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http://worldradio.ch/wrs/news/video/rejected_asylum-seekers-living-in-containers.shtml?12161

Rejected asylum seekers 'contained'

The Canton of Graubünden has introduced containers—the type often used as offices on construction sites—as a means of housing rejected asylum seekers, but this is upsetting some of the local townspeople. By law, every canton must provide emergency aid to asylum seekers who remain in the country after having their refugee status denied. The Federal Migration Office says that the cantons are responsible for how this is done as long as human dignity is respected. WRS video journalist Amy Wong spent a few days out at the containers in Landquart.

By [Amy Wong](#), World Radio Switzerland

Graubünden. It's Switzerland's largest canton, but only small towns thrive in this mountainous region. And one town in particular is at the center of a controversy - something the residents here are not used to.

On this industrial waste site in Landquart, close to Davos, four containers have been set up – not for construction work, but as accommodation. The twelve men placed here are rejected asylum seekers. And even though the Swiss Government has denied their request for refugee status, they refuse to leave the country.

Beda Egger is with the Graubünden Cantonal Police and Civil Rights Office. He took me to see the containers.

BEDA EGGER: According to the federal constitution, we have to give them emergency aid. This means we give them a place to sleep, money for food – at the moment it's eight francs per day. They get emergency medical help. And if necessary, we give them clothes.

However, it's these containers that are attracting all the unwanted attention. Each one is roughly two meters wide and five meters long. Two containers house five beds each. Another one has a kitchen and two beds. And the fourth one serves as washroom. For all twelve men, there is one toilet, one urinal, one shower, no laundry facilities, no telephone, and no visitors allowed. But the police don't seem to see a problem with this.

EGGER: Some people are even living for their vacation in such containers. And others, for example construction workers, they are living there on their own for months and years at a time.

I asked why more habitable accommodations weren't being provided.

EGGER: Well, that's not the idea to offer illegal persons in Switzerland comfortable accommodation. We want them to leave Switzerland. They have to leave Switzerland. They should leave. The asylum procedure is finished, and at the moment they are just illegal aliens.

Despite having received rejection letters, some of these men have been living in Switzerland for years. Egger tells me that the police have tried everything to repatriate them – including throwing a few of them into jail.

At Landquart, the tension between the asylum seekers and the police is obvious. None of them wish to speak to me with Egger around. And one of them even gets into a heated argument with him in front of his car.

But the next day is different. I'm invited to have lunch with a few of the asylum seekers at a nearby community center. Daniela Stirnimann-Gensch is a local schoolteacher who has known these men for years. She and several neighbours have formed a support group in order to help them.

DANIELA STIRNIMANN-GEMSCH: We met these people on the street. We said, "Hello. I'm Daniela. Who are you?" And then we talked together and then like this we became friends. There were some things that we thought was not right. You can't treat human beings like this. And so we tried to help them.

It's illegal to offer them jobs or even a place to sleep, so instead the support group cooks lunch once a week.

Only one of the men agrees to be filmed. Rachid has lived in Graubunden for the past eight years. He fled the Mullah regime in Iran. Another Iranian with a similar story has been here for five. The youngest of the bunch has just moved into the containers. He's 22 years old and fled Nigeria without any papers.

STIRNIMANN-GEMSCH: A man who doesn't go back in this situation, I think, can't go back. If they could go back, they would go. And I know a few of those people are very homesick. But they are afraid for their lives. They say if they go back they are a dead man. And I think even people who are illegal. They're still human beings. You can't treat people like this.

For the moment, Graubunden is the only canton using this form of housing. But more asylum seekers are arriving regularly. And as the containers fill up, the townspeople are being forced to take sides.

EGGER: Listen, all these people who are getting this emergency aid are free to leave Switzerland whenever they want. Within ten days we arrange their trip back to their home country if they want to, but they don't want to. So it's their problem if they're going to stay in Switzerland. We can't offer them more. I think Swiss people wouldn't understand if we financed to some people who are illegal in Switzerland some hotels or something like that. You can imagine.

STIRNIMANN-GEMSCH: It's an old story. During the first or second World War, Switzerland said, "We don't have place. The boat is full." It's an old story. We've heard that so many times. But here in Switzerland, I think we live quite well. We are so rich. We have everything we want, and we have some more room. I don't have the solution. I know that everybody can't live in Switzerland the world, but I think we have to come down.

For now, the containers are here to stay.

