

# URGENT CALL TO ACTION!

## THOUSANDS OF MIGRANTS STRANDED IN BOSNIAN BORDER WITH NO SHELTER, FOOD OR WATER AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF LIPA CAMP

Nearly all infrastructure at the Lipa Emergency Tent Camp, which housed about 1,400 migrants and was located in northwestern Bosnia Herzegovina has been destroyed by a fire on December 23.<sup>1</sup> This number is in addition to some 1,500 migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees – including women and children – stranded in squats and forest camps nearby. **With the devastation, the overall number of people in dire need of assistance has swelled to almost 3,000, according to IOM.**<sup>2</sup>

Plans to relocate the migrants temporarily to a closed facility in central Bihac have prompted protests by residents. Left without a solution, refugees and asylum-seekers put down cardboards on the floor and set up improvised barriers for privacy inside the only standing tent at the Lipa camp. Many of them took shelter in improvised tents made with bin bags, in freezing hoods nearby. Some people held their wet feet above the small fires lit outside to warm up, while others wrapped up tight in blankets for warmth. Many only had sneakers to wear in the snow.<sup>3</sup>

Human rights groups have documented violations by Croatian authorities over the years, including severe beatings and sexual assault of refugees and migrants. Women and minors have not been spared from the violence.

A joint statement<sup>4</sup> issued on Saturday by multiple aid organisations including the Danish Refugee Council, the UNHCR and the IOM, urged authorities to find an alternative solution immediately. **“The structures still existing at the location are unsafe and at risk of collapsing, as snowfalls continue. With no heating at the site, frostbite, hypothermia and other severe health problems are already being reported by those stranded at the location,”** the statement said. “It is up to the authorities to provide minimum protection for those stranded outside reception centres in deteriorating winter conditions. This includes those stranded at the Lipa location but also the estimated 2,000 others, forced to try and survive in abandoned buildings and makeshift camps.<sup>5</sup>

**While it is key that local authorities find safe and protective alternative solutions, immediate assistance is crucial.** Thousands of lives are now at immediate risk. Action is needed immediately!

**Defence for Children International Italy is partnering with IPSIA<sup>6</sup>, an independent civil-society NGO, operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1997, which is providing support on sight. An ad-hoc bank account has been set and all funds will be used to provide vital supplies, including warm clothes, sleeping bags, food and hygiene kits so that these thousands of people stranded at the location of the former Lipa can survive the freezing winter temperatures.**

“We ask all citizens to concretely express their solidarity at the beginning of this new year” explains Pippo Costella Director of Defence for Children Italy “This is an urgent and immediate action to protect the lives and the rights of many people together with a way to reaffirm our open perspective, beyond any border”.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1080852>

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1080852>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/26/we-will-die-hundreds-of-migrants-freezing-in-bosnia-camp>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bih.iom.int/pbn/joint-press-statement>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/26/we-will-die-hundreds-of-migrants-freezing-in-bosnia-camp>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ipsia-acli.it/it/>