Border Violence Monitoring Network

ILLEGAL PUSH-BACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

JULY 2021
BALKAN REGION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) documented 22 pushbacks in the July reporting period, affecting a total of 544 people-on-the-move across the Balkans. This report brings together first-hand accounts of police violence with updates from various border areas, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Italy. The publication contains an in-depth look at patterns of collective expulsion and internal violence.

In particular, the associated risks that transit groups are pushed towards in order to navigate borders were brought into view last month with the drowning of a child in the Una river. Testimonies of people crossing rivers at the Bosnian-Croatian border are analysed alongside wider research into drownings while in transit. The evidence outlines the severe risks when people evade police controls in order to cross rivers, or are caught by police and physically forced into waterways.

Further sad news came from Lesvos, where another preventable fatality of a young child took place. After years of poor conditions in the centres across Greece, this death is a tragic reminder of the violence of camp systems that people face daily. These are realities, which are only set to worsen with the signaling by authorities of new closed reception facilities across the islands, analysed here in the case of Samos.

This report also looks at the pattern of direct removals from Bulgaria to Turkey which combine high levels of violence, including sexual assault, and Islamophobic abuse. Conspicuous within recent cases from July is also the reported presence of FRONTEX personnel and the consecutive use of police canine units. The report analyses this alongside a recent court ruling on the expulsion of a Turkish national from Bulgaria, as well as another case won at the European Court of Human Rights regarding Hungary.

As mentioned in the Greek context, suppressed living conditions for people across the region are also analysed in the case of Serbia, Romania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Field updates on this cover the eviction of the large Krajina Metal squat in Bihać, dispersal of transit communities in Subotica to the south of Serbia, and police harassment in Timişoara.

The report also contains information on the renewed joint border patrols between Italy and Slovenia, the donation of border equipment by the European Union to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greek government denials and admissions on pushbacks, and analysis on Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the EU. Together, these various developments from across the region portray a migration regime that has weaponised borders and interiors against human mobility in a cruel and in many sense fatal way.

BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in Greece and the Western Balkans including No Name Kitchen, Rigardu, Are You Syrious, Mobile InfoTeam, Disinfaux Collective, Josoor, [re:]portsSarajevo, InfoKolpa, Centre for Peace Studies, Mare Liberum, Collective Aid and Fresh Response.

**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

J U L Y
R E P O R T
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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 members have a common online database used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

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 con- trast 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.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological process for these inter-views leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor push-backs at multiple borders. When individuals return with significant injuries or stories of abuse, one of our violence reporting volun-teers will sit down with them to collect their testimony. Although the testimony collec-tion 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 standardised framework for our interview structure which blends the collection of hard data (dates, geo-loca-tions, officer descriptions, photos of in-juries/medical reports, etc.) with open nar-ratives of the abuse.

ABBREVIATIONS

BiH - BosniaandHerzegovina
HR - Croatia
SRB - Serbia
SLO - Slovenia
ROM - Romania
HUN - Hungary
ALB - Albania
BGR - Bulgaria
MNK - NorthMacedonia
GRK - Greece
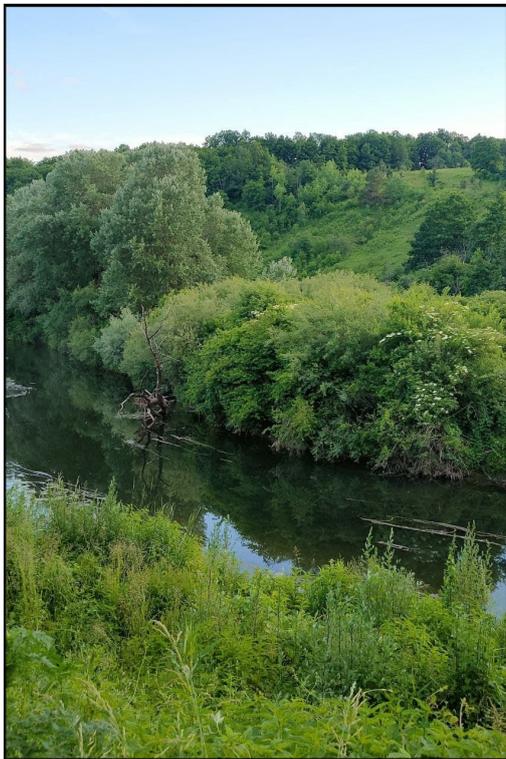TUR - Turkey
EU - European Union

CROATIAN BORDER RIVERS IN PUSHBACKS AND TRANSIT

This month, the tragic death of a young child in the Una River, which marks part of the border between BiH and Croatia, came as a firm reminder of the dangers of these waterways for people-on-the-move. The five-year-old from Afghanistan was traveling with his family, who were trying to cross into Croatia from the area of Novi Grad in BiH. During the attempted fording of the large river, the father entered the water carrying his son on his shoulders. But amidst the currents of the Una, the child was lost and later found drowned.

Unlike the numerous deaths at maritime borders like the Mediterranean, the drowning of people-on-the-move in the Balkans is a less prominent topic; unjustly so. The ever-increasing surveillance of borders encourages transit attempts via ever more dangerous routes. With bridges over border rivers being particularly monitored zones, people-on-the-move are forced to avoid them and attempt precarious crossings through the water. Especially major rivers, such as the Una, are difficult to traverse because of their low temperature, changeable depth and unpredictable currents. As shown by the recent loss of life, this combination represents a deadly threat.

Yet little remains publicly known of this pattern of geographic border violence. In an article published recently by Al Jazeera, the author explains how there is no coordinated rescue operation in place, nor is there a centralized, accessible database that tracks drownings in the Balkans. The article also cites multiple BVMN members who have been criminalised by states for trying to provide distress hotlines for people embarking on these dangerous journeys. This only reinforces the notion that authorities are actively involved in maintaining and ordering the geographic risks people take crossing rivers and other remote border landscapes.

The Korana river which runs along the BiH-HRV border (Source: No name Kitchen)

After drownings, further problems are also encountered, particularly in the barriers to repatriation of bodies so that families can bury their loved ones. In the absence of responsible bodies taking care of this, local activists coordinate the search for the dead and lost on the Balkan Route through an unofficial Facebook group and assist friends and relatives with the arrangements needed. This online community allows a glimpse into the untold tragedies of the people who find their end on the route. Additionally, the page allows activists to make a rough estimate of the number of victims, though it is obvious that the number of unreported cases remains significant.

It's not only while people-on-the-move are on the 'game' (the common term for crossing the border) that they encounter the harsh and potentially lethal nature of rivers. Numerous testimonies in the BVMN database illustrate how the Croatian police, as well as other authorities across the region, use rivers during the pushback of groups as an aid to violence. Especially in the border region around Šturlić, BiH, where the border with Croatia is marked by the Korana river, multiple accounts describe how they were forced to cross through the water back to BiH (see 4.3), even in freezing temperatures, or threatened to be pushed into it during their pushback.

In a testimony, collected in late May by network member No Name Kitchen, the respondent described how the transit group was forced to stand at the edge of the riverbank while the police mocked them, threatening to push them in. The respondent, an Afghan man, decided to jump into the river in order to prevent the treatment being done to his family.

> *"First they tried to push all of us in the river, then my sister cried. Then they pushed me... I thought 'if I don't go, they will push all of us in the water' so I entered the pool."*

As he could not swim the respondent had to grab a tree branch to stay buoyant and was just about able to paddle with his hands to the other side. In another testimony, collected in early March, the group members were forced to cross the same river. They were also not able to swim and the respondent reflected on the pushback experience afterwards, saying:

> *"Some people have drowned in this water, two of my friends also don't know how to swim, and we all had to jump over the river, or they would've beaten us up, it was very scary for us"*

This pattern matches other ingrained elements of the pushback process, such as the stripping of clothes conducted by Croatian authorities. In this way, the use of rivers as a stage for border violence is laid bare. This weaponization of geography has also been discussed in research into drownings on the Evros river where people suffer comparable treatment. In both examples the presence and absence of authorities is key. Leaving dangerous fording points vacant for transit attempts, while monitoring bridges and other "safer" routes, increases the risks people take during border crossings. Meanwhile, the deployment of police in pushback zones and their use of the river itself to push people in also creates a high potential for drownings.

The number of reported pushbacks from Bulgaria to Turkey have increased in the last months, with disturbing levels of violence. This increase may either mark a new trend in police violence, or a shift in the ways people-on-the-move are attempting to travel through the region. In July, BVMN recorded four testimonies of pushbacks from Bulgaria to Turkey, each following a similar order of events, and detailing comparable behaviors on the part of the authorities.

Historically, pushbacks from Bulgaria were often the first link of a so-called "chain-pushback", in which people, upon being apprehended by Bulgarian authorities in the tri-border region between Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria, were pushed back into Greece. In Greece, the transit groups were then often swiftly apprehended by Greek authorities and finally pushed back into Turkey. Nearly all reports include descriptions of severe violence from Bulgarian authorities, and frequently mention the presence of canine units used to locate and later attack transit groups. Bulgarian officers have also been reported to use guns to threaten members of the pushback group or fire warning shots at people.
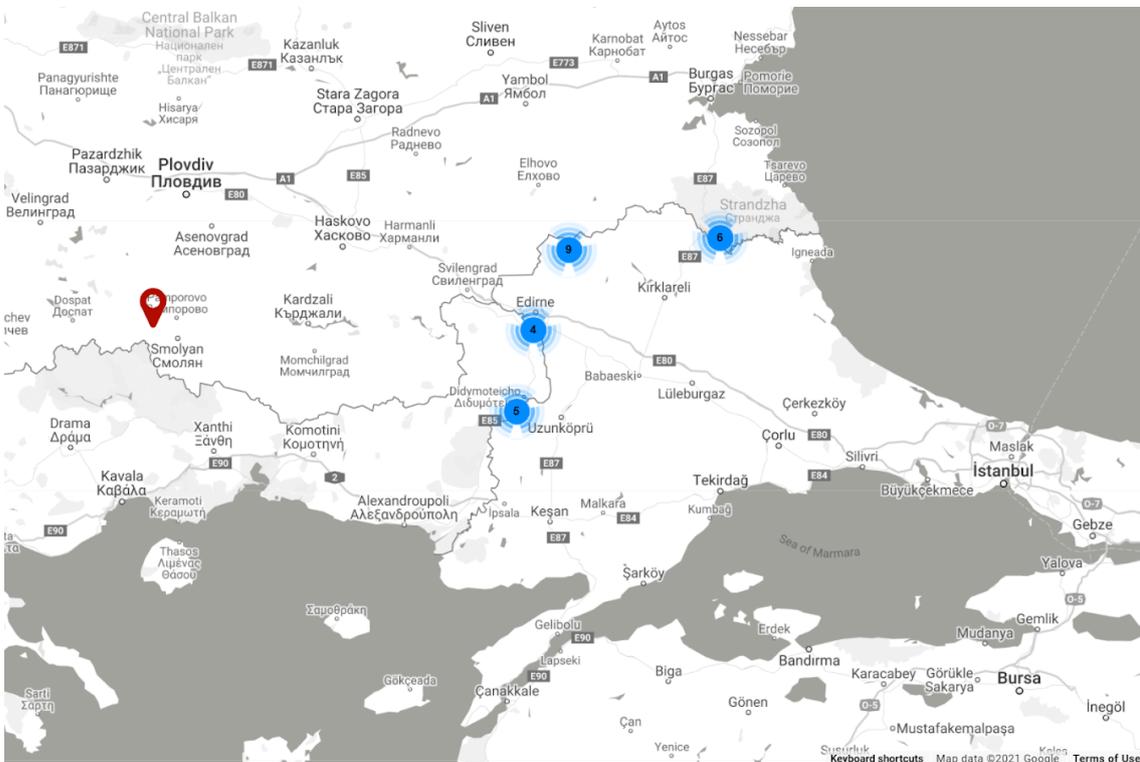
Starting in March of this year, reports of transit groups being pushed back directly from Bulgaria to Turkey began to increase in frequency, with 15 incidents recorded since then. Reports regularly mention the use of "doors" in the border fence to push people over the border. These "doors" are referenced again in three testimonies from July (see 6.1, 6.2, 6.3), which are described as "garage doors in the fence". These kinds of gateway pushbacks have been observed in Idomeni, Kelebija and most recently in the collaborative report written by Solidary Wheels, Disinfaux Collective, and No Name Kitchen for BVMN about collective expulsions from Ceuta and Melilla.

Two out of four testimonies from July also mention the presence of non-Bulgarian officers present during the pushback (see 6.2 & 6.3).

Respondents identified officers wearing a "blue armband" who spoke English, and was present during the severe beating of a transit group member. Other testimonies dating back to May also included "German speaking officers" involved in the apprehension of groups alongside Bulgarian counterparts. These observations point to the presence of FRONTEX during the pushbacks, allegations which match with previous reporting from the Intercept in 2016.

One thing that also stood out in July was consistent reports of sexual and gender-based violence (see 6.2 & 6.3), and harassment of women in transit groups by male officers. Respondents recalled women in the transit group being searched by male officers, forced to take their headscarves off, and being kicked and physically assaulted. This sexual assault and violation of religious custom reveal how harm in the pushback process is also mediated through gendered and Islamophobic repression.

Also in July, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Bulgaria's systematic expulsion of people-on-the-move to Turkey, with no consideration of individual risks of ill-treatment faced by those crossing into Bulgaria, violates the European Convention on Human Rights. This ruling was reached in relation to the case of a Turkish journalist - "D" - who was pushed back unlawfully as the authorities did not assess the risks he faced in Turkey, while also denying him the right to challenge the removal. In response, the court ordered Bulgaria to pay 15,000 Euros to "D" in compensation. This case is not an exception. As per pushbacks that occur at other parts of the EU's external border, the act itself constitutes a violation of fundamental rights and various international treaties. The Bulgarian Interior Ministry stated, in early August, Bulgarian authorities returned "16,900" people since the start of 2021. Within the context of recent expulsions reported during July by BVMN, serious question marks remain over the way such "returns" are being conducted.

Plotting of geo-location data from direct and chain pushbacks from Bulgaria (Source: BVMN)

GREECE

DEATH OF CHILD IN KARATEPE CAMP

A nine-month-old baby from a Somali family died in the "temporary" camp in Kara Tepe in July. Reports say that the child was experiencing fever and vomiting after possibly choking during a meal. The baby was taken to medical facilities within the camp, which had long been criticized for their inadequate services. From there, he was transferred to the local hospital, but initial reports suggest that by that point it was already too late, and upon arrival, doctors could only confirm his death.

According to the Directive on the Reception of Applicants for International Protection (2013/33), the health of asylum seekers "shall be of primary concern to national authorities". The apathy from both the local authorities, the Greek state, and the EU has now cost a nine months old baby's life.

For years now, services and specialized care available for refugee children and infants has been extremely lacking. Reports and complaints have been written, and MSF recently warned of an impending mental health emergency for children in Greek island refugee camps, with rising rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation. Reportedly, food in the camp is nearly inedible, often making people sick. And yet, even with all of this being known and documented, a child died last month of preventable causes. With so many preventable deaths already in the last years since the beginning of the so-called "migration crisis", what will be the eventual death toll of neglectful and violent European migration policies?

OPENING OF NEW 'HOTSPOT' ON SAMOS ANNOUNCED FOR SEPTEMBER

On 29th July, the General Secretary for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, Manos Logothetis, announced that the 5-year-old Reception and Identification Centre Vathy, on the island of Samos, would close by the end of September, while the new structure in Zervou is expected to be inaugurated on 18th September.

In the same statement, the chief of the Asylum Service confirmed two crucial points about Greece's plans and approach to refugee reception as part of the National Strategy for Immigration 2020-2021. First of all, Samos will act as a 'pilot' for assessing the feasibility of the other four camps, all entirely funded and supported by the EU Commission, currently under construction in the other Aegean islands. Second, the design of these isolated, highly controlled structures is clearly informed by a overt logic of deterrence, as remarked in the announcement:

> **"The new structure of Samos, together with the operation of the Pre-Departure Detention Center (PROKEKA) is expected to function as a deterrent for new arrivals on the island."**

For a long time now, the externalization of borders and border security has been proven a given fact in EU migration management. However a new feature of the approach, as seen in the development of these closed centres, seems to be the testing of the EU's own legal limits. By subverting rule of law on EU territory with these prison-like structures, Member States like Greece are attempting to redefine arrival into a 'fiction of non-entry', whereby people do not have their mandated right to asylum and due procedure, but instead are suspended in protracted incarceration.

Besides the seemingly ironic claim of compliance with 'sufficient standards for human living' regarding a structure located at a critical distance from urban services, amenities and solidarity networks, the design of the new 'hotspot' of Samos seems aimed at keeping arrivals 'out of sight, out of mind'.

At the same time, largely unfounded are the repeated claims that the opening of the new 'hotspots' in Zervou is supposedly meeting the wishes of local residents on the island: in fact, the sentiment of locals span from a generalised tiredness and intolerance, for half a decade of 'hotspot usage' of their island, to explicit manifestations of solidarity towards the transit population and opposition to the mass detention planned by the government.

The fact that elected officials ignore the voice of the local people shows once again the arrogance of this administration that wants to uphold its plans by any means necessary. The visit of UK Home Secretary Priti Patel in early August only confirmed the mounting concerns as regards a larger scheme of collaboration between the two national governments, towards a shared approach on offshoring border procedures and fine-tuning a policy agenda of confinement, isolation, and deterrence.

Map of Greece (Source: Alexandra Kate Mitchell)

DENIALS AND ADMISSIONS ON PUSHBACKS

Only a month after the Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD) that declared Turkey 'safe third country' for nationals from five countries of origin that make up about 70% of all asylum seekers in Greece, the request of information filed by HIAS-Greece and Equal Rights Beyond Borders produced a 'paradoxical' reply from the Migration and Foreign Affairs Ministries. As suggested by the two legal organisations, the 'opinion' on which the JMD is grounded is devoid of any legal reasoning. Instead, the sources listed in the document all suggest that nationals from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Bangladesh are not safe in Turkey.

Meanwhile on an operational level the Greek government, and in particular Migration Minister Notis Mitarakis, has continued attempting to undermine evidence of the Hellenic Coast Guard's involvement in pushbacks. This despite the significant findings made public in mid-July by the European Parliament Scrutiny Working Group in regards to FRONTEX's omissions in reporting on fundamental rights violations in the Member State. Earlier in July, during an interview given to Radio Kathimerini, the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis at once rejected the "concept" of pushbacks as a term, while openly admitting the efforts taken to carry them out:

> *"When a boat comes and we see it, we see where it leaves, and we have an obligation to inform the Turkish Coast Guard, yes, we will inform it. And we will look to do everything in our power to get this boat back from where it started."*

During the same interview, Mitsotakis gave legitimacy to the actions of the Hellenic Coast Guard, noting that it's actions are "done with absolute respect for human rights". This smacks of other fumbled attempts by national governments to frame their border enforcement through rule of law, while also advocating for violence, harking back to statements made by then Croatian President Grabar-Kitarović in 2019 on the use of legitimate force in a pushback. Also weighing down on Mitsotakis's recent statement is the 2021 Rule of Law report, issued on July 20 by the European Commission in which the 'Country Chapter' on Greece lists numerous concerns raised by many stakeholders in the past months in regards to this very point.

BOSNIA- HERZEGOVINA

KRAJINA METAL SQUAT EVICTED

On 13th July, the transit community who were staying in the abandoned factory - Krajina Matal - in Bihać, close to the old Temporary Reception Centre of Bira, were evicted by the MUP - local police - and forcibly transported to the Lipa camp. Authorities arrived early in the morning and cleared the large squat, which local news portal USKinfo.ba reported to be housing 253 people. The move fits into an ongoing pattern of evictions and dispersals to Lipa which impacts people across urban and rural squats in the Bihać area, and across wider Una-Sana Canton (USC).

BVMN reporters spoke to people on the edge of the Krajina Metal site the day after the eviction and heard first-hand accounts of police using batons to strike people who were sleeping on the floor. The operation occurred early in the morning, with police forcing the population of Afghan and Bangladeshi residents onto buses and driving them south to Lipa.

Local news reported that those transferred to Lipa were undergoing "medical examination, identification and registration" upon arrival, echoing the authorities' official line that the evictions are carried out on hygiene grounds and the need to rehouse people in suitable facilities. Yet successive reports from Lipa by residents and organisations have painted a stark picture of the poor conditions there and lack of preventative measures for COVID-19. So, while the conditions in squats like Krajina Metal represent harsh and precarious living, many people forcibly moved to Lipa choose to walk directly back to Bihać where they can find their own improvised shelter.

However, when people-on-the-move returned to the Krajina Metal squat, they found the site cordoned off with yellow tape and officers stationed at the factory gate. In the days following the eviction workers from local company Konrad were observed removing bushes and rubble from the facade of the buildings and clearing rooms previously used for cooking and sleeping. In BVMN's May report, the eviction and sealing of the Dom Pensionera in central Bihać also saw efforts to render the spaces unusable for future transit groups. The coordinated closure of informal shelters sites across USC represents a concerning pattern that reinforces the violence of the camp system.

Squat being cleared and cordoned off
(Source:BVMN)

EU DONATION TO BIH OF VEHICLES

On 30th July, the EU donated 63 items, including vehicles and specialised equipment, to the Bosnian Border Police and SIPA - the State Investigation and Protection Agency. According to an IOM statement, this equipment will be used to strengthen the work of police officers to operate with greater mobility in the BiH territory. The donation includes 34 vans and 12 SUVs delivered to the BiH Border Police worth 3 million KM (approximately 1.5 million Euros), as well as 15 all-terrain vehicles and specialized uniforms to SIPA, worth 460,000 KM (230,000 Euros).

This material support represents a continuation of EU funding since 2018, particularly designed to strengthen "migration and border management in Bosnia and Herzegovina". Funds directed to BiH since the Balkan Route tracked west from Serbia have increasingly tied in this border enforcement dimension, cogent with the EU's overall externalisation strategy.

While a large proportion of the financial support has gone towards the construction and management of the TRCs (Transit Reception Centers) in BiH - which in most cases only sustain inhumane and degrading conditions - emphasis on capacity building and protecting BiH's border with Montenegro and Serbia have also been prominent policy aims. In late 2019, the EU supported BiH with equipment and vehicles, donating five new Ford SUVs worth 124,000 Euros "to support the efforts of the BiH Border Police in their daily operations due to the increasing presence of migrants in the country". The parallel way that EU funds sustain bare subsistence in camps and encourage more intensive policing of borders and interiors is an insipid part of the blocs migration strategy.

SLOVENIA

NEW PRESIDENCY OF COUNCIL OF EU

The Slovenian presidency of the Council of the EU began at the start of July 2021, intent on pushing the legislative agenda on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and "strengthening the Schengen Area". In this light, network member InfoKolpa organised an online convergence of activists, advocates, MEPs and people with lived experience of border violence to reflect on the current state of migration and asylum policy in the presiding country, and the (mal)practice which Slovenia is set to entrench.

Since 2018, Slovenia has been involved in massive and systemic denials of asylum rights and collective expulsion to Croatia. This latest webinar discussed the guise of "legality" used to initiate these chain pushbacks, and the numerous reports and court judgements that have exposed their unlawful nature. In particular, the subsequent risks of torture during pushback from Croatia, as well as the inhumane conditions in Bosnia-Herzegovina were highlighted. Urša Regvar from PIC, a legal NGO supporting asylum seekers in Slovenia, stated that recent legislation changes had only reinforced this complicity:

"Slovenia is violating the prohibition of torture of everyone who comes here and does not have the chance to apply for asylum due to the Foreigners Act"

Speakers also addressed the spread of chain pushbacks and the monitoring of EU funding/technical support for border violence along the Balkan Route. Those assembled posed a clear question to the Slovenian state and wider EU audience: How can a country responsible for mass violations of Human Rights be an honest broker in the preparations of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum?

Speakers at the recent webinar event
(Source:BVMN)

SERBIA

EVICTIONS FROM SUBOTICA AND POOR CONDITIONS IN SOMBOR

On 27th July, network member Collective Aid found the squats along the city's train tracks empty during their weekly visit in Subotica, northern Serbia. An estimated 60-70 people had been forced into buses by authorities and driven to Preševo, along the Serbia-North Macedonia border. This practice, which is very common in the area, reveals the absurdity of the methods used to deal with displaced communities transiting throughout Serbia. Groups evicted are usually back a few days later, if not the very same day, as was the case here. Besides these regular evictions, police forces monitor informal settlements in Subotica daily, as reported by people-on-the-move living there.

Volunteers noted a clear rise in the number of families accessing distributions during July. While some families manage to get hotel rooms or private short-term accommodation, those without financial resources usually join existing squats. For many, this still leads to a certain level of isolation, with family groups living in tents on the periphery of most buildings used as squats, rather than in the buildings themselves.

Those populations are mainly present in Sombor's transit Centre, where our team distributes non-food items once a week. The regulation in Serbia seems to allow Transit Centres to have mixed populations hosted in their facilities. In theory, the Commissariat, as the state agency managing the camps in Serbia, houses minors and families in dedicated centres. However, the Sombor example shows how frequently this policy falls dramatically short of humane standards, as outlined in this report by network member Are You Syrious. As Reception and Asylum centres in Serbia do not allow any solidarity groups in their vicinity, it is difficult for people assisting to monitor the services those vulnerable groups have access to.

HUNGARY

SUCCESSFUL COURT RULING ON BREACHED ASYLUM ACCESS

On 8th July, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that a 2016 pushback by Hungarian authorities violated Article 4 of the 4th Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights and the right to an effective remedy under Article 13 of the Convention. The case, supported by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, concerned a 2016 pushback of Khurram Shahzad, a Pakistani asylum seeker. After crossing into Hungary, Shahzad was caught by Hungarian authorities close to the Serbian border. Despite requesting access to the asylum procedure, Shahzad and several other Pakistani men were driven to the border, forced to read out a document which stated that they had no right to apply for asylum outside the "transit-zones", and pushed back across the fence. On the other side of the fence, Hungarian officials severely beat several of the people-on-the-move, which resulted in head injuries and required emergency medical attention. A second case about the inadequate investigation into the assault is still pending at the ECtHR.

With this judgement, the ECtHR joins the international consensus that the Hungarian pushback system constitutes a violation of international law. In particular, the 8th July ruling, has put the ECtHR in line with a December 2020 ruling by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which had determined that Hungarian pushbacks were in violation of EU law and prompted Frontex' withdrawal from the Hungarian border. For the ECtHR, this development is particularly welcome news, given that the court had failed to rule that a 2014 collective expulsion in Melilla (Spain) was illegal.

Unfortunately, even though the illegality of Hungary's border practices has now been clearly established by relevant international bodies, the situation on the ground has barely changed, with BVMN reporting on 49 persons pushed back during July (see 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3). The Hungarian Helsinki Committee reports that since December 2020, when the ECJ ruled the Hungarian pushback practices illegal, Hungarian authorities had carried out more than 22,000 pushbacks.

Hungarian authorities patrolling the border fence (Source: Rigardu)

ROMANIA

POLICE VIOLENCE IN TIMIȘOARA

Following the incidents reported last month in Timișoara, violence against people-on-the-move at the hands of Romanian authorities remains a consistent challenge. Both pushbacks to Serbia and internal violence within urban centres mirror some of the circumstances faced by people-on-the-move in other countries along the route, particularly the precarious living conditions induced by the constant threat of police eviction and expulsion.

Local organisation LOGS documented 55 people subject to violence in July by a range of actors including Border Police and Jandarmeria (a militarised police force subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs). Authorities carried out operations on the street and in squats, including severe beatings. The people affected were mainly minors from Afghanistan, though groups attempting to enter Romania come from a range of countries, as documented in a recent Associated Press report.

LOGS also reported an incident in which a person was struck by authorities inside Galaţi Reception Centre in Romania, indicating that these abuses are targeting people across a spectrum of formal and informal accommodation. BVMN testimonies from spring and summer 2021 corroborate this spread of violence, with one example detailing a chronology of physical and material abuse against a family who were held in police custody and immigration detention, before being pushed back to Serbia. The coupling of this cross-border violence with localised assaults by police portray the increasing difficulties for people-on-the-move entering Romania.
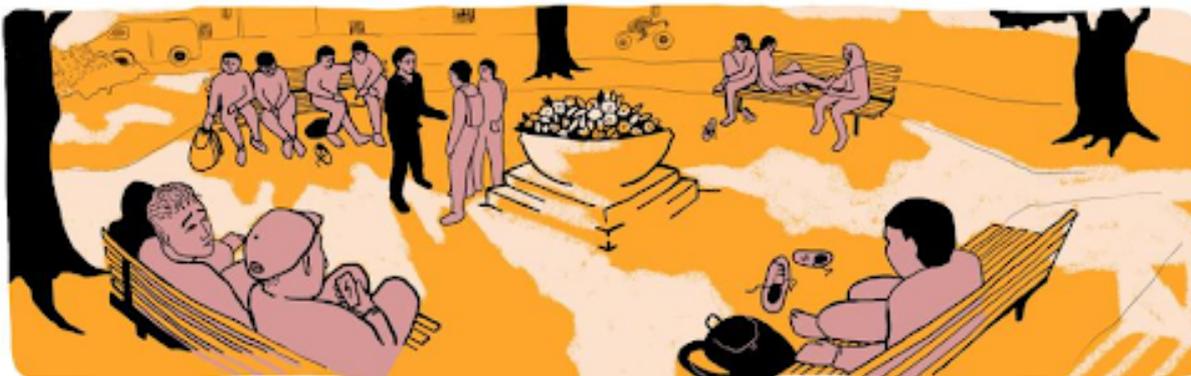
ITALY

CRIMINALISATION AND JOINT PATROLS AT THE SLOVENIAN BORDER

In July, the Bologna PM (prosecutor) concluded the preliminary inquiries against local solidarity activists Gian Andrea Franchi and Lorena Fornasir, for aiding and abetting illegal immigration. In February 2021, police arrived at dawn at their house, headquarters of local association Linea d'Ombra ODV. The authorities took personal phones, the association's account and tax ledgers and various materials, to look for proof of favoring illegal migration. In recent years, Linea d'Ombra has become well known in the area for the help provided to people-on-the-move in Trieste, and the group is present on a daily basis in the train station square helping new arrivals. The accusations of the police represent yet another attack on solidarity amid a climate of increasing criminalisation of initiatives along the route and wider Europe.

The accusation "contrasts heavily with the personal profile and the daily activity" of the couple and their NGO, which works publicly and transparently to support those who face violence and displacement at the hands of the EU border regime. Yet sadly today in Italy, giving food, clothes and shoes for free to those who need them is an action persecuted by police and state authorities.

At first, Lorena was not included in the charges, but later the Bologna PM decided to charge her with illegal permanence as well. It is obvious that the political will on the part of the authorities is to strike solidarity, create fear within groups assisting people-on-the-move, and to ultimately curtail the resources available to those traveling Balkan Route.

Further, this month mixed border patrols were reestablished along the border between Slovenia and Italy. The bilateral actions aims to bolster surveillance of the border with the use of drones and nocturnal vision devices, and have been reinstituted within an anti-smuggling frame in order "to combat the facilitation of irregular migration" according to an article in Trieste Prima. While this cooperation was stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic, their reintroduction suggests further challenges for those seeking safe passage into Italy in the next months. Reporters in Trieste continue to monitor the pattern of arrivals in the city limits in order to assess the impact of these joint patrols and to support those who do arrive safely in spite of the ever-increasing surveillance at the border.

Piazza Liberta in central Trieste (Source: Hannah Kirmes Daly / Brush&Bow C.I.C)

BVMN published 22 pushback cases in July, impacting 544 people-on-the-move. Those affected by these incidents included men, women, children with guardians and unaccompanied children. They also represent a wide demographic, including people from Palestine, Syria, Somalia, Morocco, Algeria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Cameroon, Egypt, Eritrea, Yemen, Turkey, Tunisia, Pakistan and Zambia.

- 7 pushbacks to Serbia
- (3 from Hungary, 1 from Slovenia, 3 Croatia)
- 6 pushbacks to Bosnia-Herzegovina from Croatia
- 9 pushbacks to Turkey (5 from Greece, 4 from Bulgaria)

Link	Incident	Recorded	Demographic	Group
Hungary to Serbia				
1.1	10th July	15th July	Palestine, Syria, Somalia	33
1.2	14th July	15th July	Somalia, Syria	7
1.3	21st July	22nd July	Morocco	9
Slovenia to Serbia				
2.1	20th July	22nd July	Palestine, Morocco	2
Croatia to Serbia				
3.1	27th June	2nd July	Afghanistan	8
3.2	15th July	25th July	Syria	1
3.3	29th July	29th July	Iran	6
Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina				
4.1	29th June	1st July	Morocco	4
4.2	5th July	8th July	Iran	4
4.3	5th July	8th July	Afghanistan	30
4.4	16th July	28th July	Iraq, Morocco	5
4.5	20th July	23th July	Afghanistan	31
4.6	27th July	29th July	Afghanistan	6
Greece to Turkey				
5.1	2nd July	3rd July	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Cameroon, Egypt, Eritrea	100
5.2	7th July	30th July	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Somalia	160
5.3	10th July	12th July	Egypt, Eritrea, Yemen, Somalia, Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia	20
5.4	13th July	14th July	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Zambia	83

5.5	13th July	14 July	Morocco, Algeria	7
Bulgaria to Turkey				
6.1	17th July	17th July	Syria, Morocco	8
6.2	18th July	19th July	Syria	10
6.3	18th July	19th July	Syria	8
6.4	27th July	30th July	Algeria	2

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND CONTACT

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BVMN is based on the horizontal participation of member organisations in the field of documentation, advocacy, media and litigation. The Network receives funds through charitable grants and donations from supporters. The funds primarily cover transport subsidies for ... teers in the field and staff costs.

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