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"You cannot withdraw assistance to people in precarious conditions"

Conversation with Alexandra Bogos and Oceane Juchet from the [Mobile Info Team](#) in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Alexandra is the coordinator and Oceane legal adviser for migrants there.

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Alexandra

I'm Romanian and I have been in Greece for two and a half years. I have worked on Lesbos, Samos and now for two months in Thessaloniki.

Oceane

I'm from France and I'm a case worker for Mobile Info Team in Thessaloniki, too. It's been six months.

Homeless people are being fined because of their movement

A: During the Corona the Corona-time they imposed the restrictions of movement which became stricter and stricter. Meaning that people cannot move without sending either a message or having a form where they explain the reasons of their movement. The forms are only in English and Greece making it difficult for refugees to move around, to get to their basic needs like food and shelter. Specifically in the urban area of Thessaloniki we have many cases of homeless persons, homeless migrants, who have been fined and because they hadn't sent a message or they didn't fill in a form. That has been really worrying. And for people in the camp they can still move theoretically but they have to justify their movement. So if they leave the camp to go to the supermarket for example they still don't know how to make use of this messaging and this form and they have some support from organizations in the camp but not enough. So it happens often that they are fined as well.

People who are going to food distributions are being fined by the police

O: Also, what is important to know is this camp, Diavata, is like twenty minutes away from Thessaloniki - so all the people that are not registered they cannot access the food. So the only organization at the moment working with food distribution is called Filoxenia and they work in Thessaloniki. So the people have to come to town, twenty minutes far away from the camp, to get food every day. So in this way, many police officers are waiting for them to give them a fine and they have not any other options than coming because they

don't have money, so they have to come to the city to go to the food distribution. And most of them, really most of them, they don't have a phone. So the camp is only giving paper authorization to the ones registered. They don't explain to the others that they can also fill out a paper explaining like "I go for this reason ...".



So me personally, I'm a case worker for Mobile Info Team: so what changed [due to Corona] is that everything is done remotely. First on the practical level - so with the interpreters, it's very complicated to get in touch with the interpreters and with the people and to be able to answer as many questions as I can every day. Regarding the questions it is of course more

confusion for the people because for them it is very, very difficult to get proper information because they cannot access the organizations anymore like they used to do. So we are becoming one of the main information provider in Greece.

A: We used to travel to the camps, nearby camps, and give legal information directly to the people. Now we are not able to do that because we are restricted. We used to also do trainings for volunteers functioning in other camps and we can't do that either. The same issue with interpreting - so for example we have been always collecting testimonies for different issues such as lack of accommodation in Thessaloniki or push-backs from the borders and we cannot interact neither with the person nor with the interpreter, making it very difficult to collect information. And then, obviously as an organization, we can not recruit anymore, so we are lacking staff and we cannot bring in new staff which of course makes our work more difficult and more exhausting.

There is a lot of stress because there is a lot of confusion

O: There is a lot more confusion. First, people from the camps in general. The last month, in the beginning of the crisis, it was a lot, a lot of stress regarding the situation because they knew they were not in good conditions to follow the measures. They knew that a lot of people were dying, they didn't know exactly what was exactly the virus - what were the consequences, who was in real danger. In general, it is a lot of stress regarding the procedures because with the closure of the asylum office it is for all the people whose

documents expired or the people who were supposed to do their interviews for the expired documents... - "am I getting in trouble?" because it is not clear even though there was an official announcement, they are still stressed about it, of course, because they know how is the situation in Greece and that any excuse is used to cause trouble for the people - for that, for the interviews they are like: "What is going to happen, when am I going to get it? When are the asylum offices going to reopen?" So: many, many questions.

The minister of migration shamelessly said people have to stay in the camps

A: On top of that they just put very vulnerable people in precarious situations in a more precarious situation. Because of course organizations functioning in the camp limited their services. A lot of services were withdrawn. The police also forbade the organizations to deliver certain things or limited them from doing so. And I want to mention that the minister of migration Mitarachi has also shamelessly said that the same way people have to stay at home people have to stay in camps - as a political statement, which is very worrisome because people in camps cannot stay in camps when they have to get their basic necessities from outside or when they depend on organizations to be provided with basic necessities.

O: That is also another source of confusion. So for instance the camps were in strict lockdown, like for instance Ritsona, or Malakasa at the moment, or in Larissa. So they announced 14 days of complete lockdown. So they have this fourteen days of complete lockdown, then the curfew measures, then the asylum office - like many dates - and they are all completely, completely lost: What is happening to them? What are they able to do? How is their future going to be like? So everything adds to another thing.

A: I can definitely say that you cannot withdraw assistance to people in precarious conditions. You can do it in an organized and safe way, both for the providers and the people who are being provided with something but you cannot just withdraw it because there is an emergency situation. On the contrary, people in precarious situations will be in a worse state in cases of emergency if all services are withdrawn.

O: To deal urgently with vulnerable people at least temporarily - to move them to safe places, for them to not be the first targets for the virus, then to deal with the situation of people who cannot follow the measures as homeless people, urgently as well.

A: And to annul all the fines for homeless persons and to instruct the police to stop fining homeless persons, especially when they have documents stating that they are homeless.

O: And also to stop - which adds to the confusion - to make announcement like "Ok, we're gonna do that, we're gonna do that, we're gonna do that!", and then there is nothing afterwards. Like for instance, I would just take the concrete example: The asylum office, when they announced their closure, they said: "In a few

days we are going to announce how it is going to work afterwards, more or less." But since one month no announcements from the asylum office. So either you do an announcement and you say: "We do that" - and you do it or you don't say anything because it adds to the whole situation.

A: I mean, how is the asylum service going to deal with all the interviews that did not take place? With all the registrations pending? With all the expired documents? There is no official announcement as to how they will deal with it fairly considering the fact that there are so many people waiting. Will this people who had their interviews cancelled go at the end of the list and wait for an additional of two years to continue their asylum procedure?

The interview was conducted by Imke Behrendts.

More information

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