

Greece Probes Sex Abuse Allegations Against U.S. Aid Agency



Athens, June 3 (RHC)-- Greek officials have launched an investigation into allegations that two members of U.S. aid agency Mercy Corps sexually abused refugees fleeing to Europe, local media reports.

On Thursday, the European Commission said it is considering the allegations against Mercy Corps "very seriously" and suspended its funding. Mercy Corps said it had put the two employees in question on temporary paid leave after receiving the complaints. "We are taking this situation very seriously and have reported the allegation to Greek authorities as well as to the funders of our program," the statement pointed out.

Mercy Corps is one of the NGOs working in Greece with the help of European funding to provide assistance to tens of thousands of refugees, mainly Syrian nationals, prevented from entering further into Europe.

In mid-May, the European Commission for Humanitarian Affairs had initially commented on "potentially serious allegations concerning a humanitarian project led by a partner in Greece," without mentioning the name of the agency.

More than 1.1 million refugees, most of them fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and North Africa, flocked to Europe in 2015. The flow subsided to quarter of a million last year after the EU reached a deal with Turkey in March 2016 to take back all people landing on Greek islands in return for financial aid to Ankara and the lifting of short-term visa requirements for Turks, which is yet to go into force.

EU member states agreed in September 2015 to share some 160,000 asylum seekers who had arrived in Greece and Italy. The scheme faced resistance from the very beginning, with states especially in Eastern Europe complaining that taking in refugees would expose them to serious security and economic risks.

The most welcoming countries to refugees like Germany also introduced their own restrictions on the arrivals. The EU said in February it was for the first time considering penalties for states that break the bloc's rules on relocation.

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