



# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

02.04.2025, 17:00 Uhr, Übungsraum (and online)  
IKSA, NIG, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien, 4. Stock

## Elissa Helms (Central European University)

Humanitarianism, citizenship, or solidarity?: Bosnian border residents' surreptitious aid to illegalized migrants along the Balkan Route to the EU



Elissa Helms is a socio-cultural anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University, Vienna.

Her current research

focuses on borders, race, European belonging, and humanitarian responses to Balkan Route migration in a Bosnian border town. Previous work addressed gender and nationalism in the aftermath of ethnicized war violence and the role of NGOs and women's activism in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the rest of former Yugoslavia.

Details and a publication list can be found at: <https://gender.ceu.edu/people/elissa-helms>.

### kommende Termine

09.04.2025 Mathijs Pelkmans  
Fitting and Refitting Graves on the  
Georgian- Turkish Border

30.04.2025 Working Group Against  
Intersectional Discrimination and Racism  
tba

Since 2018, Bihac, a small town in northwest Bosnia-Herzegovina close to the Croatia/EU border, has been a gathering site for irregularized migrants traveling the Balkan Route to the EU. Expectations were that local Bosnian Muslim population would feel solidarity with the mostly Muslim migrants, yet many soon joined efforts to demonize and drive them away. Local authorities restricted migrants' movement and forbade people from offering food, lodging, or transportation, while EU money funded official camps, where minimal care combined with control and containment. During my ethnographic research in Bihac in 2019-2020, many migrants preferred to avoid camps in favor of squats and make-shift shelters. Despite the near criminalization of offering aid, there were local residents who continued to quietly support migrants from their own resources and as autonomous actors not affiliated with organizations or aid groups. This presentation addresses this spontaneous and autonomous aid by bringing together concepts typically applied to similar activities – vernacular humanitarianism, everyday citizenship, or migrant solidarity. The aim is both to call attention to these acts that remain invisible in dominant accounts and to question and complicate the emphasis on resistance present in most scholarly assessments of small-scale aid.

Details:  
<https://ksa.univie.ac.at/en/department/events/wednesday-seminar/>

