

Dear Commission President, Ms Ursula von der Leyen,

Dear Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ms Ylva Johansson

Dear 1st Vice-President of the European Parliament, Dr. Othmar Karas,

Dear Minister of Migration and Asylum, Mr Dimitrios Kairidis,

Dear Dr. Beate Gminder

Since May 2023, regrettably, there has been a continuation of unacceptable humanitarian conditions within the CCAC Mavrovouni on the island of Lesbos. The gravity of this situation necessitates immediate attention and concerted efforts. It is imperative that the Council of Europe and relevant stakeholders engage collaboratively to address and improve the conditions faced by the individuals affected. The ongoing emergency underscores the urgency of implementing measures to uphold human dignity and ensure the well-being of those living in the camp.

Adult camp residents who are no longer part of the asylum system, i.e. people entitled to asylum, with and without valid documents, and those seeking protection with a negative asylum decision, are officially excluded from food distribution in the camp. These people, with exceptions for vulnerable applicants such as pregnant or lactating women, are being denied basic human needs like nutrition out of political reasons - an unacceptable situation that we in European Union can not and will not accept under any circumstances.

As of May 2023, the weekly number of camp residents denied access to food ranges from 120 to 800 people. Despite the continued transfer of thousands of people to the mainland, the increasing number of new arrival as well as people receiving either positive or negative asylum decisions has contributed to the increase in the population in need each week. This worrying trend underlines the urgency of addressing the humanitarian crisis and implementing effective measures to ensure that the basic needs of all camp residents are met.

Recently, the Greek authorities decided to distribute food to the recognized refugees staying at the CCAC for another 30 days after the positive asylum decision. However, this does not solve the problem. Without any organized transport to the mainland in the last two months and in such a limited period of time, many of them cannot afford to leave the camp and cover the cost of accommodation. The options for free accommodation for recognized refugees are extremely limited both on the island and in Greece as a whole, following the closure of the Helios (Greek Support for the Integration of beneficiaries of International Protection) program of the Ministry of Migration-Asylum on 1 October 2023.

For the last eight months, we Leave No One Behind (LNOB), Refugee Relief Doro Blancke, Europe Cares e.V. // Paréa AMKE and Siniparxi have taken care of the food supply for all those who were and are affected by these inhumane instructions. At the moment, in the second week of December 2023, we stand at 723 people per week who are officially excluded from the food distribution. Fears that the numbers will rise in the coming weeks seem realistic considering the number of arrivals to the island and the accelerated asylum procedure in the past months.

The costs for the 7-week distribution of food parcels, the rhythm in which we, the signing NGOs, take responsibility, amount to approx. 20,000€ for approx. 500 people in six weeks. We must point out that we are not in a position to continue to bear the expenses and do not see it as our actual task in any way.

Providing basic care for people seeking protection and those entitled to asylum is the responsibility of the state. Everyone, no matter their legal status, has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their family, including access to food, medical care and necessary social services, as enshrined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

We are aware that Greece is facing a major challenge, as European politicians have still not been able to reach an agreement on a European asylum and distribution system based on solidarity.

However, this failure must under no circumstances be carried out on the backs of those seeking protection.

Europe must be aware of its humanitarian values and obligations and, despite all the major challenges, preserve and uphold them.

It cannot and must not be the case that NGOs, with the help of European civil society, have to fill these gaps caused by states' inability and irresponsibility.

We therefore urge them to fulfill their political responsibility to take appropriate measures to end this humanitarian crisis as quickly as possible.

We are looking forward to your responses, and would hereby like to also suggest a personal exchange on the matter as early as possible.

Signatories

Leave No One Behind

Refugee Relief - Doro Blancke

Europe Cares e.V. // Paréa AMKE

Siniparxi - Coexistence and communication in the Aegean