Every year, thousands of migrants are detained – some for hours, others for months – in places often outside the law and away from external oversight. Human rights violations are frequent and migrants can be subjected to extreme abuse (dreadful hygienic conditions, torture, murder) with such practices rarely condemned by a court. These sites are established on an ad-hoc, punctual basis. Authorities in charge – the police, the gendarmerie or the army – do not necessarily act under the command of a ministry or any hierarchical entity. No approval or detention order is needed for them to deprive migrants of liberty. Migrants can also be isolated with the collaboration of private actors such as seamen or security officers working for transport companies. The state authorities, the inspectors of prisons (e.g. European Committee Against Torture) and civil society are thus rarely aware of the existence of such facilities. It is extremely rare that migrants detained in these can receive visitors, or have contact with the outside world. They are not systematically taken into consideration in official immigration detention statistics. There may be one or two held in these barely visible sites; there may be dozens. The discovery of these sites is hazardous, and often relies upon personal accounts or painstaking research.

It is important to identify these sites as they are part of the repressive migration policy of the EU and its neighbours. They are part of the vast apparatus deployed to hound migrants. They include administrative buildings which are not meant to be used for immigration detention, police or gendarmerie stations, military compounds, closed centres under no regulation, sometimes stadiums, former parking areas, prisons, etc. Some of these sites are difficult to access: they may be isolated in the desert (south of Algeria, Al Kufrah and Al Wigh camps in Libya, Egypt-Israel border), in the mountains (Van region in Turkey), on islands (the Greek island of Vathy) or in border areas under military control (buffer zone of the demarcation line in Cyprus). Some of these sites are ‘micro-spaces’ like those temporally used by transport companies: sea and airport facilities, cabins on merchant navy vessels, trucks, buses or aircraft, and even train coaches used by the police or the Frontex agency. While this listing does not aim to be exhaustive, it should be noted that spaces used by smugglers, traffickers or mafia rings are not taken into account here, although the detention of migrants in unknown places for variable periods of time whilst clandestinely moving from one country to another is also a product of EU’s migration policies.

**The exclusion of migrants is a breach of fundamental rights**

Since the early 1990s, all Member States of the European Union (EU) have developed legal, administrative and political strategies involving the use of camps for the reception, selection, control and removal of migrants. Meanwhile, the instruments of the EU’s “remote policing” of migration – such as the European visa policy, the signature of readmission agreements or the operations of Frontex, the EU’s border agency – have become essential tools in the neighbourhood policy that encourages third countries to cooperate with the EU and fight against “illegal” immigration. The EU and/or its Member States have thus funded the construction of camps in Libya, Turkey, Ukraine and Mauritania, turning these countries into frontline actors in the externalisation of border controls. The number of holding sites is constantly increasing (see map). In 2012, the total known capacity – two-thirds of which is located within the EU – is about 37,000. This, however, remains an estimate. Not only is the actual number of detainees often higher than the official capacity, but the authorities also use a host of detention sites which are not listed in the official statistics (see “Invisible immigration detention sites”). The growth in detention capacity is partly due to the rationalisation of the expulsion process – yearly targets of the number of migrants to be removed, organisation of “charter flights” – and partly due to increases in the length of detention (from 32 to 45 days in France, if not 6 months for people accused of being terrorists; from 40 to 60 days in Spain; from 2 to 18 months in Italy; from 3 to 18 months in Greece). Conditions in the camps vary. In many cases they are a source of concern. Some countries impose detention-like practices (detainees kept in cells limited on the amount of time spent outside of cells, restrictions on visits, isolation cells) while others – for example Germany, Cyprus, Switzerland and Lebanon – detain migrants in prison, thereby reinforcing migrants’ criminalisation even though they have not committed any crime except for non-compliance with the law on entry and stay. Beyond the material conditions of detention, some elements intensify detainees’ anxiety such as the opacity of the procedures, the lack of information on individual rights, limits on or no access to legal aid and medical care, and in some cases, subjection to inhumane and degrading treatment. Excluded, marginalised in sites to which journalists and civil society are often denied access (see the Open Access campaign), it seems impossible to guarantee the respect of fundamental rights of minors, of people seeking international protection, or the respect of the right to private and family life. The frequent cases in recent years of self-inflicted violence by detainees (suicide attempts, hunger strikes, self-harm), the symptoms of uprisings are symptomatic of how psychologically fragile, powerless and desperate these persons must feel. However, focusing on closed camps gives a limited overview of a much wider phenomenon, that of an apparatus based on a variety of administrative mechanisms. Examining this phenomenon makes it necessary to go beyond detention and look at all sites aimed at keeping migrants away from the general population. In many countries – e.g. Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia – asylum-seekers are often put in large centres, most of the time away from urban areas, where the reception rhetoric is a narrative that weakly attempts to disguise the logic of management and control. It is also necessary to take into consideration the situation of migrants who are left in limbo, confronted with police harassment almost every day in Calais, Patras or Oujda, or confronted with the absurdity of the EU Dublin II Regulation and sent from one Member State to another as if in a permanent ping-pong game. In such grotesque situations, which governments continually attempt to legitimise, migrants are not welcome anywhere. They are denied a dignified life and access to their rights. Migreurop therefore calls on all governments of EU Member States and its neighbours to stop using detention to control migration, to stop approaching asylum and immigration policies from a security perspective and, instead, to promote the right to move as a fundamental right.