



## Border Violence Monitoring Network

**PRESS RELEASE: 8th June 2020**

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### POLICE RAID HUMANITARIAN DISTRIBUTION SITE AND PUSHBACK PEOPLE IN NEED

Since late February, volunteers within the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), an alliance of groups documenting pushbacks in the Western Balkans and Greece, have been monitoring with concern the spike in pushbacks to Turkey over the Evros river. Whilst recent cases represent a peak in these practices by Greek authorities, they are not novel. Rather, they represent long standing trends that have been intensifying gradually. This press release details the latest mass pushback of people who were seized crudely while accessing essential food and medical assistance in Thessaloniki, Greece.

The expansive use of pushbacks in recent months can be mapped through the new Greek government's response to various events: namely the deployment of the [‘international protection and other provisions’ bill](#), [the handling of protests in Moria](#), the [fortification of border security](#) in the face of Erdogan's threats, and finally the [suspension of the asylum system in response to COVID-19](#). The weaponisation of lockdown period during the pandemic was simply the last in a long list of measures cracking down on asylum seekers in the country. In May, BVMN began documenting a new pattern of violence in the region in which asylum seekers and transient communities were taken from inland government institutions, like camps and detention centres, and pushed back to Turkey. This represents a stark difference to usual border security practices which target those in, or nearby to the border area. This week the trend of pushbacks from the deep interior of the Greek mainland has ramped up considerably.

**On Friday 5th June 2020**, twenty Greek police officers arrived at a well-known food distribution site where homeless asylum seekers go to access essential supplies and medical care. The authorities informed volunteers working in the area they had received a call to address a fight; contrasting witness statements confirming that a number of police vehicles and motorbikes had been situated around the area and in various side streets to apprehend those who attempted to flee: suggesting the raid was pre-planned.

The beneficiaries of these essential humanitarian services were then separated into two groups, those with papers regularising their stay in the country and those without. Multiple witnesses report that one beneficiary was asked for his paper and, when reaching to retrieve it, was beaten by an officer. Another officer insulted one of the volunteers, calling them “stupid” and “uneducated”. After a period of 15-20 minutes, approximately 40 beneficiaries were arrested and forced into police vehicles. All volunteers and witnesses on the ground report being told several times that the individuals were being taken to a police station to receive a *khartia*, a document that regularises the stay of persons in Greece for a short period of time. The next day, the [Official Security Office of Thessaloniki](#) published a statement stating:

*“Targeted checks were carried out in the context of the implementation of operational planning to deal with delinquency and the identification of persons residing illegally in the country. (39) people were arrested. The inspections took place between 13:00 and 23:30 and a total of (39) people were arrested, as they did not have the necessary documents for their*

*legal stay in the Greek territory. The detainees were taken to Immigration Management Departments.”*

Evidence gathered by BVMN volunteers suggests otherwise. On 6th June 2020 one of the beneficiaries apprehended at the food distribution contacted the team on the ground to share that he was in Istanbul, Turkey. On 7th June 2020 a full testimony was taken confirming that the group had been pushed back across the Evros border, matching the accounts given of [194 people](#) who were subject to similar actions across five different cases in April and May. See below the latest evidence:

### **Pushback: Greece - Turkey**

**Date: 05/06/2020**

[\[Read full report\]](#)

The two respondents had entered Greece 15 days prior to the events detailed. They were apprehended in the raid that took place on the distribution site. Both were then held in the courtyard of a police station where their personal belongings (phone, shoelaces, belt, 15 EUR) were taken from them by officers. They were loaded into a large bus by officers who beat and kicked them. The bus drove them to the Turkish border where they were held with around 35 individuals in army barracks for half an hour, before being ferried by boat across the Evros river in groups of 5-6 onto Turkish land by an officer wearing a balaclava.



*“15 days to walk to Greece and they take us to Turkey in 5 hours”*

### **Footage of police raid**

**Date: 05/06/2020**

[\[Watch the video\]](#)

Greek police officers wearing matching uniforms to those pictured in the roadblocks were filmed marching detained people away from the scene of apprehension. People removed from this area were later found to have been violently pushed back to Turkey at 01:00 the following morning.



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