

BRIEFING: TORTURE AND PUSHBACKS

GREECE 2020

“Like the last time, they told us

to get completely naked. They were hitting us everywhere”

- September 2nd, 2020. Pushback from Greece to Turkey

What is the 2020 Torture Report?

This briefing complements the publication of the 2020 Torture Report which reveals BVMN’s full data regarding allegations of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment experienced during illegal pushbacks from Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Italy. The report has identified 6 main categories of abuse including; excessive and disproportionate force, electric discharge weapons, forced undressing, threats or violence with a firearm, inhuman treatment inside a police vehicle, inhuman treatment inside a detention facility.

Key Findings from Greece:

- In 2020, BVMN collected 86 pushback testimonies from Greek, exposing the treatment of over 4583 people
- 89% of pushbacks carried out by Greek authorities contained one or more forms of violence and abuse that we assert amounts to torture or inhuman treatment
- 52% of pushback groups subjected to torture or inhuman treatment by Greek authorities contained children and minors

Pushback Trends in Greece:

The Greek-Turkey border has become a key point of entry into the EU, both via the Aegean Sea and the Evros land-river border. Whilst human rights watchdogs have long documented the Greek State’s increasingly repressive response to transit groups, this phenomenon was ramped up in 2019 when the right wing Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy) party entered into power. Since BVMN established a presence in the region in 2019, Network members on



the ground has collected testimonies from 89 pushback events which have affected over 4,600 individuals. These testimonies indicate the widespread and systematic use of torture and inhuman treatment by Greek authorities that we assert are clear evidence of their breach of both domestic and international law.

This was the 7th time the respondent had been apprehended in Greece and pushed back to Turkey. Upon arrival at a police station, the officers threw water on them and spurted water on them from a hose. They were put together into a room with about 25 other people, including women and children. The men were forced to undress and the whole group was beaten. The Greek authorities attacked everyone with metal batons, including the children. “They treated us worse than animals”

-July 30th, 2020. Pushback from Greece to Turkey.

The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) is a coalition of organisations documenting expulsions and police violence along the EU’s external borders in the Western Balkans, Greece and Turkey since the network’s formulation in 2016. The collection of data on illegal pushbacks and police violence is done by a consortium of independent field volunteers who are part of or cooperate with humanitarian support groups united through the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

Patterns of Torture and Pushbacks in Greece During 2020:

Excessive and Disproportionate Force

Testimonies of violence, abuse and disproportionate force are the most frequent type of testimony collected. **In 2020, this type of violence was present in up to 89% of testimonies collected from Greece.** BVMN has documented cases of extreme brutality including prolonged beatings (often on naked bodies) water immersion and the physical abuse of women and children. In some testimonies, the respondents recall how their hands were tied to the bars of their cells and a helmet placed on their head before being attacked by Greek authorities. The respondents explained that the helmet was to prevent them receiving any facial injuries that would be visible.

Electric Discharge Weapons. In 2020, BVMN has continued to see EDW's being used as a punitive and coercive policing tactic against compliant persons where there is no risk to life or injury to justify its use. **In Greece, EDW's were documented in 10% of all pushback cases.** Of increasing concern is how EDW's are being used during lengthy attacks against people-on-the-move whereby victims are routinely denied follow up medical care, without consideration of their age or health status.

Forced Undressing. In 2020, the use of **forced undressing's impacted up to 44% of all pushbacks carried out by Greek authorities.** Routinely, people-on-the-move are forcibly undressed before being pushed back across international borders, exposing them for example to the cold Evros River, rendering this practice even more deadly.

Threats with Firearms. In 2020, BVMN has identified that up to **15% of all pushbacks from Greece involved the use of threats or excessive force with a firearm.**

They were driven to a detention site in Didymoteicho. The respondent pleaded with the officers not to be returned to Turkey but dragged by his feet into the detention site and burnt with a cigarette. Inside was 70-80 other people all of whom had been forced to undress. There were men, women and children all standing around completely naked in this one room. The respondent said this did not look like a normal prison or police station but more like a stable.

-August 31st, 2020. Pushback from Greece to Turkey.

Inhuman Treatment Inside A Detention Facility. Reports collected by BVMN in 2020 reveal that, in the case of Greece, people-on-the-move who are detained find themselves faced with physical abuse, psychological torment, a lack of access to basic facilities like food, water, toilets and showers. Additionally, BVMN is increasingly concerned with the growing use of informal and incommunicado detention. We assert that these informal detention sites, including stables, abandoned buildings and derelict railway states are a **premeditated attempt on behalf of the Greek authorities to escape or evade administrative oversight when committing grave human rights abuses.**

Inhuman Treatment Inside of a Police Vehicles. In 2020, up to **20% of all pushback testimonies from Greece indicated inhuman treatment inside a police vehicle.** BVMN has regularly documented severe cases of overcrowding with up to 60 people being transported in overcrowded vans at any one time. We are additionally concerned about reports of improvised vehicles such as freezer trucks or freight trucks being used to transport or detain people on the move. We assert the continued use of improvised vehicles is a deliberate attempt on behalf of the Greek authorities to avoid scrutiny and oversight of their transportation and detention practice.

According to the respondent, and officer in black uniform told them: "if you come back to Greece, we will kill you"

-July 30th, 2020. Pushback from Greece to Turkey.