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## WINTERISATION AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SAMOS: FIVE YEARS ON AND THE JUNGLE IS STILL THERE

Winter has begun. Our governments have had at least five years to prepare for it, and to align the current EU migration policy to the fundamental value of *human dignity*. And yet tens of thousands of people all over Europe are obliged to endure the cold season mostly unsheltered.

For the people living in overcrowded camps on the Aegean islands of Greece, this means facing a long season of hardship and hazards. Overcrowded camps are the worst possible places to accommodate the 19,500+ asylum seekers, families with children and elderly people, who are confined there (1). Let alone offer them decent refuge and recover. Let alone protect them from the low temperatures and wet of winter.

From here, on Samos island, future scenarios are dismal to say the least. The health conditions of camp residents were already a major cause of concern, even before the arrival of the cold weather—and long before the “mere” threat of the spread of Covid-19 among the almost 4,000 residents of the RIC and the so-called Jungle.

The makeshift settlements on Samos’ hills are utterly unequipped and unprepared for protecting people from the cold and the heavy rains that are already hitting the island.

Life in these conditions is burdened by mental anguish and material deprivation, marked by time-consuming queues and exhausting waits for meal distributions. Snakes, rats and all sorts of pests infest the hill area, where waste management—in spite of the great efforts from NGOs and the community in the camp—is not sufficient for the disproportionate resident population and the lack of structures. Chemical toilets and handmade latrines are the only hygienic structures accessible (2). This is outrageous and unacceptable: the “hotspot” is simply not a place for humans to live in.

Now that winter is here, add the increased needs for proper shelter to this pre-existing deprivation: blankets, sleeping bags, gloves, scarves, hats, shoes, warm clothes are the rarest and most essential commodities. Many organisations, right now, are trying to provide these necessities to the best of their capabilities: so far, a “winter pack” distribution has been achieved, while tarps and other winter items are going to be distributed as well—thanks to the efforts of *A Drop in the Ocean*, *Refugees4Refugees*, *Movement on The Ground* and many others (3, 4). Coronavirus restrictions hinder NGOs’ abilities to offer a proper winter clothes distribution, or even just a warm refuge like it used to be *Samos Volunteers’* Alpha Centre.

It is not enough. And it cannot be enough. The fault is systematic and structural, and it cannot be resolved by the combined efforts of humanitarian actors. People in the Jungle cannot even access a hot shower nor running water, they have no heating and scarce electricity.

Our stand is simple: *we stand for the dignity of every human being*. And we have to acknowledge that now—in these circumstances—what this means is that we need the whole “hotspot approach” to be dismantled, and that we want all people coming into Europe to be *safely welcomed* in proper houses and proper conditions.

The EU has all the power and resources to change its migration policy and to move beyond the inhumane and shameful practice of massive camp reception. We need to see *real* international protection and a *concrete* right to asylum. We have needed it for the past five years.

This is not just about moral obligations, or good intentions and sentiments: *human dignity* is one of the core values of our European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights (5).

If we accept any kind of compromise on our fundamental values, it means that we *do not have* fundamental values.

Signatories: Samos Volunteers

A Drop in the Ocean/Dråpen i Havet

Glocal Roots

