

MONTHLY REPORT | OCTOBER 2024

Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

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Executive summary

In October, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) shared 4 testimonies of pushbacks impacting at least 47 people on the move across the Balkans and Greece. This report gathers updates from the month of October and brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the Balkans, Turkey, and France to look at the way European Union states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders. Updates come from the different Member Organisations of BVMN, as well as Human Rights Observers (France) and Glocal Roots (Kos, Greece).

After years of continuous reporting on the systematic practice of pushbacks at the different borders of many countries in the Western Balkans (and beyond), testimonies collected by various BVMN teams in the region keep pointing at the use of the same violent tactics by the authorities, sustained by a climate of impunity and growing EU funding and personnel. In this report, we look into the modus operandi of police forces carrying out pushbacks at the borders of Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose authorities seem to be increasingly incorporating its neighbors' racialised and dehumanising policies of contempt for the rights of people on the move. We share inputs from multiple testimonies collected in recent months, which describe similar types and levels of violence used by police officers, including violent beatings, theft of personal belongings and destruction of phones, after which people are often left alone and incommunicated - sometimes also naked - in isolated places. Moreover, in several recent cases people on the move report the use of gun violence for intimidation. An increase in the perpetration of pushbacks and their level of violence at some of these borders has also been pointed out by medical organisations working with survivors of border violence in Turkey.

Increasingly securitised borders in the region try to keep people still in countries that offer, at best, inadequate and insufficient support in the face of the arrival of the winter. Thus, closed Transit Reception Centers (TRC) in Serbia are not meant to reopen, and reports from other facilities, such as the Blažuj TRC, in Sarajevo, constantly raise concerns about unsanitary, unhygienic and unsafe conditions.

The deteriorating situation in the camps also constitutes one of the main themes coming from Greece. There, government facilities for people on the move across the country continuously fail to cover even the basic needs of thousands of residents, many of whom are in a situation of de facto detention. Issues reported show concerning similarities across facilities, both in the islands (such as Lesvos, Samos and Kos) - where the increase in arrivals over the past several months has been met with little to no support -, and in the mainland. Testimonies from residents often emphasize the state of disrepair of the facilities, the lack of appropriate sleeping areas and shortage of shelter items, and the absolute lack



Executive summary

of adequate services for vulnerable populations, despite the fact that regular facilities often accommodate such groups, including unaccompanied minors. Moreover, access to the cash assistance program and asylum procedures are characterised by tremendous delays, thus contributing to the uncertainty and anxiety in the lives of thousands of people.

Poor conditions and negligence also pervade many Greek prisons. We unfortunately report on the deaths of three people in three different facilities in the country, as well as another person in Turkey, in the same month that the UN anti-torture task force visiting Greece further highlighted the need to address ill-treatment and poor conditions in places of deprivation of liberty across the country.

In Turkey, we share the concerning announcement by the Directorate of Migration Management on the further increase of technology and securitisation of the country's borders, a move heavily funded by the EU as part of its resolution to keep outsourcing violence in the shape of an increasingly externalised border regime. This policy encourages and sustains much of Turkey's systematic violence against migrants and people on the move, which this month has also taken the form of mass citizenship cancellation for thousands of Syrian people. As a result, many people have been left with no legal protection and at risk of deportation. We also highlight the recent protests at the Çatalca Removal Center, led by a group of female detainees against violence perpetrated by the authorities.

Moreover, this report includes updates from Northern France, where the evictions of people on the move continue every 48 hours, with hundreds of people affected and left without any alternative shelter. Meanwhile, aggressive architecture is used to further reduce the space used by people on the move and solidarity organisations, as boulders were placed in another former informal settlement, after the evictions.

Lastly, we regret to report on the deaths of several more people this month, as a result of the racist and violent border regime in different parts of Europe. In the Aegean, at least six people have lost their lives in two different shipwrecks near the coasts of Samos and Kos, and two Iranian women have been reported to have drowned in the river Sava while trying to cross the border between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Witnesses of the tragedy describe that police officers passed by in a boat while it was happening, ignoring the calls for help. In Northern France, thirteen more people have lost their lives in different incidents in the Channel, further increasing the number of victims of this border to 67 in the deadliest year on record at the French-UK border. All of these preventable deaths constitute a cruel and tragic reminder of the total impunity with which the border regime continues to cost lives, lives that are often left unnamed, unidentified and unrecorded.



General

REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN [1] 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 partners have a common website database, used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

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 exceed 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.

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. Pushback 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. Pushbacks have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

ABBREVIATIONS

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina
HRV – Croatia
SRB – Serbia
SLO – Slovenia
ROM – Romania
HUN – Hungary

AUT – Austria
MNK – North Macedonia
GRC – Greece
BGR – Bulgaria
TUR – Turkey
EU – European Union

[1] BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece and Turkey including Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, PIC, InfoKolpa, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarmphone Austria, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid and Mission Wings

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



Increased police action around the country

Following a trend reported in previous BVMN Monthly Reports, the heavy police presence around Luka Ćelović park, in Belgrade, continued throughout October. Thus, this month, more testimonies of extortion and harassment against people on the move in this park were shared with BVMN reporters. One of these accounts was shared by an Afghan man who was approached by a lone police officer, in civilian clothing, but who showed the respondent their badge. The officer reportedly searched him, took €50, and then demanded more. When the respondent told the officer he would record the incident on his phone, they walked away.

This park was a notable hotspot for people on the move until very recently. However, fewer people have been visibly present around the area due to the threat the police have been posing over the last few months. Many people apprehended here are also being forcefully transported to the camps in the south of the country, specially at night. As a result, most people leave the park before 6pm.

People in the informal camp (commonly known as “jungle”) outside of the official centre in Obrenovac, near Belgrade, also reported that the police have been regularly entering their living sites and removing people. People have thus begun to sleep in separate areas apart from one another in efforts to avoid mass arrests.

Increased surveillance and the use of drones

Collective Aid received multiple accounts this month from people on the move who have seen drones flying overhead of informal camps near the Serbian-Hungarian border.

On one of these occasions, on October 30th, minutes after a drone was spotted in the air, 3 Serbian police cars arrived to the area and 7 people on the move were arrested. The police reportedly beat members of the group, stole their food supplies, and emptied 100 litres of water that Collective Aid had left for the group that afternoon.

Emptying and stealing supplies from people who may not be able to access or afford more is nothing if not extremely cruel, and it is also clear evidence that members of the police are not merely working to prevent irregular migration, but are actively dehumanising and inflicting misery upon people on the move in Serbia. This level of



surveillance and harassment has left people feeling extremely unsafe and anxious, consequently unwilling to come out of hiding. This means people continue to take huge risks to pass through the country undetected, thus also unable to access the aid of humanitarian actors in the country when needed.

Pushback trends in Serbia and Bulgaria

During the month of October, BVMN reporters in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have received regular accounts of pushbacks to and from Serbia and Bulgaria. This is unfortunately not extraordinary, since pushbacks, usually accompanied by high levels of violence, humiliation and theft by the authorities, are constantly reported to field teams in the region. However, a growing number of testimonies point to a rise in pushbacks from Serbia to Bulgaria specifically, with one of the people interviewed reporting to have been pushed back at this border four times over the last few weeks.

All testimonies of pushbacks from Serbia to Bulgaria collected by BVMN teams in the past three months include accounts of physical violence, inflicted on transit groups by Serbian border or national police. Most respondents describe beatings with batons and “wooden tools”, and some also report the use of gun violence. One man explained that at around 11 pm, during his crossing into Serbia, the police spotted his group and began to shoot in their direction. Afterwards, three people from his transit group were apprehended and severely beaten. These violent practices have been carried out at both informal locations or points of apprehension, as well as in police stations or in police vehicles.

Moreover, pushbacks on this border often include the theft of personal belongings by the authorities, such as phones and money, as well as the destruction of phones, which further endangers people on the move, as they are left uncommunicated in places often isolated and unknown to them. One Algerian man said he had 600€ and all of his food taken by police when pushed back, and as a result was left only eating food he found on trees for three days after. Another big group who were pushed back together also reported having their phones stolen.

In most cases, after being subjected to violent beatings and/or a brief period of detention at a police station, people on the move are dropped back on the Bulgarian border at an informal location (not an authorised border crossing), and forced to walk back into Bulgaria.



A testimony taken this month outlines a violent pushback that occurred on the 25th of September this year:

A group of 31 men from Afghanistan - including 1 child between 10 and 11 years old - were travelling in the back of a vehicle near the Serbian border town of Pirot, shortly after crossing the border with Bulgaria.

The respondent - who was part of the group within the vehicle - asserted that two Serbian border police began to fire some sort of ammunition at their vehicle as they were leaving Pirot. Thankfully no-one was injured.

The group were apprehended by the police and taken to a police station after more officers arrived.

The entire group was detained for the night at the station. They were not provided with anything to eat despite informing the officers they had not eaten for 3 days. Moreover, they were denied access to the toilet. Phones were taken from the group, and not returned.

The next morning, the group were informed they would be taken to camps. Instead they were driven back over the border to Bulgaria.

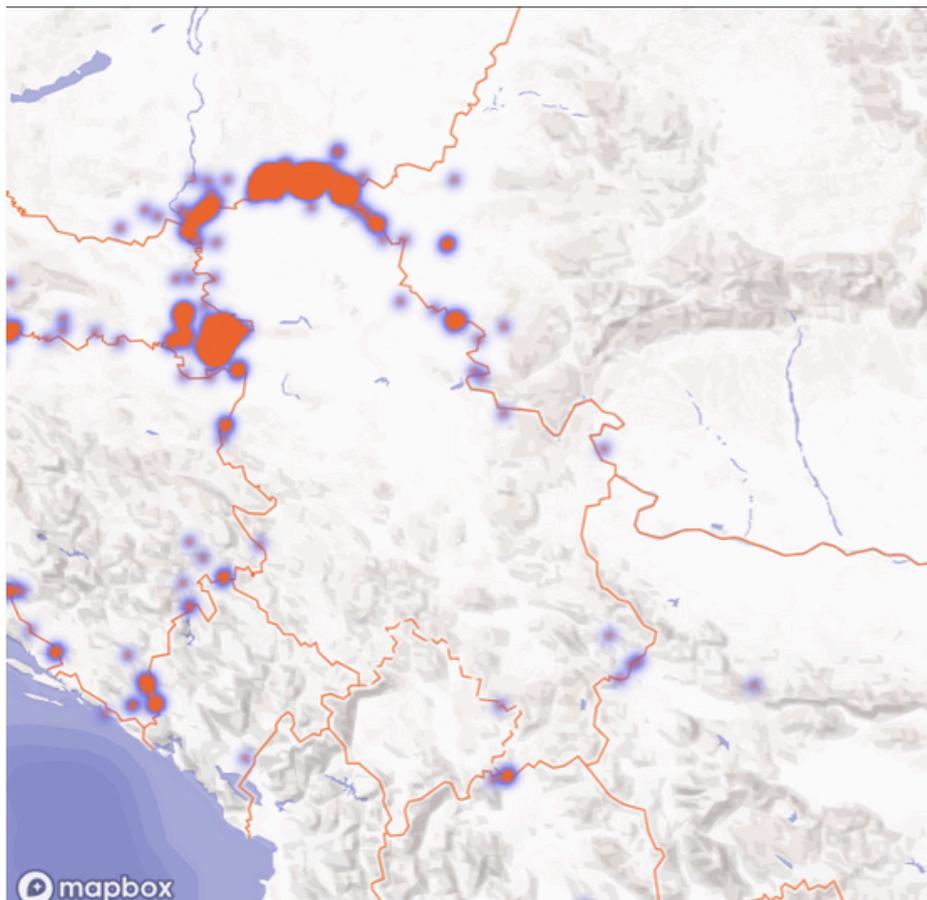
The respondents described the violence inflicted upon them during this journey as 'torture'. The police beat members of the group with 'wooden tools' so intensely that it left two individuals unable to walk. Moreover, when they tried to tell the police of their wishes to go to Europe, the police would grab their fingers and bend them backwards.

The effects of the extreme violence inflicted during pushbacks has also been reported by medical organisations supporting people on the move in Bulgaria, such as Medical Volunteers International (MVI), who have been treating patients outside of state reception camps in Sofia. MVI noted the number of pushback related injuries they have treated has increased in the month of October. Some of the most common ones include bruising and swelling often around the ribs.



The increase in this type of injuries has also been reported in the official camp in Harmanli, close to the border with Turkey. The level of violence constantly witnessed at these borders, inflicted by state authorities, evidences a clear lack of concern for international law, for the rights and safety of people on the move, and demonstrates the extent to which they are being dehumanised. Earlier this year in August, the swollen body of a 30 year old Syrian man, Khaled, was discovered in the bushes along this border. These preventable deaths and outright murders are the direct result of the violence perpetrated by Serbian and Bulgarian authorities, fueled by the climate of impunity that sustains the European migration regime.

Similar practices characterise pushbacks from Bulgaria to Turkey, where respondents have described thefts, kicking and beatings, as well as fingerprinting and forced signing of un-translated documents at police stations. In the same way, in a recent testimony recounting a pushback from Serbia to North Macedonia, the respondent describes being asked to provide his personal details and fingerprints. When he resisted giving his fingerprints, he was kicked in the chest by a police officer. He was then driven back to the border and left alone in the dark without phone service.



Heat map showing some of the common pushback locations around Serbia ©BVMN website



Camps not set to re-open for the winter

With the arrival of winter, living conditions for people on the move around Serbia are increasingly dire. Most Temporary Reception Centers (TRC) in the north of the country remain closed, so many people continue to sleep outside in make-shift shelters, under tarps, tents, or blankets. Earlier in October, the director of the Asylum Protection Centre, Radoš Đurović, called for camps across the country to be reopened in order to support people through autumn and winter, stating that “it is in the interest of the institution that people in reception centres seek help, and not from smugglers”. Nonetheless, on November 14th, the Minister of Internal Affairs in Serbia, Ivica Dačić, stated that “we have nothing against the centre's opening if the need for it is shown”, but that for now the need is not there.

Without access to camps, people also have limited access to doctors and food, and many people have been reporting to Collective Aid that they need both of these things desperately. Those arriving to Serbia from Bulgaria typically get there with severe foot injuries, as they have often just walked the width of Bulgaria without proper shoes, breaks, or supplies. In addition, they often have limited or no access to food during long parts of the journey, so some people arrive malnourished, having only eaten leaves off the trees for sustenance. Whilst many NGOs and associations are trying to fill these gaps by providing food and medical care, the need for assistance is too big and it is not currently being met whilst so many of the Serbian camps, whose purpose is precisely this, are closed.



Pushbacks from Croatia: Modus Operandi

This October, the Collective team in Sarajevo continued to receive testimonies and accounts of violence and pushbacks perpetrated by Croatian authorities against people on the move at the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Many people express their frustration and confusion at the inhumanity with which they are treated, and in the face of Croatia's increasingly impermeable borders with Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are often feelings of immobility and disillusionment about the possibility of safely crossing into the EU. As highlighted in No Name Kitchen's [recent investigation](#) into the Croatian police illegal practice of burning the personal belongings of people on the move, cruelties that violate the prohibition of torture, inhumane, and degrading treatment under both international (UNCAT) and European (ECHR, Article 3) human rights law have long ago become *modus operandi* of Croatian border authorities. Croatia, alongside the rest of Europe, continues to systematically and knowingly neglect the rights of people on the move to dignity, justice and safety.

A series of testimonies from October, shared by a group of Palestinian and Moroccan men, evidences the clear pattern of dehumanizing and overtly racialized violence. The accounts describe the experience of the transit group, who experienced 3 successive pushbacks at the Bosnian-Croatian border.

In the first of these pushbacks, the respondent, a Moroccan man, reported that Croatian officers seized all mobile phones and money held by the group, effectively removing their means of communication, documentation, and financial security. Despite communicating their intention to seek asylum in Croatia, the group were beaten with 'wooden and plastic instruments', whilst officers fired their guns in the air as a means of intimidation. The respondent reported that officers proceeded to escalate this threat of lethal force, directing their guns towards peoples' faces and threatening to shoot when the respondent asked for the return of his phone. This intentional act designed to instill terror and coerce people on the move is a striking – though not uncommon – example of the physical and psychological violence used by Croatian authorities to inhumanely deter asylum appeals within their territories.

A week later, in the second instance of pushback reported by the same respondent, officers once again turned to the theft of money and to physical violence in order to inflict harm upon the group. This time, however, Croatian officers intentionally targeted



the group's religious affiliations: the respondent reported that officers confiscated a small Qur'an that was being carried by one of the men, and tore out its pages before discarding it on the ground. This shocking act is a chilling reminder of the wider systems of racial discrimination and Islamophobic violence of the European border regime.

The respondent recalled that, in the third pushback, Croatian officers again subjected the group to physical beatings; again, officers stole their personal possessions, taking essential supplies like backpacks and food; and yet again, gunfire was used to intimidate and degrade. In another testimony collected this month about a separate instance of pushback perpetrated against a group of Iranian men at the Croatian border, the respondent reported that, in addition to kicking and slapping, officers used a small pocket knife to damage the charging ports on their phones and destroyed their sim cards and sim card holders. 'This is standard practice', the respondent explained. By damaging phones that are essential for navigation and communication, Croatian border officers routinely and insidiously target the dignity and security of people on the move.

These recurrent forms of police brutality remind us that these tactics are neither random nor outstanding, but are part of a wider, state-sanctioned regime of violence targeting people on the move in Croatia. As seen in the above testimonies, the reality that people will continue attempting the dangerous journey into Croatia, even in the face of successive violent pushbacks, underscores the unnecessary cruelty and absolute illegitimacy of this doctrine of deterrence that exposes people to sustained violence, intimidation, and abuse.

Bosnian pushbacks and further securitisation

Bosnia-Herzegovina is often understood as somewhat of a liminal place on the Western Balkan route, a regular pushback destination for those who have been illegally and violently forced out by its more visibly hostile neighbor, Croatia. This October, however, 2 out of 6 of the testimonies we collected outside of the Blažuj Temporary Reception Centre in Sarajevo detailed violent pushbacks perpetrated by Bosnian officers at Bosnia's border with Serbia. Concerningly, the brutal police practices that were reported in these instances of pushback from Bosnia into Serbia clearly echoed the inhumane tactics that continually seen in testimonies of Croatian and Serbian pushbacks. In these 2 testimonies alone, forms of violence amounting to degrading treatment and torture included the use of: electric tasers; tear gas; forced undressing; destruction of personal belongings; degrading stress positions; and broader forms of physical and verbal abuse.



In one testimony, a group of men from Afghanistan were apprehended by four Bosnian police officers, who shouted at them, 'Why are you coming into Bosnia?', whilst proceeding to beat them. The respondent, a 53 year old man, reported that he was forced by officers to lie face down on the graveled ground, in a degrading stress position, cold, and with hard gravel digging into skin, whilst they stripped him of his shoes and clothes. 'They took everything except for my underwear and socks', he told us. The respondent recalled that his phone, which contained €100 in the back of its case, was seized by an officer and thrown into the river below, together with all of his clothing, stripping him, indefinitely, of his warmth and protection. Whilst he was still lying exposed on the ground, officers mercilessly tased his legs, lower back and buttocks, leaving scars and welts that, at the time of our conversation, the respondent said had not yet healed. Finally, the respondent was forced back over the border into Serbia, unclothed.

In another testimony of pushback, tear gas was thrown at the respondent and two other men by Bosnian officers who used the chemical weapon to block them from entering the country. Two people were harmed, and the transit group were forced back into Serbia. The use of tear gas by Bosnian authorities to deter those seeking asylum is a clear abuse of a chemical weapon that can cause serious injury, and that has been historically linked to human rights violations and torture.

Though this is not the first time that accounts of violent pushbacks at this border are shared, in the past few months there has been an increase in the number of testimonies describing these practices. This suggests an accelerated move by the government to fortify its borders in line with EU recommendations. As of the end of October, for example, the negotiations for a Frontex Status Agreement are said to be in an advanced stage, with the Croatian Minister of the Interior, Davor Božinović, supporting the signing of the agreement. According to him, '500 members of Frontex in Bosnia and Herzegovina mean much more than any officer, including Frontex, on the Croatian border', because 'migrants who move from the south of Europe to Croatian borders do not encounter serious obstacles'. Of course, Božinović's words ring insidiously, as he coldly casts aside the well-documented reality of widespread violence and pushback routinely encountered by people on the move at Croatia's borders and along the Western Balkan route. His allusion to coming 'obstacles' suggests that such violations will only continue to be justified and expanded in the service of a narrative of European security with Frontex's coming deployment in Bosnia.



Camp Conditions

One of the most common concerns emphasized by those residing in Blažuj TRC, in Sarajevo, has been the poor hygiene conditions prevalent in living quarters, communal spaces, and showers. We have received multiple reports of bedbugs and other contagious diseases like scabies, with a few people showing their hands and arms covered with bug-bites and other forms of scarring.

With more than 600 occupants in Blažuj TRC, according to [IOM data](#) from the last 2 weeks of October, there is a clear sense that too little is being done by the international and national bodies running the camps to provide people with dignified accommodation. Instead, according to a mid-October [press release](#), the Service for Foreigners' Affairs, which has been progressively taking over management of the camps from IOM, subjected Blažuj to an extensive 'search raid' back in August in which 1082 people were, in their words, 'controlled'. In the same announcement, the SFA stated that '[s]uch and similar joint operational actions will be continuously implemented in other locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the coming period, all with the aim of finding migrants who may pose a threat to the safety of citizens', suggesting that the SFA's priorities with regard to migration management may lie in the further securitization and criminalization of migration, rather than in the accommodation and protection of people on the move in its territories.



BVMN's report on surveillance technology

This month, BVMN released their [Bulgaria report](#) in the [series](#) on surveillance technologies at European borders. This research publication highlights that various EU funds (including PHARE, Schengen Facility, EBF, ISF, currently BMVI, as well additional funding from EU member states) have been used to provide and develop advanced surveillance technologies on various Bulgarian borders for decades. It also shows how further investment for infrastructure on the Turkish border was introduced alongside the significant deployment of Frontex personnel in line with Bulgaria's partial accession to Schengen.

Some of the current surveillance technologies in use that have been identified include:

Surveillance systems	
Integrated Border Surveillance System (IBSS)	Turkish-Bulgarian border
Automated Border Surveillance System (ABSS)	Serbian-Bulgarian border
Maritime surveillance system (Blue Border)	Maritime border
Danube river surveillance system	Romanian-Bulgarian border
Non-fixed surveillance technology	
Thermal imaging equipment	
Detection equipment (heart rate & x-ray scanners, gas analysers)	
Aerial surveillance drones, vessels and helicopters	



The report points to the possibility that enhanced surveillance through situational awareness technologies on Bulgaria's borders have increased the frequency and 'efficiency' of apprehensions of people on the move in border areas. Multiple testimonies have reported encounters with drones, cameras, and small sensors before apprehension and pushback.

Concerns are also raised around data collection and privacy, pertaining to the Bulgarian border police's practice of photographing and taking fingerprints of people on the move prior to them being pushed back. These procedures are seemingly commonplace being attested to in a significant number of testimonies.

Lastly, attention is drawn to the lack of EU investment in reception facilities managed by Bulgarian state authorities, in stark contrast with the vast amounts of money channeled into improving surveillance technologies that facilitate higher levels of violence.

In addition to the findings of the report, in October a BVMN team in Serbia spoke to some individuals who had travelled by foot from Turkey to Bulgaria before making their way to Serbia. Accounts of what was described as a 'wire' within the Strandzha national park - which straddles the Bulgarian-Turkish border - were reported from multiple individuals. It was described that after crossing the 'wire', border police would appear around 30 minutes later, apprehending groups who had crossed. These accounts have been linked to two tenders for Bulgaria, the first from November 2023 for the installation of sensor lines, and another from July 2024 for the repair and development of sensor lines, which match the descriptions and locations of the described 'wire'.



Deteriorating camp conditions across Greece

Over the past several months, deteriorating conditions in state accommodation facilities for people on the move have been denounced by residents and solidarity organisations all across Greece. Continuous reports from people on the move point to similar issues in the camps, such as lack of hygiene, overcrowdedness, and broken down infrastructure, as well as delays and insufficient access to translation and cash assistance services, among others.

Despite the increasing number of people on the move arriving to many of the islands, the government continues to neglect the state of the facilities and the access of residents to basic services. Thus, the deterioration of infrastructure and lack of repairs has been reported in multiple camps in the mainland, as well as in Lesbos and Kos. In particular, damages to doors and locks in the WASH facilities often remain unaddressed for weeks and months, which raises severe privacy and safety concerns, especially for more vulnerable populations. Moreover, residents from the CCAC in Kos have also reported regular flooding of residential areas, and cockroach infestations. At the same time, the overcrowded conditions often result in people being accommodated in spaces that are not meant for sleeping, such as canteens or outside spaces, sometimes even without mattresses. The shortage of blankets, bed sheets and pillows, ongoing in multiple facilities, is especially concerning with the arrival of winter. In Lesbos, despite UNHCR funding provided to camp management, a shortage of blankets and bedsheets remains as the number of residents increases. Existing blankets are laundered and redistributed when they become available, but this process has not kept up with demand, while the camp management reports that blankets have been out of stock.

The insufficient, and often random, distribution of hygiene items and clothes has also been reported. Some residents of the CCAC in Kos describe not having received any of these basic items throughout the whole duration of their stay. These conditions contribute to the constant spread of preventable skin infections, such as scabies, which often remain untreated due to the completely insufficient access to medical care in most of the facilities across the country. In Kos, medical services for residents of the CCAC are staffed by only one doctor and a few nurses, whereas residents of the Pre-Removal Detention Centre in the island have no access to medical care whatsoever. This situation has recently improved at the facility in Lesbos, where the EU-funded Hippocrates programme, providing medical and psychosocial services, has now officially replaced the PHILOS programme in Greece after substantial delays in



implementation. Thus, service availability is significantly better on this island compared to others, where staffing levels are severely limited or even non-existent. However, a key structural issue with the Hippocrates programme is its lack of funding for interpretation services, which poses significant barriers for individuals attempting to access care.

Testimonies and reports from residents and support organisations alike raise even more severe concerns regarding the inadequacy of the facilities to host especially vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied minors, who are many times accommodated in the general centers, lacking protection and access to necessary services. Often, lengthy delays in the asylum process leave many minors at risk of turning 18 before their applications are processed, which could alter their legal protections and access to support. Moreover, in Lesvos, for example, the limited guardianship capacity in the facilities means that over half of the unaccompanied minors lack designated guardians. With safe houses operating at full capacity, a significant number of these minors are kept in the camp, where specialised services and dedicated support for their needs remain unavailable.

Lastly, financial and contractual mismanagement by the Greek authorities has also resulted in gaps in other essential services across the country, including interpretation, cash assistance and transportation, leaving people stranded and unable to connect and communicate. The lack of interpreters has led to constant interviews postponements and huge delays in many people's asylum procedures, while delays in cash assistance - often for several months - remain commonplace, further adding to the hardships. This takes place in a context of state-led isolation of people on the move, where facilities are very often built in remote locations, thus preventing asylum seekers from integrating into Greek society, obstructing access to essential services, and hindering access to legal support.

It is essential to highlight that while conditions keep deteriorating and the provision of basic services is constantly neglected by the Greek state, millions of euros have been spent on upgrading security infrastructure and surveillance systems, in a clear prioritisation of securitisation narratives over the rights and health of thousands of people in the country, and the authorities' legal obligation to protect them.



Evros border: decrease in arrests for smuggling, plans to increase border security

This month, a police high speed chase of a car carrying people on the move in the Evros region, Greece, resulted in 2 deaths and 5 people seriously injured. An analysis of police reports published by the media indicates that the numbers of people on the move apprehended in this region and the number of arrests of people under accusations of smuggling dropped significantly in October, with 37 arrests and 265 apprehensions, in contrast to 46 arrests and 1,868 apprehensions in the region in September. Due to the scarcity of information on these incidents (usually simply published police reports), interpretation of these bare statistics is challenging. It is noteworthy that the majority of these arrests (as in previous months) happened on roads inside the Evros region, rather than at the customs and passport stations at the border. Meanwhile, plans to increase the numbers of border guards at Evros were also announced by the Greek government this month.

Access to asylum still restricted on the Greek mainland, detention of asylum seekers

During the month of October, the ongoing technical problems with the online platform used by asylum seekers in Greece to apply for international protection and hosted on the website of the Ministry of Migration continued. A “technical error” display left people unable to book an appointment to apply for asylum. According to reports from asylum seekers and information verified by BVMN member organisation Mobile Info Team, even when operational, the platform frequently showed an error message during the month of October. The message declared that there were “Not dates available at this location” when trying to book appointments at the Malakasa reception and identification centre – the screening centre for new arrivals located approximately 40 km from Athens. The disruptions occurred during this month follow persistent problems with the system, such as the time in 2023 when the platform was not available at all for three and a half months. This type of restrictions on access to the asylum procedure leave people without legal protections and vulnerable to apprehension by the police and possible detention in carceral facilities, where people face extreme lack of access to basic services including healthcare.

Death, police brutality, and poor conditions in Greek prisons and police stations

Three deaths of people held in police stations and prisons in Greece were reported in October, with the last two incidents taking place on the same day. On October 1st, just



a few days after Mohammad Kamran Ashiq was found dead and severely beaten in a cell in the Agios Panteleimonas police station in Athens, a Bangladeshi man was discovered hanged in the nearby detention site of Omonia Police Station. According to the police, the man was arrested the previous night for causing damage to a police patrol vehicle.

A few weeks later, two more people were found dead on the same day in two separate facilities. On Friday October 25th, a 22 year old Roma woman was found hanged in the Korydallos prison's health center, in Athens. She had been held in pretrial detention since July. The two officers arrested for fatal neglect in connection with the woman's death were released at the end of the month without any restrictions, while investigations are ongoing. On the same day, in the Volos youth detention centre, a 21 year old Pakistani man was found unconscious in his cell and eventually declared dead after being transferred to Volos hospital. The young man had reportedly been complaining of not feeling well and asking guards for help for more than three hours before receiving attention. Inmates of the facility set fire to the mattresses in their cells in protest. The cause of his death is yet to be established.

Later in the month, a UN anti-torture task force visiting Greece further highlighted the need to address ill-treatment and poor conditions in places of deprivation of liberty throughout the country. From October 7th to 17th, and as part of its mandate to monitor State parties' adherence to the Protocol to the Convention against Torture, a delegation from the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) inspected psychiatric institutions, prisons, police stations, and migration detention facilities in Greece to assess the measures taken by the government to prevent torture and ill-treatment and protect people held in these facilities from the spread of disease. In a press release following the visit, the SPT delegation called on the Greek State to take urgent action to protect detainees from torture and ill-treatment and ensure the effectiveness of its national preventive mechanisms. The improvement of conditions in these centers should be taken as an emergency matter, currently another piece of the violent migration regime and the cause of many preventable deaths. However this call should not obscure the principle that people should not be in detention centers in the first place and that arbitrary detention, a widespread practice in Greece and beyond, is against European and international law.

High population and overcrowding in the Samos CCAC

4,390 people on the move were held in the Samos Closed Controlled Access Center (CACC) in the last week of October, meaning the Samos CCAC operated at 120% of its official 3,650 capacity. In October, an average of 400 people arrived in Samos every



week. Local Samian media reported that overcrowding raised serious concerns, particularly regarding the lack of adequate staffing, permanent medical personnel, and insufficient water supply.

Degrading *de facto* detention conditions in “quarantine zones”

Reports from multiple people on the move indicate that people arriving on Samos are first *de facto* detained in so-called “quarantine” zones in the CCAC, before they are subjected to a further regime of *de facto* detention in the main zones of the facility. According to accounts from seven people on the move, those in quarantine are often housed in containers with eight to 40 people. Most report they had to sleep on the floor without proper beds, sheets, or mattresses, and that they were forced to spend between five and 22 days in this area, with limited access to sanitation, inadequate facilities, minimal hygiene products and no access to showers. Additionally, I Have Rights received reports that food is delivered once a day, and that there is a lack of clear information regarding the duration of their *de facto* detention.

–*“It was a miserable situation inside”* – Reports a person on the move about their stay in quarantine zone of the Samos CCAC (they reported to have shared a container for 7 days together with 8 to 10 people).

ECtHR decision on four Samos cases

On October 3rd 2024 the European Court of Human Rights found that Greece had subjected unaccompanied minors to inhumane and degrading treatment in 2019 in the Samos Reception and Identification Center. While the judgement related to facts from 2019, it evidences a need for the reform of treatment of unaccompanied minors in the Samos CCAC. The case was supported by I Have Rights.

Population in the Lesvos CCAC

As of October 31st, the population at the CCAC on Lesvos reached 1,790, marking a 38% increase since the beginning of the month, according to data from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. This change aligns with anticipated trends, as arrival rates have continued to rise month over month.

During October alone, there were 1,208 new arrivals, reflecting a 50% increase from September’s numbers, nearly reaching arrival rates observed in the first two months of the year. This upward trend in arrivals is expected to persist in the coming months.



The demographic makeup of the camp has also shifted: people from Afghanistan now form the largest nationality, replacing Syrians, who represent the second-largest group. Additionally, there has been an increase in arrivals from Egypt and a notable rise in the number of minors, who now make up 31% of the camp's population.

Pushbacks around Lesbos

According to reports from the Turkish Coast Guard, five pushback incidents occurred near Lesbos in October, involving a total of 136 people being forced back to Turkey by the Hellenic Coast Guard, including 36 children. This number only accounts for those pushbacks perpetrated in areas closer to Lesbos than to other islands. Photos and videos published by the Turkish Coast Guard show that in at least four of these incidents, people were found in boats without engines, four of which were life rafts and one an inflatable boat. This practice, involving engine-less boats left adrift in the Aegean Sea, poses severe safety risks and violates international law.

At the end of October, a video surfaced on social media showing a particularly severe pushback incident near Lesbos. In the video, the Hellenic Coast Guard vessel ΛΣ-602 appears to dangerously approach and ram a boat carrying people on the move, including women and children. The incident's exact date remains unclear, and while it was briefly covered by a single public television programme in Greece, other major media outlets refrained from reporting it.

In mid-October, another violent incident was reported on Lesbos. Upon arriving in Plomari, a group of people on the move encountered masked men who fired shots in the air and ordered them to lie down. This incident, reported by Aegean Boat Report, has yet to be corroborated with further evidence.

Population in the Kos CCAC

As with Samos and Lesbos, numbers of people on the move on Kos increased considerably in October, from 1404 on the 1st of the month to 1946 on the 31st, according to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Many of the people newly arrived were transferred from other islands like Symi, Tylos, or Rhodes where some had stayed for over two months without any support. However, many people also continue to arrive directly on Kos, in dangerous journeys.

Due to the high number of residents in the CCAC, many individuals, in particular families, are being transferred to the mainland. Meanwhile, the situation in the CCAC



has become extremely alarming, and living conditions have continued to deteriorate throughout the year, as outlined in the above section addressing the situation in facilities across the country.

Documents delays and issues in the asylum interviews

This month, the procedure for issuing residence permits to people recognised as refugees in Kos was considerably delayed due to a lack of material support for the cards, which consequently could not be issued on time, thus increasing the uncertainty and anxiety. At the same time, some asylum seekers were forced to do their interviews in a language different to their mother tongues, as no interpreters were available. This concerning issue has been ongoing for several months. In October, it happened to Tigrinya-speaking individuals who had to do their interviews in Amharic in order to avoid waiting for an undetermined period of time until an interpreter would be found.



Government apprehension statistics

According to the [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, 17,309 “irregular migrants” were apprehended in October 2024, while the total number of apprehensions so far this year was 188,373 at the end of that month. Afghanistan, Syria, and Turkmenistan were the top three nationalities affected by such incidents. In addition, 10,559 so-called “organisers” were apprehended by the end of October.

Moreover, in October, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya [announced](#) in a social media post that 200 “migrant smugglers” and 4,040 irregular migrants had been apprehended in operations organised by the gendarmerie in 81 provinces in one month.

New border technologies and EU funding

The Interior Ministry also [announced](#) that in early October, the Directorate of Migration Management took part in Teknofest – Turkey’s “first and only aerospace and technology festival” – in Adana, to display its newly acquired border security technologies. According to the statement, the government agency exhibited a model of the border security infrastructure equipped with electro-optical towers, communication and surveillance towers, laser range finders, lighting and sensor systems, and a thermal camera system that detects people from at least 10 km and objects from 16 km away. It was also communicated that 1,168 km of security walls, 1,440 km of patrol roads, 1,053 km of lighting systems, 368 km of cameras and sensor systems, 341 electro-optical towers and 183 towers with elevators were built, as a result of the Ministry of National Defense and the Migration Administration’s joint “border security investment” project. Moreover, the project supplied 284 thermal cameras and 139 reconnaissance surveillance vehicles to border troops. The statement did however not specify the timeframe and locations that developments were specific to.

This new technology and equipment is understood to be partly financed by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, and aims to equip Turkey with border technologies similar to the ones existing along the Turkish-Greek border. European financing of this project started in January 2024. This follows the spirit and the frame of the [EU-Turkey Deal of 2016](#) and the general EU policy of [outsourcing](#) its border controls to non-member countries often with fewer checks on rights violations, resulting in harsher conditions both for local populations and people on the move.



Investigation highlights EU role in Turkey's detention and deportation system

Lighthouse Reports has recently conducted an [investigation](#) into what it called Turkey's "EU-funded deportation machine". The investigation found that the European Union has invested 213 million euro into the construction and maintenance of 30 detention centers in Turkey. In keeping with conditions of the EU-Turkey Deal, the money is part of an ongoing major investment into Turkey's migration and border management. As the EU continues to consider Turkey a "safe third country" – despite mounting evidence of the dangers faced by people on the move there – Brussels is allowed to financially back its efforts to prevent millions of mostly Syrian and Afghan people from crossing into the Schengen area.

Moreover, in recent years, the economic situation in Turkey has quickly deteriorated, and anti-immigration sentiment is growing. As a result, Turkey has increased its efforts to carry out mass deportations and pushbacks, with the support of the EU. The report also suggests high-ranking officials have knowingly overlooked accusations of rights abuses in Turkey's detention and deportation system. Lawyer for the Migrant Refugee Solidarity Network Ömer Taş echoed these findings, [telling](#) Turkish news outlet Bianet that the number of migrants and refugees being sent to removal centers has reached astronomical levels, and that reports of rights abuses are commonplace.

Çatalca Removal Center protests

On October 31st, a group of female detainees at the Çatalca Removal Center in Istanbul protested against violence perpetrated by the authorities. Lawyer Mehmet Yılıcak partially witnessed the protests from outside of the facility as he was denied entry to see his client. He went on to share a [series of posts](#), including videos and the official record of what happened.

On the morning of that day, Yılıcak was [called](#) by his client Ş.N., who said she had been subjected to poor treatment. He went to the Çatalca Removal Center to visit her but was stopped at the entrance. He said that he witnessed women banging on the window bars while chanting: "We are no murderers, no to violence against women, please help us!" Yılıcak reported that a group of riot police equipped with shields and batons entered the facility shortly after.

According to Yılıcak's account, the protests started after the detainees were told that they would not be provided lunch and dinner. His client Ş.N. told him that she was being held under inhumane conditions and was not even provided bedspace.



M.N and Ş.N.. - male and female respectively - are a married Syrian couple and were residing in Istanbul. On October 29th, Ş.N. was verbally assaulted by a man, which led to a brawl between M.N. and this man. Ş.N. and M.N. reported the incident at the police station, where they were then arrested and taken to separate removal centers. M.N. was sent over a thousand km to Urfa Removal Center, located close to the Syrian border, in order to be deported; Ş.N. was sent to Çatalca.

After Yılıcak was prevented from seeing his client on October 31st, he returned to the facility the next day and found out that a deportation order of Ş.N. had been issued. The Directorate of Migration Management issued a public statement on November 2nd, declaring that the allegations were false and citing the 24/7 video surveillance of Çatalca Removal Center and general compliance with the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458.



Istanbul Çatalca Removal Center. [@Gocmenlerle Kardesiz Twitter/X](#)

State and male violence against LGBTI+ migrants

According to Velvele, an independent LGBTI+.oriented platform, two LGBTI+ non-nationals were among those detained during a raid of a queer venue on October 20th under the guise of “disturbance of general morality”. The two non-nationals were reportedly later taken to Istanbul Arnavutköy Removal Center, despite having no deportation order against them, or other charges.

The two people have since reported they have been deprived of their basic needs and subjected to threats of strip searches and other verbal violence. The article and



related social media posts appealed to the wider LGBTI+ community for solidarity with the two detained.

At the end of October, an incident targeting members of the LGBTI+ migrant community was reported in the Konak district of Izmir province. A group of about eight men are suspected of verbally harassing and then attacking two trans women from Syria with stones, as they walked down the street during daylight hours. "It was as if they wanted to kill us. We asked for help, but the people around made fun of us," one of the women told media. The injured parties filed a criminal complaint against the suspected attackers with the prosecutor's office.

On November 8th, the Association for Combating Hate Crimes said in a public statement that law enforcement pressure on trans women in at least one area of Konak district was on the rise. The group cited an increase in identity checks and fines.

Canadian citizen reported dead in Turkish Detention Center

In late October, a 40 year old Canadian woman who is believed to have fled al-Roj Camp in northeastern Syria is reported to have died in a removal center in Turkey. Al-Roj Camp is a detention camp for Islamic State (IS) suspects and their families. The removal center in which she is reported to have died was not specified.

Multiple lawyers and activists say the woman, identified only as FJ, was detained after the Canadian government denied her permission to return due to suspected links to the IS and related security risks. According to a Middle East Eye report, FJ likely fled al-Roj and crossed into Turkey in March; her six children remained in the camp though they have since been returned to Canada.

Turkish authorities detained FJ in June on suspicion of membership in a terrorist organisation. According to Canadian CTV News, she was held at Tarsus Closed Women's Prison in Tarsus, southeast Turkey until her trial on October 15th, when she was acquitted and moved to a removal center. She is reported to have died on the night of October 16th-17th. The cause remains unknown, though a Canadian lawmaker has called for an independent investigation. In a letter seen by Middle East Eye, Senator Kim Pate blamed "Canada's refusal to take reasonable steps" to preserve the unity of FJ's family, resulting in her "imprisonment and death in Turkey."



Syrian Citizenship Cancellations

As of October 13th, Turkey has revoked the exceptional citizenship of up to 4,000 Syrians, according to a statement by Göçmen Mülteci Dayanışma Ağı (Migrant Refugee Solidarity Network), which cites media reports and witness accounts. Due to the lack of information from the government, the exact number of canceled citizenships is unknown.

Syrians who obtained Turkish citizenship after having been granted “subsidiary protection” or “temporary protection” – which does not equate to asylum – received dual nationality via government approval. That means their citizenship is considered “exceptional”, and has only been granted for a short list of reasons, including marriage, adoption or via presidential decree.

The Migrant Refugee Solidarity Network noted the “possibility of suspension or cancellation of citizenship by decisions that have no legal basis” deprive those whose citizenships have been canceled of legal status, as well as their right to protection. The threat of cancellation may prevent Syrians from pursuing legal action against xenophobic attacks or result in deportation if Syria and Turkey reestablish relations. This creates especially risky conditions for open opponents of the Assad regime.

Despite the threat of further cancellations, Syrians are left with little recourse. Turkey is party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which applied only to individuals displaced from Europe. Its 1967 protocol, to which Ankara is also a signatory, lifted that geographic restriction, but Turkey retained the limitations to its refugee policy, thus reserving refugee status for people from European countries only. As Syrians are not eligible to apply for formal asylum, they are unable to apply for citizenship based on the length of their residency, as would otherwise be the case.

In its statement, the Migrant Refugee Solidarity Network urged the Turkish government to make public any data around cancellations of exceptional citizenship and temporary protection.



October has been a cruel month at the border between France and the United Kingdom. At least 13 people have died trying to cross the Channel, and many more are still missing. State harassment of people on the move, however, did not ease.

Evictions in Northern France

In October, Human Rights Observers recorded 65 evictions of 8 different informal living sites in the Calais area. According to the teams' observations, these affected at least 962 people, including minors, who were evicted from the place they survive in. As a result, 962 people were forced by the State to live in even more precarious conditions than before. Moreover, at least 9 people on the move were arbitrarily arrested by the border police during the evictions and a private company appointed by the State illegally seized at least 157 tents and tarps, including at least 7 tents full of personal belongings.

In the area around Dunkirk, two police operations were recorded, on October 9th and 30th, amounting to 6 evictions in total. During the first, four living sites were evicted; during the second, two living sites (which were already part of those evicted on October 9th) were evicted. At least 166 people were evicted from their living site without an adequate sheltering solution offered. Again, people were dispossessed of their belongings. On October 30th, a member of the cleaning team was even seen cutting a tent with pruning shears. On October 9th, a backhoe loader and two shovel loaders cleaned up the area, seizing tents and personal belongings and proceeding to the deforestation of the site to make the area hostile and unlivable.

During these eviction operations, people on the move have been subjected to various forms of violence. On October 4th, 16th, 28th and 30th, Human Rights Observers witnessed, for instance, tents were dragged across the ground, on October 23rd tarpaulins were ripped off, and on October 28th, the team heard the bows of the tents creak and saw the police and the 'cleaning team' stepping on personal belongings. After the evictions, the tents seized are supposed to be recoverable by the people on the move in a dedicated place, but Human Rights Observers notes that the equipment seized is very often damaged and therefore not recoverable.

On October 28th, a squat in an abandoned building, inhabited for at least a year and a half, was evicted. At the dawn of the "winter truce" (the suspension of tenant evictions during the winter period, which do not apply to squatters and thus to people on the move here): people were forced to search for a new place to sleep in the streets, without any essential equipment to protect from the cold and the rain. The building was destroyed a week after.



Hindrances to observation work and intimidation

This month, Human Rights Observers' team members were again intimidated by police officers and by deliberate attempts to obstruct observation and documentation work. Observers were pushed, yelled at, threatened with a tear gas can, threatened to get fined, arbitrarily controlled repeatedly on the same day and filmed multiple times (8 times in the Calais area only) by police officers without, as intended by law, being notified of it. Human Rights Observers was maintained at a distance from most police operations, with observation being totally impossible on 22 occasions.

Calais beach: Police preventing departures

Crossing the Channel in a small boat is the most common way to get to the UK by people on the move with no access to other pathways. According to the UK government, 3880 persons have been prevented from departing or returning to France this month. This number is an operational estimate from the French authorities. This month, Collective Aid collected two testimonies that described police preventing people on the move from departing from France.

A man from Yemen who arrived in Calais a month ago told the Collective Aid team about two separate incidents:

During the first one, he was in a boat on the beach with a group of about 40-50 people preparing to embark on their crossing. He described that the police arrived, stabbed the boat and sprayed people with tear gas. Eventually, the police left, leaving the man with injuries sustained by the tear gas that required hospital treatment. He was treated for 20 hours, and sick for several days.

The second incident took place in the so-called "jungle"- a wooded area on the dunes above the beach. He was part of a group of people who were setting up a boat when they saw a drone. Soon after, the police arrived and stabbed the boat. They also started to use physical violence and tear gas on some of the people in the group until they saw a family with children. The respondent described that the police then left immediately.

These testimonies are common descriptions of the French authorities' violent shore patrol tactics - the de facto deterrent measure for channel crossings. Even though the authorities justify this as a necessary policy to prevent deaths in the Channel, in reality they risk chaotic embarkments and people setting off in partially damaged boats, a



clear disregard for the lives of people they claim to be protecting. As mentioned in [previous reports](#), in the absence of safe and legal routes, these actions only increase the number of deaths of people on the move trying to cross the channel.

Civil violence against people on the move

People on the move do not only face violence from the police, but also from other actors in the region. This month, a testimony was shared by a group of three people from Yemen who described a racist attack against them where some people harassed them while trying to sleep at night, shouting and throwing bottles at their tents. This example of hostility is unfortunately not an isolated incident, as highlighted in the [July monthly report](#).

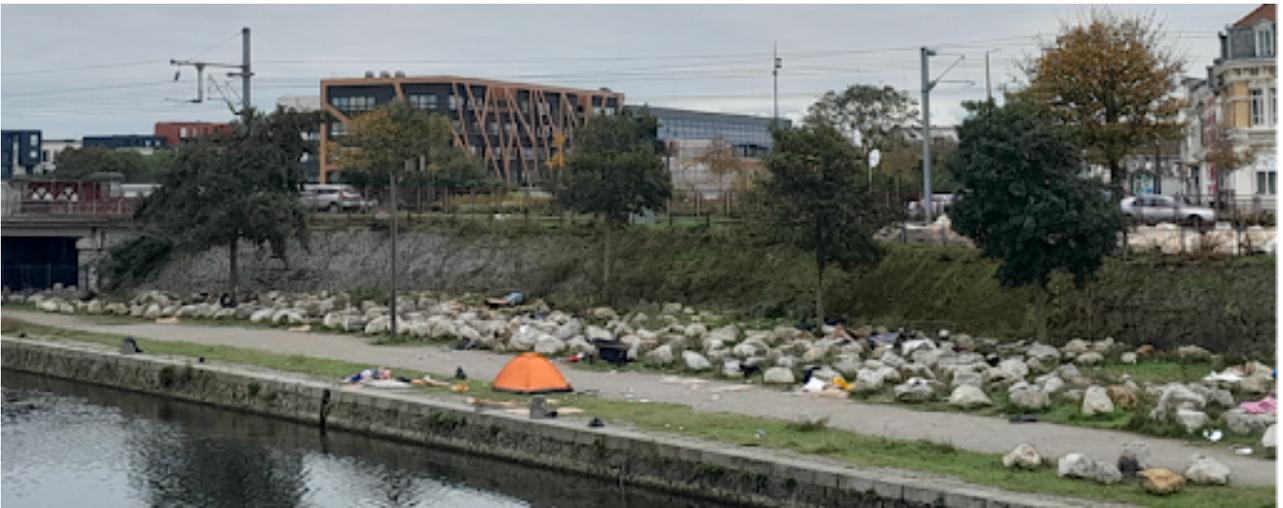
NGOs active in Calais also face targeted attacks from some local groups. Last month the lock on the Collective Aid Wash Centre was glued shut, and the van's tire was destroyed.

Expanding of the aggressive architecture: more boulders in City Center

Following an eviction on October 25th, the municipality of Calais [placed](#) a number of rock boulders at the living site at Quai du Danube on October 29th. They were placed in such close proximity to each other that tents could no longer be erected in the area. This forced those who had previously lived there to move their tents further towards the bridge between other boulders that had been already placed there at another time. This is a common practice by Calais authorities. It is regularly exercised with the clear aim of preventing people from being able to set up tents for shelter, or hindering the attempts of organisations to provide services. This compounds with policies such as the Zero Fixation Points policy, which oversees the eviction of living sites at least once every 48 hours with the intention to make the sites uninhabitable, and dissuade people on the move from coming or staying in Calais.



Boulders placed after an eviction ©Collective Aid



Boulders placed after an eviction ©Collective Aid



Boulders placed after an eviction ©HRO & @elio_j_



Evictions in Northern France ©HRO



Deaths and Disappearances

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION

Graves of people on the move in Serbia

This month, BVMN and Collective Aid visited the newly erected graves of people on the move in Loznica, a Serbian town near the Bosnian border. In Muslimansko Groblje, we found the graves of the family who had drowned in the Drina River on August 22nd, near Ljubovija, along with 9 other people. The mother, Khaija Najib Shaaban, was buried with her nine-month old baby, Lana, and the father, Ahmed Ibrahim Hilala, was buried next to them.

Beside them were the graves of other unidentified people who also died this year – one man aged 17 or 18, and another aged 19 or 20.

Without radical change to the European border regimes that deny safe passage to people in need of support, these deaths will not stop. Until then, people will continue to be buried by strangers, in a place they do not know, in a country they did not intend to stay in, and far away from their families who loved them. Every death along the migration route is a preventable tragedy that can be stopped.



Photo taken by Collective Aid team in Loznica, Serbia, on the 5th of October, 2024.



River pushbacks and border deaths

People on the move who cross into Croatia by land continue to describe being violently pushed back into rivers (like the Sava) by Croatian border authorities who force people to swim to Bosnia across the life-threatening and increasingly freezing currents of its rivers. One man from Afghanistan recently reported that he was apprehended by Croatian police outside of Zagreb, driven to a river, and made to cross.

‘I thought I was going to die’, he told us: ‘I thought, it’s finished, I’m dead’.

This practice is particularly concerning in light of regular reports of drownings at Bosnia’s borders with Croatia. In early October, we received chilling reports that two Iranian women had drowned whilst trying to cross the Sava. The boat had reportedly capsized on October 7th, throwing the four people onboard, including a minor, into the river. Concerningly, Bosnian and Croatian police were reportedly present in boats during the incident, but refused to respond to the calls for help. ‘They could have saved them. Instead, the police motorboats passed right by. They could have helped, but they didn’t. They laughed instead’, a friend of the victims told us. Despite organisations in the area receiving multiple reports abouts this tragedy, there has been no local, national, or international media coverage on the incident, as well as no announcement from an official body in Bosnia or Croatia. This is a stark indication of the total impunity with which the border regime continues to cost lives, lives that are often left unnamed, unidentified and unrecorded.

Deadly shipwrecks in the Aegean

On October 15th, yet another tragedy occurred in the Aegean Sea. The shipwreck that happened led to the death of four individuals, two women and two children. [Sources](#) speak of shootings and dangerous manoeuvres prior to the shipwreck on behalf of the Coast Guard, questioning the factors that the authorities consider as the reason for the incident in their official [statement](#).

Moreover, on October 21st, there was another shipwreck off the coast of Samos where two people died. It was the third shipwreck in the region in a two month period. The loss of life underscores the urgent need for safe pathways for those seeking safety.



13 more people lose their lives in the deadliest year at the French-UK border

During October, at least 13 people (18 including the 5 dead bodies found in November) died on the UK-French border.

On October 5th four people, including a child, died in two separate crossings. A two year old boy was crushed to death in an overloaded boat, while three adults, a woman and two men, all about 30 years old, lost their lives in another boat which suffered multiple engine failures, causing panic. On the night of October 17-18th, a four month old baby from Kurdish heritage died and was found in the water. On the morning of October 23rd, three people were found dead after the overloaded boat they were traveling in sank during the night. 48 people were rescued and the search was called off after several hours. People were reported missing after several days. According to testimonies collected by support groups and associations assisting survivors, at least 16 people are believed to have drowned. On October 27th, a 40 year old man with Indian heritage had a cardiac arrest after their boat deflated close to the French shore, when people did not have life vests on the boat. The man collapsed. Attempts by the emergency services to resuscitate him on the beach failed. On October 30th, four men died in different crossings. Among them was a 28 year old Iraqi man who was taken to the hospital. Three other people were found dead on separate beaches.

On November 2nd, the body of a 30 to 40 year old man was found near the cliffs of Cap Blanc-Nez. On November 5th and November 6th, four more bodies were found in the water. They may be linked to the events of October.

The deaths of those confirmed killed by UK-French border regimes in October push the death toll of what was already the deadliest year on the channel on record to at least 67. This does not include the testimonies that assert at least 16 people drowned on October 23rd.

This month, Collective Aid have released their 2024 Situational Update for Calais which provides an overview of the developments of the situation in Calais and northern France over the reporting period December 2023 - October 2024. Amongst other recommendations directed at the French and UK governments, the reports urges significant funding used for militarisation of coastlines in northern France through greater surveillance and border policing capabilities be diverted towards the enhancement of the capabilities of legitimate search and rescue attempts in the Channel.



Testimonies published in June

Link	Incident	Recorded	Demographic	Group size	Organisation
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Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina

<u>1.1</u>	17.7.2024	19.7.2024.	Afghanistan, Morocco, Senegal, Gambia	27	Anonymous
<u>1.2</u>	16.7.2024.	19.7.2024.	Syria	4	Anonymous

Bulgaria to Turkey

<u>2.1</u>	19.7.2024.	1.8.2024.	Afghanistan	15	Collective Aid
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Serbia to Bulgaria

<u>3.1</u>	6.8.2024.	9.9.2024.	Morocco	1	Collective Aid
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Border Violence Monitoring Network

Network structure and contact

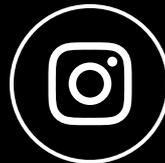
BVMN acts as an alliance of organisations in the Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of partner organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation.

We finance the work through charitable grants and foundations, and are not in receipt of funds from any political organisation. The expenditures cover transport subsidies, several part-time paid coordination positions and some costs incurred by partner organisations for their contributions to our shared work.

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.

For press and media requests please contact:
press@borderviolence.eu



@Border_Violence