

ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

DECEMBER 2022
BALKAN REGION





Border Violence
Monitoring Network

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BALKAN REGION
DECEMBER 2022



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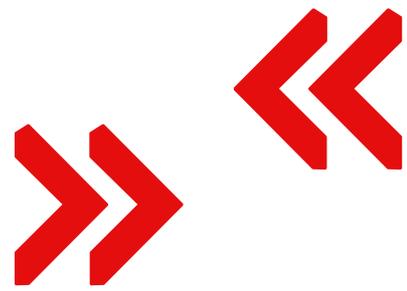


I HAVE
RIGHTS.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In December, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) shared 7 testimonies of pushbacks impacting 60 people on the move (POM) across the Balkans and Greece. This report brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the region to look at the way European Union states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders.

This monthly report starts with a piece on the publication of the second edition of the Black Book of Pushbacks by BVMN, an expanded and updated version of the first one - released two years ago-, which consists of 3,176 pages and 1,635 testimonies of pushbacks affecting over 24,990 persons across EU Member States. The four new volumes look at the intensification of violence against people on the move at EU external and internal borders that has taken place over the past two years of lockdowns, as well as at the increased pressure and harassment exerted by the authorities on solidarity groups that work on supporting people on the move in the region.

Several updates from the field follow this section, starting with a report on two aggressions that involved the setting on fire of two different squats inhabited by people on the move in the town of Velika Kladuša, Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of them while people were still inside. These constitute the most serious incidents of a trend of increasing violence and frequency of acts of harassment against people on the move in the region. In neighbouring Serbia, teams on the ground have witnessed the new presence of foreign officers in the north of the country, as well as some vehicles with the Frontex logo in the town of Subotica, that point at the unannounced expansion of the operations of the Agency in Serbia.

Some of the risks associated to the concerning expansion of Frontex in the region are explored in the next section, which presents a brief analysis on the new EU Action Plan for the Western Balkans, including the intention to open negotiations with the Western Balkan states to broaden the mandate of the Agency so as to allow for its deployment at non-EU borders in the region. The publication of over 4,000 documents concerning Frontex by Fragdenstaat, including several Serious Incident Reports documenting pushbacks and deaths in the Evros region is also included in this report. Further updates from Greece address recent evictions of some of the remaining residents of Eleonas Camp after months of resistance, the continuation of violence and pushbacks at the port of Patras and the lack of access to medical care for hundreds of people on the move at the EU-funded Closed Controlled Access Centre of Samos.

The final sections of this monthly report provide new updates on the lack of access to adequate shelter for people on the move in Trieste, despite the activation of the “Cold Emergency” programme by the municipality. Lastly, we report on the reactivation of the readmission agreements between Italy and Slovenia, a mechanism deemed illegitimate by the Court of Rome in 2021, which seems to not be working so far due to a lack of collaboration between the authorities of the different countries.

▶ 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 No Name Kitchen, Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, PIC, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, Mare Liberum, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarmphone Austria and I Have Rights



RELEASE OF THE BLACK BOOK OF PUSHBACKS

In 2020, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) published the first edition of the Black Book of Pushbacks. It was the most comprehensive repository of testimonies of border violence to date, with 892 group testimonies detailing the experiences of over 12,600 people across more than 1,500 pages. Although MEPs hand delivered the book filled with evidence of illegal brutalities at the border to Commissioner Johansson and despite the coordinated handovers to Ministers of Interior across EU Member States and extensive media coverage, the mountain of evidence was not enough to end the systematic practices of human rights violations along European borders.

Nevertheless, at the end of 2022, we published an expanded and updated edition of the book, living up to our promise that we would continue to write new versions until the culture of impunity around border violence is abolished. On Thursday 8th December, the new version was published, with 3,176 pages and 1,635 testimonies affecting over 24,990 persons across EU Member States. The two years between these books brought many more situations that directly affected people on the move and hindered our own work; defending the rights of people on the move and documenting the violations committed against them.

Throughout several of the lockdowns over the past two years, big NGOs evacuated areas and closed down many of their projects along the borders. Left without basic provisions

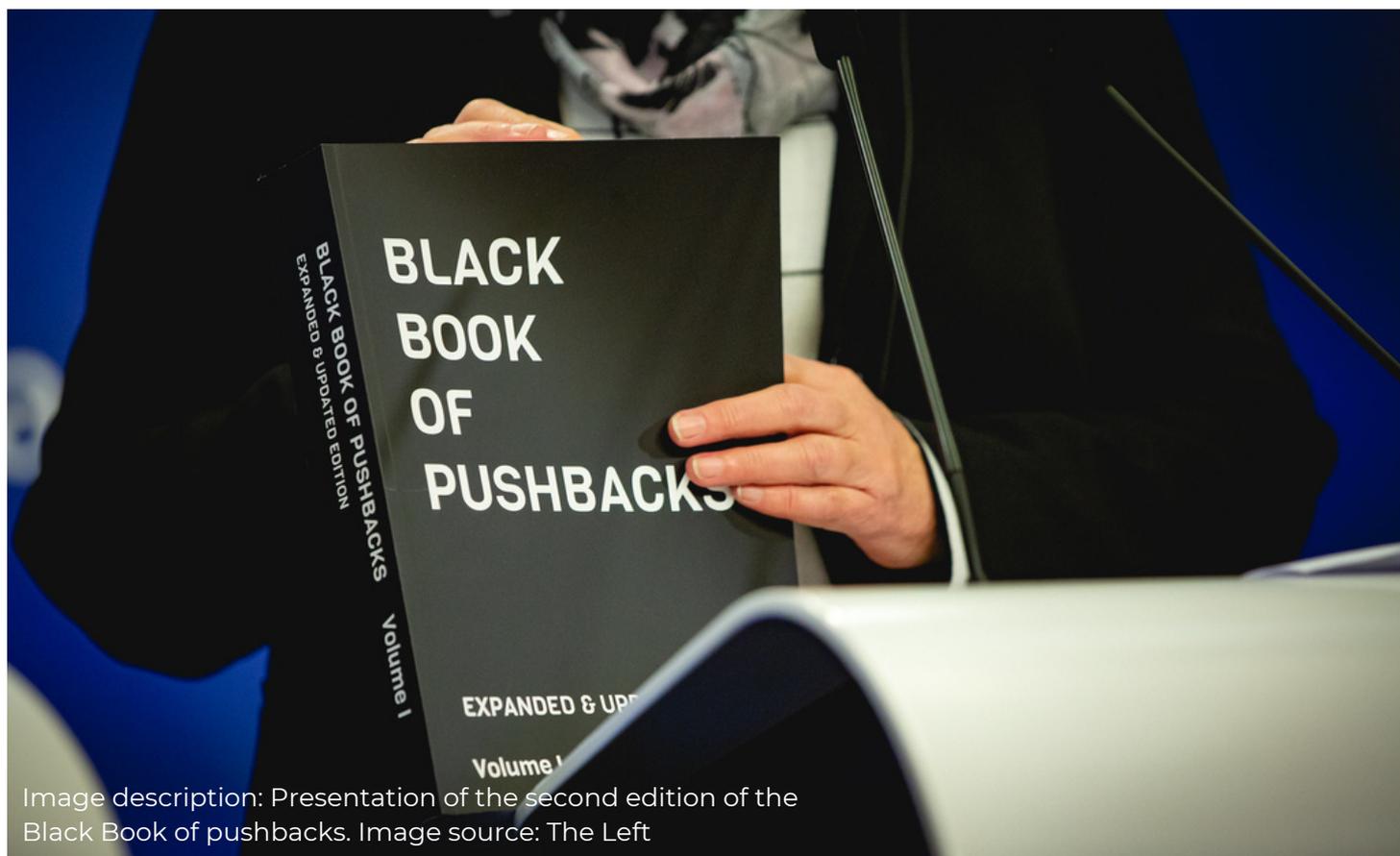


Image description: Presentation of the second edition of the Black Book of pushbacks. Image source: The Left

and far from the eyes and minds of European citizens, many people on the move couldn't afford to worry about the pandemic. Locked up behind wire fences of overcrowded EU-funded camps or living in abhorrent conditions in squalid freezing squats with no access to running water, they were more desperate than ever. Concurrently, an unprecedented rise in brutal violence against people on the move along the EU's borders began to unfold: we saw the intensification of extreme and prolonged beatings, the shaving of heads, sexual assaults, forced undressings, dog attacks, non-consensual medical treatments and attacks with Electric Discharge Weapons (EDWs).

We witnessed a concerning rise in sophisticated methods of torture at the Croatian and Greek land borders that included gun violence and rape, throwing individuals into rivers with their hands sometimes locked by zip ties, and the systematisation of forced undressing which culminated in a group of 19 people freezing to death near the Evros river. We watched as the numbers of dead and missing throughout the regions of our work continued to rise.

In this environment, it became clear that BVMN members could not and would not leave victims of these brutalities behind with no support: medical volunteers were hiking for hours through inaccessible terrains to treat the wounds of pushback victims, food and hygiene products were delivered to the doorsteps of squats to avoid queuing or moving during the curfews, we found new ways to record the testimonies, remotely if needed, and our projects were running under the new health and safety regulations that allowed us to fill a critical gap in institutionalised support for people on the move without endangering anyone further.

This, unfortunately, came at a cost. The governments of Croatia, Turkey and Greece have proven to be the most brutal in their reprisals, targeting not only our activists but also their family members, forcing BVMN member projects such as Josoor to shut down, and causing many of our key staff members to leave their countries of residence. This again hindered the reporting work of the BVMN and forced us to reconsider the public visibility of some of our most exposed members.

We are beginning 2023 in a place of precarity and political uncertainty. The future of the people we serve, of our member organisations and all their members seems increasingly uncertain. However the need to document, record and publish these violations, and to continue publishing these books is clearer and more pertinent than ever. Impunity must end, perpetrators must be held accountable, and Europe must find a way to express solidarity with all people on the move, regardless of their nationality.

Image description: MEP Cornelia Ernst, Presentation of the second edition of the Black Book of pushbacks
Image source: The Left



UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



BOSNIA

SQUAT SET ON FIRE IN VELIKA KLADUŠA



Image description: Broken windows of a house set on fire. Image source: Blindspots

People on the move staying in the area of Velika Kladuša seem to be facing an increasingly hostile environment. Though the number of people transiting through Velika Kladuša is generally decreasing, BVMN teams in the region witnessed an increase in the number of pushbacks reported, as well as police forces present at the Croatian-Bosnian border, at the end of 2022. The teams on the field report that, in the past weeks, there has also been an increase in the frequency and violence of harassment committed against transit groups and support structures in the town.

Two of the incidents that took place last month were cases in which some squats where people-on-the-move had taken shelter were set on fire. In one of the cases, the house was set on fire when the people were still inside. They described that the aggressors, reportedly four local men, had come in with guns and shouted at them from outside of the building. After that, they smashed the windows, poured gasoline over the walls and set the house on fire. Though the people in the house managed to escape, they did not have time to take their personal belongings with them. They were then forced to spend the night in the nearby woods, searching for a place to sleep, in an area that, as they described, “is not safe [for them]”.



Image description: Remains of a house set on fire.
Image source: Blindspots

Moreover, while rushing through the woods after the fire, the group was divided, and one person, who did not have a phone, remained missing until the next day.

The people on the move described how the attackers stole personal belongings from the house, such as the batteries used to charge their phones. They also made piles with the clothes and blankets left behind and set them on fire. The group that suffered the attack had previously reported that some local residents had broken into their house and stolen two phones. The group recognized one of the aggressors as the same person who had kicked them out of another abandoned building where they had previously lived and also as the one who had set fire to another squat in the area.

The destruction of places where people on the move find shelter is a common means of repression that further aggravates the conditions of people on the move at the EU's external borders by making these places even more uninhabitable. As soon as people leave the squat, stoves and batteries are often stolen, blankets and mattresses are burned, and the buildings themselves are destroyed in various ways: doors and window frames are frequently torn out, and window panes are smashed. The systematic character of these aggressions seems to have increased in the past month. Moreover, not only do most of these attacks remain unaddressed by the local authorities, but it has been reported that the police themselves often play an active role in these types of attrition strategies.

EU ACTION PLAN FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

The 2023 EU Action Plan for the Western Balkans outlines five focus areas for the European Commission's future migration strategy, namely: strengthening border management along migration routes; swift asylum procedures and support reception capacity; fighting against migrant smuggling; enhancing readmission cooperation and returns, and achieving visa policy alignment with non-EU states.

The Action Plan will have serious implications on access to asylum in EU member states. For instance, it is proposed that entire new status agreements between individual Balkan countries and Frontex be agreed upon, thus delegating more executive power to Frontex to monitor and patrol non-EU borders. "With a new mandate, it will be possible to deploy also internally so to say, between two different Western Balkan partners," Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson stated. This is particularly concerning given the fact that Frontex staff cannot be held accountable for criminal misconduct in the country they are stationed as well as the recent reports proving Frontex's involvement in pushbacks.

The plan also includes proposals to accelerate asylum procedures in Member States along EU external borders through the implementation of "pilot projects" establishing transit reception centres based on the "Safe Third Country" and "Safe Country of Origin" concepts. This would be particularly concerning in Greece, as it reinforces and perpetuates the dangers and risks asylum applicants are faced with by virtue of Turkey being designated a "safe third country".

While these points highlight only some of the many problematic proposals outlined in the Action Plan, they also portray the anti-immigration agenda the EU is implementing in order to restrict access to asylum for people on the move in Greece and all over Europe, while simultaneously facilitating grounds for pushbacks.



SERBIA

PRESENCE OF FRONTEX IN NORTHERN SERBIA

Since the last week of December, 2022, BVMN teams in Northern Serbia have witnessed the presence of an increasing number of foreign officers in the area (mostly from Germany), as well as foreign police vehicles, and at least two cars with Frontex logos on them. No uniforms from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency have been spotted yet. However, in an interaction between some of the volunteers and one German officer, who seemed to be patrolling the area around some of the informal settlements where people on the move stay, the officer claimed his unit had arrived in Serbia to support the Frontex mission in the country. So far, foreign officers have only been seen in patrolling or surveillance actions and reportedly have not been involved in the frequent evictions of people on the move in the area.

Image description: German cars patrolling the area around one informal settlement in Northern Serbia.

Image source: Collective Aid



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Some days later, another group of volunteers got their papers checked by the local authorities during an eviction of a squat that took place while the team was distributing there. They were forced to stay there while the officers carried out the eviction, and when asked about the presence of foreign officers in Northern Serbia, the Serbian officer mentioned that Frontex had come to support local authorities, since their forces were “not enough to address the [current] situation”. He claimed that at least 20 German and 6 Austrian officers had arrived in the country for this purpose.

It is important to mention that right now, Frontex’s mandate in Serbia only allows the EU Agency to operate in the Southern and South-Eastern borders with North Macedonia and Bulgaria, where they have been present since 2021. Since October 2022, the European Commission has been pushing for the opening of negotiations on the deployment of new Frontex forces in different Western Balkan states, including Serbia. However, the extent and legitimacy of this mandate remains completely unclear since no public announcement of the expansion of these operations has been made. At the time of writing, the sole public confirmation of the extension of Frontex operations to Northern Serbia was given by Frontex Deputy Executive Director Uku Sarekanno during his appearance in the Frontex Scrutiny Working Group on January 30th, 2023.



ELEONAS CAMP EVICTIONS

Approximately 40 of the remaining residents living in the closed Eleonas Camp were evicted on November 30th 2022 and forced to relocate to more isolated and remote camps north east of Athens, including Ritsona and Malakasa. Since the announcement of the camp’s closure, the Greek state has overseen the eviction of up to 640 people. This comes after months of resistance against the evictions organised by residents of the camp and solidarity groups.

BVMN reported on the struggle led by the residents in the monthly report of July 2022.

A [new Public Database of Frontex Documents](#) published by Fragdenstaat contains over 4,000 documents concerning the EU agency, including several Serious Incident Reports documenting [pushbacks](#) and [deaths](#) in the Evros region, a Frontex operational area.

The database also contains numerous reports from field visits to the Evros region carried out by Frontex Fundamental Rights Officers (FROs), whose mandate is to monitor the fundamental rights compliance of the Agency's activities. FROs have visited sites where BVMN has collected [testimonies](#) of systematic human rights violations, [including the Fylakio Pre-Removal Detention Center](#), showing that Frontex's presence in Evros as well as its internal monitoring mechanisms evidently do not prevent violations or facilitate compliance with international law and human rights standards. Documents show that FROs have reported concern at Frontex's [potential involvement in illegal pushback operations](#) and identified a culture of non-reporting of violations within Frontex operational areas.

A [BVMN report from October 2022](#) highlighted the limitations of the FRO mechanism and reported that FROs conducting field missions in Evros have been restricted in their monitoring activities, [according to the 2021 FRO Annual Report](#).

PATRAS

Over the course of December, demographics at the two derelict factories where the No Name Kitchen (NNK) team distributes resources, stayed the same; the vast majority of people are from Afghanistan with a few from Pakistan. There was a small increase in numbers with the team supporting up to 30 people at any given time. NNK continued to provide people with general legal information (many choosing to register asylum claims via the online platform) and referring people to other organisations for matters beyond the team's expertise.

The crossing from Patras to Italy is very hard due to the presence of port security guards, canine units, and the weighing of trucks, thus it is rare that anyone makes the cross successfully, and most times, people return disappointed and exhausted. The risk of violence against people on the move and their property continues. This violence was also analysed by BVMN in a [report](#) at the beginning of 2022, as well as in [multiple reports](#) in 2021. Recent testimonies describe incidents of assault by port security guards and phones being deliberately damaged. This comes in conjunction with first hand accounts of extended detention in police cells with inadequate food, no exercise or fresh air, and no access to legal support nor interpreters.

During a survey visit in Igoumenitsa, a small town on the west coast of the Greek mainland which is one stop away from Patras on the route for ships travelling between Ancona, Bari and Brindisi, the NNK team found conditions for people on the move there to be even more challenging than those in Patras, with displaced people living in a makeshift 'jungle' camp with restricted access to water and power. The continuation of a pushback trend that involves people who had crossed from Patras being brought to this more remote and hostile location was also reported.

Additionally, a [testimony from a 16 year-old boy](#) who arrived at Bari only to be taken directly to a police station by a taxi he had flagged down, was collected. He was fingerprinted, his age was incorrectly recorded, and he was placed on a boat bound for Greece. He was reportedly unable to request asylum as he was not provided with an interpreter.

In mid December, the NNK team met with journalists from the Swiss news channel SRF who were working with the independent news agency Lighthouse Reports, to investigate and expose illegal pushbacks by the Italian authorities. The [article](#) they produced as a result of the investigation is a damning and indisputable indictment of illegal practices by an EU member state.

SAMOS

CONDITIONS IN THE SAMOS CCAC

Access to medical care in the Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC), has been extremely limited for people on the move. Despite getting funding by the EU for [43 million euros](#), the CCAC still lacks the permanent presence of a camp doctor, which has left thousands of people on the island unable to access medical support. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has tried to fill the state's gap by providing a mobile clinic in the CCAC a few days a week to provide primary care. [One of MSF's patients](#) described the camp as 'mental punishment', with the detention conditions of the CCAC adding to pre-existing physical and mental distress experienced by people on the move.

Furthermore, in December, [Samos based organisations](#) raised the alarm about unaccompanied children (UAC) in the CCAC only having one set of clothing, which forced children to go to school inside the camp wearing only a towel when their clothes were being washed. UACs are not allowed to leave the camp and thus have no access to the support provided by NGOs in the town of Vathy, outside of the CCAC. They are therefore reliant on the camp authorities who seem unwilling to provide sufficient clothing to children.

2022 ended with continued affronts to the human dignity of people on the move in the EU-funded CCAC.

Pre-election posters from the main opposition People's Republican Party (CHP), stating 'Oh world... Turkey will not be your refugee camp'.



INTERNATIONAL: TURKEY-EU-UN

Turkish politics and media continue to feed into the growing hostility towards Turkey's migrant and refugee population. The Directorate of Migration Management boasted of a record number of deportations in 2022 – 119,817 in total, a 159% increase on the previous year – cynically labelling it as 'the year of deportations'.

True to that, over the past few months, there has been a steady increase in cases of refugees and migrants being rounded up collectively, transferred to removal centres and often deported almost immediately without the option of appeal or any form of legal representation.

With elections scheduled for May, competing parties continue trying to outbid one another in terms of the numbers of refugees and 'irregulars' they're promising to 'send back'. This increase in the total number of deportations provides the ruling AKP government some leverage over the opposition, whose politics largely revolve around demonising and threatening migrant communities and scapegoating them for the country's current economic crisis.

In this scenario, the AKP needs to find some balance between appeasing an electorate eagerly awaiting some resolute action in addressing Turkey's "migrant problem" on the one hand, and not drawing too much criticism from the more "concerned" voices of the European establishment.

EVERYDAY PRESSURE AND RESTRICTIONS

Everyday life in Turkey is getting increasingly difficult for the most precarious. With an economic crisis spinning out of control, rents are increasing by the month and the cost of groceries by the week. Newly introduced restrictions limiting the areas where foreigners are allowed to reside and a greater police presence in the streets, the freedom of movement for undocumented people and marginalised foreigners in general is heavily curtailed.

Late night door-to-door calls by police have become more commonplace, with officers checking exactly who is residing where. Messages circulate online, raising alarms with rumours about supposed deportation quotas for the next week, causing widespread panic. And while the spread of misinformation and the lack of clear information about what to do when confronted by the authorities is concerning, the more crucial problem is the absence of actual rights and support structures available to migrants and refugees in Turkey.

All Istanbul residents were required to register their personal public transport cards by the end of December 2022. In and of itself, this is in keeping with the trend of personalised technologies becoming more integrated in daily life, something many see as totally legitimate and efficient, even if it does raise privacy and data protection concerns. But for those of the city's roughly 20-million population (official figures 16 million) that are undocumented residents or those who are not living in the region they are assigned, this means that public transport can only be accessed by more expensive means: costly short-term travel cards aimed at tourists or taxis.

DETENTIONS & DEPORTATIONS

A number of cases are indicative of the current situation in terms of detention, deportation, and the treatment of activists and rights defenders in Turkey.

Online campaigning – mainly on the part of the Migrants Union Initiative (Göçmen Sendikası Girişimi) – and a number of newspaper articles have brought attention to the ongoing detention of a Ugandan national, Wahab Kenyatta. Kenyatta, despite being a legal resident in Turkey with his papers in order, was put into Ankara's Akyurt Removal Center on 31 October and has been there since. He suffers from bipolar disorder, has expressed suicidal ideation and has not been able to receive formal medical treatment or access appropriate medication while in detention. As of 28 December, Kenyatta was one of 18,776 people from 107 countries being held in Turkey's removal centers, according to figures from the Directorate of Migration Management. He is still in detention.

On 22 December, it was reported that Iman Nasif, a 22-year-old Syrian woman living in Turkey was ordered to be deported to northern Syria as a result of having complained before the end of the 2021-22 school year that her younger sister, a primary school student, was being subjected to physical and verbal abuse by her schoolteacher and other members of her class. Nasif, who herself is a student teacher, received no response from the school to her initial complaint. She then filed a complaint to the police about the situation. Her sister's teacher apparently complained in response claiming verbal and physical abuse on the part of Nasif, which she denies, citing proof from the school's surveillance cameras. Nonetheless, the counter-complaint was taken seriously, with Nasif arrested and placed in custody for 12 days. Her release was aided by a court intervention on the part of UNICEF, but her temporary protection status was revoked. Roughly six months later, in December 2022, she learned from her lawyer that a deportation order was filed against her. Nasif has posted videos online in Turkish and Arabic about her situation in particular and the racist treatment against Syrians in general. A Syrian lawyer following the story stated that the Turkish authorities now deport any Syrian national with a case in their name, even before the case is brought to court. This violates Turkey's already-limited laws of temporary protection, which "stipulates the trial of Syrians on Turkish territory, and does not provide for the deportation of any violator to northern Syria." Nasif is originally from Aleppo, which

is under the control of the Syrian regime and Syrian Democratic Forces, and her family lives in Turkey.

Also on 22 December, an [article](#) appeared about a deportation order against Iranian nationals Hossein Manbari and Shugar Mohammadi, who were each sentenced to death in Iran for participating in large-scale protests that started in 2017. The two arrived in Turkey in September 2022 and have been held in the Mugla Ula Removal Center since 15 December, their deportation pending. According to their lawyer, the more recent uprising in Iran has prompted the regime to quickly approve death sentences. Manbari and Mohammadi have applied for international protection in Turkey, as is their right, but at the time of the article, no decision had been made. The journalist was also contacted but had no further update on the case.

Alongside the targeting of migrant communities directly, human rights organisations and migrants solidarity initiatives are also facing severe repression. One recent example is the [GÖÇİZDER](#) trial, which came before Istanbul's 26th High Criminal Court on 13 December. A total of 22 rights defenders – 17 of whom were already in pre-trial detention – from the Göç İzleme Derneği, (Migration Monitoring Association, or GÖÇİZDER), and one member of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey are facing charges of 'membership of a terrorist organisation.'

GÖÇİZDER's offices in Istanbul were raided by the police as part of an investigation launched by the Istanbul Chief Prosecutor's Office in June 2022 and their books and computers were seized. The same day, 22 members and executives of GÖÇİZDER were detained and a "secrecy" order was brought for the case. After eight days in detention 17 people were imprisoned pending trial. The hearing took place between 13-15 December, during which the defendants' lawyers were repeatedly barred from speaking and were ordered to leave the courtroom. The judges insisted on keeping this off the record, with their objections then prompting the judges to walk out of the court with the case files. Eventually, the defendants were brought without their families or lawyers to another courtroom but families and lawyers were not permitted to enter.

DEATHS AT WORK AND ON THE MOVE

On 7 December, an [indictment](#) was announced against Turkish national Kemal Korkmaz (41), who on 16 October, 2021 burned three Syrian workers who were working and living in a marble workshop in Izmir's Güzelbahçe neighbourhood. The victims were identified as 23-year-old Mamoun al-Nabhan, 21-year-old Ahmed Al-Ali and 17-year-old Mohammed al-Bish. On 10 December, lawyers representing the rights organisations following the case released a [statement](#) in which they criticised multiple aspects of the case and Turkey's legal system. They stated that they are confident that the accused will be convicted of premeditated murder and receive the three life sentences that the Public Prosecutor has declared the appropriate punishment. However, they also stressed the range of faults in the case

ranging from gross negligence on the part of the police and fire department and violations of legal requirements by the employer, to the broader fact that Turkey's laws do not specifically regulate crimes motivated by hate.

Korkmaz, a former employee at the same company, reputedly told another employee two days before the crime that "we will clear all of these Syrians from the country." The day after the fire, this employee reported the statement to police, but no effective investigation was carried out. Korkmaz only later confessed his crime to the police after having been arrested for stabbing and robbing two other people two weeks after the fire incident. Up until his arrest and confession, the official version of the cause of the fire that killed the three young men had been an electrical leakage due to negligence on the part of the Syrian workers themselves.

An article from Human Rights Association (IHD) Co-Chairman Eren Keskin and Refugee Solidarity Association (Refugee Der) General Coordinator Pırl Erçoban about the case offered a broader context in which such hate crimes should be understood. They state: "Turkey has seen an increase in "hate crimes" stemming from racism and nationalism. Lynching attempts against asylum seekers and refugees and the use of hate speech by politicians are another dimension of the problem. But current laws do not explicitly prohibit "hate crimes." So far, no one has been prosecuted for racism or discrimination or for committing a hate crime. Reports indicate that some television and social media channels associate refugee identity with crime, creating the perception that Syrians and Afghans pose a threat to the social order."

The Health and Safety Labour Watch (HESA), with the release of their Immigrant/Refugee Job Murders Report, announced that at least 828 migrant/refugee workers have lost their lives in Turkey in the last decade. HESA defines certain worker deaths as "murders because of work" in recognition of the preventable nature of such incidents and with the purpose of assigning a degree of responsibility evaded by the term "work accidents." Their study found the main causes of deaths to be: use of unsuitable transportation in agriculture; falls from heights as a result of proper safety measures not taken; industrial explosions, burnings, crushes and poisonings; and violence against migrant/refugee workers (sometimes among migrants in workplaces). The report found that 51% of the migrant/refugee workers who died in the workplace murders are Syrians and 18% are from Afghanistan. Seven out of every ten deaths are refugees who have fled their homes due to wars. These killings are most concentrated in agriculture (29%) and construction (25%), where migrants in particular are seen as "disposable labour." The report notes that child and women workers make up 9% of the total mortality rate. In a separate report, HESA reports that in 2022 alone there were at least 1,843 "job murders" in Turkey, 90 of which were of migrants/refugees, including 39 workers from Syria and 20 from Afghanistan.

In the southeastern region of Şanlıurfa, nine people died and another was seriously injured when a minibus they were travelling in plunged into an irrigation canal. Şanlıurfa is a busy transit route for people on the move, and the bus was reportedly carrying a total of 31 "irregular" migrants, as well as one person believed to be responsible for their transportation, who was arrested.



Ahmed al-Ali (21) and Muhammed al-Bish (17) were buried in the Güzelbahçe district of İzmir.

Image Source: Ömer Sönmez / Rüdaw

<https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/middleeast/turkey/251220212>

GR-TR PUSHBACKS / SEA RESCUE:

Since February 2020, the Turkish Coast Guard has been publishing data on its [website](#) regarding pushbacks in the Aegean Sea. Further verification and analysis of such claims can be found via Forensic Architecture's [Drift Back](#) platform, where they have verified and analysed more than 1,000 cases of pushbacks documented between February 2020 and February 2022. In December 2022, the Turkish Coast Guard recorded and [published](#) 69 pushback cases in the Aegean Sea affecting 1,944 people.

Turkish pro-government media outlets have been publishing substantial reports of [repeated cases](#) of large group pushbacks in the Aegean Sea from Greek to Turkish waters, emphasising rights violations and illegality, with President Erdoğan lambasting both Greece and Frontex. Among the reported pushback and rescue incidents published on 22 December, there was the story of Turkish authorities managing to intervene and bring to shore a group of 43 migrants who were stranded off the coast of Aydın in

a sinking rubber boat. The group had reportedly been pushed back from Greece and two women had drowned before the rescue took place. There has also been a notable increase in footage released by the Turkish National Defense Ministry showing supposed pushbacks by the Greek Coastguard into Turkish waters in the Aegean.

In December there were also multiple reports of pushbacks on the land border between Turkey and Greece. Two reports are shared here covering separate incidents – from 5 and 19 December respectively – that are reflective of common patterns in land pushbacks at the Evros / Meriç River.

The earlier report comes from the Stockholm Centre for Freedom — an advocacy organisation founded by Turkish journalists allegedly linked to the Gülen movement — and has not featured in Turkish media. It is an interview with a Turkish man who was reportedly pushed back at the Evros / Meriç River on 10 October with his wife and 5-year-old son as part of a group of 50-60 people of various nationalities — among them men and women of Afghan, Kurdish and Syrian origins. The respondent describes theft and physical violence on the part of masked and unmasked officers inflicted on him and others from the point of apprehension to their detention to the pushback itself. He and his wife had each served or partially served prison sentences in Turkey for alleged ties to the Gülen movement and were seeking to flee Turkey with their son before the woman's expected rearrest. Reportedly, in the aftermath of the pushback from Greece, the woman was arrested again.

The second incident featured in at least two widely circulated news sites (here and here) on 19 December, and describes in detail another mass pushback at the Evros / Meriç River. The specific dates of the events are not given but it is implicitly recent. The incident was covered by another source on the same date with a wide circulation. The group that was reportedly pushed back was made up of a group of 45 men and women of Afghan, Iranian and Moroccan origin. It doesn't state if there were people of other nationalities present. They describe beatings, theft, humiliation and abuse from the point of apprehension to detention to the pushback itself. The group, stripped of much of their clothes in freezing temperatures, was forced onto boats, ten people at a time, which were then pushed out into the river, with many having to swim their way over to the Turkish side. There they were reportedly found by Turkish soldiers who saw to their welfare and called the emergency services. No further information was obtained regarding the people's current situation and status in Turkey: whether they have been detained or released with a removal order, or otherwise.

LACK OF ACCESS TO SHELTER IN TRIESTE

The dropping temperatures in December led to a drastic decrease in arrivals to Trieste compared to the November numbers. Despite this drop, the number of people arriving at the main square was still ten times higher than that of the same period in 2021, when 99 people were reported to have arrived in the town. Last month, 1,017 people were met by solidarity groups, including 211 unaccompanied minors (mostly from Afghanistan), 740 single men, 13 single women, and 53 family members (mostly Turkish Kurds, and a few families from Afghanistan).

Of those, only 13% said they would like to seek asylum in Trieste, the rest of them moving quickly to other Italian or European destinations. Despite the decrease of asylum applications, the lack of action to change the situation of people left without shelter while waiting to access reception centres continues to demonstrate the inability and disinterest of state institutions to take care of the needs of people on the move in the city. Thus, at the moment, waiting time for admittance to the camps exceeds one month, while transfers from the province of Trieste to other regions have become even slower. Despite the fact that the municipality has activated the "Emergenza freddo" project, expanding the available beds on a rotating basis to 50, and activating a facility dedicated to single women and families, including undocumented ones, the supply of night shelters is still far from adequate, and many people are still forced to stay on the streets every night.

In order to support those who are left without shelter during the winter nights, some activists have installed stoves made from oil cans at the Silos, the large abandoned building next to the station. Solidarity groups have also organised the distribution of wood and tea evenings in the building.

READMISSION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN ITALY AND SLOVENIA REACTIVATED

Minister Matteo Piantedosi, former Chief of Staff at the same ministry under Salvini and Lamorgese, has reactivated informal readmissions between Italy and Slovenia through a ministerial directive, a readmission agreement which was declared illegal in the ruling of the Court of Rome, January 18th, 2021.

The readmission would mainly target people who let the border police know of their intention to not stay in Italy to seek asylum but to continue their journey to other destinations. At the moment, reports from people on the move reveal that the mechanism seems not to be working due to the lack of cooperation of the Slovenian police in taking back people whom the Italian border police try to reject. As a result, some testimonies describe instead the delivery of a notice to people who declare they do not wish to seek asylum in Italy, instructing them to leave Italian and EU territory within 7 days of issuing the document.



GLOSSARY OF REPORTS

Link	Incident	Recorded	Demographic	Group Size
Hungary to Serbia				
<u>1.1.</u>	6th December	13th December	Syria	4
Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina				
<u>2.1.</u>	2nd December	7th December	Morocco	2
<u>2.2.</u>	8th December	12th December	Afghanistan, Morocco	4
<u>2.3.</u>	14th December	15th December	Afghanistan	6
<u>2.4.</u>	17th December	17th December	Guinea-Bissau	4
<u>2.5.</u>	20th December	20th December	Afghanistan, Guinea-Bissau, Pakistan	5
<u>2.6.</u>	23rd December	23rd December	Afghanistan, Guinea- Conakry, Morocco	22
<u>2.7.</u>	30th December	2nd January	Pakistan	8
<u>2.8.</u>	31st December	4th January	Guinea-Bissau	5

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

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.

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