

Denmark is Damaging Children by Leaving them on Lesbos

Author: Mette Nielsen

As part of my activism, I am currently working on getting Denmark to take in some of the children and families who are currently stuck in the humanitarian crisis at the Greek island Lesbos. Following the fire that burnt the infamous Moria camp to the ground back in September 2020, Denmark said no to taking in children and families from Lesbos, despite the fact that eleven other European countries have already taken in vulnerable people from the Greek island (Christiansen, 2020)

Instead of taking in children and families, Denmark chose to send humanitarian aid such as tents, blankets and 44,8 million DKK (DR, 2020). The Minister for Development Cooperation, Rasmus Prehn, states that the aid should have arrived at Lesbos two months after the fire, according to an unknown source in the EU (Prehn, 2020).

I have been to Lesbos several times, latest in October 2020. During this visit I went looking for the Danish tents in the new camp, and did not find a single one. What makes this situation even more absurd is the fact that if the tents were to reach the refugees on Lesbos today (November 2020), they would be useless, because the majority of them are camping tents (Hybel, 2020). The tents would thus not be able to properly shelter the residents through the cold winter on Lesbos. In spite of the large amount of money, which has been sent in order to help the refugee children on Lesbos and on the mainland in Greece, there have been no visible changes to the situation, which remains dire. Children are starving, lacking teeth, and walking around in way too large or too small crocs, which is a type of rubber clog, without any socks – and the winter is closing in. The tents that people are living in on Lesbos are not isolated and are lacking pallets below, which results in rainwater often filling up the tents with water. There are no bathing facilities in the camp and only very few toilets. The conditions are inhumane to say the least.

What happened to all these million DKK from Denmark? I have been asking myself that question many times.

On the basis of this horrible situation, I am currently working to make Denmark take on some of the responsibility for the humanitarian crisis currently taking place on Lesbos. We need to help, especially because Denmark as a member of the EU, have ultimately partaken in creating this humanitarian crisis through the EU politics.

In my voluntary work, I try to convince Danish city councils to vote about whether or not they can take in children from Lesbos. While the city councils cannot decide whether or not Denmark wishes to take in refugees, what they can do is pressure the government to take action by showing their willingness to take refugees from the Greek island (Søndergård, 2020). So far 14 city councils have publicly said that they are ready to take in children and families.

A pressure that I believe we need to maintain, because we have a responsibility. A responsibility to help not just the refugees but the Greek local societies. This is made even more clear, when realizing that a conservative government in Germany chose to take in children from the Greek island (InfoMigrants, 2020), while a Danish supposedly socialist government is completely silent and accepts that children are being damaged for life.

On Lesbos I have met children who stopped talking, and who were close to impossible to get in contact with. I experienced a mother telling me that her five-year-old son had said to her that he did not wish to live anymore. We are damaging these children and if we do not take action soon it is hard to say how long lasting this damage will be. This is both disturbing and heartbreaking.

The Danish government uses human trafficking as the justification for why we should not help the children on Lesbos. The government states that if we take in vulnerable people from Lesbos, we will encourage human trafficking. This justification ground is ultimately false as numerous studies have shown. What does in fact encourage human trafficking and make people choose more dangerous escape routes are factors like border control and making it more difficult for people to flee – which is what we, both the EU and Denmark, are doing right now. But we need to realize that people will not stop fleeing, just because we make it harder for them. We should instead support the European initiative and take in people from Lesbos as well as support the arrangement of refugees under a quota

system. This way, people will be able to avoid risking their lives on dangerous escape routes and thus not make them dependent on human smugglers.

Besides cooperating with the Danish city councils in getting children to Denmark, I have also created a voluntary group, in which we arrange demonstrations in order to direct focus to the children on Lesbos and their situation. Hence, the demonstrations both seek to maintain the focus on the case among the Danish population and to inform the public about the conditions for refugees on Lesbos.

Simultaneously, I try to draw attention towards the situation amongst the Danish media. The case of the Danish humanitarian aid that did not reach Lesbos has especially been given the spotlight, and both Politiken, Berlingske and P1 have particularly put this incident on the agenda.

While the humanitarian crisis on Lesbos can at times feel overwhelming, I think the most crucial thing to understand is, that we can all be the change we want to see in the world. It is important to understand that we can all do something in order to change the refugee and asylum politics which are being pursued today. Every change begins with yourself. Therefore, I would like to encourage you to write to the ministers in the EU and in Denmark. Write to them and encourage them to take in the people, who are currently living in inhumane conditions on Lesbos. Talk to your friends, families and acquaintances about this topic. Enlighten them about the situation. We must dare to talk about this situation, and we must dare to demand action.

Every action is valuable when it comes to making a difference in the world. Together we can change the world.

Author affiliation: Mette Nielsen, *MSc Development and International Relation - Global Refugee Studies*

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