



Border Violence Monitoring Network

ILLEGAL PUSH-BACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



JUNE 2021
BALKAN REGION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) reported on a total of 30 pushbacks, impacting a combined number of 1,073 people-on-the-move at borders across the Balkans. The reports illustrate a range of different tactics and rights breaches which have become embedded in EU border enforcement.

Over the last month, there were several significant developments in Greece. This publication covers recent developments in border violence in the Evros region and Patras port, in addition to the impact of a recent judicial decision designating Turkey as a safe third country for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. Further sections will cover protests that took place on the island of Samos to raise awareness of illegal pushbacks and its devastating disregard of human rights, as well as the landmark cases for the Moria 6 and Vial 15.

In analysing the shifting situation in Romania, this publication investigates how Romania has become an increasingly important transit country for people-on-the-move due to the high degree of violence at the Bosnian-Croatian border and the near-impossibility of crossing the Serbian-Hungarian border. As crossings have increased, so has the level of border violence, including [pushbacks into Serbia](#).

In Croatia further video evidence of pushbacks from Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina were published in June by a coalition of outlets, adding to a growing archive of visual material taken at this border which stretches [back to 2018](#). Also in June, in order to try to prevent a pushback, journalists escorted an Iranian woman and her two children to a police station where they expressed their wish for international protection in Croatia. The fact that the accompaniment of national press outlets is deemed necessary in order to compel the police to carry out due procedure speaks to systematic nature of pushbacks in Croatia, and the degree to which rampant human rights abuses have been normalised.

Regarding the situation in Serbia, this publication includes an update on conditions in Sombor Camp, where overcrowding, inhumane and unsafe housing conditions have been reported. Conditions in Bosnia-Herzegovina also continue to grow more dire with the closing of Sedra, the family camp in Bihać. Further, a recent suicide in Lipa Camp brings into focus the devastating impact of protracted displacement and border violence on mental health in the context of the camps and elsewhere within the interior of the country.

This publication concludes with an update on conditions for people-on-the-move in Italy, focusing in particular on an increase in arrivals over the last month, as well as increases in policing and the tightening of restrictions on public spaces.

**BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in Greece and the Western Balkans including No Name Kitchen, Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile Info Team, Disinfo Collective, Josoor, [re:]ports Sarajevo, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, Mare Liberum, IPSIA, Collective Aid and Fresh Response.*



Border Violence
Monitoring Network

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REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN 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 members have a common website [database](#), used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

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. Push-back 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. Push-backs have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

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 be as large as 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.

ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	-	Bosnia and Herzegovina
HR	-	Croatia
SRB	-	Serbia
SLO	-	Slovenia
ROM	-	Romania
HUN	-	Hungary
ALB	-	Albania
BGR	-	Bulgaria
MNK	-	North Macedonia
GRK	-	Greece
TUR	-	Turkey
EU	-	European Union

TRENDS IN BORDER VIOLENCE

EVROS UPDATE

Violent pushbacks of people-on-the-move continue to occur in the Evros region with alarming frequency. In June 2021, BVMN recorded eight testimonies of pushbacks from Greece to Turkey over the Evros River impacting over 840 people. Previously recorded trends in terms of border violence and tactics used by the authorities continue to appear in testimonies, including the use of third country nationals (TCN) to drive the boats across the Evros, pushing people out of the boats in the middle of the river or stranding them on islets, detention of transit groups in detention centers in the Evros region, and the use of extensive violence.

One fairly new trend that seems to be emerging, however, is the practice of Turkish officers forcing people-on-the-move to re-enter Greece immediately following a pushback from Greece to Turkey. This practice had been mentioned in previous reports, on a few occasions in the last months. In some accounts (see [7.1](#), [7.2](#)), the hostile presence of Turkish authorities on the Turkish shores of the Evros has been also described, leaving people trapped on islets for days at a time,

leaving them stranded in a quite literal “no-man’s land.” This is somewhat reminiscent of the conditions people-on-the-move faced in March 2020 (see [special report](#) on the topic), when many people-on-the-move remained trapped along the Evros while facing heavy pressure from authorities on both sides of the border.

The question of how to classify and approach these practices of the Turkish authorities remains open in terms of how they can be understood in the broader context of illegal pushbacks occurring across borders throughout the region. Can these be understood as pushbacks, or should a different framework/terminology be used? Legally, the question emerges whether/how these practices present a violation of the non-refoulement principle? What is clear, however, is that state violence against people-on-the-move within Greek/Turkish border regions is ongoing, and is part of broader geopolitical tensions between the two states within which people-on-the-move are too often used as pawns to further national political agendas.

ROMANIA BORDER VIOLENCE

On June 29th, an Afghan person-on-the-move was savagely beaten in an abandoned school yard in front of a Timisoara supermarket. The respondent described how a police unit, which he believed to be part of the Jandarmeria Română, had approached a group of Afghan men and began to beat them with batons. While most of the other men ran away, the respondent stopped. He recalled:

"I didn't do anything wrong and that's why I stopped. I thought the police in Europe only punished me when I did something bad."

After the attack, volunteers from the NGO LOGS, picked up the respondent and brought him to a hospital. He was treated for an extended period of time. A deep wound on the left side of his head needed stitches. A traumatic brain injury was diagnosed. The attending doctor reportedly exclaimed: "These animals need to be stopped!", referring to the police.

This incident needs to be seen as part of two larger trends. First, Romania is becoming an increasingly important transit country for people-on-the-move due to the high degree of violence at the Bosnian-Croatian border and the near-impossibility of crossing the Serbian-Hungarian border. [According to local volunteers from LOGS](#), a record more than 6,000 people-on-the-move applied for asylum in the country last year. But as crossings have increased, so has the level of border violence, including [pushbacks into Serbia](#).

Second, while Timișoara has recently been [praised](#) as an example of local solidarity, the incident fits into a broader pattern of police repression and internal violence faced by people-on-the-move anywhere from [Greece](#) to [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#). When the hospital wanted to report the incident to the police for investigation, the respondent asked the hospital not to do it, fearing further repression or

a possible push-back. Instead, his medical record was changed to state that he had incurred the injuries while falling from a height of 1,50 meters. This response indicates the vulnerability of people-on-the-move to police violence, resulting in the literal invisibil-

SITUATION IN PATRAS

The situation in Patras remains critical for people-on-the-move. Almost daily, the No Name Kitchen (NNK) team in Patras hears stories of severe violence, mainly perpetrated by the port police or the port guards. The people-on-the-move living in the abandoned factories close to the Port, explained having suffered different kinds of violence. Many of them reported that they were intimidated or bitten by port authorities' dogs. In other cases the physical violence perpetrated by the officers (mainly with kicks and punches), caused the need for urgent medical treatment. Although many people on the run have been stranded in Patras for months and years now, and have been living in these conditions for so long that they consider the situation to be normal, it is obvious that the constant attacks on their dignity, physical abuse, cases of racial profiling and threats severely affect their psychological stability.

In addition to the constant high level of direct physical violence inside the port, the NNK team has noticed an increase in cases of arbitrary detention in the port of Patras. Despite the fact that most detained individuals are released the same day or the following day, there have also been cases where individuals have been detained for over a month. The persons affected by detention are mostly adults originating from Afghanistan or Iran. In one specific case, the police entered one of the abandoned factories where refugees are residing in Patras in the middle of the night and woke up the sleeping people. After checking their nationalities, some men from Algeria and Morocco were arrested. Moreover, the violence suffered at the moment of the apprehension had been often denied by the authorities during the detentions, since in many cases no doctor was present and the complaints caused by the pain were ignored.

Injury sustained by people on the move trying to cross the Adriatic into Italy (Source:Ariana Egle, No Name Kitchen)



ity of the incident. It has become clear that the ordeal does not end with crossing a border, but that the lives of people-on-the-move are in danger in the countries' interiors as well.

From June 3rd to 5th, the "Regional Growth Conference 2021" took place in the city of Patras, during which many military police and international European security agents were seen around the city. Apparently, there was also a group from the European Committee that came to check the situation of migratory movements in the area. In the run-up to these events, local police officers warned local organisations supporting people-on-the-move that it was compulsory for displaced people living in the abandoned factories not to leave the factories during those days of the conference. People-on-the-move reported that they were threatened with detention if they would be seen on the streets.

However, police violence is not the only obstacle for people living in Patras. During this month, several cases of illegal pushbacks from the harbours of Italy to the ports of Igoumenitsa and Patras were informally received. On the other hand, there have been stories of people who have successfully reached Italy during the past month. Thanks to the Adriatic Port Network, an illegal push-back of 3 people, 2 from Syria and another from Morocco, were stopped in a port of Italy this month. These people are now starting their asylum procedure in Italy.



Image of patras port, where many people on the move go to “game” to try to cross the adriatic into italy. In the last months, the port has been a location for violent pushbacks and police brutality. (Source:Ariana Egle, No Name Kitchen)



A look into one of the squats in Patras port, where many people on the move looking to board ships going to Italy live (Source:Ariana Egle, No Name Kitchen)

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION

GREECE

TWO LANDMARK TRIALS FOR THE CRIMINALISATION OF PEOPLE-ON-THE-MOVE:

MORIA 6 AND VIAL 15

Two landmark trials indicative of shifting state responses to migration/asylum and the criminalisation of people-on-the-move were held in the last month. Both trials concern fires that took place in refugee camps in 2020: one in Vial Camp, Chios on April 15th, and another in Moria Camp, Lesvos on the 9th and 10th of September. In both cases, residents were arrested and detained for starting the fires with little evidence to back up the accusations. In the current political climate, the defendants served as convenient scapegoats for the destruction brought about by the fires, while there has been little acknowledgement for substandard and inhumane conditions within the camps that in the last years have led to multiple fires breaking out in camps on the Aegean islands. Legal observers and solidarians expressed concerns before, during, and after the court proceedings over the denial of a fair trial for those accused.

Moria 6

Six people were arrested following the fires in Moria Camp in September 2020 for setting the fires that razed the camp. Two officially recognized as minors stood trial in March 2021. At that time, the two had already been held in pre-trial detention for almost six months, the legal maximum period for minors, and consequently should have been released soon. In a hastily convened court hearing, [they were found guilty despite lack of evidence and sentenced to five years in prison](#).

The remaining four defendants were found guilty after a two-day trial on June 12th, despite a lack of clear evidence. None of the fifteen prosecution witnesses who testified in court had seen the defendants on the night of the alleged crime. Defense lawyer Natasha Dailiani ([Legal Center Lesvos](#)) stated: 'The only witness who identified the accused did not present himself to the court. His written testimony was full of inconsistencies.'

The six defendants were presented as guilty from the moment of their arrest. The Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarakis, had already stated in an interview with CNN on 16 September 2020 that 'The camp was set on fire by six Afghan refugees who were arrested.'

Vial 15

15 people were arrested following the fires in Vial Camp, Chios in April 2020. By the time of the trial, the defendants had spent a year and two months in pre-trial detention, including a minor (again exceeding the legal limit). The only evidence against most of the defendants is that a police officer claimed to have recognized them in the police database on his computer based on their appearance such as height and hair colour. However, the protests happened at night. The police heavily attacked the protestors with teargas and the people had their faces covered – with masks because of the Covid-19 pandemic and scarfs because of the teargas grenades and the heavy smoke coming from the fire. The majority of the defendants were arrested between two and twenty days after the fire.

The defendants for the fire in Vial Camp were all acquitted of the felony charge of arson and of the membership in a criminal group. Four people were found completely innocent, eight people were found guilty for resisting arrest and violence in the camp and one person for destroying public goods. One of the defendants was excluded from the procedure on the first day because he is a minor. Another person could not be found and arrested and therefore was not present in the trial. The nine people who were convicted received a 3.5 years suspended sentence, which the lawyers will appeal. All 15 people will now be transferred back to Athens and Chios and then be released, some on probation. Two of the defence lawyers, Dimitris Choulis from Human Rights Legal Project Sámos and Alexandros Georgoulis, stated:

“We are very happy with this development. Proud that we made the court to hear our plies for a fair trial and hopeful that this is not the exception but it will be the rule from now on. Also we are sad that this people spend a year and a half pre-detained for a crime that they didn’t commit. We wish them a better future in Greece with justice and solidarity.”

TURKEY NAMED A SAFE THIRD COUNTRY

On 7 June, the Greek government [announced](#) its decision to list Turkey as a ‘safe third country’ for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. With the decision, asylum applications from citizens of these countries who enter Greece via Turkey will be considered inadmissible based on the assumption that Turkey could offer protection and that the applicant should be returned. Nationals from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia make up about 70 per cent of all asylum applicants in Greece with a large share having protection needs recognised.

Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarakis, praised the decision as an “important step in tackling illegal migration flows and the criminal activity of smugglers’ networks.”

The move has drawn heavy criticisms by NGOs and human rights watchdog groups, who have called on Greece to revoke its decision and [argue](#) that the solution is not to send displaced individuals to Turkey. In Turkey, people seeking asylum from non-European countries are not granted international

protection per the 1951 Refugee Convention. In March 2021 Turkey announced it would withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, and will thus not be protecting victims of gender-based violence, who are at an increased risk in case of return from Greece, based on the new JMD. Moreover, according to a [joint policy note](#) published by HIAS-Greece and Equal Rights Beyond Borders, this Ministerial Decision actively places people seeking asylum from these nationalities in a ‘legal limbo’, as they both face possible rejection from the Greek Asylum System and Turkey’s refusal to allow readmissions on its territory.

According to the non-refoulement principle, people should not be returned to a country where their lives would be in danger, but multiple reports over recent years warn of the refoulement of refugees from Turkey, even to war zones in Syria. Furthermore, the concept of a “safe third country” presupposes the existence of an essential connection between the asylum seeker and that country, as well as the consent of the third country to receive the returnee. These conditions are not met in the case of Turkey.

SAMOS: 3-DAY PROTEST AGAINST PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE

Opposition to pushbacks is beginning to take a bold and united form in the Aegean. On the 24th, 25th and 26th of June 2021 [a series of events](#) – including marches, performances and speeches – took place on the island of Samos to raise awareness of the illegal practice of pushbacks and its devastating disregard of human rights. Initiated by the local group Samos Open Assembly as part of a [nation-wide action](#), the three days of events brought together the Samian community, NGO workers and volunteers, alongside individuals of the refugee and asylum seeker community residing in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre. The solidarity rally began on Thursday 24th with musicians performing alongside theatre performers [in front of the German Frontex boats moored in](#)

[Vathy harbour](#), as a means of raising awareness and mourning the loss of life caused by the illegal practice. Friday 25th saw a [well-attended protest march through the streets of Vathy town](#) collecting more people along the way with banners, slogans and the sharing of stories. Finally, the protests ended on Saturday 26th with a film screening, discussion and community dinner [took place at the Old School at Ormos-Marathokampos town](#). These actions were effective in reminding both the local and national community of the harm and violence caused by pushbacks and the broader border regime, and a profound way of remembering those people that lost their lives on the crossing between Turkey and Samos.



images of a protest against pushbacks that took place on Friday, 25th June in Samos (Source:See Bosco)

CROATIA

FOOTAGE OF FAMILY PUSHBACKS NEAR GLINICA

Further video evidence of pushbacks from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina were published in June by a coalition of outlets. An investigative journalism team from [ARD Wien/Südosteuropa](#), [Lighthouse Reports](#), [Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen \(SRF\)](#), [DER SPIEGEL](#), and [Novosti](#) filmed a total of six illegal collective pushbacks. The footage adds to a growing archive of visual material taken at this border which stretches [back to 2018](#). In particular this footage, which was filmed in the area of Glinica, gives insights to the experience of families who are squatting in the border area and facing multiple pushback violations as they attempt to enter from BiH.

Shot in May, the videos detail pushbacks carried out both at night and day. The footage shows families with young children, pregnant women, as well as minors with disabilities, all being removed on foot through the green border by Croatian officers dressed in various uniforms of the Croatian police; including armed officers in black uniforms, as well as the border police. Importantly, the team reporting on these cases were able to speak to many of the people immediately after the pushbacks and obtain testimony of their expulsion. Families told how they had been walking for many days in the Croatian interior before being caught and driven to the stretch of border west of the Bosnian town of Velika Kladuša. This latest evidence connects to a string of videos documenting this experience, of which one of the first was a [cache](#)

[of footage](#) analysed by BVMN showing the successive removal of transit groups near the Bosnian village of Lohovo.

While the recent videos corroborate much of the existing testimony on pushbacks, they added poignant insight into the way Croatian pushbacks are disguised. Notably, officers can be seen using binoculars to scan the border area for potential witnesses before bringing transit groups out from the trees to push them back. The awareness of scrutiny on the part of the Croatian state does not seem to have dented efforts to uphold the systematic pushback of transit groups at its borders. Infact, the Ministry of Interior has regularly responded to visual evidence with the weakly formulated excuse that they are examples of [border deterrence](#), rather than pushbacks initiated from the deep interior of the country. This window-dressing has been supported by the muted response of the EU Commission, with [Ylva Johansson](#) responding that “on the basis of a short video, the events are difficult to judge” – an ambivalence which only enables the continuation of pushback violence.



Still from footage of a family being pushed back from Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was published by a coalition of media outlets on the 23rd June 2021 (Source: [Der Spiegel](#))

TRANSIT GROUP SUPPORTED BY JOURNALISTS TO CLAIM ASYLUM

On 29th June, a report by the [RTL local television Potraga and the Telegram portal](#) was published regarding a family's asylum application. The press escorted an Iranian woman and her two children, a boy (14) and a girl (7) to a police station where they expressed their wish for international protection in Croatia. The Iranian woman and her two children were hidden from the police by residents of Karlovac County. Locals fed and sheltered the family, and had supported them to contact the press, convinced that only then would the family get the right to seek international protection.

A [press team with cameras](#) accompanied the family to a police station and documented the procedure as the police, who were described as "confused", telephoned their superiors, checked the credentials of the journalists and eventually lodged the asylum claim made by the family. Having been isolated under COVID-19 precautions, the family is now out of quarantine and their asylum applications are being processed.

What should be a relatively unremarkable legal procedure, took on far more symbolic proportions in the context of the volume of

people-on-the-move, who, despite requesting to lodge asylum applications, are regularly and illegally pushed back from Croatia's interior. The fact that the attention from national press outlets is deemed necessary to compel the police to carry out due process speaks to the kind of informal practice that is usually carried out when the public is not watching. As Telegram reported, only 1655 claims for international protection were submitted in 2020 in the whole of Croatia, reflecting the lack of access to asylum that the pushback regime has achieved. In this case, the mother of the family described 22 individual incidents where they themselves had been denied access to the asylum system prior to this recent attempt alongside the journalists. These included times when officers promised to drive them to the asylum shelter in Zagreb, but instead drove them to the border with BiH and cruelly expelled them across the border.

The situation also reminds of multiple cases, particularly in Zagreb, where volunteers of network members Are You Syrious and Centre for Peace Studies accompanied people to police stations to witness their asylum requests being lodged. These acts, however,

were regularly met with police harassment and the detainment of volunteers, while the transit groups were in many cases returned

illegally to Bosnia–Herzegovina or Serbia in spite of their claim for international protection.

CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES FIELDING HELP CALLS

Since last summer, network member Centre for Peace Studies (CPS) started getting an increasing number of help requests from people-on-the-move that were in Croatia and wanted to seek asylum. This intensified in the autumn period of last year, and the team started to internally document these processes. During the on-going global pandemic, the CPS team have also been in active communication with colleagues in the field and directly online with the pushed back persons that agreed to testify in criminal complaints.

The Croatian weekly magazine *Novosti* recently [reported](#) on the efforts of civil society organisations who receive calls from people-on-move on their official telephones. CPS gave a comment, sharing their experience of fielding distress calls from people asking for support in accessing the international protection system.

"(...) Unfortunately, the only way to seek asylum in Croatia is through the police or in a police station. If you agree, we can send your names and location again, but we do not know what the police will do to you and we cannot control that. We are a local organisation in Zagreb and we cannot influence police actions. We are very sorry about that."

SERBIA

"JUNGLE" SITES IN SÎD

"If I say 'racism' it will be better word for them. Because you don't have any fucking value in this country, in Serbia especially. Maybe a dog has a value, but not a human, especially migrant"

These words come from an Afghan man who in the morning of the 26th June was removed, along with many others, from the Principovac camp located in the north-west of Sid, on the border with Croatia. The reason for removing about 250 of the camp's residents was renovation works that had started in the camp on that day. People-on-the-move who found a temporary shelter in Principovac camp got only one day notice before the work started.

According to the records kept by CPS, in the period from January to June 2021, the team received 224 inquiries for a total of 178 groups of people-on-the-move and a total of at least 658 persons were involved. There were children in 82 groups, while for the other groups this information is not known. Members of the majority of the groups clearly articulated that they intend to seek asylum in Croatia and that they are currently on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. For the rest, this information is not known. During the reporting period, 49 inquiries were sent to the police – i.e. the institutions were informed about the intention to seek asylum and the need for emergency medical care. The Office of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children were also informed of this communication.

Of all the groups, just 10 finally got access to the asylum protection system in Croatia. CPS's general procedure was to send an email with the information and location of consenting groups to the Ministry of the Interior, the competent police department, and inform the Ombudswoman and the Croatian Law Centre about it (in cc).

According to the people removed from the camp, in the morning of 26th June three police cars and two buses arrived at the camp. There were about 15 police officers armed with batons and their faces covered with ski masks. They violently forced the camp's residents to enter the buses. However, many managed to escape and hide in the fields surrounding the camp. In the end, the police officers were able to fill only one of the buses, which then took the apprehended people-on-the-move to Preševo camp, on Serbia's border with North Macedonia.

Reportedly, about 50 people were allowed to stay in the camp, on the condition that they would work for free on the camp's renova-

tion. As their friends who were removed from the camp report, the difficult working conditions are made even worse by the hot weather.

Some of the people forced out of the Principovac camp managed to get registered in Adaševci camp, south of Šid. However, the authorities of that camp did not accept everybody. Some groups of people-on-the-move still stay in makeshift camps located around Principovac in the border-zone area between Serbia and Croatia. Although the living conditions in the camps in Serbia are described as appalling, exposing people-on-the-move to horrific hygiene standards and abuse of power from the camps' authorities, life outside the camps is also extremely precarious. The people there are denied the basic needs such as access to drinking water, food and safe shelter.

The camp authorities have attempted to force people away who set up their tents in the fields near the camp. They called the police but when Serbian police attend, the groups move to Croatia and then back to Serbia when they encounter Croatian police officers. This yoyo movement is a sad example of the precarity forced onto people living alongside the camp system. This fits into the general trend in the violence against people-on-the-move in the area. They are also kept away from the public spaces and out of sight of the locals, regularly being forcibly brought to the camps by the police when found in urban zones.



A makeshift camp in Sid, just outside of the official camp (Source: Erica Castiglione, No Name Kitchen)

ANALYSIS OF SITUATION IN SOMBOR

The Transit Reception Centre (TRC) in Sombor is one of the largest camps in Serbia. As most other official camps, the majority of services in this TRC are provided and overseen by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. According to the UNHCR it has capacity for 495 people, yet it is constantly overcrowded. In January of this year, the number of residents reached 847. By the end of May 2021 there were still 583 people staying inside the camp and many more in the jungle around.

For months, members of BVMN in the region have received informal and formal reports about the inhumane living conditions in the centre. A recent testimony from a former resident of the Sombor TRC –now staying in the jungle area outside of it– pointed at the lack of space and adequate facilities, specially worrisome in the context of the current global pandemic:

“There is not enough space. Some people are sleeping between the beds on the floor, on sleeping bags or some old clothes or anything. About the showers and the toilets, for the last two months, one month and 20 days maybe, [there is] no water for showers and for drinking in all the camp. And the food is bad. We tried giving it to dogs, literally they don’t eat it. They smell it and they move away.”

This lack of access to decent hygiene solutions has been highlighted by several camp residents, who not only spoke about malfunctioning and filthy facilities, but also at the insufficient provision of basic hygiene products by the camp personnel:

“If you go ask for shampoo or a piece of soap, you will get a few drops every two or three weeks.”

On the topic of medical assistance, this latest testimony joins other prior informal reports in denouncing its insufficiency –reportedly 2 hours of work a day for nearly 600 people– as well as the regular neglect of perhaps “non-life-threatening” but widespread conditions such as scabies and body lice.

In addition to the described inhumane living conditions, members of BVMN have gathered two separate testimonies that report on the existence of mechanisms of forced labour inside the camp. According to those reports, many residents are required to clean toilets, trash or even assist with construction work in the camp, in order to obtain essential non-

food-items that range from a piece of soap or new underwear to a blanket.

The Sombor TRC does not only fail in providing basic needs for people-on-the-move, but also endangers their safety. The camp and its surroundings are violent spaces. According to one testimony, physical and verbal violence seem to be common in the center. When asked about violence by the Commissariat the respondent said:

“They beat us, always. But no one dares to fight back. Because of too much corruption inside”.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

SUICIDE IN LIPA

On the night of June 29th, the lifeless body of a young Pakistani man was found in the forest near the Lipa camp, in Una Sana Canton. [Local authorities](#) and the Interior Minister of the Canton, Nermin Klijajic, claimed it was a suicide. Two police officers were injured with stones as they tried to enter the tent where the transit community was holding a ceremony for the person’s death. Local sources [reported](#) that police authorities and special forces police later arrived in the area and fired two shots in the air after.

The next day, the Minister of the Interior stated that after the incident, the situation in the Lipa camp was under control. After the autopsy, the matter of the suicide was no longer discussed, and no investigation was carried out to investigate the causes that led the young guy to hang himself. While there is limited information, it is clear that the en-

vironmental factors surrounding his death need to be strongly scrutinised. Police brutality, the closure of borders, and people being held in a state of endless limbo in camps all contribute to severe and lasting mental health problems for transit communities.

The deplorable conditions in which the transit community are forced to live are often presented as a result of “failed” Balkan countries, rather than extensions of EU externalisation. In fact, both the camp system and the closure and militarization of borders is carried out with direct and indirect financial and political support from the EU. While such camps remain a mainstay of migration management, the containment of transit communities in the border areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina will continue to be punctuated by mistreatment and avoidable deaths.

URBAN POLICING / CLOSURE OF SEDRA

This month, Bosnian authorities finally closed the family camp, Sedra, in Bihać on the first of July after it was slowly emptied out over the last couple of months. The remaining residents were moved to the Borici camp, according to [official reports](#). Most people staying in Sedra were families. It is more than questionable whether the appropriate conditions, and especially the necessary capacities to host these additional groups will be available in Borici. This prompted some families to leave Sedra in advance and not to go to Borici but to look for places outside the official structures.

In Velika Kladuša, the Miral camp is no longer issuing new identity cards that entitle people to enter the camp. As in the Sedra camp, it seems that the authorities want to gradually decrease the number of people in Miral to finally close down this camp.

These recent developments in the canton increase the number of people that live without any adequate shelter in make-shift camps and depend on the support of grassroots organizations and supportive locals. Bigger organizations like IOM do not supply all the areas where people are settling in the Una-Sana Canton.

The underlying intention behind these ongoing developments is to transfer all people-on-the-move, stranded in the canton, into Lipa camp. For several months now, we have been hearing reports that two separated areas are being built in Lipa, one for families and one for unaccompanied minors, where they will be ultimately taken to.

It is not only horrific news like this month's suicide in Lipa that demonstrate clearly that

Lipa is not a humane place to live, and it certainly cannot be a safe place for the most vulnerable. Conditions are dire: People-on-the-move who were in Lipa until recently reported that some of the toilets in the camp are constantly overflowing, and that the hygienic conditions in general are lacking. However, pooling all asylum seekers in nowhere places fits perfectly into the European hotspot system and begs the question if Lipa will turn into yet another Moria.

ITALY

QUARANTINE CAMPS, ARMY IN THE BORDER AREA AND PROTEST

The number of people-on-the-move arriving on Italian soil has increased largely on the Southern borders, and so appears to have increased in the Northern region as well. As stated by a [local authority](#), the increase compared to last year amounts to 20%.

During these months, there are no further news of informal readmissions/pushbacks, but in a recent meeting between [Lamorgese and Slovenian Interior Minister Aleš Hojs](#), the two States decided to re-establish the mixed patrolling of the border, that was interrupted due to COVID-19. It is said to be a common plan to patrol the frontier, with the use of drones and nocturnal vision "to effectively contrast the criminals that exploit migration".

Currently people who are able to enter the Italian territory and the city of Trieste are tracked down by police forces – who boosted their activity on streets and squares. In a [single day](#), 160 people were apprehended near Trieste on June 19th. They were from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Those who are intercepted by police forces on the streets are taken to quarantine camps.

In the meantime, the [Operazione Strade Sicure](#) (Safe Roads Operation, that started in 2008 to tackle criminality and establish and maintain public order) increased the number of agents involved. While in 2009 there were less than 3000 people, the Minister Lamorgese reached the number of 6753 agents involved in this operation across the country.

Military personnel were previously seen involved in the control of the border zone and the roads usually taken by groups trying to reach the city, in collaboration with police forces. One of these episodes took place in a village near Trieste, where the people were

caught and asked to sit on the ground under the sun for more than one hour without water.

Recently, the authorities activity started to focus on the train station and the adjacent square (where Linea d'Ombra and Strada Sicura operate), where various groups were stopped, identified and taken to quarantine camps. Specifically on [June 30th](#), a group of 11 new arrivals were taken in by police. There are frequently no mediators used in these actions and people are taken to the Questura to sign papers and get identified.

During the whole month many of these actions took place, along with the intensification of Polfer (train police) checks at the train stations and railways. This division of transport police often stopped and arrested people soon after they bought the tickets for the train. This appears to happen regularly in the morning and has resulted in many identifications and interceptions. This increased activity started in the second half of June.

On June 19th, the [Caravan for Freedom of Movement](#) made a convoy to the Bosnian border to demand an end to the EU's repressive migration agenda. Crossing from Italy to Slovenia, then to the Croatian border crossing of Maljevac, demonstrators from a wide coalition of groups stood together to remind that "the instigators of the violence suffered by people-on-the-move reside in the palaces of the European institutions". The day ended with a collective relaunch of ideas and initiatives across Europe, looking at ways to actively challenge the decision-making bodies of European migration policies.

GLOSSARY OF REPORTS, JUNE 2021

BVMN published 30 pushback cases in June, impacting 1,073 people-on-the-move. Those affected by these incidents included men, women, children with guardians and unaccompanied children. They also represent a wide demographic, including people from Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Nepal, Ethiopia, Somalia, India, Yemen, Palestine, Turkey, Syria, and Kuwait.

- 3 pushbacks to Serbia from Hungary,
- 5 pushbacks to Croatia from Serbia,
- 10 pushbacks to Bosnia Herzegovina (6 from Croatia, 4 from Slovenia)
- 10 pushbacks to Turkey (7 from Greece to Turkey, 2 chain pushbacks from Bulgaria via Greece, and 1 pushback from Bulgaria directly to Greece)
- 2 pushbacks from North Macedonia to Greece

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
HUNGARY TO SERBIA				
1.1	10th June	11th June	20	Afghanistan
1.2	14th June	18th June	15	Afghanistan
1.3	17th June	18th June	17	Afghanistan, Pakistan
CROATIA TO SERBIA				
2.1	1st June	8th June	25	Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia
2.2	14th June	16th June	2	Afghanistan
2.3	18th June	21st June	2	Afghanistan, Pakistan
2.4	19th June	20th June	3	Afghanistan
SLOVENIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
3.1	1st April	7th April	6	Afghanistan, Pakistan
3.2	1st June	1st June	4	Algeria
3.3	21st June	28th June	2	Afghanistan
3.4	29th June	1st July	6	Bangladesh
CROATIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
4.1	10th May	20th June	70	Afghanistan, Pakistan
4.2	3rd June	7th June	8	Ethiopia, Somalia
4.3	5th June	10th June	16	Iran
4.4	10th June	15th June	20	India, Nepal, Pakistan
4.5	10th June	11th June	1	Algeria
4.6	15th June	22nd June	6	Iran
MACEDONIA TO GREECE				
5.1	04th May	11th May	4	Morocco
5.2	28th May	14th June	6	Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
GREECE TO TURKEY				
6.1	9th May	11th May	40	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq
6.2	10th May	11th May	150	Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Afghanistan
6.3	2nd June	6th May	40	Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
6.4	19th June	7th June	130	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria
6.5	18th June	14th June	60	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria
6.6	25th June	26th June	60	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey
6.7	25th June	26th June	100	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Tunisia
BULGARIA TO TURKEY (VIA GREECE)				
7.1	20th June	21st June	200	Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
7.2	20th June	21st June	60	Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
BULGARIA TO TURKEY				
8.1	10th June	8th June	17	Palestine, Syria
Find all reports on the database here				

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

B O R D E R
V I O L E N C E
M O N I T O R I N G
N E T W O R K

BVMN is based on the horizontal participation of member organisations in the field of documentation, advocacy, media and litigation. The Network receives funds through charitable grants and donations from supporters. The funds primarily cover transport subsidies for volunteers in the field and staff costs.

To follow more from the Border Violence Monitoring Network, check out our [website](#) for the entire testimony archive, previous monthly reports and regular news pieces. To follow us on social media, find us on Twitter handle [@Border Violence](#) and on [Facebook](#). For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu. For press and media requests please contact: press@borderviolence.eu



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**