



Border Violence
Monitoring Network

ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE 2026 REPORTS

MONTHLY
REPORT
FEBRUARY

Cover image: As the eviction of their living site commences, a group of young men leave only to return 20 minutes later once all their belongings have been taken. Source: HRO



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BLIND SPOTS



Other contributors:



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Methodology and Terminology

REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN¹ 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, Turkey, Poland and France, including Rigardu, Mobile Info Team, Collective Aid, Blindspots, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid, Mission Wings. Legal Centre Lesvos, We Are Monitoring, InfoPark, Human Rights Observers and Calais Food Collective.



Executive summary

This report gathers updates from the month of January and brings together first-hand testimonies and observations from a range of countries in Europe to look at the way states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders. Updates come from the different Member Organisations of BVMN, as well as other partners like Glocal Roots and *borderline-europe*.

The narrative of small numbers of people using the Balkan route persists across the Western Balkans. Official statistics indicate a decrease, but these numbers – wielded around by government officials like a trophy – obscure the means used to achieve that and the violent consequences on the ground. Across the region, governments continue to implement strategies aimed at “managing” migration through the criminalisation of movement and assistance, the tightening of border infrastructure, and the gradual withdrawal of protection mechanisms. These developments form part of a wider political commitment to reinforcing “Fortress Europe,” with authorities expanding surveillance systems and enforcement capacities along the EU’s external borders. Often, these policies don’t necessarily reduce the number of people crossing, but force those migrating to find increasingly invisible – and dangerous – paths.

This month, we look at the European Parliament’s approval of a new set of measures with regards to “safe-third countries”, which includes the creation of an EU-wide list of such states, whose nationals will see their asylum applications examined through fast-track

mechanisms with less safeguards. The new regulations would also allow for the deportation of individuals seeking asylum to some of those countries, even if the person has no prior connection to the place. This takes place in the context of continuous conversations on the creation of Return Hubs by multiple EU states, such as Greece, Germany or the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to reduce the protection infrastructure in the country, through the closure of the Ušivak Temporary Reception Centre. The facility constituted the only accessible state-run centre dedicated to hosting families, unaccompanied minors and women in the country. Many of the residents have now been relocated to the Lipa Temporary Reception Centre, a move criticised by many human rights organisations due to the unsuitability of the facility to safely host vulnerable populations. The complete inadequacy of the centre and the negligence of those who manage it was tragically made evident by the deaths of two residents in December, which have since been surrounded by a deep lack of transparency and accountability. At the border with Croatia, border violence perpetrated by state authorities continues to put people in danger, forcing many into more and more dangerous routes that result in loss of life increasingly often. This month, at least one person has died and several have gone missing after a boat capsized in the Una river on February 23rd.

Similarly, people in Serbia have reported growing levels of violence perpetrated by Bulgarian police, including the use of dogs



Executive summary

and potentially deathly forced undressing in snowy conditions. Meanwhile, administrative and bureaucratic barriers keep many from accessing support even once they have managed to make it to Serbia, in an infrastructure of violence and hostility that goes well beyond state borders. In Greece, slow asylum procedures and inhumane living conditions in Oinofyta camp, north of Athens, have motivated the start of a hunger strike by several Kurdish families. The insufficient medical care and extremely poor hygiene conditions are compounded by the continuous illegal lack of cash assistance payments by the Greek government since April 2024, across the country, which prevents people from procuring essential items and services for themselves. Given the remoteness of many of the state facilities, the lack of these payments further increases the isolation of residents, since many are unable to take the bus that would bring them closer to the services of support organisations. This is the case, for example, for many people living in the Kos and Samos CCACs.

Despite the many unmet needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, the government keeps choosing to spend vast amounts of public resources in further criminalisation, detention and violent deterrence instead. In February, the Minister for Migration and Asylum announced a new legal framework that would allow the government to shut down “unregistered places of worship”, in a veiled targeting of mosques during the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, in the context of the new migration bill, two new detention centres are being constructed in Crete, meant to

hold people in “administrative detention” – without trial –, with the objective of deterring asylum-seekers from reaching the country. In light of these “efforts”, it’s clear that the protection of the human rights of people on the move and the prevention of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea remains loudly absent from the Greek government’s agenda. This month, we mourn the deaths of 25 people – and the disappearances of at least 27 – in the Aegean, 15 of whom lost their lives off the coast of Chios after a Hellenic Coast Guard vessel charged into the inflatable boat people were traveling in. Testimonies of survivors, many of whom were severely injured, paint the picture of a new horrifying act by the hands of Greek authorities. Meanwhile, in the Central Mediterranean, at least 86 people have lost their lives in February – and 59 remain missing –, 53 of whom as a result a shipwreck off the coast of Libya on February 5th, that left only two survivors. Governments across Europe seem to be immune to the harrowing reality behind these numbers, opting as they do for pushbacks as policy – borderline-europe recorded 1,289 interceptions this month in the Central Mediterranean – and for the continuous funding of external forces to do the dirty work, as shown by the agreements with Libya and Tunisia. Furthermore, the Italian government’s fixation with the repression of civil search and rescue goes on, with a new draft law increasing the grounds for detention of the rescue vessels. We report, however, on two victories by civil resistance amidst the ever-growing hostility, the ruling in favor of Sea-Watch on two cases related to the detention of two of their ships by the Italian government.



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In Northern France, the mismanagement of public resources away from protection and into senseless (and racist) harassment continues in the form of regular evictions. This month, another eviction of the biggest informal settlement in Calais, so-called “Hospital”, has been perpetrated, leading to the expulsion of over 322 people and the removal and destruction of at least 74 tents and many other belongings. In Dunkirk, the temporary pause in evictions motivated by the legal proceedings initiated by a coalition of solidarity organisations against the state, has ended. Thus, large-scale expulsions have restarted, marking the return of the old cycle of violence and displacement in the region.



New EU regulation on safe third countries

Following the provisional agreement between the European Parliament and the EU Council Presidency on December 18th 2025, the European Parliament has now finally confirmed the [EU-wide list of safe countries of origin](#) and the regulation on safe third countries under the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), on February 10th 2026. The existence of an EU-wide list of safe countries of origin means that applications from people from countries such as Kosovo, Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Morocco and Tunisia must [be mandatorily](#) examined in the so-called “accelerated procedure”. Numerous human rights organisations have raised serious concerns about the designation of these states as “safe,” warning that several present significant risks of human rights violations, inadequate protection systems, and the potential for exploitation of individuals forcibly transferred there. The concept of a safe third country also allows EU Member States to classify an asylum application as inadmissible if a person has entered the EU via one of these countries. Another recently passed measure would allow for the [deportation of people](#) to countries with whom the EU has signed specific agreements, even if the individual has no prior connection to the place.

Similar approaches to so-called “border management” continue outside the EU. The United Kingdom, echoing earlier policies proposed by Denmark, recently announced plans to grant only [temporary protection status](#) to all successful asylum applicants, including adults and accompanied minors, with a protection limit of 30 months. At the end of this period, individuals will undergo

a new review process, during which those from countries deemed “safe” by the UK government may have their protection withdrawn and be expected to return. This announcement comes alongside [ongoing negotiations to externalise migration control](#) through the establishment of return hubs in the Balkans. Additionally, £9 million of UK public funds have been allocated to the government’s “[Western Balkans Serious and Organised Crime Programme](#).” Taken together, these measures illustrate the continued expansion of Europe’s externalised border regime and the increasing role of the Western Balkans within it.

While European governments often emphasize declining arrival numbers as evidence of successful “border management” policies, teams working on the ground continue to witness the human consequences of intensified policing and enforcement. The reduction in visible arrivals does not necessarily indicate a decrease in movement; rather, it reflects the growing invisibility and precarity of migration routes as people adapt to avoid detection.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



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Bosnia – Herzegovina

Overview and recent trends

The total number of people on the move registered in February by [IOM](#) was 869, divided between the facilities in the Una-Sana Canton and the Sarajevo Canton. The data shows a majority of people coming from Sudan, Afghanistan and Egypt; the number of unaccompanied minors represents 4% of the total, while the number of adults and children in families represent 4% and 3%. As shown in the reports by IOM, as of mid-March the percentage of Sudanese people jumped up, meaning that a large number of Sudanese men arrived and now constitute around a quarter of camp residents. This comes as the civil war in Sudan has been going on for three years, and many people who fled the country months if not years ago are now, after long journeys and transit stays in Libya and other countries, arriving in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This war has resulted in one of the worst displacement crises currently unfolding, with over [two million](#) leaving the country since the outbreak of the conflict and a much larger number of people internally displaced.

Closure of the Ušivak Temporary Reception Centre

One of the most significant developments in February 2026 is the provisional closure of the Ušivak Temporary Reception Centre (TRC), located on the outskirts of Sarajevo. Ušivak thus far served as the only reception centre in Bosnia specifically hosting families, unaccompanied minors, and women and has a capacity of around 800 places. It had previously offered specific services for

these vulnerable groups, including education and sports activities for children.

The Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina and IOM reasoned this decision by [citing](#) consistently low occupancy rates over the previous two years. According to IOM reports, the centre had recently hosted only 100–130 residents. Authorities framed the decision as part of a broader strategy to consolidate reception capacities in response to declining numbers of people arriving. As part of the closure process, residents were [transferred](#) to other facilities. 11 families and five single women were relocated to Lipa TRC in Bihać, whereas 12 unaccompanied minors were transferred to IPSIA's Centre for minors and vulnerable individuals, and five families were relocated to Delijaš Asylum Centre (AC), since they expressed their will to ask for asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the number of relocations increases, the total number of unaccompanied minors and families in the Una-Sana Canton is also rising.

Civil society organizations have raised concerns about the process and implications of the closure. In a [statement](#), BVMN member organisation Collective Aid said the decision was implemented abruptly and with limited transparency, with partner organizations and residents reportedly informed only days before transfers began. With Ušivak TRC, the only easily accessible reception facility for vulnerable groups in central Bosnia, now closed, families, women and unaccompanied minors were relocated to Lipa, a remote TRC in north-western Bosnia that is primarily used to host single



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adult men. Concerns have previously been [reported](#) regarding living conditions in Lipa, including limited medical services, insufficient infrastructure, and occasional incidents of violence between residents.

Further, the closure of Ušivak TRC raises questions about how future arrivals of families, women, and minors in Sarajevo will be accommodated and whether adequate protection services will remain available. The Bosnian authorities, as well as IOM, have not shared information on this. Further, even though unaccompanied minors in Bosnia are assigned legal guardians to represent their interests, a legal support NGO previously working in Ušivak TRC shared that unaccompanied minors were transferred to Lipa TRC despite the lack of consent from their legal guardians due to concerns about their safety and protection at Lipa TRC.

Conditions in Lipa TRC

Throughout the month of February, 376 people were newly registered in the Lipa TRC. The total number includes people relocated from the Ušivak TRC after the closure. Consequently, there was an increase in the number of people located in the family zone in Lipa, which amounted to 50–60 this month.

The Lipa TRC continues to be unsuitable for families, and especially children. The available spaces are extremely limited, and the few that do exist, such as the small playground, are unsafe and lack adequate safety measures. Families relocated from Ušivak have raised complaints regarding the poor

living and hygiene conditions, as well as the inadequate quality of the food provided.

One member of an NGO recounts a conversation held with several young women staying in Lipa's family zone regarding the medical condition of one of their brothers. They explained that, following a pushback incident, his feet had been severely affected and he continued to experience persistent and significant pain even two weeks later. When asked about access to medical care, they indicated that doctors visited the family area only once per week, reportedly on Thursdays, and that the treatment available was limited to the administration of pain relief medication. Notably, the young women described these circumstances with laughter, conveying a sense of resignation or irony toward the inadequate healthcare conditions in the camp.

During February, temperatures in Bihać increased, but the need for a functioning heating system remains significant. Throughout the month and in the first days of March, problems with the water supply were reported: hot water seems to not have been properly provided for a long period of time in large areas of the facility. This circumstance forces people to gather in the few showers where hot water is available. However, access to these showers is often not possible due to the internal divisions within the camp between the minors' zone, family areas, and the single men's section. Furthermore, the lack of hot water hindered the planned implementation of the 'collective kitchens' project, meant to provide the opportunity for people to cook meals together.



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In [the previous report](#), we discussed the death of Alimamy Alusine Jalloh, who died inside Lipa TRC on December 27th 2025 due to authorities' negligence and the inadequate structure and services in the facility. On February 22nd, thanks to the association SOS Balkan Route and the work of Nihad Suljić, founder of the [Djeluj.ba!](#) association in Tuzla, [the burial took place](#) at Humci cemetery in Bihać. The ceremony was attended by Alimamy's sister, Maliama, as well as many people working for different organizations active in the Bihać area, residents of Lipa TRC, and several journalists.



Source: Anonymous



Source: Anonymous

It is important to recall that the two-month silence surrounding Alimamy's death brought to light the many contradictions of a system that conceals, criminalizes, and ultimately kills. What people on the move endure along the Balkan route goes beyond what can easily be imagined, placing severe strain on both the physical and psychological conditions of those who

undertake the journey. Nevertheless, the medical and healthcare conditions in the Lipa camp are still insufficient to meet the needs of people on the move.

Increasing role of the Red Cross in Una-Sana Canton

Parallel to the consolidation of reception centres, there has been a gradual shift toward greater involvement of local institutions in migration management, particularly in Una-Sana Canton, the region bordering Croatia where most border crossing attempts occur.

As the management of the TRCs is being handed over from IOM to the Bosnian authorities, the Bosnian Red Cross Society is taking on increased responsibility. As reported in recent IOM reports, the Bosnian Red Cross is now involved in the management of food distribution, non-food items, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in Lipa and Blažuj TRCs. This is



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part of a wider policy shift toward localizing migration governance and handing over management responsibilities to local authorities and other actors, such as the local Red Cross Society. While the IOM leadership who recently visited Una-Sana Canton and Lipa TRC emphasized the importance of “[locally-led migration and asylum responses](#)”, this development puts increased pressure on local actors which now take on the management of the camp. It remains unclear whether IOM will keep a role in monitoring and overseeing TRC operations.

Deaths and increasing securitization at the Croatia–Bosnia border

Only a few kilometers north of the Lipa TRC is the Croatian border, which continues to be a dangerous endeavor for illegalized crossings of people on the move. As it marks the Schengen border, it’s also been the focus of increasing securitization efforts. While deaths, disappearances and systematic violence have been reported for years, in February new reports emerged. It was [reported](#) that Croatian police have pushed-back ten Egyptian nationals to Bosnia–Herzegovina, they were stripped of their clothes and beaten. Only weeks later, a [report](#) showed that a boat had capsized on the Una river, which marks the border between Bosnia and Croatia. One person died while several went missing. The police were later able to rescue at least two people from the river, one of which was a Chinese national.

Recently, an increase in the number of Chinese nationals on the Balkan route

could be observed. As [reported](#) by Balkan Insight, the Balkan route has become a “plan B” for Chinese nationals now wanting to enter the EU, as the US has made immigration almost impossible for them.

At the same time, the EU and the US are increasing their investments in the border control capacities of Bosnia–Herzegovina. In February 2026, [the EU and several Member States](#) such as France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, provided specialized equipment with the aim of “fighting migrant smuggling” and “human trafficking”. However, the drones and camera systems provided to the BiH police are likely to be used to detect and deter people from EU borders. The BiH Border Police has also recently [received training by the US](#), which focused on ‘strengthening counterterrorism efforts, police cooperation, and border security specifically around risks associated with Afghan and Syrian migration’.



Decrease in people in informal settlements

In February 2026, Collective Aid's Serbia team observed a decrease in the number of people living in informal settlements across the country, particularly in northern Serbia. This trend was also reflected in [official statistics](#) published this month, which pointed to a broader shift in movement patterns along the Balkan route.

The decline appears to be linked to a [joint police operation](#) by Bulgarian authorities and Hellenic Police at the end of January, which resulted in the arrest of 16 people suspected of involvement in a smuggling network transporting people from Turkey through Bulgaria and onward to Serbia or Romania. One individual we spoke with described how police interception disrupted the network he had been travelling with, leaving him stranded and forcing him to continue alone. Without access to the information networks typically used to guide people along migration routes, he began his journey without knowing where he was or which direction to travel. After walking for some time, he eventually located a railway line and used it to navigate towards Serbia. He explained that it was only when he began seeing Serbian licence plates that he realised he had successfully crossed the border. Efforts to dismantle smuggling networks without introducing safe and legal pathways for migration do not eliminate the need for movement; instead, they reshape it, pushing people towards more dangerous, isolated, and less visible routes.

Border violence in Bulgaria

In other conversations people mentioned an increase in the physical violence used by state actors in Bulgaria. One example came from a man we spoke with in northern Serbia who described travelling through Bulgaria in a group of 20 people when they were discovered by police using dogs. The dogs then attacked two members of the group, biting one man on the arm and another on the leg. Four other men were reportedly beaten by Bulgarian police officers. Another individual stated that he had been struck at least ten times with a baton across his head and legs and was struggling to walk when we met him. The group reported that officers then confiscated their belongings, including phones, money, and clothing, leaving them with only their underwear and long-sleeved shirts despite the snowy conditions.

Structural violence in the city and bureaucratic barriers

Collective Aid's operations in Serbia this month were also affected by logistical challenges. Mechanical issues with the field vehicle left the team temporarily immobile, preventing access to informal settlements in northern Serbia for approximately two weeks. As a result, outreach activities were concentrated primarily in Belgrade. While this limited presence along the northern border areas, it also provided opportunities to observe and document other forms of violence experienced by people on the move within urban environments. In one case reported to the team, a man approached a police station in Belgrade intending to request arrest so that he would have



Serbia

somewhere safe to sleep for the night. According to his account, the police refused to detain him and also denied his request to apply for asylum. When he did not immediately leave the station, officers reportedly forced him outside. They then provided him with an incorrect address for the support organisation Infopark, leaving him to locate it on his own. While this incident did not involve direct physical violence, it illustrates a wider environment of hostility and intentional exclusion that people on the move encounter on a daily basis.

Similarly, forms of structural violence also emerged in February through bureaucratic and legal barriers that limit access to support. During outreach at Infopark centre in Belgrade, Collective Aid's team encountered an unaccompanied minor who lacked both financial resources and access to mobile data. Due to legal and administrative restrictions on organizations that limit their ability to help minors without documentation confirming their age, the boy was unable to receive help with transportation to the reception centre in Preševo. Taken together, these incidents show how reduced visibility does not mean reduced movement or reduced need. Instead, stronger border enforcement appears to be making routes more precarious, more isolated, and more dangerous for people trying to move through the region.

Ramadan and conditions on the move

The beginning of Ramadan also affected Collective Aid's operations across Serbia this month. The team adjusted distribution

schedules in order to better accommodate individuals taking part in the fast. For some people on the move, however, fasting was not feasible given the uncertainty and hardship of their journeys. One man told us that he had spent ten days without food while walking across Bulgaria in snowy conditions. *"I don't know when my next meal will be,"* he explained. *"So I cannot fast."*

Across Collective Aid's other projects along the Balkan route, the beginning of Ramadan has sometimes encouraged people to remain in one location for longer periods in order to avoid undertaking difficult or traumatic journeys while fasting. However, Serbia's geopolitical position means this is rarely an option for the people we meet here. For most individuals, reaching Serbia requires dangerous journeys through the EU's eastern external borders, particularly via Bulgaria and previously Turkey and Iran. Conditions in these countries are often too unsafe or unstable for people to pause their journeys for extended periods.



Hunger strike in Oinofyta camp

As the New Pact on Migration and Asylum nears implementation, concerns are growing over the frequent (and widely documented) human rights violations occurring in reception centres. Despite repeated reports and denunciations by civil society and human rights monitoring bodies, these violations persist, subjecting camp residents in Greece to systematic violence that obstructs their access to basic rights. Incidents documented over the past month once again make these abuses visible.

On February 16th, Mobile Info Team (MIT) was contacted by residents of the Controlled Access Facility for the Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers of Oinofyta, near Athens, to inform them that a hunger strike had been initiated by a group of 15 to 20 Kurdish families. This powerful act of non-violent resistance – a tactic commonly employed by prisoners, as well as people on the move in Greece’s reception and detention facilities – is a reaction to excessive delays in their asylum procedures, as well as inhuman living conditions in the facility.

The group of families, each composed of 2 to 4 children aged between 3 months to 16 years old, reported that some of them had been waiting for a decision on their asylum applications for two years. While being in a state of prolonged waiting already has a significant [negative psychological impact](#) on people facing displacement or migration, sub-standard living conditions during this waiting time, including dilapidated

living spaces and poor treatment by camp authorities, compound people’s exposure to harm.

Despite the media reportedly being denied access to the entire facility, [reports](#) have nevertheless emerged depicting tragic conditions unfit for human habitation. For instance, one of the women participating in the protest showed signs of insect bites on her face, which she linked to the living conditions inside the structure. Residents describe the sanitary conditions as non-existent, with videos showing piles of rubbish in communal areas and broken, dirty toilets infested with cockroaches. Previous reports state that residents in such facilities had to pay for spare parts or repairs due to a lack of maintenance carried out by the camp administration, meanwhile [cash assistance](#) payments are systemically delayed across the country. Medical support within the facility was also reported to be largely insufficient to meet the needs of the camp residents, including children, placing them at serious risk of developing health problems.

These reports add to a growing base of evidence on the poor state of the camp, which was established in April 2016 and closed just over a year later, in November 2017, due to [uninhabitable conditions](#). While it reopened four months later to meet the need for accommodation of newly arrived asylum seekers, the conditions [were reportedly](#) worse than before its closure. Since then, [multiple reports](#) have systematically documented the lack of provision of minimal basic services for the residents.



Requests for support by the families, including those around living conditions and questions about the asylum procedures, seem to have been met with threats of deportation and retaliation measures by the camp management, such as [electricity cuts](#), specifically in the room of the individuals who raised their concerns. This punishment, which according to the group resulted in the shutdown of all electrical appliances, including refrigerators and air conditioners, was imposed regardless of the age of residents, their health conditions, or the outside temperature. Rather than listening to the residents' legitimate demands and attempting to find a solution, the group reports that the camp manager ignored their requests and contacted the police – behaviour they described as intimidating, provocative and racist.

This episode adds to the existing evidence of the systematic violation of fundamental rights of asylum seekers in Greece, including their rights to adequate material reception conditions and dignity. It also exposes the authorities' negligent attitude towards people on the move's requests, as well as the violent retaliation used to silence them, which has serious consequences on the health of the residents. Beyond the immediate physical hardship, these actions also cause profound psychological distress. This is especially the case for [children](#), as these conditions can disrupt their sense of safety, leading to chronic anxiety, long-term developmental regressions and sleep disturbances. For individuals with pre-existing trauma or mental health conditions, these tactics can mirror the persecution they fled, [often triggering severe PTSD episodes](#).

Return hubs talks continue

In mid-February, Greece's Minister of Migration and Asylum, Thanos Plevris, [shared more](#) on Greece's ongoing collaboration with [Germany](#), the Netherlands, Austria and Denmark, aimed at the creation of so-called "return hubs". The group envisions building these extraterritorial camps, "preferably in Africa", in order to host rejected asylum seekers who can't be deported to their countries of origin. Minister Plevris claims that such an initiative will act as a deterrent for third country nationals (TCNs) not to enter the Greek territory if they do not qualify for asylum. While the countries that are being considered for the hubs remained unconfirmed, [media reports](#) mention Kenya, Uganda as well as Rwanda as [possibilities](#).

This move towards the further externalisation of migration policy is part of a broader dynamic within the European Union pushing for the use of so-called "[innovative solutions](#)" to better "control" migration. Importantly, Greece's collaboration with the four other EU member states on the creation of such facilities takes place in anticipation of the end of negotiations on the [Deportation Regulation](#). The Regulation would, for the first time in EU law and despite it previously being a taboo, sanction the creation of return hubs by member states through bilateral agreements with countries outside of the EU.

While the discussions between Greece and its EU counterparts are the first of their kind in the context of the revision of the EU's return framework, they find their



Greece

model on existing – and risks replicating – highly controversial and illegal extra-territorial facilities. A notable example is Italy's [agreement](#) with Albania, which has been [deemed](#) unlawful in several court decisions. According to Plevris, return hubs would act as an even [stronger deterrent](#) than the Albanian model, as they would be located well outside of the European continent.

The implementation of this concept by Greek authorities is a source of significant concern. In particular, the possible eventual deportation of individuals to return hubs risks creating serious issues for the respect of the principle of non-refoulement and safeguards for individuals with specific vulnerabilities, as well as access to an effective remedy, among other concerns.

As for next steps, the five EU member states agreed to work toward a [joint roadmap](#) on the implementation of the idea, with further high-level meetings expected on the topic in March and June.

Border violence and deaths in the Aegean

February in the Aegean witnessed the continuation of severe violence against people on the move, with several major shipwrecks across Greece resulting in significant loss of life. Using data from Collective Aid's new toolkit, we have been able to determine that 25 lives were taken in the Aegean throughout February, as a result of Greece's punitive border policies. Particularly jarring was the Chios tragedy of February 3rd perpe-

trated by the Greek Coast Guard (GCG) as a GCG patrol vessel collided with an inflatable speedboat carrying people on the move off the coast of Chios. 15 people were killed, and the 24 people rescued were hospitalized with [severe injuries](#). 11 of these survivors were children, and two pregnant women suffered miscarriages as a result of the [violent collision](#). The camera of the coast guard boat was turned off during the operation. Following the incident, the Greek authorities arrested one of the survivors, who is now in pre-trial detention.

According to the [testimonies of the survivors](#), the vessel charged into them with no prior notice, none of them recalled a blue light being flashed, nor sirens or stop signs being [sounded](#). Furthermore, the forensic investigations revealed that the cause of death of the victims was consistent with [severe head trauma](#) rather than [drowning](#). These findings are inconsistent with the initial statement given by the GCG, claiming that the inflatable speedboat reversed into them, after refusing to [cooperate with the patrol boat's signals](#). Migration minister Thanos Plevris [stated](#) *"When I have a report from the Coast Guard, should I not rely on their information and say that I believe them?... Because when you accuse a Coast Guard vessel of running over a boat, you are not merely alleging an accident – you are calling them murderers."* This position comes despite years of documentation of [border violence](#) and [pushbacks](#) committed by the Hellenic Coast Guard. It also follows the [criminal prosecution](#) in May 2025 of members of the Hellenic coast guard in



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connection with the 2023 Pylos disaster in which more than 600 people died.

Moreover, in February, a former coast guard captain gave anonymous [testimony](#) to the rizospastis publication, revealing that pushbacks and border violence are not isolated incidents but are carried out in a systematic and coordinated manner by the Hellenic Coast Guard, and contradicts the account of the Chios tragedy published by both the Greek coastguard and the government.

Below is a description of the three known incidents leading to deaths:

February 3rd, Chios

15 people were killed in a collision between a GCG vessel and an overcrowded boat carrying people on the move off the coast of Chios. 24 people survived, one of whom has been criminally charged.

February 12th, Izmir.

A search and rescue operation carried out by the TCG rescued 38 people from an inflatable boat off the coast of Izmir. Three dead bodies were found at the scene, and an additional two bodies were found on February 16th and 17th, bringing the death toll to five. Search and rescue operations are still ongoing for the remaining two missing people.

February 21st, Crete

An overcrowded wooden boat carrying around 50 people on the move capsized near Kala Limeni after rescue attempts by a commercial vessel. A search and rescue operation amid turbulent weather conditions by the GCG revealed five dead bodies, 20 people were rescued and 25 remain missing.

Criminalisation of movement

The Minister of Migration and Asylum continued to elaborate on his plans to tighten policies targeting people on the move in Greece even more, in line with the legislative changes discussed and enacted in the past few months. Under the recently announced [measures](#), anyone who is not eligible to get asylum will be pressured into a so-called “voluntary” return to their country of origin, the alternative being detention in a Greek prison.

Thus, in the new bill, people on the move are split into two categories, those not entitled to asylum are taken into “closed structures” (detention), forced to remain there until their deportation, whilst those deemed deserving of international protection are hosted in other facilities, with a [pre-integration process](#) aimed at filling gaps in the labour market in sectors such as agricultural production, tourism and construction. Plevris states that two detention centres will be established on Crete to manage arrivals of those the government claims are “not entitled to asylum,” [expli-](#)



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[city naming](#) people from Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

During the month of February 2026, Thanos Plevris also announced a new legal framework specifically aimed at shutting down [unregistered religious spaces](#), which the government repeatedly labels as “illegal places of worship.” The measure is presented as part of the broader debate on the new migration bill. While the measure is not supposed to specifically target mosques, in practice, it clearly does. The government stated that non-compliance with the new rules will result in the immediate cancellation of residence permits and [deportation orders](#) for those operating such spaces. Plevris cited a recent case of a Bangladeshi national whose residence permit was revoked because he allegedly operated an “illegal place of worship” in a neighborhood of Athens. In the context of Ramadan, the timing of this crackdown is far from neutral. In the weeks leading up to this month, the Greek government has reframed so-called “illegal places of worship” as a tool of “migration policing”, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty for Muslim communities - especially people on the move - precisely at the moment when communal prayer, nightly gatherings, and spiritual life intensify.

Criminalisation of civil society

The Greek government has also intensified its targeting of civil society organisations. This month, Migration Minister Thanos Plevris publicly [attacked](#) Human Rights Legal Project, a Samos based human rights NGO, representing the alleged boat driver of the

vessel of the Chios tragedy, described above. In addition, the founder of the Aegean Boat Report - currently the only independent organisation monitoring developments in the Eastern Aegean - reported that the Greek authorities have [issued](#) a European arrest warrant against him.

These developments follow the recent passing of [law](#) 5275/2026 by the Greek parliament, which significantly increases penalties for irregular migration, and creates heightened risks of criminalisation for communities and civil society organisations activities that support people on the move in Greece. Under the new law, activities that were previously considered misdemeanors have been reclassified as felonies. For example, the facilitation of entry or exit - if committed by a member of a registered NGO - now carries a minimum sentence of 10 years imprisonment and €50,000 fine. While criminalisation of solidarity for civil society and NGO actors who work with people on the move in Greece dates back many years, the new law signals the further erosion of the protection of human rights defenders in Greece.

Samos

Conditions in the Samos CCAC

In February, reception conditions remained a serious concern for I Have Rights (IHR) clients on Samos. During this month, five clients reported significant problems with the food distributed in the Closed-Controlled Access Centre (CCAC), including concerns about its quality, the long waiting times for distribution, and the quantity



provided. Many residents of the Samos CCAC do not have access to cooking facilities or stoves and are unable to cook their own food or reheat food distributed to them. One client with a young daughter reported to us:

“Since my daughter is very young, she is 2 years and needs adequate food. [...] I requested some, and was told in return that she needs to get used to it”.

Another client reported that, on several occasions, after queuing for up to two hours for food, it ran out before he was able to receive any.

Furthermore, people in the Samos CCAC continued to raise issues regarding the availability of health care at the facility. Two clients reported that there was a lack of interpreting at the medical services of the CCAC, and that the demand was too high for the available medical staff currently working there. One of them stated:

“There is too much demand, the number of people is huge and there are not enough doctors.”

Another client reported that, despite being in chronic pain, he was unable to get an appointment with the camp doctor. The ongoing problems with access to adequate health care will likely worsen now as MSF is no longer able to operate within the facility.

Lastly, IHR clients continue to share their issues with regards to initial registration and periods of arbitrary detention, with three clients reporting their phones were taken off of them for extended periods of time by the authorities. Two clients further reported no beds or facilities were available during their period of arbitrary detention. Another client was under police control for two days after arriving on Ikaria, an island near to Samos, where they were not informed of the grounds of their arbitrary detention. Cases like this one raise concerns over informal detention periods before arrival on the CCAC.

NGO letter on Cash Assistance payment

Issues with Cash Assistance payments have been consistent since April 2024. In light of the nearly two year long illegal interruption in the service, IHR along with 35 Greece-based NGOs and civil society organisations urgently [called](#) on the Greek authorities to immediately resume payments of cash assistance to asylum seekers. The joint statement highlighted the severe and negative impact this continued interruption has on individuals, families and people with particular vulnerabilities. The letter also emphasized that the monthly cash assistance payments are an obligation of the Greek State enshrined in both EU and Greek law and is not a favor or discretionary benefit.

IHR has consistently documented issues with reception conditions in the Samos CCAC, including the lack of cooking facilities and longstanding concerns



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about the availability and standard of food distributed in the CCAC. Many I Have rights clients have reported that the absence of cash payments exacerbates these underlying problems with reception conditions and makes it significantly harder for people being held in the Samos CCAC to live with dignity.

Registration and asylum procedure

Irregularities in registrations persisted at the Samos CCAC in February. This month, four IHR clients reported being misregistered by the Reception and Identification Services (RIS) as Ethiopian, and not Eritrean. According to several civil society actors, the misidentification of Eritreans seems to be widespread in Samos. Since the start of 2025, 13 IHR Eritrean clients have been registered with incorrect nationalities, the majority as either Ethiopian or Yemeni. This has potentially serious consequences for the protection status that people may receive, as people from Eritrea are granted protection at a very high rate.

Crete

Construction of new detention centres

As part of the new migration bill, two new temporary detention centres are [being constructed](#) in Crete, one in Agia Chania and the other in Heraklion. They are meant to hold people on the move under “[administrative detention](#)”, a widespread practice used, for example, in Israel and the U.S, whereby people are detained indefinitely with no prospect of a trial. In Greece, it will

be used to detain people without a legal basis until they can be deported. The reasoning behind this is the deterrence of people “not entitled to asylum” in Greece from coming to the country. People from Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan have been explicitly named as some of the ones to be targeted by this policy, on the grounds that their places of origin have been deemed “[safe third countries](#)” by the Greek government. This signals the merging of detention and deportations as a dual strategy to repress and deter people on the move from making the journey across the Aegean.

The positioning of these centres in Crete is nothing short of strategic, as it is a key entry point into Greece for people on the move, typically arriving from Libya. Furthermore, [Frontex](#) shall be stationed there at the request of the Greek authorities, anticipating that more people will attempt the crossing as the weather conditions improve with spring. The fact that Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, Thanos Plevris, has stated that Greece is seeking [further collaboration](#) with Libya, a state notorious for its crimes against people on the move, is a worrying tell of their intentions. However, these are not the only detention centres scheduled for opening. On Lesbos, government officials declared that the Vastria CCAC would open mid-February 2026, which did not seem to happen. Whilst the basic construction of the camp has effectively been completed, its opening still faces obstacles, due to the environmental concerns raised by island residents and the huge wildfire risks. It can be expected that Vastria will be used in the same way as these camps in Crete, to detain people



on the move before they are deported as quickly as possible. Vastria is located in the middle of the forest, inaccessible to the port town of Mytilene where most support for people on the move is based, and there is no way for civil society to enter. It can be no coincidence that there are no mentions of designated space for legal services in the Vastria plans. Legal experts on the island predict that authorities will begin circumspectly transferring new arrivals to the camp without a public announcement, hoping to carry out this cruel policy away from public scrutiny. These detention camps threaten to further isolate people on the move, while allowing for more regular - and hidden - violations of human rights and the disregard for international and national protection obligations on the part of the Greek state.

Kos

Arrivals and transfers

In February, we were informed of a single arrival in Kos, near Thermas Beach. The group consisted of around 30 individuals, including pregnant women and elderly people. During this month, 106 people were also transferred from another island to the Kos CCAC. These numbers once again highlight a decline in arrivals on the island of Kos compared to data from 2025. However, we have witnessed a diversification of nationalities within the people coming to the Hub - a community centre run by grassroots organisation Glocal Roots on the island. In February, the centre mainly welcomed people from Sudan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. A signifi-

cant decrease in the Egyptian population of asylum seekers was also observed.

Complications in procedures and lack of efficiency

Even though Glocal Roots welcomed a large Bangladeshi and Pakistani community in their centre in February, we heard reports of abnormally long periods spent in the closed section of the CCAC. It seems that a lack of Bengali, Hindi or Urdu translators results in Pakistani and Bengali nationals sometimes spending up to a month in that area, before they are able to finalise their asylum application procedure. This means they are not only deprived of freedom of movement but also of access to necessary services. In addition, we encountered a worryingly increasing number of people who had spent much longer than average in the camp due to complex bureaucratic procedures. As a result, the waiting times at the CCAC can go up to eight months, despite Kos being a so-called “fast-track border procedure” zone.

Unfulfilled basic needs and deterioration of living conditions in the CCAC

There are currently 1,033 people residing in the Kos CCAC. In February, 700 people accessed the Hub’s free shop for basic necessities. This represents more than two-thirds of the camp’s population, highlighting increasing needs not covered by the government. We have witnessed a concerning growing number of people who were completely barefoot, without shoes or socks. Furthermore, the spread of



scabies in the camp is still ongoing and we have been made aware of a few cases of chickenpox. Two newborns (less than one month old) are currently living in the centre with no access to basic vaccinations. In addition, mental health care continues to be an issue as no psychological support is provided in the pre-removal detention center part of the facility. Some residents are struggling with anxiety, as well as suicidal thoughts.

Due to the continued lack of cash assistance payments to asylum seekers by the Greek authorities, outlined above, more and more members of the community are accessing our services on foot rather than by bus. This constitutes a 6-hour walk and a 27 km round trip. In addition, we received a worrying message from an LGBTQIA+ resident of the camp who described a lack of support and protection after facing acts of violence within the facility. Lastly, some people stated that some of their personal belongings were stolen upon arrival at the CCAC.



Hospital living site evicted again



The eviction of Hospital living site. Source: HRO

On February 24th, for the fifth time since late November, the largest living site in Calais (known as “Hospital”) was evicted. This site has been the largest in Calais since the eviction of the “Orange Squat”, housing some 300, mostly Sudanese, people, was evicted on September 14th 2025. Instead of providing support to the people who had been evicted from the Orange Squat, the state decided to keep persecuting and pushing them further and further away, denying them the most basic shelter and following them with violent evictions wherever they went.

The eviction of Hospital on February 24th began at 7am, when 18 vans of the French riot police (CRS) turned up alongside the so-called “cleaning teams” - responsible for the removal of tents and belongings -, the border police (PAF), and the civil protection and AFEJI units. The latter’s job is to convince people on the move to get on their bus (mise en bus), which will take them far away from Calais - they refuse to share the exact destination -, in order to try to get them to claim asylum in France. It was still the dark of night at that point, when the police proceeded to enter the living sites in large squadrons, wielding



France

strong flashlights and shouting at people to wake up and leave. By the time the sun had risen, there were people everywhere. Most were holding whatever items they had been able to carry with them.

Then came the “cleaning teams”. Alongside their bulldozer, they proceeded to rip down tents and destroy the living site, dumping everything into a huge red skip. While this was occurring, the two Human Rights Observers (HRO) teams present were moving around the perimeter established by the police, trying to film and observe the scene. The team witnessed a police officer open a tent and aggressively tell the people sleeping inside to get up and leave immediately. Furthermore, we observed that, during the several hours that the cleaning teams were operating, people on the move would continuously try to make their way back into the living site

times than not they couldn’t do. They were, then, consequently re-escorted out of the perimeter while their belongings were destroyed in front of them and put into the large red skip.



Eviction of Hospital living site in Calais, February 24th 2026.



Eviction of Hospital living site in Calais, February 24th 2026.

to get something they had left behind. Yet, to do so, they had to evade the many CRS patrols around the perimeter, which more

In total, on February 24th, our teams observed at least:

- **322 people** on the move were evicted from the living site.
- **110 people** on the move boarded the AFEJI buses.
- **75 tents, 26 tarpoolings, 17 palettes**, eight mattresses and other belongings seized and destroyed.
- **37 state vehicles** used throughout the course of the eviction.



France

While numbers can help us understand the scale of these evictions, they fall very short in the task of enabling a better understanding of the human cost of these procedures. Behind every number is a human being whose life is being further disrupted by the policies of a state that continuously seeks to marginalise people on the move. These policies directly put lives in danger by seizing shelters (even in the middle of the harsh winter), clothes, blankets, money, documentation, medication, and other such essential belongings. All these numbers (and the many that go unreported) represent the lives and stories of people who are unnecessarily, unjustly, and inhumanely made to suffer by a state whose legal and moral obligation is to protect them.

The return of large-scale evictions in Grande-Synthe

As included in the BVMN January Monthly Report, for six weeks, there was a pause in the evictions in Grande-Synthe, during the legal proceedings that followed the efforts of a group of NGOs and grassroots organisations - including HRO - to litigate against the state's provision of humanitarian assistance in the Dunkirk region. However, the end of the case, on January 21st, signalled the restart of the weekly large-scale evictions in the area.

In 2026, these evictions have mostly targeted the same three or four living sites repeatedly; a tactic often used by the French police to make certain areas uninhabitable. The constant threat of eviction and almost weekly need to try to flee the area before the police arrive, or to find a new tent to sleep in otherwise, makes the already unstable situation of people living in these informal camps even more precarious and difficult.





France

Aside from the inherently immoral and cruel nature of the evictions, they represent a huge and misplaced waste of public resources. Both the UK and French governments are spending vast sums of money on operations that do little more than compound the suffering of people on the move. As shown in the images below, people will often flee a living site for the time that it takes the police to evict it, only to return straight after and find their belongings gone. Instead of funneling these resources towards supporting the wellbeing of people on the move, and towards policies that seek to make their lives safer and integrated into society, the government opts for increasing suffering, marginalisation and displacement, time and time again.



As the eviction of their living site commences, a group of young men leave only to return 20 minutes later once all their belongings have been taken. Source: HRO



Arrivals

According to figures from *borderline-europe*, 2,490 people seeking refuge arrived in Italy by sea in February 2026. This represents an increase of 108% compared to the previous month and a decrease of 27% compared to the same month last year.

The majority of people (2,157 or 87%) arrived in Sicily, mainly Lampedusa. 47 people (2%) arrived in Calabria, 147 (6%) people were taken to Tuscany after being rescued, and 114 (5%) to Emilia-Romagna. According to our counts, 1,477 people (59%) were rescued by Italian authorities, while a total of 386 people (15.5%) were rescued by civilian sea rescue services. There were also some rescues by private and commercial vessels (56 or 2%).

Data from *borderline-europe* shows that Frontex was involved in the rescue of 267 people (11%) in February, while 303 people (12%) reached Italian coastal waters (12 nautical miles off the coast) autonomously, without being intercepted or rescued.

Libya, Tunisia and Algeria serve as the primary departure points for the crossing to Italy. In February, 2,104 (85%) of the people who arrived in Italy departed from Libya and 35 people (1%) from Tunisia. The departure point of 351 people (14%) is unknown.

According to official figures from the Italian Ministry of the interior, 2,073 people arrived in Italy in February. We were able

to confirm slightly higher arrival figures for this month, but, as always, we would like to point out that there is no available access to the background information or sources behind the numbers published by the Ministry of the Interior.

Overview of the data collected by <i>borderline europe</i>¹	
Arrivals of people on the move in Italy by sea	2490
Arrivals of people on the move in Sicily	2157
Rescue by Italian authorities and Frontex	1744
Rescue by private/commercial vessels	56
Rescue by NGOs	386
People arriving independently	303
Arrivals without information on arrival/rescue	1

Pushbacks and pullbacks

This month, we recorded interceptions of 1,289 people in the central Mediterranean. During these incidents, boats carrying people on the move were illegally forced

¹ The data should be treated with caution, as the number of unreported cases is likely to be significantly higher



back to the North African coast. Of those intercepted, 1,287 people were returned to Libya and two to Tunisia. These figures should be taken with caution, as the number of unreported cases is likely to be much higher. IOM Libya has recorded the interception of 1,322 people. It should be noted that many pullbacks remain undocumented and that many people in Tunisia are forcibly pushed back into the Sahara by the Tunisian National Guard before they even attempt to cross the Mediterranean.

Alarm Phone also reported an increase in [forced expulsions](#) from Tunisia to al-Assah in Libya, which often take place directly from the ports of Sfax or Chebba. In addition, a large group of people were pushed back to the border region between Tunisia and Algeria after their [departure from Tunisia](#) towards Europe.

Furthermore, [SeaWatch reported](#) that a Frontex aircraft was involved in an interception by the so-called Libyan coast guard. Prior to this, the NGO aircraft discovered that the boat with about 40 people was in distress at sea. This confirms other [evidence](#) suggesting that Frontex deliberately passes on important information about people in distress at sea only to the so-called Libyan coast guard so that it can intercept these boats before civilian rescue organisations do, and return them to Libya.

Dead and missing

According to data from [borderline-europe](#), 86 people died while fleeing across the central Mediterranean in February, and 59 people are considered missing.

On the night of February 5th, a shipwreck off the coast of Libya claimed 53 lives. Only two Nigerian women were rescued by the Libyan authorities. Two babies are believed to be among the victims. This tragedy is not an isolated incident. In recent days, around a dozen bodies of people fleeing their countries have been discovered on various beaches in southern Italy, many of them in an advanced state of decomposition. 11 bodies were found on the coast of Sicily alone, and another four in Calabria. Bodies were also washed up on the [Libyan coast](#): the bodies of seven people were discovered around 70 kilometres east of Tripoli. The high number is most likely related to the crossings that began before the onset of Cyclone Harry, which raged in the Mediterranean at the end of January. [Many of the people](#) on board had previously been arrested several times by the Tunisian National Guard and deported to the Sahara. Despair over the [living conditions](#) in the camps, and the absence of safe routes, drove many people to risk their lives again despite the dangerous weather conditions.

The silence of the Italian government is particularly alarming. Many residents of the affected coastal regions have hardly taken notice of the dead bodies washed ashore. Meanwhile, political actors present [declining arrival figures](#) across the Mediterranean as evidence of a successful migration policy and stage the decline as a trophy of [populist communication](#). The focus is on a single indicator: how many are arriving? The human cost of this supposed 'success story' is lost sight of. For the [relatives of the missing](#), especially in Tunisia, the situation



remains agonising. They desperately try to obtain information about the fate of their family members. Death in the Mediterranean has been a humanitarian scandal for years, and the EU is complicit in it.

Update on the Cutro trial

The fourth hearing in the trial concerning the Steccato di Cutro shipwreck took place on February 26th, the third anniversary of the disaster. Representatives of various movements gathered in front of the Crotona [courthouse](#). In the trial, in which four members of the financial police and two members of the coast guard face charges, a note from a communication from the national operations centre of the financial police, received at 11.20 p.m. on February 25th 2023, confirmed that the authorities knew that the people on the boat were in danger. For more information on the case, see [borderline-europe's report 'The Cutro shipwreck: one year on'](#) (2024).

Civil resistance

In February 2026, six ships from the civilian fleet were operating in the central Mediterranean and rescued a total of 386 people in distress at sea (16% of those who arrived).

Meanwhile, the Italian government's hostile approach to civilian sea rescue continued to intensify in February. A [new draft law dated February 11th 2026](#) provides, among other things, for ships to be prohibited from crossing Italian waters for an initial period of 30 days; this measure can be extended for up to six months in total. It

is to take effect when authorities identify a ['serious threat to public order or national security'](#), such as an alleged increased risk of terrorist activity, 'exceptional migration pressure', international health emergencies or major international events. The draft also makes it possible that people on the move on board such ships are taken to third countries with which Italy has concluded agreements to this effect. There, they can be put in special facilities or detained in facilities where international organisations are active, also with the aim of later repatriation. Sanctions are provided for violations of government orders, including fines and the temporary detention or even seizure of ships.

Critics see such measures as a further attempt to systematically prevent civilian sea rescue operations in the Mediterranean. The planned regulations also form part of the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which reinforces the concept of so-called 'safe third countries' and [increasingly shifts asylum procedures outside the EU](#). Human rights organisations warn that this policy could undermine key obligations under international law, including the [right to asylum](#), the [principle of non-refoulement](#) and the [duty to rescue people in distress at sea](#).

Almost simultaneously with the presentation of the draft law, Italian authorities detained the rescue ship [Humanity 1 of the organisation SOS Humanity](#) in the port of Trapani for 60 days, and imposed a fine of €10,000. The reason given was that the crew had failed to communicate with the Libyan rescue coordination centre during



a rescue operation involving 33 people in distress at sea. The organisation rejects the accusation, arguing that Libyan actors cannot be considered legitimate search and rescue authorities due to extensively documented human rights violations.

Sea-Watch 5 and Sea-Watch 3: Not guilty verdict and compensation

Alongside these troubling developments, there are also some encouraging trends emerging in the context of civil resistance. On February 19th 2026 a court in Palermo ordered the Italian state to pay [€76,000 in compensation](#) to the organisation Sea-Watch. The background to this is the five-month detention of the rescue ship *Sea-Watch 3* in the port of Lampedusa in 2019, which has now been officially classified as unlawful. The costs and court fees must be borne by the Ministries of the Interior, Transport and Economy, as well as by the Sicilian authorities. The ruling confirms that the state's coercive measures against the ship, which docked with rescued migrants on board despite a ban, were not legal.

The political reaction once again highlights how civilian sea rescue is being delegitimised by the government. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni reacted with clear indignation and stated in a video message that the decision left her "[literally speechless](#)". At the same time, she accused the judiciary of acting in a 'partisan' manner and standing in the way of the government's migration-related plans. The ruling is thus framed by the right-wing government as an attack on the rule of law and a disregard for the 'will of the people'. This

case highlights a broader dynamic at various levels: on the one hand, it reveals the conflict between an executive border policy – which seeks to further restrict the scope of action of NGOs through new measures, such as planned naval blockades – and a judiciary that holds state action to account under existing law. On the other hand, the compensation is being politically staged as a scandal in order to achieve a discouraging effect in public discourse despite the legal defeat. Nevertheless, the ruling remains an important signal: it confirms the illegality of state measures against civilian sea rescue.

In February, another court ruling was handed down in the context of civilian sea rescue. At the end of January, *Sea-Watch 5* was detained by the Italian authorities [for 15 days and fined €7,500](#). The accusation was that the ship had rescued 18 people without consulting the Libyan authorities. However, the crew reported that the so-called Libyan coast guard had intimidated them in international waters and ordered them to leave the zone, even though a rescue was necessary.

In mid-February, the court in Catania lifted the detention of the *Sea-Watch 5* in summary proceedings. The facts of the case were so clear that the court did not have to wait for the opposing side's arguments [to lift the blockade](#). The court thus followed earlier rulings that had found that the so-called Libyan coast guard is not a legitimate partner for rescue operations and that instructions issued by it may violate international law. Even though the lifting of the detention of *Sea-Watch*



Italy

5 only took place after the expiry of the ordered 15 days, both Sea-Watch rulings in February are of great significance for civilian sea rescue. They represent an important success in that they continuously challenge central elements of the current practice of sanctions against NGOs, which is based, among other things, on the so-called [Piantedosi decree](#). This decree obliges rescue vessels to coordinate closely with state authorities and has long been criticised by organisations [as a tool for restricting civilian sea rescue](#). The rulings also confirm key arguments put forward by the [“Justice Fleet”](#) – a coalition of 13 rescue organisations – that cooperation with Libyan actors is problematic due to documented human rights violations and security risks. Overall, the rulings strengthen the position of sea rescue organisations vis-à-vis the government.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

Network structure and contact

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

We finance the work through charitable grants and foundations, and are not in receipt of funds from any political organisation.

The expenditures cover transport subsidies, several part-time paid coordination positions and some costs incurred by member organisations for their contributions to our shared work.

To follow more from the Border Violence Monitoring Network, check out our website for the entire testimony archive, previous monthly reports and regular news pieces. To follow us on social media, find us on Twitter handle @Border_Violence and on Facebook.

For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved, and for press and media requests please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu.



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