

MONTHLY REPORT | AUGUST 2024

# Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



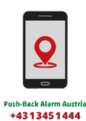
**Border Violence  
Monitoring Network**

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# Executive summary

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This report gathers updates from the month of August 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).

This month, we focus on an ever-present and concerning theme across countries: the inhumane conditions and violence perpetrated by the authorities against people on the move in detention. In the context of the New Pact on Migration, which only exacerbates EU states' room for the use of arbitrary detention, including that of minors, these testimonies constitute alarming examples of the practices of an increasingly cruel border regime. In particular, we look at accounts of ill-treatment of young minors in Croatia including denial of access to health care, food and water, and physical violence and other abuses in detention centres in Bulgaria and Greece. The latter has been the subject of a report by the CPT, in July this year, which highlighted appalling conditions within Greek detention sites and called on the government to enact changes.

We also report on a rise in pushbacks carried out by Hungarian authorities to Serbia this month, despite several recent EU sanctions, as well as the continuation of violent pushbacks from Croatia and Bulgaria. In both of these countries, severe beatings and theft and destruction of personal belongings are regularly described in testimonies. Moreover, several people have died this month as a direct result of these policies and practices at the borders of these countries. At the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, at least 12 people on the move died at the end of August after a boat carrying around 30 people capsized in the Drina river.

Even though these violent practices have been widely documented throughout the years, they are still surrounded by a pervasive climate of impunity, including a general and continued lack of media coverage. This impunity stems from both national and European institutions, like in Bulgaria, where further evidence made public proves that Frontex' presence does nothing to prevent these human rights violations in the country.

In Greece, we report on an increase in the number of people arriving in the country, including to the island of Samos where residents of the Closed Controlled Access Centre keep experiencing water shortages, and asylum-



## Executive summary

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seekers continue to have their interviews postponed several times, often due to a lack of interpreters. Furthermore, we share a snapshot of the research recently published by BVMN on surveillance technologies used in the Evros region. The report looks into the use of this region as a testing ground for these technologies, through several EU-funded projects. It highlights the complete lack of transparency that surrounds EU research projects in this field and points at the continued use of some of the equipment long after the projects are finished, including marine radars or pylons with thermovision cameras.

Meanwhile, in August, two Palestinian activists involved in a protest against Israel at a state-owned Turkish Radio and Television event in Istanbul were arrested, detained and are still under the threat of deportation. Also this month, we share the tragic news of the death of Ibrahim Izziddin, Syrian refugee and Turkish resident after having been tortured at Kirklareli Removal Center.

Lastly, we report on continued near daily evictions in Northern France, where over 1500 people have been forced out of their informal living settlements as a result of 70 evictions. Tents and other shelter items and belongings have been stolen in the process and monitoring efforts by solidarity organisations have been hindered by multiple acts of intimidation from the authorities. Moreover, organisations are now blocked from operating normally in one of the regular distribution spots due to the placing of rock boulders by the municipality of Calais, in a new example of aggressive architecture by the city.



# General

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## 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

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[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  
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### Changes to Migration Route and Subsequent Rise in Pushbacks

The month of August saw a substantial increase in the number of people heading toward Hungary. According to a report by the Serbian organisation Asylum Protection Centre (APC), there were 300 people staying on the Serbian side of the Serbian-Hungarian border on August 25th. This marks a significant change in the route since the special police operation last year, which effectively closed this border to people on the move.

In response to this change, however, the number of pushbacks from Hungary to Serbia has skyrocketed since July. According to official data published by the Hungarian authorities, 60 pushbacks were reported over the first week of July, compared to 198 in the last week of August. The real number, however, is likely to be higher. This practice continues despite the €200,000,000 fine imposed on Hungary by the European Court of Justice in June for their systematic pushbacks, together with an ongoing daily fine of €1,000,000 until they amend the legislation that legalised them within the country.

BVMN member organisations have collected hundreds of testimonies pointing at the use of violence during pushbacks at this border over the years, and similar practices have been described by many people on the move more recently. This month, a man from Afghanistan described to Collective Aid's team in Northern Serbia having been pushed back on August 12th, together with six other Afghan people. According to the respondent, the group came across three men dressed in plain clothing soon after crossing the border. Though it was unclear to them whether these were undercover police officers or civilians, the group saw that one of them was armed. Two of the men in the transit group tried to run away but were reportedly chased, apprehended and physically assaulted.

*'They were beaten so hard that blood even came out of their noses.'*

Soon after, the men in plain clothes started to punch, kick, and insult the rest of the group, who were sitting. The respondent and the people he was travelling with were then made to wait with the three men prior to the arrival of a number of Hungarian police officers who drove them back to the border with Serbia.

Despite the growing numbers of people attempting to reach Hungary, Serbia's government seems to keep its commitment to force people on the move away from





the northern region and prevent them from entering the EU through this border. Thus, multiple accounts shared with Collective Aid's teams describe that many people who are apprehended at the Hungarian border are still driven down to the south of Serbia by the authorities. According to these, some have been taken to the camp in Preševo near the North Macedonian border, and others to Sjenica, close to Montenegro.

### **Forced Signing of Documents**

Collective Aid's team in Serbia has received multiple testimonies of people who, after being pushed back from Hungary, have been held at police stations for hours. Conditions in these holding cells were dire, and people recall being forced to sign a declaration which confirmed they were held in good conditions; specifically, the document reportedly stated that they were provided with food, water, and clean accommodation. This was not the case. Several people described that, on some occasions, access to food was denied despite requests, and that they could only access water from the bathroom tap. They described the holding room as being approximately 5 square metres with 20 people inside.

### **Another Vehicle Accident**

People on the move continue to be put at greater risk when crossing through Serbia by car, as access to public buses is often denied and taxi prices have become prohibitive for most. As reported in our [July report](#), people are increasingly forced to rely on smuggling networks to move through the country, and vehicles carrying people on the move often travel quickly in order to evade police detection, thus making for far more dangerous journeys. This month, one car carrying 19 people on the move [hit a police vehicle after the driver refused to stop for the police](#).

### **Further Closures of Camps**

As described in BVMN's [last monthly report](#), in July, three official camps were declared permanently closed, while eight others were put on "standby" during August. This month, [APC reported](#) that Principovac camp, near the Croatian border and meant to host only minors, is regularly empty. Principovac is, officially, the only functioning accommodation facility in Vojvodina, the northern region of Serbia. With more and more people on the move now travelling to the north again, the continued closure of camps means they are left with no access to protection or support. The majority of people are, thus, forced to sleep rough, which increases health risks, and vulnerability to exploitation.



### Police Violence in Belgrade

In the past weeks, there have been countless reports of regular searches, theft, apprehensions, and violence conducted by police against people on the move in and around Belgrade’s Luke Ćelovića park, also known as ‘Afghan park’.

Multiple people have described that local police are arbitrarily searching people, looking through their belongings, scrolling through their phones, and consistently stealing all the cash they find. Others report having their bags stolen. As people on the move become more aware of these practices, police searches have become increasingly thorough. Officers have been asking people to remove their shoes, and in one incident, a man was asked to remove a bandage on his leg to see if he had money underneath.

A few incidents included people being taken to a small room in Belgrade’s bus station, where people were locked inside one by one, stripped, and searched. Collective Aid’s team was told by one 17 year old Afghan boy, ‘there was not an inch they did not search’. On these occasions, it was described that the police stole the money they found, and physical violence was reported. The 17 year old boy recounted being hit 3



The first and second photo are screenshots from the video of people being escorted from the park to the bus station. The two police officers are encircled in red, and the people they are escorting are encircled in black. The third photo is the door to the room where they were taken ©Collective Aid

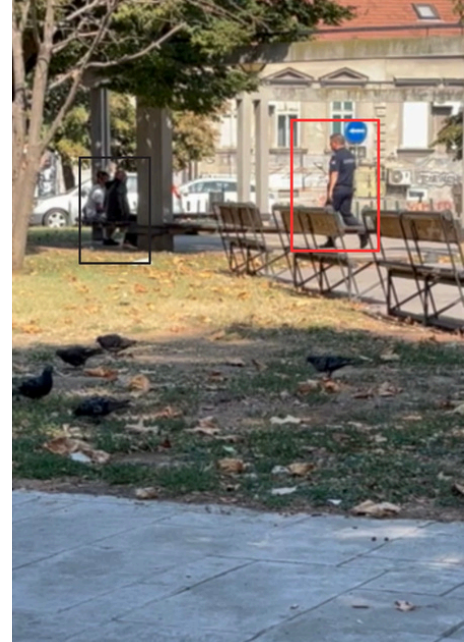


times on the head with his own phone, and described how his friend was repeatedly kicked inside the room. Others have reported being kicked, punched, and sprayed on the face with pepper spray in the park.

Members of Collective Aid witnessed people being searched in Luke Ćelovića park, as well as a group of people being escorted to the bus station. The photos below belong to those incidents:

Staff at the local community centre InfoPark say that police have begun checking whether people have documents with them during these searches, and some are now threatening people with prison time if they cannot pay a bribe. This is particularly significant in the context of the continuous closure of many official camps, for people are not able to register in the reception facilities when transiting through the country. Thus, the majority are forced to pass through Serbia without official documentation. These incidents show how their vulnerability is being exploited by members of the police around the area.

There is little recourse to this type of exploitation when the police are themselves the perpetrators. One man told Collective Aid that he recorded a video of the police searching someone, but had deleted it out of fear the police would see it when they began to check people's phones. In a context with no accountability and lack of safeguards, people on the move have nowhere to report these behaviours, leaving them extremely unsafe.



Police officer approaching people on the move in the park, and searching their belongings ©Collective Aid



### Ongoing Violent Pushbacks from Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina

We continue to collect harrowing testimonies describing the violent treatment of people on the move by Croatian authorities at the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina. Of particular concern, following the Drina River boat disaster of August 22nd, when at least 12 people died, and regular drownings at Bosnia-Herzegovina's borders, are multiple testimonies of Croatian police reportedly forcing people on the move to enter the river between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. A testimony shared with BVMN reporters in July described "with sticks and shouts, the officers pushed the group towards the river, identified by the respondent as Korana river, which marks the border between Bosnia and Croatia, forcing them to cross it."

A different group of people on the move also reported being forced, this time at gunpoint, into a river by Croatian officers. This practice, which has come up in tens of testimonies over the past several years, shows a complete disregard for human life.

Often physically violent, testimonies describing pushbacks from Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina recount practices of an incredibly degrading and dehumanising nature. Last month, two different respondents from separate incidents reported having been driven deep into a forest, a seemingly recurring practice, where they were strip searched and victims to extremely long beatings. One of the respondents, a man from Syria in his thirties, reported that the Croatian police "*forced us to take all our clothes off and inspected us. After that, they allowed us only to wear two pieces. The other clothes they threw away...*".

Similarly, another man from Syria reported that the Croatian police "*told us to take all our clothes off, we were in our underwear...*" and later the Croatian police "*took our clothes, shoes and everything that we had with us of importance and burned it in fire*". The theft of clothing is distinctively dehumanising and in both instances forced the respondents and their groups to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina not fully clothed.

Regarding physical violence and beatings, one respondent reported that Croatian police officers "*beat us like they didn't care, every single part of our bodies was hit*". Another respondent said "*it (the beating) was indescribable*." "*I could not sleep the whole next night*". Recent reports of physical violence by Croatian officers have included people on the move being thrown on to fire, being burnt with lit cigarettes, use of tear gas, and long-lasting intense beatings with batons.



Moreover, hate speech and islamophobic verbal abuse has also been reported as part of the violent and degrading treatment during these pushbacks. One respondent reported that whilst being severely beaten by Croatian police, the officers said *“Go to the Middle East. We don’t want you here. We are Jews. We don’t want Islam”*. Within the same incident, the respondents recalled that Croatian authorities repeatedly referred to the members of their group as “dogs” and “animals”, with the officers forcing smoked cigarettes into the mouths of the group and ordering them to eat them saying *“you’re all animals, should eat these cigarettes”* and later, after throwing a member of the group onto a fire, an officer reportedly said *“animals must be burned on fire”*.

Increasingly concerning is also the use of police dogs during these events, which have attacked many people on the move in the past, including minors, causing serious injuries. One respondent reported that his fourteen-year-old brother was attacked by a police dog in the forest in Croatia after crossing from Bosnia–Herzegovina. This was the second attempt the group had made to cross the border into Croatia within a week and they had been attacked by police dogs on both occasions.

### **Detention of Minors in Croatia**

Disregard for the safety of minors by the Croatian police has also been reported by groups kept in detention. In mid-August we received testimony of a pushback of a group of Syrian people on the move from Croatia to Bosnia–Herzegovina. The respondent reported on the detention of three minors as young as ten years old, and ill-treatment whilst in detention. According to documents shown by the respondent to members of BVMN, the transit group, which included three minors, aged ten, twelve and fourteen, were detained for three nights at “Postaja Granicne Policije Slavonski Samac” (translates to: “Border Police Station Slavonski Samac”).

Whilst in detention they were reportedly provided with only one small meal each day at 09:00 AM. The oldest of the minors, a fourteen-year-old boy, was suffering from bad stomach pains but was repeatedly ignored by the guards at the facility when he and the group asked for help: “no listening, no care, no medicine”. In a separate testimony, a man from Iraq, who was detained alongside eight women and six children as young as three in his group, reported being denied food and water by the Croatian police whilst in detention.



During the group's detention in Croatia they had their photographs taken and were made to sign a 'Decision on Expulsion' document banning their entry to the European Union for the period of one year. Their requests to claim asylum were ignored. This document stated that the signatory would be "forcibly removed to Bosnia-Herzegovina."

### **Situation within the Camps in Sarajevo**

Inadequate care and lack of medical attention has not only been recently reported by people who've been detained in Croatia, but also by residents of the Blažuj Temporary Reception Centre (TRC) for single men in Sarajevo. Some of them have reported a denial of healthcare on the basis of not having proper documentation, resulting in not being able to receive necessary medicines, such as antibiotics for infected wounds. Moreover, some residents have described their decision to not seek medical attention for wounds due to fear that they will be accused of fighting and therefore arrested or kicked out of the camp. We are increasingly witnessing wounds and injuries amongst people on the move at Blažuj single men's camp and Ušivak family camp, some of which have been attributed to border violence during pushbacks from Serbia and Bulgaria.

Inadequate levels of medical attention are also accompanied by reportedly poor quality food provided within the Blažuj TRC. Residents report receiving two small meals a day within the camp, one at 09:00 AM and the second at 1:00 PM, both of which have been described as being "not good" and scarce.



### Continuous Impunity at the Bulgarian–Turkish border

This month, [BIRN](#) has made public the obtention of documents showing Frontex officers deployed at the Bulgarian–Turkish border have been ‘intimidated into silence’ by the Bulgarian border police with regards to the perpetration of human right violations, including pushbacks at the EU’s external border. The documents also implicate Frontex as being active and present during these rights violations. The report builds upon a previous [BIRN publication released in February](#), in which a Frontex whistleblower disclosed that officers of the European agency were intentionally kept away from so called ‘hot-spot’ areas where pushbacks are carried out frequently.

This information highlights the culture of impunity that exists around human rights violations regularly committed at Europe’s external borders. Moreover, it evidences that the deployment of Frontex personnel does nothing to instate the fundamental rights of people on the move as the officers of the European Border Force Agency are either totally complicit in these crimes that violate international law or lack the assertion or power to properly report on violations that they know occur. Since Frontex recently tripled the amount of personnel deployed at the Bulgarian–Turkish border, grassroots organisations in the region have only observed an increase in the accounts of violent pushbacks that occur at this border.

One of these accounts was shared in a testimony this month by a man from Afghanistan who was travelling in a group of 27 people, including 10 minors. He described a violent pushback at the hands of masked Bulgarian authorities near the town of Svilengrad on the evening of July 31st. He described that, upon apprehension, the officers proceeded to violently attack some members of the group, including some of the minors, with punches and kicks in order to facilitate the theft of phones and money from most of the group. They then set some of the people’s clothes on fire. The respondent stated:

*“We wouldn’t dare look them in the eye, otherwise they would begin beating us again”*

The group were then pushed to the Turkish side of the border, unable to find out where they were. Some of the people had sustained injuries from the beatings.

On August 27th, Hans Leijtens, director of Frontex, met with the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior and the head of the border police, [posting](#) on X about their meeting:



*"We spoke about our cooperation to safeguard the EU's borders and protect the rights of the migrants who cross them".*

However, this type of violent pushbacks are extremely commonplace along the EU's external border with Turkey, and are carried out with total impunity. The information released by BIRN shows, once again, that Frontex is complicit in the violations of the fundamental rights of people on the move, even as they claim to uphold and protect them.

### **Inhumane Treatment during Detention**

This month, members of BVMN collected a testimony recounting the abuse and mistreatment experienced within detention centres in Bulgaria. The respondent described being apprehended and detained on July 31st, after crossing the border from Turkey to Bulgaria, with a group of people from Afghanistan. They initially had their fingerprints taken by the authorities and were forced to sign documents in Bulgarian without access to a translator. After an estimated 10 hours in a police station close to the border, they were transported for approximately 3 hours to a detention centre. Based on the respondent's estimation of the transportation time, and the context of the testimony, it is likely that this detention centre was the Busmantsi facility, in the outskirts of Sofia.

The members of the transit group spent 13 nights in detention, during which they were locked in their rooms between 9 PM and 9 AM. Outside of those times, the respondent stated that they would be beaten if they asked to leave for any reason, including to use the bathroom. He recalled an incident where he asked to access a bathroom to wash his face and body for Isha prayer, and was then punched repeatedly in the head and legs by camp guards, struggling to walk afterwards. Despite there being a doctor in the camp, the respondent was refused examination despite significant pain from his injuries.

*"Nobody knew where we were, we didn't know where we were".*

He also described the food as lacking, "awful" and "contaminated", and the tap water as unsuitable for drinking.

*"It was inhumane".*





It is standard procedure that people on the move who enter Bulgaria are forced to endure a period of arbitrary detention, and it is likely that the above testimony is not exceptional in its levels of mistreatment.

The updated 2023 Asylum Information Database (AIDA) report for Bulgaria mentions the issues of bedbugs within the Busmantsi and Lyubimets detention facilities. With regards to food provisions across reception and detention facilities at large the AIDA report states that the food provided is: “maintained at extremely low quality” with a budget of EUR 3.08 for three meals a day per individual. People within the facilities complain not only of the quality of the food but of the quantity. Importantly, concerning reception centres the report states that “the main factor that helped avoid a point of critical malnutrition for asylum seekers was the high rate of abandonment of the procedure by Afghan asylum seekers.”



### Ongoing Reports of Physical Violence inside Greek Detention Sites

In July 2024 the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) published a [report](#) highlighting appalling conditions within Greek detention sites including Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDCs) on the mainland, and called on the government to enact changes. BVMN member organisations have since received numerous reports of ill treatment from people detained in mainland PRDCs, in particular, those at Corinth and Amygdaleza, indicating that little has changed since the CPT's visit to Greece in late 2023. (For historic reports of violence inside these facilities, see site profiles published on the [Detention Landscapes platform](#) for [Corinth](#) and [Amygdaleza](#).)

Although many of the reports of ill treatment included references to a lack of healthcare and lack of legal advice, we have observed that EU funds for these facilities are being channelled into hiring more guards, rather than medical or legal aid staff. According to a [call for proposals](#) issued by the Greek government, over 25 million euros of EU funding will cover the costs of hiring 467 detention officers over a period of 28 months. Rather than hiring more specialised care staff, the tasks of these guards as indicated in the call include connecting detainees to necessary healthcare and informing them of their rights.

### Continued Lack of Media Interest in Pushbacks

As reported by [AlarmPhone](#), and additionally through frequent testimonies from community members to the BVMN team in Thessaloniki, pushbacks across the Evros river and the land border between Greece and Turkey continue, despite an ongoing lack of media attention. Although some of the media sources local to the Evros region publish the [police reports of arrests of traffickers](#), there is very little media coverage of the ongoing illegal pushbacks and violence.

Despite this general lack of coverage of pushbacks in the mainstream press, the independent media outlet EfSyn reported on a [particularly egregious incident](#) against people on the move by employees of a ferry company. The small island of Gavdos has, [in recent months, started to receive large numbers of people on the move](#), as it is the most southerly island of Greece and the first EU land mass a boat would reach, moving north from Tobruk, Libya. The island usually has a population of approximately 70 people and very limited support services for new arrivals, so people on the move who have arrived there have been transported, by the Greek state, to Crete and other parts of the



country where facilities are available. In the incident described in the aforementioned article, 76 people on the move who were being transported from Gavdos to Crete and Athens, were reportedly forcibly 'loaded' in the 'garage section' of the ferry, in violation of the company's own safety regulations, and in contravention of EU maritime safety rules, in addition to the degrading and harmful treatment. On a positive note, it was reported that many passengers tried to intervene on behalf of the people on the move, and also that these passengers have taken the issue one step further, and filed an official complaint for 'verbal and physical assault' by the crew members against the people on the move.

### **Increase of New Arrivals to Greece, Including to Samos Island**

This month, there was a slight increase of the population at the Samos Closed Control Access Centre (CCAC). In August, the Samos CCAC's population reached 2,244 (in the week from 26.08 to 01.09), compared to a peak at 2,193 in July 2024 (during the week from 01.07 to 07.07). According to the [UNHCR](#), on average, 24 new arrivals were recorded daily, compared to 17 daily arrivals in the previous month. Local Samian news [reported](#) people on the move arriving in Samos by speedboat.

### **Interview Postponements in the Samos CCAC**

The issue of interview postponements in the Samos CCAC was already reported in the [BVMN July 2024 Monthly Report](#). Now, in August, I Have Rights identified seven additional clients whose asylum interviews were postponed at least one time. For two of those clients, their asylum interview was postponed up to three times. It appears, for some cases, that this issue was due to the lack of Krio interpreters in the Samos CCAC in August. I Have Right's clients reported feeling stressed due to postponements.

Moreover, in August, the Residence and Identification Service (RIS) info point of the CCAC was only open for 30 minutes a day from 2pm to 2:30pm, while the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) info point remains closed since May 2024, making access to information in the facility especially challenging for people on the move.

### **Water shortages and poor food quality in the Samos CCAC**

Last month, poor food quality and continued water shortages were reported by people on the move to the BVMN Member Organisation I Have Rights.



Multiple clients reported receiving food only once in the morning for the whole day with a typical day of food being: one bread, one orange, a small portion of rice and one juice. Food distribution in the site usually starts at around 8 am and finishes at around 10:30 am. Clients reported the food is of very bad quality with sometimes uncooked or frozen food being distributed despite the lack of access to cooking facilities in the CCAC.

Regarding running water, residents report having access to water only twice a day, in the morning from 8:30am to 2pm and in the evening from 5-6pm to 6-7pm. They described they are provided with one or two 1.5 litre bottles of drinking water per day during food distribution.

### **Rescues, Pushbacks and Arrivals in the Aegean, August 2024**

According to the statistics released by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG), in August 2024 the TCG rescued 2937 people, 1342 of whom were victims of pushbacks by the Greek Coast Guard, in at least 51 incidents. According to the same statistics, 3820 people were apprehended before they left Turkish land and 5431 people were registered on the Greek islands.

These numbers constitute an increase from those of July, when 2198 people were reported to have been rescued (1270 after a pushback), 2634 apprehended by Turkish authorities, and 3865 arrived and were registered on the Greek islands, nearly 1600 people less than this month. 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. The numbers for August are somewhat similar to those from August 2023, when 2679 people were rescued and 5382 were registered in the Greek islands. Nevertheless, the number of pushbacks was higher in August 2023, with 91 reported pushbacks affecting 2404, all according to the Turkish Coast Guard.

Furthermore, according to the Turkish Coast Guard, there has been a change in the means used for crossing, with a clear increase in the use of fibreglass hulls, more rigid boats than the dinghies. The use of these boats seems to have increased from an average of 11 from January until June to 22 and 31 in August and July. The Coast Guard has framed this change in means of transportation as a justification for its own violent behaviour, claiming that with these new rigid, speedy vessels, there is no alternative but the use of force.



## Border Technologies and EU Funded Research Projects in Evros

Evros, the region of the Greek-Turkish land border, has been described as a testing ground for surveillance technologies. Most notorious examples include the deployment of Long Range “sound cannons” against people on the move or the trial of a Frontex blimp.

Over the last decade, Evros has also become a testing ground for several EU-funded projects. Funded by EU programmes such as FP7, Horizon 2020 and the ongoing Horizon Europe, research projects have been developing surveillance technologies, including artificial intelligence applications, for so-called end users that include civilian and military security agencies. In the case of Greece, the police, coast guard, security institute KEMEA – affiliated with the Ministry of Citizen Protection –, university departments and Greek companies are active participants, often with a leading role. Projects such as EWISA, CAMELOT, FOLDOUT, ANDROMEDA, NESTOR, EFFECTOR and BorderUAS have all held trials in Evros. The trial phase involved testing surveillance technologies developed by the project partners – some private companies – such as drones, thermovision cameras, Radio Frequency localisation, and command and control systems.

Yet, research conducted by BVMN and funded by EPIM, has been able to confirm that the Hellenic Police has continued to use surveillance technologies developed as part of the ANDROMEDA and NESTOR projects in Evros after the projects in question were terminated.

The ANDROMEDA project, for example, involved the construction of a pylon equipped with a thermovision camera, an automatic identification system (AIS) sensor and marine radar near a building known as the ‘Forest Hut’ (Δασικό Περίπτερο- Dasiko Periptero), used by the Hellenic Police in the area of the delta of the river Evros. The project also tested a patrol boat which it had equipped with a thermovision camera and radars.

While ANDROMEDA ended on August 31st 2021, this equipment was reportedly still in use way beyond this point, and was featured in Aftopsia, a Greek TV programme, in October 2022. The director of the Alexandroupoli Regional Operational Centre, interviewed on the show, referred to a surveillance ‘sub-system’ in Evros different from the Automated Border Surveillance System (ABSS) in the area. Monitors visible in the TV footage revealed some of its components: an INUS drone system, a patrol boat with



a thermovision camera and radars, and ENGAGE BME command and control software, consistent with elements from ANDROMEDA. A photo taken during a field visit in April 2024 shows the pylon constructed by the project, while we also saw the renovated boat on patrol.

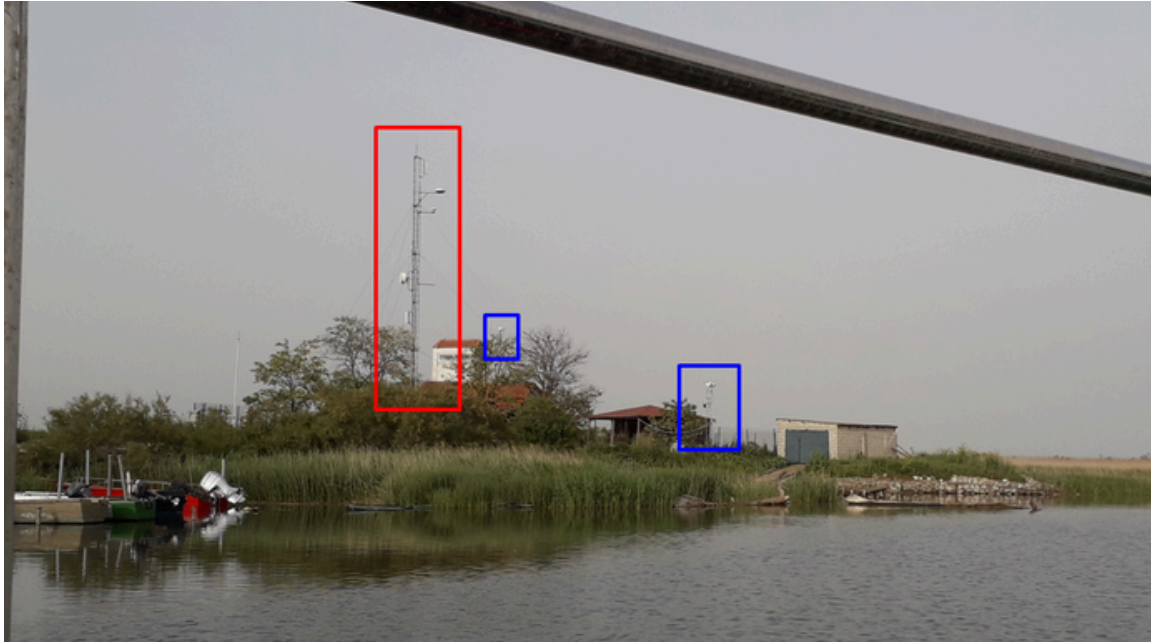


Photo shows the ANDROMEDA project pylon (red) and the Nestor project pylon and ADFA antenna (blue). ©LK, April 2022

The image of Dasiko Periptero also documents the presence of technologies sourced from another research project, NESTOR. The smaller pylon visible in the photo, mounted with a thermovision camera by the Greek defence contractor and project partner MILTECH, was tested during a trial in 2023, as shown in the Nestor final project video (at 10:16'). The white disk protruding from the tall part of the building is an Automatic Direction-Finding Antenna (ADFA), a component of a Radio Frequency localisation system. It is also featured in the promotional material of its manufacturer, the German technology company NARDA, one of the partners of the NESTOR project.

Unlike other surveillance technologies in Evros whose funding – by EU programmes and national budgets – can largely be traced on line, there is little transparency on equipment sourced through EU-funded research projects. Despite being funded with millions of public euros, such projects are surrounded by many layers of secrecy. While it is known that they develop technologies and applications which will be eventually



used by national security agencies and Frontex, access to information on their transfer to police forces and use for border surveillance is denied on the grounds of protecting public security and commercial interests.

The example of the Dasiko Periptero sub-system shows that we need to further investigate and monitor surveillance technologies sourced from EU projects. The lack of transparency surrounding their use and arrangements between security, scientific and for-profit partners can impact the rights and safety of people on the move - the people most affected by the expansion of surveillance technologies at European borders.



The patrol boat renovated by the ANDROMEDA project, seen in the area of the delta of Evros in 2024. ©BVMN



### Government Apprehension Statistics

According to the [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, 20,911 “irregular migrants” were apprehended in August 2024, while the total number of apprehensions so far this year was 149,024 at the end of that month. Afghanistan, Syria, and Turkmenistan were, again this month, the top three nationalities affected by such incidents. In addition, 8,574 so-called “organizers” -the term used by the government for those charged with facilitating people’s movement- were apprehended in the first eight months of 2024.

### Anti-Migrant Politicians Continue to Embellish Population “Statistics”

Separately, in a [press statement](#), the Presidency of Migration Management countered a claim made by far-right Zafer Party head Ümit Özdağ during an August 19th TV appearance that “there are 13 million foreigners in Turkey, 7 million of whom are Syrians, and at least 2.5 million Syrians have been granted citizenship”. The government response cited official data, stating there are 4,425,230 legally registered foreigners in Turkey. Of those, 3,099,524 are under temporary protection, 221,353 are under international protection and 1,104,353 hold a Turkish residence permit. The statement emphasised that just 238,768 Syrians who had been under temporary protection have since acquired Turkish citizenship.

Ümit Özdağ is known as an ultra-nationalist figure in Turkish politics and is particularly notable for his anti-immigrant rhetoric. He is Turkey’s primary anti-migrant grifter in keeping with similar forces in other countries today. Özdağ accuses Syrians of disrupting Turkey’s social structure and appeals to an ultra-nationalist and xenophobic audience by promising to expel Syrians from the country. Özdağ has tried to attract support by politicising the presence of Syrian refugees during election periods. Before the 2023 polls, his party used posters with slogans such as “[Enough is enough! We will send them away!](#)” and he criticised the government’s migration and security policies, targeting Syrians especially.

This anti-migrant discourse gained greater currency during the 2023 election period and received some support. In particular, former Republican People’s Party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who ran as the opposition’s joint presidential candidate, used anti-migrant rhetoric and exaggerated statistics, most especially in the second round vote, in his speeches, campaign materials and policy proposals similar to those of Özdağ. During the campaign, Kılıçdaroğlu frequently promised to expel Syrians back to their





country. His statements such as: “We will send Syrians back to their homeland within two years at the latest” overlapped with Özdağ's rhetoric. Unfortunately, these ideas still wield as much influence today and can be shared without consequence. Thus, this is unlikely to be the last time the Presidency of Migration Management will be issuing statements “correcting” them.

### **Palestinian Protesters Punished with Deportation**

During the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) World Panel in Istanbul on August 24th, the Thousand Youths for Palestine group organized a protest against Israel. The group started their protest right before Israeli journalist Gideon Levy was featured, reportedly displaying banners that read: “Erdoğan, stop oil shipments to Israel and your compliance with genocide!”

The Turkish government has repeatedly used fiery rhetoric to convey solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, but it officially only restricted all trade ties with Israel in May 2024. Despite this, the Azerbaijani state-owned oil company SOCAR is still distributing gas and oil to Israel from Turkey's eastern Mediterranean ports through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.

Shortly after the incident, two Palestinian activists were detained and taken to the Arnavutköy Removal Center. The Emek Party released a statement calling for their immediate release, criticising the use of Removal Centres as jails and a tool for silencing opposition. According to the Thousand Youths for Palestine, the two members are being held with a demand of deportation on the charge of “insulting the president”.

Under article 299 of the Turkish Penal Code, insulting the president of Turkey is punishable by up to four years in prison. Article 301 is concerned with denigration of the government, the judicial institutions, the military or security organisations and can be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and two years. Articles 299 and 301 are frequently used by prosecutors to silence opposition in Turkey. According to the news outlet BirGün, in 2022 alone, 7,600 ‘insulting the president’ cases were launched. These forms of repression are generally directed towards Turkish citizens.



### Evictions Continue

In August, 17 police operations involving 68 evictions of informal settlements took place, and at least 1385 displaced people were forced out of their living spaces, in the area of Calais. During these eviction operations, the Human Rights Observers (HRO) team documented the arrest of at least 14 people on the move around Calais and the seizing of 173 tents. In the area of Dunkirk, at least 180 displaced people were evicted in 2 police operations, involving 3 large scale evictions. These operations resulted in the destruction of tents and belongings, and the forceful transportation of people on the move away from the border in buses.

On August 9th, 14th, and 19th, CRS officers (Republican Security Corps, commonly involved in “crowd and riot control”) carrying the evictions were heavily armed with rubber bullets and shields. On August 6th, in the area of Dunkirk, the police convoy came with a cleaning team mandated by the State, destroying informal shops and meeting points. Their pretext was to carry out “cleaning,” but observers noted that debris was left on the living space.

On July 31st and August 1st, a squat in Calais was evicted and permanently closed. After a fire and a fight broke out inside the building, the police stayed on site for 48 hours to close the living place. The electricity was cut off and infrastructure was removed. All tents, bicycles, prayer items, and other belongings were seized by the cleaning agency mandated by the State. All openings to the building were sealed with metal plates, preventing any future occupation.

On August 27th, another large-scale eviction took place in Calais. According to several testimonies, the police arrived around 6 AM, seized around 30 tents, and forced 60 people to board two buses that transported them far away from the border.

The HRO team also reported several incidents of police violence outside of eviction operations. On the night of August 14th, in Gravelines, people on the move, including women and children, were dispersed by police forces using tear gas after attempting a boat crossing to the UK. On August 27th, railway security agents tried to prevent a family from boarding a train at the Calais-Ville station, using physical force and handheld gas.

Solidarity organisations like HRO keep facing numerous obstacles and intimidation incidents in their work in Calais. One of these incidents took place on August 23rd,



when a National Police officer tried to take a phone off the hands of a volunteer as they filmed an interaction with the police. Moreover, on August 19th, large stones were installed to block the associations from accessing a car park where distributions and phone charging sessions were carried out to support people on the move. This change is described in more detail below. The policy of encroachment by the local government of Calais continues to intensify.

Since August 12th, CRS forces are back in Calais on a regular basis, coinciding with the end of the Olympic Games. Their daily presence in the city is represented by one or more CRS vehicles surveilling the Calais-Ville train station. They impose increased surveillance around train stations and parks, and they are a particularly intimidating presence during eviction operations.



Eviction in Northern France ©HRO



Eviction in Northern France ©HRO



## Aggressive Architecture in Calais: New Boulder Drop

On August 19th, the municipality of Calais had rock boulders placed at the entrance to an informal living site where roughly 100 people sleep regularly. The placement of the boulders is clearly designed to block the entrance of the site to various solidarity organisations providing services to the community who live in the area. The municipality of Calais has used the placement of boulders numerous times in the past to block areas of the city from support for informal living sites. The use of aggressive architecture in Calais and the surrounding areas has been commonplace for a long time, best exemplified by the excessive use of barbed and razor wire, as well as the fencing off of many bridges as a cruel measure to stop people from taking shelter. These measures are in line with the zero fixation points policy whereby living sites are evicted at least once in a 48 hour period, designed to make lives unlivable and dissuade people on the move from crossing or staying in the city.

This is not the first time the city of Calais has implemented this strategy, but unlike in previous occasions, the rocks were not placed to prevent people on the move from setting up their tents, but to hinder the work of organisations in providing their services. These actions change the urban composition and appearance, increasing the marginalisation and isolation of communities established in living sites, already neglected by public authorities.



Rocks placed on 19th August ©Collective Aid



Previous examples of aggressive architecture ©Collective Aid

## Shore Patrol Tactics Lead to Boat Overcrowding

On August 20th, French border police officers were seen ramming their vessel into a small inflatable dinghy overcrowded with people on the move, 30 metres into the sea off the coast of Gravelines. These actions clearly risked the capsizing of the already overcrowded boat and show no regard to the lives or safety of people on the move.

This month has also seen an increase in the intensity of ‘shore patrol tactics’ – described in testimonies. These are tactics performed by the French police, designed to intercept people getting into boats before attempting a crossing of the channel. They often involve officers stabbing inflatable boats already in the water, the use of tear gas grenades, as well as the physical and verbal abuse of people attempting to board the vessels. Shore patrol tactics are carried out under the rhetoric of preventing people from making the dangerous journey across the channel. However, as these



strategies reduce the amount of available boats for people to cross, the number of people waiting to make the crossing remains the same. This has resulted in the increasing overcrowding of small vessels. The overcrowding of small boats is a significant factor to the increase in deaths in the Channel this year, with many deaths attributed to asphyxiation within the full vessels. So far, 2024 has seen an average of 52 people per small boat.



# Deaths and Disappearances

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## The deadly Drina River Boat Disaster

On August 22nd, a boat, reportedly carrying around thirty people on the move, capsized in the Drina River, which marks the border between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. To date, twelve bodies have been recovered from the incident including that of a baby girl, Lana, no older than nine months, and her parents, Ahmed Ibrahim Hilala and Khadija Najib Shaaban. Fifteen people, from Syria and Egypt, survived the disaster, of which ten were minors. Others may still be missing.

Though this has been the deadliest incident in the area in the past several months, this tragedy is unfortunately far from unique, as further deaths have been reported in the weeks prior and following, including some in the Drina River. It is reported by local actors that the Drina River has become increasingly active as a crossing spot, with over eight-hundred people on the move being treated for injuries, and over 3,000 meals handed out in the area by the Red Cross, from January to August 2024.



Drina River, the border between Serbia and Bosnia, with Bosnia in the background ©Collective Aid

This change in the route is likely a result of the heavy surveillance deployed at the Croatian-Serbian border, and the ongoing effects of the special police operation and continued pushback practices conducted at the Serbian-Hungarian border. Thus, the



majority of people transiting through Serbia are still forced to cross into Bosnia, instead of Hungary or Croatia. Compared to the flatter and relatively safer landscape of the Serbian-Hungarian border, the journey to Bosnia is far more dangerous, as it requires people to cross the Drina river and then traverse mountains.

### **Bulgaria's Borders Continue to Kill**

In the month of August, several bodies of people on the move have been found near the Bulgarian-Serbian border, as well as on the outskirts of Sofia. The bodies were discovered by the Italian activist group Collettivo Rotte Balcaniche, who work in Bulgaria performing search and rescue missions in response to distress calls. Their work often focuses on the southern border, particularly in the Strandzha national park, where the numbers of people killed by this border are well documented. However, this is the first time bodies have been discovered by the collective near the capital and on the border with Serbia.

The amount of people who are killed by the borders of Europe is certainly much higher than documented, and this is also the case for Bulgaria's border with Serbia. This border is characterised by its steep landscape and dense forests, as well as extreme



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Terrain on the Serbian-Bulgarian border ©Collective Aid





temperatures in winters and summers. As with many of Europe's borders, it is also synonymous with frequent violent pushbacks, and there is known fixed surveillance equipment stationed. The continuous efforts to securitise the border forces people to take more and more dangerous routes, increasing the probability that more people are killed as a direct result of Europe's border regimes.

### **Man Fatally Injured by Greek Coastguard**

On August 23rd, a man was fatally injured by the Greek Coastguard during a boat chase. The Hellenic Coast Guard often engages in chases of dinghies used by people on the move, in an attempt to stop the boat at sea before arriving on the Greek islands. These cases are often officially described as “immobilisation” practices. According to the Hellenic Coast Guard, these procedures often entail sound and light signals, continued by a chase. These practices put the lives of people on the move at risk and there have been several occasions in which such persecutions result in injuries, as was the case on August 23rd.

In this particular deadly chase, the Hellenic Coast Guard claimed that the boat carrying the people attempted to ram the Coast Guard vessel. The 44-year-old officer who shot the fatal bullet claimed to have done so in an attempt to stop the boat from colliding with the Coast Guard vessel, referring to his fear that the ramming would sink the Coast Guard vessel. In attempting to shoot the engine, so as to stop it from operating, the officer claimed to have a hard time discerning people inside the boat. This statement is surprising in itself, as the likelihood of this kind of boat damaging a metal Coast Guard vessel seems limited. Nevertheless, it is even more surprising that an officer would open fire without having certainty that the shot to the target is unobstructed.

This incident is representative of the deadly, excessive use of force used by the Coast Guard and border officials against people on the move in Greece. If the boat had not been “immobilised” by the Coast Guard but rather accompanied to the shore, it would have safely landed in Greece, where the relevant officials could have continued registration procedures. This begs the question, why was it necessary to open fire in the first place?



### **İbrahim İzziddin's Death in Removal Center**

On August 22nd, Turkish newspaper Evrensel reported that Syrian refugee and Turkish resident İbrahim İzziddin had died after reportedly experiencing torture at a Removal Center. 37-year-old İzziddin had previously attempted to flee to Europe multiple times but failed. After his last attempt, İzziddin was detained and taken to the Kırklareli Removal Center to be deported to Syria. He had shared with his friends that he was subjected to intense torture and violence at the Removal Center, which was reportedly visible by the marks and traces of beatings on his body.

According to witnesses, on the day of his death, İzziddin refused to sign his “voluntary return” papers and was subjected to violence. In spite of his cries for help, witnesses reportedly said he was only taken to a hospital in the morning after he was tortured throughout the night, where he was pronounced dead.

Officials at the Kırklareli Removal Center claimed İzziddin died a “natural death” as the result of a heart attack and no autopsy was performed. According to witnesses, he died while having breathing difficulties after being tortured at the Removal Center. Shortly after the incident, news regarding the case was blocked by a court order July 24th, and witnesses were deported to Syria.



# Border Violence Monitoring Network

## Network structure and contact

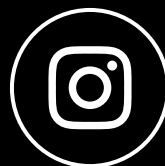
BVMN acts as an alliance of organisations in the Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of partner organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation.

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](mailto:mail@borderviolence.eu).

For press and media requests please contact:  
[press@borderviolence.eu](mailto:press@borderviolence.eu)



**@Border\_Violence**