

# ABOLISH FRONTEX

## End the EU border regime

**Frontex is the European Union's border agency and is a key actor in enforcing the EU's border regime. It is responsible for systemic human rights violations through its operations; involvement in deportations; cooperation with third countries, and role in strengthening EU borders**

**The EU's border policies are inherently racist and reinforce colonial and capitalist power structures. It's time to abolish Frontex and the system it represents.**

The militarised policies of Fortress Europe have killed over 40,555 people since 1993. Drowned in the Mediterranean; shot at borders; died by suicide at detention centers, tortured and killed after being deported - the EU has blood on its hands.

### WHAT IS FRONTEX?

What started as a small agency in Poland, has become one of the EU's biggest. Its budget has grown by over 7 560% since 2005, with €5.6 billion being reserved for the agency from 2021-2027. Frontex has been recruiting an army of border guards who can own and use handguns, and aims to have 10,000 guards by 2027.

The agency can now buy its own equipment - such as ships, helicopters and drones - benefitting the arms, security and surveillance companies that have been so influential in shaping the EU's border and defence policies through lobbying.

Frontex also acts as the EU's 'return agency', coordinating joint deportation flights from EU countries, initiating deportations, assisting with so-called 'voluntary' returns and putting pressure on non-EU countries to readmit deported refugees.

The EU defends Frontex as necessary in dealing with the 'threat' of migration. But depicting people who move as a security threat only feeds the rise of nationalism, racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

**#AbolishFrontex honours and is grounded in respect for all the work that has come before and continues to be done at local, national and international levels in the struggle against borders, deportation, detention and structural racism.**

# WHAT WE'RE CALLING FOR

- Abolish Frontex
- Regularise migrants
- Stop all deportations
- End detention
- Stop the militarisation of borders  
(and the military industrial complex)
- Stop the surveillance of people on the move
- Empower solidarity
- Stop the EU's role in forcing people to move
- Freedom of movement for all
- End the EU border regime

The aim of #AbolishFrontex is not to reform or improve Frontex, or to replace it with more of the same. But rather to target the policies and system that keeps Frontex in place. We are working towards the dismantling of the border-industrial complex, and the building of a society where people are free to move and live.

# ABOLISH FRONTEX

- End all Frontex operations
- Suspend all Frontex operations and remove all Frontex presence currently deployed
- Stop the push-backs and the pull-backs
- EU member states refuse to participate in Frontex missions - logistically (contribution of equipment and assets) and personnel-wise
- EU member states stop requesting Frontex support for border operations and deportations
- Cut Frontex' budget and reject any proposed expansion
- Disband the Frontex standing corps
- Stop hiring new Frontex staff
- Redirect spending on border protection towards services and resources for migrants, social services, welfare, health, education and transitioning towards a low-carbon economy
- NGOs: leave Frontex' Consultative Forum

Frontex personifies the EU's repressive migration and border policies. In the last few years its powers, budgets and number of employees have rapidly increased. It can now give binding advice to EU member states to strengthen border security efforts and can even intervene in their border security affairs.

While part of Frontex' new mandate is the building of its own standing border guards corps and equipment pool, it nevertheless depends on EU member states making personnel and equipment available to run its operations. Member states also usually request Frontex assistance, in the form of operations or otherwise.

## NGOS LEGITIMISING FRONTEX

Frontex has a "Consultative Forum", which "brings together key European institutions, international and civil society organisations to advise the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in Fundamental rights matters." Instead of having a serious role in addressing Frontex' role in human rights violations, this forum acts as a tool to legitimise the existence of Frontex and these violations by providing the agency with the appearance of approval and in-house control mechanisms.

## REGULARISE MIGRANTS

- Make public housing, welfare, education, health care, legal aid, employment, right to residence and a clean environment accessible to everyone, regardless of immigration status
- Invest in resources, and support services for migrant communities
- Repurpose empty buildings, houses, apartments, and hotels to house people experiencing homelessness
- Reverse the wave of privatisation and dismantling of public services that has come with neoliberalism and austerity politics
- Re-allocate state and EU funding towards healthcare, education, childcare, community centres and services, trauma and mental health support, and services for survivors of abuse and violence

We want a society where all have the right to livelihood and that doesn't privilege people based on their "citizenship" status or class. It is fundamentally racist and unjust to deny people legal standing and the right livelihood.

There is a precedent for regularising migrants which shows that governments are making a choice by refusing to do so. Between 1996-2008, 24 of the 27 European states regularised migrants. But this regularisation is often driven by economic, trade or political motives and the fact that the European economy is dependent on precarious, unregulated and migrant labour. Europe's border policies cannot be separated from its neoliberal project and the years of austerity politics and privatisation.

Everyone should have access to public housing, welfare, education, healthcare, legal aid, employment and a clean environment. No one is illegal.

## THE EU'S WAR ON MIGRANTS

The EU is waging a war against migrants and this is at the heart of its foreign policy. Migration is framed as a security threat, and the EU's response is to militarise border security, both at the EU's external borders and in third countries.

This militarisation includes:

- sending armed forces to police borders;
- erecting security fences and installing surveillance and detection technology;
- increasing the use of autonomous systems (drones);
- increasing border police;
- (para)military Frontex operations in the Mediterranean and the Balkans
- Training and providing equipment to (para)military border guards in third countries.

# STOP ALL DEPORTATIONS

- Stop and ban all deportations
- Stop deportation cooperation with countries outside the EU: cancel working arrangements and all other readmission agreements of Frontex, the EU and its member states. Stop 'presenting' migrants at embassies to get travel documents and stop inviting representatives of other countries to come and identify people on the move
- Stop the forced returns. With the new European pact on migration, countries can 'buy themselves out' of accepting migrants through forced returns
- Family reunification for everyone separated by detention and deportation
- End all "voluntary return schemes" which have been used for forced deportations under a different name - either through intimidation, threat of arrest or detention, and/or bribing people with the (often not fulfilled) promise of support for building a life in the country of origin. Find other ways to support people who really want to return voluntarily to their country of origin

All EU member states deport migrants that are not allowed to stay in the country, usually by putting a few people at a time on regular flights or through specific charter deportation flights. This is often preceded by a period of detention (see "**End detention**"). Deporting means returning people to situations they have fled from - which have usually involved war, repression, human rights violations, violence, hunger or poverty among other reasons. There have been many cases of deported people then being detained, tortured and murdered.

Frontex plays an increasingly important role in deportations from EU countries by:

- assisting EU member states in national or joint (from several countries) deportation flights;
- initiating deportations - including chartering aircraft, for which private aircraft providers are contracted;
- assisting with so-called 'voluntary returns'.

Frontex also supports EU countries' return-related activities including assisting with information exchange and deploying pools of 'return experts' to member states. A first 'Standing Corps Return Team' was deployed to Rome Fiumicino Airport in January 2021.

Countries are only able to deport people if the country they are being deported to admits them. For this, the EU and/or its member states have concluded "Readmission Agreements" with third countries. Frontex has its own working arrangements with several countries outside the EU, including agreements on returns. In certain cases those include the possibility of 'collecting return operations', for which the non-EU country of destination provides aircraft and escorting officers. These arrangements have led to many deportations to conflict regions and human rights-violating regimes, where people have been arrested, detained, tortured and murdered upon return.

People often need to get valid travel documents of their country of origin (or of another state willing to take them in), before a deportation is possible. EU countries have invited representatives of third countries, such as security forces of Sudan, to identify people as their nationals, to this end. This has endangered people even more, especially those who are political opponents of authoritarian regimes, people discriminated against, and people in other vulnerable positions, as they are essentially handed over to a regime that is bound to arrest and repress them.

## "VOLUNTARY RETURN": DEPORTATION UNDER ANOTHER NAME

The concept of "voluntary return" has been developed as opposed to forced returns (deportations). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has been pushing this concept and is involved in many projects framed as such, including ones funded by the EU and/or member states. The degree of 'voluntariness' can very often be doubted. Authorities - sometimes supported by NGOs/migrant assistance organisations - push people on the move to accept 'voluntary returns' as their only option by presenting detention and deportation as the alternative and/or bribing people with the (often not fulfilled) promise of support for building a life in the country of origin. Of course, people who do want to return to their country of origin might need and should be given support to do so, but this has to be taken out of the context of the current so-called "voluntary return" schemes.

# END DETENTION

- Close existing detention centres
- Release all detained migrants
- Stop the construction of new detention centres
- Stop local and national governments from entering into new contracts with private detention centres and prison services
- Close the camps and other facilities detaining people on the move
- Stop the collaboration between police and immigration authorities
- Stop EU support for and requirements regarding migrant detention in third countries
- Let people deported to their country of origin, or any other country within our outside the EU, return and rejoin their families and communities
- End detention by any other name (for example semi-detention in Netherlands, 'open centres' in Belgium)
- End existing alternatives to detention and other forms of controlling movement (for example the obligation to register each night; "family houses" in Belgium and the Netherlands)
- Stop detention on ships, including keeping people on the move on ships for handling asylum applications, and cancel plans for offshore detention

Detention is a part of anti-immigration policies in all EU member states. According to the Global Detention Project there are over 200 places for migrant detention in the EU. No person should be detained.

Apart from the fact that no-one should be detained, detention centres are often rife with abuse and a wide range of problems including overcrowding, prolonged detention, abusive behaviour from guards, lack of access to medical and legal assistance and more.

Frontex isn't directly involved in migrant detention, but detention is part of the system Frontex plays a crucial role in, and so is a consequence of or prerequisite for some of its functions. For example, people on the move who are intercepted by Frontex operations often end up in detention. And deportations - for which Frontex plays an increasing coordinating role at the EU-level - are usually preceded by a period of detention.

The EU and individual member states also fund and otherwise support migrant detention in non-EU countries as part of their border externalisation efforts. This includes funding for the construction of detention centers, training and consultancy services.

# STOP THE SURVEILLANCE OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

- Stop spying on migrants. Stop collecting and sharing biometric and other data
- Abolish the migration databases, delete all collected data and cancel the project to make them interoperable
- Stop the use of equipment to surveil migrants and gather data. Prohibit the introduction of new technologies
- End all contracts with private companies in the field of surveillance, collecting and sharing data. Stop Frontex participation in European Association for Biometrics (EAB) and other lobby networks
- Abolish the eu-Lisa agency
- Abolish the EUROSUR network
- Stop air surveillance unless for the sole purpose of rescue
- Stop cooperation with third countries on collecting and sharing data about migrants or for migration control reasons
- Discharge the Frontex-Europol liaison officers
- Abolish all EU member states' border security and border police authorities

The European Union strives to gather as much data as (legally) possible from (possible) migrants, before, at, and after crossing the EU's external borders. For this it has set up several (biometric) databases, including Eurodac, VIS (Visa Information System), SIS II (Schengen Information System), EES (Entry/Exit Scheme) and ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System), on which it has spent over €1 billion up to 2020. The EU is currently working on making these databases interoperable, to come to a European search portal and a shared biometric matching service.

These systems and databases are aimed at controlling, monitoring and surveilling people's movements. They are fundamental parts of border and migration management policies, facilitating the identifying, stopping and expulsion of migrants. The same technologies are also used for example to allow registered 'legal' travellers to pass border controls more quickly. As such they contribute to a system of **border apartheid**, where some can easily pass while others are immediately picked out for stringent controls following generalised threat assessments based on biometrics and features, not in the least skin color.

These systems are also a forerunner of the use of security technology to control society at large, with migrants essentially functioning as guinea pigs for measures later to be introduced on a wider scale. The increasing use of cameras, ever more refined biometrics registration, motion trackers, emotion recognition software and other artificial intelligence (AI) applications so on builds a fine-meshed system of control, risk identification and discipline.

EUROSUR, the EU border surveillance 'system of systems', provides an exchange of real time images and data between EU member states through a network of National Coordination Centers, coordinated by Frontex, to create a 'situational picture' of the EU external borders and beyond, with the aim of intercepting migrants. Increasingly, countries neighbouring the EU (in particular those in North Africa) are asked to also provide information to EURO SUR.



Frontex runs the EUROSUR network and the ETIAS Central Unit. Most other databases are run by a separate EU agency, eu-LISA (European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice), with which Frontex closely cooperates. They have awarded large contracts to biometrics companies, including Sopra Steria, Accenture and Idemia. Most EUROSUR contracts have gone to GMV. The lobby organisation European Association for Biometrics (EAB) brings together representatives from industry, governments and academia. Several high-ranking Frontex officers are members of its board and its Advisory Council.

## STOP THE MILITARISATION OF BORDERS

- Stop framing security as meaning the militarisation of society and stop framing migration as a security threat. Stop the use of militaristic language, such as 'combatting' irregular migration
- Stop the militarisation of borders: no deployment of military personnel and equipment for border security and control
- Stop the use of autonomous systems, such as drones, for border security
- Stop funding the militarisation of borders and the military-industrial complex: abolish the Integrated Border Management Fund, the European Defence Fund and funding for military and security research and development. Make funding for border security and control under other EU instruments impossible
- Reject any proposed expansion to the EU 'security' and 'defense' budgets
- Stop the externalisation of EU borders. End agreements with, and funding for, third countries for border security and control. Stop pressure on third countries to strengthen border security and to stop migration. End 'migration dialogues' with third countries
- End Frontex operations in third countries and cooperation with third countries. Cancel all agreements with third countries, including intelligence and risk analysis networks. Abolish Frontex liaison officers and other Frontex presence in third countries
- End corporate influence over decision-making (in the EU and at the national-level) through lobbying. End industry's privileged access to decision-making and to Frontex. No more Frontex meetings with industry. Cancel Frontex' budget for buying/leasing equipment. Stop revolving doors between industry and decision-makers
- Stop buying from and cooperating with arms and security companies, including those that promote their goods and services as "battlefield tested"
- End Frontex Research and Innovation programmes and cooperation with companies, universities and research institutions to develop new border security and control capacities

## WHO PROFITS FROM FORTRESS EUROPE?

As well as racist ideas about the “European way of life” and colonial illusions of grandeur in deciding who ‘deserves’ to live in Europe, the EU’s militarisation of borders has been heavily influenced by the military and security industry. Large arms and technology companies such as Airbus, Thales, Leonardo and Indra, as well as lobby organisations such as the European Organisation for Security (EOS), have shaped this discourse on migration as a threat and the policies to respond to it. They have done this through countless meetings with EU officials, participation in official EU advisory bodies, round tables with participation of EU commissioners and publishing lobby papers for example.

As well as increasing the EU’s military spending, for example with the creation of the European Defence Fund - benefiting the military-industrial complex (no coincidence given that the idea of the Fund was largely based on recommendations from an advisory group in which arms company and military research institutions played a leading role) - the EU has been funding border security purchases by EU member states and by third countries - mainly in Africa. And again, the military and security industry is the biggest beneficiary of this spending on border security - selling everything from ships and helicopters and ships, to surveillance and (biometric) identification technology.

Frontex is a key actor in the militarisation of the EU’s external borders. This process of deploying (para)military personnel and/or equipment for border security has been pushed by an influential industrial lobby for years, and it took ground especially since the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015. The expansion of Frontex - with its own standing corps, its own budget to purchase/lease equipment, the possibility of operations in non-EU-countries and far-reaching powers to force EU member states to strengthen border security - in the last few years is also something that has been propagated by the industry for years before 2015.

Frontex has increasingly close ties to arms and security companies, driven by a budget of about €2 billion to buy/lease equipment in the period 2021-2027. The same companies are also influential in shaping EU migration and border policies, positioning themselves as experts and being warmly welcomed by EU institutions, for example by being invited to take part in official advisory bodies. In this way the military and security industry has been able to push a narrative in which migration is framed as a security problem, to be combated by the products and services this industry has on sale. Large European arms companies as Airbus, Leonardo and Thales are the main winners, while the European Organisation for Security is the main lobby group.

Those same large arms companies are also responsible for many European arms exports to the rest of the world, fueling reasons forcing people to flee, such as war, internal conflict, repression, human rights violations and poverty. Over the last few years the EU has increasingly supported the ‘global competitiveness’ and exports of the European military and security industry, making this a part of its own process of militarisation through the European Defense Fund and other instruments.

Frontex and other border security authorities increasingly use autonomous systems for border surveillance. Over the last few years the agency has paid tens of millions of euros to arms companies Airbus, Elbit, Israel Aerospace Industries and Leonardo for providing drone surveillance services

in the Mediterranean. This includes the use of so-called 'killer drones' which are promoted as 'battlefield tested' in wars and repression.

Maritime Frontex operations to stop migration in the Mediterranean and towards the Canary Islands go along with member states border security efforts, separate EU military missions (Operation Sophia and its successor Operation Irini) and pressure on third countries to act as outpost border guards for the EU, stopping refugees before they can even reach EU borders (the so-called 'border externalisation'). Externalisation efforts often have serious consequences in third countries as well, by legitimizing and strengthening authoritarian regimes and their security forces, undermining local (migration-based) economies and diverting development aid.

Many EU financial instruments contribute to the militarisation of borders, next to Frontex' own budget. The most important is the Integrated Border Management Fund, which is aimed at funding EU member states efforts' to strengthen border security, including the purchase of equipment to be made available for Frontex operations. The European Defence Fund and research funding under the EU's seven-year R&T-programmes (currently Horizon Europe) can also be used for funding new border security equipment, while the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, the Instrument for Pre-Accession and the European Peace Facility and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace can all fund border security and control efforts in non-EU-countries.

## STOP THE EU'S ROLE IN FORCING PEOPLE TO MOVE

- End arms exports and other forms of military support to third countries
- Stop security cooperation with third countries whenever there is a risk this will lead to repression and human rights violations
- Stop military operations in third countries; end European participation in the 'war on terror'; abolish NATO, and stop the EU military build-up
- End unequal trade relations with third countries - including free trade agreements. Hold European and multinational companies responsible for their activities in and regarding third countries
- Stop extracting wealth and resources, including land grabbing, from third countries
- Take actual measures to prevent further climate change and work on climate justice, not 'green' capitalism
- Take responsibility for the effects of centuries of colonialism, imperialism, violence, slavery, exploitation, oppression and exclusion. Make reparations and dismantle the current neocolonialist order and infrastructure

A lot of people move because they feel forced to do so. The reasons that lead to this decision are often caused or worsened by the policies and actions taken by Western Europe and the US - historically and today.

European arms exports, and other forms of support to authoritarian regimes, fuel wars, internal conflicts, repression and human rights violations. Military operations cause death, destruction and the destabilisation of countries, communities and economies. Unequal trade relations, exploitation and exclusion maintain and exacerbate poverty. The EU is one of the main drivers of climate change through its extractivist and fossil-fuel dependent economy.

These are things which the EU, its member states and other actors refuse to take any responsibility for.

## EMPOWER SOLIDARITY

- End the brutal criminalisation and repression of people on the move
- End the harassment and policing of migrant communities
- Stop state and police repression of people on the move, migrant communities, civil society and those supporting people on the move
- Release civil society rescue ships that have been seized
- End the obstacles, intimidation and seizing of rescue vessels and follow the obligation of opening the nearest ports

Where states fall short in providing safe routes, shelter and other support to people on the move and fail to rescue people in distress, NGOs, activists and others step in and show solidarity. In camps, asylum centers, detention centers and on the streets people on the move have also organised themselves to protest against inhumane conditions, detentions and deportations and demand permission to stay, with safe, livable future prospects.

Often these actions are met with state and police repression. Search and Rescue ships have been confiscated and crews have been arrested, as have other people supporting people on the move. Places squatted for shelter have been evicted, uprisings in asylum and detention centers have been violently crushed, people have been put in isolation cells, have been denied medical and legal assistance and have been violently deported.

Over the years many people on the move have drowned in the Mediterranean. The EU and its member states have largely refused to do something about this, increasingly retreating from search & rescue efforts or using this as a thin veil for what in fact are interception operations and/or cooperation with third countries to ship people on the move back to countries they have set off from.

NGOs have filled this void, being hindered in all possible ways by border authorities. With this they do the work that states should be doing: saving lives. However, state-led search and rescue operations are only good alternatives when they are actually aimed at saving people and providing them with a future, instead of push backs or putting them in detention, with the prospect of being deported. Even more so, the EU and its member states should change their policies to avoid pushing people to use dangerous migration routes, by providing safe routes for everyone and by stopping to fuel the reasons people are forced to flee in the first place.

# FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR ALL

→ Guarantee freedom of movement, residence and livelihood for all

Europe is built on a history of colonialism, slavery, imperialism, extractivism and exploitation that continues today.

Modern borders are colonial and racist constructs, and the EU's border policies institutionalise this violence, injustice and inequality. The EU has no right to stop people at its borders and no-one should be illegal.

Europe's anti-immigration policies, in particular the militarisation of borders, have led to more violence against and risks for people on the move. They are forced to use more dangerous migration routes and are driven into the hands of traffickers and unscrupulous smuggling networks, which have often taken over where local people who assisted migrants on their journey were driven out of work by severe repression. In this way the EU itself creates the market for trafficking and smuggling it says it is fighting against.

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