2024

Annual
Report

**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

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Introduction

About Us

The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) is a horizontal self-organized network of NGOs and groups spread across the Balkans, Greece, France and Poland. Our Network was founded in 2017 to promote safe and legal migratory passage, end violent practices occurring on the Balkan Route, and advocate for the implementation of policies of solidarity and justice. ●

Our Mission

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As a collective of NGOs, we aim to shed light on the violence at and within Europe's borders, and the severity and extent of illegal, systematic border management practices perpetrated against people on the move (POM). To do so, we rely on the support of BVMN members and partners – 19 grassroots organisations spread across Europe that each contribute to our advocacy efforts whilst also providing their own services to target communities throughout the region. Some of our members provide direct aid to POM and other communities while others offer legal support and advocacy channels for those who have experienced all-too-common injustices during their journeys.

Some of BVMN's member and partner organisations are shown below. It must be noted that two member and three partner organisations choose to keep their relationship with BVMN confidential, and are therefore not listed below. ●

Members
& Partners
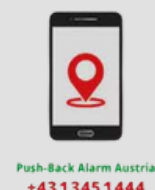
Members

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Partners

Two member and two partner organisations choose to
remain anonymous and are thus not listed above.

BVMN
Annual Report 2024

Geographical Scope

POLAND

Rigardu

BLIND
SPOTS

WE ARE
MONITORING

GERMANY

FRANCE

AUSTRIA

ARE YOU
SYRIOUS

SLOVENIA

info
park

Voice in Bulgaria

SERBIA

BULGARIA

CROATIA

collective
aid

BOSNIA –
HERZEGOVINA

MOBILE
INFO TEAM

collective
aid

GREECE

I HAVE
RIGHTS.

@GLOCAL ROOTS

members

partners
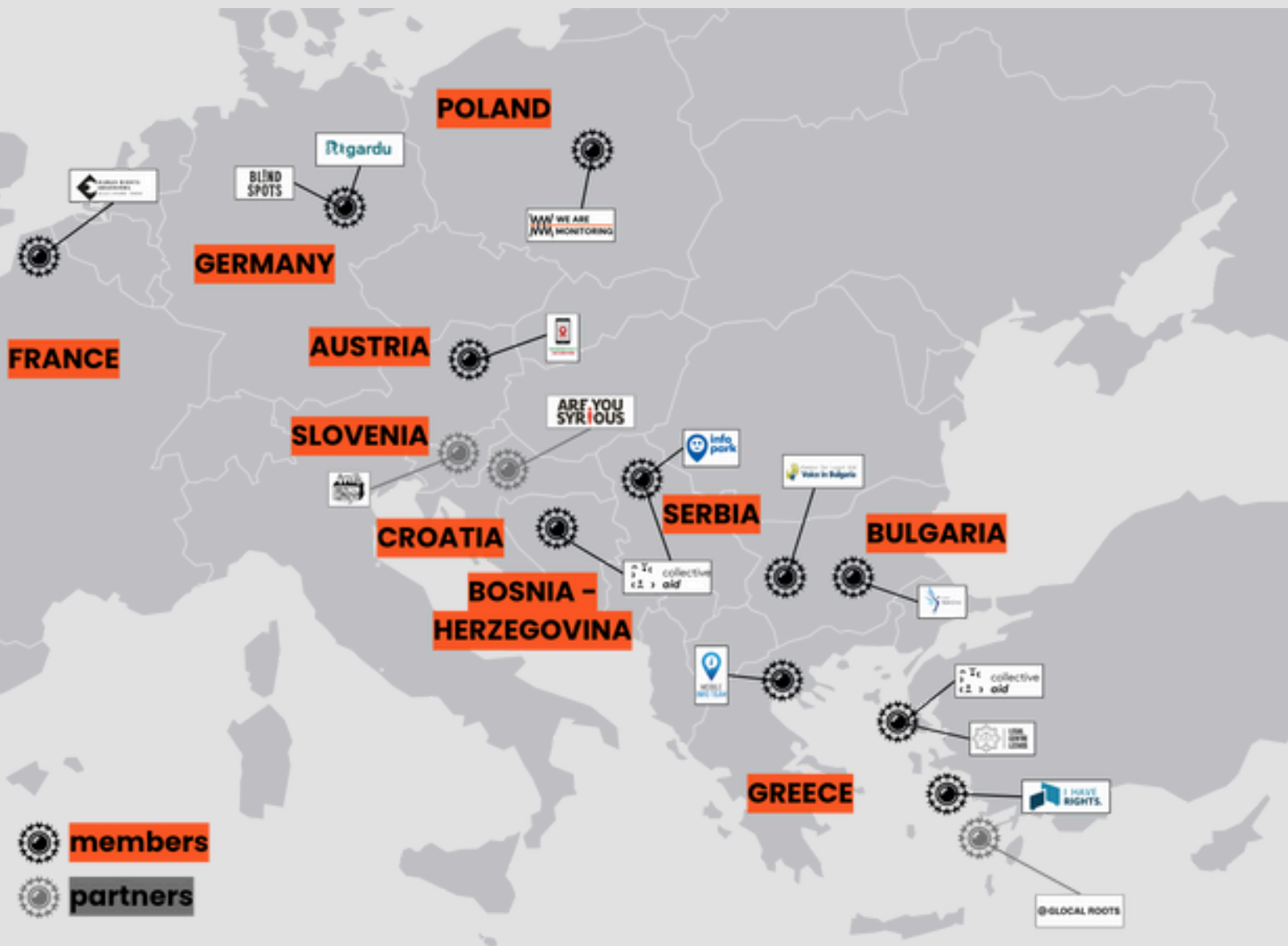
Geopolitical Context

Over the last decade, violence and injustice have become undeniable obstacles for POM on their journeys across migratory routes to Western Europe. Chief among these paths is the Balkan Route, which is the union of two migration flows: the Eastern Mediterranean Route – leading from Turkey by sea to Greece and Bulgaria – and the Western Balkan Route, which passes through North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the way to Western Europe.
The route was popularised in 2012 and is still commonly used today. Though no migratory journey is easy, the Balkan Route previously represented one of the quickest and safest paths to target countries. Today, that safety has all but vanished, and the challenges have continued to mount. Modern, migratory management in the region has given rise to a system responsible for violent atrocities and both physical and bureaucratic impediments to safe migration.

The closure of the so-called Humanitarian Corridor in 2016 was succeeded by nearly a decade of escalating violence against people on the move. In 2024, this persistent violence was compounded by a rise in pushbacks and the growing use of surveillance technology, further increasing the danger of these routes. The year was also marked by Europe's hardening stance on migration, in the form of harsher border enforcement and the continued framing of migration through the lens of security and criminality. Deepening cooperation between the European Union (EU) and third countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina to manage external borders, alongside the expanding involvement of Frontex, served increasingly to deter rather than protect people on the move. Despite widespread evidence of Frontex's involvement or complicity with human rights violations in countries where it operates, the EU continued to prioritise deterrence and control over safety and the right to seek asylum. ●

Trends

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In 2024, the use of surveillance technology became a central pillar of European migration control. Surveillance systems were increasingly deployed not only at external borders but also within countries and urban areas such as Thessaloniki, extending the reach of state monitoring far beyond traditional checkpoints. Bulgaria introduced new biometric systems and databases, including facial recognition and digital fingerprinting, often without transparency or consent, leading to an erosion of privacy and rights. In Evros and at the Hungarian-Serbian border, the use of drones to monitor crossings and coordinate pushbacks intensified. The rise of these technologies at external borders can be understood in relation to wider externalisation strategies. Incentives such as the EU accession process can be linked to the purchase of surveillance equipment, as seen in Bulgaria before joining Schengen, and in Serbia and North Macedonia as a prerequisite for progress towards accession. Alongside criminalising people on the move, these technologies are routinely used with impunity to facilitate illegal pushbacks, disproportionately targeting racialised, non-white, and undocumented individuals. Research by BVMN has shown that the EU plays a prominent role in the funding of these new border technologies, alongside private companies. However, access to information on their potentially harmful impact remains limited. This year, the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) set a dangerous precedent by developing a separate legal framework for the use of AI by law enforcement, migration control and national security authorities, introducing loopholes and effectively encouraging the use of discriminatory systems against the most vulnerable people.

Over the past year, BVMN has worked to shed light on these changes by conducting field and desk research, Freedom Of Information requests and interviews concerning border technology deployed in several countries along the Balkan route, investigating their funding and potential impacts. ●

Border Updates

Europe's borders have been shaped by recurring patterns of violence, pushbacks, surveillance, and the continued externalisation of border control this year. These patterns occur simultaneously and have defined the journeys of people on the move across the Balkan Route. Testimonies collected throughout the year reveal widespread violence at both internal and external borders, including incidents involving minors held in detention. Such tactics serve not only as acts of harm, but as deliberate strategies of intimidation and control.

Pushbacks continued as a routine practice, frequently coordinated across national borders, often involving theft, abuse, and collective expulsions in violation of international law and often working in tandem with violence. Surveillance technology, including drones, thermal cameras and biometric databases, has been widely deployed to monitor, track, and intercept people on the move, frequently enabling and accelerating violent border encounters. Incidents in the Aegean and the English Channel have also exposed the lethal consequences of deterrence at sea. The expansion of Frontex's operations into Bulgaria and Bosnia and the increasing use of surveillance tools in urban areas demonstrate how enforcement mechanisms are penetrating inland. These developments are deeply tied to the EU's externalisation strategy, where migration control is increasingly outsourced to third countries including Serbia, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria into the Schengen Area this year marked a shift in regional border politics, reinforcing the EU's external border policies and shifting enforcement pressure outward, while violent and unlawful practices on the new peripheries remain largely unaddressed. ●

Top: A Directorate of Migration Management vehicle in Hatay, Turkey. Credits: Kazım Kızıl
Middle left: graves of the Hilal family, who drowned in the Drina river in August 2024
Middle right: The Ovcha Kupel refugee centre at the outskirts of Sofia, Bulgaria, in November 2024
Bottom: French police conducts yet another eviction in Calais. Credits: elio__j_

Top: border surveillance cameras deployed at the edge of the demilitarised zone in Cyprus.
Bottom, top-left: Camera at the Pournara refugee camp in Cyprus.
Bottom, top-right: fence gate used to pushback people on the move from North Macedonia to Greece.
Bottom, bottom-left: frame from video feed of a drone, during a demonstration of the REACTION project.
Bottom, bottom-left: eviction in Calais. Credits: elio_j_

Our
Response

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The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) continues its core mission of documenting systemic border violence, amplifying the voices of people on the move, and holding state and non-state actors accountable for human rights violations. Through coordinated fieldwork across the Balkans, the network collected 34 new detailed testimonies in 2024, documenting the intensifying use of violence, surveillance, collective expulsions and pushbacks. These findings informed legal submissions, media outreach, and policy briefings, including contributions to international bodies.

This year, BVMN expanded its focus on emerging technologies at borders, while integrating this analysis into legal and advocacy efforts. In response to growing criminalisation and repression, BVMN worked closely with grassroots partners and member organisations to extend support and cross-border solidarity. The events of this year solidified the need for consistent, collective resistance to the normalisation of violence against people on the move at Europe's borders. ●
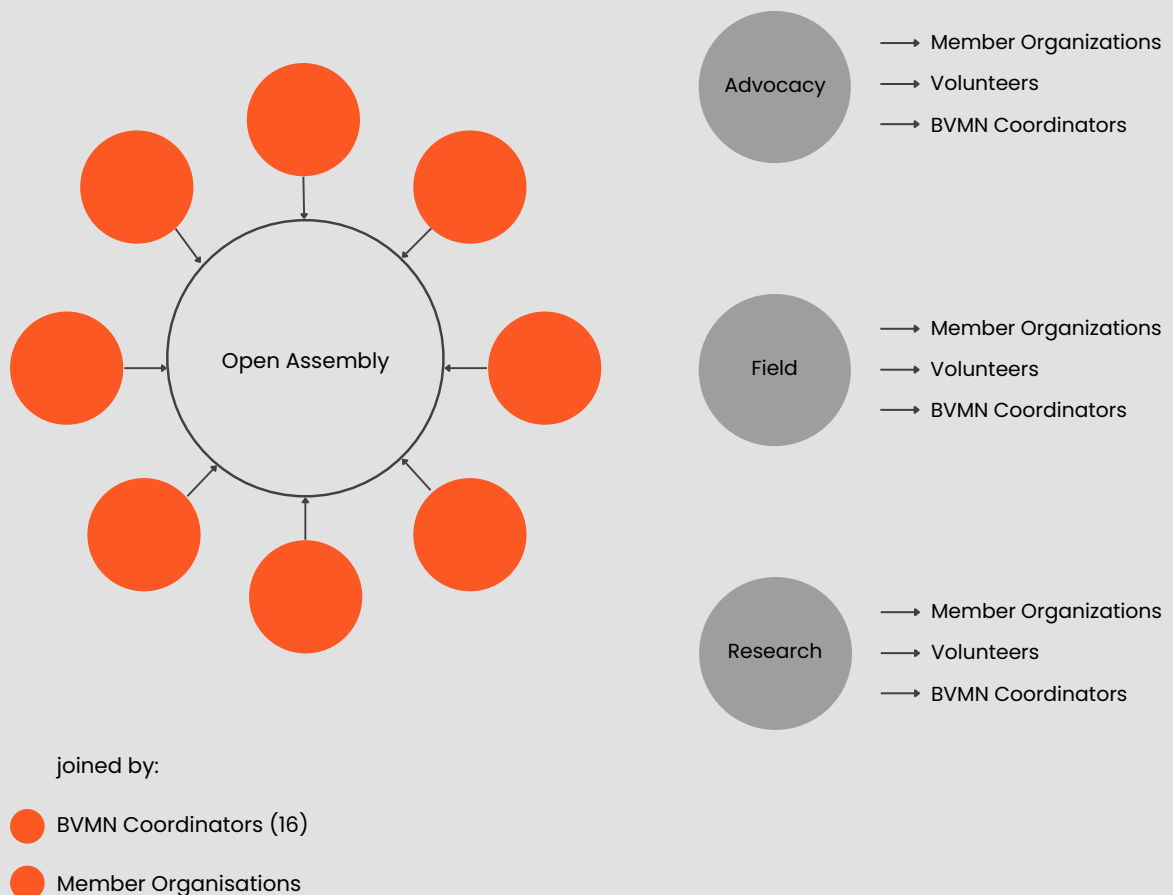
Our
Structure

The Network has continued to expand in 2024, relying on a larger
pool of volunteers and member organisations to support its work. ●

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Advocacy
⟶ Member Organizations
⟶ Volunteers
⟶ BVMN Coordinators

Field
⟶ Member Organizations
⟶ Volunteers
⟶ BVMN Coordinators

Research
⟶ Member Organizations
⟶ Volunteers
⟶ BVMN Coordinators

Open Assembly

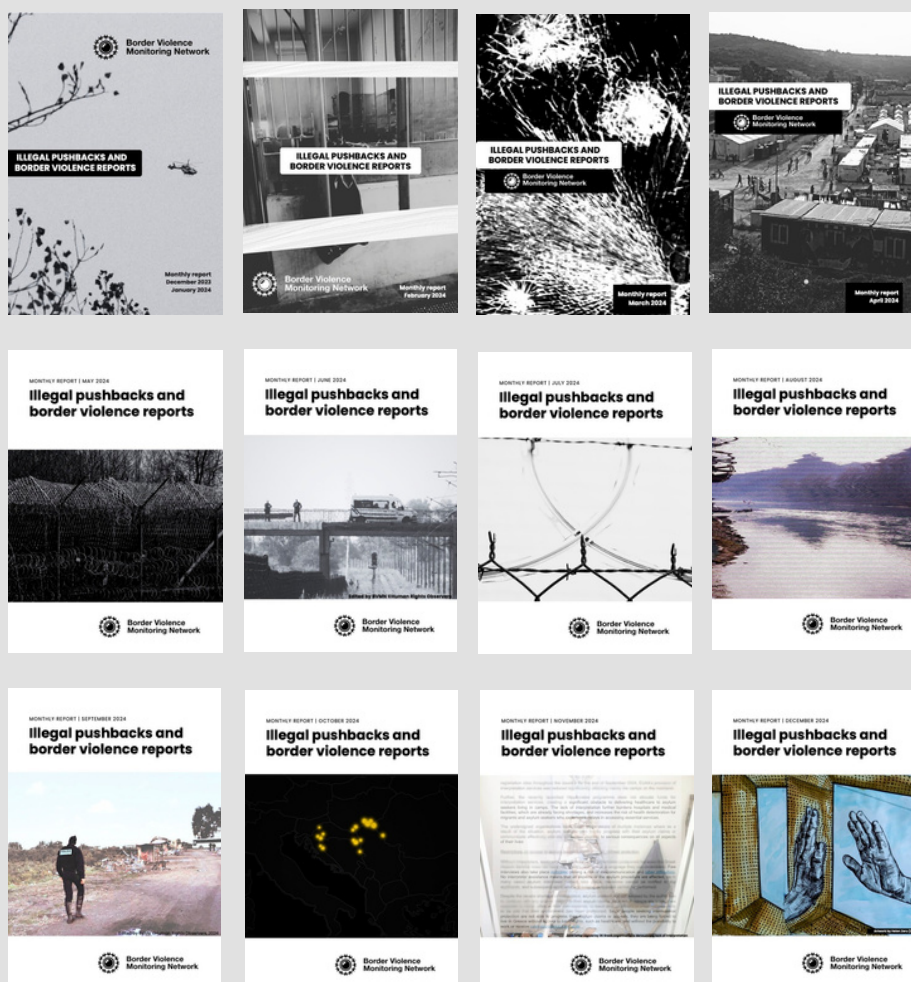joined by:

● BVMN Coordinators (16)

● Member Organisations

Monthly Reports

Throughout 2024, our member and partner organisations collected a total of 34 testimonies of pushbacks, affecting a total of 431 victims. These testimonies were used as the basis of our Monthly Reports, which looked at the trends in violence against people on the move. ●

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Internal Violence Reports

In 2024, BVMN produced two comprehensive reports on the state of internal violence against people on the move away from borders. In June 2024, we published the <u>Violence within State Borders: Serbia</u> report, which looked specifically at the so-called Special Military Operation in Northern Serbia. This was followed by the publication of the <u>2023 edition</u> of our annual Torture report. ●
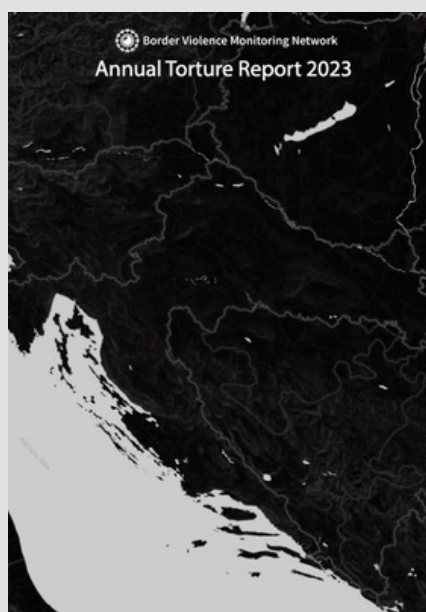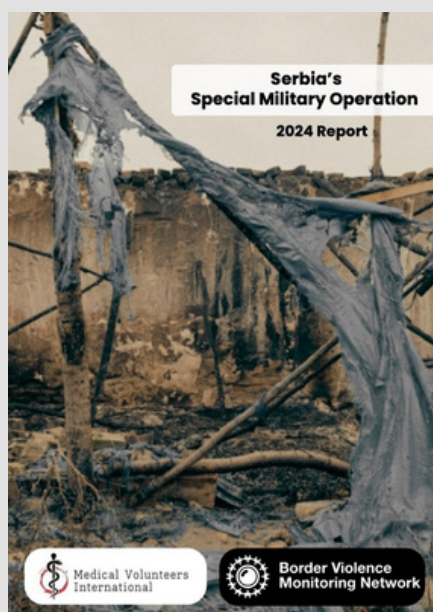
Rule of Law Reports

In 2024, BVMN reported on the of the erosion of the rule of law in Greece and Bulgaria through the Rule of Law report series. ●
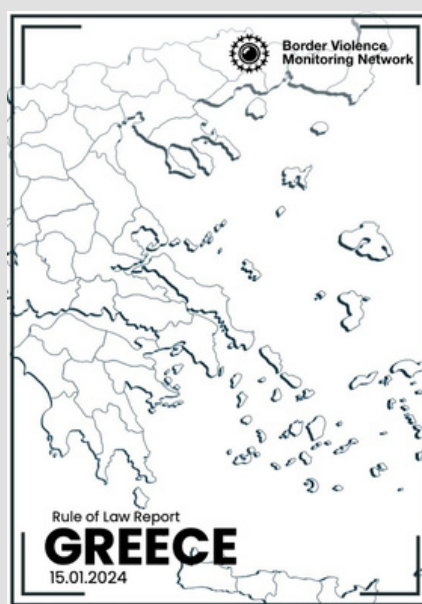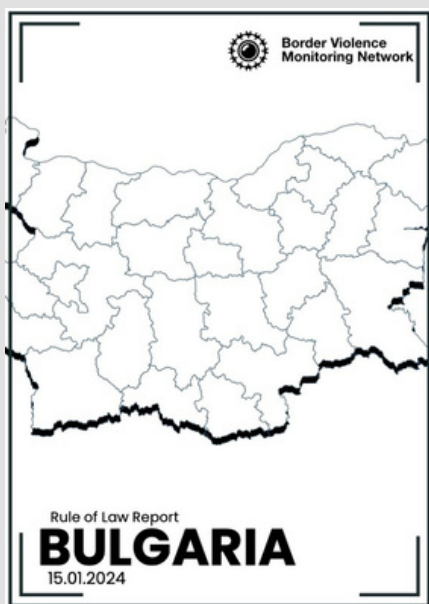
Surveillance Technologies at Borders Reports

At the end of 2024, BVMN completed a multi-year research project on the use of surveillance technologies at European borders. The project's capstone was a series of 8 reports that revealed the scope of technologies used to prevent the free movement of people on the move along the so-called Balkan route. ●

Third-Party Interventions

In 2024, BVMN continued to engage with different intergovernmental bodies through Third-Party Interventions. This included a submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the case of U.F v. Croatia & Slovenia in January 2024, a submission to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe over the execution of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the case of M.S.S v Greece in February 2024, as well as a Third-Party Intervention to the ECtHR in the case of Salman Muhammad v. Greece in October 2024. ●

Advocacy within EU Institutions

The Border Violence Monitoring Network continued to engage with EU institutions to advocate for the freedom of movement of people on the move.

In February 2024, BVMN was invited to submit a contribution to the EU Asylum Agency's Annual Report covering the year 2023 to provide evidence and data regarding migration and violence against people on the move. The contribution can be read here.

On 8 April 2024, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs to the European Parliament (LIBE) held a hearing on the Cooperation Frameworks on border and migration management with Bulgaria and Romania.

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Desislava Todorova from member organisation Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria was the only civil society representative at the hearing, speaking on behalf of the Network. ● Image [1]

Contribution to the 2024 Venice Biennale's Cyprus Pavilion

In May 2024, BVMN was invited by the team of the Cyprus Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale to conduct research on the use of surveillance systems and AI-informed technologies within the Cypriot maritime borderscape.

BVMN's contribution was later published on Cyprus Borderscape, an interactive map that shows reported incidents of border violence, including pushbacks, committed by Cypriot authorities, as well as surveillance equipment deployed by the Republic of Cyprus for the purpose of so-called migration management. ● Image [2]

Launch of Detention Landscapes Database

In April 2024, and in collaboration with University of Oxford's Border Criminologies and member organisation Mobile Info Team, the Network launched the Detention Landscapes project, an interactive open-access database that evidences human rights violations in Greek immigration detention facilities using testimonies obtained from detainees.

At its launch, the database included:

- 57 Detention Site Profiles documenting the locations, functions and ownership of facilities where foreign nationals are held under administrative detention
- 87 Testimonies from people who were previously detained in Greece, attesting to severe lack of access to services and support and appalling living conditions
- 78 Photos and Videos revealing dire physical conditions inside secretive detention sites
- 101 Incidents of violent human rights violations inside detention facilities.

Information contained within the database was used for a joint submission to the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment.

The database is now being updated with new testimonies from Italian detention facilities as well. ● Image [3]

[1]

Desislava Todorova from member organisation Center for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria speaking on behalf of BVMN on 8 April 2024 at the European Parliament's hearing on the Cooperation Framework Agreement on border and migration management with Bulgaria and Romania.

[2]

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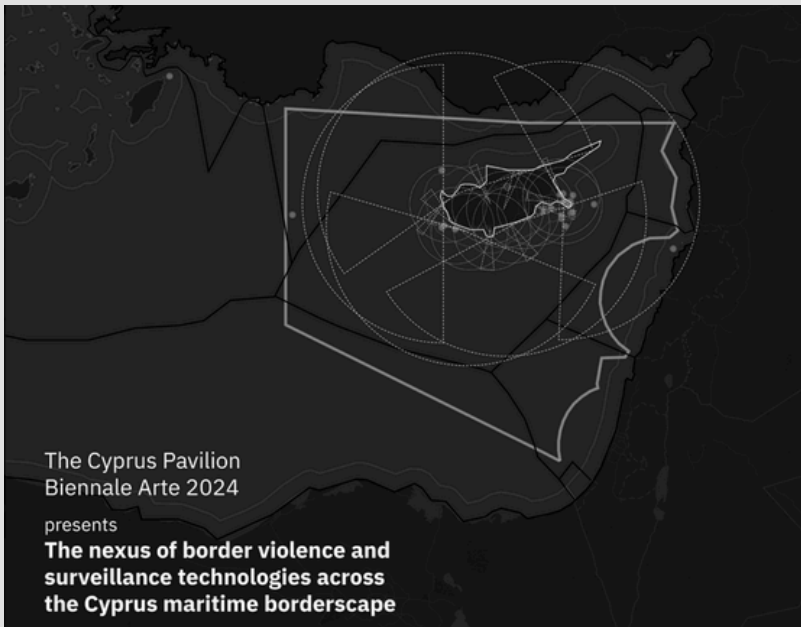
A view of the Cyprus Borderscape interactive map, as presented as part of the Cyprus Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.
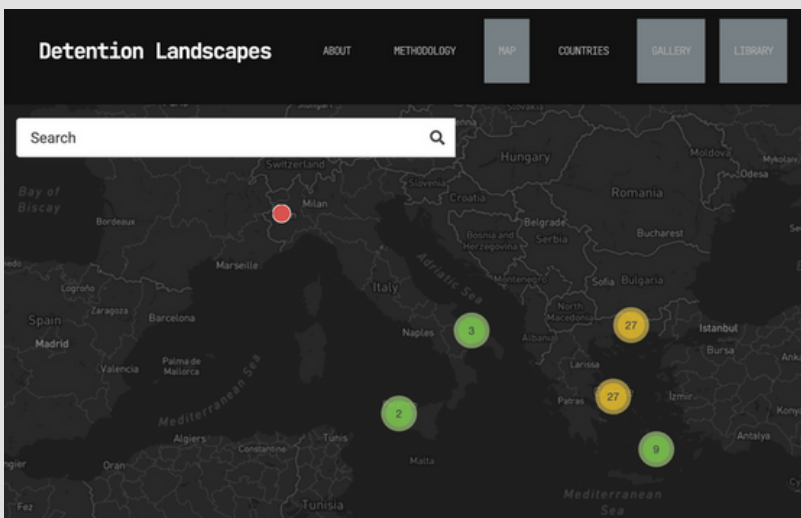
[3]

A view of the Detention Landscapes map interface, which shows detention facilities in Greece and Italy.

Our Working Groups

Field Working Group

The Field Team is responsible for updating and maintaining the testimony database and coordinating Network's reporting efforts with the intent of sharing trends and developments from the regions in which we work. In order to uphold the consistency and quality of the open-source database and to ensure that interviews are conducted following the necessary safeguarding principles, the team provides training in the common methodology used for testimony collection to all new violence reporters and partner organizations. Finally, the field team takes care of producing and publishing the Monthly reports, as well as the Internal Violence reports.

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In 2024, the Field team oversaw the inclusion of new member and partner organisations to the Network. As part of the effort to monitor border violence in new regions, the Network welcomed WeAreMonitoring from Poland and Legal Centre Lesvos from Lesvos, Greece. We also concluded partnerships with Human Rights Observers in France and Glocal Roots in Kos, Greece. ●

Legal Working Group

The Legal Working Group continues its mission to engage legal avenues and mechanisms and ensure accountability for perpetrators of border violence. We file legal briefs, submissions, and reports to European, EU, and international mechanisms from the European Court of Human Rights, to UN Committees, the Council of Europe institutions, agencies and bodies of the European Union, and others. Presenting hard evidence of pushbacks and border violence that we gather to policy-makers and legal stakeholders is a crucial part of BVMN's work. ●

EU Advocacy Working Group

The EU Advocacy Working continues to provide scrutiny into EU legislation, being a key and leading grassroots voice on the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

In 2024, the team drafted policy briefings on the Facilitation Directive, and produced joint statements with member organisations in opposition to the Pact. ●

UN Advocacy Working Group

The UN Advocacy Team continues to work to bring evidence of pushbacks and other attributed human rights violations, as collected by field-based member organisations, to the attention of the United Nations Human Rights framework. Through our engagement with UN Treaty Bodies and UN Special Procedures, we aim to establish pushbacks as a unique and definable human rights issue, secure State accountability and further develop international law.

Most notably, as part of 57th regular session of the Human Rights Council in September-October 2024, the team spoke at the Council's Intersessional Panel Discussion on the human rights of migrants, focusing on "Prevention and Accountability for Human Rights Violations in Transit."

The outcome report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has cited the team's participation, including the evidence presented on how the use of pushbacks and the externalization of borders have contributed to the continued deaths and disappearances of migrants and exposed them to greater human rights risks. ●

Criminalisation Working Group

The Criminalisation Working Group identifies and records cases of criminalisation within the network and its member organizations. It provides support for current criminalisation cases and works towards preventing potential future instances of criminalisation.

In 2024, the Criminalisation team released its first Criminalisation report, which documents instances of criminalisation targeting people on the move and actors defending their rights within BVMN and its member organisations in 2022 and 2023. ●

Research & Investigations Working Group

Throughout 2024, the Research & Investigations team continued to provide extensive desk research support to member organisations primarily in the topics of border technology and artificial intelligence. Capacity building exercises

In November 2024, the group organised a two-day conference in Thessaloniki, Greece, to tackle the topic of the proliferation of border technologies. Many of the presentations given during the conference were the product of long-term research projects conducted within the group. ●

Financial Statement   11

January - December 2024

	TOTAL
Income	
Donation Income	1,145.00
Restricted Grants	143,419.27
Unrestricted Grants	83,851.59
Total Income	**€228,415.86**
GROSS PROFIT	**€228,415.86**
Expenses	
Bank charges	285.94
Burnout Prevention	3,880.00
Contractors	54,492.02
Graphic Design	969.00
Insurance - General	1,610.32
Office expenses	20.16
Payroll Expenses	
Payroll Accountant Fees	3,856.62
Payroll Taxes	40,426.81
Wages	181,799.08
Total Payroll Expenses	**226,082.51**
Printing & Publishing	2,921.16
Server and Webdesign	241.22
Strategic Planning	4,050.00
Technical Devices	3,120.96
Telephone	105.80
Training	3,975.80
Translating	2,971.94
Travel	
Advocacy	3,645.26
EPIM	4,011.67
Field	5,760.64
Open Assembly	11,670.98
Research	675.24
Turkey	277.85
Total Travel	**26,041.64**
Turkish Medico Partners	6,434.87
Total Expenses	**€337,203.34**
Other Expenses	
Transfers to Partners	39,100.00
Total Other Expenses	**€39,100.00**
NET EARNINGS	**€ -147,887.48**

Acknowledgements

Our work would not be possible without the support of generous, like-minded foundations and organisations that have endowed us with their trust. In particular, we would like to thank our 2024 foundational supporters, including:

For more information, including reports, our testimony database, and ways to get involved, visit our website.

borderviolence.eu

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