Press kit

SHADOW GAME

Directors: Eefje Blankevoort & Els van Driel
Producer: Witfilm
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Logline

Shadow Game is a journey through the dark side of Europe with teenage refugees as our guides.

Synopsis

Everyday teenagers who have fled their war-torn countries try to cross Europe’s borders in search of protection and a better life. They travel through a shadow world we never see: a world of minefields, bears, fast-flowing rivers, smugglers and border guards. ‘The game’ is the bitterly ironic term for crossing borders that has become commonplace among these young refugees. Risking their lives, the teenagers undertake a treacherous journey that often takes months or even years. Along the way, they grow up fast. Shadow Game (89 min) is a journey through the dark side of Europe with teenage refugees as our guides.

Shadow Game is an experimentally filmed account of the far-reaching consequences of European asylum policy. Now fences have gone up all over Europe, seeking asylum has become almost impossible. The teenagers cross snowy landscapes and meet aggressive border police on their way. Reaching their final destination has become more difficult than ever. Their journey takes them through the whole of Europe: from Greece to North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, from Italy to France and The Netherlands. The film was shot over a period of three years, partly by the main characters themselves on their phones.

Durrab (16 from Pakistan) tries to cross the 152-km-long double fence on the border of Serbia and Hungary. In Greece, 15-year-old Afghan ‘SK’ is just at the beginning of his journey. All over Europe, we meet kids who have already tried uncountable times to do ‘the game’ and are now stuck, like Iranian Mo, Pakistani Yaseen, Afghan Fouad and Iraqi Mustafa.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syrian Hammoudi, at 14 the youngest of them all, recounts his attempt to pass the ‘last level’. In the same camp, brothers Jano (18) and Shiro (15) from Syria are preparing for their final move. Meanwhile in Ventimiglia, Faiz (17) from Darfur is doubting whether to try to cross into France once again.

Shadow Game is a mosaic story in which the experiences of many young refugees on the road are forged together into one universal tale: a modern Odyssey. Will they overcome the numerous obstacles they face? And will they find a new home?
General information

Title: Shadow Game
International title: Shadow Game
Spoken Languages: Kurdish, Arabic, Pashto, Farsi, English
Subtitles: English
Genre: Documentary
Country of origin: The Netherlands
Release date: March 5, 2021
World premiere: Movies that Matter, the Netherlands
European premiere: FIDFH, Switzerland
Production company: Witfilm, in cooperation with Prospektor
Dutch broadcaster: KRO-NCRV
Financed by: The Netherlands Film Fund, NPO-fonds, CoBO, UNHCR Netherlands
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Official Pages
Website: www.shadowgame.eu
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/shadowgamefilm
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/shadowgamefilm/

Screener Link

Film link English subs 90’: https://vimeo.com/471353512
Password: SG2020

Link trailer English subs: https://vimeo.com/514264176
Credits

Directors: Eefje Blankevoort
Els van Driel

Director of photography: Ton Peters nsc

Editor: Patrick Schonewille

Sound: Els van Driel
Eefje Blankevoort

Research: Zuhoor al Qaisi
Eefje Blankevoort
Els van Driel

Composer: Rui Reis Maia

Sound Design & Mixage: Mark Glynne
Tom Bijnen

Colour Grading: John Thorborg

Producer Witfilm: Iris Lammertsma

Creative Producer Witfilm: Boudewijn Koole

Executive Producer Witfilm: Femke de Wild
Nazima Mintjes

Commissioning Editor KRO-NCRV: Jelle Peter de Ruiter

Data Handling & Postproduction: FeverFilm

Subtitles: inVision Ondertiteling BV

Graphics & Titles: Studio MiNSK

Design Poster: Susanne Keilhack

Impact Campaign: Prospektor
This film was supported by
the Netherlands Film Fund, NPO Fund, CoBO, UNHCR Netherlands

Shadow Game is a production of Witfilm in co-production with KRO-NCRV and in collaboration with Prospektor

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Biography Eefje Blankevoort

Eefje Blankevoort (1978) studied History at the University of Amsterdam. Between 2002 and 2006 she regularly spent time in Iran where she studied, compiled an archive for the International Institute of Social History and worked on her book Stiekem kan hier alles (You can do anything here in secret). Since then, Eefje has developed into an all-rounder in journalism, writing articles and books, as well as creating interactive projects, exhibitions and documentary films. She is co-founder and director of documentary production agency Prospektor.
Biography Els van Driel

Els van Driel (Alkmaar, 1976) is an independent crossmedia journalist and director. She studied art history and social-cultural theology at the University of Amsterdam. She worked for almost 13 years for the Dutch Ecumenical Broadcasting company IKON television where she learned the skills and crafts of television- and documentary making. At IKON she initiated the award-winning youth documentary series ‘Just Kids’ (aka ‘Mensjesrechten’); a series about children’s rights, which is broadcast in several countries around Europe on television and is shown at film festivals around the globe.

Filmography Eefje Blankevoort

Film
*In production*

**2021**  
*Shadow Game*: Feature length documentary, a 'coming of age story', a 'coming of age story’ about child migrants who are trying to find their way through Europe.
The Dress: A four-part documentary series about a mystical find in the Wadden Sea. Two beautiful, glamorous 17th century gowns are found in an old shipwreck. Who did these dresses belong to? Why did the ship sink? Structured as a detective series, The Dress tells the story of a dozen of scientists who approach the archaeological treasure as a crime scene and try to find out whodunnit.

Film
Realized

The Deal: The EU Turkey deal: human act or devil's pact? 55 min documentary about the EU's Asylum Policy. (2Doc, IKON/EO) Premiere March 2018.


The Art of Travel: documentary about artist Rolf Weijburg, slow travel and slow art. (40 min) RTV Utrecht.

Bring the Jews home: 55-minute documentary about a Christian zealot aiming to ‘bring home all the Jews’ to hasten the second coming of Christ. Research, script and co-direction with Arnold van Bruggen. (IKON, JvdWfilm / Prospektor, Breng de Joden thuis (55 min, IKON/EO) Gouden Kalf competitie 2016, DocLeipzig, Hotdocs etc.

New: youth documentary about 8 years old Tanans, a resettled refugee from Congo. For NCRV Dokument Junior.

Awards
DOXS!, 2014 – Honorable Mention
Children’s Film Festival Seattle, 2015 – Best Short Documentary
Mo & Friese Children’s Short Film Festival, 2015 – Mo-Award (Best Short Documentary – 9-12-year-olds)
Prix Jeunesse UNESCO Special Prize

Nominations
Nederlands Film Festival, 2014 – Debuut Competitie
DocumentART, 2104 – European Competition
IDFA, 2014 – Kids & Docs Award
Prix Jeunesse International
Prix Jeunesse UNESCO Special Prize

Interactive documentaries

*In production*

2020  Shadow Game: Interactive web documentary series, a ‘coming of age story’ about child migrants who are trying to find their way through Europe.

*Realised*

2018  The Migrant: based on a true bird story. Interactive documentary about the Javan Mynah is a story about a bird’s remarkable life course, a story about how we deal with animals, the city's makeability and our attempt to shape an ideal society. At the same time, the story is a metaphor for our relationship with 'The Migrant'. Together with newspaper Trouw. Launch Spring 2018. [https://migrant.nu](https://migrant.nu)

2017  The Holy Road: Together with newspaper NRC Handelsblad. The Holy Road is an interactive web documentary about the people who live – with and alongside each other – along the ‘holiest’ but also most contested road through Israel and Palestine: Route 60. [www.theholyroad.org](http://www.theholyroad.org)

Propaganda by the people: Propaganda by the People is a crowdsourced animation project, that challenges people to think about their European identity. [www.propagandabythepeople.eu](http://www.propagandabythepeople.eu)

2015-2016  The Asylum Search Engine: a cross-media project that investigates the complex world of Dutch asylum policy and offers citizens an opportunity to think along. It consisted of a series of events and meetings, exhibitions, an online documentary, a TV documentary and two radio documentaries. Nomination Gouden Kalf 2016 Netherlands Film Festival, nomination Silver Camera. Winner Dutch Director’s Guild. [www.asielzoekmachine.nl](http://www.asielzoekmachine.nl)

www.loveradio-rwanda.org


Filmography Els van Driel

Longer documentaries
Research, script and co-direction

2020  Shadow game, 90” (co-direction) (KRO-NCRV)

2017  The Deal, 55 “(co-direction) (2Doc IKONdocs / EO)

2016  2Doc - The Asylum Search Machine Europe, 55”(co-direction) (IKONdocs / EO)

2015-2016  De Asielzoekmachine (co-direction): cross-media project; web documentary, exhibitions, debates and publications on Dutch asylum policy. 

Direction of youth documentaries/ shorts

2020  Jano & Shiro: a brother’s journey (co-direction)
Durrab’s Labyrinth: (co-direction)

Youth documentaries in the series "Mensjesrechten/Just Kids"

2020  This is Me: premiere at Movies That Matter, Beholders documentary filmfestival.
Director’s statement

Shadow Game is a film by directors Eefje Blankevoort and Els van Driel, made in close cooperation with colleague-journalist, researcher and translator Zuhoor al Qaisi. For the last four years they have been all over Europe together, meeting teenagers who are trying to cross borders in order to find safety and documenting their stories. They didn’t know the subjects before they met them on location. They were, however, in close contact with grassroots organizations on the ground, often self-help migrant/refugee groups. To explain their intentions and ask for permission they would contact the parent(s) or an adult relative in the countries of origin or in a third country. They stayed in touch with the subjects and their relatives through messenger and WhatsApp from the moment they met until now, which in some cases has been for over three years.
Eefje and Els have been working with refugees and refugee-communities for many years.

Inclusivity, ownership over one’s own story and co-creation is very important for them. Therefore, they always work together with the subjects their films are about and the communities they come from. For example, for their transmedia project *The Asylum Search Machine* ([www.asielzoekmachine.nl](http://www.asielzoekmachine.nl)), about the Dutch asylum system, they cooperated closely with artists, photographers, moderators, panelists and others, all with a refugee background. The same goes for *Shadow Game*, in which they involve advisors with a refugee background who become part of the team. They wanted to tell the story from the perspective of the boys. Some of the subjects - Kurdish Jano and Afghani SK - had already started vlogging and making videos of their journey with their own mobile phones. They shared their material with the directors. After meeting with the filmmakers, they would often send updates on their situations. This material is included in the film.

The filmmakers also have a longstanding connection with the countries of origin and cultures these youngsters come from. Eefje has worked and lived in Iran, understands Iranian culture and speaks Farsi. She knows many Iranians who have been forced to flee their country over the last decades and could therefore easily interact with the many Iranians they met on the road. Because Dari and Farsi are quite similar languages, she could also connect with the Afghan people they met. Being the daughter of an asylum-lawyer, Els has always been in close contact with refugees and appreciates the sensitivity of their stories and identities. As a documentary maker she specializes in making films about children’s rights from a child’s perspective and therefore has worked a lot with children and youngsters around the globe in dire circumstances. Researcher and translator Zuhoor al Qaisi worked as a journalist in Iraq. In 2015 she was forced to flee to the Netherlands. Zuhoor connected with Els and Eefje through a colleague-journalist and they have worked together since, first on their film *The Deal* about the EU-Turkey deal and now on *Shadow Game*. Zuhoors experience, both as a refugee and as a journalist, her empathy and commitment were essential in connecting and maintaining contact with the Arabic speaking subjects in the film.

**Biography Witfilm**

Witfilm is the production company of director Boudewijn Koole and producer Iris Lammertsma. On the one hand, Witfilm focuses on creative, social and youth documentaries, its key assets being concept development and intensive coaching of filmmakers, resulting in innovative, visually powerful films of artistic nature dealing with subjects that are thought-provoking at all times. Documentary directors Witfilm works with are a.o. Oeke Hoogendijk, Coco Schrijber and Frank Scheffer. On the other hand, Witfilm focuses on developing and
producing art house films by directors who have a strong personal signature, as Boudewijn Koole, Marjoleine Boonstra, Saskia Boddeke and Peter Greenaway. Witfilm (co-) produces both nationally and internationally. Many of Witfilm’s films have been nominated for awards like Rose d’Or, Tiger Award and IDFA (several competitions) or have won awards like the International Emmy Award, FIPRESCI, Prix Europa, Golden Calf and Prix Italia. Awarded productions include the feature length documentaries Dance or Die, My Father’s Choice, Zaatari Djinn, Transit Havana, Bring the Jews Home, Inside the Chinese Closet, Battles and Happily Ever After, the youth documentary New and the dance film Off Ground. By making high quality and visually exciting films, Witfilm aims at contributing to a thriving film sector (inter)nationally.
Stills