

MONTHLY REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2024

Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports



Edited by BVMN ©Human Rights Observers, 2024



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

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Executive summary

This report gathers updates from the month of September 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) and Glocal Roots (Kos, Greece).

This month, Frontex appears an essential piece to many of the topics in this report, as a nearly ever-present actor exercising violence in the frontlines of the European migration border regime. The infamous European Border Agency, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this month in a context of never-ending evidence of its corruption, compliance and participation with human right violations in multiple countries, continues to expand and strengthen its relations with countries at the borders of Europe. In Bulgaria, the presence of Frontex's agents has tripled in the past few months and will remain at such levels at least until the end of the year, while Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina work on finalising the agreements that would allow for an increase of the Agency's personnel in the former and their arrival to the latter.

As mounting reports from Bulgaria and other countries indicate, the presence of Frontex does nothing to prevent pushbacks and other types of violence against people on the move either because they remain purposefully oblivious or because they are an integral part of the practices. In fact, reports on pushbacks from Hungary to Serbia – a border along which local teams have spotted a growing number of suspected Frontex vehicles – and from Serbia to Bulgaria seem to have increased in the past weeks and months, as has the violence described in many of them. In the case of Serbia's Northern border, Hungary keeps refusing to stop the illegal practice despite several sanctions from the EU.

Moreover, the Agency's name continues to appear in news reports informing about rising numbers of arrests of people on the move in the Evros Region, highlighting its role in the concerning and widespread shift towards further criminalisation of movement. This policy has become normalised in many countries, including Croatia, where, this month, we report on an increasing number of arrests in the backdrop of a reported decrease of crossing to the country. Lastly, recently published documents regarding a new agreement between Frontex and the UK formalise the focus on criminalisation of movement through the prioritisation of "detection" of unauthorised crossings equipment that enables it, instead of facilitating search and rescue operations. This is shared in one of the deadliest months in the French-English Channel this



Executive summary

year, with two shipwrecks causing the death of twenty people. Meanwhile, violent shore patrol tactics continue along the northern French coastline forcing people to take more dangerous crossings.

Tragic news of more shipwrecks arrived from the Aegean as well, where the lack of safe and legal routes has killed five people in two separate incidents near the islands of Samos and Kos. Solidarity organisations working on Kos, Samos, and Lesbos also report on the very difficult conditions faced by people on the move staying in the Closed-Controlled Access Centres, while the number of people arriving continues to increase. Residents of the centre in Kos report a severe lack of hygiene and broken facilities, as well as insufficient access to health care, while people on the move on Samos continue to face obstacles to asylum applications due to a shortage of interpreters, an issue also denounced by residents of the Lesbos centre. The lack of access to mental health services and the extremely poor quality of the food – which led to several cases of food poisoning this month – constitutes an overarching problem across the facilities in the islands.

In Turkey, we follow the news about the murder trial of Afghan refugee Vezir Mohammed Nourtani, who was killed in November 2023 at his workplace in an illegal coal mine. The case highlights the exploitation and discrimination many refugees and people on the move face in Turkey, an environment of impunity for verbal and physical attacks on migrants. We also report on the death of Syrian citizen Abdulhani Munir in custody after he was deported, following a tragically long list of people who are regularly expelled from Turkey despite facing deadly dangers in their countries of origin. In this context, we share Amnesty International's call on the Turkish government to stop the forced returns of people to Eritrea, and, we add, to anywhere else.



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**



Hungary refuses to stop illegal pushbacks to Serbia

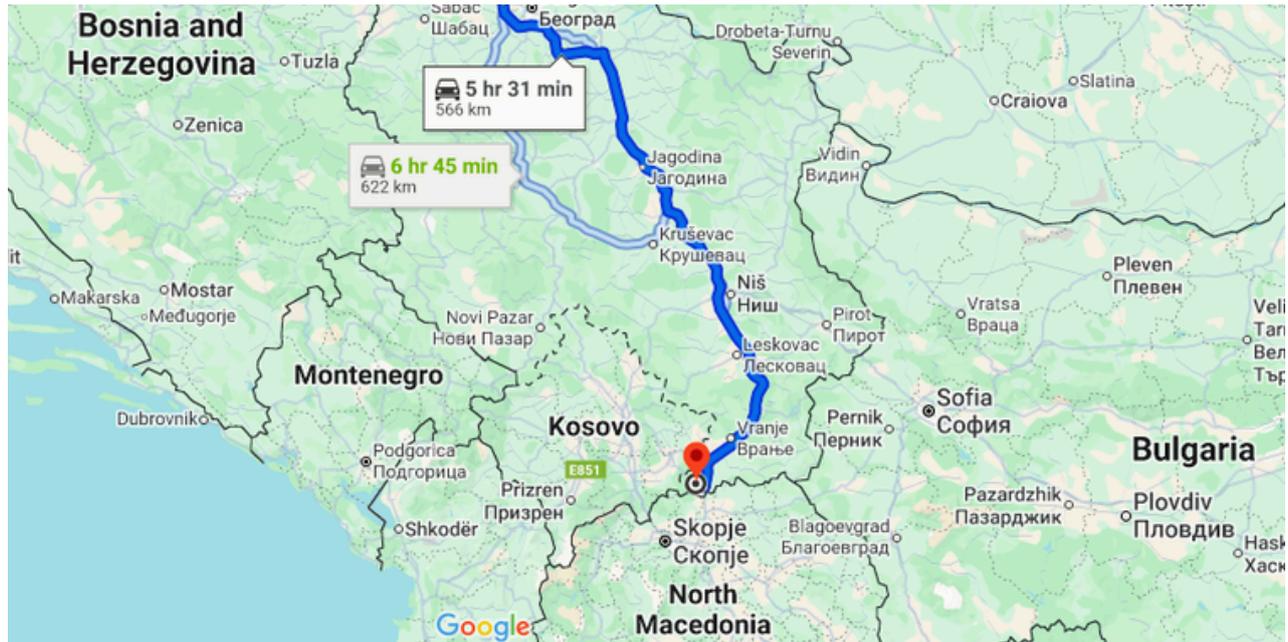
Hungary has failed to repay the €200 million fine imposed by the European Court of Justice in June 2024 for practices of illegal pushbacks and refusal to adhere to EU regulations on asylum procedures. The final deadline for repayment expired on September 17th, and as a result, the EU commission announced it would withhold €200 million in funds for Hungary through a so-called 'offsetting procedure'. The European Commission spokesperson, Balazs Ujvari, stated they will 'deduct the €200 million from upcoming scheduled payments from the EU budget towards Hungary.'

As described in the last [BVMN Monthly Report](#), Hungary's government continues to take a hard line on migration regardless of this and other sanctions. At the end of August, Orbán's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyás hit back at the fine by stating, "If Brussels wants migrants, they will get them", and "we will give everyone a one-way ticket if the EU makes it impossible to stop migration at the external border." Moreover, on September 10th, Hungary announced it was exploring legal avenues to sue the EU Commission for the money the country's government has spent on reinforcing their external Schengen borders (around €2 billion Euros).

In the meantime, Hungary's refusal to ease restrictions on migration has translated into continued illegal pushback practices to Serbia, which have increased in the past couple of months. These pushbacks are far from new, as they have been monitored and reported on by BVMN member organisations over the past 7 years. In September, more people reported to Collective Aid that they were apprehended by Hungarian police and forcibly returned, with one man stating that the police had used pepper spray against him during the incident.

According to the most recent testimonies collected, people on the move are still handed back to Serbian authorities following pushbacks and then driven down to Preševo Reception and Transit Center (TRC), in the very south of the country, against their will. One account shared with Collective Aid described how a Kurdish woman was separated from her family when she was driven to Preševo after a pushback. The rest of the family remained near the Hungarian border.





This map shows the distance between Preševo and Subotica, a city nearby some regular pushback locations at the border with Hungary.

Increased police presence along EU external borders

The EU's continuous goal to prevent people from entering its territory manifests itself through increased policing and surveillance at many of the EU's external borders and beyond. The Serbian-Hungarian border is not an exception. At the end of August, Hungary deployed 24 extra officers to the border with its southern neighbour and, during the month of September, Collective Aid teams spotted an increased number of suspected Frontex vehicles near Subotica and Horgoš.

As a consequence of this growing police presence, distribution of essential aid to people staying along the borders has become particularly difficult, and the daily conditions that most of them face have become harsher. Many people are extremely reluctant to come out of hiding in order to collect aid items, with a few people reporting a fear of police interaction. What's more, several people have expressed that they were afraid to put up tents as they did not want to be spotted by drones. As Serbia heads into a particularly cold winter, the ability to reach people in order to provide warm items such as bedding or warm clothing could be life-saving. These items are specially needed as the majority of people are still forced to sleep rough due to the recent official closure of all camps in the region and the special police operation last year, which involved countless evictions and the destruction of several informal squats, now rendered uninhabitable.



Police violence in Belgrade

Acts of police violence and harassment of people on the move in Luke Čelovića Park, in Belgrade, have reportedly increased in September. This month, Collective Aid teams collected a number of testimonies describing different types of abuses perpetrated by the authorities, such as the theft of money (one man stated that officers took €200 from his friend), physical violence, and use of pepper spray.

On September 26th and 30th, large groups of police officers were seen removing people from the park, with one witness describing it to Collective Aid as a 'police raid'. Following the same pattern as the evictions and relocations happening at the country's northern border, people on the move were reportedly driven from Belgrade to Preševo TRC, in the south of Serbia.

Pushbacks from Serbia to Bulgaria

BVMN member organisation Collective Aid has gathered a number of reports regarding pushbacks from Serbia to Bulgaria in the past several months, which people have described as being particularly violent. One of these accounts included 3 women who were beaten by Serbian police before being forcefully returned to Bulgaria.

Another group of people on the move explained that, upon apprehension by Serbian authorities in an area close to the border, they were told by the officers that they would be taken to a camp. However, the authorities then made them go into a van, used physical violence against them, stole their money, and broke their phones.

This is far from the first time Serbian police have reportedly conducted violent pushbacks. In February, the Guardian [published a video](#) showing a group of men who were stripped of their clothing being pushed back from Serbia to North Macedonia. Since then, Serbia and Frontex have [made an agreement](#) to deploy more Frontex officers across Serbia's borders. As mounting evidence from other contexts [shows](#), the increased presence of the Agency usually does nothing to prevent the illegal pushback practices and other violations, which continue unabated and ignored.



Increased vilification of people on the move by government authorities

In early September, Žarko Laketa, a senior official from the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, publicly described the presence of people on the move in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a “security threat” and called for further support from the European Union to tackle it.

These remarks came in the period leading up to the Sarajevo Migration Dialogue, which took place on September 19th. This is a conference between police directors, government’s senior officials and other actors to discuss migration within the region. During this conference, emphasis was placed on the near-completed agreement with Frontex to assist in tackling migration, a concerning development given the multiple reports of Frontex’s involvement in illegal pushbacks and other violations against people on the move.

“In a strategic sense, we have completed almost the entire work of signing the agreement with the EU when it comes to Frontex”

Concerns over criminalisation of people on the move in Croatia

In the past several months, there has been a huge increase in the number of people arrested by Croatian authorities under accusations of smuggling. From January to September 2024, 1,430 individuals have been arrested, an increase of more than 40% in arrests of this kind, compared to the same period of last year. Meanwhile, the authorities also report a 60% drop in the “interception” of people on the move at their borders, an euphemism used by the authorities to obscure the practice of illegal pushbacks in the country, invoking a false idea that someone can be arbitrarily expelled from the country if “found and intercepted” at the border.

These statistics raise concerns regarding the potential increasing criminalisation of movement by Croatian authorities, whereby individuals from groups transiting across the border might be accused of smuggling, on the basis of arbitrary criteria and just because they have crossed the border. This policy acts as a way to punish and deter migration. In a conversation with a Collective Aid team in Sarajevo, a person on the move described the experience of a violent and degrading pushback. He explained that, before the pushback, three members of the transit group were separated from the others, and arrested on the grounds of being “wanted persons” The other members of the group had lost all contact with them.



Cooperation between Bulgaria and Libya

On September 18th, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers approved a draft memorandum for regular political consultations between Foreign Ministries of Bulgaria and Libya. The draft memorandum is intended to serve as a basis for future negotiations.

Part of the reasoning behind the new memorandum, aimed at strengthening political relations between the two states, claims to be in response to 'issues' related to migration. The Bulgarian government information service mentioned the following as part of the motive behind the new agreement:

"Emerging threats linked to the growing instability in the Sahel region and increased migration pressure".

Both countries' ongoing and open neglect of human rights laws raise further concerns regarding the development of the relations between them. The need to monitor this type of agreements seems even greater when considering the track record of agreements between the EU or EU Member States with 'third countries', many of which seek to subdue migration into Europe, by further oppressing and forcing people on the move into more vulnerable scenarios.

Frontex-Bulgaria relations

On September 18th and 19th, Bulgarian border police chief Anton Zlatanov participated in the board meeting of Frontex. During the meeting - which also included representatives from Romania - Zlatanov expressed the lack of reasonable argument against full Schengen accession for the two states.

Representatives of Frontex also stated that the three times increase in permanent Frontex officers stationed at the Bulgarian-Turkish border will continue until the end of the year. The significant increase in Frontex staff came as a result of a concerted effort to militarise this EU's external border, in the context of Bulgaria's partial accession to the Schengen Area in March. An assessment is meant to be carried out in January 2025 to decide whether to continue the boltering of personnel at this border.

As shared in previous reports, investigations by BIRN have evidenced that the presence of Frontex on this border does little to nothing in terms of reducing the amount of human rights violations that occur - often in the form of pushbacks. If anything, the presence of Frontex contributes to legitimising such violations, increasing



the impunity that surrounds them. Additionally, the Agency often provides technology, training and infrastructure that can facilitate those illegal practices.

During the meeting this month, a Frontex fundamental rights officer emphasised the “extremely high levels of cooperation” between the Fundamental Rights Office and the Bulgarian border police. These alleged levels of cooperation are either false or hollow, given the regular testimonies of pushbacks happening at this border that most often than not describe extremely violent practices.



Increase in arrests of drivers transporting people on the move in Evros-Rodopis region

Alongside the increasingly aggressive rhetoric from the Greek government about strengthening borders and lengthening fortifications along the Greece-Turkey border in Evros, there was a sharp increase in the number of arrests of individuals charged with transporting people on the move by road in the Evros-Rodopis region in August and September.

According to police reports published in the local press, 23 separate arrests took place in July, with this number increasing to 34 in August and again to 46 in September. An example of one characteristic report from September in news outlet Evros24 outlines the arrest and numbers of passengers in the vehicle, but with no analysis or comment. The number of people on the move involved in these 46 incidents in September amounts to a total of 1,868. The reports do not indicate the nationality of the people on the move, or where they were transferred to, following the arrest of the driver of the vehicle.

The vast majority of the arrests were not made during searches at the borders, but rather during police stops on the roads in the region, and most involved cars or small vans, rather than large heavy-goods vehicles. In two cases (one in July and one in September) the involvement of Frontex in local police operations was specifically noted in the police reports.

Two road traffic accidents in Evros, involving alleged smugglers and people on the move were reported in September. One incident involved the driver of a vehicle with 10 passengers losing control of the van on a remote road -resulting in some injuries- while the other involved a high-speed chase with a police vehicle, which tragically caused the death of one woman. In the latter case, it was reported that the passengers included other women and children, some of whom were also injured. No mention of the nationality of the passengers was made in either of these two reports, nor any comment or information on where the people on the move were taken, following hospitalisation and treatment for their injuries. Fatal accidents following high-speed police chases have been increasingly reported in several countries in the past few months, calling attention to a potential lack of protocols (or implementation of those) in the work of the authorities, which further endangers people on the move.



Coast Guard and media framing of Search and Rescue operations at sea

Over the past year, the Hellenic Coast Guard has increasingly framed Search and Rescue operations as a fight against smuggling. A brief analysis of titles referring to sea incidents involving people on the move featured on the [Coast Guard's news page](#) reveals the growing use of terms such as 'smuggler,' 'foreigner,' 'arrest,' and 'boat pursuit'. This language portrays arrivals of people on the move in the country as dangerous and criminal. While it is not possible to certainly and directly link this shift in language to an increase in border violence, it is important to highlight that the aggressive framing has coincided with the surfacing of at least three reports this summer where the Coast Guard fired shots at boats carrying people on the move. One of these incidents took place on July 5th, followed by two more on August 5th and 23rd. As a result of these negligent practices, one person was killed and another was seriously injured. Even though this practice is not entirely new, there has been a noticeable escalation in the frequency and visibility of such incidents this summer.

When examining the reporting of these three incidents by three major Greek news outlets —[In.gr](#), [Kathimerini](#), and [Proto Thema](#), the most widely read online news platform in Greece— we found that the media often reproduced the state's narrative and wording. Moreover, when at the beginning of 2024 Greece was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for breaching Article 2 of the European Convention for Human Rights during the 2014 fatal Coast Guard shooting of a person on the move near Pserimos island, only one of these three news outlets reported on it.

This lack of editorial independence and the widespread alignment with the government's narrative is also a key factor in [Greece's press freedom ranking](#), which remained at 88th out of 180 countries in 2024, the lowest among EU member states for another year. The framing of new arrivals as a threat by both the state and the media, along with the omission of counter-narratives, reinforces legal frameworks that criminalise people on the move, building public support for increased border enforcement and stricter migration policies.

CCAC population and increase in arrivals to Lesbos

On September 30th, the population of the Closed-Controlled Access Center (CCAC) on Lesbos was 1,303, according to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. This would mark an increase of 24% from the beginning of the month. However, the daily figures provided by the Ministry may not be entirely reliable. On some days, there are sudden decreases in population without any official explanation, while on others, the population count



remains stable for days despite known new arrivals. These inconsistencies could be, at least partly, attributed to the fact that the census process can take more than one day to be completed. Nevertheless, it's important to keep this in mind when interpreting the data.

While the majority of the residents at the CCAC used to be from Afghanistan, there has recently been a notable shift, with people from Syria now comprising 45% of the population. People from Afghanistan follow, making up 30%, while Yemenis account for 10%.

The rise in the CCAC population this month is linked to an increase in arrivals to the island, though the rise in arrivals appears significantly higher than the reported increase in the CCAC population. In September, arrivals reached their highest point since February 2024, totaling 801 people by the end of the month, a 68% increase compared to August.

Delays in cash assistance and shortage of interpreters at the Lesvos CCAC

For residents of the CCAC in Lesvos, as well as across Greece, delays in cash assistance persisted throughout the summer and into September, adding to the many challenges people in the asylum system in the country regularly face. Another issue reported by residents in the past weeks is damage to WASH facilities from regular use, such as some showers lacking functioning locks, which has raised safety concerns. Additionally, there have been multiple reports from individuals who have been unable to access free legal aid in the centre, due to the unavailability of interpretation services.

Pushback incidents around Lesvos

According to [reports by the Turkish Coast Guard](#), eight pushback incidents took place near Lesvos during the month of September. According to this data, a total of 190 people on the move were pushed back to Turkey by the Hellenic Coast Guard, in those 8 incidents. This number only accounts for those pushbacks perpetrated in areas close to Lesvos. Photos and videos from the Turkish Coast Guard show that in three of these incidents, people were rescued from boats without engines, three of which were lifeboats and one an inflatable boat, which adds to the severe dangers for people on the move created by the Hellenic Coast Guard through these illegal practices.



Highest numbers of people seeking asylum on Samos since beginning of the year

In September, the population at the Samos CCAC continued to rise. By the end of the month, 3,252 people were in the facility, meaning that, once again this year, the population exceeded its 3,000 stated capacity. The number of people seeking safety on the island has also risen sharply. In the week from September 23rd to 29th, 509 asylum seekers were registered having arrived on the island.

General situation in the Samos CCAC

In September, the Samos CCAC remained without any psychologist nor any psychiatrist for at least the first two weeks of the month, as the last psychologist had resigned at the beginning of the month.

Moreover, the facility continued to lack Somali speaking interpreters, leading to delays in the registration process of Somalis and numerous postponements of their asylum interviews, as shared by Samos based NGOs. This month, I Have Rights encountered five Somali speaking clients whose asylum interview was postponed up to three times. I Have Rights also worked with eight people whose asylum interview got postponed. For two of them, the interview was postponed three times, twice for another person.

Poor food quality for Samos CCAC residents

In September conditions in the Samos CCAC continued to deteriorate. At least four I Have Rights clients complained about the distribution of frozen and raw food that they were unable to eat, as CCAC residents do not have access to cooking facilities or stoves to cook or reheat the food they receive during distribution.



Sent by one I Have Rights client with the comment : *"today's food: 4 water and two eggs. Just that"*.



Food distribution 20/09/2024.



Food distribution 20/09/2024.



Increase in arrivals and poor conditions at the Kos CCAC

According to the Greek Ministry of Asylum and Migration, 1,631 individuals were living in the Kos CCAC at the end of September. In the past few months, new migration routes have led many people to the southern Dodecanese islands, most of which lack the infrastructure needed to host them. Thus, some asylum seekers are being transferred to Kos to be registered in the CCAC. Many others, however, are being left without any support in other islands, particularly in Rhodes. Additionally, they face a risk of being arrested if they try to travel by themselves to be registered in any CCAC. Many individuals are therefore left in a limbo, waiting for a decision from the local authorities to be able to ask for asylum and regularise their situation on the island.

Due to the high number of residents at the Kos CCAC and the increasing new arrivals, the authorities decided to organise some transfers to the mainland. Some individuals who were staying outside of the CCAC and waiting for a date for their fingerprints appointments received a confusing email: *"ATTENTION: Appointments are cancelled due to the transfer to the mainland."*

No further explanation was given as to whether that meant they would be part of the transfer or not. Up until now, this situation remains unclear and no statement has been made by the authorities.

Due to the high numbers of people accommodated in the Kos CCAC over the past year, and the lack of maintenance from the camp management, living conditions have continued to worsen. Camp residents regularly report bathrooms being broken, flooding in their containers, lack of mattresses and blankets, cockroaches infestations, and a general lack of hygiene. Additionally, and in a similar trend as the one reported in the other CCACs described in the above sections, the quality of the food is very poor and the quantities are insufficient. Four individuals were reportedly hospitalised in the middle of September for food poisoning.

Moreover, access to health remains another big gap in the island of Kos. Even though MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) and MVI (Medical Volunteers International) have started operating on the island, there is only one doctor present in the CCAC and one psychologist from PRAKSIS supporting specifically cases of minors, SGBV, and LGBTQI+.



Police harassment in Kos

Some cases of police harassment have also been reported by people on the move in the first weeks of September. Around twenty asylum seekers shopping in Pyli, the village nearby the Kos CCAC, were arrested by the police and brought to Kos town in order to check their identification documents. They were released after a couple of hours, left alone to go back to the CCAC at 9pm by themselves, forced to pay for a taxi. Other cases of police harassment were reported in town, including a group of people on the move who were prohibited from celebrating a birthday in the public space.



Government apprehension statistics

According to the [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, 20,791 “irregular migrants” were apprehended in September 2024, while the total number of apprehensions so far this year was 170,085 at the end of that month. Again, Afghanistan, Syria, and Turkmenistan were the top three nationalities affected by such incidents. In addition, 9,514 so-called “organizers” –the term used by the government for those charged with facilitating people’s movement– had been apprehended in 2024 by the end of September.

The government’s “Operation Kalkan-27” (Shield 27), following [Operation Kalkan-26](#) and widely publicised this month, resulted in the reported apprehension of 1,029 “irregular migrants” and 84 smugglers by the end of September. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced, in a post on Twitter/X, that the operation lasted four days and involved raids in 27 different cities. He also shared a [video](#) of the operation. In his post, the Minister described the soldiers and police who carried out the operation as “heroes”, stated that these operations would continue and that Turkey would no longer be a transit country.

Veizir Mohammed Nourtani’s murder trial continues

On September 18th, the latest hearing in the case of the November 2023 killing of Afghan refugee Veizir Mohammed Nourtani took place in the Turkish province of Zonguldak. Six defendants are being prosecuted in the murder trial. During the proceedings, it was decided three of the defendants would remain in custody, while the case was [postponed](#) until December 20th, 2024.

As covered in [BVMN’s June report](#), 55-year-old Nourtani was working illegally in an unregistered coal mine in Zonguldak, a mining region infamous for its poor working conditions and high number of work-related deaths. The defendants [claim](#) he lost consciousness in the mine. Rather than take Nourtani to hospital, his employers are accused of beating him to death and ordering the burning of his body to cover up the mine’s illegal operations.

Nourtani’s wife Qamer [revealed](#) that weeks before the incident, one of his employers had offered him \$20,000 for one of his kidneys. During an earlier hearing, the family’s lawyer testified that Nourtani’s left kidney was missing, raising suspicions about the motives behind his killing.



Outside of the courthouse before the September hearing, Labour Party (EMEP) leader Seyit Aslan made a public statement, calling for the harshest possible sentences for the defendants, arguing the verdict could prevent future racist and fascist attacks against migrants, as well as further violations of their rights. Several organisations, including the Democracy and Equality Party (DEM Party), the Migrant and Refugee Solidarity Network, and most significantly, the Miner's Union (Maden-ış), joined the public statements. During the gathering, people claiming to be relatives of the defendants attempted to interrupt the event, chanting "Migrants out!" and attacking the group.

The case highlights the exploitation and discrimination many refugees face in Turkey. Nourtani's killing takes place in an environment of impunity for verbal and physical attacks on migrants. With various campaigners, unions and legal advocates sustaining pressure on the courts and raising their voices in solidarity –as with the Justice for Dina campaign–, there is an opportunity to challenge the general lack of justice for migrants and refugees and to expose the vulnerability and disposability many face in work, in general social life and even in death.



Scenes outside the Zonguldak courthouse where migrant solidarity activists had gathered. ©[Evrensel](#)



Marriage fee increase for non-nationals

At the start of September, the Afyonkarahisar Municipality announced a 24-fold increase to the marriage fee for refugees and other foreign residents. Turkish citizens currently pay 400 lira (10.70 EUR), while the price for non-citizens has increased to 10,000 lira (270 EUR).

The change comes after a court blocked the municipality's attempt to impose a 25-fold increase to the fee in May 2024, ruling it was excessive. The suit was the result of a petition in the administrative court by Turkey's International Refugee Rights Association (UMHD), which argued the fee hike was not compatible with international law. As Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family." The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TIHEK) published a public statement regarding the case, stating: "*In democratic societies [...] it is unacceptable for a person to be treated differently due to their race, colour, ancestry, ethnic origin, and/or language.*"

The September decision was passed by a majority vote of council members. After the voting, Afyonkarahisar Mayor Burcu Köksal stated: "*The court found the increase rate too much last time, therefore this time, we are changing our decision and increasing the fee by 24 times.*"

Mayor Köksal is a member of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), one of many parties to have leaned into anti-migrant rhetoric in local and national politics, in the past months. Köksal herself has already led a public crusade against Syrian and other foreigner-owned businesses, closing premises and promising to "*send back refugees [...] without any ifs or buts.*" As Turkey's economic crisis deepens, politicians have increasingly relied on the scapegoating of migrant communities.

The original 25-fold increase was announced alongside an image of Mayor Köksal with the slogan: "We stand with our people on the side of justice". The marriage registration price increase for refugees was presented alongside a list of four economic initiatives aimed at easing the burden of the current economic crisis on Turkish citizens, such as caps on bread prices and an 85% discount on water for families of soldiers and those killed in action.



Mayor of Afyonkarahisar Burcu Köksal back in April with municipality workers publicly locking the doors of migrant-owned businesses. ©[Afyon Municipality](#)

MAZLUMDER report on Turkey's Migration Administration practices

In September, Turkey's Human Rights and Solidarity Association for the Oppressed (MAZLUMDER) released a [report](#) addressing some of the practices of Turkey's Presidency of Migration Management. In a [statement](#) announcing the report's release, MAZLUMDER noted its findings underline "the need to remain within the legal framework and respect human rights" while providing a "comprehensive examination of the legal status and rights of migrants in Turkey." The report draws on case studies, field assessments and testimony from attorneys to analyse the "difficulties faced by migrants, the efforts made to protect their rights and the current legal framework," including reports of misconduct by officials, rights violations and barriers to legal status for migrants. The MAZLUMDER report also includes policy and practice recommendations.

Critics of Turkey's migration detention practices argue, however, that the problems in the country's system are inseparable from European Union migration policy. On September 4th, UntoldMag [published](#) an anonymous testimony of a migrant who described having been held in a detention centre. The author called the web of



detention centres in Turkey “products of a border control outsourcing scheme by the EU [which] benefits from reduced migration and plausible deniability” over potential human rights violations. The report also notes at least one detention centre had a mural of the Turkish and EU flags “side by side, and a message stating that the centre was built courtesy of a joint Turkey–EU collaboration.”

Amnesty International finds Eritreans in Turkey “at imminent risk of forced return”

This month, Amnesty International released a [statement](#) denouncing the “imminent risk of forcible return” of hundreds of Eritrean nationals from Turkey. The rights group urged the Turkish government to reverse course and allow the migrants to apply for asylum protections as required by international law, noting they would “face a real risk of torture, arbitrary detention and other serious human rights violations” if returned.

Amnesty cited reports that roughly 300 nationals “detained [...] without adequate access to communication or legal support” had already been deported to Eritrea. Turkish outlet Bianet has [reported](#) some Eritreans currently in detention have alerted their families that authorities are preparing to deport them.

The rights group noted that the United Nations Human Rights Council Commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea found that nationals forced to return after exiting the country illegally or who are suspected of seeking asylum have “with a few exceptions [...] been arrested, detained and subjected to ill treatment and torture.”

Syrian trans woman trapped in Istanbul airport after her refugee status revoked mid-journey

On September 17th, Canada fully revoked refugee status for Arwa “Nicole” Almsrawi, a Syrian trans woman who had been stranded in Istanbul airport since February 2024, leaving her vulnerable to deportation. Amnesty International Canada has [warned](#) that if Almsrawi is deported to Syria, she could face severe risks to her safety and life, including interrogation, torture, and gender-based violence under the Syrian regime.

The move to cancel Almsrawi’s asylum came after a Canadian diplomat arrived in Turkey to interview her about the authenticity of her case. Almsrawi [said](#) the diplomat was hostile and accused her of undergoing gender-affirming procedures with the goal of obtaining asylum in Canada.



Canada had earlier granted Almsrawi, who had been living without legal status in Saudi Arabia for more than a decade, refugee status with permanent residency via a referral from the UN Refugee Agency. But while in transit to Canada in February 2024, she was denied boarding during a layover in Istanbul International Airport, as her name reportedly appeared on a US no-fly list. As a result, Almsrawi was forced to live in detention-like conditions in the airport for about eight months. During this time, Canadian immigration authorities allegedly failed to investigate why her name was on the no-fly list and put an end to her refugee application without a full explanation.

Canada reportedly covered Almsrawi's accommodation and living expenses during her time at Istanbul airport, but she was informed that support would only last until October 2nd.

The LGBTQ+ collective Mubaadarat has reported that Canada cut a deal with Turkish authorities to allow Almsrawi to leave the airport. Ankara has granted her a one-month residency in Turkey, leaving her future uncertain. Almsrawi has since posted on social media about incidents of harassment and attacks in Turkey. She also says she is in need of basic necessities and accommodation for the remainder of the month.



Update on evictions and police harassment in Northern France

In the month of September, at least 954 people on the move were evicted from their living spaces in the area of Calais, during 55 evictions carried out by the police forces. During these near daily police operations in the area, grassroots organisation Human Rights Observers (HRO) was able to document numerous cases of violence inflicted upon people on the move, including the arrest of at least 5 people on the move, and the seizing of 183 tents. On evictions carried out on September 18th and 25th, a cleaning team mandated by the State picked up tents and dragged them along the ground, rendering them unusable. Moreover, on September 16th, a squat was illegally evicted by the Border Police, without complying with the eviction procedure. Those staying there, at least 17 people on the move, were not provided with any housing alternatives, so they were left to find another place to live.

Meanwhile, in the area of Dunkirk, at least 476 people on the move were evicted during 6 large-scale evictions, involving the destruction of tents, belongings and informal shops with heavy plant machinery. At least 70 people on the move were transported in buses far away from the border after the operations. On September 11th, the eviction of a living site was carried out by a group of armed CRS (anti-riot police force), equipped with defence shields and a defensive bullet launcher. Another one of this month's large-scale evictions, on September 27th, took place in difficult weather conditions, with heavy rain and strong winds. Despite this climate, people were still forced to abandon their living sites. The usual weather conditions on the Northern coast and the climate variations are an added difficulty to which people on the move are particularly vulnerable due to systematic evictions, lack of housing options and seizure of shelter items and other belongings carried out outside the legal framework.

Lastly, members of the HRO team and of other solidarity groups kept facing numerous obstacles and intimidation in their work. For example, on September 9th, a National Police officer asked HRO members to move back with teargas in his hand. On September 11th, police forces threatened observers from another association to take them to a police station for a "deep check" if they kept filming the eviction operation. All these incidents of intimidation stem from the policies and culture of criminalisation of migration carried out by French (and other European) authorities, which builds a climate of impunity where acts of violence against people on the move are meant to remain hidden, unreported, and never prosecuted.



Evictions in Northern France ©HRO



Eviction in Northern France ©HRO



Continued violent shore patrol tactics

Violent shore patrol tactics have continued and intensified over the month of September. These practices involve the interception and destruction of inflatable vessels. Very often, they also involve direct attacks, abuse, and intimidation by the authorities towards the individuals attempting to cross the Channel on the vessels. Dangerous shore patrol tactics are justified by the authorities as the established deterrent and 'preventive' measures to end deaths in the Channel. However, as highlighted in the BVMN [August Monthly Report](#), in the absence of safe and legal routes, such violent tactics only increase the risks to the lives of people aiming to cross the Channel.

On September 21st, Utopia 56 [shared](#) a video of a burning inflatable vessel as a result of shore patrol tactics. The vessel was reportedly set alight by the use of tear gas - canisters of which were also seen and photographed nearby the burning vessel -, which was fired by the police at a group of 50 people in the boat, including children.

Frontex surveillance

This month, [Statewatch](#) published a recently obtained document that details the "Specific Activity Plan" between Frontex and the UK. The document highlights the focus on the early detection of individuals or groups attempting unauthorised crossings from France to the UK as a key goal of the plan. The document specifies this as identifying:

"suspicious groups of persons and/or transportation means suspected of carrying persons and in possession of any equipment which may facilitate sea crossings."

The focus of this point raises significant concerns about resource allocation and priorities, this document explicitly championing the criminalisation of migration and shore patrol tactics over search and rescue operations for vessels in distress.

The emphasis on surveillance over safety also contributes to the shortage of available vessels for people on the move in northern France to cross the Channel, hence contributing to the overcrowding of the remaining small inflatable vessels. As outlined in the [previous Monthly Report](#), this constitutes a known cause for the increase in the number of deaths in the Channel.



On September 14th, when eight people tragically lost their lives during a Channel crossing, [flight data](#) showed that surveillance aircraft, such as the OO-MSK, operated by North Aviation Services (the aircraft previously used by the UK's HM coastguard), remained over mainland France, thus missing a critical opportunity to aid in rescue efforts.



Flight data from surveillance aircraft OO-MSK on the night of 14/09

Additionally, 2-Excel, the aviation company that now conducts surveillance flights for the UK's HM Coastguard, has restricted public access to its flight data, further obscuring the transparency of these operations.



Deaths and Disappearances

Dangerous journeys in Serbia

Greater police presence at borders and in cities leads people on the move to take riskier measures to move through the countries undetected, including in overcrowded lorries and vans. In Serbia, some local people have expressed that they are nervous to sell bus tickets to people on the move, as they are scared of possible consequences from the police. Without safe and affordable access to transportation, displaced people are forced into more dangerous transit.

On September 12th, the body of a man was found in the Drina river near the town of Čelopek, Bosnia-Herzegovina. This tragic news follows the death of 12 other people who also drowned in the same river last month, as discussed in our August report. As long as the EU, Hungary, and Serbia continue to prevent people from migrating safely, these tragic incidents will continue to repeat themselves, as they do in so many other borders around the world.

Deaths in Athens police stations

On September 21st, Mohammed Kamran Asiq was found dead in Agios Panteleimon police station in Athens, after having been detained for a period of one week in four other detention facilities. During the previous days, Mohammed had also been taken to court, where he was reportedly denied the right to call his lawyer. Greek media outlets also report that Mohammed was legally residing in Greece, had a residence permit and fluently spoke Greek. Forensics show that he died because of the brutality of the violence that he was subjected to, his body found covered with bruises and abrasions. The officers on duty at the time of the death alleged that the victim started to beat himself up and break a sink in the waiting room, which is reportedly the sole area devoid of cameras in the whole Agios Panteleimon police station. Approximately one week later, on October 1st, 29-year-old Mia Harizul was found dead hanged in Omonia police station in Athens, where he had been taken the previous day for allegedly damaging a rearview mirror of a police patrol vehicle. Many doubts surround the circumstances of these events: at the time of Mia's death, he was sharing his cell with eleven other people and the witnesses' testimonies have not been released. Moreover, physical and psychological ill treatment have previously been reported at Agios Panteleimon and Omonia police stations (for instance by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture in 2015, and again in 2019).



Shipwrecks in Samos and Kos

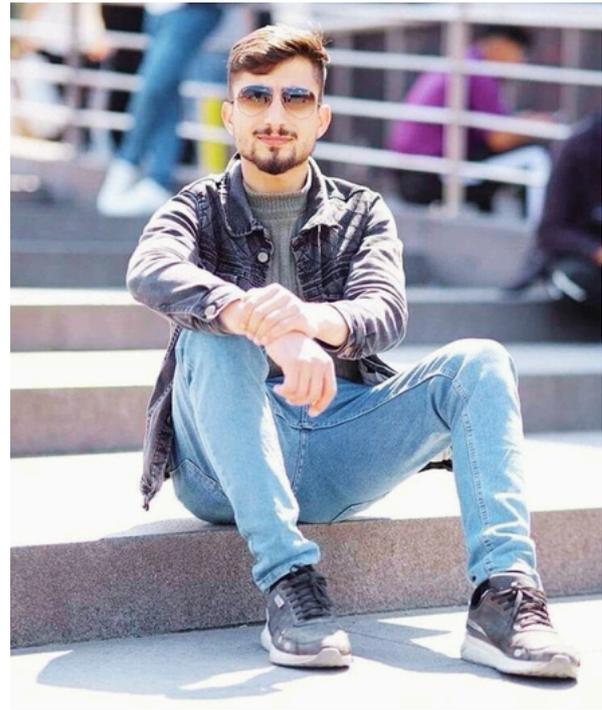
September 2024 was also marked by two deadly shipwrecks near Samos and Kos. On September 23rd, four people drowned in a shipwreck on the shores of Samos. On September 27th of September, a boat capsized off the island of Kos and a woman was found dead. Cases of pushbacks are still regularly reported by people on the move in Kos.

Hani Kasim killing in Bursa

On September 2nd, Turkish police arrested 16-year-old Efe G. in the Inegöl district of Bursa for fatally stabbing 23-year-old Syrian man Hani Kasim. Efe G. reportedly fled the scene after stabbing Kasim at least 12 times. Though passersby alerted medical teams to the incident, Kasim later died in hospital.

The incident occurred after Efe G. and Kasim had an argument, the details of which remain unclear, though at least one journalist has reported on social media that up to eight other young people were involved. The same journalist also claimed that when Kasim's younger brother tried to give his statement to police, they told him they "didn't understand what he was saying" and beat him with a stick.

The killing took place just two months after anti-Syrian pogroms erupted in the city of Kayseri and spread to other parts of Turkey. About 3,000 Syrian refugees had been forced to flee that region by late August for fear of further violence.



Hani Kasim. [@Sema Kızılarıslan Twitter / X post](#)



Abdulhani Munir, Syrian citizen, deported from Turkey dies in custody of Assad regime

In mid-September, Syrian regime authorities reportedly notified the family of 33-year-old Syrian refugee Abdulhani Munir that he had died in their custody, 24 days after his arrest in the city of Aleppo. His family told the media they suspect he had been tortured to death. Munir had earlier been deported from Turkey, despite attempting to legalise his status.



Abdulhani Munir ©Serbestiyet

About one year ago, married father of two Munir was detained in the Turkish city of Gaziantep after an argument with a Turkish citizen. He was later deported to the Syrian city of Jarablus, which is controlled by the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army. Shortly thereafter, Munir returned to Turkey illegally and applied to the Presidency of Migration Management for a temporary protection identification document. However, Turkish authorities again expelled Munir, this time sending him to opposition-held Azaz. Months later, Munir reportedly decided to return to his hometown of Aleppo. Despite being only 50 kilometres from Azaz, Aleppo is under the control of the Assad regime.

According to a report by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, as of June 2024, there had been at least 4,714 reports of regime forces arbitrarily arresting returning refugees this year. In spite of mounting evidence that shows the often deadly risks faced by refugees and migrants deported back to Syria, Turkey continues to regularly remove Syrian nationals from the country. Meanwhile, the EU decides to also ignore these risks and keep considering Turkey a “safe country” for deported people on the move.



Shipwrecks at the French-British border

In September, two major shipwrecks caused the death of 20 people who were trying to cross the Channel to reach the United Kingdom. The first shipwreck took place on September 3rd and led to 12 people sadly losing their lives in the crossing. They were believed to all be part of the Eritrean community staying in informal living sites in Calais. Less than a day after the event, a large Eritrean living site - where many of those who survived the shipwreck were staying and trying to recover - was evicted. Tents were destroyed and belongings were taken away. The sequence of events from those two days is representative of the violent and relentless border regime supported by French and British governments in Calais. The survivors of the deadly shipwreck were allowed less than 24 hours of "peace" to mourn the loss of their families and loved ones who were killed by the lack of safe routes for asylum pressures of the oppressive border regime.

On September 14th, 8 people lost their lives off the coast of Wimereux after their boat got snagged on rocks. Due to the increasing militarisation of coastlines in northern France, with increased surveillance and intensified shore patrol tactics, people are forced to cross longer distances across the Channel in more dangerous sections of water. For instance, Wimereux is 15 km down the coast line from Cap Gris Nez (the shortest crossing point from France to the UK), which adds several extra kilometres of sea to cross in the journey. Moreover, Wimereux is categorised as a rocky section of coastline, much more dangerous than the sandy coast closer to the city of Calais.

Those who survived the shipwreck at Wimereux were reportedly then taken and held by the French border police for questioning at the police station of Ambleteuse. They were then released and left on the street without any state support nor transportation toward Calais or Dunkirk (where the majority of living sites for people on the move are), some 30 km and 80 km away respectively. This absolute lack of protection and care is just the latest example of the institutions' complete disregard for the rights and wellbeing for people on the move in the country.



Border Violence Monitoring Network

Network structure and contact

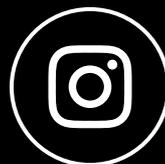
BVMN acts as an alliance of organisations in the Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of partner organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation.

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.

For press and media requests please contact:
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