



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

**ANNUAL
CRIMINALISATION
REPORT
2024**



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Introduction

Rooted in narratives that associate movement with criminality and threat, criminalisation is a phenomenon which views migration as an issue of national security and criminal law, while completely ignoring the need for safeguarding rights and providing protection. Within this logic, 'migration management' becomes synonymous with increased border fortification and securitisation, violence, control, punishment, and deterrence, criminalising the very act of seeking safety. Until this reality is acknowledged, the so-called declared 'fight against migrant smuggling' constitutes a fight against migration itself.

Criminalisation operates through both [formal and informal](#) means. **Formal** criminalisation involves the use of legal instruments such as arbitrary arrests and charges, court proceedings, administrative penalties, and legislative reforms to target people on the move and those who support them. **Informal** criminalisation, includes acts of repression outside of official legal frameworks: harassment, surveillance, intimidation, excessive identity checks, defamation, and the disruption or destruction of services. Though outside judicial processes, these tactics are no less damaging. These dynamics have led to the normalisation of state-perpetrated violence, which doesn't end at the borders. People on the move face systemic detention, unfair trials, evictions, constant policing, and deportations. At the same time, those standing in solidarity are subjected to criminal investigations, defamation campaigns, and increasing operational restrictions, hindering their ability to support.

These trends are not isolated to individual state policies. Rather, they are reinforced and legitimised at the EU level, where migration continues to be framed through the lens of security and criminality. Under the guise of combating 'migrant smuggling', legislative instruments such as the revised [Facilitation Directive](#), which intended to update the 2002 Facilitators Package, create legal grounds for the criminalisation of both people seeking safety and those offering assistance.

In this context, criminalisation is not exceptional, it is structural. It emerges from the deliberate absence of safe migration pathways and functions as a tool of the border regime to institutionalise violence, suppress resistance, and deny access to fundamental rights. It erodes the rule of law, undermines accountability, and produces a system where violations are not only tolerated but systematically enabled. This report, building on BVMN's and member organisations' previous work, documents the evolving landscape of criminalisation across multiple regions. By examining both formal and informal trends, it seeks to highlight how state and EU-level policies and practices frame violations as 'necessary' security measures and actively criminalise both movement and solidarity.

Methodology

This report is based on information collected directly from BVMN member organisations, individuals working in different border areas and individuals carrying out BVMN's work, alongside desk research using relevant BVMN and member organisations' data, such as reports, testimonies, and publications. Core contributions were gathered through individual interviews with member organisations of BVMN, exploring both broader trends and specific incidents of criminalisation across different geographic and operational contexts. Among the contributors to this report are **Are You Syrious, Collective Aid, Human Rights Observers, I Have Rights, Legal Centre Lesvos, Mission Wings**, along with others who have chosen to remain anonymous.

The structure and focus of each chapter reflect the specific circumstances of the contributing organisation, the geographical scope of their work, and the forms of criminalisation they observe. As such, some chapters offer case documentation, while others highlight broader structural patterns or informal practices. Across all contributions, the report remains attentive to the increasing targeting observed in many operational contexts. For this reason, certain details have been anonymised to protect the safety of individuals and organisations involved, as well as the people affected by criminalisation.

The report aims to contribute to a broader understanding of criminalisation, both as a set of policies and practices and as a part of a broader cycle of injustice that undermine human rights, and to highlight how it is embedded within wider structural tendencies of migration control in Europe. BVMN and its member organisations observe a growing deterioration in the conditions for both people on the move and actors working in solidarity with them, recognising that people on the move are disproportionately impacted.

FORMAL CHARGES | SLAPPS

LEGISLATION

**BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA**

MEDIA AND NARRATIVES

**ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS
AND EXCESSIVE CONTROLS**

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Legislation

In July 2023, Republika Srpska reinstated defamation as a criminal offense, targeting anyone who *'states or circulates something untrue concerning another person that may harm their honour or reputation, knowing what they state is untrue'*, through amendments to its Criminal Code. This decision was widely [condemned](#) by NGOs, journalists, activists, and international bodies as [incompatible](#) with human rights standards and freedom of expression. Their impact is expected to extend beyond Republika Srpska, as charges can be appointed in case defamation is linked to the entity, through disseminating online content or statements. The law imposes heavy fines, with vague definitions that allow for arbitrary enforcement. Charges can be aggravated based on unclear criteria, further increasing risks for those critical of the government. This climate of fear of repression and uncertainty discourages civil society and journalists from engaging in public advocacy and government scrutiny, contributing to self-censorship and disengagement. Additionally, a provision criminalising 'ridiculing' courts and legal professionals carries penalties, including imprisonment, a highly ambiguous and alarming measure aimed at suppressing criticism of the judiciary.

A draft law, introduced in 2023 in Republika Srpska, aims to establish a Special Registry and Publicity of the work of non-profit Organisations receiving foreign funding. This legislation specifically targets civil society organisations, under the pretext of enhancing *'transparency'* and *'publicity'* in their operations. However, the law can only lead to further restrictions, reducing independence and autonomy of civil society, by directly [contradicting](#) the [freedom of association](#). The proposed law will lead to extensive financial and administrative reporting and controls for organisations receiving international funding, defining them as *'agents of foreign influence'*, while also prohibiting them from engaging in any political activity. These measures have been widely [criticised](#) by civil society in the region, arguing that the law exerts pressure and fosters a negative public perception of their work. The different treatment for these *'foreign agents'* is dependent solely on the financing source, a criterion which remains vague and open to arbitrary interpretation, potentially leading to discriminatory enforcement. Similarly, the ban on political activity is loosely defined, leaving room for broad misinterpretation that could be used to suppress freedom of expression and association, particularly for human rights defenders.

Formal Charges, SLAPPS

Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation, namely SLAPPS, constitute a tool of formal criminalisation and abusive litigation, which involves the arbitrary use of legal means to silence and repress activists, journalists and other actors. Use of SLAPPS, and mostly the threat of their normalisation has arisen in Bosnia, especially regarding the latest legislative trends. SLAPPS are widely [used](#) against both journalists and human rights defenders, in order to avoid debate and criticism on certain issues of public interest, or at least to transfer this debate from the public space to the courtroom. BVMN Member organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond, have voiced concerns about the potential use of such tools against migrant rights defenders. This has formed a pattern of 'legalised' reprisals through judicial accusations, lengthy and draining court proceedings and investigations.

Administrative Barriers and Excessive Controls

In 2024, Collective Aid teams operating in Bosnia faced increasing administrative barriers imposed by authorities. These obstacles primarily targeted the organisation's registration process, creating bureaucratic hurdles that restricted their ability to operate freely. Despite maintaining full transparency about their activities, authorities raised unwarranted suspicions and threatened the organisation with investigations and inspections. These tactics appear to be part of a broader effort to undermine civil society organisations by subjecting them to constant scrutiny and uncertainty.

Media and Narratives

The public discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to frame migration as a 'security threat', a [narrative](#) reinforced by senior government officials, such as Žarko Laketa. This rhetoric views movement as a crime and people on the move as security threats, requiring urgent intervention and additional support for the issue to be 'resolved'. Such narratives are actively reproduced also by media outlets closely aligned with the government. At the same time, journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina face increasing [intimidation and harassment](#), including verbal attacks, political pressure from high-ranking officials, and even direct threats and physical assaults. Due to the partial implementation of the laws on freedom of [access to information](#), institutions and public companies often refuse to disclose requested information, undermining public oversight. The lack of media independence is further exacerbated by the influence of private media companies with strong ties to local political parties, leading to biased reporting and transmission of information that prioritises political interests over transparency and objective journalism.

**ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS
AND EXCESSIVE CONTROLS**

FORMAL CHARGES AND ARRESTS

BULGARIA

LEGISLATION

**DEFAMATION
AND CRIMINALISING NARRATIVES**

Bulgaria

Legislation

As part of its commitment to combat so-called 'criminal activity' related to migration and to reduce the number of 'irregular' entries, Bulgaria has been aiming to fulfill conditions imposed for Schengen accession. Bulgarian authorities proposed [amendments](#) to the [Constitution](#) and the [Asylum and Refugees Act](#), in order to align national law with EU legislation and introduce new procedures pending adoption under the New Pact. Additionally, in early 2023, authorities proposed amendments to the articles 280 and 281 of the Bulgarian Criminal Code, regarding the 'crime' of facilitation. These amendments lower the bar for being charged with facilitating entry by removing the requirement of financial or material benefit. This significantly lowers the threshold for prosecution leading easily to people on the move being criminalised as 'smugglers', as well as indicating that any kind of support to people on the move can be criminalised. While courts have yet to issue rulings interpreting the new provisions, the growing number of arrests targeting human rights defenders and rescue teams suggests an aggressive implementation of the law by administrative authorities.

Formal Charges and Arrests

The constant reports of deaths, violence and pushbacks at the Bulgarian borders indicate the broader systematised inaction of the Bulgarian authorities to uphold fundamental rights of people on the move. 2024 has been marked by an increase in deaths of people on the move and a subsequent inaction by the border authorities to prevent them. In most cases, solidarity workers face repression, obstruction, and threats from border police. The police often ignore rescue teams' calls for help and block their efforts, threatening to accuse them of facilitating illegal entry or stay. Furthermore, as Members of BVMN report, arrests against solidarity workers and rescue teams have increased with ten international volunteers being detained and interrogated.

In a recent incident, [Bulgarian police prevented rescue teams from reaching the location of three minors in severe distress](#), despite multiple calls and videos confirming the gravity of the situation. The combined improperness and lack of action by Bulgarian authorities, and the parallel blocking of assistance of the rescue teams by the border police, were defining for the events of the last days of December 2024, marked by the deaths of three Egyptian minor boys near the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Not only was assistance blocked, but three activists from Collettivo Rotte Balcaniche were arrested by Bulgarian police forces for trying to help the minors. Upon contacting the authorities to call for an ambulance, the activists

were arrested and brought to the police station, where they were interrogated and detained overnight. While in detention, they were subjected to harassment and intimidation, including threats of charges for 'facilitation' and 'trafficking', and were interrogated about their sources, organisational connections, and activities. The organisations also expressed serious concerns that law enforcement authorities not only failed to respond adequately to signals for help but actively delayed the rescue of the victims, whose mauled bodies were only later found by rescue teams. The UN Special Rapporteur of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor [expressed](#) deep concern regarding the obstruction of the rescue teams and the arbitrary detention of volunteers supporting people on the move in Bulgaria. She also highlighted the possible links of these actions and omissions of the authorities with the deaths of the 3 Egyptian minors and called for an independent investigation into the situation.

State inaction, [violence](#) at and within borders, repeated violations of human rights, inhumane living conditions in reception centers, obstruction of access to asylum and criminalisation of people on the move are all patterns systematically followed by Bulgarian authorities, evident also in the case of Abdulrahman al-Khalidi, a Saudi activist, held in the Busmantsi detention centre in Sofia since 2021. Shortly after arriving in Bulgaria in 2021, he was arrested for irregular entry and [at the time of writing] faces deportation to Saudi Arabia despite his asylum case being referred back to the State Agency for Refugees for reconsideration. Al-Khalidi addressed the Bulgarian asylum system and detention conditions in an [open letter](#) he wrote before starting a hunger strike. Following the deportation order, protests were organised in Sofia. Solidarity groups openly criticised the Bulgarian authorities' decision and called for the renouncing of the deportation order. They argued that the decision was based on his political views and activism stance, which would possibly lead to his persecution. They also emphasised that this would violate Bulgaria's obligations under the [Convention against torture](#) and the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee [Convention](#), which prohibits returning a refugee to a place where their life or freedom would be at risk.

Administrative Barriers and excessive controls

In September 2024, BVMN Member organisation Mission Wings was subjected to administrative controls by the Municipal Council in Stara Zagora regarding an outreach project they had applied for. In order to influence the Council to vote against the project, informal right-wing groups accused them of being 'traitors of the State' working with criminal groups. To prove this, they referenced interviews and statements made by Mission Wings talking about pushbacks. In light of such allegations, official Members of the Council withdrew their support for the project. Mission Wings made efforts to convince the

municipal authorities, such as sending a report to the authorities and commissions, holding a press conference and a round table, and addressing official statements to the Municipal Council. None of these actions received any support. Due to the composition of the Council they had to be in constant engagement with its members to ensure that the decision shall not be based on arbitrary accusations. Adding to this repression, authorities have restricted Mission Wings' access to the refugee camp in Harmanli, severely limiting their ability to monitor conditions and provide support.

Additionally, financial investigations, officially framed as routine procedures, have imposed significant pressure on organisations, restricting their operational capacities and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and stress. Under the pretext of 'random controls', financial investigations have been launched by the Financial Department of National Security, targeting civil society actors. These investigations, set to last for months, require extensive financial documentation, not only for the organisations themselves, but also for the individuals they have supported. By the time of writing, four separate financial inspections have been launched against workers, volunteers and family members of a BVMN Member organisation operating in Bulgaria. Despite seeking legal assistance and complying with all documentation requests, organisations remain in a prolonged state of uncertainty while awaiting final results. At the end of the six-month period, the financial authorities will issue a protocol outlining possible violations and recommendations for improvement, or fines in cases of found irregularities.

Although these procedures are administrative rather than openly criminal, they represent an unprecedented form of scrutiny against civil society in Bulgaria. Such unannounced financial controls drain resources, forcing organisations to allocate significant time and effort to comply rather than commit to their core activity. The reputational damage is also severe, given that being subjected to a money laundering investigation, even without formal accusations, creates doubt about the integrity of an organisation's operations. The financial burden of responding to these controls, along with the possibility of fines, poses an operational threat to organisations, potentially leading to closure, alongside with the state of constant fear and uncertainty. The worst-case scenario remains the escalation of these investigations into formal criminal charges under the country's facilitation laws, particularly given the recent legislative amendments removing the requirement of financial or material benefit for such charges.

Increasing pressure also comes from other institutions and governmental bodies which are being mobilised to target civil society actors. A representative of a BVMN Member Organisation reported receiving an official warning for sharing social media content relevant to the refugee protests in Harmanli camp. Adding to this pattern of ongoing stress

and frustration, members of BVMN operating in Bulgaria have reported being frequently called to testify in interrogations by the police. During these interrogations, the police have been asking questions, implying that providing material assistance to people on the move, such as food and water, is a crime.

As a result of these tendencies, organisations strengthen their administrative capacities, ensuring flawless documentation to meet the extensive demands of these controls. They are implementing internal measures, training sessions for staff and volunteers, while also reviewing policies in preparation for potential future controls. However, these measures come at a high cost, diverting time and resources away from essential operational tasks and support work. Organisations remain cautious in their public response, taking precautions on the scrutiny they exercise and the public advocacy stances they are following.

Defamation and Criminalising Narratives

During a visit to Bulgaria in 2024 to endorse the Citizens for European Development (GERB) Party ahead of the parliamentary elections, Ursula Von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission [stated](#): *'We Europeans will decide who comes to the European Union and under what conditions, not traffickers and smugglers'*. This statement represents rhetoric, which frames migration primarily as a security issue, establishing a criminalising narrative. The snap elections saw increased support for far-right parties in Bulgaria, such as the Revival party. Some of these parties were responsible for the spread of misinformation about people on the move in March 2024, which resulted in attacks and anti-migrant [protests](#) in Sofia, as well as for the targeting and criminalising narratives spread for civil society. This became evident after the deaths of three Egyptian minors in Bulgaria. Humanitarian organisations, including BVMN Member Mission Wings, publicly condemned the authorities' negligence in the case. In response, media outlets and politicians launched smear campaigns, spreading hate speech and attempting to discredit the organisations' work. In the National Assembly, responding to a question on why a criminal investigation for smuggling had not been opened against Mission Wings, members of Bulgaria's Secret Services responded that the matter was classified, strongly implying that an investigation had either begun or was under serious consideration. At a local level, informal right-wing groups, with a lot of influence in the local community have increasingly sought to obstruct and delegitimise humanitarian efforts and reduce support at the state level. In some cases, they have falsely accused organisations of engaging in criminal activity, including smuggling, in an attempt to create suspicion around their work. Even when unsuccessful, these campaigns create an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and stress.

LEGISLATION

CROATIA

ARRESTS

**MEDIA
AND NARRATIVES**

Croatia

Legislation

The [criminalisation](#) of people on the move in Croatia is primarily based on the accusation of *'assist[ing] and attempt[ing] to assist a third-country national in illegal crossing of the state border, in transiting across the state territory if a third-country national has entered the Republic of Croatia illegally, and in [their] illegal stay'*, as provided by Article 53 of Croatia's [Aliens Act](#). However, the [interpretation](#) of the legislation is broad, and some key terms are not clearly defined. Characteristically, the term "attempt" is vague and designed to easily justify the criminalisation of people on the move and solidarity, baselessly connecting them with smuggling operations. Despite the Article providing for humanitarian exemptions, these have remained substantially undefined as well.

A broader pattern of legislative restrictions extended into the media sphere in 2024. In the first half of the year, the Croatian government introduced sanctions on the disclosure of 'non-public' information. The organisation [Article 19](#) found these amendments to be in breach of Croatia's obligations under the right to freedom of expression. Furthermore, the Croatian Journalists' Association [warned](#) that such changes to the Criminal Code are contrary to the public interest and risk depriving the public of essential information.

Arrests

In 2024, [there was a huge increase in the number of people arrested by Croatian authorities for alleged smuggling](#). In the first nine months of the year, arrests increased by 40%, with 1,430 individuals arrested compared to the same period in the previous year. Meanwhile, Croatian authorities reported a 60% drop in the "interception" of people on the move at their borders, a statement which tries to legitimise arbitrary expulsions if someone is "found and intercepted" at the border. These trends represent a systemic practice of the Croatian authorities, whereby individuals are being arbitrarily arrested and charged of smuggling, for simply crossing the border. be accused of smuggling, on the basis of arbitrary criteria.

Apart from formal charges, [testimonies](#) collected in 2024 describe human rights abuses at the Croatian border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Reports mention forcing individuals into the river separating Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, humiliating treatment such as forced nudity, beatings, theft and destruction of personal belongings. Hate speech and islamophobic insults were also reported as part of this violent treatment.

Formal criminalisation practices were used to target [Mr. Vladislav Arinichev](#), an anti-war activist from Russia, who, since arriving in Croatia seeking international protection, has also advocated for the rights of people on the move. In September 2023 he started trying to

publicly draw attention to the poor conditions for asylum-seekers in reception centers in Zagreb on YouTube. The agency held the publication of a video highlighting the poor living conditions at Porin in 2023 against him, while also deeming him a security threat because of his past activism in Russia. . Thereafter, and although [the Ministry of Internal Affairs](#) found him eligible for asylum, his asylum claim was refused on these grounds and his being a human rights defender. Following a single-person protest against the Croatian Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA) and the worrying and arbitrary designation of people as threats to national security in July 2024, Mr. Arinichev was sentenced to 15 days in detention for insulting Croatian authorities, prompting the Center for Peace Studies (CPS) and his lawyer to appeal both his detention and rejected asylum application in the Administrative courts. Following a single-person protest in July 2024, he was [sentenced](#) to 15 days in detention for insulting Croatian authorities. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders also expressed [concerns](#) about the rejection of his asylum application and his potential deportation back to Russia. Mr. Arinichev [remained in detention](#) until October with the court four months later finding [his detention unlawful](#).

Media and Narratives

BVMN partners in Croatia described informal criminalisation practices as a common trend in 2024. Criminalising narratives around migration were widespread, with persistent defamation and [intimidation through media coverage](#) and social media channels, as well as targeted campaigns from Croatian authorities and politicians seeking to defame and delegitimise the work of actors reporting on human rights abuses.

BVMN partner organisation in Croatia, Are You Syrious (AYS) reported an [incident of defamation](#) by a right-wing media portal with a history of targeting civil society, specifically volunteers and organisations supporting people on the move. This portal published an article criticising the work of AYS and other civil society organisations, targeting the existence and purposes of a welcome center for people on the move in Zagreb. The center provides essential support to people on the move, offering information on procedures, documentation, and relevant activities. The article explicitly named AYS (alongside other organisations involved in the welcome centre). Its narrative perpetuated damaging stereotypes, paving the way for further criminalisation of their work. The article stated that the organisation is "politically colored," claiming that their focus on human rights and social justice was influenced by political bias. It criticised the organisation for publicly opposing Croatian police actions and suggested that their work supporting people on the move served ideological purposes, rather than genuine humanitarian goals. By questioning AYS's

motives and transparency, the article sought to delegitimise their efforts and reinforce negative narratives about CSOs.

This case exemplifies a recurring pattern of public officials, often in collaboration with media outlets, targeting CSOs and independent journalists. As also recognised at a 2024 [Report](#) of the Commissioner of Human Rights, instances where high-ranking politicians label these actors as national threats, foreign agents and enemies of the state, framing their activities as undermining national interest, create a rhetoric, which significantly increases their risks of harassment, abuse, and physical attacks. This hostile narrative often works in tandem with media outlets that amplify inflammatory language and accusations, forming a dangerous cycle, which deepens negative perceptions of HRDs. This dynamic fosters public mistrust of HRDs and emboldens authorities to impose restrictions or pursue legal actions against those supporting people on the move. In this way, smear campaigns can legitimise and encourage the intimidation of journalists and HRDs, through online hate speech and harassment, and can serve as a tool for delegitimation and criminalisation.'

POLICING, VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

EVICCTIONS

FRANCE

VIOLENCE BY NON-STATE ACTORS

**ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS
AND EXCESSIVE CONTROLS**

France

Evictions

In Northern France, evictions of living sites remain a systematic practice, implemented as part of the state's broader strategy to 'manage migration'. Under France's ['zero point of fixation'](#) policy, evictions increased in 2024 compared to the previous year, with a frequency of every 48 hours. These operations are usually performed by heavily armed police officers and followed by a 'cleaning' of the evicted space during which personal belongings, such as documents, tents and other necessary items are seized or destroyed. In several cases, these 'security' practices have interrupted people's access to basic supplies, such as food distributions, and in many cases have been followed by arrests and the exercise of physical violence towards people on the move. Smaller-scale evictions in Calais are often justified as responses to a 'flagrant offense' of illegal occupation, while larger, less frequent ['sheltering'](#) evacuations in Calais and Dunkirk are based on formal eviction orders and aim to permanently remove people away from the city. Human Rights Observers (HRO) have been long [documenting](#) widespread abuses by police forces during these evictions, including:

- Seizure and destruction of essential belongings: Hundreds of tents and tarps were confiscated or deliberately rendered unusable. In [March](#) alone, at least 108 tents were taken, nine of which contained personal belongings. By April, this number had risen to 213 tents, despite severe weather conditions, including Storm Pierrick.
- Interruption of food distributions: Authorities frequently disrupt humanitarian aid, making it harder for people on the move to access basic services.
- Intimidation and arrests: In [April](#), 23 people were arrested during evictions. Among them, three minors had their passports confiscated, with police officers telling them they could retrieve their documents only if they boarded on a flight to leave the country.
- Threats and police brutality: On [April](#) 19th, officers threatened to use tasers against individuals attempting to retrieve their belongings. The same month police beat people with batons and used tear gas inside trains to remove them.
- Use of excessive force: CRS (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité) riot police, often equipped with rubber bullets, shields, and automatic weapons, carried out evictions in an increasingly violent and aggressive way.

The frequency and scale of these evictions underscore their use as a systematic criminalisation practice. Indicatively, in [August](#) alone, at least 1385 people were evicted in Calais and 180 in Dunkirk. By [September](#), at least 954 people were evicted in Calais and 476 in Dunkirk, while authorities continued to ignore legal protections. On September 16th, a

squat housing at least 17 people was illegally evicted by the border police without following proper procedures. With no alternative housing provided, the individuals were left once again with having to find a place to live. Even as winter approached, evictions showed no signs of slowing down. In [October](#), 65 evictions affected at least 962 people, including minors. A squat that had housed people for over a year and a half was evicted and demolished. [Reports](#) describe police and state-appointed cleaning teams cutting tents with shears, dragging them through the dirt, and stepping on personal belongings. These are not isolated events, yet they illustrate a calculated strategy of deterrence, marked by lack of accountability and impunity of the perpetrators.

Policing, Violence and Harassment

The state's deterrence strategy extends beyond direct actions against people on the move and also targets organisations that monitor and expose abuses or offer direct support. In [March](#) alone, Human Rights Observers (HRO) recorded 26 incidents of intimidation in Calais and Dunkirk, including abusive identity checks, seven instances of police officers illegally filming observers without prior warning (four of which were perpetrated by National Police officers using personal phones) and multiple attempts to obstruct monitoring work. Police forces have systematically intensified their presence and control over humanitarian efforts, obstructing monitoring and documentation work. On [August](#) 23rd, a National Police officer tried to snatch a phone from a volunteer's hands as they were trying to film an interaction with the police. Incidents of harassment intensified during the year. In [September](#), an officer threatened HRO members with a tear gas canister, ordering them to move back. On the 11th of September, police forces [threatened](#) activists from another association with a 'deep check' at the police station if they continued filming an eviction. CRS forces have increased surveillance in key areas of the city of Calais, particularly around train stations, parks, and eviction sites, reinforcing an environment of fear and control.

Administrative Barriers and Excessive Controls

Beyond direct intimidation, local authorities have intensified their efforts to block humanitarian aid through both physical and administrative barriers. The municipality of Calais decided to place large boulders at the entrance of an informal living site, where roughly 100 people on the move were sleeping regularly in [August](#). Rocks had also been placed previously in order to bar people on the move from finding shelter by making the site inhabitable. However in this case, these boulders were explicitly positioned to block support organisations from accessing the site and providing services like food distribution and phone charging. The use of aggressive architecture has long been a strategy in Calais to block the life of the city from informal living sites and to create as many hurdles as

possible for people on the move. The widespread installation of barbed wire, razor wire, and fenced-off bridges in order to prevent people from finding shelter, serves as a physical manifestation of the state's 'zero fixation points' policy. By reshaping urban spaces to isolate migrant communities, local authorities not only reinforce policies of exclusion but also deliberately obstruct humanitarian assistance.

Violence by Non- state actors

Beyond state-perpetrated violence, people on the move and those supporting them often face direct and indirect violence from non-state actors. In 2024, the French grassroots organisation Roots [discovered](#) that one of their water tanks, used to provide clean water to people on the move in Dunkirk, had been deliberately contaminated. This was followed by attacks on the replacement equipment, making access to clean water even more precarious. In Calais, a squat housing people on the move was found vandalised with racist and hateful graffiti, including messages such as '*Leave or burn*', '*Down with migratory tyranny*', and '*France to the French*'. During the summer, incidents involved local cars chasing people on the move in the street and heavily injuring one of them. The rising of a general climate of hostility led solidarity organisations to request intervention from the authorities through an [open letter](#) calling for action. Unfortunately, [testimonies](#) of racist attacks against people on the move did not stop, with a testimony from October referring to harassment during the night, with people yelling at them and throwing objects at their tents. NGOs active in the area have [reported](#) facing targeted attacks from local groups as well. Collective Aid's Wash Centre was glued shut in October, and the tire in a vehicle was slashed. At the same time, the Welcome Centre of Secours Catholique, a local humanitarian organisation, was attacked with rocks by individuals shouting racist slurs at the people on the move residing there.

POLICING, VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

POLICING AND TARGETING IN NORTHERN GREECE

FORMAL CHARGES AND ARRESTS

GREECE

LEGAL ACCESS

MEDIA AND NARRATIVES

Greece

Formal Charges and Arrests

The rapid deterioration of the rule of law in Greece has been evident in the systematic criminalisation and imprisonment of people on the move, based on unfounded claims or non-existent evidence. Formal procedures routinely flout basic standards of justice, violating fundamental rights and due process. Throughout 2024, the criminalisation of people on the move under smuggling charges continued to be a persistent trend, reinforcing a broader pattern, with individuals routinely targeted under the harsh anti-smuggling framework. Strikingly often, arrivals by boat or car at Greek borders result in the arbitrary arrest of one or more individuals, who are consequently charged with smuggling, and subjected to disproportionate sentences.

An indicative and recent example is the [case](#) of A.H., a Palestinian refugee from Gaza, supported by Legal Centre Lesvos. A.H. was among a group of 25 people attempting to reach Greece by boat when they were attacked by the Hellenic Coast Guard, which fired live ammunition, causing their boat to capsize. After being beaten, A.H. was arrested and charged with unauthorised transfer of foreigners, causing a shipwreck, and disobedience. However, during the trial, witnesses confirmed that A.H. was not the driver but was merely trying to stabilise the boat to prevent it from sinking. The Mytilene Three-Member Felony Appeal Court ultimately acquitted him of all charges, yet his case remains indicative of how people on the move are systematically prosecuted, under arbitrary criteria, simply for trying to reach safety.

In May 2024, another landmark case saw the [dropping of all charges](#) against the nine defendants in the Adriana shipwreck case, one of the deadliest shipwrecks in recent European history, in which at least 600 people died off Pylos in June 2023. The Criminal Court of Kalamata acquitted the defendants of smuggling and illegal entry and declared itself incompetent to rule on the accusations of causing a shipwreck and membership in a criminal organisation, citing jurisdictional reasons. The defendants had consistently stated that they were passengers on the Adriana, and had no role in organising the journey or receiving payments. The survivors of the shipwreck themselves were accused and detained for almost a year instead of receiving the proper support they should have been entitled to. This case reflects Greece's systematic use of smuggling charges as a tool to criminalise migration.

On Samos, the growing criminalisation of boat drivers has led to an increase in arrests in 2024 compared to previous years. The Samos-based [Human Rights Legal Project](#) has

observed frequent violations of fair trial principles in criminal cases related to this issue. However, in a groundbreaking decision in October 2024 the one Member Court of Appeals of Syros First Instance, [acquitted](#) three defendants of all charges on the grounds of their status as asylum seekers, establishing an important legal precedent. M.S., F.F., and E.A. faced accusations of illegal transfer of third-country nationals and assisting the illegal transfer of third-country nationals with potential 15 years of incarceration for each transferred person. The first two men were accused of driving the boat, while the latter was accused of helping the driver by using his phone and the map. In a significant decision, the court determined that asylum seekers are not subject to Law 5038/2023 on the Migration Code, and thus cannot be charged with the offenses of illegal transfer or facilitation of illegal entry of third-country nationals. This marks the first time a Greek court has recognised the Geneva Convention's protection of refugees against prosecution for unauthorised entry into a receiving country.

The pattern of criminalising drivers as smugglers is also [reported](#) along the land borders of Northern Greece, particularly in Evros-Rodopis region. Alongside escalating government rhetoric about border security and lengthening fortifications, arrests of alleged transporters significantly increased during 2024. These arrests, involving cars, vans, and in general smaller vehicles, occurred primarily in stop-and-search police operations on local roads, rather than at searches at the borders. In many [cases](#), this led to high-speed chases, fatal crashes, and injuries, further exposing the recklessness of law enforcement practices and the absence of safeguards for people on the move, who were usually forced or coerced into driving, a fact systematically ignored in subsequent court proceedings.

One such case is that of Mr. Sabetara, an Iranian asylum seeker, who was arrested and convicted in Thessaloniki on smuggling charges while attempting to reach Germany to reunite with his children. In September 2022, he was sentenced to 18 years in prison, which was reduced to 7 years and 4 months upon appeal, leading to his release in December 2024, almost three months after the appeal decision and over three years after his initial arrest. His case highlights the severe [procedural shortcomings](#) and the lengthy delays which characterise the systemic violations of the Greek state to its international obligations to uphold a fair trial. Furthermore, it underscores the consequences of Europe's deterrence-based border policies, which lead to further criminalisation of people on the move and perpetuate cycles of injustice that undermine fundamental human rights.

Policing, Violence and Harassment

Police harassment and violence in Greece manifest on multiple levels, disproportionately targeting racialised and marginalised communities through physical abuse, relentless

controls and searches, arbitrary arrests, and systemic violations of fundamental rights. On September 21st, Mohammed Kamran Asiq was [found](#) dead as a result of the brutal violence he endured while detained at Agios Panteleimon police station in Athens, after having spent a week in four other detention facilities. Before his death, he had been brought to court but was denied his right to contact a lawyer. His family received no information about his whereabouts, despite repeated requests to the police. It remains unclear whether this information was intentionally withheld or simply a result of incompetence. Just a week later, Mia Harizul was [found](#) hanged in Omonia police station, where he had been detained the previous day for allegedly damaging a police car mirror. These are not isolated incidents. [Reports](#) of physical violence, psychological mistreatment, and denial of fundamental services are longstanding in these and many [other police stations across Greece](#).

Following the two deaths the [Greek National Commission for Human Rights](#), issued a formal statement expressing concern over detention conditions and systemic police abuse. Even prior to these incidents, the [Greek Union for Human Rights](#) had publicly condemned escalating police violence, particularly against migrants and marginalised groups. These domestic responses were echoed internationally: in October 2024, the [UN](#) Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture visited Greece, placing a spotlight on the issue of police violence and highlighting longstanding failures in accountability and oversight.

Furthermore, several cases of police harassment against people on the move were reported during the year. In [September](#) 2024, around twenty asylum seekers shopping in Pyli, a village near the Kos CCAC, were arrested by police and transported to Kos town for identification checks. After being held for several hours, they were finally released at 9 PM and left to find their own way back to the CCAC, forced to pay for a taxi. Additional reports of police harassment surfaced in town, including a group of asylum seekers who were prevented from celebrating a birthday in a public space, further illustrating the ongoing restrictions and intimidation faced by people on the move in the island.

Policing and targeting in Northern Greece

Throughout 2024, reports from northern Greece, and mostly Thessaloniki and the Evros region, have highlighted a troubling escalation in police violence and systematic targeting of people on the move. This included the use of police tactics such as stop-and-search operations, mass arrests, raids, and crackdown on street trading. The regular inclusion of officers from the 'Directorate of Aliens' in these operations indicates that people on the move are being specifically targeted, even though the actions are recorded as '*Operations to Prevent Crime and Ensure a Sense of Security for Citizens*'. The consistently disproportionate

ratio of people searched to people actually charged with a crime (high numbers of people stopped and searched, very low numbers of arrests) indicates that there is a significant element of aiming simply to harass, rather than to proceed on a concrete suspicion or evidence of a crime. These measures often result in human rights violations involving the excessive use of force, prolonged detentions, and inhumane treatment, and are justified under the guise of combating crime and 'illegal migration'. The frequency and intensity of these actions suggest a coordinated effort to deter migration through intimidation and criminalisation.

Patterns of police harassment have become more entrenched, targeting specific communities with sustained aggression. In late 2024, BVMN reporters operating in Northern Greece [reported](#) increased police harassment towards documented migrants of the Kuwaiti community in Thessaloniki. They mentioned constant and routine stop and search actions and questionings by the authorities. One individual, despite holding valid documentation, was forcibly escorted by police to an unknown location outside the city. Another person reported being stopped five times in December alone and another reported being searched in a deliberately humiliating manner in public. This sustained harassment has forced many persons into isolation and fear, preventing them from accessing essential support services. By [November](#) 2024, stop and search operations also included increased surveillance of young people under the guise of juvenile delinquency prevention. The 'Sub-directorate of Minors' ramped up stop-and-search measures, further exacerbating racial profiling and the over-policing of migrant youth. This reinforces a narrative in which young migrants are disproportionately criminalised, reflecting a structural effort to equate migration with criminality from an early age.

The rise in mass arrests further solidifies the strategy of criminalising migrant communities. In January 2024, Thessaloniki [witnessed](#) police operations targeting people on the move. Over the month, 1,847 individuals underwent police checks, with 338 being brought in and 63 arrested on charges related to illegal stay and transportation. These operations were concentrated in intercity transport hubs, general hospitals, and public spaces, demonstrating a systematic effort to criminalise migrant presence in the city. This pattern mirrors trends already observed in [2023](#), where mass arrests and raids, commonly referred to as 'broom operations', were widely documented.

Since the start of 2024, Greek police have escalated the crackdown on [open markets](#) in Thessaloniki, mostly affecting Roma and migrant traders. Police activity has focused on specific areas of Thessaloniki, mostly populated by migrant and Roma communities and third party nationals. Markets in these districts have been heavily targeted, with police confiscating goods and inflicting violence against traders. These operations have intensified

following statements from the new mayor, who pledged to suppress so-called 'illegal trade'. Given that many migrants rely on such markets for their livelihoods, these raids cause further hurdles to migrant communities, pushing them into deeper economic instability and precarity. This practice serves to delegitimise migrant contributions to the local economy while reinforcing exclusionary policies.

Media and Narratives

One of the most pervasive trends in Greek media reporting on migration is the lack of independence and the widespread alignment with government narratives. While movement and arrivals are presented as a threat, any opinion scrutinising governmental practices is suppressed. Media outlets' and governmental agencies' online reporting is widely connected with state interests, working to legitimise unlawful practices, reproducing criminalising legislation and shaping public opinion in favor of stricter border management and enforcement practices.

A clear example is the Hellenic Coast Guard's [framing](#) of Search and Rescue operations as part of the 'fight against smuggling'. This narrative is reinforced by the increasing use of criminalising language such as 'smuggler,' 'foreigner,' 'arrest,' and 'boat pursuit' when reporting on arrivals. This use of language was [observed](#) in parallel with the escalation of violence by the Hellenic Coast Guard with frequent incidents of shots being fired at boats carrying people on the move, during the summer of 2024. Greek media outlets largely reproduced these narratives and wording, sometimes avoiding coverage altogether. In [July](#) 2024, incidents of boat chases were shared by the Coast Guard, ending with the arrest of at least one person for being the boat driver. In cases of [shootings](#) by Greek authorities, such as the one of Chios, [coverage](#) was scarce and dismissive. Meanwhile, when a Greek officer was injured in Evros, [local press](#) widely framed it as an attack by 'human traffickers', despite unclear circumstances. This disparity in reporting reflects a broader trend: Greek media systematically amplifies state narratives that criminalise migration while downplaying or erasing incidents of State violence. In a country [ranking lowest](#) in the EU for press freedom, this bias plays a key role in justifying repression and shielding authorities from scrutiny.

The wildfires that erupted in northern Greece in 2023 were [widely yet wrongfully attributed](#) to people on the move. Despite evidence proving that the fires were caused by lightning, far-right narratives spread extensively, and police were slow to act against the perpetrators. The ensuing violence escalated to the point where locals arbitrarily 'arrested' 13 people on the move, locked them in a trailer cage, and even uploaded a video showing them confined. This was not an isolated case; in August, residents in the Evros region's town of Lefkimi similarly [detained](#) a transit group of 17 people. Local [media](#) largely fueled

this hostility, framing 'illegal immigrants' as being responsible for starting the fire. This narrative aligned with [statements](#) from politicians, such as MP Papadakis, who explicitly urged locals to '*take measures.*' By reinforcing these claims, media coverage intensified existing rage and hostility toward migration in the area, further legitimising acts of violence.

Beyond actively reinforcing narratives that conflate migration with crime, another key media tactic [observed](#) in 2024 is the systematic erasure of any mention of ongoing pushbacks by authorities. Particularly in Northern Greece, especially in the Evros region, illegal pushbacks and border violence receive little to no media attention. Instead, local media routinely amplify police [reports](#) on so-called 'smugglers' being arrested, while remaining silent on the broader context of border repression. This lack of coverage allows state violence to go unchallenged, effectively normalising and obscuring the brutality at the border, while the public is encouraged to forget or ignore it.

Legal Access

Following a complaint by Avocats Sans Frontières France, I Have Rights, and the Human Rights Legal Project, the Greek Ombudsman found that the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) at the Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) unlawfully restricts lawyers' access to the site. These restrictions not only hinder legal professionals in carrying out their work but also deprive asylum seekers of their fundamental right to legal counsel. The complaint highlighted several arbitrary barriers imposed on lawyers, including the requirement to provide prior notice before entering the CCAC, the mandatory accompaniment by security staff –thus severely limiting confidential communication with clients– and the inaccessibility of the CCAC due to its remote location. Additionally, restrictions on the movement of asylum seekers within and outside the CCAC further curtail their access to legal assistance. In response, the Ombudsman confirmed that these practices are excessively restrictive and violate Article 34(2) of the Lawyers' Code, which states that the only legal entry requirements for lawyers are presenting their professional ID and signing the entry log. Despite these findings, unlawful restrictions remain a recurring issue, reflecting broader patterns of criminalisation of solidarity and suppression of legal support for people on the move in Greece.

**ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS
AND EXCESSIVE CONTROLS**

FORMAL CHARGES

POLAND

LEGISLATION

MEDIA AND NARRATIVES

IMPACT OF REPRESSION

Poland

Legislation

The Polish Penal Code establishes the criminal offence of *'facilitation of illegal entry'* without providing any additional requirements, as well as (in the same article), the *'facilitation of illegal stay'*, however with the inclusion of a *'financial or personal benefit'* criterion for criminal liability. Notably, the Criminal Code also establishes criminal liability in a different article for anyone who, despite being able to help, omits to provide assistance to a person facing an immediate life-threatening situation or injury. Given this legal obligation to provide aid, it is absurd that humanitarian assistance is so frequently and widely associated with criminal activity by the Polish authorities.

Formal Charges

An ongoing [case](#) of criminalisation of humanitarian assistance is the one known as Trial of the Five. This case dates back to 2022, when four human rights defenders were detained while providing aid to a family from Iraq and an Egyptian national at the Polish-Belarusian border. They were helping transport them just a few kilometers from the forest to the nearest town. After being detained for 72 hours, they faced charges of coordinating an illegal border crossing. A year later, the case was expanded to include another individual providing aid at the Polish-Belarusian border, after their residence and surrounding area were searched. Unlike the other four, this person was charged, not with facilitation of illegal entry, but with facilitation of illegal stay, for providing the group with temporary housing. In 2024, the prosecution modified the charges, and the indictment submitted to the District Court in Hajnówka was based on Article 264a § 1 of the Penal Code criminalising facilitation of a person's stay. The four activists arrested in 2022 were accused of *'facilitating the stay of the specified individuals in the territory of Poland by transporting them deeper into the country'*. Meanwhile, the fifth defendant was charged with *'facilitating the stay in Poland by providing them with food and clothing during their stay in the forest, offering them shelter and rest, and also transporting them deeper into the country on March 22, 2022'*. These criminal charges carry potential prison sentences of up to five years. The first [hearing](#) took place at the District Court in Hajnówka in January 2025, drawing significant support from multiple actors. According to the prosecutor, the criterion of financial or personal gain is fulfilled, not because the Five received any personal or material benefit, but because their actions benefited the assisted people on the move. This interpretation of the law is highly contradicting and inaccurate. Authorities have repeatedly attempted to bring charges against individuals providing aid and support to people on the move near the border.

Numerous instances of detention, criminal investigations, and interrogations have been reported, all targeting those who sought to offer humanitarian assistance.

Administrative Barriers and Excessive Controls

'It's not that the targeting stopped, it's just that we got so used to it that we stopped reporting each specific incident', testify those who have been active at the Polish-Belarusian border for years. The Polish border remains heavily militarised, with uniformed presence everywhere: border guards, police, and military personnel. Armed, uniformed officers are constantly patrolling the area, and the security presence is overwhelming. People report being stopped on a daily basis at checkpoints, regardless of whether they are locals, activists, or aid workers, with constant questioning and ID checks set up for identification control. These controls sometimes extend beyond typical checks, to being more aggressive, with authorities often asking intrusive personal questions with the aim to annoy and possibly delay people, such as: *'Where are you coming from?' or 'What are you doing here?'* While these questions are not legally mandatory to answer, when authorities seek to intimidate or harass, refusing to engage can sometimes result in prolonged delays, with individuals held for hours before being allowed to proceed. During such controls or other encounters with the authorities, people are frequently tied with 'transporting illegal migrants' and implications that they are 'facilitating illegal entry'. These accusations, whether subtle or explicit, aim to create an atmosphere of intimidation and serve as an attempt to discourage humanitarian efforts. This is not only an issue for those offering aid at the border but also for locals, who have come to accept these excessive controls as part of daily life.

Media and Narratives

Public figures and far-right actors [continue to spread](#) defamatory narratives against people on the move and humanitarian assistance. In June 2024, Mariusz Błaszczak, former Minister of Defence, posted on X:

'Residents are alerting about the gathering of illegal migrants, mainly young men, who are being assisted by one organisation that has for years obstructed the service of soldiers and border guard officers.'

Xenophobic accusations have been amplified at the highest levels of government, with the minister of defence, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, publicly accusing human rights defenders of *'indicating where it will be easier to cross the border where there are no Polish soldiers. This is creating a threat'*.

Adding to this, the killing of a Polish soldier in May 2024 directly led to the rise of xenophobic and repressive narratives. Border guards and soldiers have increasingly mistreated human rights defenders, accusing them on a daily basis of 'facilitation'. One standard practice since June 2024 involves volunteers being interrogated by border guards, when trying to hand in the asylum applications of people on the move. When people contact border guards to ensure asylum applications are received, authorities interrogate them, accusing them of 'facilitating illegal entry'. Statements like, *'If you help them apply for asylum, you are helping them cross illegally'*, and insinuations that volunteers are getting paid per application have become common intimidation tactics, as reported by activists in the area. Although no formal charges have been brought, this systemic harassment creates an atmosphere of fear and constant surveillance.

According to people active for years in the area, the psychological burden of repression is profound. While some report that the ongoing criminalisation makes them more determined to act, for many, it leads to burnout, fear, and withdrawal. Some volunteers stop engaging entirely, exhausted by systemic violence and intimidation. Others shift to less direct forms of humanitarian work to avoid constant confrontation and the risk of persecution.

SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION AND ITS IMPACT ON PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Living conditions - Evictions
Restrictions to freedom of movement
and criminalisation of service provision

FORMAL CHARGES | SLAPPS

LEGISLATION

POLICE VIOLENCE

SERBIA

**DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE
AND DATA PROTECTION**

**GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED NGOs
(GONGOS)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS
AND EXCESSIVE CONTROLS**

Serbia

Legislation

The [Serbian Penal Code](#) criminalises, *'Whoever with intent to acquire a benefit for himself or another makes it possible for another to illegally cross the Serbian border or to illegally stay in or transit through Serbia shall be punished by imprisonment from six months to five years'*. While the law references financial or material benefit, this requirement is vague and lacks a clear definition. Moreover, it is not accompanied by adequate safeguards or a humanitarian exemption to ensure that people on the move, or those providing support, are not criminalised on arbitrary grounds.

Beyond criminal law provisions, Serbia has increasingly used legislative tools to constrain civic space. In November 2024, a Draft Law was introduced proposing the establishment of a registry for *'agents of foreign influence'*, targeting organisations receiving over 50% of foreign funding and imposing severe penalties for non-compliance. As reported by Collective Aid, financial investigations will apply regardless of whether organisations are officially registered in Serbia, meaning any group accepting international funding will automatically face scrutiny by money-laundering authorities. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) [criticised](#) the law for threatening civil society and hindering its role in exposing human rights violations. While the law does not explicitly restrict or ban operational capacities, it signals an intent to impose bureaucratic barriers: intensive financial controls that delay access to funding, disrupt essential activities, and undermine organisational functioning.

Serbia also introduced a series of anti-corruption laws, including a law on the *'prevention of money laundering and financing terrorism'*, which [appears](#) to be selectively targeting NGOs that maintain a critical stance towards the government. In 2022, Serbia's Administration for Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism [investigated](#) 20 individuals and 37 NGOs without justification, sparking public suspicion and fueling smear campaigns against CSOs. By [2023](#), this number increased to 20 individuals and 57 organisations. Despite the official anti-corruption justification, these investigations primarily target NGOs critical of the government, while lacking legal recourse for wrongful investigations. Leaks of these investigations to pro-government media outlets further damage the credibility of independent NGOs, while the lack of protection measures fosters uncertainty and intimidation. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights [characterised](#) the media leaks as concerning and fueling smear campaigns against targeted groups.

Special military operation and its impact on people on the move

On October 27, following a rise in the number of people on the move through Northern Serbia, a shooting incident, between individuals involved in smuggling networks near Subotica, resulted in three deaths and one severe injury of a person. The Serbian government immediately leveraged this incident to justify a large-scale [joint police operation](#) with Hungarian authorities. The operation significantly increased militarisation along the Hungarian-Serbian border, with massive police presence across cities and highways, new police bases in northern border areas and constant evictions from informal living settlements. The scale of enforcement led to an almost complete restriction on movement for many people on the move, worsening existing issues such as criminalisation, surveillance, and isolation from service provision. It also hindered independent monitoring of abuses and fostered an environment of impunity. With both official and informal routes increasingly monitored, people on the move were forced into more dangerous and hidden pathways, heightening exposure to violence and danger.

Living Conditions- Evictions

The beginning of the special operation was marked by closures of government accommodation centres and forced transfers of people to various facilities across Serbia, where living conditions were [reported](#) as dire. Overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and limited access to food and healthcare were widespread. Even prior to the operation, numerous reports had highlighted substandard living conditions, with insufficient medical services and poor infrastructure. The forced relocations only worsened these conditions, raising serious concerns over the physical and mental health of those affected.

As official reception centres became increasingly unviable, many people sought shelter in informal living settlements, where they faced frequent, violent and destructive evictions. Police raids on these settlements were aggressive involving physical abuse, destruction of belongings, and forced displacement. [Testimonies](#) indicate that Frontex officers stationed in Northern Serbia were present and directly involved in these operations. Testimonies describe the destruction of passports, personal belongings and shelters, alongside intimidation tactics which aimed at deterring individuals from returning to their previous living spaces. As people were repeatedly evicted, they were forced into increasingly remote areas, further restricting their access to food, healthcare, and humanitarian support.

Restrictions to freedom of movement and criminalisation of service provision

As part of the crackdown, freedom of movement for people on the move was severely [restricted](#). Police checkpoints were established along highways and in urban areas, where both people on the move and humanitarian workers were routinely stopped and checked. Criminalisation extended to transportation providers –particularly taxi drivers–, whose services had previously been frequently used by people on the move. Minister Gašić [accused](#) them of complicity in smuggling, declaring that vehicles found transporting migrants would be confiscated, further isolating people on the move, cutting them off from essential services, and also exposing them to exploitative pricing from the few drivers willing to take the risk. Additionally, private accommodation owners who had previously rented to people on the move faced penalties, with authorities conducting frequent inspections to deter such practices. Organisations also faced increasing restrictions, with volunteers regularly stopped at police checkpoints, questioned about their work and subjected to administrative scrutiny. This heightened surveillance significantly hindered the delivery of essential support, forcing many organisations to reduce or adapt operations to avoid direct targeting.

Police Violence

In Belgrade in 2024, numerous [reports](#) have highlighted arbitrary searches, theft, apprehensions, and violence against people on the move by police authorities. These abuses occur with complete impunity, as no accountability mechanisms exist for the perpetrators, and no safeguards for those subjected to such treatment. There are no safe channels to report abuse, and many refrain from doing so, out of fear of retaliation.

Data from BVMN's monthly reports throughout the year shows that people on the move are routinely subjected to arbitrary searches of their belongings and phones. Police frequently seize cash and personal items, while these encounters often escalate into invasive and violent searches, including strip searches and, in some cases, the removal of bandages to check for hidden money. Beyond theft, physical violence is also common. Collective Aid has [documented](#) instances in Luke Ćelovića Park, commonly known as Afghan Park, where people on the move were kicked, punched, and pepper-sprayed by police. The organisation has also reported frequent raids in which people are forcefully removed from the park and transported to southern Serbia. These aggressive police [operations](#), which often result in forced relocations, have caused a noticeable reduction in the number of people on the move in central Belgrade. Over time, individuals have begun dispersing into more remote areas to avoid mass arrests and police violence.

Digital Surveillance and Data Protection

Despite the prohibition of the usage of data for any other purpose than the one for which it was collected, and the prohibition of processing of personal data –nationality, race, gender, language, religious belief, membership in a political party, membership in a trade union, health condition, welfare allowances, victim of violence, criminal charges and sex life–, wiretapping scandals involving government officials have raised serious concerns about the safety of data and communications of human rights defenders (HRDs) working in Serbia. Reports indicate that Serbian authorities conduct digital surveillance against journalists and HRDs. In a characteristic incident, a government official was [found](#) to have been intercepting emails between the former defence minister and a newspaper. Despite public scrutiny, he faced no other consequences for his actions. The same government official was implicated in a wiretapping scandal when he publicly commented on an unpublished opinion piece from the email inbox of a journalist. A 2025 Amnesty International [report](#) revealed that Serbian authorities have been using a new spyware, NoviSpy, to target activists in 2024. Analysis of affected devices confirmed that spyware was deployed following police or Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) interactions, reinforcing concerns over government-sanctioned surveillance.

Government-Controlled NGOs (GONGOs)

A common trend identified in Serbia, used to undermine independent civil society organisations, is the establishment of government-operated non-governmental organisations ([GONGOs](#)), state-aligned entities presenting themselves as independent organisations. These entities use the space reserved for civil society, echo state policies while pretending to represent civil society, trying to [shift](#) negative perceptions about governmental actions and undermining HRDs. GONGOs receive preferential access to public funds, depriving other organisations of essential resources. Last, the difficulty of assessing whether a civil society organisation is a GONGO, a process requiring verification of its activities and statements, fosters mistrust and suspicion, weakening solidarity among individuals and organisations.

Formal Charges, SLAPPS

The use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and insult lawsuits to silence HRDs and journalists is on the [rise](#) in Serbia. These lawsuits, often brought forward by state actors, politicians and influential figures, lack genuine legal substance and function primarily as a tool of harassment and intimidation, aiming to instill fear, create financial burdens, and foster self-censorship within civil society. Journalists are most frequently

targeted, as these legal threats seek to discourage independent reporting and criticism. However, growing concerns have emerged about the increasing use of such lawsuits against HRDs, activists, and civil society organisations.

Administrative Barriers and Excessive Controls

As reported by BVMN Member organisation, Collective Aid, the criminalisation trends observed in Serbia over the past years have persisted throughout 2024. The organisation noted that the government has increasingly focused on tightening legislative and administrative pressures, forcing civil society groups to constantly adjust their operations to avoid direct targeting and continue their activities. One of the most severe restrictions is seen in the difficulties of accessing people on the move outside of official camps. Volunteers attempting to communicate with people are often monitored, followed and harassed by the police. This not only instills fear among people on the move, who worry that engaging with civil society actors may lead to police mistreatment, but also effectively obstructs support operations. Additionally, administrative hurdles continue to increase, particularly regarding residence permits for humanitarian workers. As reported by Collective Aid, the residence permit process has become significantly more complex, creating further uncertainty for those working in Serbia. Volunteer teams are routinely stopped by authorities, questioned about their work and required to present paperwork and residence permits. Even when all necessary documents are provided, these controls persist, suggesting a deliberate strategy to create a climate of fear among volunteers and those working in civil society organisations.

FORMAL CHARGES AND ARRESTS

Foreign Agents Accusations

Arrests and Dismissals
of Mayors in Turkey

Mass Arrests

Assets Freezing

Charges of Espionage

LEGISLATION

LEGAL ACCESS

TURKEY

VIOLENCE BY NON-STATE ACTORS

POLICING, VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

MEDIA AND NARRATIVES

**ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS
AND RISK OF DEPORTATION**

Turkey

Legislation

Under [Article 79](#) of the Turkish Penal Code, *'facilitating illegal entry, stay, or exit'* from the country is classified as a criminal offense. Individuals found guilty of such acts face prison sentences of up to eight years, with direct or indirect material gain serving as a key criterion for prosecution.

In 2024, a [draft law](#) was introduced in the Turkish Parliament to amend the Penal Code's section on *'crimes against state secrets and espionage'* by adding a new provision: Article 339/A, *'Committing offenses against the security or political interests of the state'*, under Law No. 5237. Popularly known as the *'Foreign agents law'* or the *'Agents of influence'* bill, this law poses a [significant threat to the operation of civil society](#) and is expected to further escalate the crackdown on the press and civil society organisations. The enactment of this law will, in practice, grant government authorities the power to criminalise anyone accused of undertaking unspecified acts *'in line with the strategic interests or instructions of a foreign state or organisation against the security or domestic or foreign political interests of the State'*, under the vague pretext of uncovering espionage and safeguarding national security. The deliberately ambiguous language of the law, citing undefined terms such as 'strategic interests', 'instructions' and 'foreign political interests', grants authorities the discretionary power to prosecute individuals and organisations deemed to be opposing the government. The term 'foreign agent' is also left deliberately broad, allowing authorities to criminalise a wide range of activities that could be framed as serving foreign interests. The proposed article directly contradicts both international human rights standards and Turkey's own constitutional protections, violating the principle of legality and foreseeability, a fundamental pillar of criminal law that ensures individuals can clearly understand what constitutes a punishable offense.

This lack of clear legal boundaries paves the way for arbitrary enforcement and misuse, enabling the criminalisation of human rights work, independent journalism, and civil society activism. For example, collaborations between national journalists and international media outlets, the citation of international reports, and the reception of international funding could all be deemed suspicious. Civil society organisations engaging in knowledge exchange, partnerships, or advocacy efforts with international actors could face prosecution, while documentation of human rights violations, committed by state or non-state actors, could be criminalised and punishable with lengthy prison sentences. Many civil society groups depend on international support to sustain their work, but under the new law, such funding could be used as evidence of foreign influence, exposing

organisations to surveillance, prosecution, or closure. Civil society, independent media and human rights organisations remain committed to resisting the law's repressive impact. Domestic and international actors have strongly condemned the bill, warning in a [joint statement](#) that it could severely restrict freedom of expression, press and association.

Formal Charges and Arrests

Foreign Agents Accusations

In January 2025, actor and artist manager Ayşe Barım, was [arrested](#) following an investigation into her alleged involvement in orchestrating the 2013 Gezi Park protests. [Charges](#) linking her to the latter, included '*aiding and abetting an attempt to overthrow the government or to prevent it from performing its duties*'. Additionally, she was accused of being an agent of foreign influence, as artists represented by her agency had allegedly undermined Turkey's efficiency by posting on social media with the hashtag *#HelpTurkey* after the country's wildfires and earthquakes in 2021. Authorities claimed that Barım's agency had '*gone beyond its intended purpose*' and had '*engaged in foreign agent influence activities against the state*'.

Legal experts and opposition figures have strongly criticised Barım's arrest, warning that it reflects the dangers posed by the Foreign agents law. They have highlighted the arbitrariness of the arrest for a crime that is unregulated and not clearly defined, based on the reasoning that a call for help after an earthquake constituted acting as an agency of foreign influence. Further criticism pointed to the targeted design of this law to suppress any type of opposition, social movement and dissent.

Arrests and Dismissals of Mayors in Turkey: The Trustee Practice

In recent months, the Turkish government has intensified its crackdown on opposition-run municipalities through the systematic dismissal of democratically elected mayors and their replacement with government-appointed trustees. Since the March 2024 local elections, the Ministry of Interior has removed elected mayors in at least [a dozen municipalities](#) and districts. These include Hakkari, Mardin, Batman, Halfeti, Tunceli, Bahçesaray, Akdeniz, and Siirt –won by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM)–, as well as Esenyurt, Ovacık, [Beylikdüzü and Şişli](#) –won by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP)–. The mayors of these municipalities have been replaced with unelected government-appointed officials, a practice long [familiar to the Kurdish community](#) and political movement in Turkey. This crackdown culminated in the March 2025 dismissal and [arrest of Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu](#), a leading opposition figure and CHP's presidential candidate for the 2028 elections. The removals are typically initiated on

the grounds of terrorism allegations and are rooted in a legal provision introduced during the post-2016 coup state of emergency, now widely used to suppress political opposition. The [Venice Commission of the Council of Europe](#) has raised serious concerns about this practice, while both the [European Parliament](#) and the [European Commission](#) have strongly criticised it for undermining local democracy.

Mass arrests

In February 2025, Turkish authorities conducted [mass arrests](#) of 30 individuals in a large-scale operation targeting the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK), a coalition of left-wing and pro-Kurdish civil society organisations, political groups and parties, across 10 provinces. Those arrested were charged with '*participating in a terrorist organisation*'. Among them were executives of the DEM Party, activists, [the editor of an LGBTI+ news platform](#), journalists reporting on migration issues and artists. During interrogations, authorities questioned them about wiretap recordings from 2012 and 2013, HDK conferences, the Gezi Park protests, and May Day demonstrations, despite allegations that these recordings were illegally obtained. As part of the ongoing investigation into the HDK, Turkish authorities have reportedly launched probes against 4,753 individuals for alleged links to a 'terrorist organisation', with 1,640 cases tied to Istanbul alone. HDK spokespeople denounced these actions as a politically motivated crackdown, while critics accused the judiciary of issuing '*copy-paste rulings dictated by political authorities*'.

Assets Freezing

In August 2024, the minister of finance and treasury of Turkey issued a [decision](#) to freeze the assets of the migration monitoring organisation Göç İzleme Derneği (GÖÇİZDER) and several of its former executives and staff members. The decision cited alleged affiliation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/KCK), which is designated as [a terrorist organisation](#) by Turkey, the United States, the EU and others. This unsubstantiated decision led to the blocking of their bank accounts, pensions, credit cards and even public transport passes, effectively restricting their financial and social mobility. Earlier, in February 2024, all 24 individuals from the organisation had been acquitted of the charge of '*membership in a terrorist organisation*' under Article 314/2 of the Turkish Penal Code, in a criminal case dating back to 2022. Meanwhile, a separate dissolution case was filed at the Civil Court of First Instance, arguing that GÖÇİZDER operated in line with the goals of the PKK/KCK. Despite the final acquittal in the criminal case, on August 31 2024, the government proceeded to freeze the assets of GÖÇİZDER and its members, citing terrorism financing allegations, in a decision that completely disregards the court's verdict of innocence.

Charges of Espionage

In December 2023, Syrian activist and journalist Ahmed Katie was [arrested](#) in Turkey on charges of espionage on behalf of the French State. He had been missing since late November, with no information about his whereabouts for over two weeks. On December 12th, Turkish authorities informed his lawyers that he was being held at the Istanbul police department, anti-terrorism branch for questioning. Ahmed Katie had been an outspoken advocate for Syrian refugees' rights for nearly a decade, vocally critical of their treatment in Turkey. On October 29th, he publicly announced on Facebook that he was suspending his media and human rights work due to increasing pressure. His disappearance on November 27th prompted his family and legal representatives to issue a statement, raising alarm over his unknown whereabouts. His lawyer, Halim Yilmaz, has described the case as part of a broader crackdown on human rights defenders in Turkey. He argued that authorities are suppressing criticism by turning human rights work into a criminal offense and falsely labeling those who challenge government policies on migration as spies seeking to defame the state. Yilmaz also emphasised that, while the government has engaged in unlawful practices regarding migration, it seeks to silence criticism by punishing those who expose these violations. Katie had been increasingly frustrated by the rising anti-refugee sentiment in Turkey and was concerned about raising his two children in such an environment. While his case has gained some attention in international media, it has largely disappeared from national news, raising concerns about transparency and due process.

Legal Access

People on the move in Turkey are legally [entitled](#) to receive legal aid from Bar Associations operating in several provinces. However, lawyers report significant restrictions in accessing their clients held in Removal Centers (GGM). Informal practices make communication between lawyers and their clients nearly impossible. Despite widespread [reports](#) of mistreatment, coercion and forced signing of voluntary return papers in these centers, lawyers find it extremely difficult to assist in preventing unlawful deportations of their clients. Lawyers would have to object to the procedure, by proving that individuals signed return papers without consent, which becomes an almost impossible task, given the severe lack of transparency and access to information.

After attempting visits to various return centers, civil society groups and legal professionals have [documented](#) grave human rights violations and arbitrary practices. They highlight the frequent disappearance of clients, either through transfers to unknown locations, or deportations without prior notice. Families and lawyers are often left uninformed about the whereabouts of detainees, sometimes for weeks. These conditions led a group of lawyers

to issue a public [statement](#) in February 2024, after being unable to reach 35 of their clients, including women and seriously ill individuals, for 11 days. Despite repeated inquiries to the directorate of migration and the police department, authorities refused to provide any information. The lawyers emphasised that detained individuals have the right to legal representation, to be notified of administrative decisions, to object to procedures and to communicate with their families and lawyers, all rights guaranteed under both the constitution and the laws on foreigners. However, these rights are being systematically violated, with individuals held in isolation, denied legal access, and coerced into signing voluntary return papers. All such practices meet the criteria of ill-treatment, under both national and international standards. The statement denounced the unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of legal assistance, the disappearance of people within the system and the coercion of people into ‘voluntary’ deportation.

In addition to the challenges faced by private lawyers in accessing people in removal centres, individuals encounter serious barriers in accessing the state-funded Legal Aid scheme, designed to provide free legal assistance. Under Turkish law, persons who cannot afford legal representation may apply for the state-funded Legal Aid scheme known as *Adli Yardım*. This right also applies to individuals held in removal centres, who are entitled to receive legal assistance through Bar Associations operating in several provinces, or by submitting a petition to the authorities at the facility for referral. This support has been implemented through a [project](#) by UNHCR Türkiye and the Turkish bar association (Türkiye Barolar Birliği – TBB), which enabled foreigners in removal centres to access legal aid through provincial bar associations. However, the availability of legal aid in practice depends heavily on local capacity and funding. When funding for these projects ceases, as is currently the case, so does the presence of lawyers and access to legal aid, inside and outside of removal centres. A few bar associations, such as the Izmir Bar Association, continue to offer this support, but in most other regions, free legal access has largely stopped.

Moreover, for many people held under administrative detention in removal centres with a deportation order, this decision can only be appealed within a seven-day window. Often, the appointment of a lawyer can take more than seven days, either through inefficiency on the part of the administration or bar associations, resulting in the person not receiving appropriate legal support and possibly being deported. In other cases, a lawyer might be appointed, but the detained person might be moved to another removal centre in a different part of the country –often [without the lawyer being notified](#)– making it near impossible to communicate with, or even locate their client.

Administrative Barriers and Risk of Deportation

The [case](#) of Aws Jubeir, an Iraqi refugee and activist working with the LGBTQIA+ community and director of the Aman project, is one of the multiple recent cases of Iraqi citizens at risk of being deported back to Iraq, which is no longer considered a country at war. Despite residing in Turkey for over 10 years, Jubeir received an appeal rejection notice from the immigration office in May 2024, paving the way for his deportation to Iraq. This decision places him at severe risk, given Iraq's recent anti-LGBTQIA+ law, the surge in violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals, and his outspoken advocacy for queer and refugee rights.

In March 2024, the [case](#) of Iranian academic Dr. Shiva Kaviani came to public attention. Dr. Kaviani became stranded at Istanbul Airport for two months, after being politically banned from Iran and unable to return to Canada due to an expired residence permit. While attempting to obtain a new visa, she remained trapped in bureaucratic limbo, unable to leave Turkey or return to Iran. During this time, she struggled to meet basic needs such as food and hygiene. Eventually, Turkish authorities intervened and, reportedly, [transferred her to the Silivri Removal Center](#), where she faced the risk of deportation and further danger due to her political status in Iran. Her case underscores the severe administrative barriers that restrict mobility and place individuals in precarious situations, reflecting a broader pattern in which citizenship benefits are tied to privilege, reinforcing systemic inequalities in legal mobility and access to safety.

Media and Narratives

In 2024, the Turkish government intensified its media campaigns to promote its crackdown on 'irregular migration'. Nationwide operations targeting people on the move and 'smugglers' were widely publicised, with minister of interior Ali Yerlikaya repeatedly [boasting](#) about record-high deportation numbers, surpassing all European countries combined. These claims were accompanied by assurances that removal centers operate in '*full compliance with human rights standards*' and are regularly monitored by national and international bodies, a narrative that contradicts mounting [reports](#) of severe rights violations from civil society organisations, journalists, and activists.

Beyond migration policies, media narratives have played a key role in shaping public opinion, fueling discrimination and legitimising state repression. During a TRT World Panel in Istanbul in August 2024, the activist group 'Thousand youths for Palestine' [protested](#) Turkey's ongoing oil shipments to Israel, calling on the Turkish government to halt shipments and end its complicity in genocide. The protest took place just before Israeli journalist Gideon Levy was set to speak. While Turkey has expressed rhetorical support for

the Palestinian struggle, it only formally restricted trade with Israel in May 2024. Yet SOCAR –Azerbaijan's state-owned oil company– continues supplying oil and gas to Israel via Turkey's Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Following the protest, two Palestinian activists were detained and sent to a removal center, facing deportation on charges of *'insulting the president'* under Article 299 of the Turkish Penal Code, which carries a sentence of up to four years imprisonment. The Emek Party condemned their detention, criticising removal centers as tools for silencing dissent.

Harmful narratives against the LGBTQIA+ and migrant communities in Turkey have been widely spread and reproduced through sensationalist journalism and social media. Following the declaration of 2025 as the ['Year of Family'](#) by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and an escalation in his rhetoric against the LGBTQIA+ community, government officials, including ministers, have intensified hate speech against the community, often invoking 'family values' as justification. This discourse has also been accompanied by [proposed legal amendments](#) to the Civil and Penal Codes, aiming to further restrict LGBTQIA+ rights, including stricter regulations on gender transition and increasing penalties related to so-called LGBTQIA+ expressions.

In this climate, transphobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric has been amplified by both traditional and social media, leading to increased targeting, stigmatisation, and violence. In one [case](#), a Moroccan transgender woman studying in Kütahya was arrested during an 'anti-prostitution' campaign and handed over to the provincial directorate of migration management for deportation. Media coverage that disclosed personal information, from her HIV status to her identity details, fuelled transphobic and anti-immigrant discourse on social media, ultimately leading to her being stigmatised and targeted. Civil society organisations condemned the violation of privacy and the discriminatory coverage that fuelled public hostility, while also highlighting the grave violations within removal centers.

A few months later, M., a Syrian trans woman refugee was similarly [targeted](#) after visiting a hospital in southern Turkey for medical care. A news outlet exposed her personal and medical information without consent and reproduced HIV-phobic, xenophobic and transphobic narratives, sparking a wave of online hate speech. Following this public backlash, she was immediately detained, facing a deportation order, without proper legal procedure. On the very same day, she was unlawfully deported to Syria, where she was murdered, reportedly by members of armed groups in collaboration with members of her own family. Following her murder, the Adana LGBTQ+ Solidarity Group released a [statement](#) condemning the media's role in violating her privacy and personal rights and inciting hate speech against her. Her case exemplifies the deadly consequences of

media-driven discrimination and state-enforced deportations that ignore human rights safeguards and due process.

Policing, Violence and Harassment

As [reported](#) by civil society, deportations and excessive controls escalated significantly in 2024. One key factor behind this increase, framed as part of the government's ongoing '*fight against irregular migration*', is the implementation of the new 'Mobile migration points' project, [praised](#) by state representatives and politicians, as a key tool in nationwide operations to arrest 'smugglers' and 'irregular migrants'. This project was launched by the ministry of internal affairs, to facilitate the identification and apprehension of so-called 'irregular migrants'. It involves placing large vehicles in major cities, staffed with an interpreter and a representative from the migration management authority. If a person, stopped by the police for an identification check, is unable to provide sufficient documentation, they are taken to these vehicles for biometric data verification. If the system confirms their 'irregular' administrative status –meaning lack of a valid permit or violation of their residency conditions–, they are immediately transferred to a removal center for deportation. The implementation of this project has contributed to the growing criminalisation of migration in Turkey. The constant threat of being stopped and checked has significantly restricted the freedom of movement and the use of public spaces for people on the move, as they fear harassment, detention, and eventual deportation.

Violence by non-state actors

Apart from state violence, the narratives surrounding migration and the rapid spread of misinformation on social media have fueled numerous attacks by non-state actors, contributing to increased violence, hate speech and discrimination. In July 2024, the online circulation of a video, falsely alleging that a Syrian migrant had harassed his uncle's minor daughter, triggered [mass attacks on Syrians](#) in multiple cities. Unverified claims and hate speech spread rapidly, fueling rage and arson attacks on Syrian homes and businesses, causing severe injuries and leading to the murder of many refugees. Social media became a tool for amplifying hate, portraying people on the move as a threat and inciting further violence.

Soon after, a Turkish nationalist Telegram group [leaked the personal data of thousands of Syrians](#) on social media, including identity numbers, registration cities, parents' names, and passport photos. The leak intensified concerns over data security and spread fear within the Syrian community, which faced a heightened risk of harassment, targeted attacks, and further violence, as [past breaches](#), such as the 'e-Devlet' hack, had already exposed refugee

information online. The ministry of interior later announced the arrest of a 14-year-old, allegedly the administrator of the Telegram group, though the full extent of those involved remains unknown. Despite the group being shut down, the leaked information continues to circulate, leaving those affected vulnerable.

At the end of October, two Syrian trans women were [assaulted](#) in Izmir's Konak district, after being harassed by a group of eight men. The attackers threw stones at them in broad daylight, while people around mocked them instead of intervening. One of the victims described the attack as life-threatening. The women later filed a criminal complaint against the perpetrators. On November 8th, the Association for Combating Hate Crimes [confirmed](#) these tendencies and reported an increase in police pressure on trans women in Konak, citing a rise in identity checks and fines, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

Conclusion

This report constitutes an effort towards demonstrating that criminalisation is not a singled-out or occasional phenomenon, but a structural and intentional feature of European and national migration policies and practices, which target people on the move, and, secondarily, civil society actors through a wide range of formal and informal mechanisms. Whether it is through courtrooms, police controls, administrative obstacles or spreading of hostile narratives, the pursued outcome is the same: migration is framed as a crime and solidarity as complicity.

Among all locations covered in this report, one of the clearest patterns observed is the constant use of formal charges against people on the move, on the grounds of facilitation and smuggling. These charges are routinely applied, through unfair proceedings, to individuals who are simply trying to reach safety. At the same time, we observe a spectrum of indirect or informal forms of violence occurring within state borders. These include violence by the authorities, reduction or dismantling of accommodation sites, cuts to access to essential services, and the intensification of checks and surveillance.

In terms of civil society, we note a dangerous trend of legal reforms, that, while not explicitly targeting the work of NGOs or solidarity actors, are vague enough to be weaponised against them. Through broad interpretations related to 'public order' or 'national security', states have created legal tools to criminalise human rights work, disrupt accountability efforts, silence freedom of expression and shrink the space for dissent. These legal frameworks are reinforced by administrative, financial and operational hurdles, from burdensome registration requirements and ID checks, to funding restrictions and constant bureaucratic obstacles. All of these trends, when read in light of recent legislative developments such as the Facilitation Directive, show that they are part of a broader EU-wide agenda which tries to reinforce criminalising narratives, in order to intensify securitisation, fortification and violence. This Directive and other relevant developments entrench a system which uses criminal law to target movement itself.

In this climate of violence and repression, we call not only for accountability but for a shift in perspective. It is not migration that constitutes a crime. It is the violent policies, the denial of safe routes, and the ongoing criminalisation that must be confronted as the real injustice.