



Border Violence Monitoring Network

ILLEGAL PUSH-BACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS



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OCTOBER 2020

BALKAN
REGION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) published 40 reports of pushbacks and police violence at European Union borders. These cases, which relate the experience of 1003 people-on-the-move, are a testament to the brutal border systems in place at internal and external EU borders. Respondents experienced a range of physical, psychological and structural violence, which is examined in detail in this report.

In the case of Croatia, over 200 people documented by BVMN in October were subject to illegal expulsion into Bosnia–Herzegovina. Incidents of extreme physical assault by police officers in the Cetingrad area and even sexual violence are outlined in this publication. Meanwhile, chain removals initiated by Italy and Slovenia provide additional context to the way transit groups are placed at such risk in Croatia.

At the external border where groups are violently ejected, October also marked a deterioration of conditions in Serbia and Bosnia–Herzegovina. Pushbacks from Hungary into the Subotica area are described in line with internal displacements to the south of Serbia and fascist action across major cities. Meanwhile accommodation, and lack thereof, is discussed in the context of Bosnia’s Una Sana Canton, where support to those outside the formal camp system was formally cut off last month.

The average transit group size recorded across the route was down from 39 people in September, to 25 people in October. This partly reflects the types of transit recorded recently by BVMN, such as the use of trains and commercial ferries which necessitate smaller group sizes. The risks from these routes were tragically highlighted in the case of seven people killed in a container packed in Serbia, their bodies not discovered until the shipment arrived in Paraguay. This report considers some of the precarious foot and vehicle journeys which people are exposed to as autumn drags on, such as transit via passenger ferries across the Adriatic Sea from Greece to Italy. In Greece, recent data collected by BVMN shows the endurance of pushbacks carried out from the deep interior, in particular from camps and urban spaces. This is coupled with increasing internal violence in detention spaces and instability on Lesbos in the wake of the Moria fire.

At a policy level, BVMN also recently published a new in–depth [analysis of the EU’s migration pact](#), challenging the retrograde proposals regarding pre–screening, detention, assessment of minors, right to appeal, independent border monitoring and safe country of origin. The evidence presented in this report is a reminder that systemic violations are already entrenched practices at EU borders, which will only worsen under new proposals.

**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, Josoor, [re:]ports Sarajevo, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, Mare Liberum, Collective Aid and Fresh Response.*

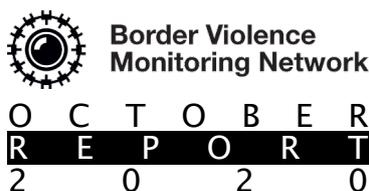


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REPORTING NETWORK

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

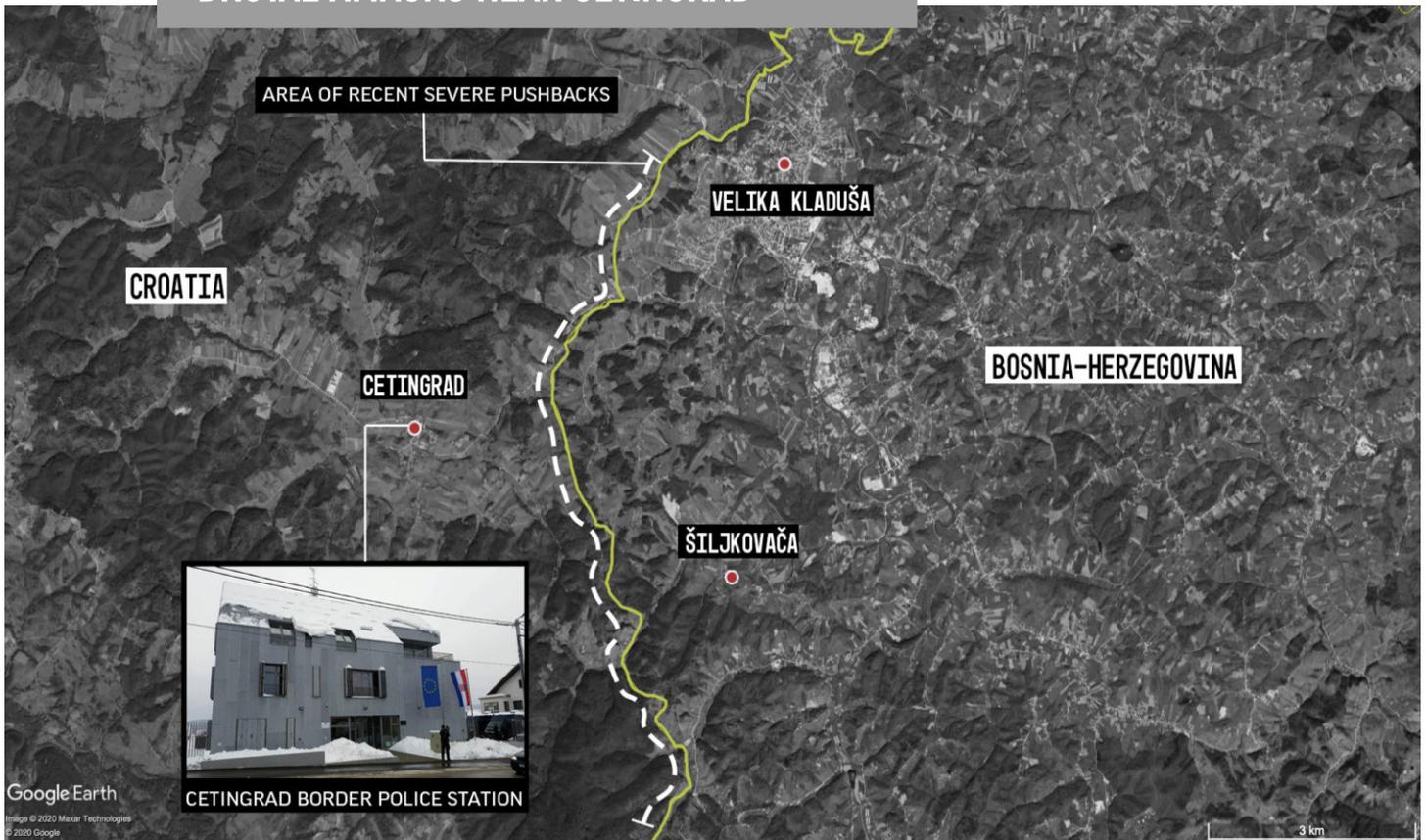
The methodological process for these interviews leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor push-backs at multiple borders. When individuals return with significant injuries or stories of abuse, one of our violence reporting volunteers 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
ITA	-	Italy
MNK	-	North Macedonia
ALB	-	Albania
GRK	-	Greece
TUR	-	Turkey

TRENDS IN BORDER VIOLENCE

BRUTAL ATTACKS NEAR CETINGRAD



Map of pushback locations in the Municipality of Cetingrad (Source: [NNK/BVMN](#))

In October, BVMN recorded the violent pushback of over 200 people from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many of these cases conformed to a recent trend in brutal attacks around Croatia's Cetingrad Municipality, bordering Šiljkovača and Velika Kladuša. They directly implicate divisions of Croatian police in the stripping, beating and humiliation of transit groups – actions intensifying in the autumn period.

Respondents cited the way officers – dressed in black and wearing face masks – ordered them to strip down to their underwear before attacking them with batons and tree branches. One person subject to this assault (see [5.4](#)) shared how they:

“had to give the officers everything they had with them: their phones and power banks, all of their clothes, including their shoes, their backpacks, their food and their money.”

In an investigation using materials filmed by transit groups in the border area west of Velika Kladuša, BVMN were able to analyse the location, time and forensic details of one of

these pushbacks (see [5.11](#)). Filming after the event, the transit group displayed their injuries to the camera, showing deep bruising caused by blunt force (batons/sticks), and surface abrasion where weapons had imparted friction on their bare skin. The injuries match many accounts already collected in the BVMN database, and similar cases published by the [Guardian newspaper](#) in cooperation with the Danish Refugee Council.

The recurrence of lateral bruising across the torso suggests that officers are often delivering blows from a vertical plane while people are laid out on the floor. This has been confirmed by reports from October, where several respondents explained the way they were ordered to lie down before being attacked by police. Within this practice, recent examples suggest a new and demeaning method has been used to aggregate transit groups at pushback sites. Officers ordered people-on-the-move to lie in a pyramid or crosshatch shape, semi-naked on top of each other (see [5.9](#)). This is used as a way of both pooling groups to target them with blows, and to cause maximum pain and humiliation as people are laid out semi-naked.



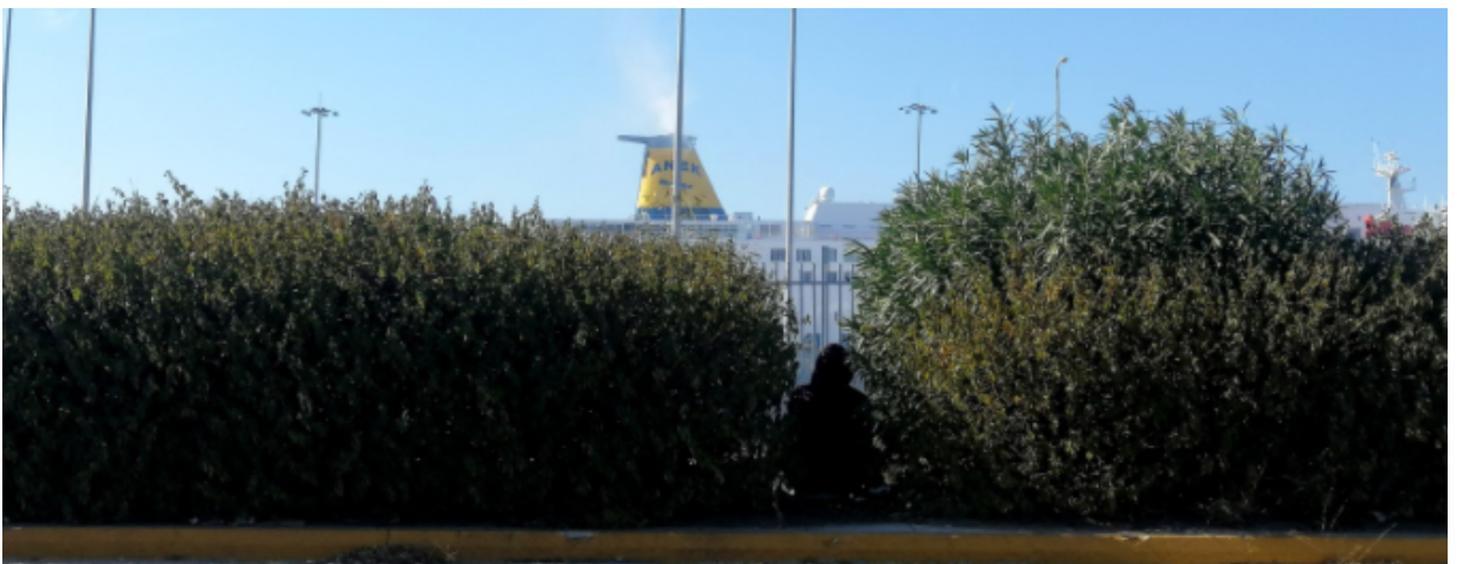
Injuries from assault by Croatian police (Source: [NNK/BVMN](#))

ADRIATIC PUSHBACKS

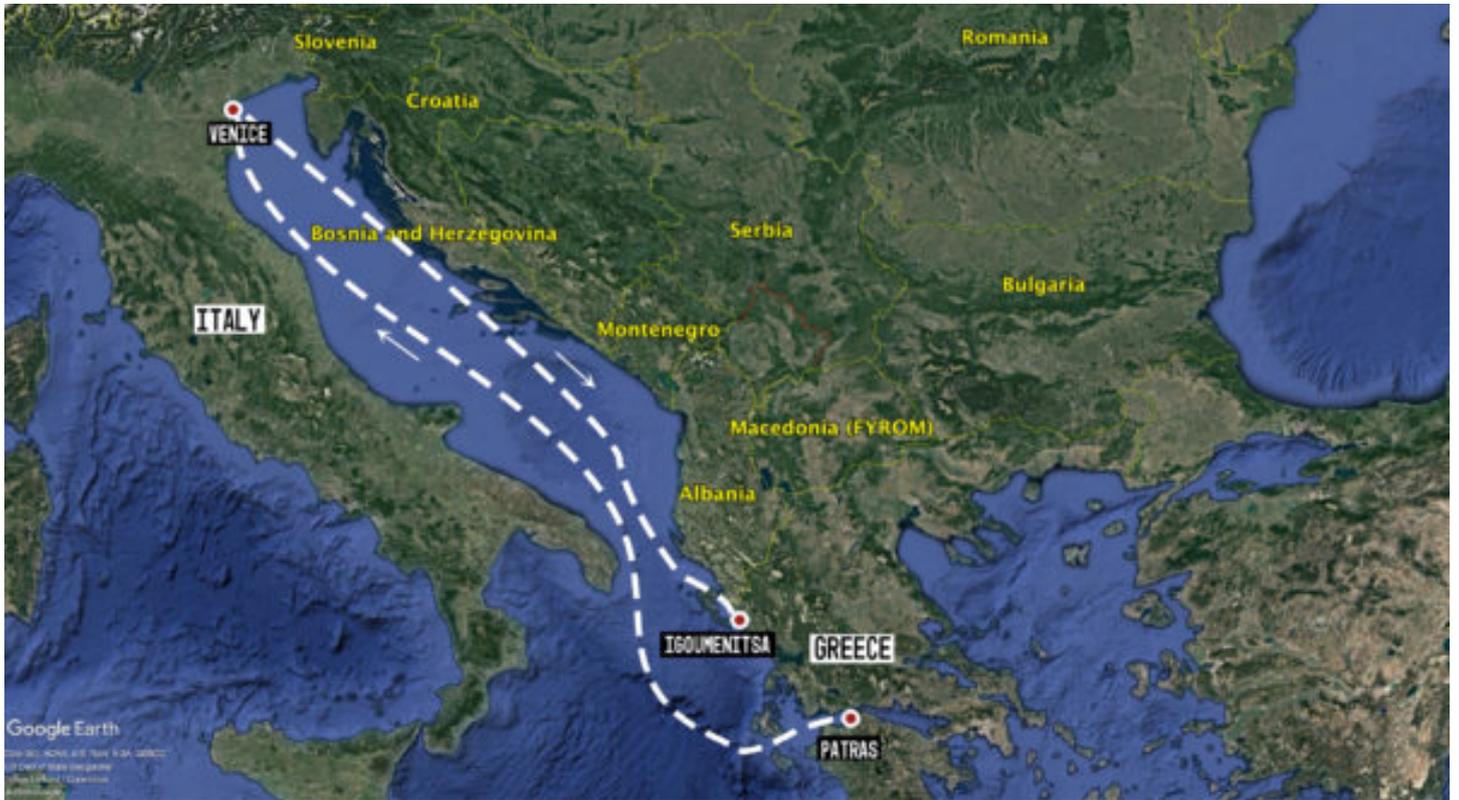
In October volunteers of No Name Kitchen, member of BVMN, encountered a paradoxical situation concerning exponential increases in policing of the Port of Patras and a simultaneous increase in success stories of people from the squatted factories reaching Italy. From approximately 5th October onward, the number of Greek police patrolling the exit from the factories and the entrance to the port has doubled or tripled on days with high maritime traffic. Not only are police cars found every 40 meters in-between the first two fences surrounding the port, but there is also an officer on a rooftop who notifies the officers on the ground of any movement.

Consequently, BVMN has recorded a high number of pushbacks on the Adriatic sea recently. Most of these follow a similar trend:

the person in question successfully manages to hide within a truck while it transits to Italy on a ferry, but on arrival they are found either by the truck driver or by officers patrolling the port. In almost all cases, the person is then detained and their personal belongings are confiscated – cell phone, documents, and even shoes (see [7.3](#)) – with some being told by the authorities that “there is no way to run”. In specific cases, stowaways are not even disembarked in Italy. Having been found already en route from Greece, individuals are detained in the ship for the return trip, and not released until the ship docks back in Patras. In one example, the respondent reported that a UN translator entered the ship in the Port of Venice where he was being detained to communicate to him that he’d be returned to Greece (see [7.6](#)).



Young man hiding from the police near the Port of Patras (Source: NNK)



Map of the push-back route according to a testimony. (Source: [NNK/BVMN](#))

When detained in Italian ports, personal information is gathered and fingerprints were forcibly taken in several cases reported in October. When people refuse this process, physical violence or coercion is used, as happened with a 20-year-old man who was beaten up by the local Italian police in the Port of Ancona (see 7.5). Two of the six individuals pushed back in October were physically assaulted, with the other case involving three security guards who boarded a ship to and attacked a minor (see 7.3).

People are regularly pushed back using the same commercial passenger ferry which they

arrived on. They are locked in what is usually described as a small dark room somewhere on the lowest floor of the vessel, closer to the engines of the ship. Testimonies regularly highlight the extremely cold temperatures of the room (see 7.4), the absence of blankets, food, a toilet or running water. Upon arrival in Greece, detainees are disembarked in either Patras or Igoumenitsa. In once case (see 7.2), the Greek police even threatened to push the respondent back directly to Turkey – a practice which occurred from Igoumenitsa in May of this year. Violence in Italian and Greek ports is therefore also now compounded with the risk of chain-removals to Turkey.

VIOLATIONS AT THE ITALIAN-SLOVENIAN BORDER

As highlighted in an article [Trieste Prima](#) in late October, the phenomenon of what the Italian authorities refer to as “*informal readmissions*” continues, continues, with large numbers of people being returned Slovenian without a legal basis – commonly known as a pushback.

In a recent testimony collected by BVMN, a group of six people from Bangladesh and Algeria described a very organized procedure, similar to previous cases of chain pushbacks from Italy to Bosnia (see [3.1](#)). When they arrived in Italy, they were caught by the military and transferred to Ferneti, a location close to Trieste. There, the respondent described a

“military tent erected for identification procedures of people-on-the-move and asylum seekers”.

Inside were around 60 people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan (including minors), and the police were dividing people by nationality.

In an article published by Rai News, the journalist claimed that this tented area was originally set up in May to put new arrivals into quarantine due to COVID-19. However, the tent is actually used for the identification procedures, and to accelerate the process of “informal readmissions” to Slovenia, in violation of international and national laws. In the



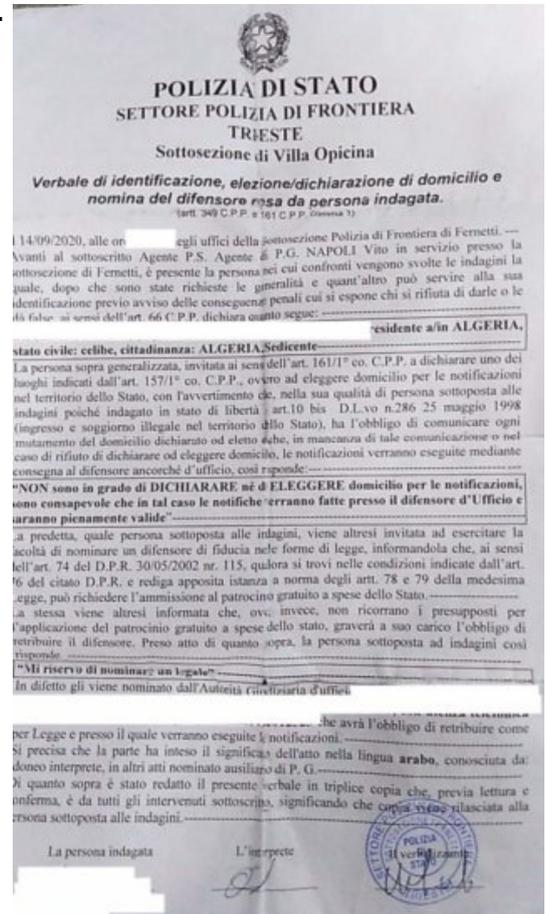
Photo of a military tent in Trieste area
(Source: [TRIESTEPRIMA](#)).

latest case, while the respondent clearly expressed his will to claim asylum, he was denied that possibility, and a police officer even lied telling him he would not be removed from Trieste. No legal assistance was available and the respondent also questioned the validity of the translation and the coercion used to make him sign the paperwork presented by the police.

“When they deport you, they make you sign this paper so that they can say you accept it. And of course, you sign it, who care[s] about you? They just say: ‘sign’ and you sign, because you don’t have power and there is no one listening to you.”

The testimony also shares how the detainees were denied dignity and basic rights: no food was provided during the prolonged detention and during their transfer by van to Slovenia

the group was assaulted by the officers when they raised concerns about ventilation. This violence overlaps overtly with the pushback apparatus in neighboring countries. As outlined in this case, removal from Italy to Slovenia is preceded in most cases with ejection into Croatia, where groups are subject to extreme violence during their expulsion into Bosnia.



An identification document the respondent was forced to sign (Source: [BVMN](#))

ONGOING INLAND PUSHBACKS FROM GREECE

Since March, BVMN has identified an ongoing trend of apprehensions and pushbacks from the mainland of Greece, especially in the Thessaloniki area. People who are often in possession of an asylum applicant's card (commonly referred to as “white card” or “Ausweis”) face arbitrary detention and then mass expulsion across the Evros river to Turkey. These developments, were recently covered in a full-length [article](#) by The New Humanitarian, providing further supporting evidence.

People-on-the-move are either stopped in the streets of Thessaloniki – often on pretext of document checking and questioning – or directly rounded up from Diavata camp in the

outskirts of the city. One testimony reports how plain clothed police officers arrived in the early hours of the morning and apprehended a large group of people (see [8.5](#)). The respondent recalled the traumatic nature of such apprehensions:

“They didn’t explain. He said they shocked me...They pushed us inside the vans and they kicked us...You can’t imagine how someone is sleeping and then someone took me by force from this place.”

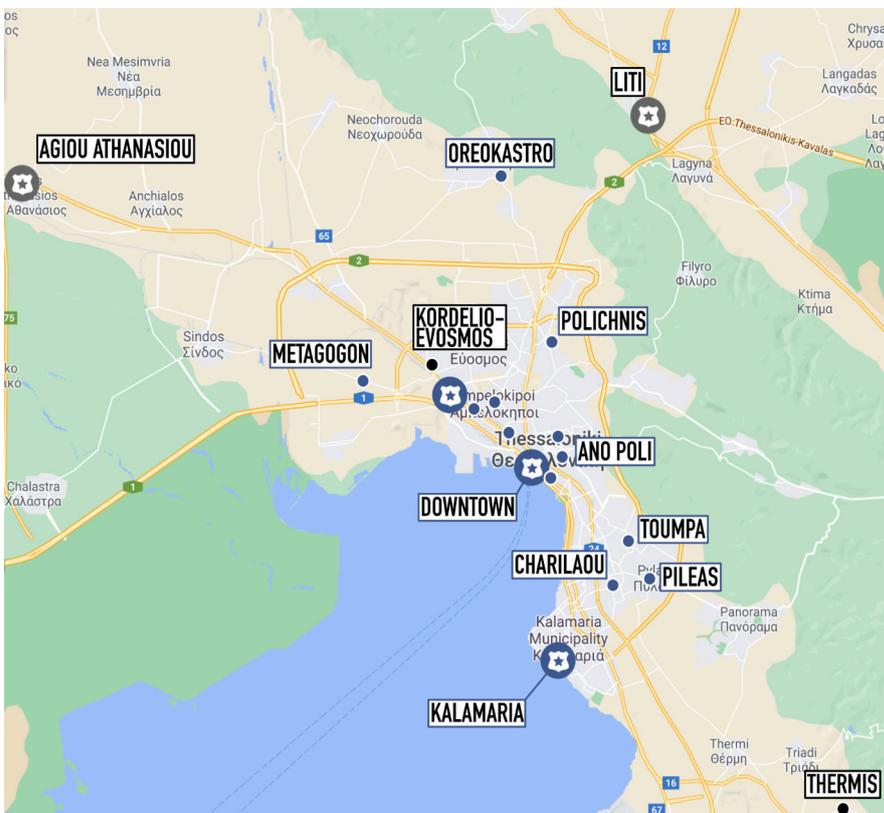
The group was then taken to the Thessaloniki Police Headquarters, one of five detention spaces that testimonies in October report the

use of. Other cases involved overnight detention in the station in Kalamaria (see [8.1](#)) and fingerprinting, and then later transfer to the municipality of Liti, in the northern outskirts of Thessaloniki (see [8.6](#)). In Liti, the respondent was repeatedly denied access to his lawyer – similar to reports from other respondents, who were held captive respectively in the Border Police station of Agiou Athanasiou (see [8.12](#)) and the police station of Republic Square in central Thessaloniki (see [8.5](#)) and received no food or water for the whole length of their incommunicado detention.

During said detention, treatment by police officers included beatings, as well as insults and racial slurs, and the destruction of personal belongings and documents. Claims for asylum were repeatedly ignored and people-on-the-move were not notified of their location or the procedure being carried out. As for consolidated practice, inland transfers continued with large blue police buses fitted with wire mesh over the windows, or unmarked vehicles, such as a white van driven by an officer in civil clothing (see [8.12](#)).

The outcome of these apprehensions feeds into the ongoing trend at the Greek-Turkish land border.

BVMN documented the pushback of 729 people across 14 separate incidents at the Evros border in October. Seen in the context of this new analysis of inner city police violence and arbitrary detention, the structural nature of pushbacks and their consistently abusive nature are further exposed.



Map of police stations in the Thessaloniki area (Source: BVMN)

HUNGARIAN BORDER PRACTICES

With temperatures dropping and winter fast approaching, there is still a high number of people-on-the-move trying to reach the EU from Vojvodina, Serbia before the harsh winter will make routes even more dangerous leading people to be stuck for several months. Although teams on the ground have witnessed that people-on-the-move on Serbia's Northern border have been trying to cross the border with less frequency than in summer, the number of people reporting pushbacks from Hungary still remains a concern.

“we didn’t beat you this time”

From testimonies that people-on-the-move shared with teams on the ground in October, the cases show that pushbacks from Hungary oftentimes follow a pattern. In two cases (see [1.1](#) & [1.2](#)), groups of people-in-transit were

forced to sit in squat positions after capture, often for hours without access to food or water. Most groups were subjected to violence such as beatings, forced undressings or insults by border officials or were verbally threatened with violence. Another pattern that can be detected throughout several testimonies is the practice of driving people-on-the-move back to the Serbian border in unmarked cars or vans before making them re-enter Serbia through gates in the border fence. While access to asylum on Hungarian territory was effectively erased through [legislative change this year](#), these pushback practices also connect to a fine tuned system of collective expulsion dating back to 2015.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION

SERBIA

STATE AND FASCIST ACTION IN ŠID

Volunteers in Šid (SRB) are facing increasing harassment from local individuals as well as the authorities. A fascist youth group called “*Omladina Shida*” (Youth of Sid), has recently called for the removal of No Name Kitchen (NNK) volunteers from Sid, as well as the removal of people-on-the-move from the municipality. As reported in the Serbian publication [Danas](#), the youth group organised a protest on the 1st November 2020 where they called for the military to be returned to the area and for all people-on-the-move to be held in camps. They also demanded that people should not be allowed to return to Serbia after being pushed back from Croatia or Hungary – citing fear over COVID-19.

People-on-the-move who once went into the centre of Sid regularly to purchase food and other essential items now report being scared to do so. The situation with locals and the police has worsened and one young man living in an informal settlement shared with BVMN his fears of physical violence:

“if we go into town, they will beat us.”

Volunteers from NNK have reported a dramatic increase in pressure from both locals and police. Photos and videos of volunteers, taken without consent, have appeared on Facebook and Instagram. Police also attended and disrupted distributions of food, and served several volunteers with removal papers, giving them seven days to leave the country. NNK organised a community event on Sunday 8th November 2020 as a response to the youth group’s protest and in order to build links with local people. They were subject to insults from onlookers and told to leave by police. Within the climate of larger fascist [demonstrations in Belgrade](#), and local responses against taxi drivers transporting people-on-the-move, these developments sit within a concerning trend of far right and police violence.

DISPLACEMENT OF SQUATS AND CAMPS

In the early hours of Wednesday 28th October 2020, members of the BVMN received messages from people-on-the-move in Subotica, Northern Serbia. As reported by network member [Are You Syrious?](#) (AYS), residents of both squats and the official camp had been raided by police and they were transferred to vehicles. People in the group reported that around 300 people were taken in six to eight buses on a 10 hour journey to the Preševo camp in Southern Serbia. There was no access to food or water during the journey. A man who was on one of the buses reported that he asked where they were being taken. He was told by Serbian officers he was being removed, “to Turkey”.

Upon arrival at the camp, they were taken by Serbian police to large rooms and told they could not leave. According to the account published by AYS some of the people were

“under extreme stress and fearful of a push-back to Macedonia, which could result in a chain that eventually takes them back into Turkey.” As yet, none of the people report to have suffered this fate, but it is common knowledge that [chain-pushbacks to Greece](#) were a regular occurrence in April and May of this year, making it a very realistic threat. For now though, most remain essentially detention, with people reporting they have to perform several hours work for camp officials in order to earn themselves an opportunity to visit the nearby town, and thereby travel back north. But with the number of people-on-the-move in Serbia exceeding the capacity of the camps, this cycle of displacement and violence is set to continue.

PEOPLE KILLED IN SHIPPING CONTAINER

Horrific reports of seven people-on-the-move found dead in a shipping container in Paraguay were published at the end of October by the [BBC](#) and the [Guardian](#). At least some of the men killed appear to be of Egyptian and Moroccan origin. They are likely to have entered the shipping container, filled with fertilizers, in Serbia sometime in July. It appears that they hoped the container would be shipped to Croatia or Western Europe. Instead, the men died of suffocation as the container crisscrossed half the world. When their bodies were found months later in Paraguay, they were largely decomposed.

This incident resembles multiple deadly attempted transits in cooling lorries throughout the past months and years. Most infamously, in 2015, [71 people-on-the-move suffocated](#) in a refrigerated truck en route from Hungary to Austria. Back then, the deaths of this migrant group served as an important moral justification to provide safe passage for people through the Western Balkans. But in the years since, with the route now firmly guarded by barbed wire and hostile legislation, more people have perished in badly ventilated vehicles as they try to circumvent the EU external border. Just last year [39 Vietnamese people-on-](#)

[the-move perished](#) in a truck in the UK, and in September of this year [Austrian authorities found 38 people](#) on the move close to suffocation in a Romanian truck.

All of these cases illustrate a similar phenomenon. With no safe (or legal) pathways open to Western Europe, people-on-the-move are forced to resort to increasingly dangerous modes of transportation to cross the EU's militarized borders. Too often, whether on a Hungarian highway, the sea between Libya and Italy, or inside a shipping container bound for the other side of the world, the result is deadly.



Container unloaded in Paraguayan port (SOURCE: [BBC](#))

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BLANKET BAN ON OUTREACH WORK

After the closure of the camp Bira in Bihać at the end of September, the number of people-on-the-move sleeping in the streets, informal camps and abandoned buildings has increased. Despite the arrival of the winter and the precarious conditions of people forced to live outside the Temporary Reception Centres, Una Sana Canton (USC) authorities issued a general [ban on assistance outside the camps](#) prohibiting the work of mobile teams from all the NGOs present in USC. As a result, people-on-the-move were denied access to humanitarian aid such as the distribution of clothes and food packages. This ban was aimed not only at organisations involved in food distribution, but also at organisations responsible for the protection of unaccompanied minors and those responsible for providing medical assistance. An ordinance this year had already prohibited locals and independent solidarity groups from assisting the

transit community, so this recent ban represents the phasing out of all support to people outside the camps.

Following this decision, on 26th October the [USC Migration Coordination](#) group met, alongside representatives of IOM and UNHCR, and agreed to reinforce the ban on access to public transport for people-on-the-move, and their right to congregate in public areas. The ban on transport has only helped in feeding an exorbitant taxi economy, constricting the mobility of people in and outside of camps. Under the new provisions, the USC Red Cross has also been mandated to monitor and coordinate the humanitarian activities of IOM, UNHCR and all outreach teams of other organizations, under the specific supervision of the Office of the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA).

Inside the official camps, moves have been taken to consolidate residents in larger, but

still ill-equipped centres. With closure of Bira in late September, the admission of new people to camp Miral in Velika Kladusa was also prohibited, with the main purpose of its gradual closure. The Ministry of Security was asked to expand the capacity of the reception centres outside USC to accommodate people currently residing in Miral. The Ministry is

also in negotiations to take over the management of camp Lipa and is requesting financial support from the EU for water and electricity costs. IOM was charged with the transfer of containers from the Bira to Lipa, but this only patches up what remains an insufficient accommodation site, wholly unfit for the impending winter.



Rubhall in Lipa where people are sleeping (Source: BVMN)

MISSING PERSONS ON THE BALKAN ROUTE

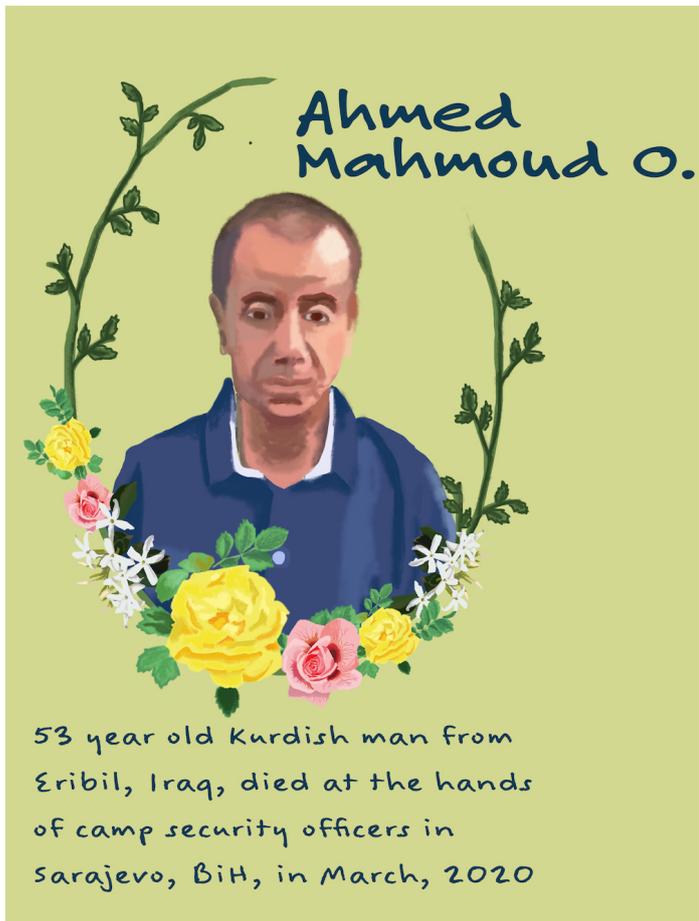
People die or go missing each year along the Balkan Route; drowned in rivers or subject to other fatal injuries in camps and at borders. Their friends and family sometimes never learn what has happened to them. Those who ask questions, such as local volunteers and companions from the transit community, are too often ignored by governmental organisations and institutions. These cases, many of which are cruel and avoidable deaths – are too rarely reported in mainstream media accounts. Recently, one case has garnered some particular attention: 19 year old Afghan Aziz fell, or was pushed, from a bridge near Sedra Camp outside of Bihać. People inside the camp called the police and implored camp authorities (i.e. IOM) to help. They received no support and called a volunteer they knew.

This volunteer, along with Aziz's brother Nassier, who lives in Germany, contacted German police authorities, who took a report, but said no further action was possible. Nassier travelled to Sarajevo, Bosnia. Volunteers there met with him and accompanied him to a police station. He was heard in Sarajevo, but told by the police they could not help with a case in Una Sana Canton.

He travelled from Sarajevo to Bihać and met with [No Name Kitchen volunteers](#) who took

him to speak with the police. The police took down details, but refused to get involved. Nassier tried to access video footage from a café near where his brother presumably died, the café told him they could only show it to the police, but the police told him the camera was broken. Similarly, the Red Cross of Una-Sana Canton only took down information, but didn't assist. Nassier and some residents in Sedra also spoke with IOM and UNHCR, but once again neither were willing to help in the search for Aziz or in the quest for information about the events leading to his disappearance. Finally, Nassier turned to the media telling his brother's story, hoping that he might learn what had happened.

While his story is now widely known, Aziz remains missing, listed among the countless others presumed dead along the Balkan Route. Deaths such as this bear an all too obvious connection to the precarious route set out for people-on-the-move by the European Union. [Transbalkanska Solidarnost](#) have recently set up a memorial page, honoring the fallen, and reminding people that these were human lives, full of vibrancy and ambition, with families, friends and stories of their own. Nassier's story is a moving obituary of his brother's life, and a sad indictment of the EU and its implementing partners in Bosnia, who showed such indifference.



YASSER BENDAHO IDRIS (27), FROM FES, MOROCCO, MISSING IN THE RIVER MREŽNICA NEAR GENERALSKI STOL, CROATIA, ON JUNE 1, 2020.

Memorials of people killed on the Balkan Route (Source: [Transbalkanska Solidarnost](https://www.transbalkanska.org/))

CROATIA

SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY CROATIAN POLICE

[Trigger warning: the below text contains graphic descriptions of rape]

Two heinous cases of sexual violence were reported by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in October, acts carried out by Croatian authorities during pushbacks to Bosnia. In articles published via the [Guardian newspaper](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/oct/29/croatian-police-sexual-violence-refugees), the reports describe the way individual group members were sexually assaulted with tree branches, acts amounting to rape.

In advance of these sexual assaults the perpetrating officers beat the transit groups with batons and stripped them of their clothing. One respondent recalled how the Croatian police used homophobic abuse, asking him repeatedly “Are you gay?”, before using a tree branch to sexually abuse him. [Dr Mustafa Hodžić](https://www.bvmn.org/en/news/2020/10/29/croatian-police-sexual-violence-refugees), who examined one of the survivors in the hospital in Velika Kladuša, stated there were

In statements given to DRC, the individuals identified the officers as wearing black uniforms and balaclava masks – matching the description of the Interventna police divisions deployed in Croatia’s border areas. Previous reports of these authorities have exposed the use of extreme torture-like practices, such as the [spray tagging](#) of peoples heads and the [smearing of food](#) into open wounds. These abuses are now the subject of criminal complaints launched by Zagreb based BVMN member Centre for Peace Studies. Twelve months ago, BVMN also documented a case where [officers used a tree branch](#) to grope the genitals of a Syrian family they had stripped to their underwear. These cases highlight the fact that while recent sexual assaults mark a level of unprecedented abuse, the practices share a lineage with the torturous methods developed by Croatian officials in the border area.

“unmistakable signs of sexual violence”.



REPRESSION AGAINST SOLIDARITY WORKERS

Recent months have seen an intensification of state-sanctioned pressure on NGO workers and their families. In the latest bout of criminalisation efforts, Croatia's Ministry of Interior (MUP) have taken further action by [targeting the partner of Tajana Tadić](#), program manager with Are You Syrious (AYS), a Zagreb based member of BVMN.

Tadić's partner, an Iraqi who arrived in Croatia on 26th April 2017, received refugee status the following year. During this time he began volunteering for AYS, assisting with translation and the organisation's integration programs. The MUP began to target him in 2019, summoning him to a police station in Zagreb where he was interrogated among other things about his relationship to Tadić. On following occasions he was pressured to become a police informant, and subsequently threatened with the revocation of his refugee status for not cooperating. Officers then illegally confiscated his residence permit, and only returned it after the interven-

tion of his partner. In May of this year the MUP revoked his refugee status, terming him a "threat to national security", though neither he nor his lawyer have been provided with evidence related to this false allegation, with the MUP denying a request for access. This revocation of his asylum status was appealed at the Administrative Court on 5th November and he now awaits a decision, facing the prospect of being removed back to Iraq despite calling Croatia home for the last three years.

AYS and other Croatian organisations such as Centre for Peace Studies have been the target of rising criminalisation and intimidation since 2015. This repressive climate was recently profiled in a network report titled [Shrinking Spaces](#) about constraints on solidarity work. The latest actions against advocates and their families fit into this context, and are disgraceful efforts on the part of the Croatian state to silence voices critical to its right-wing agenda on migration.

GREECE

FRONTEX'S AEGEAN PUSHBACKS

In testimonies collected over the last months by BVMN, it had been suggested that the European Border and Coastguard Agency Frontex, may have been involved in maritime push backs in the Aegean Sea. However up until now, there was insufficient evidence directly implicating Frontex.

This month, Bellingcat, Lighthouse Reports, Der Spiegel together released a report that

"proves for the first time that Frontex officials know about the Greek border guards' illegal practices – and that the agency itself is at times involved in the push-backs."

They focus on several key incidents in which Frontex was clearly present or involved directly in pushbacks, at times directly in collaboration with the Hellenic Coast Guard.

On 28th April, an aircraft used by Frontex twice passed over a migrant boat in the process of being pushed back. Frontex did not interfere. On the 15th of August, a Romanian Frontex vessel was again on site in the event of a pushback at the hands of the Hellenic Coast Guard. Here, the Romanian vessel MAI 1102 was located only a few hundred meters away from a dinghy being

pushed back, and can be clearly identified in footage taken by a Turkish Coast Guard vessel. A German navy ship on a NATO mission that observed the incident reported it to the German government. On 8th June, another Romanian Frontex Vessel (MAI 1103) was filmed by the Turkish coast guard directly blocking a migrant boat, and later driving past it at high speeds to create large waves. When contacted by Der Spiegel, Frontex did not deny the incidents, but rather stated that *"the officials protected the fundamental rights of migrants and respected their right to non-refoulement."* The Greek Government continues to flatly deny that pushbacks are happening. Frontex also launched an [internal inquiry](#) into the issue, conveniently finding that *"no documents or other materials have been found to substantiate any accusations of violations of the law or the Frontex Code of Conduct by deployed officers"*.

One potentially interesting development however comes through the introduction of the controversial [New Migration Pact](#) that provides for the creation of independent border monitoring. To date, despite calls from human rights groups including the UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, Refugee Rights Europe and [BVMN](#) to set up independent border monitoring structures, little has been done

on state and international levels to make this happen. While the path forward for practically creating and maintaining these monitoring mechanisms remains unclear, and will likely be a contentious issue for the governments of Central and Southeast Europe, it could be a significant development. Speaking to [BIRN](#), Greek ombudsman Andreas Pottakis elaborated:

“It is a positive recognition of the need for independent oversight over reception and border control operations... This brings again to the forefront the issue of an existing deficit of independent oversight on operations in which the EU is increasingly involved, which under the current arrangement remains unaddressed”

Currently in Greece, continued denials that pushbacks are even occurring, and the im-

punity with which the Hellenic Coast Guard (and allies in Frontex) have been committing acts of violence against people-on-the-move make the idea of successful independent border monitoring mechanisms rather speculative, but this remains to be seen, as the New Migration Pact comes into effect.



Frontex vessel filmed during a pushback (Source: [Der Spiegel](#))

INTERNAL VIOLENCE REPORT

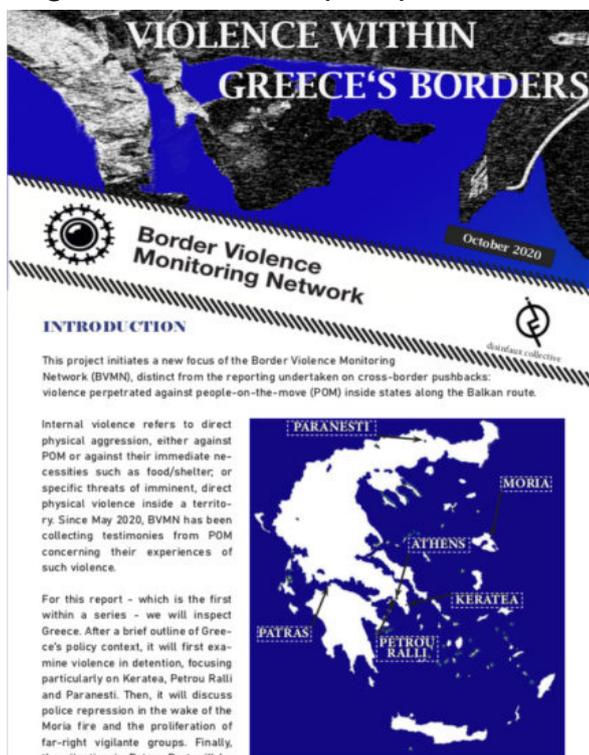
In October, BVMN released its first [Internal Violence Report](#), focusing on physical and verbal abuse suffered by people-on-the-move within Greece’s borders. In the coming months, more country-specific reports on internal violence will be published by BVMN.

The report illustrates that people-on-the-move are exposed to extra-judicial violence not only in the process of pushbacks: Throughout the country, reports show that

Greek police and vigilante groups violently attack and steal from people-on-the-move without necessarily detaining or illegally removing them. The report also shows that border violence is not exclusively used for returns, but reports from Patras point to Greek authorities and private securities also exerting violence to dissuade people-on-the-move prior to transit attempts.

Finally, the report details grueling accounts of violence inside Greek detention facilities, where people-on-the-move are frequently imprisoned for many months, waiting for their asylum status to get resolved or to be removed from the country. In addition to a lack of basic of services (food, water, hygiene, and medicine), respondents reported beatings as well as verbal and sexual abuse in Paranesti (North-Eastern Greece) and Petrou Ralli (Athens). Similar practices have previously drawn [criticism](#) from the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), calling on Greek authorities to take “rigorous action to counter acts of ill-treatment.”

As the situation escalated since the completion of the report, [two suicide attempts at the Amygdaleza detention center](#) have prompted a hunger strike among a multi-national coalition of women held inside. These actions point to the desperation of women whose status remains unresolved after being imprisoned for many months. The women make clear that they believe that without dramatic actions, the authorities will take no steps to advance their status.



Internal Violence Report (Source: [BVMN](#))

SITUATION IN CAMPS ON LESVOS

One month after fires destroyed Moria Camp, and its inhabitants were forced into a new temporary camp near Kara Tepe, the situation continues to deteriorate on Lesbos. The new camp has been described as “[worse than Moria](#)” by many people-on-the-move, and lacks essential infrastructure such as adequate hygiene/sanitation facilities, food, and medical care. All of those living there are housed in canvas tents, which are completely insufficient for winter conditions on the island and frequently lack electricity. Already in late September and October, heavy rains flooded the camp on several occasions. With the winter coming, the situation is likely to get worse. The [UNHCR](#) has supported government-led efforts within the new camp by delivering gravel to reduce the risk of flooding, in addition to insulation kits, flooring with pallets and plywood sheets for family tents. However, following a meeting BVMN

attended with the head of the UNHCR for Greece, there is no clear plan on the part of national or international authorities for further preparation of the camp for winter weather.

Plans to shut down all other housing structures outside of the new camp at Kara Tepe also seem to be slowly coming into effect. After almost two weeks of uncertainty and postponement, Pikpa refugee camp was evicted on 30th October. A massive deployment of Greek police was used in [the eviction](#), forcibly removing the 74 vulnerable residents to the old Kara Tepe camp, a process that has already caused one hospitalization. Lawyers and psychosocial support workers were not allowed into the area as the eviction was taking place. Meanwhile further plans remain in place to close the Kara Tepe family camp by 31st December.

ITALY

ANTI-MIGRANT PROTESTS IN TRIESTE

Every day in Piazza Libertà, the main square in Trieste, Linea d’Ombra and Strada Si Cura gather to give assistance, first aid and solidarity to the people who arrive from the Balkan Route. While this city in North East Italy was once viewed as a safe haven, since spring this year it has also become synonymous with pushbacks via Slovenia and Croatia, to Bosnia and Serbia.

Throughout this time the local associations bring healthcare and support, but also monitor and denounce the violent EU pushback regime that transit communities traverse on their way to Trieste. This solidarity work is well known, and until now seemingly tolerated by the police and the government. However, that did not stop authorities approving an anti-migrant rally in Piazza Libertà in October, organised by far right groups who decry the migration approach of the Italian government.

[News footage](#) of the ensuing clash showed violence from fascists and police against the volunteers and public who came to oppose this racist street action. It was clear that the [police forces](#) who came to the scene were there to facilitate the anti-migrant demonstration, and officers violently pushed and hit protestors out of the square and into the middle of a trafficked street. In the road, fascist groups were just waiting with raised fists, and weapons such as chairs and motorcycle helmets. Some of the anti-fascist protestors were [severely wounded](#) in the clash.

People who came with hate and violence at the square met a compact, solid group of people that would not leave the square and would put their bodies at risk, to prove that there is another, possible answer to hate and discrimination. The fact that Italian authorities defended this violent rally, masked under the pretense of free speech, is proof of a wider effort to stifle solidarity actions with people-on-the-move in public spaces. Yet authorities did not reckon with the swell of antifascist action who blankly refused to give ground to these sentiments of racism and hatred, and will continue to fight for the rights of new arrivals in Trieste.



Carabinieri stationed in Piazza Libertà (Source: [Mauro Minni](#))

GLOSSARY OF REPORTS, OCTOBER 2020

BVMN published 40 reports from October affecting 1003 people from a wide demographic of countries including: Afghanistan, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Iraq, Syria, DR Congo, Somalia, Egypt and Libya. The interviews account for a range of groups and individuals including men, women, families and unaccompanied minors.

Of the pushbacks recorded in September there were:

- 16 to Bosnia-Herzegovina (1 from Italy, 1 from Slovenia and 14 from Croatia)
- 3 to Serbia (1 from Croatia and 2 from Hungary)
- 7 to Greece (1 from N. Macedonia and 6 from Italy)

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
HUNGRY TO SERBIA				
1.1	23rd October	25th October	1	Morocco
1.2	26th October	27th October	13	Afghanistan
CROATIA TO SERBIA				
2.1	9th October	31st October	4	Afghanistan
ITALY TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
3.1	16th September	11th October	5	Algeria
SLOVENIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
4.1	22nd October	28th October	25	Pakistan, Bangladesh
CROATIA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
5.1	23rd September	20th October	3	Morocco
5.2	25th September	15th October	1	Iran
5.3	29th September	22nd October	20	Morocco, Pakistan, Afghanistan
5.4	3rd October	11th October	6	Algeria
5.5	7th October	10th October	50	Afghanistan
5.6	9th October	20th October	3	Algeria
5.7	11th October	12th October	10	Pakistan
5.8	15th October	15th October	9	Algeria, Morocco
5.9	16th October	17th October	16	Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria
5.10	17th October	20th October	12	Afghanistan
5.11	19th October	22nd October	10	Pakistan, Algeria
5.12	22nd October	24th October	7	Pakistan, Algeria
5.13	22nd October	27th October	19	Iran
5.14	25th October	26th October	25	Pakistan, Tunisia

FIND ALL REPORTS ON THE DATABASE [HERE](#).

LINK	INCIDENT	RECORDED	GROUP	DEMOGRAPHIC
NORTH MACEDONIA TO GREECE				
6.1	24th October	26th October	42	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Somalia, Libya
ITALY TO GREECE				
7.1	9th September	7th October	1	Afghanistan
7.2	11th September	24th October	2	Afghanistan
7.3	2nd October	10th October	1	Afghanistan
7.4	12th October	14th October	1	Afghanistan
7.5	10th October	15th October	1	Afghanistan
7.6	24th October	26th October	1	Afghanistan
GREECE TO TURKEY				
8.1	19th August	19th October	13	Iraq, Syria
8.2	12th September	7th October	25	Pakistan, Syria, Morocco, Algeria
8.3	15th September	5th October	90	Syria, Algeria
8.4	16th September	19th October	100	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq
8.5	30th September	12th October	30	Afghanistan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
8.6	4th October	13th October	52	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Libya
8.7	6th October	13th October	12	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh
8.8	10th October	21st October	17	Syria, Morocco, Algeria
8.9	12th October	17th October	15	Pakistan
8.10	13th October	21st October	60	Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Afghanistan
8.11	16th October	21st October	100	Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria, Morocco, Algeria
8.12	18th October	23rd October	80	Pakistan, Iraq, Libya
8.13	26th October	29th October	55	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, DR Congo
8.14	27th October	29th October	80	Syria, Morocco, Egypt
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 a volunteer led endeavor, acting as an alliance of organisations in the Western Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of participant organizations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation. We finance the work through charitable grants and foundations, and are not in receipt of funds from any political organisation. The expenditures cover transport subsidies for volunteers in the field and four paid positions.

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
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