

MONTHLY REPORT | SEPTEMBER 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.

Informal shop destruction by authorities
at living site in Calais, April 2025.
Source: @holzer.leonard



Border Violence
Monitoring Network

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Methodology and Terminology

REPORTING NETWORK

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

METHODOLOGY

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

TERMINOLOGY

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

ABBREVIATIONS

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

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

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Executive summary

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

This month, we look at the tragic aftermath of the fire in Obrenovac camp, described in the August Monthly Report, which leaves a woman dead and most questions surrounding the incident unanswered. We share testimonies recounting violent pushbacks by the Serbian police to North Macedonia, a reality reported by many people throughout the years. Most recent testimonies describe a systematic practice occurring not only at the country's borders, but also perpetrated against people apprehended in cities farther away, such as Belgrade.

Similarly, Croatian authorities continue to engage in regular human rights violations at the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the Interior Minister of the country praises them for their "results". Thus, pushbacks remain a constant reported by people on the move, including practices as dangerous and violent as extreme beatings resulting in severe injuries or forcing people to cross rivers chest-deep. Meanwhile, the transition towards the change in management of reception and asylum facilities from IOM to Bosnian local authorities continues, amidst EU externalisation pressures on the Balkan country. This ongoing change in management, however, is yet to bring adequate protection for people on the move in the facilities meant to provide safety, as reports on the lack of proper access to healthcare (and other basic services) in TRCs continue to arise.

In Greece, we stand witness to the start of the implementation of the new draconian migration law passed this month which, among several other changes, extends the lengths of detention and grounds for prosecution of people on the move, making voluntary departure the only alternative to imprisonment, in many cases. Before the asylum ban against people coming via Crete and Gavdos from North Africa comes to an end, an increase in arrivals to these islands has been reported, just as news emerges that exemptions to the ban have been secretly and inconsistently implemented for weeks for certain groups of people and nationalities. Meanwhile, on Samos, people keep reporting phone confiscations upon arrival at the CCAC, as well as arbitrary detentions on their scheduled transfer dates, regardless of the time of the travel. Near Lesbos, several incidents at sea resulting from the lack of safe passage and accountability leave at least five people on the move dead and others injured. As shown (again) by this month's incidents in the Aegean, those who do make it to the islands are likely to face a policy of criminalisation of movement which leads to systematic prosecutions for illegalised entry and facilitation.



Executive summary

The normalisation of the criminalisation of movement is at the foundation of the European migration regime, informing the securitisation narratives used to legitimise further violence and surveillance. In the past several years, we have witnessed the extension of this policy of criminalisation to actors standing in solidarity with people on the move, in the form of judicial charges, harassment and intimidation, among other actions. In this report, we recount the final acquittal of six activists accused of facilitation in Poland. In this important case, the judge questioned whether a person can be said to be in violation of the law by staying in Poland irregularly, when they are not allowed to submit their asylum application, thus recognising the impossible situation created by the asylum ban. Experiences shared by organisations' teams in Serbia and France also shed light on the ways in which police intimidation systematically hinders monitoring and support work, thus contributing to the culture of impunity.

Also in France, we report on the large-scale eviction of one of the biggest and most visible informal settlements in Calais, the Orange Squat, and the extremely insufficient shelter alternative offered by the state. Furthermore, the start of the implementation of the so-called "One-In-One-Out" deal between the UK and France, in the context of rising fascism and anti-migrant sentiment in Britain, promises to normalise further violations against people on the move.

Lastly, in Turkey, the government continues to push an extremely positive and flattering narrative of what they refer to as their "fight" against "irregular migration", praising the increase in deportations from the country, as well as the conditions of the facilities used to detain people on the move, which are described as compliant with the rule of law, fundamental rights, and the country's "civilizational values." This is in spite of multiple responses from rights organisations and increasingly abundant evidence of the contrary. Meanwhile, a new protocol between the Presidency of Migration Management and the Union of Turkish Bar Associations has been heavily criticised for its potential to further restrict the rights of detainees and their attorneys in Removal Centres.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



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Serbian police carrying out violent pushbacks to North Macedonia

In September, Collective Aid's team in Serbia met an increasing number of people travelling through North Macedonia, many of whom reported on violence and pushbacks conducted by Serbian police.

The team spoke to a 19 year-old man from Afghanistan, who reported being pushed back from Serbia to North Macedonia four times. During the latest pushback, he and four other men were crossing the border with Serbia. He mentioned being spotted by drones on the Serbian side of the border. Afterwards, men that the respondent identified as police, arrived. The police took the group in their cars and brought them to the police station, where they were forced to give their fingerprints. The respondent reported that the police beat the group with batons everywhere on their body. In the group was a 45 year-old man, and the respondent stated:

"We are young and strong, but he is old and cannot take it. But they do not care, they hurt him so much."

After being held at the police station, the group was pushed back to North Macedonia.

The respondent explained that during one of the attempts the transit group managed to cross the border and even reach Belgrade, but again, they were apprehended by the police and pushed back to North Macedonia. Thinking about his pushback experience from Belgrade to North Macedonia, he commented,

"There are so many camps in Serbia, why are they not sending us there?"



Injuries from police violence during a pushback from Serbia to North Macedonia; Credit: Collective Aid

Death in Obrenovac camp

In BMVN's [monthly report for August](#), Collective Aid wrote about [the fire in Obrenovac camp](#). This month, very tragic news about this event emerged. On September 22nd, the woman who was hospitalized with second degree burns due to the fire passed away, leaving behind her children and husband.

Still, no official explanation has been provided to shed light on what exactly happened the night of the fire. The investigation results have not been shared with the residents. However, we learned that the camp had just undergone renovations before the fire, which leaves behind questions on how this could have happened.

[BVMN's Shelter report](#) from July highlights the unsustainable living conditions in Serbia's camps and notes that this is not the first fatality to occur there, with four deaths reported in Sjenica Camp since December of last year. If you want to learn more about the fire and its devastating consequences read Collective Aid's [blog post](#).



Lack of access to food and water

Similar to what was reported in [BVMN's monthly report in August](#), Collective Aid's team in Serbia continues to witness lack of or even non-existent access to clean drinking water for those living in informal squats or 'jungles'. In addition, this month Collective Aid's team met a high number of people who had no access to proper food. Many cannot afford food or are afraid to encounter authorities if they move outside of the squats. It is very difficult to cook decent food in the 'jungle', so they rely on cookies, chocolate and similar products. The team regularly met people on the move stating they had not eaten for days.

Additionally, the team spoke to one person with an illness which requires him to keep a healthy diet, mostly consisting of fruit and vegetables. However, many people on the move often survive for weeks on nothing more than bread or other unhealthy food. Life on the move takes a severe toll on the body, people frequently live outdoors in unsanitary conditions, which increases their vulnerability to health issues.

Many people on the move choose not to stay in official camps. A key reason is the lack of accessible and reliable information regarding their ability to leave the camp and continue their journey after lodging an asylum claim. Most are unaware of their rights, as their primary source of information tends to be smugglers – an outcome of the European Union's closure of safe migration routes and the criminalisation of movement. Many are afraid to be returned to Serbia if they enter the asylum system there, so they decide to remain unregistered, thus living in extremely harsh conditions. Additionally, poor conditions in official camps as reported in the [Access to Shelter Monthly Report](#), including unsanitary environments, limited privacy, restricted freedom, and a general sense of insecurity, further discourage people from staying there. Hearing or witnessing deaths in the camps adds another layer of insecurity and trauma to staying in official camps.

Due to this, many people choose to sleep outside and they are already reporting very cold temperatures. It is crucial for the body to have energy to resist these conditions, however, that is rarely possible. People on the move usually wait in squatted living sites to get well again before being able to continue their journey – however, when the conditions are this poor, it is difficult to regain strength and for the body to heal. These conditions reflect a failure of responsible institutions to ensure minimum standards of health and nutrition for people on the move, leaving it only up to humanitarian organisations to fill this gap. It also reflects the general failure of states to provide protection and safeguarding.



Trash from processed food in an informal living site in Serbia; Credit: Collective Aid

Criminalisation of solidarity

In September, Collective Aid's team was forced to stop their services twice because of the police arriving during the distribution of non-food items to people on the move. In one of the occasions, two people receiving non-food items were forcefully set apart and arrested without a translator present. Furthermore, the team was held for almost two hours, and they were asked to give their personal information including non-work phone numbers, as one volunteer described:

"The officers demanded our phone numbers just "in case they needed more information for their report." They already had everything: our IDs, our organization papers, our patience. Still, they pushed. When we said we'd need to confirm with our organization first, their tone shifted instantly, colder, sharper, carrying that familiar threat and told us "we can take you to the station if you prefer". In the end, we gave them our numbers. Not because we wanted to, but because we wanted it to stop."

Collective Aid is legally registered for all the services they provide. Despite operating within the legal framework, the organisation, like many other humanitarian actors, faces increasing criminalisation and obstruction of its solidarity efforts with people on



the move. This attempts to silence solidarity actors and stop them from providing fundamental services like handing out clean drinking water, sleeping bags, warm clothes, hygiene supplies, etc.

"The police officers also tried to separate us. They took one volunteer away for questioning, then another. It felt like they were prepared for this kind of interaction, they have strategies to make us talk, to make us feel like we're doing something wrong, as if we're guilty of something. They try to make you uncomfortable, to make you feel insecure and unsettled. They want you to panic, to feel alone. They can even make you doubt your own actions. You always feel like you're crossing a line, even though there is no line, what you're doing is completely legal."

The contribution from Collective Aid's Serbian team to this monthly report is therefore limited, as it has been difficult to gather information and hear from people on the move while the team was forced to pause its activities and reassess the risks of criminalisation before returning to normal operations.



Arrivals and departures as recorded by IOM

In September 2025, [IOM](#) reported a fluctuating number of arrivals, with a total of 1,537 people, at the Temporary Reception Centres (TRCs) in BiH, with an overall upward trend. Meanwhile, IOM also reported fluctuating but ultimately decreasing departures (2,177 reported). However, these numbers do not take into account the people coming back to the TRCs from the Croatian border and, consequently, those departing again – for the second (possibly third and so on) time. Main countries of origin are Morocco, Afghanistan, Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Means of transportation in Bosnia are consistent: the majority of people on the move use buses, while the rest rely on taxis and only 10% on walking.

On pushbacks and border violence

The narrative around migration remains centered on numbers rather than on the human rights violations occurring at Europe's borders. [Frontex data](#) show a 21% decrease in irregularized entries into the EU during the first eight months of 2025, with the Western Balkan route reportedly down by 47%. The trend for 2025 has been [announced](#) as further decreasing by the Croatian Interior Minister Davor Božinović, who attributed this mainly to the 'great involvement of the Croatian police', praising the 'great results' of law enforcement agents. However, this narrative obscures the reality of persistent and systematic violence at the borders.

Testimonies of pushbacks and violence at the Croatian border continue to be frequent and constant by people on the move in the Bihać area, and beyond. In this regard, people reported systematic robberies and destruction of personal belongings, especially phones, and identification documents, such as passports. The destruction of identification documents is particularly significant, as it makes it more difficult for people on the move to prove that they are eligible for asylum – a right guaranteed under international and European law.

Intense physical violence is also common. People on the move often show inflicted wounds and injuries. Consequently (almost needless to say), people are more in need of medical attention, context to recover, new clothes and phones – implying also more money and access to the city.

The Collective Aid team met a man from Palestine who tried to cross to Croatia several times. He described being beaten so severely that his ribs were broken. He also had multiple wounds on his face, which he said resulted from police beatings. He also



reported the policemen wearing head torches so people on the move can't see their faces. He reported being beaten with batons, then driven to a river crossing and forced to wade chest-deep through two freezing rivers. He and his friend were located by a drone, which followed them until they were back in Bosnian territory to ensure they did not return to Croatia. He also mentioned that, while they were in the forest before being found by police, they could hear the shouts and cries of other people being beaten not far away.

Two Afghan men also described their pushback from Croatia as extremely violent. Both were beaten by Croatian police officers and one showed members of Collective Aid Sarajevo the result of the assault: he had a big gash on the top of his head, another smaller one to the left and a cut on his arm, as well as a wound on his ankle. His friend reported having been attacked by a dog during the pushback, showing to the Collective Aid team a gash on his ankle and indicating, through stabbing gestures, where he had been beaten.

Update on the conditions in the TRCs

Population in Lipa TRC

Officially registered arrivals in TRCs in the Una Sana Canton are rising from an average between 150/200 from late August and beginning of September to an average of 250 by the end of the month. Importantly, the numbers from Lipa camp do not reflect the amount of people on the move in the Bihać area as many of them also rely on private or informal accommodation in the city. Some people choose not to stay in Lipa TRC due to its distance from the city. Moreover, it also reflects the broader structural change of the Balkan route: smugglers on which people on the move are forced to rely have progressively expanded their "offer", meaning that they provide transportation, as well as accommodation.

In Lipa, people typically stay an average of two weeks after having spent a couple of weeks in Sarajevo. The population of the camp consists of new people arriving in the area as well as people coming back from the Croatian border after being pushed back.

Conditions in Lipa TRC

As summer ends, Lipa starts to register cold temperatures due to the altitude of the location. Lipa camp is situated at around 800 meters above sea level, it is 2 km away from the main road and 24 km from Bihać. As a consequence, people are more vulnerable to potential cuts of electricity and lack of winter clothes.



Medical assistance inside the camp seems inadequate in terms of quantity and quality. The two doctors employed by IOM come three times a week after completing their shifts at the public hospital. Their work in Lipa is an additional job, so they typically stay for only one to two hours. People on the move have reported that the doctors often do not show up, leaving residents with no access to primary health care.

Importantly, currently there's no pediatrician available, which is particularly concerning as families and unaccompanied minors have been relocated to the Lipa TRC. A pediatrician had previously been employed and available at Borići TRC. In the absence of systematic health screenings, all newly arrived minors, as well as single men, are placed in isolation as a preventive measure against the potential spread of diseases. While this practice might be necessary, the way it's conducted underscores significant structural gaps in medical monitoring and safe reception capacity.

As for the food, residents don't complain much but have reported poor quality, particularly noting that the packed dinners are dry and unappetizing. As an alternative, they can purchase food and drinks at the camp's market; however, prices there are inflated (and in euros), and the opening hours are entirely arbitrary. As a result, residents often self-organize to obtain necessary items from the city, sometimes with the paid assistance of taxi drivers.

The accommodation's main reported problem is the impossibility for the containers to be safely closed, meaning there's no security for people's personal belongings. Therefore, possible robberies are easier and more frequent. Other complaints regard weak WiFi and difficult access to the TRC.

Unaccompanied minors and families in Lipa TRC

The main update from Bihać regards the consequences of the closing of TRC Borići for families and unaccompanied minors. As a solution, they have simply been transferred to the Lipa TRC, previously only designated for single men. Here, two separated accommodation and eating areas have been established – one for single men, and one for unaccompanied minors and families. The estimated number of minors inside the TRC is on average 50 – a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 70, during the month of September. As for families, presumably around 20 people.

The unaccompanied minors are warned and kept away from single men's areas with rules and admonishments. However, the very nature of the structure simply prevents



any possibility to effectively monitor the interactions of individuals who, due to their age, are in more vulnerable conditions and therefore may be more exposed to higher risks. Unaccompanied minors also appear to have limited access to dedicated activities, services, and spaces due to the organization in charge of them (WVI) being under staffed. Save the Children, in collaboration with IOM, is currently involved only in transporting minors to school. However, it seems that only children from families attend school, likely due to their longer stays compared to unaccompanied children, who tend to transit more quickly. With regard to minors, other accommodation options are known to be available – such as IPSIA's Center for Minors in Bihać, however it's unclear whether they are being taken into account as alternatives to Lipa.

Conditions in Blažuj TRC

An increase in violence among people on the move in Blažuj camp was already reported in the [June BVMN report](#). This pattern remains evident. At the beginning of September, one man from Egypt recounted to Collective Aid Sarajevo a fight between Egyptians and Syrians that left many severely injured. He stated that such fights are common and reported that camp workers usually do nothing during these confrontations. The tensions inside the camp heighten feelings of unsafety among residents and may push more people to stay outside the camp, in informal settlements where they cannot access essential facilities. The TRC workers' inaction highlights institutional mismanagement and fosters a sense of abandonment among people on the move.

In addition to escalating tensions, an Afghan man reported to Collective Aid Sarajevo widespread alcohol and drug abuse inside and around the camp, which could be linked to the traumatic journeys that many of the residents endure. Dealing with trauma and psychological exhaustion requires a level of support that is currently lacking in the Blažuj TRC, further exposing deep institutional mismanagement. Mental health support should be urgently implemented, as the ongoing tensions and substance abuse point to worsening mental health conditions.

According to many respondents, adequate medical support in Blažuj TRC is severely lacking. Some reported that the doctors are 'really bad', while others said that they do not provide real help or send people away without proper evaluation. This exacerbates a pattern already identified in the [July report](#), which noted that medical assistance in TRCs is often limited to providing identical medication to people with different medical issues, without proper examination. For instance, a man from Bangladesh with a



serious leg injury, struggling to walk, was given six painkillers by TRC doctors, only a temporary relief and not appropriate treatment. Another man from Iran reported that someone he knew with a foot injury was treated inside the camp but received no real help.

Conditions in Ušivak TRC

Although, in general, Ušivak TRC's conditions are described as decent or very good by residents, a testimony from a Turkish woman in September highlighted severe shortages in provisions for children. She complained specifically about the lack of diapers and baby formula, both essential for maintaining children's health and hygiene.

"They told me I'll have to wait for the Aptamil. They said the baby might starve, so they told me to buy it myself."

The woman expressed her anxiety about running out of money, as she had to cover the costs of diapers and baby formula when the camp ran out of these essentials. People on the move generally lack the financial means to meet their basic needs and essential items such as diapers and baby formula, and rely on TRCs, and especially those which accommodate families and unaccompanied minors.

Infrastructure management transition phase

IOM and UNHCR are still assisting the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA) and the asylum sector of the Ministry of Security in the management of services and infrastructures used by people on the move. This process is colloquially called '*tranzicija*' or transition, signifying the change of responsibility from IOM to local authorities. This transition is being questioned because even if local authorities have generally built solid so-called management capacities and are prepared to take on management responsibilities, challenges persist in ensuring that living conditions in reception centers meet international standards and in achieving effective coordination among the various institutions involved.



Moreover, the transition can be considered as “guided” by the EU as they are fuelling funds to BiH through IOM and enhancing collaboration between FRONTEX and local authorities, with the broader aim of making BiH a trusted partner of the EU. In other words, the EU is reinforcing its external borders while simultaneously promising Bosnia and Herzegovina eventual inclusion in the Union.

Future closure of Blažuj Reception Centre

Calls for the closure of Blažuj Reception Centre intensified in June, following a surge in violent incidents around it. Temporarily out of political discussion, the issue reappeared in early September. Initially, the BiH Parliament House of Representatives Collegium failed to reach an agreement on relocating the TRC, leaving the decision to the Parliament. The proposal submitted to the Parliament tasked the Council of Ministers of BiH with urgently finding a new location for people hosted in Blažuj, although the proposed document did not specify where they would be relocated.

On September 12th, the Parliament adopted the initiative and instructed state institutions to close and relocate the Blažuj TRC. The exact date of when the closure will happen is unknown, but it will for sure happen. While the official justification for the closure is to relocate residents to a site meeting higher safety, technical and humanitarian standards, some politicians – such as Ilidža’s mayor Nermin Muzur – emphasized that improving the *‘tourist image and the development of Ilidža area’* was also a motivation. These statements reveal how decisions concerning the safety and well-being of people on the move are consistently subordinated to economic and profit-oriented considerations. The decision to close Blažuj in the future follows a broader pattern currently unfolding in Bosnia, evident in the closure of the Borići TRC. The closure of Borići TRC, the plan to close Blažuj coupled with the implementation of the New Migration Pact could suggest the beginning of a trend – the closure and possible conversion of TRCs into “return hubs”.

These recent developments definitely signal the institutional trend and will to cut of resources dedicated to what has been institutionally defined as migration management. The overall approach is clear: migration is approached as a security issue in need of management, and the direction is to restrain, obstruct and prevent it.

Overall, the way in which the transfer of unaccompanied minors and families to Lipa TRC has been handled evidently signals a lack of attention and protection of the people in the most vulnerable conditions resulting in further *vulnerabilization*.



Legal and policy developments

As covered in the previous [BVMN Monthly Report](#), on September 3rd 2025, Greece passed [Law 5226/2025](#), tightening the legal framework for migration. The law introduced the criminalisation of irregular stay, increased prison sentences and fines, broadened grounds for detention, and reduced deadlines for voluntary departure from 25 to 14 days and for the extensions from 120 days to 60 days. Entry bans were described as mandatory for security, public order, or public health concerns, with durations increased from five to ten years and possible extensions to fifteen years. Penalties for irregular entry or re-entry were also raised, while the previous seven year undocumented stay provision granting residence permits was abolished. Subsequent asylum applications are now subject to stricter scrutiny, and the law authorizes the use of Artificial Intelligence in migration and asylum procedures.

Since September 8th, several individuals who attempted to regularize their status were arrested in Lesbos. Courts in Mytilene imposed one-year sentences, accepting mitigating circumstances. At the moment, voluntary departure remains the only alternative to imprisonment. Those sentenced are either transferred to detention centers on the mainland or released with a 14-day order to leave, after which they risk re-detention if they remain. Similar cases were reported in Rhodes, where sentences were suspended on the condition of voluntary return.

Detention, returns, and protection gaps

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) [has blocked the Greek government](#) from deporting four Eritrean people held at the Amygdaleza detention center since mid-July, until they are granted access to asylum procedures. The asylum-seekers, represented by the organization Refugee Support Aegean, had submitted asylum requests that were not recorded by Greek authorities due to the three-month suspension of asylum access. The ECHR's interim measures provide critical protection until their asylum claims are properly registered and examined. Similar measures were previously issued for eight Sudanese asylum-seekers in August. Protection actors have highlighted ongoing irregular returns, procedural violations, delayed vulnerability assessments, and service gaps, including those related to gender-based violence, child protection, and medical care.

Concerns were also raised about the circulation of false information regarding possible penalties under the new law. Authorities denied distributing such information, but there's a need for official clarification of procedures. Legal actors have also requested greater visibility within the camp.



Updates from the islands

Increased arrivals to Crete and Gavdos amid news of exemptions from the asylum ban

September was the last full month during which Greece applied the 3-month ban on asylum applications for persons arriving to Greece via Crete and Gavdos from North Africa, instead placing them into immediate detention pending return. While the number of arrivals to the islands decreased in the weeks after the ban was instituted, it increased again in September. Toward the end of the month, it was also revealed that some groups of people had been formally excluded from the application of the ban.

Increased arrivals

In July, when the ban was instituted, Crete and Gavdos faced severe capacity constraints, housing new arrivals under inadequate conditions in informal spaces, such as buildings in the ports of Heraklion and Rethymnon or the former Agia Exhibition Centre in Chania. Despite these difficulties and several requests from the authorities on Crete and Gavdos, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum did not take any action to structurally increase the islands' temporary accommodation capacity. Persons awaiting transfer to the mainland have thus remained in overcrowded and makeshift facilities, receiving assistance from local authorities unequipped to provide them with an appropriate level of support. Some were held in these conditions for over a month without receiving information on their situation or the procedures they would eventually have to go through.

According to the Minister of Migration Thanos Plevris, more than 1000 people arrived on the islands during the month of September. 1,200 people were crammed into the former Agia Exhibition Centre in Chania - which, according to the Deputy Mayor of Social Policy of the Municipality of Chania, has a maximum capacity of 400. Health workers referred to the overall situation as a sanitary "bomb". They reported that serious health conditions had been identified, such as dermatological and respiratory problems, including scabies, staphylococcus and streptococcus. After their transfer to the mainland, people have continued to be held in poor conditions.

Considering the sustained nature of these challenges, and notwithstanding previous local opposition, Plevris has vowed that a new structure must be constructed on Crete, considering that almost one third of new arrivals to Greece in 2025 have been through the island.



Irregular application of the ban

In late September, it was also revealed that two internal circulars had been issued by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum excluding certain categories of people from the application of the ban. One, issued only a week after the ban was implemented, excluded people over 70 years old, women and single-parent families with minor children. The second, issued in September, excluded persons from Sudan and Eritrea, who were subsequently transferred to Malakasa and Serres to register their asylum applications. In addition to the circulars' unclear legal basis, the identification of these groups appears arbitrary. The first is not in line with Greek Law 4939/2022, which includes a much longer non-exhaustive list of groups considered as vulnerable (Article 1), and provides that vulnerable people shall be identified during registration and medical examination procedures (Article 62(2)). The second, while likely taken in compliance with two ECtHR orders referenced earlier, for interim measures preventing the deportation of a group of Sudanese and Eritrean nationals, could have included other nationalities with high recognition rates, such as Yemenis, but failed to do so.

Samos

Number of people in the Samos CCAC

At the start of the month of September there were 2,029 people held in the Samos Closed-Controlled Access Centre (CCAC). Following the summer large-scale transfer operation, the number of people in the facility went down to 1,673 by September 16th. At the end of the month, CCAC authorities slowly registered new arrivals. The number of people staying in the centre reached 1,875, amounting to a 90% occupancy rate based on the actual capacity of the Samos CCAC (2,042 people), which differs from the official capacity reported by CCAC authorities (3,664). I Have Rights (IHR) monitors the actual capacity of the CCAC based on the absence of a material improvement by the authorities to provide for the official capacity of 3,664 places. This month, IHR clients still reported overcrowded conditions during the isolation period and inconsistencies in the registration and asylum procedure.

Isolation period upon arrival to the facility

In September, one client of IHR reported a shortage of water to shower during the period of forced isolation. He also described that he had to share a room with 500 to 600 people and was forced to sleep on the floor due to a lack of beds provided by the authorities.

*Registration and asylum procedure*

This month, IHR case workers registered multiple phone confiscations upon arrival at the Samos CCAC. One client had their phone taken away for 2 hours, while another client stated that his phone was also taken for a 'few hours.' Meanwhile, the lack of systematic and individualised vulnerability assessments persisted. One client was not identified as a survivor of human trafficking but was identified as a survivor of torture, and another client was not identified as a survivor of torture.

In the context of the screening procedure, an IHR client also reported the following:

"I was not examined by a doctor, I have an eye issue, the CCAC told me there is no ophthalmologist, and I did not insist on finding a special doctor"

Under the EU Reception Conditions Directive 2013/33/EU and the recast directive, member states are obliged to inform applicants of the available reception conditions, including health care. Under Article 19 (Article 22 in the recast directive), member states shall provide necessary medical assistance to applicants who have special reception needs. However, access to timely and adequate medical assistance continues to remain a critical reception gap in the Samos CCAC, thus undermining the rights of people on the move to safeguards enshrined in the EU secondary law and the 1951 Convention.

The delays in the asylum procedures still constitute a matter of concern. Even with a lower occupancy rate at the facility, a client still reported that their asylum interview was postponed from September 30th to November 25th.

Moreover, in early September, two clients reported being arbitrarily detained before their scheduled transfers. One of IHR's clients received his transfer order on September 8th, 2025. He wanted to come to the office of the organisation on the day of his transfer to seek legal advice, but reported that he wasn't allowed to leave the CCAC in the morning. The second client described a similar experience: though his transfer was scheduled for 9pm, with the ferry leaving at around 1am, he wasn't allowed to leave



throughout the whole day, thus being arbitrarily detained for at least 12 hours. A third client described that although he had not been called for a transfer, he had been informed by people awaiting their transfers that they were not allowed to leave the facility from the moment they received their ticket until their departure time.

Kos

Criminalisation of people on the move

On September 21st, a group of 33 asylum-seekers were apprehended in Kos. Two men from Afghanistan were then singled-out, arrested, and accused of facilitating entry and endangering the lives of 31 people, while the rest of the group was taken to the Reception and Identification Centre on the island.

This type of criminalisation is extremely concerning, as individuals accused of such charges may be imprisoned for up to 10 years and prevented from obtaining asylum if found guilty by Greek courts, despite the Greek authorities' own recognition of Afghanistan as an unsafe country. This recognition is reflected in the very high approval rate of asylum claims from Afghan applicants, which according to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum's own reporting in 2025, is 99%. Moreover, multiple trial monitoring initiatives carried out by solidarity organisations in Greece have consistently shed light on the rights violations and lack of legal guarantees faced by people on the move during many of these proceedings.

From point of first arrival to processing center

According to the statistics from the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 156 new arrivals on the island have been documented during the month of September. This is higher than the number of arrivals in August (88), or all the previous months of 2025, but lower than in August, September and October 2024, a year ago. This increase was also reflected in the high number of new people registered in the community space run by the solidarity organisation Glocal Roots this month (475).

The population of asylum seekers and refugees on the island has fluctuated between about 720 and 830 residents in September (still according to the Ministry's statistics).



MONTH [2]	Arrivals in Kos (first point of entry)	Applications for international protection	New registrations in Glocal Roots' database	Total arrivals in the islands of the Eastern Aegean sea, Evros and Crete
Aug-24	529	948	509	6689
Sep-24	200	718	540	7998
Oct-24	361	1472	840	8166
Nov-24	120	880	693	7690
Dec-24	88	598	253	4781
Jan-25	56	492	544	3402
Feb-25	29	220	242	2608
Mar-25	154	290	277	2930
Apr-25	29	288	254	2234
May-25	107	292	275	3109
Jun-25	117	138	187	4792
Jul-25	93	521	295	6724
Aug-25	88	400	367	3547
Sep-25	156	September report not released yet	475	September report not released yet



There is a notable gap between the number of new arrivals reported by the Ministry and the figures for applications for international protection, as well as new registrations in our database. This discrepancy can be explained by the transfers to the Kos CCAC from other islands.

This gap underlines a shift in the island's role within broader migration dynamics: Kos is less and less the first point of arrival, and increasingly functions as a processing hub where asylum-seekers are transferred for the review of their application. This development also reflects a change in migration routes. Despite Kos' location only 4 kilometers away from the Turkish coast, few people are still choosing Kos as their first point of entry in Greece, reinforcing the idea that migration routes are shaped far less by geography than by deterrence and control measures, e.g. pushbacks, criminalisation. These measures continue to force people into longer, more dangerous routes, thus increasing the risks faced by people on the move while seeking safety.

Lesvos

Incidents at sea

On September 1st 2025, two foreign nationals, aged 26 and 28, were arrested in Lesvos under the charges of facilitating the illegal entry of 30 third-country nationals from Turkey. The 28-year-old allegedly operated the boat, departing on August 31st, while the 26-year-old was said to have guided navigation. All 30 people face charges for illegal entry.

On September 7th 2025, a boat carrying 35 people on the move collided with a Turkish Coast Guard vessel near Ayvalık, Turkey, resulting in five deaths, one person critically injured, and one missing. On September 10th 2025, a boat carrying 46 people, including 19 children, elderly individuals, and pregnant women, arrived in Lapsarna, northwestern Lesvos. The group was transferred to Mavrovouni CCAC for medical attention, food, and registration. At the end of the month, on September 30th 2025, a boat with 27 people, including 14 children, was reported in distress south of Lesvos. Despite direct alerts to the Greek Coast Guard, no rescue operation was carried out. The vessel drifted to Karaburun, Turkey, where masked personnel threatened passengers and confiscated their belongings. The Turkish Coast Guard subsequently reported rescuing 31 people, including 12 children, in that area.

[2] Source: Monthly statistical reports from the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum

*Situation in the Mavrovouni CCAC*

As of September 2nd 2025, the CCAC on Lesbos hosted 1,224 people, with Afghans comprising 45% and Syrians 29% of the population. New arrivals in September numbered approximately 222, coming mainly from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Sierra Leone, and Eritrea. Recognized refugees accounted for 39.5%, asylum-seekers for 59%, and rejected cases for 1.5%. Medical care in the facility continues to rely upon a single doctor, and information is recorded digitally in the Alkyoni system. Multiple protection and health actors have raised concerns regarding workload, feasibility, and delays in care. Though Médecins Sans Frontières have also regained access to the camp after following a lengthy application procedure, emergency access remains restricted. The organization's staff are now officially registered on the national list. Furthermore, access to the Municipality's Social Pharmacy remains limited due to EU funding constraints.

Moreover, while the organisation EuroRelief has started distributing heaters as part of winterization efforts, government-led accommodation arrangements remain unchanged. Regarding child protection, there are currently 25 children in the camp's safe area. Concerns persist about the age assessment procedure, as individuals refusing to undress during the medical check are reportedly classified as adults. Lastly, the need for clearer information on fingerprinting procedures upon arrival has been raised, as fingerprints are reportedly taken three separate times for different purposes.

Administrative and integration issues

At the administrative level, there continue to be issues related to the issuance and activation of AMKA or Social Security Numbers, following the amendment of Article 153 of Law 3655/2008 titled "Requirements and Procedure for the Issuance of AMKA." More precisely, while the amendment confirms that all individuals with legal residency and the right to work are entitled to an AMKA without needing a job contract, recognised refugees still face barriers in practice.



Since 2021, the Asylum Service has been legally responsible for issuing AMKA to recognised refugees, but this has never been implemented. EFKA (National Social Security Fund) briefly suspended AMKA issuance in early 2025 to pressure compliance, then resumed based on employer “solemn declarations” of intent to offer a contract. A newer provision extends AMKA access to all with legal residence rights, but it remains inactive pending a ministerial decision. Asylum seekers are still issued PAAYPA, a temporary number. Despite having full legal status, recognised refugees lack a direct, automatic AMKA process, limiting their access to employment, healthcare, and social integration.

Additionally, UNHCR has brought to the attention of the Asylum Service Governor that it is often unclear to persons granted subsidiary protection whether they are eligible for travel documents or should apply for national passports instead. In response, the Governor agreed to consider UNHCR’s suggestion to explicitly indicate in asylum decisions whether individuals are eligible for travel documents, particularly where the agent of persecution is the state or where no consular authorities exist or are unable to issue national passports. Legal actors continue to note delays and inconsistencies in issuing Travel Documents for Foreigners (TDVs) and in communication to beneficiaries. Access to free legal aid also remains limited, as it depends on court approval, leading to long waiting periods. KEM, supported by UNHCR, will provide training to Greek-speaking humanitarian workers on applying for free legal aid to help expedite access.

Judicial guardianship is required in cases where adults are unable to manage their own affairs or when a parent cannot assume guardianship of a minor, such as in situations involving severe mental health conditions. HIAS, RSA, KEM, and UNHCR are following up on the applicable procedures and exploring the possibility of RIS notifying the Prosecutor or the Court to initiate the process ex officio.



Presidency of Migration Management apprehension statistics

According to [statistics](#) published by the Presidency of Migration Management, 13,999 “irregular migrants” were apprehended in September 2025, with a total of 118,250 apprehensions so far this year up to October 9th. The top groups of nationals affected by apprehensions were: Afghans (32,104); Syrians (16,689); Uzbeks (10,184); Turkmen (8,113); Iranians (6,637); Moroccans (6,070). In 2025, authorities state that they have also apprehended 8,338 so-called “organizers”, or those accused of facilitating irregular transit.

Voluntary return process of Syrian nationals

On September 7th, the Minister of Interior Ali Yerlikaya issued a [statement](#) from the Presidency of Migration Management regarding the process of voluntary returns of “our Syrian brothers and sisters”. The text, together with [videos](#) shared on governmental social media pages, emphasizes the efficiency of the process accompanied by emotional accounts of the “sadness and joy” experienced by those leaving Turkey.

The statement gave the total number of returns since the fall of the Assad regime on December 8th 2024 as 474,018, reaching a total of 1,213,620 returns since 2016. According to the Presidency of Migration Management, returns to Syria are currently allowed through eight land border gates: Cilvegözü, Yayladağı and Zeytindalı border gates in Hatay, as well as the Öncüpınar and Çobanbey border gates in Kilis, the Akçakale and Ceylanpınar border gates in Şanlıurfa, and the Karkamış border gate in Gaziantep. Syrians can also fly from Turkey to Syria via the airports of Ankara and Istanbul.

A [UNHCR Syria Situation](#) report from October 10th, however, stated that, during the same period, ‘UNHCR has monitored the voluntary repatriation of over 365,000 Syrians’ – 109,018 less than the total figures shared by the Turkish government. The discrepancy between the authorities’ figures and those of UNHCR was not addressed in the UNHCR report. Notably, while the Presidency of Migration Management statement lists eight land-border crossing points, the UNHCR report states that returns occur through seven land-border crossings, which are listed. The Ceylanpınar crossing is omitted. It also states that UNHCR is present at six of these border crossings.



New protocol between Presidency of Migration Management and Union of Turkish Bar Associations

A new protocol has been signed between the Presidency of Migration Management and the Union of Turkish Bar Associations (TBB), with the stated aim of '[establishing] uniformity in the implementation of law on foreigners and to strengthen cooperation between the parties through the understanding of joint responsibility.'

The Izmir-based organisation Mülteci-Der (Refugee Solidarity Association) issued a statement citing several areas of major concern with the Protocol with regards to fundamental rights and statutory provisions. The main issues center on the ambivalence surrounding permission for TBB visits to Removal Centres (GGMs), restrictions on the fundamental right of access to justice, and problems regarding data collection and usage, as well as the approval of foreigner's statements. Mülteci-Der also underlined that since there is no hierarchical relationship between the TBB and the provincial Bar Associations – both are independent institutions – it should not be possible for the Presidency of Migration Management to impose this Protocol on individual Bar Associations. They warn that, however, in practice, it is highly likely that the Protocol will be imposed on individual Bar Associations and attorneys because the TBB has signed it.

The core points of the statement are shared below, along with some conclusions and recommendations:

1. Union of Turkish Bar Association (TBB) visits to Removal Centers

The Protocol states that the TBB may visit these centers subject to the permission of the Presidency of Migration Management. However, Article 95, paragraph 8 of Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection already stipulates that "institutions and organizations" may visit GGMs with the permission of the Presidency of Migration Management. This situation indicates that the relevant provision in the Protocol is merely a repetition of an authority and right already defined by law.

2. Restriction of attorney-client meetings to working hours

The Protocol states that meetings between foreigners and their attorneys shall be restricted to working hours. However, the attorney-client meeting is a fundamental right based on the right to defense, access to justice, and access to court, and the restriction of this right is only possible by a statutory provision. For example, similar restrictions can be regulated by law in certain situations (e.g., for convicts), as in the



Penal Execution Law. Restricting the right to meet with an attorney, which is a fundamental right, by an administrative protocol instead of a law, violates the procedural guarantees for the restriction of fundamental rights as defined in the Constitution.

3. Meeting Request Form and data security issues

The "Attorney Request for Meeting with Foreigner Form" attached to the Protocol brings with it some serious problems:

- **Purpose of Data Collection:** The purpose for which the data requested in the form will be used is not clearly stated. The absence of any provision regarding data protection raises concerns about the security and use of personal data.
- **Recording of Statements:** The section on the form regarding the foreigner's statement on whether they wish to meet with an attorney does not include the foreigner's own signature; it is approved only by the signatures of two personnel. This situation is open to abuse, where personnel could distort the foreigner's statement and prepare a false form, thereby potentially preventing the foreigner's access to an attorney. Furthermore, in previous years when the Presidency of Migration Management attempted to implement this procedure, attorneys experienced situations where foreigners were not even informed that an attorney had arrived, and meeting requests were verbally denied. It is of critical importance to confirm the foreigner's own statement on a form bearing their signature and to give this statement in the presence of the attorney to prevent such abuses.



Kayseri Removal Center (GGM). GGMs are routinely located in isolated areas making visits extremely difficult for lawyers or relatives of those detained. Source: [Medyascope](#)



Although the Protocol was presented with the stated aim of regulating the legal aid process for foreigners, its current form contains provisions that restrict the rights of attorneys and foreigners. The Protocol needs to be revised to fully observe fundamental rights and legal provisions. In particular, the right to meet with an attorney should be removed from the working hours restriction, and the data collection form should be cancelled or converted into a form that requests less information. To resolve these issues, it is critical for the TBB Board of Directors to reconsider the Protocol, taking into account the criticisms of the Bar Associations and attorneys.

Government narrative on detention and deportation practices, and responses

Throughout September, the Minister of Interior continued to frame migration primarily within a security narrative on his social media posts. In his X account, Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced simultaneous operations across all of Turkey's 81 provinces "targeting organizers of migrant smuggling," reporting the arrest of 46 suspects, including foreign nationals. He emphasised the government's "uninterrupted struggle" against irregular migration across all borders, underlining deterrence and control as central priorities. In parallel, also on X, the Presidency of Migration Management, used the national technology fair TEKNOFEST to highlight Turkey's "locally developed" surveillance and border-management tools, such as the Mobile Migration Points. Presented as symbols of technological independence and national achievement, these displays linked migration control to narratives of progress and efficiency.



Three detained men are shown flanked by two Turkish officers from the Department of Combating Migrant Smuggling and Border Gates outside Antalya F-Type Prison. The officers' sleeveless jackets are emblazoned with the words 'Combating Migrant Smuggling' and the logo of the Department. Source: [Minister of Interior Ali Yerlikaya Twitter](#)



Furthermore, in a recent official statement by the Presidency of Migration Management, the "fight" against what they define as "irregular migration" is presented as a continuous and strategic effort carried out in line with the rule of law, fundamental rights, and the country's "civilizational values." In the statement, the government highlighted "record-breaking" deportation figures as evidence of success, stating that over 130,000 deportations were carried out in 2023, and more than 140,000 in 2024, which they present as the highest figures in history. As part of the strategy, 32 GGMs across 25 provinces, with a declared capacity of 18,780 places, are described by officials as operating under three core principles: "zero tolerance for ill-treatment," "ensuring basic needs", and "completing deportation procedures in the shortest possible time." The statement affirms that, in these facilities, detainees are held "in conditions befitting human dignity" until deportation procedures are completed, with access to healthcare, communication with lawyers and consular authorities, psychosocial support, and what is described as "structured daily life."

The Presidency of Migration Management further states that GGMs are subject to extensive monitoring through continuous 24/7 CCTV surveillance. They present this monitoring system as a guarantee of transparency, noting that 898 inspections were reportedly conducted in 2024, followed by 912 in 2025, by both national and international bodies. According to the authorities, these figures demonstrate that the centres operate "in line with international agreements, domestic law, and European Court of Human Rights standards."

Following the publication of this statement, the Migrant and Refugee Solidarity Network (Göçmen ve Mülteci Dayanışma Ağı) issued a public response challenging the credibility and transparency of the government's claims. The Network questioned the nature of the 912 inspections cited by authorities, noting that parliamentarians, bar associations, and human rights organisations are routinely denied access to GGMs. They called for clarification on which institutions conducted these inspections and whether the results have been made public, stressing that monitoring reports remain inaccessible even to organisations actively working in the field. The network described the Ministry's portrait of migration as a purely "deportation-focused success story" and propagandistic, arguing that migration cannot be reduced to border control and removal figures.

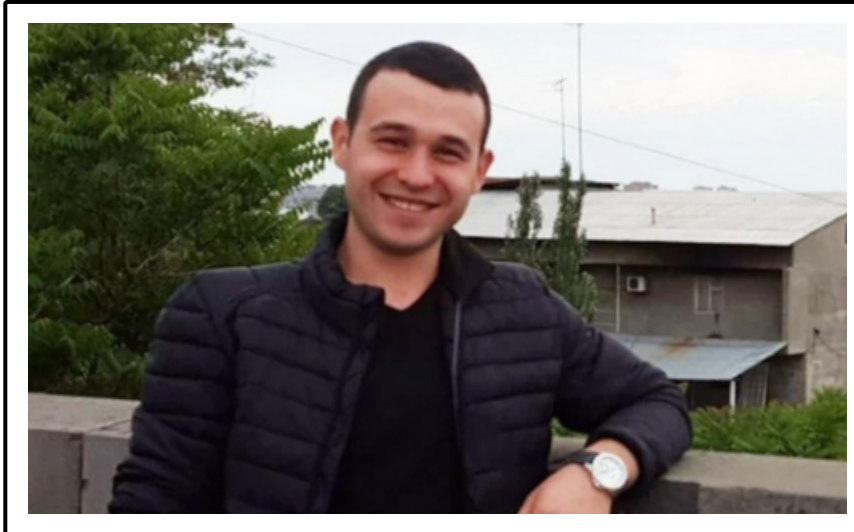
Similar themes were covered in a recent interview on the Serbestiyet news platform with the human rights lawyer Halim Yılmaz, who discussed ongoing issues related to administrative detention and the conditions inside Turkey's GGMs. He noted that administrative detention has increasingly been applied as a routine measure, rather



than an exceptional one. He also described the facilities as resembling punitive institutions rather than administrative ones. According to his observations, conditions in some centres appear harsher than in prisons, while judicial oversight remains limited. Detention has become a default policy tool within Turkey's migration governance framework. The full interview is available [here](#) and provides a rare spoken overview of the current migrant detention system in Turkey.

Nicolai Palamarciuc's torture and murder

A 31-year-old man from Moldova was tortured and murdered at his workplace, a shoe company called Cihan Deri, in Başakşehir, Istanbul. On September 23rd, 2025, at around 4:00 p.m., Nicolai Palamarciuc, who had worked at the company for at least ten years, was taken by the shop owner's relatives (Y.K.A., K.Ç., C.Ç., and R.K.) to the upper floor of the shop on suspicion that he had taken some documents belonging to the company. There, his hands and feet were reportedly tied with plastic handcuffs and he was severely tortured. Police officers, who arrived at the scene after receiving a tip-off, found Palamarciuc unconscious and R.K. standing over him with a knife in his hand. Palamarciuc was taken to hospital, but died despite efforts to save him. The four were detained on charges of "intentional killing."



Nicolai Palamarciuc, the Moldovan worker who was tortured to death by his boss and other accomplices at his Istanbul workplace. Source: [Bianet](#)

Protests were called in response by DiSK (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey) and the Migrant Union Initiative in front of the Istanbul Governorship and the Cihan Deri workplace respectively. According to [figures from ISIG](#), at least 206 workers were killed at work in Turkey in September, nine of whom were non-nationals (four Syrians, two Egyptians, one Moldovan, one Turkmen, and one Ukrainian).



Acquittal of six activists

"If we prevent people from submitting an application for international protection, we cannot be surprised that these individuals try to reach Germany. [...] If we have a situation in which we prevent the submission of an application for international protection, then it is necessary to question whether a foreigner who has not submitted such an application is truly staying here in violation of the law."

— Judge Adam Rodakowski, delivering the oral justification on September 8th, 2025 during the Hajnowka Five process.

In September, two trials of six activists present on the Polish-Belarusian border came to an end. All six people were acquitted.

The first trial concerned five activists accused of acts under Article 264a §1 of the Penal Code:

§1. Whoever, for the purpose of obtaining a material or personal benefit, enables or facilitates another person's stay in the territory of the Republic of Poland in violation of the law, shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years.

In this case, according to the prosecution's findings, the 'facilitation' allegedly involved the provision of food, beverages, sleeping bags, shelter, and transportation, among other things. The prerequisite required by the article – "obtaining a material or personal benefit" – was not attributed to the accused, but rather to the persons they had helped. Thus, the "benefit" obtained by the assisted persons as a result of the activists' actions was – according to this manipulative interpretation – sufficient to fulfill the condition.



In his oral justification for the decision to acquit the activists, Judge Adam Rodakowski referred to both ethical and strictly legal issues pertaining to the interpretation of the law. Referring to Article 264a §1 of the Penal Code, he indicated that the function of this article is based on the assumption that those who engage in these actions, do so for personal gain.

“Every foreigner who reaches Poland may need help. If we were to adopt the interpretation that one can be punished under Article 264a every time a person in need gains a personal benefit from receiving help, then anyone providing assistance would be at risk of criminal liability,” he explained.

The events that led to the charges took place in March 2022 and concerned a nine-person family from Iraqi Kurdistan – mother, father and seven children aged 2–16 –, and another man from Egypt they had met on the way. The group had crossed the border and wandered on the Polish side for some time, trying to contact a person who was supposed to transport them further into Western Europe. According to their account, the driver refused to approach the border and instructed them to walk about 20 km inland to the meeting point. Due to low temperatures and harsh weather, their physical condition gradually deteriorated. In this situation, the activists visited them twice. During the first encounter, they only delivered food and dry clothing. The second time, they decided to evacuate the group from the forest to a place where they could warm up and recover. During this rescue operation, one of the vehicles carrying some of the family members was stopped by law enforcement.

After nearly two years of proceedings conducted by the District Prosecutor’s Office in Hajnówka, an indictment was prepared. The trial before the District Court in Bielsk Podlaski began in early 2025. The defendants were supported by the Szpila Collective. Several social organizations joined the proceedings: the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the National Bar Council, the Free Courts Foundation, the Association for Legal Intervention, the Election Observatory, as well as some far-right groups: Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture and the “Independence March” Association. Witnesses included Border Guard officers, as well as the mother and one of the daughters from the family mentioned above, amongst others.

Mother and daughter’s testimonies revealed that the family were fleeing for the sake of the daughter. During that day’s hearing, the accused found out that the father, who organised the trip to save his daughter from an arranged marriage, had recently passed away in Germany. This led to some emotional moments in the courtroom.



At the end of the trial, prosecutor Magdalena Rutyna suggested changing the legal qualification and description of the act to “organizing illegal border crossings”. In her closing statement, she demanded one year and four months of imprisonment for each of the defendants, arguing:

“The evidence gathered in the case confirms the defendants’ culpability in organizing illegal crossings of the border from the Republic of Belarus into the Republic of Poland, as well as organizing illegal crossings of the internal borders of the European Union.”

The prosecutor also accused the defendants of acting conspiratorially, using coded language, operating within an organized structure with a specific division of roles, and expressing opposition to the state’s migration policy. Their actions, she stressed, were anti-state and anti-system in nature.

All organizations present – except Ordo Iuris and the “Independence March” Association – called for acquittal.

Michał Cykała of the National Bar Council stated:

“In my opinion, this case is not about whether migrants should be allowed into Poland, nor about border protection or migration policy. It is about what a citizen can do when the state and its institutions fail. Whether a citizen has the right to provide help, and whether the state can punish attempts to help others. [...] Polish history is a history of resistance against authority when the law did not treat citizens equally. From an early age, we are taught patriotic and religious values. It is difficult today to accuse the defendants of wrongdoing when, by acting on these deeply held principles, they tried to put them into practice.”



The other trial took place before the District Court in Białystok, also in September. The prosecution charged Bartosz, an activist, with “influencing the official actions of Border Guard officers”.

The incident that led to it started in October 2024. During a field intervention in the woods of Podlasie, three people – two from Ethiopia and one from Somalia – declared their intention to seek international protection in Poland to the activists who came to deliver humanitarian assistance. To reduce the risk of pushback they signed the relevant powers of attorney authorizing representation in administrative proceedings and requested that the activist call the Border Guard.

This action is standard for an operational protocol called ‘Assisted Asylum Request’, adopted by the solidarity network of organisations and activists operating at the Polish-Belarusian border before the suspension of the right to seek asylum in the region. Its aim was to reduce the risk of pushback for applicants for international protection. The process was based on an assumption known as ‘protection through presence’, according to which the presence of humanitarian organisations/activists has the ability to deter potential risk of abuse and, in this particular context, denial of access to asylum procedures. People on the move expressing their intention to seek protection to activists are offered to be accompanied by them during the process. Field workers and volunteers support asylum seekers during the process by providing information on the legal consequences of applying for refugee status in Poland, informing the Border Guard of their intention to apply for international protection, waiting with them for the Border Guard to arrive, documenting their willingness to submit an application and then accompanying them to the Border Guard station and at subsequent stages up to the point when the application is successfully submitted. Each person seeking to apply for international protection also has the option of choosing a proxy to support them during the administrative procedure until the risk of pushback has been resolved. This is done by granting a power of attorney to a designated person.

In the occasion described above, a patrol arrived and told the activists that all three men would be transported to the Border Guard station in Michałowo. Upon arrival, Bartosz tried to determine when the administrative proceedings would begin but was only assured he would be informed later on.

On his way back, he received a phone call from an officer asking if the documents of one of the men might have been left in his old clothes. Bartosz found the documents and agreed to deliver them on the next day. During the call, a Border Guard officer informed him that the procedures were to begin that same day.



When Bartosz arrived at the station at the agreed time, he was told that the two Ethiopian citizens had already been transferred to a detention center in Połowce, where administrative proceedings had been initiated. As for the Somali citizen, a Border Guard officer stated that *“that case no longer exists”*, claiming the man had allegedly withdrawn his application for protection and revoked Bartosz’s power of attorney. When Bartosz demanded to meet the man from Somalia or see documents confirming this, he was forcibly removed from the facility. In frustration, he shouted to the officers: *“You’re breaking the law! You’re screwed – consequences will follow!”* and announced that he would report the matter to the Ombudsman and the media. These words became the basis for the charge of attempting to exert unlawful influence on the actions of public officials under Article 224 of the Penal Code.

“This case too exemplifies how humanitarian aid is being criminalised. It aims to create a chilling effect,” emphasized attorney Karolina Gierdal of the Szpila Collective, representing the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. In her argument, she referred to reports by Doctors Without Borders and We Are Monitoring, focusing on the procedures at Border Guard posts in 2024 – the time when the events described in the indictment occurred:

“Your Honor, in 2024 the organization [We Are Monitoring] documented 3,183 cases of pushbacks from Poland to Belarus, involving 1,555 people. At the same time, 1,622 people formally expressed the will to apply for protection before the Border Guard in the presence of a representative of a social organization, sometimes even at the facility itself – yet 165 of them were still pushed back to Belarus. [...] The report contains several testimonies, including cases analogous to this one: foreigners participated in a so-called legal disclosure, granted powers of attorney, and yet when they arrived at the Border Guard post, the expected proceedings with their representatives never took place. They were subjected to pressure, coercion, and forced to sign documents they did not understand, then pushed back anyway. This is one of many recurring methods – blackmail, threats, psychological pressure. The accused, as a humanitarian worker, was undoubtedly aware of these practices. He knew exactly what was happening at the facilities and that such statements were obtained through coercion. It is therefore hard to blame him – his actions were in his client’s best interest and exactly what one would expect from a representative. He demanded to meet his client personally to verify whether the client truly understood what had happened, what he had signed, and the consequences thereof.”



Artur Kula, representing the National Bar Council, highlighted the systemic context of Bartosz's prosecution:

"[...] The issue of guarantees for legal representatives – whether attorneys, legal advisers, or other authorized agents – is crucial, because, colloquially speaking, we are all in the same boat. In the Bar's view, the repressive measures faced by the accused could just as easily have been used against an attorney, legal adviser, or professional representative. Therefore, this case reveals a very serious, systemic problem."

On September 26th, the court issued an acquittal. In his oral justification, Judge Tomasz Pannert went through each element of the incident that formed the basis of the indictment. In his view, it was undisputed that all three men crossed the border illegally and that, once in Poland, they granted Bartosz power of attorney. The second undisputed fact was that the powers of attorney were never revoked, meaning Bartosz remained their representative. Third, the accused did not participate in any procedural actions, nor is there any evidence he was notified about them.

Despite the relief brought by the acquittal of these six activists we cannot forget that, at the same time, cases against Border Guards in Poland for the mistreatment and abuse of people on the move are being dismissed, often on the basis of 'absence of the elements constituting a criminal offence'. The witnesses questioned are, in most instances, Border Guards representatives. At the same time prosecutors dismiss testimonies of activists as hearsay. Testimonies of people on the move are not available as, in most cases, they had been pushed back or disappeared. In these cases the prosecutors seem to be willing to accept the explanation provided by the alleged perpetrators with little to no effort put into retrieving the evidence or looking into the allegations.



Eviction of the Orange Squat in Calais and further displacement

The local organisation Human Rights Observers (HRO) has witnessed an increase in the frequency and intensity of evictions, as well as a continuous failure by the authorities to provide adequate shelter for people on the move. In September alone, at least 12 evictions took place, resulting in the arrest of at least 12 people and the seizure of over 153 tents in Calais.

The so-called Orange Squat was evicted on September 30th. This place was one of the most important and visible informal settlements in the Calais area. At its peak capacity, around 400 people were surviving in this old, abandoned warehouse. Consequently, it received a lot of political and media attention and is a good example of the complexity and absurdity of the so-called *zero fixation point policy* enforced by the government.

On April 11th 2025, the Calais Local Court ruled that the building complex located on Rue Marcel Doret and Rue Clément Ader in Calais, commonly known as the Orange Squat, could be evicted after September 14th 2025. On September 9th 2025, during a press conference in front of the Orange Squat, Agathe Cury, the state representative for Calais, announced an “experimental” plan to provide shelter for its inhabitants. On five different occasions over the following two weeks, buses were chartered to offer shelter in the Pas-de-Calais Reception and Assessment Centre (CAES) to the residents of the squat. The AUDASSE association, commissioned by the State to carry out this mission, was accompanied by outreach workers from the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) presenting the Voluntary Return Assistance programme, as well as outreach workers from France Terre d'Asile (FTDA), responsible for providing shelter to unaccompanied minors (MNA) in the department.

Nevertheless, together with other NGOs, HRO witnessed a systematic shortage of shelter spaces for the residents. Based on our observations and the responses of members of state-mandated associations on site, we know that the first refusals at the CAES began just after the second “sheltering” intervention. On September 11th, at least seven people were refused entry to the buses due to a lack of space at CAES. On September 15th, our teams again observed the refusal of at least 40 people. Although 115 people were able to access temporary shelter in the CAES during the deployment of this scheme, many others were not offered any accommodation by the state. They were forced to remain at the Orange Squat or find other precarious solutions, despite having expressed a desire to access the offered shelter.



Furthermore, between Monday, September 8th — the day before the announcement of the scheme at the Orange Squat — and September 30th, the date of the Orange Squat eviction, not a single man living in other camps around Calais was granted shelter at a CAES. Between September 14th and 30th 2025, at least 234 people on the move were refused shelter without alternative solutions. State representatives alleged that these refusals were due to a lack of space in the shelters. This lack of places was orchestrated to make room for some of the inhabitants of the Orange Squat. The symbolic use of the situation at the Orange Squat and the “sheltering operation” for its inhabitants further contribute to the invisibility of the repressive and racist policies of the State. Additionally, the political and media promotion of a so-called solution for care and shelter, just a few days after the visit of a parliamentary delegation whose objective was to observe the militarisation and non-reception policy at the French-British border, only serves to divert attention from this reality.

Moreover, September witnessed the highest number of large-scale evictions since the start of the year. On September 23rd, 25th and 30th, there were several additional large-scale evictions conducted at different living sites in Calais. In a further demonstration of power, these unpredictable, large-scale operations are intentionally carried out in the early hours of the morning, making it virtually impossible for HRO to warn people on the move that an operation is underway.

Although the general anti-fixation policy of dismantling living sites every 48 hours is arguably more predictable, it is characterised by continued arrests and intimidation of people on the move and their supporters. Overall, the cumulative effect of all evictions was twofold. Firstly, contrary to the assumptions of the state authorities, people on the move are not disappearing but rather being forcibly displaced to other informal living sites. With a high number of new arrivals, precarity and tensions have increased within these living sites, which now face a heightened risk of further evictions, perpetuating a vicious cycle of forced displacement. Secondly, the resources of all humanitarian NGOs are under immense strain, resulting in a shortage of care that has been constructed by the state.

Update on the evictions in Grande-Synthe

In the Grande-Synthe area, large-scale evictions involving the confiscation of belongings, violence, destruction of living sites, and intimidation of people on the move are a regular occurrence. There, September has seen the eviction of six living sites and of the informal shops in the camp twice. At least two 30m³ skips (or dumpsters) full of seized belongings were taken by the authorities, more than 576



people were evicted and five were arrested. The size, frequency and intensity of these massive operations is testament to the French government's aim to make the border as inhospitable as possible for people on the move; convoys consisting of up to 50 vehicles intimidate residents from as early as 8am with limited warning, with some evictions lasting for almost 5 hours.

Furthermore, HRO has witnessed police's use of tear gas at one of the living sites, in addition to receiving multiple testimonies of police violence from residents of the living sites, one of whom reports being shot in the foot with the tear gas gun by a CRS officer. On another occasion, a group of people on the move reported that they saw a man being hit by a police officer with a baton. While the HRO team has managed to collect data on the field, it is not without challenges: the police continue to establish extremely abusive perimeters in order to obscure their activities from observation. For example, in the month of September, the HRO team was totally blocked from documenting police activity three times.

These hostile policies contribute to the overall culture of fear in an already incredibly precarious situation. The sheer scale of police intimidation during these large-scale evictions in the Grande-Synthe area targets the most vulnerable. Moreover, operations such as these only serve to empower the far-right as they propagate their anti-refugee sentiment.

Note: The numbers in the two sections above are subject to high underreporting due to police obstruction during our observations, and as such should be treated as a bare minimum.

One-In-One-Out

With regards to the international political context, the so-called "one in one out" agreement between France and the UK has ramped up in intensity. The first returns started in September. Since the implementation of the deal, already 26 people have reportedly been deported from Britain to France. With this policy, France and the UK seek to portray people on the move as interchangeable numbers. This state-led support of hate, and neglect for care does not only enshrine ethical turning points on paper but also manifests in a hostile political culture. Essentially, this policy aims to incentivize people to stay in France without addressing the obvious contradictions in this plan: the living conditions faced by people on the move at the border remain dire, adequate shelter, resources and asylum, inaccessible to most.



“Stop the Boats” and repercussions in France

In the context of the unfolding of the *“one in one out”* deal, some of the violent manifestations of the extreme anti-migration sentiment, characterising the current rise of fascism in the UK, have crossed the Channel and emerged in the form of vigilante justice on French territories. One of the most prominent figures is Nick Tenconi, an ethnonationalist leader of the extreme right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Since June 2025, UKIP has used a GiveSendGo fundraiser to organise patrols in France with the expressed aim of informing people on the move that they do not want them in the UK. On September 10th at around 4am, right-wing extremists intimidated and harassed a group of people on the move while shouting with full confidence ‘you shall not pass’ in one of these marches in Grand-Port-Philippe, located between Calais and Grande-Synthe. Due to the danger and intensity of these developments and the subsequent distressing effects for people on the move, the organisation Utopia56 filed a report with the public prosecutor.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

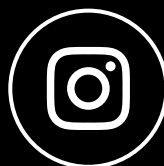
Network structure and contact

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

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

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

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



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