



## 07/02: 16 people stranded on Lesvos for two nights then taken into quarantine

In Distress Boza

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### Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations – 7th of February 2021

Case name: 2021\_02\_07-AEG747

Situation: 16 people stranded on Lesvos for two nights then taken into quarantine

Status of WTM Investigation: Concluded

Place of Incident: Aegean Sea

#### Summary of Incident

On 7th of February at 08:35h CET we were contacted by a journalist who was in touch with a group of travelers stranded on Lesvos. They had arrived on 6 February and were hiding in the woods. We later discovered that they had previously reached Lesvos and been pushed back to Turkey by the Greek coastguard. They were terrified of a repeat performance.

The journalist passed on the contact of a relative of someone in the group. We were able to reach her and she passed us names and phone numbers for the people in the group. She also sent us a position. There were six men, five women, one of whom was pregnant, and five children. After discussion with their relative, we alerted the Port authority in Mithimna by email, passing on all the information that we had. We were unable to reach the port authority by phone to follow-up our email. We also went public and sent out the following tweet:

We were informed by relatives about 16 people whose boat landed in the North of #Lesvos yesterday. The people fear that Greek authorities will illegally push them back to Turkey. The people seek to apply for asylum. We have informed @HCoastGuard @UNHCRGreece & @Frontex.

We were able to make contact with the group in the early afternoon. They were very anxious about pushback, but the difficult journey and the prolonged and continuing exposure to the elements was not good for their health. We continued trying to reach the port authority in Mithimna without success. We decided to phone JRCC Piraeus. They provided an alternative contact for Mithimna and this one worked. Mithimna claimed to have been searching for two hours but been unable to find the people. This was at least plausible as the people had been trying to hide from the authorities. They asked us to send them the pictures that we had published on social media, which apparently they couldn't access, as this might help them identify the location. They also asked us to ask the people to move to the road.

We conveyed this information to the group, and we put out the following tweet: We established contact with the port authority of Mytilene that told us that they are searching for the 16 people. We hope they will be found soon. They are without food and water for more than a day but they are too afraid to come forward because they were pushed back before.

Very late in the afternoon or even early in the evening, the group gave us a new position and we forwarded that to the port authority. Unfortunately, despite their protestations to the contrary, by then the port authority had given up the search, assuming they even started it, for the night. After being given strange and contradictory responses by various officers of the port authority throughout the evening, we put out the following tweet:

It's been 9 hours since we informed all relevant authorities in #Lesvos, but no one came to pick up the people. They will have to spend another night outside without food & water! They told us they are freezing. We urge the authorities to urgently rescue them! #refugeesGr

We also had to warn the travellers that they were probably going to have to spend another night outside. The travellers returned to the woods to spend the night in the cold. The next morning we sent another email to the port authority in Mithimna and

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cord. The next morning we sent another email to the port authority in Mithimna and the UNHCR with an updated position requesting a search for the travellers. We followed up our email with a phone call at 09:00h. We were assured that they were out searching.

We phoned again at around 11:30h and we were rudely referred to the port authority at Sigrì. They told us that a bus had been sent for Mytilene and that the group would be transferred to Mithimna. At 14:20h we phoned Sigrì again who assured us that the people had been picked up and taken to Mithimna. At 15:30, we contacted Mytilene who told us that the people had been taken to quarantine in Therma. We put out a last tweet:

The Mytilene port authority informed us that the people were found and brought to the nearby quarantine camp. The people confirmed this themselves a while ago. We are relieved that they are healthy and safe. We expect & demand that they will be given access to asylum procedures & hot water.

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