

Undocumented & Under Attack: Pakistani Migrant Workers

With anti-migrant violence on the rise, Pakistani migrants in Greece stand up to neo-Nazis and demand their rights.

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Across [Europe](#), the far-right is on the rise and it has some of the continent's most diverse communities in its crosshairs.

To the [far-right](#), these neighbourhoods are "no-go zones" that challenge their notion of what it means to be European.

To those who live in them, they are Europe. These are their stories.

It is March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and Javied Aslam is preparing for the day ahead.

As the wind rattles through the broken window of his office in Kogia Square, close to the Athens neighbourhood of Omonia, the Pakistani community leader replaces the batteries in his megaphone.

"Testing, testing, 123. Oh yes, it's working," he says.

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He'll be needing it today as he marches through the heart of the Greek capital's South Asian migrant community.

Beginning at the top of Sofokleos Street with its graffitied mobile phone shops, grocery stores and South Asian restaurants, he heads towards Omonia Square, megaphone in hand.

He has a message for those he passes.

"Raise your voices to get your papers, for every immigrant to receive open immigration, to give everyone their rights with honour and dignity," he tells them.

Some stop to shake his hand. Others gather behind him. A banner is unfurled.

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"My brothers, this is the time, so come for your rights, come raise your voice to demand your rights, with dignity. Come, everyone, let's flood into Omonia and demand our rights. Open immigration without conditions, without hurdles," he says.

By the time he reaches the other end of Sofokleios Street, there are 40 men behind him - migrant workers from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. This is their community - a bustling marketplace where everything is for sale, including stolen phones and bikes, and where nobody asks for papers or residency permits, and they are Javied's army. He speaks and they follow. But it hasn't always been like this.

When Javied first left Pakistan for [Greece](#) in 1996, his dream was to continue his education in the birthplace of democracy.

But over the past 20 years, he has seen the country struggle through a crippling economic crisis. And as Greece has suffered, the climate for migrant workers has worsened. Across the country, there have been reports of them being cheated, exploited and attacked.



Across Greece, migrant workers have been exploited and attacked [Nick Paleologos/Al Jazeera]

In helping them, Javied has found his calling. As the leader of the Union of Immigrant Workers, he pursues justice for victims of attacks, mediates between employers and employees and provides support to his community.

Among the people he has helped was Ashfaq Mahmood, [a migrant farm worker beaten unconscious](#) by a group of armed men in October 2017.

Javied knows that his is not an easy task. He is defending the rights of some of the most vulnerable, a role that comes with its own dangers and could make him a target for the country's violent far-right groups.

Source: Al Jazeera