

As temperatures drop, thousands of refugees left stranded on Europe's borders

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Thousands of people streaming into Europe from the war-torn Middle East have been stranded in the cold with inadequate food, shelter and housing as one country after another imposes border restrictions in an effort to prevent refugees from entering.

With the escalation of the Syrian civil war, each passing day adds new arrivals to the 700,000 refugees that have fled to Europe so far this year.

On Monday, Melita Sunjic, a spokeswoman for the United Nations Human Rights Council, said more than 10,000 refugees were trapped in Serbia after Croatia implemented border restrictions.

"It is like a big river of people, and if you stop the flow, you will have floods somewhere. That's what's happening now," she said.

Sunjic added, "There is a lack of food, lack of blankets, we are missing everything." She told the Associated Press that the border restrictions by Croatia had "created a domino effect," leading Slovenia to impose border restrictions in turn.

She described the situation facing the migrants, who have been left to wait for days in mud and heavy rain, as "awful and hellish."

"I am scared, everybody is scared," a 35-year-old clothing store manager from Damascus, Syria, who was traveling with his family through Croatia, told the *New York Times*. "We are worried they will close the border, but we are also worried about winter. We must get where we are going before the snows fall."

Two thousand people spent Monday night on a train in Croatia outside the border with Slovenia, which had been refusing them passage. Hungary closed its borders to migrants Friday, leading Croatia to attempt to divert refugees through Slovenia.

More than 5,000 people are crossing into Croatia from Serbia each day, the *Guardian* reported.

The brutal treatment being meted out every day to refugees was on display Monday when Croatian border guards assaulted Agence France-Presse photographer Andrej Isakovic. The photographer, who was traveling with refugees at the Serbian-Croatian border, was attacked after he refused demands from Croatian police that he turn over the memory cards from his cameras. "They stormed at me, pulled me down to the ground, grabbed both of my cameras and threw them in the mud," he told the AP.

This is only the latest crime carried out by European border police. Last week, a Bulgarian border guard shot dead an Afghan refugee at the Bulgarian-Turkish border. This followed the deaths of seven refugees off the Greek island of Lesbos Thursday after a Greek coast guard vessel rammed their boat.

On Monday, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu reiterated the Turkish government's intention to turn back refugees, declaring, "No one should expect Turkey to turn into a concentration camp where all of the refugees are kept."

These statements followed last week's discussion between Turkish officials and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and a meeting in Brussels late last week in which the EU vowed to work with the authoritarian Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to seal Europe's borders.

Even upon arriving in "wealthy" countries such as Germany, refugees receive barely any better treatment than in the Balkans or Turkey. Thousands of refugees have had to wait in line in the city centers of Germany, forced to sleep on the streets and given no social aid of any kind from the government while they wait to be processed.

The German parliament this month voted to implement a major crackdown on refugees, slashing the

types of social aid given to refugees who qualify for assistance and significantly expanding the number of so-called “safe countries of origin.” Refugees from these countries are to be denied asylum in accelerated proceedings.

The ruling class in Germany is encouraging extreme right-wing movements as part of its campaign against refugees and the working class as a whole. On Monday, some 10,000 people marched in the German City of Dresden to mark the anniversary of the right-wing anti-Islamic marches by the Pegida movement. The demonstration was met, however, with a counter-demonstration of about 15,000 people who chanted, “Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here!”

On Saturday, the day before the mayoral election in the city of Cologne, candidate Henriette Reker was stabbed in the neck by a right-wing man angered by Germany’s refugee policy. Reker is an independent candidate who is being supported by Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party. While backing the persecution of refugees, Merkel has postured as a supporter of asylum-seekers and has been criticized for this by members of her own party.

The political atmosphere for these right-wing attacks has been created by a systematic campaign in the European media and political establishment to demonize refugees. This has included statements from British Prime Minister David Cameron, who referred to migrants in Calais as a “swarm of people,” and a column by Katie Hopkins of the *British Sun* newspaper, who earlier this year called refugees “cockroaches.”

Referring to these and other comments, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that it comes “straight out of the language of [Nazi publisher] Julius Streicher in the 1920s.”

The criminal treatment of refugees by the EU stands as a scathing indictment of capitalism. For years, the European powers have, in alliance with the United States, staged countless military interventions in the Middle East and Africa, leading to death and misery for millions. Now, when the disaster created by these wars threatens to spill into their own borders, all talk of “human rights” is thrown out the window as the European powers rush to seal their borders and impose a draconian crackdown on refugees.



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