

IN DEPTH

## Citizen mobilisations across Europe

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The migration crisis within the European Union (EU) and its borders is being managed under the umbrella of the European Agenda on Migration<sup>1</sup>. Different civil society organisations share complaints on the vision of both the Agenda and the way the crisis is handled: the emphasis on security, particularly on the fight against irregular migration and the reinforcement of the external borders, does not solve the crisis nor is it compatible with a human rights approach. On the contrary, it clearly demonstrates the contradiction between the “Europe of rights” and “Fortress Europe”.

Issues such as the recognition of these contradictions at the level of the EU and its member states, the lack of coherence between speeches and the existing policies or the perception that, even though they could be avoided, deaths in the Mediterranean have been increasing exponentially over the last years<sup>2</sup>, have generated many expressions of protest against the European administration. They have triggered citizen mobilisations and solidarity towards the migrants and refugees who suffer the consequences of the European border regime.

In this article, we want to mention some of these expressions of solidarity. We do not pretend to be exhaustive, since there is a large number of networks and actions, all very different in terms of age, continuity, objectives and motivations, methods used or dimension (local, national, transnational...). We find it important to start by pointing out that migrants and refugees are the people who put their bodies and lives at risk to defend the freedom of movement and fight for their rights. They are the first ones to organise themselves and put solidarity into practice, be it at the place of origin, during

transit, or at destination, thereby demonstrating that they are active agents and entrepreneurs, and not mere objects or numbers.

**“ The claims of many organisations range from more humanitarian approaches to more political ones, such as the demand to stop the war on migrants or the claim for safe and legal routes ”**

It is also necessary to say that support is not something new, nor exclusive property of the European civil society: [Afrique Europe Interact](#), [Boats for People](#), [Borderline Europe](#), [Caminando Fronteras](#) <sup>3</sup>, [No Borders Morocco](#), [Voix des migrants](#), [Watch The Med](#) or [Welcome to Europe](#) are platforms and campaigns where activists from different backgrounds have been joining over the last years to support migrants in transit, claim their rights and protest against the European border regime. Networking is an important part of their scope, each one within its own specific area. For example, the organisation Caminando Fronteras saw the light in 2002 in Morocco to give support to sub-Saharan immigrants in transit on their way to Europe; Welcome to Europe provides contacts and advice to refugees and migrants on their journey to and through different European countries; and Watch The Med is an online mapping platform for the tracking of deaths and migrants' rights violations on the EU sea borders.

It's interesting to see how support during the crossing of the sea is approached from different perspectives. For example, “[Watch The Med AlarmPhone](#)” is a telephone alarm line, created since the great shipwrecks in October 2013 <sup>4</sup>, self-managed by civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean. It works nonstop to give support to the rescue of refugees and migrants in peril at sea.

Within the light of the clearly inadequate resources allocated by the EU to the rescue of persons trying to cross the Mediterranean, other organizations have started sea rescue operations with their own boats: [Médecins Sans Frontières](#), [ProActiva Open Arms](#) <sup>5</sup>, [Save the Children](#), [Sea Watch](#) or [Sos Méditerranée](#) are some examples. Their claims towards

Europe are diverse and range from more humanitarian approaches, focussing on the need to organise large-scale search and rescue missions, to more political ones, such as the demand to stop the war on migrants or the claim for safe and legal routes.

**“ We see numerous protest campaigns and actions against the retention, detention and the wait for deportation of migrants and refugees in internment camps or centres ”**

This request for safe and legal routes, as an alternative for the current European border regime, is strongly supported by a variety of different groups, such as the European platforms Volonteurope<sup>6</sup> or the platform of the second-level NGO CONCORD<sup>7</sup>, and organisations like Amnesty International<sup>8</sup>. In the Catalan area, the network Stop Mare Mortum also supports this alternative. As its statement indicates, it calls for measures such as the extension of the refugee concept, which should include all persons in a situation of economic and social vulnerability. It also demands to finish with the outsourcing of border security to third countries and to put an end to arms trade. It calls as well for the permanent closure of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, FRONTEX.

Another criticism with regards to the border regime has to do with the time of arrival, also wrongly known as “hosting”. We see numerous protest campaigns and actions against the retention, detention and the wait for deportation of migrants and refugees in internment camps or centres. The network of African, European, Maghreb and Middle-Eastern organisations Migreurop, for example, together with the campaign Close the camps, takes a worldwide approach in the mapping of isolation camps for foreigners in Europe. They give visibility to the conditions of detention and the abuses and violations of the detainee’s rights committed in these centres and they request their permanent closure. In the same line, in Catalonia, the campaign Tanquem els CIE (Close the CIE) which is, together with SOS Racisme<sup>9</sup> and Migra Studium<sup>10</sup>, part of Tancarem el CIE (We’ll close the CIE) has a networking relationship with the campaign CIEs NO.

Regarding the situation of retention on the Greek islands and peninsula, numerous initiatives have been started in a wide range of areas. For example, some months ago, Payasos en Rebeldía (Clowns in Rebellion) denounced the situation in Idomeni camp with their campaign #RisascontraMuros (Laughs against Walls). Stop Mare Mortum, from its side, collaborates with a group of lawyers to offer legal assistance to people who are detained or blocked in Greece and are unable to request asylum or to enter in the resettlement processes proposed in the EU-Turkey agreement. Meanwhile, over a period of several months, the Greek NGO ActionAid Hellas has done research on the so-called “refugee camps” of Lesbos, Schisto and Skaramaga, demonstrating how the EU and Greece fail to meet their obligations with regard to the protection and promotion of human and refugees’ rights for the people arriving in Greece <sup>11</sup>.

**“ When facing a transforming world, the readiness of the citizens to get to know each other, obtain deeper knowledge of the causes, share experiences and find solutions reaches much further than inactive politics ”**

Finally, we need to remember that actions of self-organisation, solidarity and mobilisation are not limited to people on the move: they take place every day in our cities, organised by many different collectives, organisations and networks. In this sense, we want to highlight the work of groups supporting persons in situations of extreme vulnerability, such as the numerous asylum seekers who live in a legal limbo for years, waiting for the resolution of their request by the Spanish State; persons finding themselves in an irregular administrative situation <sup>12</sup>, wrongly identified as economic migrants; or other persons, excluded from the system, suffering in a terrible way from the impact of the migration policy of the EU and its member states.

Many more initiatives remain to receive an in-depth presentation, but we don’t want to finish this article without specifically mentioning some experiences coming from the

world of music, such as the project Refugees for Refugees: *La musique de l'exil*<sup>13</sup>, from the Belgian association Muziekpublique, and from the audio-visual world, such as the International Film Festival CineMigrante in Barcelona or the Mostra de Cinema Àrab i del Mediterrani (Arab and Mediterranean Film Festival) – this year focussing on the migration axis – seeking to create spaces of intercultural dialogue, break down stereotypes and promote human rights.

Film, music, gatherings, dialogues and solidarity actions show that the determination of citizens to know each other, to obtain deeper knowledge of the causes, to share experiences and to find solutions reaches much further than inactive politics with an evident lack of willingness to face a transforming world where people have the capacity to raise their voices on an individual and collective level, their own voice.

1. Communication from the European Commission on the New European Agenda on Migration of 13/05/2015.

2. On 11/11/2016, the register shows an estimated record of 4,271 deadly victims in the Mediterranean in the year 2016, 773 more than in 2015.

3. At the beginning of 2016, the association Caminando Fronteras screened the documentary Tarajal, transformar el dolor en justicia (Tarajal, transforming pain into justice) on the reactions of the families of 15 persons who died on the Tarajal beach (Ceuta, Spain) on 6 February 2014. The facts that occurred in Tarajal have also been the topic of another documentary, Tarajal: Desmuntant la impunitat a la frontera sud (Tarajal, dismantling the impunity at the southern border), a co-production of Metromuster and the DESC observatory.

4. On 3 October 2013, more than 350 persons drowned near the coast of Lampedusa, Italy. Eight days later, on 11 October, there was another shipwreck near the same island where, according to the platform Watch the Med, an estimated number of 200 persons died,.

5. The action of ProActiva Open Arms and their ship Astral has been the topic of an episode of the program *Salvados*, on the Spanish channel la Sexta. For the first time, the refugee subject was screened in prime time on national television.

6. Volonteuropa reacts to the European Migration Agenda (14/05/2015).
7. CONCORD press release “Migration for Development and Human Rights” (22/03/2016).
8. Webpage of Amnesty International’s campaign Yo acojo (I welcome), where you can see the video ¿Y si fueras tú? (And if it was you?)
9. SOS Racisme is one of the members of the international network Migreurop.
10. Migra Studium is a member of the Servei Jesuïta als Migrants (Jesuit Service for Migrants), which recently published the yearly report on CIEs (Internment Centres for Foreigners) in Spain Vulnerables vulnerabilizados. Informe anual SJM sobre los Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros en España 2015 (Vulnerables vulnerabilised. Yearly SJM report on Internment Centres for Foreigners in Spain 2015).
11. Action Aid Hellas will soon translate the report: The challenges of family reunification programs and resettlement for refugees arriving in Greece (currently only available in Greek)
12. For example, the group of persons of which l’Espai de l’Immigrant (Space for the Immigrant) is composed provides, among others, free services of medical consultation, legal and administrative advice to persons in irregular administrative situations.
13. Muziekpublique has gathered around twenty refugee virtuosos, coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Tibet, who have settled in Belgium to record an album. They share one common aspect: they are all stars in their countries. Some of them have seen their situation being regularised, others still do not know whether they will be allowed to stay.

Photography: Protest in favor of “Safe passage” in Barcelona, 27th February 2016. ANONIO CRIADO

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