

PRESS RELEASE: Unaccompanied minor sues Greece for towing him out to sea, abandoning him there

On 3 March 2021, a legal team from the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and the human rights law firm Prakken d'Oliveira, filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of R, an unaccompanied asylum-seeker child who was apprehended in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre on Samos and subject to a life-threatening pushback to Turkey, along with another minor, in September 2020. The case challenges the acts of the Hellenic Coast Guard [HCG] for seriously endangering the lives of two minors by leaving them adrift in an unnavigable raft in the middle of the Aegean Sea.

The application challenges the deceitful obstruction of the minors' attempts to register their asylum claim by the Greek authorities, through their apprehension and removal from the camp and their subsequent illegal expulsion from Greece. These actions are part of a systematic practice of "pushbacks" by Greek forces in the Aegean Sea, that sends asylum-seekers adrift in non-navigable rafts with indifference as to whether they live or die. The complaint argues that the treatment the applicant was subjected to not only exposed him to refoulement, but also amounts to a violation of the right to life and the prohibition of torture in the European Convention on Human Rights.

The applicant arrived on Samos from Turkey on September 8 with a group of 17 other asylum-seekers. He and another unaccompanied child from the group made their way to the refugee camp in Vathy to apply for asylum. The following morning, they presented themselves to the camp authorities in order to register as asylum-seekers. They were then taken to a police station inside the camp under the pretext of Covid-19 public health measures, where they expected to be registered. Instead, Greek officers covertly removed them from the camp and escorted them to the port.

At the port, they were forced on board a Hellenic Coast Guard vessel where they were handcuffed, and had their phones and money stolen by the Greek officials. The HCG drove them into the middle of the Aegean Sea, forced them into an inflatable, motorless raft and left them to drift. The two teenagers were forced to paddle with their hands until they were rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard. They spent about nine days in Turkish custody before they were released and left destitute without any form of support.

The Greek government continues to [deny](#) that pushbacks are happening, either in the Aegean or at Greece's Evros river border. It stresses its commitment to international law, while [praising](#) the Coast Guard for reducing 'flows' of asylum-seekers. NGOS, such as Aegean Boat Report, however, continue to document almost-daily violations at the border, including the [events in this case](#).

The violence the applicant suffered at the hands of Greek officials is part of a systematic practice of maritime pushbacks [documented](#) since March 2020. "The abduction of the applicant from inside a refugee camp reveals just how far reaching the pushback apparatus has become", said Niamh Keady-Tabbal, legal researcher with GLAN and member of R's legal team.

We argue the widespread abandonment at sea amounts to a violation of the right to life (Article 2) and the prohibition of torture (Article 3). The case draws on the special protection afforded to minors and highlights the systemic nature of this particular strand of Greece's collective expulsions policy.

“It is striking that the EU, with all its institutions, turns a blind eye to the lack of access to territory and thus also to the rule of law, particularly when it comes to sea pushbacks. Yet I am confident that this case will raise awareness both at international level and hopefully in Greece as it needs to be addressed,” said Flip Schüller, Legal Representative.

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The Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) is a non-profit organisation made up of legal practitioners, academics and investigative journalists that pursues innovative legal actions across borders, challenging states and other powerful actors involved with human rights violations and systemic injustice. GLAN has offices in the UK (London) and Ireland (Galway).