



ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

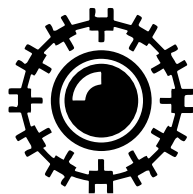


**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

**Monthly report
April 2024**

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ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



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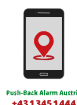




TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Methodology and Terminology	6
Update on the situation	7
Serbia	8
• Updates on the situation in the camps	
• Forced to take more hidden routes	
Bulgaria	10
• Frontex personnel and border technology at the Bulgaria-Serbia border	
Greece	11
• Court extends pre-trial detention for nationalist vigilantes	
• Analysis of violence testimonies collected in Thessaloniki	
• Updates from the Lesvos CCAC	
• Overview of the pushbacks in the Aegean	
• Double blame on the Greek State for human rights violations on Samos	
• The European Court of Human Rights once again condemns Greece for inflicting inhuman and degrading treatments to asylum seekers on Samos	
Turkey	20
• Hunger Strike in Antalya Removal Center	
• Forceful detention of Kenyan woman in Istanbul Metro Station	
• ECA's Report on EU Aid for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT)	
Cyprus	24
• EU-Lebanon Deal	
France	25
• 3 people arrested in the UK under accusations of illegal entry and facilitation	
• Continued evictions in Northern France	
• The UK-Rwanda Deal	
Advocacy	30
• BVMN presents evidence in the LIBE Committee	
• BVMN Contribution to the book <i>Chiusi Dentro. I campi di confinamento nell'Europa del XXI secolo</i> (Trapped Within: Confinement Camps in 21st Century Europe)	
Deaths and Disappearances	31
• Deadly shipwrecks in the Aegean	
• 7 more deaths at the Franco-British border	



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers updates from the month of April and brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the Balkans, Turkey, Cyprus and France to look at the way European Union states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders. Updates come from the different Member Organisations of BVMN, as well as Human Rights Observers (France) and our partners in Turkey. It also includes general insights from advocacy actions taken by members of the network and other allied organisations.

In April we witnessed a continuation of the restrictions to freedom of movement and harassment against people on the move (POM) in Serbia, as well as of the consistent denial of access to asylum. The conversion of most of the few remaining Reception and Transit Centres in the country into closed-type facilities has led to the effective detention of people without a justified cause in conditions that are far from adequate. Moreover, increased securitisation of the northern borders, together with the targeting and apprehension of POM in the public spaces, is forcing people to travel in more hidden – and, thus, dangerous – ways. This securitisation is also expanding in now-partially-part-of-Schengen Bulgaria, where the recent agreement with the EU is meant to triple the amount of Frontex officers at its borders. The deal also involves the channelling of even more millions of euros into “migration management”, thus ignoring the ample evidence of human rights violations against POM in the country.

In Greece, abuses and rights violations against asylum-seekers in the Samos CCAC have been condemned this month by the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, the Hellenic Data Protection Authority, as well as the European Court for Human Rights (once again). The ruling of the Hellenic Data Protection Authority led to the biggest penalty (175.000€) ever imposed on a Greek public body – The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Despite the widespread knowledge around such practices, testimonies collected by BVMN teams this month reveal the systematic character of the abusive treatment of POM in the country, including violent pushbacks and detention in inhumane living conditions in multiple facilities.

This month we also report on the petition and hunger strike organised by people detained at the Antalya Removal Centre, in Turkey, who protest against the constant physical and psychological violence perpetrated by the staff, which they have described as torture. Racist violence was also explicit in an incident in a metro station in Istanbul – and the media reporting that followed – where a Kenyan woman was forcefully apprehended by the police.

Updates from France shed lights, once again, on the systematic violent evictions of living sites of POM in the region of Calais, as well as on the increased



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

criminalisation faced by people trying to cross to the UK, highlighting the detention and charges against three individuals on allegations of illegal entry and facilitation.

Moreover, this month we witnessed further advancement of the externalisation of EU and UK deadly migration policies in the form of the final approval on the UK-Rwanda Deal and the announcement by the European Commission of a new agreement between the EU and Lebanon to strengthen cooperation and infrastructure on the control of “irregularised” movement from the Middle Eastern country, especially to Cyprus. The deal is likely to exacerbate violence against POM in the region, as well as to increase the risk of refoulement to unsafe conditions for Syrians on the move. Unfortunately, we also report on several deaths in the Aegean and the English Channel in April, resulting from the violent border policies enacted and exported by the EU and the UK. One of the incidents led to the death of at least three children in a shipwreck by the coasts of Chios, after which 19 survivors had to wait for 36 hours to be rescued.



GENERAL

REPORTING NETWORK

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

METHODOLOGY

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

TERMINOLOGY

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

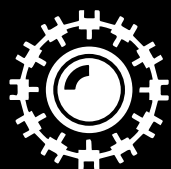
ABBREVIATIONS

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

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

[1] BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece and Turkey including Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, PIC, InfoKolpa, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarmphone Austria and I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid and Mission Wings





**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

**UPDATE
ON THE
SITUATION**

Update on the situation in the camps

On April 24th, the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees & Migration (SCRM) announced that there were currently 647 people accommodated across 16 Asylum and Reception Centres within the country. They also stated that they had registered a total of 6005 people this year so far, a 70% reduction from figures by this point last year.

The widespread closures of Serbian government-run accommodation facilities - meaning the change of these facilities into close-type camps - that began in late March has continued into April. This has resulted in the effective detention of people within the centres for up to 10 days without a given cause.

On a visit this month to the Pirot & Dimitrovgrad Reception and Transit Centres (RTC) near Serbia's southern border with Bulgaria, the Collective Aid team was able to speak to people staying in the camps who described feeling increasingly trapped. Residents in both facilities shared their experiences of being refused domestic bus tickets likely due to the colour of their skin, as well as of being regularly controlled by police when they walked around the respective towns. A woman from Congo who had been staying within the Dimitrovgrad camp for 3 weeks, reported that the provisions of food there were so poor that she had only eaten bread for the past week.



Outside Pirot RTC.
©Collective Aid



Entrance to the Dimitrovgrad RTC.
©Collective Aid

During an informal conversation with the SCRM at the Obrenovac Asylum Centre (AC) near Belgrade, they shared that there are currently only between 40-50 people staying within the 1200 capacity facility, all of whom have already started their asylum applications in Serbia. They confirmed that the camp is continuing to refuse the registration of new arrivals, thus preventing people from starting their asylum procedure in the country.

On April 3rd, UNHCR announced that they had signed an agreement with SCRM to 'strengthen cooperation and formalise long standing collaboration'. This news shows UNHCR's hypocrisy as an organisation complicit in supporting Serbia's camp structure, which constantly fails to provide adequate reception conditions, and succeeds in the denial of people's fundamental rights.

In an interview with German outlet *Proasyl* the Serbian legal NGO *Klikaktiv* speculated about the future of the centres in the northern region of the country (Subotica, Sombor, Kikinda, Principovac, & Adaševci). These facilities, which have a combined official capacity of 1,970 and are located by the traditional exit points of migration routes in Serbia at the borders with Hungary and Croatia, remain indefinitely closed since the winter. Representatives of *Klikaktiv* stated:

"We heard several rumours and different stories of what might happen with those camps. One of them is that it might serve to accommodate people who will be returned from the neighbouring member states, based on readmission agreement. Other rumours are that they might serve as EU transit camps on foreign soil in the future or as national detention centres."

Forced to take more hidden routes

In a press statement this month, Radoš Đurović, director of the organisation Asylum Protection Center Serbia (APC), talked about how migration routes in Serbia have become more hidden since the Special Military Operation carried out in the north of the country. He reported that, despite increased securitisation, up to 100 people on the move arrive in Serbia everyday, but that many are opting to make more crossings into Bosnia, as opposed to Hungary and Croatia which had been the predominant routes in the last few years.

APC also highlighted a violent pushback of a minor from Serbia to Bulgaria. The individual was beaten with a baton, verbally abused and forced to walk back down the forest path they had used to arrive at the border.

Frontex personnel and border technology at the Bulgaria-Serbia border

Bulgaria's partial accession (air and sea) to the Schengen area at the end of March, has been accompanied by the granting of a Cooperation Framework by the EU, which includes 85 million euros worth of funding shared between Bulgaria and Romania to '*strengthen cooperation on border and migration management*'. The European Commission has reported '*positive results*' at Bulgaria's borders, linked to the support from the EU, including joint patrols with Romanian border guards, which have reportedly resulted in fewer people crossing the Serbian-Bulgarian border. This month, a Collective Aid team spotted a Romanian Frontex vehicle patrolling the border area near the Bulgarian town of Dragoman. As part of the Cooperation Framework the number of Frontex personnel active on Bulgaria's borders has reportedly tripled.

Moreover, the team also witnessed a controlled mounted camera active at the Serbian-Bulgarian border. Under the new agreement, Bulgaria will be able to apply for additional funding to expand or upgrade this type of technology at its borders.



Mounted camera at the Serbian-Bulgarian border. ©Collective Aid

Court extends pre-trial detention for nationalist vigilantes

Following violence during last summer's wildfire, a judicial council in Alexandroupoli has extended the pre-trial detention of three men who are accused of kidnapping, beating and detaining a group of 13 people on the move in September 2023. In a video shared online, one of the men claims to have 'arrested' the group and reveals people on the move locked in a trailer-cage. Local media reported that the people were held in the cage for two to four and half hours. Last year, Greece experienced unprecedented wildfire in the north – a phenomenon which far-right groups blamed on people on the move. Both the Hellenic police and fire brigade had confirmed the primary cause of wildfires was lightning.

The verdict from the Criminal Court of Alexandroupoli cites a plausible danger of similar criminal offences being repeated – referring to the actions of the three accused as those of a "militia group" and without legal basis. This incident is not an isolated case of violence in response to last summer's wildfires. At the end of August, residents had arbitrarily detained a transit group of 17 in the Evros region's town of Lefkimi, as reported by Evros News.

As highlighted in a BVMN statement from August 2023, the mainstream media and politicians systematically apportion blame to people on the move, with MP Papadakis explicitly calling on residents in the Evros region to "take measures" and a local news outlet perpetuating the narrative that 'illegal immigrants' started fires 'in more than ten locations.' In reality, Greece prioritises investments in an oppressive security apparatus over fire prevention and management – with the state pouring 29 times more funding into the police than fire fighting services during 2023. The effects of these policies are highly visible in Evros, a severely restricted militarised zone characterised by proliferating human rights violations and a network of local actors collectively hostile to people on the move.

Analysis of violence testimonies collected in Thessaloniki

During the month of April 2024, the BVMN Thessaloniki team recorded 4 testimonies from respondents reporting on illegal pushbacks on the borders of Northern Greece, and violence inflicted on them inside Greece by state actors. Two of these testimonies were reports on pushbacks and two related to violence within state facilities.



Although all 4 testimonies were recorded in April 2024, the dates of the incidents range from December 2022 to March 2024. The respondents are all male and in their 20s and 30s. They are from Algeria, Morocco and Pakistan.

The two pushback testimonies involved incidents of illegal and violent expulsions, from North Macedonia into Greece, and from Greece into Turkey. In both cases, the respondents reported that the people involved in the pushbacks were officers whom they believed to be army officers, as they were wearing camouflage uniforms. The respondent speaking about his pushback to Turkey reported that he was apprehended by people in what he believed to be army uniforms, while the respondent who was pushed back from North Macedonia describes that his apprehension (on two different occasions) was carried out by people in dark blue uniforms whom he believed to be police officers (and who arrived in a marked police car). The latter reported that after apprehension, the officers who he described as 'police' subsequently transferred him to the custody of people who believed to be army officers, who transported him to the border, inflicted violence and forced him to leave the country.

"This time they took everything including my phone" (Moroccan respondent, North Macedonia)

"I was beaten way way more than the first time". [...] "they made my back more soft than my tummy". (Moroccan respondent, North Macedonia)

"they took the backpacks, [...] they took all the power banks, the phones, the money, they took all the things they could find [...] (including 600 Euros)". (Algerian respondent, Greece-Turkey)

[Respondent had been travelling with other people. One person had reportedly been separated from the group] – "Our friend- we haven't seen him since they caught him- but when they brought him back back....he wasn't walking properly. (Algerian respondent, Greece-Turkey)

"...we didn't know there was an option to apply for asylum at all. We weren't informed that we could apply for asylum at all." (Algerian respondent, Greek-Turkish border)

The testimonies reporting on internal violence inflicted by state actors in Greece refer to incidents taking place at Amygdaleza Pre-Removal Detention Centre (PRDC), Corinth PRDC, Paranesti PRDC and Metagagon Police Station / Police Transfers

Department. Both testimonies describe many specific incidents of violence as well as a denial of rights and inhumane conditions endured on a daily basis.

"...there were almost forty to fifty people who were using only two toilets. And, we were also using the water from the toilets for drinking purpose". (Pakistani Respondent, Amygdaleza PRDC)

"There is heaters but they are not turning them on. The cold fucked me up inside this to be honest.." [January] (Moroccan respondent, Paranesti PRDC)

While the particular circumstances of the incidents of violence differ, BVMN notes the commonality of methods of violence and subjection of people on the move to horrific conditions and inhumane treatment. These experiences shared with BVMN in April corroborate the findings of [BVMN's January 2024](#) report on violence by state actors against people on the move in Greece.

BVMN's report and the respondents' narratives reveal not only severe negligence on the part of the authorities to provide humane living conditions and meet basic human rights standards of people held in detention, but also what seems to be deliberate denial of access to rights and deliberate infliction of violence. The scale and breadth of the issues appears to demonstrate a systematic dereliction of duty of care as well as intentional maltreatment of people on the move.

These include: physical violence, threats and insults designed to intimidate or force compliance, confiscation and destruction of personal belongings, denial of access to rights (clean water, decent nutrition, medical care, legal advice, interpreters), denial of access to information about one's own situation, inadequate and inhumane living conditions - including exposure to extreme temperatures, broken or unhygienic facilities, lack of natural light and overcrowding.

"All the windows were broken [...] and that night it was really bad because it was a severe cold [December] and there wasn't anything to warm us". (Pakistani respondent, Amygdaleza PRDC)

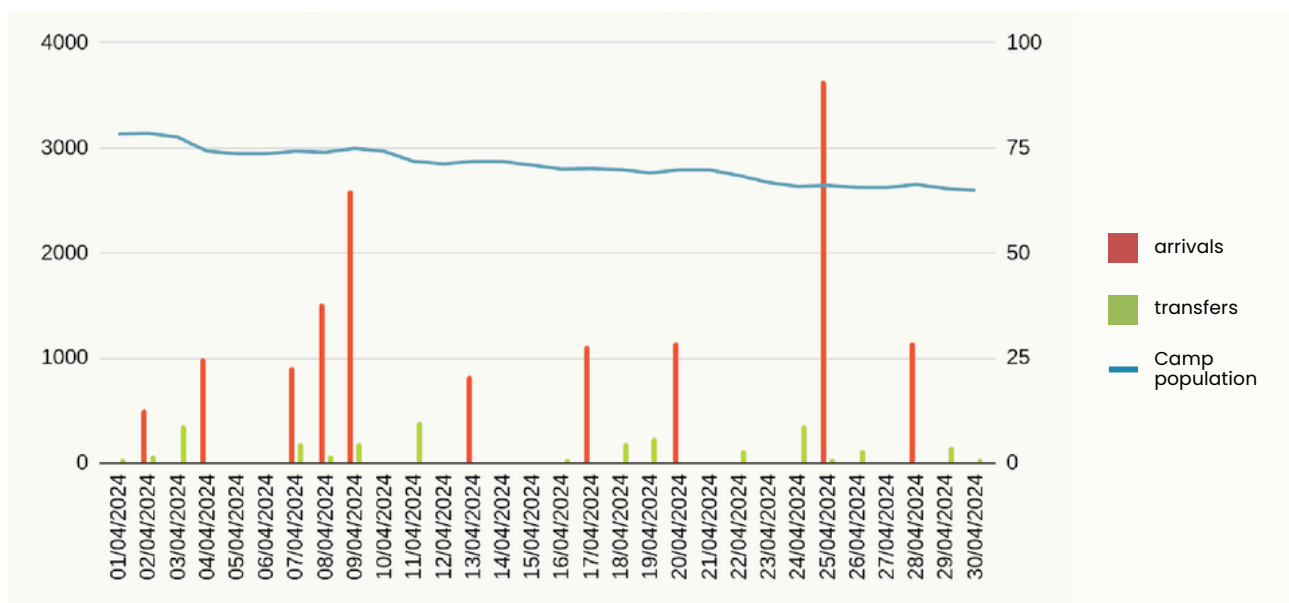
"Bedbugs. They call us 'third world countries' but we don't have such things as that that we make people sleep on. And the treatment, inhuman and anything you ask for if you want water to shower, if you want a sweep to clean your room, they just don't care, ignore you" (Moroccan respondent, Paranesti PRDC)

Two noteworthy issues arose during the interviewing processes which may have been simple anomalies or 'one off' issues, but are worth recording as they may be indicative of new methods, approaches or trends.

Firstly, the respondent from Pakistan, reported that he was apprehended inside Malakasa Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), which he had entered specifically to attend an interview for asylum, for which he had an appointment. The respondent reported that he was prevented from attending the interview and was detained by officers prior to even starting his application process, and was subsequently taken to a police station and then a PRDC.

Secondly, the respondent from Morocco who shared a testimony about two different pushbacks from North Macedonia to Greece in late 2023 and early 2024 remarked specifically that the place where he was pushed back into Greece was not a border post or the official 'known' crossing point ('the pushback gate'). Rather, the respondent reported that he was taken to a random and unmarked area (that is, not a camp, army post, border post, official crossing point) away from the places he had expected to be taken to, in order to be removed from North Macedonia.

Updates from the Lesvos CCAC



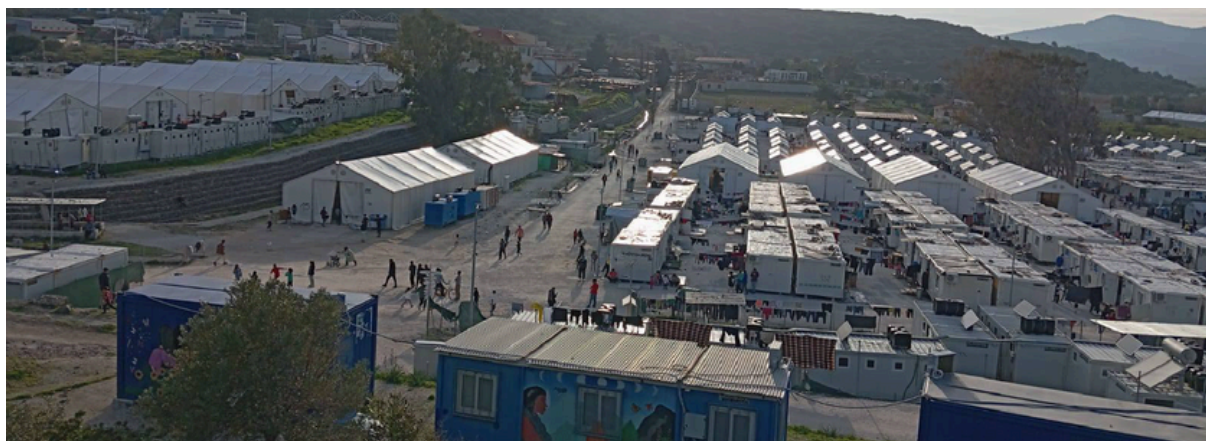
During the month of April, 362 people were registered in Lesvos and 67 people were transferred outside of the island. There is no significant difference with the previous month, though the population in the facility has decreased - to 2592, on April 30th. Despite the reduction in the number of residents of the centre, which is below capacity, the dynamics described in previous monthly reports have not changed.

Thus, people are still being transferred to rubhalls as soon as they get a positive decision and kicked out of the facilities when they receive their travel documents, with no alternative housing. People who receive a rejection on their asylum claim, as well as those who get a positive decision, are not allowed to access food and water in the camp anymore, nor are they able to use the electric pots or boilers, making it impossible to cook for themselves.

"I'm here a year ago. First thing when you have two rejections, no food no water. Same thing for the one who received a positive result and you know... here in the island the work is not easy.

Secondly, the toilets are metres away from the house and during the entire cold period there was no hot water and they prohibited pots and water heaters, knowing that we need hot water. To wash ourselves to make tea. We don't understand why they treat us like prisoners. I'm sorry but this is our daily life unfortunately"

*Anonymous camp resident
(April 2024)*



Lesvos CCAC, April 2024

The violence that people experience in the centre when they are obliged to move hasn't decreased either. Residents of the camp report that security guards throw their belongings out of their tents and force them to leave. During this month we have also noticed an increase of people living in the street. Many of these people were evicted after they got their travel documents, but don't have financial resources to continue their journeys or rent a flat and start a life on the island.

Overview of pushbacks in the Aegean

According to statistics released by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) in April 2024, 1384 individuals were rescued by the coastguard this month, 728 of whom were pushed back by Greek authorities. The same statistics indicate that there were 22 life rafts used, and 1812 people were stopped by the authorities before they left the land. By the end of the month, 1897 people were registered on the Greek islands.

The previous month, March 2024, saw similar numbers. It was reported that there were 27 life rafts used and the TCG rescued 1224 people, with 878 being victims of pushbacks. The data also indicates that 1951 people were stopped before crossing, while 1818 people arrived on the Greek islands and were registered.

The numbers show a similar pattern when compared to the same month last year. The TCG rescued 1955 people, with an alarming 1660 of them having been pushed back in April 2023. There were 17 life rafts used, and 782 people were stopped, while 685 people were registered on the Greek islands.

Looking at the "News" on the homepage of the TCG, one aspect appears to be interesting. Almost all rescues, not involving pushbacks, are due to "engine failure." This raises concerns about the length of time people are spending at sea, the quality of the fuel, or the engines being used. However, a closer look is needed to draw further conclusions.

The number of pushbacks reported remains really high. Moreover, in the first week of April, every rescue the TCG did was considered a pushback.

Besides the shipwrecks, in two of the incidents, the TCG found people at the very last moment, after being pushed back: one time in an almost sunken liferaft, the other time on a half sunken dinghy. Fortunately, nobody lost their lives in any of these cases.

On 15 April 2024 at 10.20 a.m., it was reported that a life boat that was pushed back by Greek assets and with irregular migrants on board sank off the coast of Muğla's Fethiye district, and 1 TUR CG Boat (TCSG-911) was immediately dispatched to the scene. 12 irregular migrants and 1 child were rescued from the life boat detected in a half sunken state by the TUR CG Boat dispatched to the scene and from the surface of the sea.



Rescue of the people travelling in the boat that sank on April 15th.
Source: Turkish Coast Guard

On 23 April 2024 at 08.25 a.m., it was reported that there was a group of irregular migrants on an inflatable boat off the coast of İzmir's Karaburun district, and 16 irregular migrants (along with 1 child) on the inflatable boat that was pushed back by Greek assets, were rescued in good health from the inflatable boat detected in a half sunken state and from the surface of the sea by the dispatched TUR CG Boat (KB-41).



Boat that sank on April 23rd with 17 people on board.
Source: Turkish Coast Guard

Double blame on the Greek State for human rights violations on Samos

In April, two independent national Greek bodies condemned the reception of third country nationals in the Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC).

In a report published at the beginning of the month, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) found that the Samos CCAC fails to meet basic standards and exposes "residents to completely inappropriate conditions and immediate danger", as warned by grassroots organisations on the island from its opening.

Among the issues raised by the GNCHR are the de facto detention of third-country nationals upon arrival in the Samos CCAC, the crucial lack of healthcare services provided to residents of the facility and the "completely inadequate" water supply that causes serious hygiene and ultimately health issues among the population of the CCAC. In addition, the report compares the Samos CCAC to a "detention centre" due to the heavy security infrastructures – CCTV cameras, barbed wires around the facility and NATO-type double security fence as well as 24/7 presence of security personnel – and highlights consequences on residents' mental health. The overcrowding of the facility leading to the accommodation of single men, single women and families together in administrative containers is also emphasised. In this regard, the GNCHR found that accommodation conditions were inadequate and did not meet EU standards on reception conditions. Finally, the GNCHR raises concerns regarding police violence in the Samos CCAC.

The Hellenic Data Protection Authority (HDPa) fined the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum €175.000 for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) violations, the highest penalty ever imposed on a Greek public body. The decision was issued following a complaint filed in 2022 by the Hellenic Union for Human Rights, HIAS Greece, and Homo Digitalis along with the Queen Mary University of London Lecturer Dr. Niovi Vavoulas. The decision highlights serious shortcomings in the implementation of Centaurus and Hyperion systems used in Greek reception facilities for asylum seekers, including the Samos CCAC, in order to control access and manage security. In particular, the HDPa found that a proper Data Protection Impact Assessment was not carried out before the deployment of these systems, leading to violations of GDPR and asylum seekers' rights violations.

The European Court of Human Rights once again condemns Greece for inflicting inhuman and degrading treatments to asylum seekers on Samos

On April 18th, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found, for the third time this year, that Greece's reception conditions for asylum seekers were inadequate. The case, A.R. and Others v. Greece, concerned three asylum seekers in the islands of Kos, Samos and Chios. In the case of W.A. v. Greece (Application No. 21997/20), the applicant suffered from a severe chronic illness and was forced to live in degrading conditions in the overcrowded Samos "hotspot" from August 2019 to July 2020. Despite his highly concerning medical situation, added to a strong vulnerability to Covid-19, the applicant was left without support from the Greek authorities who failed to react to the Samos General Hospital's indication to transfer them to the mainland in order to receive treatment.

The Court found that Greece subjected the applicant to inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It is the first time that such a violation is found for a hotspot island regarding the denial of healthcare for asylum seekers.

Despite various rulings from the ECtHR, however, the Greek and EU authorities keep on inflicting inhuman and degrading treatments to asylum seekers and denying them the right to medical care.

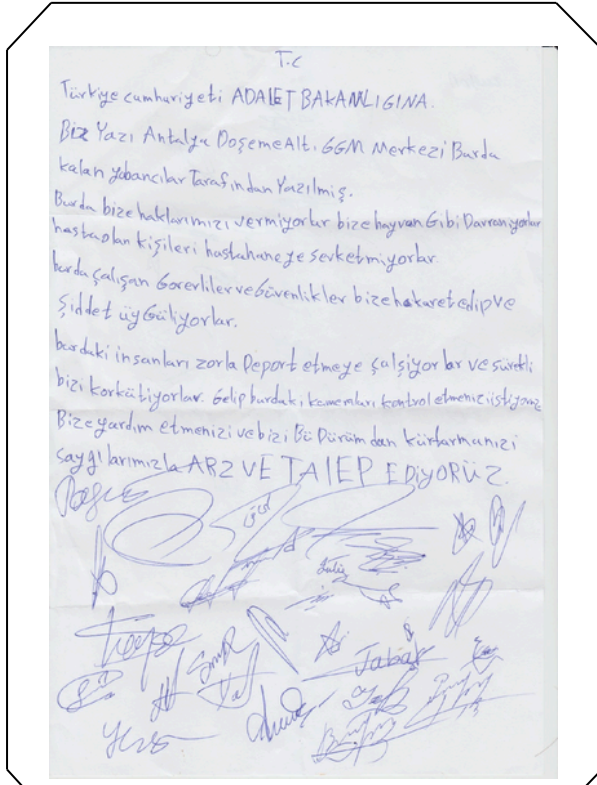
Hunger Strike in Antalya Removal Centre

The Removal Centre (GGM) in Antalya has been the target of grave allegations in a collective petition signed by 52 people detained there. In the petition, the residents describe being subjected to both verbal and physical violence by the staff and security guards of the Removal Centre. It is stated that residents are tortured and ill-treated in a room called the 'white room', and that staff and security guards threaten to take residents to this room. People who are taken there are reportedly left without food and water for at least a day. According to the reported information, residents with health problems were prevented from accessing hospitals, health checks were not carried out and hospital transfers were not organised. As well as being prevented from accessing health services, they are also unable to receive medical reports proving torture and other ill-treatment.

Omid Eshaghi, who played a crucial part in disseminating information about the hunger strike to the media, was among those detained at Antalya Removal Centre. Omid fled his homeland in 2015, citing his family's political circumstances, and sought refuge in Turkey. However, in recent months, he was apprehended at his workplace in Antalya and transported to the removal centre. After 50 days in the centre, Omid contacted a friend by phone and asked for help to make their experiences in the removal centres known to the outside world. On the phone, Omid explained that the residents with health problems were in a very difficult situation, but no one was referred to the hospital, and they had started a hunger strike to resist the violence and inhumane conditions. He stated that the others had no one they could reach for help and asked for urgent assistance. He also said, "Torture is not a crime that remained in the 90s in Turkey, it still exists. You do not want to see this place."

Eshaghi also talks about the situation after he attempted to make his voice heard:

"If some of the Iranians here return home, they will face harsh penalties, including execution, and the Afghans will fall into the hands of the Taliban regime. But we are in a very bad situation here too. The guards say, 'We will send you to the worst camp. Go to Erzurum and see.' (...) There are hundreds of elderly and children here. I know only one corridor. We have no idea what is going on in the others."



Petition signed by 52 detainees at Antalya Removal Center. Source: [siyasihaber9](https://siyasihaber9.com)

Suser Başaran, a friend of Omid Eshagi whom he contacted, reported what she heard from Eshaghi and his lawyer:

"There are many African, Afghan, Syrian, and Iranian residents there. Eshaghi is also held in that centre. (...) He contacted us from a payphone and asked for help, 'They torture us so much here, we can't stand it'. He has an inherited heart disease and asthma, he got worse there. 20 days ago he asked for a referral to the hospital, but he still hasn't been taken there. When we heard what had happened, we went to the door of the building, but they did not allow us to see him. So we sent a lawyer, who stayed with him for an hour and talked to him."

"He is at the age of 29. He was working at a bagel shop, leading a quiet life, working six days a week. They wanted to deport him because he hadn't been going to the Migration Authority for a long time, and hadn't been signing. They took him from where he was working. We didn't know, I learned when he reached out to me. (...) He wanted to get my number from his phone in custody, and they said, 'No, you'll take pictures of the surroundings.' They didn't even allow him to have a pen, just like in the Mamak, Diyarbakır prisons of the 1980s. He asked for sugar to balance his blood sugar, they didn't even give him that."

There are reportedly around 400 people, including sick, elderly, women, men, and children, in the Antalya Removal Centre, and although many lawyers and witnesses have written petitions to the prosecutor's office, the current situation of the detainees is unknown. Public recognition remained low of the incident except for the hateful and discriminative comments that came to the related news posts on social media. On the other hand, the situation in the centre was brought to the parliamentary agenda by DEM Deputy Özgül Saki, and EMEP Deputy İskender Bayhan.

Forceful Detention of Kenyan Woman in Istanbul Metro Station

In Istanbul's Şişli district, recordings of a forceful detention by police officers of a lone Kenyan woman became circulated in the news. The news reported the incident with "the Kenyan woman resisted the police by taking her clothes off" headlines. During media monitoring, it has been observed that the news contents mostly highlighted the lack of passport & residence permit, previous criminal records and resistance & undressing by the woman while the police brutality or excessive use of force were never mentioned or questioned. Only a few alternative media outlets provided the details of the incident in their coverage and analyzed the statements by the police officers in the recordings.

Following the incident, the "Siyasi Haber" reporter Ekim Veyisoğlu, who recorded the forceful detention despite the attempts by police officers to hide it, was also detained with the allegation of "insulting the police officers and interfering with their duties" and "invasion of the right to privacy". Veyisoğlu was prosecuted in court and released under judicial control.

ECA's Report on EU Aid for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT)

The latest report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) assessed the €6 billion support provided by the EU to Turkey within the framework of the financial assistance programme for refugees in Turkey. FRIT (The Facility for Refugees in Turkey) was established by the European Council in 2015 to support Syrian refugees living in Turkey. The programme consists of humanitarian aid, including health, education, protection and basic needs, and development aid, including education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support.

In the report, the ECA criticised Turkey for the use and monitoring of the refugee fund. Even though the report found that the programme provided relevant support to refugees and host communities and met their needs, it criticised the Turkish government for delays in project design, failure to systematically evaluate the costs of projects, inadequate measurement of the impact of the FRIT programme, and insufficient outputs in terms of sustainability, other than infrastructure-based projects. In addition, criticism was made to the Ministry of National Education regarding the lack of reliability of the data provided. Thus, the report stated that it was not possible to assess the impact of the funding from the FRIT programme on the integration and success of refugee children based on the data obtained.

According to the report, these findings led the EU Commission to request a refund from the Ministry of National Education, which the Ministry refused. It is not yet clear how the €19.6 million will be reimbursed. Finally, the report made four important recommendations to Turkey, underlining the need to improve cost evaluation and monitoring, the importance of strengthening the sustainability of projects, and the need to work on data collection and the measuring of the impact of projects.

EU-Lebanon Deal

On May 2nd, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen announced a deal between the EU and Lebanon that aims to stop irregularised free movement from Lebanon to EU countries, most prominently Cyprus. Von der Leyen promised Lebanon a sum of 1 billion euro available from 2024 to 2027, in return for Lebanon to further invest in border enforcement infrastructure and stop irregularised movement. The deal also encourages Lebanese authorities to enter a working agreement with Frontex.

This agreement raises concerns regarding further restrictions to freedom of movement, an exacerbation of violence in the already violent border zone between Lebanon and Cyprus, as well as an increased risk of refoulement to unsafe conditions for Syrians on the move.

The BVMN has identified 30 cases of illegal pushbacks from Cyprus to Lebanon since 2020 through media and document analysis; the actual number probably far exceeds this. In several cases, chain-refoulements to Syria have taken place, as Lebanon has implemented a non-readmission policy of Syrians pushed back from Cyprus. Part of the 1 billion euros promised by the European Commission are planned to go to the funding of the Lebanese Armed Forces, which have been involved in pushbacks and pullbacks. These are often carried out using violent behaviour, such as hitting the boats, beating and throwing people into the water. These practices have led to shipwrecks and deaths, such as the shipwreck of April 23rd 2022 which tragically left seven dead and 33 missing after the Lebanese Armed Forces, according to survivors, rammed their boat. Moreover, the Lebanese Armed Forces are currently involved in illegal refoulements to Syria, the new funding aiming to further increase 'voluntary' returns to Syria. It is important to highlight that Syria can in no way be considered safe for people to return to, as it is experiencing the worst escalations in violence since 2020, and those who come back are being specifically targeted by the Syrian regime, subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention and torture.

Through the EU-Lebanon deal, similar to recent agreements made with Egypt and Tunisia, the EU continues its attempts to externalise its inhumane migration policies, outsourcing violence against people on the move to perpetuate a system of exclusion and brutality.

3 people arrested in the UK under accusations of illegal entry and facilitation

Following the deaths of 5 people on the move in the Channel this month, three individuals were arrested in the UK on suspicion of “facilitating illegal immigration and entering the UK illegally”. Two of these individuals received charges. According to the National Crime Agency, one of the individuals, a 22-year-old from South Sudan, was charged with assisting unlawful immigration and attempting to arrive in the UK without valid entry clearance. The other individual charged, a 22-year-old from Sudan, was charged with attempting to arrive in the UK without valid entry clearance. The third individual, an 18-year-old from Sudan, has been released on bail pending further enquiries.

These kinds of charges are becoming increasingly common as a result of the Conservative Government’s pledge to “stop the boats”. In June 2022, the UK’s Nationality and Borders Act was expanded to provide harsher punishments for those arriving by small boat. The changes introduced the offence of ‘illegal arrival’, with a maximum penalty of 4 years imprisonment, broadened the definition of ‘facilitating arrival’, and increased the maximum penalty to life imprisonment. The increase of criminal charges for those accused of driving the boats does not deter crossings, but leads to the criminalisation of people for the act of seeking asylum, a fundamental human right.

Moreover, the role of driving the boat is often taken by those who require a discounted passage or are under duress, and punishing those who are seen “with their hand on the tiller” does nothing to disrupt people smuggling groups. Rather, it penalises already vulnerable people who have been forced into making a dangerous journey by the lack of safe and legal routes to the UK.

Continued evictions in Northern France

During the month of April, at least 1,074 people were evicted from their living spaces during 73 operations carried out by the police in Calais. In Loon-Plage, at least 360 people were forced to leave their living spaces by over-armed police officers (carrying LBD – blast balls – and semi-automatic weapons) on one day.

During these daily police operations in the Calais area, the French organisation Human Rights Observers was able to document numerous cases of violence suffered

by people on the move. At least 213 tents, essential for shelter, were systematically seized by a state-appointed company, even as the region of Pas-de-Calais was under orange alert for the arrival of storm Pierrick on April 9th. On several occasions last month, evictions interrupted food distributions taking place in the living spaces. By giving priority to so-called “security” policies, the authorities are hindering people on the move’s access to basic needs. Moreover, at least 23 people on the move were arrested by the Border Police during these evictions in Calais and Loon-Plage. Three minors arrested on April 11th had their passports seized when released from detention. Police officers reportedly told them that they could have them back “once they take a flight to leave the country”. On April 19th, the police threatened to use their tasers against people on the move wishing to retrieve their belongings, while their living site was being evicted.

The month of April was also marked by an upsurge in police violence at the Calais-Ville and Fontinettes stations in Calais. The police intervened at least 3 times in an extremely violent manner to remove people from trains bound for other coastal towns, beating people on the move with their truncheons and even using tear gas inside the train.

Additionally, members of the Human Rights Observers team faced numerous obstacles from the authorities in their observation work. They underwent at least 10 abusive identity checks in Calais and Dunkirk, and were filmed at least 7 times by law enforcement officers without prior warning, including at least 4 times by National Police officers using their personal telephones. The harassment against solidarity organisations, which hinders monitoring work, contributes to maintaining the climate of impunity around the constant police abuses against people on the move.

The UK-Rwanda deal

In April 2022, the Conservative Government in the UK announced the Rwanda asylum plan – an immigration policy that would see those who had claimed asylum after having made journeys that could be described as “dangerous” (such as by small boat or lorry) at risk of deportation to Rwanda to have their asylum case heard there, and granted status to live as a refugee in Rwanda. The policy faced significant opposition, and was unanimously deemed ‘unlawful’ by the Supreme Court, due to the risk of refoulement following the treatment of refugees sent there from Israel between 2014 and 2017. Since then, the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 – which overrules the judgement of the Supreme Court and declares Rwanda to be a safe country – has seen amendments made and rejected by the Houses of Parliament, and eventually received Royal Assent and became law on April 25th 2024.

Following the passing of the Act and the ratification of the Treaty with Rwanda, a 'shock operation' took place from April 29th that saw people seeking asylum in the UK detained during immigration raids and while attending routine immigration appointments. Failure to appear at these appointments would result in their Section 95 (financial and accommodation) support being cut off, and their asylum case being closed. The UK is the only country in Europe that allows for indefinite detention, meaning people are detained without a disclosed end date. Current estimates believe flights to Rwanda to take off 8-10 weeks after April 29th, leaving people locked in immigration removal centres (IRCs) for a minimum of that period. Once taken into detention, people's personal phones are confiscated and replaced with a basic phone without access to the Internet from which they can make phone calls.

The immigration removal centres are built to the same specification as Category B prisons, the second highest level of security. On May 9th 2024, it was reported that there have been instances of peaceful protest and hunger strike by those who were detained. These facilities are wholly unsuitable to house people in, particularly those who have experienced torture, modern slavery, and have fled persecution and war. People being detained in these facilities stand a significant risk of retraumatisation, and the detention conditions are likely to cause or exacerbate mental health issues like depression, anxiety and PTSD.

For the people on the move in Calais, 'dangerous' means are the only ones available to them to enter and seek asylum in the UK, since it is necessary to be on British soil to be able to claim asylum there. Safe and legal routes are extremely limited, and available only to those with the Hong Kong BN(O) visa, the Ukraine Scheme visa, or as part of the UK Resettlement Scheme for a very limited number of people from Afghanistan. The Rwanda asylum plan and the lack of access to safe passage do not deter people from crossing, they simply force them to risk their lives making dangerous journeys and cause further distress to already vulnerable people.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

ADVOCACY

BVMN presents evidence in the LIBE Committee

On Monday, April 8th, the LIBE Committee in the European Parliament, tasked with migration matters among others, convened an Exchange of Views on border and migration management on Bulgaria and Romania. The discussion centred around the recent Pilot Projects implemented in the two EU member states. Among the participants, the Border Violence Monitoring Network stood as the sole civil society actor, represented by Desislava Todorova from the Center for Legal Aid, Bulgaria. Todorova brought attention to critical issues regarding transparency, monitoring, and accountability within the Bulgarian pilot project. Her insightful intervention can be watched online.

The focal point of the discussion was the implementation of the pilot project at the Pastrogor transit centre, situated near the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Todorova underscored that, while such initiatives are ostensibly designed to uphold legal standards ensuring genuine access to entry and asylum, the choice of locations like Pastrogor signifies a concerning trend. She argued that it reflects a broader shift in responsibility, wherein migration management is outsourced to external borders, rendering migration more obscure and less accountable.

Moreover, Todorova's remarks highlighted the failure of the pilot project to address human rights violations effectively. Specifically, she pointed out the perpetuation of pushbacks in Bulgaria, a practice that strips individuals of their dignity and rights. Despite numerous investigative reports documenting severe violations, particularly along the Bulgarian-Turkish border, pushbacks persist as a glaring issue that investigative authorities seem reluctant to confront.

In Todorova's words, pushbacks represent "the elephant in the room" – a visible problem that remains unaddressed by those in positions of responsibility. The lack of effective investigations into pushbacks in Bulgaria further compounds this issue, perpetuating a cycle of impunity.

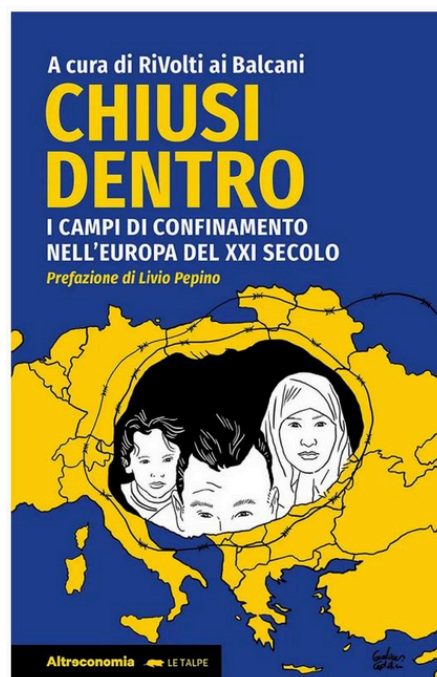
The Exchange of Views served as a platform to scrutinise the shortcomings of current border and migration management strategies in two EU member states. Pending their Schengen accession, it appears that the European institutions have moved away from resorting to the old carrot and stick strategies, laying down plenty of carrots with no sticks in sight.

BVMN Contribution to the book *Chiusi Dentro. I campi di confinamento nell'Europa del XXI secolo* (Trapped Within: Confinement Camps in 21st Century Europe)

Europe's borders are becoming graveyards of hope. "Trapped Within" presents a timely and incisive analysis of the international policies that reject migrants, from the outsourcing of borders to the creation of confinement camps both within and beyond the EU, with Italy entangled in the web.

A sinister thread binds the Libyan camps, Bosnian transit hubs, Greek and Lithuanian detention centres, and Italian CIE facilities. It's the thread of stripping away the dignity and rights of thousands of people in motion, confining and segregating them.

This book sets out to tackle vital questions through a meticulous examination of European asylum and immigration policies.



Drawing on diverse perspectives, it sheds light on cases from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Libya, Poland, Serbia, Turkey, and finally, Italy.

The exploration delves into pressing contemporary issues such as the abuse of technology in violating human rights, the role of international agencies (with Frontex at the forefront), the gradual erosion of asylum rights, the brutal pushbacks at the EU's external borders, and the disturbing "readmissions" at internal borders.

These practices, illegitimate and systematic, persist today as the European Union endeavours to normalise them. Understanding and documenting resistance practices becomes paramount in countering this dark descent.

It is based on contributions from a myriad of voices including Matteo Astuti, Alexandra Bogos, Caterina Bove, Anna Brambilla, Silvia Carbonari, Duccio Facchini, Robert Ford, Hannah Huser, Mahmut Kacan, Nikola Kovačević, Monica Massari, Keely McDonnell, Andrea McTigue, Davide Pignata, Michele Rossi, Erminia Rizzi, Luca Rondi, Gianfranco Schiavone, Ivana Stojanova, Meleanna Sunderland, and Manuela Valsecchi.

The cover art is crafted by Gianluca Costantini, capturing the essence of confinement and resistance.

Deaths and Disappearances

Deadly shipwrecks in the Aegean

On April 10th, an operation was launched to rescue 19 people from a rocky area in Kardamila, Chios. The bodies of three children, that survivors of the shipwreck had pulled out of the water, were also found in the same location. The shipwreck had happened on the evening of April 8th, so the people had been trapped in the rocks for 36 hours.

Less than 3 weeks later, on April 28th, a boat sank off the northwest coast of Samos, causing at least one death. The Hellenic Coast Guard reportedly rescued 25 people and were still searching for missing people the following day, with the support of Frontex.

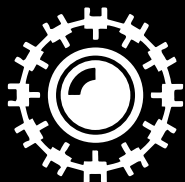
Both of these tragic incidents are a reminder that safe and legal routes for people to be able to exercise their rights and seek safety must be implemented urgently. According to InfoMigrants, at least 52 people lost their lives in the Eastern Mediterranean since the beginning of the year. These events also highlight the need for clear responsibility and accountability of the Hellenic Coast Guard and Frontex in their search and rescue operations in the Aegean. In an article published this month, analysis of Frontex's Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) from Samos and Lesvos between September 2020 and September 2023 shows that 50% of the SIRs concern an alleged case of pushback from Greece to Turkey. Half of these reports are unable to come to a conclusion because of the lack of cooperation from the Greek authorities, and 10% "establish beyond doubt" the Greek authorities' responsibility. The analysis adds to the European Ombudsman inquiry into Frontex's role, finding that the agency is "unable fully to fulfil its fundamental rights obligations and too reliant on Member States."

7 deaths at the Franco-British border

Over the month of April, 7 people have tragically died along the coast of the Franco-British border. These losses of life make a total of 410 people to have lost their lives in the region. On April 1st, one individual died after he was stabbed near Loon-Plage, Dunkirk, while another individual lost his life after being hit by a car at Pont-à-Roseaux.

On April 23rd 2024, five people - three men, a woman, and a 7-year-old girl - died during an attempted Channel crossing. The dinghy, which left from Wimereux in the Hauts-de-France region of France, was carrying 112 people at the time. Reports say that the boat came into trouble when the engine stopped, causing people to fall into the water. 49 people were rescued from the vessel, with 4 of those taken to hospital for further treatment. 58 people stayed aboard and were able to restart the engine,

continuing their journey across the Channel. This tragedy is the second of this scale in 2024, after 5 people tragically lost their lives on January 13th, and the second time a child has died during a crossing in 2024. Just last month Rula, a 7 year-old girl from Iraq, died after falling into the River Aa. These losses of life are a direct result of the brutal policing of the border, and a border policy implemented by both the French and British governments that see the rights of people violated on a daily basis.



Border Violence Monitoring Network

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

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

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

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

For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu.

For press and media requests please contact: press@borderviolence.eu



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