



NGOs on the island of Samos-Greece: “Passage from Turkey is not a safe”

Everyday new refugees arrive on the island. But the so called hot-spot on the Greek island of Samos already harbors many more refugees than is possible. Both established NGOs, such as Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and the volunteers on the island, who fund their actions for the refugees with their own money, are very concerned. There are shortages for every necessity.

“Look”, says 11 year old Mohamed, showing us his bleeding index finger. We stand in front of the hot-spot near Samos City, the islands capital, talking to Elsa, one of the volunteers of the independent network Samos Volunteers. He has cut his finger on the barbed wire that completely surrounds the camp. With his long hair and slender looks he almost looks like girl of about eight years old. Innocent. But his eyes tell a different story. They have seen more than they should have.

Laying our eyes on the camp for the first time, it is difficult to grasp what we see. Is this a refugee camp? The camp looks more like a well guarded prison, enclosed by steel fences and barbed wire. Behind the fences men sitting and children playing, sometimes hitting each other and yelling at each other. Frustrated. “I need to talk to you”, a man shouts at us, waving his arms. “We have a baby here. She is only 4 months old. She is not vaccinated and now she has difficulties breathing. She needs help!” We don’t know what to do with this information and decide to inform MSF.

Rough treatment

MSF is present in Samos City since October 2015, even though the organization has left the camp, together with the other NGOs, in protest, after the EU struck a deal with Turkey. In their eyes the deal is shameless, a political solution at the cost of people who are seeking refuge from a war. “The passage from Turkey is not safe” says

Julien Delozanne, spokesman of MSF. "Refugees tell us that they have been beaten at the Turkish border. Boats of the Turkish coast guard circle the boats with refugees, causing them to capsize. The Turks treat the refugees very roughly indeed."

Julien confirms there is a shortage of vaccines against measles, mumps and rubella. MSF cannot import vaccines without permission of the Greek government. "This government has its own agenda", he says. Besides they try to discourage refugees as much as possible hoping they will text their family and friends about the discomforts of the present situation.

'Discomforts' is actually an understatement. At this moment there are more than 1000 refugees in a camp that was built for 780 people. Since January, 600 new refugees arrived everyday, however Julien estimates the number of new arrivals since the Turkey-deal at 60 per week. In accordance with the Greek laws on asylum, Syrian refugees receive a pass allowing them to leave the camp after 25 days. But where can they go? They have no money to build up a new life. Also they are not allowed to leave Greece until they are granted asylum. According to procedures that takes 3 months from the moment they have submitted their request. Most of the refugees rely on the camp for food and a place to sleep, even after their 25 day detention period has passed. "In summer it will be 40 degrees making it unbearable to stay in the containers and tents in the camp", Julien tells, "The hot spot will turn into a cesspool of bad hygiene and disease." Also there will be a shortage of drinking water. Previously MSF would await all the refugees in the harbor telling them where to go for provisions. Nowadays they select only the ill and women who are expecting or have just delivered a baby. The organization has created a shelter in a hotel. At the end of May the hotel accommodated 50 refugees, however the organization tries to realize facilities for more than 200 people with specific medical need. "The health situation in the camp is very bad. Babies that arrive in good health end up in hospital within a month. One of the causes is the food, which is not healthy. Macaroni, macaroni, everyday macaroni." With Ramadan on the horizon, the situation is bound to get worse. "Food delivery times will not be adjusted. Muslims will have to eat their meals cold. With soaring temperatures and no fridge, health risks will increase."



Extremely worrying

Despite the impressive number of organizations present on Samos there are quite a few gaps in the aid offered to refugees. Samos Volunteers ([HTTPS://samosvolunteers.wordpress.com](https://samosvolunteers.wordpress.com)), a surprisingly well coordinated independent organization of volunteers, fills those gaps. They take care of the distribution of non-foods such as

tents, clothing, toys and diapers and they organize the necessary distraction for the refugees such as language lessons (among others French, Arabic and English) They also coordinate lessons in the arts, theater and music that are taught by refugees. Recently they have started to hygienically prepare a limited array of baby foods which they also distribute. They have promoted the dialogue between the NGOs and the dialogue between NGOs and volunteers. Finally they have started up a form of community building within the camp, stimulating groups and people of the same nationality to perform communal duties.

The number of volunteers changes all the time. However, Bogdan Cristian Andrei (31, from Romania) and Alba Chenard (28, from Spain) are a constant in the group. Every morning they enter the camp going into and the tents and containers to talk to the refugees, asking them what they need. Shoes, sanitary napkins? In the afternoon they return from the warehouse where tents from MSF can be found and other goods, donated by the Greeks and other sponsors. "At this moment we have 14 volunteers, says Alba, "but that number can be different next week. In April there were only 3 of us. Actually we are constantly looking for volunteers." And also for financial support. The volunteers pay the costs for their stay on the island themselves and sometimes they don't even have money to buy gasoline to drive to the camp.

"I believe that every person is entitled to a basic level of provisions such as good health care and that everybody should be treated with dignity", says Alba. "The deal the EU struck with Turkey does not reflect those values at all." Both Alba and Bogdan are horrified by the way Europe deals with the refugee crisis. Their advise to Dutch members of parliament: "Before you strike a deal that has such an impact on peoples lives you need to come over and verify what the situation really is like. You need to be aware of all the consequences. The rights established in international treaties should be respected, also in the case of these refugees. The deal with Turkey does not respect those rights and is based on the wrong idea of the situation. That is extremely worrying."

You can contribute too!

Samos Volunteers needs your help. Financially or as a volunteer. They always need extra hands. Please visit them on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Samos-Volunteers-565209816990516/?fref=ts>

You can donate them with your credit card: <https://www.gofundme.com/samos4refugees/donate>

Or directly via the bank account of Bogdan Andrei, under notation 'Samos Volunteers':

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