

The violence is in the system

A statement on the recent rise in violent incidents affecting people on the move in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

Words by Poppy Groves and Sara Chianchiano

Over the past two months, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia have witnessed a deeply troubling surge in violence targeting people on the move. This escalation has claimed the lives of as many as nine people in Serbia and two in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with others severely injured.

The border regime, engineered by nation-states and legitimised by European institutions in defence of Fortress Europe, has no limits when it comes to inflicting suffering. National borders are not simply lines on a map. They are active instruments of violence, deployed against specific social groups in service of an imperialist and colonial order. Their reach extends far beyond the separation of two neighbouring states. The people who have lost their lives at the EU's geographical and ideological margins embody the dehumanisation and arbitrary fates endured by all people on the move. Their deaths reverberate outward: the grief and trauma they leave behind are carried by loved ones thousands of kilometres away.

Identifying responsibility for these violent acts carries even greater weight when we resist generalisations and stigmatisation. What we are witnessing is not random criminality. These are the fatal consequences of the criminalisation of freedom of movement.

Collective Aid stands with and amplifies the demands of Klikaktiv in Serbia:

- that competent institutions provide the public with accurate, complete and responsible information
- that media outlets report in compliance with ethical standards, drawing a clear distinction between criminal acts and the position of migrants as victims of violence and insecurity

These demands must extend beyond Serbian organisations, institutions and borders.

The border regime sustains itself through the invisibilisation of people: not only those who have lost their lives, but those who are still moving. To denounce this system is also to resist the erosion of empathy corroding European societies, at a moment when even the mass killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians has not produced a coordinated reckoning with the oppressive and discriminatory logic of border regimes and the nation-state system that enables them.

A note on numbers

Inconsistency in reporting and difficulty establishing precise figures are not incidental failures. They are an inherent expression of the border regime's violence. Secrecy, fear and invisibility shape how people are forced to live, and how their realities are recorded or erased. Every person affected deserves more than to be reduced to a statistic or overlooked in the count. This is why we report at the highest end of verified figures rather than the lowest, and why we will continue to name what is happening for what it is.

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