

February - March 2023

# NORTHERN SERBIA ADVOCACY REPORT

Observations and Trends in Pushbacks, Border  
Violence, and Conditions in Northern Serbia



Collaborative work by:



# Table of Contents:

Introduction	<b>2</b>
Political Developments	<b>4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continued Frontex Presence in Northern Serbia</li><li>• Special European Council Summit on Migration</li><li>• Serbia Joins European Migration Network</li></ul>	
Trends in Border Violence	<b>7</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pushbacks by International Police and Frontex</li><li>• Physical Violence</li><li>• Chain Pushbacks</li></ul>	
Living Conditions in Serbia	<b>10</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slowdown in Evictions</li><li>• Corruption, Bribery and Theft by Serbian Authorities</li></ul>	
Conclusion	<b>13</b>
Appendices	<b>14</b>

# INTRODUCTION:

## Observations from the field

**This report details observations and trends in broader European political developments, border violence, and Serbian state actions in February and March 2023 relating to people on the move in Northern Serbia.** It is the third publication in a series of bi-monthly reports produced by grassroots organisations working along the Serbian borders with Hungary and Romania. In Northern Serbia, a transit area for many people on the move, domestic state violence and illegal border practices of neighbouring states are visible on a daily basis.

**Our findings from the past two months are predominantly concerned with the recent developments and consequences of the European Union (EU) and Serbia's alignment in migration policy following topics raised in our previous Advocacy reports** (available at [collectiveaidngo.org](https://collectiveaidngo.org)). There have been major commitments and developments made at the EU level to curb migration flows in the Western Balkan route. This is exemplified by Frontex's official presence at the Serbian-Hungarian border and Serbia's membership into the European Migration Network which requires the country to share data with the EU to support migration policy making.<sup>1,2</sup> The Western Balkan route also continues to be a major topic of discussion at numerous EU convenings.

**As a result of these developments, people on the move in Northern Serbia continue to experience discrimination and mistreatment from border authorities, Serbian officers, and Frontex personnel.** Our field teams have witnessed ceaseless evictions and regular harassment of people on the move, increased presence of foreign enforcement, and continuous neglect of state infrastructure (e.g., transit camps), to discourage future arrivals. We will provide an update on evictions and camp conditions in this report, as well as the daily abuses and neglect faced by people on the move at the hands of Serbian authorities.

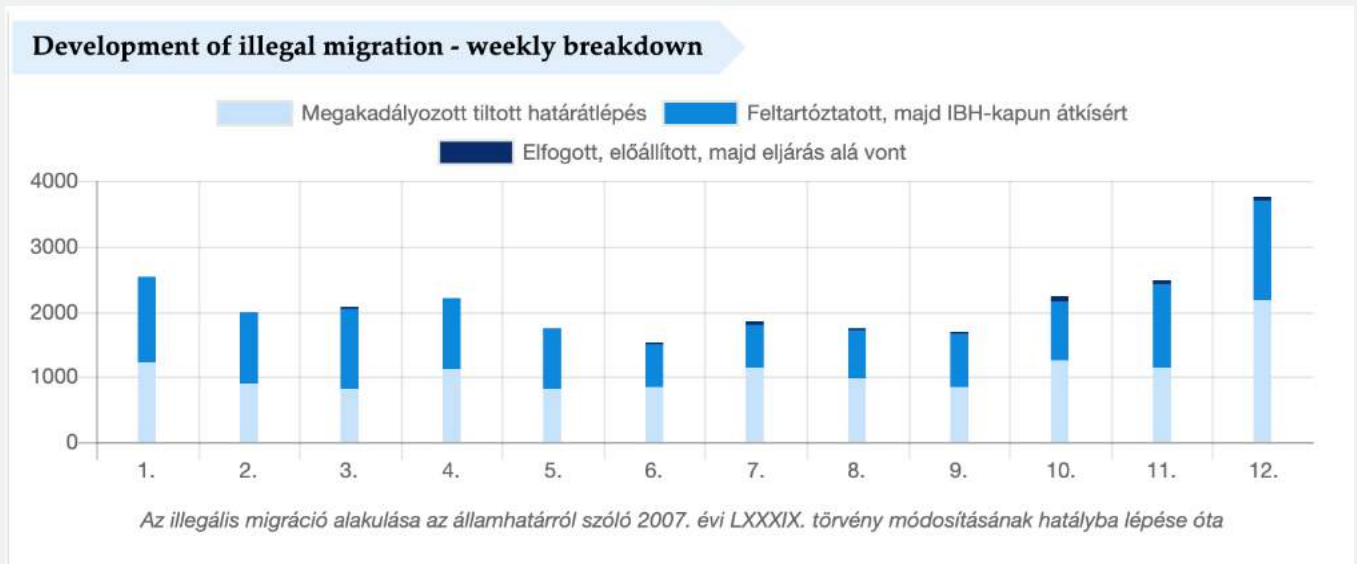
**At the borders, the number of people on the move at informal settlements we visit remain low when compared to Summer and Fall 2022.** Our observations align with Frontex official reporting which states that the Western Balkan route (i.e., including the Serbia-Hungarian border) saw a 28% decrease in crossings detected in February 2023 compared to the same time in 2022.<sup>3</sup> While Frontex attributes this decline solely to the "alignment of Serbia's visa policy with EU requirements" (e.g., termination of bilateral visa agreements with Tunisia, Burundi, and India), this trend is most likely attributed to the sustained evictions of informal settlements, increased foreign enforcement, harassment of people on the move in border areas, and a general slowdown of arrivals during the winter.

1 Frontex Twitter, March 16 2023, accessible at: <https://twitter.com/Frontex/status/1636321778178850816>

2 European Commission, 'Serbia becomes Observer Country to the European Migration Network', accessible at: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/serbia-becomes-observer-country-european-migration-network-2023-03-16\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/serbia-becomes-observer-country-european-migration-network-2023-03-16_en)

3 Frontex, 'Detections in the Central Mediterranean more than doubled in the first two months of 2023', accessible at: <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/detections-in-the-central-mediterranean-more-than-doubled-in-the-first-two-months-of-2023-wKyDkV>

**March 2023 data also indicates that migration levels are starting to increase again at the Serbian-Hungarian border as warmer months approach.** According to the most recent figures published by the Hungarian authorities below, there is a visible increase of people attempting to cross into the EU in March (columns 9-12) compared to February (columns 4-8).<sup>4</sup> These numbers are very similar to the trends at the same time last year. While public rhetoric may attribute declines in the winter to intensified border actions and other deterrence methods, the reality remains that people are continuing to attempt to cross into the EU in search of security and opportunity.



Hungarian official reporting of crossings at the Serbian-Hungarian border. Columns 4-12 indicate weeks in February and March 2023. The light blue indicates crossings prevented, the medium blue indicates individuals pushed back into Serbia, and the dark blue indicates individuals arrested

Pushbacks have also increased proportionately to the total population; every week in March, Hungarian authorities reported between 850 and 1500 pushbacks.<sup>5</sup>

**From testimonies and medical conversations with people on the move, Hungarian authorities continue to perpetuate physical and psychological violence during pushbacks.** Reports have also evidenced the violent involvement of international officers such as Czech in assisting Hungary in the systematic illegal returns. In addition, **Frontex has been reported as being involved in pushbacks to Serbia, despite the suspension of their activities in 2021.**<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, our teams are seeing the direct impact of the EU's hostile policies, as a number of individuals have been reportedly returned to Serbia from Austria, in what appears to be a "chain pushback".<sup>7</sup>

**In Northern Serbia, the hostile and oppressive climate against people on the move continues as Serbia and the EU intensify their collaboration and adopt more measures to externalise the EU border into the Western Balkans.** From the increasing role of foreign officers in migration control to the continual dismantling of support structures for asylum seekers, this report will elaborate on the abusive and dehumanising consequences of these broader political decisions on people on the move.

4 Official Hungarian Police Website, 'Illegális migráció alakulása', accessible at: <https://www.police.hu/hu/hirek-es-informaciok/hatarinfo/ille-galis-migracio-alakulasa>

5 Official Hungarian Police Website, 'Illegális migráció alakulása', accessible at: <https://www.police.hu/hu/hirek-es-informaciok/hatarinfo/ille-galis-migracio-alakulasa>

6 European Parliament, 'Suspension of Frontex Operations in Hungary', accessible at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-001120\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-001120_EN.html)

7 A 'chain pushback' is the process whereby people on the move are unofficially returned through a number of countries.

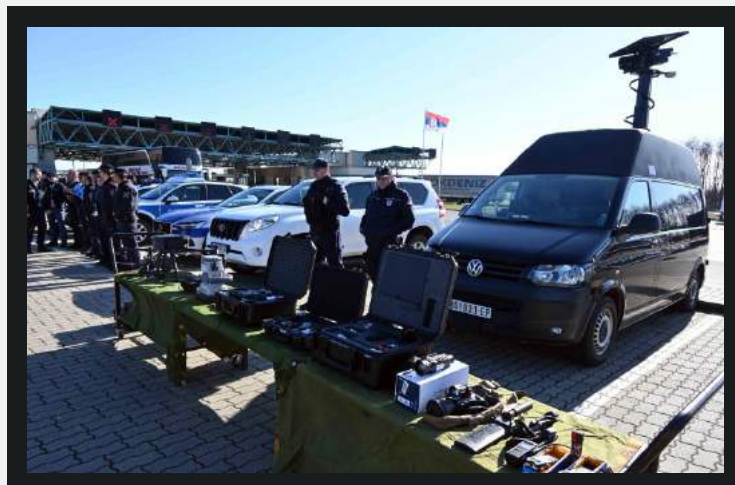
# POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

## State and Policing

The Balkan Route continues to be the focus for deterring migration into the EU, with Serbia becoming a focal point for EU policies on migration. Given that the treatment of people on the move is dictated by policy decisions made at a higher political level, it is necessary to analyse the most recent developments. This section looks at the continuation of Frontex's presence, the development in the EU's Action Plan for the Western Balkans, and Serbia's accession to the European Migration Network.

### Continued Frontex Presence in Northern Serbia

**Frontex has officially announced its presence at the Serbian-Hungarian border. Despite observations of foreign police officers beginning in December 2022, their existence at the Serbian-Hungarian border was not publicly recognised by Frontex until 16th March.** A tweet posted by the European Border and Coastal Agency announced their collaboration with the Serbian Border Police during the visit of the Executive Director of Frontex and EU Commissioner, Ylva Johansson.<sup>8</sup> The Serbian Government boasted of the “excellent cooperation with Frontex”, while highlighting the equipment afforded by the Agency used for the joint patrols (shown below).<sup>9</sup>



Frontex Officers and equipment at Horgoš Border  
Crossing 16.03.2023

**The visibility of foreign police officers has grown significantly in Northern Serbia with regular spotting of German and Italian Frontex officers around various Serbian cities across the EU external borders.** Observations and conversations on the field have evidenced a surge in the active role of Frontex in general monitoring of people on the move, violent evictions, and aggressive targeted arrests. **In several instances, people on the move have disclosed to us that German Frontex officers have allegedly beaten individuals during evictions.** Additionally, Frontex officers have also been involved in monitoring our field teams by checking the documentation of humanitarian organisations they encounter at informal settlements.

<sup>8</sup> Frontex Twitter, March 16 2023, accessible at: <https://twitter.com/Frontex/status/1636321778178850816>

<sup>9</sup> The Government of Serbia, 'Excellent cooperation with Frontex in suppressing illegal immigration', accessible at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/203274/excellent-cooperation-with-frontex-in-suppressing-illegal-migration.php>

**Despite the public announcement of Frontex presence in Northern Serbia, scope and details of its mission in Northern Serbia remains unclear.** This lack of clarity is deeply concerning for people on the move and humanitarian organisations who are experiencing increased surveillance, control, and sometimes violence from these international actors. In the past two months, efforts by humanitarian organisations to gain clarity from the German Parliament on German officers supporting Frontex operations have largely been ignored, highlighting the lack of transparency in their activities. The absence of clarity on the objective and scope of Frontex’s mission is profoundly problematic in terms of holding officers accountable. This is particularly important given the Agency’s track record for violating the rights of the people on the move. **Frontex personnel in Northern Serbia signal a new wave of interventions to externalise and militarise the EU borders which further contributes to the physical and legal violation of asylum seeker rights.**

## Special European Council Summit on Migration

**A one-day summit was held in Brussels on 9th February to discuss Europe’s collective response to migration.**<sup>10</sup> The meeting arose out of pressure applied by numerous EU Member States, including Hungary, demanding radical reform of the EU asylum system.<sup>11</sup> Despite the summit being one of many in recent months, this one included all EU Heads of States who all expressed a desire for a “team Europe” approach to outsourcing migration policies.<sup>12</sup>

During the summit, there was extensive discussion revisiting the potential EU funding of further external border fences.<sup>13</sup> Although this did not gain the Council’s consent, by agreeing to financially assist border monitoring, the EU will indirectly enable more fences by freeing up Member States’ resources to build their own fences. The Western Balkan Route was also heavily featured in discussions whereby the Council praised the progression made in EU visa policy alignment (e.g., termination of bilateral visa agreements between Serbia and Tunisia, India, Burundi). Member States called on EU’s neighbouring countries such as Serbia to swiftly take further steps, admitting the EU was not afraid to use trade and development as leverage to ensure the returns of people on the move and mobilise external action.<sup>14</sup>

**Despite the praise for Serbia’s cooperation and the announcement of more funding dominating the narrative of the Summit, our teams have observed minimal change on the ground.** Although this may be subject to change over the coming months, there is currently a disparity in the EU objective of decreasing migration, and the actual deterrence of people on the move. As such, the international focus on Serbia has pushed people on the move further away from legal and safe channels to seek asylum, making them more vulnerable and pushing them into the hands of informal networks facilitating border crossings.

10 European Council, ‘Special European Council, Main Results’, accessible at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2023/02/09/>

11 Euractiv, ‘Eight EU states demand tougher migration curbs ahead of summit’, accessible at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/eight-eu-states-demand-tougher-migration-curbs-ahead-of-summit/>

12 State Watch, ‘Letter from Ursula Von Der Leyen’, accessible at: <https://www.statewatch.org/media/3785/eu-com-von-der-leyen-letter-migration-borders-progress-20-3-23.pdf>

13 Reuters, ‘Fences protect Europe’, Hungary’s Orban says ahead of EU migration summit’, accessible at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/fences-protect-europe-hungarys-orban-says-ahead-eu-migration-summit-2023-02-07/>

14 European Council ‘Special meeting of the European Council (9 February 2023) – Conclusions’, accessible at: [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/61997/2023-02-09-eu-co-conclusions-en.pdf?utm\\_source=dsms-auto&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=European+Council+conclusions%2c+9+February+2023](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/61997/2023-02-09-eu-co-conclusions-en.pdf?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=European+Council+conclusions%2c+9+February+2023)

## Serbia Joins European Migration Network

**On the 16th March, the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration and the European Commission signed an Administrative Agreement (“Agreement”) which made Serbia an “Observer Country” for the European Migration Network (EMN).**<sup>15</sup> In practice, Serbia will share information on migration which is required by EU institutions to support policymaking. Although it is uncertain as to exactly what type of information will be shared, the EU has a clear goal of “achieving 100% registration of irregular arrivals of third country nationals at external borders.”<sup>16</sup>

**The primary concern with this Agreement is the potential for sensitive information collected in Serbia to be used to undermine asylum procedures for people on the move.** For example, claiming asylum in EU countries could be made more difficult for people on the move if the EU has data (e.g., fingerprints) that shows certain individuals transited through Serbia but did not attempt to claim asylum there. Furthermore, the value and type of information shared puts into question the alleged and required impartiality of the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, which is now clearly facilitating processes in the interest of EU stakeholders. By adopting Serbia into the EMN, the EU continues to mobilise the Western Balkans as its first line of control and defence against “irregular migration” into the EU, breaching states’ moral and legal obligations of international protection for asylum seekers.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission, ‘Serbia becomes Observer Country to the European Migration Network’, accessible at: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/serbia-becomes-observer-country-european-migration-network-2023-03-16\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/serbia-becomes-observer-country-european-migration-network-2023-03-16_en)

<sup>16</sup> State Watch, ‘Letter from Ursula Von Der Leyen’, accessible at: <https://www.statewatch.org/media/3785/eu-com-von-der-leyen-letter-migration-borders-progress-20-3-23.pdf>

# TRENDS IN BORDER VIOLENCE:

## Pushbacks & Testimonies

This section features a wider contextual overview of the Hungarian and Romanian border while providing a snapshot of the systematic pushback practices and police brutality through collected personal testimonies.

Whilst it is clear that fewer people are crossing the border into Hungary this winter compared to last year, the violence against people and illegal pushbacks continue. Consistent with the last report, our field teams regularly saw the same people returning to the informal settlements after being pushed back multiple times. In most cases, people on the move are detected by border authorities and then quickly apprehended, beaten, searched, photographed, and pushed back into Serbian territory. Since the violence used during pushbacks is systematic and procedural, it is often quickly normalised by those affected.

The majority of our conversations and testimonies involved pushbacks from Hungary in which people often reported returning back to Serbia through the Röske transit Zone near Horgos Border Crossing. We currently hear less about pushbacks at the Romanian border near the town of Rabe.

**Below are examples from testimonies of the continued types of violence enacted against those trying to cross the border in February 2023 and March 2023.** Official personnel at the border ought to comply with the Schengen Borders Code (i.e. the “Code”) and so, “in the performance of their duties, fully respect human dignity.”<sup>17</sup> The Code states that border checks should be implemented in “a professional and respectful manner and be proportionate to the objectives pursued.”<sup>18</sup> However, the testimonies and injuries our field teams hear and see make it clear that this is not the case.

## Pushbacks by International Police and Frontex

In this report, we raised the issue of increased presence of international police personnel and Frontex. In the last few months, we have repeatedly come in contact with individuals who were apprehended, physically assaulted and pushed back from Hungary to Serbia by international authorities as in the following testimony from the 28th January.

<sup>17</sup> Schengen Borders Code, Article 7, accessible at: [https://lexparency.org/eu/32016R0399/ART\\_7/](https://lexparency.org/eu/32016R0399/ART_7/)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid



The Respondent, along with a family with three children, was stopped and pushed back from Hungary by Frontex officers, Czech officers and Hungarian Officers. The group was apprehended approximately 3.5 hours after crossing the border. They were forced to lay on the ground and were physically assaulted. When the Respondent tried to lift his head up, he was stopped by the officers through intensified beating and kicking. The respondent identified at least two Frontex officers by the light-blue arm-band and a shoulder patch with the Frontex logo, and stated that, “the Frontex people, they were the ones who kicked and punched, the Hungarian police didn’t, but they did. They were dressed in dark blue, bullet-proof, walkie-talkie and everything.” The group, including the children, were reportedly searched by the Czech officers.<sup>19</sup>

The following testimony from the 7th March, also reports the involvement of Czech police officers during a pushback.

A group of 10 people from Afghanistan, including 4 women and 3 minors, were arrested by Czech police and beaten by Hungarian officers on Hungarian territory. The respondent reported that the transit group was spotted by a drone 5km into Hungary, soon after which Hungarian and Czech police arrived. The officers released muzzled dogs on the group and apprehended them. The Hungarian officers sprayed them with pepper spray and beat some of them with a baton while forcing them to stay on their knees. After some time, the group were then returned to Serbia.<sup>20</sup>

Both testimonies evidence the complicity and involvement of international police officers in the beatings of people on the move, and illegal pushbacks into Serbia.

## Physical Violence

The following report evidences the continuation of inhumane and degrading treatment of people on the move at the hands of the Hungarian authorities when being pushed back into Serbia. The following testimony given by a Moroccan woman regarding a pushback on the 22nd February is an example of the standardise practice.

After being apprehended in Hungary, shortly after crossing the border, the respondent reported that the officers undressed the men of the transit group, cut their clothes and made a rope out of them. After that the men in the group were beaten by the officers with an iron stick, and then used the rope out of clothes to tie the group by their hands. The respondent describes that the group were then forced to walk for over 3 hours tied up while being pushed, degraded and provoked. Then they were then pushed back into Serbian territory.<sup>21</sup>

## Chain Pushbacks

Although reports such as the following have been heard of along other Western Balkan routes, this is the first that this has been reported to our field teams. Chain pushbacks are extremely problematic in that they evidence multiple violations of an individual's access to asylum procedures.

On 4th March 2023, a group of 7 Moroccan men were chain pushbacked from Austria to Serbia via Hungary. The respondent reported that the group entered Austria by car and were stopped by Austrian police in the village of Burg. They were taken to a police station where they were fingerprinted, photographed, and given papers to sign without an explanation or translator provided to them, despite asking for it. The respondent recalls that the group was then taken across the Hungarian border in a van where they were handed over to Hungarian officers, and again fingerprinted and photographed. They were then taken to another police station in Hungary where they were held for approximately an hour together with one Afghan man, who was reportedly pushed back from France. They were then transported by bus to the Serbian border and pushed back to Serbia through a gate in the border fence.

This procedure denies asylum seekers the right to seek international protection and constitutes a violation of Article 4 of Protocol 4 ECHR: prohibition of the collective expulsion of aliens.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> BVMN Report collected by No Named Kitchen, 'February 22 2023'; Roszke, Serbia; Read full testimony here: <https://staging.borderviolence.eu/testimonies/they-undressed-them-beat-them-with-an-iron-stick-and-tied-them-with-the-clothes-that-they-were-wearing/>

<sup>22</sup> Protocol 4, Article 4 ECHR, accessible at: [https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide\\_Art\\_4\\_Protocol\\_4\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_4_Protocol_4_ENG.pdf)

# LIVING CONDITIONS:

## in Serbia

The following section details the ongoing harassment, abuse, and discrimination experienced by people on the move in Serbia at the hands of both Serbian and foreign EU authorities.

### Slowdown in Evictions

In December 2022 and January 2023, our team reported that Serbian authorities have taken a systematic approach towards evicting people on the move in informal settlements. Nearly all the informal settlements we visit have been evicted every one to two weeks, involving heavily armed police units forcefully taking as many people as they can to official camps and destroying the living spaces (e.g., breaking stoves vital to provide warmth at night) and personal belongings of people on the move in the process (see photos below).

**While the frequency of evictions has decreased in February and March, the violent and dehumanising nature of these operations has not.** People on the move continue to report on aggressive tactics of destruction and intimidation during evictions. Practices like cutting up informal shelters (e.g., tarps and tents) and damaging essential belongings (e.g., stoves, cell phones) are common. Some people on the move also disclosed that they endured police beatings in the process.



Person on the move share wounds after an eviction caused by excessive kicking from police officers

Evictions ultimately end with people on the move strategically taken away to remote camps 3-6 hours away to the East, South, and West of Serbia to reduce transit at EU's external borders.

**Our team has noticed some slight changes to eviction approaches in the past two months.** First, evictions can now occur multiple times a day for one location. In some instances, our field teams have observed that authorities would return after an eviction in the morning to apprehend those who avoided being caught previously, and then bring them to camps. Second, there are increased police controls and surveillance between evictions. Many informal settlements receive daily visits from Frontex and Serbian authorities in which officers would count the number of people currently living in these settlements and ask questions about why they choose not to stay in camps.



Informal settlements pictured after an eviction,  
February 2023

Lastly, foreign authorities are now involved in the eviction process, most notably German and Italian Frontex officers. Through our team's conversations with people on the move, we have heard multiple stories of German Frontex officers being physically violent with people and damaging the informal settlements. While Frontex have publicly disclosed its operations in Serbia, it is unclear if partaking in evictions is within the scope of practice for these officers. Most importantly, both direct and indirect harassment and violence towards people on the move is unacceptable and unquestionably a violation of Frontex code of conduct.<sup>23</sup>



Informal settlements pictured after an eviction,  
February 2023

<sup>23</sup> Frontex, 'Code of Conduct,' accessible at: [https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/Frontex\\_Code\\_of\\_Conduct.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/Frontex_Code_of_Conduct.pdf)

## Corruption, Bribery, and Theft by Serbian Authorities

As highlighted in our previous Advocacy Reports (available at [collectiveaidngo.org](http://collectiveaidngo.org)), people on the move frequently share experiences of discrimination and abuse from Serbia state authorities. Our field teams have collected numerous Internal Violence Reports in the past two months documenting the widespread and common abuses perpetrated by Serbian authorities in areas along the Northern Serbian borders towards people on the move.

**Bribery amongst the Serbian police officers appears widespread.** People on the move reported being apprehended by Serbian police and being asked to pay a bribe in order not to be arrested and taken to the police station. Some testimonies illustrate police officers acted with physical violence against those not being able to pay.

**Theft of money and phones has also been frequently reported.** According to some people on the move, police officers would sometimes confiscate phones and then request money in exchange to get them back. Additionally, our field teams consistently receive reports from people on the move about police officers destroying or stealing personal belongings such as: phones, clothes, medicines, tents, and other essential items for survival. These tactics are known to be committed not only during evictions, but also during random visits to informal settlements and facilities (e.g., grocery stores) that people on the move frequently visit.

The following are just a few exemplary reports taken in the past two months:

- ➔ Four young Palestinian men were stopped by the Serbian police during a taxi ride (i.e., not for border crossing purposes). Refusing to give all their money to the police officers as was asked by them, the men were taken to the police station. They were held there for several hours in which they had to give their personal information and fingerprints. They were finally released with an official order from the authorities to leave Serbia within 30 days.
- ➔ An Afghan man reported that he was apprehended by the Serbian police in a taxi while on the way to the hospital. He had to pay them a bribe in order not to be arrested. This led to continued fear of accessing medical care as he did not have more money to pay further bribes.
- ➔ A Syrian man reported that Serbian police officers stole all his personal belongings during an eviction at the informal settlement where he was staying. He reported they stole his medicine, clothes, tent, and phone. Thus, he could not maintain contact with his children back in his home country.

These testimonies only provide a snapshot of Serbia authorities' ongoing corrupt behaviour which impedes individuals' mobility and access to public services, creating an overall environment of hostility towards people on the move. While the rampant nature of bribery and theft aims to deter people from crossing through Northern Serbia into the EU, these methods are not effective interventions to address forced migration and only serve to violate basic human rights of individuals seeking safety.

# CONCLUSIONS:

Final thoughts from the field

**The international focus on Northern Serbia has significantly increased over February and March 2023, with the Serbian-Hungarian border being featured heavily in EU policy discussions and the intensification of foreign police officers on the ground.** We have already seen the detrimental effects this has in practice, with international officers contributing to the systematic violation of individual's physical and legal rights. The newly founded Frontex presence on both sides of the border therefore gives reason for grave concern for the rights and wellbeing of people transiting through Serbia at present and in the future.

**Meanwhile, to appease the international interest of externalising the EU's borders, Serbia continues to repress people on the move.** The structural neglect allows for a lack of accountability, of which the Serbian authorities take advantage. This results in people on the move going missing, being forced to pay bribes, and having to sleep in unlivable camps. To add to the repression of people on the move, there is no realistic mechanism by which individuals can seek a justiciable remedy.

**The developments in pushback practices involving more international actors is another growing area of concern.** It is likely the chain pushback from Austria is not the first, and will more than likely not be the last. With the number of crossings steadily increasing, it is probable that violent pushback testimonies involving international officers will also escalate leaving people on the move exposed to more sophisticated and cruel border regimes. We will continue to monitor these harmful border practices and domestic mistreatment of people in order to highlight the real consequences of border policies and macro-political decisions on the ground.

# Appendix 1: The Authors

## **Medical Volunteers International**

Medical Volunteers International (MVI) is a grassroots NGO based in Hamburg with projects across the Balkan route. We have been working in Northern Serbia since March 2022. We provide health education to people on the move, help with their medical needs and facilitate people's access to the Serbian healthcare system.

To connect with MVI in Northern Serbia, please contact: [advocacy-serbia@medical-volunteers.org](mailto:advocacy-serbia@medical-volunteers.org).

## **Collective Aid**

Collective Aid is a grassroots NGO committed to bringing dignity and care to refugees and other displaced people across Europe. Our organisation currently works in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and France facilitating showers, clothes & washing services, providing food, safe water, and essential material aid. We have been working in Northern Serbia since 2019 and have provided thousands of people seeking safety in Europe with countless amounts of vital material aid and hygiene solutions.

To connect with Collective Aid in Northern Serbia, please contact: [subotica@collectiveaidngo.org](mailto:subotica@collectiveaidngo.org).

## Appendix 2: Methodology

Our methodology comprises several data collection approaches to obtain detailed and accurate information which inform the content of this report.

### **Border and Internal Violence Testimony Collection**

Our organisations leverage close social contacts with people on the move to monitor pushbacks and violence at the Hungarian and Romanian borders. Our field volunteers are trained in violence reporting and testimony collection by the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) to document incidents at the borders and within Serbia. When individuals decide to share stories of pushbacks and/or encounters with authorities (i.e., both violent and non-violent), one of the volunteers will collect their testimony and document any injuries they have. There are two standardised questioning frameworks for the interview structure which blends hard data collection (e.g., dates, geo-locations, officer descriptions, photos of injuries / medical reports) with open narratives of the abuse.

### **Medical Conversations**

We come into daily contact with a large number of people on the move, sometimes exceeding 120 patients per day. A member of the team will offer and explain to the patient that they can give a report about their experience. Speaking specifically about medical issues not only corroborates the border violence testimonies that are given but the number of medical concerns that we see far exceeds the number of testimonies taken which provides a more accurate sense of the extent of the violence being experienced in Northern Serbia.

### **Joint Organisational Observations**

There are several humanitarian, legal, and advocacy organisations that monitor the conditions of people on the move across Northern Serbia such as: Collective Aid, No Name Kitchen, and Medical Volunteers International, to name a few. These organisations meet on a regular basis to share and validate observations, trends, and incidents in the field which increases the number of data points in our analysis and enhances the accuracy of information provided in this report.

### **Secondary Resources**

This report is also informed by secondary research across a variety of channels, including: government statistics, non-governmental organisation databases, quarterly reports, and reporting from Serbian and European media outlets.