

Activity Report October '22

A constant presence beside the barbed wire

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The sun is shining, we are sitting in the truck in Greece on the peninsula of Attica, north of Athens. Since March 8, the Rolling Safespace is located here, ROSA – Rolling Safespace e.V. a mobile contact point for women on the run. This is an ongoing report on the situation and situation in Greece.

As we drive past, we catch a glimpse of the meter-high walls and fences, topped with barbed wire, as well as turnstiles, which people should control when going in and out. This sight, similar to that of a prison, makes us realize every day the importance of our work. We want to create a place where women on the run, who often live in these camps for years, seem to forget their everyday life and can exchange ideas with each other in a protected environment.

As in the last few months, we continue to visit the camps Oinofyta, Ritsona and Malakasa once or twice a week. We park the truck, open the doors and sometimes the first women and children come and help set up the tents. We spread out carpets and pillows and set up a small table with snacks and drinks; The iced tea from midsummer was slowly replaced by hot tea and coffee. For two hours, a cozy place is created where the women feel comfortable and relax as well as laugh and dance together. In addition to the rest of the care work, the women in the camps mostly take care of their children throughout the day. In order to do this task for a few hours and to provide a quiet atmosphere, two crew members take over the child care. They play and craft with them and are repeatedly confronted with the challenge of engaging children of different ages and cultures together. In recent weeks, the children have been making wind games, masks, paper plate jellyfish and much more. Stones were painted, cloths printed with hand and footprints and juggling balls made of balloons and sand were conjured. When concentration slowly subsides, sports games or hiding places are played, raged or painted in another corner of mandalas.

While the kids keep one part of the crew on their toes, the rest sit in a leisurely round with the women. On some days only about five women come and we have, in a small round, time to get to know and exchange each other. On other days, up to 30 women come, we sit together, some talk in private conversations, others talk wildly, laugh and sing. In creative workshops, the women can try out many different craft activities. So we experimented with clay, made pearls and wire and were shown by a woman how to sew a skirt easily by hand. The most popular in recent weeks was self-made pearl jewelry. There are no limits to creativity and various creations were threaded on earrings, chains and bracelets. Next we tried different macrame techniques and friendship bands for friends, partners, within or within ourselves. In addition to the creative workshops, we had a lot of fun playing volleyball together, movement circles, and capoeira lessons. Sometimes, however, the motivation for sports workshops was missing, and we have to adapt to the needs and wishes of women again and again. So some afternoons ended in an exuberant atmosphere dancing with Afghan or Arabic music.

In addition, discussions took place with an input from our doctor and medical student about contraception, skin care and hygiene. If you want more detailed advice in a private room beyond these discussion groups, you can continue to use our small consulting room in the truck. There you can talk alone with medical staff and a translator, it is space and time to ask questions, discuss physical complaints and be heard and taken seriously. Especially in Ritsona this offer is currently very much used and the women come again and again to follow-up appointments.

We also had a physiotherapist with us last month. We wanted to find out whether there is a corresponding need for physiotherapeutic treatment and whether we want to expand our medical offer. At the beginning, the women were reluctant to accept this new offer. But over time, the new physio tent and lounge were gladly visited and the women often appeared for agreed dates. They were also willing to undress if necessary and allow close physical contact. Open and very special moments of closeness and connection were created. The intimacy could help in a positive way across the language barriers. Despite a lack of constant translation using body language and confidence, it was possible to create a pleasant treatment environment in which the bustling events outside the tent – whether caused by children or stormy weather – could usually be hidden. This space offered the opportunity to discuss personal needs and questions and to create a short break from the often physically and psychologically stressful everyday life. Often a woman came out of the tent radiant and reported on her experiences and her new knowledge, how she can do something good and counteract pain through independent exercises at home. For this purpose, we were able to distribute small massage oil samples as required so that self-treatments could be continued at home. For the winter it is currently not possible to continue this offer, as it is too cold in the unheated tent. So we will use the cold season to further develop the offer and make new crew members with appropriate knowledge of ROSA aware.

A special afternoon for all of us was the day on which we said goodbye to our months-long translator to Germany. She wanted to celebrate her last day with her family, her friends and the women from the camp. So we made ourselves comfortable with chips, popcorn and balloons and cooked her favorite dish together guided by the sister-in-law.

With the help of our old Farsi translator, we were able to quickly find two new translators for the Farsi speaking women. One of the translators lives in the camp in Malakasa, she supports us there and also travels with us to Oinofyta. In Ritsona, our medical team advises together with an English and Farsi speaking gynecologist from the camp. Recently, more and more Arabic and Surani-speaking women are coming to us in the Safespace in some camps, unfortunately, despite all efforts, we do not have any people on site who can translate these languages. An Arabic translation can be obtained by telephone for medical consultations. Despite these challenges, we are very happy to be able to reach a diverse group.

For several weeks we have been working in Oinofyta together with the ECHO Mobile Library. The ECHO Mobile Library is a mobile library that lends books in various languages to people in the camps. She also travels with a developed truck to various camps in Greece. The first day together was a very nice mess. Actually, we tried to create a common space primarily for the women, but the kids were much faster. They almost stormed the library in the truck, happily looked at all the books and started strumming on guitars. In the following weeks they were given their own carpet, on which books were spread out for them

and they could look at picture stories. It took a while to make the women aware that this new truck is also a place for them. Gradually, the interest grows to look at the books and borrow booklets for language learning. And so in Oinofyta a safer space is created between our Rosa Truck and the library, where the women can tinker with tea and coffee, craft together, learn English or German or exchange books.

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