

Fragile Lifelines: Organized Refugee Transportation and Rescue Missions since the 1930s

November 6-7, 2025

Joint conference of the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam (ZZF) and the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies (MMZ)



Venue:

Open Space, ZZF Potsdam, Am Neuen Markt 1, Potsdam (the public panel on Thursday evening takes place at: MMZ, Am Neuen Markt 8)

Organisers and contact:

Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş (ZZF), carolin.liebisch@zzf-potsdam.de
Phone/WhatsApp/Threema: +49 (0) 176 81636922

Julia Kleinschmidt (MMZ), julia.kleinschmidt@uni-potsdam.de
Phone/WhatsApp: +49 (0) 171 4185347

Hotel:

Mercure Hotel Potsdam City
Lange Brücke, 14467 Potsdam
From Potsdam Main Station, walk across the bridge toward *Alter Markt*.
The tall building at the waterfront on your left is the hotel.
Phone: +49 (0) 331 272424

Image: Arrival of Cuban refugees on a Freedom Flight, May 25, 1970, Gort Photo Studio, Lydia Cabrera Papers, Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2025

2.00 pm | Arrival and coffee

2.15 pm | Welcome and opening

3.00 – 5.00 pm | Panel 1

Chair: Isabella Löhr (ZZF Potsdam)

Eike Klages (EUI Florence): Organised Transports as an Argument for Restrictionism: The Case of Vietnamese “Boat People” 1978/1979

Julia Kleinschmidt (MMZ Potsdam): Resettlement as Symbolic Acts. Invited Refugees and Anti-immigration Politics in the Netherlands during the 1970s

Frank Bösch (ZZF Potsdam): Airlift for Socialist Refugees? West Germany and Chile’s opposition in the 1970/80s

Coffee break

5.30 – 7.00 pm | Public conversation: Maritime Rescue and the Politics of Refugee Evacuations with Annika Schlingheider (United4Rescue e.V./ Terre des Hommes) and Clemens Nagel (Sea Watch e.V.) at the MMZ, Am Neuen Markt 8

For the past ten years, Clemens Nagel from Sea Watch e.V. and Seebrücke Potsdam has been sailing on rescue missions in the Mediterranean. Annika Schlingheider, a member of United4Rescue and an expert for flight and migration at Terre des Hommes, has also taken part in several rescue missions herself. With this public panel, we would like to broaden our perspective as historians toward the present and discuss recent developments in migration politics, (sea) rescue missions, escape routes, and the evolution of "Fortress Europe" over the past decade.

8.00 pm | Dinner (for official participants)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025

9.00 – 10.00 am | Virtual Keynote by Peter Adey (Monash University, Melbourne)

10.15 – 11.45 am | Panel 2

Chair: Kerstin von Lingen (University of Vienna)

Dolores Augustine (St. John’s University New York): The Voyage of the S.S. Sinaia to Mexico: Rescuing Spanish Refugees in 1939

Tobias Brinkmann (Pennsylvania State University): “Liberty Trains”: The Evacuation of Jewish DPs from Shanghai 1949/50 via Ellis Island to Israel and West Germany

Light lunch snack and coffee

12.30 – 2.00 pm | Panel 3

Chair: Lisa Sophie Gebhard (MMZ Potsdam)

Lena Christoph & Konstantin Schischka (University of Vienna): Urgency and Selectivity. The Airborne Evacuation of Russian Emigres from Shanghai to the Philippines, 1949

Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş (ZZF Potsdam): Humanitarian Take-offs: The Emergence of Refugee Airlifts from the Post-war Years into the Cold War

2.00 – 2.30 pm | Wrap-up discussion