

Border Violence Monitoring Network

Working to end violence against people on the move.

ANNUAL REPORT

January - December 2023



Arranged by:

Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN)

in collaboration with Rigardu, e.V.



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GLOSSARY

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Who We Are

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

Our Mission

As a collective of NGOs, we aim to shed light on the violence along the Balkan Route and the severity and extent of illegal, systematic border management practices perpetrated against people-on-the-move (POM). To do so, we rely on the support and collaboration of BVMN partners – 13 grassroots organisations spread across the Balkan Region that each contribute to our advocacy efforts whilst also providing their own services to target communities throughout the region. Some of our partners provide direct aid to POM and other communities while others offer legal support and advocacy channels for those who have experienced all-too-common injustices during their journeys. A full list of our partners can be found below.

Our Geographical Scope

At geographical level the Network is covering: Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.

OUR PARTNERS



Push-Back Alarm Austria
+43 1345 1444



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

Geopolitical Context

Over the past decade, violence and injustice have become undeniable obstacles for people on the move on their journey across migratory routes to Western Europe. The so-called Balkan Route combines two migration flows: the Eastern Mediterranean Route, which leads from Turkey by sea to Greece, and the Western Balkan Route, which crosses through Balkan countries overland, passing through North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then through Member States Romania, Hungary, or Croatia until reaching Western Europe. This route gained popularity in 2012 and reached its peak in May 2015, coinciding with rising tensions and violence in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. For many asylum seekers, it represented the quickest and safest route.

Since 2016 and following the closure of the "Balkan Humanitarian Corridor," violence along the Balkan transit route has become pervasive. Today, this same route is the site of violent atrocities against people on the move, who are systematically denied their right to seek asylum or other forms of international protection. The term "pushback" gained popularity to describe events along the EU borders of Hungary and Croatia with Serbia in 2016, after the official closure of the Balkan Route. Pushbacks involve informal cross-border expulsions of individuals or groups to another country without due process and have become an important, yet unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere. This practice is now a hallmark of border externalization, extending from the Greek-Turkish border to the Slovenian-Italian-Austrian borders. Left unsanctioned, these pushbacks have become a recurring practice across various European external frontiers.

As pushbacks have become more widespread across the Balkan Route, in response, many NGOs along the route joined forces to document and condemn illegal pushbacks perpetrated against people on the move (POM) throughout the region. These organizations, which provided direct humanitarian assistance to people on the move, formalized a procedure for recording and documenting pushbacks. And thus, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) was born as a horizontal, self-organized collective working to raise awareness of these illegal proceedings and fight for accountability for the perpetrators responsible.

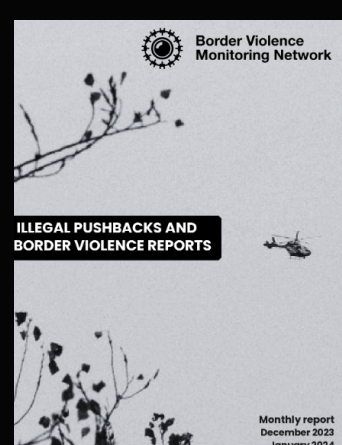
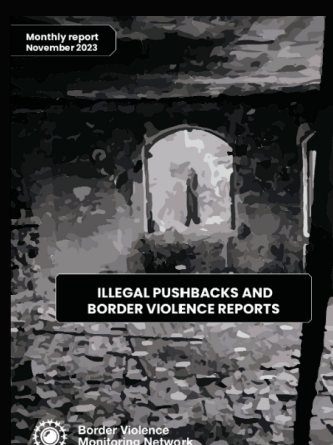
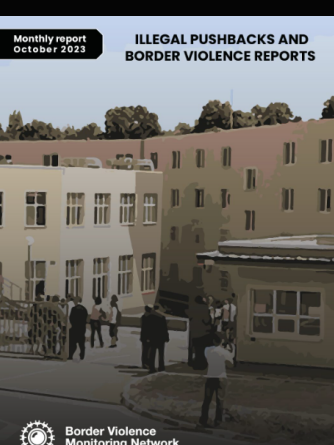
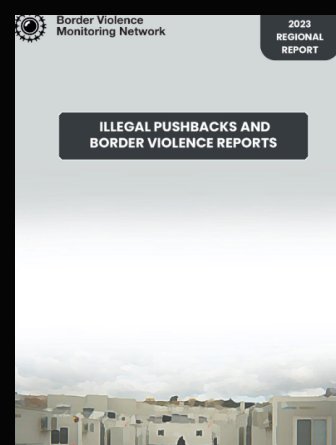
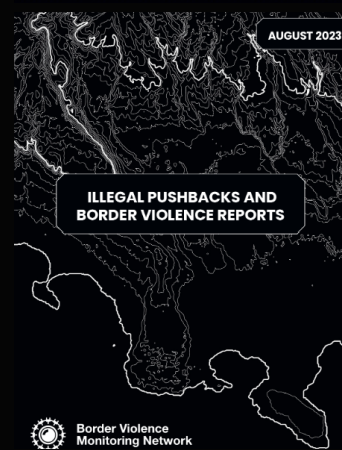
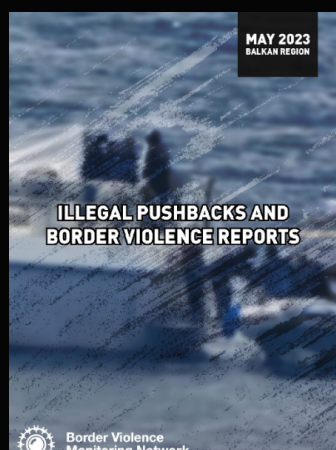
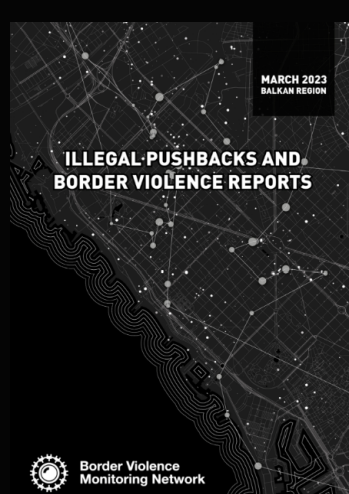
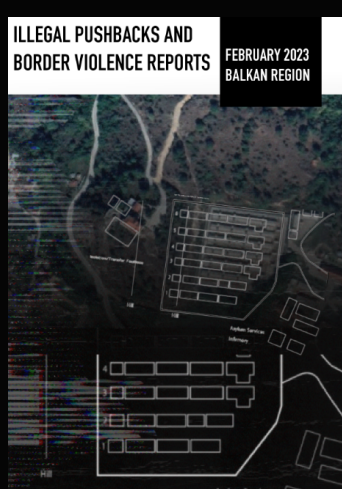
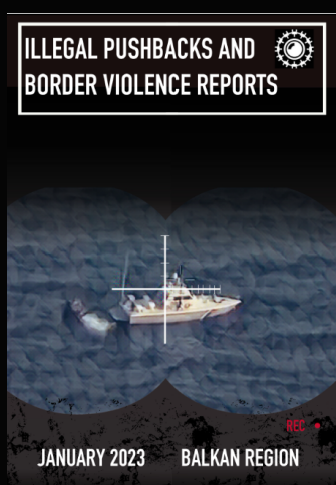
Testimony Collection and Monthly Reports

We began recording testimonies of pushbacks in 2017 and publish each of them in our online database. As of the end of 2023, the BVMN open-source database has over 1450??? first-hand testimonies of pushbacks collected by our field teams across the Western Balkans, Greece, and Turkey. These testimonies expose the treatment and abuse of over 24,990???? individuals, making it currently the largest database worldwide exposing public abuses and human rights violations at the borders.

Based on our testimony collection, BVMN publishes a monthly report that analyzes trends in border violence and gives updates from the field. Our Monthly Reports contain summaries of pertinent trends and links to all testimonies taken throughout the month. Our methodological process for 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. The high-quality analysis centered on the work of BVMN's field teams are routinely cited by international human rights organizations, journalists and academics.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Throughout 2023, BVMN partners on the ground collected a total of 98 testimonies of pushback, affecting a total of 1,100 victims, and published 12 monthly reports, as well as one internal violence report in an effort to document violence occurring against people-on-the-move (herein POM) within the borders of countries along the Balkan Route.

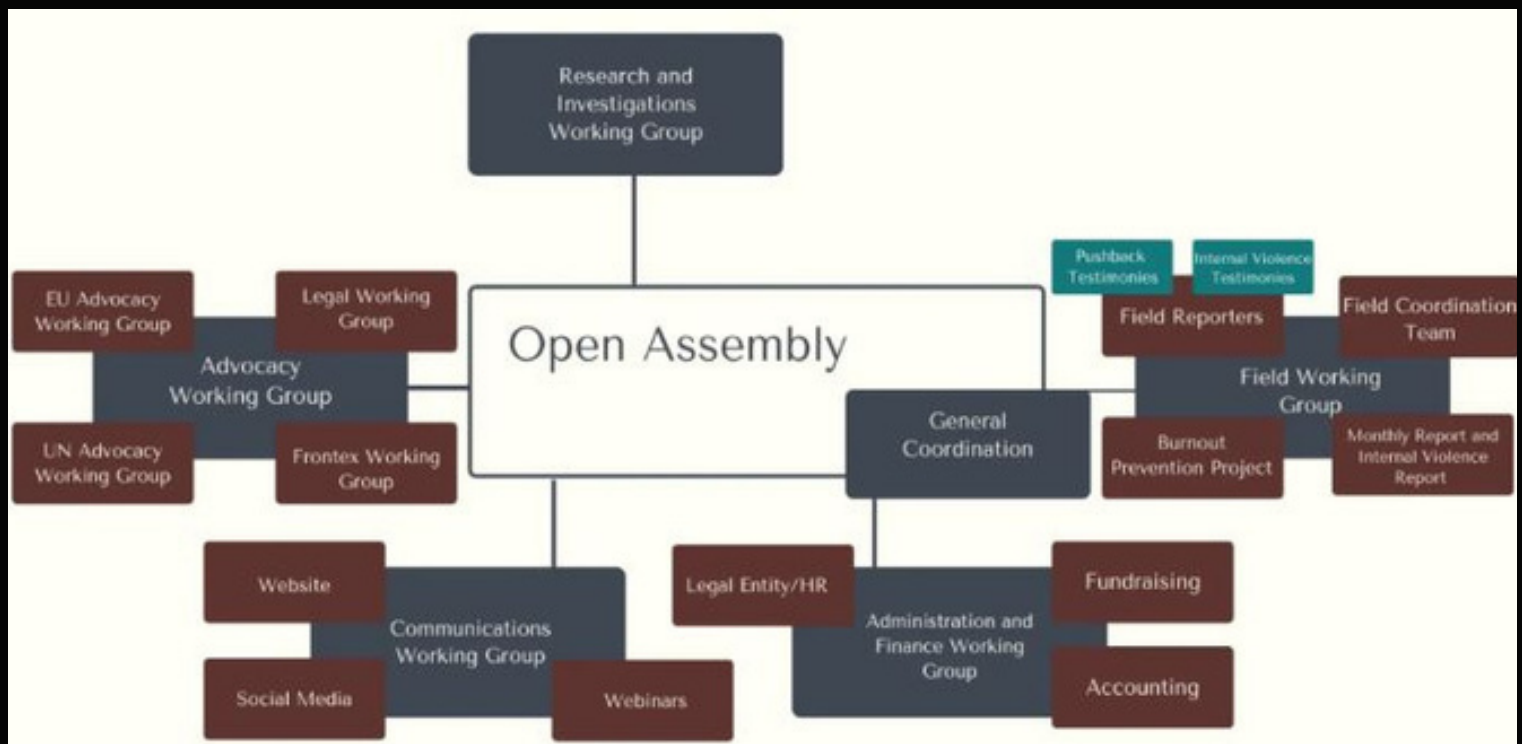


OUR Structure

BVMN comprises 14 member organizations (including two anonymous members), each of which operates throughout the Balkan Route, providing its own unique services, mainly direct humanitarian and legal assistance. These members contribute to the network through field-level evidence collection and research, as well as advocacy projects that utilize this primary evidence to inform and influence policymakers and provide direct legal aid in certain situations.

In BVMN, we pride ourselves on our horizontal organizational structure, which relies on the joint vision and responsibility of each partner organization. Network-wide decisions are made democratically within an Open Assembly, in which all partners are invited to participate. These decisions are implemented by the network's working groups, all of which are coordinated by members of the General Coordination team, paid staff on part-time contracts tasked with carrying out the vision of the Open Assembly.

In the pages that follow, some of these working groups have provided updates of their work, success, and challenges in 2022.



A general overview of our organisational structure, all of which stems from joint decisions made by all partners within the Open Assembly.

Field Working Group

The Field Team is primarily responsible for updating and maintaining the testimony database and coordinating Network reporting efforts with the intent of sharing trends and developments within the regions in which we work. In order to uphold the consistency and quality of our open-source database and to ensure that interviews are conducted following the necessary safeguarding principles, we provide thorough training in the use of our common methodology for testimony collection to all new violence reporters and partner organizations.

2023 Overview

In 2023, the field team continued its crucial work of gathering evidence of human rights violations along the Balkan Route. This year, we focused on capacity-building for field reporters to ensure the quality of testimonies collected and enhance the trauma-informed approach of our methodology. This involved adapting all our testimony collection trainings to address changes in different contexts and developing new trainings covering further geographic information, capacity-building on the use of technology at borders, and documenting violence within state borders. These updates were incorporated into a new Volunteer Toolkit, serving as a comprehensive manual for our field reporters. In addition, our efforts to document violence within state borders, particularly in detention facilities, saw significant improvement, and an updated standardized framework was created to collect this information across different regions.

Expanding our border violence monitoring efforts to other regions was also a key area of focus for our field working group this year. We welcomed two new organizations to the Network: Mission Wings and Centre for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria, from Bulgaria, who provide support to people on the move in Harmanli (near the Bulgarian-Turkish border) and Sofia. We also conducted an assessment at the Italian-French border and built relationships with organizations outside of the network through skill-sharing and information-sharing. This included providing trainings for organizations in Libya, Poland, France, or the United Kingdom.

As part of our ongoing commitment to monitoring and reporting border violence, we also produced a comprehensive report on violence within Greece's state borders, showcasing evidence of human rights violations against people on the move. This report analyzes numerous testimonies collected over months, revealing structural violence through the denial of essential living conditions, food, water, healthcare, and psychological support within Greek detention facilities.

Advocacy working group

UN Level Advocacy

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

2023 Overview

In 2023, the UN Advocacy Team submitted a total of 16 reports to various United Nations mechanisms, encompassing the UN Treaty Body system, Special Procedures, OHCHR, and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology. Throughout the year, BVMN remained actively involved in UN sessions, providing oral evidence of pushbacks and related human rights abuses. Notably, in 2023, four organisations - Are You Syrious, No Name Kitchen, I Have Rights, and Mobile Info Team - were granted the opportunity to participate in UN sessions, presenting evidence of rights violations. Additionally, BVMN was also present and took part in several high-level UN forums, including the United Nations Global Refugee Forum in Geneva.

In 2023, BVMN saw significant advancement in how international human rights bodies recognise and understand pushbacks. Following submissions by BVMN, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has, for the first time, publicly recognised pushbacks as an Article 2 violation. As of 2023, 7 out of 10 UN Treaty Bodies now recognise pushbacks as a unique and definable human rights issue actionable under their mandate. This includes the Committee on: Enforced Disappearances, Torture, Rights of the Child, Migrant Workers, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In December, BVMN submitted its first report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women highlighting evidence of the systematic use of sexual and gender based violence at border regions and during pushbacks.

Through our ongoing engagement with the UN's Committee on Enforced Disappearance (CED), BVMN played a pivotal role in initiating the first-ever CED General Comment on "Enforced Disappearances in the Context of Migration." BVMN's evidence was the sole contribution from a civil society to be cited in the General Comment, with our work being referenced three times. During the latest CED session, Committee expert Barbara Lochbihler publicly expressed gratitude to BVMN for our consistent engagement in the CED General Comment process.

Working in collaboration with other CSOs, in 2023, BVMN helped shape the language and focus of the first ever UN Human Rights Council Resolution on pushbacks. The resolution on "Human Rights of Migrants: Prevention and Accountability for Human Rights Violations in Transit" recognised a States obligations in preventing human rights violations resulting from pushbacks and "encourages States to establish and strengthen measures to prevent pushbacks and collective expulsions".

Advocacy working group

EU Level Advocacy

In 2023, the Border Violence Monitoring Network continued to provide scrutiny to EU legislation, and become a key and leading grassroots voice on the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Across the year, BVMN published policy briefings on the four key files from the pact; including the Screening Regulation, the Asylum Procedures Regulation (APR), the Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management (RAMM), and the Crisis Proposal.

2023 Overview

In November, BVMN published a joint policy paper on the EU Screening Regulation, with Mobile Info Team, I Have Rights, The Association for Juridical Studies on Migration (ASGI) and Centre for Legal Aid – Voices in Bulgaria, using examples from Greece, Croatia, Italy and Bulgaria – external EU Member States – to evidence why certain safeguards are necessary, and legal loopholes must be closed.

Continuing our collaboration with other CSO's on issues related to EU policy and legislation BVMN hosted a webinar with experts from Refugee Support Aegean, ASGI, the University of Keele and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, and published joint press-releases with organisations including Save the Children, PICUM, EuroMed Rights.

In 2023, Border Violence Monitoring Network with support from Privacy International also authored an investigation into the development of interoperable biometric databases, akin to Eurodac, in the Western Balkans, referred to as the “Balkandac” system. The investigation uncovered a lack of transparency in current regional data-sharing systems and underscores the significant role of EU institutions in their creation. The launch of the comprehensive was well attended and received significant praise from other international actors including Access Now, EDRI and the Transnational Institute.

Furthermore, BVMN continued its work on the use of new technologies at border zones, becoming a leading member of the Protect Not Surveil Coalition. Throughout our collaboration, BVMN was able to help develop a strong counter narrative against the EU Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act and present evidence of the intersection between technology and rights violations at border zones. BVMN was also able to attend the 2023 Privacy Camp in Brussels, an event organised by EDRI to bring together digital rights advocates, activists as well as academics and policy-makers from all around Europe and beyond to discuss the most pressing issues facing human rights online.

Legal working group

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

2023 Overview

In 2023, we continued pursuing our engagement with the Council of Europe. We submitted Rule 9 communications and highlighted systemic shortcomings in Greece and the Czech Republic. We submitted four third party interventions for cases at the European Court of Human Rights against Greece, contributing with field evidence to cases of border violence, pushbacks, and unlawful detention. It's important to mention that since its inception, BVMN has requested to intervene in all communicated cases against Greece and has been granted leave. To date, we have submitted nine interventions in cases of pushbacks, access to asylum, torture at borders, and illegal detention against Greece at the Court.

In addition, BVMN regularly feeds back to the European Commission's legislative proposals using the Have Your Say! Platform. It aims to inform the EU institutions the impact their legislation will have on people on the move and the protection of their fundamental rights. In 2023, BVMN submitted information to anti-trafficking legislation and the implementation of the GDPR regulation on people on the move.

The legal team has also reported to the European Commission on rule of law concerns in Greece, Croatia and Slovenia. It informed the EUAA on shortcomings on asylum, pushbacks, and other violations people on the move experience across the region, and provided feedback on the continuous shrinking space for our Network and others working on the rights of people on the move to the Fundamental Rights Agency.

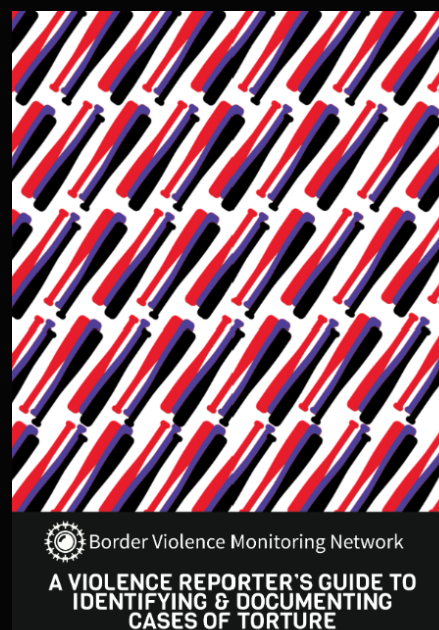
Throughout 2023, the BVMN legal working group persisted in sending notifications to national ombudspersons and initiated investigations into a range of violations against people on the move, both at borders in Greece. We also continued our work with Frontex, filing freedom of information requests and lodging a complaint with the European Ombudsman against Frontex's continuous refusal to disclose documents in full.

In 2023, BVMN was granted participatory status at the Council of Europe where we hope to bring evidence and shape better policies. The Network has also joined the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency platform and aims to inform the agency on realities from the ground.

Legal working group

Violence Reporter's Guide to Identifying and Reporting Cases of Torture:

In 2023, we compiled a guide for violence reporters on identifying cases of torture, designed to equip people from all backgrounds with an understanding of how to recognise and report potential cases of torture and ill-treatment through a lens of responsibility, finesse and humanity. The guide includes a step-by-step breakdown on the definition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and outlines a number of features frequently related to pushbacks that can be classified under that definition. It also references the key legislation that should be focused on when evaluating such cases and contains a comprehensive “Dos and Dents” section on how to conduct an interview with a potential victim of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment as well as a note on the significance of volunteer mental health on the field.



Legal Action Database on Pushbacks

The Legal Action Database on Pushbacks is a growing dataset of legal actions across regions, covering pushbacks, summary expulsions, collective expulsions, and torture at borders. Members and partners continue to contribute to it with the aim of creating a comprehensive tool for legal practitioners litigating rights at borders. The Legal Action Database on Pushbacks is an open, living resource that compiles pending cases and judgments from national courts, the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the EU, and UN Committees. This project was created with the support of Heinrich Böll Stiftung Thessaloniki.

Research working group

In 2023, the Research and Investigations working group continued its commitment to both long-term and short-term projects. The team provided essential support to various working groups and member organizations through desk research but also engaged with long term research projects.

2023 Overview

Throughout 2023, the BVMN research team focused primarily on border technology and artificial intelligence, providing extensive desk research support to partner organizations in this area. Field assessments were also conducted in Cyprus to gain a deeper understanding of border tech and AI applications in the region. The research work of BVMN in 2023 reverberated within academic research, with BVMN being cited in twelve academic publications throughout the year. These citations serve as an illustration of BVMN's impact on scholarly discussions surrounding migration, border management, and human rights.



In September 2023, with support from Privacy International, BVMN published a comprehensive report on the development of interoperable biometric databases in the Western Balkans, known as the “Balkandac” system. This report sheds light on the lack of transparency surrounding regional data-sharing systems and emphasizes the influential role of EU institutions in their establishment. The aim of this report is to contextualize recent developments toward the digitalization of biometric data collection in the Western Balkans within wider shifts in migration policy and data-sharing frameworks at the EU level. It was developed through collaboration between the Research team and the Advocacy working groups.

Amidst these activities, in the summer of 2023, the team transitioned to a new coordinator, with the new coordinator prioritizing capacity building and team engagement. Several training sessions were organized on topics such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Money trails enhancing the team's skills and knowledge base. These activities informed the research agenda for the team in 2024 and 2025 focusing on internal violence, money trails, and border technologies.

Overall, the Research and Investigations working group in 2023 demonstrated a commitment to rigorous research, collaboration, and capacity building, contributing significantly to the understanding of border-related issues and advocating for transparency and accountability in border management practices.

Criminalization Working Group

The Criminalisation working group identifies and records criminalization cases within the network and its member organizations, provides support for present criminalization cases, and works towards preventing possible future criminalization. It collaborates with other working groups to support the network and its members in developing strategies, drafting reports and publications, and providing training and counseling. The group also supports the legal and advocacy working group with submissions and advocacy work relating to criminalization.

2023 Overview

Throughout 2023, we witnessed an ongoing increase in the criminalization of both people on the move and Human Rights Defenders. This includes not only criminalization through formal methods such as hostile legislation, formal investigations, and SLAPPs, but also through informal tactics used by both government and non-government actors, such as smear campaigns, defamation, harassment, arbitrary arrests and searches, surveillance, obstacles in obtaining visas, among others.

To address these challenges, we have introduced several initiatives during the past year. The criminalization log, an internal tool aimed at monitoring incidents of criminalization and enhancing communication and advocacy efforts was launched, and criminalisation forms were distributed among member organizations to provide guidance on the necessary steps following a case of formal or informal criminalisation. In addition, the Internal Criminalization Procedures document was implemented to help address prevention, communication and notification of criminalisation as well as development of an Emergency Plan for the Network.

Another important development was the publication of the criminalization toolkit in Greek and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian languages. The criminalisation toolkit was initially published in English and is meant as a practical guide to inform on advocacy avenues, protection mechanisms and protecting legislation in cases of criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders. The translations help us extend our reach to broader audiences, including local organizations and Human Rights Defenders. They were published in both Greece and Croatia, and their release was accompanied by networking activities with local stakeholders, thereby creating a platform for collaboration and strategy development.

Our Challenges in 2023

In 2023, the increased criminalization of people on the move has drastically reduced their access to the services of NGOs and grassroots organizations in many places. In Serbia, for example, the Special Military Operation carried out in the north of the country in the last months of the year ended with the complete eviction of all informal living sites, as well as most governmental accommodation for people on the move, and the transfer of hundreds of people to increasingly isolated areas. The isolation of people in camps in multiple parts of Greece has also reduced contact between civil society and human rights organizations and people on the move. Apart from decreasing access to important support structures, these changes have also vastly reduced the ability of organizations and independent actors to monitor human rights violations in many of these places, thus increasing the impunity of perpetrators and the violence of the border regime. The criminalization of people on the move, which in most cases leads to accusations of smuggling and human trafficking against those seeking safety, has also increased the fear of many to speak up, leading to a decrease in testimonies.

This year, we have also witnessed a new push for the externalization of EU borders in the form of increased funding at the external borders, as well as the deployment of EU officers outside of EU countries to support border control. Thus, we have seen a new presence of Frontex in Northern Serbia, as well as in North Macedonia.

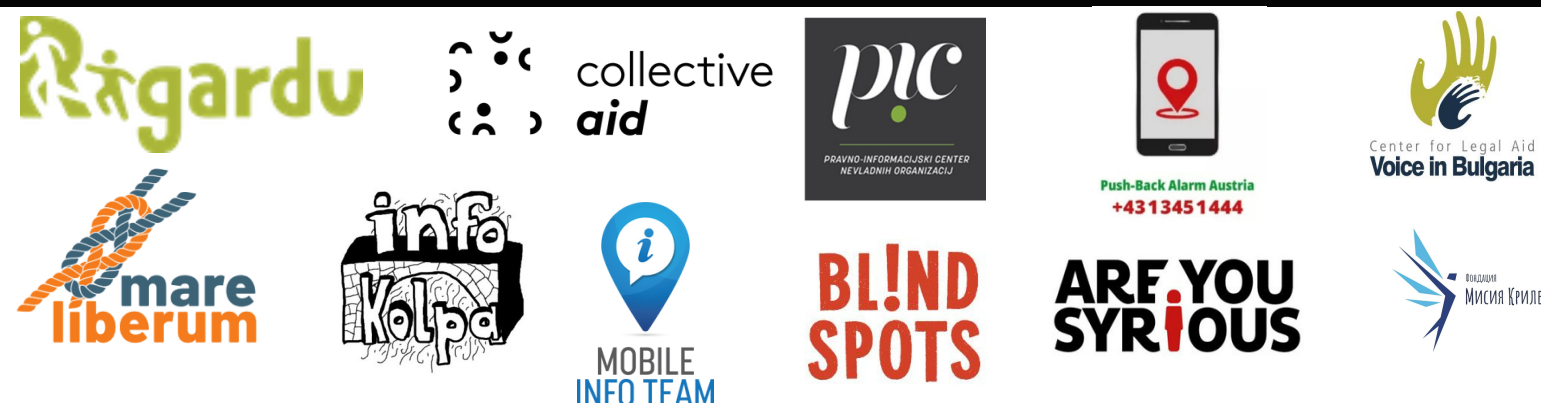
Apart from challenges arising from the continuous increase in the criminalization of solidarity, our biggest challenge remains the lack of accountability for violations against people on the move. Border violence and pushbacks persist at European borders. Engaging with mechanisms and stakeholders to encourage them to exercise their mandate in holding perpetrators responsible is a challenging process. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum moves further away from an effective protection of human rights for people in transit at both EU and European levels, with a series of unlawful practices being codified in Union law. Pushbacks, increased immigration detention, racial profiling, and the use of unscrutinized technologies are becoming pillars of EU migration law, while regularisation, protection, reception, and decriminalisation of migration are increasingly seen as utopian ideals. In the meantime, BVMN will continue its work, recognizing that it is needed more than ever.

2023 Partner Update

Our work would not be possible without the commitment of partner organizations, both to the collective efforts of the Network itself and to their separate organizational goals. Our horizontal structure requires the active participation of all partners, each of whom steers the vision and structure of the Network while collaborating on joint projects, advocacy initiatives, and field activities.

In 2023, We have onboarded two new partners in Bulgaria as part of our commitment to strategically expand the network and monitor human rights violations across diverse regions. This strengthens our capacity to report and monitor activities within the tri-border state area (Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria) and within Bulgaria itself, including inside detention centers. Additionally, this expansion extends BVMN's reach to monitor the previously overlooked southeastern Serbian border in Pirot.

The following pages have been written by some of our partner organizations concerning their work with BVMN during 2023. For more information about how all partners contribute to our project, please visit the sites below:



A message from



Have Rights (IHR) is a non-profit refugee law clinic operating on the Greek island of Samos. IHR provides free legal information to asylum seekers and supports them in preparing their asylum claim. IHR also engages in advocacy and strategic litigation focusing on the right to asylum and against detention and pushbacks. In 2022, IHR provided legal information to 255 beneficiaries from 27 countries and engaged in over 50 advocacy initiatives.

In 2023, Samos saw a 300% increase in the number of individuals seeking safety. In response, the authorities resorted to detaining thousands of people in inhuman and degrading conditions in the EU-funded Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC).

Our case work team supported 374 new clients, a 47% increase from 2022 and prepared 292 new clients for their asylum interviews, a 34% increase from 2022. The team also responded to 11,445 messages on our hotline.

We are proud to have worked alongside BVMN in 2023. We contributed to 12 Monthly Reports and worked with the Advocacy Team on 12 projects. For example, together we jointly lobbied for the EU's Anti-Trafficking Directive's reform where we used our client data on the experiences for survivors of human trafficking on Samos. The Shadow Rapporteur included all of I Have Rights' suggested amendments which was a huge success for us and would not have been possible without the BVMN Advocacy Team. We also jointly presented evidence to the European Court of Human Rights on the methods of pushbacks in Greece and the lack of access to effective remedies in Greece for survivors of pushbacks. Additionally, we co-drafted a Policy Paper and Briefing Note with BVMN and other member organisations on EU's proposed Screening Regulation as part of the New Pact.

A message from



collective
aid

ollective Aid is an independent organisation supporting the ever-changing needs of refugees and migrants on the move across Europe. We do this by: Distributing clothing, bedding, food, and essential hygiene items to those in need. Providing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services such as drinkable water, warm showers, and laundry, Distributing firewood in winter months, and providing optician appointments and glasses to the ones who need vision care.

Since the end of 2023, Collective Aid collaborates with BVMN across the three locations: Subotica - Serbia, Sarajevo- Bosnia and Herzegovina and Calais-France. We have also recruited a BVMN sponsored border violence coordinator whose focus is to improve our testimony taking strategies across sites.

In 2023 , alongside testimony taking, our support to the BVMN network our team has recruited and facilitated the field presence of an independent researcher whose aim was to assess the use of Artificial Intelligence at the Serbian-Hungarian border who produced a report in September 2023. A second round of research on the same topic has been programmed for the beginning of the following year.

In the following months, our goal is to strengthen the Border Violence Coordinator while also facilitating the production of new research with the scope of broadening and deepening our knowledge in the AI and Tech as instruments of border violence, while maintaining the focus on the stories of those who are affected by the violente policies at the EU borders.

A message from



**MOBILE
INFO TEAM**

In 2023 Mobile Info Team continued to advocate for better access to the asylum procedure in Greece. We finished a long-term research project examining conditions in pre-removal detention facilities on the Greek mainland, in collaboration with Border Criminologies at Oxford University. The project resulted in a report, “Prison for Papers”: Last Resort Measures Used as Standard Procedure, which was published in February 2023 along with two other reports by our partners on violence in PRDCs on the mainland and de facto detention in the Samos CCAC. Collectively these reports highlight the systemic use of detention for asylum seekers and third country nationals in Greece, and the appalling conditions in which people are held within pre-removal facilities. To disseminate our findings we hosted a webinar bringing together experts on detention from across Europe, shared our research with Greek and international press, and provided evidence to MEPs to push for greater pressure on Greece to comply with EU legislation. We also shared our reports with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). The CPT paid a visit to Greece in November 2023, visiting all pre-removal detention centres on the mainland, as requested in our report. The CPT’s findings from the country visit will be published during 2024. At an international level, we shared findings with UN mechanisms including the Special Rapporteur on Torture, and in a speech delivered by our team during a UN Day of General Discussion concerning torture prevention in detention.

In 2023 MIT joined forces with BVMN and other actors across Europe to produce a joint policy paper and briefing to influence political negotiations around the new EU Migration Pact. We shared evidence from our Protection Unavailable report with MEPs to help them fight for key amendments and safeguards to protect the right to asylum.

During the year, we engaged with other EU advocacy initiatives. Alongside BVMN we submitted Parliamentary Questions bringing our concerns around access to asylum and detention practices in Greece. We received responses to our queries on detention from the European Commission, providing a basis for future advocacy ensuring Greece’s compliance with EU legislation on detention.

In 2023 we engaged with third party interventions to the Council of Europe. In collaboration with BVMN partner I Have Rights, we submitted evidence to the Council’s Committee of Ministers, reporting on the current state of the asylum system in Greece following the landmark 2011 M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. Our submission showed continued rights violations against refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, helping to put pressure on the Greek government, and resulting in a further request from the Committee for information on Greece’s compliance with the judgement.

A message from



**MOBILE
INFO TEAM**

Throughout 2023, MIT maintained its close collaboration with an anonymous partner organisation in Thessaloniki for the collection of testimonies on pushbacks and violence within state borders, therefore this message is conveyed on behalf of both organisations.

Building on the ongoing collaboration from previous years, the field team visits a local community centre three times a week to collect testimonies. Additionally, testimonies are conducted remotely via phone. While doing so, the team closely monitors the situation in Thessaloniki, with a specific focus on the broader Northern Greece area, and the Greece-Turkey, Greece-North Macedonia, and Greece-Albania land borders. In 2023, BVMN Thessaloniki documented 19 pushback testimonies, affecting 501 individuals, and 36 internal violence testimonies.

The analysis of collected testimonies remains an essential aspect of our work, allowing us to identify key trends and patterns vital for BVMN's monthly reports, special reports, and press releases. Additionally, this analysis and collation of information helps advocacy efforts at both the EU and UN levels.

A particular focus of the field team was the close monitoring of police operations in the city and its surrounding suburban areas. During these 'sweep operations', police authorities systematically check individuals' documents. In 2023, our teams observed an increase in the frequency of these targeted operations. Furthermore, the ongoing trend of systematic and arbitrary detention remains as relevant as ever, as highlighted by respondents in the internal violence testimonies.

Several team members attended the BVMN conferences held in person in Tirana and Sofia. The discussions at these conferences covered important topics such as criminalisation and digital security, pertinent topics given the increasingly hostile environment for organisations advocating for the rights of POM. Our team participated in multiple training sessions with various working groups in the network, including the Research and Investigation group, the Legal group, and the UN working group. These sessions covered a range of topics and skills, such as drafting UN submissions, conducting human rights assessments and policy analysis. Furthermore, our team took part in external training sessions and workshops, such as understanding legal rights during interactions with the police and burnout prevention.

The BVMN Thessaloniki team looks forward to continuing its practice of testimony collection and analysis, monitoring key trends in the city and wider areas, collaborating with working groups across the network and strengthening advocacy initiatives.