

Life and Death on the Balkan Route: Violent Borders

Wednesday, 18 June 2025 16:45 (1h 30m)

The 'Balkan Route' - a set of intersecting routes of mobility to and through the EU - is, as Piro Rexhepi notes, '... a corridor of transitional and transient sites of migrant mobility' but also one in which multiple actors, including the EU, enact 'containment and controls.' The EU's containment and controls in the region have given rise to violence used to enforce borders, both at the EU's external borders in Hungary, Croatia and Greece but also within the 'Balkan Route' in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Border violence against people on the move is widespread, systematic and institutionalised, it is enacted at the border but also in cities, camps, at sea, and through policies that govern life and death on the Balkan Route.

Violent borders shape every aspect of life and death of people on the move. In life, people on the move experience spatial segregation, inability to access basic health care as well as sanitary facilities, and the aspect of "making insane" - the impact on mental health and the lack of instruments to face problems of depression. In death, the institutions, spaces and policies that govern mobility of people on the move, also govern their (in)visibility after death. On the 'Balkan Route', we find a context in which death of people on the move disappear into bureaucratic statistics and procedures, and whose graves are hidden and obscured from public view, taking with them any evidence of violent deaths and violent borders.

Against this background, the panel asks: How are the lives and deaths of people on the move regulated along internal and external EU borders? What violent practices of border enforcement practices and infrastructures shape mobility? We ask, how does the violent enforcement of the border lead to deaths of people on the move, and why are those deaths made invisible?

The roundtable brings together early career academics and established scholars, whose aim is to open a discussion of the centrality of the border within the field of International Relations, challenge the field's narrow approach to structural violence of the border, and bring the border rituals of life and death to the centre of knowledge production within the field.

Track Classification: South East Europe Working Group