

'Black book' of thousands of illegal migrant pushbacks presented to EU

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Shocking dossier of systematic violations of asylum seekers along the notorious 'Balkan route' compiled by watchdog groups

A 1,500-page "black book" documenting hundreds of illegal pushbacks against asylum seekers by authorities on Europe's external borders was released last week and handed over to the EU commission.

Compiled by the watchdog organisation Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), the Black Book of Pushbacks is a collection of 892 group testimonies, detailing the experiences of 12,654 victims of human rights violations along the Balkan migration route, one of the most gruelling in the recent migrant crisis given the alleged [violence of](#) border police officers.

Every day, thousands of people, mainly from south Asia, the Middle East and north Africa, attempt to cross the Balkans to reach Europe. It is an arduous journey with virtually no welcoming facilities for migrants, who are forced to spend most of the trip in makeshift camps or in train stations.

For years, charities have denounced the abuses, particularly in Croatia, as asylum seekers are systematically beaten, robbed and pushed back. Between January and November 2020, the Danish Refugee Council recorded 15,672 pushbacks from Croatia to [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#), with more than 60% of these reportedly violent.

"This book - which brings together four years of work - points to a gaping hole in accountability for perpetrating authorities, including member states and EU agencies, like Frontex," Simon Campbell, field coordinator for BVMN, told the Guardian. "The testimonies, committed here to paper, represent a definitive archive of evidence, detailing systematic violations against people on the move, such as breaches of international law on asylum and returns, as well as the prohibition of torture."

More than 15 organisations have contributed to the book, which contains maps, data, photos and other key information and was made in collaboration with the United Left block of the European parliament.

Last Friday, Malin Björk, a member of the parliament's committee on civil liberties, justice and home affairs and Miguel Urbán, co-founder of Spanish political party Podemos, presented and handed over the Black Book to the EU commissioner for asylum, Ylva Johansson, in Brussels.

Speaking about the launch of the Black Book, German MEP Cornelia Ernst said: "We have been so shocked by endless accounts of merciless, sadistic and degrading violence - reminiscent of brutal dictatorships. The Black Book sheds some much-needed light on this dark chapter of the EU. Our hope is that it will contribute to bringing an end to these crimes and holding the governments that are responsible accountable."

“Although these accusations are met with denial from the perpetrating countries, what we provide within these pages is an analysis of patterns and photo evidence that reveal an ongoing, systematic practice,” said Hope Barker, spokesperson for BVMN.

“And these are just the stories that the network has managed to record. The reality is much wider and more far-reaching.

“We call for an end to impunity and a renewed commitment to accountability, both of which will work towards ending such brutal human rights violations,” she said.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina about 1,200 migrants and asylum-seekers are living in squalid conditions in the Lipa tented camp in Una-Sana canton, a site unsuitable for winter. The International Organization for [Migration](#) said it would close the camp as Bosnian authorities had ignored its appeals to help supply basic services.

Thousands of migrants in Bosnia-Herzegovina could soon face an impossible choice: fend for themselves in abandoned buildings and squats, or attempt to cross the border into [Croatia](#) and the EU – in the hope of escaping the violence of border police.

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The Guardian

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