

NO NAME KITCHEN

**SUBMISSION FOR THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC
REVIEW OF
CROATIA IN
NOVEMBER
2025**



1. SUBMITTING ORGANISATION

No Name Kitchen (NNK) is an independent movement working to document and monitor border violence by police and state officials. Founded in 2017, NNK works closely with communities affected to document and report human rights violations, including pushbacks, collective expulsions, systemic neglect, and administrative and judicial misconduct. NNK monitors border violence by Croatian officials, including pushbacks, on the Bosnian-Croatian border, and the Slovenian-Croatian border. For enquiries, please contact press@nonamekitchen.org

2. INTRODUCTION

This submission, for the Universal Periodic Review of Croatia in November 2025, summarises NNK's findings and observations, focusing on violence against people on the move on Croatian territory. We present our concerns regarding the systematic use of pushbacks, and the physical and psychological violence which accompany these (see Section 3), as well as the use of arbitrary detention and lack of access to proper asylum mechanisms. These human rights abuses are then worsened by the lack of safeguards or accountability for perpetrators and the consistent harassment and targeting of human rights defenders (see Section 4). We issue our recommendations for the measures by the Croatian state which are urgently needed to uphold rights and dignity (see Section 5).

3. FOLLOW-UP TO THE PREVIOUS REVIEW

In the third cycle of the UPR on Croatia, submissions from major international and local stakeholders such as UNHCR, Amnesty International and the Centar za Mirovne Studije (CMS) informed the Human Rights Committee on the widespread practice of illegal expulsions from Croatian territory, denial of access to territory and procedures and mistreatment and excessive use of force at the borders.¹ Reports included denial of asylum seeking, illegal expulsion at the borders (pusbacks) and physical violence including sexual harassment. Concerns about the actions of Croatian border police were raised in a joint urgent appeal, highlighting allegations that Croatia was refusing international protection and infringing upon the principles of non-discrimination,

¹ Paragraph 5 of the Compilation on Croatia Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, submitted on the 9th of March 2020; Paragraph 49 and further of the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Croatia Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, available at: https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-05/compilation_of_un_croatia_english.pdf

non-penalization, and non-refoulement.² Recommendations from the third cycle included implementing measures to ensure access to asylum, and effective access to the territory to comply with its international and European obligations towards migrants. Since the third cycle, we do not believe the gross human rights violations taking place in the name of 'migration deterrence' have ceased, with pushbacks, unlawful detention and border violence being the norm for how Croatia handles the influx of people seeking international protection.

3. PUSHBACKS

Between 2020 and 2024, NNK field reporters took testimonies of 408 pushbacks from Croatia, averaging approximately one every 4 days. 6897 people were victims of these 408 cases.

92% of these testimonies involved at least one of the people in the group being beaten, with hands, a baton, or another object. In addition to this, reports describe abhorrent violence by the Croatian police: being forced to the ground, body searches, sexual assault, intentional humiliation, theft, burning of personal belongings³, threatening with guns, kicking, death threats, and being physically forced to cross territories through rivers or treacherous conditions. Only 4% of the pushbacks recorded by NNK did not involve violence.

These pushbacks, which take place outside of any formal return mechanisms, are a violation of the principle of non-refoulement (Article 3 UNCAT, Article 16 ICPPED, Article 3 ECHR, Article 33 1951 Refugee Convention), the prohibition of collective expulsions (Article 4 Protocol 4 ECHR), the right to due process in expulsions (Article 13 ICCPR), the right to effective remedy (Art. 13 ECHR, art. 8 UDHR, art. 47 EU Charter), and the right to asylum (Article 14 UDHR, Article 18 CFREU). The very nature of pushbacks,

² Letter dated 4 March 2016 from the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment addressed to the Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva. Available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=154>

³ Source: *The Guardian*, October 2024.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/oct/10/photos-croatia-police-phones-passports-asylum-seekers>

repeatedly demonstrated to be a *modus operandi* of the Croatian border force⁴, contravenes these international obligations irrespective of the violence used against victims. The majority of these testimonies were also extremely violent, commonly involving beating, theft, pushing, kicking, threatening with guns, water immersion, insulting, dog attacks, and sexual assault. Most provided unequivocal evidence of extreme violence amounting to violations of the prohibition of torture, inhuman, and degrading treatment (Article 3 ECHR, Article 7 ICCPR, Article 16 UNCAT).

One respondent described what he witnessed: “[The Croatian police] beat [my friend] so hard that at some point he was throwing up from the pain, and they also broke one of his limbs. The police also put his boot on the face of another member of the group”, he added that: “if the police had put a tiny bit more pressure, this person would no longer be able to speak”. After the police caught them, they began to beat the group (12/2024).

Another respondent stated that during a pushback the Croatian authorities set on fire their personal belongings, including important documents. The Croatian police officer forced them to the ground and started beating them. He reported that the officers threatened to shoot them if they moved, while pointing a gun at one of them (09/2024).

A respondent described being sexually assaulted by a Croatian authority. The officer searched her bra and her genitals. She stated: “I was shaking but he didn’t care, he was like an animal”. He then unzipped her trousers. She pleaded again that she did not have money. “He thought I was putting money inside of me, so he put his finger [inside her genitals]”. “That was the worst thing to happen to me. I prefer he beat me, then to search me in that way” (01/2024).

These incidents are examples, but by no means an exception, to the *modus operandi* of border control that the Croatian police has implemented over the last few years. Mass violence and mass pushback are used as a means of deterring irregular migration - violating a variety of human rights legislations.

We have concerns that the Bosnian-Croatian bilateral agreement has consecrated the practice of pushbacks. Respondents report being issued return orders, and reportedly forced to sign these without the assistance of a translator, and even in some cases forced to pay the costs of detention, transportation, or food during these returns.

⁴ See, for example, ECCHR, February 2023:

https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ECCHR_Croatia_factsheet_February_2023.pdf, Amnesty International, October 2021:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/eu-new-evidence-of-systematic-unlawful-pushbacks-and-violence-at-borders/>, Human Rights Watch, May 2023:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/03/croatia-ongoing-violent-border-pushbacks>, Amnesty International, December 2021:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/human-rights-body-has-condemned-croatian-authorities-for-border-violence/>

Respondents stated they were not allowed to apply for asylum, and were denied the right to appeal the deportation order⁵. We further believe that pushback practises by Croatian authorities have worsened as a result of the amendments to the Schengen borders code (formally adopted in May 2024) which seem to have legitimated and institutionalized racial profiling at the borders, thus increasing pushbacks⁶. We continue to monitor the impacts of this and of the new EU Migration and Asylum Pact (adopted May 2024) which contributed to exacerbate the process of ‘accelerated’ returns without necessary or due safeguards⁷.

A. CHILDREN

Of the 407 testimonies of pushbacks recorded between 2020-2024, 44% of these involved a minor at the time of pushback.

NNK recorded a testimony involving six children, one of which was as young as 5 years old. These children were forced to witness adults in their group being beaten, and then the group (children included) were pushed back to Bosnia, whilst being threatened with guns (11/2023). In another testimony, a 9 year old and a 12 year old were also pushed back to Bosnia: the police forced one of them to cross the bridge with the stick. The respondent recalls that the child was afraid, crying, and about to fall into the water (3/2024). A 12 year old was also detained over 20 hours, and denied access to food and water, locked in the back of a van which was overheating and driven recklessly for 4-5 hours, and then pushed back to Bosnia (5/2025).

Pushbacks occur without regard for children’s heightened vulnerability or rights (Article 3, 22, 37, CRC). Testimonies describe violence showing utter disregard for their welfare, with Croatian border police often enacting wanton violence. Rights protecting children from torture, cruel or degrading punishment (Article 37 CRC) have been ignored to enforce systemic pushbacks.

B. ‘INCOMMUNICADO’ DETENTION

Testimonies of pushbacks also consistently identify the practice of arbitrarily detaining people, including those who were explicitly asking to apply for asylum in Croatia. Minors appear to be held indiscriminately with adults.

⁵ Source: *Human Rights Watch*, May 2023:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/03/croatia-ongoing-violent-border-pushbacks>

⁶ Source: *No Name Kitchen*, May 2024:

<https://www.nonamekitchen.org/the-libe-committee-of-the-european-parliament-votes-on-the-reforms-to-the-schengen-border-code-reintroduction-of-internal-border-controls/>

⁷ Source: *No Name Kitchen*, April 2024:

<https://www.nonamekitchen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/NNK-fighting-pact-2.pdf>

The use of detention appears to be, without due process, access to legal safeguards or basic amenities. Respondents frequently report receiving inadequate information about their rights or why they are being detained: One respondent was detained for 5 days prior to being pushed back to Bosnia, and the authorities refused to give him information as to why he was detained (12/2023). Once detained, people frequently report restricted access to water, toilets, and food - even when explicitly requested. Detention also reportedly takes place in overcrowded cells, and verbal and physical violence are commonly reported.

Testimonies of pre-'return' detention reveal a variety of human rights abuses, and it appears that detention procedures aim to create a climate of anxiety and suffering. The lack of due process and information about rights violates the right to freedom from arbitrary detention (Article 9 UDHR, Article 9 ICCPR, Article 5 ECHR, and Article 6 EUCFR) and the right to be informed of reasons for detention (Article 5(2) ECHR, Article 9(2) ICCPR). Conditions in detentions seem to violate the prohibition of torture, inhuman, and degrading treatment (Article 3 ECHR, Article 7 ICCPR, Article 16 UNCAT) with the general climate of suffering exacerbating degrading circumstances.

C. LACK OF ACCESS TO ASYLUM

Where respondents informed police of their intent to claim asylum during a pushback, these did not seem to be taken seriously by police officers. Sometimes, those were even laughed at and mocked by police officers. In all the cases, the police systematically ignored the request, often simply by not responding.

A respondent reported that he was pushed back to Bosnia with 5 other people. After being apprehended by Croatian authorities, the group explicitly stated their intention to seek asylum in Croatia, which the officers didn't acknowledge, they began to beat them. The police took their belongings and never returned them to the group. The group was then pushed back on a ferry bridge on the river Una (03/2024).

Similar is the testimony of a group that was approached by two officers dressed in civilian clothing, who confirmed their identities by showing police badges and guns to the group. They were informed they would be taken to the police station, but were instead taken in a van to the Bosnian border and forced across. The respondent told one officer, in English, that his Sudanese friend wanted to apply for asylum but the officer ignored the request (11/2024).

A respondent reported that he was apprehended by the Croatian police in the forest, and detained for two days. The group wanted to be taken to the reception centre in Zagreb to apply for asylum, but the police laughed at them, and said they would take

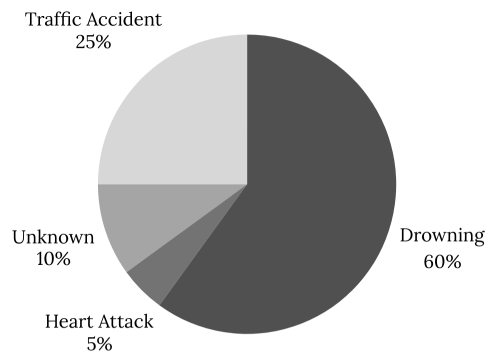
them to the camp tomorrow. The very next day they were pushed back to Bosnia by the same police (11/2024).

Croatia remains to be bound by international treaties and European legislation that provide an absolute prohibition of non-refoulement and the right to apply for asylum.⁸ It is therefore required to ensure a fair and individualized asylum procedure available to all who apply for asylum either those who are lawful or **unlawful** on its territories or **on its border**.⁹ The principle of non-refoulement applies regardless of an applicant's presence at the border, making pushbacks, ignored asylum requests, or detention illegitimate ways to circumvent it. To comply with the obligation of non-refoulement and the right to effective legal remedy under art. 3 and 13 ECHR respectively, international law requires, inter alia, a rigorous scrutiny of the applicant's claim of potentially prohibited treatment, access to an effective remedy following a negative decision, and access to the rights protected under Articles 2-34 of the Refugee Convention, where the applicant may be entitled to those rights.

D. RIGHT TO LIFE ABANDONED

The consequences of these pushbacks are not only human rights violations but also deaths. Below are the approximate numbers¹⁰ of people who have died between 2023 and 2024 trying to enter Croatia.

RECORDED DEATHS OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE IN CROATIA, 2023-2024



⁸ Article 33 of the 1951 United Nations Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, Article 18 and 19 of the Fundamental Rights' Charter of the European Union and implicitly in Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 5 of the Return Directive (2008/115/EC).

⁹ The Charter applies to the EU as well as to Member States when they act within the scope of EU law. This includes conduct at the border or outside the EU territory, the principle of non-refoulement from article 33 of the Refugee Convention does not require lawful residence on the territory of a state.

¹⁰ These data were taken from a database which is most likely incomplete due to a lack of coordinated monitoring from states. Source: 4D Database: <https://4dtrail.wordpress.com/database/>

These are not just numbers; these are lives that the European Union's anti-migration policies have taken. As you can see, most of the deaths were caused by drowning, due to the lack of safe and legal routes to asylum in the EU, and the prevalence of pushbacks in which survivors are forced to cross waters. Men, women, and children have died in Croatian rivers and on Croatian territory. It is not a tragic accident, it is a loss of life for which Croatia and EU policymakers are wholly responsible.

4. LACK OF SAFEGUARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY, AND OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE

This amalgamation of human rights violations is then exacerbated by the Croatian government's lack of meaningful efforts to ensure accountability. The response by the Croatian ministry of interior has frequently been the opposite: denial¹¹. Where pushbacks of litigations have been successful (such as *MH v. Croatia*¹²), court judgements have not been implemented. When an investigation by No Name Kitchen, about evidence of Croatian authorities burning asylum seekers phones and passports, was featured in the Guardian¹³, the Ministry of Interior released a public statement¹⁴. They called the use of the word pushback 'a skillful manipulation'¹⁵, despite a decade of evidence of pushbacks taking place. They noted that their own 'Independent Monitoring Mechanism' had received no complaints (pointing perhaps to a failure in their monitoring mechanism rather than a lack of violations), and even stated that it is "completely incomprehensible that such an event [sexual assault] would occur without being immediately reported to the police" - a response entirely blind to the trauma and distrust created by police (sexual) violence. Denying accusations adds salt to the wounds of those experiencing human rights violations in Croatia, and undermines the

¹¹ See, for example, *The Guardian*, October 2020:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/oct/23/croatia-denies-migrant-border-attacks-after-new-reports-of-brutal-pushbacks> *InfoMigrants*, October 2021:

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/35628/croatian-politicians-deny-culpability-in-border-pushbacks> *Amnesty International*, December 2021:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/human-rights-body-has-condemned-croatian-authorities-for-border-violence/> *European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights*, February 2023:

https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ECCHR_Croatia_factsheet_February_2023.pdf

¹² *MH v. Croatia*, Final judgement April 2022: <https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/ENG?i=004-60187>

¹³ Source: *The Guardian*, October 2024:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/oct/10/photos-croatia-police-phones-passports-asylum-seekers>

¹⁴ Source: *Croatian Ministry of the Interior*, October 2024:

<https://mup.gov.hr/vijesti/reagiranje-na-optuzbe-iz-clanka-portala-the-guardian/294309>

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Translated by NNK.

right to an effective remedy (Article 13 ECHR) and the obligation to effectively investigate and prevent torture (Article 2 UNCAT, ECtHR case law on Article 3). Pushbacks and border violence thus remain institutionalized practice, with the Ministry of Interior covering for perpetrators. The result is a lack of consequences for those responsible, and a lack of justice for those affected.

The Croatian authorities are not only trying to prevent PoM from entering the EU territory, they also take actions against activists, volunteers and human rights defenders. Emblematic is the case of Omer Essa Mahdi (an Iraqi citizen who arrived in Croatia in 2017, granted refugee status in 2018), whose status was revoked in 2020. He claimed that the deprivation of his status and the threat of deportation to Iraq were in reprisal against him for refusing to accept the Croatian Security and Intelligence Service's offer to become their informant.¹⁶

Solidarity at the borders is highly criminalized. People are scared to provide support because they fear they might get arrested or receive a big fine, and that is frequently reported to NNK by local residents. This fear seems to have been exacerbated by the changes to the EU Facilitation Directive proposed in 2024¹⁷ which have worsened the tendency to rely on a vague definition of the concept of 'smuggling'. That discourse has provided dangerous grounds for state actors with anti-migrant or racist agendas to repress solidarity, anti-racist advocacy, and violence monitoring, in the name of 'anti-smuggling' legislation. This harassment and criminalisation continues to impede the work of NNK, our field teams face regular harassment from Croatian authorities.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STATE

No Name Kitchen calls upon the Government of Croatia to:

1. Ensure the freedom from arbitrary detention, the right to due process, and the freedom from torture, inhuman, and degrading treatment are upheld in all police interactions, without discrimination to nationality, race, or asylum status.
2. Guarantee access to basic necessities including food, water, access to a bathroom, legal aid, and translation for those in police custody.
3. Ensure a fair and individualized asylum procedure available to all who apply for asylum - either those who are lawfully or unlawfully present on Croatian territories or on Croatian borders.

¹⁶ Source: *Front Line Defenders*, July 2021:

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/pressure-family-member-migrant-rights-defender-tajana-tadic#case-update-id-14064>

¹⁷ Source: PICUM, June 2024:

https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/How-the-New-EU-Facilitation-Directive-Further-the-Criminalisation-of-Migrants-and-Human-Rights-Defenders_EN.pdf

4. Eradicate the systematic use of pushbacks which violate the right to asylum and the prohibition of *non-refoulement*.
5. Given that the national border violence monitoring mechanisms are inadequate, stop the harassment and criminalisation of truly independent monitoring mechanisms, and enable safe environments for their work.
6. End the practice of denial by the Ministry of Interior and acknowledge the clear evidence of unlawful violence and pushbacks by Croatian police forces over the last decade, and provide accountability.
7. Ensure effective criminal investigations and prosecution of perpetrators when complaints are brought forward by survivors or civil society actors and implement measures to tackle the current inadequacy in these procedures to ensure compliance with the procedural limbs of Article 2 and 3 ECHR.
8. Launch an independent investigation into systemic racism in the Croatian police forces, acknowledging the evidence brought forward by civil society.
9. Refuse complicity in European deterrence agendas when they encourage violations of international human rights legislation (to which Croatia is a state party) in and around Croatian territory and/or by Croatian officials.