

**MONTHLY REPORT | APRIL 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.

**Kos CCAC**  
**Source: Anonymous**



**Border Violence  
Monitoring Network**



MONTHLY REPORT | APRIL 2025

# ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



**BLIND  
SPOTS**



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# Methodology and Terminology

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## 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

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[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

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

This month, we report on some of the continuous violence experienced by people on the move while in transit in Serbia, including the increase of police raids in public areas where people on the move gather or take shelter – such as around Obrenovac, near Belgrade –, or the extremely poor conditions forcefully endured while in detention or during their stay in official camps. Over the past weeks, several people reported being detained without access to food or water for long periods of time, as well as the difficulties in knowing the whereabouts of friends and relatives for days after those were apprehended and detained by the police. These practices constitute an example of the relentless extension of the violent border regime into cities and towns across Europe, which further reduces the spaces where people on the move can find rest and support. The new BVMN Violence Within Borders database aims to include testimonies of these types of violence, beyond pushbacks, in order to show the systematic nature of these racist practices that expand away from the “official” borders.

Meanwhile, at the Bosnian-Croatian border, an absolute lack of accountability allows Croatian authorities to keep engaging in human rights violations with impunity. Thus, once again this month, multiple testimonies from people on the move continue to report on severe physical and psychological violence of a degrading nature experienced during pushbacks, including beatings with batons, sticks, fists and guns, strip-searches, being forced into water, pepper spray and tasing. The perpetrators seem to make no exceptions, for the mistreatment of minors – as young as two years old – has also been detailed over and over again, by people in transit and solidarity organisations alike. Many of the injuries resulting from these practices, including severe cuts or broken bones, remain without proper treatment and care, due to a lack of provision of adequate healthcare to people on the move in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in a cycle of staged negligence that poses serious dangers to the lives and health of people in transit in the country.

We look at the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border in the first month after the suspension of the right to seek asylum, just to confirm that the concerns raised by solidarity organisations over the weeks preceding the passing of the new legislation in Poland were more than founded. Thus, an initial assessment of the consequences of the suspension shows the increased arbitrariness of the decisions of the border



## Executive summary

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guards with regards to pushbacks – with no clear, actionable or respected criteria to determine who constitutes a vulnerable person allowed to apply for asylum –, and the vagueness of the territorial scope making it possible to “legally” push people back even in areas away from the border region. Moreover, even the use of interim measures from the ECHR has proved unable to secure peoples’ right to seek asylum in some cases, for they have been ignored by Polish authorities at least once in April.

In Greece, we examine the factitious claims recently made by Frontex representatives with regard to their mission in the country and the widespread evidence of human rights violations committed by Greek authorities against people on the move – with 13 open investigations currently. In spite of the fact that Frontex is obliged to suspend operations in any country where human rights violations are being systematically committed, and the existence of several rulings condemning Greece for their violent treatment of people on the move – latest this year –, the EU Agency continues to ignore their role in perpetuating these illegal and deadly practices. Furthermore, we provide an overview of the current situation in the Evros region, one of the most militarised borders in Europe, characterised by the constant presence of EU-funded advanced surveillance infrastructure, including thermal cameras, drones, and high-tech radars, compounding kilometres-long fences.

On the other side of the border, in Turkey, so-called “voluntary” returns of Syrians continue, following growing concerns of intimidation practices by Turkish authorities, unlawful deportations and ever-present raids and apprehensions across the country. In this report, we also share summaries and findings of several reports looking specifically at Removal Centres in the country – Oğuzeli, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Izmir and Tuzla Removal Centers –, often opaque to the access of solidarity actors and organisations. These reports highlight the appalling conditions in the facilities, characterised by overcrowding, extremely poor hygiene, and lack of healthcare. Moreover, detainees recount being denied the right to communicate with families and legal representatives, and subjected to physical and psychological violence. These conditions and violence often become another deadly element of the current migration regime, as shown by the – at least – five deaths of Syrian detainees in some of the centres and police stations in 2024.

Lastly, we provide an update on evictions in Northern France – where 64 evictions were witnessed in Calais and six in Dunkirk, affecting hundreds of people on the move –, as well as on the illegal expulsions that continue to be carried out at the French-Italian border.

# **UPDATE ON THE SITUATION**



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### Detention

Very often, people on the move apprehended by police in Serbia are not heard from for long periods after the event. This month, BVMN member organisation Collective Aid spoke to a group of people who said some individuals from their group had been taken away 8 days before and they had no idea where they were, whether they had been detained or taken to an official camp.

Moreover, many of those who have experienced detention in the country report having been given no food or water for several days. Several testimonies describe police officers asking for money for food from those detained, and keeping a share of this money for themselves. Many also detailed other types of corruption, including the need to pay bribes of up to 400 euros in order to be released. Regarding the conditions of detention in these police stations, several videos shown to Collective Aid teams in the region show a small room with a broken toilet inside and an overflowing sink. According to multiple testimonies, people apprehended at the border are often held there, a room reportedly located in one of Subotica's police stations. Large groups of people, including minors, would thus be forced to stay there, usually sitting on the floor for three days before being sent south hundreds of kilometres away to Preševo Reception Centre, on the Macedonian border.

Importantly, reports of iris scans during these procedures are becoming increasingly common, a reflection of the worrisome expansion of biometric data technologies. Furthermore, many describe they were forced to sign papers, usually in Serbian Cyrillic, and nearly always without an understanding of what they meant.

### Pushbacks

Meanwhile, reports of pushbacks in the region continue, including many describing illegal and violent expulsions from Serbia to North Macedonia. This month, one man reported on the extreme violence perpetrated by Serbian border officers during a pushback in the southern border of the country, who ended up breaking his nose. He was able to receive hospital care in North Macedonia. Another group of ten people who were pushed back on this border described that the police took their phones and money away, beat them, and used a taser on them.

Pushbacks also continue in Serbia's northern border with Hungary, where people are often apprehended by Serbian authorities, after being illegally and forcefully returned, to be detained in the small, cramped conditions mentioned above, before they are



sent to Preševo camp. Reports of pushbacks from Hungary detail the presence of Hungarian and, reportedly, Austrian police, pointing to the likely involvement of Frontex officers.

Lastly, extreme violence by police officers doesn't cease to be reported by those people who had come through Bulgaria, who showed members of Collective Aid several deep scars, testament to the use of weapons and extensive violence by Bulgarian authorities.

### **Police raids around Obrenovac**

At the beginning of the month, police presence increased significantly around Obrenovac, a common spot for those on the move to pass through outside Belgrade, and the location of the only official camp around the capital. They began coming twice a day, everyday, often in the early morning. Collective Aid teams heard that, occasionally, they come just to walk around, sometimes in an unmarked van, but that they will often take people on the move to the police station if they see them.

### **Increased violence amongst people on the move**

Violence amongst people on the move has increased substantially in April – two men died as a result of stabbing incidents in Obrenovac, while another two had to be hospitalised.

Though much information is still missing, this aggression can likely be attributed to growing tensions due to the increased challenges crossing borders. This increase in violence can be considered one of the symptoms of the border regime which, through criminalising migration, facilitates the proliferation of criminal organisations in managing migratory routes.

Increasingly harsh border policies are forcing already vulnerable people on the move to rely further on the abusive criminalised networks facilitating their journeys. The groups exploit those trying to reach safety and reports of kidnapping for ransom have also appeared this month.

### **Camp conditions**

There are 7 government facilities for asylum-seekers currently open in Serbia, 4 Asylum Centres (AC) (Krnjaca, Obrenovac, Sjenica and Vranje) and 3 Reception/Transit Centres (RTC) (Bujanovac, Preševo and Principovac).



Conversations with adult men currently living in Preševo RTC, by the border with North Macedonia, spoke of the lack of sanitation and hygiene, particularly access to clean toilet facilities. The food is reportedly insufficient and it has become increasingly expensive for people to buy food outside of the centre. Moreover, Collective Aid teams heard mention of residents from the camp having their IDs ripped up and destroyed by the police as punishment for leaving the facility. As described in the sections above, Preševo is also the centre where people on the move are transferred by Serbian authorities after experiencing pushbacks from Bosnia, Croatia or Hungary.

Sjenica AC, close to the border with Montenegro, hosts around 60–70 people. From conversations with some of them, at the only safe space in town provided by No Name Kitchen, Collective Aid collected complaints about the quantity and quality of food provided in the camp, forcing people to build an improvised kitchen outside the facilities. In addition to inadequate nutrition, people described a total lack of psycho-social support, compounding the extremely difficult experience of being a person on the move stuck in a place where it is nearly impossible to find work or other opportunities to build a life and autonomy.

Moreover, between the end of 2024 and February 2025, two people on the move died at the Sjenica AC. In the first case, the person died due to negligence over his health condition. In the second case, the person was reported to have died from hypothermia, after having been denied entry into the camp and forced to spend the night in the cold. They constitute two tragic events testifying to the fatality of the border regime, even in places where people are supposed to find a safe place.

Lastly, families living in Krnjaca AC, outside Belgrade, denounced the lack or insufficiency of medical and social support provided by the camp authorities and organizations working inside the facility. People who have been living in the camp for 8–10 months are not receiving support in job searching or orientation, contributing to the lack of a stable income faced by most asylum-seeking families in the country.



## Systematic use of violence at borders

Violence against people on the move continues to be an established and methodical practice during pushbacks. In April, BVMN member organisation Collective Aid recorded an alarming number of cases where people were subject to physical and psychological violence of a degrading nature. Multiple reports detailed beatings with batons, sticks, fists and guns, strip-searches, being forced into water and tasering. Intimidation techniques such as gunshots, taunting with pepper spray and being threatened and chased by dogs were also repeatedly reported. The sentiment on the ground revealed that police brutality – namely at the Croatian border – is not just feared, but expected.

The threat of violent consequences towards people re-attempting to cross borders after being pushed back have also been documented. One Syrian respondent detailed that after being beaten by Croatian police on his legs and across his body, they threatened that *'it will be bad'* if he is caught again. Similarly, during a pushback from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Montenegro, an Afghan respondent was told by Bosnian police *'if we find you again we will throw you in the water.'*

## Minors subject to violence during Croatian pushbacks to Bosnia-Herzegovina

Regarding the systematic pushbacks perpetrated by Croatian authorities at the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly notable this month are reports detailing the extension of this violence towards minors, one as young as two years old.

On crossing into Croatia, a Syrian family including a father, mother and their four children aged two to fourteen contacted the Croatian Legal Centre expressing their intent to claim asylum. Five police officers were sent to the family in response, and they were driven to *'a remote forest area with no facilities'*, where they were subject to physical and psychological violence. The respondent reported that their ten-year-old son was *'pushed forcefully by an officer'*, causing him to fall onto a rock and fracture his arm. The two-year-old daughter, who is on the Autism Spectrum, suffered a *'severe psychological reaction'* when an officer shouted loudly near her face – terrified, she began *'screaming uncontrollably'*. Recognising the extent of injury inflicted, the officers told the family they would take them to the hospital. Instead, they were abandoned in an *'even more isolated'* location where their personal items were confiscated and destroyed.

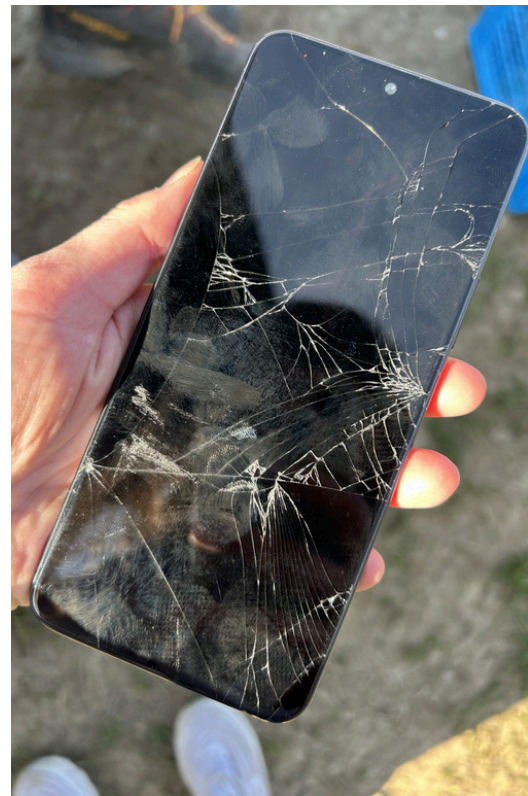


A second respondent also reported the use of violence and intimidation against a 16-year-old Syrian boy. His transit group, which included the minor, were 'beaten violently' by Croatian police and attacked by 'fierce' dogs. The transit group was forced to strip, left only with their underwear. Their clothes, phones, money and food were stolen.

Reports received from an organisation providing medical care on the ground in Bosnia-Herzegovina also include documented cases of violence towards minors. In one case, a three-year-old was beaten during a pushback in Croatia, and was described to be '*very anxious*', '*scared*' and '*traumatised*' as a result. In another, police were said to have specifically targeted a five-year-old, beating him in the face. According to the report, the child suffered with a '*black eye, swelling and blurred vision*' and was '*traumatised*'.

### Theft, destruction and isolating consequences

Apart from the physical violence, and as shown in testimonies above, theft and destruction of belongings have also continued to be a standardised practice of Croatian pushbacks. '*The police took everything*' is a statement that has been heard across multiple conversations, with phones, power banks, money, backpacks, food and water being either stolen or destroyed. One respondent noted that when his transit group came into contact with the police, they demanded '*money money, phones phones*'. After collecting all devices, the police bent to the ground and smashed them on the floor one by one, demonstrating the methodical and systematic nature of the practice. When a BVMN reporter separately asked where is best to hide belongings, a respondent implied that you simply can't - they will strip you of all your clothes, including your underwear, and find everything.



Phone broken by Croatian authorities during a pushback. Source: [Collective Aid](#)

Destruction of phones in particular places people on the move in an increasingly vulnerable situation. They lose access to navigation tools, money and essential



identification documents, as well as contact with family and friends. When money is stolen, people are unable to afford transport services back to reception centres, forcing them to take more dangerous routes which leaves them open to further instances of theft, violence and exploitation.

BVMN reporters have received additional information detailing the destruction of documents during Croatian pushbacks. This includes identification documents, proof of why people want to apply for asylum and medical records. They are often ripped up and taken away in the pockets of the police, or sometimes even burnt in front of the group. Just like with the destruction of money and phones, this practice intentionally isolates people on the move, completely disregarding their right to safety and security.

### **Physical consequences of border violence and inadequate access to medical care**

The use of police violence and intimidation has a direct and negative impact on the physical wellbeing of people on the move. The Collective Aid team in Sarajevo has witnessed bruises, large wounds and broken bones; injuries that have been exacerbated by the inadequacies of medical support provided by camps and emergency services.

A Moroccan man staying at Blažuj Temporary Reception Centre (TRC) told BVMN reporters that when forced to run from the police, he cut his leg on a fence which resulted in a wound measuring several centimeters, which was visibly infected at the time of the conversation. He was initially refused medical attention by both International Organisation for Migration (IOM) staff at the camp and local emergency services. It was only after the head of IOM Bosnia-Herzegovina was contacted by Human Rights Watch that an ambulance was called hours later.

A second respondent, also from Morocco, broke his leg in five places after falling from a bridge during a border crossing between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite initially receiving medical care in a hospital, he is now reliant on support from TRC doctors as he is unable to fund follow-up treatment. Reports on services within the camp, however, have consistently outlined limited clinic hours, negligence by healthcare professionals, and the outright refusal of medical attention. For example, the Collective Aid team was informed that in Blažuj TRC, two men, one from Syria and one from Afghanistan, have been offered only painkillers as treatment for broken bones.



Additional findings by organisations operating on the ground have further supported the opinion that healthcare provisions for people on the move have consistently fallen short in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Lipa, a reception centre in the north, doctors work limited hours and provide acutely insufficient medical care in both minor and extreme cases of injury. Reportedly, IOM has also lacked in their responsibility to make referrals and provide transport in emergency situations, consequently denying people the right to access necessary, and in some cases urgent, medical support. This reflects a broader trend of people on the move becoming increasingly reliant on services provided by NGOs, a rising issue which BVMN reporters have noted within the month of April.

### Return Hubs

UK Home Office officials are currently discussing proposals to set up overseas 'return hubs' in the Balkans for people who have had their claims for asylum rejected and their appeals exhausted. Possible host countries, which will receive funding from the British government, include Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia. The idea has reportedly been backed by the UNHCR, who has stated there is a need for an 'effective returns system', and will offer support to countries wanting to move forward with this practice.



### **One Month On from Poland's temporary suspension of asylum at the Belarusian border: Legal ambiguity and concerns over territorial scope**

April marks the first full month of the regulation suspending the possibility of applying for international protection at the border between Poland and Belarus. At the time the regulation was published, on March 27th, 2025, experts and human rights advocates raised concerns about the territorial scope of the suspension. The vague wording –*the suspension [which] [...] applies at the state border with the Republic of Belarus*– did not clearly specify how far from the borderline the ban on applying for protection would be in effect. In response to journalists' inquiries, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration stated that “the legal provisions are not formulated in a way that designates any specific area where the restriction applies”, and that “the decisive factor will be the factual circumstances of each case, i.e., the ability to confirm the circumstances [of border crossing]. It is to be expected that in practice, such cases will occur in the immediate vicinity of the border”. This response suggests a likely risk of arbitrary decisions when it comes to the fate of people crossing the border. So far, cases documented by the civil society in April and first days of May seem to support that concern.

On April 22nd, the Maritime Branch of the Border Guard reported that it had accepted asylum applications from five Somali men near Szczecin, close to the German border. The men were apprehended after local residents reported them to the Border Guard. In their case, no legal assistance was needed for them to submit their applications for international protection.

In another case, this time in the Podlaskie region, an employee of a non-governmental organization and legal representative of one of the people on the move was informed by a Border Guard officer that the man would only be allowed to submit an application for international protection after being transferred to a guarded detention center. The man was among those who, after crossing the so-called “green border” from Belarus, requested assistance from the civil society.

Thanks to the coordinated efforts of the activists and iNGOs involved in the intervention, he was granted an *interim measure* by the European Court of Human Rights, which prevented him from being pushed back to Belarus. However, due to the lack of a legal basis to accept his asylum application on the spot (according to the current interpretation of the law by the Border Guard), he was sent to a detention center for the initiation of return proceedings.





## **The European Court of Human Rights and medical facilities as points of uncertain protection**

The man mentioned above is one of 12 people who, between March 27th and May 12th, 2025, were successfully protected from being pushed back after crossing the border irregularly, thanks to interim measures issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Court granted these 12 measures after concluding that sending the individuals back to Belarus could pose a real risk of violating their right to life or their right to be free from torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment.

Notably, 11 of these individuals were in hospitals in Hajnówka or Białystok while they waited for the Court's decision. At the same time, according to the Association for Legal Intervention, in the case of two people who tried to apply for protection at the official border crossing in Terespol, and had already been granted interim measure, Poland failed to comply with the Court's ruling.

The average waiting time for a decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on interim measures was in this period typically between several hours and one to two working days. However, while awaiting the decision, individuals remain at risk of being returned to Belarus, even while receiving medical care in hospitals.

For example on April 11th, Grupa Granica reported that a young man from Mali, who had been hospitalized, was pushed back to Belarus. He had been brought to a hospital in Hajnówka by ambulance, where medical staff noticed signs of confusion—he repeatedly asked where he was and which country he was in. He told them he was 17 years old and wanted to apply for international protection. He signed a power of attorney with a legal representative from European Lawyers in Lesvos and expressed his intention to seek asylum.

Since he had no documents and had declared himself a minor, he was scheduled for an age assessment the next day – notably, a method most commonly used by the Polish Border Guard is the bone x-ray, not compliant with the EASO age assessment recommendations. However, the following morning, around 11 a.m., Border Guard officers discharged him from the hospital. The legal representative sent all the necessary documents to the Border Guard post in Białowieża and asked for information about the boy's situation.

Worried that he might be pushed back, the legal representative requested an interim measure from the ECHR. With no response from the Border Guard, she called the post



around 3 p.m. and was told that the boy was already on his way back from Białystok. The officer assured her that she would be kept updated about what was happening. However, no one followed up with her, and she received no information about the results of the age test or what steps were being taken next.

Later, around 6:30 p.m., the ECHR issued a decision in favor of the boy, prohibiting Poland from sending him back to Belarus. The legal representative emailed the decision to the Border Guard post around 7:00 p.m. and called again, but the officer refused to provide any information, advising her to call later.

The next morning, when she called again, she was told that the ECHR decision had arrived too late—the boy had already been pushed back to Belarus. The officer expressed regret, stating, "Unfortunately, time cannot be turned back."

Shortly after, the boy reached out to Grupa Granica from Belarus, saying that before being pushed back across the border, Polish officers had beaten him. He reported: *"Polish police officers beat me and broke my foot and finger."*

This case is one of three similar incidents recorded so far involving individuals hospitalized in the Podlaskie region. In each case, the ECHR issued interim measures, but the decisions were delivered to the Border Guard only after the individuals had already been pushed back to Belarus.

### **Situation at the Terespol Border Crossing**

The suspension of the right to international protection also applies to the only border crossing open for passenger traffic between Poland and Belarus – the Brest-Terespol border, which since the 1990s has been a main escape route for citizens of former Soviet Union countries fleeing persecution.

As lawyers supporting individuals reaching the Belarusian city of Brest point out, on the first day of the new regulations, individuals claiming to have experienced political repression (including torture) were turned away at the border crossing, despite declaring to Polish authorities that they feared persecution if returned to their home countries. Over the next few days, there were also documented cases of refusals to accept the asylum application of a citizen from a Central Asian country, who had been living in the Russian Federation in recent years and carried documentation regarding the violence he had suffered at the hands of Russian authorities. He also reported threats of being drafted to the Russian army and sent to the frontline in eastern



Ukraine. In the case of two women traveling together from the Caucasus, an application was accepted from one who was pregnant, while the other, traveling with a young child, was told to get out of the car and return to Belarus.

Due to geographical and geopolitical reasons, for citizens of Russia and Central Asian countries, the escape route from areas where they face danger often passes through Poland. Additionally, Russia, to which around 10% of Tajikistan's citizens have been migrating seasonally for work in recent years due to economic collapse, has intensified its persecution of migrants over the past year. This affects both those migrating seasonally or permanently for economic reasons, as well as those who left Tajikistan due to political repression. The pretext for this persecution was initiated by media reports from the spring of 2024, reporting that several men from Tajikistan claimed responsibility for a deadly attack at the concert near Moscow.

One of the key reasons to flee for women arriving at the border crossing in Brest-Terespol, is the widespread domestic violence, which has been intensified by deliberate actions of the Russian authorities. These include the decriminalization of domestic violence and the systemic lack of support for the victims. In recent years, a significant number of women seeking international protection in Terespol have come from the North Caucasus region, which is part of Russia.

### **Government's future plans regarding the suspension of the right to apply for protection**

On May 6th, 2025, Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced at a press conference that the government plans to extend the suspension of the right to apply for international protection beyond the initial 60-day period. He stated that, over a *month into the suspension, pressure on the border has not decreased*, and that *the suspension is intended to apply to those who cross the border illegally*. It remains unclear whether this statement reflects a lack of understanding of the situation at the border, a lack of precision in wording, or a potential upcoming reopening of the Terespol border crossing.

### **Summary of findings:**

This initial assessment of the first month of implementation of the new regulation, as expected, confirms previous significant concerns:

- Access to international protection is effectively blocked for those crossing the border between the two countries both irregularly and through the border crossing. The few



people on the move who succeeded in applying for asylum were predominantly hospital patients who had received interim measures from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) granting them temporary protection from pushbacks.

- In at least three cases, ECHR decisions were issued too late to be effective – the individuals had been discharged from hospitals in Hajnówka and Białystok and pushed back before the rulings reached the Polish Border Guard. In one case the delay was only about 20 minutes.
- There appears to be no effective mechanism in place to identify individuals belonging to so-called vulnerable groups who, according to the regulation, should be exempt from the suspension. This undermines any practical value of those exemptions, suggesting that they may serve more as a superficial safeguard intended to soften the perceived severity of the regulation, rather than offering any form of protection in practice.
- The suspension also impacts the Brest–Terespol road crossing – historically a vital route for political dissidents and women fleeing domestic violence from post-Soviet states. Civil society actors have documented cases of individuals being denied the opportunity to apply for asylum at this crossing, despite clear indicators of vulnerability. At least one incident was reported where an ECHR interim measure was not respected by the Polish authorities at the crossing.



### On Frontex's recent claims

Throughout April 2025, representatives of Frontex made a number of public statements, which would appear to be rather hypocritical and potentially misleading. These were criticised by “Front-Lex” and “Refugees in Libya”.

While BVMN has long documented the human rights violations carried out by Greek authorities and advocated for increased accountability for those responsible, Frontex and the EU's border policies have perpetuated the prevalence of pushbacks and border violence as accepted practice on the EU's ‘external borders’.

In a [\*Politico\*](#) article published on April 24th 2025, Jonas Grimheden, Frontex's Fundamental Rights Officer, commented on allegations of alleged human rights violations carried out by Greek authorities. Referring to the 13 open investigations into alleged human rights violations by Greece, Grimheden outlined two possible courses of action for Frontex: suspending its operations in the country or urging the European Commission to initiate infringement proceedings against the Greek government. However, the suggestion that Frontex could prompt the Commission to initiate such proceedings is misleading, as this lies beyond the agency's formal mandate. Furthermore, under Article 46(4) of its [founding regulation](#), Frontex is legally required to terminate any operation that is linked to serious or persistent violations of fundamental rights. Such violations were documented by the EU's anti-fraud office (OLAF) [in 2022](#) and again [in January 2025](#) by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which referred to Greece's “systematic practice” of pushbacks. Thus, Frontex's public framing of its response options to Greece's documented pushbacks misrepresents its mandate, as it is legally obliged to suspend operations linked to systemic human rights violations, not to defer action to the European Commission.

In a separate interview with [Euronews](#) in April 2025, Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijten stated his regret that Frontex had to push back people on the move travelling to Europe from Libya, claiming that the agent “has no choice”. Libya remains a central departure point for sea crossings to Europe, and extensive documentation exists of [severe human rights abuses](#) committed against PoM there, including [torture](#). In line with the obligations outlined in Article 46(4), Frontex is compelled to cease cooperation with Libyan entities — particularly the Libyan Coast Guard — when such cooperation is linked to human rights violations. This pattern of hypocritical claims underscores Frontex's ongoing failure to uphold its legal obligations and human rights responsibilities.



## **Evros region site overview and recent developments**

The Evros region, which forms Greece's 200 km-long land border with Turkey, is a highly militarised area, particularly around the Evros River. Key locations such as the Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), Fylakio Pre-Removal Detention Center (PRDC), and various Border Guard Departments (BGDs) serve as focal points for both border control and detention. The region is characterised by advanced surveillance infrastructure, including thermal cameras, drones, and high-tech radars. Greece's border infrastructure features two main border fences: one in the north, stretching from Nea Vyssa to Kastanies, and another in the south, comprising three segments around the Feres and Poros areas. Additionally, a substantial section between Kornofolia and Neoi Psathades, although largely constructed, remains incomplete. These fences, dominated by a 5-meter-high physical barrier, have been progressively reinforced with advanced, EU-funded surveillance and security technologies, reflecting a broader strategy to enhance border control capabilities.

Following the border spectacle of early 2020 in which thousands of people on the move gathered on the Turkish side of the border, a further set of measures fortifying the border was presented as a response to the 'crisis'. New walls were constructed in the south of the prefecture and between the villages of Neoi Psathades and Kornofolia, both financed by national instruments. The government showcased newly acquired equipment including new patrol cars, a sound cannon and armoured vehicles, while more border guards were hired. Yet the acquisition of new patrol cars and the hiring of border guards were part of ongoing EU-financed projects, while there is no evidence the sound cannon was ever used. In addition, both the Fylakio RIC and PDRC were expanded and strengthened in terms of security in 2020/2021, now resembling a CCAC – despite not officially being designated as such. More recently, in March 2025, the Turkish government announced its intention to construct an 8.5-kilometre-long wall along the country's border with Greece. This initiative appears to complement ongoing efforts by the Greek government, which began constructing a border wall approximately thirteen years ago. According to a pledge made by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in 2023, the ongoing construction of the Neoi Psathades-Kornofolia wall is set to extend the barrier to a total length of over 100 kilometers by 2026.

There have been repeated incidents of PoM becoming stranded on islets in the Evros River, where Greek authorities have reportedly ignored calls for rescue, notably from the NGO Alarm Phone. In 2023, over 300 people were left stuck on an islet for several days without food or water.



Moreover, in January 2025, Greece was condemned for the first time by the ECtHR for a pushback that occurred in Evros in 2019. Furthermore, the Court recognised the “systematic practice of pushbacks by the Greek authorities of third-country nationals from the Evros region to Türkiye”. The case related to the illegal detention and refoulement by Greek authorities of a Turkish asylum seeker who crossed into Evros in 2019.

### **The expanded Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre**

The “new” Fylakio RIC in Evros has been operational since March 2024, replacing the old facility. Labeled by the government as an “extension”, its construction faced strong local opposition since 2022, including protests in Orestiada and on the construction site. The new detention center funded by the EU Internal Security Fund has a prison-like appearance including high cement walls, barbed wire and observation towers. It also reportedly includes an underground tunnel connecting the old and new buildings. Built by TERNA, partly subcontracting to local businesses, the facility also outsourced cleaning, catering, and maintenance services. It has also been reported that the controversial Centaur and Hyperion systems were installed in the new RIC. Centaur is an AI behavioural analytics system that employs an algorithm to process data from cameras, drones, and sensors to monitor behaviour and raise alerts of supposed threats. Hyperion is a system that uses fingerprint data to control movement in and out of refugee camps. In 2024, following an investigation by the Hellenic Data Protection Authority handed the Ministry of Immigration a fine of €750.000 for significant breaches of the GDPR when installing the Centaur and Hyperion systems.

### **Arrests in the Evros region**

Since the beginning of 2025, over 300 arrests of PoM have been reported between Evros and Rodopi, particularly in the areas of Kipoi, and Orestiada. In April 2025, additional arrests were conducted by officers of the Tychero Border Guard Department, the Feres Border Guard Department and the Soufli Border Guard Department involving one group of PoM crossing the Evros river by boat and others apprehended in cars. Most apprehensions involved people traveling by car, while a smaller number were arrested in lorries, particularly at the Kipoi customs border checkpoint. This data is based on the numbers reported by Evros24 and EvrosNews since January 1st 2025.



## ***Updates from the islands***

### **Pushbacks and people arriving in the Aegean**

Following the pattern observed for the past several months, since the beginning of the year, the official data provided by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) – on pushbacks from Greece, apprehensions and rescues – continues to look suspiciously low, pointing perhaps at some changes in reporting and monitoring and/or new agreements between Greece and Turkey. As stated in our last Monthly Report, while this could be a sign of good news, of less violence and dangers, we are inclined to believe that's not the case.

First, the numbers (as per the official websites of the TCG and the Greek Ministry of Migration): during the month of April, 323 people were reportedly rescued by the TGC, 81 of whom had been pushed back by the Greek Coast Guard (HCG), in four different operations. Moreover 996 people were stopped and apprehended by the TCG before leaving Turkey and 1,116 people arrived on the Greek islands. In total, it is reported that 2,435 people tried to cross the Aegean. The numbers of people rescued by the TGC were higher than in March (117), while the number of people reportedly being pushed back also rose (from 55 in March). Meanwhile, the numbers of people attempting to cross the Aegean dropped by roughly 800 along with arrivals and apprehensions by the TCG.

	<b>January 2024</b>	<b>February 2024</b>	<b>March 2024</b>	<b>April 2024</b>
People rescued (pushed back)	1,987 (1099)	2,291 (1,196)	1,224 (878)	1384 (769)
People apprehended before crossing	1,688	3,413	1,951	1812
People arrived in the islands	2,961	3,357	1,818	1897
Total of people who attempted crossing	6,636	9,061	4,993	5093





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

### Dead and missing in the Aegean

Even though the numbers of reported pushbacks continue to be low, this month has been a highly deadly one in the Aegean. During the month of April, 21 bodies of people trying to cross have been recovered and at least two people have been reported missing in six different incidents.

On April 3rd 2025, two shipwrecks took place off the coast of Lesbos. The first one was near Sklala Sikamnia, in Greek waters, where seven bodies were recovered and a child is still missing, and the second one in Turkish waters near Çanakkale's Ayvacık, where nine bodies were recovered and one more person remains missing.

According to Reuters journalist Giorgos Moutafis, the survivors of the shipwreck in Skala Sikamnia reported that a coast guard vessel approached their boat and they attacked the boat with harpoons, tearing the bottom of it and capsizing the people onboard into the sea. The deliberate actions of the Hellenic Coast Guard in causing the shipwreck and loss of life are indisputable. Several hours after this attack, an individual was arrested and charged with facilitating illegal entry, causing the shipwreck and endangering peoples' lives leading to death. This same person lost his wife and youngest child in the shipwreck.

Two days later, on April 5th 2025, two more shipwrecks occurred in the Aegean sea. According to the Turkish Coast Guard, at 09:00 they launched a rescue operation off the coast of Antalya's Kaş district. 38 people, 13 of them children, were rescued and one body was recovered. At 23:30 on the same day, the TCG stated that they detected a boat off the coast of Muğla's Fethiye district. The boat was intercepted and 54 people, 27 of them children, were apprehended, two people were arrested as suspected facilitators and the bodies of two more people were found. We are unable to confirm the precise circumstances of these events, but lately we have observed a change in



the methods employed by the TCG. In imitation of the dangerous techniques used by the HCG for years, the TCG chases fiber-hull inflatable boats, using ramming, aggressive manoeuvres and gunshots to disrupt them. While they state that they “found two bodies”, we are unable to know how these two people died.

On April 14th 2025, the bodies of two women were found on the island of Farmakonisi. 39 other people were rescued on land. There is no more information on how the two women died. On the same day, another shipwreck took place, this time off the coast of Ikaria. 6 people survived and there is an unknown number of people missing.

During the month of April we have received many reports and accounts testifying to the occurrence of many shipwrecks. Although we are unable to ascertain or confirm the exact circumstances of these deaths, these are not accidental occurrences. These deaths represent the inevitable outcome of European border policies and the deliberate process of externalisation of the borders through deals like the EU-Turkey deal in 2016.

### **Kos**

#### *Fluctuating population in the CCAC and changes in migration routes*

The population of Greece’s Kos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) fluctuated throughout April 2025. On April 1st, 702 individuals were recorded as residing inside the CCAC. The population dropped to a low of 577 individuals by mid-month, before rising again to 695 individuals on April 30th. These trends may be attributed to the emergence of new migration routes in the Aegean sea. Most of the new arrivals in Kos initially landed on other islands, such as Nisyros, before being transferred to Kos (or in some cases Leros). This diversification of entry points complicates the provision of support and leads to longer waiting times, due to the lack of adequate registration services on certain islands, such as Rhodes.

This instability in population figures coincides with structural limitations in the island’s reception and support systems, particularly around housing and access to basic services.

#### *Housing crisis and poor living conditions in the CCAC*

Since Easter, the island of Kos has taken on a different face. With the return of sunny days, the number of tourists has sharply increased; and so have the challenges faced by displaced people. This selective hospitality is explored in the article “Kos: Divided by Invisible Borders”.



As the demand for tourist accommodation rises, many landlords have withdrawn their properties from the long-term rental market, exacerbating the ongoing housing crisis for people on the move. The general increase in prices across the island further aggravates this issue.

In recent weeks, we have documented three cases of young men who requested sleeping bags after being forced to sleep on the streets upon exiting the CCAC, due to a lack of available or affordable housing. One of them is living with untreated psychiatric disorders and receives no support whatsoever, neither for housing nor for basic healthcare. He is not followed by any doctor or mental health professional on the island, which tragically highlights the alarming lack of access to mental healthcare in Kos. Despite his obvious vulnerability, there is no support structure or system in place to offer the kind of sustained assistance he would need to access housing or navigate daily life. Left entirely on his own and unable to cope without guidance, his only remaining option has been to live on the street, where he has been sleeping for several weeks. His case starkly illustrates how the absence of long-term support mechanisms condemns people with mental health conditions to a life of exclusion and homelessness.

Beyond the issue of housing, access to basic necessities remains a daily struggle for displaced people on the island. Essential items such as hygiene products, clothing, and baby supplies are not provided in a consistent or sufficient manner by any formal structure. At present, the Glocal Roots Hub is the only organization attempting to meet these urgent needs. However, our resources are limited, and this frequency (once a month) is far from enough for many individuals who lack access to even the most basic services. No national or municipal institution currently ensures the regular provision of these essentials.

In addition, we received video evidence from inside the camp showing deteriorating living conditions: broken toilets, shower doors without locks, water infiltration destroying the floor, leaks, and the presence of cockroaches. Whether inside or outside the camp, the right to adequate shelter continues to be violated for displaced people.

The situation in Kos reflects a broader pattern of structural neglect and seasonally exacerbated inequality affecting displaced people in tourist areas. As tourist infrastructure expands, humanitarian infrastructure stagnates. Without urgent and targeted responses from institutional actors, the most vulnerable will remain invisible, unsupported, and at risk.



### **Samos**

In April 2025, delays and ongoing inconsistencies in the asylum procedure persisted. Degrading conditions, including long queues to exit the Samos CCAC and the lack of hot water have prevailed, alongside the lack of transfers. Survivors of human trafficking have reported concerns over safety and security in the CCAC. MSF published a [press release](#) on April 7th reporting that six cases of malnutrition in children aged between six months and six years had been identified, the first time since MSF began working in the Samos CCAC four years ago.

#### *Delays and ongoing inconsistencies in asylum procedures*

As of April 2025, all clients of IHR from Eritrea were wrongfully registered as being from Ethiopia. IHR believes this might be a systematic issue. Since people from Eritrea are usually granted protection status, this raises concerns regarding negligence in the asylum process. In addition, the reported absence of in-person Amharic and Tigrinya interpretation during the month of April caused significant delays in asylum interviews.

Following the Council of State's annulment of the designation of Türkiye as a "safe third country" in March, the Greek government released a [Joint Ministerial Decision](#) on April 9th 2025 re-designating Türkiye as a "safe third country" for asylum seekers originating from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Since this decision, people seeking asylum from these countries have experienced continuous interview postponements, and it is not yet clear when their interviews will resume.

#### *Degrading conditions and lack of transfers*

In the month of April, several clients reported having to wait for sometimes up to an hour and a half to leave the CCAC as a result of long queues. People were reportedly forced to queue without cover in adverse weather conditions. IHR asserts that this contributes to the degrading and undignified treatment of people in the CCAC. Furthermore, this fails to take into consideration people with vulnerabilities, such as people with disabilities, the elderly and parents with small children.

Regarding the lack of consistent hot water in the CCAC, a client of IHR reported that people will often open electricity panels and use the cables to manually boil water, which leads to electricity cuts lasting up to three to seven days before they are fixed. Reportedly, in some sections of the CCAC, there is no hot water at all and clients of IHR have reported having to go to another area.



Ironically, compared to last months' issue of people not being allowed to renew their ID cards and instead being told to go to the transfer office, there are now no transfers being organised by the authorities, even in urgent cases such as healthcare. In late April, multiple people reached out to IHR to report that they were not being allowed to transfer even at their own expense, exacerbating frustrations about stagnation in the asylum procedure and for people who wish to unite with family members in other parts of Greece. One client wrote to us:

*"Now I am asking them to give me permission to leave, but they are not giving it to us. Where are our rights? We want our rights. Why are they keeping us here? We want to leave and work."*

### *Concerns over safety in Samos CCAC, including survivors of human trafficking*

There has been a rise in the number of clients identified by IHR caseworkers as survivors of human trafficking. Survivors have reported concerns about safety in the CCAC, including being unable to lock the doors to their containers and in some toilets and showers. One survivor reported that she and her roommate lock their door with rope wire that they had fashioned themselves as without this the door could be opened from the outside.

Furthermore, women report that it 'does not matter' if they are searched by male or female actors when they re-enter the CCAC. This degrading malpractice has been described as 'humiliating' by female clients, and has particular impacts on survivors of sexual violence, gender based violence and trafficking.

### *Reports of malnutrition*

On April 7th 2025, MSF published a [press release](#) reporting that six cases of malnutrition had been identified in the Samos CCAC. According to MSF, this was the first time malnutrition had been identified since they began working there in 2021. The six children are aged between six months to six years old.

This is a concerning development, considering the lack of paediatric healthcare on the island. Moreover, this is compounded by the absence of cash assistance for the last nine months, making it more challenging for families to afford nutritious food for their children.



### Government statistics show Afghans and Syrians still most affected by apprehensions

According to statistics published by the Presidency of Migration Management, 8,566 “irregular migrants” were apprehended in April 2025, with a total of 48,513 apprehensions so far this year up to May 1st. The top groups of nationals affected by apprehensions (see Table 1) were: Afghans (15,569), Syrians (6,768), Uzbeks (4,086), Turkmens (3,372), and Egyptians (2,734). In 2025, , authorities have also apprehended 3,662 so-called “organizers”, or those accused of facilitating irregular transit.

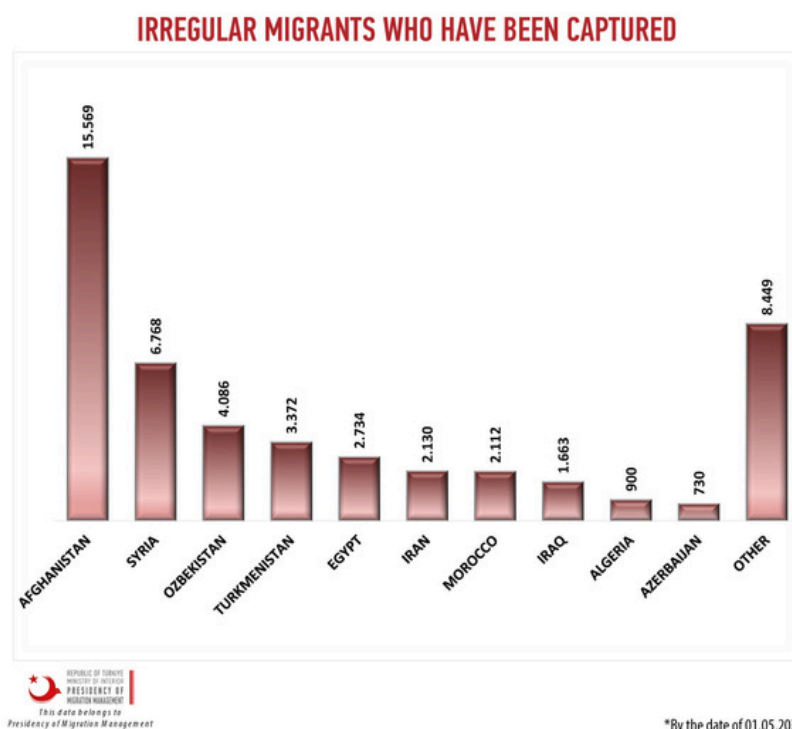


Table 1: Statistics from the Directorate of Migration Management show the number of “irregular migrants” detained so far in 2025. Source: Directorate of Migration Management

### Turkish government announces acceleration in “voluntary” returns to Syria, new report looks at concerns among Syrians around returns

In a post on Twitter/X, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that between December 9th, 2024 and April 13th, 2025, 175,512 Syrians, representing a total of 33,730 families, returned to Syria “voluntarily, safely, dignifiedly and regularly”. Additionally, he said that the total number of people who had returned to Syria since 2017 had reached 915,515.



### » GÜNLÜK GÖNÜLLÜ GERİ DÖNÜŞLER



9 Aralık 2024 - 13 Nisan 2025  
Tarihleri Arasında

**175.512** **33.730**  
Aile

#### Gönüllü Geri Dönüş Kapsamında Çıkış Yapılan Sınır Kapıları

Hatay/Cilvegözü  
**87.867**  
Gaziantep/Karkamış  
**7.127**

Kilis/Öncüpınar  
**63.532**  
Hatay/Zeytindalı  
**5.410**

Hatay/Yayladağı  
**10.151**  
Şanlıurfa/Akçakale  
**1.425**



İÇİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI

3

A graphic sharing the total number of individuals and families returned to Syria since December 2024. The graphic also displays the numbers for each particular border crossing. Source: [Directorate of Migration Management](#)

Meanwhile, the Izmir-based organization Mülteci Der has published a new report addressing the subject of the repatriation of refugees from Turkey to Syria. The report, "Rebuilding Lives, Redefining Home", addresses the subject of the repatriation of refugees from Turkey to Syria. Relying on testimony gathered from Syrian refugees in Izmir in December 2024 and January 2025, with a particular focus on women and children, it provides an overview of the key worries, challenges, and obstacles many Syrians are considering.

The report conveys the complexity of the issue, which triggered overlapping concerns and conflicting emotions among participants, different between genders and generations. The main themes raised by participants in the discussions centered around security, economic challenges, social changes, and the prospect of leaving behind relatively established lives in Turkey.

Individuals cited safety and security in Syria as among their foremost concerns, mentioning the widespread presence of armed groups and minefields. Kidnap and ransom remains a significant danger for returning refugees in particular, due to the



widely held belief they are wealthy or have ties to opposition forces. Members of religious and ethnic minorities were also apprehensive about return due to what they see as a potential for othering and ostracization.

Many participants were also unconvinced that they could provide economically for themselves and their families if they returned to Syria. With inflation and few opportunities for long-term employment and no support available to stimulate commerce, participants questioned how they would be able to earn a substantial income. Participants identified other concerns, including the costs associated with securing accommodation upon return, from rent to reconstruction materials. Indeed, even regaining possession of one's own home from people who remained in Syria was highlighted as being especially problematic, with some citing concerns about proving ownership.

Given the relative freedoms women have enjoyed in Turkey, many did not welcome the prospect of returning to a more precarious economic and security situation where equality, personal choice, and social mobility are not available to the same extent. As one respondent said: "Here in Turkey, I work, I make my own money. I don't want to go back to being dependent on my husband for everything,"

Syrians' lived experiences in Turkey also weighed heavily into considerations about returning, with many people hesitant to disrupt their lives. After years of living in Turkey, the majority of participants had learned Turkish, found employment and settled into their new lives, especially in the case of children.

But for many participants, the presence of family connections in Syria is a vital factor that had the potential to shift their opinions, while also offering access to accurate information about the realities on the ground.

In Turkey, the debate is taking place in a setting that has seen increasing agitation and calls for Syrians to return or be deported. The situation has prompted some participants to consider seeking Turkish citizenship or joining family members in Europe or further afield. Yet the overwhelming majority favoured a cautious approach depending on how the security, economic, and social situation in Syria develops over the coming months.

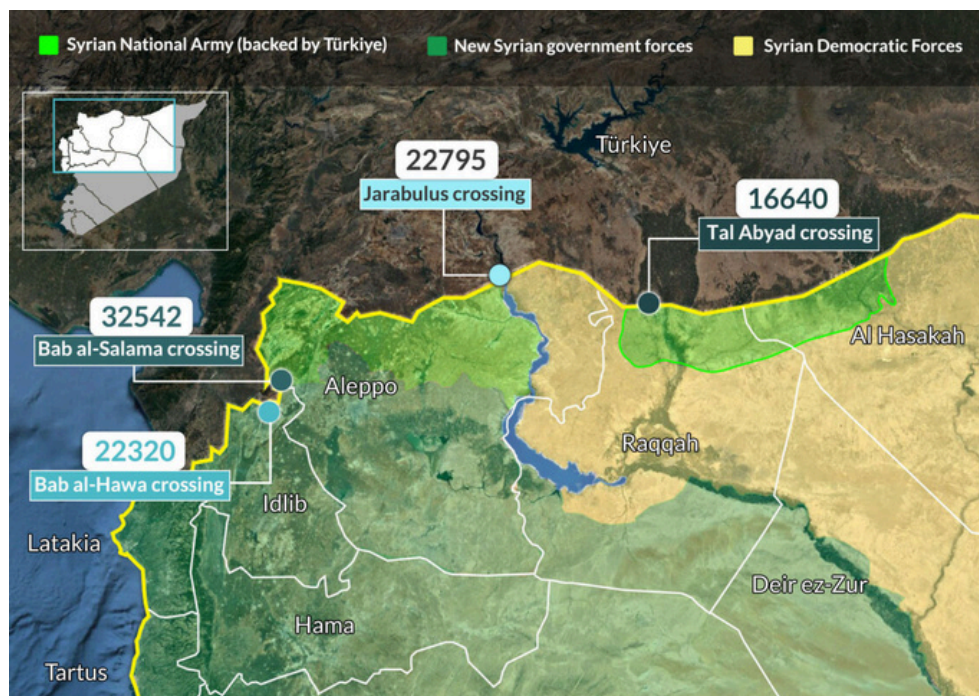




### New report highlights brutal conditions in Turkish removal centers and forced returns to Syria

The organization Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) has published a [new report](#) on deportation and on the condition of Syrian nationals in removal centers and other spaces of detention in Turkey. The report relies on 19 interviews with Syrian people previously detained in removal centers in Turkey conducted between July and October 2024. Additionally, the report relies on media investigations, human rights organizations' reports, and social media material. Note that links have been added to this report summary to further illustrate reported incidents of violence in Turkey's removal centers and do not all correspond to the specific incidents reported by STJ.

The report states that forced deportations of Syrians – including of individuals holding the “temporary protection” status – have increased since 2018, reaching 85,202 in 2024. Individuals are deported from Turkey to Syria through four border crossings: Tal Abyad, Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salama, and Jarabulus. Deportation often follows detention in one or more Turkey's 30-plus removal centres, or often in repurposed temporary accommodation centres. As many other testimonies and reports testify, apprehension and detention are often arbitrary.



A map showing the border crossings used for the deportation of Syrian refugees, along with the number of deportees during 2024. Source: [Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#).



According to STJ, based on the testimonies they recorded, the majority of people had been held in three main removal centers: Oğuzeli Removal Center, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa Removal Center, Şanlıurfa, and Tuzla Removal Center in Istanbul. Both Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa are located close to the Turkey–Syrian border, while Tuzla is on the eastern outskirts of Istanbul, and the Center is known for an exceptionally high turnover of people, with fast transfers occurring to other removal centers.

Living conditions in the Removal Centers are reportedly appalling, in terms of overcrowding, hygiene, and lack of healthcare. Moreover, detainees are often denied the right to communicate with families and legal representatives. While recounting episodes of violence that have happened all around the country, the last part of the report offers a more detailed picture of the conditions of these three main Removal Centers. More specifically, it highlights that the facilities are inadequate to host such a high number of people, harming the dignity of detainees together with their mental and physical wellbeing.

In 2024, STJ collected evidence of five deaths among Syrian detainees in removal centers and police stations, including that of one minor. Reported causes of death are: beating by the police, lack of adequate healthcare (notably in the presence of pre-existing health conditions), inadequate and insufficient food, and lack of hygiene. In all of these cases, they report a lack of clarity on the part of the authorities around the conditions of the deaths.

Moreover, the report collects several accounts of violence against detained individuals. Physical violence is often arbitrarily employed against the detainees through beating and even shooting, including as a means to force individuals to sign “voluntary return” papers or to sedate protests.

More specifically, the report collects two separate episodes of gunfire in Oğuzeli Removal Center. One of the interviewees, who was previously detained in Oğuzeli, reported that when he objected to the decision of deportation, he was beaten by the security guards. “Two other young Syrian men tried to support me by confronting the guards”, he said, “but the guards retaliated by shooting at their feet, injuring one of the detained young men”. On a separate occasion, gunfire was used by the military personnel in Oğuzeli Removal Center in order to disperse detainees protesting against the lack of clear water. No direct harm was reported to have been caused by the shooting on this occasion.



Poor hygiene conditions increase the incidence and the spreading of infectious diseases. Healthcare is often denied when requested, or only provided after long waiting times, its quality often scarce. Detainees are provided with limited amounts of food, and the quality of the meals is bad or even toxic. Psychological pressure is exerted towards the detainees in multiple ways, often as a way to lead them to sign return papers. Indeed, human rights lawyers that BVMN has spoken to have underlined that they see psychological abuse as the main means in at least some removal centers through which detainees are pressured to sign for voluntary returns, depending on levels of surveillance and external pressure for accountability.

STJ reports that the European Union logo has been observed to be printed on many objects inside the Removal Centres (furniture, bed sheets etc.), underlining the EU complicity and direct economic involvement in Turkey's detention and deportation infrastructure.

The Turkish government has repeatedly denied allegations of unlawful deportations to Syria and of mistreatment in Removal Centers. Nevertheless, this report by STJ constitutes one of a growing archive of testimonies highlighting the precarity of Syrians living in Turkey, the violence of Turkey's migration practices, and their inseparability from Fortress Europe.

### **Interior minister outlined Turkey's security strategies on "irregular" migration**

In a press briefing, Yerlikaya provided further details on Turkey's ongoing campaign against so-called irregular migration. Yerlikaya framed enhanced border control as one pillar of the state's migration strategy, highlighting major investments into national border security. Those include the construction of a 1,272 km security wall, 1,636 km of patrol roads, 1,058 km of lighting infrastructure, and 198 watchtowers. Yerlikaya attributed a 60% decrease in border crossings to the measures: 104,000 people were reportedly apprehended at the border in 2024, compared to 223,000 the previous year.

Yerlikaya confirmed that 270 mobile migration control unit vehicles are currently deployed across Turkey's 81 provinces. Since July 2023, identity checks by these units have reportedly processed more than 3.7 million foreign nationals. Of those, 145,435 individuals were identified as "irregular migrants", and had deportation procedures initiated against them. Yerlikaya also claimed Turkey is now the world leader in deportations, with higher deportation figures than the entire European Union.



### **Syrian refugee faces extradition from Turkey to Saudi Arabia**

Turkish authorities arrested Syrian national Mohammed Alkayalı in December 2024, following an Interpol Red Notice issued by Saudi Arabia. Alkayalı, who according to Amnesty International, has been living in Turkey under temporary protection since 2013, is reportedly accused of “forgery of seal” by Saudi authorities. Reports indicate Saudi Arabia has provided no official indictment or court documents for the charge, and Alkayalı has denied the accusation.

Alkayalı left Saudi Arabia in 2013 after reportedly facing online harassment over his criticism of the kingdom’s treatment of Syrian refugees. He is not a Saudi citizen. While applying for Turkish citizenship in 2018, he was informed of the red notice. According to Amnesty International, Interpol confirmed the notice’s existence in 2023. Alkayalı has since filed a legal objection against the notice, but a final decision for the objection is still pending.

Though the notice was in effect since 2016, Turkish authorities did not act on it for almost nine years. Alkayalı’s recent arrest and detention raised concerns among rights groups, including Amnesty International, which warns that his potential extradition to Saudi Arabia would expose him to serious risk of torture, arbitrary detention, unfair trial, and other abuses.

Alkayalı is currently detained in the Pehlivan köy Removal Center in Kırklareli province. His wife, who resides in Istanbul, has been unable to visit him in detention due to regional travel restrictions imposed on refugees in Turkey. Reportedly, her applications for special travel permission have been denied three times.

Amnesty International has called on Turkish authorities to immediately halt the extradition process and release Alkayalı due to Saudi Arabia’s record of prosecuting individuals for using their right to freedom of expression. Amnesty has documented 86 such cases since 2013, noting the real number is likely much higher.

### **Syrian woman and her four children go missing after arbitrary apprehension and transfer between detention centers**

News appeared on April 18th about a Syrian woman who was declared missing along with her four children, one of whom is a one-month old baby, after Turkish authorities detained the family and transferred them to a removal center, according to her lawyer. The elder children are two, four and five years old.



According to statements from Attorney Mehmet Ali Karakavuk from the İzmir branch of the Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD), the woman, identified as H.S., had at one point received a medical document identifying her as “stateless” from a Turkish health institution operating in Syria. Later, H.S. was issued a temporary identification paper and was living in İzmir with her husband and three older children after coming to Turkey three years ago.

It is understood that in March, H.S. was admitted to hospital in İzmir to give birth, though her newborn was later transferred to another facility and kept under an incubator for twenty five days due to its critical condition. On the day the baby was supposed to be discharged, hospital staff reportedly contacted the police, resulting in the woman and her children being apprehended then sent to the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center. Karakavuk said that during their stay at the Center, the children suffered serious allergic reactions to a bedbug infestation, photographs of which he shared.

Karakavuk said he was not directly notified of the detention at İzmir Harmandalı, despite having legal power of attorney for H.S. He confirmed he filed legal objections to her detention based on the baby’s urgent medical needs, which a court rejected, claiming no formal detention order had ever been issued. According to Karakavuk, the family was ultimately transferred to Harran Temporary Accommodation Center in Şanlıurfa, though again he was not notified. He learned that they had been sent to Şanlıurfa, and organised for a lawyer colleague to check for her at Şanlıurfa Removal Center, where she was not found. At this point it was speculated that they were at Harran Temporary Accommodation Center. The Harran Temporary Accommodation Center is located near the Turkish-Syrian border, and is known as a last stop for Syrian detainees before ultimately being deported to Syria. At this point, urgent statements about the missing woman and children were circulated more widely.

On April 22nd, it was announced that H.S. and the children had been located in Harran Temporary Accommodation Center and were to be released. On the same day, DEM Party Istanbul MP Özgül Saki urged authorities to clarify the situation. Saki directed questions to Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, asking for information about the family’s legal status, the medical status of H.S.’s youngest child, the reason for their transfer to another center, as well as concerns about the general conditions in the Harmandalı Removal Center.

In a statement following the news that the family had been located, Karakavuk emphasised that it was public pressure which made the difference in locating the family. He admonished the authorities for the entire affair, stating that such situations



were also becoming more widespread. He also reminded the public of the role of the EU in funding Turkey's removal centers, and that the migration administration system is supposed to follow rules and standards that are blatantly not applied.



The hands of one of the children affected by severe bedbug infestations following their detention in Izmir Harmandalı Removal Centre. Source: [Gazete Yenigün](#)

### **New report on Izmir Removal Center shows rights violations continue**

Mülteci Der (Association of Solidarity with Refugees) has also released a [new report](#) based on visits to the Izmir Harmandalı Removal Centre between January and March 2025. It highlights serious and systematic human rights violations in Turkey's administrative detention facilities.

The report found that severe overcrowding remains an ongoing issue, forcing individuals to sleep on the floor or sleep in shifts in the available beds. Access to healthcare is extremely inadequate; people with chronic illnesses, visible injuries, and psychological distress are not receiving treatment, while women, children, and people with disabilities or serious illnesses, among others, are particularly vulnerable. Legal and procedural safeguards are weak or completely absent; many detainees receive documents in languages they do not understand, are denied translation services, or are forced to sign "voluntary return" forms without legal representation. The deteriorating mental health crisis among detainees, combined with the fear of forced



return and indefinite detention without access to justice or information, reveals a system characterised by the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms, a lack of transparency, and neglect.

The report emphasises that comprehensive structural reforms are urgently needed to bring Turkey's detention system into line with its national and international legal obligations. It stresses that independent monitoring, legal advocacy and accountability mechanisms must be employed to ensure those standards are met.

### **Final hearing in Nourtani case rules for workplace negligence citing no clear evidence of intentional killing**

The case concerning the death of Vezir Mohammad Nourtani was heard before the Zonguldak 1st High Criminal Court, with the final hearing held on April 11th, 2025. The case, which goes back to Nourtani's death in November 2023, had its first hearing in May 2024, and has been followed in BVMN Monthly Reports since [June 2024](#). In the final hearing, the [court sentenced](#) Hakan Körnüş and Enver Gideroğlu, the owners of the illegal mine, to five years and eight months' imprisonment each for causing death by conscious negligence. Ahmet Aydın, who was apprehended while attempting to burn Nourtani's body, was convicted of tampering with evidence and sentenced to four years and six months in prison.

Three other defendants were given shorter sentences for the same offence or other charges of evidence tampering. The court ordered the [continued detention](#) of Körnüş, Gideroğlu, and Aydın, whereas the remaining defendants were released under judicial control measures, including a ban on leaving the country.

Following the verdict, and reflecting on the abundance of evidence implicating the accused, complainant counsel Kerim Bahadır Şeker [stated](#), "We no longer have any doubt that Nourtani being burned alive was murder." The case was mired by procedural irregularities, while the final 77-page reasoned judgment was produced within just two days. According to Şeker, the Zonguldak Chief Public Prosecutor's Office found the decision unlawful and has decided to file an appeal. Additionally, procedural violations — such as the exclusion of statements from official transcripts and the denial of audio and video recording requests — would be raised both before the Court of Cassation and the European Court of Human Rights.

Şeker and the Nourtani family also declared that they would pursue the outcome of their criminal complaint and administrative petition against the judicial panel.



Commentators have noted that the Nourtani case could have set a precedent in terms of defending the rights of migrant workers in Turkey from the extremes of exploitation and indeed defending their right to life.



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Vezir Mohammad Nourtani. Source: [T24](#)





### Evictions of informal living sites

#### **Calais**

In April, BVMN member organization Human Rights Observers (HRO) witnessed at least 64 evictions of 8 different informal living sites where people on the move were surviving around Calais. HRO counted at least 427 people evicted, and 11 people arbitrarily arrested by the Border Police during eviction operations. At least 105 tents were taken by the private company appointed by the Prefecture, 6 of them were emptied before being seized, the rest of the belongings left on site. This demonstrates a clear will to deter movement and strip people of their only possible shelter, rather than an attempt to clean the site. Moreover, at least 27 tarps, used to shelter from the rain, and 16 mattresses were seized as well. HRO also witnessed the seizing of at least 4 lifejackets, thus endangering the lives of people trying to cross the Channel even more.

It's important to note that these figures are an absolute minimum, as HRO teams are often kept at a distance and prevented from observing the ongoing police operation: on at least 10 occasions, observation was completely obstructed. Police forces try to intimidate observers on a daily basis. On at least one occasion in April, observers were filmed without warning (in violation of French law). The police also checked their IDs at least two times. But intimidation is not just about being filmed or checked. It can be psychological or even physical. On April 4th, 7th and 25th, the police were particularly intimidating, saying things like *"you're not doing anything, you're useless"*, *"the rule of law doesn't apply to us"* or *"you're so cute"*. On April 25th, a member of HRO was even insulted by an employee of the private cleaning company appointed by the Prefecture.

#### **Dunkirk**

Meanwhile, in the Dunkirk area, HRO documented at least six evictions affecting four informal living sites. Additionally, during a major police operation, authorities dismantled at least ten informal shops located near these sites. Based on our observations, 471 people were evicted in April, at least 4 individuals were arrested by the Border Police, at least 99 tents were seized and all the living sites being evicted were destroyed using construction machinery and chainsaws.

In last month's report, we detailed how these so-called *"sheltering operations"* are part of the broader *"zero fixation points"* policy enforced by the French and British governments at the border. In April, we want to focus on another facet of this policy: the dismantling of the informal shops surrounding the living sites. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, the wooden



huts used by the shopkeepers to store and sell their goods (food, beverages, chargers, cigarettes, etc.) were destroyed by a mechanical digger. More than 11 police cars and 12 anti-riot police vans were present to deter anybody entering the zone. The authorities point to the fact that these shops were most likely controlled by smugglers' networks; by dismantling those shops, they would be fighting against so-called illegal immigration and violent smugglers' networks. But it's essential to highlight that the latter exists only because repression is the only alternative proposed by the State. By failing to offer safe and legal transit routes and institutional solutions for the dignified reception of people on the move, the government is responsible for the violence that permeates life in the camps of Loon-Plage and Grande-Synthe.

On the same day, a public meeting concerning the *"migration issue"* was held at the suggestion of the mayor of Loon-Plage. During this town hall, the inhabitants of the town expressed their concerns and fears to the mayor and two high-ranking officials from the State. The representatives of the State's only response was an even more repressive policy: not only to fight against smuggler's networks but to also combat settlement of people on the move in the area. According to the sub-prefect of Dunkirk:

*"We are making the area inhospitable for them, so that they go elsewhere [...] Every week, we carry out operations in the camps so that they are destabilized, don't get bigger, get smaller and stop settling."*

The next day, the informal shops were already back in the same place. Nothing had changed, they were just surrounded by a new layer of rubbish.

As in Calais, numbers provided by HRO are a bare minimum, as we are often kept at a very long distance and prevented from observing the ongoing police operation. This is especially the case in Dunkirk where living sites are spread out over tiny forests, fields and industrial areas. HRO's volunteers are also often subject to intimidation from the police. For instance, members of HRO have seen their identity checked 3 times. In April, HRO team members also received fines for being parked in an inappropriate place. To observe the police operation, they had to park near the leaving site. The police often use all means possible to give HRO fines.



All those intimidations are repeated and systematic. They are mainly intended to hinder the work of organizations documenting and observing police operations as other organizations present on or around the living sites during the evictions are usually ignored by the police.

### Police violence outside of evictions

In April, HRO recorded at least six people arrested in Calais, outside of evictions. Most of those happened at the train station. People are ID-checked and then taken away by the border police. Most of our data comes from testimonies gathered after the fact. For instance, on April 7th, after an eviction operation, HRO received information that the police were present on another living site. When HRO arrived, the residents told the observers that there were

*"a lot of police with dogs [that] didn't let us go. They chased us, they took a Libyan man who was hurt in the leg".*

One particularly angry person told HRO about the police who had come earlier:

*"They beat a family, They beat everyone, They beat the woman, They gassed us. We don't understand, tell me why? You and I are the same, I don't understand why this happens!"*

On the same day, the police arrested 2 members of HRO while they were trying to document a police operation. The police used the fact that the observers had to cross railway tracks, a restricted area belonging to the national railway company, to take them into custody. After 17 hours in detention, the two volunteers were finally released. Each will be summoned to court in September to face charges of trespassing on private land, which could result in fines or imprisonment.



## **Updates from the French-Italian border**

The French-Italian border between Menton and Ventimiglia crosses one of the main migration routes leading out of Italy, where inadequate housing and work conditions for people on the move are leading to structural homelessness and precariousness. The sea-side city of Ventimiglia is a needle eye for people in transit on this route. It is frequently the continuation of a passage along the Balkan routes or the passage across the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly to Northern France, expulsions of informal tent camps under bridges and next to car parks occur regularly. Moreover, other intimidation and deterrence practices are used at the living sites. For example, on the night of April 5th, Italian police and military parked numerous vehicles close to the campsite with their headlights directed on the tents, making it impossible for the residents to sleep there. Police and military are also constantly present at the train station where the access to trains leaving in the direction of France, as well as the identities of passengers, is frequently controlled.

The dangerous mountain paths between Italy and France (and increasingly also public roads) are patrolled by drones and helicopters on the French side. Soldiers of Opération Sentinelle, an ongoing French military operation, patrol the border crossings and mountain paths in jeeps. People apprehended in such controls get transferred to the French border police station in Menton. Here, people are detained in two cells in the basement, or in a metal container in the case of unaccompanied minors, usually with no access to translation. When people are pushed back – most often without receiving any type of documentation of the process –, they are made to walk up the steep mountain road into Italy. From there, it is a 10 kilometres walk to the city of Ventimiglia. A bus is still operating a few times a day and often refuses to take people who can neither show nor buy a ticket. Despite explicit legislation prohibiting it, minors are still regularly pushed back from France to Italy, for example on April 14th and 28th.

Furthermore, controls of public transport by the PAF (Police aux Frontières) and arrests of people on the move also take place frequently in the cities of Sospel and Breil-sur-Roya, located in the French Roya Valley bordering Italy. These small cities constitute a traffic knot that is impossible to avoid when crossing the border north of the sea side.

Border controls of the safe passages from Italy to France continue to force people to attempt passage in life-threatening conditions (such as walking along rail tracks or the highway, climbing across steep cliffs and crossing in the sea) leading to deaths at this border.



### **Increase of expulsion papers from Italy handed out after detention**

In the past few weeks, there has been a reported increase in the amount of expulsion papers given by Italian authorities to people on the move after they are pushed back by French police. People who receive such papers are still being allowed to take the road leading back to Ventimiglia, from the border station. However, the documents impose a maximum period of seven days to leave Italy and the Schengen zone as a whole.

Moreover, this month unmarked police vehicles carrying PAF police officers (and sometimes military staff) have continued to be present in Italian territory, driving and patrolling the streets in the border zone in Italy, frequently in the direction of Ventimiglia.



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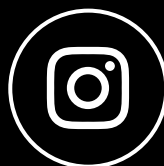
## **Network structure and contact**

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](mailto:mail@borderviolence.eu).



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