

We, the participants of the exchange on human rights and migration in Melilla, a Spanish enclave in the north of Africa, in January 2006, members of the Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG), non-governmental organisations and affiliated networks, have acquainted ourselves with the local situation. On both theoretical and practical levels we have explored the realities of the borders of Europe, and after this experience wish to voice these concerns and proposals.

On migration

The act of free movement, as well as the freedom to stay, are human rights*. Migrants have shaped cultures and societies in the past, and will continue doing so. Populations in motion break up monocultures and thus can increase productivity and improve life. However, forced migration leads to suffering and decline, and the root causes that force people to leave their societies must be combated.

Europe is not an impenetrable fortress. The economy of the European Union benefits greatly from easily exploitable illegalised populations, and this guarantees that the holes in the border will not be completely closed up. However, there is a lack of will to offer citizenship, security and rights to these illegalised migrant workers. Whether the borders should be opened or not is largely a theoretical question. On the forest borders of Eastern Europe, in the cold waters of the Mediterranean Sea, in containers on ships and on buses with temporary tourist visa in their hands are the people who open up Europe.

The borders of the European Union are not limited to the exterior borders, but are also present at airports, in summary controls of identity within the borders and in the electronic control systems that are being implemented throughout Europe.

On the causes of migration

When leaving their areas of origin, family, contacts and the world they know from before behind them, migrants have good reasons to leave. Responsibility for many of these reasons lies in the developed world.

Campaigning against weapons trade, especially of trade in small arms, is a possibility for acting against the wars and conflicts that force people from their homes. The European Union should implement policies to prevent conflicts abroad. Likewise, by being in solidarity with workers and labour unions everywhere, we can improve economic stability and security. The temporary global trade policy is limiting the growth and stability of local markets, and as a first step to remedy this, the European Union should stop export subsidies to agricultural products. The global restructuring of forms of production which encloses previously accessible land and resources like clean water also leaves people without the opportunity to an income and a stable life.

Development aid, especially when directed to projects assisting and educating women and children, improves the long-term possibilities in even the poorest of countries, and lessens the need to migrate. Support for democratic movements and human rights are necessary in areas of bad governance and failing states which cause insecurity.

One of the greatest causes for migration in the future will be environmental crisis, especially global climate change. In this area, the developed world has a clear ecological debt* to the rest of the world, and will have to accept the effects of carbon pollution also in the form of increased migration. However, governments in developing countries also have the responsibility to act in a sustainable and ecological way.

On the act of migration

The borders of the European Union must not be a cause of death, and should be removed step by step. Safe and humane possibilities to enter the European Union and participate in European society in all ways should be increased, not on a basis of European needs for highly educated labour or other productive factors but on a basis of the needs of migrants.

Current migration control policies separates migrants into refugees and other migrants. While the refugee status as defined in the Geneva Convention and in European migration law does offer an opportunity for some of the most exposed migrants for shelter, the current migration control structures turn away many deserving. It is important to campaign for a widening of the definitions in the Convention and the laws to include gender specific reasons for refuge. It should also be possible for internally displaced persons to seek asylum. States should uphold their legal obligations to follow the Convention. It should be possible to file applications for asylum in embassies.

Most refugees remain in countries near their homeland, and it should be the responsibility of the European Union to share the burden of the refugee influxes in these mainly developing countries. UNHCR should receive greater assistance in order to find durable solutions for the refugees in these areas.

However, we must not make a strict separation between refugees and other migrants in how legitimate their desire to enter Europe is.

The restrictions facing the migrant are similar regardless of status. Refugees as well as other migrants looking for a better life whether regular or irregular all may have problems even before approaching the border. Visa restrictions, corrupt practices*, lack of knowledge among border officials and outsourced borders in the form of camps, private guards and xenophobic practices may deter a migrant, or keep him or her trapped in a state of limbo and invisibility. This is not humane, nor an acceptable border policy.

To uphold these inhumane restrictions, the European Union is greatly increasing resources to control measures on the borders themselves. The double fences, guard booths and patrols around Melilla are only one example of such a fortified border.

In their attempts to bypass these control measures migrants show enormous initiative and inventiveness, but are still under threat of exploitation, injury and sometimes death. This human cost of the European border regime is unacceptable, and to act in solidarity with the people attempting entry is a virtue, not an act that should be punished*. Increased migration controls create business opportunities for exploiters such as organised gangs that smuggle people for a profit in unacceptable ways.

Women, children, the elderly and the disabled are especially vulnerable groups among migrants, and need special attention. Family ties should be respected as a reason for migration, and family unification policies upheld and deepened.

On reception and deportation

Detention centres and the practice of deportation are restrictions of what we consider basic human freedom and need to be stopped immediately. Regularisation should then be a direct consequence of entry into the European Union.

There is a need for spaces which provide to the basic needs of migrants at the time of their arrival. Such arrival centres should not be located at borders and airports, but where possibilities for communication with the general population exist.

The processing of asylum applications currently takes too long and refugee status should be awarded more quickly. The criteria for asylum should be the same throughout the European Union, and should ensure the upholding of human rights and refugee rights. The quota of accepted refugees should be greatly increased.

On inclusion and exclusion

Being regularised in the European Union means the rights associated with citizenship, but with limited rights to vote.

The rights for migrants must include the rights to freely move and work inside the European Union. In the process of regularisation they must be guaranteed both juridical and medical assistance and access to education without fear of exclusion or deportation. Migrants must be able to return to their country of origin without loss of refugee status.

Citizenship should be available to regularised migrants with minimal or no barriers and after only a short waiting time. The content of this citizenship, as compared with regularisation, should be limited to an addition of voting rights.

Immigrants face a risk and reality of exclusion. In addition to the already mentioned political, social and economical rights, some special measures must be implemented to enable inclusion into European society. Due to the fact that migrant women might have faced specific situations such as sexual violence or social discrimination in their countries of origin, special programs should be implemented by local and national authorities to ensure the confidence, self-esteem and motivation of migrant women.

Cultural exchange, both bilaterally between countries of origin and destination and internally between communities inside the European Union, is essential to prevent racism and xenophobia. Access to special facilities for migrants, including language and other education, special measures to improve their economical situation and an acceptance of degrees and studies accomplished in countries of origin are all among the special measures needed.

Strong welfare policies are important for alleviating fears for the future that may otherwise be channelled into racism and xenophobia, and also for creating an even situation between migrants and other populations.

Social housing should be available throughout cities to avoid ghettoization and economic segregation between populations.

In addition to these antiracist social policies, structural and institutional racism, as well as individual xenophobia in official institutions from welfare agencies to police, must be combated. The current War on Terror is an engine for xenophobia.

Participation by migrants in civil society is a positive phenomenon, and self-organisation by migrants should not be seen as a threat.

Intercultural and antiracist education must be included in the formal education structures throughout the European Union.

Mass media reporting of migrant issues should be supported to be balanced and to avoid populist reporting of individual events.

There are great economic benefits from the presence of migrant communities in the European Union, both in countries of origin and of destination. The remittances, formal and informal, from migrants in the European Union greatly outnumber the official development aid. This self-managed assistance to countries of origin should be protected, and transmittance fees for transactions regulated. Business linkages that spontaneously arise should be supported and transnational knowledge maintained, for example through enabling dual citizenship to facilitate a cross-border business presence. These transnational economic practices will probably increase stability and decrease the causes of migration.

If a migrant voluntarily wishes to return to the country of origin this should be assisted.

On action

We demand independent monitoring of the immigration process, of detention centres and of deportations to ensure the upholding of rights of migrants and a more transparent and effective migration management.

Alarmed by the fact that migrants are seen as fortune-seekers, a security threat and a burden to the host society, we encourage awareness raising of their former and current situations and motivations to promote an image of being a resource to society and as having legitimate reasons for leaving their country of origin.

The awareness raising can be done through

- common EU street action awareness campaigns
- publication that promotes a more realistic image of migrants
- taking personal action and confronting situations of everyday racism
- seminars to educate members of organizations on the rights and situations of migrants, to ensure that campaigners have a good and correct knowledge base of the migration issue
- denouncing of specific cases of xenophobia
- promotion of education on intercultural and migration issues in schools
- looking for new and alternative ways of raising awareness amongst host populations on migration and intercultural issues.

We encourage the sharing of information, best practices, and campaign and project strategies between organizations working on migration issues in the EU.

Organizations should cooperate with migrant associations and self-organised migrant groups to share perspectives, and may have to assume different ways of doing politics to integrate migrants and migrant positions into their organizations.

Some definitions and concepts:

* human rights: human rights are not limited to those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but include others as well. Human existence should not be, and has not been associated with particular territories, and migration has been a fact throughout human history. To limit these is to violate basic human rights, just like it is a breach of human rights to force someone to migrate.

* ecological debt: the developed world has increased its wealth in unsustainable ways which are now affecting the whole world, while the developing world is now being denied some of the same methods of development.

* corrupt practices: action by officials that, in following rules and regulations in an overly strict way, causes restrictions that were not intended by the original rules, for instance in the case of limiting access to refugee status.

* Solidarity with migrants in transit is not the same as trafficking. To systematically make a profit from human smuggling is an exploitative act and should be punished. However, receiving money to cover costs of ethically motivated human smuggling should not.