

MONTHLY REPORT | AUGUST 2025

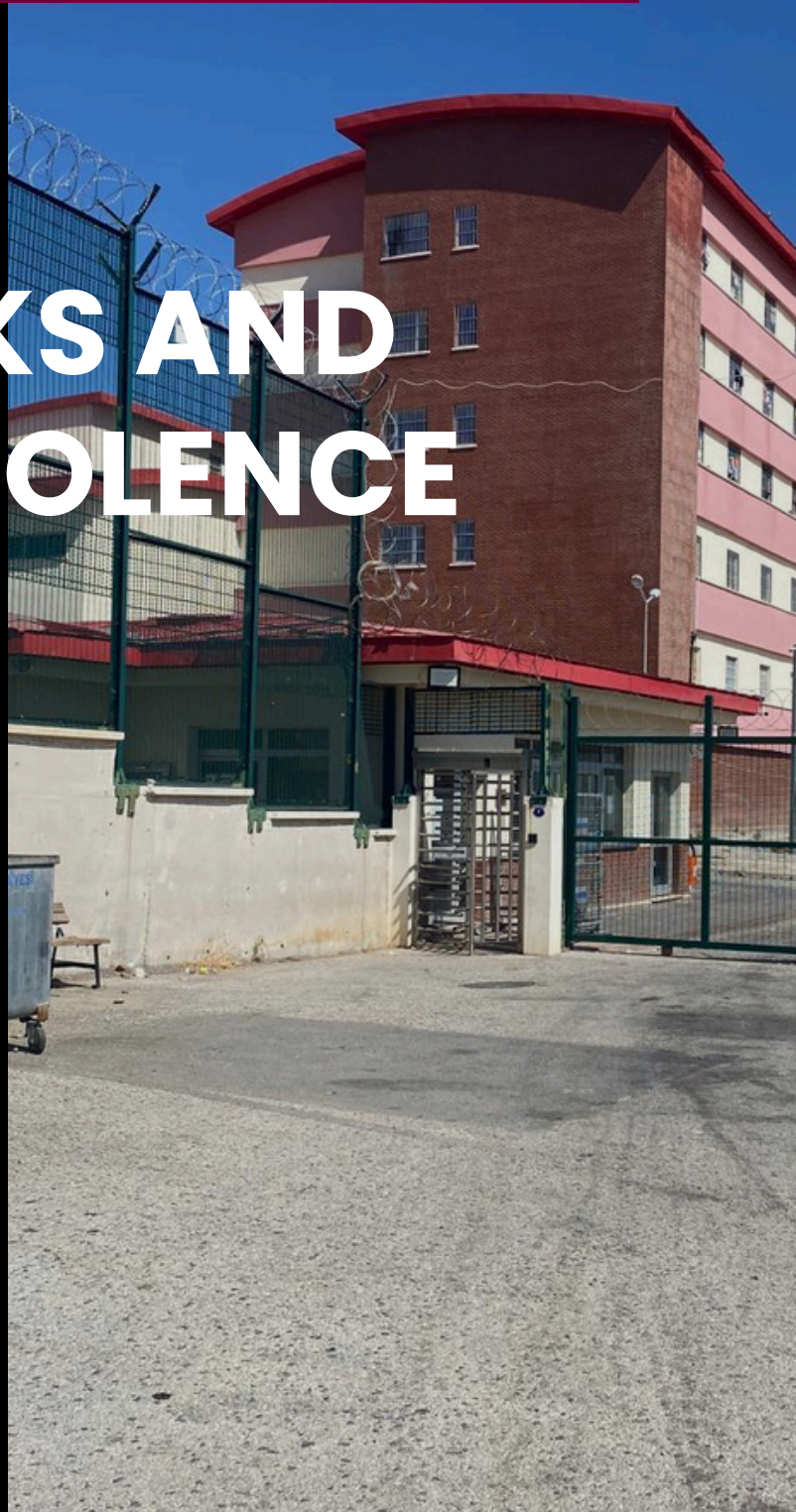
ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

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.

Harmandalı Removal Center, Izmir, Turkey. Credit: Private source



Border Violence
Monitoring Network



MONTHLY REPORT | AUGUST 2025

ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



LEGAL
CENTRE
LESVOS



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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 August and brings together first-hand testimonies and observations from a range of countries in the Balkan region, Turkey and France, to look at the way European 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).

This month, we look at different patterns of violence perpetrated against people on the move on their journey towards, within and out of Serbia. Countless conversations with people in transit outline human rights violations whose prevalence and levels of cruelty seem to have changed little over the course of several years. We share the testimony of a group of men from Morocco who endured physical and psychological violence while in detention in Hungary, before being illegally pushed back. Meanwhile, people trying to come to Serbia through the eastern border describe the recurrent use of police dogs by Bulgarian authorities, an extremely violent practice repeatedly reported in BVMN testimonies for years. Several police raids in informal living spaces around Obrenovac, near Belgrade, show that the climate of abuse and insecurity extends far away from the borders, vanishing the limited expectation of building and finding safe spaces when on the move.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the closure of the Borići Temporary Reception Center, previously designated for children and families, raises fundamental questions about the adequacy of the new appointed location – in Lipa – to host vulnerable groups. Moreover, it signals a move towards the increasing isolation of people on the move in facilities far away from urban spaces and local residents. Beyond the Western Balkan country, “out of sight, out of mind” seems to be a pillar of migration policymakers’ rulebook across Europe, driving the increasing marginalisation of displaced people while reducing their autonomy and access to essential services.

This is exactly the plan on Lesbos, where the ongoing construction of the new Closed-Controlled Access Center in Vastria, in a remote location with high wildfire risks, has been opposed by local groups and authorities since the beginning of the plan. This summer we have also witnessed the Greek government continue to harden its general stance on migration through a new law that promises further violations for people on the move. Among other changes, the legislation includes longer detention times, criminal prosecution of irregular entry and stay, and the removal of the possibility for undocumented people to apply for residency after seven years. Meanwhile, an asylum ban enacted earlier in the season and affecting people arriving through the “North Africa route” has led to the breach of hundreds of people’s right to seek asylum, fueling protests in facilities like the one in Sintiki and criticisms from rights organisations. These organisations are now facing potential retaliation, after the Minister of Migration and Asylum called for a revision of the registry of NGOs and the criteria used for inclusion.



Executive summary

Access to asylum is restricted through legislation and detention on land, and through force and death at sea. Thus, we report on several pushbacks and shipwrecks that took place in August in the Aegean, resulting in the death of at least four people. In the absence of safe passage, the state continues to focus on the criminalisation of movement and solidarity rather than protection, arresting people accused of “boat-driving”, failing to ensure access to fair trials with guarantees and preventing organisations from reporting on these and other human rights violations.

We also include a summary of BVMN partner organisation Mülteci-Der’s latest report on the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center, in Turkey, one of the few sources of information about Removal Centers in the country, whose general scrutiny is severely limited by the authorities. The report describes issues regarding the conditions endured by detainees, including the denial of access to medication, lack of procedural safeguards, physical violence or extreme psychological distress, among others.

Lastly, we provide updates on the continuation of the eviction policy in Northern France, where 38 police operations resulted in the displacement of nearly 1,000 people this month alone. Most of these operations are accompanied by high levels of violence, and severe restrictions to monitoring work that protect the impunity of the officers. Moreover, we witness the start of the “one in, one out” deal between the UK and France, presented as the way to open safe and legal passage for asylum seekers to the UK, but which turns asylum into a bargaining chip while violating people’s right to seek protection regardless of their means of entry to the country.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



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Violence during detention in Hungary

This month, Collective Aid's team in Serbia shares the testimony of violence from a 22-year-old man from Syria who was detained by Hungarian authorities before being pushed back to Serbia.

The man described that he had been pushed back from Hungary to Serbia three times. During the most recent time, he was traveling with a transit group of 11 people and was reportedly spotted through surveillance technology after crossing the border. A group of uniformed officers, identified by the respondent as Hungarian police, soon arrived at the location. The group was apprehended and reportedly hit with batons. They did not receive any information about what would happen to them or where they would be taken. They were then transported to the border station at Röszke (Tranzitóna - Röszke) and detained for three days. He described that, during this time, they were hit whenever they spoke or asked questions. According to the respondent, the beating happened several times. On one of these occasions, his friend was reportedly made to lie on his stomach while handcuffed, then beaten and kicked.

"They (the Hungarian police) put handcuffs on us from behind and beat him. They tortured him a lot."

Despite asking for it, no one was given any food or water, even as they got increasingly weak and unwell throughout the days. The respondent described that he tried to pay the police for food, but that they took 1,000 euros from him without giving him anything. The officers also took his bag and broke his phone.

"It is not right. I mean, we are human beings, we are the same."



The respondent described that, during the detention period, the authorities kept them outside of the facility while it was raining for 3 to 4 hours at a time.

"It was raining and sometimes they would look at us and drag us to the water to torture us and expose us."

He said that this was the only time he got anything to drink, as he then tilted his head and opened his mouth.

Fire in Obrenovac Asylum Center

On August 14th around 3am, a fire broke out in Obrenovac camp. It was reported to have started in a family's room while the residents were sleeping. A woman living in that room was taken to the hospital with a second degree burn on more than fifty percent of her body. Residents have volunteered to donate their skin to her.



Obrenovac Asylum Center. Credit: Collective Aid



The other residents were relocated to another building, as a temporary measure. However, they have complained about the lack of transparent information from the authorities on the incident, as well as the absence of new safety measures to prevent further incidents, e.g. functioning fire detectors.

The Serbian newspaper [192](#) reported that an investigation was carried out and “established that the installations were the cause of the fire”. The information that the residents have received is that the fans are being blamed for the fire, therefore, all fans have been taken away, even though temperatures in Serbia are still extremely high. Consequently, in conversations with members of Collective Aid, people have described difficulties to sleep, especially for some of the children. Other electric devices remain in use.

Police raid in Obrenovac

On August 25th around 5pm, the police raided a squatted living space in Obrenovac, outside of the Asylum Center.

Collective Aid’s team went to the same location on the next day and talked to some people who had witnessed the raid. They described that ten police marked cars were present, and that the authorities apprehended eight people, who were then sent to Preševo Reception Center, by the border with North Macedonia.

On the day of the raid, two of these people had severe physical health issues – one man was unable to walk properly due to an injury on his entire leg, while the other one was extremely weak, as he had been throwing up for almost a week as a result of an infection. When the police arrived, the group ran away except for these two men. They were reportedly told to “stay and shut up” while the officers chased the rest of the group.

The police conducted at least two additional operations over a period of two days. An Instagram [video](#) shared by the info channel Srbija.sad shows a group of four or five people being apprehended by the police on their way to Obrenovac on August 25th. Another [video](#) shared by the Serbian newspaper 192 on Instagram shows the police stopping a vehicle with people on the move on the highway from Belgrade to Niš after a car chase on August 24th.



Empty living space after the eviction. Credit: Collective Aid

Use of dogs by Bulgarian police

Recent conversations on the field point at the concerning and widespread use of dogs by Bulgarian police during pushbacks. An example of this was shared with members of



Collective Aid in a conversation with six men from Morocco who had been pushed back from Bulgaria to Turkey while traveling in a group of 20 men. They reported that one of the people in the group was bitten by police dogs before the pushback, a repeating incident occurring at the border with Turkey, according to many different respondents met by the Collective Aid team.

This practice is, unfortunately, far from new. Testimonies of violent pushbacks involving the use of dogs by Bulgarian police have been collected by members of BVMN for several years. Some of them describe serious attacks often resulting in severe injuries, like this one from 2022, or this one from 2023, where the police released the dogs on the respondents to force them to give away their phone passcodes.

Physical and mental health

The lack of access to adequate medical care exposes people on the move in Serbia to further risks to their life and health, especially those outside of the official centers. Frequent conversations with people on the move in the country reveal a high prevalence of scabies, infections in open wounds, and multiple foot injuries and conditions, including trench foot, blisters and twisted ankles. Most people encountered suffer from at least one of these health issues.

This is compounded with many people's lack of access to clean drinking water, which forces them to drink from rivers and streams that are extremely polluted, e.g. the Sava river. Though people are aware of the dangers and consequences of using this water to drink, cook or wash themselves and try to avoid it as much as possible, they are often left with no alternative.

One serious incident that took place in August concerns a man who had been bitten by a snake and had big infected wounds on multiple places of his body – another consequence of the policies that force people into unsafe sheltering and traveling. He was in a lot of pain and showed signs of fever. He had been unable to contact the emergency services, partly due to a lack of access to a phone of his own.

The psychological consequences of the inhumane migration policies, the neglect, violence and mistreatment, are also often visible. At least one person this month shared that he felt “unwanted wherever he goes”, he thought of himself as “finished” and expressed suicidal thoughts.



A man with a twisted ankle. Credit: Collective Aid



A man with a snake bite. Credit: Collective Aid



Closure of Borići and inadequate conditions in Lipa

During the month of August, the main development in the Una Sana Canton was the preparation for the closure of the Borići Temporary Reception Center (TRC), finalized between the end of August and the beginning of September. Borići had hosted unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and families with children, and its closure marks a critical step in the ongoing transition of migration management in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which foresees the progressive handover of responsibilities from IOM to national and local authorities. As part of this process, Borići was shut down and all residents were transferred to the Lipa TRC.

Borići, previously a student dormitory located in the city of Bihać, offered some basic protective elements despite its limitations. UASC were accommodated in external containers, while families were hosted inside the main building, where they also had access to bathrooms and meals. Its central location ensured that residents were not completely isolated, allowing a certain degree of autonomy and access to local services. Moreover, several organisations operated regularly within the center, providing a range of support services.

In contrast, at Lipa, two areas have been nominally established – one for unaccompanied minors on the move and another one for women and families with children. Beyond this superficial division, however, no effective protection measures are in place. Vulnerable groups remain insufficiently separated from other residents, leaving them exposed to risks of violence, exploitation, and neglect. The camp's isolated location, far from urban areas and basic services, further exacerbates these vulnerabilities by limiting access to external support, reducing oversight, and reinforcing the sense of confinement and marginalization among residents.

The situation is particularly concerning given that, since September 2024, the city of Bihać has hosted a newly established reception center specifically designed for unaccompanied minors on the move. This purpose-built facility, located within the city, provides dignified conditions, including bedrooms, regular meals, legal, medical and psychosocial assistance, as well as access to structured educational and recreational activities. Nevertheless, none of the minors formerly accommodated in Borići were transferred to this center after its closure. Instead, all of them were relocated to Lipa, a remote and isolated camp that lacks comparable services and exposes children to heightened risks of neglect and marginalization.



Draconian Greek law increases punitive measures against people on the move

In the June Monthly Report, BVMN reported on the plans of the new Greek Migration Minister, Thanos Plevris, to introduce new far-reaching legislation on migration and returns. Proposed in June, the draft law sought to accelerate returns, lengthen the period of detention, impose greater penalties for “illegal” entry – and “illegal” stay, for the first time –, as well as limit regularisation opportunities. After a short negotiation period in the Greek Parliament, the law was passed on September 2nd, with minimal amendments made. Among other changes, the law expands possible return destinations, decreases the period for voluntary departure for those whose asylum applications are denied from 25 to 14 days, and introduces punitive measures to prevent absconding, such as electronic monitoring. Moreover, it increases the maximum period of administrative detention pending return from 18 to 24 months, while enabling the criminal prosecution of irregular entry, stay and re-entry, punishable with prison sentences or hefty fines. The possibility for undocumented people to apply for a permit after seven years of residence is also abolished. Plevris bluntly summarised his stance on migration: *“The Greek state does not accept you. You only have one choice: to go back. You’re not welcome.”*

Concerns for the new law’s compliance with international and EU legal frameworks and its potential severe impact on the human rights of people on the move in the country have been widespread among civil society, political commentators, oversight bodies as well as legal and judicial associations. The law invokes – and, in places, directly mirrors – the European Commission’s non-binding proposal for a Return Regulation, while at the same time contravening several minimum guarantees and safeguards in the existing Return Directive (notably, for example, by exceeding its 18-month detention limit). It also conflates administrative and criminal regimes, raising questions of proportionality and necessity, as well as compliance with the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the EU that criminal proceedings not undermine return procedures. For long-term undocumented persons in Greece, the abolition of the seven year residence permits will increase their precarity and, if removed, carry devastating consequences for their private and family lives, as well as their economic and social integration. Taken together, these measures institutionalise a regime of arrest, detention and prosecution of people on the move while failing to address the structural legal and political barriers that often make return unfeasible.

Other than having a disproportionate negative impact on the protection of fundamental rights, the new law directly undermines respect for the rule of law as well as legal certainty. It marks a pivotal moment in the erosion of rights and legal safeguards at national level, with repercussions that extend far beyond Greece’s domestic borders.



Suspension of asylum applications and repercussions for NGOs

Earlier this summer, after a fallout of the negotiations with the authorities from Benghazi, the Greek government declared a state of emergency based on fears of a so-called “invasion” of people on the move. As a consequence, they decided to suspend the asylum applications and issue deportation orders for all those who arrive to the Greek shores via the so-called “North-Africa route”. Together with other grassroots organisations, BVMN has already denounced the illegality of the suspension decision and the horrendous consequences that it has led to. In parallel, the legal organisations GCR and RSA started to challenge the administrative decisions that were immediately taken against some people on the move. As a response, during the month of August, the European Court of Human Rights issued two Rule 39 interim measures to prevent the Greek government from deporting the asylum seekers and potential asylum seekers to their home countries.

Eventually, following the judicial decision and in a move that resounds like a threat, the Minister of Migration and Asylum decided to establish a working group to revise Greece’s NGO registry. Among other tasks, the working group is to redefine the criteria according to which organisations may be admitted to it and allowed to remain registered. According to local sources, the Minister of Migration and Asylum declared that a reason for exclusion from the registry will be the pursuance of legal challenges against decisions of administrative detention and suspension of asylum. Although the removal from the registry would not ban the organisations from operating in Greece, it would prohibit them from entering reception camps and monitoring reception and detention conditions in those facilities. If ultimately adopted, the Greek government’s measure could lead to a terrifying season of revenge, hindering, even more, the few existing avenues for the monitoring of human rights violations against people on the move.

The detention of asylum seekers subject to the ban in inappropriate facilities: protests in Sintiki

Between July 29th and August 3rd, 650 people deprived of their right to apply for asylum were transferred to a facility in Sintiki that used to be an open camp accommodating asylum seekers in the Regional Unit of Serres, in Northern Greece. The camp in Sintiki (also known as the camp in Kleidi) was converted into a closed structure in July, aimed at detaining newly arrived people subject to the asylum ban. Apart from raising questions regarding the legal framework under which the facility



currently operates, the center in Sintiki also has a maximum capacity that is lower than the number of people that were transferred there, as highlighted by the Border Guards Association of the Evros Prefecture following a visit to the facility.

In August, MIT received several enquiries – many for legal support – from people subject to the asylum ban, including people detained in Sintiki. Most of them have been deeply confused regarding the reasons for their detention and the impossibility to apply for asylum, and showed intense fear of being forced back to their country of origin. This clearly illustrates the critical lack of information provision from state authorities, along with the complete unpreparedness of the state for such a situation.

The high degree of uncertainty may also be contributing to tensions in the facility. On August 12th, a fight broke out between detainees from Sudan and Egypt, which ended up with one man from Sudan being injured in the head and taken to the hospital. On August 18th, six detainees attempted to escape from the same facility, but were arrested by the police. The episode was met with violence by police officers in charge of the security of the structure, who assaulted one of the detainees who had tried to escape. The six of them were sentenced to six months in Nigrita prison. Following the incident, the Association of Police Officers of Serres sent a letter to the Ministers of Migration and Asylum and Citizen Protection highlighting the shortcomings and “inadequacy of the security infrastructure” in Sintiki.

In reaction to this violence, around 260 people held in the facility started protesting and initiated a hunger strike on August 19th. In addition to police violence, detainees denounced the impossibility to submit asylum applications, as well as the undignified detention conditions. These include insufficient food and lack of access to adequate healthcare resulting in the spread of diseases, overcrowded containers forcing some of them to sleep on the floor, and the lack of provision of non-food items such as soap, hygiene products or even clothes.

The Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, Thanos Plevris, reacted to the tensions in Sintiki by showing neither solidarity nor any intention to listen to the protesters' claims: *“I want to be clear. Greece will not be blackmailed. Those who break the law, attempt to escape or go on hunger strike to put pressure on the state will face penalties. There is no way that anyone will be set free with such tactics.”*

***Samos***

In August alone, 636 people held in the Samos Closed Control Access Center (CCAC) were transferred to the mainland, amidst a large transfer operation initiated by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, that lasted from mid July 2025 until the second week of September 2025. BVMN member organisation I Have Rights (IHR) stresses that large-scale transfer operations of asylum seekers without adequate warning and appropriate explanation of the procedure and destination, while being held in undignified de facto detention conditions, violates the rights of people on the move to effective remedy and their right to a fair asylum procedure. Instead, transfers should be streamlined through a coordinated policy that is practical, encourages frequent transfers, and ensures access to basic services, including timely access to legal advice and adequate information before scheduled departures.

Additionally, in the month of August, clients of IHR continued to report on undignified conditions in the subsection of the CCAC meant for the isolation period, as well as on inconsistencies in the registration and asylum procedure. The month of August was also characterised by numerous pushback and pullback operations by the Hellenic Coast Guard and the Turkish Coast Guards in the Aegean region, leading to the loss of seven lives at sea in three separate incidents (123), in the increasingly deadly EU border regime.

Isolation period and reception conditions

In the month of August, one client reported receiving only one blanket upon arrival in the CCAC and that they were then made to stay in a severely overcrowded room. Moreover, their phone was confiscated for several hours. Another client was under police control for one day because they were picked up from another island, raising concerns about additional arbitrary detention periods happening before entering the CCAC, which don't count towards the maximum detention period. The client also reported having their phone taken away by the Hellenic police.

Issues in the registration and asylum procedure

A client of IHR and survivor of human trafficking was not identified by the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) as such, adding to the 13 clients of IHR since the beginning of the year that have not been identified by the Greek authorities in the Samos CCAC. Another client reported that, despite a severe hearing condition resulting from torture and violence suffered in his country of origin, authorities did not conduct a vulnerability assessment.



In August, there were also persistent delays for some asylum interviews and simultaneous fast tracking for others. Four clients reported continuous delays in their interviews, while two clients reported that their interviews took place remotely. At the same time, a person who reached out to IHR shared that he received his red card on August 21st and already had his interview on August 22nd, which didn't grant him any time to seek independent legal advice. IHR caseworkers also heard from a couple of people on our hotline that they had their interviews very soon after receiving their red cards.

With regards to the transfer operation, one client described that the police forced at least one person to sign the transfer paper without an interpreter on site. In this incident, no violence was reported. They also shared that the Greek authorities knock on people's doors in the CCAC at night and say that the transfers are mandatory, giving residents no choice. IHR stresses that people have a right to refuse these transfer orders if the person has specific vulnerabilities or for other individualised reasons, such as family unity. These large-scale transfers are being carried out in an undignified manner, causing even more distress for people on the move, who are already enduring inhumane de facto detention conditions.

Pushbacks and border violence

On August 11th, the Aegean Boat Report (ABR) and the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) Command reported on a pushback carried out by the Hellenic Coast Guard off the coast of Samos. As documented by [ABR](#), the HCG opened fire on around 20 people adrift a rubber boat – “instead of bringing them to safety, they circled the overloaded boat, tried to push it back—then pulled out shotguns and opened fire”. Later in the day, the [TCG](#) intercepted a group of the same number, including one child.

On August 18th 2025 at 02:04 a.m., ABR, [IOM](#), and the TCG reported that some people on the move had fallen into the sea from an inflatable boat and a call for help was made off the coast of Izmir's Karaburun district. One helicopter, one unmanned aerial vehicle, one TCG ship, and five Coast Guard boats were immediately dispatched to the scene. As a result of the operations initiated by the Turkish Coast Guard assets that arrived in the area, two people were rescued alive and four bodies were found. There was no official number of missing persons, but investigations remain ongoing.

On August 31st, as reported by [IOM](#), the Samos Port Authority informed the HCG about a speedboat with people on a rocky coast off the island of Agathonisi. The Greek



authorities allegedly used light and sound signals. Then, a chase ensued, resulting in the immobilisation of the speedboat and the arrest of a 20-year-old Uzbekistani man, who was accused of driving the boat and handed over to the Samos Port Authority. With the assistance of the Hellenic Police they carried out a search on land, finding 26 people and the body of a woman. The people were transferred by ferry to the CCAC, and the body was taken to the General Hospital of Samos for autopsy. The alleged boat driver was arrested for “disobedience, smuggling, and illegal entry”. The Port Authority of Samos conducted a preliminary investigation.

It is essential to note that, due to growing criminalisation against independent organisations reporting on these illegal pushbacks, they are extremely underreported. Contrary to popular claims that less people are arriving to Greek coasts via the Aegean sea, in the month of August at least 615 people were pushed back by the HCG. This cruel, illegal, and extremely dangerous deterrence strategy only exposes people on the move to further violence, while no safe and humane passage is provided. IHR clients continue to denounce border violence perpetrated against them in their attempts to reach Samos.

Meanwhile, we recognise that our monitoring role is very limited and exists in parallel to a growing political dissonance between the value of human life and migration policies of abandonment and neglect. Concerningly, there is a growing numbness to these hostile policies and their violent implementation by border management actors, who continue to expose people on the move to life threatening incidents.

Kos

Heightened work and housing crisis

August on Kos marks not only the fading of summer but also the approaching end of the tourist season, a change that carries serious repercussions for refugees and people on the move on the island. This seasonal shift swells uncertainty and hardship for those hoping to build new lives and finally find a sense of stability.

With the seasonal economy declining, people on the move are facing increasing difficulties securing housing and work. One Palestinian man, L, who arrived on Kos in August explained the obstacles he faced whilst trying to find a job, housing, and school placement for his 7-year-old daughter. He tirelessly searched, brought his CV to local businesses, constantly refreshed housing apps in the hope to find a place to stay, but was repeatedly turned away and told there were no opportunities for him now that the



season was coming to an end. Hotels and restaurants that usually provide some temporary opportunities are closing within weeks and no longer able to offer even short-term jobs. L. felt forced to move towards Athens in search of some kind of opportunity.

His story highlights the broader challenges faced by many. The closure of temporary employment opportunities adds pressure to an already strained and inadequate reception system and further accentuates the barriers to access basic rights and protection. It illustrates the growing vulnerability of people on the move as we end the summer months.

Shifting demographics

Throughout August, the population at the CCAC on Kos has fluctuated between 700 and 800 people. This month has seen many new arrivals, including an increase in the number of people from Syria, Kurdistan and Palestine, compared to previous months.

There has also been a growing number of people from Eritrea arriving in the island, a trend that has been felt in our community centre. 40 out of the 370 new registrations to Global Roots' free shop in August were from Eritrea, compared to just two in July. This shift could be a consequence of the general shrinking safe space for refugees and people on the move. Escalating instability in Eritrea's neighbouring countries has further limited access to asylum systems and legal documentation. Moreover, some Eritreans are choosing to avoid the central Mediterranean Sea route through Italy, and Malta because of the extreme dangers involved. This route requires passing through Libya, where Eritreans – as many others – face severe human rights abuses, including inhumane or arbitrary detention, kidnapping, and human trafficking.

Sea arrivals

Ten years ago this year, the world was shaken by the image of a young Syrian boy who drowned while attempting to cross to Greece. Found lying face-down on a beach near Bodrum, Turkey, his body captured global attention and became one of the most unforgettable symbols of the human cost of EU migration policies and the lack of safe passage that forces many into migrating through the Mediterranean. That tragic event happened on the route to Kos and stands as a stark reminder of the dangers faced by people on the move arriving here.

People on the move arriving on Kos today continue to recount horrifying experiences at sea. The boats are often dangerously overcrowded and barely seaworthy. One was



described “as fragile as a paper boat folded by a child”, while another carried 40 people and began to deflate mid-crossing. As water seeped in, passengers prayed for their lives. Fortunately, they were close enough to the Greek coast to arrive on land. One group of three young men described swimming the four kilometres from Bodrum to Kos in the middle of the night. One of them recalled, with chilling clarity, that he saw “death in the middle of the sea.”

Lesvos

Camp conditions and service gaps

As of September 2nd, the Lesvos CCAC hosted 1,224 people, up from 1,015 in mid-July. Afghans remain the largest group (45%), followed by Syrians (29%), with smaller groups from Somalia, Eritrea, Yemen, and Sudan. Recognized refugees increased from 25% in May to 39.5% in July, while asylum seekers decreased from 73% to 59%; rejections remain low (1.5%). August also saw around 240 new arrivals, mainly from Afghanistan, Palestine, Yemen, and Somalia. Eighteen minors were transferred from Serres to Lesvos after prior relocation from Crete.

Interpretation continues to be handled through Interpreti Traduttori Mediatori (ITM), while the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) supports the Regional Asylum Office in Greece with 15 interpreters in Farsi/Dari, Arabic, French and Somali. With regards to healthcare, from September 1st, the Ministry mandated that all medical interventions, even minor care, must be recorded in the Alkyoni digital system. With only one Hippocrates doctor in the camp, actors warn this will create unsustainable workloads. At the same time, the Municipality's Social Pharmacy remains capped at 100 beneficiaries, subject to its EU-funding limit.

During a recent visit, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) noted improved site conditions due to the reduced population, but raised concerns over limited interagency coordination, funding cuts, and persistent protection gaps in gender-based violence, child protection, and healthcare.

Updates on the Vastria CCAC

Debates around the planned Vastria camp intensified. While some local authorities voiced opposition, others expressed more cautious positions. Governor Moutzouris met with municipal leaders on the issue. On August 22nd, regional and municipal leaders in Lesvos, including Governor Kostas Moutzouris and Mayor Panagiotis Christofas,



publicly rejected the government's plan for a new detention facility in Vastria. Christofas underlined that the Municipality of Mytilene has already overturned its earlier support, filed an appeal to the Council of State, and insists no new structure should be built on the island. Instead, he proposed only a small registration center and called for the closure of Mavrovouni, so the site can be used for "local development". While all participants voiced opposition, their positions contradictions and differing tactics, raising questions about whether words will translate into action.

During a Municipal Council meeting in Mytilene on August 29th, the president of the local water company (DEYAL), Panagiotis Valesis, accused Minister of Environment Stavros Papastavrou of blackmailing the municipality. According to Valesis, Papastavrou conditioned state funding for the long-delayed wastewater treatment project in southern Mytilene on the municipality's cooperation with the planned Vastria CCAC, allegedly telling officials: "For this project to go ahead, you must give us Vastria." Valesis, supported by Mayor Panagiotis Christofas, rejected the demand, insisting that essential infrastructure cannot be used as leverage for acceptance of a detention facility.

Criminalisation of movement

On August 6th 2025, a 22-year-old Turkish national was arrested in Lesvos accused of migrant smuggling. During an early morning patrol, a Hellenic Coast Guard vessel spotted a speedboat without navigation lights moving at high speed toward the southern coast of the island. Despite repeated warnings, the driver allegedly ignored signals and eventually landed in the Plomari area, where he disembarked 26 people, before abandoning the vessel. Greek police later located the group and transferred them to the Kara Tepe camp. By afternoon, the reported driver was found at the Mytilene passenger port, preparing to board a ferry to Chios and Piraeus. Authorities identified him as the boat's operator, arrested him for illegal transportation of migrants, and seized both the vessel and his mobile phone.

On August 31st 2025, aboard the passenger ferry Ariadni sailing between Chios and Oinousses, a Turkish detainee, accused of migrant smuggling in a July 7th incident near Lesvos, ended his life by jumping overboard with his hands cuffed. The man, who had been held in pre-trial detention in Korydallos Prison, was being transferred to Mytilene to face trial. According to reporters, he managed to escape the attention of his police escorts, ran to the deck when another passenger opened a door, and leapt into the sea from a considerable height. The ferry stopped, and a search and rescue operation was launched with the assistance of the Hellenic Coast Guard. Despite



extensive efforts throughout the day, the man was not found. Disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against the police officers responsible for his transfer.

These incidents illustrate how the criminalisation of movement shapes the experiences of people on the move in Greece. Crossing borders is increasingly treated as a criminal act rather than a humanitarian or social reality. Individuals who navigate dangerous journeys, out of necessity, face arrest, prolonged pre-trial detention, and harsh conditions, with serious psychological and physical consequences. By framing movement primarily as a threat to public order, the system prioritises deterrence over protection and limits access to legal safeguards.

The judicial system reinforces this approach. BVMN observers have documented persistent deficiencies in trials under Article 25 of Law 5038/2023, which criminalises the unauthorised transport of third-country nationals. In September 2025, multiple cases in the One-Member Appeals Court of Chania were resolved largely through plea agreements, often with defendants represented by state-appointed lawyers who had minimal time to prepare. Even when cases proceeded to full hearings, procedural protections were inconsistently applied: witnesses were frequently absent, interpretation was inadequate or improvised, claims for protection were disregarded, and hearings were largely inaccessible to the public. Analysis of the hearings can be found here: September 1st, September 3rd and September 22nd. The cases show the undermining of several fundamental protections under the European Convention on Human Rights, including adequate time and facilities for defence, or the right to examine witnesses. Moreover, exemptions for people seeking protection under Article 31 of the Geneva Convention are applied inconsistently.



Mülteci-Der's latest report on the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center

Lawyers from the İzmir-based rights organisation Mülteci-Der (Refugee Solidarity Association) conduct regular visits to Removal Centers (GGMs), particularly in the Aegean region, during which they provide direct legal services to detainees, and try to assess the living conditions and treatment of detainees within the centers.

The latest report from the association is based on visits conducted to the İzmir Harmandalı GGM between April and July 2025. Given that independent rights groups are not permitted to conduct monitoring visits to any of Turkey's 30+ EU-funded GGMs, it is especially valuable that such work is conducted within the limited means available to organisations such as Mülteci-Der. İzmir is both a key transit city on Turkey's Aegean coast and has a large, diverse migrant population. Such circumstances also partly explain why it is an area where there is a higher degree of monitoring and social support and solidarity structures in place, when compared with many other parts of the country where GGMs or other types of migrant detention facilities have been established.

The information in the report is based on two visits carried out to the GGM in April-July 2025, during which the team conducted private or semi-private interviews with eight detainees (men and women, including elderly and vulnerable persons), reviewed administrative files, observed conditions, and also intervened in urgent cases. Their findings are also compared with prior reports (Jul-Sep 2024, Oct-Dec 2024, Jan-Mar 2025) in order to identify trends.



Harmandalı Removal Center, İzmir, Turkey.
Credit: Private source



The report outlines "...the persistence of systemic issues previously documented in past reporting periods, including chronic overcrowding, inadequate medical care, procedural ambiguities, and insufficient protections for vulnerable individuals such as women, children, and persons with chronic illnesses or disabilities," as well as survivors of pushbacks at sea. According to data from the Turkish Coast Guard, during the April-July period, there were 41 maritime 'Push Back Incidents' in the Aegean region impacting a total 982 people, including seven so-called organisers, the term used for those who provide irregular transit services for a fee. In August – the period for this BVMN Monthly Report – there were reportedly 12 such incidents impacting 380 people, including three so-called organisers.

The report shares numerous direct quotations from people detained in the GGM. Regarding overcrowding and the general dehumanising treatment they face from staff, one young male detainee stated: "There are 16 of us in a room meant for eight. It is suffocating, we cannot breathe. The gendarmerie treat us like 'creatures,' and wash their hands after touching us. It is so humiliating."

Several people report being denied access to medicine, including prescription medicine, or any other forms of healthcare treatment. A number of detainees report how legal and procedural safeguards are totally inadequate or simply absent. The majority of respondents described they were given legal documents in Turkish without any access to translation, being left to rely on other detainees to help provide translation.

On top of these persistent concerns, "...the report identifies several escalating issues, including increased psychological distress among detainees and a growing trend of indefinite detention without access to legal remedies." Furthermore, many detainees described the volatility of guards' behaviour – both gendarmerie and private security –, including a physical attack on one respondent by gendarmerie officers in a space hidden from surveillance cameras.

The report underlines the generally "...widespread accounts of depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation" encountered by the lawyers on their visits. Many detainees are facing a severe lack of clarity over their legal status and future, and arbitrarily extended detention periods. A lack of any psychosocial support or proper communication with the outside world compounds what the authors describe as an escalating crisis. The quote from one young male detainee reflects the impact these punitive conditions have had on him: "If I stay here longer, I will completely lose myself."



Evictions and violence in Calais

In Calais, the police continue to carry out evictions of informal living sites every 48 hours, often accompanied by arrests of people on the move and the seizure of personal belongings by a state-appointed cleaning team. In August alone, BVMN member organisation Human Rights Observers (HRO) monitored 35 of such operations across seven different living sites in Calais, during which over 305 people were evicted, at least 12 arrested, and over 121 tents were seized. This policy of harassment is intensified by the timing of such evictions, which tend to coincide with distributions from solidarity organisations in Calais. On August 6th, for example, the police conducted an eviction of a living site during a breakfast distribution coordinated by Salam. After people had moved away from their belongings to receive the meal, the authorities entered and seized all tents on the site along with any items left inside, which included phone chargers and external batteries. This operation displaced over 45 people, including at least 15 women and eight children. Moreover, two people were arrested. On August 30th, another food distribution was disrupted by one of these evictions, and more than 30 people were prevented from accessing essential food items. Given the authorities' knowledge of the location and scheduling of these distributions, the timing of evictions seems deliberate, and results in the creation of a constant state of uncertainty that forces people to choose between eating or staying close to their belongings in the hopes of protecting them.

Thus, the evictions of living sites constitute a clear manifestation of the restrictive border policies intended to disrupt daily life and make Calais inhospitable to people on the move. This is compounded by regular instances of police violence. In August, HRO accompanied several people who wished to testify against acts of police brutality, including a father who was threatened and beaten by police in front of his two young children:

"They threatened to spray us with tear gas if we didn't turn back. One of the police officers came up to me and kicked me hard in the left ribs, knocking me to the ground. My children started screaming. [...] Still on the ground, I tried to take out my phone, and at that moment, the police officer who had kicked me came back to grab my phone from my hands and throw it away. I was taken to the hospital, where I was told that the kick from the police officer had fractured two of my ribs."



Such instances of police violence are worryingly frequent, yet extensive police perimeters are exploited to impede observation and prevent officers from being held accountable. In August, for example, HRO registered at least two occasions in which the observation of evictions was fully obstructed, hence hiding the results of these violent policies from sight and shielding them from scrutiny.

Evictions and violence in Dunkirk

The number of evictions carried out by the police in the Dunkirk area has increased notably in recent months. As of August 2025, the number of eviction operations has doubled from last year, with 28 operations evicting at least 61 living sites compared to the 14 operations evicting 23 sites by the same point in 2024. Since the beginning of the year, we have documented that 29 skips (or dumpsters) have been filled with tents, blankets and personal belongings. This represents up to 870 m³ of seized goods, equivalent to 5,100 standard bathtubs.

In August, three large eviction operations displaced more than 592 people, including, at least, 75 women and 25 children. Furthermore, HRO directly witnessed the confiscation of 62 tents, 23 blankets, 15 tarps, three backpacks, and one mattress. It is important to note, however, that due to recurring hindrances to our observation work by the authorities, these figures should be taken as an absolute minimum. During each of these operations, the informal shops set up on camp, which constitute important places for socialisation, as well as for the provision of goods, were completely destroyed using heavy machinery.

These evictions are characterised by high levels of violence and a complete disregard for the basic needs and fundamental rights of people on the move, as evidenced by the use of tear gas on a group of people trying to charge their phones at the central distribution site, on August 21st. People are routinely separated from their belongings and prohibited from collecting them before their living sites are razed to the ground. This month, HRO took several testimonies that recounted the destruction of prescription glasses, and the seizure of crucial asthma medication, passports and phones, including that of a pregnant woman, whose shoes were also taken. Large sweeping perimeters prevent people from searching for their possessions and, on August 21st, HRO observed how this resulted in a child being forcibly separated from their parents.



Moreover, during evictions in both Calais and Dunkirk, HRO observed police officers directly seizing personal belongings. This violates the prefecture's explicit orders stating that only members of the cleaning team are authorised to handle confiscated items.

In both locations, the deployment of vast resources, particularly large police convoys, serves to intimidate people on the move and facilitate displacement, as well as to hinder documentation. In August, the activities of HRO were systematically obstructed and team members routinely threatened, including with physical violence. On one occasion, the driver of a digger threatened to hit a member of HRO with his shovel, while on another, team members were aggressively escorted by the chief of operations on site, who threatened to push them harder. These eviction operations function as costly assertions of state power, curtailing access to fundamental human rights, like shelter or freedom of movement, suppressing resistance to exclusive and discriminatory border policies, and extending the violence of the Franco-British border beyond the Channel.

UK-France deal: “one in, one out”

This month, for the first time, people were detained when reaching England by boat from the French coastline, as part of the “one in, one out” deal. Under this agreement, France committed to accept the deportation of rejected asylum seekers from the United Kingdom, who had arrived to the country “irregularly” by small boat. In exchange, the UK promised to take in one asylum seeker from France – someone who hasn’t attempted to cross the Channel – for every person deported. Presented as the way to opening legal and safe routes for asylum seekers to come to England, this deal allows deportation from England to France and turns the right to asylum into a bargaining chip. This mechanism reinforces the externalization of borders, and tramples on the very essence of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.



**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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