

The violence is structural!

Statement by residents and the Antiracist Network Saxony-Anhalt on the violence at ZASt Halberstadt

15.4.2020

During the night from Sunday to Monday, physical clashes occurred between some residents at the "Central Reception Center for Asylum Seekers (ZASt)" in Halberstadt. These events were polarized by the press and right-wing groups in particular are instrumentalizing the incidents.

However, the circumstances to which the refugees are exposed - not only during the Corona pandemic - remain unnoticed: No privacy, no self-determined everyday life, fear and isolation characterize life in these Lagers (camps). Always.

Structural violence transforms into physical violence

Physical confrontations in camps are omnipresent and a logical consequence: Being on the run and fleeing to Europe is a sequence of extremely stressful incidents preceded by a potentially traumatic situation in the country of origin. Once in Europe, people who went through years of experiencing violence are confined to camps and Lagers, in uncertainty and without the possibility to process what they have experienced. Without the necessary health and hygiene measures, without the possibility to prepare food themselves or to buy everyday items, refugees in camps experience the situation, and especially the current the quarantine measures, as untenable. Extreme psychological stress and tension can then lead to physical confrontations - regardless of passport and origin. Just like it can be observed that since the Corona pandemic women's shelters are overcrowded and domestic violence is currently an increasing danger in German households.

Insufficient supply, chaotic conditions and risk of infection at ZASt

The situation in Halberstadt is particularly tense at the moment. In a confined space and with insufficient supplies, the residents are isolated and exposed to infection with the corona virus. They have been in permanent quarantine since 27th of March. The situation in the camp was already difficult to bear before the Corona pandemic. Many of the more than 800 residents have been housed there for months and report violence of police and security personnel. They live under the constant threat of deportation, in trauma, fear, isolation and lack of prospects. Four to six people share one room, 850 people share a few showers, toilets and kitchens. Even after the protests of the last few weeks, the poor supply situation has not been improved. There is still a lack of basic food and hygiene articles. The worst is currently still being averted by donations from various organizations and individuals. This cannot be a permanent solution.

Isolation, fear and violence characterize everyday life

The refugees are isolated and locked up in the camp. They feel like prisoners. At the same time, contact with people in solidarity and support structures is prevented. After all, it is these structures that disrupt the flow of violence and discrimination and make the voice and demands of the inhabitants visible.

A resident of the ZASt describes the situation like this:

"The camp must be closed or the laws changed. Life in this shitty camp is not good for our physical and mental health. Especially for adults with family and children who want to live a decent life.

Most of the people arrive healthy and when they are put together here like dogs they get sick because of the unacceptable conditions of the toilets and showers. Sometimes 500 people share 3 toilets every day, which is unhealthy and inhuman.

In the whole block A only two toilets have been working for three months and nothing is being done to change that. And when people are angry or frustrated, the German government sends the police instead of communicating with the asylum seekers."

Against Lagers – Close the camps in Halberstadt and everywhere

It was foreseeable that in this situation, sooner or later violent clashes would occur among residents which could possibly have been prevented by decentralized accommodation. Only very few of the residents were involved in these conflicts, but the resulting feeling of threat is particularly traumatizing for vulnerable groups such as women, children, homosexuals, trans and ethnic minorities.

It is especially important to show solidarity, to reject stereotyping and to draw attention to the intolerable conditions in the camp: The violence does not originate from the inhabitants of the camp - the violence is caused by and in the camp!

Against any form of camp accommodation; decentralized accommodation now - we demand the closure of the ZASt and all other camps!