



ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS IN EVROS:

EVIDENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AT THE GREECE/TURKEY BORDER

A Mobile Info Team report based on first-hand testimonies

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

Published November 2019

CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION 3
 - A. **Legal Background – International Law** 3
 - B. **Political Situation and Related Risks in Turkey** 4
- II. PUSHBACK TESTIMONIES 5
 - C. **Arrest and Capture** 5
 - D. **Detention, Theft and Deprivation of Liberty** 8
 - E. **Coordinated Handoffs and Transfers** 11
 - F. **Collective Expulsion Across the Border** 14
- III. ANALYSIS OF TESTIMONIES 17
 - G. **Perpetrators and Their Violent Acts** 17
 - H. **Risks Related to Pushbacks and Chain Refoulement** 21
- IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 24
- V. APPENDIX 26
 - Contributors** 28
- LIST OF REFERENCES 29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

‘At night I told them I want to ask for asylum, they said ‘no!’, and beat me with a stick. They even hit me in the eye, I said ‘I would like to claim asylum’ and so he struck me. But this was not so bad, what really surprised me, was when they were just shocking us for fun. They called us up one by one to the car, and they would give us an electrical shock in the back of the legs or hit us in the sensitive places. Just for fun. They were laughing the whole time.’

In the last couple of years various refugee and human rights related organizations have reported illegal pushbacks at the Greece-Turkey Border around the Evros river, highlighting the organized and intensified nature of collective migrant expulsions in this region and the serious physical and psychological mistreatment that often accompany them.

In August 2018, Mobile Info Team started collecting first-hand testimonies of individuals who crossed the border and were forcibly pushed back to Turkey. The testimonies were collected by trained volunteers and interpreters through our fieldwork and our outreach channels for beneficiaries. There are 27 reports of illegal push backs documented in the report, collated between August 2018 and August 2019. We were struck by the similarity of the stories by respondents who never met or spoke to one another. The report is the outcome of these testimonies.

Our findings largely solidify previous research. They outline the methodology of the pushbacks which are systematically repeated, as are a multitude of abuses of key human rights and international law principles, among others; non-refoulement, the right to seek asylum, the ban of collective expulsions and the right to not be unlawfully detained and tortured.

In general, respondents experienced pushbacks in four similar stages:

1. Arrest and Capture by Greek police inside Greek territory
2. Detention and Confiscation of personal property
3. Coordinated Handoffs/Transfers to authorities
4. Collective Expulsion across the Evros river in small boats

The violent practices of Greek police are of critical concern. Established legal procedures stipulate that Greek police would meet asylum seekers on Greek land, escort them to police stations, take their personal data and register their requests for asylum. Their reported actions however ranged from complicit handovers to unidentified ‘commando’ groups, to perpetrating acts of violence and theft themselves.

The extent to which the Greek police as a whole are involved in the physical act of forcing migrants across the river (wet border) is still unclear. However, the evidence clearly shows that divisions of the Greek police are involved in systematic round up activities in the Evros region, detaining and

handing over apprehended groups who are subsequently pushed back to Turkey. Similarly, the level of coordination seems to be relatively high as indicated by the testimonies in the report.

MIT is increasingly concerned about the shocking frequency and gravity of mistreatment of those pushed back, including; deprivation of food and water, theft of property, detention in dirty and cramped spaces, unprovoked violent beatings and even electric shocks.

Conditions in prisons and detention centers where people are held before being pushed back are inhumane and unsanitary, with respondents reporting drinking from the toilet as they were given no food and water for up to three days. Men, women and children have been illegally pushed back across the Greece border into Turkey even though numerous NGO, legal and institutional sources point to Turkey being progressively hostile towards refugees within its borders and in violation of its requirements to act as a safe third country. Some respondents also noted being forced to sign 'voluntary return' papers, thereby renouncing their temporary protection status in Turkey along with any legal chance to return or stay in the country.

Moreover, asylum seekers run a high risk of chain-refoulement, i.e. not only being pushed back to Turkey but also further afield into their countries of origin. Many of the regions in these countries are active warzones or areas where asylum seekers face the renewed threat of persecution, torture and even death at the hands of the state or terrorist groups. This is particularly relevant given the deportations from Turkey to Idlib.

It is important to stress that every pushback is inherently illegal, regardless whether the individual also suffered violence and deprivation during the act. Fair procedure is completely suspended, and pushbacks often violate the principle of non-refoulement.

Mobile Info Team urges responsible authorities to immediately act to put a stop to these illegal pushbacks. We call on the Greek police and relevant authorities to:

- Review all current procedures at the land border to ensure that they comply with Article 33 of the 1951 Convention and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).
- Investigate all perpetrators of crime against migrants and act when alleged perpetrators are found to be in violation of the law.
- Introduce preventive measures to safeguard against future violations, including but not limited to, a rigorous hiring process for law enforcement officers, implementation of body-worn cameras, and mandatory training on human rights and refugee law.

We furthermore urge the EU to:

- Expand the range of safe and legal entry opportunities into the EU as an essential part of responsible and humane migration management.
- Set an example for member countries by guaranteeing the safety, dignity and rights of people in need of international protection along with access to fair and effective asylum procedures in compliance with Article 6 of the EU Procedures Directive.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Mobile Info Team (MIT), a grassroots organization in Northern Greece providing information and individual assistance regarding the asylum procedure, started collecting testimonies from individuals who were pushed back from Greece into Turkey. Pushback is the term used to describe the practice used by authorities to prevent people from seeking protection on their territory by forcibly returning them to another country.¹ This practice is in direct violation of international and national laws. For this reason, MIT began to document and record the testimonies of clients who were forcibly returned to Turkey from Greece. It was from these cases that MIT first began to see the extent of the problem and the associated rights violations occurring in the Evros region, which stretches across the Greece-Turkey land border. Respondents, who do not know each other, have never been in the same room together and who come from all different parts of the world, told MIT strikingly similar stories about how they were treated after crossing the border into Greece. Instead of being given the right to claim asylum, respondents were often robbed, beaten and forcibly pushed back across the border.

Mobile Info Team's critical position as a client-focused grassroots organization with expertise in national and international asylum law, makes us strategically poised to document and challenge the illegal and systematic expulsion of potential asylum seekers. As an organization providing information and assistance in relation to asylum procedures, it is our duty to provide clients with information about their rights in Greece and to advocate on their behalf when those rights are being violated. For this reason, MIT seeks to raise the voices of the communities we work with and to add evidence to previous reports concerning this issue, such as those published by the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Human Rights Watch, and PRO ASYL.² Through the release of this report, MIT seeks to shed further light on the situation at the Evros border and to redraw attention to the human rights violations occurring there.

A. *Legal Background – International Law*

Every pushback is inherently illegal, regardless if the individual also suffered violence and deprivation. These acts violate the principle of *non-refoulement*, a fundamental principle in international law, embodied in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Article 33 of the Convention “prohibits states to expel, return (refouler) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his (or her) life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”³ Article 18 of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights also guarantees the *right to asylum* in accordance with the Geneva Convention, the Protocol of 1967 relating to the status of refugees, and the Treaty establishing the European Community. Article 19 additionally gives the right to protection in the event of removal, expulsion or extradition. More specifically, collective expulsions are prohibited, and no one may be removed, expelled or extradited to a State where there is a serious risk that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.⁴

Moreover, the violent actions often present in pushbacks as well as the collective expulsions themselves violate the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 4 of Protocol 4 prohibits the beating and deportation of all people on the move. Additionally, Article 3

of ECHR prohibits torture and non-humane or degrading treatment. The testimonies collated by MIT demonstrate a *disregard* for human rights and detail the use of inhumane treatment. Respondents reported being forced to drink toilet water, detained in overcrowded makeshift jails, routine theft and destruction of personal property, beating, humiliating searches and electrical shocks. This clear violation of the human rights ignores international laws enshrined in the 1951 Convention as well as European laws laid out by Council of Europe and the European Union.

B. Political Situation and Related Risks in Turkey

While every pushback is illegal, Mobile Info Team is especially worried about the situation in Turkey and the potential risks associated with Greek authorities being involved in pushing back asylum seekers into this country. Three years after the EU-Turkey deal, there is clear evidence that Turkey is in fact not a safe third country for many asylum seekers, with many facing persecution on the grounds of differing ethnic and religious beliefs as well as human rights violations in the form of illegal detention along the border with Syria.⁵ A number of NGO, legal and institutional sources point to Turkey being increasingly in violation of its requirements to act as a safe third country, especially after the attempted coup d'état in July 2016 and the invasion of Kurdish land in Syria in January 2018 and in October 2019.⁶ Moreover, there is an increasing risk of *chain refoulement* (being continuously pushed back from country to country) for Syrian, Kurdish and Iraqi migrants who are currently facing threats of being returned to their countries after being pushed back into Turkey.⁷ The possibility to obtain asylum in Turkey has also become more challenging as the UNHCR registration program for international protection phased out in early September 2018 and was handed over to Turkey's Directorate General of Migration Management.⁸ Thus, applicants must directly approach the Turkish government to register for international protection, a government which is increasingly hostile towards refugees within its borders.

Recent changes in political sentiments seem to be exacerbating the risks for refugees in Turkey. In August 2019, multiple reports emerged concerning the round up, detention and deportation of refugees from Turkey. In the a few months alone, Turkish authorities intercepted about 15,000 migrants, 2,630 of which were Syrian nationals.⁹ Many are being sent to detention centers along the border and more still are being pushed back across the border into Syria. Reports indicate that the current AKP government is implementing a policy of mass deportations in order to win back its constituencies which were recently lost in March 2019.¹⁰

Recently collected testimonies by MIT seem to corroborate these claims. Some respondents described first-hand experiences of being arrested, shackled, put on buses and sent back to Idlib, Syria or to detention centers along the border, namely Şanlıurfa. Many others saw this happen to family members or other individuals they were detained with. Some respondents also noted being forced to sign 'voluntary return' papers, thereby renouncing their temporary protection status in Turkey along with any legal chance to return or stay in the country.¹¹ These testimonies highlight how the larger international political system can directly affect the lives of asylum seekers and specifically how political sentiment can shape a country's policies and practices.

II. PUSHBACK TESTIMONIES

The most important finding from these testimonies is the understanding that pushbacks at the border have been consistently occurring since MIT began collecting reports in August 2018 and that many of them follow a general pattern, demonstrating the high probability that migrants are being expelled from the country in a systematic and coordinated fashion. The consistent and repeated nature of these pushbacks demonstrate the fact that these testimonies are neither rare occurrences nor very random in nature. Instead, as the testimonies below will illustrate, there appears to be a *well-established practice* utilized by Greek authorities to handle irregular entry into the country.

The involvement of Greek authorities and their use of violence is of vital concern. In almost every testimony MIT collected, respondents reported encountering the Greek police at some point. Their actions ranged from complicit handovers to ‘commando’ groups, to perpetrating acts of violence and theft themselves. The extent to which the Greek police are involved in the physical act of forcing migrants across the river is still unclear. However, what is clear is the fact that at least some faction of the Greek police in this region are a part of a systematic approach to round up, detain and hand over asylum seekers to groups who will eventually push them back across the border. Thus, they are complicit and, in some cases, even active participants in the violation of asylum seekers’ rights.

Instead of guiding asylum seekers through the formal asylum procedure, authorities are violating international and national law by engaging in the systematic practice of collectively expelling migrants across the border. In general, respondents experienced pushbacks in four similar stages:

- Arrest and Capture by Greek police inside Greek territory
- Detention and confiscation of personal property
- Coordinated Handoffs and Transfers
- Collective Expulsion across the Evros River

These stages are laid out in further detail below with correlating excerpts from respondents’ full testimonies to demonstrate the similarity and patterns present throughout their experiences.

C. Arrest and Capture

For asylum seekers, meeting with the Greek police should provide a critical opportunity to express their intent to request asylum and to access the formal asylum procedure. Under normal, legal interactions, the Greek police would meet asylum seekers on Greek land, escort them to police stations, take their personal data and pre-register their requests for asylum. The police are obligated by law to recognize this asylum request and forward it to the responsible authority, the Greek Asylum Service. However, in the testimonies collected, this legal process is ignored. The excerpts from the testimonies below demonstrate what happens when the respondents first meet the police, how their arrest unfolded and how ultimately their encounters with the police began their pushback experience.

H.O. explains her experience trying to cross the border and the way her and her family first encountered the Greek police:

“When we entered, the police were already waiting for us.”

We entered Greece by land and walked for about 7 kilometers. There were 15 of us - including men, women and children. When we arrived at a tunnel under the main street, 8 of us decided to go inside while the others waited for a car. When we entered, the police were waiting for us. They arrested us and grabbed one of the guys. They beat him with electric batons and ripped apart his belongings. We were like family to him, so we were all very afraid after that—thinking to ourselves—what will they do with us? – H.O.

Many people attempt to make the journey by walking in the dead of night. K.R. explained his experience walking for many hours and meeting the Greek police around 3am:

“When they were about 100 meters away, they scared us by shooting their guns in the air.”

We travelled from Edirne, Turkey. First, we drove by car for 20-30 minutes over the highway, southbound. Then, we stopped and walked for 1 hour and 20 minutes towards the river. I don't remember the name of that place or area, but our group included Iraqis, Syrians, Kurds, Arabs from all over and Algerians. All together we were around 50 people. After we passed through the river into Greece, we walked for some four to five hours more until we came close to a road. It was dark and cold. In the night, around 3am, we met the Greek police. We crossed the highway to the other side, where there was a forest, and we tried to hide inside. But we were caught by the police anyway on the edge of the highway. There were two policemen and one police car—a Ford. They were wearing costumes in a color like this (points to t-shirt)—dark blue. We tried to escape but failed and were arrested. Those two policemen said nothing to us, instead they tried to scare us. When they were about 100 meters away, they scared us by shooting their guns in the air. We were scared, so we laid down on the ground. Then, they came towards us and called for back-up. Eventually, four more policemen came. Then after ten minutes, they brought a big truck used for the military and a minibus, not a big one which could fit only 14 people. It was too small for us. It was too tight, and their treatment was so bad. They were so mean to us. There they took our phones from us. And they took us in that bus to a police station. That police station was outside of a village. We drove around 15 minutes. – K.R.

Some respondents attempt to take public transportation instead of making the journey by foot. A.R. explains what he experienced when trying to board a train in Alexandroupoli:

“I entered the train and after 5 mins the Captain came to us with the police.”

We were a group of around 40 people. We walked 2 hours from Turkey to Greece during the night and eventually we stopped for a break until morning. When we got up, we walked again for 4 hours until we arrived at a small village. There, people bought tickets in different directions. I travelled for two hours towards an area called Alexandroupoli. I knew that from there, we could take a train to Thessaloniki. So, I entered the train and after 5 mins the Captain came to us with the police. They asked us to get out of the train so they could issue khartias (*Greek word referring to a note issued by the Greek foreigners police, which gives migrants who entered the country illegally, some time to either leave voluntarily or to apply for asylum*) to us and send us to Athens where there would be more services available. We all agreed to go to the police station which was about 15 minutes away. At the police station, the police separated the women and men onto different floors. They looked through our stuff and took our mobile phones. They asked us to go outside under the pretext that we would be taken to a camp. As we gathered outside, we saw new people, prisoners of other nationalities, that were not with us in the first place. Then a prisoner van with three windows (20cm-by-20cm) came and at this moment I knew they (the police) had been lying, because the cops were now all covered in black. – A.R.

Fear among respondents is generally higher during the night. Many have experienced traumatic events in their home countries and along their journeys. The added fear of being caught and returned to unsafe areas of Turkey compounds with past traumas to make that fear even greater. I.H. tells us about the behavior of the Greek authorities and how he felt during their first encounter:

“They came from the woods like ghosts.”

That first time, we travelled together as two families: my four young boys, my wife, and my sister’s whole family—including her children. All of us are from Syria. At 4 pm we left Istanbul towards the border village of Edirne. It was so cold that we had to wait in Edirne for three days because the weather conditions did not allow us to cross the river. At a certain point, we had the chance to cross. Once we arrived at the other side of the river, we were caught by police—dressed in military uniforms. It was dark, sometime after midnight. We were surrounded by woods and there was a big hill in front of us. They came from the woods like ghosts. We took a deep breath. Then, they started trying to scare us and terrifying the children. – I.H.

Respondents also reported experiencing xenophobic behavior after crossing the borders. In the excerpt below, M.H. explains the type of treatment he received when crossing the border river and landing on Greek soil:

“Muslim people should not come to Greece!”

We were travelling on the 4th of June. My wife, our two little children—a little girl of three years old and our new-born son of one month old, and me. From Edirne, we wanted to cross the border from the riverbank at the Turkish side. I had dizziness in my head, and when I sat with my children in the boat, I could not see my wife. In our group we were with two adult men, one woman, and four children. But there were two boats in total and I saw (my wife) sitting in that other boat. Our boat went first. And when we reached the other side of the river, we could see those men, the “commandos”, showing up. They were three or four, I cannot remember precisely. And they started screaming at us. One of the guys in our boat spoke English. So, he could understand what those men were saying. They were screaming in English: “What are you doing here? Muslim people should not come to Greece!” The other second boat, with my wife, was still at the Turkish side of the river. That was the last time I saw her. – M.H.

D. Detention, Theft and Deprivation of Liberty

After being caught by police many asylum seekers reported being detained for hours without access to food or water and without being told the reason for their detention, deprived of their right to request asylum. While in detention centers and police stations, respondents were usually told to remain silent, they were asked to strip in front of each other, and their personal items were taken.

R.A. and his wife were detained after being caught in a town near the border. He and his wife initially tried to act like tourists, but the police could tell they were migrants and eventually arrested them. This excerpt from his testimony illustrates what they experienced after being arrested and taken to a detention center:

“We had to stay in that room without food or water from the early morning until the late evening.”

The police brought every refugee they met to this small room. It was a collecting place. When we arrived, there were already around 10 people there. We arrived sometime after 8am. Outside of the room, the police took our watches, rings, belts, shoes and clothes. They said they were going to give them back to us after we left. We had to stay in that room without food or water from the early morning until the late evening. The room was around 6 meters-by-4 meters. It was full of garbage and dirt—it was not clean. The refugees were tired, each of us wanted to lie down and to rest a little bit. But this was not possible as the floor was too dirty. And that place was completely empty - nothing to sit on, no beds, or toilet. Just the very dirty floor. The people put their clothes on the floor so they could sit. From 8am until 8pm (12 hours) there were a lot of different groups being put into that room. Every once and a while they were bringing in people, and by the evening at 8pm, there were more than 50 people. At 8pm, we were delivered to the commandos at the river. – R.A.

While being detained, respondents were often not provided with food or water, even in instances where women and children were present. This was the case for S.S., who was captured along with his wife, young son and two other families after walking for 5 hours past the Evros river:

“My wife asked them for milk, but they said no.”

...Then the Greek police showed up. We asked them not to send us back to Turkey. He said that they would not, so we got into the car with him. We were with just three families and all of us fit in. He drove us for about half an hour until we arrived at a place close to the river. But we could not see that, we would only notice it later. They took us to a place next to a military site, something like two camps. It was around 1pm in the afternoon. There, they put us all together in one small room, women and children as well. They checked us and took our stuff before we entered the room. It was like a small detention center inside a military place. In that room there was nothing. My son was crying a lot. My wife asked them for milk, but they said no. Every half an hour the police were bringing in more people that were not part of our group. Eventually, we were with around 60 or 70 people inside the detention center - from all around the world: Afghani and Pakistani, Syrian etc. The room itself was really stinky, and my son was crying all the time. There was trash next to the door. The child cried and cried, and my wife cried too. – S.S.

H.O. told us of a similar experience where she asked for water to make milk for her son with the packets she brought. Instead of being let outside to make the milk and feed the baby, she was told to drink and use toilet water:

“When we requested water, I swear to God they said, ‘Drink the toilet water’.”

Then, they took us to their headquarters on the border, searched us and threw us in prison. After that they checked us and all of our bags. They took our phones. And when we asked for food and water, they did not give us any. They were very harsh with us. We asked for milk for my son (he was 8 months old at the time), but they did not accept this. When we requested water, I swear to God they said, “Drink the toilet water”, so we were forced to prepare dirty water. Then I started crying. I cried and said, “We come from a country in war. We come to ask for asylum and then this is what we get.” I asked them, “Who is responsible here?” They told me that the captain is not here. He will arrive in the evening and then they will decide what to do with us. – H.O.

S.O. had a similar experience where he stayed in detention without food or proper water. He was not allowed to speak nor ask for his rights, and he eventually had to drink water from the toilet. He ended up getting sick from the experience.

“We actually did get sick from drinking the toilet water, but we didn’t have any other choice at that time.”

We did not know where we were going. Then we realized that they were taking us to the Turkish border. They took us to a place that looked, not like a camp, but like a jail – a detention center. They put us in the cell. They told us to “Sit down” and never to talk. Then they checked us again. But this time it was a very strong check. They checked truly everything, even the socks. The jail was like a closed camp or center. Inside a building, you would find two beds and a very big room. That big place was like 60-70m² long and around 10 meters with all the other beds at one side. The bathroom was really bad, with kids and women in the same place—you could not do anything—it was dirty. You would find diapers and stuff; it was very dirty. If you would stay longer than 1 week, you would get sick, because of the dirt and the lack of hygiene. We actually did get sick from drinking the toilet water, but we didn’t have any other choice at that time. This jail wasn’t just for us, but it was for everybody who entered Greece. They would keep them there. It was terrible. – S.O.

Respondents like K.R. told us that when anyone talked or tried to speak up about the conditions, they were oppressed with violence. He still feels the effects of this violent treatment.

“20 hours without any food or water.”

Inside the police station, they checked us for everything. They asked us where we were coming from, but when we answered, they said nothing back. They checked our bags and took our phones, our extra clothes, the food in the bags etc. We spent the night in that police station until the next morning, the next day. The building was like a jail, a detention place. About 8 meters long. And they put us all in that place. All of us, including women and children. When we arrived, there were already some other people in the prison, they were also refugees being arrested at the border and imprisoned. Together we were with about 70 to 80 people. Among them there were a lot of children. Small babies and younger children. The place was cold, small and tight. Some of us could not breathe very well. We stayed there for 20 hours without any food or water. When we asked, they told us to, “Drink water from the toilet”. I said that this would be unacceptable. As response, they hit me, beat me in the arm. My arm was in such a bad state that I could not move it. I still feel it, even now I cannot move it freely. It feels like it was broken. – K.R.

E. Coordinated Handoffs and Transfers

In many of the testimonies MIT collected, asylum seekers discussed being caught by the police, taken to a detention center, and transferred during the night to “commando” groups of men wearing black masks. While it is still too difficult to determine the full extent of police involvement in pushbacks, they are at least complicit in the handover of asylum seekers to these commando groups, and perhaps may even be active participants in the pushbacks themselves. For this reason, this chapter focuses on what is clear throughout the testimonies, the involvement of the Greek police and their coordinated efforts to hand over asylum seekers to these illegitimate and often more violent groups.

D.A. explained the strategic manner in which the Greek police eventually handed them off to a masked group:

“Here the police changed out and switched with other officers.”

On the same day, they (the Greek police) took us towards the Turkish border. On the way, we stopped in a parking lot. Here, the police changed out and switched with other police officers. The first four officers went away when new guys came. These new guys took us to yet another group on the border who were wearing masks. I couldn’t tell who they were or where they were from. All their clothes were black, faces covered, and they didn’t speak. – D.A.

A.J. and his wife were apprehended 30 minutes after crossing the river. He told us that the normal police officers handed him off to a commando group. He also insisted that not only did the commandos hit them, but the normal police *also* beat them and took their belongings:

“We arrived at the river where the normal police delivered us to the commandos.”

They (the police) beat us, they took our stuff. Our bags, phones, we had three I-pads, and they took us to the jail—to the prison. Because the prison was full, they took us to the border. When we arrived at the river, the normal police *delivered* us to the commandos. They wore masks covering their faces. We asked them to give us our stuff back. They were holding sticks in their hands. They hit us and said, “Don’t talk about your stuff”. And they put us in boats, small boats. And told us to cross us to the Turkish territory across the river. They even took water from us. So, we had to drink from the river, because we were so thirsty. – A.J.

After S.S., his wife and child spent 6 hours in the detention center, the Greek police came to their cell to take them out. They were put in a car and driven to a small house two to five minutes from the Evros river:

“The Greek police took us from the detention center and handed us to the commandos.”

Around 7pm in the evening, the Greek police took us from the detention center and handed us to the commandos. It was still light outside. They were around 15 people. The commandos all wore masks. They seemed terrible—with big bodies. They threatened us, making sure nobody would talk. There was one man who tried to talk, and they beat him up. From that detention place, we were like two to five minutes from the river. They took us from there and walked us to the river. All I could see around was fog and forest. We walked. They had taken our phones. They were not talking. You could only see their eyes. They were wearing something on every part of their body, even gloves. I don't know if these were uniforms, because we were not allowed to raise our heads and to look to them. – S.S.

H.O. remembered being treated well by officers that she described as border guards. However, it was these same border guards that eventually handed her over and the other members of her group to “commandos” who aggressively pushed them back across the border:

“I was afraid, very afraid, and the commandos started to behave aggressively.”

The police were wearing the dark blue uniforms. There were two policewomen with them. Both had their hair in ponytails. One of them was blonde with green eyes. The other had black hair and green eyes. Their attitude was very professional. They were making two lines outside for the people to calmly enter the cars. About 15-20 of us were put into those military cars. The car was closed, completely, with only a small place to breathe. And when we arrived there (at the border) 20-30 minutes later, they (the men outside waiting) were all masked. There was around 20 men and we could not see anyone's faces nor could we recognize anybody. We stayed there for 5 minutes and they started to quickly prepare the boat, the type with a motor. It was very dark. So dark that you could not even see your finger in front of your eye. I could not even distinguish men from women. I was afraid, very afraid, and they (the commandos) started to behave aggressively. When they pulled my arm to go into the direction of the river, something fell on the ground, a pamper of my son. Then a hand came to grab me, and someone started shouting in my face “C'mon go, go!” in a very angry way. We got into the boat and they pushed us back over the river. – H.O.

K.R. explains a similar situation where at night it appeared that police were handing them over to the commandos. However, it was very difficult for him to determine if the masked men were indeed a new group of people, or if instead, they were merely the same police officers who had arrested him before but were now wearing masks.

“We did not know if it was the same people, we could not look at their faces.”

At the end of the day, after some 20 hours in that prison, a truck came with men wearing masks and military uniforms. They came at night, around 8pm or 9pm. That was the first time I saw those people in masks. We were next to the detention center. The masked people were wearing the same dark blue uniforms as the police, but now they had on masks. We could not look at their faces, that was not allowed. They told us to look down and never raise our heads. – K.R.

Clearly, the level of coordination seems to be relatively high between the Greek police and these other groups. Respondent R.A. told us he even heard the police calling the commandos on the phone during their drive to the border. When they arrived at the river, the commandos were waiting for them, weapons in hand.

“When we arrived there, there stood these men, and the boat they had already prepared.”

The commandos, the people who brought us from the van to the river and put us in the boats, were wearing masks. They were strongly built and heavily muscled. They were wearing military dark-green uniforms, you could not see their hair. Everything was covered except for their eyes. All had masks, black masks. The police had called them and told them to wait at the river. When we arrived there, there stood these men, and the boat they had already prepared. There was a big car standing next to them. There were five of them who were with weapons, guns, pointing to the people. And there were three of them who were checking if the refugees had anything with them. They were communicating with each other just with signs. I could not hear any words from them. They communicated also to us with signs. We were not allowed to talk. Not with them, and not among each other. – R.A.

F. Collective Expulsion Across the Border

The collective expulsion of asylum seekers across the Evros river is the final part of a pushback experience. Generally, after being handed off to the group waiting at the river, asylum seekers are put into little boats and sent across to the Turkish side of the river. These acts usually happen at night when it is difficult to see the perpetrators' faces.

S.O. was taken to two different detention centers by Greek police. At the second detention center, men dressed in camouflage and wearing masks came inside. They rounded everyone up and took them to the border. It was there that they were pushed back across the river.

“I swear to God. It was really like a movie. It was terrible.”

In the second detention center near the border where the guys dressed in camouflage had driven us, three men came with masks came into the detention center. They came with a big car and asked us to all get in. And then, they drove us with the commandos driving behind us in the small car. We were driving around in circles, and after the sun went down, we stopped somewhere. At the river they asked us to go out of the car. They were pressuring us, pushing us, treating us badly. There was a pregnant woman, and they were pushing her—because she was shouting at them. Her husband came to stop them, but the men with the masks hit him with the sticks. They were pushing us saying “Go, go Malaka!” They treated us like we were sheep. They pushed us into the mud, we were trying to lift the kids out. I swear to God. It was really like a movie. It was terrible. We didn't know anything it was in the middle night. We did not know what to do, where to go, just screaming for help. – S.O.

S.S. had a similar experience with the masked men at the river. His things were taken by them, he was hit, and eventually he was returned to Turkey with nearly nothing.

“We went to the Turkish land even without our shoes.”

I could not see their faces, only the eyes. They were covered with black masks. They were talking with us in hand signs, pointing at us to scare us, and they forced us to look down and to not look up. They checked each of us and took besides our phones also the bags, the clothes inside the bags, and even our shoes from us. Eventually they would give us back our documents, the passports and money—but that's all. They dropped our other stuff, phones and bags, in the river. My son was crying. And they took my son from me. I took my son back, and then they hit me. Two of them; one caught me from behind and the other started to hit me. They tried to make me silent. I begged those militaries, to at least give us some clothes for my son, because the clothes from my son were completely wet. Then they pushed us back over the river. We went to the Turkish land without even our shoes. – S.S.

Q.K. along with his wife and small son also experienced violence during their pushback. He explains the ordeal below:

“Without any mercy or empathy, they hit both of us.”

We were taken to the Turkish border by car. The officers were covered like the criminal mafia. When we got out of the car, I was holding my son, my wife was holding my daughter and—without any mercy or empathy—they hit both of us. Until this day my wife and my daughter have psychological issues. They have a lot of fear; they see psychiatrists. We thought they were going to kill us. – Q.K.

In the case of A.R. the commandos showed very violent behaviour towards also women and children and followed their boat, to make sure, they really leave Greece and enter Turkey:"

“They followed us in a faster and more powerful motorboat to make sure we got to the Turkish side.”

The cops were covered in black, and they started hitting us at this specific moment just to squeeze us into the van. Pregnant women, even kids, were being hit alongside everyone else, and people just got in because they did not want to get hit. They drove us until we arrived at the water side. It was dark when they asked us to exit the vehicle. Anyone that refused got in trouble, and they hit people randomly, for instance a pregnant Iranian woman was hit a lot and my brother's son was hit on the head as well. They gave us our bags back but without our phones. People were terrified and threw all their stuff in the water, I threw three bags that had important documents like my marriage photos. Eventually, more policemen came, and they were wearing black masks and holding batons. They filled a small boat three times, each time the boat was only about 4cm above water. There weren't any Greek police in the boat with us, but they did follow us in a faster and more powerful motorboat to make sure we got to the Turkish side. It was around 7pm when we arrived in Turkey. We were 67 people from different countries, different genders and ages. The Turkish army stopped us and kept us in jail for 3 days. – A.R.

A.A. was pushed back a total of 15 times during last year and each of his experiences generally followed the same pattern. He told us the only part that differed was the point in which they were pushed back from. This also seemed to demonstrate some type of forethought and strategic planning on the side of the authorities.

“Every time they were pushing us back from a different point.”

There were two of the masked men who were taking care of the boats, helping them to passing the river, one was driving and the other pushing. Every time they were pushing us back from a different point. Because they did not want to have us stay us in the same place.

– A.A.

III. ANALYSIS OF TESTIMONIES

The excerpts above illustrate the general pattern and experience of being pushed back across the border. From the moment of arrest until the illegal expulsion to Turkey, the testimonies reveal multiple human rights violations at the hands of the Greek authorities or of the affiliated commando groups. From having their personal belongings stolen to suffering psychological and psychological violence, it is evident authorities are disregarding the national and international laws protecting asylum seekers. In addition to a clear pattern emerging throughout the testimonies, there is substantial evidence pointing to the involvement of Greek authorities, specifically the Greek police, in these illegal pushbacks. Their involvement seems to include coordinated handovers to “commando” groups and even engaging in acts of violence themselves. Thus, if nothing else, the Greek police are still at least complicit in the violation of asylum seekers’ rights.

G. Perpetrators and Their Violent Acts

For D.A. it was both the Greek police and the “commando” group who treated him violently. After crossing the border into Greece and resting in a migrant house, he was apprehended by the Greek police who stole his money and eventually handed him over to a the more violent group.

“They put us all in a big car and after I got out, they beat me with a big stick and also gave me electric shocks on the back of my legs.”

It was 11:30 in the morning, when two police officers came into the house where we were hiding and searched us. They found 200 euros in my pocket and stole it from me. There were two other police officers waiting outside, but they couldn’t see what was going on. One of the guys outside spoke French fluently, but he was a Greek guy in a police uniform. He was a good guy, close to 25-28 years old. The other guy outside was either the Captain or the driver. He was around 50 years old. They didn’t see the other two police officers took my money. Later, on the same day, they took us to the Turkish border. On the way, we stopped in a parking lot. Here the police changed out and switched. These four officers went away, and new guys came. These new guys drove us to yet another group who were wearing masks on the border. I was the first guy to be inspected because I was last to get out of the car. They found 350 euros hidden in my underwear that the other police didn’t see. When the commandos found it, they shredded the money in front of my eyes. They even cut my passport in half. Then, they put us all in a big car and after I got out, they beat me with a big stick and also gave me electric shocks in the back of my legs. They did this twice. Now I have nothing. – D.A.

K.R. explained it in explicit terms: it was the Greek police who beat him and the members of his group. During his family's 20 hours of detention, before even being handed off to the commandos, both him and his wife were repeatedly hit by the Greek police. Both times it was the result of asking for food and water.

“They were not the masked people who beat us up. They were the Greek police.”

My wife was beaten by the police with a stick. I couldn't do anything; I was trying to protect my daughter. But still, they hit her leg. And they strongly injured it—it became blue. My wife tried to protect the children and they hit her when she did that. It was a policeman who hit her, not especially tall or small. And they (the police) reacted as if everything was normal. The children were crying, and my wife was crying out of pain. They did not offer any help when they hit my wife. They reacted as if it was normal. All of this happened inside the detention center, inside of the police station. They were not the masked people who beat us up. They were the Greek police and they injured the leg of my daughter. – K.R.

After arriving on the Greek side of the border and being captured by “commandos”, M.H. was taken to a police station where he says the police and commandos were working together.

“There were also normal police present at that police station.”

The same commandos that (caught us at the river) were at the police station. They were coming and going freely. I say commandos because they were very big, had a wide posture, and their faces were covered with masks. Only commandos look like that. Commandos who say that Muslim refugees should not come here. They repeated that. They were wearing military uniforms; green and black and brown. There were also normal police present at that police station. And other refugees. I don't know if they were also being released, because I was released before them. I was not allowed to speak with the ones who were not part of our group. I was in a different room, but I listened through the walls and they were speaking Arabic. Some of them said that they were there already for 6 or 7 days. – M.H.

Often when respondents don't know how to refer to the officers that captured them, they use the interchangeable word “commandos.” In this instance, A.J. described them as military members, some of which were dressed in all black and others which were wearing the typical military uniform.

“They (these ‘commandos’) hit me with an iron stick in their hands.”

There were more than 15 members, even two ladies were with them. (The ladies) were wearing the same uniform as the others but without masks. The other military members wore masks and they were standing at the river waiting for us. Some of them, the “commandos” were wearing black suits and black masks. The other military guys were wearing a uniform that was green—light green and dark green mixed. I know what the military looks like because they looked like just like the Iraqi, Syrian, or Turkish military outfits. They (“these commandos”) hit me with an iron stick in their hands. This happened when they took my stuff. I asked them 4 or 5 times to give me my stuff back, but they did not. My bag had everything, my marriage contract, my Iraqi passport, telephone, IDs. I told them to give me my money at least. They would not, and when I asked, they hit me. They were screaming and hitting me. I tried to hit back, but my friend held me and told me to be wise. If I hit them, it could be worse. – A.J.

I.H. told us about his own experience and the group he encountered in similar terms. He discussed his belief that the “commandos” dressed in military uniforms are actually special military forces hiding in black masks:

“By the look of their costumes and head covers, I guessed that they were special forces.”

We call them the “commandos” special security forces in military uniform. We met them right after we had crossed the river. There were around six of them, but perhaps more. I could not see. They had rubber sticks/batons in their hands. They had weapons, but they only tried to scare us with those rubber sticks. Their faces were covered with black masks, they had firm postures. By the look of their costumes and head covers, I guessed that they were special forces. They were wearing green military camouflage uniforms, the usual ones with some brown. – I.H

Another respondent, who was also beaten along his journey, told us about his encounter with a “commando” group in the forest:

“The woman was separated from the group and we heard her screaming.”

She was pregnant, but it didn’t matter to the masked men. This woman was separated from the group (she was taking some moments for privacy), and then, we heard her screaming. There were people at a nearby gas station and they saw what was happening to her. And for this reason, after the “commandos” beat her, she was taken to a hospital. I believe if there had not been people watching, they would have just beaten her and pushed her back with the rest of us. – J.A.

A.K. also encountered this 'commando' group and with them he made his intent to request asylum very clear. For trying to claim his rights, he suffered violence.

“They were just shocking us for fun.”

At night I told them I want to ask for asylum, they said, “No!” and beat me with a stick. They even hit me in the eye. I said, “I would like to claim asylum” and then he struck me in the eye with a baton. But this was not so bad, what really surprised me, was when they were just shocking us for fun. They called us up one by one up to the car, and they would give us an electrical shock in the back of the legs or hit us in the sensitive places. Just for fun. They were laughing the whole time. – A.K.

H. Risks Related to Pushbacks and Chain Refoulement

When asylum seekers are pushed back into Turkey, many face the threat of being captured, detained and eventually pushed all the way back to their countries of origin. It is important to note that many of the regions in these countries are active warzones or areas where asylum seekers face the renewed threat of persecution, torture and even death at the hands of the state or terrorist groups. This risk of being continuously pushed back from country to country is called chain refoulement and is of growing concern to Mobile Info Team. While the acts of Greek authorities are illegal, the pushback of individuals to Turkey carries the extra weight of potentially sentencing an asylum seeker to a life of deprivation or even death, as noted by M.A.:

“If they send me to Syria, I will be sentenced to death.”

The (Greek) police captured us under a bridge and from there took us to a center. We stayed there for two hours. There were so many police cars. Then they took us from that center to the river. At the river, they ordered us to stand and they beat us while we were entering the plastic boats. The people beating us were Greek police, but the people inside the boats were different. Now I am in Turkey, and have you heard the news about the Syrian people? They are threatening to deport all of us. I know that right now they are deporting so many people. They even deport some people who have legal status. For me if they send me to Syria, I will be sentenced to death because of my involvement in the Free Syrian Army. I am thinking to try to cross the border again tonight. We can't stay here. – M.A.

S.S. and his family suffered lasting repercussions because of the treatment they received from the Greek police and the commandos. In addition to physical illness, they were constantly afraid of being captured or noticed in Turkey.

“Every time I saw police in Istanbul, I would turn around to avoid seeing them so that they would not ask for my papers. “

Those two months, I spent in Istanbul (after being pushed back); it was so bad. We had no money. My wife was so sick that she could not give milk to my son anymore by breast feeding. My son was starving. I spent two months in hell in Istanbul. Every time I saw police in Istanbul, I would turn around to avoid seeing them so that they would not ask my papers. Their (the Greek Police) treatment of us was so unacceptable. Because of them, I suffered a lot. My wife got sick, my brother got sick – all of them got sick, starving, thirsty. Did we escape from the war to have something like this to happen? We are refugees, crossing the border as refugees. We are not terrorists. – S.S.

Many respondents noted feeling scared while in Turkey. They seemed to live in a state of the unknown, not knowing whether they would be detained, arrested or even sent back to Syria. This pattern increased as more news reports emerged about growing hostility towards refugees.

“We were so terrified about the idea that we would be send back to Syria.”

After that the Turkish police put us in the bus and sent us back to Urfa (Turkish town close to the Syrian border)—to the camp. We spent 10 days in that camp. A man there told us that we should leave soon because the next day they would send us back to Syria—even to Idlib. We were so terrified about the idea of being sent back to Syria. There are terrorists there, the free army, kidnapping children, raping women. We were so scared. – K.R.

Many we spoke to were not pushed back themselves to Syria or Iraq, but they had first-hand experiences being detained in detention centers along the border. R.A. and his family were detained for 3 nights along the Syria-Turkey border. They were eventually freed because they were travelling as a family. The single men, however, were less fortunate.

“But, all the young guys without families were sent back to Idlib.”

After we got pushed back to Turkey, we went to some village on Turkish territory not far from the river. There the Turkish army came and kept us (me and my family) for 3 nights in a military barrack full of 300-400 people. And after that they transferred us (with all the other people) to a closed camp named Urfa, at the Turkish-Syrian border. We were freed from the camp in Urfa after ten days there. They took our fingerprints and we were given a Police Note to walk freely. But all the other young guys without families were send back to Idlib.” – R.A.

I.H. was lucky enough to escape the detention center with his family. However, his brother-in-law was pushed back to Idlib, Syria. As a Kurd, this is especially dangerous.

“My brother in law was less fortunate. The second time we got separated from my brother-in-law and he was pushed all the way back to Syria.”

Once we got back to Turkey (after being pushed back), we were caught by Turkish militaries and detained in a camp. Everyone was being transferred to Urfa, a closed camp at the border with Turkey and Syria. We could not say that we are from Syria as the invasion in Afrin had just started. In this camp, they separated women and families from the young, single guys. My brother in law was less fortunate. The second time, we got separated from my brother-in-law and he was pushed all the way back to Syria. My brother-in-law did not have a wife or family, so after two days he was pushed back to Idlib, the place where hate against Kurdish people is the strongest. When he arrived to Idlib, he didn't have a phone. For three days he stayed in a prison in Idlib, and they—the Islamic forces—made the investigation with him and he was tortured by the militias who hold him in the prison. – I.H.

A.N. described what happened to him, after being pushed back by the Greek police to Turkey. He fears for his life in Turkey and is convinced that the Turkish authorities took his right to receive a Kimlik (informal word for temporary residence permit in Turkey for Syrians, which gives the bearer access to health care and other government services like education):

“I can’t seek asylum in Turkey.”

70 kilometers before Edirne, the traffic police stopped the bus for a checkpoint, and they asked us if we had a Kimlik. Then, they called border guards, who took us to Hatay, a police station near the Syrian border. Here, they pushed us back to Syria through the border crossing Bab Al-Hawa and forced us to sign the voluntary return. They sent me back to Idlib and there the Al Nusra Front got me. I was under interrogation for four days. They let me go when they were certain I was a citizen who didn't do anything wrong and who didn't join any militia. In Syria, I threw kid's parties. This was my job. I also worked with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. When they realized this, they let me go. The second try, thank God, I made it here to Istanbul. I must keep going. I can't seek asylum in Turkey. They took away my right to have a Kimlik. If I get caught again, I will be sent back to Idlib. I'm going to try to cross again (to Greece). – A.N.

According to A.K. the Turkish authorities seem to have a clear system for these chain pushbacks.

“Even if you tell them, ‘I can’t, I will die!’ They still reply, ‘Okay, you’re going back to Syria.’”

The last time the Gendarmerie caught me, they almost deported me back to Idlib. But luckily, they only deport people Monday and Thursdays. They have a whole system for this, especially for the Syrians and Iraqis. Even if you tell them, “I can’t, I will die!”, or if you say, “I am Palestinian, but I lived in Syria, they still reply, ‘Okay, you’re going back to Syria.’” – A.K.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that pushbacks from Greece to Turkey have been consistently occurring since MIT began collecting testimonies in August 2018. It is reasonable to believe that this has been happening for an even longer period of time as reports from other NGOs in Greece date back as far as 2013. Since then, many things have changed in terms of Europe's response to refugee migration and their increasing reliance on Frontex to manage irregular entry into EU countries. However, what has remained the same is the fact that desperate asylum seekers are and will continue to attempt risky border crossing in order to reach Greece. Refugees and asylum seekers in need of safety and security are not deterred by the violent and illegal acts they may encounter on the Greek side of the border. Many have been pushed back more than 3 times, and still the need and determination to leave Turkey and its associated risks is so great that they try repeatedly. Thus, the response of Greek police officers and the affiliated commando groups is both a violation of international and national laws, and a practice which inherently undermines the respect and integrity of law enforcement officers in Greece. Therefore, not only is it essential that authorities investigate these illegal practices for the sake of asylum seekers rights and upholding the rule of law, but also for the sake of maintaining the transparency and accountability of their institutions.

Policy Recommendations

Mobile Info Team acknowledges the prerogative of states to control the entry and stay of non-nationals in their territory and of the EU to support member states in carrying out *legitimate* border control. We also understand there has been and still is unequal pressure placed on the Greek State to handle refugee migration into the EU. With this in mind, we developed policy recommendations for both the Greek authorities and the larger European Union that offer methods for addressing these illegal acts within their insertions and larger policy proposals that may lift some of the economic and resource burden off Greece.

Proposals for the Greek police and affiliated groups:

1. Review all current procedures at the land border to ensure that they comply with Article 33 of the 1951 Convention and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).
2. Investigate all perpetrators of crime against migrants and take action when alleged perpetrators are found to be in violation of the law.
3. Introduce preventive measures to safeguard against future violations, including but not limited to, a rigorous hiring process for law enforcement officers, implementation of body-worn cameras, and mandatory training on human rights and refugee law.
4. Allow Ombudsman offices (in charge of existing National Preventive Mechanisms) and relevant civil society to have full and unimpeded access to border areas.

Proposal for the European Union and its member states:

1. Expand the range of safe and legal entry opportunities into the EU as an essential part of responsible and humane migration management. This should include at least the

- restart of the 2015 relocation program and implementation of the allocation mechanism for Dublin 4, more flexible family reunification procedures and increased use of humanitarian visas. It should also include more and varied channels for labor migration.
2. Set an example for countries to follow by guaranteeing the safety, dignity and rights of people on the move by ensuring that people in need of international protection have access to fair and effective asylum procedures in compliance with Article 6 of the EU Procedures Directive.

V. APPENDIX

How to report a pushback

If you or someone you know has been pushed back and would like to share their story for advocacy purposes, please do not hesitate to contact MIT at advocacy@mobileinfoteam.org or on WhatsApp at [+30 694 431 2793](tel:+306944312793). Your information will remain confidential and we will never disclose your personal data unless you instruct us to do so. Documenting your story helps us and other NGOs in the region challenge illegal acts and call for change.

Formal complaints and legal action can be pursued with the organizations listed below. Mobile Info Team can assist you in contacting these representatives. Sharing your experience with them may help others who come after you to avoid suffering the same experiences.

1. GCR – for legal assistance
2. UNHCR – for general assistance
3. Greek Ombudsman – to lodge complaints
4. Frontex - the European Border and Coast Guard Agency
 - If you believe Frontex was involved in pushbacks you can report the actions of their officers in your own language [here](#).
 - If you would like MIT assistance filling out the form please contact us [here](#).

Lawyers at the organization SolidarityNow in Greece advise migrants crossing the border and encountering the Greek police to learn their rights beforehand and to express these sentiments:

1. Ask for asylum and ask that this request is registered
2. Ask for legal assistance
3. Ask for an interpreter

If an asylum seeker is detained, they also have a right to know what they're being charged with and what the process is to contest that charge — *although this right is often not respected in practice*.

**It is also important to note that while legally every individual has the right to ask for asylum once landing in Greece, these requests may be met with violence by the authorities.*

Testimony Collection Methodology

Testimonies were collected by trained volunteers and interpreters after individuals came in contact the Mobile Info Team through our field work, Facebook Page, referrals from volunteers and hotline messages. Testimony collection was generally conducted on an individual basis in person or over the phone in order to give space for thorough illustration of their experiences and to protect confidentiality.

Consent was obtained from every interviewee to record and publish their anonymized stories*. The Mobile Info Team has developed a standardized framework for our interview structure which blends the collection of hard data (dates, geo-locations, officer descriptions, photos of

injuries/medical reports, etc.) with an open narrative of their experiences - as is the standard method for pushback monitoring utilized throughout the Balkan region. Hard data-based questions were also standardized to reflect the same language and relevant information asked for in the official Frontex Complaint Mechanism and the Greek Ombudsman in order to make our data more relevant and easily transferrable to this reporting system.

**All names have been changed with respect to the anonymity of those who have been interviewed.*

In total, 27 reports of pushbacks from Greece to Turkey were conducted. 24 of our respondents were men and 3 were women. 15 were from Syria, 6 from Iraq, 2 from Algeria, 1 from Morocco, 1 from Afghanistan, 1 from Pakistan and 1 from undisclosed origins.

Report Link	Respondent	Gender	Country of Origin
<u>1</u>	A.A.	Male	Syria
<u>2</u>	K.A.	Male	Syria
<u>3</u>	B.B.	Male	Syria
<u>4</u>	Q.K.	Male	Iraq
<u>5</u>	H.O.	Female	Syria
<u>6</u>	A.R.	Male	Undisclosed
<u>7</u>	S.O.	Male	Iraq
<u>8</u>	K.R.	Male	Iraq
<u>9</u>	S.S.	Male	Iraq
<u>10</u>	A.D.	Male	Syria
<u>11</u>	S.N.	Male	Afghanistan
<u>12</u>	Z.K.	Male	Pakistan
<u>13</u>	I.H.	Male	Syria
<u>14</u>	M.H.	Male	Syria
<u>15</u>	R.A.	Male	Syria
<u>16</u>	A.M.	Female	Syria
<u>17</u>	A.J.	Male	Iraq
<u>18</u>	A.H.	Male	Syria
<u>19</u>	A.K.	Male	Syria
<u>20</u>	D.A.	Male	Morocco
<u>21</u>	J.A.	Male	Algeria
<u>22</u>	S.D.	Female	Iraq

<u>23</u>	I.B.	Male	Syria
<u>24</u>	A.N.	Male	Syria
<u>25</u>	K.D.	Male	Syria
<u>26</u>	M.A.	Male	Syria
<u>27</u>	J.H.	Male	Algeria

The full testimonies can be accessed and read on the Mobile Info Team's website <https://www.mobileinfoteam.org/pushbacks>

Contributors

Kirsten Dimovitz – Writing, Research, Analysis and Testimony Collection
 Selma Mesic – Advocacy Officer, Final Editing
 Irene Arnold – Pilot Program Launch and Testimony Collection
 Juliette Malfaisan – Legal Technical Advisor
 Michael Kientzle – Content Review and Editing
 Sulieman, Karim, and Mask – Cultural Liaisons and Testimony Interpretation

Please contact advocacy@mobileinfoteam.org for any enquiries regarding the report.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Oxfam (2017). *A Dangerous 'Game' The Pushback of Migrants, Including Refugees, at Europe's Borders*, available at https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-dangerous-game-pushback-migrants-refugees-060417-en_0.pdf

2. Greek Refugee Council (2018). *Reports and testimony of systematic pushbacks in Evros*, available at <https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/ReportZ08032018.pdf>

Human Rights Watch (2018). *Greece: Violent Pushbacks at Turkey Border. End Summary Returns, Unchecked Violence*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/18/greece-violent-pushbacks-turkey-border>

PRO ASYL (2013). *Pushed back – Systematic human rights violations against refugees in the Aegean Sea and the greek-turkish land border*. Retrieved from <https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/PRO-ASYL-Report-Pushed-Back-english-November-2013.pdf>

3. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *The Refugee Convention, 1951: The Travaux préparatoires analysed with a Commentary by Dr. Paul Weis*, 1990, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53e1dd114.html>

4. European Union, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 18 December 2000 2012, 2000/C 364/01, available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

5. Safe Third Country Turkey (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/safe-third-country>

6. Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (2018). *Seeing Asylum in Turkey. A critical review of Turkey's asylum laws and practices*, available at: https://www.noas.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Tyrkia-2018-Update_Web.pdf

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2016), *The DCR/ECRE desk research on application of a safe third country and a first third country of asylum concepts to Turkey*, 20 May 2016, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/575525234.html>

EDAL (2018) A critical approach of the concept of Turkey as a safe-third country under the scope of the EU-Turkey “Common Statement” as interpreted by the Greek Council of State and two different Independent Appeal Committees, available at:

<https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/journal/critical-approach-concept-turkey-safe-third-country-under-scope-eu-turkey-%E2%80%9Ccommon-statement%E2%80%9D>

7. Chehayeb K. & Hunaidi, S. (2019, August 8). Turkey’s Deportation Policy is Killing Syrian Refugees. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/08/turkeys-deportation-policy-is-killing-syrian-refugees-assad-erdogan-akp-chp/>
8. Moving on: Authorities in Turkey Take-over Refugee Registration (2018, September 19). Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/moving-on-authorities-in-turkey-take-over-refugee-registration/>
9. Sanderson, S. (2019, August 1). Istanbul expels more than 15,000 undocumented migrants. Retrieved from: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/18545/istanbul-expels-more-than-15-000-undocumented-migrants>
10. Firtinaci, M. (2019, July 22). Turkish State begun to deport Syrian refugees en masse back to the war zones in Syria and border cities. Retrieved from <https://libcom.org/news/turkish-state-begun-extradite-syrian-refugees-en-masse-back-war-zones-syria-world-should-kn?fbclid=IwAR0Otcy9fGCwL0UeWaiK4-2hJ8qWYQdVxOVZVt1yasPOo1C8UiQGTQ6xmWs>
11. Fathi, A. (2019, July 21). Turkish regime tightens grip on Syrian refugees, deports hundreds. Retrieved from <https://7dnews.com/news/turkish-regime-tightens-grip-on-syrian-refugees-deports-hundreds>