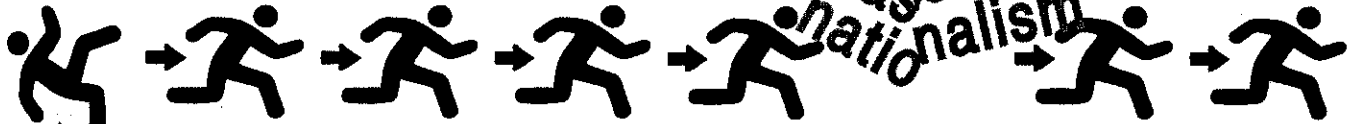


**INFORMATION  
LEAFLET  
NO. 16**

**UNITED**

fascism  
fascism  
nationalism



**A PLACE FOR EVERYONE...**

This information leaflet is a result of the UNITED project *"Integration of Refugees: Linking Good Practice Across Europe"*, that will be carried out during the year 2000. This publication also aims to provide some background information on migration issues, which can be used by NGO's for discussions, meetings, presentations, etc.

The main objective of the project has been to develop a more intensive cooperation in the refugee field, among the members of the UNITED network and the anti-racist movement in general. The general message of the whole project has been the need to **welcome and integrate refugees in our society**. This is important, not only because refugees deserve to be treated with respect, but also because we need to work on a society that is open and intercultural, and in which racism and intolerance will no longer find a place to fester. Refugees bring with them many qualities and as such contribute to society "in kind".

**SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

When you ask refugees in Europe, they will tell you that they have a hard time to integrate in our society. The political discourse in Europe, the media and many in the general public have been identifying refugees with crime, poverty, fraud, scrounging and other nasty things. If this is how we see newcomers, how can we expect them to make valuable contributions to our society?

People should have **the right to choose a place to live**. In history we can find examples of the need for migration as well as proof that it is possible for many different groups to live together in the same society. When people are granted equal rights and have the possibility to take responsibility for their future, they can always find a place of their own without taking the place of someone else. If we want to find examples, we just have to look at the history of Europe:

Thousands and thousands of Europeans went to other countries in the previous centuries fleeing from very difficult living conditions such as famine and lack of work. In the 19th century many thousands of people fled from Germany and other European countries to the USA in order to escape from poverty. In the 20th century millions of people fled from Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Greece and Italy to countries of Northern Europe, USA and Canada in order to find better living conditions. During the fascist dictatorships in several European countries (Spain, Greece, Portugal, Italy, etc.) and the Nazi-regime in Germany thousands and thousands of people fled to seek a place where they would not be persecuted because of their political opinions, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

**...Integration of Refugees: a "contribution in kind"**



## Human Rights are equal and indivisible

When we speak about Human Rights, we speak about two sets of rights. One set is made up of civil and political rights, such as the right to life and freedom of expression. The second set is made up of social rights, such as the right to have paid employment and a clean environment. Somehow, when deciding on the definition of a refugee, the second set seems to have been lost. If a refugee has suffered from an infringement of the first set of rights, states recognise the necessity to flee. An infringement of the second set seems not to be valid. This has nothing to do with the seriousness of specific human rights. Not having food will kill you just as thoroughly as being shot because of your religion. If we believe all human rights to be equal, then an infringement on each of them should count equally too.

## Official definitions

A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."  
 UNHCR, according to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

If we look at migration as a global phenomenon we can not accept all the official distinctions between refugees, asylum seekers, people under humanitarian protection, economic migrants, etc. The reasons that cause flight from the countries of origin are a mixture of social, economic and political facts. In the majority of cases it is just not possible to draw a line that separates clearly the reasons of each individual to flee. By trying to put into practice definitions which do not correspond to reality, governments are denying people something that as human beings all of us should always be entitled to: **the right to choose a place to live.**

## Everyone has the right to freedom of movement

- 1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
  - 2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.
- Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

All governments of countries where refugees try to enter and settle look at migration as a problem that they need to stop and prevent. In fact the reality is much wider and very complex. We have to think globally in order to have the complete "picture" and to understand the migration flows of our world.

## Are all reasons to flee valid?

Where is the difference between an asylum seeker who flees from economic destruction due to war, to an asylum seeker who flees from a country where the economy has been devastated because of political changes? The truth is that in both cases we are speaking about a person who can not find the necessary stability and consequently whose fundamental rights have been violated. And where is the difference between a person who knew the possibility of asking for asylum, and another person fleeing for reasons that are just as valid, but who was not aware of asylum rights and entered a certain country illegally?

## The reasons and the risks of flight

Obviously no one leaves their homeland without good reason. To make the decision to take the risk to come to Europe (or elsewhere in the so-called "western world") is not easy. It is much easier to live in a familiar environment than in a place with a different social, economic or cultural structure. Fleeing from home implies not only an extremely dangerous journey, but as well learning a new language, getting used to different structures, different ways of behaving and thinking.

Thousands and thousands of people take the risk to flee all over the world. People are motivated by many different reasons, but all of them are leaving nearly everything behind. Many of them die when trying to cross borders. Many of them are at a certain stage detained and deported under inhuman conditions. Many of them live for several years as undocumented migrants, suffering from all sorts of exploitation and excluded from mainstream society. Very few of them are given official permission to live in the country where they managed to arrive. They start then with great difficulties to organise a new life.

### So, who is a "refugee"?

If there are always good reasons for fleeing one's homeland, why don't we call all fleeing people "refugees" rather than trying to classify them into so many sorts of categories? Is it fair to analyse the personal reasons of each refugee to come to the "western world", when such reasons are complex and inter-linked with so many factors? And for whatever reasons should there be such a number of obstacles to those who are forced to choose for other places to live?

### Everyone brings a positive contribution

It is absolutely necessary to fight against the idea that there is no room for more people in Europe or that refugees are a threat because of the different attitudes they bring. In reality such arguments are false. History has proven exactly the opposite: different people are bringing creativity, ideas and innovation, contributing to the development of the society.

Recently, a United Nations report predicted that Europe needs migration to keep up economic growth and a healthy demographic balance (Source: Migration News Sheet, Feb. 2000 - Pag. 14). In some cases companies have recognised that migrants and refugees have unique capabilities: they can deal with change, be flexible, have insight in cultural differences, etc. Such capabilities are actually very valuable in today's fast-changing economy.

### Fight exclusion

The International Labour Organisation (ILO), in the Report *Workers without Frontiers - The Impact of Globalisation on International Migration (March 2000)*, estimates that the current number of migrants around the world is more than 120 million and predicts the figure will grow. The same Report says this growth is not because of the liberalisation of immigration "but because of growing labour supply pressures, rising income inequalities within and across nations brought about by globalisation itself and the revolution in information and communication technologies". Immigration policies seem not to have a determining effect. Tightening measures to stop migration will not be able to stop a global trend. Bearing these facts in mind it is necessary to find all the necessary ways of integrating people who are forced to move to other countries, due to the world's inequalities.

European countries, instead of building up a "fortress", must offer a place for all refugees as equal citizens. Otherwise it will not be possible to stop the deaths of refugees at our borders. Irrespective of all the barriers, laws and policies, people will always try to seek refuge. Instead of shutting borders, we need to find creative solutions to a global problem. We cannot speak about the positive contribution refugees bring if we are simply preventing them from living as equal citizens. Is it fair to complain about the economic costs of refugees if they are not given the opportunity to contribute to the host society?

### The numbers game

The political discourse tends to make us believe that Europe is hosting all the refugees in the world. If we look at statistics we find out easily that the great majority of refugees live in Asia and Africa. Only 30-40% of refugees in the world make it to Europe. If we think about the percentage of the world's financial resources that this continent has at its disposal, it should be obvious that we can take care of every single person that flees towards Europe.

### Colonialism, Economic Exploitation, War: "We are here because you were there"

Many European countries (Portugal, Spain, France, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Italy...) have a shameful past of colonial exploitation. During hundreds of years these countries have exploited the people and the natural resources of wide regions in Africa, America, Asia and Australia.

The trade of slaves that brought people in the most inhuman conditions, mainly from Africa to work in mines and on plantations, resulted in the death, uprooting and exploitation of millions of human beings. The colonisation of the "the South" by Europeans led to the massive murder of many different groups, destroying their cultures and their societies.

Trading in colonial times has been a largely one-sided agreement, with Europe taking and taking, without giving much in return. Valuable goods and arts were stolen. Traditional forms of agriculture were

replaced by huge properties where crops were decided according to the profit of the colonial owner and not according to the needs of local people. These massive mono-cultures have provoked many environmental problems.

### Responsibility

These facts have led to the general destruction of the societies of the colonised countries. The breaking of the development process in these regions has resulted in wars, inequalities, poverty and forced migration. One may think these injustices belong to the past, but the consequences are obviously still with us today.

Many of the regions corresponding to the former colonies of the European countries are still being exploited. All sorts of unfair treaties, agreements and economic trades between the so-called "developed" countries and the rest of the world do nothing to improve the economic situation. Particularly shocking is the selling of weapons by American and European enterprises, some owned or supported by "western" governments, to many different regions in the world. Western powers often conduct their diplomatic relations in accordance with the needs of economic profit and their political interests in a given region, not in accordance with local needs. In this manner we, in the "western" world, continue to be responsible for an increase of problems rather than for finding solutions. Migration to the "western world" is just one of the consequences of this situation...

### Refugees in Europe demand their rights

In different European countries there are local groups supporting undocumented people. They firmly believe that every person should have the right to choose their own place to live (Art. 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). After all, if capital and goods can freely circulate around the world why would people not have the same right?

These groups recognise the fact that some laws are clearly violating human rights (e.g. foreigner laws, citizenship laws, asylum laws...). They try to improve the living conditions of those who remain in Europe without documents. Many actions have been put into practice, such as the occupation of churches to demonstrate against deportations and the fight for "Papers for All", direct support to undocumented people (medical care, legal advice, etc.), demonstrations for the closure of detention centres, protests against the killings committed by the police while deporting refugees... Refugees, "illegals" and "legal" residents have combined their forces to fight for equal rights.

Self-organised groups, composed of those most affected by racism, have been organising protests and actions. By doing so, they show their strength and creativity. By taking charge of their own lives, they take away some of the power of bureaucracy. These groups mainly fight detention and deportation and demand equal rights, including the right to live in Europe. They want to contribute to our society and demand the chance to do so.

### JOIN THE ACTIONS!

This leaflet aims to be just the beginning for deeper discussions on the need to integrate refugees and to fight all forms of exclusion. Hopefully you will be inspired by its contents and join the actions in support of refugees that are taking place around Europe!

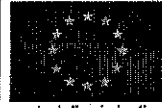
UNITED regularly publishes the Calendar of Internationalism, which includes announcements of such activities. It is available - as well as this and other info leaflets and a host of information on refugees, anti-racism etc. - on the UNITED website [www.unitedagainstracism.org](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org)

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**UNITED for Intercultural Action**  
European network against nationalism, racism, fascism  
and in support of migrants and refugees

Postbus 413  
NL-1000 AK Amsterdam  
phone +31-20-6834778  
fax +31-20-6834582  
info@unitedagainstracism.org  
www.unitedagainstracism.org

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