



Border Violence Monitoring Network

ILLEGAL PUSH-BACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



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NOVEMBER 2020

BALKAN REGION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Border Violence Monitoring Network published 29 testimonies of violent pushbacks in November, involving severe levels of physical, psychological and structural abuse. The testimonies collected in the field voice the experience of 951 people-on-the-move. This report offers analysis of the trends observed in each of these accounts, showing how law enforcement carry out these violent collective expulsions at EU borders.

Last month, BVMN members documented the use of both the Aegean Sea and land border between Greece and Turkey to strand vulnerable transit groups. This report considers the way people-on-the-move are facing stand-offs between Greek and Turkish authorities, which resulted in November with people marooned on an island in the Evros/Meriç river for multiple days. At the maritime border, reporters also observed the way lifeboats are cut adrift by the Hellenic Coast Guard. The backdrop to these violations came with leaked documents proving the way Greek and Frontex personnel are directly involved in pushbacks. Meanwhile this report also considers the criminalisation of monitoring groups on Lesbos and the precarious situation for transit communities in Thessaloniki.

Further up the route in Croatia, stark video evidence was published in November, dissecting the way pushbacks at the green border with Bosnia-Herzegovina occur. The reaction of the perpetrators and the people who endured the violence are shared here, alongside recent evidence of family pushbacks at a nearby stretch of border and an account of a trans person denied asylum by Croatian authorities. This report also looks into the drop in arrivals into Bosnia-Herzegovina and the tense situation in Sarajevo as winter draws in.

In Serbia, testimonies and field observations gathered during the last month depict the way systematic pushbacks around Kelebia and Röszke crossings on the border with Hungary are occurring. Evictions from Vojvodina in the North of Serbia continued, with an improvised tent settlement near Šid being the latest to face a targeted dispersal by the Serbian police. Reporters in the field also spoke to people-on-the-move who had been violently pushed back from Romania into Bulgaria, where they were detained and sexually harassed by officers in a detention facility in Lyubimets. The precarious nature of transit in the Balkans was also further exemplified by a chain pushback from Bulgaria (via Greece) to Turkey, showing the kind of insipid “solidarity” between EU member states that was touted in the new Pact on Asylum and Migration.

Finally, BVMN documented four cases of maritime pushbacks across the Adriatic Sea in November carried out by Italian authorities. Coupled with the rise in chain pushbacks via Slovenia and Croatia, and the downturn in reception conditions in cities such as Trieste, there is a bleak outlook as winter advances at the EU’s internal and external borders.

**BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in Greece and the Western Balkans including No Name Kitchen, Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, Disinfo Collective, Josoor, [re:]ports Sarajevo, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, Mare Liberum, Collective Aid and Fresh Response.*



Border Violence
Monitoring Network

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REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN 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 members have a common website [database](#), used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

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. Push-back 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. Push-backs have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological process for these interviews leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor push-backs 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 be as large as 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.

ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	-	Bosnia and Herzegovina
HR	-	Croatia
SRB	-	Serbia
SLO	-	Slovenia
ROM	-	Romania
HUN	-	Hungary
ITA	-	Italy
BGR	-	Bulgaria
MNK	-	North Macedonia
GRK	-	Greece
TUR	-	Turkey
EU	-	European Union

TRENDS IN BORDER VIOLENCE

STRANDED ON THE EVROS / MERIÇ RIVER

In November, BVMN recorded multiple incidents in which Turkish military apprehended transit groups that had just been pushed back from Greece, and subsequently forced them back onto Greek territory. This practice had already been documented in the spring of 2020, but had not occurred regularly since then. In the last two months once again, transit groups find themselves stranded on islands in the Evros/Meriç River for days, in freezing temperatures, without food or water.

In spring, BVMN member Josoor received reports of a case in which a 16 year old Pakistani who was presumed to have [drowned](#) after he was left stranded on an Evros/Meriç island. This November, BVMN recorded three further cases where people reported being stranded on an island for several days. BVMN was able to identify two of the islands on which people frequently find themselves stranded, one close to the Kapikule border crossing (see [10.6](#)), and another further south.

On 11th November, Josoor was contacted by a group of 70 people from an island in the Evros/Meriç. 60 people had been marooned on this island for three days following their pushback from Greece. Another 10 had been pushed back the day before. Whenever they tried to cross to either side, they were prevented by Greek and Turkish officers threatening them with rifles, or firing shots.

This conforms to two recent trends noted in the area by reporters. Firstly, Greek border forces seem to have changed pushback tactics, and are only forcing people halfway through the Evros/Meriç river and then ordering them to jump into the water (instead of being driven to the Turkish shore like before). Secondly, the Turkish army patrolling the border now forces almost every group they encounter to cross the river back to Greece, only sometimes making exceptions for families with small children or severely injured people.

However in the case videoed in November, no such lenience was shown. Another NGO that had been contacted by the group, Alarm-



*A pregnant woman was among those stranded
(Source: [Josoor](#))*

Phone, alerted Greek and Turkish authorities. Josoor published [footage](#) the group sent and reached out to several MEPs to alert them of the ongoing incident. Since Frontex has a liaison office in Turkey, and Evros is a Frontex operational area, BVMN additionally alerted the agency of the ongoing incident in an [urgent letter](#) and several follow-ups to no avail. In a reply which came two days later, and only after the group had finally been able to leave the island into Turkey, the Frontex Director Fabrice Leggeri shirked responsibility. The letter stated that Frontex officers had not been in the area at the time, but the agency had alerted their Greek counterparts who had confirmed sightings of people on the island. In effect, Frontex only sought corroboration from the original perpetrators of the pushback, failing to ensure border policing was being carried out in respect of fundamental rights.

VIDEO EVIDENCE OF A CROATIAN PUSHBACK



Pushback group, featured with consent of respondent (Source: [NNK/BVMN](#))

In November, a startling visual reconstruction of a violent pushback at the Croatian–Bosnian border was published. Led by network member No Name Kitchen, on behalf of BVMN, the investigators used open source techniques to analyse and verify a cache of film material and photographs from the border area, showing in granular detail the way masked Croatian authorities violently remove people—on—the-move across the green border.

The footage compiled in this investigation was taken in March by a member of a transit group who documented their own violent pushback. Meta data from the person’s phone, alongside photostitch techniques, allowed the team to establish the pushback site as a bend in the Glina river close to the Bosnian village of Poljana. This was also later verified by local Bosnians who took the injured group in and fed them after the pushback.

In the video, an injured man in the foreground can be seen being supported by two other men as they limp away from the Croatian border. In the background, on the opposing bank of the river, four officers (three wearing black balaclava masks) stand forming a line at the border. The authorities are wearing an array of uniforms which correspond in appearance to those of the Croatian Border Police, Special Police and Interventna

units. One is seen to be carrying a large stick, while another wields an improvised whip made out of a stick with a string tied to the end. The interlocutor featured in the foreground of the video is crying out in pain, his clothes are soaked and he is wearing no shoes. In an [interview](#) carried out after the pushback, one person described how they had been stripped and beaten by the officers.

“Everywhere they beat [us], I mean head, legs, arms, everywhere.”

These observations are confirmed moments later with more authorities matching the description of Croatian police arriving on the scene. As the camera continues to film the opposing bank, four more officers enter the shot, escorting a line of three detainees. One, dressed in a balaclava mask and an olive green jacket (matching the uniforms worn by the Croatian Special police) uses a large stick to hit one of the detainees across the torso. Another officer closer to the border who is conscious of the camera, signals for the officers to temporarily halt the pushback. Yet later on, as the footage continues, the viewer can see members of the second transit group being chased with weapons down the river bank into Bosnian territory.

The video material was also analysed in a

special report by [der Spiegel](#). Though notable pushbacks videos have been analysed in the past by [BVMN](#), the [Guardian](#) and [SRF](#), this represents a unique piece of evidence, corroborating the accounts of thousands of people who have been subject to violent illegal removals at the Croatian border. Working together with [der Spiegel](#) and [SRF](#), the investigative team were also able to trace the entirety of the pushback, confirming the group had been initially held in Kočevje Slovenia, before being chain-removed to Bosnia, in patent denial of their asylum rights.



Masked officers identified in the video (Source: [NNK/BVMN](#))

In a farcical response, the [Croatian Ministry of Interior](#) (MUP) said that it had recorded no such incident and that the perpetrators featured in the video were not in fact Croatian police officers – begging the question, what oversight the authorities have over masked operatives carrying out torturous acts of violence within the interior and at state borders? On the issue of oversight, the statement from the MUP placed Croatia in further jeopardy, providing an admission that no independent border monitoring mechanism had been put in place. Despite receiving [6.8 million euros in 2018](#) from the EU Commission, binding them to implement such an oversight, the MUP announced its readiness to create the mechanism in the wake of the recent video

evidence, openly acknowledging that until now no independent instrument had been put in place to observe whether fundamental rights are respected.

In Brussels, the investigation also created waves, garnering a [response from European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson](#) who stated that: "If proven true, what is shown there is of course unacceptable ... People cannot be beaten up at the border. There must be consequences." When situated alongside past visual evidence and the hundreds of first hand testimonies collected by BVMN, this video represents a damning portrayal of the daily pattern of violence against people at the Croatian border.

FAMILY PUSHBACKS NEAR BOJNA

Border pushbacks in the area of Velika Kladuša increasingly involve families, among them the most vulnerable: unaccompanied minors, children, infants, pregnant women, the elderly, and the infirm. Some two months ago, the No Name Kitchen team in Velika Kladuša noted an increase in arrivals of families along the Croatia-Bosnian border in the settlement of Bosanska Bojna. The difficulties in crossing into Croatia, characterised by continual and violent pushbacks, resulted in the families setting up camp a mere 300 meters from the border. In total, more than 50 families, some 250 people, settled in a series of abandoned houses along a one-kilometer stretch of road. The vast majority of the families staying there were from Afghanistan, and many had passed through Moria camp on the Greek island of Lesbos.

During their numerous attempts to cross the border, the families, including those with infants and elderly members, were subject to violence at the hands of the Croatian police (see [6.3](#)). While in most of the cases the fam-



Child with a broken phone (Source: No Name Kitchen)

ily groups themselves are not directly struck by the police, the police do violate and humiliate them in other ways. Women and mothers reported that they were thoroughly searched and touched everywhere on their bodies. During this procedure, Muslim women claim that they were forced to take off their hijabs in front of male officers. Additionally, officers searched in the diapers of infants under the assumption that their parents had hid money or cellphones there.

During the pushbacks, the families were also forced to hand over their sleeping bags and backpacks containing their water and food. In some cases, the families reported that they had to hand over their jackets and shoe laces to the officers, even as the outside temperature fell below freezing. The police officers then often set fire to families' be-

longings, a standardised practice which is particularly dangerous for vulnerable groups, such as those with young infants. The aftermath of these events are also traumatic, with parents reporting the way that children have a heightened fear of the dark, have difficulty sleeping, or suddenly wake up crying during the night.

After the first snow of the winter fell on North West Bosnia–Herzegovina, the families joined together on the 2nd December to protest both their living conditions and the Croatian police violence. In a large group of some 200 people, they walked to the nearby border, tried to cross it, and were stopped by both Croatian Special Police and the [border police](#). The next day [they were transferred](#) against their will from the Bojna houses to family camps.

DETENTION IN BULGARIA

A recent testimony shared with BVMN members has brought to light conditions in Bulgaria's detention centres and transit camps (see [1.1](#)). The respondent in this testimony, a 23 year old man from Iran, reported that after being pushed back from Romania to Bulgaria at the Silistra–Ostrov border crossing (in what appeared to be coordinated action by both Romanian and Bulgarian border officials) he was subjected to physical violence and intimidation from Bulgarian officers. After being held overnight in a building near the border checkpoint he was transferred to Lyubimets Detention Centre, a facility with capacity for [400 people](#) located in southern Bulgaria close to the borders with Turkey and Greece.

Here, he again reported experiencing physical violence as well as forced undressing by an officer who sexually assaulted him. While detained he described being struck in the face by the officer, who then:

“made sexual hand gestures and noises towards him, mocking the respondent as if he were deriving sexual pleasure from being struck.”

Overcrowding and cramped conditions in Lyubimets have also been documented since at least [2012](#) and the respondent in this tes-

timony reported having to share a 6m² cell with 8 other people, with other cells of the same size holding up to 15 people. Detainees were not allowed to leave their cells for 15 days once entering the centre, supposedly due to Covid-19 quarantine, however this was never communicated to them at the time.

As well as being held in Lyubimets, the respondent in this case was also later transferred to Harmanli camp where staff from International Organisation for Migration (IOM) were present, and where he was again placed in lockdown. In total he was detained for over 40 days before managing to leave and cross into Serbia. He reported that the IOM staff in Harmanli told him he either had to claim asylum in Bulgaria or be deported to Iran.

According to informal reports received by BVMN members on the ground in Serbia, the violence in this case does not seem like an isolated event with many people on the move reporting harsh conditions and use of violence from state authorities in Bulgaria. Additionally, a report this year on Bulgaria [published by bordermonitoring.eu](#) revealed testimonies of arbitrary detention in Lyubimets (including that of children) and violence from guards in the centre, as well as in other detention spaces in the country.



Lyubimets Detention Centre, Southern Bulgaria (Source: [Mathias Fiedler, bordermonitoring.eu](https://bordermonitoring.eu))

CHAIN PUSHBACK INTO TURKEY

Incidents of pushbacks recorded by BVMN in the last month throughout Eastern Greece and across the Evros, speak to the increasingly precarious and dangerous conditions for people-on-the-move. In early November, BVMN member Josoor recorded a testimony of a transit group that experienced a chain pushback from Bulgaria, via Greece, to Turkey (see [9.1](#)). This testimony highlights several emerging trends in pushbacks throughout the region, while also raising issues of further misconduct and violence on the part of the authorities at the Evros border.

The respondent described how during the first pushback from Bulgaria to Greece, he was severely beaten and bitten by police dogs at the moment of apprehension. From there, the transit group was taken to a detention center near the border where they were forced to undress, their belongings were stolen, and they were beaten again before being pushed back to Greece.

In Greece, the transit group was again quickly apprehended by the authorities, and taken to several informal detention sites along the border with Turkey before being taken to the shores of the Evros along with potentially several hundred other people-on-the-move. During pushback from Greece to Turkey, they were left in the middle of the river and forced

to swim, at which point the respondent describes people being carried away by the current.

Yet those who made it to the Turkish bank were faced by violence from the Turkish military stationed there and pushed back towards Greece. On the other side, Greek authorities proceeded to push the people back again, effecting a yoyo strategy that matches with the trends analysed in the first section of this report.

This incident included blunt weapons to cause physical harm, third-country dinghy drivers being used in operating the pushback boats, the forcing of people to get out of the dinghies in the middle of the Evros river, and Turkish soldiers forcing people-on-the-move to cross back into Greece. The testimony also alludes to other moments of potential misconduct on the part of the authorities, for instance in the lack of medical attention for severe injuries caused by dog attacks. The experiences and violence described in this testimony fit into increasingly well documented trends of the pushback system in Eastern Greece, and to the phenomena of chain pushbacks that are prevalent amongst other EU member states such as Italy, Slovenia and Croatia.

TRANS PERSON DENIED ASYLUM IN CROATIA

A recent testimony recorded by a BVMN member in Sarajevo (see [6.2](#)) highlights Croatian authorities' failure to provide protection and access to legal procedures to vulnerable groups of asylum seekers. The respondent, a 30 year old transgender woman from Morocco who was traveling with her partner, reports being denied their right to seek asylum in Croatia and violently pushed-back to Bosnia-Herzegovina

According to the [Asylum Act of the Republic of Croatia](#) protection can be granted to an individual facing persecution because of their sexual orientation in their country of origin (Article 22, Section 5). In this case, Croatian authorities recognized the respondent and her partner as members of a group eligible for protection with a clear intention to seek asylum, and deliberately disregarded these factors.

In preparation for their journey, the respondent and her partner had researched asylum procedures in Croatia. They had obtained a number for the Croatian Law Centre and were intending to request protection based on their sexual orientation. The Croatian Om-

budswoman had also been notified by email of their intention to seek asylum.

In the incident that occurred on 4th November 2020 the respondent was approached by the police in Split, Croatia. She instantly made her intentions clear by requesting assistance in contacting the legal support group. She and her partner also revealed their sexual orientation, stating it as a reason for seeking protection. The officers ignored the request, confiscated the respondent's mobile phone, and took the couple to a nearby police station.

The two again expressed their intention to seek asylum. In response, they were ridiculed for their sexuality and, with no translator present, asked to sign obscurely phrased documents. They were then transferred to another police station in Vrgorac, subsequently put into the police van and transported to the Bosnian border. They were then stripped, beaten and, in the respondent's case, subjected to overly flamboyant and homophobic gestures that mocked her sexuality before being sent back to Bosnia-Herzegovina naked.

ADRIATIC PUSHBACKS CONTINUE

In November, BVMN collected four pushback testimonies carried out by authorities on commercial shipping lines run by the Greek company "Super Fast Ferries". Four of the individuals removed in this way from Italy to Greece were unaccompanied minors. In comparison to previous months, the percentage of violence by Italian officials in the ports has also increased, usually involving beating with hands, fists or batons, and often reaching a height when individuals are forced against their will into cells or police vehicles.

"[...] , they just grabbed me by the arm strongly to push me inside the car. My friend was hit by five Italian police officers in front of me just because he did not want to enter the car".

At other times, the violence conferred onto people as they arrive in Italian ports is prompted for no other reason than to simply injure and abuse. A minor from Afghanistan who was pushed back from the port of Bari shared how he was pushed to the floor and, while lying there, hit near the ribs with a baton (see [8.4](#)). This treatment mirrored an in-



Industrial area near the port of Patras where people live (Source [NNK](#))

cident that occurred to the same child only twelve days earlier (see [8.3](#)), showing the cyclical types of violence being used on this pushback route.

During the forced removal back to Greece, authorities also regularly take the opportunity to remove clothes from individuals, ex-

acerbating the cold temperatures they endure while detained in the hold of the vessel. In November, Italian police were seen to confiscate jackets, sweatshirts and even trousers of people before lengthy detention in locked rooms (see [8.2](#)).

Once back in Greece, the chances of being physically assaulted remain high. The victims are often hit by either local police or port/ship security guards, who come to find them in the cabin of the vessel and use brute force to remove them. From there, the ordeal continues in the Greek ports of Patras and Igoimenitsa, with individuals facing further arbitrary detention in deplorable conditions, often for multiple days (see [8.1](#)). Alongside this abuse is the ever present threat of push-back to Turkey, which BVMN has proved to be a tangible risk for people, even though they are being held on the opposite side of the country (see [8.2](#)).

Hence, push-backs through the Adriatic sea continue with the complicity of local, national

and private actors working together in an intricate web to traumatize and dehumanize people who have no option but to play a game with rules they never agreed to.



Industrial area near the port of Patras where people live (Source: [NNK](#))

VIOLENCE AT THE HUNGARIAN BOR-

In November, BVMN published four cases of pushbacks from Hungary to Serbia affecting a total of 28 people-on-the-move, five of them minors. In all but one case, Hungarian border officials used violence, including reports of kicking and beating with tree branches or batons, both of men, women and minors (see [2.1](#), [2.3](#) and [2.4](#)). One account of violence was particularly humiliating. Hungarian police forced the male group members to undress to their underwear while laughing at them. Female group members were also patted down by male police officers

(see [2.3](#)). When group members protested these practices, they were insulted by the officers

“Shut up! Don’t speak! Fuck all Syrians! Fuck all refugees! You are shit!”

The physical violence upon apprehension that was reported, shows institutionalised patterns of mistreatment that match previously published reports about practices by Hungarian authorities. The practices and weapons, such as tree branches, also bear the hallmarks of a European-wide pushback apparatus, showing direct symmetry with the kind of violent border techniques documented in countries such as Croatia and Greece.



People sleeping in abandoned railway carriages (Source: [APC](#))

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION

GREECE

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN THESSALONIKI

The situation for transit communities in Greece continues to deteriorate. Amid a [heightened police presence](#) and the continuation of lockdown measures, movement in urban areas and key transit zones, such as Thessaloniki, is severely restricted. Indeed, a marked observation by BVMN during this period has been the almost complete disappearance of people-on-the-move from the public space.

It has become increasingly difficult for people-on-the-move to access essential services and support as they run the risk of apprehension, detention and eventual pushback; a development made all the more grave with the onset of winter. This feeds into a precedent documented by the BVMN of the Greek police

[disrupting the delivery of humanitarian aid](#) in order to apprehend and illegally remove groups from Thessaloniki.

More specifically to BVMN, one knock on effect of the Covid-19 lockdown measures is the sharp decrease of people presenting themselves for interview regarding their experiences of border violence. This is not to suggest that these illicit practices have decreased. After all, the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic saw a dramatic [expansion and intensification](#) of pushback practices across the Balkans. Yet it is the constant and proliferating threat of these violent removals that means many cases are remaining undocumented because people-on-the-move have been consigned to spaces out of public view.



Police block roads during a pushback from Thessaloniki (Source:[BVMN](#))

CRIMINALIZATION OF SOLIDARITY

Mare Liberum is a member of BVMN, focusing on monitoring human rights in the Aegean Sea. Their aim is to observe, document and draw public attention to the dangerous situation at the European border between Turkey and Greece and to strengthen solidarity and fundamental human rights. Below is their statement regarding ongoing criminalization of solidarity in Greece:

The situation in the Aegean has only intensified in 2020. The deterrence policy of Europe is to reduce the number of arrivals to Greece and to make asylum in the country as least desirable as possible, if not inaccessible. The political will to achieve this, in flagrant disregard of fundamental rights, comes alongside concerted efforts to repress organisations and those who try to help people-on-the-move, or document violations carried out against them. As such, Mare Liberum and other groups face increasing efforts by the Greek state to silence their critical voice.

On 28th September, the Greek police issued a press release stating that there are ongoing criminal investigations against four NGOs, 33 individuals associated with them, and two 'third-country nationals', allegedly "for an organized circuit to facilitate the illegal entry of

aliens into Greek territory." The charges, besides human trafficking, include forming and joining a criminal organisation, espionage, violation of State secrets and violation of the Immigration Code. Neither Mare Liberum nor any other NGO nor any individual has been named officially, even though there is a consensus in the Greek media that Mare Liberum will be at the centre of the criminal case.

There is also a telling consensus of why organisations like Mare Liberum have been targeted with these allegations. People crossing the Aegean are exposed to excessive violence including the use of firearms, severe beatings and being abandoned at sea in unseaworthy liferafts. Mare Liberum has been researching these violations, and collected evidence that more than 8908 people have been brutally pushed back at sea across this stretch of the EU external border. These are 8908 cases of human rights violations, but they are also people, and instances of personal collective tragedy. Mare Liberum have been one, among many voices, bringing attention to pushback practices in the Aegean Sea. Rather than dealing with the illegal and inhumane methods being used, the Greek state, [like other counterparts in the Balkans](#), has simply sought to silence this evidence.



The monitoring vessel currently barred from operating (Source:[Mare Liberum](#))

PUSHBACKS IN THE AEGEAN AND FRONTEX INVOLVEMENT

In November, a total of 16 migrant vessels reached the Greek Islands according to the [Aegean Boat Report](#). This marks a sharp increase from October, when nearly no migrant boats were able to reach the islands, or where those aboard were pushed back even after landing on Greek shores. Pushbacks of people on the move in the Aegean Sea at the hands of the various authorities active in the area continue, making the already precarious conditions of sea crossings even more dangerous.

BVMN documented one such incident in November (see [10.7](#)), in which a dinghy with 19 people aboard, including 5 children, was apprehended at sea off of Rhodos by first what is described as a military vessel, later a Hellenic Coast Guard vessel. The transit group was taken aboard the Coast Guard vessel, and driven to a location off of the Turkish coast near Söğütköy before being abandoned at sea in two inflatable life rafts. After their life rafts were damaged by rocks along the coast, the transit group was rescued by a Turkish Coast Guard vessel.

After the release last month of a [report](#) by multiple media outlets with proof of Frontex involvement and knowledge of pushbacks occurring in the Aegean, an [extraordinary meeting](#) of the Frontex Management Board was convened on 10th November to discuss potential misconduct. During the meeting, the EU Commission presented questions for Frontex to answer by the end of the month, when another Management Board meeting will be held. A "sub-group" has now been set up by the Board to investigate allegations of abuse and other matters. A [follow up meeting](#) was held on the 27th of November, and another will be held in early/mid December.

Eight organizations, including Amnesty, have [called for](#) new independent monitoring mechanisms on Europe's southern borders to insure fundamental rights and accountability. They argue that the mechanisms proposed in the Commission's new Pact on Asylum and Migration are inadequate given the scope of the issue, and that there is currently a severe lack of accountability on issues of human rights violations.

ITALY

UPTICK IN CHAIN-REMOVALS

While the exact number of persons arriving via the Slovenian-Italian border is unknown, there has been a [sharp rise since April](#) of people entering Italy from the Balkan route. Not only in Trieste, but also around the province of Udine, arrivals have increased compared to last year. In Udine, [around 100 people](#) were identified in one day. This has been met with a huge rise in chain pushbacks, initiated by Italian authorities via readmissions to Slovenia. From January to October 2020, [1321 people have been returned](#) via the informal readmissions agreement, representing a fivefold increase when compared with the statistics from 2019.

In this context, civil society groups highlight that "the returns are being carried out so quickly there is no way Italian authorities are implementing a full legal process at the border to determine if someone is in need of international protection." The pushbacks to Slovenia appear to be indiscriminate. According to [Gianfranco Schiavone](#), from ASGI ([Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull'immigrazione](#)), "[they] have involved everybody, regardless of nationality," he said. "They

pushed back Afghans, Syrians, people from Iraq, people in clear need of protection." As stated by [Anna Brambilla](#), lawyer at ASGI, the [Italian Ministry of the Interior](#):

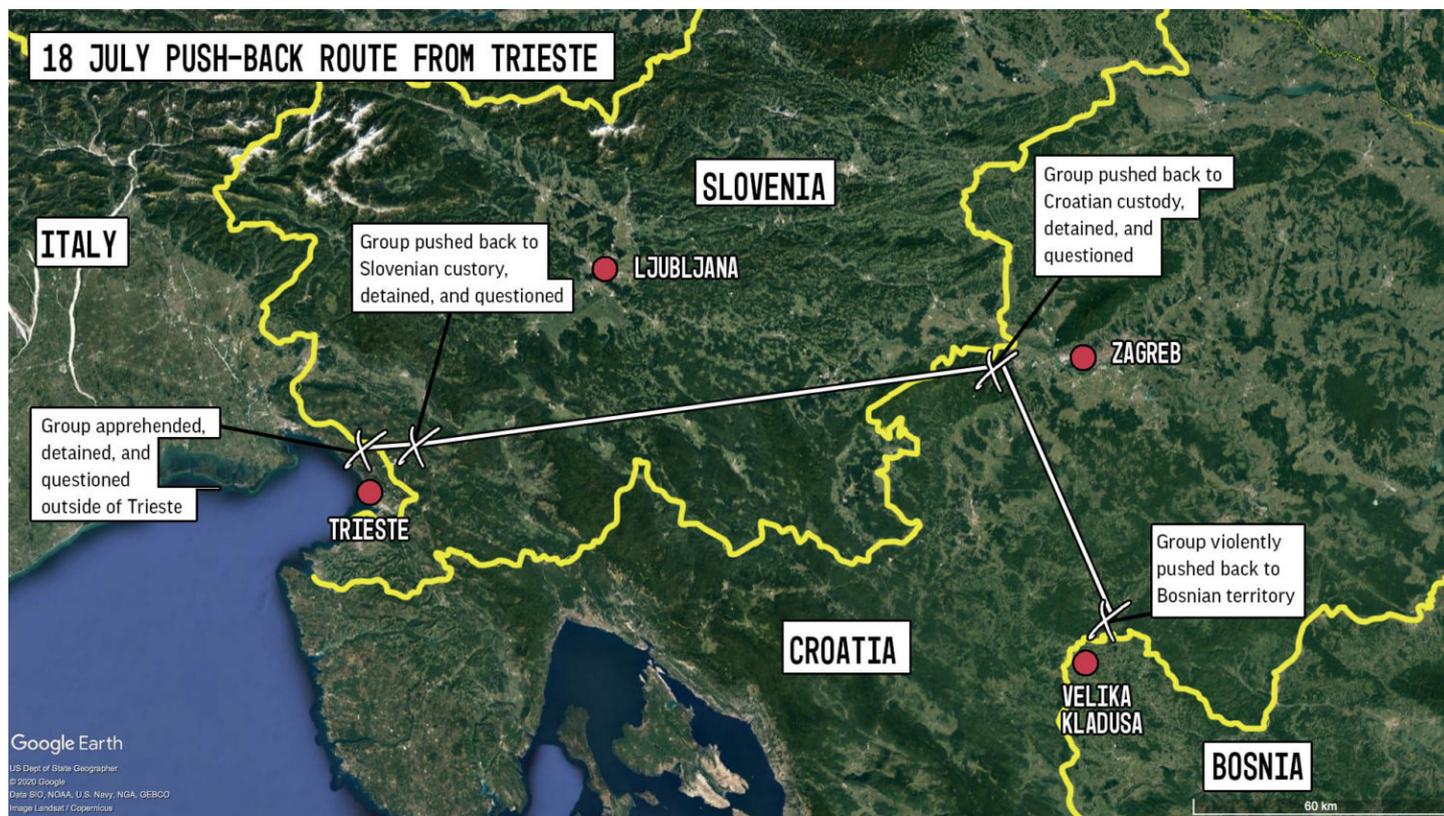
"confirmed that people who have expressed a desire to apply for international protection are readmitted to Slovenia and that readmissions are carried out without delivering any provision relating to the readmission itself."

Crucially, the well publicised nature of chain removals from Slovenia, and onwards through Croatia, mean the authorities are aware of the violent sequence they are entering people into, and thus complicit within this violence.

But instead of dealing with this deficit in adherence to international asylum law, in recent months Italian authorities have only sought to adapt border controls to apprehend more people. Border checks are now [focusing on trucks, cars and smaller border crossings](#),

rather than focusing solely on the military patrols of the forested area. This fits into a strategy of heightened control, pioneered by the Governor of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region [Massimiliano Fedriga](#) who hopes to deploy more detection equipment at the bor-

der. The aim is to choke off any onward transit beyond the first 10km of Italian territory, and therefore apply the fast tracked process of readmission to the maximum number of new arrivals.



A pushback from Italy occurring in July (Source:[BVMN](#))

WINTER IN TRIESTE

Alongside the threat of pushbacks, new arrivals face harsh winter elements, regularly spending nights sleeping out on the street, or in abandoned buildings. Aside from the volunteers working daily to support people arriving in Trieste, there is a distinct lack of adequate winterised accommodation and support, as argued by [Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà \(ICS\)](#).

From 26th October to 30th November, around 336 people were treated and assisted in Piazza della Libertà by the volunteers of Linea d'Ombra and Strada SiCura. Of the people they supported, many shared accounts of pushbacks and violence in previous attempts at crossing the Bosnian-Croatian and Slovenian-Bosnian borders. Questions remain as to where these people will gain sanctuary, with the municipality yet to devise a proper plan to help new arrivals who will endure sub-zero conditions as winter progresses. In contrast to [past years](#), there is

still no emergency dormitory in the city to provide food and beds for the homeless transit community. NGOs and activists have generated political pressure to address the issue, including an [open letter from Strada SiCura](#) calling for bed spaces, public toilets and a health protection program.

Almost 170 people (family members and single men) have been accommodated in the quarantine camps during November. However within the formal system, the effects of Covid-19 have in fact been more prevalent. For instance in detention centres, [many cases of Covid have appeared](#) amongst residents and workers, exacerbated by the cramped conditions and lack of hygienic support. People in the [detention centre in Gradisca](#) shared how, with winter fast arriving, they didn't have windows on their rooms or blankets for their beds, a situation that has caused sickness and discomfort.



People sleeping in abandoned buildings in Trieste (Source: [Ylenia Gostoli/TNH](#))

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

DROP IN ARRIVALS TO BIH

According to [Bosnian authorities](#), the number of new arrivals to the country has almost halved since 2019 from roughly 25,000 to 13,683. Humanitarian organizations said 6,377 people-on-the-move are currently registered in centers around Sarajevo and the Una-Sana Canton. The majority of people-on-the-move in the country are recorded to have come from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Morocco.

The causes behind these decreasing numbers are somewhat speculative, but several developments are likely to have contributed. First and foremost, the COVID pandemic has decreased the mobility of people-on-the-move, forcing them into de facto detention in camps across the region and making it ever more difficult to access transportation, cross borders, and find shelter (see [BVMN's report](#) on the impact of COVID on people-on-the-move).

Second, the safety situation for people-on-the-move in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and especially in the Una-Sana Canton, has deteriorated rapidly. Closure of multiple camps, such as Bira in Bihac, have forced people-on-the-move onto the streets. Provision of humanitarian assistance outside the camps, in-

cluding food and NFI distribution, [has been criminalised](#). Anti-migrant demonstrations and violent incidents between locals and people-on-the-move have also been a concern. Finally, and perhaps most influentially, the consistently violent treatment by Croatian officials, as well as border agencies further along the route in Slovenia and Italy, may slowly lead to a shift of the transit towards Serbia and Romania.

The numbers put forth by Bosnian authorities may themselves be imperfect due to some of the trends observed above: it is likely that the proportion of people-on-the-move who are registered has decreased due to the closure of camps and the increasing risk faced when interacting with law enforcement.

Still, the shift away from Bosnia may continue into the future. On 4th November, [it was reported](#) that Bosnia-Herzegovina had signed a readmission agreement with Pakistan, allowing Bosnia to deport Pakistani people-on-the-move if they are found to reside illegally in the country. This development sits in line with a general trend in Europe which maximises mechanisms for forced removal rather than providing support for those in need.

PROTESTS AFTER PERSON KILLED IN SARAJEVO



23rd November protest in Blažuj (Source: [Klix](#))

On 17th November, the murder of a Bosnian citizen allegedly committed by a Moroccan national in a neighborhood of Ilidža, shook the local community, causing a shift in some attitudes towards the transit community and their movement within BiH. Ilidža, a municipality on the outskirts of Sarajevo, is the juncture point for public transportation between two camps (Blažuj and Ušivak), and is frequented by people-on-the-move travelling to Sarajevo city centre.

Between 18th and 21st November, three peaceful protests were held in the centre of Ilidža, Hadžići, and Otes. The first of these in Ilidža drew around 100 locals and was characterised by an atmosphere of mourning for the victim. Amongst them were the family of the deceased and the newly elected mayor. The murder as well as the local response were widely commented on by local and national media, with many voicing demands for a prompt reaction from the authorities and condemning them for not implementing sufficient safety measures.

As a result, a Security Council conference was held on 23rd November – the same day as a fourth protest in Blažuj – and decided, among other points, to strictly implement restriction of movement on camp residents, meaning they were no longer allowed to leave or enter the facilities after 16:00 in the afternoon. The rule was first announced on 19th November in both Blažuj and Ušivak.

Incidents of police apprehending individuals on the streets and transporting or directing them to camps were reported by local volunteers and people-on-the-move. Local support groups also mentioned individual cases of people-on-the-move being evicted from their rented accommodations in the days following the murder.

Bosnian police launched an investigation that led to the arrests of three suspects. One of them has since been acquitted and two others were captured in Serbia and Kosovo. Nearly three weeks since the crime was committed, the situation remains tense, with the long-term consequences for people-on-the-move in Sarajevo difficult to predict.

SERBIA

MINISTRY LEAD EVICTION OF "JUNGLE" CAMP

On 13th November, the Serbian Ministry of the Interior, along with police officers, evicted an informal camp in the border town of Sid, as reported by [N1 news](#). Some 40 individuals lived in tents in this part of the forest prior to the eviction. The eviction was carried out under the guise of being a Corona virus protection measure, for both persons in transit and locals. The police came while those staying at the site were still asleep in their tents. Pictures from the incident show that they were gathered outside of their tents and had to huddle in the cold while armed officers arranged their transfer.

Individuals taken from the tent site were then alleged to have been transported to Southern Serbia. Similar clearances have been happening across Northern Serbia, as documented in a recent article by [Are Your Syrians](#). This particular eviction served as something of a PR stunt, with Minister of Internal Affairs Vuljin, Director of Police Vladimir Rebić and Sid Mayor Zoran Semenović in attendance. Their

role at the site appears to have been primarily to show an increasingly frustrated populace that the state is "controlling the situation." However, even the Minister of Internal Affairs himself [reminded](#) the people of Serbia that even though over a million people had transited through Serbia in the past few years, there had been few incidents and no assaults against Serbians.

On the same day, a hostel next to the family camp in Sid was also cleared with additional individuals being taken away on busses. However, some residents report welcoming this move as those evicted were alleged to have been stealing from families in the camp. In spite of their differing reception among the transit community, these evictions match a worrying rise in squat dispersals that have also occurred in the West Bačka, North Bačka and North Banat municipalities. A more in depth analysis about evictions throughout Serbia will be provided in the BVMN internal violence report that will be published in the beginning of next year.



Police evict tents near Šid (Source: [NNK](#))

GLOSSARY OF REPORTS, NOVEMBER 2020

In November BVMN published 29 reports, impacting 951 people-on-the-move. The people in these cases included men, women, trans persons, children with guardians and unaccompanied children. They also represent a wide demographic, including people from Iran, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, DR Congo and Somalia.

- 7 pushbacks to Serbia (4 from Hungary, 2 from Croatia, 1 chain from Slovenia)
- 8 pushbacks to Bosnia-Herzegovina (1 chain from Slovenia, 7 from Croatia)
- 1 pushback to Bulgaria from Romania
- 5 pushbacks to Greece (4 from Italy, 1 from North Macedonia)
- 8 to Turkey (1 chain from Bulgaria, 7 from Greece).

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
ROMANIA TO BULGARIA				
1.1	13 th August	21 st November	1	Iran
HUNGARY TO SERBIA				
2.1	31 st October	2 nd November	12	Syria, Yemen
2.2	31 st October	2 nd November	5	Syria
2.3	16 th November	19 th November	2	Afghanistan
2.4	17 th November	20 th November	8	Afghanistan
SLOVENIA TO SERBIA				
3.1	28 th September	30 th October	5	Afghanistan, Iran
CROATIA TO SERBIA				
4.1	8 th November	12 th November	15	Afghanistan
4.2	11 th November	12 th November	4	Afghanistan
SLOVENIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
5.1	14 th November	15 th November	12	Afghanistan, Pakistan
CROATIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
6.1	23 rd October	10 th November	6	Algeria
6.2	4 th November	17 th November	2	Morocco
6.3	9 th November	11 th November	7	Palestine, Iran, Syria
6.4	13 th November	15 th November	86	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladeshi, India
6.5	14 th November	15 th November	110	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladeshi
6.6	18 th November	20 th November	5	Pakistan
6.7	25 th November	20 th November	7	Afghanistan, Algeria
SERBIA TO NORTH MACEDONIA				
7.1	22 nd October	30 th October	5	Afghanistan
FIND ALL REPORTS ON THE DATABASE HERE .				

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
ITALY TO GREECE				
8.1	3 rd October	13 th November	1	Afghanistan
8.2	7 th November	9 th November	1	Afghanistan
8.3	8 th November	9 th November	2	Afghanistan
8.4	20 th November	21 st November	1	Afghanistan
BULGARIA TO TURKEY				
9.1	30 th October	8 th November	200	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Algeria, Morocco, DR Congo
GREECE TO TURKEY				
10.1	10 th September	2 nd November	30	Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Somalia
10.2	3 rd November	10 th November	65	Afghanistan, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt
10.3	1 st November	17 th November	40	Syria, Morocco, Algeria, DR Congo
10.4	8 th November	13 th November	150	Afghanistan, Pakistan
10.5	12 th November	20 th November	60	Iran, Iraq
10.6	14 th November	24 th November	90	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
10.7	30 th October	24 th November	19	Palestine, Syria
FIND ALL REPORTS ON THE DATABASE HERE.				

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

B O R D E R V I O L E N C E M O N I T O R I N G N E T W O R K

BVMN is a volunteer led endeavor, acting as an alliance of organisations in the Western Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of participant organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation. We finance the work through charitable grants and foundations, and are not in receipt of funds from any political organisation. The expenditures cover transport subsidies for volunteers in the field and four paid positions.

To follow more from the Border Violence Monitoring Network, check out our [website](#) for the entire testimony archive, previous monthly reports and regular news pieces. To follow us on social media, find us on Twitter handle [@Border Violence](#) and on [Facebook](#). For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu. For press and media requests please contact: press@borderviolence.eu



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