The deportation machine: Europe, asylum and human rights
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The deportation machine: Europe, asylum and human rights

By Liz Fekete

Abstract: Issues of immigration, asylum and refugee rights have become targets for politicians of all persuasions across Europe, from social democrats to the far Right. Ever-increasing pressure, spearheaded by populist media and electioneering politicians, to reduce the numbers of those seeking asylum, to raise the bar for successful claims and return those whose claims have ‘failed’ has resulted in sustained abuse of human rights. Europe’s deportation programme serves to undermine not only the Geneva Convention, but also international conventions on human rights and children’s rights. Yet, despite the shocking nature of the practices exposed here, little heed is paid to them or to the traumas suffered by their victims – a blindness that is only explicable in terms of the xeno-racism meted out to the desperate and the dispossessed.

Keywords: asylum seeker, Geneva Convention, immigration, racism, refugee, xeno-racism

We live in an age in which the rich industrialised world pronounces on human rights abuses abroad while failing to live up to its own standards at home, particularly in relation to its obligations under international law. But whereas the erosion of the international rule of law that arose from the ‘war on terror’ is recorded by a whole host of individuals, journalists and alternative tribunals, the degree of illegality
that flows from the (undeclared) ‘war on refugees’ is less keenly observed. The war on terror has undermined the 1949 Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War; the war on refugees has undermined the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Both wars have eroded international conventions outlawing torture, cruel and degrading treatment or other punishment. What follows, based on a much larger study, explores some of the ways in which the EU Deportation Programme undermines the Geneva Convention and documents just a fraction of the countless human rights abuses and illegalities that deportation policies have engendered.

At the time of writing, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is engaged in ‘Convention Plus’, a series of ‘global consultations’ with the state signatories of the Geneva Convention (and other ‘stakeholders’) on how to update the 1951 Convention (and its 1967 Protocol) in order to ‘address all the pressing issues pertaining to refugee protection in today’s changing world’. But while (officially, at least) the UNHCR still speaks the language of refugee protection, the state signatories to the Geneva Convention start from an entirely different premise: the need to protect states from the growing international refugee burden. In the EU, the shift from protecting refugees to protecting states can be seen most clearly in the development of a common asylum policy based on set targets both to reduce the numbers of asylum claims and to increase removals of failed asylum seekers. What such targets signify is the EU’s intent not to bring the Geneva Convention up to date, but to bypass the humanitarian principle that is its guiding rationale.

But how can EU countries assess individual asylum claims objectively and protect refugees displaced by war and conflict if they are to predetermine, by the setting of quotas, how many refugees are to be absorbed into Europe and how many rejected? That it is need, not numbers, which characterises a humanitarian approach to asylum was a fact recognised by the original drafters of the 1951 Convention, who were responding to the humanitarian crisis after the end of the second world war, when displaced people wandered around Europe or squatted in makeshift camps, with barely any legal protection or assistance. The Geneva Convention (and its 1967 Protocol) was the first systematic attempt to hold states to account, asserting that they had duties and responsibilities towards refugees. In compiling this report, I did not originally set out to document with what frequency European states were violating their international responsibilities under the Geneva Convention and other international laws. But, as the distressing stories of those targeted for removal came to light, it became manifest that, if international law was respected, most of these removals would not take place at all. This is not a question of individual immigration officials making incorrect decisions on individual cases;
what is key is the creation of a conveyor belt system of removals designed to meet government targets. The rot starts at the top, when government ministers announce, in parliaments dominated by anti-immigration sentiment, targets for removal. Across Europe, the anti-foreigner press duly blazon such targets, while anti-immigration and extreme Right parties urge even higher targets and the removal of ever-increasing numbers. The actions of government ministers, politicians, press and the extreme Right all constrain the civil servants, immigration officials and police officers who have to enforce these targets to act with greater zeal. In the stampede that follows, the most vulnerable are targeted, precisely because they are easiest to remove. Today, those caught up in the EU’s deportation drive include torture victims, those severely traumatised by war, psychiatric patients and the terminally ill. Even vulnerable children, including those who have sought asylum in Europe unaccompanied by any adult, are caught up in it. Some have developed symptoms of complete depressive breakdown, including severe apathy. Unable to thrive emotionally and physically, due to traumatic experiences in their home countries compounded in Europe by their fear of deportation, they have had to be hospitalised and fed intravenously.

But, then, the politicians do not tell us about the real life stories of such children, the sick or the elderly; instead they speak as if all asylum seekers are young, fit, male ‘economic migrants’ in search of western prosperity and a better standard of living. Politicians harp on about the number of asylum seekers arriving, the difficulties that communities face in accommodating them and how their very presence fuels the far Right. In the UK, for example, Tony Blair has spoken in pious terms of the government’s determination to protect us from those who ‘simply flout negative decisions and remain’ and whose continued presence sends the ‘wrong message to those who may try to come to this country without genuine cause’. Prominent among these disingenuous and self-seeking individuals, it would seem, are those attempting to flee war zones who are now being returned to some of the most dangerous regions of the world – Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Chechnya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Algeria (the list of countries grows with each passing day). They also include AIDS victims (who will die for lack of treatment in their home countries), homosexuals fleeing persecution, Roma escaping racial violence, girls who have been trafficked into sex slavery and the female victims of genital mutilation. While some may not be Convention refugees in the strict sense, do they not have a genuine claim to protection on humanitarian or compassionate grounds, as laid out in the European Convention on Human Rights and other instruments of international law?

In the era of a globalised economy, where more and more people are displaced by war or by economic or environmental devastation, and
where the distinction between an ‘economic refugee’ and a ‘political refugee’ is razor thin, western states are anxious to rewrite conventions relating to refugee protection. The EU has already been engaged in a systematic attempt to erode Article 31 of the Geneva Convention which guarantees the individual right to cross international borders to seek asylum. It is now ready to move to stage two of its plan, the creation of a new model of refugee protection based not on individual rights, but on a system of ‘warehousing’ refugees in large camps in their region of origin until a conflict has been resolved to the satisfaction of the western powers. In this way, the EU seeks to transfer its ‘refugee burden’ on to the impoverished South (already host to the vast majority of the world’s refugees), from where a chosen few will be selected for resettlement in Europe under an Australian-style quota system.

One of the first instruments to effect this change is the mind-numbingly named ‘European Council directive on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third-country nationals and stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection’ – the ‘Qualification Directive’ for short – passed in June 2004. Whereas the Geneva Convention gave protection to refugees from conflict until a ‘fundamental and lasting change has occurred in conditions in their country of origin and state protection has been restored’ (emphasis added), the Qualification Directive states that protection can be provided not just by the state, but ‘also by parties or organisations, including international organisations . . . which control a region or a larger area within the territory of the State’ (emphasis added).

In a global polity dominated by the war on terror, where the doctrine of US security is paramount and where the source of ‘terror’ is deemed to lie in those states antithetical to US interests, the way is opened for direct western-led intervention into weaker (though theoretically sovereign) states. The danger, though, is that interventions lead to further displacement of peoples, greater refugee flight. And ‘security’ for the West is also security from refugees (humanitarianism, after all, only goes so far). Hence, the importance of the Qualification Directive in establishing that protection for refugees need not only be provided by a functioning state, but by protectorates (presumably under the auspices of the UN) which can confine refugees in camps in their regions of origin and prevent them seeking asylum further afield. And if xenophobic parties such as the Danish People’s Party have their way, refugee camps in regions of origin will also be used as dustbins for the asylum seekers Europe has rejected – the Iraqis, the Afghans, the Somalis, the Congolese who cannot be repatriated to their homeland because war is still ongoing, there is no functioning state and it is simply not safe to return.

The idea that refugees can be ‘warehoused’ – the term is significant – until conflicts are resolved denotes the denigration and reification of
asylum seekers. Already set apart from society, they can be more readily expelled; treated as commodities, they can be parcelled up, packaged and sent out of Europe. To dehumanise asylum seekers like this indicates the xeno-racism inherent in the whole deportation programme. What else but anti-foreigner racism can legitimise the use of such brutal force against asylum seekers as is evidenced in case after case?

**Setting targets**

The process begins with that most managerial of enterprises – the setting of ‘targets’ and the culture that such an approach engenders. To this end, a number of joint initiatives have been taken under the EU Deportation Programme to facilitate the achievement of targets. These include the creation of the EU Expulsions Agency, with a mandate to arrange joint expulsions from the territory of two or more member states if there is a sufficient number of people for it to make economic sense. Similarly, a Council decision was taken (April 2004) on the organisation of joint flights for removals, from the territory of two or more member states, of third-country nationals who are subjects of individual removal orders, to be funded by the European Commission. What has ensued has been an escalation in the use of chartered flights and military jets to enforce removals.

Governments argue that removal is an essential part of a credible asylum process. However, as the Refugee Council in the UK has pointed out, removal can only be seen as a fair end result of the asylum process if asylum claims have been dealt with justly, with claimants being given adequate opportunity to present their cases. But this is patently not the case in a Europe that has introduced systems to fast-track asylum cases (prejudiced as unfounded even before they are heard) and reduced the funds available for rejected asylum seekers to launch appeals. Furthermore, the systems introduced by the EU to prevent asylum seekers reaching Europe in the first place ensure that the new tough approach to removals comes at a time when asylum claims to most EU countries are declining. A UNHCR report shows that claims for asylum in industrialised countries fell by 22 per cent in the first half of 2004 compared with the same period in 2003 and the level of new asylum claims was the lowest in seventeen years.\(^1\) At the same time, the acceptance rate for those who actually manage to lodge an asylum claim has dropped drastically. Meanwhile, as asylum claims plummet within core European industrialised nations, the rate of removal of failed asylum seekers steadily increases, as does the size of budgets given over to forced removals. Some examples from across Europe include:
In 2003, the former centre-Right Spanish government created the Central Brigade for Expulsions, almost doubling funds for deportations in 2003 (the total figure of 18.6m euros assigned to the repatriation of foreigners constituted 60 per cent of the budget of the Government Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Immigration). The current administration has assigned a further 300 police officers to cover border surveillance, expulsions and repatriation. A new expulsions and repatriation unit will have the job of co-ordinating detention centres for foreigners and carrying out deportation orders.

In Sweden, the budget for removing failed asylum seekers rose from 42m SKr in 2000 to 73m SKr in 2003, with the figure for 2004 expected to be even higher owing to a 30 per cent increase in expulsions. (Up until June 2004, 1,727 removals had been carried out, which was an increase of 21 per cent when compared to the same period in the previous year.)

In Ireland, in the first three months of 2004, twice as many failed asylum seekers (300 in all) were deported as in the first three months of the previous year. Overall, asylum applications for 2004 are believed to have dropped by 40 per cent.

In Germany, where the number seeking asylum in 2004 was the lowest in 20 years, statistics cited by Deutsche Welle suggest that 50,000 failed asylum seekers and other foreigners are removed each year. In 2004, only 960 people were granted refugee status.

In September 2004, British prime minister Tony Blair set a target for the removal of failed applicants. At present, 50 per cent of those who fail in their asylum applications leave. Blair wants the monthly number of removals to exceed the number of unfounded applications by the end of 2005. In the second quarter of 2004, there was an average of 2,640 new asylum applicants per month, of whom 80 per cent were refused permission to stay in Britain, and of whom 1,043 per month were removed. In order to meet Blair’s pledge, removals would have to increase threefold. In February 2005, Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced a five-year strategy for immigration and asylum which includes a pledge to step up the rate of removal of failed asylum seekers. Funds will also be set aside to expand the capacity of immigration removal centres and increase the resources of police officers used to carry out deportations. Asylum claims to the UK have dropped significantly and the acceptance rate, following an initial claim for refugee status, is currently running at just 4 per cent. In fact, the UK has gone still further in proposing to include in its deportation programme those who, although they have full refugee status, are deemed to have committed ‘serious crimes’. The definition of
'serious crimes', it seems, is so widely drawn that it includes trespass, stealing a car and being caught in possession of drugs, as well as immigration offences. But, according to the Geneva Convention, a country can only throw out a person already given refugee status if he or she commits 'a particularly serious crime' – what the UNHCR dubs 'heinous acts'.

Influence of the far Right

It is significant that, in countries where the xenophobic Right is either part of the government or a significant opposition force, governments are most proactive in setting targets for forced removals and making expulsion an issue of political debate. Party politics have been transformed beyond all recognition in the Netherlands since the stunning gains for the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in 2002. Today, the centre-Right coalition government has sought to undermine the LPF by adopting the LPF’s asylum and immigration agenda itself. And this, despite the fact that the number of asylum seekers entering the Netherlands has fallen more significantly than in any other western European nation (a total of 10,000 people sought asylum in the Netherlands in 2003, compared with a peak of 43,560 in 2000). Hence, in February 2004, the government introduced legislation which, in creating a new offence of illegal residence, seeks to deport, by 2007, 26,000 asylum seekers who failed to qualify for a residence permit under a recent amnesty. This ‘deportation law’, termed by the Dutch immigration minister Rita Verdonk as ‘very good, very humane’, has created the conditions for what has been described as the biggest forced exodus from Europe since the second world war. Verdonk is unperturbed by mounting criticism from the UNHCR, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Council of Europe, which convened a special debate to discuss the human rights implications of the deportation law.

As in the Netherlands, so in Denmark and Switzerland. In Denmark, in August 2004, the Danish People’s Party (DFP) threatened to vote against the annual budget and withdraw support for the continued presence of Danish troops in Iraq unless expulsions to Iraq were stepped up. Earlier, in April 2003, the centre-Right government had passed legislation authorising police to forcibly return asylum seekers whose claims had been rejected. According to DFP leader Pia Kjaersgaard, refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants are ‘a major financial burden’ and it is ‘our own citizens, and primarily the elderly, who are targeted for cutbacks’. What she did not reveal was the 25 per cent reduction from 2002 to 2003 in the number of people claiming asylum in Denmark (a total figure of 4,557 asylum seekers) and the fact that the acceptance rate for asylum seekers...
had dropped from 53 per cent in 2001 to around 9 per cent in the first half of 2004.\textsuperscript{15}

In November 2002, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) put forward a referendum, which sought to tighten the law, on the abuse of the right to asylum. The referendum failed by a narrow margin, but since the last general election, the SVP holds two cabinet posts and controls immigration and asylum policy through Justice Minister Christoph Blocher. One of Blocher’s first acts was to commission a survey to ascertain the number of ‘illegal immigrants’ residing in Switzerland – a prelude to tough new deportation measures. Yet the number of people requesting asylum in Switzerland has dropped to its lowest level in seventeen years.

**The use of force**

Target-driven deportation programmes legitimise force and institutionalise brutality against asylum seekers. The harsh methods of control and restraint used to enforce removals have on occasion led to the deaths of asylum seekers, mainly from suffocation.\textsuperscript{16} (People have, in some cases, been literally parcelled up with adhesive tape; in others, sedated or restrained where they sit by a special deportation helmet which locks the head onto the seat.) There have been countless injuries, ranging from those associated with prolonged periods in handcuffs to brain damage and loss of sight. In October 2003, for example, the 59-year-old Togolese asylum seeker Doviodo Adekou was seriously injured and blinded in his right eye during a deportation attempt in Mettmann, North-Rhine-Westphalia.\textsuperscript{17}

Forced deportations, suspended in Belgium in 1998 following the death by asphyxiation of Nigerian Semira Adamu, have been quietly revived. (The police video of 20-year-old Adamu’s deportation, broadcast on Belgian TV after her death, showed gendarmes cracking jokes as officers used the so-called ‘cushion technique’ to stop her verbal protests. One officer is seen gripping her arms, while another holds the cushion over her head for several minutes.) In March 2004, the Belgian interior minister announced the intensification of forced deportations on specially chartered flights: 2,250 forced expulsions took place in the first four months of that year.\textsuperscript{18} As far back as 1986, France incurred international condemnation when it deported 101 Malians, some in chains and forced on to a specially chartered flight. Nevertheless, in March 2003, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy announced that at least one flight would be chartered each week to carry out group deportations.\textsuperscript{19} Shortly afterwards, two deportees, Ethiopian Mariame Getu Hagos and Argentinian Ricardo Barrientos, died while being deported from Paris. In Spain, concern about brutal
tactics peaked in the 1990s. Currently, according to Interior Ministry figures, an average of 300 people are being expelled daily.\textsuperscript{20}

Today, a growing number of medical professionals and other concerned groups are attempting to document what they consider to be excessive and possibly unlawful use of force in deportations. The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture’s report on excessive force against failed asylum seekers advised that any form of restraint involving restrictive positioning (especially compression of the chest) or pressure on the neck carried with it a risk of serious injury and even, in the most extreme circumstances, death.\textsuperscript{21} It cited evidence, including a doctor’s report, that in the past security staff had used ‘excessive or gratuitous force’ against detainees. One woman reported being ‘dragged on her back up the aircraft steps in handcuffs’; one man said he was ‘pushed, punched and slapped; another alleged being ‘kicked in the abdomen, chest, legs and mouth while on the ground with his hands cuffed behind him’. Deportees were told they were ‘dirty’ or referred to as ‘black bastard’ or ‘black bitch’. The National Association Providing Assistance to Foreigners at the Borders (ANAFE) made similar observations about racist slurs, excessive force and brutality in France in a report based on six months’ observation at Charles-de-Gaulle Airport in Roissy, Paris.\textsuperscript{22}

The Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture was quite clear about the use of force in its 1997 General Report. While recognising ‘that it will often be a difficult task to enforce an expulsion order in respect of a foreign national who is determined to stay on a State’s territory’ and that ‘law enforcement officials may on occasion have to use force’, ‘the force should be used no more than is reasonably necessary’. Furthermore, ‘it would be entirely unacceptable for a person subject to an expulsion order to be physically assaulted as a form of persuasion to board a means of transport or as a punishment for not having done so’.

The dangers of return

Yet death and serious injury do not just occur in the back of a deportation van or on the aeroplane. A number of asylum seekers are known to have met their deaths following their return, variously, to Somalia, Turkey, Syria and Eritrea. These are countries known for the illegal detention and torture of political dissidents, as are the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Egypt, also countries to which asylum seekers have been returned, if not directly, then through a process described as ‘chain deportation’ under which asylum seekers removed from EU member states may be further removed to other third countries and from there back to the state they fled in the first place. Such a practice has been given the official stamp of approval.
in the form of the ‘Council directive on minimum standards on procedures in member states for granting and withdrawing refugee status’. The directive permits member states to deny people access to the asylum procedure if they have travelled via a so-called safe third country. According to UNHCR, the result could be that asylum seekers find themselves forced back to their home countries, in direct contravention of international law, as a result of chain deportations by a string of countries applying readmission agreements, starting with an EU member state.

Recently, Italy and Germany, backed by the UK, Austria and the Netherlands, proposed that new asylum seekers should be sent to processing centres in countries bordering Europe (such as Libya) where their asylum claims would be heard. Although the proposal was opposed by Spain and the Scandinavian countries, Italy has already entered into an agreement with Libya under which migrants who enter Italy by boat, and whose last point of departure was Libya, are immediately returned. This is part of Italy’s new ‘rapid expulsion policy’ which means that there is no time for those who may want to seek asylum to file a claim. As Libya has not even signed the Geneva Convention, the Italian authorities must now be held responsible for any human rights abuses that occur when asylum seekers who reach Italian shores are sent back to Libya.

For example, at the beginning of October 2004, the Italian authorities deported an estimated 1,000 handcuffed migrants from various African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries to Libya, only days after they had reached the Sicilian island of Lampedusa. Members of the Anti-Racist Network in Sicily have claimed that, prior to their deportation, men were herded into groups of thirty to forty and forced to stand for long periods in the boiling sun before being escorted onto military jets. Following criticism, the deportations were temporarily halted, but then resumed within days, with hundreds more being deported. Giving details of the expulsions to a parliamentary committee, Interior Minister Giuseppe Pisanu confirmed that 1,153 people had been sent back to Libya in one week. Of these, 1,119 were Egyptian, twenty-three were from Bangladesh and eleven were Moroccan. Once in Tripoli, the deportees were taken to detention centres. By 7 October, Libya reported that it had repatriated around 1,000 Egyptians following their expulsion from Italy. The deportations from Libya to Egypt were paid for and organised by the Italian government on Italian flights.

A number of challenges have been made against the legality of this ‘collective expulsion’ to Libya. The UNHCR has accused Rome of breaking international law by not allowing its officials to interview the migrants before they were flown out of the country. Three Italian associations working in the field of migrant rights have filed a complaint...
with the European Commission, calling upon it to sanction Italy for contravening international and European human rights law.26

Refugees from war and other conflicts are being targeted for deportation despite the immense difficulties and human rights concerns attached to their removal. The EU has drawn up return programmes for specific nationalities from conflict zones. It is also attempting to remove failed asylum seekers who previously would not have been deported because they had no travel documents and/or their nationality could not be established. These changes are part and parcel of an entirely new approach to refugees from conflict, evidenced in a draft EU directive (due to come into force in June 2005) which proposes that those seeking sanctuary from persecution, torture and inhuman treatment be given just temporary permission to stay in Europe.27 The idea is to repeat the so-called Kosovo model under which refugees from Kosovo in 1999 were given temporary protection on the assumption that most of the ethnic Albanians expelled from the Serbian province would return within a year.

Returning war refugees, political dissidents and others at risk of serious harm to countries still at war, or where torture and cruel and degrading treatment are systematic, is in violation of the Geneva Convention and other international instruments. But as, globally, the national security of powerful states takes precedence over human rights, the war on terror has ensured that such returns have become more commonplace. And, once again, the fact that there are no systematic attempts by member states to monitor the outcome of deportation programmes, in terms of the safety and security of deportees, indicates that asylum seekers are lower in the order of things than animals. Every cow that goes in and out of Europe is tagged, documented and monitored so that EU officials know details of its movements and whereabouts. It is fully traceable. But the fate of asylum seekers is nobody’s concern. They have less value than livestock.

Children at risk

The EU deportation machine is armour-plated against corrosion from any sense of compassion or responsibility. The refusal to yield to any basic human instinct of compassion extends to asylum-seeking children. Nothing speaks more clearly of xeno-racism than the fact that immigration law (including the right of states to detain and deport children) now takes precedence over the internationally recognised rights of the child. One might have hoped that, in any forced deportation involving children, the principle of the ‘best interests of the child’ would be held paramount, as laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Yet several European states, including the UK, have issued reservations to the Convention, effec-
tively putting immigration control above the best interests of the child, opening the way to the abuse of the rights of asylum-seeking children. In the UK, Clause 11 of the Children Bill currently going through parliament places a duty on organisations to safeguard the welfare of children – but excludes immigration and asylum authorities from that duty. Furthermore, the Home Office has issued a manual advising immigration service officials on the use of control and restraint techniques for deporting asylum seeker children, stipulating that they must have skills in paediatric emergency lifesaving. The manual also gives official sanction to the rounding up of children from schools to be detained with their families. Such a practice in Norway has outraged the Norwegian Parents’ Association, which reminded the authorities that the school must at all times remain a place of safety for the child.

Again, there seems to be no thought given to the long-term traumatic implications for children forced to watch their parents being degraded, humiliated and even assaulted during the deportation process. This is particularly inexcusable in the UK where lawyers for the son of Joy Gardner have been seeking compensation for the psychological damage that the boy (then aged 5) suffered after witnessing deportation police restraining his mother with a body belt and other instruments while they wrapped thirteen feet of tape around her mouth to stop her screaming. Among such cases are the following:

- In the UK, the deportation on 29 April 2004 of three Lithuanian women and three children (the youngest aged about 6) was witnessed by British photographer Jess Hurd on the same flight. Hurd says that the women and children were placed at the back of the plane, screaming and crying. A young girl, aged between 12 and 14, was flanked by a male immigration officer who appeared to be holding her by the neck. A woman in her thirties, guarded by male officers, was in handcuffs and only her underwear. Hurd refused to travel on the flight while the women were in such distress and the immigration official agreed to remove the deportees from the flight. The woman in underwear was taken off the plane, hunched over in an attempt to preserve her modesty, in full view of all the passengers, who witnessed her walk from the plane, handcuffed and pushed from the front and behind.

- Bernice Wairimu Kamau was deported in May 2004 from the UK on a Kenya Airlines plane with her 6-year-old daughter. Passengers are believed to have complained about the fact that she was restrained with foot and hand chains throughout the whole ten-hour journey. On arrival in Nairobi, she was admitted to hospital with facial injuries which it is believed were caused in a tussle with her three UK escorts. When representatives of the Kenyan media
attempted to interview the UK escorts, they locked themselves into a room to avoid the journalists.31

- A woman from the Ivory Coast told the *Guardian* that during an aborted deportation attempt from the UK on 10 July 2004, nine officials had restrained her physically by pinning her down by her arms, twisting her neck and sitting on her back. The incident was witnessed by her 15-month-old child who became distressed. When the mother asked that her son be taken to her father (a British citizen), the child was taken away and placed in foster care. The woman was subsequently deported, without her son, in August 2004.32

On occasion, force has also been applied to minors:

- The forced removal from Malmö, Sweden to Serbia in April 2004 of 15-year-old Anisa Muric was filmed by her cousin and broadcast on a local Swedish TV channel. Anisa, fearing deportation, had become depressed. Her family had accepted that they would have to leave, but were fearful that, as Anisa had a fear of flying, she would have an anxiety attack on the plane. They had therefore asked for an alternative method of travel. However, the authorities pressed on with the plans to deport the family by plane and, as it was considered a difficult deportation, transferred responsibility for it to the police. The video broadcast showed Anisa, barefoot, crying and screaming and without her glasses, being carried to a police riot van. Four police cars and over a dozen police were in attendance. An asylum support group in Malmö alleges that, during the subsequent deportation, Anisa was placed in handcuffs and foot-cuffs and kept apart from the rest of the family. At one point, she was, allegedly, left lying in the place reserved for dogs on the aeroplane. An official complaint has been filed with the Swedish Ombudsman and Chief Prosecutor Kristian Augustonsson has launched an investigation into any possible breach of duty.33

- Following a failed attempt in Germany to deport a minor from Kyrgyzstan (the boy was not an asylum seeker, but an orphan), who refused to be sent back without his 18-year-old brother, criminal charges of inflicting bodily harm during the performance of duties were brought against six members of the Federal Border Guard. After passengers intervened, the pilot refused to fly the boy. It is alleged that guards punched the boy and he was subsequently hospitalised.34

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Yet what will happen to these children, to the sick, to the elderly, campaigners ask? To which the reply is, targets must be met and the integrity of the asylum system must be preserved. In this view, children are
pawns and arguments about their rights serve as a means for parents to evade deportation – in much the same way as the traumatised are seen to use their torture scars to dodge removal. A terrible human price is paid by asylum seekers in their struggle for justice; there are countless incidents of self-harm and suicide among those either in removal centres or on the streets in destitution. But, in much the same way as the US authorities at Guantanamo Bay have reclassified detainees’ suicide attempts as ‘manipulative self-injurious behaviour’, EU governments ignore the shocking escalation in suicides and incidents of self-harm among the detained and the desperate. Instead, they denounce such individuals as ‘self-mutilators’ or ‘emotional blackmailers’ who are ‘testing the hospitality’ of the nation. It is a stereotype that not only ignores the very real human misery that prompts suicide, but adds a deeply offensive dimension to the growing xeno-racist discourse against asylum seekers and refugees. In effect, it turns reality on its head: states are the victims of such behaviour and asylum seekers their victimisers.

The EU Deportation Programme is a juggernaut. If allowed to continue unchecked, it will violate all our basic human values. It has already drawn in civil servants, immigration officials and police officers to a programme for removal based on the bullying of the vulnerable. But there is now an added danger. It is that the deportation system is aiming to create a new layer of de facto deportation officials among public servants and welfare professionals generally. Doctors who are willing to sanction the use of force against asylum seekers – against their own ethical codes – or administer sedatives to make the process easier will be incorporated into that system. Teachers, whose pastoral duty is to protect all children in their care, will have to allow arrests for deportations to be carried out on school premises if the state so dictates.

The juggernaut has rolled on ignored, unmonitored and unimpeded for too long. It is high time that an EU-wide campaign for accountability and transparency of the asylum process was launched. Throughout Europe, there are conscientious doctors, committed journalists and filmmakers, social workers, teachers, children’s advocates, human rights campaigners and trades unionists who are attempting to make clear the inhumane effects of a target-driven deportation policy. And asylum seekers themselves, denied every single civil, social and human right, are using the only weapon at their disposal – their bodies – to highlight their predicament. Across Europe, they sew their lips together, they refuse food, they protest in any way they can. Governments that are strangers to compassion are deaf to despair. The Deportation Machine has been researched, compiled and written in the urgent hope that its readers will make them hear.
Liz Fekete is deputy director of the Institute of Race Relations and senior researcher on the IRR’s European Race Audit. This article is based on her recent research report The Deportation Machine: Europe, asylum and human rights (London, IRR, 2005).

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