

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association



# FIELD REPORT 2016

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*In TC Tabanovce in December, push backs continued, being mostly single men and families. Most of them did not get to TC Tabanovce and sought refuge in the villages near the center. The Police insisted not to allow anyone in the center including vulnerable groups. The number of refugees seen near the railway station increased. During December the number of accommodated persons in TC Vinojug has decreased, due to two reasons, firstly, many refugees request to return to Greece and secondly, all asylum seekers staying in the camp were transferred to the Reception center for asylum seekers in Vizbegovo.*

## TC Tabanovce

The most pressing concern in the camp in December was the number of push backs. The number of pushed back refugees who approached TC Tabanovce during December was approximately **30** people. Most of the refugees which our field lawyers have talked to, claimed that Serbian Police have used violence and have conducted collective push backs. MYLA field lawyers informed all the refugees approaching TC Tabanovce about their right to asylum in Macedonia. None of them remained in the camp, most of them being single men from Algeria, Morocco, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

*69 refugees stayed in TC Tabanovce in December*

When they approached TC Tabanovce they obtained necessary assistance, but police officers did not allow them to stay in the camp longer than needed. The number of refugees staying around the railway has increased this month. 30-40 persons could be seen near the railway station daily. As they informed MYLA field lawyers, all of them have been pushed back to Macedonia at night by Serbian police. They were all informed about their right to seek asylum, however they were only interested to continue their journey.

*At least a 100 persons per day have been spotted in and around villages, including vulnerable individuals.*

This number decreased during the last days of December because Macedonian police deported a larger group of refugees to Greece, without allowing them to stay around the campsite.

Our partner organizations informed us about the increase of refugees staying in houses in the villages near the railway station and the border. On average, at least a 100 persons per day were spotted when visiting villages, including vulnerable individuals.

Police officers from PS Sopot held a meeting in TC Tabanovce where MYLA, UNHCR, the Red Cross mobile team, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Crisis Management Center were invited. Several issues were discussed during the meeting, the most important being refusing entrance to vulnerable groups in TC Tabanovce. Police officers claimed that there has been a policy change due to the winter conditions, namely, from now on vulnerable groups of refugees and minors will be allowed entrance in the camp.

However this is not the case for all the single men who will be pushed back from Serbia and who will still not be allowed to stay in TC Tabanovce. At the meeting, the police officers from Sopot Police Station requested MYLA's presence in the villages surrounding the border with Serbia. Their request is in line with the information MYLA has gathered on field, that in those villages there is a bigger number of refugees who wait for an opportunity to cross the border to Serbia and should be informed about their right of asylum in Macedonia.

MYLA's representatives raised the issue of access to procedure for potential asylum seekers, due to the problem with the police not accepting any asylum claims.

During the meeting, the MLSP and the CMC pointed out the importance of having one official number of refugees registered in the camp because in previous months there have been situations when different organizations and institutions working on field had different numbers of refugees staying in the camp, causing logistics problems with food and medical assistance.

## TC Vinojug

In December, the number of persons accommodated in TC Vinojug varied between 91 and 99. As in the previous few months, the majority of people who were offered legal aid and counseling in TC Vinojug were caught by Macedonian Police in an attempt to enter Macedonia irregularly, returned to the camp site for questioning/profiling and later pushed back to Greece.

In total **141** persons from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Eritrea, Lebanon and Palestine have been pushed back to Greece during December. MYLA's field lawyers gave them necessary information, mostly on questions regarding the asylum procedure in Macedonia, social security in Macedonia, possibility for finding work,

*One unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan and 5 from Pakistan were intercepted by Macedonian Police in an attempt to enter Macedonia irregularly.*

information regarding conditions for accommodation in the reception center for asylum seekers in Vizbegovo, the integration process in Macedonia etc.

All push backs were conducted unofficially to places/points without Greek police patrols. MOI continued registering refugees caught attempting to enter Macedonia irregularly, by taking personal data and fingerprints.

During December, one family from Iran and one person from Syria were interested in applying for asylum in Macedonia. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, Sector for Asylum officials conducted an informative conversation with them. Worth noting is that this kind of communication prior to applying for asylum is not provisioned by the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection.

**141 persons from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Eritrea, Lebanon and Palestine have been pushed back to Greece during December.**

Following the interview, the asylum seekers from Iran stated that the SfA informed them that if their asylum

claims are rejected, they will be deported back to Greece or to their country of origin. Also they informed them,

*In December, between 91 and 99 persons were accommodated at TC Vinojug*

that it is not the police's responsibility or obligation to accommodate them in the Reception Center, so there is a possibility that they will need to pay for their accommodation elsewhere.

Following the interview, the potential asylum seekers from Iran were not certain whether they would actually apply for asylum, fearing deportation. At the end of the interview the SfA gave them a form to sign stating they withdraw from actually applying for asylum.

In another case, a person from Syria, after having the same informative conversation, remained interested in applying, and was transferred to the police station where a written application for asylum was filed and after several days he was transferred to the Reception Center for asylum seekers in Vizbegovo.

During December, several unaccompanied minors (one from Afghanistan and 5 from Pakistan) were caught by the Macedonian Police in an attempt to enter Macedonia irregularly. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, together with MYLA field lawyers, conducted an interview with them after which the MLSP appointed a guardian to every unaccompanied minor, and after that they were all transferred to RC Vizbegovo.

*Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental professional organization which provides legal aid and strategically litigates to protect human rights. By using the knowledge and innovative capacities of young lawyers, MYLA promotes the rule of law and influences policy through research and advocacy. MYLA strives for a society in which the rule of law is established and people proactively strive for the respect of their human rights.*

*MYLA is the only organization in the Republic of Macedonia that provides free legal aid and represents asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons and other persons of concern in procedures related to asylum, legal residence and other social rights.*

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