



PRESS RELEASE

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Report on the violation of asylum seekers' Human Rights by Greece

The situation for asylum seekers in Greece is alarming. Thousands of asylum seekers live under unworthy conditions, and without any forms of legal protection. The chance of receiving protection in Greece is close to zero. Transferring asylum seekers to the country is therefore irresponsible.

This is the conclusion of a report presented today by Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) and Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM). The report is based on the organizations' own investigations from Greece in March 2008.

- An asylum seeker in Greece has greater chance of being beaten up by the police, than of being granted asylum, says Head of Department Sylo Taraku of NOAS. He is among those who have examined the conditions for asylum seekers in Greece, and has spoken with several of those who have experienced violence from the Greek police. – It is shameful that a person, who flees his home country, hoping for protection in Europe, instead is beaten up by the police of an EU country.

Asylum lawyer Spyros Rizakos from Greek Helsinki Monitor has himself witnessed police brutality against asylum seekers. – You never know what can happen with an asylum seeker when he is in the hands of the police in Greece, he says.

In 2007 Greece received 25.113 asylum seekers, but only 163 of the applications were granted. There are only 750 reception centre places. – We have seen cases where both families with infants, and unaccompanied minors have to sleep in parks, says Berit Lindeman, Advisor in the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

It is not difficult to understand that many asylum seekers prefer to travel on to other European countries. However, since Greece is the country where they entered the EU, this country is responsible for examining their application. This is according to the Dublin-regulations, an EU regulation to which also Norway and Iceland has acceded.

An important premise for the Dublin Regulation is that the evaluation of the need for protection should be approximately the same in all Member States but in reality practices are diverging widely.

The organizations responsible for the present report are of the opinion that these regulations lead to a gamble with the possibilities of seeking protection in Europe. They call on all European countries to stop transferring asylum seekers to Greece. They also call Greek authorities to review their asylum policy so that it complies to its International obligations.

The hopeless situation of the asylum seekers was succinctly expressed by an Afghan the organizations spoke with in Athens: “We are neither given help in Greece, nor given the possibility to try our chances in another European country”.

The report “A Gamble with the Right to Asylum in Europe - Greek asylum policy and the Dublin II Regulation” can be downloaded at:

www.noas.org/...

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