

Anti-migration policies housing of migrants and common struggles



This brochure's subject is the housing of migrants in Greece. It emerged after our assembly got in contact with people who are threatened with evictions from the departments that had been assigned to them. Their denial to abandon their houses defines fields of struggle that we started to explore this year. It is an attempt to put everything we learned last year in order and suggest a way of how to proceed with this struggle.

The housing projects that are directed to migrants in Greece can be divided in two general categories: the pro-

grams for asylum seekers and the integration programs. To begin with, we will look into the program ESTIA that is in the first category. The reason we are focusing on ESTIA and not on camps or the FILOXENIA program is that the eviction cases we know of and that we could perhaps face at first, concern the ex-recipients of this program. The matter of housing in camps is part of a more general criticism on the system of camps, which follows in the next section of this text. The integration program with housing services that operates as we write this text is called HELIOS and will be addressed afterwards.

Housing programs for asylum seekers within the urban network

FILOXENIA

The program FILOXENIA run by IOM was stopped in January 2021. After reaching an agreement with the hotels, IOM (International Organization for Migration) was paying them with money from the Greek state (funded by the EU) to accept asylum seekers. In the last year it was operating there were 79 hotels around Greece giving 6.898 rooms to asylum seekers. After the ministerial decision on April 2020, the asylum seekers had to leave the accommodation facilities within 30 days after receiving the decision of their application.

The fact that the program provides accommodation in hotels and not apartments enables IOM and the hotel owners to use the police to force the people out of their accommodation. The reason for this is that hotel rooms aren't considered asylum, so the police can evict anybody without juridical decision. So, around the time of the expiration of the program, the hotels were emptied. In January, the process of evictions was completed and the program expired. The asylum seekers who were still waiting for their decisions were transferred into camps.

ESTIA

The program ESTIA is also addressed at asylum seekers. It's a housing program for apartments in the city. The past years (2015-2020), the program was funded by UNHCR. In the summer of 2020 a changeover process, that is now complete, started and the program was transferred into the hands of the state (the Ministry of Migration & Asylum). Now, the Greek state funds various NGO's with EU money. These NGOs find and lease apartments for migrants.

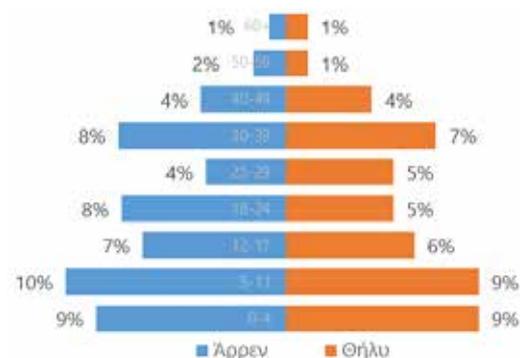
Beside the NGO's, the municipalities also participate in the program. With this new structure, companies can also join the program (in Thessaloniki for example some expansionary companies own some of the departments).

When the state took over the ESTIA program, funding was cut (from between 139 million to 190 million in the previous 5 years to 91,5 million for 2021). Following this, some NGOs that participated in the program under UNHCR, stopped to cooperate with ESTIA (like Solidarity Now). Migrants and apartments are now under the responsibility and management of the remaining NGOs. Some of those houses are administrated by more than one NGO and each one can bring their "own" migrants in. Now, the program provides 24,440 places for accommodation in 3,979 units, of which 225 are rooms in buildings and the rest are apartments. According to the press release of March 2021 the capacity of these places was at 75.5%. We will comment on that later on. Obviously, the non-recipients that stayed in their houses are not included in these statistics. The recipients of the program are asylum seekers. Nevertheless, in order to become accepted in ESTIA, there are certain vulnerability criteria granting higher priority in being accepted. Hence, the majority of recipients are families, often with health problems, out of which a big percentage face severe problems (of course, the access to healthcare remains a great struggle in all of these cases), with some families being single-parent. The nationalities of the beneficiaries are also specific due to the indirect effect of criteria of nationality. Below, we'll cite some statistic and demographic data from the report of March (2021).

Demographic data

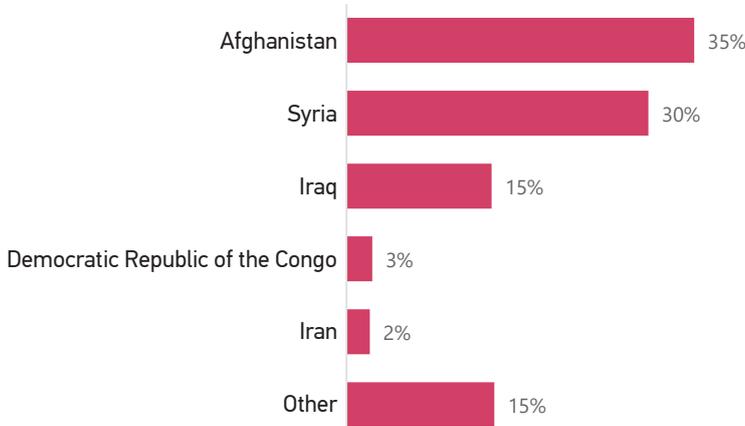
Overall, since November 2015, nearly 75.000 people have benefited from Housing Programs. By the end of March 2021, 18.463 people were hosted by the Program, among them 4.732 recognised refugees. 50 % of the recipients are children. The vast majority are families, on average families with 5 members. More than 1 out of 4 recipients meet at least one of the vulnerability criteria for the participation in the Program. The 3 most common vulnerability criteria are:

12% serious medical problem **4%** children in danger **3%** single-parent family



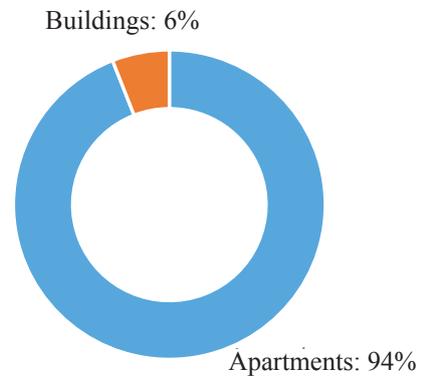
ETHNICITIES

The vast majority – 85% of people that participate at the housing programs – are Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Congolese(DRC). However, the people that were hosted until the end of March 2021 were speaking more than 30 different native languages.



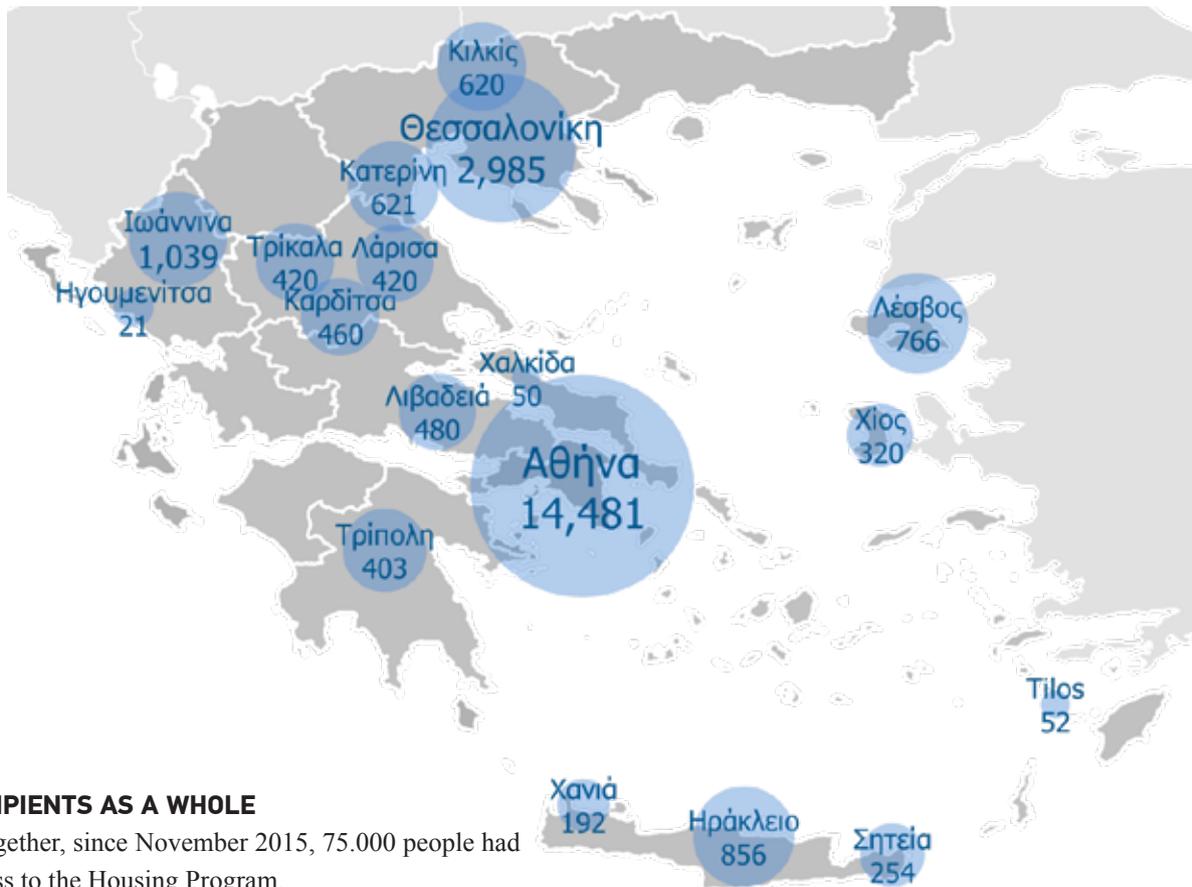
TYPES OF HOUSING

More than 4 out of 5 spaces for housing are apartments. The rest are buildings.



MAP OF THE HOUSING SERVICE AREAS

Housing for asylum seekers and recognised refugees is provided to 15 cities on the mainland and 3 islands. More than half of the housing spaces (59 %) are in Athens, 36% is in the rest of southeastern Greece, while 5% are on the islands.



RECIPIENTS AS A WHOLE

Altogether, since November 2015, 75.000 people had access to the Housing Program.

The housing program of the Ministry of Migration & Asylum is part of ESTIA 2021 that is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union.

75.000

As can be seen from the picture above, more than half of the recipients are in Athens. In Thessaloniki, there are currently around 3000 recipients, while in each of the nearby cities of Kilkis and Katerini, there are 620.

The NGOs and the municipalities that participate in the program, have taken over most of it, while various companies (e.g. development) that have are involved as well, only maintain a few housing units. As we wrote above, apartments and migrants under the responsibility of NGOs that refused to continue in ESTIA, have been transferred to those participating in the new program.

Below is a picture with the main NGOs and municipalities participating in the program, the percentage of recipients that each has managed, as well as the cities they are mainly active in it. The source is again the monthly press release of march 2021.

Evictions and general legal framework

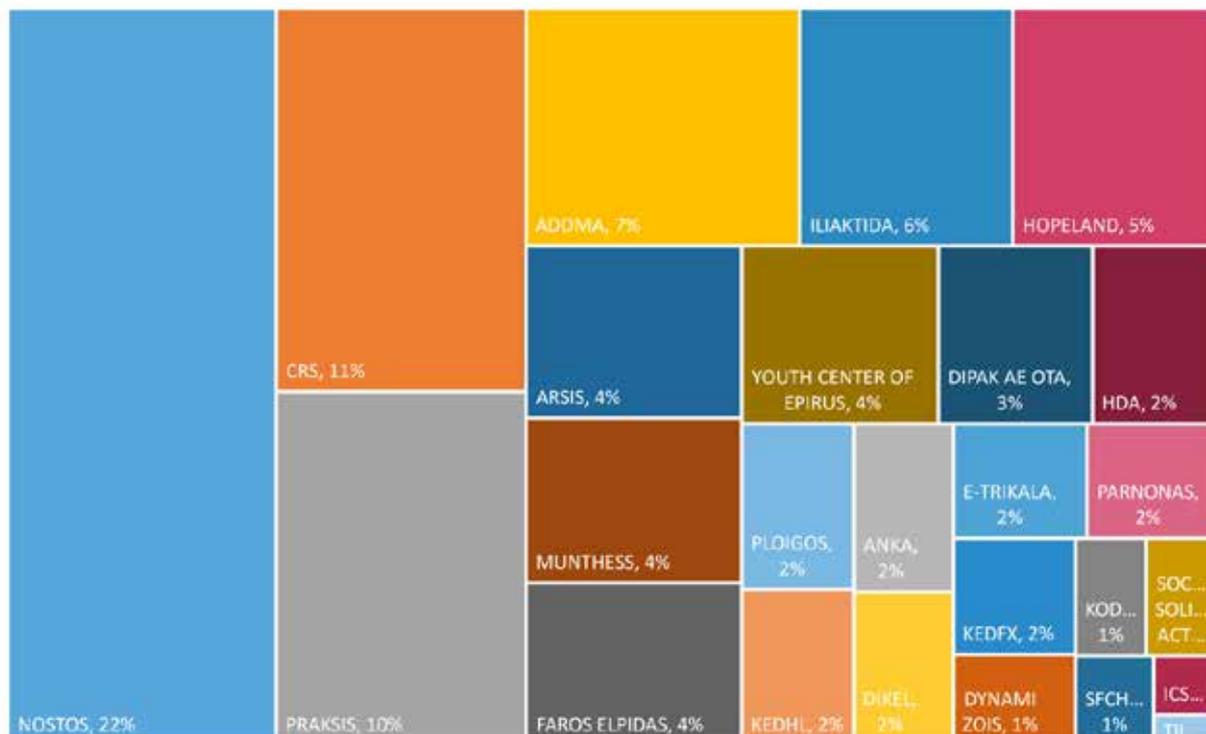
As we mentioned above, the ESTIA program is aimed at asylum seekers. After the issuance of the relevant decision, the residents of the apartments are no longer entitled to housing under this program. This right is also lost for second time applicants whose first application has been rejected. If we consider that the decision of an application could take years (the law that was passed in the spring of 2020 tries to change this by introducing a fast track process that facilitates the final rejection of applications) and that the program began to accept migrants in November 2015, the phenomenon of non-recipients remaining in the apartments has not been very common. This changed in the last year(s). Until 2019, the NGOS usually handled these cases with flexibility and there was no state regulation as to when the migrants have to leave the apartments. It was

HOUSING PARTNERS

Until the end of march 2021, the ministry of Migration and Asylum, materialized the housing program through 25 cooperations, with 11 greek and international NGOs and 14 municipalities.

The housing partners are the NGOs: CRS (Athens, Thessaloniki), Hopeland (Athens), ICSD (Igoumenitsa, Ioannina), Praksis (Athens, Thessaloniki), Arsis (Athens, Chios), Social solidarity actions (Thessaloniki), Dynamis Zois (Athens) Iliaktida (lesbos) Youth center of Epirus (Ioannina), Nostos (Athens), Faros Elpidas (Athens, Thessaloniki).

The municipalities: Athens (ADDMA), Thessaloniki (MUNTHESS), Heraklion (HDA), Karditsa (ANKA), Katerini (DIPAK), Larissa (DIKEL), Lebedeia (KEDHL), Nea Philadelphia - Nea Chalkidona (KEDFX), Peiraeus (KODEP), Siteia (PLOIGOS), Tilos (TILOS), Trikala (E- TRIKALA), Tripoli (PARNONAS), Chania (SFCHANIA).



common for recognized refugees to stay in their houses for more than two more years until they found work and could live somewhere else or got passports. Migrants, whose application was initially rejected, also remained in their homes. The ones issuing a second application for humanitarian reasons (repealed by the spring 2020 law) could formally continue to live there, although the interval between rejection of the first application and acceptance of the second was legally a “gray area”.

This flexible situation did not need to be adjusted in the first years of the program as the transition from recipient to non-recipient only attributed to a small percentage of people. The first attempt at clear regulation was made in March 2019 by the SYRIZA government, as the number of non-recipients who remained in the houses was getting more significant. A legal framework was then established in which recognized refugees were able to remain *ex officio* in the apartments for up to 6 months after the approval of asylum, with extensions provided in case of non-completion of a school year (if there are children attending classes), pregnancy or serious health problems. Those, whose application was rejected in the first degree, typically had 30 days to leave but in case of appeal their stay was extended. In case of a secondary negative decision, the migrants were expected to leave within 30 days from the issuance of the decision.

We did not manage to observe on a large scale how the NGOs responded to evictions in this more flexible context. This is also because a year later, in April 2020, Nea Dimokratia used a ministerial decision to turn the asylum process into a deportation process and created a much harsher and more hostile framework. These changes were in line with the immigration bill that passed in the same month and entailed a series of regulations (abolition of asylum for humanitarian reasons, minimum time to appeal to rejection of first degree while increasing the difficulty of the procedure from a bureaucratic point of view, fast track procedure for rejection of the application in second degree, disciplinary measures, prolonged detention in closed centers, facilitation of deportations).

This new framework fits into the escalation of the war against migrants of which a symbolic turning point were the events at Evros and on the islands in 2020. This war is characterized by displacing people from the cities and pushing them into camps, controlling public finances and migrants more strictly since the state takeover of ESTIA from UNHCR. All of this is a continuation of the state policies that started with the SYRIZA government characterizing the stay of ex-recipients as problematic

and was further intensified with intensified aggression by Nea Demokratia.

Now, both the recognized refugees and those who have received a negative decision for the asylum, have to leave their homes within 30 days, without any possibilities to get extensions. After this deadline it is possible for the NGO to initiate legal proceedings that can lead to evictions.

Something that did not change recently and has not been mentioned above are cases of asylum seekers which the NGOs want to move into either a camp or another apartment; if they refuse the housing offer in writing they are excluded from any other housing programs. However, they have the right to see for themselves where they want to live. It should also be noted that, as in the past, both recognized refugees and rejected migrants do not receive the allowance for asylum seekers. Thus, all non-recipients who remain in the homes usually have no source of income, from the day the asylum decision is issued.

The NGOs implementing the decision of the ministry of immigration and asylum started their efforts to empty the apartments of the non-beneficiaries in the summer of 2020. Of course, initiating legal proceedings has costs for them due to the large number of former recipients who refuse to leave their houses. The cost is both financial (to be evicted by the police, a trial is absolutely required) and political. The court is a predominantly public sphere. An NGO that mainly takes migrant families to the courts in order to throw them on the street loses its charitable face, which is important for funding and donations. Also, the proceedings of a trial can be time consuming, especially if the accused migrants have a way to find lawyers to appeal etc. So, almost a year after that the evictions attempt has begun, we do not know of any case in all of Greece, where the legal route has been chosen and the police was used for an eviction of somebody (formerly) in ESTIA program.

Evictions and special legal framework

Looking more specifically into the process, we must clarify that in the ESTIA program there are three parties, NGOs, migrants and the landlords. The relationship of these parties, the legal imprint and the moves they may make produce various legal scenarios as to how an eviction could take place.

In a standard rental agreement, the landlord must take legal action, including going to trial, to evict the tenant. The tenant, if he has no other residence in his name, is protected for at least 3 years, regardless of the duration of the rental agreement that was signed. There are three reasons that the landlord can invoke to evict the tenant before the 3 years of protection. The tenant a) has not paid rent for at least 2 months, b) wants to live in the house, c) violated the law for example through major damage to the house, subletting or generally a crime inside the house. To initiate legal proceedings, the landlord must send an out- of- court settlement to the tenant which will be delivered to him in person by a bailiff. Depending on the reason for which the tenant is being prosecuted, the out- of – court settlement has the following contents. For case a) the tenant is required to pay rent within 15 days. If this does not happen, a law suit is filed, which is usually won by the owner. After the completion of the trial, the tenant has to leave the house within two months if the 3 years of protection from the conclusion of the contract have not passed, or within 30 days if they have passed. In case b) the out- of – court settlement calls for the tenant to leave. If this does not happen, a lawsuit is filed in which the owner is required to prove that he will use the house for his own residence. In case c) the police can enter the house without trial and – if they find evidence of a crime committed – the trial follows.

Regarding the ESTIA program, there are two types of contract that are concluded. The most common is tripartite (between three parties). The contract also includes the migrants and the NGO. In this case, the NGO pays the rent and the migrants appear in the contract as tenants. They have all the legal rights that local tenants have, and the eviction procedures are those described above. If the NGO stops paying the rent, the landlord can take legal action against the migrants according to the procedure described above, since they appear in the contract. So far there has been no such case. As a rule, NGOs continue to pay rent to landlords as the latter can move against them too and they do not want to get into trouble. Sometimes they transfer new recipients into the apartments in which the former recipients still live. This is also a means of pressure to get rid of them which will be commented on below.

The second type of contract is concluded only between the NGO and the owner. The NGO appears as a tenant while signing a concession agreement with the migrants. These contracts are less common in ESTIA. In these cases, the landlord cannot take legal ac-

tion against the migrants if the NGO stops paying rent. They will move against the NGO. The NGO can sue the migrants themselves, accusing them of staying at the house illegally.

In all cases a legal process involving a trial is required. Only if such a procedure is followed, a trial is set and completed, can a tenant be evicted by the police and with the mandatory presence of a prosecutor after the deadline has expired. The only case where such a procedure is not required is when there is evidence of criminal activity at home, such as drug trafficking, subletting etc.

At present we do not know of any incidents in which either the NGOs or the landlords have initiated such proceedings. As explained above, NGOs themselves avoid lifting the political weight of such an option, which is additionally expected to have indirect economic consequences, while a generalization of such practices would mean a sizeable direct cost. We are also not aware of any eviction executed by a landlord. NGOs do not want to risk the landlords turning against them, so they usually pay the rent. The situation as it stands so far favors the migrants even though the law is not in their favor. If we have identified the correct reasons for the non-involvement of the courts and the police, then the collectivization of individual resistance by migrants and the creation of struggles and the placement of the issue of evictions in the public sphere will support these factors. Such a development would make it even more difficult for NGOs to take legal actions in order to evict people, as they would be even more exposed.

A little change of thought

A point that we want to stress here is that the way the text presents things can be reversed. Until now, we refer to state initiatives, legal matters, institutional problems. In the next part we will refer to the means the NGOs use to apply the state orders in order to do evictions. So, it might seem that the above data form an environment that is the background of competition and struggles, a background that is set by the antimigrant policy of a state that exerts arbitrarily its sadistic power over defenseless bodies.

This would be a huge mistake and we do this change of thought flow in order to underline it. The way we see this environment, is that the moves and actions of the migrants that usually personally and often collectively, don't comply and struggle for a better life, are an answer to this situation. This is not an abstract opinion and we can see more specific how this situation is expressed.

What is most significant, is the moment when people don't leave their houses although they don't have the right to stay there anymore. Since this happened on a large scale, it "forced" the state to turn housing into a problem and then to introduce a solution. So, it decides that the Ministry will be responsible for ESTIA program, so it can make its policy stricter and, as we will see below, it intensifies its tries to push people into camps. So, the state's moves are the answer to the moves people targeted as "surplus" towards the cities or their refusal to move out of them. Especially for evictions in particular (even on a personal level firstly) the migrants disobedience actions come before and define the state policies..

So how do evictions happen?

As we said before, the NGOs are the ones that do the evictions but for now they have some reasons not to do the legal actions in order to have police support in their tries. Until now there has neither been police intervention anywhere, nor any legal action that ought to be done before an eviction.

The NGOs try to handle this matter alone, because their philanthropic image demands that actions like an eviction have to be done as quietly and undercover as possible. So, they keep paying the rents to the landlords (anyway the houses will be used again by other people), while at the same time, trying to persuade the migrants to leave. These tries are mostly unknown, also due to the exclusion of migrants from social life and aligned with the NGOs' goals: to get the job done as quietly as possible.

So, in order to do the job, they use different kinds of techniques. They start informing the migrants that they no longer "have the right" to use the house, that their stay is from now on illegal and that they have 30 days to leave. In the same time, they cut the benefit from the asylum appliers, according to what the law says. These combined moves, the simultaneous loss of house and benefit, especially if the asylum decision is negative, are enough to be really stressful. Despite these, only few leave their house that easily.

There are alternative scenarios in which the NGOs use more invasive methods. There have been cases of cutting the electricity or the water of a house or changing of the locks when the migrants are not in the house. Another method often used is to bring some new people that "have the right" to use the house to confront the disobedient old

ones. This often happens in very small apartments where all these people hardly have any space and this can lead to disagreements or even fights between them.

Sometimes the NGOs try to make migrants that are still applying for asylum leave the house, in order to empty it. In this case they move them either in another house or into a camp. The paper that the NGOs have in these cases is that if the migrants refuse to accept the conditions of the housing program that the NGOs suggest and the the NGO members sign a statement confirming this, the migrants lose the right of housing in any program in the future. Even with this pressure, migrants don't always accept the transfer to another place. Sometimes the new place is a camp, other times it's an apartment that already has many people inside, sometimes its in another city. Sometimes, the NGOs in order to pressure them further, might threaten them that their refusal of moving will affect the outcome of the asylum decision, taking advantage of the fear and stress that the possibility of rejection causes.

Those methods are all unrealistic in a way. The pressure applied is mostly psychological. In many cases though, they help them reach their goal. This can be explained considering the conditions in which migrants in Greece have to live in. Excluded from most aspects of social life, usually without understanding the language and without any relations with locals, they often experience a situation of fear, stress and uncertainty. In this environment, the NGOs gain power on them since they mediate the migrants' most vital and needed interactions with the local society. They find and pay a house for them, they provide them with legal support and other services. A relationship based on dependence is formed this way, that gives NGO the ability to force people into eviction, without any stigma of public and without less philanthropic actions such as a trial.

As we said, the NGOs have influence on migrants who still often refuse to obey by their rules. On the one hand there are the threats that are based on the insecurity caused by social exclusions, but on the other hand there is the reality of unemployment, passports that aren't issued and real estate agents that don't rent to migrants. Many migrants don't accept the addition of homelessness, especially when there are children involved. So, since the summer of 2020, there have been tries from migrants in Athens to link the personal disobedience so it can take a collective characteristic and become common struggles. A similar will and potential exists in Thessaloniki.

The struggles of migrants (and some locals) against evictions

Since the summer of 2020, the NGOs started trying to empty the apartments of ESTIA program from unqualified people. Many migrants didn't get frightened and continued staying in the houses. But some of them took it a step further, seeing the collective struggle as the actual realistic prospect.

A small migrant team was formed in Athens in the summer of 2020 named NOT LEAVING MY HOME with the eviction as the main point. Although this team never reached a high number of members, it had much acknowledgement among migrants. Its material was shared a lot in social media and also printed and glued on many walls and shops in Thessaloniki. The material was multilingual and mainly had informative goals but it was also political, since they tried to legalize the reaction of the migrants, their refusal to leave the apartment. It was explained that nobody is in danger if they refuse to leave the house and the flaws of the integration program HELIOS were revealed, which is a program that was used as a bait in order to facilitate and justify the later evictions (more for the program below).

This team was connected with other solidarity teams, mainly formed by locals, such as solidarity with migrants, Victoria solidarity and Mirmigki team. Some demonstrations and gatherings took place in Athens with multilingual material in order to give attention to the issue. The team wrote down the contacts of the families under eviction and formed some networks so that coordinated groups of people could gather outside the houses in order to block evictions. These moves led to the forming of relationships between migrants, between locals and migrants and a network of solidarity among them.

Now the team has evolved into the assembly Coordination against Evictions with the participation of locals and migrants from the old team, the assembly Solidarity with Migrants, the Victoria solidarity assembly and the Mirmigki team.

The team tries to write down the information about the migrants threatened with evictions, to form relationships and networks that can stop the fear and the paternalism of NGOs and at the same time it has blocked many evictions already. Furthermore, it has reconnected the supply of electricity and water in houses where NGOs had cut them, it distributes multilingual informa-

tive material like the one of the picture above, it calls to protests/gatherings with sound system and other public actions in order to call more attention on the issue.

In Thessaloniki our assembly was involved in a related struggle in June 2020. A member met a family of migrants in a playground in the neighborhood. After some time, while they were meeting there regularly we learned that the family faced eviction. Knowing the existence of NOT LEAVING MY HOME, we asked the family and they appeared to have connections with other families in a similar situation. After having some meetings with them we decided together, with our initiative, to do a demonstration in a neighborhood in the center of the city. The demonstration took place in June 30th with migrants and locals participating.

However the struggle didn't continue further (this outcome might be a product of the fact that we couldn't overcome the limits set by divisions based on gender or nationality, for example, we were communicating with families of the same nationality and we didn't manage to spread the struggle in all the different communities so it could take multinational characteristics, another example being our communication with only the men in every family). At the beginning of September we organized an event about evictions with the participation of a migrant from NOT LEAVING MY HOME, that's how our actions ended in 2020.

From mid-March on we came in contact with people who were again facing evictions, through families we already knew (since summer 2020) and through acquaintances our assembly made. The fact that in a short period many people shared the same kinds of problems, combined with an estimation our comrades from Solidarity with Migrants from Athens – where they never stopped struggling against the evictions issue – shared with us, are proof that since mid-spring, some of the NGOs are intensifying their pressure towards the non-recipients to make them leave their houses from ESTIA program. The time period this has been happening is connected with the transition of the same program, from the hands of UNHCR to the hands of the state, being completed in the beginning of 2021, and possibly also connected with the gradual end of the lockdown condition.

That's why in April we started a mapping in Thessaloniki, we had some interventions (to be continued), we

VOUS RISQUEZ UNE EXPULSION?

Une ONG vous demande de quitter la maison où vous êtes hébergé ?

Une expulsion signifie que l'ONG qui vous fournit un logement vous demande de quitter la maison dans laquelle vous habitez. Les ONG tentent généralement de vous expulser en vous envoyant des notes écrites ou en vous disant de partir au téléphone ou en personne.

Pourquoi suis-je expulsé ?
Vous pouvez être expulsé :

- si votre demande d'asile a été rejetée et que vous n'avez pas le droit de faire appel ou que votre appel a été rejeté.
- Si vous avez l'asile et que vous n'êtes plus qualifié pour le programme ESTIA

Une ONG peut-elle me mettre à la porte sans aller au tribunal ?

Non. Les ONG ne peuvent pas vous expulser par leurs propres moyens, c'est-à-dire en verrouillant votre porte, en fermant vos services publics, en utilisant la force pour vous expulser ou en utilisant une méthode d'expulsion autre que le recours au tribunal.



Contactez nous Ici

 **@StopWarOnMigrants**

Que faire si je risque une expulsion ?

- Restez calme. Ils pourraient essayer de faire pression sur vous pour que vous partiez immédiatement. Vous n'êtes pas obligé de partir si vous ne voyez pas un document légal indiquant l'expulsion et si ce document n'est pas traduit dans une langue que vous comprenez.
- L'ONG vous appellera ou se présentera à la maison. Ils pourraient essayer de vous intimider en vous disant que ce que vous faites est illégal. N'oubliez pas qu'en l'absence de décision judiciaire, la police n'a pas le droit d'entrer dans votre maison et de vous forcer à la quitter.
- Refusez de signer tout papier, qui est dans une langue que vous ne comprenez pas. Vous avez le droit de demander une traduction.
- Si vos enfants vont à l'école, contactez l'école pour expliquer la situation. L'école peut écrire une lettre de soutien pour vous et vos enfants que vous pourrez remettre à l'ONG.
- Soyez avec quelqu'un si possible, faites savoir aux gens que vous êtes confronté à cette situation. Faites passer le mot. Faites-le savoir à vos voisins.
- Organiser la communauté. Il y a des locaux et des migrants dans votre - Organiser la communauté contre les expulsions.

Les ONG de votre quartier expulsent les migrants et les réfugiés de leur domicile.

Les ONG impliquées sont NOSTOS, PRAKSIS, SOLIDARITY NOW, EATA (ADDMA) entre autres qui ont reçu un financement du UNHCR pour gérer le programme ESTIA. Le changement de législation et la transmission de l'ESTIA au gouvernement entraînent des expulsions massives de personnes, qui sont laissées à la rue. L'État propose le programme HELIOS en tant que programme d'intégration qui soutient le logement et l'"intégration" des migrants. Le programme HELIOS est cependant impossible à gérer, ce qui rend très difficile pour les migrants de trouver un chemin vers un logement, laissés à la rue.

Informative material in French from the team Coordination against Eviction from Athens that is distributed in Thessaloniki from our assembly (hence the sign left and down)

stopped an eviction (hopefully there will be no need to do this again) and organized a subgroup to collect information, the result of which is this text. All of these actions are aiming at opening a struggle against evictions again. The political lines and methods of this struggle will be discussed later on.

The HELIOS program

The HELIOS program is an integration program with housing benefits run by IOM, with state money coming from the EU. In the last year, it was the only integration program with a housing part. As an integration program, it refers exclusively to recognized refugees. In addition to housing, it provides integration courses (Greek courses, courses for the culture here) and employment support (connection with potential employers, counseling services for finding a job). HELIOS is presented to migrants being evicted for getting asylum (but also

to people who were housed in a camp and got asylum) as the ideal choice to take their lives in their own hands. It is definitely the only institutional option that provides some housing support. The program provides migrants with some financial support if they enter a rental contract. The money supply lasts from 6 months to a year. A first difficulty is that two and a half rents are required for the initial conclusion of the contract. The people have to find this money themselves in order to enter the program. Beyond that, there are extra difficulties. To sign a contract, the migrant must have been issued a Greek vat number and opened a Greek bank account. Even if they have found some money from the beginning, and have solved the bureaucratic issues, many brokers and landlords refuse to enter contracts with migrants (IOM made some agreements and had some houses available on the HELIOS page, but most of them were very expensive or very far from the city centre). As soon as the migrant manages to sign the contract, they are given some money in two installments in the first month, while from

the second month on and for as long the program lasts, a smaller amount is given as an aid. The amounts given depending on the number of members of the tenant's family are shown in the table below.

It is obvious that HELIOS cannot be a long-term solution for housing. First, it is clear from the table that even during the program (6-12 months) the financial support is much less than the small amount asylum seekers receive, since they also have to pay a rent (e.g. a family of 5 who manages to find a house with 300 euros, would have to make a living with 200 euros). Secondly, after the end of the program, the migrants are faced with insecurity again. In a situation where even for the locals it is difficult to secure their means of reproduction, for the migrants the obstacles are much higher. They do not have the social and family ties that usually act as a safety net for survival and housing, as is the case with the locals. Not speaking the language well and without acquaintances it is much more difficult to find a job, without even considering the abundance of racist exclusions from the Greek society. Also, if we are referring to recognized refugees, the ones coming from the ESTIA program, are mostly families with children, who therefore have more needs. Also, many times the children are young and of course there is no grandmother or uncle to take care of them in case the parents (or the parent, many are single-parent families) work. Third, the program is aimed at recognized refugees. So those who are no longer ESTIA recipients and have a negative asylum decision, are either way out of any housing program (and of course they cannot even work legally). Based on the above, the HELIOS program cannot be a solution for the housing of migrants (we do not comment here on its overall usefulness for the "integration" of migrants in society). It functions rather as an institutional, personalized, temporary bait, which facilitates the eviction process.

This program, as the migrants themselves immediately realized, had structural problems from the beginning and

cannot be a solution neither for housing nor for the social integration of migrants. The creation of the program is also linked to the issue of evictions from ESTIA, as NGOs and various other institutions often promote it (at least to recognized refugees) as the next step after ESTIA. When a migrant is faced with the choice between irregularly staying at their house or become homeless, the first choice is not so much a choice but a bare necessity. HELIOS came to alleviate this dilemma or to postpone it in the future for the part of the migrants who decide to choose it. This helps to empty some houses more easily. The migrants of NOT LEAVING MY HOME saw HELIOS critically from a very early stage and made sure to publish multilingual material that highlighted its problems.

HELIOS also acts divisively for the potential struggles over housing and evictions. It does this in two ways. On the one hand, it divides the potential migrant struggle community. One of the bonding elements of such a community is the experience of free housing at ESTIA and the threat of eviction. The process of joining HELIOS where the migrants sign the contract themselves and pay the rent while they have chosen to leave previous housing structures creates a different experience making it difficult for the migrants to form networks and connect. On the other hand, it changes the practices of the fight. As we have seen above, the struggle against evictions by ESTIA has as its starting point the individual refusals from migrants to leave their homes. The direct adversary are the NGOs that are trying to go through with the evictions and which, as we have discussed, have a lot of reasons not to take the issue to the court. So, the struggle starts with creating a situation in which a lot of needs are not met and where material responses to these insufficiencies create dependencies that can stop migrants from acquiring and developing more collective ideas and networks. The NGOs they are facing in the first phase are all different and have specific practices each and which makes it harder for migrants to unite against

Table 1

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	First installment of the initial disbursement (consists of partial amount of Contribution to Start-up of Independent Living)	Second installment of the initial disbursement (consists of remaining amount of Contribution to Start-up of Independent Living plus first month of Contribution to Rental Costs)	Contribution to Rental Costs provided after the initial disbursement (month 2 and onwards)
	Released upon submission of lease agreement and other documents (see below)	Released upon confirmation of exit from Reception System and proof of payment of the first rent	Released monthly upon proof of payment of rental costs
1	301 €	301 €	162 €
2	569,5 €	569,5 €	309 €
3	688 €	688 €	396 €
4 to 5	838 €	838 €	504 €
6+	1.060 €	1.060 €	630 €

them. On the other hand, the HELIOS program disengages the NGOs, the municipalities, the state from the issue of housing, essentially connecting the migrants with individual homeowners. Thus, a practice of the “I am staying home” type after the end of the program, brings the migrants face to face with different individual owners, while at the same time the contracts bind them with the payment of rents. The plethora of owners, on the one hand, cannot become a united single target, on the other hand, the factors that prevent the use of legal means by NGOs, do not apply to individual landlords. In this context, a struggle for free housing, at least in the existing social conditions, can only take on an abstract and demanding character, losing the momentum that social practices of imposing needs have.

It should be emphasized here that we do not claim that HELIOS was designed for the purpose of preventive subversion of movements for housing. The goals of its designers may start from the sincerest charitable feelings. The critique here takes a functionalist view, examining how HELIOS comes to join, and in turn influence, a grid of social relations and competitions. So, we look at how HELIOS might work in this structure, which depends on the components of the program itself and not on the purposes of its designers. Of course, integration programs are not reinvented every time from scratch. They are designed based on existing principles and models that contain repression and integration techniques.

The presentation and critique at HELIOS so far correspond to the form that the program had until the beginning of 2021. In the last 2 months, IOM has introduced some additional and especially strict criteria for receiving financial assistance, which have created a series of new problems for migrants and indirectly for the landlords. This may have come in response to the alternative use of HELIOS that was chosen by several migrants. Fully aware that the program does not solve anything in the long run, neither housing nor integration, many migrants chose to take the first installments of the money and use this money to go to other EU countries. Alternatively, they would enter fake contracts with some owners and use the money for whatever it was needed for. IOM identified this phenomenon of migrants refusing to “join” on its terms and use HELIOS as a way to find some money. So, it introduced some extra conditions which make it more difficult for the migrants who do follow the program as it is intended.

The first step is that a document is now required to certify the exit from the previous housing structure where the migrant lived in as an asylum seeker. This measure

is supposed to ensure that the migrant does not stay illegally in a structure that they are no longer a recipient of and that they use the money of this program for the rent. This paper is not always easy to obtain. For the ones who stayed in a camp, it is a difficult process, while there are also camp managers who for often racist reasons refuse to give it (for example at Nea Kavala camp).

The second measure is that IOM has hired people to check if the migrants are actually in their “rented” houses. If they visit the house and do not find anyone (for whatever reason they might be out) the financial aid stops. It is paid again only if a second check is done, and the migrants are indeed inside. Then the aid is administered retrospectively. But between the two visits up to two months may pass. During this period, the rents will probably remain unpaid, and the migrants will have no income. It is also common for the check to take place after the first installment of the first month has been paid. So, if no one is found at home when they come to check, the second installment of the first month is not paid. If we look at the amounts in the table above, it becomes clear that one installment is not enough for the migrant to get back the two and a half rents needed to conclude a contract (first rent, collateral, and down payment). Consequently, if one has no other source of income, one suddenly find oneself in debt, has no money for basic needs and depends on when IOM will do a second check. Also, in the recent months, IOM has begun to delay the provision of the allowance. When the program started, they were paying the money in the first days of the month, now the payment can be delayed up to a month.

A third measure is that the allowance can be frozen if there are absences from the integration courses. With distance learning, attending classes can be difficult or even impossible for some migrants as it requires internet access, a laptop, or a smartphone. For several migrants, the allowance was frozen for this reason.

The second and the third measure have led to the inability of migrants to pay rent. The situation has worsened since the end of April 2021. IOM launched a retrospective audit of all rent payments to identify possible irregularities. From then until the total completion of the audit, all the payments were frozen, even for migrants who are very punctual with the payments, who happened to be at home during the IOM people visits and did not miss school.

The new criteria set by IOM, the delay in payments, the problems caused for migrants and for landlords, show that IOM is doing what they can to give as little money as possible, while undermining HELIOS. At the same time,

it is discussed that the program will not continue for much longer, at least not the housing part. Now, there are some relatively new posts talking about “integration camps” which will probably replace HELIOS. At the same time the reduction of the financial support for asylum seekers who have not applied for a place of accommodation either in ESTIA or in a camp has been announced. The cuttings will start from July 2021. These two measures show that the direction the state wants to follow for the migration policies is “everybody in the camps”, no matter if the people are asylum seekers or recognized refugees. The part about camps has not been discussed so far, although most asylum seekers are placed in camps and not within the cities with ESTIA. However, a critique of the existing camp system is essential for any discussion about migrant housing policies.

But a critique of the necessary for any discussion about migrant housing

The camp system

“As part of immediate action to help front-line member states facing disproportionate migratory pressures at the eu’s external borders, the European migration agenda presented in may, the European commission proposed to develop a new approach “hotspot”.

One of the first eu texts on the “hotspot” system.

The state policies of exclusion of migrants moving to Europe (and) through the Greek- Turkish border include the forced expulsion of migrants by a techno-military-police complex, deportations, push-backs, a countless of violence. These practices are expressions of the violent aspects of the “inclusive” capitalist exploitation of (illegalized) migrant labor in the fields or in the center of the cities. This puzzle of the war on migrants is completed by the reality of the life in Greece that is experienced by thousands of migrants (in fact, the majority of migrants), the reality of being locked up in a camp – a concentration and displacement camp.

Any migrant who arrives in Greece and is not entitled to join another housing program for asylum seekers (as we saw above, the conditions are very specific and strict for the vast majority) is most likely to end up in a camp – “open” or “closed”, – we will examine this distinction in more detail below.

Let us start with a statement: European countries (not just European) in state of “crisis” or “emergency”, are not

bound by respect of human rights which therefore are not guaranteed. What is considered a crisis or an emergency is a matter of interpreting situations that the ruling class perceives as threatening, situations might threaten the (social) reproduction of this world. Thus, European states, in response to the desire of people to move to European territory, have declared a yet another state of emergency to be managed: the movement of migrants has been described as “disproportionate migratory pressure at the EU’s external borders”. And so, the military-type management and the hotspot-confinement system emerged as a rational solution to this crisis and it was decided to build a hotspot system in Greece and Italy, on European soil, and the EU-Greece-turkey agreement was voted. There is no “disproportionate migration pressure”, only the inability of western states to integrate populations moving into domestic production-consumption. In the hotspot system nothing but the rationality of the world of merchandise that is imposed violently and militarily on the oppressed is inevitable.

At this point, it is worth referring to a perception that is reproduced even within the “competitive” movement. According to this perception, the “open” and the “closed” camps are completely different from each other as a condition, as in the “open” camps (“structures of hospitality”) migrants have the right to choose their exit, while in the closed camps (camps mainly migrants to be deported to their countries of destination) do not have this right, which makes closed camps look more like a “prison”. We do not disagree with the judgement that camps as a form of residence are a lot different to prisons, but we believe that this narrative tends to beautify the situation in the camps. A narrative that in its extreme form, augmented by the cynical logistics of the state, can reach statements such as “these are the camps, whoever does not like them can leave” (see Mouzalas’ statements during SYRIZA government about the mobilizations in the camp of Elliniko.)

Really, how “open” are the camps, when the stay of migrants in them is a condition for securing the (maybe) few chances of them to be identified and be granted asylum? How “open” is it when escaping from one of these hells automatically means being excluded from any chance of being considered a “refugee” who is worthy of “international protection”. How “open” are these camps, when in migrant uprisings and mobilizations they “close” and any provision (provided through the NGO system, to which we refer later) stops until the reactions stop? How open are these places of displacement when the experience of people in solidarity (after the establishment of the hotspot system and the recognition of NGOs as the



only ones that can “provide assistance”, after the criminalization of the struggling local- migrant community) shows that even handing out a text in the camps immediately mobilizes the police and makes the camp administrations close the front doors? We do remember (bitterly, but every time) that we have to cross and level the internal border that separates us from the migrants, that is not just the camp’s fence, but a whole policing and confinement mechanism that reproduces a separation. How “open” (can) the camps be when, in an amendment voted in parliament (on the left wing “SYRIZANEL” government), the overall management of the “migrant issue” for concluding agreements, providing money etc. is given to the army and its mechanisms? And finally, is the fragmented view on the phenomenon of not being able to see that the “open” and the “closed” categories of managing the lives of migrants constitute the one and only, overall strategy for filtering and selecting migrants who will “stay” or be pushed back not a terrible depoliticization of the migration movement?

For the system of hotspots and concentration and displacement camps for “surplus populations” to be managed, it is not enough to point out that it is a part of a broader historical dynamic of camps as a form of managing “dissident” or “undesirable” populations: a history that begins during (colonizing) “primitive accumulation” until it was integrated into the “interior” of the “west”, from interwar German social democracy to Japanese camps in America during Roosevelt’s new deal. It is not enough to see just a macro-historical trend, but we must also look

at the historical-social peculiarities in which the camps emerged in 2015-2016 as a form of management of migrants arriving in Europe.

The policy of confinement in the camps, apart from being a systematic technique of filtering, sorting and at the same time excluding migrants, is a process of disciplining people arriving in Greece, a preventive process of compliance for the potentially “naughty populations”, a real process of keeping these populations out of cities, on fenced and cordoned off areas, within which they will again encounter other national or gender divisions. The policy of confinement, in the end, turns proactively against the community of locals and migrants, which is not active but potential, trying to exclude any possible meeting, organization and multinational resistance. That is why the policy of ghettoization in the camps is expected to intensify in the near future either by forcing more and more people into them (see termination of the housing part of HELIOS) or by upgrading the intensity of confinement (see more and more construction of “closed” camps, or the conversion of “open” to “closed” with new fences, new restrictions, new bans, etc). On the basis of this and in order to impose an invisibility regime, concrete walls supervised by IOM authorized by the Greek state are being built around the camps (see the walls around the camps of Diavata, Ritsona, Malakasa, Polykastro, Nea Kavala).

In this context, the (little) welfare that migrants receive is distributed through the NGO system, which we will refer to below.

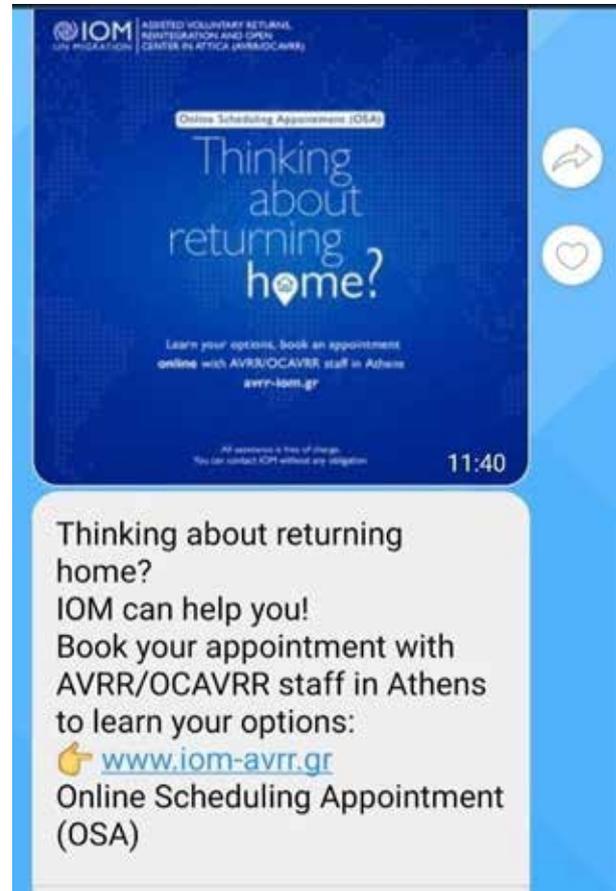
NGOs as the (necessary) humanitarian complement of militaristic management

Since 2015-2016, the migrants who headed to Europe were the excuse for the construction of a “crisis” and the declaration of a state of emergency which legalized and eventually made permanent the “emergent character” of Hotspot system in which a new factor appeared in the management of migration: NGOs

The coming of NGOs and their “humanitarian missions” has a long history of cooperation with the military missions or military-type management of “natural problems”, destructions etc. However, an extended overview of NGOs’ history is not the goal of this text. In brief, we could mention their participation not only in a series of military operations (Iraq, ex-Yugoslavia..) as the humanitarian complement, but also in various post-war or post-destruction reconstruction operations as means for the re-organization of both the social relations and the capitalistic profitability.

NGOs funding apart from individual donations, is mostly covered by the states, super-national formations, international organizations or/and institutions, corporations. This isn’t highlighted in order to argue about conspiracy theories such as “Who’s behind that NGO?”, but to point out that the funding is not in an autonomous sphere, separated from states and their institutional policies. Of course, the NGOs are not a homogeneous formation regarding their role. There exists a space of relative autonomy in every NGO’s action, because their sources of funding may vary and be contradictory to each other. For this reason, sometimes there seems to be an apparent hostility between a state and an NGO, using a rhetoric against corruption or uncontrolled action. All of the above results in a campaign of control of NGOs’ action in a framework of national strategies. However, this relative autonomy and the specific examples are something that should not concern us. Our concern should be how the NGO system functions generally in the crisis management and specifically in the state management of the migrants.

As we said before, with the construction and the perpetuity of the open and closed camps’ system, migrants as human beings are stripped off their “human rights”.



So, the NGOs’ role is to remove migrants’ movement from the historical-social context, present both – the movement itself as well as the state policies – as a “natural phenomenon” and offer “humanitarian work” to humans “in need”. In contrast and complementary to the image of the intruder, which corresponds to the moment of exclusion in the anti-migration policy, NGOs build the image of “beings with no will” for the migrants, who consequently only need our humanitarian help, so this image corresponds to the moment of inclusion in the above policy. From this point of view, the NGO system is located in the center of the reproduction of the system that confines migrants and separates them from locals.

In conclusion, it is neither unreasonable nor contradictory to see NGOs taking a repressive role against the migrants whenever necessary cooperating with the state policies and/or for their further funding. In this way we are heading back (again) to evictions.

Who fits in the center of metropolis?



As we've seen in the above, the majority of migrants who manages to cross the borders, escaping from the techno-military control, will probably end up in a more or less closed camp. A smaller number of migrants who have the right to enter into a housing project, will stay in some apartment until their asylum request is examined and then they will be facing the threat of eviction. An even smaller number of migrants will manage to receive asylum, overcome bureaucratic and other obstacles like racist landlords and will enter into an integration program like HELIOS. However, the numerous public reports state that HELIOS is going to be replaced by integration camps for recognized refugees. Finally, concerning housing the migrants are pushed outside of the cities, something that on the one hand confirms the anti-migrant policies of the Greek state and on the other hand produces and reproduces their segregation with and separation from the local communities.

If along with the above we take into account the everyday technique of control, supervision and extrusion of the migrants by the police, a systematic strategy aiming at the normalization of migrants' invisibility as one of the most devalued parts of the working and human potential, we can conclude the following: Cities and especially their center tend to be spaces in which migrants do not fit (of course this procedure cannot be complete due to migrants' negotiations, struggles and their desire to meet with others which overflows parks, streets, squats etc). The above doesn't concern only their housing but al-

so their social relations as well as movements and activities in general.

At this exact point we see a common ground and a common experience that result in a common field of struggle. On the one hand we face everyday the blackmail of the rent conditions with wages continuing to drop while rents are going up at the same time until the rents of center apartments are the same as a monthly salary. This situation forces many of us to look for houses outside the center area. On the other hand, we face a less intense problem with the absence of public spaces where they we spend time outside of structures defined by capital. This restriction of our sociability and our freedom to meet each other has been extended during lockdown, a condition that generalized police control for many parts of the locals.

Not only the locals but also the migrants (in greater degree) realize that the center of modern big cities tend to be uninhabitable to us. Their role is to house commodities, fancy shops, AirBnBs for tourists, business plans for the sake of alternativity and to turn everything in a museum-like state¹ etc. Whatever produces (real or cultural) profits is good and whatever ruins the view of a

1. Besides, even the vivid experience of the collective way of life that turns everything upside down, or the transnational status of a neighborhood, can (up to a point) turn into merchandise through the mediation of the Spectacle: «Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation».

“touristic” city or disrupts the capital’s movement (migrants’ image, a demonstration in the street) must be pushed away. The spatial interrelations come to confirm and (re)shape the class and in general social relations.

For these reasons and not only....

...Common struggles of locals and migrants

In the last years, migrants in Greece have been experiencing the reality of an (undeclared) war against them. Through the depiction of them as “intruders” who disturb the unified nation-body, military means of control and domination are legalized and the separation of them and locals, who feel more privileged, is reproduced. The fact is that our societies are going to be more multinational as time progresses. In addition, more and more locals will be “surplus” and thus become subject to similar forms of state management as the migrants.

We believe that the degree of connection between the movements and migrants’ negations and struggles is the actual measure of the advance of social liberation. From our contact with migrants we can only learn, our struggles can only gain as long as they are part of the multinational working class. Concerning not only the housing, apart from evictions’ blocking, we can reclaim city centers as the spaces where locals and migrants live and fight together, but also in every social struggle that will rise in the future.

StopWarOnMigrants - June 2021

