

# THE FATAL POLICIES of Fortress Europe

## UNITED'S LIST OF REFUGEE DEATHS

Since 1993, UNITED has been monitoring the deaths of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants seeking a better life in Europe. The fatalities included in the UNITED 'List of Deaths' range from fateful attempts to enter the impenetrable fortress that Europe has built around itself to those during state-operated detention or deportations. The List reveals diverse causes and circumstances, resulting from an increasingly complex, unworkable and unjust system.

## NO MORE REFUGEE DEATHS

UNITED already demands this since 1993 – supported by an increasingly higher number of deaths documented – each unnecessary death is one too many. How many deaths must we count before these fatal policies will change?

The exact number of refugees who have died as a result of Fortress Europe will remain unknown, estimated 3 times higher than the number documented, many bodies are never found: 60.000, 100.000...?

## TIME FOR CHANGE!

Join our protest against the fatal policies of Fortress Europe, leading to the death of desperate people looking for safe refuge. We must make sure that all these deaths are known and mourned! And above all, we must make sure that these policies stop! Act now!



**UNITED for Intercultural Action**  
European network against nationalism, racism, fascism  
and in support of migrants and refugees  
[www.UNITEDAgainstRefugeeDeaths.eu](http://www.UNITEDAgainstRefugeeDeaths.eu)  
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# FORTRESS EUROPE: DEATH BY POLICY

The UNITED 'List of Deaths' draws since 1993 unwelcome attention to the role of our societies in protecting those who flee from war, persecution, poverty or natural disasters and highlights the serious flaws in our asylum and immigration systems that repeatedly threaten human dignity. On the way to Fortress Europe, in detention or identification camps, during deportation, or once repatriated, many refugees and migrants die.



Cartoon by ©Chappatte in "Le Temps", Geneva - [www.globecartoon.com](http://www.globecartoon.com)

Europe's exclusion policies make it almost impossible to enter Europe regularly. These fatal policies have forced 1000s of people to resort to irregular ways of getting to a country where they are safe and where economical survival is possible. No matter how different the circumstances of these deaths are, they can all be ultimately put down to one reason: the building of a Fortress Europe which refers to the policy of exclusion and the on-going tightening of EU asylum policies. These decisions are taken on highest political level: the Schengen Treaty, the Dublin Convention and EU border control programmes. We face a rat race of tougher asylum policies amongst the European Member States - accompanied by common European initiatives to reduce immigration. EU migration policies are driven by targets and objectives rather than humanity.

In the face of civil war, conflict and global political and social unrest, Europe responds by adopting exclusionary practice and policies, turning a blind eye to the root causes of migration. Refugees and migrants fleeing to Europe are presented to the public opinion (and as a result perceived) as the reason of many problems in Europe. They are abused as scapegoats, thus stimulating racist ideology and offering ground to right wing populist parties. Instead of being the problem, refugees and asylum seekers are in search of a solution to the serious problems they leave behind in the countries they had to flee. Refugees are not the problem! The real problem is a general lack of vision in Europe on migration and a lack of support for the peaceful development in their home countries.

It is important to bear in mind that all these deaths are due to policies that criminalise a fundamental human right: freedom of movement. Many also violate other rights such as the right to leave and return to your country of origin, the right to seek asylum and the right to family reunification. These rights are laid out in the 1951 Geneva Convention and are not simply a set of values and principles the EU should try to uphold, but constitute international law to which each participating country is bound.

## FRONTIERS OF HOPE?

The European agreement called 'Dublin Convention' requires asylum seekers to register in the country where they first enter the EU. In reality this tends to be the south of Europe, such as Italy, Spain and Greece. These three countries are heavily indebted and provide only minimal welfare for refugees, already struggling to provide for their inhabitants. This situation leads to the development of xenophobia, racist attacks and growing populist political movements.

Many refugees are left without protection after entering the EU but are forced to stay in the country 'responsible' for them. The Dublin agreement became a key tool in a regime of border controls, allowing refugees to be deported from the wealthier northern countries back to poorer countries of entry. This is just passing the buck of responsibilities. In their turn the EU-border countries are pushing back newly arrived refugees to outside EU territory. And their non-EU neighbours are financially supported to keep the refugees even further away from 'our' borders. These pushback actions must be stopped and responsibilities taken.

Unfortunately, the issue is not high on the political agenda of the mainstream politicians. Right-wing populists however are taking up the issue and campaigning against immigration. In the discourse of European politicians, 'traffickers' and 'people smugglers' are identified as being the great villains, yet the hardened borders and tightened asylum policies directly force people in illegality and create a need for facilitators helping migrants to cross borders. Traffickers are not the reason for migration.

When so many choose to take their own lives rather than returning to the situations they fled from, when migration is not just the nicer, but the only option, there is clearly a need for governments to critically assess their decision-making processes.

*In January 2014, a group of 12 refugees drowned after the Greek coast guard pushed back their boat at high speed to Turkish waters. The boat capsized and the refugees were prevented by the coast guards to leave their sinking vessel (ECRE, 2014).*

## BORDER MANAGEMENT & EXTERNALISATION

For years European governments have tried to implement border control and militarisation policies. What can be seen is that borders are shifting towards the outer parts of Europe where tighter controls are being implemented. The ultimate aim of the 'management of external borders' is to stop victims of persecution, civil war and forced migration even before they reach Europe. Numerous deaths, including those that remain unknown, are a direct consequence of the reinforcement of EU borders. Further realignments and restructuring of borders just leads to refugees trying to find other ways inside, often through more dangerous routes.

The externalisation of the EU's political borders can be seen mostly in North African countries, whose coasts are the starting point for many migrant journeys into Europe, especially to Spain, Italy and Greece.

*In February 2014, a group of migrants were shot at with rubber bullets by the Moroccan and Spanish border police while they were trying to swim to the Spanish enclave Ceuta, at the Moroccan border. Police was shooting both directly at people and at the floating tools the migrants needed for swimming. 17 people were killed (No Borders, 2014).*



Externalising EU policy is not the only method used, processes of “border imperialism” are also at play; countries in negotiation to become member states such as Turkey must comply with the Schengen Agreement and adopt European policies. In April 2014, Turkey and EU have signed an agreement that makes it possible to return migrants from the EU to Turkey and vice versa. Under this agreement, Turkey receives financial and technical support to help build up border police and install border surveillance equipment.

Furthermore, the EU seeks cooperation with countries like Libya and Morocco in order to prevent migrants and refugees from reaching Europe at all.

By contracting out border policing, migrants are subjected to inhumane treatment that the Human Rights Convention prohibits. Millions of euros are being spent on the construction of ‘walls’ around Europe. The budget of Frontex, the European agency set up to coordinate the external border management, is a vast 90 million euros annually.

Perhaps the analogy of “Fortress Europe” is even misleading; these territories and spaces are pliable, ignoring certain streams of migration, such as irregular migration that brings in the labour upon which the economies of many EU member states depend. ‘Illegal’ migrant workers have become a vital economic necessity, since countries are facing labour shortages and vacancies that cannot be filled by the domestic workforce.

However, no matter how hard Europe tries, it will always be incapable of ‘effectively’ shutting its doors. The more they try and the stricter laws are implemented, the higher the number of deaths. By reinforcing their exclusionist policy, they are simply pushing the most vulnerable into even more dangerous situations.

## PROCESS INEFFECTIVENESS

There is a clear defect in immigration and asylum policies across Europe; the blind ambition of governments to control migration flows and meet immigration targets are not matched by resources, skills and training of the staff employed to conduct procedures. Within Europe, tens of thousands of migrants are trapped in bureaucratic systems, unable to become part of any society. When policies are shaped purely as a reaction to statistics and goals, they are both ill thought out and difficult to implement. Frequent changes to the application process, to employment and movement restrictions, and entitlement to support services and healthcare all around Europe often lead to confusion, misapplication and result in more unnecessary deaths.

*In January 2013, the Russian asylum seeker Alexander Dolmatov committed suicide in a deportation centre in the Netherlands where he was placed due to a system error. For fear of being deported back to Russia, he took his own life while under state supervision (UNITED for Intercultural Action, 2013).*

## DETENTION

Refugees, asylum seekers and “illegal” migrants, even children, are often held in detention. Detention centres exist throughout Europe and they go under many different names. Detention can last from a few weeks to a year and longer, according to national immigration law. Although media insist in naming them “waiting zones”, “identification centres”, “accommodation centres”, “hospitium” etc., people in holding are often treated worse than criminals. In many countries these centres function as no more than basic prisons, except for the fact that due to the overcrowding and

lack of a common policy, basic human rights are daily violated. Legal assistance is often denied and NGO’s and humanitarian associations are regularly denied entrance to the camps. The whole management of detention is often military-based, and due to the lack of interpreters and social workers, conflicts and misunderstandings are solved with the use of violence.

More and more frequent episodes of self-destruction practices take place: from hunger strikes, eyes- and mouth-sewing to all manners of suicide, including putting oneself on fire. These episodes rarely catch the attention of the media. The suicides, as being caused by the extremely hard conditions of detention and by the lack of social, medical and legal assistance, are directly linked to the enforcement of the exclusion policies referred to as Fortress Europe. Refugee camps and detention centres are on the edge of illegality themselves according to the international conventions on asylum, human rights and preventive detention. Governments should stop placing migrants (and their children) in detention for the ‘crime’ of travelling without documents.

*In February 2014, Kahve Pouryazdan, a 49-year old Iranian, set himself on fire. He had spent 10 hopeless years in Germany, he could not leave and even though he could speak perfectly German, all doors remained closed for him. No work, no perspective. A terrible death (Karawane, 2014)*



*‘No Refugee on the Street or Behind Bars’. March 2014, rejected asylum seekers in Amsterdam demonstrating against Dutch migration policies, which are forcing them in illegality. Since 2011 they have been campaigning against these policies. Now it is time for change!*

## DEPORTATION

Whether due to a (mis)belief that countries in conflict are now safe places to return to or simply that the requirements to stay in the EU have not been met, deportations are a convenient way to manage immigration statistics and to cattle people around. This is only viable if we can ensure their safety and reintegration upon return. Regardless of the wisdom of authorities’ decisions, they have a duty to conduct deportation procedures in a way that prioritises safety, welfare and preserves human dignity.

The fact that governments across Europe regularly refuse asylum or issue deportation orders have enormous impacts upon the psychological and emotional state of applicants. UNITED has recorded many instances over the years where forced repatriation or failed asylum claims have resulted in deaths.

*In March 2013, Khalid Shahzad, 52 years old (Pakistan), died just hours after being put on the train from a removal centre. He was released in poor health conditions and medical advice had been ignored (The Guardian, 2013).*



## THE UNITED 'LIST OF DEATHS'

The 'Fatal Policies of Fortress Europe' is an on-going campaign of the UNITED network against the deadly consequences of the building of Fortress Europe. The aim of this campaign is to raise public attention and denounce the exclusionist policies of the EU.

In the 'List of Deaths' UNITED collects since 1993 reliable data on refugee deaths related to Fortress Europe. In the period 1993-2014 at least 20.000 refugee deaths can be attributed to the Fatal Policies of Fortress Europe'. Most probably 1000s more are never found.

The List summarises information on where, when and under which circumstances they died. On all death cases further documentation is kept in archive. The data are collected through own research, information received from the 550 network organisations in 48 countries and from local experts, journalists and researchers in the field of migration. Compiled in the 'List of Deaths' they add up to an impressive listing and a strong campaign statement: No More Deaths – Time For Change!

The List shows the deadly impact of the building of a Fortress that 'protects' European citizens from the rest of the world through border militarisation, criminalisation of migration, detention, mass deportation, discriminatory and time-consuming asylum procedures and police raids. The fatal results already reach the daily headlines: bodies that surface on European shores, stowaways found in the back of a truck, or asylum seekers who kill themselves consequential to hard living conditions and depression for the long and lingering asylum claim decision. Those are the consequences when Europe shuts its doors and eyes.



Artist Banu Cennetoglu made our message even bigger by showing The UNITED 'List of Deaths' in several countries on large public billboards. In 2007, 110 large posters were exhibited in public space all over Amsterdam. Translated versions of the List have been displayed all over Athens (2007), Basel (2011), Istanbul (2012) and Sofia (2013). The picture shows the List on Basel train station.

## TIME FOR CHANGE: TAKE ACTION

Wake up the policy-makers! It is extremely important for the purposes of the campaign to raise awareness on this issue throughout Europe. The main targets are media and the general public. With their help it is possible to force European politicians to reconsider European immigration policies and to develop a human vision on migration.

Use the information compiled in the List to organise activities: lectures, multicultural evenings, debates or prepare a petition.

### Campaign contacts

[listofdeaths@unitedagainstracism.org](mailto:listofdeaths@unitedagainstracism.org)  
[www.UNITEDAgainstRefugeeDeaths.eu](http://www.UNITEDAgainstRefugeeDeaths.eu)  
[facebook.com/UNITEDAgainstRefugeeDeaths](https://facebook.com/UNITEDAgainstRefugeeDeaths)

Make the List as public as possible to advert against the cruel and inhuman consequences of Europe's exclusion policy.

The sheer number of deaths documented on the List is powerful in itself, yet each individual casualty must not get lost in statistics. The human dimension is what makes the List so potent; by giving attention to the very real challenges, struggles and suffering that migrants face, you help your target audience to relate to and engage with the situation. In your campaigning, adopt cases that you feel will resonate most strongly with them - some possible options have been highlighted throughout this leaflet - if necessary, contact the UNITED secretariat for more background information.



Example of use of the List: Bamako Caravan 2011. A printed UNITED List of Deaths held at a demonstration in Dakar.

## 20 JUNE: INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE DAY

On the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Convention in 2001, the United Nations General Assembly declared 20 June World Refugee Day. UNITED stimulates an annual campaign around this date, aiming to highlight refugee issues from an NGO perspective at all levels: local, national and European. We call upon all organisations to take part in this campaign. Visit the campaign site and Facebook page for regular updates, news, tips and ideas how to get involved.

Without concrete action, these tragic death tolls of Fortress Europe will continue to rise. It is time for change.

## USE THE 'LIST OF DEATHS'!

The most recent List is accessible online and can be used by activists, researchers, journalists and artists to generate further awareness through their own work and projects. Journalists and researchers can request the complete export for research at [listofdeaths@unitedagainstracism.org](mailto:listofdeaths@unitedagainstracism.org)

**Order up to 100 free posters at the UNITED secretariat!**

### UNITED is SUPPORTED by

more than 550 organisations from 48 European countries, many prominent individuals, private supporters and long-term volunteers from Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service and the EVS, Grundtvig and Leonardo Programmes of the European Union.

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### UNITED for Intercultural Action

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