



Border Violence
Monitoring Network

ILLEGAL 2026 PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

MONTHLY
REPORT
JANUARY

Calais, January 30th: The so-called "English Toilets" area of the Hospital living site is evicted.
Source: HRO



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Other contributors:



TABLE OF CONTENTS

JANUARY 2026

METHODOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY	6
REPORTING NETWORK.....	6
METHODOLOGY.....	6
TERMINOLOGY	6
ABBREVIATIONS.....	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
UPDATE ON THE SITUATION.....	9
BOSNIA - HERZEGOVINA .	10
New arrivals and population	10
Another person dies in the Lipa TRC.....	10
Conditions in the Lipa TRC	10
Pushbacks and border violence.....	11
Update on Frontex deployment.....	11
Tension and police crackdown in the Blažuj TRC.....	12
Transition of responsibilities from IOM to state authorities continues	12
SERBIA	14
Record-breaking winter conditions increase hardships	14
Administrative violence compounds pushbacks and displacement.....	14
GREECE	16
Renewed talks of Return Hubs by Greek Minister of Asylum	16
New law further criminalising civil society in Greece.....	16
Official narratives and the erosion of the rule of law.....	17
Deaths in the Aegean.....	18
Apprehensions and Interceptions by the Turkish authorities	19
Samos.....	20
Procedural delays and irregularities	20
Updates on conditions in the Samos CCAC	20
Cash Assistance payments..	21
FRANCE	23
Legal proceedings on living conditions in the Dunkirk camps	23
Police intimidation and the Plan Grand Froid in Dunkirk .	24
Eviction of the largest living site in Calais.....	25
ITALY	27
Arrivals.....	27
Overview of the data collected by borderline europe	27
Pushbacks and pullbacks.....	27
Dead and missing	28
Cutro trial: Italian officers face trial for the deaths of 94 people	29
Civilian resistance	29



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 *borderline-europe*.

This month, we regret having to report on another death inside the Lipa Temporary Reception Centre (TRC), just some days after Mukter Hossain lost his life in the facility, both of them while under the supposed care of the state. The two deaths are an extremely concerning sign of the authorities' negligence and the inadequate structure and services of the centre. More than anything, they illustrate the disregard for the lives of people on the move, who continue to experience daily violence at and within the borders of European states. In January, the conditions in the Lipa TRC became even more dire due to the power cuts resulting from the extremely cold temperatures, which are made more dangerous by the intentional remoteness of the facility. In the midst of the arrival of Frontex in the country – with 100 officers deployed since the start of the implementation of the agreement –, EU priorities in the region continue to be clear: more externalisation and migration deterrence, less protection and accountability.

All across Europe, the lack of an adequate state response in the face of people on the move's – and other unhoused individuals and communities – exposure to the elements shows its most dangerous side

during the winter. In Serbia, record-breaking temperatures resulted in 11 municipalities entering a state of emergency, with multiple power outages and disruption of basic services. The extreme winter conditions compounded the hardship of many people on the move in the country, especially those staying in makeshift camps, worsening pre-existing medical issues and further endangering lives. In Northern France, the activation of the so-called Plan Grand Froid in the region has exposed the shortcomings of the government's response, as the capacity of the shelters made available remained extremely insufficient and the access to those, highly restricted. The implementation of the policy remained deeply embedded within a broader regime of surveillance, control, and intimidation, often discouraging many from seeking shelter during dangerous winter months. While protection avenues remain scarce, public resources continue to be poured into violent deterrence. Thus, the next stage of the eviction of the largest informal living site in Calais ("Hospital") took place in January. Around 430 people were forced to leave, and at least 20 people were arrested. This large-scale operation lasted several hours and resulted in the seizure of a vast amount of personal belongings, including over 100 tents.

Meanwhile, in Greece, we focus on the increasing normalisation of border violence in politicians' public discourse. As we move away from the systematic public denial of the occurrence of pushbacks towards open calls for the legalisation of the practice, we witness a deeply concerning narrative shift that seems to quickly expand the limits of



Executive summary

what's admissible. In this context, Greek government officials also join the club of EU states pushing for the creation of so-called "Return Hubs" in third-countries, further signaling an erosion of previous societal and political rules requiring (at least) the maintenance of a sort of facade in relation to some human rights standards. The impact of these discourses and policies is far from symbolic and continues to be felt across the country. Six more people have died in the Aegean this month and many more remain missing. Furthermore, on Samos, residents of the Closed-Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) keep reporting issues with the hygiene, hot water provision and access to health care in the facility, as well as delays in their asylum process often linked to a lack of available interpretation.

Lastly, we look at the Italian coasts, where over 1,000 people have likely lost their lives at sea this month, as Cyclone Harry raged across the region, followed by a thundering silence from government and society. Thus, the Mediterranean mass grave continues to grow, while pushbacks and the criminalisation of civil search and rescue remain policy. This month, the vessel *Solidaire* was assigned to a distant port after rescuing 33 people, resulting in the loss of valuable time which could have been used for further rescues. Moreover, the *Sea Watch 5* was detained and forced to pay a fine after another rescue, for failure to comply with the obligation to communicate with the so-called Libyan coast guard. The struggle for justice, protection and accountability is carried out in many fronts, while three civilian vessels managed to rescue 200 people in distress at sea, the case against

six Italian officers accused of causing a shipwreck that killed 94 people in 2023 started, several search and rescue organisations together with 65 survivors as joint litigants.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



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Bosnia – Herzegovina

New arrivals and population

According to UNHCR, more than [12,600 people](#) entered Bosnia-Herzegovina for the first time between January and November, 2025, and there were 1,392 irregular arrivals registered in December – these ones may reflect some people entering several times. Whilst about three quarters of all those people reportedly showed the intention to apply for asylum in Bosnia, only about 175 people (about 2%) did. Furthermore, only [6 people](#) were granted refugee status in the country in all of 2025. The processing speed of asylum applications remained extremely low, as did the approval rate, thus raising serious concerns about the effective access to protection for people on the move, through the very few available channels.

With the beginning of the new year, in January, between 900 and 1,110 people were registered by [IOM](#) in Temporary Reception Centres (TRCs) in Bosnia Herzegovina, mainly from Afghanistan, Sudan, Egypt and Morocco. Of the total, around 11% were reportedly Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Another 11% were families and single women. This month there has also been a slight increase in the number of young adults (18-21 yo), from 9% to 13%.

In the Una Sana Canton, [IOM](#) registered up to 350 new arrivals and the population of the Lipa TRC oscillated between 350 and 550 people. Even though the number of people residing in the family zone is not shared by the authorities, inhabitants of the facility report a fluctuating average of 30 people in families and around 40 UASC. As

border crossing attempts and pushbacks remain frequent, these numbers change on a daily basis.

Another person dies in the Lipa TRC

In [December](#), we wrote about the death of Mukter Hossain in the Lipa TRC, after the authorities of the facility repeatedly ignored calls for urgent medical assistance. Some days later, another person, Alimamy Alusine Jalloh, died inside that camp on December 27th. The episode has been reported by residents of the facility. The 27-year-old man from Sierra Leone most likely died of natural causes. SOS Balkan route is organizing his burial and funeral in Bihać, in February. In this occasion, another three gravestones will be installed at the cemetery in the place where three people were previously buried after losing their life at the Bosnian-Croatian border.

On January 27th, a commemoration for the people on the move who had drowned in the river Drina took place on the other side of the Bosnian-Serbian border in Loznica (Serbia). Members of civil society and activists from Serbia and Bosnia, as well as some local and European NGOs reunited at the city's cemeteries to celebrate the memories of those who lost their lives attempting to reach Bosnia-Herzegovina from Serbia in the last year.

Conditions in the Lipa TRC

The two deaths that happened within days from each other are an alarming sign of the authorities' negligence and the inadequate structure and services of the



Bosnia – Herzegovina

centre. It has been reported constantly that the Lipa TRC lacks consistent and reliable access to medical assistance. This makes it very difficult for people to receive necessary help for pre-existing health issues or sudden and worsening conditions, to prevent illnesses and death.

Furthermore, this month, the Lipa TRC experienced power cuts during the coldest days in early January. This resulted in a lack of heating in the room containers, as well as in the common spaces, such as the dining hall. The power cuts reportedly lasted overnight. In those cases, residents of the facility were just advised to stay indoors. The cold drastically worsened the living conditions in the centre, creating a real life threat for those living in it. The temperature in Lipa reached -10 degrees Celsius, in January, while the snow was 50-100 cm high.

Occasionally, it has been impossible or extremely difficult to reach the facility due to the high snow and frozen roads, which posed a danger for organizations providing services inside the camp. Importantly, these obstacles and extreme exposure are the direct result of the isolated and remote location of the Lipa TRC. In other words, the main problem is the general inaccessibility of the infrastructure, designated to isolate people on the move, rather than the cold itself. In this context, people on the move report insufficient provision of winter clothes and the need to rely on unofficial humanitarian support outside the camp.

Pushbacks and border violence

Violent pushbacks continue to be routine at the Bosnian-Croatian border. People on the move keep reporting violations at the hands of state authorities and showing them on their bodies and personal belongings (broken phones, ripped jackets...). [The BVMN December report](#) highlighted the preventable loss of life of people along the rivers in the border regions.

In January, people continued sharing with the Collective Aid team that they were, often repeatedly in short periods of time, pushed back by Croatian authorities: being beaten and stripped of their clothes and then forced to cross the ice-cold river back to Bosnia. Among them, many are without proper shoes, and walking around the snow in slippers. Thus, the effects of pushbacks are observed daily by support actors, as people come back from crossing attempts stopped by the authorities' illegal but systematic practices. This month, SOS Solidarity Line also reported two violent group pushbacks at the northern border with Croatia. Both of them included unaccompanied minors, four, in one of the groups, and 11 in the other. Still, the stories we hear also speak about perseverance and determination, and the hope for a better life beyond the Croatian border.

Update on Frontex deployment

The deployment of Frontex in the country, included in the last [BVMN Monthly Report](#), continued in January. A total of [100 officers](#) of the European agency have arrived in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the start of the



Bosnia – Herzegovina

implementation of the agreement with the Western Balkan country. In January, its cars and personnel were seen at the eastern border with Serbia and in the northern area close to Croatia – Kostela –, signalling the full operativity of the agency. Frontex presence has been observed accompanied by Bosnian police and border guards, in joint operation with the military and with Italian and Croatian police. Moreover their cars are present at the border crossing stations. The arrival of the European agency constitutes a further step in the militarisation and securitisation of the borders in the region, a move in line with the institutional primacy of surveillance and impunity over protection and respect for human rights. As pushbacks continue to take place on a regular basis in the area, the presence of Frontex (and their praises of and contributions to the [decrease](#) in the number of irregular crossings) only signals the role of the EU as a direct accomplice of this unlawful return practice.

The presence of Frontex is a clear sign of the continuous externalization of the EU borders into Bosnia-Herzegovina and other countries in the region. As the EU keeps working on a Deportation Regulation, with huge potential effects in the definition of the role of third countries, like Bosnia, it's essential to monitor the changes in the Western Balkan country, and its effects on the lives of people on the move.

Tension and police crackdown in the Blažuj TRC

The end of 2025 and the beginning of 2026 have been marked by unrest and

tension in the Blažuj Temporary Reception Center (TRC), where a Federal Police Administration's operation to combat [“criminal acts related to illegal migration and organized crime”](#) took place. A coordinated action between Christmas and New Year's, in which multiple police and security organizations worked together, marks the beginning of what they announced to be intensified and coordinated efforts in the area. In this context, people on the move with no other alternative but to reside in the Blažuj camp have become scapegoats of these police crackdowns.

This comes at a time when calls from local people for the relocation of the [men's camp](#) have also become more visible, based on complaints about fights, trash and public drunkenness. In the absence of effective pathways to residence, housing, income, and other basic needs, the empty-worded aim for the improvement of [social cohesion](#) – included in the documents related to the allocation of 13,5 million euro by the EU to Bosnia-Herzegovina to support [“locally owned migration management”](#) – becomes a facade for the actual push for more securitisation.

Transition of responsibilities from IOM to state authorities continues

The transition of management from the IOM to the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina of the three TRCs in the country continues, with an evident lack of transparency. In the process, the cutting of resources also seems evident, with the closure of the Borići TRC (Bihać) in September 2025 and the plans to close down the facility in



Bosnia – Herzegovina

Ušivak in February 2026, which will leave only two operative TRCs remaining.

The decision to transfer the management stems from 2021, when the IOM observed a stabilization of the numbers of people on the move in BiH. In their [2022-2025 strategy report](#), the IOM mentions they are progressively shifting from ‘emergency assistance to a state-owned migration response, and a focus on long-term migration governance’.

The consequences of this transition are to be seen. The transition to local management could, if implemented well, lead to improved living and asylum conditions, including accessible and suitable medical and legal support. However, experience shows effective protection and dignified living conditions tend to come last in the list of uses of funds related to migration. Moreover, Amnesty International states that between 2018-2021 [systemic and institutional deficiencies](#) in Bosnia-Herzegovina migration management led to a situation in which state authorities ‘struggled to provide adequate reception conditions and other assistance to the people in need and failed to cooperate to find systemic solutions for reception and ensure effective access to asylum procedures’. Thus, there is a need to [closely monitor](#) whether the country’s agencies are able to uphold international law and human rights when the transition is complete.



Serbia

Record-breaking winter conditions increase hardships

January's extreme winter weather brought sharp drops in temperature, heavy snowfall, and strong winds, leading to a [state of emergency in 11 municipalities](#) across Serbia. The country experienced nationwide outages, severe disruption to heating and water supplies, and restricted access to essential services and transport. The harsh edges of Serbian winter were felt most by people on the move whose exposure made already difficult journeys more dangerous.

Migration through Serbia has been systematically hidden following 2023, when a series of shootings triggered a [special military operation](#) along the northern borders with Hungary and Croatia. This operation forcibly displaced migrating communities, destroyed informal settlements and led to the closure of official transit centres north of Belgrade, which had previously sat at exit points of the country. Since then, migratory patterns have shifted, forcing people to rely on invisible routes through Serbia. Without any "legitimate" spaces left, individuals have been pushed into smaller informal settlements often controlled by smugglers. Scarce resources between organisations on the ground often hinder efforts to map these new routes, leaving many journeys undocumented and people unsupported. We have received reports from Italian organisations this month which suggest women travelling from Africa have been trafficked through Serbia without detection or organisations on the ground having any knowledge of these networks.

In the absence of formal living sites, people endured the record-breaking winter in makeshift shelters. Environmental exposure in these settlements created inhumane conditions: groups huddled around small fires for warmth, overcrowded sleeping areas, and reliance on melting snow for dirty drinking water. Prolonged icy and wet conditions caused serious health complications, including frostbite, worsening injuries from excessive walking, and untreated wounds from police brutality or war. We met one boy who had broken his foot on the Hungarian border but, due to fear of police and freezing temperatures, continued to walk to Serbia with his injury untreated. Whilst warmer temperatures later in the month eased hardships for most people in Serbia, struggles for people on the move persisted.

Administrative violence compounds pushbacks and displacement

Increasingly, violence in Serbia manifests through bureaucratic mechanisms that obscure rights and enforce exclusion. Deportation orders are often issued in Serbian Cyrillic, with no translation, leaving people unable to understand instructions. One group reported being given a 30-day order to leave the country with a two-year ban, but the language barrier meant the document was incomprehensible. In another case, a minor with frostbite was denied treatment and whilst one hospital refused care because he was a minor, another refused due to a lack of proof of underage status. We see similar bureaucratic mechanisms operate on the international system where, for instance,



Serbia

[deportations from Pakistan to Afghanistan](#) have left individuals without [national identity cards \(The Tazkira\)](#), [stateless and denied international protections](#).

Meanwhile, Serbia continues to prove itself as a key figure in systematic breaches of international law. In the northern border, for example, state authorities cooperate with Hungarian officers undertaking illegal pushbacks. Accounts describe mass expulsions by Hungarian authorities followed by Serbian police transport in windowless vehicles for six-hour journeys from the north of Serbia to the reception facility in Preševo, in the south.

Transit centres operate using architectures of violence, where people are confined for months at a time. Reattempts to cross borders are costly, often requiring taxi journeys from isolated towns at inflated prices exceeding \$100. These practices reveal the truth of Serbia's border regime, where violence is embedded not only in physical force but in the structures of confinement and economic exploitation. Importantly, Serbia's border regime must be understood within broader power structures in the EU and beyond. Evidence shows that much of the "dirty work" of so-called "migration management" is externalised and outsourced by Western powers. Serbia's role is further revealed through obscured mechanisms of bureaucratic violence which embed exclusion and harm within broader architectures of asylum control. These structural violence are not incidental but integral to the functioning of Europe's border regime, where forces erasing rights and protections converge to harm people on the move.



Renewed talks of Return Hubs by Greek Minister of Asylum

The newest and perhaps most deranged theme in EU migration policy is that of “return hubs”, dominating the discourse of the year so far. On January 22nd, in Nicosia, the Greek Minister of Asylum, Thanos Plevris and his Deputy Sevi Voloudaki, joined EU talks on return hubs outside of Europe. They [presented](#) Greece as a success-story, an expert in this field, having been on the front lines of EU migration policy since 2015, despite the egregious crimes that the Greek Coast Guard has committed. With the EU Deportation Regulation in motion, states including Greece, Germany, Austria, The Netherlands and Denmark are eagerly preparing by speculating the opening of “return hubs” outside of Europe. These hubs would require EU funding to the countries in question - Uganda and Egypt, popular choices at the moment -, to operate detention centres to hold people on the move and attempt to prevent them from crossing further. This leans on the notion of so-called “safe third countries”, states which would allegedly be safe as a deportation destination for people of certain nationalities - even when these people have no connection to those countries whatsoever. For instance, politicians such as Plevris have [stated](#) that Sudanese people would be safe if deported to Chad or Egypt, with no consideration of individuals’ personal circumstances. Of course, such assertions hold no basis in law nor reality. These return hubs - already attempted by countries like Italy in their deal with Albania - would constitute a massive step in the externalisation of EU

migration policy, in yet another attempt to circumvent the human rights obligations that all EU states have agreed to, in both the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. From a legal perspective, if the EU is funding these states and building their capacity to detain people on the move, the triggering of extraterritorial obligations (ETOs) is not out of the question.

New law further criminalising civil society in Greece

On December 30th, the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum published a [new draft law](#) introducing measures on legal migration as well as penalties for the facilitation of illegal entry, stay or exit. Following a period of public consultation and Parliamentary negotiations on the proposal in January, the Greek Parliament [passed](#) the proposal into law on February 5th.

The law introduces measures which largely aim to facilitate legal migration by easing bureaucratic procedures, in line with [“the real needs of the \[Greek\] economy”](#). On the one hand, this includes the automatic renewal of some categories of residence permits (RPs), a minimum validity period of 2 years for every RP to avoid issues related to administrative delays in delivery, and the creation of new categories of visas for highly skilled workers. On the other hand, the [final text](#) also restricts legal pathways by abolishing the possibility for third country nationals who entered Greece as unaccompanied minors and completed at least 3 grades of secondary education in a Greek school



Greece

before turning 23 to regularise their stay by obtaining a 10-year RP. The law seeks to [promote](#) bilateral cooperation with third countries to facilitate both the legal entry of workers to Greece, and the return of undocumented third country nationals. The law also includes a provision enabling the suspension of a prison sentence for third country nationals, “on condition of their removal from the Greek territory”, again reaffirming the Ministry’s emphasis on deportation. Pending removal, third country nationals would be transferred from prison to detention in pre-removal detention centres, the time in which would not count towards their sentence.

In addition, the new law introduces a strict criminalisation framework for NGOs and individuals providing support to people on the move in Greece. Among other measures, the law increases penalties for the facilitation of illegal entry, stay or exit, and makes facilitation in the course of conducting professional activities, or as a member of an organisation registered on the Greek NGO Registry, an aggravating circumstance. In the case of facilitation of illegal stay and refusal to provide official documents, the offence is converted into a felony for NGOs on the Registry, punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment and fines of tens of thousands of euros. Furthermore, the law provides that if the offense is allegedly perpetrated by a member of an NGO registered on the Greek NGO Registry, the mere initiation of criminal prosecution – without any requirement of a conviction – may result in the removal of the entire organisation from the Registry by order of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

Similarly, if the alleged perpetrator is a third country national, they are at risk of having their residence permit revoked or its renewal rejected, thereby destroying the very concept of presumption of innocence.

The law has been widely condemned. Nearly 80 civil society organisations [expressed concern](#) over its disproportionate nature and denounced the move as part of an ongoing ministerial effort to intimidate civil society which has also contributed to increasing [stigmatisation](#) around humanitarian work.

The Greek Ombudsman also [raised](#) serious concerns regarding the new law, describing the penalties as disproportionate, and the meaning of the term “facilitate” as too broad and subject to various and different types of interpretation. In addition, the Ombudsman claimed that the law goes in “the opposite direction” to European Commission’s [guidance](#) providing that humanitarian assistance should not be criminalised, and instead “equat[es] [NGOs’] actions with those who assist for profit or in an organised manner”. Importantly, the Ombudsman also highlights that the criminalisation of facilitation of entry and exit goes against the Geneva Convention which provides that States shall not sanction refugees for entering and residing illegally on the territory of a State party.

Official narratives and the erosion of the rule of law

The negotiations surrounding the adoption of the new law took place against a



backdrop of increasingly hostile anti-migration narratives which also threaten to undermine the rule of law. On December 1st, during a [media interview](#), Plevris was asked about accusations of pushbacks, and claimed that “our job is to guard the borders from illegal immigrants, from illegal immigration. We will do everything to protect our borders and protect Greek citizens”. As included in the [BVMN December Monthly Report](#), later in the month, Greek Health Minister Georgiadis [explained](#) that he aligns himself “with the European forces that are asking us to reconsider whether pushbacks are illegal”. He also added that “the moment this idea [pushbacks] was banned, the conditions were different; now they are not”. The Minister’s statements were made within the framework of controversial [publications](#) he had previously written on X concerning Amnesty International and the International Court of Justice, where he was claiming that both were “irrelevant, left-dominated entities”. This perspective was shared by Plevris who [argued](#) that many European and international courts’ rulings reflected “left-wing ideological hegemony”, with an “anti-Western, anti-European” perspective. In addition to posing a serious threat to the rule of law and the inalienable character of the most basic human rights, those claims display a gradual shift in position by the Greek authorities, who have always been [categorically denying](#) involvement in pushbacks.

These statements must also be taken into consideration against the broader background of a push within the [Council of Europe](#) to reinterpret the rights and

entitlements stemming from the European Convention on Human Rights, including to facilitate the expulsion and return of third country nationals.

Deaths in the Aegean

The first month of 2026 has been and gone, and along with it, any optimism that this year might be safer for people on the move. At least six people have lost their lives due to the perilous journeys forced upon them by inhumane Greek migration policies. We note the pattern of disproportionate death and suffering affecting children travelling across the Aegean Sea, highlighting the increased exposure to danger that they face during these deathly journeys.

Below is a description of the five known incidents leading to deaths.

January 8th. Samos

The Greek Coast Guard found the body of a seven-year old Sudanese girl off the Greek island of Samos. Her mother identified her by the clothes she was wearing, and reported that she had fallen out of the boat into freezing water in late December, near the island of Farmakonisi.

January 10th. Dikili

According to the Turkish Coast Guard, a boat sank off the coast of Turkey, thirty-seven people were then rescued from a rubber dinghy near Dikili. One person died, and seven others remain missing.



January 16th. Rhodes

The Greek Coast Guard located the body of a person on the move in the land area of Gennadi beach, Rhodes. Later, Hellenic Police officers identified 33 people, including eight men, 12 women and 13 children in the wider land area.

January 18th. Farmakonisi

The Greek Coast identified 35 people on the move on land consisting of 27 men, five women, and three children. One woman and one child, both Somali nationals, required immediate medical treatment, and were transferred to the General Hospital of Rhodes by helicopter. The woman passed away in hospital and the child remains hospitalised in the Pediatric Clinic accompanied by their father. The remaining people were transported to the Closed-Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) in Leros.

January 24th. Ikaria

A shipwreck occurred off the island of Ikaria. The Greek Coast Guard initiated an operation involving a patrol vessel, a patrol boat, a private vessel, and a Hellenic Air Force helicopter. 50 people were rescued, three remain missing, and two were found dead. The deceased were a woman and a four-year old boy.

Apprehensions and Interceptions by the Turkish authorities

This month has seen continued efforts by the Turkish Coast Guard and Police to engage in apprehensions that prevent many people on the move from reaching their destination of the Greek Islands. In perpetrating these apprehensions, the Turkish authorities aggressively intercept and tow boats in practices professionally coded as "[prevention of departure](#)". The institutional violence doesn't stop there, as upon either interception or rescue from Greek pushbacks, people on the move are subsequently arrested and detained in Turkish prisons where they are threatened with deportation to their country of origin should they attempt to leave the country again.

According to our monitoring at Collective Aid, over 1,000 people were prevented from applying for international protection in Greece this last month. The [UNHCR](#) (UNHCR) reported that 368 people arrived on Lesbos in January, with 1,222 people overall arriving in Greece via the Aegean Sea. These figures demonstrate the impact that apprehensions by Turkish authorities have on Aegean crossings. When one factors in those who have lost their lives or are missing at sea, the number of arrivals in Lesbos alone should have been more than double what it was. This can be explained by the lethal combination of pushbacks by the Greek Coast Guard, interceptions by the Turkish Coast Guard, and the stormy weather conditions that winter brings to the Aegean, and that people are forced into due to the lack of safe passage.



Samos

Procedural delays and irregularities

In January, multiple clients of I Have Rights reported no or limited interpreting available in the Samos CCAC in various languages. The languages reported to I Have Rights were Tigrinya, Amharic, Krio and Wolof, but it is noted that availability and standard of interpreting has been a persistent issue at the Samos CCAC for years. Provisions for interpreting are laid out in articles 8 and 14 of the 2013/3 recast Asylum Procedure Directive. The lack of adequate interpreting is causing long delays for people and short notice cancellation of asylum interviews. Additionally, multiple people have reported agreeing to conduct their interviews in languages that are not their language of choice.

Meanwhile, problems with the issuing of fingerprint appointments also continued at the Samos CCAC. I Have Rights has heard accounts that the camp authorities are attributing these delays to individuals remaining in the camp after being granted asylum. More concerning, we have received reports from two people that camp authorities are making fingerprint appointments conditional: people are reportedly being coerced to report back the location of other recognised refugees in the CCAC, suspected of having remained in the camp beyond the 30 days grace period.

Updates on conditions in the Samos CCAC

At the start of 2026 there were 1,701

people held in the Samos CCAC, amounting to a 83% occupancy rate, based on the actual CCAC capacity of 2,042 people. This number differs from the official, and arbitrarily adjusted, capacity of the CCAC, set at 3,664. This extra capacity was “added” in 2023 without any adjustments to the infrastructure of the facility. Over the course of January the number of people held in the Samos CCAC increased to 1,734 people - 85% of the actual capacity of the facility. Over 200 people arrived in Samos during this month.

In January, the undignified conditions in the camp were raised by multiple clients of I Have Rights. Six people reported extremely poor sanitation in the facility, with one person stating that: “the environment is really disgusting, nothing clean and the bathroom is terrible. Not even an environment for animals”. Over the month, issues related to the availability and consistency of hot water were raised by four clients, including parents with young children and people with disabilities. The Samos CCAC is not connected to the central water system and water must be brought to the facility on a daily basis by a truck. As a result, water tends to only be available for four to seven hours a day.

Furthermore, conditions in the containers remained a major issue, with multiple clients reporting on the extremely low hygiene standards. Three clients described having cockroaches in their containers. Issues with the availability and access of beds were also raised by two clients. One of them, a pregnant woman, reported to her caseworker at I Have Rights “I don’t



Greece

sleep on my bed because it is very small. I am pregnant, so sometimes I need space to move around, and it hurts. That's why we put something, a foam, on the ground because the bed is small, and it hurts to turn around." The inadequate conditions in the containers and other living spaces in the Samos CCAC have been documented by I Have Rights and other civil society actors for years yet, despite these interventions, the sanitary and hygiene standards of the facility remain poor.

Meanwhile, the standard and availability of health care in the CCAC remained another source of concern in January. Multiple clients reported ongoing health issues that were not being treated at the CCAC or were not provided adequate healthcare when they attended the Samos Hospital in Vathy. Despite a relative increase, over recent years, of the size of the medical team in the Samos CCAC, issues with health care provision persist. One client described severe pain and numbness in their arm, despite asking for both a visit from the doctor and an ambulance, no actions were taken. In a separate incident, a client reported ongoing concerns about the health of their young child, whose medical issues were not being treated and medication not provided.

The Samos CCAC currently has one nurse and two part-time doctors, covering a population of approximately 1,700 people. The limited and inadequate access to health care in the facility has been raised consistently by I have Rights and other actors in Samos over multiple years. Exacerbating these issues are wider

concerns regarding the staffing of the Samos hospital. In January, local media reported that multiple vacancies at the hospital are currently not being met. This is likely to create further barriers to access health care for people held at the Samos CCAC, in the wider context of the long-term structural issues in the Greek public health system.

Cash Assistance payments

The conditions of people held in the Samos CCAC are exacerbated by the long-term issues of the Cash Assistance Payment system, not delivered by the Greek Ministry of Migration consistently since April 2024. While this situation has become dire over the past two years, issues with Cash Assistance payments have been persistent since 2020, when the Greek Ministry of Migration took over responsibility for these from UNHCR. Importantly, Cash Assistance payments are not a discretionary payment or a token of goodwill from the Greek government, but a right laid out in both Greek and EU law. Furthermore, the Greek government has been in receipt of payments through the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) since 2020. The fund is intended to allow Greece to meet its legal obligations to provide adequate material reception conditions to asylum seekers, which enable people to obtain a dignified standard of living.

The lack of cash assistance compounds underlying issues with reception conditions in the Samos CCAC. Over the last year, 37



Greece

I Have Rights clients reported issues with food at the CCAC, with 24 clients describing they are unable to eat the food due to the poor quality of the provisions. Moreover, 11 clients of I Have Rights who are mothers have shared their experiences with regards to issues with formula and inappropriate food provisions for their babies needs. They reported that, even after raising the issues with camp authorities, adequate baby food was not provided.

These systemic deficiencies - together with the ones described in the section above, regarding health care and medication - mean that residents are often unable to cover their basic health and nutrition needs without access to cash assistance. They are also compounded by restrictions on access to essential services outside the facility due to the cost of public transport to Vathy - the nearest town to the CCAC. Clients of I Have Rights report regularly walking the 14km round trip to Vathy to visit the I Have Rights office for legal appointments and describe being unable to access the other psycho social, legal and community support groups located in town. In January, one client cancelled a legal appointment for asylum interview preparation due to the cost of the bus fare.



France

Legal proceedings on living conditions in the Dunkirk camps

Recent legal proceedings concerning the living conditions of people in exile in Dunkirk have once again exposed the profound gap between the formal recognition of rights and their protection on the ground. While a partial legal victory in early December acknowledged the State's failure to provide basic humanitarian amenities and its duty to uphold a minimal standard of living, subsequent judicial decisions have left core practices of repression and evictions intact.

On December 4th, the Lille Administrative Court condemned the State and local authorities for failing to respect the fundamental rights of people living in informal camps in the Dunkirk area, granting some of the basic demands put forth by the case that a collaboration of NGOs had argued in court. The court ordered the implementation of measures to improve living conditions, including the regular distribution of drinking water, access to showers near the informal camps, the installation of enclosed toilets close to living areas, regular waste collection, and the deployment of information patrols for unaccompanied minors. On these points, the reality of extreme precarity and lack of services on the ground prevailed over the security-based arguments advanced by the State.

However, this ruling represented only a partial response to the humanitarian crisis. Many further demands regarding the living conditions of people on the move in Dunkirk were rejected. In light of these rejections, six

associations (Médecins du Monde, Roots, Salam, Human Rights Observers, Utopia56, and the Refugee Women's Centre) lodged an appeal before the courts. This appeal sought additional and essential measures, including the provision of meals, improved access to healthcare and emergency accommodation, additional water points, the ability for people to retrieve their personal belongings after evictions, and outreach to identify and support victims of trafficking. Yet, despite the essential nature of these measures, and the State's duty to uphold basic human rights in France, on January 21st the State rejected the appeal, dismissing these requests and leaving the initial December ruling unchanged.

Despite the formal recognition by the French State of the dire and precarious living conditions in the informal camps, the situation on the ground remains alarming. Since January 1st 2026, the Refugee Women's Centre alone has encountered nearly 140 women and around 20 children under the age of five living without adequate access to water or food. Associations have reported a deterioration in access to basic services such as healthcare, and humanitarian actors are increasingly compensating for the State's failure to provide these services. As Médecins du Monde emphasised, the denial of the appeal was deeply disappointing, yet the initial ruling confirmed the legitimacy of continued documentation and advocacy in the face of these ongoing violations.

For the entire duration of the legal proceedings (around six weeks), evictions in Dunkirk stopped completely. This was,



France

unfortunately, not out of a realisation of their cruel and harmful nature, but most likely a public relations strategy. The very next day after the appeal was denied, large-scale evictions of living areas in Dunkirk resumed. On January 22nd, a large-scale eviction operation targeted at least four living sites, seizing tents, clothes, and other personal belongings, once again plunging residents into further precarity. The timing of this eviction made it absolutely clear that the pause in evictions in Dunkirk had simply served to assist the State's position during the litigation process. Notably, the Administrative Court declined to rule on the legality of evictions and the seizure of personal belongings, despite their central role in the perpetuation of suffering at the Franco-British border. These practices constitute a serious violation of the rights of people on the move in Dunkirk and directly undermine any claim made by the State during legal proceedings that it cared about implementing dignified living conditions.

These developments demonstrate the limits of judicial intervention in the absence of political will. While the courts have acknowledged certain violations and imposed minimal obligations, the broader system of repression, evictions, and police violence remains firmly in place. Human rights continue to be violated daily. As the associations reiterated throughout the legal proceedings, human rights are universal and inalienable, and it is the responsibility of the French State to guarantee them in practice.

Police intimidation and the Plan Grand Froid in Dunkirk

The activation of the Plan Grand Froid (PGF) in the Nord department of the Hauts-de-France region was intended to mitigate the effects of extreme cold on people on the move with the provision of emergency shelter. Yet, what should have been a positive policy has once again exposed the contradiction between the provision of humanitarian measures and the repressive state practices that actively undermine them. While the PGF is presented by the authorities as an emergency response aimed at safeguarding people in situations of extreme precarity and danger, its implementation in Dunkirk has been accompanied by policing practices that deter, intimidate, and criminalise those it is meant to protect.

On December 24th, the Nord prefecture activated the Plan Grand Froid (PGF), requisitioning a gymnasium in Petite-Synthe with a capacity of just 160 places. This capacity is hugely insufficient given the number of people living in informal camps in the Dunkirk area, estimated at closer to 1,000. While shuttle buses are organised to transport people to the gymnasium, individuals must make their own way back to the camps once the facility closes, relying on public transport infrastructure.

Since the activation of the PGF, Human Rights Observers (HRO) have received multiple testimonies and accounts of police operations targeting these transport networks that bring people from the gymnasium back to the camps. The bus



France

stops constitute the only public transport access points between the camps and the gymnasium. The police, aware of this, have specifically targeted these sites for violent operations. The reports received include routine surveillance and arbitrary identity checks, intimidation, arrests, and even the use of tear gas. This has effectively turned the provision of, and access to, emergency shelter into a site of risk and oppression.

On January 7th, amid a drastic drop in temperatures and the extension of the PGF, reports of police intimidation linked to access to the facility persisted. One man explained to HRO that he was unable to go to the gymnasium for fear of being stopped or intimidated by the police. A few days earlier, he had been subjected to an identity check followed by an arrest near the gymnasium. Upon his release from the police station, he was issued with an Obligation to Leave French Territory (OQTF). These events illustrate the ostensibly helpful nature of these emergency provisions, which in reality further expose individuals to immigration enforcement, effectively penalising them for attempting to access shelter and safety.

These realities stand in stark contrast to the prefecture's publicly stated objectives. The Nord prefecture claims that the activation of the PGF aims to "provide assistance to people in situations of particular precarity and isolation" and guarantees the "mobilisation of all State services to support the most vulnerable people." In practice, however, these aims are eclipsed and entirely undermined by the persistent actions of the police – including ongoing

evictions and police violence against people on the move – indicating that the prefecture does not, in reality, respect the human rights of people living in the camps.

Rather than functioning as a protective mechanism during periods of extreme cold, the PGF in Dunkirk has been embedded within a broader regime of surveillance, control, and intimidation. Emergency shelter is rendered risky and inaccessible for many, particularly those who are racialised, undocumented, or already targeted by immigration enforcement. This dynamic not only undermines the stated humanitarian purpose of the PGF but also places lives at risk by discouraging people from seeking shelter during dangerous winter months.

Eviction of the largest living site in Calais

In Calais, the largest informal living site for some time was known as "Hospital," which housed around 700 people. This site partly became the biggest because of the eviction of another settlement known as "Orange Squat" – at the time housing around 300 people – on September 14th, which forced many residents to resettle. "Hospital" had consequently been at risk of eviction since.

Evictions at the site began at the end of November, marking the first of four eviction stages. The second stage took place on December 12th, when around 250 people were expelled. At the start of 2026, HRO was aware that the final stage of the eviction of Hospital was imminent, and security



France

checks were conducted at 7 a.m. on most days to determine whether that would be the day of the third and largest phase of the expulsion.

This day came on January 30th. At 7 a.m., a huge convoy of police arrived alongside state-mandated “cleaning teams” and AFEJI buses to transport people away. Around 430 people were forced to leave, with at least 20 people arrested. This large-scale operation lasted several hours and resulted in the seizure of a vast amount of personal belongings, including over 100 tents.

being further disrupted and destabilised. Once again, the French and British States are wasting vast amounts of money and resources on cruel operations such as this one, instead of attempting to support vulnerable people and provide a basic standard of rights and dignified living.



Calais, January 30th: The so-called “English Toilets” area of the Hospital living site is evicted. Source: HRO

Arrivals

According to *borderline-europe*'s figures, 1,196 people seeking protection arrived in Italy by sea in January 2026. This represents a decrease of 40.6% compared to the previous month and a decrease of 61.9% compared to the same month last year.

The majority of people (994 individuals or 83.1%¹) arrived in Sicily, mainly Lampedusa. 110 people (9.2%) arrived in Sardinia.

According to data from *borderline-europe*, 632 people (52.8%) were rescued by Italian authorities. A total of 200 people (17%) were rescued by the civilian fleet. Moreover, Frontex would have been involved in the rescue of 36 people (3%) in January. 328 people (27.4%) reached Italian coastal waters (12 nautical miles off the coast) on their own without being intercepted or rescued.

According to official figures from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 1,457 people arrived in Italy in January. While we were able to confirm lower arrival figures for this month, we would like to point out that there is no access to background information or source data for the numbers published by the Ministry of the Interior.

Overview of the data² collected by <i>borderline europe</i>	
Arrivals to Italy by sea	1196
Arrivals to Sicily	994
Rescue by Italian authorities	632
Rescue by Frontex	36
Rescue by NGOs	200
Unassisted arrivals	328
Arrivals without information on arrival/rescue	0

Pushbacks and pullbacks

This month, we recorded 1,292 interceptions in the central Mediterranean, where boats carrying people on the move were often forcibly pushed back to the North African coast. In all the documented cases, the intercepted persons were taken back to Libya.

The figures for interceptions are not reliable, however, as obstacles to documentation make the number of unreported cases likely to be much higher. Interceptions to Tunisia and Algeria also take place but are documented even less frequently. IOM Libya has only registered the interception of 537 people.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all percentages refer to the total number of people who arrived in Italy by sea this month.

² These should be taken as minimum, as the number of unreported cases could be significantly higher.



Even though the number of documented cases of people intercepted in the Mediterranean has fallen slightly compared to the previous month (December 2025: 2,318), it remains very high in relation to departures and arrivals. Most importantly, it is essential to remember that these interceptions and returns constitute an illegal practice that violates people's fundamental rights and endangers lives.

Dead and missing

This month, the Mediterranean continued to be a mass grave for people fleeing their homes. In January, Cyclone Harry raged across the central Mediterranean. As a consequence, the number of dead and missing people rose dramatically compared to the previous month. Reports of missing persons range from 380 to over 1,000, all of whom are most likely dead.

According to data from [borderline-europe](#), the deaths of 113 people fleeing across the central Mediterranean have been confirmed. On January 24th, Italian authorities reported 380 people missing after the cyclone. This includes the passengers of eight boats that departed from Tunisia between January 14th and 21st and with which no contact could be established. During this week, [the worst days of the storm](#), wind speeds of over 100 km/h and waves over 7 meters high were registered. There is no information about the arrival of these boats in Italy, nor about their return to Tunisia.

However, based on research by the organisation [Refugees in Libya](#), many more

people would still be missing. Through conversations with relatives and other people who wanted to leave, it was possible to reconstruct that 29 boats left Tunisia. Only one of the boats arrived in Italy and another was able to return to Tunisia. Thus, 27 boats remain missing and the exact number of individuals that were on them is unclear. However, it is estimated that there were over [1,000 people on the move](#).

On January 23rd, Ramadan Konte, an individual from Sierra Leone, was rescued by a merchant ship. He had survived 24 hours at sea and remains the sole survivor of a shipwreck that happened the day before, which is believed to have claimed the lives of 50 others. Another 59 bodies were found on the same day after another shipwreck took place off the Libyan coast. It appears that no one survived.

These are just two confirmed shipwrecks, but it is likely that there were many more. The silence from politicians and the media on this issue is completely unacceptable and extremely alarming, for it shows, once again, how little importance is attached to the lives of displaced people in Europe.

The cyclone also caused severe damage along the coast in southern Italy, particularly in Sicily, Sardinia, and Calabria, and brought the heaviest rainfall in 75 years. [Tunisia](#) also experienced severe flooding and damage to infrastructure. In the context of deadly lack of information and systematically insufficient rescue measures, the cyclone made crossing the central Mediterranean even more dangerous than it already is during winter months.



Cutro trial: Italian officers face trial for the deaths of 94 people

On January 30th, the trial began against six officers and non-commissioned officers of the Italian Coast Guard and Guardia di Finanza. They are charged with causing a shipwreck through negligence and multiple counts of negligent homicide.

On February 23rd, 2023, at least 94 people died in a shipwreck off the coast at Steccato di Cutro, in Calabria. 35 of them were minors, and at least 11 others are still missing. 86 people survived. It is considered one of the most devastating shipwrecks to have happened in Italy.

Despite the boat being spotted six hours before the shipwreck by a Frontex aircraft and the weather deteriorating significantly, neither the Italian authorities nor Frontex initiated a search and rescue mission. The Italian authorities arrived at the scene of the shipwreck 1.5 hours too late. The indictment revealed a chain of grossly negligent decisions and communication between the authorities, which ultimately left the people to fend for themselves. Their lives could have been saved.

65 survivors and six sea rescue NGOs (Emergency, Louise Michel, Mediterranean Saving Humans, Sea-Watch, SOS Humanity, and SOS Mediterranee Italia) are appearing as joint litigants in the trial. For more information about the case, see our report [“The Cutro ship disaster: one year after” \(2024\)](#) on our website. The trial will continue on [February 10th](#).

Civilian resistance

This month, 3 civilian fleet vessels operated in the central Mediterranean, rescuing a total of 200 people in distress at sea (17% of those who arrived). The Ocean Viking (SOS Mediterranee) carried out a multiple rescue, bringing a total of 90 people safely to the port of Palermo.

In January, civilian sea rescue operations were once again obstructed and criminalised. For example, after rescuing 33 people, the *Solidaire* was assigned to the [distant port of La Spezia](#) by the Italian authorities, causing the crew to lose valuable time during which they could have carried out further rescues. In addition, the *Sea Watch 5* was detained this month, following the detention of the [Humanity 1](#) in December.

On [January 24, 2026](#), the crew of the *Sea Watch 5* rescued 18 people in distress in international waters. Upon arrival in Catania, they were detained by Italian authorities for [15 days](#). In addition, a fine of [€7,500](#) was imposed. The reason given was that the *Sea Watch 5* had refused to inform the so-called Libyan coast guard about its rescue operation. The Italian authorities' allegation is related to the Piantedosi law, which states that civilian sea rescue services must communicate with the Libyan authorities as soon as they carry out a rescue in the Libyan SAR zone.

However, prior to the rescue, the so-called Libyan coast guard had attempted to [intimidate](#) the *Sea Watch 5*, [circling it, pursuing it, and ordering it](#) to leave the area. Such actions are illegal in [internatio-](#)



[nal waters](#), under [international law on freedom of navigation](#). This example illustrates, once again, how the life-saving work of sea rescue NGOs is being deliberately and systematically restricted and obstructed.

The case also speaks to the research conducted by ["nd" and Sea-Watch](#), which shows that Frontex 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 and return them to Libya before civilian rescue organizations can reach them. When a boat is discovered on its way to Europe, Frontex's policy has been to inform the relevant rescue coordination centres, including Libya, since 2018. This is despite the widely documented human rights violations perpetrated by these authorities.

If flight crews assess a ship as being unseaworthy, Frontex can send out a "Mayday Relay" via the international emergency radio channel. Civilian sea rescue organizations operating ships and aircraft in the area rely on these emergency calls, as NGOs are excluded from the official government coordination channels. However, several cases show that Frontex's Mayday messages often omit crucial information for locating the boats, such as their course and speed.

Frontex justifies these measures by saying they are intended to avoid "confusion" and emphasizes that a Mayday call is only intended for immediate danger — a disturbing statement given the many deaths and missing persons in this part of the EU border regime.

However, despite the setback in the *Sea Watch 5* case, success can also be reported on behalf of civil sea rescue. There was a small victory in the second court case in the *Mare Jonio* (Mediterranea) trial on [January 13th, 2026](#). The background to this case is a [2020 incident](#) in which the crew of the *Mare Jonio* took on board and brought ashore 27 people who had been rescued by a Danish cargo ship. When the shipping company of the Danish cargo ship transferred money to the shipping company of the *Mare Jonio* shortly afterwards, accusations were made that a financial advantage had been gained by supporting "illegal migration." Now, among others, the captain of the *Mare Jonio* is on trial.

The hearing on [January 13th, 2026](#), resulted in the decision that all chats and wire-tap transcripts that are either prohibited by law or not relevant to the court case must be destroyed. According to *Mediterranea*, this includes a lot of material that has been used to defame civilian sea rescue operations for many years. The next hearing will take place on May 12th, 2026, which will hopefully bring justice for civilian sea rescue operations. In addition to this court case, it can also be reported that the [Sea Eye 5](#) (Sea Eye) has been saving lives in the Mediterranean again since the end of January.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



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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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