



Mr Christos Stylianides
Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management
European Commission, Berlaymont
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Copy to:

Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission
Frans Timmermans, First Vice President
Federica Mogherini, Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Dimitris Avramopoulos, Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship
Johannes Hahn, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
Neven Mimica, International Cooperation and Development
Matthias Ruete, Director General of the Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs

12 June 2017

Dear Commissioner Stylianides,

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the European Commission to review its decision to withdraw humanitarian aid from the Greek islands.

This decision to end funding in July 2017 will force vital service providers to leave the islands, while handing over the full responsibility to the already over-stretched Greek authorities appears to be a wholly misguided plan of action by the European Commission. This decision appears to disregard the principles of human rights which the European Union is otherwise keen to safeguard, and risks having detrimental impact on displaced people arriving at Europe's shore to seek sanctuary here.

Recent independent field research conducted by the Refugee Rights Data Project (RRDP) in partnership with the Refugee Info Bus in the island of Chios found that the island is already at breaking point, characterised by overcrowding and over-stretched and under-funded service provision.

The key findings indicated the following:

- Nearly two thirds (60.7%) of refugees had been unable to access services in Chios. For those who had gained access, it often involved little more than receiving basic nutrition or an item of clothing, rather than more substantive support.

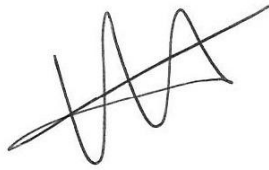
- Similarly, the safety and security measures provided for refugees seem wholly inadequate, with 85.3% of respondents saying they 'never feel safe' or 'don't feel safe' in Chios.
- Out of the staggering 71.3% who had experienced health problems since arriving in Chios, less than a third (28.5%) had been able to access medical care.
- Among women, 94.3% had experienced health problems in Chios, but only 30.3% of them had received medical help. Overall, women specific services are sorely lacking.
- Living conditions are largely inadequate in many places on the island, with 40.8% of respondents stating that their health issues had started due to the unhealthy environment in the camp.
- About a third (31%) of those who had experienced health problems described the issue as a mental health problem rather than a physical ailment. One of the most oft-cited reasons for mental health issues was the uncertainty of the outcome of one's asylum applications and long waiting times. Many feared deportation and found it difficult to sleep at night in face of such uncertainty.
- 39% of respondents had witnessed someone die in Chios. Some of these deaths had occurred due to self-harm or suicide.
- As regards their interaction with the authorities, 24% had experienced police violence in Chios (73.2% of these respondents describing it as 'physical violence' and 78.9% 'verbal abuse'). 45.8% described the treatment by camp management as 'bad' or 'very bad'.
- 73.3% of children said they 'don't feel very safe' or 'don't feel safe at all' in Chios. At the time of the study, there were an estimated 80-90 unaccompanied minors in the island. 56.7% of children said they did not have access to any form of education in Chios.
- The current lack of support and services is hence highly alarming, particularly considering that the majority of refugees on the island are escaping war and turmoil in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In light of these research findings, we believe that further cuts to funding for vital services would be detrimental, in particular given the continued arrival of refugees from conflict ridden countries to the Greek islands. Therefore, the European Commission must ensure that emergency funding is made available to ensure a safe and sustainable handover to Greek authorities, whilst enabling charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to continue their operations providing vital, yet overstretched, services on the islands. Needless to say, an accelerated transfer of asylum seekers from the islands to mainland Greece is of utmost importance, but in the immediate term, we must ensure the standards on the islands are humane.

We, the undersigned, hence call on the European Commission to urgently revise its decision to withdraw funding from the Greek islands. We urge you to bear in mind and honour Europe's commendable leadership on human rights worldwide, and continue to provide emergency funding to the Greek islands until the situation has stabilised.

We look forward to an immediate response to our request.

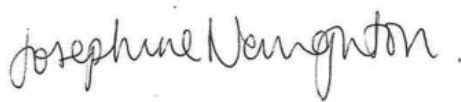
Yours sincerely,



Marta Welander
Director, Refugee Rights Data Project
T: +447880230979
E: Marta.Welander@RefugeeRights.org.uk



Sarah Story
Co-founder, Refugee Info Bus
T: +447450686892
E: sarah@refugeeinfobus.com



Josephine Naughton
CEO, Help Refugees



Jonny Willis
Co-founder, Refugee Youth Service