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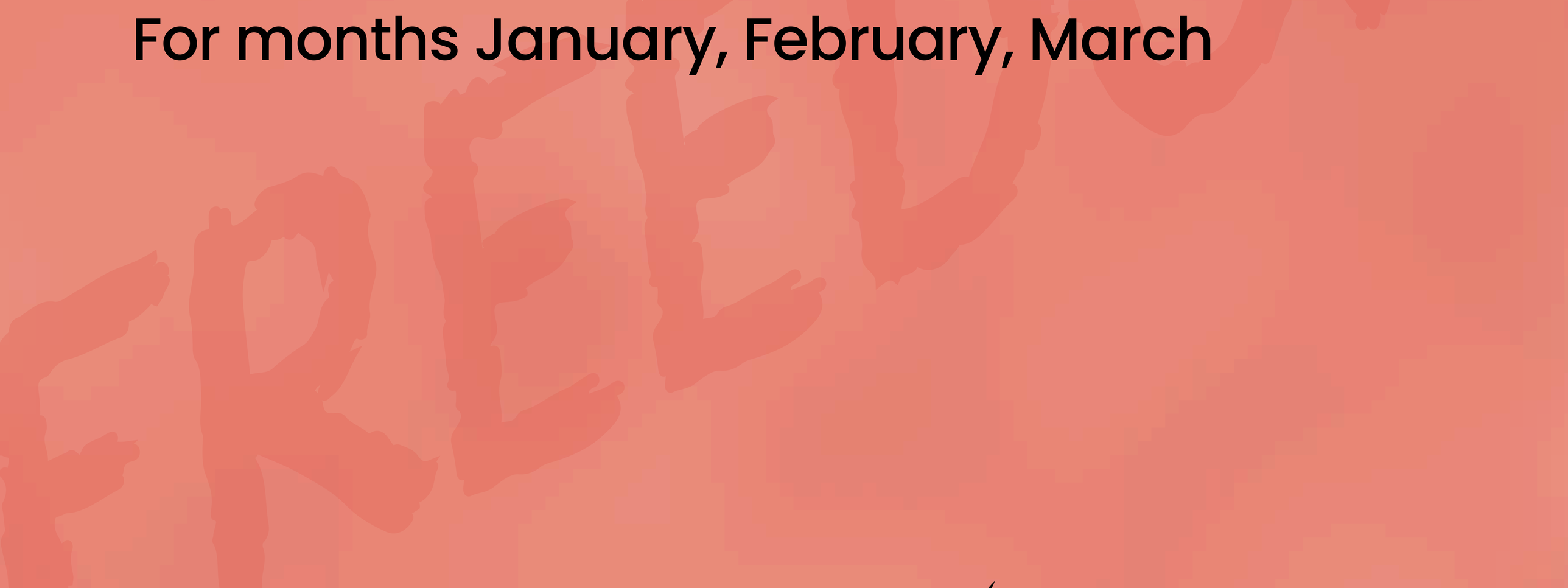
Quarterly report

For months January, February, March



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List of Abbreviations

BiH Bosna i Hecegovina
EU European Union
IOM International Organization of Migrations
NFI Non Food Items
PoM People on the Move
SFA/SPS Service for Foreign Affairs / Službe za Poslove sa Strancima
TRC Temporary Reception Centre
AC Asylum Center
UASC Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child
USK Una Sana Kanton
WB Western Balkan
EU Pact European Pact on Migration and Asylum

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Methodology

This report was built through a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative sources of information.

Formal qualitative data were collected through a systematic review of local and international media outlets, articles, and essays focusing on issues relevant to our solidarity work and the broader context of migration in BiH, the Western Balkans, and the European Union. These insights were complemented by informal information gathered through exchanges with key actors, sources, and people on the move, providing insight into individual experiences and complementing the broader analysis.

Quantitative data were also collected in our space to support the analysis, including the number of individuals accessing our space, disaggregated by country of origin; the number of NFIs distributed; and the services provided. In addition, some quantitative figures derive from official data provided by IOM and the Service for Foreigners' Affairs, particularly regarding the number of people registered in temporary reception centres or recorded as entering the country. These data are often sourced from IOM's weekly and monthly situational reports, although other sources may also be referenced where relevant. It is important to note that attendance data may include repeat visits, as individuals accessing the space multiple times are counted more than once. Furthermore, NFI distribution figures should not be interpreted as a direct measure of needs, as they may be influenced by stock availability; items may appear under-distributed due to shortages rather than a lack of demand.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that migration as a phenomenon is inherently difficult to track with precision, as transit movements and flows are often partially invisible and elude comprehensive statistical capture.

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Summary

This report provides an overview of migration in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first quarter of 2026, covering January, February, and March. During the first quarter of 2026, a total of 770 individuals accessed our Daily Center, confirming the continued relevance of our services. Over the same period, we distributed more than 5,000 Non-Food Items (NFIs) and hygiene products, responding to both urgent and ongoing needs of people on the move. Kompas 071's consistent visitor numbers confirm its essential role as a reliable support system, particularly in winter, when access to basic items is most critical. The distribution focused primarily on essential items such as warm clothing, sleeping bags, hygiene products, and other materials necessary to cope with the harsh conditions PoM face while transiting to Bosnia.

The winter season proved particularly severe, significantly affecting the path of PoM. Many individuals faced serious risks during border crossings, with frostbite becoming an increasingly common consequence. Additionally, cases of people getting lost in remote areas while avoiding the police were reported. To address these conditions, we worked to maintain a safe and warm environment in our space.

The migration management context underwent significant changes this quarter. With the recent closure of the Ušivak TRC (for families and minors near Sarajevo), building on the earlier closure of Borići TRC (in Bihać), the operational environment has rapidly transformed. These developments are redefining how people on the move are supported and managed, likely foreshadowing future regional trends. This volatile situation has created considerable uncertainty and disorientation for our team, requiring greater effort in informal information-gathering, coordination, and networking to stay informed and adjust our strategies.

The coming months mark a period of significant transformation for Kompas. Thanks to the support of one of our donors, we are establishing a new Research and Advocacy program. This crucial development expands our scope beyond direct service provision, and we are currently focused on building the necessary operational, structural, and human resource capacities to support this expansion.
In parallel, we aim to strengthen our internal capacity through targeted capacity-building initiatives. This will allow our team to refresh and update our skills, ensuring that we remain effective, responsive, and aligned with people's changing needs.
Considering the expected changes in national migration management (also influenced by European Union policies), we are taking steps toward better communication with other relevant actors.

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General Context in Western Balkans / EU

Our concerns persist this quarter, as we anticipate the implementation of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum by June 2026. Even before its official adoption, the situation on the ground appears to be evolving in ways that reflect the Pact's future directives, creating uncertainty.

A primary concern is Frontex's growing reach in the region. Agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina were established in June 2025, leading to the deployment of forces along the country's borders since winter. On paper, this cooperation aims to harmonize border control with European standards and to counter terrorism and irregular migration. However, this development remains a major concern for us and for civil society organizations working on the ground. Frontex has a controversial reputation regarding respect for human rights, and its growing presence represents yet another step toward the further externalization of European borders.

This externalization process is not limited to the agency’s deployment but is also reflected in the broader direction of EU migration policies. Recent EU decisions on “safe countries” and the proposed EU Return Regulation are expected to significantly weaken asylum protections. Along with other civil society organizations, we argue that these reforms form part of a wider EU strategy to externalize migration management, shifting responsibility for asylum procedures and returns to third countries through mechanisms such as so-called “return hubs.” These measures are likely to introduce a more coercive deportation system, including expanded detention and the transfer of individuals to facilities outside the EU.

In this context, the Western Balkans could be included in the list of “safe third countries.” The Pact introduces updated definitions of “Safe Countries of Origin” and “Safe Third Countries,” with the stated aim of accelerating asylum procedures. In practice, however, these changes risk reducing access to legal assistance and limiting the possibility of a fair, individualized assessment, making it easier for claims to be rejected or deemed inadmissible if applicants are considered able to seek protection elsewhere.

Further concerns arise from the proposed Return Regulation, introduced in March 2026, which seeks to standardize and expedite return procedures across the EU. It also expands surveillance through interoperable databases, increasing data tracking and collection. Critics warn that such measures could undermine fundamental rights, including protection against refoulement, while weakening individual procedural safeguards.

Overall, the evolving context in the Western Balkans reflects a broader EU strategy increasingly oriented toward deterrence and externalization, raising serious questions about the future of asylum rights and human rights protections at Europe's borders. In practical terms, this approach risks deepening the limbo for POM, who may be repeatedly rejected at the EU's external borders and redirected to third countries (potentially to an even greater extent than is already being observed today). The consequences for individuals cannot be understood only through a human rights lens. Indeed, prolonged delays along migration routes can inflict severe psychological distress. Uncertainty, repeated displacement, and the absence of stable prospects intensify stress and anxiety, eroding mental well-being.

For the moment, along the Western Balkans route, there has been, according to Frontex official data, an alleged 42% decrease in so-called "illegalized" border crossings when comparing 2025 and 2024. The reported decrease is attributed to strengthened security measures and closer cooperation of local Police forces with Frontex. However, this reduction could be illusory, as restricting transit often renders flows invisible and boosts reliance on informal and smuggling networks. Furthermore, this decline in data along the route may be explained by a disconnection between entry points and onward movement. While arrivals at the EU's external borders have increased, this trend is not reflected further along the Western Balkan route. At Kompas, our observations indicate no substantial reduction in overall movement. Rather, we are witnessing a clear diversification across countries of origin, transit routes, and ultimate destinations.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that we are increasingly hearing of people relying on the voluntary return programs (AVRR) offered by IOM within TRCs in BiH. What is particularly relevant to us is the reasoning behind these decisions: individuals often explain that their choice to return to their country of origin is driven by rising route costs. In particular, the need to pay facilitators to avoid violent pushback and remain less visible makes the journey financially unsustainable for many.

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General Context in Bosnia and Herzegovina / Sarajevo

According to the IOM situational reports, monthly arrivals to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first quarter of 2026 were as follows:
January: 881
February: 1,249
March: 1,343

While these figures remain lower than those of the peak years of the Balkan Route, they represent an increase over the same period in 2025 (approximately 600 arrivals in January and February and around 900 in March). This confirms that Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to play a significant role as a transit country along the route.

According to the IOM Migrant Mobility Reports, the majority of entries occur through the eastern border with Serbia. This aligns with testimonies collected from people accessing Kompas services: many report entering through eastern Bosnia, crossing the dangerous Drina River, and moving onward toward western border areas, while transiting through Sarajevo. Montenegro remains an alternative entry point, though it appears to be used less frequently.

While exit points from Bosnia along the Croatian border are diversified, most crossing attempts originate from Una-Sana Canton. Individuals often transit through the Lipa TRC before making these attempts. Additionally, crossing attempts have been reported in other areas, including Gradiška, Brod, and the Herzegovina region.

A major structural change in migration governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is linked to the operationalization of cooperation with Frontex. As previously mentioned, after the agreement was signed in June 2025, joint operations and deployments began at the end of 2025. This represents a shift toward increased EU involvement in border management within BiH territory.

Indeed, in February, the European Union and several Member States (including France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands) increased their material support to the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Mostar by providing equipment (such as drones and surveillance systems) and training programs.

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In March, EU Ambassador Luigi Soreca visited Frontex officers deployed at the Bijača Border Crossing, where they operate in support of the national border police. This support is part of broader initiatives such as EU-funded projects aimed at strengthening operational and technical capacities, improving border management, and “aligning” Bosnia and Herzegovina with “EU standards” in the context of the accession process. The Bijača border crossing is one of the most technologically advanced customs in the country at the moment.

Despite the coldest and most dangerous periods, people continued their attempts to cross the border. What truly alarmed us were the accounts from our visitors and information from Croatian activists - numerous groups called for rescue after becoming lost and stranded in the snow. Cases of severe frostbite and subsequent amputations were frequently reported until early February.

Simultaneously, visitors to our space frequently shared harrowing accounts of individuals who had drowned in rivers or gone missing for weeks after attempting the crossing. Though the media sometimes reported fatalities along this route, it was only through the tireless commitment of solidarity activists that some of those who did not survive ultimately found rest in a grave. Tragically, many remain unnamed. On January 27, at the cemetery of Loznica in Serbia, on the banks of the Drina River, new graves and monumental headstones were placed for 28 refugees who in recent years lost their lives while attempting to cross the river. They join countless others in the small cemeteries scattered between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In February 2026, the migration management landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina changed. On 28 February, national authorities, in coordination with IOM, closed the Ušivak TRC (Family and Minors Camp) without prior public notice. In fact, Kompas became aware of this only through informal rumors three weeks before the closure, and it is likely that even the staff working within the facility were similarly uninformed or only partially aware of the situation.

Families, unaccompanied minors, and women were transferred to the Lipa TRC and the Delijaš Asylum Centre. These transfers were conducted with significant deficiencies, lacking proper individual assessments, informed consent, or clear communication about rights and procedures – both for the individuals being transferred and for other actors on the ground. For unaccompanied minors, these transfers occurred without a clear definition of how legal guardians would be involved.

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The current receiving facilities in Lipa and Delijaš pose a significant concern.TRC Lipa continues to struggle with structural limitations, especially concerning hygiene and access to healthcare. Meanwhile, the Delijaš Asylum Centre suffers from geographical isolation, located over 40 km from Sarajevo, and poor connectivity to essential services and public transport. The closure of Ušivak has drastically reduced reception capacity in Sarajevo, leaving vulnerable individuals more exposed to risks and ambiguous procedures.

Operational challenges within reception facilities were also reported during the same period. It appears from rumors that the Red Cross, responsible for hygiene services, had to strike after a lengthy period without payment. As a result, the residents of the TRCs suffered the most.

At the same time, access to protection and legal support appears to have deteriorated. UNHCR has significantly reduced its operational capacity in the country. As legal aid is largely provided through its partner organization, Vaša Prava, which has also experienced staff reductions, this has resulted in a noticeable decline in available legal assistance. This trend has been consistently reported by individuals accessing Kompas services, who describe increasing difficulties in obtaining legal information and support and who ask for help that we cannot currently provide.

Field observations and testimonies consistently highlight persistent pushbacks and insufficient outreach. While SFA and IOM provide outreach services to individuals on the Bosnian side of the border, their activities are limited to daylight hours, ending at 4 pm. This leaves people highly vulnerable, especially given our extensive experience showing that pushbacks frequently occur after dark.

Croatia has recently announced plans to build a new migrant reception center near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the site of the former military airbase of Željava, not far from key crossing points along the Balkan route. The initiative is presented as a way to expand national reception capacity in response to ongoing migration movements.

The announcement has triggered notable opposition at the local and cross-border levels. In Croatia, residents of areas such as Korenica have expressed concerns about the potential impact on tourism, the environment, and local infrastructure. The future construction site is not far from one of the most important Croatian tourist attractions, such as Plitvice Lakes.

Public demonstrations also saw the participation of some residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Una-Sana Canton, local authorities have similarly voiced strong opposition, with the canton's Prime Minister publicly supporting protests and calling for institutional intervention on both the Bosnian and Croatian sides.

As already reported in our previous reports and other media, this winter a citizen of Bangladesh and one from Sierra Leone died at the Lipa camp, most likely due to a lack of adequate medical support.

Korenica, which is not far from that area, is particularly sensitive in this context due to its proximity to the planned site and its previous association with violent practices of migration control. The area became infamous in past years for informal detention practices ongoing within a local police station, where there are documented cases of ill-treatment and allegations of torture against PoM.

In this context, the planned reception center in Željava Air Base risks becoming more than a simple expansion of accommodation capacity.

Simultaneously, recent field testimonies collected at Kompas reveal that informal detention and mobility-control tactics persist today. Individuals on the move consistently report being detained for multiple days in undisclosed locations near the Croatian border. Following these detentions, they are often returned en masse to Bosnia and Herzegovina, frequently to Bihać, through coordinated bus transfers, consistent with existing bilateral agreements between Bosnia and Croatia. These accounts suggest the continued use of informal or semi-formal practices of containment and readmission along the border.

3. Beneficiaries and Reach

Before presenting the figures, it is important to clarify how we understand and use them. In concrete terms, our work has focused on providing direct support through distributions and basic services. The numbers help convey the scale and relevance of what we do, but counting alone does not fully capture its meaning. Rather than simply presenting numbers, we prioritize sharing the context and narratives that explain them.

3.1. Total Number of People Reached

Within this broader context, understanding the diversity of the people we encounter is crucial. Our visitors are predominantly "single men" (boys and men over 18 traveling without their families), a composition directly influenced by our proximity to TRC Blažuj, which primarily accommodates this demographic. It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that minors may also reside in the same center. This can occur due to administrative registration errors or their own decision to misrepresent their age, often to avoid separation from traveling siblings or peers. Furthermore, Kompas occasionally provides support to unaccompanied minors.

In February, we received a woman from Uganda and another from Iran. In March, we met a Bosnian mother with her daughter, who were in a very precarious condition. This small number of women and children highlights the presence, even if limited, of family units within our space.

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Behind every person there is a story of a long journey often marked by violence, hardship, and uncertainty, but also by determination and resilience. Despite the many obstacles, people continue to move forward, driven by the hope of building a dignified everyday life. Through distributing essential items and creating a small but welcoming space, we aim to address this need, offering not only material support but also a moment of care and humanity.

In recent months, our open days have allowed us to cultivate humanity and connection with approximately 770 individuals. We created moments of encounter that moved beyond mere assistance, providing brief experiences of dignity and care. Although we understand the importance of being open daily, this remains unachievable at present.

Over the three months, attendance at the space totaled 311 visits in January, 270 in February, and 189 in March, for a total of 770 people across 56 working days.
In January, the main countries of origin were Morocco (100) and Afghanistan (67), followed by Algeria (36), Sudan (35), and Egypt (16). Alongside these, 16 people came from a broader range of backgrounds, including China, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Yemen, highlighting the diversity of trajectories even within a single month.

In February, Afghanistan became the most present country of origin in our space (109), followed by Algeria (47) and Morocco (45). Smaller groups included Iran (12) and Sudan (11), while 10 people came from diverse countries and regions, including Kazakhstan, Uganda, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Kurdistan.

In March, Afghanistan remained the largest group (71), followed by Morocco (27) and Algeria (23). Other nationalities included Palestine (11) and Egypt (9), while 29 people came from a wider range of countries, including Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Yemen, and Russia.

Another alarming report comes from the Croatian area along the border with the Una-Sana Canton (USK). In the spring, the proposal to establish a reception and detention centre in Željava, on the Croatian side of the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, became quite diffused. This should be understood as part of a wider regional framework where the EU Pact and management of migration are, of course, intertwined.

The announced construction of a new facility in Željava, in Croatia's Lika-Senj County, represents a worrying development. While there has been no official public confirmation of the project, Croatian Interior Minister Davor Božinović confirmed its planned construction. The location is not casual: "We followed the logic of building centres where migrants already transit the most, in order to place illegal crossings under stronger police supervision; this ultimately also means a higher level of security for residents."

The project would add to existing facilities, expanding Croatia's capacity to implement the procedures introduced by the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (people arriving irregularly at EU external borders may be subject to border procedures involving identification, asylum processing, and possible detention).

If established, the Željava facility would therefore become part of the operative architecture of the Pact, contributing to a model increasingly based on the containment of mobility before people can access the territory and procedures of the European Union. The project's design, which appears to be based on container structures, would also enable relatively rapid implementation.

However, the project has also generated concerns among local communities on both sides of the border, many of whom are involved in tourism activities or connected to the former Željava military complex, or, more broadly, to natural parks on both sides of the border.

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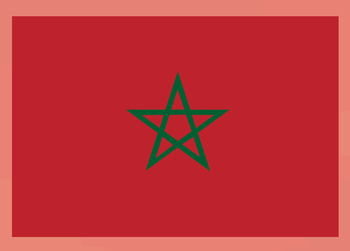
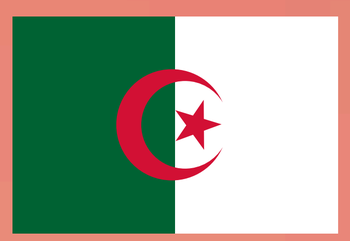
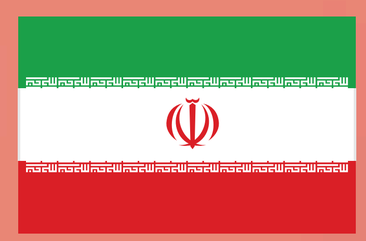
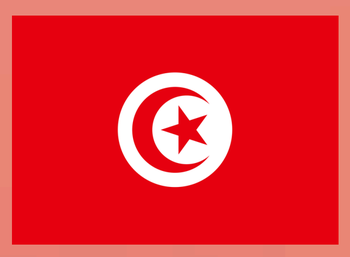
	172	247	
	106	23	
	4	8	
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Showers and laundry provided

Over the three-month period, the provision of essential services and materials remained a central part of the activities carried out at the space.
Access to showers was provided 22 times in January, increased slightly to 26 in February, then returned to 21 in March. Laundry service had 14 uses in January, 17 in February, and 23 in March.

In short, in the first months of the year, access to basic services such as showers and laundry has been an important part of the support provided within the space. Of approximately 770 people, about 69 instances of shower use were recorded, corresponding to roughly 9% of the total. Laundry services were used about 54 times, representing approximately 7% of the total number of people.

It is important to underline that these figures refer to episodes of service provision rather than unique individuals. This means that the same person may have accessed showers or laundry services more than once over the three-month period, so the numbers should be understood as an indication of use rather than a precise count of individual beneficiaries.

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NFIs provided: jackets, hoodies, pants, joggers, long pants, sneakers, etc.

The distribution of non-food items (NFIs) was significant. In January, 1,583 items were provided, followed by 1,406 in February, and 911 in March.

Alongside clothing, hygiene items such as toothpaste, shower gel, and razors were also consistently distributed. These totaled 499 items in January, 431 in February, and 295 in March. Overall, this amounts to 2,082 items distributed in January, 1,837 in February, and 1,206 in March, reflecting the ongoing effort to meet basic needs through practical, immediate support.

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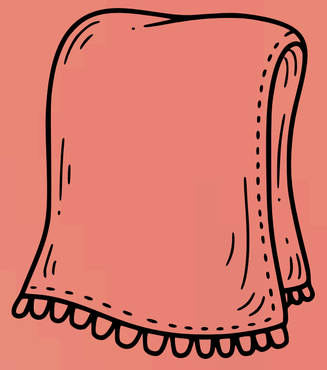

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In addition, we only sporadically distribute small food assistance, depending on the availability of donations. Between February and March, thanks to the long-standing support of our partner association “Catch a Smile”, we distributed more than 200 food packages during the holy month of Ramadan. Each package contained items such as juice, cheese, dried fruit, biscuits, dates, and sweets.

Furthermore, with financial support from friends and solidarity networks, we were able to organize four iftar dinners (one per week), creating moments of sharing and a festive atmosphere among some of our regular guests.

All of this would not have been possible without external financial support, but above all, it relied on the internal efforts of our workers, volunteers, and also friends in transit who contributed actively to these initiatives. A special mention goes to Ismail, a Palestinian cook currently awaiting documentation in Bosnia, who enriched these evenings by preparing meals that nourished both the body and the community.

3.2 Active Days and Volunteers

Our activities in January commenced on the 7th after an initial break and ran consistently until the month's end. Due to weekend closures, we had a total of 18 working days.

In February, we operated for a total of 20 days. In March, however, the number of working days decreased to 18 due to several factors, including national holidays such as Bosnia and Herzegovina's Independence Day, the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, and a two-day internal training session at the end of the month.

If we have been able to keep the space open and bring even a small form of support where much more would be needed, it is thanks to our volunteers at Kompas. Over the three months, the volunteer team changed at different times, ensuring continuity in daily work. In January, Lina and Rebecca supported the activities. In February, the team included Lene, Tom, Lina, Alexandra, and Valery. In March, support came from Linda, Mathieu, and Leo. Their presence has been essential in sustaining the space, both in practical terms and in maintaining the human dimension of the work carried out every day.

3.3 Information Point

At present, Kompas is not in a position to fully map the broader constellation of services that the state, migration management system, and other actors may offer to the POM we meet. In the same way, our role remains limited to directing people, when possible and known, towards services they themselves request or identify as necessary. There are several areas in which we are not directly involved at this stage, including medical and legal support, structured access to information about available services, and housing assistance. As a result, we do not have precise data on how many people over these months had specific needs in these domains. However, in our daily interactions, it has been evident that many people come to us seeking answers precisely in these areas. In particular, requests for access to medical care and legal assistance have been the most frequent, highlighting significant unmet needs that exceed our current capacity to respond.

3.4. Other Programs of Kompas – information & education/research and advocacy updates

During the first three months of 2026, Kompas continued to receive groups and individuals interested in its activities, who visited the center and expressed solidarity and support. In March, one of our colleagues was invited to participate in a roundtable on migration, returns, and solidarity as part of the Slavika Festival, held in Turin from 12 to 15 March. This initiative increased Kompas's visibility with supporters and affirmed our role as a relevant voice providing insights on the Balkan route.

At the end of March, Kompas also hosted an educational session for around 50 Italian students from Verona, in collaboration with the Italian association One Bridge To. This exchange on migration context and solidarity practices was certainly meaningful for the students, but for us at Kompas, it also represented an important opportunity to turn our daily practice into a concrete example and point of reflection on the reality of transit migration.

Conclusion:

This report marks the first publication of 2026 under our new quarterly reporting format, reflecting our intention to provide more consistent and structured monitoring over time. It builds on the continuity of our previous work while adapting to an evolving context along the Balkan route.

Data, information, numbers, and recorded events represent only a small part of our work: tools that help us remain informed and connected with the people who stand close to us and support our efforts. The reality on the ground calls for justice in ways that these documents alone cannot convey or deliver.

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List of sources

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