

Refugees across Europe struggle during pandemic



London, January 8 (RHC)-- The United Nations says the majority of vulnerable people in refugee camps across the globe have turned to negative coping mechanisms to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Livelihoods have been wiped out and the UN says it needs hundreds of millions of dollars to bring the people back from the brink.

For refugees in reception camps in Greece it has been a year of fires, double displacement and now -- COVID-19, with rolling lockdowns enforced since March along with restrictions that have only served to make unbearable living conditions even worse. Various organization are desperately trying to get funding to help improve the mental health of tens of thousands living in these camps, but it's nowhere near enough.

The United Nations says that in response to this, independent groups have sprung up and are trying to make a difference. Yellow Days is one of them -- empowering forced migrants and changing the narrative surrounding their circumstances lies at the heart of everything they do.

The friendships forged during Yellow Days festivals have lasted and although COVID-19 prevented them from getting together in 2020, the team is still busy making magic happen online. Workshops are being held, run by asylum seekers themselves. Today's lesson in lockdown was about self-portraits.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the most vulnerable individuals in the reception centers are pregnant women, new mothers, the elderly and children. Yellow Days is run by a core group of eight women, which members say is one of its most important aspects.

One of the primary goals of groups like this is creating a model for a more sustainable future not only for forced migrants and minorities but the entire human race. This is an ambitious goal, and the push back is a well-oiled machine.

The International Rescue Committee says depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and self-harm, that are the byproducts of hopelessness and despair have spiked amid COVID-19 restrictions. With the majority of asylum applications on pause there's no means of escape and during the pandemic, self-isolating often means being locked in a shipping container with many others.

Every year, tens of thousands of refugees reached Greek shores. The media has aided the dehumanization of asylum seekers by reducing them to just that; a statistic, but there are still those fighting for stories to be told and lives celebrated.

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