year, with up to 200–300 people sleeping in squats around the camp.

However, their stays were brief, and by the end of the year, the number of people in these informal settlements had significantly decreased.

“

**I tried to enter the camp but they told me at the gate that the camp is closed. But I saw some refugees inside the camp. Maybe they just don’t want to accept Afghans.**

**— Refugee from Afghanistan, October 2024, Obrenovac**

”

## Sjenica

Sjenica, a town in southwestern Serbia near the borders with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, has hosted an asylum center since December 2013, initially located in the private hotel *Berlin*. The local population has generally been welcoming toward asylum seekers. However, due to increased refugee arrivals in March 2017, the center expanded from 200 to an additional 250 places by repurposing the former administration building of the *Vesna* factory. Over the years, the center's function has shifted—first accommodating families and individuals, later unaccompanied minors, and now exclusively adult men. When Klikaktiv first visited Sjenica in February 2024, around 500 people were reportedly in the camp.

During Klikaktiv's visits to Sjenica, its team engaged with refugees who often gathered in an abandoned factory complex across from the camp, mainly to cook meals that better suited their preferences than the food provided in the camp. During Ramadan, the use of this space increased significantly, as cooking inside the camp was prohibited. However, as the year progressed, the refugee population in Sjenica steadily declined, and by year's end, fewer than 100 people remained in the camp, reducing the number of refugees encountered in the field. Toward the end of the year, *No Name Kitchen* opened a community center for camp residents, which soon became another key gathering point.



*Image 11: Informal Gathering Place for Migrants and Asylum Seekers Near the Asylum Center in Sjenica*

Initially, the main complaints were overcrowding and poor hygiene conditions. Most refugees saw no future in Serbia and lacked information about the asylum process or ways to regulate their status. Many had attempted to cross the border multiple times, primarily toward Croatia and Bosnia, later shifting their focus to Hungary. While border crossings were difficult in the first half of the year, they became easier by the end of 2024, reflected in the decreasing camp population and increased refugee movement.

In the summer and second half of the year, complaints focused on the treatment by camp staff and security personnel with reports of physical violence. While conditions improved toward the end of the year, the most pressing issue remained the lack of mental health support and the neglect of refugees facing psychological challenges. Throughout 2024, the camp had only one general practitioner, with no systematic psychosocial support or regular psychiatric visits. The situation in Sjenica highlights the ongoing challenges refugees face, from difficult living conditions and limited access to legal pathways to inadequate mental health care and shifting migration routes.

## Tutin

Tutin, located about 50 km from Sjenica and near the borders with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, has hosted an asylum center since June 2014. Like Sjenica, the center has undergone changes in its population structure. Initially accommodating families who stayed for years, in 2024 it only housed single men. The center itself was also relocated—from its original site in the old *Dalas* furniture factory to a newly built facility on the outskirts of the Velje Polje settlement. The surrounding infrastructure is minimal, with only private houses and a single shop, in front of which a police patrol is usually stationed.

When Klikaktiv began its visits, the camp housed around 200 people, but by the time it closed at the end of July, the population had dropped to just 20–30. Refugees reported similar issues as in Sjenica: poor hygiene, limited access to hot water—available for only one hour at a time—and a general lack of prospects for staying in Serbia. Many were unaware of legal options to regulate their status and had no information to help them make informed decisions about their journey. As the route to Bosnia and Herzegovina became more active, the number of people in the camp steadily declined, reflecting broader migration trends in the region.

## Pushbacks

In 2024, a significant number of people on the move reported experiencing violent pushbacks from EU member states, including Hungary, Croatia, and Bulgaria, as well as from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a non-EU country. Additionally, many suffered systematic violence at the hands of Serbian authorities, particularly in border areas in the north, as well as in the south, near the borders with Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

In response to these ongoing violations, one of Klikaktiv's key priorities was documenting testimonies of these experiences, ensuring that the violence and human rights abuses faced

by refugees and migrants were recorded and brought to light.

A pushback refers to the illegal practice of collective expulsion of individuals from a country back to the territory they entered from, without due legal process, consideration of their asylum claims, or assessment of the risks they face upon return.

Klikaktiv's monitoring methodology focuses on gathering key information, including whether individuals were granted access to EU territory, allowed to claim asylum, and provided with essential services such as accommodation, health-care, legal aid, or protection from detention. Another critical aspect of our documentation is assessing the legal and social support available to individuals after being pushed back to Serbia, as well as the barriers they face in accessing these protections.



**When the Bulgarian police catch you and they release a police dog on you, you are doomed. All the worst things that a person can imagine, that is what Bulgarian police does to us when they torture us.**

**— Refugee from Afghanistan, August 2024, Belgrade**



Most of the people on the move were complaining about the violence by the Bulgarian police at the Bulgaria-Turkey border, stating that they were subject to police brutality including beatings, kicks, use of police batons and sticks, and dog bites. None of them had access to asylum in Bulgaria, but they were all pushed-back to Turkey. Many tried several times to cross this border before succeeding. Towards the second half of the year, people on the move reported a new common practice where they would agree and pay the smuggler to take them directly from Turkey to Serbia, out of fear from Bulgarian authorities. People reported that they had to pay up to 10.000 EUR for this “Game”. Some people also reported violence of the Bulgarian police near the Serbian border, but in those cases they were robbed and beaten, but they were not pushed back to Turkey nor were they taken to detention or accommodation facilities in Bulgaria.

During the first half of 2024, more people on the move were also reported that they were pushed-back from Serbia back to Bulgaria. Most of them were caught near the villages on the Balkan mountains or on the outskirts of the city Dimitovgrad and were pushed-backs across the green border, often with the use of violence or threat of violence. Therefore, people on the move referred to a city Pirot as “a safe zone” because chances of push-backs from Pirot were much lower compared to the territory between the borderline and Pirot. Most of the people on the move who were pushed-back to Bulgaria did not have any contact with Bulgarian authorities upon their return, but they would just spend several hours in the woods before retrying to enter Serbia. None of the people that Klikaktiv spoke to had access to asylum in Serbia before they were pushed back to Bulgaria.

“

**Pirot is a safe zone. When you reach Pirot that means you will not be harassed by the Serbian police and they will not deport you back to Bulgaria. But if they catch you before Pirot, then you will be deported back.**

— Refugee from Afghanistan, October 2024, Belgrade

”

“

**Police beat us however they want and the same happens with the Serbian police at the Bulgarian border. Sometimes they kick us, sometimes they slap us, with batons or whatever they have on them. For example, two police officers would stand in front of you and they would just randomly kick you. Someone will be beaten more and someone less, it's just a matter of luck.**

— Refugee from Afghanistan, October 2024, Obrenovac

”

## Case of Pushback from Serbia to North Macedonia

*Push-backs from Serbia to North Macedonia also became more common during the 2024. A man from Afghanistan reported to be pushed-back from Serbia back to North Macedonia in November 2024, despite the fact that he was residing in the official camp in Presevo for several days and was in the possession of the so-called camp card. According to his testimony, police intercepted him on the streets of Presevo while jelling at him which then escalated to the beatings on his legs and back. The bruise of his right leg (picture below) is a consequence of the beatings. The police officers then forced him into the police car and drove him to, what they stated is the border with North Macedonia where they dropped him off and threatened him to walk back.. “I don’t know if that was really the border, I didn’t see any signs nor the border fence, it was dark and I was scared.” the man stated. He started walking, but as the police car drove away he also turned around and started walking back towards the north and Presevo. “I went to the camp in Presevo just to collect my belongings and I immediately left the camp. I was afraid that the police might find me and deport me. The smuggler organized transportation and that’s how I came to Obrenovac. Now I wait for my turn to go on the Game.” he stated.*



Image 12: Injuries Resulting from a Pushback by Serbian Police

“

**Police are corrupted everywhere you go. It’s not that difficult to cross any border if you have enough money.**

— Refugee from Syria, December 2024, Sjenica

”

## Case of Multiple Pushbacks

*In May 2024, Klikaktiv's team met an unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan who reported to be pushed-back on several borders along the Balkan refugee route: he was pushed-back from Bulgaria to Turkey, then from Serbia to Bulgaria and eventually he was pushed-back 6 times from Croatia to Serbia. According to his testimony, he was pushed-back from Serbia to Bulgaria in January 2024 after the Serbian police caught him in a group of 10 other people on the Balkan mountains, on their way to Pirot. Serbian police took their belongings, mostly phones and cash, and beat all of them randomly, after which they instructed them to go back to Bulgaria. They walked back towards the Bulgarian border and spent several hours in the forest, waiting for sunset, after which they walked back to Serbian territory. This time they made it safely to Serbia and continued their journey towards the north. In the period of the following 4 months, he tried to cross the border with Croatia 6 times but each time he was pushed-back to Serbia. His last attempt was at the beginning of May 2024 when he tried to cross the border on foot but was soon caught by the Croatian police and pushed back to Serbian territory. On that specific occasion, Croatian police did not beat him, but they did take all of the money he had with himself. However, he stated that he was beaten by the Croatian police on the previous occasions.*



**It is just a matter of luck what happens on the Croatian border. Police might beat you or they might just take your money. I went on a Game 6 times so far. Sometimes the police beat me, and other times they just took my phone and my money.**

— Unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan, May 2024, Šid

Most of the people on the move tried to cross into Croatia by hiding inside the trucks which are daily parked alongside the highway waiting for customs and border control checks. This is also where most of them are spotted either by the Serbian or Croatian police and prevented from continuing their journey towards the Western Europe. Also, many people on the move reported being pushed back by the Croatian border after they tried to cross the border on foot. Unlike in previous years, Klikaktiv did not record any case of push-backs from Croatia when people reached deeper into the territory. All of the interviewed refugees were pushed-back after being caught only a few kilometers from the border.



As the border between Serbia and Hungary became more active, so did the numbers of push-backs increased. People on the move reported less violence by the Hungarian police, compared to the previous years. But, most of them reported that they were returned back to Serbia in an organized manner through joint cooperation of the Hungarian and Serbian police. According to dozens of testimonies, people on the move were always brought to the Roszke transit zone by the Hungarian police where they would be handed over to the Serbian police. Some of the return-

ees were subsequently detained in the detention center by the MoI's orders, others were taken to Misdemeanor court in Subotica and fined for illegal residency while some were taken to one of the accommodation facilities on the south. Some people on the move also reported that Serbian police would just send them away from the official border crossing point so they were able to retry to cross into Hungary on the same day.



**I don't want to cross into Bosnia and Croatia because Croatian police takes fingerprints and other countries could deport me back to Croatia. It is safer for me to go to Hungary.**

**— Refugee from Afghanistan, November 2024, Obrenovac**



### **3. Legal Support and Trainings**

Beyond our core outreach activities in border areas, Klikaktiv continued to provide legal support to asylum seekers in Serbia throughout 2024. Our legal team handled four asylum cases, representing individuals whose cases are currently pending before the Administrative Court. Additionally, we provided legal assistance to an asylum seeker who underwent a second interview as part of their application process in Serbia. Apart from asylum cases, Klikaktiv also supported a long-standing citizenship case for one person, which remains before the Administrative Court due to prolonged procedural delays.

In addition to providing direct legal assistance, Klikaktiv played a key role in strengthening the knowledge and capacities of 52 humanitarian workers, volunteers, and activists through free training on asylum law and legal procedures. These sessions covered Serbia's asylum process, detention procedures and centers, EU asylum systems, the Dublin Agreement, readmission agreements with EU member states, legal requirements for foreign volunteers in Serbia, rights and obligations when approached by police, and legal counseling for specific cases, ensuring that participants were well-equipped to support people on the move effectively.

By providing both legal representation and educational opportunities, Klikaktiv continued to enhance access to justice for asylum seekers while equipping those working in the field with essential legal knowledge to support their efforts. Klikaktiv's mission is to support all displaced people in Serbia, with particular attention to those in vulnerable situations. This includes unaccompanied and separated children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those facing intersectional discrimination based on their country of origin, skin color, religion, ethnicity, gender, or age.

## Legal Support and Collaborative Action Following the Drina Accident

*In the aftermath of the tragic Drina accident, our legal team took swift action to protect vulnerable survivors. We pursued an interim measure from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on behalf of a group of 15 survivors—of whom 12 were unaccompanied minors. These individuals had reached the Bosnian shore safely but were subsequently detained by local police at a border station.*

*Under the existing readmission agreement between Bosnia and Serbia, and in close cooperation with Serbian authorities, they were slated for deportation. Although the ECHR did not approve the interim measure, our legal intervention exerted significant pressure on Bosnian authorities. As a result, the planned deportation was suspended. The survivors were then registered as asylum seekers and transferred to refugee camps in Sarajevo, where they received further protection. Many have since left Bosnia, underscoring the critical role of coordinated legal support and cross-border cooperation in safeguarding the rights and lives of vulnerable migrants.*

*This case exemplifies how effective legal advocacy, combined with strong collaboration with local activists and actors on the ground, can create positive outcomes even in the most challenging circumstances.*

## 4. Psychosocial Support

Throughout 2024, Klikaktiv provided psychosocial support to refugees and people on the move living in informal settlements, commonly referred to as squats. These individuals face severe mental health challenges stemming from displacement, trauma, and dire living conditions. The lack of safety, coupled with systemic barriers, leaves many trapped in a cycle of vulnerability and psychological distress.

Squats offer minimal protection, exposing people on the move to harsh environmental conditions, injuries, and violence—particularly while navigating dangerous forest routes to avoid detection by law enforcement. These treacherous journeys take a heavy toll on both physical and mental health. Access to medical care and necessary medications remained extremely limited, as logistical barriers—including the isolation of squats, lack of transportation, and control of these locations by smugglers—prevented many

from seeking healthcare. The overwhelming desire to continue their journey toward the EU further discouraged individuals from prioritizing their health.

Repeated pushbacks and forced returns further exacerbated trauma experienced by refugees, especially among vulnerable groups like women, children, and unaccompanied minors. Many reported experiencing violence, confiscation of belongings, and forced relocations. Increasing border enforcement and surveillance measures forced migrants into deeper hiding, cutting them off from support provided by civil society organizations (CSOs) and pushing them toward even more perilous routes. This heightened invisibility made them more susceptible to exploitation, violence, and abuse, while also reinforcing fear, distrust, and isolation, which further deteriorated their mental well-being.

The consequences of prolonged exposure to violence, exploitation, and deprivation were profound. Many refugees exhibited symptoms of PTSD, anxiety disorders, and depression, compounded by their precarious living conditions. The worsening situation along the Balkan route also contributed to an increase in substance abuse, as some individuals turned to medications and drugs as a coping mechanism for trauma and isolation.



*Image 13: Medications Used by People on the Move, Found in a Squat Along the Hungarian Border*

Additionally, police repression and frequent raids on squats, combined with pressure from smuggling networks, intensified refugees' vulnerability. Fear of detention, reprisals, or further exploitation made many hesitant to seek help from humanitarian teams like Klikaktiv. These conditions forced individuals to rely on more dangerous and concealed migration routes, exposing them to further harm.

Despite these challenges, Klikaktiv remained committed to empowering refugees to address their physical and mental health needs, recognizing that delayed intervention could lead to serious complications, including substance abuse. Our efforts focused on creating a supportive environment that fosters resilience and hope, even amid institutional barriers and limited outreach. Through this work, Klikaktiv helps refugees navigate immediate challenges while coping with the broader uncertainties of their journeys.



*Image 14: Conversation with Migrants and Asylum Seekers Staying at the Asylum Center in Sjenica*

Addressing these urgent challenges requires systemic reforms, including the cessation of violence, arbitrary detentions, and pushbacks; improved access to healthcare, particularly mental health services; the provision of safe living conditions that protect refugees from exploitation; and strengthened pathways to professional support for addiction prevention and treatment. Ensuring the dignity and well-being of refugees and migrants along the Balkan route demands comprehensive action to break the cycle of trauma, promote safety, and provide long-term solutions for mental health and social integration.

## 5. Public Engagement and Advocacy

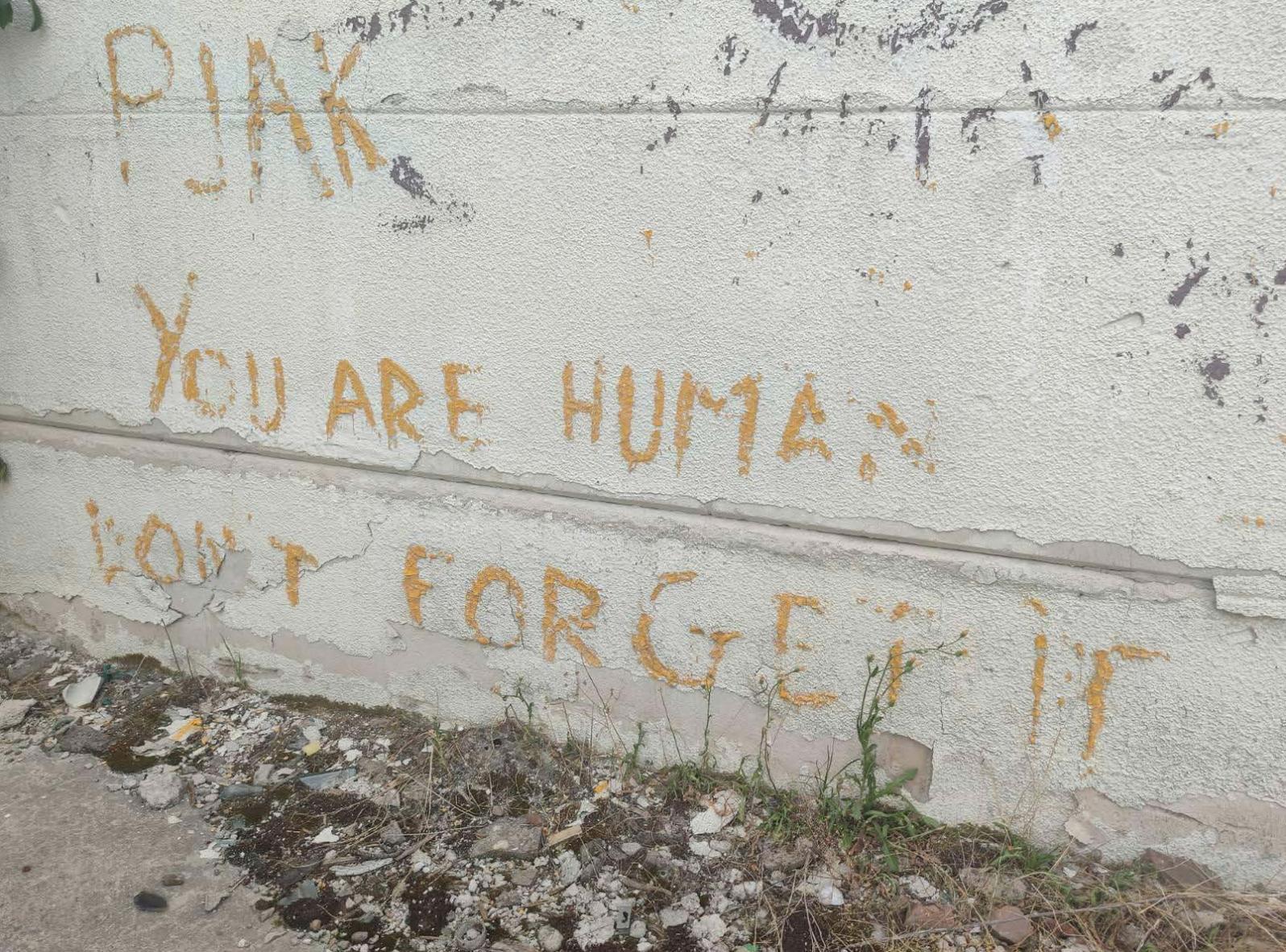
In 2024, Klikaktiv team members actively participated in public events, conferences, and migration-related discussions, sharing field insights and raising awareness about the harmful impacts of the EU's border externalization policies and Serbia's inadequate response to smuggling. Through 45 media interviews, guest lectures, researcher interviews, and panel discussions, we contributed to critical conversations on migration, border violence, and human rights violations along the Balkan Route.

Below is a selection of our key advocacy and public engagement activities during the reporting period:

- **Commemoration of deaths along the Balkan Route** – Klikaktiv participated in the unveiling of a monument honoring people on the move who drowned in the Drina River. Held at a cemetery in Bijeljina, the event included the erection of 16 grave-stones, the planting of a tree-lined avenue in memory of the deceased, and the installation of a memorial plaque.<sup>132</sup>
- **Lecture at Utrecht University (February 2024)** – We delivered an online lecture for students on the Frontex operation in Serbia, highlighting its impact on migration dynamics.
- **Final conference of the ERIM project (April 2024, Zagreb)** – We participated in discussions on migration, border violence, and civil society efforts to address human rights violations.
- **Summer School collaboration (June 2024, Belgrade)** – As part of a joint program between the Faculty of Political Sciences (FPN) and Boston University, we presented on the legal framework, the general situation on the ground, and Klikaktiv's work.
- **Novi Sad Summer School for Feminist Abolitionism (June 2024)** – Klikaktiv contributed to a film screening of *Shadow Game* and a panel discussion on border violence.
- **Rebbio 4 (Milan, Italy, June 2024)** – We participated in a panel discussion at this gathering of NGOs operating in Italy and along the Balkan Route, aimed at strengthening solidarity networks. While the meeting was held in person, we joined remotely.
- **Conference on Migration along the Balkan Route (October 2024)** – We participated in a workshop discussing Serbia's readmission practices and their impact on people on the move.
- **Presentation for Red Cross secretaries (November 2024)** – We delivered a session titled “*Migration – Border Situation 2023-2024*,” providing insights to Red Cross representatives from Serbia's interior regions.
- **Webinar: “The Borders from Within: The EU External Borders – A Mirror to European Migration Policies” (November 2024)** – Organized by the Legal Aid Center *The Voice* from Bulgaria, this webinar featured experts from Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia discussing migration policies, the situation on the ground, and anticipated changes in the region, including the impact of the New Pact and Bulgaria's Schengen Zone accession.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Vijesti iz Tuzle, ‘Ljude koji su se danas okupili na novom bijeljinskom groblju u ...’ (Facebook, c. 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=797976848839409> accessed 19 February 2025.

<sup>133</sup> Center for Legal Aid Voice in Bulgaria, ‘The EU External Borders - A Mirror to European Migration Policies’ (YouTube, 14 June 2024) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2R\\_jTo1308](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2R_jTo1308) accessed 19 February 2025.



*Image 15: Message of Encouragement Left by People on the Move in One of the Squats Along the Croatian Border*

Through these engagements, Klikaktiv remained committed to amplifying the voices of refugees and people on the move, advocating for policy changes, and strengthening networks of solidarity across the region.

## 6. People Gone Missing in Serbia

In 2024, Klikaktiv continued documenting and responding to the growing number of missing persons<sup>134</sup> cases along the Balkan migration route, particularly at high-risk crossings such as the Drina River on the Serbia-Bosnia border, the Sava River between Bosnia and Croatia, and

the Balkan Mountains between Bulgaria and Serbia. Many disappear without a trace in these remote areas, where dangerous routes, exploitation by smugglers, and inadequate shelter contribute to rising numbers of fatalities.

Klikaktiv focused on gathering information, especially in the Drina River region, where at least 43 bodies were discovered along the riverbanks. However, the actual number of deaths is likely much higher due to unreported cases. Despite legal obligations for autopsies and tissue sampling, many bodies were buried without proper identification. In several border areas, particularly near Bosnia and Herzegovina, graves of unidentified persons lacked markers or reference numbers, making it nearly impossible

<sup>134</sup> Marijana Hameršak, 'Disappeared' (e-ERIM, 17 July 2023) <https://e-erim.ief.hr/pojam/p-nestali-p-71ed93df-ba29-4e37-bd5f-5f17e480e52c?locale=en> accessed 19 February 2025.

for families to locate their missing loved ones. Additionally, there is no unified database of missing persons, as people often vanish without a trace in the context of migration, further complicating efforts to track and identify them.



*Image 16: Muslim Cemetery in Loznica Where Some of the Victims of the August Accident on the Drina Were Buried*

The crisis of missing people on the move is directly tied to the dangers of irregular migration through Serbia, a key transit country for those heading to Western Europe. Refugees face extreme risks, from life-threatening crossings and harsh environments to exploitation by smugglers who often abandon them or expose them to trafficking and violence. Additionally, many are arrested near border areas, further complicating efforts to trace missing individuals. Out of fear, refugees frequently provide false personal details—such as fake names, ages, and even countries of origin—making it difficult for authorities to track them once a disappearance is reported.

## Drina River Accident

*During the night of August 21-22, a tragic incident on the Drina River—a natural border between two countries—claimed 12 lives when an overloaded migrant boat capsized amid turbulent waters. Rescue efforts were severely hampered by strong currents and limited visibility.*

*Out of the 12 victims, 11 were identified and laid to rest according to their families' wishes, while one body remained unidentified and was interred as an unknown victim. Our team maintained active communication with several families who reached out for support. This collaboration enabled us to locate surviving family members, including three children who have since been placed in a secure care facility. A close relative has even initiated custody proceedings to ensure their future, given their lack of immediate family in their country of origin.*

*Our coordinated efforts with local activists and partner organizations were crucial in ensuring dignified treatment for the deceased and in preventing the deportation of survivors. This case not only underscores the extreme hazards faced by migrants during irregular crossings but also highlights the vital role of coordinated humanitarian and legal responses in protecting vulnerable individuals.*

Although Serbian law mandates that a search for a missing person must begin within 24 hours of a report, systemic challenges hinder the process. Families reporting disappearances often come from other countries and lack key details about the circumstances leading up to the disappearance. Witnesses, if any, typically continue their journey, leaving families as the only source of information. If a missing person was previously registered in the system, discrepancies between the information they provided and what their family reports further delay the search. In many cases, a photograph becomes the only reliable identifier when searching in hospitals or detention centers.

Institutional shortcomings further exacerbate the issue. State agencies, hospitals, social work centers, and police forces often lack the necessary material and human resources to conduct thorough searches. Meanwhile, civil society organizations (CSOs) are viewed not as partners but as critics or intruders, limiting cooperation. When collaboration does occur, it is usually based on personal connections rather than a systematic recognition of the role CSOs can play

in addressing this crisis. As a result, the full potential of civil society remains untapped.

Recognizing the urgency of this crisis, Klikaktiv has improved missing persons reporting procedures in migration contexts and launched a research initiative to raise awareness about the dangers of crossing the Drina River. This initiative aims to inform migrants and their families about the risks and available support mechanisms, identify high-risk areas, and improve local coordination in search and recovery efforts. Additionally, Klikaktiv is working to increase community awareness and strengthen preventive measures to reduce fatalities.

Moving forward, Klikaktiv remains committed to advocating for institutional accountability, improving search and identification processes, and ensuring a coordinated response to missing persons cases. Urgent action is needed to prevent further disappearances and protect the lives of people on the move along the Balkan route.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current political and economic situation in Europe, and globally, is becoming increasingly unfavorable for people on the move. Across European states, right-wing parties continue to gain popularity, with anti-immigration policies serving as a central element of their political platforms. The impact of this growing narrative is evident in both institutional (e.g., the new EU Pact on Migration, EU status agreements with third countries) and non-institutional responses (e.g., border violence and pushbacks carried out by the police of EU member states). These developments represent a significant step toward the realization of the “**Fortress Europe**” strategy.

Serbia finds itself in a delicate position, navigating between its obligations as a candidate country for EU membership and what it perceives as its own best interests. Regarding migration policies, Serbian authorities have so far acted as cooperative partners to the EU, swiftly adopting and implementing EU-recommended regulations with little to no objection. However, there is a growing concern that, as the last country on the route to the EU, Serbia may soon become a “**parking lot**” for European migration policies once the new Pact comes into force.

Amid this situation, numerous **illegal practices** have emerged within key state institutions, particularly the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. These irregularities contribute to a **climate of insecurity and distrust in state institutions**.

Given these circumstances, it is evident that Serbian authorities are striving to **minimize their engagement** with people on the move. However, this approach only benefits smugglers, whose operations are becoming increasingly well-organized and sophisticated. Consequently, migration is being pushed entirely into **irregular channels**, putting the lives of people on the move at **greater risk**, exposing them to **extortion, physical violence, and even death**.

At the same time, Serbia is witnessing a **significant increase in the number of foreign workers**, a relatively **new phenomenon** that requires careful attention. The current state policy toward foreign workers is quite **liberal**, leading to a **constant rise in their numbers**. However, there is an urgent need to **clearly define legal frameworks and enforcement practices** to ensure that all **guaranteed labor rights** are upheld. Additionally, attention should be paid to **potential abuses of Serbia’s liberal visa regime**, where some foreign nationals see the country merely as a **shortcut to the EU**. This issue demands **particular attention**, especially given the aforementioned rise in restrictive EU migration policies.

In a situation where **irregular migration routes have largely overtaken legal pathways, strict adherence to the law must be a priority**. The reality on the ground indicates **heightened restrictions**, making it imperative to provide **maximum protection for people on the move**. In this regard, **timely and accurate information** must be provided by two key institutions—the **Ministry of Interior and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration**—to ensure unhindered **access to asylum procedures and all rights derived from asylum-seeking status**. This is particularly significant, as these rights are directly linked to the **enjoyment of fundamental human rights** for people on the move, including access to free medical care (including mental health services), education, and employment. Furthermore, **law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and courts**, which frequently cite the **fight against irregular migration** as a **top priority**, must translate this commitment into **effective action**. The focus should **shift toward prosecuting and penalizing human smugglers**, rather than criminalizing people on the move, who are often left with no other choice but to rely on smugglers for survival.

# THE COMPLETE STATISTICS FOR 2024 REFERENCES

## Public Information (Indictments and Verdicts for the Criminal Offense of Human Smuggling) for the Period 01.01.2024 - 31.12.2024.

Court	Indictments		Verdicts						Plea agreement
	No. of indictments	No. of accused	CONVICTIMS		ACQUITTAL		PROCEEDINGS SUSPENDED		
			No. of verdicts	No. of people	No. of verdicts	No. of people	No. of verdicts	No. of people	
I BC BELGRADE	4	6	1	1	0	0	0	0	
II BC BELGRADE	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	
III BC BELGRADE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BC ALEKSINAC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC Dimitrovgrad									
BC BAČKA PALANKA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC BUJANOVAC	3	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	
BC VALJEVO	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	
BC VELIKA PLANA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC VELIKO GRADIŠTE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC VRANJE	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC VRBAS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC ZAJEČAR	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	
BC ZRENJANIN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC KIKINDA	3	3	1	2			1		
BC KRAGUJEVAC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC KRALJEVO	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	
BC LOZNICA									
BC NEGOTIN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC NIŠ	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC NOVI PAZAR	2	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	
BC NOVI SAD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC OBRENOVAC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
BC PANČEVO									

**Misdemeanor proceedings for illegal stay and illegal entry into the country under the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Border Control**

<b>Country of origin</b>		<b>Court</b>	
Syria	381	MC Beograd	1552
Türkiye	353	MC Subotica	883
Afghanistan	334	MC Loznica	594
China	222	MC Novi Sad	158
European countries, USA, Canada	153	MC Niš	109
Pakistan	60	MC Sombor	97
Morocco	55	MC Zaječar	56
Nepal	55	MC Zrenjanin	53
India	54	MC Pirot	47
Russia	46	MC Vršac	39
Bangladesh	41	MC Preševo	33
Iraq	30	MC Bačka Palanka	30
DR Congo	21	MC Mladenovac	26
Palestine	19	MC Negotin	24
Egypt	19	MC Vranje	21
Cuba	17	MC Valjevo	6
Iran	17	MC Sjenica	0
Mongolia	14	MC Obrenovac	0
Libya	13	MC Lazarevac	0
Algeria	12		
Uzbekistan	9		
Ukraine	8		
Sri Lanka	8		
Senegal	8		
Indonesia	6		
Gambia	6		
Moldova	5		
Nigeria	5		
Somalia	4		
Tunisia	4		
Ivory Coast	4		
Kazakhstan	4		
Azerbaijan	3		
Georgia	3		

<b>Agreement on Readmission between the EU and Serbia - Readmission of Third-Country Nationals</b>							
	<b>From Hungary to Serbia</b>	<b>From Croatia to Serbia</b>	<b>From Romania to Serbia</b>	<b>From Bosnia to Serbia</b>	<b>From Serbia to Bulgaria</b>	<b>From Serbia to N. Macedonia</b>	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Total:</b>
Turkey	2	210		8	1		221
Syria		43	3	2	62	1	111
Afghanistan		17	7	5	34		63
China	3	31					34
Morocco		5			11		16
Mongolia		1	7				8
Pakistan		2		1	3	2	8
Russia		8					8
Egypt		2		3	2		7
Armenia		6					6
Albania		4					4
Bangladesh			1	1	1		3
Georgia		3					3
India		1		2			3
Iran		1			2		3
Nepal		3					3
Palestine		1			2		3
Tunisia		3					3
Algeria				1		1	2
Iraq					2		2
Cameroon			1				1
Somalia			1				1
Kyrgyzstan		1					1
Comoros		1					1
Mali		1					1
USA		1					1
Lebanon					1		1
						<b>Total</b>	<b>518</b>

### Return Decisions Issued by the MiO in 2024

Syria	4026	Cameroon	17	Bolivia	3
Afghanistan	2005	Colombia	16	Benin	3
Turkey	1425	Philippines	16	Uganda	2
Morocco	742	Burundi	16	Turkmenistan	2
China	590	Bulgaria	16	Togo	2
Pakistan	366	Moldova	14	Tajikistan	2
Iraq	340	Lebanon	14	Suriname	2
Egypt	302	Italy	14	Mexico	2
India	277	Ghana	14	Cyprus	2
Bangladesh	223	Senegal	13	Czech Republic	2
Russia	187	Yemen	13	Australia	2
Nepal	172	Austria	13	Angola	2
Palestine	145	United Kingdom	12	Zimbabwe	1
Iran	122	Kazakhstan	12	Venezuela	1
Indonesia	106	France	12	United Arab Emirates	1
Libya	93	Guinea	11	Taiwan	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	86	Brazil	11	Eswatini (Swaziland)	1
Congo	76	Georgia	10	Saudi Arabia	1
Albania	69	Denmark	9	New Zealand	1
Montenegro	67	Slovenia	8	Korea	1
Algeria	65	Hungary	8	Kingman (possibly an error or specific region?)	1
Cuba	56	Canada	8	Kenya	1
Sri Lanka	52	Mali	7	Cambodia	1
North Macedonia	50	Belarus	7	South Sudan	1
Germany	46	Sweden	6	Jamaica	1
Tunisia	44	Portugal	6	Israel	1
Croatia	37	Greece	6	Iceland	1
Romania	34	Gambia	6	Ireland	1
Azerbaijan	32	Eritrea	6	Haiti	1
Somalia	31	Switzerland	5	Guatemala	1
Uzbekistan	28	Slovakia	5	Grenada	1
Ukraine	28	Poland	5	Ecuador	1
Sierra Leone	28	Ivory Coast	5	Equatorial Guinea	1
USA (United States of America)	28	Netherlands	5	Dominican Republic	1
Mongolia	27	Ethiopia	5	Burkina Faso	1
Nigeria	26	Argentina	4	Belgium	1
Sudan	24	Spain	3	Barbados	1
Armenia	21	Norway	3		
Kuwait	18	Unknown Country of Origin	3		
Kyrgyzstan	18	South Africa	3		
Jordan	18	Guinea-Bissau	3		
<b>TOTAL 12130</b>					

**Data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs  
on the Number of Persons Assigned to Stay  
in the Reception Center for Foreigners in  
2024 (Article 87 of the Law on Foreigners)  
- TOTAL BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

**Data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs  
on the Number of Persons Assigned to Stay  
in the Reception Center for Foreigners in  
2024 (Article 87 of the Law on Foreigners)  
- TOTAL BY RECEPTION CENTER**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Number of Persons Placed in Detention</b>	<b>Reception Center</b>	<b>Number of Persons Placed in Detention</b>
Afghanistan	132	Dimitrovgrad	199
Syria	108	Padinska Skela	148
Turkey	40	Plandište	79
Morocco	29		
India	20		
Pakistan	14		
Egypt	12		
Nepal	9		
Bangladesh	8		
Sri Lanka	5		
Palestine	3		
Iraq	3		
Tunisia	3		
Mongolia	3		
Azerbaijan	3		
Russia	3		
Montenegro	3		
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3		
Yemen	2		
Libya	2		
Lebanon	2		
Iran	2		
Cameroon	2		
China	2		
Sweden	2		
Kuwait	2		
Somalia	1		
Algeria	1		
Cuba	1		
Kazakhstan	1		
North Macedonia	1		
France	1		
Italy	1		
Switzerland	1		
Romania	1		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>426</b>

**Number of Deaths at the Border Between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Recorded by Klikaktiv**

Country of Origin	Male	Female	Minors accompanied by parents/guardians		Unaccompanied minors		
			Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Afghanistan	5				1		
Pakistan	6				1		
Iran		1*					
Syria	7	1		1	1		
Iraq	1						
Palestine							
Turkey							
Egypt	1						
Tunisia							
Morocco	4						
Algeria	1						
Unknown country of origin	13						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>		
			<b>43</b>				

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