



*A picture of the Marovouni camp.*

*"The police don't respect refugees. A family wanted to bring dinner to their family in quarantine, from jail to jail - " They kept being rude and saying: time is finished, yes or no, are you listening, yes or no, do you understand, yes or no". (If) The police understands that they want to give food, why do they not allow it."*

**The following article was written by volunteers from different collectives on Lesbos in close collaboration with multiple people on the move after they expressed a strong desire to share their experiences. For them it is important that you, the reader, knows what is going on inside Marovouni camp on Lesbos. And not only to know, but to take action.**

Marovouni was established in two thousand twenty after Moria famously burned down in a fire. It took the Authorities six days to claim the former military site as a supposed "temporary" facility that was quickly built with the international support of UNHCR and some NGO's.

This camp is not a place that is generally in the media spotlight. It is, however, as bad as the previous detention facility on Lesbos, the notorious Moria camp. Moria was well known for its de-humanising conditions. Marovouni is terrible in mostly different, more subtle ways. Not a lot is known nowadays about the situation in the camp. This is partly because of a lack of interest from the International press, but also because inhabitants are "heavily discouraged" from sharing information or footage from inside the camp. Of course "heavily discouraged" means active oppression by security and police inside the camp through fines and intimidation, but also outright

abuse and violence. In addition, most of the "house rules" are unclearly stated and communicated, which increases the confusion. Much like the new facility on Samos, for the people with an interests in maintaining and continuing the status quo it is important that the illusion of peace and security ("dignified") of these facilities is upheld. With the construction of the new facility in a seemingly permanent limbo, it is unlikely this facility will be in use in the foreseeable future. As you will read in the article below, changes in policy are a daily occurrence and constructions are seemingly being made to make the camp more permanent.



*A map of the camp, giving an overview of the locations.*

## 1. Location and Description

*“My daughter is crying every time we are going to camp. Children understand everything.”*

The camp is located approximately 10 kilometres from Mytilini, the biggest city on Lesbos. First, let us paint you a picture of the camp. Imagine a small area between the sea and a main road. A concrete wall and a fence with barbed wire on top surround the Maravouni camp. From the road you can only see the gate with its checkpoints and a bus of riot police always posted next to it, and a first glimpse of the wall. Behind it the roofs of white tents and containers are slightly visible. But most of the fence and everything behind it is hidden between a big supermarket and a couple of warehouses.

There are buses going 6 days a week in order for people to be able to reach the city. Currently, people living in the camp are allowed to leave the camp seven days a week during daytime, but the bus does not go on Sunday.

The camp is divided into colored zones according to single/family, gender/sex, and nationalities. All of the families and most of the single women have been moved to containers, so called "ISOboxes", only some of the single women and the single men remain in big white tents. These tents contain multiple "rooms", which now two or three people have to share.

Most of the services available in the camp are located between the main gate and the entrance of the "living section". These services include EASOU offices for issuing asylum decisions and passports/IDs, the office of UNHCR, medical organizations, in addition to a general practitioner and a dentist plus an office for psychological support, and a small grocery shop. The two NGOs with offices in the camp, Eurorelief and Movement on the Ground, are located farther inside the camp, between the living sections.

There is also a facility that is indicated as being a school inside the camp, that has however been described to us as more of a daycare facility without a regular schedule.

## 2. Security and policing.

*"They ask for ID – I say “What ID? Your government is not giving me an ID. This is an asylum card madame”*

One of the major changes between Moria camp and Marovouni is the increased control of inhabitants. Through private security and police, and with the aid of multiple checkpoints, control of the camp is tight. And, as it seems from the people we spoke to, mostly not to the benefit of its inhabitants.

Take for example the gate, that every single person living inside has to enter.

Without papers stating that one is either a registered asylum seeker or working for a registered NGO there is no chance of entering. This also means that if a person living in the camp does not have their papers on them, or their phone with a photo of their papers dies, they can not enter their living space. Besides having to provide papers, one also has to stick to the opening hours of the camp. If

one arrives at the gate too late, they can be fined - Police and security are stationed at the gate 24 hours a day.

Everybody and bag that enters the camp is searched. Upon arrival one has to lay out their belongings on a table to then undergo a full body check with metal detectors. During the searching people are often harassed and asked humiliating questions. There are many stories of guards showing personal belongings around and laughing about them, such as contraception, hygiene articles or underwear, or letting people wait to be searched for an unreasonably long time without any obvious reason. Certain groups, like single men, are often searched more intensely than others. For example, sometimes single men are asked to even take off their shoes.

Police stationed at the gate are often rude, disrespectful and generally demeaning when communicating with the people.

It seems, that what exactly is or isn't allowed to be brought into the camp is not transparent and doesn't only depend on security for the people inside. Beer for example is available in the camp for €1,50 per can, whilst it is not allowed to bring alcohol inside. It is forbidden to bring cameras inside and phones are regularly checked, most likely for people making an attempt at documenting their living conditions.

*"They will search you. They search everything, and you must put everything you have on a table and they will search your bag. Camera's are forbidden, and you can be fined €350, sometimes they give €500 for that. Sometimes they don't find it. It depends on the police if you are allowed to bring in alcohol or similar stuff."*

Checkpoints have to be passed in order to move anywhere, and NGOs like Eurorelief and Movement on the Ground play a large role in controlling and checking the inhabitants. Eurorelief is responsible for keeping track of how many people are in the camp and where they are living. In practice this means that people are going from tent to tent, door to door every day, checking who is present. Eurorelief calls this the "census". In a similar manner, by bringing a paper to the assigned tent or ISObox, they seem to inform people when and where they have appointments. As such, life inside the camp is tightly controlled by the police, NGO's and private security.

### 3. Utilities

*"From the food line we keep only water and the fruits. The food we throw away"*

Besides the intense control, there are the often malfunctioning utilities in the camp. The utilities in the camp are as badly organized as they were in the old Moria camp, despite the fact that there are much less people housed inside. Electricity seems to be kept deliberately scarce. Until last month, seemingly at random in some zones, electricity was available the whole day, whilst in other parts only a few hours. Currently, the electricity seems to be structured in yet another way. Now, there are parts of the day where the whole camp has power and other times when it doesn't.

*"For example, for one part they bring electricity 24 hours, but for other zones we have maybe 3 times a day, maybe morning, maybe lunch and for sure in the evening. Also in the winter people stayed without electricity, so without heat. When there is electricity available 24 hours in this part, then why not in all parts?"*

This means that in summer there is no way of cooling living spaces (meaning tents and containers,



so the heat inside is often unbearable) and in the winter there is no means of heating them for a significant number of the inhabitants. Also charging a phone, the only connection people have to family, information, and some form of distraction, is impossible for a remarkable amount of time per day. There seems to be no clear answer as to who decides what power goes where.

The hygiene facilities available are still inadequate, despite the drastically reduced number of people in the facility. Also, education for the children is lacking and has been described more as a daycare than an actual school, that is only open two to three times a week. Education possibilities for adults are non-existent.

The food is, as it always has been, notoriously bad. Often there isn't enough, and people who have received a second rejection are excluded from receiving food from the food line. The food is often so bad that people throw it away or take the contents, wash them and re-cook the ingredients themselves, especially since parts of the food, like the meat, are often undercooked. Cooking outside of the tent or ISObox is not allowed and sometimes leads to police intervention, claiming that it would be a fire hazard. And while fires are common, the faulty electricity systems are the most likely culprit.



*Marovouni from a different angle, clearly showing the spaces where the burnt down single men facilities were located.*

## 4. Medical care.

*"It's not hard to see a doctor (in the camp), but they only appear to give paracetamol. It's safe to say medical assistance is minimal. Paracetamol is the only thing they give. If they have, they give"*

The medical care is equally lacking. Doctors are available, but the medical services that are provided in the camp are extremely limited and not consistent, as a lot of the medical staff consists of short-term volunteers. In practice, this means that from what we know, the only medicine that is reliably provided is paracetamol. Appointments are rarely ever given, resulting in long waiting hours that often end with being sent away to come again another day. Referrals for seeing a doctor outside of the camp are rare, and it's very hard to go to a doctor outside without one. Outside the treatment of migrants in need of medical help is often not any better, and people struggle to get adequate medical care at the local hospital. In Greece the state of medical care is very low in general, but this goes double for migrants who in addition to being confronted with the structurally underfunded Greek health care system are also faced with the additional racism of some of its staff.

*"On this island you can't find a special doctor for everybody. They really don't respect the health problems. I went to the hospital, they gave me medicine, but it was wrong."*

## 5. Mental issues

*"Psychologist said 'Of course you can't change the big situation, but better if you change your small situation. Go to the gym' You can not remove my mind problem, because the problem is my [asylum] decision."*

Between the institutional apathy, living conditions that barely fulfill basic needs and aggressive behaviour of police and security, people are constantly made to feel unwanted and precarious. As a result of this and traumatic past experiences, many people deal with psychological problems. Psychological care is also technically available, but seems to be on roughly the same level as the medical care. People that approached us to tell their story complained of extremely basic level advice they were given after sharing their stories with therapists in the camp. Because of limited resources available, it is impossible to provide proper mental care even when the organisations try

their best. The psychology clinic in the camp is only available in the evening between 17:00 and 21:00

People are upset at getting advice like the quoted above, because it doesn't really help them in any way. For psychological care a safe environment without acute danger and with basic needs met would be needed - something the camp surely does not provide in any way, shape or form. Rather, the opposite is the case: life in the camp is even more damaging for their mental health.



*One of the outer edges of the camp.*

## 6. Day to day life

*"During the night the refugees are not sleeping, also the children wake up because their parents have stress. People are walking around, sitting, not sleeping. All of us are sick, no one is happy."*

Daily life in the camp is often described as stagnant, monotonous and dull. The basic schedule is dictated by the camp. The day starts with getting in the food line for breakfast, before 8:30 nobody is allowed to leave the camp anyways. Then limited options are possible - people without papers are not allowed to work properly, though quite a few take "volunteer" positions in NGOs, which results in many working hours, often translating in difficult situations, in exchange for 20€ - 100€ per month in vouchers for a specific supermarket. Besides this exploitation there are only a few opportunities to educate oneself or connect with others.

So the day is filled with waiting, for updates on the case, for the next food line, to see a doctor, for the electricity, for time to pass.

Around 20:00 or 21:00 the camp day officially comes to an end. The gate is closed, everybody coming after can be fined. Meeting others inside the camp after these hours is difficult, the police is checking and breaking up gatherings.

*"At night it's difficult. If you go to pee, police can stop you. Seeing friends is difficult. The police raid all the single people tents on a regular basis."*





*A picture of the single men tents.*

It doesn't help either that the situation in the camp at night seems to differ little with old Moria. Women are still afraid to go to the bathroom at night. Violence is still commonplace, and the police is especially present in the single-men section. They have multiple checkpoints around the camp and their attitude towards the single men has been described as abysmal. Young non-white males are particularly discriminated against, as they are perceived as being barbaric and lustful individuals. It is an old racist stereotype, but a persistent one.

*"Every refugee has a story, and it does not make sense to me that we should be selected based on factors that are not within our control. There are a lot of organisations that work with and take care of minors and families, but none that takes care of single people. When you are a single person on this Island, nobody cares about you."*

But the oppressive atmosphere is in no way confined to the single-men section only. Abuse of power and authority is a structural phenomenon in the camp, and it strongly resembles those of any prison. The most visible proof of this on the outside are the often arbitrary court cases that happen related to incidents in the camp like fires.

*"One time we try to play football, and the police come after ten minutes and told us to go back to our tent. Parties are also not allowed, and are broken up with violence and teargas."*

## 7. Asylum process

*"It is too bad, one refugee, a new arrival gets a decision after few days, while others from Moria don't get attention for 2 or 3 years"*

In addition to the general situation in the camp, the asylum process itself is a very stressful procedure for many. The overly bureaucratic approach to processing asylum claims in Greece is well-known worldwide, but the changes that are being made are exclusively for the worst. Since the first of January 2022, people have to pay €100 to apply after an initial rejection of their asylum claim. And €100 is money that a lot of people just do not have. The Greek state should in theory provide a ridiculously small allowance for people, but in practice they don't. People are only eligible for cash assistance if they are awaiting their asylum decision. After they receive a decision, no matter if it is negative or positive, they will not receive anymore cash support. The authorities often wait as long as possible to issue the so called "cash card" for receiving this allowance, usually until just before people are expected to receive their decision, so that they actually don't have to pay anything.

Sadly, this is only part of the problem. The asylum process itself has often been described by people as an extremely dehumanizing process. Generalisations are common, and so is the impatient and uncaring staff that usually populates these offices.

*"Asylum service is big stress for refugees. Camp is emergency life. They keep us waiting for many weeks, it is too bad. If we ask for decisions, we get bad answers: "Why are you asking, you have to wait" "Go back to your tent, Eurorelief will inform you" – not even checking in the computer."*

Adding to this is the seemingly arbitrary way in which these institutions prioritise who to process first. It seems that decisions for new arrivals are handed out rather quickly in most cases. So quickly in fact, that some people are not even aware that they are being interviewed. As the following quote describes well:

*"During the quarantine people received rejections. People didn't know it was an interview. When I came in 2020 I also didn't know, I thought it was registration. We got out of the water, still wet, and the Irani translator made fun of us, laughed at us."*

Feelings of unequal treatment between communities of different countries have of course always existed, both institutionally and socially.

*"Two nights in the jungle, a group of Afghans and Africans, Africans were registered, Afghans were pushed back. (during last week of April) What is the problem with Afghan people?"*

## 8. Conclusion

*"Everybody keeps saying "Oh it's the government, we can't do anything".  
"It's the rules" yeah who makes the rules? Rules are not coming from sky  
like this."*

As much as it might appear on the outside, not a single aspect of the life in the camp is left to chance. What might seem to be happening because of "lack of funds" or "scarcity" is deliberately organised in a way to make the camp run as inefficiently, unsafely, and as unwelcoming as possible by only instituting the absolute minimum of "human rights" mandated services as possible. Consciously underfunded by European and national governments, people are left to rot for indeterminate amounts of time behind walls and fences. Behind these walls police and private security forces treat them with apathy at best and outright harassment and police brutality at worst. Basic human needs like water and electricity are only minimally available and the food is often described as not fit for humans. In addition, the health care, both physical and mental, is extremely lacking.

This trend seems to be pervasive in all things related to migration in Europe at the moment. This article is a snapshot of what the conditions are currently like in the Marovouni camp, but they are in no way unique. Thanks to the prevailing attitude towards Ukrainian migrants we know that Europe can do better, if it wants to. That the money and the resources are in fact there to properly take care of people forced to leave their homes behind. That the suffering they are currently being subjected to is not rooted in economic considerations but in the attitude and will of those in power who claim to uphold "human rights".

With this article we, the writers, channeled the views of migrants that shared their stories in the hope to be listened to, but also because they are angry and tired. Angry at the conditions in which they are forced to live, and tired of waiting.