

Hundreds of migrants freezing in Bosnia camp



Aid organizations urge for a solution as migrants stranded by Croatian border face cold with no facilities or heating.

Lipa, December 27 (RHC)-- Hundreds of migrants have been stranded in a squalid, burned-out tent camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina as heavy snow fell in the country and winter temperatures suddenly dropped. Migrants at the Lipa camp in northwest Bosnia wrapped themselves in blankets and sleeping bags on Saturday to protect against the biting winds in the region, which borders European Union member

Croatia.

A fire earlier this week destroyed much of the camp near the town of Bihac that already was harshly criticised by international officials and aid groups as being inadequate for housing refugees and migrants.

Despite the fire, Bosnian authorities have failed to find new accommodations for the migrants at Lipa, leaving nearly 1,000 people stuck in the cold, with no facilities or heat, eating only meagre food parcels provided by aid groups.

“Snow has fallen, sub-zero temperatures, no heating, nothing,” the International Organization for Migration’s chief of mission in Bosnia, Peter Van Der Auweraert, tweeted. “This is not how anyone should live. We need political bravery and action now.”

A joint statement issued on Saturday by multiple aid organisations including the Danish Refugee Council, the United Nations Refugee Agency and the UN Migration 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 make-shift camps. “Failing to act with the utmost urgency will put lives at risk.”

The EU has warned Bosnia that thousands of migrants face a freezing winter without shelter, and it has urged the country’s bickering politicians to set aside their differences and take action.

On Saturday, migrants crowded at the camp to receive water and food provided by Bosnia’s Red Cross as police sought to maintain order. Some migrants wore face shields to protect them from coronavirus. “We are living like animals. Even animals are living better than us!” said a man from Pakistan who identified himself only by his first name, Kasim. “If they [do] not help us, we will die, so please help us.”

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