



May 20, 2020

"If people are left in a camp, where no one has access to, and no one inside has information, it means that there is no protection of their rights"

Conversation with Natasha from the [Legal Centre Lesbos](#), a NGO that provides legal aid to refugees on the island. Natasha works from Athens and is also specialised for the Dublin procedures.

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People were kept, turning the open camps into closed camps

The situation was very difficult before, so together with the Corona virus, access has been denied, people were kept, actually turning the open camps into closed camps. So these people were left all together with high risk. It is a very very difficult and very questionable way how these people were treated during the Corona virus. They were completely mistreated I would say, and not equally taken care of their rights to protect their health.

The asylum office is shut down at the moment. It is not clear when they will operate again. So what they are still doing is issuing decisions - again in a very questionable way - where people can go in front of the asylum office and be informed about the decision - but they don't have a way to appeal against these decisions. After the asylum office will operate again, it will be a chaos, because many many people will have many requests. They will need to appeal their negative decisions within a very small timeframe. There are people that have been unregistered for a long time, they will lose their right for Dublin, for family reunification. There are unaccompanied minors waiting to register so they can go to their families in Europe. And this combined with a new law that came into force on the 1st of January with very strict deadlines and obstacles in assessing the asylum office and appealing negative and unfair procedures.



I think the solution would be to immediately evacuate the islands. This has been an ongoing demand for years. But now it will be even more urgent to implement.

If people are left in a camp no one has access to, no one can defend them

We are very busy in advocating within this time, because we need to make sure that people stay visible and not being completely invisible. Because this is also something that happens due to the new law and due to the situation. If people are left in a camp no one has access to, no one has information, it means that there is no protection of their rights, and so no one can defend them. Our aim was to monitor, to still be there for them, to try to be in communication through WhatsApp, through emails, to be aware of the situation, the problems and to give the people the voice; and also, wherever possible, to visit people in detention, to try to get cases for litigation.

You cannot apply rules of social distancing when you have overcrowded camps

The focus was to protect the general population, and not so much on the population within the camps. The camps, as I said before, they were kind of left alone, like you cannot apply rules of social distancing when you have overcrowded camp. You cannot speak about hygiene rules, washing hands, being careful all the time and wearing masks when there are no products available for the people to be able to protect themselves. So there is a contradictory situation. There should have been other solutions they didn't implement, and I don't think they were really interested in implementing measures that would cost money and need effort at this moment.

The interview was conducted by Imke Behrends.

More information

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