

The situation at the border crossings Gevgelija and Kumanovo

Period: 01.04.2017– 30.04.2017

Gevgelija

Over the course of April 2017 the situation in the transit center (TTC) Vinojug, Gevgelija did not undergo significant changes compared to the previous month. The number of refugees remained low, resulting a slow dynamic of events. There have been no major changes to the camp infrastructure. The frequency of refugees caught across the territory of the Republic of Macedonia by police officers keeps the same intensity. Most of them have been taken back to Greek territory, while a minor number have been allowed to stay in the country.

Available facilities and conditions

The number of refugees in the camp at the start of the month amounted to 14, 8 of whom originate from Afghanistan, while the rest of them from Iraq and Syria. The number of refugees further dropped to 9 due to the transfer of a 5-member family to Greece.

Excursions to the town are organized for the refugees staying in the camp, accompanied by camp representatives. Lessons in various languages are still organized for the children in the camp who are now significantly fewer than before.

The refugees are regularly provided with access to dental check-ups and interventions. At the same time, refugees who need medical aid or intervention are regularly taken care of by the Red Cross representatives in the camp, or taken to the local hospital in Gevgelija.

Starting from April, the janitors in the camp, who were previously hired on contractual basis through the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, made engagement contracts with IOM (The International Organization for Migration). Since then, the camp hygiene has largely improved and the camp is regularly cleaned.

Institutional treatment

Members of foreign police services are still patrolling down the Macedonian-Greek border. In the course of April, the presence of police units from the Czech Republic was observed.

In the course of this month, a total of 47 refugees were caught down illegal roads in the Republic of Macedonia and “deported” to Greece. The deportation process continues to take place illegally, unaccompanied by any formal procedure for refugee transport, and without notification or collaboration with the Greek security services.

The refugees caught down the illegal roads originated from Syria (13), Pakistan (10), Afghanistan (13), Morocco (6), Iraq (2) and one from Iran and Palestine each. They are mainly individuals who travel alone or in a group, while families were seldom observed. Most of them did not possess personal

identification documents, and when checked by the security services, some people also underwent a search of their personal belongings. On one occasion, a family originating from Syria was held in the camp for several days due to the poor health of the mother in the family. A few days later, after her health improved, the family was sent to Greece. In nearly all cases, the refugees are transported to Greece at their own request.

The Helsinki Committee has criticized this practice on several occasions and urgently appeals for it to stop being implemented by the police officers. In replacement, a legal way should be sought to transport the refugees who are willing to go back to Greece in a lawful manner and in collaboration with the Greek police officers in order for the refugees to be adequately treated and taken care of.

Kumanovo

Unlike the Vinojug Camp, the frequency of refugees in the TTC Tabanovce is significantly higher, mainly due to the open character of the camp. The number of refugees staying there long-term is low, but it changes on daily basis due to the permanent arrival of refugees from outside. Apart from the sporadic adjustments, there haven't been significant changes to the camp infrastructure. An increase has been observed in the number of refugees coming back to Macedonia after being rejected by the Serbian police. Refugees who have made several attempts to cross the border, or who are unable to continue their journey, go back to Greece.

Available facilities and conditions

There have been no major infrastructural changes to the camp. A change has been made to the locks of all the containers (bungalows) in the camp, and new toilets have been set up.

Due to the differing statistics run by the Crisis Management Center and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, exact data on the number of refugees in the camp is not always available. The number of refugees oscillates from 25 to 35, but changes on daily basis due to the constant arrival and departure of refugees. Refugees from Morocco who spend their nights in the open air can also be constantly observed around the camp, in the vicinity of the railroad.

A study visit to the camp was conducted by about twenty students from Denmark, who got acquainted with the situation in the camp and talked to the refugees there.

At the start of the month, a fire broke out in the immediate vicinity of the camp and the railway station. Due to the rapid intervention of the fire-extinguishing brigade, no large-scale material damage was caused. Measures have been taken to investigate and determine the causes of the fire.

Institutional treatment

Over the month of April, the police force down the border with Serbia has been fortified due to an alarm notification that a larger group of refugees would be sent back from Serbian territory.

Police officers have inspected the containers (bungalows) with weapon detectors.

Refugees sent back from Serbia arrive to the camp on daily basis, after staying there, or simply trying to cross the border and being caught by the Serbian police. According to their testimonies, they often fall victims of violence inflicted by police officers or organized groups in Serbia.

In vein similar to what was happening before, the policy of selective admission of refugees to the camp continues. It is unclear how the selection is made, as there are no set and constant criteria. In most of the cases vulnerable groups are the ones that are most often allowed to enter, but exceptions are sometimes made even to this. On one occasion, a group of 26 refugees who arrived to the camp was not granted access. Immediately prior to that, a person who had a stabbing wound from a knife arrived with another group, but was also not given permission to enter. Certain refugees (once again, according to unknown criteria) are sometimes allowed to stay in the camp to spend the night, but they are ordered to leave on the next day. There are frequent cases when refugees who are allowed to spend the night in the camp and get water and food, leave the camp at their own after a brief respite in order to go back to Greece. The refugees who are not admitted to the camp are taken care of by the mobile group of the Red Cross which provides them with clothes, food and means of hygiene.

The Helsinki Committee warns against the selective approach towards refugees who try to get access to the camp to spend the night, get food, water or medical aid. Access to these services must be provided at all times.

The situation in the Shelter Centers in the Republic of Macedonia

The number of refugees in the shelter centers is not available to the Helsinki Committee.

Irregular migration

According to the daily bulletins of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Macedonia, only one group of refugees was found during April. The group of 12 refugees originating from Pakistan was caught on 12.04.2017, in the vicinity of the village of Lojane, Lipkovo Municipality, by police patrols, in an attempt to illegally cross the Serbian-Macedonian border. The people were taken to the police station in Sopot for questioning, and there is no information on how they were further treated.

The Ministry of Interior also informed that on 24.04.2017 criminal charges were pressed against a person from the village of Pirava, Valandovo region, a manager of a taxi transport company, on grounds of reasonable doubt of him committing the crime of “providing transportation without a license”. To be more specific, the accused was suspected transporting migrants by bus en route Gevgelija-Tabanovce on three occasions, without possessing a public transport provider license.