

ENACTING (DIGITAL) CITIZENSHIP FROM BELOW

A Study on Care and the Uses of Digital Infrastructure by Refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Digital Ethnographic Research at the EU's External Border

How do refugees at the borders of the EU care for themselves and others through digital infrastructure? How does this shape their political subjectivities and hold potential to enact citizenship from below? The research team investigates these two central questions, focusing on the experiences of migrants and refugees at the EU's external border between Bosnia and Croatia. With this focus, the project makes visible refugees' care efforts and the multiple care relations refugees at the EU borders are involved in, both locally and at a distance. Through an in-depth digital ethnographic and collaborative approach, we aim to identify everyday acts of citizenship, however overt or subtle they may be. Ultimately, we will explore how the triad of care–digital infrastructure–citizenship affects refugees' political subjectivities.

Digital Infrastructure: Tool and Trap

Digital infrastructure presents a complex terrain for migrants and refugees, operating simultaneously as a critical resource for orientation, participation and not least for maintaining transnational caring relations. Digital tools have become essential for migrants and refugees to coordinate care and support, enable civic engagement, and potentially facilitate new pathways to rights and recognition. However, these same digital technologies also expose them to significant risks of surveillance and potential violence, and have become an integral part of contemporary migrant governmentality and border control mechanisms.

Acts of Citizenship From Below

Central to this research are refugees' informal support and solidarity networks both inside and outside refugee camps, their journeys into EU territory, and their civic engagement through digital infrastructure. Focusing on everyday forms of resistance as outspoken or subtle as they may be, we understand refugees as political actors. Citizenship from below in such a way is likely to be closely connected with refugees' struggles and everyday strategies to navigate care and border regimes. Connecting care to debates on citizenship, particularly to questions of citizenship from below questions the public–private division that often characterizes debates on citizenship but also debates on care.



Charging station in Bihać in 2020. Photo by Spomenka Celebic.



Internet information signs in Bihać in 2020. Photo by Spomenka Celebic.