



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA IN
MIGRATION PROCESS
AND
THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE
"IMPACT"



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Bosnia and Herzegovina as the migrants waiting room

The original Balkan migration route, which ran from Turkey, Greece via Macedonia and Serbia to Croatia, was closed in 2016, when people smugglers turned to alternative routes through the region where borders were less closely guarded. Migrants from the Middle East and North Africa were increasingly using the new route from Greece via Albania, Montenegro and BiH to EU member Croatia.

In 2015 and 2016 BiH received almost no migrants. At the end of 2017, Bosnia and Herzegovina started seeing an increase in the number of migrants and refugees to the country. In **2018**, authorities detected **24,067** migrant and refugee arrivals, compared to **755** in the whole of **2017**. In **2019**, **29,124** migrant and refugee arrivals were detected, and the trend continued throughout **2020** with **16,150** migrant arrivals registered in BiH. The composition of the migration flows is mixed, with top declared countries of origin being Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran and Syria. While the vast majority are single men, there are also families with children, elderly, unaccompanied migrant children, and other vulnerable categories.

So the milestone happened in 2018 when BiH experienced a sharp increase in arrivals of migrants and the related humanitarian crisis in the north-western Canton of Una-Sana (**USC**) of the country, where a significant number of refugees have gathered waiting for the opportunity to cross the Croatian border and enter the EU. The USC is one of the ten cantons that comprise the administrative partition of the territorial 'entity' named Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The two municipalities of Bihać and Velika Kladuša, both near the Croatian border are where most of this population-on-the-move can be found today. The refugees, from here, attempt to enter Croatia via Velika Kladuša Pass and, after no more than 60 km, enter Croatian territory. ¹

In USC, where majority of migrants are situated there are 5 available accommodation at the moment: The Borići Temporary Reception Centre (TRC) in the City of Bihać (opened in January 2019 following a complete renovation supported by the EU); The Bira TRC in the City of Bihać (opened in October 2018); The Miral TRC in Velika Kladuša (opened in October 2018); The Sedra TRC in Cazin Municipality (opened in July 2018) and Provisional Camp (PC) Lipa which was opened in January 2021² after the closure of the Emergency Tent Camp Lipa. The crisis in this part of BiH is far more serious than in other parts of the country. ³

¹ Minca C and Umek D (2019): The new front of the refugee crisis in the Balkans. 14/02/2019 <https://societyandspace.org/2019/02/14/the-new-front-of-the-refugee-crisis-in-the-balkans/>

² UN in BiH (2021): Monthly Operational Updates on Refugee/Migrant Situation - January 2021, Inter-agency Refugee/Migrant Situation Report, 1. https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Monthly%20Inter-agency%20SITREP_January%202021_0.pdf

³ UN in BiH (2019): Monthly Operational Updates on Refugee/Migrant Situation, March 2019, Inter-agency Refugee/Migrant Situation Report, 8-10. <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/bih/PDFs/UNCTBiHSitReps/Inter-agency%20refugee%20and%20migrant%20operational%20update-%20March%202019.pdf>

Other official reception centers within the country are mostly situated in the proximity of the capital city Sarajevo (TRC Blazuj, TRC Usivak, Asylum Centre (AC) Delijas and Immigration Centre Sarajevo) and near the City of Mostar (RRC Salakovac).

The epidemiological situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) continues to cause general concern among the authorities, with restrictions still in place at both entity and cantonal levels. IOM continued to pay particular attention to COVID-19 prevention measures such as increased disinfection in the centres, while closely monitoring the health conditions of migrants and asylum seekers.⁴

Overview in numbers

According to the UNHCR BiH Operational Update covering February, 2021, the estimated number of migrants and asylum seekers who entered Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first two months of 2021 amounts **1,443** including **13** unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) detected the arrival of **70,856** since the start of the mixed movement in January 2018. Total number of pending asylum claims with the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (**SFA**) at the end of February 2021 amounts to 240.

Average number of days persons waited to register an asylum claim** for those claims which were registered in 2020 and 2021 is **154** and the average processing time* in days for first instance decisions issued in 2020 and 2021, as of the end of February 2021 is **411**.⁵

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Applications	1,572	785	244	26
Recognized refugee**	0	3	1	0
Subsidiary protection**	16	41	31	0
Rejected applications**	45	35	54	11
Suspensions**	741	1,059	546	45

The immigration governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina is responsible for the protection of international borders, internal border crossings and traffic regulation at Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁴ IOM – Bosnia and Herzegovina Migration Response – Situation Report 17-23 April, 2021, 1.

⁵ UNHCR Bosnia and Herzegovina Operational Update covering February, 2021, 2-3

<https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/details/85599>:

**Average processing time (days) from registration of asylum-claim to first-instance decision made at case level (not individual). The data only includes decisions made at first instance and does not factor in appealed decisions. Data presented reflects an asylum-seeker address at the time of asylum claim registration.*

***Waiting time for registrations is calculated as the number of days between AISA issuance and the date when asylum claims were registered, excluding registrations conducted in Immigration Centre or prison.*

border crossings. It organizes the procedures and the way of organization of the service related to movement and stay of foreigners in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has an asylum organization unit (Sector for Asylum) and the organizational unit for immigration (Immigration Sector).

The **Sector for Asylum** conducts administrative and other professional tasks related to enforcement of policies and asylum procedures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, coordinates the work of competent organizations units, carries out tasks related to pre-drafting and draft laws and subordinates regulations within this area, provides for the reception, accommodation and support of asylum seekers, monitors the state of affairs achieving European standards in this area, analyzing and reporting, as well as other tasks which by their very nature fall within the competence of this sector.⁶

The Law on Asylum states that the first step for foreigners in the process of exercising the right to asylum is to indicate the intention to seek asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An foreigner may submit an intention to apply for asylum pursuant to Article 31 of the Law on Asylum: - Border Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the border crossing or - organization units of the Service for Foreigners Affairs. If a foreigner intends to present an application for asylum at one of the border crossings, the **Border Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall immediately inform the local competent organizational unit of the Service obliged to take over the foreigner.**

The Border Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina or the organizational unit of the Service to which the foreigner has expressed the intention to apply for asylum shall inform the foreigner about the asylum procedure and its rights and obligations.

The organizational unit of the Service for Foreigners Affairs shall issue a foreigner with the intention of asylum the declaration on intention, which determines the direction of movement within the time period required for coming to the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the purpose of personally submitting an application for asylum. The organizational unit of the Foreign Affairs Service immediately sends a copy of the confirmation of the stated intention to the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina with copies of personal and other documents of foreigners who have stated the intention relevant to the asylum procedure. The validity period confirmed by the stated intention can not be longer than eight (8) days except in the case of a large number of simultaneously expressed intentions for applying for asylum when the time limit can not be longer than 14 days⁷. The organizational unit of the Service for Foreign Affairs to which the application is intended, transports the applicant to the reception center and takes care of the accommodation of the asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers have the right to work in BiH if a decision on their asylum application is not made within nine months and the burden of failure to make a decision cannot be placed on the asylum seeker.

⁶ Ministry of Security of BiH, Sector fo Asylum, <http://www.msb.gov.ba/onama/default.aspx?id=1673&langTag=bs-BA>

⁷ Article 32. (confirmation of the stated intention), The Law on Asylum of BiH, <http://msb.gov.ba/docs/BiH%20Asylum%20Law%202016%20E.doc>

The **Immigration Sector** conducts administrative and other professional tasks related to planning and the implementation of immigration policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Performs tasks related to pre-drafting and draft laws and subordinate legislation in this area, and monitoring the situation regarding the achievement of European standards in this area. Realizes the acceptance of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina by readmission agreements, accepts and accommodates foreigners - victims of trafficking, analysis and reporting as well as other tasks that by their very nature fall into the jurisdiction of this Sector. The performance of this sector's responsibilities is divided into two departments:

- a) Department for Administrative Affairs, Regulations and Readmission;
- b) Analytical, Strategic Planning, Supervision and Training Department.

Department of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter: the Service) as an administrative organization with operational autonomy within the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the bearer of activities in tackling immigration issues. The service controls the arrival of visa-free foreigners in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the validation of invitation letters, resolves on the status of foreigners in Bosnia and Herzegovina by approving or refusing the stay of foreigners in the country, canceling residence, expulsion, putting under control, and forcible removal of foreigners from the country. The service collects data on all aspects of irregular migration and irregular migrants, monitors and controls the stay of foreigners through their potential misuse and illegitimate use of residence and possible endangering of the public order or national security of the country of certain categories of foreigners.⁸

The Border Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an administrative organization within the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with operational autonomy, established for the purpose of carrying out police tasks related to the control of the crossing of the Bosnia and Herzegovina border and other tasks prescribed by law. Border control is carried out at 83 border crossings, of which 55 are international and 28 for border traffic. It is structured to ensure coordination of all activities at central, regional and local level. It has established an organizational structure within the jurisdiction of discovering and opposing illegal migration at central, regional and local level.⁹

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina undertakes certain competencies in the migration management system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the field of visa and passport affairs performs regular analysis of the work of diplomatic and consular missions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on the monitoring of migration movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, actions and activities are undertaken with other competent state bodies and institutions in the prevention of illegal migration and in the management of migration processes.

⁸ Ministry of Security od BiH, Departament oh Foreign Affairs, <http://sps.gov.ba/nadleznost/?lang=hr>

⁹ Ministry of Security od BiH, Border Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina, <http://www.granpol.gov.ba/Content/Read/13?title=Organizacija>

The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees owns the Department for Refugees, Displaced Persons and Housing Policies, in order to gain access to the right to work, health and social protection and education, accommodation and other rights prescribed by the legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Sector prepares proposals for determining and improving policy, among other, in the field of:

- refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, returnees, as well as the rights of refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, housing policies, and monitor their implementation;
- complies with laws, by-laws and other regulations relating to refugees, displaced persons and returnees, refugees and refugees and housing policy;
- participates in the preparation of proposals for agreements and protocols in the field of refugees, displaced persons, returnees and housing policies; takes care of their use;
- works with domestic and international, governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions and the civil sector in the field of the scope of their work...

The Coordination Body for Migration Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina was established by the Decision on the Establishment of the Coordinating Body for Migration Issues in BiH¹⁰ as a permanent body in charge of coordinating activities between competent institutions dealing with migration and asylum issues. The Coordination Body examines the overall situation in the area of migration and asylum, encourages and ensures inter-departmental cooperation between relevant institutions dealing with migration and asylum issues, and assesses future migration movements and proposes measures for improving migration policy to relevant institutions.

The Office for Free Legal Assistance of the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina plays a role in providing free legal aid only in relation to procedures before bodies and institutions of BiH. If one looks at the constitutional competence of these bodies, it can be concluded that in relation to decision-making on the rights of individuals, treatment is dominant within the Ministry of Security of BiH. Additional difficulties in the provision of legal aid is the fact that the Office has not been established and administrative affairs are performed by administrative inspectors as an additional activity and *ad hoc* principle.

Social Welfare Centres play a crucial role in the official assistance scheme for migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and unaccompanied or separated children, as they are mandated to provide family-legal protection, child protection, social protection, and family protection against violence and juvenile delinquency, as defined by the relevant laws on social protection. The lack of clear protocols or standard operating procedures for assisting vulnerable migrants and refugees results in SWCs being unable to offer this population effective assistance. The human and financial resources of SWCs in BiH were insufficient before the influx of migrants and refugees, and are especially insufficient for handling this additional population group. SWCs' staff lack

¹⁰ "Official Gazette of BiH", No. 10/13 of 11.02.2013., 115 (which came into force on the eighth day after the date of its publication). <http://sllist.ba/glasnik/2013/broj10/broj010.pdf>

capacity and understanding of relevant legislation and procedures, particularly in cases of missing, unaccompanied and separated children or domestic violence.¹¹

City of Mostar and the migrant crisis

The City of Mostar is situated in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (**HNC**), in the Federation of BiH, geographically, south of the BiH. Due to its geographical position, in the context of migration, the City of Mostar is not attractive to the vast majority of migrants who generally want to exit BiH on the northwest border and move on to the Western Europe countries transiting through the Republic of Croatia.

The only accommodation facility for migrants in the HNC and the City of Mostar area is the Salakovac Refugee Reception Centre (**RRC Salakovac**). The RRC Salakovac (in operation since 2000), situated in the small village of Salakovac - 10 km far from Mostar, provides accommodation to refugees, asylum seekers and persons granted subsidiary protection. The centre management services - with basic services, free legal aid, psychosocial support, and primary healthcare - and running costs have been continuously supported through a partnership with UNHCR since 2000. As part of the contingency plan of the BiH authorities the Salakovac RRC opened its doors to asylum seeking families as of May 2018, pursuant to a protocol between the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (**MHRR**) and the Sector for Asylum (**SA**) of the Ministry of Security (**MoS**). The Salakovac RRC has a maximum capacity of **213 people**.¹²

The Migration Crisis has not significantly affected the City of Mostar in any part of its standard functioning, for the reasons explained above. One of the additional reasons is the position of the RRC Salakovac which is located 10 km from the City of Mostar and the movement of its users is restricted due to the lack of the regular public transport to the City and vice versa. Accordingly, the majority of migrants stay within the premises of the RRC Salakovac due to the difficulties in reaching the City. However, on a daily basis some migrants can be seen roaming the streets of Mostar in pursuit of some earnings through begging or selling trifles such as paper tissues.

Good practices at local level

The data provided under this particular point is in line with the actions linked to RRC Salakovac (Herzegovina-Neretva Canton / City of Mostar). Similar activities are implemented by international organisations and partner CSOs in other parts of the country where the migrants are concentrated. NGOs are currently the main providers of direct humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees throughout the country. This is recognized by stakeholders such as the SFA, police bodies and international organizations, which consistently refer to migrants to NGOs. NGOs are engaged countrywide, in reception centres as well as in those locations with the highest number of migrants and refugees.

¹¹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (OSCE in BiH) (2018): ‘Assessment: Migrant and Refugee Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Overview of the intervention of key actors in the field’, 25.9.2018., 28. <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/397319?download=true>

¹² BiH Interagency operational update – Refugee and migrant situation – November 2019

Supported by UNICEF, and operated by **Žene sa Une (ŽsU)**, SOS Children's Villages, and World Vision, Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) operate at the Salakovac RRC, **while the UNHCR's partner (BH Women's Initiative) BHWI, continued to work on Gender based violence prevention, identification and response in RRC Salakovac.**

At the end of January, 2021, **94 asylum-seekers** were accommodated at Salakovac RRC. The MoS assumed responsibility for admitting families to the centre which now follows strict rules, as with the Delijaš AC.

Danish Refugee Council (DRC), continues to provide **healthcare for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** who are registered in the Salakovac RRC (as of 1 March 2019). In each of these centres, **primary healthcare** is provided on-site through the engagement of medical teams from local primary healthcare centres (PHCs) through the support of IOM/EUD and ECHO. Secondary healthcare services are provided through Cantonal Hospital Dr. Safet Mujic, Mostar and University Clinical Hospital Mostar.

IOM and the **Red Cross Mostar Branch** continued to support the provision of three meals and two fruit snacks per day for the Salakovac RRC users. Additionally, IOM continued to provide specialized food to migrants in need of specific dietary requirements, and special complementary food to babies below 24 months which is prepared by the Red Cross in line with UNICEF's guidelines on child feeding. UNICEF in partnership with Fenix and World Vision operated the **Mother Baby Corners (MBC)** in RRC Salakovac. MBC provided parents with IYCF counselling and awareness raising on breastfeeding. IOM provides babies below 24 months with special complementary food which is prepared based on UNICEF's guidelines on child feeding.

Asylum seeker children in the Salakovac RRC are excluded from formal and structured non-formal education, pending approval of the Cantonal Government. In lieu of approval from the HNC Ministry of Education for asylum seeker children to attend school, "**My School**", a custom education program run by BHWI continued in January 2021 in the Salakovac RRC. In the Salakovac RRC, BHWI, supported by UNHCR, provides a range of activities, including knitting workshops, women's aerobics, and sports and recreational activities. Childcare services are provided during the activities as needed.

LDA Mostar in migrations story

All the above gathered data are predominantly the plain information that speaks in favor of the figures and the general situation related to migration in the country. The lives of migrants and refugees are the whole other story. How does the community they reach by force react to them and vice versa? Do their lives touch our lives at all and if so to what extent? Their lives in foreign country which is not the destination country are on hold, so what can communities do to make a difference?

In that sense our project [“IMPACT – Inclusion Matters! Using Performing Arts towards Cohesion and Tolerance”](#) is one of the fine links in the chain of good practices that want to leave a human mark in the harsh migration process. Local Democracy Agency Mostar started implementing this project co-founded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union at the beginning of March 2019, with the aim to include and integrate migrants and refugees into the local community using the theatre as the main tool. Our goal was to gain the trust and make a connection with the migrants and refugees residing in the Salakovac Refugee Reception Centre near the City of Mostar but also to raise awareness within the local community on the migration subject. Following that path LDA Mostar worked closely with colleagues from [MTM - Mostar Youth Theatre](#) and along the way encountered the help from IOM in Salakovac. During December 2019 and January 2020 LDA Mostar organized local pedagogical workshops with the attendance of more than 100 migrants and refugees as well as local people which lasted for 5 weeks. During that period lots of stories and testimonies, fears and hopes came through the invisible armour of division.

Some project actions resonated further than expected project outputs and became a part of a wider story on humanity and acceptance. While being directly involved within the pedagogical workshops, working with the migrants/refugees and their families, young actresses from MTM, Sara Kljajić wrote a short story related to her experience. The story titled **"We are all the same, we are all human, and we all need Love"** won first place in [EuResurs](#) citizen activism contest.

Sara and her fellow colleague Adnan Bratić also wrote a blog on their experience working and encountering migrants/refugees.

Here is an excerpt from [Sara's blog](#) recalling the time spent with migrants/refugees during the pedagogical workshops:

“The motive that guided us through this whole process is the ideal of equality. So, during one of the workshops, we were making masks. Whoever wanted his mask to be made, would lie on the nylon and we would start working. That wasn't a short process. Sometimes it lasted up to 20 minutes or more. Most of the “models” were children who were lying still and patiently all the time. We were delighted with the absence of hyperactivity and the need to constantly provoke someone's attention, which we almost always encounter among younger ages. When the masks were done, we would explain to them why we made them in the first place:

“Looking at the mask, we can't conclude anything about the skin color, nationality, religion or any other imaginary traits we associate with people as padlocks of prejudice.”

The message is quite clear. We are all the same kind, we are all human, and we all need Love. It is the source of energy that drives the world and brings together even complete strangers. LET'S JUST LOVE EACH OTHER!!”

Adnan Bratić, also a young actor with the MTM wrote in his [blog](#):

“My interviewees, the mirrors into my soul, are hard-working passengers traversing the road from fear to peace. By wearing crudely-sewn clothes and footwear, they express a peaceful state of mind, preparing themselves to relieve both the best and the worst all over again, merely to reach

a final destination and to feed themselves and their families. “Inshallah”, they say. “What God wills”. Many are uncertain of their next steps, with no one to complain to nor talk to when hardships strike. Nevertheless, they persist on going. Despite the obstacles, they will keep fighting for themselves and their children.

...

“Every single thing we note down when talking to a man of a seemingly “lower” position than us gives us an insight into what we are. Every migrant we talk to is our mirror and window into ourselves. He tells us both what we have in common and our differences. He teaches us important and long-lasting life lessons on persistence, positivity and serenity. Younes told me this when I asked him about what he thinks his life will be later on: “I don’t know. Only God knows my path. As far as I’m concerned, I’ll go my own way, working to overcome any obstacle threatening me.”

This process of building the relationships between the migrants and refugees on the one side and the local people within the course of the project was beautifully depicted in the text written by Sead Đulić, director of the MTM - Mostar Youth Theatre titled “Is “Game” a play?” that brings heartbreaking testimonies and intertwined with the author’s own war experiences...

“Is “Game” a play?” by Sead Đulić

“My name is Maya. I am 9 years old. My parents are named Muhammed and Fatima. We’re from the city of Herat in Afghanistan. I departed my home while still in my mother’s stomach. I don’t recall any one of my neighbors in Herat. We headed to Iran from Afghanistan; I was born in Iran. From there, we went to Greece. Then we departed to Bulgaria. We lived around for years in the Principovac refugee camp in Šid, Serbia, after that. That’s where I learned to speak your language, never once forgetting mine. I felt fine back in Serbia. I really feel fine, however, over here: in Salakovac, Bosnia. I wish for our border “game” to succeed and for us to reach Switzerland. I want to be a doctor and help people.”

These are the words of a nine-year old girl who began her search for a better life in her mother’s womb. She is a resident of Mostar and knows our language fluently, aiding everyone in the Salakovac refugee camp as an interpreter. My friend Milan, who wrote the story down, promised to put it into a book. And he did.

I could not believe it the first time I had heard it. I could only recall my own son Vedran being of the same age in 1992, when I’d sent him with his mother and sister with the last humanitarian convoys out of Mostar and into places unknown. He ventured outside his birthplace at age nine. She’s been traversing her destination of fortune for nine years.

I listened to a man’s story. He spoke as if he was talking of someone else’s journey, but also of his own pain holding him hostage. He said:

“On my eighth birthday I was woken up by a loud noise – someone banged on the front door. Soldiers entered, roughly dragging along to the center of the village every single adult male. They also took my father and older brother. I hid and watched from afar. An enormous hole had been

dug in the middle – deep as a swimming pool. They gathered them on the edges and asked them questions which they couldn't answer. Then they were forced down the hole and buried alive with bulldozers. I lost my father, brother and relatives. This is why I began this journey: I do not want my children to lose their own father like that, nor do I wish for them to perish in a hole just like they did."

During the Bosnian War, I had witnessed many crimes occur. This painful testimony, however, bestowed anxiety upon me. We were all silent. A vacuum of noise was felt. Then, a woman's soft voice spoke:

"I am 36. My father gave my hand to my husband when I was 16. My husband is 17 years older than me. The first time I'd seen him was at our wedding. Such are our ways. The only thing I can recall from my childhood home is a bag always ready to be taken in case of an emergency. We'd always move and run from danger. Even my father remembers the bag he'd take with him in case of emergency. They were on their feet as well. The bag became our ensign. You know, the war has been affecting us for over 75 years now. We barely managed to unpack it during that time. This is why we went on this journey: for our children to be the ones to finally open it and put things where they belong."

These are only a handful of testimonies I'd listened to during the workshop sessions...

I worked with many people during the sessions: various victims of crimes and abuse, soldiers who did horrid things, children, retirees and our war refugees being among them. This, however, was different.

I could only simultaneously listen to these testimonies, as well as media reports on:

- How the migrant question is not a humanitarian crisis but rather a "question of security"
- How they are "occupying" our country and how they "should be forced back to where they came from"
- How they're all "runaway fighters hiding over here, criminals and scum"
- How they're "changing" Bosnian and Herzegovinian demographics and are supposedly occupying us

Such reports go on spinning in circles on various media outlets. Meanwhile, I listened to painful stories of families and children wishing for playtime...

We would rarely communicate through spoken language. They spoke in languages for which we didn't have any interpreters. We had to keep going, though. Eventually, we found some native instruments which some of them could play, surprising them. They broke into a song. We joined them in this truly emotive and cathartic experience. With music came dance, and we learned both the songs and dances – in joy. Additional trust was made. They wanted to learn a traditional Bosnian song. We presented them with *sevđalinka*. This is where everyone's positive aspects came to light. People were smiling, wishing to take selfies with us. The *sevđalinka* was key in pushing out all the sadness and pain of the stories told.

Then we made masks out of their faces, pouring a gypsum cast over their heads – children, men and women in that very order...

This is when we heard of the phrase “game”. To them, it’s the act of illegally crossing borders to reach a final destination.

It’s more than a regular game – one of life and death, that is, as per our notes. Each of the 15 workshops in which we’d participated left us in awe and silence. It brought all of us closer, and we got to know their culture, traditions and botherations; they also sought the same from us, in a new, unprejudiced light...

Once we’d gathered all the information needed, we began working on a theatrical production. The only thing we were certain of regarding it was the name, “GAME”, with it needing to be raw and emotive, just as the workshop sessions were. We only sought after our scenic presentation of the events. After it came the folk music and dances, especially a Kurdish lullaby with insightful lyrics which even opened our senses.

It goes like this:

Lay down,

No one lives forever.

Neither do I.

Take care.

Lay down, o sweet child,

Be good to life.

Stand up,

Look for yourself, see where you are,

Ask what you can do.

Lay in eternal happiness.

Please,

Bother not for imperfections.

As I sometimes wish to breathe one last time,

I take a step

And ask myself where I am.

The stories and testimonies shared during the workshops were the basis for the theatre play “Game” performed for the first time on February 27th, 2021 by Mostar Youth Theater (MTM) in cooperation with Local Democracy Agency Mostar. The play was performed online due to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Those collected stories were presented in the most powerful way as a unique play emanating from a universal message of peace, social inclusion, solidarity and sense-of-belonging.

The “Game” was directed by Sead Đulic and it was performed by Sara Kljajić, Edina Delalić, Irma Lipovac, Ali Kamer Aksoy, Haris Habibija and Haris Pašić.

The record of the “Game” with the English subtitles can be watched at the following [link](#).

Limits of action for the local NGOs

International and local NGOs have been the main providers of direct humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. During its assessment, the OSCE Mission in BiH found that the importance and impact of NGOs present in BiH is also widely recognized by the SFA, police agencies and other international organizations, all of which reported having referred migrants and refugees to NGOs for assistance. NGOs are engaged countrywide, both in reception centres in major cities and in areas like Una-Sana Canton, where the highest numbers of migrants are currently located. However, NGOs in the country also face significant challenges to their efficacy related to a lack of funding (and in particular, a lack of long-term funding plans) as well as poor coordination with other organizations, whether governmental, non-governmental, national or international. On the level of the City of Mostar examples include the Red Cross in Mostar, which is providing support to the RRC Salakovac. Generally, NGOs provide migrants and refugees with humanitarian assistance in the form of food, clothes, childcare equipment and hygienic products, including female hygienic products. Some are also providing legal support, psychological support, medicine or simple healthcare, transport and accommodation.¹³

Based on the same OSCE Mission Assessment of local administrations’ approaches to the migrant and refugee situation, their respective roles and responsibilities appear to be largely self-determined and ad-hoc, varying widely between locations. The main challenges to local management of the migrant influx in BiH are a lack of clear roles of and within local administrations, and a lack of coordination by local administrations with other levels of government in BiH. Another thing is that the BiH Ministry of Security Strategy and the Action plan in the area of Migration and Asylum 2016-2020 (p.140) foresee engagement at the local level but not from an operational perspective.¹⁴

¹³ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (OSCE in BiH) (2018): ‘Assessment: Migrant and Refugee Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Overview of the intervention of key actors in the field’, 25.9.2018., 31. <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/397319?download=true>

¹⁴ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (OSCE in BiH) (2018):

Since the jurisdiction over the migration issues is on the state and entity level it is difficult to impact or change the crucial issues on the cantonal or local level in an operational sense.

Some challenges on immigration in the country

- complicated asylum seeking procedures
- complicated procedures in access to secondary and third health care and difficulties in regular access to primary health care
- no regular primary education for migrant children was provided in some parts of the BiH (example is Herzegovina-Neretva Canton which the City of Mostar is situated in)
- low systematic and coordinated approach between the institutions, decision makers and operational partners on field
- action difficulties caused by COVID-19 pandemic

‘Assessment: Migrant and Refugee Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Overview of the intervention of key actors in the field’, 25.9.2018., 34. <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/397319?download=true>

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