Homeless can't stay at home

Information about police fines for homeless migrants in Thessaloniki

From 23rd March until 4th May the Greek government has imposed a lock-down, only allowing people to leave their residence with an ID document and a special permission, which can be filled on a form or by sending an SMS. If not obeying the restriction of movement the police is able to impose a fine of 150 Euro. To put this into perspective: For an asylum seeker a fine of 150 Euro is the amount of their cash card allowance for a whole month (for a single person living in an accommodation without provided catering).

Because homeless people don't have the possibility to stay at home, this measure created a huge dilemma for homeless migrants. At the moment there is no shelter for homeless migrants in Thessaloniki, leaving 150-200 people in an extremely difficult spot during the lock-down: On the one hand they are much more exposed to the risk of getting infected, due to a lack of shelter and the impossibility to take proper hygienic measures, and on top of that they are under a constant threat of being fined for being in the streets.

A significant number of homeless migrants don't have phones and have no or nearly no access to information. They lack Greek or English language skills and therefore have no realistic possibility to comply with the restriction of movement measures.

Mobile Info Team has been multiple times at a food distribution for homeless migrants in Thessaloniki to speak with persons who got fined and collect information. Altogether we have collected 123 fines from 81 people. Nearly all of them have been referred to the Greek Council for Refuges (GCR) for assistance to annul the fine.

The vast majority of the persons fined, were on their way to get food, looking for shelter or possibilities to shower. The police has shown a strong presence outside a camp which is for most homeless the only possibility to shower. This has led to a significant number of fines.

One third of the people have been fined more than once. One person had been fined 5 times, multiple others had been fined 4 times. 7 persons have been fined twice on the same day.

Additionally the communication with the police was often not possible because of the language barrier. Multiple persons tried to comply with the government measures by sending the requested SMS, but sent them in a wrong format and received a fine nonetheless. In two cases the police doubted that the reason stated in the SMS is correct and fined them. Nobody received the information from the police that it is possible for them to object to the fine.

There were four reported incidents of police misconduct, involving insults, threats of physical violence or actual physical violence.
In cooperation with GCR, Mobile Info Team distributed a solemn declaration in Greek, stating the homelessness of the signatory and asking due to that fact the police officer in charge to show leniency. There were multiple occasions in which the persons were fined regardless of the declaration. Additionally Mobile Info Team has been handing out paper forms for homeless migrants to fill to justify their reasons for being outside. People who had had been properly informed and had received the forms had a significantly smaller chance of getting fined. However, persons that couldn't be informed or new arrivals still continue to receive fines from the police.