



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

**ILLEGAL
PUSHBACKS AND
BORDER VIOLENCE
REPORTS**



**AUGUST 2022
BALKAN REGION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN)¹ shared 13 testimonies of pushbacks impacting 354 people-on-the-move (POM) across the Balkans and Greece. This report brings together first-hand testimonies from a range of countries in the region to look at the way European Union states and other actors are affecting systemic violence towards people crossing borders.

In Greece, Greek Minister of Migration [Notis Mitarachi claimed](#) that Greek Security forces had prevented 50,000 people from crossing Greek-Turkish borders in the month of August alone, and 154,000 since the beginning of the year. This announcement comes amidst the implementation of more surveillance and border control measures at Greece's land and sea borders with Turkey. Regarding access to asylum and other support services, the online registration system launched during the summer has already failed, leaving those looking to seek asylum in Greece in incredibly precarious conditions with little to no access to support services. In August, the struggle also continued in Eleonas Camp in which residents for the last months have successfully blocked the eviction of the camp.

In further updates from the field, a clear commonality across the different contexts in which BVMN member projects work was a steady increase in police violence, or change in police tactics during pushbacks. BVMN member project No Name Kitchen (NNK) shares observations on new strategies being implemented by police in Bosnia and Herzegovina in apprehending and pushing back people-on-the-move. In Serbia, members of BVMN witnessed a massive spike in police action against people on the move around the parks in central Belgrade, next to the main bus station, as well as around Collective Aid's WASH centre in the city. A final section touches on the recent increase in people-on-the-move arriving in Piazza Libertà in Trieste, and insufficient state responses to the basic needs of those arriving to seek asylum in Italy.



**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

¹ *BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in Greece and the Western Balkans including No Name Kitchen, Rigardu, AreYouSyrious, MobileInfoTeam, Push-back Alarm Austria Josoor, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, BlindSpots, Mare Liberum, Collective Aid, and Fresh Response.

GENERAL

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 partners have a common [website](#) database, used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological process for these interviews leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor pushbacks 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 exceed 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.

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. Pushback 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. Pushbacks have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

ABBREVIATIONS

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina
HRV – Croatia
SRB – Serbia
SLO – Slovenia
ROM – Romania
HUN – Hungary
AUT – Austria
MNK – North Macedonia
GRC – Greece
BGR – Bulgaria
TUR – Turkey
EU – European Union

TRENDS IN BORDER VIOLENCE

GREEK MINISTER CLAIMS 50,000 PEOPLE PREVENTED FROM CROSSING THE TURKISH-GREEK BORDER IN AUGUST

In August, Greek Minister of Migration [Notis Mitarachi claimed](#) that security forces had prevented 50,000 people from crossing Greek-Turkish borders in the month of August alone, and 154,000 since the beginning of the year. These numbers come in stark contrast to UNHCR figures regarding arrivals within the last year, which currently stand at [10,139 \(5,742 by sea and 4,397 by land\)](#) since the beginning of the year.

This announcement brings concerns regarding potential human rights violations, lack of safe passage and access to asylum procedures for those seeking international protection in Greece. Amid allegations of greek police and border guards perpetrating illegal pushbacks and other forms of border violence against people-on-the-move, there are concerns over what [“prevention” methods are being used](#). In recent years, the Greek state has bolstered border controls with the construction of fences, implementation of an automated border surveillance system (ABSS), and increasing the number of border guards and police officers deployed in the region. This summer, plans were announced to update and expand existing surveillance systems, as well as to send an additional 250 officers to the region to assist in border enforcement through the “Akritas” project.

In August, [Kathimerini released an article](#) detailing changes in the contingency plan used by the police regarding border controls in the Evros region. This plan includes the deployment of more officers, as well as the relocation of water cannons,

unmanned aerial vehicles, tear gas and stun grenades to the region, in addition to what was already available to the police directorates of Orestiada and Alexandroupolis.

Together, these developments paint a bleak image as to what to expect in the next weeks and months in the Evros region.

UPDATES ON THE SITUATION

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

In August, field teams in Velika Kladusa observed that in most pushbacks, Croatian police took possession of money, phones, SIM cards and backpacks of people-on-the-move (POM) apprehended. Expensive phones were often confiscated and kept by the police, while cheaper phones were broken and returned to the POMs. In some cases, the phones were not damaged in a visible way, but the charger slot was broken using a metal cable in order to make the device unusable (Image 1 and 2). Furthermore, in the pushbacks involving minors, it was observed that the Croatian police did not register the subject with the real age that was declared to him, but tended to register the minor as an adult.

Generally, women and families were allowed to cross the border, while it remained more difficult for people attempting to cross alone. Further, there are several reports of Croatian police threatening with guns or firing shots into the air, and of using electric tasers against POM. Respondents also suspect that police are using drones in order to apprehend people-on-the-move attempting to cross through the forests along the green border.



Image description: phone charging ports broken by police during pushbacks
Image source: NNK

SERBIA

INCREASE IN POLICE RAIDS/POLICE VIOLENCE IN BELGRADE

During the month of August, members of BVMN witnessed a massive spike in police action against people on the move around the parks in central Belgrade, next to the main bus station, as well as around Collective Aid's WASH centre in the city.

In the past years, Belgrade has become a transient hub for people on the move travelling through Serbia, perhaps moving away from its past character as a place where people would stay for longer periods of time to rest or before making their way to other countries in Europe. Thus, it seems like a lot of people arrive at the central bus station in the city and leave that same day or after very few days. Many spend most of that time in the parks surrounding the station. Police raids in these parks are common. They usually involve different degrees of violence often ending with the transportation of big groups of people on the move to nearby or further away camps in the country.

In the past month, these police actions have become much more frequent. For at least two weeks, police officers were present in the park every morning for several hours. They gathered groups of people on the move in the parks, made them sit on the ground very close together – often screaming at them to put their heads down – forced people into police vans, and took them to Obrenovac camp outside of Belgrade to get registered. Sometimes, officers would twist people's arms behind their backs and shout at them if they talked.

Additionally, some BVMN volunteers reported hearing taser-like sounds during several of these actions. Although the volunteers never witnessed the police using tasers, it is believed these devices were used to threaten the people on the move. These police actions also extended to

the area around Collective Aid's WASH centre, which is located a mere 10 minutes walk away from these parks. Often people on the move gather outside the centre in the morning waiting for it to open. Several of these mornings police officers were stationed next to the door for over an hour, monitoring and discouraging the presence of the people-on-the-move.

On August 20th a neighbour was verbally aggressive towards people-on-the-move waiting outside of the centre, as well as towards a volunteer working there that day. At some point, this neighbour pushed both the volunteer and the people-on-the-move. This was witnessed by the police, who, instead of engaging with them, started chasing the people-on-the-move present in the area while screaming at them.

Another organisation in the city mentioned it might have been due to the upcoming Pride week. While tensions may be high currently due to this event, we believe that harassment and violence done by the police will not necessarily decrease, especially as the number of people-on-the-move is expected to increase.

GREECE

Throughout the summer there has been a [protracted struggle](#) against the eviction of Eleonas camp organised by the residents of the camp and local solidarity groups. The attempted closure of Eleonas is in some ways enigmatic broader changes in the accommodation of asylum seekers in Greece: from a system of “open” camps located close to urban centres where residents had at least limited access to social support services and possibilities for work and social integration, to one of “closed controlled access centres” (CCACs) in remote locations, where residents are heavily surveilled by the authorities, isolated and out of sight of the broader society. As reported in the [July 2022 BVMN monthly report](#), the struggle against the eviction of Eleonas can be understood as one of the last stands against the implementation of a camp system built on the mass incarceration and isolation of asylum seekers in Greece.

Plans for the closure of the camp were first announced several months ago, and have been reiterated by government spokespersons throughout the summer. On August 18th, Minister of Migration [Notis Mitarachi stated](#) that “in cooperation with the municipality of Athens, we are proceeding with the closure of the Eleonas camp, as the modernisation of the area progresses and there are places available in other existing structures.” The “modernisation” the Mitarachis refers to in this case concerns the demolition of the camp, and construction of a football station: largely perceived to be part of broader state-supported gentrification efforts in Athens pushing migrant, low-income and working class people out of the city.

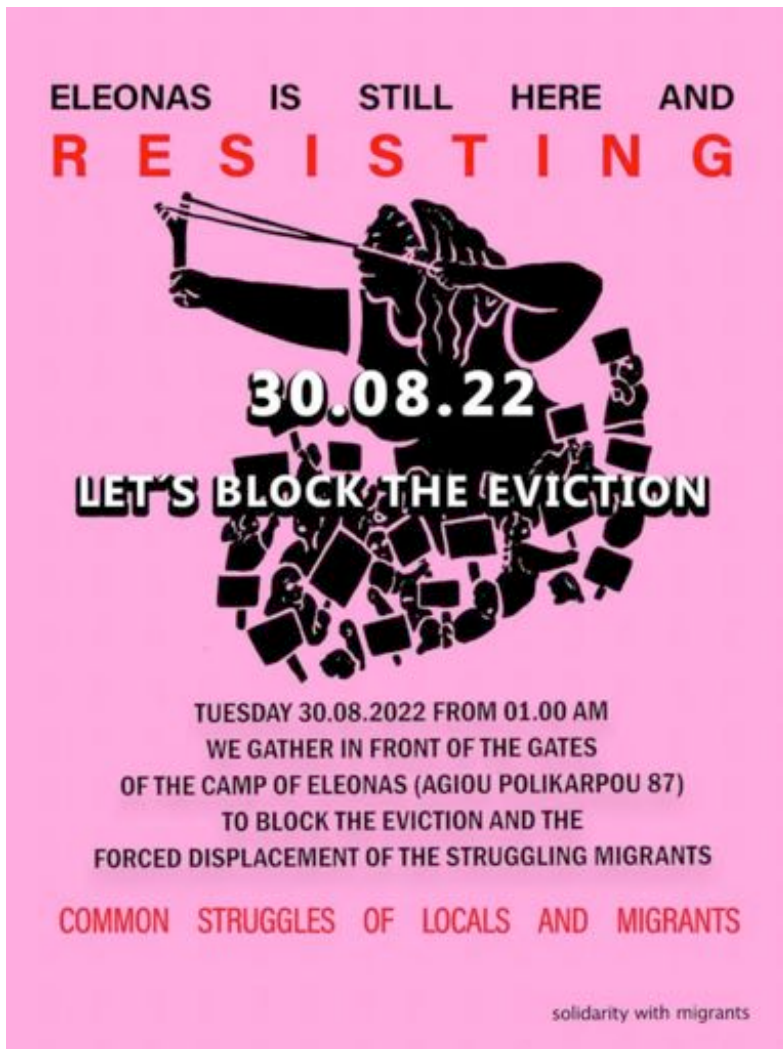
Up until now, efforts to resist the eviction of the camp have largely been a success. [Residents and those in solidarity](#) built barricades, held sit-ins, organised peaceful protests and press conferences– both in order to prevent their forced removal from the

camp, and to raise broader public awareness on the issue. The demands of the residents are:

1. The interruption of any attempt to close Eleonas camp.
2. The interruption of any attempt to forcibly displace the inhabitants of the camp.
3. The commitment by the Municipality of Athens and by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, to ensure that the support activities carried out by the organizations and the social workers operating in the camp are not to be interrupted.
4. The commitment by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to guarantee the enjoyment of the Cash Assistance for the inhabitants of the camp, as established by the Estia program.
5. The commitment by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to ensure that people transferred from refugee camps to housing projects under the Estia program over the last few months will not be forced to leave their homes before completing their asylum procedures

Responses of the authorities have been largely negative, and on several instances [riot police entered the camp](#) to beat or arrest protestors and families. However, for now it seems as though immediate plans to empty and demolish the camp have been halted, which can be considered a small victory for those organising against the eviction.

<https://www.euronews.com/2022/08/19/clashes-as-greek-riot-police-storm-athens-camp-to-evict-migrants>



New asylum seeker registration procedure begins today and is already at capacity: People will be forced to remain undocumented for 14 months as they wait for an appointment in Diavata or Malakasa

The following is an excerpt from a [press release](#) written by BVMN member project Mobile Info Team regarding the new asylum registration system in Greece:

The new online platform for the registration of asylum seekers in Greece was published just six weeks ago with appointments commencing today in Diavata and Malakasa. Yet, Mobile Info Team reports that people are already experiencing significant delays, with appointments being assigned up to 14 months later, or increasingly, not at all due to a 'lack of availability'. We express our serious concern that these delays, combined with the lack of official documentation provided to applicants as they wait,

will result in people being forced to live in poor conditions, at risk of pushbacks and without access to essential services

We recommend that Greece acts urgently to ensure fair and efficient access to the asylum procedure for all, by:

A. Increasing the capacity of Reception and Identification Centres to guarantee that there are sufficient appointments available to ensure that people are able to access international protection systems quickly.

B. Providing individuals with official documentation once they have filled in the online application form, to ensure that their status as applicants of international protection is respected and that they are provided with material reception conditions immediately.

C. Covering transportation costs to Diavata and Malakasa to ensure that all applicants are able to attend their appointments promptly and without financial burden.

D. Establish a fast-track procedure for individuals with vulnerabilities or Dublin family reunification claims to ensure that applicants with special reception needs benefit from additional safeguards as soon as possible and that family reunifications under the Dublin procedure are not hindered.

Read full statement [here](#)

EXPANDED BORDER WALL

Towards the end of August, the Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA) convened in response to rising tensions with Turkey, and [stated that the Evros fence with Turkey should run the entire length of the border](#). Later in the month, the Minister of Civil Protection [Takis Theodorikakos reaffirmed in a visit](#) to the region that the fence would be extended an by 140 kilometres. This comes in addition to the existing 40 kilometers of metal fencing installed in 2012 and 2021.

The government also announced in August the [hiring of 250 additional border guards](#) for the Evros region, and that upgrades would be made to surveillance systems in the area as [part of the new “Akritas” plan](#) to increase controls on the border.

Through these actions, the Greek State has pushed a discourse of migration as “developing into a very particular threat to Greece’s integrity and security.” This has occurred in the midst of rising geopolitical tensions with Turkey, with Minister of Civil Protection Theodorikakos describing the extension of the fence as a move [“against those who weaponise migration in an attempt to blackmail Europe”](#). The entanglement of militarism and conflict between states, with issues of migration and access to asylum is dangerous in it’s potential to violate the fundamental rights of those seeking to claim asylum in Greece and how it may be used to justify further violence against people within the border region.

Theodorikakos [further added](#) “our message is that no one crosses Evros illegally; we will not allow it.” These kinds of statements also neglect to mention that to date, there is no safe and legal way for many people fleeing violence and seeking to apply for asylum in Europe to cross from Turkey into Greece. Further, as we have seen in the last years, despite increasing controls, those seeking to

claim asylum in Greece have continued to try to make the difficult and perilous journey to have their rights recognized, and seek safety in Europe. The impact of heightened border enforcement and controls and the absence of options for safe passage, far from actually stopping migration, push asylum seekers to take all the more dangerous routes, and contribute to the rising numbers of deaths at EU external borders.

ITALY

In August, there were over 2,011 new arrivals to the piazza Libertá (Trieste) (1730 men, 136 unaccompanied minors, and 13 single women, 132 people travelling as families). Of the new arrivals, most were from (753), Afghanistan (527), Bangladesh (284). Other countries of origin of the arrivals include India, Nepal, Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq, Turkey, Burundi, Kosovo, Syria and Morocco. Of the 2011 people who arrived, 611 decided to stay in Trieste while the rest continued further.

The routes travelled by people-on-the-move in order to reach Trieste also seem to have changed in the last months. Many testimonies underline how “games” originating from Serbia/Bosnia and Herzegovina and crossing Croatia and Slovenia now have higher success rates compared to previous months. The same can be said for people going to “game” in Northern Serbia and crossing Hungary and Austria, even though it is a much longer journey to Italy than from there.

For those that decide to stay in Trieste, the local reception system remains ill equipped to grant decent living standards to people-on-the-move. The two official camps for new arrivals are constantly full, and transfers to other areas have been almost halted. As a result, every day between 200 and 250 people waiting to be admitted into the camp sleep in the streets.

Police forces often show up in piazza Libertá to try to scare people away – in vain, as even those who decide to take a walk come back a few minutes later. This presence of police officers seems to be motivated by keeping people-on-the-move out of sight of tourists, but at the moment it only represents a nuisance. Collectives are nonetheless worried, as this scenario might evolve and turn, once again, ugly.

DEATH IN GRADISCA D'ISONZO CPR

We are sad to report that yet another person lost his life in the CPR (deportation center) of Gradisca d'Isonzo. This is the fourth death in little over than 2 years. Following days of unrest both inside as well as outside the center, the director finally gave the name of this fourth person: Arshad Jahangir, a 28 years old man from Pakistan. In addition to that, collectives were able to get in touch with people inside and they gave notice of multiple suicide attempts in the days following the death of Arshad Jahangir. We expect to have more to report on this next month.

Link	Incident	Recorded	Demographic	Group Size
Romania to Serbia				
1.1	26th August	2nd September	Egypt	6
Hungary to Serbia				
2.1	3rd August	4th August	Pakistan, Tunisia	4
2.2	24th August	25th August	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia	15
2.3	22nd August	23rd August	Morocco	4
2.4	29th August	29th August	Syria	20
Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina				
3.1	22nd August	23rd August	Pakistan	10
3.2	10th August	11th August	Lebanon	1
3.3	20th August	5th September	Afghanistan	9
3.4	20th August	22nd August	Afghanistan	8
Greece to Turkey				
4.1	11th June	14th June	Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan	80
4.2	15th November	24th August	Iran, Syria, Algeria	85
4.3	30th April	24th August	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria	110
Albania to Greece				
5.1	7th August	8th August	Syria	2

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



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