

ANNUAL FIELD REPORT FOR TC VINOJUG AND TC TABANOVCE

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Author: Angela Siljanoska Shumkoska

Editor: Teodora K Joseva Kostadinovska

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the situation in the Vinojug and Tabanovce Transit Centres for the period January–December 2024. The findings of the report are based on information obtained through regular field visits, systematic monitoring of conditions, as well as direct fieldwork conducted by the field lawyers of the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), who are present on a daily basis in both transit centres.

In preparing this report, the following sources were used: a) data obtained through direct contact and communication with people on the move and asylum seekers; b) monitoring and daily field documentation and cooperation and communication with relevant institutions and organizations engaged in the management of and support for people on the move.

The purpose of this report is to provide a realistic picture of the factual situation on the field, to inform relevant stakeholders and the wider public about the current conditions, challenges, and procedures in the two transit centres, as well as to share statistical data and identified trends. Through this approach, MYLA aims to contribute to informed policy-making, the advancement of the rights of people on the move and the improvement of inter-institutional coordination.

SITUATION IN THE TRANSIT CENTRE VINOJUG (TC VINOJUG)

ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY AND CONDITIONS

TC Vinojug has accommodation capacity for 90 persons, housed in containers. However, some of the containers are not in use, so the actual capacity is 80 persons. Within the Centre, there are also three Rubb hall tents, but they are not used for long-term accommodation. The Centre is equipped with toilets and shower cabins, separated by gender (for men and women).

For each person on the move, three meals per day are provided and both primary and secondary healthcare services are ensured. Free legal aid is also available in relation to the right to international protection, as well as information on assisted voluntary return. Persons accommodated in the Centre have access to dedicated premises where non-formal education is provided for children of preschool and school age. Additionally, free internet access is available, along with a small gym, a recreational room with a TV monitor, a room for sports and vocational activities for adults, as well as programs for language learning and the development of various skills and crafts. A relaxation room and space for social games are also available, as well as a dedicated children's

corner. In the children's corner, children on the move have the opportunity to play and to learn English and mathematics.

FUNCTIONING OF TC VINOJUG

The legal status of the Vinojug Transit Center and of the persons accommodated therein, as well as the actions of the competent authorities, remained legally unregulated throughout 2024. The Center continued to operate without a formal act or standard operating procedures that would regulate the admission and accommodation of persons housed there, as well as their rights and obligations.

Formally, the TC Vinojug is an open transit center where persons are accommodated for humanitarian reasons. However, in practice, the Center often functions as a facility of a closed character, with restricted freedom of movement. Responsibility for the operation and management of the Center lies with the Crisis Management Center (CMC), while the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth (MSPDY) is the institution responsible for accommodating people on the move in the Center. The Ministry of Interior (Mol), namely the Border Police, is responsible for controlling the entry and exit of people on the move to and from the Center, including photographing and fingerprinting them upon initial entry.

Representatives of state institutions, as well as non-governmental and international organizations, are present at TC Vinojug. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) has been present at the Center since 19 April 2023, with a mandate that was initially valid until January 2024.

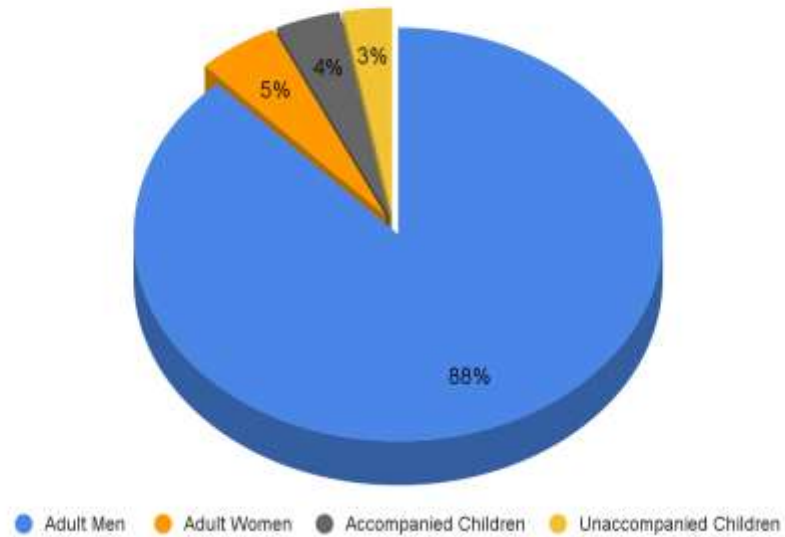
The mandate of FRONTEX has been extended until January 2026. During 2024, four police officers were deployed at the Center, without the presence of external experts, unlike the previous year when mission-based staff were rotated every one to two months. Following the registration of people on the move, which is most often conducted on the basis of an oral statement and less frequently on the basis of a presented document, police officers carry out basic identification. This is followed by screening and profiling of individuals, conducted by FRONTEX representatives.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE ACCOMMODATED IN TC VINOJUG IN 2024 AND IDENTIFIED TRENDS

During 2024, a **total of 4055 people on the move were accommodated in the Center**, the majority of whom originated from Syria (1660), Morocco (545), Egypt (421) and Afghanistan (205).

Most of the accommodated individuals were adult men - 3574, while the number of adult women amounted to 200. During the reporting period, a total of 281 children were accommodated in the Center, of whom 105 were unaccompanied. All unaccompanied children were assigned a legal guardian from the Center for Social Work. Out of the total number of accommodated persons, 103 were families.

Graph number 1: Accommodated men, women and children expressed in % in TC Vinojug



The Transit Center in reality functions as a closed-type facility, therefore, the persons accommodated there do not have the possibility to enter freely. Unlike previous years, as of 2024, people on the move are able to leave the Center voluntarily, without being transported by the police to unofficial points along the border with Greece. However, in practice, accommodated persons are effectively left with two options: either to apply for asylum or to voluntarily proceed toward Greece. Any movement along the Balkan route—north toward Serbia, will again be recorded by the police, and the individuals will be returned to the Center. During the summer period, when the number of transiting persons increased, accommodated individuals were granted permission by the police to move to the city and the nearest shop, with the obligation to return within a specified period of time. Initially, they were accompanied by representatives of the Red Cross and later they were allowed to move independently under the same conditions. In August 2024, one adult man from Afghanistan was struck by an electric shock from a train in Gevgelija.

Table 1: Number of People on the Move Accommodated in the TC Vinojug, by Month and Age

Months	Adult Men	Adult Women	Children – Male	Children – Female	Unaccompanied children – Male	Unaccompanied children – Female
January	514	11	8	0	4	0
February	434	25	10	5	6	1
March	183	28	17	5	5	0
April	130	21	4	2	2	0
May	173	11	1	1	9	0
June	104	8	5	3	5	0

July	123	10	8	3	8	0
August	272	13	4	1	10	1
September	324	9	5	3	7	0
October	496	29	15	7	14	1
November	452	23	22	21	22	0
December	369	12	21	5	12	0
Total	3574	200	120	56	102	3

According to MYLA statistics, during 2024, the **Centre accommodated people on the move from 35 countries.**

Table 2: Total Number of Registered Persons in 2024 at the TC Vinojug, by Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Total number of registered persons in 2024				
Afghanistan	205	Iraq	221	Pakistan	79
Algeria	66	Iran	84	Palestine	76
Bangladesh	9	Yemen	3	Qatar	1
Gambia	9	Cameroon	9	Senegal	7
Ghana	8	China	74	Sierra Leone	31
Guinea	3	Congo	83	Syria	1660
Egypt	421	Kuwait	70	Somalia	2
Eritrea	1	Lebanon	15	Sudan	1
Ethiopia	1	Libya	29	Togo	1
Indonesia	2	Morocco	545	Tunisia	20
India	21	Nepal	98	Turkey	198
		Nigeria	1	Uganda	1

ASYLUM SEEKERS IN TC VINOJUG IN 2024

Out of the total number of persons accommodated in TC Vinojug, 131 persons submitted a request for recognition of the right to asylum in the Republic of North Macedonia. Of the 131 asylum seekers, 84 were adult men, 16 were adult women and 31 were children (8 girls and 23 boys). Out of the total 31 children – asylum seekers, 9 were unaccompanied children. The largest number of asylum seekers come from Syria (28), Morocco (27), and Egypt (21). After submitting their asylum applications, these persons were transported to the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo.

Table 3: Total number of asylum seekers in TC Vinogug for 2024, distributed by month and country of origin.

Countries	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Morocco	0	9	6	0	0	0	2	4	0	4	2	0	27
Tunisia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3
Algeria	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	10
Syria	0	0	6	0	3	0	0	1	6	2	10	0	28
Sierra Leone	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	5
Afghanistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
DR Congo	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	4	21
Egypt	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	6	3	6	1	18
Iran	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	8	0	10
Libya	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cameroon	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total by month	0	11	22	0	3	0	26	11	13	13	27	5	131

ACCESS TO THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE

All persons were granted access to the asylum procedure, regardless of whether they were merely interested or had formally expressed their intention to apply for asylum. However, in the majority of cases, it has been noticed that there have been delays in the registration of asylum applications. These delays have been the result of the absence of a person designated as responsible for organizing the process or from the lack of transportation to transfer applicants from the transit center to the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers. The delay in registration is usually 10 to 14 days.

The MYLA field lawyer was present in the Center on a daily basis and provided a total of 351 legal consultations related to the asylum procedure and the right to apply for asylum in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the statistics, legal assistance was provided to 259 men and 92 women.

ACCESS TO TERRITORY

In 2024, the number of persons on the move who were found to have voluntarily and informally left the center and proceeded towards Greece amounted to 3633.

DETENTION AT THE TC VINOJUG

Persons and children are no longer detained at the TC Vinograd as witnesses in criminal proceedings against smugglers. All individuals found in incidents or involved in criminal offenses are processed under an expedited procedure. In the case of children, a guardian is immediately appointed and they are transported before a public prosecutor in Skopje, after which the guardian makes decisions in accordance with the best interests of the child. As regards to adult witnesses, they are transported before a public prosecutor in Skopje or to the Foreigners' Center in Gazi Baba, Skopje, until the scheduled court hearing.

SITUATION IN THE TRANSIT CENTER TABANOVCE (TC TABANOVCE)

ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY AND CONDITIONS

The Tabanovce Transit Centre has an accommodation capacity of 120 to 150 persons, provided that four persons are accommodated in each container. However, if more than four persons are accommodated per container, the capacity may be expanded to 280–300 persons. The Centre also includes rubbish halls, the use of which may increase the overall accommodation capacity to up to 1,200 persons, however, these facilities are not intended for long-term accommodation. The Centre is equipped with toilets and shower facilities, segregated by sex (for men and women).

No educational or recreational activities are implemented at the TC Tabanovce for the accommodated persons on the move. The Centre does not provide a children's corner, nor are there any children's facilities or equipment available that could be used for activities for the youngest categories of persons.

Each person is provided with three meals per day and both primary and secondary health care are ensured. In addition, free legal aid is available with regard to the right to international protection, as well as information on assisted voluntary return.

FUNCTIONING OF TC TABANOVCE

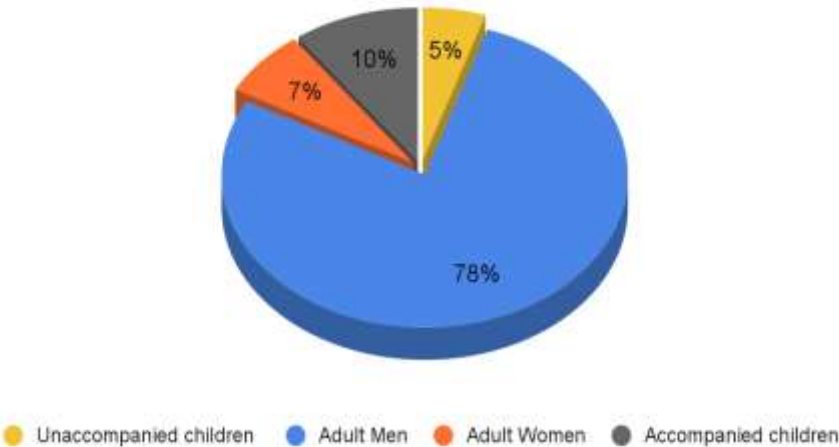
The legal status of the TC Tabanovce and of the persons accommodated therein as well as the conduct of the competent authorities remained legally unregulated throughout 2024. The Centre continued to operate without a formal act or standard operating procedures regulating the manner of admission and accommodation of persons placed therein as well as their rights and obligations.

The Tabanovce TC is an open centre and persons are accommodated therein on humanitarian grounds. As in the Vinojug TC, the Crisis Management Centre is responsible for the operation and management of the Centre, the MSPDY is responsible for the accommodation of persons on the move in the Centre, while the Ministry of Internal Affairs namely the Border Police is responsible for the entry and exit of persons on the move to and from the Centre, as well as for their photographing and fingerprinting upon their initial entry into the Centre. Representatives of state authorities, as well as non-governmental and international organisations are present in the Transit Centre.

PERSONS ON THE MOVE ACCOMMODATED IN TC TABANOVCE IN 2024

During 2024, the total number of persons on the move accommodated in the Centre amounted to 2348, of whom the majority originated from Syria (1464), Iraq (141), Egypt (121) and Afghanistan (113). The majority of accommodated persons on the move were men, numbering 1840, while the number of accommodated adult women amounted to 166. During the reporting period, a total of 343 children were accommodated in the Centre, of whom 107 were unaccompanied. A guardian from the Centre for Social Work was appointed to all unaccompanied children. Out of the total number of accommodated persons, 163 were families.

*Graph Number 2: Accommodated Men, Women and Children
Expressed as % in the Tabanovce TC*



The Transit Centre operates as an open-type facility, allowing accommodated persons to freely enter and exit the Centre under the constant supervision and regulation of representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Although all persons brought to the Tabanovce TC are handed over to the MSPDY with a report and registered as accommodated persons, in practice they rarely remain for a prolonged period of time. Most often, they leave the Centre after one day of stay.

Table 4: Number of Persons on the Move Accommodated in the Tabanovce TC, by Month and Age

Months	Adult Men	Adult Women	Children - male	Children - female	Unaccompanied children
January	206	15	13	2	3
February	267	7	20	2	1
March	121	11	12	2	11
April	81	12	5	5	4
May	79	6	7	3	1
June	81	7	13	9	15
July	112	29	27	7	14
August	61	9	8	2	6
September	136	16	18	13	19
October	259	15	13	4	13
November	280	23	19	18	11
December	160	16	6	8	9
Total	1840	166	161	75	107

According to the statistics of MYLA, during 2024, persons on the move **from 36 countries** were accommodated in the Centre.

Table 5: Total Number of Registered Persons in 2024 in the Tabanovce TC, Distributed by Country of Origin

Country of Origin		Total number of registered persons in 2024	
Yemen	1	India	33
Afghanistan	113	Indonesia	2
Azerbaijan	3	Iraq	141
Algeria	11	Iran	51
Bangladesh	24	Cameroon	7
Gambia	1	China	15
Ghana	3	Congo	53
Guinea	7	Kuwait	20
Egypt	121	Lebanon	3
Eritrea	1	Libya	5
Ethiopia	1	Morocco	51
Israel	1	Nepal	77
		Nigeria	1
		Pakistan	29
		Palestine	53
		Sierra Leone	15
		Syria	1464
		Slovakia	1
		Somalia	3
		Tunisia	4
		Turkey	34
		Total	2349

CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN THE TC TABANOVCE

The situations occurring on the field at the Tabanovce TC are diverse and indicate serious challenges faced by persons on the move and the institutions. The following are some key situations that have been identified:

- **Violent and Illegal Returns from Serbia to North Macedonia (February and June 2024)**

In February and June 2024, multiple cases of violent and illegal returns of persons on the move from Serbia to North Macedonia were registered, without the implementation of formal procedures and in the absence of respect for readmission agreements. In February, over 70 persons from Syria¹ arrived at the Tabanovce TC with visible bodily injuries, reporting that they had been physically and verbally abused, beaten, robbed and stripped to their underwear by the Serbian police. Additionally, they reported that police dogs had been unleashed on them, resulting in some being bitten. In June, a similar trend was observed among 23 persons, (including 8 unaccompanied minors), who reported that they had been forcibly brought to the Macedonian border. Furthermore, five other persons reported being subjected to similar violence, including one person from Afghanistan with visible facial injuries. All persons received medical assistance, and those with more severe injuries were referred for hospital treatment. Among them were individuals with internal bleeding, broken ribs and a fractured nose.

- **Challenges in Handling Persons with Severe Communication Barriers and Unknown Status**

Two specific cases were registered at the Tabanovce TC that complicated standard procedures due to severe communication barriers and the absence of personal data. These involved persons showing signs of cognitive or communication impairments for whom no established protocol exists for identification, care and further processing. The competent institutions noted that the Centre lacks adequate conditions for accommodating such persons and that no clear procedure exists for further action.

The first case concerned a person from Algeria who, despite an extended stay in the Centre, remained completely unable to communicate. The second case involved a 19 year old person from Slovakia, identified as a missing person following the intervention of a social worker and Interpol. Regarding this case, the social worker on site informed the Centre for Social Work of the possibility of appointing a guardian, given the individual's vulnerability.

These cases underscore the urgent need to develop clear procedures and institutional mechanisms for handling persons with cognitive impairments and/or intellectual health challenges, as well as to ensure appropriate care, accommodation and international coordination when necessary.

¹ <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/55402/serbia-police-deny-beating-up-migrants-at-north-macedonia-border>

They also indicate a continuing trend of **violent and illegal returns of persons on the move from Serbia to North Macedonia**, accompanied by serious injuries and inhumane treatment.

- **Need for Immediate Institutional Response in Cases with Potential Risk of Child Abuse**

On 9 January 2024, an eight year old child and a 29 year old man were admitted to the TC Tabanovce after being found outside the Centre by the Red Cross. The adult initially identified himself as the child's father but later stated that he was the child's uncle. During an examination by the IOM and Red Cross medical teams, the adult was diagnosed with scabies, while dermatological changes were observed in the child's genital area, raising suspicion of a sexually transmitted infection.

The case was immediately reported to the National Commission for the Prevention of Human Trafficking and a mobile team was summoned. The child's examination was scheduled two days after their arrival, in the meantime, the child and the adult left the Centre and did not return, making it impossible to assess the potential risk to the child. This case clearly highlights the need for a faster and more effective institutional response, improved coordination and mechanisms for the protection of children at risk, particularly when there are indications of possible violence or human trafficking.

- **Minor child victim of physical and sexual violence**

In February 2024, a group of persons on the move, including seven minor male individuals, was brought to the Tabanovce TC. Upon arrival, a nine year old child, the youngest in the group, stated during a medical examination that he had been a victim of physical and sexual violence. According to his allegations, he was first abused by his cousin (14 years old) and then by other children in the group. Doctors noted bruises on his body, and the child was visibly scared and anxious.

The social worker intervened immediately, was appointed as guardian and informed the Centre for Social Work – Kumanovo. On the same day, the child was transferred to a foster family, where he began showing signs of stabilization, although he continued to exhibit trauma-related reactions, particularly in contact with unfamiliar adult males. A few days later, the child's uncle appeared at the camp intending to take custody. He was informed that written parental consent was required and that the child had been accommodated due to serious indications of abuse.

The prompt response in this case was particularly significant and ensured timely protection of the child.

ASYLUM SEEKERS IN TC TABANOVCE IN 2024

Out of the total number of persons on the move accommodated in the Centre, only seven individuals submitted an application for recognition of the right to asylum in the Republic of North Macedonia, representing a small percentage compared to the overall number of accommodated persons. After submitting their asylum applications, these individuals were transferred to the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo.

All asylum seekers were adult males and the applications were submitted during the first half of 2024.

Table 6: Total Number of Asylum Seekers in Tabanovce TC in 2024, Distributed by Month and Country of Origin

Countries	January	February	March	May	Total by Country:
Syria	2	1	0	0	3
Iraq	1	0	0	1	2
Lebanon	0	0	1	0	1
Pakistan	0	0	0	1	1
Total by Month:	3	1	1	2	7

ACCESS TO THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE

Due to the low number of submitted asylum applications, no significant obstacles to access to the procedure were observed. However, in individual cases, the registration of an application was delayed by one to two days due to the absence of the responsible staff member on duty, required for signing and confirming the application.

The field lawyer from MYLA provided a total of 1308 legal consultations in relation to the asylum procedure and the right to apply for asylum in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the statistics, legal assistance was provided to 1123 men, 128 women and 57 children (39 accompanied and 18 unaccompanied).

ACCESS TO TERRITORY

During conversations with persons on the move accommodated in TC Tabanovce, it was noted that the trend of returning persons on the move to the Greek border from TC Tabanovce by the police has almost ceased. However, in one case, a return by the police was recorded based on information received from other persons on the move. Specifically, in February, one person from Afghanistan reported that police officers randomly selected a group of persons on the move, placed them in a police van and took them away. Three hours after the incident, the persons who remained in the camp and had access to mobile phones received information that the detained individuals were already on the territory of Greece. Accommodated persons indicated that this is not an isolated case but that such practices occur frequently and that they had previously witnessed

similar incidents in which the police apprehend groups of persons on the move and take them to an unknown location.

In June, a person from Afghanistan stated that they were left twice at the entrance of the Centre – the first time for an entire day and the second time for three days – before finally being admitted. These cases indicate arbitrary access and the absence of a clear and consistent procedure for admission to the Centre.

DETENTION IN TC TABANOVCE

During the reporting period, approximately 40 cases of detention of persons on the move in TC Tabanovce were recorded. The detentions involved both individual and group cases from Afghanistan, China, Syria and Nepal, including women and minors. Among the detained persons, three unaccompanied minor male children from Syria were registered. According to available information, these persons on the move most often attempt to transit through the territory of North Macedonia to Greece with the assistance of smugglers.

TC Tabanovce is an open-type centre whose status is not legally regulated and according to its purpose, it is not designed for detention. However, in practice, despite its intended function, some persons on the move were detained as witnesses in criminal proceedings or on other grounds. After being apprehended by the police, the detained persons are temporarily accommodated in a separate room within the Centre under constant supervision by police officers, which had previously been used as an office. Once they are transferred to the public prosecutor's office, the persons are returned to the Centre, where they are registered and accommodated. The duration of detention usually does not exceed three days.

SUPPORT AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE IN THE TRANSIT CENTRES BY MYLA

MYLA, through its field lawyers, is present daily in its offices in the Transit Centres Vinjug and Tabanovce. During their work, the field lawyers provide legal advice and information regarding the asylum procedure and also assist those who wish to submit an application to the competent authorities. In addition, they monitor the situation on the field and actively identify vulnerable categories of persons, who are appropriately referred to the competent institutions in order to address specific problems or challenges.

During the reporting period, the field lawyers provided a total of 1659 legal consultations. According to the statistics, legal assistance was provided to 1382 men, 220 women and 57 children (39 accompanied and 18 unaccompanied).

Graph number 3: Number of Legal Assistance Provided by MYLA, by Sex and Age in Both Transit Centres

Legal Assistance in the Transit Centres



The field lawyers conduct consultations and advisory sessions with almost all persons who stay in the centres for more than 2–3 days. The purpose of these sessions is to understand the motives for leaving their country of origin, to document experiences and challenges encountered during their journey, including risks and threats they may have faced. At the same time, persons on the move express their opinions regarding the services available to them in the transit centres, as well as their future intentions and expectations.

From the statements of accommodated persons, complaints are most frequently expressed regarding the poor quality of food provided. Although meals are distributed three times a day, the food is monotonous and in small portions. Additionally, they complain about the limited amount of drinking water and the lack of facilities to meet basic hygiene needs.

CONCLUSIONS AND TRENDS

Significant differences in migration flows were observed compared to 2023. Compared to 2023, TC Vojjug recorded a 57% decrease in the number of persons on the move accommodated and the number of persons who submitted an asylum application decreased by 88%. In contrast, TC Tabanovce recorded an 88% increase in accommodated persons on the move and more than a twofold increase in the number of unaccompanied children. These changes indicate a redirection of migration routes, as well as the need to adjust capacities and ensure adequate protection for vulnerable categories.

Although basic living conditions (food, water, hygiene) are provided in both centres, accommodated persons continuously express dissatisfaction with their quality and quantity. In particular, the monotony of the food,

limited access to drinking water and insufficient hygiene facilities are highlighted. This indicates the need for a review and improvement of accommodation and nutrition standards.

Regarding vulnerable categories, especially unaccompanied children, enhanced institutional coordination and provision of appropriate living conditions are necessary, including access to educational and recreational activities, as well as space for play and development, which is currently completely lacking in TC Tabanovce. Additionally, children accommodated in these centres are not part of the formal education system in the country.

The recorded individual cases of delays in the registration of asylum applications indicate the need for the constant presence of authorized staff and better logistical support (Particularly for transportation to the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo).

The practice of detaining persons as witnesses has been almost entirely abolished in Vinojug, but it is still present in Tabanovce, albeit on a limited scale and duration. This indicates the need to harmonize procedures between the two centres and ensure standardized and humane treatment in such situations.

From the practical experience in the centres, the most urgent need highlighted is the regulation of the status of the centres, the status of the persons accommodated in these centres, as well as the procedures for entry, accommodation, referral and registration of persons. This, among other things, will prevent any arbitrariness and violation of the rights of these persons and will strengthen institutional preparedness in taking actions and handling persons on the move.

It is necessary to strengthen protection mechanisms, establish clear procedures for dealing with vulnerable categories, and ensure better conditions for accommodation and healthcare, with a particular emphasis on the efficiency of institutional response.

These findings point to a clear need for a systemic approach, enhanced institutional response, and improvement of conditions in both transit centres, especially TC Tabanovce, as a centre that recorded a significant increase in accommodated and vulnerable persons on the move in 2024.