

Border Violence Monitoring Network

Working to end violence against people on the move.

ANNUAL REPORT

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Arranged by:

Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN)

in collaboration with Rigardu, e.V.



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GLOSSARY

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INTRODUCTION



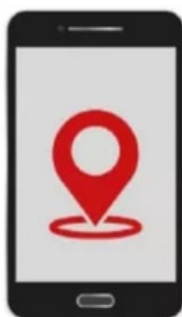
Who We Are

Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) is a horizontal self-organized network of NGOs and associations spread across the Balkans, Greece, and Turkey. Our Network was founded in 2017 with a unified purpose: to promote safe and legal migratory passage, end violent practices occurring on the Balkan Route, and advocate for the implementation of policies of solidarity and justice.

Our Mission

As a collective of NGOs, we aim to shed light on the violence along the Balkan Route and the severity and extent of illegal, systematic border management practices perpetrated against people-on-the-move (POM). To do so, we rely on the support and collaboration of BVMN partners – 13 grassroots organisations spread across the Balkan Region that each contribute to our advocacy efforts whilst also providing their own services to target communities throughout the region. Some of our partners provide direct aid to POM and other communities while others offer legal support and advocacy channels for those who have experienced all-too-common injustices during their journeys. A full list of our partners can be found below.

OUR PARTNERS



Push-Back Alarm Austria
+43 1 345 1444



Two partner organisations choose to remain anonymous and are thus not listed above.

GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Setting the Stage

Over the last decade, violence and injustice have become undeniable obstacles for POM on their journeys across migratory routes to Western Europe. Chief among these paths is the Balkan Route, which is the union of two migration flows: the Eastern Mediterranean Route – leading from Turkey by sea to Greece – and the Western Balkan Route, which passes through North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the way to Western Europe.

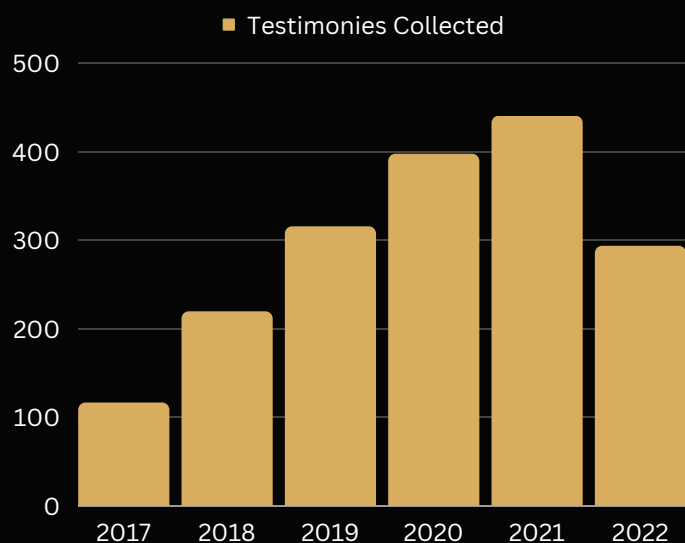
The route was popularised in 2012 and is still commonly used today. Though no migratory journey is easy, the Balkan Route previously represented one of the quickest and safest paths to target countries. Today, that safety has vanished, and the challenges faced by a past generation have continued to mount. Modern, migratory management in the region has given rise to a system responsible for violent atrocities and both physical and bureaucratic impediments to safe migration.

Perhaps no action is more depictive of this reality than a *pushback*. Pushbacks are informal cross-border expulsions of individuals or groups to another country without due process. In the past five years, pushbacks have become an important, and unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere. The term 'pushback' has been popularised to describe the events unfolding along the EU borders of Hungary and Croatia with Serbia in 2016, after the official closure of the Balkan Route. The practice is now a hallmark of border externalisation, which reaches from the Greek-Turkish border all the way to the Slovenian-Italian-Austrian borders. While our work focuses on pushbacks occurring within this region, border externalisation and the violent practices that it breeds extend far beyond European borders.

What We Have Seen

As pushbacks have become more widespread across the Balkan Route, activists and NGOs serving across the regions began to pay attention. These organisations - which provided direct humanitarian assistance to POM - formalised a procedure for recording and documenting pushbacks. And thus, the Border Violence Monitoring Network was born, as a horizontal, self-organised collective working to raise awareness of these illegal proceedings and fight for accountability for the perpetrators responsible. Over the past 6 years, this has been our mission, one which very much continued in 2022 and beyond. Over this period, policy changes have made life more difficult for POM, as well as those who stand in solidarity with them. Political action driven by the EU's border externalisation policy has made our work more important than ever.

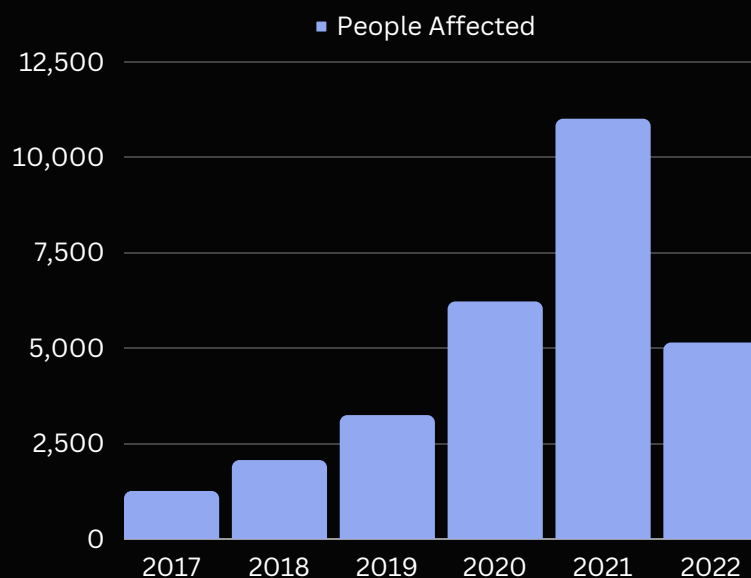
Pushback Monitoring in Numbers



The above data is by no means an exhaustive depiction of the reality along the borders; in fact, there are likely far more illegal pushbacks being perpetrated across all points of access into the European Union than we will ever truly know. We estimate that they have increased - in both occurrence and severity - despite our decreased ability to collect testimonies.

More statistics - including country-specific data and key characteristics of pushbacks - are included in the [2022 Black Book of Pushbacks Volume II](#), as discussed below.

We began recording testimonies of pushbacks in 2017 and publish each of them in our online [database](#). The decrease in testimonies collected in 2022 does not signal good news: in fact, the primary cause for this drop is an increase in the impediments to testimony collection, including increased risk of criminalisation amongst our partners.



2022 AT THE BORDERS

Introduction

2022 saw several significant policy changes and shifting trends that reinforce the trend of fortification along borders within Europe. These changes come during a time of great migratory instability taking root all around the world, as war, climate change, and the resonant effects of the pandemic force countless people to seek refuge on foreign soil. And while media coverage and international response to some of these events, such as the Ukrainian refugee crisis, has been robust, transit throughout the ever-shifting Balkan Route has remained relatively uncovered and unspoken amongst policy leaders within Europe and abroad.

Western Balkans

During 2022, Serbia recorded a 170% rise in new arrivals, many coming into the country legally due to the liberal visa relationships with countries such as Cuba, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Burundi, India and Türkiye. At the same time, Croatian authorities introduced the use of expulsion orders, issued en masse to entering POM, that orders their departure from the European Economic Area within the seven days.

The increase of arrivals into Croatia and Serbia triggered a harsh response from the EU, which claimed that Serbia was unnecessarily fuelling an increase in the number of POM entering the bloc. Following weeks of diplomatic pressure from Brussels, Serbian authorities halted visa-free travel from Tunisia and Burundi and announced potential visa restrictions to 18 other countries.

This was not the first time the EU intervened in the migration policies of the Western Balkans. In fact, since the closure of the humanitarian corridor in 2016, EU Agencies have been at the forefront of migration management in the region. Towards this end, personnel of European Asylum Support Office (EASO), European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), EU Police Cooperation Agency (Europol), and EU Judicial Cooperation Agency (Eurojust) are deployed on the ground, even in the non-EU countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania.

In fall 2022, the European Commission proposed the Western Balkans Action Plan that will further legitimise EU's interventions in the region. Western involvement, evidentially, does not aim to create safe, legal pathways for the POM: rather it exacerbates the externalisation of the EU's border management in a way that encourages the Western Balkan countries to do their dirty work of pushbacks, readmissions and deportations.

Greece

According to the UNHCR, 13,043 asylum seekers arrived in Greece in 2022. However, this number may represent only a fraction of those who have attempted to reach Greek territory. In September 2022, Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarachi confirmed that more than 150,000 irregular migrants were “averted” in the last year, while still systematically denying that pushbacks are occurring.

Testimonies from survivors of pushbacks highlight the systematic use of extensive physical violence, prolonged arbitrary detention, abuses that amount to torture or inhuman treatment, the use of firearms, and denial of access to the asylum procedure and medical care. Additionally these accounts indicate the involvement of various national authorities in perpetrating human rights violations and suggest, at a minimum, the on-site presence of Frontex officers during pushbacks. While visibility on the topic of pushbacks has greatly increased, Greek authorities maintain their denial to allegations of pushbacks and refused to initiate investigations of such acts. Official statements from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) have instead sought to shift this discriminatory narrative to one of border securitisation and the need to



Unmarked graves of POM in Komotini Muslim burial ground

defend territorial sovereignty amid rising tensions with Türkiye. Along Greece’s land border with Türkiye, existing fences along the border were reinforced and expanded in 2021 and 2022, and a new automated border surveillance system was implemented, equipped with long-range cameras and thermal sensors.

The long dysfunctional and inaccessible asylum system has forced many to remain undocumented and without access to basic services. Coupled with the increasing presence of police carrying out sweeps to check people for documentation, POM are at heightened risk of apprehension, detention and pushbacks.

The repression of civil society actors in Greece, particularly on the topic of migration, intensified in 2021 and 2022. The new NGO registration system, which had previously been heavily criticised by the civil society actors operating in Greece, was deemed in clear violation of standards of EU law and human rights. Regardless of the heavy criticism, the government has continued to implement the registration system as a tool to hinder the operations of organisations working in Greece.

OUR RESPONSE

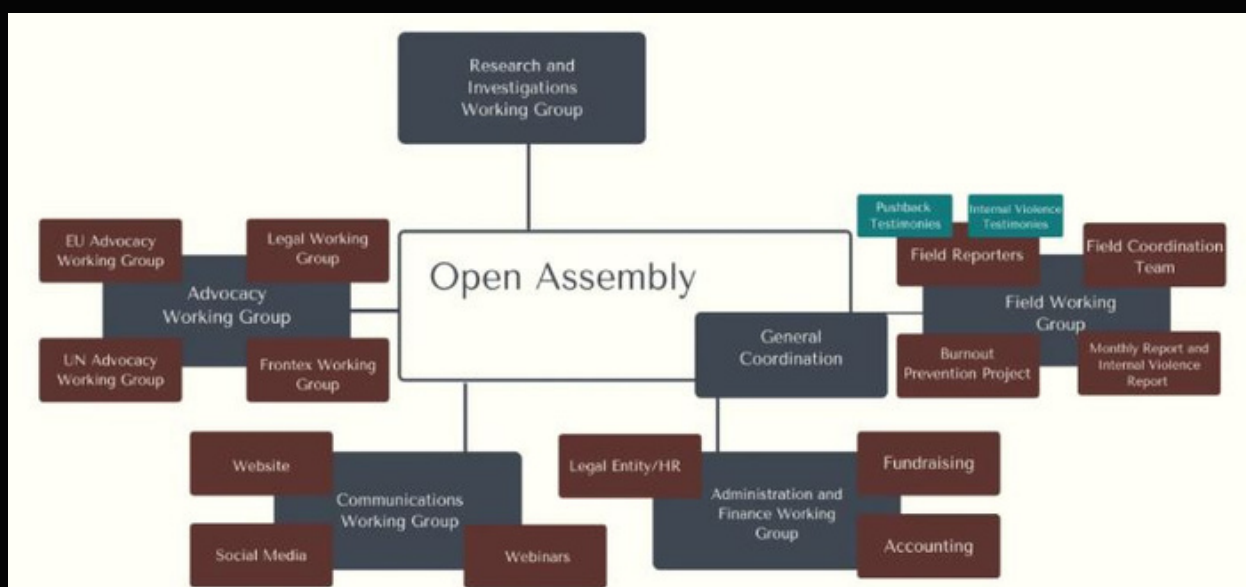
A Year of Change

In 2022, we expanded our work in many new directions, growing to include new partners, working groups, staff members, projects, and collaborations in order to address the ever-changing challenges present along the borders. These efforts, along with our pre-existing initiatives, have equipped us to better understand trends and problems in border regimes throughout the region and to identify new, promising avenues for advocacy efforts. Many of these changes are described in detail below in the updates from several working groups.

Our Structure

We pride ourselves on our horizontal organisational structure which relies upon the joint vision and responsibility of each partner organisation. Network-wide decisions are made democratically within an Open Assembly in which all partners are invited to participate. These decisions are carried out by the Network's working groups, all of which are coordinated by members of the General Coordination team - paid staff on part-time contracts that carry out the vision of the Open Assembly.

In the pages that follow, some of these working groups have provided updates of their work, success, and challenges in 2022.



A general overview of our organisational structure, all of which stems from joint decisions made by all partners within the Open Assembly.

FIELD WORKING GROUP

Introduction

The Field Working Group is primarily responsible for updating and maintaining the testimony database and coordinating Network reporting efforts with the intent of sharing trends and developments within the regions in which we work. In order to uphold the consistency and quality of our open-source database and to ensure that interviews are conducted following the necessary safeguarding principles, we provide thorough training in the use of our common methodology for testimony collection to all new violence reporters and partner organisations.

2022 In Review

During 2022, the team focused on the further harmonisation of testimony collection through new and improved trainings in response to regional trends that have reshaped BVMN's research and advocacy strategies. To meet the demands of these developments, we have adjusted the testimony-collection process to include new considerations and areas of focus. One such area is the increased use of advanced border technology by authorities perpetrating pushbacks and other human rights violations against POM. These technologies include drones, thermal imaging, and biometric data warehousing, all of which have been documented by the field teams and are now explicitly included in our testimony collection process.



Galleries of common uniforms and vehicles used during testimony collection

Last year, we also increased our focus on documenting other types of violence against POM, including many acts carried out within state borders. These incidents include the use of illegal detention by states, systematic evictions, and attacks and violations by other groups, among other examples. In order to highlight and summarise these events, we published several Internal Violence reports - each focused on a different country - and have created a new standardised

reporting procedure to document these cases. Moreover, we made our first visit to Turkey this year in line with a new initiative to explore and define new opportunities for collaboration and testimony collection in the country.

Our vision for 2023 includes continued focus on training and capacity-building for reporters, including an increase in regional and context-based workshops providing information on the specifics of the different borders. We also plan to increase our focus on retraumatisation and secondary trauma to mitigate the risks arising from testimony collection and wider work on this field. Ensuring volunteers' wellbeing by setting up a support system will provide a safer working environment for all, and we aim to accompany this with specific trainings that inform our volunteers on how to collect testimonies in trauma-informed ways.

MONTHLY REPORTS



Our [Monthly Reports](#) contain summaries of pertinent trends and links to all testimonies taken throughout the month. Our methodological process for interviews leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor pushbacks at multiple borders. When individuals return with significant injuries or stories of abuse, one of our violence reporting volunteers will sit down with them to collect their testimony.

ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP

Introduction

In 2022, the BVMN Advocacy Working Group continued to expand its capacities by onboarding new volunteers and engaging new Network members with an advocacy focus. As a result of our growing team and areas of focus, we have split into three distinct working groups - EU, UN, and Legal.

EU Level

Our biggest EU-level achievement of 2022 was the publication of the updated edition of the [Black Book of Pushbacks](#). This is an achievement of the entire Network which pulls together years of field reporting, advocacy efforts and network building on behalf of all of the partner organisations, working groups, and volunteers. The book was over 3,000 pages long and was presented in a press conference alongside MEP Cornelia Ernst in the European Parliament in Brussels.



Additionally, we have been working on three key legislative files this year that form part of the New Pact on Migration published by the Commission in 2020:

1. **Schengen Borders Code Reform (SBC)**. We co-authored a paper with our partners, ASGI, on the issues within the legislative file and tabled a series of amendments to the Rapporteur and the Shadow Rapporteurs. Furthermore, BVMN co-organised a webinar alongside ASGI, PICUM and ECRE with speakers from EDRI, the Parliament, and the Commission. After extensive lobbying, the Draft Report removed the two articles that BVMN and ASGI had been consistently arguing against - Article 1 on the instrumentalisation of refugees, and Article 23(a) on internal readmissions, both of which would have meant a de-facto legalisation of pushbacks within the Schengen zone.
2. **Pre-Screening Mechanism (including the Independent Border Monitoring Mechanism)**. We have provided extensive internal briefings on what this mechanism should look like and its scope, and have tabled a number of amendments regarding the proposed Pre-Screening Centres.
3. **Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA)**. We have joined the AI-Migration Coalition alongside a number of other key EU actors in the field and have contributed to lobbying efforts for greater safeguards around migration in the legislation. This has meant holding meetings with Rapporteurs and Shadow Rapporteurs on the file, sending internal briefings with BVMN evidence, and tabling amendments.

EU Level, Continued

On top of these engagements with legislative files, we have also done targeted advocacy with the European Ombudsman. After a [complaint](#) co-submitted by BVMN with a number of other NGOs, the European Ombudsman has found that the European Commission failed to take necessary measures to ensure the protection of human rights in the transfers of technology with potential surveillance capacity supported by its multi-billion Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. Furthermore, the BVMN advocacy team has engaged with the Frontex Scrutiny Working Group of the European Parliament and continued to provide evidence of Frontex involvement in fundamental rights violations at the EU's borders. On top of this, two delegations were assisted by Milena Zajović at the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, with members of The Left and The Greens of the European Parliament.



MEP Cornelia Ernst presenting the Black Book of Pushbacks to the Croatian Minister of Interior Davor Bozinović, State Secretary Terezija Gras and the Head of Border Police Zoran Niceno



Hope Barker (BVMN, Policy Analyst), Milena Zajovic (BVMN, Head of Advocacy), and Cornelia Ernst (MEP, The Left Group in the European Parliament/Die Linke) presenting the Black Book of Pushbacks: Expanded and Updated Edition in the European Parliament on December 8th, 2022.

UN Level

Our key UN achievements have been through its engagement with the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances. Following a multi-year advocacy campaign by BVMN that included the first known case of a pushback survivor providing their own testimony directly to a UN Treaty Body Committee during a formal session, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances recognised pushbacks as violations including or leading to an enforced disappearance (and recognised violations of Articles 2, 12, 17, 24 and 25).. The Committee also announced its first ever General Comment on the issue of enforced disappearance in the context of migration, in which it will clarify to state parties issues of non-refoulement and pushbacks. Due to multiple BVMN advocacy campaigns, pushbacks are now recognised as a unique and definable human rights issue actionable under four distinct UN Treaty Bodies.

BVMN has been invited to the UN to provide evidence to sessions held by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and we have been able to pass these engagement opportunities onto partner organisations or individual activists on the ground including NNK, AYS, CPS and Mare Liberum.

Furthermore, we launched a European-wide International Torture Prevention campaign aimed at raising attention to the violations facing people-on-the-move during pushbacks which targeted all International Torture Prevention Mechanisms including the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), the Committee Against Torture (CAT), the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and the Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Lastly, we led a successful campaign to hold the Greek state accountable for systematically perpetrating human rights violations. BVMN submitted a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) input on Greece, after which 17 countries issued recommendations on pushbacks, collective expulsions or the violation of the principle of non-refoulement in line with the submission. Furthermore, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), Mary Lawlor, conducted a country visit to Greece in 2022 and met with a number of BVMN partner organisations and volunteers. The speech and report that followed her visit were in line with BVMN recommendations, and BVMN's Policy Analyst Hope Barker was a guest speaker on the panel to present her final report on the topic of criminalisation of HRDs at the UN.

National Level

Across different national levels, we have engaged in a number of campaigns to apply pressure around the topic of pushbacks and connected fundamental rights violations. Some highlights include:

Germany

Building upon the work of the Research & Investigations working group regarding German funding of Croatian border practices (as discussed later in this report), we attended a Bundestag Parliamentary Breakfast on the topic of pushbacks to brief key national MPs on the topic, with inputs from key actors such as Stefanos Levidis from [Forensic Architecture](#).

Greece

We have continuously monitored violence in detention centres and urban areas against people-on-the-move. In response, we have published numerous briefings, complaints, and notifications to the Greek ombudsman. During summer 2022, after a new trend emerged of transit groups being stranded on islets and being forced to resort to applying for Interim Measures at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the Thessaloniki BVMN team released an [extensive report](#) on the practice. This report included a foreword from UN SR on HRDs, Mary Lawlor, and was cited widely in Greek media.

North Macedonia

After researching bilateral agreements between North Macedonia and other countries such as Czechia, BVMN uncovered fundamental rights violations taking place under these agreements at the North Macedonian-Greek border. After a visual investigation proved the research to be true, we submitted a [complaint](#) to the Czech General Inspectorate of Security Forced (GISF) who initiated an investigation into the topic. BVMN also assisted the pushback victim from the visual investigation to tell [his own story](#) on Czech TV relating to the case.



LEGAL WORKING GROUP

Introduction

The Legal Working Group was created in mid-2020 with a unified mission: to reveal the role of Frontex in pushbacks and uncover a parties responsible for authorising and conducting this behaviour. Since then, our work has grown to include much more.

The onboarding of new volunteer in 2021 shifted the team's focus as we collectively learned to engage with other important mechanisms such as the EU legislative process, implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, more third party interventions, complaints to national human rights mechanisms (such as national ombudspersons), and strategic litigation. We submitted two requests for interim measures to the European Court of Human Rights for people pushed back and left stranded on islets in the Evros. One was successful and the people were rescued.

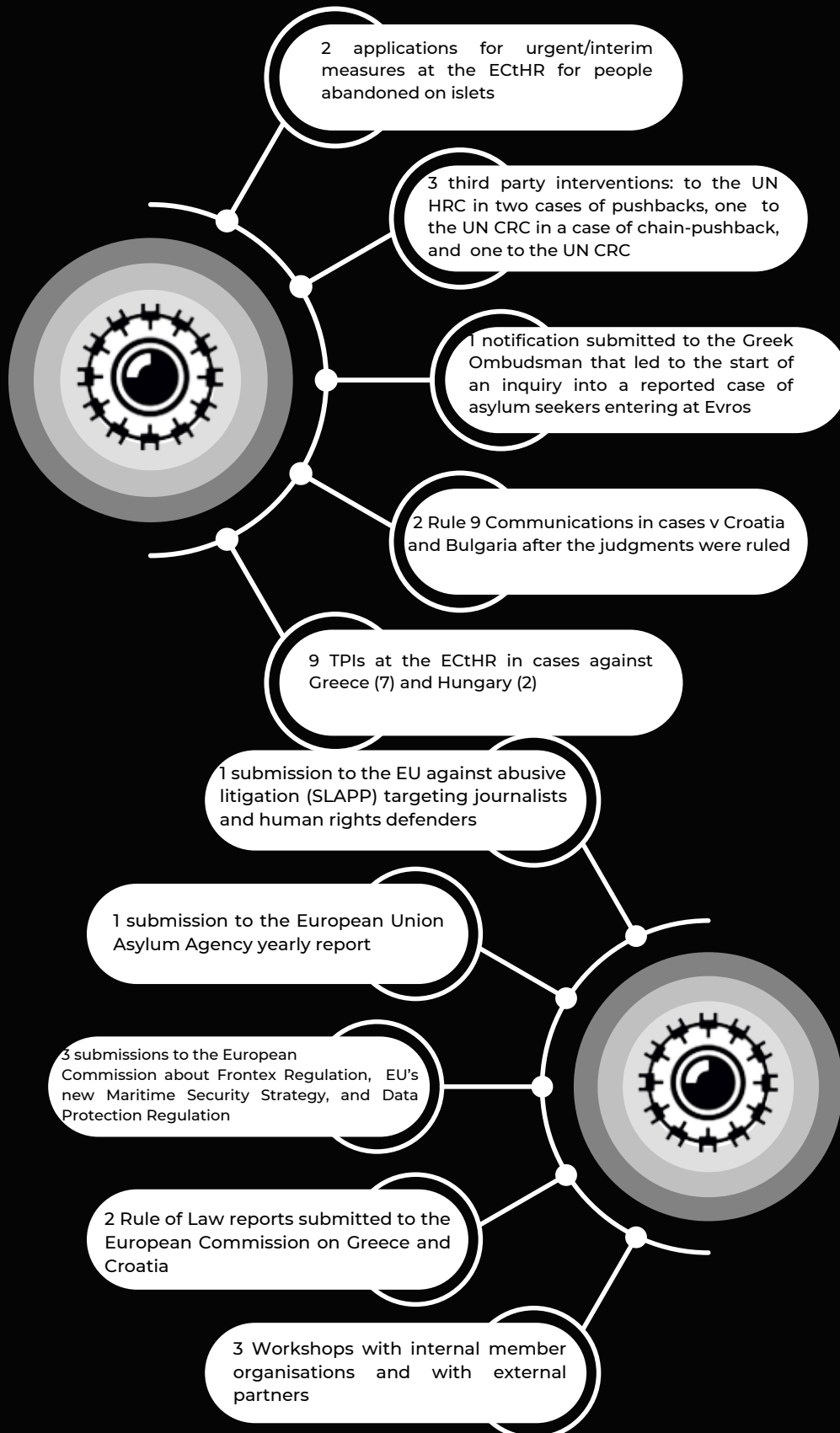
2022 In Review

In 2022, we submitted 12 freedom of information requests to Frontex and another 12 to the European Commission. Each request requires at least one month for a response - often even longer - and requires constant attention and research from our side as new questions take shape based on the answers we receive. For this reason, we rely on our volunteers' legal expertise of EU law, a resources that is shared across the Network since the legal team is only one of the teams submitting freedom of information requests.

We also submitted 9 third party interventions to the European Court of Human Rights, in pushback cases against Greece and Hungary, during 2022. Similarly, we submitted 4 third party interventions to the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Through these interventions, we aim to provide judges and UN experts with accurate, first-hand information on the modus operandi of pushbacks and the human rights violations with which they are perpetrated, often including ill-treatment or torture, theft, reckless endangerment, restricted access to asylum, and many others. We hope that, in the long run, this leads to recognition of the countless injustices committed against the individuals who file the complaints whilst also reaffirming the undeniable truth that human rights violations are perpetrated by European states at their borders.

Furthermore, we began production of a Legal Action Database on Pushbacks - an open, living resource that compiles pending cases and judgments from national courts, the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the EU, and UN Committees. The cases gathered relate to non-refoulement, pushbacks, summary expulsions, collective expulsions and, in general, to border violence. This database was launched in 2023 on our new [website](#), and was created with the support of [Heinrich Böll Stiftung Thessaloniki](#).

LEGAL WORKING GROUP IN NUMBERS



RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATIONS WORKING GROUP

Introduction

The Research and Investigations Working Group is amongst the newest structures within BVMN, created in November 2021. 2022 was a period of growth for us, with new volunteers, increased internal capacity, and new projects rapidly changing how and where we operate. The current team includes 25 volunteers with a wide range of skills in different forms of research, archiving, and visual analysis, bringing together field and non-field perspectives. As we continue to grow and develop new working relationships both within and external to the Network, we are excited for the many opportunities in front of us to build upon our work from last year, which included:

Visual Investigation: Pushback from North Macedonia

This report analyses two pushbacks experienced by a respondent on the 23rd of April from North Macedonia to Greece. During the second pushback, the respondent recorded several videos whilst being held at the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center, shortly before being pushed back to Greece. By combining the respondent's testimony with an analysis of the visual materials available, this report provides a thorough account of the incident, including key locations and perpetrators, even detailing the foreign officers as they actively participated in some of the events described.

PUSHBACK FROM NORTH MACEDONIA: VISUAL ANALYSIS



The following report analyzes two pushbacks experienced by a respondent on the 23rd of April from North Macedonia to Greece. During the second pushback, the respondent was able to take several videos while being held at the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center, shortly before being pushed back to Greece. In combining the respondent's testimony of what occurred with an analysis of the visual materials available, this report seeks to provide a detailed account of the incident, key locations and perpetrators, including the foreign officers actively participating in some of the events described.

PUSHBACK 1

The respondent, a 34-year-old man from Tunisia arrived together two other Tunisian men 26 and 27-years-old in North Macedonia on the 23rd of April around 2 AM, along train tracks south of Gevgelija (41°07'41.8" N 22°31'01.9" E).

The transit group waited until around 6 AM before they began walking towards the bus station in Gevgelija. From there, they intended to take a bus to Skopje. They were apprehended along the way by two men in uniform driving in what the respondent identified as a police car. The men in uniform asked the transit group for their documents.

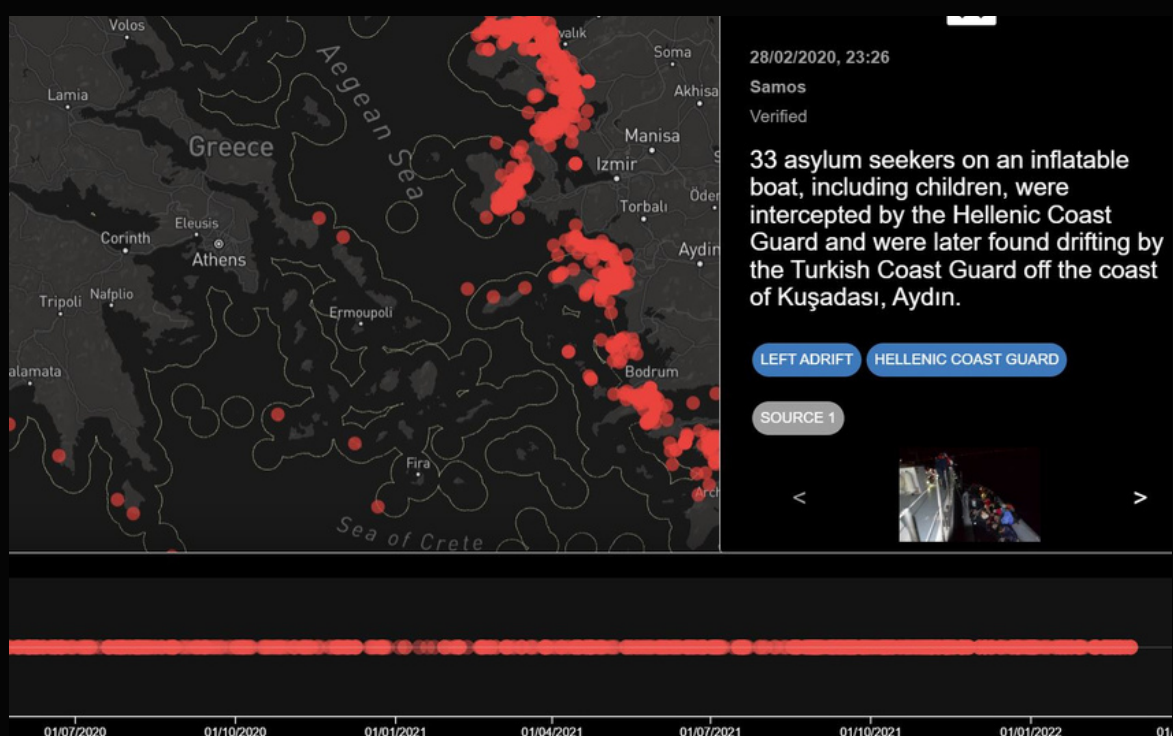
When the respondent and others from the transit group responded that they did not have documents, the men in uniform allegedly brought them to a police station (either the Border Police Station, or the Gevgelija Police Station).

The respondent explained that they did not stay long at the police station and supposedly waited for other officers to arrive who would bring them to a 'camp'. In addition, the respondent could not remember what the uniforms of the officers who apprehended him looked like. He did remember having seen the insignia of the North Macedonian police.



Drift-backs in the Aegean Sea

In July 2022, [Forensic Architecture](#), in partnership with Forensis, Bellingcat Global Authentication Project, Amnesty International Crisis Evidence Lab, and BVMN, released a [platform](#) documenting systemic drift-backs in the Aegean Sea. 'Drift-backs' - a newly-coined term used to describe the practice of abandoning asylum seekers at sea - have become routine occurrences throughout the Aegean, often resulting in drownings and serious injuries. Today, the scale and severity of the practice continues to increase, with 'drift-backs' reported from the coast of the Greek mainland and as far south as Crete. For this report, we assisted with the geolocation of visual materials from drift-backs presented on this platform.



A screenshot of Forensic Architecture's platform.

German Funding to Croatian Border Enforcement

This [project](#), in collaboration with [PRO ASYL](#), investigates the use of equipment and other support measures donated to Croatia by German authorities from 2016-2021 (and for deployments of officers, until 2022). Specifically, we research the extent to which these donations have been used in operations that directly or indirectly violated the fundamental rights of POM at Croatian borders. Methodologically, this report draws on a combination of observations from grassroots actors and POM, open-source research, and the submission of FOI and parliamentary questions to relevant authorities. By drawing on different source materials and perspectives on the issue, this report seeks to provide a faceted approach to create greater visibility and accountability for human rights violations.

North Macedonia Special Report

This report provides an in-depth analysis of violence against POM along the North Macedonian Border. It focuses in particular on trends in border violence identified in testimonies collected by BVMN, the perpetrators of pushbacks, and the lack of access to asylum.

The emerging use of AI-Based technologies in Border Surveillance and Control

For years, BVMN has voiced serious concerns in relation to the lack of minimum safeguards in the use of technology and AI for migration management. To date, as per BVMN observations, these relatively new practices are characterised by a lack of transparency in their use and by the absence of any sort of impact assessment on the fundamental rights of POM. With this 2 year project supported principally by the [European Programme for Integration and Migration](#), BVMN seeks to provide evidence of the use of artificial intelligence at the borders in violation of fundamental rights of POM, through:

1. developing a body of open-source evidence that is backed by independent, verifiable investigations and analysis demonstrating the use of new technologies in border surveillance and migration/asylum contexts;
2. addressing issues of potential bias and discrimination in surveillance and biometric technologies, data protection and profiling; and
3. advocating for greater transparency in terms of legislation and implementation of new surveillance and biometric technologies in the context of border control and border security.

This project is being conducted in close cooperation with partners [No Name Kitchen](#), [Collective Aid](#), [Blindspots](#), and [InfoKolpa](#), all of whom are contributing immensely to the project through the continued collection of pushback testimonies and expanded research into new areas of focus and developing trends within the regions in which they work.

BALKANDAC

This project aims to investigate the development of interoperable biometric databases in the Western Balkans. In doing so, it seeks to shed insight into the topics and raise concerns regarding potential human rights violations and violations of personal data protection. The report will conclude to provide recommendations on how such system should(or should not) be implemented going forward, and will be finalised and released in Spring 2023.

CRIMINALISATION TOOLKIT

Recent years have seen a rise in the erosion of the rule of law in Europe and a backlash against democracy, human rights and their defenders. Human Rights Defenders are at high risk of facing repression and various forms of criminalisation while protecting, promoting and safeguarding fundamental freedoms and basic human rights. In September 2022, we published a [criminalisation toolkit](#), in cooperation with our partners, the [Heinrich Böll Foundation](#).

The main aim of the toolkit is to fill the gap in publications and guidelines for Human Rights Defenders in Europe concerning practical tools they can use when facing criminalisation. The toolkit is meant to inform on advocacy avenues, protection mechanisms and protecting legislation in cases of criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders. We also hosted a workshop held in Greece, in which different strategies in cases of criminalisation were discussed, and knowledge exchanged.

This is a non-exhaustive list, and we hope to increase the toolkit in the future with input on other countries as well. In addition, we are aware of the fast changes happening throughout the regions where we work and wish the toolkit to be an alive project that can be revised in the future and is open for feedback.



GO, FRIEND, GO

With the support of [Guerrilla Foundation](#), BVMN developed a social media campaign with the aim of raising awareness of the challenges faced by POM along the borders of the Balkan Route. Through short clips and podcasts, the campaign provides an insight into the never-ending obstacles that people face in their travel.

In parallel to the campaign and in collaboration with [Broga Doite](#) and [Brush & Bow](#), we supported the production and release of GO, FRIEND, GO, a documentary aiming to draw the viewer to feel the contrasting experience of resilience and resourceful hope that can be found even in the context of destitution and violence produced by the European border system. The documentary has been presented in several festivals and has one several awards, including at [Festival dei popoli](#) (HOME VIDEO DISTRIBUTION AWARD POPOLI DOC) and the [Festival Cinema Africano, Asia e America Latina](#) (Extr'A Competition - BEST FILM AWARD). Production of the film required nearly 2 years of collaborative effort between us, the filmmakers, and the Brush & Bow crew. This result would have not been possible without the support of the [European Cultural Foundation](#) and [Rivolti ai Balcani](#).



GO, FRIEND, GO [trailer](#)

2022 PARTNER UPDATES

Introduction

Our work would not be possible without the commitment of partner organisations, both to the collective efforts of the Network itself and to their separate organisational goals. Our horizontal structure requires the active participation of all partners, each of whom steer the vision and structure of the Network while collaborating on joint projects, advocacy initiatives, and field activities.

Josoor's Departure

After two and a half years of supporting pushback survivors and documenting fundamental rights violations at the hands of the current EU border regime, our partner Josoor made the heartbreaking decision to dissolve its organisation. This decision was dictated by a series of cumulative factors, among them the deteriorating situation in Turkey, the erosion of the Rule of Law in Europe and the escalation of the War on Migration as well as an immense lack of funding.



Partner Messages

The following pages have been written by partner organisations concerning their work within BVMN during 2022.

As mentioned, each partner engages in its own humanitarian services over and above its involvement with BVMN and devotes untold effort to fostering a culture of solidarity within the Network and amongst all people seeking fair and safe movement across all borders.

For more information about how all partners contribute to our project, please visit the sites below:

A message from

BLIND SPOTS

Blindspots is a non-profit association that aims to provide direct solidarity aid to POM and to raise public awareness of places of humanitarian and political crisis. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, we seek to improve the living conditions in squats by installing stoves, performing construction work, and distributing firewood.

In addition to the work in squats, we engage in public relations on the situation of POM and communicates background knowledge on the so-called Balkan Route on social media and in public events in Germany. In 2022, Blindspots also worked with ECCHR to support an unaccompanied Rohingya minor refugee from Myanmar to file a complaint with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child against Croatia and Slovenia for violent pushbacks perpetrated against him.

As part of the Network, we collect testimonials of pushbacks and internal violence, and evictions, which are included in the Network's database and in the newly published Black Book of Pushbacks. In addition, we participate with regular contributions in the monthly reports of the network by reporting on current trends and developments in the border regions. From 2022 to 2024, we will participate in a BVMN research project on the use of artificial intelligence in border control and will conduct research on this in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During 2022, we created a great cooperation with other Network partners such as Collective Aid and No Name Kitchen, along with other actors in the region, in order to supply heat through stoves and firewood for POM in Squats Northern Serbia and to jointly draw attention to the precarious and violent living situation of people on the move.

We look forward to 2023 and beyond as an opportunity to continue working together in solidarity within the Network, and to many project and actions in the common struggle against the violent EU border regime!



A message from



collective
aid

Collective Aid is an independent organisation aiming to cater to the ever-changing needs of refugees and migrants on the move across Europe. We endeavor to do this by:

- Distributing clothing, bedding, food, and essential hygiene items to those in need;
- Providing WASH services: drinkable water, warm showers, and laundry;
- Distributing firewood in winter months;
- Providing optician appointments and glasses to the ones who need vision care;
- Collecting testimonies of border violence in order to advocate for basic human rights.

In 2022, we collected testimonies of border violence and police brutality in the three Balkan projects: Belgrade, Sarajevo and Subotica. In total, volunteers and staff collected 174 testimonies this year. The majority of testimonies were collected by the Subotica team in Northern Serbia, where our team works along the Serbian-Hungarian border. In Sarajevo, the team has also increased the number of testimonies taken. With the help of a designated BVMN intern, Sarajevo has been able to better structure its work and distribution model to collect testimonies as much as possible.



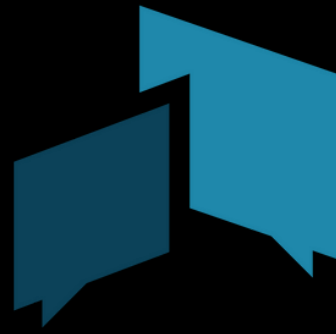
The Serbia programme took part in BVMN's ambitious research initiatives this year, contributing to desk research investigating the use of AI, facial recognition, and drones on the Serbian-Hungarian border. The team is now working to hire a qualified researcher for a short period of two months to assist in the next stage of the research process, that will involve testimony collection, observational research, and investigative field research.

In the coming year, we will continue to develop robust policies, practices, and standards that match the demands of the ever-changing contexts in which we operate. Further, we will continue to support organisations in proximity to our work and to provide insight where our experience allows, while striving to deepen the work we do with the Network. Our other strategic goals include deepening our outreach with local stakeholders where we work, ensuring programme sustainability and expanding the reach of our advocacy efforts.

Photo credits - Romain Koselleck



A message from



**I HAVE
RIGHTS.**

I Have Rights (IHR) is a non-profit refugee law clinic operating on the Greek island of Samos. IHR provides free legal information to asylum seekers and supports them in preparing their asylum claim. IHR also engages in advocacy and strategic litigation focusing on the right to asylum and against detention and pushbacks. In 2022, IHR provided legal information to 255 beneficiaries from 27 countries and engaged in over 50 advocacy initiatives.

IHR joined the network in 2022 and actively participates in the Advocacy Working Group of BVMN and contributes to BVMN's monthly reports. In 2023, IHR will deepen its involvement in the network's advocacy projects, specifically through joint initiatives on the topic of detention of POM. IHR will also start to take internal violence testimonies from Samos and co-draft BVMN's internal violence reports for Greece.



Photos of the EU-funded Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) on Samos. Through its work outside the CCAC, I Have Rights monitors human rights abuses in the structure and advocates for its closure.

A message from



**MOBILE
INFO TEAM**

Mobile Info Team works closely with another Partner organisation in Thessaloniki, which chooses to maintain its anonymity; thus, this message comes from both organisations collectively.

Together, the teams collect testimonies of pushbacks and internal violence at a local community centre three times a week, as well as monitoring the situation in northern Greece, particularly within the city and at the Greece-Turkey land border, the Greece-North Macedonia border, and at the Greece-Albania border. In 2022, BVMN Thessaloniki collected 30 testimonies of pushbacks pertaining to over 2,000 people and 50 testimonies pertaining to internal violence. Internal violence testimonies predominantly describe people's experiences in pre-removal detention centres and police stations across Greece.

Testimonies are analysed to identify key trends, and are included in BVMN's monthly reports, special reports, press releases, strategic litigation and complaints mechanisms. In 2022, the team monitored the lack of access to asylum due to Greek policy changes in late 2021, in parallel with a significant increase in police operations in Thessaloniki, whereby routine sweeps are carried out to check individuals' documentation. Another pertinent trend during 2022 was the increase in systematic and arbitrary detention, as detailed in many of the internal violence testimonies.

During 2022, our teams heavily collaborated in the drafting processes of the Second Black Book, by contributing to country/thematic chapters and extensively vetting testimonies. Additionally, we participate in several other working groups within the BVMN, including the Legal, Research and Investigations, and UN Advocacy Working Groups. When UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, visited Greece, our field team organised to meet and discuss topics regarding criminalisation and the increasingly restrictive environment for civil society actors working with POM. Members of the team also attended the in-person BVMN conference in Zagreb, as well as a conference in Thessaloniki partnered with the Heinrich-Boell Foundation, covering topics such as criminalisation and legal action against pushbacks.

Over the next year, BVMN Thessaloniki will continue to closely monitor the situation in northern Greece, collecting information directly from those experiencing border violence to facilitate advocacy efforts. The field team hopes to establish stronger relationships with actors across Greece, widen the scope of their reporting, and further contribute to the efforts of the Research and Investigations Working Group.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Funding

BVMN receives funding from several sources:

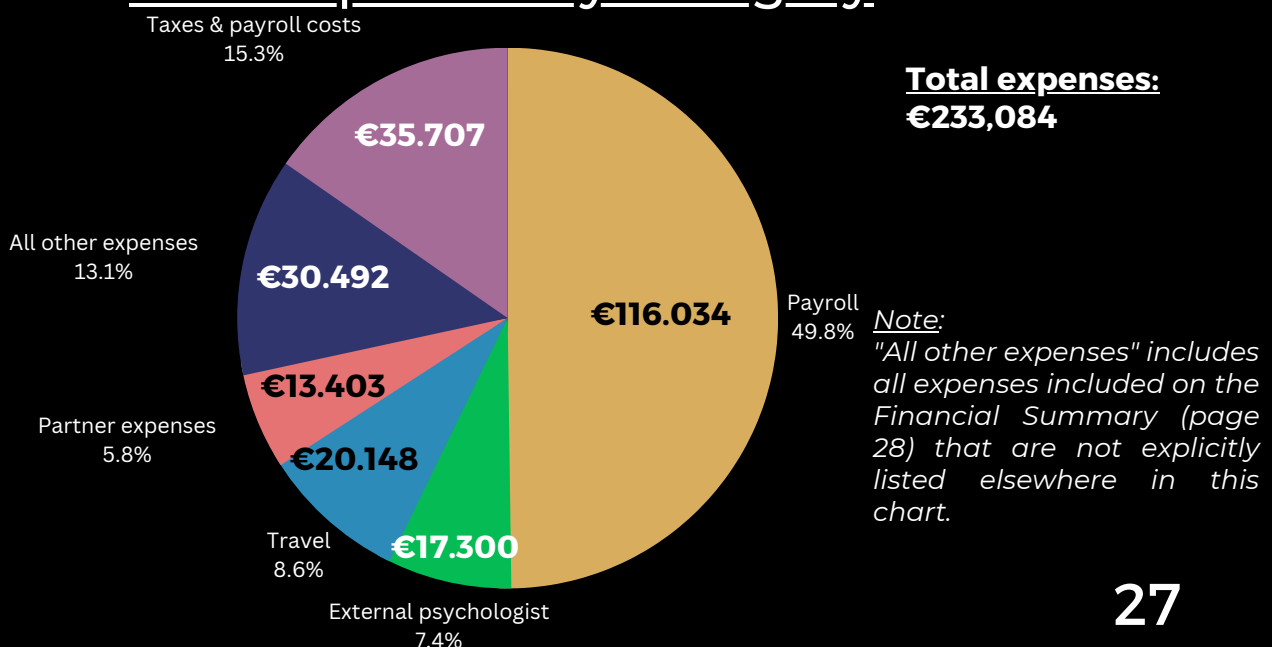
1. **Foundation grants**, provided by private foundations that stand in solidarity with our cause and provided funding, either for specific projects or as core funding for our continued operations. These funds vary in the restrictions they impose, both in terms of the timing of expenditure and acceptable expenses. Our Finance Team - composed of 3 part-time employees - ensures the Network's compliance with all such restrictions while searching for new funding opportunities.
2. **Services Provided**, which includes all revenue received from organisations with which we have contracted to provide advocacy support or research evidence of specific issues, such as some of the topics discussed above.
3. **Black Book publication revenue**, allocated from the EP research funds by The Left in the EU Parliament, which also pays for the printing and publication costs of the book.
4. **Individual donations**.

Expenses

BVMN expenditures have been assigned to 12 categories, some of which include:

1. **Salaries and payroll costs**. BVMN activities are coordinated by a team of 12 professionals who are contracted to part-time roles. BVMN is not managed or directed by a full-time team; we rely on the collective effort of partner organisations, volunteers and part-time coordinators.
2. **External psychologist**. 2022 marked the beginning of our initiative to provide psychological support and industrial-organisational consulting for partners, volunteers, and coordinators throughout the Network.
3. **Travel expenses**, which are primarily incurred for field coordination efforts, advocacy trips, Network-wide conferences, and in-person training events.
4. **Partner expenses**, which represent amounts spent or transferred directly to partner organisations for Network-related activities.

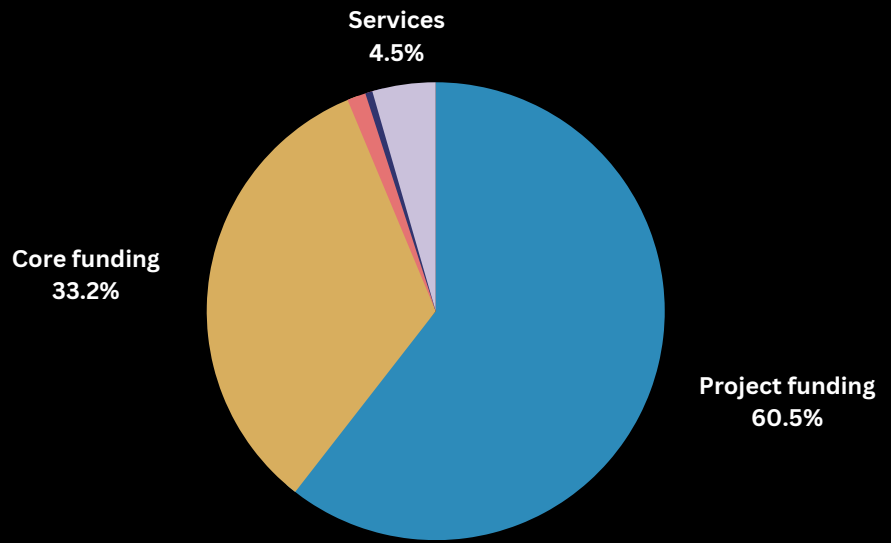
2022 Expenses by Category



Reserve Funding

We maintain a reserve of funds for both legal requirements and financial stability. As of the end of 2022, the balance of this reserve totaled €19.098. The size of this reserve is determined in tandem with the Finance Team and Open Assembly and is updated as needed throughout the year.

2022 Funding by Support Type



2023 Financial Outlook

For the upcoming year, we plan to achieve our budgetary needs through a mix of newfound support and renewed cooperation with several generous past grantors. We also aim to develop a more diverse and robust fundraising portfolio in the new year by drawing upon new opportunities including joint projects and social media campaigns. Similarly, we plan to retrofit our expenditures so as to include increased support for partner organisations throughout the year. While the financial results shown below represents the centralised costs of BVMN, these figures do not include the costs of operating partner organisations, paying their staff, or maintaining teams of volunteers - without whom the work of BVMN would be impossible. When possible, either through join projects or unrestricted funding, BVMN assumes the cost of certain Network-related activities for partner organisations, including translation costs, travel, technology, among others. This is a trend we greatly wish to increase in future years.

The true cost of our work spans far beyond the figures shown below, and we are consistently humbled by the solidarity shown across our entire Network to share these costs and contribute to a shared vision, all while providing countless other critical services to POM all throughout the Balkan Route and beyond.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Statement of Financial Activities

January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022

Revenue:	Total
Foundation grants	284.965
Services provided	13.587
Black Book publication revenue	4.000
Individual donations	1.545
Total Revenue	304.097
Expenses:	Total
Wages & contractor expenses	116.034
Taxes & payroll costs	35.707
Travel	20.148
External psychologist	17.300
Member expenses	13.403
Film costs	10.213
Transfer to external researcher	5.963
Internet expenses	4.214
Technology	3.429
Graphic design	2.000
Training	1.557
Translating	1.503
Insurance	1.014
Bank fees	344
Office expenses	255
Total Expenses	233.084
Net Change in Assets:	
Reserve Net Assets	19.080
Non-Reserve	51.933
Total Change	71.013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Financial Supporters

Our work would not be possible without the support of generous, like-minded foundations and organisations that have endowed us with their trust. In particular, we would like to thank our 2022 foundational supporters, including:

OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS



Brot
für die Welt



HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG



European
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Foundation

FONDATION
monde un
par
tous

REFERENCES AND MORE INFORMATION

For more information, including reports, our testimony database, and ways to get involved, visit our [website](#).

To support us on social media, please follow us on [Twitter](#).

For contacts, please email us at:

Advocacy - advocacy@borderviolence.eu

Finance - finance@borderviolence.eu

All others - mail@borderviolence.eu