

# After clearing the camp in Idomeni, Greece: Syriza government continues its attacks on refugees

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On Friday morning, a representative of the Greek police announced that the makeshift refugee camp at Idomeni had been completely cleared. “There are no longer any people there, only tents with property belonging to the aid agencies,” he said.

Armed guards are now securing the area in order to prevent refugees returning. Of the estimated 7,500 to 8,000 people who had been holding out in the camp in the hope of finding their way to Western Europe, only 3,500 were transported away in buses by the police. More than 4,000 refugees disappeared into the nearby woods and erected smaller tent encampments.

The clearing of the camp did not pass as smoothly as was claimed by the state press agency APD and broadcaster ERT. While they presented images of a peaceful evacuation, showing the resigned faces of the refugees, the inhabitants of the camp had been veritably starved out.

The camp’s electricity and water supplies had been turned off. Aid agencies were prevented from bringing food to the camp. Even the distribution of food for children was halted. Given the presence of armed police units in full riot gear, the refugees were left no other option than to leave the camp. Police bulldozers then flattened all the tents, including those used by aid agencies for the provision of food and other supplies, including equipment that had been financed by donations.

The refugees, mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, were taken away in buses guarded by soldiers from the Greek Army. Journalists were prevented from reporting on the evacuation of the camp and from following the buses, *Spiegel Online* reported. Clearly, the Greek authorities did not want the world to see the catastrophic conditions in the new detention centres.

According to aid agencies, conditions in these camps, which are mainly within the city of Thessaloniki, are even worse than in Idomeni, where the refugees had to endure months in freezing temperatures, rain and mud.

Medico International stated, “It is not about improving the situation of those stranded here, but of making them invisible.” Thirty-two-year-old Syrian Juan spoke to an AFP reporter about the Derveni camp: “There is not enough food, no showers and no doctor.” Twenty-nine-year-old Nidal added, “I feel like a prisoner here.”

The Derveni camp was established in a building formerly used for auctions; the Kalohori camp is a former warehouse. Both are situated in an abandoned industrial area of Thessaloniki. There is no infrastructure nearby and no prospects for the refugees. The military has erected tents in the halls, which have not even been properly cleaned. Refugees have to sleep on the bare concrete floor.

“For many people, the relocation is another horrible experience,” Amy Frost of the aid organization “Save the Children,” told *Neues Deutschland*. The situation in the camps was “appalling,” she said. “Families have received hardly any food and water, and there are only four incredibly filthy toilets for nearly 200 people.”

In some camps where refugees have been placed there is no medical care and no interpreters available. Instead, there are only soldiers guarding the people and preventing them from escaping.

Despite the criticism, the Syriza government is continuing its policy of forcible evictions of “unofficial” camps. As well as the tent encampments erected by the refugees that have fled from Idomeni in nearby places, along the motorway and at service stations, makeshift camps at the Pireaus harbour, with 2,000 inhabitants, and at Athens Airport, with 4,500 inhabitants, are all to be cleared in the next days.

The refugee organization “ProAsyl” writes that in this way, the refugees are being made invisible, “because the camps to which the people are being relocated, by no means offer better living conditions—their “advantage” is merely that they are not the focus of public and media attention.”

Approximately 55,000 refugees are currently being kept in

the state-organized Greek detention centres. In the environs of Athens alone some 11,500 refugees are in emergency accommodation, which do not even provide sufficient basic supplies of food, water, sanitary provisions or medical help.

An Afghan family man who lives in the Eliniko camp near Athens, reported, “We have been here for two months. 1,500 people live in a large hall. There are too few toilets and showers. Children are getting respiratory problems.”

At the same time, the Greek asylum agency is completely overloaded, and unable to register all the refugees or process applications for asylum or for family reunifications. As ProAsyl reported refugees have to try and make an appointment with the agency using Skype. “Currently, there are 50,000 people trying to get an appointment over Skype,” explains Maria Stavropoulou, director of the Greek asylum agency. Due to government budgetary constraints, there is a hiring freeze, so that the agency cannot take on additional staff.

Among those suffering are particularly vulnerable people such as minors, babies, heavily pregnant women or the sick, who cannot access the asylum process. It is these groups of people that are supposed to be redistributed to other EU member states through a resettlement programme encompassing more than 63,000. In fact, fewer than 1,000 have been redistributed since September 2015. Germany had promised to take in more than 17,000 refugees from Greece, but has so far received just 37.

The aid organization Doctors without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, MSF) regards the situation as a complete disaster. “We are looking at a scenario where people might have to hang on here for years,” an MSF representative said. This often involves mothers with children who could actually be immediately reunited with their families in other European countries.

According to doctors, severe depression has spread dramatically among the refugees in Greece. In addition, there are increased anxiety reactions and suicide attempts. In the big cities, refugee children begging have now become a familiar sight on the streets.

“For us it is not about a better camp, there is not a one star camp and a five-star camp, we just want to be free,” Wisam from Syria, who was taken away from Idomeni, told the weekly *Die Zeit*. But this is exactly what the Greek government is seeking to prevent. It is evacuating refugees to internment camps guarded by soldiers in order to better control them. Refugees apprehended in Macedonia and deported back to Greece are sent straight into detention, without an opportunity to apply for asylum.

“It’s not about Macedonia or Greece,” said Wisam, “Germany is behind it. It doesn’t want us anymore, but dare not say that openly.” German Interior Minister Thomas de

Maiziere had already said in March “one must endure these images” in order to prevent refugees from getting into the European Union via Greece.

The real role of the Idomeni camp, i.e., to deter refugees from entering Europe, was also confirmed by a recent comment in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The paper explains: “Idomeni was an ugly stopover on the path from a chaotic and almost fatalistic approach to the refugee crisis to an orderly migration policy which, as cold-hearted as it may sound, had to contain elements of deterrence. ... The unmistakable message from the camp was: the final destination of irregular migration on the Balkan route is not Austria or Germany but an expanse of mud on the border with Macedonia.”

But even if the decisions regarding the inhuman treatment of refugees have mainly been taken in Berlin and Brussels, the supposedly “left” Syriza government in Athens is mercilessly implementing the EU’s policy of sealing off its external borders to refugees.

The Greek police have repeatedly used stun grenades, batons and tear gas against refugees from the camp at Idomeni. The euphemistically called “hotspots,” registration centres on the Greek islands, have been turned into giant internment camps. When clearing the Idomeni camp, the Syriza government has trampled press freedom underfoot and chased away journalists from the facility before a martial police detachment began the deportation of refugees.

The attacks on the rights of refugees are being accompanied by further austerity measures, cuts and sackings, which seriously threaten the living conditions of the entire Greek working class. Workers who protest against these measures are violently attacked by the police with tear gas and stun grenades.

The Syriza government, a darling of the pseudo-left organizations throughout Europe, is launching increasingly more brutal repression and police state measures in order to suppress any opposition to their right-wing policies, their imposition of austerity and the detention of refugees.



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