

MONTHLY REPORT | JULY 2024

Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



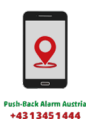
**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

MONTHLY REPORT | JULY 2024

Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



Push-Back Alarm Austria
+43 1345 1444



**BLIND
SPOTS**



**ARE YOU
SYRIOUS**





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Executive summary

In July, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) shared 6 testimonies of pushbacks impacting at least 124 people on the move across the Balkans and Greece. This report gathers updates from the month of July and brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the Balkans, Turkey, 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).

After months of indefinite closure of half of the Asylum and Reception Centers in Serbia, the government declared the permanent closing of three of the facilities and the continuous “stand-by” of another 7, which will remain empty at least until the end of September. Meanwhile, camps in Sarajevo, where transit has increased in the past few months, seem to be overcrowded and people are sometimes left to sleep outside due to a lack of capacity. A similar lack of adequate reception conditions has been reported by some Dublin returnees in Bulgaria who have been forced to sleep outside and referred to stretched non-governmental services which are not able to support them properly.

July has also been marked by the announcement of further EU-funded upgrades of border technology in different countries in the Balkans. More money from grants tied to the prospect of accession to the EU or Schengen will be used to purchase more drones, cameras and surveillance systems in Serbia and Bulgaria, despite the ever-growing evidence of the role of these technologies in the perpetration of violence against people on the move.

Such measures follow the rationale of a policy of securitisation that continues forcing people into dangerous routes, increasing the number of people murdered and missing at the borders. This month, we unfortunately report on the death of 8 people after a pushback in the Aegean, and another 8 lives lost in different shipwrecks in Northern France. There, fencing of the coastline and violence by the authorities at the beaches is pushing embarkations further along the coast, making the journey to the UK longer and more perilous. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, three bodies, believed to be people on the move, have been found at the borders of the country with Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. And, at the border between Serbia and Bulgaria, 2 different vehicle crashes have left tens of injured people on the move and at least one death this summer when overpacked vans overturned on the same spot of the highway.



Executive summary

We see that when these events are not reported for the purpose of justifying further abusive policies, they're most often not reported on at all. Thus, in Greece we highlight the difference in media attention and language employed in the coverage of two events involving gun violence. In one case, the shots seem to have been fired by Greek authorities during a boat chase, whereas in the other, the authors were allegedly "human traffickers" on the Turkish border.

On the islands, we look at the continued lack of proper reception conditions in the Closed-Controlled Access Centers on Samos and Lesbos where the inadequate preparation for the summer heat, the isolation and the long, chaotic and undignified food distributions mark the lives of residents everyday. On Samos, where we have witnessed an increase in arrivals, reports by Amnesty International and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture recently denounced the overall situation of people in the facilities, particularly, the restrictions of freedom and the lack of proper healthcare.

This month, we also report on a mass online leak of personal information of thousands of Syrian people right after the violent attacks on Syrian communities that took place across Turkey at the beginning of July. We then reflect on the role of social media in promoting and facilitating these surges of racist violence. Moreover, we share the tragic news of a Syrian transwoman who was killed after she was deported from Turkey. Her arrest and forced return to Syria was carried out after a leak of her own personal information and HIV-positive status from a hospital, followed by a hate speech campaign against her on social media.

Lastly, we share new updates on evictions in Northern France, where at least 1198 people have been forced out of their living sites during 49 evictions and 2 larger-scale operations in Calais and Dunkirk. Evictions have also deeply impacted the life of those people on the move (and others) staying in informal sites in Paris and its surrounding areas in the past several months, in the context of a typical run-up to the Olympic Games marked by such social cleansing policies.



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, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid and Mission Wings

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**



EU boosts border tech in the country

In July, the EU submitted two tenders for border technology on behalf of Serbia. The tender published on [July 10th](#) focuses on the supply of border management equipment and specifically involves the purchase of multiple all-terrain vehicles (ATV), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) or drones and a mobile surveillance system (MSS van) with cameras. The tender published on [July 19th](#) looks for a company that can provide “fixed surveillance systems for border surveillance and management” in the country.

These contracts fall under Serbia’s IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) funding, granted to potential candidates for EU accession. The prospect of accession, with its growing list of conditions for potential candidates, has, for a long time, been used by the EU to leverage influence and further border externalisation. The pressure on the non-(yet)EU countries leads to increasingly restrictive migration policies and systematic human rights abuses funded by EU money.

Announced camp closures

Following the [special police operation](#) carried out in northern Serbia during the past winter, state camps at traditional exit points of migration routes were gradually closed for an indefinite period of time. UNHCR – who support the running of state asylum and reception facilities in the country – published their latest [“Camp profiles”](#) in June, which describes the numerous currently closed facilities as being “*on standby*”.

Following a nearly complete lack of information regarding the future of most of the closed facilities, in July, the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) [announced](#) that 3 of the camps will become permanently closed, whilst a further 8 will remain “on standby” between August 1st and September 30th. This decision has left just 7 facilities operating at full capacity during this summer period, the total number of people accommodated in them at the time of the announcement being 429.

Whatever will happen after September 30th is unclear. However, considering the trends followed with regards to camp management in the past several months, and the government’s strategy to reduce services and increase isolation for people on the move, it is likely that at least some of these camps will also permanently close.



One of the camps that will be permanently closed is the one in Dimitrovgrad, at the border with Bulgaria. On a visit to this facility in July – before the official announcement – a SCRМ staff member informed us that the camp had already been empty for 3 months at that point.



The now permanently closed Dimitrovgrad facility for families ©Collective Aid

Moreover, some of the facilities meant to remain on standby at least until the end of September, such as the Subotica and Sombor RTCs (Reception and Transit Centres) have been closed to new registrations since the end of 2023.

This chart outlines the status of each facility from August 1st:

PERMANENTLY CLOSED

- Šid
- Dimitrovgrad
- Kikinda

OPERATING AT FULL CAPACITY

- Sjenica (men 18+)
- Obrenovac (only for asylum seekers)
- Vranje
- Krnjaca (families)
- Bujanovac (families and men 18+)
- Preševo
- Principovac (minors)

STANDBY FROM AUGUST 1ST UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30TH

- Tutin
- Banja Koviljača
- Pirot
- Bosilegrad
- Sombor
- Subotica
- Adaševci



Lastly, despite the statement that the Obrenovac Asylum Centre is currently operating at full capacity for asylum seekers, Collective Aid teams in the country have been made aware that the camp does not allow the registration of new arrivals, thus effectively preventing people from accessing their right to asylum.

Vehicle crash at the Serbian–Bulgarian border

In late June, a vehicle carrying 50 people on the move crashed on the highway that links the cities of Pirot and Niš in southern Serbia. Of the 50, 30 were injured and some needed hospital treatment. This month, another accident took place on the same section of the highway, on July 31st, when a vehicle carrying 32 people on the move overturned. 20 of the people needed hospital treatment, and it was later reported that one individual died.

Since the special police operation and subsequent closures of official camps, people travelling through Serbia have been forced to hide even more and further rely on smuggling networks to arrange their journeys, pushing them into more vulnerable circumstances. As a result, people increasingly travel in overly packed vehicles way above capacity, driven recklessly fast to avoid police detection, which poses significant risks to the lives and safety of people on the move. A crash under similar circumstances on the border with North Macedonia killed three people on the move in February.

Both of the recent crashes described above could have easily resulted in many deaths. Reports on this type of accidents have become increasingly common across transit countries, the deaths and injuries resulting from them a consequence of the lack of access to safe and legal routes for migration. Moreover, it is important to highlight that several of these fatal crashes have taken place during high-speed police chases.



Situation within the camps in Sarajevo

There are two main government camps for people on the move in Sarajevo, Blažuj which accommodates single men only, and Ušivak, meant for families. Around mid-July, BVMN members in the area received reports from residents at the Blažuj camp that it had reached full capacity, with people on the move being turned away upon arrival or kicked out after just one night. The timing of these reports aligns with a [situational update](#) released by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) during the July 8th - 21st period. According to this update, there had been 1,973 arrivals at the Blažuj camp during this period, which is 273 more than the total capacity of the camp. Nevertheless, the same report sets occupancy of the facility at 1,177 and IOM has not shared any information about the camp being at full capacity.

These numbers, together with the informal reports from residents, raise concerns about the access to healthcare for people on the move in Sarajevo. Even those with access to the camp often struggle to acquire medication due to their lack of documentation. Moreover, some solidarity organisations in the city have also witnessed an increase in the number of people who show different types of wounds and injuries.



Lack of support for Dublin returnees

In 2023, Bulgaria received 17,899 incoming requests and 590 incoming transfers under the Dublin regulation. By the end of February 2024, Austria alone had reportedly returned at least 76 people to Bulgaria. Many of these returnees are faced with abuses and a lack of adequate support and reception conditions.

Even though the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) is the competent authority handling returns under the Dublin agreement, we are aware that returnees are advised to visit the office of Caritas in Sofia upon arrival in Bulgarian territory. Moreover, after reaching out to Caritas to discuss the situation of returns in Bulgaria, they stated that they do not have the capacity to support Dublin returnees due to budgeting restraints and recent cuts in funding.

In July, a testimony describing this lack of support was collected outside the Harmanli camp near the Turkish border. There, a Collective Aid team spoke with an individual who had been returned under Dublin regulation 10 days prior. He had been deported to Bulgaria from Germany, where he had resided for 11 months. Upon arrival on a Friday, he was directly taken to the camp in Harmanli, but was forced to sleep rough in the park over the weekend without funds or supplies to support himself. He was told that the camp authorities do not work during the weekend and were not able to register him.

"They told us to go to the hotel for the start of work on Monday. We sat in the hotel and did not have money, then we went to the park for two days".

"Here when we were returned to Bulgaria we were not given any salary, any money, or any aid".

This account of poor treatment upon return to Bulgaria resembles others encountered by BVMN member organisation Mission Wings, active in Harmanli. Mission Wings describe that people are sporadically returned to the Harmanli camp, and sometimes forced to sleep rough. They reported an instance in April where a group of 4-5 people were returned to Bulgaria and taken to the camp but could not enter the reception facility until their asylum procedure was reopened. In the meantime they were not given any alternative accommodation and were forced to sleep rough for a week.



These testimonies of mistreatment join an account from [September 2023](#) whereby an individual was beaten by security at a reception facility in Sofia and also forced to sleep rough.



The Harmanli facility ©Collective Aid

Abuses in the Harmanli camp

According to the SAR, there were 272 people accommodated within the Harmanli facility on the last day of June, resulting from 277 new arrivals and 160 so-called voluntary departures throughout that month.

Whilst speaking to a group of adult men and some minors who were staying in the Harmanli camp, an 18 year old boy from Syria reported he had been beaten by police officers within the camp facility 5 days before.

He shared that he had been play-fighting with a friend when the camp authorities brought in the police to intervene. The police proceeded to beat the boy using excessive force, while the camp staff witnessed the abuses. BVMN volunteers were shown a video of the incident recorded on the phone of another member of the group.

Two more people in the group - one of them, a 16 year old minor - reported other instances of serious abuses from the police at the Harmanli facility. They described



that, upon their return to the camp after the 6pm curfew, the police used Electric Discharge Weapons on their backs and hands – specifically targeting a tattoo on one of the individuals' wrist.

“My friend, a 16 years old minor, [was] caught [by] a police officer after 6:00 and they electrocuted him in the back”.

Later on, another member of the group described being a target of police brutality as a means to gain information on alleged drug dealers. These testimonies point at an established pattern of abuse against people on the move within the facility, months after the Bulgarian parliament voted to bolster the security of state reception facilities nationwide. Following this vote, the responsibility for the security of these centres lies fully within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, thus prioritising a policing approach to safety in the facilities. As a result, the presence of Bulgarian police and Gendarmerie in Harmanli and other centres is meant to increase, despite a long history of human rights abuses by state authorities against people on the move in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria to upgrade border technology around the Black Sea

On July 19th, the European Commission announced that Bulgaria will receive 20 million EUR for the upgrade of border technologies on the Black Sea. These technologies will be part of the so-called Integrated Surveillance System “Blue Border”, and include new radar devices, thermovision, and daylight long-range cameras. The upgrades are meant to strengthen the overall capabilities of the European Border Surveillance system (EUROSUR), and information sharing system aiming at facilitating cooperation between EU countries and Frontex to *“improve situational awareness and increase reaction capability at the external borders.”*

The recently granted funding falls under the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI) 2021–2027. The BMVI was also the channel through which Bulgaria received 85 million EUR in March of this year. The stated purpose of that money was to “enhance national capabilities at the EU external borders” within the Cooperation Framework on border and migration management that was implemented alongside Bulgaria’s partial accession to the Schengen area in the same month.

The 20 million EUR grant likely follows a successful application for additional funds for border technology by Bulgaria, as the documents associated to the March 2024 BMVI



fund included the following statement: “[Bulgaria] can now apply for additional funding to extend or upgrade the existing border surveillance systems; purchase of means of transport including with thermo-vision capabilities; purchase of operating equipment such as movement detection cameras and thermo-vision cameras and the development or upgrades of systems”.

The announcement of these upgrades in the border technology operating along Bulgaria’s and EU’s external border at the Black Sea comes at the same time as some testimonies point at the possible use of a route from Turkey to Bulgaria through these waters.

Also in July, an account was shared with Collective Aid’s team in Serbia by an individual who claimed that a movement-detection mechanism had facilitated his interception by the police whilst walking through the Strandzha national park in Bulgaria by foot. It is fair to assume that the well-documented police violence and pushbacks regularly perpetrated in Bulgaria will be further facilitated by the ever increasing use of border technology. The additional funds granted in July only help to (once again) showcase the impunity around crimes committed at the EU’s external borders, and the EU’s determination to overlook them.



Boat chases and injuries in the Aegean

During the month of July, the Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG) registered and shared 15 instances of boat chases carried out by them. Most of these ended with the forced rescue of the people on board and the criminalisation of one or two of them, accused by the HCG of being the drivers of the vessels. At least on one occasion, on July 20th, fire guns were shot during the chase which resulted in one person on the move being injured. The guns were reportedly fired by Greek authorities, as the HCG was chasing a boat, carrying 15 individuals, sailing towards the island of Chios. The injured passenger was transported to the hospital in Chios where he is recovering, while the person allegedly driving the boat was arrested. The remaining people were transported to a Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) at the port of Kardamylos in Chios.

Lack of impartiality and absence of reporting in Greek media

In mid-July, there were at least two incidents involving gun violence during interactions between people on the move and Greek authorities: one in the Evros region and another off the coast of Chios, mentioned above. In the Evros incident, the shooting had allegedly been carried out by a person attempting to cross the border, while in the Chios incident, the shots were reportedly fired by Greek authorities. Reports from Evros stated that a Greek police officer on patrol at the border was shot by alleged “human traffickers” from the Turkish side. The police officer was immediately taken to a hospital in the town of Didymoteicho and operated on, without experiencing life-threatening injuries. Reportedly, the patrolling team that was on duty could not clearly identify the origins of the bullet due to dense vegetation that covered the area between them and the shooter. Information on the incident is scarce as officials are not allowed to speak about cases under investigation and the concerned police officers have requested anonymity. Despite the uncertainty that surrounds the facts, news of a shooting likely caused by a “human trafficker” spread all over the Evros news channels.

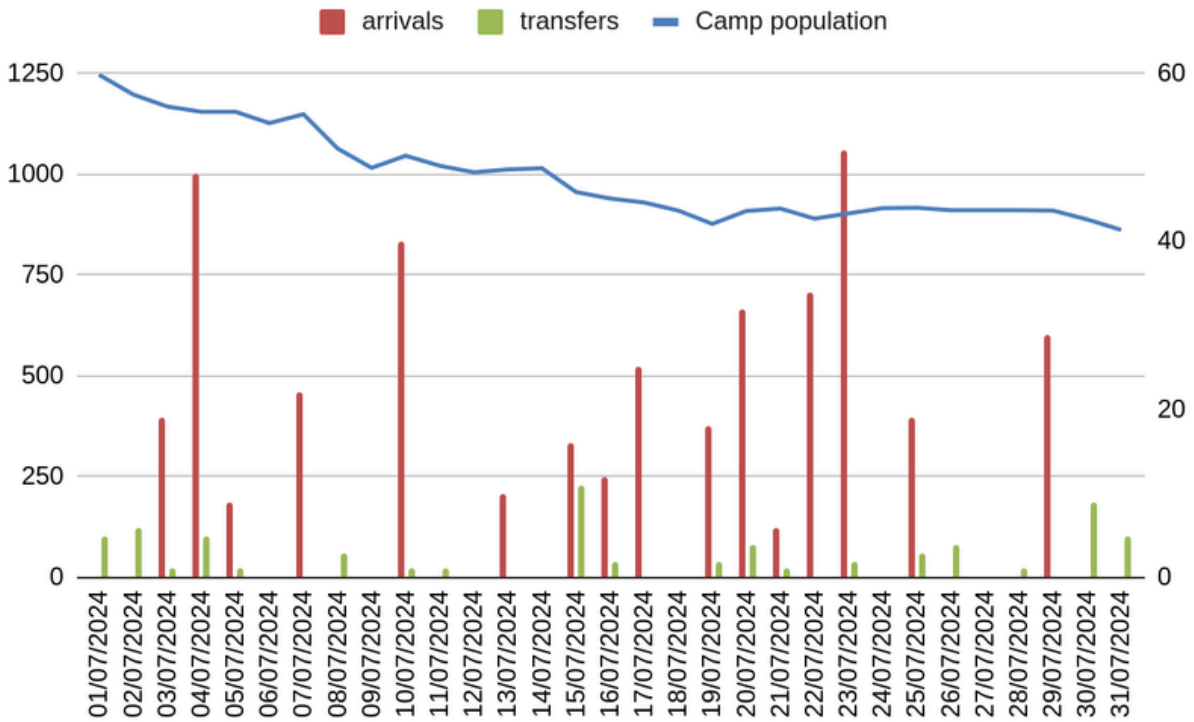
The noteworthy differences in vocabulary and the extent of the media coverage between the two events, despite their equal seriousness, highlight the lack of impartiality and manipulation of information on migration in the Greek press. This media bias observed by BVMN is part of a wider trend within the broader framework of press freedom in Greece. According to a range of sources both within and outside of the country, Greece ranks lowest in the EU for media freedom.



Increasing reports on arrests in Evros region

Over the past 2-3 months, BVMN team in Thessaloniki has noted an increase in reports of traffickers being arrested while transporting people over the Turkey-Greece border by land (in cars and lorries) in the Evros and Rodopis regions. In the vast majority of cases, the vehicles are Greek-registered. Due to the lack of commentary and analysis in the reports, it is difficult to assess whether this increase reflects a rise in the number of people crossing the border or more intensive police activity.

Situation in the Lesvos CCAC



According to the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 390 people were registered in Lesvos, in July. During this month, only 67 people were transferred outside of the island, but the population in the camp continued to decrease. This is because the amount of people that decide to leave by their own means is currently much bigger than the amount of people that get transferred. Thus, the number of people in the camp went down from 1250 to 861, as of July 31st.



Despite the decrease in the camp population, the conditions in the facility have not improved over the summer. As a result, residents of the camp were still forced to endure the July heat wave in a facility full of dust and without shading structures. Moreover, people are still required to stand in lines for hours in order to get their scarce daily portion of food. The long distribution takes place in the middle of the day and people often get extremely dizzy and sick due to the heat. Leaving the camp for the day has also become a challenge in the high temperatures, due to the need to wait for the bus under the sun or walk the 4 km that separate it from the city.

One of the consequences of the lack of adequate preparation for these weather conditions is, therefore, the increased isolation of people on the move, an ongoing goal of EU and Greek policies. The plans to build a new camp aim to make this isolation much worse. This month, [news](#) came out regarding the continuation of the construction work on the road towards Vastria, the planned location for the new facility, 30 km away from the city and in the middle of a forested area. The camp is supposed to open in [November](#), although there is a pending appeal regarding the construction of the road and its environmental impact, as well as that of the facility.

Pushbacks in the Aegean

According to the statistics released by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG), in July 2024 the TCG rescued 2198 people, 1270 of whom were victims of pushbacks by the Greek Coast Guard. According to the same statistics, 2634 people were apprehended before they left Turkish land and 3865 people were registered on the Greek islands.

These numbers constitute an increase from those of June, when 1634 people were reported to have been rescued (1019 after a pushback), 2306 apprehended by Turkish authorities, and 2379 arrived and were registered on the Greek islands. They are also higher than those from July 2023, when 1479 people were rescued, most of them after having been pushed back, 1394 were apprehended and 2555 new people were registered in Greece.

Increase of sea arrivals in Samos

In the first two weeks of July, there was an increase of asylum seekers arriving in Samos. According to the [UNHCR](#), 283 people arrived on the island over this period. The following two weeks saw 76 and 97 new arrivals respectively, bringing the total number of asylum seekers arriving in Samos in July to 456.



As detailed by the the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe in July, *“when the number of foreign nationals arriving on the islands increases, the systems break down quickly and many persons, especially those with specific needs and vulnerabilities, find themselves being subjected to treatment which could be described as inhuman and degrading”* (CPT 2024; 34).

Interview postponements in the Samos CCAC

By the end of July, BVMN member organisation I Have Rights noticed a high number of postponements of asylum interviews for people on Samos. In the course of one week, between July 23rd and August 1st, four clients had their interviews postponed. For all of them, the interview was postponed twice. In I Have Rights' experience, interviews can be rescheduled up to four times. What makes this situation all the more worrying is the vulnerability of the people involved. 100% of the clients identified that week were vulnerable people, including survivors of female genital mutilation, sexual violence and/or human trafficking.

CPT and Amnesty international call to improve accommodation facilities of people on the move in the Samos CCAC

On July 12th, the CPT published a report following its visit to Greece from November, 20th to December 1st 2023. The report describes the living conditions in the Samos Closed Control Access Center (CCAC) as inhuman and degrading. It echoes what I Have Rights has been reporting in the last several months regarding the numerous fundamental rights violations occurring in the Samos CCAC. In the report, the accommodation facilities are described as defective and unsuitable, with single women and mothers with children being accommodated with unrelated adult men (CPT 2024; 4, 41). Moreover, the CPT pointed out that deprivation of liberty of people accommodated in the Samos CCAC often overrode legal provisions (CPT 2024; 35).

Food distribution in the CCAC is mentioned as “chaotic” and “undignified” (CPT 2024; 4), with vulnerable people not being able to get their daily rations as they cannot “fight” the jostlings in queues (CPT 2024; 39). In July, I Have Rights' clients reported that food distribution took place from early morning to 11 am, with CCAC residents having to queue under the sun for hours. The report also finds that the Greek authorities do not carry out effective vulnerability assessments of all new arrivals (CPT 2024; 4). Indeed, the CPT confirmed there are large numbers of “people with special needs and vulnerabilities” that are “held in (...) the Samos CCAC” (CPT 2024; 41).



Furthermore, the Committee expressed concern about the access and quality of medical care in the Samos CCAC (CPT 2024; 5). They found that medical checks for newly arrived persons are too rapidly conducted, due to insufficient and inadequate medical staff (CPT 2024; 43). This situation has worsened since the visit of the CPT, since EODY, the National Organisation for Public Health and the competent body for the provision of medical and psychosocial services in the Samos CCAC was not operating in the facility in the first two weeks of July.

Lastly, the CPT report highlights hygiene-related issues with cleaning products given only when asylum seekers arrive in the CCAC, and meant to cover their entire stay in the facility. Sanitary facilities are described as being “in a dreadful state and in need of repair” (CPT 2024; 39).

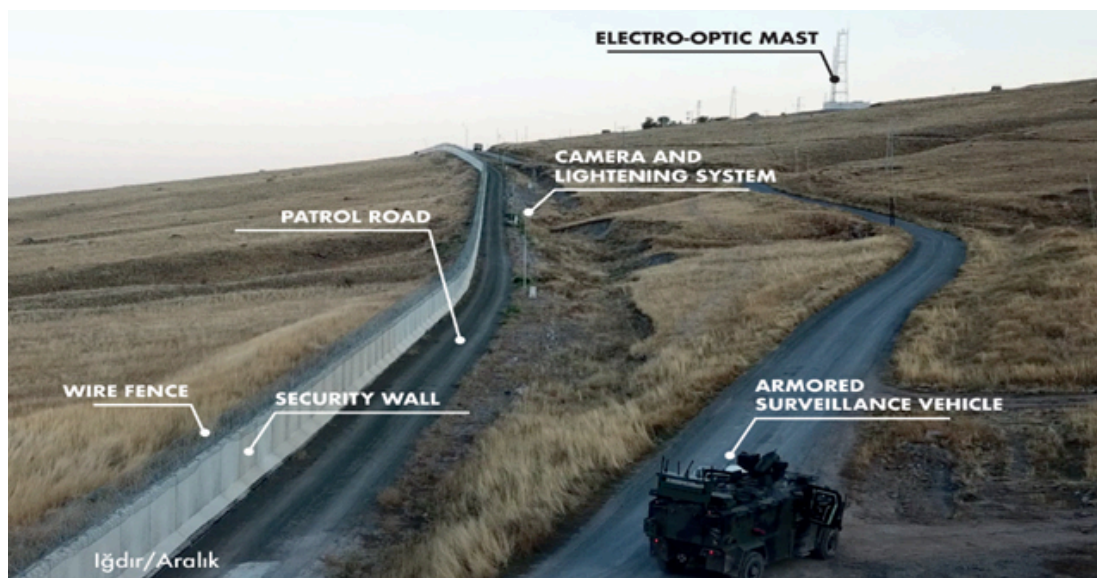
In its recent report from July 30th, Amnesty International paints the same pattern, drawing on the testimonies of several Samos-based NGOs, including I Have Rights. The report emphasises, among other things, the illegality of the “restriction of freedom” regime where every asylum seeker is unlawfully *de facto* detained upon arrival to the Samos CCAC. It also highlights the undignified and inhumane conditions in this prison-like structure. Whether it be chronic water shortages or the totally inadequate provision of medical and psychological support, the report shows how the Samos CCAC should serve as a warning sign for the EU and its member states in their implementation of the new EU Migration and Asylum Pact.



Latest statistics from the Presidency of Migration Management

According to the [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, there were 19,002 “irregular migrants” apprehended in July, while the total number of apprehensions was 127,934 as of the end of July 2024. The top three nationalities affected by such incidents were Afghanistan, Syria and Turkmenistan. In addition, a total of 7,344 so-called “organisers” were apprehended in the first six months of 2024. This month, the government’s police “Operation Kalkan 26” (Shield 26) continued receiving significant media coverage. The operation, conducted in Istanbul, reportedly resulted in the apprehension of 94 “irregular migrants” and five “smugglers” last month.

The Presidency of Migration Management also made public some [statements](#) by Minister of Interior Yerlikaya with regards to the success of the policies for the so-called “fight against irregular migration” and border security systems. In his statements, Ali Yerlikaya highlighted Turkey’s “significant achievements” in combating irregular migration over the past 14 months, emphasising the fact that Turkey has deported more people than all European countries combined. He reported that 163,745 “irregular migrants” were deported over the 14-month period, the highest figure in Turkey’s history. Furthermore, he claimed that the conditions in Turkey’s 32 removal centres are in “full compliance with human rights standards” and regularly monitored by both national and international bodies. This goes against numerous [reports](#) from local and international rights organisations regularly sharing evidence of poor conditions and [abuses](#) perpetrated at these facilities.



Iğdır/Turkey – Turkey’s north-eastern border ©Border Security Report



Lastly, Yerlikaya discussed border technologies, proudly stating that \$950 million have been spent on such systems so far, including security walls, patrol roads, night lighting systems, thermal cameras, reconnaissance surveillance vehicles, and electro-optical towers. He emphasised how those "measures" have decreased the number of people trying to cross the borders. He claimed that the migratory routes have changed as a result of all these policies and that Turkey has, thus, ceased to be a transit country.

Mass leak of personal data sparks fear among Syrian community

As described in BVMN's [last monthly report](#), a surge of mob violence [against Syrian refugees](#) erupted in Kayseri on June 30th, sparked by the circulation on social media of a video alleging a Syrian migrant was harassing his uncle's five-year-old daughter in a district of the city. The video triggered public outrage, which resulted in crowds of people targeting Syrian-owned residences and businesses, some of which were set on fire. The wave of violent incidents quickly [escalated to other cities](#) in Turkey, leading to severe injuries and, tragically, the violent murders of many refugees.



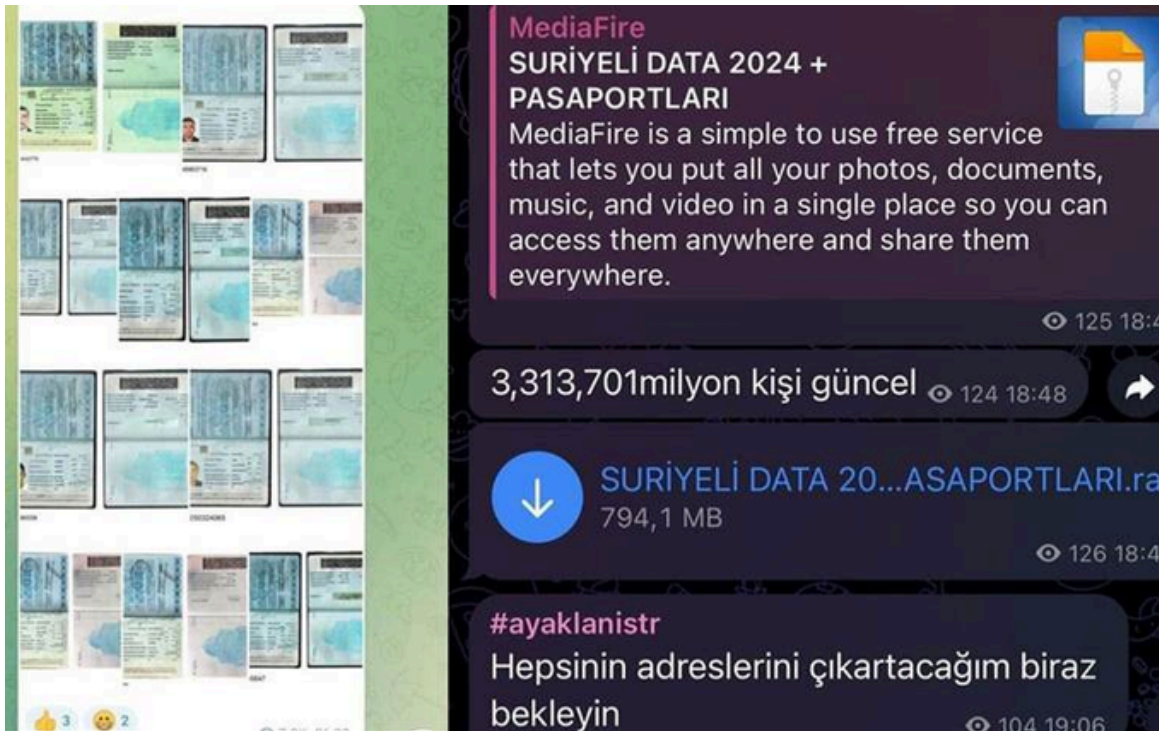
Mob violence against Syrians that started in Kayseri and spread across the country.

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The rapid spread of these violent incidents across the country is testament to the impact of social media on the flow of information in times of mass crisis, and the fact that random posts have become the primary source of information for many. Most social media platforms allow for the rapid sharing of unverified images and information without context. In addition to misinformation, these platforms provide the space for the spread of hate speech and racist posts, fueling social tensions and polarisation, and contributing to the perception of refugees and migrants as a “threat”. Secured messaging groups (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.) in particular become the place where various racist groups can digitally gang up and plan organised acts of violence.

At the beginning of July, right after the pogroms against Syrians, a Telegram group called **“Ayaklanış#Türkiye”** (Uprising#Turkey) shared identity information and passport data of thousands of Syrian people in the country. The same group was responsible for sharing posts that fueled the violence that started in Kayseri and spread across the country. The data sets made public by them included people’s identity number and name, the city where they were registered, their parents’ names, and their date of birth. In addition, passport photos of many people of different nationalities were also leaked on social media.



Screenshots of a conversation in a Telegram channel where the personal information of thousands of Syrians was leaked. The text in Turkish reads, ‘3,313,701 million people updated’ and ‘I’ll get the address details of all of them, wait a bit.’

©Rudaw



Some experts speculate that this information was probably leaked 2-3 years ago from provincial health centres, i.e. health centres that provide special services for refugees. However, it is not possible to fully confirm the source of this data. The Directorate of Migration Management announced that the leaked data does not match the current official information and that a large-scale investigation has been launched to determine the source of the data and the years that it belongs to. Multiple news outlets have reported that the personal data of over 3 million Syrians has been circulating on the internet. It is extremely concerning that various social media users have been able to obtain this data from multiple online sources, including illegal internet groups and the dark web, and stored it in a centralised pool. Most worrying is the government's inability to secure this kind of data.

Two years ago, there was a data breach involving "e-Devlet," an electronic platform used for various bureaucratic transactions and for storing citizens' personal data. The leaked information was subsequently sold on different online platforms. In other words, before the most recent leak, there were already many data sets processed by the government in circulation on the internet, used in various ways for disinformation purposes. However, it was right after the Kayseri incidents that a data set was shared, for the first time, on platforms such as Twitter, openly targeting refugees.

The day after this data leak, the Ministry of Interior issued a press release stating that the perpetrator had been captured. The press release highlighted that a 14-year-old boy was behind this group and that a more thorough investigation would follow. Many experts warn that there is a concerning growing number of minors who are well-versed in social media, have access to the dark web and find themselves in groups promoting racist ideologies. Many of them now produce content for social media. The arrested person is 14-year-old E.P, the alleged owner of the account "Ayaklanış#Türkiye", however, it is not yet clear how many people were behind the data leak and its dissemination. Moreover, though this Telegram group has been shut down, the information is likely still being shared in other chats.

The recent racist campaigns and large-scale demonstrations have sparked unrest within the Syrian community, making it even more challenging for them to resume their daily lives. Many fear for their safety due to their personal information being available online, which can lead to further abuses and many violations of rights. Though the leak does not include a specific residence address or detailed photographs, Syrians whose personal data was shared may also be targeted by fraud networks, as happened following the leak of "e-Devlet" data.



This incident constitutes an example of how the combination of social crises, spread of hate speech, prevalence of online racist groups, and the difficulty in accessing reliable news on social media is likely to increase violence and polarisation against vulnerable communities.

A Trans woman refugee deported back to Syria by Turkey was killed

A Syrian refugee trans woman was admitted to the hospital in Adana, in Southern Turkey, due to some health issues. Days later, on July 5th, a local news outlet illegally exposed her HIV-positive medical records, leading to a wave of hate speech against her, fueled by HIV-phobia, transphobia, and xenophobia. On the same day, officers detained the trans woman from her residence without a formal order or warrant.

A deportation order against the victim was then issued on July 9th to be implemented immediately, leaving no time for an appeal. The Association for Access to a Fair Trial (AYHED) criticized the decision for not allowing the required 7-day period for objections, stating:



"Transgender homicides are political."

©Ekmek ve Gül



"The reason for all these unlawful procedures was the disclosure of her identity and the results of her tests at Adana [...] Hospital where she went for treatment. Health workers shared the health data of a refugee trans woman with various news websites, and news websites published the health report in such a way that personal data was visible. Subsequently, Adana Governorate decided to deport the person on 09.07.2024 by going beyond the legal regulations, notified the decision on the same day and deported the person on the same day without waiting for the 7-day objection period."

The victim was unlawfully deported on that very same day through the Cilvegözü border gate to Syria. The LGBTQ+ news outlet KaosGL then reported that the victim was murdered by the Free Syrian Army in collaboration with her own family members. Adana LGBTQ+ Solidarity group published a statement on July 27th, confirming her death:

"In Adana, a Syrian trans woman's private health information was shared without permission, and she was subjected to hate speech. In this case, her personal rights and privacy were violated. Trans woman M.E. was deported from Cilvegözü Border Gate after the incidents. Unfortunately, we learned that she lost her life 5 days ago. The definition of Turkey as a 'safe country' for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees should be abandoned immediately."

Turkey's "third safe country" status is at the very centre of the legal framework of the infamous 2016 Deal between the EU and Turkey. The status allows bordering EU countries to arbitrarily reject asylum applications without further examination and return them back to Turkey. As emphasised by the Adana LGBTQ+ Solidarity group, this status continuously endangers refugees, especially those part of more marginalised communities.



Racist violence by non-state actors continues

BVMN's [June Report](#) highlighted an increase in violence perpetrated by non-state actors against people on the move near the Northern French coast. This situation continued over the month of July. At the start of the month, there was an [incident](#) involving two vehicles driven by civilians chasing down some people on the move. As a result, at least one person was twice hit by a car and required hospital treatment.

As a response to the increase of this type of violence in recent months, in the context of the rise of the far-right party National Rally (RN), 15 solidarity organisations working in Northern France signed a [joint statement](#) denouncing the abuses and calling on public authorities to intervene and act against this wave of racist violence.

Update on evictions in Northern France

As every month, eviction operations keep taking place every couple of days in Northern France. In July, at least 720 people on the move were evicted from their living spaces in Calais throughout 12 police operations, representing 49 evictions. Meanwhile, in the area of Dunkirk, at least 478 people were evicted during two large-scale operations, involving the destruction of tents and personal belongings. After the operations, several buses would transport people on the move away from the border without informing them of the destination. During these eviction operations, grassroots organisation Human Rights Observers documented at least 29 arrests of people on the move in Calais, and 108 tents and tarps seized. In the Dunkirk area, on July 23rd, a State-appointed cleaning company seized and destroyed the belongings of hundreds of people on the move using backhoe loaders, whilst the police prevented people from accessing the living site to retrieve their personal belongings. Moreover, on July 2nd, the squat on street Frédéric Sauvage, in Calais, was closed in an operation involving the Municipal Police, the Anti-Crime Brigade, and the municipal technical services. The site was sealed off with planks screwed onto the doors, windows and gate from the inside, while grills were installed in front of the gate by the street.

This month, the Human Rights Observers team also noted an increase of police violence at the Calais-Ville station, as well as of violence on beaches during attempted crossings, as reported above. On July 31st, four vans from the Border Police parked at the bus station and carried out identity checks exclusively on people on the move. Just on that day, at least eight people on the move were arrested.



The monitoring of these abuses is also purposefully hindered by the authorities, as members of Human Rights Observers face constant intimidation during their observation work. On three occasions, members of the team were followed by the National Police and the Anti-Crime Brigade, either by car or on foot. They were also filmed by National Police officers, at least three times, without notice. On July 19th, two National Police motorcyclists in the area of Dunkirk made degrading comments and threatened the observers with prison, custody, and legal proceedings.

Evictions around Paris in the run-up to the Olympics

The run-up to the Olympics and Paralympic Games has been marked by a similar pattern of evictions of living sites and other abuses against displaced people, and other people living on the streets, in Paris. In response, a number of solidarity associations and groups have worked together under the name 'Le Revers de la Medaille', the other side of the medal, to bring this reality to light. Between April 2023 and May 2024 they reported 138 evictions in the region of Île-de-France, affecting 12.545 people, including 3.434 minors, amongst other actions. They also stated that the "the fortnight preceding the opening ceremony saw a very high concentration of operations targeted geographically at the 'Olympic exhibition' sites (Paris and the nearby Seine-Saint-Denis)". More information can be found in their report "*Move along, there's nothing to see*": 1 year of social cleansing before the 2024 Olympic games'.



Deaths and Disappearances

Bodies found along Bosnia–Herzegovina’s borders

Over the month of July, at least three bodies, believed to be people on the move, have tragically been found in rivers and lakes along the borders of Bosnia–Herzegovina. The first one was found in the Sava river near the town of Gradiska, by the Croatian border on July 6th. Later on, during the second week of July, the body of a man described as “most likely of Afro–Asian origin” was found by the town of Donji Sepak, in the Drina river, which runs along the border between Serbia and Bosnia–Herzegovina. On July 29th, a third body was reportedly found in Bileca Lake, located along the border between Montenegro and Bosnia–Herzegovina. The identity of these two people is unknown. However, the border location of the bodies, together with the tragic precedent of other deaths of people on the move in this lake and rivers makes it likely that the individuals were people on the move, attempting to travel from Serbia and Montenegro.

These deaths are a direct consequence of a European border regime that forces people on the move to take ever more remote and dangerous routes in order to reach safety. Safe and legal pathways must be implemented urgently to prevent more lives being lost at borders.

8 people died and more went missing in several incidents in the Aegean

In early July, the Aegean Boat Report published an update including disturbing quotes, images and videos pertaining to two incidents on Chios involving people on the move, including a pushback, and eight deaths by drowning. The 8 people who died were travelling in a group of at least 27 people, 19 of whom were rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard. It is not completely clear whether the two incidents reported by Aegean Boat Report involved the same group of people or two separate groups, as the organisations that received the distress calls lost contact with the group(s). What is evident is that severe violence had been inflicted. It is extremely concerning that the group of people who were documented as having arrived on Chios cannot now be located in any RIC and that no one has been held accountable for the deaths described or the violence inflicted.

Moreover, there was another alarming incident in which AlarmPhone received a distress call from people describing that they were trapped on an islet in the middle of



the Evros River, having been pushed back and forth multiple times. Few details were confirmed, despite activists' attempts to provide information on the injuries suffered by the concerned individuals, resulting from violence by authorities on both the Greek and Turkish sides. Reports arose that at least one person from the group might have drowned.

To BVMN's knowledge, there has been no international or local media coverage of any of these incidents.

Increasing risks and rising number of deaths at the UK–French border

During this month, eight people died at the French–British border, and several others went missing, far from their families and home countries. On July 12th, four people died when one of the tubes of their boats deflated during a crossing. At least three more people lost their lives in three different shipwrecks on July 17th, 19th and 28th. The vessels were carrying 72, 86 and 35 people, respectively. The number of people killed by the border in 2024 was 25 as of July 31st, which doubles the amount of deaths in all of 2023.

Channel crossings are becoming increasingly dangerous, mainly due to higher levels of police surveillance and violence. On July 13th, French officers intervened during an attempted crossing, stabbing a boat that was still in the water with at least 10 people on board, including some minors. The people were also reportedly subjected to heavy tear gas when leaving the site. Violence on the beaches, including these kinds of practices, have led to more chaotic – and thus, dangerous – embarkations as people try to leave before the arrival of law enforcement. Furthermore, the ongoing militarization of the border, including the fencing of tens of kilometres of coast in Calais with barbed wire, has pushed embarkation sites to be spread out over a larger area. As a result, more boats leave from sites further away from Calais and Dunkirk, increasing the distance – in some cases, making it 2 or 3 times as long – and risks of the channel crossing.

These deaths are often instrumentalized by the authorities and used as a justification for the hardening of these policies of repression and non-reception. Meanwhile, the lack of safe alternatives and the government's strategy based on the creation of inhumane living conditions along the coast, daily police harassment and violence on the beaches, continue to claim lives at the border.



Testimonies published in July

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

<u>1.1.</u>	May 20th	May 20th	Syria	7	Anonymous
<u>1.2.</u>	June 28th	July 5th	Syria, Iraq, Lebanon	30	Collective Aid

Bulgaria to Turkey

<u>2.1.</u>	May 1st	June 20th	Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria	15	Collective Aid
<u>2.2.</u>	May 15th	June 25th	Afghanistan	30	Collective Aid
<u>2.3.</u>	April 30th	June 25th	Afghanistan	12	Collective Aid

Hungary to Serbia

<u>3.1.</u>	January 1st	June 6th	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, India	30	Collective Aid
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Border Violence Monitoring Network

Network structure and contact

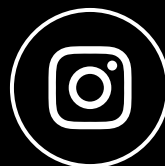
BVMN acts as an alliance of organisations in the Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of partner organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation.

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.

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