

INTERNAL VIOLENCE REPORT



GREECE

This report considers violence within state borders experienced by people-on-the-move (herein POM) and those seeking asylum in Greece. It draws on 40 testimonies collected in the last months of violence in detention, police brutality, racist violence, and hate crimes, as well as open-source data on structural forms of violence present in the management of migration and asylum in Greece. Since the BVMN's last report on internal violence in Greece in October 2020, the situation has continued to deteriorate, leaving POM at increasing risk of both physical, actual harm, and structural violence against their living conditions and immediate amenities.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the New Democracy administration has used lockdown measures as an excuse to significantly expand the power of the police, while violence and abuses of these new powers have largely gone unchecked. In 2021, Greek Ombudsman Andreas Potakis announced that official complaints of police violence have risen by 75 percent during the past year. Much of this violence has targeted migrants, asylum seekers, and people-of-color, as well as outspoken political minorities (i.e. anarchists, feminists, etc), journalists, drug users, and the homeless. The consolidation of control on issues of migration and asylum under the Ministry for Migration and Asylum (herein MMA) has led to significant changes in terms of support available to asylum seekers, and yet another step away from a desired integration-focused approach, doubling down on containment policies, which are transformed into an incarceration-based model. The designation of 'Turkey as a safe country' for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia and the introduction of admissibility interviews, as well as the closure of the Skype pre-registration system, has made it extremely difficult to access the asylum system, leaving those arriving at high risk of detention, involuntary return, and deportation.

The normalisation of detention as a result of the passing of the International Protection Act (2020), reported on by BVMN in a policy analysis on the New Pact on Migration, continues to contribute to high levels of incarceration of POM in Greece, particularly for those considered to be from "safe countries of origin".

Drawing on testimonies collected by BVMN, the first sections of this report will provide an overview of violence experienced by POM in state-run detention facilities, in addition to police brutality in the port of Patras. The following sections will examine structural violence present in the Greek state's praxis of migration management, focusing on recent legislative, structural and infrastructural changes that have driven considerable deterioration of conditions for POM and those seeking asylum in Greece.



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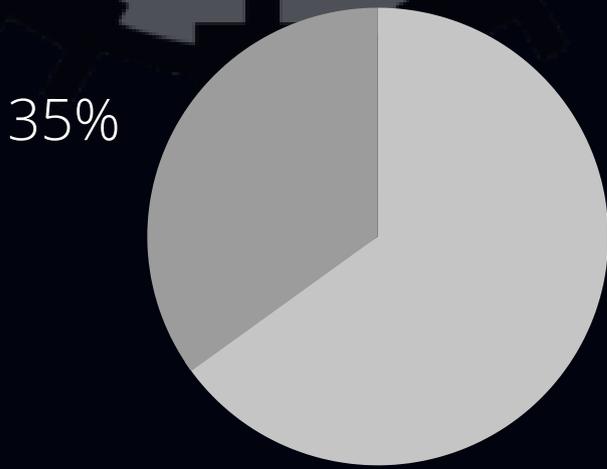
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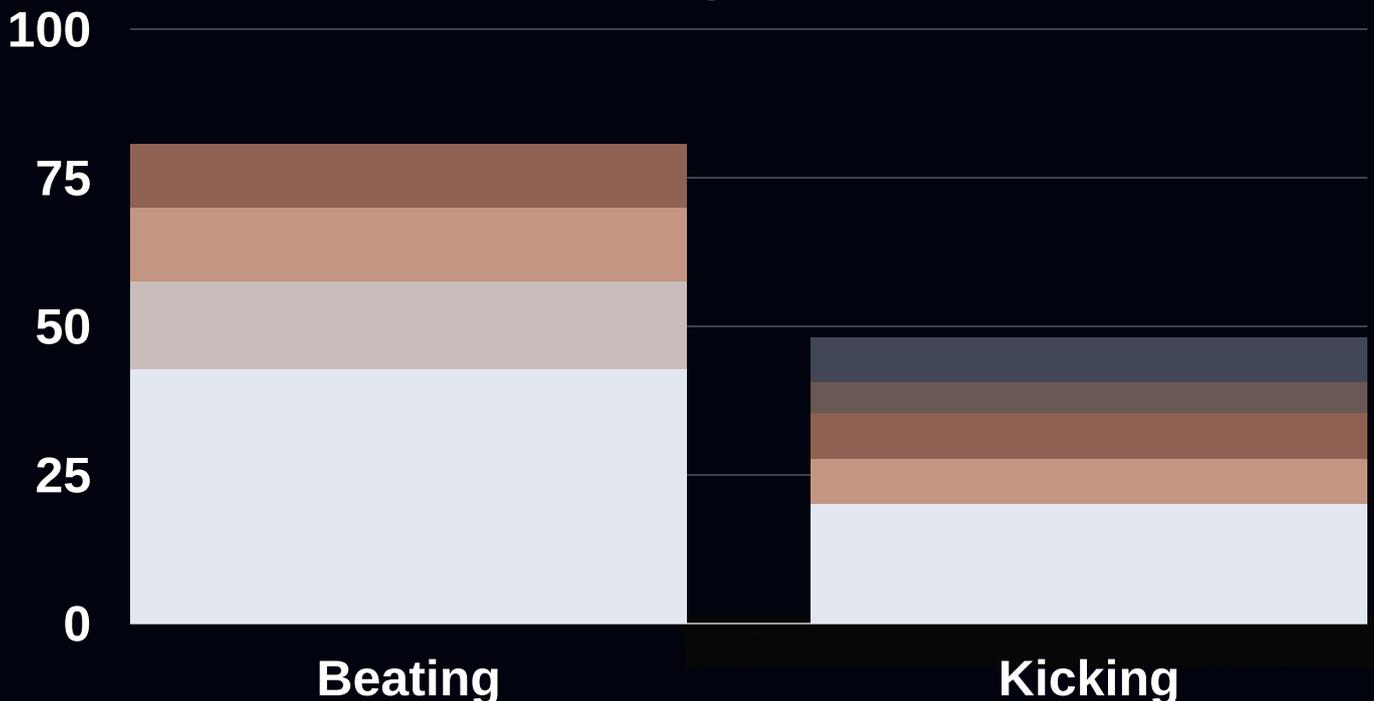
10% OF CASES INVOLVE MINORS



60% OF CASES INVOLVE POLICE OFFICERS



- Light blows
- Severe injuries
- Injuries on extremities
- Head Injuries
- Stomach Injuries
- Other





Paranesti PRDC

VIOLENCE IN DETENTION

In the first installment of BVMN's work looking at violence within Greece's borders, we examined incidents of violence inside state-run facilities in the mainland, focussing on Paranesti and Petrou Ralli Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDCs), and Karatea police station. Here, we will revisit the conditions in Paranesti PRDC after further shocking reports of violence have emerged from the centre.

Since the passing of the International Protection Act (IPA) in 2020, the Greek state's response to migration has shifted towards policies of containment, detention, and return. PRDCs have become a central pillar to this process; originally these were designed for those 'awaiting the execution of a pending deportation order /return decision', but laws passed in 2012, 2013, 2019, and 2020 gradually expanded the use of PRDCs to more categories of asylum seekers, who could also be detained 'together with third-country nationals under removal procedures'. It is important at this stage to note that, according to the UN Human Rights Council, detention in and of itself can amount to a form of torture when it is based solely on migration status and employed for the purpose of 'intentionally imposed or perpetuated for such purposes as deterring, intimidating or punishing irregular migrants.' In fact, the UNHCR has published concerns that PRDCs are being used 'for categories of individuals who should not be subject to administrative detention', for example, individuals detained before being able to register their intention to ask for asylum due to a lack of access to the asylum system (which will be expanded upon later in this report), as well as asylum seekers who cannot feasibly be returned to their countries following a negative decision which leaves them facing prolonged sentences in facilities designed for removal.

In the case of PRDCs in Greece, under Article 46 the IPA successfully increased the detention time limit up to 18 months, with the possibility of a further 18 month extension in lieu of removal. In practice, this means individuals can be held for a total of three years in these closed detention facilities simply for the 'crime' of asking for asylum. The shift towards detention as a first resort for asylum seekers at the EU's external borders is in clear contravention of the statements of the UN Human Rights Council, and may even be considered as in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights which prohibits "torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment".

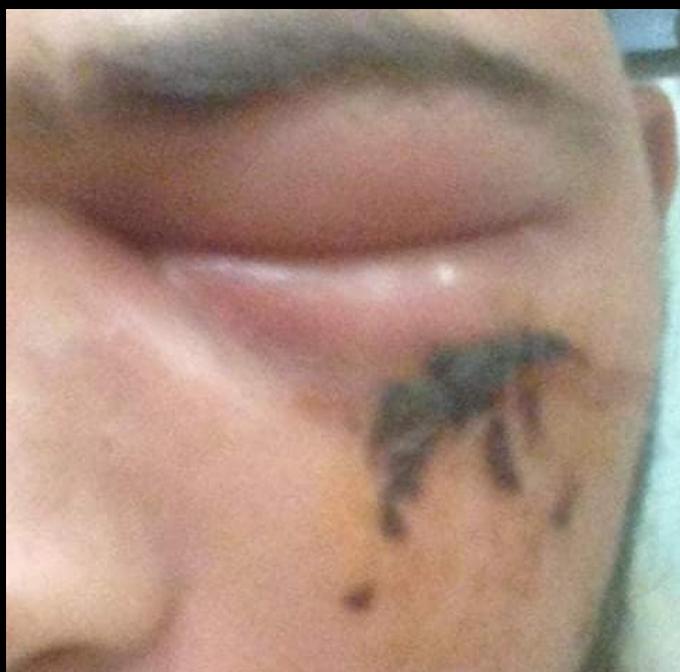
Unfortunately, interviews conducted by field reporters for the BVMN in Greece have revealed that malpractice in PRDCs extends beyond the improper usage of such facilities. We have gathered testimonies that speak to physical violence, humiliation, verbal abuse, and denial of access to basic facilities and medical care. Indeed, the UN Convention against Torture (CAT) has imposed a series of obligations on states regarding prison conditions; these refer to the cleanliness, size, and capacity of cells as well as access to daylight, heating, ventilation, electricity, water, and material items like bedding and the positive right to legal and medical care or assistance. Reports from the ground not only show that such standards are not being met but speak to brutal violence extending far beyond conditional insufficiencies.

CASE STUDY: PARANESTI PRE-REMOVAL DETENTION CENTER

Analysing first-hand testimonies, BVMN has uncovered a web of violence within the Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Center (PRDC) stretching from virtually non-existent access to healthcare outside of medical emergencies, to the brutal repression of hunger strikes, prompted by the lack of adequate food, and the deliberate humiliation of detainees, leading to severe psychological deterioration. Five detailed testimonies were gathered remotely by the BVMN reporting team relating to Paranesti PRDC in 2021; all five of these testimonies report that the food given to detainees was of low quality and quantity, that they were denied access to medical care despite repeatedly asking, that the conditions in the cells were overcrowded and squalid with broken toilets and a strong smell and that they were forced to sign papers without an explanation of what they were and without a translator present. Overall, this paints a picture of neglect and structural violence, in which individuals are not granted their rights to a standard of living that is consistent with human dignity. On top of this, inmates report being verbally abused by staff members, citing racist abuse as commonplace with individuals repeatedly being told to go back to their countries. One respondent reported that, after asking for pain relief to treat the discomfort of his artificial hip joint replacement in the cold weather conditions, he was told to 'get used to the pain because you are going to spend your whole life here with the pain'.

Perhaps most shocking are two testimonies taken together by field reporters in February 2021, in which two individuals sharing a container describe a series of violent altercations with other detainees and staff members which led to substantial injuries and severe psychological harm. The two respondents were of Algerian nationality and self-reportedly aged 16 and 28. They described an event in the middle of December 2020 in which a conflict between Pakistani and Algerian detainees broke out. The minor describes being subject to a violent attack by 15 Pakistani detainees who punched, kicked, and attacked him with razors. A video of the aftermath of this assault was shared with the BVMN. Reportedly, the police officers charged with the care of the inmates were watching from the window and laughing as the assault was unfolding. The older respondent attempted to help the minor who was being attacked and at this point the police entered the container and beat the older respondent. He ascertains that the officer was wearing a ring under his glove which exacerbated the extent of the injury, causing him to lose consciousness.

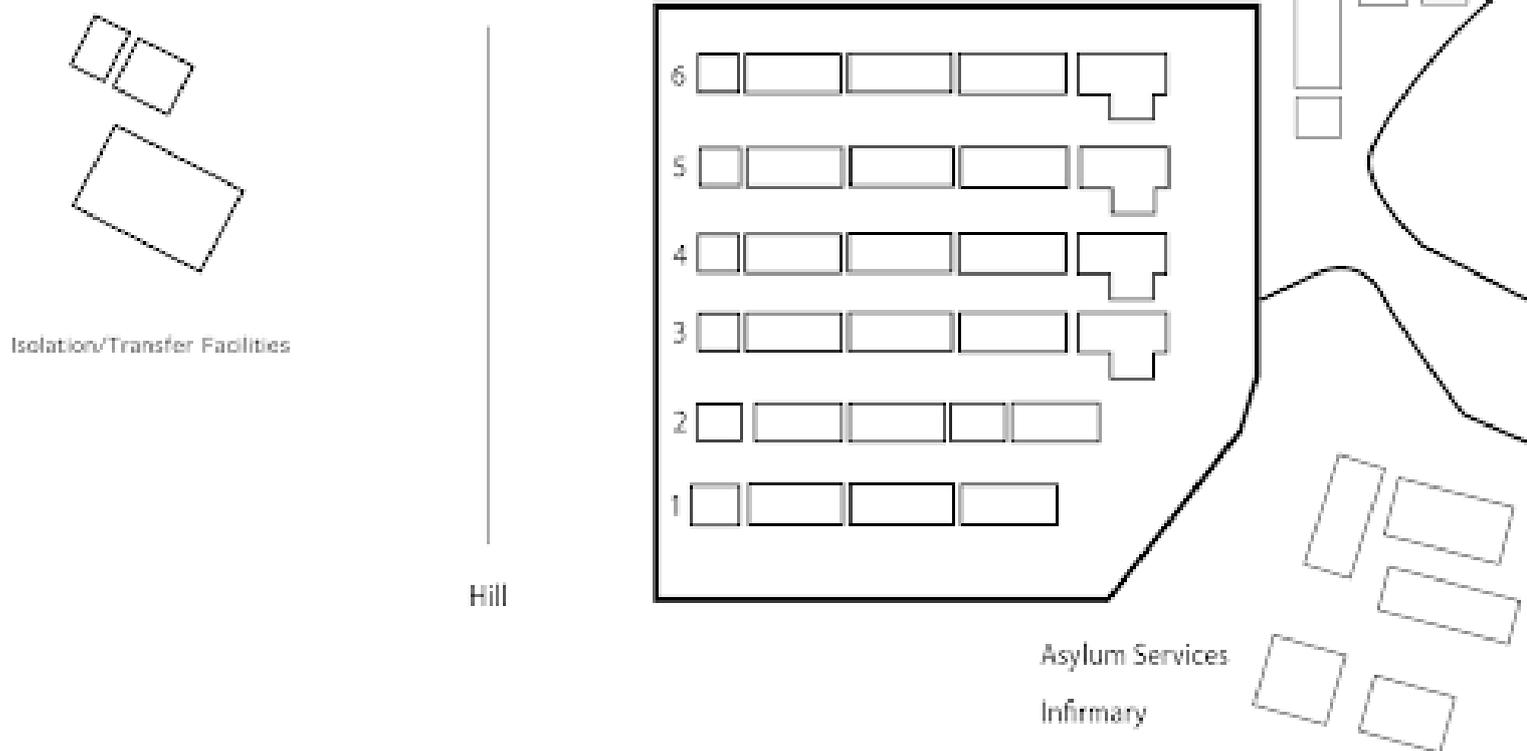
In the aftermath of this violent event, the 28-year-old respondent repeatedly asked for medical assistance for his injured eye which was swollen shut impairing his sight and causing him severe pain. Eventually, he was taken to hospital in handcuffs and an operation was performed, however, he was not given any information about the procedure nor given any medical documents upon his release from the hospital. The condition of his eye continued to deteriorate and he was further denied medical care, as a form of protest he took his clothes off and stood on top of his container threatening suicide. After this, he was taken to another hospital in Kavala and given a second operation which appeared relatively successful.



Meanwhile, the minor who was subject to the attack by Pakistani inmates reports being taken into solitary confinement by the officers, forced to undress to his underwear, handcuffed, a helmet placed over his head, and 10 litres of water emptied out onto him by police officers. He then reports being beaten with plastic batons and kicked by officers. As a result of being in a state of undress and covered with water he reportedly fell ill during the time of isolation. He was left in this condition for two days. Furthermore, the minor reports being registered as an adult in the centre to justify his stay there, and speaks to abuses he has been subject to that originate from him being a minor in an adult detention facility; he reports his belongings being repeatedly stolen by older, larger inmates and being subject to sexual harassment by two older detainees.

Drama - Paranesti Detention Center

[Layout as described by detainees]



According to both respondents, the officers were aware of the specific harms being posed to this vulnerable individual and decided not to act. This particular case shows the wide-ranging abuse detainees inside Paranesti are subject to, which stretches from conditional to verbal to actual physical harm. The 28-year-old respondent ended the interview by asking field reporters to ensure his story is published saying, 'show the people how we are suffering in this detention.'

These kinds of reports are not limited to Paranesti PRDC but are indicative of a wider trend of human rights violations across detention sites in Greece. Further reports gathered speak to the denial of medical care, squalid conditions, and physical beatings from staff in both Corinthos and Xanthi PRDC. Rather than 'a few bad apples', data gathered by the BVMN suggests violence in detention is a systematic and coordinated practice that fits with the general policy of deterrence and incarceration that the MMA appears to be pursuing. We assert that the Greek state is knowingly breaching its international obligations by regularly denying detainees access to basic conditional securities, procedural guarantees, and the protection of their non-derogable human rights.



VIOLENCE IN THE PORT OF PATRAS

Moving further south in the mainland, we turn our focus to the port of Patras; a unique place with a long history of violence against POM in Greece perpetrated by both public and private authorities. Typically, POM arrive in Patras attempting to clandestinely board a vessel setting sail for an Italian harbour. In doing so, they hope to avoid the lengthy and dangerous 'Balkan Route' over land.

As outlined in the previous BVMN report on Greece, POM in Patras face different forms of violence, not only in the harbour, but also in the adjacent factories where POM usually sleep, in the city centre, and in police detention. After being apprehended aboard vessels travelling from Patras to Italy, POM are regularly sent back in violent and degrading circumstances, only to be subjected to further violence once they arrive back at the port – as further outlined in this section. Although activists, media and human rights organisations have for years illuminated the inhumane living conditions and police violence, the situation has remained unchanged since our last comprehensive report (October, 2020).

BVMN has collected 35 reports of violence in Patras from March 2021 to January 2022; herein, 27 respondents indicated physical violence such as beatings and 12 additional cases involving kicking. One interviewee also claimed that he was subjected to a police dog attack. Besides the physical violence, 8 respondents claimed that they were subjected to psychological abuse such as bullying, harassment, verbal insults, and defamation. In 6 cases the victims of violence reported the theft and/or destruction of their belongings. While nearly half (16) of the incidents report violence happened inside of the port of Patras, 17 reports concern violence occurred in the city or other public spaces (whereby 6 incidents of violence in public transportation). Other acts of violence took place in squats and during police detention. Looking at the data collected, we have identified three key groups of official and unofficial actors that are named as perpetrators of violence.

Private security guards:

POM are often discovered hiding in vessels or inside trucks by private security staff hired by the port. The patrolling activities in the port are carried out by the ICTS Hellas, a private security firm with deployments inside the Port for over 10 years. Rather than handing people over to police officers, several POM reported that the guards operated autonomously and used force to deter them from future stowaway attempts. In one report from 1 December 2021, the respondent explains he was hiding inside a truck when he was found by a security guard wearing a uniform of some kind. The guard started to beat the respondent on his knees with a baton. Fearing he might be arrested and despite being injured, the respondent was able to escape from the guard.

Truck drivers:

POM who manage to evade discovery by police and private security guards may still later be discovered by truck drivers in whose vehicles they are hiding. As with the security guards, POM reported that truck drivers also behave violently towards them, without calling the authorities. For example, a report collected on 13 September, 2021 states:

“The driver of the truck in which the respondent had been hiding found him and urged him to come out. When he did so, the driver hit him on the head with a wooden bat, causing a gash of about 7 cm. The respondent then tried to run away, while the truck driver shouted words at him in Greek that he did not understand”.

Police in the port:

POM also identified police officers who patrol inside the port as perpetrators of violence. In one incident from 20 September, 2021, the respondent claimed that he was apprehended by a plainclothes officer inside the port. Reportedly, this officer assaulted him by hitting him on the back and on his head with a baton. The respondent added that he already had a wound on his head (sustained after a truck driver discovered him in his vehicle) that was healing. The policeman’s blow reopened his wound.

POM also reported theft of their personal items, including cell phones, by the police. In two cases of internal violence reported in January 2022 by field reporters on the ground, police officers in the New Port of Patras confiscated the respondents’ mobile phones, forcing them to enter their passwords to unlock the device. In one of the cases, the police officer reportedly said, “Give me your mobile phone for information, and then you can go back to the factory.”

These individual cases speak to wider policies of bodily harm, structural violence, and containment by the authorities. POM in Patras are unable to return to their countries of origin, yet prohibited from moving forward and therefore become trapped in the precarity of living arrangements in abandoned factories, brutal conditions of the port, and state-sponsored conditions of constraint, all of which restrict mobility and administer force. This situation is far from new and proliferates a continuation of policies that have been detailed as established in the BVMN’s previous report. In spite of the consistent reporting on such human rights violations, little evidence is present for a less hostile, less inhospitable environment for POM or accountability on the part of perpetrators. Subsequently, the following sections will address underlying and structured forms of violence that constrict mobility vis-à-vis access to asylum, basic needs, and safe passage.



Injury sustained by POM from a police officer in the port of Patras.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

As the MMA's turn towards incarceration, containment, surveillance, and control has seen a deterioration of brutal realities on the ground, it is important to acknowledge that violence against POM within the borders of the Greek state is not strictly limited to actual physical harm. The next section of the report will speak to structural violence and the impact that the shift in focus has had on access to asylum, living conditions, cash assistance, and other reception conditions within Greece.



ACCESS TO ASYLUM RESTRICTED

The following is a short excerpt from BVMN member organisation Mobile Info Team's work on access to asylum in Greece. The full report can be found [here](#).

At the end of November 2021, the Greek Government announced major changes in access to asylum for people seeking safety on mainland Greece, Crete and Rhodes. This policy saw the termination of the Skype pre-registration system for the registration of asylum claims. Instead, people seeking safety will now need to go to two reception centres on the mainland of Greece. However, such centres are not yet operational meaning that there has been little to no access to asylum for the majority of people on mainland Greece, Crete and Rhodes since 22 November 2021.

Temporarily blocking access to asylum not only leaves people in need of protection at risk, undocumented and destitute, it also violates national and international law. Even when such reception centres are opened, this policy will force people into de facto detention under prison-like conditions. Closed reception centres with policies of indiscriminate detention for men, women and children stand in contrast to any notion of protection, negatively impacting people's mental health, autonomy, liberty and ability to rebuild their lives.

An increasing number of people have been entering Greece via the mainland over the past six years with 2021 being the first year that more people entered Greece via the mainland than the sea (53%). Our projected impact analysis forecasts that Greece would need to register between 30,160 and 44,000 people annually on the mainland alone. This policy change will therefore undoubtedly have a significant impact on the lives of tens of thousands of people seeking safety in Europe.

The abrupt change in policy has left people in an information void. There are currently no details available on how and when individuals can enter the asylum system. It is deeply concerning that the Greek authorities are denying people access to the asylum system without offering any interim measures or information on how and when people can expect to register their asylum claims.

Policies of exclusion and detention are detrimental to both people seeking asylum and to Greece. For people seeking asylum, these policies impede people's ability to rebuild their lives, negatively impact people's mental health and take away people's autonomy and liberty. De facto detention also limits people's ability to access essential services such as healthcare and education. For Greece these policies are also detrimental as they force people seeking asylum to stay reliant on the State for extended periods and prevent people seeking asylum from integrating and giving back to their new societies.

NEW MPRICS/CCACS

The changes to the asylum system detailed in the previous section indicate a policy that expands the use of closed Multi-purpose Reception and Identification Centres (MPRICs) or, as they are referred to in Greek legislation, Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs). In stark contrast with promises made by the New Democracy party of immediate action towards decongesting the 'hotspot' islands (Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos), this incumbent policy, in conjunction with €276million of earmarked EU funds directed towards the construction of such centres, speaks to a strengthened politics of containment in the Aegean, Mediterranean, and mainland, with a commitment to cease transfers of PoM, who have crossed the Aegean Sea, to the mainland.

While the majority of PoM trapped on the mainland have been unable to apply for asylum since the 22nd of November, questions surrounding the future of asylum in Greece are paramount. Discursive assurances from Greece's New Democracy party elucidate the ridiculousness of another unfolding summer of migration after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan this past year. Despite the Greek government's published data (January 27, 2022) citing a 79% decrease in PoM living on the Greek islands and a 49% decrease in the overall 'migrant and refugee population', combinations of proliferating pushbacks and data miscalculations from the Hellenic Coast Guard of registered arrivals lead to larger questions about new forms of migration management taken on by the Greek government. The future, it seems, remains border externalisation inter alia capacity building of reception centres on hotspot islands, pushbacks, restrictions on the right to asylum and restrictions on physical and labour mobility.



Front of New MPRIC/CCAC on Samos

Cash assistance

Greece's Refugee Cash Assistance Programme (RCA) has been instrumental in providing financial assistance to PoM, sustaining some of the costs associated with living, applying for asylum and to offset the costs of untenable insertion into the formal labour market, as the possibility of engaging in recognized work whilst waiting for the adjudication of asylum claims is non-existent. The programme provided differing amounts of financial support to PoM, and was part of the Refugee Cash Assistance Programme, funded by the European Commission in cooperation with the UNHCR, as part of the ESTIA programme (Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation). Launched in 2016, funding began in Greece in the spring of 2017 and has supported more than 200,000 'vulnerable asylum seekers', said the UNHCR in a statement. This past August, the UNHCR announced that they would pay their last installment to eligible recipients through to the 30th of September 2021, before handing the fiscal baton over to the Greek government.

Crucially, RCA 'gives refugees the power of choice', highlights the UNHCR, namely as a step towards financial inclusion into local markets, independent and sustainable livelihood building, freedom and security via financial autonomy and as a means to support the local economy. Provided in the form of prepaid cards, topped up every month, financial support has fluctuated from the programme's inception. Namely thirty days following asylum decisions, cash assistance is revoked. Subsequently, RCA is linked with accommodation under the ESTIA programme, meaning that financial assistance is only provided to POM living in reception centres and specific facilities operated by public entities and international organisations, given that there is proof that a beneficiary in the programme is not working and/or not earning adequately to cover the costs of living.

It is unclear as to why the UNHCR stepped down in September from its central role within Greece's RCA programme, however this shift is in alignment with the Greek government's explicit desire to end the 'migration crisis' once and for all. In a statement issued by the Greek Ministry for Migration and Asylum, the government body "thanks the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for its cooperation so far and the European Commission for funding," reminding interlocutors how "the country covers its obligations to provide material assistance to asylum seekers," and how "the transition of the programs from the international organisations to the Ministry...constitutes part of the government's plan for full recovery of control in migration."

In the middle of October, just two weeks after the RCA changed bureaucratic hands, more than 36,000 eligible recipients of cash assistance had not received their support, as reported by twenty-six organisations working on the ground. In response, the ministry contended that, in fact, "no delay" was undergone regarding pay-outs to camp residents and that cards would be reloaded by the end of the month. UNHCR Greece, on their website, maintain that they are still not privy to "the future modality to provide assistance to cover basic needs" by the Greek authorities, leading to further questions of the Ministry's commitment to durable material solutions for PoM. To this day, those who are eligible for cash assistance – dependent on their present status – have received back payments, with many only receiving a halved figure if they are being provided meals through the continuation of catering programmes within camp facilities. Furthermore, thousands who no longer have 'legal status' still await cash assistance back-payments from the end of 2021 and local organisations report 60% of camp residents across Greece without access to sufficient food since the start of the new year – a harbinger of a prolonged 'hunger crisis'.

Hunger Crisis

The middle of October 2021 saw widespread demonstrations by POM, aid workers and those in solidarity across Greece due to restrictive access – and at times an absence altogether – to food. In Nea Kavala reception camp in northern Greece, asylum seekers bore cardboard signs with messages to the Greek government: "Do your kids go to school without food?" and "No Food!!!!!! We want our money Mitsotakis give us our money!!!!"

According to legislation, passed in October 2020 (Article 114 of the Law 4636/2019, Law 4636/2019 amended by Article 111 of the Law 4674/2020, Law 4674/2020), all material support provided by the Greek government will, in effect, cease thirty days following an asylum decision; a cessation which comprises accommodation and cash assistance as well as alimental and hygienic provisions. Those living in camps in Greece who have received a rejected claim for asylum, or are deemed ineligible, based on nationality, are subsequently denied the right to food, cash assistance, and accommodation, in some instances, prior to thirty days following the decision.

According to IOM Greece, there are over 16,000 people living in reception centres across the Greek mainland. Catering contracts provided by the Ministry indicate that just over 10,000 camp residents are allowed meals, leaving nearly 40% of camp residents on the mainland – wherein 40% of the population are children – without access to food. With added pressure from the European Home Affairs Commissioner, Ylva Johansson, calling upon Greece to ensure the safety and material security of 'the vulnerable' – discursively positioned in terms of an obligation on behalf of the commissioner – the General Secretariat for Reception of Asylum Seekers, Manos Logothetis, affirms that such allegations have been manufactured by NGOs. Many have responded to Logothetis's comments, pointing blame to Greece's failure to integrate refugees into the Greek housing and labour markets in the long-term, and the imminent ineptitude to meet fundamental human rights in the short-term.

Larger discussions of Greece's obligation to feed residents of reception centres remain contingent on notions of 'illegality'. While the Ministry of Migration and Asylum has assured the international community that their provisioning of material need is in line with national and international law, Johansson has underscored the EU's position remains that "all persons, irrespective of their status, should benefit from the provisions of EU law, notably the provisions of the Reception Conditions Directive, the Qualifications Directive and the Return Directive, and from the relevant provisions of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights." The IRC has openly called for the Greek government to provide belated cash assistance payments and to ensure the provision of food regardless of legal status, to assure the health and well-being of those forced to remain in camps, in line with the commissioner's appraisal. Unceremonious of juridic-legal interpretations, residents of Greece's camps, dependent on state-provided food, are left to fend for themselves, on an empty stomach.

Surveillance and Restrictions on Mobility

Since the March 2020 decision of Turkey to no longer accept POM returned from Greece – as per the conditions of EU-Turkey Deal of 2016 – due to a rejected asylum claim or inadmissibility of submitting a claim, the Greek government has adopted a patent and unmistakable modus operandi of 'control and containment'. Under Article 39 of the International Protection Act – adopted into Greek law on the 1st of November 2019 and implemented on the 17th of November 2021 – any person who enters Greece without sufficient documentation to prove the right to remain, either issued by the Greek authorities or recognized by the authorities, is subject to reception and identification procedures. Significantly, section four of the article (4636/2019) frameworks the de facto detention, for a maximum of 25 days, for reasons of submitting claim for asylum; enabling, as outlined in Article 39(4), a 'restriction of their freedom' inter alia the 24/7 surveillance in detention facilities, the impossibility of mobility, the threat of physical and psychological violence and the, in effect, limitation of applying for asylum.

Marios Kaleas, the governor of the Greek Asylum Service voiced in an interview with the Guardian in direct reference to the International Protection Act: "There are people who for years evade detection by never declaring themselves to authorities... For purposes of control, of having a full picture of who is here and for national security and public order reasons, they have to be traced."

This is not the first instance of an overt, all-seeing surveillance apparatus created by the Greek government over POM, reminiscent of early uses of drones at the Greek 'borderscape' in early 2017, and misinformation campaigns of migratory flows in 2015. This time, however, surveillance devices deployed by the Ministry involving the tracking, tracing, negotiating, and ultimately restricting of mobilities of POM has reached dystopian proportions.

Initially introduced in Greece's National Migration Strategy 2020-21, the mythological Centaur has itself been rendered non-fiction. A fully functioning network of surveillance, tethered to the Ministry's headquarters in Athens, the Centaur system – surpassing 33 million euros from EU coffers – is an "integrated digital system of electronic and physical security management placed inside and around the facilities using cameras and a motion analysis algorithm (AI Behavioural Analytics)." Currently operated in Samos' MPRIC and soon to be in Chios, Leros, Kos and Lesbos, POM are de facto monitored, according to Algorithm Watch, via "various technological solutions including a CCTV system and video monitors, drone flights over the facilities to detect incidents, perimeter violation alarms with cameras, control gates with metal detectors and X-ray devices and an automated system for public announcements, broadcast from loudspeakers." Notwithstanding the nostalgic eminence of Michel Foucault's elaborations on scopic power and the Panopticon, the lived reality of POM within this apparatus of control lends itself to a protracted system of waiting whilst being watched, regulated, and trapped inside what has been respectively branded by the MMA as Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs).

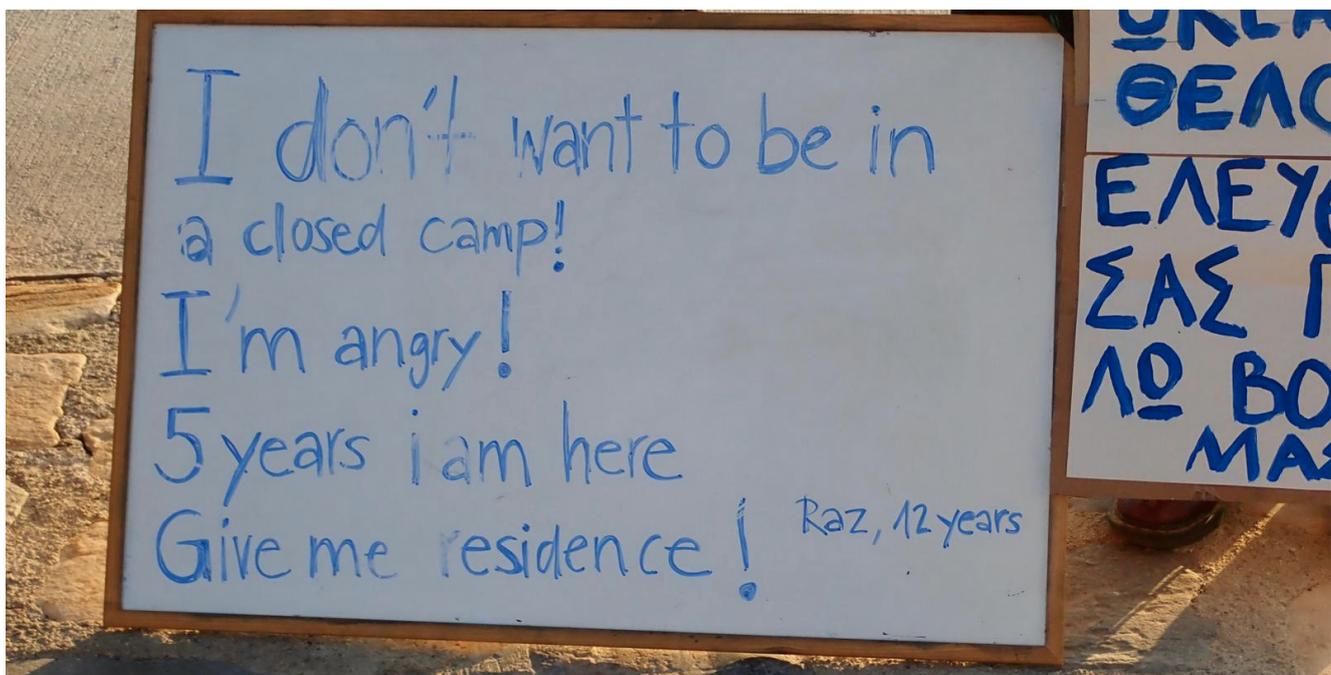


Image Source: Samos Advocacy Collective

CASE STUDY: SAMOS CCAC

The Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centre (MPRIC) in Samos opened this past September 2021 and has been vehemently critiqued for violations of human rights. Upon its inauguration, external signage labels the institution as 'Closed Controlled Access Centre of Samos' (CCAC; KEDN in Greek), which is, in fact, visibly contradictory to promises by the EU Commissioner Ylva Johansson that all new facilities "will not be closed, they will be humane, and allow for areas for families and vulnerable people." In a later blog post, Johansson assured European constituents that new camps "will also be designed to make the process fair and efficient, including for those who are not allowed to stay," emphasising the prioritisation of dignity, safety, justice, and transparency.

Living conditions in Samos' CCAC are advertised as wholly ameliorated, compared to its predecessor facility, which hosted 8,000 residents in a camp overlooking the capital city of Vathi designed to accommodate 650 people. The CCAC, located on the hilly area of Zervou in the centre of the mountainous isle, far from the prospect of shade, potable water and the capital city – distanced 7km away – asylum seekers are roomed in isobox containers, which are equipped with amenities (i.e. cooking facilities, refrigeration units, air conditioning, etc.), all illustrative of assured 'decent living conditions'.

Many local and international organisations are acutely sceptical of the new camp's larger corollaries for the future of migration management in Greece and around the world. Patrick Wieland, of Médecins Sans Frontières, is adamant that the new camp "cannot be sold as an improvement." Meanwhile, General Secretariat of Reception, Manos Logothetis, welcomed the upgraded conditions, comparing the facilities to the old Vathi Camp: "That's a big change from the long food lines and mud and filth we had before, but yes it is also going to be more regulated, more controlled." Otherwise said, upgraded accommodation has, in effect, been exchanged for heightened containment and prison-like conditions.

In a report published by Samos Advocacy Collective and Europe Must Act, residents of the CCAC express testimonies of feeling "like a slave... [where] you are never really free," as well as emotions of detachment from the outside world, the psychological effects of stagnation, the burden of constant surveillance (the omniscient 'watchdog'), sensations of insecurity and the results of financial destitution caused by restrictions on the right to work coupled with unfulfilled cash assistance benefits. Sae Bosco, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator with Samos Volunteers, shared in a personal correspondence how larger political implications of the new camp can be viewed as 'a prison within a prison'. She explained how camp residents who do not currently have a valid asylum applicant card are subject to entry and exit restrictions from the CCAC, which is imbibed in murky legal grounding, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to access services and networks of support. While being able to leave the camp for a few hours might bring temporary reprieve, she explains, the compounding pressures of systematic containment, such as the dissolution of the EU-Turkey Deal and heightened investment into techno-centred facilities, leaves far too many people trapped in the camp, on the island and within Greece, with little hope of fluid mobility for the future.

Larger implications of the closed and controlled camp are manifold. The injunctions thrust upon camp residents, explains a report by the Greek Council for Refugees, "in a closed structure, in the context of strict planning and control, implies the absence of privacy, the destruction of their identity and dignity, amounting to what is a policy of deprivation of freedom and insult to human dignity."

"A closed structure, in the context of strict planning and control, implies the absence of privacy, the destruction of their identity and dignity, amounting to what is a policy of deprivation of freedom and insult to human dignity." (More here)



Anti-eviction action in Viktoria Square, Athens. Source: Viktoria Solidairty

EVICCTIONS

With regard to official housing available to refugees and asylum seekers in Greece – external to camp structures – options have been increasingly limited. Resultantly, a heightened sense of social isolation and disenfranchisement of those seeking to stay in Greece has ensued. Shifts in policies, in fact, have intensified long-standing inequalities, putting many at high risk of eviction and consequent legal difficulties.

On the 15th of July 2020, the control over the ESTIA program relating to accommodation of asylum seekers was handed over from the UNHCR to the MMA, starting with the transition of 12,000 places (nearly half the entire project) on the 1st of September 2020. The ministry announced in late November 2021 that the program had been fully implemented with the support of 14 municipalities, in collaboration with 11 Greek and international NGOs.

Under the new jurisdiction of the MMA a previously unknown NGO “Hopeland” (the name was later changed to “Hopeten”) – with no prior experience providing support for asylum seekers and refugees – became a key implementing partner for the Greek government on the accommodation of asylum seekers. An [investigation](#) later conducted by Solomon and Reporters United revealed several worrying issues regarding the competency of the NGO, and close relationships with several real estate companies/foreign investment firms. These issues have since become a matter of [parliamentary inquiry](#), and 28 deputies of SYRIZA have submitted questions on the matter to the Minister for Migration and Asylum.

In December 2021, journalists from Solomon and [Reporters United](#) received a [pre-litigation legal threat](#) from Hopeten after having sent follow-up questions pertaining to ongoing investigations into the NGO’s involvement in ESTIA programs. The threat from Hopeten described the investigation as “unethical, biased and in bad faith”, demanding that Solomon and Reporters United “immediately refrain from any action that could damage the NGO’s prestige and reputation.” The International Press Institute (IPI) described this [legal pursuit from Hopeten](#) “as a clear attempt to silence the two media’s public interest investigative reporting” and referred to the incident as “another example of the suffocating legal pressure used against the country’s few independent media.” Aside from issues of freedom of press, this episode stands as an example of the Greek government’s mismanagement of issues relating to asylum and migration, whereby private and state interests take precedence over the lives of those seeking asylum in Greece.

The transition to increased involvement of the Ministry for Migration and Asylum in the housing of asylum seekers was coupled with changes in policies decreasing the amount of time asylum seekers could stay in official accommodation and receive cash assistance following a decision on their asylum claim – initially within six months, and later agridged to one month in July, 2021. In practice, this left many people with few options, little time to jump through all of the administrative hurdles necessary to obtain documentation (i.e. tax numbers, health insurance, etc) necessary to live and work in Greece, and little to no support for vulnerable groups.

It ignores existing high rates of unemployment in Greece (reaching 16% in 2020), stringent restrictions on mobility under the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as pervasive forms of structural violence and racism within state institutions and the labour markets, – formal and informal alike – which make it extremely difficult for many migrants to find work. In response to the enactment of this policy, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) states:

There is only one outcome from the Greek Government’s decision: homelessness.”

Throughout late 2020 and into 2021, evictions escalated as people with nowhere else to turn attempted to remain in the homes they had been provided as long as possible. Abandoned by state and larger humanitarian structures, many at risk of eviction turned to solidarians and self-organised groups across major cities (i.e. Thessaloniki, Athens) who stepped in to provide information, access alternative housing and resist evictions. In many instances, police were dispatched and issues of enforced homelessness/housing instability were then compounded via interactions with carceral systems and legal procedures that, invariably, have the propensity to further jeopardise people’s legal status in Greece.

Survivors, an advocacy group composed of beneficiaries of the MSF rehabilitation clinic for victims of torture, based in Athens, comments on the topic:

“For those of us who have experienced destitution, we know the mental impact of this will be catastrophic. Fear, stress, and depression are the everyday reality of the streets. For us as survivors, homelessness meant re-traumatisation and a return to the horrors of the past. The physical dangers are just as lethal: sickness, malnutrition and violence from passers-by and the police. On a social level, refugee homelessness will mean more division between Greeks and migrants, more dependency, and more criminalization of black and brown faces.” (more here).

Stable, safe and suitable housing –the possibility of a home – is and must be viewed as a basic need; the first step in a long process for people fleeing violence and oppression in rebuilding their lives. Evictions, and their preceding threats, have the potential to compound existing trauma and oppression, and play into real issues of structural racism and xenophobia –exposing people to criminalization and police violence.

GLOSSARY OF REPORTS

Below is an overview of reports on violence within state borders collected by BVMN. In total, 44 reports were collected, impacting 91 people from a range of countries of origin, including Afghanistan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Iran.

Date	Location	People Impacted	Age	Countries of Origin	Types of Violence
2020-01-03	Drama Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Centre	40	19-30	Algeria, Unknown	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Humiliation, Sexual assault/abuse, Arbitrary detention
2020-02-08	Petrou Ralli Pre-Removal Centre, Amygdaleza Pre-Removal Centre, Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Centre	1	23	Algeria	Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation), no access to medical care
2020-12-04	Drama Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Center	1	19-30	Algeria	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2020-12-15	Drama Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Centre	1	0-18	Algeria	Property destruction/theft, Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Sexual assault/abuse, Humiliation, Arbitrary detention
2021-01-11	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-01-27	Thessaloniki City Center	1	19-30	Algeria	Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation), Other
2021-02-12	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Kicking
2021-02-12	Port of Patras	1	30-40	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-03-02	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-03-08	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2021-03-13	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2021-03-14	Port of Patras	1	0-18	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2021-03-18	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)

2021-03-18	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2021-03-19	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Property destruction/theft, Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2021-03-20	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Property destruction/theft, Kicking
2021-03-20	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-03-22	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Property destruction/theft, Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-03-27	Port of Patras	2	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2021-05-28	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Humiliation, Arbitrary detention
2021-05-30	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Humiliation, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2021-05-30	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Humiliation, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2021-07-01	Port of Patras	1	0-18	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-07-09	Patras City Center	1	19-30	Iran	Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation), Other
2021-07-31	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation), Other
2021-08-02	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Other
2021-08-03	Port of Patras	5	19-30	Afghanistan	Other
2021-07-28	Xanthi Pre-Removal Detention Centre	4	30-40	Afghanistan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation), Other

2021-08-16	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Morocco	Kicking, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2021-09-13	Port of Patra	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-09-20	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-11-15	Police station, Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Property destruction/theft
2021-11-21	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Property destruction/theft, Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-11-22	Drama Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Centre	1	30	Tunisia	Arbitrary detention, Lack of access to medical care
2021-12-01	Factory in front of the New Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Property destruction/theft, Beating (with batons/hands/other), Arbitrary detention
2021-12-19	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2021-12-22	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Dog attacks, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2021-12-22	Port of Patras	1	30-40	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2021-12-23	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2021-12-29	Port of Patras	2	0-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking, Psychological abuse (e.g. bullying, harassment, verbal insults, defamation)
2022-01-14	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)
2022-01-15	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other), Kicking
2022-01-19	Port of Patras	1	19-30	Afghanistan	Beating (with batons/hands/other)

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

B O R D E R

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N E T W O R K

BVMN is a volunteer led endeavor, acting as an alliance of organisations in the Western Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of participant 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 for volunteers in the field and four paid positions.

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



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