

MONTHLY REPORT | MARCH 2025

ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Poland and France including Rigardu, Mobile Info Team, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarm Austria, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid, Mission Wings, InfoPark, Legal Centre Lesvos, We Are Monitoring and Human Rights Observers.



Eviction in Northern France.
Source: @elio_j



Border Violence
Monitoring Network

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**BLIND
SPOTS**



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Methodology and Terminology

REPORTING NETWORK

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

METHODOLOGY

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

TERMINOLOGY

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

ABBREVIATIONS

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

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

[1] BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece, Turkey and Poland including Rigardu, Mobile Info Team, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarmphone Austria, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid, Mission Wings. Legal Centre Lesbos, We Are Monitoring and InfoPark



Executive summary

This report gathers updates from the month of March and brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the Balkans, Poland, Turkey, and France to look at the way European Union states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders. Updates come from the different Member Organisations of BVMN, as well as Glocal Roots (Kos, Greece).

Last month we touched upon the massive student protests that have shaken Serbia's political landscape in the past several weeks, claiming against widespread corruption in the government and facing severe assaults on freedom of press and civil society organising – assaults that have also deeply marked the Turkish government's reaction to the protests erupting in multiple cities in the country this month. Reports have emerged of the use of sonic weapons by the Serbian authorities against demonstrators in Belgrade, a move that has reminded many of the use of similar devices against people on the move during the large-scale eviction campaign of the winter of 2022-2023. While the government continues to repress and intimidate activists, harassment and violations against people on the move seem to remain at the centre of the agenda. Thus, people on the move continue to be immediately transferred to camps in the south of the country after being illegally pushed back by Hungarian authorities, and more and more reports are shared regarding the poor conditions faced during arbitrary days-long periods of detention at police stations. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the lack of adequate support and facilities in the country's reception system seems to be increasing the reluctance of people to register and access the official camps, opting instead for informal or private accommodation outside of those.

Despite the mounting sentences condemning Greece's treatment of asylum-seekers and people on the move – one more this month when the EU found Greece guilty of killing a minor during a shooting against a vessel at sea –, the government seems to be completely uninterested in addressing the inhumane detention conditions which don't cease to bring violence and suffering to people on the move in the country. In fact, the appointment of a new Minister for Migration known to have violent, vocal opinions against people on the move in the country raises concerns about the conditions continuing to worsen. This month, several protests have arisen in multiple Pre-Removal Detention centres, where one person died and another attempted suicide, highlighting the terrible mental health situation in these facilities. Severe lack of access to healthcare and mental health support also continues to be an issue for people living at the Closed-Controlled Access Centres on Kos and Samos, with people also finding obstacles to receive this type of care even outside of the facilities, due to discrimination, as well as language barriers, among other reasons. On Samos, the unhygienic conditions of the centre – with reports of rats infestations and lack of



Executive summary

access to water for most of the day – and the continuous failure to identify and adequately support victims of human trafficking constitute ongoing concerns.

Furthermore, this month we report on a suspicious change in the numbers reported by the Turkish Coast Guard regarding pushbacks from Greece, crossing and rescues in the Aegean over the past two and a half months. These numbers show a substantial decrease in transit and refoulements at sea whose cause is still hard to identify, though a new agreement between Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria on further border militarisation could be behind it. Turkey's announcement regarding the future construction of a 8,5 km fence along the border with Greece is testament to this increased militarisation. This announcement affects an already extremely securitised border region, where 30 out of 200 km of the Greece-Turkey border are already covered in a barbed fence on the Greek side – who pledges to increase it to 100 km –, and most of the 260 km border that unites Turkey and Bulgaria are also marked by a razor-wire fence.

Together with the seemingly ever-present use of the Mobile Migration Vehicles in multiple cities in the country – which have allowed for the increased harassment of people on the move in the public space in a plan to speed up identifications and apprehension in racially profiled checks of so-called “irregular migrants” – these moves are part of the government's strategy to reduce migration transit in Turkey. Such a strategy, which included the apprehensions of 9,679 people on the move this month, has been celebrated by Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya this month.

In Poland, the law allowing for the possibility to suspend the right to asylum in the country in contexts of “instrumentalisation of migration” has not only come into effect, but an ordinance on March 27th made it applicable for the current situation less than 24 hours after approval. Despite the concerns repeatedly raised by multiple human rights groups and the widely documented abuses already taking place at the border with Belarus everyday – with at least 419 pushbacks recorded by solidarity organisations this month, describing severe violence – the authorities seem to not have hesitated, setting a tremendously dangerous precedent in a continent where the rights of people on the move are under continuous attack.

Lastly, in France, we report on the death of five people at the border with the United Kingdom, a direct and terrible result of the policies that not only preclude any sort of safe and legal passage, but also make the lives of people on the move in Northern France increasingly hard to bear. The eviction policy in the region, which aims to force people out of their informal living spaces around Calais every 48 hours bears witness to this constant harassment which does nothing but increase the insecurity and anxieties of people seeking safety.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



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Pushbacks from Hungary

In March, Hungarian authorities continued to carry out pushbacks to Serbia as documented by reports made to the Collective Aid team in Serbia. These reports included many instances of people being pushed back multiple times. One testimony described having been pushed back three times, the most recent time with 15 other people who were all taken to Preševo camp, by the southern border of the country with North Macedonia.

"Everytime we played the game, the police would arrest us and deport us."

As for the official data published on their government's website, this month, Hungarian officials reported that 292 pushbacks had taken place, compared to 365 in the previous four weeks. However, this alleged decrease in expulsions does not align with on the ground information received by Collective Aid which indicates that violent pushbacks might have occurred with growing frequency.

Moreover, Hungary has deployed 25 police officers to Serbia and 20 to Bulgaria as part of a joint effort between Hungary, Austria, Bulgaria and Serbia to prevent the cross-border movement of people. Pursuant to this deployment, Hungarian officers patrol border areas and roads in Serbia using field vehicles, thermal cameras and night-vision devices. Additionally, Frontex has also increased its presence in Serbia with joint Italian and German patrols assisting Serbian police in monitoring border zones and roads, as reported by Serbian organisation [APC](#). This has been corroborated by testimony from people on the move who have indicated the involvement of English-speaking officers in pushbacks.

Police detention conditions

Collective Aid has continued to receive reports describing the detention of people on the move in police stations in Serbia for days at a time, often without access to water or food. Videos and pictures seen by Collective Aid testify to the cramped and overcrowded conditions in which people are held for up to three days. One video showed men, women, and a very young child all detained in a single cramped detention room in a police station. A message accompanying the video read:



"Hello, good morning. Please help us. We have been here for several days. They are not moving us to the camp. We have not eaten for several days. We have no money. It is very dirty here."

This account is typical of many people on the move who are subjected to detention by the Serbian authorities. Individuals frequently report being held without notice of how long they will be detained or where they will be taken next. In addition, many people report widespread extortion among Serbian police who demand bribes in order to secure release from detention. This is completely illegal and reinforces an imbalance between those who have the means to pay for their release, and those who face further detention as a result of their inability to pay the bribes.

Government use of sound weapon on March 15th

On March 15th 2025, the student protests which had spread across Serbia reached their peak as between 275,000 and 325,000 protestors took to the streets of Belgrade to oppose corruption within the government and the lack of accountability. The largely peaceful protests were marred by credible allegations that the Serbian authorities had used a sonic weapon in an effort to disperse the crowds. BVMN released a [statement](#) attesting to the truth of reports that Serbian authorities used a Long-Range Acoustic Device' (LRAD) against protestors causing widespread disorientation and panic.

The Serbian authorities have denied the use of this weapon but have since been called out for multiple inconsistencies in reports surrounding the incident. The use of a sonic weapon sets a dangerous precedent, for it is a device which causes indiscriminate harm and potential threat to life. Various external security agencies have started to investigate the events of March 15th 2025, including the FBI and Russia's FSB who uncovered that Serbia authorities are in possession of a LRAD. The government maintains, however, that despite possessing the instrument, it was not utilised on the 15th of March.

As documented in a [report](#) prepared by Collective Aid and BVMN, a similar device was likely to have been used against people on the move during the Special Military Operation in Northern Serbia in late 2023. On November 7th 2023, near the town of



Sombor, 35 people were affected by a loud shrill noise while trying to escape through a field. This follows an all-too-familiar pattern of migrants and refugees being used as test subjects for new and experimental technologies. There are no formal international safeguards on the use of technology in migration management and as such the use of this device against people on the move falls through the cracks of public awareness – leading to a dangerous lack of accountability.

As mentioned in BVMN's February 2025 [report](#), the protests have witnessed the intensifying criminalisation of NGOs and activists. The Serbian government has sought to clamp down on civil society organisations using intimidation tactics against activists, students and public figures including harassment, deportation and entry bans. Authorities are intent on silencing dissenting voices as they face the most intense challenge to their authority since coming to power.



General trends: less movement and reluctance to access formal reception

The number of individuals registering in temporary reception centers in the country remains low, despite a slight increase over the previous months, with the current figure reaching 927 registrations in March. However, sources indicate that many people continue to avoid formal registration, preferring to remain outside of the camps. This trend suggests a growing reluctance to engage with the formal reception system, which may be related to the poor conditions reported in the facilities. Though the cost of staying in private accommodation seems to have significantly decreased compared to earlier periods, the closure of former squat locations, which had served as informal shelters, plays a role in diminishing the options available for those seeking non-institutional shelter.

Over the past month, the movement of people has notably slowed. Several factors contributed to this change. First, Ramadan has led many people to observe fasting, potentially limiting their capacity or willingness to move. Second, the month has been marked by extreme weather conditions, including persistent rain and floods in the Velika Kladuša area. Nevertheless, extensive and violent pushbacks continue to be regularly documented, with individuals subjected to beatings, forced into rivers, and having their documents and personal belongings confiscated and destroyed.

Growing “voluntary” returns and closures in Borići

An emerging trend in the country is the increasing recourse to Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programs. This shift appears to be driven both by the growing promotion of AVRR by migration management authorities and by the fact that many people on the move find themselves in a protracted state of limbo, with limited prospects for legal stay or onward movement. It is particularly concerning that AVRR is increasingly framed as the only viable solution, rather than one of multiple options, raising questions about the voluntariness and informed nature of such decisions.

In the reception centers, special provisions were made for those observing Ramadan. Food packages were distributed during Iftar for Suhoor. However, there have been complaints from guests regarding the inadequacy of food supplies, signaling a gap between the needs of the population and the resources allocated to meet them. Furthermore, an important development to note is the announced closure of the Borići building, a facility in Bihać where families had been staying. This decision raises concerns, particularly as the only remaining accommodation for families will be in the container area, which is currently designated for unaccompanied minors.



Situation on the border area

March brought an increase in the number of people on the move crossing the Poland-Belarus border irregularly, following a trend observed in previous years. Between January and March 2025 organisations, collectives and activists involved in the solidarity movement registered distress calls from a total of 1,301 persons, 827 of which took place in March only [1]. Out of those, at least 166 were women and 60 were minors. This number includes at least 10 underage girls and 50 underage boys and persons of unknown sex. Most common countries of origin were: Somalia (200), Ethiopia (146), Eritrea (87), Sudan and South Sudan (50), and Afghanistan (27).

The majority of these requests came from Belarus, with only 301 people contacting from inside of Polish territory in the first quarter of the year. From these, 11 were women. As much as 294 distress calls from Polish ground took place in March, when support was provided to 115 persons including two women and two minor boys, one of which traveled unaccompanied. A total of 75 field interventions to 'search and rescue' were undertaken, 47 of which were successful – which means that the groups of people on the move were reached and assisted.

87 of those who called requested to be assisted during their application for international protection to the Border Guard [2]. This is consistent with a trend we have observed since the spring of last year of bigger and bigger numbers of people who, aside from requests for basic support – mainly including clothing, food, water and first aid –, also announce their intention to seek asylum in Poland, and are thus supported through the process. It is necessary to mention that although the procedure of 'Assisted Asylum Request' has proved to substantially reduce the risk of pushback, it is

[1] As of April 16th we are in the process of verifying data from the last three days of March. The final number might be slightly higher but the difference should not exceed 10 people.

[2] Assisted Asylum Request is an operational procedure adopted by NGOs and activists operating at the Polish-Belarusian border. Its aim is to reduce the risk of pushback from an applicant for international protection, and the process is based on an assumption known as 'protection through presence', according to which the presence of humanitarian organisations can deter the potential risk of abuse and, in this particular context, denial of access to asylum procedures. Migrants expressing their intention to seek protection to humanitarian workers are offered to be assisted by them when they meet with the Border Guard. Field workers and volunteers support asylum seekers during the process by providing information on the legal consequences of applying for refugee status in Poland, informing the Border Guard of their intention to apply for international protection, waiting with migrants for the Border Guard to arrive, documenting their willingness to submit an application and then accompanying them at subsequent stages. Each person seeking to apply for international protection also has the option of choosing a proxy to support them during the administrative procedure until the risk of pushback has been resolved. This is done by granting a power of attorney to a designated person.



never guaranteed that the person will not be illegally taken back to Belarus. In March, 32 people reported having been pushed back after submitting themselves to the Border Guard and declaring their intention to seek asylum in the presence of activists and NGO representatives. Moreover, since the suspension of the right to seek asylum on the Belarus border on March 27th the situation has further worsened as we discuss in the next section.

In cases where people are pushed back after an Assisted Asylum Request, Border Guards often inform their representatives that they have changed their minds at the border station. However, multiple interviews with people on the move provide evidence that their signature is often obtained by threat, use of force or manipulation.

"BG [Border Guard] did not want to take the POA [Power of Attorney documents] or let him take it with him. They told us to bring them to the station. They handcuffed him in the back and put him in the back seat of the jeep. In the morning I acquired information via phone call that he had signed a statement saying that he does not want to apply for international protection in Poland."

Excerpt from the operational report from March. The person was given POA by a man from Ethiopia to assist him in requesting international protection.

The man himself later confirmed, while visibly shaken, that he was taken back to Belarus and reportedly beaten by Polish and Belarusian services:

"[I] came back to Belarus. Beat me. Poland and Belarus beat me."



In total this month, we have registered 419 pushbacks reported by 276 people on the move. Podlaski Border Guard Regional Unit admitted to perpetrating 1383 pushbacks in March 2025, as a response to a request for access to public information on April 3rd 2025. Several people also reported experiencing violence from Belarusian authorities as a direct consequence of pushbacks, with one man reporting that his hand was broken as a result and another one relating that the Belarusians used 'shovel' and 'iron' on him, and that he was beaten in the face.

Legislative changes in Poland: suspension of the right to seek asylum and its immediate effects

Pursuant to Article 33 a paragraph 5 of the Act of June 13, 2003 on granting protection to aliens on the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2025, item 223 and 389), it is ordered as follows:

§ 1. A temporary restriction shall be introduced on the right to submit an application for international protection.

§ 2. 1. The restriction referred to in § 1 shall be in force for a period of 60 days from the date of entry into force of the Ordinance.

(2) The restriction referred to in § 1 shall apply at the state border with the Republic of Belarus.

§ 3. The Ordinance shall enter into force on the day of its promulgation.

Full contents of the ordinance that effectively removed the possibility to seek international protection in Poland on March 27th.

Critics of the legislation had long been sharing the concerns raised by the many ambiguities in its design, and were hoping that the ordinance – necessary for the law to take effect – would answer some of these. The core of the legislation adopted by the Parliament introduces a mechanism allowing for the temporary and territorial suspension of the right to submit applications for international protection in cases of so-called “instrumentalization of migration” by ‘other states’ which are not explicitly named.



During the legislative process Maciej Duszczek, responsible for migration policies in Poland reassured:

"This law does not function in a normal situation. It functions in a very clearly defined situation. We have a definition of instrumentalization – it is written in a way that excludes normal situations. In fact, there has to be a very significant threat, also to the territorial cohesion of the state, etc., for this law to actually be applicable. [...] This is a kind of safeguard that we want to have in the law, which will allow us to respond appropriately to situations in which... Today, to be honest, I don't feel capable of predicting what those situations might be. That's why it's a regulation that specifies this: the place and the time, really, in which it can be applied."

In mid-March, the Senate approved the bill without amendments despite overwhelming criticism of CSO. On March 26th, it was signed into law by the President. Despite the Minister's reassurance, the corresponding ordinance was published mere hours after the presidential signature effectively suspending the right to seek asylum on the territory of 'the border with the Republic of Belarus'. The immediate publication was made possible by the fact that the law did not include a vacatio legis period and entered into force the day after its signing.

The legislation stipulates that the suspension does not apply to five categories of "vulnerable people" (provided they don't use force or weapons): unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, persons who may require special treatment – particularly due to age or health conditions –, individuals whom the Border Guard determines are at risk of suffering serious harm in the country from which they arrived directly onto the territory of the Republic of Poland (not explicitly named, but implicitly referring to Belarus, and notably excluding Russia) and citizens of the state engaging in instrumentalization, from which territory the foreigners are arriving in Poland: in the current context, citizens of Belarus.

Even though unaccompanied minors are listed as one of them, on the first day of the law, as reported by Grupa Granica a 17-year-old unaccompanied minor from Somalia was pushed back from the hospital in Hajnówka, located around 18 kilometers from the border.



"The boy said he was 17 years old. [...] The family is from a persecuted minority in Somalia. In Belarus, he experienced horrific violence. He fell off a border wall. Before an ambulance took him away, Polish officers still sprayed him with gas. In the hospital, he was unable to stand up, unable to eat or drink after starving for days in the forest. He declared his intention to seek international protection in Poland. He spent several hours in the ER, was picked up by the Border Guard, after which we learned that he had been pushed back."

Prior to the enactment of these provisions it was sometimes possible to successfully submit an asylum application after crossing the green border, or at the only open for private traffic border crossing in Terespol. Under the new suspension framework, this has become nearly impossible. Only individuals classified as belonging to "vulnerable groups" are eligible for exemption — provided they are granted this status that is determined arbitrarily by the Border Guard.

The legislation formalizes the existing chaos and ongoing abuses by state linked actors. It is based on vague premises, and along with the anti-migrant narratives utilises fear of migration and incites racist and xenophobic fear of 'others' by further dehumanising them. It stands in clear violation of local and international law. It allows for the further erosion of human rights in Poland and sets a dangerous precedent for removing access to fundamental rights in the European Union.



Is Turkey a “safe third country”?

Greece's top administrative court, the Council of State, recently overturned a government rule that had classified Turkey as a “safe third country” for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia, though it remains unclear if and how the court’s decision will be implemented in asylum procedures. The policy had allowed Greek authorities to reject asylum applications from individuals of those nationalities who had previously resided in Turkey, on the grounds that they could seek protection there instead.

The court ruled that the Greek government had not provided substantial evidence to classify Turkey as a safe third country. The government had cited international sources, but hadn’t carried out an adequate evaluation of the general safety conditions in Turkey for asylum seekers. The Court’s ruling supports the concerns of human rights organisations and reports over the decision to classify Turkey as “safe”.

If the ruling is implemented, Greek authorities will be required to examine individual asylum applications for nationals of the affected countries on their own merits. In short, applicants from the affected nationalities can no longer be rejected solely based on their previous stays in Turkey.

The court’s decision marks a significant shift in Greece's legal framework concerning asylum applications from Syrian, Afghan and other nationals. It also emphasises the need for thorough and individualised assessments.

EU rights court finds Greece guilty of shooting, killing minor at sea

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has found Greece in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights over the August 2015 killing of a 17-year-old Iraqi national. The incident occurred when the Hellenic Coast Guard opened fire on a vessel during an interception near the island of Symi. The ruling underscores failings in the conduct of the operation as well as in the subsequent investigation. The ECtHR concluded Greece breached Article 2 of the Convention, which protects the right to life. The ruling emphasised that the operation lacked strategic oversight and any prior risk assessment related to the potential use of lethal force. The court found no evidence that the safety of the individuals on board the vessel had been considered as a key objective in planning the intervention.



Moreover, the ECtHR strongly criticised the Greek coast guards' decision to open fire on an overcrowded vessel carrying vulnerable individuals, describing it as inherently hazardous. The coast guard, the court noted, should have been aware of the risks posed by discharging firearms and did not take precautions to mitigate threats to human life.

The court also found that Greek authorities failed to conduct a thorough and effective inquiry into the shooting, resulting in the loss of critical evidence in the killing.

The ruling follows the ECtHR's January 2025 decision to condemn Greece for its practice of systematic pushbacks of migrants (read a full summary in BVMN's January report). Combined, the judgements expose a pattern of disproportionate use of force by Greek border authorities. They also mark a significant development in European human rights jurisprudence, reinforcing the need for systemic reform of Greece's border security practices and robust safeguards to protect the lives of people on the move.

Crisis in Greek pre-removal detention: death and protests

During March 2025, BVMN field reporters documented state violence against people detained in Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDC) on the Greek mainland, including violent repression of protests arising after the death of an Egyptian detainee at Paranesti PRDC.

On March 25th 2025, Hasir Latif, a Pakistani worker who was detained for the second time in the Amygdaleza PRDC despite having previously suffered from health issues, attempted suicide. Found in a coma, he was transferred to the Agioi Anargyroi Oncology Hospital, with doctors warning of possible permanent damage. His case underscores the severe mental health toll of prolonged detention.

Three days later, on March 28th 2025, an Egyptian detainee died suddenly in the Paranesti PRDC, with the event sparking unrest within the detention centre. After reporting the death to Kurdish and Egyptian media and civil society organisations, detainees went on a mass hunger strike against the inhumane conditions in the detention centre and the systematically prolonged detention periods. As reported to BVMN, the Greek authorities responded with repression, sending riot police to suppress the protests and reportedly using tear gas and locking detainees in their containers.

Mass protests also erupted in the Xanthi PRDC during March, where detainees reported being held for up to 13 months with no indication of when they will be released. Mobile Info Team (MIT) was in contact with protesters who describe reaching "breaking point," citing indefinite incarceration as the primary cause of unrest:



"Many people are here for seven or eight months and in some cases up to thirteen months. The main reason for the protests taking place is that people do not know for how long they will be detained and why they're being detained in the first place. At first it was for six months, then eight, nine months, and then thirteen months and then eighteen months! What have we done for all of this? We don't deserve that. It's not about the living conditions. It's not about the food. It's not about the place being clean or not. People are at a breaking point. [...] There is this general sentiment, general frustration that we're here. We don't know why we're here, for how long we're here, and people just explode. I am one of the people who every night thinks if it's better to just hang myself"

Reports from Xanthi indicate regular hunger strikes, self-harm incidents, and suicide attempts from detainees. These protests reflect a long history of resistance within Greek detention centres, with similar incidents recorded in Xanthi since its opening in 2012.

Appointment of a new Greek minister for migration: concerns of increased violence against people on the move

On March 14th 2025, the Greek Prime Minister announced a cabinet reshuffle that included the alarming appointment of Makis Voridis to the position of Ministry of Migration, a far-right extremist, open supporter of Greece's former military dictatorship and violent activist with close ties to far-right groups across Europe. Voridis has long been vocal about people on the move, in particular Muslim immigrants, calling them a threat to Greece and Europe and his appointment raises concerns of increased targeting of racialized communities, as well as a greater threat of criminalisation against solidarity groups that support them.

In one of his first interviews on being appointed, Voridis advocated pushbacks and other pressure tactics to prevent the entry into Greece of people on the move, as well as the removal of individuals that already are in the country. In what The Press Project called an "extreme anti-immigrant rhetoric of hate", Voridis's interview on national television supported the Prime Minister's programme of reinforcing border walls and



characterised people on the move as “criminals”. Further to this, in a radio interview on March 26th, he stated that “legally protecting the deterrence policy is at the heart of our strategy” which gives significant cause for concern about the possibility of increased and arbitrary forced returns, as well as a rise in violence and pushbacks.

In his first formal decision as Minister, Vouridis further tightened already very restrictive processes for people on the move to regularise their residence in Greece. The legislative changes and high possibility of increased policing and scrutiny of people on the move, as well as organisations working with them, create an environment that emboldens and encourages racism and intolerance.

Updates from the islands

Number of pushbacks, arrivals and apprehensions in the Aegean seem unreliable

Something has changed. For the first time in years we have reasons to believe that the official data provided by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) – on pushbacks from Greece, apprehensions and rescues – is not accurate. All of these numbers are down, including the amount of pushbacks from Greece to Turkey. While this could be a sign of good news, of less violence and dangers, we are inclined to believe that’s not the case.

First, the numbers (as per the official websites of the TCG and the Greek Ministry of Migration): during the month of March, 117 people were reportedly rescued by the TCG, 55 of whom had been pushed back by the Greek Coast Guard (HCG), in two different operations. Moreover 1,156 people were stopped and apprehended by the TCG before leaving Turkey and 1,911 people arrived on the Greek islands. In total, it is reported that 3,184 people tried to cross the Aegean. Most of these numbers are slightly higher than those from February (except for the number of people rescued and pushed back), when 344 were rescued – 157 after being pushed back –, 606 were apprehended by the TCG and 1,622 people arrived to the Greek island. In total, it was reported that 2,572 people – more than 600 people less than in March – tried to cross the Aegean.

Importantly, the total number of people who tried to cross, as well as the number of people who were pushed back, were significantly lower in February and March than in January of this year, when 459 people were pushed back in 15 different cases – 1,399 were rescued by the TCG – and nearly 6,000 tried to cross. The numbers were also extraordinarily higher in the same period of last year:



	January 2024	February 2024	March 2024
People rescued (pushed back)	1,987 (1099)	2,291 (1,196)	1,224 (878)
People apprehended before crossing	1,688	3,413	1,951
People arrived in the islands	2,961	3,357	1,818
Total of people who attempted crossing	6,636	9,061	4,993

In fact, according to Katherimini (a rather right-wing newspaper), “the main challenge facing the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum is not so much the migration flows from Turkey, which appear to be down by 36% in the first two months (January - February) of 2025 compared to the same period last year.”

So what is happening?

Of course at this point in time we can't know for sure, but there are reasons to believe that after the summit that took place mid-January in Istanbul, where the Greek, Bulgarian and Turkish Ministers of Interior met and discussed “important issues in the field of border security, countering illegal migration, and combating cross-border organised crime”, some changes were implemented in the reporting mechanisms on the numbers of people crossing the Aegean.

We do know of news relating to at least some pushback cases that were reported this past month and don't appear in the TCG website, but we have no means to verify them. Moreover, since we don't have access to numbers of people arrested on the Turkish mainland (when those apprehensions are carried out by police, and not during Coast Guard operations), there might also be bigger operations carried out with the goal to stop people before they can even try to cross.

For now, we will keep monitoring the numbers provided by the TCG and the Greek Ministry of Migration and trying to understand the changes and the reliability of these numbers. What we can say is that in our experience at least the numbers provided in February and March seem strange and suspicious.

**Kos***Camp population dropping*

The downward trend in the population of Greece's Kos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) persisted through March, with 759 individuals recorded on March 1st, and 706 on March 31st, a significant decrease when compared to the 1506 on January 1st. The drop appears to be linked to the reduced number of people arriving in the island, as migration routes seem to be shifting towards other, smaller islands in the Aegean Sea. There have also been reports from residents of construction within the camp and transfers to the mainland, which may have further contributed to the decline.

Additionally, asylum procedures for individuals from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have been suspended, forcing many to remain in the camp while awaiting updates on their cases.

Barriers to healthcare access

Access to healthcare remains a major concern for displaced individuals on this – and other – Greek island. Following the departure of Doctors Without Borders in mid-February 2025 and the absence of a replacement from the EU-funded Hippocrates program (which is meant to provide medical and psychosocial support to residents of reception and identification facilities in Greece), medical services inside the Kos CCAC are virtually nonexistent. Outside the camp, individuals also face numerous obstacles when trying to access public healthcare, including language barriers, administrative hurdles, and discriminatory practices.

Several concerning cases were reported by solidarity organisations this month. In one instance, a woman was reportedly denied treatment at the local hospital because she was wearing a headscarf. In another, a pregnant woman left the hospital without being informed of the status of her pregnancy, due to the lack of interpretation services. Additionally, a dentist refused to examine patients with dental pain, handing out antibiotics without conducting check-ups.

These incidents are not isolated. They highlight a broader pattern of neglect and systemic discrimination within the Greek healthcare system, and they reinforce the urgent need for inclusive, accessible, and non-discriminatory medical services for all, regardless of legal status, background, or appearance.



Mental health support is also critically lacking on the island. No psychiatric care is available within the CCAC or in its vicinity, and there is no dedicated system in place to support individuals with psychosocial disabilities once they leave the camp. People living with mental health conditions are left without any specialized support, including for basic needs such as finding stable housing, leaving many particularly vulnerable to homelessness and neglect.

Samos

In March 2025, inconsistencies in asylum procedures and the degrading living conditions faced by asylum seekers in the Samos CCAC prevailed, while survivors of human trafficking faced barriers in asserting their rights. In response to the ongoing delays in cash assistance, along with 19 other NGOs, I Have Rights (IHR) urgently called on the Greek authorities to resume financial support.

Ongoing inconsistencies in asylum procedures

In March 2025, ongoing inconsistencies in registration and asylum procedures continued to raise concerns. Multiple clients of IHR from Eritrea reported being wrongfully registered as Ethiopian nationals. This mis-identification of nationality not only highlights the existence of systemic negligence in the registration process, but also has serious consequences for the protection status of people on the move – especially since individuals from Eritrea are typically granted protection status by default.

Moreover, many clients of IHR reported that their asylum interviews had been postponed by over a month. This delay was further compounded by the Council of State's decision on March 21st 2025 – discussed above – to annul the Joint Ministerial Decision that had designated Turkey as a safe third country for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. As a result, interviews for individuals from these countries were suspended.

Alarmingly, delays in the renewal of identity cards also persisted, putting the asylum applications of people at risk. Multiple clients of IHR reported being unable to renew their identity cards for up to two weeks. This malpractice is particularly damaging given that the Greek authorities may cancel someone's asylum application if they fail to renew their identity card in a timely manner.



Degrading living conditions in the Samos CCAC

People held in the Samos CCAC continued to face issues accessing basic necessities and degrading living conditions. For example, one client of I Have Rights described issues with the inconsistencies in food distribution:

"The problem is that they don't serve food at a specific time. When we go a bit later, even though the food isn't finished, the employees get angry and refuse to serve the food."

This uncertainty of when — or if — meals are distributed left the client feeling "always stressed" while waiting for food. In addition to this, access to water remained severely restricted, running only twice a day for a few hours—often cold. The lack of water exacerbated already degrading, *"really unhygienic"* living conditions in the CCAC with *"a lot of rats"* and *"bed bugs everywhere."*

The limited access to essential services was particularly evident in the area of medical and psychological support. On top of the constant lack of medical support, in March 2025, the only state-appointed psychologist resigned, leaving a gap in mental health care. The sole psychologist, already overwhelmed and insufficient to meet the needs of the current population of 3,145 people, has now left, leaving people held in the CCAC without any access to psychological assistance offered by the state.

This situation also raises serious concerns about how vulnerability assessments are carried out, and whether individuals with specific vulnerabilities — such as survivors of human trafficking, whose rights are already at heightened risk — can be properly identified and provided with the "adequate support" required by law so that they can exercise their rights.

Lack of identification of trafficking survivors

In March 2025, survivors of human trafficking on Samos continued to face barriers in asserting their rights. For example, a pregnant client identified by IHR as a trafficking survivor reported that their registration interview was conducted in their second



language rather than their mother tongue, undermining their ability to fully express themselves. Another client, also identified by IHR as a trafficking survivor, experienced difficulty expressing their trafficking experience during the asylum interview due to interpretation issues. These cases raised serious concerns regarding the ability by Greek authorities to identify and protect human trafficking survivors. The provision of qualified and capable interpreters for the entire procedure is crucial to ensuring that survivors of human trafficking receive recognition and have access to appropriate support measures.

Joint Statement: NGOs call for cash assistance to resume

In light of the ongoing severe delays in the provision of cash assistance, IHR and Mobile Info Team, along with 18 Greece-based NGOs urgently called on the Greek authorities to immediately resume payments of cash assistance to asylum seekers. The joint statement highlighted the severe challenges faced by asylum seekers in meeting their basic needs after nine months without receiving any financial support.

On Samos, the absence of financial support has further exacerbated the already degrading and isolated living conditions in the CCAC with frequent reports of inadequate and insufficient provision of drinking water and food. In the absence of cash assistance, it is consistently challenging for people to compensate for the ongoing gaps in the provision of their basic needs.



Government data show most March apprehensions affected Afghans, Syrians

According to [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, 9,629 “irregular migrants” were apprehended in March 2025, with a total of 34,103 apprehensions so far this year through to March 27th specifically. The top groups of nationals affected by apprehensions (see Table 1 below for more information) were: Afghans (11,121); Syrians (4,823), Uzbeks (2,691), Egyptians (2,424), and Turkmen (2,179). Furthermore, authorities apprehended 2,575 so-called “organisers”, or those accused of facilitating irregular transit.

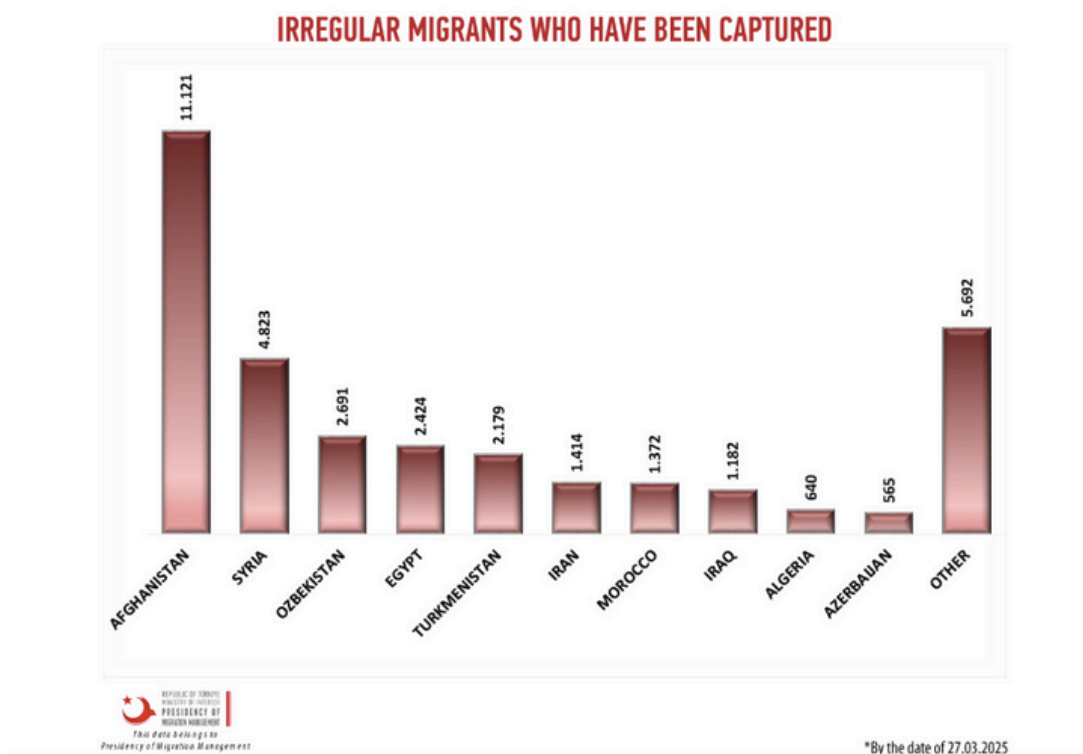


Table 1: Statistics from the Directorate of Migration Management show the number of “irregular migrants” detained through March 27th 2025 according to nationality/country of origin. Source: [Directorate of Migration Management](#)

Turkey celebrates successful strategy against “irregular migration”

Turkey has announced that it is making dramatic progress with its Strategy to Combat Irregular Immigration. In a detailed post on Twitter/X, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya [announced](#) that in February, 80 Mobile Migration Point vehicles across 28 cities were



used to conduct identity checks of at least 5,795 people. The operation identified 87 “irregular migrants”, who were referred to removal centers. One so-called “organiser” was also reportedly arrested.

Yerlikaya stated that the detection rate of “irregular migrants” in the first three months of inspections with “Mobile Migration Point” vehicles, launched on July 19th 2023, was 74.5%. This has now reportedly dropped to just 2.7% in the month of February 2025. He added that the strategies implemented, such as continuous inspections and operations within the country, as well as deportation procedures, have resulted in Turkey no longer being a transit route for “irregular migration.”

The “Mobile Migration Point” vehicles are used to speed up the identification of foreign nationals unable to prove their identities during security checks. They are staffed by a migration expert and an interpreter from the Directorate of Migration Management, alongside police officers that stop and check passersby profiled as (potentially “irregular”) migrants. Migrants’ biometric data is cross-checked against the GöçNet database, and those who lack legal status are referred to removal centres. Following a meeting in March, it was announced that the vehicles will also soon be deployed to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.



A Mobile Migration Point vehicle conducting an identification with biometric data. Source: [IHA](#)



Turkey says more than 145,600 people have voluntarily returned to Syria since December

Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz announced that at least 145,639 Syrian nationals returned to their country from Turkey between December 9th, 2024 and March 16th. He also stated that between 2017 and March 2025, at least 885,642 people had voluntarily returned to Syria from Turkey, “to the safe zones [Turkey] had created through cross-border operations,” referring mainly to the areas of northwestern Syria that had come largely under Turkish control in cooperation with a number of local militias, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the main organisation that overthrew the Assad regime in December 2024.

It should be noted that all returns from Turkey to Syria have been categorised as voluntary, although rights groups have documented numerous cases of forced returns occurring under this category. A new report published by Syrians for Truth and Justice – Syria\Türkiye: “Go Back to Your Country; We Do Not Want You Here”: Torture and mistreatment in deportation centers in Türkiye – outlines extensively the conditions under which Syrian and other migrants have been detained and reportedly tortured in Turkey’s EU-funded removal centers and other detention facilities. A more detailed summary of this report will feature in BVMN’s April 2025 Monthly Report.

Turkey to build 8.5km border wall with Greece

Turkey is set to take further physical security measures on its western border. An 8.5-kilometre wall will reportedly be built along the Greek land border in the Edirne province. The planned structure will consist of a two-meter panel fence on a one-meter concrete base, supported by towers and cameras.

According to a statement by the General Directorate of Migration Management, such structures already in place along Turkey’s southern and eastern borders reach up to 6.5 meters in height. The statement also emphasised that since early 2024, 2,304 people have been apprehended while trying to cross from Edirne to Greece and Bulgaria. The Greece-Turkey land border runs to approximately 200 km in length. Currently Greece has a barbed fence covering 30 km of this, and has pledged to extend it to 100 km by next year. Bulgaria’s land border covers approximately 260 km, almost all of which is covered by a razor-wire fence on the Bulgarian side. Edirne Governor Yunus Sezer also indicated that Turkey’s planned wall may be extended to the Bulgarian border in the future.



Since 2015, the EU has provided €9.5 billion in funding for refugees and host communities in Turkey. According to a report by non-profit investigative organisation Lighthouse Reports, part of a nearly €1 billion total aimed at managing migration flows, with some of the funds used to expand fingerprinting systems for tracking migrants and enhance removal centers with barbed wire and higher walls. In December 2022, €220 million was specifically allocated to enhance border control at Turkey's eastern border, funding equipment such as surveillance and lighting systems along the borders with Iran and Iraq.

Court ruling on deportation of Uyghurs to China

On March 13th, it was reported in Karar news outlet that two separate Administrative Courts ruled in favor of the repatriation of Mahemuti Anayeti and Aierken Abuduwail, two Chinese nationals of Uyghur ethnicity. The ruling was reportedly based on the supposed absence of a concrete risk of persecution. The lawyer of the two individuals denounced the ruling as contradicting both national and international law regarding the protection of refugees. While Uyghur individuals had already been deported from Turkey to third countries, this would mark the first instance of a Turkish court issuing a ruling of deportation directly to China.

The following day, Karar again reported that protesters had gathered in front of Istanbul Administrative Court, accusing authorities of committing a “crime against humanity”, and highlighting that the decisions might constitute a dangerous precedent for the Uyghur community in Turkey. Recent years have seen an increase in detentions targeting Uyghurs in Turkey, as outlined in this article from 2024.

On March 15th, however, the Directorate of Immigration Administration issued a statement in response to the media attention on the case, denying that the two individuals are being repatriated to China, claiming that false information was being spread through the media coverage.

The statement declared that Turkey does not violate the prohibition of refoulement and that ‘no one is sent to a place where they will be tortured or where their life or freedom will be threatened due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a certain social group or political ideas.’ The statement also asserted that ‘A.M.’ (assumedly the above-mentioned Mahemuti Anayeti) already by their own request left Turkey voluntarily to ‘a western country’ where it was stated they have relatives. They also stated that the surveillance order of ‘A.A.’ (assumedly the above-mentioned Aierken Abuduwail) ended in 2023.



According to migrant rights lawyers in Turkey who spoke to BVMN, attempts to contact the cited legal representative of Mahemuti Anayeti and Aierken Abuduwail were not successful during the reporting period.



Protests against the deportation of Uyghur individuals. Source: [Feyza Nur Calıkoglu / Karar](#).

Murder of Fatma El Muhammed

A six-year-old Syrian girl, Fatma El Muhammed, was brutally murdered on March 20th near her house in Ankara. Her severely damaged body was reportedly found buried 50 meters from her house.

Fatma was born in Ankara after her parents moved to Turkey from Syria in 2015. According to the reports, she left her house at around 3 pm that day, after which she went missing. Shortly after, her parents found her dead body buried near their house completely naked and with the right part of her body torn apart. Initial reports of the incident suggested a stray dog attack to be the cause. However, upon further investigation of El Muhammed's death, it was reported that she had been raped and dismembered by her 50-year-old neighbour. The neighbour was taken into custody a few days afterwards. At the time of reporting, there had still been no official statements made regarding the case.



It is important to note that the debate of stray dogs in Turkey has recently caused a huge public turmoil, which resulted in Turkish legislators approving a 'massacre law' aiming at the mass murder of millions of stray dogs. In 2021, a presidential decision led to Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's treaty on preventing violence against women and domestic violence.

On March 27th, DEM Party MP Ömer Faruk raised the case in a Parliament speech, clarifying that the accused neighbour had been arrested and sent to prison. Reflecting on the degree of disinterest in the case displayed by authorities and media, he stated bluntly, "because Fatma is Syrian, this murderer was not talked about or reported."

Detention and deportation of foreign journalists and other public figures in relation to recent protests

As was reported widely in international media, massive protests erupted in Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, as well as other cities across Turkey in late March, following the detention of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, who was held on the basis of a developing case that state authorities reported centred on corruption and terrorism charges. Relevant to reporting here is that a number of foreign nationals – many of whom were freelance or affiliated journalists – were apprehended and in most cases immediately deported from Turkey during this period.

On March 25th it was reported that a US national, Michael Anthony Ganoë, had been detained by Turkish authorities alongside a Romanian acquaintance with whom he attended the protests. In a statement to police after his detention, Ganoë reportedly claimed that he was a freelance journalist. He and his Romanian acquaintance were both deported on charges of "inciting the public to hatred and resentment."

The most high-profile example was that of Mark Lowen, a BBC correspondent who had come to Istanbul to cover the protests. He was apprehended at his hotel on March 27th, held for 17 hours and then deported. He was reportedly presented with a written notice declaring him a threat to public order.

On April 3rd, it was reported that pianist Davide Martello, a German national, had been deported after having his mobile piano confiscated and being forbidden to give a concert in the Kadikoy district of Istanbul. Martello is known internationally for playing in various conflict zones and protest settings.



Swedish journalist Joakim Medin has faced more severe charges. He was arrested just after arriving at Istanbul airport and officially detained the following day. He faces more charges of “Membership of an Armed Terrorist Organisation” and “Insulting the President”, which Turkish authorities claim has no connection with his journalistic work but for having attended a protest in Sweden that ridiculed President Tayyip Erdoğan. As of the time of reporting, he was still being held at Silivri Prison in Istanbul and had communicated via his lawyer that there was no valid reason for his detention.



Update on evictions in Northern France

In March, BVMN member organisation Human Rights Observers (HRO) witnessed at least 66 evictions of 9 different informal living sites in the area around the city of Calais, which took place more or less every 48 hours. HRO counted at least 365 people on the move evicted, and 14 people arbitrarily arrested by the Border Police during the operations. At least 96 tents were taken by the private cleaning company appointed by the Prefecture, 11 of which were emptied before being seized, the rest of the belongings left on site. This demonstrates a clear will to strip people of their only possible shelter as a deterrence strategy, as opposed to an attempt to clean the site. At least 19 tarps, used to shelter from the rain, and 2 mattresses were seized as well during these evictions. Moreover, HRO witnessed the taking of 1 lifejacket, an act that shows a complete disregard for the increased danger posed to the lives of people trying to cross the Channel to reach the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, in the area around Dunkirk, HRO recorded at least 3 evictions of 5 informal living sites. According to our observations, 140 people were evicted in March. The French government and police refuse to call these “evictions” and prefer the term “evacuation operations”, as the people being evicted in this area can board buses that will take them to state shelters. However, this solution is neither appropriate nor sustainable for the people being relocated. First, even though this alternative is not presented as “forceful” by state agents, the consent of the people being evicted is never gathered. There is also no social diagnosis or evaluation carried out before the eviction and people are usually not informed that an eviction will take place. On the day of the eviction, they are escorted by heavily armed police to the buses where the border police are usually waiting. If the people being evicted refuse to board the bus, they can be arrested – in March, 5 people were arrested during evictions in Dunkirk. Furthermore, in many instances, interpreters are not present to explain where the bus is going and the closest shelters are located far away from the border (the closest being in Lille, 100 kms from Dunkirk), a situation that doesn’t align with the needs of the people wanting to stay put to wait for a good opportunity to go to the UK. Those ‘sheltering operations’ are in fact one of the many lines of the policy of zero points of fixations that the French and British governments are carrying out at this border.

Following this policy, in order to avoid people reinstalling themselves after the eviction, as in Calais, the French government employs private companies to seize tents and shelters and make the living sites inhabitable. Moreover, they cut down the trees and turn over the soil. In March, at least 119 tents were seized in this area and all the living sites were destroyed using construction machinery and chainsaws.



In the cases of both Calais and Dunkirk, the numbers provided here constitute a bare minimum, as HRO teams are often kept at a distance and prevented from observing the police operations. This month, observation was totally obstructed at least 10 times. Observation is made especially difficult in Dunkirk, where living sites are spread out over tiny forests, fields and industrial areas. Police forces also attempt to intimidate observers on a daily basis. In March, observers were filmed without notice (thus breaching French law) at least 8 times, and police forces physically pushed back a volunteer of the organisation during two different evictions, while the driver of a police truck tried to scare an HRO team member by swerving towards them while leaving a living site. Members of HRO saw their identity checked 5 times, and one non-European volunteer was arrested by the border police for a check of his legal residence. Furthermore, during an eviction in Dunkirk, members of HRO and volunteers of another association received fines for trespassing in a property belonging to the SNCF (the national train network) where a living site was located. To observe the police operation, they had to enter the property and were thus fined.

All these instances of intimidation are repeated and systemic. It is clear these are mainly intended to hinder the work of organisations documenting and observing police operations, as other organisations present on or around the living sites during the evictions are usually ignored by the authorities.



Eviction in Northern France. Source: @elio_j



Police violence outside of evictions

In March, Human Rights Observers recorded the arrest of at least 2 people on the move in Calais, outside of evictions. Those arrests were heavy-handed, and people were pushed against a panel during the events. According to a witness, the people were arrested because they entered a supermarket with backpacks.

Moreover, this month, five persons died at the border. That's one more death than in February, and two more than in January. By making exiles' lives more precarious, border crossings ever more dangerous, the French government is responsible for the increase of people dying at the border. The constant harassment of people on the move by the police also has an important effect on their mental health and participates in deteriorating it, which sometimes results in serious mental breakdowns, trauma and suicides.

Finally, in March, surveillance around bus stops and stations continued. Although HRO has not documented any physical violence during these operations, the constant surveillance of people on the move in their daily lives bears witness to increasingly harsh and frequent control policies, further contributing to the dehumanization of the people targeted by these measures.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

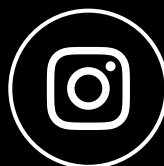
Network structure and contact

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

We finance the work through charitable grants and foundations, and are not in receipt of funds from any political organisation. The expenditures cover transport subsidies, several part-time paid coordination positions and some costs incurred by partner organisations for their contributions to our shared work.

To follow more from the Border Violence Monitoring Network, check out our website for the entire testimony archive, previous monthly reports and regular news pieces. To follow us on social media, find us on Twitter handle @Border_Violence and on Facebook.

For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved, and for press and media requests please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu.



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