



# Border Violence Monitoring Network



## ILLEGAL PUSH-BACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



BALKAN REGION

MAY 2021

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) reported on a total of 43 pushbacks, impacting a combined number of 760 people-on-the-move at borders across the Balkans. The reports illustrate a range of different tactics and rights breaches which have become embedded in EU border enforcement, including extreme physical and racialised violence.

In Croatia, the publication looks at the way anti-Muslim and homophobic violence are part of pushback regimes. Cases recorded from April and May reveal high levels of physical, verbal and psychological abuse pivoting on racialised-Islamophobic narratives. Meanwhile the report also looks at a recent case of members of the LGBTQ community being pushed back to Bosnia-Herzegovina, representing further identity-based violence in the enforcement of the border.

Across the region, bilateral controls and donations of equipment also remained a major topic last month. Most notably, the deployment of international officers to the Slovenian border marked a major step in externalisation. Meanwhile in North Macedonia the cache of border equipment given by the Bundespolizei, including vans and thermal imaging cameras, also signalled the projection of German migration policy to the south of the Balkan Route.

In Bulgaria, the frequency of dog attacks marked a continuation of police K9 units involved in the torture of transit groups. Seen within the context of increased militarisation in the Evros region, this entrance point to the route has remained consistently violent with the approach of summer. In a wider view, the report also looks at events in Ceuta and Melilla, situating pushbacks within a globalised system of border violence. Looking at the brutality of border enforcement and parallels in violent forced removals across different borderscapes highlights the unified and violent strategy being deployed by the EU.

The report also includes a summary of the carceral/surveillance systems being applied to Greek camps, the criminalisation of movement symbolised by a recent Lesvos court ruling, quarantine conditions in Italy's Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, and squat evictions in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In sum, the month of May saw a continuation of violence against people-on-the-move, both at borders and interiors, with erosion of rights and expansion of right wing violence underscoring the overall precarious nature of transit along the Balkan Route.

*\*BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in Greece and the Western Balkans including No Name Kitchen, Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, Disinfo Collective, Josoor, [re:]ports Sarajevo, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, Mare Liberum, IPSIA, Collective Aid and Fresh Response.*



Border Violence  
Monitoring Network

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# GENERAL

## REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN is a collaborative project between multiple grassroots organisations and NGOs working along the Western Balkan Route and Greece, documenting violations at borders directed towards people-on-the-move. The members have a common website [database](#), used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

## TERMINOLOGY

The term *pushback* is a key component of the situation that unfolded along the EU borders (Hungary and Croatia) with Serbia in 2016, after the closure of the Balkan route. Push-back describes the informal expulsion (without due process) of an individual or group to another country. This lies in contrast to the term “deportation”, which is conducted in a legal framework. Push-backs have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological process for these 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. Although the testimony collection itself is typically with a group no larger than five persons, the pushback groups which they represent can be as large as 50 persons. We have a standardised framework for our interview structure which blends the collection of hard data (dates, geo-locations, officer descriptions, photos of injuries/medical reports, etc.) with open narratives of the abuse.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	–	Bosnia and Herzegovina
HR	–	Croatia
SRB	–	Serbia
SLO	–	Slovenia
ROM	–	Romania
HUN	–	Hungary
ALB	–	Albania
BGR	–	Bulgaria
MNK	–	North Macedonia
GRK	–	Greece
TUR	–	Turkey
EU	–	European Union

# TRENDS IN BORDER VIOLENCE

## ISLAMOPHOBIA DURING PUSHBACKS FROM CROATIA

Perpetrators draw on a range of overlapping justifications to sustain pushbacks, including security, rule of law, and nationalism. On an implementation level, increasing evidence is also emerging to show the way racialised Islamophobia is underpinning border enforcement. A look at recent cases from Croatia reveals how officers on the ground are using this repression to target people-on-the-move. Reports published in the last months by BVMN provide first hand accounts of a pattern of verbal, physical and psychological abuse.

In recent incidents, respondents shared the way masked and armed Croatian officers used verbal abuse, including Islamophobic slurs, while carrying out pushbacks to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a [case from February](#), a group of young Afghans, including an unaccompanied child, were forced to undress and beaten with tree branches and batons. The officers carrying out this attack shouted blasphemous and racist remarks, mocking the group's Muslim faith and their ethnicity. This was also reported in a later [case from March](#), where officers interrogated and then beat group members:

***“The first question the police asked them was if they were Muslims. After the respondent confirmed, the authorities told them: ‘We don’t like Muslims’”***

Testimonies of survivors from these incidents reflect the way verbal abuse can act as an articulation of racialised and religious borders, with the “Othering” of non-white and non-Christian people as a threat and therefore legitimate target. Notably, the people subject to these insults also recounted their pushbacks as acts of “torture”, because of their demeaning nature and overlap with physical assault.

Looking at the narrative constructed by officers with this verbal violence also sheds light on the way perpetrators frame their oppression of others. Racialised-Islamophobia can present as both a driving force for abuse, but also as a skewed psychological tool used to detach perpetrators from the heinous bodily violence they are active in. Such detachment is also seen in the dehumanisation of people-on-the-move by attacking officers, who regularly refer to transit groups as “animals” (see

[5.12](#)), underscoring the direct racism they employ and also their perceived licence to carry out torture.

Discrimination on race and faith also functions through a variety of repressive acts which accompany verbal/physical abuse. For example, in one [case from March](#) a family were forced to burn their children's clothing along with their Quran, meanwhile in another incident a man was struck across the face for refusing a cigarette during Ramadan (see [5.9](#)). Female Muslims have also been violently [forced to remove their Hijab](#) during pushbacks from Croatia, or had their bodies searched aggressively by male police officers. These attacks on people's bodies, faith, desecration of religious objects, and removal of religious dress, all mark part of the profiling and abuse of Muslim transit groups. This violence also interlinks with racial profiling based on features such as skin colour and facial hair, creating a racialised “Muslim Other” which not only channels prejudice of Islam, but also hatred of people from Middle Eastern, South Asian and North African backgrounds.

This racialised approach of police officers is often most apparent in the differentiated treatment of people with Christian beliefs. In most cases, racist and anti-Muslim sentiment informs widespread violence against captured groups, and profiling of ethnicity plays a role in merging all transit communities under a “Muslim Other”, no matter what their beliefs are. However, in cases where group members have either verbalised their Christian faith, or were spotted wearing items such as crucifixes, officers have frequently singled these people out for [preferential treatment](#), or [excluded them from beatings](#). These perverse practices have also been noted in other border areas, such as [Evros pushbacks](#), depicting the way Christianity is mobilised within this violence to delineate targets. The fact that transit groups, who are themselves mostly people of colour, have to alert officers to their faith in order to receive less severe beatings only reinforces the fact that racial profiling intersects strongly with the application of Islamophobic violence.

In a wider lens, the EU's reinforcement of the

"shield" rhetoric, coined by [Commissioner Von der Leyen](#) in spring of 2020, has only cemented the view of the external border as a barrier against a racialised "Other". Coupled with the emphasis on counter-terrorism techniques within migration policy, such as the new UN office launched in Budapest which was described in the [March report](#), the constriction of rights for people-on-the-move is increasingly being tied to the threat

of radical Islam. This intersection of violence based on race and religion highlights the fact that pushbacks are not only violations of asylum law and returns. Resisting them requires an anti-racist and de-colonial approach, which recognises peoples experience of racialised-Islamophobia. This oppression is not only a tool in the daily execution of pushbacks, but a political stimulus which states and the EU are using to secure borders.



Masked Croatian police carrying out violent pushback (Source:[Brush&Bow](#))

## K9 POLICE UNITS ATTACK TRANSIT GROUPS IN BULGARIA

The month of May saw a sharp increase in numbers of pushbacks from Bulgaria to Turkey. So far in 2021, BVMN member Josoor recorded 17 testimonies recounting the experience of 90 people-on-the-move pushed back from Bulgaria to Turkey. Six of these testimonies, affecting 50 people in total, were recorded in May alone. Compared to pushbacks from neighboring Greece, transit groups that are pushed back from Bulgaria are not usually detained and gathered to be pushed back in larger numbers. Instead, Bulgarian police push people back directly to Turkey, or via Greece's tri-border, immediately after apprehension and thus this often happens in much smaller groups in comparison to the aggregate use of detention by Greece. In particular, the Bulgarian police often separate the transit groups into even smaller sub-groups to push them back at slightly different locations on the border.

Just as in Greece, Bulgarian officers use high levels of violence. All of the testimonies collected so far this year reported beatings, and 14 out of 17 testimonies also included descriptions of people-on-the-move being kicked by officers. Similarly to the Evros area

in Greece, civilians are often reported to cooperate in stopping and alerting police to the presence of transit groups. Police officers are also regularly reported to wear balaclavas and use a mix of patrol cars and unmarked vehicles. Another similarity between pushbacks from Greece and Bulgaria is the frequent forced undressing which was reported in over half of pushbacks recorded from Bulgaria this year.

One key difference to Greek pushbacks is the more extensive use of police dogs in Bulgaria. Eight out of 17 testimonies in 2021 reported police dog attacks, as did three out of six testimonies recorded in May (see [9.2](#), [9.4](#), [9.6](#)).

*"I have a phobia of dogs and a heart illness, so I kept yelling to the officers "please sirs, please sirs" but they all kept laughing at me. The dog bit my legs and the officers were saying "bravo bravo" to encourage the dog."* (see [9.2](#))

A tactic first observed in 2020 and continuing this year is the pushback of transit



groups from Bulgaria to Greece resulting in subsequent chain pushbacks to Turkey. This practice has been recorded both for groups who initially crossed to Bulgaria from Turkey via Greece, as well as for transit groups who never entered Bulgaria directly from Turkey. Relaying one experience of this from April, a [respondent described](#) how:

***“They pushed us back to Greece...we tried to go back to talk to them because we didn’t know what would happen, where we were, where we would go; we didn’t know anything but we were afraid that they would set the dog on us. It’s not something new that they do—they do this every time.”***

On 29th May, a Dutch film crew was detained in the Evros border area while following a group of Afghans that had been pushed back from Bulgaria, also with the use of dogs. “Most of them had wounds from the Bulgarian police dogs on their face, arms and legs” [wrote the journalists](#), corroborating the evidence regularly presented in BVMN testimonies. Both trends in the use of K9 units, direct pushbacks and the weaponisation of the tri-border area continue to make Bulgaria a highly precarious place of transit.



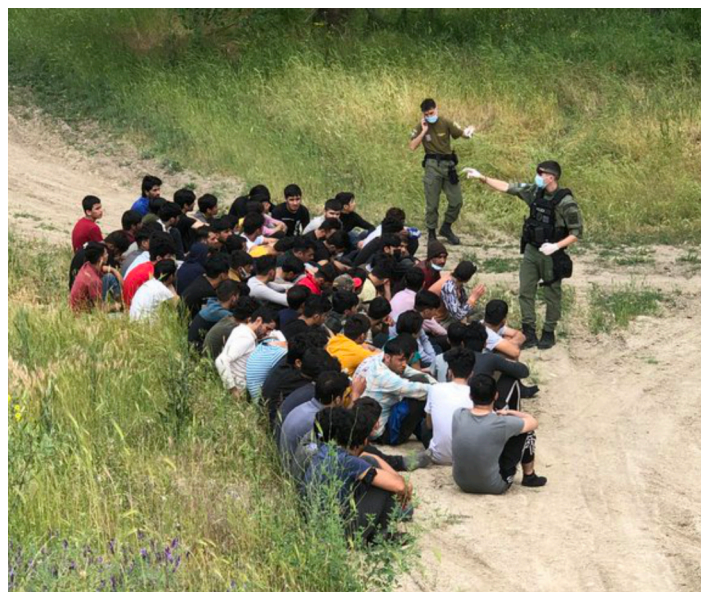
Injury sustained in Bulgarian pushback (Source: [Josoor /BVMN](#))

## PUSHBACKS ACROSS THE EVROS/MERIÇ RIVER

In May, BVMN recorded only a few testimonies of pushbacks from the Evros region, with many occurring directly from Bulgaria to Turkey. However, the pushbacks documented from Greece followed similar trends observed in past months, namely: people-on-the-move have their belongings confiscated by authorities, people are gathered en masse in detention centers or police stations in the Evros region, food and water are denied while in detention, and people are forced out of dinghies into the water or onto small islands in the middle of the Evros/Meriç river during pushback. The consistency of this pattern speaks to the systematic approach on the part of the authorities.

One testimony (see [8.1](#)) from this month also directly mentioned the Soufli police station as a place of detention in which people-on-the-move are held prior to being pushed back. This particular police station has also previously been identified in other [testimonies](#) (also [here](#)) directly, and is situated near where many pushbacks over the Evros Meriç river have been recorded. Additionally, Turkish police and military increasingly force

people-on-the-move to cross back into Greece. This creates a situation in which people are pushed “back and forth” across the Evros river, from Greece to Turkey, back into Greece, and at times back into Turkey.



Greek police detain people in Evros (Source: [Bram Vermeulen](#))

# UPDATE ON THE SITUATION

## GREECE

### WALLS CONSTRUCTED AROUND GREEK CAMPS

Construction of three meter tall concrete walls has started around Ritsona, Diavata, and other refugee camps on the Greek mainland, with plans to build them around 23 other camps. The estimated cost for these walls is about 28.4 million euros, which will be largely funded by the European Commission. The justification used by the Ministry of Migration for the wall's construction has been that it is for the "protection" of those living inside of the camp.

In addition to the walls there are further plans to implement extensive security systems within camps, including the use of drones, magnetic gates with integrated thermographic cameras, x-ray machines and security cameras at the entry and exit points. These surveillance systems will be installed in 39 camps across the mainland and the Greek islands, while 75 percent of the costs will be covered by the European Internal Security Fund. When asked to comment, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Migration stated:

**"It is the necessary supervision of structures, security, prevention of delinquent behaviours, fires and other unforeseen factors. It is the maximum possible control of who enters and who leaves the structures. Greece initially installed barbed wire fences but the residents of the structures have repeatedly and continuously destroyed and continue to destroy the barbed wire fences. That is why it was decided to upgrade the fences."**

The walls and surveillance systems come as only the latest move by the Greek state towards increasingly incarceration based approaches to migration and asylum. In the last year, the passing of the International Protection Act both extended the use of detention, and increased the time-frame to up to 18 months. This duration can "reach 36 months if added to immigration detention", in effect legalising the systematic use of imprisonment in return procedures and during the asylum procedure in some cases. Refugees are detained for uncertain periods of time waiting for deportation, or the arbitrary and slim chance they may be released or granted asylum. Moves to defund and close down integration-focused housing programs outside of camps in the last six months, coupled with the cutting of cash benefits for asylum seekers living outside of camp structures, leaves people with few choices but to live in these increasingly prison-like structures.

Through these carceral approaches to migration/asylum, the Greek Government treats people on the move as if they were criminals: limiting their freedom of movement, their right to live freely, and access to basic services and necessities not available within limited camp structures. It serves to further isolate communities from the local Greek population, structures of support, and solidarity projects that have in the recent years been crucial in building transnational communities, collective struggles, and networks of mutual support in Greece.



Concrete wall under construction (Source: [Efsyn](#))



## THE FRAMING PEOPLE-ON-THE MOVE AS 'SMUGGLERS'

On 13th May 2021, 27-year-old Mohamad H. was [sentenced to 146 years imprisonment](#) by a court in Mytilene, Lesbos. After fleeing from Somalia to Turkey, the young father of four attempted to reach Greece on a rubber boat together with 33 others on 2nd December 2020. When their boat capsized, two of the passengers drowned. The remaining, including Mohamad H., were picked up by the Hellenic Coast Guard. According to survivors, Mohamad H. attempted to steer the boat in distress safely ashore to save the remaining passengers lives.

Despite the survivor's testifying that they owe their lives to the actions of Mohamad H., he was [arrested](#) for steering the vessel and consequently charged with the *'illegal transportation of third-country nationals into Greek territory'*, with the aggravating circumstances of endangering the life of others and causing the death of two people. The defense lawyers will [file an appeal](#) against the decision stressing that Greece's hostile border policies, without safe and legal routes for people to seek asylum, are forcing people to make perilous journeys to safety.

The case of Mohamad H. is unfortunately not an isolated case. Most recently, a young Syrian was [sentenced to 52 years in prison and a fine of 242,000 euros](#) for crimes of 'illegal entry' and 'facilitating illegal entry' in April. The filing of such charges against people-

on-the-move arriving on the Aegean islands has been systematically used by the Greek state for several years. A [recently published report](#) by Borderline Europe, bordermonitoring.eu and Aegean Migrant Solidarity outlined the *'system of punishment and incarceration of migrants who are accused of human smuggling at the EU external border in the Aegean'*, highlighting that the *'every-day practice of incarcerating non-Europeans on the Greek islands goes almost unnoticed by the public'*. The report highlights that most people who are tried in court for facilitating illegal entry are *'people seeking asylum in the EU or Turkish citizens living precarious lives, who are pushed to undertake this task by their economic situation'*.

Furthermore, an appeal was meant to take place this month on a similar sentence that was given to a young Syrian man who attempted to reach Samos from Turkey back in 2017. According to human rights lawyers working on the island, the individual, who fled from the Syrian army, was forced to drive the boat by people in Turkey in order to secure his passage. The boat went into distress mid-journey and was eventually picked up by Frontex authorities. The person found driving was sentenced for 55 years, and has been in prison since 2017. The frequent postponement of appeals has characterised the applicants incarceration over the last years, and is representative of a wider use of prisons and court systems which use the framing of 'smuggling' to lock up people-on-the-move.

## SLOVENIA

### NEW JOINT BORDER PATROLS AT THE CROATIAN BORDER

On 10th May 21 [police officers from Poland, Lithuania and Estonia joined Slovene police](#) to strengthen border surveillance on the Slovene-Croatian border in the area under the jurisdiction of the Police Directorate of Novo Mesto. According to the Slovene Ministry of Interior, they are working in joint patrols with Slovene police officers and have been granted the same authorisation as their Slovene colleagues. This means that they are authorised to patrol the border areas in search of persons who have crossed into the country irregularly and arrest them, conduct identification procedures, create roadblocks, confiscate personal belongings, and do security checks. They will also have access to the same instruments of restraint such as

handcuffs, pepper spray, batons, dogs and teasers.

The duration of their stay in Slovenia is not known but the memorandum signed by state officials sets the maximum length of their operation to be six months. As stated by the Slovene Minister of Interior Aleš Hojs, Slovenia is seeking the deployment of 150 foreign police officers in the near future. According to media reports, there will be at least 25 officers coming from Romania and an unknown number from Hungary, additional [talks are ongoing with Denmark, Austria, and Germany](#). Intentions of the Slovene Ministry of Interior to strengthen the international co-

operation on the border comes after [failed attempts](#) to subordinate military personnel, who are patrolling the border areas, to the authorities of police.

The Slovene international cooperation on border control began only a week after the [official visit](#) of the Interior Minister Aleš Hojs in Poland where he met with his Polish counterpart Mariusz Kaminski. While in Poland the Interior Minister also visited the Executive Director of Frontex Fabrice Leggeri with whom he discussed the role of Frontex in the Western Balkans and specifically the need to establish a strong Frontex presence in North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. On

4th June the [Slovene Interior Minister](#) also hosted the Italian Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese. They discussed the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) and agreed to re-establish joint border patrols of Slovene and Italian Police, which are to operate in the border areas close to the Italian cities of Trieste and Udine. As shown by numerous reports and several court cases [Slovenia and Italy](#) have been extensively involved in severe violation of basic rights by conducting chain-pushbacks to Croatia via readmission and thus bear responsibility for violence which occurs when people are expelled to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## ITALY

### ARRIVALS AND QUARANTINE CAMPS IN FVG

The flow of people through the Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG) region in North Eastern Italy has been consistent but relatively small in size during May. People arriving from Slovenia are often moving on through Trieste in small groups of two to three, and are generally in better conditions than in previous months (which may be linked to the fairer weather). Movements into Italy from the Balkan Route remain fluid and sometimes hard to track, particularly because new arrivals have recently had less interaction with solidarity initiatives in Trieste, with the city being increasingly used as a temporal transit point as people attempt to move swiftly on.

Surveillance of border traffic remained high of late, as demonstrated by numerous arrests of people accused of smuggling by the au-

thorities operating within the army operation Strade Sicure. Despite these arrests, there remains limited evidence of further pushbacks or “readmissions”, with the majority of people-on-the-move caught by police being taken into quarantine camps in FVG. Aside from the smaller flow of groups, one of the largest arrivals quarantined [consisted of 130 people](#) found stowed in vehicles on highway A23 near the City of Udine. While this is currently being carried out through centres on land, approaches in Italy to the pandemic may soon seek to offshore these isolation procedures. The [Transport Ministry](#) recently floated the proposal of quarantine ships in the north Adriatic Coast to receive new people, similar to those used to isolate arrivals from the Central Mediterranean Route.

## CROATIA

### PUSHBACK OF LGBTQ TRANSIT GROUP

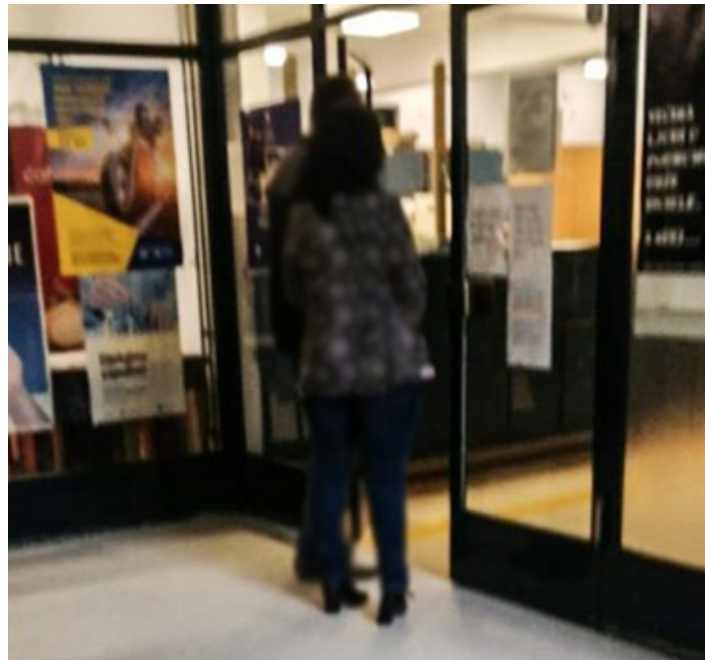
In an article by Croatian portal [Index](#), a recent pushback of people from the LGBTQ community from Croatia was detailed, showing the continued gatekeeping of asylum access and illegal forced removals to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Three people, who's sexuality is criminalised in their home country, crossed into Croatia and sought to make a request for asylum at a local police station. The group alerted both the Ombudspersons office and local organisations, and activists accompanied them to the station to see their claim lodged. Selma Banich who was present at the scene stated that:

***"Three people entered the police station in Petrinja, asked for asylum in the morning shift. I was in contact with them, escorted them to the entrance of the station, received photos, exchanged messages"***

But despite this, the group were then pushed back to Bosnia-Herzegovina, echoing previous experiences of LGBTQ transit groups that BVMN reported on in the [November report](#). The group have since returned to Croatia and had their asylum request heard in the Sisak-Moslavina Police Department. They have now been housed in an asylum seekers

shelter in Zagreb and their claims for international protection are underway. Whether this step would have been taken if not for the pressure of activists supporting their case is unclear, and BVMN's evidence on the way that Croatian police indiscriminately remove transit groups suggests that most people seeking protection are not able to make such a request. These severe shortcomings in the

asylum system should also be understood within a wider context of violent bordering which also includes high levels of gender based violence against transit groups. While the situation of LGBTQ people –on-the-move is an often untold story within pushbacks, it is a further illustration of the way authorities use repressive notions of identity to “Other” people at borders.



Approaching the police station in Petrinja (Source:[Index](#))

## BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

### EVICION OF INFORMAL SITES ACROSS USC

The Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA), with the support of the police force and in cooperation with International Organisation for Migration (IOM), started evictions of the main abandoned buildings in the area of Bihać and Velika Kladuša in May, moving people to Lipa. While the camp in Lipa remains unprepared to accommodate the informal population currently in the Una Sana Canton (USC), authorities signal it will be increasing capacity to do so this summer.

The Dom Pensionera, an abandoned old people's home within the city of Bihać that housed about a hundred people-on-the-move, was evicted in the middle of the month, and many residents were transferred against their will to Lipa camp. After the eviction, the building was cordoned off with physical obstacles and cleaned by the public utility company "Komrad".

The mayor of Bihać, [Šuhret Fazlić](#), said that "after the session of the city's crisis staff on

*the epidemiological situation, they came to the conclusion that the location of the rest home, as well as some others in this town, is a possible source of infection [for COVID-19]."*

In fact, right in front of the squat the first vaccination centre in the city of Bihać was opened in May, which has already started immunising the elderly population. It seems clear that this was a motivating factor in the local administration's decision to permanently close the squat, which has been one of the main buildings where the transit community has found shelter in Bihać since 2018.

The eviction fitted into a wider pattern across the month, with follow up operations such as that which cleared the small squatted area ("jungle") in Vedro Polje. According to people that were living there, police set fire to their personal belongings before transferring them to the camp in Lipa. Network member [No Name Kitchen](#) has been tracking the way



fires have been used by police to break up and disperse rural squatted sites. These tactics are a companion piece to the orchestrated raids on the abandoned buildings used in the urban centres of USC.

In May the SFA also coordinated operations in four other locations in the city of Bihać: Zegarsko polje, Debeljača, a location near the cantonal hospital and the Jedinstvo football stadium. The 255 persons using these spaces for makeshift shelter, mostly citizens of Pakistan and Afghanistan, were forcibly transferred to Lipa. The activities were carried out in cooperation with the police officers of the Ministry of Interior and with the support of the medical team of the organisation SOS Bihać. The evictions also involved

families and unaccompanied minors staying in the vicinity of Cazin, namely Sturlić and Hadžin Potok. A total of 160 people-on-the-move were evicted in these operations, including 19 families with 29 children. Most came from Afghanistan and Iran, and they were also relocated to Lipa camp.

Parallel the clamp down on squats, camp access is also fluctuating. At the beginning of May, IOM announced the closure of the camp Sedra for families and unaccompanied minors, in the Cazin area (likely by the end of June). IOM is no longer accepting new arrivals in the camp, and families who decide to leave to attempt to cross the border with Croatia will lose access to the camp if they are pushed back to Bosnia-Herzegovina.



*The Dom Pensionera squat which was evicted and cordoned off (Source:BVMN)*

## NORTH MACEDONIA

### GERMANY DONATE EQUIPMENT FOR BORDER CONTROL

Responding to a [parliamentary question](#) by the German left-wing party Die Linke, the German government enumerated a number of items given to the North Macedonian border police by German police forces. These items include 22 “*emergency vehicles for control and patrol duty*” (with a hefty price tag of more than 350,000 €), thermal cameras (worth almost 100,000 €) and document scanners as well as some clothing. This equipment allows the North Macedonian border police to harden and technologise the border, in a trend that aligns with Berlin’s and Brussel’s strategy of border securitisation and externalisation who are increasingly equipping non-member states with resources to constrict movement at borders. It almost goes without saying that such equipment is likely to be utilised by security forces at the North Macedonian forces as they en-

gage in pushbacks and other human rights abuses, as [documented by BVMN](#).

In addition to these broad trends, the donations are concerning for two reasons. First, as Die Linke [pointed out](#), the internationalisation of police work circumvents the strict parliamentary controls in place for military operations. The ability of parliament to challenge or even become aware of international police operations is severely limited. This comparative lack of control may be part of the explanation for the recent mushrooming of international military operations by the German police in Europe and beyond.

Second, the provision of police equipment by Germany to North Macedonia is only one instance in a growing list of bilateral police co-

operation between EU-member states and North Macedonia, as well as the Western Balkans more generally. While Frontex is playing a key role in the EU's externalisation regime elsewhere in the Western Balkans, a [Bulgarian veto](#) has so far prevented a formal Frontex deployment to North Macedonia, though allegations of their [informal operations](#) there remain rife. But without a legal mandate, a "void" of EU presence has opened up that member states, especially those associated with the Visegrad group, are happy to fill. For instance, Hungary has been deploying police officers to North Macedonia

and Serbia, accompanied by [aggressive rhetoric](#) about "defending" European borders. Similarly, the Czech Republic [first deployed](#) police officers to support North Macedonian border guards in 2016. In a press release from February 2021, the Visegrad Group claimed that Czech border guards stationed in the area helped North Macedonian police [detain a lorry](#) with 280 people-on-the-move. Given the prevalence of push-backs at the border, it is plausible to assume that the transit group was illegally expelled to Greece thereafter.

## SERBIA

### RAIDS ON SQUATS & POLICE VIOLENCE

In the past weeks, members of BVMN working in Northern Serbia have received several informal reports about two evictions carried out by Serbian authorities in Subotica and Horgoš. Both towns are situated a few kilometres away from the Serbian-Hungarian border. According to one testimony, over 200 people were taken from several squats in Horgoš one morning. The number of people evicted from the squats in Subotica is unclear but footage shared with BVMN members shows over 30 people were taken in the operation.

Both evictions were carried out by the police in the early hours of the day, between 6AM and 8AM. At least one of them allegedly involved officers in military style uniform, wearing balaclavas, together with regular police officers in blue uniforms. In Horgoš, two people-on-the-move were reported to have been subjected to physical violence by the authorities –namely beating with black batons. After both evictions, all people-on-the-move were taken by bus to the official Reception Centre (RC) in Preševo, next to the border with North Macedonia, over 550km away from the squats in the North of the country.

Moreover, upon returning to Horgoš, those evicted found that most of the personal belongings they had left behind –especially bedding items– had been taken away from the squats. The confiscation of blankets after evictions, in previous cases reportedly by the police, has been a practice observed by BVMN members in Subotica in the past, including last winter when temperatures reached -10C. Daily police presence at the squats in the early mornings before and after the evictions has also been reported in both Subotica and

Horgoš. Some police officers were observed wearing civilian clothing and reportedly took pictures of people-on-the-move while they were asleep.

Reports of evictions of people-on-the-move in the region have been regularly received by [BVMN members](#) in the past months. They followed similar patterns as they were conducted in the early morning, have Presevo RC as the final destination, involve the confiscation of blankets after the operations and entail some degree of physical violence. Though absent from these most recent testimonies, destruction of personal belongings –including phones– has been reported as a common practice during evictions in the region.

The [overcrowding of Reception Centres](#) in the North of the country prevents many people-on-the-move in the region from staying in official accommodation. Many of them report to be repeatedly told by police officers to go to the official camps in Subotica or Sombor, only to be rejected upon arrival by camp authorities, claiming a lack of capacities. Meanwhile, the constant forced relocations to the South of the country constitute a drain of financial and, in many cases, emotional, resources of people-on-the-move.



# SPAIN

## VIOLENCE AND PUSHBACK OF THOUSANDS FROM THE CEUTA ENCLAVE

Beginning on the 17th of May approximately 10,000 people crossed the border from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, both via sea and land. Approximately half were minors, and those making the crossing also included women, and many sub-saharan Africans.

The unprecedented number of arrivals was firstly met by the Spanish authorities' incapacity to act. However, on the second day of crossings, the Spanish government began to deploy its security forces -including the military- all around the enclave, including drawing additional numbers from mainland Spain, in order to (1) prevent the entry of people through forceful means and (2) pushback as many people as possible to Morocco, en masse and regardless of their right to an individual assessment for asylum.

Tear gas, rubber bullets and intimidation were among the methods used by the Spanish authorities in order to stop people from crossing into Ceuta. Additionally, network members No Name Kitchen and Disinfaux Collective witnessed Spanish security forces beating people with batons, in addition to other forms of violence such as kicking and pushing. The military also forced groups of people to stay in the sea for prolonged periods of time, which caused cases of hypothermia. Later on, people were dragged by authorities through the water by their arms and legs into an effective limbo, left in the water where the coastline divides between Spain and Morocco. There were countless injured and at least two people have been found dead after attempts to cross into Ceuta between 7th - 19th May.

At the same time, Spanish police forces initiated a hunt for undocumented people in the streets, collecting them using violent methods such as chasing, intimidation, verbal abuse, beatings and kickings. Many of these were unaccompanied minors who, once detained, were either brought to the facilities for minors or pushed back to Morocco. The detainees were held in inhumane conditions, with a lack of water, food, and sanitary facilities, prompting many of the minors to attempt escape.



*Hundreds of minors detained by Spanish authorities  
(Source:NNK/BVMN)*

This situation has also resulted in an escalation of brutal violence performed by local groups in Ceuta, who organise themselves to rob, stab and abuse people-on-the-move inside the enclave. These attacks continue to result in head wounds, cuts, black eyes, and other severe bodily injuries. Nevertheless, rarely do the victims want to be treated in the hospital, as the hospital staff [notify the police](#) every time a person who crossed into Ceuta on these dates enters the emergency room. Hence medical services in the Spanish enclave are complicit in the subsequent pushbacks faced by people. Transit groups who manage to stay in Ceuta remain at constant risk of violence from multiple actors, and are forced into a precarious existence on the streets. Cases of deaths and suicide, as well as a high number of missing minors, illustrate the fatal border violence being employed by Spain and the EU.





*Two Spanish military officers beat a minor during a pushback to Morocco (Source: NNK/BVMN)*

## PARALLEL BORDER VIOLENCE AND POLICE BRUTALITY IN MELILLA

The week beginning the 18th of May saw five consecutive nights of mass attempts to cross Melilla's border fence. This unprecedented increase in attempts to jump the fence came as a consequence of the so-called crisis in Spain's other Moroccan exclave, Ceuta. As in Ceuta, law enforcement exercised disproportionate use of force against people attempting to cross the border, using batons to beat people who were in the water surrounding Dique Sur, the southernmost point of the border, as well as using tear gas and rubber bullets against groups of people approaching the fence on the Moroccan side. Additional Guardia Civil forces were mobilized, as well as the army, in order to further "secure" the border and [an extra 30 million Euros](#) have been promised to the Moroccan government to fund militarisation of the border zone.

However, unlike in Ceuta, the Moroccan police and forces auxiliares deployed around Melilla's border fence collaborated fully with the Spanish authorities, both in terms of physical violence, and in aiding the implementation of pushbacks. A minor from the Moroccan town of Farkhana died as a result of the injuries sustained after being beaten by Moroccan police forces patrolling the fence.

Pushbacks took place at multiple points of the border fence. On the 18th of May, a group of around 20 people on the move who had managed to enter Melilla at Dique Sur were loaded into a van belonging to the Guardia Civil. They were driven two hundred metres along the border on the Spanish side and one by one forced through a door in the fence into Moroccan territory. On the 20th of May, a group of 100 people from the neighbouring town of Mariguari were kept for hours in Melilla, surrounded by Guardia Civil,

before again being forced through a gate in the fence. Activists on the ground were able to observe that no individualised assessment took place, and that it is highly probable that those who were pushed back include people eligible for international protection and unaccompanied minors. Removals from Spain to Morocco have technically been legal since [the 1992 bilateral agreement](#), and [the amendment of March 2015](#) states that "these rejections will be realised respecting the international law on human rights and international protection ratified by Spain", but in reality international human rights law is consistently violated.

Whereas previously mainly people from Sub-Saharan Africa jumped the fence, the week of the 18th of May saw the arrival, and the pushbacks, of young people from neighbouring Moroccan towns. They were motivated not only by the events in Ceuta, but by the fact that since March 2020, when the border closed due to Covid-19, people who usually have the right to enter Melilla during the day for work or educational purposes have been blocked from entering.

Moroccan men in particular face difficulties when claiming asylum, which leaves them, undocumented, living in the streets of Melilla. Subsequently, they attempt to cross to mainland Spain via the port, hiding in trucks or directly in the ferries. In Melilla, as in Ceuta, this practice is referred to as "risky". On top of the danger involved in scaling 9 metre walls and barbed wire fences, and hiding for hours inside trucks, people who attempt "risky" are subject to systematic police brutality, including severe beatings and the use of humiliation tactics such as forcing people to strip, destroying shoes with scissors or throwing shoes into the sea and cutting of their hair.

# GLOSSARY OF REPORTS, MAY 2021

BVMN published 43 pushback cases in May, impacting 760 people-on-the-move. Those affected by these incidents included men, women, children with guardians and unaccompanied children. They also represent a wide demographic, including people from Syria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Iran, Somalia, Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Algeria,

–3 pushbacks to Serbia (1 from Croatia, 2 from Hungary)  
 –27 pushbacks to Bosnia-Herzegovina (24 direct from Croatia, 1 from chain from Slovenia, 2 chain from Italy)  
 –5 pushback to Greece (4 from North Macedonia, 1 from Albania)  
 –8 pushbacks to Turkey (6 direct from Bulgaria, 8 from Greece)

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
HUNGARY TO SERBIA				
<a href="#">1.1</a>	16 <sup>th</sup> May	19 <sup>th</sup> May	10	Syria, Morocco
<a href="#">1.2</a>	22 <sup>nd</sup> May	29 <sup>th</sup> May	8	Syria
CROATIA TO SERBIA				
<a href="#">2.1</a>	12 <sup>th</sup> April	3 <sup>rd</sup> May	4	Afghanistan, Pakistan
ITALY TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
<a href="#">3.1</a>	27 <sup>th</sup> March	27 <sup>th</sup> March	8	Afghanistan, Pakistan
<a href="#">3.2</a>	7 <sup>th</sup> May	12 <sup>th</sup> May	4	Afghanistan
SLOVENIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
<a href="#">4.1</a>	4 <sup>th</sup> May	21 <sup>st</sup> April	1	Afghanistan
CROATIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
<a href="#">5.1</a>	11 <sup>th</sup> April	15 <sup>th</sup> April	15	India
<a href="#">5.2</a>	27 <sup>th</sup> April	5 <sup>th</sup> May	6	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.3</a>	29 <sup>th</sup> April	1 <sup>st</sup> May	38	Afghanistan, Pakistan
<a href="#">5.4</a>	29 <sup>th</sup> April	1 <sup>st</sup> May	13	Pakistan
<a href="#">5.5</a>	5 <sup>th</sup> May	10 <sup>th</sup> May	3	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.6</a>	5 <sup>th</sup> May	5 <sup>th</sup> May	6	Pakistan
<a href="#">5.7</a>	6 <sup>th</sup> May	7 <sup>th</sup> May	7	Afghanistan, Pakistan
<a href="#">5.8</a>	10 <sup>th</sup> May	14 <sup>th</sup> May	8	Pakistan
<a href="#">5.9</a>	12 <sup>th</sup> May	12 <sup>th</sup> May	20	Morocco, Pakistan
<a href="#">5.10</a>	13 <sup>th</sup> May	21 <sup>st</sup> May	10	Afghanistan, Pakistan
<a href="#">5.11</a>	14 <sup>th</sup> May	17 <sup>th</sup> May	6	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.12</a>	15 <sup>th</sup> May	25 <sup>th</sup> May	6	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.13</a>	16 <sup>th</sup> May	20 <sup>th</sup> May	32	Bangladesh, Pakistan
<a href="#">5.14</a>	17 <sup>th</sup> May	20 <sup>th</sup> May	20	Afghanistan, Pakistan
<a href="#">5.15</a>	17 <sup>th</sup> May	21 <sup>st</sup> May	14	Pakistan
<a href="#">5.16</a>	17 <sup>th</sup> May	22 <sup>nd</sup> May	12	Pakistan
<a href="#">5.17</a>	18 <sup>th</sup> May	20 <sup>th</sup> May	60	Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria
<a href="#">5.18</a>	20 <sup>th</sup> May	3 <sup>rd</sup> June	50	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.19</a>	21 <sup>st</sup> May	2 <sup>nd</sup> May	3	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.20</a>	22 <sup>nd</sup> May	23 <sup>rd</sup> May	18	Pakistan

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
<a href="#">5.21</a>	22 <sup>nd</sup> May	25 <sup>th</sup> May	20	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.22</a>	23 <sup>rd</sup> May	24 <sup>th</sup> May	30	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh
<a href="#">5.23</a>	24 <sup>th</sup> May	26 <sup>th</sup> May	11	Afghanistan
<a href="#">5.24</a>	28 <sup>th</sup> May	29 <sup>th</sup> May	7	Afghanistan
NORTH MACEDONIA TO GREECE				
<a href="#">6.1</a>	8 <sup>th</sup> May	12 <sup>th</sup> May	7	Morocco
<a href="#">6.2</a>	10 <sup>th</sup> May	12 <sup>th</sup> May	5	Morocco
<a href="#">6.3</a>	11 <sup>th</sup> May	14 <sup>th</sup> May	5	Morocco
<a href="#">6.4</a>	18 <sup>th</sup> May	26 <sup>th</sup> May	33	Morocco
ALBANIA TO GREECE				
<a href="#">7.1</a>	29 <sup>th</sup> April	26 <sup>th</sup> May	5	Morocco, Afghanistan
GREECE TO TURKEY				
<a href="#">8.1</a>	3 <sup>rd</sup> May	5 <sup>th</sup> May	150	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt
<a href="#">8.2</a>	17 <sup>th</sup> May	18 <sup>th</sup> May	55	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Syria. Iraq, Tunisia
BULGARIA TO TURKEY				
<a href="#">9.1</a>	5 <sup>th</sup> May	6 <sup>th</sup> May	3	Algeria, Tunisia
<a href="#">9.2</a>	6 <sup>th</sup> May	7 <sup>th</sup> May	12	Syria
<a href="#">9.3</a>	6 <sup>th</sup> May	7 <sup>th</sup> May	8	Syria
<a href="#">9.4</a>	7 <sup>th</sup> May	10 <sup>th</sup> May	14	Syria
<a href="#">9.5</a>	12 <sup>th</sup> May	14 <sup>th</sup> May	2	Tunisia
<a href="#">9.6</a>	21 <sup>st</sup> May	24 <sup>th</sup> May	11	Syria
FIND ALL REPORTS ON THE DATABASE <a href="#">HERE</a>				



# NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

B	O	R	D	E	R
V	I	O	L	E	N
M	O	N	I	T	O
N	E	T	W	O	R

BVMN is based on the horizontal participation of member organisations in the field of documentation, advocacy, media and litigation. The Network receives funds through charitable grants and donations from supporters. The funds primarily cover transport subsidies for volunteers in the field and staff costs.

To follow more from the Border Violence Monitoring Network, check out our [website](#) for the entire testimony archive, previous monthly reports and regular news pieces. To follow us on social media, find us on Twitter handle [@Border Violence](#) and on [Facebook](#). For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved please email us at [mail@borderviolence.eu](mailto:mail@borderviolence.eu). For press and media requests please contact: [press@borderviolence.eu](mailto:press@borderviolence.eu)



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