



From the « war against the virus » to the war against exiles: security responses to Covid-19 exacerbate violence at borders.

The Greek hotspots in which exiles are crammed without any protection of their rights or from the pandemic are an example of the precarization of their trajectories by the security policies of States. Migreurop denounces the violence inflicted onto exiles in the name of the “war against the virus”, their unequal treatment with regard to the pandemic, and demands the immediate closure of all spaces of migrant detention in order to ensure their right to be protected.

Today, Migreurop publishes a video denouncing the existence and functioning of the hotspots, these centres designed to sort migrants created by the European Union (EU) in Italy and Greece in 2016. In this last country, neither relocations to Member States¹ nor returns to Turkey on the basis of a “dirty deal”² have met the commitments and are now blocked. The hotspots were thus de facto turned into open-air prisons. More than 42 000 migrants are currently contained in 5 Greek hotspots with a capacity of 6,000 places. The Moria hotspot, on the island of Lesbos, contains 20,000 persons on its own (for 2,800 places). In addition to the intolerable overcrowding, the lack of sanitary infrastructures (drinking water, showers, toilets) and food, the accommodation in tents that leads to deaths from hypothermia every year, the recurring fires, now comes the Covid-19. Faced with this pandemic, European States are asking to their citizens to take steps to protect themselves, particularly through self-isolation, but migrants do not have this privilege. On March 22nd 2020, the Greek authorities announced the forced confinement of exiles in the camps on Greek territory, including hotspots³. Their overcrowding makes the prevention of the spreading of the virus almost impossible, despite the self-organized efforts of exiles⁴. These measures knowingly expose the exiles to a serious and imminent risk of contamination⁵.

The situation in the Greek camps is emblematic of the amplification of the violence related to the control of migrants as a result of the virus and the security policies deployed to contain its spread. While European States have restricted the movement of people across the external and internal borders of the EU for this purpose, they willingly confuse the “war against the virus” with the war against illegalised migrants that they have been waging for years⁶. The strengthening of policies of closure and the suspension of asylum procedures in several European countries further exacerbate the precarious trajectories of migrants, while their reasons for fleeing violence - in all its forms- to seek protection are left unchanged.

¹ <http://www.aedh.eu/fin-relocalisations-bilan/>

² <http://www.migreurop.org/article2968.html>

³ <https://legalcentresvos.org/2020/03/24/greece-move-asylum-seekers-migrants-to-safety-immediate-hotspot-decongestion-needed-to-address-covid-19/>

⁴ <https://standbymelesvos.gr/2020/creation-of-corona-awareness-team-in-moria-camp/>

⁵ <https://www.msf.org.uk/article/covid-19-evacuation-squalid-greek-camps-more-urgent-ever-light-coronavirus-pandemic>

⁶ https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/what-happens-freedom-movement-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2MYSd4elzvcUIGf1i_7Vuj-tYfXDe9JTVuOMSArbxxmAhWomszsO1p5ec

In attempting to cross the Mediterranean, migrants can no longer count on the presence of rescue NGOs which were forced to stop their activities after the closure of Italian ports and in the face of the risks linked to the virus⁷. The subcontracted push-backs operated by the Libyan coastguards continue unabated, as do those conducted by Greek or Cypriot authorities⁸. Acts of violence against exiles are also increasing all along the Balkan routes⁹ where migrants face conditions of extreme precarity amplified by the virus. Violence at borders are also exacerbated inside the EU territory: for instance, the French authorities keep pushing exiles back to Italy, despite the country being one of the epicentres the pandemic.

The closure of borders is becoming the norm, even for the most vulnerable, at a time when experts are questioning the effectiveness of these measures in preventing the spread of the Covid-19,¹⁰ and when alternative answers exist. The UNHCR has for instance called on States not to close the avenues to asylum but to adopt “screen tests” at border crossings¹¹.

At the time of the pandemic, the “stay home” logic dominates¹². Policies aiming to contain the spread of the virus however cannot suspend exiles’ *right to flee* when confronted to violence in all its forms¹³. We denounce the violence and the denial of rights towards migrants in the name of the “war against the virus”, and their unequal treatment with regard to the virus. We welcome Portugal’s initiative to temporally regularise migrants to guarantee their access to healthcare, and ask for this measure to be extended throughout Europe and made permanent¹⁴.

Since its foundation, Migreurop has denounced the policy of detention of exiles in both formal and informal camps. We are joining today the calls for the immediate closure of the overcrowded Greek camps¹⁵, as well as all other spaces of migrant detention in Europe and at its borders. This immediate closure and the rehousing of exiles in places where they can live in dignity, including in others Europeans countries when necessary, are the precondition for them to be able to exercise their fundamental rights, including the right for everyone to be protected from the virus¹⁶.

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⁷https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/03/18/news/coronavirus_le_ong_fermano_le_missioni_di_salvataggio_in_mare_migranti_senza_piu_soccorsi-251590974/

⁸ <https://kisa.org.cy/21st-march-international-day-against-racism-2/>

⁹ <https://www.courrierdesbalkans.fr/Refugies-la-haine-se-reveille-tout-au-long-de-la-route-des-Balkans>

¹⁰ <https://www.heidi.news/articles/rony-brauman-le-coronavirus-rappelle-que-sans-etat-les-plus-vulnerables-sont-ecrases>

¹¹ <https://www.heidi.news/articles/rony-brauman-le-coronavirus-rappelle-que-sans-etat-les-plus-vulnerables-sont-ecrases>

¹² <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/nicanor/blog/150320/coronavirus-ferme-les-frontieres>

¹³ https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/what-happens-freedom-movement-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2MYSd4elzvcUIGf1i_7Vuj-tYfXDe9JTVuOMSArbxxmAhWomszsO1p5ec

¹⁴ <https://news-24.fr/le-portugal-traitera-les-migrants-comme-des-residents-pendant-la-crise-des-coronavirus-2/>

¹⁵ <https://www.msf.org.uk/article/covid-19-evacuation-squalid-greek-camps-more-urgent-ever-light-coronavirus-pandemic>; <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/fil-dactualites/230320/coronavirus-des-eurodeputes-appellent-evacuer-les-migrants-les-plus-vulnerables-des-camps-grecs?onglet=full>; <https://legalcentrelesvos.org/2020/03/25/protect-the-most-vulnerable-to-ensure-protection-for-everyone-restore-legality-to-protect-refugees-and-the-society-at-large-amidst-the-pandemic/>

¹⁶ https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/03/18/l-inegalite-des-vies-en-temps-d-epidemie_1782169?fbclid=IwAR3WMovh7-DNptjNNb6qhWiR0n-w75PEy5DSFsmIXSN0B3qCdcf5DYMMyrY

Press releases and actions of Migreurop members regarding Covid-19 and migrants:

Belgium:

- **Ciré** : « [Courrier à Maggie De Block: Mesures d'urgence en vue d'endiguer la propagation du COVID-19 aux personnes migrantes](#) », March 18, 2020
- **Inter associative initiative**:
 - « [Coronavirus: la détention des personnes migrantes en centre fermé est devenue illégale](#) », carte blanche in the journal Le Vif, published on March 18, 2020
 - « [Crise à la frontière gréco-turque. Dignité et droits humains : sur les ruines des fondements de l'Union européenne](#) », press release of March 18, 2020
 - « [Coronavirus: permettre à tous de se confiner est la seule manière d'en sortir](#) », carte blanche published in Le Soir, April 1, 2020

Spain:

- **Plateforme « CIEs No »** : « [La campaña estatal por el Cierre de los CIE exige la urgente puesta en libertad de todas las personas internadas en los CIE](#) », press release of March 23, 2020

France:

- **Anafé** : [Demande de libération des personnes maintenues dans les zones d'attente dans les aéroports](#), open letter of March 20, 2020
- **La Cimade** :
 - [Coronavirus: Réorganisation des activités de La Cimade et demandes transmises au Gouvernement](#), press release Cimade, March 17, 2020
 - [Loi d'urgence Covid-19: La Cimade ne relâche pas ses efforts de plaidoyer](#), to be found on the website of La Cimade, March 24, 2020.
- **Inter associative initiatives** :
 - [Face à la crise sanitaire, l'enfermement administratif des personnes étrangères doit immédiatement cesser](#), Press release from the Observatory for the Detention of Foreigners, 18 March 2020.
 - [Coronavirus: Associations et avocats saisissent le Conseil d'Etat pour demander la fermeture des centres de rétention](#), March 23, 2020

Italy:

- **ASGI** : [Emergenza covid-19. L'impatto sui diritti delle/dei cittadine/i straniere/i e le misure di tutela necessarie: una prima ricognizione](#), March 22, 2020.

- **Inter associative initiative** : « [Tavolo asilo al governo e parlamento: considerare gli stranieri](#) », campaign launch *Io Accolgo*, March 2020

Morocco:

- **Gadem** : « [Covid-19 : le gouvernement marocain en action mais quelles mesures pour les personnes étrangères au Maroc ?](#) », press release of March 20, 2020
- **AMDH Maroc** : « [Nous demandons la protection des migrants/tes dans notre pays contre les dangers de la pandémie de Corona virus et la garantie de leurs droits fondamentaux](#) », press release of April 1st, 2020
- **Inter associative initiative** : « [Maroc: migrant·e·s et réfugié·e·s sont aussi vulnérables face au COVID-19](#) », press release from several associations including AMDH Morocco, published on March 30, 2020

Switzerland:

- **Solidarités sans Frontières** :
 - « [Coronavirus : des mesures de protection pour tout le monde !](#) », appeal co-signed by around 60 organisations to the federal and cantonal authorities and all public authorities, 18 March 2020
 - « [Suspension des auditions d'asile pendant une semaine : de qui se moque le SEM ?](#) », press release following Gattiker's interview in the Blick published in March 2020
- **Vivre Ensemble** : « [La politique migratoire plus importante que la santé publique ?](#) article published on March 26, 2020