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O M B U D S M A N
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Ombudsman - National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) carried out **regular unannounced visit** to the Temporary Transit Center “Vinojug” – Gevgelija, on **17.10.2016**. This visit was the last one in a series of follow up visits carried out on the following dates: 23.05.2016, 31.05.2016, 10.06.2016, 01.07.2016, 21.07.2016, 04.08.2016, 23.09.2016 and 13.10.2016.

These visits were carried out according to the mandate and competencies of the NPM arising from the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Law on Ombudsman. These visits were follow up on the last visit carried out in the Temporary Transit Center “Vinojug” – Gevgelija, on 16.05.2016, for which NPM issued a special report with the stated condition including recommendations to the Government, the Interior Minister, the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, the Minister of Health and the Director of Crisis Management center.

The aim of the visit was to assess the implementation of the recommendations given in the Special Report issued on 01.06.2016 as well as identifying risks in order to prevent torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

During the visit, the National Preventive Mechanism found that five out of the six recommendations given to the competent authorities for managing the Temporary Transit Center “Vinojug” - Gevgelija, are successfully implemented.

Given that NPM reacted due to obstructions imposed by officials of the Crisis Management Center, in the subsequent visits the team has experienced good collaboration and cooperation with them. Furthermore, it was found that the representatives of international organizations and NGOs have been allowed access to the tent “Habitat” and allowed to conduct interviews with migrants / refugees, which was not the case before the visit of the NPM.

As the NPM requested presence of officials of the Asylum Sector within MOI, they are now visiting the Center several times in order to register the persons who have applied for asylum or to conduct interviews with the asylum seekers.

During the visit, the NPM team has ascertained that one recommendation has not been implemented. Namely, NPM detected continuous practice of returning the irregular migrants intercepted in the country, back to the country they were formerly staying (mostly to Greece), without any formalities and without keeping an official record of it, after providing them shelter for a few hours.

The current number of accommodated refugees/migrants in the Temporary Transit Center “Vinojug” on the day of the visit was 124 persons. All of them were intercepted in the country before the official closure of the borders and the so called “Balkan route”.

They have also detected newly established practice – the asylum seekers accommodated in the Temporary Transit Center “Vinojug” are no longer transferred to the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo – Skopje. Instead, they are placed in the living containers located adjacent to the Temporary Transit Center “Vinojug”. Namely, out of the total number of refugees / migrants, 21 have applied for asylum, of which 11 persons were accommodated in living containers adjacent to the fence of the facility, while the remaining 10 persons were still residing in the Temporary Transit Center.

The overall impression was that the relevant authorities in the Center consider the Ombudsman's recommendations and make efforts to improve the condition.