



Brussels, 11th of November 2020

Chairman of the Justice and Home Affairs Council

Dear Minister Seehofer,

Two months ago, the fire in Moria completely destroyed the camp, leaving more than 12,000 asylum seekers without shelter. Whilst responding to urgent needs warranted setting up a temporary camp on Lesbos, we now risk seeing this temporary solution turning into a permanent one. But, based on the account of refugees themselves and experienced service providers, the conditions in the new camp are worse than the conditions in Moria.

Almost 8,000 people – mostly families with children – have been forced to live in tents and face dire living conditions. Rapid protection assessments<sup>1</sup> carried out at the end of September identified numerous risks to the people living in the camp. These include limited access to food with reports of residents fainting out of hunger, inadequate measures against Covid-19 as well as no drainage nor sewerage system on site, with only one toilet being shared by twenty people and no access for persons with physical disabilities. Due to a lack of running water, residents are forced to wash themselves in the sea – this raises a risk to children who could drown. This lack of sanitary facilities coupled with the insufficient lighting exposes women to an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Residents are unable to access health services or legal aid. Children have no access to education and truly risk becoming a lost generation.

We are convinced that the camp, located by the beach, will not withstand the adverse weather conditions, such as strong wind and rain, which are typical for the season. In the weeks since that camp has been built, it has already been flooded twice, destroying whatever little property asylum seekers had with them. With temperatures expected to drop soon, heating with stoves to keep residents warm at night will create fire hazards.

Time is passing and it becomes more evident by the day: there is no realistic chance to provide decent housing conditions for all people in need on Lesbos. The only feasible solution is to move the vast majority of asylum seekers to other places in Europe. We stress that this is not a national issue. Greece cannot and should not handle this situation alone. In

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek Council for Refugees and Oxfam, October Lesbos Bulletin:  
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lesbos%20Bulletin%20-%20Oct%202020%20%28joint%20Oxfam%20%26%20GCR%29.pdf>

this context we would like to point out that in Germany alone 204 cities and municipalities have declared themselves "Sichere Häfen/Safe Harbours". They stand ready to welcome asylum seekers immediately, and they have the necessary capacities. In other EU member states there are also "Solidarity/Sanctuary Cities" providing safe havens for refugees. So there is an enormous willingness to put an end to the hardship and misery of the people who come to us seeking for protection.

It is a European responsibility and European leaders should not turn a blind eye to the situation at hand. We regret that to this day, no binding mechanism for fair relocation of asylum seekers in the EU exists. In the absence of such a mechanism, a fair relocation of asylum seekers lies in the hands of the Member States.

We call on you as the incumbent president of the Council of Ministers of Home Affairs, to urgently coordinate among the Member States and push for the immediate relocation of all asylum seekers in the Greek islands to other places in the EU, where decent living conditions can be guaranteed.

Human dignity is at the heart of European values, and right now it is denied to thousands of people. The key to an immediate change for the better lies in your hands and the hands of your minister colleagues. We urge you to use it.

Yours sincerely,

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