

possible for them to pay the annual residence fees which amount to 600 TL. Therefore most migrants are practically pushed into “illegality,” both in terms of residence and in terms of work. They end up working in the informal sector in textile, construction, and domestic work without any security. And they are denied such basic rights as health and education.

In order to be granted temporary asylum, refugees coming to Turkey must prove to both the Turkish authorities and the UNHCR that they have a “well-founded” reason for fleeing. During interviews that last for several hours, they are made to share the most painful and intimate stories of their lives with people they have never met before, and whose language they most probably do not speak. The smallest inconsistency in these narratives can lead to rejection. Throughout the application process, an asylum seeker must reside in a “satellite city” assigned by the Ministry of Interior and must register with the Foreigners’ Police in their designated city, signing in daily to prove that they have not “escaped.” Yet most refugees rarely have the means and the social support mechanisms in these cities to be able to survive. Due to the various gaps in the legal framework, many vital issues, such as whether they will receive an exemption from having to pay residence permit fees, whether they will be provided with cash or in-kind assistance, or whether their children will be able to attend schools, are arbitrarily determined. Although refugees have the right to work in Turkey, this right is rarely exercised in practice, therefore, the ability to find work in the satellite cities is dependent on the informal economic opportunities available.

What are return centers?

Once called guesthouses and now to be renamed as return centers, these are places in which migrant are detained for indefinite periods of time. The largest ones are located in Istanbul-Kumkapı, İzmir and Kırklareli, with the stated goal of establishing such centers with a capacity of 100 people throughout the country. Migrants in these centers are held without any defined legal conventions, without being informed of the causes and the duration of their detention, deprived of their legal rights and with very limited access to healthcare.

What are the new regulations proposed by the state regarding the return centers?

In March 2010, the Ministry of Interior issued a directive under the title “Fighting Irregular Migration,” where it is stated that a host of improvements will be initiated. Among the promised improvements are: adequate lighting, clean cells, nutritious meals, hot water and health and legal services. However, these proposed changes are silent on the question of access to justice and the right to appeal the basis and the duration of detention.

A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS, WITHOUT NATIONS, WITHOUT EXILE

MIGRANT SOLIDARITY NETWORK

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The Migrant Solidarity Network is a network organization comprised of individuals who insist on everyone's right to unconditional freedom of movement and everyone's right of abode wherever they may desire. No one may be detained for the exercise of these rights and freedoms. We object to the reduction of movement to a security concern by nation-states; we find unacceptable the treatment migrants face as if they were potential criminals; and we refuse to be complicit in the hierarchies created among migrants by categorizing some migrations as legitimate and others as illegal. It is not human beings who are unlawful; it is only borders and institutions that mark and maintain those borders that are illegitimate

Simultaneously as states claim to fight illegal migration, there is a tacit tolerance of what gets designated as "illegal migration" in accordance with the demands of the labor market. We wish to draw attention the fact that under the rhetoric of "fighting illegal migration," labor migrants become instrumentalized as cheap labor force that is systematically rendered vulnerable. Local labor organizations, trade unions, occupational associations and the oppositional left in general need to place on their agenda the exploitation, marginalization and detention migrants face.

Our initiative has been formed by members who share these sensibilities and who have gathered together on the principles of transparency and equality. While MSN members may also have affiliations with other groups, they attend the MSN decision processes as individuals.

What are the activities of the Migrant Solidarity Network?

The MSN network launched its activities through a campaign on what in Turkey are euphemistically called "guesthouses" (now to be renamed as return centers.) The campaign sought to unmask the unlawful basis of these centers and to demand that they are shut down. Towards this end, we organized three protests in front of the Kumpaki migrant "guesthouse," on March 14, April 18 and May 28. We intend to continue with these protests in the coming months. The Migrant Solidarity Network also holds forums at regular intervals to discuss current developments. Most recently, on May 8, 2010, we took to task the new legislation draft being proposed regarding the regulation of migration in Turkey. Additionally, MSN seeks to raise public awareness through monthly film screenings and a radio program entitled "The Unseen, Unheard and Unmentioned: Migrants," which is broadcasted biweekly on the radio channel Life (89.4).

Who is a migrant?

Although Turkey has conventionally been known as a country of emigration, mostly due to the influx of labor migrants to Europe in the seventies, it has in

fact always also been a country of immigration. According to the Settlement Law that came into effect in 1934 and was most recently revised in 2006, only those who are deemed to be of "Turkish descent" are accepted as migrants in Turkey. However, we as the Migrant Solidarity Network, aim to establish a network that reflect the true scope and diversity of migration and one that includes all migrants regardless of their origins and their legal status.

What is the number of migrants in Turkey?

In part because of the inadequacy of the statistics that are shared with the public, in part because much of the migration remains unrecorded, and in part because some of the migrants engage in circular migration, it is hard to estimate the number of migrants in Turkey. Furthermore, the question of numbers is often deployed as a political tool in accordance with diplomatic processes and economic concerns. Notwithstanding these caveats, it is estimated that over 1.6 million migrants have arrived in Turkey between 1923 and 1990, and since then, there are over a million of migrants in Turkey including transit migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and labor migrants.

Who is a refugee?

Turkey is a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees which internationally defines the legal basis for being a refugee. Accordingly, a refugee is a person who "has a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or belonging to a particular social group, and because of this fear is unable or unwilling to return to his/her country." However, Turkey is one among the very few countries to have signed the Geneva Convention maintaining the geographical limitation, which means that refugees arriving in Turkey from non-European countries are not legally recognized in Turkey as refugees.

Today in Turkey there are only a total of 44 persons who have been recognized by Turkish authorities as refugees, while the remaining 20.000 currently reside as asylum seekers, waiting for the decision to be made on their case by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Ankara. If the UNHCR reaches a negative decision, they will be asked to leave the country, or worse, they will be deported. If the decision is positive, they do not have the chance to settle in Turkey but have to be resettled to a third country instead.

What are the problems experienced by migrants in Turkey?

The most obvious example of ethnic and class-based discrimination against migrants is reflected in the problems migrants experience while trying to obtain residence and work permits. Obtaining a work permit in Turkey for foreigners is dependent on holding a valid residence permit. However, taking into consideration the monthly wage of most migrants coming to Turkey, it is barely