



# Violations at Greek Borders

## Sea and Land Report

February/March 2020



# ORGANIZATIONS

[Border Violence Monitoring Network](#) is an alliance of grassroots groups and NGOs documenting and advocating for the end of illegal pushbacks from Greece and other countries along the Balkan Route. Participants in the Network take interviews with people-on-the-move, gathering first hand testimonies of collective expulsions and violence in some of the most challenging border areas in the region.

[Mobile Info Team](#) is a Greek based organisation providing support to individuals caught within the inefficient and complex European asylum system. The team aim to improve the situation of refugees by providing them with vital information, clarification and assistance for the full duration of their asylum procedure.

[Mare Liberum](#) is an organisation monitoring human rights in the Aegean Sea by ship. The group's aim is to observe, document and draw public attention to the dangerous situation at the European border between Turkey and Greece and to strengthen solidarity and fundamental human rights.

[No Name Kitchen](#) is a group of independent people from different parts of the world with the intention of covering one of the most basic and universal needs: food. The organisation work in various spots along the Balkan Route, and in the Greek city of Patras, supporting people-on-the-move who live in informal settlements and have little recourse to institutional help.

[Balkan Info Van](#) is a collective aiming to support people-on-the-move in the Balkan Region and Greece with a mobile hub signposting primary services, providing charging, respite and ad hoc assistance along the route.

# Introduction

The deteriorating situation at the Greek land and sea borders represents an affront to the basic rights of people-on-the-move - not only since Turkish President Erdogan's decision to "open the gates" for refugees. This joint report summarises the most recent findings of multiple organisations who are documenting violations at Greek borders, including first hand testimonies from people suffering at the hands of EU border externalisation policies. Of deep concern are the commonalities in fundamental rights violations across the Greek islands and the mainland, and the fact that recent events show intentional and deliberate human rights violations against vulnerable transit groups, instead of an emergency reaction as presented by government and media within the European Union.

## Overview of Situation

Tens of thousands of people have attempted perilous land and sea crossings into Greece since the end of February 2020 and were met with a wall of violence. The need for safe passage is evident for the transient migrant and refugee populations stuck in Turkey. But Turkish President Erdogan's decision on 17th February to "open the border" to Greece is also the culmination of a perfect storm that has been a long time coming. Publicly, the Turkish government justifies its decision to open the border to Greece with humanitarian motives due to the further displacement of Syrian civilians from Idlib towards Turkey and with the EU's failure to live up to its responsibility under the EU-Turkey deal, concluded in early 2016.

Turkey certainly has a point: [the EU has barely carried out any resettlement](#) of people-on-the-move from Turkey to the EU, which it had promised - although this presents, technically speaking, not a breach of the agreement as resettlements are linked to the number of people sent back from Greece. The six billion Euros Turkey was meant to receive in exchange for

closing its borders, were [disbursed behind schedule](#). Finally, the EU has failed to honor its commitment to re-invigorate Turkey's [membership process](#), and, more importantly, to [grant visa free entry](#) to Turkish citizens. Turkey's unhappiness with the EU is thus understandable and has been continuously expressed by officials over the years - yet, it is not the full explanation for Turkey's decision to open the border.

Domestically, the Turkish government is embattled on three fronts. In 2018, it has faced off an economic crisis in the making by [refueling its economy with additional debt](#). The current growth appears unstable and there is a strong sense that the country could slip back into a recession at any time. Domestic opinion has increasingly [turned sour](#) on Erdogan's openness towards refugees. After [electoral losses](#) in Istanbul and other major cities, the government may feel that it is time to respond to popular demand and to begin expelling people-on-the-move. Finally, Turkey's intervention in Northern Syria has led to an increasing [number of casualties](#). Fearing popular backlash, the government temporarily [shut down](#) major social media sites in the last week of February. Embedded in this military crisis is the fear that once Idlib falls to Assad, it could cause a mass exodus from the region, destabilizing Turkey's domestic situation further.

With this context in mind, it becomes possible to understand what Erdogan wants out of this crisis. Simply, expelling people-on-the-move is part of the goal as it will satisfy popular anti-refugee sentiment. But more importantly, he wants money - preferably [disbursed directly](#) to his government - in order to stabilize the country's economy. Finally, [geopolitical support](#) from the EU (and NATO) could increase the legitimacy of Turkey's military action in Northern Syria and possibly tip the scales to affect the outcome of the conflict through sanctions or limited military action.

Driven by a lack of European solidarity, economic woes, popular backlash, and geopolitical interest, Turkey has made people-on-the-move pawns in a bigger power struggle between the EU and Turkey. As the remainder of this report shows, Greek authorities under the conservative Prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis known for his tough stance on migration followed suit and responded with unspeakable violence against those who are most in need of protection - with full support of the EU.

### Suspension of Asylum Rights

As people began to muster at the land border and the islands from 27th February onwards, the Greek government dealt a swift and illegal rebuttal. On 1st March 2020, the Greek National Security Council announced the “temporary suspension, for one month [...] of the lodging of asylum claims by all people entering the country illegally” and their “immediate deportation without registration, where possible, to their countries of origin or transit.” Since the announcement, multiple international agencies and NGOs have affirmed that the suspension of asylum rights and the principle of non-refoulement is neither permitted under international law nor European law. The UN Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 UN

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights all protect the right to asylum or non-refoulement. The EU Commission has sent deliberately incoherent messages in response to Greece’s infringement of internationally affirmed rights and principles.

The infringement and suspension of fundamental rights by Greek authorities has facilitated and intensified a brutal border regime that has led to people-on-the-move being shot and tear gassed at official border crossing points and pushed back across the Evros river. Whilst, unfortunately, the practice of illegal pushbacks is commonplace across Europe’s external borders, the veracity with which Greece has enforced these illegal procedures and the political will from the EU to back such violations are particularly disturbing. Despite the documentation of widespread abuse, violence and a host of human rights violations currently being carried out against people-on-the-move by Greek border officials, multiple EU member states have used the frame of a security threat to justify the deployment of additional police forces to the region. The ongoing support that member states are providing has allowed their Greek counterparts to act with impunity during the current suspension of rights at both the Evros land border and across the islands.



Areas considered in this joint report - Evros, island “hotspots”, and Patras (Source: [BVMN](#))





# On Land: Militarization of the Evros Region

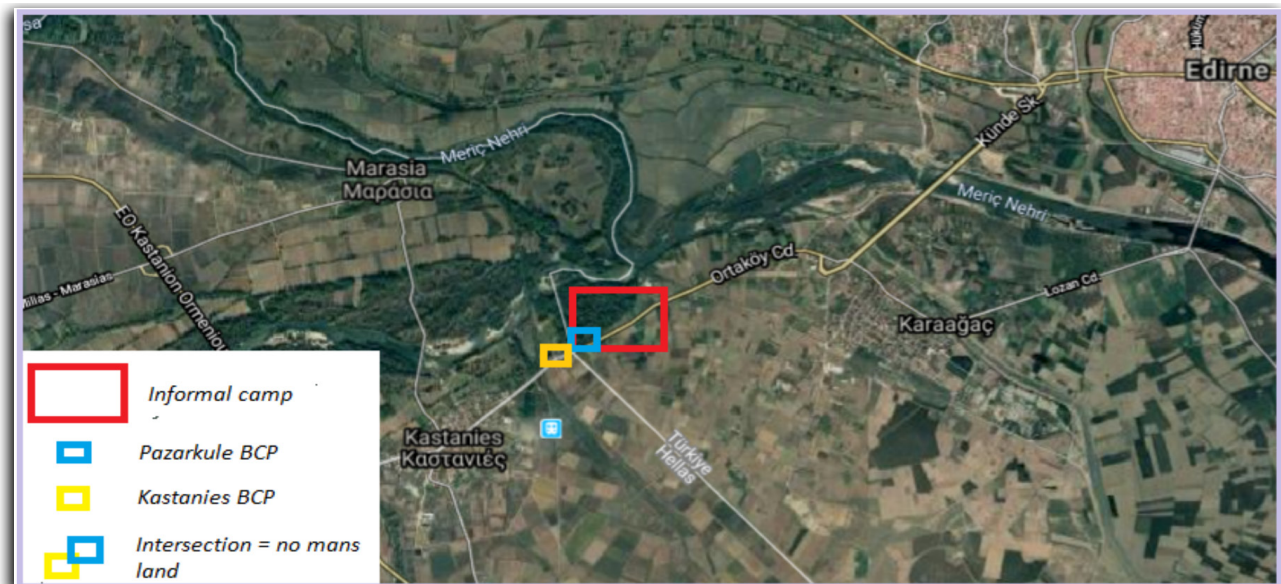


Diagram of Border Crossing Point (BCP) where thousands are stranded (Source: [GoogleMaps](#))

## Violence at Pazarkule/Kastanies Crossing

“We are cards and they are playing with us”, shared the father of one Syrian family at the Pazarkule/Kastanies border crossing near Edirne where people-on-the-move have been cynically maneuvered by Turkey and violently outflanked by Greece. An informal camp sprang up on 27th February 2020 with the [promise of safe passage across the border](#), but an estimated 10,000-20,000 people, many of whom are women and children, then became stuck in effective no-man’s land as Greece rejected their right to apply for asylum. Camping in squalid conditions, with limited food and water, people face daily acts of brutal violence by the Greek police and army who sealed off the entrance to the Kastanies crossing.

[Water cannons, tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition](#) are among the methods used to target men, women, and children alike by Greek military and police personnel, already causing reported gun

[fatalities](#). The Greek authorities made regular attacks into no-man’s land during the first two weeks of March, firing shots towards the Turkish side. One of these shots pierced the arm of a person-on-the-move as he tried to assist another gun victim bleeding on the ground [\[1.1\]](#).

*“They shoot me in the arm”*

Meanwhile, a Syrian family (with children aged two and four) describe their desperate situation [\[1.2\]](#):

*“[There’s] no escape, the Turkish Army close the gate so that we could not get out”*

The combined actions of the Greek and Turkish military led to the cruel enclosure of thousands of people in a space where they are subject to ongoing teargas



*Left: Bullet wound from shooting by Greek authorities (Source: [BalkanInfoVan](#)).*



*Right: Greek authorities launch tear gas into no mans land (Source: [Guardian](#))*

attacks, causing severe irritation to eyes and lungs. To compound these measures, the Greek authorities drafted in [large fans](#) to blow the teargas fired from both sides of the border, concentrating it on the improvised camp and creating unbearable conditions for the people inside.

Sealed off by the Turkish Army and Police, one of the few ways to exit the camp for people-on-the-move is to leave on one of the busses offered by Turkish authorities allegedly going to Istanbul. But doubts have been raised about the true destination of such transport [\[1.3\]](#). For journalists and humanitarian aid workers, [access](#) has been increasingly limited since the standoff at the border began. The permanent police checks on the roads between Edirne and Pazarkule, have effectively blocked the dissemination of information from the border zone. Alongside the arrests of two [Kurdish journalists](#), while sources inside the camp suggest one

member of the international press was also questioned for seven hours inside the perimeter of the crossing.

After the initial efforts of Greece and Turkey to encourage media coverage of their respective actions, it seems both are keen to suffocate objective coverage of the humanitarian crisis they have willfully created. At the time of publication, some groups have attempted to leave the crossing, but thousands remain stuck. Reports from inside suggest that free access to and from the site is limited to one day a week, and on the basis of fingerprinting by Turkish authorities. Police have also [reportedly](#) offered up to 300 TL (43 Euros) for people to leave via bus to Istanbul, that or the prospect of being forced to make a dangerous crossing into Greece. The brutal border closure by Greek authorities and the containment tactics applied by Turkey only support the statements of people inside that they are indeed “cards” being laid out.

*Left: Greek authorities sealing off the entrance to Kastanies BCP (Source: [BalkanInfoVan](#))*



*Right: Children trapped at the Pazarkule border crossing in dire conditions.*





## Systemic Pushbacks from Greece to Turkey

For those who have been documenting the organised and systematic collective expulsion of people across the Greek-Turkish border around the Evros river, the recent events described above have represented a continuation, and intensification of standard practice in the region. A coalition of actors in Northern Greece have been working over the last eight months to collect testimonies of push-backs, and draw trends from the patterns of violence occurring at the land border. BVMN's [August Report](#) details procedural norms such as the theft or destruction of personal belongings, physical violence, and the use of balaclavas to protect the identity of perpetrators. Meanwhile in autumn, Mobile Info Team [released](#) landmark findings on these heinous acts in a feature length report analysing 27 pushback cases recorded by their team. Research found corroborating accounts of:

- Masked authorities in military style uniform*
- Beatings and theft carried out by Greek authorities*
- Unlawful detention of people in unsanitary conditions*
- Collective expulsion via boats across the Evros river*

The events of the last two weeks are, therefore, in

line with existent knowledge of human rights abuses in the region, as footage published by Der Spiegel [proved](#) in December. The notable differences between the current situation and standard practice is the large scale on which these procedures are now being carried out, despite or perhaps because of wider media attention. Whilst previous reports from BVMN field reporters have only detailed collective expulsions of groups with up to ten members, the border is currently overwhelmed by thousands of migrants who have made their way by foot or bus from various sites across Turkey. As a response to increased numbers, the level of violence has intensified, as described in the testimony gathered from Pazarkule/Kastanies.

Actors on the ground, such as Turkish outlet TRT, have shared images which have been widely disseminated, showing large groups of migrants being stripped revealing clear signs of physical abuse. This is not an unusual phenomenon, and BVMN have previously shared reports of [water immersion](#), [arms broken by security forces](#) and serious [baton attacks](#). In March alone, the Network covered the pushback of 76 people from Greece to Turkey, including two cases where families were involved. On 8th February 2020 over 50 people, including women and children, were held in a detention facility in Evros where some of the group were beaten, and the Greek authorities refused detainees food and water [\[2.2\]](#). The following



*Above left: A group pushed back from Greece stripped to their underwear (Source: [TRT](#))*

*Above right: Torn clothes, shoes and bags on the Greek side of the Evros (Source: [BalkanInfoVan](#)).*

evening the respondent shared how 16 of the people were loaded into a van and driven to the Evros river where they were:

*“forced to undress and then, eight by eight, were loaded into a boat.”*

In two other cases recorded in March the respondents share how the Greek authorities held their transit groups in inhumane and degrading detention cells. One minor aged 16 years old recalls how the “men were refused water and were only allowed food if they paid €2” [2.2], meanwhile another person who was denied access to a toilet shared, “if you want to pee, you should to pee in one bottle” [2.3].

The three cases portray familiar tenets: masked authorities, inhumane detention and pushbacks via boat over the Evros river. Such severe human rights abuses, which in many other cases encompass acts of beating and physical torture are nothing new in this north eastern region of Greece. Erdogan’s recent decision to “open the borders”, and increased media attention have only illuminated these underlying practices.

### **Imprisonment of Asylum Seekers**

While human rights groups have called for adequate accountability for the breaches outlined above, the judicial response in Greece has represented a worrying continuity with the persecution of migrants and refugees being seen on the ground. German outlet Tagesschau recently [published](#) an investigation into an alleged 50 persons who were charged with illegal border entry, fast tracked before Greek courts and handed sentences of up to four years imprisonment. The youngest of those sentenced is reported to have been a 12 year old Afghan girl.

The practice has led to the separation of families, and calls from UNHCR and the Greek Refugee Council for immediate adherence to the Geneva Convention and its protections for asylum seekers. Such breaches highlight a deep concern about the independence of legal institutions in Greece, and the diminishing rights of people-on-the-move as outlined in the

recent cases recorded by BVMN. Unfortunately, this is not the first time where a criminal trial has been based based on arbitrary arrests from the transit population, exaggerated criminal charges, lack of access to due process and punitive pre-trial detention - a trend that peaked in the infamous “[Moria 35](#)” trial. Furthermore, in a context where right wing vigilante [groups](#) are freely allowed to operate in border regions (and even [praised](#) by Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis), the move to imprison asylum seekers is a crude demonstration of Greece’s intent to block access to its territory.



# At Sea: The Situation at Greek Maritime Borders

## Update from the Greek Islands

With the signing of the the [EU-Turkey Agreement](#) in March 2016, the former registration centers on five “hotspot” islands in the Aegean sea were increasingly fashioned into wire-fenced camps. On Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos, so-called Fast-Track Border Procedures were introduced as well as a prior Admissibility Interview in order to quickly and effectively proceed people from the Islands and if applicable, admit them to Turkey. Supposedly a temporary measure, the camps remain to this day ill equipped to deal with the numbers of people arriving and are considered by many to have become open air prisons.

In the last four years, arrivals to the islands continued - although stemmed through the intervention of the Turkish Coast Guard who [prevented](#) boats from setting off from their shores - meanwhile the Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG) permitted boats to enter Greek waters. As of 1st March 2020, with the Greek government suspending the right to apply for asylum, the HCG started to [prevent](#) boats from entering Greek waters by [firing](#) warning shots towards at least one boat, and cutting off other vessels from reaching the shore. One boat capsized as it was overturned by its passengers when the HCG approached, resulting in the [death of a young Syrian boy](#).

Meanwhile, refugees who arrived at the shores were immediately confined in [provisional detention centers](#). On Lesbos, 450 people were restricted to the port until [detained on a navy ship](#). On Samos, approximately 95 people are detained at the Port Police. The practice is similar in the other hotspots where refugees have [restricted movement](#) to have contact

with relatives on the island, and to [lodge an application for asylum](#), overlapping with the escalation of draconian controls at Greece’s land border in Evros.

## Case Study: Struggles on Lesbos

Since the summer of 2019 arrivals to the Aegean islands increased, while the accommodation structures remained highly insufficient. The unbearable living conditions in the camps and the continuous burden for the Greek population created an ever more tense situation. After the Greek central government announced the construction of closed camps on the Aegean islands, the atmosphere on Lesbos has started to change for the worse. Recently a [local protest](#) was confronted by riot police units sent from the mainland and the situation became increasingly more tense. It escalated further when Turkey announced to open its borders, when between 29th February 2nd March more boats carrying refugees arrived on the shores of the island.

On Sea the MARE LIBERUM, a ship monitoring human rights in the border areas of the Aegean, continues to observe human rights violations by Greek and FRONTEX authority vessels. In one instance from March a boat of vulnerable people was left stranded by Greek authorities off the south shore of the island. Despite being in Greek waters, the vessel and its passengers were abandoned for ten hours, and rescue was dangerously stalled even after HCG had been informed and pressured to respond by international actors. Only when water had already entered the boat and people were desperate did domestic and EU authorities chose to act.

On 1st March 2020 the MARE LIBERUM vessel observed several cases of severe human rights violations. For example, a boat carrying a large transit group was attacked by masked men who pursued boarded from their own vessel and destroyed the engine. The damaged vessel still made it to the shore of Lesbos by rowing, but there they were met by [right-wing local groups](#) who prevented the people from landing in the small village port of Thermi. In the early days of March, security was far from guaranteed on land and at sea. Roads were blocked by fascists, refugees were denied access to the camp in Moria. The Stage 2 Reception Centre was set on fire, and the same night several cars of NGOs support groups were destroyed. On 2nd March 2020, monitoring vessel the MARE LIBERUM was threatened by a mob that poured gasoline on the stern deck. Subsequently, the crew was forced to pass several days at sea in the urgent need of a [safe port](#), which the authorities didn't provide until nine days later. On 7th March 2020 the School of Peace inside the community centre of [One Happy Family was burned down](#).

Since 1st March 2020, 555 people have arrived on Lesbos by rubber boat from the Aegean the sea, though arrivals decreased later into the month, due to both the Greek and the Turkish Coast Guard operations. Rescue is not guaranteed any longer and there are many reports of [pushbacks and pullbacks](#). For those able to arrive on Lesbos, there is no possibility to apply for asylum, there is no safe place to

stay and no supplies are being provided for new arrivals. For the ones already on the islands, the situation is also worsening severely.

On 16th March 2020 a fire broke out in Moria camp, another example of the dangers presented by willfully overcrowded camps, and a reminder of the need to urgently evacuate all camps on the islands, create safe passage for arrivals and respect human rights.

### **Across the other islands**

Sources from other hotspots report that all arrivals from March were separated from the general refugee population on the islands. From a legal perspective, they are not asylum seekers since they are restricted from lodging an asylum application.

**Chios:** 296 refugees arrived on Sunday, 1st March. 124 were transferred to the camp and were confined to the first reception area, where they are still being held today. Other arrivals and subsequent arrivals, [136 persons](#) the first week of March, were eventually transferred to a narrow strip of land surrounded by water from three sides, in front of the Port Police. Men spent nights in the cold, while buses hosted women and children overnight. On 14th March, [UNHCR set up 15 tents](#) at the request of the Chios Police Directorate. The tents have been assembled on the same strip of land and people have been detained since arrival.



*Chios, 15 tents in front of Port Police, Source: [Alithia](#)*



*March arrivals are moved from Port Police premises to the waiting area in the port of Leros (Source: Independent Volunteer)*

The police distributed NFIs and food donated by NGOs and locals, and granted access to medical-trained volunteers. One woman who had given birth some days prior to her arrival, was taken to the hospital for tests, released, and is currently housed in one of the tents. None of the refugees received legal advice and they were not allowed to submit an application for international protection.

**Leros:** March arrivals were also placed on the premises of the Port Police. During their first days, women and children were loaded in a truck at night for warmth, while men slept outside under the rain and in the cold. In the last days, the new arrivals were moved to the waiting area of the port. Different sources report between [232 and 252 persons](#) are currently hosted in the space that has merely a roof, and was enclosed with plastic from the sides as protection against wind and cold. In the absence of hygienic conditions, infections started spreading, such as skin diseases and stomach viruses. One pregnant woman was moved to the local hospital to give birth. Amongst the refugees, there are 28 children under the age of three.

The police allowed distribution of NFIs, including personal hygiene products for women, and formula and diapers for children. Contact between the refugees and relatives on the islands was not allowed. Additionally, asylum applications could not be lodged with the authorities.

**Samos:** Beatrice Chioccioli, project coordinator for Avocats sans frontières France, reports that there were around [90-93 arrivals](#) in the first week of March. Men, women, and children were all placed in detention in the building of the Port Authority of Samos, Vathy. Amongst the detainees, a 17-year-old unaccompanied minor boy from Afghanistan. The detainees have not had access to water for basic hygienic needs since their arrival. Legal counselors were not allowed to the detention area. Due to lack of access, more information about medical conditions and demographics were not available.

Additional sources report that the arrivals are held in two-guarded holding cells, which measure, according to a rough estimate, 25 square meters each, and are closed off with bars. It is unclear which actors have access to the detention area. Some food has been provided, and a chemical toilet installed on the premises. The building floor on which the cells are located has small windows for ventilation and daylight.

In the second week of March, the Aegean Boat Report documented [37 arrivals](#). Volunteer sources report that their current location is unknown. Persons from either group were not allowed to register an application for asylum, according to local sources.



**Kos:** Aegean Boat Report published [251 arrivals](#) since 1st March 2020 on the island. The 176 arrivals from the first week were all placed inside the port's waiting area, a construction surrounded by glass. [Consecutive arrivals](#) were placed in tents set up in the same area. Police officers patrolling are restricting contact with outsiders. The [Labor Centre](#) offered blankets and sleeping bags to refugees, including children, held at the local port on 14th March. The goods were [gathered](#) by local residents and associations.

Compared to other islands, the camp is remote, 15 km far from Kos city. Sources state that since 1st January 2020, with the adoption of the new law on asylum ([Law 4636/2019](#)) all refugees have been detained upon arrival and underwent the asylum procedure in detention. Only once they have been granted international protection, they were released. Sources confirmed they are being detained in the existing detention facility, with rare cases of extremely vulnerable persons being released without being supported.

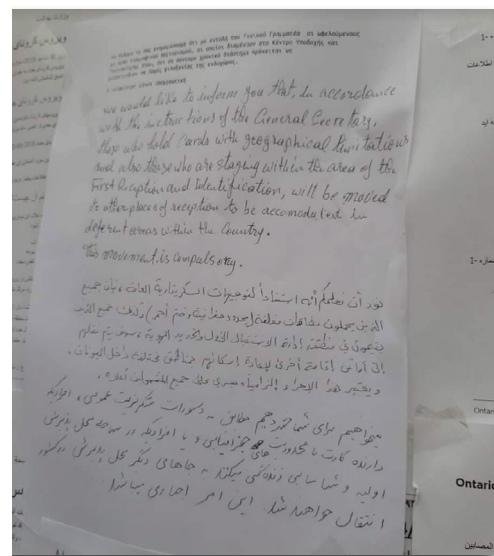
### At Time of Publication

Entering the third week of March the situation remains dire. [The tents on Chios collapsed](#) due to poor weather and the ill-advised setup on exposed ground. On the night of 16th March, the wind surged at 8 Beauforts and the waves burst onto the strip knocking down all UNHCR tents.

On the info board in the Vial camp, Chios, a bulletin was posted by camp management, stating: “We would like to inform you that in accordance with the instruction of the General Secretary, those who hold cards without geographical limitations and also those who are staying within the area of the First Reception and Identification, will be moved to other places of reception to be accommodated in different areas within the country. This movement is compulsory” The bulletin was removed afterwards without additional information.

On Sunday, 15th March 2020 approximately 76 people arrived on Kos, were restricted to the port area and placed in tents together with previous arrivals.

The police and volunteers on both Chios and Samos were informed by the central Government that transfers will take place, however there has not been any progress so far. This led to the Associations of Police workers from Chios, Lesvos, Samos, and the Northern and Southern Dodecanese islands to make an [out of court declaration](#) against the government for criminal indifference. They called for [“direct measures for the relief of \(our\) islands”](#). The police officers [condemn](#) the government for instituting measures creating a health hazard, in the context of the outbreak of COVID-19. They condemn the regulations imposed by the central government regarding the “immigrants custody rules and all the other relevant provisions for public health”.



Above left: Collapsed tent on Chios (Source: [politischios](#))

Above right: Info sheet Vial camp (Source: Anon)

## Port Violence in Patras

Despite the fact that the total numbers are not as high as in other parts of Greece, violence at the port of Patras is also a cogent reminder of the established level of abuse at various points along the maritime border of Greece. In this coastal city on the western mainland, a rolling community of around 150 people live in informal shelter near the boat terminal, hoping to cross the Adriatic sea on the regular ferry departures to Italy (Bari, Ancona and Venice), where they risk extreme violence from this precarious route.

The living conditions in the major squats already form a backdrop to the violence exacted upon people at the sea border, a mark of the systemic failings of the Greek asylum system and Helios housing program which have led to documented persons being made to sleep rough. Coupled with this is the psychological and physical attrition faced by people forced into irregular routes on the passenger ships. Reports taken by No Name Kitchen in Patras document a high level of internal violence from Greek authorities preventing access to the ships and attacking people in their informal settlements .

At the port transit groups report heavy security controls and the use of physical violence by port authorities and police to remove people from vehicle trailers. The border guards reportedly carry out beatings, arrests and detention of captured groups. Some respondents also share experiences of being taken from the port to detention centres, where they are held without an interpreter or access to legal assistance. Such acts marry up with other findings from Evros and the Greek islands in terms of their use of disproportionate force and unlawful detainment.

To compound this violence, Greek police also carry out systematic harassment of the informal settlements in Patras, appearing at the factory squats several times a day where they threaten the residents while they are cooking, sleeping or eating. Officers reportedly steal and damage the groups' property, breaking phones and charging ports as a crude method of hindrance. The police also beat people with batons, and often internally disperse groups, to Athens where they are left outside police stations or near Victory Square. The acts of Greek law enforcement,

and their impunity, form a microcosm of the wider problems highlighted in this report: that refugee and migrant communities are facing widespread measures to strip them of their fundamental rights.

## European Union Support

The Commission and the Council's main response to the events at the Turkish-Greek border has been unflinching support for Greece's actions to brutally repress transit to the islands and mainland. Calling Greece "Europe's shield", Commission President von der Leyen [pledged](#) 700 million Euros of financial support as well as substantially reinforced FRONTEX missions, despite questions on the legality of using FRONTEX in a context in which fundamental rights have been suspended. Despite [UNHCR](#) criticisms, a Commission spokesperson claimed that the Commission was unable to determine the [legality](#) of Greece's actions. This stands in stark contrast with the infringement procedures, the Commission has levelled against Hungary's asylum laws. Yet, the EU's anti-refugee front is not fully united.

A Danish FRONTEX patrol boat [refused](#) orders to pushback a transit group to Turkey despite orders – an action for which the crew's captain was lauded by the Danish Prime Minister. Following New York Times reports on Greece's use of "blacksites" to facilitate illegal pushbacks, the Commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson, called on Greece to honor the right to asylum and criticized the violence against people-on-the-move. As the EU re-negotiates a future deal with Turkey, it is important that voices in support of people-on-the-move do not remain unheard, but as it stands these critiques are hugely outweighed by political and infrastructural support that fails to wane, despite the impact on human life on Greek borders.

# Conclusions and Reccomendations

The weight of evidence presented in this cross-organisational report implicates both Greece and the European Union in a raft of abuses against refugees and migrants. These findings are presented alongside evidence of prior and systematic procedures targeted against said communities such as asylum breaches, pushbacks and inhumane conditions on the islands. Events in February/March 2020 are therefore an escalation within a continuous set of illegal border practices. The accounts presented here, taken from a wide range of organisations observing at eye-level this physical, psychological and legal onslaught against transit groups, advocate for immediate and substantive change.

This report calls on relevant institutions to adhere to international law, specifically regarding: human rights, asylum access and humane reception conditions. As teams observing illegal pushbacks and border violence on the ground, the need for safe passage for people-on-the-move and accountability for those using violence and disproportionate force against people at Greek borders is an absolute necessity. As it stands, institutional backing is being given to a violent border system that includes acts such as stripping, beating, shooting and potential drowning. The events in early March on terrestrial and maritime borders question the integrity of Greece and the EUs commitment to protecting human rights. Voices presented here from the land and sea border call them to account, and demand substantive change.

## **Press Requests**

For further information regarding this report and the monitoring work of the organisations involved please see the relevant contacts below:

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