

BRIEFING: TORTURE AND PUSHBACKS

CROATIA 2020

“They treated us as if we are not human, but even animals are not treated this way”

- January 5th, 2020. Pushback from Croatia to Bosnia

What is the 2020 Torture Report?

This briefing complements the publication of the 2020 Torture Report which reveals BVMN’s full data regarding allegations of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment experienced during illegal pushbacks from Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Italy. The report has identified 6 main categories of abuse including; excessive and disproportionate force, electric discharge weapons, forced undressing, threats or violence with a firearm, inhuman treatment inside a police vehicle and inhuman treatment inside a detention facility.

Key Findings from Croatia:

- In 2020, BVMN collected 124 pushback testimonies from Croatia, exposing the treatment of 1827 people
- 87% of pushbacks carried out by Croatia authorities contained one or more forms of violence and abuse that we assert amounts to torture or inhuman treatment
- 39% of pushback groups subjected to torture or inhuman treatment by Croatian authorities contained children and minors

Pushback Trends in Croatia:

The use of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment in 2020 by officials at EU borders – including towards minors – remains stubbornly high. 85% of all testimonies from over 4,500 migrants at the borders of 11 States complained of such treatment. Over a third of the groups included minors, the youngest of whom was just 5 months old, clearly demonstrating the indiscriminate nature of these practices.



A closer focus on testimonies from Croatia reveals abuse in nearly 90% of recorded cases in 2020 and increasingly documents multiple forms of choreographed abuse. As such, forced undressing or the use of firearms more than doubles in comparison to 2019, whilst inhumane treatment in police cars and dog attacks increased twofold. Further actions, no less cruel, fall outside the reports identified patterns of abuse; such as the mock execution where a migrant was hung by his neck, the migrants whose heads were smeared with food or those spray-painted with crosses.

If they looked at an officer in the face they were hit or tasered. Guns were trained on them as they were forced to strip, their belongings were burnt. They were made to swim across the border whilst officers shot at them in the river. Earlier, during beatings with batons, the minor sustained a severe injury to his leg, the group was then pushed to the ground and kicked in the ribs. One man's teeth turned black after a punch to the face. Afterwards, they were held in detention without water, food or medical attention and then taken to the border to be pushed back.

-February 2, 2020. From Croatia to Bosnia

The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) is a coalition of organisations documenting expulsions and police violence along the EU’s external borders in the Western Balkans, Greece and Turkey since the network’s formulation in 2016. The collection of data on illegal pushbacks and police violence is done by a consortium of independent field volunteers who are part of or cooperate with humanitarian support groups united through the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

Patterns of Torture and Pushbacks in Croatia During 2020:

Excessive and Disproportionate Force

Testimonies of violence, abuse and disproportionate force are the most frequent type of testimony collected. **In 2020, this type of violence was present in up to 89% of testimonies collected from Croatia** and represents a 10% increase from the previous year. BVMN has documented cases of excessive and disproportionate force that include assaults lasting up to six hours, attacks by unmuzzled police dogs, and food being rubbed into the open wounds of pushback victims.

Electric Discharge Weapons. In 2020, BVMN has continued to see EDW's being used as a punitive and coercive policing tactic against compliant persons where there is no risk to life or injury to justify its use. Of increasing concern is how **EDW's are being used during lengthy attacks against people-on-the-move** whereby victims are routinely denied follow up medical care, without consideration of their age or health status.

Forced Undressing. In 2020, the use of **forced undressing's impacted up to 45% of all pushbacks carried out by Croatian authorities.** As with previous years, BVMN has documented cases involving the forced undressing of minors, the burning of clothes and the continued practice of forcing people across international borders in a complete state of undress.

Threats with Firearms. Following several instances in 2019 of Croatian authorities shooting or discharging their firearms at people-on-the-move, BVMN is concerned about the continued use of firearms to threaten and intimidate. In 2020, BVMN has identified that **up to 31% of all pushbacks from Croatia involved the use of threats or excessive force with a firearm, of which, 54% indicated the presence of minors.**

"When one of us passed out, they would start on the other. They beat us like they had the full right to beat us, I don't know what to say to you to describe the kind of injustice they dealt us with. I told the highest-ranking one that my bones were broken and that they had broken my leg that I couldn't stand. He said not to worry as they would proceed to break my other body parts such as chest, feet, head and arm. They kept on beating me."

-May 27th, 2020. Pushback from Croatia to Bosnia.

Inhuman Treatment Inside A Detention Facility. BVMN regularly records testimonies that depict how, before being pushed back, people-on-the-move are often detained by Croatian police. BVMN asserts that detention occurs in both formal detention facilities such as police stations and the Trilj and Tovarnik detention centres but also in informal and inadequate facilities such as the notorious garage near Korenica police station. Data collected in 2020 indicates that **up to 48% of testimonies resulted in detention, of which 66% of detention cases were held with no access to food, water or toilets.**

Inhuman Treatment Inside of a Police Vehicles. In 2020, **up to 41% of all pushback testimonies from Croatia indicated inhuman treatment inside a police vehicle.** The use of extreme driving, prolonged confinement and the manipulation of temperature within the vehicle is now viewed as a common method of abuse used to purposefully punish people-on-the-move. Further to this, BVMN has identified the purposeful use of overcrowding as a disturbing tactic by which **Croatian police transport up to 30 people forced into the small vehicle for several hours, often with terrible health implications.**

"Germany, France says they don't need refugees, and the European Union don't want refugees, therefore I will beat you, go back motherfucker."

-May 02nd, 2020. Pushback from Croatia to Bosnia.