



Detention centres for asylum seekers are "intolerable"

Asylum seekers and refugees have the right to live in dignity, access to health care and the right to effective recourse against detention. So says the European Parliament in an own initiative report adopted by 483 to 39 with 45 abstentions, which highlights "intolerable conditions" in detention centres throughout the EU.

The report by Martine **ROURE** (PES, FR), which draws on findings by the Civil Liberties Committee during visits to detention centres for asylum seekers and refugees, deplores the number of deficiencies within Member States, particularly with regard to legal aid and reception conditions. MEPs of the Civil Liberties Committee visited ten Member States to ascertain whether minimum standards for asylum seekers were being applied.

MEPs note on several occasions that the detention conditions in some centres were "intolerable from the point of view of hygiene, overcrowding and the equipment available". They also found that the people detained were "not systematically informed of the reasons for their detention, of their rights and of the progress in their case".

Legal aid amounts to no more than a list of lawyers' names

Asylum seekers and migrants complained systematically about insufficient and inadequate medical care, in particular for pregnant women and victims of torture. Access to health care is often made difficult in detention centres which are located in prison establishments, say MEPs.

The report also points to the lack of quality interpretation services or legal aid in certain Member States, which can amount to "no more than a list of lawyers' names". Access to legal assistance is made more difficult when people in detention are moved between different reception or administrative detention centres, the report states.

Existing directives poorly applied by Member States

The report regrets that a number of Member States are making increasing use of detention and stresses that a person should not in any event be held in detention for the sole reason that he/she is seeking international protection.

Furthermore, the visits revealed that, in some Member States, existing directives were being poorly applied, or were not being applied at all. MEPs call on the Commission to establish, in cooperation with the European Parliament, a permanent system of visits and inspections. They also hope that the Committee on Civil Liberties can continue its visits so as to ensure full compliance with Community law on reception conditions.

The report calls for asylum seekers and immigrants to be lodged in open reception centres, rather than in closed units, similar to those already in existence in certain

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Member States. Moreover, basic reception conditions, such as food, housing and emergency health care should never be withheld.

A show of solidarity

MEPs welcome the recent Commission proposal which seeks to reduce obstacles to the labour market and which allows access to employment after a period of six months after an application for international protection has been lodged.

Noting that some Member States are more affected by the challenges of immigration than others, the report calls on the EU to "show more solidarity", and not just technical and/or financial solidarity. It proposes establishing a European solidarity instrument aimed at relieving the burden posed by the high number of refugees received by Member States with external borders.

Delegations of the Civil Liberties Committee visited detention centres in the United Kingdom (November 2007), Italy (Lampedusa), Spain (Ceuta and Melilla, Canary Islands), France (Paris), Malta, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Denmark and Cyprus.

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