



**ILLEGAL
PUSHBACKS
& BORDER
VIOLENCE
REPORTS**

**BALKAN
REGION
NOVEMBER
2019**



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

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Executive Overview

The Border Violence Monitoring Network gathered and published extensive material on pushbacks and their violent application during the month of November. This report covers several different trends, analysing the illegal and life threatening police practices which govern the external border of the European Union. Here, case material gathered from the Western Balkan Route corroborates the recent publication of BVMN's wider statistics, particularly in regards to the use of firearms during collective expulsion, but also the continuation of unlawful detention and border incursions.

In focus were the high number of cases from Croatia in which guns were either present, or fired while ejecting transit groups from the territory. In November, BVMN released its entire dataset on firearms use, which is analysed here in conjunction with two major incidents reported by the media. The near fatal shooting of one transit person, and the wounding of another, are read within a context of continual firearm use to threaten, and intimidate people-on-the-move. This sits within the supporting evidence of BVMN reports from November, despite attempts by Croatian authorities to shift the burden of blame away from their police officers and towards people-on-the-move.

More incidents from Bajakovo BCP have also highlighted the ongoing use of detention facilities to abuse minors during their pushback from Croatia to Serbia. Meanwhile in Slovenia, official stats were released to show the stark rise in removals to Croatia under the bilateral readmissions agreement. This large scale misuse of legal removal framework is compared to the practice of Croatian pushbacks, and given further critique when witnessed next to the poor conditions in the Una-Sana Canton (BiH) to which the majority of people are being returned.

This report also follows expulsions from Greece to Turkey, chain pushbacks from Italy, heightened transit into Bosnia-Herzegovina, and squat evictions occurring in western Serbia. In summary, the information collated by BVMN in the field, combined with developments in the region, paints a disturbing picture of EU border practice on the West Balkan Route in the early winter months of 2019.

General

Reporting Network

Testimony analysed in this November field report was recorded by volunteers from No Name Kitchen, Philoxenia and The Border Violence Monitoring Network.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

Methodology

The methodological process for these reports leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor push-backs in the Western Balkans. 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 standardized 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.

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.

Abbreviations

BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina
HR - Croatia
SRB - Serbia
SLO - Slovenia
ITA - Italy

EU - European Union
TUR - Turkey
GRK - Greece
BCP - Border Crossing Point
USK - Una Sana Canton

Trends in Border Violence

Firearms statistics in pushbacks from Croatia

In November, BVMN published an [entire dataset on firearms](#) use in pushbacks, establishing the use of guns by Croatian police officers as a broad and concerning trend. The material was released in response to a near fatal shooting in Gorski Kotar, where a transit group was fired upon by police, resulting in the [hospitalisation of one man who received life threatening injuries](#). The response from the [Croatian Ministry of Interior \(MUP\)](#) was to claim this shooting was part of a regular operation, and police sources state the gun [accidentally went off](#) as an officer slipped. Yet this case from 16th November 2019, was soon followed by a second shooting in the same mountainous area, with injured by a bullet wound to the shoulder. Furthermore, supporting testimony gathered in by BVMN in November showed that, even with a person-in-transit at risk of death in Rijeka hospital, Croatian police officers continued to use firearms during illegal collective expulsion, with a clear intentionality.

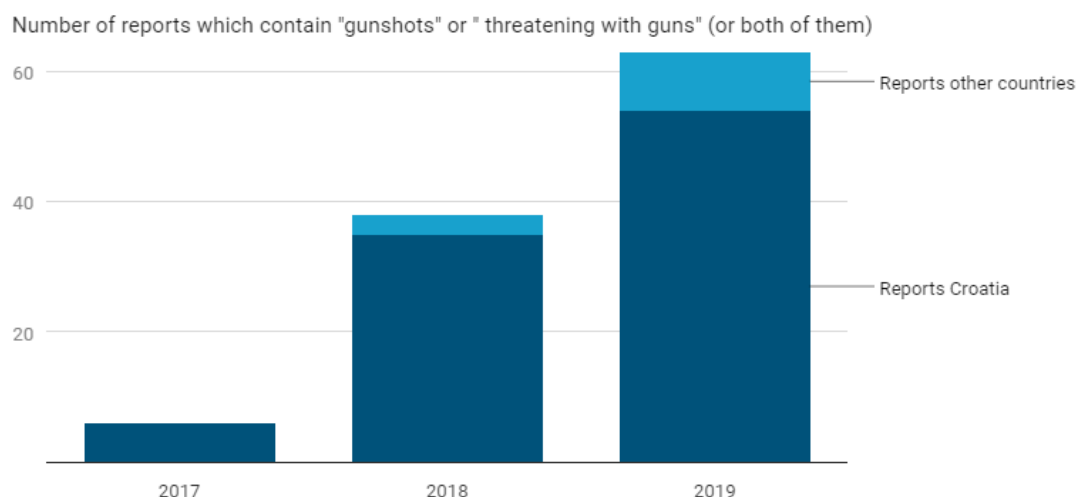


Croatian pushbacks filtered by "gun" use (Source: [BVMN](#))

The data collected in 2019 depicts a far more systemic problem than just these two shooting cases alone. This year a total of 770 people in transit were subject to the use of guns when they were pushbacked - involving both hand-guns and assault rifles. The database shared by BVMN represents only a portion of these illegal expulsions, meaning such a figure is at best a conservative estimate of the number of people subject to firearm abuse. BVMN statistics from 2019 show the discharge of weapons by officers in 31 out of 54 recorded cases, querying the institutional response that this was merely an accidental incident.

With such a frequency of cases in which weapons are fired close to transit groups, in some previous incidents [even close to children's heads](#), it is obtuse to suggest the critically wounded man is just a victim of chance. The prior [shooting of two](#) minors in transit was reported by [Are You Serious \(AYS\)](#) in 2017, and was raised as a timely reminder that these violations are not a new occurrence, in spite of the recent increase in gun related incidents.

Reports containing gun violence



Firearms data recorded until 18th November 2019 (Source: [BVMN](#))

Instead, as shown in the graph above, threats and discharge of weapons during pushbacks have grown significantly over the last three years. Yet, as seen in the first incident from November, such weapon discharge has already become life threatening for people on the move. This calls into question the logic of “warning shots”, used as justification by the Croatian MUP. In BVMN case material, warning shots were fired even at groups who had voluntarily called the police (see [3.13](#)), showing that weapons are used readily to threaten, and physically intimidate, rather than providing any functional purpose (see [3.1](#)).

Statistics from the first ten months of 2019 describe many cases where guns were used in massive breach of transit people’s fundamental rights. A specific incident from November supports this, highlighting the use of firearms to coerce a group into the river marking the border between Croatia and BiH (see [3.2](#)).

“Two officers fired pistols into the air and began pushing them [the transit group] into the river”

Firing live ammunition at very close proximity to transit persons in order to immerse them in deep and cold water is violent and potentially deadly. The fact that the river also

constitutes a green border, determining this act as collective expulsion, exposes the mechanistic role of firearms within illegal pushbacks.

The level of excessive gun use speaks to the mutual relationship between militarization and management of the EU's external borders. The treatment of people-on-the move has become increasingly governed by this repression, further eroding the mandated access of transit persons to asylum systems and due process (as granted under [Directive/20018/115/EC](#)). Adherence to law and appropriate accountability for these actions need to be brought into place, because as the evidence from November confirms the use of guns in pushbacks from Croatia continues to put lives in danger.

Further violations from Croatia's Bajakovo BCP

A basement room used to abuse minors reappeared in a testimony recorded by BVMN in November. The underground portion of the Bajakovo Border Crossing Point (BCP) was host to another severe incident involving unaccompanied persons under the age of eighteen. As with the three cases shared in the [October Report \(pg 4\)](#), Croatian border officials removed the transit group from a vehicle and used the concealed lower ground floor of the BCP to detain, humiliate and beat the minors.

The report contains information corroborating the previous testimony, identifying the proportions of the room in line with previous statements. Led down a single flight of stairs, the three Afghans from the latest case were placed in an unfurnished space which had one other door, leading to an adjacent room. Here they were held by officers for between four and five hours, coerced for the majority of this time to assume a crouched position on the floor. The respondent recalled how they were, "*Commanded to squat face down looking at their feet*", and attacked by the officers when they moved from this pose.



Injury to wrist from baton strike (Source: BVMN)

During the ordeal, separate officers took turns beating the minors in a series of episodes using closed fists and batons. The physical abuse was also accompanied by psychological violence. After the impact blows, the guarding officers proceeded to imitate blows, causing the detained minors to be in a constant state of fear. The respondent said these feints and near misses were designed to intimidate and exhaust the group. The minors were also subjected to a pat down search inside of the basement and their belongings were taken and damaged (the charging ports of phones were broken with screwdrivers).



Phone charging ports damaged by police officers (Source:BVMN)

It is not the first time the basement in the BCP at Bajakovo has witnessed extreme harm to detained transit groups. Since the animation of this crossing point in 2015 when large movement of transit populations saw constrictions soon brought into place, the BCP has played a troubling role. A [fire ripped through the facility](#) in January of that year, causing deaths and serious injury to the detained transit persons held in the basement. Centre for Peace Studies (CMS) have been supporting [the legal case of one victim](#) who suffered severe physical injury from this incident. With new case material also emerging from Bajakovo alleging continued use of this clearly inadequate detention space, CMS has also written directly to the [Ombudswoman for Croatia](#) calling for immediate investigation of the site.

The body of evidence localized around this single BCP alone shows an alarming disregard for human life, fundamental rights and legislation such as the [Schengen Border Code](#), to which Croatian national boundaries have now been deemed fit. The cases, which are due further investigation, reveal the depth of unlawful detention practiced by Croatian authorities. This upholds a wider trend of abuse within pushbacks, not only through the extreme violence at the green border, but also in formal BCPs. Across these locations there is a willingness on the part of supposed law enforcement agencies to risk the lives of people in transit, be it in detention spaces or with the unsolicited use of firearms.

Case material of pushbacks initiated from Italy

In November, an interview with two transit people returned from Italian territory into Bosnia-Herzegovina (via Slovenia and Croatia) was a cogent reminder that pushbacks are a multilateral project that involves several states and countless violations. The incident (see [1.1](#)), which saw three people from Morocco exchanged between three separate national police forces, is an extreme (but not unprecedented) example of how people-in-transit are denied their legal rights to asylum and due procedure, even deep into EU territory.

In a [testimony from August](#) a group was returned from Ferneti (ITA), through the combination of hasty readmissions procedures and an illegal pushback to Velika Kladuša (BiH). This recent case revealed a similar use of sequential removals, forcing the respondents back into the same town in the north of the Una-Sana Canton. Statements during the interview highlighted legal abuses within each of the three national territories.

ITALY

“At the police station [Trieste, ITA] a female translator from Morocco asked the group if they wanted to express intent for asylum. The respondent said, “Yes”, but the translator told the respondent to write ‘No.’”

SLOVENIA

“An officer [Ljubljana, SLO] told the respondent that they ‘Are going to the judge.’ The respondent believes they were wrongfully informed regarding this process.”

CROATIA

“[At the HR border] the respondent described how the group was hit on the shoulders and back with police batons. ‘They beat us in Croatia.’”

A set of transferable violations combine here, implicating each state authority: from their requirements to uphold the Common European Asylum System, to their obligations to human rights. Slovenia have been consistently aiding the pushback apparatus of the Croatian state, and it now seems that evidence is building to suggest Italy is also complicit in the chain refoulement of people-in-transit. These participating member states in the pushback regime are not only reshaping the EU’s external border, but also redefining the interior of Europe and its semblance to legal norms.

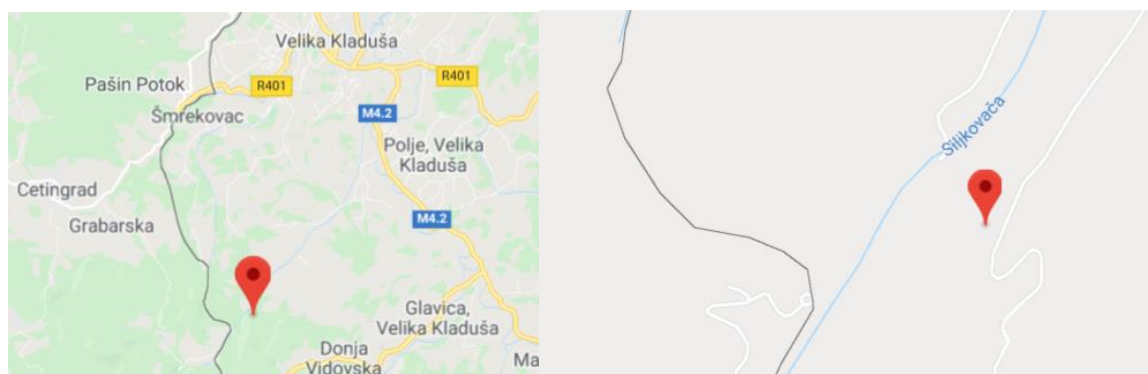
Cross border incursions present further illegality

In a recent report from 10th November 2019 (see [3.6](#)), the respondent described being taken by Croatian police into woods where he was forced to undress, beaten and robbed. This incident is a regular pattern recorded by BVMN, but the case is particularly revealing because the person was able to pin the location where it occurred, which was markedly inside BiH territory. The report describes how:

“[The 24 year old man from Western Sahara] pinned the push back location on his phone and claims they were in the woods within the Velika Kladusa municipality at 45.137198, 15.786798, inside of BiH territory.”

This offers further insight to the ongoing challenge to territorial sovereignty which pushbacks pose. Reception of transit groups in BiH is increasingly subject to the highly irregular use of the green border by perpetrating Croatian authorities, and a total negation of law. Notably foreign police officers are prohibited from entering BiH without notice prior notice (and via agreed border arrangements) as stated under Article 126 of the [Law on Foreigners of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).

These unlawful incursions are part of a recorded pattern, with Croatian officers transgressing the green border and entering in BiH unannounced to violently expel transit groups. A case from [August](#) revealed the respondents group being “chased” and beaten into BiH territory near Poljana, as Croatian officers fired guns in the air. Meanwhile in [October](#) people-on-the-move were violently pushed into the Papari river inside BiH by infringing Croatian officials. That same month, BiH officers [“documented that the Croatian police hit a tractor trailer in the village of Glinica-Poljana near Velika Kladuša”](#) while firing live rounds of ammunition into BiH territory, as reported by [Zurnal](#).



Pushback location pinned by the respondent: 45.137198, 15.786798 (Source: [Google Maps](#))

The most recent example was initiated from the Croatian-Slovenian border, and saw the respondent merged with a larger captured transit group in Karlovac (HR), before being driven into BiH by van. At the pinned location in remote woodland, the group were beaten by Croatian police with batons, the respondents existing hand injury being targeted specifically.

"How can you beat me when my hand is already bleeding? My friend please stop."

The assault, carried out by a foreign national in law enforcement uniform, raises serious questions about the rule of law and Croatia's ability to respect national boundaries. These criticisms were given further voice in November via the sighting of [two Croatian officers who were stopped in Rujnica](#), near Cazin, by BiH police. When asked about their presence in BiH territory the officers simply answered: *"We came for coffee"*, offering a crude excuse for a clear infraction which was linked at the time to the whereabouts of a large transit group. Prior to the incident, two members of the Croatian MUP dressed in civilian clothes had been spotted in a car by local BiH officials (MIA USK). The Bosnian officers called in the sighting of an official foreign vehicle in conjunction with the presence of a transit group, reportedly totaling 250, in the same area. According to the Journal, the prosecutor ignored this potentially inflammatory case and the Croatian officials were not even asked for a travel order, nor checked for weapons.

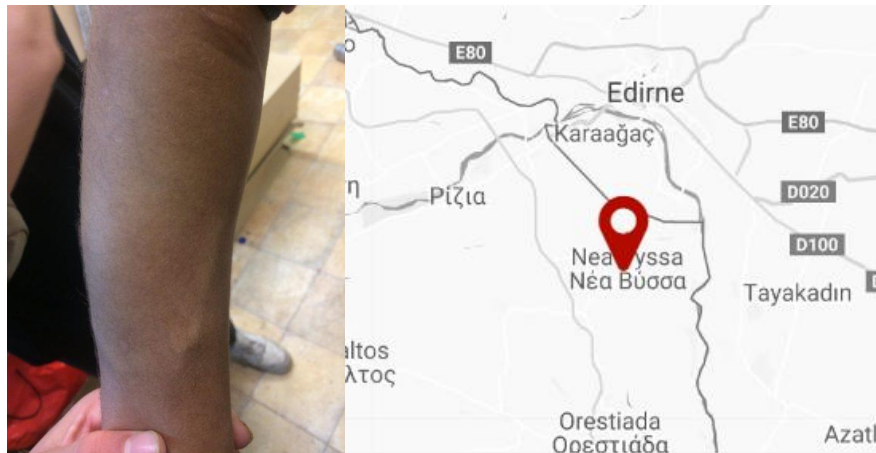
The incursions and shootings over the border are not just isolated incidents but are seen here as a pattern, as yet unchallenged. The infractions are both physical, but also legal, and further the analysis offered by BVMN on the wider conduct of Croatian authorities which has been found to be systemically unfit by international standards and frequently violent.

Pushbacks from the Greek Evros region continue

Two reports recorded by BVMN in November provided timely corroboration of the pushbacks from Greece to Turkey covered extensively in a recent [publication by Mobile Info Team \(MIT\)](#). The cases (see [6.1](#) & [6.2](#)) provided complimenting evidence of the mass practice of collective expulsion from the Evros region and highlighted a set of identifying police actions and violations within apprehension, detention and removal.

Of note was the conspicuous use of ski masks by the Greek operatives who ejected transit groups from the territory. In line with the findings of MIT, respondents identified the perpetrators as regularly conforming to a profile of "officers in balaclavas". Assessed in previous reports as *"accessories to violence"* ([June Report, pg. 17](#)), balaclavas work on multiple levels to shield perpetrators from being identified and to instill fear in the groups subject to such faceless violence. The level of actual physical violence used was also

consistent with the data collected by MIT, including one case in which a respondent's arm was potentially broken by the blunt force of baton strikes during his capture by Greek officials (see [6.1](#)).



Left: Contusions to arm from batons attack. Left: Location of assault in Greece
(Source: [BVMN](#)).

Compounding these aggressions were the continued use of detention facilities confirmed by both reports and described by one respondent as “resembling a prison”. (see [6.2](#)). Transit groups were held in substandard conditions for up to 48 in these unserved locations. Like the unsanitary conditions recorded by MIT, respondents in November described to BVMN the treatment during detention as appalling (see [6.2](#)).

“They didn’t provide us with food and the water we drank was from the toilet.”

The pushbacks at this entry point to Greece (and the potential point for onward travel through the Balkan Route) are putting people at severe physical and psychological risk. Beyond this human toll, collective expulsions to Turkey are also breaching multiple international laws and must be held to account alongside violations in Croatia and across the EU's external border.

Update on the Situation

Croatia

Criminalisation of shooting victim

On 16th and 27th November people-in-transit were shot by Croatian police in the Gorski Kotar region close to the Slovenian border. On 16th November a man was injured in the chest, stomach and spine area, remaining in a critical condition in hospital as a result. As outlined in the beginning of this [report](#), these shooting come in the context of many more cases of firearm abuse by Croatian police against people-in-transit, pointing to the systematic use of live weapons as part of the border regime.

In response to these violent incidents three complementary narratives have emerged from the Croatian police. First, firearm usage is framed as “accidental.” In response to the incident on 16th November, Croatian Minister of Interior, Davor Božinović, [stated](#) that: *“What I could possibly say at this point is that it has not been established that the use of the firearm was directed at a specific person with the intention of acting against a person.”* A subsequent [report](#) by the Interior Ministry found that the police officer who shot the person-in-transit was separated from his team and slipped on the wet ground which was said to have contributed to the shooting.

Second, Croatian police claim that people-in-transit are resisting arrest or even attacking police officers. For instance, in response to the 16th November incident, Božinović [said](#) he could not confirm whether the group was armed, and during the 27th November incident people-in-transit were said to have [resisted police officers](#). In fact, the person-on-the-move who was shot on 27th November, is [charged](#) with “*coercing an official*,” which could result in a prison sentence of up to eight years. In a similar vein, a whistleblower, which BVMN discussed in last month’s report, [claimed](#) that people-in-transit regularly carry knives. These accounts form a narrative which implies that aggressive behavior by people-in-transit warrants, or at least excuses, the use of firearms.

Finally, Croatian police [claim](#) that firearms were used in ways which do not qualify as “coercion” under Article 93 of the Law on Police Affairs and Powers. This argument is necessary because Article 62 of [Croatian police law](#) restricts the use of firearms for coercive means to self-protection and catching serious criminals who would face multi-year prison sentences if convicted. People-in-transit who, even if they were tried for illegal immigration would face a [maximum sentence of 30 days](#), are clearly not a category of people against whom the coercive use of firearms is legally permissible. Describing the use

of firearms against people-in-transit as “non-coercive” is a rhetorical sham, and under this poorly formed pretext people-on-the move have been shot and seriously wounded.

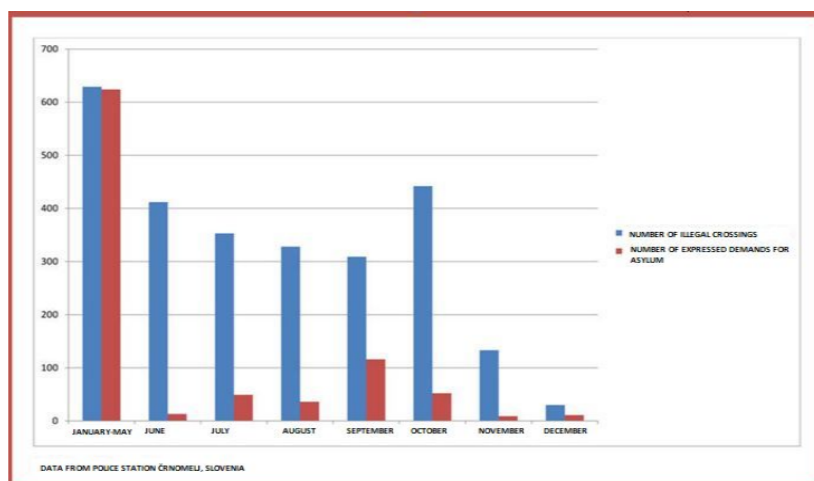
Slovenia

Removals into Croatia more than double in 2019

There was a doubling of readmissions from Slovenia to Croatia (9653 people) in the first ten months of 2019 compared to the same period last year (3906 people). Activists in Slovenia have decried the systemic failings and illegality underpinning the use of the [readmission agreement](#) with Croatia. In effect, Slovenia is returning people into a territory from which they are collectively expelled to Bosnia-Herzegovina or Serbia in what is commonly termed “chain pushbacks”.

The mass removal of persons from Slovenia has been linked to a [police directive issued in May](#) which is still not fully available to the public. *The application of these readmissions is* also mediated through a highly systematised collaboration between respective Slovenian and Croatian forces. In both chain pushbacks from SLO to BiH recorded in November, respondents were exchanged via the police station at Metlika on the Slovenian border, and Croatian officers carried out the collection and transportation by van (see [2.1](#) and [2.2](#))

Slovenian authorities are able to initiate these removals by abdicating all responsibility towards asylum law, a trend born out in a [May 2019 report](#) from InfoKolpa which included BVMN testimony. The findings showed the regular use of threats, intimidation and abrogation of protocol to coerce the signing of removals documents: in breach of persons right to request asylum and status as a minor.



Picture 1: Chart of illegal crossings side by side with demands of asylum in 2018 on border Police Station Črnomelj

(Source: [InfoKolpa](#))

The above chart shows the difference between claims for asylum (marked in red) and the far greater number of “illegal crossings” (marked in blue). The gap represents a huge number of persons who have likely been denied their legal right to apply for international protection, a trope that can consistently be found in BVMN testimony (see [2.2](#)). One example, grounded in data from a [Črnomelj](#) police station illustrates the shifting trend in “recorded” asylum claims.

“in May out of 379 people who were processed for illegally crossing the border, 371 applied for asylum. But after the issue of police commands, in June out of 412 people who crossed the border illegally, only 13 officially asked for asylum”

In a wider view, response to the recent official readmissions statistics have also been raised alongside concerns of [deaths at Slovenia’s wet border](#) (marked by the river Kolpa). With the consistent removals to Croatia, Slovenian authorities are forcing prospective transit groups to take higher risks in order to cross the territory unseen. This has again manifested itself with [fatal consequences](#), when “two people drowned in Kolpa, and recently a 20-year-old Syrian citizen died from cold and exhaustion at Ilirska Bistrica”. Unfortunately, as long as fundamental rights are being denied by Slovenian police forces - who are mandated to respond to asylum claims under national and EU legislation - deaths on the route will continue to occur as a direct consequence.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Conditions in Una-Sana Canton

An update on informal settlement was provided by volunteers of No Name Kitchen working in Velika Kladuša during November which found systemic problems with housing in the canton. Volunteers noted the difficulties facing people-on-the-move, especially regarding their accommodation outside official camps. At times, upwards of 800 people were sleeping in camp Vujčak during November, meanwhile squats across the canton swelled, despite October and November seeing a growing wave of evictions taking place. As yet, the official temporary reception centres in USK remain open, but the level of internal repression has escalated to hit hard at informal communities.

The internal displacement covered in the [October Report](#), saw efforts to remove people from the streets of Velika Kladuša, the Cazin area and Bihac. Respective police forces within the canton have used Sturlic and Vujčak to remove people from the main transit points and impede their stay in the canton by pushing them to more remote locations. The

broader political narrative from USK officials was oriented towards demanding support for the issue of “overburdening” faced by towns on the north western border with Croatia. But within this sweep of informal communities, there was a marked level of violence that had a clear intentionality to remove people from public places, distance them from available aid resources and discourage them from establishing themselves in host communities.

As of November, volunteers estimated there to be in excess of 2500 living in informal settlements in USK. Hundreds of people-on-the-move are using squats, abandoned buildings, or even sometimes sleeping huddled under balconies completely exposed to the winter weather. It is estimated that Miral camp has 600 people registered and currently living inside, but in the area around Velika Kladusa alone a great number of people are using improvised shelters. Of the [9,000](#) people-on-the-move reported to be currently in Bosnia, the conditions in and out of camps form a daily concern.

Entrance to official temporary reception centres is typically gatekept by police, security and IOM staff, meanwhile the perennial issue of camp ID cards which are often lost or taken by Croatian police during pushbacks makes access an ongoing challenge. The secondary options of squats or improvised shelter are perhaps easier to access but typically lack proper amenities like electricity, toilets and heating, subjecting vulnerable groups to further risk as they sleep in the cold and inhale smoke from what little heat can be produced with indoor fires. With the winter upon these informal communities, the practical challenges of sustaining themselves and the question marks that remain around the continuity of prospective indoor shelter are a continuing concern.

Internal violence from BiH police was present again in November. Apart from the violent push backs occurring at the border, more unchecked violence from local police accompanied the eviction actions noted above. One case saw a man from North Africa severely beaten inside the police station of Velika Kladusa. As reported in [this article](#) by Are You Syrious the man, who wanted to lodge a complaint for the theft of his bag, was put in the corner of a room and severely beaten by four officers who kicked him in the chest and the ear. The violence of the beating caused shock, breathing difficulty and the man is currently experiencing complications from the impact with his ear. After the attack the officers stole his money and asthma inhaler, before ejecting him by van some 15 km outside of the town.

More recently, a young man from Morocco reported having been attacked by the police while he was asleep. According to the respondent, the police arrived during the night following a fight between people in front of the squat where he was staying. The group involved had run away when the police arrived, but instead the officers entered into the

squat and found the young man asleep, and he reports that: *“three police officers got inside the house and found me asleep. They beat me without any reason”*



Injuries inflicted by BiH police on the young man inside the squat (Source:NNK)

On 26th November two more accounts of internal violence were witnessed in Velika Kladusa, first where a group of local police attacked a respondent outside a supermarket, and the second in a summary beating of an individual in the main park in the centre of town. These acts are not just isolated to police, but also occur in temporary reception centres where private security use tasers on residents, and reports of the beating of minors are a regular occurrence.

In the AYS article, volunteers from No Name Kitchen challenged the current context in which [*“European money is still being invested in police forces”*](#) outside the territory to traumatise stranded transit populations (as seen in the [donation of police vehicles](#) by International Organisation for Migration). With the inadequate housing situation already mentioned, these heinous acts of violence will continue to present the rudimentary outsourcing of border repression by the EU, and while BiH institutions need to be made accountable, a broader critique of the transit conditions in USK must recognise the complicity of Brussels.

Fluctuating patterns in border entry to BiH

In November official entry statistics hinted at a state of flux at the BiH border with Serbia where the number of transit groups crossing spiked in late autumn. [Oslođodjenje](#) published the figures for the first ten months of 2019, which revealed that in the last two months over 7,000 (registered) people entered BiH, exceeding the monthly average for the first eight months of the year, which stood at 2,300.

Several hypotheses were put forward for this increase, one being the cold weather which causes an annual shift of persons seeking onward transit before the harsher winter months set in. Another factor cited by the article was the recent changes made in joint policing at the BiH border with Serbia. Where the first eight months had seen collaboration between BiH border police and the State Protection and Investigation Agency ([SIPA](#)), this association has recently been changed with SIPA being replaced by Gendarmerie MUP of Republika Srpska. Unofficial police statements suggest that since this change, the number of recorded border preventions has dropped, although these statistics are hard to verify and are also dependent on the seasonal factor listed above.

The recording mechanism is perhaps of most note here, given that a similar blindspot has developed between Croatia and BiH border police concerning pushbacks. Representative Zoran Galic stated definitively that:

"Border Police officers did not record any incidents with the authorities of the Republic of Croatia regarding the return of migrants."

Despite these claims, Galic has [expressed consternation](#) about the overstretched policing of the border with Serbia, which seems to present a discordant attitude towards BiH's respective neighbours. On the Western boundary where BiH borders Croatia, Mayor Fazlic of Bihać has presented an entirely opposing attitude. In a recent [debate on Croatian television](#) Fazlic accused authorities of continually removing transit groups into BiH, stating he was well aware of the Croatian officials responsible.

Serbia

Squat evictions in Šid displace approximately 200 people

No Name Kitchen volunteers providing assistance to the informal transit population in Šid (Serbia), recorded a large scale removal of the predominantly Afghan community inhabiting the town in November. Volunteers witnessed the eviction and destruction of the improvised settlements on Friday 22nd November 2019, which come after an escalation of pressure from police and local government towards people-on-the-move. BVMN shared reports of previous police harassment at these informal settlements, followed last month by the burning of a tent site near the border (see [October Report pg 24](#)).



Police use of zip ties to cuff the squat residents. Injuries incurred by cuffing (Source: NNK)

The scale and deployment of both police and local municipal staff within this more recent operation displayed a far more systematic approach, reaching beyond the simple localised displacement of transit groups. In an [AYS report](#), it was shared how Serbian police and contracted workers from the municipality of Sid arrived in the early hours to break up the largest settlement at the Grafosrem site. All transit persons and their [belongings were removed](#), before bulldozers and forklifts moved in to render the space unlivable. The [statement](#) of the local mayor Zoran Semenović was also conspicuous, with volunteers reporting that he “*declared the abandoned factory site to be his property*”.

The residents of the squat, many of whom were unaccompanied minors, were brought to the local police station where their personal information was taken, before being bussed off to official camps and juvenile accommodation facilities. The process included forced removal to sites as far away as Kikinda on the Romanian border and Pirot close to Bulgaria. The incident displays a unified attempt by Serbian institutions (Police/Local Municipality/Commissariat) to limit access of informal communities to border areas, and public spaces outside of official reception centres.

Glossary of Reports, November 2019

The Border Violence Monitoring Network recorded 22 interviews during the month of October, recording the pushback of 230 people. The transit groups affected varied in size, the smallest being as low as two people, and the largest up to 40 people.

- 17 cases were pushbacks to BiH (one chain pushback from Italy, two from Slovenia, and fourteen direct pushbacks from Croatia).
- 3 cases were pushbacks to Serbia (one chain pushback from Slovenia, and two direct pushbacks from Croatia).
- 2 cases were pushbacks to Turkey (both were direct pushbacks from Greece)

The reports were conducted with a wide demographic variety of respondents including adults and unaccompanied minors, men and women. The respondents in these reports also originate from a wide variety of places including Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Link	Incident	Recorded	Group	Demographic
<i>Italy to BiH</i>				
1.1	23rd November	25th November	3	Morocco
<i>Slovenia to BiH</i>				
2.1	29th October	2nd November	5	Morocco, Algeria
2.2	15th November	22nd November	9	Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria
<i>Croatia to BiH</i>				
3.1	28th October	1st November	3	Syria, Morocco
3.2	31st October	1st November	6	Algeria
3.3	2nd November	11th November	21	Algeria, Morocco, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Tunisia
3.4	3rd November	3rd November	10	Morocco, Algeria
3.5	5th November	12th November	14	Morocco, Algeria, Egypt

<u>3.6</u>	10th November	12th November	21	Western Sahara
<u>3.7</u>	10th November	13th November	2	Algeria
<u>3.8</u>	12th November	13th November	3	Syria, Yemen
<u>3.9</u>	12th November	13th November	5	Morocco
<u>3.10</u>	14th November	17th November	4	Syria
<u>3.11</u>	14th November	25th November	9	Morocco, Algeria
<u>3.12</u>	22nd November	23rd November	27	Syria, Algeria, Pakistan
<u>3.13</u>	25th November	28th November	9	Pakistan
<u>3.14</u>	27th November	29th November	17	Afghanistan, Pakistan
<i>Slovenia to Serbia</i>				
<u>4.1</u>	15th December	26th November	11	Afghanistan, Syria, Tunisia
<i>Croatia to Serbia</i>				
<u>5.1</u>	31st October	15th November	3	Afghanistan
<u>5.2</u>	21st November	21st November	40	Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia
<i>Greece to Turkey</i>				
<u>6.1</u>	24th October	9th November	3	Morocco
<u>6.2</u>	6th November	26th November	5	Algeria, Tunisia

More reports from previous months can be found [here](#).

Network structure and contact

The Border Violence Monitoring Network is a volunteer led endeavour, relying on the efforts of participant organizations working in the field, in advocacy and in litigation. The Network receives grant funding from The Open Society Foundations, supporting three paid positions, and volunteer travel expenses.

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.

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