

# VIOLENCE WITHIN GREECE'S BORDERS



Border Violence  
Monitoring Network

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disinfo collective

## INTRODUCTION

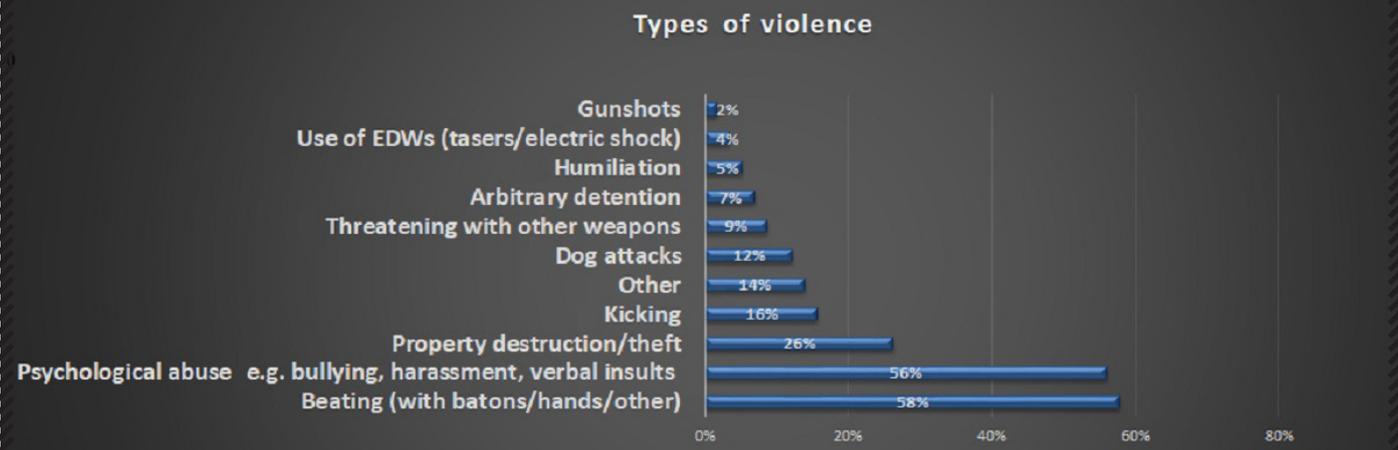
This project initiates a new focus of the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), distinct from the reporting undertaken on cross-border pushbacks: violence perpetrated against people-on-the-move (POM) inside states along the Balkan route.

Internal violence refers to direct physical aggression, either against POM or against their immediate necessities such as food/shelter, or specific threats of imminent, direct physical violence inside a territory. Since May 2020, BVMN has been collecting testimonies from POM concerning their experiences of such violence.

For this report - which is the first within a series - we will inspect Greece. After a brief outline of Greece's policy context, it will first examine violence in detention, focusing particularly on Keratea, Petrou Ralli and Paranesti. Then, it will discuss police repression in the wake of the Moria fire and the proliferation of far-right vigilante groups. Finally, the situation in Patras Port will be explored.



The aim of this report is to bring together reporting on violence and human rights violations, while creating an informative resource on the situation in Greece. Our analysis reveals that the assaults suffered by POM are not isolated incidents but rather fit into a pattern of [rising violence](#) exercised by Greek law enforcement officers since 2019. In fact, this is systemic, involving various state and non-state actors across Greece. Through the collection of testimonies, BVNM has implicated local and national police officers, the Hellenic Coast Guard, military forces, [private security companies](#) and local groups. Locations include transit areas, the Greek islands, state run facilities and public spaces.



## POLICY CONTEXT

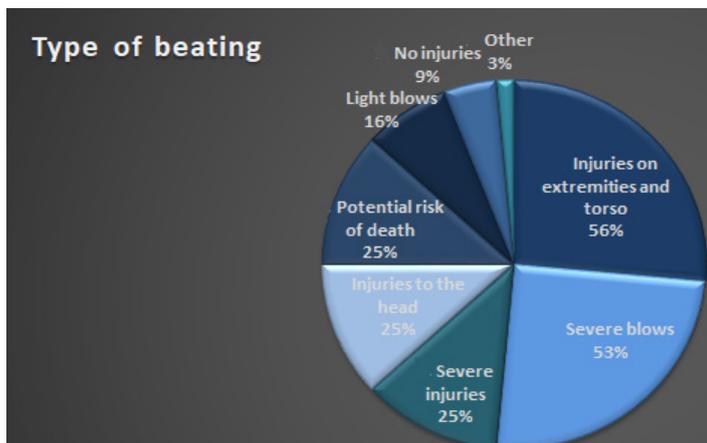
While far from perfect under the Syriza government, the situation of POM in Greece markedly deteriorated with the election of the New Democracy party in July, 2019. With Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis calling migration an [“asymmetrical threat,”](#) a highly securitised, anti-immigrant agenda was pursued to create a hostile environment for transit communities. Whilst BVNM has long documented the implications of this at the border, this report offers a new perspective from inside Greece.

Some notable policies include beefing up Greece’s police force with [2,000 additional officers](#) and the launch of [“Operation Net”](#) in Athens that will see some 130 armed officers - incongruously dubbed the Black Panthers - patrol transport hubs in the capital.

Already Greece has seen an increase in excessive use of force and ill-treatment by the police, including [severe beatings](#), unlawful arrests and humiliating practices of illegal undressing and photographing detainees. This recent [‘militarisation of the public space’](#), has accompanied an unprecedented concentration of power in the Ministry of Citizen Protection that oversees the police, which also took charge of the Ministry of Migration and the penitentiary system [in July](#). As the New Internationalist puts it, Greece is witnessing the emergence of a [“police state.”](#)

It is important to note, however, that violence against POM is the result of the European Union (EU) acting in its perceived self-interest. Since 2015, the EU has used Greece as a [buffer zone](#) against unwanted migration. Besides providing €130 Million for the [detention centres on Aegean is-](#)

it has granted Greece access to over [€ 700 Million](#) for migration management. The budget does not clarify what this money will be spent on.



Still, the role of the EU in violence within Greece is more a question of subtle pressures and omission, rather than direct policies. When Greece adopted new legislation in 2019, which expanded [asylum-related detention](#) and [rolled back safeguards](#) for vulnerable groups, the EU remained silent. When [reports](#) emerged detailing dire conditions and rights violations in holding and pre-removal facilities, their response was equally hushed. This is despite the fact that the report's observations breach the bloc's [own legal requirements](#) that asylum applicants must have an "adequate standard of living which protects their physical and mental health". As a result, there is little faith that the "independent monitoring" of compliance with human rights promised in the EU's 2020 [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) is more than hot air.

## INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY

The human cost of violence is high. On the 25th of September, a 23-year-old Moroccan man was sitting with two friends having dinner on the outskirts of Kavala, Greece.

A police car arrived, dispersing the group, and the man was apprehended by three officers who proceeded to beat him in a savage flurry of

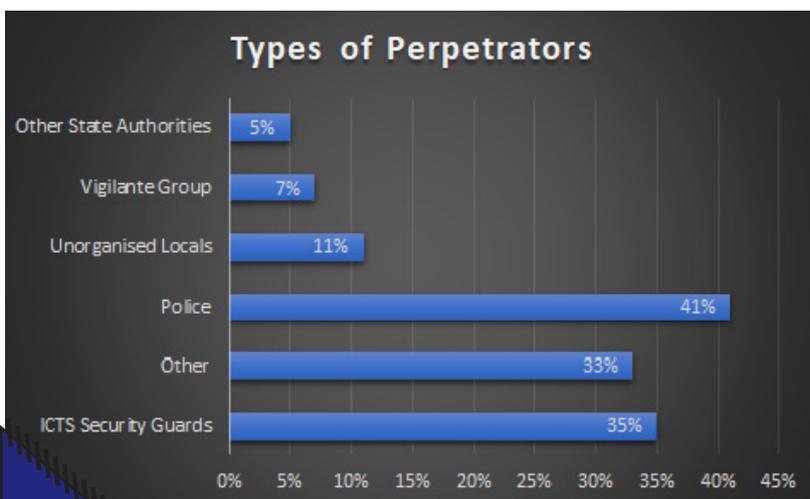


kicks, fists and strikes with metal batons. He sustained a broken nose, swelling to the head, fractured shins on both legs, abrasions to the arms and his front tooth was knocked out. While the man was unconscious on the ground, the officers emptied the contents of his bag into a nearby river. It contained his phone, money, powerbank, jacket and a small quantity of food.

Despite his injuries, the police drove away,

**39 %** of the cases might qualify as **HATE CRIMES** due to referencing the affected person's race, ethnicity, religion or country of origin during the violent incident

Despite his injuries, the police drove away, leaving the man to walk three days to Thessaloniki in search of food and medical assistance.



## VIOLENCE IN DETENTION - KERATEA, PETROU RALLI, PARANESTI

For this report, BVMN examined multiple incidents of violence within state run facilities, particularly detention centres, in Greece. Article 3 of the [European Convention of Human Rights](#) explicitly states that “no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.” This is an absolute, non-derogable right - even if the individual concerned has entered the country illegally - and contains the positive obligation that prison conditions are consistent with human dignity. This is further emphasised in the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) which necessitates police cells be a reasonable size, clean and in decent conditions, alongside that at least one meal is provided.



Reports collected by BVMN indicate the reality of detention in Greece consistently contravenes such obligations. The [Paranesti Pre-Removal Detention Facility \(PRDF\) in Drama](#), northeastern Greece, is notoriously harsh. Testimonies collected by the Network reveal that ‘[mass beatings](#)’ of detainees by the police, individual assaults and deplorable conditions, [including insufficient access to food](#), are commonplace inside the facility. [One respondent reported](#) that he was hospitalised 5 times in violent altercations with the police over the course of 45 days.

BVMN has identified similar patterns of violence in the [Petrou Ralli PRDF](#) near Athens, a long standing hotbed of [human rights violations](#). Besides breaking his shoulder and rib in a fierce beating, one respondent described how several police officers inside the camp insulted his religion and nationality. He later resorted to self-harm because of the traumatic conditions.

Under both national and international law, such acts constitute a hate crime. However, evidence suggests that, due to [deeply rooted institutional racism](#) within Greece, law enforcement authorities do not take reports of racist crime seriously or believe the victims of such offences.

Elsewhere in Athens, Are You Syrious (AYS) disclosed [inhumane conditions](#) at the Keratea police station, where basic needs and human rights - to hot water, beds, hygiene facilities, natural light, access to the outside world, medical treatment and legal support - were denied. Following a hunger strike by 12 inmates over the terrible state of affairs inside Keratea, AYS received a message reaching out for help and demanding the fulfilment of their right to a dignified life. These cases are indicative of the broader patterns of state violence as detailed across this report.

**15 %** of the individuals affected by violence within Greece's borders are **MINORS**

## VIOLENCE AFTER MORIA FIRE

The September fires in Moria Camp [grabbed international attention](#) with images of burning tents and thousands sleeping on the streets. In recent years, Moria has become [infamous for its inhumane living conditions](#), systemic neglect and state violence: a grim symbol of Europe's border policy. Yet, following the fire, punitive police repression dovetailed with long-standing forms of structural violence to create a situation where people impacted by the fire were stripped of all options and forced into a new temporary camp in the Kara Tepe area - [despite clear demands for evacuation and freedom of movement](#).

In the months leading up to the fire, [tensions on Lesbos soared](#) over the building of closed camps, the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid deterioration of living conditions in Moria and the fact that 20,000 people remained confined in a space originally built for 3,000. Since February, the state's effort to open closed camps on Lesbos has been met



with [heavy opposition](#) from locals against having migrants on the island. In the Spring there was a surge in violence against POM by far-right vigilante groups, who set up road-blocks to do [informal ID checks](#), [attacked migrant boats](#) and even [shot at POM](#). When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Greece, Moria was placed under a lockdown that in practice became a permanent structure, enduring long after restrictions were lifted for the rest of the island. Despite reports that [far-right groups brought canisters of gasoline](#) to help it spread, the exact cause of the fire is unknown. What is clear, however, is that those fleeing the fire, many attempting to reach the Island's capital Mytilini, were prevented from doing so by the police, who established blockades. On the smaller streets through Moria Village, locals, together with known fascists, blocked roads. Armed with sticks, rocks, and often wearing balaclavas, these groups intimidated, harassed and even attacked POM that were attempting to escape the blaze, according to BVMN respondents.

The following night came more fires, and the remnants of the camp burned. By the 10th of September, nearly all POM formerly living in Moria camp [were sleeping rough on the streets and in the hills between Moria, Panagiouda, and Karatepe](#). Hemmed in by police using teargas and stun grenades, they could not move on. Several witnesses describe POM being heavily attacked with teargas - at times directly fired at people's legs or heads - assaulted and beaten with batons. Thousands were trapped there for over a week without access to food, shelter or water. In the first days, POM organised [demonstrations](#), demanding freedom and not to be sent to another camp, that were met with [more teargas and mass detentions](#).

The army, originally charged with its provision, decided not to distribute food over concerns of inciting a riot. This responsibility was eventually palmed off to NGOs formerly active in the camp, but only after POM had been without basic provisions for four days. In fact, the state's primary response was to send [nine contingents of riot police from Athens](#) to “maintain public order”, water cannons and an anti-organised crime unit the Attika Security Directorate. In a move widely condemned as a [feminisation of border security](#), 70 female police officers were dispatched to “soften” policing and “convince” women and children to relocate to the new camp. [Medical teams were, on several occasions, prevented from accessing POM](#) between the police blockades, and ambulances were denied entry.

On September 18th, a [police operation began](#) to move all POM to a new temporary camp near Karatepe. Individuals were threatened by the police that if they did not go to the camp willingly, they would be imprisoned or that their asylum applications would be terminated.

One worrisome feature of the crisis on Lesbos is the behaviour of vigilante groups. In the militarised context imposed by the New Democracy party, far-right, anti-migrant groups have proliferated across Greece. In the north, villagers clad in black clothes and heavy boots, resembling the Greek special forces, have formed vigilante mobs who now patrol the Evros border [“looking for migrants.”](#)

Taken in the context of larger patterns of structural violence by state institutions, as well as the immediate forms of police brutality, such local reactions towards POM mark a significant and notable escalation in direct violence in Greece.



## PATRAS PORT

For decades, POM have faced the brutality of public and private authorities in Patras, as they risked their lives trying to get on trucks boarding ferries bound for Italy. Today, there are currently around 200 POM in Patras living - or rather surviving - in deplorable conditions, with limited access to humanitarian assistance, at the mercy of smugglers and policy



In between the two stage barrier surrounding the Port and the restricted-access port facilities, patrolling activities are carried out by ICTS Hellas, a private security firm with deployments inside the Port for over 10 years, and Greek police. Both have received [EU funding since 2015](#).

At the passenger entry point where vehicles board the ferry, border authorities and ICTS Hellas use canine units and scanners to search for POM. Interviews conducted by No Name Kitchen (NNK), reveal unidentified actors wearing camouflage uniforms working alongside these officers. An analysis of Patras Port, the surrounding locality, and the actors at play reveals a stratified logic of violence against POM whose movements are brutally limited.



The reports collected show [different levels of violent action](#) perpetrated by local police officers, border authorities and personnel of ICTS Hellas. The first, most immediate, level of violence is largely “reactive” and occurs the moment individuals enter the Port space.

POM are subjected to mental and physical abuse in the form of insults to their culture, spitting, kicking, beating, destruction of mobile phones, threats of forced deportation and dog attacks. Indeed, POM can be held for days in unofficial cells within the Port area.

The area between the adjacent factories and the Port is home to the second level of violence. There are three roads and two barriers separating the Port from the factories.



This area is meticulously searched by police and motorbike patrols who chase those trying to enter the Port. Inside these factories, the third level of violence occurs. This takes the form of officers' invasion into the private sphere of POM in Patras through the congregation of police officers around POM's residences and unexpected raids, often at night. These episodes involve disturbing sleep, beatings, searches, destruction of belongings and

arrests, as NNK interviews with those affected testify to. Unwilling or unable to return, yet prohibited from moving forward, POM are trapped in



the violent quagmire of Patras. [This situation is far from new](#), but the continuation of such obvious and outright violence is symptomatic of violence within the Greek state as a whole. Direct and physical aggression against POM and their immediate necessities continues undisturbed, even intensifies in the wake of Mitsotakis' hostile environment, and yet the EU turns a blind eye as external borders are fortified and remain strong.

