

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS' COORDINATION

M I G R A N T S '

JOURNAL



DECEMBER 2021

STRUGGLES

COORDINAMENTO MIGRANTI BOLOGNA, CSP69, HDP
AND HDK MIGRATION AND REFUGEES COMMISSION
ASSEMBLY, INFOKOLPA, SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS'

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MIGRANTS' STRUGGLES





MIGRANTS STRUGGLES AND THE GOAL TO STRENGTHEN OUR COLLECTIVE FORCE

This journal collects contributions from migrants and activists involved in struggles around mobility and freedom of movement in different regions and countries that are integrated in the European border regime. The texts describe and discuss the situation in Greece and the Aegean, the Turkey-EU relations, the role of wars in displacing Kurdish people, struggles and violence along the Balkan Route, the dynamics and protagonists of the newly formed Belarusian route, anti-immigrant policies and forms of struggle in Spain, the conditions of migrant labor and asylum seekers' struggles in Italy and the undocumented movement that for years now is organising in France. The pandemic has impacted on migrants' life in different ways and containment measures have also impacted on border crossings, providing an argument for strengthening controls and arbitrariness against migrants. However, migrants' movements have not stopped and the articles included in this journal illustrate a terrain of confrontation and struggles that is as fragmented as crisscrossed by common dynamics.

The aim of this journal is thus that of raising the question of how to grasp the connections between the different elements that compose this picture. What is the link between migrants stranded in a Belarusian forest and those demonstrating in the streets of Paris? What is the link between asylum seekers blocked in Greece and those struggling against exploitation in a logistics center in Italy? What is the relation between men and women, amid worsening winter weather, trying to reach the EU through the Balkans and migrants resisting institutional racism in Spain? We think two elements must be considered: first, all these situations happen in countries or regions that are directly involved in the EU and its member states' attempt to regulate and govern mobility by deciding who can enter the EU. Second, in all these situations migrants are not mere objects of this attempt, but are on the contrary the subjects of a transnational movement that fights for its freedom to move across the borders and to seek a better life, free from violence, threats and exploitation.



As for the first element, discussing the connections between the situation at the EU borders and migrants' conditions in the different member states allows one to understand how border and migration policies are not just aimed at keeping out unwanted migrants, but are tools to determine under which conditions migrants live within and outside Europe. The violence at the border is the mirror of the violence of exploitation within workplaces and vice versa: on the one hand, migrant workers are blackmailed by institutional racism and the link between visas and labor that constitute a common feature of migration policies in all countries; on the other hand, migrants at the border are treated with inhuman violence because they are considered as disposable workforce without rights.

At the same time, the involvement of countries such as Turkey, Morocco or Libya shows how the European border regime is now integrated in a wider attempt to limit migrants' autonomy and possibility to move. However, the second element clearly present in these articles, that of migrants' struggles, shows that migrants are challenging this system in all its manifestations: the issue at stake is how to articulate coordinated political discourses and initiatives that are up to this challenge. In order to do so, we need to reverse some common assumptions regarding migrants and migration: the contribution discussing the Belarus-EU situation and that from Italy are both relevant in this regard.

The first discusses the self-organisation of refugees that in very high numbers are trying to reach Belarus in the attempt to get closer to the EU borders, thus questioning any identification of migrants stranded at the border as mere victims of geopolitical games. The second shows how, besides the limit of the reception systems for refugees, asylum seekers are today part of a transnational labor force and often leading important struggles inside the workplaces. On the other hand, the contributions from the Balkans, France and Spain show the different forms of solidarity and struggle: in the Balkans activists and migrants organise together to keep alive the route towards Europe; in France and Spain, besides local mobilizations, national coordinations of migrants' struggles brought thousands of people in the streets, and clash not only with the daily institutional racism, but also with the advance of the right or the silence of the government.





Overall, this journal describes a clash on mobility that sees migrants fighting the different forms of institutional racism and border violence which are pillars of the attempt to stem and govern migration within and around Europe. It also describes struggles enacted by migrants in different contexts. We think that these struggles must be supported: from activism at the border to solidarity groups, everything that can sustain migrants' in their daily efforts must be continued. However, we think that something more is needed: we need to strengthen our capacity to act together and to push forward collective demands which are capable of enlarging and reinforcing migrants' struggles collectively beyond the specificity of a single struggle. We need to make migrants' demands heard in every struggle, as the one fought by women and LGBTQI people fighting against male violence. For several months now we are claiming a European residence permit without conditions for all migrants. But we think that to achieve these common goals we need to strengthen our transnational communication and to elaborate common views. As the Transnational Migrants' Coordination we will keep pursuing this objective and promote transnational assemblies to discuss together.

IT IS NOT A BUSINESS. IT IS A MOVEMENT!

HOW PEOPLE
ORGANISED A MASSIVE
AND COLLECTIVE
EXODUS TO ASK FOR
ASYLUM IN THE
EUROPEAN UNION

AIGUL HAKIMOVA, INFOKOLPA (SLOVENIA)

The emergence of a new migrant route, called now the Belarusian route, is opening necessary perspectives that are not seen or are deliberately missing from our thinking or vision of today's migrant struggles and refugees' movements.

At the end of September, we received an SOS request for help from the Belarus forests near the border with Poland. This was the first time that I tried to call an emergency number from Grodno city (a town in Belarus close to Poland border) to beg them to go to the group of people in great distress, but they responded that they can go to the forest only if Belarus border police calls them to do so. This is how I got engaged in the situation on the Polish/Lithuanian/Belarusian borders.

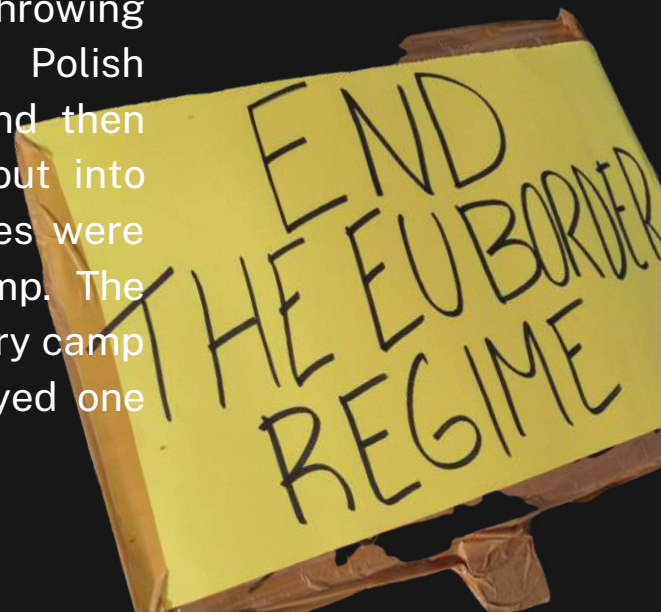
Thousands of migrants from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and many more countries tried to cross the borderlines and reach, first of all, Germany. What was happening along the Balkan route in the last 4 years occurred on the border with Poland and Belarus in only 2 months. Horrifying pictures of people living outside in harsh and freezing weather conditions, enormously huge numbers of families with small children sleeping under the sky for weeks and even months without food and water. Just in the last 3 months more than 21 people have died, mostly due to exhaustion, freezing and drowning in the river.

Poland has officially pushed back people on the move more than 40 thousand times. Some people tried to cross the line at least 30 times. Troubling alerts first started arriving in August and September 2021, mostly from people being exhausted in vast forests for weeks and even months and trapped between two lines, two national border police units and armies. Police from both countries (in our case Poland and Belarus) have been pushing them back and playing a ping pong game with peoples' lives for months.

With winter knocking on the doors, people on the move decided to get together (from November 8th) in large numbers near the border crossing point Bruzgi/Kuźnica and massively, as one movement, try to push themselves forward. People decided to stick together because of their safety, it was hard for families or smaller groups to survive by themselves in deep forests, and that was the reason they organised themselves via phones and messengers to occupy a certain border crossing. On Monday morning, November 15th, the refugees, hoping for a positive outcome of their situation (that the EU will accept them), packed warm clothes, tents, sleeping bags. By noon, they self-organized into a large column and began to move towards the Bruzgi/Kuźnica checkpoint. The next day the situation on the border escalated, when refugees first began to break the fence in neutral territory and then began throwing stones at the Polish security forces. The Polish military used tear gas against migrants, and then stun grenades, thus trying to force them out into Belarusian territory. As a result, the refugees were forced to return to the depths of the camp. The majority of people were taken to the temporary camp known as the logistics centre, the rest stayed one more night at the checkpoint.

**THEY SELF-ORGANIZED
INTO A LARGE COLUMN
AND BEGAN TO MOVE
TOWARDS THE
BRUZGI/KUŹNICA
CHECKPOINT.**

**REFUGEES BEGAN TO
BREAK THE FENCE IN
NEUTRAL TERRITORY**





**CAN WE LOOK BEYOND
THE HUMAN RIGHTS
INSTITUTIONALIZED
DISCOURSES AT WHAT
IS HAPPENING ON THE
ROUTES AND
MIGRANTS' MOBILITY?**



But why did people massively arrive in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, and try to cross the EU (Schengen) borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia? Were refugees, people on the move, lured by some dictatorial forces that wanted to take revenge on Western countries because of the sanctions? Or maybe the refugees organized a collective exodus in such a way that they would not expose themselves to pass deadly seas, or humiliating, long and exhausting jungles in countries on the Balkan Route?

Do we accept that it was a smart move from migrant people who have plans to coordinate their lives differently, to secure a better perspective for themselves, their families and children?

Do we have to always stick to a narrative according to which refugees or people on the move are the victims of all systems, of their own first of all, from their countries of origin, the border regimes of the European Union, its integration policies and labour exploitation?

Do we anticipate that people on the move are a chaotic mass of victims, trapped and stranded in the most ancient jungles of Europe? Why do we always try to rationalize the moves by constantly describing their condition in classical liberal approaches by saying that people are devastated, and poor, that they are forced to leave their territories because of numerous reasons?

Can we look beyond the human rights institutionalized discourses at what is happening on the routes and migrants' mobility? Who are these people? Why did they stay and live outside at zero temperatures with small children and many pregnant women, elderly people, and people with special needs for weeks and months?

These are the questions I have been repeatedly asking myself to gain a new perspective to understand the situation on Belarusian and Polish borders since the end of September 2021. To see the viewpoint that diverges from the accepted articulations in civil societies and mass media of the Western world:

- *to look at the border movements beyond the hybrid attack narrative;*
- *to see the angle that is not explained only by the humanitarian crisis;*
- *to understand the movement beyond the national propaganda produced both from the West and the East;*
- *to avoid the meta-narrative of current geopolitics;*
- *to recognize the movement's efforts beyond accusations and military discourses;*
- *to try to acknowledge the tragedies and deaths on the borders by asking a simple question, how might migrants and refugees' deaths be considered examples of martyrdom in their fight and struggles for freedom of movement?*
- *why is the refugee movement the strongest subjectivity in terms of confrontation with the border regimes, and whose borders do they liberate?*
- *How do they find possibilities to create those pockets of resistance in terms of either territoriality or survival kits?*

- *Why are their struggles (as we have seen on the Belarusian border with Poland, and earlier on the border with Hungary) not considered political movements from below that forces the constituted power to reorganize itself?*

- *to recognize the multitude of people composing the movement on the borders, it is not only people who run from ruined or war zones, desperate people from the global south. There are many people as well with residence permits from different countries than the so-called third world, so for many, it is also a secondary migration that is potentiating the questions we raise here, so they are materialising their right to move and not merely running away from harsher conditions.*

All these questions partly offer a retort to why people on the move are arriving and almost dying on the borders. Since they know what they want in comparison to our European neoliberal politics and liberal policies that failed to sustain the basic rights of the humans' movement.

Refugees, people on the move, when they push borders and sacrifice their lives in jungles, are not doing anything less than dismantling the basic idea of nationalistic states, globalizing freedom from below, fighting the system that illegalises them. They are the main protagonists and advocates of the most crucial and basic right which is the right to move and have mobility. It is an anti-hierarchy as well.





STRUGGLE IS THE VOICE OF HUMANITY

NAJEH
KEBAIER
MILITANTE
DU CSP69

Since 1996, undocumented migrants in France have been fighting to demand their collective regularization. But in 2020, because of the pandemic, the struggle voice was heard all over in France. The first national demonstration took place on May 30th 2020 in several French cities. Undocumented migrants went out to demonstrate even without prefecture permission. This is because their situation was so serious that they were in life threatening, because their access to work was denied due to the lock-down. This is what prompted them to go and demonstrate. Since then, a struggle began against government's indifference. We decided to hold a second demonstration on June 20th 2020, again in all French cities. As the pandemic worsened and with no solution in front of us, the number of demonstrators and revolutionaries against this situation continued to grow: more than 5000 people demonstrated in Paris, more than 1000 in Lyon and Marseille, and more than 300 in Montpellier, Strasbourg, Grenoble, Rennes, Lille.

On May 30th and June 20th, those who have no rights except to be exploited, the undocumented migrants, were themselves impressed to find several thousand people fighting, marching on French soil despite the restrictions, and placing themselves at the French struggle movements front-line even during this peculiar period. This gave them the courage, thanks to the support of many trade unions and associations, to undertake, on September 19th 2020, a large national strike starting from the four corners of France: Marseille, Strasbourg, Lille, Rennes. This strike converged in Paris on Saturday October 17th 2020.

The day of the big demonstration in Paris, we were more than 60000 people in the street. Our objective was to go to the Elysée: unfortunately, the police blocked us and we could not conclude our demonstration. Paris resounded with our chants and slogans, but the French government, as usual, welcomed us with deaf ears.

But we didn't give up: thanks to this mobilization of the national strike, we managed to create new collectives in several French cities (CSP: collectives of undocumented migrants; and CDP: collectives of document seekers), notably in Marseille, Lyon, Grenoble, Montpellier, Strasbourg and Rennes; and to create strong links with the other collectives that already existed, such as the Coordination 75 (Paris) and the CSP59 (Lille), thus weaving a real national coordination. We continued to organize national events, but above all to work at the local level for the visibility of undocumented migrants, to raise awareness among citizens, and to develop a power relationship with the prefecture. Until now, the government's response has always remained negative. After two years of struggle, in 2020 and 2021, undocumented migrants remained in the front-line during the whole pandemic, in the most difficult workplaces. But despite these difficult sanitary conditions, the French government has redoubled its inhumane treatment by multiplying not only identity checks in public spaces - especially in neighborhoods heavily frequented by migrants - but also arrests and expulsions from the territory. Throughout the summer and even during the winter break, the squats where many undocumented migrants, foreign minors, and asylum seekers live continued to be evicted by the prefectures in all cities.

We didn't give up: thanks to this mobilization of the national strike, we managed to create new collectives in several French cities

The political and media atmosphere is increasingly tense as the presidential election approaches, where racist and xenophobic candidates occupy all media. Thus, at the end of September, in order to increase the pressure on the Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) to accept even more of their nationals to be deported from the CRAs (detention centers), France decided to decrease by 50% the visas for people coming from these countries. This blackmail of the French government towards these countries is a continuation of French colonialism, and the first victims are, again and again, the immigrants. It is in this context that the national coordination of undocumented migrants co-organized a counter-summit, on the occasion of the Africa-France Summit organized by Macron in Montpellier. For four days, we organized debates and marches in the city to raise our voices against French neo-colonialism in Africa, against violence towards undocumented migrants, and against the fact that the Mediterranean is turning into a cemetery. Several thousand of us demonstrated against "Françafrique" on October 8th 2021 in Montpellier.

For the past few months, the humanitarian situation at French borders has been getting worse and worse: men, women and children are forced to take very dangerous routes to avoid police controls, in the Alps (in Briançon) or the Pyrenees (in Bayonne). At least 7 people died trying to cross the Italian border in 2021, mainly between Menton and Ventimiglia, and 5 others at the French-Spanish border, including one person who drowned while crossing a river and 4 young people who were hit by a train. In Calais, three associations members went on hunger strike during the whole month of October to simply ask the government to stop evicting the camps and to allow the associations to properly carry out their distribution work: despite the media attention, they were not heard.

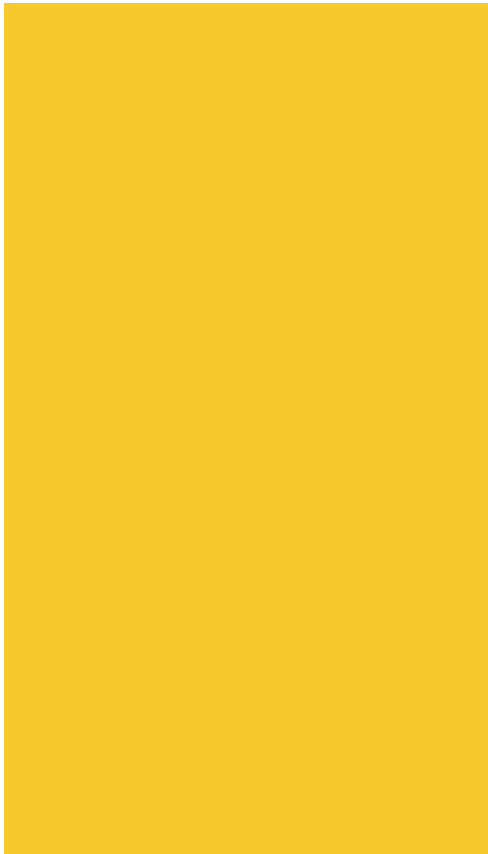
**Raise our voices
against French neo-
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Because of the increasingly sophisticated truck crossings control, people who want to go to England are forced to set sail: the number of people who have died crossing the English Channel has reached unprecedented levels in recent months, culminating in the tragic shipwreck that caused the death of 27 people on 23rd November. France is directly responsible for these deaths because it is the country that carries out the migration controls for England, since the Touquet agreement, and also because these people also leave because of the lack of reception and possibility of regularization in France.

Our demands do not change:

- Regularization of undocumented migrants
- Dignified housing for all man and women and the end of squats eviction
- Closure of the CRAs, stop to the arrests and expulsions of undocumented migrants

The struggle continues!



STRUGGLE'S



SIGNALS IN THE PANDEMIC PRESENT

Public discussion in Italy today is dominated by the "recovery" so acclaimed by the owners after the early phase of Covid-19 pandemic. Newspapers, politicians, and entrepreneurs celebrate a new period of economic growth. But this has not brought any improvement in the living and working conditions of many workers. For migrants, this has meant the loss of their jobs, or even more intense exploitation in sectors such as transport, logistics, care, and agriculture because the burden of running at full capacity of factories, warehouses, construction sites and care services has been placed on migrant labour.

COORDINAMENTO MIGRANTI BOLOGNA

After a year and a half, most of the migrants who had applied for regularization during the pandemic are still waiting for a temporary residence permit and continue to work under the blackmail of masters and bosses on whose paperworks they depend. This intensification of exploitation and blackmail has had a decisive impact on the ability of migrants to organize on an ongoing basis, and has also increased the impatience, anger, and willingness to fight for many of them. For this reason, although it is difficult to organize mass struggles and to coordinate at the national level, there have been many experiences of struggle. Some of these mark important innovations.

In Bologna, during the week of the Black Friday, a group of asylum seekers employed in a logistics warehouse of the SDA group went on strike, blocking the work of the whole warehouse for many hours. These workers have protested against the unpaid extra hours, the violence and racism used by the owners and foremen in the ordinary management of the warehouse, against the very short contracts, the just-in-time recruitment at any time of the day and night, against the starvation wages. Only a few weeks earlier, in the same warehouse, a 24-year-old asylum seeker, Yaya Yafa, was killed by a trailer. He had a contract of just four days. Yaya Yafa's death and the Black Friday strike have brought to light the fact that the SDA warehouse, like most of the warehouses at Bologna's Interporto and in the logistics industry, now operates at full capacity mainly thanks to the exploitation of asylum seekers: an increasingly large slice of the workforce is forced to accept these conditions in order to access a salary and renew their residence permit. This shows how the issue of refugees and asylum seekers, which is always talked about even in anti-racist movements especially in terms of reception or protection, now concerns the organization of labour and shows the link between the struggles against exploitation and those against institutional racism and border policies.



In fact, many of the Interporto workers live in reception structures and in large centers such as CAS Mattei. Here they had already protested, on the occasion of the transnational May Day of migrants, against living and working conditions. The spontaneous and autonomous strike of the Interporto has highlighted the inability of the trade unions active in the warehouse to take charge of the problems of a precarious, movable and widespread in the territory workforce, but so decisive for the realization of profits.

migrant women have to face up insidious, biased, or openly racist measures, such as those contained in the Recovery Plan

In the climate of generalized consensus around the post-pandemic reconstruction, migrant women have to face up insidious, biased, or openly racist measures, such as those contained in the Recovery Plan, domestic violence support measures, or benefits for those with children. Most find themselves excluded from these measures because the requirement is a long-term residence permit. Since it is increasingly difficult to obtain a residence permit due to precarious contracts, for many women there is only the path of family reunification, and this means depending on the citizenship or documents of their fathers or husbands. After having taken to the streets on July 1st together with thousands of women around the world, to protest against Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the women of the Women's Assembly of the Migrant Coordination joined the demonstration in Rome organized by the feminist movement Non Una di Meno, which was attended by more than one hundred thousand women, men and LGBTQI+ people, against the racist and masculine violence.





These struggles are important signs, but they run the risk of remaining isolated and dispersed at the local level, of not resonating enough. The ways in which production and reproduction are being reorganized in this post-pandemic phase, the intensification of exploitation and violence in homes, warehouses, factories, reception structures, all contribute to divide and isolate the strength of migrants in every context. European governments and institutions are deaf to the demands and, while they proclaim themselves as representatives of civil rights, they continue to discuss plans to govern the movement of migrant women and men in an attempt to exploit them more. They continue to sign bilateral treaties with foreign allies on the eastern border and the Mediterranean Sea, to guard and militarize the borders leaving hundreds of women and men who try to enter Europe to die as victims of their diplomatic games, as it has been happening for several months on the border between Poland and Belarus.

In a situation where fragmentation constantly risks making our struggles as well as our lives invisible, the transnational dimension is fundamental for us to show and assert our strength. The conditions that are imposed on us and that we live on our skin depend, in fact, on a migration's governance that, although complex and diversified at the national level, is European and which binds our lives with those of other migrants inside and outside Europe, halted at the Polish border, in the camps in Greece, Turkey or Libya or exploited in warehouses, factories and homes.

For this reason, the Transnational Migrants' Coordination represents for us the opportunity to show the presence of common conditions, to take them away from the isolation in which they want to keep them, to build a political communication able to enhance the rip-roaring force that we embody and with which we daily challenge the violence of borders and exploitation. It is with this perspective that we want to organize towards the strike of March 8th that has already been relaunched in several countries around the world as a moment of a process of struggle, communication and connection between the different conditions experienced women and LGBTQI+ people, including migrants.

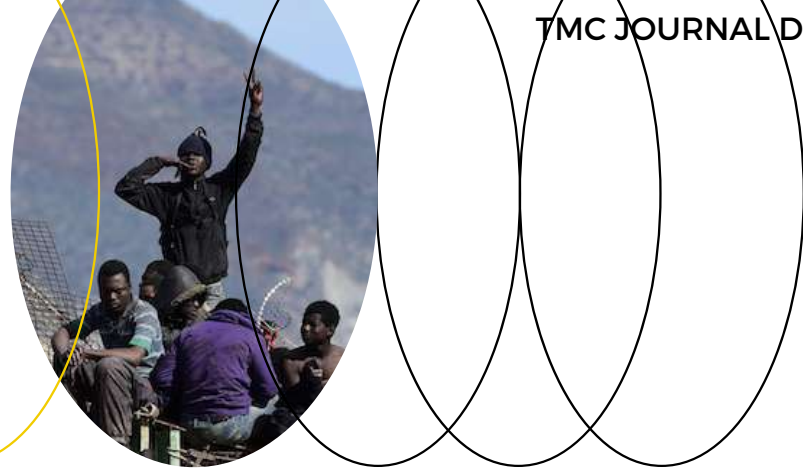
AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF MIGRANTS IN SPAIN

ZAKARYA ELBIDANI,
ACTIVIST FROM MAROC



In light of the domination of foreign capitalist companies and factories and their control over most of the economies of the third world countries, their exploitation of cheap labor and their looting of goods, poverty and unemployment, weak infrastructure, illiteracy, and the spread of treatable diseases become an essential feature of the lives of people of these countries. This is what drives the sons of these people to leave their homelands and families, searching for a better life within countries that describe themselves as “developed”, “the center of the capitalist system”: Europe, America, Russia and China.

The latest statistics show that the number of arrivals to Spanish homes in 2019 exceeded 47 million people, including women, men and children. They came by planes, boats, trucks, secretly in ships and on foot, from Venezuela, Colombia, Afghanistan, North Africa and passed through Turkey, Greece, Hungary, Croatia and Italy, as well as from Ceuta and Melilla, or by boats from Libya, from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, all the way to Spain.



“Migration” today is the dream of everyone whose country is unable to provide the simplest social services. A dream that shatters after you set foot in the dreamlands, countries that sing about human rights, equality, social justice, openness and progressivity, but indeed, there are thousands of immigrants without shelter, food or medicine. So what justice are you talking about Spain? This sums up with the laws in effect: the law allows to obtain residence documents within 3 years, and requires a promise of work for a year with 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. It requires the immigrant to have an amount of money that may reach 10 thousand dollars or more, which is almost impossible in light of the research, criminalization, and harassment to which immigrants are exposed to, as well as the manipulation of their fate within the political game.

Talking about equality in light of this discrimination and the absence of conditions for a decent life is a form of imagination. Discrimination affects the Spaniards. What about the expatriates, despite their multiple skills, living double alienation, the daily fear of displacement and arrests by the authorities, hatred, racism, and hateful acts that reach the beating, as happened to the young man Younis in Murcia?

The administration of Spain is aware of the number of expatriates who are on its lands without enjoying the right of residence. It turns a blind eye in the interest of employers and the employment of immigrants with low wages. The expatriate has no choice in front of police harassment and threat of deportation but to accept these wages that are not even enough to survive. Not to mention sexual exploitation and trafficking of immigrant women, inside brothels, in the general silence. Spain knows about the more than five million children, most of whom live in some particular centers, where the conditions for simple living such as nutrition and education are not met. That’s why the majority of them prefer to live in the streets or in abandoned houses rather than in these centers, which suffocate a child who would need care and attention, instead of racism and violence. A violence that reached the point of killing, as happened to the child Elias Al-Tahri.

The arbitrary and racist laws that Spain adopts towards migrants, fuel anger and rebellion against authority and the law. The demands of the immigrants do not exceed good health, real integration, the removal of crippling laws, and obtaining residency without conditions, legitimate demands asking for a decent life and peaceful coexistence.

This humanitarian situation experienced by the arrivals to Spain has always prompted young men and women to take to the streets and demand their legitimate right to residency without further conditions, social justice, and to live in peace.

In the past five years, Spain witnessed a wave of anger from immigrants in most cities, like Madrid, Murcia, Andalusia, Valencia, and Barcelona. This month, on December 18, the city of Madrid will witness protests against the policy of the ruling right-wing party Vox. After reaching the power, Vox did what he promised and tightened the screws. This is what prompted thousands of expatriates to take to the streets and demand their right to a decent life, to settle their situation without conditions, and to live without the burden of racism.

These protests are necessary but not sufficient to pressure the government to settle the situation of immigrants, insufficient due to their organizational weakness, low awareness, and the government's instilling fear in the expatriates.

The planet does not belong to a particular country or person, the planet belongs to everyone.



**GIANNIS FROM SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS' (ATHENS)
AND NAGEHAN USKAN, ACTIVIST FROM LESBOS**



GREECE

A SHIELD OF FORTRESS EUROPE WITH ITS OWN RACIST AGENDA

The Greek state has been on the forefront of European migration policies for quite a long time, often by silently doing the dirty work that other states, supposedly more liberal, avoid doing. Even if Greece is not currently the epicentre of the migrants' move towards Europe, at least at the extent it was during 2015-2016, the racist stance of the Greek state and the EU keeps affecting – in terrible ways – the lives of thousands of migrants, either directly or indirectly.

Theoretically, fewer people have applied for asylum in Greece over the past year compared to the previous years. Fewer people may have drowned in the Aegean Sea too. However, this has only come as a result of an even more hostile policy that has taken, threatened or worsened migrant lives even more than before.



The borders between Greece and Turkey have become a place of daily extreme violence from the Greek Coast Guard, the Greek army and police officers, or even groups of local vigilantes or hired migrants, all of whom push migrants - from the Evros region and the Aegean islands - back to Turkey. Pushbacks, which are supposedly illegal under international law, are happening literally every day in Greece and usually not just on the actual borders. Migrants are often being taken from areas that they have reached further into the mainland or the islands, and instead of being given the chance to apply for asylum, they get beaten, have their money, personal objects and mobile phones stolen, and are forcibly sent back to Turkey, by military or paramilitary forces. There have also been cases of rape by those forces, while migrants have also been killed while violently being transferred out of Greece.

Evros is a river that runs through the Balkans, partly forming the borders between Greece and Turkey in the mainland

Apart from that, the EU's borders in Greece have been much more equipped - militarily and technologically - to prevent migrants from reaching Greece: a concrete wall and 'intelligent' security systems such as thermal cameras, AI systems or sound cannons on Evros, floating fences and expanded forces of the Greek Coast Guard and Frontex in the Aegean Sea. At the same time, access to those places is totally forbidden for grassroots organisations, NGOs or even journalists just to ensure that none of the atrocities happening there can be prevented or even recorded. A key moment of that undeclared war against migrants has been the period of February-March 2020, when military and police troops from Greece, Frontex and other European states moved to Evros to combat unarmed, oppressed people that wanted to reach the EU after Erdogan temporarily decided to let them freely leave Turkey. A moment similar to the recent one on the Belarus-Poland borders took place, leading to at least three killings (two of them from Greek-gun bullets). Since then, pushbacks, obscured violence and human rights violations have been the main border policy in Greece. As a result, the deadly situation on the Belarus-Poland borders is interlinked with the hostile conditions against migrants in Greece, since the path towards Europe through Greece has become more difficult than ever.

However, the hostile environment for migrants in Greece cannot only be seen on its borders. The anti-migration EU policies, the clearly racist Greek government of ND (that has built upon the dishonest, also racist policy of Syriza), and their agreements along with Turkey on migration, have been making an increasingly unbearable situation. Many people have been waiting for an asylum appointment or its outcome for years, thousands have had their asylum rejected even if their life was in absolute threat in their home country. No legal advice is granted, except if someone can pay a lot of money to a lawyer individually (and also not fall for a scam one). Even worse, the many that have not had any asylum appointment yet, recently have set a different way of making the interview, all about Turkey and the possibility of getting deported there, as a result of the recent government's decision to officially consider Turkey as a 'safe country' for migrants of most countries.

At the same time, a new camp system is being built in the country, even more closed and controlled than before. Prison-like camps are being built in remote areas on the Aegean islands (already in use on Samos, Kos and Leros, soon ready on Lesbos and Chios) with the financial contribution of the EU, while the camps on the mainland are also getting closed with fences all around them, a project also funded by EU and implemented by the Greek state and IOM as well.

Migrants that live in the camps are getting more and more isolated, not able to access social services, not able to be easily seen from the local society. At the same time, the Greek government has recently taken over - from UNHCR - migrants' financial support (for those eligible for it anyway, which is far from their majority) and has left them since then (for more than 2 months) without any support for their absolute basic needs. As for education, only few children from the camps receive some kind of it, while even fewer go to the public schools as the rest of the children do.

Even more importantly, migrants are almost excluded from healthcare, while covid-19 has mostly been an excuse for state punishment towards them rather than any reason to provide care. Lack of doctors in the camps, neglect or huge delays for ambulances to come in case of emergencies (that has often led to deaths), no support to get vital medicine, no medical registration at all for many in order to 'deserve' treatment, are all a reality. Moreover, we can see long camp lockdowns when people had no right to go out, big fines for covid-19 measure violations (since the Greek police targets migrants more than anyone - both near the camps and in the cities), huge delays to give them the chance to get vaccinated which means further exclusions from many rights.

Regarding access of migrants to work, that has been a debate for a long time since undocumented, badly-paid or non-paid work under harsh conditions and racist treatment, has been the case for many since a long time. This has gotten even worse in the last few years, while also the repressive state response to the pandemic which has been mostly based on lockdowns, curfews and more police presence in the streets, has caused extra difficulties for migrants to keep their job or find a new one. Finally, the difficulty to find a job is also connected, along with other reasons, with the inability of many migrants, single mothers especially, to rent a place to live, with evictions - often on the pretext of IOM or NGO 'integration programs' that "just end"- being more and more frequent in Athens and other places.

Overall, the phrase 'human rights', often used by state leaders, UN and NGOs as something that should be taken for granted, has completely lost any sense for migrants in Greece. This situation has also led most to be having mental problems, many of them severe ones. A way to escape this awful situation has been for some to try and follow the Balkan route towards other European countries in order to ask for asylum there. Which proves that the anti-migration policy of Greece is interlinked to the awful conditions that many have experienced in Balkan forests or makeshift camps - such as the inhuman conditions on the Bosnia-Croatia borders lately.



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From Moria to Victoria, we break down the borders that keep us apart

Although all the above presents a totally hopeless situation, we need to refer to the many struggles - individual and collective- of migrants, often along with solidarity groups, that have been taking place in various forms all over the country. Through an actual movement by demonstrating in or out of the camps, by finding ways to evade controls, blocking evictions, building communities inside the camps and the cities, creating networks of communication and shared information, with hunger strikes and other ways, migrants have been daily fighting for their rights. A recent example has been the struggle in the Ritsona camp - one of the three main camps, along with Malakasa and Elaionas, that are close to Athens and that we often visit as a political group - that led to a few of their requests being accepted.

As solidarians, in this continuous war waged by the state and the bosses, we choose the side of the migrants and the oppressed locals. We want to establish new, more equal, freer forms of coexistence, collaboration and living-together. We think that communities of all the oppressed, based on their common needs, will be the ones to fight this wretched system, responsible for wars, poverty, racism, gender oppression, and will create a society open to all of us, irrespective of race, nationality, gender, religion and sexual orientation. At the same time, a transnational coordination between the various social and political movements around migration that exist globally, is now needed more than ever. Until all borders and fences which separate us are broken down, class solidarity is our weapon!

Moria, located in Lesvos, used to be the biggest refugee camp of Greece, until it was burnt in September 2020

Victoria is a square in central Athens that has been a place of meeting or living for many migrants



ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE

EU FORTRESS

NIDZARA AHMETASEVIC, ACTIVIST FROM BOSNIA

**EQUALITY, HOPE
AND LOT OF PAIN**

When in winter 2017/2018 migrants and refugees started coming to Bosnia and Herzegovina in more significant numbers, the government showed no interest. Even though several big groups entered the country in November 2017, the authorities did not find it important, and they did not inform the public that over 100 people were placed in an asylum centre close to Sarajevo, the capital, while several hundreds were staying in different parts of the country, outside or in mosques or churches, or private accommodation.

The very first information that came out was in February 2018, and it was hate speech. The centre Delijaš had been built with help of the EU several years ago (2004), and placed in a remote area, with no access to infrastructure, no bus, no shops, no internet or phone signal. The only thing the head of the state Office for Foreigners had to tell the public when they finally decided to talk about the presence of migrants was related to the fight, which occurred in this center where over 100 people were practically detained. The state official described them as “illegal migrants”, “criminals” and “drug addicts”.



The rhetoric remained the same almost three years later when almost 90.000 people entered the country, and over 3.300 applied for asylum (less than 10 were granted refugee status).

In the meantime, the people staying in the asylum centre left and wandered in the streets of Sarajevo, hoping to find some help. And they did. Not from any organisation, being NGO or international organisations dealing with migrants, but from the local people. All over the country, people mobilised to show solidarity. Self-organised groups were active in Sarajevo, Biha, Velika Kladusša, Trebinje, Foča, and groups and individuals coming from other cities supported them. People opened their homes accommodating mostly families while providing clothes, shoes and food, first aid for thousands of those who stayed outside in parks, forests, under the bridges, train stations, etc. People were everywhere. Unlike the EU that was determined to stop a new route opened in the Balkans, the government remained uninterested.

**OVER 3.300 APPLIED FOR
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STATUS.**



The EU decided that, instead of the government, their main partner in “managing migrations” through Bosnia would be the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM), which became the decision-maker with access to millions of donor money. The first tasks were to create accommodation centers and to do everything that was possible to control self-organised groups, keeping them away from migrants.

In Velika Kladuša and villages around, the area closest to the EU border with Croatia, local people witnessed “migration management” from the very start. In 2018, they met the first migrants who were pushed back from the EU border.

First, they heard their cries in the night. Then, beaten people started coming and knocking on their door. Villagers offered them some comfort, a place to sleep, some food, and first assistance. And they kept doing that for over 3 years now. Most of them rejected any kind of formal organisation, but rather acted as small self-organised groups, collecting help among their allies. For people on the move this approach and the hospitality signified some kind of safety. Often they show more trust in locals than anybody else, compared to big international organisations or groups of volunteers who are coming to Bosnia from all over the world since 2018. These volunteer groups usually do not cooperate with locals, or if they do, it is very limited and strictly controlled. They operate as independent groups, and many local solidarians remain skeptical about their way of work or understanding the situation.

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Like in 2018, even this winter, 2021/2022, many migrants and refugees in Bosnia will spend the night outside the official accommodation that the IOM runs. When asked why, most of them will answer, “to have more freedom”. Existing camps impose restrictions on basic freedoms, including movement, and are often very violent surrounding.

Nevertheless, in most cases, these acts of solidarity are not accompanied by strong political actions. Locals will stay alongside refugees and migrants if they protest, and will publicly denounce all the attempts to put pressure by the police or the IOM, but no protests or any similar action ever took place. They never tried to organize, but they cooperate across the country. One of the reasons for this is that activism in Bosnia, in post-war years, was pushed out by the international donors who imposed strictly controlled NGOisation of the civil society. While in the years immediately after the war (from 1996 until 2010) significant donor money was put into human rights organisations, over the last decade this money is lost and directed toward the organisations working in the field of the EU accession or security-related issues, or LGBT rights.

Everything else was put aside, and this led to the situation in which Bosnia has no human rights organisations or free legal aid. Having no such kind of support from the NGO side, the self-organised groups often do not engage in any political type of actions, being aware that consequences could be harsh, and that there is nobody to provide assistance.

Since many people from Bosnia were, are or will soon be migrants - leaving the country due to very difficult living conditions (this year over 85.000 people left Bosnia) - there is a strong bond between people on the move who are transiting through Bosnia and locals. And this connection may in the future bring some new type of organising and acting together. For now, they stand equal, opposing the concept of closed borders, hoping for a change to come.

THIS CONNECTION MAY IN
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HDP AND HDK MIGRATION AND REFUGEES COMMISSION ASSEMBLY

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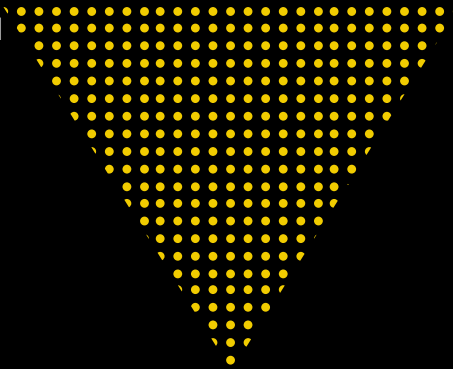
THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

The Syrian civil war has been ongoing with different actors since 2011. This war has increased the number of displaced people in the world, particularly almost 5.6 million Syrians have been displaced throughout the conflict. Because of the breakdown of the security and humanitarian circumstances in Syria, a large number of Syrians have migrated to different countries to find a safer place. Turkey is one of the prominent countries that have been affected the most by the Syrian refugee crisis. Turkey's being a gateway to Europe and its open-door policy led to serious immigration to Turkey.

Historically, Turkey has become the last station for transit to EU countries. This situation caused the border securities of neighboring countries to take precautions. The most important result of the increase and expansion of border 'security' is that refugees take risks for their lives each time. However, border crossing itself increasingly requires an international network, and border crossing turns into a "service" that sells for a higher price every day. Therefore, this flow of migrants from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and African countries, or many other places, still affects Turkey in every sense. For example, Turkey is one of the countries where the most violations of human rights are experienced for migrants. The attacks of the European Union border police on migrants who want to enter the borders of the European Union, the fact that migrants forced to work in conditions that do not meet human dignity in Turkey and that they are forced to return to the country where life-threatening dangers continue can be cited as examples.

The refugee policies of the states have been not determined on scientific and humanitarian grounds, but to the national interests of the country, and the personal profits of the bourgeoisie. In fact, the basic issue in place is not refugees in themselves, instead, it is the destructive war policies that have been adopted by the receiving countries. In this way, the main essence of nation-states is to maximize their own profit rate and to protect their national interests.

Refugees are seen as cheap and spare labor by the bourgeoisie. In fact, advocating the exploitation of refugee labor means indirectly pushing forward the exploitation of one own's people. This is actually a crime against humanity. Therefore, nation-states and the capital being subject of war policies are one of the fundamental reasons for the current refugee problem. After the Civil War in Syria, the refugee problem entered the agenda of European States and made them led to take some strict precautions. In this way, Europe has developed a method called the "EU-Turkey Deal", which is an unwritten and unofficial agreement between two parties measure as keeping refugees away from their countries by providing money flow to Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey has been using refugees as leverage to create a means of pressure in domestic politics and greed for profit for a long time. Turkey officials have constantly said that "we will open the doors", revealing that refugees are nothing more than a trump card for a policy to counter the decisions taken by the European Parliament against Turkey. Likewise, the policy of "opening the gates" of the Turkish government, proclaimed as a threat, in the winter of 2020 has led to the accumulation of thousands of refugees on the Greek border of Turkey. As a result, refugees had been exposed to serious human rights violations by Greece and Turkey.



Currently, there have been more than six million refugees and migrants in Turkey. The refugees and migrants' population have still faced plenty of issues in their access to basic rights and basic needs such as education, health, housing, nutrition, protection from violence and discrimination, having sufficient income to live humanely, and access to justice reveal the serious risk of Human Rights. For instance, almost half of the refugees consist of women. Migrant women who had to leave their place of residence as a result of war, violence, and poverty face the deepening of psychological traumas, increasing discrimination and violence against them wherever they go. In this sense, multilingual counselling centers should be established, where refugee women can apply for what they need, and social services should be arranged in line with the needs of refugee women and children. According to the laws and Turkey's reservations in international agreements, refugees migrating from Syria to Turkey cannot have the right to international protection in Turkey. Turkey gives to refugees who came from Afghanistan, Iran, and other Arabic countries a "temporary protection" permit, which defines a status that we can call the grey area outside the international standards.

According to the Human Rights Association of Turkey, even if refugees receive legal status, they are reluctant to apply to the judicial authorities against the injustices they experience, and they even hesitate to claim rights for fear of being deported. For instance, LGBTI refugees fall under the category of "vulnerable groups", according to the United Nations. However, criminal complaints made by LGBTI people to the police about the violence they see on the street are mostly not taken into consideration at the police station in Turkey and therefore these people withdraw their complaints. They face the threat of deportation from the authority, although they face many challenging violations such as non-fulfillment of health demands and long-term detentions. Furthermore, children are the most affected by the difficulties faced by refugees in Turkey. They are not well fed, they grow up in an environment of social isolation. They cannot receive appropriate treatment when they get sick, they are forced to work informally, they are sexually abused. Protection mechanisms should be provided. For these many reasons, most of these negativities they experience are not recorded and remain hidden.

Turkey's war policy in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan and Northern Syria, which is known as Rojava, leads to an unwanted refugee crisis in the world. As a result of the inhuman policies, people living in these regions try to flee for a better life in Europe, leading to unexpected tragic conditions. In this way, displaced people from these regions face hunger and violence on the Polish-Belarusian border. Trapped on the Belarus-Polish border since July 2021, refugees face hunger and cold with the onset of the winter months. It has already been reflected in the media that 10 immigrants have died of cold and starvation. Within the framework of the EU-Turkey Deal, FRONTEX and armed forces along the borders of the European Union and Turkey, as well as along the Aegean Sea, carry out activities against human rights to prevent the flow of migration. As an example of these human rights violations, we show the deliberate sunk and push back of immigrants' boats by European border forces in the Aegean Sea and facing life-threatening of hundreds of immigrants as a result.

In order to put an end to the human tragedies in the Aegean Sea and Belarus, European states and Turkey must stop using refugees as a political tool. We strongly state that conflict resolutions should be started in regions that have been turned into places of armed conflict and civil war, especially in the Middle East, and that peaceful policy should be followed to stabilize these regions and to put an end to the conditions that cause people to leave their countries. We call the EU States, Turkey, and the relevant countries to act with the human rights of refugees and demand an immediate end to this tragedy. As we know, the wall built between Rojava and Turkey today rises on the America-Mexico border. Migrants fleeing the war on the border Greece and Poland are being beaten with police batons. Refugees will continue to exist as long as the war policies that created refugees do not disappear. The problem can only be solved by standing against these war policies.



The Transnational Migrants Coordination involves migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, collectives and groups from France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Slovenia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Morocco and Lebanon. The time has come to take back migrants' lives!



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