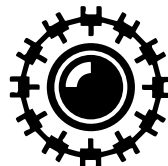


MONTHLY REPORT | JUNE 2024

Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



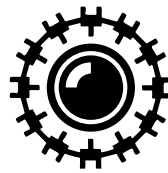
Edited by BVMN ©Human Rights Observers



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

MONTHLY REPORT | JUNE 2024

Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



Push-Back Alarm Austria
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Executive summary

In June, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) shared 8 testimonies of pushbacks impacting at least 137 people on the move across the Balkans and Greece. This report gathers updates from the month of June and brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the Balkans, Turkey, Cyprus and France to look at the way European Union states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders. Updates come from the different Member Organisations of BVMN, as well as Human Rights Observers (France).

This month, BVMN teams shared multiple testimonies of pushbacks by the authorities of Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece, describing systematic and extremely violent practices, such as the use of electric weapons, kicking and punching, often resulting in lasting injuries. Several testimonies were also collected regarding violence in detention in Bulgaria and Greece, where access of detainees to health care is being increasingly restricted, and lack of legal counsel, physical violence and overall inadequate conditions have repeatedly been reported. Despite the continuous and well-documented human rights violations perpetrated against people on the move in Bulgaria, this month we witnessed the strengthening of the collaboration between the country and Frontex. As the Agency promises to deploy even more personnel at the borders of the country, Bulgaria poses itself as the potential facilitator of future relations between Frontex and Turkey. The country has also declared it is now fully in line and connected with EU systems regarding biometric data collection, which poses enhanced dangers to people on the move.

In an attempt to counter the climate of impunity, we share the news of the new fines imposed by the European Court of Justice on Hungary, due to the continuous violation of the right to asylum since the (illegal) legalisation of pushbacks in the country in 2016. However, the sanction has been met with no changes in the daily and systematic forced returns of people on the move to Serbia, where unaccompanied minors are now being housed in the Bujanovac Temporary Reception Centre (RTC), also against the law. The centre, near the country's border with North Macedonia, is unequipped to support this vulnerable population, but has started receiving them following the trend of transfers of people on the move towards the south of the country, witnessed since the beginning of the year.

Once again this month, we report on the concerning conditions in the Closed-Controlled Access Centres on Samos and Lesbos, where the lack of adaptations in shelter and water and food provision worsens the situation as the extremely hot summer progresses. In June, we focus on the withdrawal from the centres of



Executive summary

the state body providing healthcare, which leaves a very worrying vacuum of an absolutely essential service. Meanwhile, in Northern Greece, we have witnessed a growing number of arrests and policing of people on the move, which increases the feeling of insecurity and exposes people to a higher likelihood of suffering violence and arbitrary detention.

The policing and harassment of people on the move in the public space has also become increasingly systematic in many parts of Turkey in the past few months, specially through the implementation of the so-called Mobile Migration Points. In June, we also report on a massive surge of violence by non-state actors. This month, a series of pogroms and violent protests have targeted houses and businesses of Syrians in several Turkish cities, leading to the murder of at least one minor, and the hospitalisation of others after an attack in the place where they worked.

Lastly, we include updates from Northern France, where amidst continued violent evictions, grassroots organisations have also registered several incidents of violence against people on the move by non-state actors, including the contamination of drinkable water tanks.



General

REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN [1] is a collaborative project between multiple grassroots organisations and NGOs working along the Western Balkan Route and Greece, documenting violations at borders directed towards people-on-the-move. The partners have a common website database, used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological process for these interviews leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor pushbacks at multiple borders. When individuals return with significant injuries or stories of abuse, one of our violence reporting volunteers will sit down with them to collect their testimony. Although the testimony collection itself is typically with a group no larger than five persons, the pushback groups which they represent can exceed 50 persons. We have a standardised framework for our interview structure which blends the collection of hard data (dates, geo-locations, officer descriptions, photos of injuries/medical reports, etc.) with open narratives of the abuse.

TERMINOLOGY

The term pushback is a key component of the situation that unfolded along the EU borders (Hungary and Croatia) with Serbia in 2016, after the closure of the Balkan Route. Pushback describes the informal expulsion (without due process) of an individual or group to another country. This lies in contrast to the term “deportation”, which is conducted in a legal framework. Pushbacks have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

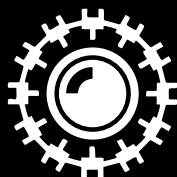
ABBREVIATIONS

BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina
HRV - Croatia
SRB - Serbia
SLO - Slovenia
ROM - Romania
HUN - Hungary

AUT - Austria
MNK - North Macedonia
GRC - Greece
BGR - Bulgaria
TUR - Turkey
EU - European Union

[1] BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece and Turkey including Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, PIC, InfoKolpa, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarmphone Austria and I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid and Mission Wings

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



BVMN Report on the Special Military Operation

This month we published a report on the Special Military Operation carried out in Northern Serbia from the end of October 2023 to January 2024, together with Medical Volunteers International. As outlined in previous [monthly reports](#), the actions involved the eviction and destruction of all informal living settlements where people on the move used to stay in the region, as well as the closure of all government-run Reception Centres in that part of the country. The report presents a timeline of the police operation, and analyses its impact on people on the move in Serbia, including the increased isolation and restrictions imposed on freedom of movement, overcrowding conditions in some of the facilities and lack of access to asylum procedures. You can read the report [here](#).

EU court issues penalty payments to Hungary for pushbacks to Serbia

On June 13th, the European Court of Justice [ordered](#) that Hungary is to pay a lump sum penalty of 200 million euros for a continued breach of European Law in regard to their pushback practices to Serbia. The significant penalty comes after a failure to implement a previous judgement of the Court back in 2020. Additionally, the June 13th ruling comes with daily penalty payments of 1 million euros whilst pushbacks still occur and the national legislation that allows them is not amended.

The practice of “legalised” pushbacks from Hungary to Serbia was introduced in 2016 whereby anyone found staying ‘irregularly’ in Hungary can be arbitrarily pushed back into Serbia. As BVMN has been documenting since 2017, pushbacks at this border are systematic and often very [violent](#). Many testimonies describe the use of beatings, kicking, use of pepper spray, and other types of [severe physical violence](#), as well as psychological violence and [humiliation](#).

Despite the ruling on June 13th, Hungarian border authorities have continued to [publish](#) their pushbacks online, accounting for 81 pushbacks since the ruling was adopted. Further, Serbian NGO Asylum Protection Centre [claimed](#) that 30 people were pushed back from Hungary into Serbia, over the weekend of June 15th.

It is important to continue monitoring Hungary’s and the EU’s response to this latest Court ruling, which remains surrounded by the climate of impunity that we have now been witnessing for almost a decade.



Bujanovac RTC houses unaccompanied minors against legislation

This month, the Asylum Protection Centre reported that the Bujanovac Temporary Reception Centre (RTC), located near the North Macedonian border, is now housing unaccompanied minors. While the Bujanovac camp is designed for the reception of families, it is not legally equipped with the appropriate infrastructure to house vulnerable populations of unaccompanied minors. This practice is currently against the existing legislation of the country.

This violation comes on the same month that the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees & Migration (SCRM) took part in a training workshop with the European Asylum Agency (EUAA) to strengthen their capacity for the protection of children and vulnerable people within Serbian state reception facilities. The workshop was titled "*Persons with special needs and unaccompanied minors in reception and asylum procedures*".

Further, the Asylum Protection Centre stated that those who are staying in the Bujanovac facility are prevented from using public transport. Other people on the move have already experienced severe restrictions to their freedom of movement in other reception facilities throughout Serbia – as highlighted in the April report –, often as a consequence of racial profiling. Moreover, residents of the Bujanovac camp also fear being pushed back to North Macedonia if they leave the facility.



Analysis of violence testimonies collected in Sarajevo

During the month of June, the Collective Aid team in Sarajevo recorded eight testimonies of violence against people on the move. Six of these testimonies reported on illegal pushbacks; one, on violence within state facilities, while another one involved both types of violations.

All of these testimonies described multiple forms of violence and degrading treatment, including beating, kicking, electric shocks, dog attacks, forced undressing, and theft or destruction of personal belongings.

The dates of the incidents reported range from January to June 2024. One of the respondents is female, aged 35, with two children, aged 3 and 10. The other respondents are all male between the ages of 18 and 55. Most of the respondents are from Afghanistan, two are from Syria, and one is from Iraq.

The testimony that involved both an illegal pushback and violence within state facilities was given by a 55-year-old man from Iraq who was violently pushed back from Hungary to Serbia in January 2024. He was then reportedly detained in a Serbian prison for two months. He stated that, whilst in prison, he was repeatedly beaten and allowed outdoors for only 5 minutes a week. Similar physical violence was described in the second testimony related to violations within state facilities, this one referring to the conditions in a detention centre in Bulgaria.

The remaining six pushback testimonies involved incidents of illegal and violent expulsions from Bulgaria to Turkey and from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The four incidents that took place on the Bulgaria-Turkey border were all reported by men from Afghanistan, and involved groups of people on the move including minors who were subjected to the same level of violence as the adult men.

"The officers forced teenagers to strip naked by threatening to beat them more if they did not comply."

35-year-old respondent, Bulgaria.



"They released their dog on us and hit us with 'electric sticks'"

21-year-old respondent, Bulgaria.

"The officers kicked us, punched us and hit us with 'sticks'."

18-year-old respondent, Bulgaria.

"The officers fired their guns towards the ground in front of us to scare us."

26-year-old respondent, Bulgaria.

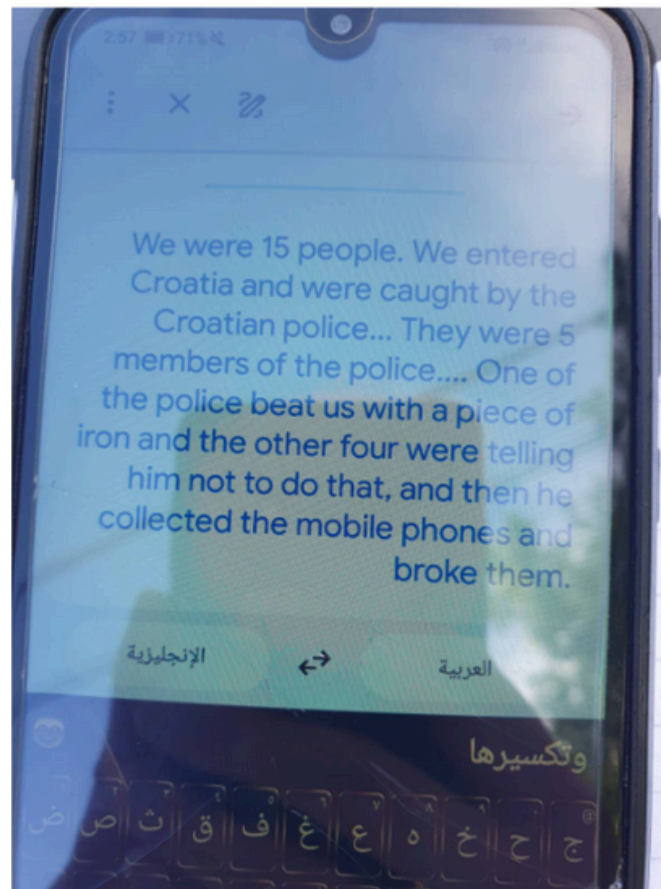
Due to the ongoing police operations in Serbia and Bulgaria, monitoring and testimony collection in these countries continues to be difficult, which is why some of the pushbacks reported at the borders of these countries have been recorded by the team in Sarajevo.

One of the two testimonies describing pushbacks on the Croatia-Bosnia border was reported by a woman from Afghanistan who was travelling with her two sons. They were detained in Croatia for three nights before being pushed back and handed over to individuals whom the respondent identified as Bosnian police officers. The respondent reported that the Bosnian police then handed them over to IOM and they were driven to Sarajevo.



"My son was scared and crying. I tried to console him by telling him it was all just a game."

The second pushback testimony from the Croatia-Bosnia border was reported by a man from Syria who was travelling with his mother and brother. He reported being beaten by Croatian police officers before being pushed back to Bosnia. The respondent received medical attention in Bosnia for the injuries he had sustained during the pushback and showed our team the back brace he was wearing under his T-shirt.



"One of the police beat us with a piece of iron...and then he collected the mobile phones and broke them."

These testimonies point to a surge of violent practices inside and outside of state facilities, aimed at preventing and deterring people on the move from entering EU territory.



Biometric data gathering systems and border technology

Whilst commenting on Bulgaria's readiness for full Schengen accession, in early June, chief police commissioner Anton Zlatonov claimed that the biometric data gathering systems used at Bulgaria's land borders were now unified with the rest of Europe, thus contributing and accessing the biometric data pool. The data in question seem to be fingerprints and portraits. He further stated that: *"Our border is developed, we are equipped with the appropriate means of video surveillance and sensor lines"*.

This statement comes in the wake of a 'cooperation framework on border and migration management' agreed in March 2024 in line with Bulgaria's, and Romania's, partial admission to the Schengen block. Within this agreement, Bulgaria receives its share of 85 million euros specifically under the Border Management & Visa Instrument (BMVI) 2021-2027, designed to 'enhance national capabilities at the EU external borders'. The BMVI enables further applications for additional funding to extend or upgrade technology along the state's borders. This includes purchasing, developing, or upgrading equipment such as movement detection and thermo-vision cameras and vehicles with thermo-vision capabilities.

Bulgaria, EU, Frontex Relations & Elections Update

On June 13th, Bulgaria's police chief commissioner met with Frontex's Deputy Executive Director for Returns & Operations in Brussels. Two of the main takeaways from their meeting include Frontex's commitment to continue providing 165 officers to the Bulgarian-Turkish border monthly, as well as the Agency's promise to provide advanced support to the Bulgarian-Serbian border in order to prevent secondary movements of people. Moreover, in this meeting, Anton Zlatonov stated that Bulgaria is prepared to facilitate the strengthening of cooperation between Frontex and the Republic of Turkey.

On the same day, Bulgaria's Interior Minister credited recent EU funds for the reduction in entries to the region with the statement: *"Thanks to the European funding, granted by the EC, we have managed to significantly strengthen the technical and human capacity for border protection, the number of Frontex officers on the Bulgarian-Turkish border has tripled, and the deployment of officers on the Bulgarian-Serbian border has increased."* This comes in the same month that the Bulgarian border police announced their statistics of reduced border crossing attempts. According to this data, they recorded 3.5 times fewer attempts to cross the state's borders in 2024



compared to 2023, and 15,000 attempts were “prevented” between January and May 2024 - compared to 55,000 in the same period of 2023. It is safe to assume that a significant proportion of the alleged 15,000 prevented border crossings can be accounted as pushbacks, as the EU de-facto border deterrence measure around the borders of Bulgaria. Which has repeatedly been reported by BVMN - including 10 published testimonies of pushbacks in the last 12 months between the EU’s external borders Bulgaria shares with Turkey and Serbia.

Lastly, this month, president of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen took a trip to Bulgaria to endorse the GERB party ahead of the June 2024 snap election - in which the GERB party attained a high number of seats, but no majority, in what was the lowest voter turnout since the end of Communist rule in 1989. The snap elections saw a strengthening of pro-Russia and far-right parties in Bulgaria, such as the Revival party. Some of these parties were responsible for the spread of mis-information about people on the move in March, which resulted in attacks and anti-migrant protests in Sofia. During her visit, when discussing the topic of migration, Von der Leyen stated: “*We Europeans will decide who comes to the European Union and under what conditions, not traffickers and smugglers*” - a statement which inherently neglects international and European rights to asylum. Something we know is regularly disrespected at Europe's external and internal borders.

UK National Crime Agency awards Bulgarian Custom Officers

On June 21st, Bulgarian customs officers were given an award by the UK’s National Crime Agency (NCA). This award comes as customs officers seized many small inflatable boats allegedly destined for smuggling networks in northern France to be used to cross the English Channel. The relationship between UK and Bulgarian police units is marked by a statement to enhance cooperation since November 2023.



Continued reports of violence inside Greek detention centres

This month, BVMN's team in Thessaloniki collected three testimonies concerning violence, arbitrary detention and inhumane conditions inflicted by state actors in the Amygdaleza, Paranesti, and Corinth Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDCs), and in a police station on Crete. Amongst the reported issues were the overall lack of acceptable living conditions, the absence of access to legal support and the inadequate medical care in detention sites. In particular, one of the respondents reported repeatedly asking to apply for asylum during their eighth-month long detention period. However, this request was reportedly ignored by authorities working in the detention centre of Amygdaleza. Further, another respondent reported insufficient food quantities, and witnessed authorities inflicting violence on detainees and hunger strikes in protest against poor living conditions and lack of access to healthcare.

During June, BVMN partner organisation Mobile Info Team (MIT) received an increased number of complaints from people in detention regarding deteriorating conditions in Corinth and Amygdaleza PRDCs. According to the reported statements, the detainees' access to healthcare is being increasingly restricted. More specifically, police officers reportedly inflicted physical violence on some detainees and then sent them back to their cell, following and despite the detainees' previous request to see a doctor. Last month, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and the European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) jointly published their 2023 yearly AIDA report, which confirmed the trend reported by the respondents.

The AIDA report stresses that the long-lasting absence of hygiene in detention facilities is compounded by a lack of medical staffing resources. Reportedly, detainees do not have access to adequate healthcare services, nor do they undergo medical screening upon arrival in Greek detention sites. According to the AIDA report, at the end of 2023 there were six doctors present across all of Greece's seven PRDCs, for a total detained population of at least 2,325 individuals. Doctors were also disproportionately distributed, with the Paranesti and Kos PRDCs lacking on-site medical staff and none present in police stations.

Pushbacks continue at Greece-North Macedonia border

According to the North Macedonian NGO Legis, 193 people arrived at the Vinojug transit reception centre in Gevgelija during May. Out of the total 193 people, only 35 were allowed to use the services offered by Legis and other NGOs, and 158 were



reportedly pushed back to Greece within a few hours upon arrival in the transit centre. By the end of the month, only 6 male asylum seekers remained at the centre, 4 from Syria, 1 from Iran and 1 from Afghanistan. The rest of the people had reportedly left the centre as a result of pushbacks or had allegedly made a request to be returned to Greece. BVMN has documented pushbacks from North Macedonia to Greece in recent months including during [December 2023](#).

Arrests of undocumented people in Thessaloniki

Community members from one of BVMN's anonymous member organisations have reported experiencing increased policing and frequent arrests this month. One group of approximately six people reported that plain-clothed officers raided the building in which they were sleeping early one morning, checking all individuals for documents and arresting four people. One person was detained for a few hours while another one was held overnight at a police station in the city. Two men from Morocco are reportedly still being held due to lacking official documentation for their stay in Greece.

At least four other community members were detained at the [Metagogon Transfer Facility](#), a holding facility where people should only be detained for a short period of time prior to transfer to another detention facility. However, the facility is often used to detain people for prolonged periods of time including for months on end. It is also known for overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and lack of access to the outdoors, as attested by the [European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CPT\)](#), following a visit in 2019. These conditions have also been described in [testimonies taken by BVMN](#).

Worrying conditions on Samos: Scorching heat, deprivation of mobile phones and disappearance of healthcare for people on the move

In June, I Have Rights continued to receive concerning reports of conditions in the Samos Closed Control Access Center (CCAC). Despite the soaring heat, people are only provided with one 1.5L bottle of water per day. Food distribution starts from 9am and lasts until around 11:30-12pm. CCAC residents report they are required to queue in the sun for at least two hours to receive food, consisting of two portions only for the whole day. People report that the food provided is often neither sufficient nor edible.

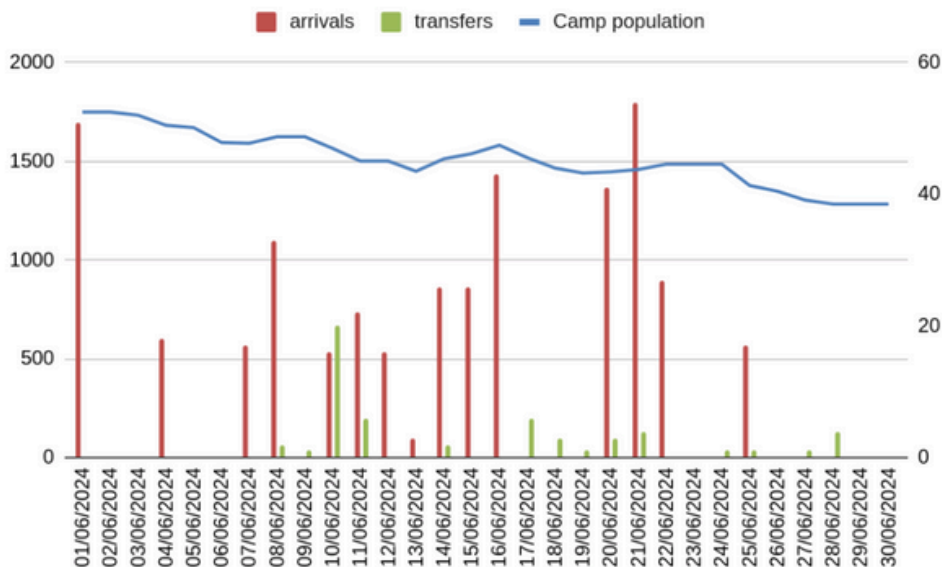


Last month, I Have Rights and other Samos based NGOs monitored issues regarding the ability of people in the CCAC to travel to Vathy, the capital of Samos, where most of the support services on the island are located. CCAC residents reported overcrowded buses and being forced to either stay in the CCAC or walk for over an hour in sweltering heat because of insufficient space on the bus to town.

As part of I Have Rights’ ongoing research into technology in the Samos CCAC, 38 interviews have been carried out so far with current and former residents of the facility between March and June 2024. Of these interviews, 100% mentioned they were required to hand their phone over to the authorities upon arrival on the island, 82% reported that the police took their phone, and 63% of the interviewees reported they had to provide their passcode or unlock pattern, often by writing it on a post-it note attached to it. People report that their phones are then returned to them on average one to four days later. Importantly, 37% of the interviewees noticed changes to their phones, such as new Wi-Fi connection or changes in battery percentage, suggesting someone had gone through their phone.

Lastly, in the last week of June, EODY, the National Organisation for Public Health and the competent body for the provision of medical and psychosocial services in the Samos CCAC, ceased operating in the facility. No new state run health program was implemented in the CCAC to replace it. Local media reported that the new HIPPOCRATES program, which is intended to provide state medical support in the CCAC, will not be operative before 15.09.2024, potentially leaving a three month gap in the provision of medical services.

Worrying conditions on Lesbos: unequipped for the summer weather and disappearance of healthcare for people on the move





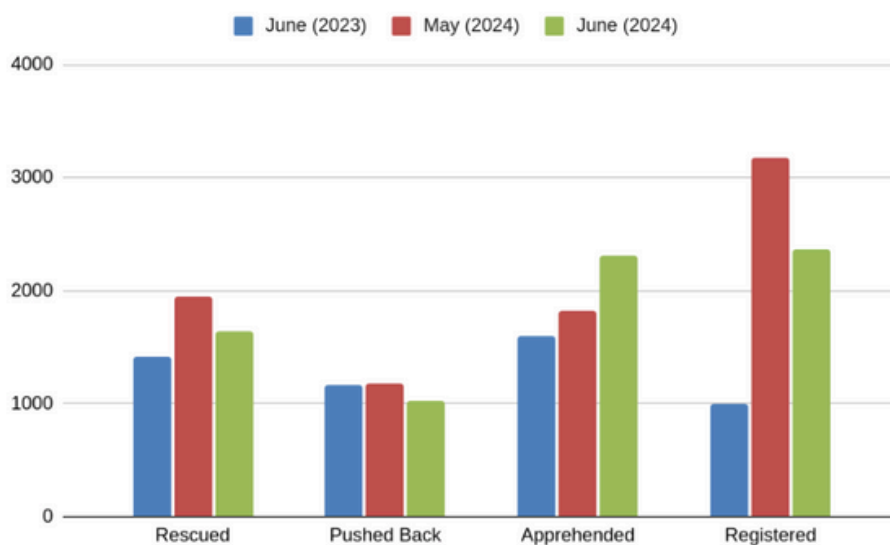
During the month of June, 410 people were registered in Lesvos and 55 were transferred outside of the island. On June 30th, there were 1282 people in the CCAC. Although the transfers during this month have been very low, the population in the camp has decreased significantly, likely due to people leaving for the mainland using their own means.

Since March, BVMN has been able to observe a big decrease in the number of people arriving in Lesvos, while registrations in other smaller islands in the Aegean have increased. The amount of illegal pushbacks by the authorities seems to not have changed, but there are currently many more people arriving in Crete, a much longer and dangerous route that has become the most transited one over the last few months.

During the month of June, the temperatures have been exceptionally high and, as reported in the [last BVMN monthly report](#), the space in the CCAC has not been equipped with adequate shelter to be out of the heat. Even though the decrease in the camp population has allowed for many of the remaining residents to be moved from the rubhalls into better shelter structures, the situation in the facility is still unbearable. Moreover, at the moment, 70% of the population in the camp have acquired refugee status and are waiting for their travelling documents. After receiving their positive decision, these people don't have access to food or water in the camp.

As mentioned in the previous section on Samos, another worrying fact also on Lesvos is the withdrawal of the EODY from the facility, which leaves a vacuum on medical access, including first healthcare inside the camp, medical registration, a system to book appointments at the hospital, etc.

Aegean Sea: numbers of rescues, arrivals and pushbacks in June 2024





According to the statistics released by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG), in June 2024 the TCG rescued 1634 people, 1019 of whom were victims of pushbacks by the Greek Coast Guard. According to the same statistics, 40 life rafts were used, 2306 people were apprehended before they left Turkish land and 2379 people were registered on the Greek islands.

Statistics for June report slightly smaller numbers than the previous month, but the data indicates similar figures compared to the same month last year. In June 2023, the TCG rescued 1417 people, with 1161 of them being victims of pushbacks, and 1596 people were stopped before crossing. However, the number of people registered on the Greek islands has more than doubled compared to June 2023, when 991 people were registered.

We are not aware of any incident involving casualties at sea in June 2024.



37 people pushed back and trapped in Cyprus Buffer Zone since May

37 people on the move from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan and Cameroon, including men, women, and children (some of whom are unaccompanied), have been trapped in the UN-controlled 'buffer zone' or Green Line that de facto divides Cyprus, for weeks, some since mid-May. 43 people that attempted to cross from the North through the demilitarised zone into the area under effective control by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) in order to apply for asylum were apprehended by the RoC authorities and refused access to the asylum procedures. This violates the right for asylum as stipulated in the Geneva Refugee Convention. Since then, six people have gone missing, and the rest have been trapped in two areas of the buffer zone - 27 in Aglantzia, Nicosia and 10 in Akaki, west of Nicosia. Meanwhile, the police have been patrolling the area day and night. According to [information from the NGO KISA](#), some were forcibly returned even after they had entered the RoC-controlled areas, having been detected on their way to the First Reception Center Pournara. Some others were returned after they had made an asylum claim in Pournara. Prior to the forced return, some of them were reportedly [arrested, interrogated and subjected to humiliating treatment](#) by the Cyprus Police.



Tents of the people trapped in the Buffer Zone in Aglantzia, Nicosia ©BVMN



While in the 'buffer zone', people have been staying in tents provided by aid workers and UN peacekeeping forces for nearly 2.5 months and are in serious danger, facing temperatures of up to 45 degrees Celsius and lack of access to water and hygiene items. Emilia Strovolidou, UNHCR's public information officer, said that the tents are unbearably hot and constantly filled with dust, while people have to contend with the threat of other environmental risks such as snakes. These pushbacks follow a series of measures infringing on the rights of people on the move taken by the government of the Republic of Cyprus in recent months. Another one of these measures has been the suspension of all asylum applications by Syrians, with than 14,000 Syrians already waiting for a response to their asylum applications for more than a year.

Since 2019, the buffer zone has been a key crossing point for many people in transit as migration movements shifted to Cyprus, especially following the increasing securitization of European borders and the dangers - including pushbacks - of crossing by sea. As the initiative Far Right Watch stated "since the [RoC] government itself, with its repeated pushbacks at sea, cut off that route, it was to be expected that the other route would be used." Since 2020, at least five pushbacks have been previously reported at the buffer zone, which led to people being trapped in that area for periods between three days and 9 months. However, none of the previous incidents involved as many people or children.

A European Commission spokesperson explained that they are closely monitoring the situation, underlining that EU law obliges Member States to provide access to the asylum procedure to persons *on their territory, at their borders or in transit zones*. Similarly, the UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus) and UNHCR have called on the RoC government to give the people access to asylum procedures. The Cypriot government, however, has dismissed accusations of violations, referring to the Green Line Regulation as a justification for the measures; it states that this is to prevent the buffer zone from becoming a "transit route for migrants" and that Cyprus will not accept migrants on its territory.

Far Right Watch has denounced the pushback as unprecedentedly inhumane treatment by the Cyprus government. KISA announced that their lawyer has taken legal action on behalf of the people on the move to demand their access to the asylum system. Meanwhile, the physical and mental health of the 37 people continues to deteriorate.

**Since the initial writing of the report in mid-July, the number of people pushed back and stuck in the Buffer Zone has risen to 53. Eight out of the 53 people have disappeared.*



Apprehension statistics from the Presidency of Migration Management

According to the [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, there were 12,362 “irregular migrants” apprehended in June, while the total number of apprehensions is 105,889 as of the end of June 2024. The top three nationalities affected by such incidents were Afghanistan, Syria and Turkmenistan. In addition, a total of 5,961 so-called “organizers” were apprehended in the first six months of 2024. Extra publicity was given this month to the government’s “Operation Kalkan 25” (Shield 25), which allegedly resulted in the apprehension of 2,500 “irregular migrants” and 49 smugglers. This [article](#) by the pro-government Daily Sabah covering the operation reproduces many traits of the current state discourse on migration, which focuses on showing the public that there is a swift crackdown on “irregular migration.”

Gaziantep: 41 CSOs’ statement demanding the forced return of Syrians to Syria

Gaziantep in southeastern Turkey bordering Syria, with [429,183 temporary protection status holders](#), is the city with the highest Syrian population after Istanbul. The city was hugely affected by the February 2023 earthquake, which impacted [roughly 1.8 million Syrians](#) registered in Turkey alone, not to mention its effect in Syria. Since then, refugee unemployment rates in the city have [soared](#) from 10% to 40%. In mid-June, a [joint statement](#) was released by 41 local organisations addressing the presence of Syrians in the city and claiming a failure of integration, advantages in the labour market, business and social services. They also demanded that “negotiations to ensure the return of refugees should be started immediately.”

The organisations that signed the statement include chambers of commerce, business and professional organisations, as well as those active in education, culture and sports. The statement, issued following meetings under the theme “Changing Demographic Structure in Our City and Its Effects,” acknowledged that Syrians sought refuge in Turkey under “temporary protection” to address their immediate needs. However, it was suggested that individuals holding temporary protection status should now consider returning to Syria with a claim that the war in Syria is over.

While the statement criticises the deficiencies in the government’s integration practices and how the current situation harms the local population and the city’s culture, it also targets Syrians as the direct cause of many economic, social, and demographic problems. Typically in the current migration discourse based on



scapegoating and labour competition through a nationalist lens, Syrians working illegally or for low wages are criticized without addressing employer exploitation, citing their “negative” impacts on regional employment. Syrians’ access to education and health services are also targeted as a significant economic burden on the state without mentioning the funds Turkey receives from the EU and elsewhere, imperialist and opportunist as these economic policies may be.

The statement has been criticised from many sides, one of which is the textile union “BIRTEK-SEN”. The union issued a response, providing counter-arguments to the statement signed by the 41 organizations, regarding the living and working conditions of Syrians in Turkey, and especially addressing the exploitation of migrant labour. Gaziantep also ranks second in textile exports after Istanbul, and many labour struggles there and in the vicinity have involved the joint struggle of Turkish and migrant workers.



Mobile migration unit vehicles parked in an area densely populated by Syrians in Gaziantep. ©Melih Meriç, Twitter

Whatever the complexity of the issues facing local people in Gaziantep, the solutions proposed at the end of the statement make it impossible to produce an inclusive and human rights-based policy to address these issues. The statement by BIRTEK-SEN rightly identifies the class opportunism masked behind the “national interest” claims of the petition.

Two weeks after the release of the statement, the Minister of Interior, Ali Yerlikaya, visited Gaziantep and stressed that the government was taking more steps to combat regular and irregular migration. He announced that the number of “mobile migration points” vehicles in the city would be immediately increased. Shortly after, social media posts revealed that these vehicles were deployed where migrants are most densely populated. The mobile migration point application was launched to



identify “unregistered” individuals and expedite processes. The number of these vehicles and the cities where they are deployed is increasing every month. Under the hashtag “SyrianProblem”, opposition CHP parliamentarian for Gazinatep Melih Meriç later tweeted, “Although *this problem has become a non-partisan issue*, the necessary realistic measures must be taken urgently to ensure that foreigners, especially Syrians, return to their country” [emphasis added].

Riot in Bursa Removal Centre

According to some allegations, on June 17th, a riot broke out at the Bursa Removal Center, in northwestern Anatolia. The incident was not reported on any news channel or shared on social media but was followed only by the Bursa branch of the right-wing, anti-immigrant Zafer Party. The party’s post on the incident also implicitly reproduced the false claim that there are “14 million refugees and illegal immigrants” in Turkey.

Witnesses reported hearing multiple gunshots from the building, and gendarmerie, firefighters and ambulances were dispatched to the site shortly afterwards. The people detained in the building were evacuated by buses, but no explanation was given as to where they were taken.

According to the video testimony of an Azerbaijani national* whose brother was staying in the removal centre and who relayed the information he received from him by telephone, the guards in the centre were torturing and ill-treating the detainees, causing verbal or physical violence. According to information he received from his brother, a riot broke out in protest against this situation inside the centre and the reaction of the staff was very violent; people were covered in blood after the intervention, and the security guards also used weapons.

It is still unknown where the detainees were taken after the incident, how many were injured or how the riot broke out.

**The clip is the fourth of the videos shared in the linked post on the Bursa Zafer Party Twitter page. The testimony is shared anonymously with the members of Zafer Party standing outside the removal centre.*



Vezir Mohammad Nourtani

Vezir Mohammad Nourtani, a refugee from Afghanistan, and his family, sought a better life in Turkey but faced severe challenges due to bureaucratic hurdles and legal restrictions. Unable to secure proper residency permits, they struggled to access basic services and employment. Nourtani, like many other migrants, was forced into dangerous and exploitative work – in his case, in an illegal mine. On November 9th, 2023, he fell ill while working in a mine in Zonguldak but instead of being taken for treatment, he was beaten by the mine owners, who later burned his body to cover up the incident. This was one of the most shockingly brutal examples of the exploitation and violence migrant workers can face in Turkey.



A photograph of the late Vezir Mohammad Nourtani. ©Labour Party

Illegal mines in Zonguldak, Turkey, a coal mining hub since the 1840s, are notorious for deadly working conditions. These mines employ thousands of migrants who work without safety measures, social security, or regulated hours. Licensed companies buying coal from these operations perpetuate the exploitation and danger. Migrant workers, lacking proper training and safety equipment, face significant risks, leading to the high number of work-related deaths among migrants in Turkey – or work homicides, as the labour movement has long referred to them – including of children. 12-year-old Syrian national Ahmet Avan was the most recent young person to be added to these sorry statistics after he died in an elevator accident at the textile workshop where he was employed in Adana.

In the case of Vezir Mohammad Nourtani and his family, two developments occurred in June specifically pertaining to their case.



The first hearing of Nourtani's murder trial took place on May 29th in Zonguldak 1st High Criminal Court. According to the forensic report, the victim's internal organs had been burned and some could not be found. His lawyer testified that the victim's left kidney was missing. Vezir Mohammad's wife Qamer Nourtani was also present to testify. She explained to the court that only a week before his death, her husband had explained that his boss, EG, had told him he would pay 20 thousand USD for one of his kidneys. EG, one of the defendants in the case, was also present at the hearing. EG himself explained at the hearing that this illegal mine had been open for four years operating without basic health and safety measures or inspection. The next hearing of the trial was scheduled for July 8th.

Further compounding their plight, on June 25th, Qamer Nourtani and her children had their application for International Protection rejected by the 10th Regional Administrative Cases Chamber of the Ankara Regional Administrative Court. This now leaves them under threat of deportation. Their application in Ankara was already an appeal after the Zonguldak Governor's Office Provincial Directorate of Migration Management had rejected their initial protection request. The family is applying for international protection due to death threats in Afghanistan. The Ankara court decision stated that their concern regarding returning to Afghanistan stemmed from employment and housing issues and that the plaintiff otherwise "does not have a justified fear."

Pogroms against Syrians across Turkey

On the evening of Sunday, June 30th, a video circulated on social media alleging that a Syrian man had committed a heinous crime against a young girl in the Central Anatolian city of Kayseri. This video sparked widespread outrage and led to violent protests and pogroms targeting refugees and migrants.

Mobs attacked neighbourhoods where Syrians live, burning vehicles and houses, and looting businesses. The day after the attacks in Kayseri, many more migrants in Turkey were injured as the pogroms spread to Hatay, Adana, Urfa, Izmir, Bursa, Istanbul, Maraş, Konya, and Antep. On July 2nd, migrant children employed as seasonal agricultural labourers in the Serik district of Antalya were attacked; Hasan Khalid Al Nayif and and Bashar Obaid Al-Marai, 15, were seriously injured and hospitalised, and Ahmed Hamdan Al Naif, 17, was stabbed to death.



Ahmed Hamdan Al Naif, 17, was murdered in Serik, Antalya on July 2nd. ©Migrant Union Initiative

These events have left the migrant and refugee communities in Turkey in a further mix of shock, fear and resignation, profoundly impacting their daily lives, livelihoods, and sense of security. Many stayed indoors, and shops owned by Syrians and other foreigners remained closed. The destruction of businesses caused significant economic hardship, with looting and vandalism depriving many of their income. Social isolation increased as interactions between refugees and local residents were disrupted, with non-Turkish individuals and families avoiding public spaces out of fear.

A further pretext for tensions, confusion, and more attacks followed the spread of images of the Turkish military fighting various armed actors in north-eastern Syria, where Turkey has maintained its occupation in cooperation with a number of armed jihadist groups. Syrians in Turkey have faced increased forced deportation to these territories framed as “voluntary returns” over recent years.

The recent move to rapprochement between Turkey’s ruling AKP government and Syria’s Assadist regime marks another major geopolitical factor that cannot be separated from these developments.


We publish here some of the images shared by Syrians for Truth and Justice, along with a link to the statement they co-signed on July 5th with over 70 CSOs on the developments since the Kayseri pogroms of June 30th. A more detailed overview of the incidents will be published in a later report.



WE exist

Escalation of Threats and Violence Against Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Urgent Call to Protect Human Rights


Türkiye has recently witnessed unprecedented incitement campaigns and violence targeting Syrian refugees, in addition to assaults against them and their properties.



WE exist

Escalation of Threats and Violence Against Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Urgent Call to Protect Human Rights

Syrian refugees in Türkiye suffer from repeated attacks and discrimination against them as well as forced deportation for years under the label of "voluntary return".



WE exist

Escalation of Threats and Violence Against Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Urgent Call to Protect Human Rights

The lack of decisive measures by the Turkish government against those inciting hostile rhetoric and carrying out assaults has led to a widening of attacks against Syrians, elevated inflammatory language, and increasingly harsh treatment of Syrian refugees.



WE exist

Escalation of Threats and Violence Against Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Urgent Call to Protect Human Rights

We call on Türkiye to swiftly protect Syrians and guarantee their fundamental rights. The Turkish government and international community must collaborate to support refugees and displaced people, ensuring safety within Türkiye's borders while pursuing practical solutions to remedy their hardship.





Evictions continue

Following the same trend as previous months, in June 2024, people on the move faced constant violence and harassment from the French police forces, within the context of the “zero fixation points” policy. This policy was set up by the French State with the objective of preventing informal living sites from appearing and/or prevailing near the border.

Throughout the month of June, French grassroots organisation Human Rights Observers (HRO) documented at least 50 evictions carried out systematically on 10 informal living sites located around Calais and Dunkirk. These evictions resulted in the forced displacement of at least 633 people, and 28 arrests. During these evictions, the police forces have often demonstrated a complete lack of respect for the rights and dignity of people on the move, announcing orders without the presence of a translator, mocking and humiliating them, preventing them from going back to their living sites to retrieve their belongings, and using physical violence. One of the most violent incidents took place on June 20th, when two people were beaten with batons by

members of the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (a National Police unit specialised in riot control), in a living site near Dunkirk.



Evictions in Northern France. ©HRO



These evictions also resulted in important material damage for people on the move, thus further draining their financial resources. This month, police forces seized at least 129 tents, 19 tarps, and 5 sleeping bags. Furthermore, on June 11th, 20th and 25th living sites and shops set up by people on the move in Dunkirk were destroyed with chainsaws and backhoe loaders. It is important to emphasise that the brutality and frequency of these evictions - carried out almost every two days in Calais and once a week in Dunkirk -, creates an unbearable climate of anxiety and insalubrity for people on the move, only adding up to their already extremely vulnerable conditions.

As usual, police officers systematically prevented the HRO teams from properly carrying out monitoring work by physically escorting them away from the living sites during the evictions, to perimeters that make observations nearly impossible. In June, the HRO teams also had to go through at least 9 ID checks and have been filmed by the police forces without previous notification at least 8 times.

Increase in hostility against people on the move

This month people on the move were also the target of several violent attacks by non-state actors. On June 14th, French grassroots organisation Roots discovered the purposeful contamination of one of its water tanks in the town of Loon-Plage in the Northern France area of Dunkirk. The water tank, an intermediate bulk container or IBC, is one of several that provide drinking water for hundreds of people on the move in the



Evictions in Northern France. ©HRO



area. These services are provided by civil society organisation as insufficient access to water and sanitation is made available by the authorities. After the equipment was replaced, on June 18th, a second incident discovered where the taps had been disconnected and the pipe work taken apart. These actions show an increase in the hostility against people on the move in the area, which has further been made evident by other types of violence in the past few weeks.

Between June 11th and June 13th several racist inscriptions and threats were tagged on a squat which housed people on the move in Calais: "Leave or burn", "Down with migratory tyranny" and "France to the French", amongst others. On June 17th, some people threw rocks and shouted racist insults from a moving car, against people on the move leaving the Welcome Centre of local organisation Secours Catholique.



Testimonies published in June

Link	Incident	Recorded	Demographic	Group size	Organisation
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Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina

<u>1.1.</u>	28th May	29th May	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh	25	Collective Aid
<u>1.2.</u>	25th April	21th May	Iraq, Syria	3	Collective Aid
<u>1.3.</u>	20th May	20th May	Syria	7	Anonymous
<u>1.4.</u>	29th May	5th June	Syria, Egypt	15	Collective Aid

Hungary to Serbia

<u>2.1.</u>	1st january	6th June	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, India	30	Collective Aid
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Bulgaria to Turkey

<u>3.1.</u>	07/05/2023	25/01/2024	Palestine, Syria, Morocco, Libya	45	Anonymous
<u>3.2.</u>	7th June	11th June	Afghanistan	12	Collective Aid

Greece to Turkey

<u>4.1.</u>	14/04/2022	01/02/2024	Palestine, Syria		Anonymous
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Border Violence Monitoring Network

Network structure and contact

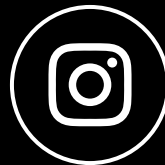
BVMN is a volunteer led endeavor, acting as an alliance of organisations in the Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of partner organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation.

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, several part-time paid coordination positions and some costs incurred by partner 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 please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu.

For press and media requests please contact:
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