



Ten Years Alarm Phone



Credit cover photo:
Paul Lovis Wagner / Sea-Watch

World Social Forum in front of the Frontex
offices in Dakar, Senegal after the Caravan from
Bamako, Mali to Dakar, 2011. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Banner saying 'Open the borders' at a CommemorAction in Toulouse, France, 6 February 2024. - Photo: Laure



CommemorAction in Zarzis, Tunisia, September 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda



Action on the river Spree in Berlin, Germany, for the foundation of the Alarm Phone, October 2014. - Photo: Alarm Phone

P-ER 226

Comité de Suivi du Réseau pour
La Mobilisation du 06 Février 2016 - Maroc
NOUS SOMMES TOUS DES MIGRANTS



**FERRIES
POUR
TOUT.E.S**

LES FRONTIÈRES
TUENT!

CONTRE LA LOI DARMANIN
SOLIDARITES
ANARCHISTES

LIBYA
TIGEREN ENK VIVRE
PAS POUR MOURIR

حزب
18/18
ZARZIS CRIMES

WE STAND WITH
LIBYA

COMMEMORATION
THEIR LIFE
OUR LIGHT
THEIR FATE
OUR FIGHT
BURN THE BORDERS

Leur vie notre lumière
Leur destin notre colère
CommemorAction ♡

CommemorAction in Marseille, France,
6 February 2024. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Non-stop reading performance in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, June 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Ten Years Alarm Phone

11 October 2024

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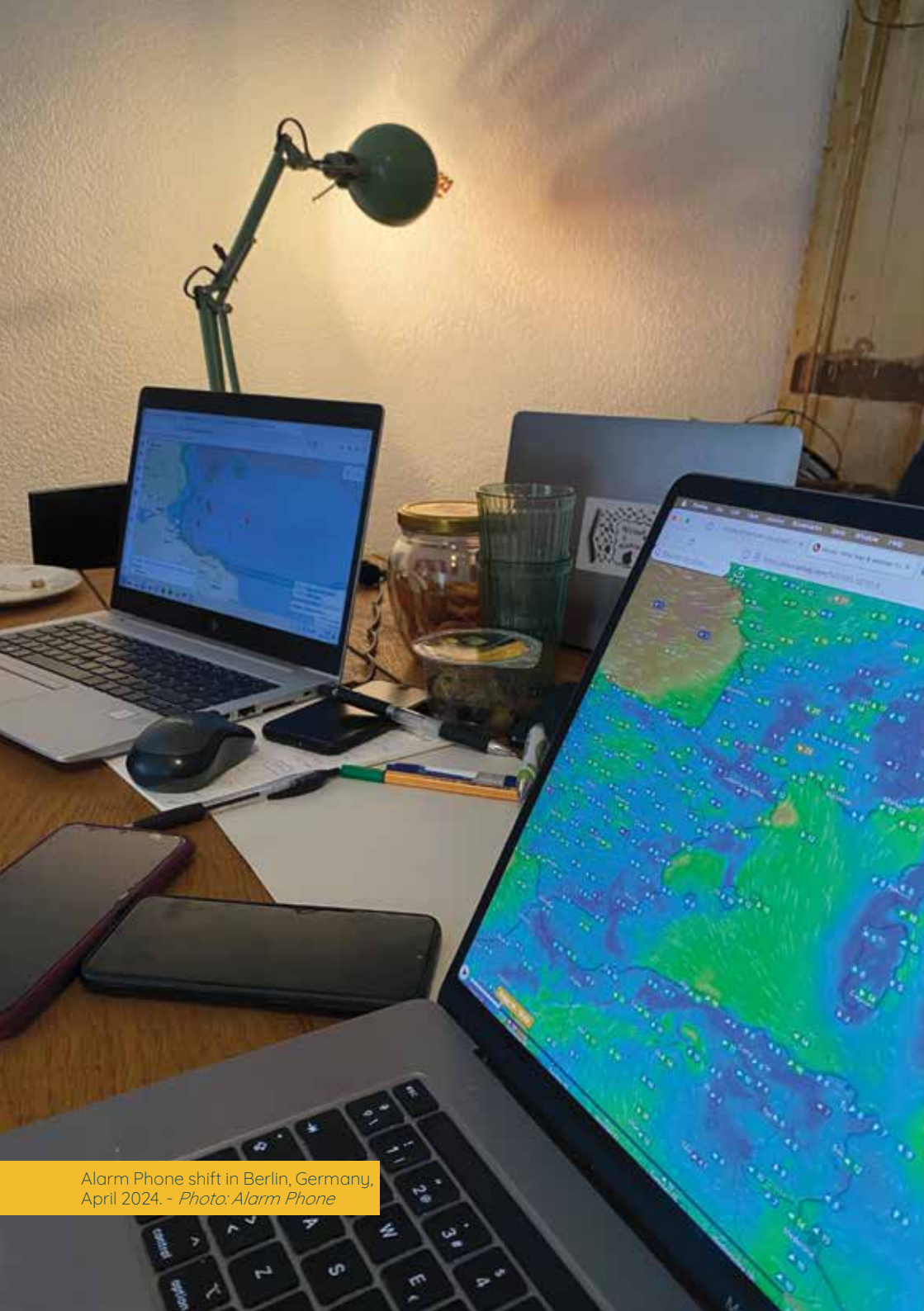
Alarm Phone meeting in Rennes, France, May 2024. - Photo: Alarm Phone

Alarm Phone information stand at a demonstration in Bern, Switzerland, June 2018. - Photo: Alarm Phone



1.

Introduction



Alarm Phone turns 10!

Building an Infrastructure for Freedom of Movement

11 October 2024: Today, the Alarm Phone turns ten years old. For 3,650 days and nights, we have been on shift. During these shifts, we were alerted to over 8,000 boats from all corners of the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic region or the English Channel, directly by the travelers or their relatives and friends. This means, on average, at least two distress cases reached us every single day over the past ten years. Some days we were on stand-by, with no call coming in. On other days, twenty or more boats called us from the sea.

When the idea for the Alarm Phone was born after the shipwreck of 11 October 2013, and when we launched it after extensive preparations a year later, nobody could have imagined such scale and intensity of need and engagement.

During our shifts, we witness time and again how voices on the other side of the phone line become desperate and panicked, or how they fall silent and the contact breaks. We experience nearly daily, how relatives contact us, asking us about boats that disappeared. Over the past ten years, death at sea has become our companion. Many times, facing such cruelty by the murderous border regime, we feel helpless anger.

At the same time, we realise again and again how we can often accompany boats and empower autonomous landings in Europe. Days and nights of communication with the people on board, in various languages, ultimately leading to their safe arrival. Or, in other cases, how receiving information from the boats in distress, and forwarding it to the civil fleet, can contribute in decisive ways to successful rescues.

Over the years, our activist hotline has grown. By now, we are more than 300 activists, and our network is composed of a very diverse noborder crowd. Our members have various backgrounds and face different living conditions and realities. We live in dozens of places all over Europe as well as North- and West-Africa. We have built a transnational and multilingual collective that is committed to stay at the side of people who enact their right to move.

Some have left our network. Many could no longer stand repeatedly experiencing traumatic situations during shift work and decided it was time to leave. Others have taken a break and then returned. While we have thus faced continuous fluctuations in our network, we have nonetheless grown and consolidated over time.

24 The Alarm Phone learns from direct experiences of crossing the sea and subverting borders by some of our members or our friends. Due to our relationships with members of communities on the move, we also learn from their lived experiences and struggles, as well as their tenacity to overcome violent borders in the search for a better life. We thus, first and foremost, want to thank those who move determinedly across borders for your trust when reaching out to us via the phone.

We know that we have become, and will continue to be, a disruptive force, challenging the inhumane border regime. We have pushed authorities into unwanted rescue activities, when they would have chosen to leave people to die. Our disruption has become amplified through the many collaborations we engage in, with other noborder activists, NGOs operating at sea and on land, with lawyers, journalists, some compassionate politicians even. Collectively, we try to prevent every illegal pushback and seek to make every person in distress count.

Currently, we face a harshening wave of racism, authoritarianism and inhumanity – all over Europe as well as in North Africa and elsewhere. We have to fear that the border regime will become even more brutal in the years to come. We can only struggle on in a broad alliance of progressive forces. Thus, our second ‘thank you’ goes out to all networks and actors with whom we have cooperated over the past decade. All those who are part of the civil fleet, who send rescue ships and airplanes to find people in distress, and all others with whom we share the fight for safe passage and global justice.

For our tenth anniversary, we publish this book, which is the fifth of its kind. In it, we share articles, analyses, interviews, and poems. We offer an account of how the Alarm Phone started and how it developed. We highlight the struggles against criminalization and the struggles for memory in the form of CommemorActions, alongside families and friends of the missing. We present sister projects of our network and show maps, graphics, and photos. Together,

these fragments speak for our common perspective: We will continue with our solidarity on the routes and build and extend infrastructures for freedom of movement.

Never forget, never give up! This is and will remain our motto in our struggle for freedom of movement and equal rights for everybody. We will not give up the hope for a future, in which our archive of violence against people on the move will serve as the basis for a systematic interrogation and condemnation of state crimes against humanity, as the basis for demands of accountability and compensation.

As Alarm Phone, we will move on in contested spaces and we will follow the tenacity of people on the move as a transnational nodal point of a network that undermines and overcomes a racist and exploitative system of global segregation.

**No border lasts forever.
Solidarity will win.**

Alarm Phone, 11 October 2024

Ferry transfer and farewell in the port of Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece, 2009. - Photo: Alarm Phone

2.



**Backstories
of the
Alarm Phone**



Final demonstration of the 'March for Freedom' to Brussels, Belgium, in front of the European Parliament, June 2014. - Photo: kein mensch ist illegal Hanau

A symbolic date

The very first day the Alarm Phone became operative was 11 October 2014. About one year before, in the context of another big shipwreck in the central Mediterranean, the idea to create a hotline for people in distress at sea had emerged. For several months, dozens of activists busily prepared the logistics and technical infrastructure of the phone system and also collectively drafted first operational concepts. So-called 'alarm plans' were developed for the different sea regions and it was clear that, for such an ambitious project with a 24/7 hotline, at least fifty experienced and committed people were needed. Building the initial team was only possible to prior noborder struggles and networks.

Alarm Phone was therefore born within the continuity of grassroots struggles against the EU border regime, seeking to overcome and undermine that regime in the Mediterranean. It was anchored in the concrete experiences of people on the move, who directly supported and even became members of the project. On this basis, the Alarm Phone could grow over the last ten years to build an effective infrastructure for freedom of movement as part of larger transnational struggles for global justice.

In the following contributions, we will outline the 'backstories' of the Alarm Phone, i.e. the different developments in various regions which eventually contributed to the emergence of our activist hotline.

https://alarmphone.org/en/2014/10/08/watch-the-med-alarm-phone-against-left-to-die-cases-at-sea/?post_type_release_type=post

<https://alarmphone.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Alarmphone-Call-english1.pdf>



Activists organising in the forest around Ceuta, a Spanish enclave bordering Morocco, 2013. - Photo: No Borders Morocco

The situation in Morocco before the arrival of the Alarm Phone

An interview with Fatou and Rodrigue

Since when have you been in Morocco and what was the situation (for migrants) like before 2014?

R I came to Morocco in 2001 already, but I can try to tell a bit about the communities and their activities in Morocco between 2010 and 2014. Even before 2010, there were many Sub-Saharan communities in Morocco; Cameroonians, Nigerians, Senegalese, people from Ghana, Guinea-Bissau... In 2010, the Ivorians had very serious problems in their country, and many of them came to Morocco, including Guineans. Among them were so-called "VIP" migrants who came by plane. To come to Morocco at that time, you needed to have a passport and a visa. And if you weren't a student, it wasn't easy to get one.

F I arrived in Tangier in 2013. We were a group of 14 people. We sold small things on the street, and for those who wanted to leave, we pooled our money. There was a large Sub-Saharan community with many Senegalese, Cameroonians, Ivorians, Malians, Gambians, and Guineans. The Bouhalef neighborhood was like a big migrant city; there were only black people there. We lived in houses that were empty. We also organized trips there. The Senegalese who knew the sea because they were fishermen sold the zodiacs. At that time, there were many departures from Tangier. Every day there were "Bozas" with zodiacs. All activities took place in Tangier. It was self-managed. That's how the migrant network in Tangier started.

How did you organize yourselves and how was the communication between migrant groups?

R There were communities starting from Tamanrasset (on the Niger-Algeria border). So, the president of the Cameroonians in Fez or Meknes communicated with the president in Tamanrasset, and from there we could coordinate the march to Morocco. There weren't many associations or activists at that time. There were, for example, MSF in Oujda and Padre Esteban in Nador who helped migrants. They provided food to the migrants who were in the forest near Melilla.

Did you work with other activists or associations at that time?

32 R I have known people from the *Conseil de migrants* since 2013. Camara Laye came to the forest for meetings to motivate the migrants and knew more organizations. There was also Serge, who is still with the network. In northern Morocco, there was Arona, who was active with an association in Tangier that no longer exists.

F I knew some too. Arona worked with an association that brought clothes, medicine, and other things for migrants. It was a solidarity structure. People who were at sea called Helena Maleno. At that time, I was in contact with her. Helena helped many boats.

When and how did you get to know about No Borders Morocco?

F An activist from No Borders Morocco introduced me to the networks. They organized a small event at the beginning of 2014 in the hall of the Chabaka association in Tangier. We could discuss the dangers of the sea and learn how the arrival in Spain happens thanks to the information from Welcome to Europe.

R Even before 2014, I communicated with some people in Europe by phone without ever having seen them. We also met people from Melilla. I got in touch with No Borders Morocco thanks to José Palazón from the Prodein association in Melilla. After the attack in Tarajal on February 6, 2014, which resulted in 14 deaths, I was deported to Fez where I met a person from No Borders Morocco. In the following years, No Borders Morocco helped organize collective houses. There, Europeans from several groups could join us; there were computers and rooms for meetings. Thanks to that, we could meet and gather in one place.



Boukhalef, the newly inhabited district of Tangier, Morocco, 2013. - Photo: No Borders Morocco



Boats4People conference in Monastir, Tunisia, 2012. - Photo: Alarm Phone

“The dynamic of the Arab Spring is emanating into the entire world...”

Backstories in the Central Mediterranean

“The departures occurring in Northern Africa demonstrate what is possible. They refer to a new Arab World, a new Africa, a possible new Europe. They refer to new spaces of freedom and equality, to be created in transnational struggles: in Tunis, Kairo or Bengazi as well as in Europe and in the movements of migration, crisscrossing both continents.”

-From the statement “Freedom not Frontex”, published by Noborder activists in March 2011.-

Of course, many of these hopes and expectations were disappointed in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings. Still, the revolts that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and January 2011 led to a rupture in the European attempts to build up an externalised border regime. At the time, while the Arab Spring was blossoming, thousands took to the boats and this period marked also the beginning of new trans-Mediterranean contacts and collaborations. In May 2011, a first visit of European Noborder activists took place in Tunis, Zarzis, and other Tunisian cities.

With the escalation of the civil war in Libya, many people, also thousands from other African and Asian countries, had to flee. Thousands of people from different countries were brought by UNHCR and IOM to a large camp in Tunisia, near the Libyan border: the Choucha camp (see the interview on

page 31). Tunisian and European activists supported them in their demands for evacuation.

In summer 2012, and in response to the increasing death toll in the Mediterranean Sea, the Boats4People network was created as a new trans-Mediterranean alliance. Besides organising symbolic actions at sea, denouncing the deadly effects of the European border, activists also came together during the World Social Forums in Tunisia and encountered people on the move and the families of the missing. At the time, in Europe, protests demanding the resettlement of people from Libya and Tunisia grew louder.



Front page of bordermonitoring.eu brochure from August 2011, entitled 'Tunisia: between revolution and migration. Impressions and fragments of a delegation trip in May 2011'.

In October 2013, following the two infamous shipwrecks near Lampedusa and Malta, the Italian maritime operation *Mare Nostrum* was launched. Military vessels would rescue about 150.000 people until the operation ended on 31 October 2014. What followed was Frontex's operation Triton, an

operation of deliberate non-assistance and deterrence by death at sea. Over the following years, European governments also reinforced their policies of border externalisation, not least by financing and training the so-called Libyan coastguard. Consequently, interceptions, push-backs and the number of deaths increased.

It was at this time that the concept of the Alarm Phone was developed, inspired by individuals like Father Mussie Zerai, whose private phone had been an emergency line for people in distress at sea for years already, and by the countermapping platform "WatchTheMed", which had reconstructed boats that were 'left to die'.

Then, on 11 October 2014, the Alarm Phone was launched with this sentence, outlining its vision:

"Such an alternative alarm network would be a first but an urgently required step on the path toward a Euro-Mediterranean area that is not characterised by a deathly border regime but by solidarity and the right for protection and the freedom of movement."



Action by Boats4People in Choucha Camp in Tunisia, July 2012. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Choucha Camp in Tunisia, 2011. - Photo: Alarm Phone

From Choucha Camp to Lampedusa

B. is an activist from Nigeria. From 2010 to 2023, he was in Libya and Tunisia, where he met people from the Alarm Phone at actions and conferences. Today he lives in Germany. Here he tells us the story of his struggle, his fight for human rights and against racism, and how he overcame borders.

B. fled in 2010 as a political activist from Nigeria to Libya. In 2011, the war broke out in Libya. Millions of people from other countries were evacuated. People who could not return to their home countries and wanted to apply for asylum were brought to the Choucha camp in Tunisia, close to the Libyan border. B. was among them :

"We were not informed how the system in this camp worked and the whole asylum process was done in a rush. We encountered a lot of irregularities, e.g. the translators were selected from the camp and did not speak the same Arabic dialect as the Tunisians. Among thousands of Nigerians in the camp, there was only one person who received a refugee certificate and was later resettled to Germany. The asylum applications of all the other Nigerians were rejected after less than a week - on the grounds that UNHCR said Nigeria was a peaceful country."

B. and other people in the camp organised against this unfair system.

In the Choucha camp nobody got money, and in 2012 even the provision of food was stopped for the rejected asylum seekers:

"We survived by doing some minor jobs in the nearby city Ben Guerdane, while some begged for alms from the Libyan road users. The Choucha camp was officially closed in June 2013, but many of us stayed there as we had no other choice. We started our struggle with the communities who were rejected. Some national and international human rights organisations supported us, e.g. if we wanted to go to Tunis as a group. We organised protests in front of the UNHCR headquarters and the EU delegation in Tunis. We were arrested four times at those protests, and in 2015 the Tunisian authorities tried to silence us by expelling 15 of us to the Tunisian-Algerian border. They confiscated our cell phones and all our documents that indicated that we were registered at the UNHCR. The Algerian border guards asked if we wanted to go to Algeria or to continue our struggle in Tunisia? We explained to them that we were in Libya before the war and that we did not come to Tunisia ,illegally,' but that international organisations brought us there. The Algerian border guards said that if we wanted to, we should go back to Tunisia. The Tunisian border guards finally allowed us to enter. Some international activists supported us and some people at the border gave us a bit of money and food. IOM insisted we wait at the border until they bring us back to Tunis, but we managed to go on our own."

In Tunis, the group lived in a house of an association for about one month, but since nobody received any money, some of them went back to the Choucha camp and worked nearby.

"On 19 June 2017, the military came with bulldozers and the whole camp was destroyed. We were put on busses and the IOM brought us - a group of 46 people - to Tunis to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then to a hostel in La Marsa, a suburb of Tunis. Some of our group are still there. We brought up our issue to different organisations, like the FTDES (Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights), several ministers and international entities in Tunis. Authorities wanted to make us invisible, e.g. by blocking any website where we published something about us, or by deleting parts of television interviews, in which people from Choucha explained their situation. They also told lies about us in the media."

At the end of 2017, B. left La Marsa and found work in Ben Guerdane. In 2019, he met A., who had fled from horrible detention in Libya. They got married and decided to stay in Ben Guerdane. There was a lot of racism there already then, and later it became worse.

"When our baby was born in April 2022, we were thrown out of our apartment. We managed to find another apartment, but after the racist speech of the Tunisian president in February 2023, citizens were

empowered to take action against Black people, also in Ben Guerdane. Tunisians who rented flats to Black people were threatened with imprisonment. So, in June 2023 we had to leave our house. We, as Black people, could not get a taxi anymore, so we went by foot with our baby to Zarzis. The situation there was the same. This was the main reason why we decided to leave Tunisia and to take the risk of trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Since 2011, many people had done it, but I was very reluctant. Our first attempt to cross was in July 2023. We were 42 people in the boat and we spent five days at sea, because after three days we ran out of petrol for the engine. We had no phone connection, so we could not call the Alarm Phone. Fishermen brought 25 of us back to the Tunisian coast, but many people died.

In September 2023, we tried again and after four days, on 14 September we arrived in Lampedusa. It was an overwhelming situation. More than 7,000 people were in the hotspot. After two days, we were brought to Sicily and from there to Verona. We managed to leave the camp, in which we had been locked up because of Covid, and thanks to the solidarity of some people we were able to get on a train that took us to Hamburg."



Protest camp at the UNHCR office in Tunis, Tunisia, 3 September 2013. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Protest in front of the Pagani detention centre in Lesvos, Greece, 2009. - Photo: Alarm Phone

Maintaining close relationships with people on the move, despite daily pushbacks

Backstories of the Alarm Phone in the Aegean

Since the No Border camp in 2009 on Lesvos, refugees, activists, migrants, and everybody in-between had built close relationships and networks of exchange and support. During the no border-camp, people gathered together in a circus-tent built in the harbour of Mytilene. This space allowed many people who had newly arrived on the island and were waiting for registration to exchange with locals, tourists and No Border activists from all over Europe.¹ This period also saw the final days of the prison-like detention centre of Pagani, which existed long before the notorious Moria hotspot camp. At this time, revolts were repeatedly started inside the prison, finally leading to its closure. Together, the people from the No Border camp spent a summer and autumn inside and outside the walls of Pagani - coming together again when those released had made it to the Greek mainland and further North.

What became clear during these days was that there was an obvious need for information for people navigating the borders of Europe. And so, shortly afterwards, in the beginning of 2010 we collectively began to build the web guide of 'Welcome to Europe' (w2eu.info). The idea was to collectively create an accessible network of support structures that could help as many people as possible, not only on the people who arrived on the Aegean islands.

¹ Infopoint during the Nobordercamp Lesvos 2009: <http://w2eu.net/files/2010/03/Infopoint.pdf>



Front page of 'Infopoint' brochure from transact at the NoBorder Camp 2009 in Lesvos, Greece.

In 2013 many of us travelled together back to the border.² Welcome to Europe and Youth without Borders organised a get-together on Lesvos. Young people who had arrived in Greece in 2008/2009 and succeeded in fighting for their right to stay in Germany and Sweden returned to their place of arrival in Europe. They wanted to welcome people and provide them with support, just as they had received support when they had first arrived. Together, we protested in front of Moria - the newly built prison which later become infamous all over the world as another shameful example of Europe's violent policies of deterrence and imprisonment of people on the move.

On Saturday, 12 October 2013, there had been a spontaneous visit in the morning time in the prison and we managed to speak with the people directly at the fence. After this, we gathered for a memorial in the harbour of Thermi.

² Journey back to the border 2013: <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/files/2014/02/Lesvos2013-Screen-DS.pdf>

Those of us who had travelled to Lesvos were joined by Syrian relatives who had lost family members in a shipwreck off the coast of the island in March 2013. Local fishermen who had rescued the survivors and recovered the bodies also joined us. In the memorial we remembered not only those who had died in the Aegean, but also all those who had drowned in front of Lampedusa a few days before and the case of the left-to-die boat that had happened only the day before, on 11th of October.

The idea to create an Alarm Phone was born not long after this. After meetings with survivors of the 11th of October 2013 on Malta, and as a result of the disturbing left-to-die policy in the central Mediterranean, it was clear action was needed. When the idea was being discussed it became obvious that such a structure would need to support people beyond the central Mediterranean: it would also have to be ready to support the people struggling in the small boats in the Aegean.

However, when we first started with the Alarm Phone, we were unsure how to make effective use of our hotline in the Aegean Sea. For many years already, Greek activists and NGOs together with international allies had tried to document and denounce these practices of human rights violations at Europe's outer borders. Illegal pushbacks by Greek coastguards were daily practices at that time. When discussing this issue with people who had directly experienced such life-threatening situations, we thought it would be impossible to develop strategies for real-time interventions to prevent these practices.

We built mixed teams of people with lived experiences of the sea-crossing and activists with experience in scandalising these practices of human rights violations at Europe's outer borders. Together, we started to gain a better understanding of the sea crossings and tried to find strategies of what to do and how to react when people were in distress in the Aegean Sea. We were ready to try what seemed, at that time, impossible.

In 2014, we made a second journey back to the border. Whilst there, we would sit together in Mytilene with those who had just arrived by boat and try to understand more about the current situations during the crossing and what we could do to support.

In the first year of Alarm Phone, self-organised groups of refugees from Syria and Iraq would teach us many things - and we were ready to learn. Newroz and Eltaf would describe in the first anniversary-booklet how they started to use the memories of their own journey via the sea to take decisions during Alarm Phone shifts³:

³ How we use our memories to take decisions - Interview starting on page 44 in the one year Alarm Phone booklet: <https://alarmphone.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Alarm-Phone-1-Year-Moving-on-English.pdf>

"We are familiar with the situation and this is why we are maybe not so much afraid of taking responsibility. Of course, the calls and the contacts touch us emotionally, but it does not keep us from doing it. It is rather different from what takes me back right into the fear of the past. It is in other moments of my life, that sometimes there is for example the smell of wet gravel that reminds me of the freighter and the stench still is in my nose. This type of memory comes more indirectly through smell for example, or a shaking motion. At the beginning of this year, when there were again big boats going to Italy I started to remember my own story. Actually, I found out in an Alarm Phone meeting where exactly I had arrived at that time. It was good to find out: that's me, my story. The beautiful thing is simply that we complement each other so well with all our experiences and we work with them."

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But this was all a bit later, after the Alarm Phone had already started and when the summer of migration had just begun.

In memory of Noori, our friend

Our friend Noori fled Afghanistan as a teenager. In 2010, we met each other for the first time in Greece on the island of Lesbos. Noori fled further to Norway but was deported to Afghanistan from there. He had to make his way to Europe for a second time via the Aegean Sea and survived the sea twice. By chance we met again in Hanau in 2014. When we set up the Alarm Phone, he worked with us in the first years and helped us to deepen our understanding by sharing his experiences.



He experienced the violence at the border twice, but he wanted to use his knowledge to help others. He set up our first shift-phones and taught us to use WhatsApp. He rarely made big speeches; he was someone who preferred to stay in the background. But he fought steadfastly against the injustice of these murderous borders and against the violence which he himself had been confronted with so often in his young life. We cannot measure how great the wounds in his soul were and how hard this struggle must have been for him.

Now he is no longer with us. We wish him peace and quiet - and the freedom he always sought.

We miss you still. We quietly say thank you. Thank you for letting us know you, Noori, our friend.



Three decades of militarisation and struggles on the French-British border

Towards new ways of crossing the Channel

The contemporary history of struggle of people seeking to cross the French-British border took shape in the 1990s, in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and various conflicts that forced thousands of people into exile from Kosovo to Afghanistan. Initially, people travelling to the UK by ferry were forced to return to France. Subsequently, more and more of them found themselves stuck in the Calais port terminal. This was followed by policies of invisibilisation and the clustering of people blocked at the border, which, for almost 20 years, marginalised people on the fringes and outskirts of cities. Sangatte, a village to the west of Calais, hosted a centre for people delegated to the Red Cross between 1999 and 2001 and then later the shanty town-ghetto of 2016. These were the management phases of a border structured by policies of invisibilisation and police harassment.

In 2003, the Le Touquet agreements were part of a wider set of cross-border agreements to increase port and customs controls with countries operating maritime links with the United Kingdom. They were at the forefront of outsourcing borders by transferring police responsibility to France. They have also involved a long process of militarisation of the coastline through the regular renewal of British funding agreements, in human and technical terms. This militarisation has happened through the increase of the number of police officers, offensive infrastructures, surveillance and control, particularly in these areas of capitalist flows.

A self-organised protest against the many deaths at the border, as well as police and truck driver brutality. A few days earlier, Yasser Abdallah, a young Sudanese man trying to reach the UK, was hit by a truck. The banner reads "since 1999, 304 dead at the French-UK border", Calais, France, October 2021. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel

Historically, people wishing to cross the Channel have done so mainly by lorry, if not by train. Calais acts as a bridge to the UK, with its port and numerous daily ferry links. Since 1994, with the opening of the Channel Tunnel, it has been the main transit point for goods and people between the island and the mainland, while the other ports along the coast - from Dunkirk to the Netherlands - also contribute to cross-border flows, albeit to a lesser extent. Know-how of how to cross the border was therefore built up through attempts to use freight transport, with the omnipresence of lorries, car parks and logistics areas dedicated to the cross-border economy. Even if people were held up at the border for long periods of time, attempts of crossing by swimming were rare due to the risk of drowning. Crossings by lorry or train in comparison were relatively successful and perceived as less mortally dangerous, even though casualties did take place. The idea, let alone the organisation, of boat crossings did not arise until 2018.



Beach in Dunkirk, France, from where many migrant boats leave. In the background a power plant, November 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda

Initially, very localised solidarity networks developed to provide material, legal and accommodation support. In 2009, the organisation of a 'No Border Camp' helped to internationalise the support with the arrival and continued presence of activists from outside. Notably the Calais Migrant Solidarity network, has been supporting and relaying the struggles of people wanting to go to the United Kingdom. Squats were created, occupations and demonstrations held, and police violence and the violation of rights were regularly denounced from the border.

In 2015, two decades of militarisation, an increase in the number of people on the move and of illegalized immigrants in Europe, as well as a new clustering

phase initiated by public authorities all contributed to the creation of Europe's largest ghetto-like shanty town just a few metres from the port ring road. This shanty town, which would last less than two years, left its mark on the history and representations of the border. Both fantasising and disparaging it, public authorities would then use it to reinforce repressive discourse and practices, and institutionalise daily police harassment from 2018 onwards. It is complicated to pinpoint the reasons for the emergence and structuring of boat crossings from 2018 onwards. However, a cultural change seems to have taken place, since the Channel was previously only considered to be crossable by ferry or train. Before 2018, the few boat crossings or attempts to swim across the Channel that had taken place were relatively exceptional events, which received media coverage and were prosecuted, whereas most attempts to cross the Channel by freight, lorry, train or ferry had become commonplace and often went unheeded due to the sheer number of attempts and the frequency with which they were made. However, at the time, week after week the number of boats taking to the water increased, and this at a continuous pace over the next six years. The fence-border separating off the safe means of transport doubled into the sea, which became another border to navigate. The proliferation of fairly well-organised crossings soon made other people want to use this method, using locally found inflatable or semi-rigid boats bought independently.

As a result, from the very first crossings, local activists realised that this was going to be a long-term phenomenon. Thus, without any certainty about the state's response, the rescue services or their possible repression, they backed the idea that it was going to be necessary to talk about it, mobilise on the issue and remain vigilant. While people have always crossed the Channel and continue to do so today, particularly by freight, boat crossings could be seen by some as a new and desirable means of crossing for a number of reasons. They nonetheless mean exposure to other forms of violence and repression.

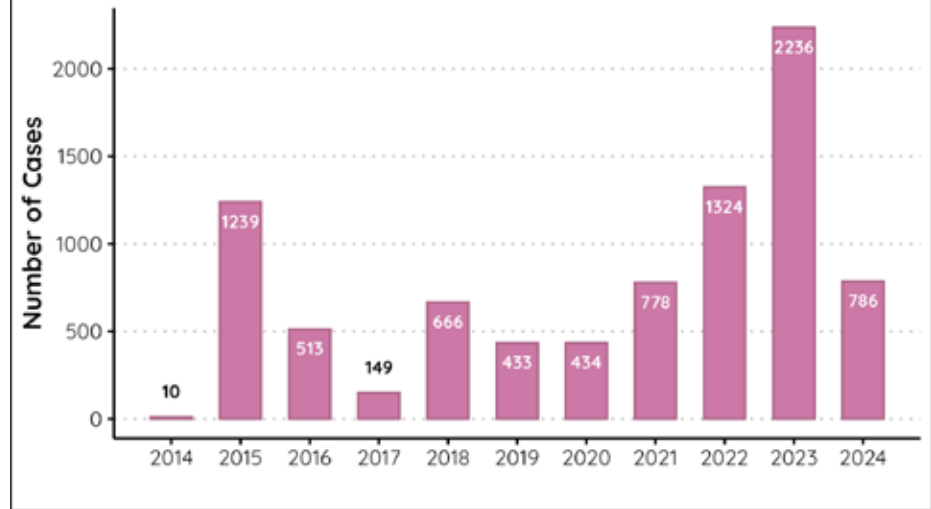
Since the End of 2023, most departures on the Atlantic route left from Mauritania, for example from the fishing port of Nouadhibou. - *Photo: Alarm Phone Laayoune*

3.

**The
Alarm
Phone across
four Regions**

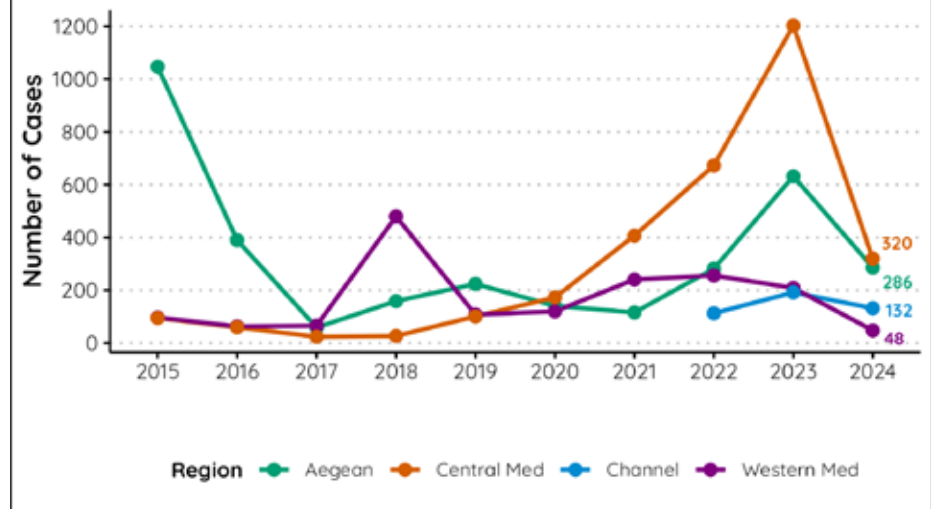
Alarm Phone Cases by Year

*Recorded Cases until End of June 2024
 **Cases in the Balkans and Belarus are not included

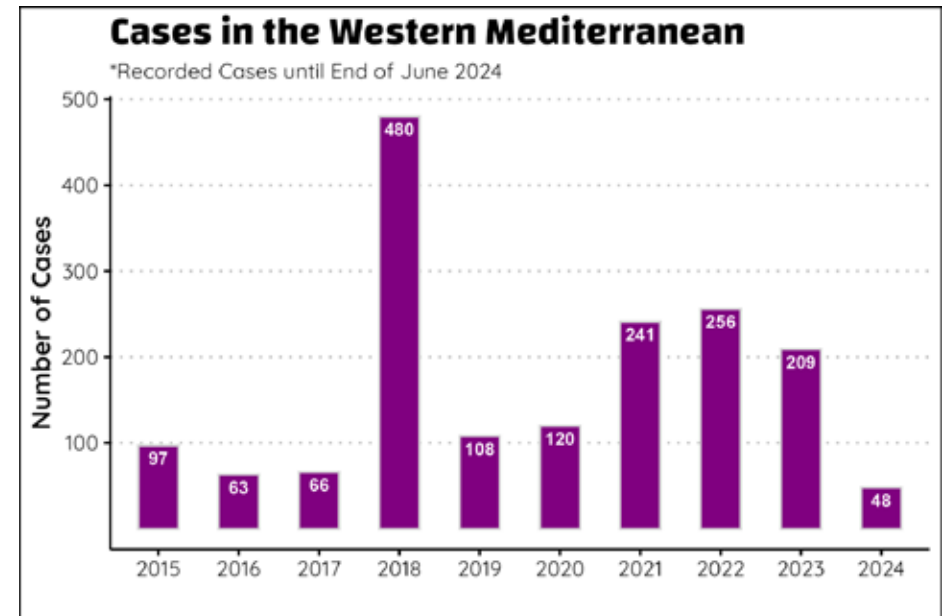


Cases by Region

*Recorded Cases until End of June 2024
 **Cases in the Balkans and Belarus are not included



The Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic





Paintings made for a CommemorAction in Tangier, Morocco, June 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

10 years of networking

Alarm Phone in Morocco

By Junior, Léontine, Babacar, Rodrigue, Saliou and others

For almost 10 years now, we have seen the Watch the Med Alarm Phone network grow in different regions and intensively so in the Western Mediterranean. Since 2014, active members have dedicated their energy, time, knowledge, and resources to campaign for freedom of movement and against the murderous border regime. At the end of 2014, some members of the network were able to carry out a huge amount of networking in Morocco, in collaboration with the NoBorders Morocco group. This led to the creation of the first Alarm Phone teams in Tangier and Nador.

Alarm Phone Nador and Melilla was a group of activists who were already present and quite active. Initially, they were people looking for the best way to support migrant communities in the forest. In the forest camps, there was a lot of mistrust towards white people and towards journalists for security reasons. So first we had to explain that there were European people who shared our struggle, that these people had a big heart. The aim was to raise awareness among the presidents of the communities. In Nador, there are established roles in the camps, i.e. leaders appointed as community presidents. So, it took quite some effort to garner understanding for Alarm Phone. The idea was to assist migrants during the crossing. We started raising awareness in the forest, in people's homes, using cards with the Alarm Phone number: we informed people about the role of Alarm Phone, about what we do. We explained to migrants what to do once at sea, using the 'Safety at Sea' and 'Welcome2Europe' flyers.



Conference in Rabat, Morocco, organised by Alarm Phone, No Borders Morocco and Welcome2Europe, 2015. - Photo: Alarm Phone

In 2015, the authorities decided to expel migrants living in the Gourougou forest, kicking them out and destroying their homes known as 'bunkers'. The migrants moved to new camps a few kilometres away, in Bolingo and Soutia. It has become very difficult for migrants to live in the forest, because it takes several hours and several kilometres to get water and find food.

Together as people from Europe and Africa, we joined forces to create very close links with the presidents of the communities. The work that Alarm Phone was doing in the forests was to build up the trust of the community presidents. For some of the boats that crossed there was a lot of communication, thanks to the massive awareness-raising that we had done. That's why, between 2016 and 2019, we received a lot of calls from boats that BOZAed [arrived in Europe]. From 2020, with the start of COVID, there was a lot of repression, and a lot of people were forcefully displaced to the south. This is still the case today.

The Alarm Phone Tangier team was formed in 2014 and organised a CommemorAction in February 2015, one year after the Tarajal massacre committed by the Guardia Civil. The event was a great success and gave a voice to the survivors.

Between 2015 and 2017, the team grew with the arrival of new members, but also thanks to a cooperation with the Ceuta team. We had to use

humanitarian action (clothes, medicines, blankets) to get in touch with the migrant communities in order to raise awareness and distribute cards with the Alarm Phone number.

In August 2017, there were mass arrivals of people, the famous 'yalla yalla': the Moroccan coastguards no longer guarded the borders, and more than 50 boats embarked at the same time. Within 48 hours, a total of more than 950 people crossed to Europe. This happened after the migrant communities had been notified that the Red Cross [Salvamento Marítimo] was out at sea. The polo [departure point] was free to go! At that moment, Alarm Phone Tangier/Ceuta made an important contribution in assisting boats in the Strait of Gibraltar.



Demonstration at the Spanish embassy in Rabat, Morocco, 6 February 2016. - Photo: Alarm Phone

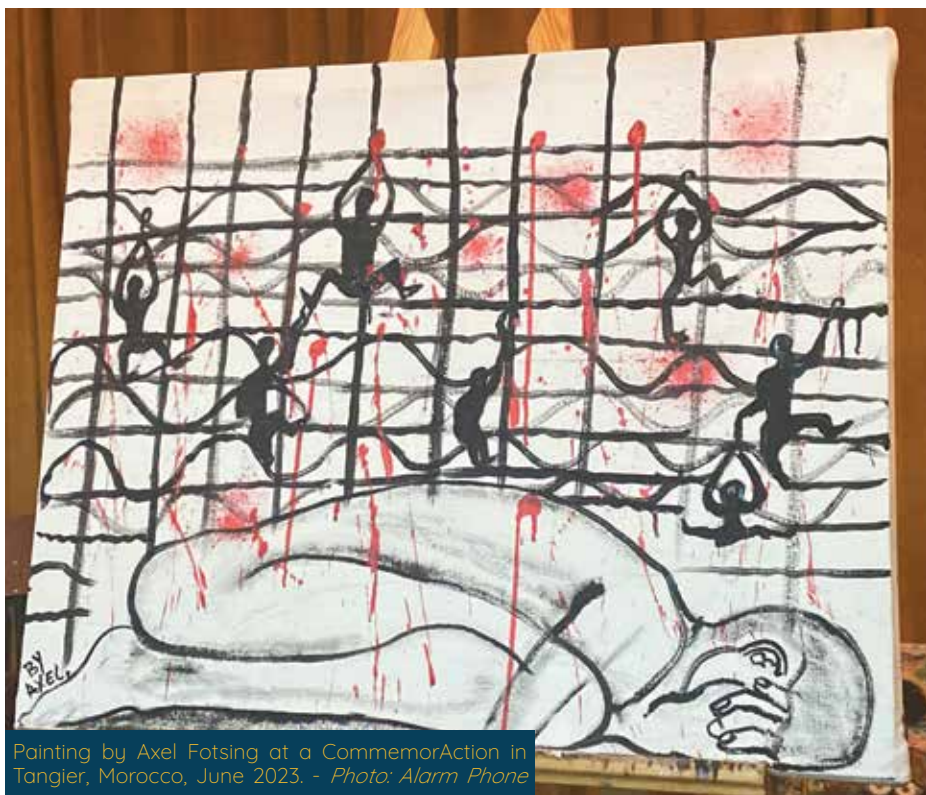
From the end of 2017 until the end of September 2018, there were more than 28,000 BOZA that entered Spain, leaving from Tangier. There were also many deaths and many people went missing at sea. It was a really hectic time in Tangier!

From September 2018, a heavy crackdown began in Tangier, it was really chaotic. After almost 9 months of intense BOZA, the authorities decided to put an end to it and "clean up" the whole city and all the undocumented migrants who were in Tangier at the time. The police started making arrests: hooded officers entered houses and broke down doors to arrest and forcibly displace people. Most of the migrants took refuge in the Spanish Catholic Church. We had lost our homes, we had lost everything.

So, the only refuge for the migrants was the church. From September 2018 until March 2020, many migrants lived in the church compound in Tangier. As Alarm Phone, we sometimes went out to the church to motivate the young sub-Saharan people who were there, telling them not to lose hope.

From March 2020, with the pandemic, the authorities started calming things down, treating us like brothers, saying that we should stay at home and protect ourselves. Tensions began to ease, and the authorities stopped arresting people. At that very difficult time, we helped many sub-Saharan Africans to find homes here in Tangier, in working-class Moroccan neighbourhoods. Some Moroccans agreed to share their homes with sub-Saharan Africans who were living outside, in the forests. For example, we spoke to a woman in the medina who was only housing Moroccan women in her apartment block. We went to talk to her about the situation of single sub-Saharan mothers and this work enabled us to give these mothers access to these apartments for women and children only.

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Painting by Axel Fotsing at a CommemorAction in Tangier, Morocco, June 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

It was really about humanitarian activities until the end of 2021, when COVID-19 started to abate. At that point, the authorities resumed their repression, arrests in the city, forced displacements to the south of the country and even deportations. When boats tried to enter Spain leaving Cassiago were arrested, the people were deported directly, either to Algeria or to their countries of origin. The Moroccan authorities took advantage of the fact that some countries of departure had signed agreements to repatriate their nationals. As Alarm Phone, we have strongly condemned this practice. After 2022, migration routes changed, with many migrants starting to move southwards.



Conference in Rabat, Morocco, 6 February 2016. - Photo: Alarm Phone

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From 2020 onwards, the south became the migrants' destination by force: migrants were the victims of a game of ping-pong, with forced displacement to the south (for migrants from Tangier and Nador) or to the north (for migrants from the Sahara). As a result, Laayoune became the centre of departure for convoys to the Canary Islands. Alarm Phone Laayoune assists migrants who have survived shipwrecks, repression and arbitrary arrests. For awareness-raising, the team decided to do things differently: Rather than reaching out to migrants in traquillots (their homes) or restaurants, we decided to organise awareness campaigns with the presidents of the communities in Laayoune, Tan Tan, Boujdour and Dakhla. In addition, we organise training days and workshops concerning safety at sea, communication, telephones and GPS tracking.

At the same time, we also organise CommemorAction events to remember missing people. We do this on an international scale: Alarm Phone is a transnational network made up of different people in many countries. But we stand united, we're a family and everyone is ready to continue fighting.

In memory of our friend Idriss

Idriss was an essential member of the Alarm Phone team in Morocco for many years. He left us in January 2024.

Idriss always embodied solidarity, acting without many words. He was one of the many who build the backbones of our movements.

Idriss knew what was needed and always tried to use his networks to support people on the move in their daily needs. In his humble and modest way he did what needed to be done.

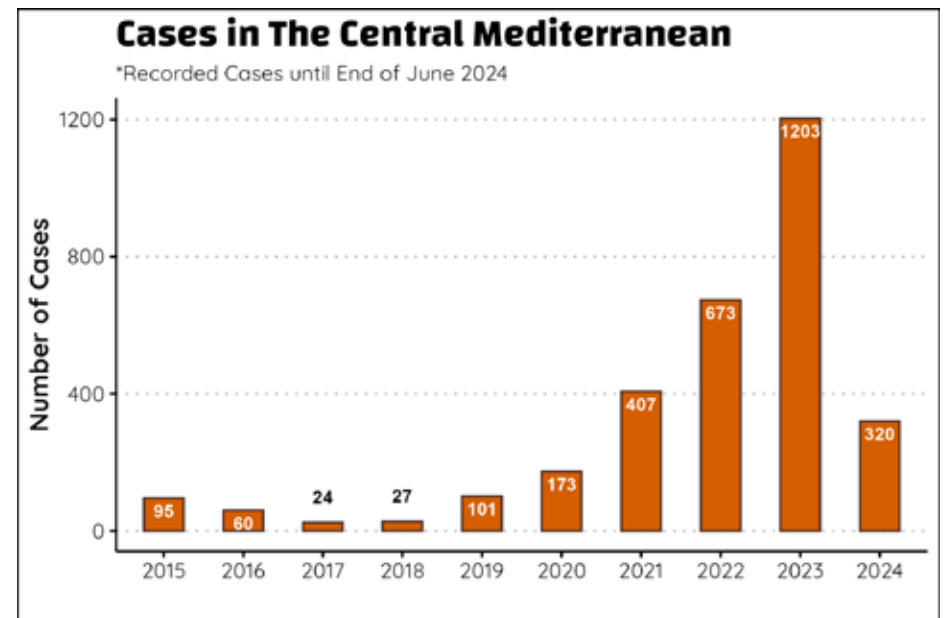
His presence was often quiet - but nevertheless everyone realises that he is now missing. We are missing his smile and his struggle. He was one of our most persistent fighters for the right of freedom of movement.

We will keep his memory alive.

May your soul rest in peace, dear friend Idriss.



The Central Mediterranean





Arrival at the port of Lampedusa, Italy, Summer 2023. - Photo: maldusa.org

It makes a difference!

10 years of Alarm Phone along the Central Mediterranean Route

Introduction

Over the past ten years, Alarm Phone has engaged in more than 3,000 distress cases just in the central Mediterranean region. However, as in the other regions, the frequency of cases has shifted over time, reflecting not only changing dynamics of migration movements and border enforcement but also a growing awareness of our activist network among communities on the move. While we were alerted to 95 distress cases in 2015, our first full year in operation, we worked on 1,203 cases in 2023, the busiest year for us so far.

In 2013, when we wondered whether and how to launch our activist hotline, we asked Father Mussie Zerai for advice. Back then, the Eritrean-Italian priest had been contacted by people in distress in the central Mediterranean for years already, in particular by people from East Africa. In Libya, his phone number was written on the walls of detention camps and passed on - from the prison to the sea. When called from the boats, Father Zerai would gather crucial information and then pressurize Italian authorities to rescue. When we told him about the idea of the hotline project, and our ambition to collectivize his work, he said: "start today, not tomorrow".

In the first years of Alarm Phone, cases from the central Mediterranean would usually come via Father Zerai. He would pass GPS coordinates and the numbers of satellite phones to our shift teams and we would then reach out to the boats and offer assistance. Over time, fewer calls reached Father Zerai and more Alarm Phone directly.

Between 2017 and 2018, the calls received by our network first decreased due to the overall decline in crossings. Over the two years, only 51 boats called us from the central region. However, from 2019 on, every year saw a dramatic increase in cases. From 101 in 2019 to 173 boats a year later, from 407 boats in 2021 to 673 in 2022. And then, last year, reaching even 1,203 cases.

These rising numbers point to the increasingly important role of Alarm Phone in the central Mediterranean Sea over the last ten years. However, numbers do not tell the whole story. In this text, we thus want to highlight some of the crucial developments that have taken place over the past decade and show how migrant struggles and solidarity at sea continue, despite the often deadly border violence of Europe and its North African allies.

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Solidarity at Sea

Ten years of Alarm Phone also means ten years of solidarity at sea in the central Mediterranean. Especially from 2015 on, we saw how more and more activists and humanitarians would enter that space to carry out vital Search and Rescue operations. This solidarity was at first, more or less, accepted by EU member states, including by Italy, whose Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) would routinely instruct NGOs assets to where rescue was needed and then disembark people along different Italian ports.

However, times have changed. From 2017 on, the rescue NGOs became increasingly politically pressured and harassed, denounced as ‘pull factors’, criminalized, and blocked. In parallel, EU member states and institutions were doing what they could to increase the interception capacities of the so-called Libyan coastguard and Tunisian forces. Over time, maritime rescue coordination centers in Italy and Malta have become increasingly dysfunctional. Instead of doing what they were meant to do - coordinate rescues - they delegated such responsibility to ‘third countries’, whose border forces would abduct people trying to escape. NGOs that were available for rescue were thus increasingly bypassed by the European authorities, which widened the deadly rescue gap.

In light of these developments, Alarm Phone took on an increasingly central role in coordinating rescues, especially from 2019 onward. ‘Blinded’ by the lack of state information, rescue NGOs would become more reliant on information of boats in distress received by our activist hotline. Over time, a real chain of solidarity was formed, between us on the phone, those rescuing at sea, and the civil reconnaissance airplanes circling above the Mediterranean in search of distressed boats. Hundreds of boats have been rescued in the last years through this civil fleet collaboration.



People being transferred from the port of Lampedusa, Italy, July 2023. - Photo: maldusa.org

Although state authorities are always informed and thus fully aware of distress situations, they often decide to not engage in rescue activities. Even worse: We regularly experience how their actions produce additional risks to the people on the move and make rescue efforts harder.

When the GPS position of a boat in distress is known to authorities, a ‘race’ begins: On the one side there are Frontex airplanes and drones, the authorities in Italy and Malta, as well as Libyan and Tunisian naval forces who try to intercept boats before reaching Europe and pull them back to Libya or Tunisia. These concerted operations often take place in international waters, including deep inside the Maltese Search and Rescue zone. On the other side there are the actors of the civil fleet, who try to ensure that the boats in distress are not merely rescued at sea but are brought to a safe harbor in Europe.

NGOs have to expect intimidation or even direct attacks if Libyan coastguards and militias are nearby. In this complex operational situation and in a sort of pull- and pushback zone, Alarm Phone and the civil fleet have to bundle

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their knowledge, skills, and capacities to prevent human rights violations. Against this background, the Civil Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (CMRCC) was formed in 2020, giving the ad hoc coordination between civil fleet actors engaged in this chain of solidarity a more durable structure. In ECHOES, its bimonthly publication, the collective practices by the civil fleet are highlighted, under the title: “It makes a difference”. Despite all attempts to criminalize solidarity, this collective civil fleet continues to fight for every boat in distress at sea.

Border Control

Over the past ten years, we witnessed the dramatic militarisation of the central Mediterranean region. While in 2013 and 2014, a short-lived window opened for state-led humanitarian rescue through Italy’s Mare Nostrum operation, the subsequent years were characterized by ever-more draconian efforts to securitise the sea and to deter migrant boats, no matter the human cost.

From Operation Triton to Operation Eunavfor Med and then the shift away from rescue at sea and toward surveillance through the sky by Frontex and co: We directly witnessed the lethal effects of reducing rescue capacities at sea and the growing unwillingness of actors to provide any assistance to boats in distress. Delays and non-assistance have become systematic and the death toll at sea increased. Attacks on the civil fleet has become a central political strategy under the Italian governments, with Salvini as Italy’s interior minister and subsequently with Meloni as prime minister.

We experienced first hand how so many boats and the people on board were ‘left to die’ or even more actively killed. For example, during the Easter days of 2020, Malta escalated its violence against people on the move. First failing to assist several boats in the Maltese Search and Rescue zone, it then orchestrated a pushback operation of one group to Tripoli. What has come to be known as the ‘Easter massacre’ cost the lives of twelve people and survivors were forcibly returned to Libya, where they were imprisoned in an inhumane camp.

Over recent years, death at sea has been a daily occurrence. Alarm Phone has been able to document innumerable human rights violations and innumerable boats capsizing but also, very often, we only learned from relatives about shipwrecks that had occurred, with their loved ones going missing. Unfortunately, with such border violence becoming increasingly normalised, the exposure of crimes at sea is receiving less and less attention in the media and the public. As a consequence, the killings at sea continue, in full impunity and with no accountability.

Continuous Transits but also escalating Racism and Border Violence in Tunisia

After 2011, the year of the Tunisian uprising, 2023 became the year with the highest number of arrivals from Tunisia to Italy. More than 90.000 people, in their majority from West-African countries like Guinea or the Ivory Coast, made it to Sicily by boat, mainly from Sfax to Lampedusa. These continuous transits shaped significantly what we called the “small summer of migration” last year in the Central Mediterranean region.

This development occurred in the context of the Tunisian president Saïed’s hate speech in February 2023 and increased violence and racism targeting Black people in Tunisia since. Even valid residence papers did not protect Black people. They faced institutional violence, including racial profiling and arbitrary detention. Attacks and even pogroms took place through armed mobs and security forces. The ongoing violence culminated in illegal mass deportations to the desert areas bordering Libya and Algeria, leading to numerous deaths and disappearances.

In reaction to the increased number of crossings over the summer, peaking in September 2023, the border violence along the Tunisian route escalated even further. On the water, the number of interceptions by the Tunisian coastguard, with nearly 70.000 interceptions in 2023, doubled when compared to the year before. Violent forms of behaviour by the Tunisian coastguard – boats being pushed away and rammed, people being beaten with sticks and intimidated with gunshots, engines being stolen from rubber dinghies and people being left adrift at sea – became standard practices. According to official figures released by Tunisian authorities, between January and May 2024, about 28,000 people were intercepted. Also many of them would face deportations to Libya or chain deportations via Algeria to Niger.

This brutalisation by the Tunisian border authorities, which has been documented for several years already, is taking place against a backdrop of increasing border externalization policies by the European Union and its member states. European support for Tunisian security forces has considerably increased, setting up a “refoulement by proxy” regime, following the example of the EU’s cooperation with Libyan militias.

<https://alarmphone.org/en/2024/02/18/2023-a-long-summer-of-migration-in-the-central-mediterranean-sea/>

<https://alarmphone.org/en/2024/06/20/interrupted-sea/>



Pushback to Libya, 2023. - Photo: Sea-Watch

Continuous ruptures, contested spaces

While the central Mediterranean region thus remains a liquid graveyard also ten years after we launched our hotline, the use of death as deterrence continues to fail. Despite a decade of intensifying border control and militarisation, the central sea route has not been 'sealed off'. Quite the contrary is the case: ruptures and breakthroughs continue.

In Libya, the self-organized struggle of the Refugees in Libya has been a remarkable political struggle, organizing not only in an extremely dangerous environment but carrying on the fight - from detention centers to the sea and to the streets of Europe where protests highlight that the suffering of people in Libya is directly connected to the actors and their decisions made in Geneva and Brussels.

The year of 2023 has been particularly remarkable in terms of ongoing ruptures: more than 157,000 people reached Italy via the sea and therewith the highest number of arrivals since 2016. This "small summer of migration" saw the landing of 112 boats and more than 5,000 people in Lampedusa in one single day - the 12th of September 2023. Often traveling on small boats from Tunisia, thousands arrived on this island and broke through the central

Mediterranean border. In Lampedusa, the hotspot was overwhelmed and collapsed and many moved quickly on, to the Italian mainland and beyond.

Five years after the Alarm Phone was launched, in 2019, one of our members wrote the following sentence into our anniversary book: The Alarm Phone comprises those "*who, with each shift, remove a brick from a wall and add it to a bridge.*" This vision of a bridge continues to accompany our daily practice.

We know that if there was the political will, the sea would no longer be a deadly barrier but a bridge, connecting both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. It seems far away, if we look at recent political developments. For 2024, the number of people who will succeed in escaping Libya or Tunisia and reach Europe appears to be much lower than in 2023. Yet, in whatever direction the political developments will go, we will continue to be present in the central Mediterranean Sea, under the slogan: "Ferries not Frontex - Towards an open Mediterranean space!"

Boats arriving at the port of Lampedusa, Italy, September 2021. - Photo: Sea-Watch Airborne



In memory of our friend Wolli

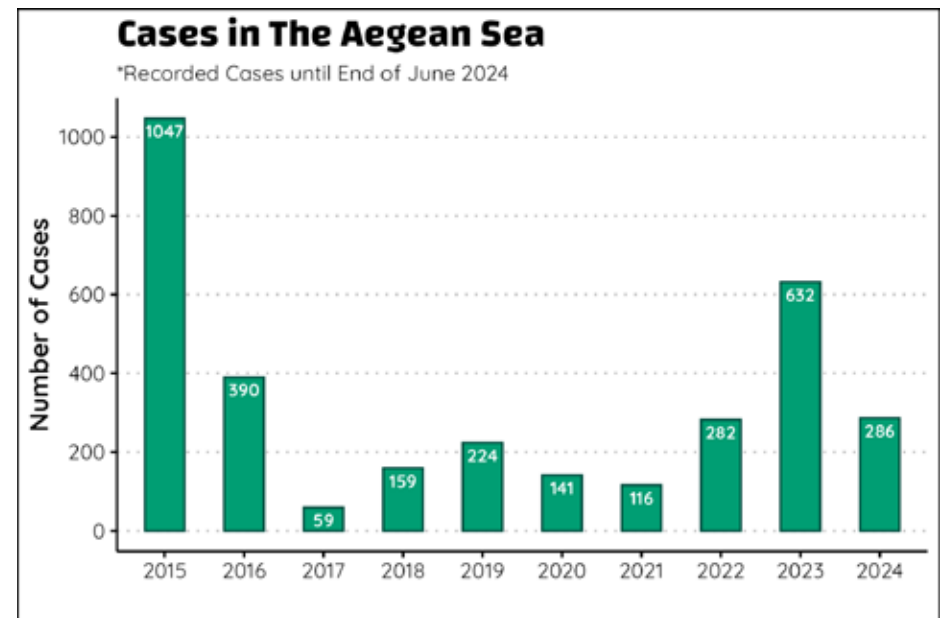
Our friend and comrade Wolli passed away peacefully on 9 October 2021 in Munich, only a few weeks after we were all together at our Alarm Phone Meeting in Palermo.

Wolli was a networker in Munich with a lot of connections and a strong vision to connect different struggles. He made connections easily with people - in the broader sense of creating connections between and for movements as well as in the small moments of daily life. He was the one who always made sure that everyone had a coffee. He was also an artist and loved to paint.

Your ideas, your laughter, your strength, your solidarity, your painted banners and posters, your determination, your clear stance against injustice, your spirit of resistance - you beautiful human being, will continue to accompany us in our struggles.



The Eastern Mediterranean region





Ferry leaving Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece, 2015. - Photo: Welcome to Europe

Contested Spaces and Unforgiveable Massacres

The Eastern Mediterranean Region

The Aegean region between Türkiye and Greece was an important starting point at the beginning of Alarm Phone. In the past ten years, routes have changed, and violence has escalated - with deadly outcomes. The cruel games that the European border regime plays with people's lives demonstrates the brutal face of border policies. Here, we look back at cases, reports, and changes that have taken place over the last ten years in the Eastern Mediterranean region: from pivotal moments during the long summer of migration in 2015, to the EU-Turkey deal in 2016, to systematic pushbacks in Greece since 2020 and the increasing violence and criminalisation people on the move face. We also remember and share the voices of the people who made their way across these dangerous borders.

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The long summer of migration: 2015 and the years after

"This long summer of migration in 2015 has clearly shown that barbed wire fences, military forces and other measures of deterrence cannot stop human mobility."

-Alarm Phone regional report, 6 September 2015-¹

¹ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/09/06/weekly-report-attacks-occurred-in-the-aegean-sea-by-masked-men-presumably-units-of-the-greek-coastguard-2/>

In 2015, the border regime collapsed thanks to immense and sustained pressure from many migrant communities who collectively broke through the EU's border in their march of hope. As a result, some borders were opened for people to move from Greece northwards. However, whilst the European media spoke of a migration 'crisis' for European countries, it remained clear that the only 'crisis' which existed was for people on the move - a global crisis of social justice. Despite the strength and significance of this moment, violence and death remained a permanent consequence of Europe's border policy and practices of deterrence during these months, especially in the Aegean region. As an Alarm Phone regional report at the time described:

*"This past week we learned that, once again, attacks occurred in the Aegean Sea by masked men, presumably units of the Greek coastguard. We received first-hand testimonies of those who had suffered attacks at sea on four different occasions, when masked forces stopped and entered their vessels, and often stole their engines, leaving them behind in acute distress."*²

These forms of attacks, as we'd learn later on, would become again systematic. Despite this, in the summer and autumn of 2015 most of the calls which reached Alarm Phone came from the Aegean. There were hundreds of cases registered. In the first week of September 2015 alone Alarm Phone supported 66 boats which crossed the Aegean. Some weeks later, there were 90 cases in a week. During this time, there were between 4,000 and 10,000 people arriving per day on Lesbos. As Alarm Phone, we wrote of these intense weeks in September 2015:

*"The social movement of migration in the Mediterranean Basin towards Europe has never been that strong: more than half a million people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea in the first nine months of this year, more than twice as many as in the entire year of 2014. The vast majority, more than two-thirds, arrived in Greece, which reflects the hundreds of distress calls the Alarm Phone has received from that region. As the summer comes to an end and the weather changes, sea-crossings become even more dangerous."*³

The high number of crossings meant that even when people managed to make the journey to the islands and survived violent practices at sea, they faced difficult conditions. Access to accommodation, medical care and other basic needs were severely limited and it was vital that people were allowed to

2 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/09/06/weekly-report-attacks-occurred-in-the-aegean-sea-by-masked-men-presumably-units-of-the-greek-coastguard-2/>

3 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/09/27/alarm-phone-weekly-report-21st-to-27th-of-september-2015/>

reach the mainland. We called for "regular ferry services to Greek mainland"⁴ - not only for the Aegean Sea, but for the Eastern Mediterranean region more widely. We called for "Ferries not Frontex", an essential demand at the time, and also still today!

Despite the violent conditions in Greece and in Türkiye, as well as the dangers of the crossings, people continued their way and refused to be silenced. They stood up against both the perilous crossings and against becoming stuck in Türkiye. In Türkiye they organised collectively, as Alarm Phone reported in autumn 2015:

*"Up to 6000 people walked towards the Turkish-Greek and the Turkish-Bulgarian borders with the slogan #crossingnomore to demand the opening of land borders so that they would not have to risk their lives at sea. This protest movement was met with violence and repression by the Turkish police."*⁵

As people continued to claim their right to move to safety, European governments claimed to be facing an unmanageable 'crisis'. In response to this, extreme measures were taken at a political level, as Alarm Phone reported in October 2015:

*"EU leaders desperately seek to re-stabilise their border regime. Besides the installation of the infamous 'hotspots' in Greece and Italy, the EU is now also drawing the Turkish government more closely into its system of deterrence."*⁶

The hotspots were used to register people after they arrived and were initially places of transit. However, this changed drastically when the EU-Turkey deal was born. Together with many organisations we denounced this development as to us it was clear: the deal with Türkiye would only increase violence and death but offer nothing to establish safe and secure routes.

In 2015, Alarm Phone condemned the deal and called for an investigation of the border crimes already happening in the area at the time:

"These measures will not prevent people from moving but it will make unauthorised human movement even more lengthy, costly, dangerous and deadly. In the light of these developments we call for safe and legal ways to Europe and we also demand independent investigations of the

4 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/09/20/alarm-phone-weekly-report-14-20-september-2015/>

5 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/09/27/alarm-phone-weekly-report-21st-to-27th-of-september-2015/>

6 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/10/18/armed-attacks-on-6-boats-in-aegean/>

violent attacks and pushbacks in the Aegean Sea which deliberately endangered the lives of hundreds of travellers seeking protection and shelter in Europe.”

The EU-Turkey deal

In March 2016 the EU and Türkiye reached an agreement known as the “EU-Turkey deal”. The goal of the deal: Return on large scale asylum seekers who arrived on the Greek islands to Türkiye. In addition, Türkiye agreed to more actively prevent people from leaving towards the EU. For its willingness to act in Europe’s interest and against the interests of hundreds of thousands of people on the move, Türkiye received billions of Euros in return.

The deal was problematic for several reasons. It considered Türkiye as a safe country for asylum seekers. The countless cases of detention and abuse people on the move reported to us while being in Türkiye, as well as forced returns to Syria and Iran have proven that this is wrong.

The deal led to an increase in deportations from Greece to Türkiye and also to a tighter situation of migration control in the country itself, which made departures at sea and on land more difficult - and more dangerous.

After the EU-Turkey deal

After the deal came into practice in March 2016, deportations back to Türkiye increased. Every Thursday, a boat with deportees left from Lesbos and deportation flights were carried out. Hence, as a result of the deal, the islands became open air prisons. Thousands of people faced geographical restrictions meaning they were unable to move to the mainland and instead became trapped in terrible conditions in the hotspots on the islands. When people did manage to move to the mainland, they found themselves in another difficult situation. Taking place alongside the EU-Turkey deal, in March 2016 the northern border between Greece and Macedonia was closed. After these efforts to close off the Balkan Route it became much more violent and dangerous for travellers.

In light of these unsuccessful attempts to control migration, Alarm Phone stated at the beginning of 2020: “No one can stop the rain, but Europe tries hard”⁷. Even though European states put huge efforts into increasing migration control in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, their strategies largely failed. People continued to come, they continued to practice their right and need to move against the increasingly violent efforts of Europe and its partners.

7 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2015/10/18/armed-attacks-on-6-boats-in-aegean/>

8 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2020/01/10/no-one-can-stop-the-rain/>

While pushbacks did not vanish completely, they became, for a brief time, less common. However, over time, pushbacks and attacks started to increase again, and in March 2020, the spiral of violence reached a new dimension.



Survivor of the shipwreck of 24 April 2017 in front of the memorial in Thermi, Lesbos, Greece. - Photo: Marilyn Stroux

Testimonial, 30 October 2019

“When we reached 1000 metres near Samothraki a white boat arrived from the Greek side which was written on “coast guard”. They ordered us to stop and threw a rope. One young man who didn’t want to take the rope got beaten on his head with a metal stick they used. He was injured. They insulted us badly in English. Then they pulled us back towards Turkey. Then they left us with a second bigger boat. We think it was from the NATO. They waited nearby until the boat of the Turkish Coast Guard arrived. They arrested us and took us to 6 days in the police station of Enes. They kept the single men in detention and released us families with kids only. We told to the Greeks we wanted to apply from asylum, but they returned us back. It was the seventh time I tried with my family to reach Europe.”

The real criminal is the border regime: Escalation of violence in March 2020

After weeks of escalating discussions and announcements, the Turkish president Erdogan publicly stated at the end of February 2020 that Turkish forces would no longer stop people from leaving towards Greece and the EU. This episode showed how much pressure authoritarian leaders can put on Europe by weaponising migration and using it as a tool of political negotiations. Erdogan got what he wanted; days of violent confrontations between the Greek Coastguard and travellers trying to cross into Greece. At the same time, Greece got the backing they were asking for. During this time, people crossing the border of Greece, at both land and sea were violently beaten, shot with rubber bullets, and tear gassed. The Greek state even suspended the right to asylum.

Despite the extreme and well-documented attacks against people at sea and at the land border in Evros, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, travelled to Greece and supported their violent actions. Von der Leyen famously stated that Greece was “Europe’s shield”⁹, the shield in Europe’s escalating war against migration. The public broadcasting at the time gave the impression of the exceptionality and performativity of border violence. However, when the cameras turned away, the violence did not stop but instead, has continued until today. This moment led to a new period of openly practiced violence by the Hellenic Coast Guard and Greek border guards in the whole Eastern Mediterranean and Evros region. As such, it saw the start of a new era in the brutalisation of the EU border regime and its acceptance by large parts of the European public started – pushbacks became the new old routine in the Aegean Sea.¹⁰

Alarm Phone continued to support the distress calls from people on the move. We also followed-up with the people after the distress situation ended – often the people were pushed back. Dozens of people told us the horrors they went through. They asked us to “*tell the world what they did to us, so nobody can ever say, they did not know*”¹¹ And so, this is what we did and continue to do.

⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/greece-turkey-refugees-explainer/>

¹⁰ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2020/05/14/push-backs-the-new-old-routine-in-the-aegean-sea/>

¹¹ <https://aeg.bordercrimes.net/report/>

Testimonial, 31 October 2020

On August 31st, 2020, a group of people tried to cross the Aegean Sea towards the island of Symi and was attacked by the Hellenic Coast Guard. A survivor told us:

“We were driving between 1 and 2 hours and when we reached the borderline there was a huge ship of the Coast Guard. They were armed and they told us to stop. Our engine stopped then and could not be restarted. We asked them for help but they only shouted, “go back, go back!”. They started to create big waves to make our boat return backwards by itself. The engine was anyway stopped and so they left us there and watched from a distance. We could then manage to restart the engine and we went backwards, towards Türkiye.”¹²

In their next attempt, the group was attacked again, this time with a knife which pierced their boat. They were left at sea, at risk of drowning. Finally, they managed to call 112 and were found by the Turkish Coast Guard and brought back to Türkiye. The survivor explained the attack with the following words:

“On this boat there were men with masks and arms. They looked like ninjas, all black. They attacked us. Shouting all the time on us. They had a stick and on this stick a knife. They sabotaged the engine. They held a light on us all the time, that’s why on the videos I made it is difficult to see something. Another friend also made video, but they saw that he made it and they slapped him and took the phone and broke it and threw it in the sea. They don’t want us to prove their violence and to show it to the world. But another friend noted down the number they had on their boat: ΛΣ 070.”

Increasing infrastructures of violence & pushbacks

Systematic pushbacks became the brutal reality people faced when they tried to reach Greece. As a part of this, Greece increased their capacities to execute pushbacks, even performing them over hundreds of kilometres.

In October 2020, Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat in distress near the Greek island of Crete. We informed authorities about the emergency distress case. The situation was tense, there were nearly 200 people on board and weather conditions were dangerous. The people tried to land on Crete by themselves but were prevented from doing so by the Hellenic Coast Guard. In the early evening, we received a video from the boat which showed a masked man boarding. After that, the contact broke. Two days later, relatives informed us that the people had been pushed back to Türkiye. They were put into inflatable life rafts and left adrift at sea. What they reported was horrific violence

¹² <https://aeg.bordercrimes.net/report/>

Testimonial, 20 October 2020

“They waited until 9pm. It was very dark already when they entered our boat. There was a Greek boat coming. First, we thought to assist us. It was a big grey ship and it looked like made for war. First, they stormed the boat with men wearing black masks. They entered in a very violent way and started beating everybody around. They broke some people’s arms and fingers. They took phones away and also other sorts of belongings, even clothes or trousers of some people. When they found the captain of the boat, they beat him up with very heavy violence. We all feared that he will die. He was severely injured and had one arm broken 5 times. Also the other hand was broken and he suffered from a brain-shock. Possibly also organs have been damaged, as he was heavily beaten in the stomach. They literally beat him everywhere. He was pushed back with us – back to Türkiye.

They transferred all people on two different boats. I think both boats belonging to the Greek Coast Guard or Military. At this point, the first commando of masked men who entered our boat had left. However, also these next group of officers all wear masks. I was lucky because they put me on the boat with the families, which was better because they did not beat us anymore after the transfer. On the boat where they put most men they continued beating them during the whole journey.

All of us had to sit down on the deck. They shouted: “Sit down. Look down.” We had to sit on the floor and were not allowed to take up the head. They treated us like dangerous terrorists. They did not really speak with us. Only in the beginning one of them said they will bring us to the camp now. It was impossible to realise where they brought us, but they went with a lot of speed. The journey lasted 10 hours. Due to the rain and the wind, we all became wet – also the women and children who were with us on the top of the ship. The Greek officers did not give us any food or water and we weren’t allowed to pee. Some said they want to go to toilet, but they only shouted at us.

When it was morning again they forced us into life-rafts. They pushed us down and some people just fell from the boat into the rubber islands. When we were all on the life-rafts they drove away, but stayed in a distance and observed us. In the beginning we were very afraid because we thought they will shoot us, as they were watching at us while holding guns. It was horrible. Some of the second group later told us that they were put on bigger swimming islands – similar to demobilised boats. During their journey, they suffered more violence. Many of them were injured. They were placed on a different location on these bigger life-rafts without a roof. We only met them in Türkiye.

When the Turkish coastguard picked us up, we suffered another 2 days. We had to sleep outside in a yard, they only gave us some UN-blankets. After two days we had to pay for a bus ride, which finally brought us to a supportive organisation. We could choose then if we want to go to Izmir or to Istanbul. In

total, we spent 4 days in the forest, then 3 days at sea, then 2 days outside in the yard of the police station, then 1 night outside at the bus-stop. So 10 days in total under really horrible conditions.”¹³



CommemorAction in Skala Sikaminias, Lesvos, Greece, 2015. - Photo: Marily Stroux

Beyond the horrific violence which took place during this pushback, this case also demonstrates the collective efforts and solidarity which exists to fight against the injustice and violence which people are forced to go through. A group of survivors together with the Legal Centre Lesvos took legal action to take this case to court,¹⁴ also creating a forensic reconstruction which adds another dimension to the testimonies of the survivors. This court case against Greece is one of many cases which are pending before the European Court of Human Rights and demonstrates efforts to make the Greek state face up to the innumerable pushbacks and violent practices they perform. Even though these court cases often take place out of sight, and are limited by the nature

¹³ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2020/11/27/197-people-pushed-back-to-turkey/>

¹⁴ <https://legalcentrelesvos.org/2023/01/17/press-release-forensic-reconstruction-video-released-today-evinced-the-greek-authorities-illegal-expulsion-of-200-migrants-off-the-coast-of-crete-in-2020/>

of the existing legal framework, these efforts are nonetheless remarkable steps. They not only confront the Greek state and European institutions with the crimes committed against people on the move but are also an important and emancipatory decision of people on the move, who are taking collective action against the ones who attacked their lives. It underlines the diverse landscape that struggles for freedom of movement and struggles against the regime of border crimes are embedded in. These span from individual decisions to cross, to collective actions of crossing, the use of infrastructures of solidarity to support, and the mutual organisation between people on the move and the ones in solidarity with them – be this for the purpose of legal action, moments of joy, or Commemorations. As Alarm Phone, we will continue to contribute all that we can to these manifold daily struggles for freedom of movement, which refuse to relinquish control to the multi-billion Euro industry of migration control.

More calls from Evros: Between unbelievable violence and death

After the escalation of violence in the Aegean Sea, Alarm Phone increasingly started to receive calls from the Evros region, the land border between Türkiye and Greece. This rural region is shaped by the Evros river which marks the frontier between the two countries. The border area in the Evros region is a heavily militarised zone, with highly limited access for civilians, except some locals. This means that the Evros region is a black box. There are no projects or groups active in the region that are able to reach people on the move in distress situations, except authorities.

Shipwreck survivors in front of the memorial for those who died at the Korakas lighthouse in Lesvos, Greece, September 2010. - Photo: Marily Stroux



For many years, people on the move have reported brutal attacks and pushbacks in the Evros region. After March 2020, Alarm Phone started to receive more calls and reports about such attacks. A survivor who reached out to Alarm Phone on August 10th, 2022, was found, brutalised and pushed back by Greek border guards. He had an injured knee and could not walk anymore, which is why he was calling for help. He did not receive the assistance needed. On the contrary, he told us of another violent pushback:

Testimonial, 10 August 2022

“At seven o’clock, close to the highway, a masked/hooded person in green military uniform with the “Border Police” written on it came to me. He took the phone while I was talking to my wife. He broke it and he asked me which knee is injured, I said the right one. He beat me all over my body, especially on the injured knee. He asked me to take out what was in my pockets. I had Euros and Turkish money. He took it all, he robbed me. He checked my bag and didn’t find anything of value but he didn’t let me take anything. He was repeatedly hitting me on my knees with a stick and on my back in a brutal manner. On the main road there was a police car and there was another person in the car, masked and wearing the same outfit. He opened the trunk of the car and put me inside it. It was very tight and I could not breathe. They took me to another area. It was like a forest road, a country road. They asked me to come down and there were two policemen in normal black police uniforms. They were just looking. Here began a torture party of half an hour of severe caning all over my body with a lot of racist talk and sexual humiliations like “I want to kill you” or “I want to fuck you”.

Then a car exchange happened. The police took their car and I was taken in a closed military vehicle. We drove a bit and then they set up a checkpoint by the two masked people. The border police was searching cars. They arrested 3 Afghans, one of whom could not walk, and a Syrian who was in critical health situation. I think he was poisoned by the swamp water.

Another small military vehicle arrived without any ventilation holes, containing at least 30 people in a very small space. We were dying from the heat and the smells. We arrived at a prison close to the border. I don’t know the place, but among the Syrians it is known as “Abu Riha prison”, which has a bad and frightening reputation. It is a dirty prison. They asked us to take off all our clothes and made us all naked and piled all our clothes in only one pile. There were children and women in the other room watching us. Then they gave us 30 seconds to get dressed and people started taking other people’s clothes. Then they put us in a very small military truck. We were at least 70 people in a very small place maximum 2/3 meters.

There were a lot of other cases of fainting and nausea. Half an hour later we reached the Turkish border. We got on the rubber boat and then they left us on the other side.”¹⁵

15 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2022/09/07/a-dilemma-between-unbelievable-violence-and-death/>

'Ferries Not Frontex' sticker on the ferry from Chios, Greece to Çeşme, Türkiye, Summer 2016. - Photo: Lisa Groß



The stories Alarm Phone received from people in Evros are those of dilemmas between unbelievable violence and death. Unbelievable violence if you find yourself in the hands of the Greek border guards, death if you do not try and ask for help and send an alert if a person is lost in the woods or injured. All of this has happened for years in this region, a region in which Frontex has a large presence. They are informed about every alert that Alarm Phone forwards to authorities. Their only reply is: *“Thank you for your email. Please be informed that Frontex has immediately relayed the message to the Greek authorities.”* They are complicit in the crimes happening against people on the move, which often have deadly consequences in the Evros region and at every other border.

Never forget, never forgive: Remember Alaa Muhammad Al-Bakri

On 2nd September 2021, Alaa Muhammad Al-Bakri lost his life on a small islet in the Evros river. This happened after he and his fellow travellers were pushed back and put on an islet by Greek border guards, as the friend of Alaa reported to Alarm Phone after the tragic incident:

“I carried him on my back and took him for a long distance. I surrendered myself to the police and they put us in prison. Then we were disgustedly put in a car and thrown on an islet in the middle of the Evros river. The young man died on the island.”¹⁶

More than a year later, his brother remained unable to retrieve the body of his brother to bury him, nor hold the ones who had murdered Alaa Muhammad Al-Bakri accountable for their actions. He described the cruelty which his brother had to endure and wanted the world to hear it:

“It is as if what had already happened to him wasn’t enough, they tortured him and stole his stuff and abandoned him close to the Evros river without any mercy. It was cold. He endured a lot before he died.”¹⁷

Until today, there were no consequences, no justice done against this crime. Alaa Muhammad Al-Bakri, you are alive in our memory. We will remember you. You will never be forgotten. We say your name and commemorate: Alaa Muhammad Al-Bakri.

More crossings through the Ionian Sea

These circumstances, both at land and at sea, have forced people to become even less visible and to take more dangerous routes on their way towards Europe - with deadly consequences. Over time, we saw that crossings directly from Türkiye to Italy started to rise. This is a very old and known route, which was common in the nineties, but which was used less in recent years - until now. With the increasing attacks around the Aegean islands, people tried to evade the violence and once again started taking this long and dangerous route in overcrowded boats, which are difficult to steer.

In December 2021, around Christmas time, four of these boats were shipwrecked, causing many deaths. Close to Folegandros, about 50 people were feared dead, near Antikythera, 11 people lost their lives and near Paros, 16 people died¹⁸. What followed shows another dimension of the systematic

¹⁶ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/03/20/we-remember-alaam-muhammad-al-bakri/>

¹⁷ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/03/20/we-remember-alaam-muhammad-al-bakri/>

¹⁸ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2021/12/25/three-shipwrecks-with-dozens-feared-dead-in-the-aegean-while-pushbacks-continue-to-happen/>

attack against people's lives. Instead of getting the support needed to deal with their traumatic experience, survivors were detained in the notorious Amygdaleza pre-removal centre near Athens. For several weeks, people could not see a doctor, were not handed out the medicine delivered for them by solidarity groups and were deprived of warm clothes and other supplies. In addition, five people were accused of 'boat driving'. Some of them faced charges that could have meant receiving 16 life sentences. All the while, the real crimes of the border regime and the violence inherently linked to it, remain unaccounted for.

Pylos: A massacre while Europe was watching

On the 13th of June 2023 at 16:53 CEST, we alerted the Hellenic Coast Guard to a boat in distress after people on board had called us for help. The boat was coming from Libya and had ended up near Pylos, a small coastal town on the Peloponnese peninsula. The boat was severely overcrowded, with 750 people reported to have been on board. In the early hours of the 14th June 2023, the boat capsized. Over 600 people died.

As Alarm Phone, we have documented innumerable cases of pushbacks and cases where overcrowded boats capsized because they took longer routes, trying to avoid Greek forces or pushbacks in the Central Mediterranean. Only shortly before the Pylos massacre, on the 23rd of May 2023, Alarm Phone had documented how the passengers of another large boat that had also left from Tobruk, Libya, had been abducted from deep within the Maltese Search and Rescue zone and towed back to Libya.¹⁹ The people were imprisoned in Libya after being forced back there. People on the move know that they need to travel as far as they can to heighten their chances of avoiding pushbacks.

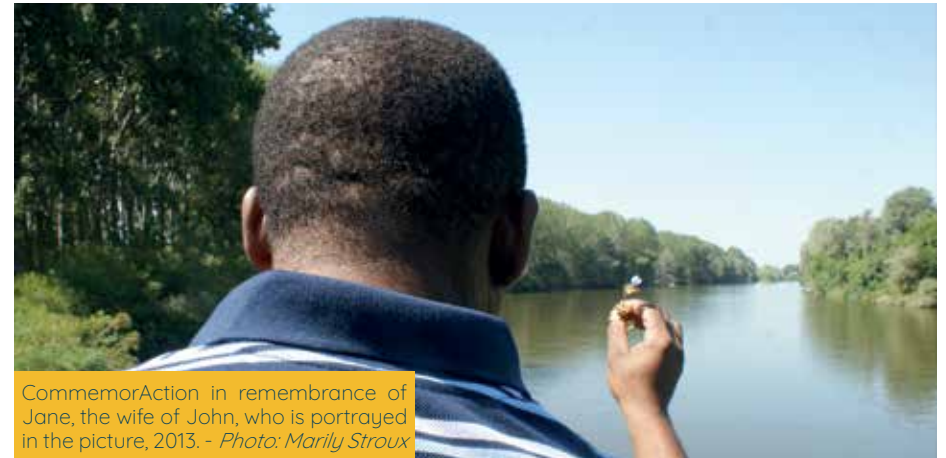
After the fishing boat capsized, Greek authorities were quick to publicly justify their failure to rescue.²⁰ What was clear from the outset and became clearer in the following months through investigations made into the mass murder, was that European authorities could have sent out adequate rescue resources without delay. They failed to do so because their desire to prevent arrivals was stronger than their desire to rescue hundreds of lives. Greek authorities then blamed nine survivors for 'boat driving', using them as scapegoats to cover up their own crimes. In May 2024, the charges against them were dropped and by mid-June 2024, all the nine survivors were set free. Even though the acquittal of the nine people is a victory in the fight against the criminalisation of people on the move and against the strategy of scapegoating survivors for crimes of the border regime, it is only a small step towards justice. There

¹⁹ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/05/29/500-people-abducted-at-sea/#:~:text=In%20the%20afternoon%20of%202023,55%20children%20and%2045%20women.>

²⁰ <https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/06/14/europes-shield/>

is still a long way to go until the ones responsible for the organised violence and extensive border crimes will be held accountable. However, together with others, we will continue to fight for justice for those who lost their lives and for those still missing.

Since the beginning of the Alarm Phone, we have witnessed death and a systematisation of violence in the Eastern Mediterranean, both at sea and on land. But we are also witness to a strong and consolidating network of people on the move as well as individuals and groups in solidarity with them, who collectively and effectively counter the deadly European migration policies. Together, we fight against death at sea, against criminalisation of migration and the absurd prosecution of boat drivers and border crossers. We commemorate the ones who died and fight for the ones still living and crossing. We will not rest!



CommemorAction in remembrance of Jane, the wife of John, who is portrayed in the picture, 2013. - Photo: Marily Stroux

Stop blaming people on the move for trying to escape your violence!

Stop blaming people on the move for their own death!

Stop pushbacks, end death at sea, tear down Europe's borders!

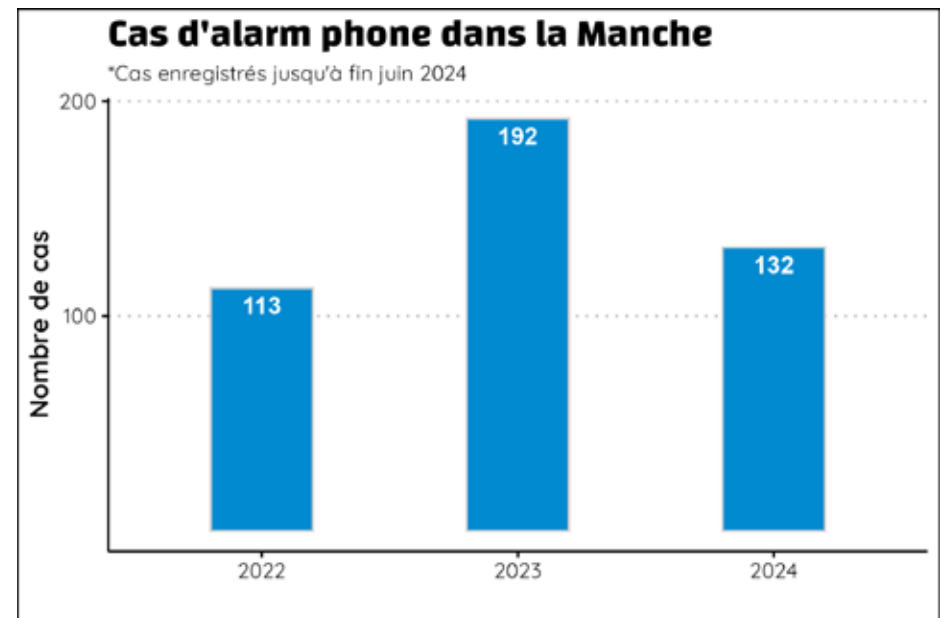
For Freedom of Movement and Freedom to Stay!

Aegean Border Crimes

Archive of the systematic attacks and violence of Greek authorities in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea from March 2020 until April 2022.

www.aeg.bordercrimes.net/

The Channel





Organising in solidarity with people crossing the Channel

From Watch the Channel to the Channel regional group of the Alarm Phone network

At the end of 2018, several successive boat crossings had a lasting impact on the way people cross the French-British border. This autonomous means of transport had been organised beyond the freight networks. For a time, it enabled people wishing to cross the Channel to escape the increasingly technologically sophisticated control and surveillance infrastructures that were being deployed first at the Eurotunnel and then at the coastal ports, including Calais. Initiated by a handful of local communities, the first successes quickly inspired others to consider it as a means of reaching the United Kingdom. At the time, the question of rescue was still often absent from travellers' strategies.

The first solidarity efforts with people at the border on the issue of crossing the Channel by boat was initiated by two people involved in the Alarm Phone network who had been working in Calais for several years. They started by facilitating discussions on the subject with the people concerned, to understand what information was available to them. Information on sea rescue practices from the states responsible was often sketchy and sometimes false or uncertain based on hearsay and rumours. Another challenge that arose, was how to include all the local associations and activists in the discussion on the subject of rescue. Finally, we had to start monitoring and documenting the reactions of governments, police forces, coastguards and rescue services, which were still very unpredictable and heterogeneous. The

Flyers produced by the Alarm Phone Channel regional team on Safety at Sea procedures, July 2024. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel

idea was to analyse and report on the dynamics of funding, practices and non-intervention at sea. Similar forms of research had already been carried out locally within Calais Migrant Solidarity (CMS).

At first, most people took to the sea without a telephone, as the people organising the crossings were criminalised. Many believed that once at sea, they would be rescued, probably by the British. In 2018, a boat often carried between 5 and 15 people for several thousand euros. The democratisation and standardisation of procedures also contributed to the circulation of information and know-how. When it became apparent that travellers were being watched rather than intercepted in French waters, the possibility of reporting the situation at the outset and communicating with the coastguard became a safe practice. Although today boats carry between 50 and 100 people at a lower cost, initially the composition of the boats was structured in terms of equipment and performance according to the economic resources of the passengers. These early years therefore often saw unsuccessful self-organised attempts by small affinity groups, using inflatable leisure craft, kayaks, coastal boats and so on.



French Warship P676 Flamant returns to Calais, France, following operations in the Channel, January 2022. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel

In 2018, the first risk reduction flyer was produced. This idea was inspired by prevention documents relating to attempts in lorries, which were based on a document on the risks of railway lines following several accidents. The risk reduction flyers were also inspired by a flyer published on the French-Italian border in Briançon - which in turn was inspired by practices of WatchTheMed Alarm Phone - about the risks linked to the mountains and above all, guiding people to find and share their GPS location.

In Calais, although it is easy to meet and spend time with people before the crossing, a lot of information was already provided by relatives or organisers, so there needed to be an added value for having an extra flyer. The idea was to distribute it widely as a medium, to encourage discussion at a time when, given the uncertainty of government reactions, the subject remained rather taboo. The issue was not taken very seriously, particularly by volunteer organisations, or was deemed secondary in the face of humanitarian dynamics. Given the highly specialised nature of each local player, we decided not to monopolise knowledge in a niche activity, but to share it widely, to create spaces for training and awareness-raising, to help people grasp the issue and to help democratise the subject.

At the same time, the strategy was to take a back seat, documenting and building knowledge about funding as well as rescue and repressive practices. Watch the Channel was born as a project inspired by the WatchTheMed (WTM) documentation project. Even if the prospect of the Alarm Phone becoming active in the area seemed desirable locally at the time, rescue practices seemed to be working and there were still relatively few crossings. However, the institutional players were not yet stable enough to know how to position themselves. Other local players had telephone numbers for various forms of support that they distributed widely. Since it was not possible to distribute the Alarm Phone number, the idea was to help these third parties receive calls from people in distress and to follow up on these cases independently.

In practice, the idea of training and working directly with volunteers who interact with travellers on a daily basis has come into conflict with the vertical nature of the management of several humanitarian organisations. Since 2019, Choose Love has refused to allow volunteers to use the information flyer. Their official reason was because of the risk of criminalising their organisation. However, their refusal to distribute the flyer also had deeply paternalistic and racist bias. Especially considering that the idea of democratising the flyer and information related to the crossing of the Channel was precisely to re-politicise certain activities at the border with a more horizontal vision of solidarity.

A boat burning on the beach in Oye-Plage, France, May 2023. It is unclear if the boat was set on fire by the people after the police punctured it or if it caught fire from the tear gas used by the police. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel



In 2021, it became clear that Watch the Channel has nevertheless succeeded in building its legitimacy with the support of the Alarm Phone, structuring responses and monitoring cases of distress at sea and documenting the progress of crossings, and that the discussion has become relatively democratic. The Alarm Phone's direct investment in the Channel therefore made sense. Crossing practices and rescue operations became more structured and standardised over the first three years, with a marked increase in the number of people arriving in Dover. Arrivals would rise from 8,000 in 2020 to over 28,000 in 2021. However, long-term government responses remained unclear, and the threat of pushbacks was still looming.

Since then, Alarm Phone's Channel region members have found their own methodology. They continue their work with local actors and with the other Alarm Phone teams. Crossings and rescue methods have been standardised. The specificity of the region is that in many cases the coastguards are informed by the people themselves or by the many military mechanisms in place to prevent crossings, such as the Frontex aircraft that started flying over the Channel coastline at the end of 2021. Some people are rescued without having sent their location to the coastguard, the Alarm Phone or a third party. While the type of boat has become largely standardised, there has been a steady and significant increase in the number of passengers per boat as a result of police repression. Over the past year, this has contributed to making crossings increasingly precarious, with some boats leaving without plates to stiffen the bottom, or without life jackets on board. Finally, repressive practices have also become more widespread, especially on the beaches, with an increase in human and technological resources, and a large and continuous military presence along a 200-kilometre coastline. Operation

Poseidon of the Gendarmerie Nationale – using the same name as Frontex – and financed by the British government, has also increased the pressure and the destruction of equipment before the boats are launched. Violence, haste and chaotic situations at the time of embarkation have led to numerous deaths since 2023 and to the latest funding agreements between Sunak and Macron.



Police walking along the beach in Oye-Plage, France, with a boat burning in the background, May 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel

The Alarm Phone's work on the Channel may seem imperfect in its relative lack of autonomy, assisting and following up for other actors who came before it. Nevertheless, it remains all the more relevant at a time when launches are becoming ever more precarious and dangerous. Even if weather data, location sharing and links with the coastguard have gradually become part of local know-how, there is still a great need to limit the risk of shipwrecks and to document the evolution of repressive state practices and local dynamics.

Regarding rescue practices on the French side, it seems that the various staff have not received any specific training. Until 2022, they still spoke very little English, and there were still no cultural mediation or psychological support posts. At the beginning of 2020, the UK Border Force was reviewing its fleet of ships to adapt them to certain requirements posed by the increasing number of crossings. There has also been a lack of coordination and standardisation in the practices of the Calais and Dunkirk branches of the association Société Nationale de Sauvetage en Mer (SNSM), until they were gradually side-lined by the CROSS Gris-Nez (the regional surveillance and rescue operational centre). The crossings really started to be taken seriously around 2022, a few months after the shipwreck on 24 November 2021 in which 27 people drowned and four went missing.

'Parloir sauvage' (when prisoners communicate with the outside world) at the administrative detention centre in Coquelles, France, January 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel



Two vessels, the Minck and the Ridens, were chartered by the prefecture, reinforcing the almost exclusive use of French Navy vessels. This could be interpreted as the state taking responsibility for the need to provide assistance and to provide the material and human resources to do so. However, it also helps to make rescue operations invisible. More and more frequently, military vessels are switching off their AIS to make themselves invisible to third-party observers, aid workers and travellers. The recent development of this militaristic policy is repressive, criminal and violent. It makes the means of crossing precarious and creates chaotic situations. After doing so, authorities come and pick up the drowned with the same means that created the situations of chaos in the first place. The invisibility of rescues, the silencing of these actors by professional secrecy, but also the treatment reserved for those shipwrecked, reinforce the necessity and legitimacy of our presence at the border.

After three years with the Alarm Phone, some people feel that the risk reduction work has not had the desired effect. Often travellers are already informed or think they don't need any more information. It's difficult to assess the relevance of our presence and the extent to which it has helped to establish a link with the emergency services, given the large number of actors on land and at sea. However, our presence makes sense, despite this multi-multilayered system, because it puts the Channel back into the violent

continuum of borders. It shows that France can be a place of departure, and reminds us that people's journeys do not end when they disembark in Italy or Greece. Freedom of movement must be demanded everywhere, all the time and for everyone.

The Channel is a densely populated political and resistance space, but it also offers the opportunity to be mobilised and reactive, to meet people preparing to cross or living on the border, to take part in spaces for living, learning, making demands and political struggle, and to develop the cold, critical eye needed for analysis. The Alarm Phone has contributed in its own way to the creation and development of local knowledge and resources for people wishing to cross the Channel and for those aspiring to act in solidarity.

Nonetheless, the outlook is hardly rosy. The process of outsourcing asylum procedures is being stepped up in the UK, with the political will to criminalise anyone arriving in a small boat. In fact, for more than two years now, captains have been the focus of much of the criminalisation of those who take to the sea. On the French side, the violence taking place where people live and especially on the beaches, before and at the time of departure, makes them vulnerable and creates situations of panic leading directly to deaths. These deaths must be seen in the context of the generally accepted idea that deaths only occur offshore. Similarly, we feel it is important to remember that a significant proportion of violence occurs on land, during attempts to cross by freight, lorry or train. We therefore need to continue to take a critical look at and analyse all the violence perpetrated by states, and to bear in mind that the central problem is that of having to cross the sea by these precarious means in the first place, whether in an inflatable boat or via a lorry on a ferry.



French vessel RIDENS following a dinghy as it makes its way to the UK, 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone Channel



CommemorAction in Zarzis, Tunisia,
September 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda

4.

Reflections on Gender and Borders



CommemorAction at the beach of 'Cap de l'Eau' in Northern Morocco, 6 February 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

10 years of the Alarm Phone and 4 years of the Alarm Phone women*'s¹ group

By the Alarm Phone women*'s group

The Alarm Phone has been active for 10 years now. For about the last 4 years a women*'s group exists within the Alarm Phone structures- consisting of women* from AP Morocco and European women* in order to empower ourselves and each other. This text stresses the need for more women* and LGBTIQ+ spaces.

At the beginning of the Alarm Phone work in the Western Mediterranean region there were mainly European women* working together with Sub-Saharan men. This is not because there were no sub-Saharan women* or European men present in these struggles. Rather, this reflects the overarching patriarchal system which structures the ways we live, work and are active in, as well as the gender-based distribution of tasks.

Retrospectively we realized that women* based in the Western Med had been active in the Alarm Phone network the whole time. For example, doing the communication work with people on boats or distributing the Alarm Phone material. However, these women* were less visible and present in the network.

At a certain point, a woman from Alarm Phone Morocco got active directly with Alarm Phone shifts work and worked as an important intermediary between Wolof speaking communities and the French and English-speaking

¹ With this star* we want to make visible that we adopt an inclusive definition of "women". This means all people who identify and live as women, regardless of the sex they were attributed at birth.

shift teams. Another woman was involved in organizing an entire international Alarm Phone meeting. Over time, more and more women* have actively joined Alarm Phone Morocco and participated in meetings.



Women's activity of testimonies and solidarity in Tangier, Morocco, 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

It was in March 2020 when we realized that it was time to come together and empower ourselves to be able to step up and raise the voice of women* for the Alarm Phone in public. We held a first small women* only meeting in Tangier and combined it with claiming the streets together during the women* protests of the 8th of March, just before the meeting took place.

Since then, we meet regularly and have created women* spaces in the physical Alarm Phone meetings. These spaces are warm, powerful, and sometimes funny spaces but also spaces where we share terrible stories we have learned from other women*. Without the presence of men, we have empowered and given each other advice.

Foulma of Alarm Phone Tangier says:

*"We created the women*s group in the Alarm Phone because we noticed that men were overly dominant in the Alarm Phone meetings and overall. There wasn't enough space for women* to express themselves. It was an initiative to motivate them and push them a little to be more dynamic in the meeting. When I'm among my female colleagues, I'm more at ease, I express myself better, I'm free. When I attend meetings with the men,*

I don't talk. Because I feel a certain pressure on me. Because the men talk too much, I have no space. So, I stay calm. With other women, I can be myself and be free, I say what I think. And that's why it's such a good idea to create a women*s group."*

The women*s group thus provides an empowering space for women*. Leontine of Alarm Phone Tangier describes the positive effects of the group as follows:

*"[...] this group has enabled women like me to speak out in public and in front of everyone - also men. There was also the training we received through this women*s group, which has strengthened us a lot."*

Over the years women* in Morocco have found their place within the Alarm Phone network by being members of the report writing, the shift-support, the financial council, the awareness structures, etc. The Alarm Phone women* often hear from women* on the move testimonies of gender-based violence in private and more structured contexts. We share those stories with each other and try to bring unheard voices to the public.

After four years of the Alarm Phone women*s group, there is still a lot to work to do together and we still need to do more to make everyone feel seen and empowered in the same way. But we think we are already getting better as network and are on a good way to continue.



Women's action in Tangier, Morocco, 8 March 2022. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Design made by Queers against Borders.

Transfeminist border crossings

Queer voices in the Alarm Phone

10 years of Alarm Phone have sharpened our perception of changing migration routes, the ongoing European externalization efforts and the transformations the border regime undergoes. But 10 years of Alarm Phone also mean changes within our network and our own transformation process; people join and others drop out, we learn collectively from our mistakes and apply new practices. We are not the same network we were ten or even five years ago.

Some of these changes are subtle and others are more obvious. When we come together as Alarm Phone network twice a year in person we often also have reflections on gender dynamics within our network, something that we didn't use to do some years ago. We have started to organize as queer people in the network and exchange our experiences. We now use the gender-neutral "Dear officer on duty" when we address emails to authorities instead of starting them with "Dear Sir / Madam" like we used to do.

"When I make a call to a coast guard, European or non-European, it sometimes happens that the officer answers the phone with 'Hello, Sir', automatically assuming I am a man. Once they hear my voice, they switch to 'madam', but in doing so, still misgender me."

There is shockingly little we know about queer people on the move in relation to Alarm Phone work. We tend to note the gender composition of the people on a boat because it is one of the few ways we can match information about arrivals or shipwrecks when authorities meet our requests for information with silence. But how often do we get it wrong because we only speak of "men, women

and children”? How many TIN¹ persons are invisibilized and absent from our documentation? Well, pretty much all of them. And on the rare occasions when it happens that we know we are talking to a trans person, we are confronted with the particular violence gender-queer people face in migration:

“It was seven in the morning. We were contacted by two Syrian people who had arrived on a Greek island. One of them told me her name was A. and she was a trans woman. She wanted to apply for asylum, but was afraid of police violence.

In order to avoid the high risk of pushbacks when people arrive on the Greek islands, one of Alarmphone’s strategies is to send an e-mail to the authorities, the UNHCR and local organizations with people’s names, birthdays and nationalities as proof of the person’s presence and willingness to apply for asylum. But in this case, we weren’t sure what to do. Which first name should be included in the e-mail to the authorities? Should it be the person’s administrative name, as registered in her documents, or her real name, the one she uses? How can we best reduce the risk of police violence in her case? And how would it affect her future asylum claim as a trans person if we give her official name?

It’s weird, because many of these questions I ask myself every day: how to juggle first names, how to deal with the administration and repression as a trans person. I’m part of a strong community that’s doing all kinds of fantastic things to deal with these issues together. But in this situation, I felt we are lacking resources, because these questions are almost never asked in our Alarm Phone work. When you’re not used to asking questions, you don’t have the answers. And I’m sure that the more we will face these questions, the more we’ll have answers and strategies to share.”

Queer people who are already affected by discrimination and homophobic or transphobic violence in their home countries, face increased challenges along the often exploitative migration routes, where medical care is difficult and sexualized violence is common frequent. Also after arriving in Europe, institutional queerphobia, degrading remarks from authorities or disadvantages when failing to conform to stereotypical expectations around gender and queerness regarding asylum claims are common documented experiences.² In everyday life, queer people living in isolated camps in the countryside upon arrival in Europe are often confronted with a lack of adequate services, intersectional discrimination and feelings of loneliness. In response to people reaching out to us with these issues, the network *Queers Against Borders*³ was founded. It is a group of queer people in Europe who try to connect LGBTQIA+ people on the move in need of support with local contacts.

1 Trans, inter and non-binary

2 <https://www.refworld.org/reference/themreport/vuu/2011/en/83496>

3 <https://linktr.ee/queersagainstborders>

A testimony from our comrade from the *Nadir*, a sailing vessel monitoring the Mediterranean and supporting people in distress between Tunisia and Lampedusa, shows the ambiguity of Europe as a queer refuge:

“I remember when we found a boat that was in a very precarious state and could sink at any moment. As we helped the people in distress onto our sailing vessel, one of the passengers, Ahmed, saw the queer flag flying on our boat and exclaimed: “Oh, this is a welcoming boat for queer people; we’re a whole group of homosexuals fleeing discrimination and violence in Tunisia and before that in our home countries. It’s wonderful, happy pride everybody!” After a little rest and food, many people were smiling and seemed to feel confident; couples showed themselves and were kissing. We had a long chat with Ahmed, who told me that he wanted to go to the Netherlands and work as a hairdresser.

After disembarkation, life in the transit centers in Italy was not easy for Ahmed, but he was hanging in there. He alerted us to the violence suffered by friends of his in another accommodation center because of their homosexuality. I contacted people from the migrant solidarity network. These people went to the center, made some noise and let it be known that they were aware of the human rights violations in the center, and the violence calmed down. A few weeks later, Ahmed had arrived in the Netherlands. Now I’m waiting to hear from him so I can go and get my hair cut there.”

It is encounters like these that reveal what is often hidden, that show stories and identities that are absent from our statistics, despite all the monitoring and documenting we do. But if nationalism promotes the idea of a masculine and patriarchal state whose mandate is to protect the purity of the (feminized) nation, then queering the border means overcoming it. In this sense, we can think of our trans-border struggle for freedom of movement and a world without borders as a queer practice.

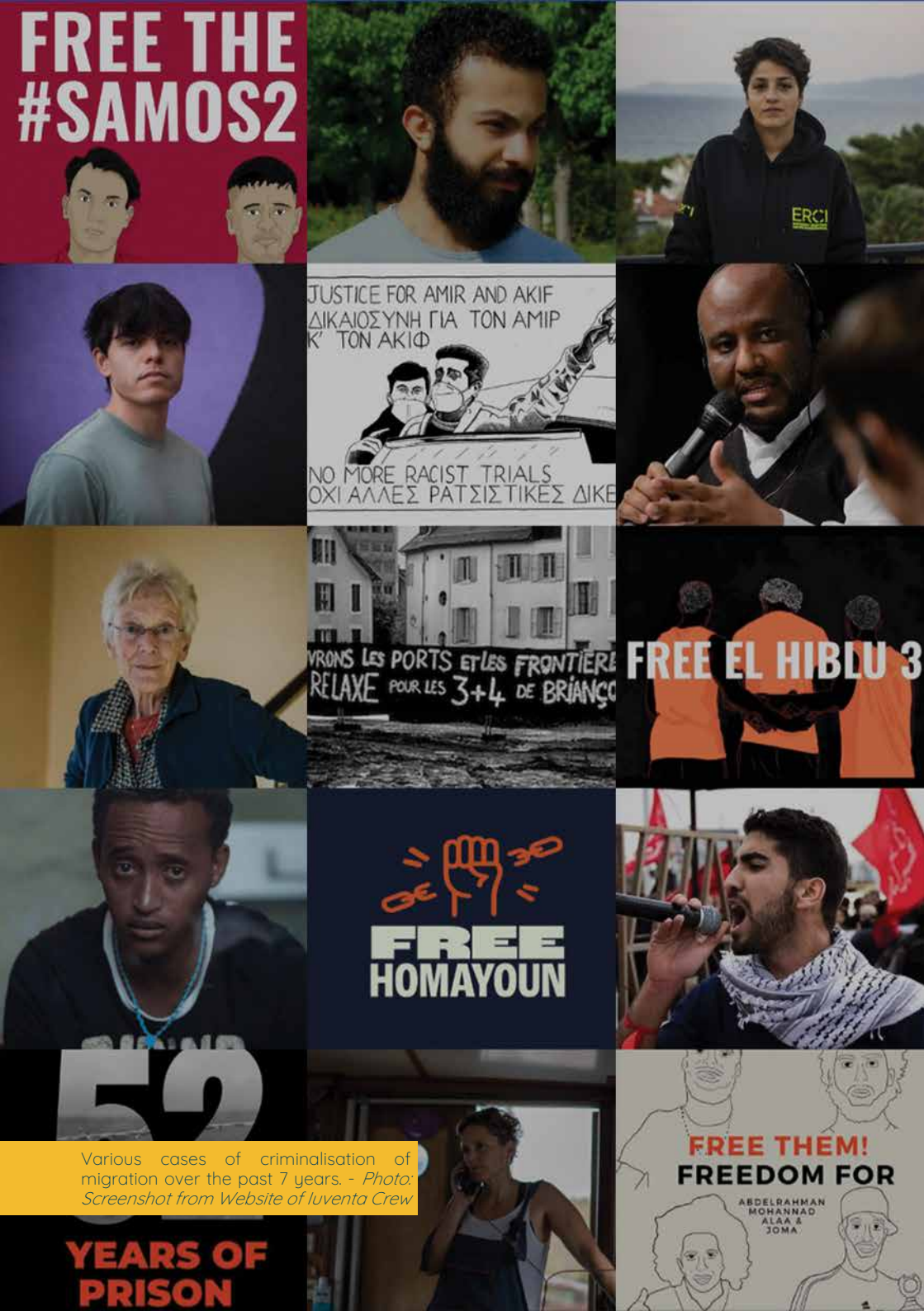
In memory of Elli.

Protest outside the Kalamata court, Greece, during the Pylos9 trial, May 2024. - Photo: #freepylos9 campaign



5.

Criminalisation



Resisting the criminalisation of migration is to fight for freedom of movement

At the beginning of March 2024, dozens of people gathered in front of the court in Trapani, Sicily, for the trial against the crew of the Iuventa. Iuventa was a search and rescue ship, which was seized by Italian authorities in 2017. After years of struggles, the charges were finally dropped. There was a lot of public attention on the case, and many activists and media attended the final hearing. In front of the court room, it became clear that this was not an isolated incident, but part of a wider, often unnoticed, criminalisation of migration as such:

“Today we especially think of the El Hiblu 3, waiting for the decision of the preliminary trial on Malta, the Moria 6, that will have their appeal hearing on March 4 in Lesvos and Free Homayoun, sentenced to 18 years for smuggling in Greece and having the appeal trial on 22 April.”

the Iuventa crew told the public. While legal processes against search and rescue actors have received a lot of attention in the past, the criminalization of people on the move for driving boats or crossing borders, has remained largely unnoticed. In the last year, significant efforts have been made to build strong alliances among different groups, organisations and across different regions, in order to counteract the divide between good and bad ‘smugglers’ and to shift attention to criminalisation of migration as such, and give support to all those fighting for freedom of movement. The goal of these networks is to shed light on the extent of criminalization against people on the move, strengthen practical support for those in prison, and fight for their release. The real crimes and violence are the borders, not those who try to overcome them.

Various cases of criminalisation of migration over the past 7 years. - Photo: Screenshot from Website of Iuventa Crew

52 YEARS OF PRISON

Invisible form of violence

People on the move face increased surveillance and control through measures such as drones, razor-sharp fences, and pushbacks. These measures endanger migrants, who rely on community networks to navigate obstacles. Thousands across the EU and Africa have been arrested for exercising freedom of movement. Facilitators - such as captains, drivers, and mediators - are also targeted, facing long prison sentences.

As Alarm Phone, we witness the criminalisation of captains driving boats across the sea, truck or bus drivers transporting people across land borders or the desert, interpreters, mediators, and those providing shelter, food, or any support to illegalised journeys, in all regions where our network is active: from the shores of Morocco, Türkiye, Senegal, Mauritania, and Tunisia to Italy, the UK, France, Malta, Greece, and Spain. Those who facilitate journeys or are accused of 'smuggling,' 'trafficking,' or 'facilitating illegal entry' can face 6 months to 100 years in prison.

This phenomenon of criminalisation is widespread across the regions: in Greece, more than 2,100 people have been accused or condemned based on these charges. In Italy, more than 1,100 people are imprisoned. We estimate that, in the Canary Islands alone, at least 250 people are currently detained on charges of smuggling and facilitating illegal entry into Spanish territory. When people are disembarked in ports, Frontex agents appear to automatically question them about who was driving the boat and/or arbitrarily target two people per boat as captains. In Malta, France and Türkiye, hundreds of people are imprisoned and criminalised for similar reasons.

Criminalisation after shipwrecks

In cases of a shipwreck, or of people dying during the journey, the charges are intensified: those held responsible for the deaths at sea and facing charges of murder or manslaughter are often fellow travelers who survived the crossing — or those steering the boat, holding the compass, or playing a role in organising the journey, as demonstrated by the cases of the Pylos9 or the Cutro4.

PYLOS 9:

The Pylos9 are nine survivors of the massacre off the coast of Pylos in Greece, which happened on 14 June 2023. Over 600 people drowned when an overcrowded boat sank, literally in front of the eyes of Greek authorities and Frontex: Alarm Phone and other actors informed them the day before about the overcrowded boat, but they failed to rescue and prevent the death of hundreds of people. In the aftermath, nine survivors were arrested and put

on trial, accused of having facilitated the journey and being responsible for the shipwreck. After their arrest, a powerful campaign was launched to support them. In May 2024, the charges were dropped, yet despite this, the nine survivors remained in prison. Only after the support campaign intervened and appealed, were they released. Lawyers and activists joined forces to not only organize legal support but also to raise public awareness around the imprisonment of the Egyptian nationals and the Greek state's attempt to scapegoat the nine survivors for its own failure to rescue the overcrowded boat, which had been its duty.

More info here: <https://captainsupport.net/freepyls9/>

Similarly, after a boat sank off the coast of Cutro, Italy, in February 2023, it was not the coast guard that was accused of manslaughter, despite having been alerted to the distress situation. Rather, four of the survivors stood trial and were sentenced to year-long prison terms. Also in this case, authorities failed to launch a timely and effective rescue operation, causing the deaths of dozens of people.

CUTRO 4:

The 'Cutro4' are four survivors of the Cutro shipwreck that took place on 26 February 2023, off the coast of Calabria, Italy. Although the shipwreck was clearly provoked by the non-assistance of Italian authorities, the 'Cutro 4' were arrested as those responsible for the deaths of more than 100 people, and for facilitation of illegal entry. This inversion of justice, which characterises most cases that criminalise 'facilitation', often leads to life in prison for those accused. Their ongoing trial is the usual farce: not only are hearings regularly postponed, and translation is not provided adequately, but the witnesses' key testimonies used to jeopardise the accused are flawed. Those who had identified the boat drivers after the shipwreck, later declared in court that the policemen who showed them pictures of potential boat drivers, had suggested to them the people they should identify.

Criminalisation can impact people's entire lives, even after they are released from prison: often, they are refused the opportunity to apply for asylum, or their asylum cases are dismissed due to their conviction. This often leads to threats of deportation. Trials can take years, keeping people suspended in a legal limbo. Moreover, prison sentences are regularly accompanied by fines that are impossible to pay. Every administrative step of their life is made more difficult by the presence of a criminal record. Administrative violence compounds prison and penal punishment, subjecting people to multiple forms of punishment simultaneously and repeatedly.

In some cases, such as in Tunisia, Greece and Senegal, families are blamed, and sometimes criminalised for the death of their children, accused of encouraging their children to undertake the journey, bringing them on the boat or for sending them the money necessary for their journey. This shows how criminalisation is part of a wider and systematic attack not only against individuals, but against migrant communities.



Demonstration in solidarity with all criminalised captains outside Trapani court on 19 April 2024, the day the charges against the Juventa crew were dropped. - Photo: Alarm Phone

Scapegoats to cover up the real crimes

Those steering boats are targeted by legal means and used as scapegoats by authorities to hide their own crimes and violence. Campaigns in solidarity with people on the move—such as the El Hiblu 3, the Pylos 9, Free Hamayoun, and Free Ibrahim Ba—highlight how the criminalisation of facilitating and supporting journeys legitimizes the violent interventions of states and authorities, while obscuring their responsibility for the deaths and suffering caused by the border regime.

FREE IBRAHIMA BAH:

Ibrahim Bah was arrested in December 2022 after surviving a shipwreck in the Channel. He was steering a dinghy from France to the UK, across the English Channel. When the dinghy reached a fishing vessel, people stood up to get rescued. The sudden movement caused the floor of the dinghy to rip, and people were thrown into the water. Four people lost their lives and up to five are reported missing. 39 survivors including Ibrahim were brought to the UK. The UK Captain Support group organised prison visits, demonstrations, legal support and raised public awareness in support of Ibrahim Bah. As in other countries, in the UK, hundreds of people have been arrested and imprisoned for crossing borders. As proved to be the case in other regions, the people piloting a dinghy often do so out of economic necessity: if they have no money to pay for a place in a dinghy, they may agree to take additional risks in exchange for free passage. In Ibrahim Bah's case he confirmed he had agreed to steer the dinghy but then tried to pull out when he saw the state of the craft. He was assaulted by the organisers of the passage and forced to comply. Survivors described him as saving their lives. However, by a majority of 10 to 2, the jury found that he contributed to the deaths in a way that was more than minimal and convicted him of gross negligence manslaughter and facilitating illegal migration. He was sentenced to 9.5 years detention. Captain Support are supporting his appeal scheduled later this year.

Authorities and the media legitimise these forms of repression against those who cross borders or help others to do so, by constructing narratives of 'dangerous/violent smugglers' often portrayed as 'threats for national order and security'. These narratives not only depict any facilitator of so-called 'illegal immigration' as a threat to national and societal security, but also blames them for most forms of border violence.

This clearly intends to shift the blame for border violence, for deaths at the border, and for the dangerousness of migration routes away from border policies. It places the blame on those defying borders, rather than on those creating them, as formulated recently in Echoes magazine:

"No Frontex, no smugglers. No violent EU border regime, no market for business. Let's remember to the summer of migration in 2015 in the Balkan route: the smuggling market collapsed as soon the people on the move could travel with usual buses and trains. Remember the refugees from Ukraine in 2022: no smuggling networks appeared as the Ukrainian refugees were free to move and even free to choose where they wanted to live.

Safe passages is not a utopia, it's just a political decision and we still and again know: tomorrow all the smuggling and even the death at

sea could become history, if the border – and visa – regime would be abolished and all people would have their freedom of movement.”

FREE EL HIBLU 3!

On the 13th of April 2024, the Coalition for the El Hiblu 3 presented Abdalla Bari, Amara Kromah, and Abdul Kader with the Human Rights Defenders Award at the University of Malta in Valletta. From the celebration speech:

“We’re here tonight to celebrate Amara, Abdalla, and Kader, who arrived in Malta five years ago in 2019, as teenagers. In the days before they had acted as translators and mediators on an oil tanker that rescued them and their fellow passengers from a sinking rubber boat. Although they were only 15, 16, and 19 years old, they successfully mediated between frightened passengers and frightened crew members to de-escalate a tense situation at sea. They helped save over 100 people from an illegal pushback to Libya – as their fellow travellers have attested to. Yet, as we know, they were not greeted by the authorities on our islands as the heroes they are, but rather they were wrongfully accused and imprisoned. Like then, again and again we have been reminded of how our government is complicit in deaths at sea and unlawful pushbacks to Libya. We are reminded not only of the bravery of resisting this border violence but the very necessity of it. The fact is that without Amara, Abdalla and Kader, another 100 people would have faced this fate. In their struggle against injustice, they have also been joined by an international campaign that demands that the charges against them be dropped. We stand in solidarity with them and in awe of their courage and bravery.”



El Hiblu 3 protest in front of the court in Valetta, Malta, 2023. - Photo: Coalition for the El Hiblu 3

Over the past years, most solidarity campaigns have focused on defending European solidarity workers and/or NGOs from criminalisation, defining it as an unjust repression against innocent people who were not criminals but lifesavers. Whilst the criminalisation of rescuers is the ultimate form of perversion of the border regime, these efforts to defend ‘white innocent people’ and distance themselves from ‘traffickers and smugglers’ as the real criminals, perpetuate racist structures and white saviourism. It separates those deemed innocent and ‘good’ that should be supported and those allegedly criminal or ‘bad’ that, following this logic, are rightfully criminalised and detained. It creates a fake differentiation between European solidarity workers and other facilitators of people’s journeys, therefore reinforcing – rather than challenging – the criminalisation of freedom of movement, implying that some indeed deserve criminalisation. In recent years, strong alliances were built to overcome this distinction and to see these attacks as part of efforts to criminalize migration as such.

Captain Support Network:

Captain Support is a transnational network of activists, organizing collectively against the criminalization of ‘captains’, namely boat drivers, as well as of border crossers. It stands in solidarity with all the people criminalised for facilitating freedom of movement. The network connects activists in different places, shares best practices, mobilises resources for legal support and pushes counter-narratives against different aspects of the criminalization of migration. It connects those accused of driving the boats to Europe to local support networks and lawyers. Activists and volunteers try to react to requests by providing helpful information and connecting people to lawyers and social support if needed. Different support campaigns are linked to the network. Captain Support’s promise: “We will continue to support any acts facilitating freedom of movement, and we will continue to support those defying borders on land and at sea.”

www.captainsupport.net

Whilst we do not want to romanticise the role of smugglers or so-called traffickers, we also do not want to reproduce narratives portraying them as violent criminals. Instead, we see these roles as necessary services in the context of border militarisation. People turn to smugglers to make journeys possible and even safer in a context of illegalised crossings. Smugglers are often those who know the routes and the loopholes to challenge the border regime. The militarization of migration routes and the illegalisation of migration force people onto more dangerous routes and make them more invisible.

The latest developments in Niger have seen the 2015-36 law repealed, thanks to the tireless struggles waged by activists and networks such as Alarme Phone

Sahara. This law was a perfect example of how the criminalisation of facilitation can transform bus drivers previously tolerated by authorities into “violent smugglers” from one day to the next. It also changed an entire economy: while travel agencies had front desks on the street, with transparent prices and there were systems of trust and control between people providing service and their customers, the law forced them to go underground. Customers had less power to negotiate and fewer opportunities to build systems of security to ensure they would arrive at their destination.

WESTERN MED – ATLANTIC:

In this vast region that we call “Western Med – Atlantic”, each country has its own legal system and specificities in the way they criminalise those exercising their freedom of movement and/or acting in defiance of the border regimes. Yet, since the 2000’s and the acceleration of the implementation of the Palermo Protocol on “traffic of migrants” in national systems, the criminalisation of people on the move has never stopped increasing. From Senegal, Mauritania, Morocco and Spain, authorities use a range of criminal laws to target people on the move and punish those attempting to cross or support journeys. Families are targeted in Senegal for sending money to their sons who lost their life at sea. Young men who had distributed water or steered the boat are detained and criminalised daily in Spain. In Laayoune, Morocco, several survivors, who were accused of manslaughter and aiding illegal exit of the country, have now been imprisoned after being sentenced to 10 years in prison after their friends lost their life in a shipwreck.

These trials often take place after months of pre-trial detention, in centres with degrading conditions. Tired of the wait and the conditions in the Canary Islands, some prefer to plead guilty in the hope for benefiting from some sentence reduction. Everywhere, testimonies highlight the violence people are often subjected to by the police in their court cases to identify the so-called “smugglers”.

Lastly, people on the move in Morocco face arbitrary arrests and forced displacement to the South on a daily basis.

Strengthen solidarities

Whilst some legislations differentiate between the ‘humanitarian smuggler’ and those who do it for profit or as a business, we are not in a position to judge as blameworthy those who provide this service for profit, as profit motives are what drive most human actions under capitalism. We are aware that the business around migration is created by the illegalisation of border crossing. Profit is made not only through smuggling, but mostly through the business of border militarisation, often involving state-sponsored private companies like Leonardo SPA in Sicily or the Israeli military company Elbit systems. Profit

is made through surveillance technologies, such as airplanes and drones, the construction and management of detention centres, camps and hotspots, as well as deportation charters. If some smugglers do make profit out of migration, this profit is fuelled by the border regime that makes their services necessary and expensive. If there were no border there would be no border violence, no smuggling, no profit. The solution to violent journeys is clear, but the process of criminalisation mystifies and reverses this logic.

As a transregional network, we want to strengthen solidarities with people facing any form of criminalisation during their journey. Colonial borders continue to be used to detain and exploit people, prevent them from moving, and control their movement as well as their access to rights. European and African states keep using people moving as pawns in their political game. We need to create alliances and solidarities across regions, as well as between and with those being criminalised for supporting, facilitating or exercising their freedom of movement, rather than reinforcing distinctions between good and bad facilitators. We want to build decolonial and abolitionist counter-narratives to put an end to the violence and criminalisation people on the move are subjected to.

6.

**Commemor-
Action**



CommemorAction in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave bordering Morocco, 2024. - Photo: Amélie Janda



CommemorAction in Zarzis, Tunisia, September 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda



#SayTheirNames action by Sea-Watch and Alarm Phone commemorating those who died at the border in Berlin, Germany, 9 February 2021. - Photo: Amélie Janda



Sit-in by families of the missing in front of the embassy of the European Union in Rabat, Morocco, on 24 February 2023. - Photo: AMSV Oujda Morocco



CommemorAction in Nouakchott, Mauritania, 2024. - Photo: Fatou Diop



CommemorAction in Dunkirk, France, November 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda



CommemorAction in Marseille, France, 2024. - Photo: Amélie Janda



CommemorAction in Lampedusa, Italy, October 2023. - Photo: maldusa.org



CommemorAction in Saïdia, Morocco, February 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda



CommemorAction in Gorée, Dakar, Senegal, 2022. - Photo: Boza Fii



CommemorAction in Toulouse, France, 6 February 2024. - Photo: Laure



CommemorAction in Saïdia, Morocco, 2018. - Photo: Amélie Janda

“Their life, our light. Their destiny, our anger. Open the borders!”

10th anniversary of the Tarajal Massacre

Every year on the 6th of February, the families of missing persons, along with their friends and activists from Africa and Europe, come together in memory of those who were forcibly disappeared at sea and on land at the externalized European borders. They gather simultaneously on both continents, mourning and protesting together across distances on this day of CommemorAction.

CommemorAction is a time to make visible the daily crimes of the EUropean border regime, a space to demand freedom of movement for all and justice and truth for the missing and their families.

October 2024 marks 10 years since the creation of Alarm Phone, while February 2024 marks the 10th anniversary of the Tarajal Massacre. **155**

On February 6, 2014, at least 200 people left the Moroccan coast and tried to swim to Tarajal beach, in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. The Guardia Civil deployed anti-riot equipment to stop them from reaching Spanish territory, while the Moroccan military present did not come to the rescue of the people drowning in front of their eyes. Fifteen bodies were found on the Spanish side while dozens of others disappeared. The survivors were pushed back to Morocco, where more people died.

Ten years on from this massacre, the families are still searching for their loved ones, and are still hoping to learn the truth about what happened: they are still waiting for justice. In a discussion with Feric - an activist from

Cameroon whose brother has been missing since the day of the massacre - he emphasised the importance of standing together, of building solidarity, but also of pursuing the legal battle to obtain justice.

“For me personally, in every CommemorAction we are in pain. In our daily lives as families we tend to forget sometimes and get busy with other things, yet the CommemorAction is a unique day to remember, to not feel alone, to push things forward and to grieve. 10 years of waiting for answers and justice without any outcome is frustrating, it is also a state mechanism to discourage the families, to isolate them in their struggles. Yet I believe that, as frustrating and painful as it can be, these feelings will strengthen our next CommemorActions. It is a long struggle for freedom of movement for all of us.”

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CommemorAction is also a space of solidarity and knowledge sharing aimed at supporting people on the move and their relatives.

In recent years, the constellation of CommemorActions has expanded with new collectives in different cities joining this day of shared mobilization. The connections between the different realities have strengthened, and a common language is being built collectively and is asserting itself publicly all over the African and European continents. Yet this shared journey has not only strengthened solidarity and mutual support: this common experience has also enabled a direct encounter and exchange between families, who have found others with whom to share their demands and struggles.

This coming together, which is an ongoing process, has facilitated the exchange of practices and experiences between actors from different countries, as well as the possibility of sharing information on concrete cases and directly supporting families' search efforts. Some families have created their own associations and collectives, others have joined existing European activist that wish to support them and to facilitate and be there for those who have recently lost their loved ones. The conversations below with mothers from Senegal and Tunisia tell us about why they were and still are committed to continuing to organize and participate in CommemorActions.

Awa Ba - Senegal

“I was too disoriented while he was missing in Morocco. Then the most difficult thing was that we didn't know where to find information, except perhaps ask his friends with whom he lived in Morocco. We were confronted with a total lack of structures or dynamics that deal with these situations of death and disappearance of people on the move in Senegal until we attended for the first time a decentralized CommemorAction in

Dakar. Then a second CommemorAction - a centralized one - in Zarzis, Tunisia. These were important moments in our lives.

I think many people like me are suffering in silence from this situation of disappearance. So I feel it's my duty and responsibility to give them this chance to free themselves from their deep pain by raising awareness so that these families can also have the chance to attend CommemorActions, to find a space to express their feelings and to connect with other families and share the pain.”

Anta Ndiaye - Senegal

“For me personally the CommemorAction is an important initiative and should be an integral part of our lives. It is a space where families of missing persons can at least feel that they are supported and not left alone in this system. Unfortunately in Senegal there's only Boza Fii and Alarm Phone Dakar who are doing this work, and no other structure is speaking about this or supporting families.

My thoughts today are with all the families who live with these unanswered questions. I would have liked to introduce them to this CommemorAction initiative, at least so that they can understand and have the opportunity to talk about a situation that is destroying the lives of so many people.”

Jalila - Tunisie

“Personally, I consider it as a message to our state and to Europe. It is a message to tell them that we are still demanding the truth, to say that I will never forget my two sons, Mehdi and Hedi, and that you are the reason for their death at sea. It is a message to make our voices loud and to be heard. We will not forgive. The CommemorAction is also a space to demand freedom of movement for all, because without achieving that we would never achieve real justice.

The CommemorAction is like a sort of birthday for my two sons. They died in 2019, and on every 6th of February I remember them, and in every other CommemorAction I will remember them. The CommemorAction is also a space for those who have been waiting for information about their relatives since 20 and 30 years to say that we haven't forgotten about our children, parents, siblings and friends who were killed by the EU murderous border regime. Yet for me, I also see the importance of standing together as families, it creates a difference when we are united in our struggles, it is also important to meet families from different countries, to share our experiences, to share our pain and to change the system together. The change will come, if not for us, then for the next generations.”

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For several years now, CommemorAction has become a regular transnational event that fosters a community of mourners who will not give up their struggle against the violence perpetrated by a European Union that kills and disappears people on the move. Their families and friends from the Global South and North express their rage against a criminal border regime created and exported by the Global North. Their commitment is to put an end to the mobility apartheid that continues to reinforce colonial inequalities and injustice, and that has plunged whole communities into mourning for over three decades.



"March of Dignity" in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave bordering Morocco, 6 February 2023. - Photo: Centre IRIDIA



Kythira: A trip back to the EU border where many lost their loved ones

Report from a CommemorAction on the Greek island of Kythira together with survivors, relatives and local residents one year after 5 October 2022, when many people drowned in a shipwreck.

“October 5th remains an unforgettable date for all of us. That night two boats capsized in Greek waters, one of them just off the island of Kythira. The people on the boats were fleeing war and terror - filled with longing for a safe future. Here in this place, very close to the harbour, the boat crashed into a rock face. The wind was strong, the waves high, and it was dark. Many inhabitants of the island came and tried to save the people by any means possible. They saved 80 people with their efforts. However, at least 15 people lost their lives that night.

When the tragedy became known to the relatives of those on board, those who could made their way to Kythira. In this time of shock and loss, survivors and relatives met there, as well as initiatives in solidarity and people willing to help.

Some of the dead were found in the water. They were identified, transported to Kalamata’s hospital, and then buried in Komotini. Others are still missing a year later. The survivors have been housed in inhumane camps and are fighting for their residence permits to live a safe life.

Since October 2022, we - some of the survivors and relatives remained in

contact. In March 2023, we remembered what happened in Erfurt with an evening called "A Sea Full of Tears." More than 200 people created space for mourning, pain and remembrance, but also for courage and hope. It was possible to feel the presence of those who are no longer with us. In this touching atmosphere, the idea of returning to Kythira became more concrete.

We gathered here in Kythira with everyone to mourn and commemorate the lost. We keep alive the memory of the people who died in the sea. We also come angry at the European borders that killed them, and continue to kill. We come with the desire to build another future in solidarity and without borders. It is our resistance."¹



CommemorAction in Kythira, Greece, 5 October 2023. - Photo: Marily Stroux

One year later, in October 2023, some survivors and family members returned to Kythira. They wanted to thank the local people, who, without thinking of the danger to their own lives, rescued a total of 80 people that night. People who otherwise would certainly not be alive today. They came together to hold a memorial ceremony on the beach of Diakofti, the place where the night of 5 October 2022 will remain forever present for all. At the beginning of the

¹ Discours des membres de la famille présentant la commémoration à la plage de Diakofti.

memorial, Shuja and Sultana shared the story of how we all came together and introduced the speeches of the survivors and family members.

Khadijah, who lost her dearest husband Abdul Wase Ahmadi that night, began by expressing her discomfort. She said:

"I stand here wanting to tell you so many words. But the waves behind me make me sad and I can't find the words. The last words from my husband were: who will save us here? You came and saved us, endangering your own lives. We are here to thank you. To embrace you. We are a family now. We will never forget you. Thank you!"

Zameer, who lost his mother, sister, and brother, stood with his back to the sea, which became their graves:

"I lost my whole family here, in this sea, but you saved me. I wanted to say thank you. When I leave Kythira, I will be leaving my family here with you. Please take care of them."

More than 100 people came together to commemorate those who died that night, listening to the heart-breaking statements from the survivors.

In the days leading up to the memorial, the 25 travellers to Kythira - including 12 survivors and family members of missing people and their supporters from Hamburg, Erfurt, Munich, Athens, and Kalamata, among others - had daily conversations and meetings with the people who saved them that night:

There was Dimitris, who took his uncle's crane and stood on the edge of the abyss with it, saving Khadijah, Hussein, Masih and many others from certain death. Kostas, who also played the clarinet at the memorial, who with others were able to pull up many people from the treacherous rocks with ropes, their strength coming from their hands and willpower. The vice mayor and volunteer firefighter who unobtrusively made everything possible throughout the entire rescue efforts. The firefighter Spyros, who with two of his colleagues, abseiled down the dangerous slope with his private equipment to give instructions to people on how to be pulled up with the rope. Everyone who spent the next few days cooking, bringing clothes, healing wounds, comforting worries, answering questions for the survivors and for the many relatives who immediately came from abroad. These people made sure that all who were there were comforted in their difficult time and helped through the bureaucracy.

Many of the survivors who could not travel listened to a live stream on 5 October, and were thus also present. Some had written their own speeches and sent voice messages.

The day before the memorial, the survivors invited all those who had saved them to an Afghan meal in Karavas. Here, in this sheltered place, many were able to embrace and share stories and pain for the first time. Many of the locals said that they do not talk to anyone about that night, they do not want to burden their families, but constantly the images flash in their minds. Now, through this trip, they had finally found others again with whom they could share the painful experiences.



CommemorAction in Kythira, Greece,
5 October 2023. - Photo: Marily Stroux

"I don't take off my sunglasses and you understand why,"
said Giannis.

And then there was the other Giannis, the cook who after rescuing people still opened the kitchen of his restaurant and cooked whatever he had so the survivors would have something to eat says: *"Solidarity is a big cooking pot. Allilegii ine ena tsoukali".*

Today, there remains no certainty for far too many about what happened to their loved ones, because their bodies were either not found or not identified. While some now have at least a grave to mourn, for others the comparison of DNA is still lost in the bureaucracy. The murderous border regime leaves traces, too many family members and survivors still suffer from the trauma of losing their loved ones.

We promise to never forget those who lost their lives at these borders. Our thoughts will always remain with all those who are thinking of their loved ones, whose lives ended or who were forced to disappear due to the European policies of deterrence. We will move forward together to tear down the borders and build another world of welcome.



CommemorAction in Saidia, at the Moroccan border to Algeria, 2019. - Photo: Alarm Phone

I Could Have Died

*I could have died like the others
Like my friends and my brothers
Why them and not me
It was not out of virtue:
of having successfully crossed the shores
of not being able to cross the Mediterranean or the
Atlantic
of not having succumbed in the sea and on land borders*

*I could have been swallowed by those deep waters
Because I was not the strongest among the weak
Not the bravest nor the most cunning
Maybe the luckiest
I think my life just had to go on.
We have all been scared at some point.
But a single hope fed our lives and gave us the courage
to continue:
that of making Boza one day*

*We were faced with this same reality of life
This reality of the global disorder of our countries
We were often forced to make such difficult choices:
"forced departures"*

*Without considering what we leave behind
How many families live with this heavy burden*

*Today I think of those who did not make it,
Who died or disappeared at the borders.*

Saliou Diouf



Person reading during the non-stop reading performance in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, June 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

We kindly request you to stop killing

Every year since 2014, the Alarm Phone has sent out thousands of SOS-emails alerting authorities to boats in distress at sea. Thousands of standardised words, numbers and GPS-coordinates, reporting urgent situations of distress. Thousands of repeated kind requests for rescue, many of them going have gone unanswered.

In June 2023, Alarm Phone activists read out 1,338 of these distress emails that the network had sent in the first half of 2023 during a non-stop performance in front of the European Parliament in Brussels.

The action 'We kindly request you to stop killing' was an attempt to address the systemic indifference we face regarding matters of life and death on the Mediterranean Sea. When someone calls us from a boat in the hope that on the other side of the line a human will answer and not a machine, the Alarm Phone activists take each unique voice and convert it into a standardised bureaucratic language so authorities might pay attention. We transform people into numbers, and lives into coordinates. We log each call and politely state our cause, one email at a time, 4,325 emails a year. But we are not patient as it might seem when we start our message again with 'Dear officer on duty...'

Instead, we are angry! We are tired! We are desperate! We want answers!

During the action in Brussels, we read under the midday sun, through wind, rain, and at night, illuminated only by two lights. Sometimes we had an audience, other times, we spoke into an apathetic void. Sometimes we were met with cheers of support and other times with racist ignorance. Regardless, we held our place and kept on reading, one after the other, passing on the

microphone to the next person – just like we hand over the phone on our shifts.

Our voices were strong and steady, calm and angry, loud and quiet, desperate and tired – but always determined. As the stack of papers dwindled, the alerts to authorities continued to spread around the stage. As we neared the end of the performance, our voices became louder, faster and more urgent. We read out emails that spoke of boats that were still at sea with fates uncertain. During the final hours of reading, hundreds of white papers lay on the ground, staring up at the empty night sky like silent accusations; testimony to the hundreds of boats full of people pushing up against centuries of colonial violence, exploitation and continuous injustice.

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Person reading during the non-stop reading performance in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, June 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone



Person reading during the non-stop reading performance in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, June 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

The Alarme Phone Sahara tricycle on its way to 'point zero' following an act of refoulement from Algeria on 25 December 2023. - *Photo: Danyaye*

7.

Sister Projects and Networking





Alarme Phone Sahara Desert evaluation mission, February 2020. - Photo: Danyaye

Alarme Phone Sahara: Our motto is “free to go, free to stay”

Interview with Moctar Dan Yayé of Alarme Phone Sahara

Hi Moctar, can you tell us how Alarme Phone Sahara came about?

M Alarme Phone Sahara started in 2017, following the so-called ‘migration crisis’ of 2015 in Europe. We realised that public attention was focused on the Mediterranean Sea and other EU border regions. We decided to draw attention to the situation here to show what people on the move were experiencing before reaching the Mediterranean. We wanted to expose human rights violations.

Our motto is: free to go, free to stay. We ourselves are not facilitating movements. We just want to stop human beings dying. Our headquarters is in Agadez, Niger – one of the main gateways of northbound migration – but we are also present in many other African countries, such as Mali, Togo, Burkina Faso and Morocco. We also have members in Europe and consider ourselves to be a transnational project between Africa and Europe.

We see Alarme Phone Sahara as the sister project of Alarm Phone. We decided to build a similar structure for the desert, and circulate a phone number that could be called by people in distress. However, we realised that creating a phone line here was not enough, due to limited network coverage in the desert. People on the move rarely have satellite phones. It is dangerous to carry them as you could be seen by the police or military as belonging to a criminal network. We therefore had to think about alternative ways to learn about distress situations.



Alarme Phone Sahara team working at the Assamakka police station in Niger to assist deportees, 2023. - Photo: Danyaye

And so you built a system of ‘whistle-blowers’...

M Yes, we decided to build a network of volunteers who live in villages around the routes of migration to Libya or Algeria and who know these regions well. We call these people ‘whistle-blowers’ as they raise the alarm when migrants are in distress. They know where to find phone network coverage and water or how to assist people in need, for example by fixing broken cars. Finding whistle-blowers was not easy, however. We had to build confidence among the population. Over time, these locals realised that what we were trying to do was also in their own interest. We see this as a common fight.

The criminalisation of migration has affected the whole economy of the region. Many people were involved in migration-related activities, which used to be legal and normal. People in the villages do not want anyone to die in the desert, but they are scared of the consequences of engaging with migrants. They fear criminalisation. So, together, we tried to come up with ideas of what to do. We also held meetings with former drivers who used to transport people (legally) in order to get their advice and share our information with them. If our whistle-blowers hear about abandoned migrants, they cannot transport them as they might be considered smugglers or traffickers if caught by the police. What they can do, however, is to orientate the migrants and tell them how far it is to reach Libya or the next village.

Combined with this network of whistle-blowers, our hotline works well. Sometimes when we inform authorities about distress cases, they allow us or our whistle-blowers to evacuate the migrants to the nearest villages. We also get calls from different cities in Niger from people asking about the risks of the journey, or we receive calls from abroad from people in the diaspora who are searching for someone.



An evacuation of people from ‘point zero’ to the village of Assamakka, Niger, 2024. - Photo: AP Sahara

Following the coup in Niger, the new military government repealed the law 036 from 2015 that had criminalised the transport of people. Can you tell us what has changed since?

M On 25 November 2023, the new military authorities repealed this law that had tried to end the “illegal trafficking of migrants”. In fact, what this law had done, was to criminalize the previously legal and regular transport of people across the desert. It also led to the criminalization of forms of solidarity and of migrants themselves.

Since the coup, economic sanctions have been imposed on Niger by the international community, and relations with and funds by Western donors were cut, which means that humanitarian assistance has declined.

For APS, it is a relief that this law is gone. For years, we have campaigned against this law and taken legal action against the government of Niger at the level of the ECOWAS court. Civil society actors in Niger, who are working for freedom of movement, as well as previous service providers to migrants in the Agadez region have also welcomed the repeal of the law. These service providers had been severely sanctioned by this law and many were arrested and imprisoned.

All those who were incriminated have been released. So, the transport of people resumes its course. Drivers and smugglers load their vehicles and take the road to the north without fear of being arrested.

While this has been good news, you also continue to document serious human rights violations in the desert. Can you tell us about those?

M Yes, in the meantime, Tunisia and Libya, to whom Europe outsources its borders, have worsened the suffering of people on the move in the Sahel-Saharan region. Even if they now stand better chances of crossing Niger, many then become victims of human rights violations in the Maghreb region. Since the racist speech of the Tunisian president in February 2023 against the so-called “sub-Saharan migrants”, the violence against them has continued to increase.

We have noticed the multiplication of repressive channels: people who are in Tunisia are initially pushed back to the border between Tunisia and Algeria, either by the authorities or by the populations. Then these people are recovered at the border or in Algerian cities by the Algerian authorities to be thrown into the desert of Niger. In 2023, we documented more than 26,000 people who were deported by the Algerian authorities.

These pushbacks are degrading. Algerian forces send people in trucks from Tamanrasset to ‘point zero’, a ‘no man’s land’ in the desert between the two countries where people must walk at least 15 km to reach the village of Assamaka. Among them are often women, children, and the elderly or the sick.

In Assamaka, there are international organizations supposedly responsible for the protection of these people. But their assistance is conditional – people must agree to ‘voluntarily return’ to their country of origin in order to receive the assistance of these organizations. And while they have the task to ensure accommodation and assistance, these organizations do not manage to offer adequate living conditions. They also struggle to return those, who accept to go back to their country of origin, within a reasonable time frame, which means that many remain in undignified living conditions for months, exposed to extreme temperatures and harsh winds, often wearing the same clothes for several months.

In light of this worsening situation in the desert region, what can Alarme Phone Sahara do?

M We continue to document and denounce the policies and practices that violate the rights of those who cross Niger. We have multiplied our actions to advocate for and assert the right to mobility in an area that is in the grip of insecurity crises where people are increasingly forced to move in search of protection. We have

reinforced our whistle-blowing teams so that they can go on more patrols to save lives. We have also renewed links with comrades in the Maghreb region, notably our Alarm Phone friends in Tunisia and Morocco, with the aim of coordinating our efforts and exchanging information in real time to monitor mobility on both sides of the Sahara.



Sign indicating the direction of Assamakka, Niger, from ‘point zero’, 2023. - Photo: Danyaye



CommemorAction in Zarzis, Tunisia, 2022. - Photo: Alarm Phone

BOZA Fii

By Saliou Diouf

Boza Fii is a non-profit association based in Senegal. It was created by Saliou Diouf in September 2020, inspired by the Alarm Phone network. Boza Fii is made up of volunteer activists and largely migrants. Within the association, some of the more active members make up the Alarm Phone Dakar team. The idea behind the creation of the association was to address the lack of respect for migration in Senegal. Specifically, the aim was to fight for the freedom of movement for everyone.

BOZA Fii is engaged in the field of flight and migration. The association supports migrants who have voluntarily returned, migrants who have been expelled to their countries of origin, and those facing a total lack of assistance. The association also supports the friends and families of those who have disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and at the borders. It accompanies them in their painful quest for answers. The association also seeks to promote the right to identity and dignity for all victims of our borders and the right of their families to know. BOZA Fii aims to work for greater respect of the rights of these individuals, that are not only weakened by the tragedies of migration but also often stigmatized in their own communities. It also wishes to encourage the production of knowledge and promote objectivity around the debate on migration and international exchanges to face global realities together.

For almost four years, Boza Fii has been carrying out activities every year on many different themes in the field of migration. However, political issues frequently come to the forefront. As a result, the association has been targeted by Senegalese authorities. Since October 2022, after their first initiative “72h Push Back Frontex,” the members of the

association have faced numerous problems, such as the restriction of their Facebook page for over a year, the deactivation of the president/founder's account twice in one year, the criminalization of some of its members in the Schengen area, and the frequent refusal to authorize the organization of events.



72-hour 'Pushback Frontex' action in Dakar, Senegal, September 2023. - Photo: Alarm Phone

The association is committed to defending the rights of people on the move, but also proposes development initiatives to continually improve the living conditions of migrants, as well as social and solidarity actions. In our roadmap entitled "suñu wareef", which means "The patriot act" in English, we have drawn up ten events, four of which we want to do every year. These include the caravan for the disappeared, which we run every year to promote the right to identity of the victims of our borders and their families. Another initiative is the "Noël Solid'action" (Solidarity Christmas Action), which aims to lend a helping hand to children who are victims of the tragedies of migration.

The action consists of giving them presents every Christmas, but we also encourage our competent authorities to take care of them at school and to monitor their state of health. Also linked to deaths at sea and forced disappearances, we hold a Commemor'Action every 6 February in memory of those who have disappeared at the borders, an initiative of our Alarm Phone network. There are other events we want to organise in the future. Carrying out these activities is often financially difficult, but with the help of our Alarm Phone network, our new partner CCFD-Terre Solidaire and the support of other organisations such as Medico International, CRID, Number into Names, migration-control and Abolish Frontex Switzerland, we always manage to be on the ground to do our bit to solve one piece of the migration puzzle in Senegal.



Christmas Solidarity Action in Gorée, Dakar, Senegal, 2022. - Photo: Alarm Phone



CommemorAction in Gorée, Dakar, 2022. - Photo: Alarm Phone Dakar

Positive Thinking

*There is a time for everything
A time for advice and warnings
A time for help...*

*It has certainly happened to all of us.
We sincerely advise someone.
We warn them... we caution them...
But to no avail.
They do not listen to us.*

Then...

*There comes the moment when that person falls.
They stumble precisely where we had warned them!
And naturally... the first thing we want to say is:
BUT I WARNED YOU!!*

(Deep down we might even think: Serves you right!)

And yet...

And yet now is not the time for that.

What good is it to tell them?

They know it very well now.

*At this point, this person needs help more than
reproaches.*

*They need us to help them out, not push them further
down.*

(Of course, they must be willing to reach out).

*Sure, it's not easy but this is how sincere companions
act.*

We must be beneficial to those around us.



Collection of Echoes brochures from the Civil MRCC, 2024. - Photo: Echoes

Networking in the Civil Fleet and the evolution of the Civil MRCC

Since 2017, EU maritime authorities and coastguards in Malta and Italy, including their Rescue Coordination Centers (MRCCs) in Valetta (RCC Malta) and Rome (MRCC Italy), have become increasingly dysfunctional. Since then, systematic non-assistance of boats in distress and the establishment of a push- and pullback regime are the reality in which the civil fleet has to work. Since 2019, Alarm Phone found itself increasingly in the role of a “rescue coordination center,” receiving many calls from boats and relatives on land, trying to push EU authorities to carry out rescue operations, and coordinating with the civil fleet to guarantee that people were not left to die. In 2020, a civil MRCC was founded with members of various rescue organizations to respond to the new challenges and to consolidate a network of solidarity to support people on the move.

The Palermo Charter Platform Process

Palermo’s historic communal library served as a worthy space for coming-together that was unique at the time. Under the title “from the sea to cities”, the mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, welcomed actors from municipalities, the church, as well as researchers, noborder activists, and sea rescuers to Palermo in 2018. The Alarm Phone had approached Orlando as he was the ‘most progressive mayor or Europe’ and asked him if he could organise such networking meeting. Orlando was a driving force behind the Charter of Palermo of 2015 that explicitly called for the right to mobility for all.

At this meeting, and just a few days before Salvini came into power as Italy’s interior minister, the so-called Palermo Charter Platform Process was

launched. “Toward a Coalition of Solidarity – For the Right to Mobility and Equal Rights for All” was the title of a first published statement, which had a clear message:

“From sea rescue to solidarity cities, from access to housing to medical care and fair working conditions, from legal counselling to protection against deportation: we prefigure and enact our vision of a society, in which we want to live. And we ask the civil society to join this process to create corridors, spaces and projects of solidarity, crisscrossing and subverting all internal and external borders of Europe.”

In the following months, further Platform Process meetings took place in Naples, Barcelona and finally, in November 2019, in Bologna. Here, two main working groups were created, which developed their own dynamics and structures. One group was dedicated to welcoming- and solidarity-practices on land and over the next years this process developed into the transnational network “From Sea to City”². The second group focussed on forms of cooperation at sea and formed the nucleus of what would later become the Civil MRCC (CMRCC).

Already in 2016 and 2017, several sea rescue organizations had met regularly for operational exchange. While the role of the Alarm Phone in sea-rescue-communication increased significantly in 2019 and 2020, some rescue NGOs did not (want to) accept this development. Although the crews of rescue ships and the shifts of Alarm Phone worked very successfully together, including during long nights, to find and rescue people in distress at sea, several of the rescue organizations would not acknowledge, or would even deny, the importance of this cooperation. However, over time, with “the chain of solidarity between phone and air and sea” turning into a daily practice - the mutual recognition has grown and cooperation has improved.

From Exchange to Coordination

It was in summer 2021, again during a meeting in Palermo, where the decision was made to go public as the CMRCC - not as a ‘big bang’, but humbly and slowly, building on our daily cooperations. Not the organizations as such but singular members of these organizations who were more convinced of the need of collective political and operational exchange, joined the emergent process. Finally, in January 2022, the CMRCC’s website was launched and our operational concept was published.

¹ see: <https://alarmphone.org/en/2018/06/17/toward-a-coalition-of-solidarity-for-the-right-to-mobility-and-equal-rights-for-all/>

² voir: <https://fromseacity.eu/>



Palermo Charter Platform Process, Italy, May 2018. - Photo: Alarm Phone

The CMRCC endeavours to improve the coordination of the different non-state actors engaged in Search and Rescue (SAR) operations at sea and to call for the intervention of State actors in fulfilment of their duty to rescue in compliance with human rights principles. Besides improving SAR coordination, the CMRCC intends to gather data and information on cases of distress in the Central Mediterranean area, to raise public awareness and to support advocacy efforts and research as well as legal interventions.

After a SAR event, the CMRCC engages in further follow-up work, especially when people went missing. As competent authorities don’t release any information on ongoing or completed SAR events, the CMRCC documents all SAR events through a dedicated software called the “SARchive”. The documentation is also needed to support SAR operations and gather evidence to hold the responsible actors accountable. Furthermore, information can be provided for requests from third parties, such as journalists and researchers. Finally, collecting documentation contributes to gathering evidence for potential strategic litigation initiatives to expose violations and omissions by relevant authorities, through the direct involvement of the victims, their relatives and communities.

“It makes a difference”: The start of the publication of “Echoes”

CMRCC’s first issue of “Echoes” was published in July 2022. Echoes was born out of the desire to pool the knowledge gathered by various SAR actors, to create more public awareness of the daily human right violations in the Mediterranean, and to raise the profile of the different struggles for freedom of movement at sea. In Echoes, meanwhile with 14 published issues, important aspects of search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean are addressed, challenges are discussed, analyses and research results are presented, and the self-organized struggles of people on the move are amplified. The main aim of Echoes is to highlight the impressive cooperation that exists between different civil society actors in the Central Mediterranean. Echoes is a collaborative publication, which also seeks to encourage dialogue with civil societies in the North and South, and to strengthen transnational solidarity.

Web site of CMRCC: www.civilmrcc.eu

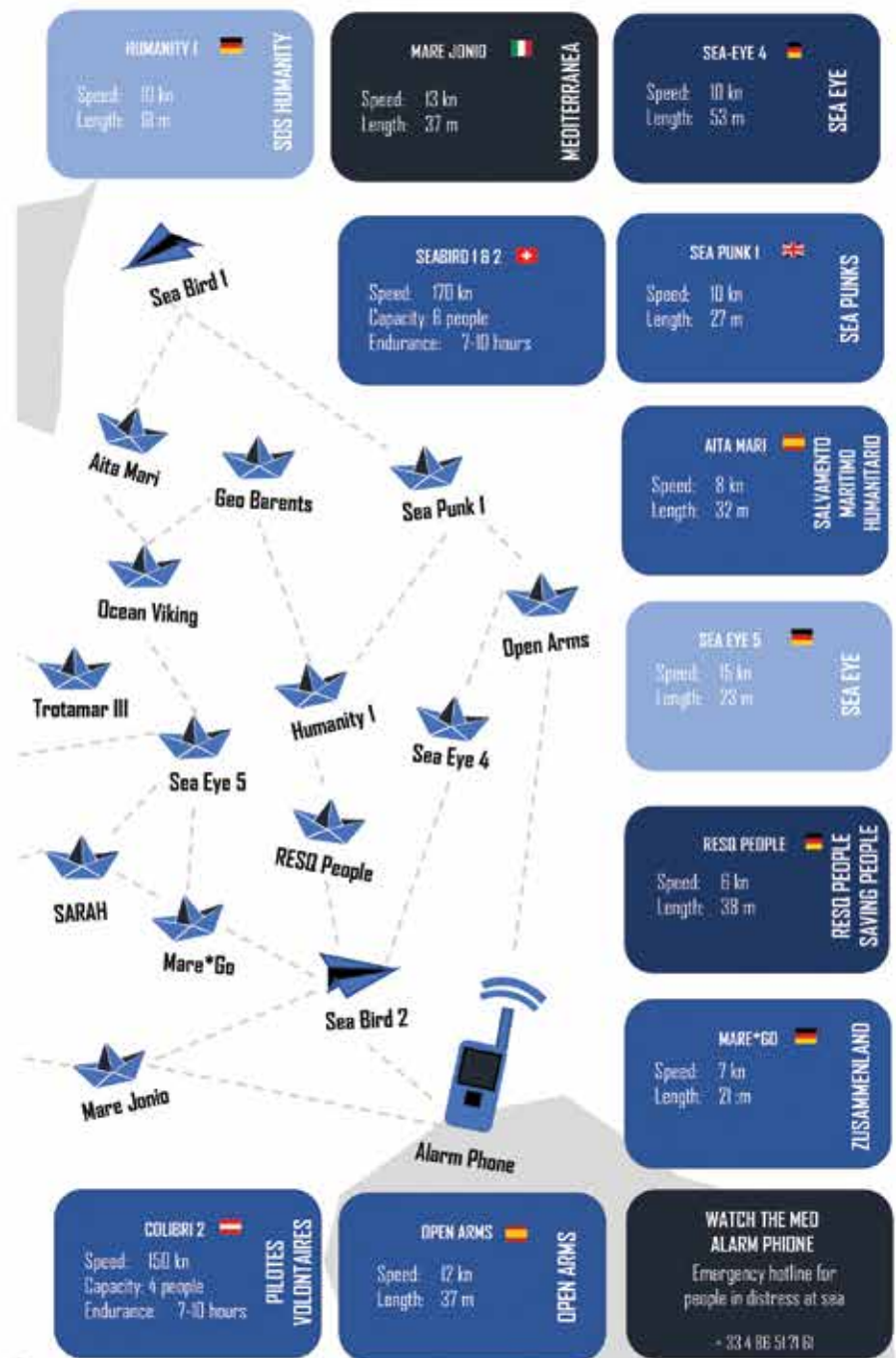
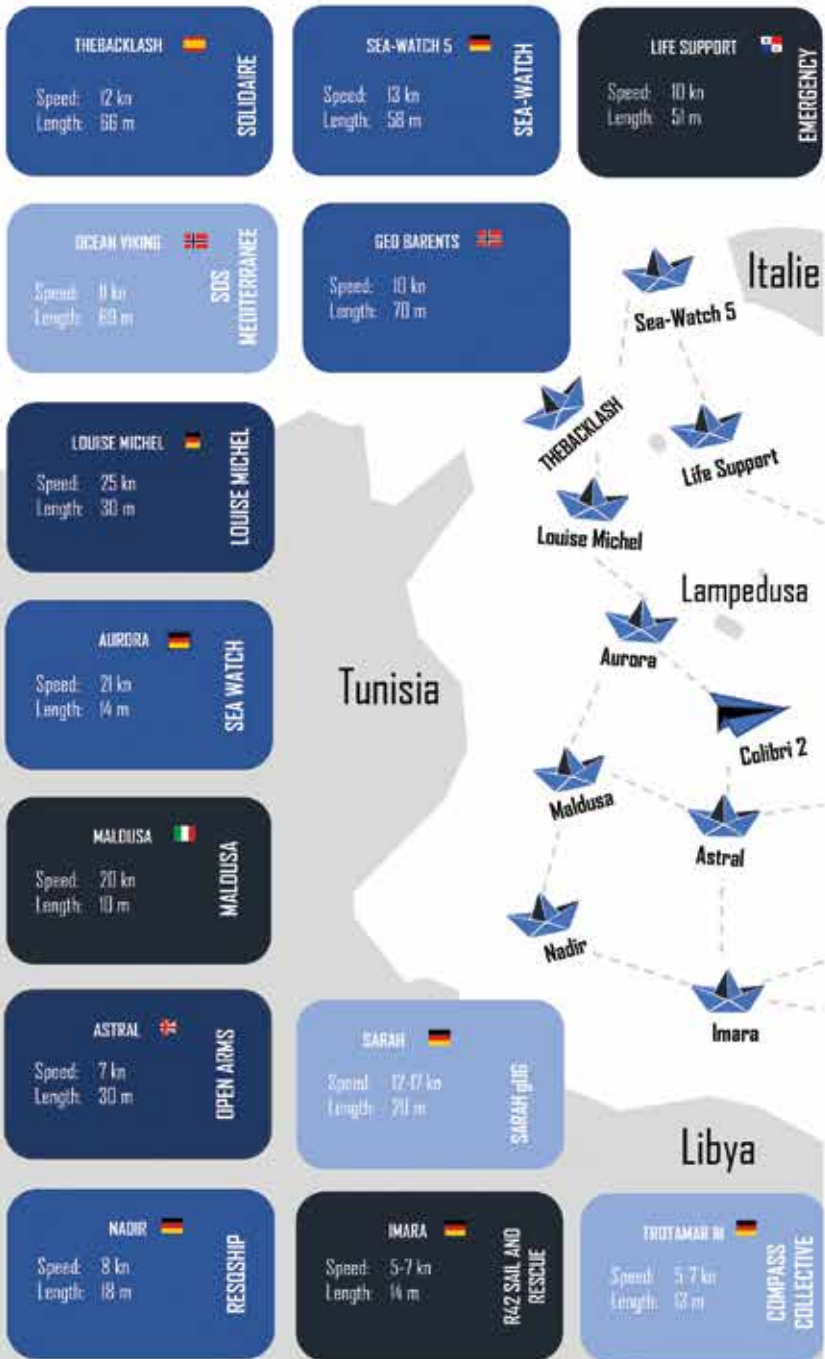
How the chain of rescue often works in the Central Mediterranean:



Photo: Pilotes Volontaires

In the night from the 14th to 15th of August 2024, the Alarm Phone received a distress-call from a boat with 57 people, who had escaped from Libya. The Alarm Phone alerted authorities in Malta and in Italy by email. As usual, there was no response and not any information. The Alarm Phone stayed in contact with the people on the boat overnight and updated authorities and the civil fleet with another GPS position.

With this information the Colibri2, the airplane from Pilotes Volontaires, searched and found the boat in the southern Maltese SAR-zone and confirmed their position. Later on, the Colibri2 guided the RHIBs from Geo Barents, the ship of Médecins Sans Frontières, to the boat in distress. The 57 people could be rescued in the late morning.





Exhibition from Refugees in Libya during an event in Rome, Italy, June 2024. - Photo: Refugees in Libya

Refugees in Libya: “We dare to imagine a better world worth living in”

Interview with David Yambio

David was one of the main organizers of the unprecedented protests of people on the move in Libya in October 2021. In his four years in Libya, he experienced four pushbacks at sea. In summer 2022, he succeeded to escape autonomously to Italy. When arriving in Europe, David immediately continued the struggle for the demands of Refugees in Libya, together with fellow fighters who had also crossed the border and with support networks.

David, you reached Europe autonomously, about two years ago. Since then, you continue non-stop to support your comrades in Libya. What is your impression of the political situation and the social movements in Europe?

D Two years seems so little to have fully understood the political dynamics and social movements in Europe. But reflecting on the political situation across and within Europe, I cannot pretend that it is hopeful for the future that we, the civil society and the common people, envisage. The political situation is sickening and has put us in constant fear of our world collapsing beyond repair. A few lunatic politicians have managed to brainwash and purposely poison the Western common people into believing that Europe can be a democratic continent by drawing circles around them and their politically

motivated borders. The European authorities want to destroy solidarity and those who practice it and do it in various ways, from threats to illegal judicial attacks to defamation. We must always remember that there is a very precise reason why they criminalize those who practice solidarity: We give flesh to another society, to another possible world, and we show that it is much more beautiful than the current one that is dominated by individualism, capitalism, authoritarianism and patriarchy. This is why people and social realities practicing solidarity are attacked and this is why we resist and will always resist.

As for the social movements in Europe, I share unpleasant feelings based on my two years of experience. The weakness of the social movements lies in competitions, identity and access to resources as well as reputation wars. There are hundreds of movements in Europe working on the same issues, but they are divided by the things mentioned above. Therefore they produce hatred and are not able to unite their respective groups for this noble goal that is however only achievable through common efforts.

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“Refugees in Libya” (RiL) is a self-organized movement that was born in October 2021, when thousands of refugees demonstrated in front of the UNHCR office in Tripoli after Libyan security forces had carried out brutal mass raids in neighbourhoods with Black populations. The protesters demanded protection, and an end to abuses in detention and to torture and slavery perpetrated by EU-funded Libyan militias and authorities. The sit-in of RiL lasted for a hundred days until, on 10 January 2022, Libyan security forces affiliated with the ministry of interior violently evicted the protesters and imprisoned hundreds of them.

In 2022, some activists from RiL managed to escape from Libya to Europe. From Italy and other countries, they continued to advocate and mobilize for their demands. From abroad, they began to document abuses of, and offer support to fellow refugees still living in Libya. A first demonstration took place in December 2022 in Geneva in front of the UNHCR headquarter and in June 2023, protests were held in front of EU institutions in Brussels. The Alliance with Refugees in Libya (ARiL) was built in the autumn of 2023 with activists from several supporting organizations. Two solidarity events took place in Bologna and Rome in January and May 2024. A new hotline is under construction to support people on the ground in Libya on a daily and practical level. At the same time, an evacuation campaign is in preparation to create safe passages for human right defenders, who are still blocked in Libya.

<https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/>



Demonstration by Refugees in Libya in Brussels, Belgium, June 2023. - Photo: Alliance with Refugees in Libya

Over the last months, more comrades from Refugees in Libya (RiL) made it to Europe, some by resettlement and some by boats. Do you hope to consolidate the core group of your self-organization? How can people, who struggled and suffered so much, keep energy and motivation?

D The comrades who arrived recently to Europe came through the Sant'Egidio Humanitarian corridors and were recognized as human rights defenders thanks to the campaign to evacuate the 221 human rights defenders. Others made it by boat. We are all coming together to solidify our efforts and construct our horrible experiences into a world where hope is not lost and justice is not forgotten. As for the energy and motivation of people who suffered from violence and negligence of the state, we find it our duty that we should not look away because the continued pain inflicted on people on the move in Libya and elsewhere in the North African region is a pain that reopens our old wounds. For these reasons we find it necessary to resourcefully reflect on the current crisis affecting refugees and people on the move. We also have a constant dream of changing the narratives and norms of people with no lived experiences, speaking and representing our needs and wants or interests as if we are incapable.

Our strengths are driven from the never-ending imagination of a home of belonging where dignity, safety, security, equality and social inclusion are not constantly asked or fought for. We dare to imagine a better world worth living in.

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In January 2024, the Alliance with Refugees in Libya (ARiL) organized a public event in Bologna, in May 2024 another one in Rome. What impact did these gatherings have?

D The events organized by ARiL have been fundamentally positive in many ways. First, the idea was to spread awareness about the human rights defenders who are stuck in Libya and face destitution and innumerable consequences for defending human rights. Secondly, the aim was to lobby politicians, local governments and host cities to recognize the 221 comrades as legitimate human rights defenders and to welcome them as such, and not just as asylum seekers or refugees. We have had the positive participation of mayors of each of those cities, international and regional lawyers, film makers, members of civil society organizations, universities and church organizations like the Vatican and the Sant'Egidio community who have supported and endorsed this campaign. The campaign has also drawn the attention of politicians and members of the European Parliament as well as the European Commission.

On your private phone, you receive(d) literally thousands of requests and distress messages from people on the move in Libya. Now with ARiL, you try to build a hotline structure to respond in a more collective way. What is the status and what are the main challenges of this new hotline project?

D Yes, I received and still receive hundreds of requests and distress cases from people - not only in Libya but also in Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Ethiopia, Niger, Greece, Poland and at other internal borders of Europe. In the spirit of effectiveness, I asked ARiL members to find a collective and meaningful solution to these requests and we are in the process of implementing the many new ideas. We use an online portal and we try to develop an archive that helps us to store and keep the information accumulated from the hotline. We are still looking for new members, who can provide trauma-related case training and communication. A main challenge remains to collect money as the cases we receive need practical solutions and we do not have the funds to provide for their needs.

In July 2023, your comrades were released from the Ain-Zara prison in Libya, also because of your continuous engagement, protests and lobbying. Now in Bologna, you started the evacuation campaign for 221 human rights defenders. What are the challenges and what is your expectation for the campaign?

D The release of my comrades came from a collective effort of people on the move as well as members of both Libyan and European civil societies,

including Alarm Phone. It was an incomplete job to leave our comrades stranded in the streets of Tripoli after their release and with never-ending risks of kidnapping, harassment and torture by militias affiliated with the Libyan ministry of interior or the lack of recognition from the UNHCR, which is a body mandated to advocate for the security, safety and wellbeing of such people. We therefore had to initiate the evacuation campaign which in some ways had tumultuous conditions because Europe is not the champion of human rights as it claims. We faced a lack of engagement from member states. Also, local governments have little power to receive our comrades without the approval of the higher authorities. The solidarity/welcoming cities are long in decline and we are sparing no efforts to revitalize these mechanisms. I still have hope that this campaign will yield great success and will open more recognition routes for human rights defenders at risk in Libya or Tunisia.



Event by Refugees in Libya in Bologna, Italy, January 2024. - Photo: Alliance with Refugees in Libya

You joined the general Alarm Phone meeting in Amsterdam in December 2022. Some of our members are part of ARiL. What would be your main message for the continuation of our hotline project, after ten years in operation?

D Before joining the general Alarm Phone meeting in early December 2022, I was moved by a strong experience that I had during my attempt to reach Europe in January 2019. We were en route at sea from Khoms, Libya, to Europe, when our rubber dinghy had tough times making it through the violent waves. We sought help from all parties and none answered except for

Alarm Phone. Although we were later rescued by a merchant vessel bearing the flag of Sierra Leone with the name Lady Sham and forcibly deported to Libya, our experience with Alarm Phone remained a lifelong memory and a cause to admire. During my 2022 experience with the Alarm Phone gathering in Amsterdam, I cemented a solid relationship with its members who have stood in both practical and political solidarity over the years. Together with them, we have initiated political campaigns for the freedom of movement and have joined forces to respond to emergency situations, however little it may be. At this point, I wish to see Alarm Phone continue documenting the daily human rights violations that are committed at Europe's external and internal borders. I am happy to see them continue raising alarm and call for rescue for those in distress. And I would love to see its members grow globally and be the guardians of our planet against impunity and inhumanity.

Welcome to Europe

w2eu.info - web guide

Welcome to Europe tries to provide accurate accessible information for all people on the move, always with the underlying aim of a common struggle for freedom of movement. Since it was first developed in 2010, the web-guide has aimed to provide a minimum list of contacts in nearly all European countries of arrival and transit as well in various transit-countries around the Mediterranean.

Many country sections are fed with various thematical chapters that cover the rights and situations for migrants/refugees in each place. The information is available in four languages: Arabic, English, Farsi and French. Since its creation, the web guide has evolved into a tool that is widely used by migrant/refugee communities all along the different routes and at different points of their flight - before people's departure, when they are stuck in transit and upon their arrival. It is used by those who face problems along the way and those who have arrived, as well as those threatened by deportation.

This source of information against fear and for the right to stay for everyone is an attempt to empower people through counseling and with the information published in the web guide. w2eu.info has also become a tool for networking and is used not only by people on the move but also by activists. It can be useful to find help in case it is needed.

In our Alarm Phone work, we often send the links to the Welcome to Spain, Welcome to Italy or Welcome to Greece guides to people when they have made it to Europe. We do this to wish them a safe onward journey and to give them strength for the struggles ahead.



Commemoration of the massacre by survivors on 29 June 2022 in front of the CETI in Melilla, a Spanish enclave bordering Morocco. - Photo: Cléo Marmié

Border Forensics: Investigative interventions against border violence

By Charles Heller

Border Forensics (BF) is an investigative agency launched in 2021 which develops new investigative methodologies to document and contest the different forms and geographies of border violence illegalised migrants encounter across their entire trajectories. BF builds on the Forensic Oceanography (FO) project which focused exclusively on the maritime borders of Europe. The investigations both BF and FO have led have been intertwined with the WatchTheMed Alarm phone's essential practice of real-time intervention over the last 10 years.

From 2011 to 2021, FO critically investigated the political, spatial and aesthetic conditions that have transformed the Mediterranean into the world's most deadly border zone. Emerging out of the wider Forensic Architecture research agency based in London, FO spearheaded the use of geographic and media technologies – such as satellite imagery, drift modelling, vessel tracking – to reconstruct with precision specific cases of human rights violations and deaths occurring at sea, which otherwise would have remained invisible. In doing so, it contributed to open a breach in the impunity that had long prevailed for the death and violent treatment of migrants at sea. Starting from the report on the Left-to-die boat, in which 63 passengers died as they were left to drift for 14 days in NATO's maritime surveillance area, FO consistently investigated emerging bordering policies and practices that threatened migrants' lives and rights. FO's work has been used in a broad range of forums – from courts of law and political institutions to cultural spaces.

FO also supported activist groups and NGOs in forging new tools to document violations such as the WatchTheMed (WTM) mapping platform and the

associated Alarm Phone (AP). As other contributions in this booklet detail, when FO published its investigation on the Left-to-die boat case in 2012 to support demands for truth and justice of the survivors through litigation efforts, several activists saw the potential to seize upon the methods and technologies FO used to map the practices of actors across the maritime frontier, and combine them with existing forms of remote support exercised by Father Zerai, to create a new tool for real-time and networked activists interventions in support of migrants. FO thus participated in the emergence of the WatchTheMed platform and later the Alarm Phone, and continuously worked with the Alarm Phone to document and contest the changing forms of border violence perpetrated by states across the Mediterranean – from practices of abandonment to changing strategies of pushbacks.

204 After 10 years of exclusive focus on the Mediterranean, and considering that civil society actors (such as the Alarm Phone and rescue NGOs) have developed a much stronger capacity to intervene, document and demand accountability for violations at the maritime frontier, FO decided to shift its geographic focus beyond the sea and to focus on other border zones which have received less attention from civil society and the press, and where as a consequence border violence continues to be perpetuated in all impunity. It is through this re-orientation that we launched Border Forensics in 2021 as a new investigation agency.

BF's investigations have focused on a broad range of geographies across which illegalised migrants from the global South encounter Europe's violent borders – from the lethal effects of the EU's border externalisation policies beyond Europe, such as in the Niger desert, to the bordering practices targeting migrants within Europe, such as across the Alpine borders between Italy and France. The Mediterranean has however remained an important focus for BF, and we have continued to collaborate with the Alarm Phone. In particular, in 2022, BF published an investigation led in collaboration with Human Rights Watch titled "Airborne Complicity – Frontex Aerial Surveillance Enables Abuse", which focused on the increasing reliance on EU aerial surveillance – performed by Frontex in particular – to enable the interception of migrants attempting to escape from Libya. To circumvent Frontex' lack of transparency on these issues we cross-referenced official and open-source data, including drone and plane flight tracks, together with information collected by Sea-Watch and the Alarm Phone, as well as the testimony of survivors who courageously shared their stories with us. We demonstrated that Frontex aerial surveillance is key in enabling the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept migrant boats and return their passengers to Libya, knowing full well that they will face systematic and widespread abuse when forcibly returned there.

In the different phases of FO and BF collaboration with the Alarm Phone, we can see the way methodologies initially developed by FO to document

violations and seek justice contributed to the emergence of the new and extraordinary practice of real-time intervention at the maritime borders of Europe led by WatchTheMed Alarm Phone, which in turn has expanded our capacity to hold states and EU agencies accountable for their crimes – one of the means which may contribute to finally bringing these practices to an end. 10 years after the Alarm Phone was initiated, the network plays an essential role in supporting migrants in the exercise of their contested freedom to move and in defending their rights, and BF is committed to continuing to work with the Alarm Phone in support of these aims in the future.

Border Forensics website: www.borderforensics.org

Forensic Oceanography website:
<https://forensic-architecture.org/category/forensic-oceanography>

Established in 2022 in Bologna (Italy), LIMINAL works with communities affected by border violence to document and contest the violence created by unequal mobility regimes across multiple geographies and temporalities. In particular, it seeks to unravel the connection between border violence and other forms of harm and oppression, for example, the way in which bordering and neocolonial extractive practices are affecting West African communities, or how those same communities are the target of racialised policing and criminalisation in Europe. In the context of these and other projects, and building on a longstanding relationship built through Forensic Oceanography and Border Forensics, LIMINAL continues to collaborate with the Alarm Phone as well as with connected groups such as Maldusa, the Captain Support Network, Watch the Channel, Refugees in Libya and many others.

www.liminal-lab.org

COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

A solidarity intervention by and for People on the Move

Interview with Ihab Al Rawi

The Consolidated Rescue Group (C.R.G.) has been supporting people in distress situations along various migration routes for many years. The project was founded by Ihab al Rawi, who fled to Europe himself in 2015. He soon realised the enormous scale of abuse and violence against migrants that takes place in Europe, and decided to set up practical support. He has been running the project together with partners for ten years. C.R.G. is an important partner for Alarm Phone in its' daily struggle for freedom of movement and against violence and death at sea.

Ihab Al Rawi, can you tell us a bit about yourself and explain why you decided to set up the Consolidated Rescue Group ?

Ihab Al Rawi: I am Ihab Al Rawi. I'm from Iraq and have been living in Germany for almost ten years. My organisation has been around since 2015 and still exists today. The idea to start the project came when I migrated myself. I took the same route across the Aegean to Europe and saw the extent to which people were suffering. I couldn't bear it, so I came up with the idea of helping people. I was lucky, my route was a bit easier, but most people weren't so lucky. I wanted to do something about that.

Ihab Al-Rawi at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, June 2024. - Photo: Consolidated Rescue Group

Your organisation is called Consolidated Rescue Group. C.R.G. started ten years ago. Please tell us something about your history: How many people are you, what is your work ?

I was already interested in activist work in Iraq, my home country. I liked helping people. When I started the Consolidated Rescue Group, everything was a bit more uncoordinated: I posted on Facebook about people's suffering, and I received more and more requests. In the beginning, there weren't that many people. But that changed quickly: over time, more and more people and communities approached me to talk about their suffering but also their needs. That was the starting point. In the beginning, we tried to be everywhere at once. We were not only active in emergency situations on the water or along the borders, but also in camps in Syria and Turkey. We tried to start activist projects wherever they were needed. Some of these were also projects to provide financial support to people in need. But as we became better known as an organisation and received more requests and calls, that was no longer possible. Our work is completely activist; we don't get any money, nobody gets a euro for what we do. That's why it became difficult to finance all the activities in the long term. That's why we decided to cut back. We focused on emergency situations at the border, especially people in distress at sea.

You have become increasingly well-known over the years. How do you inform the public about your work and what people tell you about the borders ?

In the beginning, we limited ourselves to social media as our main communication channel. This is still the case today, but over time we realised that social media is not enough. Our voice is not being heard enough there. That's why we changed our strategy and increasingly started talking to the media. This is necessary for our voice to be heard. Because it's clear to us: we don't just want to help, we also want to make a difference. And when you report in the media, you have a political impact. People trusted us because we were always there, which is why we grew and became bigger. They realised we want to help them. We have no other intentions, neither politically nor financially. They realise that. The people we are in contact with realise that we are doing everything in our power to solve problems, despite the limited resources we have.

The trust of the people travelling is very important. We also realise this in our daily work at Alarm Phone. How did you gain this trust?

We worked very hard to get the right sources and information. We

are very sure that the information we receive and pass on is accurate and trustworthy. This makes people trust us. Many people get false information from smugglers or people with dishonest intentions. We work hard to ensure that we receive and pass on good, correct information. Some people only start their journey because they receive false, misleading information. Then they are shocked by the terrible things they experience on the journey or when they arrive. This is also why the media and journalists trust us and come to us for information.

You are a migrant organisation and have a common language with many refugees. Does that strengthen trust ?

The language is of course very important. It automatically makes people trust us because everything they say is understood, not only linguistically but also culturally. They can speak freely and tell us everything. And of course, people also know that we understand what they are going through because we have experienced it too. They know that we know the routes, the suffering, the situation. That makes trust easier. Sometimes we take witness statements when something bad happens. They often tell us everything, but when we work with the media and they are involved in the conversation, people don't talk.

How many people are involved in C.R.G. and what kind of work do you do ?

We work as a volunteer organisation. People come and go. There were people who worked with us for many years but then stopped. New ones joined us. Today, there are five of us. I started the group and I'm still responsible for many of the strands and also do public relations work. Then we have one person who takes all the calls and messages. Another person who translates, as well as people who work with the media or technology and a lawyer who manages legal affairs and maintains contact with other organisations and lawyers.

There are different routes on the way to Europe. Along which routes and in which regions are you particularly active ?

When we started, the focus was clearly on the route between Greece and Turkey, especially around the Aegean islands. People there knew me, and I knew the route. But as the organisation became better known, we started getting calls and messages from everywhere: Belarus, the UK, Canada, Morocco and Libya. There was no limit to where people contacted us from. The routes have changed over the years: when things started to get more difficult and violent in Greece, people found other

ways. It's about politics and what conditions prevail in different countries. People inform themselves before they set off - that's why the routes change depending on political developments.

In recent years, we have seen an intensification of violence along various routes. This is particularly true in the Eastern Mediterranean, where the Greek coastguard has established a regime of violence. How has the work changed in recent years?

I Over the years, many boats have arrived in Greece. Greece and the EU used various means to try to stop migration or at least control it more effectively. In doing so, they increasingly began to use force. But despite all the measures and violence, they have still not been able to stop migration. People come from countries and situations in which they are suffering. They often only have two options: arrive or die. When they come to C.R.G. and ask for help, they are asking for someone they can talk to, someone who can make their voice heard, someone who can help tell the world what they are going through. And that's exactly why our work makes a difference. We activate the media and try to use reporting to help stop the violence perpetrated against migrants. This is an important goal of ours: to make our voice and the voices of migrants heard.

But you also do important work for affected individuals or communities far beyond the immediate emergency situations. How exactly do you support People on the Move and their families?

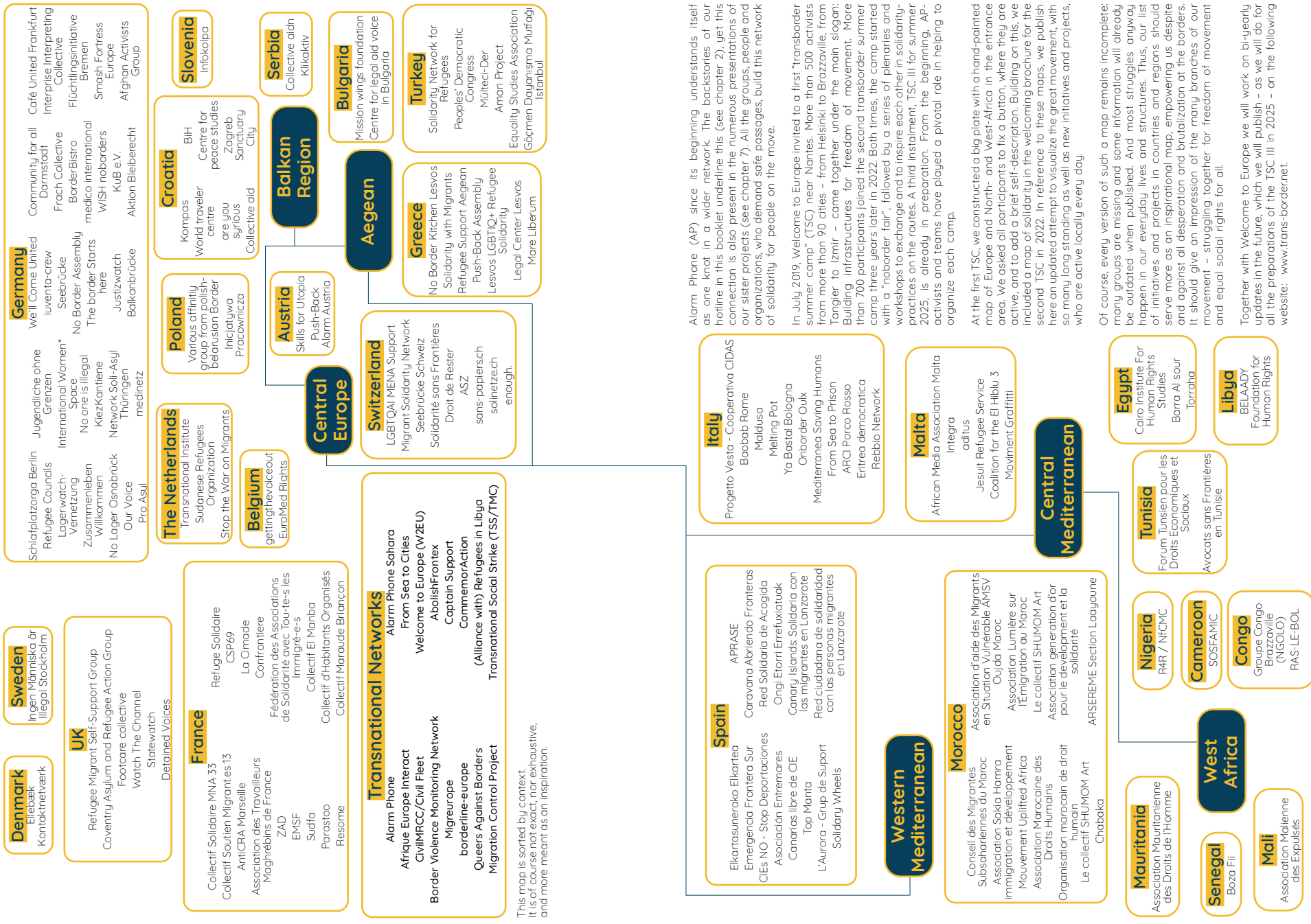
I Yes, we try to help families and relatives in difficult situations. For example, in Bulgaria, if they are looking for relatives, we work with organisations and groups in Bulgaria to find out where the disappeared are. We help them find their loved ones, contact organisations, assist with funerals, or if they want to transport bodies back to their countries we try to help them financially by connecting them with other organisations. We try to connect them with the right authorities or people, because people in Syria have no idea how things work in Europe. We simply try to do our best in every situation to provide meaningful support in these difficult moments.

And finally: Alarm Phone and C.R.G. have been working together for many years. In what way and what are your experiences with it?

I We have a close relationship with Alarm Phone and the collaboration is very important to us. We have been working together since the beginning,

since 2015, and you have been very important for the emergency calls we receive. The collaboration has resulted in many lives being saved. We share information and contacts and continue to develop together. We help each other and complement each other in our daily work.

Transnational map of solidarity for freedom of movement and equal rights



This map is sorted by context. It is of course not exact, nor exhaustive, and more meant as an inspiration.

Wall-painting in Lampedusa,
Italy, 2023. - Photo: maldusa.org



8.

**The
Struggle
continues**



Alarm Phone shift in Berlin, Germany, April 2024. - Photo: Alarm Phone

We will continue with the Alarm Phone, because ...

Voices from a diverse noborder network of everyday solidarity

For 10 years, operating day and night, the Alarm Phone has been in contact with over 8,000 boats. Shift by shift we have felt the pulse of migration movements and struggles. We have become ear-witnesses of hardships and death. And there is no end in sight. What are our motivations to go on and how can we keep up the commitment?

We asked our diverse network from various cities, teams and working groups for at least one sentence on why they will continue. Below you can find a collection of quotations. They show a spectrum of responses with perspectives that span from the motivation of acting in solidarity against the feeling of helplessness, to dreaming for a world with open borders.

We will continue with the Alarm Phone, because ...

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... we see when others look away.

AP Leipzig

... it gives us the energy and motivation to help anyone in need.

AP Oujda

... the fight against these violent border regimes has to go on, to shine a light on the realities migrants face everyday, and to directly support people on the move who are experiencing incredibly difficult journeys.

AP Dijon

... we have made a promise that is just as valid today as it was ten years ago: Every boat counts!

AP Zurich

... we want to campaign for better rescue conditions for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the Mediterranean when they attempt to cross it in makeshift boats in search of a better life.

AP Tetouan

... we have seen the murderous consequences of states' attempts to deny people their freedom to move.

AP Brighton

... now more than ever we want to destroy all borders and fight for freedom of movement for all people without distinction.

AP Saint Etienne

... another world is possible!

AP Kassel

... we love to be part of this amazing transnational network and it is important for us to participate in the struggle against Fortress Europe from where we are.

AP Bielefeld

... we refuse to ignore and stay silent.

AP Lausanne

... we want to contribute to this impressive network to act across borders against borders.

AP Berlin

... on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea solidarity is our better weapon.

AP Rennes

... Human Rights need to be defended - with this great network we will fight the European border regime.

AP Munich



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... Solidarity is the only kindness possible in this brutal world.

AP Toulouse

... we are - even after 8 years of our membership - not tired but happy & proud to be part of such a great, respectful and international network.

AP Hamburg

... as long as the sun rises in the sky, and as long as the night sets on our side of the Mediterranean, we will fight from Marseille to make our shared sea smile and say welcome; we are together.

AP Marseille

... our fight is their fight, and we must all fight - here, there and always. We must fight with determination and sacrifice for a better world without borders and above all for freedom of movement and the ability to move where we want, when we want.

AP Laayoune

... no one should have to take the violent routes that kill and generate so much suffering; but since they exist, we will continue to be there accompanying those who take their way, and pointing out and pressuring those who generate this hostile world.

AP Catalonia

... we do - as we obviously cannot change the system - what is most useful by accompanying and supporting people on the move who show great courage and tenacity.

AP Central Med Team



... the network stands for daily practical solidarity and therefore shines as a star of utopia in times that often seem hopeless.

AP Frankfurt/Hanau

... because there is a visa system.

AP Vienna

... we are proud of our grassroots approach without any paid positions and thus we can redistribute the surplus of our balance to self-organisations in and from the global South.

AP Financial Council

... fortress Europe still has to fall!

AP Erlangen

... we will go on until everyone can cross the oceans by ferry.

AP Calais

... we see that our work makes a difference and solidarity on the routes is very much needed and will be crucial in the future.

AP Cologne

... our team just started, and there are still borders.

AP Grenoble



... of its strength, the diversity of its members, and its humility in solidarity for the freedom of all !
AP Brittany

... we believe that intersectional liberation and transnational solidarity are the only way to be free.
AP Tunis

... we believe in a world without borders.
AP London

... borders kill and people die every day at sea on our doorstep and we will never accept that.
AP Palermo

... it is a network of activists committed to saving the lives of migrants, to fighting for their dignity and to promoting freedom of movement for all human beings.
AP Nouakchott

... governments choose racism over humanity.
AP Glasgow

... solidarity is most important in times like these.
AP Bremen



... we still have hope.
AP Copenhagen

...we want to achieve freedom of movement, solidarity and justice for those missing across borders.
AP Tangier

... we want to put an end to discrimination and violence against women; we will all fight for freedom of movement.
AP Women*'s Group

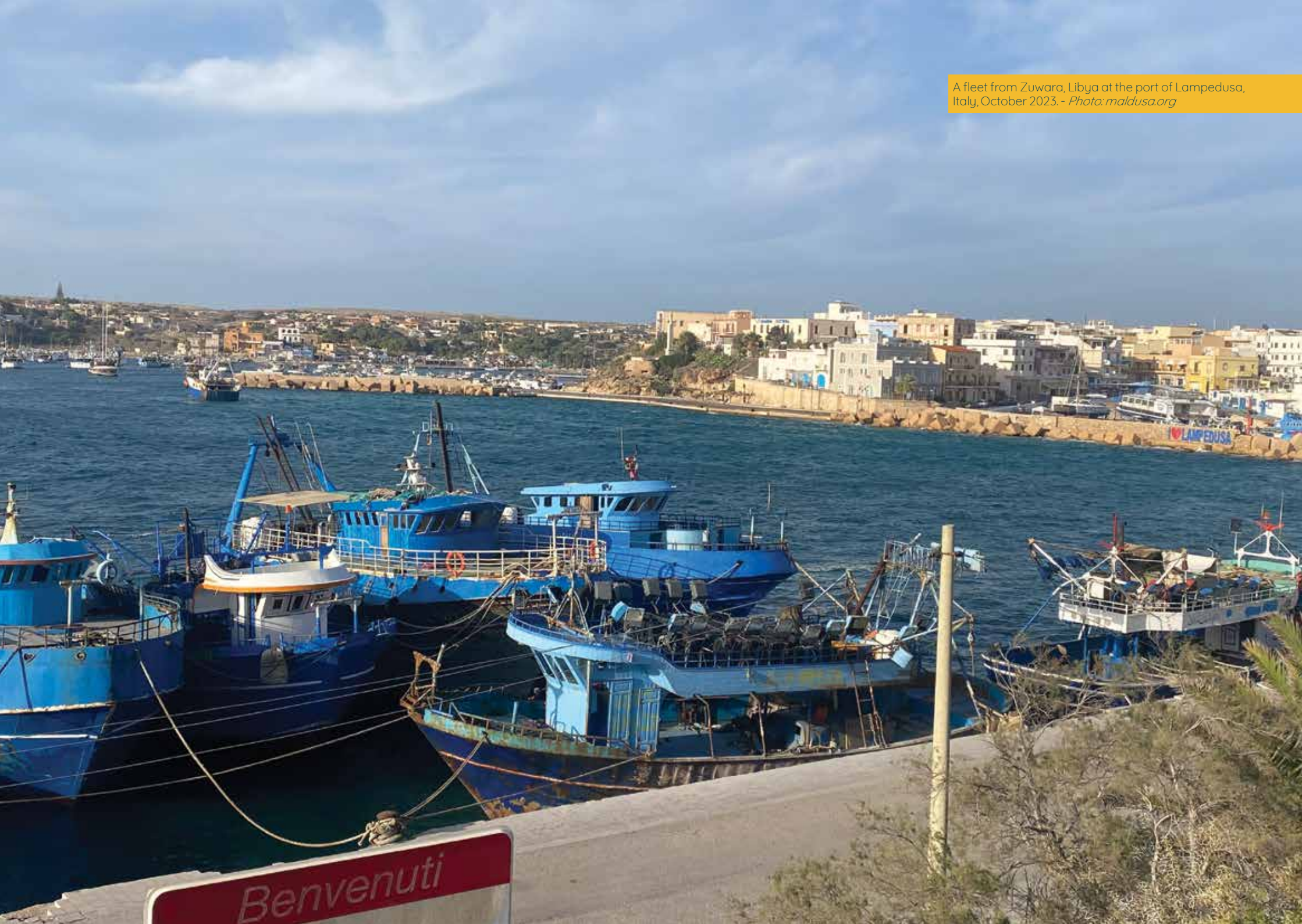
... we are committed to the fight for freedom of movement for all, and we have made a promise not to forget our migrant brothers and sisters who have died or disappeared and are calling for justice to be done.
AP Dakar

... we will continue to struggle for the right of everyone to move and to arrive alive; nobody should be left alone.
AP Aegean Team

... it's powerful to be part of a network of activists organising in solidarity with people on the move, because we're convinced of the equal dignity of all lives and the absurdity of the murderous, racist border regime, and because we want freedom of movement for everyone more than ever.
AP Paris



A fleet from Zuwara, Libya at the port of Lampedusa, Italy, October 2023. - Photo: maldusa.org





10 AÑOS
¡TARAJAL!

PAS DE PAIX
SANS JUSTICE

Racism

TSINA
FRONTES

CommemorAction in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave bordering Morocco, 2024. - Photo: Amélie Janda

Many thanks to all of you

... with whom we were in contact and with whom we cooperated during the last 10 years!

... who supported us on an operational, practical or psychological level, who shared our work and who offered donations.

230 It is only thanks to you that we have been able to build and continuously grow this broad network of solidarity!



Credit : Alarm Phone

Please consider donating so we can continue our solidarity work

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Les attestations de don sont envoyées automatiquement après réception du paiement.

Demonstration by Refugees in Libya in Geneva, Switzerland, December 2022. - Photo: Alliance with Refugees in Libya



Refugees in Libya demand:
EVACUATION | JUSTICE | SAFETY

مطالب اللاجئين في ليبيا:
إجلاء آمن | عدالة | أمان



UNFAIR
The UN Refusal Agency

Alarme Phone Sahara assisting Nigerian families deported from Algeria, December 2023. - Photo: Alarme Phone Sahara



Glossary

AIS

Automatic Identification System. Automatic vessel tracking system. Vessels are localised by satellite or base stations on land.

BOZA

(Bambara language) Victory. Celebratory call of West African migrants when they reach Europe.

CIVIL FLEET

Term used to refer collectively to non-governmental actors engaging in SAR activities in the Central Mediterranean region.

CIVIL MARITIME RESCUE COORDINATION CENTRE (CIVIL MRCC or CMRCC)

Coordination and documentation platform for people in distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea, operated by members of the civil actors engaging in SAR activities.

EU-TURKEY DEAL

On March 20, 2016, this agreement came into effect. Its aim to return all “irregular migrants” after reaching Greece to Turkey from that point on did not work out. Nevertheless, deportations to Turkey occur regularly and interceptions have increased.

FRONTEX

European Border and Coast Guard Agency founded in 2004 and based in Warsaw. Main tasks are the coordination of national border polices and the ‘protection’ of EU borders against ‘irregular’ migration. Symbol and main actor of Fortress Europe.

HARRAGA (Arabic)

Those who burn [the border]. Self-description of North African migrants who cross the Mediterranean by boat without visa.

HOTSPOT

Registration centers deployed by mobile →Frontex teams at particular sites of the EU border to assist screening and speed up deportation. The first Hotspot was opened on the 17th of September 2015 in Lampedusa, another one in October 2015 in Moria on Lesbos.

IMO NUMBER

International Maritime Organization number. Seven-digit number to uniquely identify a ship or a ship owner’s company.

INTERCEPTION

Stopping of migrants at sea or on land and forcing them back to the state of departure by the corresponding border police. This must not be confused with a rescue or →SAR operation.

IOM

International Organization for Migration. Intergovernmental organization for migration management founded in 1951. Cooperates closely with (especially Western) governments, for example in the 'voluntary' return of migrants to home countries.

MARE NOSTRUM

Air and naval operation of the Italian navy to conduct large-scale →SAR operations in the central Mediterranean, carried out for one year in 2013/14, able to rescue about 150,000 migrants.

MRCC (also sometimes referred to as **RCC** or **JRCC**)

Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre. Primary search and rescue agency of states, coordinating and controlling →SAR operations.

PULLBACK

Forced return of migrants at sea or on land to departure state as described for →Pushback, but carried out by forces of the state of departure – usually with knowledge and consent of the destination state's authorities.

PUSHBACK

Forced return of migrants at sea or on land to departure state as described for →Pullback, but carried out by forces of the state of destination – usually with knowledge and consent of the departure state's authorities.

SAR ACTOR

Actor engaging in Search and Rescue activities.

SAR ZONE/OPERATION

Search and Rescue zone/operation. The Mediterranean is divided into SAR zones. In case of a boat in distress, the corresponding →MRCC is obliged to coordinate a SAR operation in order to rescue that boat.

SARCHIVE

Search and Rescue archive that documents SAR activities and developments in the Central Mediterranean Region, maintained by the Civil MRCC.

SCHENGEN AREA

The Schengen Area is an area encompassing 29 European countries that have officially abolished border controls at their mutual borders. Still, spot

checks are carried out and lately, wider border controls were reintroduced.

SO-CALLED LIBYAN COAST GUARD

Expression used to describe the European supported Libyan coastguard, which performs pull-backs to Libya and has repeatedly violated international law.

THURAYA

Satellite phone provider from the United Arab Emirates and shorthand for the satellite phone itself. The coverage extends throughout the entire Mediterranean Sea.

THEMIS

Joint border security operation by →Frontex and the Italian Ministry of Interior. Started in February 2018 and followed the previous Operation Triton. Its principal task is border control, rescue remains secondary.

WATCH THE MED

Online documentation and mapping platform to monitor the deaths and violations of migrants' rights at the maritime borders of the EU. Initiated 5 December 2013 as part of the Boats4people campaign. www.watchthemed.net

ZODIAC

Common term for an inflatable rubber boat. The French company Zodiac is the main producer of that type of boat that is often used to cross the Mediterranean. Equivalent expressions are rubber dinghy or just dinghy.

Action against Frontex in Zarzis, Tunisia,
April 2018. - Photo: Alarm Phone





Alarm Phone information stand at 'Unite', an anti-fascist festival at Kochareal in Zurich, Switzerland, August 2019. - Photo: Alarm Phone

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FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR ALL

Light-banner at an Alarm Phone action in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, December 2022. - Photo: Amélie Janda



CommemorAction in Zarzis, Tunisia, 2022. - Photo: Alarm Phone



In October 2024, the Alarm Phone turns ten years old. For 3,650 days and nights, we have been on shift. During these shifts, we were alerted to over 8,000 boats from all corners of the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic region or the English Channel, directly by the people on the move or their relatives and friends.

For our tenth anniversary, we publish this book. In it, we share articles, analyses, interviews, and poems. We offer an account of how the Alarm Phone started and how it developed. We highlight the struggles against criminalization and the struggles for memory in the form of CommemorActions, alongside families and friends of the missing. We present sister projects of our network and show maps, graphics, and photos. Together, these fragments speak for our common perspective: We will continue with our solidarity on the routes and build and extend infrastructures for freedom of movement.

No border lasts forever. Solidarity will win!



watch
THE MED
Alarm Phone