

NEWBORNS LIVING ON WOODEN PALLETS, SUCH IS THE REALITY OF THE REFUGEES OF 44 NATIONALITIES ON THE ISLAND LESBOS

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Abstract: This short article is about an ongoing crisis on the Greek Island, Lesbos. We are presented with the problems of migrants living there, such as poverty, mental illnesses and inability to get a job. It appears that this problem might be unsolvable but the solution to it is not as hard as it seems to be.

Key words: Lesbos; trap; overpopulation; Moria camp; conflicts; misery

The island of Lesbos continues to face a humanitarian crisis. It is the third largest island of Greece and one of five faced with a massive inflow of refugees. The island is just a few kilometres away from the Turkish border in the Aegean Sea. This makes it an ideal „transfer station“ on the way to the longed-for continental Europe.

Migrants cross hundreds, sometimes thousands of dangerous, even life-threatening miles to get to this place. The only problem - they get trapped here. Lesbos is mainly a trap by virtue of its geography. Four hundred kilometres of sea separate it from the mainland, apart from the sea of administrative obstacles.

If they obtain a permit for free movement on the island, the situation doesn't change for them one bit. They wait, pending their asylum request is processed, without being able to get a job. And even if they could, where would they work on this overcrowded island? They live, survive, stressed over both the past and the future. Some live like this for days, some wait for years. Not even humanitarian workers can

tell us how the authorities assess asylum requests. Volunteers speak of chaos, baffled migrants of corruption.

120 000 people inhabit the entirety of the island. (FRELAK J. S. et al., 2017) Migrants officially account for 10 000 people - 7000 in the Moria camp, three thousand roam the island freely. These are, however, official figures, the number is closer to 15 thousand. Moria camp surpassed its capacities long ago, by 50 per cent. People are often crammed by tens inside refurbished shipping containers.

Those who cannot fit into the containers have to improvise. They live among olive trees, in makeshift tents made of blankets. These „dwellings“ are only referred to as „the jungle.“ The tent can fit as many as 15 people, newborns, pregnant women and the elderly sleep on wooden pallets. The rest sleeps on the ground. They are burdened with a lack of water, low-quality food and frequent conflicts caused by the chaotic distribution of refugees, without ethnicity or religion being taken into consideration. During the several days of work alongside a Slovak doctor Tomáš Šimonek and a nurse Mária Jackulíková, we counted over 44 nationalities among the refugees. Shiites have conflicts with Sunnis, Afghans with Arabs, white people

with black people, people with good manners with those without. Police is generally peaceful during resolutions of such conflicts. Tensions between these desperate people, however, rise day by the day.

Besides the shot wounds, ostentatious suicide attempts and inflamed lesions from insect and rodent bites, people are plagued by many psychological conditions: PTSD, depression, anxieties and phobias.

At the same time, they are aware that here they don't need to fear death or famine and that basic healthcare is provided for free, in contrast to their country of origin. There are few doctors, even fewer psychologists. More often than not, we encountered sighs of desperation: “I wish I had better ended up on the seafloor than to experience this misery”. Besides providing healthcare for migrants, UNHCR pays out 90 euros per month, meant to cover basic living expenses. That money then often ends up in the hands of families who did not manage to run away.

„There are none,“ a local Greek soldier answered, shoulders raised in reaction to the cautious question. It would be foolish to criticize the Greek or Turkish governments without devising systemic solutions for the whole of the EU. The

pressure on the buffer states is immense. Retention of refugees in Turkey or in Greece, quotas, repatriations nor segregation are not solutions.

Since the Great Migration crisis broke out, Europe showed humanity several times by saving the lives of scores of refugees. This we can be rightfully proud of. The thing we should be less proud of is our negligence over the dignity of people, who survived the horrors of war, persecution and the treacherous road to safety and a better life. We let newborns with pregnant women and the elderly sleep on wooden pallets, under makeshift shelters in an area full of conflict. The European Union already took several steps towards their protection a few years ago. It sends billions of euros to Turkey, which curbed the flow of migrants to 41 720 migrants. 352 fewer people died in 2017 than before. (WHO, 2019) However, this still means that 62 people die per year just on this route. When we asked Tomáš and Mária for some systemic changes, they proposed one, smiling: “The majority of Europeans consider themselves Christians. We should then start behaving like ones, like true Christians.”

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