# What is it like to be a refugee in Croatia? by Vladislav Arinichev

Introduction

*The following story written in autobiographical form presents an exposé of the life of a refugee in Croatia. By interweaving personal experiences and stories heard through corridors of "Hotel Porin"1 Vladislav Arinichev visualizes the life of an asylum seeker and their troubles, worries and violations of their dignity as human beings.*

# What is it like to be a refugee in Croatia?

The morning begins with a rude knock on the door. I'm frantically trying to find the key to the room, which was hidden somewhere by a neighbor whose name I haven't yet remembered. The knocking intensifies, and when I finally find the key, the door is opened by a tall man in a police uniform and stumbles towards me. He rudely demands something in an unfamiliar language, and in my underpants I begin to look for at least some papers to show that I am a refugee here. The policeman unceremoniously searches my belongings, looks at my papers and marks my name on his list - this is a routine monthly police inspection.

I'm going to the dining room for breakfast. I walk through the corridors of Porin, past people who were also awakened by the police. We are not allowed outside until the end of the inspection. People in line are complaining about problems. I've only been here a couple of weeks, but I'm already tired of hearing the same thing. Eventually they let us out, and I ran to breakfast. After standing in line, I get inside, but today they give me cheese, bread and milk, and with my lactose intolerance, I am left without breakfast.

I come back and get in line to get a laundry token, they are given in the mornings from 9, but you need to get in line as early as possible, only 10 tokens a day are given out to the lucky ones. People get in front of me and say that they were just running for a card, we argue, but they don't leave, and again I don't get a token. I at least get toilet paper and go back to the room.

There are only two of us in the room now; two people fled to another country a couple of days ago. We are told about the Dublin procedure, but many do not return, and this gives hope to people who are tired of Porin. When there were four of us in a room of 15 sq.m., it was more difficult. I take out my laptop, which miraculously survived the journey, and connect to the barely live Internet and try to learn the Croatian language. I try to block out the noise with headphones.

1 Reception Centre for the International Protection Seekers in Zagreb

At half past eleven I run to the lunch line to eat early and go to AYS2, because my boots are completely worn out, and they might be my size. I won't be allowed to work any time soon, permission is supposed to be given after 3 months, but people are waiting for half a year. After quickly eating, I go to my pride, a bicycle, which I was able to get in Zelena Akcija. But his seat was stolen, so I angrily walked to AYS. Again, they have no shoes for me, so I take a couple of T-shirts. I think it's easier to take T-shirts here than to get a token for washing, so I go back.

When I come to the room, I see that my laptop is missing. I start to swear, there is no neighbor, the door is open, I go to the guards, through an interpreter I try to tell them something, but they say that they were settling two new refugees, they immediately ran away, they will try to find them. I understand that no one will return my laptop to me or find

these people. I go back angry, fall on the bed, and cry. I think that these are tests, and I must pass them with honor.

I'm going to dinner. There's a queue again. I'm standing, going to eat. When I eat, my tooth falls out. I ran to MDM3 and talked about the tooth. They say they will make an appointment for me to see a dentist, but from conversations I know that people wait two months for an appointment.

I just go outside because the room is stuffy and I can no longer breathe. A group of people from my country are discussing where we can escape to from Croatia. They say that in other countries it is better and they pay a normal allowance, not 20 euros. They say that the decision is given to everyone, but here, out of 50 thousand people who passed through the year, only 50 people received protection. I think that with my luck I'm definitely not one of a thousand. I think about what's left at home. I definitely can't go there.

I'm angry. I'm going to the room. A refugee is smoking next to her. I tell him "No smoking." He suddenly attacks me, we fight a little. The police come running. He takes us

both to Jzhevo, they don't need to figure out which of us is to blame. They give me a paper that I entered Croatia illegally and that I am being expelled. No one cares that I passed

through the border crossing and officially requested protection, because in Ezhevo there are no lawyers, human rights activists, there is only me and the police. They take me to the

Bosnian border and force me to leave. And no one cares what happens to me next. I'm just one of 50 thousand people, the number is in statistics.

I'm just one of thousands. I don't know how hard it is for families with children who cannot send them to kindergartens and take a long time to get them into schools. I don't know how difficult it is to get a work permit and then explain to the employer why you can be hired, how long your permit is valid for, and what will happen if you are denied protection. I don't know how to translate my education diploma. I don't know how to prepare papers for my case, because I'm not a lawyer. I don't know that thousands of people receive refusals for far-fetched reasons, without understanding what is happening in their countries. I don't

know how people are taken to Ezhevo for the wrong beard length or for an unusual transfer of 30 euros from a family. I don't know how people are convinced to sign documents

renouncing asylum. I don't know any other way than asylum to stay in Croatia.

The only thing I know is that no one needs me here, that everyone around me will

2 Are You Syrious?

3 Médecins du Monde

do everything to make me give up and leave Croatia. They will make me feel fully that I am nobody, that I have no rights, that all I have is charity from the gentlemen whom I dared to disturb, that my life means nothing, and if I disappear from Croatia tomorrow, no one will worry about my fate, just as they didn't worry about it in Croatia. I will be kept for 21 months in Porin, taught to walk from bed to dining room and back, but nothing beyond that. If I dare to say anything about the living conditions in Porin, about the fact that I don't understand anything about legal issues, and I'm afraid for my life even while in Croatia, no one will listen tome.

This is what refugees in Croatia have to live with. They are trying to unite in groups, trying to communicate with non-governmental organizations, but they are trying to limit them from this. They built a fence around Porin during Covid and it still stands. They drove all

non-governmental organizations into the city and did not allow them inside. All aspects of refugee life were entrusted to the police and government agencies. However, most refugees are not criminals. And allowing the police to work with people who have not committed any crimes is a deliberately negative practice.