

## **Assessing risks from natural hazards in Greek refugee camps**

*Risk assessments in Greek refugee camp planning fail to protect asylum-seekers from harmful environmental conditions. What impedes the assessment process, and is it possible to tackle these challenges?*

2015 saw a sharp increase in asylum-seekers arriving in the European Union, leading to the creation of numerous refugee camps in Mediterranean countries such as Greece. Conditions in these camps were soon criticized as disastrous. Part of the problem are natural hazards, for example freezing temperatures or heavy rainfall, that affect camp residents who often live in tents or self-made structures. Humanitarian minimum standards prescribe that risk assessments should identify hazards during camp planning so that they may be addressed, and future harm minimized. Ideally, risk assessments cover all sectors and hazards holistically to identify interconnected risks and consequences and achieve realistic results. For example, when camp residents are forced to sleep in self-made shacks or tents due to overcrowding, the exposure to cold temperatures and rain increases the risk of disease.

Despite the relevance of refugee camps for the European asylum policy, they are to date barely covered by scientific literature. This impedes the development of effective disaster risk management strategies for camp planning. To address one aspect of this gap, the thesis describes how risk assessments were conducted for two camps, Mavrovouni and Moria (destroyed by fire in September 2020), on the Greek island of Lesbos. Both sites are heavily criticized for falling below humanitarian minimum standards. In Moria, for example, roughly 6% of the camp residents addressed in a survey reported that they experienced the death of another resident due to cold weather. Accordingly, the thesis explores which challenges impede the efficiency of a preceding risk assessment, and how these challenges may be addressed. Data collection is based on interviews with humanitarian practitioners from either site. The identified challenges are grouped into eight categories: awareness, political attitude, time, capacities, inflexibility, funding, Standard Operating Procedures, and information management. Five recommendations were developed to address these challenges: establishing a position that is responsible for risk management in a camp, capacity development, more flexible funding, the introduction of Standard Operating Procedures, and information sharing mechanisms. The results highlight that prevalent political and social power structures are the root cause for these challenges and are likely to complicate any solution efforts. Moreover, camps require a long-term and holistic planning approach. While Greek and European authorities only focus on immediate objectives, organizations do not collaborate adequately while conducting risk assessments. The thesis concludes with suggestions for further research to increase the generalizability of the findings, expand on the relevance of power, and evaluate the applicability of theoretical risk management frameworks in dynamic emergency contexts.

The number of displaced people is increasing. It is likely that refugee camps will continue to play an important role in the European asylum policy. Thus, it is crucial to improve living conditions to avoid further harm to those accommodated in camps. Risk assessments are a crucial component to increase the safety of camp environments.