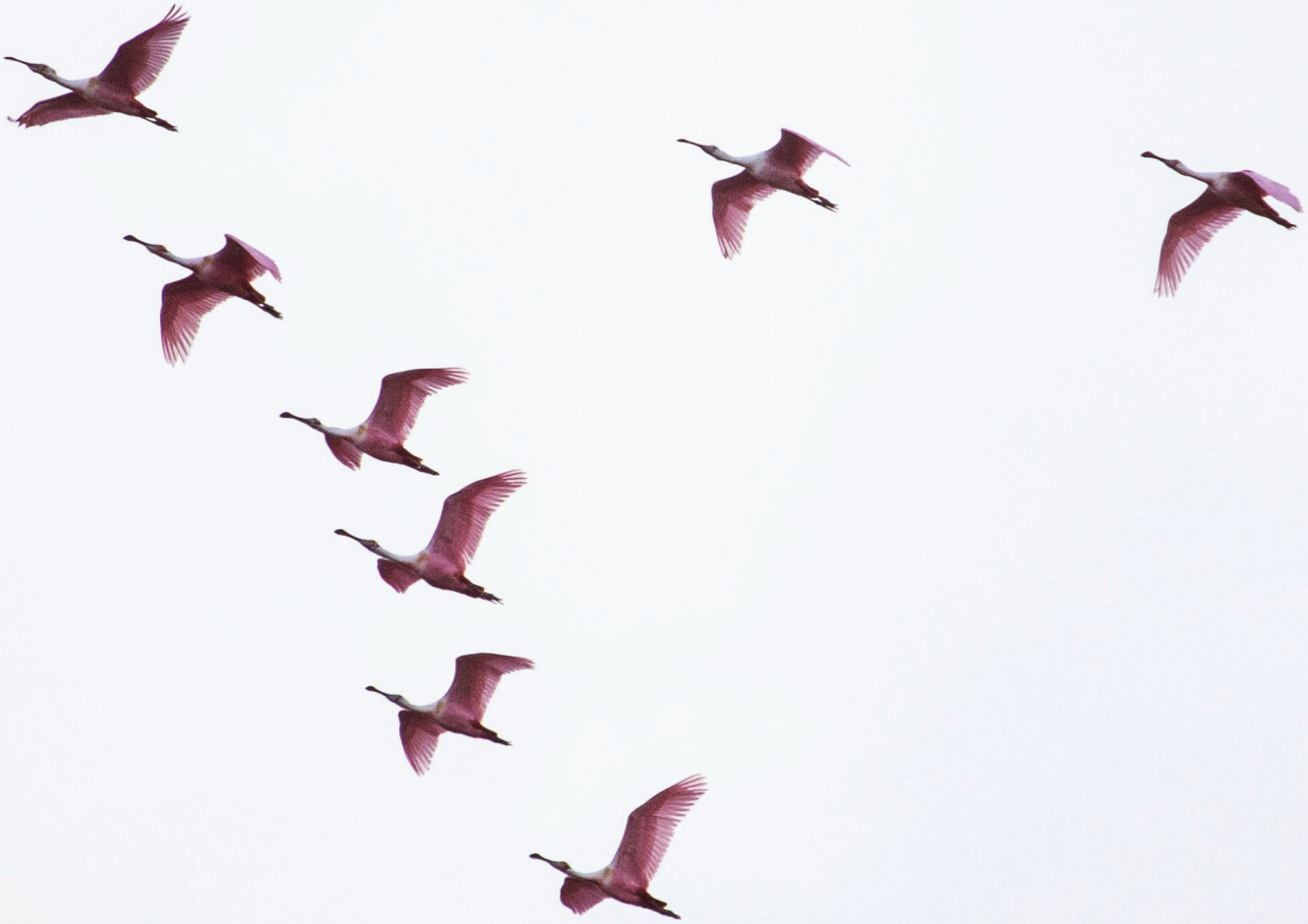
BRIDGES

A **toolkit** for **diversifying knowledge** and **tackling discrimination** through **civil society participation** in universities.

TRANSIT

TRANSIT
DEFINITION



A transit country is one through which "migratory flows" (regular or irregularised) move. This is taken to mean the country (or countries), different from the country of origin, through which a migrant passes in order to enter a country of destination. The concept of transit migration was only invented during the 1990s and publicised by certain institutions, notably the International Organisation for Migration (IOM); the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD): the Council of Europe; and various United Nations (UN) agencies. Countries that are transited by migrants are successively integrated into a wider European policy framework of migration control. The notion that certain countries are definable as "transit countries" is problematic insofar as it assumes, first, that people on the move just "flow" through spaces of transit, and do not get "stuck" there for protracted periods of time; and, secondly, that migrants all have the same destination in mind when they begin their journey, and that it remains fixed throughout.

TRANSIT
PROCESS

We came up with this concept during one of the PAR meetings composed of researchers from Orange House and FAC Research in Athens. Along with the concept of crisis, we identified transit as particularly relevant to the context in which we are located, Greece. Indeed, Greece is represented as a "transit country" through which migrants attempt to move (deeper in)to "Europe". During this PAR meeting, moreover, we discussed how it would be interesting to challenge the notions of "transit" and "destination" by questioning how migrants experience their daily lives in Greece (for instance, while Greece is considered a space of transit, they are people who want to stay) vis à vis Germany for example (which is conceptualized as a destination country, however, from where someone might want to depart). And how these feelings and desires can change over time and accordingly to the various experiences that one goes through.

ELABORATION

With this concept we want to critically engage with migration management"s categorizations such as "transit" and "secondary mobility" and the various identities that are reified through them, such as "asylum seeker," "recognized refugee," "undocumented migrant." The concept of transit also references the uneven geographies of Europe. The different locations in which PAR is undertaken in the BRIDGES project (Greece, Spain, UK, and Germany) are implicated in very different ways in national and supranational projects of "migration management"; in historical and contemporary relations of colonialism internal and external to Europe; and figure differently in imaginaries of European citizens and non-citizens alike. We aim to deconstruct the binary between transit and destination countries in relation to migratory experiences, and to reveal how it relates to the colonial cuts, and how it reproduces colonial histories expressed in centre/periphery politics. We want to challenge hegemonic representations of Europe's geographies of migration and asylum by turning to the lived experiences of people who are being "managed" and controlled through border regimes, as these are unevenly governed at the national and supranational levels - particularly through instruments such as the European Agenda for Migration, the Dublin Agreements, the EU-Turkey and EU-Libya Agreements and other multilateral "Deals" aiming at externalising European borders. Thus, with the concept of transit our aim is to highlight the embeddedness of sites within each other and to interrogate their asymmetries in terms of policy implementation, access to higher education, social, legal and economic opportunities and to various forms of resistance and solidarity within and across these different sites/locations. In this regard, we build upon Suryia Nayak's (2017) discussion on "location as method" and the epistemological insights of other Black Feminist scholars who in their work challenge the hegemonically constructed binary between method and content (politics) that is enforced within academic research. Along the lines of Black Feminist Theory's activism as a politics of location that functions simultaneously as content (the what) and as a method (the how), we suggest that "transit" finds itself at the heart of what Nayak sees as the "mutually constitutive relation between content and method."

Transit states and spaces

According to Souad Osseiran (2017), by trying to alter migrants' and refugees' relations with state actors in "transit" countries, the EU seeks to change how migrants and refugees approach these states as spaces of temporariness. Osseiran argues that Turkey's role as a transit state bordering the EU is the result of particular processes. By assigning Turkey transit status, she contends, the EU allocated it a role in maintaining the southeastern borders of Europe. "Using transit state presents

methodological dilemmas due to its definitional limitations. The concept "transit" state depends on temporal measurements and therefore contains its means of conceptual undoing". Moreover, she argues that "unlike transit state, transit space is a broader concept. It can be used to describe how migrants' and refugees' relations with state actors, state regulations or laws, institutions, or other people produce spaces as spaces of temporariness". In other words, the aura of transit extends to other spaces, such as ferries and other means of transportation (see Spathopoulou, 2016) or camps and other infrastructures of containment and detention, and the various practices of bordering that materialise in such spaces. The transit status of Turkey is also arguably reinforced by its geographical restriction to asylum applications: since only Europeans can apply for asylum in Turkey (according to its particular interpretation of its commitments under the Geneva Convention), non-European refugees understandably seek to pass through the country on the way to a European country where they could plausibly seek international protection.

Osseiran shows how certain spaces are produced as transitory as part of processes to manage migration; she emphasises the ways transit space is made productive. The same, it could be argued, holds true for those states that are being produced as transitory when it comes to the governance of migration. Importantly, along with ways in which transit space is made productive we should pay attention to how transit time is, also, made productive, in other words, how space is being governed through time and how time is governed through space.

Secondary mobility

We see, moreover, how transit signifies both mobility and immobility, movement and stuckness, what Fiorenza Picozza (2017) refers to as "caught in mobility", when referring to migrants' experiences of (im)mobility within Europe's geographies of asylum. Rules governing non-European citizens' mobility within Europe, particularly those people who are denied legal status or seek to claim asylum in a European country, create juridical categories of mobility, such as "secondary mobility." Secondary mobility refers to the clandestine movement of "non-status" people or asylum seekers across national borders from the member state in which they first entered Europe (under the Dublin Regulation - European Commission, 2020a - legally the only state where they can seek asylum), to another member state (which has the right to "return" - that is, deport - them back to the first country). Picozza argues that "the EU-ropean asylum regime produces new subjects of power in terms of legal identities (recognised refugees, rejected asylum seekers, Dublin cases, among others) -while also producing space, in the form of geographies of transit and asylum, and time, through channelling, disrupting, decelerating or speeding up circulation." While the Schengen Treaty (signed in 1985 and implemented in 1990) created an Area currently comprising 26 European countries that have officially abolished passport control and other types of border control at their mutual borders, the fundamental right of free movement guaranteed by the EU to its citizens does not extend to non-citizens (European Commission, 2020b). Hence, the notion

of secondary mobility derives from this differential function of borders internal to the European Union, which are porous for EU citizens, while being impermeable for those denied the same fundamental rights.

The case of Greece

During summer of 2015, dubbed the "summer of migration," and the beginning of 2016, that is, at the so-called peak of the so-called "refugee crisis," clear divisions within the EU among its member states, and tensions between the EU and states aspiring to access to the union, "disclosed certain limitations of the European project" (Rózsa et al. 2017). In particular, the division between "transit countries" and "destination countries" linked through the Balkan route was expressed both in the assertion of transit from below, and its imposition from above. Shortly thereafter the creation of so-called "hotspots" on 5 islands within Greek national territory, and prior to the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement (see European Commission, 2015; European Council, 2016), the "Greek hotspot puzzle" was constructed as following: on the one hand, all those "quasi-refugees" (such as Afghans) are forced to remain in a "quasi-European" space, in "Greek EU-rope" (Stierl & De Genova, 2017; see European Commission 2015), whereas all "economic migrants" must be returned to a "non-European" space, Turkey. After the EU-Turkey deal of 2016, Greece as a country has been characterized as the hotspot of Europe, first becoming a space of transit and then a space of detainment (Carastathis, Spathopoulou, and Tsilimpounidi, 2018). According to this script, Greece is being constructed as a country of transit; according to this ideology, refugees, prototypically Syrians, urgently seek to pass through on their way to "Europe" (see Kallius, 2019; Spathopoulou and Carastathis, 2020). Transit states that border, or are accessing to the EU have to prove their "Europeanness" in a way that coincides with how asylum applicants are forced to prove their "refugeness".

Abominable conditions in the hotspot and mainland camps (especially Moria, the "largest refugee camp" of Europe in Lesvos) are met with incredulity from western and northern European observers: how can this be happening in Europe? (see Nye, 2018; see Spathopoulou, Carastathis & Tsilimpounidi, 2020 for a discussion). The Eurocentrism and Orientalism in such performative declarations subtends the construction of Greece as a transit space more generally: a crisis-ridden country teetering on the verge of being declared a failed state, which lacks the resources to properly or ethically "welcome refugees". Moreover, the idea behind relocation is, ultimately, tied to the notion of "transit" and the reproduction of certain countries as "spaces of transit" (Stevens, 2019; Kallius, 2019; Osseiran, 2017; Picozza, 2017; Fontanari, 2015). At the same time, it works towards essentializing Greece as a space of exception, as if in other European countries the conditions were more welcoming and safer for asylum seekers, recognised refugees, and undocumented or precaritised migrants, or as if in non-European regions conditions are more hostile and more dangerous. We only need to recount the fact that since 2016, northern European countries such

as Germany and Sweden have decreased dramatically the acceptance rates of asylum applications and have increased the numbers of deportation orders and flights (Burmann & Valeyatheepillay, 2017).
At the same time, countries such as Greece often readily adopt the "identity" of being a country of transit, and premise their migration policies and bordering practices on this contradictory notion: that people forced to seek asylum in Greece (the country of first arrival for those who make the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean passages) aren't really meant to stay here; if they are granted asylum they should be relocated to another European country, whereas if they are denied asylum they should be deported to their country of origin or to another transit country (for instance, Turkey under the EU-Turkey Agreement).

In light of the failed promises to relocate recognised refugees in other European member states, the closure of borders by neighbouring states, and the fraught implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal (particularly the stalling of so-called "returns" from the Greek hotspot islands to Turkey of asylum seekers who arrived after the Deal took effect on March 18, 2016) the five hotspot islands have become transformed into spaces of containment - effectively island prisons - impeding people's movement to the mainland and onward to Europe, rather than efficient infrastructures to facilitate transit. Well-intentioned campaigns advocating evacuating the overcrowded camps, allowing people off the islands, and opening the borders, are often premised on, and take for granted the notion of transit. Discourses of "congestion" and "decongestion" of the islands are articulated both by proponents of refugees' human rights and by ethnonationalist and fascist demagogues who view the mere presence of refugees on Greek territory as anathema to their fantasies of ethnoracial purity and national sovereignty. In contrast to an autonomous notion of mobility, which contests the legitimacy of borders and defends the inalienable right to free movement, discourses that assume people on the move are fundamentally "out of place" draw implicitly or explicitly on the idea of "transit" (particularly as it is articulated from above, as a category of migration management).

The ascribed temporariness of asylum seekers' stay in transit countries (despite the fact that, in reality, they may wait for months, years, or even decades for recognition and relocation) enables a politics of provisionality in relation to states' obligations vis-à-vis people living within their territories as a result of forced migration. This is clearly expressed in the case of Greece with respect to the camp regime and to temporary housing schemes, such as the UNHCR's Estia programme which temporarily houses asylum seekers, that abruptly end when international protection is granted. Thus, "protection" coincides with eviction and homelessness, given the multiple barriers (including structural and interpersonal racism) to securing housing independently, whether by renting apartments in urban centres or squatting abandoned and empty buildings. Thus, even when recognised refugees are given the "right to the ferry" (Spathopoulou 2016) and allowed to travel from a hotspot island to the mainland, they arrive in Athens only to find themselves

homeless (displaced) and in transit (from the port of Piraeus to Victoria Square in central Athens, from benches on the square - removed by authorities to prevent people from finding comfort there - to side streets, with little possibility of securing a fixed address, and subject to police sweeps that result in their forcible re-encampment, this time in a mainland camp.

For transit countries, then, the notion that they have an obligation to integrate refugees into the social fabric and remove barriers of full participation in society and its institutions is bypassed. The temporary "solutions" to meet social needs (housing, education, food, etc.) become permanent, which is to say that they never cease to be temporary, and social needs mainly go unmet. This is clear in the case of education, to which the vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers are in effect, denied access [link to "Greece - HE context" document]. For those people forced to live in camps, encampment itself is a barrier to accessing education. Others, who live in apartments, face structural and interpersonal racism in trying to register their children in neighbourhood schools (their constitutional right and obligation), while their own credentials and previous educational background may be next to impossible to demonstrate in practice - despite the existence of administrative processes such as the European qualifications passport for refugees - to name but one barrier to accessing higher education.

Being "stuck in transit" can also affect people"s capacity to organise politically and to create durable communities of resistance to fight against the violence of these border regimes. However, even within such situations of suspended mobility, moments and spaces of solidarity are created [link to solidarity tool]. Alejandra Diaz (2020) in the case of migrants in transit through Mexico, speaks of a "transient community", a community en route that migrants form in order to facilitate cooperation and solidarity between its members and other migrants who they do not know and do not trust. With a focus on the "messy reality" and the complex dynamics of transit that people on the move"s trajectories within "Europe" reveal, Annastiina Kallius insightfully discusses "solidarity in transit" with which she refers to instances of solidarity in the Hungarian context that escape denominations such as "political" or "humanitarian". She argues, moreover, that when examining solidarity structures, one must pay attention to the different historical and political contexts within Europe. In the case of Greece, for example, when thinking of emerging "solidarities in transit" it is important to reflect on how in 2015-2016, Greece became a space of "destination" for thousands of international volunteers from all over the globe to support the people on the move. And as people seeking asylum gradually found themselves trapped in Greece, solidarians in turn were being criminalized by the state for their actions of support and assistance. In relation to this, we would like to draw attention to the fact that people with a so-called "migrant background" in Greece became part of the solidarity movement and created spaces of solidarity with the people on the move, their own lives in many cases in a permanent state of transit, as their asylum claims or stay applications have been on hold for years, constantly being postponed, or in the best case resolved

through the legal status of "second generation migrants". Such cases of solidarity challenge the state's attempt to undermine coalitional struggles between precaritized groups by dividing and separating them into distinct juridical categories, legal statuses and speeds.

The general point is that the notion of transit traps people in a state of suspended mobility, in a regime of chronic waiting (Kallio, Meier and Hakli, 2020) perpetually "on standby" (De Genova, 2020). Instead of being merely descriptive (as the hegemonic definition implies), the concept of "transit" is thoroughly normative: that is, it functions as a mechanism through which the reality it purports to merely describe it actually brings into material existence. Thus, we suggest that transit countries are those through which people are made to want to "flow", while the European migration regime enforces their being "stuck" there. Indeed, reading between the lines of hegemonic discourses and policy analysis, we might say that what was declared in 2015 as a "refugee crisis" in/by Europe was, in essence, a crisis of transit whereby people on the move asserted their autonomy and freedom of movement, for an all-too-brief window of time disrupting the logic of Fortress Europe.

BRIDGES

This document is part of the BRIDGES Toolkit, a set of tools and strategies for addressing and dismantling structures of exclusion in Higher Education curricula. The Toolkit has been developed in the context of the Erasmus+ project **BRIDGES: Building Inclusive Societies: Diversifying Knowledge and Tackling Discrimination through Civil Society Participation in Universities,** whose working team consists of the following entities:

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