

# NEW REFUGEE CAMP ON SAMOS

## BEHIND THE SCENES

by Julia Minder & Simon Bader

Dear friends, members, supporters, patrons and sponsors,

On September 18th, 2021, the new refugee camp on Samos was opened to the media - you have probably heard or read about it.

But as is so often the case in Greece, the truth unfortunately does not correspond to the embellished image that is proudly presented to the media.

The suffering that is actually hidden behind this opening can hardly be put into words. Because only by carelessly pushing people around and disregarding any human rights - transfers to the mainland and pushbacks to Turkey - could the opening take place.

In this *Special Edition* of our newsletter, we would like to give you a glimpse behind the scenes. We report on what was happening long before the international media arrived. And what remains now that the reporters have left Samos.



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## THE NEW REFUGEE CAMP

### BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Pictures of tent sites and overcrowded camps at Europe's external borders should finally come to an end.

That is why the EU has invested EUR 250 million in building a new, so-called "controlled" refugee camp on each of the five Aegean Islands of Leros, Chios, Samos, Lesbos and Kos.

The first of the new camps to be finished is located on Samos and it was hoped that its completion would mark a positive precedent.

More:

["EU announces funding for five new refugee camps on Greek Islands" \(The Guardian\)](#)

Picture:

By S. Hassan, Manager Art Department SKILLS FACTORY

## THE NEW REFUGEE CAMP

### AN OPENING WITH OBSTACLES

The construction work had been going on for a long time. However, due to many complications, the opening was postponed several times.

Small example: until shortly before the opening, drinking water sources were still being drilled.

It soon became clear that the Greek government would not be able to carry out the move in accordance with the requirements of the EU. The government feared having to transfer and accommodate too many people.

But the EU wanted to see results. The solution?

A vacuum was created ...



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## OPEN CARDS

THOUSANDS HAVE BEEN SHIPPED TO THE MAINLAND WITHOUT SAFETY

Contrary to the EU-Turkey deal, which states that refugees have to stay on the islands until the decision on their asylum application has been made, thousands have left the island in the past few months - legally, illegally or through official transfers.

The fear of the new camp was so great that for many the only way out was to escape from the island of Samos.

The island's refugee population has therefore decreased radically in the past few months; when the new camp opened there were only around 600 refugees on Samos (compared to almost 6000 the year before).

An impressive video report on SRF:  
["I came to find shelter, but this is a prison"](#)

Many were initially pleased that it seemed to be going a step further. But the lifting of the geographical restriction on the island of Samos has nothing to do with the asylum procedure.

In reality, most of the refugees find themselves in illegality, on the streets in Athens or in the hands of smugglers through the Balkans towards Western Europe.

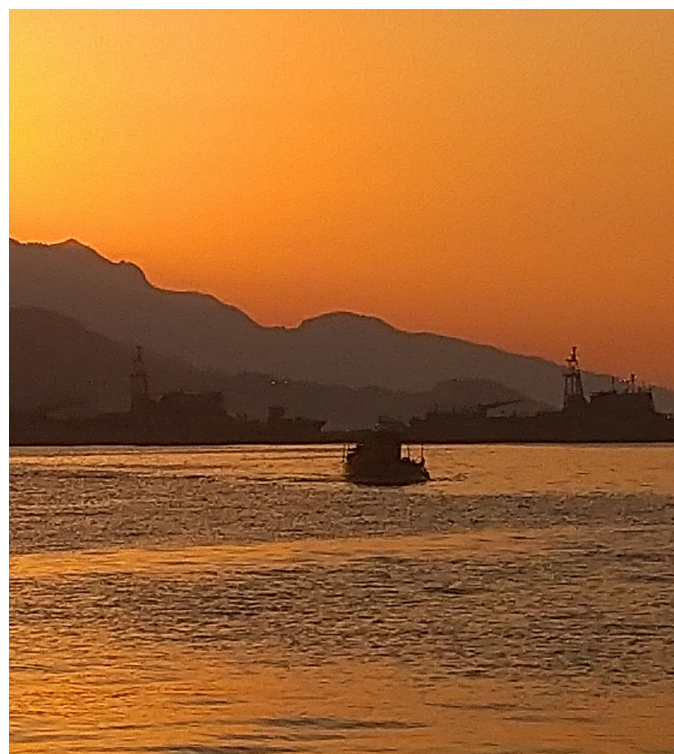
## PUSHBACKS

THOUSANDS WERE RETURNED TO TURKEY WITHOUT A CHANCE TO APPLY FOR ASYLUM

At the same time, of course, the government of Greece wanted to prevent the arrival of new refugees on the island, so that the successfully reduced numbers won't rise again.

The number of boats trying to come to Europe has increased significantly in the last few months.

But a new rush would have threatened the planned opening, which is why the Greek coast guard has also increased their presence in the area (see picture) and reports of pushbacks are rapidly rising.



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## ABANDONED AT SEA

PEOPLE WHO HAVE ARRIVED ON THE ISLAND OF SAMOS ARE ILLEGALLY BROUGHT BACK TO TURKEY

An impressive example occurred on August 13, 2021, practically on our doorstep: two boats reached Samos at the same time. Out of fear of being illegally turned back to Turkey, the people split up and hid in the woods and later in a monastery.

A group of 10 people was picked up by the police and found the next morning in Turkish waters - abandoned on the open sea in lifeboats.

The rest of the people were brought to the refugee camp, and only thanks to the persistent intervention of various organizations were they registered and given the chance to apply for asylum. Based on the pictures, that pushback can't be denied.

More:

[Pushback Samos, Full Report \(Aegean Boat Report\)](#).

Another example occurred on October 20, 2021:

[The Disgrace Of Europe \(Aegean Boat Report\)](#).

**EVEN IF THE OPERATIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE VIOLATE THE GENEVA REFUGEE CONVENTION, EU LAW AND ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, THESE CRIMES HAVE NOT HAD ANY LEGAL CONSEQUENCES TO THIS DAY.**

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## THE WEEK OF THE MOVE

CHANGES IN THE SKILLS FACTORY: EVERYTHING WAS DIFFERENT

These developments obviously also had an impact on our work in the SKILLS FACTORY. Most of our team members have left the island due to the upcoming move and our production has stalled.

For those who stayed, the situation has been particularly severe. The closer the move got, the more noticeable was the impact of the imminent change on the mental health of our team.

And so we had to temporarily change the focus of our work. Because occupation and distraction were no longer enough. During this time we offered a lot of emotional support and 1:1 consultations. At the same time, we opened the SKILLS FACTORY in order to temporarily store personal items and to recharge our batteries before the move.

And the world reported on the move:

[Umstrittenes Flüchtlingslager auf Samos eröffnet \(ARD\).](#)

[Greece begins moving migrants to new 'closed' camp \(France 24\).](#)

[New refugee camp on Samos 'like a prison', says MSF \(Info Migrants\).](#)

## THE CAMP IS NOT READY

DESPITE THE GRAND OPENING

On September 18, 2021, the new camp was finally opened and presented to the media. The new facilities, the kitchens, the clean and safe containers were particularly praised.

But already the next day we received calls that many things were lacking: there was a kitchen, but nothing to cook. There were showers, but no soap or towels. There weren't even any trash bins.

We reacted immediately and distributed food packages, hygiene items and coffee to our team living in the camp. But many of the utensils (bowls, knives, even a toaster) were taken away from them while entering the camp - "forbidden".

How big the deficiency in fact is becomes clear in the following report from "Europe must Act" (one of our team members also speaks out):

["When will I become a human?" \(Europe must Act\)](#)



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## A NEW ERA IN THE SKILLS FACTORY

THE TEAM AND NOISE ARE BACK

To everyone's surprise, there is something that does work well - and that is the transport to the city.

Thanks to the hourly buses, our team and with it life slowly but surely came back to the SKILLS FACTORY.

On October 5th, 2021, we organized an "Open House" and got to know many new, interested and highly motivated people and were able to build up a small team again.

Finally, the roar of machines, milling noise, hammering, jumble of languages and laughter from the factory can be heard again.

We are very happy about it and are excited to see what we will build, experience and achieve with our new motivated team members.

## WHY WE ARE STAYING ON SAMOS

- For those who must stay, the situation is more desperate than ever before. Working in the SKILLS FACTORY has become all the more important.
- With other NGOs leaving, the need for our services has increased.
- There is a lack of so many things in the new camp - leading to a new need for self-made solutions.
- Some organizations have rented land next to the camp and rely on the SKILLS FACTORY team to help set up structures for teaching and medical consultations.
- The current global crises give little hope for a reduction in refugee numbers and displacement; we can only assume that more people will be arriving on the islands in the near future.

**ONLY IF WE OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE TO ISOLATION CAN WE FACILITATE ENCOUNTERS  
AND BUILD BRIDGES ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES.**

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